

MANDATE ARCHIVE

RED SANGHA MERCENARY CORPS

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HEIRS TO A BLOODY NIRVANA

The Red Sangha mercenary company is the legacy of a zealot's blind fanaticism and the biochemical excesses of a fallen age. Condemned to short, neurochemically straitened lives of cold-blooded serenity, the Red Sangha endures its particular damnation as best it can. Its services in conflict resolution and personal defense are famed throughout the sector, and many petty kings and local tyrants seek their assistance in resolving untoward rebellions. Still others seek the lost arts that created the Red Sangha and the secrets that would forever cement their grasp on the brains of their wretched subjects.

Augmented Buddhism and Liberation

The latter days of the Second Wave of human colonization planted many strange blooms of humanity on the distant worlds of the frontier. Virtually every form of human faith and ideology could find at least one world wholly dedicated to its principles, and many familiar creeds grew in ways scarcely imagined by their ancestors. One such growth was the "augmented spirituality" movement.

By use of elaborate neurochemical conditioning, a believer could artificially eliminate certain urges or impulses in his own mind. Unchastity, gluttony, sloth, anger, and a host of other primordial passions could be tamed and suppressed by the correct mix of biochemical supplements or neural surgery. Unfortunately, these artificial methods invariably had severe physical and mental drawbacks, to say nothing of the very questionable technological status of the more extensive modifications. Perimeter agents often considered such innovations to be out-and-out maltech due to their potential for the creation of brainlocked slaves.

Still, some faiths developed a cult of reverence around those who received the treatments. Their sacrifice of health for the sake of suppressing their sinful natures was considered a noble and pious choice. One such world was Jivaka, a dry, poor world colonized by Reformed Theravadin Buddhists. The world was poor in metals and edible organics, but some of the native plants proved a rich source of pharmaceuticals. A dedicated and devout corps of Jivakan monk-scientists gradually developed "Liberation", a drug that was to change the course of society on their world.

Liberation was an exquisite cocktail of chemicals that was administered during six weeks of neural therapy. At its conclusion, the subject would be permanently locked into a state of calm serenity, capable of modest pleasures, gentle happiness, and measured concerns. Rage, panic, lust, dread- all these old, savage emotions and attachments would be severed permanently. The only emotion that the Liberated could feel strongly was a deep and abiding love for those people, places, and ideas that earned their devotion.

Liberation came with a cost, of course. Subjects could expect to die of assorted exotic brain cancers within forty to fifty years of modification. Given the great human longevity achieved by pretech anagathics, the price was a real one, but some of the most pious Jivakans received Liberation all the same.

The elder monks of Reformed Theravadinism maintained that the chemical state induced by Liberation made it impossible to accrue merit. A practitioner who no longer felt passion could not be honored for his lack of attachment, and the other conventional means of acquiring merit were no longer efficacious for the Liberated. However, the act of choosing to undergo Liberation was exceedingly meritorious and could make up for all that was sacrificed thereafter. The act of encouraging others to accept Liberation was also a notable means of accruing merit toward eventual freedom from the cycles of the world.

Mantheesh the Damned

One monk-scientist became consumed by this idea of borrowed piety. Mantheesh Thilak's own life was in ruins. Ejected from the sangha of monks, the association defrocked him for his dissipated ways and unbecoming behavior. He burned to find some way to redeem himself, some feat so dramatic that the others must acknowledge his worthiness. He labored long years in obscurity, importing rare pretech carrier nanites and 'recruiting' assistants from among those who would never be missed. After fifteen years of passionate labor, he had what he had desired.

Water was a rare and limited resource on Jivaka. It was simple enough for him to infiltrate the nanites into the few major water supplies, to let the carrier spread undetectably in every sip. The effects did not begin to show for six weeks, by which time the consequences were irrevocable. The entire population had been retrogenetically modified. The death toll was enormous. Thirty percent of those modified died within the year from systemic immune collapse. Mantheesh had aimed for a greater return on this price, but he got some of what he was after. Two percent of all Jivakan offspring were going to be born Liberated. Surely Mantheesh's merit would be unimaginably great for ushering so many generations into serenity.

He earned the universal hatred of his fellow Jivakans and the name "Mantheesh the Damned" that follows him even today. Whatever merit Mantheesh had earned by bringing so many into non-attachment was overwhelmed by the tragedy that was to befall those children. Born as they were, they could not hope to acquire merit from spiritual growth, and could not be credited with the choice to become as they were. They were to be condemned to a life of terrible spiritual stasis, unable to gain merit toward true liberation. The enraged Jivakans were never able to capture Mantheesh, who vanished somewhere deep in the system's thick asteroid belts and took his forbidden research with him. Despite this, a certain number of Jivakans nurse a secret conviction that Mantheesh was right, that his plans were flawed only in that they did not go far enough. This "Left Hand of Enlightenment" still quietly seeks Mantheesh's laboratory and the ancient secrets of mass Liberation locked within.

The Scream and the Red Sangha's Rise

This hatred for Mantheesh did not have much time to fester. Five years later, the Scream destroyed the links with the core worlds and cast Jivaka on its own resources. The harsh life became harder still as pretech agricultural equipment and industrial materials began to break down before the Jivakans were able to develop alternatives. For decades, the planet experienced a slow, inexorable decline in the number of colonists it could support. Increasing pressure caused fissures to form in Jivakan society, hunger and fear driving the cities and statelets into open conflict.

The sangha of Jivakan monks tried desperately to maintain peace and amity among the city-states. Their cause seemed lost until one among them thought to enlist the Liberated. Pitied for their unfortunate births and inability to accrue merit, they had never found a solid place in Jivakan society, and tended to gather together in isolated communities to live among their own kind. The desperate monks gathered them together and argued the necessity of their aid in the face of Jivaka's impending catastrophe. After brief consultation, the Liberated agreed. The monks presented an ultimatum to the warring states; either they accepted the guidance of the sangha and the peace they would impose, or the Liberated would be unleashed upon them.

Some refused. The Liberated understood the necessity of the moment, the need for Jivaka to stand together if it was ever to survive as something more than benighted barbarism. And knowing no true fear of the enemy and no true distress at the killing, they unleashed such merciless violence against the resisters that all opposition crumbled within six months. The "Red Sangha" was born there in the ruins of burning temples and shattered cities. A grotesque mockery of the sangha of monks, the Red Sangha would be the bloodied fist of salvation.

The Liberated were perfect guardians for the monks who were to guide Jivaka. They craved neither wealth nor families nor power, and were content to exist in calm, serene peace, motivated solely by love for their faith and their world. They were impossible to bribe, fearless in the face of the enemy, and unflinching in their devotion to their people. Were it not for their tendency to unhesitatingly commit the most extravagant acts of violence against anyone not included in benevolence they felt, they might have been perfect as leaders as well as guardians.

Jivaka's poverty left it trapped within its own atmosphere until the Silence began to wane, and a tramp freighter from a more advanced neighboring world finally managed to reestablish contact. The freighter captain made a king's ransom in pharmaceuticals in exchange for providing the first bootstrap system ships to reestablish mining facilities in the asteroid belts and slowly haul Jivaka's industry back up to posttech standards.

Despite the pharmaceuticals derived from Jivakan plants, the planet remained desperately poor. After due consideration, the leadership of the Red Sangha volunteered to establish a band of mercenary monks, Liberated men and women willing to leave their home system and fight on distant stars in order to bring back foreign wealth to their beloved homeworld. The monastic leadership of Jivaka made ritual objections to the inevitable loss of human life, but the Red Sangha would not be dissuaded. As they were already condemned to further cycles of existence, who was better suited to make such sacrifices?

In the years since, the Red Sangha has earned a ferocious reputation among the worlds of the sector. While their equipment is somewhat lacking compared to the wealthier interstellar mercenary organizations, the absolute fearlessness of Red Sangha troopers gives them a strength far out of proportion with their numbers. A Red Sangha brother never panics, never freezes up, and never experiences the gnawing torment of fear, stress, and anger. They retain calm and untroubled hearts even amid the thunder of an orbital bombardment or tactical nuclear strike. Their avoidance of wanton destruction and misuse of the locals is also a point in their favor, though guerilla activities are suppressed with a brutal thoroughness that respects neither age nor sex.

Presently, the Red Sangha is based off of the Peerless-class orbital station *Lower Heaven* above Jivaka, with the station serving as the heart of the poor world's makeshift stellar navy as well as its central command for the Red Sangha brotherhood. A dedicated troop transport ship has been assigned to the mercenaries, but much of the rest of Jivakan navy can be enlisted at need.

RED SANGHA ORGANIZATION AND RESOURCES

Corps Organization

The Red Sangha is technically comprised of two percent of the entire Jivakan population, over 8,000 men and women of ages ranging from newborns to those in the final throes of brain cancer at age fifty. Eight hundred of these are fit for offworld military duty, and these combat-trained members form the Red Sangha as it is known to outsiders.

The organization is built around almost monastic lines rather than those of a conventional military. Much of the common discipline, rigorous social control, and focused effort to build an esprit de corps that military structures allow are unnecessary with the Liberated. They simply lack the urges and weaknesses that make traditional military structures so important.

The leader of the Red Sangha is the Abbot, a position appointed by a council of the eldest sangha members. The word of the Abbot is law within the Red Sangha. Beneath him are appointed the rectors who oversee each company of one hundred brothers and sisters, the rank and file of the Red Sangha. Within the rank and file, authority generally shakes out along time in service, though occasionally a squad will recognize the special talents of one of their more junior members. Discipline problems are extremely rare among the Red Sangha, though when they happen, they can be brutal. Most brethren reserve their dearest love for the Red Sangha and the homeworld, but those who conceive different attachments can respond with unmeasured violence to threats against them.

Roughly fifty of the brothers are left to man the *Lower Heaven*, while three or four of the companies are aboard the station in training or refitting after a mission. No more than three or four hundred Red Sangha brethren are out of the system at any one time. Each company of one hundred brethren is usually composed of one quarter logistical and support troops and three quarters combat troops. The mercenaries tend to rely heavily on local support for their logistical needs, though they can get by on surprisingly limited supply when necessity requires it.

Individual companies are broken up into ten-man squads led by an Elder Brother or Sister, with the second most experienced brother assisting. These ten-man squads can break into five-man fire teams when necessary, one led by the Elder Brother and the other by his second-in-command. The Red Sangha is highly reluctant to detach troops in less than fire team strength, and where one is found, four more are almost invariably close by.

Five of the companies are mechanized infantry, relying on simple battery-powered armored personnel carriers to get them to the fight. These carriers are relatively low-tech, but they can be kept in operation with refitted local parts on any world with tech level 3 or better. A drop pod, cargo lighter, or other landing craft can usually keep an entire company's APCs powered by refreshing expended type B power cells. Keeping more than that operational requires setting up a fusion plant facility, fossil fuel power plant, or tapping into a town's power grid. A company carries enough spares to go three or four days between charging opportunities.

Sixth Company is artillery, detailed to fire and support an array of heavy self-propelled guns. These guns are significantly slower than the all-terrain APCs that the Red Sangha uses, but their effectiveness against the fortifications of low-tech enemies is undeniable. Even enemies on more advanced worlds are rarely equipped to deal with tracked artillery unless they too are military personnel. The guns are often used to wreak fearsome destruction on the villages and towns of those locals who find guerilla warfare preferable to open confrontation.

Seventh Company is officially the recon company, trained and equipped for scouting and local liaison. In practice, it is also the home of the Deep Black operatives that belong to the Red Sangha. These men and women are trained for deep infiltration into enemy territory, and they carry out covert operations for the Jivakan government as well.

Lotus Company is comparatively short on strength, comprised of only fifty staff officers and support personnel. The abbot's appointed representative on the world generally leads the company, though for exceptionally important or delicate contracts, the abbot himself might leave Jivakan space to personally oversee affairs. This company is often split off in smaller parcels to oversee individual contracts, and at least ten of them are almost always back in Jivakan space to manage affairs in the home system and serve as a training cadre in case of catastrophic losses. Those who manage to inflict such catastrophic losses can expect these survivors to diligently seek the culprits' transmigration into their next existence.

Red Sangha Deployment

The corps is most often deployed in company strength at a minimum, transported aboard the company's cantankerous second-hand troopship, the *Hinayana*. The *Hinayana* is easily capable of transporting up to six thousand troops at a time, but it severely undergunned compared to other cruiser-class vessels. As such, the *Hinayana* almost never leaves Jivakan space without an escort of one or two frigates, or patrol boats if the additional drill range is necessary.

The *Hinayana* does not normally remain in orbit around a world unless the locals are unable to pose a significant threat to it. Even in that case, it will only remain as long as its hydroponic supplies or medical bay are necessary. Air support is normally provided by helicopters, with an atmosphere-capable frigate dispatched for heavy support.

The Red Sangha will deploy into a hot landing zone only under circumstances of dire necessity. The *Hinayana* is equipped with a Thunderhead grav pod system that can launch a cloud of six hundred ten-man landing pods, making it all but certain to get the vast majority of her troops onto the surface, even through ferocious anti-air defenses. However, the Thunderhead system costs 625,000 credits to refit- a sum amounting to slightly more than four percent of Jivaka's entire annual naval budget. Under most circumstances the crew are ferried down by the *Hinayana's* drop pod.

On the surface, liaison personnel set up local sources for food and spare parts while the *Hinayana* provides the logistical slack to support the corps while it sets up. Earthmovers and plasticrete are used to put together a fortified encampment for the troops, as the Red Sangha prefers to barrack well away from the locals for security reasons.

When charged with guarding a site or VIP, the Sangha will always detach troopers in multiples of five. Inclination and experience have taught them that small groups of mercs have a habit of going missing on foreign worlds. Kidnap attempts are useless against Red Sangha mercs, however. The corps regretfully writes off any kidnapped troopers as casualties, and simply preferences targeting their kidnappers with no special concern for retrieving their people alive. It is a variety of mercy to usher a Liberated one into their next cycle, after all.

The Red Sangha are remarkably well-disciplined in many regards, compared to the usual run of interstellar mercs. They do not pillage, torture for sport, rape, recklessly destroy property, or kill civilians thoughtlessly. They pay for what they take and they can be relied upon to keep their word even when it is inconvenient.

In other respects, however, the Red Sangha is monstrously brutal. Their respect for human life tends to be abstract, a general appreciation for the value of compassion and nonviolence. If the most convenient way to accomplish an end is to kill every living thing in a town, they'll pile the corpses in the market square without batting an eye. They respect neither sex nor age when "cleansing" an area, and some frankly prefer clearing noncombatants as being easier work. Their theological justification for this coldness rests on an appreciation of existence as being a commingled skein of suffering. The skillful means of liberation can be gentle teaching or it can be a quick dispatch to the next cycle. The choice of means is determined by convenience.

Many other Buddhist faiths in the sector find the Red Sangha to be unutterably depraved, but the Sangha is unconcerned. The sole attachment remaining to them is that of love- love for their world, their brethren, and their faith. As they can progress no further toward enlightenment in this life, they are fit and correct sacrifices to the necessities of the world. What they do is necessary, as they understand it, and they say that they would not regret it even if they could.

Jivakan Naval Forces

Under the rules provided in the *Skyward Steel* naval sourcebook, Jivaka is a planet with 400,000 people living at a Poor standard of living. As such, they have 70 budget points with which to build their fleet. The Red Sangha live aboard the Peerless space station *Lower Heaven*, while a Bannerjee-12 orbital provides coverage for the other side of the planet and a terminal for the limited trade conducted with other worlds.

The Jivakan fleet consists of the troop transport *Hinayana*, the three frigates *Vajra*, *Prajna*, and *Bhavana*, the two patrol boats *Vinaya* and *Sutta*, the naval couriers *Sutra* and *Khor*, and the free merchant *Maya*. Three or four of these ships are docked at the *Lower Heaven* at any one time for refitting and maintenance. The naval couriers are generally used to keep in contact with dispersed Red Sangha detachments, though they also find use in Deep Black operations. The free merchant runs supplies to the smaller corp units, and is occasionally impressed for covert operations that require a suitably innocent civilian vessel.

Details on the troop transport and naval courier ship classes can be found in the *Skyward Steel* naval sourcebook, along with information on creating planetary naval forces and conducting orbital assaults.

Using the Red Sangha in a Campaign

The Red Sangha work well as enemies for experienced groups of adventurers. While their equipment leaves something to be desired, their lethal aim can make them a threat even to well-armored and hardy freebooters. Most novice adventurers should have the sense to avoid tangling with them, especially since they are rarely found in groups smaller than five.

The Sangha can be guardians of a person the PCs need to kill, protectors of a place they need to infiltrate, or even the opposing force across some backwater world's smoking battlefields. Repeated clashes in which the Sangha is foiled or embarrassed are likely to result in Deep Black operatives being dispatched to cause terminal problems for the PCs. There's nothing personal about the act to the Sangha; it's just necessary business to clear away inevitable future problems.

The Sangha might be used as patrons or allies as well, perhaps requiring the help of the PCs to salvage some vital mission or avenge themselves on a treacherous employer. The Sangha might be decimated by some disastrous reversal, and be in desperate need of outworlder help to fill out their numbers or maintain their obligations until more Liberated can be mustered. While the Sangha is merciless in many ways, they lack the megalomania and arrant cruelty that can put a group firmly onto the "implacable foe" list for some players.

Aside from this, the secret biochemical lore of Mantheesh the Damned still lurks somewhere deep in Jivaka's asteroid belt, and certain zealous Jivakans are looking for it. This Left Hand of Enlightenment might well contain a number of renegade Red Sangha, all of them dedicated to infecting new worlds with the synthetic enlightenment of Liberation.

RED SANGHA NPC STATISTICS

Red Sangha Brother

Armor Class	5 (Woven Armor)	No. Appearing	5
Hit Dice	1	Saving Throw	15+
Attack Bonus	+4	Movement	30'
Damage	1d12 combat rifle	Morale	12
Skill Bonus	+1		

The Red Sangha lacks the money and infrastructure to supply all its troops with advanced postech armor and weaponry. The corps spends enough time on low-tech worlds that more primitive combat rifles and woven armor are much easier to supply from local materials. Their chief advantage is in the quality of the troops rather than that of their gear; Red Sangha troopers never rout and never panic. This serene efficiency in the midst of roaring chaos makes even the least experienced brother exceedingly dangerous, with their shots squeezed off as calmly as if they were on a firing range.

Red Sangha Covert Operative

Armor Class	4 (CFU)	No. Appearing	1-6
Hit Dice	3	Saving Throw	14+
Attack Bonus	+6	Movement	30'
Damage	2d8+1 mag rifle	Morale	12
Skill Bonus	+2		

These brothers are those chosen and trained for highly sensitive Deep Black operations far behind enemy lines. All of them wed years of field experience to the Sangha calm, and have their pick of the best equipment available on Jivaka. No more than fifty Sangha are qualified for such operations at any one time, and as many as half of them are on long-term deployment as personal security for well-paying officials and foreign rulers. Due to their rarity, the Sangha cannot always deploy five of them at a time.

Red Sangha Psychic

Armor Class	2 (Deflector Array)	No. Appearing	1
Hit Dice	3+3	Saving Throw	14+
Attack Bonus	+3	Movement	30'
Damage	2d6 thermal pistol	Morale	12
Skill Bonus	+2		

With as few as the Sangha are, there are rarely more than two or three psychics available to them at any one time. Such combat psychics are often drawn from personnel otherwise far too young or old to serve with the corps, such is the need for experienced psionic experts. They are protected jealously and never exposed to danger unless necessity demands it. Other Sangha will readily give their lives to save a brother psychic. Psychics normally have 21 psi points, Telepathy 5 (with levels 1-3 mastered) and Teleportation 5, with their duties largely revolving around interrogations and bypassing enemy defenses. For exceptionally sensitive covert missions, a psychic will form a mental link with the participants and then go into deep hiding in a system's asteroid belt or on some lifeless moon. So long as the psychic remains in the system, the Deep Black team can use him as an undetectable, untouchable communications channel.

Abbot Daniel Balavrata

Armor Class	2 (Deflector Array)	No. Appearing	1
Hit Dice	9 (52 hit points)	Saving Throw	11+
Attack Bonus	+12	Movement	30'
Damage	2d6+2 mag pistol	Morale	12
Skill Bonus	+4		

Abbot Balavrata has led the Red Sangha since his predecessor's death to brain cancer eight years ago. With his fiftieth year approaching, Balavrata understands that his own time is growing short, and he feels concern over the prospects of the Sangha after his death. A catastrophic betrayal by a treacherous employer four years ago killed both of the potential successors that he was grooming to succeed him, and the remaining candidates all lack the seasoning and accomplishment that Abbot Balavrata finds necessary. Almost as regrettably, the traitorous employer remains unrebuked for his treachery, and his example is doubtless giving unfortunate thoughts to others in the sector.

Balavrata is even considering gathering in some of the renegades that have left the Red Sangha in hopes that some few of them might have manifested the leadership skills and prowess he requires. Unbeknownst to him, several of those renegades have gone over to the Left Hand of Enlightenment, and the consequences of their ascent could be catastrophic. Outside the order, a few native Jivakans have found evidence to suggest this spiritual cancer, but it is insufficient to prove their case. Outsiders may be necessary in order to acquire the proof that Abbot Balavrata would doubtless require.

RED SANGHA AS PLAYER CHARACTERS

Those afflicted with Liberation have short lives, with few living much beyond fifty before succumbing to brain cancer. Still, some do leave the Red Sangha to find a different path, most often those who can no longer subscribe to the Sangha's interpretation of Buddhism. Their brothers do not challenge these departures. They feel only pity and sympathy for their wayward friend.

The advantages and flaws of the Red Sangha have no mechanical effect on player characters, as PCs already effectively have unshakable morale and can choose to react to situations as they see fit. The natural talent Red Sangha members have for violence and bloodshed tends to blend in well with the usual pastimes of player characters.

In terms of roleplaying, the average Red Sangha PC will be calm, polite, patient, and devoted to their friends and chosen companions. They will not be terribly interested in physical pleasures or material rewards, but can become fiercely fixated on ideological goals and religious obligations. They simply do not feel the darker emotions as more than mild notions- no fear, no hate, no anger, no lust, no greed... and certainly no regret.

Brother of the Red Sangha *Background*

Even those Liberated that are expected to fulfill different duties as they age are often posted to the Red Sangha during their youth. These acolytes of battle spend their days in serene meditation and study of the arts of war.

Skills: Combat/Projectile, Culture/Jivaka, Religion, Tactics

Veteran Sangha Infantry *Training*

After a period of four or five years of training, even the least promising brother has seen some action planetside and mastered the essentials of war. Veteran infantry such as these are superb soldiers, easily the match of any ordinary mercenary trooper. The bloodless calm and focus of the Sangha make them extraordinarily effective under circumstances that would leave a normal man shattered with panic or excitement. Infantry with a knack for technical pursuits often are made drivers and mechanics for the armored personnel carriers favored by the Sangha.

Any class can choose this option for a training package. Psychics gain the first four skills, warriors and experts gain the next two, and experts get the last two.

All characters gain: Combat/Projectile, Combat/Unarmed, Religion, Tactics

Warriors and Experts also gain: Athletics, Stealth

Experts also gain: Tech/Postech, Vehicle/Land

MARTIAL ART: UPAYA

The traditional unarmed martial art of the Red Sangha, "Upaya" refers more widely to the entire corpus of military knowledge and expertise the corps has cultivated. Outsiders have been known to master the art, but much of it is cloaked in complex Buddhist religious terminology and arcane physical exercises. Observant Buddhists from other religious traditions in the sector abhor it, and consider its practice *prima facie* evidence of unspeakable spiritual degeneration.

The style itself focuses on indifference to personal suffering in order to achieve victory over a foe. This feat is substantially easier for Liberated humans than those who retain the full scope of emotional reactions, but it can be sustained by sufficiently determined outsiders. The style uses numerous sacrifice moves and demands motions that can occasionally strain or harm the user. Damage inflicted on oneself by using the novice level of the art cannot reduce the stylist's hit points below 1.

Martial arts styles are intended for campaigns in which the GM wishes to make unarmed and melee combat a reasonable alternative to firearms. For details on learning and using martial arts, consult *Mandate Archive: Martial Arts*.

Weapon Groups Unarmed

Level 0 Novice The novice's strikes do 1d8 damage. The novice can declare an unarmed sacrifice strike before rolling; if the attack is successful, the strike automatically does maximum damage. Whether or not it's successful, the user takes 1d6 damage himself.

Level 1 Intermediate After a miss with an unarmed attack, the stylist can push the assault and gain a reroll on the attack roll. However, the next melee attack by the target against the stylist will automatically hit.

Level 2 Master The master's strikes do 2d6 damage. When missed by an enemy in melee, the stylist may grant the enemy a reroll on the attack roll. Hit or miss, if the stylist survives the second attack roll he may make an immediate unarmed counterattack.