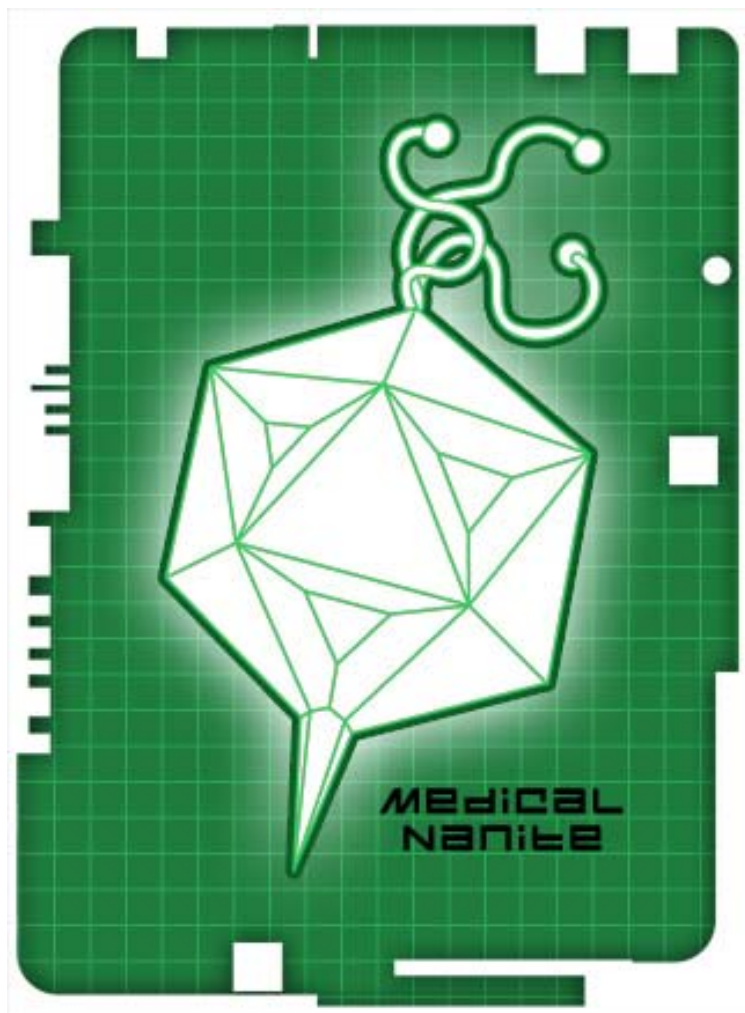


TERRAFORMER

SHAPE YOUR WORLD



BONE ORCHARD ENCOUNTER

by LEE HAMMOCK



Requires the use of the d20 Modern Roleplaying Game, published by Wizards of the Coast, Inc.

BONE ORCHARD ENCOUNTER

“Well Red Hill has never been what the folk from Dawning Star would call settled. We have patrols and such just like the rest of the Republic, but around here we like solving our own problems. But this problem . . . we’re at a loss.

“Now I won’t say that I was stone cold sober. Me and Jack Henny had been hittin’ his whiskey a bit earlier in the evening, but I know drunk from tipsy, and I was not drunk. I was heading home from Jack’s, takin’ the road near the bone orchard. What’s a bone orchard? Cemetery it is.--Tin horns.--Anyway, I was walkin’ by the cemetery and I saw something moving. We’ve never had grave robbers round here, but I didn’t want to take a chance so I took a look over with my light. And there I see Mildred Powers, buried not two weeks ago from the Julian Measles goin’ round, crawling out of her grave! All maggots and rot, but still better than I would think not having an embalmer in town. I don’t know how long I stared at her.

“Well then I ran home, got my shotgun, and put four rounds into her head but not before she bit me. Damned weird, it’s hurt ever since. From that night two days ago we’ve had three others crawl up out of the bone orchard and while we’ve kept them from getting out, we’ve got no idea as to what’s the cause. Well, more right to say we’ve got plenty of ideas but not the sort of stuff you want to say in public. In Red Hill we hate asking for help, especially from the Republic, but this is a problem beyond our ken.”

Bone Orchard is an EL6 encounter.

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Dawning Star was the first full-scale science fiction campaign setting built on d20 Modern and powered by the Future ruleset from Wizards of the Coast. The critically-acclaimed setting was nominated for an ENnie for Best d20 Game. You can learn more and download free material by visiting www.dawningstar.com.

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⌘ ABOUT LEE HAMMOCK

Lead writer and game designer on the Dawning Star line, Lee has been affectionately called the “Hemingway of RPGs” for the quality of his writing and prolific body of work. Lee has worked for numerous publishers, including AEG, Bastion Press, Louis Porter Jr. Designs, and DC Comics.

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Overview

Two days ago a recently buried corpse in the cemetery at Red Hill crawled out of its grave and attacked one of the locals, inflicting on him a wound that has grown infected and increasingly painful. While the locals have worked to contain the other corpses that have risen up, they are on the edge of fleeing the town entirely, unable to find a rational cause for these events. While stories of curses and alien ghosts make their rounds in the town, Mayor Johan Seral, has put out a call to the Republic and anyone else he could think of for help with the situation.

While the locals all suspect some sort of supernatural cause for the recent events in their town, things are not quite so odd. The walking corpses, already being called zombies by some locals who are fans of old Earth horror movies, are actually the creation of ancient surgical nanites gone awry because of a vaasi computer virus. Now the locals need help getting into the ancient underground Star Confederation medical center from which the nanites can be controlled before the zombies spread the nanite “virus” to the rest of Eos.

History

Beneath Red Hill was a subterranean medical center built by the Star Confederation to help handle casualties for the inevitable invasion of Eos by the vaasi and to do so with some measure of concealment. The medical center sustained little physical damage during the assault, but over time much of it has collapsed, leaving just four rooms relatively intact. The center did suffer serious damage in the form of a vaasi computer virus used to infect Star Confederation nanites to turn them against their creators. Within a few hours of the beginning of the assault on Eos, the medical center was knocked out of commission, and all of its personnel and patients were killed by a swarm of rogue surgical nanites. These nanites went into a dormant state once they began running low on power. However, expansion of the Red Hill graveyard put several corpses within range of their sensors, causing the nanites to activate. Following what remained of their original programming after it was twisted by the virus the nanites began entering the corpses of the recently dead in Red Hill.

These nanites were originally programmed to enter a body and initiate life-support and treatment functions, all the while using protein in the subject's blood for fuel. This required the subject to consume a high-protein diet as long as the nanites were operating. After being infected by the vaasi computer virus the nanites followed their original programming in spirit, but not in practice. Anyone who becomes infected by these nanites will lose control of their body and go on a meat-eating frenzy, consuming any type of protein they can find. Also the nanites repair any damage to the host body, allowing the subjects to sustain terrible injuries and keep moving. In short they become cannibalistic eating machines that are very difficult to stop.

The nanites only recently began infesting corpses when a grave digger crew breached a natural cave formation that also linked to the remains of the medical center. The nanites then began infesting the newer corpses in the graveyard. (After a few weeks, corpses retain insufficient protein to initiate the nanites' programming.) Unfortunately for Red Hill, the town recently suffered an epidemic of Julian Measles, a viral infection that causes skin irritation and death if not properly treated. There are currently some 80 corpses in the graveyard susceptible to nanite infestation. Additionally, by infecting the living, the nanite zombies could increase their numbers dramatically.

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Introducing the Player Characters

Due to the unusual and serious nature of the events in Red Hill, the locals are calling in everyone they can think of who may be able to help with the problem. Once the infectious nature of the nanites becomes evident they will stop being merely a local problem, and Republic and EFL personnel may even work side by side for a time against the greater threat.

Characters allied to the Republic, who have any experience with combat, relic hunting, ruin exploration, or general problem solving, could be dispatched to Red Hill to try and help the mayor deal with the problem. However, few in Dawning Star City are going to believe the truth of the situation until they have corroborating accounts of the strange events. Due to the disbelief, bureaucrats are not likely to dispatch a senior agent like a Republic Ranger to deal with the problem, instead using lower ranking agents to handle what they believe to be some drunken hicks seeing things in the dark. Characters from the Republic will have the cooperation of the mayor of Red Hill, but few of the locals will go out of their way to assist them until the severity of the situation becomes apparent.

Characters who have thrown in with the EFL could be called in by EFL agents in Red Hill or could be sent by Patricia Rogers and the leadership of the EFL to help Red Hill as a public relations exercise. The EFL does not believe the problem to be any more real than the Republic, but they are more willing to throw resources and personnel at dealing with it than the Republic. If it does turn out to be a serious problem, the EFL makes the Republic look bad, and if not they still look like they tried to help.

Characters with no affiliation could be asked to Red Hill by friends or relatives that live there or could simply be passing through the town when they hear about the local problems. The mayor offers a standing reward for anyone who can solve the problem with the walking dead, a reward that will boost all the PCs Wealth bonuses by +5. More mercenary-minded characters may get involved for the money.

Locations

This section describes the various locations in the encounter.

The Red Hill Bone Orchard

Even after its annexation by the Dawning Star Republic, Red Hill has been a rough-and-tumble town, where spies, dissidents, and troublemakers go to be among their own kind. While the city is not openly rebellious, it has the highest crime rate of all the Republic settlements though most of it is perpetrated against Republic assets as opposed to other citizens. The people of Red Hill, commonly called "Hilltoppers," are a strong-willed, independent sort that would rather go without than ask the Republic for help. Except, of course, when the dead begin rising from their graves.

The settlement of Red Hill is centered on a small downtown area, complete with central square and town hall, but most of the people live in the farms and ranches that surround the city for miles in every direction. One of the town's major landmarks is the Red Hill Cemetery, or "bone orchard" as it is commonly called by locals. The cemetery is very large, occupying a full square mile of territory, though the vast majority of this space presently lies fallow. Only five percent of the land currently holds gravesites, and most of this space is taken up by a number of monuments to those who fought against the annexation of Red Hill by the Republic in the Dawning Star Slaughter as the locals call it. Many of the long term residents of Red Hill visit the cemetery on a weekly basis; it is a

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focal point of the small town's culture.

The cemetery itself is square in shape, its western border jutting up against Culver Street, which is effectively the eastern border of downtown Red Hill. The other three sides of the cemetery are bound by dirt roads, along which are numerous houses and workshops that thin out the farther one gets from downtown. All the existing graves are within one hundred yards of Culver Street. The grave markers range from massive marble and steel monuments to small wooden plaques, and flowers are a common find on the graves in the spring and summer months. The area of the cemetery currently in use is a heavily landscaped and manicured grassy area, while the rest of the cemetery is wild plains. The entire area is mostly flat, though a small hill does rise in the center of the cemetery directly over the old Star Confederation medical center.

By the time the PCs arrive, the graveyard is guarded by 50 local militia (Tough Ordinary 2), who are armed with shotguns and hunting rifles. They have orders not to enter the graveyard, only to keep any of the zombies from leaving and to keep unauthorized personnel out. Both the mayor and the sheriff can give authorization for people to enter the graveyard. When the players arrive on the scene, ten nanite zombies are shuffling around the graveyard. Another rises up every ten minutes.

The Star Confederation Medical Center

Located beneath the center of the Red Hill Cemetery, this structure was originally a large underground facility comprised of dozens of operating rooms, storage facilities, and complete living quarters for a population of hundreds of staff. Little of this remains now as most of these chambers have collapsed over time, leaving only four remaining rooms. These structures are all at least 20 feet below ground, making it difficult to reach them through digging. The only realistic method to reach the facility besides digging is a small cave created by the gravediggers that recently buried Mildred Powers, waking up the nanites and starting these unsavory events. If the players search Mildred's grave they can locate the cave with a Search check (DC 10).

There are no light sources inside the medical complex. The ruins are unstable. Any area-of-effect attacks that inflict more than 10 points of damage trigger a cave-in, inflicting 4d6 points of bludgeoning damage on everyone in the medical complex (Reflex DC 16, halves). A Craft (Structural) check (DC 5) will alert characters to this threat as soon as they enter the facility. The doors in the facility are all shut and must be opened manually because the motors that once powered them have stopped working long ago, requiring a Strength check (DC 10).

Characters entering the cave activate the nanite sensors, causing all of the nanite zombies in the area to approach. The nanite zombies will chase the PCs through the cave and into the medical complex in an effort to feed.

Areas in the Medical Center

1. The Cave

Little more than three feet high, this natural cave formation seems to have been made by running water that dried up long ago. The walls are smooth stone and everything is covered in a thin layer of fine gray dust. It leads east further into the graveyard.

Formed by an underwater stream that dried up long ago, the cave that reaches from the grave of Mildred Powers to the medical facility is a natural formation that has become infested with nanites. The cave is only two feet high

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so the characters must scramble through its 100-foot length before reaching the first of the surviving rooms in the medical facility. Each round the characters are in the tunnel they must make a Fortitude save (DC 12) or become infected with the nanites. Once infected, a character will himself turn into a nanite zombie after four hours per point of Constitution. At the end of the tunnel the players can crawl into the storage room, one of the surviving rooms in the medical facility, through a collapsed section of the wall.

As soon as the players enter the cave, the nanites will direct their hosts back toward the cave in order to defend the nanite control unit. If there are a large number of nanite zombies active, they may well trap the PCs inside the medical facility.

2. Storage Room

The small cave opens up in to a room with metal walls that have seen better days. The walls and ceiling are cracked, and rubble lies everywhere. Collapsed shelves and tables are scattered about the floor, all made of metal. A single door is present on the northern wall of the room.

Once one of the many rooms used to store medical supplies within the facility, most of the supplies in this room were consumed well before it was wiped out by the rogue nanites. The room is roughly a twenty-foot cube, though collapsed wall sections make it irregularly shaped. It contains a number of collapsed shelves and tables, all made out of metal. Some nanites remain in this room, but they are either inert or moving toward the cave instead of trying to infect new hosts. There is a single door out of this room, on the opposite wall from the cave entrance, that leads to the control room.

If the players search the room (Search DC 20), they can find a medicomp sensor (PL 7) that requires some basic maintenance (Repair DC 15), to return to working order.

3. Control Room

This heavily damaged room seems to have been a computer center at some time, but all the computers now are little more than piles of rubble. The walls are cracking and motes of dust fall through them with every tremor and sound. There are closed doors on the north and south walls.

Once the central control center of the computer system within the medical center, now it is little more than a half-collapsed room with a few battered remains of computers, hologram projectors, and furniture. None of the computers are functional. However, if the players have a computer with them, they can try to patch into the surviving memory modules of one of the computers with a Repair check (DC 25). The computer is a progress level 8 device. If successful, they can find out the original purpose of the structure and how it met its end, but the information that can be access is limited.

The control room is a square room, thirty feet on a side, with a twenty-foot high ceiling. The walls are still in place but have numerous cracks and other signs of structural instability. A door on the western wall leads to the storage room, while one on the north wall leads to the living quarters and one on the south wall leads to the nanite central control room.

4. Living Quarters

This room seems to have once contained numerous bed-like containment devices, but now they have all been smashed into thousands of pieces and scattered about the floor. There are doorways on the north and eastern walls, but they are blocked by many tons of rubble.

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One of the many rooms that once housed the staff of the medical center, it once contained twelve advanced sleep chambers that allowed occupants to gain a full day's rest in a matter of hours. Now these chambers are shattered and broken, betraying little hint of their original use. With a Search check (DC 20) the players can find a nanite eliminator in among the wreckage, but the Star Confederation power pack in the eliminator has only enough power for eight shots. A door in the southern wall leads to the control room. Other doorways are on the northern and eastern walls, but the attaching rooms fully collapsed long ago.

5. Nanite Central Control

Amid another room of rubble and cracked metallic wall plates, a single computer control panel glows softly below the remains of a collapsed shelf. In a far corner of the room a large pile of dust seems to move about as if blown by an unseen wind and slowly beings rolling in your direction. There seems to be no other way out of the room.

This room houses the central control unit for the nanites within the medical complex. From here all the nanites received orders and accessed medical records to better serve their patients. It was this computer that the vaasi computer virus infected, and through it all the nanites became infected. If the Star Confederation personnel in the base had been able to shut off the nanites through this computer, the destruction of the facility would have likely been averted, but the nanites concentrated on defending this room above all others. Indeed, a colony of virus-created flesheater nanites remains, waiting for any disturbance as a sign to reactive and attack any living creature they can detect. This nanite colony's abilities are described on the following pages. It will attack the players until defeated or the players are all dead.

In order to stop the nanites the players must make a Repair check (DC 15) to restore the nanite control system (PL 8), which takes one minute. Once repaired, the controls can be used to shut down all nanites in the area; this requires a successful Computer Use check (DC 15) and takes an attack action to complete. If the character attempting the check does not understand Unispeak, he suffers an additional -4 penalty to the Computer Use check. Once the computer system is used to shut down the nanites, all the nanite zombies fall to the ground motionless. The nanites including the colony in this room become dormant, and those infected are effectively cured.

The room itself is forty feet long and twenty feet wide with walls made of cracked metallic plating, through which roots and soil are visible. The floor is littered with the remains of computers and other machinery, much of which is covered in soil from cracks in the veiling. Most of the computers have long ago been damaged beyond repair by the elements, but near the center of the room the nanite control system remains active, sheltered from the elements by a collapsed shelf. Its control panel glows weakly, providing a faint bit of illumination in the room.

Wrapping Things Up

Once the players get involved in the investigation they will probably investigate the graveyard and Mildred Powers grave in short order, finding the cave and going into investigate. Throwing a number of zombies at them to drive home the seriousness of the situation can work to stall them, and if one of them gets bitten it adds a feeling of immediacy to the situation. Having one of the locals go through the transformation into a nanite zombie could provide some excellent motivation to get moving. If the players don't take care of the situation, Sheriff

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Peters may well order the militia into the graveyard to eliminate all the zombies, a tactic that could easily result in the militia becoming infected and spreading the nanite plague.

Once inside the medical center the PCs will have to get to the controls and shut down the nanites while dealing with nanite zombies and the flesheater colony. Once deactivated, the nanite danger passes, though this may just be the tip of the iceberg. While inert, the nanites are still of great scientific value, so the players may become involved in efforts to collect the nanites and keeping others from getting a hold of them. These nanites could be powerful weapons in the wrong hands if someone learned how to control them. In a sense, shutting down the nanites could be only the beginning of the adventure for the PCs.

There are approximately 100 nanite colonies in the cave, the graveyard, and the medical facility, although collecting all 100 is a high impossible task. They could conceivably be controlled by the nanite control system in the medical complex, but that would require neutralizing the computer virus. This task requires a Computer Use check (DC 50), and the nanites are a progress level 9 device.

Appendix A: Characters

This section presents all of the NPCs that may be used in the encounter.

Mayor Johan Seral

A man far in over his head, most of the time he simply defers leadership of Red Hill to Sheriff Megan Peters, having long ago been intimidated into being a figurehead by the EFL. While he is a man of principle, he is not a brave man and has trouble standing up for himself. He usually just delegates authority to Sheriff Peters when problems arise, except when these problems require dealing with the Dawning Star Republic directly. In this recent zombie crisis Mayor Seral is completely at a loss, having no real idea what to do other than call the militia up and seal off the graveyard until someone else comes up with a better plan. He will give the PCs what help he can, but not if it involves crossing Sheriff Peters or the EFL.

Mayor Johan Seral (Charismatic Ordinary 4/Smart Ordinary 3): CR 6; Medium humanoid; HD 7d6; hp 23; MAS 10; Init +0; Spd 30 ft.; Defense 12, touch 12, flat-footed 12 (+2 class); BAB +3; Grap +2; Atk +2 melee (1d3-1 nonlethal, punch); Full Atk +2 melee (1d3-1 nonlethal, punch); FS 5 ft. by 5 ft.; Reach 5 ft.; SQ None; AL Dawning Star Republic; SV Fort +3, Ref +3, Will +2; AP 0; Rep +4; Str 9, Dex 10, Con 10, Int 15, Wis 9, Cha 16.

Occupation: Bureaucrat.

Skills: Bluff +10, Computer Use +5, Diplomacy +12, Drive +1, Forgery +7, Gather Information +12, Investigate +5, Knowledge (Business) +12, Knowledge (Civics) +12, Knowledge (Local (Red Hill)) +12, Knowledge (Popular Culture) +11, Listen +0, Profession (Mayor) +10, Research +4, Spot +0, Search +7, Treat Injury +0.

Feats: Meticulous, Personal Firearms Proficiency, Trustworthy, Windfall.

Possessions: Dress clothes, info-comp, papers and documents, identification, universal communicator.

Winston Kolridge

Kolridge is in charge of leading the local militia in its assignment to guard the bone orchard. A dour man who spends most of his days as a metalworker, he cares little about the Republic or the EFL. He is loyal only to Red Hill. He follows the orders of both the Sheriff and the Mayor but tends to follow the Sheriff when

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these orders conflict. He is a thinker though and will not blindly follow orders that do not make sense; conversely, he is not above bending regulations and laws as needed to keep his boys alive. He avoids risking his militia soldiers when at all possible.

William Kolridge (Tough Ordinary 3/Dedicated Ordinary 3): CR 5; Medium humanoid; HD 3d10+3d6+12; hp 44; MAS 15; Init +0; Spd 30 ft.; Defense 17, touch 14, flat-footed 17 (+4 class, +3 armor); BAB +4; Grap +5; Atk +5 melee (1d4+1, boot knife), +4 ranged (2d10, Brase shotgun); Full Atk +5 melee (1d4+1, boot knife), +4 ranged (2d10, Brase shotgun); FS 5 ft. by 5 ft.; Reach 5 ft.; SQ None; AL Red Hill; SV Fort +4, Ref +2, Will +5; AP 0; Rep +2; Str 12, Dex 10, Con 15, Int 10, Wis 14, Cha 12.

Occupation: Blue Collar.

Skills: Craft (Mechanical) +6, Intimidate +4, Knowledge (Local (Red Hill)) +6, Spot +7, Ride +2, Sense Motive +5, Survival +7, Treat Injury +5.

Feats: Armor Proficiency (Light), Iron Will, Personal Firearms Proficiency.

Possessions: Rough outs, Brase shotgun with 23 shells, universal communicator, medkit, binoculars, backpack, 3 days of jerky and water, matches, flashlight, boot knife.

Groundskeeper Willis McTavish

The man charged with keeping the grounds of the bone orchard nice and neat, this whole incident has been quite a trying experience for him. His life's work has somehow gone terribly wrong, and there seems to be nothing he can do about it. Since the graveyard was cordoned off by the militia, Willis has spent his time in local taverns drowning his sorrows in the various, locally brewed beers. He will help the players if asked and can locate all the graves in the graveyard easily. He also knows that they broke into some sort of natural cave formation while digging Mildred Powers's grave, but he didn't think anything of it at the time.

Willis McTavish (Tough Ordinary 4): CR 3; Medium humanoid; HD 4d10+8; hp 37; MAS 14; Init +0; Spd 30 ft.; Defense 13, touch 13, flat-footed 13 (+3 class); BAB +3; Grap +4; Atk +4 melee (1d6+1, shovel), +3 ranged (2d10, Brase double barreled shotgun); Full Atk +4 melee (1d6+1, shovel), +3 ranged (2d10, Brase double barreled shotgun); FS 5 ft. by 5 ft.; Reach 5 ft.; SQ None; AL Red Hill; SV Fort +6, Ref +1, Will +2; AP 0; Rep +1; Str 13, Dex 10, Con 14, Int 10, Wis 12, Cha 9.

Occupation: Blue Collar.

Skills: Craft (Structural) +7, Profession (Gravedigger) +8, Spot +8.

Feats: Endurance, Great Fortitude, Personal Firearms Proficiency.

Possessions: Brase double barreled shotgun, work clothes, shovel, trowel.

Sheriff Meghan Peters

Sheriff of Red Hill, she has been the true power behind the Mayor for the last few years, working for the EFL instead of the Dawning Star Republic. Her allegiances are openly known in town, but there is no proof of her activities, only rumor. She runs protection rackets in the city through intermediaries, helps EFL agents hide in Red Hill, and generally causes problems for the Republic. The EFL occasionally lets her catch some agents in order to keep the Republic from getting too suspicious, but over time Sheriff Peters has gotten more and more confident, and thus is becoming sloppy. She is a charismatic but overbearing person, always yelling and ordering others around. If the players are allied with the EFL, she will treat them well and give them what support she can, but if they are agents of the Republic she will do her best to make them feel unwelcome and stymie their efforts without endangering the town.

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Sheriff Meghan Peters (Fast Hero 4/Gunhand 4): CR 8; Medium humanoid; HD 8d8+8; hp 49; MAS 12; Init +3; Spd 30 ft.; Defense 23, touch 20, flat-footed 20 (+3 Dex, +7 class, +3 armor); BAB +7; Grap +7; Atk +7 melee (1d6, hatchet), +12 ranged (2d6+4, EDF-9 auto-pistol); Full Atk +7/+2 melee (1d6, hatchet), +12/+7 ranged (2d6+4, EDF-9 auto-pistol); FS 5 ft. by 5 ft.; Reach 5 ft.; SQ Signature firearm, tough as nails, weapon specialization (EDF-9); AL EFL; SV Fort +4, Ref +6, Will +2; AP 10; Rep +1; Str 10, Dex 16, Con 12, Int 13, Wis 10, Cha 14.

Occupation: Law Enforcement.

Skills: Drive +6, Gather Information +6, Hide +6, Intimidate +9, Knowledge (Civics) +5, Knowledge (Local (Red Hill)) +5, Knowledge (Streetwise) +8, Move Silently +7, Sense Motive +4, Sleight of Hand +10, Spot +4, Treat Injury +4, Tumble +10.

Talents: Improved Sharpshooter, Sharpshooter.

Feats: Armor Proficiency (Light), Double Tap, Eos Freedom League Member, Personal Firearms Proficiency, Point Blank Shot, Weapon Focus (EDF-9).

Possessions: Rough-outs, 2 EDF-9 auto-pistols (one of which is her signature weapon), with 6 clips, universal communicator, night vision goggles, flare, medkit, flask of whiskey, hatchet.

Militia Members

Most of the militia members are local farmers, craftsmen, or laborers with little military training. They are armed with shotguns and hunting rifles that are mainly used for hunting, and they have little desire to see combat, especially when fighting the walking corpses of their friends and family. They will help the PCs when able but are averse to putting themselves at risk and will follow the orders of both the Sheriff and the Mayor with little question.

Red Hill Militia (Tough Ordinary 2): CR 1; humanoid; HD 2d10+4; hp 20; MAS 14; Init +0; Spd 30 ft.; Defense 15, touch 12, flat-footed 15 (+2 class, +3 armor); BAB +1; Grap +2; Atk +2 melee (1d4+1, survival knife), +1 ranged (2d10 or 2d8 depending on weapon); Full Atk +1 ranged (2d10 or 2d8 depending on weapon); FS 5 ft. by 5 ft.; Reach 5 ft.; SQ None; AL Red Hill; SV Fort +2, Ref +0, Will +0; AP 0; Rep +0; Str 12, Dex 10, Con 14, Int 10, Wis 10, Cha 9.

Occupation: Rural.

Skills: Knowledge (Local (Red Hill)) +5, Profession (Farmer, Shopkeeper, or Farmer) +5, Ride +3, Spot +2.

Feats: Armor Proficiency (Light), Personal Firearms Proficiency.

Possessions: Rough-outs, Brase hunting rifle, shot gun, or double barreled shotgun, 20 shells, survival knife, flashlight, canteen.

Appendix B: Equipment

This section describes the new equipment presented in the encounter.

Brase Arms Double-Barreled Shotgun

A recent addition to the Brase Arms line of firearms, the double-barreled shotgun is the cheapest of the Brase Arms products and is aimed for the farmer or rancher without much money to spend on a firearm. It uses the same shells as other Brase Arms shotguns, which are commonly available in. Some with more criminal pursuits in mind have sawn off the barrels of the weapon.

BRASE ARMS DOUBLE-BARRELED SHOTGUN									
PL	Dmg	Crit	Dmg Type	Range Incrm	RoF	Mag	Size	Wgt	Purch DC
4	2d10	20	Ball.	30'	S	2 int.	Lrg	12 lb.	15

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Nanite Eliminator

This device transmits a focused beam of radiation that eradicates colonies of nanites. Nanites struck by the beam may become completely and permanently inert. On a successful hit, the weapon deals 6d6 points of damage and requires the nanites to succeed at a Fortitude save (DC 16) or be stunned for 1d4 rounds. This weapon only inflicts damage on nanite colonies. A living being struck by the nanite eliminator must succeed at a Fortitude save (DC 16), or all the nanites in their body are subjected to the effect. (The character may voluntarily fail this saving throw.) The weapon runs off of a Star Confederation power pack and consumes two charges each time it is fired. (The full description of the nanite eliminator will appear in the upcoming *Helios Rising* from Blue Devil Games.)

Appendix C: Xenomorphs

This section describes the new creatures found in the encounter.

Nanite Zombies

Either the result of a specific class of vaasi nanites or Star Confederation nanites corrupted by vaasi computer viruses, nanite zombies were a common threat in the latter stages of the war with the vaasi. They were rarely a threat against hardened Star Confederation positions with nanite jammers, but against smaller installations they could pose a major threat. Several facilities on Eos were wiped out by nanite zombies during the invasion of Eos, and there are probably hundreds of nanite colonies on the planet waiting in stasis for something to enter their sensor range. Red Hill is by no means the only place that may be assaulted by these monstrosities of a bygone age.

The nanites that create nanite zombies will attempt to infest any creature of Small, Medium, or Large size that comes within five feet of them. They infest corpses that are principally structurally intact and not more than five days dead. Once infested, the victim can sometimes fight off the nanites, but usually the subject is turned into a nanite zombie within three days of infection. Once this transformation is complete the subject loses all control of his body to the nanites, which “rewired” the nervous system to take complete control. The nanites direct the subject to consume any sources of protein available, usually animal flesh, in order to keep the nanites fueled. The nanites repair any damage to the subject very quickly, making it very difficult to destroy nanite zombies.

Nanite zombies continue to attack and feed as long as possible. The nanites remain active as long as the subject consumes one-fifth of its bodyweight in meat each day or its equivalent in some other protein source. Eventually nanite zombies can be starved to destruction, but the nanites will feed off the flesh of the host before becoming dormant, killing the host in the process.

Template Traits

“Nanite zombie” is an acquired template that can be added to any animal, humanoid, or monstrous humanoid (referred hereafter as the base creature). It uses all the base creature’s statistics and special abilities except as noted here.

Challenge Rating: Same as base creature +1.

Hit Dice: Change to d12.

Speed: Reduced by 10 ft. to a minimum of 5 ft. Flight speeds are not reduced, but burrowing and swim speeds are.

Attacks: As the unarmed or natural weapon attacks of the base creature, though now the unarmed attacks of the nanite zombie carry the chance of infection (see below). Nanite zombies cannot use melee or ranged weapons

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even if the base creature can. Humanoid nanite zombies gain a bite attack that inflicts 1d3 points of piercing damage and is considered a natural weapon.

Special Qualities: The nanite zombie retains all the natural or species abilities of the base creature but cannot use any feats, talents, or class abilities of the base creature. In addition it gains the following special qualities.

Curing: "Curing" a nanite zombie requires all of the nanites to be destroyed or shut down quickly. This requires either the use of anti-nanite weaponry, such as a nanite eliminator, or a direct command to the nanites. The nanites cannot be starved to dormancy without killing the host. For each day the host does not consume at least one-fifth its body weight in animal flesh it takes one point of Constitution damage that cannot be healed until it returns to its normal diet. A nanite zombie struck by a nanite eliminator is immediately destroyed and its host cured, though the host will be stunned for 1d6+4 rounds as they recover.

Infection: Any creature struck with an unarmed attack or natural weapon by a nanite zombie runs the risk of becoming infected. Each time a creature is struck by a nanite zombie it must make a Fortitude save (DC 13) or become infected by the zombie nanites. On a failed save, the character transforms into a nanite zombie a number of hours later equal to four times his Constitution score. The process is not apparent except to a thorough medical examination (Treat Injury DC 30). The subject will feel ill and suffers periodic episodes of acute venal pain, but there are no other obvious symptoms until one minute before the transformation is complete. At that point, the subject falls to the ground and begins convulsing, effectively becoming disabled until the transformation is finished.

Once the infection begins it can be halted with a massive blood transfusion, requiring a Treat Injury check (DC 25). The process takes twenty-four hours and a large supply of compatible blood.

Regeneration: Nanite zombies heal one hit point each round, even if dead, unless they have been slain by failing a massive damage save.

Allegiances: Nanite zombies have no allegiances.

Action Points: Nanite zombies have no action points.

Ability Scores: Nanite zombies gain the following ability score modifications: Str +8, Dex -4, Con +10, Int -10, Wis -6, Cha -10. Any ability score that would be reduced below 1 is instead reduced to 1.

Skills: Nanite zombies cannot use any of the base creature's Intelligence- or Charisma-based skills.

Feats: Nanite zombies cannot use any of the base creature's feats.

Talents: Nanite zombies cannot use any of the base creature's talents.

Advancement: N/A.

Sample Nanite Zombie (Tough Ordinary 2): CR 3; Medium Humanoid; HD 3d12+21; hp 41; Mas 24; Init -2; Spd 20 ft.; Defense 7, touch 7, flat-footed 7 (-3 Dex); BAB +2; Grap +7; Atk +7 melee (1d3+5 nonlethal, punch) or +7 melee (1d3+7, bite); Full Atk +7 melee (1d3+5 nonlethal, punch) or +7 melee (1d3+7, bite); FS 5 ft. by 5 ft.; Reach 5 ft.; SQ Curing, infection, regeneration, ; AL none; SV Fort +9, Ref -2, Will -2; AP 0; Rep +0; Str 21, Dex 6, Con 24, Int 1, Wis 5, Cha 1.

Skills: Climb +8, Spot -1.

Possessions: Rotting clothes.

Flesheater Swarm

While corrupted surgical nanites spawned nanite zombies, waste control nanites corrupted by the vaasi computer virus became flesheater nanite colonies.

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Waste control nanites were originally programmed to only destroy unmoving organic and inorganic waste placed in specific containers, but their programming was altered by the virus to purposefully seek out organic materials and destroy them. The colony's senses are limited to a 30-foot range and it is not particularly swift, but if it reaches its target it can do tremendous damage in a short amount of time. Victims of flesheater swarms literally are disassembled cell by cell, their skin sloughing off in large chunks.

Flesheater swarms look like large piles of gray dust or slime that flow towards their targets, who are enveloped and consumed. They are very difficult to destroy without anti-nanite weapons.

Species Traits

Fast Healing: Flesheater swarms heal one hit point per round.

Swarm Subtype: A swarm is a collection of nanites that acts as a single creature. A swarm of nanites has the characteristics of a construct, except as noted here. A nanite swarm has a single pool of Hit Dice and hit points, a single initiative modifier, a single speed, and a single Defense. A nanite swarm makes saving throws as a single creature. A single swarm of nanites occupies a 5-foot-by-5-foot square, but its reach is 0 feet like its component creatures. In order to attack, it moves into an opponent's space, which provokes an attack of opportunity. It can occupy the same space as a creature of any size, since it crawls all over its prey. A nanite swarm can move through squares occupied by enemies and vice-versa without impediment, although the nanite swarm provokes an attack of opportunity if it does so. A nanite swarm can move through even the smallest cracks or holes. A nanite swarm contains one million nanites. A nanite swarm can compress itself to Tiny size if required, such as when being transported.

Traits: A swarm has no clear front or back and no discernable anatomy, so it is not subject to critical hits or flanking. A nanite swarm is immune to all weapon damage. Reducing a nanite swarm to 0 hit points or lower causes it to break up, though damage taken until that point does not degrade its ability to attack or resist attack. Nanite swarms cannot be tripped, grappled, or bull rushed, and they cannot grapple an opponent.

A nanite swarm is immune to any effect that targets a specific number of creatures with the exception of technology specifically designed to affect them. Nanite swarms take half again as much damage (+50%) from effects that affect an area, such as splash weapons and explosives.

Nanite swarms are susceptible to high winds. For purposes of determining the effects of wind on a swarm, treat the swarm as a creature of the same size as its constituent creatures. A swarm rendered unconscious by means of nonlethal damage becomes disorganized and dispersed, and does not reform until its hit points exceed its nonlethal damage.

Swarm Attack: Nanite swarms don't make standard melee attacks. Instead, they deal automatic damage to any creature whose space they occupy at the end of their movement, with no attack roll needed. Nanite swarm attacks are not subject to a miss chance for concealment or cover. A nanite swarm's stat block has "swarm" in the Attack and Full Attack entries, with no attack bonus given. The amount of damage a swarm deals is based on its Hit Dice, as shown in the table to the left.

Incorporeality, damage reduction sufficient to reduce a swarm attack's damage to 0, and other special abilities usually give a creature immunity (or at least resistance) to damage from a swarm.

Swarms do not threaten creatures in their square, and do not make attacks of opportunity with their swarm attack. However, they distract foes whose

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SWARM DAMAGE

HD	Dmg
1-5	1d6
6-10	2d6
11-15	3d6
16-20	4d6
21+	5d6

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squares they occupy, as described below.

Swarm Detection: Spotting a nanite colony requires a Spot check (DC 15).

Flesheater Swarm: CR 6; Medium construct (swarm); HD 5d10+10; hp 38; MAS -; Init +1; Spd 5 ft.; Defense 11, touch 11, flat-footed 10 (+1 Dex); BAB +4; Grap +1; Atk swarm; Full swarm; FS 5 ft. by 5 ft.; Reach 0 ft.; SQ Darkvision 60 ft., construct immunities, swarm traits; AL None; SV Fort +2, Ref +3, Will +2; AP 0; Rep +0; Str 5, Dex 12, Con -, Int 3, Wis 10, Cha 1.

Skills: -

Feats: -

Appendix D: Rumors in Red Hill

If the PCs attempt to gather information in the town, these are some rumors they might uncover.

1. The zombies are being caused by a velin curse on Red Hill because a velin was killed in a robbery last week.
2. The zombies are caused by alien ghosts who have been angered since they had a graveyard in the same place as the Red Hill bone orchard and they are angry at their graves being disturbed.
3. It's all part of an EFL or Republic secret weapon test.
4. The zombies are the product of a meteor that crashed in the area recently.

Appendix E: Julian Measles

An ailment common in murcows, it recently mutated into a form that could be contracted by humans. A bacterial infection, it causes red splotches on the skin reminiscent of terran chicken pox or measles, hence the name. Most human victims are ranchers who spend several hours around infected murcows, but infected humans can pass it to each other. While Julian Measles can be fatal in humans, for murcows it is little more than an uncomfortable experience. It can sour the murcow's milk or make the flesh unsuitable for human consumption. The Republic is currently working on a vaccine and immunization for Julian Measles, but it is expected to take several years to prefect.

JULIAN MEASLES

Type	Incubation Period	Initial Damage	Secondary Damage
Inhalation DC 13	1d4 days	1 Con	1d3 Con

The Bone Orchard in a Dawning Star Campaign

Incorporating the encounter into a Dawning Star campaign is a simple matter. Although it is described as being in Red Hill, it could easily be placed in any remote settlement. The encounter could range from an amusing side trek to the first glimpse of the greater vaasi threat. Connecting the encounter to a larger, vaasi-centric campaign could be as simple as allowing the PCs to locate the source of the vaasi nanite virus through the control module.

The Bone Orchard in Other Science-Fiction Campaigns

The encounter is well suited for almost any type of campaign that allows for the concept of animating nanites. In particular, it would fit nicely in a post-apocalyptic campaign, substituting the vaasi virus for a governmental defense test gone horribly awry. The underground medical center need not be placed near a town at all. Instead, the nanites could be reanimating the workers and test subjects.

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