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THE

RIFTS

Your Guide to the Megaverse

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Nightbane® Morpheus Tables

Rune Weapons

Rifts® Short Story

Palladium Fantasy® adventure and monsters

After the Bomb® sneak peak

Fiction, news and more ...



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The Rifter® Number 15

Your guide to the Palladium Megaverse®!

First Printing – July, 2001

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Palladium Books® Presents:

THE RIFTER

#15

BRANDL - 97

Sourcebook and guide to the Palladium Megaverse®

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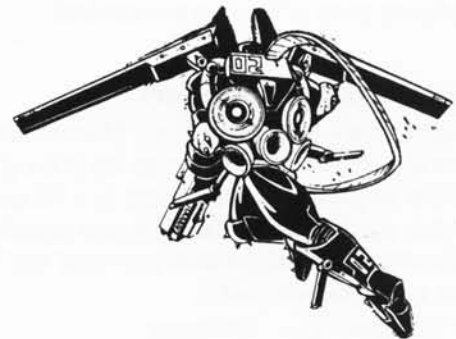
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Special Thanks to all our contributors, writers and artists. Our apologies to anybody who got accidentally left out or their name misspelled.

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Page 6 – Art Page

Apollo Okamura depicts a Coalition UAR-1 on moonlight patrol; probably on the outskirts of the 'Burbs.

Page 7 – From the Desk of Kevin Siembieda

The boss man reveals the "Curse of Palladium," late books (and why), what's at the printers, and the current status of hotly anticipated books like *Coalition Wars™ Six: Final Siege* and *After the Bomb®* and other titles.

Page 7 – Palladium News

What and When: The current schedule for releases through October. Don't forget Kevin and Maryann will be at *Dragon Con* in September (unless something goes terribly awry on the end of the convention folk).

Page 9 – Coming Attractions

Will the *Rifts® CCG* ever come out? Find out here. The latest on the *After the Bomb® RPG*, the *Northern Hinterlands™* which should be on store shelves with *Adventures in the Northern Wilderness, Second Edition* hot on its heels, details on the upcoming *Rifts® Game Master's Guide* and a look at *Mechanoid Space™* coming in 2001.

Art by Freddie Williams, Kent Burles and others.

Page 14 – After the Bomb® RPG “Sneak Preview”

A tantalizing excerpt of Erick Wujcik's work for this anticipated role-playing game of mutants and survival.

Page 17 Questions and Answers

This issue, Rodney Stott and Shawn Merrow address questions concerning a variety of topics, from the price of *Palladium Fantasy RPG®* wagons, to vehicle speed in a "dense" forest to Cosmo Knights, and jet lag. All really helpful material endorsed by Kevin Siembieda (actually Kevin answered the Wagon and Dense Forest questions personally).

Artwork is by newcomer, Jeff Burke.

Page 19 – The Palladium Fantasy Role-Playing Game®

Knights of the Eastern Territories

Here's a real treat for you Palladium Fantasy fans, this section on *Knights* was cut due to space considerations from the

Eastern Territory sourcebook. It is written by *Steve Edwards* and fully endorsed by Kevin Siembieda as "official" fantasy source-material. A bit of history and specific Knightly Orders found in the southern and northern parts of the Eastern Territories is presented in detail. Includes masters of the shield, sword, lance and horse.

Artwork is by Jeff Burke.

Page 27 – The Palladium Fantasy Role-Playing Game® Blade Law

Richard Thomassen presents optional history, magic and rules for *Rune Weapons*. Some cool ideas and a keen insight as to how these fabled weapons were created. The *Backlash* sections takes into consideration the magical weapons' intelligence, awareness and curses.

Artwork by Apollo Okamura.

Page 33 – Heroes Unlimited™ In Only Six Days

James M.G. Cannon takes a look at and offers some insight and suggestions to "world building" in the *Heroes Unlimited™* setting. The world at large, history, technology, magic, vigilantes, themes and more.

Illustrated by Michael Wilson.

Page 42 – Nightbane® Brain Fry

David Haendler presents a number of villains and designer drugs for the world of the misbegotten and misunderstood, *Nightbane®*. Everything one needs to launch a good adventure campaign involving a seedy underworld of drugs and vice. Plus a trio of villains suitable for use in *Nightbane®* or *Heroes Unlimited™*.

Artwork by the Midnight Rider, Freddie Williams II.

Page 51 – Nightbane® New Morpheus Tables

Eric Baierl, David Solon Philips, RC Craigo, and DeAnna Renae Bearce join forces to present a slue of really cool and exciting, "optional," new morphus combinations, including Alien Appendage, Food, Fish, Mannequin, Toy, Freak and Undead Tables.

Oh, and let's not forget RC Craigo and DeAnna Renae Bearce's New *Nightbane* Talents, including Shadow Weapons and other cool things.

Artwork by Nightlord, Wayne Breaux Jr.

Page 65 – Rifts®

Operation Ironskull

Ted Dimitry does double duty as writer and illustrator for this section of optional Coalition Cyborgs and skullduggery. Four optional new CS Cyborgs and adventure ideas.

Art by Ted Dimitry. Written by Ted Dimitry.

Page 76 – Rifts®

One Chance in a Million

Part one of a three part story dealing with Chi-Town, the Black Market, NTSET and Colonel Thaddius Lyboc.

A short story written by Paul Sillanpää.

Art by Michael Wilson.

Page 88 – Rifts®

Specialized Shifters™

Alex Miller presents “optional” variant Shifter O.C.C.s for your consideration. They include the Traveller, Sensechal, and a dozen or more new Shifter Spells. Some very cool stuff.

Art by Wayne Breaux Jr.

Page — Rifts® Phase World®

Hammer of the Forge

The 15th chapter in James M. G. Cannon’s gripping *Phase World™* story.

Artwork by Apollo Okamura.

The theme for issue 15

This issue’s theme is *magic and dimensions*, with new material for *Palladium Fantasy®*, *Nightbane®*, *Heroes Unlimited™*, and *Rifts®*.

Palladium Books plans on more actively supporting all of its game lines, and this issue of *The Rifter®* continues that pledge.

The Cover

We thought the cover had a nice, sort of, **After the Bomb®** kinda feel. We thought it would be a nice change to go with something more peaceful and atmospheric this time around. Oil painting by an unknown artist.

This is embarrassing, but we have misplaced the information regarding the identity of this talented freelance artist, and can not tell you who he or she is. With any luck this individual will contact us and we can give said individual the credit he or she deserves. Our sincere apologies to the artist.

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 the reader can use (if you want to), or which might inspire you to create your own wonders.

Coming Next Issue

The Rifter™ #16

- **New contributing authors.**
- **Material for *The Palladium Fantasy RPG®*.**
- **Material for *Heroes Unlimited™*: The Thropo Aliens by Wayne Breaux.**
- **Material for *Nightbane®* and/or *Beyond the Supernatural™*.**
- **Material for *Rifts®*.**
- **The next chapter of the *Hammer of the Forge™*.**
- **The second of three parts for *One Chance in a Million™*.**
- **The latest news and developments at Palladium.**
- **Source material for the entire *Palladium Megaverse®*.**
- **New contributors and fun.**

So please join us.

www.palladiumbooks.com — Palladium On-Line



From the Desk of Kevin Siembieda

Let's face it, Palladium Books is cursed. We're never going to get a book out on time. And when we do it's a miracle, so you should enjoy it when it happens!

I don't mean to be flip. Believe me when I tell you there are times when a manuscript is late or we discover that a rewrite (which takes weeks) is necessary, that Maryann and I feel like curling up into a ball and crying. But that doesn't get books out, so we have to suck it up, get back on track the best we can, and rock and roll.

Think I'm crazy talking about a curse? Okay, so maybe I am crazy, but that aside, even companies associated with Palladium in the slightest of ways seem to suffer from the "Curse of Palladium." Take *Precedence Entertainment* for example. They planned on getting the **Rifts® CCG** out in February of this year. As I write this in the middle of June, they tell me they are "shooting" for a July release! They are planning demos and tournaments at the **Origins Game Fair** and **Gen Con** and they seem determined to hit the July release date. I don't know what the delays have been at Precedence, and all of us at Palladium are chomping at the bit to see the final game. I have approved a ton of artwork, and a lot of it looks great – the kind of stuff that should whet the appetite of even gamers who don't normally care to play CCGs (of which I am one). So where is it?! Coming soon! I hope so. As you can see, Precedence has fallen victim to "The Curse."

Why set a date if you don't know the product will come out? That's a frequently asked question by Palladium fans.

First, we always intend to hit the dates announced, just things inevitably go awry.

Second, our fans always want to know what we have "planned." Which is only natural. So like idiots we tell them.

Third, our distributors and retailers need to know what's planned and when books are supposed to come out, three months in advance.

So, we plan, plot and schedule what the release dates "should" be, and even plan for delays, and then we work toward that date. We tell people about our plans because we are excited about the product and honestly "plan" to hit those dates. Unfortunately, it seems like half the time something (like life) gets in the way to cause delays, rescheduling, and cancellations. A common mantra around the office this year has been "shoot me now," because everything that could go wrong has gone wrong to cause delays and a complete shake up of our 2001 schedule.

Except for **The Rifter®** series, I think every single product this year has been late. Why? You wouldn't believe me if I told you. Numerous and consecutive missed deadlines, manuscripts that required rewrites (which take weeks), manuscripts that miss the mark and have to be rewritten from scratch or cancelled, freelancers who can't finish the job, licensing negotiations that just spin in circles, and a whole lot more!

This creates the *Snowball Effect*. You see, every book that requires a "rewrite" chews up an extra 3-4 weeks. Every issue that requires my time takes away time from writing. I have lost 12 weeks (that's three months outta six) reworking other people's manuscripts to be suitable for publication. Then there's the book that comes in late – sometimes months late. And, folks, that knocks the entire schedule off, as is the case with the **After the Bomb® Role-Playing Game**.

These delays tear at me and Maryann, not only because we know how disappointed our fans will be, but because it makes our lives all the more crazy and difficult. On a personal level, it drives me insane with frustration, because I can not get to do the many projects I'm dying to finish, like *Coalition Wars Six: Final Siege™*, *The Nursery™*, *Mutant Underground™*, *Wolfen Wars™*, *Beyond the Supernatural® Second Edition* and a host of others.

Everything probably looks even more wacky to our fans looking in from the outside. Especially when they see a *NEW* book slotted in while a dozen "promised" books remain Missing In Action! This can happen for any number of reasons. In some cases it is a secret project that has been under development for some time, and is now ready to go to press, like the **Rifts® Game Master's Guide™** announced this issue. Rather than put the new item at the end of the line, we slot it in NOW to get something out to appease our patient and hungry fans rather than continue to delay *everything*. Other times, a delay (for whatever good reasons) requires that the project be rescheduled. Take the **After the Bomb® RPG**. Erick being the brilliant writer that he is, has, I'm sure, created a masterpiece. To make the RPG everything it should be, he even turned in a bigger manuscript chock full of great ideas and fun things to play. However, it was so late, we had to adjust the schedule to fit in other books to fill in the gap, and can not drop everything *now* to jump into that manuscript. It will be weeks before I can take a good look at it, 4-6 weeks to get all the artwork assigned and in for it, then another two weeks for the final editing and typesetting, followed by 4-6 weeks to get it printed. As you can see, even an immediate turn around will take three months! Books will also be delayed and juggled depending on how long we "think" it will take to turn them around and get them to press. A book that should be quick and easy might get slotted in before one that will require more time and energy.

Business sucks. While Palladium is in the business of fun and games, or as one fan recently put it, "producing enjoyment," it is a lot of hard work. As a business, we can not afford to take 2-4 months off without producing a single product just to get the next book out in the order it was announced. As a business, I have dozens of people counting on me for their livelihood. If there aren't Palladium products released on a monthly basis we can't pay the bills, and could go out of business. That's the Catch 22 of a creative business like this, it's not all fun and

games. I wish it were, but it is not. We have real responsibilities and financial concerns that have to be met.

On the bright side, know that we put our all into *every* product. We only try to produce the most exciting and fun games we can imagine. So despite painful delays, when that title finally does see print, it is the best it can be – and adds to your worlds of adventure.

I apologize for the screwed up 2001 schedule and have to warn you that the rest of this year will probably remain just as unpredictable and screwy. I hope everyone will stay with us to enjoy the fun we have “planned” for the rest of the year and the future. **The Northern Hinterlands™** for *The Palladium Fantasy RPG®* is at the printers and should hit the store shelves just before this issue of **The Rifter®**. Palladium’s newest catalog should be out at the same time, so if you want one (to keep better track of what’s late), write or e-mail us with your address

and we’ll send you one for FREE. I’m back to writing **Coalition Wars 6: Final Siege™** right NOW and hope to have it finished soon. That means it should be in the stores August, even if I have to kill myself to do it. The much requested **Rifts® Game Master’s Guide™** “should” be out in September or October (more on it in the Coming Attractions section). And I’m “shooting” for a Fall release for **After the Bomb® RPG**, **Hardware Unlimited™** and the first two (of three) **Land of the Damned™** books. Anything else is a crap-shoot. I plan to jump into doing the two **Rifts® Australia™** books and **Mutant Underground™** but who knows what the Curse of Palladium will do to me next.

Thanks for listening to me rant, and thanks for hanging with us despite the product delays and schedule shake up. Keep your imaginations burning and we’ll continue to create role-playing games to send those imaginations soaring to new heights.

— Tired, crazy, and cursed Kevin Siembieda, June, 2001

News & Coming Attractions

By Kevin Siembieda (the guy who should know)

What & When

If you read, *From the Desk ...* you already know that Palladium’s release schedule is a shambles. So here’s the revised “target” release dates for upcoming titles.

July, 2001

- **Northern Hinterlands™ for the Palladium Fantasy RPG®** – in stores mid-July. This one is DONE and at the printers, folks. When we get it at the warehouse it ships out the same day.
- **Rifts® CCG** from *Precedence Entertainment*, should be out by the end of July or early August at the latest (that’s what we are told). Check it out!

August, 2001

- **Rifts® Coalition Wars 6: Final Siege™** should be out by the middle or end of August. All the artwork is done and I’m finishing the writing as you read this!!!!
- **Adventures in the Great Northern Wilderness™, Second Edition.** By Siembieda, Coffin and a host of others.

September, 2001

- **Rifts® Game Master Guide™.** You demanded it, so we aim to give to you! 250+ pages of collected data, G.M. tips and other good things. Probably out late September.

October, 2001

- **After the Bomb® RPG** is rescheduled for a Fall release; probably October. It is bigger and better than ever. You’ll hate yourself if you miss it.
- **Land of the Damned One: The Northern Mountains™** for the *Palladium Fantasy RPG®*; 224 big pages of monsters, mayhem and fun.

- **The Rifter® #16** – ‘Nuff said.
- The annual **X-Mas Surprise Package/Grab-Bag**; with something special.

What’s next?

The above titles are the *definite*, “these titles will be out if it kills us” stuff. The following are all things we “plan” to get out as soon as we can, but are not yet scheduled. Some will be this Fall, others will slip into next year. They are listed in the likely order of release.

- HU2: Hardware Unlimited™** (200+ pages; Brent Lien)
- Rifts® Australia 2™** (Siembieda & Lucas)
- Rifts® Australia 3™** (Siembieda & Lucas)
- Palladium Fantasy®: Land of the Damned™ Two** (200+ pages; Bill Coffin)
- Palladium Fantasy®: Land of the Damned™ Three** (200+ pages, Bill Coffin)
- Rifts® Dimension Book 5: The Anvil Galaxy™**
- HU2: Mutant Underground™** (Kevin Siembieda)

Convention Update

Dragon Con — Atlanta, Georgia — September. Maryann and I are confirmed guests at Dragon Con this year and hope to see thronging multitudes of our southern fans. *Erick Wujcik* is also a guest at Dragon Con 2001, so come on down and see us! Not to mention join the more than 20,000 other fans of gaming, science fiction, film and comic books who attend the show. We’ve attended in the past, and this is a fun convention.

For more information, contact the convention folks at:

Dragon+Con – August 30 - September 3, 2001
P.O. Box 16459
Atlanta, GA 30321-9998
www.Dragoncon.org
(770) 909-0115 tel. (9 am to 5 pm) (770) 909-0112 fax

No Gen Con® 2001, for us. Just a reminder that Palladium Books will not be attending Gen Con this year. This is NOT a protest or a boycott, we just can't make it. Our schedule is too crazy and the show takes a lot of time to prepare for, do and recover from, so we're skipping it. We'd rather take that time and get out a new sourcebook. We hope people are not too disappointed, but we'll see ya at Dragon Con.

Coalition Wars™ 6: Final Siege is NOT the end of Rifts®

A number of fans online have speculated that the *Final Siege* is the end of the Rifts® RPG series.

Heck, no!

Quite the contrary, it is a new beginning. A chance to re-examine the world and see what has happened over the War Years elsewhere, as well as ride the shock waves that follow the aftermath of the war.

What new plots of retribution and forging of unholy alliances are born from the war?

Where does Free Quebec stand and what is its fate?

How do the Cyber-Knights end up?

What is going on with Northern Gun and the Manistique Imperium?

What has Archie Three been going all this time?

Will the Federation of Magic attack Chi-Town before its forces can recover from combat?

How has Triax and the New German Republic been doing in its war against the Gargoyle Empire?

What new threats have appeared?

These and other questions beg to be asked – and we plan to answer them. We have a ton of new ideas for *Rifts Earth* as well as *Phase World*®. In fact, John Zeleznik is working on a secret project for Rifts® right now, while Coffin and Siembieda are working on other areas of the Rifts® Megaverse®.

Coming Attractions

Guide to the Galaxy™ For Heroes Unlimited™

— Available now

The *Guide to the Galaxy*™ for *Heroes Unlimited*™ shipped to stores at the end of May. If you haven't seen this book, track it down. It is an excellent companion to *Aliens Unlimited*™ and can be used as a space campaign setting or as a sourcebook for *Heroes Unlimited*™. The monstrous Riathenor and other aliens and technology make for ideal villains for Earth based campaigns, while the many alien worlds present unique locations to spirit Earthlings away to on a cosmic adventure. Includes the long awaited rules for space travel, space combat and building spaceships.

- Spaceship construction rules.
- Space travel and combat rules.
- New skills and skill programs.
- New alien races, monsters and menaces.
- More information on the Riathenor.
- More on the Atorian Empire and the TMC.
- Galactic time-line and overview of the galaxy.
- Key people, places and adventure ideas.
- Art by Breaux, Wilson, Burles, and Williams. Cover by Breaux.
- Written by Wayne Breaux Jr.
- Compatible with *Skrapers*™ and *Phase World*®.
- \$20.95 — 224 pages.



Rifts® Collectable Card Game By Precedence Entertainment® — July they say

If all has gone well, there should be a copy of the Rifts® CCG on the store shelf where you bought this issue of *The Rifter*®. It is designed, published and distributed by *Precedence Entertainment*. They tell us the Rifts® CCG is the best looking card game they have ever done.

We've yet to see the final game rules and finished cards, but Palladium Books has approved a ton of artwork. From what we have seen, the Rifts® CCG looks to have captured the look and feel of the Rifts® Role-Playing Game quite nicely. Unfortunately, without the finished rules, we can not tell you how well we think it plays. We'll have to wait with the rest of you for the finished product to make that determination. Precedence tells us the Rifts CCG is one of the best things they have ever done. We can hardly wait.

Artists include: John Zeleznik, Ramon Perez, Scott Johnson, Freddie Williams, Joachim Gmoser, David Martin, Susan Van Camp, Dennis Calero, Matt Cavetta, Fernando Palina, Slawek Wojtowicz, Steve Snyder, Mark Evens, Ron Lemen, Steve Roberts and a host of others.

The CCG captures the Rifts Setting. From what I have seen, the “look and feel” of Rifts is very well done and seems very loyal to the RPG.

Game Rules are supposed to be fun, fast playing and easy to learn.

Basic Deck \$9.95 – Booster packs \$2.95 each.

In stores July, 2001 (we suspect it may slip into August). The CCG will also be available from Palladium Books; see our web site for complete ordering information – www.palladiumbooks.com.



After the Bomb® The Role-Playing Game – October

The original designer of the *Ninja Turtle® RPG* and creator of the original *After the Bomb®* series, Erick Wujcik, is back to turn ATB into a stand alone role-playing game and breathe new life into this famous apocalyptic setting. There is a ton of new mutant animals, new mutations, animal powers, people, places and world information. Those of you sad to see the *Ninja Turtle® RPG* go out of print should be tickled by the appearance of this fun, new (and old) game.

An all-time favorite adventure setting is becoming a hot, new role-playing game of post apocalyptic science fiction, mayhem,

adventure and weirdness. Mutant animals have inherited a war and plague-devastated Earth. They struggle not only to survive, but to build a new civilization. Some are obvious in their origins, others are monstrous throwbacks or the creation of genetic manipulation prior to the apocalypse.

The *After the Bomb® Role-Playing Game* is a complete game in and of itself. Easy to learn and a blast to play. Everything one needs to play except dice, players and imagination.

Highlights include:

- Nearly 100 mutant animals – more if you include the many additional “breeds” tables.
- Expansive mutant animal section often divided into species, “pure breed” and others.
- Over 40 mutant animal powers – many more if you include the weird abilities exclusive to certain animal species, breeds and genetic “chimeras.”
- Chimeras, the product of genetic engineering.
- Mutant animal psionics.
- Human mutations.
- Optional appearance and background tables.
- World history and background information.
- More on the Empire of Humanity.
- More opportunity for adventure.
- Art by Ramon Perez, Scott Johnson, Freddie Williams and others.
- Compatible with *Heroes Unlimited™, 2nd Edition*.
- Complete role-playing game by Erick Wujcik.
- \$20.95 – 224 big pages. Ships October!

After the Bomb® Sourcebooks

The best selling, original sourcebooks (never out of print) are still suitable for the *After the Bomb RPG*, so if you have them, you’re ready to play around the world. If you don’t, they are available through Palladium Books and fine comic book and game shops everywhere.

Road Hogs™: 20 new mutant animals, vehicle combat and creation rules, four adventures. \$7.95 – 48 pages, by Erick Wujcik. A fan favorite.

Mutants Down Under™: Nearly 30 new mutant animals from Australia. Plus giant insects, Dream Time magic, psionic powers, airship construction, new villains, and adventures. \$7.95 – 48 pages by Erick Wujcik. Another all time favorite.

Mutants of the Yucatan™: Over 20 new mutant animals, more trouble from the Empire of Humanity, and adventures by Erick Wujcik. \$7.95 – 48 pages.

Mutants in Avalon™: King Arthur is back, but as a mutant animal! More mutant animals, mutant insects, druids, druid magic, invasion and adventure. \$9.95 – 80 pages.

Mutants in Orbit™: Killer satellites, space stations, a moon base, new villains, monstrous insects, adventure ideas and more. Half this book is for *After the Bomb®* and half is for *Rifts®*. \$11.95 – 112 pages.



The Northern Hinterlands™ For The Palladium Fantasy RPG® – Available now

A 192 page fantasy sourcebook packed with information about the western settlements of the Great Northern Wilderness, Ophid's Grasslands, and other remote regions at the doorstep of the mountains that wall off the Land of the Damned.

- Over a dozen new monsters.
- 19 ancient magic artifacts, like Fire Ice, Magebane, the Ring of Ice and Fury, the Soulstone of Arendrun, the Immortalisman, the Withering Stone and others.
- Over a dozen new magic spells.
- The Wild Lords — gods who helped to defeat the dreaded Old Ones, but who are almost forgotten today.
- Eight Optional O.C.C.s including the Barbarian Warrior and Keeper.
- Kiridin, land of barbarians and home to the Realm of Eternal Autumn.
- The 13 colonies of the Shadow Coast and the Shadow Rebellion.
- Cold Rules and the Long Winter.
- Information about the Vault of Destiny and Palladium of Desires!
- Key people and places.
- Maps, history and tons of adventure ideas.
- Art by Breaux, Wilson and Burles. Cover by Mike Sutfin.
- Written by Bill Coffin and Kevin Siembieda.
- \$20.95 — 192 pages. In store now.

Northern Wilderness™, 2nd Edition August Release

Adventures in the Northern Wilderness and Further Adventures in the Northern Wilderness “combined” into one big sourcebook with additional notes, tables, maps and information.

- Information on *Shadow Fall*, the Wolfen capital.
- The 12 Wolfen tribes (updated).
- Expanded encounter table — offering 101 Adventures.
- Hook, Line & Sinker™ adventures.
- More history and background.
- The Northern Elfland, the ancient “Golden City.”
- Art by Burles, Wilson, Breaux, Johnson and others.
- Maps, adventure ideas and hints about the Wolfen War.
- Written by Bill Coffin, Kevin Siembieda and others.
- \$20.95 – 190+ pages.

The Land of the Damned™

The Land of the Damned is too large to cover in one book, so it will be presented as a series of three, big, 224 page, “stand-alone” books that will explore and describe the various unexplored regions of this forbidding land. It will also reveal the strange creatures and beings who dominate the land, many extinct elsewhere in the world, as well as the dark powers that rule.

Land of the Damned #1: The Northern Mountains™ — ships October

- Key people and places.
- Exotic new O.C.C.s, monsters, adventure and more.
- Ancient magic and dark secrets.
- Over 20 new monsters and races (some leftover from the Age of Chaos).

- Over a dozen new demons.
- Campaign hooks and Hook, Line and Sinker adventures.
- Maps and adventure ideas.
- Art by Burles, Wilson, Breaux, Johnson and others.
- Written by Bill Coffin.
- \$20.95 –224 pages.

Land of the Damned #2: Eternal Torment™

- A land of the undead and villainy.
- The enchanted forest known as the Darkest Heart.
- New types of undead and werebeasts.
- Dark magic..
- Campaign hooks and Hook, Line and Sinker adventures..
- Maps and more adventure ideas.
- Art by Burles, Wilson, Breaux, Johnson and others.
- Written by Bill Coffin.
- \$20.95 –224 pages. Probably ships the end of 2001 or early 2002.

Land of the Damned #3: The Bleakness

- Ancient Minotaur races and empires.
- Key people, monsters, and more.
- The Citadel — Fortress of pure chaos magic.
- Maps, adventure ideas and more.
- Art by Burles, Wilson, Breaux, Johnson and others.
- Maps galore.
- Written by Bill Coffin.
- \$20.95 –224 pages. Probably an early 2002 release.

Rifts® Coalition Wars™ 6: Final Siege – Ships August

This is it. The grand finale! One will win, one will lose. This book has it all.

- The City of Tolkeen mapped and described.
- Tolkeen's King, Circle of 12 and Warlords described in detail.

- Tolkeen's newest demonic allies and monsters.
- Tolkeen's secret weapons!
- The City of Freehold — home of the Dragon Kings.
- The final Siege — who wins, who loses, who survives.
- The Aftermath, and loads of adventure and adventure ideas.
- What is the fate of the refugees?
- What happens to the Cyber-Knights?
- How is the region changed?
- Art by Perez, Breaux, Wilson, and others. Wrap-Around cover by Zeleznik.
- Written by Kevin Siembieda and Bill Coffin.
- \$20.95 — 224 pages. Mid or late August, 2001 release.

Rifts® Game Master's Guide™ — Ships September

No your eyes are not deceiving you, Coffin and Siembieda are putting together a big, 250 page or larger Game Master's Guide. The book is still being put together, but the goal is to create one big, easy reference guide for G.M.s that should include comprehensive and condensed lists of skills, magic spells, psionic powers, O.C.C.s, R.C.C.s, weapons, vehicles, and more. As well as vital information for Game Masters, more and updated world information, and lots of other helpful lists, charts and information.

- Updated world overview.
- Comprehensive skill list with basic percentages.
- Hand to hand combat skill charts and tables.
- Comprehensive list of Magic Spells with P.P.E.
- Capsuled descriptions of weapons, bionics and vehicles.
- Tips and hints for running campaigns.
- Charts, lists, tables and reference material galore.
- Scattered skill descriptions all put into one easy to find place.
- Rifts® bibliography of titles complete with a summary of what is found in each.
- Art by Perez, Breaux, Wilson, and others. Wrap-Around cover by Zeleznik.



- Over 250 pages.
- Compiled by Bill Coffin.
- Additional material by Bill Coffin and Kevin Siembieda.
- \$24.95 — probably around 250 pages or more. September 2001 release.

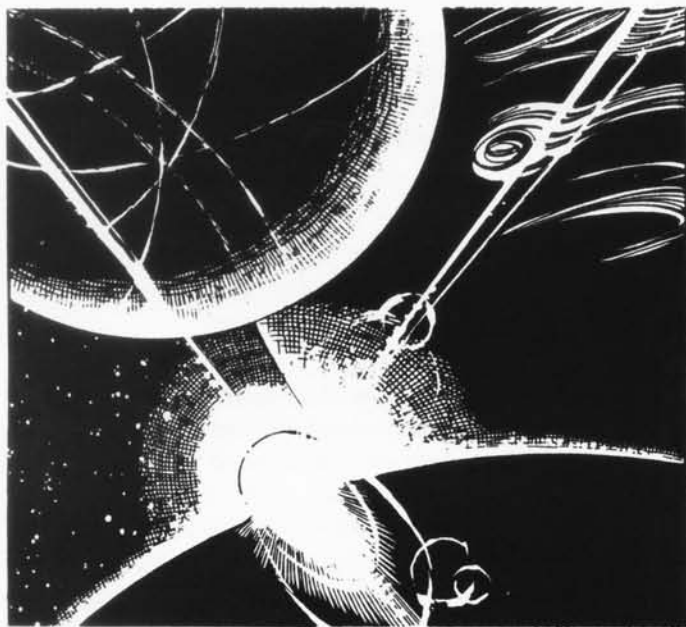
Coming for Rifts®

Rifts® Australia Two

Rifts® Australia Three

Rifts® Dimension Book: Anvil Galaxy™

Plus Rifts® Africa Two, more on Triax™, more for Phase World® and more on the world at large.



Mechanoid Space™

A new role-playing game

— coming 2002

Other commitments prevent me (Kevin Siembieda) from jumping into this project with both feet, but **Mechanoid Space™** is something that has been percolating in the back of my head for years and years. It has been on the back burner, not only because of my other commitments, but because all the pieces weren't quite in place. Then one day, it just all came together. I am ready to write it! I pitched the most basic concepts to Bill Coffin six months ago and he still hasn't climbed down from the ceiling. In fact, he's so excited about the game that he's already formulating ideas and worlds to contribute to the game line.

I've been making notes and developing ideas in what little spare time I have. I *hope* to start the "real" work on **Mechanoid Space™** sometime early next year with no definitive target date yet. What follows is all I can tell you right now, as it is very much a work in progress.

- The Mechanoids® are back with a vengeance. Their disappearance and apparent self-destruction the means to "purge" themselves of mutations and dangerous free-thinkers. To recreate their race!

- Now they are back and have begun to purge the universe of human and humanoid "contamination" while rebuilding their empire.
- Psychics throughout the old Mechanoid space-ways are beset by grim visions and premonitions.
- Dead Mechanoid® computers on their Homeworld spring to life. All repeat the same message:

"The shameful taint of humanity that we bury deep inside us had slowly risen to corrupt and degrade our people. Mechanoids dared to imagine and question our program of genocide. Many of the "we" that are the Mechanoids questioned the meaning and rationality of our very existence. The only solution was to purge our race, terminating the existing Mechanoid species.

"Only an elite core was preserved. A core of the *pure*. Taken into seclusion to effect a correction and begin our race anew.

"Having traversed the farthest reaches of the universe, it was an easy thing to hide and restore our people. So it is that we now ready ourselves to make our presence known to the universe again. To sweep across the cosmos to eradicate all bipedal, carbon life forms.

"Though it sickens us that our old enemies infest our Homeworld, they shall be the last to perish. They will be allowed to see the iconoclastic storm that engulfs all before them. And they shall weep for their own wretched lives. When Homeworld is liberated, it will be the ultimate triumph, for it will signify that the last of the plague that is humanity has been eradicated from the universe.

"That mission begins now"

- *The Mechanoids®* redefined. Including new designs and renegades.
- The secrets of the Mechanoid Homeworld and other secrets revealed.
- The Confederacy of Planets and the many past victims of the Mechanoids unite in an intergalactic campaign to find, stop, and whenever possible, destroy the Mechanoids.
- Player characters are these intrepid heroes. Men and women from a growing multitude of races who go forth to discover new worlds, make new alliances and defend entire planets from the devouring horde that is *The Mechanoids®*.
- Genetically engineered human "Ultras."
- Human "Retros" and "ESPers."
- All the old favorite alien races and new ones join the ranks.
- I think it will be a Hit Point/S.D.C. system, perhaps with Mega-Damage conversions (let me know what you think and would like to see).
- True "World Books" will expand **Mechanoid Space™** on a cosmic level, introducing new heroes, victims, enemies and adventure settings.
- I want **Mechanoid Space** to be truly epic and boggle the imagination.
- The initial game will be a stand-alone role-playing game; probably over 220 pages.
- Written by Kevin Siembieda. Final size and price not yet determined.
- Coming in 2002.



After the Bomb®

RPG – Sneak

Preview

By Erick Wujcik; excerpted from the upcoming role-playing game

The Birth of the Mutants

Starting at the turn of the 21st Century, when humankind had completed the Human Genome Project, the science of genetics progressed in blindingly brilliant steps. Disease, even cancers and genetic disorders were tamed, one after another, and it even seemed as if mortality itself could be defeated.

Along with the great advances, it was also only a matter of time before the technology of genetics became a consumer product. Just as computers, once the property of giant corporations and governments, led to home computers, so too did *bio-tech laboratories* become miniaturized and marked down.

It wasn't long before ordinary citizens could buy gene-scan attachments and software for their personal computers, before trading in gene patterns was common on the internet, and before "virtual" breeding games let anyone experiment with mixing genes and chromosomes from different animals.

One of the most dramatic new products was called the EGG®, or *Embryonic Genone Generator*. Sold as "make your own mutant" kits, the first EGGs were used to grow transgenic mice. EGGs suitable for growing dogs, cats and other pets quickly caught on. Within months, people all over the world were experimenting by mixing genes from different animals, and even from humans (which was against the law, but since every human carries a full set of human chromosomes...).

And that's what happened. A few years into the booming new technology it suddenly became glaringly obvious that humanity had created other intelligent life on the planet. Not computerized artificial intelligence, as had been expected, but a new kind of intelligence. Animals with sentience. Animals that were speaking, reading and writing, and reasoning.

If it hadn't been for the Crash, sentient animals would probably have become just another class of citizens. After all, what difference would it make, a few tens of thousands of mutant animals, compared to the teeming billions of human beings?

The Crash

It probably started in a high school somewhere. Some kid, not quite ready to take that Wednesday afternoon quiz, brought a test tube full of home brew in that morning.

After all, what was the harm?

In the years leading up to the bio-craze, virtually every *known* human disease and disability had been cured. There was no reason to fear any mere disease. Bacteria were domesticated creatures. Viruses were "tailored" to do mankind's bidding. Even pesky autoimmune diseases were disappearing.

For a High School kid, the idea of getting seriously ill, much less dying, from something as innocuous as the flu was ridiculous. It didn't seem any more dangerous than setting off the smoke detector, letting a skunk loose in the Teacher's Lounge, or hacking into the school's computer.

Just good fun, right?

Well, it was nothing to be really alarmed about. Not at first.

But it spread.

It became a fad, an edge thing, a new way of impressing the "cool" kids.

Eventually, after a few dozen incidents, there was one that got serious.

The media blew it up, covered it like flies on a sugar bowl, made a huge deal about it, and about the five kids who cooked up the virus.

People were outraged. Politicians screamed. Laws were passed.

Now had this been a real tragedy, had someone died, or even been chronically ill, that might have been the end of it. Instead, the illness was short-lived, a cure was found in a few hours, and it turned out to be, basically, nothing. The young people responsible were told never to do it again, while they basked in their fifteen minutes of fame..

To say the least, the law was ignored.

"Prankster diseases" popped up everywhere. Copycats constantly tried one-upping the experts. It became a race, a contest. And the winner would be the bio-hacker who could beat the authorities.

Simple human viruses wouldn't really crack the system. Bacteria were too slow, too big, too clunky.

No, in order to confound the gene doctors, to get around the system, a new kind of disease was needed.

The thing came about slowly, insidiously. First as a theory promoted on a website. Then a few kids got together to work out the structure and the details. It took millions of processing hours... only a couple of weeks with time borrowed from tens of thousands of computers.

It was a simple idea. What if a human cell, a cell just like the cells in every human body, was modified into a disease form? After all, every good medicine leaves the human cells alone, while it attacks the invaders.

Whoever cooked it up was probably one of the first victims. Within a month, over 74% of the human race died, victims of rampaging genetic change, caused by a cell that contained a full set of human chromosomes. Once released, it was unstoppable and billions died.

Some animals were affected as well. About 25% of all primates, and 10% of mammals, as well as 2% of other creatures, showed symptoms of the disease. Of those animals affected, most died, but about a third seemed to mutate as they recovered, gaining *human traits*. (The disease seemed to suddenly inject the afflicted animals with 5 to 30 points of BIO-E; 1D6 times 5).

At first it seemed that most of the animals were unaffected. It wasn't until the next generation, when their offspring were born, that the extent of the plague was completely realized. That manufactured disease, containing the 23 pairs of human chromosomes, was also infecting the offspring of most mammals, birds, reptiles and amphibians, as well as a few fish, crustaceans and insects.

The Bomb

Perhaps if the Crash had happened a few years later, it wouldn't have triggered the following catastrophe. After all, most of the world was at peace, and there was widespread talk of disarmament, and of dismantling the last remaining nuclear arsenals from the Cold War of the 1950s and 1960s.

Instead, when the Crash hit, it looked like an act of biological warfare. Few believed that such a devastating plague could be anything other than an *intentional attack*, and fewer still believed that the source of such pain could be just a High School prank.

Dying in their headquarters, palaces, command centers and military bases, it seemed that retaliation was the only solution. So the Bomb was dropped, the button pushed, and thousands of nuclear missiles were targeted on the largest cities in the world.

The Time of Darkness

After the Crash, humanity still numbered in the hundreds of millions. That would have been enough to keep civilization alive. After the Bomb, there were less than ten million humans left alive, many of them sterile, or too old to have children, scattered throughout the world, living in fear and isolation.

Even though human-dominated nations still exist, such as the Empire of Humanity, it is becoming increasingly obvious that the *new world* will not belong to humans. It is becoming clear that it will be the animals who will resurrect civilization, who will again bring the light of learning to the world...

The Top of the World: The Arctic

Records from before the Crash describe the Arctic, and the place over the North Pole in particular, to be ocean covered by moving ice. Well, the ice is no longer moving. There are now great mountains of ice all over the region, with great ice valleys that descend down to the ocean. Those who have ventured to the north describe it as the "Mountains of Madness," where the language of the Inuit is spoken, where there is the worship of the Alignuk, and the dance of the Anirsaak, and magic of the Ilisineq. Here are the words of one *Mutant Wolf traveler*:

"What I have learned is that there are two great forces in the world. The force of Sila Maligdlugo, or that which is 'According to Nature,' and that of Sila Agssordlogo, which is 'Contrary to Nature.' In the North the magic of these two forces are both practiced, both monstrously powerful, both pathways to madness. I have seen two kinds of shaman, both Angakut, who can call the breath-soul from out of a living being, and Angatkok, who can make skin and bone come to powerful life. And I do not know, I do not know which is the good and which is the evil. I only know that the great walls of ice are moving south, and that all that we have will be devoured by it."

The Bottom of the World: Antarctica

Little is known of this far-off land, save that it is no longer a frozen wasteland, no longer covered with glacier ice. Advertisements from before the Crash offer houses and apartments in what was called the "New Eden of the South," complete with illustrations of lush grasslands and forests. It seems reasonable that the massive build-up of ice in the Arctic is somehow related to the missing ice in Antarctica, but the exact mechanism of the transfer is unknown, and seems impossible.

Europe

Human domination of Europe is certainly coming to an end. Human "empires" in Germany, Hungary, France and Spain have all been conquered, and only Skandia, in the north of Denmark, and SAECNS, retreating from France, are still ruled by humans. However, the great alliances that formed against the human oppressors are starting to fall apart, and Europe seems likely to once again be home to a thousand unstable "nations."

Most disturbing are reports from Bohlen (formerly Heidelberg, Germany), once home to the greatest concentration of bio-technology corporations in the world. Until an invasion from SAECNS, it was assumed that Bohlen was just another enclave of mutant animals. And, if they seemed a little more deformed, with a larger number of *chimeras*, no one thought much about it. However, in fighting SAECNS, frightening powers were unleashed, including mutant animals capable of projecting unknown energies, of shape-shifters, of giants, and of creatures that seemed a fusion of flesh and machine.

SAECNS (Calais, France)

The *Societe A Eliminer les Creations Sauvages et Nuisibles*, once the dominant force in France, has been pretty much routed. A society of all humans, rejecting even the use of mutant animals as servants, exterminating even their own mutant dogs (a horror that no other human-dominated society can comprehend!), they were once the dominant military force in Europe. The tide turned when they attempted to roll over the remains of Heidelberg, a move that cost the best of their armies. Since then, SAECNS has suffered defeat after defeat, seemingly unable to

change their losing strategies or improve their static technology. Although they are trying to keep their movements secret, most suspect that they are attempting an invasion of Britain (see *Mutants in Avalon* for details about SAECSN, as well as the various kingdoms and conflicts in the British Isles).

Current Political & Military Situation: Defeated and pressed in on all sides, SAECSN's policy of mutant animal extermination has left them friendless and unsupported. As their neighbors make steady gains in technology, it would seem that SAECSN is pretty much doomed.

Population: 29,200. **Language:** French. **Species:** 29,200 humans, and humans only.

Capital: Calais (3,500).

North America

The time is the late twenty-first century. The place is America. An America torn apart in a brutal catastrophe of war, plague and nuclear winter. Sometimes called the Crash, sometimes called the Bomb, and sometimes called the Big Death.

The majority of the population consists of mutant animals, but scattered humans remain, most of them hard at work helping the animals establish schools, factories and governments for the new animal order. Other humans were not so enlightened, and records of persecution and killing were common.

Now all of the evil humans are capable of generating has been concentrated into one powerful force: *The Empire of Humanity*. With a functional nuclear fusion plant, with advanced 21st Century technology, with a loyal canine nation blind to their madness, and with a huge slave labor force, the Empire is one of the strongest forces in the known world. Worse, the Empire loudly threatens to exterminate all the intelligent animals.

The player characters, regardless of their origins, will usually be citizens of Cardania. Whether as *free traders*, *scouts*, or *members of the military*. Here are a few notes on life in After the Bomb.

The Empire of Humanity (North America)

Strongest and most feared of all the post-holocaust powers is the *Empire of Humanity*, a tyrannical realm built on a foundation of hate and racism. The capital is *Technoville*, an advanced, walled city built around a working fusion reactor (the only one left in the world). The Empire is ruled by a brutal dictatorship intent on enslaving and exterminating all sentient animals. Their economy is dependent on slave labor made up entirely of humanoid animals. Slave uprisings have been frequent, as have brutal repressions.

In recent years it's become obvious that the Empire of Humanity is really the Sick Old Man of the political landscape in North America. Repeated attempts to increase the human population have been, at best, abject failures. At worst, they've been disasters with unbelievably bad consequences.

The most recent disaster to come to light was an attempt to create a place where only humans proven to have pure human genes, and superior genes at that, could live. It was established nearly ten years ago as "Purityville," mostly in response to the discovery by Emperor Christian of an entire community of Pig People who had been "passing" as human and freely interacting

with the rest of the Empire. From the very beginning the offspring of the select of Purityville were plagued with human mutations like deformed or missing limbs, as well as featureless faces reminiscent of egg-headed aliens. Attempts at culling these "freaks" (i.e. killing them) triggered riots and threats of revolution against the Empire.

Changing tactics, the Empire scientists decided to simply clone what they considered the best of Purityville's offspring. Twenty-four "perfect" children were selected, each to be duplicated twenty times. The resulting 480 children became the Empire's brightest hope. As babies they were bright and healthy. When they all entered kindergarten, the Empire started showing them on television and created posters advertising them as the "Future of the Empire." Cute and smart, and obviously "pure" human, plans were drawn up to recreate humanity by the thousands, and then by the millions.

And then they were seven.

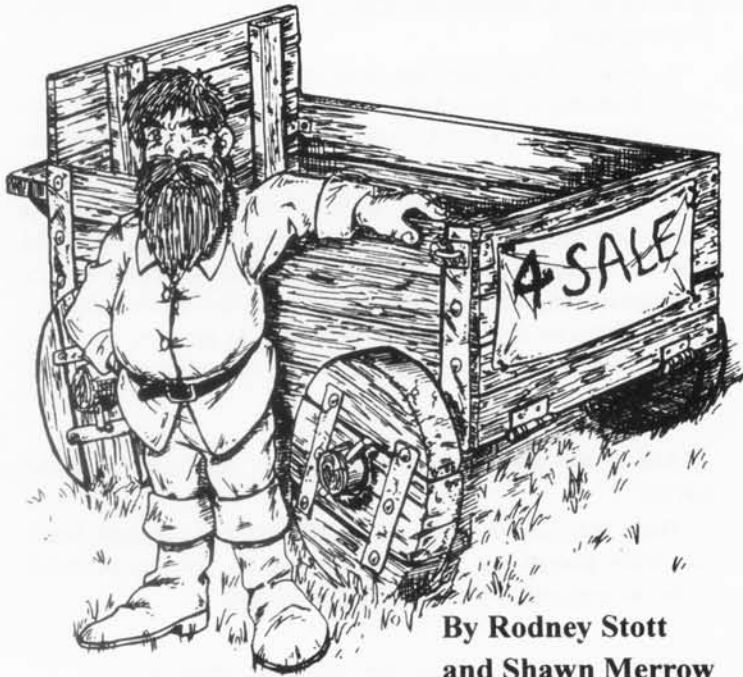
At the tender age of seven, the 479 innocent looking children (one had died in infancy) attempted a coup. For nearly three weeks the world shook as their superhuman powers were revealed. Far from innocent, all 479 shared a group mind, as well as a range of abilities that included Teleportation, Advanced Mind Control, and Telemechanics. They were also incredibly brutal, regarding anyone not of their group mind to be sub-human and worthy only of extermination (many blame the Empire's relentless "humans-first" propaganda as the reason why the children were so warped, while others point to raising the children without normal families).

The only thing that saved the Empire of Humanity (and, likely, everyone else in North America) was interference from outside. It seems that Three-Eyed Mutant Elephants, the mystics of Ghenech, the Theocracy of India, were brought in to put down the Purityville children.

Ever since then, the Empire seems to have lost its optimism for the future. While still far better armed and equipped militarily, as a political entity it seems to have faltered, its bright hope for a human renaissance dashed by too many failures, by too many enemies.



Questions and Answers



By Rodney Stott
and Shawn Merrow

This column has a theme based around travel, with questions covering all the Palladium games, from Palladium Fantasy to Rifts.

Eastern Territories included a Teamster skill, but where are the prices of carts in Palladium Fantasy?

Here are some basic prices; 40-60% less for "used" wagons depending on condition.

Simple wooden cargo wagon (small; as pictured above): 60-90 gold.

Simple wooden cargo wagon (medium): 100-125 gold.

Simple wooden cargo wagon (large): 130-180 gold.

Wood, reinforced with iron (medium): 250-350 gold.

Wood, reinforced with iron (large): 350-500 gold.

Wood and lacquer buck board (seats 2-4, plus small cargo area): 200-400 gold.

Fancy coach or sleigh (medium; seats 4-6): 300-500 gold.

Fancy coach or sleigh (large; seats 8-10): 500-1000 gold.

Are there any time zones in Palladium Fantasy? If so, what is the difference between the East and West Coasts of the Palladium World?

There are no Time Zones as such in the Palladium World, but each village or town will set their own timing by the local rise and setting of the sun.

Any mechanical clocks set in one location will have to be reset if traveling to another location, likewise those traveling great distances via magic such as Teleportation will notice the difference.

This difference is about 4 hours between the East and West Coasts of the Palladium World.

Does the Palladium Fantasy world have a moon? If so, does it have just one or does it have several? What is the moon like? Is it like Earth's moon?

It has one moon with a similar cycle and appearance to Earth's moon.

Do you get hurt when you walk across a Ley Line when you are not a Ley Line Walker?

No, you do not get hurt when crossing a Ley Line or traveling along it, the energy of the web generally doesn't affect human and animal life, though it may affect some senses (i.e. Sense P.P.E., Sense Magic, etc). In most cases, you won't even notice it's there.

If traveling in or walking through a Ley like doesn't hurt anyone, how come they destroyed the world?

It wasn't the ley lines that caused the apocalypse, but the release and influx of P.P.E. energy combined with nuclear weapons, earthquakes, ley line storms, dimensional Rifts, tidal waves, storms, tornadoes, etc.

I was wondering if an S.D.C. creature (i.e. a Palladium character) magically acquired the ability to fly faster than the speed of sound, would the laws of physics apply and decimate his body, or would the magic include protection?

Magic would protect the body from the stresses involved in traveling that fast.

Can the Bugs from Systems Failure travel through satellite systems like they can through phone lines?

No, they cannot broadcast themselves. Their power restricts their travel to physical cable connections.

If a character with Sonic Speed or Sonic Flight reaches MACH 1, initiating a sonic boom, will they be affected by their own sonic boom deafening and stunning them?

No, the very nature of these powers protects them from the stresses of traveling at such speeds.

My question deals with the speed of a vehicle going through a dense forest, like the forests in Kentucky. For example, the Mountaineer ATV has a max. speed of 120 mph. Does that mean it can go through these dense forests, which usually have no workable roads, at that speed? If not, what sort of modification to a vehicle's speed should be made in passing through areas like this?

The listed speed is only available on roads and hard, open terrains, like grasslands. Safe speeds through *trails or broken roads* is limited to about half of maximum speed; possibly slower if the terrain is very difficult. Traveling through "dense" forest is probably *impossible*. Just because the vehicle is an M.D. machine does NOT mean it can plow through or over trees, or thick tangles of logs and underbrush (just as a tank can not plow through a thick forest neither can M.D.C. vehicles). That's why there is a need for hovercycles, motorcycles, power armor and other small, fast vehicles. And even these small ones

are likely to see their maximum speed reduced by 30-50% in dense woods. A large vehicle like the Big Boss, Mountaineer and M.D.C. tanks are forced to take roads and trails that can accommodate their size. **Note:** Smashing or blasting one's way through the woods is slow work (1-3 mph/1.6 to 4.8 km) and incredibly noisy, attracting attention to one's presence from everyone (and thing) within 30 miles (48 km) or more.

Can the Packmaster Carrier in the Phase World Source Book travel at FTL speeds?

Yes, the Packmaster is capable of traveling at 6 light years per hour.

The Cosmo-Knight's Superluminal Flight power states that after he meditates for 10 minutes, he can transform himself to pure energy and travel 1 light year per level. How fast does he travel in this condition? Is it a set speed for all Knights or is it based on level?

The Cosmo-Knight will travel at 5 light years per hour while in energy form.

How do you use a Rift for long distance traveling; it's not the Dimensional Teleport spell. I know that Tarn's expedition tried this form of transportation and it got them sent to Wormwood.

You try to create a portal to another location within the same dimension. A Rift is just a rip in the fabric of reality, and while it can lead to another dimension it can also open up elsewhere on the same planet or dimension, forming a gateway.

What penalties should be used for Jet Lag or Dimensional Travel Lag?

Jet Lag is generally caused by the internal body clock being used to a certain day-night cycle, when a character is transported to a different time zone without any real adjustment period, Jet Lag will result. This will generally last for 1D6 days until the character adjusts to the new day-night cycle.

The exhaustion penalties from the front of the various main books make a good set of penalties for this period of adjustment.

Dimensional or D-Lag can arise by traveling to different dimensions, or even different planets, with different day-night periods which are unfamiliar to the character. The adjustment penalties should remain the same, but the period of adjustment should be extended by 50% or more unless you are traveling to a parallel location in another dimension.

In our campaign we were affected by some kind of spell that transported the party to the Palladium Fantasy world. In Rifts Earth we have the language called English or American, well in Palladium it's called common. I was wondering, since my character speaks American can he talk and understand someone using common from Palladium because the Game Master is saying that I cannot and it's hurting me not being able to speak to anyone.

There is no common tongue in the Palladium Fantasy world among the humans who live there. Each regional grouping of humans has their own language. A lot of non-human races which have been around a lot longer than humans, however, have developed a common tongue among their race.

The closest language that could be considered the lingua franca (universal tongue) for the Palladium World, and probably a good portion of the Megaverse, would be the Elven tongue (also called Dragonese in Rifts), as well as Gobblely and Demongolian.

A form of trade language does exist in Palladium Fantasy, and is basically a form of sign language. This sign language allows those with different language backgrounds to communicate effectively.

As for foreigners coming to the Palladium World with no compatible language skills, they will need access to a wizard with the Tongues spell to act as some kind of translator, or have an experienced dimensional traveler with applicable language skills, otherwise the characters will have to get their meaning across non-verbally (and think of all the role playing possibilities there!).

Are there any civilian airports or airfields on Rifts Earth?

There are, they are generally small, dirt strips though. Many post-Rifts aircraft are VTOL capable so do not require much space, or prepared facilities to support aircraft.

Where do non-Coalition aircraft land, refuel, etc.?

Small towns, trade settlements, etc., can support small commercial landing fields and facilities. Those craft and their occupants that do not pose a threat to the Coalition (and are generally human) can also use CS civilian facilities.

I am currently enjoying the PFRPG, and have begun to get my hands on the source books. What order should they be run in if one wanted to do a "World Tour" kind of campaign focusing on the plot lines and adventures in each book? I would have guessed that they should be run in order, but Old Ones kind of scared me. Also, where would Adventures in the Northern Wilderness fit it?

There is no set order as to how they should be run to do a world tour, however the following could be a reasonable order (top to bottom, or bottom up).

Eastern Territory
Adventures in the Northern Wilderness
Further Adventures in the Northern Wilderness
Northern Hinterlands
Western Empire (Ophid's Grasslands Colony to start)
Baalgor Wastelands (Western Empire Colony to start)
Mt. Nimro
Yin-Sloth Jungles (side trip)
Island at the Edge of the World
Old Ones

Adventures on the High Seas will cover sea journeys, with the Library of Bletherad being just off the coast of the Eastern Territory, making a good island to visit between the Wolfen Empire and the human lands, avoiding the disputed lands.

Is it possible to use a teleportation ability to teleport yourself and an enemy straight up, reappear, and continue to teleport upwards until you choose to stop, and then teleport to safety as your enemy falls to his death?

Yes it is possible, but the chance of an unsuccessful teleport would be high (there is no frame of reference for the arrival point apart from "up," and teleporting away once up there. There will also be additional penalties for additional teleports unless the character has natural flight capabilities, as the distraction from falling may reduce the chance of another teleport.

Do the Aircars in Century Station run on gasoline?

Yes and no. The Aircars use a hybrid gas-electric engine like those of the new model hybrid cars that get good fuel efficiency. This efficiency allows them to fly on ordinary gasoline.

In Rifts I was wondering if there is a tent that can be bought or if there is any camping equipment that can be bought?

Prices of camping and wilderness equipment can be found in Warlords of Russia.

How high can you travel using the spell Fly as the Eagle? Can you fly into orbit using this spell?

The maximum altitude for this spell and many other spells of a similar nature is 6000 feet (1829 m). Above this altitude, the spell will generally fail to work, or optionally will not lift you very far from the ground (a couple of feet, perhaps).

Palladium Fantasy RPG[®]

Knights of the Eastern Territories

By Steve Edwards

The Eastern Knight is many things. Some knights are kind and generous while others are cruel, manipulative and tyrannical. The common thread amongst them all is they at least pay lip service to a higher ideal, chivalry. Chivalry is a romantic concept — a warrior must be honest and brave, fight fairly, accept victory and defeat with the utmost decorum and respect women, taking up arms to defend them if necessary. This is the ideal. In practice, most knights strive to attain these goals, fall short and try again. To a knight, there is no greater mission in life than to attain chivalry. Then there are the "black knights," those knights who have fallen from grace and turned their backs on the code and the Orders from whence they came. They are doomed to wander the lands hunted by knights of all Orders and faiths.

Just as the politics and culture of the Eastern Territory's north and south are at times dramatically different, so too are the knights who champion them. The southern knights are concerned with tradition, station and their past, with each knight being able to trace their bloodline through generations of knighthood. To these soldiers, knighthood is a birth right, and they scoff at the knights of the north, viewing them as pretenders to a station they can never hold. The northern knights view their southern brethren as overly proud, having lost sight of the true meaning of chivalry. Indeed, there are some Orders of knights who are in a virtual state of war with their southern cousins, notably the Knights Common and the Order of Knights of the Lance. The two hate each other with a passion equaling the Dominion's hatred of the Wolfen.

Southern Orders

The southern knights are much like the medieval knights of Europe. A relative few knights are land holders or "Overlords" while the rest are employed by the Overlords and the nobles who hold title to the land. The Overlords have considerable power, and are the men with whom adventurers are most likely to come into contact. They are responsible for the day-to-day operation of the estates that take up most of the lands of the south. These knights are sworn to obey their noble lords, perform military service when necessary, train and maintain a body of men-at-arms sufficient to defend the estate(s) under their care, and to entertain and escort the noble lords when they decide to visit. By and large the Overlords live a life of comfort and ease. Some are kind and just to the peasants under their care, while others are cruel and squeeze every last gold piece from the beleaguered serfs under their iron clad fists. So long as the tax money keeps flowing and the vineyards and fruit groves continue producing, the noble land owners let the Overlords govern as they see fit. For most of the peasants and serfs in the south who live under them, the Overlords are nothing more than the fist of the nobility; thugs and ruffians content to sit behind their castles of stone.

The common knights, those men who are under the employ of an Overlord or a noble, hold no lands of their own. These men are highly trained and ready to fight when and where their lord directs. The common knights are used as a show of force to the peasantry, a constant reminder that their lives and livelihood are provided at the whim of their lord. These knights are respon-

sible for their own training, and may or may not have to supply and maintain their own equipment. The more wealthy lords will provide these items, and so are much sought after employers. The less wealthy lords require their knights to supply their own equipment and keep themselves and their gear in condition for fighting. These lords tend to employ the more independent minded knights and those who are not skilled enough to gain one of the more coveted positions. Because of the expense involved in outfitting a knight, southern knights are rarely sent into the north as part of the Kingdom's military obligation to the Dominion. The exceptions are some of the younger knights who sometimes get permission to go north and get some combat seasoning. These tours are typically less than a year, with combat being an intermittent affair. Should war break out in the north, it is unlikely that the south will send massive numbers of its knights. Instead, forced peasant conscripts will be used to fill out the quotas.

In the south, to become a knight, one must be of noble birth or be able to trace their blood to a knight. Tales of commoners being knighted for brave and honorable deeds are just that, tales told around cook fires and sung by bards. Likewise, women are never accepted as knights, being considered too fragile and without the stamina for bloodshed. Like their cousins in the north, all southern knights belong to an Order, something like a fraternity of soldiers. Each Order is aligned with one or more noble families, and a couple are sponsored by Churches. Several of the more powerful nobles have established their own Orders as well. The Orders hold considerable political power, since nearly all the male nobles are members of one of them. During the civil war the Orders were pitted against each other, and strong rivalries still exist. Following are descriptions of a few of the more influential Knightly Orders of the South. It is important to note that for both the Northern and Southern Orders, the knight candidates almost always have already received extensive training in court etiquette, combat and horsemanship. Candidates who come to the training Orders without the advantage of the previous experience typically take up to 50% longer to complete the program and are required to pay an additional 5% of the tuition for the extra time. The knights in training, their family or sponsor pays for the training, not the lord who ultimately hires them.

Order of the Knights of the Shield

Crest: A blue and red shield on a green field.

Grand Master: Sir Michael Wardick, 10th level Knight.

Rolls: 180 Knights.

Training: Costs 25,000 gold, must be sponsored by another knight in the Order or by a noble family, must be able to trace one's blood line to a knight of any recognized knightly Order. Typically takes two to three years.

Commanderie: Wyndglade Castle, seat of power for the Wardick noble family.

The Knights of the Shield are affiliated with the Wardick family and several other minor noble families. With the smallest roll of the Southern Orders, they are nearly all employed by the nobility to act as officers. Currently, the Order has called a quest to find and put an end to whomever or whatever is committing the murders along the Wyndglade Swamps. Thus far, 20 knights of the Order of the Knights of the Shield have responded, along with a pair of Knights Drakko and two dozen mercenaries.

Bonuses: The Knights of the Shield are especially proficient with their shields, and gain a +2 bonus to strike and parry with them. A common trait amongst all Shield Knights is that their shield will have a sharp steel blade on its lower outside edge, inflicting 1D6+2 points of damage with a successful strike.

Order of the Knights Drakko

Crest: A red dragon with wings spread wide and claws outstretched on a white field.

Grand Master: Sir Arlon Watt, 12th level Knight.

Rolls: 12 Palladins, 450 Knights; 15 in training.

Commanderie: Gatehouse, a large moat and bailey fortress overlooking the Eastern Ocean on the Gold Coast.

Training: 40,000 gold, sponsored by another knight of the Order or a member of the Dragonwright church, must trace one's blood line from a knight of any knightly Order or priesthood of the Dragonwright church. Training typically takes two to four years depending on previous training.

The Knights Drakko trace their roots back to knights who followed Sir Penington against the Blood Eye Orc horde. After the war, the newly-crowned King Penington granted the knights a castle and officially recognized them as a knightly Order with all benefits and responsibilities that went with the title. Some in the Order claim that the King himself was a member of the Knights Drakko but the Penington family bitterly denies this. All members of Knights Drakko are devotees of Zandrangel, the war god of the Dragonwright pantheon, and new squires must make vows to the dragon god upon acceptance into the Order for training.



The Knights Drakko are the most militant of all the southern Orders, and aside from the Knights of Dawn are the most likely to be found in the north following the tides of conflict. They are very concerned with personal honor, especially as it applies to combat, and the gravest insult one can give a Knight Drakko is to call him a coward. Insults are almost certain to draw a challenge for lethal combat. Their reputation has preceded them in the north and they are given a wide berth wherever they go. The Knights Drakko consider this a sign of respect, though it is really fear that keeps people away.

Amongst the Knights Drakko are a group of Palladins, each no lower than 8th level, who are known simply as the Twelve. The Palladins wander the East honoring Zandragal by their feats of combat. Eight are currently within the Disputed Lands preparing for the war they feel is inevitable, two are on quest in the Old Kingdom, and the last pair are at Gatehouse. Each wears magical crimson scale armor with a long, horse hair plume on his helm.

Bonuses: Members of this Order gain +20% to intimidate, have a Horror Factor of 12 to anyone who recognizes their Order, and a one time bonus of +15 S.D.C. from their extreme physical regimen.

Order of the Knights of the Lance

Crest: A red lion emblazoned on a checkered blue and white field.

Grand Master: Duke Reginald Penington, 7th level Knight.

Rolls: 4,000.

Commanderie: Peninsher, an immense castle built on a man-made hill of rock.

Training: 60,000 gold, must be sponsored by another knight of the Order or any noble family who can trace their ancestors to the knights who served the first King Penington. Training typically takes three to five years depending upon previous training.

The Knights of the Lance are formally recognized as the first Order in the Eastern Territory, having been dubbed so by King Penington upon assuming the Ivory Throne. Despite their exclusive nature, they have the second largest rolls of any Order in the south, all claiming their descendants were companions of King Penington at the battle of the Mound Hills. The Order hosts several large tournaments in the spring and summer, inviting knights from all over the south to come and try their skill against the "legendary" might of the Knights of the Lance.

Lance knights are known for their arrogance, self-confidence and utter lack of conscience. They are as corrupt as the nobility from whence they came, and are seen by the southern peasantry as a symbol of the nobility who oppress them.

Currently, the Knights of the Lance are committed to an undeclared war against the Knights Common and the Sisterhood of Knights. Both are considered violators of the Code of Chivalry, the Sisterhood because they are women and the Knights Common because their Order's founder was a rogue knight accused of having murdered several knights of their Order.

Bonuses: +2 to strike with the lance at level one in addition to O.C.C. bonuses. Can expect lodging anywhere in the south

(with the exception of the Groff Estates), whether it be a Lord's castle or the humble home of a peasant.

Knights of Dawn

Crest: A disc, half black, the other silver. The field is likewise divided, black and silver opposite the disc so the black half of the disc rests on a silver field and vice versa.

Grand Master: Sir Rodney Stott, 9th level Knight.

Rolls: 500 Palladins; 12,000 Knights (9,000 in the south).

Commanderie: The Citadel of the Sun, a large, domed structure with gleaming, whitewashed walls and sweeping, stained glass windows similar to the Winter Palace at South Watch. The northern Knights of Dawn are headquartered in Haven.

Training: Free, candidates must be sponsored by another knight or any clergy of the Church. Graduates are required to pledge an oath of service for a period of eight years.

The Knights of Dawn are sponsored and directed by the Church of Light and Dark, and are the only Order of knights with commanderies in both the north and the south. Subsequently, they have the largest roll of any Order in the East, all giving their ultimate loyalty to the Church. This loyalty would ordinarily cause problems, if it were not for the fact that most of the Penington family and other prominent nobles are devout followers of the Church themselves.

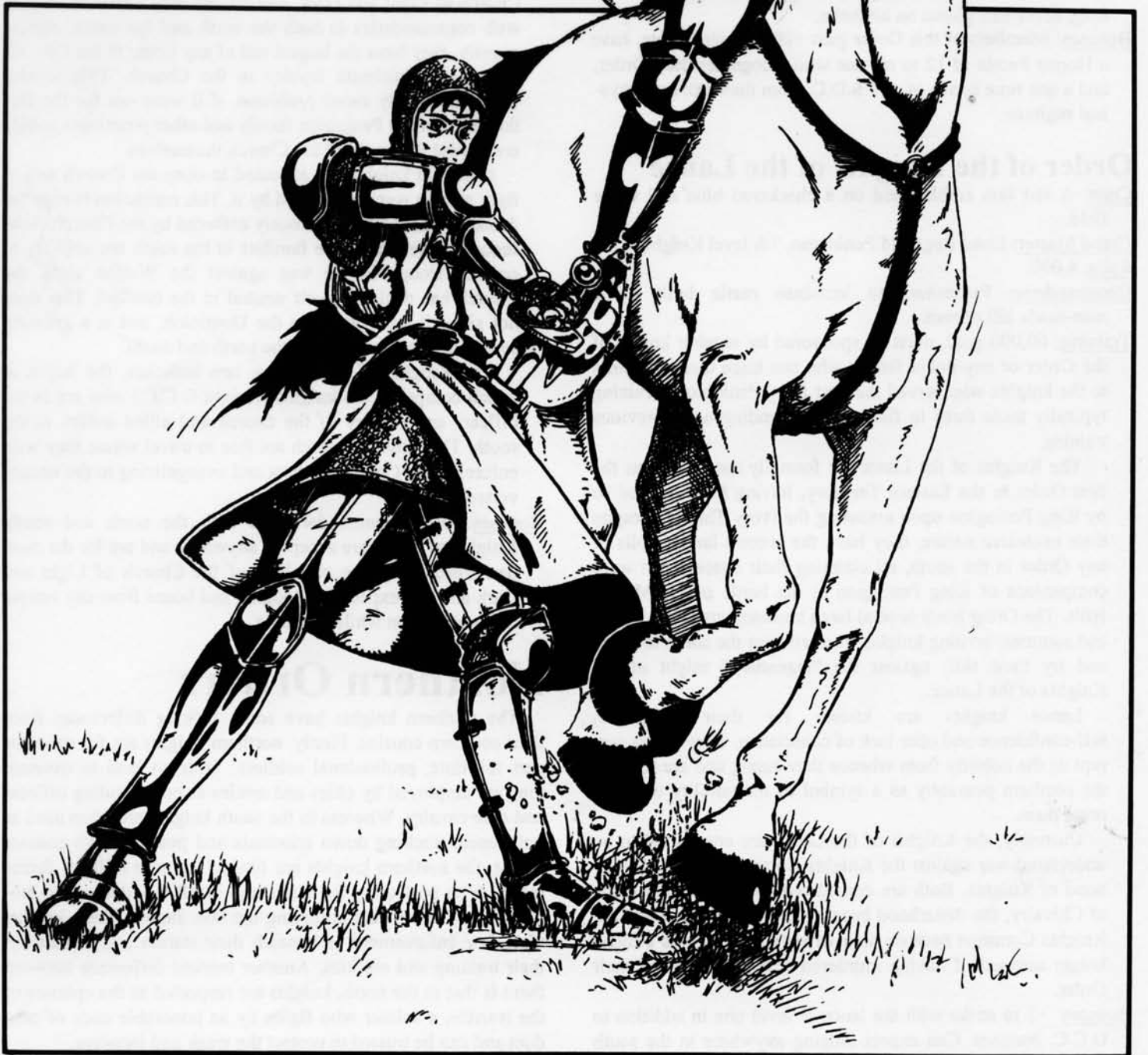
Common knights are expected to obey the Church and to fight only in wars sanctioned by it. This restriction is only for declared wars and is vigorously enforced by the Church. Subsequently, several noble families in the south are unlikely to commit troops to the war against the Wolfen since the Church has declared itself neutral in the conflict. This does not sit well with others in the Dominion, and is a growing source of hostility between the north and south.

The Knights of Dawn have two branches, the larger of which comprises the knights (Knight O.C.C.) who act as the officers and cavalry of the church and allied nobles in the south. The Palladin branch are free to travel where they will, enforcing the Church's edicts and evangelizing to the unconverted masses.

Bonuses: With commanderies in both the north and south, Knights of Dawn are accepted anywhere and are for the most part trusted. All are members of the Church of Light and Dark and can expect free lodging and board from any temple of their religion while traveling.

Northern Orders

The northern knights have some striking differences from their southern cousins. Firstly, northern knights are for the most part full-time, professional soldiers. With no land to oversee, they are employed by cities and armies as commanding officers and elite cavalry. Whereas in the south knights are often used as policemen, tracking down criminals and putting down peasant unrest, the northern knights are limited to large military forces tasked with protecting the cities and small kingdoms who employ them, rather than enforcing the law. Indeed, these knights view law enforcement as beneath their station and a waste of their training and abilities. Another marked difference between them is that in the north, knights are respected as the epitome of the warrior, a soldier who fights by an honorable code of conduct and can be trusted to protect the weak and innocent.



Amongst the northern knights, the Code of Chivalry is more than an act or outward guise, it is a way of living that transcends loyalty and honor itself. The only warriors held in higher esteem by the average resident of the north are the Palladins who roam the countryside on their own personal campaigns of honor, seeking out injustice and putting down the forces of evil wherever they may be found.

Like the southern knights, those of the north are also members of Orders where they receive their training and to whom they owe allegiance for life. Only the most unusual of circumstances can bring a knight to forgo his oath of service to his host Order and seek another. Those knights who routinely fail to obey the Code of Chivalry are brought before their Order to stand trial before their peers. Those found guilty are typically cast out of the Order, their names stricken from the rolls of members and added to the list of the Fallen, black knights without honor or kin. Should the crime be heinous or the knight refuse to stand trial, he is dubbed a rogue knight and is subject to a Hunt, a gathering of knights of the rogue's Order who track down and bring their fallen brother to justice. These rogue knights are rarely returned alive.

The Order acts as an extended family to its members, assisting them when they can and helping them to find employment. Members are always welcome in the commanderie and can expect to find healing, food, warm shelter and a sword if necessary. In return, members are expected to obey the rules of their Order, donate up to 30% of their income to the Order's upkeep, bring no dishonor to their fellow initiates of the sword, and assist other members of the Order whenever possible. The requirements for admittance to an Order are not as elitist as those of the south. Any soldier of honor can apply for admittance to an Order. These soldiers are reviewed by a special committee, their past service is examined, friends and ex-commanders interviewed, and the applicant put through a series of tests designed to measure the hopeful's honor and grasp of Chivalry. Should the applicant pass these examinations they receive a sponsor, a knight of the Order specially picked for their ability for instruction. All that is left is payment for the training received, typically ranging from 35,000 up to 80,000 gold or more. Due to the extreme cost of the training, most knights come from the noble and merchant elite, though there are a sizable number whose families have made themselves destitute to put their child through the training. Knights from outside the East who are not members of an Order, or knights wishing to change Orders (particularly southern knights who wish to distance themselves from the lack of chivalry practiced by their kin), can apply for admission and must undergo the same review and testing process as is given to normal applicants. Those knights who are trying to change Orders must justify their desire to switch.

Following are just a few of the more noteworthy knightly Orders who call the north home.

Sisterhood of Northern Knights

Crest: Two roses wrapping around a long sword on a black field.

Grand Master: Lady Amber Leairn, 11th level Knight.

Rolls: 45 Palladins, 320 Knights.

Commanderie: Rosewood, an extensive estate overlooking the Eastern Ocean some 120 miles (192 km) south of Haven. The estate consists of a small fort that houses the Grand Master,

the Sisters' treasury, armory, and a small stable. Surrounding the fort are guest houses, cottages for resident knights, an extensive stable, a horse training facility, drill yards, orchard and a small town, Roseshire, under the Sisters' protection, whose residents cater to the knights' needs and look after the orchard.

Training: 35,000. The Sisters earn most of their income from the pear-orchard, where they grow a unique striped yellow and red pear popular in Haven. In recruiting, the Sisters specifically look for women who display courage, loyalty, steadfastness and discipline. To these young women are given invitations to come to Rosewood for candidate training. The "boot camp" is under the watchful eyes of the Chief Drill Instructor Lady Jessica Rastain, a veteran who started her military career as a Llornian mercenary. The "camp" is designed to push the young women to their absolute breaking point, much like the training regime in Llorn. Every year, some 75-100 women come to Rosewood to take the training. Of those entering, roughly two-thirds do not make it past boot camp. Of the remaining third, only half make it through the knight training which takes two years. Those women who complete the first year of training and then drop out are the equivalent of a Soldier O.C.C. Upon obtaining their knighthood, the resident Palladin, Lady Lynn Solesteri, may take an exceptionally skilled, motivated and mentally strong knight aside for further training and eventual acceptance into the Order of the Rose, the Sisters' Palladin branch.

The Sisterhood is not recognized as a legitimate knightly order in the south, where women are strictly prohibited from knighthood and for the most part warfare in general. Sisters traveling in the south are subject to ridicule, are often refused service, and are banned from participating in southern tournaments. In the north, the Sisters enjoy an untarnished reputation as warriors of the highest order, and are much sought after by city militias and mercenary companies for their skill, honesty, and utter devotion to duty.

Benefits: +10% to Horsemanship, +20% to impress, +2 to P.E.

Knights Common

Crest: A sickle on a split field of green and wheat stalks.

Grand Master: Sir Leonard Tristain, 13th level Knight.

Rolls: 200 Knights.

Commanderie: Serenity, a circular fort with a wooden palisade and a dry, spike-filled moat on the southern expanse of the High-Back plains.

Training: 2,000 gold plus 10 years of sworn service to the Order. The oath of service may seem excessive, but the Order primarily attracts idealistic youth who believe they can make a difference for the inhabitants of the plains, and for whom the extended period of service seems a good way to do so. The training takes two years.

The Knights Common were founded by Sir Roger Conliat, originally a member of the Order of the Lance far to the south. Sir Conliat became a rogue when he killed two members of his own Order, while defending a lone knight of the Sisterhood of Northern Knights from an unwarranted lynching at the hands of his compatriots. Fleeing the Lance's knights and the unjust society from whence they came, he moved into the Highback Plains, where he became a local hero. In time, he attracted a following of like-minded com-

mon soldiers, each dedicated to defending the otherwise defenseless people of the scattered farms. From that band of followers was born the Knights Common, a small Order of knights dedicated to and comprised of the common folk of the Highback Plains. The antagonism between the Knights Common and Knights of the Lance is well known, and were it not for the Sisterhood of Northern Knights' assistance, the Knights Common may well have been decimated during the past 50 years of intermittent conflict. For now, the Knights Common stay in the southern plains, defending the burgeoning farming communities from attack, while the Order of the Lance stays in the far south, ever watchful for any Knight Common who dares to enter their domain.

Benefits: The residents of the plains adore the Knights Common and will go out of their way to assist them if they can. This assistance can range from free lodging and meals, to healing and medicines, to help scouting out the surrounding countryside and in fighting local threats.

Knights of Wolf

Crest: A gray wolf pierced by a lance on a yellow field.

Grand Master: Sir Adrian Tobias, 10th level Palladin.

Rolls: 120 Palladins.

Commanderie: Stoneguard, a foreboding tower situated on the Eastern Ocean in the Disputed Lands, protected by 20 Palladins and 80 Soldiers, all between 3rd and 6th level of experience.

Training: 55,000 gold plus a sponsor from a knight already in the Order. The training focuses on woodlands combat against the Wolfen and Coyles (like most humans, the Knights of Wolf do not differentiate between the two).

The Knights of Wolf are first and foremost dedicated to the defeat of the evil Wolfen threat. To this end, the Order trains Palladins to hunt down and destroy those canines who inhabit the Disputed Lands, and assist in the defense of South Watch and the surrounding fortifications. In place of the emphasis on mounted combat, the Knights of Wolf are taught how to fight amongst the heavy undergrowth of the Disputed Lands and how to survive there for an extended period of time.

The Order's founder, Sir Henry Gladstone, fought against the Wolfen during the first canine invasion on the shores of the Inland Sea, and then in a retreating defense along the length of the Great River, before finally being relieved at Haven. After the canines' defeat, Sir Gladstone dedicated himself to ridding the north of the scourge of the Wolfen. He fought the Coyles in the Disputed Lands for many years before finally forming a knightly Order. Over the past five centuries, Palladins from the Knights of Wolf have served in the armies of every northern city who is threatened by the Wolfen, and have made it their personal duty to push the hated canines back into the Northern Wilderness where they belong.

The Palladins meet at Stoneguard once per year in the fall for a roll call, for admitting new Palladin candidates, to celebrate the dubbing of new Palladins into the Order, and to take care of any other business the Order may have.

Benefits: Replace the Horsemanship: Palladin skill with Horsemanship: General, and add Wilderness Survival, Track Humanoids and Detect Ambush all with a +20% bonus. In

addition, Knights of Wolf enjoy a +1 to parry and dodge and +2 to initiative while fighting in woodlands.

Mistoan Knights

Crest: Eagle with lightning bolts grasped in its talons.

Grand Master: Sir Lugard VasPasseon, 9th level Palladin and cousin to the ruler of Llorn, Duke Githeon VasPasseon.

Rolls: 200 Palladins, 7,000 Knights.

Commanderie: Mistoan War Academy in Llorn.

Training: 200,000 gold, with an 8 year tour of duty in either the Mercenary Corps or the city militia or a combination of the two, whichever is needed by Llorn.

The Mistoan Knights act as the officers and heavy cavalry of Llorn's military, as well as a large share of the armies of cities all along the Great River. Knight candidates are taken from every social strata, so long as they can pay tuition and are willing to serve eight years after their 3 year period of training is completed. A few of the most skilled knight candidates are offered training into an elite cadre of Palladins, the Golden Eagle Corps, independent operators who are employed by Llorn to search out and destroy the supernatural predators who infest the western Disputed Lands. The high cost of the training for the most part ensures that the Mistoan Knights' rolls are filled out by children of the nobility, other knights and the merchant elite. Occasionally, an exceptional talent is transferred from the enlisted ranks of the Mercenary Corps and the Llorn Army. They are required to pay for their training with an additional six years of service to the city.

The Mistoan Knights pride themselves on their unequalled skill as an organization, and are rarely bested in the Melee events in the frequent tournaments around Llorn and elsewhere in the north. Mistoan Knights occasionally travel to the southern tournaments, but find the rules intended to protect the participants distracting, and almost never return a second time.

Bonuses: +2 to strike and parry on horseback, +1 to strike and parry afoot, +15% to intimidate, and a Horror Factor of 13 due to their reputation as the best knights in the East.

Order of the Sword

Crest: A silver sword emblazoned over a black oak leaf.

Grand Master: Sir Audrey Lenskiel, 14th level Knight.

Rolls: 4,500 Knights.

Commanderie: Dain-Rurga, an immense castle currently being rebuilt along the Great River.

Training: A variable fee, ranging from as little as 15,000 to 80,000 depending upon the individual's ability to pay.

The Order of the Sword is a religious knightly Order, overseen and directed by the Sect of Rurga, a growing church dedicated to the warrior goddess Rurga, and to a lesser extent Rurga's compatriot Cirga. The Knights of the Sword form the backbone of several of the more prominent northern cities' cavalry units. Others have found employment with the many honorable mercenary companies who thrive in the conflict-worn lands of the north, especially in and around the Disputed Lands.

The Order's training fee is unique in the East, in that it is based on what the knight candidate can afford. The wealthier the candidate's family, the higher the fee. One would expect contention with this arrangement, but in practice most of the

wealthier families see it as a status symbol; the higher the tuition, the higher one's status. Indeed, this lure of status has caused some families to pay more than they are required. The Sect of Rurga is always willing to accept the money, to help fund the construction of Dain-Rurga and to train and send out priests to the edges of the Sect's sphere of influence (currently the entirety of the Great River, and a sizable portion of the Disputed Lands and the Highback Plains).

The Knights of the Sword are respected as skilled warriors whose loyalty, bravery and skill is unquestionable. In recent years, the Order has found itself training so many candidates that the training period has increased from three years to just

over four. When the castle is completed, about a year from now, the Sect will begin construction of another complex near Dain-Rurga to handle the increased number of trainees. The Order maintains the highest standards of conduct for its members. Knights who routinely break the Code of Chivalry, commit evil acts, or who lie on a routine basis will find themselves summoned to the commanderie for discipline ranging from a fine, to a quest of purification, to expulsion from the Order. All members of the Order of the Sword are expected to pay 40% of their income to the Sect. The Sect of Rurga maintains three other Orders: the Order of the Maple, currently with only 120 members who wear a black maple leaf as their heraldic device; the Order of the Tree, whose membership is composed entirely of Palladins and wear the silhouette of an oak tree as their heraldic device; and the Order of the Scale, comprised entirely of the Holy Palladins of Rurga, currently with 40 members, whose heraldic device is a silver scale with a sword as the center piece.

Benefits: Are welcome to stay at any Barracks of Rurga for free.

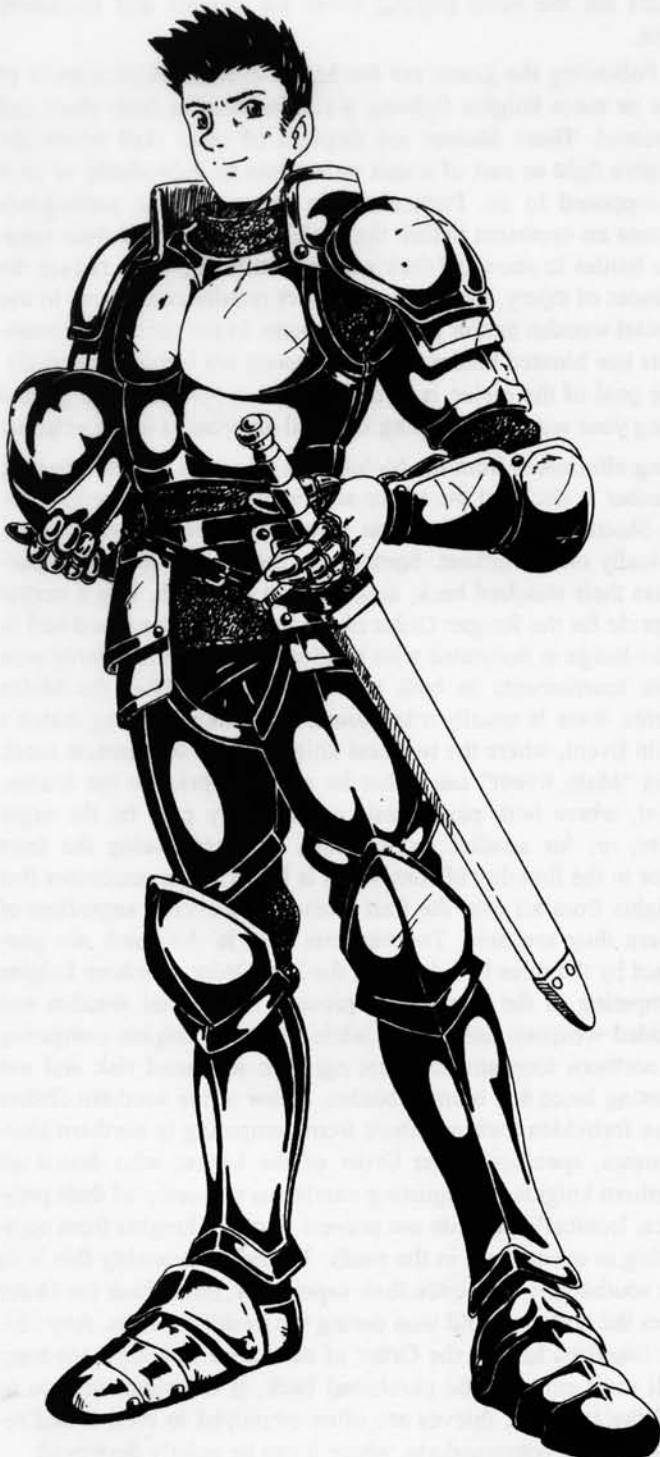
In addition, they are much sought after by employers and can demand 25% more for their services than knights from most other Orders.

Knightly Tradition

Although much about the northern and southern knights is different, each shares two things in common; the Dubbing Ceremony which marks the entry into knighthood, and tournaments, those all important events where a knight can at the same time display his/her fighting skill and their grasp of the finer points of chivalry.

The specifics of the Dubbing Ceremony vary between Orders, but the main parts are unchanged. First, the prospective knight is washed with special soaps and then dressed in a fresh garment that has never been worn. This garment may or may not be decorated. From the bath, the individual is typically brought to the grand hall of the castle or to a large courtyard where he is presented to the rest of the Order, clean of past wrongs and ready to begin his new life as a knight. After the presentation, the prospective knight dons his armor and a tabard bearing the Order's heraldic device. Kneeling before the Master of Ceremonies, he receives the ceremonial blows on the head or shoulder thereby officially making the individual a knight. At this point and not before, the new knight's name is added to the Order's rolls. Following the blows, the entire assemblage of knights is brought into the grand hall and they feast long into the night. If the new knight has some wealth, as most do, there follows a tournament paid for by the new knight lasting from a day to a week. The practice of following the dubbing with a tournament is particularly popular in the south, where appearance and spectacle mean everything. Other variances, especially in the north, include a short sparring match between the prospective knight and another member of the Order prior to receiving the ritual blows. Other Orders require the new initiate to fast for a day or more prior to the Dubbing Ceremony and/or to hold a night-long prayer vigil the day before.

During times of war, the Dubbing Ceremony can be held on the battlefield, with the only requirement being the symbolic blows, which must be performed by a knight of the Order and





witnessed by at least one other member or trusted retainer such as a squire.

Second in importance only to the Dubbing Ceremony are tournaments. Tournaments are held throughout the East. They typically draw large crowds to view the excitement, which can last anywhere from a day to two weeks. These events are held to test the knights' combat expertise and as a means to display their grasp of chivalry, specifically the edicts of fair play in combat, the edicts of nobility in victory and defeat, and the edicts of courtesy towards other participants and to spectators.

The tournaments always open with some sort of public speech by the Master of Ceremonies and, if appropriate, prayers to one or more deities, followed by a grand feast for the participants. The feast is an opportunity for the knights to display their grasp of courtesy and nobility and is the scene of much good-natured hazing and not-so friendly challenges. The next day, the trials of combat begin, usually with the ever popular and lucrative jousts. Jousts consist of a pair of knights, each mounted and armed with lances, charging each other across an open field (there may or may not be a wall dividing the knights to prevent collisions), attempting to knock the other off their horse by hitting them with the lance. The victor is awarded the defeated's horse and armor or their value in a gold ransom. As with any game of chance, there are those who are addicted to the tournament. Those knights whose skill is lacking quickly find themselves, and often their family, impoverished. On the other hand, a highly skilled knight can, and some do, make tournaments a full-time profession, amassing incredible fortunes and reputations on their tournament prowess alone. In order to ensure that jousts are won by the superior opponent rather than by chance, the northern tournaments perform three or five passes

for a single event, with the knight who wins the majority of the passes being declared the victor (knights score points for breaking lances, for striking the opposing knight and for knocking the opponent to the ground). Should a knight be unable to complete the required passes, he is declared the loser. Due to the frequent injuries and fatalities of the event, the southern Orders have ruled that knights use special lances with a large padding of cloth, which has markedly cut down on tournament-related injuries. There is no such rule in the north, where jousting lances, weapons with a special metal tip designed to reduce penetration, are still the accepted tool of the joust. It is a rare tournament in which at least one joust is not injured, and fatalities are an all-too-common occurrence. Despite the danger (perhaps because of it, since it is seen as a display of the edicts of Valor), jousts are the most popular event for knights and spectators alike.

Following the jousts are the Melee events, which consist of five or more knights fighting a similar number both afoot and mounted. These Melees are displays of team skill where the knights fight as part of a unit rather than as individuals, or so it is supposed to be. Particularly in the south, the participants choose an opponent before the Melee and then fight their separate battles to show off their personal skill. Again, to reduce the chances of injury, the southern Orders require contestants to use special wooden and/or padded weapons. In the north, the contestants use blunted blades. Chain weapons are forbidden entirely. The goal of the melee is to knock your opponent to the ground using your weapon. Tripping is a foul and results in the offender being eliminated from the Melee. The side with the last standing member is declared the victor and receives the opponents' Melee Standard, a special ribbon worn on the contestants' armor, typically on the helmet. Sometimes, the loser will offer to purchase their standard back, especially in the south. It is a matter of pride for the Rurgan Order of the Sword that the grand hall in Dain-Rurga is decorated with hundreds of Melee Standards won from tournaments in both north and south. After the Melee events, there is usually a last joust, much like a boxing match's Main Event, where the two best knights of the tournament meet. This "Main Event" can either be arranged prior to the tournament, where both participants are typically paid by the organizer, or, for smaller tournaments, arranged during the feast prior to the first day of contests. It is important to remember that knights from all over the East attend these events, regardless of where they are held. Tournaments held in the south are governed by the rules laid down by the host Order. Northern knights competing in the south must procure the special wooden and padded weapons used there, while southern knights competing in northern tournaments must agree to increased risk and use jousting lance and blunted blades. A few of the southern Orders have forbidden their members from competing in northern tournaments, specifically the Order of the Lance, who deems all northern knights as disgusting charlatans unworthy of their presence. Ironically, they do not prevent northern knights from competing in events held in the south. Though presumably this is so the southerners can prove their superiority, most think the Order likes the northern gold won during the jousting events. Any Melee Standard lost by the Order of the Lance to a northern team will most certainly be purchased back. If the victor refuses to sell the standard, thieves are often employed to steal it and return it to the commanderie, where it can be quietly destroyed.

Palladium Fantasy RPG®

BLADE LAW

By Richard Thomassen

Optional Material for the Palladium Fantasy RPG®

The Dwarven sage took the wizard into what was the forge, and proudly showed him the great black rune blade. It did not overly worry him that the wizard was an Elf — the blade was buried almost to the hilt in a rune covered anvil, and had not moved for anyone in the hundreds of years since the forge had been rediscovered.

As he had expected, and many had done before, the Elf was casting spells upon the blade, trying to fathom its secrets and wrest it from the anvil. But something was different with this one — the blade started to audibly hum, loudly, causing the Dwarf's teeth to ring, and then the Elf started shouting at the blade in a dialect of Elven the sage had not heard before.

With a scream, the Elf ripped the sword from the anvil.

The Dwarf closed his eyes and swore — the drawing of the blade was the last thing he saw.

During the Elf-Dwarf War, the Dwarves' rune weapons were the bane of the Elves — the secrets of rune magic were closed to them. In response, the Elven magi developed spells that would let them study, subdue and then control captured blades, turning them on their creators.

It was only very near the end of the conflict that the Dwarves truly became aware of these spells, and were able to counter them, creating a few blades that would react aggressively against any of these magicks.



Book of Blade Law

The spells contained within are spells lost to common spell knowledge, that allow a wizard to study, manipulate and ultimately control a rune weapon or item.

In game terms, these are all relatively high level spells, as the magic involved is complex and alien to the wizards of today. Priests of some Elven gods, or old gods once worshiped by the Elves, may be granted these spells under special circumstances, but most gods do not know them, or have forgotten their use.

Note: The spell names and descriptions use the term "rune blade" or simply "blade." This is used to describe whatever rune weapon or item is being controlled, regardless of the actual weapon type.

Spell List

- Blade Lore — Level 6 — 20 P.P.E.
- Blade Beguile (Lesser) — Level 8 — 40 P.P.E.
- Blade Beguile (Greater) — Level 12 — 100 P.P.E.
- Blade Beguile True — Level 15 — 500 P.P.E.
- Blade Silence — Level 10 — 120 P.P.E.
- Blade Bond — Level 12 — 200 P.P.E.
- Blade Sate (Lesser) — Level 8 — 80 P.P.E.
- Blade Sate (Greater) — Level 13 — 160 P.P.E.
- Blade Mastery — Level 13 — 100 P.P.E.
- Blade Domination — Level 15 — 1000 P.P.E.
- Blade Absolution (Lesser) — Level 10 — 60 P.P.E.

Blade Absolution (Greater) — Level 14 — 300 P.P.E.

Blade Denial — Level 12 — 200 P.P.E.

Blade Scream — Level 13 — 50 P.P.E.

Blade Question — Level 11 — 50 P.P.E.

Blade Commune — Level 15 — 300 P.P.E.

Blade Drain — Level 14 — 40 P.P.E.

Blade Lore

Level: Six.

Range: One blade; 3 feet (.9 m) per level of experience.

Duration: 1 melee per level of experience.

Saving Throw: Standard (or none; see below).

P.P.E.: Twenty.

Blade Lore is the first step down the road of dominating a rune weapon. It is a combination of Object Reading and Empathy, potentially enlightening the wizard as to the nature of the blade.

Line of sight is not required, but the mage must know the exact location of the blade. E.g., if the wizard is warned not to look upon the rune blade, but is holding a case containing it, then this spell can still be cast.

Each melee round, the wizard will gain one piece of information about the studied blade. If the rune blade is not of the same alignment grouping (good, selfish or evil) as the wizard, then typically the blade will resist the spell, giving it a saving throw per piece of information.

Possible information gained:

- Alignment of blade.
- Level of intelligence.
- Principle purpose.
- Level of perception and awareness.
- Age and founding race.
- List of lesser rune powers.

When all of the points above are known, the following can be determined:

- Individual major powers, if any (e.g., Soul Drinking, Spell casting, Priestly powers, etc.).
- Individual curses, if any.

If the blade is trapped against the use of these spells, the trap will normally be activated after the wizard has gained all of the lesser information. Also, intelligent blades will be aware of this spell's use, and may react.

The use of any of the spells below requires all of the information Blade Lore can provide, possibly requiring several castings.

Additionally, the success of any of the other Blade Law spells can be determined through the use of this spell, for which there is no save for the blade.

Blade Beguile (Lesser)

Level: Eight.

Range: Self.

Duration: 1 hour per level of experience.

Saving Throw: Special.

P.P.E.: Forty.

Using this enchantment, a wizard can alter his aura with respect to the blade, so that his alignment appears to be more akin to its wishes. If the blade fails its saving throw, the wizard's

alignment may be changed by one step for every four complete experience levels, with respect to how the blade views the wizard. For instance, a fifth level Unprincipled Wizard could be viewed as Scrupulous or Anarchist by the blade, while an eighth level Wizard could be viewed as anything from Principled to Miscreant or Aberrant.

While there is no saving throw against the casting of the spell, any rune blade gets a standard saving throw to see through the enchantment.

Note that this doesn't actually change the wizard's alignment, and he must be careful not to destroy this illusion with his own actions. An intelligent, observant blade *may* figure out that it has been tricked if the wizard is acting too far out of his supposed alignment.

Blade Beguile (Greater)

Level: Twelve.

Range: Self or touch.

Duration: 1 day per level of experience.

Saving Throw: Standard.

P.P.E.: One hundred.

The same as Blade Beguile (Lesser), except the duration is much longer, and the wizard's alignment can be changed by one step per three complete levels, not four.

While there is no saving throw against the casting of the spell, any rune blade gets a saving throw against the influence of the spell. Once failed, however, the wizard can renew this spell indefinitely, until there is a lapse in the enchantment's duration or he runs out of P.P.E.

If not targeted on the wizard casting the spell, this spell can affect a willing, touched target identical to a Blade Beguile (Lesser) spell.

Blade Beguile True

Level: Fifteen.

Range: Self or touch.

Duration: 1 year per level of experience.

Saving Throw: Standard.

P.P.E.: Five hundred.

The Same as Blade Beguile (Greater), except the duration is measured in years, and the blade will except the alignment of the casting wizard to be whatever he desires upon casting.

If not targeted on the wizard casting the spell, this spell can effect a willing, touched target identical to a Blade Beguile (Greater) spell.

Blade Silence

Level: Ten.

Range: One blade; 3 feet (.9 m) per level of experience.

Duration: 1 hour per level of experience.

Saving Throw: Standard.

P.P.E.: One hundred twenty.

Intelligent blades are able to communicate with their wielders, owners, or those nearby. When an intelligent sword does this, it is usually done to influence and coerce people, possibly through speech, possibly through telepathic suggestion.

If successful, the Blade Silence enchantment will provide the equivalent of the psionic power "Mind Block" and a muting spell, making the effected blade unable to communicate in any way.

Blade Bond

Level: Twelve.

Range: One blade; touch.

Duration: Instant.

Saving Throw: Standard.

P.P.E.: Two hundred.

Normally, a blade will have to be in close contact with its wielder for approximately six months before it will trust him and bond with him. If the saving throw is failed, this spell will bypass that time, allowing the wizard to instantly bond with the blade.

For this to work, the blade must accept the wizard as a suitable wielder, either normally or through the other Blade Law spells.

Opening oneself to a blade in such a way is not always safe. If the bond between man and blade is ever broken (either through spell, or an intelligent blade's choice), then the wizard will be briefly open to attack from the sword. The wizard will suffer a penalty of -4 on any saving throws against the blade until 30 minutes minus the wizard's M.E. have passed. One would be wise to leave a vengeful blade's presence.

Blade Sate (Lesser)

Level: Eight.

Range: One blade; 3 feet (.9 m) per level of experience.

Duration: 10 minutes per level of experience.

Saving Throw: Standard.

P.P.E.: Eighty.

This spell is particularly useful in controlling a blade that has requirements and urges. Some soul drinkers actively thirst for death, while others demand constant cleaning, or even material wealth such as jewel encrusted scabbards. If the blade fails its saving throw, the blade is fooled into thinking these desires have been sated for the duration.

Blade Sate (Greater)

Level: Thirteen.

Range: One blade; 3 feet (.9 m) per level of experience.

Duration: 1 hour per level of experience.

Saving Throw: Standard.

P.P.E.: One hundred sixty.

The same as the lesser version of the spell, with a much greater duration.

Blade Mastery

Level: Thirteen.

Range: One blade; 1000 feet (305 m), +200 feet (61 m) per level of experience.

Duration: One minute per level of experience.

Saving Throw: None.

P.P.E.: One hundred.

This spell requires first that the blade be bonded with the wizard, either conventionally or through other spells.

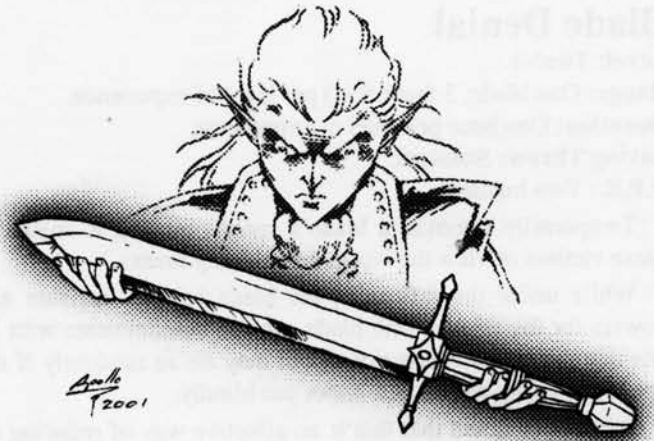
This spell gives the wizard a temporary telepathic and telekinetic link with the blade, through which the wizard is able to command and wield the blade, even if at extreme range, and have access to the blade's usual powers.

Because the wizard can not as effectively wield the blade as if it was in his hand, any strike and parry rolls are at half their

usual bonus. Any damage bonuses for strength obviously do not apply.

However, as it is the wizard's mind controlling the blade, a strong mind will wield the blade more effectively — every two points of M.E. above 14 reduce the strike and parry penalty by one (+1 at 16, +2 at 18, etc.) and provide a +2 damage bonus. E.g., a wizard with a strike and parry bonus of +6 would normally be only at +3. His M.E. of 18 reduces the penalty (-3) by two points, giving a bonus of +5, and a damage bonus of +4.

Dangerously for the wizard's foes, this spell requires only vocalization, meaning the only way to stop the wizard from casting the spell is by gagging him.



Blade Domination

Level: Fifteen.

Range: One blade; 3 feet (.9 m) per level of experience.

Duration: One hour per level of experience.

Saving Throw: Standard.

P.P.E.: One thousand.

This spell, if successful, gives the wizard complete domination over a rune blade. The blade's alignment and intelligence can be overridden, curses are ignored and powers can be used at the wizard's will, up to their normal limits.

Unless the blade is particularly forgiving, if the domination fails, or after the duration expires and the spell is not renewed by the wizard, any blade with intelligence will typically react with hostility to the wizard (though within the bounds of its alignment). This results in the blade effectively being at +4 to save against any Blade Law spells for a period of at least one day per level of the wizard. During this time, any bond the wizard has with the blade is broken.

Furthermore, if the wizard is not already bonded to the blade, he will suffer penalties against any reprisal attacks as if he were.

Blade Absolution (Lesser)

Level: Ten.

Range: One blade; 3 feet (.9 m) per level of experience.

Duration: One hour per level of experience.

Saving Throw: Standard.

P.P.E.: One hundred.

This powerful but short lived enchantment removes one curse from a blade for every four levels of the caster's experience. The blade gets a saving throw against the enchantment. If the

saving throw was successful (which can be detected through the Blade Lore spell) and the curse is still inflicted, the effects of the curse will typically last for twice as long, and take half the amount of time to influence the wielder (if applicable).

Blade Absolution (Greater)

Level: Fourteen.

Range: One blade; 3 feet (.9 m) per level of experience.

Duration: One day per level of experience.

Saving Throw: Standard.

P.P.E.: Three hundred.

The same as the lesser version of the spell, except removing one curse per *three* levels of experience and lasting longer.

Blade Denial

Level: Twelve.

Range: One blade; 3 feet (.9 m) per level of experience.

Duration: One hour per level of experience.

Saving Throw: Standard.

P.P.E.: Two hundred.

Temporarily removes a blade's senses, making it unable to sense victims or view the world through any means.

While under the influence, the blade can not activate any powers for the wielder (the blade can not communicate with its wielder to receive instructions), but may do so randomly if the entrapped entity panics and lashes out blindly.

It has been noted that this is an effective way of reducing an enemy's power over their weapon, if the wizard is brave enough to get within casting range.

Blade Question

Level: Eleven.

Range: One blade; 3 feet (.9 m) per level of experience.

Duration: One question.

Saving Throw: Standard.

P.P.E.: Fifty.

This spell forces a single truthful answer from a blade in response to a single question.

The blade will only answer the question if it is able to communicate, and it fails its saving throw. If the blade does not know the answer, it will say so.

If the blade has no voice or telepathic abilities, communication may be limited to the blade pointing in a direction, being drawn to a symbol, or any other non-vocal means.

Note that if the blade does make its saving throw and is so inclined, it may lie. Use of the Blade Lore spell may spot the deception (by indicating whether this spell was successful).

Blade Scream

Level: Thirteen.

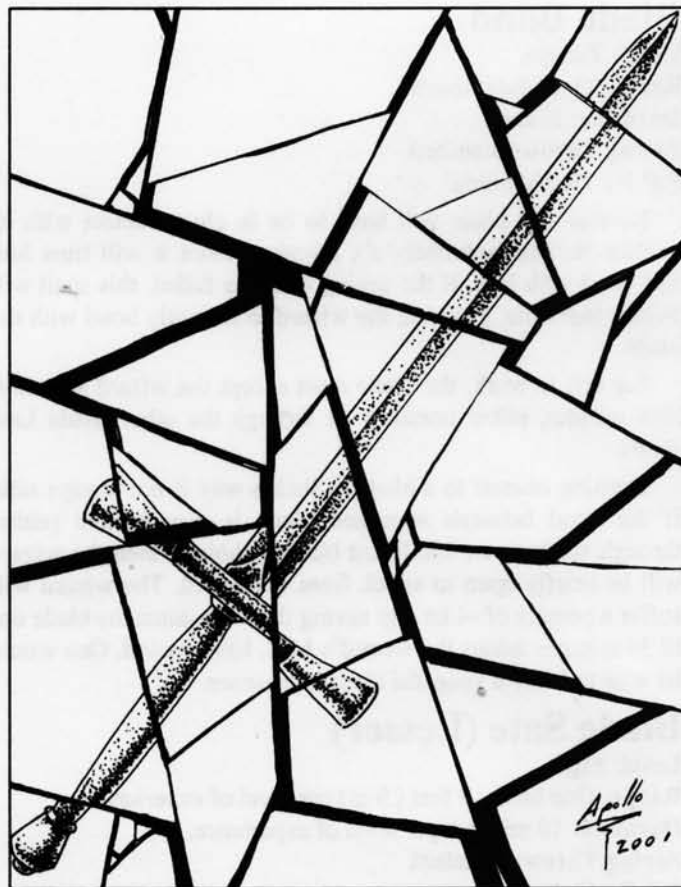
Range: One blade; 3 feet (.9 m) per level of experience.

Duration: One minute per level of experience.

Saving Throw: Standard.

P.P.E.: Fifty.

For blades to work effectively, they must be able to sense the world. This is done through a verity of means, but they all provide sensory information to the entrapped entity that empowers the blade.



This cruel spell, if not successfully resisted by the blade, will temporarily corrupt the blade's perceptions, giving it the sensations of burning agony.

While the spell has no other effects, it can be used as a device of torture for obedience (or pleasure), to "soften" the blade for other spells (-1 to save vs Lore, Question, Commune and Domination Blade Law spells for every point this saving throw was failed by), or in retribution for the sword's own actions.

The reaction of a blade to this spell is up to the G.M., who must take the blade's intelligence, alignment and personality into consideration. A blade of very low intelligence is not likely to react to the spell, positively or negatively, while the most intelligent blades may quietly plot their revenge.

Blade Drain

Level: Fourteen.

Range: One blade; 3 feet (.9 m) per level of experience.

Duration: Instant.

Saving Throw: Standard at +2.

P.P.E.: Forty.

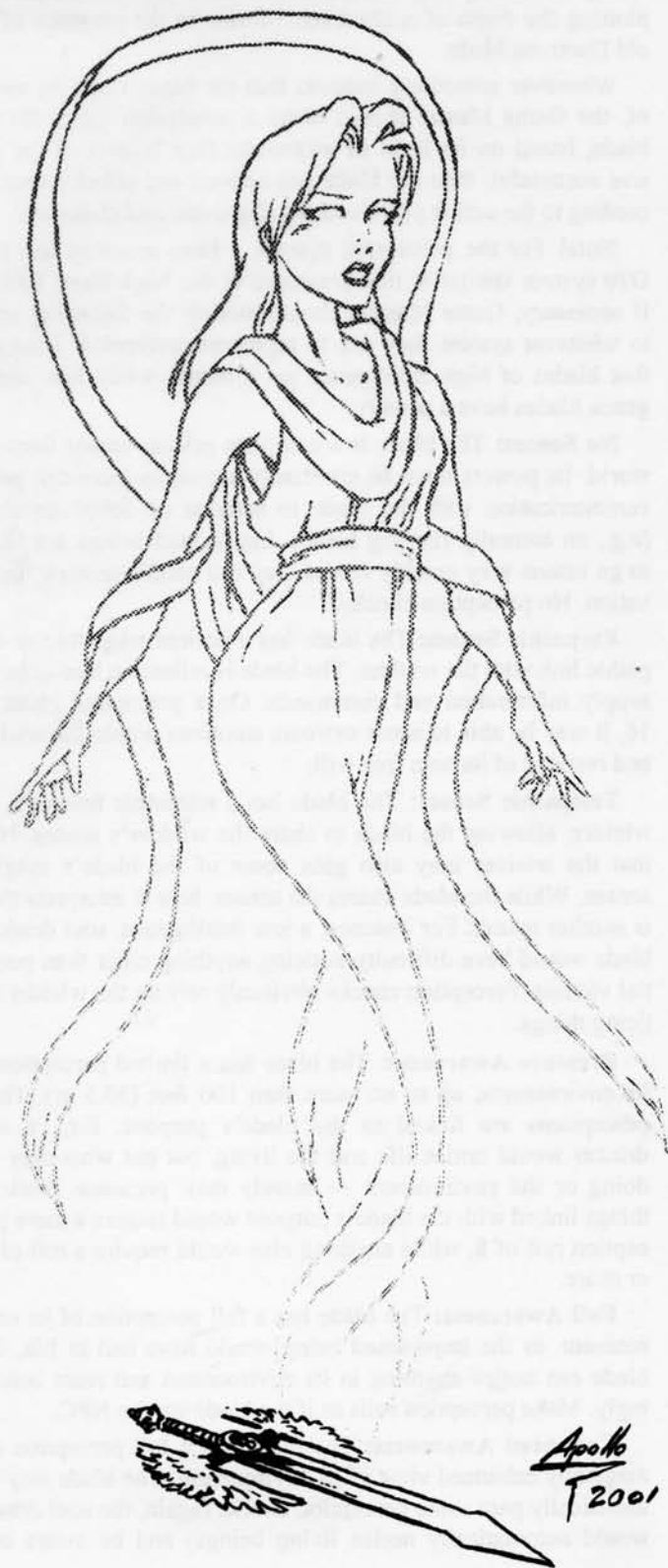
Rune Weapons are amongst the most powerful enchanted items on the face of Palladium, and as such, they are a potential source of massive amounts of P.P.E. This enchantment lets the wizard attempt to rip that P.P.E. out of the blade for his own ends, up to a limit of 30 P.P.E. per level of the wizard.

While this can not permanently damage a blade, it can temporarily shut it down, isolating the blade's entity and stripping it of all its powers — the blade effectively becomes an indestructible piece of metal. The spell is instantaneous, but the blade suffers the draining effect until it can recover and recharge its P.P.E., at 20 P.P.E. per hour for lesser rune blades, and 40

P.P.E. per hour for greater ones. When half of the P.P.E. has been regained, the blade will regain its senses, but not its powers.

While recharging, the sword can not be drained again, and will be at a further +4 to save against the spell for the next day. When recharged, the blade may react to the wizard as if it had been effected by a Blade Scream spell.

If the wizard limits himself to drawing a mere 10 P.P.E. per level, then the blade will suffer no negative effects, as long as it isn't drained again for the next twelve hours.



Blade Commune

Level: Fifteen.

Range: One blade; 3 feet (.9 m) per level of experience.

Duration: Five minutes per level of experience.

Saving Throw: Standard.

P.P.E.: Three hundred.

Effectively a limited "Commune with Spirits," this spell lets the wizard communicate with whatever entity empowers the blade. The wizard will be able to see a ghostly image of the entity that will be bound or chained in some way to the blade. Psychics will also be able to see the image, as will non-psychics if the wizard expends an extra 50 P.P.E. when casting the spell.

There is no guarantee that the entrapped entity will be willing to answer the wizard's questions (see the "Commune with Spirits" spell for details), able to communicate in a way the wizard can understand, or even sane.

If the blade does not wish to communicate with the wizard, then it gets a saving throw.

Live by me, die by me

Backlash

Rune blades are all intelligent, to some degree, and they are almost all created with a purpose in mind. Obviously, to be effective, the blade needs a wielder, but not all wielders will have the same aims and goals as the blade.

To dissuade these "undesirables" from abusing their powers, rune blades often have the ability to damage a wielder. Typically, it is this ability that is activated by the blade when those of incorrect alignment or race pick up the blade, doing as little damage as a numbing but harmless static charge, to lethal amounts (4D6 and above).

This damaging ability has been called "Backlash" within Blade Law, as it was often experienced by wizards who lost control of their rune blades and suffered this as a result.

A wizard affected by Backlash gets a saving throw, typically of 12. If the save is successful, the wizard recognizes the danger of the imminent attack. If they release the blade immediately, they suffer no damage. If they can not or will not release the blade, then they suffer damage in full. Note that spells such as Blade Bond open the wizard mystically to the blade, making it harder for the wizard to pre-empt the attack.

Backlash has been known to happen if a Beguile or Control spell ends, either because of a careless or unconscious wizard, or because the spell was negated by a third party. It can also occur as a test of endurance for blades who demand powerful wielders, or as an indication of the blade's displeasure.

Most blades of advanced intelligence can limit the Backlash damage (in steps of 1D6), so blades not of an evil alignment may avoid killing their target. Evil blades and blades of low intelligence will typically inflict full Backlash damage.

Backlash is not limited to mere damage. The wizard may also be affected by spells or powers the blade has, such as blinding flashes, mute, life drain, teleportation or even the summoning of spirits or demons.



“The Sword... It’s watching me...”

One question anyone dealing with a blade should be aware of is exactly how much of the surrounding world the rune weapon is able to perceive. Is it limited to only what the wielder perceives while wielding the weapon? More? Less? This may sound like a trivial question, but consider the consequences of taking a starving soul drinker into a crowded marketplace, or plotting the death of a Dwarfven warrior in the presence of an old Dwarfven blade.

Whenever something happens that the blade could be aware of, the Game Master should make a perception check for the blade, based on its level of awareness (see below). If the roll was successful, then the blade has noticed and should react according to the action perceived, its alignment and character.

Note: For the perception system, I have assumed use of a D20 system similar to that presented in the *Nightbane RPG*®. If necessary, Game Masters should modify the following notes to whatever system they use to represent perception. I suggest that blades of high intelligence get a bonus, while low intelligence blades have a penalty.

No Senses: The blade is a complete prison, sealed from the world. Its powers must be constantly active, as there can be no communication with the blade to activate or deactivate them (e.g., an eternally flaming blade). Imprisoned beings are likely to go insane very quickly unless they can handle sensory deprivation. No perception checks.

Empathic Senses: The blade has a limited telepathic or empathic link with the wielder. The blade is reliant on him or her to supply information and commands. On a perception check of 16, it may be able to sense extreme emotions within the wielder and respond of its own free will.

Telepathic Senses: The blade has a telepathic link with the wielder, allowing the blade to share the wielder’s senses. Note that the wielder may also gain some of the blade’s magical senses. While the blade shares the senses, how it interprets them is another matter. For instance, a low intelligence, soul drinking blade would have difficulty noticing anything other than potential victims. Perception checks obviously rely on the wielder noticing things.

Presence Awareness: The blade has a limited perception of its environment, up to no more than 100 feet (30.5 m). These perceptions are linked to the blade’s purpose. E.g., a soul drinker would notice life and the living, but not what they are doing or the environment — merely their presence. Noticing things linked with the blade’s purpose would require a mere perception roll of 8, while anything else would require a roll of 16 or more.

Full Awareness: The blade has a full perception of its environment, as the imprisoned being would have had in life. The blade can notice anything in its environment and react accordingly. Make perception rolls as if the blade was an NPC.

Enhanced Awareness: The blade has a full perception and magically enhanced view of its environment. The blade may automatically pass some perception checks (again, the soul drinker would automatically notice living beings) and be aware of a

Curses

A warrior picks up a rune blade, and is inflicted by the curses the blade bears. Why?

Curses could be considered a defense mechanism the blades are empowered with. Unlike Backlash that is an instantaneous effect, curses are typically permanent, inflicting the wielder at least as long as the blade is owned, possibly long after.

Some curses are intrinsic to the blade — being empowered by the blade may make the wielder’s eyes glow, or the blade may have an ego such that it forces the wielder to abandon all other arms and armor. Other curses may be a side effect of the construction of a blade, and as such are unavoidable, while some may be a deliberate hindrance to the wielder, a product of a mad or twisted creator or bound entity.

But there are those curses that the blade has control of, and may be relinquished under the right circumstances.

For instance, a blade may curse any wielder that is not a Dwarf, or a priest of Ra. Another may relinquish the curses it has if pampered and treated as it desires, or if the wielder acts in a particular manner. One may force the wielder to follow the rules of chivalry, while another may demand to only be used in ambush attacks. Yet another may curse the wielder constantly until it is bonded with, at which time it will reward the wielder by dropping the curses.

As such, it is up to the G.M. to determine the reasons why a blade bears a curse or curses, when they are activated and how they can be avoided.

much wider range of senses and information, such as magical disturbances, auras, and supernatural entities.

A highly intelligent and perceptive rune blade is going to have a strong personality and should be handled as a full NPC. Game Masters wishing to avoid this should limit blades in their games to No Senses, Empathic Awareness or Presence Awareness.

In Only Six Days

Some Thoughts on World-Building for



By James M.G. Cannon

Most Palladium games, like **Rifts**® or **Nightbane**®, come complete with rules and world information. Along with the usual mix of character classes, races, technology and magic, the Game Master and players get at least a glimpse at a large and well defined game world in which to set their adventures. Not so with **Heroes Unlimited**™. There are a few sourcebooks supplementing the main Heroes Unlimited text, but none of the material really defines the game world in the same concrete terms that, say, a **Rifts World Book** does for **Rifts**. This leaves the Heroes Unlimited game world vaguely defined as a modern Earth plus super powers. All we gamers are given to work with are the presence of high technology (in the form of robotics and bionics), the existence of magic, aliens, and a few organizations like S.C.R.E.T. and Project: Tyche. Other than that, it seems, the game world is our Earth with the simple addition of super-powered heroes.

For some, this lack of detail could be seen as a drawback. It's a lot of empty space that needs to be filled in. For others, like myself, it means freedom.

I'm from the old gaming school, from the days when companies didn't provide any world information with their rulebooks, so we had to build our own worlds. There is something reassuring about the wealth of information and background available in your average **Rifts World Book**, but sometimes I miss the freedom to create my own game world and play my games within it. **Heroes Unlimited** gives me that freedom, which is one of the reasons I love the game so much. Of course, the other reason is that I'm a comic book junkie.

One of my favorite comic book gimmicks is the alternate reality or alternate time line branching off from some main line to create a new history or world, where the rules are different, where the things we take for granted are changed beyond recognition. Kevin and the gang are also obviously fans of this con-

cept, and one only needs to look at **Rifts** to notice that. But the plastic nature of the **Heroes Unlimited** game world allows Game Masters and players to create their own distinctive worlds in which to play. This is perhaps one of the most fundamental aspects of the role-playing experience, and though it requires a great deal more work from those involved, the rewards are well worth it.

So how do you go about building a world? There's no right or wrong way to do so; whatever works for you and your players is how to go about it. Below are a few suggestions on areas that should be concentrated upon, and some suggestions on how to do it.

The World

The first step, and one not to be taken for granted. What world will you use? The natural answer is of course Earth itself, but as John Zeleznik pointed out with **Skrapypers**, Earth isn't the end all, be all of heroic games.

Earth has a definite advantage over any other world; it is the one most familiar to us. History, technology, cultures, religions, and so on are already laid out for us and well known to us, because we deal with them all each day. All of these provide perfect and easily researched springboards from which to craft the rest of your world. It also parallels the comic books themselves, where Earth is typically the home from which the heroes hail. But comics depend to a large degree upon a basic recognition factor in order to sell. They require institutions, places, people, and situations that make a story feel somehow more real to the reader, even though the characters themselves routinely violate the most basic laws of physics.

If you want an alien world with some familiarity, consider dropping your heroes into the midst of the **Nightbane Earth** or the **Palladium World**. Imagine superhumans doing battle with the **Mechanoids** or **Systems Failure's Bugs**. Naturally, the Earth consumed by the **Rifts** would be a perfect home for superhumans. But in order to make it a **Heroes Unlimited** game, you'd have to make some modifications. The aim here is not to play that game with the addition of superpowers, but to play a **Heroes Unlimited** game utilizing that specific world as your setting. There is a difference, though it may be a subtle one. In order to make it a **Heroes Unlimited** game, you might provide the **Coalition** with a specially trained cadre of superhuman opera-

tives, or allow the Doppelgangers of the Nightlands to duplicate the powers of superhumans, or design laws of the Western Empire that pertain to costumed vigilantes, or perhaps NORAD experiments stimulate the development of superhuman abilities.

Rules modifications may be necessary as well, besides concerns about game balance, which should be paramount (should heroes have access to robots and power armor, for example? Probably not is the correct answer), and right behind that, concern about what would be fun. A Heroes Unlimited campaign set in the Palladium World, for example, would mean no bionics or robotics characters would be available. Hardware and some special training characters would require extensive modification as well, in order to fit into the fantasy milieu. Can Elves, Dwarves, and Giants manifest superhuman abilities, or are powers reserved only for humans? The extra effort goes a long way, and your game will only benefit from it.

There's a third option, and that is to start from scratch. Build a whole new world, like Seeron from *Skraypers*, and go to town. This option certainly provides the most freedom, but it also requires the most work. You've got to put a whole world together from scratch, from the ground up. The history and geography of the world, the technology level, society and culture, and everything else comes from you and the players. It sounds daunting, and it does require a considerable investment of time and energy, but it can be a lot of fun as well.

History

The history of your world is vital, as everything that comes before has impact on what occurs in the now. It is thus important to consider the history of the super-powered hero and how it has affected the world in which your player characters live. For example, are the player characters and their contemporaries the first superhumans on the planet? Or have their been others in the past? How deep into the past do superpowers manifest? Most comics use the Second World War as the benchmark, because that's about the time when super-powered heroes first burst on the scene (Superman in 1938, Batman in 1939, and everybody else busted loose after that), but that needn't be so in your world. In the Heroes Unlimited main book, the theory is presented that superpowers go all the way back to the Iron Age, and that the figures of mythology are simply superpowered humans rather than gods. That's a long way back, and it gives you at least three thousand years of human history to play with, but you needn't go quite that far.

Don't just worry about heroes, either. There are millions of points in history at which it might have all changed, one way or another, due to the actions of ordinary people. In our own century, the degree to which the United States became committed to the war in Vietnam may have been averted had President Kennedy lived. As well, Truman's hard line against the Soviets following the Second World War was not the way Roosevelt himself planned on dealing with Stalin. The life of a single person can and has altered history, again and again, without benefit of outrageous abilities. Keep that in mind as your world takes form.

What about the First World War? As mentioned in *Rifter #5*, the heroes of the pulps weren't all that different from the heroes of the comic books. Perhaps superbeings first appeared in the twenties and thirties, and have affected history since then.

Or what about the Western? The Lone Ranger and Zorro are both hero types, and not just because they wear masks. They have other heroic clichés too — the secret hideout, the sidekick, the trademark weapon, and the mission of justice. Western comics were popular in the fifties when "hero" comic books weren't selling, and many publishers have since incorporated those



western heroes into the background of their official universes. You could do the same.

Maybe you can push the advent of superhumans even further back, to the American Revolution, or to the Age of Discovery. Whatever you do, just be certain to accommodate these historical changes into your world. A two hundred year old heroic legacy stretching back to the Revolutionary War holds a different kind of weight than a fifty year legacy stretching back to World War II — and creates many different story opportunities. If the first Captain Freedom fought the Nazis, his successor may be looked on more favorably in 2001 than if the first Captain Freedom was a Virginian and a slave owner two hundred years ago. Sure, he helped free America from the British, but he also contributed to the racism and inequality rampant in the United States today.

There is also the opposite tack to consider. There is nothing in the rulebook that requires your game to take place in the present day; take your heroes into the future and see what happens. Right there you solve the problems posed by having bionics, robots, and hardware characters running around with outlandish technology at their disposal. In the 22nd century, such things may be commonplace. Indeed, superhumans of all kinds may be common. Imagine experiments designed to create superhumans to colonize and terraform other planets, or a race of super evolved mutants leading humanity to the stars, while alien powers observe Earth's development from afar. The possibilities are endless, from the bleak, apocalyptic future of Rifts to a more utopian view like Star Trek, to dystopian, grungy worlds like Blade Runner or Cyberpunk. The bleak futures are often the best to use where heroes are considered; surrounded by darkness, the heroes offer a beacon of hope, a bright light in the endless night.

Once you have your starting point, it is time to fill in the blanks. You should create a timeline, but don't feel you have to put everything in there at once. Start with a few significant dates and work your way to the present. Remember that this isn't just a catalogue of famous heroes and when they first appeared, but primarily a list of events that have occurred in the past that shape the present. Consider how the outcomes of certain events in history may have been affected by the presence of superhumans, like the civil rights movement in America, the hostages in Iran, or the great Chicago fire. If the Viking colonies in North America had succeeded, would there be a Leif Erickson Day instead of a Columbus Day? Would the Cold War have progressed as long as it did if superhuman operatives were available, or might it still be going on?

Wars in general should be thought about. The twentieth century was a catalogue of armed conflicts around the world, and the presence of superhumans would affect the outcome of those wars. Even so much as a single invulnerable soldier or a teleporter could prove devastating in battle, never mind if a Mega-being took to the field. In the comics, while World War II consumed the world's attention, the writers and artists had to come up with a reason for their heroes to stay out of the war; with their power, they'd have it wrapped up in an afternoon, which would have cheapened the efforts of the men and women actually involved in the war. The characters in Heroes Unlimited don't even begin to approach the power of the big comic book superstars, but they are powerful enough to alter the course of human events. Keep that in mind.

Another thing to consider is the origin of the superpowers themselves. In the comic books, the acquisition of powers tends to be a pretty random thing. One guy is bitten by a radioactive spider, another comes from a distant planet, and some people are just born that way. It can be fun, however, if the advent of superpowers can be traced back to a single event, a blazing indicator of the point at which the alternate reality of the game world branches off from our own. Perhaps a meteor or comet crashes into the Earth, unleashing cosmic radiation that mutates humanity, or an alien virus is loosed on Earth with devastating results, or an atomic bomb opens up a gate to some other dimension that floods the planet with otherworldly energy. If the game begins in the future, perhaps the first use of a jump-gate, hyperdrive, or other faster-than-light means of travel sets off a chain reaction that awakens super abilities in humanity.

I've always liked this option, and I find it makes the rest of the equation easier to deal with once I've marked the world with a big X and said, "Here is where it starts." Once I'm there, the rest of the world falls into place. For example, I once designed a setting for a campaign based on the premise that the atomic bombs that devastated Hiroshima and Nagasaki in 1945 not only ended the second world war, but also opened up twin gateways to other dimensions. The otherdimensional energy leeching from the gates created mass mutations all over the globe, creating superhumans. That not only gave me a neat and easy explanation for why superpowers existed on this world, but it also provided me with a number of ideas for structuring the rest of the world. Nuclear power, for example, would be largely nonexistent and the arms race that fueled the Cold War would never have happened — after all, if the only two atomic bombs ever detonated opened up gates in time and space, not many people would be willing to exploit that kind of technology. Japan, at the heart of the maelstrom, becomes the most powerful nation on the planet after they learn how to tap the tremendous energy of the gateways. With nuclear power out of the equation, fossil fuels become much more vital, and the situation in the Middle East even more volatile, and so on. With the larger brush strokes applied, I could then move in and fill in the rest of the details that make a world feel real.

Something else to think about is adventuring in other time periods; the Heroes Unlimited rulebook presupposes that you'll be playing in the present day. This needn't be the case. You can flash forward into the future, or drop back into the past. If you add time travel to your game, you can play in the past, present, and future.

Once you have your timeline, it might be fun to play out certain events or scenarios that had a great impact on the past. For example, if masked vigilantes with super abilities helped tame the American frontier during the nineteenth century, you might set up a mini-campaign to explore that idea with your players. While being a different way of playing the game, this also has the added advantage of giving your players real input into the history and form of the game world. The actions of their characters in the past help create the present or future that their other, perhaps "primary," characters will inhabit. When your players are allowed to invest that kind of care and attention in the game world, only good things can happen.

Technology

A high technological level is pretty much a given in your average Heroes Unlimited game. The presence of bionics, robotics, and hardware characters demands it, as previously noted. You have to ask yourself how common these items are, however, and how they've affected society.

For example, bionic systems are pretty expensive for the average consumer. An arm and hand combo would cost you about a million dollars. Most people in need of prosthetic devices won't be able to afford bionic limbs. On the other hand, from a government's point of view, a well equipped bionic soldier is cheaper to build than a state-of-the-art fighter jet. From there, it isn't hard to imagine government or corporate grants that might enable the handicapped to afford bionic prosthetics. Industries and corporations could also develop cheaper and easier ways to build the devices over time. Just look at computer technology today; in 1980, owning a personal computer was pretty rare and in some cases outrageous. The devices were also crude and difficult to operate without a math degree. In 2001, however, computers are relatively cheap and available, and just about every family in America has one, or access to one. Point and click technology has made them easy to use, even for the so-called computer illiterate. Put the bionics in Heroes Unlimited on that same kind of curve, and within a twenty year span, simple bionic or cybernetic devices could be available to the public.

Robotics is a bit trickier, particularly if artificial intelligence exists in your world. How sophisticated are robots? How smart? How common are they? In the real world, robots are the backbone of many industries, but the robots are little more than automated arms or tools. A Heroes Unlimited robot is something else entirely, particularly if it is an artificial intelligence. Is it just another tool, albeit a highly advanced one, or can it be classified as a new life form? How common is power armor/exoskeletons? Once again, building a human sized exoskeleton is a great deal cheaper than building a stealth bomber. Who has access to this kind of technology? Might the government keep it a closely guarded secret, perhaps prohibiting commercial use?

Or could any of the technological items available to Heroes Unlimited player characters be easily available to the public? After all, it isn't likely that every person who falls in the Hardware category is going to fight crime. Some of them might found their own companies and develop these technologies to become millionaires the old fashioned way, or they could fund their heroic activities with the money made by their corporations. Just keep in mind what selling that technology to the public means.

This is something most comic book worlds tend to ignore. In many comics we see heroes who are brilliant inventors or technical geniuses, but rarely do we see their fabulous creations in the everyday lives of the general populace, or applied anywhere but in their personal crusades against crime. Might there be other geniuses using their intellects to create technological breakthroughs to better humanity's lot, rather than just weapons to blow up stuff? Could an Analytical Genius devote his life to finding a cure for cancer, and succeed? What about flying cars, bases on the Moon or Mars, hydroponics facilities under the oceans growing enough food to feed every hungry man, woman,

and child on Earth? Why not heroes who can actually change lives instead of simply saving them?

Then there are the powers themselves to consider. What are the industrial uses of Create Force Field or Adapt to Environment? Might nuclear power become safer and more common if every plant had someone with Control Radiation or Energy Absorption on staff? What do Control Elemental Forces: Air, Control Insects and Arachnids, and Plant Control mean to agriculture? Just to tie this into the history column, imagine at the height of the Cold War Soviet superhumans combining their powers to produce enough wheat that the Soviet Union no longer needs grain from the United States. How would that affect the Cold War itself?

It is also important to keep in mind corporations like Fabricators, Inc., KLS, Cyberworks, and Triton Industries. What are they manufacturing, and who buys from them? Is it strictly governments (and criminals in the case of Fabricators, Inc.) who are reaping the benefits of the work these corporations do? Might it be possible that, in your world, flying cars, video phones, and other sci-fi gadgets are readily available by 2001?

If you prefer advanced technology to remain in the hands of the heroes and villains and beyond the reach of the public, create a rationale for it. Perhaps the government has severe restrictions on who can access certain types of technology. Maybe the hi-tech stuff only works for the heroes and villains who build them, and they become inert when anyone else tries to use them. If the player characters and their contemporaries are the first generation of heroes, then their hi-tech items will be prototypes, and the rest of the technology will be cutting edge but at the beginning of that curve mentioned previously.

In the "Rift world" I mentioned previously, I used a combination of ideas. I decided that the special skills Hardware characters possessed were inborn abilities, like superpowers, rather than acquired skills. Thus all the high tech items available to the player characters or the public came from the minds of a few gifted geniuses who, in many cases, could not articulate their knowledge in a satisfactory way to others. This limited mass production of some items, while allowing me to play with other toys. For example, a Hardware character might be able to build a flying car for he and his teammates with which to buzz around the city, but he couldn't duplicate that technology for a company; he built the car on instinct, not through planning. On the other hand, I allowed the technology to build energy weapons to be fairly widespread, which meant even common thugs might have a laser pistol with which to annoy the heroes.

If you have set your game in the future, then the question of technology is even more important. How far into the future are you? The 21st century, the 22nd? There may be megacities or arcologies, power armor, bionics, and cyberpunk subculture. Heroes may even find themselves lost within or obsolete with the growth of technology — which could be a good idea for a campaign.

Magic

On the flip side of the technology coin is magic. There are four magic character classes in Heroes Unlimited, not counting the Stage Magician. Not as prevalent as the hi-tech characters, perhaps, but a decent representation. Its presence in your game requires some thought.

First, do you want to have magic at all? Many people don't think it is appropriate in this type of game, preferring a more science fiction approach to super-powered heroes. If that's the case, don't feel you need to have magic characters available. Wipe them out, and let your players know that is the case.

If you decide otherwise, that you'd like to have magic present, then you have some more decisions to make. How common is magic? Is it a forgotten art, practiced by only a few scattered individuals in isolated parts of the country? Perhaps only gods or the servants of gods have access to enchanted weapons or items, or become mystically endowed with power. Perhaps only alien organizations have access to magic items. This is generally how comic books portray magic. The guy from Greenwich Village, the hero from Asgard or serving in the galactic police force, the guy who gets hit by lightning and can now tussle with superhumans; these are the magic characters in comics. Magic tends to be the seamy underside of the universe, confined to rambling houses and other dimensions.

But this is your game, your world, your universe. You might decide magic is more common in your world, perhaps even studied and researched in the greatest academic institutions of the world. Some colleges exist which specialize in magical instruction, and those with the aptitude can learn on a scholarship. You have the chance now to introduce other forms of magic from **Rifts** or **Nightbane**, creating specialized fields of study. Techno-Wizardry is a discipline especially fun and appropriate to Heroes Unlimited, as are Temporal magic, Phase magic, and Astral magic. One of the advantages of the Palladium System is the melting pot it creates, where everything from every other game can fit neatly together. Take advantage of it when you can.



Culture

A great deal of information falls under the culture bailiwick. It is definitely the largest topic a world builder has to tackle, because it covers so much. It is important to keep in mind the other things you have developed when you come to the culture heading.

Law and legality are of primary importance to heroes. As crime fighters, they need to be cognizant of the laws they uphold and the laws that they break. As the Game Master, you need to know these things too. Vigilantes break laws; that's why they wear masks. No matter how many times a vigilante captures a criminal, that criminal will never be put on trial, unless there are bystanders who witnessed the crime. The vigilante himself can't testify against the criminal in a court of law, as that first question about name and occupation tends to gum up the works — especially since, while apprehending that criminal, the vigilante himself broke a number of laws, like breaking and entering, assault and battery, and others. As a result, no matter how much "good" a vigilante may do in the community, he's going to be in trouble with the law. Even if he isn't blowing criminals away in imitation of the grim-n-gritty 80's comic revolution, the authorities will take a dim view of his actions.

Special dispensation may be lent certain heroes, however. Many of the A-List heroes in the comic books have arrangements with certain governments or the United Nations, that allow them to operate legally without revealing their secret identities or compromising themselves. Typically these are among the most popular and powerful heroes in a given universe, but it sets a precedent for lawful vigilantism that, in the game world, may be applied to other heroes. Perhaps there are special agencies that actively recruit superhuman agents (if so, there should also be special agencies that actively hunt down and incarcerate superhumans). Perhaps special dispensation can be given out to certain costumed adventurers who fulfill certain requirements.

It's your world; do what you will. Just remember to include consequences for the laws you create, and resist the temptation to make things easy for your players. Making things difficult for them creates adventures and role-playing potential, after all. Don't be afraid to stick it to them once in a while.

Prejudice is a topic that a number of comic books tackle, using mutants in particular as proxies for real world minorities. The attempt is laudable but falls apart in execution all too often, since only mutants are targeted by prejudice. What about the other varieties of superhumans? Why does the origin of their powers affect how the public views them? At heart, the fear of superhumans is pretty basic, and shouldn't be ignored. These are beings who can bench press tanks or fly as fast as jets, who can survive underwater or in space unaided, who can point a finger and unleash deadly amounts of electricity or radiation. Not only that, but most of these people wear masks and hide their identities from the public. Sure, they're our friends today, and help out against the super-powered villains and alien invasions, but what about tomorrow? Think of the evil ordinary people can do, and then provide them with the power to alter reality. It can be very scary to contemplate.

On the lighter side, something neat to do is to give superhumans and heroes a catchy name as a group; John

Zelevnik did this in Skraypers, of course. He didn't call them super rebels, he called them Skraypers, and came up with an interesting rationale for giving them that title. Providing your world's heroes with a new title is an excellent way to make your world unique and different. Tying it into the history is a good idea; if a comet crashed into the Earth in 1903 and spread around weird radiation that gave rise to super powered beings, those super folks might be called the comet-born, or the comets, or something similar. Different power groups might be further identified with other titles. The guys with superhuman strength and invulnerability and the like could be called "tanks," those with energy expulsion are "projectors," those who can fly are referred to as "wings," and so on.

Give the heroes their own slang for normal humans, other super-powered beings, gadgets, and villains. When the mutant terrorist always refers to normal humans as "Normans" and "Normas," it adds more flavor to the game than just calling them humans. Language, and especially slang, helps you and your players feel more comfortable in the world. Don't go overboard, of course; you don't want to inundate your players with too many new words and turn it into *A Clockwork Orange*. A few key words or phrases is enough to start. The best way to do it is to pepper the language of your non-player characters with the slang, and good players will pick it up and continue to use it themselves.

I just used the example of the mutant terrorist, as hackneyed a character in comic books these days as the child sidekick used to be. This is a perfect opportunity to remind you that just because mutants are hated and reviled in the comics, there is no need for them to be seen as such in your game world. It always amazes me that mutant heroes in the comics save the world again and again, and yet do nothing to affect public perception of mutantkind. It is as if they exist in a creative limbo where, in order to maintain their fanbase, they are not allowed to actually affect the world in which they live. Please, do not fall into this trap as a Game Master. Allow your characters and non-player characters to grow and to influence the world. Let their failures and successes have meaning. This may be the whole point of creating a new world in which to play: to allow the superbeings to really change things.

Keep in mind the cultural attitudes towards superhumans, and those attitudes change from culture to culture (and not necessarily from country to country). In the United States, super-powered heroes may be at the height of chic, but in France, they may be reviled as malcontents. It all depends on who the most outspoken and well known superhumans are, and how superhumans have acted throughout history. Heroes will always be trusted above villains, but even heroes have their bad days and their failures may color popular opinion. Everybody loves you when you stop the evil villain's latest rampage, but when you fail and he firebombs Des Moines, people aren't going to be happy.

But let's say for the sake of argument that in your world superhumans are experiencing an unprecedented popularity. What does that mean? It means theme restaurants staffed by waiters and waitresses in spandex costumes with super memorabilia on the walls. It means superhumans on television, in movies, making music, writing tell-all books; just having a super power doesn't guarantee you're going to fight crime or commit crimes, and as long as there is money to be had legally, there

will be people trying to make it. It means there are people out there who want to be like the super-powered heroes, there are people out there trying to make money off of them, and there are people who will dismiss them all as part of a fad.

What about the reverse, super-powered beings reviled and hated by the public? It would be a much less flashy place, where costumes would mark you as an enemy of society rather than someone popular. Forced registration for superhumans would be likely, perhaps exploitation by governments or corporations, and at the extreme, concentration camps. Hiding one's powers would be a necessity if you wished to lead a normal life, and you would always live with the fear that someone would find out your dark secret. Those who flaunt their abilities would be enemies of the state, perhaps rebels or trouble makers. "Villains" and "heroes" might be forced to work together just to get by.

These are two different cultural approaches towards superhumans, both of which offer a wide variety of adventure ideas and potential. You can tell some good stories with either setting, but you can't always tell the same stories. If you move around the world, though, you can get away with it. Scenario One might be the way it is in Australia, for example, but in the United States, Scenario Two may have taken hold. And within each country, different cultural or religious groups might challenge the popular view.

Once again, it isn't necessary to do everything at once. A few initial broad strokes are usually all you need to begin, and you can fill in the blanks along the way. Doing it that way can also encourage the players to add material themselves, and in that way your world can grow and develop on its own. Listen to your players; you may have a masterful vision of the way the campaign should go, but if they have other plans, adjust your own. It is important to keep in mind that role-playing is a collaborative process, and works best when everyone is able to contribute and enjoys contributing. If you don't allow your players a say in how the world evolves, you're hurting yourself and the game, not just them.

Conventions

The little things that make heroes what they are, the conventions that define the genre, are too often taken for granted. In building your world, it may be a good idea to look at a few of them and decide which ones fit and which ones don't, which ones need a little tweaking and which ones are too good to pass up.

First up is the costume. Since Clark Kent first put on blue tights and a red cape in 1938, heroes have tended towards garish and outlandish outfits, usually with accompanying codenames. Ostensibly this is to hide one's identity, which can often be a good thing. Vigilantes are not law-abiding citizens themselves, though they fight crime, and wearing a mask certainly hides your identity from the authorities. In addition, keeping your identity secret means friends and loved ones who don't possess powers won't be left vulnerable to revenge meted out by one's enemies. At least, that's the way it works in the comics. In the real world, though, maintaining a secret identity would be all but impossible, especially if you're relying on a pair of glasses or a domino mask. Think about it. Did you dress up last Halloween? How many people failed to recognize you?

This is a game we're playing, however, and thus fiction. Whatever works for you and your players is the way to go. Given that you're already playing a comic book inspired game, why not stretch implausibility a few steps further and allow secret identities? Trying to maintain a secret identity provides a great deal of role-playing opportunities, and can also strain the resourcefulness of the players (You're trapped in an elevator with a half dozen co-workers, when the evil villain attacks your office building and the elevator gets stuck between floors. How do you save the day without revealing you're really Captain Freedom?). If you'd rather a more plausible approach, you might consider eliminating secret identities altogether. You lose some of the fun of playing a hero, but your world may be more believable and thus accessible to your players.

One other thing to consider regarding costumes: It is taken for granted in the comics that heroes wear them. But what kind of person would dress up in a bat costume and run around in public, beating up "bad guys?" Somebody who is not the poster child for mental health, certainly. So even if you prefer your heroes a bit more realistic, you might consider keeping the campy costumes in order to explore some psychological and emotional realism. Which is not to say every costumed hero has to be "crazy," but that it takes a certain kind of extreme personality to put on a costume and fight crime, even if you do have superpowers. As I said, costumes are taken for granted in the comics, but that doesn't mean they necessarily have to be in your world.

Sidekicks have largely fallen by the wayside in modern comics, but there was a time when no hero was worth his cape and cowl without a young ward who helped him fight crime. Granted, these days they can be a hokey idea, but don't discount them out of turn. Think about what it would be like to grow up as a sidekick, to be fighting crime from the age of ten or twelve onward. It would be a pretty warped childhood, beyond question. Consider how much trouble former child actors get into when they grow up, and then apply that to the concept of the sidekick. Someone given a great deal of power and responsibility at a young age will not always react to it in a mature fashion. Temptations are offered to heroes that adults, with a more concrete self-image, are strong enough to resist. A child in the same situation will probably react differently, perhaps with disastrous consequences. On the lighter side, a sidekick is probably the best example of someone who can carry on the legacy of a fallen or retired hero, as outlined in the *Heroes Unlimited* rulebook. Being a former child sidekick can be a great background for your character, providing lots of adventure hooks and role-playing potential.

Another comic book convention (or cliché, depending on how you look at it) is the alien. In *Heroes Unlimited*, you have the option of playing a character from outer space, and *Aliens Unlimited* certainly opened up the doors of opportunity regarding alien campaigns. But not all aliens come from outer space in the comics, and you might consider this when you're constructing your world; some of them come from beneath the oceans, while others are from other dimensions, or from lost civilizations in remote parts of the Earth. Undersea civilizations are almost a comic book staple, and they can be fun to use in a game. Many heroes come from the ocean, and they're usually hybrids of humans and a race of mermen who live in a sunken Atlantis; they can breath both air and water, and have a number of powers

besides. Other "lost worlds" can provide alien characters as well; consider an ancient civilization hidden away in Antarctica, or on the highest peaks of the Himalayas, or deep within the Earth's crust. Other dimensions are home to alien beings too; in the comics, these folks usually turn out to be gods from Earth mythology, but in *Heroes Unlimited*, you can plunder just about any *Rifts* book for ideas. Keep in mind that Atlanteans, Temporal Wizards, and others routinely travel between dimensions and could end up on your world.

Now take a moment and imagine what it would mean to the world if aliens existed in any form, either from the depths of the ocean or the depths of outer space. What would it mean to science? To biology, astronomy, oceanography? What would it mean to religion, politics or culture, if a spaceship landed in the middle of Times Square and an Atorian stepped out into the street? It would be pretty outrageous, pretty revolutionary, pretty world-shaking. Don't ignore that; aliens may be a given in the comics or the movies, but that doesn't mean it has to be that way in your game. You needn't go the X-Files route, but there are literally millions of questions raised by proof of alien existence. Part of the fun of playing an Alien character is answering some of them.

Robots are another staple of hero comics that is pretty much taken for granted. Robot heroes with artificial intelligence go back to the beginning of the genre; the original Human Torch, an android, made his first appearance in 1939. But again, think about the real world, and how revolutionary the creation of a genuine artificial intelligence would actually be. What would it mean for human beings to create a new form of life? What would it mean to industry, technology, medicine, religion, or society? Think about the consequences of creating artificial intelligence. In the movies or with the Mechanoids, it usually means war between the robots and humanity. It's not a bad idea for a *Heroes Unlimited* campaign, either. You can get a lot of mileage out of a worldwide war between superhumans and an android army. Throw in some time travel or aliens, and you've got yourself a blockbuster.

Themes

Not every game needs more than one level to be complete. Both comic books and role-playing games can be enjoyed for what they are, escapist fantasy. But a good game or a good comic book can be elevated to a great experience if there is some depth to it, some meat. You can build a game, or a campaign, or an entire world around a few themes you wish to explore. Some examples of themes appropriate to a *Heroes Unlimited* world include: Alienation, Compassion, Justice, Law, Identity, Heroism, Trust, Loyalty, Prejudice, Violence, Patriotism, Hatred, Continuity, Legacy, and many more. I'm sure you can think of a dozen on your own, especially after perusing a few comics. But how do you incorporate them into your game or your world? It depends upon the kinds of stories you want to tell, the kinds of games you want to run.

For example, perhaps the issue of identity intrigues you. Heroes are one of the best mediums to explore that issue. Wearing a mask has practical reasons, as previously mentioned, but there are also psychological ones. Putting on a mask allows a person to act out in ways that they normally would not; this is part of the attraction and bane of Halloween. Masks have been



connected not only to secrecy, but also to healing — shamans and witch doctors have worn masks in their roles as healers and spiritual leaders. The mask creates a connection to a supernatural power, and the wearer may even become that power when the mask is put on, whether that power is an animal, a god, or a spirit. Many heroes wear animal masks, as if they are channeling the totem or power of the animal. The mask is also part of the adolescent power fantasy that super-powered heroes embody. Unable to affect change in one's own life, one identifies with a glamorous hero who can leap tall buildings in a single bound or bend the courses of mighty rivers with his own hands. Why would a real person with super abilities choose to wear a mask, to subsume their own identity beneath that of this hero persona? Perhaps they feel that as a normal person they cannot effect change, but the mask and costume somehow liberates them to act out their heroic impulses, awakening something long-buried.

Okay, cool. But now what does that mean for your world? Well, for one thing you might decide secret identities are virtually impossible to maintain and most heroes don't bother with them. Super-powered beings may have nicknames, but for the most part they're public figures. Some may decide to make a living off their powers, others will try to ignore them completely. There is a small percentage of people endowed with superhuman might who decide to remain anonymous, however, dressing up in elaborate costumes and running around saving lives and righting wrongs. The player characters, naturally, are part of this group, and each one has to come up with a plausible rationale for the costume, besides avoiding possible litigation. The maintenance of the secret identity becomes an important part of the game, as they try to keep their loved ones or the authorities from finding out who they really are. And which one is

the real one, anyway? Which is the mask, the civilian identity or the heroic identity?

That's just one theme, and its development can dramatically affect the growth of a game world and the kinds of adventures your players have. You might like to use two of three themes at once, to maintain variety and to give you a chance to explore more. A world and campaign built around themes of identity, justice, and prejudice will have more going for it than one that is just about issues of identity.

Micro vs Macro

We have discussed, throughout this article, the creation of entire worlds, nations and people, the macro level. But it may behoove you to start with a smaller canvas, somewhere on the micro level. There are benefits to crafting an entire world from the ground up, but there is also the danger of becoming lost in the details. It is also a tremendous task to undertake, and not one to be started lightly.

You may feel more comfortable starting your world-building enterprise with a single town, city, or county. But there are still some choices to make. Paramount among them is the decision to use a real city, or to create one from scratch.

Using a real city as a template is a good idea. Picking your hometown, the nearest big city, or somewhere iconic like New York City or London, creates a feeling of instant familiarity in your players. Reference material is plentiful, easily found at your local library. News reports can give you great story hooks and ideas, as well as clues as to how your heroes can fit into the city. Perhaps they could become municipal defenders, working out of city hall, or crazed vigilantes with a hidden base under the streets, or perhaps just a bunch of local kids made good. Grounding your heroes in a real city has a tendency to enhance both the "super-ness" of the heroes, and the "real-ness" of the setting.

On the other hand, creating a city from scratch is certainly more in keeping with comic tradition. Much like Century Station, dozens of imaginary locations have become as much a part of heroic mythology as masks and capes. The greatest benefit is, of course, complete creative freedom. You can lay the city out in whatever fashion you wish, give it whatever sordid history you want, and fill the city's government with whatever colorful characters you devise. You want the city built on an ancient Indian burial ground so that your characters will have to fight some (righteously angry) undead? Go ahead. You want a five hundred foot tall cathedral in the center of town so your brooding vigilante character has somewhere to lurk? No problem. You want the mayor to be the head of a secret club out to kill superhumans? Easy as pie.

Either style presents problems and benefits. The trick in picking the right one depends entirely upon your group and its playing style. You may even choose to try a little bit of both; starting the players out in an imaginary setting, and then having them move to San Francisco or Houston when they make it big.

The Game

So you've built a new world, a new Earth. You have a timeline that roughly describes the course history has taken on this world. You've decided what kind of technology is common

there. You've touched base on some important cultural aspects. You've examined and discarded certain comic book conventions. you've incorporated some themes that are near and dear to your heart. Now what? What does it all mean?

It's time to figure that out. It's time to look at the rules and decide which ones stay, which ones go, and which ones need to be modified. For example, in my "Rift world" I decided that Hardware skills were actually super abilities rather than learned skills. But that wasn't enough; I had to decide which ones were Minor or Major, whether they could be available to other Power Categories, and whether other powers could mix with the Hardware abilities. Every time you make a decision that affects the rules of the game, you have to keep in mind game balance. You might want to playtest some things, like letting android characters have superpowers as they do in comics. If they have powers, can they also bulk up on armor and weapons? Probably not.

Also consider what these changes mean to the material that has already been published. If hi-tech inventions only work for the person who builds them, then the Fabricator isn't going to be as rich and successful (and dangerous) as he is in Villains Unlimited. If aliens are the hated and mistrusted group on Earth, instead of mutants, then the Thissera-Micean Cooperative may look the other way when the Atorian Empire invades Earth, just to teach Earthlings a lesson. Or they might sacrifice many lives to keep Earth free, and thus turn public perception around (besides saving everyone, of course). In a world where costumes and secret identities simply don't exist, the Masters of Speed are going to look and operate a little differently, but they're still going to be the bad guys.

These are important considerations to make. Heroes Unlimited is a good game, and it provides you with enough material and rules to run a thousand variations on the hero mythos, but you have to remember it is a game. You have to abide by rules, and ensure new rules don't ruin things for you or your players. Too much power too soon has ruined many, many games in the past. Keep that in mind at all times, but don't balk at rewarding your players for a job well done, either. The best thing to do is to start small and build.

Now that you have the house rules worked out, what do you do? Hopefully your players have been with you every step of the way, but that isn't always the case. How do you provide them with all the information you've developed? The easiest way is to just pass around your notebook and let everybody read the background themselves and digest it all. Of course, this is also the most boring way.

Everybody should get a list of the house rules first, since these are what primarily impact upon the characters they create and how they're created. If there's no magic in your world, then your players had better know they won't be making any Mystically Bestowed characters.

Remember that time line you wrote? Clean it up and make copies for each of your players, omitting anything that the general public would not know and retaining everything a public school education would provide. You might consider just putting the ten biggest events on the players' time line and keeping the rest to yourself for now. This is just to give the players some solid ground to stand on as they begin the game. It should be during play itself that the rest of your material comes out, like little nuggets of gold hidden away. Mention things offhand, ca-

sually. Make them work to discover the secrets. It helps to create the illusion that the world is real and organic and growing. It's also a lot more fun than reading everything on a list.

For example, you don't need to tell your characters outright that superbeings have been active since the 1930s. Mention obliquely as they're cutting across town to rescue a friend from a villain that they have to detour around Central Park; Spike Lee is filming a bio-pic about Mister Muscles, the gangbuster who enforced Prohibition in Harlem. Don't just blurt out that bionics are as common as prosthetics in the real world; after the sixth guy they see jogging in the park with bionic legs they should get the picture. When they go see a Brooklyn Dodgers game in 2001, and you tell them the manager, Fidel Castro, is looking haggard, they should be able to figure out communist Cuba doesn't exist, and that the Bay of Pigs and Cuban Missile Crisis never happened, all without you having to spell it out for them. They should start to wonder about Batista, modern Cuba, and other communist movements. Let your players fill in the blanks; it adds another layer of enjoyment to the usual two-fisted heroics, and they might really get involved and offer suggestions and ideas that you never thought of that would be really cool to try out.

Always remember, Heroes Unlimited is a game. It is meant to be enjoyable. It is meant to provide a good time for all. The best world to play in and the best way to play are the ones that make everybody happy. Have a good time.



Brain Fry

Nightbane®

Optional Source Material for Nightbane®

By David Haendler

Zachary slapped a clip into his assault rifle as he nervously trotted up the crack house's front stairs. He was a Doppelganger, who had been offered a choice between a life of deceptions and lies on Earth or an eternity of torture and night in the Nightlands. His duties on Earth as a SWAT team officer were hellish, often requiring him to fight with inhuman monstrosities like Nightbane and vampires. Still, even the most grueling firefights were like child's play compared to what he could expect in the Nightlands. This battle, against a group of pathetic human druggies, looked like it would be an easy one for a change.

The Ashmedai led the way, their guns blazing. The shape-shifting demons were always very willing to die first, which Zachary didn't mind a bit. He was still running up the stairs while they had already bashed the door down and were charging inside. The moment that the monsters barged in, there was the chilling tattoo of automatic weapons fire. A few of the Ashmedai tumbled back down the stairs, stone dead. One or two of them even reverted to their true forms as they fell. Zachary was thankful that he didn't have the job of covering up messes like this.

By the time that Zachary and the other Doppelgangers had reached the door, all of the Ashmedai were dead. Inside the crack house, ratty old couches and chairs had been turned over to serve as shields against gunfire, and heavily armed gangers crouched behind them. Zachary dived out of the way just in time to avoid a volley of gunfire, which tore apart the Namtar behind him. The terrified Doppelganger began to blindly fire at the gang, although it didn't seem to do much good.

As Zachary backed up against the wall, the rest of the SWAT team began to rapidly fall. The Doppelganger noticed that his comrades were dying not only by gunshot wounds, but from flying knives and daggers and mysterious bolts of invisible force as well! A few of the SWAT team members simply fell over and died, clutching their chests or their heads. When a pen knife sailed into the throat of a Namtar and cut the Hollow Man's head off, Zachary decided that he had had enough. The Doppelganger leapt out of a nearby window, crashing to the street below. The wounds he received from the fall were only superficial, allowing him to get up and sprint back towards the armored vans.

"They knew we were coming!" Zachary yelled to the crew of his personnel carrier. "We're outgunned and outnumbered, and I think they have magic as..." He never got to finish his sentence, for the vans all burst into flame simultaneously. Zachary looked behind him in panic, to see deliriously happy gang members swarming out of the crack house. The Doppelganger did the only thing that he could think of. He ran.

After a dizzying chase through back alleys and abandoned buildings, when Zachary thought that he had finally lost the scumbags, he collapsed on the ground in exhaustion. His lungs were sore and raspy, his head was swimming, and his heart was pounding a mile a minute. Suddenly, a sharp pain shot through his chest.

A little man with a wide, pear-shaped body began to walk up. He was dressed in layers of ratty, lice-infested old clothing, and stank like a decaying corpse. He wore a pair of chipped sunglasses which obscured his eyes. One of his hands was held out as if he was talking to an invisible skull of Yoric in a mime performance of Hamlet.

"Wh-who ARE you?!" grunted out Zachary, the pain in his chest getting worse by the second.

"Squish!" said the little man merrily, bringing his fingers together in a fist. Zachary felt something pop in his chest, and the world went red.

The Brain Fry are the newest addition to New York City's underworld. They are a savage gang of human psychics and sensitives, who use their powers and their weapons to get what they want. They have proven to be a powerful force in the underworld, due to masterful leadership and total amorality.

The Brain Fry were founded by Nikolai Kelishnov, a Russian immigrant in his late 50's. As a young man, Nikolai had spoken out against the Communist government, and had been kidnaped by the KGB as a result of it. He, along with many other political dissidents, were exposed to the Burner-6 drug, a top-secret chemical formula causing heightened brain wave activity. It could produce brief periods of mental clarity and coherence to severely mentally retarded people, and could temporarily impart minor psychic abilities upon people of average to above average intelligence! However, the effects of the drug were only temporary, lasting a few hours on average. Furthermore, the user went through a terrifying and debilitating crash as soon as the drug's effects wore off. This hangover induced terrible headaches, bleeding from the nose and ears, and veins standing out on the forehead. Repeated use would cause eventual brain damage, including brain tumors and aneurisms. These debilitating side effects prevented Burner-6 from being a viable source of power for KGB agents and spies.

Unbeknownst to everybody, Nikolai was himself a latent psychic, even without the drug. Burner-6 increased his mental powers astronomically, giving the young dissident incredible telekinetic powers. He decided to hold these abilities back from the researchers, so that they would not put him under tighter se-

curity, and began to formulate an escape plan. When given the drug, he would scan the minds of the researchers and guards, to come up with the best possible escape route. One rainy November day, he finally managed to break out of the KGB prison, killing six guards and eight scientists with the power of his mind, and making off with a large container of Burner-6 and notes on how to make the drug. The KGB put out all of its feelers to catch the fugitive, but experienced no success.

Nikolai spent the next two decades learning how to make and refine Burner-6. He held odd jobs, changing his name frequently, to pay for his experiments. While uneducated in the field of the brain's chemistry, he could read the minds of top scientists to refine his skills. He was his own guinea pig, testing out new varieties of Burner-6 upon himself. While Nikolai did make many mistakes, and had to be hospitalized more than once due to these mistakes, he did eventually create several newer, more powerful versions of the drug.

After the USSR crumbled, Nikolai joined the Russian Mafia. He cooked up and distributed new designer drugs for them, but did not unveil Burner-6. That would be the ace up his sleeve, to pull out if he got into trouble. However, Nikolai got into trouble before he ever had an opportunity to manufacture a decent quantity of his drugs. He sided with the wrong mobster in a gang war, and was forced to flee to America, bringing his notes and his equipment with him.

Nikolai moved to New York City, where he believed he could found a criminal empire for himself. He spent several years creating new drug laboratories for himself, and trying to find new contacts and allies who could help him in his struggle for power. During this period, Nikolai first came into contact with the psychic criminals Erdelle and Slammer. Once everything was in place in early 2004, Nikolai started up his gang, the Brain Fry.

At first, when the gang needed members more than it needed anything else, anyone who wanted to join was let in. Unsurprisingly, many were attracted by the lure of guns and money. Nikolai kept these new recruits on a steady diet of Burner-6, in order to give them the powers which he relied upon as his "edge." The psionically endowed gangers were therefore able to withstand or evade the early dangers which the Brain Fry faced. Due to the great profits that the gang raised through drug trafficking, they were able to expand.

This is when Nikolai began to become more exclusive. He turned away "norms" who were looking for membership, and instead began looking for natural psychics. Even the tiniest amounts of excess mental energy would give Burner-6 the boost that it needed to be truly effective. He managed to attract many young and gullible psychics into the Brain Fry, telling them how superior they were to normal people and how much more power the drugs would give them.

Once the Brain Fry had these new members, it truly became a force to be reckoned with. Instead of dangerous and high-profile drive-by shootings, they killed their enemies with simple glances or mental commands. The sudden brain aneurism or unexpected (and very grisly) suicide became quite common amongst the leadership of the Brain Fry's enemies. As a crowning touch, the gang would always make its involvement in the deaths known by spray-painting a burning brain (their symbol) upon the tombstones of their victims.

The Golden Posse and the Warlords both became instant enemies of the Brain Fry, and set out to destroy the fledgling gang before it could grow large enough to destroy them. These efforts all met in failures. The Brain Fry members were always prepared for every attack, and always countered with a stinging counterattack. An uneasy truce was eventually declared, but only after much loss of life and property.

The Nightlords, underestimating the resourcefulness and power of the psionic gang, sent several groups of SWAT police, Hunters, and Ashmedai to destroy them. Every such effort met in dismal failure, greatly frustrating the supernatural conspirators.

After failing at trying to crack open the enclaves of the Brain Fry, the Nightlords began to try a somewhat more subtle method. They had their agents tail individual gang members, and then sent in attack squads as soon as those members were all by themselves and vulnerable. This strategy worked much better, and many a psychic was killed. Occasionally a group of attackers would be ambushed and cut down, but by and large the tactic worked quite well.

However, the Brain Fry quickly adapted to that strategy. They were already a social bunch of misfits, and began to travel in packs, live in the gang houses, and gain an even tighter degree of solidarity. The war between the Brain Fry and the Nightlords resumed their apocalyptic stalemate.

Currently, the Brain Fry are the number one distributors of designer drugs in New York City. They have three safe houses, where the members hang out day and night. One of these is in a sleepy suburb of NYC, in an abandoned house. Suburbanites and high school kids looking for the latest high but unwilling to enter the heart of urban decay come to buy their stuff there. The second house is an old warehouse which is used as a laboratory, to cook up the drugs. The third house is actually not a house at all, but an underground bomb shelter built in the 1950's. Gang members go there to relax, watch pirated cable TV, and play video games and basketball.

Each safe house is heavily guarded and fortified. Every entrance has been replaced with a fortified steel door, having A.R. 15 and 200 S.D.C. Lock-pick attempts against these vaults are at -20%. Furthermore, the places are designed to have lots of hiding places, gun ports, and extremely lethal booby-traps. Armed guards are hanging around at all hours, and most of the people inside will be carrying handguns, knives, or other such weapons. Needless to say, anyone who tries to barge in will be met by a barrage of gunfire and psionic attacks.

When encountered on the streets, Brain Fry will always be met in packs of 2-8. They usually hang out at bars or street corners, getting wasted and starting trouble. They love petty vandalism and muggings, but find using their powers the biggest thrill of all. Temporarily blinding or deafening a random passerby or policeman is considered to be great fun by these scumbags. They will not split up, as they know that they are very vulnerable when alone.

Brain Fry Ganger O.C.C.

Psychic Powers: All current Brain Fry members are psionic in some way. Roll on the following table to determine which powers are possessed.



01-20%: Minor Sensitive. Select 4 powers from the Sensitive category, plus 1 Sensitive power every 3 levels. M.E.x2 I.S.P.

21-45%: Physical Psychic. Select 3 powers from the Physical category and 2 from the Healer category, plus 1 additional power from one of these categories every 2 levels. M.E.x2 +3D6 I.S.P.

46-65%: Healer. Select 3 powers from the Healer category and 2 from the Sensitive category, plus 1 additional power from one of these categories every 2 levels. M.E.x2 +3D6 I.S.P.

66-80%: Use the Psychic P.C.C. to determine powers.

81-95%: Use the Psi-Mechanic P.C.C. to determine powers.

95-00%: Super-Psychic! Select 4 powers from the Physical, Healer, and Sensitive categories, and 2 Master powers. Select a new power at every level of experience, and a new Master power at every 3rd level of experience. 2D4x10+M.E. I.S.P.

Bonuses: +3 save vs Horror Factor, +3 save vs possession, +2 to save vs psionics at levels 2, 5, 7 and 9, +2 save vs magic at levels 4, 8 and 10, +4D6 S.D.C.

Alignment: Selfish or evil only!

Attribute Requirements: None. An M.E. of 12 or higher is highly recommended, however, as are high P.E. and P.S. ratings.

O.C.C. Skills

Speak English: 98%

Speak one Language of choice (+10%)

Streetwise (+20%)

Streetwise: Drugs (+24%)

Pilot Automobile or Pilot Motorcycle (+10%)

W.P. Knife

W.P. Automatic Pistol

O.C.C. Related Skills: Select 5 skills from the following list. Plus select 2 skills at level 3, 2 at level 5, and 1 extra skill at levels 7, 9 and 10.

Communications: None.

Domestic: Any (+5%).

Electrical: None.

Espionage: Any (+10%), except Intelligence.

Mechanical: Automotive only.

Medical: None.

Military: None.

Physical: Any.

Pilot: Pilot Motorcycle or Automobile only (+10%).

Pilot Related: None.

Rogue: Any (+15%).

Science: None.

Technical: Any (+5%).

W.P.: Any.

Wilderness: None.

Secondary Skills: Select 6 skills from the above list. Remember, secondary skills do not get the bonuses listed in parentheses.

Equipment: Knife, pistol of choice with 3 reloads, fashionable clothing, sunglasses, lock picks, spray paint, crowbar, high quality motorcycle or low quality car, rat-hole apartment, 12 standard Burner-6 pills, 6 Class II pills, and 6 Class III pills. Starts with 2D4x100 dollars in savings.

Experience: Uses the Mountebank experience table.



Brain Fry Drugs

Burner-6

Burner-6, a mind-altering drug created by the KGB during the height of the Cold War, is the power base of the Brain Fry. There are several different varieties of the drug, all of them created by Nikolai. He is the only one with the knowledge of how exactly to make the drugs. While he has several assistants who help him to "cook up" the pills, they are kept in the dark of the entire process. Each assistant helps with only a small portion of the drug-making process, and Nikolai keeps them from knowing exactly what they are mixing together. Burner-6 is very difficult to chemically analyze, requiring a massive laboratory setup to do so. On the other hand, it is relatively easy to make if one has the knowledge, and can be done with normal cooking utensils.

Burner-6 and all of its varieties work by stimulating certain glands in the brain, releasing bursts of chemicals which can cause heightened mental ability or psychic power. The more of those chemicals or glands that were there to begin with, the more effective Burner-6 will be. Furthermore, the drug masks the pain which the process would normally induce. However, these effects do not last long. Sooner or later, the gland will close, and the brain juices released will wear out. At that point, the user begins to experience stabbing headaches, blurry vision, slurred speech, and reduced mental faculties. Nausea and dizziness nearly incapacitate the unfortunate junky, and he or she is soon reduced to a quivering pulp.

While hung over, the character's attacks per melee are halved, and he gets -6 to all combat rolls. All skill rolls are made at -30%. This unpleasant state of being lasts for 1-4 hours. Standard painkillers like aspirin are useless against it. The only thing that will take away the pain and the side effects is... you guessed it... more Burner-6. This causes junkies to have a continual need for the crud, so that they will not be devastated by the terrifying crash.

Burner-6 will not work on non-human beings such as Nightbane, Guardians, and Living Spells. Supernatural beings taking Burner-6 might find that it has no effect on them, or might immediately suffer a hangover (G.M.'s discretion).

Continued use of Burner-6 will cause permanent damage. After a few months of frequent use, veins will pop out on the forehead, reducing P.B. by 1. This disfigurement is easily covered up by makeup, but that is rarely done. Brain Fry members take pride in their "lines," and new recruits are rarely given much re-

spect until they too have sprouted a network of pulsing blue veins. After about a year of using Burner-6, severe and lethal brain tumors or aneurisms will result. However, members of the Brain Fry do not know this. All that they know is that once in a while, one of their members will simply die. They attribute it to Nightlord meddling or old wounds, and go on with their lives. Nikolai has survived for a long time due partially to his brain's fairly unique chemistry, and partially due to his own healing powers.

Nikolai distributes free Burner-6 to all of his employees. Every month, he gives out 12 standard capsules, 6 Class II capsules, and 3 Class III capsules, to every member of his gang. Additional Burner-6 is given out to gangers when it is clearly needed, or it can be bought at a 50% discount. The Russian uses the drugs as a leash to keep the gang under his control. People on the streets must pay about \$25 a pill for standard Burner-6, and \$100 a pill for Class II drugs. The Brain Fry refuse to sell Class III drugs to anyone who is not a member of their gang.

Mixing Burner-6 drugs is not a good thing! Taking two different types of Burner-6 at the same time will cause seizures for 1D4 minutes. When in a seizure, the character can take no actions, not even self-defense, and takes 1D4 S.D.C. every 15 seconds. Furthermore, brain damage may result. Roll on the following table to see what has happened to the character after mixing drugs.

- 01-25%:** Lucked out! No permanent damage.
- 26-50%:** Minor brain damage. -1 to I.Q. and M.A., and -2 to M.E.
- 51-60%:** Minor brain damage. Lose 1 random psychic power and 2D6 I.S.P. No effect if you didn't have psionics to begin with.
- 61-75%:** Major brain damage. -2 to I.Q. and M.A., and -3 to M.E.
- 76-95%:** Major brain damage. Lose 1D4 random psychic powers and 3D6 I.S.P. No effect if you didn't have psionics to begin with.
- 96-00%:** General nastiness. The seizure has affected your higher brain functions and psychic powers in some bizarre way. G.M.'s choice (and don't be afraid to be mean!).

Other drugs (alcohol, marijuana, etc.) can be "safely" taken with Burner-6, and in fact cause a better high than normal. However, the eventual crash lasts twice as long as normal and is even more painful.

Standard Burner-6 Capsules

These pills are the bare-bones Burner-6 which was first created by the KGB. They are extremely common on the streets of New York, because Nikolai is willing to sell these low-power capsules at a far lower price than for his other, more powerful Burner-6 variants.

For an average person, standard Burner-6 provides +1D4 to I.Q. and M.E., +1D6 to M.A., 1 random psionic power from the Sensitive or Physical category, and 3D6 I.S.P.

For a psychic, standard Burner-6 provides +1D6 to all mental attributes, +3D6 I.S.P., and two random powers from the Sensitive or Physical category.

The powers granted last for 1D4 hours per capsule taken. Taking more than one capsule at a time prolongs the duration of the drug, but has no effect on the potency.

Eye-Openers

These Class II pills affect the sensory powers of the mind, providing sensitive powers to psionic individuals, and greater empathy and understanding to non-psychics. While on Eye-Openers, most people experience dilated pupils and sometimes slight sensations of dizziness or giddiness.

For the standard person, Eye-Openers provide +1D4 to I.Q. and +1D6+2 to M.A. M.E. is at -2, due to heightened sensitivity. They also provide 3 random powers from the Sensitive powers and M.E.+2D6 I.S.P.

For a psychic, Eye-Openers provide +1D6 to I.Q. and M.A., +3D6+6 I.S.P., and 4 random powers from the following list; Empathy, Object Read, Presence Sense, See Aura, Sense Evil, Sense Magic, Telepathy, and See the Invisible.

Eye-Opener powers are especially short-lived, lasting only 3D6 minutes per capsule taken. Up to three capsules can be taken at one time. Any more cause an instant hangover.

Berserkers

These Class II pills affect the pain and reasoning centers of the brain. This provides a temporary feeling of invulnerability and belligerence to non-psychics, and powerful physical powers to psychics. Brain Fry love to gulp down Berserkers before going into battle, for the added confidence and combat powers.

For the standard person, Berserkers provide +1D6+2 to M.E., and +3 to save against Horror Factor. They provide no psychic powers.

For psychics, Berserkers provide +1D8 to M.E., +4 to save vs Horror Factor, Impervious to Cold, Impervious to Fire, Summon Inner Strength, and Resist Fatigue.

Berserker powers last 30 minutes per capsule taken. Up to two capsules can be taken at one time. Any more cause an instant hangover.

Fireworks

These Class II pills are different from other Burner-6 pills in that they do not result in any temporary bonuses to the mental attributes. Fireworks affects only one portion of the brain... the portion in charge of maintaining body temperature. An individual on Fireworks will sometimes have a flushed face or a high fever, and they have been known to sweat profusely. Not a drug for the summer months.

For the standard person, Fireworks provides 4D6 I.S.P., and the psychic powers Impervious to Fire and Impervious to Cold.

For psychics, Fireworks provides +5D6 I.S.P., Impervious to Fire, Impervious to Cold, and Pyrokinesis.

Fireworks powers last 2 hours per capsule taken. Only one capsule can be taken at a time.

Skin-Knits

These Class II pills affect the body's metabolic and healing processes. They force the immune system into overdrive, healing injuries and curing most diseases in a matter of hours. Some people have wondered if Skin-Knits could be used as a cure for cancer or AIDS, but unsurprisingly, their requests for permission to do studies on the drugs have been blocked by the Nightlord-controlled police departments and FDA. Skin-Knits are one of the more unpleasant Burner-6 drugs to take, as the enhanced healing oftentimes feels like spiders or cockroaches under the skin.

For the standard person, Skin-Knits provide 3D6+6 I.S.P., and the psychic powers Deaden Pain and Bio-Regeneration. They also double the standard rate of healing, and have a chance equal to the P.E. number of curing any minor diseases.

For psychics, Skin-Knits provide 4D6+6 I.S.P., and the psychic powers Deaden Pain, Bio-Regeneration, and Healing Touch. They triple the standard rate of healing, and have a percentage chance equal to the P.E. number of curing any minor and most (G.M.'s discretion) major diseases.

Skin-Knits powers last 1D4 hours per capsule taken. Up to 6 capsules can be taken at a time.

Washers

These powerful Class III pills enhance the powers of suggestion. They make the user much more confident and egotistical, for a short period of time. Washers are Nikolai's personal favorite brand of Burner-6, a sentiment which he shares with many members of the gang.

For the standard person, Washers provide +1D6 to M.A., +2 to save vs Horror Factor, 2D6+M.E. I.S.P., and the psychic power of Suggestion.

For psychics, Washers provide +1D8 to M.A., +3 to save vs Horror Factor, additional I.S.P. equal to their M.E. attribute, and the psychic powers of Suggestion, Bio-Manipulation, and Mind Wipe.

Washers powers last 1-2 hours per capsule taken. Up to 3 capsules can be taken at one time.

Glass Shield

These Class III pills provide powerful telekinetic powers. They do not provide any bonuses to the mental attributes and do not cause any special emotions or feelings to surface, but are powerful and highly valued pills nonetheless. Random telekinetic feats (glass breaking, pebbles flinging themselves through the air) may occur around the user, adding +2 to his Horror Factor.

For the standard person, Glass Shields provide 3D6+M.E. I.S.P., Levitation, and Telekinesis.

For psychics, Glass Shields provide additional I.S.P. equal to their M.E. attribute, Levitation, Telekinesis, Telekinetic Force Field, and Psi-Shield.

Glass Shields last 1-2 hours per capsule taken. Up to 2 capsules may be taken at one time.

Dreamdancers

These Class III pills are the rarest, and perhaps the most powerful, of the Burner-6 pills. They are useless to non-psychics, but provide the powers of Astral Projection and Dreamdancing to psionic individuals who take the drug. Because of this powerful Burner-6 variant, the Brain Fry have had a much stronger presence in the Dreamstream and in the Astral Plane than they should have. Jetting away for some downtime in the ether or some malicious fun in an enemy's Dream Pool are the most common vacations for Brain Fry to take.

For the standard person, Dreamdancers do nothing! The person will have very extreme (either good or bad) dreams the night after taking them, however.

For psychics, Dreamdancers provide M.E.x2 I.S.P. and the powers of Astral Projection and Dreamdance.

Dreamdancers last 6 hours per capsule taken. Only one capsule may be taken at a time.

Brain Fry Gang Members

Nikolai Kelishnov

Nikolai Kelishnov was born in one of the poorest rural communities of Russia. The only asset that his town had was a coal mine, and working in it was hard and dangerous. Winters were bitterly cold and wet, and every year a blizzard or cold snap would claim a few lives. The local Communist officials were corrupt, and used money that should have gone to the town for their own purposes.

Soon after he began working in the mines, Kelishnov decided that this was not the way to live. He moved out of his town (bypassing all of the paperwork that was required) and managed to jump on a cargo train that was heading for Moscow.

In Moscow, Kelishnov became involved with several underground movements. Some of them were legitimate (as legitimate as such an organization could be in the USSR) and peaceful, while others were composed solely of bomb-throwing radicals. Kelishnov dreamed of assembling a powerful coalition of freedom fighters, a coalition of which he would be the leader. He began writing essays and letters to support this cause. Unfortunately, those writings came to the attention of the KGB. While Kelishnov was walking to his apartment one day, he was grabbed by three burly men, injected with sedatives, and shoved into a van. He was then taken off to a secret laboratory.

There, he became a part of the first Burner-6 experiments. As a latent psychic, he reacted the best to the drugs, and found a heady thrill in the mental powers which they imparted. He bided his time, waiting until he was absolutely sure of his powers and his limitations, and then staged an escape effort. He managed to break out of the secret prison, killing a few of the scientists and guards and making off with samples of Burner-6 and notes on how to produce the stuff.

Nikolai, realizing that Burner-6 could bring him great power and wealth, joined the Russian Mafia. He knew that someday, he could use the contacts and distribution systems of that criminal organization to flood Russia with Burner-6 and make himself rich. Until that day, he did all sorts of odd jobs. These ranged from beating up rival mobsters, to planting car bombs, to selling opium out of the back of a van. In his spare time, he cooked up new varieties of Burner-6, scanning the minds of prominent scientists to procure the chemical knowledge which he needed.

However, there was a mob war soon after the USSR crumbled. The mobsters who employed Nikolai were killed, and Kelishnov feared that he would die soon. He took his Burner-6 supply, his notes, and his tools to America. There, he would forge his empire.

Now, Nikolai is the undisputed leader of the Brain Fry. He is the best tactician and leader in the gang, and is the only one who knows how to make the Burner-6 which the members are reliant upon. However, Nikolai is not entirely satisfied with his success. Although the Brain Fry do have a great deal of power and



influence in New York City, NYC is just one city. He wants to spread his network until it envelops the entire country, and perhaps even the world. He feels the competitors (Nightlords, vampires, etc.) which stand in his way must be ruthlessly slaughtered before that can happen.

Nikolai likes to keep a firm hand over everything which he controls. Gang members who are suspected of treason or treasonous thoughts are killed instantly and without warning. He's been known to talk to one of his lieutenants amiably, and then whip out a pistol in the middle of the conversation, shove it into the lieutenant's mouth, and pull the trigger. He has absolutely no pity for his enemies, and will deal with them using maximum force. When talking to him, alert people will realize the ambitions and determination of the Russian. He talks of grand, sweeping plans, with little care for the "little people" who may be hurt in the process.

Physically, Nikolai is unremarkable, and he likes it that way. He is a man of average height and build in his mid-50's. He wears bland clothing of fairly good quality, and always has a pair of sunglasses on (it's whispered, very quietly, that there's some deformity in his eyes). He has a thick network of veins on his forehead, which really do stand out because he's completely bald. When dealing with outsiders, Nikolai usually tries to cover the veins up with makeup or a hat. He has a slight Russian accent, but speaks good English.

Alignment: Diabolic.

O.C.C.: 8th level Brain Fry Ganger.

Attributes: I.Q.: 18, M.E.: 18, M.A.: 21, P.S.: 13, P.E.: 15, P.P.: 13, P.B.: 11, Spd 12.

Hit Points: 44, S.D.C.: 16.

I.S.P.: 40, P.P.E.: 3.

Psionic Powers: Deaden Pain, Induce Pain, Bio-Regeneration, Telepathy, Sixth Sense, Summon Inner Strength, Psychic Purification, Resist Fatigue, and Suggestion.

Bonuses: +3 to save vs Horror Factor, +3 to save vs possession, +6 to save vs psionics, +4 to save vs magic, +3 to strike on aimed shot.

O.C.C. Skills: Speak Russian: 98%, Speak English: 80%, Streetwise: 72%, Streetwise: Drugs: 79%, Pilot Automobile: 86%, W.P. Knife, W.P. Automatic Pistol.

O.C.C. Related Skills: Chemistry: 70%, Analytical Chemistry: 65%, Biology: 65%, Hand to Hand: Assassin, Writing: 70%, Research: 80%, Prowl: 65%, Tactics: 65%, W.P. Blunt, W.P. Sub-Machinegun.

Secondary Skills: Read Russian: 75%, Read English: 75%, Interrogation: 70%, W.P. Rifle, W.P. Chain, Sniper.

Weapons: His favorite gun is an old .45 automatic pistol, but he has been known to use sub-machineguns and combat knives as well.

Armor: Wears a Kevlar vest (A.R. 10, 80 S.D.C.) when he thinks that there's going to be trouble, and wears Riot Armor (A.R. 14, 150 S.D.C.) when he knows that a battle's going to occur.

Other Equipment: Cell phone, sunglasses, fashionable clothing, expensive apartment, convertible, tools and chemicals for making Burner-6, lots of Burner-6 (although he doesn't use it much himself), 1D4x\$10,000 dollars, and has access to millions more.



Raw Skull

Matthew P. Roskull was born in the worst slums of New York City. His mother was an alcoholic prostitute, and even she did not know who the boy's father was. Matthew had six older siblings, who picked on him and tormented him. The little boy had no friends, as he was sickly and not good at sports. He had no real belongings, as his family lived in poverty. And he had no hope for the future, as he was rather backwards and didn't go to school.

One day, Matthew was hiding from some of his childhood tormentors in an alleyway, when he saw a stray cat pass by. The feline, hoping for some food, began rubbing up against the boy and purring. Matthew was touched, and stole some money from his mother's purse to buy the cat a can of tuna. He was severely beaten for the theft later, but felt that it was worth it to make his little friend happy. Matt kept the cat in a cardboard box on the fire escape, feeding it scraps of his food and enjoying its company. For the first time in his life, he had something which he could love.

One day, Matthew was playing with the cat on the fire escape when two of his brothers came in. They saw the cat, and decided to have a laugh. While one of them held Matthew back, the other one roughly hurled the animal off of the fire escape, to its death four floors below. "Guess they don't always land on their feet," chuckled the boy who had thrown the cat, as he looked down at the furry corpse.

Suddenly, that boy's head twisted around 180 degrees on his shoulders, with a sickening crack. His lifeless body was then

hurled by some invisible force to the pavement. The other brother tried to run and get help, but found that his legs were being held in place by some invisible force. There was another grisly snapping noise, and the boy bent backwards, his spine broken like a twig. Seeing the corpses of his brothers stretched out before him, Matthew smiled, and merely said, "Good." He was 10 years old.

He ran away from home, thinking that he'd be blamed for the murders. Matthew spent the next few years of his life using his telekinetic powers to steal from people. He slept in homeless shelters and parks, and used what little money he had to get food. If not for his psychic powers, he certainly would not have survived. With them, he managed to eke out a living.

When Matthew was 15, he stole a baggie of assorted drugs from a dealer. He sold most of the stuff to junkies in the neighborhood, but could find no buyers for a couple of strange little pills. The boy decided to take the pills himself, to forget his troubles for a few hours. He didn't get high like he thought he would. Instead, he found himself filled with power that he had never experienced before. His senses were far better than normal, his telekinetic energies seemed great enough to lift a car, he felt full of inner strength and vitality. Eventually, this ended, and Matthew hit the crash. But even this terrifying hangover was a small price to pay for the thrill which he had received.

The teenager immediately set out to find where he could get more of this wonderful drug. It wasn't hard to find out. The Brain Fry, just starting out, were in the middle of their recruitment drive. Even a minor psychic like Matthew was admitted with open arms. Surrounded by other misfits like himself, with lots of Burner-6 that opened up his hidden power and lots of people who appreciated his company, Matthew felt, for the first time in his life, like he belonged.

He became a vicious and efficient fighter in the gang, cutting no corners to defend his brotherhood. If anyone was messing with Nikolai or any Brain Fry, Matthew was always willing to help beat up or kill that troublemaker. He was nicknamed Raw Skull (a variation on his last name of Roskull) after decapitating a former member who had squealed to the police.

Raw Skull is now 18 years old. The scrawny little homeless kid whom everybody kicked around is now a well-muscled, tattooed warrior with a grudge against the world. He has become fiercely protective of the Brain Fry, who are really the only family that he has. He will kill anyone, with no hesitation and no remorse, to protect his friends.

Raw Skull has all of the charisma of a rabid pit bull. He rarely speaks, preferring to communicate his violent and morbid thoughts by means of telepathy. He hates "norms," and will savagely beat or kill them on a whim. He respects some Nightbane and vampires, but considers most non-human entities, and all Guardians and Nightlord minions, to be lower than bugs on the evolutionary scale. Raw Skull does retain a certain soft spot for animals, and keeps a few aquariums and a pair of mean-tempered Dobermans.

Alignment: Abberant, with total loyalty to the gang.

O.C.C.: 6th level Brain Fry Ganger.

Attributes: I.Q.: 11, M.E.: 15, M.A.: 7, P.S.: 19, P.E.: 14, P.P.: 13, P.B.: 9, Spd: 14.

Hit Points: 41, S.D.C.: 20.

I.S.P.: 81, P.P.E.: 1.

Psionic Powers: Summon Inner Strength, Telekinesis, Resist Fatigue, Deaden Pain, Induce Pain, TK Punch, TK Leap, Mind Block.

Bonuses: +3 to save against Horror Factor, +3 to save against possession, +4 to save vs psionics, +2 to save against magic, +2 to pull punch, +2 to roll with punch, fall or impact, +3 to parry, +3 to dodge, Critical Strike on 18, 19 or 20. 3 attacks per melee.

O.C.C. Skills: Speak English: 98%, Speak Spanish 90%, Streetwise 64%, Streetwise: Drugs 79%, Pilot Motorcycle 94%, W.P. Knife, W.P. Automatic Pistol.

O.C.C. Related Skills: Detect Ambush: 60%, Hand to Hand: Expert, Body Building, Prowl: 70%, Pick Locks: 60%, Interrogation: 80%, W.P. Blunt, W.P. Shotgun, Detect Concealment: 35%.

Secondary Skills: Cook: 65%, Sew: 70%, Escape Artist: 60%, W.P. Chain, W.P. Whip, Tracking: 55%.

Weapons: Raw Skull always has a melee weapon, such as a switchblade or a baseball bat. When he does use firearms, he likes shotguns and .45 automatics. Grenades and explosives (thrown via telekinesis) are another favorite weapon of this psychotic enforcer's.

Armor: None.

Other Equipment: Burner-6 pills (his favorite is Berserker, although he's been known to use almost all of them), high-quality motorcycle, leather jacket, fashionable clothing, sunglasses, alcohol, rat hole apartment, 2D4x\$1000 dollars.

Dreamgirl

Alice Tosgoy was born in rural Massachusetts, to the local reverend and his wife. She lived a fairly typical teenage life and childhood, joining the cheerleading squad and the prom committee, getting decent grades, and being a social butterfly. Alice thought that her life was perfectly sane and normal, until her 18th birthday.

On that special day, her proud parents gave her two gifts. One of these gifts was a little statuette, made of a curious green stone which they said came from a meteorite. What the statuette was of was hard to tell. It had tentacles, a pulpy, wart-ridden body, and the head of a bizarre insect. Alice could have sworn that the strange thing was moving around, although at a rate far too slow to chart, on its little base. Even more disturbing than that was the feeling that she had seen the thing somewhere before.

The second gift was an antique book, which seemed to date back to pre-Roman times (although it had been kept in excellent condition). The pages were made of thick, leathery parchment, and seemed warm to the touch. Although the book was not in English, Alice could understand it somehow. The title was "The Old Ones."

Her parents explained that they were part of a secret society which worshiped sleeping gods called the Old Ones, who would one day awaken to rule the cosmos. Occult rituals had been performed at the time of Alice's conception, which would grant her a special, mental link to those beings. They said that with the proper training, she could enter the dreams of the Old Ones, and stir them in their tombs. At first, Alice laughed this off, although she was rather disturbed. An hour after going to bed that night, the girl woke up from a nightmare, covered in sweat. She only



remembered fragments of her dream, but those fragments were enough. Alice left home that very night.

She traveled to New York City, which seemed to her like a place where she could easily lose her parents. However, she herself was lost in the metropolis. Without money, friends, or any real job skills, Alice found herself in real trouble. She began working as a streetwalker to pay the bills. It was during this period that her powers began to appear. She began remembering more and more of her dreams, and even slipping into spontaneous trances on a few occasions. Feelings of tangible doom wrapped around her heart, and the statuette which her parents had given her, left back in Massachusetts, slithered its way into her mind.

Nikolai found her soon after, and brought her into the Brain Fry. The terrified, overwhelmed girl was happy for what little structure and guidance the gang gave her. It was obvious that there was a great deal of potential to be unlocked in her brain, and some people thought that once her powers had truly manifested, she would lead the gang. It was her clairvoyant flashes which allowed the Brain Fry to survive some of its nastier encounters. Her bizarre dreams and good looks prompted her to be nicknamed Dreamgirl. Unfortunately, Alice grew dissatisfied with her slow progress, and decided to take some Burner-6.

At the first taste of the chemical, something in her brain exploded. Her body was wracked with terrible pain and mutations for weeks, and it seemed sometimes like she would not survive. When Alice finally awoke, her young body was badly warped and deformed. Her fingers had grown twice as long as they had been, and her right arm had wormed its way inside her body,

leaving only an enlarged hand at the shoulder. Her skin had become grey and heavily veined, and her skull had become lumpy and covered with a complex network of vessels and fleshy tubes. Her left eye swelled to twice its normal size, while the right one nearly shut. Little tentacles, just a few inches long, even sprouted from her face and legs.

Worst of all were the changes in Alice's mind. During her mutations, she had finally connected with the dreams of the Old Ones. She remembered nothing of the experience, save that she had stared into the abyss and found it to be a mirror.

Ever since then, Dreamgirl has been an enigma. She sits alone in the safe houses, all by herself, adventuring in the Dreamstream or the Astral Plane. Dreamgirl speaks only in riddles, and oftentimes will start grunting out pre-Druidic tongues or languages not meant for the ears of man. While her clairvoyant visions and extra-planar odysseys have proven a great benefit to the gang, she frightens many of the Brain Fry. Nikolai keeps her around as much out of fear as for respect for her talents.

Alignment: Diabolic.

O.C.C.: 4th level Dream Dancer.

Attributes: I.Q.: 21, M.E.: 22, M.A.: 6, P.S.: 9, P.E.: 8, P.P.: 11, P.B.: 3, Spd: 9.

Hit Points: 17, S.D.C.: 10.

I.S.P.: 102, P.P.E.: 42.

Psionic Powers: Clairvoyance, Bio-Manipulation, Suggestion, See the Invisible, Telepathy, Mind Block, Dream Dancer Powers.

Bonuses: +3 to Dream Combat rolls, +2 to pull punch, +2 to roll with punch, fall or impact, +2 to parry, +2 to dodge, +4 to save vs psionic attacks and insanity. 3 attacks per melee.

O.C.C. Skills: Speak English: 98%, Literacy: 98%, Dreamstream Lore: 88%, Demon Lore: 73%, Geomancy: 68%, Cook: 68%, Play Flute: 68%, Prowl: 63%, Hand to Hand: Basic.

O.C.C. Related Skills: First Aid: 73%, Streetwise: 49%, Nightlands Lore: 58%, Religious Lore: 63%, Vampire Lore: 63%, Art: 68%, Anthropology: 48%, Astronomy: 53%, Concealment: 41%.

Secondary Skills: Pathology: 68%, Toxicology: 68%, Forensics: 73%, W.P. Knife, W.P. Chain, W.P. Revolver.



New Morphus Tables By Multiple Authors

Optional Material for Nightbane®

Aura Table

By Eric Baierl

This table includes anything that may be considered an aura around the Morphus. It is usually 3 to 10 feet (0.9-3 m) away from the body, and is in use continuously. While it does not use any P.P.E. or I.S.P. or any other form of energy, the Nightbane cannot turn the aura off. It is always present.

01-09% Heat Flash: The character, while not actually on fire, always feels warm. The heat is felt about three feet (.9 m) from the body, and feels about 200 degrees Fahrenheit (93 Celsius). Dry grass may start on fire, but no other damage occurs.

Bonuses: Normal damage from fire and heat (normal or magical) is reduced ½. Cold attacks do double normal damage. The Morphus is completely unaffected by temperatures greater than 50 degrees.

10-17% Cold Flash: The character is always freezing cold to the touch, and about 3 feet (.9 m) away the temperature feels about -50 degrees F (-46 C). Water in the area of effect will freeze, but no other damage occurs.

Bonuses: Normal damage from cold (magic and normal) is reduced by ½. Fire and heat attacks do double normal damage. Morphus is unaffected by cold temperatures below 50 degrees.

18-26% Static Electricity: Small sparks can be seen between the Morphus' fingers, legs, arms and body. If a person comes within 5 feet (1.5 m), a spark will jump from the Nightbane and strike the person, doing 1D6 S.D.C. damage. This cannot be used as a voluntary attack, and cannot be shut off. The Morphus also glows because of the sparks, and can be seen easily at night.

Bonuses: Damage from electricity (normal and magical) is reduced by ½. Lightning Rider talent can be taken for 10 P.P.E. instead of 15.

27-35% Electronic Erasure: Any and all electronic storage devices (cassette tapes, disks, video tapes, hard drives, eight tracks, etc.) within three feet (.9 m) will be completely erased. While this does allow the Nightbane to erase unwanted information, it also makes it impossible to use a computer without damaging it.

36-42% Hate: Anyone coming within 5 feet (1.5 m) will instantly hate the Nightbane. They will either (01-50%) violently hate and attack the Nightbane, or (51-00%) hate them so much that they cannot be anywhere near them. A save vs Mind Control will negate the Hate, but there will still be a feeling of unease.

43-51% Fear: Adds +4 to Horror Factor, but only when within 5 feet (1.5 m) of the Morphus. If Horror Factor has already been saved against, it must be rerolled when the 5 foot line is broken.

52-60% Halo: The character glows with a holy brilliance. People will either be in awe of the Nightbane as some kind of an-

gel, or fear him out of ignorance. Some will hate the 'bane as a mockery of their religion.

Bonuses: Add +2 to Horror Factor. The character cannot prowl at night or hide at all because he glows brightly.

61-69% Stench: The Morphus stinks, plain and simple. Be it feces, urine, rotten fruit, garbage, decaying flesh, whatever it is, it's horrible.

Bonuses: +1D4 to Horror Factor, felt within ten feet (3 m).

70-78% Shadow: An unnatural darkness hangs over the 'bane, making it appear as if it is standing in a dark alley. While it is not a complete darkness, it is enough to hide features and help hiding in shadows.

Bonuses: 95% prowl in shadows; takes double damage from light-based attacks (does not include lasers).

79-86% Animal Repulsion: Normal animals (i.e., not supernatural) will not come near the Morphus. They will not attack, but will make noise to warn others of the Nightbane.

Bonuses: Immune to attacks from normal animals. -50% to prowl when in forest regions or near animals because they will notice and make noise.

87-95% Shatter Glass: All glass within ten feet (3 m) will explode outwards as if hit by a gale force wind. The glass will *always* explode away from the Nightbane, and will do 2D6 S.D.C. to anyone in the path of the flying glass. This affects all types of glass.

Bonuses: +1D4 to Horror Factor when walking near glass.

96-00% Combination of two: Select two or reroll twice, ignoring results of 96-00%.

Alien Appendages Table #2

By Eric Baierl

01-10% Chains: The Morphus has 1D4 chains wrapped around his body, usually his chest and torso area, though some have chains on their arms and legs as well. The chains can be used to attack and grapple opponents. The chains have the same strength as the other limbs, and have a range of twenty feet (6 m).

Bonuses: Add one attack per melee for every chain, +2 to strike and parry with the chains. Add one to Horror Factor.

11-20% Bone Chains: These chains are identical to the previous chains except that they appear to be made of lengths of vertebrae. Same strength and bonuses as normal chains.

21-30% Vines: The Nightbane has portions of his body wrapped with a vine-like material. Can be used the same as chains and bone chains.

31-40% Eye Stalks: Has 1D10 eye stalks from protruding from the shoulders, head, arms, chest, abdomen, back, or legs. The stalks are prehensile but only six inches (.15 m) in length. The Nightbane can control them and cause them to look in 360 degrees at any one moment. Cannot be surprised as long as they can see (i.e. will be surprised in complete darkness). Each stalk has only 1D8 S.D.C., but if one is cut off, it will



completely grow back within 24 hours. There is also a chance of infravision (01-40%), or see the invisible (41-50%), but many (51-00%) have completely normal vision.

Bonuses: Cannot be surprised, +2 to initiative, +1D4 to Horror Factor.

41-50% Prehensile Hair: The Nightbane has complete control over their hair, using it as if it were another limb. Hair has a P.S. of 10, and a P.P. of 3D6. The Nightbane can use weapons with the hair, though at -2 to strike because it has no fingers to use. Most Nightbane with this ability grow their hair to extreme lengths (10 feet/3 m), and many keep it in braids to use like tentacles. They are typically very vain about their hair, and most are also very beautiful because of it.

Bonuses: Add one additional attack per melee. +2 to P.B., +1 to Horror Factor.

51-60% Elephant Trunk: Somewhere on their body, the Morphus has the trunk of an elephant. A few actually have one in place of their nose, but many have one growing out of their back, their chest, even their arms. They can breathe through the trunk, so it is possible to hide under water and use the trunk as a snorkel. The trunk has a P.S. of 3D6, and a P.P. of 3D6+2, though using weapons is difficult (-3 to strike).

Bonuses: Add one additional attack per melee, +2 to Horror Factor.

61-70% Cape: The Morphus has a large cape that can be used as a shield and has minimal parrying abilities. The cape can appear to be as small as a normal cloak, hanging down to about the knees, or it can be so large that it can cover the Nightbane and extend an additional ten feet (3 m) in every direction. The cape has an S.D.C. of 200 and regenerates at 2D6 points per hour, but in order to use the cape as a shield, the Nightbane must spend one turn gathering the cape around his body and cannot do anything as long as the shield is used.

Bonuses: Add one additional action per melee, but must be used to parry with cape, +1 to Horror Factor when cape is extended and moving.

71-80% Wires: Prehensile wires extend from 1D10 locations on the body. They vary in length from 1 to 8 feet (0.9-2.4 m), but are very weak (P.S. 3). They are open on the ends and have an electrical current running through them which can cause 2D6 damage.

Bonuses: +1 attack per melee, +1 to strike with wires, electrical attacks do half damage, +1D4 to Horror Factor.

81-90% Ties, Belts or Headbands: The Nightbane is wearing a very long headband or belt, or other cloth wrapped around any part of his body. The cloth is tied, and the extra cord is prehensile. These can also be used the same as chains, but the wrapped portion of the fabric adds 3D6 to S.D.C.

91-00% Super Tongue: The Nightbane either has a very long tongue (4-5 feet/1.2-1.5 m) in their normal mouth, or they have an extra mouth on their body which has a super long tongue. The tongue has a strength of 2D6. The tongue does not in any way interfere with talking, and can in fact be completely pulled inside the mouth.

Bonuses: Add one additional attack per melee, +1D4 to Horror Factor.

Food Table

By Eric Baierl

These are the strange and unusual, especially for Nightbane. Some have an oral fixation, others just like to eat, but all have some grand connection to food.

01-10% Pasta: The Nightbane's body is completely made of pasta, be it spaghetti, fettuccini, or lasagna noodles, he's pasta to the core. Parts of him may occasionally fall off, but they will regrow. About one half also have sauce to go with.

Bonuses: +2D6x10 to S.D.C., -3 to Spd, +1D4 to Horror Factor.

11-20% Rice: Similar to the Pasta form, this guy is made of billions of pieces of rice, somehow held together by his willpower. Blunt attacks will pass through him, blade attacks barely do any damage as well. Only magic, psionics, or energy attacks will significantly harm him; other physical attacks do half damage.

Bonuses: +2D6x10 S.D.C., -4 to Spd, +1D4 to Horror Factor.

21-30% Buttery Skin: Somewhere underneath, the Nightbane has flesh, but on the surface he is coated with butter. His body creates it as though it were sweat. When it is warm out or he has been physically exerting himself, the butter will begin to melt and flow all over, creating a very big mess if indoors. He will always be slippery, and difficult to grab, but

he also has an incredible urge to eat popcorn. Must always have a bowl of popcorn with him.

Bonuses: +4 to break any grapple attack or hold, +1D6 to S.D.C., and +2 to Horror Factor.

31-40% Raw Meat: Skin is roughly the texture of ground chuck. Red, soft and squishy, along with a little blood to let you know it's raw. Does not go bad, however; it appears to be in a constant state of freshness.

Bonuses: +3D6 S.D.C., +1D4 to Horror Factor.

41-50% Condiment Blood: Whenever the Nightbane is injured, he bleeds. Maybe, just maybe, some have normal blood, but these guys don't. They bleed the stuff that runs true in their veins, whether it's mustard, ketchup, even Worcestershire sauce. Doesn't add any bonuses, just looks kind of funny.

51-60% Gingerbread Man: The Nightbane appears to be a big cookie, made from gingerbread and decorated with frosting. They can be two or three dimensional, with as detailed of facial features as they want, but their flesh will always be gingerbread.

Bonuses: -10% to prowl since they have a very strong and distinct odor of gingerbread to them, +2D6 to S.D.C., +1 to Horror Factor.

61-70% Soda Bottle Body: The Nightbane has skin of clear plastic and innards that can be clearly seen. Some are actually filled with soda, and pore it out any time they are punctured. Facial features are either molded into the plastic or applied like a plastic label.

Bonuses: +3D6 to S.D.C., +2 to Horror Factor.

71-80% Soggy Cereal: The body is made of cereal that has sat in the milk to long. They are held together, but occasionally an especially soggy piece may fall off. Milk also oozes from their body, and some have pieces of banana or strawberry in them.

Bonuses: +3D6x10 S.D.C., -5 to Spd, water based attacks do double damage, +1D4 to Horror Factor.

81-90% Pudding: The character is made of pudding, plain and simple. These Nightbane are very soft, molded easily, can squish their bodies down to half their height and width, and taste like chocolate, vanilla, or butterscotch.

Bonuses: +3D6x10 S.D.C., -4 to Spd, +1D4 to Horror Factor.

91-00% Peanut Butter and Jelly Sandwich Man: He looks like a PB&J sandwich, complete with crust around the edges. If he is cut, Peanut butter or jelly will ooze forth. Skin is the texture of bread, white or wheat, the Nightbane's preference.

Bonuses: +1D6x10 to S.D.C., +1 to Horror Factor.

Octopoid Table

By Eric Baierl

Very few Nightbane become Octopuses, but there are a couple out there. Many become reclusive and hide in the ocean, where they can live in relative peace. Some Octopus Nightbane may have been the cause of tales of giant squid or mermaids, though most tend to be small and ugly. All naturally have the ability to swim at 85%.

01-20% Giant Octopus: The Nightbane is a giant octopus with eight tentacles, a large beak, and a large, floppy body. Can breathe both air or water, and can function on land, albeit

sluggishly. The body is roughly three feet (.9 m) in diameter, and the tentacles are 10-15 feet (3-4.6 m) in length.

Bonuses: +8 to P.S., +4 to P.E., +3 to P.P., +4D6x10 S.D.C., +6D6 to swimming speed. Bite inflicts 4D6 S.D.C. +3 to Horror Factor.

21-40% Were-Octopus: The Nightbane is roughly humanoid in shape, with two tentacles becoming more leg-like and stiff. Head is smaller, but still looks like a large sack with has black eyes, and the six tentacles protrude from the shoulder region. A beak is in the place of the normal mouth.

Bonuses: +6 to P.S., +3 to P.E., +3 to P.P., +3D6x10 to S.D.C., +5D6 to swimming speed. +4 to Horror Factor. Bite inflicts 3D6 S.D.C.

41-60% Humanoid Octopus: The body is nearly humanoid, with normal human legs and arms, and four tentacles that protrude from the sides, under the normal arms. The head is human like, though it still has a beak and sags down in the back. Can pass for human from a distance or in shadows.

Bonuses: +4 to P.S., +2 to P.E., +2 to P.P., +5D6 to S.D.C., +3D6 to swimming speed. +1D4 to Horror Factor. Bite inflicts 2D6 S.D.C.

61-70% Extra Tentacles: The Nightbane has 1D4 pairs of extra tentacles jutting from his back. The tentacles are ten feet (3 m) long and have a P.P. of 10 and a P.S. of 16.

Bonuses: Add one attack per melee for each pair of tentacles, but those attacks can only be used with the tentacles. +2 to Horror Factor.

71-80% Octopus Head: The head appears as a full grown octopus, with eight tentacles and a central beak in the place of a normal mouth. Eyes are black, and the head is soft and squishy, and sags down in the back.

Bonuses: +2D6 to S.D.C., bite inflicts 3D6 S.D.C., +1D4 to Horror Factor.

81-00% Octopus Centauroid: The upper torso is completely human, but the legs have been replaced by eight 10 foot (3 m) long tentacles. The Nightbane can crawl at 3D6, but running is impossible. The tentacles can be used as rudimentary hands, but can not use computers, shoot guns accurately (-5 to strike), etc.

Bonuses: +8 to P.S. (tentacles only), +3 to P.E., +3 to P.P., +4D6 to S.D.C., +6D6 to swimming speed. +1D4 to Horror Factor.

Crustacean Table

By Eric Baierl

Scuttling about the sea shore, children playing in the sand and building castles. They develop a fascination with the animals that crawl the shore, the crustaceans that hide beneath the rocks and feed the folks who live on the beaches. Ironically, many Nightbane who used to dine upon lobster regularly, become those creatures in their Morphus. All crustacean Nightbane can swim at 85% and breathe both water and air.

01-20% Giant Crustacean: The Nightbane is a giant crab, lobster, crayfish, something with an exoskeleton that lives in the water. They resemble animals completely, right down to the eye stalks. They are usually six to eight feet (1.8-2.4 m) long. (Note: they have no human hands, so skills requiring manual dexterity are -50%).



Bonuses: +8 to P.S., +4 to P.E., +4D6x10 S.D.C., +3D6 to swimming speed. +3 to Horror Factor. Claws inflict 4D6 S.D.C.

21-40% Were-Crustacean: The Nightbane is somewhat humanoid in shape, and have two large arms, four legs beneath the waist, and a single head on top of the shoulders. They are still multi-legged, and still have an extremely hard exoskeleton covering their bodies. The face resembles a crustacean's.

Bonuses: +6 to P.S., +3 to P.E., +3 to P.P., +3D6x10 to S.D.C., +3D6 to swimming speed. +4 to Horror Factor. Claws inflict 3D6 S.D.C.

41-60% Humanoid Crustacean: The body is nearly humanoid, with normal human legs and arms, though the body still is covered in a light exoskeleton. The face is roughly human-like, with normal eyes, an impression of a nose, a sort of mouth, but the Nightbane would not pass for a human under close inspection. They can be mistaken for human if seen from a distance or in shadows.

Bonuses: +4 to P.S., +2 to P.E., +2 to P.P., +5D6 to S.D.C., +3D6 to swimming speed. +1D4 to Horror Factor. Claws inflict 2D6 S.D.C.

61-70% Lobster Claws: The arms have been replaced with two large lobster claws. The claws are limited in their usage, but are very strong and make excellent weapons.

Bonuses: Add 2 to Horror Factor and +6 to P.S.

71-80% Crustacean Shell: The Morphus is completely human looking, except for the exoskeleton that covers their back. Some have a segmented shell like a lobster's, but others have a large, single piece shell like that of a horseshoe crab.

Bonuses: +3D6x10 to S.D.C., +1D4 to Horror Factor.

81-00% Lobster Centauroid: The upper torso is completely human, but the legs have been replaced by the tail of a lobster, complete with many legs and tail for quick, watery escapes. The Nightbane can still walk on land easily.

Bonuses: +3 to P.E., +2D6x10 to S.D.C., +6D6 to swimming speed. +1D4 to Horror Factor.

Fish Table

By Eric Baierl

These are the Nightbane who swim the seas, oftentimes alone. They are lonely creatures since most of their brethren are surface dwellers. All Fish Morphus can swim at 98%.

01-20% Full Fish Form: The Morphus is a large fish, 8-10 feet (2.4-3 m) long, of any kind the player wishes. They have full fish features and can swim, breathe water and move completely like a fish. They do not have any hands though, so using weapons is really not an option.

Bonuses: +4 to P.S., +4 to P.E., +1d6x10 to S.D.C., +5D6 to swimming speed. Add 1D4 to Horror Factor.

21-40% Limbed Fish: Similar to the full fish form, this one has two humanoid arms emerging from where the frontal fins would normally be. The limbs are scaled and webbed, and have small fins along the forearms. The hands have three small fingers and an opposable thumb which can be used to manipulate objects and use weapons. The Nightbane breathes water but may surface for short amounts of time (P.E. in minutes).

Bonuses: +3 to P.S., +4 to P.E., +3d6 to S.D.C., +3D6 to swimming speed. Add 1D4 to Horror Factor.

41-60% Fish Man: This creature is a humanoid with very prominent fish features. The Nightbane stands on its hind legs with a slightly hunched back. There is one large fin running down its back and smaller fins on the forearms and legs. They always have gills and lungs and so are able to survive above or below water. Fish Men can survive up to two miles (3.2 km) underwater without suffering from the pressure.

Bonuses: +2D6 to swimming speed, +2 to P.S., +3D6 to S.D.C. Add 2 to Horror Factor.

61-80% Mermaid: The Morphus is the shape of the typical mermaid. It has the upper body of a normal human and the lower body of a fish. They can breathe both air and water and are can dive up to one mile (1.6 km) without protection from pressure.

Bonuses: +2D6 to swimming speed, +2D6 to S.D.C., +1 to P.B. Add 1 to Horror Factor.

81-90% Scaly Skin: Though otherwise human looking, the Morphus is covered in fish scales. They may have a normal pattern for a real fish, or may be completely random. Most do tend to have stripes that resemble camouflage.

Bonuses: +15% to Prowl underwater, +3D6 to S.D.C. Add 1 to Horror Factor.

91-00% Gills: The Nightbane has a large pair of gills located under the jaw line. The are very difficult to conceal and make the otherwise human face appear slightly monstrous.

Bonuses: Can breathe underwater. Add 1 to Horror Factor.

Fish Limbs and Attributes Table

By Eric Baierl

This table includes everything not covered in the previous one. It is mostly body coverings and self defense mechanisms used by unusual fish and aquatic creatures.

01-10% Puffer Fish Skin: The Morphus has loose skin covered with small spines. When not in use, the spines lay harmlessly against the skin. However, the Nightbane can cause its skin to expand like a puffer fish, increasing its size three times and creating a wall of spines around its body.

Bonuses: +3D6 to S.D.C., spines do 2D6 damage. Add 1D4 to Horror Factor, applicable only when skin is inflated.

11-20% Urchin Spines: Whereas the puffer spines are small and harmless most of the time, the Urchin Spines are large, bony structures tipped with poison. They most often protrude from the back, but some will have them on their arms and legs as well.

Bonuses: +3D6 to S.D.C. Spines will do 3D6 damage and poison is capable of paralyzing a man-sized creature for 2D4 minutes (roll to save vs non-lethal poison). Add 2 to Horror Factor.

21-30% Shark Mouth: The Nightbane has an enormous shark mouth, filled with rows upon rows of sharp teeth... in his chest. The mouth sticks out about two feet (.6 m), making it impossible to conceal with clothing. A bite attack does 3D6, but if a Nightbane manages to bear-hug a victim, the mouth can continue to bite automatically as long as the hug is maintained.

Bonuses: One additional attack per melee. Add 2 to Horror Factor.

31-40% Fish Spines/Fins: The Morphus has a large, spiny fin running the entire length of the spine, as well as fins on the forearms and legs. May also have fins on the head.

Bonuses: Add 2D6 to swimming speed and +1 to Horror Factor.

41-50% Piranha Hands: The Morphus has large, hungry piranhas instead of hands. Guns cannot be fired because there is no finger to pull the trigger, but melee weapons can be held and used at -1 to strike. A bite from the piranha does 2D6, and they have a tendency to crave blood, whether or not the Nightbane wants it.

Bonuses: Add 1 to Horror Factor. Special Ability: Bloodlust — Every time blood is spilled, the Nightbane will attack and fight better. Add one attack per melee and +2 to strike under these circumstances.

51-60% Bioluminescence: The Nightbane has the ability to glow like some deep sea fishes. In half of the cases (01-50%), this is uncontrollable, it's always on. The glow can be any color and come from anywhere, though most common are small globes that hang from short stalks above the Nightbane's head. The glow has a radius of about 30 feet (9.1 m) and makes prowling impossible. Add 1D4 to Horror Factor.

61-70% Webbed Digits: All the Nightbane's fingers and toes have webbing in-between them.

Bonuses: Add 2D6 to swimming speed and +1 to Horror Factor.

71-80% Electric Eel Attack: This person has the unique ability to cause an electrical surge to travel through their body, causing damage to anything touching them, or anything within ten feet (3 m) underwater. The attack can only be used once per hour and requires one melee of concentration.

Bonuses: Attack does 4D6 S.D.C. electrical damage.

81-90% Shark Teeth: The Morphus' mouth is filled with six rows of small, serrated shark teeth. If any are ever lost, more from the back will move forward and replace the lost ones. The mouth is also about twice the size of normal.

Bonuses: Attack does 2D6. Add 1 to Horror Factor.

91-00% Ink Cloud: Underwater, this ability causes the Nightbane to release enough ink to fill a 10x10x10 foot (3x3x3 m) cube. On the surface, though, it just drips ink down their skin and makes a puddle. There are usually small orifices where the ink is released near the neck or in the back.

Bonuses: Escape underwater when using ink cloud. Add 2 to Horror Factor.

Submersible Biomech Table

By Eric Baierl

Nightbane with a Submersible Biomech part, often have a need to explore under the seas or travel over them. They are techies of the ocean, almost an opposite of the more natural forms noted above.

01-10% Diving Suit Skin: The Morphus is completely covered in an old-style diving suit, with a large glass helmet and a breather tube that seems to float upward to infinity. They have heavy, leaded feet and constantly release a flow of bubbles upward. Even if they are above water, bubbles will still float up and the tube will still rise. They always breathe very heavily, which makes it difficult to prowl.

Bonuses: Add 1D6x10 to S.D.C., water and air breathing, and +3 to P.E. Add 1 to Horror Factor.

11-20% Flippers: Simply, the Nightbane has large, plastic swimming flippers permanently attached to his feet. Surface walking becomes difficult, but is manageable.

Bonuses: Add 2D6 to swimming speed, +2 to P.E.

21-30% Propellers: The Morphus has propellers in his back or sticking out from his sides. Underwater or surface movement is 35 mph (56 km).

Bonuses: Add 1D4 to Horror Factor.

31-40% Sonar Screen: The Nightbane has a large glass screen in his chest which constantly "bleeps" and registers all movement within one hundred feet (30.5 m). Some also have a small sonar dish which rotates on either their shoulder or head.

Bonuses: Constantly tracks everything within one hundred feet (30.5 m), adding +2 to dodge and making surprise attacks impossible. Add 1D4 to Horror Factor.

41-50% Jet Engine: The Nightbane has stiff forearms, large hands and a jet engine pointing down towards their legs. When they lean forward, they can hydrofoil over the surface of water at up to 60 mph (96 km). The Nightbane cannot use the engine to fly, but may make short leaps of up to 10 feet (3 m) high or 15 feet (4.6 m) across.

Bonuses: Add 2D6 to Spd. And 1D4 to Horror Factor.

51-60% Fins: These are large metal fins like those on a submarine or boat. They will point in the same direction and make the Nightbane more aerodynamic when underwater.

Bonuses: Add 3D6 to S.D.C. (Due to the metal), and add 2 to Horror Factor.

61-70% Net Clothing: The Morphus appears to have been caught in fishing nets but able to break free. The whole body is wrapped in heavy duty nets, and may even have some buoys tied to its length.

Bonuses: Add 3D6 to S.D.C. and +1 to Horror Factor.

71-80% Mechanical Gills: Huge metal gills rest on the shoulders. They constantly make noise as they breathe, even above water.

Bonuses: Add 2D6 to S.D.C., water and air breathing, +2 to Horror Factor.

81-90% Scuba Gear: Unlike the bulky diving suit, this gear is the sleek, skin tight suit of thermal wear. The Morphus has a small set of goggles over the eyes and has a removable mouth piece. Fins are also removable, the only parts that are not are the eye goggles, the suit, and the single air tank on the back.

Bonuses: Add 2D6 to swimming speed, +2 to P.E., and 2D6 to S.D.C. Add 1 to Horror Factor if they are seen walking around away from water.

91-00% Harpoon Arm: The hand has been replaced with a harpoon. Two-handed weapons are impossible to use, but the harpoon limb becomes a fully functioning weapon. Attack does 2D6 S.D.C.

Bonuses: Add 2 to P.S., +1 to Horror Factor.

Artificial Appearance Table

By David Solon Phillips

These Nightbane appear, in various ways, to be artificial. Perhaps these Nightbane were sculptors that become their art, or perhaps they worked closely with the substance that they have become. A third possibility is that the Nightbane has always

been "fake," not a genuine person, and now their true (artificial) colors are finally coming through.

01%-10% Store Mannequin: The Nightbane appears to be a real, department store mannequin (not to be confused with doll-like or plastic). One can see where the arms and legs and head attach, the hair is the consistency of fishing line, etc. Also, the clothes of this Nightbane are usually what the Player Character consider to be the absolute best clothing style at the time. Perhaps these Nightbane loved shopping, worked in a department store or were just so concerned with outer appearance that their Morphus reflects this.

Bonuses: Add 3D6 to S.D.C., +5% to Prowl (can stand COMPLETELY still, nearly invisible in a department store), and add 1D4 to Horror Factor ("I knew they could move! Every time I went to the store they were watching me!").

11%-20% Crash Test Dummy: This name is self explanatory, this Nightbane looks like a crash test dummy. They are also built to last like a real thing.

Bonuses: Add 2D6x10 to S.D.C., +2 to P.P. and add 7 to roll with punch/fall/impact, +1 to H.F. (they are -2 to P.S. however, as they lack rigidity).

21%-30% Scarecrow: Quite plainly, this Nightbane looks like a Scarecrow. Not necessarily in the shape of a human, just a stuffed version of what ever they may be, (a lizard, a Minotaur, etc). This appearance has both strengths and drawbacks.

Bonuses: +2 to P.P., yet -2 to P.S. (floppy). Add 7 to roll with punch/fall/impact, +1D6 to S.D.C., and this form is particularly creepy to most people so it is +3 to Horror Factor.

31%-40% Porcelain/Ceramic: This Nightbane appears to be a giant porcelain doll or a ceramic statue; it could be in any

form: person, animal, creature, etc. While not overtly frightening (for example, from a distance a ceramic wolf looks no different from a normal wolf) but the ceramic/porcelain effect is bizarre (+1 to H.F.). These Nightbane have a difficult time displaying expressions on their faces, their "skin" is so stiff they don't show much emotion as their faces can't move (-1D4 to M.A.). It is also tougher than normal ceramic, porcelain or flesh (+2D6 to S.D.C. This stiffness, however, doesn't give much under pressure so they are at +1D6 to S.D.C. damage in hand to hand combat as well.

41%-50% Junk Golem: This Nightbane may have been a trash collector, owned a junkyard or had any number of occupations that deal with rubbish, but in any event this Nightbane looks as if he/she is made entirely out of junk! Put together from odds & ends (bottles, cans, bits of wire, glass, etc.), in many cases the Nightbane is little more than a heaping mass of junk that can move (very unsettling). For this reason Junk Gollums are +1D6+4 to Horror Factor.

Bonuses: Add 1D4x10 to S.D.C. rating, +1D8 S.D.C. damage in hand to hand combat and +10% to prowl in any urban area that usually contains trash, like an alley or slum (70% invisible in a junkyard). Multiply weight x2.

51%-60% Glass: Similar to Porcelain/Ceramic but made from glass. Could be stained glass to green soda bottle glass. Usually colored or cloudy; this is not a form of invisibility.

Bonuses: +2 to H.F., +1D6 to S.D.C., -3 to M.A., -1 to P.P. +1D6 hand to hand damage. They only take ½ damage from energy attacks (reflection/refraction) and +10 to prowl due to partial transparency.

61%-70% Patchwork: This Nightbane appears to be constructed from a mishmash of materials that have been stitched, stapled, welded, etc., together. Depending on the other attributes possessed by the Nightbane, this character can look like anything ranging from a piece of modern art to a mad scientist's creation (or both).

Bonuses: Add 2D6x2 to S.D.C. and +1D6 to Horror Factor.

71%-80% Clay-Like: The Nightbane appears to be made of clay. Add 30% (or a base skill of 40%) to Disguise as the Nightbane can shape and mold his/her own appearance (add a temporary bonus of +6 to Horror Factor if someone witnesses this, it's just weird). He/she can only impersonate those of similar size and weight, cannot impersonate specific individuals, and the color of the skin cannot be changed.

Bonuses: Add 2 to roll with punch/fall/impact, +2D6 to S.D.C. and +1D4 to Horror Factor.

81%-90% Wood Statue: This Nightbane looks like a statue carved from wood. Unless other alterations make it impossible, the Nightbane blends in remarkably well in wooded areas (forests, lumber yards, etc.). This is expressed though a bonus of +20% to prowl (or a base of 30%) in these wooded areas (this is a judgement call on the parts of both player and G.M.).

Bonuses: Add 4D6x5 to S.D.C., +8 to P.S., +6 to P.E., but they are stiff and slow: subtract 4 from P.P., -2 to strike and -4 to Spd. Multiply weight x2.

91%-00% Mirror Man: This Nightbane's Morphus is reflective, like a walking mirror (-5% to prowl due to shininess). They have no facial features or other distinguishing marks, they just reflect. This appearance give them a +5 to saving



throws versus energy attacks (this includes fire, lasers, lightning, etc., magic or not). Even if the Nightbane fails his/her saving throw he or she only takes ½ damage. It also means that in a bright light (the sun, flood lights or the like) others are at -2 to strike as the reflection is so bright it is hard to look at.

Bonuses: Add 3D6 to S.D.C., cannot be flash blinded, +1D4 to Horror Factor, 90% invisible in a house of mirrors. Could cause havoc in a disco.



Freakish Appearance Table

By David Solon Phillips

The Morphus of one of these Nightbane usually reflects some perversion of the body, perhaps these are the physical representation of fears and misgivings about one's body, but who knows the true origins of the Morphus?

This table can be treated as an optional Stigmata table or an Optional Alien Shape table (G.M.'s choice).

01%-12% No Bones: This Nightbane may appear normal (or as other Morphus forms allow) but only when they start to move does one truly realize the freakishness of this Nightbane. They appear to have NO BONES. Their arms, legs, neck, etc., can move/bend any which way, yet somehow they can keep the shape of their bodies when desired (this does not allow the Nightbane any type of stretching power or shapeshifting abilities). All are better than the world's best contortionist.

Bonuses: +10 to roll with punch/fall/impact, +3D6 to S.D.C., -2 to P.S. due to lack of rigidity. Also this Morphus

form gives the Nightbane an anti-grappling bonus. This bonus is the equivalent of an A.R. rating of 10 + parry and dodge bonuses (derived from a high P.P.) against grappling attacks only; (they can wriggle out of holds like nobody's business). +2 to Horror Factor.

13%-24% Meat: This Nightbane is particularly horrific. They appear to have no skin and are muscled with raw meat! Cold to the touch and offensive to the olfactory senses, this is a true abomination. They drip meat juice and produce a horrible squishing sound when they walk or are pushed/slapped/struck.

Bonuses: +3D6 to S.D.C., +1D4 to P.S. (extra muscle where skin should be), +4 to H.F. Will attract dogs, cats and other carnivores (not to mention the flies), but animals don't attack as the scent has an obvious supernatural hint to it.

25%-36% Oddly Unsettling: "There's just something I don't like about that guy..." This Nightbane is oddly unsettling. You can't quite put your finger on it but this guy is creepy!

Bonuses: +1D6 to S.D.C., +2D4+4 to Horror Factor (or max. of 18).

37%-48% Shadow Man: This character appears pitch black, like a three-dimensional shadow. Can move with virtually no sound, (+25% to prowl) and is 80% invisible in darkness (this does not count if lights, such as street lamps or head lights, are turned on the Nightbane). The only thing that gives this Nightbane's presence away is his/her glowing red eyes, which incidentally allow for normal vision at night and 60 feet (18.3 meters) in total darkness. The down side is that this Nightbane sticks out like a sore thumb in daytime or in well-lit areas.

Bonuses: Gives a +1D4 to the player character's Horror Factor.

49%-60% Abnormally Large Sensory Organs: The eyes, ears, nose, tongue and finger tips of this Nightbane are really, REALLY big (+2 to Horror Factor). But the senses are proportionately better too.

Bonuses: +8 to ALL perception checks. They also have a saving throw of 12 versus surprise, as well as the following abilities:

Track by Scent: 20%+5% per level. Recognize scent (humans, hounds, etc.): 30%+5% per level of experience.

Recognize specific scent (your cousin Al, your dog, etc.): 20%+3% per level. Night vision: 2000 feet (609.6 meters).

Hawk-like day vision.

61%-73% Brute: This Nightbane becomes bigger, stronger, tougher and uglier (+2D4x5 to S.D.C., +2D4 to P.S., +2D4 to P.E. and -1D4 to P.B.). Teeth become fangs (1D4 S.D.C. damage) and fingernails become claws (1D4+P.S. bonus S.D.C. damage). Body hair begins to look more like fur and the face appears sub-human, almost as if the Nightbane is de-evolving.

74%-86% On Fire: This is an odd one, perhaps the product of someone that is deathly afraid of fire, or it could be the opposite, maybe they are closet pyromaniacs. The Nightbane remains unchanged in appearance except that they are currently on fire! This fire cannot be put out, it does not rely on oxygen (its owner does, though), nor does it produce smoke. It will catch flammables on fire only if the owner wishes it (although scorch marks are left everywhere). The Nightbane is at -20% to prowl due to the light and noise of the flames.

Bonuses: Heat/Flame attacks do ½ damage, but cold attacks do double damage. Add 2D6 S.D.C. to hand to hand damage from the fire. All attackers must make a saving throw vs spell magic or suffer 1D4 S.D.C. damage for every round in physical contact with the fiery Nightbane (unless the attacker is armored in some way that would protect against fire).

87%-00% Baggy Flaps of Skin: This atrocity has skin too large for its body, causing it to fold, flap and sag all over; so much in fact that it is difficult to tell which part of the body one is looking at. This gives the Nightbane with this power a strange combat edge, and it gives an effective Automatic Dodge for any and every attack (except psionics and some magical attacks that "always hit"), even though the Nightbane may not be actively dodging every attack. Most attacks are actually hitting one of the skin flaps, which does no real damage.

Bonuses: The extra skin also supplies the Nightbane with an extra 3D6 worth of S.D.C. Unfortunately there is a down side (aside from the -1D6 to P.B.); these Nightbane are at a -10% to all skills requiring physical activity as the flaps get in the way. They are, however, at +25% to concealing things on their person, for reasons that are too disgusting to describe (you figure it out).

Oafish Appearance Table

By David Solon Phillips

Body image and its related anxiety has always been one of the most common fears throughout time. People thinking they are too fat, too skinny and such is what keeps plastic surgeons in business (and they aren't starving). "*My hands are too small, my feet are too big, my head is too big for my body!*" These are the signals from one who suffers from the fear that their body is ugly and malformed. Perhaps it is Nightbane with this fear that created the **Oaf**, one of the oddest types of Nightbane known. While larger and stronger than your average Nightbane (+15 S.D.C., +1 to P.E., +2 to P.S.) this character has a body that is grossly out of proportion. Where one could have large arms and small legs, another could have a huge torso and a minuscule head. The combinations are seemingly random. This table can be treated as either an optional Stigmata or Alien Shape table.

Oaf Table: (affected area)

01%-20% Head

21%-40% Arms

41%-60% Torso

61%-80% Legs

81%-95% Roll again 2x

96%-00% Roll again 3x

Head Table:

01%-10% **Double Size:** +2 to I.Q., +1 to Horror Factor.

11%-20% **Huge Jaw:** 1D4 S.D.C. damage Bite attack, +1 to H.F.

21%-30% **Huge Teeth:** 1D4 S.D.C. damage Bite, +1 to H.F.

31%-40% **Huge Neck:** +1D6 S.D.C., +1 H.F.

41%-50% **Very Small Head:** -2 to M.A., -2 to be hit by called shots to the head, +1 to H.F.

51%-60% **Pencil Neck:** -2 to be hit by called shots to the neck, +1 to H.F.

61%-70% **Huge Ears:** +4 to perception checks, +1 to H.F.

71%-80% **Huge Eyes:** Hawk-like vision, and normal vision at night.

81%-90% **Huge Nose:** Track by scent: 20%, +5% per level of experience.

91%-00% **Extra Roll:** Roll for or pick one extra.

Arms & Legs:

01%-25% **Left:** Bonuses only apply to left limb(s).

26%-50% **Right:** Bonuses only apply to right limb(s).

51%-00% **Both:** Bonuses apply to both left and right limbs.

Arms:

01%-20% **Huge Arm(s):** +2D4 P.S. for that limb (or add to overall statistics if both limbs). +1 to Horror Factor, +1D6 to S.D.C.

21%-40% **Very Small Arm(s):** -2 to P.S., +2 to P.P. (to that limb and only for arm related tasks), +2 to strike, +1 Horror Factor.

41%-60% **Huge Hand(s):** +3 to parry, +2 S.D.C. to hand to hand damage. +1 to Horror Factor.

61%-80% **Small Hand(s):** +2 to strike, +10% to all manual dexterity related skills (Fencing, Sewing, etc.) +1 to Horror Factor.

81%-00% **Roll Twice.** Add two attributes together. If 81%-00% is rolled a second time, ignore and roll again. If conflicting attributes (such as tiny hand and huge hand) are rolled, make one the left and the other the right.

Legs:

01%-20% **Huge leg(s):** +2D4 to P.S. of the assigned limb (+2D6 Spd also if both legs, plus also jumping distance and height x2). +1 to Horror Factor.

21%-40% **Small Leg(s):** +2 to H.F., -1D4 to Speed (double H.F. if both legs).

41%-60% **Huge Foot (feet):** +1D6 swimming speed per foot (like flippers). +1D6 S.D.C. to kick damage. +1 to H.F.

61%-80% **Small Foot (feet):** Feet like a mountain goat, +2 to P.P., +20% to sense of balance (double if both legs).

81%-00% **Roll Twice:** Ignore 81%-00% if rolled a second time.

Torso:

01%-33% **Hugely Muscled Torso:** +2D4 to P.S., +1D6 to P.E., +2D6+4 to S.D.C., +1 to H.F.

34%-67% **Hugely Fat Torso:** +3D6 to S.D.C., +1D4 to P.S., +1 to H.F., double weight.

68%-00% **Puny Torso:** +4 to Dodge, +2 to H.F.

Toy/Gizmo Alien Features Table

By RC Craigo and DeAnna Renae Bearce

Whether from a longing for a return to the innocence of childhood, an immature streak, or a not-quite-forgotten obsession with a favorite childhood toy, these Nightbane have a unique feature that resembles, in some way, a toy or gadget. Though a bit surprising, and occasionally even humorous, these unusual traits can be rather useful at times.

01-09% Batteries: Visible batteries (giant size or normal) are set into the character's back, side, etc. These batteries are, like all batteries, a means of storing energy; in this particular case, they store P.P.E. The character's total P.P.E. plus an additional bonus of 6D6 P.P.E. is focused in the visible batteries. If the batteries are removed, or an enemy takes a called shot at them, all of his/her powers and spells which require the expenditure of P.P.E. are useless until they are replaced or the damage is healed. Fortunately, to hit the batteries requires a called shot with a -3 to strike and they have an S.D.C. of 1D6x10.

10-18% Skates: Skates of some kind (i.e. ice skates, roller skates or blades, old rickety metal wheels, or even one foot as a skate board) are permanently attached to the Morphus of this character. This Nightbane's speed is tripled on appropriate surfaces. Traversing other surfaces is not impossible, but there is no bonus or penalty if walking on pavement with ice skates or ice with roller skates (walking on stoppers makes this no more difficult than walking on ice with shoes), or when walking through grass or gravel. Any skates, due to their nature and shape, cause a 1/2 Speed penalty on any type of ladder or staircase.

19-33% Gimmick Switches: Wind-up knobs or keys, pull strings, levers and switches protrude from the Nightbane, causing a variety of options. Some effect should occur when the knob is turned or wound, or button pressed or whatever, such as blinking lights, sound or music, uncontrollable movement, etc. The possibilities for this are endless. Appropriately, some of the Nightbane's powers or abilities should be dependent on the use of these switches (i.e. can only use wings for flight after a knob has been wound, or can only activate the Darksong talent by pulling a cord).

34-45% Biomechanical: Roll on the Biomechanical table. The trait, however, is a toy-like version of the result. Water pistols and dart guns can substitute for weapon limbs, hinged plastic arms and legs replace metallic artificial limbs, and video game screens or drawing toys appear instead of computers and TV screens. Use your imagination! Bonuses are as per the Biomechanical table.

46-57% Stuffed Animal: Roll on the Animal table. The result is that of a plush stuffed or even rag-doll version of the animal. Fur coloring, shape, and even faces may be wildly exaggerated. A partial animal appearance might inspire a cartoonish, upright, personified animal character; a fully animal Nightbane might become a more artistic, realistic stuffed rendition of the creature. The animal abilities remain the same, and bonuses are as per the Animal table.

58-67% Construct: The Nightbane's body is constructed completely out of a "constructive" toy, like building blocks, modeling clay, wood or plastic blocks, simple metal frames fastened with nuts and bolts, or any number of modern creative toys (Tinker-Toy, Lincoln Logs, Lego, Erector Set, etc.). Add 1D6x10 to S.D.C., and the Nightbane is resistant to cold.

68-79% Action Figure: The body of the Nightbane (and, optionally, the equipment he carries) appears to be made of plastic, rubber, wood, or some other material. The joints of the limbs, though capable of moving in a natural human way, appear to be visibly hinged. Hair may be "real" or simply solid plastic. Clothing may appear to be anything from armor

or hard plastic to flexible rubber, or it may simply be fabric, and might appear to be a uniform of some sort (favorite action film star, superhero, military dress, space suit, etc.). Add 2D4x10 to S.D.C. and has an A.R. of 14. Note: Any equipment that changes with the character retains its original characteristics (guns can still fire and be loaded and swords are still sharp, they just don't look like it).

80-87% Hidden Compartment: A flap opens to reveal a space to hide things. This can be located anywhere, but its size cannot exceed the size of the body part it is located in. The compartment can either be concealed or visible (50-50 chance) and may have some sort of locking mechanism (35% chance).

88-96% Puppet/Marionette: The Nightbane looks like a puppet or marionette with flexible or jointed limbs (sticks or strings are optional). The character can leap twice as far as a comparable normal person, as if being swung or propelled by some unseen force (like the unrealistic motions of some puppets). The character can also speak and make sounds without having to move his/her mouth (this works even if the character has been gagged). Add 1D4x10 +10 to S.D.C.

97-00% Roll again twice or make up your own.

Undead Morphus Table

By RC Craigo and DeAnna Renae Bearce

Perhaps due to a fascination (or obsession) with death, this type of Nightbane bears the traits of the undead. A character with an Undead appearance should be morbid, dark and/or mentally unstable. They may have a strong fear of death, which manifests by the character taking on the form of something undying. Or they may see themselves as immortal and have no fear of death with the same result. This table can replace the Unearthly Beauty table whenever it is rolled on the main appearance table.

All Nightbane with an Undead appearance have absolutely no life signs (e.g. no pulse or respiration), and the body gives off no heat. Though the Nightbane is not truly "undead," he or she is immune to the effects of extreme cold or heat, has no need to breathe and is usually unaffected by poisons or toxins. At his option, the G.M. may have the player roll for a special insanity to further the Undead concept (see below).

01-15% Ghostly Knight: A suit of ancient chain mail, plate and mail, or full plate armor serves as the Nightbane's body. Nothing but air exists within the armor, as if the suit itself were animated. At the player's option, pitch black darkness fills the suit (with or without glowing eyes), or nothing at all but the inside of the armor can be seen. Add 3D4x10 to S.D.C., +2 to P.E. and +1D4+1 to Horror Factor.

16-30% Skeletal Form: The Nightbane appears to be an animated skeleton. No skin, muscles or internal organs are visible, only bare bones (tattered rags are optional). Add 3D6 to S.D.C., +2 to P.P., +2D6 to Spd and +1D4 to Horror Factor.

31-45% Mummified: The entire body of the Nightbane is wrapped in tattered linen strips of cloth, leaving only a slit for the eyes and possibly the mouth. Under the linen wrapping is a horrid, desiccated corpse-like body. Add 1D4x10 to S.D.C. and +1D6 to Horror Factor, with an additional +3 to Horror Factor if the linen strips are removed. Also, while in Morphus, the Nightbane is unaffected by hunger and thirst

due to a lack of internal organs. On the down side, the Nightbane takes double damage from fire.

46-60% Walking Corpse: The Nightbane has a zombie-like appearance, with rotten flesh, sunken eyes and an overall gaunt body. Tattered clothing is optional. Add 1D4x10 S.D.C., takes only one third damage from bullets and other piercing attacks, and gains +1D4+2 to Horror Factor. In addition, if a finger or limb is severed (or just rots off), it can be reattached simply by placing it back on the body. Note: This can even be done with the head if the Nightbane survives the damage done.

61-75% Vampiric: The Morphus of the Nightbane looks like the classic vampire. Sharp, pointed fangs and pale, flawless skin mark the physical traits of this Nightbane. Though a Vampiric Nightbane does NOT need to drink blood like a true vampire, several do because they think they are vampires or they are simply sick, twisted and sadistic. Add +2 to P.S. and P.E., +1 to P.P. and P.B. and +1D4 to Horror Factor.

Optional: If a Vampiric Nightbane does decide to drink blood, he will find his powers temporarily enhanced. A sip will only provide a +1 on initiative and a feeling of power bordering on overconfidence. Drinking a full pint or more of fresh blood will raise the Nightbane's P.S. and Spd by +3, increase S.D.C. by 10, and he is +1 to strike parry and dodge. Completely draining a person of blood will increase the Nightbane's P.S., Spd, and S.D.C. by 50% and he is +2 to strike, parry and dodge. Regardless of the amount of blood consumed, the effects last for 1D4 minutes.

Unfortunately, drinking blood is addictive for this Nightbane. If the Nightbane drinks a pint or more of blood more than three times in a week, or more than ten times ever, he becomes addicted to drinking blood. There is also a cumulative 25% chance of addiction each time the Nightbane completely drains a person of blood. The blood is not addictive if taken in sips. Once addicted, the Nightbane will feel compelled to drink blood upon assuming his Morphus, unless he has already done so within the last 24 hours. A Nightbane can resist this compulsion by making a save versus insanity with a cumulative -2 penalty for each day after the first, even if he stayed in his Facade for those days. A Vampiric Nightbane who is addicted to blood will grow weaker every day without blood, losing one point of P.S., P.E., Spd and Hit Points, but counting only the days he has assumed his Morphus. A vampiric Nightbane addicted to blood may die of starvation if deprived of blood for too long. Unless the G.M. determines a method for breaking the addiction, it is permanent with no hope for recovery. In addition, the Nightbane must save versus insanity once a month or gain a vulnerability similar to those of vampires (the cross, cannot cross running water, stake through heart causes paralysis, etc.).

76-90% Specter: The Nightbane's Morphus is a disembodied entity. The Nightbane is essentially an Astral being and has all of the abilities and limitations of an Astral traveler. Unlike a true Astral being, however, the Nightbane is visible from the physical plane and can be seen as a translucent figure. Note: The Nightbane may use the Astral Self talent to transfer his body fully to the physical world. This Nightbane has an ability identical to the psionic power Astral Navigation which costs 2 P.P.E. for each use.

91-00% Make up your own, or roll on this table twice. Optionally, roll once again on the Nightbane Appearance and the Undead Appearance tables and combine the results.



Special Insanity Table for Undead Morphus Appearance

- 01-07% Death Wish:** Wants to die and takes foolish risks, but not actively suicidal.
- 08-15% No fear of death and believes he can't die.**
- 16-22% Reborn:** Alignment reversal; good becomes evil and vice versa.
- 23-30% Recluse:** Prefers to be alone; tends to be cool and aloof.
- 31-38% Frightened by loud noises.**
- 39-45% Intimidated by spoken language.**
- 46-53% Fear of brightly lit places.**
- 54-61% Fascinated with death and studies all its forms.**
- 62-68% Paranoid.**
- 69-75% Mindless Aggression:** 72% chance of going berserk when angry or frustrated.
- 76-85% Phobia:**
 - 01-17% Blood
 - 18-33% Water
 - 34-49% Ghosts/Entities
 - 50-66% Confining enclosures
 - 67-83% Places of the dead (graveyards/graves, tombs, etc.)
 - 84-00% Dead bodies/corpses/skeletons

86-90% Roll on the Random Insanity Table

91-95% Roll on the Neurosis Table

96-00% Roll on the Psychosis Table

Unusual Blood Table (Stigmata/Alien)

By RC Craigo and DeAnna Renae Bearce

Blood has always been a symbol for life and health. A Nightbane whose life or state of health is dependant on or connected to something may find their blood has taken on some of its characteristics. Another possibility is that the trait is the result of a strong obsession or phobia tied to the blood or life of the character. Of course, it could simply be something always associated with the Nightbane (such as an Italian cook having pasta sauce for blood, or the blood turning the character's favorite or most hated color).

The following Nightbane Morpheus table can be substituted for any Stigmata or Alien Features table. The Horror Factor bonuses provided by this table apply only while the blood is visible. This may be all of the time if the Nightbane has an appropriate stigmata from another table.

01-10% Odd Color: The Nightbane's blood is of an unusual color. Add 1D6 to S.D.C. and +1 to Horror Factor. Pick or roll percentile for color.

01-10% Blue

11-20% Clear

21-30% Pink

31-40% Black

41-50% Yellow

51-60% Green

61-70% White

71-80% Purple

81-90% Orange

91-00% Metallic (silver, gold, etc.)

11-20% Animated Blood: The blood of the character can move as if it has a life of its own. The blood can either be controlled mentally by the Nightbane or it can act on instinct. Regardless, the animated blood can move at a speed of 16, lift and carry objects up to 30 pounds (13.5 kg), and is +1 to strike and parry and +5 to dodge. Animated blood does no damage on its own, but may blind an opponent by striking the eyes, or may wield a weapon. Weapon attacks are clumsy at best and are -4 to strike. The animated blood cannot float or fly in any way, but can crawl/flow along any solid surface, including walls and ceilings, and can form tentacles which act as prehensile limbs. Additionally, the blood can leap/propel itself up to 10 feet (3 m) high or across. If separated from the body, the blood continues to "live" and remain animated for five minutes per level of experience of the Nightbane. Blood can always be absorbed back into the body (usually through to method it was released) as long as it is still "alive," but blood that has "died" is lost. The blood also has five (5) Hit Points per pint, and the Nightbane loses these Hit Points while the blood is out of his body. The average Nightbane has approximately 9 to 10 pints of blood, but may suffer from the effects of blood loss if there is too little blood in the body. The blood must be drawn from the body normally, usually meaning the Nightbane must cut himself to release the blood, but some other stigmata or talent may allow the release of blood without major injury.

01-50% The blood can be mentally controlled by the Nightbane. The blood can be controlled up to 10 feet (3 m) away from the character, plus two feet (.6 m) per level of experience; any further and it moves on instinct. Add 2D6 to Hit Points, and +1D4 to Horror Factor if the blood is moving on his body. The blood itself has a Horror Factor of 8+1D4.

51-00% The blood moves without conscious control and acts instinctively. It will respond to danger with a survival instinct and act upon the subconscious desires of the Nightbane. The blood will flee, fight or kill (if possible) to protect itself. This also means that the blood will always make an attempt to return to the body before it "dies." The survival instinct is so strong that the Nightbane gets an automatic dodge against any attack he can perceive as long as at least three fourths of his blood remains in his body. Add 2D6 to Hit Points, 1D6 to S.D.C., and 1D6 to Horror Factor if the blood is moving on the Nightbane's body. The blood itself has a Horror Factor of 8+1D4.

21-30% Blood Body Fluids: All the Nightbane's bodily fluids are composed of blood, including saliva, tears, urine and sweat. These fluids still function as they should (sweat cools the body, tears clear the eyes, etc.), but it will always look as if the Nightbane is bleeding. Add 3D6 to S.D.C. and +2 to Horror Factor.

31-40% Has No Blood: No pulse or heartbeat either. The Nightbane does not lose Hit Points due to blood loss, and cannot acquire any talents involving blood. Any medical skills performed on the character are at -30% unless the doctor is a mortician or a coroner. Add 4D6 to S.D.C. and 1D4 to Horror Factor.

41-50% Hemophiliac: Whenever the Nightbane is wounded, the bleeding cannot be stopped without bandages and constant pressure. Any wound will continue to bleed until the damage is fully healed. The character never suffers damage from blood loss, however (even if combined with animated blood above). Add 4D6 to S.D.C. and 1D4 to Horror Factor.

51-60% Other Liquid for Blood: The blood of the Nightbane does not appear to be made of blood, and has the properties of some other liquid.

01-10% Tree Sap

11-20% Gasoline

21-30% Water

31-40% Alcohol

41-50% Mineral Acid

51-60% Beverage (milk, soda, etc.)

61-70% Oil (motor or cooking)

71-80% Mercury/Quicksilver

81-90% Glycerin (not explosive)

91-00% Other (player or G.M. choice)

Note: If the Nightbane bleeds a harmful substance (such as acid), it does not harm him but will react normally with everything else. However, any reaction involving the Nightbane's blood will affect him normally (such as gasoline blood catching fire). Add 4D6 to S.D.C. and 1D4+1 to Horror Factor.

61-70% Blood of Fire: The blood of the Nightbane is literal flame. Whenever the character is cut, or otherwise bleeds, flame is emitted from the body instead of blood. This flame does not harm the Nightbane, but may harm others or set nearby objects on fire. This Nightbane is still harmed by fires

from other sources (including those he himself sets). Add 5D6 to S.D.C., +1D4+2 to Horror Factor and the blood flame does 3D6 S.D.C. to anything it touches.

71-80% Gaseous Blood: Instead of blood or other fluid, the Nightbane bleeds a gas, such as smoke, fumes, or steam. This gas should not be seriously harmful, or if it is, the Nightbane bleeds slowly (G.M.s, use your discretion). In any case, the Nightbane is still vulnerable to whatever gas is bled. Add 4D6 to S.D.C. and +1D6 to Horror Factor.

81-90% Blood is Under High Pressure: Whenever cut, the Nightbane's wound will squirt blood at least several inches, possibly a few feet if the wound is severe. This character's body has twice as much blood as normal for a body his size (18 to 20 pints). He still may suffer from blood loss, which occurs normally because he bleeds twice as fast. Add 2D6 to Hit Points, +1D6 to S.D.C. and +1D4+1 to Horror Factor.

91-00% Other Unusual Blood Trait: Create your own trait, or roll or pick two unusual blood traits.

New Nightbane Talents

By Roy Craig and DeAnna Renae Bearce

Commanding Presence (Elite Talent)

Dark Sight

Descry

Living Blood (Elite Talent)

Nourishing Blood (Elite Talent)

Shadow Pockets

Shadow Weapon

Speed of Darkness

Spirit Vision

Voice of the Beast (Elite Talent)

Zombie Master (Elite Talent)

Commanding Presence (Elite Talent)

Only Nightbane with an Unearthly Beauty may take this talent. When activated, a Nightbane with this talent has his Mental Affinity temporarily increased by three, with a minimum M.A. of 22. Anyone who sees the Nightbane will be affected by his charisma and supernatural charm, and must roll a save versus the Nightbane's M.A. trust/intimidate score. If the roll is under the percentage to trust/intimidate, the person is completely swayed by the Nightbane and will do nearly anything, short of endangering themselves, to be close to him. Even if the save is successful, others will still view the Nightbane with awe and reverence. This ability is cumulative with Animal Magnetism if the Nightbane possesses that appearance. Nightbane and other supernatural creatures are +10% to save against this talent.

Limitations: Usable only by the Morpheus form. Not available until third level. Only Nightbane with an Unearthly Beauty may acquire this talent.

Cost: 12 P.P.E. to acquire permanently. 8 P.P.E. to activate for a duration of two minutes and an additional 4 P.P.E. for each two minute duration thereafter.

Dark Sight

A Nightbane with this talent has supernatural senses related to darkness. When activated, the Nightbane can see in total darkness with a range of 1000 feet (305 m). Any supernatural

creature hidden or concealed in darkness is revealed to this character, including creatures concealed in a human disguise (Night Princes, Hollow Men, etc.). There is no way for the being to hide as long as it remains in shadows (Shroud is still effective if performed in a lighted area). In addition, the Nightbane is +2 on any perception roll made in shadows or darkness.

Limitations: Usable only by the Morpheus form.

Cost: 7 P.P.E. to acquire permanently. 4 P.P.E. to activate for two minutes, and an additional 3 P.P.E. for each two minute period thereafter.

Descry

This ability allows the Nightbane to locate an object or specific person by tracking it/him/her like a living divining rod. If the Nightbane is looking for a specific person, that person must be known by the Nightbane (met in person at least once, even briefly). To begin the Descry, the Nightbane must concentrate for one full melee round. At the end of the melee of concentration, the Nightbane will know the direction of his quarry if it is within range, and the general distance; i.e. very near (within 10feet/3 m), near (within one half range or one mile/1.6 km, whichever is shorter), or far (over half range or one mile/1.6 km), and can continue to track the object as long as he keeps it pictured in his mind (and keeps paying the P.P.E. cost). The range is one mile (1.6 km) per level of experience.

Limitations: Usable by both the Facade and Morpheus forms, but the range is half in the Facade form. This power cannot locate a class of objects, like "money" or "food," the Nightbane must Descry for something more specific (hundred dollar bills or hamburgers).

Cost: 10 P.P.E. to acquire permanently. 4 P.P.E. to activate for one minute and 2 P.P.E. per additional minute.

Living Blood (Elite Talent)

This talent allows the Nightbane to become a pool of living blood. While in this form, the Nightbane can move normally (the blood forms wings or whatever if the Nightbane can fly), fit through cracks or slip under doors, and is invulnerable to physical attacks (punches, swords, bullets, etc.) but is still harmed by energy (lasers etc.), psionics and magic. The Living Blood form fights with the Nightbane's normal combat bonuses, but P.S. is only 10. All other attributes, powers and abilities remain the same, including Hit Points, S.D.C., and Horror Factor, but Horror Factor is increased by two during the activation process. This talent takes two melee attacks/actions to activate.

Limitations: Usable only by the Morpheus form. Not available until third level. Only Nightbane with Unusual Blood may acquire this talent.

Cost: 18 P.P.E. to acquire permanently. 10 P.P.E. to activate for one minute and 5 additional P.P.E. for each minute after the first.

Nourishing Blood (Elite Talent)

The blood of the Nightbane can be drunk, nourishing and replenishing the body. One pint of blood provides the equivalent nutrition of one full balanced meal and restores 1D6 Hit Points or S.D.C. Unfortunately, the Nightbane with this talent cannot gain this benefit from his own blood and, in fact, must sacrifice three Hit Points for each pint lost (but regains the Hit Points by drinking the blood). The blood must still be drawn as normal.

Limitations: Usable only by the Morphus form. Not available until third level. Only Nightbane with Unusual Blood may acquire this talent. The nourishment of the blood can only be gained by others, the Nightbane himself gains no benefit from drinking his blood (but he does regain the 3 lost Hit Points).

Cost: 5 P.P.E. to acquire permanently. 4 P.P.E. and three Hit Points for each pint of blood drawn for nourishment. Once drawn for nourishment, the blood lasts (stays good) for 10 minutes per level of experience.



Shadow Weapon

A Nightbane with this talent can create a hand to hand weapon made of dark energy. The weapon can look like any ancient hand to hand weapon, such as a sword or an axe, but not bows or modern weapons such as pistols. The Nightbane can only create one type of weapon and must decide what the weapon will look like when he gains this talent. Regardless of the weapon type, it does 3D6 S.D.C. +1D6 S.D.C. at levels six, nine, twelve and fifteen. Any W.P. bonuses applicable to the weapon type may be used with the Shadow Weapon.

Limitations: Usable in Morphus form only; not available until third level.

Cost: 15 P.P.E. to acquire permanently. 10 P.P.E. to activate for the first melee round, 5 P.P.E. for each melee round of continued use.

Shadow Pockets

This talent allows the Nightbane to open a mini-dimension and place objects inside of it. Though it can be used in both the

Facade and Morphus, P.P.E. must be spent for each item brought into or out of the pocket. The Shadow Pocket may hold up to five pounds per level of experience, but no single object may weigh more than 15 pounds; thus large objects such as vehicles and heavy weapons cannot be carried this way. Placing an object into or retrieving an object from the pocket takes one melee attack/action.

While inside the pocket, objects are temporarily removed from Earth or the Nightlands and are held in a state of limbo, and can only be brought back by the Nightbane who put them there. The objects can remain in the pocket indefinitely without ill effect, even if the Nightbane is sleeping or knocked unconscious. If the Nightbane is killed while objects are still in the Shadow Pocket, the objects will either reappear, taking up the space of the Nightbane's Morphus as it vanishes, or will be lost forever if the Nightbane is killed while in his Facade.

There are many different ways this talent can appear to function. One is for the Nightbane to actually reach into the pockets of his clothing; another may appear to be a sleight of hand trick. Of course more flamboyant effects can be used, such as the objects vanishing or appearing in the open hand of the Nightbane. Players and G.M.s, use your imagination.

Limitations: Not available until fifth level.

Cost: 20 P.P.E. to acquire permanently. 12 P.P.E. to either place or retrieve one object.

Speed of Darkness

Did you ever notice how fast it gets dark when the lights go out? It's nearly instantaneous, making the speed of dark as fast, if not faster, than the speed of light. A Nightbane who activates this talent will move with a near blinding speed and agility, receiving one extra attack per melee, +4 on initiative, +2 to strike, parry and dodge, and speed is increased 50%. This inhuman speed has its price, however. Once the duration ends, the Nightbane is minus one attack per melee, automatically loses the initiative, is -2 to strike, parry and dodge, and speed is reduced by 50% for 1D4 melees.

Limitations: Usable only by the Morphus form.

Cost: 10 P.P.E. to permanently acquire it. 15 P.P.E. per melee to activate.

Spirit Vision

A Nightbane with this talent can see ghosts, Entities, Astral beings, and similar creatures as well as communicate with them. This communication may be limited to a sort of empathy with the more simple-minded Entities (Haunting or Poltergeist). The Nightbane must still speak normally to be heard and understood by Astral beings and Entities. Note: This power only allows for communication; any other interaction is limited to the other powers and abilities of the Nightbane and the Entity or Astral being. In addition, the Nightbane is able to recognize undead, such as vampires, Wampyrs, and Dybbuk, on sight when using this talent.

Limitations: Usable in both the Facade and the Morphus forms, but the P.P.E. cost is doubled if used in the Facade.

Cost: 8 P.P.E. to acquire it permanently. 5 P.P.E. to activate for one minute, and 3 P.P.E. for each additional minute activated. The range is equal to the Nightbane's line of sight.

Voice of the Beast (Elite Talent)

A Nightbane with this talent must have an Animal Appearance. It allows the Nightbane to communicate with the type of animals whose traits he bears. To use this talent, the Nightbane can either communicate either through a means similar to telepathy by making eye contact with the animal, or by hissing, growling or buzzing, whichever is appropriate, but the method of communication must be chosen when the talent is acquired. Though the Nightbane cannot command the animal in any way, he can ask it questions or request a favor. The animal will consider the Nightbane to be one of its own and will listen to what he has to say, but it is the animal itself who decides if it will carry out the request or answer any questions (or really, the G.M. who decides based on how well the player role-played the conversation).

Limitations: Usable only by the Morpheus form. Only available to Nightbane with an Animal Appearance.

Cost: 6 P.P.E. to acquire it permanently. 3 P.P.E. to activate. It will remain active as long as the Nightbane communicates with the animal only; if the Nightbane says anything to anyone other than the animal, he will need to reactivate the talent.

Zombie Master (Elite Talent)

Some Nightbane with an Undead Appearance have the ability to animate and control the dead. Though not nearly as powerful as the ability of Necromancers, this power is still quite fearsome. The dead animated by this talent have the same statistics of dead animated by the Animate and Control Dead spell.

Limitations: Usable only by the Morpheus form. Not available until third level. Only Nightbane with an Undead Appearance may acquire this talent. All animated dead must be within line of sight.

Cost: 25 P.P.E. to acquire permanently. 15 P.P.E. to activate, animating one dead creature. Up to one dead may be animated



per level of experience, each costing 15 P.P.E., but they may all be animated in the same action.

Operation Ironskull

The Secret CS Cyborg Project



By Ted Dimitry

TOP SECRET:

Address to Chi-Town Human Augmentation Research Scientists, Lieutenant Colonel Jeffery Sykes, Chi-Town DSD Research Group:

"Ladies and Gentlemen:

"We all know that our boys and girls in armor are fighting in two desperate struggles on either side of our fair nation. One struggle is to preserve the union so precious to our race and species, while the other is to eradicate the taint of alien evil so close to our borders. We all know that neither of these fights is going as well as predicted. The partisans of the rebel state of

Quebec have proven resourceful and cunning, while our enemies in Tolkeen show their true allegiance to powerful forces of darkness, the likes of which not even our best intelligence operatives could have anticipated.

"The stakes of these struggles have changed, and it is time for our beloved Coalition to consider new measures and new tactics. 'What,' you may say, 'can we do from here, deep within Chi-Town's research laboratories?' Well, my friends, we have already done a great deal. While the commanders in Tolkeen and Quebec consider their options with what they have at their disposal, we must provide them with more and better options.

"As all of you know, we have done much to redesign the Coalition military along with our compatriots in Lone Star and the researchers in Iron Heart. You also all know that the Emperor and the High Command did not approve of many of our more radical ideas. Well, times change rapidly and, as your intelligence readouts from both fronts demonstrate, the stakes are higher. It is time to reconsider the options before us.

"The Coalition has long objected to the chemical and mechanical augmentation of the human form, preferring the use of power armor and combat robots in order to counter the threats our enemies may present. The need for a fast and assertive victory in Tolkeen and, once the flag of rebellion was raised, in Quebec, justified the creation of the Coalition Juicers under military jurisdiction and the Coalition Cyborg Division. Despite the incredible versatility and power these respective new units bring to the Coalition war effort, more is needed. That is where we must step in.

"Back in 104, with some help from our friends at Triax, a number of cyborg models were developed that were thought to be more powerful than some of the best Coalition power armor. Members of the High Command have informed me that the time is at hand to redevelop these designs and prepare them for re-submission to the Emperor and his top advisors. Should the Emperor and his advisors approve of our changes (and I have been assured that it is likely they will this time) we should see production of new models within a month.

"Ladies and gentlemen, get to your research stations and start revamping those designs. We cannot keep the war effort waiting. The Coalition needs our designs now and I mean for us to deliver! I expect results from each design team within a week! Dismissed!"

Operation Ironskull is the result of a decision made by Emperor Prosek, his son Joseph and the highest members of the High Command, regarding the Coalition's utilization of cybernetically augmented troops. While the Coalition has historically renounced such practices as Juicer or cybernetic augmentation, the plans for mounting an offensive against Tolkeen and the subsequent need to pacify the renegade province of Quebec justified the creation of both CS Juicers and CS cyborgs. The initial months of both struggles, however, have demonstrated that the Coalition drastically underestimated the effectiveness of the limited implementation of using chemically or cybernetically augmented troops.

In Free Quebec, Glitter Boy variants chew through CS armor while new cyborgs of the Québécois Liberty Reserve hamper Coalition moves in the wilds west of the province, as well as in the waters of the St. Lawrence Seaway and the Gulf of St. Law-

rence. The use of Dog Boys and other mutant animals and slightly superior CS air power has mitigated this somewhat, but the CS forces in Quebec are fighting a war against their own kind and the Québécois are defending their ground. Coalition efforts in the area are stymied, and the CS High Command needs to resolve the conflict quickly in order to address the growing concern over the struggle in Tolkeen.

Much closer to the CS heartland, to the north and west of Chi-Town itself, the titanic struggle between the magical forces of Tolkeen and the technologically empowered legions of the Coalition is unfolding as few predicted. The use of legendary magical artifacts from across the Megaverse, astonishing developments in Techno-Wizardry, the introduction of the Iron Juggernauts to the field of battle and unexpected alliances with demonic forces like the Daemonix, the Brodkil, Neuron Beasts, Black Faerie and Witchlings, have all taken the CS Military by complete surprise. Every day, Tolkeenite forces unleash something new and horrible before their Coalition foes, and every day the morale of the CS trooper in the field is tested. Talk of stalemate is rife and some even mutter rumors of the Tolkeenites actually turning the tide!

The introduction of new CS cyborgs, if done properly, just might tip the scales back into the Coalition's favor on both fronts (if they ever truly were in the Coalition's favor, that is). The Québécois would be unprepared for the increased use of cyborgs by the Coalition, while such measures might augment the CS forces' abilities to counteract the terrors unleashed upon them by the Tolkeenites in the north and west.

G.M. Note: The CS cyborg designs detailed below are entirely optional and can be utilized at the Game Master's discretion. A few might be introduced as prototypes on either front in the early stages of the war. Alternatively, they might be introduced en masse when the Coalition realizes that their overconfident preparations have failed. The G.M. can use these designs as new and unpredictable CS foes for players participating in an anti-CS campaign on either front. Alternatively, the new cyborg models might be made available to players assuming the roles of CS cyborg commandoes. They can be the rescuing cavalry for Coalition characters, or a terrifying surprise for Tolkeenite/Québécois forces. The possibilities are endless. Enjoy.

CSC-020A

Bonecrusher Cyborg

Designed in 103-104 P.A. by Coalition design specialists in Chi-Town, with help from Triax technicians sent over from the New German Republic, Emperor Prosek originally rejected the Bonecrusher heavy cyborg because of its radical departure from the human form. Leery of cybernetic augmentation anyway, the Emperor felt that the monstrous shape and dramatic firepower of the heavy 'borg would dehumanize the person inside, making them some kind of monster to be feared rather than trusted.

The concerns over the twin wars the Coalition is currently fighting, however, have recently changed this outlook. Before the two offenses began, the benefits of using the heavy design ran against the tenets of CS doctrine. Now, however, the Emperor feels that the use of the Bonecrusher and other new cyborg



models might help the ailing efforts of the CS in both Minnesota and Quebec.

The Bonecrusher is a heavy cyborg, designed to go toe to toe with powerful monsters, demons, robots, other cyborgs and enemy power armor. During the design process, Triax scientists shared some of the features involved in the creation of the NGR's VX-2000 series cyborgs with Coalition researchers. The result is a powerful amalgamation of man and machine, capable of incredible firepower as well as vicious close range combat. The 'borg is enormous, is incredibly strong, and has an impressive array of weapons and sensors. On the downside, the Bonecrusher's large size (9 feet/2.7 m tall) can be a problem in covert

operations or urban environments. Unlike the VX-2000 series in the New German Republic, the CS Bonecrusher retains the human face under a skull-like faceplate. This represents the Coalition's efforts to prevent or minimize any loss of humanity involved in becoming part of such a powerful machine. (For details on the VX-2000 series cyborgs, see pages 113—117 in **Rifts World Book Five: Triax and the NGR.**)

Coalition CSC-020A Cyborg Soldier

Exclusive to the Coalition Military

Typical Training/Skills: In addition to the basic O.C.C. Skills, these special skills are included.

Boxing

Wilderness Survival (+10%)

Lore: Demons and Monsters (+10%)

Note: The following stats are for the "standard" CSC-020A full conversion cyborg. Specific weapons and bionic features may change slightly from 'borg to 'borg.

Model Type: CSC-020A Bonecrusher Heavy Cyborg.

Class: Full Conversion Cyborg (heavy combat).

Crew: One human "volunteer."

M.D.C. by Location:

*Hands (2) — 25 each

Arms (2) — 75 each

Legs (2) — 120 each

*Shoulder-Mounted Weapon Units (2) — 70 each

*Shoulder-Mounted Mini-Missile Launchers (2) — 30 each

*Vibro-Blades (2, right arm) — 10 each

*Head (Reinforced) — 90

Main Body (normal) — 250 (Note:** +220 M.D.C. for medium armor or +380 M.D.C. for heavy armor; never wears light armor. Also increase the M.D.C. for the head, arms and legs by 50% when wearing additional medium or heavy *cyborg body armor*. Cyborg armor typically hooks directly onto the bionic body. Armor penalties: -10% on Prowl, Climb, Acrobatics or similar physical skills requiring agility and flexibility of movement.)

* Destroying the head of the cyborg will kill the character! However, the head is a small and difficult target to hit. The attacker must make a called shot and even then he is —3 to strike. To hit the shoulder-mounted weapon units (plasma/laser cannons), an attacker must make a similar called shot at —3 to strike. The hands, Vibro-Blades on the right arm (when extended) and shoulder-mounted mini-missile launchers are also small and difficult to hit, requiring an attacker to make a called shot at —4.

** Depleting the M.D.C. of the main body will effectively destroy it, but emergency systems will keep the brain and vital organs alive for 36 hours. Recovery of the severely damaged body will enable doctors to place the character on life support that will keep him or her alive until a new bionic body (same or another model) can be found for full conversion. Failure to find the damaged 'borg within 36 hours will result in the character's death. Similarly, massive amounts of damage (125 points below 0) will completely destroy the cyborg without hope of recovery.

Speed

Running: 70 mph (112 km) maximum.

Leaping: The powerful bionic legs are strong and capable of leaping 25 feet (7.6 m) high or lengthwise. A running start will add another 30 feet (9 m)!

Jet Assisted Leaps: Two large thrusters are located on the lower rear portion of each leg. These jets are designed to give the 'borg a boost to attain greater height and distance when leaping. The cyborg can attain distances of 150 feet (45.7 m) high or lengthwise when using these thrusters!

Flying: Via jet pack only (one-third speed because of the great weight of the cyborg). Coalition commanders and logistics experts typically discourage the use of jet packs on a cyborg of such incredible weight and size.

Statistical Data

Average Height: 9 feet (2.7 m).

Width: 4 feet (1.2 m).

Length: 4 feet (1.2 m).

Weight: 3200 lbs (1440 kg).

Physical Attributes: Equal to a P.S. 40 (unique for 'borgs, shared only by the Triax VX-2000 Series), P.P. 21.

Power System: Nuclear, average life is 20 years.

Black Market Cost: Exclusive to the Coalition military and not available on the open market. Very rare; eight to ten million credits with all shared features and weapons.

Penalties: This heavy cyborg is incredibly powerful and well armored. Due to this, however, the 'borg cannot prowl (impossible), flying with a jet pack is discouraged and the character's maximum speed is somewhat reduced. The character also has penalties considered in its bonuses to strike, parry, dodge and roll with impact.

Standard Bionic Features (non-weapon types)

Note: These features are all found in the bionic and cybernetic section of the **Rifts RPG**.

1. Bionic lung with gas filter and oxygen storage cell.
2. Built-in language translator.
3. Built-in loudspeaker.
4. Built-in radio receiver and transmitter.
5. Climb cord (concealed).
6. Clock calendar.
7. Gyro-compass.
8. Modulating voice synthesizer.
9. Multi-optic eyes.
10. Psionic electro-magnetic dampeners.
11. Universal headjack with amplified hearing and sound filtration.
12. Short-range radar (see below).

Weapon Systems

1. Shoulder-Mounted Weapon Units (2): Powerful weapon units are mounted on either side of the cyborg's head. Although radically different in appearance, the weapons are very similar to the SS-09 weapon mounts of the PA-09A Super SAMAS (see pages 117-119 in **World Book 11: Coalition War Campaign** for details). Each mount consists of two weapons, a plasma ejector and a long-range laser. The plasma ejectors allow the 'borg to deal out massive amounts of damage at close range, while the lasers augment the unit's long range attack capabilities. Each weapon unit can be used independently or in conjunction with the other. Both can rotate side to side or up and down at 45 degree angles. **Note:** If each weapon unit is turned on two *different* targets, each blast from each weapon counts as one of the cyborg's melee attacks, and *NO* initiative or strike bonuses apply to the attack on either one. Furthermore, the plasma gun and laser cannot be fired simultaneously; one or the other must be selected for use.

Primary Purpose: Anti-Monster, Anti-Power Armor, Anti-Cyborg, Anti-Robot.

Secondary Purpose: Anti-Personnel, Defense.

Mega-Damage: Plasma Ejector: 1D6X10 M.D. per single blast or 2D6X10 M.D. per dual, synchronized blasts from both plasma weapons!

Laser: The small barrel underneath the large gun is a light laser that inflicts 3D6 M.D. from a single blast or 6D6 M.D. per dual, synchronized blast from both laser weapons.

Rate of Fire: Equal to the combined number of attacks of the cyborg. Each single or simultaneous double blast at the same target counts as one melee attack.

Maximum Effective Range: Plasma: 1600 feet (488 m).

Laser: 2000 feet (610 m).

Payload: Effectively unlimited. The plasma and laser weapons of the dual system are powered by the energy supply of the cyborg.

2. Shoulder-Mounted Mini-Missile Launchers (2): Just below the dual weapon units, the CSC-020A has two, quad-tube mini-missile launchers mounted just above the arms. The mini-missiles greatly increase the 'borg's field capabilities against both technological and supernatural foes.

Primary Purpose: Anti-Aircraft, Anti-Dragon, Anti-Aerial opponents.

Secondary Purpose: Anti-Armor, Anti-Monster, Defense.

Mega-Damage: Varies with missile type. Any mini-missile can be used, but standard issue is armor piercing (1D4X10 M.D.) or plasma (1D6X10). These anti-armor units seldom use fragmentation mini-missiles.

Rate of Fire: One at a time or in volleys of two, three or four.

Maximum Effective Range: Usually about one mile (1.6 km).

Payload: 16 total; there are eight missile tubes, four on each shoulder. Each tube has two mini-missiles for a total payload of 16 mini-missiles.

3. Forearm Mounted, Dual Ion Blaster: On the left forearm of the cyborg, CS engineers have installed a dual ion blaster for close and intermediate range combat. This feature fills in the gaps between the powerful plasma ejectors and the long range weaponry of the 'borg. Each weapon unit can be used independently or in conjunction with the other, but the two cannot be fired at separate opponents. In other words, the cyborg must choose to fire a single or double blast (double blasts are typical unless there is a compelling reason for using a single blast, or if one of the ion weapon barrels is disabled).

Primary Purpose: Anti-Monster, Anti-Power Armor, Anti-Armor, Anti-Robot.

Secondary Purpose: Anti-Personnel, Defense.

Mega-Damage: 3D6 M.D. per single blast or 6D6 M.D. per dual blast!

Rate of Fire: Equal to the combined number of attacks of the cyborg. Each single or simultaneous double blast at the same target counts as one melee attack.

Maximum Effective Range: 1200 feet (366 m).

Payload: Effectively unlimited; the dual ion weapon system is powered by the nuclear energy supply of the cyborg.

4. Forearm Mounted, Dual Vibro-Blade: The right forearm of the Bonecrusher houses two sinister Vibro-Blades for use in hand-to-hand combat. The weapons are retractable and perfect for melee combat against monsters and Glitter Boys. Typically, the weapons are used in conjunction with one another unless there is a compelling reason to use one blade

(such as a precision cutting tool) or one of the weapons is disabled.

Mega-Damage: 2D6 M.D. per blade; 4D6 M.D. per strike with both blades.

Maximum Effective Range: Hand to hand combat.

Payload: Effectively unlimited; patched into the cyborg's power supply.

5. Hand to Hand Combat: Rather than use a weapon, the cyborg can engage in Mega-Damage hand to hand combat. Unlike typical 'borgs, the Bonecrusher can inflict Mega-Damage punches and kicks! Additionally, the spikes on the knees and elbows can be made into Vibro-Blades at will, further augmenting the 'borg's combat capabilities.

Attacks per Melee Round: Equal to the character's hand to hand combat skill selection and experience, plus one additional attack/action from heightened reflexes.

Combat Bonuses: +5 to strike, +4 to parry and dodge, +3 on initiative, +2 to pull punch, +2 to roll with impact, +1 to save vs psionic attack and +1 to save vs Horror Factor (includes the P.P. 21 bonus and optic/sensor considerations). The character cannot be surprised by attacks from behind!

Damage:

Restrained Punch — 1D6+25 S.D.C.

Full Strength Punch — 1D6 M.D.

Power Punch — 2D6 M.D. (counts as two melee attacks)

Head Butt — 1D4 M.D.

Kick — 1D6 M.D.

Knee Jab/Elbow Jab (Vibro-Spikes) — 2D6 M.D.

Jump Kick/Leap Attack — 2D6 M.D. (counts as two melee attacks)

Judo Style Throw/Flip — 1D4 M.D.

Full Speed Ram/Body Block — 1D4 M.D. (counts as two melee attacks)

6. Optional Hand-Held Weapons: Typically, the CSC-020A Bonecrusher enters the field without a hand-held weapon due to the incredible array of built-in weapons at the cyborg's disposal. Occasionally, however, some units are sent out with weapons. Weapons typically issued are designed for heavy assault, like the C-29 heavy plasma cannon, the CTT-P40 particle beam cannon, the CTT-M20 missile rifle or the C-200 "Dead Man's" rail gun. See pages 93-96 of **World Book 11: Coalition War Campaign** for details on these and other CS weapons.

7. Typical Training/Skills: See *Coalition Cyborg Strike Trooper O.C.C.* in **World Book 11: Coalition War Campaign** (pages 69-71) for complete details. Other than the skills of Boxing, Wilderness Survival (+10%) and Lore: Demons and Monsters (+10%), the CSC-020A has no special skill options.

8. Sensors and Features of Note: 1) The Bonecrusher has full optical systems, including laser targeting, telescopic, passive nightvision (light amplification), thermo-imaging, infrared, ultraviolet and light polarization.

2) Rear optics located in the back of the upper torso (the head is too far hunched over for this). This is a second pair of eyes and allows 360 degree vision. That makes sneaking up on the Bonecrusher impossible and contributes to the character's combat bonuses.

3) The additional sensor array built into the upper back of the cyborg contains the rear eyes and the majority of the sen-

sory equipment. It also includes a short-range radar system similar to those used in power armor units. It can identify and track up to 24 targets simultaneously and has a range of 10 miles (16 km).



CSC-030 Skullknocker Cyborg

Designed by Chi-Town and Lone Star cybernetic researchers back in 102-104 P.A., the Skullknocker cyborg was rejected by the CS High Command in favor of the cybernetic troopers to be clad in CA-6C armor, which resembles the heavy CA-6EX body armor and exoskeleton used by unaugmented commandoes. The heavy armaments and differing design was deemed unnecessary by CS authorities and the model was mothballed. The few converted volunteers were reconfigured into standard CS 'borgs before 105 P.A.

But the poor progress of the Coalition offensives in Tolkeen and Quebec has prompted the CS to reconsider the Skullknocker cyborg. Designed for urban combat, the High Command now sees the introduction of the CSC-030 into both fronts as a possible shot in the arm to the Coalition troops pinned down along the borders of Quebec and Minnesota. House to house fighting, particularly in Minnesota, has proven to be difficult and costly. Any advantage the CS may have is now seen as worth the costs of concerns over dehumanization and departures from conventional cyborg models.

The Skullknocker cyborg is designed for urban combat. Its compact design and lack of mounted armaments makes it versatile and adaptable in the field. Typically, Skullknockers are armed with heavy, hand-held weapons. Their introduction has been under the cover story of a new CS commando division in unique armor. These efforts at deception have proven worthwhile, as both Québécois and Tolkeenite foes have underestimated the power of the cybernetic troopers in early

engagements. On several early occasions and on both fronts, the introduction of squads of CSC-030 cyborg soldiers into a stymied effort to take an enemy community has proven worthwhile in tipping the balance of the siege.

Coalition CSC-030 Cyborg Soldier

Exclusive to the Coalition Military

Typical Training/Skills: In addition to the basic O.C.C. Skills, these special skills are included. However, reduce the selection of other O.C.C. Skills by half.

- Boxing
- Climbing (+10%)
- Swimming (+10%)
- Wilderness Survival (+10%)
- Lore: Demons and Monsters (+10%)
- W.P.: One of Choice.

Note: The following stats are for the "standard" CSC-030 full conversion cyborg. Specific weapons and bionic features may change slightly from 'borg to 'borg.

Model Type: CSC-030 Skullknocker Cyborg.
Class: Full Conversion Cyborg (urban combat).
Crew: One human "volunteer."

M.D.C. by Location:

- *Hands (2) — 15 each
- Arms (2) — 40 each
- Legs (2) — 80 each
- *Shoulder-mounted Grenade Launchers (2) — 20 each
- *Vibro-Blades (2, one per arm) — 10 each
- *Head (reinforced) — 90
- **Main Body (normal) — 180 (**Note:** +270 M.D.C. for cyborg infantry body armor. Cyborg armor typically hooks directly onto the bionic body.)
- * Destroying the head of the cyborg will kill the character! However, the head is a small and difficult target to hit. The attacker must make a called shot and even then he is —3 to strike. The hands, Vibro-Blades on each arm (when extended) and shoulder-mounted multi-grenade launchers are also small and difficult to hit, requiring an attacker to make a called shot at —4.
- ** Depleting the M.D.C. of the main body will effectively destroy it, but emergency systems will keep the brain and vital organs alive for 36 hours. Recovery of the severely damaged body will enable doctors to place the character on life support that will keep him or her alive until a new bionic body (same or another model) can be found for full conversion. Failure to find the damaged 'borg within 36 hours will result in the character's death. Similarly, massive amounts of damage (125 points below 0) will completely destroy the cyborg without hope of recovery.

Speed

Running: 100 mph (160 km) maximum when equipped in standard infantry armor. Without armor, the cyborg's top speed increases to 120 mph (192 km).

Leaping: The powerful bionic legs are strong and capable of leaping 25 feet (7.6 m) high or lengthwise. A running start will add another 30 feet (9 m)!

Flying: Via jet pack only (half speed because of the weight of the cyborg).

Statistical Data

Average Height: 8 feet (2.4 m).

Width: 4 feet (1.2 m).

Length: 3 feet (0.9 m).

Weight: 1000 lbs (450 kg).

Physical Attributes: Equal to a P.S. 27, P.P. 24.

Power System: Nuclear, average life is 20 years.

Black Market Cost: Exclusive to the Coalition military and not available on the open market. Very rare; six to eight million credits with all shared features and weapons.

Penalties: The Skullknocker's light infantry armor provides excellent Mega-Damage protection but is actually quite heavy. The following penalties apply when the 'borg soldier is equipped with the light infantry 'borg armor: -1 to parry and dodge, -1 to roll with impact and —20% to Prowl.

Standard Bionic Features (non-weapon types)

Note: These features are all found in the bionic and cybernetic section of the **Rifts RPG**.

1. Bionic lung with gas filter and oxygen storage cell.
2. Built-in language translator.
3. Built-in loudspeaker.
4. Built-in radio receiver and transmitter.
5. Climb cord (concealed).
6. Clock calendar.
7. Gyro-compass.
8. Modulating voice synthesizer.
9. Multi-optic eyes.
10. Psionic electro-magnetic dampeners.
11. Universal headjack with amplified hearing and sound filtration.

Weapon Systems

1. **Shoulder-Mounted Multi-Grenade Launchers (2):** Each shoulder plate conceals a multi-grenade launcher similar to the weapons mounted on the forearms of the PA-09A Super SAMAS (see pages 117-119 in **World Book 11: Coalition War Campaign** for details). When activated by the cyborg, the shoulder plates slide back to reveal eight launch tubes! Like the Super SAMAS, the Skullknocker's launchers fire rifle grenades and have proven highly effective in urban warfare.

Primary Purpose: Anti-Monster, Anti-Power Armor, Anti-Cyborg, Anti-Robot.

Secondary Purpose: Anti-Personnel, Defense.

Mega-Damage: The weapons can fire conventional M.D. rifle grenades doing 2D6 M.D. to a blast area of 12 feet (3.6 m), but are typically loaded with the *new, micro-fusion grenades* that inflict 6D6 M.D. to a 12 foot (3.6 m) diameter blast area/six foot (1.8 m) radius.

Rate of Fire: Equal to the combined number of attacks of the cyborg, either one at a time or in volleys of two, four, six or eight! One volley, regardless of the number of rounds in that volley, counts as one melee attack.

Maximum Effective Range: 1000 feet (305 m).

Payload: 80 total; 40 per shoulder.

2. **Forearm Mounted, Concealed Vibro-Blades (2):** Concealed within each forearm is a Vibro-Sword that can be extended and retracted at will.

Mega-Damage: 2D6 M.D. per blade strike.

Maximum Effective Range: Hand to hand combat.

Attacks per Melee Round: Total hand to hand melee attacks for the cyborg soldier.

Payload: Effectively unlimited; patched into the cyborg's power supply.

Note: The P.P. of 24 provides a strike and parry bonus of +5, not including any W.P. Sword bonuses.

3. **Optional Hand-Held Weapons:** Typically, the CSC-030 Skullknocker is sent into combat with one or two hand-held weapons and a small sidearm. Weapons can include ordinary hardware issued to unaugmented CS troops to heavier rail guns, particle beam weapons and missile rifles. See pages 89-96 in **World Book 11: Coalition War Campaign** for details on CS hand-held weapons.

4. **Hand to Hand Combat:** Rather than use a weapon, the cyborg can engage in Mega-Damage hand to hand combat. Remember, although sheathed in M.D. cybernetics and armor, the cyborg's physical strength is S.D.C. based except for the occasional special attack, such as a power punch.

Attacks per Melee Round: Equal to the character's hand to hand combat skill selection and experience, plus one additional attack/action from heightened reflexes.

Combat Bonuses: +5 to strike, +2 on initiative, +3 to pull punch, +1 to roll with impact and +1 to save vs Horror Factor (includes the P.P. 24 bonus and optic/sensor considerations).

Damage:

Restrained Punch — 1D6+12 S.D.C.

Full Strength Punch — 3D6+12 S.D.C.

Power Punch — 1D4 M.D. (counts as two melee attacks)

Head Butt — 2D4 S.D.C.

Kick — 4D6+12 S.D.C.

Jump Kick/Leap Attack — 2D4 M.D. (counts as two melee attacks)

Judo Style Throw/Flip — 3D6 S.D.C.

Full Speed Ram/Body Block — 1D4 M.D. (counts as two melee attacks)

5. **Typical Training/Skills:** See *Coalition Cyborg Strike Trooper O.C.C.* in **World Book 11: Coalition War Campaign** (pages 69-71) for complete details. Other than the skills of Boxing, Climbing (+10%), Swimming (+10%), Wilderness Survival (+10%), Lore: Demons and Monsters (+10%) and one additional W.P. of choice, the CSC-030 has no special skill options.

CSC-040

“Skeleborg” Cyborg

Designed in the utmost secrecy in the Chi-Town military research and development facilities in 103 P.A., this cyborg model was considered the ultimate in cybernetic deception. The Emperor and the High Command rejected the implementation of the Skeleborg due to economic considerations, objections to altering the human form to such an extent and prior commitments to the Skelebot legions already being manufactured.

The Skeleborg is designed to resemble the infamous Skelebots of the Coalition Army. This resemblance is deliberate, intended to trick opponents into thinking that they are engaging the mindless automatons of the Coalition when they are actually

facing highly trained, cybernetic soldiers. The CSC-040 is built on a modified version of the FASSAR-40 Skelebot Hunter frame (see pages 129-130 of **World Book 11: Coalition War Campaign** for details on the Skelebot Hunter and other Skelebots). Designed as special strike units to attain complete victories, these cyborgs are placed into the field only in special circumstances. In both Quebec and Minnesota, opponents of the Coalition have underestimated the cybernetic soldiers, thinking they faced only a new form of mindless Skelebot. But when the Skeleborgs have broken rank and made rapid, tactical decisions, the enemies of the Coalition have become confused and unable to react, and have either retreated or have fallen to the Coalition onslaught.

Although being produced, the Skeleborgs are being utilized as special forces in situations that demand this kind of deception. To over-utilize the new cyborgs would be to "let the cat out of the bag" and allow the enemies of the CS to adjust accordingly. The Coalition High Command wants to avoid this on both fronts at all costs. Thus, there are less than one hundred Skeleborgs currently in service. Several hundred more have been manufactured and are kept as "spares" for compromised Skeleborg soldiers already in service or potential Skeleborg conversion recruits.



Coalition CSC-040 Cyborg Soldier

Exclusive to the Coalition Military

Typical Training/Skills: In addition to the basic O.C.C. Skills, these additional special skills are included. However, reduce the selection of other O.C.C. Skills by half.

- Boxing
- Climbing (+10%)
- Wilderness Survival (+10%)
- Tracking (humanoids; +10%)

Lore: Demons and Monsters (+10%)

Note: The following stats are for the "standard" CSC-040 full conversion cyborg. Specific weapons and bionic features may change slightly from 'borg to 'borg.

Model Type: CSC-040 Skeleborg.

Class: Full Conversion Cyborg.

Crew: One human "volunteer."

M.D.C. by Location:

*Hands (2) — 32 each

Arms (2) — 65 each

Legs (2) — 100 each

*Shoulder-Mounted Grenade Launchers (2) — 20 each

*Vibro-Blades (2) — 50 each

*Chest Mounted Plasma Ejectors (2) — 40 each

C-200 Rail Gun (1) — 40

*Head (reinforced) — 90

Main Body — 210 (Note:** The CSC-040 cyborg does not wear cybernetic armor, as it would detract from its appearance as a new FASSAR Series Skelebot. Exceptions can be made at the G.M.'s discretion, but are highly unlikely.)

* Destroying the head of the cyborg will kill the character! However, the head is a small and difficult target to hit. The attacker must make a called shot and even then he is —3 to strike. The hands, Vibro-Blades on each arm (when extended) and chest-mounted ejectors are also small and difficult to hit, requiring an attacker to make a called shot at —4.

** Depleting the M.D.C. of the main body will effectively destroy it, but emergency systems will keep the brain and vital organs alive for 36 hours. Recovery of the severely damaged body will enable doctors to place the character on life support that will keep him or her alive until a new bionic body (same or another model) can be found for full conversion. Failure to find the damaged 'borg within 36 hours will result in the character's death. Similarly, massive amounts of damage (125 points below 0) will completely destroy the cyborg without hope of recovery.

Speed

Running: 100 mph (160 km) maximum.

Leaping: Due to the design of the SCS-040 Skeleborg along the lines of the FASSAR series robots, the bionic legs, although strong, are not designed for leaping and jumping. Therefore, leaps are limited to about 6 feet (1.8 m) high or lengthwise. A running start will add another 4 feet (1.2 m).

Flying: Via jet pack only.

Statistical Data

Average Height: 8 feet (2.4 m).

Width: 4 feet (1.2 m).

Length: 3 feet (0.9 m).

Weight: 600 lbs (270 kg).

Physical Attributes: Equal to a P.S. 40, P.P. 24.

Power System: Nuclear, average life is 20 years.

Black Market Cost: Exclusive to the Coalition military and not available on the open market. Extremely rare; ten to fifteen million credits with all shared features and weapons.

Penalties: Although this cyborg model does not wear protective armor over the cybernetic chassis, the Skeleborg's design does have some flaws due to the rather spindly frame. Leaping is limited to 6 feet (1.8 m) with a bonus of only 4 feet (1.2 m)

added for a running start. Additionally, the Skeleborg is not particularly well suited for use underwater. The best this 'borg model can do is walk along the bottom of the sea, lake or river at about 25% of its normal speed. Maximum depth tolerance is 300 feet (91 m).

Standard Bionic Features (non-weapon types)

Note: These features are all found in the bionic and cybernetic section of the **Rifts RPG**.

1. Bionic lung with gas filter and oxygen storage cell.
2. Built-in language translator.
3. Built-in loudspeaker.
4. Built-in radio receiver and transmitter.
5. Climb cord (concealed).
6. Clock calendar.
7. Gyro-compass.
8. Modulating voice synthesizer.
9. Multi-optic eyes.
10. Psionic electro-magnetic dampeners.
11. Universal headjack with amplified hearing and sound filtration.

Weapon Systems

1. Chest-Mounted Plasma Ejectors (2): Two compact but powerful plasma ejectors are mounted under the "rib cage" of the skeletal cyborg, to either side of the narrow torso. These weapons are not readily apparent to the observer and often catch enemy troops by surprise. Essentially, these weapons are little different from the hand-held plasma weaponry utilized by ordinary CS troops. The plasma ejectors allow the 'borg to deal out massive amounts of damage at close and intermediate range. Each weapon unit can be used independently or in conjunction with the other. Both can rotate side to side 180 degrees or up and down at 45 degree angles. **Note:** If the weapon units are turned on two *different* targets, each blast from each weapon counts as one of the cyborg's melee attacks and *NO* initiative or strike bonuses apply to the attack on either one.

Primary Purpose: Anti-Monster, Anti-Power Armor, Anti-Cyborg, Anti-Robot.

Secondary Purpose: Anti-Personnel, Defense.

Mega-Damage: 6D6 M.D. per single blast or 1D6X10+12 M.D. per simultaneous, dual blast.

Rate of Fire: Equal to the combined number of attacks of the cyborg. Each single or simultaneous double blast at the same target counts as one melee attack.

Maximum Effective Range: 1600 feet (488 m).

Payload: Effectively unlimited. The plasma weapons are powered by the nuclear energy supply of the cyborg.

2. C-200 "Dead Man's" Rail Gun: This light, all-purpose weapon is the standard issue for the CSC-040 Skeleborg as well as the FASSAR-30 new model Skelebots and FASSAR-40 Skelebot Hunters. The weapons are highly effective and contribute to the deception that the cyborgs are a new type of Skelebot. The weapon can use what is called a short clip with 200 rounds (10 bursts), light drum with 600 rounds (100 bursts) or a heavy, belt-fed drum containing 2000 rounds (100 bursts). Typically, CSC-040 units are outfitted with one of the two ammo drums per Skeleborg soldier.

Primary Purpose: Assault.

Secondary Purpose: Defense.

Weight: Gun: 45 lbs (20.25 kg), short clip: 10 lbs (4.5 kg), light ammo-drum: 30 lbs (13 kg) or heavy ammo-drum: 100 lbs (45 kg). Ammo drums are hooked to the back of the cyborg.

Mega-Damage: A full burst of 20 rounds inflicts 4D6 M.D.; a single round does 1D4 M.D.

Rate of Fire: Equal to the combined number of attacks of the cyborg.

Maximum Effective Range: 4000 feet (1200 m).

Payload: The short clip holds 200 rounds and is capable of firing ten full damage bursts (20 rounds each). The light drum holds 600 rounds and can fire 30 bursts. The 2000 round drum is capable of firing 100 full damage bursts.

3. Vibro-Wing Blades (2; one per arm): Vibro-Wing Blades similar to those found on the FASSAR-30 new model Skelebots are mounted on each forearm of the Skeleborg. The cyborg soldier can use these lethal weapons in deadly, Mega-Damage hand-to-hand combat.

Mega-Damage: 2D6 M.D. per Wing-Blade.

Maximum Effective Range: Hand to hand combat.

Payload: Effectively unlimited; patched into the cyborg's power supply.

4. Hand to Hand Combat: Rather than use a weapon, the cyborg can engage in Mega-Damage hand to hand combat. Unlike typical 'borgs, the Skeleborg is built upon the FASSAR-40 Skelebot Hunter frame and therefore has the corresponding strength of that robot. Thus, the CSC-040 can inflict Mega-Damage punches and kicks! Although, since it is a cyborg and not a robot, the amount of damage the Skeleborg can inflict is compromised when compared to the Skelebot Hunter. As a 'borg, however, it does have more hand to hand combat options (Jump Kicks, Leap Attacks, Judo Throws and so on).

Attacks per Melee Round: Equal to the character's hand to hand combat skill selection and experience, plus one additional attack/action from heightened reflexes.

Combat Bonuses: +5 to strike; +4 to parry and dodge, +3 on initiative, +2 to pull punch, +2 to roll with impact, +1 to save vs psionic attack and +1 to save vs Horror Factor (includes the P.P. 21 bonus and optic/sensor considerations).

Damage:

Restrained Punch — 1D6+25 S.D.C.

Full Strength Punch — 1D6 M.D.

Power Punch — 2D6 M.D. (counts as two melee attacks)

Head Butt — 1D4 M.D.

Kick — 1D6 M.D.

Jump Kick/Leap Attack — 2D6 M.D. (counts as two melee attacks)

Judo Style Throw/Flip — 1D4 M.D.

Full Speed Ram/Body Block — 1D4 M.D. (counts as two melee attacks)

5. Optional Hand-Held Weapons: Although the Skeleborg in the field is typically armed with the C-200 rail gun, some CSC-040's are sent into combat with another hand-held weapon and occasionally a small sidearm. Weapons can include ordinary hardware issued to unaugmented CS troops to heavier rail guns, particle beam weapons and missile rifles. See pages 89-96 in **World Book 11: Coalition War Campaign** for details on CS hand-held weapons.

6. Typical Training/Skills: See *Coalition Cyborg Strike Trooper O.C.C.* in **World Book 11: Coalition War Cam-**

paign (pages 69-71) for complete details. Other than the skills of Boxing, Climbing (+10%), Wilderness Survival (+10%), Tracking (humanoids; +10%), and Lore: Demons and Monsters (+10%), the CSC-040 has no special skill options.

CSC-050 Seaskull Aquatic Cyborg

The Coalition States Navy in Chi-Town commissioned this controversial design in 104-105 P.A. The CS High Command allowed the design to be prototyped and tested, but denied the CSN the rights to mass production due to the priority of the CS Army's preparations for war against Tolkeen. With the stalemate in a lake and river-sodden Minnesota and the CSN's inability to counteract Québécois strikes against ships in the Gulf of St. Lawrence and the Great Lakes, the CS High Command is reconsidering the introduction of an aquatic cyborg to the CS Navy's limited repertoire. Additionally, the Coalition Army is interested in utilizing the design against the numerous enemies lurking in the lakes and rivers in and around Tolkeen.

The CSC-050 "Seaskull" has recently been put into mass-scale production. Although the new cyborgs have had limited success against the more experienced 'borgs of Free Quebec, they have proven quite effective against the Daemonix and other aquatic demons fighting for Tolkeen. Fast and agile underwater, the Seaskull utilizes a compact water jet propulsion system similar to that of the PA-20B Trident power armor (see **Sourcebook Four: Coalition Navy** for details on the Trident and other aquatic weapons used by the CSN). Although not as fast as the Sea SAMAS or similar suits of aquatic power armor, the Seaskull is designed for quick insertion strikes and defense of Coalition vessels.

Coalition CSC-050 Cyborg Soldier

Exclusive to the Coalition Military

Typical Training/Skills: In addition to the basic O.C.C. Skills, these special skills are included. However, reduce the selection of other O.C.C. Skills by half.

- Swimming (+20%)
- Swimming S.C.U.B.A. (+20%)
- Navigation (+15%)
- Read Sensory Instruments (+10%)
- Demolitions: Underwater (+20%)
- Demolitions Disposal (+10%)
- Lore: Demons and Monsters (+10%)
- W.P.: One of Choice.

Note: The following stats are for the "standard" CSC-050 full conversion cyborg. Specific weapons and bionic features may change slightly from 'borg to 'borg.

Model Type: CSC-050 Seaskull Cyborg.

Class: Full Conversion Cyborg (aquatic and amphibious combat).

Crew: One human "volunteer."

M.D.C. by Location:

- *Hands (2) — 20 each
- Arms (2) — 60 each
- Legs (2) — 100 each

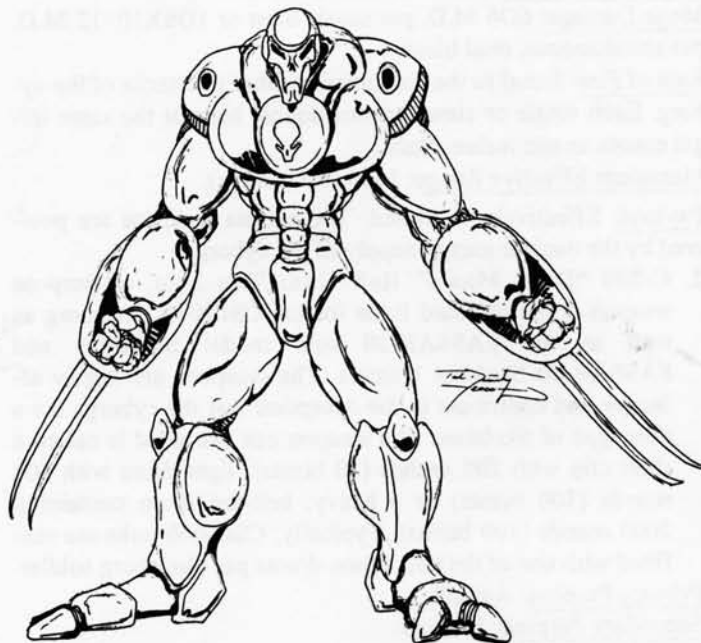
- Underwater Propulsion System (mounted on back) — 75
- *Shoulder-Mounted Mini-Torpedo/Mini-Missile Launchers (2) — 30 each
- *Vibro-Blades (4, two per arm) — 10 each
- *Head (reinforced) — 90
- **Main Body (normal) — 210 (**Note:** +250 M.D.C. for cyborg infantry body armor. Cyborg armor typically hooks directly onto the bionic body.)
- * Destroying the head of the cyborg will kill the character! However, the head is a small and difficult target to hit. The attacker must make a called shot and even then he is —3 to strike. The hands, Vibro-Blades on each arm (when extended) and shoulder-mounted multi-grenade launchers are also small and difficult to hit, requiring an attacker to make a called shot at —4.
- ** Depleting the M.D.C. of the main body will effectively destroy it, but emergency systems will keep the brain and vital organs alive for 36 hours. Recovery of the severely damaged body will enable doctors to place the character on life support that will keep him or her alive until a new bionic body (same or another model) can be found for full conversion. Failure to find the damaged 'borg within 36 hours will result in the character's death. Similarly, massive amounts of damage (125 points below 0) will completely destroy the cyborg without hope of recovery.

Speed

Running: 70 mph (112 km) maximum when equipped in standard infantry armor. Without armor, the cyborg's top speed increases to 80 mph (128 km).

Leaping: The powerful bionic legs are strong and capable of leaping 15 feet (4.6 m) high or lengthwise. A running start will add another 20 feet (6.1 m).

Underwater Capabilities: When swimming without the utilization of the back-mounted underwater propulsion system, the Seaskull can move at a maximum speed of 20 mph (32 km). The underwater propulsion system, however, can propel the 'borg at a maximum speed of 40 mph (64 km or 34.4 knots) and provides a dodge bonus of +2 when engaged.



Maximum Depth: 2000 feet (610 m). To go deeper than that, the cyborg character risks the bends and hazards of decompression.

Flying: Via jet pack only (half speed because of the weight of the cyborg).

Statistical Data

Average Height: 9 feet (2.7 m).

Width: 4 feet (1.2 m).

Length: 4 feet (1.2 m).

Weight: 2000 lbs (900 kg).

Physical Attributes: Equal to a P.S. 27, P.P. 24.

Power System: Nuclear, average life is 20 years.

Black Market Cost: Exclusive to the Coalition military and not available on the open market. Very rare; eight to ten million credits with all shared features and weapons.

Penalties: The Seaskull's light infantry armor provides excellent Mega-Damage protection but is actually quite heavy. The following penalties apply when the 'borg soldier is equipped with the light infantry 'borg armor: -1 to parry and dodge, -1 to roll with impact and —20% to Prowl.

Standard Bionic Features (non-weapon types)

Note: These features are all found in the bionic and cybernetic section of the **Rifts RPG** unless otherwise noted.

1. Bionic lung with gas filter and oxygen storage cell.
2. Bionic gills (licensed from Triax Industries by CSN designers before the war started; similar to those used by Quebec's FX-370C Leviathan Cyborg — see **World Book 22: Free Quebec** for details on this and other Québécois cyborg soldiers).
3. Built-in language translator.
4. Built-in loudspeaker.
5. Built-in radio receiver and transmitter.
6. Climb cord (concealed).
7. Clock calendar.
8. Gyro-compass.
9. Modulating voice synthesizer.
10. Multi-optic eyes.
11. Psionic electro-magnetic dampeners.
12. Universal headjack with amplified hearing and sound filtration.
13. Built-in depth gauge.
14. Built-in sonar.
15. Built-in echolocation system.
16. Concealed energy-clip arm ports (1 per arm).

Weapon Systems

1. **Shoulder-Mounted Mini-Torpedo/Mini-Missile Launchers (2):** Each shoulder of the Seaskull cyborg houses a small nozzle that actually serves as both a mini-torpedo and mini-missile launcher. Torpedoes are used against enemy ships, aquatic power armor, aquatic vehicles, submarines and other threats encountered underwater. Mini-missiles are used against aircraft, personnel on land, armor, flying demons and similar threats when the Seaskull is involved in amphibious assaults or similar operations.

Primary Purpose: Assault, Anti-Monster, Anti-Power Armor, Anti-Cyborg, Anti-Robot, Anti-Aircraft.

Secondary Purpose: Anti-Personnel, Defense.

Mega-Damage: Typically, the Seaskull is equipped with plasma (1D6X10) or armor piercing (1D4X10) mini-missiles or mini-torpedoes.

Rate of Fire: Equal to the combined number of attacks of the cyborg, either one at a time or in volleys of two. One volley, whether consisting of one or two, counts as one melee attack.

Maximum Effective Range: About one mile (1.6 km).

Payload: 20 total; ten per shoulder. Typically, a Seaskull cyborg soldier is equipped with ten mini-missiles and ten mini-torpedoes, which can be switched at will.

2. **Forearm Mounted Concealed Vibro-Blades (4; two per arm):** Each forearm of the Seaskull houses two sinister Vibro-Blades for use in hand-to-hand combat. The weapons are retractable and perfect for melee combat against aquatic monsters, underwater power armor and the bottoms of ship hulls! Typically, the weapons are used in conjunction with one another unless there is a compelling reason to use only one blade (such as a precision cutting tool) or one of the weapons is disabled.

Mega-Damage: 2D6 M.D. per blade; 4D6 M.D. per strike with both blades.

Maximum Effective Range: Hand to hand combat.

Payload: Effectively unlimited; patched into the cyborg's power supply.

Note: The P.P. of 24 provides a strike and parry bonus of +5, not including any W.P. Sword bonuses.

3. **Forearm Mounted Lasers (2; one per forearm):** Between the housings for the Vibro-Blades, each forearm has a blue-green laser nozzle for use both underwater and in amphibious assaults. Although considered backup, these weapons can also be handy tools as well as superior when accuracy and range is needed.

Primary Purpose: Assault.

Secondary Purpose: Defense.

Mega-Damage: 2D6 M.D. per blast, or 4D6 per dual blast at the same target (dual blasts count as a single attack if fired at the same target).

Rate of Fire: Equal to the combined number of attacks of the cyborg. Again, dual blasts are considered a single attack *ONLY* if fired at the same target.

Maximum Effective Range: 1200 feet (366 m).

Payload: Effectively unlimited; the lasers are patched into the cyborg's nuclear power supply.

4. **Optional Hand-Held Weapons:** Typically, the CSC-050 Seaskull is equipped with a Coalition-issued weapon. Weapons can include ordinary hardware issued to unaugmented CS troops to heavier rail guns, particle beam weapons and missile rifles. See pages 89-96 in **World Book 11: Coalition War Campaign** for details on CS hand-held weapons. Additionally, Seaskull 'borgs in the service of the CSN have access to all naval hand held armaments, such as the CSN-20 speargun or the CSN-T30 torpedo-grenade launcher. See pages 45-46 in **Sourcebook Four: Coalition Navy** for details on these weapons and other aspects of the CSN.

5. **Hand to Hand Combat:** Rather than use a weapon, the cyborg can engage in Mega-Damage hand to hand combat. Remember, although sheathed in M.D. cybernetics and armor, the cyborg's physical strength is S.D.C. based except for the occasional special attack, such as a power punch.

Attacks per Melee Round: Equal to the character's hand to hand combat skill selection and experience, plus one additional attack/action from heightened reflexes.

Combat Bonuses: +5 to strike, +2 on initiative, +3 to pull punch, +1 to roll with impact and +1 to save vs Horror Factor (includes the P.P. 24 bonus and optic/sensor considerations).

Damage:

Restrained Punch — 1D6+12 S.D.C.

Full Strength Punch — 3D6+12 S.D.C.

Power Punch — 1D4 M.D. (counts as two melee attacks)

Head Butt — 2D4 S.D.C.

Kick — 4D6+12 S.D.C.

Jump Kick/Leap Attack — 2D4 M.D. (counts as two melee attacks)

Judo Style Throw/Flip — 3D6 S.D.C.

Full Speed Ram/Body Block — 1D4 M.D. (counts as two melee attacks)

6. Typical Training/Skills: See *Coalition Cyborg Strike Trooper O.C.C.* in **World Book 11: Coalition War Campaign** (pages 69-71) for complete details. Other than the skills of Swimming (+20%), Swimming S.C.U.B.A. (+20%), Navigation (+15%), Read Sensory Instruments (+10%), Demolitions: Underwater (+20%), Demolitions Disposal (+10%), Lore: Demons and Monsters (+10%) and one additional W.P. of choice, the CSC-050 has no special skill options.

One Chance in a Million



Part One

By Paul Sillanpää

Not so long ago, I was paid a visit by a young lad who had recently been taken on as an apprentice to a Techno-Wizard friend of mine. He was a bright boy, all eager to learn his trade, which he felt would lead to a life of adventure. His energy brought a smile to my face, because he reminded me so much of myself many years ago, when I was first learning the "less practical" craft of Card Magic. The fact that he was willing to listen with rapt attention to my tedious reminiscing about "the good old days" certainly helped to endear him to me as well.

I spent most of that rainy afternoon yarning away, and it was getting about time for him to go that I happened to mention the time I spent in Chi-town and its 'Burbs back in 102 PA. All at once the boy's eyes went wide and he asked me if this was during the time of something he called "*the Prince's Great Ascension*."

"During the what?" I asked, a bit perturbed at being interrupted in the middle of one of my funnier anecdotes.

"The Prince's Great Ascension," he said. "You know, the Prince of the Streets? Colonel Thaddius Lyboc, the Coalition officer who dominated Chi-town's underworld."

Lyboc. A fairly large man who had a way of making himself appear thin and snake-like. Oh yes, I knew Lyboc all right. I knew him personally, and very few of those memories were

pleasant. An arrogant, vindictive, manipulative man he was. The lad had my attention now, but I kept my face neutral and pretended not to remember. "Lyboc? ... Lyboe. The name does sound familiar," I said.

"Yes, Lyboc," said the boy. "It was around 102 PA that he was involved in a vicious war with the Black Market for control of the Black Market operations on Level 5. He managed to outmaneuver the Market's chief lieutenant Black Eye Jack and drive him from the city, securing a lot of Level 5 for himself."

Black Eye Jack. Him I also remember, and the memories there are even more unpleasant than the ones about Lyboc. If I close my eyes I can still see him staring down at me with those corpse-like eyes of his, while his two thugs beat me to a bloody pulp. I've met worse people in my day, but few with the dull, single-minded brutishness of Black Eye Jack Kavanagh.

I sat there for a moment, not believing what I was hearing from this youth. "Yes," I said slowly. "I knew about the thing with Lyboc and Jack. And so do you, it seems."

He smiled modestly and shrugged. "It's kind of a hobby of mine. History, that is. Especially criminal history." He then launched into a twenty minute lecture on the connections between Lyboc's criminal operations and the disaster of the Juicer Uprising. "Sometimes," he said in a sage voice that had to have been borrowed from one of his teachers. "The most earth-shattering historical events begin with a bunch of nobodies on the street level." He then went rummaging around for a moment in his book bag, coming up with a battered hardcover book which he proudly handed to me. "I've been reading up on the Black Market and its ties to the Coalition."

It took a conscious effort not to laugh at the title: *Succession in the Streets: The rise and fall of Col. Thaddius Lyboc.* I studied it for a moment, then asked if I might borrow it for the night.

My first impressions of the book were confirmed later that evening as I skimmed through it in bed. It was written by a smarmy hack of a rogue scholar named Robert Devonshire, and was filled from cover to cover with lurid stories about Lyboc's Machiavellian climb to power. Or as the author put it, "*his struggle to assume his concrete throne.*" One hour and fifty-eight pages later, I lost interest and skipped ahead to the chapter about Black Eye Jack. What I read there made me groan in frustration.



"...It was in this clash of the Titans that one can truly obtain the measure of this great man. Though his rival Jack Kavanagh was undeniably an excellent leader, his abilities paled in comparison to the ascending Prince's. While Jack operated linearly, within the confines of the code of ethics of organized crime, Lyboc went beyond, thinking outside the box, and striking down his enemy with a ferocity that would guarantee his dominance of the underworld for years to come..."

And so on, and so on...

By the end of the second hour I was thoroughly sick of Mr. Devonshire, and the book had found a place on the floor by my bed while I drifted off into an uneasy sleep.

Most of you are probably familiar with Colonel Lyboc and know all about his underworld connections. But not all of you might know about one of his early rivals, one Jack Kavanagh of

the Black Market. Black Eye Jack, as he was known, controlled most of the Market's operations on the Chi-town fortress city's Level 5. One of the first Marketeers to really establish a foothold in the fortress city, he is often fondly remembered as a sort of pioneer: Tough and resourceful, with the wisdom and cunning of a true frontiersman. Well I knew him personally, and he was none of these things. In reality he was as crude and brutish as Lyboc was short sighted and egotistical. How they achieved such a high position in their respective organizations is beyond me, but that both men eventually met with such catastrophic fates is no surprise.

It's always bothered me, that people worship such inferior examples of the human race. Though I suppose the fact that they're usually worshiped at a distance makes it easier to understand. No one who knew them personally could like them. "The street level" is an ugly place, and Chi-town's Level 5 was one of the worst. Sure, nobody died of disease or malnutrition as they might have outside, but there were plenty of other ways to go. Fail to pay your protection money, and there would be a gang of thugs showing up at your door to break your legs. Look at somebody the wrong way and you might find yourself in an alley trying to breath with a shank stuck in your lungs. Living was expensive, but death was cheap. For five hundred credits you could hire a couple of local toughs to cripple someone you didn't like. For a thousand credits, they'd kill him. Even if you were strapped for cash, you could probably dig up a junky who'd do it for twenty five and a tab of Crash, but the results weren't always guaranteed. Money was power, the power to stay alive. And the less you had of it the harder you'd fight over the little things.

For people like that, human life has no meaning unless it's their own. Jack and Lyboc were no exception. Neither hesitated when it came to violence, and what men like the learned scholar Robert Devonshire never seem to realize is that it was usually the weak and defenseless who suffered. Anyone else would have retaliated and killed them first.

But I think what really got on my nerves was how quick Mr. Devonshire was to give Lyboc all the credit. Oh sure, there was no way he could have known about what really happened during those desperate days. Only one other person actually knows what my full involvement was, and she had too much to loose to risk telling anyone. But to assume that the bloody gang war that ensued was all part of some grand scheme by larger than life heroes is to be too kind to the memory of those terrible men.

Ironically, the boy had been right when he spoke of grand events being directed by nobodies. I was a nobody back then, still am mostly. My name doesn't appear in any of the history books (although it does in a number of police files) and even though I am writing this manuscript in order to preserve what I know, I doubt that many will believe me. I suppose some might consider me to be great. I am after all, Ezekiel Chance, Trickster Mage extra ordinaire. But I was seldom in control of anything that happened, and I never would have gotten involved had it not been for a host of other nobodies who had drawn me in. The red-haired waitress and night club singer, the brutish Black Market enforcer, the small time businessman who was lousy at cards, and that crazy mutant leopard who...

...wait, I'm getting ahead of myself here. I should probably start with that morning of March 3rd, 102 PA. On that morning I was performing my routine in the Chugging Skull...

It started with a pretty routine morning inside the Chugging Skull, a decent bar/restaurant down on Chi-town's 5th level. And by decent I mean just that, decent. On a Level where a person can be stabbed by muggers in broad daylight and bleed to death while no one lifts a finger to help him, the Chugg (as it was fondly known) catered to that silent and impotent majority of people who only wanted to survive and raise their children in what they had thought would be a better place. It's one thing that people always seem to forget: Level 5 was populated by the poor and desperate. The people who were lucky enough to get into the fortress city but ran out of resources once they made it in. Many of these people are quite vicious, but many more were just ordinary people like you and me (well all right, not me) whose only fault was believing the propaganda that said Chi-town was paradise. But while most of Level 5 was a pit of desperation, the Chugg was an island of calm and safety where one could sit and relax, where nobody minded if you ran a tab, and where the manager, a retired veteran and partial conversion cyborg named Frederic Holtz, would throw you out on your butt if you misbehaved. He'd got himself maimed in a skirmish out in the Magic Zone a few years back, and had to have both his legs and one arm replaced with gleaming bionic prosthetics. He did not like violence in his establishment.

It's not much of an existence, living on Level 5, which was where I came in. Although I lacked in marketable skills and my puny frame was sometimes too weak to drag my own weight, I did have a talent, in addition to my minor magical abilities, for manipulations and sleight of hand. So, in exchange for three hot meals a day and the occasional monetary contribution, I gave the Chugg's clientele a bit of joy by putting on a magic show for them, three times a day. It was a dangerous thing to do, certainly. Back then Coalition citizens were as terrified of true magic as they'd ever been. But I managed to sooth things over by calling it a Manipulation Act, and, after the local Dog Pack had checked me out and declared it safe, it was pretty much smooth sailing. Of course, if they'd been able to see past my false aura, the entire matter would have turned out differently.

Anyway, the morning had started out pretty much as usual, with me running through my standard routine to the delight of my audience. Many of them were children who showed up just for my act, and it did my old heart some good to see their eyes go wide when I produced coins from their ears and swallowed lit cigarettes, only to produce them, still burning, from my nose. I had just finished up and the little urchins had dispersed for the day when *she* walked in. Anita Holtz, the manager's niece. Probably the most beautiful thing that will ever exist on Level 5. At first glance you might not see anything more than a better than average looking girl. Short hair dyed red, wearing a crop top and jeans that showed off the tattoos on her shoulders and her back. But a neural mace hung from her belt and her grey-blue eyes were clear and intelligent, not clouded over with the drugs that were so very popular among the young people. She carried herself with a sense of purpose, and when she smiled... ah, well. When she smiled at you the whole world seemed a little bit brighter than before. It was the kind of smile that just radiated kindness and could make a man feel special, even down on Level 5. Beauty, like joy and laughter, were scarce commodities down there. The fact that she'd been able to resist the local pimps and brothel owners who'd tried to recruit her only made her more precious in my eyes.

Of course, being an intelligent woman, she was well aware that I was eighteen years her senior and probably had a shady past (she had no idea), and so there was no way of there being a relationship between us. Still, having little to do between performances, I made attempts nonetheless. If only just to make her smile.

That morning I waited until she'd gotten herself some breakfast and sat down in one of the booths, then I went over and parked myself across from her.

"Hello Anita," I said, flashing my most charming smile.

Her eyes had been glued to the TV set over the bar. She shifted her gaze over to me with a start. "Oh... hi," she answered back, then gave me a nervous grin. Not quite what I'd been hoping for, but still...

"And how are you this fine morning?" I asked.

"Busy," she said. "I'm on all night down at Howlers."

Howlers was an only slightly disreputable club where Anita sometimes sang. I say slightly disreputable in that it only dispensed hard drugs and promoted gambling but left its women employees alone. In my opinion that's why they had some of the better singers around. "So that's what has you all distracted," I said, pulling a deck of cards from my pocket. "Well I have a solution to that." I fanned out the deck. "Pick a card, any card."

I ignored the slightly annoyed look she gave me. I knew she'd be happy soon enough. Sighing, she drew a card and examined it while I squared the deck and cut it down the middle. "Now, return the card to the deck, but make sure that I can't see it." She did, and I closed the two halves over it, taking care to press my finger against the card's edge to avoid losing it. A quick jog shuffle brought her card to the top and a snappy rifle shuffle with a waterfall finish left it there, but made it look as though the deck was thoroughly randomized.

"Now then, draw the card from the top of the deck," I instructed her. She drew it and I saw a slight flicker of amusement in her eyes that told me all went well.

"Well what do you know, it's my card." She said with forced surprise. She didn't sound very impressed, and frankly I couldn't blame her. It was a simple trick that I'd just done. Given an hour she could have learned to do it herself. But the trick wasn't over.

I took the card from her hand and examined it with a sigh. "The Three of Clubs. It's a rather drab card for a lady such as yourself." She shrugged, and I went on. "Not a face card, not even a high number card, and the suit is all wrong for you."

"Whatever," she replied. She now seemed to be hurrying up to finish her breakfast. "It's the card I drew."

I gave her a sly smile. "But what if we could change the card you drew?" She looked up with real interest this time.

"That'd be a trick," she said.

I handed the card back to her and instructed her to place it face down on the table and hold it there with her hand. I covered her hand with both of mine.

"It would have to be a Queen, whatever the suit," I said, and gently caressed her hand. Anita blushed slightly and smiled. My heart soared. "And I don't think that a Club is an appropriate suit for a woman as beautiful as yourself, your mace notwithstanding. What do you say we make it the Queen of Hearts?"

Anita couldn't help but chuckle at this. "Sure, why not?"

"Very well. Close your eyes and concentrate on the Queen of Hearts, but don't for a moment let go of the card you're holding." With that I lowered my defenses and released the real magic. The stuff that would get me killed if ever the authorities caught me. A few words muttered under my breath, and it was done.

I removed my hands from hers. "Now. Open your eyes now and turn over your card."

She complied and her eyes went wide. There, staring up at her, was the Queen of Hearts. "How did you do that?" she gasped. Her eyes were alight and she couldn't help but laugh in delight as she examined the card. I smiled and tapped the deck meaningfully (again muttering the necessary words), then motioned her to draw the card on top. She did, and lo and behold the card she drew was her very own Three of Clubs! "I don't believe it. How did you get it back into the deck?" she said.

"Believe it or not, the hand is quicker than the eye," I replied.

She shook her head and studied the two cards. There was nothing for her to find, of course. My talents with real magic may not extend far beyond a deck of cards, but that does have some advantages. Card Magic is minimal enough to begin with and it leaves traces that are difficult even for a psychic to pick up. To a normal human there is nothing. Finally she handed back the two cards, which I returned to the deck. In a few minutes they would return to their original face values and no one would be the wiser. "You do have a talent there," Anita said, her breakfast forgotten.

I bowed my head in thanks. "I'm told you're quite a talented singer," I said. "Would you mind if I came down to the Howler and saw for myself?"

For a moment she studied me with a critical eye, making sure that I was sincere. Then slowly she nodded. "Alright. My first performance will be at nine-thirty, I'll be around until two when the club closes." She finished her breakfast and got up to leave.

"Great, I'll see you then!" I called after her. Already the day seemed a bit better than before.

I had no illusions about the effect I'd had on Anita; if something was going to develop it would take a lot more time than that. Nevertheless, even if the night was a complete failure it would help to break the boredom. As much as I liked performing at the Chugg, I was eager to get back to a more exciting form of money making.

Like a wise man once said, be careful what you wish for.

Not long after Anita had left, a man entered the Chugg. A huge man whom I noticed immediately by his expensive clothes and wide, unimaginative face. *With the Black Market no doubt*, I thought. You can imagine my surprise when he walked over to my table and sat down across from me.

"You're Ezekiel Chance, right?" he said, folding two meaty hands together on the table top.

I gripped the deck of cards a bit more tightly and readied myself. Card Magic isn't much to defend yourself with, but it would have been better than trying to settle this gorilla of a man with my bare hands. A quick glance confirmed that Fred Holtz was watching us closely, and I felt a bit better. He wasn't afraid of the gangs or the Market, and had once severely beaten a gang member who'd groped Anita. "Yes," I replied in a level tone. "What can I do for you Mr..."

"Rocky," said the behemoth.

"Mr. Rocky," I said. "I don't believe we've met. Have you attended one of my performances?" I knew the answer was no, for I would have instantly remembered this tower of hair and muscle.

"No, actually I'm here on behalf of my employer. I believe you might know him: Mr. Jack Kavanagh?"

"Black Eye Jack? Yes, the name does sound familiar. A local entrepreneur, I believe," I said sarcastically. Everyone on Level 5 knew Black Eye Jack.

"Something like that," Rocky growled. "I'm here to convey an invitation for you to attend one of Mr. Kavanagh's parties tonight, at around ten in the Midnight Bazaar. He has a business proposition to discuss."

Ten at the Midnight Bazaar, a club that was halfway across town from Howlers. "Well I'm very flattered that Mr. Kavanagh would see fit to invite me. But I seem to be otherwise engaged at the present. If you could convey my regrets to him, as well as my assurances that I'll be willing to meet with him at any other time in the future..."

Rocky may have been of a limited cranial capacity, but he knew a snow job when he heard one. "Mr. Kavanagh would be deeply offended if you refused his invitation," he said flatly, cracking his knuckles as he did so. I cringed. Black Eye Jack was not a man you wanted to offend.

"Well, in that case, I suppose I could change my plans..."

"Good," said the thug, then he got up to leave. "The Midnight Bazaar at ten tonight. Don't be late." Without another word, he turned and ambled out the door.

I thought about Anita and swore silently to myself. If I thought I could have gotten away with it, I'd have had someone break Rocky's legs.

* * *

The story of how I came to be in the Chi-town fortress city is one that's better left for another time, preferably after the people involved are either dead or too old to seek revenge. But a brief synopsis won't get me into too much trouble. Let's just say that by the time the smoke had cleared on my little 'Burbs adventure, my associates and I had stood victorious over our enemies and had attracted the attention of the local law enforcement community. We'd decided to split up and each make our own way home, but since the Spectors only had a vague description of me and none of their psychics had ever gotten close enough to get a decent whiff of my magical aura, I'd decided on a bolder strategy. When you're being chased, the best place to hide is somewhere right under your enemy's nose. He'll never suspect it.

So while my companions high-tailed it into the wilderness, I altered my aura to suppress my magical talents, used a set of forged documents to gain access to the fortress city itself, and set up shop on Level 5.

It almost proved to be my undoing. Normally my talent with Card Magic enables me to support myself anywhere the game is played. And even though I would have to suppress my magical abilities, my sleight-of-hand and card counting skills should have been more than enough for me to get by. But not on Level 5.

I'd been able to secure a 24-hour courier pass to get me into the city, and I have to say that walking straight through the front door of the most powerful city state on the continent without a care for the Dog Packs or Psi-Stalkers did a great deal to boost my confidence. But that confidence was soon shattered when I tried to rent an apartment. The fat, grinning slob of a landlord took one look at my courier pass, then promptly held out his hand for a bribe. I obliged, and the very next morning I was awakened by a furious pounding at the door. Opening it, I found myself face to face with a couple of Spectors who muscled their way into my apartment, which they proceeded to demolish as they searched for contraband. They found none (my pistol was concealed inside a false bottom in my valise) but they did find my courier pass and my money (more than 20,000 credits). At this point I figured the jig was up and that if I was lucky, I would only be thrown out of the city. But the two men simply confiscated the money and told me that if I didn't want to be arrested I would find a way to come up with another 5,000 every month.

On the way out I saw them give my landlord his cut of the profits. I later found out that these men worked for Colonel Lyboc, and that shakedown like this were commonplace on Level 5.

This left me with only a few loose chits worth about 75 credits on which to survive, which forced me to hit the card tables a lot earlier than I would have liked. There's a couple of rules that I have about gambling for survival: Learn the lay of the land first, and always keep the exit in sight. My minimal assets forced me to enter a game in a rather disreputable place before I'd had a chance to scout it out. Otherwise I would have known that the shark I was playing against had a cybernetically enhanced telescopic eye, which had enabled him to read the cards in my hand by their reflection in a strategically placed glass some distance behind me. More importantly, it enabled him to see me palm a third deuce to add to the other two that I held in my hand. Fortunately, I had remembered rule number two, and made a quick, though undignified exit. Unfortunately I left almost all of my money on the table.

I wound up with ten credits, which I had to spend in some greasy spoon diner to get something to eat. It was starting to look like I was going to have to take up burglary in order to support myself (I'm never doing the "Three Card Monte" thing again). As I often do when I'm nervous, I took out a deck of cards and began shuffling them, then running through various palming tricks that I had learned long ago as a boy. As I did so, I became aware of somebody watching me.

It was Anita, and she was watching my act with some interest. Never able to resist a pretty face (especially if she can be convinced to pick up the tab), I went over to her table and ran through my *other act*. This consisted of a combination of charm, compliments, a sad story and card tricks to keep her distracted while I tried to weasel a free meal out of her.

Usually this works, and when it doesn't I have to go away with my tail between my legs. But this time was an exception. Anita saw right through me, but she offered me a job at her uncle's restaurant instead. Well, I know how to take yes for an answer, and at the time I felt that there might be some genuine chemistry between the two of us. I was wrong on that account as well. Anita was just a kind hearted girl who liked to give a person a break, and I was just another one of her charitable causes.

Although I was disappointed when I realized this, I didn't mind that much. The job would help me work up another stake for when I next went to the gaming tables, and when I found out that Anita wasn't seeing anyone, I decided that it wouldn't take long to bring her around. Twice before, I had risked my altered aura to show her my more "impressive" tricks (pretending all the while that they were just elaborate manipulations). Finally, the third time around, she had she agreed to a date of sorts. So as you can imagine, this was not time I wanted to spend placating the local kingpin.

* * *

The Midnight Bazaar was a club owned exclusively by the Black Market, and was perhaps the most luxurious place on Level 5. While homeless derelicts begged for pocket change across the street, expensive cars pulled up in front of elegant glass doors framed in carved oak to disgorge passengers, who were kept from distraction by a handful of heavily armed toughs who watched the locals like hawks. The guests that night in the Bazaar were either Marketeers from Jack's crew, or else they were Lofties: young legitimate entrepreneurs from the higher levels who'd made connections with the Market and were out for a bit of slumming down on Level 5. The Marketeers were all hard bitten and tough looking; many sported gang tattoos and a few even carried weapons. The Lofties looked softer, but had that intelligent look that suggested many of them were educated. But if their origins represented a cross section of Chi-town's population, they all had one thing in common: They were all *nouveau riche*, new money. Some had been living a marginal existence as recently as two or three years before, but they'd made it by then. The Marketeers by clinging to Jack's coat tails, the Lofties by capitalizing on the booming military industry that would in four years lead to the blood-soaked horror of the Tolkeen War.

But even though they had money and power, the clientele of the Bazaar still lacked the one thing that the Old Money and the hardworking rich have, usually by their very natures: Class. That indefinable quality that gives legitimacy to one man's superiority to another. Most people don't mind a person being better off than they are, just so long as that person deserves it. And while the Marketeers did have a certain toughness to them that suggested they actually earned their keep, neither they nor the Lofties really seemed at ease with their wealth. I once saw a pre-Rifts television show about a clan of wilderness squatters who sold the mineral rights to their property, became rich, and moved to a city called Beverly Hills which was populated by the elite of old America. Of course, being hicks meant that they didn't fit in with their opulent new surroundings, which lead to various comic situations. Given the choice, I think that I'd have rather been at a party with the squatters. At least they were sincere in their backwardness. These *gentlemen*, on the other hand, around me persisted in their pretenses at class, which in their case meant grotesque displays of money.

And not since my time in the Splynn Dimensional Market had I seen such wealth. The whole place was a sea of gold watches, diamond cufflinks, rings, earrings, necklaces, and chokers. Fine leather shoes, stylized "work boots" (that had probably never seen a real day's work in their lives), and spike heels that cost more than an honest man could make in a month.

Then there were the women. The fairer sex seldom held positions of power within the criminal underground or with the war industry, so most of the women present were valued above clothing and jewelry only in that they were more expensive, and more likely to inspire envy. At least half had the vacant, glazed look that came from having sampled some of the chemical refreshments being made available by our gracious host. It's truly staggering just how much money a man can wear, and when you're in a room filled with such men, the effect can be suffocating.

I was especially shocked to see a couple Spectors lounging around at the end of the bar. Less than five feet away a Marketeer was reading an illegal book. I knew that the law seldom ventured down to Level 5, and when it did it was always careful not to interfere with the big boys, but this was truly staggering. However, even that didn't compare to what came next.

I was running through my standard nightclub act, going from table to table, and group to group, performing a couple of quick illusions at each one. All of it was sleight-of-hand of course. Even if Jack did have the local cops in his pocket I didn't want to take the chance of being detected by Net Set unit; those guys *couldn't* be bought. All was going well when I came to one group at the far end of the club. There, another man was giving a performance of his own. Dressed in an elegant black suit and draped with outlandish jewelry, the man may not have been the richest in the room, but something about the way he carried himself told me that he was operating on another level entirely, where money was irrelevant. Easing my way through a press of bodies to get a closer look, I saw why. As his small audience clapped with delight he caused shimmering spheres of light to appear, dance through the air, then vanish without a trace. I almost screamed when I saw it, for it was magic. Real magic.

The performing mage noticed me and laughed. "You look like you've just seen a ghost," he said.

"I'm afraid I might end up a ghost, that's all," I replied. "Pretty brave to be doing that around these parts."

He laughed again and the spheres reappeared, this time whizzing around me. *A smaller version of Ball Lightning spheres*, I realized with a shudder. One touch and I would have been incinerated. My eyes locked with his and he gave me a mocking look as I drew back from the deadly spheres. I shot a quick glance at the jewelry he was wearing, trying to figure out which city or faction he belonged to. I didn't see anything I recognized, but that didn't mean much since I'd been out of the loop for a long time.

"How about making those things go away, huh?" I asked cautiously.

The mage's smiled broadened, and the spheres of ball lightning vanished. "Alright then," he said. "If they make you uncomfortable." The onlookers giggled at my discomfort. I felt my face burning with humiliation. I wanted to yell at them. *You think you're in control here? If Net Set found us we'd all be dead! Let's see your fat wallets deflect a laser bolt!* But I kept my mouth shut. I'm quite sure he was mad, though. I never found out his name or his history, but no sane magic user would ever flaunt his abilities in the middle of Chi-town, no matter whose company he kept.

I was just about to slip away when one of the women watching the act broke away from the crowd and tugged at my arm. I

use the term *woman* loosely since, although she was clearly female, she was not at all human.

She might have been a mutant, but I suspected that she had probably come out of a Rift. She looked like some great humanoid cat, a leopard to be exact. She had an upright human posture and human hands, and although her face was almost completely feline her voice was clear and audible, and her pronunciation excellent. I was sure she couldn't have been from Earth because mutants like her didn't just happen, and the Coalition only used mutant dogs in the army. As I turned to face her she shrank back a bit and glanced around, as though embarrassed at having been so forward. Her companion, a tall burly human with a laser scar that left half his scalp bare, patted her reassuringly on the head, and I couldn't help but smile as she timidly asked me if I could do any magic as well.

What can I say? I can't resist a direct request. I went through a quick one I knew for cigarettes. Light the cigarette up, "insert" it into my ear, then "pull" it out of my nose. Her eyes went wide and she insisted on studying the cigarette and my ear for several seconds, then she demanded that I perform another trick. I went through the rest of my cigarette routine, then through a number of card and coin tricks. After each trick she would insist on inspecting all materials involved, which couldn't help but endear her to me. I usually only get this level of attention from children. Once her companion, whom I immediately put down as a Marketeer from the 'Burbs, drew her aside and spoke with her for a moment, then she returned and asked me to *do the one with the big bronze coin again!* When finally one of Jack's men came over twenty minutes later and informed me that Mr. Kavanagh was ready to see me, we were both disappointed. Reaching over I quickly scratched her behind her ear and told her I'd be back if I could. She smiled and told me to hurry, then added that her name was Samantha. Walking away, I found I was sorry to leave.

I've already described how the men showed off their money. Well Black Eye Jack Kavanagh and his entourage could have put them all to shame. He lay sprawled on the couch in his own private suite at the back of his club, fed by his own private kitchen, watered by his own private bar, waited on by a pair of beautiful women whose uniforms contained less material than my vest. In addition to them, every man in the room had at least one woman of his own, and Jack himself had four with him on the couch. As I strode up to the table I felt distinctly out of place, a feeling that was made worse when Jack noticed me.

He may have been literally buried in luxury, but Jack Kavanagh was no weakling. He was a huge man, and even lying back on the couch I could feel it when he turned his attention to me. He stirred, and the girls retreated, allowing him to sit up straight and face me. Two huge, muscular arms rested themselves on the coffee table in front of him, then, like a tank turret swivelling to acquire a new target, he raised his head to stare me in the eyes. His skin had the unhealthy pallor of a man who had spent his entire life indoors, and his shaved scalp caught the light and formed a kind of halo around the top of his head. Then his eyes locked onto mine. Both were completely black, with neither cornea nor pupil distinguishable. The result of a minor mutation that he had carried since birth, they seemed almost dead, like the eyes of a corpse. If it had been up to me, I would have named him Dead Eye.

One of the massive hands extended itself, and I took it. "It's very nice to meet you Mr. Chance," he said in a deep, rumbling voice. "I've heard so much about you."



The man had a grip like a vice. "I'm honored that you invited me," I said. "I must say your gathering is certainly a step up from what I'm used to."

He smiled proudly and spread his arms out to either side, like a child showing off a new toy, I couldn't help but think. "We enjoy our comforts," he said. "After all, we earned them. That's the beauty of the free enterprise system: You get what you put in. Talent gets rewarded. And from what I hear, you're a very talented man."

It was my turn to smile proudly. "You should have seen my performance at the Galileo Lecture hall in Lazlo."

"I'm not talking about your little card tricks," he sneered. "I'm talking about the other things you do with cards. Wolf here," at this he jerked his thumb towards a uniformed Psi-Stalker sitting by the bar, "happened to be passing by the Chugging Skull a few weeks ago when he caught a very strange vibe coming from inside. He went inside, just inside the door where he saw you. You can do things with cards, Mr. Chance. You can make them appear, you can make them disappear, you can even make them dance." Then suddenly he leaned forward, his dead eyes boring into me. "And you can change them. Say a few words, and you can beat any hand. Those kinds of talents can make you a very rich man around here Mr. Chance. I'm surprised you aren't rich already, actually."

I almost laughed out of relief. Here I'd been, worried that maybe Jack was going to blackmail me or ask for a serious favor. And all along he'd just wanted me to cheat at a couple of card games. It just goes to show, the man had no appreciation for talent.

The Psi-Stalker did laugh suddenly, and I resisted the urge to run for the door. Oh, I've worked with those pasty-faced psychopaths before and I know they're not all bad. But don't try and tell me they're not the greatest threat a mage can ever face. I've still got dozens of scars on my arms and legs from when a tribe held me prisoner and used me as food source for nearly a month. This one was taller than most of the people in the room, and had been staring at me with a hungry look ever since I came in. "It gets better, Black Eye," the Stalker said in a harsh tone. "I'm not sensing anything from him right now. He's a complete null."

Jack's head snapped around to stare at him, then slowly he returned to me. "You can hide it?" he asked, a trace of awe in his voice. "No wonder the Sectors haven't been able to find you."

Despite everything, I felt a slight hint of relief. Jack had been building up some momentum, and I knew from experience that in negotiations like this whoever said the most words usually won out. Now I had a chance to get some of my own back. "Yes," I said. "In addition to my magical talents I'm also classified as a minor psychic. I can change my aura and hide my talent. Which is more than I can say for some of your guests."

"You mean the mage and the mutant cat?"

"She's a mutant?" I asked, somewhat surprised. In all my travels I'd never seen such a complete random mutation.

"She belongs to one of our people out in Michigan. He's visiting and he wanted to bring his pet along."

I pressed on. "Well, she's not the point. That mage is a homing beacon for any Dog Packs or Spector patrols that might be passing by. Just ask Mr... Wolf is it? He'll tell you, some of his people can pick up a mage a quarter of a mile away or more."

Jack clenched his jaw, and I knew that I'd made him angry. "Do I look stupid to you, Mr. Chance?" he snarled. "Do you think I'm some kind of idiot? That I don't know ISS patrol patterns inside and out? Let me tell you something, I own half the Sectors on Level 5, and I've got enough muscle to make the other half do what I want without them even knowing it. The only Dog Pack in the area that might possibly pick up my 'guest' is Sgt. Wolf's. And as you can see, he doesn't care."

Wolf's grin widened. "So long as he's gone by tomorrow, and the credits are transferred to my account, like we agreed," he said and Jack nodded absentmindedly in his direction.

I had him on the defensive now. "I don't doubt you have a lot of power with the local law," I said, adding just a hint of contempt to my words. "But I've yet to hear of even a single corrupt Net Set officer. And last I heard they've got a separate chain of command. How do you expect to control them?"

Jack brightened a bit at this, and Wolf snickered. "Maybe you haven't heard, but the NTSET still has to coordinate their activities with the *local law*. Trust me Mr. Chance, none of them will be within a mile of this place."

There. I saw an opening and dove for it. "Well that's the problem, you see. I have to trust you." He started to rise up from the couch at this but I was quick to placate him. "Understand that I mean no disrespect, I have the deepest admiration for you and your associates. But before I sit down at a table, I like to know what game it is I'm playing. Especially when my life is on the line. And don't try to say that it isn't! I'm sorry Mr.

Kavanagh, but there is too much here that I don't know for certain. I have to decline your generous offer."

Don't get me wrong now, I've never had any qualms about working with the criminal fringe. But everything there is about power, and from where I was coming from, I had none. Under such circumstances, there is no such thing as a part time job. Once you're in, you're in until you've fulfilled your obligation. And that could be years.

For a moment Jack just sat there, his jaw working, his black eyes unreadable. Then suddenly one of his people came forward, leaned in close, and whispered something into Jack's ear. Half the man's face was cybernetic and as he whispered I saw Jack's eyelids flutter ever so slightly in surprise. Something was up, I realized. The cyborg knew something and Jack was worried. Did he have a built-in radio? Had he just received some bad news? Suddenly I felt the hairs on the back of my neck stand on end. Around me the walls seemed to close in just a little bit and I realized that I wanted nothing more than to get away. Now. The 'borg finished speaking and Jack dismissed him with a wave of his hand, then turned back to me, smiling broadly as his black eyes bored into me.

"I'm sorry to hear you say that," he said in a patronizing tone of voice. "I really am. We could've done well together. But I hope the failure of these negotiations won't keep you from staying a little while longer and entertaining my guests a little. I have some business to take care of right now, but I might come out later and take in your act myself, I hear it's good. If not, then good luck in the future and maybe we can do business some other time."

He again offered his hand, which I eagerly shook, before hurrying out of the room. I wasn't sure what exactly had happened back there, but I was off the hook and Black Eye Jack wasn't going to have me beaten up. I was so relieved that I didn't mind when Samantha returned and attached herself to my arm, demanding that I do the bronze coin trick again. I had settled down with her in an out of the way booth to show her, when my attention was drawn to the far end of the club, near the front door. The doorman was arguing with someone trying to get in, and all around him people were either edging closer to see what was happening, or moving away.

From so far away it was impossible to hear what was being said, but judging from body language the doorman was obviously furious, and the people around him anxious. Suddenly I realized that the majority of the people moving away from the door were Marketeers, and that they were afraid. The music had stopped and the conversation died a moment later, and now I could clearly hear the doorman's voice.

"No!" he was yelling. "This is a private party! You can't come in here!" There was a pause as the person outside said something. "No, I don't care what you want!" the doorman retorted. The person outside spoke again. "Hey, you want trouble?" the doorman waved a threatening finger. "You gonna get it. Now get out!" Again there was a pause, but this time I could almost make out the low, guttural voice that was speaking. The doorman exploded. "Alright," he yelled. "That's it! What's the name of your superior officer?"

At the words *superior officer* I was on my feet. By that point I couldn't see the door for all the people, so I stood on my chair. Samantha was next to me, her eyes wide with fear. I was feeling

nothing, however. Just the numbing calm that came with knowing that what was about to happen was inevitable, and that I could only watch and hope that fate would present me with a chance to escape.

There was a shout from outside, and suddenly the doorman was driven back by a mass of men forcing their way in. I saw a short, squat figure grip the doorman about the waist, lift him up off the ground, and bring him crashing down onto the reservations desk. I saw a flash of brown fur and knew that the attacker was a mutant dog. Then with a loud crack the desk gave way and the two tumbled to the ground, out of sight in a pile of fragmented particle board.

It didn't matter, though. The Dog Boy's friends were already through the door, spreading out into a rough skirmish line with military precision. The crowd was in full flight now; those without the sense to flee were driven back by attackers who swung rifle stocks and neural maces without care for whom they hit. There were maybe a dozen of them wearing black Coalition body armor. Half of them mutant dogs, and among the humans I saw one or two that had the spiked helmet of a Psi-Stalker. All had pistols, and many had rifles as well. In center was a officer, screaming at the civilians to get down on the floor, that no one would be hurt if they did not resist. But my eyes were drawn to the soldiers' armor instead; I felt my knees turn to rubber at what I saw. There, in the center of each man's breastplate, in bright white letters was the acronym "NTSET."

NTSET. Nonhuman Tactical Strike and Eradication Team. "Net Set" in popular slang. "Nut Set" to those who really knew them. For madness was certainly a prerequisite for the job. They were the Emperor's maniacs, his demon hunting elites. If you know anything about the Coalition, then you've probably heard rumors about them. I'm here to tell you that they're all true, and there's probably a lot more that you don't know about. Out of the entire armed forces they had the third highest mortality rate, next to the infantry and special forces, and yet people still fought to be recruited into that elite corps. They were men, women and mutants who would give their lives to defend the fortress cities against people like myself and Samantha. And the mage. *Oh no, the mage!*

I looked over to where the magic user had been standing. The playful spheres of ball lightning were gone, and I could see the mage's face had gone pale. They were here for him. Any idiot would know that. What's more, Net Set wouldn't have kicked in the front door without first covering the back. Which meant that unless the mage had a Teleportation spell handy, he was a dead man. With a quick, efficient move he flipped over a nearby table and hunched down behind it, his mouth moving and his hands gesturing as he worked his spell. The Net Set team, who, up until then had been conducting a standard crowd sweep, suddenly began converging on the mage's position. The Psi-Stalkers and Dog Boys could smell the magic, and with their quarry sighted the civilians around them no longer mattered. Rifles were coming up, and the officer was signaling his men with hand gestures I didn't understand. I realized suddenly that if it came to a fight I'd be right in the middle of it, and with Samantha at my side I was a sure target. With a quick shove I forced her down under the table, then looked back to where the mage crouched. I thought, *Please let that be a Teleportation spell he's casting!*

The mage had finished his spell, and I saw his body was calm and relaxed. Magical energy crackled about him, and a cold smile spread across his face. A Dog Boy was almost on top of him then, a C-12 laser rifle leveled at the table. "Come out of there with your hands up!" the mutant dog growled.

The mage turned his head slightly and his gaze met mine. For a second that arrogant smirk was back and he winked at me with an almost mischievous air. Then suddenly his face went hard and in one fluid movement he'd risen to his feet and spun around to face the Dog Boy.

All Coalition mutants are bred to be psychics, and many have a Sixth Sense that warns them of attack. From the way he moved, this one was no exception, but as fast as he was, the mage was faster, and an instant before the Dog Boy could fire, the mage unleashed his spell. There was a brilliant flash of blue light and the Dog Boy, weapons, armor, and equipment were gone. Flash-fried into a cloud of ash and vapor so fast he didn't even have time to scream.

What followed was one of those moments when a second stretches into an hour and one seems to have all the time in the world to take in the details about him. The Lofties and the few remaining Marketeers dove for cover, the Net Set soldiers contorted into poses of shock and anger; the mage, crackling with energy, was laughing. Then the officer screamed "Fire at will! Take him down! Take him down!" and I gave up my perch on top of my chair to join Samantha in the relative safety under the table.

The air was suddenly alive with noise and heat as the Net Set soldiers opened up on the mage. Lasers hissed through the air, crackling sharply as they struck the walls and furniture. But worse were the screams. How many people had been caught in the line of fire when the two sides opened up is anybody's guess, and at the risk of being morbid, I'll say that with what was left over, it would have been hard to tell. Those energy weapons were meant for use on the battlefield, against armored soldiers and demons from the Rifts. When used in a room filled with defenseless humans, the results are ghastly. And while Net Set was trying to minimize casualties, picking their shots carefully and firing through the gaps in the crowd, the mage was under no such restrictions.

From my hiding place under the table I saw him unleash a barrage of Ball Lightning spheres which cut a swath through a group of fleeing party-goers and struck the soldier standing closest to us square in the chest. His armor was heavier than the Dog Boy's, for instead of being killed he was knocked back more than a dozen feet, where he lay, alive but apparently unconscious, his armor smouldering. It was the opening I'd been praying for. In a flash I was out from underneath the table, crawling frantically towards the soldier. It wasn't until I was halfway there that I realized I still had Samantha with me. I don't know why I let her follow me. I mean, she was a nice girl and all and if given the choice I would have certainly rescued her, but the fact was that at the time she was a liability of the worst kind. An ordinary human crawling by would have attracted little attention. Samantha on the other hand was a veritable laser magnet. I put it down to temporary insanity on my part.

Reaching the soldier, I rolled him over slightly and felt around his belt for his Vibro-Knife. There was no sign of it there so I checked his boot. By then two more Net Set men were

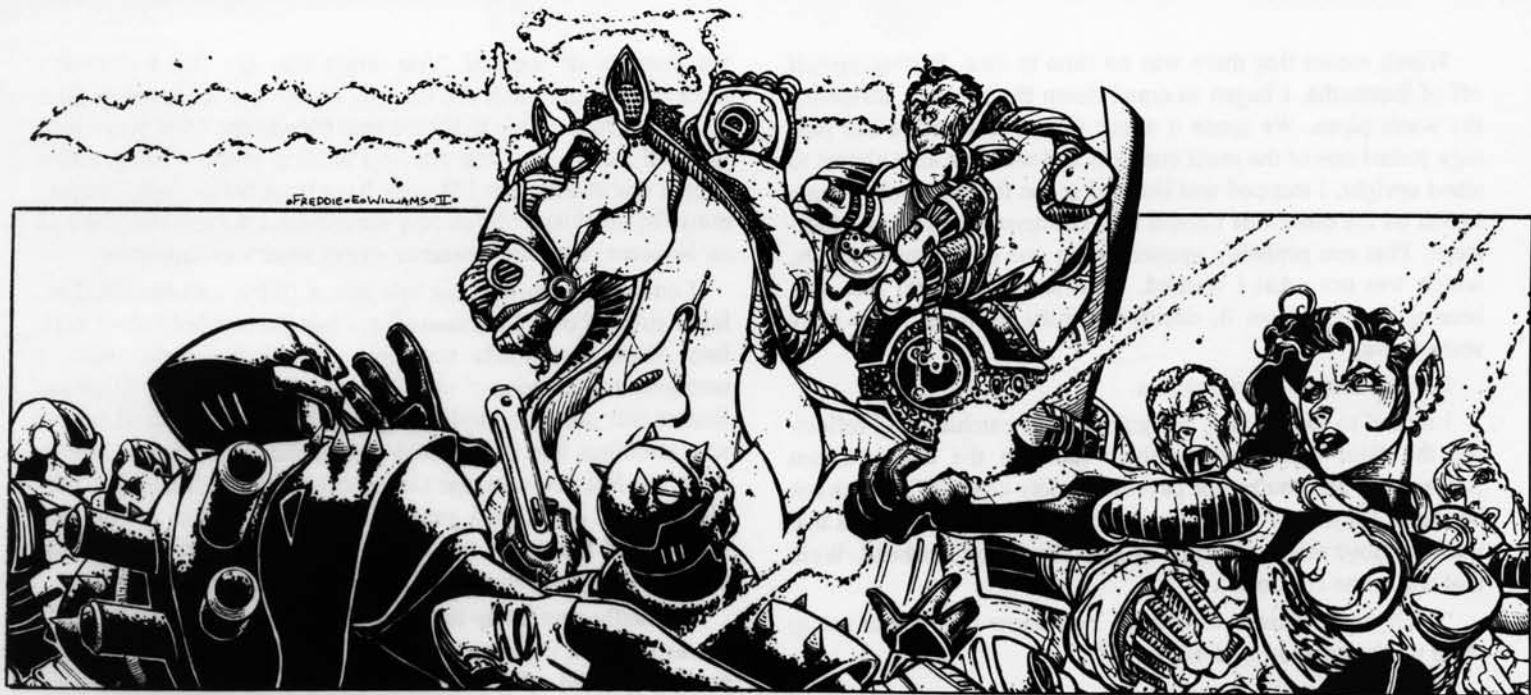
down, and a good part of the Bazaar was on fire. The mage was still on his feet, however, and was driving the Net Set team back towards the entrance, while the officer screamed frantically into his radio for backup. I wasn't fooled for a moment. It may have looked as though the mage was wiping the floor with them, but there was probably a full platoon outside waiting in reserve. At best I had a minute or two, but if all went well then that would be all I'd need. Keeping this in mind, I drew the soldier's Vibro-Knife out of his boot and made for the bathrooms.

Here's a trivia question for you: When a pipe bursts in a Coalition fortress city's sewage system, how do they dig up the street to get at it? The answer is, they don't. The crawl spaces in-between levels are left open so as to make maintenance easy. Underneath the floor is a veritable labyrinth of passages that are almost as extensive as the city itself. I knew that the crawl spaces would have been cut off at their major junction points long before the NTSET made their move. But all I needed was to get out into the street. Once outside I would be all right.

The washrooms were at the end of a small corridor, not too far from Jack's suite. By this point I was running flat out, dragging Samantha along with me. I ignored the men's room and threw myself through the door to the ladies' room, on the idea that the women would be less likely to get in my way. I was right. The appearance of a disheveled man brandishing a Vibro-Knife and with a mutant cat in tow sent the occupants scrambling to the far end of the room in a shrieking mass. Quickly I took in the layout of the room, and found the access port discreetly hidden under the sinks. It was locked, as was the law. The Vibro-Knife came to life with an evil hum and with one quick swipe the lock went sailing off in two different directions. I then gripped the cover by its handles and pulled. The thing didn't budge.

I pulled again, this time bracing my feet against the floor on either side. Still nothing. The cover seemed to be jammed into place. I tried again, straining my puny muscles for all they were worth. For what must have been the hundredth time in my life I cursed myself for not having spent more time working out. Still nothing. Outside I could hear the sound of weapons fire intensifying. Reinforcements had arrived. But just as I was starting to look around for another way out, Samantha was suddenly beside me. With quick, efficient movements she shoved me aside, took hold of the cover and yanked it out of the hole with one fierce tug. The hatch came away with a shower of rust, and in an instant Samantha tossed it aside and disappeared down the hole. I stood over the access port for a moment, staring in shock. Then from somewhere outside the bathroom a voice shouted, "*Fire in the hole!*"

"Get down!" I screamed, half to the ladies in the bathroom, half to myself, as I threw myself head first through the port. I landed on top of Samantha and we collapsed into a confused tangle of limbs onto the crawlspace floor. She was swearing at me (some really shocking language) when the Bazaar was rocked by a tremendous explosion. Above us I heard the bathroom door blown off its hinges by the concussion, and then we too were ground into the floor as the blast wave passed over us. The air was filled with the reek of plasma, and I guessed that one of the Net Set soldiers had decided to toss a fusion block into the fray. From above our heads came a horrible symphony of moans and cries from the wounded. But there was no more shooting, and from that I deduced that the worst was over, and the mage was dead.



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Which meant that there was no time to lose. Pulling myself off of Samantha, I began to crawl down the passage, following the water pipes. We made it about fifteen feet before our passage joined one of the main conduits and we were able almost to stand upright. I stopped and listened at the first manhole I came to, but on the other side I could hear confused shouting and footsteps. That one probably opened up on one of the main streets, which was not what I wanted. I hurried to the next one and, hearing nothing from it, decided it must open up in an alley somewhere.

Perfect. Except for Samantha.

I turned to look at her, her golden eyes catching and reflecting the faint light, making them glow in the dark. "Listen Samantha... uh, you're not psychic by any chance?" She shook her head. "A mage? Do you have any supernatural qualities that the Dog Boys might pick up?" Again she shook her head. Well, that was some comfort.

"Well, look. This is how it is. You know that if you go up there you're as good as dead, right?"

"Yeah," she said uncertainly.

"So your best bet for survival would be to lie low here until the heat dies down, you understand? That could be as much as a day or two, depending on how much of a mess they made up there."

"Two days!" she cried.

"It... uh... gets worse I'm afraid. If I stay here with you, we'll get caught for sure." Her eyes narrowed in suspicion, and I almost told her everything right then. About how in a few more hours my false aura would vanish and I would be revealed to any Psi-Stalker or Dog Boy within a quarter mile radius, and even if I renewed it there was a decent chance that at this close range they'd pick it up and find us. But I couldn't risk it. If she was caught she might tell, and then they would be after me. So I promised her I'd return if I could, and if that wasn't possible then she should try to get into contact with Jack's people. I reassured her that if anyone could smuggle her back out of Chi-town, it was them. Then, without a backwards glance, I started climbing up to the manhole.

In the movies, when the hero is forced to abandon the heroine (something he *never* does willingly), it is usually at the insistence of the heroine herself, and usually only after a long, passionate speech of how he'd rather die with her than go on living alone, etc. Violins play in the background and the two try to maintain eye contact for as long as possible. I'm far more practical.

For one thing, after I'd said my piece I made sure I didn't look her in the eye. This wasn't out of callousness, but because I didn't want to see that look of fear and betrayal that I knew would be there. You see, I didn't have any illusions about what I was doing. Odds were, she was as good as dead and even she must have known that. By leaving I gave her at least a shot at survival, but even if she'd been a special forces professional, I wouldn't have given her more than one chance in ten. And when I finally heard about her death at the hands of a Net Set mop-up crew, I didn't want her face coming back to haunt me at night. There were enough of those as it was.

You might say I was cruel to leave her, and that I deserved to have her face haunting my dreams. I'd argue that it would have been cruel not to leave her, and no-one should have to live with

the memory of betrayal. You might also say that I shouldn't have cared at all. After all, I'd only known her for about an hour or so, too short a time to form a real friendship. What was she to me? All I can say is that she was another sentient being, and a decent one at that. Her I.Q. may have been below room temperature (in Celsius), but that only emphasized the fact that she was an innocent, and didn't deserve any of what was happening.

I emerged from the manhole into a filthy, garbage filled alley. I stopped only long enough to slide the manhole cover back into place, then made my way towards the main street. I emerged into a scene of utter chaos. The front of the Midnight Bazaar was almost completely gone; the glass doors and expensive moldings had been blown out by the fusion block. Out in front, the Net Set team was slowly extracting itself from the rubble. A large crowd had gathered to watch. I tried to work my way around the crowd but found that the entire street had been blocked off by a steel fence barricade manned by Spectors.

I casually strolled up to one of them and asked what was going on, as though I'd just arrived on the scene. He told me that the area was sealed off for the next few hours due to the discovery and neutralization of a terrorist mage, and that I should please remain calm and return to my home or place of business. Thank you, move along. I slipped back into the crowd and worked my way up to where the Net Set team was. One of the first things I noticed were four body bags. Judging from their bulky shape, these were the Net Set soldiers that had been killed. Or at least, the ones whose remains could be found. A bit further down the sidewalk was one more bag, over which a Psi-Stalker stood, weapon at the ready. The mage, I guessed. After the price they'd paid, no one was taking a chance on him suddenly re-animating and killing some more (don't laugh, I've seen it happen).



There was a murmur from the crowd around me, the denizens of Level 5 at once both fascinated and horrified by what had happened. There was a strong feeling in the air, not unlike what I felt three years later at Newtown just before the Devon Incident. The people were restless, filled with energy. Energy that could be redirected any number of ways.

I think I can understand the reasons for what happened next. Net Set didn't usually handle such things as crowd control, so the officers probably had no idea how tense things were. On top of that, at least four of their men had just died, and I was later to learn that several of the people in the Bazaar, other than myself, had managed to escape despite the cordon. That sort of thing would hurt anyone's morale.

Beyond the barricade, trucks were pulling up, and Sectors dressed in full riot gear were piling out. As I watched, they formed themselves into a huge clearance line, with their shields interlocked and neural maces at the ready. Swearing to myself, I retreated back into the crowd. Climbing halfway up a lamp post, I looked over the heads of the people and saw that the far end of the street was blocked in a similar fashion. Just then the announcement came.

"ATTENTION CITIZENS! THE TERRORIST MAGIC USER WHICH WE HAVE JUST ELIMINATED HAS ALLIES SOMEWHERE IN THIS AREA! FOR SAFETY REASONS, YOU ARE ALL GOING TO BE DETAINED UNTIL THEY CAN BE LOCATED! PLEASE COOPERATE WITH THE ISS PERSONNEL PRESENT AND DO NOT RESIST! THIS WILL

ALL BE OVER SOON!" The message then started over in a continuous loop, and the clearance line lurched forward to advance on the crowd. I couldn't believe what I was seeing. Around me the murmur had turned into a low roar that was rapidly gaining in volume.

Even on Level 5, the average Coalition citizen is still a devout human supremacist. Many waited for years to get inside the cities, and remembered the outside world and all its alien inhabitants with horror. For the police (already an unpopular bunch) to suggest that they might be harboring the allies of a mage was too much. As the steel barricade was dragged aside for the line to advance, the crowd howled its outrage. From somewhere nearby, a whisky bottle sailed through the air to break on the armored mass, and I knew in a moment I would be at the center of a full scale riot.

Deciding against such an unhealthy option, I pushed my way to the front of the crowd which was already giving way before the Sectors. If I surrendered immediately, before the real violence broke out, I might just be able to avoid arrest. All of a sudden I was clear of the people and found myself just less than four feet away from the row of interlocked shields. The Sector closest to me brandished his neural mace and I threw up my hands in supplication, trying to show that I wanted to surrender. I don't quite remember whether I wasn't convincing enough or whether the Sector just didn't care. The only thing I do remember was the gut wrenching jolt as the neural mace touched me, then blackness.



SPECIALIZED SHIFTERS™



Optional Material for Rifts®

By Alex Miller

It is commonly assumed that all Shifters are alike, alternately summoning hideous creatures forth from dimensional Rifts and stepping through them to visit alien dimensions, however this is not entirely true. In fact, many Shifters are only interested in one of these activities, and pursue it to the exclusion of the other. Some begin their career in magic this way, while others drift to one or the other over time. A standard Shifter can change his focus to one of the following O.C.C.s by sacrificing two effective levels of experience (must therefore be level 3 and above), with a corresponding drop in P.P.E., Hit Points and other bonuses gained with those levels, but retains his current spell selection and must meet all attribute requirements. In addition, he starts at the beginning of the new level and all special O.C.C. abilities are at half strength (range, duration, bonuses) until the next level of experience is gained. This temporary loss reflects the effort required by the Shifter to refocus his magical energies.

Traveller O.C.C.

The sound of the Dabuggs moving through the undergrowth was growing louder. Carmen beckoned her companions to come closer so she could draw upon their stores of magical energy. Reaching out to the two Mantaz Sectles, the Ley Line Walker and the Cyber-Knight, she added their energy to that of her Dragonsaurus mount and the energy that permeated the surrounding vegetation. Holding aloft her Millenium Staff, she concentrated on a spot ten feet in front of her. After a moment of channeling the magic, a point of white light suddenly appeared, hovering in mid air. Just as suddenly, the spot stretched upward and downward simultaneously, drawing a line of light, subsequently widening to form an opaque rectangular portal.

Carmen nodded at Sir Rahem, and the Cyber-Knight promptly powered up his Psi-Sword before jumping through the Rift. Hustling the other three through the portal, Carmen heard a loud chittering behind her. A glancing blow knocked her sprawling and Rufus, her mount, growled as he leaped over her prostrate form at her attacker. Shaking her head to clear it, Carmen grabbed her staff, clambered unsteadily to her feet and looked toward the spot where she had been standing. A giant

Dabugg, metamorphed into its praying mantis form, was clutching Rufus tight to its chest, its vicious mandibles gouging grooves of bloody flesh in her mount's neck. Rufus kicked feebly as his lifeblood streamed down the rags that had been the Dabugg's clothes in the village. The compound eyes which had given its true nature away then, looked at her mockingly. Carmen weighed up the odds in mere moments, and thinking of the half-dozen other Dabuggs from the village who were perhaps only a couple of minutes away, she came to a decision. Swallowing her anger and sorrow at Rufus' brutal death, she turned and dove through the fading portal.

Much like the Atlantean Nomad, the Traveller is akin to a dimensional Wilderness Scout, seeking adventure across hundreds of worlds. Often a keen dabbler in anthropological matters, the Traveller loves encountering new cultures, sometimes filling the role of merchant, generating trade between places and peoples that would otherwise never have come in contact with each other. Many such Travellers go to sell their wares in places like Atlantis and Center, or work for merchants that do. Some Travellers hire themselves out as interdimensional bounty hunters, recruiting muscle to assist in the capture of criminals or simply those with a bounty on their head, be they the enemy of a kingdom of humans or a den of demons. Most pay their henchmen well, usually hiring those without the ability to dimensionally travel on their own, allowing the mage to strand them if they turn on him. This is an extremely effective deterrent, as most beings throughout the Megaverse feel most at home in their own dimension, among their own people, and to be so far away from them, unable to reach them no matter how fast they travel, yet in a sense only a heartbeat away from them in a neighboring dimension, creates an overwhelming sense of fear and disorientation.

Special O.C.C. Abilities:

1. Initial Spell Knowledge and Learning New Spells: The Traveller starts with the following spells: Sustain (see **Federation of Magic**), Time Slip, Tongues, Portal Divination, Compass, and Dimensional Beacon. In addition, the Traveller may select one spell from each spell level 1-4.

At each new level of experience, the character will be able to figure out/select one new spell equal to or less than the new level, and may learn or purchase additional spells and rituals of any magic level at any time, regardless of the Traveller's level of experience. This includes the following Temporal magic spells: D-Phase, D-Shift Phantom, D-Shift Two Dimensions, Dimensional Envelope, Dimensional Pockets, Fourth Dimensional Transformation, Id Self, Remote Viewing, See Dimensional Anomaly and Sense Dimensional Anomaly. Note that learning or purchasing Temporal spells is extremely difficult for non-Temporal classes, so figuring them out by oneself is the best strategy.

2. Mini-Rift: The Traveller can, for a base cost of 120 P.P.E., create a **one-way** dimensional portal permitting only himself and his familiar to pass through. For every other person he allows to pass through this portal, it costs an additional 30



P.P.E. The portal will remain open for at most one minute (four melee rounds), and the P.P.E. cost must be paid up front. In general, five people per melee can pass through the portal by the time it closes, so long as all they do is line up to pass through, rather than waste time hanging around, but this is very expensive (20 people = $120 + (19 \times 30) = 690$ P.P.E.).

The Traveller cannot designate specific people to go through, so an enterprising stowaway can jump through the portal and thus deny another person passage. Note that this cannot be done to the Traveller, but restraining the Traveller is a viable alternative. Finally, this ability need not target only the Traveller's home dimension. Instead, it can target their home dimension, a random dimension, or a dimension visited by the Shifter at some time in the past.

When targeting a random dimension, the portal is completely random within the resulting dimension, *except* that it is drawn to high P.P.E. places like planets, which are rich in P.P.E. because of their resident life forms. So it is exceedingly rare that a random portal will appear in the depths of space or on a completely lifeless planet. However, this does not mean that it is guaranteed to be safe, as places like Primorder (see **The Rifter #3**) support life yet are inhospitable to a vast majority of life forms.

Targeting one's home dimension will target any desired planet within it that the Traveller has already visited previously, however, it will be at a random location upon that planet, although it will be a location that is relatively ideal for his species, i.e. a human Traveller targeting Rifts Earth will not end up in the ocean, but on a landmass, and usually not in the middle of a desert either. Mid- to high-level Travellers (levels 5-9), can target a country or continent, while the highest level Travellers (level 10 and above) can arrive within 50 miles (80 km) of their desired destination.

Finally, targeting a world previously visited in another dimension will mean the characters will arrive at a reasonably hospitable but random location on the desired planet. For greater accuracy and for two-way travel, the spell Dimensional Portal is recommended.

3. Sense Rifts: Similar to the Ley Line Walker's ability, the Traveller can feel the ripples and surge of energy whenever a Rift is within a 50 mile area (80 km) + 20 miles (32 km) per level, or when a new Rift occurs. He will also instantly know the exact direction the Rift is located, the approximate distance to the Rift and whether the Rift is big or small.

4. Familiar Link: As per the Shifter ability, except that the Traveller prefers to bond familiars that can double as riding animals, from a Dragonsaurus to a horse. The spell Tame the Beast (**Federation of Magic**) is sometimes used rather than linking a familiar, because of the danger to the Traveller should the familiar be hurt or perish. Note that if a familiar dies of old age, the link is severed, but only the extra six Hit Points are lost and there is no chance of becoming comatose.

5. Ley Line Phasing: As per the Ley Line Walker ability.

6. P.P.E.: As per the Shifter: **Permanent Base P.P.E.:** $1D6 \times 10 + 10$ plus P.E. attribute number. Add $3D6$ P.P.E. per additional level of experience. Of course, the Traveller can draw P.P.E. from ley lines, nexus points, and other people.

7. Bonuses: As a seasoned explorer, used to seeing unusual sights and meeting strange beings from other worlds, the Traveller receives the following bonuses:

+2 to save vs Horror Factor, +1 at levels 2, 5, 8 and 12. +1 to the M.A. attribute at levels 6 and 12. +1 to save vs magic at levels 3, 7, 10 and 13. +1 to Spell Strength at levels 4, 7, 10 and 13.

Alignment Restrictions: Can be of any alignment, but bounty hunting with no consideration for true justice, or selling items like drugs or weapons to the wrong people is likely to cause a drop in alignment toward evil, unless evil to begin with.

Attribute Requirements: I.Q. 12, P.E. 9, or higher. A high M.A. and M.E. are desirable but not required.

O.C.C. Skills:

Language: Native tongue at 98%.
Two Languages of Choice (+25%).
Literacy: Native tongue at 90%.
Astronomy (+25%)
Mathematics Basic (+15%)
Lore: Demon & Monster (+20%)
Lore: D-Bee (+20%)
Lore: Magic (+10%)
Land Navigation (+15%)
Navigation (+12%)
Wilderness Survival (+10%)

Hand to Hand combat must be selected as an O.C.C. Related Skill. Hand to Hand: Basic costs one skill selection, Expert counts as two, and Martial Arts or Assassin (if evil) counts as three skill selections.

O.C.C. Related Skills: Select four other skills. Plus select two additional skills at levels 3 and 6, and one additional skill at levels 9 and 12. All new skills start at level one proficiency.

Communication: Radio: Basic, Surveillance Systems and TV/Video.

Cowboy: None.

Domestic: Any (+5%).

Electrical: Basic only.

Espionage: Intelligence or Tracking only.

Mechanical: Basic only.

Medical: Holistic Medicine or Paramedic only (+5%).

Military: None.

Physical: Any except Boxing, Wrestling and Gymnastics.

Pilot: Any (+5%), except Robots, Power Armor and military vehicles.

Pilot Related: Any.

Rogue: Any (+2%).

Science: Any (+5%; +10% to Anthropology).

Technical: Any (+5%).

W.P.: Any.

Wilderness: Any (+5%).

Secondary Skills: The character also gets to select five secondary skills from those listed, excluding those marked "None." These are additional areas of knowledge that do not get the advantage of the bonus listed in parentheses (). All secondary skills start at the base skill level.

Standard Equipment: Like many mages, the character usually has an orientation toward either nature or technology as a result of the society in which they were brought up, although some embrace both equally. A typical starting set of equipment for Shifters originating on Rifts Earth is as follows:

Set of clothing, set of traveling clothes, light M.D.C. body armor (seldom wear heavy armor, because it reduces one's speed and mobility by half, and can interfere with magic), knapsack, back pack, 1D4 small sacks, one large sack, pocket

mirror, silver cross, 2D4 cloves of garlic, six wooden stakes and mallet (for vampires and other practical applications), salt, canteen, binoculars, tinted goggles or sunglasses, air filter and gas mask, pocket laser distancer, pocket digital disc recorder/player for recording observations, and a hand-held computer if proficient with computer operation. Often wears hooded robes and dark clothing.

A good guide to essential equipment for any character on Rifts Earth and most travellers in the Megaverse is found in the contents of the NG-S2 Survival Pack, listed in brief as follows:

A two-person tent, a sleeping bag, a flashlight and six batteries, a pocket knife, a compass (+10% to Land Navigation), a short-range radio, a mini first aid kit, a hunting and fishing kit, saw wires, a fire starter, four signal flares, thirty feet (9.1 m) of climbing cord, soap and washcloth, a canteen and food rations.

Weapons will include an energy pistol and several extra clips of ammunition. A hollow iron rod sharpened at one end with a comfortable handle at the other, measuring about two feet (0.6 m) for easy carrying, used to dispel certain magic illusions and skewer monsters vulnerable to cold iron. Finally, a silver-plated Vibro-Blade is a favorite weapon, for when the energy field is turned off, the blade can be used against creatures vulnerable to silver.

The vehicle of choice is often a motorcycle, hover vehicle or horse. The vehicle is often inexpensive and easily replaced in case it is destroyed by a creature from a Rift or left behind when exploring a Rift. Exotic mounts found in other dimensions, especially flying ones, are prized highly.

As Travellers grow in experience, they like to acquire Techno-Wizardry devices and other magic items, especially devices that manipulate space and time or facilitate travel.

Money: The Traveller starts with 1D6x1000 in credits and 2D6x1000 in black market items.

Cybernetics/Symbiotes: Starts with neither type of enhancement and will avoid getting any major augmentation like bionics, which interferes with magic. Nevertheless, a fair proportion of these mages opt for enhancement not exceeding three minor cybernetic implants, specifically sensory enhancements for environments encountered in alien worlds they are not adapted to. Mechanical optics are sometimes taken, but Bio-System eyes are greatly preferred for the lack of maintenance they require, as well as the reduced dehumanization.

As an alternative, Symbiotes are eagerly sought, particularly those from Wormwood or stolen from the Splugorth. Nevertheless, cautious research is usually applied to a Symbiote before its attachment, especially if the Symbiote is an unknown one or stolen/purchased from the Splugorth, who are notoriously deadly pranksters.

Seneschal O.C.C.

Dalfen examined the restraints on the unconscious Lanotaur. He noted that they were still in good condition, and returned to the study of his victim. It was a fine prize, and the continued drains had strengthened Dalfen to new heights. A scuttling noise behind him made him turn in a hurry. It was just his familiar, Fennel. The Psi-Goblin had a worried expression on his face as he tugged on Dalfen's sleeve.



"Master Dalfen," he squeaked urgently. "The Silver Dragon mercenaries have entered the castle grounds!"

Frowning, Dalfen asked "Did you activate the sentinels, Fennel?"

Nodding eagerly, Fennel replied. "Yes Master, I did as you bid me."

"Good. Return upstairs and keep an eye on our intruders. But don't let yourself be seen." Dalfen commanded. "I'll be up shortly."

Fennel nodded and scampered back up the stairs cackling to himself. Checking the restraints once more, Dalfen turned toward the stairwell. Tensing his body, half expecting the Lanotaur to make another attempt to strike him down, he walked to the bottom of the stairs. Letting out the breath he'd been holding, Dalfen smiled ruefully to himself. Since the tenth successful casting of the spell, the Lanotaur had lost its appetite for combat, along with a large portion of its vitality. In contrast, Dalfen had never felt as good as at that moment. He raised his arm and admired the sharp, black talons capping his scaly fingers. The recent physical changes were a little disturbing, but he would adjust. Gripping the stair hand-rail, he tightened his grip, crumpling the iron like it was solder. Grinning to himself, Dalfen hastened up the stairs, excited by the prospect of conflict to come.

This mage is often responsible for the reputation of irrationality and evil ascribed to Shifters. While some focus solely on the slaying of demons and act as protectors of their communities, the majority seek power through the recruitment or enslavement of supernatural beings. The latter tend to develop a species of megalomania, but in most cases, this is tempered by a calculating mind that rationally assesses the Seneschal's weaknesses, preventing destructive overconfidence. Such mages are among the most dangerous of all, sitting at the center of a web of informants and minions, only closing their nets upon their enemies when everything is in place, but also flexible enough to revise their plans to accommodate new variables. Naturally, they are highly sought after by supernatural intelligences, so much so that they are never treated as pawns like Witches are, instead, as a king would treat the general of his armies. Of course, the intelligence may have a great deal of contempt for the Shifter, but this will only be communicated if the Seneschal betrays the intelligence. Otherwise, the bargain between the two is a matter of give and take — the Seneschal receives the benefits of the link and a number of minions, who typically report the Seneschal's activities to the intelligence directly, but will otherwise obey his every command, furthering the plans of both masters.

Special O.C.C. Abilities:

1. Initial Spell Knowledge and Learning New Spells: Protection Circle: Simple, Agony, Summon and Control Lesser Being, Control/Enslave Entity and Communication Rift. In addition, the Seneschal may select one spell from each spell level 1-4.

At each new level of experience, the character will be able to figure out/select one new spell equal to or less than the new level, and may learn or purchase additional spells and rituals of any magic level at any time regardless of the Seneschal's level of experience.

2. Dimensional Rift Home. The Seneschal is so attuned to the dimensional nuances that he can always find his way home from another dimension. Better yet, he can always dimensionally teleport home at the cost of a paltry 200 P.P.E.; unfortunately, his ability to dimensionally teleport back home only applies to himself and his familiar, and not anybody else (a full Rift or Dimensional Portal is necessary to take others with him). The ability to Rift home means that the Seneschal is often tempted to explore new worlds by stepping through a random Rift.

3. Sense Rifts. Similar to the Ley Line Walker's ability, the Seneschal can feel the ripples and surge of energy whenever a Rift is within 30 miles (48 km) or when a new Rift occurs. He will also instantly know in what general direction the Rift is located and whether the Rift is big or small. **Note:** This sensing ability specifically relates to dimensional portals/Rifts and not ley lines and nexus points.

4. Familiar Link: As per the Shifter ability, with the following change:

At level 10 or above, the Seneschal can bond with a supernatural being, but it cannot have a maximum racial intelligence of more than 14 (e.g. an I.Q. of 2D6+2, 3D4+2 or 1D6+8, etc.), or more than 150 M.D.C. as an individual. Other requirements are that the creature and the Shifter must have the same general alignment, i.e. good, selfish or evil, and finally, the creature must be willing to bond with the caster. This means that a contract must be drawn up, whether verbally or in writing. Once both parties agree to the terms, the bond is formed by mixing the blood of the Shifter and familiar together, usually by cutting an extremity of each and pressing them together. The bond is permanent and it can only be severed by the agreement of both, the death of one, or by deliberately breaking one of the conditions in the contract. The first can be done with no penalty to either party, the second harms the survivor as defined by the Familiar Link spell, and the third harms the one failing to live up to the contract, in the same way. Note that if a familiar dies of old age, the link is severed, but only the extra six Hit Points are lost and there is no chance of becoming comatose.

5. Link to the Supernatural: Identical to the Shifter ability, except that the G.M. and the player together can expand further upon this if desired, to grant different or greater abilities or spell knowledge. However, as a rough guide, the gifts bestowed upon Witches will almost always be greater, because most Seneschals understand the price of this power and value their independence. Unlike the Witch, the Seneschal sees the intelligence as an ally, not his master. Note that some Seneschals never link themselves to a "greater power," instead seeking dominion over supernatural beings on their own terms.

6. Authority of the Master: The Seneschal radiates a Horror Factor toward lesser supernatural beings, for they recognize that this character is familiar with their weaknesses and specializes in their summoning, control and even eradication at times. Although this does not affect greater demons, demon lords, gods or supernatural intelligences, they will be inclined to show a measure of respect to the character. Horror Factor is 8, +1 at levels 2, 3, 4, 5, 7, 9, 12 and 15. If the Seneschal has a link to an intelligence or god, the supernatural minions of that being must save versus this Horror Factor with none of their usual bonuses. If they fail their save, they will obey all instructions save sui-

cidal ones, following the intent of his command rather than the letter, because they fear the wrath of their true master should they fail to serve the Seneschal to their full ability. Of course, if they have been instructed to thwart the Seneschal by the intelligence, or have been given instructions superceding the Seneschal's authority, they receive their full bonuses and only the normal effects of Horror Factor apply.

7. P.P.E.: As per the Shifter: **Permanent Base P.P.E.:** 1D6x10+10 plus P.E. attribute number. Add 3D6 P.P.E. per additional level of experience. Of course, the Seneschal can draw P.P.E. from ley lines, nexus points, and other people.

8. Bonuses: Accustomed to coercing creatures from the Rifts into doing his bidding, the Seneschal receives the following bonuses:

+3 to save vs Horror Factor, +2 at levels 3, 6 and 12. +1 to the M.E. attribute at levels 5, 10 and 15. +1 to save vs magic at levels 3, 7, 10 and 13. +1 to Spell Strength at levels 4, 7, 10 and 13. Add an additional +2 to Spell Strength whenever the target is a supernatural being (14 at level one).

Alignment Restrictions: Can be of any alignment, but tends to drift towards evil over time, as their association with demons continues. Some may retain a good alignment, but only if they limit their association with monsters to slaying them and thwarting their schemes, as quickly and cleanly as possible, in service to the light.

Attribute Requirements: I.Q. 12, M.E. 15, or higher. A high M.A. and a low P.B. are desirable, but not required, as fear can keep your minions in line.

O.C.C. Skills:

Language: Native tongue at 98%.

Language: Demongogian (+30%).

Literacy: Native tongue at 90%.

Astronomy (+15%)

Mathematics: Basic (+15%)

Lore: Demon & Monster (+30%)

Lore: Magic (+10%)

Intelligence (+10%; applies to demons/supernatural beings)

Land Navigation (+10%)

Wilderness Survival (+5%)

Hand to Hand combat must be selected as an O.C.C. Related Skill. Hand to Hand: Basic costs one skill selection, Expert counts as two, and Martial Arts or Assassin (if evil) counts as three skill selections.

O.C.C. Related Skills: Select five other skills. Plus select two additional skills at levels 3 and 6, and one additional skill at levels 9 and 12. All new skills start at level one proficiency.

Communication: Radio: Basic, Surveillance Systems and TV/Video.

Cowboy: None.

Domestic: Any (+5%).

Electrical: Basic only.

Espionage: Interrogation Techniques only (+10%).

Mechanical: Basic only.

Medical: Holistic Medicine or Paramedic only (+5%).

Military: None.

Physical: Any except Boxing, Wrestling and Gymnastics.

Pilot: Any (+5%), except Robots, Power Armor and military vehicles.

Pilot Related: Any.

Rogue: Any (+2%).

Science: Any (+5%; +10% to Anthropology).

Technical: Any (+5%).

W.P.: Any.

Wilderness: Any (+5%).

Secondary Skills: The character also gets to select five secondary skills from those listed, excluding those marked "None." These are additional areas of knowledge that do not get the advantage of the bonus listed in parentheses (). All secondary skills start at the base skill level.

Standard Equipment: Like many mages, the character usually has an orientation toward either nature or technology as a result of the society in which they were brought up, although some embrace both equally. A typical starting set of equipment for Shifters originating on Rifts Earth is as follows:

Set of clothing, set of traveling clothes, light M.D.C. body armor (seldom wear heavy armor, because it reduces one's speed and mobility by half, and can interfere with magic), knapsack, back pack, 1D4 small sacks, one large sack, pocket mirror, silver cross, 2D4 cloves of garlic, six wooden stakes and mallet (for vampires and other practical applications), salt, canteen, binoculars, tinted goggles or sunglasses, air filter and gas mask, pocket laser distancer, pocket digital disc recorder/player for recording observations, and a hand-held computer if proficient with computer operation. Often wears hooded robes and dark clothing.

A good guide to essential equipment for any character on Rifts Earth and most Seneschals in the Megaverse is found in the contents of the NG-S2 Survival Pack, listed in brief as follows:

A two-person tent, a sleeping bag, a flashlight and six batteries, a pocket knife, a compass (+10% to Land Navigation), a short-range radio, a mini first aid kit, a hunting and fishing kit, saw wires, a fire starter, four signal flares, thirty feet (9.1 m) of climbing cord, soap and washcloth, a canteen and food rations.

Weapons will include an energy pistol and several extra clips of ammunition. A hollow iron rod sharpened at one end with a comfortable handle at the other, measuring about two feet (0.6 m) for easy carrying, used to dispel certain magic illusions and skewer monsters vulnerable to cold iron. Finally, a silver plated Vibro-Blade is a favorite weapon, for when the energy field is turned off, the blade can be used against creatures vulnerable to silver.

The vehicle of choice is often a motorcycle, hover vehicle or horse. The vehicle is often inexpensive and easily replaced in case it is destroyed by a creature from a Rift or left behind when exploring a Rift. Exotic mounts found in other dimensions, especially flying ones, are prized highly. Monstrous mounts are popular among Seneschals, but are forgone if trying to blend in among normal D-Bees.

As Seneschals grow in experience, they like to acquire Techno-Wizardry devices and other magic items, especially devices that inflict pain or which aid them in enforcing their will over others, like the Whip of Pain (**Federation of Magic**) and the Enslaver (**Rifts: Atlantis**).

Money: The Seneschal starts with 1D6x1000 in credits and 2D6x1000 in black market items.

Cybernetics/Symbiotes: Starts with neither type of enhancement and will avoid getting any major augmentation like bi-

onics, which interferes with magic. Nevertheless, a fair proportion of these mages opt for enhancement not exceeding three minor cybernetic implants, specifically sensory enhancements for environments encountered in alien worlds they are not adapted to. Mechanical optics are sometimes taken, but Bio-System eyes are greatly preferred for the lack of maintenance they require.

As an alternative, Symbiotes are eagerly sought, particularly those from Wormwood or stolen from the Splugorth. Nevertheless, cautious research is usually applied to a Symbiote before its attachment, especially if the Symbiote is an unknown one or stolen/purchased from the Splugorth, who are notoriously deadly pranksters. More so than most other Shifters, the Seneschal loves to be enhanced, so long as it doesn't seriously interfere with his magic or physical sensations. In addition, he has only a 50% chance of developing any attendant insanities.

New Spells Developed by Shifters

Unless it says otherwise, P.P.E. costs for the dimensional spells listed below are for those casters who specialize in dimensional magic, particularly the Shifter, Temporal classes, and others such as the Paradox Shaman from **Rifts: Spirit West**. All other mages must expend 50% more P.P.E. to cast them.

The same applies to the monster-related spells below. In this case, the listed P.P.E. costs are for Shifters, Necromancers (treat those spells as Necromantic spells for this purpose) and other classes that focus on monster control/destruction, with the same 50% increase for other mages.

In addition, please note that these spells are considered to be precious, although they are not as closely guarded as Temporal magic, so great services are almost always required, rather than mere money, to obtain them. Of course, the two Spells of Legend are never taught and must be discovered by a mage (in other words, the G.M. can determine what it takes to get these spells, and they should **never** be learned before the player character is tenth level or greater).

The terms "portal" and "Rift" have been used interchangeably throughout the following spell descriptions, but to clarify, a Rift is a naturally occurring dimensional portal, typically located at ley line nexuses where the immense magical potential weakens the wall between dimensions.

Level Six: Compass

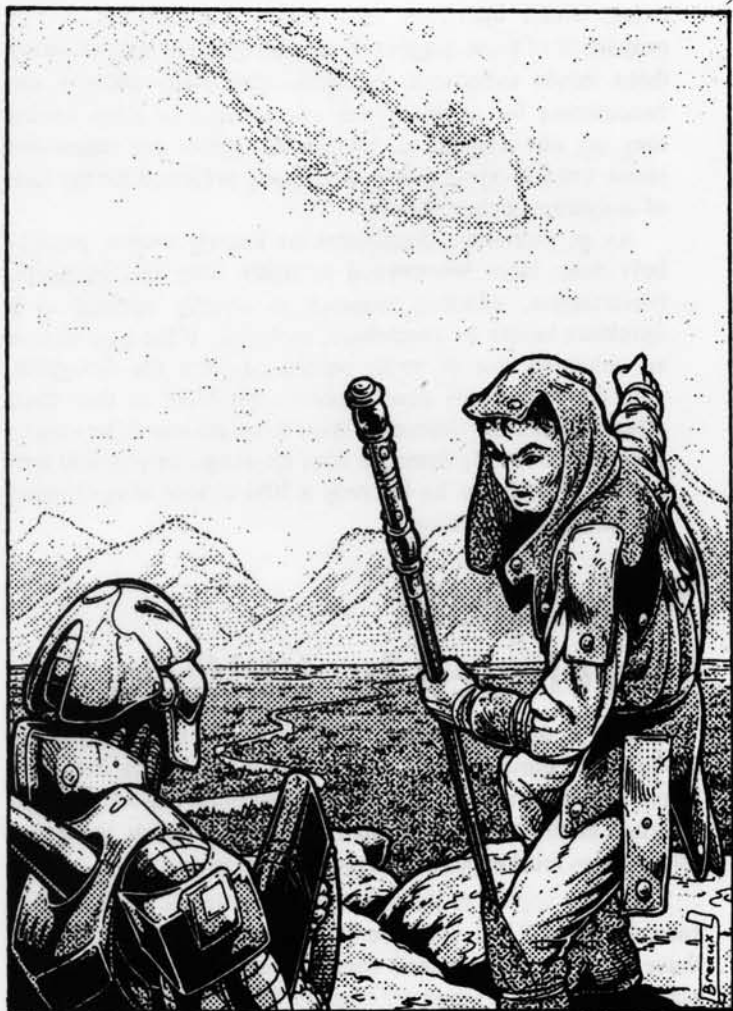
Range: Unlimited, but the arrow appears 1 foot (0.3 m) away from the caster.

Duration: 1 melee.

Saving Throw: None.

P.P.E.: Twelve.

A very useful incantation, this spell creates an arrow of glowing light floating in mid air, that points in the direction of the desired destination, not just on the horizontal plane like a compass, but indicating the relative elevation of the destination from the caster. This spell cannot be used to track a specific object or



Level Seven:

Dimensional Beacon

Range: 60 feet (18.3 m).

Duration: 3 hours per level of experience.

Saving Throw: Standard, if the target is alive.

P.P.E.: Forty-two.

This incantation can be cast upon an object or a person. If used on an object, the caster can cause it to act like a beacon across the dimensions, transmitting a sentence lasting no longer than 15 seconds. This message will repeat itself every hour after the initial transmission. This message must be spoken aloud after casting the spell, and the caster must visualize the recipient of this message. The recipient receives no saving throw, although a Mind Block will block a transmission (this does not include Mind Block Auto-Defense, as it only activates to ward off an attack). Once the recipient receives the message, he can open a dimensional portal to the exact location of the enchanted object (the beacon) if he so chooses, with no chance of failure, provided the beacon is still active.

If used on a person or creature, the spell acts like a curse, allowing the caster to open portals or dimensionally teleport to their current location. The side effect of this spell is that the person will also attract entities and their ilk like honey attracts flies. Any creature that feeds on ley lines within 500 feet (152 m) is 80% likely to home in on them. This usually leads to unwelcome attention from these bizarre beings, who see the person as a new toy to play with, but on the bright side, they will defend their plaything against anyone trying to kill it. Remove Curse and Negate Magic work normally, and are highly desirable in this circumstance.

Sometimes installed in Techno-Wizard devices, this is incredibly valuable as it allows those with psionic or magical abilities to channel their energy into the device and allow them to be rescued if they have been stranded in a foreign dimension.

Dimensional Observation Ball

Range: 500 feet (152 m).

Duration: 5 minutes per level of the spell caster.

Saving Throw: None.

P.P.E.: Twenty.

Useable only on a ley line or nexus, this globe of green light mimics the Ley Line Walker's observation ball. Upon closing his eyes, the spell caster receives a vision of what the observation ball sees. However, instead of normal vision, the mage sees only dimensional energies, including beings in Astral form, ghosts, entities, the essences of alien intelligences (including Elementals), the outline of dimensional portals, and swirls of coloured lights marking where dimensional teleports recently occurred. No material structures are visible, except the landscape which is a lurid green, nor can lifeforms be seen, except for beings with the natural ability to perform a dimensional teleport, who are visible as a glowing red outline. In addition, sound is not transmitted and communication with observed non-material beings is only possible through appropriate spells or psionics, or if they take possession of a living creature. The statistics of the observation ball are exactly the same as those of the ley line observation ball.

person, only a location. Particularly valuable on planets without magnetic poles, or in dimensions that are not planetary in configuration, it is also useful for determining position in other ways. If the visualized destination is not in the current dimension, the arrow will collapse in on itself, becoming a glowing sphere that shrinks until it vanishes. If the destination is on another planet in the same dimension, the arrow will spin wildly in all directions. The spell does not last long, so once the direction of the destination is established, navigating by landmarks (Land Navigation) or through astronomical knowledge of the skies in that world (Astronomy) is desirable, although of course the spell can be recast at a later time if P.P.E. conservation is not a high priority. Accuracy of the direction indicated by this spell for destinations on the same planet is identical to the chances of a successful teleport as described under the spell Teleport: Superior.

Alternatively, the spell can be used to locate the nearest sentient creature within a 100 mile (160 km) radius, something that may change from moment to moment, but at the time it is cast is 100% accurate. (Note that the caster can exclude anyone within 50 feet/15.2 m of himself at the time of casting, notably his companions.)

Portal Divination

Range: 20 feet (6 m).

Duration: 1 melee per level of experience.

Saving Throw: None.

P.P.E.: Twenty.

For the duration of the spell, after concentrating for one melee round upon an active dimensional portal or magical device that creates one, the caster can receive the following information about it:

- A vision of what lies on the other side of the portal, overlaid on the portal itself (most Rifts are a spindle of blue-white energy that obscures sight).
- If the destination is able to support life, for beings of the same species as the caster.
- If there are any greater supernatural beings within a 50 mile (80 km) radius from the other side of the portal.
- The general magical level of the dimension on the other side of the portal (e.g. S.D.C. vs M.D.C. magic levels).
- If there is any danger on the other side of the portal, but no specifics. Note that the vision will not show the entire situation on the other side of the portal, as at least half of the surrounding landscape on the other side will not be visible. Of course, it might be night, or underground on the other side, so nothing but darkness (unless the caster has nightvision) may be seen. The level of danger is one of the following: mild, moderate, extreme or certain death.
- If it is a magical device/object capable of generating a portal, the caster will know how to activate it and how to turn it off.

Level Eight:

Achilles Heel

Range: Touch or 10 feet (3 m).

Duration: 30 minutes per level of experience.

Saving Throw: Standard.

P.P.E.: Forty.

This incantation curses the target with a vulnerability to one substance of the caster's choice. If it normally deals S.D.C. damage and the target is M.D.C., the substance will do 1 M.D.C. per 5 points of S.D.C. damage of the attack to the victim, including any applicable strength bonuses of the attacker. The damage is simply doubled if both the attack and the victim are either both M.D.C. or both S.D.C./Hit Points in nature. If the target was already completely immune to the attack, he will receive normal damage, rather than double.

Arcane Weakness

Range: Touch or 10 feet (3 m).

Duration: 24 hours per level of experience.

Saving Throw: Standard; 12 by spell, 16 by ritual.

P.P.E.: Fifty.

This incantation inflicts the target with a vulnerability to magic. They no longer receive any bonuses to save versus magic, and magical weapons inflict double normal damage when used against them.

Only a Remove Curse invocation can negate the effect of this enchantment.

Distort Aura

Range: 30 feet (9.1 m).

Duration: Three minutes per level of experience.

Saving Throw: Standard.

P.P.E.: Thirty-six.

This incantation alters the aura of a target creature. The spell takes one melee to complete, as the caster must concentrate on what characteristics he wishes to instill in the new aura. Once the spell takes effect, the aura cannot be altered unless the spell is first dispelled. The characteristics able to be instilled in the aura are as follows:

- General level of experience; low, medium or high.
- The presence of magic.
- The presence of psychic powers.
- High or low base P.P.E.
- The species of the creature.

Possible uses of this spell are to convince a group of demons that one of their number is a human mage in magical disguise, or to convince the coalition psychics that an officer is a shapechanged demon. This only affects the aura, not the scent of the creature, so this is likely to cause a degree of confusion.

Perceive True Nature

Range: 60 feet (18.3 m); one target.

Duration: Instant.

Saving Throw: None.

P.P.E.: Thirty.

This spell allows the caster to perceive the true nature of shapeshifters, and those creatures that resemble non-supernatural beings with the capacity to suppress their Horror Factor. No saving throw is applicable, however, the spell creates a two-way link, so both caster and target see each other's true nature and both are aware that the other is doing so. The victim of this spell is likely to try to preempt any attempt to communicate this deadly secret by verbally attacking the caster and any companions by asking awkward questions and casting aspersions upon them. It is also very likely that, when no witnesses are around, the creature or its minions (if it has any) will seek to destroy the caster and his friends, but only if other parties can be blamed for the deaths. Only creatures with low intelligence and willpower (I.Q. and M.E. of 8 or lower) will lose self control, immediately forsaking their disguise and leaping to attack the caster.

For example, if a player character were to cast this spell when in the court of Camelot, to examine Mrrlyn, they would immediately see that he was an extremely powerful supernatural being of evil, but Mrrlyn would likely begin badmouthing the characters, seeking to have them detained or watched at all times, and when they had left the court, arrange an ambush of Supreme Nexus Knights to try to wipe them out.

Level Nine:

Communication Rift

Range: 5 feet (1.5 m).

Duration: Five minutes per level of experience.

Saving Throw: None.

P.P.E.: Fifty.

This incantation can only be cast at a ley line nexus or pyramid, and generates a miniature Rift about one foot (.3 m) in height, permitting only sound and the tiniest essence fragments of an intelligence to pass through. The other side of this Rift appears at another ley line nexus or pyramid up to any distance away in the same dimension, or even in a completely different dimension. It can be used in one of three possible ways: to target a particular person or creature, who must be at a nexus or pyramid at the time the spell is cast, to target a known nexus or pyramid, or finally, the Communication Rift can be random. Communication Rifts can be sensed much like normal Rifts, but the range for sensing is equal to 1% of normal, due to the diminutive disruption of the dimensional fabric. Supernatural intelligences are most often found at ley line nexuses or pyramids, feeding on the highly concentrated magical energies that pool there, and the tiny Rift created by this spell intrigues them. Usually, these beings split off a tiny essence fragment that they send through the Rift to see what lies on the other side, performing a function similar to that of an insect's feelers. Much smaller and weaker than the normal essence, it is incapable of possession or of attacking the Shifter on the other side of the portal. Instead, it is able to skim the Shifter's mind for memories, amounting only to glimpses of what the Shifter saw or snatches of conversation no more than ten days old. This is used to get its bearings and see what kind of world it has entered. The Shifter is fully aware that the fragment is probing him and can prevent it with a Mind Block or similar mental protection. After that, the usual procedure is that the fragment uses Telepathy and Empathic Transmission to try to persuade the Shifter to willingly connect with the fragment, offering power through the link, minions to serve and other inducements.

Note that many intelligences know this spell and often create a random Communication Rift, for the purpose of trying to snare mages in other dimensions to serve them, much like a fisherman waiting for a fish to come along and take the bait. It is also important to remember that the essence fragment cannot move more than 50 feet (15.2 m) away from the Communication Rift, and the Negate Magic spell is all that is needed to shut down this Rift, rather than the Close Rift spell.

Dimensional Anchor

Range: 60 feet (18.3 m).

Duration: 1 hour per level.

Saving Throw: Standard.

P.P.E.: Fifty-five.

An effective spell for combating those creatures able to teleport or dimensionally teleport, both through natural abilities and spells, this curse almost completely nullifies both abilities for a substantial period of time, making them much more vulnerable in the interim. The chance of success for both remain the same, and they may still be attempted once per melee, but with the following changes: Teleportation is limited to a distance of 50 feet (15.2 m) and Dimensional Teleportation will instead cause the creature to shimmer like a mirage for the remainder of the melee, temporarily unable to be damaged, or damage others, except with phase weapons, as they have been dimensionally displaced.

Hide Portal

Range: 100 feet (30.5 m).

Duration: 5 minutes per level.

Saving Throw: None.

P.P.E.: Sixty.

Much like Concealment, this spell hides both sides of a Rift or dimensional portal. In contrast however, this enchantment is so powerful that no saving throw on the part of observers is possible. Simply put, not even the magic concealing the Rift can be seen by Ley Line Walkers. The only way to sense the Rift is through the use of the Temporal spell Sense Dimensional Anomaly and the psychic power of the same name. Apart from that, any creature who can sense Rifts can feel its presence when within a mile (1.6 km), no further, except for Shifters, who can feel it within 10 miles (16 km). Tracking it with such senses will lead the tracker straight to its location. Sensing its presence will also alert the one sensing it that it is a portal that has been deliberately concealed. This spell can either be cast up to a minute before a dimensional portal is created, causing it to be cloaked from its very beginning, or can be cast upon an existing Rift or portal in order to conceal it.

Level Ten:

Challenge Authority

Range: 50 feet (15.2 m).

Duration: 1 hour.

Saving Throw: Standard.

P.P.E.: One hundred.

This incantation is used upon the leader of a group of beings, to challenge his position of authority in the group. The caster can choose to do one of two things, either the caster can choose a champion from among his companions to challenge the leader, or create an illusion that makes the leader appear to lack in his normal leadership qualities, encouraging one of his underlings to issue a challenge. The nature of the challenge varies, depending on what attributes the group looks for in a leader. In most barbarian tribes and demon hordes, combat capabilities are important, meaning there will be a fight, whereas more civilized societies value cerebral qualities in their leaders, perhaps leading to a riddle contest, a lively debate or a series of difficult tasks that must be completed. Of course, a magical society would likely require a magical duel. If the caster designates a champion to challenge the leader, that champion must be considered a worthy foe, but not appear too powerful, or pull dirty tricks in the combat (unless that is a quality well regarded in a leader by the group). If the champion wins the challenge, he or she will be regarded as the new leader for the remainder of the duration of this spell. However, once the spell has elapsed, the group will realize they have been duped and attack the caster and his companions en masse, so it is advisable to set them a task and send them away to carry it out, while getting away in the meantime. If the caster is nowhere in sight at the end of the spell, a new leader will be selected and it will be back to business as usual, and while the caster had better beware if they are encountered again, they will not bother to pursue him otherwise. If the caster had simply chosen to create the leadership challenge within the group, rather than issue a challenge directly, the ensuing contest between the leader and the underling will oc-

copy the attention of the group, allowing the caster and his companions to slip away on a successful Prowl roll at +30% (use the lowest Prowl skill of the player character's group) and remain unnoticed until the challenge is over or the spell ends.

Follow Dimensional Wake

Range: Self and/or two others (if willing) by touch; 5 feet (1.5 m) or less from teleport location.

Duration: Instant.

Saving Throw: None.

P.P.E.: Eighty.

Dimensional teleportation creates a tear in the dimensional fabric, much like the wake a boat leaves behind it as it moves, reducing resistance for a short period of time to further dimensional travel in the location where it occurred. This incantation takes advantage of that fact, allowing the caster to hitch a ride on the coattails of those who have just performed a dimensional teleport through spell or natural ability, usually pursuing them to exact retribution for a raid, or to continue a fight. The sooner the spell is cast after such an event, the better the chances of not getting lost are.

Chance of following the teleporter to the destination dimension:

- If cast less than a minute later: 99%
- If cast one to two minutes later: 90%
- If cast two to three minutes later: 80%
- If cast three to four minutes later: 50%
- If cast four to five minutes later: 30%

After five minutes, there is no longer any trail to follow, and the spell fails.

An unsuccessful roll results in the hitchhikers landing in a random dimension. However, even if they arrive in the correct dimension, the passage through the dimensions distorts the passage of time, making it likely that they will arrive long after the original teleporter did.

If successful pursuit is made, roll on the following table:

- 01-20% Arrives 1 melee after the pursued, possibly just as they are performing another dimensional teleport to throw off pursuers.
- 21-40% Arrives 1D4 minutes after the pursued, either just in time to see them disappear around a corner in the distance for example, or to have just enough time to pursue them on another dim-teleport.
- 41-65% Arrives 1D4 x 5 minutes after the pursued, either they have dim-teleported again and are now out of reach or they have simply left the area, and the trail is still warm.
- 66-79% Arrives 1D6 hours later. Asking around in an urban setting may get some leads.
- 80-89% Arrives 12 hours later. Tracking by scent or trails in a wilderness setting is the best option at this point.
- 91-99% Arrives 2D4 days later. Unless the teleporter was someone in a position of importance in this place or a frequent visitor of note, the chances of finding him are next to zero.
- 00% Arrives 3D4 months later. The travelers have not aged, but events have skipped ahead and things may have changed greatly in their home dimension upon their return.

Lockdown

Range: 20 feet (6 m).

Duration: 10 minutes per level of experience.

Saving Throw: None.

P.P.E.: Ninety.

This incantation can only be cast upon a dimensional portal created by the caster, and only once per portal. The result of doing so is that the portal collapses in upon itself, fading from sight, seemingly destroyed and thus undetectable, but is in fact kept in stasis for the duration of this spell. Once this spell ends, is cancelled by the caster, or dispelled by the negate magic spell, the dimensional portal powers up again for the remainder of its normal duration. The advantages offered by this spell are considerable for dimensional raiders, since it saves them having to create another costly portal to retreat from pursuers, providing a quick escape route when on a fast raid. Protecting the caster is essential, as his premature death will mean the full duration must elapse or the spell must be negated by another, both time-consuming and likely to cause the failure of the entire raid. Such raids are typically planned down to the last detail, time-keepers synchronized and an exact duration placed upon this spell so that all participants can escape if they make it back to the rendezvous in time.



Reveal True Nature

Range: 200 foot (61 m) radius.

Duration: Instant.

Saving Throw: Standard for each victim within range.

P.P.E.: One hundred.

This incantation will instantly attempt to force all shapechanged creatures, and those suppressing their Horror Factor, to resume their natural appearance and Horror Factor. Beings that are naturally invisible will be visible for a full minute before fading from sight. If outnumbered and endangered, such beings will most likely flee by the fastest route, be it teleporting, flying or simply running away at full speed. However, if the creatures hold the balance of power, they will attack en masse, seeking to wipe out the caster and any witnesses, replacing them later if possible, with other shapeshifters. Vampires masquerading as humans will almost always attack, confident in their regenerative abilities, unless their foes are wielding vampire-slaying weapons, particularly water-based ones.

Level Eleven:



Complete Symbiosis

Range: Self or touch; affects only one selected organism on that host.

Duration: Permanent.

Saving Throw: Standard; applies to the symbiote or parasite.

P.P.E.: One hundred twenty, plus a permanent sacrifice of P.E., Hit Points and P.P.E. by the recipient.

This spell has the opposite effect from the spells Purge Self and Purge Others (both from **Federation of Magic**), as it enhances the symbiosis between an organism and its host, rather than severing it. One of two results can be obtained. Firstly, this

spell can be used to allow a symbiote to survive outside of its natural environment, if it has such a limitation, by diverting its sustenance needs from that environment to the life force of the host instead. The best example of this is in the case of Wormwood symbiotes, which shrivel up, fall off and turn into dust, 1D6 hours after leaving that dimension/world. Using this spell, that problem is eliminated, however, please note that it does not affect any symbiote that is not currently implanted in the body, nor does it affect the Spirit of Wormwood or the Blood Stones and magic crystals, excepting the Eye Stone, which is placed in an empty eye socket and therefore is considered a part of the body.

The other use of this spell is to permanently halve the penalties visited upon a host by a parasite or symbiote (round up, and may only work once upon a symbiote). This only applies to numeric penalties, so for example, if the character's arm falls off or they become blind because of a parasite, this spell will not prevent that.

The organism must fail a saving throw versus magic in order for the spell to work, unless it is an intelligent symbiote that is willing to have the symbiosis enhanced. If the spell is successful, the recipient will lose a portion of his life force to the symbiote, resulting in the following permanent penalties: -1 P.E., -1D4 Hit Points, and -1D4 P.P.E. If the recipient of the spell is not actually the caster, these penalties are doubled. On one hand, symbiotes with short life spans have them extended to the length of the host's, but on the other, this bonding makes the Purge spells completely ineffective on that particular organism.

An unusual and often unwanted side effect of this spell is that if the organism is intelligent enough to be given mental statistics, this spell has a 10% chance of resulting in a mental meld of the host with that organism, the new combined mind having the average of each mental attribute, as well as access to the psionics and magic of both. Please note that insanities as well as a changed world view are likely to occur.

Level Twelve:

Bar Portal

Range: 100 feet (30.5 m).

Duration: 10 minutes per level of experience.

Saving Throw: See description below.

P.P.E.: Two hundred fifty.

This spell effectively seals a Rift or portal, barring passage to those who would pass through it. All lesser beings, be they supernatural, magical, robotic or flesh and blood life forms, find the surface of the Rift to be completely impassable as a shimmering, impenetrable force field now covers it. Equally, no object may penetrate the force field except rune weapons, which will cause their wielder to be treated as a greater supernatural being for the purpose of this spell. Greater beings, whether supernatural or magical, may attempt to force their way through the barrier upon a successful saving throw versus magic. This will allow only that individual to pass through however, as the barrier reseals itself even as they stumble through. This takes a toll on the individual, and for 1D4 minutes afterward, their number of attacks and combat bonuses are halved. On the other hand, a failure to make a saving throw versus magic will result in the creature being engulfed in crackling energy and flung

back 1D6x10 yards/meters, inflicting the effects of the Agony spell upon them. Alien intelligences and gods may do the same, but they all have the natural ability to nullify this spell, equal to the Breach Portal spell for the cost of a mere 150 P.P.E. Negate Magic and Anti-Magic Cloud do not affect this spell once it is in place.

Divert Portal

Range: 100 feet (30.5 m).

Duration: Instant and permanent.

Saving Throw: Standard.

P.P.E.: One hundred eighty.

A good analogy for a Rift is that of an open door between two adjacent rooms, which in this case, represent the two dimensions that have been linked by the Rift. With this spell, the mage destabilizes a Rift, effectively closing the door for a moment, then reopening it and finding that the room on the other side of the door has changed. What actually happens is that the Rift is suddenly barred on either side, essentially the same as the Bar Portal spell. One melee after that, the other end of the Rift, in the other dimension, dissolves and the Rift in the caster's dimension pulses with light. One minute later, the light fades and the Rift or portal suddenly returns to normal as the other end of the Rift appears in a new, random dimension. A cheaper and generally less draining alternative to closing a Rift, the drawback of this spell is that the new dimension on the other side of the Rift may be just as dangerous or more so than the first. Unlike the spell Close Rift, this will affect even permanent and seemingly uncloseable portals like the St. Louis Gateway, but in their case will cause a loss of 2 P.P.E. from the caster's permanent P.P.E. base whether the spell succeeds or not. The same saving throw on the part of the Rift still applies, just like the Close Rift spell. In the case of permanently linked Rifts like the Calgary Rift and its counterpart in Russia, the link between the two would be reestablished in 1D6x10 minutes.

Level Thirteen:

Blood Oath

Range: 10 feet (3 m).

Duration: Until completion of the oath, or 1 month maximum.

Saving Throw: Standard.

P.P.E.: Three hundred fifty.

This spell enforces an oath made by the target of the spell. If the target agrees to be bound by the spell, there is no saving throw applicable, even if the target is lying. The spell will inflict the effects of the spell Agony upon the target should they directly go against their oath. Delays on fulfilment of the oath are possible unless it is a part of the oath to succeed in the task by a certain deadline. However, if events not under the control of the target prevent the success of the mission, the spell is broken, unless the target deliberately set them in motion, which will inflict the effects of the Agony spell for 5 minutes per level of the caster. Note that the creature is given free rein to achieve its goal in way it pleases, allowing it to exploit any loopholes in the wording of the oath, and will not heed any further commands, but will not attack the caster, and the goal *may not* require its death. A Remove Curse or Negate Magic spell has only a 20% chance of removing this curse, and the creature may not cast them, nor may it request either spell to be cast upon it.

Breach Portal

Range: 100 feet (30.5 m).

Duration: Instant results once resolved.

Saving Throw: Not applicable, battle of wills instead.

P.P.E.: Three hundred forty.

This spell was specifically created to overcome the effects of the Bar Portal spell. Once this spell is cast, the caster engages in a battle of wills with the one who barred the portal, regardless of where both are at the time, whether on different sides of the portal or the same side. From this point on, both are oblivious to their surroundings, unable to do anything but stand where they are and vie for control of the portal. Companions will be unable to rouse them, but can carry them away, even out of the 100 foot (30.5 m) range from the portal without interrupting this struggle. At the beginning of each melee, both the caster and the one barring the portal roll a D20, adding any M.E. bonuses and the following bonuses if applicable: Alien intelligences get +5 on their rolls, gods and Spatial Mages receive +4, while Shifters and Temporal Wizards/Raiders get +3. If a god or alien intelligence has Shifter or Temporal abilities, they receive an additional +1 bonus to their roll. Every time the caster of this spell succeeds in rolling higher than his antagonist, he usurps control of the portal for the rest of the melee round, causing the shimmering force field to disappear for that period, allowing anyone on either side to pass through before the melee is over. Should the antagonist



roll higher than the caster at the beginning of the following round, the portal becomes sealed again for the remainder of that melee. If either of the two wins 3 successive duels, the other will collapse into a coma for a period of 1D6x10 minutes, losing the contest.

Greater Banishment

Range: 200 foot (61 m) radius.

Duration: Two weeks per level as a spell, 20 years per level as a ritual.

Saving Throw: See description below.

P.P.E.: Four hundred fifty.

A superior version of the Banishment spell, this does more than simply banish lesser supernatural beings from the local area. Instead, it banishes them back to their dimension of origin and bars them from reentering the caster's dimension for the duration of this spell. All lesser supernatural beings within 200 feet (61 m) of the caster need to make a saving throw versus magic, without the benefit of their usual bonuses, or be banished. In addition, one greater supernatural being per level of experience, of the caster's choosing, is affected, unless it succeeds in a standard saving throw versus magic. A successful saving throw on the part of a supernatural being means that it is unaffected, except for a wrenching sensation that makes it immediately aware that the caster attempted to banish it. Typically this will anger the creature, and drive it to create trouble for the caster, assuming it wasn't already doing so.

Turbulence

Range: 50 feet (15.2 m); 300 foot (91 m) range in a 90 degree arc in front of each Rift opening.

Duration: 5 minutes per level of experience.

Saving Throw: None.

P.P.E.: Three hundred sixty.

Through this magic, based on the eighth level spell Wall of Wind (**Federation of Magic**), the caster creates an atmospheric pressure differential between the two ends of a Rift, so that the resulting winds rush through it. This creates a cone of roaring wind at each opening, rushing toward the Rift in one dimension and away from it in the other, leaving only the caster and anyone touching him unaffected. Within the first minute, the Rift grows larger and larger until it is the size of a large, two-story house. Damage done to nearby buildings and large, fixed structures by these gale force winds is 1D4 M.D.C. per melee round, easily ripping apart S.D.C. structures and battering M.D.C. ones.

Those weighing less than 1000 lbs (450 kg) are automatically pulled off their feet and flung through the air in the direction of the wind. Creatures weighing 1001-4000 lbs (450-1800 kg) have a 50% chance per melee round of losing their balance and bowling along the ground for 1D4x10 yards/meters. Creatures or objects weighing more than this have a 30% chance every melee round of being dragged or blown 2D6 yards/meters. Holding onto stationary objects firmly implanted in the ground is the best way to avoid being flung through the Rift, but the battering winds are likely to rip such things out of the ground, or pull those holding them away, with an equivalent supernatural strength of 30. Flying debris will inflict substantial damage to those they strike, and if a roll to maintain balance fails, will send them flying in turn. Simply being within the cone of rushing wind makes it impossible to do anything but resist being blown away.

This spell is typically used to dispose of beings by tossing them into another dimension, or to retrieve creatures from another world. The caster can determine the direction of the wind through the portal, but the spell will not work if either side of the Rift is underwater or the two atmospheres are significantly different in composition (e.g. the other atmosphere is poisonous or consists of acid vapor).

Level Fourteen:

Artificial Environment

Range: 150 feet (15.2 m), creating a cube, 3 feet (0.9 m) long per level of experience along each edge.

Duration: 2 years per level of experience.

Saving Throw: None.

P.P.E.: Seven hundred fifty.

Light and gas and other environmental conditions within the confines of this spell are funneled from a distant world or dimension that a Shifter has visited at some point in the past. This spell can be used to create a survivable environment in a location normally unsuitable for a particular being or group of beings. It can also duplicate other effects like that of Wormwood upon the crystals, symbiotes, etc., originating there. If the dimension is an S.D.C. one, the conditions within the boundaries of this spell are S.D.C. in nature. An important effect of this spell is that only sentient beings and up to 40 lbs (18 kg) of clothes and equipment on their person, as well as visible light, can cross into or out of the cube; all other energy and matter in the local dimension is unable to pass the threshold. The boundaries of the spell can be molded, to fit within the confines of a room for example, so long as the maximum height, width and length are all less than 3 feet (0.9 m) per level of experience. A faintly glowing transparent wall of blue-white dimensional energy is the only way of telling where the artificial environment begins.

Binding

Range: Touch or 10 feet (3 m).

Duration: Three days per level.

Saving Throw: Standard.

P.P.E.: Six hundred.

Related to the Familiar Link spell, this spell will link the life force of the caster and victim (usually a summoned creature), so that if one is hurt, the damage is transferred across the link. If the caster is hurt, double that damage is transferred across the link to the creature, and it cannot be regenerated, merely healed at the normal human rate. If the creature is damaged, half of that damage is transmitted across the link to the caster. If one of the two is killed, the other falls into a coma and loses 8 Hit Points or 20 M.D.C. permanently. Effects like the Agony spell are not transmitted across the link, easily putting the caster in the driver's seat. Note that healing is not transmitted across the link, and that S.D.C. damage to an S.D.C. being would be transferred as Mega-Damage to an M.D.C. being, and vice versa.

Level Fifteen:

Confinement

Range: 30 feet (9.1 m) from any of the candles.

Duration: 1 day.

Saving Throw: None.

P.P.E.: Eight hundred P.P.E. per day (in total).

This spell requires the use of four large candles, specially prepared and enchanted to be P.P.E. reservoirs. Each candle requires the infusion of 200 P.P.E. daily to maintain a globe of force, with the properties of the spells Wall of Defense and Sustain. From the inside of the globe of force (encompassing a portion of the ground, such that it appears to be a hemisphere, thus denying the possibility of tunneling out), no magic, no force can penetrate. All dimensional and normal teleportation is nullified, and the only psychic power that can penetrate the shell is Astral projection (and that is limited to coexistence with the material plane within a radius of 1000 feet/305 m, and only the psychic powers of Telepathy, Empathic Transmission, Presence Sense, See Aura, and Alter Aura can be used). This barrier works both ways, in that no magic, psionics or natural abilities can penetrate the globe, but the globe can be destroyed from the outside (it has 300 M.D.C.) or if one of the candles is destroyed or simply moved out of range of the globe. Note that the imprisoned being cannot use Telekinesis to do so, however.

Finally, like the spell Sustain, all sustenance requirements, including P.P.E. vampirism, are fulfilled automatically, so all the creature has to worry about is boredom. This spell is used mainly to frustrate the captive until it agrees to serve the caster in a designated task, and if it should do so, it will be bound to carry it out, under the same conditions as the Blood Oath spell (no saving throw applicable). Generally, the less onerous or difficult the task is, the sooner assent will be given, and the less likely the creature is to seek revenge once it is completed. Of course, greater beings are likely to seek retribution no matter how obliging the caster is, as they resent being forced to obey.

Trapping the creature in the first place is the difficult part. Summoning and Control spells can be used to snare lesser beings and entities immediately, by activating the trap, then summoning the victim directly into the sphere (note that only one creature can be held at a time). Since the creature is automatically bound to obey the commands of the caster for 24 hours per level by those spells, this trap is only used upon lesser beings if the task will take longer than that. With greater supernatural beings, they must be lured into the trap, something that is only likely if the trap is positioned at a doorway and if the being does not sense the immense P.P.E. reserve in the candles. This spell will not affect gods or alien intelligences.

Dimensional Barrier

Range: 100 foot (30.5 m) radius per level of experience, to a height of 50 feet (15.2 m) per level.

Duration: 12 hours per level of experience.

Saving Throw: See description below.

P.P.E.: Two thousand.

This spell dampens all dimensional fluctuations within a given distance from the caster's current location. Dimensional Pockets and Envelopes cannot be accessed, dimensional portals cannot be created within, and locally targeted portals appear just

outside the boundary. Those attuned to dimensional activity are suddenly bereft of such senses until they leave the area, and teleportation of either type is restricted identically to the Dimensional Anchor spell with no saving throw possible. Wherever two Dimensional Barriers overlap, they interfere with each other, allowing teleportation and all other dimensional spells and abilities to be attempted once per minute, provided that those initiating them succeed in a saving throw versus magic on each attempt.

The Splugorth have taught this spell to selected High Lords (those with Shifter abilities), who have managed to install it into stationary magical devices. These resemble totem poles, consisting of five of the largest Eyes of Eylor in fluid-filled cylinders stacked vertically on top of each other, all linked and programmed to cast only this spell and at twelfth level, renewing the barrier every sixth day. They have begun positioning them at regular intervals throughout their markets to make thieving more difficult for dimensional raiders.



Only Human

Range: Touch.

Duration: Until the "shell" is destroyed, or 3 days per level.

Saving Throw: Standard, but with no bonuses applicable.

P.P.E.: One thousand.

This spell is rare and perhaps the worst curse that can be cast upon a supernatural creature. Similar to the Monster-Shaping

tattoos of the True Atlantean clan, Clan Skellian, this spell only affects supernatural beings, and should they fail their saving throw, they are shapeshifted into the form of a human. Hit Points are equal to their P.E. +1D6 per level, S.D.C. is 20. All natural abilities, spells, psionics and supernatural attributes are not available while bound in this form, which is that of an average human (no spells, psionics, no extra bonuses to saving throws, all physical attributes 8 + 1D4). Upon the apparent death of this form, the creature is returned to normal, completely unharmed. However, while in the form of a human, its senses are those of a human, and the vulnerabilities of the human form are anathema to most such creatures, so it is likely to be panicky and temporarily disoriented. Torture of the creature can be easily carried out, and even the threat of such will cow it, with an effective Horror Factor of 18. The monster must either try to kill itself or wait for the duration to elapse to be freed from this form. Note that the monster is convinced that it has been truly transformed into a human, so does not necessarily realize that its "death" will liberate it, although it is possible that the creature will try to kill itself anyway, preferring death to the weakness of a human.

Reroute Teleport

Range: 60 miles (96 km) per level of experience.

Duration: 6 hours per level of experience.

Saving Throw: None.

P.P.E.: One thousand, five hundred.

This ritual is the ultimate trap for those traveling across great distances by means of magic. Within the area of effect, all ley line phasing is treated as though it had a 95% success rate and all teleports are -5% to their accuracy. Not only that, if those travelers do not succeed when teleporting or phasing, they are "derailed" and appear at the spell's epicentre. As an alternative, the trap can be set for a specific being, if the caster has in his possession a piece of their hair or other body part or even an object they used to own. These must have been in contact with the being within the last year, and are consumed by the spell. In this case, only the targeted being is affected, and suffers a -20% to his chance of a successful teleport and a 70% success rate for ley line phasing. Again, a failed teleport or phase means that they arrive at the location this spell was cast at. Dimensional teleports are not affected, and victims derailed may, if they are able, try to teleport away the next melee round, but with the same chances of success. If the spell was not cast at a ley line or nexus, phasing away will be impossible. Note, this spell only affects teleporting or phasing that is initiated at a location within the radius of effect. If this spell is cast by another nearby, then any failed teleport in an area in which the two spells overlap, has a 50% chance of ending up at either epicentre.

Spells of Legend:

Reality Merge

Range: 5 mile radius per level, centered on the caster.

Duration: 10 minutes per level.

Saving Throw: Not Applicable.

P.P.E.: Five thousand.

This spell causes a thick fog to rise from the ground, possessing all the properties of the Summon Fog spell. The other effect

of the spell is that all dimensional anomalies within the area of effect, including all Rifts, portals and triangles, are shut down for the duration of this spell. In addition, all existing access to other realities, such as the Yucatan Peninsula, Nightbane Earth from the Nightlands and vice versa, or dimensional teleportation by any means, is denied within the area of effect. However, in their place, a thinning of the barriers between parallel worlds occurs. Any being sensitive to dimensional anomalies, including Shifters, Temporal classes, those with the innate ability to dimensional teleport, four-dimensional beings and psychics with the Read Dimensional Portal or Sense Dimensional Anomaly powers, will understand what has taken place and be able to step through to a parallel world by simply willing it and expending either 30 P.P.E. or 60 I.S.P. If they have ever visited a parallel world before, they are able to step into that particular world if they so choose, otherwise, the destination is random. The process takes an entire minute, during which time, they will perceive the events occurring at their destination, overlaid on the fog, gradually coming more and more into focus, even as they are fading out from the original dimension. This allows the dimensional traveler to move around in the foreign dimension, up until the minute ends, at which point they fully materialize, hopefully in a secluded location, as opposed to suddenly appearing in front of a crowd of people, or just in front of a speeding vehicle or other hazard. During that minute, they are intangible to physical attacks and kinetic weapons in their original dimension, but are vulnerable to energy attacks, psionics and magic. If any of the latter strike the character, the process is interrupted and may only be re-attempted once the traveler is again free to concentrate. Once the being arrives in the new dimension, he or she has one chance to return to their starting point, but may stay there indefinitely otherwise. So long as the spell is still in effect in the starting dimension, they may return for the same P.P.E. or I.S.P. cost as before, in exactly the same manner.

All within the area of effect will see obscured images in the fog of these parallel worlds, from buildings and machines to vehicles and inhabitants. These real-time glimpses into other worlds can be disturbing, and the muffled sounds that emanate from them only add to the uncertainty and fear of those without the above mentioned psychic or magic abilities. For these unfortunates, the fog has a Horror Factor of 15. Staying still is the safest thing to do, for these "phantasms" have no substance. Panicking and running wildly through the fog is a dangerous thing to do, because for every melee that a being does so, there is a cumulative 5% chance that they will stumble out of the fog and into the parallel dimension they are fleeing. Fortunately for these unwilling castaways, there is a 99% chance of reappearing at their last position in the original dimension at the end of the spell.

Note: Parallel worlds are essentially divergent time lines, where at some point in their common history, an event occurred in one that didn't in the other. This can range anywhere from a single butterfly perishing, to an alien invasion, to an asteroid missing Earth rather than hitting it, allowing the dinosaurs to evolve into sapient life forms. The chain of events that follow can create the most profound differences between the two dimensions or have very little noticeable effect at all. This would seem to suggest that there is an unlimited number of parallel worlds, branching off at every possible event, but Spatial Mages have discovered that such divergence does not happen very often and when it does, the changes are usually far-reaching.



Soul Leech

Range: Touch.

Duration: Instant; permanent on the final drain.

Saving Throw: Special.

P.P.E.: One thousand per drain, for a total of 20,000.

Used only by the most morally corrupt of Shifters (even to consider casting this spell, the Shifter must be Anarchist or evil), this spell extracts the life force from a lesser supernatural being, channeling it into the caster. The victim must be restrained, which means that the bonds must be thick and strong enough, at least initially, to counter supernatural strength. Consequently, these restraints are typically constructed out of M.D.C. metal or stone and are extremely thick and heavy, and fixed firmly in the earth. Preventing the use of psionic, magic and natural abilities by the victim is accomplished by keeping them in a near comatose state, drugged to the eyeballs, dosing them every few hours. This means that creatures impervious to poisons and drugs will not be affected, and alternative means of restraint must be sought.

This powerful spell can only be cast once per month (30 days). When it is cast, the result of a successful drain is that one random natural ability possessed by the creature, including such things as nightvision, empathy, imperviousness to fire, magical or psionic abilities, among others, along with 5% of the creature's combined Hit Points and S.D.C. are transferred to the caster and are no longer available to the victim. If the creature is M.D.C. in nature, the caster becomes an M.D.C. being, with 5%

of the M.D.C. transferred each time. In addition, the caster receives 5% of the creature's I.S.P. and P.P.E. If a Soul Drain is saved against, it cannot be attempted until the next month, however each successful drain will mean subsequent attempts to succeed at a saving throw versus magic incur a cumulative -1 penalty, as the victim becomes weaker and less able to resist.

The price to be paid for this power is a 01-70% chance, for each drain, of the caster developing one of the following:

01-25% The caster develops one of the creature's weaknesses (such as damage from sunlight, vulnerability to iron or magic weapons, etc.).

26-50% The caster's body alters to mildly resemble the creature's. This could be a change in hue, the growth of protuberances, a loss or gain of weight and size, elongation or shrinkage of extremities, and so on. A corresponding loss of one point of P.B. occurs. Note that a humanoid shape is maintained, even if the victim is not humanoid in shape.

51-75% The caster develops an insanity either possessed by the creature or similar to a behavior it displays. There is a 5% chance that this will be accompanied by a decline in alignment as follows: Anarchist becomes Miscreant, Miscreant and Aberrant become Diabolic.

76-00% The caster's body reacts violently to the process, falling prey to a sickness that lasts 1D4 months. During that period, the caster will be unable to perform another drain and will, for the entire duration, display one of the following symptoms as described under the spell Minor Curse:

01-25% Fever

26-50% Headache

51-75% Nausea

76-00% Runny nose and cough

After ten drains, the caster receives +1D6 to every physical attribute, excluding P.B., and his or her attributes become supernatural. Conversely, the victim's attributes are no longer considered supernatural, it no longer has the energy to use magic, psionics or natural abilities, and its body shrivels in a way consistent with the effects of the spell Dessicate the Supernatural (**Federation of Magic**). In the week following every drain from the eleventh onward, the sheer evil of the Soul Drain triggers a spate of disturbing dreams, featuring the caster and saturated with a powerful impression of supernatural evil, in all clairvoyant psychics within a 2000 mile (3200 km) radius. This can lead to questing do-gooders trying to throw a spanner in the works.

Upon the twentieth drain, the husk of the creature finally crumbles into dust and the soul transference becomes permanent. The caster receives +4 to all attributes, and is considered to be a greater supernatural being in the same way a Master Vampire is, gaining all relevant strengths and weaknesses. The caster's life span is doubled or increased to 50% of the victim's, whichever is greater. Finally, once the process is complete, this spell may never be recast by the mage. If the caster or the creature perishes prior to this, the process is reversed for the survivor at a rate of 1 day per month formerly taken. If it is the creature that dies, the caster may reattempt this spell on another victim after the process is completely reversed.



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The Hammer of the ForgeTM



By James M.G. Cannon

Chapter Fifteen Pathfinder

While the people of the Consortium of Civilized Worlds prefer to think otherwise, magic is a powerful and vibrant force in the Three Galaxies. Most dramatically, this magic manifests itself upon and within living worlds. Observers often see this force as a network, a lattice, of lines that encircle the world. But magic permeates the environment, soaking into every living thing, piercing into and through the earth itself. Some theories hold that magic itself is the catalyst for evolution, that it guides the development of lifeforms, that it may be the ultimate source for the ascendancy of intelligent life in the Megaverse.

That theory has its detractors, but few would deny that the presence, and strength, of ley lines affects the life forms that inhabit that world. The Seljuks of Gemini One, for example, appear as normal flesh and blood, but possess supernatural

strength and endurance that allow them to physically match power armor. That other reptilian species in the Three Galaxies do not possess these abilities may be attributed to the powerful, violent expression of the ley lines on Gemini One. Ley storms so devastating that the Seljuks — as a species — permanently gave up their ability to manipulate magic in order to put a stop to them, frequently tore across the planet's surface as the Seljuks evolved.

This is not to be taken lightly.

But living worlds are not the only place in the Three Galaxies that ley lines manifest. The trackless aether of space is also home to lines of force that duplicate the energy signature of ley lines. Without the potential psychic energy provided by life, without the anchor of a world, these lines of force stab through space. The Celestial monks use them to plumb the mysteries of the Megaverse, while the Dwarven runemasters of the UWW use them as railways to carry their magic-fueled ships between worlds. And an ambitious Consortium scientist named Arthur Nast is attempting to map these lines, and while his project is far from complete, in its current form it suggests that the space leys, too, create an invisible network, a circuit, that connects disparate worlds to one another.

What does this mean?

I have no idea. But I do believe it is absolutely marvelous.

— Weddron Nurrick, *Noro scholar and quantum psionicist*

Caleb Vulcan, Knight of the Cosmic Forge, reclined backward into the plush leather seat of the pilot's chair. He let loose a long sigh.

The control panel of his newly purchased, and slightly used, Orion Industries Comet was much more complicated looking than the guidance system of Lothar's old freighter had been. Lothar, Caleb's late mentor, had allowed Caleb to pilot his ship for short distances, and Caleb had hoped that his grounding in



the basics of interstellar travel would enable him to pilot the new craft. But Caleb had to admit that the array of buttons, lights and screens laid before him was a puzzle he could not comprehend. He shifted in his seat, his mop of blood red hair falling into his eyes, and checked the few indicators he comprehended.

The Contra-Gravitonic drive that powered the ship was nominal. The life-support systems were fine, the air-scrubbers chugging away to keep clean air circulating throughout the ship. The red button on the top right corner of the panel would raise the landing gear, while a dial at the bottom right controlled the ship's defense screen. Other than that, the control panel was a confusing mess. There was no joystick, no altimeter or fuel gauge, or any of a dozen other items Caleb expected to see. What it had were six tiny screens, flashing brightly with glyphs in Trade One, one of the oldest tongues in the Three Galaxies, and one Caleb could not speak, let alone read. Two globes were incised in the bottom of the panel, spinning lazily without any direction from Caleb.

Caleb spun his chair around to regard the rest of the Comet's bridge. U-shaped, the bridge had six seats spread on two levels. The lower level, where Caleb sat, was designed for the pilot and co-pilot. The raised section was largely for passengers, but contained a communications and sensor array, as well as posts for engineering and weapons targeting, though this particular Comet wasn't armed. Weaponry would have raised the price on the craft considerably, and as it was, Caleb was indebted to Hiram and Kornelia Acherean to the tune of thirty million credits for the Comet. At their daughter Kassiopaea's behest, they had purchased the ship for the use of their daughter and her friends. But neither Kassy nor their other companion, the shadowman spellcaster Doctor Abbot, could pilot a starship. The three of them had hoped Caleb's lessons with Lothar would be enough.

Caleb sighed again, and stood up. It was such a good ship, too. A sleek, red craft, nearly two hundred feet long and shaped like a dagger, the Comet was a medium-sized runner. The type of ship used by mercenaries, nobles, or smugglers; a fast ship with excellent defense screens, that could slip past blockades undetected. The drive on this particular Comet had been modified, making it slightly faster than other ships of its kind.

Not that it mattered. The ship still needed a pilot.

Caleb heard voices coming from elsewhere in the ship. He hopped up to the higher level, in time to greet Hiram Acherean and a stranger. Hiram Acherean was an Atlantean, and was gifted with the body of a Greek god. Tall and powerfully built, Hiram's dark skin was decorated with blue and white glyphs which marked him as an Undead Slayer, a specialized Atlantean warrior. He wore a white tunic, and flowing robes edged with violet. Hiram Acherean had the bearing of a king, but neither that nor Hiram's piercing blue-eyed stare intimidated Caleb. Hiram intimidated Caleb because he was Kassy's father, and Caleb felt the need to gain the man's approval and acceptance. Perhaps it had something to do with Caleb's own father, a harsh taskmaster who had spared few kind words for his son.

To distract himself from such morbid thoughts, Caleb focused his attention on the stranger. The new figure was just as tall as Hiram, putting him a good foot higher than Caleb himself. He possessed an expansive cranium that tapered down to a

narrow chin, giving him a triangular appearance. A ridge of violet-black spikes erupted from the top of his head, forming a sort of mohawk. His pale skin had a violet undersheen as well, giving him an odd look, emphasized by large eyes as black as pitch. He wore a black leather jacket, strung with chains, and beneath that an apparently nondescript gray flightsuit. As soon as he saw Caleb, the figure stuck out a long fingered hand. Caleb automatically took it, noticing in passing that there were six fingers.

"Caleb Vulcan," Hiram said, "allow me to introduce Siv Yurilak."

"A pleasure," Siv Yurilak said. He had a low, humming quality to his voice. Almost an echo.

"All mine," Caleb said. "You're the pilot?" he asked.

Yurilak chuckled. "Ah, yes," he agreed. "But I am much more than that. I am a mentalist, a seeker of truth, a wanderer of the cosmos."

"Uh... right," Caleb said, shooting Hiram a concerned glance. Yurilak sounded like some sort of hippie. How good a pilot could he be?

"My wife is helping our daughter load the supplies on the ship," Hiram said, unaware of or ignoring Caleb's discomfort. "I shall help them. You two should get better acquainted." Hiram gave Yurilak a pat on the shoulder as he left.

Yurilak grinned in Caleb's direction. "Hiram and I go back a few years," he explained. Stepping around the young man, Yurilak hopped down into the pilot's station. Casually he reached out and toggled a switch, lighting up the screens before him. Yurilak looked over his shoulder at Caleb. "You are threatened by my presence, yes?"

Caleb blushed bright scarlet, and tried to mutter a denial. Yurilak flashed neat, even teeth. "No need," he said. "I'm the best pilot in the Three Galaxies. Few could approach my skill; it's nothing to be ashamed about."

Caleb could only stare, shocked at the Noro's egotism.

Yurilak smiled enigmatically. He turned back to the control panel. "I've seen you on the newsfeeds of late," he said, changing the topic. "You're quite a busy Cosmo-Knight. Busting up terrorist cells doesn't leave you much time to learn how to drive, does it?"

Caleb grimaced, feeling his cheeks darken further. Most of his time on Alexandria had been spent buzzing around in full armor, rushing headlong into dangerous situations. Cosmo-Knights were a rarity in the United Worlds of Warlock, and the presence of such an active Knight on one of the UWW's most prosperous worlds caused quite a stir. However, Caleb had come dangerously close to losing his humanity during his crusade. He had nearly subsumed his true self beneath the persona of a cold-hearted Cosmo-Knight, a conscious imitation of his fallen mentor, Lothar. Kassy had brought him back to his self, but the memory of how close he had come made him terribly self-conscious.

"Yes, I was busy," Caleb said at last. "My job is saving lives. Tends to be a full time one. Not all of us can have glamorous careers, like chauffeuring people around the Three Galaxies." Yurilak stared at Caleb, his smile fading rapidly. Caleb instantly regretted snapping at the Noro, but he didn't care for the man's attitude. "I think I'll check on our supplies," he said.

"You do that," Yurilak said, all trace of humor gone from his voice. "I'll do the preflight check. We should be ready to go in about half an hour."

"We'll be ready," Caleb told him. He left the bridge, feeling even more gloomy than he had when he entered it.

Caleb bumped into Doctor Abbot in the hallway. The alien spellcaster looked like a human shadow, dark and featureless save for twin orange lights where his eyes should be. To make himself more approachable, Abbot favored a battered trenchcoat and fedora, complete with cane. Those, combined with the British sounding accent he used in Trade Four, gave Caleb the impression of an old professor, rather than one of the most powerful wizards in the Three Galaxies. "Caleb," Abbot said warmly. "I hear Hiram found us a pilot."

"Yes," Caleb told him. "And he's a jerk."

Abbot's shadowy face lightened in his version of a smile. "Excellent. Should be an interesting trip, then!"

* * *

But it wasn't.

I turned out to be a quick, two day jaunt to another of the pastoral worlds of the United Worlds of Warlock, a planet called Celene. Celene was sparsely inhabited, populated mostly by an alliance of Elven tribes who dwelled within the vast, primordial jungles of the planet's northern hemisphere. But what made Celene special in the Three Galaxies was the presence of an ancient monastery that sprawled across much of the planet's smallest continent. Ten thousand years ago, a sentient named Sollust, wandering the galaxy in search of enlightenment, had come to Celene and according to his followers, discovered the perfect place to continue his meditations. Sollust found that Celene's orbital pathway brought the planet through one of the few ley line nexuses in space, a hub that connected over a dozen individual space ley lines, and from them, connected to the vast network of celestial pathways throughout the Three Galaxies. In short, a mentalist of Sollust's skill and experience could explore vast reaches of space without leaving Celene's soil. The followers of Sollust built a monastery, and codified Sollust's teachings, creating the Order of Celestial Monks. Since those early days the monks have studied and meditated, expanding the grounds of their monastery as their numbers waxed and waned over the centuries, and their knowledge of the Megaverse's mysteries deepened. In time, seekers of truth from throughout the Three Galaxies and beyond began to journey to Celene in search of Sollust's wisdom, and the Order expanded out into the Three Galaxies as well.

Centuries ago, an orphaned child of an unknown alien race was brought to Celene by Celestial monks who found him living unprotected on a floating asteroid. Raised among the esoteric Celestians, the child proved adept at wizardly arts and eventually earned a degree at the monastery's academy of magical study. He left Celene soon after, seeking a clue to his origins out in the strange and frightening Three Galaxies.

Now he was returning to the home he left behind so long ago, and it seemed that Celene held the key to discovering his origins after all. Abbot smiled at the irony, as he sat cross-legged on his bed. He had searched, off and on, on a thousand worlds and

across a hundred dimensions, for some sign of his origins, his background. Even in the Megaverse melting pot of Phase World itself, however, Abbot had remained an alien. The same held true on Wormwood, on the Palladium World, through the gray reaches of the Astral Plane, and even in the darkened wastes of the Nightlands. Nowhere could Abbot find a hint or clue as to what he was, where he came from, or whether others like him existed in the Megaverse.

But recently, as Abbot had performed the funeral rites for his departed friend and ally Lothar of Motherhome, utilizing the nearly forgotten techniques of the Celestial monks who had raised him, Abbot had connected with the ley lines that crisscrossed space, the Celestial Pathways. He had felt a ripple across them, a strange feeling that had seemed at once foreign and familiar, and he knew without a shadow of doubt that another Shadowbeing existed somewhere in the Three Galaxies. But as soon as the realization hit him, the feeling was lost, and no matter how hard he tried, Abbot could not recapture it.

On Celene, however, Abbot knew he would find it again. More, he would be able to track the elusive Shadowbeing, to find them wherever they were in the Three Galaxies. Then, perhaps, he would finally find the answers he had sought all his life. He might even discover a relative. Or, dare he hope, a mate?

Abbot shook his head to clear such thoughts. His lifespan had measured several long centuries; he would not act like a child at Yuletide. He needed his wits about him if he was going to succeed, and that meant no more daydreaming. Though, on the trip from Alexandria to Celene, there had been little else to do. Though Caleb and Yurilak barely exchanged a civil word with one another, they barely spoke at all. Caleb spent most of the trip in his cabin, poring over flight manuals and playing with flight sims. Even Kassy couldn't coax him out of his quarters, and the boy was smitten with her. Though neither of them seemed aware of that fact; Kassy was edgy, though she didn't appear to know why, and she seemed distracted, failing to rise to Yurilak's occasional snide comments.

The Noro, Abbot was forced to admit, did leave something to be desired in the personality department. He was sarcastic, egotistical, and liked to needle his shipmates with pointed observations. Yet, Siv Yurilak truly was an exceptional pilot. Unlike most Noro, who channeled their natural psionic abilities into either mysticism or warfare, Yurilak had decided to focus his psychic abilities on his piloting skills. His sixth sense and clairvoyance allowed him to navigate a busy spaceport with ease, and he could plot a course through interstellar space without needing to consult the nav-computer. Yurilak could "see" space for kilometers in a three-hundred and sixty degree arc around himself. Further, he could feel the ship itself, communicate with its computer and drive system, and sense its strengths and weaknesses. Hiram had outdone himself in contracting Yurilak to fly the Comet.

"Attention," Yurilak's voice suddenly appeared on the speaker, jolting Abbot out of his reverie. "Attention, folks. We're coming up on Celene."

Abbot jumped to his feet, pulled his coat and fedora on, and scooped up his cane in one hand. He hurried to the bridge, almost colliding with Kassy in the hallway.

Tall and dark like her parents, with her father's blue eyes and similar blue-white tattoos running up and down her shoulders, Kassiopaea Acherean was definitely a beautiful woman by human standards. She smiled at Abbot. "A little eager, Doc?" she asked with a laugh.

Were he capable of it, Abbot would have turned red. Instead, he let his eyes twinkle and nodded. "I cannot think of the last time I was this excited about something," Abbot admitted.

"You've a right to be," Kassy told him, leading the way down the corridor. "Gods, but I'm excited for you. I just wish Caleb could muster up some energy."

"His mind is elsewhere," Abbot said. "The boy is still adjusting to his new home. It wasn't that long ago that he was living on some backwater world in another dimension. The Three Galaxies are still new to him." Abbot paused. "And he still hasn't come to terms with Lothar's death."

Kassy's eyes widened in surprise. "But I thought —"

"He is himself once more," Abbot told her, "but the guilt is still there. So he seeks distractions, hence his current quest to master astronavigation. I fear he may remain so until we catch up with Lothar's killer."

Kassy sighed, and was not able to keep the bitterness from her voice. "Perhaps. But I for one have seen enough of death and revenge. I prefer the road we're on now." She managed to smile once more. "A chance at finding you a family. That's something to believe in."

Abbot threaded his arm through Kassy's. "I assure you, my dear, that I already have a wonderful family. One more couldn't hurt, though." Kassy's laugh brought them into the bridge.

Caleb was already there, trying not to glower at Yurilak, who was obnoxiously ignoring the other man. Caleb's features softened when Kassy appeared, and even managed a smile in her direction. The blue and green jewel of Celene filled the ship's observation screen. Abbot felt a warmth settle into his bones at the sight.

Home, he thought.

"The monastery is on the nightside at the moment," Yurilak told them as they appeared. "but somebody's up. And they're eager to see us. When I mentioned Abbot was aboard, they about flipped their lids."

"I have not been home in sometime," Abbot agreed. "And Brother Tandostiir did make me promise to visit soon when I saw him at Lothar's funeral." Out of the corner of his eye, Abbot saw Caleb flinch involuntarily at Lothar's name. Kassy reached out and laid a hand on Caleb's shoulder.

"Bring us down, Siv," Abbot said.

"Your wish," Yurilak said as his hands flew across the controls, "is my command."

* * *

The Comet landed lightly on the tarmac, though Yurilak gave it a little bounce. Caleb grimaced, Kassy grinned, and Abbot tried to ignore the Noro's sense of humor. Tucking his cane under his arm, Abbot left the bridge and headed for the airlock. Caleb hurried after him, grumbling under his breath about "showboating."

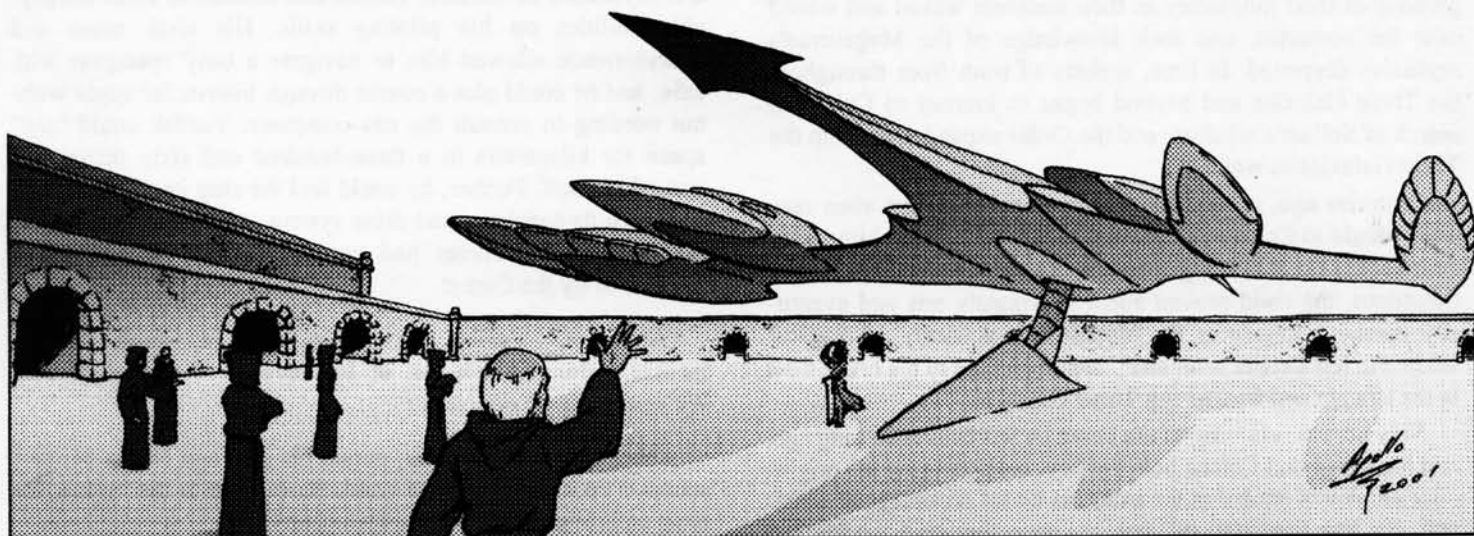
The airlock cycled open and the gantry ramp slid down to reach the ground with a thump. Abbot ambled down the ramp, and could not help smiling as he breathed the sharp Celene air. Even through the tang of ozone, heated metal, and oil coming from the ship, Abbot could smell the orchids in the monastery's garden in full bloom, the scents of bread baking in the kitchens, and the faint smell of incense carried on the breeze.

Brother Tandostiir was waiting for him at the base of the landing platform, with a circle of his brothers and sisters, all of them in the nondescript robes of the order and representing the order's diversity. Tandostiir himself was a Noro, with shaven head and a ready smile. "Welcome, Doctor Abbot," he said, stepping forward and holding out his hands in a welcoming gesture. Abbot took them, and bowed his head to receive Tandostiir's benediction. "Sollust's blessing be upon you."

"And you as well, Brother Tandostiir," Abbot said, rising. "You remember my friends Caleb Vulcan and Kassiopaea Acherean," Abbot said, introducing his friends.

"Ah yes," Tandostiir said. "The young Cosmo-Knight and the Undead Slayer. The Order of Celestial Monks welcomes you to Celene."

"Thank you," Caleb said.



"Yes, thank you for allowing us to visit," Kassy added. "Hiram and Kornelia Acherean send their greetings."

Tandostiir's pale gray face split into a wide grin. "Good friends. I trust they are well?"

"They are indeed," Kassy said.

"Does everyone in the Three Galaxies know one another besides me?" Caleb murmured, just loud enough to be heard. Kassy elbowed him in the ribs, but Tandostiir laughed.

"Please, let us retire inside," Tandostiir said at last. "Our home is yours. Please, enjoy our hospitality." The other brothers and sisters broke away, leading Caleb and Kassy across the landing field towards the campus buildings. Siv Yurilak appeared, his leather jacket slung over one shoulder, and with a grin at Abbot, followed the rest of the party. Abbot stayed behind, noting without surprise that Tandostiir did as well.

"What brings the wandering son home, so long after he left?" Tandostiir asked softly.

"I may have discovered what I left to find, so many years ago," Abbot explained. "But I need the use of the Star Chamber. I must commune with the Celestial Pathways."

Tandostiir's eyes widened, almost imperceptibly. After a moment, he said, "This is not a simple thing you ask, my son. You were raised here, but never fully indoctrinated into the order's mysteries. The use of the Star Chamber is for brothers and sisters of the order alone."

"I understand," Abbot told him evenly. "I do not ask for this favor lightly. While meditating on Alexandria, I felt the presence of another Shadowbeing through the celestial currents. But the presence was lost almost as soon as it was sensed."

Tandostiir frowned. "Are you certain of this, Abbot?"

"Without doubt," Abbot told him. "Nothing I have ever felt could compare. It felt like looking in a mirror... it was quite startling. I fear that startlement led to me losing the connection."

Tandostiir was quiet for a moment. "The Concordation will not be pleased to hear of this, I fear," he said at last. He smiled slightly. "But I believe I can convince them to help. We do not lightly turn away family, after all." Tandostiir began to follow the others, and after a moment Abbot went after him.

"There may be something you can do for us," Tandostiir told him.

"Whatever I can do to help," Abbot said automatically.

"We have a young student, very promising, herself of an heretofore unknown alien species. She has achieved an unprecedented level of power in a short span of time. Yet the accompanying enlightenment has eluded her." Tandostiir sighed, an uncommon occurrence. "I fear that she has reached the limit of what we can teach her."

"You want me to bring this student off-world with me," Abbot said.

"Essentially," Tandostiir agreed. "Perhaps you can help her in ways that we cannot."

Abbot blinked, and suddenly smiled. "You're a wily old man, Tandostiir," he said. "This is why you wanted me to come visit, isn't it? You haven't missed me. You want me to look after this troubled child of yours."

Tandostiir grinned ruefully. "I am happy to see you," he said with a laugh. "But come, let us eat dinner before anything is settled." Tandostiir led the way, and Doctor Abbot followed.

* * *

While Abbot waited for Tandostiir to bring the Concordation, the order's ruling body, to accede to Abbot's request, the others explored the monastery's grounds. Kassy and Caleb took the tour, led around by an enterprising and energetic young initiate named Arwen. According to Kassy, Caleb was astounded at the variety of people and architectural styles he found here, as well as the fact that the monks studied martial disciplines. For a boy — no, Abbot corrected himself — a man who had seen the wonders Phase World had to offer, Celene and the monastery should have seemed tame in comparison. Yet Caleb seemed charmed by the place. Kassy, for her part, had heard stories of the monastery from Abbot and her parents, but never been to the site before, and found it just as she had imagined it. Siv Yurilak, for his part, took advantage of the meditation spaces to commune with the celestial pathways himself. Abbot was impressed.

After three days, Caleb was beginning to get antsy, and took off to explore Celene a bit on his own. Kassy, feeling annoyed and abandoned, began sparring with the younger initiates, including the girl, Arwen, who proved to be an exceptional hand to hand combatant.

All this Abbot learned third hand. He could not talk to his friends, as he had sequestered himself in a cell in order to purify his mind and body for the coming trial. He burned incense, meditated with legs folded upon a reed mat, and drank only tea. Nightly, Tandostiir would visit and inform him of his progress with the Concordation and the activities of his friends.

On the fifth day, when Tandostiir visited, he brought more welcome news. "The Concordation has decided to allow you the use of the Star Chamber. With reservations. Brother Huskarl thinks it a betrayal of our precepts, while Sister Banaban fears, rightly so, that the rigors of the Star Chamber will destroy you."

Abbot nodded. Despite Tandostiir's warnings, he felt relieved. He was one step closer to the goal that had eluded him for centuries. "I understand," he told Tandostiir. "But I have no intention of betraying the order or of losing myself within the Chamber."

Tandostiir smiled warmly. "I told them as much. But they don't know you as well as I do. When will you be ready?"

"Tomorrow," Abbot said. "At first light."

"Very well," Tandostiir said, and withdrew, leaving Abbot alone with his thoughts.

Abbot did not sleep that night, instead simply using the long hours to further his connection with the living world around him, tapping into the ley lines that encircled Celene. As the sun appeared in the western sky, Abbot rose, dressed, and made his way towards the central building of the monastery, a domed structure of steel and glass that rose a dozen stories into the sky. It was not the largest building on campus, nor the most beautiful, but it was the most captivating.

The morning sun gave the dome a blinding sheen, and the reflected light made Abbot feel insubstantial. Within the building, a dozen ley lines met, forming a nexus of incredible power. This close to the nexus, Abbot could feel the energy bleeding off of it, thrumming through the invisible lines of force that radiated out from it like the spokes of a wheel. Sollust had chosen the site well; the very air here crackled with power for those sensitive to notice such things.

Brother Tandostiir and the other members of the Concordation waited in a semicircle before the dome. Abbot slowed as he approached them, finally coming to a stop within the circle. He bowed his head.

Sister Banaban, a graying Wolfen female, stepped forward, the hem of her robes whispering on the cobblestones beneath her feet. "Who is this that comes before us?" she intoned.

Brother Tandostiir stepped forward. "A seeker of truth," he answered her.

"Is his cause just?" she asked.

"His cause is just," Tandostiir answered.

"Is there any here who would block his path?" Banaban asked. Abbot risked a glance at Brother Huskarl, a thin boned Draconid, but Huskarl said nothing. After a brief silence, Banaban spoke once more. "Then proceed, seeker of truth, and may Sollust's blessing be upon you."

"My thanks," Abbot said. He handed his cane to Tandostiir, and then divested himself of his trenchcoat and fedora as well. Naked, a creature of living shadow, he stepped through the door into the dome. The world shifted around him.

Surrounded by light, imprisoned in a maze of steel and glass, he picked his way across the mirrored surface of the floor towards a distant point on the horizon. Images of his past flickered on the panes of glass around him, like two-dimensional holovids. He saw himself as a child, on that barren asteroid, living alone. There he arrived on Celene, and was welcomed into the order with open arms. There, he struggled with his first spell, trying to light a candle with a thought. Beyond, he shattered the bonds of reality, opening a gate between worlds and ushering in a beast that had nearly destroyed him, but for the timely intervention of a young and limber Tandostiir. He saw himself, in his first hat and coat, leaving Celene behind on an outbound freighter, nervous and excited, seeing the Three Galaxies for the first time. He felt a slight pain in his chest when he beheld his first meeting with Lothar, on one of the Draconid Hub worlds while Quajinn Huo was massing his first army. Images of Abbot throughout his travels appeared before him, as he wandered from world to world, dimension to dimension, discovered friends and allies and fought terrible foes. His knowledge, his worldliness, grew, and yet the answers he desperately sought continued to elude him. Until now. Abbot reached the doorway, and stepped across the threshold, into the Star Chamber. The world shifted around him.

He stood in a small, dark room. A circle of wan, orange light lay upon the floor. Other than that, the space was bare. Abbot stepped over the light, and folding his legs beneath him, settled into the circle. He laid his hands upon his knees, closed his eyes, and opened his other perceptions. Around him, the air crackled and sizzled, and the orange light grew brighter and brighter, while Abbot's own body grew dimmer and dimmer. He felt his consciousness touch the nexus that surrounded him, broadening to touch upon the ley lines that radiated out around him. He felt his mind soar, higher and higher, until he touched the heavens. Light exploded all around him, and sucked him in. Deeper.

Deeper.

Deeper.

* * *

Golden sunlight reflected brightly off the crimson carapace of Caleb's centurion-themed armor as he descended from the clouds and flew towards the monastery. It was late afternoon on the sixth day of their stay on Celene, and after buzzing around the northern jungles for two days, Caleb was returning to the monastery to check on his companions. The jungles in the north were lush and beautiful, in the throes of their rainy season, and life abounded. Huge, draconic creatures with incredible wingspans and too many teeth glided through the rain clouds and stalked the jungle floor, while birds of incredible colors filled the skies and tiny primates chattered and hooted. The Elves Caleb had expected to see proved elusive, but then they probably had to be good at hiding to avoid the dragons. One of the creatures, assuming Caleb was food, had tried to bite him, but was rewarded with a few broken teeth for its trouble.

He had hoped to find some excitement, some adventure, perhaps some Elven damsel to rescue, but the aside from the one hungry dragon, the trip had proved a bust. Perhaps he should have stayed with Kassy at the monastery. He had enjoyed touring the grounds with her, exploring the gardens and the temples, helping in the apiary and watching the brethren test their martial skills against one another. But there was a greater danger in that than he faced against dragons or tropical storms; he was falling for Kassy.

As of now, Caleb knew it was nothing more than a crush. It could too easily become something more, however, and Caleb didn't know how to deal with it. Back at home, on Earth, he would have just asked her to a dance, or out to a kegger or something. But life in the Three Galaxies made things substantially more complicated. First and foremost was the fact that he was a Cosmo-Knight; could such beings even have normal relationships? He had pledged himself to the service of the Cosmic Forge and, by extension, all living things. Caleb had known priests with less responsibility, and they hadn't been allowed to clutter their lives with girlfriends or lives. Then there was the cultural barrier, not to mention the age difference. Kassy looked like she was only a year or two older than he was, but Atlanteans could live for centuries, and Kassy herself was almost as old as his father.

On the other hand, Kassy was easily the most beautiful, intelligent, confident, funny, and compassionate woman he had ever met.

"Aw, nuts," Caleb muttered darkly. He landed lightly on the tarmac beside the Comet, dispelling his armor with a crimson flash at the same time.

"There you are!"

Caleb turned sharply, and saw Kassy framed in the ship's airlock, her dark hair wild in the late afternoon breeze. Caleb felt his breath catch in his throat.

"Why didn't you bring your radio?" she demanded, storming down the gantry.

"There's no world-net to monitor here," Caleb explained automatically, "and I thought you would all be fine here. What's wrong?"

"Abbot went into the Star Chamber this morning," Kassy said sharply. "That was fifteen hours ago, and he still hasn't come out. The Concordation seems to think that could be trouble."

"Well, what can we do?"

"I don't know," Kassy frowned. "But I hate standing around and wringing my hands by myself. And I hate being left behind."

Caleb winced. That jab had been aimed at him, not at Abbot. "I'm sorry, I just wanted to explore..." He trailed off, unable to tell her exactly why he had felt the need to leave.

"By yourself? You didn't even ask me. It felt like Alexandria all over again. Though, at least there I could call you up on the comm and yell at you."

"I'll remember it next time," Caleb told her.

"What?"

"I mean, it'll never happen again."

She nodded. "Better." She shook her head. "I swear, sometimes Caleb I don't know whether to belt you or..." It was Kassy's turn to trail off. Her eyes focused on something over Caleb's shoulder, and he turned to see what it was. Arwen Griffin, the young initiate who had served as their guide, was running towards them.

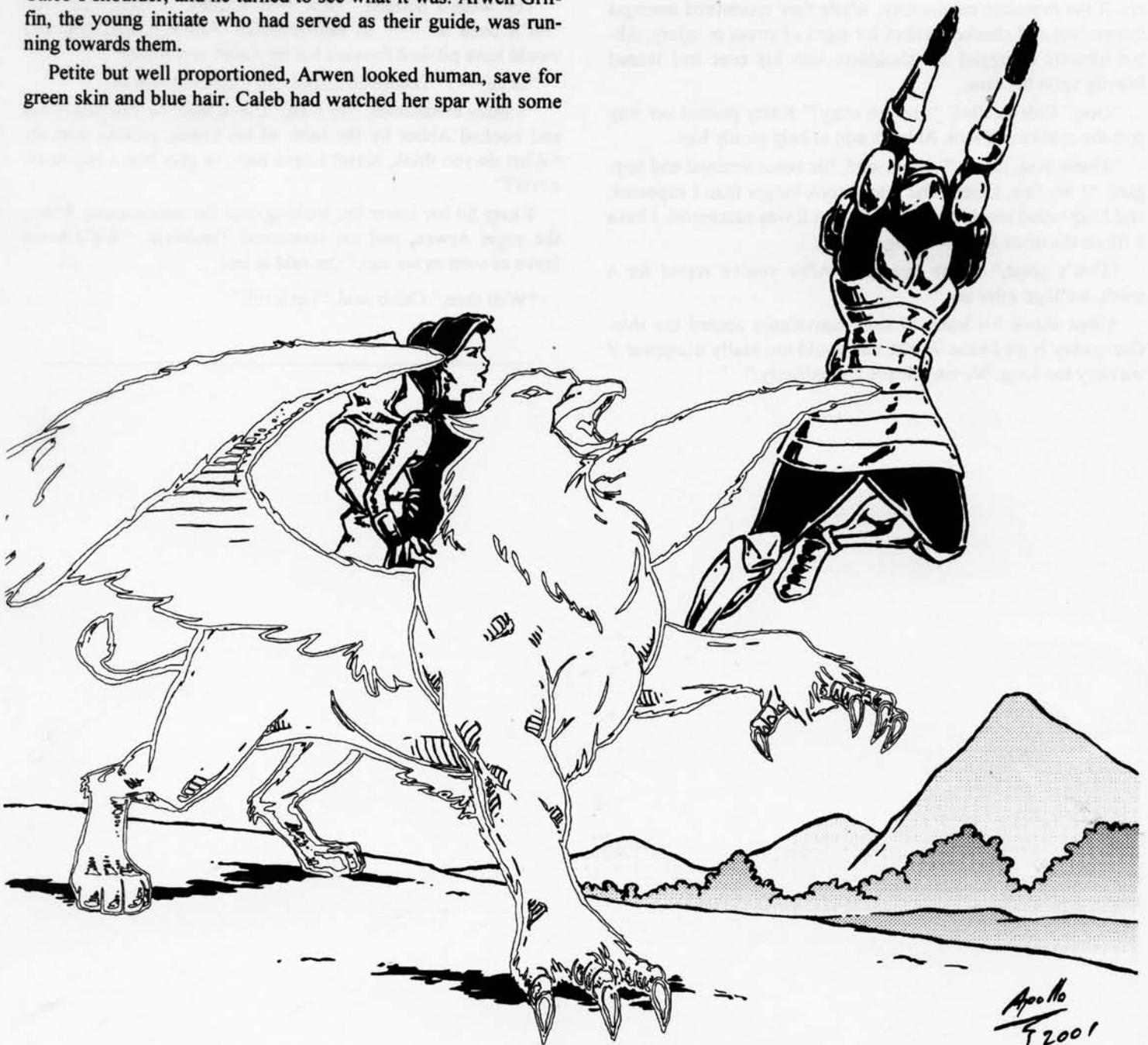
Petite but well proportioned, Arwen looked human, save for green skin and blue hair. Caleb had watched her spar with some

of her brethren, and found himself impressed with her skill. Kassy had been as well, which only served to impress Caleb all the more. Arwen was quick, too, covering the ground with a rapid pace that brought her to them in heartbeats. She slid to a halt in the tarmac, her hood sliding off her head and her robes in a tangle around her legs. Yet she her breath showed no sign of exertion.

"You must come," she said urgently but clearly. "Doctor Abbot has emerged from the Star Chamber."

Caleb arched an eyebrow in Kassy's direction. "See, I'm right on time." Arwen shot a questioning glance at both of them, while Kassy tagged Caleb in the shoulder. "All my worry for nothing," she grumbled.

"Shall we take the Cosmo-Knight express?" Caleb offered.



"I have a better idea," Kassy said. With two fingers she touched a glyph on her right bicep, and in a shower of blue light a massive, blue-white Gryphon appeared before them. "All aboard," Kassy said with a grin, and the Gryphon let out a screech.

"Ladies first," said Caleb. Kassy hopped across the Gryphon's shoulders, and Arwen followed with some urging. "I'll race you," Caleb said when the younger girl was settled. He didn't wait for a response, instead taking to the air. Behind him he heard the Gryphon screech again, and the heavy beat of its wings as it followed him into the sky.

Caleb reached the center of the campus in moments, but Kassy was right behind him, and the Gryphon touched down on the cobbles just as he did. The air flickered with blue light once more as Kassy dispelled her beast, and she and Caleb rushed to Abbot's side.

The wizard stood surrounded by the Concordation, the leaders of the monastic community. While they murmured amongst themselves and checked Abbot for signs of stress or injury, Abbot himself shrugged his shoulders into his coat and leaned heavily upon his cane.

"Doc," Caleb called. "Are you okay?" Kassy pushed her way past the monks and took Abbot's arm to help steady him.

"Thank you, Kassy," Abbot said, his voice strained and haggard. "I am fine, Caleb. The search took longer than I expected, and I expended much of my energy, but it was successful. I have a fix on the other Shadowbeing."

"That's great," Kassy beamed. "After you've rested for a week, we'll go after her."

Abbot shook his head. "I shall convalesce aboard the ship. Our quarry is on Phase World, and could too easily disappear if we tarry too long. We must leave immediately."

"Whatever you say, Doc," Caleb told him. He had made his way through the crowd as well, and now offered Abbot his own arm, helping to support the wizard's weight.

The Noro monk, Tandostiir, materialized with Arwen at his side. "If that is the case, Abbot," he said, "then Arwen must begin packing."

"Excuse me?" Caleb asked.

Abbot smiled weakly. "So she is your prodigy," he said.

Kassy looked across Abbot at Caleb. "Did I miss something?"

"Don't look at me," Caleb said. "I've been gone the last few days."

Arwen clasped her hands before her, but bounced on the balls of her feet. "Truly, Master Tandostiir? I am to go offworld so soon?"

"Abbot?" Tandostiir prompted.

The wizard nodded. "Best find Yurilak as well," he said. "He'll need to — " In mid-sentence, Abbot passed out, and would have pitched forward but for Caleb and Kassy.

"Is he — ?" Tandostiir asked, but Caleb cut him off.

"Simple exhaustion, I'm sure," Caleb said. He reached down and hooked Abbot by the back of his knees, picking him up. "What do you think, Kass? Leave now, or give him a day to recover?"

Kassy bit her lower lip, looking over the unconscious Abbot, the eager Arwen, and the concerned Tandostiir. "We'd better leave as soon as we can," she said at last.

"Well then," Caleb said. "Let's roll."



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