



Signs & Portents

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Roleplayer

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S&P Roleplayer 41

February 2007

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Ah, February. It's about this time every year that I think 'oops, I forgot to write an editorial this month'. Well, actually that's completely untrue. It's only this year that I've thought that, but it's a pattern I can see continuing. What excuse do I have for my unabashed laziness? What possible reason could I present to ameliorate the crushing disappointment instilled by the sight of my editorial box devoid of text?

This:



That's right, it's a colossal bronze gorilla skeleton animated by God Learner techno-sorcery. It tears its enemies to pieces with silver claws, then drenches itself in their blood in a most barbaric way *and no-one knows why a soulless machine would do such a thing*. It is a symbol both of the power of the Clanking City and of the seething corruption at its heart that is only now beginning to make itself known.

Yes, I've been reading *The Clanking City*, one of our forthcoming releases.

Yes, it's good.

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EYE ON MONGOOSE

Coming This Month



Nehwon

This essential book contains the expanded details on the wide world of Nehwon, adding to the information presented in the main Lankhmar book, which primarily dealt with the City of the Black Toga and the possible adventures therein. It is part-appendix to that first tome and part-expansion. Ilthmar, with all its filth and poverty; Quarmall, with all its dark and hidden sorceries; the northlands, where the temperature falls with each step north – these realms are revealed in greater detail between the covers on this book, combined with the first part in a multi-scenario adventure that takes characters from Lankhmar across Nehwon and back again.

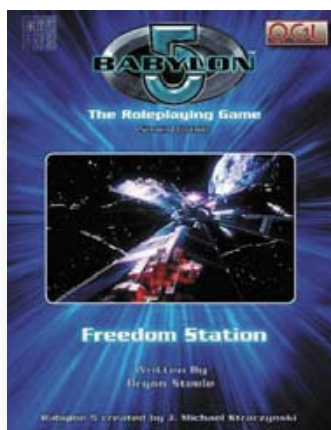
Finally, taking up the latter half of the book is the scenario Swords Across Nehwon. This scenario is designed for characters to leave the walls of Lankhmar behind them and travel the length and breadth of the wider world in their quest for adventure. It is also designed to link directly into the forthcoming scenarios such as Swords Against Sorcery, serving as the first steps on a much longer path. A number of story hooks and plot devices that occur in the adventure here tie into later scenarios, allowing Games Masters to connect the tales in one epic campaign.

Swords Against Sorcery

Swords Against Sorcery immerses Games Masters and players in the world of Nehwon, in the first full-length scenario for the Lankhmar campaign setting. The characters find themselves caught in a sorcerous civil war between two cults that have risen in the slums of Lankhmar - each dedicated to bringing about the worship of their own foul deities which were cast from the city centuries ago by the mandate of the Great God.

Under the guidance (and with the unreliable assistance) of the mighty archimages Ningauble of the Seven Eyes and Sheelba of the Eyeless Face, the characters will pit themselves against these newly-risen cults before all of Lankhmar suffers under their ascension.





Babylon 5: Freedom Station

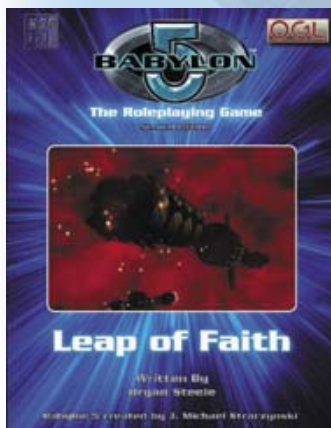
Before there was a Babylon 5, before the League of Non-Aligned Worlds had a place to bring all their commerce, there was Tirrith Transfer Point Alpha. Years pass, wars are waged, and the station took on a new name...Freedom Station.

This huge cylinder is home to over five thousand permanent residents - at least, that is what the official census says. Those who commonly visit or stay on Freedom Station know the difference between what the records say and what is really going on.

This book looks at the League's original version of the Babylon Project, how it failed, and where its new residents took it once they settled with the locals. Freedom Station is a powerful reminder that law and justice mean drastically different things depending on where in the galaxy you go, and who really runs the spacelanes away from the policing of the larger governments.

Babylon 5: Leap of Faith

The experimental Earth Alliance science vessel, the EAS Eyre, had a fully mapped route to what they thought was a cache of Vorlon-era technology ready for them to salvage when they triggered their jump drives and entered Hyperspace. With the highest-grade scientific equipment, a fully trained staff, and a squad of Marines 'just in case', they were ready for nearly anything.



That was seven weeks ago. Senator MacHenry worries for their return, and not just because they have yet to report in any way. Although the tyrannical reign of Clark has ended, it seems that Senator MacHenry has her share of dangerous secrets as well.

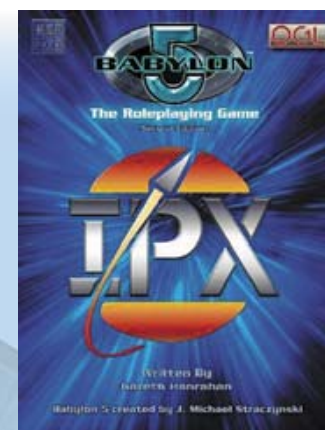
This is a scenario set in the year 2264. It is designed for a handful of characters ready to get hurled into Ancient mystery and underhanded politics, and will give them an opportunity to learn one of the EA's darkest secrets.

Babylon 5: IPX

In many ways, the Babylon 5 universe is a science-fiction retelling of a fantasy epic. There are ancient prophecies, slumbering monsters, warriors with bright swords (or StarFuries), wise mentors, jealous kings, powerful wizards, angels and demons...and there are also crazed, greedy adventurers who delve into deadly, trap-filled dungeons in search of treasure and magic items. They are IPX - and they just hired *you*.

This sourcebook details the history and inner workings of the IPX corporation, from its connections to EarthForce to the search for a cure to the Drakh plague. Characters can be employed by the corporation, or struggle against it, or just use the equipment and new character options presented in this book. There is a galaxy out there to be plundered.

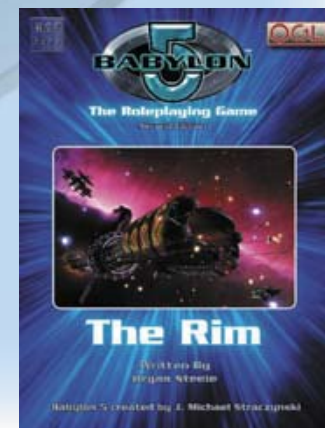
IPX - exploring the past to bring you the future.



Babylon 5: The Rim

The outer limits of the Galaxy have always been a mysterious place that travellers see as the end of everything, but true explorers and adventurous spacers know better. They know that there is no such thing as the End, no Void beyond the Void, and that there is something out there to be found. It is the role of explorers and wanderers to find these things and turn them from mystery into fact.

This book looks at the process of exploring the Rim and the many uncharted planets and systems that make it such an attractive topic. Unmapped jump routes and new experimental colonies, explorer vessels and the discovery of new life are all just parts of what can be learned in this sourcebook.



DRUIDS

Blending history and fantasy, here is an introduction to these forest-dwelling healers. By Tim Bancroft.

Druids are the enigmatic nature-worshippers of the European Celtic and pre-Celtic cultures. They were renowned as doctors by the Romans who encountered them, frequently feared and almost always respected. Druids are sometimes seen as shamans, are sometimes associated with Stonehenge, and modern romantic imagery portrays them as powerful, hermit priests of nature.

Their powers are mysterious, they commune with nature, they can heal and, above all, they provide unerringly accurate advice. Their reputation is such that druids are frequently regarded as having incredible magical abilities.

Here can be found rules to enable you to place these magical, wonderful characters into your RuneQuest campaigns. Drawing on history, romance and fantasy these guidelines and sample characters provide a solid background for playing druids, or for your players to encounter...

Which Druid?

One of the ranks of druids was a highly respected, aristocratic rank called the filid, judges or magistrates who also acted as priests or seers but who were most concerned with the law. It is a sign of the power of these judges that as kingship died out as a function

their cultural descendants, the appointed vergobrets (or 'Chief Magistrate'), became the key person in a Celtic tribe or community. The filid could be male or female, such as the Irish judge, Brigh, and they were frequently assisted by other, lesser druids.

The people we know as bards were both respected advisors on the oral law and were keepers and creators of lays and stories. Bards were the guardians of the rich mythology, oral poetry and stories of their culture. Taliesin is one of the more well-known bards from the stories we still know.

There existed another rank, the vates, sometimes translated as ovates or soothsayers. Some reports state they used the ritual sacrifices of purified victims to determine the outcome of important events under the direction of the more senior druids.

Rulers frequently employed all three of the main ranks of druids as advisors and speakers of the law.

In the rest of this article we will refer to the various ranks of druids as Druids, Bards and Filids. The word 'druids' will be used to refer to the order as a whole. The vates, or soothsayers, can be seen as inferior Druids.

The nature religion for which the druids acted as guardians venerated a wide range of natural elements,

not just individual plants, including certain groves, hill-tops, streams and lakes. In addition to the respect for nature, the Celts had a strong belief in the afterlife and a form of reincarnation. Removing the head of a dead person, however, 'sealed' them in the afterlife, which led warriors to remove the heads of their enemies to stop them coming back to attack them.

In the following sections the Celtic culture skills can easily be adapted to reflect your own campaign cultures.

Skills

Each rank within the hierarchy focuses on a particular area of study and lore. A Druid focuses on philosophy, theology, astronomy and the higher arts of magic. In contrast, a Filid has exceptional oratorical and diplomatic skills and an unsurpassed knowledge of the law. A Bard not only has skills in music, public speaking and entertainment but also in the mythology and history of his people: Bards were artists, able to build unforgettable lays both for the entertainment and for the praising the accomplishments of those they served.

The Druid has exceptional First Aid, Heal, Lore (Animal), Lore (Plant), Lore (Law) and Survival skills. In addition Craft (Infusions) should be high. Skills in Oratory are low, but the ability to Influence a chief

is high. Above all, the Druid's knowledge with Lore (Druid Theology) should be unsurpassed and he must have a very good Lore (Law) skill. Finally, a high Stealth skill and some basic skills with quarterstaff and dagger are appropriate.

A Filid is an aristocrat and judge, as well as a religious leader. Not only should he have exceptional Lore (Law), but also Lore (Druid Theology) to help lead his believers in worship. Given his role as a public speaker, Oratory skills must be excellent, though Influence less so and as the law is also bound up in history and cases Lore (History) is useful. Much of their other skills could come from experience, perhaps including Riding and 1H sword and shield use.

Of course a Bard must have superb communication skills and preferably speak several languages. As guardians of myth and legend, his Lore (History) must be better than any Druid or Filid, and his Lore (Law) must also be solid in order to support his function as advisor to chieftains and kings. Play Instrument and Sing should also be good to enable them to act in their role as entertainer. Whilst they would have some skill in Lore (Druid Theology), their major gift apart from history and law would be bringing knowledge of other places to the communities they visit: Lore (World) should also be high.

Magic

A Druid should be the master of nature magic, a Bard be aware of a wide range of lesser magic, and a Filid master of little except that which helps him with his task of magistrate and judge. Though there were Druidic schools and a single, huge and isolated temple may reflect such a school, it is more likely that most trainees were apprenticed to a single, experienced druid to learn their craft. In RuneQuest terms, this would limit their access to spells to those known by their master. Druid magic was not just tied to nature, however: some were



said to be able to drive people insane, others the ability to fly and still others had the ability to conjure storms. All these additional abilities are readily supported by the magic systems in RuneQuest.

All ranks of druids are initiate members of a loosely organised cult, that of Druidism. Apart from the Druid School, there are no massive temples, just a few, small woodland glade-shrines which are dedicated to the gods and the spirits of nature. A Druid hermit may live within or on the edge of such a glade, but may live elsewhere, travelling to the glade once in a while to keep it usable. Within villages and hill-top towns there are sites or shrines, easily recognisable as a small, square enclosure with sacred trees planted at the corners or at the gate, probably oak, yew or rowan but each area is likely to have its own, special tree.

Magic

Divine Spells

There are a few, additional spells that the Druids can use and which are specific to the druidic cult.

BeastForm (Specific Beast)

Duration 15, Magnitude 1, Range Self

This is a number of different spells which all operate in a similar fashion. The caster of the spell transforms himself and his equipment into an animal of approximately equal SIZ. The beast to which the Druid is to be transformed must be specified when the spell is taken, providing it is approximately equal SIZ (+5/-5) and lives in the area in which he casts the spell.

When cast, all the caster's Integrated Runes, clothes and basic possessions are transformed with him. Up to 6 ENC of equipment may also be transformed and

absorbed into the transformation, reappearing when the spell ends, though metal (such as swords) is treated as twice its normal encumbrance. Whilst in the animal form the Druid can only communicate, see, move and act using the forms natural to the animal and has the animals shape, SIZ, STR, CON and DEX. His own POW and INT are retained and how much CHA is retained is up to the Games Master. His knowledge based skills are retained. Any magic which requires the use of incantations or gestures (Rune Magic, Divine Magic, Sorcery and similar) is not possible in the new form.

The Druid has the natural attack modes of the transformed beast but initially at basic skill levels (DEX + STR) only. Druids may improve these skills like any other, but each animal counts as its own skill (Natural Weapons (Wolf), Natural Weapons (Bear), and so on). For this reason, most druids pick one or two forms to 'specialise' in.

Trial of the Beasts

Duration 15, Magnitude 1, Progressive, Resist (Persistence), Touch

The witness is surrounded by a circling pack of ghostly, translucent wolves. Should he lie, one of the pack lunges forth to bite him, its insubstantial jaws inflicting very real harm.

Typically cast on a witness, this is similar to the Rune Magic spell Oath of Ordeal but no metal is required. For every intentional lie told by the target one of the shadowy wolves will bite him in a random hit location for 2 hit points per point of Magnitude. The spell may be resisted using Persistence at a skill modifier of -10% but a successful resistance will be obvious to all as the wolves will not appear.

The beast-shades circling the witness need not be wolves but could be any animal applicable to the environment or cult practice.

Rune Spells

Summon Beasts

Runes: *Beast*

Instant, Magnitude 3, Range 3 miles

If in the wild (and not underground or in a city), the druid can summon an animal of size 12-20 such as a small bear, forest leopard or Fell-wolf, or a pack of 1D3+1 smaller animals such as wolves if they are pack animals, or a small herd of 2D3+1 herd animals. These will perform a simple task commanded by the summoner providing he can both communicate with them and persuade them to do so, though such attempts receive a +20% skill modifier on the persuasion checks (whichever skill is used). The beasts summoned will not commit suicide.

The beasts must move normally to appear before the caster of the spell. If the caster moves, the beasts will go to the location where the spell is cast. Once the task is complete, the effect wears off. If there are no such creatures within the area of the spell then the spell cannot be cast. If overcharged, the range increases by 50% for each Magic Point invested into the spell (so a caster with a POW of 16 who casts Summon Beasts with two Magic Points will be able to summon a beast within 160m - $16 \times 5 + 40m \times 2$). To determine what sort of creatures may be in the area which are suitable for such a summons, the characters should make a Lore(Animal) skill check.

Legendary Abilities

Beast Speech

Requirements: Lore (Animal) 90%; Integrated Beast Rune; Lore (Druid Theology) 90%

Cost: 10 hero points

Beast Speech gives the you the ability to talk to the animals you encounter and communicate effectively with them. It is of most use when asking questions about things the animals have seen or encountered and Games Masters must be careful what information is passed on by animals. For example, a wolf is likely to see a lone human as a puzzling anomaly, an animal away from his pack, obviously ill and therefore fair prey; the wolf is unlikely to be able to form a conjecture as to why the human was there. You may use your normal interaction skills (Influence, Oratory, and so on) on any animals you can speak to, although the Games Master may assess penalties based on relative intelligence and outlook.

Forest Ally

Requirements: Lore (Animal) 100%; Integrated Beast Rune; Lore (Druid Theology) 100%

Cost: 8 hero points

You acquire an animal ally from the creatures commonly encountered in your demesne. When you receive the ability you choose the creature you wish as your ally (which you must have had previous contact with) and succeed at a Lore (Druid Theology) check. With success the animal will appear within 2d12 hours; failure means you cannot ally with that creature and must wait 24 hours before trying again (which costs you no extra points, just time). The Forest Ally is completely loyal to you and will follow you around at an appropriate distance. It will also guard you and protect you from attackers, but will not attack any who are not apparently hostile to you. If your Forest Ally can bear your weight

it will allow you to ride it or will allow you to put it to harness. The Forest Ally will not willingly leave your proximity except to hunt or drink.

If you know Beast Speech you can ask your Forest Ally to perform tasks for you. Its bond with you allows it to understand you as a human would, and it responds to requests as a devoted companion.

If your Forest Ally dies, you can approach another creature after 24 hours and attempt to make it an ally just as if you had just received the ability.

Potions and Poultices

Anyone can use these rules if they have the appropriate skills. They are presented here within a druidic context, but the mechanics are setting-independent.

A Druid not only has an excellent awareness of the plants and animals around him, but is also taught how to develop these plants into useful medicines using his Craft (Infusion) skill. The potions and poultices brewed and prepared by a Druid are used to supplement his magical capabilities and his Healing and First Aid skills. In addition, he can brew and make poultices and medicines which speed the healing process.

The process for making a potion, lotion, poison or poultice is as follows:

- The Druid must spend time searching for ingredients in an environment with which he is familiar. After an hour he may make a Lore (Plant) check, with possible modifiers depending on the richness of the region. If the check is successful, he has found enough

basic ingredients (leaves, roots, stems, fruit and similar) for a single Craft (Infusions) check.

- The Craft (Infusions) check takes an amount of time dependent on the infusion (see below for details) and consumes all the ingredients. On a success, the infusion has been created. On a critical success, you have created twice as much infusion (or double the number of doses) as you were aiming for. On a critical failure, you have created... something. Its actual properties are up to the whims of the Games Master.

Druids do not sell their infusions, using them to help their local community for contributions to the upkeep of the local shrine or for service.

Storing Ingredients

Gathered herbs and ingredients can be stored and preserved for up to 3 months using a further Lore (Plants) or Craft (Infusions) check, but must otherwise be used within a week of being gathered.

Preparing/Brewing

When he has the relevant equipment such as a mortar/pestle for grinding, a knife for cutting and peeling, a cooking pot and fire or similar simple equipment, the Druid can attempt to prepare the infusion. This is achieved with a Craft (Infusions) check, modified by the complexity of the preparation he is making.

Because of the complexity of the process, the normal skill bonuses for taking extra time are halved, while the skill penalties for doing it more quickly are doubled.

A herbalist can brew up to five sets of ingredients simultaneously providing he deducts 10% from the success chance for all preparations for each additional set of ingredients (so three sets of ingredients can be prepared simultaneously, for example, at a -30% chance on each).

Antidotes

A Druid can also craft antidotes which must be drunk before the poison is imbibed, ingested or otherwise delivered. Each antidote lasts for 1D6+2 hours and gives a 20% bonus to the imbibing character's Resilience check. Each additional percentage bonus subtracts from the chance of making the brew by twice the bonus (so a 30% Antidote, +10% above normal, forces a dice modifier of -20%). On completion of the preparation, there is enough antidote for two applications.

Medicines

A herbalist can brew potions, lotions, poultices (or salves and ointments) which assist with the healing process, helping to recover hit points or helping the character recover from disease. A poultice or ointment works on a single hit location, whilst a healing potion must be imbibed and works on all hit locations simultaneously. A potion can only be taken once per day and, whilst the effects of a poultice or ointment can only be felt once per day, a separate poultice/ointment can be applied to each damaged hit location.

Potions to help resist the effects of a disease work in a similar fashion to Antidotes. The skill modifiers and bonuses for each type of healing medicine are given in the Healing Infusion Skills Modifier Table.

Other potions can be brewed which restore characteristic points, or can assist in fighting disease in a similar fashion to Antidotes, giving bonuses to the Resilience

Healing Infusion Skills Modifier Table

Hit Points Restored	Poultice Skill Modifier	Potion Skill Modifier
1	+20%	-40%
2	0	-80%
3	-20%	-160%
4	-40%	-320%

Antidote/Curative Infusion Skills Modifier Table

Resilience/Persistence Bonus	Skill Modifier
+20%	0
+30%	-20%
+40%	-40%

or Persistence skill check required to fight the disease. The skill modifiers are provided in the Antidote/Cure Preparation Skills Modifier Table.

For all medicines a single set of ingredients produces a single potion or two poultices or ointments. 'Magic' potions are not part of the Druids stock in trade, though a Spellcharged item with the Heal spell is often one of the first tools a suitably be-runed druid will create.

Healer's and First Aid Kits

A Druid can replenish First Aid Kits and Healer's Kits by gathering materials and preparing them as above. At the end of the process, a Druid can replenish the supplies in two First Aid Kits or a single Healer's Kit.

Cult: Druid

This is not focussed on a single god but provides a reason and structure for a druidic civilisation and way of life. As a result, it is a mix of a nature or earth/fertility cult and a cult of law. All members of the tribe are automatically Lay Members from birth and are expected to attend the regular festivals held at their local hilltop town (a small site or shrine) or in their local forest shrine. All members are expected to support the Priests and Acolytes in their tasks. Members who are sentenced to excommunication are exiles and outlaws, irrespective of whether or not they have the Excommunicate Divine Spell cast on them.

Temples: Whilst the Druid School is a Major Temple, it is the only group of buildings recognisable as a temple

in the druid cult. Other 'temples' are groves of trees or nemeton, square areas with entrances at the four points of the compass with sacred trees placed around it. The grove or nemeton at a hamlet is most likely a very basic site but other groves and nemeton vary in strength depending on the length of time they have been established and the continuing presence of a Druid. Most Druid Groves will be the equivalent of a Minor Temple.

Cult Skills: Lore (Animal), Lore (Plant), Lore (Law), and First Aid. Initiates and higher gain Lore (History), Play Instrument and Sing as cult skills. Acolytes and higher include Healing, Influence, Oratory, Lore (Druid Theology) and Craft (Infusions) on their list of cult skills.

Worshiper Duties: Initiates are expected to assist Acolytes and Rune Priests with any duties they have to perform.

Ranks: Trainee and apprentice druids are initiates and some never advance beyond that level. All committed and trained Druids, Bards and Filids are Acolytes at least and lead worship. Filids develop into Lords of the cult, as do the majority of Bards. All Druids become Priests, and the name is often interchangeable, and some Bards progress to priestly status (as does the occasional Filid).

Cult Spells - Rune Magic: For lay members these are Oath of Ordeal (Truth), Clear Path (Plant) and Vigour



(Beast). Initiates include Bestial Enhancement (Beast), Detect (Truth), Heal (Fertility), and Summon Beasts (Beast). Acolytes include Endurance (Fertility) and Thunder's Voice (Mastery).

Cult Spells - Divine Magic: Divine Magic spells available to druids are from the domains of Beast, Fertility, Plant and Truth, together with those specific to the cult and those available to all cults. Spells associated with Truth and Heal Wound are available to Initiates.

Acolytes can take spells from the Truth, Fertility, Plant and Beast domains, as well as all healing and cult spells. Priests are referred to as Druids even if their background is from the Bardic or Filid path: their elevation to the cult priesthood gives them the respect a Druid receives.

Cult Lords: Filids occasionally become Lords, though most remain as Acolytes.

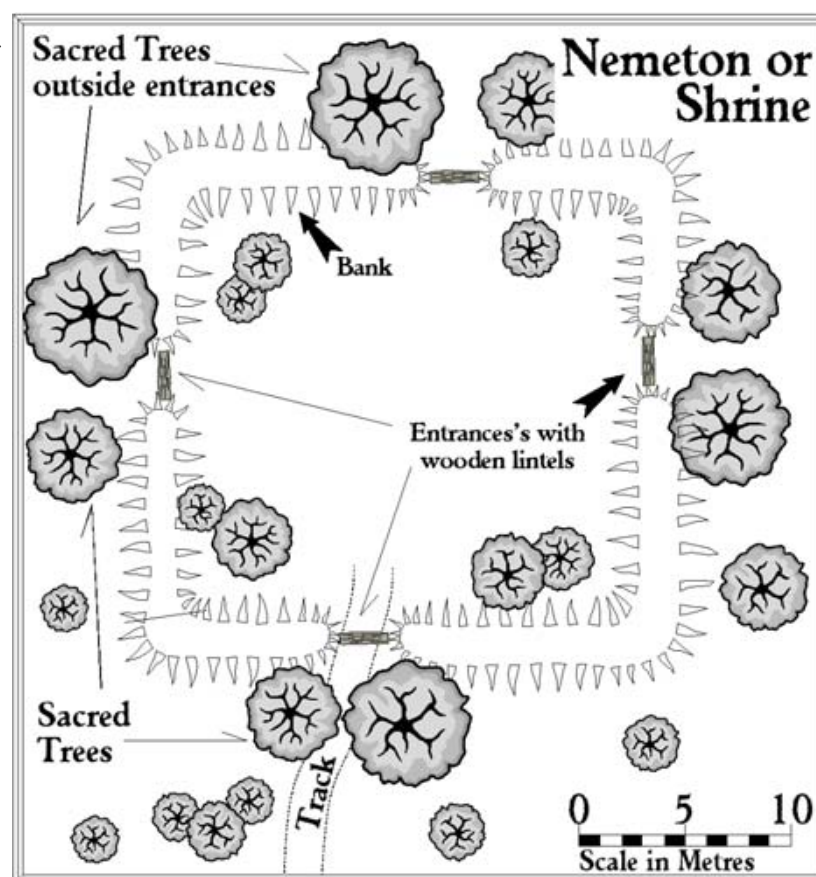
Special Benefits: Members can receive First Aid and Healing for free, and pay significantly reduced prices for Heal spells. Members can also demand a hearing in law at which an Oath of Ordeal or Trial of the Beasts is used.

Generating Druids

It is recommended that experienced and fully trained druids should remain Non-player Characters. They can be approached for advice and knowledge, but are unlikely to be found outside their woodland domain. Trainee Druids, Filids and Bards sent on a quest by their mentor could make excellent adventurers as they seek to improve their knowledge of the world around them. Failed or exiled druids can make interesting Player Characters but would be banned from cult training and spells.

Whilst on the rare occasion Druids will ask a group of assistants to perform a task, Filids in the service of a ruler are highly likely to hire a group such as the Player Characters for a delicate task or to assist with an investigation. Bards are almost never likely to hire an external group unless in serious need, but may carry news that bears investigating.

The following Profession represents a trainee druid at the very beginning of his apprenticeship. His mentor has passed on some of the venerable skills of the druids, but the character is far from an expert. It can also be used for someone who began the druid training but was later failed or exiled.



Profession	Cultural Background	Basic Skill Bonuses	Advanced Skills
Trainee Druid	Barbarian, Peasant	Lore (Animal) +5%, Lore (Plant) +5%, Persistence +10%	Pick Two Craft (Infusions), Healing, Lore (Druid Theology), Lore (Law), Runecasting*, Survival
		Pick One 1H Sword +5%, Staff +5%, Influence +5%, Sing +5%, First Aid +5%	

*This is a Magical skill. Choose one of the following: Beast, Fertility, Man or Plant. The character has integrated that rune and has that rune's Runecasting skill. A trainee druid may only pick this skill once

Nemeton/Shrine

The plan of how a sacred place or nemeton may have looked is provided. Much is conjectural, though it is known that sacred trees were planted in or at the entrances to such shrines, and the entrances had wooden posts with wooden lintels. In many hill-forts the nemeton would have been smaller, perhaps only 10m square. Whilst the inside is relatively clear: Games Masters could add in an altar or a circle of seats or a simple menhir if they wished.



D20 Cards



Sick of rolling dice? Try these alternative rules by Mark Charke, suitable for any d20 or OGL game.

Welcome to *d20 Cards*, a system that replaces d20s with cards drawn from a standard deck of cards. Each time you would normally roll a d20, you instead draw two cards and use them to determine the result of the action. The card system is a little different but the odds are roughly the same.

There are two ways to include this system in your games. Everyone can use the card system or individual people can choose to use it by taking the d20 card feat or prestige classes.

Basic Rules

Basic Mechanic: You draw two cards and add their value together instead of making a d20 roll. Whenever you draw a face card, a Jack, Queen or King, discard it and draw another card. Once used in this way, discard these cards.

Threat (Optional): The odds of getting a 20 or a 1 is less with the cards, so a total of 18, 19 or 20 on the cards is considered the same as a natural 20 on the die for threats on attacks and automatic successes on saving throws.

The next numbers continue consecutively at a 1 to 1 basis. A total of 17 on the cards is considered a natural 19. A total of 16 is considered a natural 18 and so forth. This is important for the Improve Critical feat.

Fumble (Optional): A total of 1, 2 or 3, on the cards, is considered the same as a natural 1 on the die. The attack is an automatic miss, additional negative effects may occur on saving throws and so on.

Critical: If you threaten on an attack, you draw two more cards to make another attack roll to determine if it is a critical hit or not.

Face Cards: Face cards have no use in the basic system but there are feats and abilities that take advantage of their presence in the deck.

Advanced Rules

All of the following rules are optional.

Combat Draw: At the beginning of each combat round you draw two cards for each attack you are going to make. If you draw more than two cards, you must use a full attack action (you cannot change your mind after the first attack). You decide which cards to use for each attack. This allows for a certain amount of strategy.

Discard: At any time you may discard two cards and draw one. You can only get a 1-10 with this result (an Ace is a natural 1) but this might be better than what you drew with the original two cards.

Combat Discard: You can 'discard' from a 'combat draw', more than once if you wish, as long as you still

have two or more cards in your hand. Discarding will reduce the number of attacks you are able to make but you still must use the full attack action even if you are left with only one attack.

You must use two cards for each attack, unless you have an odd number of cards. In this case the last attack uses one card just like a Discard.

Joker: The joker can be *any* card you wish.

Poker Combat Draw: You can make a poker hand from your combat draw. When you do, you must discard those five cards for a single attack, reducing your total number of attacks, but getting an automatic result shown below.

On a critical hit result, increase the damage; you do not need to make another attack roll to confirm it as a critical hit. A dead man's hand doubles the critical multiplier. For example, a pick would inflict x8 damage with a dead man's hand.

Poker Hand Results

Hand	Effect
Dead Man's Hand	Critical hit, double the critical multiplier
Royal Flush	Critical hit
Straight Flush	Critical hit
4 of a Kind	Natural 20
Full House	Natural 20
Flush	19
Straight	18

Dead Man's Hand: The exact contents of the dead man's hand are not certain and vary as a result, but are often the Ace of Clubs, the Ace of Diamonds, the Eight of Clubs, the Eight of Diamonds and the Queen of Hearts.

Royal Flush: A poker hand with an Ace, King, Queen, Jack and 10, all in the same suit.

Straight Flush: A poker hand with consecutive cards in the same suit.

4 of a Kind: A poker hand with four cards of the same value or face.

Full House: A poker hand with a pair, and three of a kind; two cards of the same value or face and three cards of the same value or face.

Straight: A poker hand with five consecutive cards such as 9, 10, 11, Jack and Queen.

Once Through: Do not reshuffle the discarded cards into the deck until the deck has run out of cards (also wait until everyone's hands are empty to reshuffle the deck).

D20 Card Feats

The following are d20 card feats that can be taken as a general feat with the Games Master's permission.

D20 Cards (General)

You use cards instead of a die for your d20 rolls.

Prerequisites: Games Master's permission.

Benefit: You may use any of the card systems, basic or advanced, instead of rolling a d20.

Special: You can create card related magical items as if you had the Craft Wondrous Item feat.

Joker (General)

You can save Jokers to use later.

Prerequisites: d20 cards.

Benefit: When you draw a Joker, you can put it aside. The hand you removed it from uses one less card. The joker is not replaced. Any time before you reshuffle your deck, you can replace any card just drawn with the Joker.

Jack (General)

You gain bonuses from Jacks.

Prerequisites: d20 cards.

Benefit: Each time you draw and discard a Jack, add a +1 luck bonus to the total if it is an attack roll.

For The Mathematicians

The odds of drawing cards as opposed to rolling a 20-sided die...

No	% Odds	Odds in 20
1	0%	0 in 20
2	1%	0.2 in 20
3	2%	0.4 in 20
4	3%	0.6 in 20
5	4%	0.8 in 20
6	5%	1.0 in 20
7	6%	1.2 in 20
8	7%	1.4 in 20
9	8%	1.6 in 20
10	9%	1.8 in 20
11	10%	2.0 in 20
12	9%	1.8 in 20
13	8%	1.6 in 20
14	7%	1.4 in 20
15	6%	1.2 in 20
16	5%	1.0 in 20
17	4%	0.8 in 20
18	3%	0.6 in 20
19	2%	0.4 in 20
20	1%	0.2 in 20

Queen (General)

You gain bonuses from Queens.

Prerequisites: d20 cards.

Benefit: Each time you draw and discard a Queen, add +1 luck bonus to the total if it is for a saving throw.

King (General)

You gain bonuses from Kings.

Prerequisites: d20 cards.

Benefit: Each time you draw and discard a King, add +1 luck bonus to your damage if it is for an attack roll and you hit.

New Prestige Classes

The following are the new prestige classes related to d20 cards; the card blade and the card caster.

Card Blade

'It's not just anyone who can enter the King's court armed.'

The huckster, the gambler, the supernatural gunfighter, a card blade belongs in the dusty, dry streets of some backwater town with a pair of irons and a deck of cards up his sleeve. Wherever he is though, he is the master of games and quick on the draw. Card blades often serve dual purpose as muscle for a casino, as body guards or even as undercover law enforcement.

Fighter/rogues are ideal for card blades but both a fighter and rogue can qualify at higher levels. Other classes can also take card blade when they can meet the requirements.

Hit Die: d10

Playing Cards As Weapons

Without proficiency you cannot inflict damage with a playing card, except on a critical hit where you inflict one point of nonlethal damage. Proficiency in this exotic weapon allows you to inflict one point of lethal damage or two points on a critical hit. Weapon Specialisation with this weapon increases the base damage to 1d4 (small or medium) instead of dealing an additional two points of damage. Greater Weapon Specialisation increases the base damage to 1d6 (small or medium) instead of dealing an additional two points of damage.

Cards can be made from metal, costing 52 gp for a deck, and can be made of unusual metals gaining the benefits for being made of those materials. Cards, generally, are never made from glass, leather, wood (except paper and papyrus) or cloth.

Multiple Cards: No matter how many cards you use for a single attack, damage is dealt as if only one card was used. If your cards deal extra damage, such as from the *greater magic weapon* and *flaming arrow* spells, this extra damage is only applied once per attack. If you have multiple attacks, you can deal damage normally for each attack.

Playing Cards

Exotic Weapon	Cost	Dmg (S)	Dmg (M)	Critical	Range Increment	Weight	Type
Playing Card	1cp/52 cards	1	1	x2	5 ft.	1/2 lb. (full deck)	Slashing

Multishot: If you have the Multishot feat and Exotic Weapon Proficiency: playing cards, you can use Multishot with cards. This is an exception to the multiple cards rule above.

Requirements

To qualify for card blade a character must fulfil all of the following criteria.

Base Attack Bonus: +3

Skills: Profession (gambler) 3 ranks, Sense Motive 5 ranks, Sleight of Hand 3 ranks, Spot 3 ranks

Feats: Quick Draw

Special: The character must have at least one deck of cards (more than one is recommended).

Class Skills

The card blade's class skills (and the key ability modifier for each skill) are Climb (Str), Craft (Int), Handle Animal (Cha), Intimidate (Cha), Jump (Str), Profession (Wis), Ride (Dex), Sense Motive (Wis), Sleight of Hand (Dex), Spot (Wis) and Swim (Str)

Skill points at each level: 4 + Int modifier

Class Features

All the following are class features of the card blade prestige class.

D20 Cards: A card blade gains this feat for free at 1st level.

Energy (Su): Starting at 1st level, a card blade can use a standard action to charge a deck of up to 52 cards. This last one hour per point of Charisma. Each card deals 1d6 energy damage, when thrown and is discharged whether or not it hits. No matter how many cards he throws, they deal a maximum of 1d6 damage per attack. He can only charge a deck with one type of energy at a time and must choose 1 energy type he can use (acid, cold, fire, lightning or sonic). At 3rd, 7th and 9th levels he can use the power one additional time per day and chooses one more energy type he can use.

Exotic Weapon Proficiency (card): Card blades are proficient in the use of cards as weapons and can deal one point of lethal damage with them.

The Card Blade

Level	Base Attack Bonus	Fort Save	Ref Save	Will Save	Special
1 st	+1	+2	+0	+0	D20 cards, energy I, Exotic Weapon Proficiency: playing cards
2 nd	+2	+3	+0	+0	
3 rd	+3	+3	+1	+1	Energy II
4 th	+4	+4	+1	+1	
5 th	+5	+4	+1	+1	Weapon specialisation
6 th	+6	+5	+2	+2	
7 th	+7	+5	+2	+2	Energy III
8 th	+8	+6	+2	+2	
9 th	+9	+6	+3	+3	Energy IV
10 th	+10	+7	+3	+3	Bonus feat

Weapon Specialisation: At 5th level the card blade can deal 1d4 damage with a card instead of one point of damage (this counts as having Weapon Specialisation with cards).

Bonus Feat: At 10th level, the card blade gains a bonus feat. This can be any fighter feat or Craft Wondrous Item.

Card Caster

'Got a deck of cards? Let me show you a trick.'

The first card caster was the son of a jester and apprentice to an evoker. He earned an early living in the gambling halls until he went on the road as an adventurer and later retired to open his own gambling casino where he taught other card casters. Card casters are kin to arcane tricksters and you can find the two working together very well.

Card casters are usually chaotic, working with other rogues. They prefer being in cities where they can ply their trade but card casters are not unknown to dungeons

and the wild to increase their skill. Some card casters work for law enforcement undercover or as bodyguards in places such as the royal court.

Hit Die: d4

Requirements

To qualify for card caster a character must fulfil all of the following criteria.

Skills: Profession (Gambler) 5 ranks, Sense Motive 7 ranks, Sleight of Hand 5 ranks, Spot 5 ranks.

Spellcasting: Ability to cast 3rd level spells.

Special: Sneak attack +2d6. The character must have a deck of cards (more than one is recommended).

Class Skills

The card caster's skills (and the key ability for each skill) are Appraise (Int), Balance (Dex), Bluff (Cha), Climb (Str), Concentration (Con), Craft (Int), Decipher Script (Int), Diplomacy (Cha), Disable Device (Int), Disguise

(Cha), Escape Artist (Dex), Forgery (Int), Gather Information (Cha), Hide (Dex), Intimidate (Cha), Jump (Str), Knowledge (all skills, taken individually) (Int), Listen (Wis), Move Silently (Dex), Open Lock (Dex), Perform (Cha), Profession (Wis), Search (Int), Sense Motive (Wis), Sleight of Hand (Dex), Spellcraft (Int), Spot (Wis), Swim (Str), Tumble (Dex) and Use Rope (Dex).

Skill points at each level: 6 + Int modifier

Class Features

All the following are class features of the card caster prestige class.

Spells per day: When a new card caster level is gained, the character gains new spells per day as if he also gained a level in a spellcasting class he belonged to before adding the prestige class. He does not, however, gain any other benefit a character of that class would have gained (improved chance of controlling or rebuking undead, metamagic or item creation feats, hit points beyond those he receives from the prestige class and so on), except for an increased effective level of spellcasting. If a character had more than one spellcasting class before becoming a card caster, he must decide to which class he adds the new level for purposes of determining spells per day.

D20 Cards: The card caster gains this feat for free at 1st level.

Deck Book: A wizard/card caster no longer uses a spellbook but stores his spells on special decks of cards. The spells are only written on one side so they may be used as playing cards and a clever card caster would disguise them further to look like a normal deck of cards. It takes the same number of cards to store a spell as pages in a spellbook, requiring the same time and

money to write down. Another spellcaster can use a deck book as if he was reading another wizard's spellbook.

Sneak Attack (Ex): If a card caster attacks an opponent who is unable to defend himself effectively, the card caster can strike a vital spot for extra damage. Any time the card caster's target would be denied his Dexterity bonus to AC (whether he actually has a Dex bonus or not), or when the card caster flanks the target, the card caster's attack deals extra damage. The extra damage is listed on The Card Caster table, below. If the card caster has another class with sneak attack, add all the sneak attack damage together to determine the bonus damage when sneak attacking. Should the card caster score a critical hit with a sneak attack, this extra damage is not multiplied.

Ranged attacks can only count as sneak attacks if the target is within 30 feet. The card caster cannot strike with deadly accuracy from beyond that range.

With a sap (blackjack) or an unarmed strike, the card caster can make a sneak attack that deals nonlethal damage instead of normal damage. He cannot use a weapon that deals normal damage to deal nonlethal damage in a sneak attack, not even with the usual -4 penalty, because he must make optimal use of his weapon in order to execute a sneak attack.

A card caster can only sneak attack a living creature with a discernible anatomy — undead, constructs, oozes, plants and incorporeal creatures lack vital areas to attack. Any creature that is immune to critical hits is also not vulnerable to sneak attacks. The card caster must be able to see the target well enough to pick out a vital spot and must be able to reach a vital spot. The card caster cannot sneak attack while striking a creature with concealment (See *Core Rulebook I*) or striking the limbs of a creature whose vitals are beyond reach.

The Card Caster

	Base Attack	Fort	Ref	Will		
Level	Bonus	Save	Save	Save	Special	Spells/Powers per Day/Known
1 st	+0	+0	+0	+2	d20 cards, deck book	+1 level of existing class
2 nd	+1	+0	+0	+3	Sneak attack +1d6	+1 level of existing class
3 rd	+1	+1	+1	+3		+1 level of existing class
4 th	+2	+1	+1	+4	Sneak attack +2d6	+1 level of existing class
5 th	+2	+1	+1	+4	Exotic weapon proficiency: playing card	+1 level of existing class
6 th	+3	+2	+2	+5	Sneak attack +3d6	+1 level of existing class
7 th	+3	+2	+2	+5		+1 level of existing class
8 th	+4	+2	+2	+6	Sneak attack +4d6	+1 level of existing class
9 th	+4	+3	+3	+6		+1 level of existing class
10 th	+5	+3	+3	+7	Sneak attack +5d6	+1 level of existing class

Exotic Weapon Proficiency (card): At 5th level, card casters are proficient in the use of cards as weapons and can deal one point of lethal damage with them.

New Spells

The spells herein are presented in alphabetical order. They are all arcane spells, but at the Games Master's option some may be selected as alternate spells for the Trickery Domain at the specified levels.

Card Golem

Conjuration

Level: Sor/Wiz 1, Trickery 1

Components: V, S, F

Casting Time: 1 standard action

Range: Close (25 ft. + 5 ft./2 levels)

Effect: One summoned construct

Duration: 1 round/level (D)

Saving Throw: None

Spell Resistance: No

You animate one, or more, decks of cards into a Medium-sized humanoid form. The resulting creature is the same as an animated object, Medium, as described in *Core Rulebook III*, except that it has 1 hit point per caster level.

Focus: For every 5 hit points you must use one deck of cards to create the card golem. If the golem is damaged or destroyed, so are the cards used to make it.

Card Nova

Conjuration

Level: Sor/Wiz 3

Components: V, S, M

Casting Time: 1 standard action

Range: Long (400 ft. + 40ft./level)

Area: 20-ft.-radius spread

Duration: Instantaneous

Saving Throw: Reflex half

Spell Resistance: Yes

You hurl a deck of cards, which fly out to the specified range and explode in a burst of cards that transform into

energy, striking anyone in the area and dealing 1d4 + 1 damage per caster level (max +15). You can choose to have the cards deal acid, cold, fire, lightning or sonic damage, but only one type.

Material Component: A tiny ball of bat guano, sulphur and a deck of cards which is destroyed in the explosion; eaten by acid, frozen and shattered, consumed by flames, burned by electricity or vibrated apart. Telltale bits of card always remain, though.

Card Strike

Evocation

Level: Sor/Wiz 1

Components: V, M

Casting Time: 1 standard action

Range: Personal

Target: You

Duration: See text

You charge a card and throw it at an opponent. The card transforms into brilliant energy and ignores armour. If it hits it deals 1d4+1 energy damage per caster level (max +10). You can choose to deal acid, cold, fire, lightning or sonic energy but only one type.

Material Component: One playing card.

Instant Army

Conjuration

Level: Sor/Wiz 9, Trickery 9

Components: V, S, M

Casting Time: 1 standard action

Range: Close (25 ft. + 5 ft/2 levels)

Effect: Up to 54 creatures

Duration: 1 round/level

You transform a deck of cards into an army. The cards

2 through 10 become 1st level human fighters. Jacks become 2nd level human fighters. The Queens become 3rd level human sorcerers. The Kings become 4th level human fighters. The Aces become 5th level human barbarians, paladins or rangers. The Jokers become 3rd level rogue/3rd level human wizards.

The army is not especially clever but can follow complicated instructions such as 'fight until you are dangerously injured or being overwhelmed.' Soldiers slain (or successfully dispelled) revert to damaged or destroyed cards.

Material Component: One deck of cards.

Pokerkenisis

Transmutation

Level: Sor/Wiz 3, Trickery 3

Components: V, S, F

Casting Time: 1 standard action

Range: Long (400 ft. + 40ft./level)

Effect: One, or more, deck of cards

Duration: 1 min./level

Saving Throw: Reflex (negates)

Spell Resistance: No

You telekinetically cause a deck of cards to fly. You can shape them into a carpet to carry people or a sphere to hold objects, or any other contiguous shape you can think of. You can hold up to 25 pounds per caster level (maximum 375 pounds at 15th level) on the carpet or in the sphere.

Damage to the cards quickly destroys them and removes support but you can add more cards. You cannot carry liquids (without a container), sharp or damaging materials because they would cut through the cards and fall.

If you try to lift an unwilling target, they can negate the effect with a successful Reflex saving throw, by making a Strength check (DC 5) or by dealing 2 or more damage to the cards.

Focus: One or more decks of cards.

New Magic Items

Blessed Deck Book: These especially well made cards are durable and waterproof. Each card can store one spell up to a spell level equal to the value of the card. An Ace can store a 1st level spell; a 2 can store a 1st or 2nd level spell and so on. The Jack, Queen, King and Joker can store spells of up to 9th level. Only card casters with the deck book class ability can write spells onto a blessed deck book.

Moderate transmutation CL 7th; Craft Wondrous Item, deck book class ability, *secret page*; 12,500gp; Weight 0.5 lb.

+1 Deck of Cards of Returning: Treated as ammunition, each card in this deck has a +1 enhancement bonus. This gives them a +1 to hit and it deals 2 points of damage, instead of 1, in the hands of a proficient user. The cards also have the returning ability and come back to the wielder just before the beginning of his next turn. Removing or destroying cards in the deck has no effect on the other cards.

Moderate transmutation; CL 7th; Craft Magic Arms and Armour, *telekinesis*; Price 8,000gp

Scroll Deck: This is a magical deck of cards. As a free action useable once per round a character can draw one card randomly from the deck. As a move-equivalent action he can shuffle that card back into the deck or he can cast the spell exactly as if he were using a scroll. If

the character casts the spell, that card is removed from the deck. It cannot be used again. The cards of Ace to 9 contain spells from 1st - 9th (Ace is a 1st level spell, deuce is a 2nd level spell and so forth), 10, face cards and wild cards may contain spells of any level. The spell on the wild cards, if used, must contain a random effect such as *prismatic spray* or *confusion*.

Cost: To determine the cost of a scroll deck find the total number of spell levels. There are 180 spell levels in the cards from Ace to 9 plus the levels chosen for the 10, face cards and wild cards. Like making a scroll the cost is: Caster Level (minimum 17*) multiplied by total spell levels multiplied by 25gp. This cost is reduced by 25% (because the cards are random). Then add the cost for any material components or experience point costs over 1 gp.

*The spells must all be created at the same caster level.

Repair: You can replace a used card by scribing a replacement scroll (but on a card). This costs the same as making a scroll.

The Elemental Arcane Scroll Deck

	Diamonds (Earth)	Spades (Air)	Hearts (Fire)	Clubs (water)
Ace	<i>Mage armour</i>	<i>Feather fall</i>	<i>Burning hands</i>	<i>Obscuring mist</i>
2	<i>Shatter</i>	<i>Whispering wind</i>	<i>Flaming sphere</i>	<i>Fog cloud</i>
3	<i>Keen edge</i>	<i>Fly</i>	<i>Fireball</i>	<i>Water breathing</i>
4	<i>Stone skin</i>	<i>Solid fog</i>	<i>Fire shield</i>	<i>Ice storm</i>
5	<i>Wall of stone</i>	<i>Overland flight</i>	<i>Shadow evocation</i>	<i>Cone of cold</i>
6	<i>Wall of iron</i>	<i>Shadow walk</i>	<i>Stone to flesh</i>	<i>Control water</i>
7	<i>Reverse gravity</i>	<i>Control weather</i>	<i>Delayed blast fireball</i>	<i>Ethereal jaunt</i>
8	<i>Dimensional lock</i>	<i>Power word stun</i>	<i>Incendiary cloud</i>	<i>Polar ray</i>
9	<i>Imprisonment</i>	<i>Freedom</i>	<i>Meteor swarm</i>	<i>Shapechange</i>
10	<i>Stone skin</i>	<i>Control weather</i>	<i>Fire shield</i>	<i>Water breathing</i>
Jack	<i>Wall of stone</i>	<i>Fly</i>	<i>Fireball</i>	<i>Cone of cold</i>
Queen	<i>Wall of stone</i>	<i>Fly</i>	<i>Fireball</i>	<i>Cone of cold</i>
King	<i>Wall of stone</i>	<i>Fly</i>	<i>Fireball</i>	<i>Cone of cold</i>
Wild Card	<i>Rainbow pattern</i>	<i>Rainbow pattern</i>	-	-

Strong enchantment (or by school, if the deck is heavily slanted towards one); CL 17th; Craft Wondrous Item, all spells in the deck; Price: Varies (see above).

Elemental Arcane Scroll Deck: This is an example of a scroll deck. This deck contains arcane spells with an elemental theme. Each suit represents one element, earth, air, fire or water. This deck contains 254 spell levels + 500gp for stone skin material components.

This deck is favoured by elementalists wizards and sorcerers and those who worship elemental themed deities. Because the deck contains spells from all four elements certain elementalists may not be able to use them all. If you replace spells in this deck, they should either be the same spells or of the appropriate element.

Strong evocation; CL 17th; Craft Wondrous Item, all spells on Elemental Arcane Scroll Deck table; Price: 80,963

Divine Deck (Thor): This divine deck is themed for the god of thunder, patron of agriculture and promoter of personal reliance and strength. This deck contains 254 spell levels of divine spells. The cost includes the price of the *miracle* spell that costs more than the typical 9th level spell (see *Core Rulebook II*).

The Divine Deck of Thor

	Diamonds	Spades	Hearts	Clubs
Ace	<i>Magic weapon</i>	<i>Obscuring mist</i>	<i>Cure light wounds</i>	<i>Magic stone</i>
2	<i>Spiritual weapon</i>	<i>Fog cloud</i> 1	<i>Cure moderate wounds</i>	<i>Bear's strength</i>
3	<i>Searing light</i>	<i>Call lightning</i>	<i>Cure serious wounds</i>	<i>Magic vestment</i>
4	<i>Magic weapon, greater</i>	<i>Sleet storm</i>	<i>Cure critical wounds</i>	<i>Air walk</i>
5	<i>Righteous might</i>	<i>Ice storm</i>	<i>Cure light wounds, mass</i>	<i>Atonement</i>
6	<i>Blade barrier</i>	<i>Control winds</i>	<i>Cure moderate wounds, mass</i>	<i>Bull's strength, mass</i>
7	<i>Holy word</i>	<i>Control weather</i>	<i>Cure serious wounds, mass</i>	<i>Regenerate</i>
8	<i>Earthquake</i>	<i>Whirlwind</i>	<i>Cure critical wounds, mass</i>	<i>Cloak of chaos</i>
9	<i>Storm of vengeance</i>	<i>Storm of vengeance</i>	<i>Heal, mass</i>	<i>Summon monster IX</i>
10	<i>Spiritual weapon</i>	<i>Call lightning</i>	<i>Heal</i>	<i>Magic vestment</i>
Jack	<i>Magic weapon, greater</i>	<i>Control weather</i>	<i>Heal</i>	<i>Bull's strength, mass</i>
Queen	<i>Magic weapon, greater</i>	<i>Control weather</i>	<i>Heal</i>	<i>Bull's strength, mass</i>
King	<i>Magic weapon, greater</i>	<i>Control weather</i>	<i>Heal</i>	<i>Bull's strength, mass</i>
Wild Card	<i>Miracle</i>	<i>Heal, mass</i>	-	-

At your Games Master's discretion you may replace used cards with new ones, changing the theme, or you may have to stick to the theme and replace used cards with the same spells.

Thor is a chaotic good deity and the deck may not respond well to being used by lawful or chaotic persons or persons of a religion opposed to Thor's, Loki in particular.

Strong evocation; CL 17th; Craft Wondrous Item, all spells on Divine Deck table; Price: 105,963gp

Deck of Power: The cards from this magical deck enchant weapons. As a move-equivalent action you draw a card randomly and either shuffle it back into the deck or place it on the weapon, which activates the ability. If the card falls off the weapon, or is removed, the ability ends. If the card is Ace to 5, the weapon gains a +1 to +5 enhancement bonus for 15 rounds. If the card is 6 or higher the weapon gains the +5 bonus and gains additional abilities shown on the table below for 15 rounds. Each card in the deck can be used only once and then loses its enchantment.

This deck is appropriate for a card blade, or a blade slinger, spellsword or any combination of fighter/spellcaster. The random nature of the deck makes it favoured more by chaotic persons than lawful persons as they are unable to control or predict the results of the cards. A lawful person might find himself spending time shuffling cards back into the deck looking for the effect he wants, while a chaotic person would just 'go with the flow.'

Strong enchantment; CL 15th; Craft Wondrous Item, *magic weapon, greater*; Price 58,500gp.

The Deck of Power

	Diamonds	Spades	Hearts	Clubs
6	Defending	Frost	Flaming	Shock
7	Merciful*	Icy Burst	Flaming Burst	Shocking Burst
8	-*	Icy Burst, Throwing	Flaming Burst, Keen	Speed
9	Holy*	Icy Burst, Disruption	Brilliant Energy	Dancing
10/J/Q/K	Ghost Touch*	Icy Burst, Speed	Brilliant Energy, Flaming	Dancing, Shock
Wild Card	Your Choice	Your Choice		

*Plus all previous abilities

Deck of Many Simple Things: This deck contains a menagerie of mundane items. Their usefulness depends on the situation. As a standard action, once per round, a card can be drawn and the item appears in the user's hand or on the ground beside him. After an item is used, it can be put back onto the card as a full round action. Using the deck provokes an attack of opportunity in combat. If an item is destroyed or used up, it can be replaced with a similar item. Decks may even contain blank cards, damaged items or even

masterwork or magical versions of the items listed on The Deck of Many Simple Things table, below. All of these items and their complete description can be found in *Core Rulebook I*.

The deck of many simple things functions in a manner very similar to a *portable hole* or a *bag of holding*. If the deck is ever placed inside one of these, a rift to the Astral Plane is torn and both are sucked into the void and lost. The deck contains a warning to this effect on each card.

The Deck of Many Simple Things

	Diamonds	Spades	Hearts	Clubs
Ace	Backpack	Chain	Ladder 10ft	Rope, silk, (100ft)
2	Barrel	Chalk, 1 piece	Lantern, hooded	Sack
3	Basket	Chest	Lock, amazing	Sealing wax
4	Bedroll	Crowbar	Manacles	Sewing needle and thread
5	Bell	Firewood, 1 days	Mirror, small steel	Signal whistle
6	Blanket	Fishhook	Oil (1-pint flask)	Signet ring
7	Block and Tackle	Fishing net	Paper, 100 sheets	Sledge
8	Bottle, wine, glass	Flask	Pick, miner's	Soap
9	Bucket	Flint and steel	Piton, 50	Shovel
10	Caltrops	Grappling hook	Pole, 10 foot	Spyglass
Jack	Candle	Hammer	Pot, iron	Tent
Queen	Canvas, 10 sq yd	Ink, 1 oz. vial and ink pen	Pouch, belt	Water Skin
King	Case, map	Jug, clay	Ram, portable	Whetstone
Wild Card	Healer's Kit	Thieves' tools		

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WARS: Weapons II

Part 3 of the unreleased supplement, Soul and Steel. Written by Greg Lynch

Heavy Weapons

AllMag AM1107 'Zeus' Heavy Assault Cannon

Possessed of phenomenal range and amazing stopping power, the Zeus is a powerful heavy weapon. Unfortunately, its great size (2.5 metres long and 16.5 kg) make it a cumbersome weapon as well. It is based on the same gauss technology that powers the Allied Magnetics Scorpion rifle. It fires an enormous steel projectile 15 cm long and 2.5 cm wide.

When fired, the Zeus rests on top of the user's shoulder, and the user must sight down the side of the barrel. Like other gauss weapons, the Damage Reduction granted by armour against impact damage is only of partial use against the Zeus, which cuts the effectiveness of such armour in half.

The Zeus is size 'Huge' which is one step above Large. A normal-sized person (size Medium) can drag one of these about but counts as heavily loaded while doing so (see *WARS*, page 215). A Quay or other Large being, or someone with the *Wield the Massive* kizen power, can use a Zeus with both hands. Cost: 3,500 creds.

Brown & Averson BA 522 'Krakatoa' Flame Thrower

A heavier and deadlier version of the Vesuvius, the Brown & Averson BA 522 'Krakatoa' Flame Thrower is a terrifically effective weapon, so long as it is in an atmosphere.

The Krakatoa does not require an attack roll to use. Rather, it fills an area 10 metres by 10 metres with fire every time the wielder fires it. All creatures and bots within this area must make a Reflex saving throw (DC 20) or take the listed damage. Any targets who fail the save will suffer another 1d10 fire damage for the next 1d4 rounds as the Krakatoa ammunition continues to burn, though mobile targets may choose to spend an entire round putting out the flames to avoid this additional damage. Additionally, the Krakatoas may be used to create a wall of fire three metres thick and 12 metres wide anywhere in conjunction with the wielder so long as he is adjacent to the centre of the wall on its long side.

This weapon can only be used in an oxygen-rich atmosphere – if a human cannot breathe in it, the Krakatoa will not work in it. Cost: 950 creds. Additional canisters of fuel for the Krakatoa cost 90 creds and weigh 1 kg. These canisters can be refilled.

Clanton Arms GR-5 Grenade Launcher

Originally built to fire a 20mm version of the Clanton Arms Corporation's famed grav grenade, the GR-5 quickly became so popular that other arms corporations began manufacturing their own grenades in 20mm size for use with this weapon. Other grenade sizes have been phased out over time – all fired grenades produced by any of the three human factions (and humans are the only ones who seem to use such weapons) now come in 20mm. Reloading the GR-5 requires a full-round action.

The GR-5 has an ammunition capacity of eight grenades, and can be fired in semiautomatic mode. Cost: 875 creds when it can be found for sale.

Colt-Burton B-9335 Bumblebee Rocket

The quintessential 'fire and forget' weapon, the Colt-Burton 9335 Bumblebee Rocket is a devastatingly effective tool on the battlefield. Essentially, it is a stripped down and wholly disposal version of the Hornet rocket launcher (see below) that comes loaded with a single CB-538 Hellfire rocket. The rocket does not arm itself until it has travelled at least 10m from the weapon, a safety feature to protect the wielder of the Bumblebee. The entire body of the Bumblebee is of inexpensive plastic – and considering the weapon is supposed to be dropped on the battlefield the moment

it is used, there is little reason to construct it of more durable material. The Bumblebee cannot be reloaded after firing – it is purely a single-shot weapon.

The Bumblebee is very compact when sold, about 65cm long and 10cm wide. Before firing, the user must extend the barrel to its full length of 97cm, pull the stock down and seat the weapon on his shoulder. Cost: 3,500 creds when it can be found for sale.

Colt Burton R-4 Hornet Rocket System

The Hornet Rocket System is one of the deadliest weapons available to Earther troops. Unlike the Bumblebee, the Hornet is not a disposable weapon – it can be reloaded and fired again. Further, it boasts expanded ammunition capacity, able to hold up to four rockets in total (one in its firing chamber, three in its top mount). These rockets do not arm themselves until they have travelled at least 10m from the weapon, a safety feature to protect the wielder of the Hornet. Colt Burton manufactures several types of ammunition for

the Hornet, and a few Maverick gangs are rumoured to have concocted their own ammunition for use in captured Hornets. Reloading the Hornet requires a full-round action for every rocket. Cost: 10,750 creds when it can be found for sale.

- **CB-538 Hellfire Rocket:** This rocket delivers a load of superheated plasma to the battlefield, creating a zone of destruction in a five metre radius. Everything within the area of effect is subjected to 5d10 fire damage, though a successful Reflex save (DC 25) will result in only half damage. Cost: 400 creds per rocket.
- **CB-397-a Black Hole Rocket:** This rocket is based off the same technology the Clanton Arms Corporation uses to build its various grav explosives. Upon impact, the Black Hole creates a gravitic pulse that momentarily increases the mass of the rocket's shrapnel, making it exceptionally deadly. The radius of the weapon's damage is six metres, inflicting 4d10 impact damage on every creature and object within that range. Damage Reduction is halved against this damage. Cost: 850 creds per rocket.
- **CB-1205 Gong Buster:** The Gong Buster rocket was designed specifically for use against Gongen armoured units like the TSV, though it is equally effective against any armoured vehicle. The Gong Buster burrows into a vehicle's armour and explodes, inflicting only 5d8 damage but ignoring all hardness and halving all Damage Reduction. The localised detonation has a radius of only three metres. Cost: 750 creds per rocket.

Colt-Burton CB433 'TriGun'

This weapon is essentially three Colt-Burton Mk 814 assault rifles fused together. The TriGun features a triple-barrel rotating design that prevents its incredible rate of fire from overheating and ruining the barrels.

The TriGun can be used as a personal weapon, but the recoil from the rate of fire, and the 'rise' in the barrels, make it difficult to do so. A human or Shi wielding a TriGun in this way suffers a –4 penalty to all attack rolls, no matter what feats he may have. A Quay may use it as a personal weapon without penalty. Usually, the TriGun is mounted on a vehicle or incorporated into a bot, which gives it the stability it needs to be fired without penalty.

Ammunition capacity is another reason the TriGun is usually mounted. The weapon fires only on autofire, consuming 30 bullets with every attack (due to its three barrels). With an on-board capacity of only 60 bullets, the TriGun needs the enhanced ammunition capacity of a vehicle or bot to remain effective in a fight. Cost: 875 creds when it can be found for sale.

Colt-Burton XL-86 'Torpedo' Grenade Launcher

The Colt-Burton XL-86 'Torpedo' Grenade Launcher is an underslung grenade launcher, designed to be attached to a rifle. Any Colt-Burton weapon of size Large can accept a Torpedo, though almost any other Large firearm can be modified to mount it. Doing this requires a Craft (mechanical) skill check DC 15 and about two hours of work. The Games Master has final discretion over which weapons can accept a Torpedo attachment. The Torpedo fires 20mm grenades. Reloading the Torpedo is a full-round action. Cost: 750 creds when it can be found for sale.



Gongen Batan Grenade Launcher

The Gongen Batan, the newest grenade launched from Grandfather's workshop, sacrifices hang-time in the fight for the quick knockout punch. The user of the Batan can choose to fire a single grenade at his target, or a burst of two grenades for double the effect. Both grenades will detonate in the same two-metre square, but the damage for the two of them should be calculated separately – in other words, the target's Damage Reduction, if any, will reduce damage from each of the grenades. The Batan fires 20mm grenades and requires a full-round action to reload. Cost: 1,750 creds when it can be found for sale.

Heavy Machine Gun

Once a mainstay of heavy weapons on Earth, the heavy machine gun is just as deadly today as it ever was. However, it has long since been eclipsed by other weapons that do not share its twin drawbacks of great size and immense weight – two things that make it an unwise choice for a personal weapon. The heavy machine gun carries a box magazine that holds 30 .50 calibre rounds, but it is more often fed by a belt of ammunition, especially if the weapon is emplaced. Holding and firing a heavy machine gun is a difficult process, as the weight of the weapon, combined with its powerful recoil, tends to pull the user off balance and cause his attacks to go astray. Whenever this weapon is used without a mount of some kind, the user must succeed at a Strength ability check (DC 20) or be thrown off balance, inflicting a –4 penalty on all attack rolls and depriving the user of his Dexterity bonus to Defence until his next turn. Cost: 500 creds.

Hinote TS-47 Plasma cannon

The Hinote plasma cannon is essentially Gongen's answer to the Earther F.L.I.C. Possessed of a slightly longer range but marginally lower ammunition capacity, it is in many ways nearly identical to the deadly weapon fielded by the Earthers. Cost: 1,800 creds.

Plasma Carbine

The plasma carbine is the standard heavy weapon of Shi troops and is comparable in many ways to the Earther F.L.I.C., though it is superior to the Earther weapon in every way except ammunition capacity. The appearance of these weapons on the battlefield is usually greeted with fear by the troops and with anticipation by the commanders of Earther or Gongen forces, who have been ordered to capture as many plasma carbines as they can manage. It is a testament not only to the training and ability of the Shi, but also to the efficacy of this weapon that thus far very few have fallen into enemy hands. Plasma carbines are only rarely available for purchase, and then only in Maverick territory. Cost: 2,100 creds when it can be found for sale.

Taka GW-3 Missile System

This weapon is Gongen's answer to the Colt-Burton R-4 Hornet, and is very nearly identical to the Earther weapon, though it is slightly lighter and has a maximum payload of three missiles. Clearly copied from a captured Hornet, the Taka even mounts the same kinds of ammunition as its Earther counterpart, though the actual configuration of the missile is different enough to keep ammunition for the two missile systems from being interchangeable. These rockets do not arm themselves until they have travelled at least 10m from the weapon, a safety feature to protect the wielder of the Taka. Cost: 10,500 creds when it can be found for sale.

- **Kasai GW-18 Rocket:** This rocket is functionally identical to the CB-538 Hellfire Rocket. Cost: 425 creds per rocket.
- **Uzumaki GW-203 Rocket:** Based on the grav technology of the grav grenade and the Black Hole rocket, the Uzumaki uses a fluctuating gravitic pulse that creates a short-lived whirlwind of spinning shrapnel four metres in radius. This whirlwind lasts for two rounds, and inflicts 3d10 impact damage per round on everything within the area of effect. Damage Reduction is halved against this damage. Cost: 900 creds per rocket.
- **Kantsuu GW-781 Rocket:** The Gongen answer to the Earther Gong Buster, this missile is almost identical to its inspiration, except the damage is somewhat greater – 5d10 rather than 5d8. Cost: 975 creds per rocket.

Welles Gorget Disruptor

The Welles Gorget Disruptor is the latest heavy weapon of the Earther forces, and represents an entirely new direction in weapon design. It consists of a harness worn over the torso, attached to a 30cm-wide projection plate centred on the chest. A slender cable runs from the harness down the wearer's arm to the wrist, where the activation trigger for the gorget disruptor is located. The gorget disruptor unleashes a wide beam of tremendously destructive electrical energy at its target, sufficient to overwhelm many bots and bypassing the fire resistance that has made the Quay such a troubling foe.

Because of its strange design, the Welles Gorget Disruptor requires the Exotic Weapon Proficiency feat to fire accurately. Cost: 2,500 creds.

Heavy Weapons

Weapon	Type	Damage	Damage Type	Crit.	Range/ Spaces	Burst	RoF	Mag.	Ammo	Size	Weight	Faction	Cost
AllMag AM1107 'Zeus' Heavy Assault Cannon	Heavy Weapons	3d12	Impact (See Text)	20	50 metres/25	—	S	18 slugs	Gauss III slugs	Huge	16.5 kg	Earther	3,500 creds
Brown & Averson BA 522 'Krakatoa' Flame Thrower	Heavy Weapons	3d10+3 fire	Energy	—	16 metres/8	—	S	12	Brown & Averson Fuel	Large	6 kg	Earther	950 creds
Clanton Arms GR-5 Grenade Launcher	Heavy Weapons	See Text	See Text	—	30 metres/15	—	S	8 grenades	20mm	Large	8.5 kg	Earther, Maverick	875 creds
Colt-Burton 9335 Bumblebee Rocket	Heavy Weapons	5d10 fire	Energy	—	50 metres/25	—	SS	1	—	Large	8 kg	Earther	3,500 creds
Colt-Burton R-4 Hornet Rocket System	Heavy Weapons	See Text	See Text	—	50 metres/25	—	SS	4	See Text	Large	14 kg	Earther	10,750 creds
Colt-Burton CB433 'TriGun'	Heavy Weapons	5d6	Impact	19-20/x3	30 metres/15	Y	A	60 rounds	5.56	Large	10.5 kg	Earther	875 creds
Colt-Burton XL-86 'Torpedo' Grenade Launcher	Heavy Weapons	See Text	See Text	—	24 metres/12	—	SS	3 grenades	20mm	—	4.5 kg	Earther	750 creds
F.L.I.C.*	Heavy weapons	2d10 fire	Energy	19-20/x3	44 metres/22	Y	S, A	60 charges	Earther energy cell	Large	6 kg	Earther	1,500 creds
Gongen Batan Grenade Launcher	Heavy weapons	See Text	See Text	—	30 metres/15	Y	S, A	4 grenades	20mm	Large	9.5 kg	Gongen	1,750 creds
Heavy Machine Gun	Heavy Weapons	2d12	Impact	20	34 metres/17	Y	S, A	30 bullets	.50 calibre	Large	38 kg	—	500 creds
Hinote TS-47 Plasma cannon	Heavy Weapons	2d10 fire	Energy	19-20	48 metres/24	Y	S, A	50 charges	Gongen energy cell	Large	5.5 kg	Gongen	1,800 creds
M44 heavy plasma gun*	Heavy weapons	2d8 fire	Energy	19-20/x2	30 metres/15	Y	S, A	50 charge	Earther energy cell	Large	7 kg	Earther	800 creds
Plasma Carbine	Heavy weapons	2d12+2 fire	Energy	19-20/x3	60 metres/30	Y	S, A	45 charges	Shi energy cell	Large	5.5 kg	Shi	2,100 creds
Taka GW-3 Missile System	Heavy Weapons	See Text	See Text	—	54 metres/27	—	SS	3	See Text	Large	12.5 kg	Gongen	10,500 creds
Welles Gorget Disruptor	Heavy Weapons (Exotic)	4d8+4 electrical	Energy	20	24 metres/12	—	S	15 charges	Earther energy cell	Large	7 kg	Earther	2,500 creds

* Complete statistics for this weapon can be found in the *WARS Roleplaying Game* core rulebook

Placed Explosives

A planted explosive is set in place through the use of the Demolitions skill, with some kind of timer or fuse determining when it goes off (length of time is anywhere from the beginning of next round upwards). No attack roll is necessary to plant an explosive; the explosive sits where it is placed until it is moved or goes off. When a planted explosive detonates, it deals its damage to all targets within the burst radius of the weapon. The targets may make Reflex saves (DC varies according to the explosive type) for half damage.

Det Cord

Det cord is a rope like substance that does not truly explode, but it burns so quickly (4,000 metres per second) that it might as well explode. It is normally used to link together multiple explosives for simultaneous detonation (see box below), though it can be used to cause damage on its own.

The information on the table above reflects a 20 metre length of det cord, which may be laid out to pass through as many as 10 two metre squares. In this case, it inflicts the listed damage to all creatures in all squares through which it passes. The det cord may also be doubled up. For each additional two metres of det cord in the same two metre square, increase the damage by 1d6 (to a maximum of 4d6).

Det cord requires a detonator (coming soon in Signs and Portents) to ignite. It is considered a simple explosive. Cost: 75 creds per 20m length.

Linking Explosives

Several types of placed explosives (dynamite, molded plasma and polymer bonded explosive) can be linked together, combining larger amounts of the same explosive to create a much more devastating effect. For example, one stick of dynamite is dangerous, but ten sticks linked together and set to explode simultaneously are dramatically more dangerous.

Dynamite is the easiest common explosive to link. For each stick of dynamite in addition to the first, the linked explosion will either cause an additional 1d6 points of damage or increase the radius of the explosion by one metre (user's choice). Linking sticks of dynamite together requires det cord and a detonator, as it is impossible to achieve a simultaneous detonation with standard fuses. Linking dynamite requires a Demolitions skill check (DC 15 + 1 for every stick of dynamite linked to the first). Failure results in multiple single detonations, rather than one immense detonation.

Molded plasma comes in 0.5kg blocks, but it is possible (again, with telepathic commands only) to merge multiple blocks together. Each block of molded plasma in addition to the first will add 4d8 damage and one metre to the burst radius. Linking molded plasma requires a Demolitions skill check (DC 25 + 1 per block linked). Failure results in multiple single detonations, rather than one immense detonation.

Polymer bonded explosive is perhaps most suitable to linking. Every 0.5 kg block linked to the first will add 2d6 damage to the explosion, but will only increase the radius by 0.5 metres. Linking polymer bonded explosive requires a Demolitions skill check (DC 20 + 1 per block linked). Failure results in multiple single detonations, rather than one immense detonation.

Dynamite

Explosives come and explosives go, but it seems there will always be a place for Alfred Nobel's 19th Century invention. Dynamite can be detonated either with a lit fuse (as is usually the case when it is thrown), which requires an open flame (and an oxygenated atmosphere) and a move action or with an electrical detonator (usually the case when it is placed). Dynamite is a very cheap but not terribly potent weapon, offering low damage and a small blast radius. Cost: 20 creds per stick.

Kaban Charge

One of the most powerful explosive devices in the Solar System, no human, Quay or Shi knows the secrets of its construction. The Kaban Charge is the product of Grandfather's Workshop on Gongen, and all attempts by other factions to study a captured Kaban have ended rather messily.

The Kaban incorporates its own timed detonator, requiring no knowledge of the Demolitions skill to put this terrible weapon into use. The detonator allows

a time window of anything from a single second to ten days. Cost: 1,000 creds when it can be found for sale.

Molded Plasma

Even when it is dormant and cool to the touch, molded plasma looks like solidified fire. The primary form of Shi-created explosive, molded plasma packs an incredible amount of destructive power into a small package.

Molded plasma incorporates the use of specialised Shi nanobots. It is completely malleable when dormant and may be formed into shapes as easily as the far more common human-made polymer bonded explosive (see below). However, with a simple

command (transmitted telepathically to the nanobots) the molded plasma can be hardened to the consistency of steel.

Molded plasma requires a Shi detonator (details in a future Signs and Portents) to activate, and is impossible for a non-Shi to fabricate, as the nanobots are an essential element of the explosive. Cost: 750 creds.

Polymer Bonded Explosive

The direct descendant of C-4 and Semtex, polymer bonded explosive is a malleable explosive that can be shaped into virtually any form. PBE requires a detonator to explode. Cost: 150 creds.

Astute readers may notice that the rules for explosives here are not the same as those in the main rulebook. If you use the Soul and Steel explosives, we recommend that you use the explosives rules presented here.

Thrown Explosives

Brier Systems B-876 Flechette Grenade

This grenade contains hundreds of tiny steel slivers housed within the grenade casing. When the grenade strikes its target space, the slivers are expelled at supersonic speed, slicing easily through armour. All impact Damage Reduction is halved against damage from this grenade. A successful Reflex save (DC 20) means the target(s) takes only half damage. Brier Systems also makes a 20mm version of this grenade, the B-866 20mm, though it is smaller and inflicts less damage. Cost: 45 creds.

Cogwerks Mag-7 'Pull' Grenade

This grenade does not truly detonate. Rather, it creates an extremely powerful magnetic field when it goes off, drawing all metal within eight metres straight toward it with a Strength of 30. Characters in metallic armour must make an opposed Strength check (without the benefit of any augmented strength from armour or cybernetics) to resist the effects. Failure means the character is pulled straight toward the grenade at his regular movement rate, while success

Placed Explosives

Weapon	Type	Damage	Damage Type	Burst Radius	Crit.	Reflex Save DC	Size	Wt.	Faction	Cost
Det Cord	Placed	2d6	Energy	See Text	—	12	Medium	1 kg	Earther, Gongen, Maverick	75 creds
Dynamite ¹	Placed	2d6	Impact	2 metres	—	15	Tiny	0.5 kg	Earther, Gongen, Maverick	20 creds/stick
Kaban Charge ¹	Placed	15d10	Energy	10 metres	—	25	Small	3.5 kg	Gongen	1,000 creds
Molded Plasma	Placed	8d8	Energy	4 metres	—	20	Diminutive	0.5 kg	Shi	750 creds
Polymer Bonded Explosive ¹	Placed	4d6	Impact	4 metres	—	18	Diminutive	0.5 kg	Earther, Gongen, Maverick	150 creds

¹ Anyone within the burst of this explosive must also make a Fortitude saving throw (DC 10) or be deafened for 1d6 rounds.

Thrown Explosives

Weapon	Type	Damage	Damage Type	Burst Radius	Crit.	Reflex Save DC	Range/ Spaces	Size	Weight	Faction	Cost
Brier Systems B-876 Flechette Grenade	Thrown	1d12	Impact (See Text)	4 metres	—	20	10 metres/5	Diminutive	0.25 kg	Earther	45 creds
CGC smoke grenade *	Thrown	—	—	5 metres	—	—	10 metres/5	Diminutive	0.25 kg	Earther	50 creds
Clanton grav grenade ¹ *	Thrown	3d10 explosion	Impact	4 metres	—	—	10 metres/5	Diminutive	0.25 kg	Earther	100 creds
Cogwerks Mag-7 'Pull' Grenade	Thrown	—	—	8 metres	—	18	10 metres/5	Tiny	0.75 kg	Maverick	125 creds
Colt-Burton Arms M4702 ¹	Thrown	See below	Energy	6 metres	—	—	10 metres/5	Tiny	0.75 kg	Earther, Maverick	100 creds
Dynamite ¹	Thrown	2d6	Impact	2 metres	—	15	10 metres/5	Tiny	0.5 kg	Earther, Gongen, Maverick	20 creds/stick
Fragmentation Grenade ¹	Thrown	3d6	Impact	4 metres	—	15	10 metres/5	Tiny	0.5 kg	Earther, Gongen, Maverick	40 creds
Gongen web grenade *	Thrown	—	—	4 metres	—	14	10 metres/5	Diminutive	0.25 kg	Gongen	50 creds
GW-179 Plasma Grenade ¹	Thrown	3d8 fire	Energy	3 metres	—	16	10 metres/5	Diminutive	0.25 kg	Gongen	75 creds
Maverick Whiskey *	Thrown	2d10 explosion	Energy	2 metres	—	12	8 metres/4	Diminutive	0.25 kg	Maverick	25 creds
ShoSys 'Nuru' EMP Grenade	Thrown	—	—	6 metres	—	—	10 metres/5	Tiny	0.5 kg	Gongen	250 creds
Sonic Grenade *	Thrown	—	—	5 metres	—	14 (Fortitude)	10 metres/5	Diminutive	0.25 kg	Gongen, Maverick	60 creds
Ulisha Grenade	Thrown	2d8	Impact (See Text)	5 metres	—	20	10 metres/5	Diminutive	0.25 kg	Shi	200 creds
White Phosphorous Grenade ¹	Thrown	2d6 fire and See Text	Energy	4 metres	—	—	10 metres/5	Diminutive	0.25 kg	Earther, Gongen, Maverick	40 creds

¹ Anyone within the burst radius of this explosive must also make a Fortitude saving throw (DC 10) or be deafened for 1d6 rounds.

* Complete statistics for this weapon can be found in the *WARS Roleplaying Game* core rulebook

still limits the character to half his normal movement rate (though he is free to move however he likes). Any weapon that uses metal ammunition suffers a -2 penalty on all attack rolls if it is being fired in or through the area of the grenade's effect. The magnetic field created by a pull grenade lasts for three rounds before its power source runs out. Cost: 125 creds.

Colt-Burton Arms M4702

This grenade is more commonly known as the 'breath of fresh air' or even the 'breather'. It saw extensive service on Titan in the 22nd Century, when multiple Earth governments were attempting to seize control of the moon for themselves, but fell out of use for some time afterward. However, there are still large stockpiles throughout the Solar System, and there are even rumours the Accord is producing them again. In any case, the breather grenade is easy enough to find for someone who wants one.

The breather is designed for use on Titan, and is of little effect in most areas of the Solar System. This is because the breather depended upon Titan's atmosphere to inflict its damage. Larger and heavier than most grenades, the breather consists of a small amount of conventional explosives and a highly

compressed cylinder of oxygen, encased together in a metal sheath. Upon detonation, the conventional explosives rupture the oxygen cylinder. What makes this grenade deadly is the composition of Titan's atmosphere. Laden with methane and ethane, Titan's atmosphere, combined with the sudden release of oxygen and heat from the breather, triggers a localised chain reaction in the atmosphere itself, creating a large and extremely hot fireball.

On Titan (or in any other methane-heavy atmosphere) the breather creates a short-lived ball of flame with a blast radius of six metres, inflicting 4d6 points of fire damage on anyone and anything inside it. If used in an atmosphere without a large percentage of methane (such as Earth or any place habitable to humans), the breather is little more than an expensive firecracker, its conventional explosion charge dealing 1d4 points of fire damage in a two metre blast radius. Cost: 100 creds.

Fragmentation Grenade

The fragmentation grenade is the oldest kind of grenade, but is still effective enough to be manufactured by all three human factions. Upon detonation, the grenade casing shatters into multiple jagged bits of metal, which are propelled by the explosion throughout the grenade's radius of effect. A successful Reflex saving throw (DC 15) results in half damage. Cost: 40 creds.

GW-179 Plasma Grenade

The primary grenade of the Gongen military, the GW-179 delivers a powerful load of superheated plasma to the burst area. Cost: 75 creds.



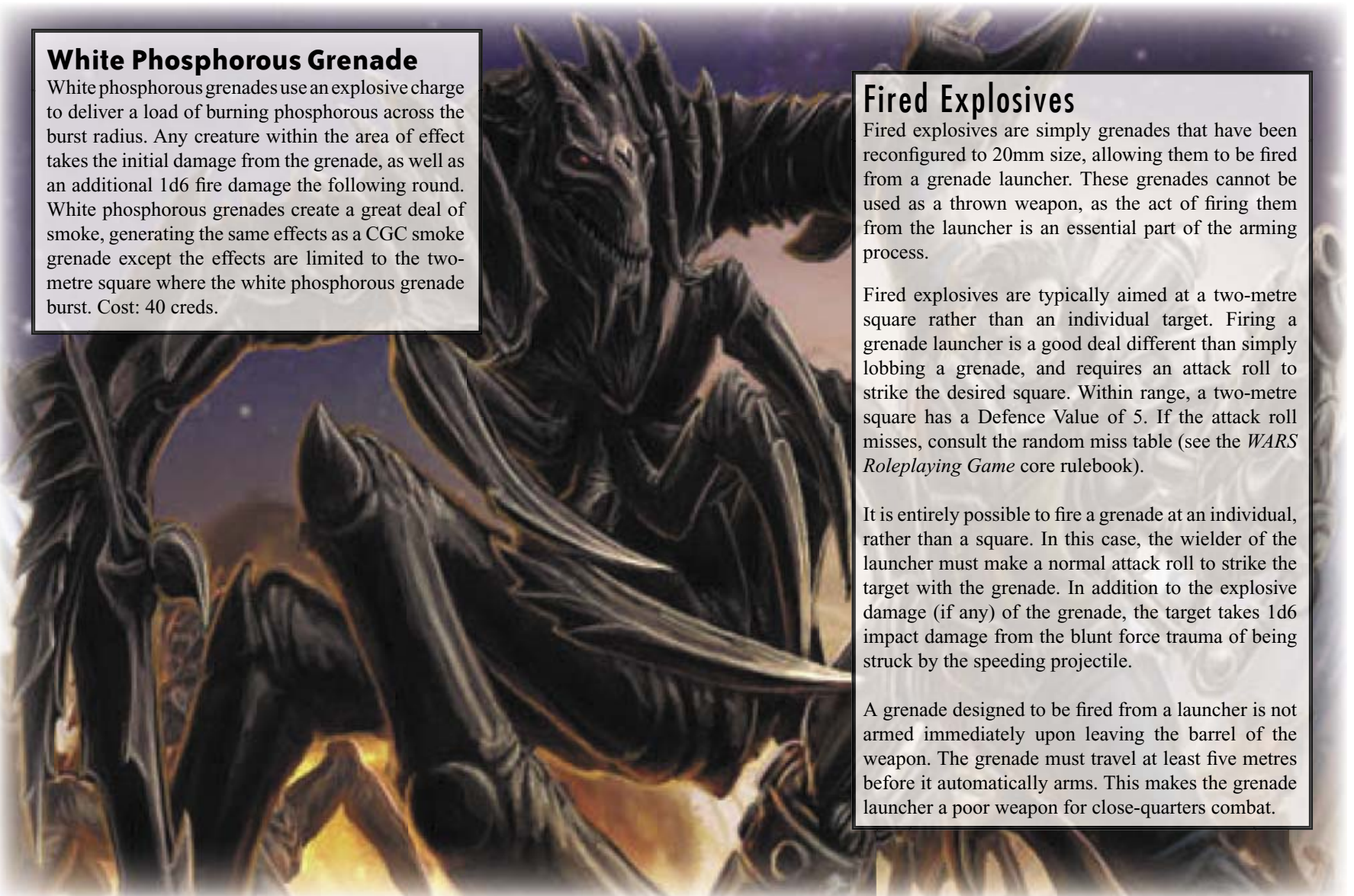
ShoSys 'Nuru' EMP Grenade

This grenade creates a low intensity electromagnetic pulse when it detonates, with a radius of six metres. The effect is instantaneous, robbing any victims of a Reflex saving throw. All unshielded electronics within the range of effect are knocked off line for 1d4 minutes. Shielded electronics, such as energy weapons and power armour, are knocked out for 1d3 rounds before coming back on line. Though the CGC and the Mavericks have tried, neither of them has been able to recreate the Gongen feat of fitting an EMP-capable device into a grenade, thrown or 20mm. Cost: 250 creds when it can be found for sale.

Ulisha Grenade

This grenade functions much like the Brier Systems B-876 Flechette Grenade, except that it inflicts slightly more damage over a larger area and uses magnetic energy to propel the tiny shards of metal. The magnetic propulsion device the Shi use for the Ulisha is able to propel the metal shards at vastly greater speed than the B-876, completely negating all impact Damage Reduction against this grenade's effects. Cost: 200 creds when it can be found for sale.





White Phosphorous Grenade

White phosphorous grenades use an explosive charge to deliver a load of burning phosphorous across the burst radius. Any creature within the area of effect takes the initial damage from the grenade, as well as an additional 1d6 fire damage the following round. White phosphorous grenades create a great deal of smoke, generating the same effects as a CGC smoke grenade except the effects are limited to the two-metre square where the white phosphorous grenade burst. Cost: 40 creds.

Fired Explosives

Fired explosives are simply grenades that have been reconfigured to 20mm size, allowing them to be fired from a grenade launcher. These grenades cannot be used as a thrown weapon, as the act of firing them from the launcher is an essential part of the arming process.

Fired explosives are typically aimed at a two-metre square rather than an individual target. Firing a grenade launcher is a good deal different than simply lobbing a grenade, and requires an attack roll to strike the desired square. Within range, a two-metre square has a Defence Value of 5. If the attack roll misses, consult the random miss table (see the *WARS Roleplaying Game* core rulebook).

It is entirely possible to fire a grenade at an individual, rather than a square. In this case, the wielder of the launcher must make a normal attack roll to strike the target with the grenade. In addition to the explosive damage (if any) of the grenade, the target takes 1d6 impact damage from the blunt force trauma of being struck by the speeding projectile.

A grenade designed to be fired from a launcher is not armed immediately upon leaving the barrel of the weapon. The grenade must travel at least five metres before it automatically arms. This makes the grenade launcher a poor weapon for close-quarters combat.

The arming time on most explosives makes them unsuited to close-range confrontations.

Fired Explosives

Weapon	Type	Damage	Damage Type	Burst Radius	Crit.	Reflex Save DC	Range/ Spaces	Size	Weight	Faction	Cost
Brier Systems B-866 Flechette Grenade	Fired	1d10	Impact (See Text)	4 metres	—	20	As Launcher	Diminutive	0.25 kg	Earther	45 creds
CGC smoke grenade *	Fired	—	—	5 metres	—	—	As Launcher	Diminutive	0.25 kg	Earther	50 creds
Clanton grav grenade ¹ *	Fired	3d10 explosion	Impact	4 metres	—	—	As Launcher	Diminutive	0.25 kg	Earther	100 creds
Cogwerks Mag-7a 'Pull' Grenade	Fired	—	—	6 metres	—	18	As Launcher	Diminutive	0.25 kg	Maverick	125 creds
Fragmentation Grenade ¹	Fired	3d6	Impact	4 metres	—	15	As Launcher	Diminutive	0.25 kg	Earther, Gongen, Maverick	50 creds
Gongen web grenade *	Fired	—	—	4 metres	—	14	As Launcher	Diminutive	0.25 kg	Gongen	50 creds
GW-179 Plasma Grenade ¹	Fired	3d8 fire	Energy	3 metres	—	16	As Launcher	Diminutive	0.25 kg	Gongen	75 creds
ShoSys 'Nuru' M1 EMP Grenade	Fired	—	—	4 metres	—	—	As Launcher	Diminutive	0.25 kg	Gongen	250 creds
Sonic grenade *	Fired	—	—	5 metres	—	14 (Fortitude)	As Launcher	Diminutive	0.25 kg	Gongen, Maverick	60 creds
White Phosphorous Grenade ¹	Fired	2d6 fire	Energy	4 metres	—	—	As Launcher	Diminutive	0.25 kg	Earther, Gongen, Maverick	40 creds

¹ Anyone within the burst radius of this explosive must also make a Fortitude saving throw (DC 10) or be deafened for 1d6 rounds.

* Complete statistics for this weapon can be found in the *WARS Roleplaying Game* core rulebook. The listings on the table above merely indicate the 20mm variety of the grenade.



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THE SAAMI

A NEW PEOPLE FOR CONAN: THE ROLEPLAYING GAME. BY W. N. VOSSBRINK.

Culture: The Saami are a hearty, mainly nomadic people living in the uttermost north of Nordheim and parts of Hyperborea who are quite comfortable in the deadly cold of the Northern Wastes where some Nordheimers would hesitate to abide. Theirs is a culture which has changed little over the millennia, and one which is significantly shamanistic. In addition to reindeer-herding the Saami hunt, gather and fish by a variety of means. They call themselves *Samid*, or *Sapmelash*, but the more indelicate of Nordheimir refer to them instead by the pejorative term *Lapp*. In the past there were clashes between the Nordheimir and the Saami, which at times places a great strain on their relations. Fortunately the inhabited lands of these two peoples are now far from one another, and conflict is extremely rare.

Names: (male) Ahcchi, Aigidolin, Almmajolmmosh, Arpa, Boaris, Ganda, Girjeradju, Kaveri, Lavlu, Olmmái, Riipu, Ruksesrieban, Sátneduojár, Vilbealle; (female) Bajandavgi, Balva, Biika, Boallonjukcha, Oabbá, Ruksesraddi, Ruohitta, Savvon, Uhcaoabbá, Väibmu, Vuodjarássi.

Religion: see "Beliefs of the Saami" below.

Racial Features:

- +2 Constitution. The Saami are a remarkably hearty race, capable of enduring the harshest frigid lands of the Hyborian world.
- +2 racial bonus to all Climb, Balance, Hide, Knowledge

(nature), Listen, Move Silently, Survival and Spot checks made in cold environments.

- +2 racial bonus to all Handle Animal checks when dealing with reindeer. Many, but not all, tribes of Saami herd reindeer. For tribes that do not herd this animal, a character may instead get a further +2 bonus to Survival checks or Profession (fisherman).

- Saami receive Animal Affinity and Track as bonus feats. They need not meet the prerequisites for these feats.

- Simple Weapon Proficiency. Compared to the Vanir, Æsir and Cimmerians to the south the Saami are a placid folk, not warriors. They are only familiar with the tools of survival: bow, hatchet, knife, and the hunting spear. Some tribes also use the staff for shepherding reindeer and fighting off wolves, bears or wild dogs.

- Exotic Weapon Proficiency (lasso) as a bonus feat. Technically the lasso is not so much a weapon in Saami hands but a useful tool in herding reindeer. Virtually all adults are skilled with this instrument, and children are instructed in its proper use from the age they can stand up and use their tiny hands. Coastal, fishing-oriented tribes can instead take a feat which better reflects their milieu and means of living.

Background Skills: Handle Animal, Knowledge (nature), Survival

Favoured Classes: Nomad

Prohibited Classes: Noble

Automatic Languages: Saami

Bonus Languages: Cimmerian, Hyperborean, Nordheimer

The average Saami male stands rarely taller than five feet, six inches; females average six inches shorter. They have stocky, broad-shouldered frames, dark eyes, dark hair and high cheekbones. Furthermore, the men do not grow full beards as do the Vanir and Æsir: what scant whiskers grow on their cheeks, lip and chin are plucked out unceremoniously. The men shear the hair of the head very short, while the women-folk wear theirs down to the waist. Only married women braid their hair.

Due to a lack of regular contact between the Nordheimir and the Saami, stereotypes and misunderstandings are numerous. To the Vanir and Æsir, the Saami seem cryptic, inscrutable, stoic, aloof - deaf and mute from birth, or even mentally deficient. The Nordheimir think that the Saami sleep out under the stars in snow-drifts, chasing wild animals, sacrificing to the sky and praying to trees. To the bearded, sword-wielding ones the Saami are little more than two-legged animals that wear crimson, patchwork garments.

The truth, however, is markedly different. The Saami are superb hosts: they welcome guests without exception into their tent-homes, offering food, drink, fire and a place to sleep. This is a universal, unwritten law among all Saami tribes. The Saami know nothing of alcohol, nor gluttony. The constant feasting and revelling of the Nordheimir would be distasteful to the men and women of the Five Nations.

Taciturn in extreme around strangers, the Saami are quite chatty amongst themselves. They are avid conversationalists, delighting in riddles, folktales, myths, legends, fairy tales, gossip, local news, and most of all epic songs. Some tribal singers and shamans have a prodigious memory, retaining the equivalent of many thousands of verses without error.

Theft and other crimes are rare. On unusual occasions a proven offender is either shunned for a period of time or, in severe cases, exiled permanently. Capital punishment is not practiced among the Saami: to be set adrift in the harsh world is a death sentence enough.

A Saami tent, or *dallu* provides a +2 bonus to Fortitude saves against cold. If the tent is occupied by at least 3 people and a fire offers additional heat the bonus is doubled. In areas where there is little vegetation to burn, dried reindeer dung provides suitable fuel. The typical tent can be assembled or disassembled in 15 to 20 minutes and can be carried by four or more adults of average Strength.

NEW ITEM: LASSO

A lasso is used to entangle or capture a target, either by horns, head, neck, a limb or some such similar projection. When you throw a lasso, you make a ranged touch attack against your target. A lasso's range increment is 10 feet.

The maximum range of a lasso is 30 feet. This assumes a loop big enough to ensnare a man or the head of a large animal. The loop can be made big enough to ensnare up to four men at once if they are standing close together (i.e. in adjacent squares) but each extra man reduces the range of the lasso by five feet. Changing the size of the lasso loop is a standard action.



The Saami method is to place together the extra coiled length with the loop and throw the loop and the coils toward the target. This ensures a flatter, straighter trajectory, with no need for an excessively large loop.

If you hit, the target is ensnared. An ensnared creature takes a -2 penalty on attack rolls and a -4 penalty on Dexterity and can move at only half speed. If you control the trailing rope by succeeding on an opposed Strength check while holding it, the entangled creature can move only within the limits that the rope allows.

An entangled creature can escape with a DC 25 Escape Artist check (a full-round action). The lasso has 12 hit points and can be burst with a DC 30 Strength check (also a full-round action).

A lasso must be coiled evenly to be thrown effectively. The first time you throw your lasso, you make a normal ranged touch attack roll. After the lasso is unfurled, you take a -4 penalty on attack rolls with it. It takes 4 rounds (24 seconds) for a proficient user to coil a lasso and 10 rounds (1 minute) for a nonproficient one to do so.

THE GREAT NATIONS

There are five major divisions of the various nations of the Saami, one for each direction of the compass, plus an additional division dwelling in the so-called Blue Mountains which divide Vanaheim from Asgard. Their numbers are highly speculative. Most of the tribes have had a very low birth-rate for many generations, and are slowly dying out.

DAVVI: c. 600 members. North Saami.

MADDI: c. 400 members. South Saami, i.e. those who live in more southerly Nordheim, relatively closer to Vanir and Æsir settlements. Conflicts with the Nordheimir in years past have severely diminished their once great numbers.

NUORTI: c. 2000 members. Name for the Eastern, i.e. Hyperborean Saami.

OARJI: c. 800 members. Western Saami, i.e. those who live in Vanaheim.. Most live along the coast and are fishermen. Vearra is their largest permanent settlement. Guolli is their prime deity. There are three sub-divisions, namely:

- **Skálzhu**, c. 300 members. A coastal tribe, known for using seashells as currency, some carved with designs. These items are even more valuable the further inland they are traded.

- **Oaggu**, c. 300 members. Known for being excellent fishermen in the fjords of Vanaheim and along some rivers.

- **Suolu**: c. 200 members. This group inhabits three of the larger islands just off the coast of Vanaheim. They are especially adept “coast-hugging” seafarers, hunting seals and occasionally whales. Also called *Dámpa*, or Boat-People. Games Masters are encouraged to give such characters ranks in Profession (shipwright), or Profession (sailor), Profession (fisherman), and so on. For more nautical concepts suitable for this group, see *Pirate Isles*.

GASKI: c. 900 members, Central Saami. Foremost among them being the Várri.

• **Várri** (c. 600 members), living in the Blue Mountains. Geadhgi is their god.

BELIEFS OF THE SAAMI

Saami shamanism involves nature and ancestor worship, and veneration of the World Tree, named Muorra. Shamans make offerings to discrete geographical or topographical features such as lakes, mountain, boulders, or sky above.

By long sessions of drumming and dancing, shamans go into a trance wherein they believe their spirit (in the guise of a bird) flies to the world of the dead or the realm of the gods for the purpose of asking questions, seeking remedies to diseases, or understanding the manifold signs and portents which manifest themselves in the natural world.

A faithful tribesperson who seeks the counsel or treatment of a shaman later benefits from a +1 morale bonus to all Will saves for 1d8 days thereafter.

Often shamans are the repositories of a tribe's lore - a kind of walking library or almanac of traditional wisdom.

For more ideas on the Shaman multiclass option, see *Hyboria's Fiercest*.

Saami and Multiclass Options

Instead of the Shaman multiclass, Saami characters can be developed with the Mystic multiclass in *Hyboria's Fiercest*. Some Saami Player Characters or Non-Player Characters make for superb guides: those who know the frigid lands, hidden dangers and how to cross vast snowscapes in safety. For information on the Guide multiclass option, see *Hyboria's Fiercest*.

GODS AND SPIRITS OF THE SAAMI

The world of the Saami is full of life - the sky, trees, mosses, snow and even stones are alive. Every phenomenon has its spirits or even gods which are venerated by the Saami, although some receive much more attention than others. The Saami offer prayers to various spirits, thanking them for bounties, or begging them for mercy. They think of the spirits and gods, not as beings all too removed from the kin of Men, but merely another tribe with somewhat more power over the forces of nature. Many tribes conceive of a particular spirit as their progenitor or patron.

What follows is a basic primer in glossary form of the major spirits, gods and tales that pertain to them. Games Masters are welcome to compose more details to suit their individual campaigns.

Almmai, the prime diety, the first man, primogenitor of the Saami race. He sacrificed himself by dismembering his own body. Each limb became the various great nations of the Saami. His head became the Davvi Nation, his legs and feet the Maddi Nation, his left arm and hand the Nuorti Nation, and his right arm and hand the Oarji Nation. Lastly, the stump of his torso became the Gaski Nation.

DEITIES OF ANIMALS, Venatorial Pursuits

Aldu, a goddess in the form of a reindeer cow. Also called Gussa. Wife of Heargi.

Badje, a tutelary god of reindeer herds. Also called Badjeolmmosh.

Bierdna, a god in the form of a great bear. Also called Karhu, and Guovzha.

Bivdu, god of the hunt.

Boazu, god of reindeer.

Chearpmat, a tutelary god of new-born reindeer calves.

Gumpe, a wolf-god. Enemy of the Saami and their reindeer herds. Offspring of the evil Skabma.

Guolli, god of fish and fishing.

Heargi, god in the form of a reindeer bull. Husband of Aldu or Gussa.

DEITIES OF THE SKY, Celestial/Meteorological Phenomena, Weather, Precipitation

Albmi, the sky, or heavens deified. Husband of Eana.

Almmibalggis, The Milk Way, or, as the Saami believe, a long procession of their ancestors following the celestial reindeer herd.

Arve, the god of rain.

Bajan, the god of thunder. He pounds the celestial shaman's drum and dances.

Bajannjuolla, the god of lightning.

Beaivvash, the sun-god. Also called Chalbmi, The unblinking Eye. Husband of Mannu.

Biegga, a god of winds.

Borga, god of snowstorms.

Buolash, god of the frigid airs.

Galja, god of sleet. The three brothers Galja, Borga and Arve wrestle one another in the heavens to decide whom may impregnate Eana with their seed.

Mannu, goddess of the moon. Sister of Nasti. Wife of Beaivvash. She is chased by Gumpe and each month is devoured by him. After a few days, as the new waxing crescent, she re-emerges from his tail. Beaivvash tries to rescue her but never can reach her in time.

Muohta, goddess of snow. Sister to Jieknga and Chahci. Of uncertain relation to Borga.

Nasti, goddesses of the stars. Children of Mannu. Some say rather that Nasti, the stars, are the fragments or shards of another moon, a twin sister of Mannu, that was broken in a dispute or war some time before the Saami were created from the limbs of Almmai.

DEITIES OF LOVE, Matrimony, Fecundity, Children

Bierggas, the goddess of carnal love, passion, lust, copulation. Wife of Doanggat. Also called Rihccut.

Chizzhi, goddess, patron of new (nursing) mothers (human and animal).

Cumma, the goddess of romantic love, tenderness. Sister of Heajat.

Dievva, goddess of pregnant reindeer cows and women.

Doanggat, god of male fertility, virility, generative

potency. Husband of Bierggas.

Heajat, the goddess of marriage.

Irgi, protective spirit of grooms. Husband of Moarsi.

Manna, tutelary goddess of children.

Moarsi, protective spirit of brides. Wife of Irgi.

THE EARTH, Terrestrial Phenomena, Vegetation, Minerological

Chahci, god(dess) of water, whether salt (male) or fresh (female). Also called Njuoska.

Eana, goddess of earth, all the lands of the world. Wife of Albmi.

Geadhgi, god of rocks, stones, (and by extension, all mountains). When avalanches or rock-slides occur the Saami say that Geadhgi awakes from deep slumbers.

Jieknga, god of (rock-hard, mid-winter) ice. Brother of Geadhgi. Sometimes thought of as a Goddess, when pertaining to melting (late spring) ice. The female form thought to be sister to Chahci, "water."

Muorra, the World Tree (as the *axis mundi*) at the centre of the cosmos. Its roots push deep under the disk of the world, while its wide-spreading branches support the heavens.

Soahki, spirit of birch forests, often thought of as a goddess.

Vuovdi, the emerald-eyed god of forests (esp. fir forests). His skin is as tree-bark and his beard thick, green moss.

Squirrels and birds live in his leafy hair and when the wind blows he whispers ancient tales of the world when it was young. He fears Bajannjuolla. Son of Muorra, and brother of Soahki. Sometimes called Tapio, and thus Tapiola is his dwelling. Worshipped quite predictably further south in Nordheim where forests are more common.

OTHER BEINGS

Chiegus, little, invisible, benevolent spirits who sometimes lend aid to the Saami-folk. Their adoration may be yet another form of ancestor-worship. They live in the earth, in giant, rounded stones (called *häll* by the Æsir, for example), in trees or bodies of water such as lakes or mountain streams. Every year the Saami deposit a sacrificed reindeer bull into a sacred lake dedicated to the Chiegus.

Goaskin, a golden eagle who sits in the World Tree and conveys the spirit of the deceased up to the realm of the afterlife. Conversely, he bears the spirits of the dead down to Earth to communicate and watch over posterity. At times the friend of Oarri, the squirrel, at other times, his enemy.

Matki, protective spirits who accompany and watch over those who travel. Patrons or “guardian angels” of wayfarers.

Monni, the cosmos before the creation of the world, being a perfect, unblemished egg. The egg was broken in ages primeval, the top portion becoming the sky, while the bottom became the earth (the yolk) and sea (the whites).

Oarri, the squirrel who runs up and down the World Tree carrying messages between the World of the

Living and the Realm of the Ancestors above. Often invoked by Shamans.

Skabma, god of dark, the place beyond the world. God of the abyss that existed before the world and time came into being. The “Eater.” Enemy of Beaivash, the sun-god. Father of Gumpe.

TERMS FOR NON-SAAMI PEOPLES:

Daro, the Saami word for the Nordheimir.

Jiehtanas, signifying “giant.” Refers to the Nordheimir, being much taller than the Saami. A term undoubtedly related to the Nordheimer word *jötunn*, “giant.”

Miehkki, a term for the Nordheimir as bearers of swords. Swords are unknown to the Saami, who instead use knives, spears, and bows.

Ravdi, the term used for the Cimmerians, known for their blacksmiths.

Ropmi, a derogatory term for the Nordheimir. “The ugly ones.”

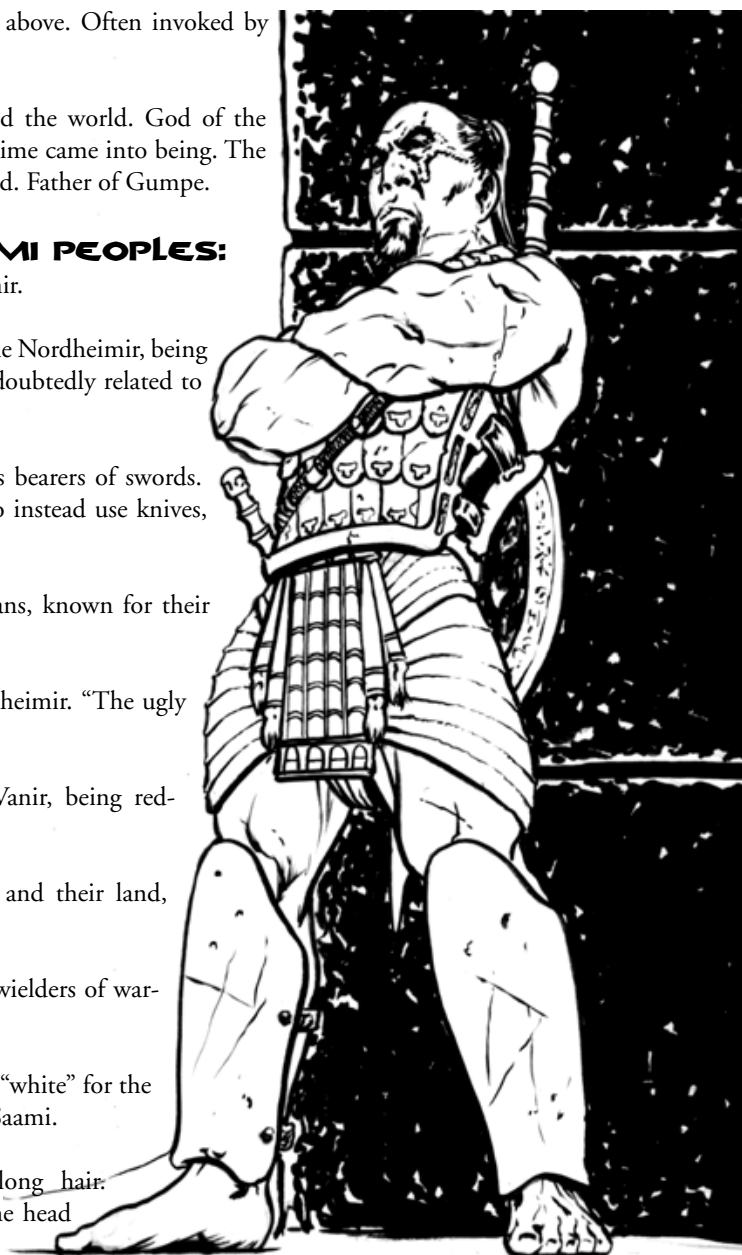
Rukses, “red”, a term signifying the Vanir, being red-headed.

Ruottha, a term referring to the Æsir, and their land, Asgard.

Veazhir, a term for the Nordheimir as wielders of war-hammers.

Vielgat, a term for the Æsir. Also vilges, “white” for the Æsirs’ blonde hair appears white to the Saami.

Vuokta, the Nordheimir as having long hair. The Saami normally crop the hair of the head closely.



This Saami has come a long way since his exile.

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Earth Alliance Special Forces

Part 1: The People

By M Flegal

Overview

As of 2262, Earth Alliance special operations are undergoing a much-needed period of recuperation from the terrible losses of the past two years. Earth Alliance special operations forces served in all theatres, from supporting the regular forces at the battle of Proxima III to hundreds of small, sharp, and bloody actions all over the known galaxy. Operators fought on seceding colony worlds, bled and died on alien soils, and grappled hand to hand in the cold of space. While the Fleet Marines' assault on the Babylon 5 station is perhaps the best known of these operations, tens of thousands of operators died during the two wars, too often in combat with those who had been their brothers and sisters just months before. The Earth Civil War in particular was a bloody and wretched affair, as special operations personnel loyal to the President Clark's faction of EarthForce battled those who broke off to follow General Hague and Captain Sheridan. Some special operations personnel defected as entire units, others in small groups and some as single individuals. When the Special Operations Command's (SOC) commander, General Natalia Murnikova, cast her lot with Captain Sheridan in 2260 this pace picked up dramatically and by the final battles of the Civil War over 60% of SOC's personnel had joined her to help liberate Earth.

When Clark's forces were defeated President Luchenko offered General Murnikova the position of Chief of Staff,

Earth Ground Forces. She declined; preferring to stay with SOC and tend to her battered troops as they rebuilt their units and digested the lessons of the war. SOC and Earth Alliance special operations forces in general have come through some extremely difficult times but it would be a mistake to dismiss them as depleted forces in 2262. While Earth Alliance special operations units have lost almost 20% of their operators to death, injury, or retirement in the past five years those who remain are battle-hardened beyond any previous achieved level, more so than even during the desperate battles of the Earth-Minbari war. Before 2262, EarthForce special operations forces were recognized as being among the best in the galaxy. In 2262 it can be argued that they are the best.

Organization

The majority of the Earth Alliance special forces personnel operate under an umbrella command, the Special Operations Command (SOC), which reports directly to the Chief of Staff Earth Ground Forces, placing most of EarthForce's special operations units into the Ground Forces Command structure. EarthForce special operations units outside of SOC include the Fleet Marines, who report to the Chief of Fleet Operations, and the Special Activities Task Force, reporting to the Director of Military Intelligence. Outside of EarthForce, the various Intelligence Directorate and Psi-Corps units report through their appropriate command structures.

However, all of these units are classified top secret and a few are almost unknown outside of their respective organizations. It is not unusual for the majority of an organization's members to not know if one of their special operations units truly exists, much less whom it reports to.

Military Units Special Action Service Regiments

Special Action Service (SAS) regiments are the best known and second largest group of special operators in EarthForce, second only to the Assault Rangers in size. Their post-Minbari War expansion and reputation is a direct result of their successes during that conflict, where the SAS provided some of the few bright spots for Earth during the disastrous conflict. While the Earth Alliance fleet was being slaughtered in space, ground-based operations were the only area where the Minbari were successfully resisted, even if only long enough to evacuate civilians and essential personnel. Yet while GROPOS troops and Fleet Marine forces fought several successful, albeit costly, delaying actions SAS personnel were amongst the few who often defeated the Minbari outright. SAS personnel struck blow after blow against the Minbari juggernaut; ambushing relief columns, sniping high-ranking Minbari officers, destroying ammunition dumps, and coordinating resistance operations on fallen colony worlds.

When the war ended, only the valiant Starfury pilots ranked higher in the public's esteem. More importantly, EarthForce realized that for the foreseeable future Earth's potential enemies included those who could sweep their tanks from the ground and their warships from space. Special operations had more than proven their worth in the face of those types of threats. The special operations budget in general and the SAS budget in particular were greatly increased after the war and SAS units were expanded as rapidly as possible, a process that was accelerated when a celebrated SAS officer was promoted to the commanding general of SOC. General Murnikova's influence has been great, not the least because she proved an extremely skilled in-fighter amongst the hierarchy in EarthDome as well as being a personal friend of the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs, General Jennifer Romano.

Telepaths in Special Operations

Telepaths do not serve outside of Psi-Corps control except in the Blue Berets. Experiences in the Earth-Minbari war showed that telepaths attached to regular special operations units under EarthForce command for long periods often became accepted as team members and began to lose their distrust of mundanes. Since this camaraderie ran counter to the desires of Psi-Corps these long-term postings ended shortly after the war. By 2258, members of Psi-Corps, usually from the Department of Military Affairs, were assigned on a mission-by-mission basis to existing special operations teams. Care is taken to frequently rotate telepaths through these units to minimize the development of personal bonds, although this is not completely effective. Typically, the telepath is assigned a specific mission such as scanning or subverting enemy personnel while a team of mundane operators provides protection during the operation. It is commonly understood that telepaths above P7 are rarely used for these duties, although P10's and even P12's are occasionally sent on missions of the highest priority. At least that is what Psi-Corps high command tells EarthForce. In reality, many covert telepaths have served in special operations units over the years without any but their Psi-Corps handlers knowing that they were telepaths and many more have been represented as having a low P-ranking when their actual level was far higher. While this is generally done to keep tabs on the special operations community, darker missions have taken place as well. In recent years several telepaths of P10 or higher have served secretly as mundanes or masqueraded as P3-P5's in various special operations units to surreptitiously install 'Asimov' blocks in special operations personnel as well as conduct loyalty scans and build a database of weaknesses in high ranking operators. When Psi-Corps makes its move to take control of the Earth Alliance, it intends to keep the various special operations forces from being an obstacle.



In many ways the SAS are the closest to the public stereotype of special operators, engaging in ambushes, sabotage, sniping, capture of enemy personnel, reconnaissance, and the training of other resistance forces. The typical squad consists of one officer, a warrant officer, and 11 enlisted operators. This warrant officer is generally a former NCO with several years of experience in a SAS squad who often mentors new officers assigned from selection. The enlisted operators are typically of higher rank than in an equivalent GROPOS squad, due both to the requirement that applicants for selection have a minimum of 2 years in line units before applying as well as the high retention rates in special operations. These 11 enlisted operators usually consist of at least one medic, one or two heavy weapons specialists, one sniper, one communications specialist, and the rest a mix of assault, demolition, and reconnaissance specialists.

The primary exception to this structure are SAS sniper squads, which consist of 2-3 snipers, generally with one experienced primary sniper and 1-2 less experienced snipers who assist with observation and provide extra firepower during contact and extraction.

Combat Swimmer Flotillas

The 'Killer Whales' are the maritime version of the SAS, commandos tasked with operating from water. While there are many similarities between the two units, there are also some significant differences that should be recognized. While the SAS specializes in missions lasting from weeks to months, the combat swimmers generally plan missions lasting a few days at most. While this is partly due to a desire to prevent mission overlap it is also due to the fact that, as difficult as it is

for SAS personnel to carry 50-80 kilos of equipment on their back for dozens of miles, it is even more difficult for a combat swimmer to drag that equipment behind him while fighting a 5 knot current. These difficulties are magnified by present sensor technologies that make even Minnow dive vehicles prone to detection and small surface craft almost suicidal to use. Thus, the vast majority of combat swimmer infiltrations involve swimming long distances underwater. Because of this, most missions involve quick and aggressive direct action such as destroying a high value target, ambushing an enemy unit, or capturing enemy personnel. The primary exceptions are sniper teams and small six-person reconnaissance teams who operate much like their SAS counterparts in missions that can last from 1 to 2 weeks. The most common team organization involves 12 men with one officer and 11 enlisted operators organized into swim-teams of 2 operators tasked with watching out for each other during long swims or ruck-marches. This buddy system is almost holy writ to combat swimmers, beaten into them from the first day of training due to the serious dangers of swimming in the murky depths. It is incredibly rare for an odd number of operators to go out on a mission, in the event that specialists such as telepaths are assigned to the team, one member is either left behind or added to provide standard swim teams (and baby-sit the specialist). Players wishing to play a combat swimmer must maximize their Swim skill ranks for each level before allocating skill points to other skills. In addition, a player choosing a combat swimmer character automatically gains the Swim skill as an extra class skill so long as they are serving in a combat swimmer unit.

There are a few reasons why, in spite of the added difficulties of operating from water, combat swimmers exist. The most obvious is that most populated worlds have surface water, often in the form of rivers or coastlines that provide ideal routes for small teams to



SAS Selection and Training

All of the Special Forces units have their own challenging training processes and the more elite the unit, the more difficult the process. SAS training, for example, has an 82% failure rate with many of these candidates being Assault Rangers who have already survived that fierce unit's own selection and training process. However, while each unit has different selection processes, SAS training is a useful standard for comparison.

Once accepted for SAS Selection, the applicant will undergo three weeks of physical training to build them up for what's to come. During this period, applicants spend over 14 hours a day, six days a week, running obstacle courses, tabbing long distances cross-country, weapons training, and suffering intensive calisthenics. At the end of this period, Selection truly begins. This weeklong ordeal consists of non-stop solo cross-country marches against a timer, with the distances getting longer and the times shorter each day. Once back to camp the applicants spend quality time performing more physical training such as calisthenics, swimming, weapons' drills, and generally avoiding sleep. The week culminates in a 35 mile march across mountains, rivers, and thick brush to be done in under 20 hours. Those few who exceed the secret time cut-off move onto the next phase.

The week after Selection is spent primarily in the classroom, studying small unit tactics and guerilla warfare. The primary purpose is to provide a week's worth of rest for sprains, abrasions, and wrenched muscles and tendons to heal. For the next 18 weeks, the trainees learn and practice small unit tactics in various terrains. One week might be in the blistering desert, the next on a polar ice cap. The final 5 days consists of the students planning and executing a typical SAS mission against their instructors. While Selection itself accounts for over half the washouts, it must be remembered that fierce testing continues for the rest of training and many students are drummed out all of the way to the end of the process.

Following a week of space training in zero-G and a week studying water assault tactics trainees are assigned a terrain specialty. While the student's own choice is given some weight, their training scores in the various terrains and where the SAS needs warm bodies takes precedence. Trainees are assigned to desert, jungle, arctic, high-gravity, mountainous, or zero-G/space specialties and spend a further 5 weeks perfecting their skills in their new specialty. After 30 weeks of intensive training, trainees graduate in a tradition rich ceremony and are given 1-2 weeks of leave to visit their families. Finally, these men are assigned to a SAS unit where they move to the bottom of the team's roster. Generally, each unit has its own culture and methodologies and so the new members spends a further 6-8 weeks of training in the unit's own practices before they are finally assigned to a squad and truly begin their SAS career.

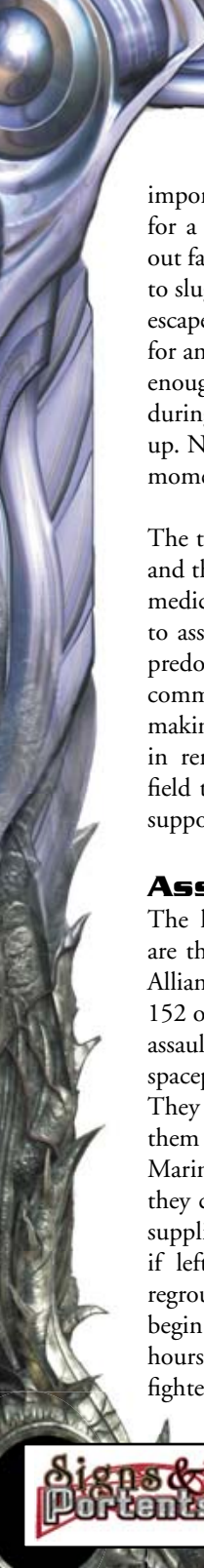
infiltrate into enemy territory. Waterways are also more difficult to monitor, especially beneath the surface. Many races also place sensitive installations underwater for reduced detection or increased protection and SOC is not about to leave them alone. Finally, there is a prime psychological reason as well. Aside from the few truly aquatic races such as the Abbai who are at home in the water, most races are quite uncomfortable off of dry land. For most troops, having a large body of water at their back means no line of retreat. To the combat swimmers, that same body of water is sanctuary.

While every special operations unit conducts reconnaissance missions, the Radvedchik are the masters of them. Shunning direct action, these brave men and women sneak into extremely hostile territory unnoticed, gather their intelligence, and then leave as quietly as they came. Generally, any Radvedchik mission that ends in a firefight is a failure on some level because the enemy was alerted to their presence. They are the eyes and ears of Earth Alliance forces and typically operate under EarthForce Military Intelligence control, though they report through SOC. While the uninformed may look at these 'typical' missions as uneventful, they are fraught with tension and danger as these teams are often surrounded by vastly larger enemy forces only meters

away. Radvedchik teams must infiltrate unnoticed before conducting observations or, in some cases, sneaking into the enemy's facilities to physically gather intelligence. It was a Radvedchik team that spent eleven days sheltered in a 3 by 4 meter stand of trees and brush within a Minbari headquarters camp during the Earth-Minbari war. One can only try to imagine the stress on these operators as the Minbari walked about and even occasionally trod upon the team members hiding in the foliage.

In the event of detection, the Radvedchik are more than capable of exfiltrating under fire and breaking contact. Even more so than other units, the last is the most

The Radvedchik Regiment



important. They have to carry everything that they need for a multi-week patrol, so ammunition tends to run out fairly quickly in a firefight. They can ill afford to try to slug it out toe to toe, they need to break contact and escape before they are overrun. As it is, the normal load for an individual Radvedchik is 60-80 kilograms, heavy enough that when they collapse on their side for a break during a ruck-march they need assistance to stand back up. Needless to say, these packs are dropped in the first moments of a firefight.

The typical team structure is 6-9 operators, one officer and the rest enlisted. Usually one member is a qualified medic and a heavy-weapons specialist is often included to assist in breaking contact. The rest of the team are predominantly reconnaissance specialists with a mix of communications, demolitions, and assault specialists making up the rest of the team. Because of their skill in remaining undetected, telepaths that go into the field to surreptitiously scan enemy personnel are often supported by a Radvedchik platoon.

Assault Ranger Regiments

The hammer of EarthForce special operations, these are the largest group of special operators in the Earth Alliance, usually operating in full company strength of 152 operators. These men and women are the premiere assault force in the Earth Alliance, tasked with seizing spaceports, command structures, and supply dumps. They hit fast and hard, seizing airheads and holding them for hours until relieved by regular troops or Fleet Marine assault companies. Optimized for rapid response, they can be expected to deplete their ammunition and supplies in several hours, leading to serious problems if left unsupported long enough for the enemy to regroup and counter-attack. Usually, regular troops begin landing and expanding the held areas within 2-4 hours. In addition, Thunderbolt, Wraith, and Heimdall fighter-bombers typically provide close air support

during the assault.

Unlike other special operations units, their equipment tends to be heavier than a Sigurd AFV or two. Several Nomad AFV's are typically deployed to provide mobile response and evacuate casualties. Turret-mounted EF-449's are also common and Rangers carry a significant number of Hammer and Yellowjacket missiles as well. They also tend to have a fairly high number of heavy weapon operators to lay down a thick wall of firepower.

As befits their mission profile, Rangers have Condor transports and Magni VTOL transport aircraft integrated into their organization. Presently, several Okinawa class space transports are also assigned to the Rangers with the idea to provide them a self-contained assault transport elements.

A typical Ranger company consists of a three 36 operator assault platoons, a 30 person heavy weapons platoon, and a headquarters platoon of 14 officers and high-ranking enlisted troops. It is also worth mentioning that the Rangers are a recognized 'breeding ground' for other special operations units and a disproportionate number of operators in other special operations units proudly wear their Ranger flash along with their unit insignia.

The Combat Search and Rescue Regiment

Fighter pilots are an expensive resource, with a great deal of time and millions of credits expended in their training. The CSR regiment was initially formed with one mission, to find those pilots stranded behind enemy lines and bring them home. In the Earth Minbari war, with the Minbari overrunning positions and extraction and support difficult, CSR teams became tasked with aiding special operations and guerilla teams far behind enemy lines. In many ways, CSR operators are the elite of the elite, second only to the hostage rescue teams in

performance and capabilities. It takes a special person to parasail into freezing water, swim 7 kilometers, hike for another 50, patch up a wounded pilot, and carry him back to safety. CSR operators are highly trained for land, water, and even space rescues. All are trained combat medics and all are highly trained in stealth and small unit combat with their mandate being to get the injured to safety at all costs.

The typical six-person CSR team is made up of a varying number of officers and enlisted personnel. While all are medics, many teams have at least one qualified combat physician as well. CSR teams shun direct action but will fight ferociously to get to an injured person and get him back out to safety. There is a legend that the Earth Alliance will fall if a CSR operator ever has to buy her own drink in a special-ops watering hole. This is open to debate, as it's never been tried; the 'Mothers', as they are affectionately known, always have their drinks bought for them. After all, when highly trained SAS or Radvedchik operators are fighting to get away from an enemy, CSR operators are fighting to get in to patch them up!

The Forward Air and Space Control Regiment

FSAC personnel truly came into their own during the Earth-Minbari war. Prior to this, they were often derided as 'air-traffic controllers' who practically needed to be carried into battle. After all, while they carried a rifle for self-defense, their primary weapon was a radio transmitter. During that war, this all changed.

When superior Minbari forces threatened to overrun Ranger companies or SAS teams, the sight of a badly wounded FSAC controller calmly directing airstrikes and even orbital bombardments onto enemy positions only tens of meters away changed a lot of minds in a hurry. The Rangers had always seen their worth, as they

depended on these controllers to establish an airhead at their positions to bring in reinforcements. However, for the rest of the special operations community it was a revelation. Within months of the start of the war, FSAC went from being mild jokes to having demand far outstrip their small force. Today, most any unit that expects a warm reception requests a FSAC be attached to their unit. Not that every team doesn't have operators highly trained in calling in support, it's simply that FSAC are the experts.

This illustrates one of the unique features of FSAC personnel; they deploy as attached individuals and not as teams. In larger Ranger assaults several FSAC operators may be assigned to the company but this is the exception to the rule. Realizing that camaraderie is the life-blood of special ops, FSAC operators are typically assigned to a team for several months or even longer, becoming a true member of the team. Capable of handling themselves in a fight, they are not quite up to the combat standards of the SAS or combat swimmers. While those groups spend extra time practicing small unit actions, FSAC operators spend time practicing orchestrating fire support mission and the difficult task of bringing 30 Magni VTOL transports into a 2 acre field in two hours. As experienced a loadmaster as any transport crew chief, they are also communication experts. A FSAC operator is a maestro with comms gear,

able to get more range and power out of a unit than even the designers intended. In the absence of good comms gear it often seems that with a pocket calculator, helmet comms, and 10 meters of wire they can get a signal to a Nova Dreadnought in near orbit for a fire-suppression mission. As should be obvious, FSAC members must have at least one rank as a communications specialist.

Special Air Wings



Several cuts above the average Frigga or Valkyrie pilot, the men and women of the special air wings are an integral part of SOC, charged with transporting operators to their destinations and providing immediate fire support when needed. It takes a special type of person to maneuver a Frigga at 100 mph between the trees 2 meters off the ground to prevent detection, in pitch black with all sensors turned off save passive light

amplification. These same pilots will fly into a swarm of missiles and ground fire to retrieve a team pinned down by enemy fire.

While the pilots get the public recognition, everyone in the special air wings are exceptional. The mechanics, the loadmasters, the gunners; all have had to fight hard to become a part of SAW and all must fight hard to stay there. Excellence has to be the norm, for anything less leads to a smoking hole in the ground where several million credits worth of men and machine have been wasted.

Counter-Terrorism/ Hostage Rescue Regiments

The CT/HRT (commonly shortened to HRT) are the cream of the crop, the best of the best. Only the elite of EarthForce make it into SOC and only 2% of those fearsome soldiers make it through the training to join these regiments. The reason is simple; while most special-ops units choose when and where they strike, HR teams typically have to

assault a group of trained terrorists who are expecting and prepared for them. Beyond that, it takes a special person with extensive training to swarm into a room and immediately identify and kill the terrorists within without harming hostages. The minimum rank to apply to this group is sergeant, 5 years of military experience is barely adequate.

These teams are also unique in that they have Psi-Corps personnel assigned to them for 2-year tours. Despite much early resistance, even Psi-Corps had to admit that these teams needed time to bond and gain familiarity with each other. The fact that several hostages died in botched actions to demonstrate this is generally not talked about. Once the decision was made, Psi-Corps embraced it for PR purposes. Telepath operators are held up to the public as examples of the good works of Psi-Corps; the photo of Lucas Josephs staggering badly wounded out of a Martian dome clutching a crying 4-year old girl to his chest may have done more to better the Psi-Corps in the public eye than any other single event in their recent history. The fact that he put his own body between the PPG blasts and the hostages has been carefully publicized by Psi-Corps in articles and movies. However, it is almost unknown for any telepath higher than P7 to be assigned to the teams, as Psi-Corps is unwilling to let its most capable be contaminated by that much exposure to mundanes. In addition, on paper the telepaths report to Psi-Corps controllers and not their team leaders.

The average team consists of 30 operators, subdivided into an A-team and B-team of 15 operators each. Typically, hostage situations are long, drawn out affairs with hours, days, or even weeks of negotiation taking place before an assault occurs. While one team rests, the other is ready to go within mere minutes if terrorists start killing hostages. While each sub-team has its own commander, each operator is expected to think for himself or herself and not hesitate to deviate from orders if the situation unfolds differently from what was expected. In order, their decision tree is simple; save the hostages, kill the terrorists, protect your teammates, and finally protect yourself. A character must possess the marksman feat to serve in the CT/HRT and assault specialists make up the bulk of these units, although each team has a few reconnaissance specialists and 3-

4 snipers. The snipers are critical to the unit's success as they provide surveillance during the operation and at least one sniper is always positioned to watch the hostages and their captors.

Psychological Operations Regiment

This unit is an interesting fit into SOC. For the most part, these people aren't operators. Rather, they are intelligence specialists who sift through mounds of data, from classified enemy documents to public entertainment to prisoner interrogations to get a feel for what the enemy and potential allies think so that they can lead them in directions favorable to EarthForce. However, there are several missions that require this expertise in the field, from planting false and implicating information to negotiating with potential allies in the midst of hostile territory. While the SAS and combat swimmers are well trained in working with indigenous forces PsychOps operators are the experts and frequently go in with a SAS team to swing groups to their cause or convince enemy personnel to defect or surrender. These operators are assigned individually to existing teams for important missions.

Fleet Marine Companies

One of two units in EarthForce outside of Ground command, the Fleet Marines are the only special-ops unit serving directly in the fleet. These men and women act as shipboard security onboard warships, crew breaching pods, and act as fleet-borne assault forces for limited surface actions. Frequently dismissed by the public as mere security personnel, they are actually an elite unit that often operates in the most dangerous environment of all, the depths of space. When breaching pods are deployed, the few dozen Marines aboard are expected to hold their own on a station or ship crewed by hundreds or thousands. Relief is rare, they must fight their way

aboard to destroy critical systems or seize the command center and casualties are often high. The opposite is also true, even an Omega destroyer carries a scant three-dozen Marines, yet those few men are expected to defend the ship against alien breaching pods. Marines are also the most highly trained special operations personnel in space borne operations, often slipping onto installations or warships undetected in their armored spacesuits after deploying from Zeebrugge assault shuttles. While most ground assaults by Fleet Marines are conducted by the on-board complement of a single vessel, Fleet Operations Command was uncomfortable having all planetary assault operations being conducted under GROPOS command, so the Tantalus and Okinawa-class assault ships dedicated to the Fleet Marines serve as mobile fire-centers for the fleet. One unique facet of the Fleet Marines is that they field armor such as the Thor, Loki, Odin, and Frey MLRS systems on their assault ships, giving them heavier punch than the Assault Rangers and allowing longer term missions and garrisoning abilities.

On-board ship, Marines are generally assigned in 6 member teams consisting of one officer or senior non-commissioned officer and 5 enlisted operators. It is very rare for smaller teams to be deployed; larger teams are generally made up of multiple 6-person teams. Each assault company consists of 134 Marines made up of 20 6-person assault teams and a 14-member command group. It is worth noting that, while Marine personnel are equivalent in skill to other special operations units, their gear is not. Fleet Command has forced the Marines to operate somewhat on the cheap, with their gear typically the same as that carried by the GROPOS. As an example, the DRC-34A-6 integrated helmet and communications system didn't start showing up in Marine footlockers as general issue until 2262, long after it was the standard in SOC. Marine armorers have worked miracles getting the most out of the gear that



they do have and the Marines take a perverse pride in being less well-equipped than the rest of their special-ops brothers and sisters.

Special Activities Task Force

The EarthForce Intelligence Corps operates a small clandestine force known as the Special Activities Task Force, also known as 13. Acting as a sort of 'dirty tricks' squad, the 39 operators serve as reconnaissance commandoes, assassins, saboteurs, and whatever else 13 needs them to do. 13 has acted as a shadow organization in EarthForce, actively supporting President Clark and even coordinating with some Psi-Corps programs, primarily under Department Sigma. Psi-Corps probably would have been most interested to find out that the head of 13 was a Psi-Cop that they thought dead. Instead, she

had been recruited by Vice Admiral Singh and given a small group of people and almost unlimited budget to police EarthForce for disloyal elements and conduct research into mechanical and biological augmentation of operatives. Less than a dozen people in EarthForce Intelligence are even sure of their existence.

Structure is rather free and operators are unranked. Operational assignment is based on which operator(s) are best suited to the task and how many need to go. While the research arm of 13 is generally kept separate from the operations group, operators often act as control personnel when the latest biomechanical monster from Research gets deployed.

Civilian Intelligence Units Special Action Teams

Special Action Teams serve under the auspices of the External Security Branch's Department of Operations in the Civilian Intelligence Directorate. Colloquially referred to as Earth Alliance Intelligence the CID acts primarily to gather intelligence both inside and outside the Earth Alliance. However, there are times when something a little more overt is needed than the standard intelligence officer. This is where the Special Action Teams come in. When the CID needs a traditional special operations mission conducted, it usually transfers over personnel from SOC. However, when the risk of disclosure is too great, SAT are used. SAT are organized similarly to the SAS teams and in fact many of them are former SAS. Typically, they will use indigenous weapons, equipment, and uniforms to provide some degree of anonymity. In these situations, SAT's often rely on physical disguise kits or even reconstructive surgery to assist in the subterfuge. One anomaly that has been of great value is that with prosthetics or surgery humans can easily be made to look like most other humanoid races, at least to the casual inspection.

Psychological Operations

On the CID organizational chart they are listed as Psychological Operations, known around the directorate as Psy-Ops. The pun is amusing and probably somewhat risky, as Psychological Operations is an operations unit made up entirely of unregistered telepaths. Most are former blips whose P rating attracted CID early enough to slip them out of the telepath registration system, a very few are turned Psi-Corps personnel. Few are higher than a P5 and only two members are of P10 level. Nicknamed the Blue Berets, their missions run the gamut of special-ops and they are trained to the standard of the SAS. They also uniformly despise the Psi-Corps and are considered an ace in the hole when

the inevitable war with Psi-Corps erupts. Personnel scan each other continually to discover any Psi-Corps agents in their midst. The few that have been discovered met rather unpleasant ends.

The average team consists of 4 operators; one commander and 3 lower ranking agents. Equipment is lavish, training is extensive, and the pay is excellent. Some of the telepaths are rather unsavory, enjoying psychic assault and even murder in their off hours. So long as they don't draw attention to Psy-Ops or foul their own nest, CID covers up for them when needed. Often, they hide within the cover of other groups, several SAT missions have actually been made up of Blue Beret teams; news reporters who investigate the operation deeply enough attribute it to the shadowy SAT group. Those who delve deeper generally stop soon after, for a variety of reasons.

Special Tactics Squads

The Federal Investigative Service (FIS) acts as the Earth Alliance wide law enforcement body. As such, they are often the first responders to terrorist actions. While SOC HR teams are theoretically allowed to operate on Earth, they are usually stretched thin just covering Earth Alliance colonies, space stations, and EA hostages on alien ruled worlds. Thus, on Earth it is the FIS's Special Tactics Squads in the Counter-Terrorism Group that rescues hostages and assaults possible terrorist safe-houses. For the most part, these 12 member squads are quite capable, if not up to SOC levels. Since the average terrorist has spent only a few weeks at a training camp this isn't much of a problem.

However, the mission parameters for FIS are quite different than those in SOC. At least until the worst abuses of the Clark administration all suspects were considered innocent until proven guilty. So, while a SOC team will storm the house and kill all suspected

terrorists, the ST squads are expected to apprehend them while ensuring the safety of the hostages. As can be expected, this not only creates a different mindset, it makes things significantly more difficult. Fortunately, outside of the various separatist groups, most Earth-bound terrorists are simply criminals who have taken hostages and are in way over their heads. They don't want to die, which gives the STS some leverage. Regardless, it often makes operations more stressful and requires instantaneous decision making from STS operators.

Psi-Corps Units **Alpha Unit**

The Psi-Cops are the elite of Psi-Corps. The Alpha unit is their elite. Quite possibly the most fearsome force in the Earth Alliance, it is perhaps fortunate that their numbers are so few, numbering less than 30 operators with every member a P12 level telepath. At that level, Alpha group can simply walk into an enemy encampment, deep scan their commanders, plant Asimovs in all enemy personnel that they encounter, and just walk back out without anyone noticing. The best surveillance gear in the world is useless when the operator isn't reading it correctly, or has been placed in a fugue state. From a strictly combat skill standpoint, these operators don't measure up to the skills of the SAS or even Psi-Corp's Direct Action Teams. However, their telepathic skills more than make up for any deficiencies in small arms tactics. Because of their low numbers and high P rating, Alpha Unit primarily focuses on assassination and information gathering where their high telepathy levels allow them to get close to heavily protected people and either kill or scan them. Because of this, the reconnaissance specialist prestige class is generally chosen for these operators. In general, members of Alpha Unit have served time commanding one of the Psi-Corp hostage rescue teams before moving into the unit.

During the Shadow and Civil Wars, Alfred Bester's Psi-Corp faction deployed Alpha Unit in support of Captain Sheridan's forces on several occasions. Needless to say, this partnership abruptly ended when Clark was removed from power and even Sheridan was kept unaware of exactly what form Bester's help took. The few rumors of Alpha Unit outside of the Psi-Cops typically refer to them a special operations force made up of P5's and such. The truth is far worse for those who would oppose Psi-Corps.

Direct Action Teams

The Psi-Corps Department of Military Affairs fields their own special operations unit, the direct action teams. Regarded as secret to the public, these teams often work in conjunction with EarthForce. This makes them a bit of an open secret amongst EarthForce personnel. This is desired, since rumors of the Direct Action Teams provide cover for Alpha Unit when needed.

Made up of telepaths P5 and higher, each team consists of 6 platoons of 7 operators. Generally each team commander is the one with the highest P-number, at least on paper. However, in the absence of a true command system, each member is expected to make his voice heard in the team, especially during mission planning. On an actual mission, everyone on the team knows who the team looks toward for leadership and that member becomes the defacto commander of the team. If Psi-Corps doesn't like a P8 taking orders from a lowly P5, that is just too bad. Typically, these teams fulfill the more traditional special operations operations for Psi-Corp than the Alpha unit. As an example, the constant Psi-Corps incursions onto Deneth are often run by small DAT units. To date, none have returned.

Hostage Rescue Teams

When it comes to mundane hostages, telepath support of hostage rescue can be limited. No telepaths serve with

the FIS's STS squads and SOC's HR teams are lucky to have a single telepath assigned to each squad. It's a very different story when it comes to telepath hostages. The department of Psi-Security operates teams specifically oriented to rescuing telepath hostages and disrupting those terror groups who wish to do telepaths harm.

Operating in 12 person teams of P5's to P10's, these teams are extremely well trained and equipped. Although technically under the same legal constraints as the FIS, terrorists have a surprisingly high rate of suicide by cop when it comes to taking telepath hostages. A P12 Psi-Cop commands each team and teams tend to remain together for years, leading to an extremely high level of institutional experience. While the existence of telepath HR teams are well known, few outside of the Psi-Corps know that they are more than standard P2-P4's with special tactics training. Were the full details to be known, people might wonder why the benevolent Psi-Corps doesn't provide more powerful telepaths to the other hostage rescue groups. A character must possess the Marksman feat to serve in the HRT.

Classes

Reconnaissance Specialist

The Reconnaissance Specialist excels at undetected movement and observation. Data gathering is their primary purpose and a mission that ends in combat is usually a failure. Almost always greatly outnumbered and outgunned, these operators thrive in environments where the slightest misstep can lead to a quick and painful death.

To qualify to become a Reconnaissance Specialist, a character must fulfill all the following criteria:

Abilities: Dexterity 12+, Wisdom 12+, Will save +6

Skills: Balance 6 ranks, Gather Information 8 ranks, Move Silently 8 ranks.

Feats: Alertness, Endurance, Improved Initiative

Class Skills

The Reconnaissance Specialist's skills (and the key ability for each skill) are Balance (Dex), Climb (Str), Concentration (Con), Gather Information (Cha), Hide (Dex), Jump (Str), Listen (Wis), Move Silently (Dex), Search (Int), Spot (Wis), Survival (Wis), and Swim (Str).

Skill Points Per Level: 2 + Int modifier

Class Features

All of the following are class features of the Reconnaissance Specialist prestige class.

Hit Points Per Level: 2

Hidden: At first level, Reconnaissance Specialists automatically receive two free ranks in the Hide skill, (to the normal maximum ranks by level). With each successive level reached, one extra skill rank is allocated to Hide before any other skill points are spent.

Aware: At second level, the character

automatically gains the Alertness feat.

Undetected: The Reconnaissance Specialist gains a +2 competence bonus on all Hide and Move Silently checks.

Disappear: At this level, the character is a master of concealment and camouflage. Besides gaining a further +2 competence bonus (on top of his Undetected ability) on all Hide checks, once per day the player can create a successful diversion as if a successful Bluff check was conducted, allowing an immediate Hide check for himself. At 9th Level up to 3 other characters can also benefit from this diversion and make Hide checks, and at 10th Level this limit increases to 8 other characters.

Assault Specialist

The Assault Specialist is generally what the lay-being has in mind when thinking of special operations. While stealthiness is important in getting to the site of action, assault characters live for breaking things, be

The Reconnaissance Specialist

Level	Base Attack Bonus	Fort Save	Ref Save	Will Save	Defence Bonus	Class Features
1	+0	+1	+2	+1	+0	Hidden
2	+1	+2	+3	+2	+1	Aware
3	+2	+2	+3	+2	+1	
4	+3	+2	+4	+2	+2	Bonus Feat
5	+3	+3	+4	+3	+2	
6	+4	+3	+5	+3	+3	Undetected
7	+5	+4	+5	+4	+3	
8	+6	+4	+6	+4	+4	Disappear
9	+6	+4	+6	+4	+4	
10	+7	+5	+7	+5	+5	

they inanimate objects or enemy personnel. In many ways, they are the opposite of reconnaissance personnel since their missions revolve around engaging the enemy instead of avoiding them.

To qualify to become an Assault Specialist, a character must fulfill the following criteria:

Abilities: Dexterity 12+, Strength 13+

Skills: Balance 6 ranks, Climb 6 ranks, Tumble 6 ranks.

Feats: Endurance, Improved Initiative, Point Blank Shot.

Class Skills

The Assault Specialist's skills (and the key ability for each skill) are Balance (Dex), Climb (Str), Concentration (Con), Intimidate (Cha), Jump (Str), Move Silently (Dex), Spot (Wis), and Tumble (Dex).

Skill Points Per Level: 2 + Int modifier

Class Features

All of the following are class features of the Assault Specialist prestige class.

Hit Points Per Level: 3

Gun Readiness: At 1st Level, an Assault Specialist who has a rifle readied when combat breaks out receives a +4 competence bonus to his initiative check in combat. This bonus is increased to +6 at 4th level, +8 at 7th level, and +10 at 10th level.

Rapid-Fire: At 3rd Level, an Assault Specialist has mastered automatic weapons and no longer takes penalties for firing in rapid-fire mode.

Weapon Mastery: At 4th Level, the Assault Specialist is so skilled with standard firearms that he can hit almost

anything that he aims at. He receives a +2 competence bonus to his attack with any rifle or sidearm weapon, so long as it is not rapid-fired. This bonus does not apply to grenades.

Grenade Mastery: At 6th Level, the Assault Specialist is so skilled with grenades that he can hit almost anything that he aims at. He receives a +2 competence bonus to his attack with any

grenade, either thrown or fired.

Rapid-Fire Mastery: At 8th Level, the Assault Specialist is so skilled with automatic weapons that he receives a +2 competence bonus to attack rolls when firing a weapon in rapid-fire mode.

Heavy Weapons Specialist

The Heavy Weapons Specialist is the linchpin of any special operations squad. When contact is initiated, a special operation team is almost always outgunned and out-numbered. Skilled use of heavy weapons such as the EF-492 Light Machine Gun, EF-749/AC-SO1 'Harbinger' Automatic PPG, and EF-449 Heavy PPG allow a small team to send out a massive amount of weapons-fire at the enemy, highly useful both in slicing down large numbers of enemy troops as well as making them keep their heads down when the team is breaking contact. What sets these men apart is that they can take a generally inaccurate weapon and turn it into an almost surgical tool of destruction.

To qualify to become a Heavy Weapons Specialist, a character must fulfill all the following criteria:

Abilities: Dexterity 13+, Strength 14+, base attack bonus +5 or higher

Skills: Balance 6 ranks, Concentration 4 ranks, Technical 5 ranks.

Feats: Endurance, Point Blank Shot

Class Skills

The Heavy Weapons Specialist's skills (and the key ability for each skill) are Balance (Dex), Climb (Str), Concentration (Con), Intimidate (Cha), Jump (Str), Move Silently (Dex), Spot (Wis), Technical (Int), and Tumble (Dex).

The Assault Specialist

Level	Base Attack Bonus	Fort Save	Ref Save	Will Save	Defence Bonus	Class Features
1	+1	+2	+1	+0	+0	Gun Readiness
2	+2	+3	+2	+0	+1	
3	+3	+3	+2	+1	+1	Rapid-Fire
4	+4	+4	+2	+1	+2	Weapon Mastery
5	+5	+4	+3	+1	+2	
6	+6	+5	+3	+2	+3	Grenade Mastery
7	+7	+5	+4	+2	+3	
8	+8	+6	+4	+2	+4	Rapid-Fire Mastery
9	+9	+6	+4	+3	+4	
10	+10	+7	+5	+3	+5	

The Heavy Weapons Specialist

Level	Base Attack Bonus	Fort Save	Ref Save	Will Save	Defence Bonus	Class Features
1	+1	+2	+0	+0	+0	Quick Fire
2	+2	+3	+0	+0	+1	Rapid-Fire
3	+3	+3	+1	+1	+1	
4	+4	+4	+1	+1	+2	Light as a Feather
5	+5	+4	+1	+1	+2	
6	+6	+5	+2	+2	+3	Undetected
7	+7	+5	+2	+2	+3	
8	+8	+6	+2	+2	+4	Accurate Fire
9	+9	+6	+3	+3	+4	
10	+10	+7	+3	+3	+5	

Skill Points Per Level: 2 + Int modifier

Class Features

All of the following are class features of the Heavy Weapons Specialist prestige class.

Hit Points Per Level: 3

Quick Fire: At 1st Level the character automatically receives the Rapid Shot feat. At 4th Level the two attacks no longer suffer the -2 penalty.

Rapid Fire: At 2nd Level the character has gained proficiency in firing his weapons on full automatic fire. The rapid-fire penalty is reduced to -2 instead of -3. Further, at 4th Level this is reduced to -1 and at 6th Level the Rapid Fire penalty is eliminated. These reductions apply to 'spraying' his target as described in the Babylon 5 rulebook.

Light as a Feather: At 4th Level the character can select one heavy weapon and designate it as his 'favourite'. For encumbrance purposes, the weight of the weapon and its ammunition is reduced by ½, with fractions rounded up. At 6th Level, the effective weight is reduced to ¾ of the original weight.

Accurate Fire: At 8th Level the character may use the standard

aimed fire rules with the rapid fire weapon designated as his 'favourite'. At 10th Level, the character may use the standard aimed fire rules with any rapid-fire weapon.

Communications Specialist

As a general rule, Special Operations units are always outmanned, outgunned, and one mistake away from destruction. Because of this Special Operations teams are firm believers in both maximizing firepower as well as getting rapid extraction when compromised. These depend on dependable communications to call in air strikes, reinforcements, and extraction. It is the Communications (Comm) Specialists who perform these duties. In addition, their skills with electronics make them invaluable when accessing communications and data systems. However, it must be remembered that these operators are special operations personnel first and foremost and are expected to hold their own with the rest of the unit.

To qualify to become a Communications Specialist, a character must fulfill all the following criteria:

Abilities: Intelligence 12+, Wisdom 13+, Dexterity 11+

Skills: Computer Use 6 ranks, Technical 8 ranks

Feats: Alertness, Data Access

Class Skills

The Communications Specialist's skills (and the key ability for each skill) are Balance (Dex), Computer Use (Int), Concentration (Con), Drive (Dex), Knowledge (Int), Listen (Wis), Move Silently (Dex), Search (Int), Spot (Wis), and Technical (Int)

Skill Points Per Level: 3 + Int modifier

Class Features

All of the following are class features of the Communications Specialist prestige class.

Hit Points Per Level: 2

Covert Communications: At 2nd Level, the character will be able to maintain contact with friendly forces at all times so long as there is not active enemy jamming going on. In game terms, this means that a character will always be able to make a call for fire support and extraction, although the GM can decide whether their request is granted or not.

Intercept: At 4th Level, the character has the skills to tap enemy communications with a fair degree of skill, allowing them to better pinpoint enemy movements. In game terms, this means that once per day the character's knowledge of enemy positioning allows them to reverse

a successful enemy Spot check or a failed Spot check on his team's side.

Language Fluency: At the 5th and 7th Levels, the character may select one foreign language and master it. This allows him to talk with other races in their own language as well as make sense of enemy transmissions that are intercepted. In combination with the Intercept skill, the player may be assumed to be 'reading the enemy's mail' and once per day may reverse a failed Hide or Spot check for his team.

Running Special Forces Games

Special operations characters can be played fairly simply as an exciting PC variation, possessing interesting skills and exotic equipment. In addition, a squad of special operations NPC's to back up a group of PC's can allow more difficult missions to be performed. However, for those interested, a special operations mission can provide an interesting and unique experience.

First of all, real special operations missions are quite intricately planned before execution, something that allows the gamemaster to both inject an air of realism into play but also provide players with the opportunity to bolster their chances of success. While it is unlikely that players will have any interest in a real-world 48 hours of planning before they finally play their mission each plan should include the method of infiltration, a rough idea of how they will execute the mission and deal with resistance, and methods and alternate plans for extraction. This in itself leads to possibilities. For example, it is quite unwise to simply leap into a mission without knowing the situation that one is dropping into. Hence, intelligence is needed to give an idea of the size and capabilities of the enemy, the terrain to go through to get there, the layout of the base/buildings/warship, etc. This provides several avenues for the gamemaster to

add to the experience. Intelligence can be incomplete or non-existent, prompting the players to start a separate mission to gather the intelligence needed to adequately prepare for a raid. Intelligence can be wrong or contradictory, forcing players to improvise and think on the run. Obviously, there are a host of other things players might wish to think about: did they plan for air support, what happens if the extraction transport gets shot down, and so on.

A good gamemaster can also load on the tension in a special operations campaign. Remember that special operations units are small and usually surrounded by vastly larger enemy forces. Shooting everything that moves often leads to a rather abbreviated evening as all the PC's are slaughtered. Players should be sweating during the mission as enemy patrols wander by, surveillance craft fly overhead, or bursts of startled animals give away their position. A really good gamemaster can have the players agonize over every movement as they try not give themselves away. Throw in mines and booby traps and just getting to the mission objective can be a challenging and involving experience.

In addition, never forget that special operations gets this name because its members do things that most soldiers can't. These missions should be difficult and

The Communications Specialist

Level	Base Attack Bonus	Fort Save	Ref Save	Will Save	Defence Bonus	Class Features
1	+0	+1	+1	+1	+0	
2	+1	+2	+2	+2	+1	Covert Communications
3	+2	+2	+2	+2	+1	
4	+3	+2	+2	+2	+2	Intercept
5	+3	+3	+3	+3	+2	Language Fluency
6	+4	+3	+3	+3	+3	
7	+5	+4	+4	+4	+3	Language Fluency
8	+6	+4	+4	+4	+4	
9	+6	+4	+4	+4	+4	
10	+7	+5	+5	+5	+5	

challenging, although a well-planned one might involve no combat at all. The danger is that it is far too easy to get so wrapped up in the intricate and impossible mission requirements that the players stop having fun. Since fun has to be the primary objective one needs to gauge the players' involvement and react accordingly. If players get frustrated or trapped, offer them a way out. Remember, the bad guys make mistakes too! Also, don't get too enthused with realism. Real units operate by the KISS principle, for 'Keep it Simple, Stupid'. A real operator wouldn't paraglide down 10 miles to land on the back of a moving vehicle. However, players usually want to do impossible things for the sheer fun of it. Why not give them the leeway to do it?

Next month: the toys. Game statistics for more guns, grenades, vehicles and spaceships than your special forces team is ever likely to need.

CODENAME: ARMOURED FURY

PART 2

BY RICHARD FORD

Thrower's face was suddenly peppered with sticky globs of flesh and shell. He opened his eyes, which he had closed against the guard bug's death blow, to see it being torn apart by sustained cannon fire. The creature fell, its huge claw missing him by inches as it collapsed to the ground, dead.

In the hangar doorway stood the unmistakable silhouette of a trooper in Cougar armour. For a second Thrower thought they had been rescued by a second strike team, but then the trooper spoke.

'You OK, Lieutenant?'

It was the voice of Hernandez, unmistakeable despite it being distorted by the voice mic of the Cougar suit.

Thrower stood and wiped the remains of the bug from his face. 'Where are the rest of the men?' he asked, suddenly concerned.

'They're right behind me, Sir. Their suits are missing though. This is the only one left.'

Thrower quickly slotted another clip into his Peacemaker pistol as his men filtered into the hangar, Sergeant Kains at their fore.

'No sign of any more bugs, Captain. It seems they've disappeared, along with our suits.'

'Why would they take them and not kill us when they had the chance?' asked Fredo, his voice rising in desperation. It seemed he was beginning to panic, which Thrower couldn't blame him for. There were bugs around and the troopers were without their armour.

They may as well have been naked.

'That's not our problem right now, Trooper,' Thrower replied. 'We need weapons. Who knows when the arachnids might come back? We need to make a sweep—'

Thrower was suddenly cut off by the sound of something rattling in a nearby storage bin. He pointed his weapon in the direction of the noise and Hernandez followed suit, the hum of his sixguns filling Thrower with a little confidence. The rest of the men pulled their combat knives – for all the good they would do against a bug – and spread themselves out.

With a sweep of his arm, Thrower signalled Hernandez to advance. The trooper obeyed, the hydraulics of his Cougar suit buzzing as he gingerly stepped towards the large square storage unit. He reached out one heavily armoured arm toward the bin, but before he could reach it the large metal container toppled forward.

'Hold fire,' Thrower shouted as the sixguns on Hernandez' Cougar suit began to spin in expectation of a target. The Lieutenant immediately recognised the figure that fell from the container as little threat. There before them quivered the terrified form of Doctor Scialli, his thin face resembling that of a pale rat, his glasses – one lens shattered – skewed across his face.

'Good afternoon, Doctor,' said Thrower.

Scialli could barely muster a smile. Lifting up his trembling hand he approximated a greeting.

'OK,' said Thrower, turning his back on the terrified technician. 'We'd better make a sweep of the facility for more survivors.'

'NO!' shouted Scialli suddenly. 'You have to get me... we have to get out of here. There might be more of those creatures lurking around. We'll all be killed.'

'Hernandez, you'll take point,' ordered Thrower, ignoring Scialli's hysterical rant. 'We'll stick close behind you. There's no way we can split up with no armour and substandard weaponry.'

Hernandez turned and led the group back towards the innards of the facility, closely followed by the rest of the troopers. Sergeant Kains turned before they left, nodding at Scialli's still-kneeling form.

'You coming?' he asked.

Scialli shook his head feverishly. With a shrug, Kains followed the rest of his men.

The hangar was silent but for Scialli's laboured breathing. He waited a full five seconds before scrambling after the troopers.

The sound of Hernandez' Cougar suit hummed with anticipation as the troopers systematically swept forward, clearing the procession of corpse-strewn corridors. They had almost reached the comms room when one of the access hatches opened up ahead. Every trooper froze. Even Hernandez stood stock still, his suit looking like a bulky statue but for the sixguns that rotated; spinning

in wait for a target. The only sound came from Scialli, who was crouched, a gelatine wreck, at the back of their formation.

Thrower lifted his Peacemaker, aimed at the door and waited for whatever screaming terror was about to issue forth. Slowly the barrel of a gun eased its way through the open hatch, closely followed by a curvaceous leg. Doctor Hendricks peered out, her eyes wide with fear and the troopers let out a chorus of sighs.

'Thank god,' said Hendricks, her body visibly relaxing as the tension lifted.

Thrower lowered his weapon and walked forward to comfort the Doctor but she seemed not to need it.

'Where's your armour?' she asked, looking over the troopers.

'Gone,' said Thrower, along with our weaponry.

'There are some weapons left in the armoury. It's in the next block. If we can get there without bumping into any more bugs we should be able to defend ourselves until help arrives,' she said.

'Sounds like a plan,' said Thrower. 'Lead the way.'

With the troopers right behind her, Doctor Hendricks moved quickly through the facility and past the mutilated bodies that lined the corridors. The armoury looked relatively unscathed, if a little bare. Quickly the troopers set about assessing the situation and pickings were a little slim. There was only one experimental rifle left in addition to the one Hendricks had, two pistols, some grenades and a handheld flamer.

Sergeant Kains quickly set about distributing the weapons and ammo amongst his men and Hernandez guarded the door.

'Picking up a weird electrical signal at the end of the corridor, Sir,' said Hernandez suddenly.

'What kind of weird?' said Thrower.

'Not sure, Sir. It's getting stronger though, Seems to be some kind of pulse, could be a signal.'

'Could be a survivor, lead the way Hernandez.'

The Cougar suit moved along the corridor. Hernandez was closely followed by the rest of the troops. At the end of the corridor he overrode the internal hatch interface, his guns at the ready as the door opened.

'Er, Sir? You need to see this.'

Thrower moved up beside Hernandez. The floor of the room was completely destroyed. He had seen its like before, it could only be the mess made when a tanker bug appeared on the scene.

'Any life signs on the sensors?' said Thrower.

'Only us, Sir,' Hernandez replied.

'Where's the signal coming from?'

'Just behind that door,' said Hernandez, motioning to a closed hatch in one corner.

Thrower skirted the large hole. Peering down he saw it disappear into the earth, leading to God-knew-where. Using the swipe card he'd taken from a dead technician, Thrower opened the hatch. The inside of the room was veiled in shadow, an oppressive heat emanating from within. Thrower stepped through the door, his Peacemaker at the ready. Despite the fact there were no life signs there could be any number of things the arachnids could have planted to surprise an unwary trespasser.

Through the dark, Thrower could see a green LED winking at him from one corner. This must be the source of the anomalous signal. Carefully he crossed the half-lit room, his eyes scanning all around for signs of danger. As he reached the source of the light he realised his mistake. There were no other sources of danger in here – the one in front of him was great enough. The winking light was part of a detonator strapped to several kilos of explosive. The timer was already running down, 18 seconds... 17 seconds... 16!

'In the hole! In the hole!' screamed Thrower as he ran from the room. He stopped to close the door behind him but he knew it would do little good. The size of the explosion would be enough to destroy the entire facility.

The rest of the troopers wasted no time and obeyed without question. Dragging the doctors with them, Thrower's men dived into the massive hole, Hernandez leading the way. He charged along the tunnel, his halogen lights illuminating the blackness of the tunnel as the group tried to put as much room between them and the explosive.

Thrower brought up the rear, counting down the second in his head. There were five remaining, not enough time to put a suitable distance between themselves and the explosion.

He stopped and pulled out one of the grenades he had found in the armoury. Clicking off the safety he flung the grenade as far back down the tunnel as he could, then turned and sprinted for his life.

The first explosion was like a dull thud as the grenade detonated. As planned, it collapsed part of the tunnel and partly blocked their escape route. It was instantly followed by a sound that Thrower felt more as a vibration than a noise. He was thrown from his feet, rock, dirt and debris falling from the roof and partly covering him. All was blackness.

A light flashed from up ahead. As the ringing in Thrower's ears subsided he could hear Hernandez, his voice warped by the Cougar suit's microphone. 'You OK, Sir?'

Thrower stood. There was bruising but no broken bones. 'Everyone else?' he asked.

'Beef's dead, Sir.'

It was Sergeant Kains, his growling tone doing a lot to allay Thrower's fears.

The lieutenant's vision began to clear and by the light of Hernandez' torchlight he could see the rest of the dishevelled bunch gathered around a hulking figure lying prone on the ground. There was no time for speeches.

'OK, there'll be no way back, must be tons of rubble after that explosion. We'll have to press on. Besides that,

the bugs have taken our armour and we might be able to locate it down here. Hernandez, see if you can pick up any of the tracking beacons. Meantime, let's press on.'

They began to move down the tunnel, Hernandez again taking point. Thrower was close behind him with Kains at his shoulder.

'That was no bug explosive,' Thrower whispered to his Sergeant. 'It was rigged by human hands. One of the scientists must have been trying to hide something.'

'This whole mess is starting to stink,' replied Kains. First we're sent to a remote facility due to a distress signal that was never sent. Then a bunch of bugs escapes and wrecks the place and now someone's planted a bomb to cover the whole mess. What the hell's going on?'

'I don't know Sergeant, but our first priority is to get out of here alive. We'll worry about conspiracies later.'

'I've got it, Sir,' said Hernandez. 'Two clicks away, it's a beacon from Fredo's suit.'

'Lead the way, trooper,' Thrower ordered, as they moved deeper into the subterranean dark.

They walked for nearly an hour, the winding tunnel leading them in circles as they searched for the suit. Eventually the tunnel led out into a large cavern and there in its centre lay the prone and empty Cougar armour.

Thrower lifted a hand at the cavern entrance to signal his men the stop. Something wasn't right. Why would they just leave one suit in the middle of the cavern? This had ambush written all over it, but Thrower could see no alternative but to press forward.

'Hernandez, are you reading anything?' asked Thrower, keeping his voice low.

'Nothing in the immediate vicinity Sir, but ahead of us is solid rock. Scanner only penetrates it up to 500 metres.'

'OK, we move forward. Keep your eyes and ears open. Fredo, check your suit.'

The troopers began to cross the cavern floor, its interior only dimly lit by the lights from their single Cougar suit. His path illuminated for him, Fredo moved

forward towards the suit.

Suddenly there was a sound from the opposite side of the cavern. Everyone stopped dead, Hernandez aiming his torch towards the origin of the sound. He illuminated an adjoining tunnel that led off into the darkness. Again another sound, this time easily recognizable as the chittering of arachnids.

'We need to—' Thrower's order was cut off by an ear piercing scream.

Hernandez turned, his torch flashing across the cavern wall, desperately searching for the origin of the scream. As his suit lamp focused on the source everything was thrown into panic.

Fredo, a little way ahead of the other troopers, was covered in tiny bugs. He screamed in panic, desperately trying to shake the creatures off but it was no good. Thousands of tiny mouths were eating him alive.

Thrower looked to the ground. The floor of the cavern was alive with inch long creatures, all moving towards the troopers.

'Ortega! Flamer!' barked Thrower.

Instantly Ortega unleashed the flamer on the crawling mass. The cavern was lit up by the fire as the swarm was ignited. Everyone backed away from the intensity of the heat as Ortega went about his task, systematically burning every inch of the ground before him.

As the flames died, Thrower ran towards Fredo but it was too late. His body was prone and lifeless, tiny bugs crawling from his nose and mouth.

Thrower stepped back and gave Ortega a nod. The trooper stepped forward and began to burn his dead comrade.

'Contact! Contact!'

Thrower could barely make out the words over the sound of Ortega's flamer. He looked up in time to see Hernandez unleashing his twin sixguns down the corridor ahead of them.

'Withdraw,' ordered Thrower, turning to move back the way they had come, but the sight before him made him stop dead in his tracks.

Scialli lay prone on the ground, his body consumed by a teeming mass of insects, his face staring to the ceiling of the cavern in a silent scream. Doctor Hendricks stood over him, her body also consumed by bugs but she was not struggling or screaming in pain. Thrower could only look on in horror as her once full lips now parted in a bug encrusted smile.

'I'm afraid you've reached the end of your mission, Lieutenant,' she said, bugs falling from her mouth as she spoke.

Ortega was suddenly at Thrower's shoulder, he raised the flamer ready to unleash a blaze on the twisted figure before him. Hendricks was faster. With inhuman speed she bent over, her mouth gaping open wider than any human jaw should allow. Yellow bile sprayed forth and covered Ortega's face and torso. He had time for a short gurgling screech before the corrosive vomit had eaten his flesh.

'Lieutenant, get back!' Thrower's arm was grabbed by a weathered fist as Kains pulled him away from the horrid form. Ortega's body spasmed, then went limp, the flamer still clutched in his hand.

The din of Hernandez' sixguns reverberated around the chasm as he tried to hold the arachnids at bay. Kains and Thrower raised their weapons, unleashing a volley of rounds at the Doctor but she simply stood smiling as thousands of bugs crawled all over her.

Thrower turned as he heard a scream behind him. Hernandez' Cougar suit was impaled on the massive claw of a guard bug. Remnants of other arachnids lay all around but there were simply too many of them. The sixguns began to fire wildly, some shots hitting the chasm roof. Chunks of debris fell to the floor and a stream of light suddenly invaded the subterranean darkness. The surface was just above their heads, but also out of reach. More of the creatures burst from the tunnel and began to tear the reinforced armour to pieces. Hernandez' voice went silent.

'Peace at last,' said Doctor Hendricks. The bugs parted from her face revealing a casual smile. Thrower's

Peacemaker was empty and Kains had abandoned his spent rifle in favour of his combat knife. Hendricks stepped forward as the guard bugs continued to tear at Hernandez.

'We must thank you, Lieutenant. The suits you have provided for our tests will be most valuable.'

'This was all a trap?' Thrower said, as much to himself as to Hendricks.

'That's quite a simplified way of putting it but yes, I suppose it was.' Hendricks took a step forward. 'So sorry it had to be like this.' Bugs once more consumed the Doctor's head. As she walked towards them she was simply a mass of writhing insects.

'The Cougar suit should still have a working jump jet,' said Kains suddenly.

Before Thrower could work out what he meant, Kains raced forward, his knife flashing towards the mass of bugs that was Hendricks' head. The sergeant gripped Hendricks and plunged the knife into the squirming bugs up to the hilt. Instantly he was consumed by insects.

Thrower wasted no time, unwilling to see Kains sacrifice himself for nothing. He turned and leapt towards the prone Cougar suit. At the opposite end of the cavern the guard bugs saw him move and instantly advanced. Thrower would never be able to don the suit in time but he could still engage the jump jets if the suit was in position.

Kains began to scream in pain and fury as his body was quickly eaten. At the same time, Thrower cried out as, with a strength borne of desperation, he hauled the Cougar suit to a standing position.

He punched in the jump jet override on the external control panel and aimed the suit as best he could for the gap in the cavern's roof. Kains screamed again as his body was consumed, his aggression no longer able to overcome the pain of a thousand bug bites.

Thrower stood on the feet of the Cougar suit and flicked the engage switch. The jump jet engines kicked

in and he gripped the sides of the suit as tightly as he could, shutting his eyes against the sight of the deadly bugs bearing down on him. There was sudden pressure under his feet as the jets ignited and began to propel the suit roofwards. As they roared into life, Thrower heard Hendricks screaming in fury at his escape.

Sudden light hit his eyelids as Thrower realised his aim had been true and the Cougar suit had propelled him through the narrow gap in the cavern ceiling. Now all he had to do was survive the landing and put enough distance between him, marauding guard bugs and a contaminated human before they tore him apart. This mission just got easier by the minute!

The FedNet newscast played more to itself than Matiz. He sat staring towards the vid screen in the corner but none of the news registered. Then, suddenly his interest was piqued. He sat up, placing the brandy glass back on the coffee table and focused fully on the report.

'...after his mission on the planet of Xenon IV, Lieutenant Thrower managed to make his way back to a known rendezvous point. He had spent 15 days in the jungle and was reported to be malnourished, dehydrated and close to death. The science facility he had been sent to investigate was destroyed completely and Thrower seemed reluctant to answer any questions regarding his mission, when approached by FedNet journalists.' Matiz smiled as he watched a recording of Thrower's fist close in on a camera lens. *'Lieutenant Thrower's Cougar team were all killed in action on the mission and reporters have yet-'*

'Turn it off.' The voice was cold and seemed to penetrate Matiz' dimly lit living room like a harsh shaft of light.

Matiz recognised it instantly. It was not a voice to question or disobey. Without taking his eyes off the screen, Matiz reached for his remote and switched off the vid screen.

'How did you get in here?' he asked.

'I was part of an insurgency team for fifteen years. Don't you remember? No, I forgot. With your new friends you probably don't remember your old life.'

Matiz slowly stood and turned. There was Thrower, a shadow of his former self. His usually clean cut jaw line was now marred by an unkempt beard and his eyes showed the strain of days living rough.

'How did you know?' asked Matiz, a gentle fatherly smile appearing on his face.

'You sent us there. It was a trap from the beginning. A fictional emergency in a fictional facility. Send in a unit of Cougars to steal their suits, take their technology and study it.'

'And you're here for what? To kill me? Have you any idea how deep this goes. How many people are involved, Thrower? Killing me solves nothing. We are legion! Soon this planet will be just another resource. Think about it. Your best option is to join us. I can assure you, it's quite painless. It's like having a friend by your side at all times.'

The flash of the peacemaker muzzle momentarily lit the room and crack of its report stung the air. Matiz' brains exploded from his head, showering the antiseptic white of the living room wall with a wide, red splash.

Thrower kept his weapon trained on the dead body, waiting, but he wasn't quick enough. The control bug raced from the corpse of its host and was across the room in a second. Thrower only managed to loose three rounds before the creature was gone.

It wouldn't be long before they came for him. He'd shot dead his own colonel and no amount of talk about control bugs and arachnid conspiracies would get him out of this. Besides, they were 'legion' Matiz had said. Thrower had no reason to doubt him. They had managed to infiltrate the highest echelons of the MI. Anyone could be infected. Maybe he was next.

That Thrower could not allow. He raised the Peacekeeper to his forehead and could feel the warmth of the muzzle as he held it near his temple. Its flash lit up the room for the last time...

A RECIPE FOR DISASTER

A short RuneQuest adventure by Carl Walmsley.

Introduction

Angry bees, a mysterious illness and a bizarre creature trapped inside an oven – hardly the ideal ingredients for a tasty new range of pies. So what is the secret of Manfrik the pie man's recent success?

A Recipe for Disaster is designed for relatively new characters, and requires a copy of *RuneQuest* and *RuneQuest Monsters*. It presents characters with a mystery to solve along with a taster of underground exploration. The adventure can be set in just about any fantasy campaign without much need for modification, and can be completed in 2-3 hours of play.

Adventure Background

Manfrik Kessal was struggling to make a success of the pie shop left to him by his father when fate served up a unique opportunity. Beneath Manfrik's shop – *The Upper Crust* – are tunnels pre-dating the current settlement by several centuries. A creature, spawned somewhere in the darkness below, found its way into these tunnels when searching for food and became trapped in a narrow fissure in the base of Manfrik's great stone oven, located beneath his shop. Unwittingly, the pie-maker cooked the beast along with his usual provisions for the day. As luck would have it, Manfrik found the demand for pies unusually large that day and – with little alternative and desperate to turn a coin any way he could – the pie-man

wrapped the strange meat in pastry and served it up. He found that he had an instant hit on his hands. His customers loved the unusual flavour of the new pies, and the unscrupulous shopkeeper managed to double his daily take.

That evening, when the oven had cooled, Manfrik discovered the opening in the floor of his oven and the strange creature trapped within. Far from having killed the beast, the pie maker found that he had roasted only a portion of it – the main bulk remained trapped in the narrow passage leading down into the ground. What was more, the creature seemed to be recovering, regenerating before Manfrik's eyes. By sunrise, the creature had recovered sufficiently for the shopkeeper to fire up his oven and prepare more of the tasty new pies. That was six months ago. Since then, Manfrik's fortunes have taken a turn for the better and he is fast becoming a wealthy man. The creature remains trapped in the oven, a portion of it being cooked each day, only to regenerate by night. Manfrik has been careful to feed the beast, learning quickly that it thrives on meat and is not choosy about where it comes from. Mostly it dines on rat, dog or rancid mutton but a few times – to really keep the costs down – Manfrik has not balked at gathering bodies from pauper's graves. The beast doesn't seem to mind.

Unknown to Manfrik, the creature has been issuing

waste the entire time it has been trapped inside the passage. This foul slime initially pooled within the old tunnels but has now found its way into a stream that flows through the village. Though the stream does not flow past any homes, it does pass through a meadow where there is a bee-farm. Passing through the flowers growing there, the vile waste has been building gradually within the colony of bees until they have now become dangerously corrupted. The beekeeper has already been killed by the insects and two others in the town have been taken ill after receiving stings.

Adventure Synopsis

The PCs will begin this adventure by investigating the mysterious illness affecting two of the locals. When it becomes apparent that both have suffered stings of some kind, this (and possibly further evidence gathered in the village) will lead them to the bee farm.

After finding a way to deal with the corrupted insects, they should discover that the field is contaminated in some way. The source of the contamination is the stream that runs through it. Backtracking along the waterway leads to Manfrik's pie shop.

A search of the shop (something Manfrik will try to prevent) will reveal the creature in the oven. The beast must be removed if further contamination is to be

prevented. This can only be done properly by finding a way down into the old tunnels. Unfortunately, the presence of Manfrik's creature, and the build up of waste, has already affected the local ecology. A colony of giant beetles and a trollkin have been feeding on the regenerating beast for some time and will try to prevent any efforts to remove it.

Adventure Hooks

If this is the PC's first adventure, one or more of them may be related to the locals who have been taken ill. This could be a way to get a new party together, working towards a common goal as they seek to uncover the cause of the illness.

Alternatively, the PCs may be visiting the settlement looking for one of the people taken ill. If this person is a potentially useful contact, an effective way to get into their good books would be to discover the source of their illness.

The PCs may even be the ones who find the injured villagers. By the time they have witnessed the effects of the tainted bees' stings, they may well decide to help out.

Starting the Adventure

The first part of the adventure sees the party investigating the illness afflicting Gerti Smallweed and Nancie Brewdrop, two residents of Bindler's Cobb.

The women were found in the field behind the Crooked Mill. They both have a puffy face and a dark, swollen tongue. Their temperatures are high and they keep slipping in and out of consciousness. A successful First Aid or Healing skill test will ease each woman's suffering, but this will not bring them round long enough to answer any questions. Only Heal or a similar spell will accomplish this.

If able to talk, both women will claim that they received several stings whilst gathering flowers by the mill. This is a lie – they were actually stealing honey from the bee farm. They will insist it was bees that stung them, in an attempt to conceal their true activity.

Any PC that examines either woman should make a Perception test. Success indicates that they find several angry looking insect bites on the victim's body.

The PCs can make Influence tests to learn more about Gerti and Nancie if they ask around the village. Each successful test and each person asked can reveal one of the following pieces of information:

- Gerti and Nancie do not have regular jobs and have been known to get into trouble for stealing the odd trinket or two.
- Gerti has a famously sweet tooth.
- Gerti and Nancie have been chased out of Thester Hancran's bee farm on more than one occasion.



The Bee Farm

Read or paraphrase the following once the PCs go to investigate the bee farm.

Sectioned off by a tall wooden fence overgrown with plants and flowers is the bee farm. Even from this side of the fence, there is an audible humming, reminiscent of summer but at the same time somehow threatening. A single, roughly constructed wooden gate seems the only way in or out.

The gate is locked, and no amount of calling out will succeed in attracting Thester's attention. He was stung by his bees several hours before Gerti and Nancie and is already dead.

If the PCs try to climb the fence, they find it is overgrown with sharp, thorny plants, specifically placed here by Thester to keep out intruders. Anyone that tries to scale the barrier must succeed at an Athletics (Climbing) test or suffer 1d3 points of damage to a random location as he scrambles over.

The PCs best bet is to make their way to the rear of the farm. Two sections of fence are missing where the stream enters and exits Thester's land. Anyone willing to wade out into the water can gain access through one of the gaps in the fence.

1. Thester's Body

The beekeeper's body, which lies face down in the grass, is covered in swollen red sting marks, making it an unpleasant sight.

Treasure: A pouch on his belt contains the key to his cabin.

2. Thester's Cabin

This well-constructed wooden cabin is locked, but can be opened with Thester's key or a successful Mechanisms test with a -20% penalty. Inside is an uncomfortable-looking bed that Thester made himself, a shelf of books and a small chest containing Thester's supply of food and honey.



Corrupted Bee Swarm

For details on swarms, see pages 83-84 of *RuneQuest Monsters*.

Like other insect swarms, the corrupted bees are too small to have Characteristics, and characters cannot effectively engage them in battle. Infected as they are by the waste from the slithering lurker, these bees are unusually aggressive and will attack any creature that approaches their hive.

Each round, the swarm may attack up to three creatures that come within 10 meters of their hive. Creatures targeted by the hive take the number of stings listed on the accompanying table every round until they escape the swarm. This may be done by moving out of range – the bees will not pursue targets beyond the borders of the bee farm.

The Hive starts off as Large. However, fire spells or similar attacks that the Games Master deems to be effective against the swarm may reduce the size of the swarm. Each effective attack against the hive reduces by one both the hive's size category and the number of creatures that can be attacked in a combat Round.

Every round that a creature is exposed to the swarm the Games Master should roll the total number of stings taken and multiply that result by 6 (the corrupted bees' Venom Factor). This new total gives the base Potency of the venom introduced into the target creature's body.

The corrupted bees' venom has an onset time of 1D4 Combat Rounds. After that time the Potency of the venom should be matched against the victim's Resilience in a standard opposed test. If the target creature loses this test, apply the effects of the venom.

Insect Venom

Type: Sting

Delay: 1D4 Combat Rounds

Potency: Special

Full Effect: 1 hit point damage to all locations

Duration: 2D12 hours

Any creature that takes damage from the bees' venom must make a second opposed Resilience test. If this is failed, the creature falls unconscious for 2D12 hours.

Located at the centre of the hive is the queen. If she can be destroyed (a single point of damage will do it), the swarm will dissipate. The queen is almost immobile, and once located can easily be destroyed.

Treasure: One of the books on Thester's shelf, *To Bee or Not to Bee*, is the definitive guide to beekeeping. It is worth 100 SP to another beekeeper.

3. The Bee Hives

As soon as anyone approaches within 10 metres of either of the two hives, the bees will attack. Once provoked, they will continue to attack every creature within the confines of the farm until they are destroyed.

If the bees attack, read or paraphrase the following.

The constant humming of the bees erupts suddenly into a violent and angry dirge. Hundreds of the insects swarm from the hives, forming a dark cloud in the air above the farm.

The three characters nearest the hives are each attacked by the swarm. The bees are slightly larger than normal, and emit a foul odour not unlike decaying meat.

The queen bee is located inside the centre of the hive nearest the stream. At three inches long she is now hideously bloated and unable to move herself. The queen reeks of gone-off meat. If the PCs do not destroy her, she will produce a new colony of corrupted bees within two weeks.

4. The Contaminated Stream

Along the edge of the stream the plant life is withered and mostly dead. The few plants that have survived seem tainted in some way, growing thorns or thistles and emitting a faint scent of rotten meat. Any character that comes within 10 metres of the stream will notice this with a successful Perception test. Any character that purposefully explores the banks of the stream will automatically notice the tainted plants.

The stream enters Thester's land through a narrow gap in the eastern fence and exits through a similar breach to the north. The stream is spanned by a small rickety bridge that Thester built himself. Once the stream leaves Thester's land it flows downstream for half a mile before being swallowed by a larger river. Upstream, the waterway heads back into the settlement, passing directly behind *The Upper Crust*, before veering sharply away from Bindler's Cobb towards the hills where it originates.

The Upper Crust

The pie shop is open from six in the morning till late afternoon every weekday, by which time Manfrik always manages to sell all his pies. If the PCs visit the shop before noon, they will have to queue up in order to see him.

A well-dressed man with the air of someone who has done well for himself, Manfrik greets all of his customers with a big smile as they enter his shop.

Questioning Manfrik

Manfrik knows nothing about the strange goings-on at the bee farm or the illness affecting Nancie and Gerti. He is happy enough to answer questions when they are not too intrusive – especially if he believes he is talking to potential customers. If the PCs are too pushy, or suggest he might somehow be involved, he will quickly clam up and use his busy schedule as an excuse to end the conversation.

Under no circumstances will Manfrik allow the PCs to enter his house.

Once the shop closes for the day (at around 5 o'clock), Manfrik will go for a brisk walk before returning home (at six o'clock) to eat his supper. He will then spend the evening in his bedroom reading.

Manfrik Kessal

CHARACTERISTICS

STR	12
CON	11
SIZ	15
INT	13
POW	10
DEX	12
CHA	14

Hit Locations

D20	Hit Location	AP/HP
1–3	Right Leg	1/6
4–6	Left Leg	1/6
7–9	Abdomen	1/7
10–12	Chest	0/8
13–15	Right Arm	0/5
16–18	Left Arm	0/5
19–20	Head	0/6

Weapons

Type	Weapon Skill	Damage
Cleaver	50%	1D6+1D2 / 4 AP

Special Rules

Combat Actions:	4
Strike Rank:	+12
Move:	4m
Skills:	Athletics 34%, Dodge 45%, Lore (Animal) 40%, Craft (Pie) 51%, Perception 46%, Stealth 54%, Track 45%
Armour:	Leather apron (1 AP on legs and abdomen, -3% skill penalty)
Runes:	Earth
Spells:	Protection (3)
MP:	10

1. The shop itself is 5 metres square and occupies the ground floor of Manfrik's home. The walls are covered with shelves, piled high with pies during the day and empty at night. The shop has been recently redecorated and is hung with paintings of various baked goods. A door at the northern end of the room is always ajar, revealing a staircase leading down to the cellar and another leading up to the second floor. A second door to the north accesses a small store room. There are windows in the southern and western walls.

When the shop is closed, the sturdy front door (5 AP/12 HP) is locked. It can be opened with a successful Mechanisms test with a -30% penalty.

2. Manfrik's bedroom is ostentatiously decorated and cluttered with furniture. A large portrait of the pie man

hangs on the wall opposite his bed. Several recipe books are stacked on a small shelf. There is a single window in the eastern wall.

Treasure: A loose floorboard may be located with a successful Perception test. Hidden beneath it is a bag of mixed coins (130 SP), a silver ring (10 SP) and a *potion of shadows*. Thester purchased this last item in case the source of his pies is ever discovered and he needs to make a quick escape. If imbibed, the potion duplicates the effects of a Magnitude 3 Cover of Night spell (*RuneQuest*, p70).

3. This small store cupboard holds Manfrik's rapidly expanding collection of clothes.

Treasure: there are several finely tailored garments worth 100 SP.

4. The oven room is 6 metres square and filled with the mouth-watering aroma of cooked meat and pastry. A large stone oven, with a wooden-handled metal door, is set into the southern wall. Shelves festoon the walls and there are several barrels and sacks littered about the room.

Any character that investigates the inside of the oven should make a Perception test. Success indicates that they notice the 30 cm opening in the base of the oven with something pink and fleshy inside. If the PCs are investigating the oven early in the morning, this check is unnecessary – they will automatically notice a tentacle protruding from the crack in the floor.

The tentacle belongs to a *slithering lurker* that has reached up out of the sewer. This creature seems untroubled by having one of its tentacles cooked and eaten each day – and the PCs will not be able to destroy or permanently dislodge it from here.

Confronting Manfrik

If Manfrik is questioned about the creature in his oven he will attempt to flee, attacking any character that tries to stop him. If possible, he will gather his belongings from beneath the loose floorboard in his bedroom, quaff his *potion of shadows* and then try to slip away unseen.

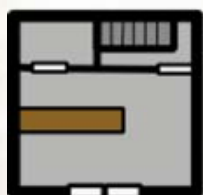
Entering the Tunnels

The PCs should deduce that the creature in the oven is bigger than the portion that they can see and that the rest of it is likely in some sort of tunnel or cavern below ground. If the PCs can somehow break through the floor of the oven room, they will be able to dig down into the tunnels. This will take some time, however.

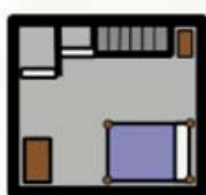
Any PC that explores around the back of *The Upper Crust* should make a Perception test. Success indicates

The Upper Crust

Ground Floor



First Floor



Cellar/Bakery



2m

that they find a sinkhole that grants much easier access to the tunnel.

The Old Tunnels

The tunnels are uncomfortably cramped, with a diameter of only 2 metres. As a result, creatures with SIZ 14 or higher receive a -10 penalty to all skill tests including attack rolls. Creatures with SIZ 25 or higher may not fit inside the tunnels.

CREATURES

Ham Beetles (see *RuneQuest Monsters* pages 17-18)

There are 9 ham beetles nesting in the tunnels near the slithering lurker.

Trollkin (see *RuneQuest Monsters* pages 137-138)

There is a single trollkin living close to the slithering lurker.

1. If the PCs enter the tunnels through the access tunnel behind *The Upper Crust* this is where they will appear.
2. If the PCs enter the tunnels by digging down through the floor of the oven room, this is where they will appear. The noise involved in such an enterprise will alert the creatures in the tunnels to the PC's approach.
3. When the PCs reach this area read or paraphrase the following:

Ahead of you, the narrow tunnel is all but blocked by a mound of dark sludge. Half-buried in this mire is a fleshy mass of tentacles that writhe gently. A number of beetles scurry about the edge of the mound, nibbling and chewing.

Any PC that takes a moment to scrutinize the mound may take a Perception test to notice that there is a small alcove in the wall a few feet from the mound. Hidden

within the alcove is a trollkin. The GM should secretly make a Stealth test for the trollkin; if a searching character's Perception test also beats this roll, then they will see the creature hidden inside the alcove.

The mound of dark sludge stops 50 cm below the ceiling. Whilst creatures with SIZ 9 or less may crawl through this gap with relative ease, any creature with SIZ 10 to 15 must succeed at an Athletics test to squeeze through. Creatures with SIZ 16 or higher may not get past without clearing away some of the mound.

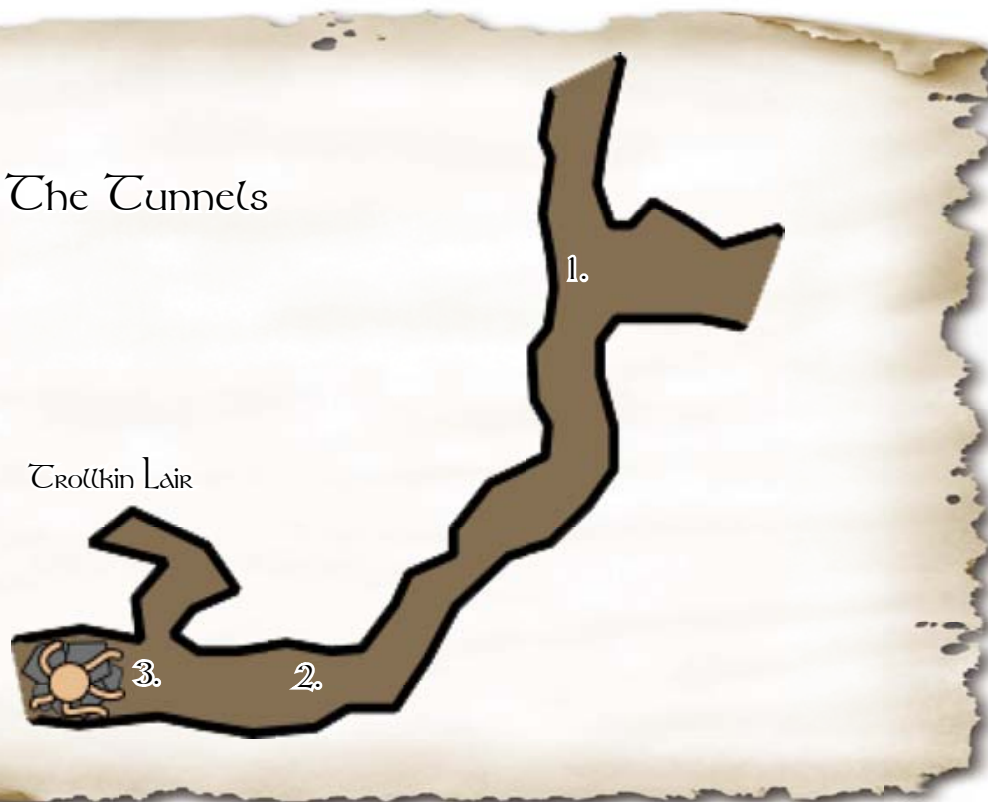
Creatures: The slithering lurker will pay no attention to the PCs unless they attack it. The beetles and the trollkin are far more territorial, however, and will attack

anyone that comes within 3 metres of the mound or that seeks to harm the lurker – which has provided them with a steady source of food for months now.

Tactics: The slithering lurker will defend itself if attacked, lashing out with its tentacles. Remember that the creature emits its sub-sonic rumble at all times, potentially affecting the PCs. The beetles attack the lead character, instinctively trying to surround and flank him. The trollkin tries to surprise a weak-looking victim and then draw it back to the alcove where it can finish it off. If it takes a Serious or Major Wound, or if the slithering lurker is destroyed, the trollkin will attempt to flee by climbing over the mound and escaping westwards along the sewer.

The Tunnels

Trollkin Lair



Treasure: Hidden within the mound of sludge are a pearl and diamond necklace (100 SP) and an exceptionally fine dagger (+5% to hit; +1 damage), both in need of a good clean.

Development: A search of the ceiling above the mound reveals the passage leading up into Manfrik's oven. It is also clear where the waste matter has been seeping through a breach in the walls into the soil and contaminating the stream above.

If the GM wishes, there may be signs that the sludge has contaminated the westward sewer, providing a starting point for further adventures.

Concluding the Adventure

If the PCs reveal the truth behind Manfrik's new pies it will come as something of a shock to the residents of Bindler's Cobb – many of whom were regular customers. The general sentiment will be to sweep the whole business under the carpet and forget it ever happened.

If Manfrik has been killed by the PCs, the truth is almost certain to come out. In which case, the locals will adopt the same approach, concluding that he must have been a bad sort after all and brought it on himself.

Despite having done a good deed for the people of Bindler's Cobb, the PCs will receive no formal award – nor will they be made especially welcome: their presence will serve as a constant reminder of Manfrik's unwholesome pies. This could serve an excellent motivation for new characters to leave town and seek further adventures.

Slithering Lurker

The slithering lurker is a non-sentient mass of fleshy tentacles emanating from a large toothless mouth. Its skin resembles that of a pale human, though it is far more leathery. Slithering lurkers appear from time to time, oozing up out of deep caverns to feed on waste and decaying matter found in tunnels and burial chambers. Slithering lurkers rarely attack unless provoked, in which instance they use their tentacles to slam opponents.

Characteristics

STR	3D6+6	(15)
CON	3D6	(11)
DEX	2D6	(7)
SIZ	4D6+6	(20)
INT	2	(2)
POW	3	(3)
CHA	2	(2)

Hit Locations

D20	Hit Location	AP/HP
1–12	Body	2/12
13–14	Tentacle One	2/6
15–16	Tentacle Two	2/6
17–18	Tentacle Three	2/6
19–20	Tentacle Four	2/6

If the PCs do not reveal the truth about Manfrik's pies, the pie man will – if able to – disappear without a trace. There will be gossip for a while, but he will quickly be forgotten. Only the memory of his tasty pies will linger...

Weapons

Type	Weapon Skill	Damage/AP
Tentacle	45%	1D6+1D4

Special Rules

Combat Actions:	2
Strike Rank:	+12
Move:	4m
Traits:	Sub-Sonic Rumble, Regeneration
Skills:	Perception 20%, Survival 70%
Armour:	Rubbery hide (2 AP on all locations, no Skill Penalty)

Regeneration

The slithering lurker can completely re-grow severed tentacles and flesh, restoring lost hit points in all locations at a rate of 1 point per hour. If killed, it ceases to regenerate.

Sub-sonic Rumble

Slithering lurkers emit a deep, resonant sound that is undetectable to most creatures. It has the peculiar effect of soothing creatures that hear it, making them inclined to remain close to the source. Any creature that comes within 5 metres of a slithering lurker must succeed at a Persistence test or feel compelled to remain near the creature and do it no harm.

Creatures with 10 or higher Intelligence may take a test each day to shake off the effects. Creatures with Intelligence 9 or lower may test only once each month.



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