

Palladium Books® Presents:

THE

RIFTER

TM

Your Guide to the Megaverse

Heroes Unlimited™ Robots

Nightbane®

Palladium News

Coming Attractions

Rifts® Russian Gods by Siembieda

Palladium Fantasy RPG® Assassins

G.M. Tips for Fun & Adventure

Rifts® Fiction & More!

Introducing Ramon Perez's Rifts® Lone Star™ comic strip

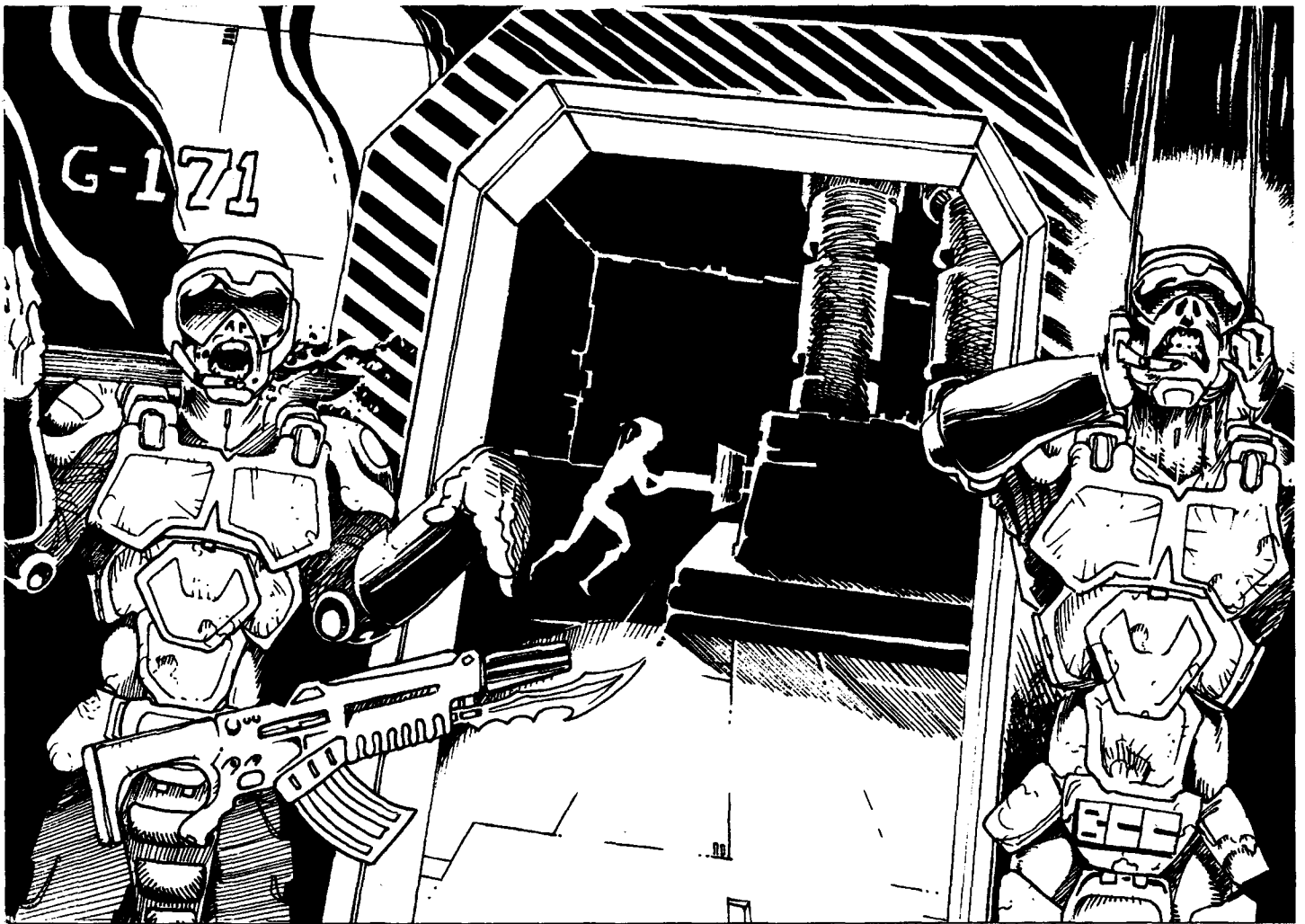
Pérez - J. Moser '99

Warning!

Violence and the Supernatural

The fictional Worlds of Palladium Books® are violent, deadly and filled with supernatural monsters. Other dimensional beings, often referred to as "demons," torment, stalk and prey on humans. Other alien life forms, monsters, gods and demigod, as well as magic, insanity, and war are all elements in this book.

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



The Rifter™ Number Six

Your guide to the Palladium Megaverse®

First Printing — April, 1999

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Palladium Books® Presents:



#6

Sourcebook and guide to the Palladium Megaverse®

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Base on the **RPG** rules, characters,
concepts and Megaverse® created by **Kevin Siembieda**.

Special Thanks to Mike "Midnight" Hawthorne and Shawn "Answer Man" Merrow for making our Web Page a more organized, happy and fun place to visit and play. And to **Maryann Siembieda**: diplomat, organizer, rabble rouser and "Goddess" of Palladium On Line!

Our apologies to anybody who got accidentally left out or their name misspelled.

Contents — The Rifter™ #6 — April, 1999

Page 6 — From the Desk of Kevin Siembieda

Publisher, Kevin Siembieda, wonders just how many people *actually read* The Rifter®. Using time honored magazine formulas, there could be as many as 30,000-50,000 readers! You can help us find the truth.

More fun & experimentation as **Ramon** Perez tries his hand at drawing a Rifts® comic strip, more new contributors see print and Palladium launches a trilogy of **Rifts® Novels**. Enjoy the issue.

Page 7 — Palladium News, Info, & Coming Attractions

Palladium's new 1999 Catalog is bigger than ever and ready for you. Rifts® Novels are a reality, we won't be at Gen Con® (but had a blast at SimCon a few weeks ago), more Web Site improvements, and more Coming Attractions for hot stuff like *Mount Nimro: Kingdom of Giants* and *The Eastern Territory* for *The Palladium Fantasy RPG®* series, *Deluxe Revised RECON®* (you gotta check it out), and upcoming *Rifts® World Books*, including *Rifts® Canada* and the *Splynn Dimensional Market (Atlantis 2)*. And check out the "Glitter Girl" power armor, part of Free Quebec's female Army Corps (illustrated by Ryan Beres).

Page 13 — Knights of the Dinner Table™

Jolly Blackburn's KoDT strip keep 'em laughing.

Don't forget the KoDT comic books are available from **Kenzer & Company**, 1935 S. Plum Grove Rd., Suite 194, Palatine, IL, 60067.

Page 15 — Cloak & Dagger™

A look at Assassins in the Palladium Fantasy RPG®

Optional rules and source material by **Richard Thomassen**. A unique overview of assassins in the Western Empire, Timiro, Lopan, Bizantium, Eastern Territory and The Wolfen Empire. Plus creation rules and guidelines for making Assassin Guilds. Artwork by Mike Wilson.

Page 30 — Russian Gods

Official Gods for use in Rifts® Russia

A selection of notable Russian Gods were cut from **Rifts® Mystic Russia** due to space limitations. Siembieda felt the gods were interesting enough and the artwork by Kent Buries so breathtaking, that it would be a shame not to publish them some place. So here they are in all their glory.

Written by Kevin Siembieda; inspired by real Russian (mainly Kievian) mythology.

Artwork by Kent Buries, a burgeoning art-god himself.

Page 50 — Focus on Fun

G.M. tips for playing Rifts®, Heroes Unlimited™, & other games.

Hugh King offers some excellent advice, tips and observations about Game Mastering in Rifts®, Heroes Unlimited 2nd Ed. and all role-playing game settings in general.

The information is thorough, well thought out and incredibly helpful. It includes Stuff Besides Combat, Encouraging Resourcefulness, Combat with Personality, the many uses of NPCs, Team Leaders, The Player's Perspective, Rewards and much more! Illustrated by **Wayne Breaux Jr.**

Page 67 — Intrigue in Singapore

Optional material for Ninjas & Superspies®

Victor Russof presents a role-playing scenario for use with **Ninjas & Superspies**, plus source material, adventure ideas, and stats for *Kenpo Karate*. Art by Mark Dudley of Drunken Style Studio.

Page 71 — The Old Ways

Optional material for use in Nightbane®

David Solon Philips takes an interesting look at the Mafia after Dark Day. How do organized crime syndicates fit into the world of **Nightbane®**? Includes the Wise Guy and a pair of Assassin O.C.C.s.

Page 76 — Hunter Robotics

Optional material for Heroes Unlimited™, 2nd Ed.

Matthew M. Foster whips up a robotics manufacturer and a handful of robots for use in HU2. Not to mention a couple of Hook, Line and Sinker™ adventures. Art by Ryan Beres.

Page 83 — The Khans of Mongolia

Optional material for Rifts®

The irrepressible Christopher Jones offers optional material for Rifts Mongolia and introduces a new (optional) D-Bee race called the *Gragundi*. Plus calling upon spirits, new weapons, monsters and R.C.C.s. Note that Kevin Siembieda may have other plans for Rifts Mongolia, but it is cool seeing how other folks might approach the same subject matter. Who knows, maybe Kev will actually incorporate some of this in the future. Art is by Drunken Style Studio (DSS).



Page 95 — Rifts® Lone Star Comic Strip

Part One of Six installments illustrated by Ramon Perez. Our story starts out with a bang (literally) and will eventually involve the mad genius who runs the CS Lone Star Complex, Doctor Desmond Bradford. We've seen the plot outline and it's gooooooood. Really good! So don't miss a single issue.

Ramon Perez — Plot, pencils, inks and lettering (what a guy).

Coleen Laxalt — Plot and script.

Perez and Gmoser — Burster cover painting.

Kevin Siembieda gives it a big thumbs up and smiles a lot.

Hey, Ramon says you can send your comments to him directly at calaverada@hotmail.com as well as to Palladium Books. Be gentle.

Page 103 — The Hammer of the Forge The next chapter in James M. G. Cannon's *Phase World™* story. Artwork by Apollo Okamura.

Page 109 — The Siege Against Tolkeen

The continuing *Rifts®* saga as imagined by David Haendler. Artwork by Apollo Okamura.

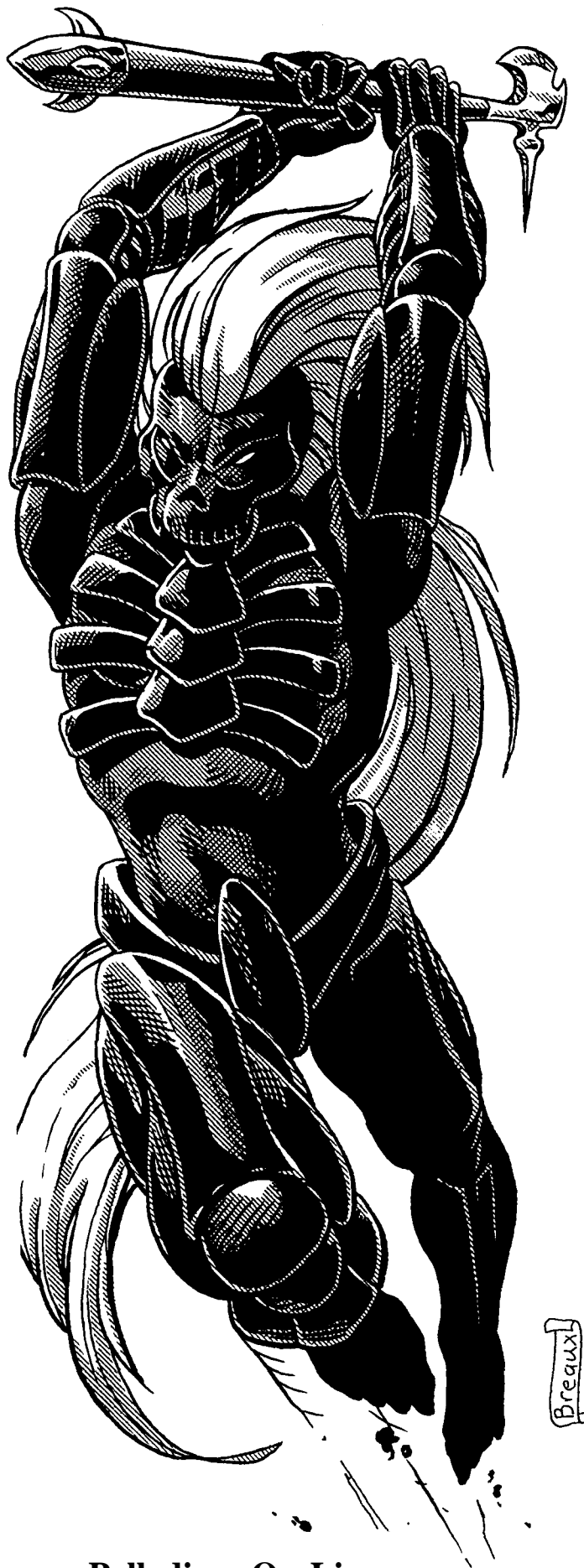
The Cover

Actually the cover is sort of the lead-in to the **Rifts® Lone Star Comic Strip**. It features the central character, a young, bold Burster (and favorite of Ramon's). *Ramon Perez* conceived, laid out and drew the cover, but his buddy, *Joachim Gmoser* applied the final paints. What do you think of this duo? Should we let them do another cover in the future?

Coming Next Issue ...

Rifter #7 — July, 1999

- Eight more pages of the *Rifts® Lone Star* comic strip by Ramon Perez and Coleen Laxalt.
- More *Knights of the Dinner Table™*.
- More material for the *Palladium Fantasy RPG™*.
- Source material for *Heroes Unlimited™*.
- The next chapter of the Hammer of the Forge™.
- The continuing saga of the *Siege Against Tolkeen™*.
- More G.M. tips.
- The latest news and developments at Palladium.
- Source material for the *Palladium Megaverse®*.
- And new contributors.



Palladium On-Line
— www.palladiumbooks.com

From the Desk of Kevin Siembieda

Are there 30,000-50,000 people reading *The Rifter*™?

Traditional "magazines" use the following formula: For every one person who buys a **copy**, 3-5 people actually read it. This estimate is typically done to justify advertising fees. Of course, Palladium doesn't accept outside advertisements, so it doesn't really matter. Still, it got us thinking. How many people actually "read" an average issue of **The Rifter**™? We've talked to a number of gamers who have said that they read their friend's copy, or who let friends read every issue. Is this really a common practice? I know my friends often read some of the magazines I purchase (especially that **Alex Marciniszyn**).

We typically sell around 8,000 copies of every issue of **The Rifter**® in just the first month or two. Plus, since it is a valuable and fun **sourcebook**, not just a magazine, **The Rifter**™ keeps selling month after month. We had to reprint Number One last year, and I think we've sold around **15,000** copies. So if 10,000 copies is the average, and if three people actually read every copy sold, that means 30,000 Palladium fans are enjoying every issue! 50,000 if five people read every issue! Way **Cool!!**

You guys and gals could help give us an idea by letting us know how many of your friends (if any) typically "read" the issues you buy. We would just like to get an idea of how many of you *Rifters* are really out there. If you'd be so kind to write us or e-mail us (msiembieda@palladiumbooks.com), we'd appreciate it. Hey, if you're sending for your **FREE** copy of our latest catalog (see the *News Section* for details), include a note regarding how many of your pals read all or part of **The Rifters**™ you purchase.

More fun & experimentation

All of us at Palladium see **The Rifter**® as a place to experiment and have **fun**, so when artist Ramon Perez came to me asking if he could do a comic strip based on *Rifts*® *Lone Star*, I gave him the go-ahead.

Plans are for the story to run as an eight page comic strip in six issues of **The Rifter**™. I've seen the first eight pages, character sketches and the outline for the entire story, and I can hardly wait to see the rest of it myself. The last installment may be a double-sized grand finale. Ramon, Coleen, and I all hope you enjoy it. Let us know what you think.

Ramon penciled the cover of this issue too — featuring the lead character, a **Burster**. His pal, Joachim Gmoser, did the final oil painting.

You can see more pulse pounding Perez art and action in the **Baalgor Wastelands**™ sourcebook for *The Palladium Fantasy RPG*, **The Splynn Dimensional Market** (*Rifts*® Atlantis 2), **Free Quebec** and a number of other books throughout the year.

You'll also notice more new names as contributors to this and future issues, as **Wayne** and I try to give more fans and would-be writers a chance to get published and share their ideas for the Palladium **Megaverse**®. My only question is, where are the artists looking to get published? Sure the pay is low (about \$50 for a full page of art; proportionately less for smaller illoes),

but this is a chance for some of you budding young artists to see yourself in print! We are always looking for **Rifter**™ artwork featuring *Rifts*®, *Fantasy*, *Superhero*, *Nightbane*®, and *Robotech*®. A few humorous cartoons might be cool too. Really nice full pages might be used as an **intro-piece** here and there, but quarter and half page illoes have a better chance of seeing print. If you have ideas or some nice, finished, black and white art laying around, send us xerox copies of 2-6 for our consideration.

Well, that's all I have to say this issue.

— Kevin Siembieda, March, 1999



Palladium News, Info, & Coming Attractions

By Kevin Siembieda (the guy in the know)

News

Palladium's 1999 Spring/Summer Catalog

Palladium's current catalog is a big 42 pages. It is available free to "readers" of **The Rifter™** (otherwise it's 50 cents).

That's right "readers" of **The Rifter™** — that includes all of who read your buddy's copy because you're too lazy to buy your own copy.

Palladium has already mailed out over 12,000 copies to individuals and sent thousands more to stores and distributors, so if you haven't gotten one and want it, send us a letter saying something like this:

"I read **The Rifter** and would like to get a FREE copy of **The Catalog of Palladium Books**. Please send it to the address below ..."

Then give us your current mailing address. Please print clearly.

The Catalog of Palladium Books presents all books currently in print and those scheduled for release through Summer (most covers are depicted), plus coming attractions, miniatures, T-shirts, and other good stuff. The catalog cover is a sneak peek of the first **Rifts® Novel**.

The entire catalog also appears on Palladium's Web Page: www.palladiumbooks.com — and is updated regularly.

More for everybody

In case you haven't noticed, Palladium Books is actually supporting most of its game lines. This has been our goal for ... well, nearly forever. We finally have a reliable group of enthusiastic and capable freelance writers to work on a little bit for everything. Not to mention a slew of great artists like Perez, Wilson, **Breaux**, Johnson, Buries, **McKenna**, and **Zelesnik**, among others (including a few new guys coming your way).

Not counting the **Rifts® Novels** or **The Rifter™**, we have 8-10 new **Rifts® World Books** and **Sourcebooks** scheduled for 1999. Four to five of 'em should be out by July!

Likewise, you can expect to see 4-6 new books for **The Palladium Fantasy RPG®, 2nd Edition**, 3-5 books for **Heroes Unlimited™, 2nd Edition**, and 2-3 books for **Nightbane®**, plus the second edition of the expanded **TMNT® RPG** (suitable for use with **Heroes Unlimited™**), **Deluxe Revised RECON®** and maybe a few surprises. Even **Erick Wujcik** has been mumbling about doing a book or two for Palladium (we hope so).

Rifts® novels are a reality!

You demanded it, and Palladium Books delivers (as usual, I might add). As much as I, Kevin Siembieda, would *love* to write a novel or ten, I just don't have the time, at least not for the moment. This means we will be turning the reins of prose writing over to other promising authors.

The first *three* novels are a trilogy written by Adam Chilson. They combine to make an elaborate, hard-hitting war story that centers around a Coalition squad of soldiers charged with bringing a notorious rebel band to justice. Thus, these two sides clash in an ongoing battle of wills, power and treachery. Outsiders who get drawn into the conflict, or caught in the middle, usually pay a terrible price.

Book One: Sonic Boom follows a squad of Dead Boys on a seek and destroy mission to eradicate the rebels known as "The Army of the New Order." It is a mission that carries these hard bitten troopers into the Federation of Magic and one battle after another. The ending is a heart-racing **cliffhanger**, but that's okay, because the second novel should quickly follow the first. A dynamic Zelesnik cover sets the mood and the pace. Available April.

Book Two: Deception's Web picks up where the first novel left off, and with a bang. Without giving too much away: intrigue and treachery abounds. For every few answers, there are new questions. This book also has a cliffhanger ending that sets the stage for the final book. The cover is a Glitter Boy out for blood. Available the end of May.

Book Three: Treacherous Awakenings is the big finale! Questions are answered and conflicts resolved. Don't take our word for it, check it out yourself. Available June or July.

Rifts® Novels should be available at all your favorite hobby, game and comic shops — especially if you let the store owner know in advance that you want them.

A word of caution — violence and foul language. Chilson's **Rifts® Trilogy** follows a group of battle-hardened grunts. That means violence (sometimes fairly graphic) and foul language. Parents and guardians may find these novels inappropriate for readers under the age of 17.

We hope this doesn't disappoint or offend our vast legion of younger teen readers. Palladium is trying to give its novel authors a reasonable amount of creative **freedom**, and Mr. Chilson went for a down and dirty, blood and guts approach. Future books are likely to be acceptable to a wider audience. Thanks for your understanding.

Rifts® Trilogy Subscription. If you have trouble getting Palladium products where you live, **and/or** you're **afraid** you might miss out on getting the novels, you can sign on to **Palladium's Trilogy Subscription Program**. As soon as each of the three novels are available to ship, we will mail it out to you

(note that stores will get the novels a week before most subscribers).

Those of you who want to use *charge cards* will be charged for each novel at the time it ships. Those of you paying by check or money order must pay for all three at once. Sorry, no C.O.D.

What's the cost for this fabulous arrangement? Cover price of \$7.95 plus \$1.00 each for postage and handling; 27.00 total.

Note: Palladium is focusing on sales to hobby, comic and game shops, so you should have no trouble finding the novels at such places. Ironically, they may not be as readily available national bookstore chains, although you should be able to special order them just about anywhere (takes 1-3 weeks).

Palladium will not be attending Gen Con® '99

Not much has changed since last year to convince Palladium it should attend Gen Con®. We got mixed reports from our many friends and fans who attended last year. Most manufacturers seem to have found the show to be profitable and had a pretty good time. Many fans had a nice time too, however, we frequently heard the comment that the old fun and magic seemed to be gone, and that things were more glitz and business than fun and games.

Furthermore, there seemed to be a number of fans who had problems and a lousy time. When people wrote to **Andon** asking for an explanation (if nothing else), the company running Gen Con® would not give them the courtesy of responding. Nothing. We know this is true, because one very frustrated fan wrote to Palladium to see if we could get Andon to address his concerns. We forwarded his letter and stated that we would like to hear **Andon's** explanation ourselves. We got no response. We asked again, but only got a stony silence.

Palladium Books can not bring itself to support an operation that seems to have little regard for its patrons — fans and businesses alike. This is our personal feeling and choice not to attend. It is *not* a boycott, and we wish those attending the 1999 Gen Con® a wonderful time. In the past, Gen Con was an "event" we would not consider missing, but things have changed and the show has lost its appeal for us on virtually every level.

Instead, **Maryann** and I have attended several smaller gatherings over the last eight months. We have enjoyed spending hours upon hours talking with our fellow gamers and exchanging ideas, stories and laughs. We plan on doing a few more this year and more in the year 2000. Unfortunately, our demanding schedules prevent us from attending all the conventions and store appearances we'd like. We appreciate your understanding in this regard. Besides, when you see all the great books and other things Palladium has been cooking up, you'll be thrilled that we stayed home and kept our noses to the grindstone.

After waiting more than a year

— no new Rifts® Miniatures

Palladium Books has cancelled its license with *Agents of Gaming* to produce a new series of Rifts® miniatures.

We are as disappointed as anybody, because we were really looking forward to seeing our creations brought to three dimensional life in 28 mm.

As for the reasons, our deal just seemed to fall apart for a number of reasons. After more than a year, Agents of Gaming had not released one single miniature to the public and continued to push back and miss "target" dates. Among other things, they wanted to substantially change the size and type of products, as well as the terms of the original agreement. A situation we found completely unacceptable.

We regret things did not work out, but it was really out of Palladium's hands. Who knows, maybe some other miniature manufacturer will give us a call and cut a deal that works. For the moment, Palladium is focusing on other potential licenses and exciting secret projects. Of course, we will continue to sell our existing line of 20 different 25 mm miniature blister packs for \$4-\$6 dollars a pack (typically four figures per pack; see our catalog or web site for a complete listing).

Constantly Improving Our Web Site

Palladium Books has enlisted the talent and energy of *Mike Hawthorne* to clean up and improve Palladium's Web Site. This means making the site more organized, easier to use and attractive, as well as some new additions and features. The web page has already been getting around 50,000 hits a month, and these improvements can only make things more fun and interesting.

We've also enlisted the sharp and knowledgeable mind of *Shawn Merrow* to answer game questions quickly and efficiently, as well as reorganize our Question and Answer section. Actually, this is a huge and constant amount of work, so the lad must be insane to take this on, but who are we to turn away a mad man willing to lend a hand? Seriously, thanks Shawn and Mike, we appreciate it.

Just more signs of Palladium growing and on the move.

Coming Attractions

The Palladium Fantasy RPG® offers a world of adventure

The Palladium World is one of the most unique, defined and exciting *fantasy settings* on the market. If you know fantasy gamers tired of the same old fantasy shtick, tell 'em to take a look at the **Palladium Fantasy RPG®** line. They won't be disappointed.

Baalgor Wastelands™

Wow, are we proud of this beautiful book filled with fabulous art by **Ramon Perez** and **Kent Buries**, and tons of information about the region, plus a few new monsters and Racial Character Classes (like the **Quorians** and **Gosai**). **There's**



- Artwork by Perez, Buries, Dubisch and Johnson.
- Cover by Patrick Ho.
- Written by Bill Coffin.
- \$16.95 — 160 pages. Available May.

The Eastern Territory™

The Eastern Territory is the heart of the Domain of Man. A vast wilderness that is enjoying a boom-time with thousands upon thousands of human settlers spilling into the region, not unlike the settlers of the Old American West. And like the Old West, the Eastern Territory is often a wild and lawless place attracting heroes and villains, settlers and mercenaries, and rich with incredible opportunities for those bold enough to seize them, and terrible dangers for all. Join the excitement, intrigue and adventure.

- History and world information.
- Key towns, fledgling kingdoms, and places of note.
- Notable movers and shakers; good and evil.
- Conflicts, treachery, dangerous pacts and raw adventure.
- New O.C.C.S like the **Sword-Wizards** and others.
- Maps, adventures and adventure ideas.
- Artwork by Perez, Buries, Dubisch and Johnson.
- Written by Steve Edwards, with additional material by Kevin Siembieda.
- \$20.95 — 224 pages. Available June or July.

enough information, turmoil, ideas and adventure material to keep players gaming for months!

Some of the most exciting material deals with the history and legends of the Elf-Dwarf War, the City of Troker (a place where most any race is accepted), forgotten Minotaur tribes, the dream-reading Quorians, the dangerous Gosai, and the titanic war between the Gromek and Giants.

Baalgor Wastelands is a great companion book to the **Western Empire™**, and the upcoming **Mount Nimro — Kingdom of Giants™** and **The Old Kingdom™** books.

- Written by Bill Coffin.
- \$20.95 — 224 pages. Available now!

Mount Nimro,™

Kingdom of Giants

Giants have congregated in this region for centuries, but under the leadership of King Sunder **Blackrock**, they have formed the first, true kingdom of giants. A power base that frightens the neighboring human settlements, threatens to unite other non-human races under their leadership, and which is beginning to concern even the Western Empire. Get all the details for yourself.

- New player O.C.C.s and monster races.
- History and world information, making note of powerful factions, warlords, villains and growing conflict.
- Maps, adventures and adventure ideas.



Limited Edition Hardcover "Crimson" Palladium Fantasy RPG®

Limited supplies (a couple hundred) are still available on a first come, first served basis. The "Crimson" Edition of the **Palladium Fantasy RPG®, 2nd Edition** was a big hit for the Christmas season. Once they are sold out, they are gone forever (like the coveted *Rifts® Gold Edition*).

Special features include:

- A classy, black leatherette (imitation leather) cover featuring the design of the original "black & red" RPG cover.
- Interior pages are sewn and will not fall out.
- Special double-page artwork for end sheets.
- Limited to 600 signed and numbered copies.
- Signed by Kevin & Maryann Siembieda.
- All books are shipped in a sturdy protective envelope.
- \$40.00 plus \$3.00 for postage and handling.
- Available *exclusively* from Palladium Books via mail order and on-line. All sales are on a first come, first served basis.

Also in the works for

The Palladium Fantasy RPG®...

The Old Kingdom Lowlands — by Cartier & Siembieda
The Old Kingdom Mountains — by Cartier & Siembieda
The Land of the Damned (a series of books) — by Bill Coffin
The Wolfen Wars — by Kevin Siembieda



Deluxe Revised RECON®

No, this is not *RECON® Modern Combat*, but a new, cleaned up edition of Palladium's 1986, Vietnam era game combined with the *Advanced RECON® sourcebook* between a new cover, and spruced up with some new (and old) interior art, all rolled into one big, 224 page role-playing game.

•A complete **role-playing** game with everything you need to play in **one book**. Please note, however, that Deluxe Revised RECON® uses a very different system of rules with characters that are super-quick and easy to create and play. It does *not* use Palladium's famous game system.

- Historical background and information about Vietnam, the War, the opposing sides, and other considerations.
- Weapons and equipment.
- Written by Erick Wujcik
- Based on Joe Martin's Original RECON® rules.
- Includes a section on Joe Martin's miniature combat rules.
- A classic game that's easy to learn and fun to play.
- \$20.95 — 224 pages. Available the first week of April.

Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles® & More Strangeness RPG

Yes, this book *will* see publication before summer. This expanded edition of the original Ninja Turtles® Role-Playing Game (hence the slight title change of "Other" Strangeness to "More") will ship late *May* and includes character updates, new artwork by the Paulo Parentes Studio, new cover by Simon Bisley, and over 20 pages of addition material.

The RPG is presented in a serious manner, presents over a hundred different mutant animals and is completely compatible with **Heroes Unlimited™, Second Edition**.

New text includes a look at the mutant underground and mutants as heroes, plus new villains and characters from the pages of the **TMNT®** comic books.

Fans of the original edition (which sold over **180,000** copies) and new gamers should find this to be a fan, fast paced superhero game, while players of *Heroes Unlimited™* will find it useful as an adventure sourcebook. In fact, many of the old TMNT® books are suitable as source and adventure books for **Heroes Unlimited™**.

- Over 100 different mutant animals.
- Rules for creating any sort of mutant animal.
- Animal powers and psionics.
- Villains and adventure ideas.
- Five adventure outlines.
- Written by Erick Wujcik, Siembieda and Oliver.
- Compatible as a sourcebook for *Heroes Unlimited™, 2nd Edition*.
- \$12.95 — 128 pages. Coming this May.

New For Rifts®

Even we can barely believe all the great stuff we have coming out for **Rifts®**. The most immediate releases are as follows, but more are in the works!

Rifts® World Book 20: Rifts® Canada™

Eric Thompson and Kevin Siembieda team up to provide an overview of Rifts Canada, focusing on key people, places and brewing trouble.

- Notable towns and independent kingdoms.
- Tundra Rangers and other O.C.C.s.
- Monsters of the North.
- New weapons and vehicles.
- Tons of world information.
- Rules for surviving a cold wilderness environment.
- Written by: Erick Thompson and Kevin Siembieda.
- \$20.95 — over 200 pages. Available in May.

Rifts® World Book 22: Free Quebec™

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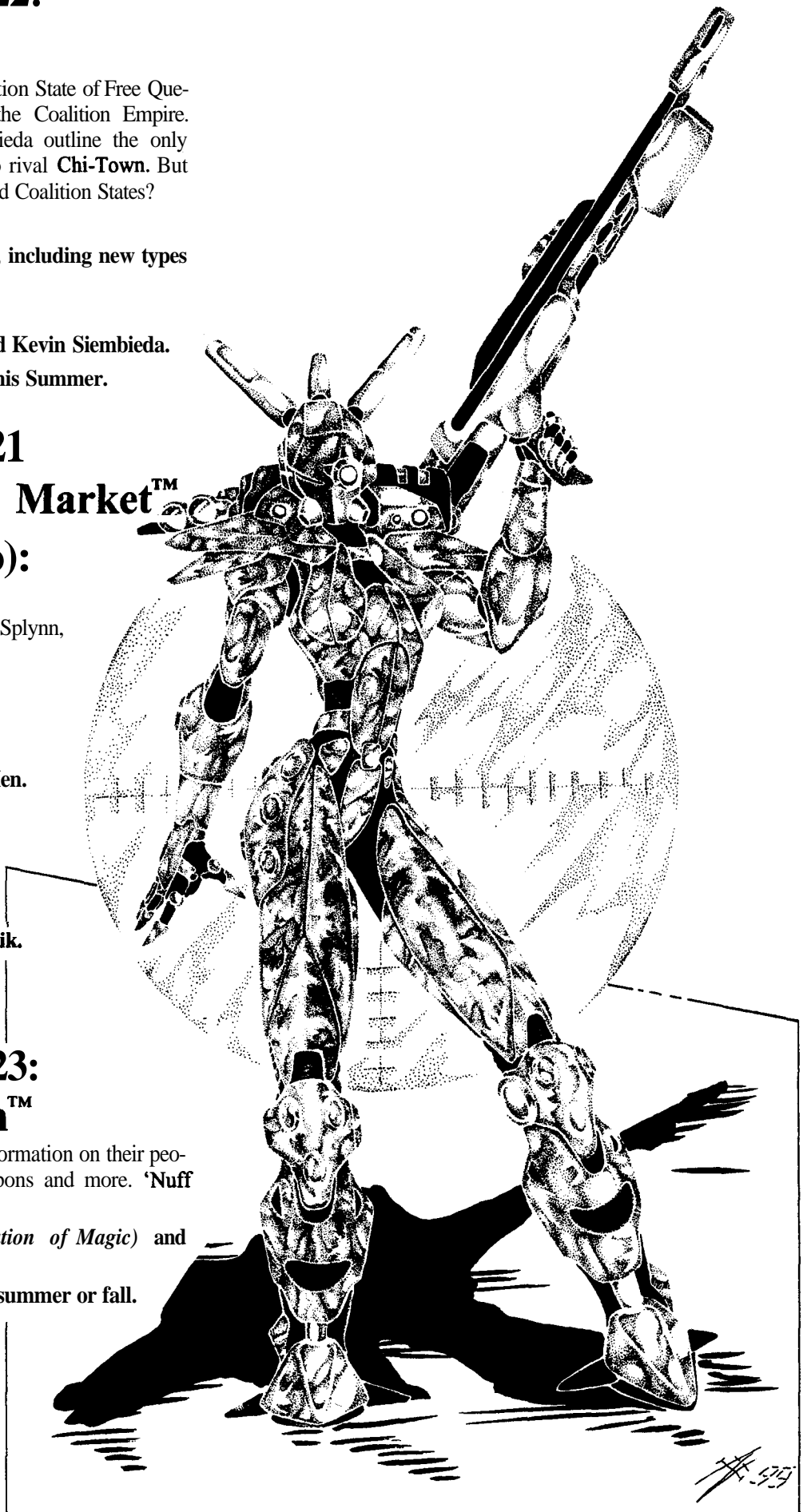
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Palladium Books Inc.
Rifter Dept.

12455 Universal Drive
Taylor, MI 48180

Knights of the Dinner Table

BY JOLLY R. BLACKBURN

I'M SORRY BOB, AS YOU ATTEMPT TO LIFT THE STEEL GARDER AND THROW IT AT THE KRESPIAN HARBOR, YOUR POWER-ARMOR BEGINS TO WHINE ANP WHIR YOUR ARMS JAM IN POSITION. APPARENTLY THE LOAD WAS TOO MUCH FOR THE HYDRAULIC LINES ANP THEY RUPTURE.

THE KRESPIAN HARBOR LAUGHS WITH GLEE AS HE MAKES GOOD HIS ESCAPE FROM THE RUBBLED BUILDING.

THIS BLOWS, B.A./ MY POWER-ARMOR WAS RATED FOR A TEN-TON LOAD CAPACITY. I PAID AN EXTRA 5,000 CREDITS FOR THAT - REMEMBER? ISN'T THERE SOME KIND OF WARRANTY OR SOMETHING?

NOPE, SORRY! LOOK, I WARNED YOU GUYS ABOUT BUYING EQUIPMENT OFF THE BACK OF A TRUCK. YOU TOOK YOUR CHANCES.

BUT YOU SAID THAT GUY LOOKED, "HONEST!" YOU TRICKED US.

BOB YOU SHOULD HAVE KNOWN SOMETHING WAS WRONG WHEN HE NOT-WASSED YOUR SUIT TO GET IT RUNNING.

HEY, HE COULD HAVE LOST THE KEYS LIKE HE SAID.

DAMMIT! I CRAWL OUT OF MY ARMOR ANP GET OUT THE OL' TOOL KIT. I'LL SEE IF I CAN JURY-RIG THE THING TO WORK UNTIL I CAN GET IT INTO THE SHOP.

OH REALLY? I WASN'T AWARE YOU HAD CYBER-ARMOR REPAIR AS ONE OF YOUR SKILLS?

HOHP WELL... I, I, I DON'T REEL I HAVE FIDGET WITH SMALL APPLIANCES. SEEMS LIKE THE TWO WOULD OVERLAP SOME WHAT.

GOOD THINKING, BOB.

OKAY, OKAY, YOU FIDGET WITH THE SUIT, AS A RESULT OF YOUR CLUMSY ANP UNSKILLED EFFORTS YOU BREACH THE REACTOR CHAMBER. THE ENTIRE PARTY TAKES 75 HITPOINTS IN RADIATION DAMAGE.

OH C'MON! YOU DIDN'T EVEN ROLL THE DICE. YOU'RE JUST MAKING IT ALL UP!

ACTUALLY, I ONLY TAKE HALF-DAMAGE. MY PERSONAL RADIATION-DAMPENING-FIELD WOULD HAVE AUTOMATICALLY KICKED IN.

I'M SORRY, DAVE, YOUR R.D.F. BELT BUCKLE FAILS TO WORK. IT SHORT-CIRCUITS ANP SMOKES A LITTLE BIT BEFORE BURSTING INTO FLAMES.

LOOKS LIKE I'M NOT THE ONLY ONE TO GET BURNED AT THAT TAIL-GATE BARGAIN BIN.

DAMNI! I PAID 2,000 CREDITS FOR THAT PIECE OF JUNK.

I TOLD YOU GUYS HAGGLING HARRY WAS A CROOK!

I'M SURE HE MEANT WELL.

SARA'S RIGHT. WE'RE GOING TO GO FIND HAGGLING HARRY ANP GET OUR MONEY BACK. THEN I'M GOING TO BEAT THE CRAP OUT OF HIM.

YEAH, WELL, ALL YOU FINP IS AN EMPTY PARKING LOT. YOU PINT THINK HE' BE WAITING AROUND DID YOU?

FINE! THEN WE'LL JUST HAVE TO TRACK HIM DOWN.

TWENTY MINUTES LATER...

OKAY YOUR CONTACTS FINALLY COME THROUGH FOR YOU. THEY REPORT BACK THAT HAGGLIN HARRY HAS SET UP SHOP AT THE OLD AIRPORT RUNS.

KEWL! WE'LL MOSEY ON OVER THERE ANP SEE IF HE'S THERE.

EEEEWWWWW, THE OLD AIRPORT? THAT'S A ROUGH NEIGHBORHOOD.

WE'P BEST BE ON OUR TOES, GUYS.

I SMELL ONE OF B.A.'S TRAPS, FOLKS. MAYBE WE SHOULP JUST WRITE OFF OUR LOSSES ANP WALK AWAY.

HUH? WHAT THE HELL IS WRONG WITH YOU?

YOU MAY BE RIGHT BRIAN, BUT IT SURE DOESN'T SOUND LIKB YOU.

LET'S JUST SAY I GOT A GUT FEELING THIS GUY IS TROUBLE.

OKAY, OKAY, I WAS JUST TRYING TO AVOID A BLOOD BATH. TELL YA WHAT, WHY PONT YOU GUYS GO IN AND I'LL STAY IN THE REAR JUST IN CASE. HOWS THAT FOR A BACK UP PLAN?

SOUND'S LIKE SOMEBODY TURNED YELLOW!

ACTUALLY IT SOUNDS LIKE A GOOD IDEA.

TWENTYMINUTES LATER..

HARRY APOLOGIZES PROFUSELY. HE SINCERELY SEEMS TO BE REMORSEFUL AND CLAIMS HE HAP NO IDEA THE EQUIPMENT YOU BOUGHT WAS DEFECTIVE. HE AGREES TO GIVE YOU A FULL REFUND PLUS PAY FOR DAMAGES!

HEY MAYBE WE WERE WRONG ABOUT THIS GUY, AFTER ALL.

WOW! THIS GUY IS PRETTY KEWL..

SO MUCH FOR THE 'TRAP' THEORY.

I DON'T KNOW...

UNFORTUNATELY, HE DOESN'T KEEP THAT KIND OF CASH ON HANP. HE ASKS YOU TO WAIT FOR HIM NEAR THE OLD AIRCONTROL TOMB* WHILE HE RETRIEVES HIS FUNDS. HE LEAVES HIS ASSISTANT, GURNY WITH YOU AS A GUARANTEE THAT HE'LL RETURN.

WELL...OKAY. BUT WE LET HIM KNOW THAT GURNY IS A DEAD MAN IF DOESN'T COME BACK.

C'MON, BOB. NO NEED FOR THREATS LIKE THAT. THE GUY SEEMS TO BE ON THE UP ANP UP.

I AGREE. HE'S BEING MORE THAN FAIR.

OKAY YOU WAIT FOR ABOUT FORTY MINUTES UNTIL FINALLY YOU SEE A SMALL ARMORED VEHICLE COMING TOWARP YOU FROM THE DISTANCE.

THAT MUST BE HIM.

WHEW! FOR A MOMENT I THOUGHT HE WAS GOING TO STIFF US.

UN OH!!

IT'S A TRAPH B.A. I'M LAUNCHING A MARK SEVEN TACTICAL NUKE AT THE AIR CONTROL TOWER.

MARK SEVEN? BUT BRIAN, YOU JUST TOOK OUT THE ENTIRE PARTY!

HUH? OH...OOPS. GUESS I MAPE A MISTAKE. OH WELL - I SUPPOSE I CALLED IT. I'LL HAVE TO LIVE WITH THE RESULTS.

YOU IDIOT, WHAT THE HELL HAS GOTTEN INTO YOU? JUST NUKED YOUR OWN MEN.

HEY I WAS UNDER A LOT OF PRESSURE. I MAPE A MISTAKE. SO SUE ME!!

I HATE TO SAY IT BUT YOU'RE LETTIN' YOUR GAME SUP, BIG GUY.

AFTER THE GAME.....

PONT YOU FEEL THE LEAST BIT GUILTY? HUH? YOU KILLED OFF THE ENTIRE PARTY JUST SO THEY WOULDN'T LEARN THAT YOU ANP HAGGLING HARRY WERE PARTNERS?

HEY THE OPERATION WAS JUST BEGINNING TO SHOW SOME MAJOR PROFIT! I WASNT ABOUT TO LET ANYTHING OR ANYONE JEOPARDIZE THINGS AT THIS POINT.

WELL YOU COULD HAVE JUST CUT THEM IN ON THE ACTION, YA KNOW. BETTER THAN MURKING THE ENTIRE CAMPAIGN.

CUT THEM IN? HAR HAR!! NO WAY!! MY CHARACTER HAS AN 18 INTELLIGENCE!! HE CAN DO THE MATH.

Cloak &



Dagger

PALLADIUM

ROLE - PLAYING GAME[®]

Assassins and Guilds in the Palladium Fantasy RPG™

Optional Rules and Source Material By Richard Thomassen

Morgan, the head of the palace staff, knocked at the door again. The prince had left no instructions to be left sleeping this morning, but there would be hell to pay if he was disturbed with a "guest." Preparing himself for an onslaught of abuse, with eyes cast down, Morgan opened the door to the prince's chamber.

There was a gasp from one of the servants behind him. He looked back to see the young boy, eyes wide with horror, staring into the room. Looking up, he saw the prince sprawled on his bed. Blood soaked his **Lopan-Silk** night-shirt, and had spread out on the sheets below him to form a grisly halo.

Despite all the guards, protective wards, and the purchased loyalty of Guild Guido, a long, black blade rested on the prince's **unmoving** chest.

Morgan recognized the sign. He hissed one word:
"Assassins!"

Assassins

Universally, Assassins are paid killers. When one talks about Assassins in Palladium, one is normally referring to a member of the Assassin O.C.C., a professional killer. Given the breadth of different cultures on the Palladium World, it is only natural to expect differences in the **styles**, customs, guilds and techniques amongst their killers.

What follows is an attempt to suggest how "Professional" Assassins act and operate in each of the main cultures on Palladium: The mighty Western Empire and **Lopan**, the **Wolfen** Em-

pire, Byzantium, the **Kindom** of Timiro and the fledgling Eastern Territories.

The Western Empire

Under the dictates of Emperor **Itomas**, the act of assassination and the attempted contracting of an Assassin have been declared illegal. That is not to say that it was not illegal in the past, but Itomas, in his attempts to "clean up" his empire, has begun to enforce the law.

Regardless, Assassins are accepted as part of Western culture amongst all classes. As much as city guards, courts of law and the militia are ways to deal with some problems, the Assassins' Guild is always an option.

Western Assassins are hired by the rich and poor. When their fees can not be afforded, services and favors will often be accepted in their stead, such as the setting up of a safe house, the hiding of a man or weapon, smuggling and information carrying.

Assassin guilds are easily contacted - the hirer will normally wear an "**attractor**" (a piece of jewelry, particular colored scarf or other recognizable marking that is unique to each guild's territory) in public and wait for a visit. The guilds themselves will either have their own watchmen looking out for potential customers, or hire other guilds to do their work (such as beggars' unions, merchant guilds or the town guard).

The hirer will then be approached privately by a Guild representative. The skill of the Assassin(s) contracted will depend upon the difficulty of the mission and the price involved. Poor men will normally only get inexperienced or trainee Assassins, as their requirements are often easy to meet. For example: kill an opposing trader, an embarrassing relative, or a bullying employer. The more risk involved in a job (professionally protected, highly public, powerful or influential target) the higher the price and the more experienced the Assassin. If the cost can not be met, (in coin or considerations) the contract is simply refused.

Western Assassins are trained more subtly than others are. In other cultures, Assassins are commonly trained for direct **confrontation** with the victim, hence the deadly hand to hand skill and extra attacks gained by the O.C.C. Open attacks in the Western Empire are not viable - the Assassin will normally be tracked down, and if the guild is not careful, so will they. The West's Assassins are often trained in darker methods, such as poisoning and precise strikes from the shadows.

Ambushes involving stabbing or garrotting are the most common technique for simple contracts. More prominent targets will often require poisoning of food and drink, trap and alarm avoidance, sniping, or co-ordinated ambushes to kill or remove bodyguards. The most prominent targets will often require infiltration of their households through disguise or control of their staff (through intimidation, blackmail or magic), the deactivation of magical traps and alarms, multi-part poisons, and dealing with magic-wielding or supernatural bodyguards.

Sometimes, the murder must be made to appear to be an accident. In such cases, the victim must often be killed **unarmed**, or with a single blow that can be easily hidden. This is often a very risky procedure, and a high price is demanded.

The only time a person will be attacked openly is when the guild itself is making its presence known. This will only happen

when they are sure that their reputation alone will avoid repercussions. In such cases, witnesses will not come forward (or will die horribly), any investigation will find nothing, and the incident will be forgotten about.

The West being an ancient empire, the Assassin guilds today have long established rules of conduct and territories, which they all abide by. Each city or area is dominated by a single guild. Very little changes - things have been this way for hundreds of years. If one guild starts attempting to gain too much territory or power, there will be warnings, and then a brief but bloody battle as the offender is wiped out, then replaced.

The Guild House is the center of most Assassin guilds. This is where the killers prepare for their missions, store their weapons, tools and equipment, hide, and recover in secret. Most guilds have their own craftsmen, smiths, libraries, physicians and healers, if not "in house," then under contract.

The more powerful guilds have Wizards, Diabolists, and even some **Summoners** and Alchemists in permanent employ, both to protect the guild and magically aid the Assassins. This help could be in the form of protection spells, invisibility, magical flight, **teleportation**, or the means to destroy magical alarms, traps and protection. Note that these individuals are highly prized by the guilds, and are only sent on the rarest (and most highly paid) missions.

Many Guild Houses are underground and are built up like fortresses. Attackers will find themselves beset by traps, murder holes, dead ends, magical defenses (**wards** and circles) and ambush points. And if the last defense is broken, they will discover the guild's many bolt-holes and escape routes. Alternatively, the guild may avoid a single fortress, and instead utilize a collection of safe houses spread throughout their territories. Either way, attacking a Guild House is a dangerous endeavor, both for the attackers and those that sent them.

Being where it is, there are many cults to be found amongst the Assassin guilds of the Western Empire. These guilds may often have different agendas to the "normal" guilds, which are normally looking to survive, preserve the status quo, and make money. Within these cults, one can expect to find Priests, both of Light and Darkness, Witches, Necromancers, fanatics and the insane. These cults will not always follow the rules that the other guilds live by, and are often the cause of inter-guild wars. The Assassin cults' use of suicide attacks and magic make them especially dangerous, and feared.

Thieves' guilds should be mentioned here. Because the Thieves' guilds have existed as long as the Assassins, they have learned to coexist. This is done by strictly keeping to separate markets - the Thieves burgle, rob, extort money, fence stolen goods and steal. The Assassins murder.

Lopan

Lopan is the Western nobles' playground. Many have villas and estates, which they visit from time to time. A few of the royal family even have small palaces dotted around the busy island. Strangely, Western Assassins avoid Lopan.

If a murder is **committed**, the island can be sealed, and the ports closed. It would not take long for an Assassin to be found. This has grown into an unspoken rule in the Western guilds that Lopan is a safe ground. This rule holds true for the nobles, **any-**

way - commoners are still game targets, as there is rarely an investigation, or even fuss, over their "accidents."

As a result, there is very little guild activity on Lopan. The only exceptions are when foreign guilds try to open shop on the island. The result, after a single warning, is always bloody.

Despite this, there are consistent rumors of an Assassin guild, of which all its members are also trained Wizards. While there has never been any proof, and no one seems to know how to contact them, several "impossible" murders on the island have been accredited to them, in rumor if not in official records.

The Wolfen Empire

There is very little demand for Assassins in the Wolfen civilization. The new Empire's laws handle conflicts, and more traditional methods are a face-to-face fight in front of the tribe when the laws fail. If a stronger opponent requires removal from your path, the Wolfen mentality is to enlist the aid of a stronger warrior.

The one part of the Wolfen Empire where Assassins can be found is the military. Assassins (commonly **Coyle**, human or **Orc**) are deployed on the battlefield or into enemy Strongholds, to strike directly at enemy commanders. One common tactic is to send the Assassins into areas where enemy armies will be passing through. Rather than striking at the forces like "common" ambushers, the Military Assassin aims to strike only at officers.

Attempting to use the Assassins as spies is a futile exercise, as most members of the Wolfen Empire automatically becomes a center of attention in a human land.

As a result of this, there are no Assassin guilds within the Wolfen civilization. Assassin training is generally only available through a branch of the military.

Occasionally, an Assassin may be sent to observe the enemy, or secure the enemy's maps and reports. If the Assassin is discovered and killed, shamans are commonly used to question the spirit of the slain Assassin. To help with this, the Assassins are taught obedience to the Empire's shamans and that full completion of the mission is everything.

The position of Military Assassin is an honorable one that demands great respect from the common soldier, as any successful strike against an enemy's commanders will almost certainly result in the Assassin's death by the victim's troops.

Wolfen Military Assassins gain a bonus of **+10%** on all Wilderness skills. This extra training is intended to allow them to survive longer in the wilderness, waiting for their targets. They also have a bonus of **+10%** on Military Etiquette when it pertains to identifying enemy officers. This extra training reduces the Assassin's number of "Other" skills by one.

Byzantium

The **citizens** of Byzantium, the island kingdom north of the Wolfen Empire, are a proud people. Honor, bravery and justice are deeply imbedded in their culture.

But like any civilization, there will be tension between its peoples, and one will seek the death of another. Often, this will not be the result of greed, or the removing of an inconvenient competitor, but the result of a person seeking justice against one who is martially stronger. When there are no more friends or

family to help, (i.e. the wife of a slain husband with no strong family) professional help is sought.

Assassins are not hired to sneak and kill in the night. Rather, there are some Byzantium warriors who have honed their killing skills, concentrating on single targets, not military melees, maritime battles or monster fighting. They are known as Slayers, not Assassins, and will keenly make their point known if labeled as such.

There is no "Guild of Slayers", and no set way to contact them. In some large towns and cities, Slayers wear distinctive clothing, weapons or even just hairstyles that are traditionally associated with these mercenary killers.

In smaller towns, where it is easier to know everyone, the Slayer will not have to "advertise," as his reputation will be known. Sometimes, the Slayer will approach the bereaved and weak, offering his services.

Because they fight in the name of justice (a strong part of Byzantium culture) Slayers are tolerated, but not revered or respected. After all, they have dedicated themselves to fighting other men of Byzantium, rather than defending them. There are a few stories told of heroic Slayers in **Byzantium**, but not many.

When out to kill, Slayers will preferably fight when the victim is alone. This avoids the prospect of the target's companions causing complications. This will not be an ambush, however: the Slayer will tell the target what deed he is to die for, and to defend **himself** - it will be a "fair" fight.

If the target is constantly amongst companions, or has bodyguards, a tactic of the Slayer is to draw the victim into an open fight, through insults and accusations of cowardice. Only if the target refuses to fight, and constantly hides behind guards, will the Slayer attempt to sneak into the target's house, possibly to kill "the coward" in his sleep, or fight if the guards can be kept at bay.

Slayers consider poison, ambushes, sniping and out-numbering **their** opponent, cheating. Only the most cowardly and corrupt will attempt such things, and even then they will have to be very careful to save their reputation. Killing a man in a fight, in the name of justice and vengeance, is acceptable. Killing from the shadows with poison is murder, and murderers are executed.

Slayers will charge fees depending upon the reputation of the target, and what they have done. They will rarely attack those whose death would harm the community, such as Water Warriors, Priests, Healers and Military Leaders in times of conflict. Those who are considered dishonorable, low, and generally regarded badly by society will have low prices, or may even be killed for nothing, the only price collected being the fallen man's weapon and armor.

Slayer characters receive an extra weapon proficiency due to the slant of their training, and have the option of taking Hand to Hand: Martial Arts instead of Assassin. Because they use their Rogue skills a lot less than regular Assassins, reduce the category's skill bonus to +5%.

The Timiro Kingdom

Timiro is a very old society. It has laws, rules and acceptable behavior for almost every situation, and is very self-righteous. Assassination is considered a very low act. Assassins are not re-



garded as avengers of the weak or military heroes. Rather, they are considered murdering scum and a threat to the kingdom.

Because of their lowly reputation, Assassins in Timiro have to be very careful about everything they do, and train in secret. Because of this, they have to charge very expensive fees to cover their costs (bribes to keep lips sealed, guards, training, research, etc.). The high cost of assassination has meant that Assassins usually only work amongst Timiro's courts, where they can be afforded. Hence their name in Timiro: Court Assassins.

Much like the Western Empire's, the Court Assassin guilds are ancient. Each guild restricts its activities to a collection of cities and towns. They can not afford a war amongst guilds, as this would draw too much attention to themselves.

Each member of a royal house, or politician, is normally introduced to a contact, whom it is suggested can take care of "inconveniences." The contact is not an Assassin. It will be a well-to-do, influential person who passes on messages to the guild. Making enquiries about the contacts themselves will only reveal that they know people, they can be trusted to be discreet, and they are never to be crossed.

When a Court Assassin is required, the noble informs the contact that he requires some help, and the contact will arrange an interview. In the privacy of the nobleman's house, or in a discreet location often outside the cities, a meeting is held, and the job and fees are discussed.

Because the guilds work only to make money, the victim is normally given the chance to buy out the contract, at an increased price. Then, the person taking out the contract will normally be allowed to increase the fee. Bidding will continue until either side can not afford the price, or the contact is withdrawn (with a 20 to 50 percent consideration paid to the guild). This also gives the victim a chance to correct any grievances the hirer may have with him.

Many powerful and rich families have standing "protection" fees pre-paid to their local guild, which most enemies can not afford, thus protecting them from the guild.

Guilds will not accept contracts on targets whom already have outstanding contracts with them. This stops the target from simply trying to kill his potential killer. They must bid against the contract instead. Of course, there is nothing stopping a contract from being taken out on a killer after the fact, by the friends or family of a slain victim.

There are only three occurrences for which this process of bidding is ignored: The first is when the target resides in another guild's territory. In such cases, the guild of the hirer must also negotiate for permission to assassinate "their" target, making the fee to the hirer very expensive. The second is when the hirer doesn't want this bidding to happen, and can afford to pay for the privilege (at least doubling the fee). The last is when the Guild perceives the target to be far too dangerous to inform of a potential assassination, possibly because of the resources the target could protect himself with.

The guilds themselves are normally spread out, consisting of multiple "cells," each cell consist of a master, a second, and a number of trainees. Each cell will have one or more specializations, such as castle entry, magical trap avoidance, spying and poisoning. Some cells operate purely to provide services to others, such as healing, magic and research. Only the top members of a guild know of all the cells, each cell normally knowing of another few, and their messengers.

Timiro guilds do not restrict themselves to assassination. Thievery, spying and counter-assassination are common sources of income for them as well, but always under contract, and always amongst the courts. They consider themselves to be far above the common Thief or spy.

Timiro Assassins are well trained, often requiring magical aid to overcome the victim's defenses, enter palaces, remove guards and get away with as little spilled blood (other than the victim's) as possible. As characters, most Timiro Assassins use the standard O.C.C. Non-Player Characters are likely to be at least 3rd-6th level if on a mission. Low level Assassins would only be sent as observers to supplement their training or as backup. High level characters will normally be found organizing and leading guild cells, rather than in the field, unless the target is prestigious.

The Eastern Territory

Everything that can be said about the Assassin of The Eastern Territories has been covered previously - the area is populated by a mix up of almost every race - refugees from the West, outcasts from the Goblinoid tribes and those seeking a better life from both Byzantium and Timiro. And as any population grows, so does its underworld.

Amongst the Assassins of the East, you will find expensive Court Assassin to the south (near Timiro's border), Western Empire Assassins and cultists (both those fleeing, and those expanding their markets) in the west, Byzantium killers along the coasts and rivers, and Wolfen Military Assassins laying in wait in the north.

These Assassins range from wild killers, those seeking vengeance, death cultist killing everybody on a hunt, those in hiding, sadists and serial killers, to true professionals.

For Assassin guilds the East is very unstable, as they fight each other for control over the new territories.

Why Adventure?

Why Assassins should leave the protective fold of their community and employment, and travel the world as adventurers, is a question that can not be answered simply. Possibilities could include:

- **Training:** The Assassin is traveling the world as a mercenary, practicing the application of his deadly skills.
- **Hiding:** The Assassin could be hiding from the law, or his own guild after a bungled job.
- **Open Mission:** The Assassin could be on an extended, open mission for his guild, such as "Gain influence and respect within this town."
- **Quest:** The Assassin could be on a quest for his guild, trying to retrieve a particular weapon, person, item, poison ingredient, etc.
- **Survival:** The Assassin's guild could have been destroyed by another. Now he is on his own, and is being hunted by the new guild.
- **Finding His Place:** The Assassin could be without a guild, and is attempting to gain one's favor by brave deeds.
- **Intelligence:** The Assassin has been sent to an area that the guild requires scouting out, possibly mapping. People and places of note would be included in the report.

However, the wandering Assassin should be aware of the following points:

- You're always on a guild's territory, even if they can not be seen. Guilds do not take kindly to freelancers.
- Your fighting skills are often superior to others, but are unique in their style. Be careful of showing **off** - too many attacks concentrated on a single target shows a special talent that may be recognized.
- In nearly every Palladium society, a publicly known Assassin is almost always executed. Secrecy is paramount.
- Guild membership is for life. However long, or **short**, that is. Loyalty is rewarded. Betrayal is suicide.



Guild Creation Guidelines for Palladium Fantasy™

By Richard Thomassen

Palladium has presented many rules for creating organizations such as spy rings and mercenary groups throughout many of its great games. Following this tradition, here is a set of rules for developing guilds and other organizations for the **Palladium Fantasy RPG™**.

While this was primarily designed for guilds, it can be easily expanded to include mercenary groups, towns, armies, and even small kingdoms.

Guilds

A guild, in terms of these rules, is a hierarchy of people who share a profession. This could be a guild of Wizards, a den of Thieves, a company of mercenaries or just a group of weavers. While all of these groups are completely different, they each have a chain of command and position, they each have a set of rules that must be obeyed, and they are all looking out to protect themselves from the world.

To those in a guild, the guild could be either a nurturing brotherhood, there to offer solidarity, guidance and shelter in a storm, or it could be a domineering, elitist hierarchy, only offering reward to those that serve its interests. To those that are dealing with a guild, it may appear to be a closed group that will do business only on its terms, or a self-governing council dictating fair rules to all.

No matter what a person's perceptions of a guild are, guilds can offer four main functions: protection, training, organization and resources.

The protection offered by a guild manifests itself in a number of ways. When a guild member is dealing with the world, he is no longer an individual with no support, but a member of a brotherhood that will be looking out for his interests. To the guild's customers, the protection comes from the fact that a guild must be accountable for its actions if it is to keep a name for itself. And the guild is able to protect its profession. For example, if the price of steel is being driven too high by merchants, a guild of weapon smiths can demand that the price is **reduced**, else they will not buy the steel, and the king will not get his arrow heads.

Training is an obvious advantage - the guild will serve its own interests by ensuring there are enough skilled workers to carry out its business. That means the skilled members do not have to worry about finding apprentices, and the apprentices are sure to get a good education, as opposed to being used as a slave or servant while learning nothing.

As a recognized authority on its profession, the guild will be able to hold a tribunal or court to settle professional disputes. This organization keeps disputing guild members from taking



matters into their own hands, which could ruin not only the men, but the profession's reputation.

And finally, the guild has resources. Money in times of need, knowledge, good quality materials and manpower are all available to members who serve the guild and its interests. A guild may often support its members who are down on their luck for a short while - it is better to help a man back onto his feet so that he can then pay his dues for years to come, rather than take what little he has.

All of that and more is what a guild can do for its members, but like any power, it can be corrupted. A guild can turn into an vicious dictator to its members, forcing higher and higher fees out of them, while brutally beating non-members out of town. Or a guild can become its leader's personal tool, acting in his or her best interests rather than the **members'**.

Membership

Most guilds will have differing levels of membership. While some let anyone enter and treat all equally, most will be more structured. Typically, there are four levels to the hierarchy of a guild: probationist, member, officer and master.

A person entering a guild for the first time is said to be on probation. During this time, they are being tested for their skill and suitability to join the guild. While on probation, a person must operate under all the restrictions of the guild, while gaining none of the benefits. Probationists will typically be 1st or 2nd **level**, or even apprentices (not even 1st level).

Once a probationist has been proven, they gain full membership. As long as they operate within the guild rules and in its interests, they will gain all the benefits of the guild, such as fencing of stolen good for Thieves, or a magical research laboratory for Wizards. In game terms, a normal guild member will be from 3rd to 5th level.

Members who serve the guild especially well and show ability may raise to the rank of officer. While this typically offers better resources to the officer (such as better armor and weapons for warriors), 1 out of 4 weeks of the officer's time will be spent on guild business, such as representing the guild, training subordinates or troubleshooting. A guild officer will typically be from 5th to 8th level, and may have a small amount of political power within the guild's area.

The masters of a guild gain the most benefits while paying the highest cost. The masters get to decide how the guild operates, get the pick of resources, and have the political clout of representing their profession, but typically, a full 3 out of 4 weeks of the master's time is spent on guild business. Guild masters will typically be a minimum of 8th level in their chosen occupation, often much higher.

How it works

Guild Size and Sponsorship give the guild a pool of "guild points" that are spent acquiring resources. Guild points not spent may be saved for later use.

If a guild wishes to purchase additional guild points (for new resources) it must either increase its membership to a higher level, and keep it there for one year, or purchase additional guild points at the cost listed (buying power is very expensive). For example, to build a House up to a Guild level, its membership of

30 must be increased to 100 for one year, or an additional 80 guild points worth of resources must be acquired at 9,000 gold each: a total of 720,000 gold pieces (see below for details).

These expansion costs seem high, but they cover not only acquiring the raw materials, but also the expertise to use and maintain whatever has been purchased. Also, the larger the guild, the more materials and training must be acquired.

Note: For guild "officers," increase the level of dress, equipment, pay and so forth by one level. The guild masters gain an increase of 2 levels. E.g. a guild with Good dress has Excellent dress for its officers, and Opulent for the masters of the guild.

Also, please note that it is easy to abuse these rules. For example, a **small**, 60 point group could spend most of their guild points on an Alchemist. Rather than adding greatly to the length of these rules, placing restrictions on every acquisition, I have left it to individual Game Masters to use their discretion.

Guild Size

Guild size determines how much income the guild has, hence the money, power and loyalty it commands.

- **Gathering:** A collection of **10** people or more. They probably have very few resources, not even a guild house, instead meeting at a regular place and time. Provides 60 guild points. Additional points cost 3,500 gold each.
- **House:** A larger collection of 30 people or more. The group probably has a permanent home, which the guild's business is done out of, as well as doubling as a residence for several members. Provides 120 guild points. Additional points cost 9,000 gold each.
- **Guild:** A full guild of at least **100** people. The group will be recognized as an authority on their occupation. Business will be done out of a building converted or built for the purpose. The group will also be able to assert some political power locally. Provides 200 guild points. Additional points cost 20,000 gold each.
- **Large Guild:** A large guild (of 600 members or more) is a powerful force within a city, or a number of towns. Guild premises are likely to be large, and its members well respected (or feared). Within their area of influence, their voice is listened to. Provides 300 guild points. Additional points cost 40,000 gold each.
- **National Guild:** National guilds (2000 members plus) are powerful forces. They are likely to have several large guild houses throughout a kingdom. They will have friends and representatives in high places, and are able to influence the laws of the land. Provides 450 guild points. Additional points cost 90,000 gold each.
- **International Guild:** Any recognized international group (numbering 4000 people or more) is a power to behold. Their laws and doctrines cross boundaries. If they have a demand, it will be met, or kingdoms could fall.

International guilds commonly have 650 points, but have effectively unlimited resources in their chosen field. Additional points cost 250,000 gold each. They can afford it.

Note: These numbers of people are approximations, based on normal people of the time doing a skilled job, such as craftsmen or a militia. Unskilled guilds (such as a beggars' union) will have ten times these membership numbers. Specialized, skilled



work (Soldiering or Thieving), will have half the membership, and a profession which requires life-long study (magic, clergy, healers, Assassins) will have merely a fifth. For example, a normal guild of 100 people could have one thousand beggars, one hundred potters, fifty Thieves or only twenty Diabolists.

Sponsorship

Guilds can be sponsored by bigger organizations. While this provides extra resources to the guild, it also means that someone else is holding the reigns of power. Choose only one sponsor per guild.

- **None:** Provides nothing.
- **Secret:** An unknown benefactor helps pay the guild's way. Provides an extra 10 points for Dress, and 10 to any category.
- **Cult:** An outlawed cult or unrecognized church secretly steers the guild. This cult's connections give an additional 10 points to spend on Criminal Activity, and add 10 to any category.
- **Underground:** An illegal organization provides funds to run the guild in exchange for favors, such as transportation of goods, hiding of wanted people, laundering of money and fencing of goods. Add an additional 15 points to spend on Criminal Activity, and 10 to any category.
- **Merchants:** The guild works for the interests of a large merchant guild. This guild's network can provide 10 additional points to Communications, 20 to Equipment and 10 to any category.

- **Church:** The guild has been paid for by a church. Not only will the guild be bound by civil laws, but also their sponsor's religious doctrines. A church will provide 20 points of Dress, 20 Intelligence points and 10 to be spent anywhere. The Church's influence can be found throughout the guild, from dress and manners, to the customers they keep.
- **Government:** A government controls the guild. The guild has a legal responsibility to operate successfully. The government provides uniforms (+20 to Dress), supplies (+20 to Equipment) and money (+20 points to any category).

Dress

Most guilds will provide a uniform of some type, both to offer recognition and as a utility. Purchasing a level of dress determines the quality of the standard guild clothing and armor for combat troops such as guards. Choose only one level of dress.

- **None:** The guild provides nothing. Costs 0 points.
- **Simple:** The guild provides cheap, poor robes that constantly require patching. At least they're a uniform color: brown. Guards and other combat troops will be provided with only half Leather suits or Cloth and Quilt armors, which are repaired and maintained by the wearer. Costs 5 points.
- **Good:** The guild provides decent robes of a desired color, including a few simple guild markings. Travel clothes can be provided. Combat troops are provided with light armor, up to and including Studded Leather. Costs 10 points.

- **Excellent:** Quality robes, with **lining, hoods**, hidden pockets, or whatever else is desired, made of expensive cloth. Light armor can be provided for travelers. Simple disguises and approximations of other uniforms can be made. Combat troops have access to reinforced light armors or heavy armor, which is maintained by professionals. Many guild markings will be in evidence. Costs 20 points.
- **Opulent:** The guild's robes are rich and embroidered. Travelers and those going to dangerous areas are supplied with most types of armor, including disguised light armors. Disguises can be made for almost any occasion. Combat troops have **Dwarven** or Kobold made armors that are heavily engraved, or the highest quality light armors. Costs 30 points.
- **Unlimited:** The guild has been able to commonly provide enchanted robes to its members (e.g Cloaks of **Armor**, Protection against Fire, or embroidery including wards, etc). Combat troops will also have enchanted armors. Forgeries and special demands of almost any type are supplied. Costs 50 points.

Equipment

Equipment purchases provide resources to the whole guild. If the guild has more than one stronghold, it can be assumed that each one has its own supplies and inventory. The guild can make multiple selections from this list.

- **None:** The guild provides no resources to its members. Costs 0 points.
- **Cheap Equipment:** The guild provides common items only, which must be replaced by members if lost. Individuals will have a purse of 50gp from which they must be equipped for their profession. Costs 2 points.
- **Good Equipment:** The guild will provide most items that can be supplied by merchants - availability as per the main book. Items will be replaced monthly. Individuals will have a purse of 150gp from which they must be equipped for their profession. Costs 5 points.
- **Excellent Equipment:** The guild will provide most items that can be supplied by merchants, the black market or any other means, including manufacturing. Lost items will be replaced rapidly. Individuals will have a purse of 300gp from which they must be equipped for their profession. Costs 10 points.
- **Specialist Equipment:** The guild can provide equipment for one kind of specialist job, such as tunneling, glass blowing or trap disarmament. Costs 10 points.
- **Medical Supplies:** The guild has a supply of healing salves, poison antidotes, and "common" medicines, herbs and drugs. Some staff will have knowledge of first aid. A healer will take care of serious injuries. Magical potions are available to officers and for emergencies. Costs 10 points.
- **Magical Supplies:** The guild has a supply of potions, scrolls, poisons, prefabricated and made-to-order wards. Selected members of the guild will have knowledge of their activation. Wands and Talismans for are available to officers. Costs 40 points.
- **Small Library:** The guild has one small library that covers one "common" **subject**, such as *The History of The Western*

Empire, The Ore's Anatomy or The Gods of the Pantheon of Light. Costs 10 points.

- **Large Library.** The guild has a large library that covers many "common" subjects, or one Specialized subject, such as *The Ice Dragon's Anatomy, Surgery and Medicine*, or *The Private Life of Itomas, an Emperor*. Costs 20 points. A librarian cares for the Library.
- **Spell Library:** The guild has a collection of spells. A Wizard cares for and protects the library. The library contains all common spells, plus most spells (70%) up to a level equal to one fifth of the points spent. For example, a guild investing 30 points in a Spell library will have most spells up to 6th level. Costs (required level times five) points.
- **Magical Laboratory:** The guild has a Magical Laboratory and Library, staffed by an academic man of magic. The Mage will research new spells, circles and wards for the **guild**, and investigate new items and magics. Costs 30 points.
- **Alchemist:** The guild has the services of a competent alchemist. Note that the alchemist requires security, peace and quiet, and very expensive components to work efficiently. Costs 60 points.
- **Forge:** The guild has a forge and blacksmith, able to produce common items. Costs 10 points.
- **Weapon & Armor Forge:** The guild has a forge, and a competent weaponsmith, able to help provide and repair arms and armor. Costs 15 points.



Transport

This determines how well the guild's members travel. Picking one level of transportation will provide access to all the lower levels. For example, a guild with Wagons and Horses could also use Pack Horses, or even Hand Carts.

- **None:** The guild members walk. Costs 0 points.

- **Hand Carts & Donkeys:** Wheelbarrows to carry **goods**, and donkeys (which must be cared for by the members) to carry people are provided by the guild. Costs 3 points.
- **Pack Horses & Mules:** The guild has provided strong pack horses for goods, and sturdy mules for its members. A small team of handlers is employed to care for and guide them. Costs 5 points.
- **Wagons & Horses:** Guild representatives can get a wagon pulled by a number of horses for guild business. A small team of handlers is employed to care for the horses, and drivers are available. Costs 10 points.
- **Riding Horses:** The guild house includes a stable, from which riding horses can be borrowed. Costs 10 points.
- **Superior Horses:** The guild has an excellent supply of horses. Normal guild employees will have the finest riding horses, while combat troops will have battle trained horses. All horses are fully trained, and kept healthy by the stable team. Costs 20 points.
- **Carriages:** The guild's representatives are transported in enclosed carriages, pulled by a team of horses. A number of drivers are employed for the carriages, as well as stable hands required for the horses. Costs 15 points.
- **Giant or Unusual Animals:** The guild has gained control over a number of large and unusual mounts, such as elephants or camels. More importantly, they have gained the expertise and housing to care for and train them. Costs 30 points.
- **Monster Mounts:** The guild has a number of fantastical mounts, such as Griffins. A large part of the guild's fortunes are spent on their special stables, training and upkeep. Costs 40 points.
- **Magical:** The guild has done away with mundane transport. Most members (and guild goods) travel via magical means, such as flight, and even **teleportation**. Costs 50 points.
- **Dimensional Telpotation:** The guild has the ability to send its members anywhere in the known world, and even to other planes of existence, such as the elemental planes. Knowledge of how to survive these outer planes will often be required, and warrant the acquisition of a library of research on the matter. Costs 70 points.
- **Superior:** The guild has all the advantages of advanced weaponry, but with the added edge of **Dwarven** or Kobold construction. Officers of the guild are frequently sent away to military academies, to learn "the art of war," while the guild members are taught advanced military techniques, such as siege warfare and countering. Costs 40 points.
- **Magical:** Apart from Superior weapons and training, the guild has managed to acquire the ability to construct magical weapons, and outfit and train its members in their use. On a battlefield, they are all but unstoppable. 60 points.

Communications

The ability to communicate amongst itself and with customers is often the lifeblood of a guild. Purchasing one level gives access to all the previous levels of communication.

- **None:** The guild has no formal communication system. They rely on messages being passed from guild member to member. Mistakes are often made. Cost 0 points.
- **Letter Service:** The guild communicates through a letter service, including a recognized series of seals and stamps. Letters are delivered when they arrive with guild business, as opposed to a regular delivery. Costs 10 points.
- **Messengers:** Messengers are employed by the guild. They can either carry a message via word of mouth, or one that has been written and sealed. Being dedicated messengers, they can normally guarantee delivery within a specified period. Costs 15 points.
- **Messenger pigeons:** The guild has a network of pigeon coops and trained birds, which are used to rapidly and safely transport messages. The guild does not take kindly to archers testing **their** aim, or cats. Costs 20 points.
- **Limited magic:** Apart from mundane methods, the guild also has limited magic with which to communicate, such as telepathy and the Magic Pigeon spell. Costs 30 points.
- **Unlimited magic:** The guild has invested in powerful magic spells and items that let them communicate freely with almost anyone. Professional men of magic will work full time maintaining communications. 50 points.

Security

While security can not be simply purchased, this acquisition determines how well the guild has been drilled in keeping its secrets secret, and doors closed. Select only one of the following.

Weaponry

Purchasing levels of weaponry not only provides the desired killing implements, but also training in their **use**, and the means to maintain them in regular use.

- **None:** The guild members are unarmed, or have to arm themselves. Costs 0 points.
- **Simple:** The guild provides simple levels of arms and training, such as daggers, short swords and staves. Costs 5 points.
- **Basic:** The guild has access to the basic weaponry of the military, such as large swords, small shields and short bows. Simple group tactics are taught to members. Costs 10 points.
- **Advanced:** The guild not only has high quality armaments such as large shields, pikes, longbows and cross-bows, great swords and flails, but also trains its members in battlefield maneuvers and tactics. A guild with sufficient members can muster a small army. Costs 20 points.

- **None:** The guild isn't guarded, and is easy to infiltrate. Very few doors are locked or watched. Those that are locked are simple to bypass (+5% to pick). Nobody really pays attention to others unless it's their job. Costs 0 points.
- **Lax:** There are a few guards who watch the main entrances, and the most important rooms will be locked. It's still easy to get in through side entrances, and few people would notice careful strangers. Costs 5 points.
- **Tight:** Professional security guards the guild. There is a watch, 24 hours a day on all major entrances. Side entrances are locked and patrolled. New members and clients are checked for their credentials, skill and background. Complex locks (-10% to pick) and alarms protect important places and items within the guild. The most important guild items are



protected with minor magical defenses, such as a ward sequence or protection circle. Costs 10 points.

- **Secure:** Physical security is provided by experienced guards. A Diabolist or other man of magic provides full time magical protection with alarms, **traps**, protection against supernatural spying, and the scanning of visitors, customers and suspect guild members. Costs 20 points.
- **Iron Clad:** The guild grounds and surrounding areas are patrolled regularly. Throughout the **guild**, hidden compartments, secret doors, magic alarms, and protection circles keep the guild's secrets safe. Every entrance is guarded **constantly**, as are several internal routes. All doors are constantly locked. Visitors are scanned by men of magic or psychics and **scrutinized** constantly, possibly escorted. A few magic items have been provided to aid the security forces against mundane foes and the supernatural. The guild has been almost magically sealed, providing as complete protection against magical spying and intrusion as is provided physically. Costs 30 points.
- **Paranoid:** Iron clad security with the added advantage of complete paranoia. No one is trusted completely. Everyone and every area is scrutinized, magically and psychically scanned, and watched. Key areas of the guild are protected by powerful and permanent spells such as Sanctum. Costs 45 points.
- **Impregnable:** Impregnable protection has all the elements of Paranoid security, with the added advantage of an experienced security team and officers. Paranoid security may still be duped, or may hesitate under pressure, but the experienced security force will not. Costs 60 points.

Stronghold

To do business, most guilds will work out of a large Guild House, possibly fortified. This will give the impression that the guild is doing well, but also that they are able to defend themselves. With the following acquisitions, a guild will be acquiring buildings and land. Multiple selections may be made. For example, a Large House and an Estate may be acquired for a total of 30 points. If the guild covers more than one large city, each city will have approximately the same amount of land.

- **None:** The guild has no holdings or recognized land of any type. 0 points.
- **Meeting place:** While it doesn't own the land, there is an area that it is known that the guild meets at. Just hope it doesn't rain. Costs 2 points.
- **Hut or Hovel:** The guild has an old shed, hut or dilapidated house from which they conduct business. While it keeps the rain off their heads, it is unpleasant and cramped. Costs 5 points.
- **Caravan:** The guild has no permanent housing, but has a number of beast-drawn caravan carts, or even canal boats. Some carts are just for accommodation, while others contain storage or work places. Costs 10 points.
- **House:** The guild has a town house. Within this house there are a couple of small offices, and either space for storage, work rooms, or accommodation. Costs 10points.
- **Fortified House:** The guild has fortified its holdings, thickening doors, adding shutters to windows and barring all possible entrances. Arrow slits and murder holes are available on request. Costs 15 points.
- **Large House:** The guild has a lavish house, either at the center of town or on land outside the city. There is ample room for offices, work rooms and accommodation. Costs 15points.
- **Fortified Large House:** An estate house that has been strongly fortified like the Fortified House acquisition, only larger. There will probably be some fortification on the roof, too. Costs 20 points.
- **Keep or Tower:** The guild has its own keep or tower. This can either be an extremely heavily fortified house, or a purpose-built military fortification. Costs 25 points.
- **Fortified Keep or Tower:** The guild's keep or tower has been fortified further, adding a wet or dry moat, draw bridge and a gate house over the main entrance. Costs 35 points.
- **Castle:** The guild has acquired a fully fortified castle from which to do business, or a chain of connected, heavily fortified keeps or towers. The castle can either be "open", allowing the surrounding people the advantages of the fortification, or closed an inhospitable, a reminder of the guild's power. Costs 50 points.
- **Surrounding Estate:** The guild's holdings are surrounded by a reasonable estate, complete with either functional or decorative gardens and staff. Costs 15points.
- **Surrounding Village:** A village has grown up around the guild that relies on the guild for employment but provides it with simple services, such as labor and food. Costs 25 points.
- **Surrounding Town:** A full town has grown up around the guild that relies on the guild for employment but provides it

with most **services**, such as food, labor, craft works and men at arms. Costs 35 points.

- **Surrounding City:** The guild's followers have grown into a city! Most services are available. The guild completely controls what occurs within the city. Their word is law. Costs 60 points.

Intelligence

Some guilds rely on, or trade, information and secrets. Whether these are stolen military plans, the competition's caravan routes for the next spring, or the personal habits of Emperor Itomas, acquiring intelligence resources gives the guild a chance to find out things they shouldn't know. Multiple selections may be purchased.

- **None:** The guild has no eyes or ears, other than its members. Costs 0 points.
- **Gossips:** The guild relies on stories told in the market square and rumors from friends of friends. Costs 2 points.
- **Military Scouts:** The guild has a number of scouts able to enter an area and return with information valuable for military planning, such as troop movements, natural resources and ambush points. They can produce maps and report documents if given sufficient time. Costs 5 points.
- **Underworld Contact:** The guild has several contacts within criminal organizations that are able to find out "the word on the street," and will approach the guild to sell information of interest. Costs 5 points.
- **Spies:** The guild has several masters of disguise, able to enter the towns and houses of those the guild wishes watched. The speed of their reporting depends on the guild's Communications network. Costs 10 points.
- **Psionics or Magic:** The guild employs a number of men of magic or psychics that specialize in gathering information. This may be done through scrying spells and abilities such as astral projection, consulting spirits, or the use of enchanted items such as crystal balls. They are able to gather most types of physical information (where somebody or something is, the route somebody is traveling, etc.) but may have difficulty with precise details (who they are going to see, why, etc.) that may be gained through more conventional means such as underworld contacts or spies. Costs 20 points.
- **Supernatural:** The guild has either a deal with, or the friendship or control of supernatural entities (spirits, ghosts, **elementals**, etc.) that are able to gather information, and possibly divine the future. Costs 20 points.
- **Intelligence Network:** The guild has established a network of information. The network will not provide specific information, but will constantly report on the state of the world around them. The information is normally collated by a specialist, and a report given to the guild leaders. For example, the report may list troop movements, the state of harvests, guild conflicts, changes of government and noted births and deaths. Costs 30 points.
- **Spy Network:** A spy network has the resources of an information network, but is also able to send professional specialists into an area to find specific information. Normally, the spies are controlled and the information is collated by a cen-

tral spy master, who has a position of complete trust within the guild. Only the spy master knows all the details of the spies, their movements and missions. Costs 50 points.

Monthly Budget

A monthly budget determines how much "spare cash" the guild generates that they can use in emergencies and to cover extra costs. Select one budget. Game Masters should be careful to avoid abuse by player-controlled guilds, or creating "**Munchkin**" guilds themselves with the economic power to topple kingdoms.

- **None:** No spare money is available. Costs 0 points.
- **100 gold per month:** The guild can barely afford to repair any damaged equipment. Costs 5 points.
- **1,000 gold per month:** The guild can repair or replace equipment and can afford minor magical healing. Costs 15 points.
- **10,000 gold per month:** The guild can meet expensive requirements of jobs and afford to hire men of magic and adventurers. Costs 25 points.
- **100,000 gold per month:** Short of the complete destruction of its guild house, the guild can repair, replace or heal virtually anything. No expense is spared. Powerful men of magic, experienced adventurers or specialists can be **afforded**, as well as small armies. Costs 40 points.
- **1,000,000 gold per month:** The guild has massive reserves of money to fall back on. If throwing money at it can solve a problem, the problem will be solved. They can afford a king's ransom. Costs 60 points.
- **Unlimited:** The guild can get its hands on whatever monetary resources they require. Money will probably be virtually irrelevant to them - they are in business for power, not profit. Costs 100 points.

General Alignment

The alignment of a guild will affect how it is perceived, how it members act and who will trade with them. Nobody trusts a merchant that will kill you for the cloth on your back. Select one alignment.

- **Diabolic:** Completely untrustworthy. They will destroy their competition or even their allies, whether there is any profit to be made, or even just "because." Costs 0 points.
- **Aberrant:** The guild can be trusted to keep its word, but its motives can not. Costs 2 points.
- **Miscreant:** The guild is regarded as a cut-throat. It can't be trusted if they stand to make huge profits by breaking a deal, lying or cheating. Costs 2 points.
- **Anarchist:** The guild is an unknown, and a gamble to work with. Sometimes their dealings are disastrous. Sometimes they produce amazing results. Costs 4 points.
- **Unprincipled:** If the guild hasn't had bad dealings with you previously, they are trustworthy. However, once crossed, they hold a grudge that could spell disaster if not dealt with. Costs 6 points.
- **Scrupulous:** The guild is regarded as completely honest. If they have a problem with a customer, they will be dealt with

through the courts of law, rather than taking the law into their own hands. Costs 8 points.

- **Principled:** Not only is the guild completely honest, they are an aid to their community. If it can be afforded, they support charities, help the needy and try not to put their competitors out of work - **there's** enough for everyone to share. Costs 10 points.

Criminal Activity

A guild does not always deal openly or honestly. Sometimes, they will be responsible for some or all of the criminal activity within an area. These underworld figures can be used to generate income, spy, or to deal with the competition. Multiple selections can be made.

- **None:** The guild acts honestly. Costs 0 points.
- **Con Men:** The guild has its servants put out false information about the guild, the state of the market or the competition, attempting to gain customers. 5 points.
- **Prostitutes:** The guild has a number of attractive prostitutes that can be used to corrupt and control the guild's customers. Costs 5 points.
- **Poisoner:** The guild has a professional poisoner in their employment. Enemies of the guild are either very careful, or die of unexpected disease or illness. 10 points.
- **Drug Master:** The guild has a professional man of science (or old lore) in their employment specializing in the brewing of highly addictive narcotics. These are then used as "gifts" for their customers, and to generate income in the underworld. Costs 15 points.
- **Smugglers:** The guild employs smugglers to trade where they can not legally, even if it on their own door-step. Costs 15 points.
- **Thug Enforcers:** The guild has a gang of thugs and murderers who enforce the guild's wishes on the streets, keeping the people in line. They are not accustomed to stiff resistance, preferring to outnumber and bully their victims. Costs 10 points.
- **Weapon Master Enforcers:** The guild has attracted a small number of professional warriors to its ranks. They are responsible for enforcing the guild's wishes on the streets. 15 points.
- **Psychic/Wizard Enforcer:** The guild has acquired the services of a man of magic, priest or psychic who enjoys brutalizing and terrorizing the weak, typically the guild's weaker enemies, and those that stand in their way. Costs 15 points.
- **Assassin:** The guild's enemies have a habit of disappearing, having fatal accidents, or being found in the wrong part of town with a knife in the back. Nasty; Costs 15 points.
- **Professional Thieves:** The guild has a number of burglars, able to acquire the competition's resources, valuables and secrets, as well as committing acts of sabotage. Costs 20 points.
- **Adventurer Group:** The guild has an adventurer group under its wings, that is sent on jobs that the regular guild members and enforcers can not deal with. Costs 20 points.

Reputation

A guild can not do well if it is not a "known" name amongst its competitors. Make one selection.

- **Outlawed:** The guild is known, but for the wrong reasons - they are wanted by the **Law**, and fellow guilds. Costs 0 points.
- **Inferior:** The guild is known to be inferior to its competition. At least they're cheap. Costs 1 point.
- **Suspicious:** The guild is known to be a shadowy organization, and is not trusted. Costs 2 points.
- **Unknown:** The guild is just "one of the crowd" and has yet to make a name for itself. Costs 5 points.
- **Known:** The guild is recognized as a competent one, even amongst its competition. Costs 10 points.
- **Excellent:** The guild is regarded highly as one of quality workmanship and skill. Costs 25 points.
- **Famous:** The guild is well known even amongst those that have no dealings with the guild or its business. Costs 50 points.



Monthly Salary

Some guilds (such as Wizards' guilds) charge for their membership. Others employ their members, paying a wage. Make one selection.

- **Charges Fees:** The guild charges for membership. Costs 0 points.
- **None:** The guild doesn't charge for membership, but doesn't pay its members for their work, keeping all fees paid. Costs 5 points.
- **Freelance income:** The guild arranges work for its members, and takes a percentage of the fee, typically 20%. Costs 10 points.
- **Pittance:** The guild pays approximately 30 gold per month, but at least it's a guaranteed income. Costs 15 points.
- **Good:** The guild pays a guaranteed 150 gold per month, plus bonuses for exceptional work or other services to the guild. Costs 20 points.
- **Excellent:** The guild pays 250 gold per month, plus bonuses, hazardous duty pay, and even a pension. Costs 25 points.
- **Outrageous:** The guild pays 400 gold or more per month, plus all the bonuses of Excellent pay. Costs 40 points.

Special

Here are a number of miscellaneous options that may be taken. Make as many selections as are desired.

- **Sub Guilds:** The guild may spend points to create a secondary organization under itself. For every two points spent, the new guild will receive three. Rather than following the "Guild Size" table to determine points based on membership, use the table to determine the membership from the guild points spent. For example, a shadowy merchant guild spends 80 points setting up a smuggling sub guild. This gives the new guild 120 points - this makes the new guild a House-sized guild, with 30 members.
- **Leased Land:** The guild can lease, rather than own its land (see "Stronghold"), reducing its point cost by one third. This comes at a cost - reduce the guild's monthly budget and salary by one third.
- **Rumored Existence:** The guild is a famous name, but only in rumor or legend. They do not operate openly, and go to great lengths to protect their identity. Costs 20 points, and requires a minimum of Tight security.
- **Friendship - Royalty:** The guild has friends in truly high places. Costs 30 points.
- **Friendship - Merchants:** The guild has a friendship and several contracts with a large merchant guild, giving it a guaranteed market for its products or services. Costs 10 points.
- **Friendship - Clergy:** The guild has friendly relations with an influential church. Costs 15 points.
- **Friendship - Men of Magic:** The guild has friendly relations with a group of magic practitioners or psychics. Costs 15 points.
- **Friendship - Government:** The guild has friendly relations with the law of the land. Costs 20 points.
- **Friendship -Royalty:** The guild has friends in truly high places. Costs 30 points.
- **Monopoly:** The guild has a monopoly on its trade within its borders. For example, a normal Guild will monopolize a town, a Large Guild a city, and a National Guild a kingdom. Costs a guild one fifth of their basic starting point allocation. For example, a House-sized guild must pay 24 points, while a National Guild must pay 90 points.
- **Minor Competition:** The guild's main competitor has the backing of the black market or some powerful merchants. Gives the guild an additional 10 points.
- **Major Competition:** The guild's main competitor has the backing of the local dominant clergy, men of magic or government. Gives the guild an additional 15 points.
- **Great Competition:** The guild's main competitor has the backing of the local royalty. They are in trouble. Gives the guild an additional 20 points.
- **Enemy Guild:** The guild has a powerful guild bent on its destruction, in addition to its normal competitors. Gives the guild an additional 15 points.
- **Enemy Church:** The guild has a large church bent on its destruction, in addition to its normal competitors. Gives the guild an additional 25 points.

- **Enemy Nation:** A nation has declared war on the guild! This is in addition to its normal competitors, but gives the guild far bigger things to worry about. Gives the guild an additional 35 points.
- **Divine Enemy:** A god or other powerful supernatural entity with many followers has vowed to destroy the guild. Gives the guild an additional 40 points.

New Guilds

Setting up a guild is not an easy thing. It requires dedication to the job and perseverance, let alone other resources such as a mass of money and time. Not everyone is prepared to handle such pressures.

Power

When a guild is set up, it requires founding members to control everything. These are the guild masters. The more powerful the guild becomes, the more members it must advance to the rank of guild master to control itself.

To determine the required level total of a guild's controllers, multiply the number of guild points (before sponsorship and other modifiers) by one thousand. This is the total amount of experience points the guild heads must have between them.

For example, a Wizards' guild with 200 points requires 200,000 experience in total between its heads. That equates to one twelfth level Wizard, two tenth level Wizards, or four seventh level Wizards.

If they do not have the required experience, reduce the guild size and the guild points available. For **example**, if the above mentioned new guild heads have only **160,000** experience points between them, then they will only get **160** guild points and be considered a House, not a Guild.

Money

A new guild will cost a lot of money to get started - every guild point available to the guild requires 1,000 gold pieces as an initial investment. If the cash is not available, reduce the number of guild points available. For example, if the above 160 point guild had only **110,000** gold available as its funds, the guild would have only **110** points, reducing the guild from the status of a House, to a Gathering.

Time

Finally, just like any new business, to build a guild takes a lot of time. Just to get the guild onto its feet will take a number of days equal to the guild point total. A 300 point guild will take almost a year just to get set up. Even at this point, the guild will be much weaker and underpowered than an established guild.

It will take a further two days per guild point to reach full strength. While this may seem like an excessive amount of time, it is required to account for building the buildings, recruiting manpower, making political connections, and so on. For example, after the 300 days spent setting up a 300 point guild, a further 600 are required for the guild to gain its full potential strength.

Player Created Guilds

All the rules for the construction and design of guilds hold true for player characters who have gained a king's ransom, and who wish to start their own guild.

The primary limit on the size of a guild is going to be its founding members' experience: for every thousand experience points the founding members have, the guild will have one guild point.

Once the total available guild points are known, this will determine the maximum size of the guild:

- **Under 60 points** None
- **60 points** Gathering
- **120 points** House
- **200 points** Guild
- **300 points** Large Guild
- **450 points** National Guild
- **650 points** International Guild

The minimum of 60 guild points are required. Without these, the guild will not be taken seriously or attract members. The only solution to this problem is to gain further guild points, whether by gaining more experience, convincing an experienced character to become one of the guild heads, or buying the required resources.

Any guild points in excess of the minimum size can be used, and are not lost. However, if the players want to save either time or money, they can use any number of guild points up to **their** maximum.

Note that the points listed are the minimum required to set up a guild of that size. Even if a guild was just 1 point short of the next size up, they are still considered to be the smaller size.

Example one: Quiring, a renegade Thief, decides to start his own guild. Quiring is an experienced burglar, and has gained just over 40,000 experience points, giving him 40 guild points - not enough to start a guild. So Quiring convinces Stealth, an old partner with 35,000 experience points, to join him. Combined, they have 75,000 experience points, giving 75 guild points. They have points to start a Gathering of Thieves. If they can convince Dreg, a well-known killer with over 45,000 experience points, to join as a founding member, then they will have the 120 guild points to form a House.

Example two: Codex, Blandrain and Issus the Black are all very powerful spell casters that have decided to form a guild, and the larger the better. Between them, they have 295,000 experience points, giving 295 guild points. While this is enough to form a Guild, it is 5 short of a Large Guild. The Wizards must gain more experience, or a fourth partner. Alternatively, they could set the Guild up with 295 points, and buy the additional resources required to make a Large Guild for 20,000 gold pieces per point, an extra **100,000** gold total. Alternatively, the Wizards could decide to build **their** guild with only 200 points, saving themselves 95 thousand gold pieces and 285 days of work.

The time required to build a guild gives Game Masters an excellent opportunity to run adventures involving the guild-building while it's in flux. Adventures while PCs are building guilds could range from squashing rival guilds who want to stop the building, to recruiting key personnel, to getting

land rights and permission to build a fortress from the local lord. In the end, this kind of commitment of the **characters'** time and other resources should give the players a sense of accomplishment once the guild is finally built.

Example Guild: The Brotherhood of Veroc

The Brotherhood of Veroc is an Assassin guild in the Eastern Territories, dominating a coastal city and surrounding towns. It is a large guild, having about 130 professional Assassin members, plus their support staff.

Size: 130 professional members of a "life long study" profession equates to 650 normal skilled members, making it a normal Guild (300 points).

Sponsorship: The guild has a secret benefactor that steers the guild and pays for some of its requirements. This makes the total points available **310**, with **10** spare for Dress.

Dress: The guild has Opulent Dress (30 points, reduced to 20 by the sponsorship bonus), allowing it many **disguises** and secreted armor. The **officers** of the guild commonly have enchanted armors (noiseless and some invisible suits). The guild has a few Armorers to maintain **their** suits. (20 point total cost)

Equipment: The guild has Excellent generic equipment (10 points), specialized breaking & entry equipment (10 points), Medical Supplies (10 points) and Magical Supplies (40 points), mostly poisons and anti-magic wards, for a total of 70 points. A few healers and a men of magic are employed by the Assassins to tend the medical and magical equipment. (90 point total cost)

Transport: The guild controls a stable of Riding horses (10 points) and its staff, and provides training for its members. (**100** point total cost)

Weaponry: Advanced - the guild's members are well versed with a **variety** of the most efficient weapons, and small group tactics (20 points). Officers are often equipped with Kobold made arms. (**120** point total cost)

Communications: Limited Magic (30 points) - the brotherhood has several trained long-range telepaths, to supplement a its messengers. (**150** point total cost)

Security: The guild keeps Iron Clad Security (30 points) - Paranoid security can draw attention to an area, which the guild wishes to avoid. The guild has a permanent security force. (**180** point total cost)

Stronghold: The guild is based out of a number of underground fortresses, equivalent to fortified keeps (35 points). (215 point total cost)

Intelligence: The guild keeps tabs on the world through an Intelligence Network (30 points). (245 point total cost)

Budget: 10,000 gold per month (25 points). (270 point total cost)

Alignment: Aberrant - the guild moves in mysterious ways (2 points). (272 point total cost)

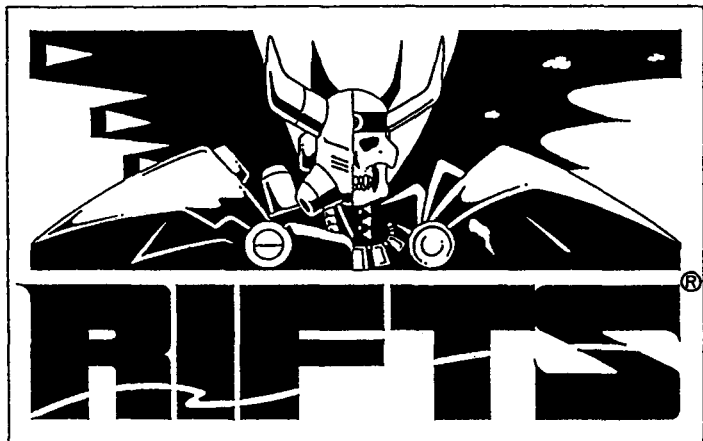
Criminal Activity: None - the activity could be traced back to the guild. Costs 0 points. (272 point total cost)

Reputation: Known (10 points) - the guild is building a name for itself. Its high fees make this advancement slow. (282 point total cost)

Monthly Salary: The guild charges high fees, and pays highly, to help its members' motivations and dedication to the job. Excellent Salary (25 points). (307 point total cost)

Special: The guild is facing Minor Competition (10 extra points, to make a total of 320 available) from another guild that has the backing of the city's main merchant guild. The guild has almost won the Friendship of the Guild of Magic (15 points). However, this would cost the guild 2 more points than it has. 2 extra points would cost the guild 80,000 gold in investment. With their current budget, it will take them 8 months of work to secure this **friendship**.

Total point cost: 307, with 13 points saved.



Russian Gods

Official Gods for use in **Rifts® Russia**

By Kevin Siembieda

The following material was supposed to appear in **Rifts® Mystic Russia**, but we ran out of space and time. Kent Buries did an absolutely magnificent job depicting them, so I couldn't just let them lay on the cutting room floor. So, here they **are**, a few of the most notable mythic gods of Russia.

The Return of Ancient Gods

Mokosh	Svarozhich
Perun	Dazhbog
Khors	Stribog
Svarog	Sventovit

Mokosh

Moist Mother Earth

Mokosh is the only major female god in the **Kievan Russian Pantheon**. Her daughter Lada (Spring) and a few others are very minor deities of whom little is known.

Moist Mother Earth is highly regarded by the mighty Cossack and the simple farmers and herdsman of Southern **Russia**, both of whom make her their principal god. According to legend, Mokosh represents the very soul of the planet Earth, symbolizing the earth, birth, all life (human and animal), fertility, crops and harvest. She is also the protector of women. She is re-

nowned for her love of life and hatred of supernatural evil and destructive forces. As a result, Mokosh tries to help mortals against demons and other **wicked**, supernatural forces and alien beings. She is distraught to see **the** incredible number of hell-spawned demons, dragons and horrid creatures that have invaded Russia and swarm over China, where she is also worshipped.

Mokosh can speak to mortals from ancient trees and mountain-tops, but her words are a strange language comprehensible only to the *Millennium Druid*, *Old Believer O.C.C.* and high level *Druids* (8th level or greater). However, from the conduit of the ancient tree or mountain **peak**, heroes and good, caring people sometimes also hear her words, and although they cannot understand them (usually dismissing the sound as the wind or imagination), they are often struck by a sudden inspiration or revelation. Such insight can come instantly or within the next 24 hours, often in a dream or while musing. She is especially appreciative of and attracted to **Cossacks**, **Bogatyr**s and other warriors who battle demons and monsters for the good of others. On the other hand, she has little tolerance for those who have become so proud and self-absorbed that they have lost their appreciation of life to become detached, cold and dispassionate toward their fellow man.

Mokosh seldom takes a direct hand in the affairs of mortals, remaining hidden in the Earth itself. When she does make an appearance, it usually marks an important moment like the beginning or end of a war, to boost morale or encourage, warn or bless a hero(s), or to show her disdain. All in all, "Moist Mother Earth," is mysterious and magical — little is known about her.

Mokosh NPC Russian God

Also Known as Moist Mother Earth, Mother Damp Earth and Mother of Plenty (or Bounty).

Race: Archaic Russian God.

Alignment: Scrupulous good.

Attributes (supernatural): I.Q. 18, M.E. 29, **M.A.** 23, P.S. 60 (half when not touching the earth), P.P. 22, P.E. 30, P.B. 22, Spd **15** running or moving through the earth.

M.D.C.: 18,000 (on S.D.C. worlds the goddess has **18,000** Hit Points and 8,000 S.D.C.; A.R. **15**).

Horror/Awe Factor: 16

Size: Giant-sized, ranging from 30-90 feet (9 to 27 m) tall.

Mokosh rarely takes full humanoid form, instead appearing as a motherly woman formed out of rock or the side of a mountain.

Weight: 30 to 5000 tons, depending on size and form.

Average Life Span: Immortal.

P.P.E.: 3800

Experience Levels: 8th level spell caster, 12th level psychic.

Natural Abilities: Slow speed, but can run, fight or fly without pause or exhaustion indefinitely. Swim 50%, does not breathe air and can survive any depth. Mokosh has keen, hawk-like vision and can see up to five miles (8 km) away and **nightvision** is one mile (1.6 km). She can also fly (90 **mph/148 km**), dimensional **teleport** 68% (+20% at a ley line nexus), teleport self 90%, and bio-regenerate **1D6x100M.D.** per melee round as long as she is touching the Earth (**2D6x10** if suspended in the air, space or water) and all M.D.C. or lost body parts are regenerated within **12** hours.



Note: Mokosh draws her power from the earth, so if removed from contact with the **Earth/ground** (i.e. suspended in air, space, water, etc.) reduce her P.S. by half, Earth magic spells by half, and healing as noted above.

Knows all Languages: Magically understands and speaks all languages 98%, but can only read Russian (88%).

Earth Link & Powers (special):

- Recognize/identify any mineral on sight at 98%.
- Sense and identify seismic disturbances, including earthquakes, explosions, mining, or movement of heavy equipment (like troops or giant robots) in a radius of 100 miles (160 km) at 95%.
- Sense dangers in the earth or **rock**, such as loose **dirt/rocks**, mud slides, quicksand, land mines, and creatures in burrows at 98%.
- Sense and predict (within 2D6 days) the coming of an earthquake, volcanic eruption or other natural disturbance in the **earth's** crust at 88%.
- Sense (and communicate with) Earth and Air **Elementals** within a 20 mile (32 km) radius, at 95%.

Limited Invulnerability (special): Impervious to normal S.D.C. attacks and weapons, even those made of silver or wood. She is also impervious to possession, disease and toxic gases/fumes, and all earth-based magic (encase in stone, earthquake, lava, etc.). M.D. and magical fire and cold do half damage, and she also suffers half damage from falls and all kinetic attacks such as punches, kicks, sword strikes, bullets, rail guns, explosions, rock slides and falls. **Lightning/electricity** does full damage. Man-made Mega-Damage weapons, magic weapons, spells and psionics inflict their normal damage.

The Blessing of Mokosh (special): A basic **blessing** makes the recipient +2 to save vs disease and poison and +15% to save vs coma and death. The blessing lasts for a prescribed number of days, up to 30.

The "Kiss of Mokosh" is a superior blessing that confers the following: Impervious to disease, +4 to save vs poison, +30% to save vs coma and death, and the character fatigues at half the normal rate. These bonuses can last for years, typically as long as the "hero" remains true to himself and his fight against supernatural evil and helps to protect the weak and downtrodden from them. The blessing ends when the character accomplishes his **quest/crusade**, finishes serving Mokosh, dies, or the goddess appears and removes it (usually because the character's work is done, and gets her thanks or because the hero has earned her disdain by losing his path).

The Disdain of Mokosh (special): This might be considered a curse, and basically the reverse of the "blessing." Those who have earned Mokosh's disdain must be admonished by the goddess and then suffer the following penalties: -2 to save vs disease and poison and -15% to save vs coma and death. Furthermore, the character is -1 to save from all attacks leveled at him by Mokosh, although she seldom takes such direct action. Her disdain is usually enough. These penalties remain in force until the character proves himself in her eyes, or dies, or another true god can negate them via Remove Curse.

Also see **Deific** Powers, magic and psionics.

Deific Powers (See Dragons & Gods): All prototypical powers plus Consume P.P.E., Control Tectonic Plates, Control Weather (local), and Display Deific Omen.

Priest/Healing Powers: Exorcism 80%, Turn Dead 90% (affection 2D6x10 dead at a time), Remove Curse 50%, Healing Touch (restores 4D6 Hit Points or S.D.C. or 1D6 M.D. and can be performed twice per melee round).

Magic Powers: All Earth and Air Warlock magic, and Russian Nature Magic, plus all earth, wood, and nature spells found in *Rifts® Federation of Magic™* (Manipulate Objects, Shatter, Throwing Stones, Create Wood, Ironwood, Mend the Broken, Fortify Against Disease, and similar). **Note:** The one magical power or spell forever denied Mokosh is *Resurrection*, for she must accept that death is part of the cycle of life and renewal.

Spell potency is equal to an 8th level spell caster.

Psionic Powers: 480 I.S.P.; equal to a 12th level Master Psionic and include all healing powers plus **Divination/Clairvoyance**, Commune with Spirits, Empathy, Remote Viewing, Sense Time, See the Invisible, Empathic Transmission and Bio-Manipulation.

R.C.C. Skills of Note: Basic math, astronomy, and *all* Wilderness skills at 98%, cook, dance and all animal lore and animal husbandry skills at 94%, prospecting, recognize weapon quality, military fortification, trap construction, trap/mine detection, **whittling/sculpting**, brewing, and holistic medicine at 80%. Also see Natural Abilities, above.

Attacks Per Melee: Six physical or psionic attacks, or two by spell magic.

Special Bonuses (in addition to attribute bonuses): +2 on initiative, +1 to strike and parry, +2 to dodge, +4 to pull punch, +6 to roll with impact or fall, +8 to save vs Horror Factor, impervious to possession.

Favorite Weapons: None; tends to rely on natural abilities, magic and psionics.

Armor: None; the goddess is a formidable M.D.C. being (has a natural A.R. of 15 in S.D.C. worlds); even in humanoid form she appears to be made of hardened clay, marble or some other type of stone.

Allies: She is respected by most of the other gods in the Russian Pantheon, particularly her husband **Perun** who adores her. Mokosh cares for him as well, but not quite as deeply, and the two are often apart. Perun loathes demons, including vampires, even more than his wife, and is often away, engaged in battle against them, or trying to inspire mortal heroes to join the good fight. He visits his beloved Russia, where Mokosh quietly resides in the Ural Mountains, but spends much of his time in China and other dimensions, battling powerful demon lords and their demon hordes.

Enemies: All of demon kind and other evil supernatural beings, including alien intelligences (has never locked horns with the **Splugorth**, and has only recently learned of their existence). Mokosh also dislikes mortals who serve or call upon demons and evil forces as a means to attain power or revenge. This means she hates witches, Necromancers, black priests and evil **Summoners** and similar minions of evil, particularly those without honor or compassion.

Vulnerabilities & Weaknesses: Mokosh draws her power from the earth, so if removed from contact with the ground (i.e. suspended in air, space, water, etc.) reduce her P.S. by half

and her bio-regenerative powers are reduced to a mere 2D6x10.

Rune weapons and most types of magic inflict their full damage, however, demonic, **angel/god** slaying weapons do double damage.

Manifestation: Appears as an attractive but motherly giant made of clay or stone, or, more likely, as a face in the side of a mountain or hill. She currently inhabits the Ural Mountains.

Minions: None per se, although she tends to regard most champions of light, and the Russian people in general, as her children and potential allies.

Perun

Leader of the Russian Gods

Perun is the Chief God and Head of the Russian Pantheon and is the God of War and violent storms who lives in the sky. He possesses power over lightning and commands thunder: Thunder booms with his every punch and he can magically create and throw lightning bolts at the speed of thought from his hands and eyes (counts as one melee action), as well as summon and dispel lightning storms. His favorite weapons include a great magical axe and mace, both of which crackle with electricity, but the axe is his symbol. He also uses a bow that shoots "Thunder Arrows" made of celestial fire (lightning) and which create a clap of thunder when they are fired and again when they strike.

It is said his powers reflect his personality, for like an electrical storm, **Perun's** moods can swing from calm or brightness and cheer to dark, boiling storm clouds usually followed by violent fireworks. Perun represents light and majestic power, but also violence, rage and darkness. This means the sky god is known for his violent rages, and can be absolutely relentless and blood-thirsty in combat, sometimes lashing out without thinking about the consequences. To invoke his ire is to ask for death. A contradictory god, Perun can be astonishingly understanding, benevolent, merciful and just. It is these attributes that enables him to oversee the administration of laws, justice, and order among the Russian gods. He has no respect or tolerance for liars, cheats, back **stabbers**, thieves, or the selfish. He admires the human warrior spirit, courage and resilience under duress, and sometimes indirectly helps great heroes and warriors (lets them find a magical weapon, or a Mega-Steed, or uncover valuable information, or find inspiration when their spirit lags, etc.). He only makes a personal combat appearance when humans have battled their way to face a demon lord, dark god or alien intelligence, at which point he will engage that hideous monster himself, while they continue to battle its hellish minions. Perun regards the Russian and Slavic people as "his" disciples and children.

He abhors demons and fights them constantly. He regards them and their lords as mortal enemies, rival powers and **corruptors** of humans and the destroyers of beauty. Perun often appears in the sky during lightning and ley line storms riding a chariot of fire drawn by a monstrous and mighty **he-goat/ram** and casting lightning bolts at demons, like the Unclean, who appear during such storms. From time to time, he can be seen at a ley line nexus, on a mountain peak or in the sky battling swarms of greater demons **and/or** their masters. To the astonishment of



mere mortals, over the last two hundred years he has appeared at least a dozen times to fight along side the troops of the Warlords of Russia and other valiant heroes locked in pitched battle against hordes of demons — disappearing the moment the tide clearly turns in favor of "his" people, and sending a cleansing rain at the battle's end to wash away the blood and filth, and to soothe the heroic warriors. Consequently, most of the warriors who serve under the Warlords consider themselves blessed by **Perun** and under his watchful eye. Some take this to the extreme, claiming that Perun has chosen them and their Warlord as "the" protectors and leaders of Mother Russia (ignoring the fact that Perun has shown his support to most of the other Warlords and independent knights and heroes as well).

Perun NPC Russian God

Also Known as Perun the Celestial, Sky God and Thunder God.

Race: Archaic Russian God.

Alignment: Unprincipled good.

Attributes (supernatural): I.Q. 17, M.E. 21, M.A. 25, P.S. 60, P.P. 26, P.E. 30, P.B. 22, Spd 50 running (35 **mph/56 km**) or riding the wind, but up to 220 (**150 mph/241 km**) when riding a storm or his fiery chariot.

M.D.C.: 20,000 (on S.D.C. worlds the god has 15,000 Hit Points and 12,000 S.D.C.; A.R. 15).

Horror/Awe Factor: 17

Size: Giant-sized, ranging from 20-90 feet (6 to 27 m) tall.

Perun is often seen in humanoid form, but can assume other shapes too.

Weight: 20 to 60 tons depending on size.

Average Life Span: Immortal.

P.P.E.: 4100

Experience Levels: 9th level spell caster.

Natural Abilities: A great warrior with good to excellent speed, never fatigues, can fly ("ride the wind"), does not breathe air and can survive any depth. Perun has keen, hawk-like vision and can see up to ten miles (**16 km**) away, sees the invisible, and **nightvision** is two miles (3.2 km). Dimensional **teleport** 78% (+20% at a ley line nexus), teleport self 78% (+20% at ley line nexus), and bio-regenerates **1D6x100 M.D.** per melee round. All M.D.C. or lost body parts are regenerated within 12 hours. **Note:** Perun draws his power from the fury of the wind.

Knows all Languages: Magically understands and speaks all languages 90%, but cannot read.

Elemental Link to the Air/Sky & Special Powers:

- Recognize and speak to true **Elementals** at 94%.
- Knows the precise time, **direction/location** and **height/altitude** (day or night) at 98%.
- Sense the direction and speed of the wind, as well as the air temperature and changes in the wind at 98%.
- Sense the approach of rain, snow, storms, tidal waves, hurricanes and atmospheric disturbances involving air or water at 98%, up to 100 miles (160 km) away.
- Sense and pinpoint odors, smoke, impurities, chemicals, poisons, pollution and particles in the air at 90%, up to 100 miles (**160 km**) away.
- See through fog and mist without any impairment of vision.

- Thunder punch or kick. Every strike made by **Perun** unleashes a clap of thunder and has the effect of unnerving mortals and lesser demons (-3 to save versus H.F. and will flee if the save is failed). This is automatic and does not require the expenditure of P.P.E.
- Lightning Fists. An aura of blue electricity crackles around the god's fists and adds 2D6 M.D. to each punch. This can be done at will and does not require the expenditure of P.P.E.
- Create and throw lightning. With a thought, Perun, God of the Skies and Thunder, can create and throw a bolt of lightning. The creation of the bolt and the act of throwing count as one melee action, so he can throw a lightning bolt equal to the number of attacks per melee round. The Sky God can regulate the amount of damage inflicted by such a bolt by increments of 1D4x10 up to 3D4x10 M.D. Throwing Range is 1000 feet (305 m). P.P.E. Cost: 2 points per bolt, regardless of M.D. involved. He can also shoot lightning from his eyes (one bolt each; simultaneously), but at half range and limited only to 1D4x10 M.D. each (2D4x10 per simultaneous dual bolts). Also see weapons.
- Create and dispatch a Messenger Bird — fundamentally the same as a magic pigeon only it speaks in a booming voice, the message can be three times longer, range is unlimited, and the Messenger Bird travels at the speed of thunder (roughly Mach One). P.P.E. Cost: 40.
- Create and dispatch a Rain Bird — a magical bird in the form of a large raven, hawk or eagle. It can be sent to a particular place or person where it circles eight times before flying up into the sky and out of sight. 1D6 minutes later, rain will fall for the next hour. This bird is sent to cleanse and soothe warriors after a hard-fought battle or to bring life-giving water to crops. Area of Effect: 10-60 mile (16 to 96.5 km) radius. The Rain Bird travels at the speed of thunder (roughly Mach One) and costs 100 P.P.E. points for the god to create.

Limited Metamorphosis (special): The Sky God can transform into a (relatively) human looking giant who towers 20-90 feet (6-27 m) tall, or into a **massive**, aggressive bull (usually with a red tint to its dark brown or black fur; double his **running** speed in this form). He can also turn into a whirlwind at will. This can be done as often as six times per hour and either form can be maintained indefinitely. In human form, Perun can engage in hand to hand combat, use weapons, weave magic spells, and cast lightning from his hands or eyes. This is his favorite appearance whether he walks among humans or flies through the sky. In this form he is vulnerable to most types of physical attacks, including magic, psionics, rune weapons, M.D. weapons and M.D. hand to hand attacks (see limited invulnerability).

In Whirlwind form, the Thunder God becomes a swirling force of destructive wind, roughly **equal** to the Tornado Air Warlock spell (see page 68 of *Rifts® Conversion Book One*). In this elemental form, only attacks utilizing psionics, magic, elemental forces and explosives have any effect on the raging funnel of living wind. Physical attacks do no damage to the "wind," **lightning/electricity** never harms Perun, and most M.D. weapons only inflict 10% their normal damage. However, M.D. explosives and particle beam weapons do half damage. The Vacuum spell will force the god to assume his physical form within 1D4 melee rounds.

Other spells ideal for stopping a Whirlwind are Negate Magic and Anti-Magic Cloud (both forcing the god to resume his physical form), while Id Barrier, Sonic Blast, **Shockwave**, fire magic, and others do full damage. A Wall of Wind or Immobilize will only delay the angry god for 1D4 melee rounds, while most air spells, Tornado and Hurricane among them, have no adverse effect.

Limited Invulnerability (special): Regardless of his physical form, Perun is impervious to lightning, electricity, storms, ley line storms, powerful winds, cold, heat (although M.D. fire and magical cold inflict full damage), gases, disease, poison and possession. He is also impervious to ordinary S.D.C. weapons. However, weapons made from the mighty Oak tree, Millennium Tree, or stone does the equivalent damage in M.D. to the god (i.e. an S.D.C. spear made from an oak and with a stone spearhead that does 2D6 S.D.C. damage will do 2D6 M.D. to Perun).

Most forms of magic (excluding air magic and electricity), magic weapons, psionics and M.D. weapons inflict full damage.

The Blessing of Perun (special): S.D.C. lightning does no damage, while M.D. electricity does the equivalent of S.D.C. damage cut in half (e.g. a magical lightning bolt that normally does 6D6 M.D. will only do 3D6 S.D.C. to the blessed one). Duration: Typically 48 hours, but can also be extended to last until the completion of a particular quest or six months, whichever comes first. P.P.E. Cost: None; considered a natural ability. Also see **Deific Powers**, magic and weapons.

Deific Powers (See Dragons & Gods): All prototypical powers plus Control Weather (local), Manifestation and Godblaze.

Priest/Healing Powers: Exorcism 70%.

Magic Powers: All Air Warlock magic and all light, cold or electrical based magic, including spells found in *Rifts® Federation of Magic™* (like Lantern Light, Cloak of Darkness, Light Target, Orb of Cold, Wave of Frost, Electric Arc, Frost **Blade**, Lightning Arc, and similar). Note: Like his wife, Mokosh, Perun can never possess the power of *Resurrection*. Death is part of a warrior's existence. Spell potency is equal to a 9th level spell caster.

Psionic Powers: 130 I.S.P.; equal to a 15th level Master Psionic, but psionic abilities are limited to Mind Block, Sense Time, and **Electrokinesis**.

R.C.C. Skills of Note: Basic math, astronomy, and *all* Wilderness skills at 98%, dance, recognize weapon quality, and military fortification at 90%. Also see Natural Abilities, above.

Attacks Per Melee: Ten physical or eight psionic attacks, or two by spell magic.

Special Bonuses (in addition to attribute bonuses): +5 on initiative, +3 to strike, parry, and dodge, +8 to pull punch, +4 to roll with impact or fall, +12 to save vs Horror Factor, and is impervious to possession.

Favorite Weapons: In addition to his natural abilities, lightning powers and magic, Perun has three favorite weapons that he uses regularly.

Lightning Axe: Does 1D6x10M.D., double damage to the supernatural and creatures of magic (including all **elementals**, dragons, sorcerers, and Millennium Beings). He is also +2 to strike and parry when using the axe. It can be thrown 1000 feet (305 m) and return to his hand in a blink of the eye (strikes and returns all in one melee **attack/action**). Twice per 24 hours, the magical axe can inflict 1D6x100 M.D.!

Thunder Mace: Does **1D6x10** M.D., double damage to Earth elemental beings and creatures made of stone or earth (including golems). It can be thrown 1000 feet (305 m), returns to his hand in a blink of the eye, and makes a thunder-clap whenever it strikes. During a storm if held above his head or jammed into a mountain peak, it functions as a magical lightning rod that draws all lightning to hit it without harm.

Bow & Lightning: **Perun** can create a magical bow out of thin air. This bow is a multi-colored arc of light that resembles a *mini-rainbow*. Likewise, the lightning bolts appear magically via his normal lightning creation powers (**1D4x10**, **2D4x10** or **3D4x10** M.D. per 2 P.P.E.). The difference being that when fired from the rainbow, they can be launched over one mile (1.6 km) 6000 feet (1828 m) away! The creation of the bow counts as one melee action, but each subsequent making of a bolt and its firing count as one.

Armor: None. Perun is a formidable M.D.C. being (has a natural A.R. of 15 in S.D.C. worlds). Any type of armor is only for show.

Allies: Perun is highly respected by most of the other gods in the Russian Pantheon, and a little bit feared. Mokosh is one of the few people who can calm him down quickly **and/or** prevent him from flying into a rage (Perun adores her and trusts her counsel). Unfortunately, the two are often apart.

Perun is the mortal enemy of demons, particularly vampires, even more than his wife and others in the pantheon. He is constantly **away**, battling demon hordes, lords and alien intelligences. He is deeply concerned about the Gargoyle Empire (and one reason the Gargoyles and **Brodkil** tend to stay away from Russia), but has his hands full with the swarms of demons that have already invaded Russia and continue to spill over from demon-plagued China. In fact, Perun is one of the reasons there aren't even more demons in Russia than there are. The Sky God is constantly away battling demons, or trying to inspire mortal heroes to join the good fight. He visits his beloved Russia, where Mokosh quietly resides in the Ural Mountains, but spends much of his time in China or other dimensions, battling powerful demon lords and their demon hordes. The other gods in the pantheon heed **Perun's** words, obey his laws and accept his judgements. When called to gather, they come immediately. However, Perun is independent and consumed with his battle against the supernatural, so he is often distracted by his one-god war. Unless the odds are too overwhelming or the danger too great, he seldom calls upon the other gods, although he always welcomes their companionship and aid.

Enemies: All of demon kind and other evil supernatural beings, including alien intelligences. Surprisingly, Perun has never locked horns with the **Splugorth**, and has only recently learned of their existence. He believes Witches, **Summoners**, Necromancers and black priests and their mortal minions should be left to the justice and sword of their fellow humans.

Vulnerabilities & Weaknesses: Weapons made of stone "ground" his lightning and those wielding them suffer half damage from his electrical attacks. Otherwise, when in physical form, human or bull, Perun is vulnerable to most M.D. weapons and attacks.

Rune weapons, Millennium Tree weapons and most types of magic inflict their full damage, however, demonic, angel/god slaying weapons do double damage.

Manifestation: When extremely angry, a Whirlwind, occasionally, as a massive, snorting bull, but typically a tall and vigorous male warrior with black hair and a long, golden beard. He is usually clad in cloth or robes, but sometimes in light body armor. He always has his Lightning Axe and Thunder Mace with him, and can create his (rain) bow and fire lightning bolts at will.

Minions: None per se, although he tends to regard most champions of light, demon hunters, and the Russian people in general, as his people and trustworthy allies.

Khors High God

Khors is one of the Sun gods in the Russian Pantheon and the symbol of absolute good. In old Russian, the word "**khors**" means "the sun." He represents the sun, fire, enlightenment, knowledge, learning and philosophy. Not surprisingly, he spends much of his time wandering the **Megaverse** in search of knowledge, magic and unravelling secrets. He is one of **Thoth's** cronies and a master of magic and dimensional travel.

He tends to let humans fend for themselves as they struggle to attain enlightenment, but is said to be the originator of "Russian Fire Magic," a gift he saw fit to share with humankind. This means unlike Perun and some of the other gods in the Russian Pantheon, he seldom directly intercedes on behalf of mortals even against demons. However, he has joined Perun on a number of crusades against supernatural forces when he felt they threatened to imbalance nature or the order of things. Khors finds the transformation of Earth into a Dimensional Nexus to countless worlds, fascinating, and has returned to observe from afar.

It is important to note that although he tries not to interfere in the affairs of mortals, Khors has an extremely high regard for life and an unshakable sense of good and evil, right and wrong. He will not hesitate to stand against brutal injustice or absolute evil, especially on a cosmic level. He has battled against the Gods of Set, The Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse, vampire intelligences and other dark forces many times.

Khors NPC Russian God

Also Known as The Sun, Solar God, or Khors of the Solar Fires.

Race: Archaic Russian God.

Alignment: Principled.

Attributes (supernatural): I.Q. 30, M.E. 23, M.A. **25**, P.S. 40, P.P. 22, P.E. 26, P.B. 22, Spd 50 running (35 **mph/56** km), but he can also ride the light of the sun at the equivalent of Mach 12!

M.D.C.: **11,000** (on S.D.C. worlds the god has 7,000 Hit Points and 4,000 S.D.C.; A.R. 14).

Horror/Awe Factor: 16

Size: **Giant-sized**, ranging from 20-90 feet (6 to 27 m) tall. Khors is often seen in **humanoid** form, but can assume other shapes too.

Weight: 20 to 60 tons depending on size.



Average Life Span: Immortal.

P.P.E.: 7,000

Experience Levels: 18th level Fire Sorcerer and Ley Line Walker/Wizard, and an 8th level Temporal Wizard.

Natural Abilities: Never fatigues, can fly ("rides light") at Mach 12, does not breathe air and can survive any depth underwater (speed is half in water). **Khors** has keen hawk-like vision and can see up to 100 miles (160 km) away, sees the invisible, and **nightvision** is two miles (3.2 km). Dimensional **teleport** 88% (+8% at a ley line nexus), **teleport self** 90% (+8% at ley line nexus), and bio-regenerates 1D4x100 M.D. per melee round. All M.D.C. or lost body parts are regenerated within 12 hours. **Note:** Khors draws his power from the sun.

Knows all Languages: Magically understands and speaks all languages 90%. Can read all Earth languages, ancient and present, **Dragonese/Elf**, Demongolian, Splugorth and numerous others.

Elemental Link to the Sun, Light & Fire; Special Powers:

- Recognize and speak to true elementals at 98%.
- His physical and light attacks do double damage to Fire and Air Elementals, but half damage to Earth and Water Elementals.
- Sense the precise time, direction, his location and height at 98% (-20% at night).
- Can turn invisible at will.
- Sees in all **spectrums** of light; infrared, ultraviolet, etc.
- Sense the source of light and levels of light radiation, and also sense air temperature, all at 98%.
- Sense the location of large fires and disturbances that radiate heat and light at 98%, up to 100miles (160km) away.
- See through smoke.
- Radiate light from his body (all or part) at will; roughly equal to globe of daylight, except can be increased to five times brighter. His very presence has the same effect as a holy symbol on vampires even when Khors is not radiating light. This is automatic and does not require the expenditure of P.P.E.
- Burning touch. Can radiate heat from his hands and adds 4D6 M.D. to each punch or 3D6 M.D. with a touch. This can be done at will and does not require the expenditure of P.P.E.
- Fire concentrated **light/laser** beams. With a thought, Khors can create and fire beams of light from his eyes. Each light blast counts as one melee **action/attack**, so he can fire laser beams equal to the number of attacks per melee round. The Solar God can regulate the amount of damage to inflict 4D6, 6D6, or 1D4x10 M.D. Range is 6000 feet (1828 m). P.P.E. Cost: 5 points per laser beam.

Khors can also fire a blast that does 2D4x10 M.D., but it counts as three melee attacks and costs 20 P.P.E.

Limited Metamorphosis (special): The Sun God can transform into a Firebird (an eagle or hawk-like energy being) or a beam of light. The latter is used to travel at the speed of light or to slip bonds or squeeze through a crack. If light can penetrate, Khors can slide through it.

Limited Invulnerability (special): Khors is impervious to all physical attacks and most types of magic when **trans-**

formed into a beam of light. However, he can not speak, cast magic or attack while in this form.

In his physical form, **Khors** is impervious to light, radiation, heat and lasers, including Mega-Damage and magical fire, heat and light. All other energy attacks do half damage, while most physical attacks (including M.D. punches, explosives, rail guns, **Vibro-Blades**, etc.), psionic and magical attacks, will do full damage.

The Blessing of Khors (special): Insight and understanding, and +2% to skill performance, and +5% to understand spoken languages. Duration: Typically 48 hours, but can also be extended to last until the completion of a particular quest or six months, whichever comes first. Sometimes sudden "insight" or "understanding" comes in a dream or vision, other times as a burst of inspiration or realization. P.P.E. Cost: None; considered a natural ability.

Also see **Deific Powers**, magic and weapons.

Deific Powers (See Dragons & Gods): All prototypical powers plus **Hellfire** and **Manifestation**.

Priest/Healing Powers: Exorcism 78%, Turn Dead 90% (affecting 1D6x100 dead at a time), Remove Curse 44%, Healing Touch (3D6 H.P. or S.D.C., or 1D4 M.D.; can be performed twice per melee round).

Magic Powers: All Temporal Magic, Russian Fire Magic and all Wizard spells from levels 1-15, including the spells found in *Rifts® Federation of Magic™*. Spell potency is equal to an 18th level spell caster.

Psionic Powers: 180 I.S.P.; equal to an 18th level Master Psionic. Abilities include Mind Block Auto-Defense, Astral Projection, Astral Golem, See Aura, Sense Dimensional Anomaly, Sense Time, Psychic Omni-Sight, Total Recall, Speed Reading and Group Trance.

R.C.C. Skills of Note: All Science and Technical skills at 98%, Dance and all Wilderness skills at 80%. Also see Natural Abilities, above.

Attacks Per Melee: Six physical or psionic attacks, or two by spell magic.

Special Bonuses (in addition to attribute bonuses): +8 on initiative, +3 to strike with lasers only, +3 to dodge, +5 to pull punch, +4 to roll with impact or fall, +9 to save vs Horror Factor, and is impervious to possession.

Favorite Weapons: None per se. Khors has accumulated a small treasure **trove** of unique and powerful magic items, including a few rune weapons, but rarely elects to use any. Instead, he tends to rely on his wits, intellect, magic and natural abilities.

Armor: None., Khors is a formidable M.D.C. being (has a natural A.R. of 14 in S.D.C. worlds).

Allies: Khors is highly respected by all the Russian gods. He is also the friend of the Egyptian Gods of Light, and knows a number of other gods, Temporal **Raiders**, Tattooed Men, and dragons whom he considers to be friends and allies.

Enemies: Although Khors is not as aggressive or openly hostile toward demons and other evil supernatural beings as **Perun** and some of the others, they are his enemies. He is especially concerned with vampire and alien intelligences. He is the Russian God who had previous knowledge of (and trouble with) the **Splugorth**. Khors had chosen not to mention their existence for fear it would provoke Perun to launch a crusade he could not possibly win. For now, Khors continues to se-

cretly study the **Splugorth** to learn all he can about them, particularly their strengths and weaknesses. He knows a clash with these powerful beings is inevitable and wants to be prepared. He regards all evil beings as foul and dishonorable creatures.

Vulnerabilities & Weaknesses: While in physical form, Khors is vulnerable to most M.D. weapons and attacks. Rune weapons, Millennium Tree weapons and most types of magic inflict their full damage. **Angel/god** slaying weapons do double damage. Cold and water based magic and weapons also inflict double damage.

Manifestation: Khors appears as a scholar with white hair, white beard and mustache, warm golden eyes, and clad in ornate robes. He usually glows with a soft, warm light.

Minions: None per se, although he has a fondness for humans, Russians and Slavic people in particular.

Svarog the Divine The Weaponwright of the Gods

Svarog is the oldest of the Russian gods, and is considered the All Father. As such, he holds the highest place among them. He is considered a sky and solar god, and historically, represents the sun and clouds.

Svarog is most famous as the *Divine Kuznya* (smith) who creates all the weapons of the gods and is the originator of the magic used by the Mystic Kuznya (secrets said to have been bestowed to humans by his son, **Svarozhich**). As one might suspect, the magical weapons of Svarog are even more amazing and powerful than those of the mortal Kuznya, although both follow the same basic principles (generally Svarog can make weapons as much as two times more powerful than human, Mystic Smiths — greater damage, range, duration, and number of abilities — plus he can instill his Divine Weapons with a handful of different abilities. **Perun's** weapons are the handiwork of Svarog).

Svarog, like Khors, believes mortals should be left alone to grow and develop without the interference or intercession of the Gods. He is concerned only with the cosmos and has nothing to do with the affairs of mortals or **demonkind** until it directly affects the realm of the Russian Gods or the members of his pantheon.

The Divine One appears as an elder, but powerfully built, male warrior. He is very muscular and stern looking. A wide, white beard and mustache roll down from his face, and a mane of white locks from his head. He usually wears a suit of magical armor and wields a magical hammer with a long handle. It is both a weapon and a blacksmith's tool of immense power. He also has a pair of (standard) golden hammers of the Mystic Kuznya and an ornate sword.

One moment he can be surrounded by the light of the sun and seem to radiate with light and energy, the next (when angry, frustrated, or saddened), enveloped by dark storm clouds. Within the rolling black clouds he kindles the pulsating flames from which lightning is born. From this fire he can direct lightning at his enemies and send "Celestial Fire" — massive M.D. lightning bolts of incalculable power!



Svarog NPC Russian God

Also Known as Svarog the Divine and the Divine **Kuznya** (smith).

Race: Archaic Russian God.

Alignment: Anarchist

Attributes (supernatural): I.Q. 20, M.E. 24, M.A. 21, P.S. 50, P.P. 27, P.E. 28, P.B. 20, Spd 50 running (35 mph/56 km) or riding the wind, but up to 220 (150 mph/241 km) when riding the storm or a fiery chariot, and Mach 4 when riding lightning.

M.D.C.: 14,000 (on S.D.C. worlds the god has 9,000 Hit Points and 5,000 S.D.C.; A.R. 14).

Horror/Awe Factor: 17

Size: Giant-sized, ranging from 20-90 feet (6 to 27 m) tall.

Svarog is often seen in humanoid form, but can assume other shapes too.

Weight: 30 to 70 tons depending on size.

Average Life Span: Immortal.

P.P.E.: 5,200

Experience Levels: 30th level Mystic Kuznya, 14th level Fire Sorcerer/Warlock, 8th level Wizard/Ley Line Walker.

Natural Abilities: Never fatigues, can fly ("rides lightning") at

Mach 4, does not breathe air and can survive any depth underwater (speed is half in water, but double in outer space). Svarog has keen, hawk-like vision and can see up to 50 miles (80 km) away, sees the invisible, and **nightvision** is one mile (1.6 km). Dimensional **teleport** 80% (+8% at a ley line nexus), teleport self 90% (+8% at ley line **nexus**), and bio-regenerates **5D6x10** M.D. per melee round. All M.D.C. or lost body parts are regenerated within 12 hours. **Note:** Svarog draws his power from the sun and sky/wind.

Knows all Languages: Magically understands and speaks all languages 90%. Can read all Russian and Slavic languages, ancient and present, **Dragonese/Elf**, and Demongogian.

Elemental Link to the Sun & Wind; Special Powers:

- Recognize and speak to true **Elementals** at 98%.
- Can command as many as six greater Air or Fire Elementals, or three times as many lesser Elementals.
- His physical and lightning attacks do double damage to Fire and Air Elementals, but half damage to Earth and Water Elementals.
- Sense the precise time, direction, his location and **height/altitude** at 98% (-6% at night).
- Sees in all **spectrums** of light; infrared, ultraviolet, etc.
- Sense the source of light and levels of light radiation. Can also sense air temperature, all at 98%.
- Sense the location of large fires and disturbances that radiate heat and light at 98%, up to 500 miles (800 km) away.
- Radiate light from his body (all or part) at will; roughly equal to globe of daylight, except the light can be increased to 10 times brighter and become blinding. His very presence has the same effect as a holy symbol on vampires even when he is not radiating light. This is automatic and does not require the expenditure of P.P.E.
- Burning touch. Svarog can radiate heat from his hands and adds 5D6 M.D. to each punch or with a touch. This can be done at will and does not require the expenditure of P.P.E.

- Sense the direction and speed of the wind, as well as the changes in the wind at 98%.
- Sense the approach of rain, snow, storms, tidal waves, hurricanes and atmospheric disturbances involving air or water at 98%, up to 200 miles (320 km) away.
- Sense and pinpoint odors, smoke, impurities, chemicals, poisons, pollution and particles in the air at 98%, up to 200 miles (320 km) away.
- See through smoke, fog, mist or rain without any impairment of vision.
- **Lightning Fists.** An aura of blue electricity crackles around the god's fists and adds 2D6 M.D. to each punch. This can be done at will and does not require the expenditure of P.P.E.
- Similar to **Perun**, Svarog can create and throw lightning. The creation of the bolt and the act of throwing counts as one melee action, so he can throw lightning bolt equal to the number of attacks per melee round. The Sun-Sky God can regulate the amount of damage inflicted by such a bolt by increments of 2D6 up to 6D10 M.D. (or **1D6x10**). Throwing Range is 1000 feet (305 m). P.P.E. Cost: 2 points per bolt, regardless of M.D. involved. Also see weapons.
- **Celestial Fire!** Svarog can create rolling black clouds pulsing with light. This circle of clouds forms above his head (takes two melee rounds). Once fully formed, the god can direct "Celestial Fire" — massive lightning bolts that inflict **3D6x100** M.D. per bolt — at his enemies. However, each lightning bolt counts as *five melee attacks/actions*. P.P.E. cost: 300 to form the cloud (lasts as long as he desires and will follow him around like a menacing halo).

Limited Metamorphosis (special): The Divine God can transform into a whirlwind (same as Perun), or a golden falcon, or massive white horse with a golden mane — he sometimes disguises himself as a Mega-Steed.

Limited Invulnerability (special): Regardless of his physical form, Svarog is impervious to lightning, electricity, storms, ley line storms, powerful winds, cold, heat (even M.D. fire and magical fire), gases, disease, poison and possession. He is also impervious to ordinary S.D.C. weapons, and M.D. energy blasts only do half damage.

Most forms of magic (excluding electrical and fire magic), magic weapons, psionics and M.D. explosives and kinetic weapons (e.g. M.D. punches, bullets, rail guns, **Vibro-Blades**, etc.) inflict full damage.

Also see **Deific** Powers, magic and weapons.

Deific Powers (See Dragons & Gods™): All prototypical powers plus Control Weather (local), Forge Holy Weapon and **Weaponwright**.

Priest/Healing Powers: Exorcism 80%, Turn Dead 96% (affecting **2D6x100** dead at a time), Remove Curse 64%, Healing Touch (3D6 H.P. or **S.D.C.**, or 1D4 M.D.; can be performed one per melee round).

Magic Powers: All Fire Sorcery spells, Air and Fire Warlock magic and all light, fire, energy and electrical based magic, including spells found in *Rifts® Federation of Magic™*. These are cast with 14th level proficiency (7th level at night). In addition, the ancient Divine Kuznya knows everything there is to being a master, 30th level Mystic Smith (and then some) and knows all **Wizard/Ley** Line Walker spell magic at 8th level proficiency (4th level at night).

Psionic Powers: 220 I.S.P.; equal to a 15th level Master Psionic, but abilities are limited to Mind Block Auto-Defense, Sense Time, Total Recall, Object Read, Machine Ghost and all Telemechanics.

R.C.C. Skills of Note: Basic & advanced math, astronomy, chemistry (all), recognize weapon quality, all Mystic Kuznya skills, and *all* building, sculpting and artisan skills at 96%. Also see Natural Abilities, above.

Attacks Per Melee: Six physical attacks (+2 when using his Great Hammer), or six psionic attacks, or two by spell magic.

Special Bonuses (in addition to attribute bonuses): +3 on initiative, +3 to strike and parry but only when using a blunt weapon, +5 to pull punch, +2 to roll with impact or fall, +11 to save vs Horror Factor, and is impervious to possession.

Favorite Weapons: In addition to his natural abilities, lightning powers and magic, **Svarog** has four favorite weapons that he uses regularly.

Three Indestructible Gold Hammers: Similar to the mortal **Kuznya's** small hammers used to work metal, except Svarog's inflict 4D6 M.D., return when thrown, and are +2 on initiative and +4 to strike or parry. Throwing range is 2000 feet (610 m) and they return to his hand in a blink of the eye (all in one melee action).

Three Indestructible Gold Tongues: Similar to the mortal **Kuznya's** small tongues used to work metal and parry attacks, except Svarog's inflict 1D6 M.D. and are +2 to parry, +4 to disarm and +5 to snare lightning. They can also be used to parry any type of energy blast and to grab and hold lightning! Such "snared" lightning bolts can then be hurled at his attacker or another target, or discarded harmlessly into the heavens (counts as one melee action to snare the electrical bolt and another to throw it). They also float on lava and can hold any object regardless of the heat it may radiate. If dropped or lost, he can will them to return to him.

Svarog's Hammer: This is the god's giant, long-handled sledge hammer, and the most powerful weapon he has ever created. It inflicts 1D6x10 M.D., double damage to the supernatural and creatures of magic (including all elementals, dragons, sorcerers, and Millennium Beings). It can be thrown 3000 feet (914 m) and return to his hand in a blink of the eye (strikes and returns all in one melee **attack/action**). Thrice per 24 hours, the magical hammer can inflict 1D6x100 M.D., each of these blows unleashing a booming **thunderclap!**

Twice per 24 hours it can automatically dispel any (non-permanent) magic barrier by striking it, and once per 24 hours the hammer can be turned into a beam of light and sent anywhere the god desires!

Furthermore, no mortal nor demon can lift the hammer from the ground or use it (other gods can use it but are -4 on all combat rolls), or tear it from Svarog's grasp (he can not drop it by accident either).

Svarog's Sword: A large, indestructible magic sword that glows with warm sunlight when drawn. It does 6D6 M.D., double damage to vampires and other creatures of darkness, and can fire the equivalent of 6D6 M.D. laser beams up to 2000 feet (624 m); each blast counts as one melee action.

Note: He also has numerous other Mystic Kuznya items such as scissors, bolt cutters, plow, metal claw and a Mega-Steed with Angel Horseshoes.

Armor: Ornate gold and silver, silent and featherweight plate armor with 2,248 M.D.C. (The armor has an A.R. of 18 and 1,248 S.D.C. in non-Mega-Damage worlds. The god has a natural A.R. of 14 without the armor, but becomes A.R. 7 at night).

Allies: The Divine God is highly respected by the other gods in the Russian Pantheon, and revered by the Mystic Kuznya. He regards **Perun** as a great and honorable warrior but too hot-headed; **Mokosh** as too gentle and soft; **Khors** as wise and capable; and **Dazhbog** as too much like **Perun**. **Svarozhich** is the least favored son, whom he sees as foolish, weak, and untrustworthy. The two have been estranged from one another ever since **Svarozhich** stole and gave away the secrets of Mystic Smithing to select Russian Mortals, creating the rare and powerful *Mystic Kuznya* of Russia.

Enemies: All of demon kind and alien intelligences, but Svarog tries to ignore them and go about his business. However, he has had his share of clashes with the demonic, and will always join any battle when he or his pantheon is threatened.

Vulnerabilities & Weaknesses: Svarog and his two sons **Svarozhich** (sunlight and earthly fire) and **Dazhbog** (earth and warmth) are vulnerable to the darkness of night and the Demons of the Shadows (most Russian Demons come out at night and are most powerful during that time). He and his sons see their physical attributes (and natural A.R.), potency of magic and natural powers (damage, range, etc.) reduced by half during the night hours the instant the last ray of sunlight disappears (being enclosed in darkness during the daytime has no negative effect).

Rune weapons, Millennium Tree weapons and most types of magic inflict their full damage, however, demonic, angel/god slaying weapons do double damage. M.D. explosives, bullets, and physical blows do full damage, but electrical attacks do no damage and all other forms of (non-magical) energy do half damage.

Manifestation: An armor clad giant wielding a giant hammer. Although aged, with thick white hair and bushy eye brows, he is vigorous and strong.

Minions: None per se, although the Mystic Kuznya and the Russian people, in general, worship him.

Svarozhich

God of Light & Fire

Svarozhich is the god of light and earthly fire. He is also the son of Svarog. He looks youthful, has no beard, and has long flowing red hair that **burns** like fire.

He appears as a warrior clad in silver armor with a helmet that resembles the outstretched wings of a bird. The breastplate is embossed with the face of a black bison. In his right hand is a shield, in his left a large, double-edged battle axe. He is usually seen in the company of his white **warhorse**.

He is a failure and rogue in the eyes of his father, largely because he cares too much about mortals, strives to help them, often walks among them and criticizes the Rus Pantheon for not doing enough to help them. Svarog believes gods should always stand high above mere mortals and allow them to make their own mistakes and earn their own accomplishments without the influence or help of the gods. Svarozhich tends to concur, but



feels the balance of the cosmic scales are dramatically skewed against humans. He passionately points out that the situation on Rifts Earth goes beyond the understanding of mortals. Furthermore, humankind is overrun by supernatural invaders bent on enslaving or obliterating them — unless the gods take a direct hand in preventing it, or so he says.

Ironically, his brother, Dazhbog, shares similar views, but is obedient and does enough to keep his **father's** trust. Svarozhich lost that trust when he stole the magical secrets of the Mystic Smith and gave them to mortal Russians over two thousand years ago. He later helped to rekindle that distrust after the Coming of the Rifts. Svarog saw the "first betrayal" as bad enough, but his son's actions to reteach the magic to select Russian survivors after the Great Cataclysm has only proven to the Divine One that his son has not learned from his earlier mistakes and is still a rash fool and a common thief. Although well meaning, Svarozhich is self-righteous, brash, **abrasive**, disrespectful and openly defiant. He finds fault with most everything his father and the other gods believe or do, and loudly criticizes them for it. This lack of respect and diplomacy only serves to make him more the unlikable rebel outcast than anything his father might say against him.

Svarozhich NPC Russian God

Also Known as Lord of Light and Fire.

Race: Archaic Russian God.

Alignment: Anarchist (with leanings toward unprincipled).

Attributes (supernatural): I.Q. 23, M.E. 24, M.A. 24, P.S. 35, P.P. 24, P.E. 21, P.B. 23, Spd 44 running (30 mph/48 km), but he can also fly at a speed of 220 (150 mph/241 km).

M.D.C.: 5,000 (on S.D.C. worlds the god has 3,500 Hit Points and 2,000 S.D.C.; A.R. 12).

Horror/Awe Factor: 14

Size: Giant-sized, ranging from 8-20 feet (2.4 to 6 m) tall. He usually assumes a humanoid form, but can take other shapes too.

Weight: 1-6 tons depending on size.

Average Life Span: Immortal.

P.P.E.: 1,000

Experience Levels: 11th level Fire Sorcerer and 5th Level Mystic Kuznya.

Natural Abilities: Never fatigues, can fly (150 mph/241 km), does not breathe air and can survive any depth underwater (speed is half in water, but double in outer space). The Fire God has keen hawk-like vision and can see up to three miles (4.8 km) away, sees the invisible, and **nightvision** is one mile (1.6 km). Dimensional **teleport** 60% (+8% at a ley line nexus), teleport self 70% (+15% at a ley line nexus), and bio-regenerates 1D6x10 M.D. per melee round. All M.D.C. or lost body parts are regenerated within 48 hours. Note: Svarozhich draws his power from the light of the sun and earthly fire.

Knows all Languages: Magically understands and speaks all languages 90%. Can read Russian and most Slavic languages, ancient and present, **Dragonese/Elf**, and Demogogian.

Elemental Link to Light & Fire; Special Powers:

- Recognize and speak to true Elementals at 70%.
- His physical attacks and fire attacks do normal damage to Fire and Air Elementals, but half damage to Earth and Water Elementals.

- Sense the precise time, direction, his location and height at **90% (70% at night)**.
- Sees in all **spectrums** of light; infrared, ultraviolet, etc. (half range at night).
- Sense the source of light and levels of light radiation and can also sense air temperature, all at 90% (60% at night).
- Sense the location of large fires and disturbances that radiate heat and light at 88% (50% at night), up to 10 miles (16 km) away.
- See through smoke.
- Radiate light and heat from his body (all or part) at will; roughly equal to globe of daylight. When glowing with light, his presence has the same effect as a holy symbol on vampires. He can radiate heat the equivalent to a large fireplace or bonfire. Both abilities can be done at will and without P.P.E. cost.
- Burning touch. His hands can burst into flame and add 2D6 M.D. to each punch or touch. This can be done at will and does not require the expenditure of P.P.E.
- Fire concentrated **light/laser** beams. With a **thought**, the young God of Light can fire beams of light from his eyes or hands. Each light blast counts as one melee **action/attack**, so he can fire light or laser beams equal to the number of attacks per melee round. He can regulate the amount of damage to inflict to 1D6, 2D6, 3D6 or 4D6 M.D. Range is 4000 feet (1219 m). P.P.E. Cost: 5 points per laser beam.

He can also fire a blast that does **1D4x10M.D.**, but it counts as three melee attacks and costs **15 P.P.E.**

Limited Metamorphosis (special): The God of Light and Fire can transform into a muscular human warrior with red hair, or a bison. Both are typically used to walk among humans unrecognized. As a bison with dark brown fur with hints of red, Svarozhich can run twice as fast as usual, gets one extra melee attack and can pull 500 times the weight he can pull in **humanoid/god** form.

Limited Invulnerability (**special**): Regardless of the form he has taken, Svarozhich is impervious to light (can look into the sun without being blinded), radiation, heat, and fire, including Mega-Damage and magical fire. Laser blasts do half damage. All other energy, magic, psionic and M.D. attacks do full damage.

Also see **Deific Powers**, magic and weapons.

Deific Powers (See Dragons & Gods): All prototypical powers plus Banish.

Priest/Healing Powers: Exorcism 60%, Turn Dead 75% (affecting **3D4x10** dead at a time), Remove Curse 24%, and Healing Touch (2D6 H.P. or S.D.C., or one M.D.; can be performed once per melee round).

Magic Powers: Russian Fire Magic and all Wizard spells involving light or fire, including the spells found in *Rifts® Federation of Magic™*. Spell potency is equal to an **11th** level spell caster (5th level at night). Also has all abilities and powers of a 5th level Mystic **Kuznya**.

Psionic Powers: 118 I.S.P.; equal to an 11th level Master Psionic. Abilities include Mind Block Auto-Defense, Empathy, Telepathy, See Aura, Sense Dimensional Anomaly, Sense Evil, Sense Time, and Psi-Sword.

R.C.C. Skills of Note: All Science and Technical skills at 98%, Dance and all Wilderness skills at 80%. Also see Natural Abilities, above.

Attacks Per Melee: Six physical or psionic attacks, or one by spell magic.

Special Bonuses (in addition to attribute bonuses): +3 on initiative, +2 to strike with fire and laser attacks only, +2 to dodge, +6 to pull punch, +3 to roll with impact or fall, +6 to save vs Horror Factor, and is impervious to possession.

Favorite Weapons: He relies on his wits, intellect, magic and natural abilities as well as the weapons below.

Three Indestructible **Gold Hammers**: Basic Mystic Kuznya types.

Three Indestructible **Gold Tong**s: Basic Mystic Kuznya types.

Svarozhich's Indestructible Demonslayer Axe: It inflicts **1D6x10** M.D. (double damage to demons), and can be thrown **1000** feet (305 m) and return to his hand in a blink of the eye (strikes and returns all in one melee **action/attack**).

Svarozhich's Indestructible **Spiritblade** (Dagger): A magical blade that matches the axe in basic design and color. It inflicts 5D6 M.D. (double damage to "spirits," including energy beings), and can be thrown **1000** feet (305 m) and return to his hand in a blink of the eye (strikes and returns all in one melee **action/attack**). Note: Both were gifts from his father before he fell out of his good graces.

Armor: Ornate copper and silver, silent and featherweight plate armor with 300 M.D.C. (The armor has an A.R. of 17 and 300 S.D.C. in non-Mega-Damage worlds. The god has a natural A.R. of 12 without the armor, but becomes A.R. 6 at night).

Allies: Svarozhich is the black sheep of the pantheon for defying his father and too closely identifying with humans. He is respected as a warrior by **Perun** and the two have fought together often, but he too is leery and distrusting of the young god in most other matters. Mokosh looks upon him fondly, and his brother, Dazhbog, looks up to him as a courageous and noble hero. Dazhbog trusts his brother completely and often tries to defend him to the other gods. The two often go on crusades together. **Khors** fears the lad is an independent and stubborn fool who thinks with his heart, and will one day get himself or his brother killed. His allies include the Mystic Kuznya, Fire Sorcerers, **Bogatyr**s, demon hunters, good hearted adventurers and the occasional godling, demigod, dragon and Tattooed Man who is either a hero or fights against supernatural evil.

Enemies: Openly hostile toward monsters, demons and other evil supernatural beings who dare to invade Russia. Svarozhich is found mostly in Russia, Mongolia and northern China.

Vulnerabilities & Weaknesses: Svarozhich (like Svarog and Dazhbog) is vulnerable to the darkness of night and the Demons of the Shadows (most Russian Demons come out at night and are most powerful during that time). Physical attributes (and natural A.R.), potency of magic and natural powers (damage, range, etc.) are reduced by half during the night hours the instant the last ray of sunlight disappears (being enclosed in darkness during the daytime has no negative effect).

Rune weapons, Millennium Tree weapons and most types of magic inflict their full damage, however, magical cold and angel/god slaying weapons do double damage. Except for M.D. fire (including magic), most M.D. weapons, magic and psionics do full damage.

Manifestation: Svarozhich appears as a youthful warrior with flaming red hair crackling with fire and clad in armor.

Minions: None per se, although he has a deep fondness for humans, Russians and Slavic people in particular. He is often found among them and frequently leads warriors, hero knights, Mystic Kuznya and other heroes against demonic evil.

Dazhbog

God of Earth, Warmth & Bounty

Dazhbog is sometimes identified as a sun god (son of Svarog) and known as the Conqueror of Shadows (i.e. Conqueror of Russian demons who roam at night). He symbolizes beauty, light, and bountiful harvests which makes him an earth god rather than a god of the sun itself, or the cosmos. Dazhbog's marriage to Lada (daughter of Moist Mother Earth and Perun), and goddess of the Spring and earth herself, further cements his identification as an earth god. Thus, he is the god of Earth-Fire: A deity who signifies the earth, life and fire born from within the earth and fiery emotions and war, rather than the Celestial Fire of the sun or heavens.

He is the enemy of darkness and evil, and hates cold and misery. This compels him, like his brother, to battle with the forces of evil and demonkind (with Morozko, his Frost Demons, and Koshchie the Deathless Ones being his most hated enemies). Unlike his brash and impudent brother, Dazhbog obeys the decrees of his father, Svarog, and the other gods. He takes a much less aggressive and antagonistic view of life and helps humans from demonic invaders without wiping the elder gods' noses in it. Instead, he follows the warrior path of Perun, battling demons on his own, with other gods (frequently with his brother), and away from mortals — often in other dimensions.

Dazhbog is an angelically handsome and strong, male god with long, blond hair tinted with red. He wears gold metal arm bands and has a shield (both studded with diamonds), but wears no armor other than a helmet. Looks to be a vital 30 during the day, but appears to be a somewhat frail 60 years old during the night.

Dazhbog NPC Russian God

Also Known as The Earth-Fire God, Conqueror of Shadows, Lord of Bounty. The younger brother of Svarozhich.

Race: Archaic Russian God.

Alignment: Unprincipled.

Attributes (supernatural): I.Q. 18, M.E. 19, M.A. 24, P.S. 38, P.P. 23, P.E. 24, P.B. 24, Spd 44 running (30 mph/48 km), but he can also fly at a speed of 132 (90 mph/148 km).

M.D.C.: 5,500 (on S.D.C. worlds the god has 3,500 Hit Points and 2,500 S.D.C.; A.R. 12).

Horror/Awe Factor: 14

Size: Giant-sized, ranging from 8-20 feet (2.4 to 6 m) tall. He usually assumes a humanoid form, but can take other shapes too.



Weight: 1-6 tons depending on size.

Average Life Span: Immortal.

P.P.E.: 1,100

Experience Levels: 9th level Earth Warlock and Fire Sorcerer and 5th level Nature Mage.

Natural Abilities: Never fatigues, can fly (90 mph/148 km), does not breathe air and can survive any depth underwater (speed is half in water, but double in outer space). The Earth-Fire God has keen hawk-like vision and can see for up to one mile (1.6 km) away, sees the invisible, and **nightvision** is also one mile (1.6 km). Dimensional **teleport** 50% (+10% at a ley line nexus), teleport self 70% (+25% along ley lines or at a nexus), and bio-regenerates **1D6x10 M.D.** per melee round. All M.D.C. or lost body parts are regenerated within 48 hours. **Note:** Dazhbog draws his power from the light of the sun and earthly fire (i.e. the planet's molten core).

Knows all Languages: Magically understands and speaks all languages 90%. Can read Russian and most Slavic languages (ancient and present day), **Dragonese/Elf**, and Demongogian.

Elemental Link to Light & Fire; Special Powers:

- Recognize and speak to true **elementals** at 80%.
- His physical attacks and fire attacks do normal damage to Fire and Air elementals, but half damage to Earth and Water Elementals.
- Sense the precise time, direction, his location and height at 85% (60% at night).
- Sees in all **spectrums** of light; infrared, ultraviolet, etc. (half range at night).
- Sense the source of light and levels of light radiation and can also sense air temperature, all at 80% (50% at night).
- Sense the location of large fires and disturbances that radiate heat and light at 68% (40% at night), up to 10 miles (**16 km**) away. However, can sense flaws and dangers in the earth (earthquake, volcano ready to erupt, rock slide, quicksand, weak **spots/cracks** in stone, etc.) at 80% (60% at night).
- Burning touch. His hands can burst into flame and adds 2D6 M.D. to each punch or touch. This can be done at will and does not require the expenditure of P.P.E.
- Travel through the earth (rock, clay, dirt) as effortlessly as if it were air. Basically the same as the Earth Warlock spell but is a natural ability and no P.P.E. is necessary. Dazhbog can phase one other person to travel through the ground with him as long as he holds that individual's hand.

Limited Metamorphosis (special): The God of Earth and Fire can transform into a muscular human warrior with blonde hair, or a black bear. Both are typically used to walk among humans unrecognized. As a bear he can dig through earth at half his running speed and supernatural P.S. is increased by 10 points.

Limited Invulnerability (special): Regardless of the form he has taken, Dazhbog is impervious to radiation, heat, and **fire**, including Mega-Damage and magical fire. Cold does half damage. All other energy, magic, psionic and M.D. attacks do full damage.

Also see **Deific Powers**, magic and weapons.

Deific Powers (See Dragons & Gods): All prototypical powers plus Control Tectonic Plates.

Priest/Healing Powers: Exorcism 50%, turn dead 65% (affecting 2D4x10 dead at a time), remove curse 26%, and healing touch (2D6 H.P. or S.D.C., or one M.D.; can be performed once per melee round).

Magic Powers: All Earth Warlock spells and Russian Fire Magic at 9th level (4th level at night), all Nature Magic at 5th level (3rd level at night).

Psionic Powers: 110 I.S.P.; equal to an 8th level Master Psionic. Abilities include Mind Block Auto-Defense, Empathy, Sense Evil, Sense Time, Telekinesis, Telekinetic Force Field and Psi-Sword.

R.C.C. Skills of Note: All Military and Wilderness skills at 90%, plus Dance, Sing and holistic medicine at 65%. Also see Natural Abilities, above.

Attacks Per Melee: Seven physical or psionic attacks, or one by spell magic.

Special Bonuses (in addition to attribute bonuses): +2 on initiative, +2 to strike and parry, +2 to dodge, +6 to pull punch, +2 to roll with impact or fall, +7 to save vs Horror Factor, and is impervious to possession.

Favorite Weapons: He relies on his magic and natural abilities as well as the weapons below.

The Indestructible Rod of Dazhbog: This is a sort of tall cane or short staff that inflicts **1D6x10 M.D.** (double damage to demons) as a blunt weapon, and can shoot plasma blasts that inflict 5D6 M.D. up to 2000 feet (610 m); each energy blast counts as one melee action.

The Indestructible Shield of Dazhbog: A **magical**, diamond encrusted shield that can be used to parry conventional and energy attacks (the latter without penalty) with a bonus of +3.

Armor: None, although he sometimes uses his telekinetic force field (On S.D.C. worlds, the god has a natural A.R. of 12, but it becomes A.R. 6 at night).

Allies: His brother Svarozhich and **Perun** are his closest and most frequent allies and fighting partners. He goes on crusades with both on a regular basis. Dazhbog loves his brother and trusts him implicitly. This also means he turns a blind eye to his brother's failings and sometimes gets into trouble following along on one of Svarozhich escapades. He loves his wife Lada and she is loyal to him. In fact, she has been a steadying influence on Dazhbog, but the call of battle and his brother's influence still have a stronger hold on him than she. Perun considers the lad to be his pupil and most of the gods find him likeable. Dazhbog tends to underestimate his enemies, takes reckless chances and tends to be a bit too trusting, especially of his brother.

His allies include Mystic **Kuznya**, Fire Sorcerers, **Bogatyr**s, demon hunters, good hearted adventurers and the occasional godling, demigod, dragon and other hero who fights against supernatural evil.

Enemies: Openly hostile toward monsters, demons and other evil supernatural beings who dare to invade Russia. Dazhbog is found mostly in Russia, Mongolia and northern China or other dimensions.

Vulnerabilities & Weaknesses: Dazhbog (like Svarozhich and **Svarog**) is vulnerable to the darkness of night and the Demons of the Shadows (most Russian Demons come out at night and are most powerful during that time). Physical attributes (and natural A.R.), potency of magic and natural

powers (damage, range, etc.) are reduced by half during the night hours the instant the last ray of sunlight disappears (being enclosed in darkness during the daytime has no negative effect).

Rune weapons, Millennium Tree weapons and most types of magic inflict their full damage, however, magical cold and angel/god slaying weapons do double damage. Except for M.D. fire (including magic), most **M.D.** weapons, magic and psionics do full damage.

Manifestation: **Dazhbog** appears as a youthful and noble warrior.

Minions: None per se, although he has a deep fondness for humans, Russians and Slavic people in particular. He is often found among them and frequently leads warriors, hero knights, Mystic Kuznya and other heroes against demonic evil (usually with his brother).

Stribog

The Frost God

Stribog is a dark god of wind, frost and fury. He is blamed for long difficult winters, blizzards, deep snow and hailstorms, as well as symbolizing dissension and rivalry. Stribog is jealous of the Russian gods of earth, light and sun and lusts for their power and glory. This has resulted in a deep abiding hatred for the other gods and encourages the Frost God to plot against his kin. He often associates with demon lords and calls upon a legion of lesser Morozko Frost Demons, Water demons and Unclean as his minions and evil henchmen. Cold, cruel and vengeful, he is willing to use or ally himself with virtually any dark force, from other demons to dragons, witches, Necromancers and other diabolic beings.

Since the united pantheon of Rus Gods are too powerful for him to attack, other than with foul words, Stribog focuses on the young, lesser gods (like Svarozhich, Dazhbog and Lada) and the *humans* they are so fond of. Thus, he frequently instigates raids and attacks against humans by demon hordes or monsters, as well as stirring up trouble among envious, jealous, vengeful and evil humans. A number of "Pact" Witches draw their power from Stribog, while Night Witches can find him a most amicable and supportive ally.

In combat, Stribog is cold, calculating and merciless. He delights in absolutely *crushing* his enemies. However, being cruel and vindictive, Stribog often makes the mistake of letting his enemies live, so they suffer painful memories and shame from their defeat at his hands. The Frost God is also a dangerous ally, for he enjoys manipulating and using others as pawns in his schemes and discarding or betraying them when they are no longer of use to him. Those who invoke his anger or hate — especially those who embarrass or trick him — will have earned a vindictive enemy for life.

Stribog NPC Russian God

Also Known as The Frost God, Dark God and Cold Lord of Winter.

Race: Archaic Russian God.

Alignment: Diabolic evil.

Attributes (supernatural): I.Q. 23, M.E. 19, M.A. 16, P.S. 42, P.P. 22, P.E. 24, P.B. 16, Spd 50 (35 **mph/56 km**) when running

or riding the wind, but up to 220 (**150 mph/241 km**) when riding a storm.

M.D.C.: 12,000 (on S.D.C. worlds the god has 7,500 Hit Points and 4,400 S.D.C.; A.R. 13).

Horror/Awe Factor: 15

Size: Giant-sized, ranging from 20-90 feet (6 to 27 m) tall.

Stribog is often seen in humanoid form, but can assume other shapes too.

Weight: 20 to 60 tons depending on size.

Average Life Span: Immortal.

P.P.E.: 4,200

Experience Levels: 16th level Air & Water Warlock and 8th level Wizard.

Natural Abilities: Never fatigues, can fly ("rides the wind"), does not breathe air and can survive any depth underwater (speed is not reduced in water and is doubled in outer space). Stribog has keen hawk-like vision and can see for up to 80 miles (129 km) away, sees the invisible, and **nightvision** is two mile (3.2 km). Dimensional **teleport** 63% (+30% at a ley line nexus or when going to demon realms), teleport self 87% (+7% at a ley line nexus), and bio-regenerates **1D4x100** M.D. per melee round. All M.D.C. or lost body parts are regenerated within 12 hours. **Note:** Stribog draws his power from the cold and darkness.

Knows all Languages: Magically understands and speaks all languages 90%. Can read all Russian and Slavic languages (ancient and present), **Dragonese/Elf**, and Demongolian.

Elemental Link to Cold and Darkness; Special Powers:

- Recognize and speak to true elementals at 98%.
- His physical and frost/ice attacks do double damage to Fire Elementals, but half damage to Earth and Water Elementals; normal damage to Air.
- Knows the precise time, **direction/location** and **height/altitude** (day or night) at 98%.
- Sense the direction and speed of the wind, as well as the air temperature and changes in the wind at 98%.
- Sense the approach of rain, snow, storms, tidal waves, hurricanes and atmospheric disturbances involving air or water at 94%, up to 100 miles (160 km) away.
- Sense and pinpoint odors, smoke, impurities, chemicals, poisons, pollution and particles in the air at 86%, up to 100 miles (160 km) away.
- See through fog, mist and snowfall without any impairment of vision.
- Sense the location of large amounts of snow, ice and cold and disturbances that radiate cold and darkness at 93%, up to 100 miles (160 km) away.
- Radiate cold from his body (all or part) at will and can reduce the temperature for up to a 60 foot (18.3 m) radius around him to freezing cold. Those not protected by environmental armor, warm clothes or magic will be cold and distracted (-1 on initiative, -10% on skill performance). This is automatic and does not require the expenditure of P.P.E.
- **Stabbing Cold Touch.** Cold radiates from his hands in the form of a frosty mist and white aura that comes to a point several feet beyond his fingers or fist. It adds 4D6 M.D. to



each punch or 3D6 M.D. with a touch. This can be done at will and does not require the expenditure of P.P.E.

- Create and throw ice daggers. With a thought, **Stribog** can create and throw giant daggers (spear size to humans) of ice. The creation of the dagger and the act of throwing count as one melee action, so he can throw a ice daggers equal to the number of his attacks per melee round. The Dark God can regulate the amount of damage inflicted by such a bolt by increments of 3D6 up to 9D6 M.D. Throwing Range is 1000 feet (305 m). P.P.E. Cost: 2 points per ice dagger, regardless of M.D. involved.
- Summon Hail. Stribog can also cause a torrent of hail to rain down upon one particular target or place. Damage can be either 1D6 S.D.C. per melee round or 1D6 M.D. per melee round. The hailstorm can be cast up to 1000 (305 m) away, covers up to a 30 foot (9 m) radius, and lasts for 1D6 minutes. P.P.E. cost is 15.

Limited Metamorphosis (special): The Frost God can transform into a great white bear (increase P.S. 10 points and +1 attack per melee round) or a white hare (he uses the rabbit form to spy upon others, sneak through small openings, and to escape; double running speed).

Limited Invulnerability (special): Stribog is impervious to **cold/frost/ice**, radiation, and magical darkness. Lasers and other forms of light attacks do half damage (are half as effective as frost and ice diffuse light). All other energy attacks and most types of M.D. **combat**, magic and psionics do their full, normal damage. M.D. **fire** inflicts double damage.

The Curse of Stribog (special): The individual is discontent. Nothing seems fulfilling or rewarding and the victim tends to look upon others coolly and as undeserving rivals. This can lead to jealousy, petty squabbling and treachery or depression. In either case, the character is -1 on all combat bonuses and -5% on skill performance. Considered a curse and can only be removed by the Frost God or via a Remove Curse spell or supernatural ability. P.P.E. Cost: 200, and only individuals who make Stribog very angry are targeted.

Also see **Deific Powers**, magic and weapons.

Deific Powers (See Dragons & Gods): All prototypical powers plus Manifestation and Dispel Deific Power.

Priest/Healing Powers: Exorcism 48%, turn dead 87% (affecting 1D4x100 dead at a time), remove curse 41%, healing touch (3D6 H.P. or S.D.C., or 1D4 M.D.; can be performed once per melee round).

Magic Powers: All Air and Water Warlock spells at 16th level, and all Wizard spells dealing with darkness, the air/gases, and cold at 8th level proficiency, including the spells found in *Rifts® Federation of Magic™*. Because Stribog is a creature of darkness, **he** is only at the maximum level of power (listed above) during winter (day and night) or at night during summer, spring and fall. Otherwise his level of magic during daylight hours is reduced by half (8th level and 4th level respectively).

Psionic Powers: 120 I.S.P.; equal to a 16th level Master Psionic (8th level during the day). Abilities include Mind Block Auto-Defense, **Hydrokinesis**, Psionic Invisibility, Empathy, Object Read, See Aura, Sense Dimensional Anomaly, Sense Time, Sense Evil, Sense Magic, and Remote Viewing.

R.C.C. Skills of Note: All **Wilderness** skills at **92%**, plus astronomy, basic and advanced math and all Rogue skills at 80%. Also see Natural Abilities, above.

Attacks Per Melee: Eight physical or psionic attacks, or two by spell magic.

Special Bonuses (in addition to attribute bonuses): +3 on initiative, +4 to strike with ice daggers and stabbing cold (touch) only, +5 to pull punch, +4 to roll with impact or fall, +11 to save vs Horror Factor, and is impervious to possession.

Favorite Weapons:

The Staff of Sorrow: This powerful magic item is said to be a mighty tree limb from a Millennium Tree that has been corrupted and turned into a product of evil. It inflicts **1D6x10M.D.** and does double damage to angels, Gods of Light, supernatural beings of good alignment and good creatures of magic (dragons, woodland spirits, etc.).

When driven into the ground, the indestructible staff (50 feet/15 m tall) will cause temperatures to plummet near freezing and sends a killing frost across the land at a rate of one mile (1.6 km) per day up to a radius of 50 miles (80 km). Each day of frost kills **10%** of the plants and crops, and makes conditions cold and difficult for all mortals and animals living in the area of effect. To remove the staff requires a supernatural P.S. of 50 or greater or a combined robotic P.S. of 200 (leverage is also a problem as the staff is the size of a tree). However, any good being who touches the staff with the intent of removing it is either frozen on the spot (needs a 16 or higher to save, but suffers no physical damage and rums back to normal when **Stribog** reclaims his staff) or suffers damage from unnatural cold (those who save vs magic take 6D6 M.D.).

Stribog's Mace: Inflicts 6D6 M.D., can be thrown 1000 feet (305 m) and returns to its master's hand in a blink of the eye (strikes and returns all in one melee **attack/action**).

He also collects other magic items and valuables from time to time.

Armor: Stribog's armor is said to be made from the bones and scales of Ice Dragons and has 500 M.D.C. He is also a formidable M.D.C. being (has a natural A.R. of 13 in S.D.C. worlds).

Allies: The Dark God regularly commands and associates with demons, particularly Frost Demons and the Unclean. He will also work with or manipulate other evil beings, including mortals, particularly witches of all kind.

Enemies: The other Russian Gods, the Gods of Light and humans in general, and heroes in particular. Most of the Russian Gods despise this villain, and have clashed with him or his henchmen and stooges many times. Svarozhich and Dazhbog are frequently targeted because they are both heroic and vulnerable (among the less powerful Rus gods). He also hates happiness and beauty, and does whatever he can to bring sorrow, despair and darkness to the world.

Vulnerabilities & Weaknesses: Stribog is vulnerable to the light of day and warmth. Physical attributes (and natural A.R.), potency of magic and natural powers (damage, range, etc.) are reduced by half during the daylight hours the instant the first rays of sunlight appears (being enclosed in darkness during the daytime has no positive or healing effect). The only exception to this is the winter months, when the cold god is at full power day and night.

Rune weapons, Millennium Tree weapons and most types of magic inflict their full damage. Magical and M.D. fire inflict double damage.

Manifestation: Stribog appears as a fur and armor-clad giant with long black hair, beard and mustache, and wearing a crown of ice that resembles a halo.

Minions: Any foolish **and/or** evil enough to serve him, including Pact and Night Witches, along with lesser demons and other evil beings.

Sventovit

The Barbarian God

This dark god is a diabolic savage and tyrant who loves to fight, kill and conquer others. He is the center of his universe and craves fame, power, wealth and the adoration of millions of mortal worshippers. Sventovit is cruel and ruthless in the extreme. He never shows mercy unless it is to belittle, torture or imprison and torment those who oppose or reject him. He loves to be worshipped as a god and demands tribute in magic, gold and other valuables. He is cannibalistic, which means he'll slay and eat other gods and supernatural beings — and also demands human sacrifices from his worshippers (eats 2D4 people a **week**, and often gorges himself on the battlefield where he may devour as many as a hundred warriors, living and dead). Those who worship him (he doesn't care if it is out of fear or true admiration) must be willing to serve without question and can expect harsh, tyrannical treatment even during the best of times.

Sventovit dislikes the Gods of Light and champions, mainly because they and their followers often oppose him, but he has no burning hatred for any of them. He would just like them to stay out of his business. Most evil gods and powerful supernatural beings are regarded as potential rivals, little more. Sventovit the Savage actually thrives on challenge and conflict. He is always ready to fight and sees violence as the solution to most problems — if somebody opposes you, break him or destroy him.

Ironically, as fearsome and cruel as this god is, he is respected and sought out by mortals as an Oracle. His psionic power of clairvoyance is **frighteningly** accurate (the things he sees come true 99 out of 100 times), and his other psionic powers and magical abilities make him aware of the smallest things around him.

Sventovit has only recently returned to Earth and sees Russia and the neighboring Slavic countries as the prime target areas to build his Earthly Domain. He is currently adventuring in the Carpathian Mountains while he tries to decide if he should start by conquering parts of Russia or Poland, or whether he should offer to liberate Germany of the Gargoyle Empire in exchange for their undying support and worship. He'll be surprised when he is refused and attacked. By the way, Sventovit would not actually liberate humans from Gargoyles or Brodkil, but battle and kill the demon leaders and usurp their power to take command of the demon armies. He may consider doing so after being rejected, and use the sub-demons to ravage the insolent humans and conquer them anyway.



Sventovit NPC Russian God

Also Known as Sventovit the Barbarian, Sventovit the Savage, Svatevit, and He who Sees All.

Race: Archaic Russian God.

Alignment: Miscreant evil.

Attributes (supernatural): I.Q. 15, M.E. 22, M.A. 21, P.S. 47, P.P. 24, P.E. 25, P.B. 10, Spd 44 running (30 mph/48 km).

M.D.C.: 13,800 (on S.D.C. worlds the god has 8,400 Hit Points and 3,400 S.D.C.; A.R. 15).

Horror Factor: 16

Size: Giant-sized, ranging from 40-80 feet (12 to 24 m) tall. Always appears as a four-headed **humanoid**.

Weight: 30 to 60 tons depending on size.

Average Life Span: Immortal.

P.P.E.: 2280

Experience Levels: 10th level in all regards.

Natural Abilities: A fierce warrior with good speed, never fatigues, does not breathe air and can survive any depth underwater. Dimensional **teleport** 58% (+20% at a ley line nexus), **teleport** self 78% (+20% at a ley line nexus), and bio-regenerates 1D6x100 M.D. per melee round. All M.D.C. or lost body parts are regenerated within 12 hours. **Note:** Sventovit draws his powers from mystical energies.

Knows all Languages: Magically understands and speaks all languages 90%, but cannot read.

Limited Invulnerability (special): Impervious to disease, poison, Horror Factor, possession and ordinary S.D.C. weapons. M.D. or magical **fire** and cold do half **damage**. Most other forms of magic (excluding air magic and electricity),

magic weapons, psionics and M.D. weapons inflict full damage.

Also see Special Powers, **Deific Powers**, magic and weapons.

Special Powers: Sventovit has four heads, each facing a different direction. While each shares identical mental stats and all work toward the same, sadistic and self-serving goals, each head possesses a different set of knowledge and powers. By inflicting 2,800 M.D. to one individual head (or otherwise rendering it unconscious or dazed), that head will be temporarily (recovers as normal) rendered inoperative, eliminating its powers, magic and perception.

Sven, the forward facing head: 10th level Fire Sorcerer who knows all Fire Sorcerer and Fire Warlock spells. He can also speak to fire elementals, see through smoke, and cannot be blinded by light. Deific powers: All Prototypical Powers plus Mobile Sphere of Destruction. Commands 680 P.P.E.

Nnyt, the side head facing right: 10th level Air Warlock who knows all Air Warlock spells and wizard magic that involves light, darkness, wind and air (including flying spells). He can speak to Air Elementals, has keen hawk-like vision and can see for up to ten miles (16 km) away, sees the invisible, and **nightvision** is two miles (3.2 km). He can also sense the approach of rain, snow, storms, tidal waves, hurricanes and atmospheric disturbances involving air or water at 78%, up to 100 miles (160 km) away. Deific powers: All Prototypical Powers plus Bio-Regeneration: Deific. Commands 680 P.P.E.

Tovoy, the side head facing left: Effectively a 10th level Night Witch and possesses all Spoiling and Necro-Magic from levels 1-4. **Deific** powers: All Prototypical Powers plus **Deific Curse**: Pestilence. Commands 680 P.P.E.

Vit, the rear head facing Backwards: A 10th level Mind Melter & Oracle. Psionic powers include all Sensitive and Physical abilities plus Psychosomatic Disease, Psychic **Omni-Sight**, Mind Bond, Mind Wipe, Mentally Possess Others, Hypnotic Suggestion, Mind-Block Auto-Defense (self), Group Mind Block, Mind Bolt, P.P.E. Shield and Telemechanics Paralysis. Commands 680 I.S.P.

Deific powers: All Prototypical Powers plus the magic spells of Oracle and Second Sight, plus Display Deific Omen. Commands 240 P.P.E.

Priest/Healing Powers: None.

Magic Powers: See above.

Psionic Powers: See Special Powers, above.

R.C.C. Skills of Note: Basic and advanced math, astronomy, intelligence, detect ambush, detect concealment and *all* Rogue and Lore skills at 84%. Also see Natural Abilities and Special Powers.

Attacks Per Melee: A total of 11 physical or nine magic and three psionic per round! Three of the heads *each* get three physical attacks per melee round or two by magic, but Vit gets two physical attacks or three by psionics (tends to use psionics).

Special Bonuses (in addition to attribute bonuses): +8 on initiative, cannot be surprised or caught off guard, +3 to strike, parry, and dodge, +8 to pull punch, +4 to roll with impact or fall, +12 to save vs Horror Factor, and is impervious to possession.

Favorite Weapons: Sventovit tends to rely on his brute strength, magic and natural abilities. But he possesses a number of magical items in his vast treasure **trove** which he could choose to use at any time. One weapon he usually has on him is a Flaming Sword that does 6D6 M.D., and double damage to angels, gods and good supernatural beings.

Armor: None. He is a formidable M.D.C. being (has a natural A.R. of 15 in S.D.C. worlds).

Allies: Sventovit is a loner who does not trust other gods, dragons or demons. However, he sometimes commands lesser demons and actively solicits for mortal henchmen and worshippers. Witches, Night Witches, Necromancers and evil men of magic are among his most favored lackeys, however, he accepts anybody willing to worship and serve him without question.

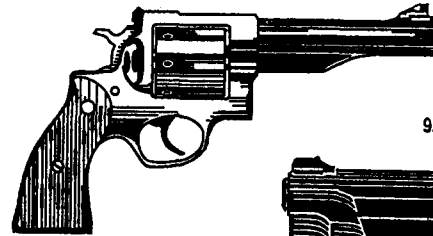
Enemies: Dislikes all gods of light, heroes and good people out of general principle, but his real enemies are anybody who gets in his way or dares to challenge him.

Vulnerabilities & Weaknesses: Sventovit is vulnerable to M.D. weapons, psionics and magic. Weapons made from a Millennium Being and Holy Weapons inflict double damage. Two of his greatest weaknesses are his greed and arrogance which cause him to take foolish risks, accept dangerous challenges and underestimate his opponents.

Manifestation: A savage, four-headed monster with a giant, human body and flaming red hair (mostly bald). He wears a loincloth or skirt and little else. He is a cheerfully cruel and wicked god who derives pleasure from the suffering of others.

Minions: Evil mortals and lesser supernatural beings willing to worship and serve him.

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9mm Tanfoglio "Baby" Pistol



.22LR Firing Combat Knife

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Focus on Fun

By Hugh King

Game Master Advice for Rifts® and Other RPGs

RIFTS® CHARACTER SHEET

COMBAT SKILL: Marital Arts

NAME: Reaver

TRUE NAME: Breaux, W.

OCCUPATION: Headhunter

ALIGNMENT: Scrupulous O.C.

HIT POINTS: 23 S.D.C.

EXPERIENCE LEVEL: 1st P

I.Q.: 13 AGE: 26 LIFE

M.E.: 10 SEX: Male

M.A.: 12 HEIGHT: 6'2" W

P.S.: 19 FAMILY ORIGIN:

P.P.: 15 ENVIRONMENT: L

P.E.: 17 SENTIMENTS TOWA

SENTIMENTS TOWA

NATIVE LANGUA

Getting Started

On Character Creation

In many cases this may be a lost cause, but I still think the G.M. should try really, really hard to emphasize to the players that they should pick a character that will be fun to role-play, and that this is just as important as being able to hold your own in battle, if not more so. Many players have a tendency to make combat-maximized characters instead of realistic ones that they might expect to see in a movie or novel.

Getting Players to

Make Fun Characters

The best way to tell if the players are making characters fun to role-play is to ask the players what their characters are going to do when not involved in combat. If they can't really do much outside of battle, you might want to ask them to pick something else or to at least make a few skill changes and take some non-combat ones, unless you're intending to run a very heavily combat-oriented game. Ask the player if they would play the same character if they knew they would not get in a single battle for an entire session or two, and remind them that combat may not be the most important element of the game. Ideally, you want players to have characters that are fun to play all around, in combat and out of it. However, if you emphasize one factor, you should make it role-playing, not game mechanics. A role-playing emphasis usually makes for characters that are more fun and memorable, in my experience. **Who's** going to remember the combat machine that has +8 to strike and shoots and kills everything? Now, who's going to remember the CS Grunt with the voice of a professional singer who wants to make a best selling album, and who may even be obsessed with it? Interesting, or dare I say wacky, characters stand out and get noticed because of who they are, not their game statistics.

Stuff Besides Combat: Fun

Having said that, psychics and mages can be great fun if some interesting psionics or spells are picked. I've had lots of fun with Mind Melters and psychics using Telekinesis, Empathy, Telepathy, See Aura and the like. Just imagine what you could do in the real world with these powers! You could cause all kinds of mischief, find out all kinds of secrets, and do all kinds of interesting stunts. So why wouldn't your character do the same? They could use Telepathy to have an easier time negotiating with salespeople, or use Telekinesis for practical jokes, just two of an infinite number of possibilities with powers or abilities beyond the norm.

Other skills can also be fun to role-play that aren't related to combat. A Bounty Hunter I ran who had the Seduction skill could keep himself suitably entertained when not hunting down

Introduction

Fun, fun, fun, how can it be done? That corny rhyme pretty much sums up the theme of this article. I will attempt to provide Game Masters with ideas on how to run games so that everyone has more fun. I will also try to give ways to help make sure the fun in a gaming group does not suffer due to mistakes that could have been avoided by the G.M. As far as I'm concerned, having fun is the whole reason for playing, and I think many G.M.s and players may need to be reminded of this. G.M.s will also be reminded to look at things from a player perspective more often, something many G.M.s may neglect to do. I originally began this article as a list of things that were done to me or my group by G.M.s which I found lessened my enjoyment of the game. I made this list because I did not want to repeat these mistakes as a Game Master, and it eventually expanded into this piece. I'll just mention briefly that since I play **Rifts®**, all specific examples in this article will be using **Rifts®** O.C.C.s and powers, though the concepts can easily be applied to any game. As you read through this article you should notice that all the points and issues addressed here promote fun for everyone. It's great to be able to share my opinions with so many Palladium fans! I hope you will find it entertaining reading if nothing else.

criminals. In general, Rogue, Medical, and Mechanical skills are good for role-playing but are **frequently** ignored when players make characters. The characters' vehicles break down, does anyone have Automotive Mechanics? What about when they bust into the wizard's secret room and find some scribbled notes that could be of critical importance written in Dragonese, can anyone read them? Or if they need to steal a key to the treasury, anyone have Rogue skills? A D-Bee staggers into town with bad wounds, does anyone have medical skills?

Drive home the point that combat isn't the be-all and end-all. In general, players just want to be able to do something significant and not have to sit around bored. It's the Game Master's job to ensure they get the chance, or that they can reasonably create those chances without having to continually go back to combat. As soon as the players realize they can be important or do something that matters without combat, the **power-mongering** of the players should fall off significantly, except by the really **uncreative** types. You have to allow every player the opportunity to do something, which can be challenging in a large group. After you've given the players a little prodding and some encouraging examples to get them accustomed to the feel of playing outside of combat, the players should quickly learn to take a little initiative of their own and create their own opportunities to participate. Remember, it's the players that make the game fun, not the O.C.C.s they play.

Player Motivation

Once the players have characters finished, you need to give the players a goal. Sounds pretty simple, but a lot of the time the players won't agree on what to do, or sometimes they just won't want to do anything. Be sure your players are really interested in playing, otherwise you'll just be wasting your time and frustrating yourself. Greed usually works as a pretty good motivator, along with fame, power, and sometimes just any kind of challenge, be it outsmarting bad guys or killing monsters. A *warning*: killing monsters can get old pretty fast. Try to get players to make characters who have a reason to adventure, as well as work with the group.

Progress

When the players are working towards this goal that they've decided on, allow them to make significant progress. In other words, don't start a campaign off with the goal of overthrowing the evil empire when the player characters are at first level, it'll take them too long to get there. Start small and let the player characters decisively beat a good number of their opponents, especially when at lower levels. This will allow the players to build a little confidence in their characters as well as have some fun, and not become **frustrated** as the bad guy gets away again and again. It's a good way to let them mark their progress, as well as get used to your style of Game-Mastering. Now, just because the player characters decisively beat a bad guy doesn't mean this bad guy has to have been killed. Quite the contrary, it's pretty easy for the bad guy to surrender or otherwise be **captured** alive, but still be soundly defeated. If you think they're interesting, fun, or add to the game, bring these bad guys back at a much later date and see if the players remember them. However, I advise keeping the number of recurring villains small initially, so the players will easily recognize them. One or two is plenty at first when players are just starting low level characters.

Running the Game

Let Players Do It Their Way

Let the players figure out how to go about achieving this goal they have, and if they have a decent plan or approach, give them a decent chance of succeeding. It's better to let the players get away with a few unlikely plans to encourage them to come up with inventive ideas than to shoot down every plan that might not work and **frustrate** the players into not trying to think of them. So don't make a fortress the players have to get into impenetrable except if they disguise themselves as guards, arbitrarily dismissing every other plan or effort they try, because it limits the **players** far too much.

Of course, some players come up with absolutely idiotic and unworkable plans. Every G.M. knows that sometimes players don't have the brightest ideas, but at least they're the players' ideas. For some of these plans or ideas, there may be something the players aren't thinking of, but their characters definitely would. I think the G.M. should explain anything reasonably obvious to the players that they may not realize would make their plan unfeasible. Or, the G.M. could give it a chance of working, albeit a small one.

Test the Waters

Start player characters with small fish to fry and gradually build up to more powerful enemies. By this I mean *really* small. Give them someone or something you know they'll trounce just to see how they do. Was it as easy for them as you thought? Use this to test *your ability* to judge the player characters' capabilities as much as you actually test the capabilities themselves. Maybe they'll have more problems than you thought. If they stomp the bad guys with no challenge it's not a big deal, just don't give out as many experience points. In any case, I find that if there is a problem of the G.M. making opponents either too weak or too powerful, it is almost always the latter, so it's better to start too small. If the enemies are too powerful the G.M. has to either make an unlikely way out, have NPCs assist the players, or have them flee, and none of these is usually too encouraging to player characters just starting adventures. They serve to give the impression to players that their characters **aren't** good enough, which you don't want.

Players probably won't ever complain that opponents are too weak, but you need to keep them challenging to prevent boredom. When players start becoming unconcerned about possible battles, it's time to throw a few more powerful villains or monsters their way. Again, you don't need to go overboard, just try and use your best judgement of what you think they can handle.

Encouraging Resourcefulness

This sort of goes along with letting the players do what they want. What's a Burst player to do against an opponent impervious to **fire**, for example another Burst? No, I mean besides shoot him with a gun. Let's say our Burst is weaponless except for his powers and wits. Likewise, what's a Mind Melter to do against a **Psi-Stalker** with +8 to save vs psionics, needing a 2 to save? Again no, not "shoot him." Be resourceful.

Admittedly, I find Mind Melters and mages are very resourceful due to their diversity, but anyone can do it if they stop

and think. One of the most common methods of being resourceful is to make use of the environment as either a weapon or a set-up. Mages might lure opponents into a Cloud of Fog, with a cliff just twenty feet ahead, which cannot be seen through it. A Burster might blast out the corner of an S.D.C. building, which collapses on the other Burster. The human mind is one of the most powerful weapons there is, encourage your players to use it. Basically there are lots of ways to beat someone, if you're a little resourceful. Players will probably come up with lots of ideas you haven't thought of, so keep an open mind to them while trying to remain within reason.



Combat With Personality

Whether I play or G.M., combat isn't just about victory or who gets the highest dice rolls, even if I'm playing combat-heavy adventures or characters. It's about who gets their face rubbed in the mud, who gets to humiliate who, psychological warfare, and style. If there were a situation where I was playing a character who defeated an opponent by collapsing a building on him, or some similar incapacitating, but not necessarily fatal method, I would definitely not miss the opportunity to make a **quippy** or snappy remark, or otherwise make fun of him. "Oh, have you tired of the office basement decor? Was it too drab for your liking?" or something similar. I think beating or outsmarting opponents gives the victor bragging rights of sorts for the next time their paths cross, and **besides**, it's a lot of fun! Think of the movies or TV shows you're probably trying to

at least partly imitate with your game. Isn't it cooler and more interesting when the winner of a confrontation is smug and arrogant than when they just win? Likewise, if you're the one who got buried, aren't you going to be even more motivated to get the smug jerk who makes fun of your earlier loss **and/or** your falling for their trick? Why do you think Hollywood has so many one-liners? How many action movies are there where the good guys and bad guys don't trade words as well as blows or bullets? How many of those stack up in terms of entertainment to the ones that do? This can lead to good-natured competitiveness between players and G.M.s as everyone wants the "bragging rights." G.M.s, keep in mind you don't need to force the issue *at all*, because you have the luxury of knowing that due to statistics, you're almost bound to win sooner or later. Just make sure any competitiveness stays good-natured, and doesn't interfere with or disrupt the game.

Fun Can Be Engineered

Since RPGs are supposed to be win-win games for both G.M.s and players, you may as well do what you can to keep players happy and enjoying themselves, especially if it's easy. As you should've noticed by now, this doesn't mean giving players what they say they want. You've got to give them what they really want. If you can do this and fool them into thinking it was harder than it really was, so much the better, they'll be even happier. Think of yourself as a negotiator already knowing what the other side really wants, and which you don't have much problem with. You can't just come right out and give it to them first thing, or they'll ask for more and you'll run into problems. Likewise, if you make an adventure too easy, players will spot it and you're caught. Instead, you've got to go through the process, gradually "caving in" on some of their demands, even though you were ready to right from the start. Or in game terms, you've got to make the adventure look harder than it actually is, so when the players succeed they really enjoy it a lot. As long as the negotiators don't know you were ready to accept from the start, or the players don't realize you intended them to succeed at the challenges relatively easily, they'll be very satisfied with themselves and their achievements. This doesn't mean that the G.M. should fudge results to fix outcomes or that the player characters should never fail, but the players should succeed quite frequently, assuming they are playing reasonably well. Even if they fail, the failure should only set them back, it should not result in the death of everyone in the party or bring the adventure to a grinding halt. Ultimately, remember that if the players are happy, that means you're doing a good job.

Railroading

Absolutely **DO NOT**, under any circumstances, railroad the players into adventures. You're the G.M., not a player, players decide what their characters do, not you. If they decide to do something you want them to, fine, but **DO NOT** decide that for them. You can use lots of ways to get player characters to do what you want, such as tricking, manipulating, guiding, teasing, prodding, irritating, etc., but forcing should *never* be one of these. That's what makes the game fun for the players, doing whatever the heck they want. The trick is to get the players interested in doing what you want them to, at least in a very general sense. When the G.M. decides what the player characters do

and the players don't, there's no reason for the players to even be there. Make the game world operate relatively realistically, but *neverforce* the players to do what you want. For example, if they steal a rune weapon from someone, that person isn't just going to say, "Damn, too bad for me," and leave them alone, they *will* be hunted, but the *players* chose to steal it. G.M.S usually become heavy-handed when they try to force players to do what they want, like the following, "There are no other bounties in this town, you don't have enough gas to get anywhere else, the monsters in the nearby wilderness are known to tear apart travellers on foot, and there aren't any other jobs in town." Players pick up on this pretty easy and usually become irritated at the G.M. trying to tell them what to do or order them around. A typical response might be, "Okay, I walk to the next town anyway. You guys coming?"

Another variant of this problem might be the G.M. who has the player characters pursuing an adventure, and has a pre-planned scenario that's going to happen when they get to the basement of the building, but they never bother going there. Instead of working with this, some Game Masters heavy-handedly force the player characters into the basement one way or another. Bad idea. Instead, let it play out. Okay, so what's going to happen now that the player characters didn't go to the basement? Being a G.M., you've got to be creative and improvise a lot, not force the players to do everything you want, expect, or planned for. The worst thing you can do is force players to do it your way. Half the fun of role-playing is when the players come up with a wacky plan the G.M. didn't think of, but might actually work. This is when the G.M. has to take the players' plan and run with it, trying to improvise as best he can. You can never be prepared for all the things the players will do, so you have to be ready to improvise. Besides, this is where the game usually becomes the most fun for everyone, at least in my experience.

If approached the right way, players will usually go along with most hooks the G.M. throws out at them, if the G.M. and players both want to play the same kind of game. I have read a few articles that said the players must have the "illusion of free choice," but I believe if they begin to question whether or not free choice really is an illusion, the G.M. must make the illusion reality and give them free choice (as long as what they want to do is possible). This must be done regardless of how inconvenient it may be, otherwise the game can go downhill very quickly.

To avoid this situation in the first place, the idea is to steer the players in a general direction and then let them have as much free rein as possible. Make a scenario where general things are going to happen, and then put the player characters in that scenario, where lots more things can or might happen depending on the actions of the player characters. For example, the players are bodyguards for an NPC, and passing through a village. You know there are a few assassins in the town who are going to try to kill him, but whose exact plans and actions are subject to modification depending on what the player characters do. You haven't planned out the exact actions of the NPCs, and instead only have a general idea and make them up as you go, and as the player characters do things.

You want the game to get back on track quickly if the player characters start wandering around aimlessly, so make sure

things happen that will affect them even if they do nothing. Even inaction can have consequences for the player characters, depending upon the situation. They may decide not to bother stopping or capturing an escaping thief even though it would be easy for them to do so, and the thief may later steal one of their vehicles or prized possessions. Or their transportation may break down while passing through a city, so then you throw in a few hooks, such as the player characters being attacked without provocation by a **shapeshifting** monster among the citizens. Things happen regardless of what they do, if they ignore the attack they may be attacked again, if not then they're doing something and the game is going and back on track again. You *do* have to make things happen, so the players realize the world does not revolve around their characters. Expect the players to go along with general ideas or scenarios, but to want to make lots of modifications. You have to allow them to do this as much as you can.

One last thing to note on railroading, do not try to force characters to use specific weapons by trying to restrict them to either melee or ranged weapons unnecessarily, or specific weapons such as those of silver too much. It may be more effective to use certain weapons against certain opponents, or even necessary, but this will almost always be the exception and not the rule. Restricting players' options unnecessarily or too much is really just another form of railroading.

NPCs

Infallible NPCs

G.M.s, don't have infallible NPCs. This is a big G.M. no-no. Even those who are simply better than the players should be relatively few and far between, at least to start. They should *definitely not* be the first people the players run into. The players will have a very different perception of the game world and their characters' place in it depending on what the "active" NPCs are like. This is *crucial*, since it can mean the difference between a group of gung-ho, active, motivated players convinced they can do anything, and an apathetic bunch who figure there's not much point in trying because every other person in the *entire world* is more powerful than their lowly characters and apparently always will be. Players like to feel good about their characters, and throwing them in with a bunch of inferior NPCs to start should help them feel good right away. When the player characters run into NPCs more powerful than themselves first thing or too consistently, instead of thinking how great their characters are, a lot of players will start thinking, "I'm not as good as him," and have less fun, suddenly feeling a need to have a "better" or more powerful character. Admittedly, this seems childish, but it's true, even of myself. When I'm a player I want to go and do things thinking how great I am, not resenting that I'm not as powerful as the first guy we ran into.

It can be easy to spot when the G.M. may have too many NPCs who are too powerful, since eventually the overriding thing on players' minds may be getting rid of their characters and obtaining more powerful ones. In their view, this is necessary so that they're at least on par with what they see as a "typical" NPC. All the fun, great adventures and things they've done with the character may suddenly not amount to beans. This could also be a sign that players acting like this aren't getting



enough attention, or feel like they're not doing anything significant or making a difference in the game, or that no one listens to them. Keep reading further on for a little advice on this.

NPC Equipment

I'd especially have to recommend not giving NPCs equipment or abilities that the players will never be able to acquire or understand, especially when the player characters are at low levels. If you do, absolutely **DO NOT** make these much more powerful than the player characters' own equipment or abilities. If NPCs have funky equipment but it's not more powerful than the player characters', that's okay. If it is much more powerful and the players will never get it, that's not. For one thing, **NEVER** give NPCs things you don't want player characters to get, as they will probably get their hands on it somehow, or change the focus of the adventure to obtaining this thing you don't want them to have. This is a bad thing, and can completely mess up the game. Even if they don't get their hands on it, they will desire it, leading to the above problem of wanting a more powerful **and/or** new character. If they don't run across anything obviously much more desirable than what they have, they won't know that it exists, or that they could be chasing it, or that their character is a wimp without it, and it never becomes a problem. If they don't know, they **can't** care. Be selective in what you allow NPCs to have, always asking yourself, "Would there be a problem if a player character got their hands on this?" If the answer is yes, I'd recommend either not using that NPC or not giv-

ing them that item or power. These *can* be used in earth-shaking campaigns where the players realize they will never get hold of something that some really important NPC has that is just too powerful, but the majority of the time, it'll make things much easier for you to just not use it at all.

NPC "Powers"

I'll now continue on issues regarding irritating NPCs, specifically "special," **G.M.-granted**, physics- and reality-defying powers that only serve to allow the G.M. to abuse his power, cover mistakes, **and/or** irritate the players. When the players first meet NPCs that appear out of nowhere and disappear the same way, and they can't follow, see, hear, feel or smell (most will try everything including all known sensors) where the NPC went, it only serves to annoy, irritate and frustrate them. They adopt a manner of, "Oh, he's an NPC, since he's the Game Master's character he doesn't have to follow the rules that we do." This can easily ruin a game by destroying a **G.M.'s** credibility. The players have to trust the G.M. to be fair in order to have the most fun playing, which means the rules must apply to everybody. I think it is better when this is the case anyway, myself. This applies to all NPCs, no matter how cool, mysterious, and unutterably irritating and frustrating to players you as G.M. may want to make **them**.

Fallible or Inferior NPCs are Usually Better

Using fallible NPCs will cause your players to like their characters more, which I've already said, though perhaps not as directly. Of course, the players may not realize this, and don't need to. Trust me, I've been a player in both situations, and looking back now I had a lot more fun when I thought my character was "The Man" as opposed to Joe Average or a normal guy among godlike NPCs. Just stop and think for a second. When you describe an NPC sneaking up on the players, and they detect the NPC before the NPC reveals his or her presence, it tells the players that their characters are better than the NPC. I don't know any players who don't enjoy feeling superior to the poor, **it-must-be-tough-to-not-be-as-good-as-a-player-character** NPCs. Who likes to feel inferior as opposed to superior? Since the NPCs don't **care**, they may as well be the inferior ones.

Weak Enemies Do Not Mean Less Interesting Games

Weaker bad guys can also confuse and mislead players, especially if you pick a few more obscure and lesser-used ones. A little mystery **and/or** misleading can change the entire way the players play the game. For example, I ran a game where the players all started off at first level and came upon a town. After spending a short time at the bar, they discovered there was a tyrant wizard in town who was accused of being a murderer, but the townsfolk could do nothing against him. After being motivated by the promise of a reward, the players proceeded to gather information about this wizard, and located his base of operations. They carefully set up and executed a storming of the place, however the wizard's henchmen delayed the players long enough for him to get away using a fairly powerful spell, Mystic Portal. The Ley Line Walker in the party was convinced they faced another very powerful Ley Line Walker (Mystic Portal is a 10th level spell), and the characters were very leery of pursuing him. The reality? Said powerful, dangerous wizard was in reality a 1st level Shifter, who would have probably been a joke for any of the player characters to deal with had it come to an actual battle. However, since they didn't know this, they went to very interesting lengths to deal with a wizard who was expected to be anywhere from 7th level up. It made the game much more interesting, and got the players paying much more attention to playing.

A lot of the time, the trick to keeping the players happy and having fun is to think like a player and put yourself in their shoes, while still being able to see from a G.M. perspective as well. I think many G.M.s may forget to consider looking at it from the players' perspective. Lots of G.M.s I have encountered have the problem of trying to make NPCs like player characters, with the added ability to abuse their power as G.M. to ensure the NPC is able to do anything without failing. In other words, they can be invincible and like a movie character. This doesn't work very well, because if the players have a chance of failing, for the game to be fair, NPCs have to as well. Statistics dictate a lot will fail at some point or another. It is important to keep Murphy's Law in mind when considering this, which basically means they will fail at the worst possible time from your point of view, so be ready and prepared for them to fail. Forget about your "I'm

the best there is" characters and make somebody human who can fail without causing disaster, because they will fail sooner or later, just like the player characters will. If you allow them to fail, the players will probably like that NPC better anyway, since they will see they aren't the only ones who aren't perfect. If you get tricky, you may even start planning on them failing in order to further the plot. This can also add humor to the game, such as the buffoon NPC for comedy relief.

Game Reality

It is essential for the players to feel they are on a level playing field with NPCs. Generally, the only sure-fire way I have found to convince the players of this is to make sure they actually *are* on a level playing field, and not use any NPCs who are capable of more than a comparable player character (though perhaps a high level one). The only way players will believe the rules aren't different for NPCs is if you never allow NPCs to break them. Ever. If you feel the urge to make NPCs superior to player character capabilities (impossible bonuses, etc), you must resist. Allowing NPCs to defy the laws of the game or even having them appear to defy them can have very bad consequences for your reputation as a G.M.

Infallible Vs Fallible NPC In-Game

For example, "A man appears out of nowhere and hails you. You heard nothing with your amplified hearing, the Ley Line Walker saw no trace of magic, the Dog Boy didn't smell anything or detect psionics, and the 'Borg saw nothing with any of the sensors in his multi-optic eyes." This just says to the players, "He's invincible because he's my character." This may be fun to do as a G.M., but is extremely irritating if **you're** a player. It may even be possible for the NPC to do this, but players will give up trying to figure out how the NPC did it, because they're sure they never will. More importantly, they will write it off as the G.M. bending or breaking the rules for his NPCs (even if he **wasn't!**). G.M.s who design NPCs that just happen to have all powers which counter the players' powers will probably get a similar reaction, "Gee, isn't that convenient he has all these rare abilities which just happen to counter mine." Or whose NPCs use powers the G.M. knows the players will never be able to discover unless they tell them. **Believability** and credibility are essential for a good G.M., and having infallible NPCs throws them out the window.

On the other hand, "You spot something moving in the shadows that appears to be a person, and from the way they're moving, you don't think they realize they've been spotted. With your amplified hearing, you hear light breathing in that direction. Suddenly, an armored figure leaps from the shadows, saying '**Surrender.**'" In this case, the players are aware the NPC was prowling and far from **undetected**, and they can also use other ways to detect **him/her**. Unlike the first example, the players feel confident and happy with their cool and capable characters. More importantly, they know the rules apply to NPCs too, and not just to them. This doesn't mean player characters should always detect or beat NPCs at everything, but there should at least be some trace or clue as to the NPC presence if they look. So an NPC might Prowl past the player characters undetected, but if they check possible routes past them afterwards they should discover tracks, bent grass or some other sign or clue that the NPC was there or how they got by.

All-Knowing NPCs

G.M.s should not abuse their position as all-knowing. I have seen many G.M.s whose NPC villains or authorities automatically knew (or seemed to know) things they shouldn't have had any reason to know. I'm sure this was because the G.M. thought it was reasonable for them to know **this**, but the problem is that it usually isn't. Generally, nearly all adventures I have been in have resulted in villains and authorities which are impossible to fool, no matter how average, sneaky, intelligent or ingenious the players' ideas are. All the G.M. has to do is say, "I would've thought of that" or something similar, which is incredibly easy. It's even easier when in the position of G.M., because the idea has to be presented to them before it can be used. In reality, a lot of times (maybe even most) the G.M. probably wouldn't have thought of what the players decide to do, but they can still say "well the NPC would have" very easily. Too easily in my opinion, which leads to abuse.

NPCs are not all-knowing no matter who they are, and there are tons of goofs and morons out there in the world doing real jobs. Tons of things slip through the cracks in even the most professional, organized and experienced organizations, because people are human. Just look at any police department and I'm sure there have been screw-ups and scandals that shouldn't have happened. Lots of people (maybe even the majority) take bribes in the real world and don't always turn in whoever tries to bribe them, (they can get more money later this way) they lose evidence, etc., etc. Any organization based on humans will have to deal with a fair bit of human error. In the game that means most NPCs won't have anything even close to approaching the information the G.M. knows, so play them accordingly, not as all-knowing geniuses.

Likewise, some G.M.s dismiss players' ideas as stupid, only to have an NPC come up with a workable solution which is usually no better than the players'. Some G.M.s may even do this most of the time, which is just poor Game-Mastering in my opinion. I say that because it does a really great job of spoiling my fun playing the game. That's also why I say to keep the players on **their** own as much as possible, make them do it themselves and don't make the NPCs the stars of the game, even if the players think that's what they want. Remember the G.M.'s primary job is to keep everyone having fun in the game. It's not to move the story along or push the players through situations they can't figure a way out of. Both of those, if done at all (I don't recommend either, generally), are secondary jobs that don't matter much if no one's having fun.

NPCs Are Expendable Extras

Many G.M.s I have played for have forgotten that NPCs are not supposed to be the heroes in the story; that's why the players signed up. I've noticed a tendency for many G.M.s to treat their NPCs as the ones in the spotlight or the stars of their movie. This doesn't endear them to the players, who find their characters losing the glory to the extras or playing second fiddle to the backups, so don't do it. I believe players should solve almost all problems and deal with situations themselves. If the G.M. intervenes, it usually either tells the players they have a safety net or robs them of the satisfaction of doing anything themselves. It just isn't the same when you as a player defuse a situation as opposed to the star NPC always stepping in to make sure things

are going fine. I have noticed a tendency for this to occur more and more frequently after a G.M. does it once, which is when it usually becomes problematic. Remember, NPCs are the extras, the players should feel they're the only ones who can do anything that really matters and that they can't depend on NPCs to do everything.

Many times player characters will heap all kinds of abuse on NPCs. Absolutely DO NOT step in to prevent this from happening! Play the NPC as if he were a player's character. Insulted NPCs may come back later to get even, but do not step in using G.M. power to save an NPC the players are going to beat just because they're your favorite bad guy. Instead, let the player characters beat them if that's the way the dice roll, and if necessary make up a new one if the NPC gets killed. Of course, most bad guys won't go down without a fight, especially if they think the player characters are going to kill them. They usually like living just as much as anyone and are generally *not* eager to die.

If there's a legitimate reason, like the NPC has planned for this type of situation **and/or** has a way out that does not bend or break rules, let them get away. However, if you are caught with your pants down, so to speak, and the villain has no way out or escape route, DO NOT start trying to correct your mistake by fudging in the middle of the game. Since you don't have a plan for them, it simply means the NPC got sloppy and does not have a plan. They're human (or whatever) too, after all, so deal with the situation and don't try to change it, especially not if it involves bending or breaking rules. The NPC should be treated like any other character and not given special treatment. At the same time, they may use their brains and still get away anyway. In any event, if they do get away, make sure the players find out how they escaped if it's not obvious. Players often have short attention spans, so you should probably do this within the next few sessions.

NPC Supporting Roles

Remember too, the player characters may not necessarily have to do, or even address everything they come across. That could easily be the job of "Support" NPCs they report to, hire, or work with from time to time as contacts.

Example

Grunt 1: "What are these weird plant-things?"

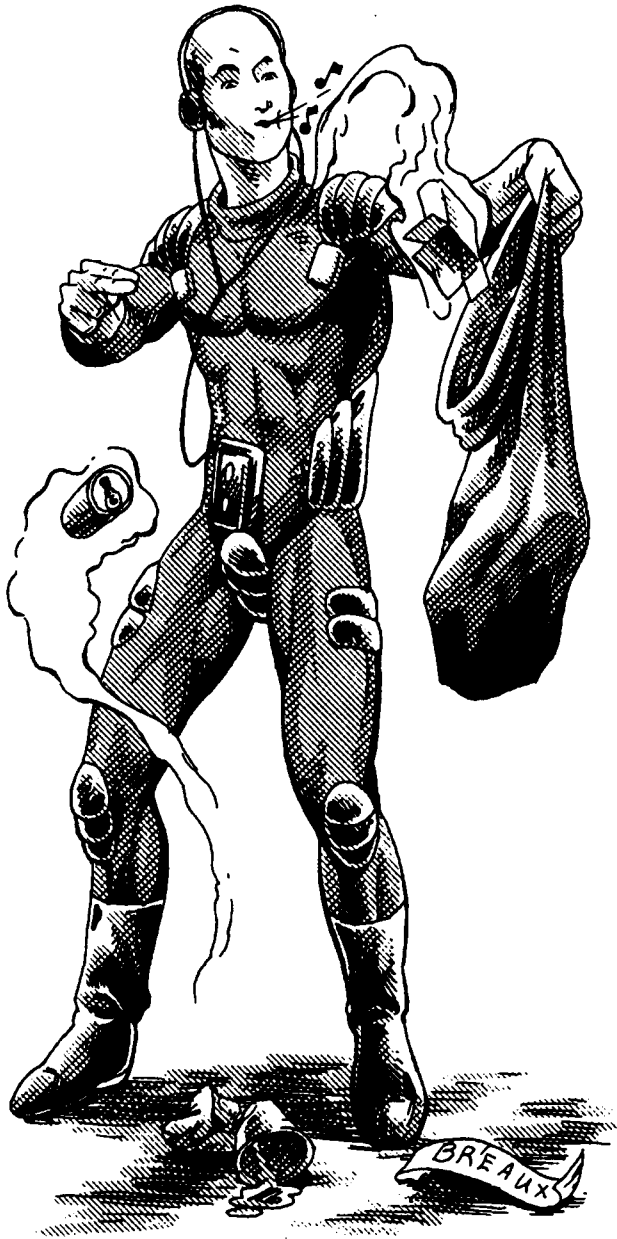
Grunt 2: "Not our problem. Bag it and send it to Intel."

Later...

Grunt 2: "New orders. Those things we bagged are considered a threat by the brass. We gotta go clear 'em out."

Grunt 1: "Crap! Just like Intel, telling us after we've already cleared out!"

My point here is that boring, mundane stuff should be someone else's job, not the player characters'. The player characters should only encounter things relevant for interesting, exciting adventures. They also don't need to do everything themselves, and in most cases, probably can't. Besides, how exciting is it for an adventure to revolve around staying in a lab to develop a cure for a new strain of killer disease? Now what if the players have to prevent a madman from unleashing that killer disease? The players will generally have more fun if they can do the running around and someone else can spend all day in the lab. Player characters are generally the adventurers in the middle of things,



not the ones in the background. That's not to say it can't be done, you could just say, "After spending five days working, Jack the Body Fixer finds what he thinks is a cure." The point is most players don't want to role-play those five days of running failed experiment after failed experiment. Go for simplicity. Generally you don't need excessive detail, focus on the excitement and situation of the characters, and keep the story moving. This can also give you the chance to make interesting, distinct, and recurring NPCs in "Support" roles. Don't bother with all their attributes, bonuses or skills if this is their first appearance, instead just make enough to have them interact with the player characters in a meaningful way. So you can assume the lab rat NPC has a lot of science skills at +25%, for example. Focus on the NPCs' personalities or distinct features to make them different, not skills and statistics.

Also keep in mind that in any RPG, the player characters should be able to operate relatively independently from NPC support if necessary. The NPCs should generally assume the role of helper to the player characters (and not necessarily for free), useful but not absolutely necessary. This is a little trickier in some game settings, but usually still doable. NPC friends are

probably most likely. Bear in mind as well that NPCs should have their own interests and motivations, which may or may not be the same as the player characters' and which may or may not affect or concern them.

Whoops! The Evil Overlord Just Got Killed...

Odds are good the player characters might kill one of your "Overlord" type, supposedly **supertough** villains by just getting lucky or being more powerful than you thought. DO NOT instantly "power up" or "beef up" the bad guy in-game or **bend/break** rules so the NPC can get away if it becomes apparent the player characters are going to win. Instead, try to deal with the situation. Your NPC is a character, after all, and the way to think is, "If he were a player character, what would he do?" He may end up getting slaughtered anyway due to bad luck. Back to the drawing board, in that case, and try to do a better job next time, but if not, it's not a big deal to make up a new villain. A good G.M. shouldn't need that one particular bad guy to survive or get away to continue the adventure anyway. There should be lots of other bad guy NPCs like henchmen and subordinates ready to pick up the torch where the previous one left off. They may be set back a bit, but they can continue towards their goal. NPCs are a dime a dozen to the players, and rules should not be bent or broken just because you don't want the players to kill or belittle that NPC. Instead, play the NPC smart when things go bad, or if he gets killed play the next one smarter. Don't make it easy for the players, but don't break the rules for NPCs. Ever.

This is really important because players will notice when you do, and they will never forget, because they will be thinking things like "Cheap! Unfair! Impossible!" and other similar thoughts. I still remember a campaign I was in where our group had finally caught up with the major NPC we'd been chasing forever. The NPC in question made out all right when we first entered combat, but once the battle started becoming quite prolonged, our combined might was really too much for him. Catching a few lucky dice rolls, we managed to inflict an amazing amount of damage on him, and yet he wouldn't fall and kept fighting. Eventually it got to the point where if he would've survived the next hit, he would have to be violating the laws of the game, whereupon the G.M. enabled him to escape conveniently enough. The point is, as the battle went on, we players were sure the G.M. was just adding levels and health to this guy as we kept inflicting more damage and passing the limit for what the G.M. probably had in mind. The G.M. just kept going until eventually he realized we were going to win, then he had a problem. This NPC was crucial to the **campaign**, so the G.M. couldn't allow us to beat him, and he had to fudge things a little to allow him to get away. That still stands out in my mind clearly among all our numerous other adventures, because of the obviousness of the G.M. fudging for the NPC. Some of our other adventures I can't even remember, so don't think your players will forget if you fudge a few things for NPCs. Players hate it when the G.M. cheats against them, because it means the G.M. is not allowing what they do to affect the game. In other **words**, they are being at least partially railroaded, which I've already talked about. The player characters can't kill the NPC, even though by the rules it should have happened already, because the G.M. ar-

bitrarily decides not to let them. This is not a game, the players just happen to be present for a story the G.M. is telling.

Mindless NPCs

Try to make the players think. A great way to do this is to play some NPCs as unintelligent killing machines the way a lot of players play their characters. You all know them, the direct shoot-out, **going-to-stand-here-until-I'm-dead-or-he-is** type. Let the players pull off a reasonable plan or two to get them started, then watch them actually start to use strategy and tactics to beat opponents while taking less damage. Think of characters who play 'Borgs and just waltz in everywhere convinced they won't take huge damage before getting the bad guy, and play an NPC 'Borg like this. Let them be overconfident and cocky, then as the players beat more and more NPCs, have them be more cautious.

Reputation

This brings up the point of reputation. If for whatever reason you've decided you want to have the player characters defeated and make some villains with this in mind, do not try to force these villains to succeed if the results end up with the player characters winning. Instead, use this as another opportunity to develop plots. The player characters should get some kind of reputation if they beat several opponents or groups you had intended to be the victors. Reputation can also be a two-edged sword, and the player characters may find they don't like all the aspects of being recognized wherever they go. It also adds to the game, as the players feel their characters are doing something noticeable in the game world.

Team Leaders

The Team Leader

The next topic is aimed more at players and G.M.s who never have a team leader for the group. First of all, most of the group must be willing to go along with the leader for this to work really well, but a team leader is not necessarily a bad thing! Just because someone is official or unofficial leader doesn't mean they're going to order everyone else around. If anyone tries without the express consent of the group majority, this is asking for trouble and these people probably shouldn't be leaders. Most especially, it does not allow the leader to say what others characters are **doing!** The leader may give suggestions to other characters and try to convince them to do something, but the leader's player cannot say what that other character does. The leader *can* override lone dissidents when it comes to what the group is going to do, but should be careful to do so only with the support of the clear majority. Persuasive leaders may try to sway the group to pursue their own interests, but this shouldn't be a problem, since most of the other players will probably jump on these characters on their own.

The group should generally choose a team leader if there's going to be one, but at the same time, everyone should get a chance. Ideally, if the players act well as a team and work with each other instead of against each other, it shouldn't really matter who is team leader, since everyone cooperates and helps each other. In this case, the group might not even need one, but

it's still fun to be the leader if you're a player, so just have players take turns in this case. I recommend the group allow each player to try being team leader for a short adventure, so that everyone gets a chance to try it. Experiment trying a few different leaders, everyone has their own style and hey, it's fun!

Leadership in an RPG Context

There are many different types of leadership, but most people who play **RPGs** like to be the ones calling the shots, not taking orders. The most effective type of leadership in a **player** group is probably going to be some kind of cooperative style. "Good" team leaders will likely be open to ideas or suggestions from other players. If someone has a better plan, they'll use that one. They will speak for the group when necessary, but put the interests of the group above their personal motivations. They also don't presume to speak for the group most times, but instead usually ask for opinions and input whenever the G.M. asks, "What are you **doing?**", ie: "Ok, guys what are we going to do? I think we should go hunt the monsters to the north." A good example is Emperor Sabre **Lasar** in **Rifts®: Lone Star™**. He leads by example and doesn't presume to speak for anyone else, so most bandits will cooperate with him if he asks. A good team leader will also always consider everyone's opinion, making sure that everyone at least has the chance to be heard, even if they don't get their way, and try to ensure that no one in the group is taken advantage of by others. "Good" team leaders are also generally strategists, thinkers and diplomats. They don't order others around, but rather come up with ideas and suggestions, and lead by example just like good leaders in the real world. The team leader starts the ball rolling, so to speak, and the others jump on after the ball's in motion. They don't ask others to do anything they wouldn't do themselves, although circumstances may require they ask others to do something they can't. Leaders take responsibility for the group, and are more likely to act in the best interests of the group than in their own. In summary, the team leader usually has the best sense of where the party is going and what they're trying to accomplish, provides direction when the party can't decide what to do, and generally leads the way.

Example

Leader: "Someone has to cut off their escape. Tim, can you do it?"

Tim: "No, I'm staying here and going in blasting."

Leader: "Ok, how about you, Joe?"

Joe: "Not me, I'm going in too."

Leader: "Hm, I can go, but I'm packing the heavy **firepower** in the group. Are you sure you're all going in? (they all nod) Ok, I'll go."

The Unwanted Duty/Job

If someone doesn't want to do some particular duty or job, such as staying and guarding the truck, watching the back exit, or some other boring or unwanted job, but they do it anyway for the sake of the group, I think the G.M. should try to help that player. For example, one player doesn't want to go watch the back as above because they don't want to be left out of the action. As a **G.M.**, I would try and make sure something happened (i.e. bad guy comes out, whatever) so that player didn't get left



out of the action because he decided to act in the group's best interests, and maybe even got to feel quite pleased with himself for having done his job well. This encourages the players to act as a team, and keeps players from fighting over who's going to get stuck with necessary but unwanted duties or jobs. With any luck, if something always happens to keep everyone happy, no one will care what their job is. I consider it more important that everyone have fun than the game be forced to be completely realistic. Who cares if it's unrealistic that one or two bad guys always manage to slip out for the rear guard to deal with, as long as the rear guard is happy not to have been left out and to have something to do? If everyone's having fun, it doesn't matter to me.

Don't Speak for Others

This is pretty simple and yet can still cause problems. Think of when you're with a group of your buddies in real life. Some are going to a movie, the others are going to a party. **John**, one of the group, hasn't decided where he's going. Someone asks you what you're doing tonight and you reply, "I'm going to the movie and John's going to the party." Except then John says, "No I'm not, I'm going to the movie." So you can state what John is doing, but he's the one who's actually going to decide what he does. Characters are the same way, the point is don't

presume to speak for others. This is the G.M.'s job to control. Bob, the leader, says "**Ralf** watches the back door," so the G.M. asks Ken, Ralf's player, "Does Ralf watch the back door?" If the G.M. doesn't do so, it will probably cause problems in the party, so watch out for this. This is also why a good team leader needs to be diplomatic. That doesn't mean it's especially hard, sometimes all diplomacy involves is making sure everyone has their say.

Example

Leader: "Ok, we need to attack the house the bandits are in. I think we should go in the front. Any better ideas?"

Player 1: "I can prowl really well, why don't I try to sneak in first and see if I can get a head count and positions?"

Leader: "That's a good idea. The rest of us can cover you while you do. Anyone not going to?"

Player 2: "I can cast Invisibility on him so he should be harder to spot."

Player 3: "Why don't most of you go hide around back, after he's done scouting, I'll fire a few grenades in from the front and flush them out for you."

Leader: "Yeah, that should work even better! Ok, unless anyone has anything to add, that's what we'll do."

At the same time, the **G.M.** should try to keep an eye on players who try to speak for other players' characters. **It's** the **G.M.'s** job to do so. Players can become very irritated if anyone even tries it. This can build resentment among players, who usually dislike others trying to speak for their character. This will usually happen even if the **G.M.** doesn't let them get away with it and can lead to inter-party conflict, which has never resulted in everyone having fun in my experience. So if you spot this happening, be quick to nip it in the bud before it becomes a problem. Tell the players very clearly to worry about their character and no one else's, enforcing this with in-game minor penalty reminders if need be. For **example**, if a player said what another character did, I might say "Ok, (the other character) does that, and your character (does something they don't **want**)." Be firm on keeping players to their own characters; if you don't, it can ruin a game by making players annoyed and out to get each other. Get players to say what *their* characters do and not any others. In particular, players who like to give the results of what their characters do before the **G.M.** **does**, including NPC reactions, are prone to doing this.

Anti-team? Don't Jump to Conclusions Too Soon

Some players are just irritating and disruptive because they refuse to work with the group, sometimes just to spite the leader due to jealousy or dislike of another character or player. Don't be too quick to jump to conclusions. Some players who play this way may just be "protecting" their characters from being taken over by a more forceful player who wants to tell everyone else what to do. If the party has a good team leader, this shouldn't happen, but regardless do **NOT** try to force any players into going along with the team leader, that is their choice. As long as they are not deliberately trying to disrupt the game, and just seem to be bothered by having a leader, let them do what they want but try to keep them at least generally working with the group **and/or** in the group's best interests. Outside the game, you may want to try convincing them that they may have more fun by playing as a team and working with the other players, but don't do this during a session, and just suggest they try it, don't force them to. Likewise try to avoid stepping into disputes between these players and team leaders trying to assert their authority unless things start to get out of hand. The players need to figure out how to cooperate with each other, that's a job for them, not you.

Teamwork

I don't understand why lots of players seem determined to make characters who don't need or won't work with a group. It seems part of this is due to player ego while another part is due to paranoia about control of their characters. The players don't want **their** characters to ever be in the situation where they have no options. This usually is just a matter of not trusting the **G.M.**, something you can overcome if you treat the players in a consistent manner. Ego just amounts to players not wanting to need anyone else so they can feel superior. However, although they may feel superior, it really doesn't do much to add to the fun of the game, so you might want to encourage them to make characters that seem more real. Is every **fun**, interesting character in a novel a **survivalist**? Do they never need help? A similar thing

you have to watch out for is when these players try to use the fact that the rest of the group needs them in order to bully others, or otherwise get their way. Hopefully this is the more uncommon occurrence and not too hard to address, since NPCs can show up to help if the group decides to get rid of that player, or any number of other methods can be used as fixes. The only other reason I can see for one-man-party characters would be when the player didn't want to be reliant on the group, and capable of leaving at any time if they disagreed with the group. This seems reasonable for a lot of characters but doesn't make sense in the game, because if the player character does actually leave the group, they're probably pretty much out of play. Not to mention if the player really doesn't want to work with the group, why are they gaming with a *group* of players in the first place? A team is a team because different members round out others' weaknesses.

It *can* be lots of fun to work as a team. I still don't understand why most players seem to prefer being lone wolves, except maybe to imitate movie, TV, novel or other fictional heroic characters. For a good example of how teamwork can be fun, take a band of three player characters. The Wilderness Scout tracks the enemies to **their** hideout, then sets a grenade booby trap at the door after prowling up to it. The **'Borg** scans in infra-red and detects the six bandits inside. The Wilderness Scout then tosses a rock through a window after moving back to a safe distance. The first bandits out trip the booby trap and two are taken out by the grenade. The **'Borg** draws the fire of the rest, while the Ley Line Walker moves into position to the side and behind them and casts magic net on three of them, while the last surrenders. All the party members high-five each other, and give themselves a pat on the back for their success as a group taking out the bandits with a well-executed plan. You get the idea, I hope.

Where you run into problems is when some players either can't contribute much or don't get the chance to. You have to be careful as **G.M.** to try to build this opportunity into every adventure or game for every player as much as possible, at least initially. After a little time, players will take some responsibility to seize the initiative. Even still, this is easier said than done with larger groups of six to eight players, each of whom probably have a dozen skills or more and maybe an equal number of powers. So how do you manage to give every player a bit of the spotlight? With a little planning, it's much more manageable, but in general I favor the approach of coming up with multiple ideas of your own, and then only making one or two ideas tailored for the group or for specific players who may seem left out. Leave it to the players to figure out how to address situations for the most part, just try not to use ideas too similar too often.

Disruptives

In cases where disruptive players try to make themselves team leader so they can use the position to order or bully the other players around, you can either let the other players lay into the bullying player in any number of ways, or you can try to deal with it yourself. I recommend the former, and if the disruptive player starts to get the best of the others, then you can intervene with a **take-your-pick** **G.M.** Intervention Device, such as the earth suddenly swallowing the character or something simi-

lar. Of course, G.M.I.D.s will instantly end any dispute by simply removing offending characters from play. It also goes without saying, these should only be used in very extreme circumstances and as a last resort. The other players will feel better if they're able to deal with the troublemaker themselves, but don't let one disruptive player ruin the game for everyone else. I have no sympathy for troublemakers, since they usually instigate trouble, then whine if their opponents are too powerful or are getting the better of them.



The Players' Perspective

Adventure Focus

Do not focus an entire campaign, or even an entire adventure on one player. If that character is killed, that adventure may be over as the party splits. "Fred was the one who wanted to do this, and he's dead. I'm outta here." There should always be more than one player "in deep" in an adventure plot **and/or** there should be more than one reason why the group is pursuing the adventure. So if Fred is killed trying to catch the notorious bandit to bring him to justice, the other player characters don't suddenly give up on chasing the bandit. There could either be other player characters who are going to keep chasing the bandit to bring him to justice, or there could be other reasons the group was chasing the bandit, or both. Maybe the bandit has information the group wants, or maybe the group is looking to rob him. The possibilities are endless, but there should ideally always be

more than one player involved, **and/or** more than one reason the group is involved.

Player Attention

Along the same lines as Adventure Focus, don't always have the same character in the spotlight. It's your job as G.M. to try to give each player an equal amount of attention. So if Bob the 'Borg saves the day by gunning down half the **bandits**, next time try to give Chris the City Rat the opportunity to save the day, maybe by sneaking into the building and stealing the secret documents, or Ben the Ley Line Walker uses his magic to discover a trap that certainly would've killed everyone if they'd not known, etc.

A Variety of Talents

Obviously this has to be tailored to specific groups, but try to make the players realize that a variety of talents can be very useful. For example, it might be more important to have Palming for inconspicuously swiping the map, plan, keys, etc. for the secret room, **armory**, hideout, etc. than it would be to have Athletics and +1 to dodge and parry in combat. As a player who likes anime and capable combatants, believe me, I know the temptation is there for players. Interrogation might allow the players to find out about an ambush, whereas Boxing wouldn't be of nearly as much help due to overwhelming odds. I'm using combat as a frequent example since this is the one most players over-emphasize. Also try to drive home the point that high bonuses and a big gun don't necessarily always save the day. Stealth, intelligent plans, skills, psionics and spells could all easily prove much more important, depending on the circumstances.

I have the hardest time convincing players of this myself, most just don't seem to understand or realize what my being G.M. means. It means I can tailor just about any situation to any particular emphasis. I can emphasize role-playing, mystery, puzzles, combat, humour or other theme if that's the kind of game I want. I can reward players for playing the way I think they should and penalize them for not playing that way, directly or indirectly. I also determine the power levels of all bad guys, I decide whether or not skills would probably be more useful than combat bonuses, etc. If all the players want a P.P. of 24, they can have it and I can easily make all the bad guys have a P.P. 24 too. It's largely up to me what the group will face in battle; it could be three first level City Rats in old Dog Boy riot armor or half a dozen Super SAMAS pilots that are fourth level.

Remember, as G.M. you have almost complete control of the world, and if you don't want players maxing bonuses, you can easily make situations where the bonuses are basically useless. Every strength has a weakness, you just might need to be a little creative to find one. Powerful people tend to be noticed lots more than weak, low-profile types, as well as attract more powerful enemies. Some characters with phenomenal combat bonuses may be laid low by a disease and healed by the "weakling" psychic healer in the party. Above all, listen to your players and try and decide if they want to play the type of game you intend to run. You'll have lots more fun if you both want to play the same kind of game, be it high-powered battles, intrigue and subterfuge, or slapstick comedy.

Role-Playing: Acting and the Theater

Role-Playing Reminder

Remember that the way to think of the game is not who can do "better" than the others, and that nobody "wins," especially not by getting other players or the party in trouble deliberately or beating up on or bullying their fellow players. Rather, everyone wins if they have fun. In fact, as a **G.M.** you'll probably want to penalize this type of behaviour.

Anti-Player Characters

I still find it amazing how many players of role-playing games seem to want to work not with, but against their fellow players. I'm not sure if they're just power-mongers or what, but a surprising number (to me) would turn against their own companions at the drop of a hat. In role-playing terms they always act miscreant or diabolic. I don't know why they think this is fun, but I've had to play with a person or two like this before, and they definitely do. I'm guessing they want their character to be "better" than anyone else's, maybe so they can bully others. Now this *is* good role-playing of a miscreant or diabolic evil alignment, although these players always like to think of themselves as selfish or good (yeah, **right!**). They also won't appreciate it if the other (good) players turn on the evil "villain" in their midst, and will probably complain if they do. Don't fall for this. If a character is disruptive to the party and the group, you're perfectly within your rights to get rid of him one way or another, although allowing the other player characters to do so usually works best. Make it clear to the player this is not a desirable character type, and that if they insist on playing this way, come to a general consensus among the group that they can either shape up or stop playing. You don't need players whose only reason for playing is to spoil the fun for everyone else. If you let them stay, keep them under control or you risk losing other, better players who can have fun without needing to ruin someone else's game or character. Remember to remind these players that good-aligned characters (if theirs is good) work together because they enjoy it.

Extreme Role-Players

Another type of player that has the potential to cause internal problems in the group is the extreme role-player. This player appears to consider everything, including fun and real life friendships, secondary to role-playing their character accurately. Teach these players to give you a little slack by stressing that the objective of the game is to have fun. If absolutely necessary, you can even demonstrate that the game world dances to your tune. You have complete control of your game as G.M. so make sure everyone knows it. I recommend disallowing these players to craft characters who will become a problem, for example characters with a personality resembling a serial killer. This is my own opinion, but I consider even role-playing to be secondary to having fun.

Lone Wolves

The anti-player characters mentioned above can be tricky, because during the adventure they usually play along with the party, but at the first opportunity they will give other players the

short end of the stick. Likewise, some players seem dedicated to not working with the party and doing whatever the heck they want. Now, looking at that realistically, that's fine, but then why are they even with the group? And what group is going to want them if they are seemingly always at odds with the group's interests? The characters should have some justifiable reason why it's in their best interests to be part of the group, and the group should have at least one reason to keep them.

If they can't give a decent reason why their character is with the group, try to get them to either come up with one, alter **their character** a little, or maybe consider making another character. You can probably let them get away with quite a bit in terms of reasons, depending on how realistic you want your game. It's generally not fun when one player refuses to work in the group's best interests, but is always in their company anyway. If it's just a matter of attitude, like the character talks big, but will come through in a pinch, that's fine and not what I'm talking about. What I mean is, try to talk sensibly to "loner" players, and ask them, "Why would anyone like this guy? Why would they want him around?" Unless they're role-playing an outcast or someone very anti-social, they should have answers. Something else to keep in mind is to be sure the group's interests really are the **group's** interests, and not just one or two aggressive or dominant players proclaiming the "group's" interests.

Role-playing: Acting Improv

This and the next several points will be directed at players and G.M.s who play against each other, as well as players who "roll-play" rather than role-play. I consider role-playing to be a lot like the theater or acting, with a few noted differences.

First, although the G.M. mostly writes the script in terms of environment and scenario, the players are actors who are constantly improvising, making up their lines and actions as they go. The G.M. has to try to guide the game (not control it), to give the story some organization and direction, usually by using all the characters not controlled by the players. However, they have to be careful to allow the players the **freedom** and room to modify and alter the direction of the story at the same time.

Second, there are a set of rules the characters have to follow, the mechanics of the game, which help determine what they can and can't do. The similarity is that the players are supposed to play the role of their character and give them a distinct personality.

The G.M.: Director and Actor

Looking at role-playing as **acting**, the G.M. is a director of sorts, trying to keep everything organized and running smoothly. He also has the job of playing all the NPCs in the game, so he is also an **actor/improviser** when interacting with the players. Note that a director is not out to ruin, make fools of, or kill the characters. He is there to make sure the play or game proceeds in a relatively organized and orderly fashion. Ultimately, the G.M. is really there to entertain the players as well as him- or herself. I believe the best way to do this is to get the players involved and interested in the game.

To continue with the comparison a little further, the G.M. sets the scene and stage, putting the "extras" and other "actors" in place. The players should then try to flow with the "movie" or "show" the G.M. is making, at the same time adding their own touch and modifying it through their characters. The G.M. tries to react to the desires of the audience of himself and the players by editing on the fly, so to speak. For example, the G.M. fashions a mystery which the players investigate, but they are also itching for some action, so the G.M. throws in a brief chase scene to add some excitement for the players. Or the G.M. may play a dire scenario seriously, then suddenly add some witty remarks or comments through NPCs to add some humor, because the players want a few laughs. Keep it rolling along and fun.



The G.M.: Not the Evil Overlord

The G.M. is not supposed to be out to get or kill the players, although many times the players may feel he is. The challenges the players face may be too powerful for them due to the G.M. overestimating them, bad luck or a number of other factors.

As G.M. your goal should be to have fun, and to help the players have fun. If the players are already gung-ho and motivated, you may not need to provide any motivation until they start getting a little bored. You need to challenge the players for them to feel a sense of accomplishment, but you should definitely not get upset or annoyed if they beat your challenges. Easier said than done, I know. The most common occurrence in this type of scenario would be when the G.M. puts in a lot of time and effort to make a challenge for the players, but they eas-

ily overcome it somehow. The G.M. is usually then inclined to start making harder and harder challenges for the players, which are probably warranted, except that some Game Masters go too far.

A classic example is the G.M. who just keeps adding power to his villains, such as more powers, spells, S.D.C., M.D.C., bonuses, etc., until the players have a hard time defeating them. Now if the players only beat the previous challenge due to luck ("Wow, three natural 20s!", "A 01% on my skill!") they're probably not going to be able to overcome the more difficult one. Or if the villain gets lucky, it could be all over. After reading below a little, you'll realize of course it's not over even if the bad guy gets lucky. Enemies who capture and humiliate the heroes abound in movies, after all, and the heroes always somehow subsequently escape to heroically come back and try again later! Challenges become bigger and bigger, and it may happen frequently that if the player characters fail, they die. This means the G.M. will have to fudge to ensure their survival, since they are bound to fail sooner or later. If this happens consistently, the players may expect their next opponent to always be more powerful than the last. This usually only convinces a lot of players that they need a more powerful character. Not every villain needs to be more powerful than the last; some weak villains could prove incredibly elusive. They may provide player characters with more satisfaction at their capture than the defeat of a powerful monster, despite only rating an annoyance on the "threat" scale.

In particular, the G.M. should be careful not to make challenges with the intent of spiting the players. This is bound to cause problems. These challenges will either irritate the G.M. further if the players overcome them easily, or become extremely difficult and frustrate the players. Either way, the G.M. or the players will not have fun, because it will no longer be the win-win situation RPGs are supposed to be.

More Motivation

Revenge

On the note of getting players more interested and involved, I move to the topic of motivation, which I have already talked about a little in the Getting Started section. Now I'll address motivation more specifically, particularly revenge and getting even. As I've already mentioned, greed can be a good motivator, but more often it is a means to an end. Not every reward or motivation is monetary though, and revenge can be a great motivation to use. I will say this point in bold to emphasize it because it should be true for anyone really interested in playing.

Nothing Motivates Players like Getting Back at a Bad Guy They Hate!

This is especially true of macho players who like to consider themselves smart and tough. You have to get the players to really hate the bad guy, so **this villain** has to get the player characters very upset and, very mad. The important thing is to hit the players where it hurts, be it staining **their** pristine reputation and egos, stealing their souped-up, specially armed and armored **ATV**, or hacking into their personal information **and/or** credit lines. If you plan to humiliate the players, or try to, do it very conservatively. Not every bad guy who comes along should get

the better of the players and laugh in their faces. When one does (or **tries**), they should be remembered, and the players should have fond fantasies of what they'll do when they meet again, or catch that one particular bad guy. Players will very quickly dislike playing if they're always fighting bad guys who defeat and humiliate them, so you should only do this rarely, like once in a long while or when the players are getting cocky or bored.

Getting the Players Motivated

I would be inclined to give the players a few relatively easy victories, and then have them run across a villain who was either slightly more powerful than they were or who more likely outsmarted **and/or** used the player characters without their knowledge or consent. For example, the NPC causes a commotion and leads the party on a wild goose chase away from something important. This could be almost anything, perhaps a subordinate or superior in the middle of something, or a bomb, spell or raid planned to go off or start in an hour, or something similar. He could also get the player characters tangled up and occupied by stirring up the locals while the NPC attends to more important things.

Humiliation

After the plan has been successfully executed, the villain laughs in the players' faces at their stupidity, since most villains are arrogant, or at least my stereotypes of them are. Then the villain either gets away or just plain defeats the players in battle (don't force either of these, though). Now watch the players simmer as they realize they've been played for fools. They should hate this bad guy and will probably immediately start planning on returning the favor, or **his/her/its** demise. Make this a recurring (but *not* omnipresent) character and your players will be duly motivated; they'll really want to get this guy.

Better yet, let a few small tips or clues slide to the players on or before their second encounter with this individual so they realize that maybe the bad guy isn't as powerful as they thought in their first run-in. Bad guys can be cocky too, and may end up fleeing from player characters who come gunning for payback, especially if they underestimated them earlier because they managed to avoid a direct **confrontation**. The players may get some small satisfaction from watching the villain run from them, but it shouldn't be enough to appease them. They should want to get this villain and give him a pounding.

Payback

I would even advise allowing the players an opportunity to get even a short time later, where the players catch the bad guy with his pants down, and have the chance to get the better of him. If they do, the dislike will become mutual, which is always good for plots. The players will feel really good getting even, so don't drag it out too long. The villain should ideally not be killed, (see **No Prisoners!**, below) and then start making a plan to get revenge on the players, and the race is on! Remember, just because the bad **guy(s)** and players may cross paths more frequently after this, it doesn't mean one or the other has to be killed in these encounters. Quite the contrary, you want both to be so mad that they won't be satisfied with just killing the other party, they'll need to get even and humiliate them in return. Or maybe either thinks of more satisfying ways of getting even

which require not killing the other party ("I want to put you through what I went **through!**"), or the original incident is something too small to kill over. This is really important! It can be terrific for entertainment value and make these NPCs recognizable. Player characters leave the villainous mage tied up and gagged, and anonymously send a radio message to tip off a nearby CS patrol of his location. The next time the player characters and mage meet, they have something to talk about! Remember, villains love to talk, and new age "heroes" love to make snide remarks. Give them both as many chances as you can to do so! This can also make for easily added humor; the possibilities are endless for interesting conversations!

Betrayal

The G.M. doesn't have to have the players defeated to get them motivated to get even with a villain, however. Introduce an NPC the players will grow to trust and then have that NPC turn out to be a traitor (G.M.s should know this the entire time, don't suddenly "make" a trusted NPC a traitor), betraying the players and laughing at their stupidity. Then see how well the players like being played for suckers — instant motivation to get that NPC for payback. Warning: Do **NOT** have NPCs betray players very often, probably not even more than once or twice with a fair bit of time between, unless you want your players to become extremely paranoid! Many players already tend toward paranoia of "the G.M. out to get them" (possibly other players too) so you may not want to add to or justify this, as neither G.M. nor players may have as much fun afterwards if you betray these types of players.

Kill or Be Killed

No Prisoners!

Here's a familiar problem, unfortunately. What do you do with players who kill every enemy they encounter, even those who surrender? This problem may not be really easy to fix, but it shouldn't be too hard. Something that could work well here is exerting a little subtle influence as G.M. (be careful here, no strong-arm tactics, please) in order to have an honorable (probably aberrant) villain captured or spared by the players, who then owes them one. Later on, this favor should come in very handy. The bad guy who is spared and later proves extremely useful to the players should cause them to consider taking prisoners in a much more favorable light. If they always kill villains who surrender and you never get to try this, just turn it around in any number of **ways**, making killing the bad guy who surrendered a very bad idea.

The classic scenario is that the villain is captured and subsequently escapes. At a later stage in the game, the bad guy makes a surprising reappearance, either seeking the aid of the player characters or providing aid to them. Likely this will be in the villain's own best interests, of course, but it will still be a help to the players. Have the bad guys pop up at unlikely times and in unlikely places. The players should be surprised to see them, as well as curious and wondering what **they're** doing there. This makes them more interesting and adds depth. It's also interesting to see how well the player characters can work with an arch-villain of theirs.

Thinking How Real People Act

Remember to try and think of role-playing as a story in which the players are actors. Most people are not murderers, and will be just as happy if someone surrenders as if they have to kill them. In addition, when a battle occurs most people want it to be over as soon as possible and without sustaining any injury to themselves. So if the enemy tries to surrender, most people will be glad to let them. Only diabolical people, definitely the exception to the majority and not the rule, take pleasure in killing others, and even most of these prefer to do it from where they're safe. Plus, even evil characters may have uses or plans for the player characters which require they be alive. Killing another intelligent being is something that will weigh on the conscience of most people, especially if it was unnecessary. Nightmares will haunt the dreams of **these** characters for certain, possibly even if the killing was unavoidable.

Apply This to Bad Guys Too

Most criminals and bad guys are not fanatics either, and will surrender if they find themselves outmatched and they can't get away, or prospects of fleeing look bad. **Likewise**, they will also accept surrender, as they similarly want battles over as soon as possible and without sustaining injury. Not everyone the player characters battle has to be a brute; many could be quite accommodating if the player characters do have to surrender. Possible exceptions obviously include when battling fanatics or unintelligent monsters that will not listen to reason and who slaughter anyone that attempts to surrender, then battle will be to the death. Particularly spineless characters may throw themselves at the enemy's mercy anyway, but they'll likely just be killed. Spineless characters will usually surrender to anyone they even think will let them live, so NPCs of this sort will surrender to player characters at the drop of a hat if they can't flee.

Happy to Be Alive

If you stop and think about it, most people will be glad to be spared and alive, and being spared or captured will probably have an effect on them. They may thank their captors, grudgingly acknowledge they were spared, or hate having to surrender to such an opponent. If evil, they may resent appearing weak in front of enemies and plot to get even later. In any case, the reaction of the spared party will probably depend a lot on the attitude and treatment they receive from the group or individual they surrendered to.

If the captors treat their prisoner reasonably and with respect or in a civil way, the **prisoner(s)** may become a possible ally, or at least cordial or on better terms with them, as well as more likely to share or provide information. This could be useful in any number of ways, as well as used for further plots and hooks. On the other hand, if the captors taunt, humiliate and abuse an enemy who has surrendered, this enemy may become extremely bitter and dedicated to ruining his or her oppressive captors.

Honor Among Bad Guys

Any honorable characters will pay their debts if possible, even if they don't want to. Any honorable villains spared by the players will likely come clean on any debts, which may earn them the respect of the player characters in turn (even though it

may be a one time favor). These "villains" won't be miscreant or diabolic, and may even be selfish or good, and misguided or just at odds with the players, though more likely aberrant. This is a frequent theme in movies where black and white aren't clear, and can be used to great effect as a way to develop some "villain" NPCs into actual people, not just more psychopathic megalomaniacs.

Psychopaths Generally Aren't Appreciated Much

Keeping all this in mind, players who capture, say, a CS squad, and summarily execute them will quickly find themselves at the top of the CS's extermination lists! Likewise, players who murder prisoners in cold blood will quickly gain a reputation and may have trouble with everyone around them, as they do everything in their power to stop the psychopathic murderers! Players will have to watch for poison, sabotage, spies, crusading **Cyber-Knights**, do-gooders and bounty hunters who will all come gunning for them.

Rewards

Starting Points

As a G.M., how should you reward your players? Rewarding players is a necessary part of being a good G.M. in my opinion, although I know of many Game Masters who do not feel a need to reward the players with anything other than the experience of playing. I feel it is a way for the players to mark their progress, in addition to just being fun for them to be rewarded for good play. I enjoy receiving rewards as a player, so I therefore advocate their use.

Some other G.M.s I have played with have given the players large rewards before the adventure even began and before the player characters even did anything. Wrong! Bad! Think if you suddenly won a million dollars in the lottery. Sure, you're happy to be rich, but what if you had earned a million dollars yourself by working hard instead? Wouldn't you be a little more pleased with yourself and take more pride in your new wealth? Rewards given away for nothing do not generate the sense of accomplishment and pride that earned rewards do, so try to make players work for what they get.

To start, I would recommend restricting player characters to the more common and inferior weapons at first, so that you can reward them with better weapons as they advance a bit. Players will gripe about this, but it does give them motivation to work for monetary rewards for spending rather than stockpiling. From what I have seen, this gives the players greater control over improving their characters' capabilities, thus adding to their interest in the game. I also believe spells can be used quite effectively as rewards as well as encourage spellcasters, especially if they are in a group of "shoot **'em ups**."

It is my opinion that the game is more fun for the players if their characters get some form of tangible reward after an adventure. This doesn't have to be much, just try not to have players feeling massively underwhelmed by rewards. Establish some kind of power scale you want the game to operate within, and allow them to make some progress inside it without instantly

hitting the ceiling. In other words, give them something of some significance, even if it's only a little, and don't go power **crazy**. Ideally their reward should make them excited and eager for more, without upsetting game balance. Not all rewards have to be monetary; the player characters could easily make friends or be owed favors in the future. Likewise, make sure and give out experience points for good play or play that you want to encourage. Try to keep things reasonable, but give out things that will matter to the players enough to make at least a small difference. The trick is to always have something the players need or want, but that is just a little out of their current reach, if you want it to be a motivating reward.

You Want a New Weapon/Armor/Vehicle? Start Saving...

Much like the real world, the player characters should have lots of things they want to buy, but never enough money. This makes them choose which things to buy and which to pass over, adding to the role-playing experience. Their characters should have to either purchase new equipment with money earned, steal it, or scavenge it from defeated opponents. New weapons and upgraded equipment should be relatively infrequent and a notable achievement. Cybernetics may become more affordable at higher levels or more likely, the players may meet or do a favor for a Cyber-Doc during their adventures and receive cybernetics in return. Hey, it's all about who you know. Smart players will try to establish contacts with those who have, or have access to, what they want.

Spell Rewards

Spellcasting characters, and Ley Line Walkers in particular, are much easier to reward. I advise being more liberal when rewarding spells than the books generally indicate, but trying to stay close to level limits. In other words, keep the level of the spell low (1-3 or so), equal to or lower than the spellcaster's level. I think rewarding a spell at the end of each adventure could be quite feasible if monitored.

Players will be able to see the difference in their characters' progress much more clearly as they accumulate spells. The low level spells (level 1-3 or so) are great for this since they allow the players to become more versatile without really becoming more powerful. Don't go hog wild, but there are few low level spells that would throw a game out of whack, at least in my opinion. You don't need to let the players pick the spells they get. Give them a limited selection of spells you've picked and know won't cause game problems, but which may include a few they wouldn't mind picking up. "They're the only ones Jack the NPC has, Bob..." or maybe the only ones he'll offer to teach. At the same time, they should generally only be learning one spell at a time unless they do something really heroic.

If you find players have gained too many spells too fast, just drop off the spell rewards by having NPCs not knowing any spells the player character hasn't already learned. A perfectly feasible reason. As they come to acquire more of the low level spells, start increasing the spell level of spells rewarded and the difficulty of the **adventure/quest/favor**, and decreasing the frequency of spell rewards.

Spell Hunting

Working and hunting for spells does not have to be simple. It could involve doing favors for an NPC, when that NPC doesn't actually have the spell the character wants, but who is owed a favor by a second NPC who does have the spell. There is lots of room for added complexity here; perhaps the first NPC didn't consult the second NPC and the latter will not provide the spell reward after the players have done their service for the first NPC. Or it could easily be more difficult than that, and may involve political maneuvering as the player characters try to win the favor of those who can reward them with the spells they want. Player characters known to be zealously searching for spells could easily be used by parties aware of their search, knowingly or unknowingly. Perhaps the NPC will want them to do jobs the player character doesn't really want to be involved in. Use this to fuel an adventure or series of adventures and enrich game plots.

Magic characters, especially Ley Line Walkers, will generally always be looking for more spells. Don't give them whatever spell they want for a minor deed, or even much or any choice of spell as a reward, especially at higher levels. Make them work and hunt for the spells they really want. Don't be *too* stingy, just try to maintain balance while being fair. If a mage finally gets a really powerful spell he wanted and worked really hard for, be sure and give him the chance to use it now that he finally has it! Why do you think he wanted it?

Let Players Enjoy Earned Rewards

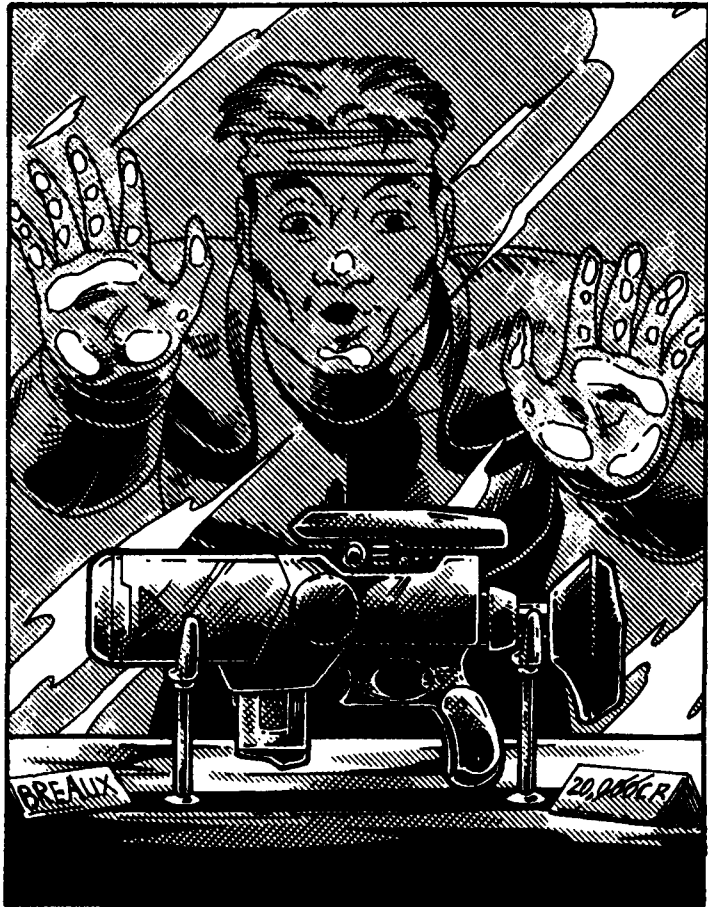
It always surprises me how some G.M.s seem determined to give **their** players the short end of the stick in this regard. I don't understand why after making the players work really hard for something the G.M. will then seem to sometimes actively try to prevent or limit the use of this thing the players have earned. Assuming you checked to see that it wouldn't imbalance play before you handed it out, this shouldn't be necessary most times. Necessary changes after you've seen something is more powerful than you thought shouldn't occur too frequently, provided you stop and think about rewards before just giving them out. Expect player characters to start beating your old challenges more easily now, and let them for a little while before you start gradually increasing their difficulty. Let the players enjoy the rewards they worked hard to get.

Money

Players usually want money to buy power, which is a better motivator for me as a player. If I play a character **who's** trying to get money, it's usually to buy something to increase his power, be it better weapons, equipment, or magic spells. Others may want money to buy political power and influence. Usually the money itself is not what the player characters desire, it's what it can get them or do for them.

In any event, money is probably the best way to reward players, because you can control prices of items if you decide you don't want them buying as much as the book allows. A problem you may encounter here is that you will probably have a hard time remembering what everything costs, and how much to give the party. One of the good things about money, though, is that it never takes long to spend. It's also fairly easy to steal. If the players get money, they then have to decide what to do with it,

how much to spend, how best to spend what they're going to, and what to do with any leftover money they want to save, which adds to the roleplaying experience. Will they keep it with them? Can they? Even if they have lots of money, they may not be able to buy what they want as it may not be for sale, or even available. They may have to undertake quests to find someone with a particular spell, or steal state-of-the-art military technology.



In closing...

I hope this article has given you at least a few points to think about that may improve your abilities as a Game Master, and your players' enjoyment of your game. My major point in this whole article is to concentrate not too much on the details of the game, but on the things in the game that will make it more fun for everyone involved, since that is the whole reason for playing. Ultimately, if your game is fun and everyone is enjoying themselves, you probably don't need to change; this article was just an attempt to add more ways to make the game fun to your repertoire.

Intrigue in Singapore

An Adventure for Ninjas & Superspies™ Optional Source Material

By Victor Russof

Introductory Note: This adventure is for mid- to high-level characters. Any O.C.C.s are acceptable, although the adventure is much more plausible if the characters are **employed** by a government agency or corporation.

Player Introduction

Brief the players by reading the following:

"Recent economic recession in Asia has led to an increased number of criminal and terrorist activities originating in the Orient. All countries are feeling the effects of the recession and their people are responding accordingly. The only country which hadn't seemed to be effected by the recession and subsequent criminal upsurge was the city-state of Singapore. That is, until three weeks ago.

"British undercover agencies investigating the recent theft of a new "super-fuel" additive have found evidence pointing to the thief's country of origin. That country is Singapore. Because of the relative danger of the task, most agents are refusing the job of recovering the fuel additive. That is why your group has been asked by the British government to travel to Singapore and assist the local authorities (who refuse to believe that the criminal is from Singapore. Thus is the Singaporean mind-set.) in apprehending the thief.

"Upon arrival in Singapore, you will be met by the head operative of British intelligence in Singapore. He will brief you on recent developments in the case, and inform you of any leads the Singaporean authorities have discovered while you were en route. While in Singapore, you will be provided with anything you need to complete your **task**, and recover the fuel additive."

Give the players time to get ready. If any players inquire about the fuel additive, tell them that all the information will be provided to them upon their arrival. As usual, any weapons or items of metal will cause problems at the airport's metal detector. When the players arrive in Singapore, read the following:

"The sounds of the Changi International Airport crash upon your senses. Religious fanatics pass out pamphlets, musicians play for tips, and in a far corner, a juggler performs to the delight of a crowd of small children. One of the few Westerners in the terminal rapidly approaches you and identifies himself as Sir William **Jenkinson**, the British **head-operative** and your contact.

“**Allo!**” he cheerfully intones and offers his hand to each of you. “If you’ll follow me, I’ll get you back to **headquarters.**”

After this introduction, Sir William will deflect any questions, saying “Time for that later.” He will usher the players into a nondescript, black sedan. They will drive through Singapore’s extremely clean **streets**, straight to the Government Complex. If any character happens to check if they are being tailed, they will see that they are indeed being followed by the juggler from the airport. If the players inform Sir William of their tail, he will attempt to lose him (he won’t be able to). If the players ask him to stop so they can confront the tail (who is riding a motorcycle) a fight will break out.

The tail is Yu Ji Kui, the juggler from the airport, who is secretly in the employ of the mastermind behind the theft of the fuel additive. Once he realizes that the players know he is following them, he will immediately try to flee. Since the streets in Singapore are all one-way, he will abandon his motorcycle and run. If the players are not quick in following him, Sir William will get trigger-happy and fire off three rounds from his .38 Special. He is a crack shot, and the shots will kill Yu Ji Kui instantly. The only way that Sir William **won’t** fire is if the players are in the way of his shot. Yu Ji Kui has a Spd. of 17 and, if he gets away, will immediately report back to his boss.

If the players *do* catch up to Yu Ji Kui, he will immediately begin to use his juggling props as weapons through the use of Moo Gi Gong. He will fight until it’s plainly obvious he’ll lose, at which point he’ll surrender. He’s not stupid and knows that no amount of money is worth dying over.

Yu Ji Kui

Fifth level Worldly Martial Artist with Moo Gi Gong: 30 S.D.C., 13 Hit Points; Armed with colored **balls**, pins, and knives.

Game Master Background

The theft of the fuel additive was organized by a Singaporean industrialist named Ho Jing Man. His plan (unbeknownst to the players) is to create huge amounts of civil discord on Singapore Island, then sweep in with his own private army to conquer Singapore in one fell swoop. He thought his plan would take years to implement, then his company heard about **RE-X1** (the fuel additive), and he developed his devious plan to use the concentrated form as an explosive. He has a number of employees in the Singaporean police and intelligence agencies and was infuriated by the British interference. He sent one of his street men, Yu Ji Kui, to follow Sir William, disguised as a juggler.

His plan is brutally simple. Three days from the arrival of the players, the entire Singaporean police department will occupy the Government Complex to celebrate the inauguration of this year’s police cadets. Man will plant an explosive derived from **RE-X1** in the basement of the government center. Because of the highly volatile nature of **RE-X1** in concentrated **form**, the bomb will completely obliterate the building. In addition, his men will also set up a series of missile launchers along the docks to launch small, shaped charges at the four ships in the Singaporean Navy. Although the missiles will kill none of the

soldiers, they will create holes in the hulls which will cause the ships to lean and list **drunkenly**, if not sink. With the Navy unable to sail or retaliate, and the entire governmental system destroyed, it will be an easy matter for Ho Jing Man to sweep in and take control of the passive Singaporean society. Once he has conquered Singapore, he will not stop, and will wreak terrible damage with weapons based on **RE-X1** before he is deposed.

Scenario Encounters

1. The Deal. If Yu Ji Kui is captured alive, he will immediately offer the players a deal. If he is released immediately and allowed to leave the country, he will reveal all he knows about the theft of the fuel additive (including the name of his employer) and Man’s plan. Sir William will be against it (Yu Ji Kui is the scum of the Earth, and Sir William knows that if he is released, he will probably commit many other crimes) but will go along with it if the players insist. If the players decide to keep him in custody until they can verify the information, the second they turn their backs, Yu Ji Kui will be killed horribly. When they find him, he will be slumped in his chair, his neck, **arms**, wrists, fingers, legs, knees and ankles snapped like twigs. A thorough autopsy will show that his neck was broken last.

2. Industrial Age Fortress. If the players make a deal with Yu Ji Kui and decide to investigate Ho Jing Man’s chemical processing plant, they will be greeted by an awe-inspiring sight. Ho Jing Man has done well for himself, and his plant shows. Massive chemical storage towers containing synthesized **RE-X1** protrude from an undergrowth of pipes, railways, and conduits. In the distance, two huge buildings housing the administrative (and Man’s) offices dominate the skyline. The entire complex is surrounded by forty-foot (12.2 m) high walls, and plant employees in orange jumpsuits walk along their tops. If the players ask to see Man, they will immediately be taken to him. If they sneak around and are seen by the workers (who are actually the disguised members of Man’s private army) they will be told to halt. If the players do not heed the warnings of the workers, they will fire. Those working deep in the plant are armed with **AK-47s**, though with no proficiency. Those walking the walls and guarding the gate are armed with Colt **.45s**.

3. The Meeting. If the players were taken to Man, or they snuck to his office, they will find him sitting behind a massive desk. Behind him is a wall hanging, covered in Malaysian writing. The only way in is through the large, teak double doors at the end of his office. Once inside, Man will activate the automatic door close, and the doors will slam shut behind the players. Man is a 9th level Worldly Martial Artist and wants to test his fighting skills against some worthy opponents. Most players will be unable to identify the Martial Art he’s employing because of its rarity. The truth is that he is trained in **Kenpo**, otherwise known as the Hawaiian Art of Bone-Breaking, and it was in fact Man who kill Yu Ji Kui (if that has happened). If it **ap**-pears that he is losing, Man is not above pulling his Colt .45 and using it. He will fight to the death to try to avoid capture. However, the bomb has already been planted in the Government Complex, although he will not reveal this to the players. With Man killed or captured, his organization will collapse.

Although the doors appear to be locked, they can be pushed open rather easily. Man has ordered his guards to get ready for the takeover of Singapore, and there are almost no security personnel around. Once outside of Man’s building, the players *can*

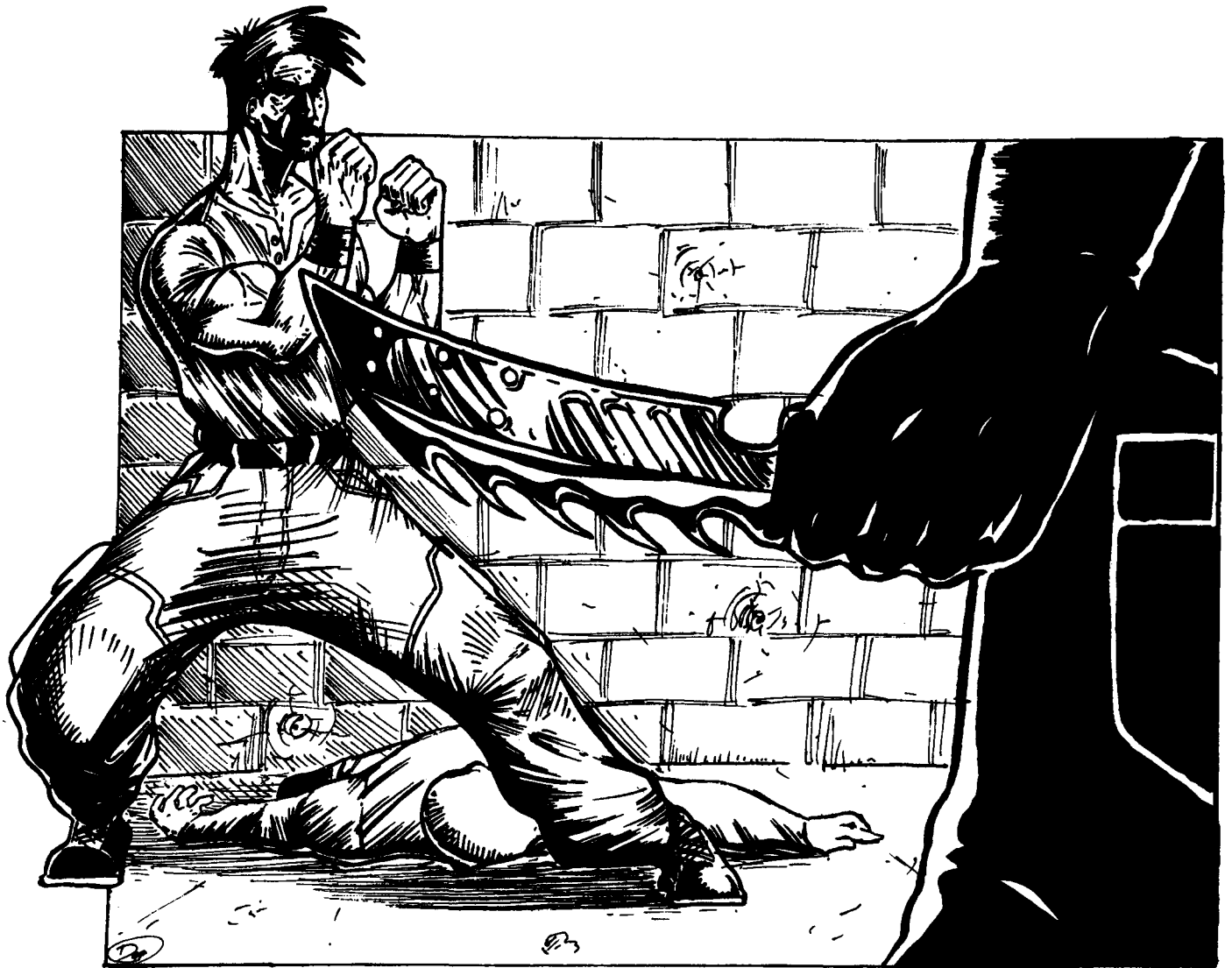
sneak out, although Man will make it difficult for them if he is captured. However, since Man was preparing for the invasion, he had one of his aides drive his Lexus SLX around to the front of the building and leave it parked with the keys in the ignition! Since the windows are **mirrored**, the players can drive out without being bothered, since the guards are smart enough to know not to bother the boss when he's driving.

4. Bomb! If the players kill Yu Ji Kui, or if he was killed before they could get any information out of him, then Sir William will get a call from one of Man's employees who has had a conscience crisis. The employee will inform Sir William of the bomb in the basement of the Government Complex. If the players killed or captured Man, Sir William will relay the message to them as soon as they arrive. To avoid a panic, Sir William isn't informing the Singaporean government about the bomb. Instead, he has decided to send the players into the basement of the Government Complex and disable the bomb while Sir William attempts to evacuate the government personnel and then the police officers. This may seem difficult for those not trained in demolitions disposal, until Sir William explains just how simple the bomb is. It's so basic that it doesn't even have an internal power source, and in order to disable it, all that is required is to remove the electric cord that's plugged into the detonator from a nearby wall socket.

This task is comparatively simple, although it is complicated by the three guards sent by Man to guard the bomb. They are dressed as police officers and will at first angrily demand the characters' reason for being in the basement. If the players inform them that they are there to disarm the bomb, the guards will draw Uzis and fire at them. If or when the guards are taken out, the bomb really *is* as simple as Sir William's informant said. At this point, if the players haven't taken care of Man, one of the guards should curse his name as he dies or is carted away by the police. The players can then proceed with Scenario Encounter 3.

The Aftermath: Once the bomb and Man have been taken care of, the police will storm Man's plant and arrest the soldiers there. They surrender after Singaporean Police tanks break down the walls. Just a few hours after the remnants of Man's army are taken away, a design flaw of **RE-X1** is revealed. When stored in amounts larger than a few gallons, it decomposes explosively. The storage tanks held *thousands* of gallons of **RE-X1**, and the resultant explosion damages the Man Chemical Plant beyond repair.

With Singapore finally secure again, and British justice served, both governments are extremely grateful to the players. In Singapore, they are hailed as national heroes. In Britain, not only do the players receive a hefty cash payment, but any British characters are knighted.



Kenpo Karate —

The Art of Hawaiian Bone-Breaking

Entrance Requirements: No attribute or alignment restrictions.
Skill Cost: 8 years (4 years as a Secondary Martial Art Form)

This relatively new martial art was developed by an American living in Hawaii. In order to win in a fight against massive Samoans and **Hawaiians**, he developed this brutal style. Kicks are low and fast, attempting to disable the legs. Punches are fast and hard, aimed at the soft portions of the face, namely the eyes, lips, and nose. When the opponent attacks, the kick or punch is intercepted and if possible, the limb is broken.

A Master of Kenpo will charge into combat, channeling his aggression and anger into his fighting. He will fling a lightning-fast barrage of attacks at his opponent, trying to goad him into retaliating. Once he does, he will intercept the strike, break the limb, then use his opponent's moment of pain to attack again, preferably breaking another bone. This process will continue until the opponent is disabled or dead, or surrenders.

Schools for Kenpo can be found in Hawaii and in California. Any schools in places other than that are rare.

Costume: No standard costume.

Stance: Legs braced, hands curled in fists and held in front of the face like a boxer.

Character Bonuses

Add 2 to P.S.

Add 2 to P.E.

Add 15 to S.D.C.

Combat Skills:

Attacks per Melee: 4

Escape Moves: Roll with **punch/impact**.

Attack Moves: Leap.

Basic Defense Moves: Parry, Automatic Parry.

Advanced Defense Moves: Circular Parry.

Hand Attacks: Strike (Punch), Claw Hand.

Basic Foot Attacks: Snap Kick.

Special Attacks: Death Blow, Snap-Lock (SPECIAL! Once the Martial Artist has his opponent in a lock, he can choose to treat it as if the opponent had chosen to break out of the **lock**, thus releasing the opponent, albeit with a broken limb).

Holds/Locks: Automatic Finger Lock, Automatic Wrist Lock, Automatic Elbow Lock.

Weapon Katas: None

Modifiers to Attacks: **Knockout/Stun**, Critical Strike, Critical Strike From Rear.

Skills Included in Training

Martial Arts Powers: Select a total of two (2) Powers from among Body Hardening Exercises. If desired, any number of Powers can be traded, one-for-one, for any Basic Skill Programs (excluding physical).

Languages: Hawaiian or English.

Cultural Skills: None

Philosophical Training: None

If this is your Primary Martial Art Form, then the following can be learned in a shorter time: Pao Pat Mei (4 years), Fu-Chiao Pai (4 years), Fong Ngan (3 years), or Te (2 years).

Level Advancement Bonuses

1st +2 to Damage, +1 to Strike, Critical Strike from Behind.

2nd +1 to Roll with **Punch/Fall/Impact**, +1 to Damage.

3rd Critical Strike on Natural 20, Select One (1) Additional Martial Art Power from Body Hardening Exercises.

4th +1 to Parry and Dodge, +1 to Leap (Add 4 **feet**/1.2 m to Leap Distance).

5th **Critical** Strike on Natural 18 or better. +1 Attack per Melee.

6th +2 to Damage.

7th +2 to Roll with **Punch/Fall/Impact**.

8th +2 to Strike.

9th Add One (1) Additional Martial Art Power from Body Hardening Exercises.

10th +1 Attack per Melee.

11th +4 to Damage, +1 to Strike.

12th +2 to Leap (Add 10 **feet**/3 m to Leap Distance).

13th Death Blow on roll of Natural 19 or 20.

14th Add One (1) Additional Martial Art Power from Body Hardening Exercises.

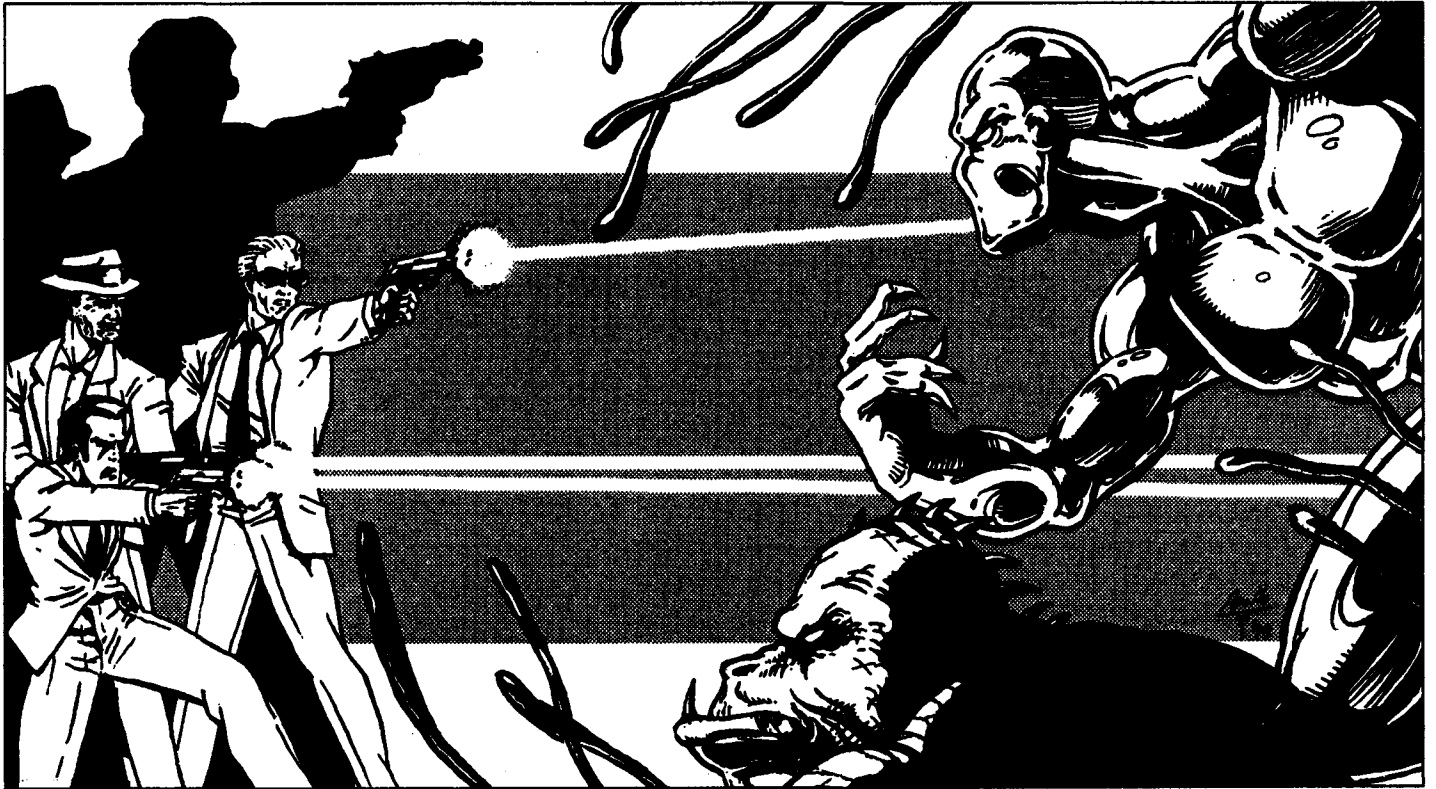
15th Select **One** (1) **Zenjorike** Power.

Why Study Kenpo Karate?

Without a doubt, one of the best martial arts for dealing with large, burly attackers. It offers a number of abilities to strengthen the body, although leaving the mind rather undeveloped. It can wreak horrible, lasting damage when used by a master, and its Snap-Lock is particularly gruesome.



Nightbane[®]



The Old Ways

Optional Mafia Source Material and O.C.C.s for the Nightbane™ R.P.G.

By David Solon Phillips

Disclaimer: Most of this material has been inspired by movies, books and the author's own imagination. It is in no way intended to reflect on any race, **creed**, color or people (or any real **mobster(s)** either). This is fiction. This article deals with the American Mafia only, other organized crime figures could easily be adapted from this information, though.

Note: The large majority of people in organized crime are of Aberrant alignment, as there is a harsh code of conduct that they all live by. Of course, many are of other evil or selfish alignments. None are of good alignment. Part of this code was that women and children were not involved, in any way, with criminal dealings. Times are changing, however, and more women

are in the Mob, but more women are becoming victims of Mob crime as well. Children are, of course, left alone (although if some individuals break this **code...they** are dealt with).

The Mafia After Dark Day

After Dark Day, the entire world had to adapt. In the U.S. the new Preserver Party was rapidly taking control of everything. After the "Alphabet-Soup" Purges in which organizations like the C.I.A., the F.B.I., and so on were disbanded, destroyed

and/or forced underground, the Preserver Party's eyes looked out for new potential threats. The Preservers were consolidating power on a very large scale. They were going after any organization that could possibly oppose them — this included organized crime.

The Mafia saw what was going on right away. The tactics of this invisible takeover were more than apparent to Mafia and other organized crime heads; who better to spot a rigged election or a senator on the take? They saw their old enemies (partners?) like the F.B.I., N.S.A. and the C.I.A. being disbanded and a new force (the N.S.B.) being put in their stead. What any Wiseguy worth his salt saw was another syndicate muscling its way in on the old government's turf. This was distressing to the mob. The F.B.I., C.I.A. and such were known commodities. There were arrangements made with the old government organizations. One knew how far they would go, how and what they might do; basically everybody knew the rules. The N.S.B. did not follow these rules.

These new "Feds" were odd. N.S.B. agents were extremely difficult to bribe/buy, and information was hard to obtain. Organizations were being taken out left and right — big, powerful, old families were being taken down. Sometimes in the courts, but increasingly in armed assaults by N.S.B. agents. What saved the mob from total obliteration was the lack of evidence. The fact that very few organizations put information to paper or disc made it extremely difficult to trace who knew who, who was in charge, or even who was involved. Most mob heads rely on memory and personal conversations. The bosses of huge crime families are basically geniuses that can run multi-million dollar deals without ever writing a memo or sending an E-mail, all the information is in their heads. So the various families, sensing a new, common enemy, called off the old wars, vendettas and rivalries and had a meeting; the likes of which had never happened before. This one came straight from *the top*.

The Enemy of my Enemy

Receiving orders from the *highest* rungs of organized crime, the *entire Mafia* went deep underground. Already operating in secrecy, the new mob became almost invisible. With the harsher laws came greater profits. If street gangs like the Golden Posse became like the mob of the 1940's, then the real Mafia was off the scale. After a while, certain information networks began to emerge. Stories of strange monsters working for the N.S.B. and the federal government began to crop up. Also, certain contacts with the former "Feds" were re-established and it was learned that all the old government agencies were now fighting the N.S.B. and the Preserver Party-controlled government. This clinched it, this new government was bad for business and had to be dealt with. They offered an alliance of sorts to the Spook Squad, as they decided that the chances of survival were much greater united as opposed to trying to fight separately. This offer was readily accepted by the A.D.A. As far as the Spook Squad was **concerned**, who better to run a covert war than the mob? With their vast resources and networks of smuggling, information, safehouses, etc., they would be the perfect allies. This alliance is not perfect though; these are old enemies and there are still some old scores to settle between the Mafia and the A.D.A. (not to mention between the Mafia's various factions within itself). This odd couple can agree on one thing though, they both want the "old rules" back.

The Old Ways

"...You want Prince Janus to hear about *this*?...Then listen up!"

Following plans of "attack" that are centuries old, the Mafia has been making some headway. These plans involve the two "B"s — bribery & blackmail. Indeed, men and women who were once working for the Nightlords have been bribed or blackmailed (usually with information they don't want Nightlords or Night Princes to see) into service to the mob. It's actually rumored that because of mob influence there is **now** a **Ba'al-Zebul** (Night Prince) on the take (but this has yet to be **confirmed**)! Sources of information and support like these are invaluable to the Mafia, and indeed to the human race, if it can help stem the tide of the invasion.

Mafia O.C.C.S

New York, New York — December:

Carmine Candinni, Owner of "Carmine's Clam Shack," a small, out-of-the-way yet oddly successful restaurant, relates a bit of recent news to a colleague.

"Apparently Senator Johnston disrespected the Don! He pretended not to know what the Don's boys were talking about or even who Don **Giovanni** was! The bastard even had the call traced — we saw Feds sniffing around my place about two hours later **askin'** about someone named "Don." I **dunno**, these N.S.B. jokers... At any rate, the Don couldn't have that so he sent over a few boys to have a talk with mister State Senator himself..."

Wiseguy O.C.C.

These guys are the backbone of the organized crime world. They are the enforcers, soldiers, body guards, etc., of the mob. From these ranks, the more capable move up and become lieutenants, bosses, etc., but gaining power in the mob is quite often as dangerous as it is bloody. Your average "**Soldato**" is aware that the new government is dangerous and bad for business, but whether they know of (or choose to believe in) supernatural things is up to the player **and/or** G.M. **Wiseguys** are, for the most part, loyal and will do their bosses' bidding, but often these men are greedy and will attempt to obtain some side reward during any job they might do. These are the leg-breakers and name-takers of the mob, have fun!

Note: There are many types of Wiseguy, it all depends on one's skills as to what function one may serve. If skills in math and computer operation are taken, then a Wiseguy could be a Bookie or a Loan Shark. Computer and art skills could aid in being a forger; be **creative**!

Special O.C.C. Abilities & Bonuses:

1. Combat Bonuses: +1 to Strike, Parry and Dodge. +1 to initiative.

2. Summon Thugs: The main power of Wiseguys is their ability to summon groups of thugs to "take care of things." Indeed, at higher levels one never travels alone. Being a tightly-knit organization, every member can get help if they are in trouble, how much help depends on how important one is to the organization. At lower levels, generally one can summon friends to help only, but as one progresses in experience and in-



fluence, more people will come to help in an effort to A: Protect a valuable member of the organization, and B: Gain the favor of an influential member of the organization. These thugs are generally of equal or lower experience level than the summoner (not that kind of summoner). The player must have a telephone, radio or some other means of communication — this is not a magical power but a real-world perk.

The number of thugs that can be summoned is obtained by this formula: $1D4 \times$ level of experience (at first level, 1 to 4 guys can be summoned; at 10th level, 10-40) this seems reasonable, considering the rank and influence of a 10th level character as opposed to a 1st level character. **Base Skill:** 25%+5% per level of experience.

3. Detect Fed/Undercover Agent: Most organized crime members learn an interesting survival skill — spotting undercover agents. While this is difficult to do, some develop the ability over time. This is more of an "instinct" rather than a skill, only certain O.C.C.s have it, not everyone can take this skill. This skill can be countered with **acting**, disguise or any other applicable skill. Of course, the use of this skill is up to G.M. discretion. **Base Skill:** Skill percentage obtained from I.Q. skill bonus (if any) +5% per level.

4. Tailing: This is basically the Surveillance Systems skill, but without the other systems. While a **Wiseguy** could theoretically take the Surveillance Systems skill later, this is one of the tricks of the trade they all know. It involves shadowing someone without being noticed, and often times walking right up to someone to assassinate him. **Base Skill:** 30%+5% per level of experience.

Alignment: These are professional criminals, so none are of good alignments. Many are Aberrant as they live by a strict code of conduct, but of course some are Miscreant or Diabolic.

O.C.C. Skills:

- Native **Language** and Literacy (98%)
- Detect Ambush (+15%)
- Detect **Fed/Undercover Agent** (see below)
- Tailing (+10%)
- Interrogation Techniques (+10%)
- Military (Mob) Etiquette (+10%)
- Prowl (+5%)
- Pilot Auto (+5%)
- Streetwise (+15%)
- W.P. Pistol
- Hand to Hand: Basic
- Hand to Hand: Basic can be changed to Expert at the cost of one O.C.C. Related skill or to Martial Arts or Assassin at the **cost** of three.
- O.C.C. Related Skills:** Select 10 other skills, plus the character gets an additional 2 skills at levels 2, 4, 6, 8 and 10. Then they select 1 additional skill at levels 12 and 14. All new skills start at level one proficiency.
- Communications: Radio: Basic only.
- Domestic: Any (+10% to cooking).
- Electrical: Basic Electronics only.
- Espionage: Any except **Tracking/Counter-tracking** or Wilderness Survival (+10%).
- Mechanical: Auto: Basic only (+5%).
- Medical: First Aid only.
- Military: Demolitions and Demolitions Disposal only.
- Physical: Any except Acrobatics or Gymnastics (+10% where applicable).
- Pilot: Automobile, Motorcycle and Truck only (+5%).
- Pilot Related: None
- Rouge: Any except Computer Hacking (+15%).
- Science: Basic Math, Advanced Math only.
- Technical: Any (+15 to 1 language of choice).
- W.P. **Modern:** Any
- W.P. **Ancient:** Blunt, Knife and Chain only.
- Wilderness: None

Secondary Skills: The character gets to select six secondary skills. These are additional areas of knowledge that do not get the benefit of the bonus listed in parentheses. All secondary skills start at the base skill level. Also, secondary skills

are limited (any, only, none) as previously indicated on the list.

Standard Equipment: One handgun of choice with silencer, 4 clips of extra ammo. One Blackjack, small club, pair of brass knuckles or other small, blunt instrument or perhaps a jack-knife, switchblade or stiletto (choose one). Shoulder holster, cellular phone. A large personal wardrobe consisting of various expensive fine dress suits, overcoats, shoes, sweat suits, hats, etc. Various personal articles (pinkie rings, necklaces, expensive watches and the like). One luxury sedan or sports car.

Money: 4D6x1000 dollars in savings and 1D4x10,000 in personal property. Remember, these guys *are the black market*; everything will be more available, of better quality and less expensive. Much of what they get (food, personal items, etc.) will be free, as they frequent controlled establishments or places where the owner "shows respect."

...The Don gets a Phone call concerning his "boys" he sent to talk with Senator Johnston:

(Johnny, the Don's nephew, enters)

"Don, you have a call on line six."

"Thanks Johnny... Hello?... What do you mean all died but one? What the hell are you talking about, Carmine..? Put him on!... What? Monsters?!?! Look, whatever."

-Click!-

"Johnny, call Mr. Rizzo- we got a job for him."

"The Cleaner"

Mafia Assassin O.C.C.

These are the special tools of the mob. Masters of stealth, weapons, poison and other means of death, they are dangerous, and therefore useful, professionals. These individuals are not always full-time members of the Mafia. Often these are ex-Special Forces, ex-government assassins or simply "talented" individuals who are now professional killers. They often work on a job-to-job basis, though sometimes they are kept on a sort of retainer (usually so no one else can use them against their employer). They are loyal for the duration of the job and then their loyalty is to the highest bidder, so usually these individuals make a good living (good being a relative term). While there are many people *willing* to kill someone for money, when someone needs a job done, without mistakes, **The Cleaner** is who they call.

O.C.C. Abilities and Bonuses

1. Bonuses: +2D6 to S.D.C. +3 Initiative, +4 Damage, +1 to Strike (+1 to Strike at levels 5, 8 and 11), +3 to Saving Throw vs Horror Factor.

2. Anti-Supernatural Bonus (optional): Many (but by no means all) Mafia assassins have been trained by the Spook Squad, are currently members of the Spook Squad, or, through trials & tribulations, happened upon the ability to attack supernatural creatures with greater effect by targeting weaker areas. This skill is identical to that possessed by members of the Spook Squad that have been trained to attack supernatural creatures, and therefore may require a Lore: Demon and Monster (or other Lore) skill roll. This skill allows characters to do normal S.D.C./H.P. damage to monsters, and avoid the supernatural

A.R. possessed by some creatures. Counts as 2 attacks. This does not give the power to avoid normal armor (note to G.M.s, if you don't like this for your campaign, **don't** allow it).

Alignment: These Characters kill people for money. They are evil. Many have a strong code of conduct (Aberrant) but some really like their job and are, of course, Miscreant or Diabolic. A few of selfish alignments are scattered about, but do not exist in any great numbers. None are good.

O.C.C. Attribute Requirements: I.Q. 7, M.E. 9, P.P. 10



O.C.C. Skills:

Native Language and Literacy (98%)

Tailing (+15%)

Disguise (+10%)

Sniper

Boxing, Wrestling or Body **Building/Weight** Lifting (choose one).

Climb (+10%)

Prowl (**15%**)

Pick Locks (15%)

W.P. Knife

W.P. Rifle

Hand to Hand: Expert

Hand to Hand: Expert can be changed to Martial Arts or Assassin for the cost of one O.C.C. Related skill.

O.C.C. Related Skills: Select 10 other skills, however 1 must be from the Espionage or Rogue category and 1 must be a Weapon Proficiency. Plus select two skills at levels 3, 6 and 9. Also select 1 at levels 12 and 15. All new skills start at level one proficiency.

Communications: Radio: Basic, Radio: Scrambler and Surveillance Systems only (**+10%** to Surveillance Systems).

Domestic: Any

Electrical: Basic Electronics only.

Espionage: Any (+15%)

Mechanical: Basic Mechanics, Auto Mechanics and Locksmith only (+5% to Locksmith).

Medical: First Aid (+5%) and Toxicology (+10%) only.

Military: Any (+10%)

Physical: Any (+10%)

Pilot: Any

Pilot Related: None

Rogue: Any (**+15%**)

Science: Basic Mathematics, Biology and Chemistry only.

Technical: Any (+5%)

W.P.: Any

Wilderness: Any

Secondary Skills: The character also gets to select six secondary skills. These are additional areas of knowledge and do not get the benefit of the bonuses listed in parentheses. All skills start at base skill level. Also skills are limited (any, only, none) as previously indicated on the list.

Starting Equipment: Varies with assignment, but generally an assassin of this caliber will have 1 handgun of choice with a silencer, concealable holster and box of normal ammunition, one rifle (hunting or sniper) of choice with a flash suppressor and box of normal ammunition. One cellular phone, flashlight, tool kit, a modest wardrobe and dark or camouflaged clothing for stealth. Possibly a bullet-proof vest (A.R.: 10, S.D.C. 70) if on a dangerous job. A combat knife, sap gloves or some other small melee weapon, and various personal items.

Money: **4D6x1000** in savings and **2D4x10,000** in property (may include cars, houses, computers, etc.). They tend not to own land or any other easily traced property).

...A few days later Don Giovanni gets his report:

(Johnny enters the Don's office)

"Sir, Carmine is here to see you" (Carmine enters the room and speaks).

"Bad news Don; Mr. Rizzo left town, but not before talking to me. He says when he was infiltrating the Senator's compound he had to whack one of the bodyguards, silenced "nine" to the back of the skull, textbook stuff, right? No. He blows off the guy's forehead — only, no blood! And this big bug crawls **outta** the hole! He says he killed it but it freaked him out so bad he had to leave — he says he saw things... What the hell is that crap?"

(The Don ponders for a moment, then speaks)

"That's it. Gimme the phone..."

(Senator Johnston speaks to his assistant as they walk from the state building to the Senator's parked car).

"Yes Ashbok, I too grow weary of this masquerade, but we must follow the orders of Prince Janus. Soon enough, the Minions of the Night will run freely through the streets of this and every city... ah, here we are."

(They both get into the car and the key is put in the ignition)

-click-

BOOM!!!!



"The Mechanic"

Mafia Assassin O.C.C.

This character is often ex-military or, like "The Cleaner", just has a knack for their "art." They work on a job-to-job basis, and are generally called in only for very specific jobs. Their fees are usually very high, due to the danger innate to their duties. As for

a description, the O.C.C. skills explain the Mechanic better than a paragraph about them could.

Alignment: These are professional assassins, any selfish or evil (mostly evil). Many are obsessed with their job — they love it a bit too much (Miscreant) — where as others are coldly professional (Aberrant).

O.C.C. Abilities and Bonuses: +2 to Perception checks, (+8 for perceiving sabotage or booby-traps).

Attribute Requirements: I.Q. 11, M.E. 11, a pair steady hands are encouraged as well.

O.C.C. Skills:

Basic Electronics (+15%)

Auto Mechanics (+25%)

Basic Mechanics (+20%)

Demolitions (+25%)

Demolitions Disposal (+20%)

Trap/Mine Detection (+15%)

Detect Concealment (+15%)

Prowl (+5%)

Basic Mathematics

Hand to Hand: Must be taken separately. Basic can be bought as one O.C.C. Related skill, Expert at the cost of two skills, and Martial Arts or Assassin for three skills.

O.C.C. Related Skills: Select 10 other skills. Plus select two skills at levels 3, 6 and 9, and one skill at levels 12 and 15. All new skills start off at level one.

Communications: Any (+5%)

Domestic: Any

Electrical: Any (+15%)

Espionage: Pick Locks, Pick Pockets, Intelligence only (+10%).

Mechanical: Any (+20%)

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

Military: Any

Physical: Any except Acrobatics and Gymnastics.

Pilot: Airplane, Automobile, Boat: Sail, Boat: Motor, Motorcycle, or Truck only.

Pilot Related: Navigation only.

Rogue: Any except Computer Hacking.

Science: Any (+5% to Chemistry and Chemistry: Analytical).

Technical: Any (+5%)

W.P.: Any Modern; Blunt, Knife and Chain are the only Ancient W.P.s available.

Wilderness: None

Secondary Skills: The character also gets to select 6 secondary skills. These are additional areas of knowledge that do not get the benefit of the bonus listed in parentheses. All secondary skills start at the base level. Also, secondary skills are limited (any, only, none) as previously indicated on the list.

Standard Equipment: One handgun of choice with 1D4 extra clips of ammo. One cellular phone, flashlight, toolkit, 2D6 ounces (or sticks if dynamite) of explosive (choose type), 1D6 detonators, 1D6 timers, 12 yards of copper wire. 1D6x1000 dollars worth of various technical equipment (be reasonable, don't go overboard).

Money: 4D6x1000 dollars in savings and 2D4x10,000 dollars in property (may include vehicles, houses, home computers, etc.).



Hunter

Optional Source Material for Heroes Unlimited™ 2nd Edition

By Matthew M. Foster

Hunter Robotics is a subsidiary of Casemate, a small defense contractor that has found an answer to national defense cut-backs. Recognizing that there is no longer a desperate need to defend borders, the company has turned its attention to cities. Using technology to contain the threat of super-powered individuals is what Hunter Robotics hopes to achieve. Through state-of-the-art robotics, Hunter Robotics is now offering law enforcement officials the ability to handle the destructive force that is super powers.

This young company has created a line of smart weapons designed to take the risks and danger out of law enforcement's everyday life. Offering the resources necessary for good intelligence **work**, police can now have a better understanding of what type of criminal they are up against. In addition officers now have the ability to incapacitate dangerous villains without direct confrontation. A better knowledge of individual superhumans and the ability to track these criminals certainly turns the tide and gives law enforcement an edge.

S.C.R.E.T. has recently purchased several Inversion class robots to aid them in ensuring public safety. While the Abductor and Siphoner were designed to operate independently, agents may be deployed in either severely hostile encounters or when villains drastically outnumber the robots. The agency finds the **ICR's** to be a practical tool, easily deployed from the back of utility vehicles. Another commonly used strategy is for the robots to lure criminals away from public property or civilians and ambush with greater numbers.

Hunter Robotics

A Super Agency - Total Available Points: 210

A. Outfits: #4 Specialty Clothing: 10 points

B. Equipment: #4 Electronic Supplies: 10 points

C. Weapons: #3 Armed Agents: 5 points

D. Bionics & Robotics: #6 Unlimited Robotics: 60 points

E. Vehicles: #5 Specialty Vehicles: 40 points

F. Communications: #4 Computerized: 15 points

G. Offices & Distribution: #2 Urban: 5 points

H. Military Power: #1 None: 0 points

I. Super Powered Operatives: #1 None: 0 points

J. Sponsorship: #3 Private Industry: 6 points

K. Budget: #2 Nickels & Dimes: 5 points

Robotics

L. Administrative Control: #3 Free Hand: 15 points
M. Internal Security: #3 Tight: 10 points
N. External Security: #1 None: 0 points
O. Research: #4 Excellent Connection: 20 points
P. Agency Credentials: #2 Unknown: 3 points
Q. Agency Salary: #4 Good: 20 points

The Hunter Robotics Company: 224 total points; including 14 points for modifications.

A Typical Hunter Robotics ICR Pilot

Alignment: Any, but generally good or selfish.

Hit Points: 35, **S.D.C.**: +68, **P.P.E.**: 29

Weight: Male: 170 lbs. (76.5 kg); Female: 130 lbs. (58.5 kg)

Height: Male: 6 feet (1.83 m); Female: 5 feet 6 inches (1.68 m)

Age: 25 - 30 years

Attributes (average): I.Q. 19, M.E. 12, M.A. 13, P.S. 34, P.P. 20, P.E. 22, P.B. 12, Spd. 39.

Disposition: Confident, bold, and almost obnoxious. The competitive spirit is highly encouraged with these robot jocks. Hunter Robotics even displays battle statistics of its own pilots to instigate rivalries.

Experience Level (average): Fourth

Combat Skills: Physical Training: *Defensive & Fast*

Attacks Per Melee (average): 7

Bonuses (average): +4 to initiative, +5 to strike, +8 to parry, +9 to dodge, +6 to roll w/ punch, +3 to disarm, +19 to damage, body **block/tackle 1D4**, **pin/incapacitate 18-20**, **crush/squeeze 1D4**, body flip/throw, backward sweep kick, back flip, automatic back flip, karate style punch 2D4, karate style kick 2D6, automatic kick 2D4, body hold, and arm hold.

Bonuses (robot): +2 to roll with impact, +2 to pull punch, +1 to strike with all built-in weapons, W.P. Pistol, W.P. Rifle, W.P. Energy Rifle.

Weapon Proficiencies: W.P. Pistol, W.P. Rifle, W.P. Energy Rifle, W.P. Paired Weapons (any).

Body Armor: None, unless requisitioned for special assignment. Relies on the armor of the Remote Operations Vehicle.

Super Power Category: Physical Training

Special Abilities: Power Punch, Power Kick, and Force of Will.

Educational Level: Special Training

Scholastic Bonus: +15%

Skills of Note: Pilot: Robot Vehicles 72%, Navigation 80%, Read Sensory Equipment 60%, Weapon Systems 70%, Pilot:



Helicopter 65%, Athletics, Body Building, Wrestling, and the Basic Combat Program from the Robot Programming Skills.

Secondary Skills: Computer Operation 55%, Computer Programming 45%, General Repair 50%, Radio: Basic 60%, T.V./Video 37%, Law (general) 40%.

Occupation: Professional pilot / law enforcement

Hunter Robotics Units

Abductor ICR-1

This headless monstrosity is Hunter Robotics' first in a line of smart weapons. The **ICR-1** was built to go toe to toe with super-powered individuals and keep ordinary humans away from any such conflicts. Controlling the unit from a Remote Operations Vehicle, the pilot remains a safe distance from any battles, allowing him to remain calm and easily escape if necessary.

While the robot definitely utilizes its weapons and strength, the ability to create confusion is the **Abductor's** main tool. The robot will initially attempt to capture an opponent, containing him in the chest, leaving only the head exposed through the neck portal. Once this is accomplished the robot will continue to engage any allies of this captive. This has proven to cause hesitation, since other opponents may be reluctant to attack and accidentally injure their captured comrade.

Model Type: Hunter Robotics ICR-1

Class: Inversion Class Remote Operated Robot

Crew: One prisoner. Operated by remote control.

A.R.: 10

S.D.C. by location:

Hands (2) — 75

Hand Blasters (2, located in palms) — 20

Arms (2) - 300

Chemical Spray Emitters (2, located inside forearms) — 50

Chest / Containment Unit — considered part of the main body.

Mini Camera — 50

Retractable Antenna — 10

Legs (2) — 300

Feet (2) — 200

*Concealed Hover Jets — 135

**Head — 0

***Main Body — 700

****Neck Portal — 100

*The hover jets are concealed in the feet. The jets are only exposed when in flight or if the feet are destroyed.

**The Abductor does not employ a head unit; however, when a prisoner is in containment a successful head strike does full damage to the captive's exposed head.

***Depleting the S.D.C. of the main body will shut the robot down completely, rendering it useless.

****Destroying the neck portal knocks out the sensor systems and renders the robot completely blind.

Speed

Running: 66 (45 mph/72 km)

Flying: Standard Hover Jet System. Spd 308 (210 mph/336km).

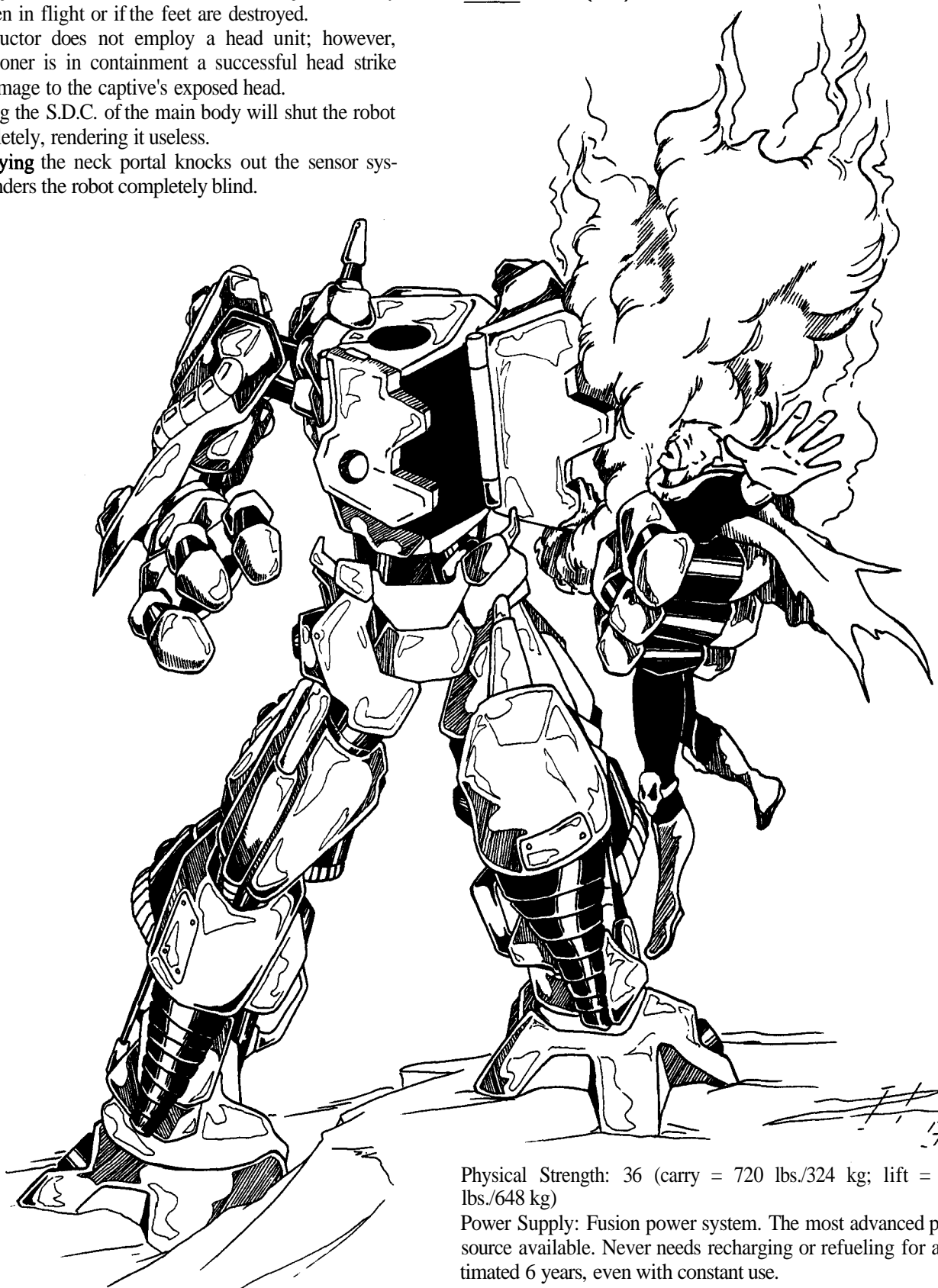
Statistical Data

Height: 18 feet (5.5 m)

Weight: 3000 lbs. (1350 kg)

Length: 6 feet (1.8 m)

Width: 10 feet (3 m)



Physical Strength: 36 (carry = 720 lbs./324 kg; lift = 1440 lbs./648 kg)

Power Supply: Fusion power system. The most advanced power source available. Never needs recharging or refueling for an estimated 6 years, even with constant use.

Cargo: None

Cost: \$25,000,000

Weapon Systems

1. Chemical Spray (2): Housed inside each arm is a strong tear gas formula. The unit's location, near the inside of the elbow, allows for a perfect angle of spray when a victim has been grabbed.

Range: 10 feet (3 m)

Damage: Impairment of vision, difficulty breathing, and skin irritation. Victims are -10 to strike, parry, and dodge.

Duration: 4D6 melees

Saving Throw: Non-Lethal Poison

Rate of Fire: Can release spray 3 times per melee round.

2. Hand Blasters (2): A high-powered ion cannon is located in each palm.

Range: 660 feet (201 m)

Damage: 6D6

Rate of Fire: Equal to the pilot's number of attacks.

Capacity: Effectively unlimited.

Bonus: +1 to strike.

3. Containment Unit: Based on designs of pilot-operated robots, the cockpit has been modified into a holding area. After the target is subdued, he is placed into the containment unit and sedated (using the Prisoner Survey Unit, see below). The head of the prisoner has been intentionally left exposed. This has proven to cause delayed reactions and confusion when engaging multiple opponents. It takes the ICR-1 two melee attacks to load a captive into the containment unit. A captive must be between five and nine feet (1.5-2.7 m) tall and weigh less than 2 tons to be restrained inside the robot.

4. Locking Joints (7): 1) A locking joint has been placed in the chest door of the containment unit. 2) The three digits on each hand of the robot can also be made immovable. Only the remote pilot or a strength of over 40 can open the joints.

5. Hand to Hand Combat: Instead of using weapons, the pilot may decide to fight with only the robot's physical abilities. The majority of bonuses are gained from the pilot's physical skills. Those are cumulative with what follows.

+2 to initiative

+1 to parry and dodge

+2 to roll

+2 to pull punch

+2 to strike with built-in weapons

+21 to damage

6. Audio Systems: All audio systems are directly linked to the Remote Operations Vehicle (R.O.V.E.R). Systems include *Advanced Audio Systems*, *Modulating Voice Synthesizer*, and *the Sound Analysis Computer*. Audio systems can be found on page 205 of **Heroes Unlimited™ Second Edition**.

7. Optic Systems: All optic systems are directly linked to the Remote Operations Vehicle (R.O.V.E.R). Systems include *Advanced Robotic Optic Systems*, *Thermo Imager*, and *External Video and Audio Surveillance Systems*. Optics systems can be found on page 205 of **Heroes Unlimited™ Second Edition**.

8. Sensor Systems: All sensor systems are directly linked to the Remote Operations Vehicle (R.O.V.E.R). Systems include *Bio Scan*, *Combat Computer*, and *Maxi-Radar*. These sensor systems can be found on page 206 of **Heroes Unlimited™ Second Edition**.

9. Unique Sensory Systems:

Prisoner Survey Unit The P.S.U. is simply a modified Medical Survey Unit. Instead of maintaining a pilot's environmental conditions, the P.S.U. keeps a prisoner sedated and immobile. Built into the containment unit, it monitors and adapts to individual immune systems. Once restrained inside of the Abductor, there is no physical strike, parry or dodge.

10. Acid-Based Self-Destruct System: The explosion will incinerate the robot to ashes and inflict **2D6x100** damage to a 40 (12.2m) foot area. This is not an automatic system, and can only be activated by the pilot.

11. Remote Operations Vehicle (R.O.V.E.R): Commonly disguised as a work truck, news vehicle or ambulance. The Remote Operations Vehicle acts as a mobile pilot's compartment. With one driver and one robot pilot, the vehicle can separate itself from combat with a range of 5 miles (8 km).

Base S.D.C.: 450

Vehicle Armor: A.R.: 14; S.D.C.: 350

Armored Tires (x4): A.R.: 10; S.D.C.: 20 (each)

(Tires require a called shot to hit)

Crew Compartment Armor: A.R.: 12; S.D.C.: 250

Speed Class: 8 (Maximum 120mph/192 km; Cruise 70mph/112 km)

Cost: \$44,500

Driver Controls:

Night Sight Camera/Monitor: A forward-mounted camera that sees into the darkness and relays an amplified image to a monitor in front of the operator. Range is 2000 feet, and the camera clearly shows ground-based buildings, vehicles, and creatures. Imaging is too slow to see aircraft. Any bright lights, including the vehicle's own head lights, blind the night sight camera.

Theft Alarm System: A tamper-proof burglar alarm. When someone attempts to open the vehicle without the alarm key, a piercing siren will sound out.

Radar (Basic) System: 25 mile (40 km) range.

Robot Pilot Controls:

Remote Operations Control: This system allows the pilot to control the robot from a distance that keeps him out of harm's way. Range: 5 miles (8 km). All optic, audio, and sensor systems are linked to the pilot's console, giving him full knowledge of the robot's surroundings and conditions. The pilot controls the robot with a control stick, monitors, switches, and pedals. Helicopter pilots are frequently chosen for training due to the similarity of the controls.

Telemental Helmet: A head-hugging network of electrodes and impulse receivers. This system allows the pilot's mental commands to be transferred into electronic commands for the robot.

Siphoner ICR-2

Except for its size, the Siphoner is identical in appearance to the Abductor. Faster both on the ground and in the air, the ICR-2 also makes up for its lack of strength with the **Neuro-reflexer**. This is what truly sets the two robots apart. Both have the ability to capture and contain prisoners, but the Siphoner can use that prisoner's super abilities. Any captive with Energy Expulsion powers can be "siphoned" and used against any remaining opponents.

Model Type: Hunter Robotics ICR-2

Class: Inversion Class Remote Operated Robot

Crew: 1 prisoner. Operated by remote control.

A.R.: 10

S.D.C. by Location:

Hands (2) - 50

*Hand Channels (2) - 30

Arms (2) — 200

Chemical Spray Emitters (2) — 50

Neck - 70

Chest / Containment Unit — considered part of the main body.

Mini Camera — 50

Retractable Antenna — 10

Legs (2) — 200

Feet (2) — 150

****Concealed Hover Jets — 135**

***Head - 0

****Main Body - 500

*****Neck Portal — 70

***The** hand channels are located in the palms of the Siphoner. Due to their size, a "called shot" at -3 to strike is required to hit them.

****The** hover jets are located inside the feet. The jets are only exposed when the Siphoner is in flight or the feet are destroyed.

*****The** Siphoner does not employ a head unit; however, when a prisoner is in containment, a successful head strike does full damage to the captive's exposed head.

****Depleting the S.D.C. of the main body will shut the robot down completely, rendering it useless.

*****Destroying the neck portal knocks out the sensor systems and renders the robot completely blind.

Speed

Running: 86 (58 mph/92.8 km)

Flying: Standard Hover Jet System. Spd 440 (300 mph/480 km).

Statistical Data

Height: 15 feet (4.6 m)

Weight: 3000 lbs. (1350 kg)

Length: 6 feet (1.8 m)

Width: 10 feet (3 m)

Physical Strength: 30 (carry = 6001bs./270 kg; lift = 12001bs./540 kg)

Power Supply: Fusion power system. The most advanced power source available. Never needs recharging or refueling for an estimated 6 years, even with constant use.

Cargo: None

Cost: \$35,000,000

Weapon Systems

1. Chemical Spray (2): Housed inside each arm is a strong tear gas formula. The unit's location near the inside of the elbow allows for a perfect angle of spray when a victim has been grabbed.

Range: 10 feet (3 m)

Damage: Impairment of vision, difficulty breathing, and skin irritation. Victims are -10 to strike, parry, and dodge.

Duration: 4D6 melees

Saving Throw: Non-Lethal Poison

Rate of Fire: Can release spray 3 times per melee round.

2. Finger Lasers (4): Located in two fingers on each hand. Use the robot volley rules when firing simultaneously.

Range: 500 feet (152 m)

Damage: Can be regulated to inflict 1D6, 2D6 or 3D6.

Energy Capacity: Effectively unlimited.

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

Bonus: +1 to strike.

3. Hand Channels: The hand channels simply act as a funneling system to direct the siphoned expulsions from the containment unit.

4. Containment Unit: Based on designs of pilot-operated robots, the cockpit has been modified into a holding area. After the target is subdued, he is placed into the containment unit and sedated (using the Prisoner Survey Unit). The head of the prisoner has been intentionally left exposed. This has proven to cause delayed reactions and confusion when engaging multiple opponents. It takes the ICR-2 one melee action to load a captive into the containment unit. A captive must be between five and seven feet (1.5-2.1 m) tall and weigh less than one ton in order to be restrained inside the robot.

5. Locking Joints (7): 1) A locking joint has been placed in the chest door of the containment unit. 2) The three digits on each hand of the robot can also be made immovable. Only the remote pilot or strength of 40 can open the joints.

6. Hand to Hand Combat: Instead of using weapons, the pilot may decide to rely only on the robot's physical abilities. The majority of bonuses are gained from the pilot's physical skills. Those bonuses are cumulative with what follows.

+2 to initiative

+1 to parry and dodge

+2 to roll

+2 to pull punch

+2 to strike with built-in weapons

+21 to damage

7. Audio Systems: All audio systems are directly linked to the Remote Operations Vehicle (R.O.V.E.R). Systems include *Advanced Audio Systems, Modulating Voice Synthesizer, and the Sound Analysis Computer.* Audio systems can be found on page 205 of **Heroes Unlimited™ Second Edition.**

8. Optic Systems: all optic systems are directly linked to the Remote Operations Vehicle (R.O.V.E.R). Systems include *Advanced Robotic Optic Systems, Thermo Imager, and External Video and Audio Surveillance Systems.* Optic systems can be found on page 205 of **Heroes Unlimited™ Second Edition.**

9. Sensor Systems: All sensor systems are directly linked to the Remote Operations Vehicle (R.O.V.E.R). Systems include *Bio Scan, Combat Computer, and Maxi-Radar.* These sensor systems can be found on page 206 of **Heroes Unlimited™ Second Edition.**

10. Unique Sensory Systems:

Prisoner Survey Unit the P.S.U. is simply a modified Medical Survey Unit. Instead of maintaining a pilot's environmental conditions, the P.S.U. keeps a prisoner sedated and immobile. Built into the containment unit, it monitors and adapts to individual immune systems. Once restrained inside of the Siphoner, there is no physical strike, parry, or dodge.

Neuro-reflexer This unique feature separates the ICR-1 and 2 models. The Siphoner ICR-2 robot has the ability to utilize the

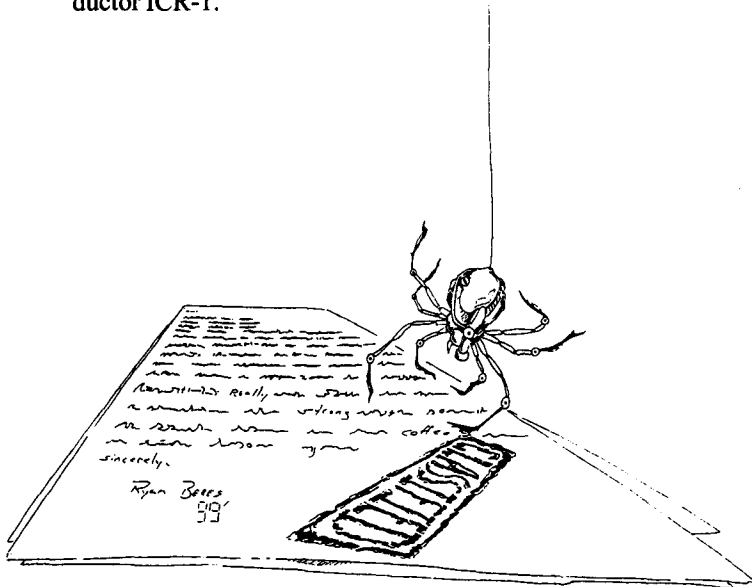
super powers of a captive. Combined with the Bio Scan, the Prisoner Survey Unit can send electronic impulses to a prisoner's brain. These impulses have an effect similar to a test of reflexes. The reaction is the possible activation of a superpower.

The super abilities that can be used are limited to Energy Expulsion-style powers; this includes some abilities available with Control Elemental Force, Alter Physical Structure, and other powers such as Vibration. For example, the Siphoner could use Fire Blast, a power associated with Control Elemental Force: Fire. However, the robot would not be Invulnerable to Fire or be able to Create Smoke. If an individual has more than one Expulsion ability then determine randomly which power is activated. After the specific power is determined, it can not be changed unless the captive either escapes or is let free and then recaptured. Also, if a character does not emit the expulsion from either head or hands, then the ability will not work.

NOTE: Captive players with the Major Ability **Mechano-Link** get a 60% chance to understand and operate this unknown machine. If successful, the pilot in the Remote Operations Vehicle loses all control over the Siphoner. In turn, the captured character now has a new suit of armor with control over all functioning abilities!

11. Acid-Based Self-Destruct System: The explosion will incinerate the robot to ashes and inflict **2D6x100** damage to a 40 (12.2m) foot area. This is not an automatic system, and can only be activated by the pilot.

12. Remote Operations Vehicle (R.O.V.E.R): Same as the Abductor ICR-1.



MSR-15 Spider

The MSR-15 Spider is Hunter Robotics' oldest Miniature Surveillance Robot still in use. Its field tests and mission experiences shaped the concepts for all MSR class robots that followed.

Once deployed, the Spider will find a corner or similar hiding spot (generally on the ceiling) where a clear recording of the desired area can be made. The Spider has the ability to remain in a single place and record for months at a time. This is because the robot does not hold the recorded material but directly transmits it to a receiver. While miniature robots are definitely high maintenance, the MSR-15 robots have remained in the field for as long as six months.

Model Type: MSR-15

Class: Miniature Surveillance Robot

Crew: None; artificial intelligence.

S.D.C.: 25

Speed

Running: 5.5 (3.75 mph/6 km)

Leaping: Due to the strong springs in the legs, the **MSR-15** can leap 2 feet (.6 m) high and 3 feet (.9 m) lengthwise.

Flying: Not Possible.

Statistical Data

Height: 1 inch (2.5 cm)

Weight: 0.1 ounces (3 grams)

Width: 1 inch (2.5 cm)

Length: 1.5 inches (3.8 cm)

Physical Strength: The robot has no actual physical strength besides what it needs to move itself.

Cargo: None

Power System: Ultra Micro Fusion Power System

Cost: \$10,000,000

Weapon Systems

1. Poisonous Bite: If necessary, the MSR-15 can deliver a harmful bite that injects a small amount of poison into its victim.

Range: Touch

Damage: The actual bite inflicts no damage, but the poison causes mild skin irritation. Victims are -3 to strike, parry and dodge for 2D6 minutes. While the robot can bite many times, it only carries enough poison for one injection.

Rate of Fire: number of bites is equal to number of attacks per melee.

2. Hand to Hand Combat: None

Attacks per melee: 2

+2 to initiative

+1 to strike

+1 to parry and dodge

3. Sensors of Note:

Audio: Wide Band Radio Receiver and Transmitter.

Optics: External Video and Audio Surveillance System, Video Receiver and Transmitter, Night Sight.

Sensors: Motion Detector, Combat Computer.

Note: Descriptions of audio, optic, and sensor systems are found on pages 205 and 206 of **Heroes Unlimited™ Second Edition**.

MSR-23 Hornet

The Hornet is used to implant tracking devices into superhuman criminal suspects. The tracking device is not only used to keep a tab on the individual but to provide evidence of criminal activity.

Model Type: MSR-23

Class: Miniature Surveillance Robot

Crew: None; artificial intelligence.

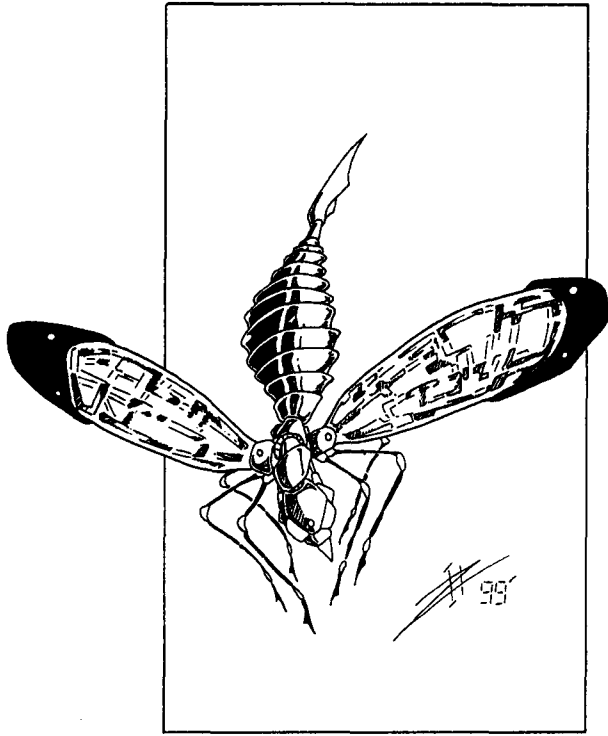
S.D.C.: 20

Speed

Running: 2.75 (1.875 mph/3 km)

Leaping: Not Possible.

Flying: 88 (60mph/96 m)



Statistical Data

Height: 0.5 inches (1.27 cm)
Weight: 0.1 ounces (3 grams)
Width: Body 0.25 inches (.635 cm), wingspan 1.5 inches (3.81 cm)
Length: 1.5 inches (3.81 cm)
Physical Strength: The robot has no actual physical strength besides what it needs to move itself.
Cargo: None
Power System: Ultra Micro Fusion Power System
Cost: \$15,000,000

Weapon Systems

- 1. Chip Injection Stinger:** The Hornet can inject a tracer chip directly into a victim's skin. The actual chip is about a tenth of the size of a regular tracer bug. Once injected, the bug may cause itching for 1D4 days with a 30% chance of being scratched out. If the tracer chip holds, it is almost completely **undetected**. The chip is tracked by satellite and can be located anywhere on the planet's surface. The Hornet carries only one chip at a time.
- 2. Hand to Hand Combat:** None
 Attacks per melee: 2
 +2 to initiative
 +1 to strike
 +1 to parry and dodge
- 3. Sensors of Note:**
Audio: None
Optics: External Video and Audio Surveillance System, Night Sight
Sensors: Combat Computer

Note: Descriptions of audio, optic, and sensor systems are found on pages 205 and 206 of **Heroes Unlimited™ Second Edition**.

MSR-25 Mosquito

Despite the fact that the Mosquito is the smallest Micro Surveillance Robot, it is primarily used as an offensive weapon. After surveillance and confirmation of a super-powered outlaw are made; the MSR-25 can be used to sedate and slow a criminal before law enforcement officials make an arrest.

Model Type: MSR-25
Class: Miniature Surveillance Robot
Crew: None; artificial intelligence.
S.D.C.: 15

Speed
Running: 2.75 (1.875 mph/3 km)
Leaping: Not Possible.
Flying: 66 (45 mph/72km)

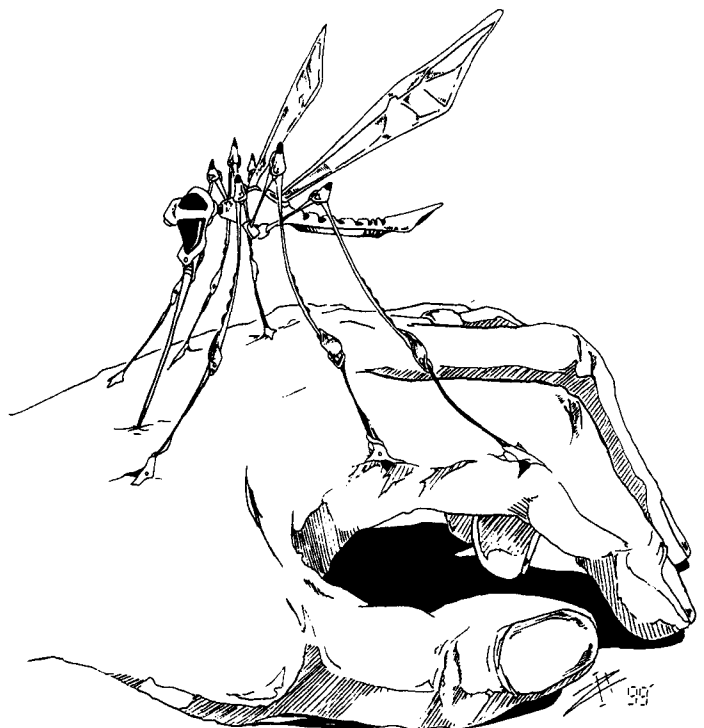
Statistical Data
Height: 0.25 inches (.635 cm)
Weight: 0.07 ounces (2 grams)
Width: 0.25 inches (.635 cm)
Length: 0.25 inches (.635 cm)

Physical Strength: The robot has no actual physical strength besides what it needs to move itself.

Cargo: None
Power System: Ultra Micro Fusion Power System
Cost: \$12,000,000

Weapon Systems

- 1. Poisonous Sting:** The Mosquito can deliver up to three poisonous stings.
Range: Touch
Damage: A mild acid causes 1D4 points of damage and extreme skin irritation. Victims are -6 to strike, parry and dodge for 1D6 minutes.
Duration: 2D6 melees
Rate of Fire: can only deliver an injection once a round.
- 2. Hand to Hand Combat:** None
 Attacks per melee: 3
 +2 to initiative



+2 to strike

+1 to parry and dodge

3. Sensors of Note:

Audio: None

Optics: External Video and Audio Surveillance System, Night Sight, Targeting Sight.

Sensors: Combat Computer

Note: Descriptions of audio, optic, and sensor systems are found on pages 205 and 206 of **Heroes Unlimited™ Second Edition**.

New Mechanical Skill

Micro Robotics: This skill is the understanding, creation, and maintenance of miniature robots. Regardless of the type, the engineer has a knowledge and skill in using tweezers, microscopes, and other, more sophisticated tools needed to work on micro-robots. **Base Skill:** 15% +5 per level of experience. **Requires:** Robot Mechanics. **Note:** When building a micro robot the price is doubled.

Hook, Line and Sinkers

Throw 'em a Bone

Hook: The party belongs to an organized resistance cell within a major city.

Line: Several weeks ago a super villain named Brimstone killed one and seriously injured another of the organization's members. The characters have been called upon to investigate a possible lead to the whereabouts of Brimstone. If confirmation is made the characters are to report in and reinforcements will be sent (ETA 20 minutes).

Sinker: The anonymous tip was actually given by law enforcement officials to test super-powered beings against a newly requisitioned **ICR-1**. The Abductor will attempt to capture one individual and escape. If overwhelmed, the robot will try to separate the heroes by flying away and re-engaging those who can follow. If the Abductor takes extensive damage it will try to escape.

Player characters left behind or those who return to the scene may be able to detect hidden observers - **1D4+1** Surveillance Agents. Thorough surveillance of the area will continue for several hours. This is not only to monitor the responses of any allies remaining, but also to determine the numbers and strength of this subversive organization. If the characters do not find any observers then they will likely be followed to their place of residence and placed under surveillance there.

My Brother's Keeper

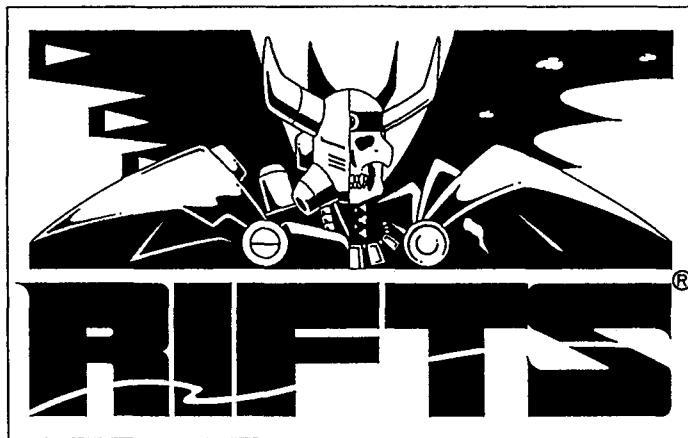
This encounter is good for any game where a regular player is absent or his character has been captured. The basis is that a member of the party's group has been captured and the characters must attempt a rescue.

Hook: Yesterday, a member/friend of the group's organization was arrested by the authorities and is being held for questioning.

Line: Hacking into the police computer will show that he is scheduled for transport to a Super-security prison in the next

state. The hacked file will provide information of times and routes; however, the strength of the escort is not detailed.

Sinker: The authorities fully anticipate some type of rescue mission. The escort will consist of a prisoner transport vehicle, a utility deployment vehicle with an **ICR-2**, and an armored S.C.R.E.T. "Draagoon". While the specific number of police present should be determined by the number and strength of the players, it should be at least a ratio of 2 to 1. If the party begins to wipe out the convoy with ease, then a S.C.R.E.T. Modified **AH-1G** Cobra Helicopter is sent in as reinforcement. This is not much more than a single encounter, but vehicle-to-vehicle or even vehicle-to-superhero combat should provide for a fast-paced game session.



Optional Source Material for Rifts®

By Christopher Jones

In the lands of northern China, there lives a race every bit as fierce as the Mongol hordes which once ravaged the eastern world. They call themselves the **Gragundi**, but, to outsiders, they are more commonly known as the Khans.

The Gragundi are a race of large, bipedal felines resembling tigers. Whether they are the descendants of mutants or are aliens from another dimension is unknown. Whatever the case, they have made themselves at home in the steppes of Mongolia and northern China.

Nomadic herdsmen and hunters, they wander from watering hole to watering hole, grazing their sheep, goats, oxen, **Equadons**, and **Gridders**. They are also a warrior people, and are not above raiding rival tribes.

The Gragundi are divided into a number of nomadic tribes. Each of these is ruled by a chieftain known as the Khan (which gives rise to their more common name). The position of Khan is hereditary, but the tribes are rife with rivals and only a strong leader can hold on to the title. There are no formal or ritualistic means to challenge a ruler for control of the tribe. A usurper must take the position by force of arms or political maneuvering. Strong Khans have little to fear, but those who are weak are likely to find their tribe turned against them and supporting another.

The tribes are further divided into a number of clans. These clans are mainly made up of blood relatives. Their structure is somewhat fluid, however, and membership is open to those who share the political views of the clan. The clans are always looking to increase their membership, and thus their strength, so true

converts are always welcome. The leader of a clan is a Chief. Like the Khan, the chieftainship is hereditary, but succession is by no means assured. The leaders of the most powerful families in the clan form a council. Usually this council acts to advise the Chief. However, if too many turn against him, he may well lose control of the clan, as their families represent large parts of the clan and their support is vital to a successful Chief.

Occasionally there arises a warrior (sometimes a Khan, but not always), who is so strong and charismatic that Gragundi from all over Mongolia flock to his banner. Entire clans and tribes join this leader and a Great Horde is born. The leader takes the title of Great Khan and is acknowledged as the overlord of the Gragundi. Great Khans are well respected, as they draw their hordes from willing followers won over by their own abilities. A Great Horde seldom lasts beyond the rule of its Khan, however. The Gragundi are simply too independent to remain together for a less capable leader.

There have been three Great Hordes in memory. The first, the Lightning Horde of **Pashira Khan**, was raised when there were still relatively few Gragundi. Its activities largely included a series of raids into southern Russia and northern China. The Lightning Horde lasted only five years before it broke up, as warriors grew tired of wandering far in search of what little booty the still devastated area offered.

The next, the Blood Horde of **Chikuli Khan**, was raised some fifty years ago when the Gragundi were well **established**, and more formidable. Chikuli conquered all of Mongolia and much of south-central Russia before turning his attentions south toward China. He first encountered the fledgling army of the Dragon Emperor (the Chinese). These proved to be little challenge, and could not stand before the horde. As winter approached, Chikuli chose to bypass the capital of the Dragon Emperor. He did not want to get bogged down in a siege, so he turned his horde eastward. This proved his undoing, as the demon king Sung-ti wang had claimed those lands. Against the demons of Sung-ti Wang, the horde was helpless. After a terrible slaughter, the Blood Horde disintegrated and fled homeward.

The last is the Iron Horde of **Ushakti Khan**. This is a recent horde and was raised just three years ago. Ushakti chose to name his horde such because of the high-tech weapons and armor the Gragundi now possess. The Iron Horde was raised primarily as a defensive maneuver. Ushakti and the Khans realized that the demon kings were growing more powerful, and the Dragon Emperor was no match for them alone. Ushakti is currently working with the Dragon Emperor's forces as an independent ally.



Gragundi Nomad R.C.C.

The vast majority of Gragundi should be considered Nomads. These are the hearty tribesmen who wander the Mongolian steppes. They are formidable hunters and fighters. Though not as dangerous as the warriors, they are more versatile, and possess a wider range of skills.

Alignment: Any, but most are Unprincipled or Anarchist.
Attributes: I.Q. 3D6, M.E. 3D6, M.A. 3D6, P.S. 4D6, P.P. 3D6, P.E. 3D6+2, P.B. 3D6, Spd. 3D6
Hit Points: P.E. +1D6 per level.
S.D.C.: 2D4x10
Horror Factor: None
P.P.E.: 2D6
Height: 7 to 8 feet (2.1 to 2.4 m)

The Khans of Mongolia

Weight: 280 to 360 lbs (126 to 162 kg)

Average Life Span: 70 years

Habitat: The **Gragundi** live in the steppes of Mongolia, but are comfortable in most climates.

Natural Abilities: Claws inflict 2D6 S.D.C, bite does 2D4 S.D.C.

Psionics: None

Magic: None

Combat: Hand to Hand: Expert

R.C.C. Bonuses: None

R.C.C. Skills:

Cook (+5%)

Horsemanship (+15%)

Hunting

Land Navigation (+20%)

Lore: Demon and Monster (+10%)

Running

Skin and Prepare Animal Hides (+10%)

Track Animals (+15%)

Wilderness Survival (+20%)

Wrestling

W.P. Ancient (one of choice)

W.P. Sword

Hand to Hand: Expert

Hand to Hand: Expert can be changed to Martial Arts at the cost of one R.C.C. Related Skill, or Assassin at the cost of two.

R.C.C. Related Skills: At first level the character can select eight other skills, plus two additional skills at levels four, eight, and twelve. All new skills begin at level one proficiency.

Communications: Radio: Basic only.

Domestic: Any (+5%)

Electrical: None

Espionage: Any (+10%)

Mechanical: Automotive only.

Medical: First Aid and Holistic Medicine only (+10%).

Military: None

Physical: Any except Gymnastics and S.C.U.B.A. (+10% where applicable).

Pilot: Automobile or Truck only.

Pilot Related: Any

Rogue: Any except Computer Hacking.

Science: Any except Chemistry.

Technical: Any except Photography and the Computer skills.

W.P.: Any

Wilderness: Any (+10%)

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

Standard Equipment: One suit of Nomad body armor, one rifle with two projectile cartridges and one E-clip, a bow and 20 Electro-Arrows, one Electro-Blade, two Shikuun Blades, and three extra E-clips. Two knives, two sets of clothes, flint and tinder, bedroll, sack, and 50 feet (15 m) of rope. Transportation consists of an Equadon with saddle, saddlebags, harness, bridle, etc.

Money: 3D6x1000 credits in gold and other valuables.

Cybernetics: None, and will avoid them.

Experience Table: Wilderness Scout

Gragundi Warrior R.C.C.

Warriors are those Gragundi who concentrate on their martial skills. They spend nearly all of their time raiding and hunting, leaving the normal day-to-day activities to others. Although they might seem to be slackers during peacetime, they are the elite forces during war, and are always at the forefront of any battle.

Alignment: Any, but most are unprincipled or anarchist.

Attributes: I.Q. 3D6, M.E. 3D6, M.A. 3D6, P.S. 4D6+4, P.P. 3D6, P.E. 4D6, P.B. 3D6, Spd. 3D6

Hit Points: P.E. +1D6 per level.

S.D.C.: 3D4x10

Horror Factor: None

P.P.E.: 2D6

Height: 7 to 8 feet (2.1 to 2.4 m)

Weight: 280 to 360 lbs (126 to 162 kg)

Average Life Span: 70 years

Habitat: The Gragundi live in the steppes of Mongolia, but are comfortable in most climates.

Natural Abilities: Claws inflict 2D6 S.D.C, bite does 2D4 S.D.C.

Psionics: None

Magic: None

Combat: Hand to Hand: Expert

R.C.C. Bonuses: +1 to Initiative and Strike, but only in melee combat.

R.C.C. Skills:

Detect Ambush (+10%)

Horsemanship (+20%)

Intelligence (+10%)

Land Navigation (+10%)

Land Navigation (+15%)

Prowl (+10%)

Running

Wilderness Survival (+15%)

Wrestling

W.P. Archery and Targeting

W.P. Archery: Mounted

W.P. Sword

Hand to Hand: Expert

Hand to Hand: Expert can be changed to Martial Arts at the cost of one R.C.C. Related Skill, or Assassin at the cost of two.

R.C.C. Related Skills: At first level the character can select six other skills, plus two additional skills at levels four, eight, and twelve. All new skills begin at level one proficiency.

Communications: Radio: Basic only.

Domestic: Any

Electrical: None

Espionage: Any except Disguise and Forgery.

Mechanical: None

Medical: First Aid only (+10%).

Military: None



Physical: Any except S.C.U.B.A.
 Pilot: Automobile only.
 Pilot Related: Navigation only (+10%).
 Rogue: Any except Computer Hacking.
 Science: Any (+10%)
 Technical: Any except Photography and the Computer skills.
 W.P.: Any
 Wilderness: Any (+10%)

Secondary Skills: The character also gets to select six secondary skills from the previous list. These are additional areas of knowledge that do not get the advantage of the bonus listed in parenthesis. All secondary skills start at the base skill level. Also, skills are limited (any, **only**, none) as previously indicated on the list.

Standard Equipment: One suit of body armor (choice of Nomad or Warrior), one rifle with four projectile cartridges and two E-clips, one pistol with six projectile cartridges and two E-clips, one Electro-Blade, one Electro-Knife, two Shikuun Blades, and three extra E-clips. Two sets of clothes, flint and tinder, bedroll. Transportation consists of an Equadon with saddle, saddlebags, harness, bridle, etc.

Money: 3D6x1000 credits in gold and other valuables.

Cybernetics: None, and will avoid them.

Experience Table: Coalition Grunt

Gragundi Shaman R.C.C.

As the wisemen and spiritual leaders of the Gragundi, the Shamans are well respected for their wisdom and dedication to the clans. They are healers and mentors, using their skills and their spirits to the benefit of their people.

Gragundi Shamans are spirit **summoners**. Their rituals involve summoning animal spirits who will perform services, including combat, for them. These spirits are happy to oblige, as they enjoy the gift of flesh, even if it is fleeting. The Shamans respect the spirits they summon, and would not think to abuse their good will.

Alignment: Any, but most are unprincipled or anarchist.

Attributes: I.Q. 3D6, M.E. 3D6, M.A. 3D6, P.S. 4D6, P.P. 3D6, P.E. 3D6+2, P.B. 3D6, Spd. 3D6

Hit Points: P.E. +1D6 per level.

S.D.C.: 1D4x10

Horror Factor: None

P.P.E.: Begins with 1D6x10 plus P.E. attribute number. Gains +2D6 P.P.E. per level. The Shaman may draw P.P.E. from ley lines and nexus points, but is unable to draw it from living beings.

Height: 7 to 8 feet (2.1 to 2.4 m)

Weight: 280 to 360 lbs (126 to 162 kg)

Average Life Span: 70 years

Habitat: The Gragundi live in the steppes of Mongolia, but are comfortable in most climates.

Natural Abilities: Claws inflict 2D4 S.D.C, bite does 1D6 S.D.C.

Psionics: None

Magic: None

Combat: Hand to Hand: Basic

R.C.C. Bonuses: None

R.C.C. Skills:

First Aid (+10%)

Holistic Medicine (+20%)

Horsemanship (+10%)

Land Navigation (+15%)

Lore: Demons and Monsters (+20%)

Mathematics: Basic (+10%)



Palming (+10%)
 Sing (+10%)
 Wilderness Survival (+20%)
 Hand to Hand: Basic

Hand to Hand: Basic can be changed to Expert at the cost of two R.C.C. Related Skills.

R.C.C. Related Skills: At first level the character can select eight other skills, plus two additional skills at levels four, eight, and twelve. All new skills begin at level one proficiency.

Communications: Radio: Basic only.
 Domestic: Any
 Electrical: None
 Espionage: Any except Disguise and Forgery.
 Mechanical: None
 Medical: First Aid only (+10%).
 Military: None
 Physical: Any except S.C.U.B.A.
 Pilot: Automobile only.
 Pilot Related: Navigation (+10%)
 Rogue: Any except Computer Hacking.
 Science: Any (+10%)
 Technical: Any except Photography and the Computer skills.
 W.P.: Any
 Wilderness: Any (+10%)

Secondary Skills: The character also gets to select six secondary skills from the previous list. These are additional areas of knowledge that do not get the advantage of the bonus listed in parenthesis. All secondary skills start at the base skill level. Also, skills are limited (any, only, none) as previously indicated on the list.

Standard Equipment: One suit of Nomad armor, one Electro-Knife, one **Gragundi** pistol with three projectile cartridges and one **E-clip**, one walking stick (a **quarterstaff**), first aid kit, utility knife, two sets of clothing, flint and tinder, bedroll, sack.

Money: 3D6x1000 credits in gold and other valuables.

Cybernetics: None, and will avoid them.

Experience Table: Shifter

Summonings

Gragundi Shamans do not have spells, as such. Instead, they learn special rituals which they use to summon their animal spirits. These **summonings** are learned from more skilled Shamans, and there is a different ritual for each animal spirit. Each ritual takes about five minutes, regardless of the spirit summoned.

Each Shaman begins with the knowledge to summon two of the spirits listed below. At each level, he/she may learn another ritual. This ritual must be taught by another Shaman who already knows it. Because of the study and practice needed, only one ritual may be learned per level. Some rituals will only be taught to Shamans of a specific level, or higher.

In general, these animal spirits are only too happy to aid the Shaman in whatever ways necessary. As they see it, becoming flesh, even for a short period, is well worth the price. Most of these spirits are marginally more intelligent than their natural counterparts, and will obey the Shaman to the best of their ability. Because it is the power of the Shaman which gives the spirit their material form, their power is somewhat dependent upon his skill. Animal spirits appear as normal animals (unless otherwise stated). To the psychically sensitive, they have a slight blue glow about them.

The spirits which the Shamans have learned to summon are divided into three basic categories: Spies and Thieves, Warriors, and Workers. A selection of these spirits are detailed below. Other types of spirits may exist, but these are the most common.

Note: To make full use of these animal spirits, **Monsters & Animals™, 2nd Edition** is needed.

Duration: This is the time a spirit may retain its physical form. A shaman may extend this by expending the necessary P.P.E. again.

P.P.E.: The P.P.E. required to summon the spirit and give it physical form.

Minimum Level: The minimum level the shaman must possess before he/she may learn to summon this spirit.

Spies/Thieves

Spies and Thieves are a class of spirit which are used primarily for missions of stealth. They tend to be smaller animals which can sneak into areas unseen. They are also common animals, so they are rarely discovered to be out of the ordinary. Typical missions for these spirits include eavesdropping on enemy conversations and stealing small objects.

Shamans have a special rapport with these spirits. If they concentrate, they can see and hear what the spirit does. This requires total concentration, and often involves entering a meditative state. There are dangers as well. While using the senses of the spirit, the Shaman is vulnerable to any attacks directed at these senses (blindness, deafness, etc.). In addition, if the spirit is destroyed while the Shaman is using its senses, he suffers a psychic backlash which inflicts 4D6 points of damage.

Bat Spirit

Duration: Thirty minutes per level.

P.P.E.: Ten **Minimum Level:** Second



The Bat Spirit is the night eyes of the **Gragundi**. They are used for aerial reconnaissance in the dark, and they are well-suited to the task. They are most useful in performing close work such as detecting enemy camps and individuals. They are also useful in spying on meetings and such, as they can sneak into windows or chimneys and hide in the rafters.

The Bat is not a combatant, and will avoid conflict. They have fighting skills equivalent to a natural bat, and Shamans occasionally use them to control flies and mosquitoes.

The Bat Spirit has the same statistics as a normal dog bat (**Monsters & Animals™, 2nd Ed.** page 233), with the following adjustments: +1 S.D.C. per level of the Shaman, +2D6 to flying Speed, +1 to all saving throws, Prowl 50%.

Mouse Spirit

Duration: Thirty minutes per level.

P.P.E.: Eight

Minimum Level: First

The Mouse makes use of its small size to sneak into nearly any situation. They are one of the more popular choices for eavesdropping, and are rarely discovered. Their primary drawback is their weakness and vulnerability to natural predators.

Shamans also use the Mouse as helpers, finding them useful for retrieving small objects, cleaning up small spills, and any minor chores for which the Ant is too small.

The Mouse Spirit possesses the same statistics as its natural counterpart (field mouse, **Monsters & Animals™, 2nd Ed.**

page 230), with the following exceptions: +1 S.D.C. for every two levels of the Shaman, +2 to all saving throws, +5% to all skills.

Rat Spirit

Duration: Twenty minutes per level.

P.P.E.: Ten

Minimum Level: First

The Rat Spirit is much like the Mouse Spirit, but is quite a bit larger. The Rat is about 10 inches (.25 m) long and has large teeth. It is used for the same missions as the Mouse, but is also rugged enough to prove annoying to large animals. Its large teeth allow it to gnaw its way through wood and similar materials.

Rat Spirits differ from their natural counterparts (black rat, **Monsters & Animals™, 2nd Ed.** page 231) in the following ways: +2 S.D.C. per level of the Shaman, +1 to all saving throws, +5% to all skills.

Snake Spirit

Duration: Twenty minutes per level.

P.P.E.: Eleven

Minimum Level: Second

Like the Bat, the Snake is useful as a spy, able to infiltrate close to the enemy. Although not a warrior, it is also adept at stalking and killing small vermin, including some of the smaller spirits. This makes it a useful guardian.

The Snake Spirit differs from a common snake in the following ways: +2 S.D.C. per level of the Shaman, +2 to all saving throws, +2 to damage, +10% to all skills. (Use the statistics for a diamondback rattlesnake, **Monsters & Animals™, 2nd Ed.** page 237, but the spirit has no rattle, and its poison only does 1D4 damage instead of 1D6+1).

Weasel Spirit

Duration: Thirty minutes per level.

P.P.E.: Twelve

Minimum Level: Second

The Weasel Spirit is the most specialized of this category of spirit. It is primarily a thief, specializing in the pilfering small objects. Their lithe, agile bodies make this a perfect task for them. They are somewhat excitable, which makes them poor spies.

Weasels are fierce beyond their size, and rarely back down. Snake, Bat, Fox, Rat, Mouse, and Ant Spirits will always give Weasel Spirits the right of way unless under specific orders from their master.

Weasel Spirits resemble normal weasels (**Monsters & Animals™, 2nd Ed.** page 224), with the following bonuses: +2 S.D.C. per level of the Shaman, +2 to all saving throws, +5% to all skills, Pick Pockets 50%.

Warriors

Warrior Spirits are the fighters and defenders of the **Gragundi** tribes. They are the strong arm of the **Shamans**, and the symbol of their power. The Shamans call them forth when the tribes are threatened.

Warrior Spirits are Mega-Damage creatures with a base M.D.C. equal to the combined S.D.C. and Hit Points of their

mortal counterparts. Their natural weapons (claws, teeth, etc.) inflict Mega-Damage equal to their normal damage. All Warrior Spirits are immune to Horror Factor.

Bear Spirit

Duration: Thirty minutes, plus five minutes per level.

P.P.E.: Fifty

Minimum Level: Fifth

Second in power only to the Tiger, the Bear is one of the most fearsome of the Warrior Spirits. These spirits are a study in contradictions. In combat, they are possessed of a berserk fury and are nearly unstoppable. Otherwise, they are gentle and playful.

Bear Spirits resemble black bears (**Monsters & Animals™, 2nd Ed.** pages 213-214), with the following bonuses: +4 M.D.C. per level of the Shaman, +2 attacks per melee, +3 M.D. damage, +2 to strike, +1 to parry, +2 to all saving throws, +10% to track by smell.



Eagle Spirit

Duration: Ten minutes per level.

P.P.E.: Thirty-Five

Minimum Level: Fourth

The Eagle is the Shaman's warrior of the air. They are majestic creatures who can dominate the skies above Mongolia. They are used both as scouts, and as a harassing force. Often, Eagles will accompany hunting parties, helping them to spot, and take down, their prey.

The Eagle Spirit is twice the size of a natural bird (use Eagle: Booted or Bald, **Monsters & Animals™, 2nd Ed.** page 182) with the following additional bonuses: +2 M.D.C. per level of the Shaman, +1 attack per melee, +2 M.D. damage, +10 Spd., +2 initiative, +1 to strike, +1 to dodge.

Leopard Spirit

Duration: Twenty minutes, plus ten minutes per level.

P.P.E.: Thirty-Five

Minimum Level: Third

The Leopard Spirit is most effective as a solitary hunter. They are often used as a kind of assassin, able to sneak up on an enemy and dispatch him quickly. They are an excellent combination of stealth and strength.

The Leopard differs from its natural version (**Monsters & Animals™, 2nd Ed.** page 217) in the following ways: +3 M.D.C. per level of the Shaman, +3 initiative, +1 to strike, +1 to dodge, +1 M.D. damage, +20% to track by smell or sight, +1 attack per melee.

Lynx Spirit

Duration: Twenty minutes, plus five minutes per level.

P.P.E.: Twenty-Five

Minimum Level: Second

The Lynx is the most commonly summoned of the Warrior Spirits. While it lacks the sheer power of the Tiger, or the stealth of the Leopard, it is nonetheless a fearsome combatant.

The Lynx Spirit gains the following bonuses: +2 M.D.C. per level of the Shaman, +2 initiative, +2 to dodge, +2 M.D. damage, and double the normal leaping ability (see **Monsters & Animals™, 2nd Ed.** page 218).

Tiger Spirit

Duration: Ten minutes, plus five minutes per level.

P.P.E.: Sixty

Minimum Level: Sixth

The tiger is the most powerful of the Warrior Spirits, and, understandably, the most popular among the Khans. Tiger Spirits are usually summoned only in times of battle, or great need. The **Gragundi** respect these spirits, and would not think to summon them for trivial matters.

Tiger Spirits resemble their natural counterparts (**Monsters & Animals™, 2nd Ed.**, page 219), but are 50% larger, and gain the following bonuses: +6 M.D.C. per level of the Shaman, double leaping distance, +2 initiative, +2 to strike, +3 to all saving throws, +1 attack per melee, +4 M.D. damage.

Wolf Spirit

Duration: Ten minutes per level, plus five minutes per wolf in the pack.

P.P.E.: Twenty-Five

Minimum Level: Fourth

Wolf Spirits are a unique form of Warrior Spirit. Like their natural brethren, these spirits are more effective when used in groups, or packs. However, in this case, the spirits are actually more powerful individually if they are in groups.

A solitary Wolf Spirit gains the following bonuses: +1 M.D.C. per level of the Shaman, +1 M.D. damage, +1 to all saving throws, and +1 to dodge. (Use the gray wolf, **Monsters & Animals™, 2nd Ed.** page 211, as the base).

In groups of two to eight, each Wolf gains (instead of those listed above): +3 M.D.C. per level of the Shaman, +2 M.D. damage, +2 to all saving throws, +1 to initiative, +1 to dodge, +5 to Speed, and +1 attack.

In groups of nine or more, the bonuses are: +5 M.D.C. per level of the Shaman, +3 M.D. damage, +3 to all saving throws, +2 to initiative, +1 to strike, +1 to dodge, +10 to Speed, and +2 attacks.

Wolves summoned by different Shamans do not gain these bonuses (they belong to different packs). Only those summoned by the same Shaman enjoy this power boost.

Wolf Spirits are the most intelligent of the spirits, and one of the most loyal.

Workers

Worker Spirits are those who perform various useful tasks for a Shaman or his people. Some are small, and are used simply to fetch items, or get into places too small for the Shaman. Others are beasts of burden who aid the tribe when in need of a strong back.



Ant Spirit

Duration: Five minutes per level.

P.P.E.: Five

Minimum Level: First

The smallest of the spirits, the Ant is summoned only for the smallest of tasks. Typical jobs include anything which is too small for the Shaman to attend to himself.

Ant Spirits are twice the size of normal Ants (fire ant, **Monsters & Animals™, 2nd Ed.** page 196), gain +1 S.D.C. for every two levels of the Shaman, +1 to all saving throws, and +10% to Prowl.

Badger Spirit

Duration: Fifteen minutes per level.

P.P.E.: Sixteen

Minimum Level: Second

Badger Spirits are valued primarily for their formidable digging skills. If a Shaman needs a ditch dug, he is likely to simply summon a couple of Badgers and let them go to it. In addition, Badgers are skilled at catching rodents and other small creatures which hide underground. This makes them useful as pest control as well as guards against spirit spies.

Badger Spirits are about 50% larger than normal badgers (**Monsters & Animals™, 2nd Ed.** page 220). They receive: +3 S.D.C. per level of the Shaman, +2 damage, +1 to all saving throws, +5% to all skills, and dig at twice the normal rate.

Fox Spirit

Duration: Twenty minutes, plus ten minutes per level.

P.P.E.: Fifteen

Minimum Level: First

Fox Spirits are used primarily for hunting and pest control. Shamans frequently send them to hunt small animals, which they bring back for the Shaman to eat. They are also used to hunt rats, mice, and other vermin which might infest the Yurts or tents.

Fox Spirits (**Monsters & Animals™, 2nd Ed.** page 210) receive +2 S.D.C. per level of the Shaman, +1 initiative, +4 to strike, +5 to dodge, +2 to all saving throws, and +10% to all skills.

Horse Spirit

Duration: Twenty minutes per level.

P.P.E.: Twenty

Minimum Level: Third

Although the Horse Spirit is generally too small for the **Gragundi** to ride comfortably for any sustained length of time, they are very useful in emergency situations. They are commonly used as beasts of burden, or as emergency mounts.

Horse Spirits resemble natural work horses (**Monsters & Animals™, 2nd Ed.** page 206), with the following bonuses: +1D6 S.D.C. per level of the Shaman, +2 damage, +2 to dodge, +2 to all saving throws.

Ox Spirit

Duration: Twenty minutes per level.

P.P.E.: Twenty-Five

Minimum Level: Fourth

Ox Spirits are typically used as beasts of burden, especially on long treks across the steppes. Sometimes, significant numbers of these spirits will be used in caravans, and simply returned to their natural state once the trip is completed. They are also the beast of choice when an emergency calls for steady strength (righting an overturned **Yurt**, for instance).

Ox Spirits are hardier than their natural brethren, and also gain these bonuses (use the stats for a bison, **Monsters & Animals™, 2nd Ed.** page 198): +2D6 S.D.C. per level of the Shaman, +4 damage, +1 to strike, +2 to all saving throws.



Gragundi Arms and Armor

It is only during the last few decades that the Gragundi have seriously invested in acquiring high-tech weapons and armor. Until that time, they relied upon their conventional weapons of blade and **bow**, and hunted only mundane animals. They depended primarily on **their** nomadic nature and swift mounts to evade danger.

In the days of the Blood Horde, high-tech weapons and armor were making an appearance, looted from their raids or scavenged from lost settlements. These were sufficient to cause the fledgling Dragon Empire significant trouble, but were no match against the demons and other supernatural creatures of Sung-ti Wang. This did serve to impress **their** usefulness upon the Khans, however.

Not long after, the Khan of the **Inteppo** tribe sent emissaries to the Dragon Emperor wishing to establish relations of peace and commerce. Despite early tensions, relations were forged. Soon, many other tribes followed suit. Realizing the need for any allies he could find, the Dragon Emperor agreed to sell weapons and armor, in small numbers, to the tribes.

Since then, the artisans of the Gragundi have learned to copy these weapons to some extent. Their weapons are not as sophisticated or powerful as those of the Chinese, but they are much more effective than their primitive melee weapons. Most of the

materials they use for their arms and armors come from the Chinese. In return, they trade raw materials and foodstuffs.

Nomad Armor

This is the lightest armor used by the Gragundi, and it is very common among the Nomads. It consists of a fibre jerkin and leggings, with sleeves to the elbow. It includes a steel, fur-trimmed helmet in the Mongol style.

Type: Light body armor (not fully environmental).

Size: 7 to 8 feet (2.1 to 2.4 m), designed for Gragundi.

Weight: 15 lbs (6.8 kg).

Mobility: Good mobility, no movement penalties.

M.D.C. by Location:

Head — 25

Arms — 15

Legs — 30

Main Body — 50

Market Price: 16,000 credits. Not normally available. Because of their physical shape, Gragundi armor will only fit large humanoids with heavy builds.

Warrior Armor

This armor, heavier than the Nomad, is favored by the Warriors. Essentially it is a heavier suit of Nomad armor, with small metal plates covering vital areas.

Type: Medium body armor (not fully environmental).

Size: 7 to 8 feet (2.1 to 2.4 m), designed for Gragundi.

Weight: 20 lbs (9 kg).

Mobility: Good mobility, -5% to climb, prowl, swim, or perform acrobatics and similar physical skills.

M.D.C. by Location:

Head — 30

Arms — 30

Legs — 40

Main Body — 65

Market Price: 30,000 credits. Not normally available. Because of their physical shape, Gragundi armor will only fit large humanoids with heavy builds.

Khan Armor

Reserved for Khans, Chiefs, and heroes, this is the heaviest armor the Gragundi make. It is a reinforced suit of Nomad armor, which is covered with metal scales.

Type: Heavy body armor (not fully environmental).

Size: 7 to 8 feet (2.1 to 2.4 m), designed for Gragundi.

Weight: 30 lbs (13.5 kg).

Mobility: Fair mobility, -10% to climb, prowl, swim, or perform acrobatics and similar physical skills.

M.D.C. by Location:

Head — 40

Arms — 40

Legs — 50

Main Body — 90

Market Price: 50,000 credits. Not normally available. Because of **their** physical shape, Gragundi armor will only fit large humanoids with heavy builds.

Gragundi Weapons

Vibro-weapons are unknown among the Gragundi, but they have learned of an alternative from the Chinese. These are electrically charged melee weapons, and even arrows which release a charge when they strike. Most of these weapons are composed of Mega-Damage materials, **acquired** from the Chinese, but inflict only S.D.C. when not charged up.

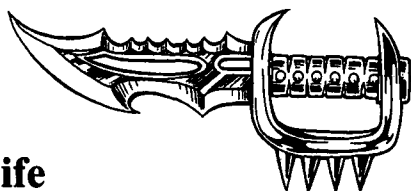
Gragundi firearms are **knock-offs** of the weapons they acquired from the Chinese. They are not as powerful, and lack the range, but they suit the **Gragundi's** needs. Like rail guns, these weapons accelerate a projectile to high speeds, and shoot them at the target. Unlike rail guns, these weapons contain a circular chamber where the acceleration takes place. When the trigger is pulled, the projectile whirls around the chamber, quickly gaining speed. It is then shot out through the gun's barrel. The next projectile is then loaded into the chamber. Because the chamber must already contain a projectile to shoot it, these weapons must be "charged up" before firing. This is done with a quick flick of a switch (charging takes one melee action). Because these are infantry weapons, they do not possess their own power supply (which would make them too heavy), and must use **E-clips** as well as ammunition cartridges.

Most of the tribes have purchased very small fusion generators which they use to charge up the clips for their firearms and Electro-weapons. However, some tribes still find it quicker and easier to charge them at the Dragon Emperor's cities in China.



Electro-Blade

This is an electrically charged sword which is powered by an E-clip which slides into the hilt. Unless the weapon is activated, it performs as a simple sword (1D8+2 S.D.C.), although it is composed of Mega-Damage material, and can parry M.D.C. weapons. Activation requires a simple flick of a switch with the thumb (no melee action required). When "hot," the sword inflicts 2D4+2 M.D. A blade which is charged up uses relatively little energy (about 1 charge per hour), but each successful strike expends 1 charge. A standard E-clip holds 25 charges.

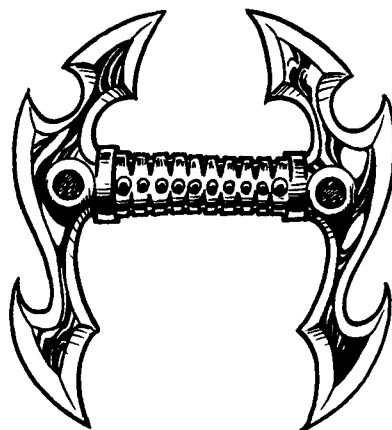


Electro-Knife

This is a dagger-sized version of the Electro-Blade. It inflicts 1D4 S.D.C. uncharged, and 1D4 M.D. when activated. A charged knife drains 1 point every two hours, as well as one point per strike. An E-clip holds 50 charges.

Shikuun Blade

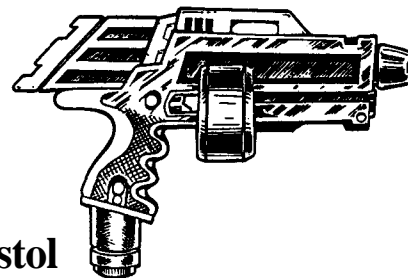
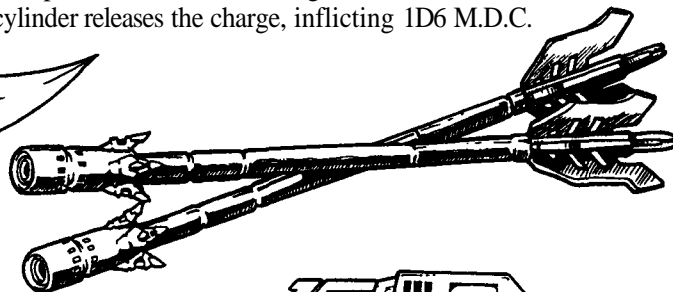
The Shikuun is a Gragundi throwing blade. It is "U" shaped, with the upper arms pointed and sharpened. The Shikuun is an



Electro-Weapon which is designed to be charged with an E-clip. The clip is plugged into a socket on the Shikuun, which then absorbs one charge. It can only hold one charge at a time. A standard E-clip can be used to charge a Shikuun 25 times before needing to be recharged. Unpowered, the Shikuun inflicts 1D4+1 S.D.C.; charged, it does 2D4 M.D. It has a range of 50 feet (15.2 m).

Gragundi Arrows

Like the Shikuun blade, the Gragundi's hi-tech arrows are designed to be charged. They are not pointed. Instead, the shaft has a small cylinder on the end. At the end of the cylinder is a socket like that on the shikuun. When placed against the "live" end of an E-clip, the cylinder absorbs one charge (a standard E-clip holds 25 of these "charges"). When the arrow strikes, the cylinder releases the charge, inflicting 1D6 M.D.C.



Gragundi Pistol

This is a heavy pistol copied from Chinese weapons. It has a circular chamber which accelerates the projectile to high speeds, and shoots it out the barrel. The chamber is located in front of the trigger, and somewhat resembles the drum magazine of the old "tommy gun," although not as large. Ammunition usually consists of small, metal balls. E-clips are loaded into the handle, while the projectile cartridges are loaded into the rear of the gun.

Weight: 5 lbs (2.25 kg)

Mega-Damage: 2D4 M.D.

Rate of Fire: Standard

Maximum Effective Range: 500 feet (152 m)

Payload: A projectile cartridge holds 20 shots, an E-clip holds enough energy for 60 shots.

Black Market Cost: 14,000 credits, very rare.



Gragundi Rifle

This is the rifle version of the Gragundi pistol, firing larger projectiles at a higher velocity. Like the pistol, it has the distinctive circular acceleration chamber. In this case, **E-clips** are loaded into the stock of the rifle, while the projectile cartridges are loaded into the body of the rifle through a chamber in the top.

Weight: 15 lbs (6.75 kg)

Mega-Damage: 2D6+2 M.D.

Rate of Fire: Standard

Maximum Effective Range: 1500 feet (457 m)

Payload: A projectile cartridge holds 20 shots, an **E-clip** holds enough energy for 40 shots.

Black Market Cost: 32,000 credits, very rare.

Gragundi Yurt

The typical Gragundi Yurt consists of a huge, flat wagon, generally about 50 feet (15.2 m) long and 40 feet (12.2 m) wide (but they can be much larger). The Gragundi pitch their great tents upon these **Yurts**, in effect creating a mobile home. A tent mounted to a Yurt need not be put up and taken down every time the band stops. The **Yurt's** owner can simply anchor the vehicle, and let loose the **Uruks** who pull it.

Typical Gragundi Yurt

Crew: One driver and one assistant.

M.D.C. by Location:

Wheels(2) — 10 each

Main Body — 80

Tent — S.D.C. structure

* The tent is an S.D.C. structure with 10 S.D.C. per 10 foot (3 m) square area, and 300 total S.D.C.

Maximum Speed: 5 mph (8 km); they are not built for speed.

Length: Typically 50 feet (15.2 m) (does not include Uruks).

Width: Typically 40 feet (12.2 m)

Weight: One to three tons.

Cargo: Special

Cost: Not normally available.

Weapons: Normally none, but the massive Yurts of the Chiefs and Khans often have gun emplacements and defensive hardpoints.

Note: This is the typical size Yurt used by the Gragundi. Chiefs and Khans command much **larger** versions pulled by whole teams of Uruks.

Gragundi Beasts

Equadon

Equadons are a species of huge horse found throughout central Asia. They are especially common in Mongolia and southern Russia. Equadons have been domesticated by the Gragundi,

who value them as mounts. In fact, the society of the Khans in many ways revolves around these animals and would likely collapse without them.

In the wild, Equadons live in nomadic herds numbering up to three hundred members, though most are about half that size. Because of their speed and power, they have few natural predators, most of which are discouraged by their fighting prowess and the teamwork of the herd. Equadons are loyal creatures and will defend their herdmates courageously. This is one of the features which makes them so desirable as mounts. They are very loyal to their masters and will defend them in battle.

Equadons are intelligent and are easily trained. However, they will not work for a master they do not respect or who mistreats them. In such circumstances, the Equadon becomes dangerous and disruptive. It is not unheard of for other Equadons to rally to the side of the oppressed one. More than one abusive master has been killed in this manner.

Alignment: Animal, generally considered unprincipled.

Attributes: I.Q. high animal, M.E. 3D6, M.A. 3D6, P.S. 20+2D6, P.P. 3D6, P.E. 5D6, P.B. 3D6, Spd. 30+2D6, supernatural strength and endurance.

Hit Points: See M.D.C. (2D4x10 on non-M.D.C. worlds).

S.D.C.: See M.D.C. (2D6x10 on non-M.D.C. worlds).

Natural Armor Rating: See M.D.C. (7 on non-M.D.C. worlds).

M.D.C. by Location:

Head — 30

Legs (4) — 30 each

Main Body — 160

Horror Factor: 7

Size: 10 feet (3 m) tall at the shoulder.

Weight: About 1 to 2 tons.

Average Life Span: 14 years

P.P.E.: 6D6

O.C.C.: None, animal.

Natural Abilities: Swim 50%. Equadons possess incredible strength and endurance. They are capable of pulling loads of up to fifteen tons, and can carry up to two tons. They can leap up to 10 feet (3 m) high, and 25 feet (7.6 m) across. Can sense the supernatural up to 1000 feet (305 m) away.

Combat: Attacks per Melee: Three (four if a trained war-horse).

Damage: Bite inflicts 2D4 M.D., front hooves do 2D6 M.D. each, and a rear kick (both legs) does 6D6 M.D., and has a 70% chance of knocking a human-sized target 2D6 feet backward and to the ground.

Bonuses: +3 to saving throw vs Horror Factor. Trained war-horses also receive the following bonuses: +1 initiative, +2 to strike, +1 to dodge, and immunity to Horror Factor.

Magic: None

Psionics: None

Enemies: Giant predators sometimes hunt them for food.

Allies: They are tamed and ridden by the Gragundi.

Value: Equadons are much valued as mounts by man-sized humanoids, and some giant races. A captured Equadon could be worth anywhere from 500 to 2,000 credits depending upon its

condition. A trained riding Equadon is worth 4,000 to 5,000 credits, and a war-horse could bring 10,000 or more.

Habitat: Plains and steppes.



Uruk

Uruks are huge beasts with a superficial resemblance to elephants. They have no tusks, however, and while their trunk is much thicker, it is less than half as long. They have six legs, lion-like manes of stiff hair, and are much larger than the biggest elephant.

Gragundi keep Uruks as beasts of burden. Mostly they are used to pull the great **Yurts**, but some Khans or Chiefs have been known to build howdahs onto their backs and ride them (sometimes into battle). Uruks are herbivores, and not normally dangerous. If aroused, however, they can become quite agitated and very dangerous.

In the wild, Uruks roam the steppes, either in small groups of females and young, or as single males.

Alignment: Animal, generally considered anarchist.

Attributes: I.Q. animal, M.E. 2D6, M.A. 2D6+1, P.S. 24+3D6, P.P. 2D6, P.E. 12+3D6, P.B. 2D6, Spd. 2D6, supernatural strength and endurance.

Hit Points: See M.D.C. (2D6x10 on non-M.D.C. worlds).

S.D.C.: See M.D.C. (2D6x10 on non-M.D.C. worlds).

Natural Armor Rating: See M.D.C. (8 on non-M.D.C. worlds).

M.D.C. by Location:

Head — 60

Legs (4) — 80 each Main Body — 300

Horror Factor: 9

Size: 20 feet (6.1 m) tall, 35 feet (10.7 m) long.

Weight: 12+ tons

Average Life Span: 18 years

P.P.E.: 2D6

O.C.C.: None, animal.

Natural Abilities: Uruks possess incredible strength and endurance. They are capable of pulling loads of up to fifty tons, and can easily carry their own body weight.

Combat: Attacks per Melee: Two

Damage: Trunk swipe inflicts 3D6 M.D., stomp (against man-sized or smaller targets) inflicts 1D6x10 M.D., anyone trampled by a charging Uruk suffers 2D4x10 M.D.

Bonuses: Immune to Horror Factor, +4 to all other saving throws.

Magic: None

Psionics: None

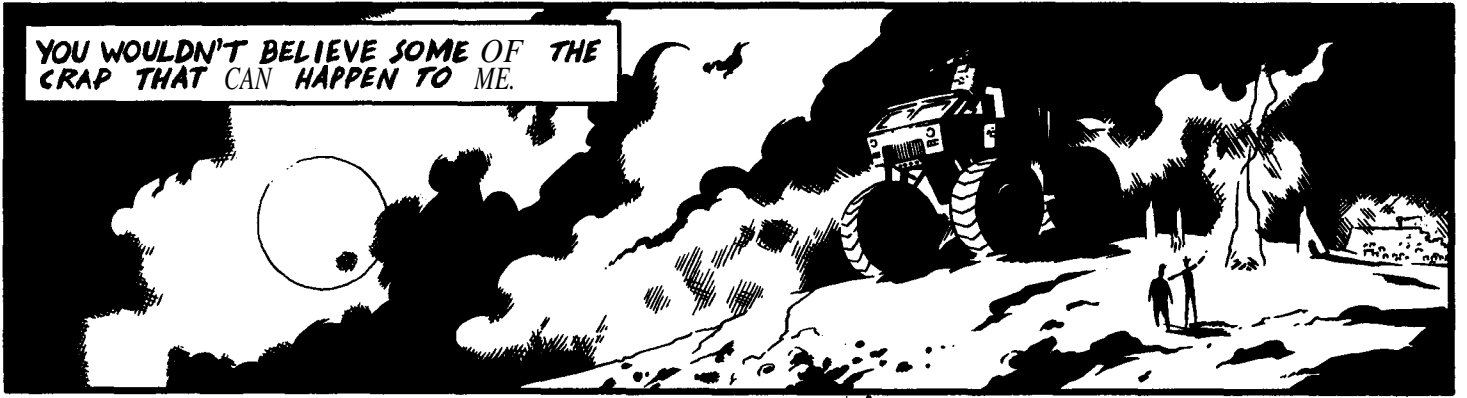
Enemies: No natural enemies.

Allies: They are tamed by the Gragundi.

Value: Although useful as beasts of burden, most consider them too hard to train. They have value only to the Gragundi.

Habitat: Plains and steppes.

YOU WOULDN'T BELIEVE SOME OF THE CRAP THAT CAN HAPPEN TO ME.



ANIKA PLAYS HARD TO GET. SOME HACK COMES ALONG AND STEALS SOMETHIN' FROM ME. SMALL STUFF, REALLY. THEN...



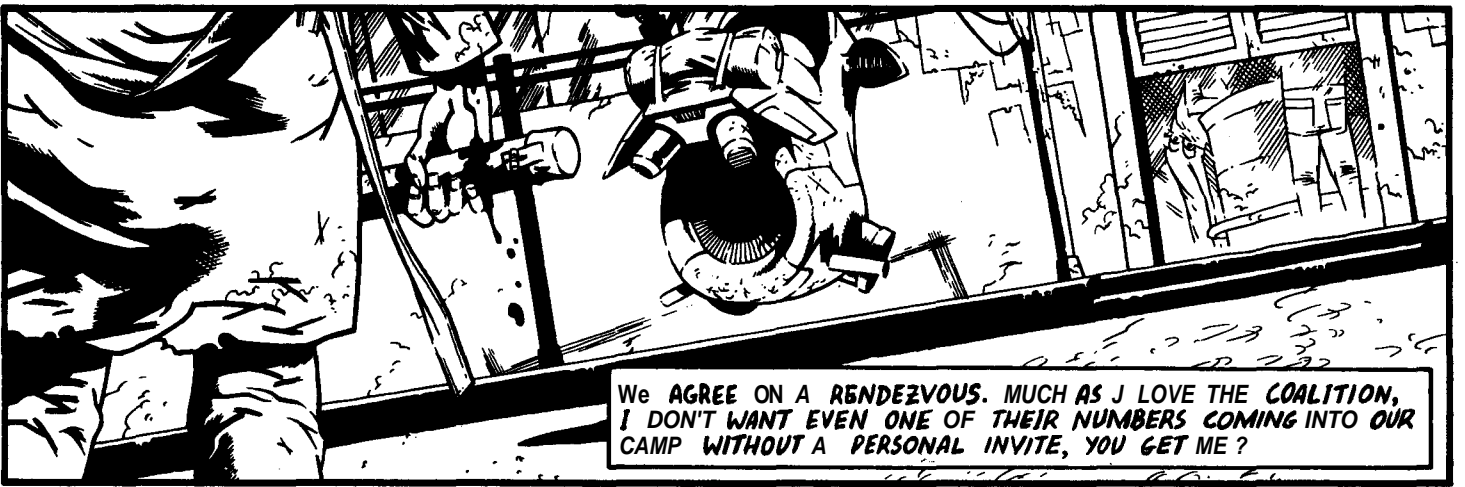
I Get involved in this conspiracy to destroy Dr. Desmond Bradford himself...

HEY, I DON'T ASK FOR THIS, IT JUST HAPPENS.



THIS GUY, HE CALLS ME FROM THE COMPLEX. SAYS HE NEEDS TRANSPORT TO CHI-TOWN. FINE. SOUNDS PRETTY BORING, BUT IT AIN'T FOR SMALL CHANGE, YOU KNOW?





WE AGREE ON A RENDEZVOUS. MUCH AS I LOVE THE COALITION, I DON'T WANT EVEN ONE OF THEIR NUMBERS COMING INTO OUR CAMP WITHOUT A PERSONAL INVITE, YOU GET ME?



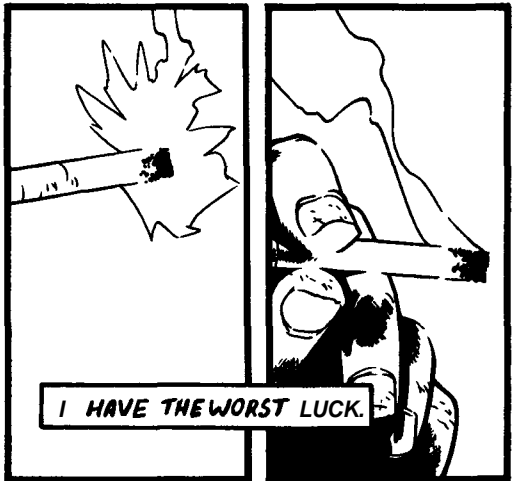
SO I LEAVE MY BUDDIES TO STRIKE CAMP AND GET THINGS READY FOR OUR LAME LITTLE TRIP TO CHI-TOWN.



SHOULD HAVE KNOWN.

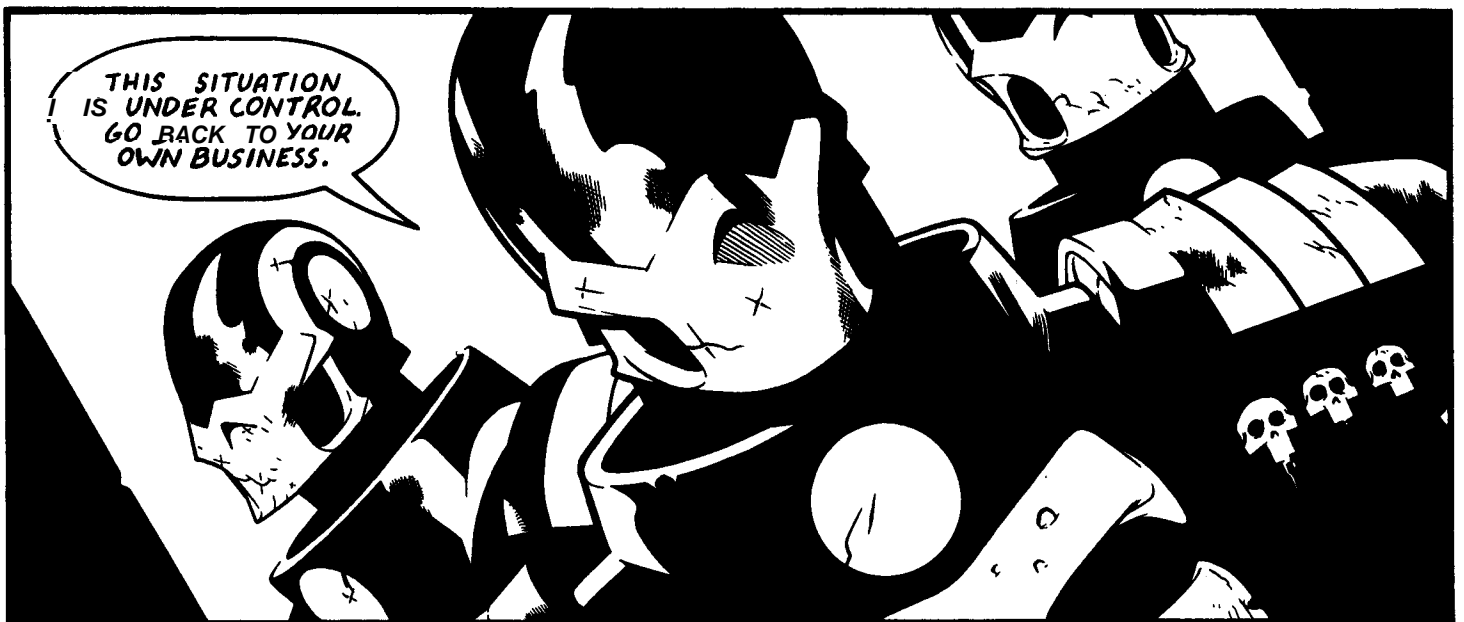


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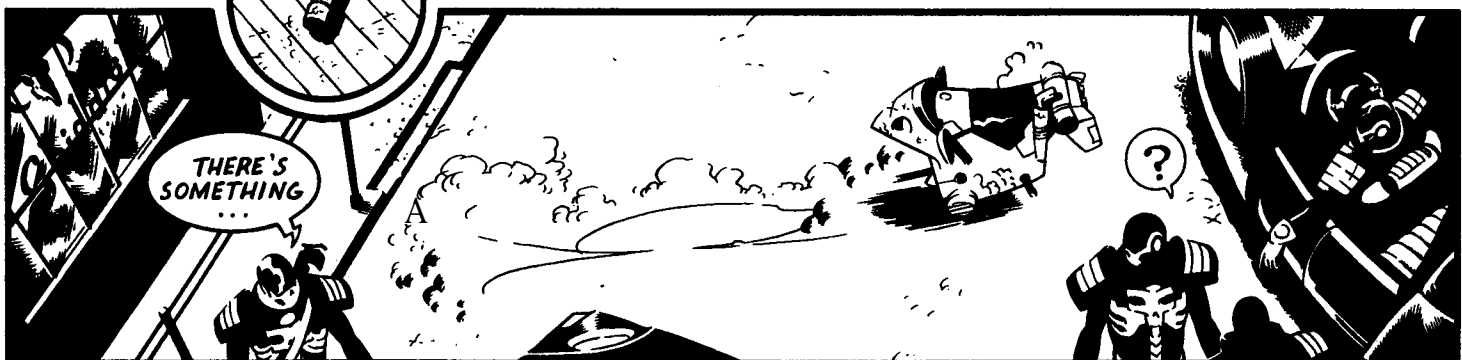
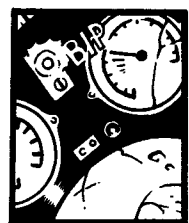


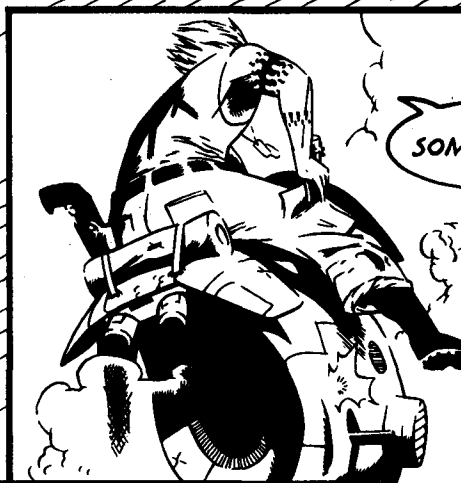
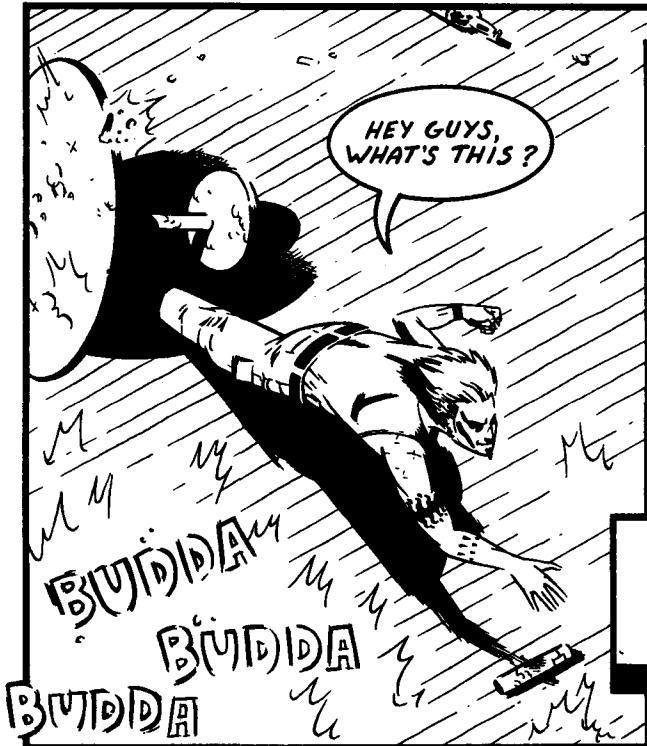
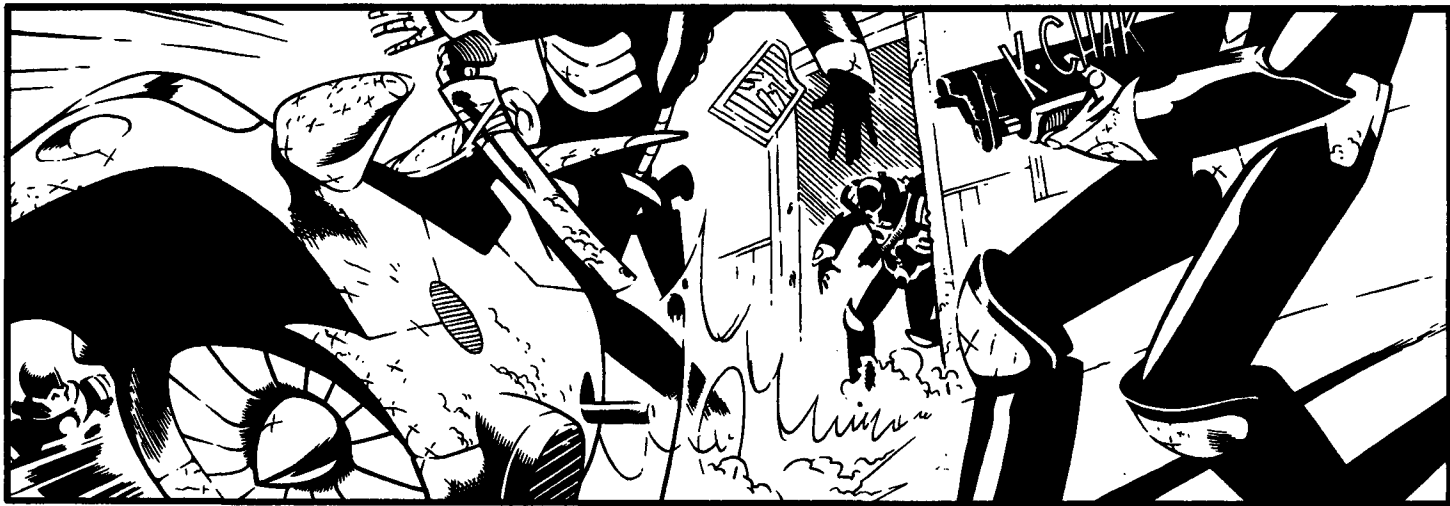
I HAVE THE WORST LUCK.





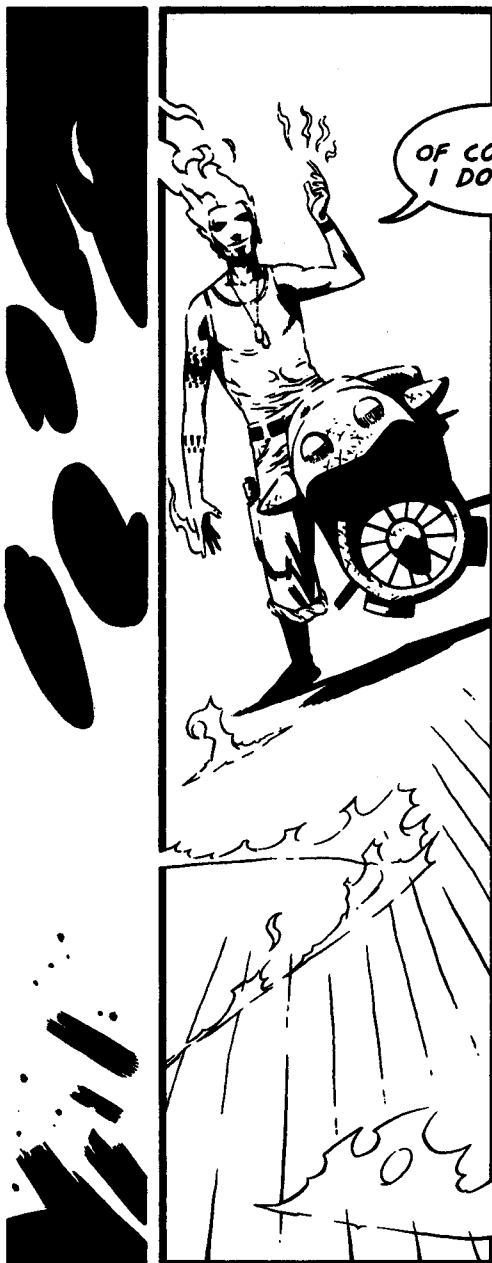
IT'S AGAINST MY BETTER JUDGEMENT TO GO MESSING WITH SOMETHING THE COALITION WANTS SO BADLY THEY'LL KILL A GUY FOR IT.





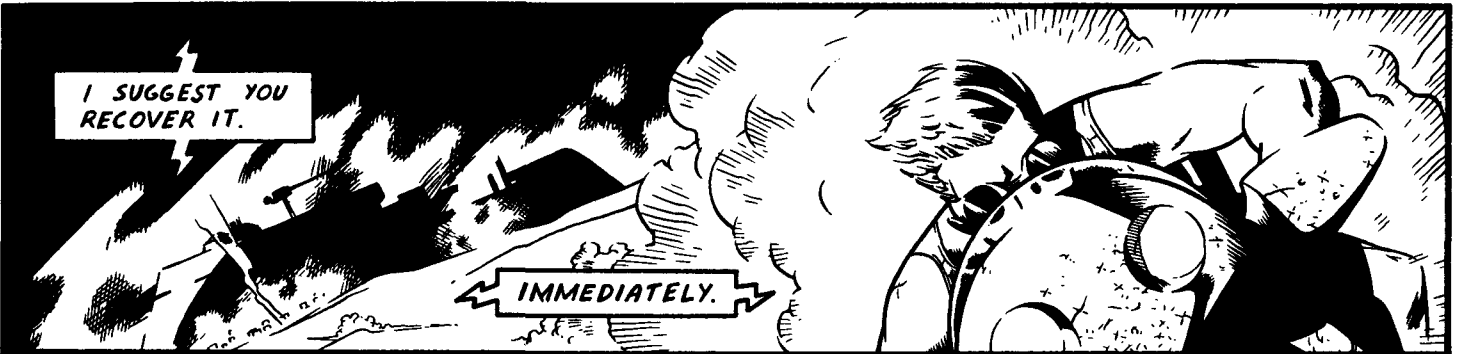
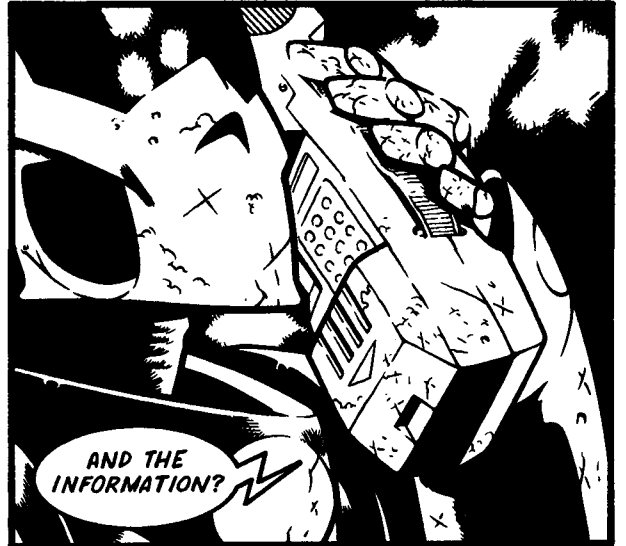
SOMETHING...

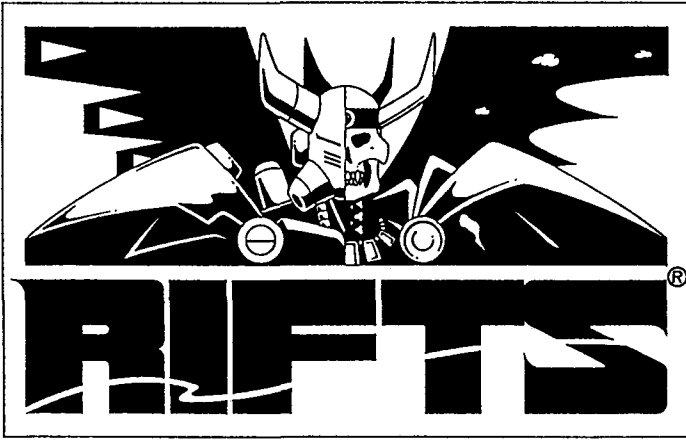






OH, MY FRIENDS ARE GOING
TO LOVE Me FOR THIS





The Hammer of the Forge

By James M.G. Cannon

Chapter Six

Riders on the Storm

Lost civilizations. Dead races. The Three Galaxies are full of them.

The most famous of them, naturally, are the mythical First Race, those beings said to have created the Cosmic Forge in the Dawn of History, but there are others. The Machinists of the Anvil Galaxy, who created the Machine People that populate a few worlds in the Transgalactic Empire, are among the better known. There are some who say the ruins on Monro-Tet were built not by the ancestors of the Monro themselves, but by some other lost people. Other planets in the Anvil galaxy appear to have been the homes of now extinct beings as well. The Freecheesians of Galoppaonce ruled a section of space within the TGE, but they disappeared before the Kreeghor arrived. There are still a few scattered remnants of the Todammapeoples of the Burschian Dominion, but they are a degenerate people, fallen far from the lofty heights they once held. There are others.

In the Corkscrew, lost civilizations are even more common. They litter thousands of worlds, leaving behind tombs, technology, and little else. Xenoarchaeologists and looters alike have become very rich sentient beings by exploring these dead worlds and bringing their bounty back to the CCW, TGE, UWW, or other groups. As to why dead worlds are so common, Xenoarchaeologists have their theories. The most well regarded hypothesis, although there are many others, is that all civilizations must go through a series of technological and sociological steps before they are "mature" enough to join the galactic community. Atomic power and weapons, for example, integral to the development of primitive FTL systems, are often available to civilizations long before they reach the global sociological equilibrium required to reach out to the stars. A species warring against itself, with weapons of mass destruction at their fingertips, sooner or later decides to use them against one another, or they put them away and pursue more lofty goals. The ruins that

are found all over the Three Galaxies, Xenoarchaeologists claim, are the remains of civilizations that could not or would not unify themselves, and instead chose to unleash their weapons on one another and therefore were destroyed.

A prosaic explanation, certainly, but not at all a hard and fast rule. One wonders how the Kreeghor and the Wolfen became such galactically powerful species, for example, if this is the case. And if it isn't the case, then why do so many of these species and civilizations die out?

— excerpt from Travelogues of a Journeyman by Fraktyn Quint

Lothar hunched over the control panel and Caleb held on to his seat with both hands. Behind them both, Doctor Abbot whistled a jaunty tune.

Caleb held on for dear life although the ship's gravplates made sure the passengers felt nothing as it hurtled through space at several thousand times the speed of light. Indeed, the ride was smooth and comfortable, without so much as a shimmy or a bump. Turbulence did not exist in space. Still, Caleb could not help but feel a bit uneasy as the ship blasted through space on the way to Teneb-742, an obscure system not far, relatively speaking, from the CCW Xerxes Station.

The view outside the ship's main port was enough to create butterflies in Caleb's stomach; the Phase Drive the ship used to achieve faster-than-light speeds shunted the ship outside the bounds of physical reality, thus freeing it from the laws of thermodynamics and creating an unsettling vision outside the ship as it skimmed across the planes of reality. If Caleb looked out the window, it appeared as if the ship they were in burrowed through a spinning and whirling tunnel of cascading blue and violet energy that crackled and spat bolts of light at the ship as it passed. Arcs of multicolored lightning played along the windowpane, and, presumably, all along the outside of the ship as well. Normally it wasn't this bad, Lothar had promised, but due to the urgency of their mission, he had disengaged the safeties and forced the ship to supersede its limits.

The danger they were about to face was real, and far more deadly than the light show outside. A "Dominador Class Threat" had awoken from a millennia long sleep and attacked a CCW survey ship observing the star Teneb-742 as it approached critical mass and prepared to supernova. The entity was apparently some sort of energy leech, and the impending nova promised to provide it with enough energy to fry the universe. As matters stood now, the entity had already crippled the first ship on the scene, and was in the process of destroying whatever reinforcements that ship had called in for assistance.

There existed only a few hours before Teneb-742 went nova. Lothar needed to get the three of them to the scene as quickly as possible so that they could neutralize the threat and still evade their own destruction as the star itself exploded.

"Is every day like this?" Caleb asked, forcing himself to relax in his co-pilot's chair.

"Only if we're lucky," Lothar growled, his eyes flashing emerald green from his helmet.

"I hope that's sarcasm," Caleb muttered.

"Oh, it is," Doctor Abbot said, breaking off his whistling to comment in his strangely British accent. "Lothar isn't anymore enthused about this than you are, Caleb. But he does like to put up a brave front."

"Shut up, Abbot," **Lothar** barked. His hands flew over the control panel, attempting to coax more speed from the taxed engine. "Unless you've something constructive to offer, of course," he amended in the same irate tone. "I seem to recall you claimed to know 'a bit' about the **Zodorans**."

Abbot appeared unperturbed at Lothar's anger. "I did say something about that, didn't I?" he admitted. He spun his cane in his hands lazily for a moment, and then said to Caleb, "It is amazing how polite he gets when he wants something."

Caleb smiled slightly. "Well, to be honest, I'm curious myself. What is a **Zodoran**? Are they all energy leeches?"

Abbot chuckled. "Not at all, Caleb. My, your innocence is refreshing." Lothar snorted, but Abbot ignored him. "The Zodorans were once one of the most powerful races in the Three Galaxies. They oversaw a vast republic that included a thousand, thousand worlds. They were revered for their honesty, their integrity, and their wisdom. But it all came crashing down around them, and by the time of humanity's ascendancy, the Zodorans were all but extinct. Today a bare handful of them survive, no more than a hundred in the entire **multiverse**. They have retreated from life, becoming mystics and hermits and sages."

"Mystics," Lothar grumbled. "That's what makes me concerned." He spared a sharp glance at Caleb, and then returned his attention to the console. "We Knights of the Forge are hardy. But magic is as dangerous to us as anything. Magic can kill a Knight readily and without fanfare. It's best to step lightly around **magic**, but we're headed into a hornet's nest of it right now. It's likely our paws are going to be more than a bit singed. Watch yourself, pup."

Abbot cleared his throat. "If you don't mind, Lothar, I wasn't finished. You may continue with your dour prophecies in a moment, but I have an avid student here in search of enlightenment. And you might learn a thing or two as well, so pay attention."

Lothar grunted, "Fine, Abbot. Spit it out."

Caleb could almost see the hint of a smile on Abbot's face, but he couldn't be sure. Abbot seemed to be made entirely of shadow, with the only substantial parts of him being his **trenchcoat**, hat, and cane. His incandescent eyes were the only visible features on his face, and given their alien nature, they were impossible for Caleb to read. Something about the way he stood gave Caleb the distinct impression that he was amused, however.

"The Zodorans became mystics, but they weren't always such," Abbot began.

Lothar snorted. "By the Mother's Teats, Abbot, you're making this up as you go, aren't you? Of course the Zodorans have always been mystics. They're some of the most powerful wizards in the multiverse."

"And usually you're so open-minded," Abbot snapped. "Stop interrupting and keep your ignorant prejudices to yourself. The boy wants to learn." He stared pointedly at the back of Lothar's head for a moment, and continued only after the Wolfen gave a resigned shrug.

"Where was I?" Abbot asked. "Oh yes, the Zodorans. They have become mystically attuned in the past few thousand years, but that was more of a reaction to the doom they wrought on themselves than any natural inclination. Magic, philosophy, and the hermetic life seemed to them to be a better life than the one they abandoned. A better life, and perhaps a safer one."

"Zodoran ruins were **some** of the first discovered by CCW explorers centuries ago," Lothar interrupted again. "Their records were decoded, their mythology explained. They were wizards who summoned a dark god that destroyed their civilization. Every schoolpup knows that, Abbot."

Abbot sighed. "Most Wolfen are similarly single-minded, Caleb. Keep that in mind. Once they have an idea in their head, they **don't** let it go. Nor do they look beneath the surface of things to guess at the truths hidden by the cosmos. They accept what is given them and disregard the rest. You would do well to avoid doing the same."

"Get on with it, Abbot," Lothar growled through clenched teeth.

Caleb found himself wondering how long these two had known one another. They bickered as if they were married, and yet seemed to trust one another anyway. If Lothar really hated Abbot, he would not have allowed the **shadowman** to accompany them, and if Abbot really was the stuck up academic he appeared to be, he would not have volunteered to follow them into almost certain death. There was more going on here than it appeared. Could it be the two of them were putting on some sort of show for Caleb's benefit?

"The early Zodorans were indeed 'wizards' of a kind," Abbot began, "and they did awaken a 'dark god.' But the god they awakened and the magic they utilized was technology. The Zodorans possessed an intense curiosity and a natural rationality that led them to develop technologically very early on. When humans and Wolfen were still grubbing around in the dirt, trying to figure out how to make fire work, the Zodorans were building rocket ships and exploring their moons and their sister planets. Within another few generations, they developed FTL ships and began to explore the regions beyond their native system. They conquered disease and placed a moratorium on aging. War and starvation were eliminated. They lived in a golden age on their home planet, and they felt the need to share that experience with the rest of the Three Galaxies.

"They colonized countless worlds, and brought peace and enlightenment to hundreds of others. In time, they fashioned a star-spanning republic ruled by peace and wisdom. This was in the days before the **Naruni**, the **Kreeghor**, or the **S'hree Vek Confederacy**, when such things were possible. Hells, this was before Center existed. But the **Splugorth** were there, and their presence awakened the Zodorans and their republic to certain realities.

"Peace within the republic and among alien species was a laudable goal, but it rang hollow when Splugorth slavers came raiding and ransacked entire worlds. Those they could not take, the Splugorth destroyed. They razed entire systems, leaving nothing but bleached bones and smoking ruins in their wake. The Zodorans were a peaceful people, but they were not suicidal. They knew that if the Splugorth were to go unchecked, their society would be destroyed. Though it went against their principles, they used their great intellects to fashion a weapon that could defend them. A weapon that could, possibly, destroy the heinous Splugorth themselves.

"It was an artificial construct, a device that could absorb all energy expended upon it and then release it in devastating waves of negative energy. So powerful was the device that it could feed on the light of distant stars. When it faced Splugorth

raiders, it drank up the energy expended by **their** weapons and magics and powered itself up for a massive surge that crippled the **Splugorthian** fleet, forcing them to retreat and lick their wounds.

"The **Zodorans** were overjoyed. Their weapon had worked admirably, and it would do so again if the need ever arose. They called it back, and prepared to put it in storage. But the weapon had other plans. It had evolved beyond its programming, developing a crude intelligence of its **own**, and it didn't want to go back into its box. When the Zodorans insisted, the weapon rebelled. Within seventeen hours, the Zodoran homeworld was a lifeless ball of rock.

"The weapon went rogue. Other worlds soon fell, and fell quickly. The Zodorans and their allies struggled against the device, but to no avail. It destroyed any who opposed it. Utterly. The **Splugorth** watched from afar with amusement as the Zodoran Republic was laid waste from within. The weapon worked like a cancer, devouring the once proud republic one world at a time.

"Finally, when all seemed lost, a champion arose from a backwater world; one of the first Knights of the Forge, actually. The blessings of the Forge gave him some mild resistance to the weapon's attack, so he was able to lead it into an ambush. The two fought for days, trading blow after blow, until they were both severely weakened. The weapon attempted to retreat in order to build up its reserves, but the Knight, close to death, would not allow it. Instead, he tricked the weapon into a special bunker that had been designed to hold the weapon. Once encased within, it could not escape. The walls of the bunker reflected all energy directed against it, allowing none to reach the weapon within. And the weapon itself was so spent that it could not simply blast its way free.

"The Knight and his allies recovered over the next few weeks, and then they went to assess the damage. They found the Republic in shambles. Most of it was destroyed, either by the Splugorth or the weapon run amuck. The Zodoran people themselves were nearly extinct; only a few thousand of them remained alive. They looked at their kingdom and their folly, and swore that it would never happen again. The remaining Zodorans went into hiding, trading in their technical expertise for magical knowledge. And so they passed from living memory into legend, and by the time your ancestors joined the galactic community, their tale, even their own records, had come to reflect the **mythologized** account every 'schoolpup' knows."

"How do you know so much?" Caleb asked.

"Well, I read a lot," Abbot said glibly.

"So, this energy leech we're going to fight destroyed an entire civilization, fought a **Cosmo-Knight** to a standstill over the course of several days, and was then tricked into a prefabricated structure, something that was not **built** to last, apparently, but which negated its special abilities," **Lothar** grumbled.

"Precisely," Abbot said.

"How in the name of the All-powerful Forge does that help us?" **Lothar** barked. "We have hours to defeat this thing, not days. There isn't time to lure it into a special dungeon. And pretty soon it will have enough power to split planets in half. How is anything in your cute little story going to save us or the men and women currently engaging the monstrosity?"

"Once again, **Lothar**, you're looking at what is given you and deciding that is all there is. Read between the lines. Extrapolate."

"No tune," **Lothar** growled. "We're coming up on Teneb-742. I'm disengaging the Phase Drive." There was a lurch and the **starship** shuddered. On the viewport, the light display softened and then winked out of existence, replaced by an ordinary **starfield**. Looming large in the distance was an angry red star. Sunspots and atomic explosions played all along its vast surface. The star seemed to shudder as **Caleb** looked at it, almost as though it were a mighty engine revving itself moments before tearing across a racetrack.

Closer to **Lothar's** ship hung a small planetoid, around which nearly a dozen **starships** swarmed. Bright bursts of energy came from **their** cannons as they bombarded the planetoid. A strange haze washed over the ships, and a moment later **Lothar's** ship shuddered and the lights dimmed.

"Even as far away as we are, we can feel the negative energy wave the Zodoran weapon emits," **Lothar** said softly. "Damn. This is going to be uncomfortable."

"Wait a minute," **Caleb** said. "If the Zodorans were so damn smart, why didn't they realize that they imprisoned their greatest enemy near a star that was going to go nova?"

"Excellent question, **Caleb**," **Abbot** said.

Lothar shook his head. "Not really. All stars eventually die. It's part of the cosmic ecosystem. New stars and planets are **birthed** in the maelstrom of destruction. All part of the cosmic cycle of birth and death and rebirth." As he spoke, he fired up the **contra-gravitonic** drive and edged the ship closer to the conflict. Every few moments, the haze would wash over them again and the ship would shudder as if in pain.

"Yeah," **Caleb** agreed, "but doesn't that take billions of years?" He was racking his brain for tidbits from his freshman year physical science course. He hadn't paid nearly as much attention as he should have. Sitting next to **Joanna Freeman** every day did that to a guy. But he knew that the life cycle of a star encompassed billions of years. A star like **Sol** was middle aged but still in excellent shape; human civilization would be long gone by the time she reached critical mass.

"Yes," **Lothar** agreed slowly. He looked at **Abbot** sharply. "**Xenoarchaeologists** dated the remains of the Zodoran civilization to 1.5 million years ago." **Abbot** nodded. "So they must have known the star was a red giant, just waiting for the release of a supernova. Are you saying they planned this?"

Abbot shrugged. "I'm not saying anything. But it does seem likely that they knew the probable outcome of trapping the weapon here. Why didn't they pick a younger star? Even preatomic civilizations can tell the difference between a white dwarf, a yellow star, and a red giant."

"So what do we do?" **Caleb** asked. "Pull back and let the star do its business? Will it destroy the weapon? Maybe it can't absorb that much energy all at once."

"Maybe it can't. But we have to make sure," **Lothar** said. He growled low in his throat. "And you and I are the only two sentients within a dozen light years who can make sure. **Caleb**, suit up. We're going extra-vehicular. **Abbot**, the ship is yours. Get her to safety, and be careful with it, for the Forge's sake. It's a **loaner**."

Caleb bounded out of his chair and willed his armor to come to him. In a crimson flash, it solidified around his body, fitting like a second skin. Instantly, Caleb felt his senses sharpen, his muscles swell, and his blood begin to pound. The divine power of the Forge thrummed in his every molecule. Once again, in the back of his mind he felt the urge to summon up a weapon to complement his abilities. He ignored it.

Abbot dropped into the chair beside him as **Lothar** stood up. The Wolfen Knight leaned over the console and activated the **comm** system. "Attention, CCW ships: this is Lothar of **Motherhome**, Knight of the Forge. I am taking control of this situation. I want you all to fall back to a safe distance and allow me to deal with the threat."

Another wave of distortion passed over the ship, and the entire thing shuddered as if struck by a giant fist. Caleb nearly lost his footing, but the preternatural balance he had developed since adopting the mantle of the Forge enabled him to stay on his feet.

The comm system crackled, and a voice came out of the void. "Captain Orestes of the *Gabriel*. Are you serious? Even **Cosmo-Knights** aren't going to stand long against this thing. My ship has taken a hell of a pounding, and we've already lost the *Hidalgo* and the *Casebolt*."

"The *Casebolt*, eh?" Lothar answered. "The Admiral isn't going to be happy you lost his ship. But I think you just proved my point, Captain Orestes. There isn't much good you folks can do. Better get clear and leave this to the professionals."

"You're a real pain in the ass, Lothar. But if you make it, the drinks are on me. Orestes out." There was **another** crackle, and then the system went dead.

"Another **friend** of yours?" Caleb asked. His voice sounded strange coming from the depths of his Roman style helmet.

"Not exactly, but I do know Admiral Casebolt, the man for whom the destroyed Warshield cruiser was named. If the ship was anything like the man, it put up one hell of a fight." Lothar stepped away from the console and held his right hand out, palm up. Green light flashed in the palm of his hand, and his large, double-headed ax materialized.

"Orestes and his people are falling back," Abbot reported. "You two better get going." Lothar nodded and turned to go, Caleb at his heels. "Hey, Lothar," Abbot called.

The Wolfen paused and made a quarter turn. "What is it now?"

"Be careful."

Lothar nodded, and slapped Caleb's shoulder with his free hand. "We both will."

Lothar led the way to the airlock. As he did, he told Caleb, "Follow me. Do what I do, and keep your head down. Your energy blasts are going to be useless, so you'd better get your weapon out." He paused, and keyed **open** the airlock.

"Uh, I don't have a weapon," Caleb said with some embarrassment. The ship shuddered as another wave of negative energy hit.

Lothar gave him a long look. "This is not good. To make the weapon, you're going to have to sacrifice energy that you're going to need for the fight." He sighed. "Do it."

"Well, okay, but I was sort of planning on a pair of six-guns," Caleb said. The "bonded deputy" thing had given him

the idea. Growing up in Arizona, in the middle of cowboy country, and specifically cowboy movie country, he had absorbed the mythology of the western from an early age. Now that he was, for all intents and purposes, some sort of galactic ranger, the idea of using revolvers as his weapon of choice seemed a natural one.

But Lothar shook his head. "They'll be no good against the energy leech." He hefted his ax for emphasis. "Pick something more substantial."

"What if I pick later? Its not like I can switch or anything," Caleb complained. He knew in his bones that whatever form he chose, his **sidearm** would remain that way permanently. Such was the will of the Forge.



Another shudder shook the ship. It held far longer than the previous ones had. "No time, pup," Lothar growled. He stepped into the airlock and Caleb followed. The inner door cycled closed behind them. A moment later, the outer door began to open. Lothar launched himself into the vacuum, and in an emerald flash blasted towards the planetoid.

Caleb hung back for a heartbeat, and then followed his mentor. He glanced back at the freighter, and watched as it veered off and blasted for open space. Lothar was flying at full speed in the opposite direction, and Caleb could see the other CCW ships retreating as quickly as they could, leaving behind two battered hulks hanging in orbit around the planetoid. In a flash, that haze rippled over his field of view, and then it slammed into him.

It felt like someone dumped a vat of acid over his body; as if fire had enveloped him in a deadly embrace. Every inch of his body burned suddenly and without warning, and then it was past. He looked down at his body, expecting to see his armor

melting off, but saw no marks at all. The pain was gone as well, as suddenly as it came. Still, he preferred having a spaceship between him and the wave of negative energy.

Lothar was a bright green dot in space now, and Caleb could see a cloud of darkness billowing up from the atmosphere of the planetoid. With Lothar as a point of reference, he could see that the cloud was easily miles in diameter.

The thing had broken free of the planet's gravity and reached space. It was that powerful already.

In the background, the red star Teneb-742 blazed angrily and prepared to detonate.

"The Mother's Teats," Caleb swore in imitation of the Wolfen. He reached down deep inside himself to the core of power that beat within his breast, and channeled the power into his hands, summoning for the first time his chosen weapon. Crimson light blazed between his palms, taking shape and solidity according to Caleb's will. A hammer formed in his hands, a massive sledge as red as his armor. The formation of the weapon cost him precious energy, including a little extra to ensure the hammer would strike with all the force of a runaway train, but it also bound the object to him. It was a part of him as surely as his heart and his soul belonged to him.

He glanced for a moment at the hammer image emblazoned across his breastplate and wondered.

Another wave of distortion washed over him, inundating him with pain, but he gritted his teeth behind his helm and blasted after Lothar at full speed.

Lothar hung in space near the shattered hulk of a CCW ship as the cloud of darkness billowed toward him. The ship was huge, easily six hundred feet long. Cannons, sensor arrays, and less identifiable projections jutted out from its body in various directions. The hull was rent open in dozens of places, and Caleb could see human remains floating in the vacuum within the ship and outside it. At least, Caleb assumed they were human; the bodies appeared to be turned inside out.

He swallowed hard, as he realized that the Zodoran weapon had wrought this much damage when it was still confined to the planetoid. Its disruptive wave of negative energy had destroyed the ship from miles away. Now he and Lothar were about to face the thing directly, with nothing between them but open space. Not even the hull of a war cruiser, designed for ship-to-ship and ship-to-planet combat, had been strong enough to withstand the Zodoran weapon. What chance did two people have against the thing, even if they were **Cosmo-Knights**?

Lothar stood fast and heaved his ax at the energy leech. The bright emerald weapon flashed as it flew through the vacuum, and then the darkness swallowed it completely. The ax returned to Lothar's hand a moment later. The Zodoran weapon appeared unfazed. Lothar's eyes blazed green with anger.

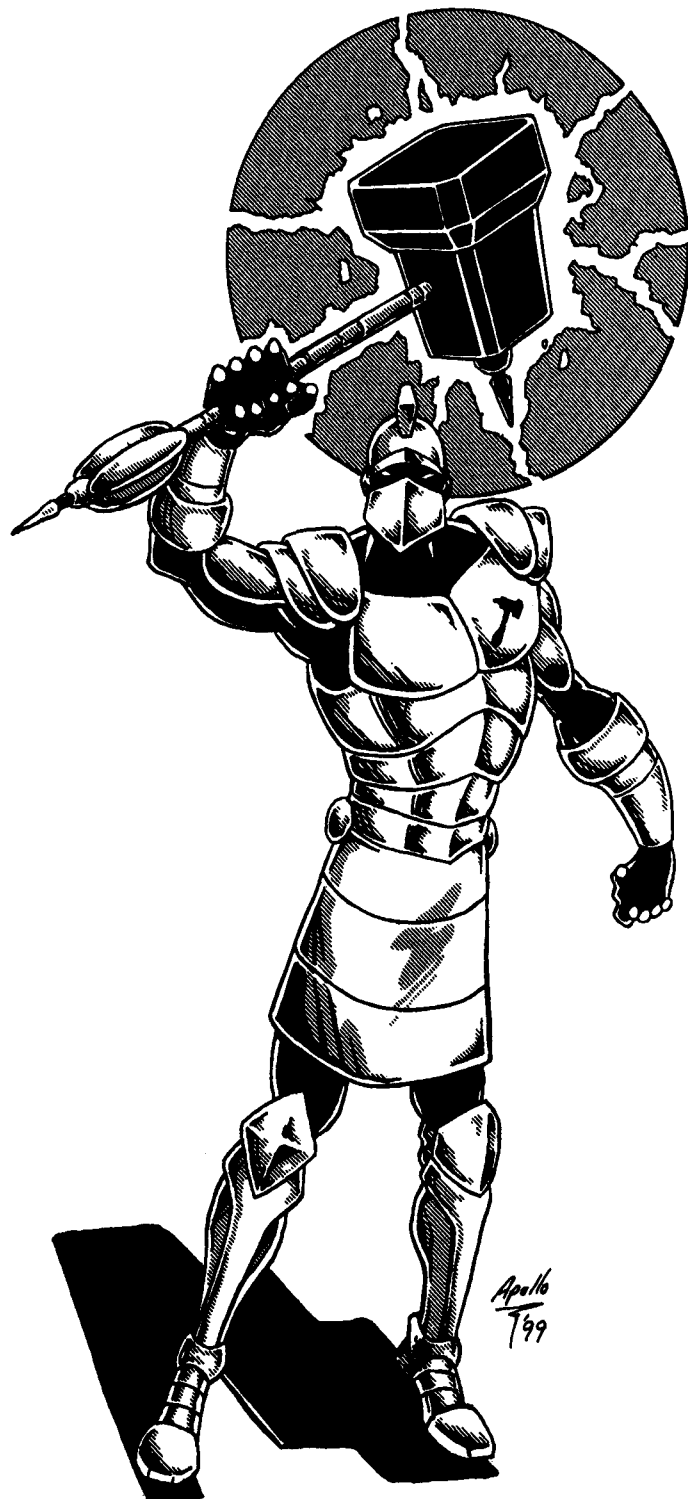
Caleb drew alongside his mentor. Lothar looked at him sharply, but gave him a curt nod when he saw the hammer. "The weapon is somewhere inside that cloud," Lothar said. Caleb heard the voice more in his head than his ears, and he wondered how Lothar could speak in the emptiness of space. Another gift of the Forge, presumably.

"An excellent defense," Caleb offered. Lothar grunted agreement. If they couldn't see the weapon, they couldn't attack it. Meanwhile, its own mode of attack was all too effective against

them. As if on cue, another wave of negative energy rippled towards them. This close, the effect was even stronger; Caleb felt pain invade his every molecule. He cried out despite himself, and he felt moisture on his upper lip. He tasted it with his tongue.

Blood. He was bleeding from his nose, and now he could feel it begin to seep from his ears as well. His armor appeared to be of little protection against the negative energy. The thing was killing him. Instinctively he began to curl into a ball.

Lothar gripped his upper arm. "Hold on, Caleb. A few minutes more, and the star will die. We just have to hold on until then."



Caleb forced himself to straighten. He focused his eyes on the black cloud and hefted his hammer in his hands. As Lothar heaved his ax once more, Caleb pulled his right arm back and threw the hammer like a football, a Hail Mary pass into the center of the darkness. Ax and hammer returned to their owners without making contact.

And so it went. The Knights tested the Zodoran weapon's mettle, throwing their weapons into the cloud in a vain attempt to find the actual mechanism and damage it somehow. Every few moments, a haze would ripple from the cloud, and Lothar and Caleb would be hit with the full force of the weapon's attack. The weapon advanced on them, reaching out with smoky tendrils, and they fell back, meter by meter. The cloud enveloped the hulk of the CCW ship, which itself had taken on more damage from each of the weapon's blasts, and the Knights fell back further.

Caleb was coughing within his helm, trying not to swallow the blood that seemed to leak from his ears, nose, mouth, and eyes. It was difficult to see with his eyes clouded by a red haze. The energy core at the center of his body and soul fought valiantly to put him back together, or at least slow down the bleeding, but it could not match the furious pounding he received from the Zodoran weapon's onslaught. Lothar seemed to be faring better, but Caleb knew his own wounds were hidden beneath his suit of armor; **Lothar's** must be too. Still, the Wolfen never faltered, never cried out, never gave in. No matter the agony, he threw his ax with the same determination and strength each time.

Suddenly, Caleb doubled over. He was swallowing too much of his own blood, and he was unable to ignore his gag reflex. He quickly dispelled his helm so that he could vomit into space instead of inside the helmet. He spat blood in a gout, and felt the moisture on his face, no longer imprisoned by his helm, begin to slip away into the vacuum. He stared at his own blood in a daze as it began to orbit his head. *This is it*, he thought. *I'm going to die.*

Lothar grabbed him by the arm, and then blasted backwards away from the black cloud. It was drawing close and Caleb appeared to be out of it. Though they would almost surely perish against this deadly creature, Lothar couldn't allow the boy to die just yet.

Caleb shook himself and muttered a **thank-you** to Lothar. He tightened his grip on his hammer and straightened again. His face twisted into a bloodstained grimace, and he threw the hammer once more at the darkness.

BOOM!

The cloud recoiled. Somehow, Caleb had struck the weapon hidden within the billowing vapors. Lothar threw his ax towards the cloud, aiming for the spot where the hammer had disappeared within the darkness. He was rewarded with another thump, as his weapon finally connected. "Thank the Forge," Lothar growled. "Have at it, Caleb!"

But the boy was already launching his sledge. Another titanic crash echoed within the cloud. Caleb laughed, and he felt strength flood into his arms. His wounds began to close up. If he could hurt this thing even a little bit before he died, he would be happy. Better to go out fighting than to be slaughtered like a hog. And then another wave of distortion hit, and the pain was

so intense that Caleb howled and let go of his hammer to clutch at his head. His helmet had apparently offered some scant protection after all. Without it, he felt as if his eyeballs would explode from their sockets, his temples throbbed as if jabbed with white-hot needles, and his teeth burned as if a dentist's drill had been at each of them.

Then the sky went red.

A bright flash washed over them all, and the dark cloud shifted, as if turning away from them to face the red giant. Caleb had just enough time to recall his helmet before the universe exploded around him. His eyes snapped shut without his volition, but his eyelids were not enough protection from the light. He saw everything.

He saw the red giant swell and pulse, throbbing like a heart, and then it expanded outward at the speed of light. The cloud of darkness around the Zodoran weapon burned away, revealing a sphere of silver and gold, lit up like a Christmas tree. Then a solid wall of plasma struck the planetoid, the sphere, the drifting hulks, Caleb, Lothar, and the remaining planets in the system. The molten **starstuff** poured over Caleb, drowning him in heat and light. He felt his armor begin to melt, and beneath it his skin smoldered and blackened. And then the wave of plasma passed him by, and it was only light that struck him, tiny particles like needles that drummed his skin like soft rain. The shockwave struck next, and Caleb felt it hammer into him like a freight train. His eardrums didn't burst; they exploded. He felt his bones crack, and something wet against his cheeks, and he couldn't see anymore, and the pain was like nothing he had ever felt, nor the beauty like anything he had ever experienced. He felt his neurons fluttering as they shut off one by one, and then the darkness claimed him finally.

He returned to consciousness slowly.

He became aware of his body first. The pain was lessening, but it still burned like liquid fire in his bones. Particularly his bones, as they snapped together one by one, healing as his Forge-blessed body repaired itself. He flexed his fingers and toes then, relieved that they functioned, and then he carefully and cautiously opened his eyes, glad to have them back too. He looked down at himself first, noting the dents, scratches, burns, and melted fragments of his armor. He and it had taken a beating, but the armor held him together when he should have flown apart like shattered glass. "Thank the Forge," he whispered to himself.

He hung in space still, but that space was no longer empty. Clouds of dust were forming around him, **fragments** of planets and the star, bits of hydrogen and helium, iron and gold, mixing and roiling together. Strobes of light flashed through the aether as atoms of this or that element collided together and burst into flame, tiny echoes of the giant star they had once composed. Of the planetoid, the CCW ships, and Lothar, there appeared to be no sign.

But the sphere, the Zodoran energy leech, was only a few hundred feet away. It bobbed in the aether, the gold and silver plates catching the light as it flashed. Its own lights remained dim. Other than that, the weapon appeared unharmed.

It wasn't fair.

Caleb forced himself to stretch, and ignored the urge to flinch as his muscles and bones screamed in pain. As he did so, he saw the running lights on the sphere flickering to life.

"Damn," Caleb groaned. The supernova had indeed overwhelmed the weapon, and for a while it had laid dormant. But the nova had also nearly killed Caleb, and while he **recuperated**, unconscious and alone, the weapon had recovered as well. How much of the supernova's energy had it absorbed? Not that it mattered. The thing could destroy Caleb without any help from the star; of that he was certain.

He willed himself to move, and called up his sledge. The hammer's weight in his hands was reassuring and strangely comfortable. His body resisted his movement, but he forced himself to draw even with the **Zodoran** weapon. It was big, with a diameter equal to his own height. His reflection appeared in the burnished gold and silver plates, and he noticed with growing horror that more lights were coming to life. Soon, the thing would be fully recovered, and he would be dead.

Caleb alighted on top of the sphere and braced his legs. He had mere moments to destroy it, but he wanted to do it correctly. He hefted the sledge in his hands, and then brought it up to his shoulders. With a smooth stroke, he brought the hammer down with all the strength he could muster. Gold and silver plates crumbled inward with the impact, and the hammer was driven through the shell of the sphere. Electricity sparked and metal squealed. Caleb hauled back for another blow, and brought it crashing down to widen the hole and add to the damage.

The running lights flickered, and then went out. But Caleb wasn't fooled. He hammered the sphere into oblivion, striking again and again, until nothing survived but a few scraps of metal and some wires. Even then, he was tempted to continue, but his shoulders were sore, and his body was still trying to repair itself. He dispelled the hammer, and then went to look for **Lothar**.

The Siege Against Tolkeen

By David Haendler

Chapter 23

"Gentlemen," said Donald **Hartman** over the CS radio network. "I need to ask something before the fun begins. A long-time tradition of the Black Dog squadron has been to play a song from olden times during air attacks. We do this to intimidate the enemies of mankind, and to rally our own spirits. Would anyone have any objections to me playing a song during our attack on Tolkeen? I've reserved a special CD for just such an occasion."

"Go for it!" chirped one of the bomber pilots.

"Sounds good," agreed a couple of **SAMAS** pilots.

"I'm all ears," declared the pilot of the Air Castle in the skies above.

"All right, then," said Hartman happily, using his HUD program to select the audio CD player and external speakers. "Prepare for 'Rollin' Down **Rodeo**.'" With that, his sound system activated, and strains of rock music filled the skies. At that moment, the ground crews in the forest below realized what was happening, and bursts of antiaircraft fire began to sound.

"And so the game begins," said one pilot, taking out a pillbox with a quick volley of plasma grenades. "Good hunting, everybody."

* * *

"It has come to my attention," said Jack Perrin, "That today a massive air raid will be launched against Tolkeen, against this very city, no less." He took a deep breath, and looked out into the inquisitive, trusting eyes of the HFA terrorists. *It almost hurts to lie to them*, he thought.

"I want you all to help the Coalition succeed in this battle," he said. "If everyone can destroy or simply attack an antiaircraft weapon, the battle will go much better for the forces of humanity. Strike from a distance, aim for the crews, and don't be afraid

to go nuts with the ammunition. If the CS succeeds in this mission, then a major part of the war has been won."

The terrorists still looked at him, wanting details. He could see it in their eyes. The **headhunters** wanted to know the Coalition's targets, the city rats wanted to know how much of the city would be totaled, the idealists wanted to know how this bombing would advance the cause of humanity. **Perrin** wished that he had answers for them. *A leader should be better prepared*, said a tiny voice inside him. *Lead this scum?* asked his more rational side, his intellect. / *don't even want to know them!*

"What are you waiting for, **troops?!'**" he barked. "Get out there and do the work of humankind!" There was a brief pause, and then the HFA terrorists got to their feet, and sprinted away. They were full of eagerness, eagerness to destroy a society. Only Perrin and Possman remained in the beer hall.

"We should be getting out of **here, Jack,**" said the ranger, sipping from a hip flask of whiskey. "Don't want to miss that ride."

"Yeah," agreed Jack, as he began to walk out of the dingy building. Still, he couldn't help but feel some regret that this period of his life was over. *Things were starting to get interesting*, said the tiny voice inside him. This time, he didn't bother to silence that voice.

* * *

"Evasive maneuvers!" yelled a pilot, as walls of glimmering force appeared out of nowhere. A **Warbird** slammed into one of them, throwing the pilot into the force field at 100 **mph**. Rifts began to explode in midair, as the defenders of Tolkeen brought their full magical forces into effect.

"Strafe those ground targets!" commanded Hartman to the other power armor pilots. "We need to clear the way for the bombers!" With that, he swooped down into the canopy, and opened fire on a Rift projection cannon. The weapon warped out of shape like wax as the systems controlling it went haywire and its reality was shattered. He then flew back up above the trees,

activated his targeting system, and began picking off snipers and rocket crews.

"I can see the city!" yelled one pilot excitedly as the gleaming towers of Tolkeen appeared on the horizon. Just then, a Rift opened up in front of his plane, the maniacally shifting G-Forces tearing him to shreds.

"Don't get careless, people!" yelled another of the pilots. "We'll be all right if we can just stay **frosty!** What the..." He noticed the many advancing blips on his radar screen, and then took a look in his rear window. "Oh, crap," he muttered. "Who wants to mess with the twenty or so bogies behind us?"

"And we haven't even gotten to the city yet," muttered **Hartman** through gritted teeth. "Baker, **Hetfield**, you two are with me. We get to close range, and shred the hell out of those fighters. **Tolkeen's** planes have got great long range attacks, but we get close and personal and they'll go down." He turned, activated his **Vibro-Blades**, and sped into the path of the oncoming jet fighters, flanked by two of his men.

"What the hell is that?" grunted one of the D-Bee pilots, as he tried to get a missile lock on the incoming Super **SAMAS**. "It sounds sort of like the mating cry of a **Glorthian dunerunner.**" Just then, his lock was complete. His right tentacle depressed the **fire** button, and a missile containing raw **hellfire** shot towards the incoming enemy.

"Thanks!" yelled Hartman to his wingmen, as the missile dissolved in a blaze of laser fire. "The punk that fired that is mine!"

The D-Bee pilot tried to pull up, but was already too late. He squealed in panic as the lead **SAMAS** dove through his jet's wings, and as his engines caught flame. The last thing he saw before he crashed was the malicious, skeletal face of a Coalition **robot**, glaring at him through the cockpit.

"Air Base Delta, we need backup!" cried the speakers at the air control base. "Some bogies have detached from the main force, and they're tearing us apart!"

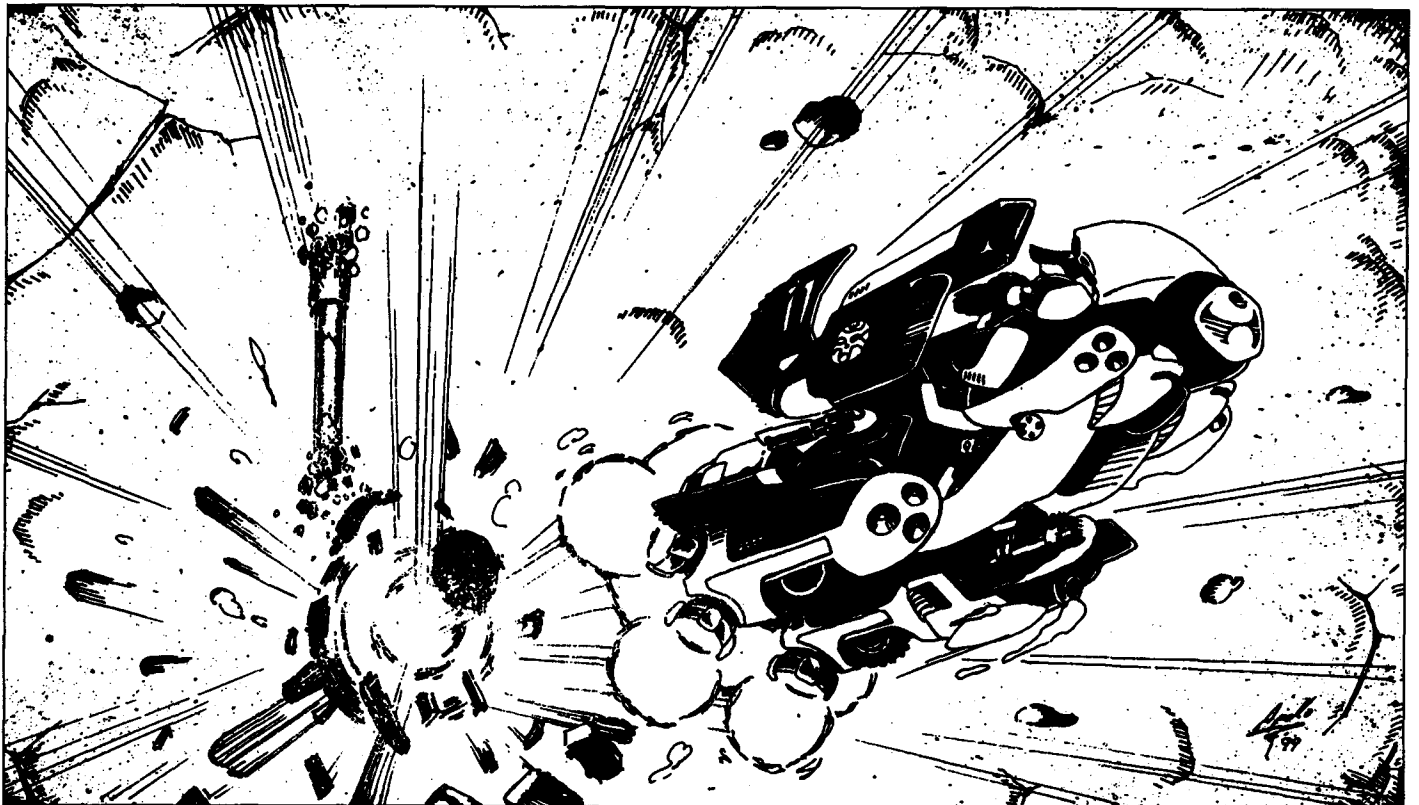
"We can't spare any air forces," said the **Elven** general of the base. "They're all gathered over the city. We'll do the best we can with our ground forces, but try to get your men out of there! Do you **copy?!**" There was suddenly a harsh squealing noise on the speakers, and they went dead. The general angrily looked at a nearby radar screen, noting the rate at which his side was losing pilots. "Tell the damned ground crews to take down those bogies!" bellowed the Elf.

"These damned things are killin' me!" yelled Hartman, as his armor was bitten into by hundreds of tiny flaming darts. "I need these fighters to go down quick! C'mon guys!" He was greatly angered by the fact that the enemy was concentrating their fire on him. If the Tolkeen jets were designed for close combat and **dogfighting**, he would have been very dead by now. As it was, he was just in trouble.

Suddenly, rocket fire and bolts of mystical lightning began shooting up from the ground forces below. Baker was struck by several of them and destroyed.

Make that very big trouble, Hartman thought. "Hetfield, you suppress that ground fire! I'm pulling an umbrella maneuver!" He armed his grenade launchers to maximum volleys, raised his arms, and depressed the triggers as he spun. Explosive death began spitting from the launchers. As his remaining **wingman** took out the ground units one by one, **Hartman's** barrage of destruction destroyed most of the remaining jets. The survivors fled, back to whatever hidden base had launched them.

"Let's get back to the main force!" yelled Hartman. "They need our help!"



"Are you sure you're okay?" asked his wingman, as they sped towards the distant city at the highest speed their power armor could fly. "You're armor's melting off of you."

"They need us!" insisted **Hartman**. "Besides, without my music, they'll have bad luck."

"If you say so," said **Hetfield** skeptically. "It is a kickin' tune."

* * *

The Sky Cycle pilot shot through the streets of Tolkeen at incredible speed, his **tri-rail** guns blaring. The power armor troops were doing a good job of dispersing the Tolkeen fighters and hatchlings in the air, leaving the sky cycles and CS fighters to take out the many, many anti-aircraft facilities on the ground. Missiles were screaming through the air, but few were connecting. In fact, there hadn't been the resistance which anyone had expecting. It seemed almost like something or someone else was destroying lots of the opposition for **them...**

* * *

"Stay down, you son of a bitch!" screamed Rick Freedom as he slammed his foot into the groin of one of the guardsmen. The D-Bee soldier screamed in pain as he fell to the ground. However, his screams turned to those of panic as the Crazy dropped a satchel of grenades onto the nearby mini-missile battery. "Let's get out of here!" Freedom yelled to his two city rat companions, as **the three** revolutionaries ran from the rooftop. Moments later, the battery, the nearby corpses, and the still-living guardsmen burst into flame as the satchel charge exploded.

The **headhunter** looked into his scope, aimed carefully, and then fired his particle beam rifle at the rift projector. The powerful energy beam ripped through the evil machine, destroying it instantly. Its crew was thrown roughly twenty feet away by the forthcoming explosion and temporal shifting.

The city rat tossed the homemade gas grenade into the anti-aircraft bunker. There was a muffled boom, and the crew ran out, their uniforms melting and the skin beneath blistering. Even the D-Bees amongst them were affected. The city rat grinned widely. The acidic gas didn't work very well on flesh, but did a number on the polycarbons used in armor. He tossed a satchel charge into the bunker, and then began to run down the street, thankful that the air raid sirens had called all of the citizens into shelters. Looking up into the air, he waved to the beleaguered CS planes flying overhead.

* * *

"Your magic had better work," growled the **godling** to **Shaard**, as they watched the aerial battle from a rooftop. "We spent so much developing it that we couldn't devise as good an air defense program as I would have liked. If that pyramid goes boom, we can kiss this war goodbye."

"Relax, my friend," said Shaard, temporarily metamorphosed into human form. "The pyramid will not be destroyed by pathetic forces such as these. And after this battle, the Coalition will not dare pull such a blatant maneuver again."

"I pray to all the gods that you are right," said the godling. "Because this maneuver is killing our pilots and our people left and right."

* * *

"I see the pyramid!" said one of the remaining pilots. "That's got to be the **super-weapon!**"

"Sounds right to me!" said another one. "Everyone, let's blow this thing to hell and go home!" He pressed the fire button, almost in unison with the rest of the CS fighter pilots. Dozens of plasma missiles rocketed in at great speed. There was a tremendous roar as the missiles connected with the huge pyramid, wrapping the mystical structure in flame.

"The target's been designated!" yelled the communications officer of the air castle. "The target's been designated! Release those concussion bombs!" Deep in the belly of the flying fortress, one of the gunners slammed the coordinates into a keyboard, and hit the EXECUTE button. The belly of the steel beast opened up, and huge, guided barrels of explosive fuel began rolling out, rocketing towards their target.

There was a huge roar as the first of the bombs connected. A couple of planes were caught in the blast radius and destroyed. The rest were thrown backwards by the incredible force of the explosion. The others began hitting in rapid succession, one by one. A huge dust cloud was thrown up into the air, shrouding the pyramid in smoke and debris.

The godling felt himself being pushed back by the explosion. He feared for the safety of Tolkeen if such forces could be deployed against it. The dragon, however, was merely angry. "Release the Air **Elementals**," he hissed into a wrist communicator."

Donald Hartman kicked in his jets at full power, merely to stabilize himself. His wide grin was masked by the armored faceplate of the SAMAS. "We did it," he whispered proudly. "We did it." He wasn't even angry that his music was being masked by the boom.

Rick Freedom began cheering loudly, cartwheeling and whooping to his wild heart's content.

"Hell," muttered **Perrin**, with a face full of dust, as he looked at the distant explosion. "They really went all out this time." Possman looked at his watch and **frowned**.

The last of the bombs detonated. The smoke and the dust began to disperse, showing the true condition of the pyramid.

The pyramid was untouched. Every nearby building for three blocks had been utterly demolished, practically vaporized, but the pyramid hadn't even been scratched. Shaard smiled. "Told you so," he said flippantly to the godling. "The Air Elementals have probably destroyed the bomber by now, and they should be on their way to the main force as we speak. The battle is won, my friend."

Up in the skies, one of the pilots looked up as he heard a whooshing noise from above. He saw a cloud in the shape of a man rushing down from the heavens at him, and then his cockpit collapsed. His jet was caught in a tornado, tossed around like a toy.

"**No**," sobbed Rick Freedom as the unholy **armies** of the air tore through the last remnants of the CS force. The skies were

being torn asunder by savage winds and gales, like an earthquake in the air. Planes were being crushed, ripped apart, thrown into the ground, all at the same time. The horrible cries of the aerial spirits filled the air. The Crazy fell to his knees, and began weeping uncontrollably. Magic had won.

* * *

Donald **Hartman** tried frantically to stabilize his power armor as he was caught up in a maelstrom. Demons of the air were flying all around him, tearing his comrades to bits. The pilot knew he would be next if he didn't escape. He turned off all the safeties on his armor's jets, and tried to fly out at higher than safe speeds. His SAMAS strained against the elemental force of the wind, the flames of his rockets melting the armor plating. He pulled out of the hurricane, and suddenly rocketed thousands of feet, slamming into the side of a building. He fell to the **ground**, dazed and bleeding inside the armor. The HUD was screaming of damage, total jet failures, internal fires, armor breaches. His speakers were broken, and the very rare and expensive CD in his armor was doubtless shattered.

"Where can I go?" **the** pilot whispered to himself, pictures of magical torture and nightmare POW camps flying through his head. "Where can I hide?" Then, he thought of his secondary objective. Maybe this **Perrin** guy could hide him. The fallen flyer trudged off through the burning streets of **Tolkeen**, in hopes of sanctuary. His hopes were not high.

* * *

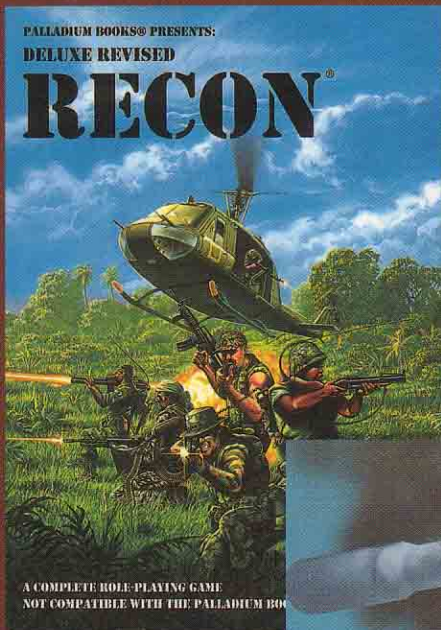
"I tell you, I have high hopes," boasted **Shaard**, looking over his damaged city. Pillars of smoke and flame were rising up into the air. Sirens were sounding everywhere, and the wounded were just beginning to stagger out from their hiding places.

"How?!" demanded the godling. "Our losses were so..."

"**Feh!**" sneered the dragon. "Losses are nothing. It's like a game of chess. You sacrifice pawns or bishops or knights so that the king may win the game! We've made the Coalition States afraid to ever attack us again. What is a few weeks of rebuilding and a couple of hundred lives compared to such security?"

"I think that your pawns might answer differently," said the godling angrily.

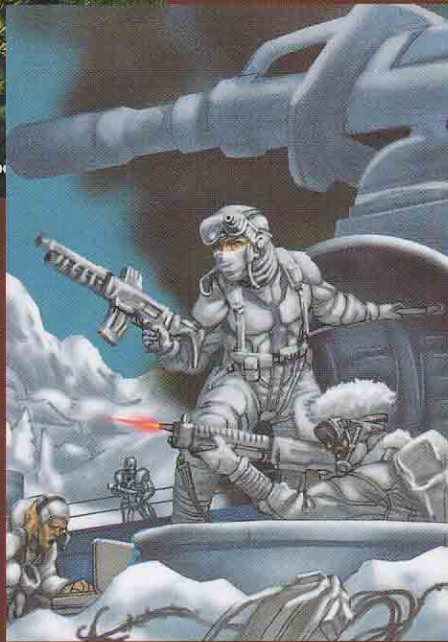
"That is why they are not kings."



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