

Palladium Books® Presents:

# THE RIFTER®

Your Guide to the Megaverse®

*Inside this July/August, 2005 Issue...*  
Rifts®: Adventure in the NGR  
Phase World™ Source Material  
Heroes Unlimited™: One Evil Funhouse  
An Epic Palladium Fantasy® Adventure  
The Hammer of the Forge™  
Conventions, News & More

*Apollis*

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

Please note that none of us at Palladium Books® condone or encourage the occult, the practice of magic, the use of drugs, or violence.



**The Rifter® Number 31**

**Your guide to the Palladium Megaverse®!**

First Printing – August, 2005

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The Rifter® #31 RPG sourcebook series is published by Palladium Books Inc., 12455 Universal Drive, Taylor, MI 48180. Printed in the USA.

Palladium Books® Presents:

# THE RIFTER #31



BRANDT - 97

Sourcebook and Guide to the Palladium Megaverse®

Coordinator & Editor in Chief: **Wayne Smith**

Editor: **Alex Marciniszyn**

Contributing Writers:

**Branden Aten**

**James M.G. Cannon**

**K.G. Carlson**

**Edwin Emmer**

**Jason Marker**

**Kevin Siembieda**

**Taylor White**

Interior Artists:

**Kent Burles**

**Mark Dudley (DDS)**

**Allen Manning**

**Brian Manning**

**Apollo Okamura**

and other Palladium Madmen

Proofreader: **Julius Rosenstein**

Cover Illustration: **Apollo Okamura**

Cover Logo Design: **Steve Edwards**

Credits Page Logo: **Niklas Brandt**

Typesetting: **Wayne Smith**

Keylining: **Kevin Siembieda**

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

**Special Thanks** to all our contributors, writers and artists – and a special welcome on board to the artists and writers making their debut in this issue. Our apologies to anybody who got accidentally left out or their name misspelled.

# Contents – The Rifter® #31 – July, 2005

## Page 6 – From the Desk of Kevin Siembieda

The Boss covers a number of subjects this issue: **Rifts® Ultimate Edition** is done, at the printers, ships August and we think it will please a lot of Rifts® fans. **The Rifts® Promise of Power videogame** for the N-Gage will hit the global marketplace this Fall, and we are all very excited about it. **The future of Palladium** looks positive and will involve many factors. **What's Next for Palladium other than Rifts®?** A lot, and you can read about it here. Kevin's right, we have a number of products in development. Things we haven't told anybody. Our plan? To have books actually in our hands, finished so we can actually hit our schedule next year. (Yeah, it's probably a pipe-dream, but don't tell Kevin, he really thinks we can get books out on time.) **Palladium fans are the greatest.** Heck, we all knew that already. Oh, one last thing, don't think of this issue coming out late, think of it as **The Rifter® #32** coming out sooner! Except . . . um, it's coming out in October like always. It will just seem sooner because this issue was late, and . . . oh, never mind.

The artwork depicting a pair of Faeries was done for **Rifts® Ultimate Edition**, but appeared at a fraction of this size. We thought we'd show it off here, full-size. Nice work by Apollo Okamura.

## Page 8 – Advertisement for the Rifts® Videogame

**Rifts® Promise of Power™** is already being acknowledged as an outstanding mobile game. Read all about it for yourself.

## Page 10 – Palladium News

E3 was fun and interesting. Gen Con Indy is coming and we hope to see some of you there. Kevin Siembieda had to bow-out and cancel attending *Dragon\*Con*, one of his favorite conventions on the planet. Trinity Con is coming in October, where the Palladium crew will be gaming, chatting with fans and selling product, and lets all support National Games Week.

## Page 11 – Coming Attractions

**Beyond the Supernatural** is not forgotten, Kevin can hardly wait to get back to writing **Tome Grotesque™** and **Beyond Arcanum™** (both key pieces in the overall fabric of the **Beyond the Supernatural™ RPG**) **Powers Unlimited 3™**, **Adventures in Dinosaur Swamp** and more are in the works or release over the next few months.

This section also includes a detailed presentation of what some of the changes and additions are in **Rifts® Ultimate Edition**, some examples of the new artwork, and some commentary by author, Kevin Siembieda. We're excited about this new edition and hope you are too. By the way, the signed and numbered, limited edition, **Rifts® Ultimate Gold** is still available but being gobbled up fast! We even doubled the size of the original press run and still expect them to sell quickly.

## Page 16 – Rooms with a Skew

### Optional adventure/source-material for **Heroes Unlimited™**

Mutant, killer plants, weird and dangerous animals, space aliens, and all kinds of trouble are unleashed by the *Dread Micro-Wizards of Chaos* (nasty, child-geniuses originally introduced in the pages of **Villains Unlimited™**). Presented by the wonderfully wicked mind of K.G. Carlson.

Artwork is by the Brothers Grimm, *Brian & Allan Manning*.

## Page 23 – A Shadow from the Past™

### – The Quest for Castlerake™

#### For the **Palladium Fantasy Role-Playing Game®**

Edwin Emmer whips up a wonderful fantasy adventure inspired by the legendary rune weapon known as Castlerake. (Castlerake created by Erick Wujcik for the original edition of the *Palladium Fantasy RPG®*. And Edwin does Erick proud.)

This is *Part One* of an epic quest to retrieve the scattered and magical pieces of this great rune weapon. However, doing so is not an easy task and carries the adventurers across the face of the Palladium World – Old Kingdom, the High Seas, Enry Isle, Lopan, the Great Northern Wilderness, Ophid's Grasslands, ancient ruins, jungles, and more. Check out Chapter 10 for Olympic Games on Lopan.

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Chapter Five – page 34

Chapter Six – page 36

Chapter Seven – page 38

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Chapter Twelve – page 53

*Part Two* – The Rifter® #32

Artwork is by wizard, *Kent Burles*.

## Page 60 – National Games Week Advertisement

## Page 61 – A Komplex Problem™

### For **Rifts®** – **Triax & the NGR Adventure**

Brandon Aten and Taylor White join forces to weave a tale of intrigue, secrets and conspiracy.

The story revolves around the discovery of a secret military base where Gargoyles, Brodkil and other monster races are captured, tortured and cruelly experimented upon. The purpose of

this “research” is to develop new weapons to destroy the monstrous invading hordes of the Gargoyle and Brodkil Empires, but is it too much? Too cruel? Do the people have the right to know?

A handful of NPCs, the Triax Research Scientist O.C.C., a few new Triax weapons, and the X-5001 Devastator Mk. II.

Artwork by the mecha-maniac Apollo Okamura.

## Page 79 – Rifts® Phase World®

### Sunhammer Consolidated Freightways, Ltd

Jason Marker details an independent trans-galactic freight company in the Three Galaxies, some of their ships and notable crew members; and a few villains for good measure.

Sunhammer can be used as a potential employer of the player characters, the other crews may be friends, employers or rivals, or the source of adventure ideas.

Artwork by *Brian & Allen Manning*.

## Page 90 – Rifts® Phase World®

### The Hammer of the Forge™

Chapter 31 of James M.G. Cannon’s popular, ongoing saga takes an unexpected and potentially deadly turn. Read and enjoy.

Artwork by Mark Dudley (Drunken Style Studio).

## The Theme for Issue 31

This issue’s theme is adventure, secrets, struggle, and quests. Editor Wayne Smith continues to try to support the Palladium Fantasy RPG® with another, epic adventure saga, plus a nice variety of other subjects and game lines in the Palladium Megaverse® that should put a smile on your face. Hopefully, they will inspire you to experiment with your game settings, villains, monsters and storylines. Enjoy.

## The Cover

Apollo Okamura has created a cover depicting the climax to this issue’s installment of the Hammer of the Forge. Caleb Vulcan, the Cosmo-Knight, is locked in battle with a Kreeghor Admiral while a black hole appears in the background.

## Optional and Unofficial Rules & Source Material

Please note that most of the material presented in *The Rifter*® is “unofficial” or “optional” rules and source material.

They are alternative ideas, homespun adventures and material mostly created by fellow gamers and fans like you, the reader. Things one can *elect* to include in one’s own campaign or simply enjoy reading about. They are not “official” to the main games or world settings.

As for optional tables and adventures, if they sound cool or fun, use them. If they sound funky, too high-powered or inappropriate for your game, modify them or ignore them completely.

All the material in *The Rifter*® has been included for two reasons: One, because we thought it was imaginative and fun, and two, we thought it would stimulate your imagination with fun ideas and concepts that you can use (if you want to), or which might inspire you to create your own wonders.

[www.palladiumbooks.com](http://www.palladiumbooks.com) – Palladium Online

## Coming Next Issue

### The Rifter® #32

We haven’t plotted out everything that’s going into this Fall issue, but you can count on it including monster and scary things, along with the usual news, source-material and fun. Including:

- **Another October horror spectacular.**
- **Part Two of Quest for Castlerake for *Palladium Fantasy*®.**
- **Material for *Beyond the Supernatural*™.**
- **Material for *Rifts*®.**
- **Gen Con Indy Report, other news and developments.**
- **The next, epic chapter of *The Hammer of the Forge*™.**
- **Source material for the entire Palladium Megaverse®.**
- **New contributors and fun. So please join us.**

**Palladium Books® role-playing games ... infinite possibilities, limited only by your imagination™**



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# From the Desk of Kevin Siembieda

## Rifts® Ultimate Edition

I rant and rave about this elsewhere, so just let me say it is done, at the printers, looks great and we hope all of you find it a satisfying improvement and upgrade. It's packed with little (and big) tweaks, changes and additions, new artwork and lots of love. Oh, and it will be available at Gen Con Indy, as well as on store shelves (and from Palladium directly) all around August 18-25th. Enjoy and let us know what you think.

This 15th Anniversary *relaunch* of the game hopefully means a lot of long-time fans rediscover **Rifts®** and even more *new gamers* discover it for the first time. All of us here at Palladium would like to think that **Rifts®** offers an amazing gaming environment/setting that gets the imagination burning and offers endless adventure opportunities.

## Rifts® Promise of Power™

That's the name of the Nokia videogame for the N-Gage. In a few months, Palladium will enter into the electronic game medium via a license with Nokia. **Rifts® Promise of Power** is another product that Palladium is very proud of, and we are happy to have our name and creation associated with this fine product and company. I think fans of **Rifts®** will be surprised and im-

pressed with this little gem. Those of you going to **Gen Con Indy** can see it for yourselves, firsthand, by hitting the demos at the *Nokia/N-Gage booth, #133* (just down the aisle and over a bit from Palladium at booth #213).

## The future for Palladium Books

As I mentioned last issue, my goal for Palladium Books and its creative teams is to produce the best, most fun role-playing games around. I think the **Beyond the Supernatural RPG** followed by **Rifts® Ultimate Edition** and a slew of cool sourcebooks for each (some still on their way), only punctuate that sentiment.

In addition to working on creating role-playing games and supplements for all our lines, we are doing things behind the scenes to improve Palladium's visibility and overall business. That includes expanding our distribution network, more advertisements, special promotions, and slicking up aspects of our website, among others.

Participating in *National Games Week* (November) is all part of our "master plan." With a little hard work, you'll soon find our products in a growing number of hobby, comic and book stores.

## What's next other than Rifts®?

Plenty.

Check out the Coming Attractions for the complete low-down, but I wanted to comment here that we plan on supporting most of Palladium's game lines, including the long-suffering fans of the **Palladium Fantasy RPG®**, as well as **Heroes Unlimited™**, **Beyond the Supernatural™**, and **Chaos Earth™**.

Those of you who worry BTS-2 will be left to languish, fear not. BTS-2 is my new baby. I have all kinds of ideas for it and I'm dying to finish the above two sourcebooks as well as dive into a couple of adventure book ideas brewing in my mind. I'm having a blast with BTS and you can count on them coming out in 2005! I want these two titles to knock your socks off, so I'm not going to rush them, but they aren't going to fall into limbo either. I'd promise October, but I may be participating in a Nokia Press Tour of Europe that is likely to steal away a week or two of my time this Fall. I will promise I'll do everything in my power to get them both out by the end of this year!

**More for Heroes Unlimited™ & Palladium Fantasy®.** Although it may not seem like it, we have several books planned for both **Heroes Unlimited™** and **The Palladium Fantasy RPG®**. These lines are NOT forgotten and 2-5 titles for each line *should* hit store shelves next year (2006). I don't want to list titles now and get you all excited, but there are some cool books in development, including 2-3 HU2 titles by fan-fave, Wayne Breaux Jr., another by Carl Gleba and probably another by Carmen Bellaire.

Likewise, I hope to release at least three new books for **Palladium Fantasy** in 2006. I wanted to actually get some of these books in "the can" before I announce them.

**Secret Project Gleba!** I have had freelance writer, Carl Gleba, working on a top secret, five part, *Megaversal crossover* series. The first book (**Dimension Book: Hades**) is finished, Carl's nearly done with the second book, and . . . hmmm, we're going to wait until the next book or two are in the pipeline before we announce or launch this groundbreaking series. With any luck, it will be the talk of 2006.

**Other stuff.** We still plan on doing the virtual tour of Palladium's offices on the website ([www.palladiumbooks.com](http://www.palladiumbooks.com)) and an updated company history and profile. I'm hoping to find the time to do a couple of live chats, too.

**Limited Edition Signed Prints of the End Sheets (August)** will be available at Gen Con and probably offered online (via the mail), as well as from John Zeleznik (limited to about 500 total copies, each).

We may be doing posters for retail stores and other promos.

Oh, and of course we will be doing our annual X-Mas Surprise Package/Grab Bag starting in October.

## Palladium Fans – the Greatest

I just wanted to say that Palladium has the greatest fans on the planet. It's true. The Palladium gang and I look forward to conventions like *Gen Con Indy* and *Trinity Con*, because of YOU, the fans. In fact, these two shows are great examples because they represent both ends of the spectrum: Gen Con Indy being huge, fun and demanding (you seem busy almost every minute) and Trinity Con which is small (about 400 gamers), quiet, relaxed, more personal and fun. It's you guys and gals who make conventions, large or small, fun. It is you who make it all worth doing, and I want to say we look forward to seeing you at conventions.

What brought this to mind was a chat with a fan just yesterday. He's a good guy, a thirty-something father who has been playing Palladium RPGs for some time now. We bumped into each other and talked about Palladium, Rifts® Ultimate Edition and business. I mentioned a recent hurdle Palladium was still struggling to overcome, and he says to me, "Kevin, I live reasonably nearby, if there's anything I can do to help, and I mean anything, work in the warehouse, mail order, anything, just give me a call." And he wrote down his work and home telephone numbers on a business card and handed it to me. He then adds, "I'm not looking for money or free books either. Palladium has brought me so much enjoyment over the last 15-20 years I'm glad to do anything I can to help out." I was blown away, I barely know him. And he's *not* the first fan to make such a generous offer or some other act of kindness. Yet every time something like that happens, it still blows me away. I mean . . . wow, thank you, it doesn't get better than that. I *know* a lot of you probably feel the same, and I just want you to know that you are appreciated. That's why I try to keep our prices low and always produce quality product. It's a two-way relationship here, and one of mutual appreciation.

Like I said, Palladium fans are the best. Thanks for being you.

## One Last Thing

Let me apologize for the delay of **The Rifter® #31**. Expanding the **Rifts® Ultimate Edition** to 376 pages (sheer madness!) and running past our original deadline for it delayed **The Rifter® #31**. I believe this is only the second time that an issue of **The Rifter®** was knocked clear into the next month. Not bad for its 8-year history. Sorry. Enjoy and see ya soon.

– Kevin Siembieda, July, 2005



FOR THE FIRST TIME, THE RIFTS® MEGEVERSE® IS COMING TO THE VIDEO GAME WORLD, AVAILABLE ONLY ON THE N-GAGE™ GAMING PLATFORM.

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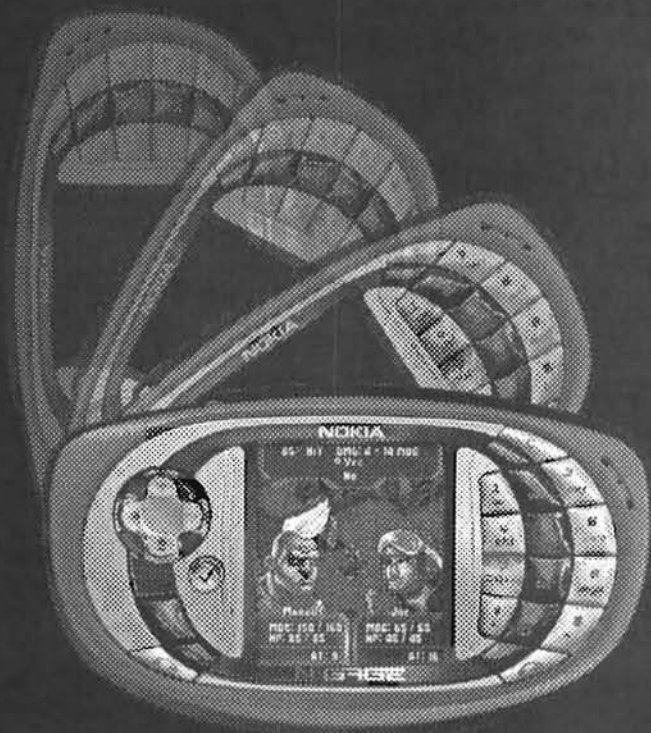
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# Palladium News

By Kevin Siembieda (the guy who should know)

## Rifts® Promise of Power™

– official web site –

[www.rifts-promiseofpower.com](http://www.rifts-promiseofpower.com)

For the latest on Nokia's Rifts® Promise of Power™, go to their dedicated website.

- Artwork and production diary.
- Character bios and FAQs.
- Screen savers and wallpaper.
- In-game movies of the game for the very first time.
- Brand new screen shots.
- News and updates.
- A downloadable demo of the game will be released this Summer as well.

## E3 (Electronic Entertainment Expo)

My trek to Los Angeles for E3 was positive and fun. I participated in a number of interviews, Shane and I were video-interviewed by GTtv (see [www.gametrailers.com/gamespage-php?id=1609](http://www.gametrailers.com/gamespage-php?id=1609)), I met some new people, hooked up with old friends and had fun with Mark Freedman (my agent), Shane Neville (Nokia Producer) and a host of other people, including my ol' pal Kevin Eastman (co-creator of the Ninja Turtles). I also got to spend an afternoon and evening with Erick Wujcik in from Shanghai, China (he's never looked happier).

The show was as big and explosive as ever, with displays, demos and trailers hyping a ton of new games coming to various videogame platforms. The Nokia booth was nice, and Rifts®: Promise of Power™ was prominently displayed.

## Gen Con Indy 2005

Indianapolis, Indiana – August 18-21

– Palladium Books – Booth #213

We can hardly wait for Gen Con Indy and the release of Rifts® Ultimate Edition. We will be bringing plenty of the Rifts® mass market hardcover books and 300 copies of the signed and numbered limited gold edition (get 'em while you still can).

Gen Con Indy should be a blast, and here are some reasons for Palladium fans.

- 50+ “official Palladium Gaming Events” (*Rifts*®, *Splicers*™, *Beyond the Supernatural*™, *Heroes Unlimited*™, *Palladium Fantasy*®, and more) run by the likes of Siembieda, Bellaire, Roger & Randi Cartier, Gleba, Yoho and other Palladium creators and long-time Palladium G.M.s. That's more than we have ever run at any convention!
- The debut of **Rifts® Ultimate Edition Hardcover RPG**.
- The debut of **Rifts® Ultimate Edition Signed and Numbered Limited Edition, Rifts® Ultimate Gold** available while supplies last. Gen Con is also a great opportunity to get signatures by authors like Carl Gleba, Todd Yoho, Jason Richards and Carmen Bellaire, as well as artists Apollo Okamura and Ramon Perez (possibly others).
- Recently released RPG books.
- Hard to find back stock and collector items.
- T-shirts, posters, miniatures and other items.
- Original artwork by Siembieda, Okamura and others.
- Guests at the Palladium Booth will include:
  - *Kevin Siembieda*, publisher, writer and game designer.
  - *Wayne Smith*, editor and the man behind The Rifter®.
  - *Carmen Bellaire*, writer (*Powers Unlimited*™, *Splicers*™).
  - *Carl Gleba*, writer (*Three Galaxies*™, *Megaverse*® Builder).
  - *Todd Yoho*, writer (*Rifts*® Dinosaur Swamp, *BTS-2 Arcanum*).
  - *Jason Richards*, writer (*Arzno*™, *The Rifter*®).
  - *Apollo Okamura*, artist.
  - *Ramon Perez*, artist (tentative).
  - *Randi and Roger Cartier*, play testers, writers and map-makers.

And quite possibly others.

This will be Palladium Books' biggest presence at any convention this year.

**For more information contact:** [www.gencon.com](http://www.gencon.com) (click on Gen Con Indy).

Or write to: Gen Con LLC, 120 Lakeside Ave., Suite #100, Seattle, WA 98122.

## Dragon\*Con

Atlanta, Georgia – Sept. 2-5

Sorry, I had to cancel on this convention at the last minute for a couple of reasons. Dragon\*Con is famous for its gaming and multi-media events, guests and all-around fun, including a massive costume ball that attracts thousands of contestants (including hundreds of Stormtroopers) and a parade down Main Street. Whether I'm there or not, you should think about joining the tens of thousands of attendees who come down every year.

**For more information contact:** [www.dragoncon.org](http://www.dragoncon.org) or call (770) 909-0115.

Or write to: Dragon\*Con, P.O. Box 16459, Atlanta, GA 30321-0459.

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## Trinity Con

### Southfield, MI – Oct. 21, 22 & 23

We got the dates wrong last issue, October 21-23 are the correct dates and we hope to see a bunch of you there.

Last year's event was small (about 200-300 gamers) but a blast! Lots of time to spend talking to fans, gaming and having fun. We invite everyone within driving distance to join the fun this year. Heck, fly in too. Last year we had a gent in from Minnesota so come on down.

Me (*Kevin Siembieda*), Wayne "*The Rifter*" *Smith*, editors *Alex Marciniszyn* and *Julius Rosenstein* (who don't normally attend conventions), *Carmen Bellaire*, *Drunken Style Studio* artists and other Palladium creators will be in attendance to chat, sign autographs, run gaming events and sell product for hours on end!

The convention also has a dealers' room, 24 hour anime room, game industry panels, anime panels, LARP, Mage Knight, Warhammer, Yu-Gi-Oh, Magic the Gathering, video game events, and scores of gaming events, including Palladium RPG events run by Kevin Siembieda, Julius Rosenstein, Carmen Bellaire, Roger Cartier and others. Join this year's fun.

#### For information Contact:

Convention Enterprises  
P.O. Box 210757  
Auburn Hills, MI 48321  
(313) 492-4204  
[www.conventionenterprises.com](http://www.conventionenterprises.com)

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## National Games Week

### – November, 2005

We can't hype up this great idea enough, and we invite *retailers* and *gamers* across the country to encourage and support it.

The **idea** is to bring greater awareness of "games" of all kinds – trading card games, role-playing games, miniature games, and board games. This is done by getting retail stores to host a week (or weekend) of special *gaming events* at the store. Participating retailers are supported by game publishers and manufacturers. Palladium Books and most major game publishers and manufacturers are participating in National Games Week, so there is a wide range of product and materials available to suit every need.

The National Games Week organization also supplies posters, suggestions and ideas for events, as well as coordinates events nationwide!

2005 is the second year of this spectacular event and it should be bigger and better than ever. Palladium's involvement will be much bigger than last year.

**How can you help?** Tell, or photocopy and give *this* information or the National Games Week advertisement to your game store, comic & game store, or hobby shop manager or owner, let the person know if you and your friends would partic-

ipate (even run gaming events) in such a week of fun, and have him/her contact – [www.nationalgamesweek.net](http://www.nationalgamesweek.net) – to get more information.

This is a great way for you to spread the word about the hobby and your favorite Palladium game by introducing new gamers and first-time players to the Palladium Megaverse®. Won't you help?

#### National Games Week Contact information:

NGW Coordinator  
Matthews Simmons Marketing  
80 Garden Center, Suite 16  
Bloomfield, CO 80020  
Phone: 303-469-3277 – Fax 303-468-6174  
Internet: [www.nationalgamesweek.net](http://www.nationalgamesweek.net)

## Coming Attractions

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We haven't ironed out the exact order of releases (although this is probably pretty close), but here's what's coming for the rest of 2005.

### Beyond the Supernatural™, 2nd Ed. is a hit!

The overwhelming response to **Beyond the Supernatural™, Second Edition** has been nothing short of spectacular. If you haven't taken a look at this role-playing game, you should, especially if you are looking for something different in a modern setting.

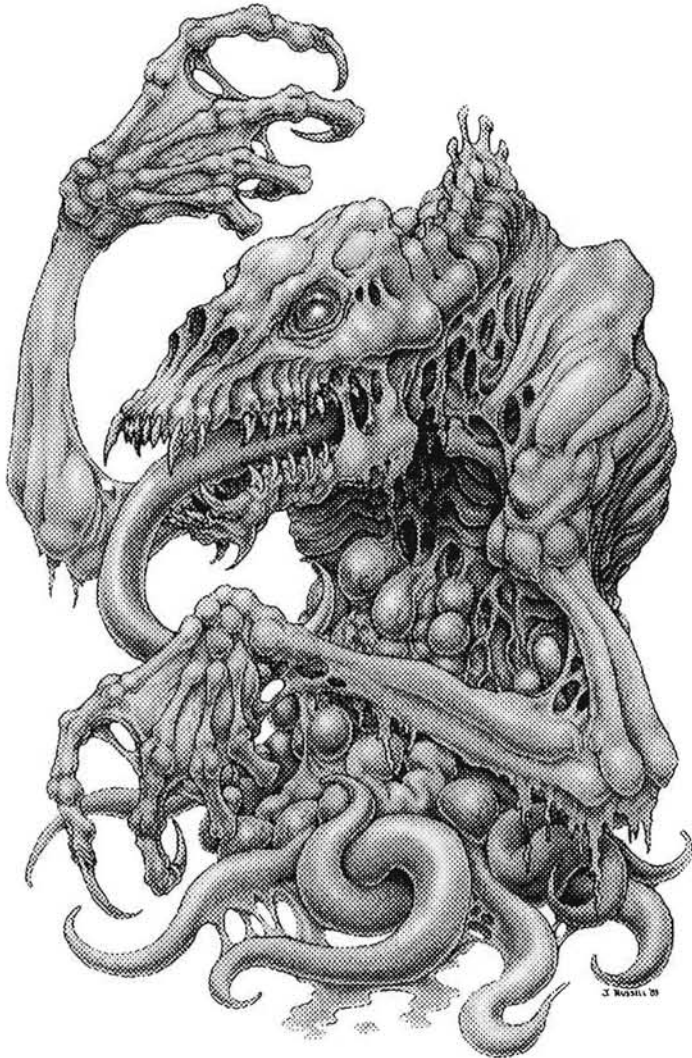
- A different spin on modern horror that will leave you begging for more!
- Two juicy sourcebooks are coming this Fall.
- \$24.95 – 256 pages. Cat. No. 700. ISBN 157457-083-8. Available now and in good supply, we've made sure of that.

### Beyond the Supernatural™ – Limited Edition

The **signed & numbered limited edition BTS hardcover** is available only from Palladium Books and is also selling well. Available on a first come, first served basis, only while supplies last.

- Signed by writer, Kevin Siembieda, and artist, Michael Dubisch.
- Limited to 500 copies; signed and numbered. Once they are sold out, they are gone forever.
- Blood red leatherette cover with gold foil stamping.

- \$50 plus \$5 for postage and handling (double that to \$10 for Canadian and \$15 for overseas orders). Cat. No. 7000HC. Available only from Palladium Books. Available now.



## Tome Grotesque™ For Beyond the Supernatural™

**Tome Grotesque™** is the next sourcebook for **Beyond the Supernatural™** and it will continue to carry the look and feel established in the RPG.

That means monsters that are more than slobbering beasts. My goal is to give evil a face – a face and personality that will make these horrid things all the more repulsive and frightening. Creatures of darkness and hatred who insinuate themselves into our lives, often invisibly or behind the scenes, where they corrupt and manipulate humans to work their evil. Creatures that possess frightening supernatural abilities, magic knowledge and a taste for blood. The more powerful the creature, the more likely lesser creatures, human pawns and henchmen serve and protect the horror. Hiding it from prying eyes and eliminating those who get too close. Destroying an evil cult, maniac or servant creatures may put a temporary stop to bad things happening, but the nightmare will all start again unless the root cause – the Greater Demon or Ancient Evil – is tracked to its shadowy lair and destroyed.

Like I said, I want monsters that have personality, motive, goals and strategies. Fiendish masterminds who have been commanding armies of minions or manipulating events to torment and corrupt humankind from the shadows for thousands of years.

Sure there will be simple creatures and predators who are the pit bulls, enforcers and hunter-killers of the supernatural world, but they answer to greater powers and can be made to fulfill terrible agendas.

- Supernatural predators who stalk our streets at night.
- Pranksters and Haunters.
- Demonic Servants who tempt, corrupt and torment humans.
- Ancient Evil that functions as sinister puppet masters, schemers and destroyers lurking in the shadows where they pull the strings of lesser beings and mortal men.
- Demonic magic and psychic abilities.
- Spectacular artwork by Dubisch, Clark and Russell.
- Plenty of ideas and inspiration for adventures.
- Written and created by Kevin Siembieda.
- \$17.95 – 160 pages. Cat. No. 702. We are shooting for an October release, but could slip into early November.

## Beyond Arcanum™ For Beyond the Supernatural™

**Beyond Arcanum** is another **Beyond the Supernatural™** sourcebook that will take players on a journey of hope, darkness and the supernatural. Magic is a choice, and those who choose it are often led down a dark and dangerous path.

Here again, there will be a new and sinister twist on how magic works, who is really in control and how it can be used as a tool for good or evil. In addition, **Beyond Arcanum** will include places of power, ancient artifacts, charms, mystic relics, cursed items and more.

- The Arcanist O.C.C. and other practitioners of magic.
- Magic spells designed for the BTS setting.
- Magic rituals, weapons, charms and artifacts.
- Ancient secrets and places of magic.
- Spectacular artwork by Dubisch and Russell.
- Plenty of ideas and inspiration for adventures.
- Written by Kevin Siembieda and Todd Yoho.
- \$17.95 or \$22.95 (probably the latter) depending on final page count – Cat. No. 703. Tentative November or December release. And more *will* follow in 2006.

## Powers Unlimited™ 3 – October

100 new super abilities, random tables and other super-stuff. 'Nuff said.

- Written by Carmen Bellaire, author of the previous **Powers Unlimited™** books in this series.
- \$13.95 – 96 pages. Cat. No. 523. October, 2005.

## The Rifter® #32 – October

The usual fun, optional source-material for numerous Palladium RPG lines, news and fiction gamers love. October always has a *horror* theme.

- \$9.95 – 128 pages, Cat. No. 132. October, 2005.

## Splicers™ Sourcebook One

One of the Great Houses of human defenders (Splicers), new organic weaponry, and adventure ideas. Final size and price yet to be determined.

## Rifts® Conversion Book 2: Pantheons of the Megaverse® is back

Due to popular demand, **Pantheons of the Megaverse®** is back after a seven year hiatus.

- 150 gods and pretenders; Aztec, Babylonian, Greek, Indian, and more.
- Demigod, Godling and Minion R.C.C.s.
- Priest O.C.C.
- Written by C.J. Carella.
- \$22.95 retail – 224 pages. Available now.

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## Rifts® Ultimate Edition

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### – Bigger, Better and at the Printers

**Rifts® Ultimate Edition** went to the printers at the end of June.

- The book topped out at 376 pages!
- The price remains unchanged at \$33.95 retail.
- August 15, 2005, is the day it will ship to distributors and should be in stores by the following week (in some cases, possibly sooner).

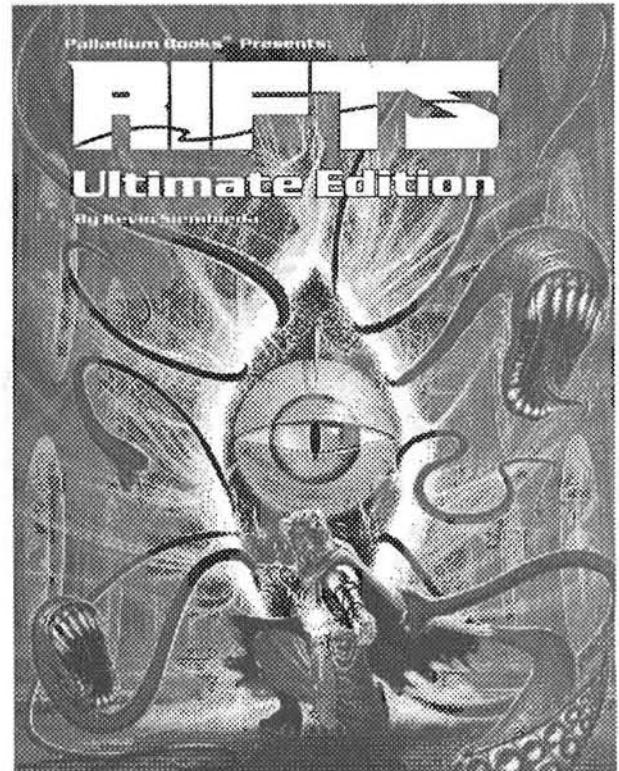
### Changes and Additions:

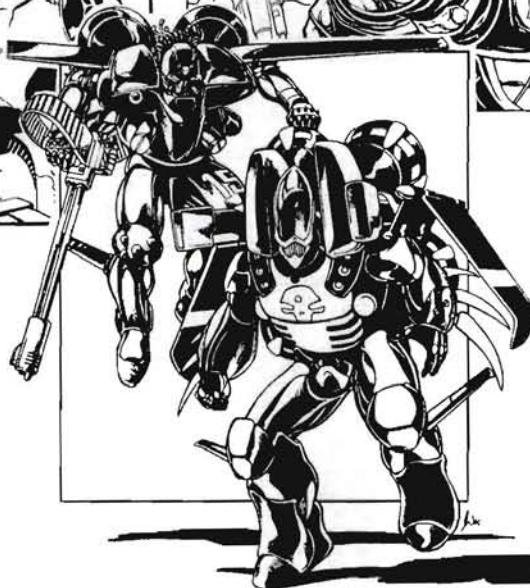
- EVERYTHING (okay, 95% of everything) has been rewritten, updated, and reorganized. I think most of you will love the additions.
- Dog Boys can select the Boxing skill.
- The number of attacks per melee round has been defined.
- The difference between “supernatural being” and “creature of magic” has been defined (along with a number of other things).
- The layout has been redone with rules and skills in the back of the book.
- There is more world information, background data and orientation via Erin Tarn.
- Missiles, grenades and ammo have prices.

- Missile types are described and so are general types of M.D. weapons (lasers, ion blasters, etc.). Unfortunately, this data is spread out a bit, in two or three locations (CS weapons, How to Survive Mega-Damage Attacks and Long-Range Combat).
- Techno-Wizard device construction rules.
- Skill clarifications (Field Armorer rules for souping up vehicles and such).
- Rule clarifications.
- Weapon & Combat clarifications (BTS-2 approach).
- Some magic spell clarifications.
- Penalties for “low attributes.”
- Skill Penalties.
- Rules for surviving M.D.C. damage.
- Crash damage.
- Expanded, Rifts-specific Insanity Tables (100 phobias).
- How to use the Rifts® time-line.
- How to get started.
- Rifts® supplement reference guide.
- Designer notes.
- And more.

### New O.C.C.s:

- Merc Soldier O.C.C. (there was never a military O.C.C. in the original book, players had to adapt Coalition O.C.C.s to play a military O.C.C., which they can still do, but now there are also an official Merc O.C.C. and Robot Pilot O.C.C.s).
- Glitter Boy O.C.C. redefined and updated.
- Cyber-Knight as per Book Four in the Siege on Tolkeen™ series.
- Robot Pilot O.C.C. (separate from the Glitter Boy).





Armored Division



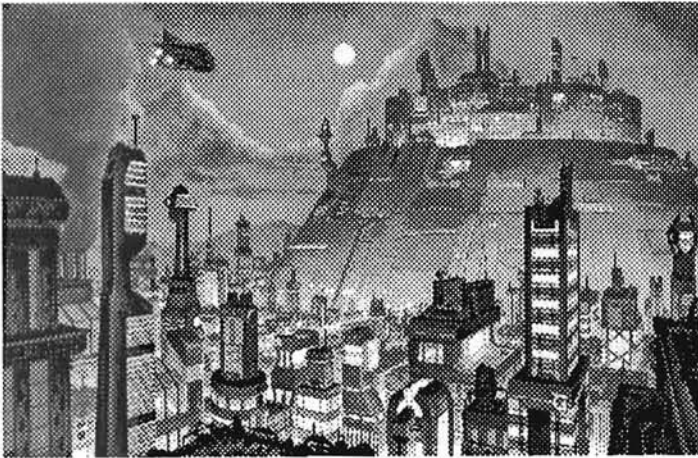
Cyborg



Engineer

# Rifts® Ultimate Edition

- CS O.C.C.s and the Coalition States fleshed out a bit.
- Elemental Fusionist O.C.C. – sort of the wild man of Warlocks, but different than the traditional Warlock. I think you’ll like this interesting take on the character – a character born in the Nokia, Rifts® Promise of Power videogame and transplanted into the RPG.
- Ley Line Rifter (a specialty spin-off of the Line Walker).
- New species of Dragons and the Hatchling O.C.C. better defined.
- More oomph for the Rogue Scholar, Rogue Scientist, Body Fixer, Wilderness Scout, and other Adventurer O.C.C.s (special skills and bonuses).
- More info and updates on Dog Boys.
- And all kinds of little tweaks and improvements.



### The Artwork:

The artwork is a blend of old and new. Not just some of the artwork from the original edition, but a selection of “choice artwork” from many different Rifts® titles. Artwork that is either evocative or a definitive or favorite depiction of that character or whatever. Before Palladium’s critics start screaming and suggesting that reprint of artwork was used to save money, please note: 1) Palladium pays the same price for “reprinted” black and white artwork as it does for new, original artwork, so there is no cost advantage to reprints, and 2) this was a conscious decision.

My approach to redesigning Rifts® was to rekindle a love affair. I want long-time Rifts® players and gamers who once played to pick up the **Ultimate Edition** and see familiar and favorite images. I want them to smile and think to themselves, “Rifts, Baby, you’re looking better than ever. I forgot how fun and exciting you could be. Let’s get together and make some new adventures.” At the same time, new gamers should find the artwork dynamic and enticing. When they see the artwork again, in a World Book or sourcebook, it will be their turn to see a familiar and welcomed face.

Don’t get me wrong, there is plenty of new art and I also added a lot of color. One of the things I thought would be cool was to reprint a bunch of the color artwork from the short-lived **Rifts® CCG**. The Rifts® CCG was very fun to play and looked great. Unfortunately, the company that produced the card game went out of business before the first booster set hit store shelves. I always thought that was a shame, and saw **Rifts® Ultimate Edition** as an opportunity to finally (something like five years

later) showcase the work of these talented artists. In fact, **Ultimate Edition** presents something in the neighborhood of 80 color images in 24 pages of color; 75 or so from the CCG.

- \$33.95 – 376 final page count!
- Cat. No. 800HC (replaces the original current softbound edition).
- In stores everywhere by August 26, 2005.

## Rifts® *Ultimate Gold* – Signed Limited Edition

There will also be a limited edition, signed and numbered by Kevin Siembieda, the editors and perhaps a few artists, for the **Rifts® Ultimate Edition**.

- Limited to 1500 copies; signed and numbered.
- Leatherette cover with two-color foil stamping.
- “Tip in sheet” with a small, color illustration by John Zeleznik and it will be signed by me (Kevin Siembieda), Editors Alex Marciniszyn and Wayne Smith, other Palladium staffers like Julius Rosenstein (contributing writer, proofreader and G.M.), Henry Siembieda (yep, my Dad, the Palladium warehouse guy), and, if we can swing it, some of the other crew and contributors like Carmen Bellaire, Carl Gleba, Apollo Okamura, Mike Wilson, etc.

To make things even a bit more wild and fun, I hope to have John Zeleznik and Scott Johnson sign the first 300 or so copies and then have some of the other artists and contributors sign other number runs. Of course, you can have other contributors add their signatures to the book by visiting conventions for years to come.

- \$70.00 (+\$6.00 for shipping and handling in the U.S.), available on a first come, first served basis. The collector’s gold edition of the original **Rifts® RPG** sold out in a matter of weeks and is currently selling on the collector’s market for \$300 and up. That price is likely to skyrocket as **Rifts®** expands into the mass market with videogames, movies and more. Thus, the **Rifts® Ultimate Edition** seems destined to be an *instant collector’s item*, making the \$70 price tag a bargain.
- Cat. No. 8000HC will be available only at Gen Con and via mail order directly from Palladium Books. Get ‘em while you can.
- Available August 12, 2005, but we are taking advanced orders right now! Debuts to the public at Gen Con Indy.
- **Note:** To make sure **Rifts® Ultimate Gold** is available to everyone, we have increased the press run and worked with distributors to enable select stores to get one or two copies of the Gold Edition (about 400 total copies, worldwide). Ask your store about it today.



## Coming Soon for Rifts®

### Rifts® Merc Adventure Sourcebook™

A fun companion to the other recent merc books (**Rifts® MercTown** and **Rifts® Merc Ops**). It offers a few new character classes, some background data and adventure outlines.

- A half dozen new “optional” merc O.C.C.s.
- Devil Rider Psi-Stalker Clan.
- A dozen adventure outlines and merc boot camp.
- Written by Pat Nowak and Kevin Siembieda.
- \$10.95 – 64 pages, Cat. No. 867. September, 2005.

### Rifts® Adventures in Dinosaur Swamp™

More dinosaurs, only stranger and more dangerous than you can imagine. More world information and adventure ideas.

- Spell casting dinosaurs and other dangers.
- New R.C.C.s, Native Americans, weapons and equipment.
- The Ocmulgee Mound, adventure ideas and more.
- Written by Todd Yoho and Kevin Siembieda.
- \$17.95 – 160 pages. Cat. No. 866. September, 2005.

### Rifts® World Book: Arzno™

Mercs and vampires clash. The city-state of Arzno (located in Arizona) is a little too close to the Mexican border and they find themselves pitted against vampire incursions from the south. Thankfully, this mercenary outpost town is equipped to handle the situation – or are they?

- Written by Jason Richards with additional material by Kevin Siembieda.
- \$17.95 retail – 160 pages. Tentatively scheduled for a Fall release.

## Other Rifts® Books in development

These are probably all 2006 releases.

**Rifts® Sourcebook One Revised and Expanded** – More Archie Three, D-Bees, Monsters, a new, epic adventure, and cool stuff. By Kevin Siembieda, probably 160 pages.

**Rifts® City of Lazlo™** – Yes, the magical city and home of Erin Tarn. By Carmen Bellaire and Siembieda.

**Rifts® China 3 (and 4!!!!)?** Maybe. Eric Wujcik insists he’s going to wrap up the China Magic part of the series by year’s end. (Let’s be optimistic and hope so.) Only he’s got sooooo much material it may actually require two books to present it all. Hey, if it’s as epic as it sounds, this will be a welcomed turn of events. Erick’s a busy guy in China, so let’s hope he really does finish this long-awaited book (or two) over the next 4-6 months.

**Rifts® Madhaven™ (Manhattan)**. No promises, but a pair of first time freelancers are working on it. Sounds intriguing, but can they write?

**Rifts® Chaos Earth™: NEMA™ Mission Book One.**



# Rooms with a Skew

## Optional Material for Heroes Unlimited™

By K.G. Carlson

*Black Tiger prowled cautiously through the shadows of the night. A single street lamp cast the forlorn playground equipment in stark relief, a dimly glowing island in a sea of darkness. He'd traced Glider's comm signal to this deserted schoolyard.*

*Fear clutched his stomach in memory of the horrified scream that had been cut off abruptly. Black Tiger searched desperately through the shadows, yet fearing what his hunt might yield.*

*He froze at a strange sound; skritch-skritch-skritch. A moment ago he'd have sworn that he was alone in the dark, but as he spun towards the sound he saw a little girl in a dark blue dress kneeling on the pavement within the puddle of light cast by the street lamp.*

*Black Tiger frowned at the sight. The little blonde-haired girl couldn't be a day over five years old, and yet here she was outside playing at a few minutes to midnight. Her long tresses were tied into ponytails by bright red ribbons, and she seemed quite intent on an artistic project she was tracing with sidewalk chalk.*

*Although eager to find his missing teammate, Black Tiger could not in good conscience leave this child unattended. The little girl seemed not to notice his approach, biting her lower lip in concentration as she hurriedly sketched her design onto the pavement.*

*She finally looked up when his shadow fell across her pattern. Bright blue eyes twinkled, and a childish giggle revealed a gap-toothed grin. "You wear funny clothes," she said.*

*Black Tiger glanced self-consciously down at his spandex costume. Shaking his head, he reminded himself not to get sidetracked by the wandering attentions of the child. Frustrated by the evening's events, he struggled for a moment to organize his thoughts. What to address first: his missing teammate, or getting this child home to her parents?*

*The little girl made the choice for him. "Are you looking for the pretty lady who wears funny clothes like yours?"*

*Black Tiger's eyes widened in surprise. "Have you seen her?" he asked anxiously.*

*A subtle change came over the child then, and Black Tiger sensed that something was not quite right. With eyes that seemed suddenly very old and a smile full of malice, the little*

blonde-haired girl's voice dripped with menace. "I certainly have. She and all your other friends are guests at my playhouse. Would you like to join them?"

Suddenly fearful, Black Tiger glanced quickly around. It was then he noticed the little girl's artwork on the pavement. Strange runes etched in chalk, around a circle. A circle that he happened to be standing in...

In **Villains Unlimited™** we are introduced to the *Seven Dread Micro Wizards of Chaos*, those miniature masters of murder and mayhem known as the Terlin. That wondrous tome tells us all about the powers and abilities of these pint-sized terrors, and it briefly describes their other-dimensional playhouse where they reign supreme.

According to the text, the Terlin's playhouse contains one hundred rooms. Some are portals to other worlds; a familiar concept to any Palladium gamer's experience, no doubt. But what horrors are to be found in those other chambers? Welcome to a twisted tour of the otherworldly playhouse of the Micro Wizards that I like to call *Rooms with a Skew*.

The rooms presented below are not doorways to another realm, but pocket dimensions that are part of the playhouse and thus subject to the whims of the Terlin. Only greater supernatural beings, such as gods or elder adult dragons, possess the power to resist the restrictions that these miniature realities impose. All others are subject to the altered rules of reality contained within each room.

All doorways appear identical from the outside, giving no clues as to what lies beyond. The location of each room may also move about within the playhouse corridors, foiling any attempts by the player characters to successfully navigate the manor house.

## The Grass Is Always Greener

Players opening this door are struck by a wave of warm, humid air. Hazy sunlight streams in through foggy glass panes overhead. A tangle of overgrown plant life spills out onto the multiple pathways that lead into what appears to be a large greenhouse, 30 feet (9.1 m) wide and 60 feet (18.3 m) long. The gravel covered walkways meander through this miniature jungle and converge on another door on the far side of the room.

Amid the tangle of harmless plant life, there are three types of vegetation that may prove deadly to any sightseers. Scattered throughout the greenhouse are *Blood Thorn bushes* and *Nightmare Blossoms*, and in the center (to which all paths lead) is the carnivorous *Venus Man Trap*.

When they are not busy causing havoc and tormenting the innocent, the Terlin like to take extra-dimensional field trips to find new "friends" to keep their playhouse staffed. On one such excursion, they discovered a lush, tropical world where plants are the dominant life form. Selecting three prized species, they quickly constructed a special room in the manor just for them.



### Blood Thorn Bush

The Blood Thorn Bush appears to be a tangled mass of ordinary, Earth variety brambles. However, any animal life forms that pass within 5 feet (1.5 m) will discover that this vegetation draws its sustenance from the blood of the living, as the thorny branches lash out at them! Although it is alive as any plant, the Blood Thorn bush is not a sentient creature. Once attached, the thorns will draw enough blood to sustain itself for a few days, the equivalent of about 20 Hit Points/S.D.C. The real danger lies in several of these plants trying to feed at the same time.

**Size:** Main body 3 to 5 feet (1-1.5 m), branches may lash out to a distance of 5 feet (1.5 m).

**S.D.C.:** 2D10+20

**A.R.:** 10

**Horror Factor:** 8 when attacking.

**Attacks per Melee:** Three.

**Damage:** 1D6+5 whip with branch, 1D4+2 blood drain. Only blood drain damage counts towards the 20 points of required sustenance. The plant has negligible strength, and characters can remove one of the branches per action, taking 2 points of damage in the process.

**Bonuses:** +5 on initiative, +8 to strike.

**Natural Abilities:** Sense prey (animal life forms) within 60 feet (18.3 m), half damage from blunt weapons (including fists), immune to poisons and toxins except for those specifically against plants, regenerate damage 1D8 points per day.

**Vulnerabilities:** Double damage from fire and cold.

**Speed:** None. Cannot uproot self and move.

**Life Span:** With proper feeding, a Blood Thorn bush can live for 800-1000 years.

## Nightmare Blossoms

The Nightmare Blossom is composed of a tightly coiled bloom that is a deep shade of purple growing atop a dark green stem, to a height of nearly 2 feet (0.6 m). It typically grows in clusters of 7-12 flowers. It can sense sentient creatures at a range of 20 feet (6.1 m), and observant characters may actually note the flowers pivot to track their movement.

Any sentient being approaching within 10 feet (3 m) of the Nightmare Blossom will see the flower petals explode outward as it releases a spray of spores (15 foot/4.6 m range, 3 foot/1.5 m radius of effect). Characters who do not make a saving throw of 16 vs Poison will fall into a coma lasting 1D8+2 hours! Even those who do save will feel very drowsy, reducing their attacks per melee and bonuses by half for 1D6x10 minutes. Only characters who are immune to poison/toxins or who don't breathe are safe from this deadly flower.

Characters who succumb to the coma of the Nightmare Blossom's spore attack will be wracked with dark dreams for the entire duration. Upon waking, they will be so fatigued from their mental torment that they have a -5 penalty to initiative, -2 attacks per melee and no combat bonuses! The nightmares and the associated penalties will persist until after the character sleeps for at least 8 hours and then makes a saving throw vs Insanity at 18.

Those affected by the Blossom's spores provide the means of its continuity. 2D8+5 days after suffering the ill effects of the Nightmare Blossom, the character's skin will become very dry and itchy. The flakes of dead skin contain the tiny seeds of the Nightmare Blossom! These plants require the normal stimuli of sunlight, soil and water to grow, so only a small number of new Blossoms will sprout from the leavings of each infected character. Unfortunately, those that do grow (2D6 clusters, 1D6+6 flowers per bunch) are likely close to the characters' homes.

Should a group of Nightmare Blossoms be attacked with ranged weapons, the spores will be released in a cloud instead of a directed spray. The spore cloud will be 5 feet (1.5 m) in diameter per Blossom destroyed, and will take an entire melee round (15 seconds) per Blossom to dissipate.

**Size:** 1 to 2 feet (0.3 to 0.6 m) high.

**S.D.C.:** 2D4

**A.R.:** None, but characters are -5 to strike because of the size of the plant.

**Horror Factor:** 18, but only after it attacks.

**Attacks per Melee:** One per day.

**Damage:** Deadly spray requiring saving throw vs Poison at 16. Failed save results in coma for 1D8+2 hours, successful save means bonuses and attacks per melee reduced by half for 1D6x10 minutes.

Coma victims have no bonuses, -2 attacks and -5 to initiative until sleeping 8 hours and making a saving throw vs Insanity at 18.

**Bonuses:** +10 to strike.

**Natural Abilities:** Sense prey (sentient life forms) within 20 feet (6.1 m), immune to poisons and toxins except for those specifically against plants, regenerate damage 2 points per day.

**Vulnerabilities:** Double damage from fire and cold.

**Speed:** None. Cannot uproot self and move.

**Life Span:** 2-5 years.

## Venus Man Trap

Unlike the other perilous plant life found in the greenhouse room, the **Venus Man Trap** is a fully sentient being that thoroughly enjoys its malevolent habits.

This particular species of carnivorous flora was created by a vengeful goddess. Aphrodite, Greek Goddess of Love, dallied frequently with any willing (and some not) male, god and mortal she liked. Having discovered one of her flesh-and-blood paramours in the arms of another, she used her deific powers to craft her vengeance. Having created her means of revenge, she scattered seedlings of the deadly man-eating plant across the Mediterranean basin.

Aphrodite revealed her creation to the next mortal lover she took, a Roman proconsul. Thus it came to be that the Man Trap plant was known by her Roman appellation, Venus. When she tired of him, the capricious goddess fed him to her creation, giving him a firsthand experience.

After several decades, Zeus took her to task for the bane she'd inflicted on the mortals. Chastised but not regretful, Aphrodite gathered up the Man Traps and deposited them on a world dominated by plants, where they flourished. It was there that the



creatures were discovered by the Terlin. While they kept only one as a “pet” in the greenhouse, it is entirely likely that they have transplanted the vicious flora to other worlds.

The only sentient animal life that is safe from this voracious predator are average and unattractive females. For one thing, the creature devours any males who come within its grasp. In addition, Aphrodite was ever jealous of beautiful women, regarding them as competition, so any female with a P.B. of 18 or higher may find herself as a servant of the intelligent plant, usually as bait! The plant can sustain up to three slaves via its own nutrients.

If the *Venus Man Trap* has any female servitors, it will use them to lure the men within reach of its thick, tentacle-like vines. The hapless males will then be eaten at the soonest opportunity. The mouth area of the carnivorous plant can only hold two human sized meals at a time, so the others will be entangled until they can escape or the plant digests its current meal, which typically takes a day.

Females of low Physical Beauty will be ignored unless they attack the plant. Should any woman with a Physical Beauty score of 18 or higher approach, she will hear the plant speaking to her telepathically. It offers her immortality in exchange for serving the Man Trap. If she accepts, the vines will part to reveal a patch of thorns at its base, approximately 1 foot (0.3 m) in length. The female cohort will be commanded to sit with her back to the plant. Should she do so, a thorn will pierce her spine. The bonding is complete after 1 hour, and forever more the woman is bound to the plant, unable to go more than 100 feet (30.5 m) away. As long as the plant survives, it will keep its servitors alive as well. When there is no food at hand, the female servants of the Venus Man Trap are found protected within its coil of vines, receiving sustenance through the thorn that sealed their bargain.

Should any of the females refuse this bargain, the Venus Man Trap will try to destroy them, however it will NOT eat them.

Even if the Man Trap has no living servitors, it can use its power of Control Others to secure aid or simply lure prey in. It can also use Control Plants to enlist the help of nearby “lesser” flora.

The plant is composed of two clamshell-shaped leaves that form the “mouth” of the creature, approximately 10 feet (3 m) in diameter. Directly below is a thick, short trunk that is the main body of the sentient plant, 5 feet (1.5 m) high and 3 feet (1 m) thick. A dozen thick vines are coiled about the main trunk, about the thickness of an adult human’s arm. When attacking, these vines reach an impressive 30 feet (9.1 m)!

The life essence of this supernatural monster is contained in the trunk and roots, represented by the Hit Points. Any attacks targeting areas of the plant other than the main body will not do Hit Point damage, regardless of the amount of damage dealt. It’s possible for the player characters to think the Man Trap destroyed if they eliminate the S.D.C. of the mouth and vines, but if any life remains to the plant it will regrow its destroyed parts in a few weeks!

**Alignment:** Diabolic.

**Attributes:** I.Q. 2D6, M.E. 1D6, M.A. 1D6, P.S. 3D6+10 (supernatural), P.P. 4D6, P.E. not applicable, Speed none, rooted in place.

**Size:** Main body and mouth, 10 feet (3 m), tentacles 30 feet (9.1 m).

**Weight:** 1.5 tons.

**Hit Points:** 1D4x10+60

**S.D.C.:** Main body 100, mouth 150, vines 50 each (12 total).

**P.P.E.:** 2D4x10

**A.R.:** 15

**Average Life Span:** Immortal! The creature feeds for pleasure, not sustenance. Only completely eliminating the Hit Points of the main body will destroy this flesh-eater.

**Disposition:** Carnivorous plant of supernatural origin.

**Natural Abilities:** Regenerate 1D4x10 S.D.C./Hit Points every day. Regrow lost vines in 1-3 days. Grow a new mouth in 1-2 weeks.

**Power Category:** Super abilities.

**Major Super Abilities:** Control Others and Control Plants.

**Minor Super Abilities:** Energy Resistance.

**Attacks per Melee:** Ten! And maintaining a hold on creatures it has entangled in its vines or held in its mouth does not use up attacks.

**Bonuses:** +6 to strike, +4 to parry, +8 to entangle.

**Damage:** Vine slap 3D6 plus P.S., vine crush/squeeze 1D4 plus P.S. Victims in the Man Trap’s “jaws” must make a saving throw vs Poison of 12 each round or be paralyzed by the digestive enzymes, and the mouth can deliver 2D4+10 damage by crush/squeeze.

## Open Up and Say Aaargh!!!

The malicious Terlin love to play doctor, and so their torture chamber is decorated to resemble an emergency room. The operating table comes complete with a system of restraints that require a Supernatural P.S. of 45 or greater to break. Nearby tables and racks contain all manner of hooks, needles, clamps, and saws guaranteed to have the patient in stitches while entertaining the Terlin. Various rows of tubes contain innumerable poisons and acids to add to the fun.

One wall of the surgical chamber is made of glass, and beyond it is an observation room. From inside either chamber, it would appear that the doors leading to the hall are side by side. Should any heroes arrive in the observation room to find a comrade on the table, they will be disappointed to find that the next door in the hall does not lead to the operating room.

Normally, the structure of the playhouse is indestructible, but the Micro Wizards have altered this glass to give a false sense of hope. A strike inflicting 100 S.D.C. of damage will cause fractures to appear in the window. The characters will note that the glass immediately begins to seal. A second strike of at least 100 S.D.C. by the same character will break through the glass, provided it is delivered in the same round. More than one character may attempt to break the window, but each tallies his damage separately. Should a player character manage to cause over 200 points of damage with a single attack, the glass will break from

a single blow. Once the glass is shattered, anyone with actions remaining may cross the opening, but at the end of the melee round, the window is completely reformed.

Any Terlin playing doctor will likely flee the operating room should his victim's rescuers break through the window. No need for a final confrontation here, with so many allies to be found elsewhere in the house.

## Walk the Plank!

There are two doors into this room. One opens to a large room, thirty feet (9.1 m) wide and forty feet (12.2 m) long, revealing a blue-green carpet that covers the room and a wooden play set resembling a miniature pirate ship against the left wall. This door does not open from inside the room, only from the hallway. The other opens onto the deck of the "ship," which places it about five feet (1.5 m) above the floor of this room. This door opens and closes freely, unless locked from the inside. Any character on the deck of the pirate ship can easily unlock this door.

The pirate ship is eight feet (2.4 m) wide and twenty feet (6.1 m) long. It contains a small captain's cabin towards the rear of the ship, behind which is mounted the helm. A small opening near the center of the deck contains a ladder that would allow child-sized beings to scurry below decks. Fake rigging is mounted to the undersized masts.

Any Terlin found here will be dressed as pirates, wielding what appear to be cheap, plastic, pirate-style cutlasses that are, in fact, magical swords, dealing 2D4 (plus the Terlin's Supernatural P.S.) damage. Should any player characters (or beloved NPCs) be found here, the Micro Wizards are likely to be caught in the act of making them walk the plank.

The Micro Wizards have had their fun ruined by spoilsport super heroes before, and so they altered the laws of reality in this room to negate any flying powers.

A fall of five feet will do no damage; unfortunately, the carpet behaves like water. Any characters setting foot on the carpet will immediately plunge downward as if they had been cast into the ocean. Hopefully, they can swim. This will aid them when the sharks come up to feed. A large, grey dorsal fin plowing through the carpet is all the warning they'll get.

## Great White Shark

(*Monsters and Animals*, 2<sup>nd</sup> Edition, pages 192-193.)

**Size:** 18 to 25 feet (5.4 to 7.6 m).

**Attributes of Note:** P.S. 2D6+30, P.P. 1D6+16, P.E. 2D6+20.

**Weight:** 1-2 tons.

**A.R.:** 8

**Horror Factor:** 14

**Hit Points and S.D.C. Combined:** 1D4x100

**Attacks per Melee:** Three.

**Damage:** Nip does 2D6 points of damage, full strength bite 6D6, slashing tail 2D6, head butt 1D6 and body ram 2D6.

**Bonuses (in addition to attributes):** +3 on initiative, +4 to strike, +2 to dodge, +10 to save vs Horror Factor, +3 to save vs poison and disease.

**Natural Abilities:** Swim 100%, nightvision 3000 feet (914 m), locate moving objects in water by keen hearing 90% up to 3000 feet (914 m), sense all movement within 60 feet (18.3 m), sense a few drops of blood in the water up to 3000 feet (914 m), and a gallon (3.8 liters) or more from 2 miles (3.2 km) away!

**Speed:** 16, dive at double speed, stop on a dime, make tight turns in 15 feet (4.6 m).

**Average Life Span:** 80-150 years.

## Collect 'Em All!

This room obviously belongs to a little girl; decorated in shades of pink, with stuffed animals, toy ponies, wind-up ballerinas and a rather ornate dollhouse. The size of the room will depend greatly on which door you entered. One of the hallway doors will lead to a normal looking little girl's room, the other will shrink any interlopers down to four and a half inches (11.4 cm) tall! Characters passing through the shrinking door will appear inside the dollhouse. They may be a little bit confused at the appearance of the rooms' fixtures and furnishings, at least until they realize the changes in themselves.

Those reduced in size will also find their bodies now made of plastic, with swivel points replacing their joints. They've been turned into action figures! Reduce all physical attributes, speed, Hit Points, S.D.C. and damage, as well as lifting and leaping multipliers, to 1/10th normal value. Any powers that alter the consistency of the basic form, such as Stretching (Elasticity) or Enlarge Body Parts, no longer work. Any shapeshifters are limited to one or two alternate forms, and their action figure body is anatomically incorrect due to the multi-purpose body panels used to portray their altered appearance.

The action figure transformation does bestow a few benefits. It provides a Natural A.R. of 14, and a +5 saving throw vs pain due to the dulled feelings of their new plastic bodies. Increase prowling by 50% (up to 98%).

The only way to reverse the transformation is to exit the front door of the dollhouse from the inside. Otherwise, the unfortunate living toys are stuck in that form. With any luck, they will figure this out before any of the female Terlin scoop them up to play in another room of the house.

Another problem that will be of little concern to normal sized characters in the room is that pesky stray cat...

## "Giant" House Cat

(*Monsters and Animals*, 2<sup>nd</sup> Edition, page 217.)

**Note:** If modifying the player characters down by 1/10th is too much work, you could always multiply the cat's statistics up by a factor of 10. The domestic cat is presented below with his normal statistics.

**Size:** Body: 1 1/4 feet (0.35 m), plus tail: 10 inches (0.3 m).

**Weight:** 6 pounds (2.7 kg).

**Hit Points:** 2D6

**S.D.C.:** 2D6

**Attacks per Melee:** Two.

**Damage:** Claws do 1D4 points of damage; bite does 2 points of damage.

**Bonuses:** +2 on initiative, +3 to strike, +2 to parry, +3 to dodge, +1 to save vs Horror Factor.

**Natural Abilities:** Keen vision and sense of smell, nightvision 40 feet (12.2 m), climb 70%, prowl 70%, swim 40%, can leap 5 feet (1.5 m) high and 6 feet (1.8 m) long.

**Speed:** 16, with bursts of speed up to 22 for 1D4 minutes.

**Average Life Span:** 8-14 years.

## Into the Void

This nondescript door opens into a small, 8 foot (2.4 m) square room with an identical door on the opposite wall. No feat of strength will budge this inner portal until the door to the corridor is closed. When the inner door opens, any characters in the foyer will be swept into a starry void!

It appears to be the depths of space that the characters tumble into, but after a few panicky moments they will discover that they can in fact breathe and the temperature, while chilly, is non-lethal at 50 degrees F (10 C).

Occasionally, in the distance, the characters can see doorways drifting through the blackness. Unless they have some form of flight power or are really talented with a lasso, they may be drifting for quite some time. Any of these doors open back into the playhouse proper. Exits do not have the "airlock" chamber; if this causes concern among the players, let paranoia reign.

Not wanting the fliers to miss out on the fun, the Micro Wizards have stocked the void with several nasty critters. The Vacuum Ghouls may be found drifting through the abyss or clinging to one of the exit doors. The malevolent Dark Breeze Entities can move under their own power through the void.

## Vacuum Ghouls

(Within humanoid corpses; *Aliens Unlimited*<sup>™</sup>, pages 172-173.)

**Alignment:** Diabolic.

**Size:** Approximately 6 feet (1.8 meters).

**Weight:** 200 pounds (90 kg).

**Hit Points:** The energy being has 4D6.

**S.D.C.:** The animated corpse has 200 S.D.C., the energy being has none.

**Attributes:** Mental attributes and P.E. do not apply, P.S. 5D6, P.P. 1D6, P.B. 1D6, Speed 2D6.

**Average Life Span:** Animated body lasts indefinitely, the energy being lives approximately 300 years.

**P.P.E.:** 2D4x10

**Disposition:** Totally chaotic. The energy being only wants emotions and the ghoul lashes out at anything in range in a vain attempt to end its pain and to feed on the emotions of others.

**Natural Abilities:** Immune to mind control and psionics, poisons and toxins, and heat and cold because it is undead. Does not show up on thermal sensors.

**Power Category:** The energy being is psionic.

**Major Psionic Abilities:** Empathy and Empathic Transfer.

**Minor Psionic Abilities:** None.

**Attacks per Melee:** Four by the corpse, or three via psionics.

**Bonuses:** None.

**Weapons, Vehicle, Equipment:** None.

## Dark Breeze

(*Aliens Unlimited*<sup>™</sup>, pages 161-162.)

**Alignment:** Miscreant or evil.

**Attributes:** I.Q. 2D6, M.E. 3D6, M.A. 1D6, P.S. 2D6, P.P. 3D6, P.E. not applicable, Speed 4D6 – most physical attributes apply only when in a tangible state or on the Astral Plane.

**Size:** 6 to 8 feet tall (1.8 to 2.4 m).

**Weight:** None.

**Hit Points:** 1D4x10

**S.D.C.:** 1D6x10 (represented by the grey aura; double on the Astral Plane).

**P.P.E.:** 2D4x10+22

**Natural Armor:** Intangible natural state.

**Average Life Span:** Unknown; may be immortal.

**Disposition:** Predatory hunter of supernatural origin.

**Natural Abilities:** Prowl 80%.

**Power Category:** Super abilities. **Note:** super abilities and psionics are natural, and not subject to the Negate Super Abilities power.

**Major Super Abilities:** Intangibility and Bio-Ghost. The Dark Breeze can only become tangible through a great deal of effort, and only for a maximum of 10 minutes. It can become intangible at any time.

**Minor Super Abilities:** None.

**Psionic Abilities:** 4D4 I.S.P.; abilities are limited to Empathy, Mind Block, Detect Psionics, and Astral Projection (it is a creature from the Astral Plane).

**Attacks per Melee:** Three.

**Bonuses:** +2 to strike, +4 to dodge, and +8 to save vs Horror Factor.

**Weapons, Vehicle, Equipment:** None.

## Disaster Area

This small bedroom is piled high with video games, snack food wrappers, sporting equipment, collectible cards, toy trucks, and other sundry treasures that you would find in a young boy's room. And from the state of this room, it's obvious there is no mother Micro Wizard shrieking for the resident to clean up this mess.

There are no magical items to be found among the assorted piles of junk. Nor are there any traps in the room. In fact, the only danger to intruders is the Tectonic Entity that they've just disturbed!

## Tectonic Entity

(*Monsters and Animals*, 2<sup>nd</sup> Edition, pages 53-55.)

**Alignment:** Miscreant or Diabolic.

**Attributes:** Not applicable. High intelligence, crafty and cruel; equal to I.Q. 10 or 11. Physical body has a P.S. of 30 and a Speed of 12. The Entity's natural energy form is invisible and intangible and has a Seed of 30 (about 20 mph/32 kph).

**Size:** The physical body construction is typically 10-12 feet (3-3.6 m) tall, but can be as small as 1 foot (0.3 m). The energy

body is about 4 feet (1.2 m) in diameter.

**Weight:** Varies with composition of the physical construct.

**Hit Points of the Entity:** 2D4x10+20. Physical attacks do no damage, magic and psionics do full damage.

**S.D.C. and A.R. of the Physical Body:** Random collection of toys, 200 S.D.C., A.R. 10.

**P.P.E.:** 10 plus what it absorbs from others.

**Natural Abilities:** Able to compose a physical body, roughly humanoid in shape. The construct is not alive, and therefore immune to cold, poison, drugs, gases, and pain. Does not need to breathe. When the body is destroyed, the Entity cannot build or possess another for 12 hours.

**Attacks per Melee:** Three via psionics or four physical attacks when it inhabits a construct.

**Damage:** 2D6

**Bonuses:** +1 on initiative, +3 to strike, +2 to parry and dodge, +2 to save vs Magic, +1 to save vs Psionics and +10 to save vs Horror Factor.

**Magic:** None.

**Psionics:** Empathy, Mind Block, Presence Sense, See the Invisible, See Aura, Sixth Sense, and Telekinesis. Equal to a fourth level psychic.

**I.S.P.:** Its base I.S.P. is a mere 20 points, but it can draw on the P.P.E. of those around it, converting 1 P.P.E. to 4 I.S.P. It will use its own I.S.P. only when it has no choice.

## The Games People Play

The door to this room opens into a small vestibule, five feet by five feet (1.5 m x 1.5 m), and a much larger room opening up ahead and to the left. The floor of the room appears to have a winding path of multi-colored blocks, much like the surface of a board game.

Any character entering the foyer must roll a saving throw vs Magic at 15; those who fail move immediately to the first square, clearly marked as START. Any character willingly stepping onto the starting square gets no save, and must see the game through to the end.

The game begins when at least one person steps onto the starting square. At this time, a pair of one foot (0.3 m) square, translucent six-sided dice will appear out of thin air and tumble to the ground, indicating that character's movement. If there are no other "pieces in play," the dice will tumble again after a brief pause until that player makes it to the end of the game, or dies trying.

Characters traversing the "game trail" go in the order that they entered the game. If more than one character arrives in the starting position in the same round, a single six-sided die will roll initiative for each of them, going in order from highest to lowest and ties rerolling.

Once in play, a character may only leave his square when moving according to his dice roll. Flight powers, Intangibility and Teleport will not work in this room. Characters may stretch from their squares, but their feet remain firmly rooted until it is their turn to move. They may use ranged attacks to aid their friends, however.

There are sixty squares in the winding trail, not counting START. Track each character's movement separately. They must land precisely on the FINISH square; if their movement would take them past that point, they go nowhere and receive an electrical jolt for 3D6 damage.

Anytime characters occupy the same square (other than START), they are compelled to fight. The first one to inflict damage wins. The loser moves back two spaces.

If any character rolls doubles, an oversize deck of game cards appears, and the top card flips up. Roll 1D10 on the following chart for results:

1. 1D4+2 animated clubs appear and pummel the character for a round. **Animated club:** A.R. 8, 20 S.D.C., 3 attacks per melee, +5 to strike, 2d4 damage.

2. Volcano! Small eruption in character's square scalds him or her with pseudo-magma, 10D6.

3. Move ahead three spaces.

4. Tidal wave! Water crashes down out of nowhere, 2D6 damage.

5. Move back three spaces.

6. Mudslide! A barrage of mud drops onto the character, burying him up to his neck. 4D6 damage and lose a turn.

7. Roll again!

8. Short cut! Reduce the number of remaining squares by half.

9. Return to start.

10. Lock down! Character is shackled as per the spell **Tied with Chains** (*The Rifter*® #9 ½), with a permanent duration until the character rolls another set of doubles. Character is held in that square until free from the chains.

## There's a Monster Under My Bed!

This 30 by 30 foot (9.1 m by 9.1m) room appears to be a normal bedroom with a large, four post bed against the far wall beneath a large picture window. Moonlight shines in through the window, providing the only light. 1D6 rounds after the first character enters, the door will shut. The door, walls, and window of this room are indestructible.

The door will not open until any characters trapped in the room get into bed and sleep for eight hours. At that time the sun will appear over the horizon and the door back into the playhouse will swing open.

Getting to the bed could be problematic, for there is a hideous monster lurking beneath it. It will attempt to grab any characters approaching the bed with its tentacles, and pull them underneath to devour them in its toothy maw.

The creature's tentacles are only about ten feet (3 m) long, but it can move the bed in order to reach characters trying to rest on the floor. It will try to wait until no one is looking, and preferably, everyone is asleep, before doing this. It may use its magical or psionic abilities to speed the process. The creature is intelligent and always hungry, so if it becomes obvious that the

characters are not going to lower their guard, it moves in for the kill.

Any characters making it onto the bed are safe from the creature. If all the characters in the room are within this "safety zone," the monster will lie quiescent. When the sun is shining in the window, the monster cannot be found.

This nameless horror lives in a pocket dimension that it never leaves. At night, it opens a dimensional portal that it reaches its tentacles through and will even protrude its mouth through in order to feed. This portal must appear on a solid surface, and the creature seems to prefer the underside of beds.

Although it enjoys the taste of flesh and blood, the monster's primary diet is P.P.E. While the creature will attack with its tentacles and even bite should its prey struggle too mightily, it tries to devour them whole. It can only absorb P.P.E. from victims it has devoured.

## Lurker 'Neath the Bed

**Alignment:** Diabolic.

**Attributes:** I.Q. 2D6, M.E. 2D6, M.A. 2D6, P.S. 4D6 (Supernatural), P.P. 3D6, P.E. 3D6, Speed 2D6 – if portal is attached to moveable object, the creature can drag it.

**Size:** Unknown. Tentacles are 10 feet (3 m) in length, mouth is 3 feet (0.9 m) wide.

**Weight:** Unknown.

**Hit Points:** 2D4x10

**S.D.C.:** Main Body 1D6x10+100, tentacles 50 each (six total).

**P.P.E.:** 1D4x10+20

**Average Life Span:** Unknown; may be immortal.

**Disposition:** Predatory hunter of supernatural origin.

**Natural Abilities:** Prowl 80%, regenerate 2D10 per minute, regrow lost tentacles in a day.

**Vulnerabilities:** Takes 1D4x100 points of damage from direct sunlight. Takes double damage from any explosives hurled into its maw.

**Psionic Abilities:** 4D6 I.S.P.; abilities are limited to Empathy, Empathic Transmission and Induce Sleep.

**Magic Abilities:** Befuddle, Darkness, Fear/Horror Factor, Heavy Breathing, Paralysis: Lesser, Blind, and Trance.

**Attacks per Melee:** Five.

**Bonuses:** +5 to strike, +4 to dodge/parry, and +8 to entangle.

**Damage:** 3D6 plus P.S. tentacle whip, 1D4 plus P.S. tentacle crush/squeeze, 1D4x10 bite. The monster's gullet is heavily muscled, and once prey is delivered, it contracts to kill the victim quickly and absorb the doubled P.P.E. with a 3D6+20 damage crush/squeeze.

# Palladium Fantasy RPG<sup>®</sup>

## A Shadow from the Past

### The Quest for Castlerake

An Adventure for the Palladium Fantasy RPG<sup>®</sup>

By Edwin Emmer

### Part One

This adventure is designed for a group of 4-6 mid-level characters in the **Palladium Fantasy Role Playing Game<sup>®</sup>** setting. In the original play test, the characters were in the employ of the

Wolfen Empire, which had recently discovered the following historical record in the Uncatalogued Section of the Library of Bletherad, and were sent to find the pieces of the famous rune sword Castlerake, to use it in their coming war with the Dominion of Man. However, the Game Master should feel free to adjust this beginning to explain how the adventurers might come across the historical record. Also, anticipating how long the players might take to travel between each portion of the quest, the Game Master will need to coordinate the start of the campaign to have the party arrive at the Island of Lopan (Chapters Nine and Ten) at the beginning of the Summer months in order to participate in the Olympic Games.

**Game Master's Note:** The following adventure outlines the key encounters crucial to the overall plot. It leaves the "in-between" events to the Game Master's own development. Game Masters should feel free to make these intervals as detailed and involved as they wish, or simply jump straight from chapter to





chapter in order to further the plot without developing any side-adventures along the way. The following *Palladium Fantasy Role Playing Game*® (PFRPG) books were used in creating this adventure and, though not required, having these references would allow Game Masters to take full advantage of the various settings and creatures described in the following adventure: *Adventures on the High Seas*, *Island at the Edge of the World*, *Yin-Sloth Jungles*, *Mount Nimro*, *Library of Bletherad*, *Northern Hinterlands*, *Land of the Damned One: Chaos Lands*, and *Land of the Damned Two: Eternal Torment*. Of course, *Monsters and Animals* is always useful, and *Dragons and Gods* includes full details about the Castlerake Rune Sword.

(The author would like to thank Joe, Andy, Max, Jeremy, Benjy, and Ryland for their imagination, patience, and love of the game throughout the play-testing of this adventure.)

## Prologue: A Historian's Final Tale

Every adventurer who has ever listened long enough in a pub has heard about Castlerake, the legendary rune sword capable of shattering castle walls and winning wars. Most have heard the story of how Kortag the Conqueror used the sword to destroy an enemy's stronghold.

*"...arrows and molten lead rained down from the battlements, but Kortag the Conqueror just stood under the raised shields and seemed to gather his thoughts. Then, suddenly, with a mighty thrust, his whole body straining, he shoved the blade of Castlerake right into the stone foundations. A moment later, the whole structure, from the deepest dungeons to the highest parapet, shuddered. Then it shook, like a dog coming out of the water. And then the conqueror pulled free the sword and then ran like hell. For the whole place, every stone of it, was turned to rubble."*

*—from page 228, *Dragons and Gods*, 2<sup>nd</sup> Ed.*

While this tale is told at many a tavern, few know who Kortag the Conqueror really was. Scholars and linguists know that Kortag is a fairly common Orc name and this by itself has caused many to dismiss the entire story as myth, saying that while the rune sword Castlerake might be real (it is mentioned at least once in the *Tristine Chronicles*), that there was never a real Kortag. For after all, how could an Orc have ever wielded the most famous rune sword in history? Still, around the campfires of Orc nomads in the Old Kingdom, the name Kortag the Conqueror is famous, not only for the oft told tale of his having commanded Castlerake, but as a ruthless war chief who for one brief moment of history united a great nation of Orcs in the lowlands north of the Old Kingdom Mountains.

Rumor, myth, and campfire tales aside, Kortag did exist, and recently a transcript of a historical text has been delivered to the monks of Bletherad by unnamed persons who simply explained

that they were fulfilling the final wish of a fallen comrade. Whether that fallen comrade was indeed the author of the document, Ketheras Trelaine, is unknown, but nothing has been heard of this adventurer scholar for over a year. This transcript details the most complete account of Kortag the Conqueror's life to date:

*"As commanded by the Order of the Scroll, I, the adventurer scholar Ketheras Trelaine, now recount the tale of Kortag the Conqueror and the defeat of Vortan the Undying. It has taken many years to piece together the closest thing to the truth that one may ever hope to learn, much of it gleaned from the verbal histories of the older nomadic bands who, to this day, still ride across the lowlands and plains of the Old Kingdom. And no two tales unfolded in quite the same fashion. Still, amidst the numerous versions of what I have heard, there is a common thread of truth that I now humbly submit.*

*"It was in the 50<sup>th</sup> year of the long rule of King Belgerphon the Great of the Timiro Kingdom that events transpired in the heart of the fallen domain of the ancient Elf and Dwarf Empires that threatened the entire southern world. Few in the human dominated lands know how narrowly a great evil was cast down that might have turned all the free lands into a hell not unlike the cursed Eternal Torment in the Nameless Place beyond the Northern Mountains. Fewer still realize that it was by the hand of an Orc that this evil was banished. But strange and oftentimes unbelievable are the events that mold the future of the world.*

*"While the Western Empire reveled in its golden age of prosperity and expansion, blissfully unaware that its five centuries of glory were soon to come to an end, and while the newly declared Timiro Kingdom struggled still to maintain its holdings from threats both without and within, few cast an eye to the barbarous lands south of the Old Kingdom Mountains. Yet it was here that Vortan the Undying summoned an army of living dead to conquer and consume all of the lands under the sun. None knew from whence this ancient and evil Liche King had come, but within five years, much of the lands south of the mountains had fallen to chaos. For who could stand before an army of soulless warriors who rise again as quickly as they are cut down? And with each dark victory, the newly slain would rise to swell the ranks of their unholy master.*

*"Word of this growing evil did ultimately reach the nomadic tribes north of the mountains and, though at first, most refused to believe that such a force could exist, when refugees began to brave the mountain passes, fleeing before the evil tide, few could refuse the truth. The leaders of the various warring Orc tribes set aside their differences to deal with this coming danger. It was decided that only the strongest amongst them could hope to command the army that would stand against the Liche King. And so it was that the great Orc war chief Kortag the Conqueror rode forth to see this army of walking dead for himself.*

*"Though merciless in fighting and ruthless in his rule, Kortag was a wise and experienced war chief and quickly realized that even his own formidable army could not hope to defeat an undead army. So the great conqueror set out a call for all of his old companions from his early days of adventure to rally to his aid as they had all long before pledged to do. And, true to*

*their word, his allies of old returned to his side. Their names now forgotten, these heroes rejoined their comrade and set out upon a quest to find what Kortag believed would be the only weapon capable of defeating Vortan. The war chief felt that if it was impossible to destroy an army that could not be killed, then you could only hope to destroy the evil that commanded it. He had witnessed with his own eyes the great black fortress atop which the Liche King sat. And though it would take an army to assail such an impregnable keep, he knew of one great artifact that could cast down his enemy with ease - Castlerake.*

*"Where and how Kortag and his companions found the scattered pieces of the legendary rune sword, none could say. But a year to the day that they had set out, Kortag returned. And even as the army of skeletal warriors made ready to invade his lands north of the Old Kingdom Mountains, Kortag, with a force no more than one hundred strong, penetrated deep into the hell on earth that the lowlands to the south had become. And even as his guards fought an un-winnable battle against the endless legions of dead, Kortag and his companions reached the foundations of the keep and plunged Castlerake into the black stone.*

*"The keep trembled and fell; the stone shattered as if it were glass.*

*"For a moment, the heroes waited. Yet as the dust settled and the last broken stone came to rest, the army of the dead was no more. Bereft of the will of their evil master, the army slumped into lifelessness. Of the Liche King Vortan, nothing remained. No trace of the vile creature could be found amidst the crumbling ruins of its black keep. Though this troubled some in the party of heroes, Kortag was satisfied that the evil had been vanquished. Victorious, though at a heavy cost not only to his elite guard of warriors, but also amongst the unnamed heroes that were his closest companions of old, the war chief returned home.*

*"Though some of the other war chiefs of the northern lowlands tried to take advantage of the great conqueror's weakened forces, none stood long before the might of Castlerake. For who would wish to do battle with a war chief who wielded a weapon that could crumble your own castle?*

*"And so did the evil of Vortan come to pass from this world and Kortag the Conqueror took his place in the annals of history.*

*"So you ask now, what of the sword that can destroy castles and win wars?*

*"What became of the pieces of Castlerake, none of the collective stories could tell. That it was broken and scattered is certain, for not long after he returned to his lands, Kortag ceased his relentless quest to conquer all of the northern Old Kingdom under his banner. Some whisper that the sacrifice paid to vanquish the undead threat was too great and that Kortag left his heart on that battlefield with those of his comrades who had fallen. Others claim that a collective of war chiefs united and threatened the conqueror with open war if he did not relinquish the rune sword. Whatever the case, Kortag's moment in history was bright yet brief.*

*"Yet, your humble servant has uncovered one final piece of the puzzle, a piece I wonder even now as I write if I should simply leave off. I fear what putting these words to parchment may set into motion. Will I send others out upon a fruitless quest for glory that will claim their lives? Or will my final revelation*

plummet the nations of the world into a cataclysmic war over a single sword? I am a chronicler of history, not its judge. I seek only to illuminate the past so that others may learn from it. History already tells of the ends to which forces will go to seek this greatest of all relics. Seldom has a nation stood long once it possessed Castlerake, for few will stand idle while one's neighbor holds the key to their destruction, no matter how noble their intentions might be. Regardless, I shall report what I have discovered and only hope that history does not judge me unfairly for my own noble intentions.

"After much searching and sifting through the various tales, I did at last discover the last resting place of Kortag the Conqueror's once vast kingdom. Located on the high plains only a few days travel northeast of the Canyon of Shadows where the Dragon River pours out from the Old Kingdom Mountains, there is a village of Orcs. And not far from there, obscured within a dense cluster of old growth trees, I am told there rests the ruins of a once splendid fortress. All of my research leads me to believe that this was once the seat of Kortag's realm and that these near by Orcs, the Broken Tusk Clan, are the last descendants of the great conqueror's line of war chiefs.

"After many long nights proving my intentions and trustworthiness to their elders, they revealed to me what still I hesitate to write down. I now have no doubt that these surprisingly peaceful Orcs are indeed the descendents of Kortag's noble line.

"On the last night I was with them, their eldest chief called me into his tent. There, I met with the tribe's shaman, a spiritual figure they simply called the Seer. A torn strip of black cloth covered this Orc's eyes, leading me to believe that he was blind. He did not speak, but their chief, Keloran, explained that what they were to tell me had been a closely guarded secret of their tribe for countless generations. When I asked why they were honoring me with this knowledge, he further explained that the Seer had deemed it important to reveal it to me now.

"The Seer produced a faded and torn piece of old wool. I could tell by its frayed edges that crumbled even as he gently held it up that this fabric was many hundreds of years old, if not older. Without a word, the Orc handed it to me. Gingerly, I opened it and saw a single piece of yellowing parchment resting within. Knowing that if I touched it, it would most likely crumble to dust before my eyes, I peered at the faded writing. As I read the ancient Old Kingdom dialect, I felt my pulse quicken. Written in a delicate, flowing script was the last entry of the personal journal of Kortag the Conqueror.

"I feel the weariness of my age now more than ever as I set down my last words before I descend into the hall of my fathers. Even had I not seen the concerned look from the healer as she lied to me about my failing health, I would have known that I would soon walk this world no more. I can only hope that my sons will succeed in what I should have done long ago. Perhaps if I had had the strength to do the task before this twilight hour, the strain of rule would not have quickened my end. No matter, for the past is beyond all hope of recall and the future holds only shadows.

"Perhaps now the war chiefs who threatened for so long to conquer my lands will see that I am no longer a danger to them, for not only am I soon to die, but the thing that has almost brought us once more to the brink of war

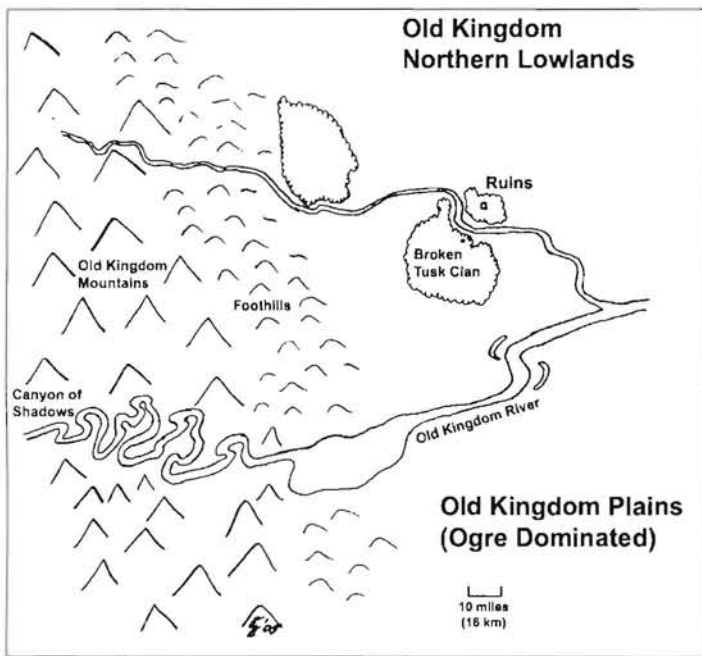
will no longer tempt them. These war chiefs, the very same who demanded that I take action to save us all from Vortan the Undying, that I assemble the Bane of Fortresses, now threaten me with war out of fear that I will use this mighty weapon against their own heaps and shatter their walls as if they were but glass. Yet, if I simply hand it to one of them, then I plunge the lands into anarchy as they continue to fight over it until the civilized become as savage and bloodthirsty as the undead we joined forces to cast down. So I send my sons to the farthest reaches of the world in hopes of scattering the five remaining pieces beyond the reach of the greedy who even now demand I surrender it to them. Perhaps I condemn my people to a brutal revenge at the hands of one of those war chiefs. Perhaps my sons will be able to defend them even without the power of the sword. It saddens my heart to know that even as I find rest, I leave behind only strife for all for whom I have ever cared. I go now to my chamber. I save only the centerpiece diamond to take to my eternal rest, until the need arises in some distant future to summon forth the power of Castlerake."

"I reread the passage so many times that I now write it down from memory. That this legendary, ruthless war chief could have felt so much compassion for his fellows was beyond all reckoning. Thanking the Seer, I gently folded the cloth once more over the words and handed it back. Bowing, I turned to leave when I felt the chief's restraining hand on my arm.

"The Seer tells me that you must take these words to the outside world, for the time draws near. Do not fear for what use will be made of them.' Then he hesitated and I could tell that there was something else he was supposed to say, but was unsure if he should. He looked at the Seer, almost imploringly, but the blind Orc simply nodded. Keloran sighed and turned back to me. 'When the time comes, trust your companions to complete the task and deliver the words to the keepers.'

"'When the time comes?' I asked, but my only answer was the sad, knowing look on the chief's face. I have spent the long hours of the night and into the morning twilight setting down these words as instructed by the Seer, pondering if, despite his assurances, I was setting the stage for more bloodshed. And as I finish and make ready to rejoin my companions whom I had asked to remain outside the village while I met with their elders, I consider Keloran's parting words and the silent exchange between him and the Seer and wonder if I shall even live to witness the unfolding of the events the shaman has clearly foreseen."

However the players come across this information, be it as originally play-tested and the party works for one of the major powers who hopes to use Castlerake in a coming war, or if they, instead, are freelance adventurers who stumble across it in some other fashion, the meaning of the words is clear. The location of at least one piece of the legendary rune sword has been revealed. And according to legend, as well as the cryptic final journal entry of Kortag the Conqueror, if one is found, it will lead the possessor to the others in succession.



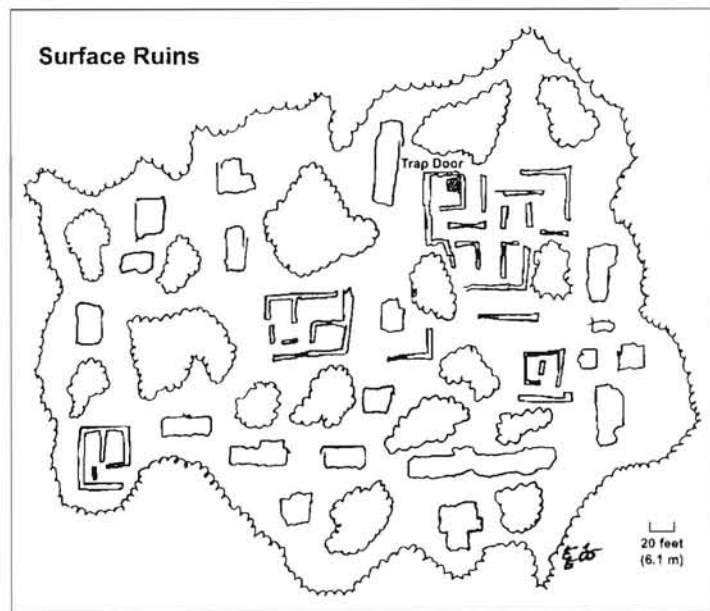
## Chapter One: The Broken Tusk Tribe

Game Masters should feel free to make the journey to the heart of the Old Kingdom as difficult or easy as they wish. Ultimately, the tribe originally visited by Ketheras Trelaine over a year ago can be found on the northern lowlands two days ride northeast of where the Old Kingdom River cuts through the Old Kingdom Mountains.

As the party approaches, young Orcs playing in the woods will rush off to warn the villagers about the strangers. As they reach the village, a dozen armed warriors will stand ready with simple axes and blunt weapons. Another five hide around the simple earthen huts wielding short bows. All are the equivalent of 1<sup>st</sup> to 3<sup>rd</sup> level Vagabonds who possess no real fighting skills but are ready to defend their village to the death. A middle-aged Orc will emerge from behind the defenders and ask what the newcomers want. If the players ask about the ruins or Kortag, the Orc (Keloran) will demand that they first prove themselves worthy to enter their hallowed grounds. Should the players decide to find the ruins on their own, they will discover that no matter how long they search, they will not be able to find it. Ultimately, they will have to do as Keloran demands.

The tests should vary depending upon each individual O.C.C. For warriors, the test should include feats of strength and bravery against the strongest members of the tribe. For rangers or thieves, they should have to prove their cunning and skill. And for magic users, priests, and psychics, a demonstration of power or resourcefulness should suffice. The players should be able to overcome the challenges, as they are all designed to give the Seer a chance to ascertain if these are the ones he has foreseen. In any event, after the contests, the players will be invited to join him in the shaman's hut. They will meet with the Seer, an old, blind, 8<sup>th</sup> level Shaman/major psychic with a gift for Clairvoyance.

The Seer will not speak, but Keloran will describe how to reach the ruins (which are an hour's ride further north). Even if this place is one that the party has already searched, they will find the forest this time and the ruins within. Keloran will be at a loss to explain how this is possible, but will insist that they will be able to find it now. If asked about the ruins, he can only explain that he has not been to them since his youth and that he knows them to be haunted. He will also warn that his people fled the ruins many generations ago when an evil settled amongst them. Why the evil did not give chase, they are uncertain, but it remains to this day, or so he believes, in the heart of the ruins. If asked why he is allowing them onto their hallowed grounds, Keloran will look to the Seer who will only nod. He will then say, "The time draws near." With nothing more to add, he wishes them farewell.



## Chapter Two: The Crypt of Kortag the Conqueror

An hour's ride north of the village, after crossing a small river issuing from the distant Old Kingdom Mountains, the party will come across a dense wood that they somehow mysteriously missed before. The woods do not register magic, though a palpable sense of unease can be felt by magic users and psychics. It will take several hours to force their way into the heart of the forest, longer if they try to bring their mounts with them, which not only are too large to easily navigate the thick tangle of old growth, but which also sense the unnatural aura hanging over the place. Should anyone attempt to fly over the trees to find their way, they will see only a dense canopy of impenetrable treetops.

By late afternoon, they will reach a crumbling wall of stone that marks the remains of the outer wall of Kortag's fortress. The entire grounds are completely overgrown and it will be dusk by the time they find the only remaining structure, the ground floor of the original keep.

Game Masters may make exploring the keep as quick or long a task as they wish, but shortly after they enter the area around the ruins, they will attract the attention of one of the ruins' current residents - the Poltergeists. There are a total of ten that inhabit the ruins. They will stick mainly to the outside and the ground floor of the keep, and will not venture into the dungeons or beyond the edge of the ruins. They will not be deliberately harmful, merely inquisitive and annoying. However, while they may cause some minor damage, their real danger lies in their ability to drain P.P.E. from magic users, which they will do to fuel their own psychic abilities. All ten will not appear at the same time, but they will use hit and run tactics and attack in small numbers to scare the players.

**Ten (10) Poltergeists:** Inhabit the surrounding grounds and surface level of the keep.

**Hit Points:** 22

**S.D.C.:** Not applicable.

**Horror Factor:** 10

**P.P.E.:** 4 (initially).

**Attributes & Special Abilities:** Invisible, intangible, fly at speed 44, immune to non-magical attacks, gases, and drugs, but vulnerable to all magic and psionic attacks.

**Attacks per Melee:** 2 (psionic only).

**Bonuses:** +2 to dodge, +10 to save versus Horror Factor. Attackers who cannot see the invisible are -8 to strike.

**Damage:** By psionics, thrown object or weapon only.

**Magic:** None.

**Psionics:** Initial I.S.P. is 10, but they can absorb 1D4 per round from others and convert it to I.S.P. at a rate of 4 I.S.P. per point of P.P.E. absorbed. Powers include: Empathic receiver (automatic, no cost), See Aura, See the Invisible, Sense Magic/P.P.E., Levitation, and Telekinesis. Equal to a 4<sup>th</sup> level psychic.

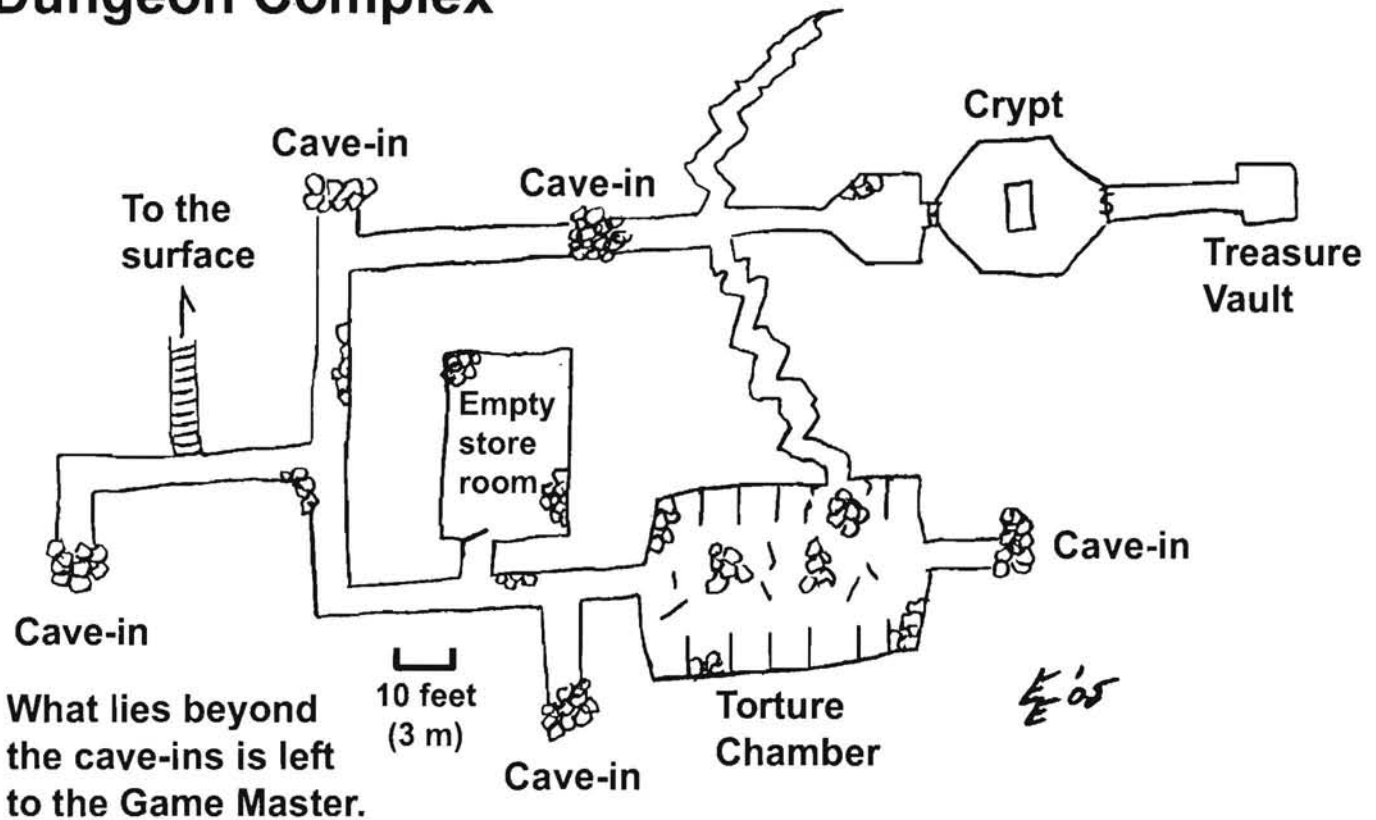
**Appearance:** To those who can see the invisible, they appear as translucent, jellyfish-shaped balls of energy with glowing tendrils hanging from the main body of the sphere.

Though there is nothing of value remaining in the ruins, at some point, the party will discover a stone trap door that leads to the dungeons below the keep. While in much better shape, as the dungeons have not been ravaged by centuries of forestation, there are still piles of broken stone rubble lying about, and the occasional ominous cascade of dust and stone from the ceiling should warn the players that the structure is not entirely sound. The layout of the dungeons is left to the Game Master, but there are three areas of interest. First, there is a section that clearly was used for the detainment and torture of prisoners. Several open cells, stone rubble, and a few bones litter the room. Players with any ability to sense the supernatural will feel a presence in the room, and those with Sixth Sense will be warned of a coming danger.

The reason the Poltergeists never venture deeper into the dungeons is that they are inhabited by a malicious Tectonic Entity. This creature will construct a body from the stone and iron bars that litter the chamber, with a few well placed skulls for ef-



# Dungeon Complex



fect, and will fight until its makeshift body is destroyed or the players are driven off.

**Tectonic Entity:** Inhabits the torture chamber of the dungeon only.

**Hit Points:** 80 (for the Entity only).

**S.D.C. (of the physical body):** 340 with an A.R. of 14 (any attack roll below 14 does no damage whatsoever).

**Horror Factor:** 14

**P.P.E.:** 0 (initially).

**Attributes:** I.Q. equivalent of 10 or 11, P.S. 30, Speed of 12.

**Natural Abilities (in its energy state):** Invisible, intangible, fly at speed 30, immune to non-magical attacks, gases, and drugs, but vulnerable to all magic and psionic attacks. It also possesses the ability to inhabit and animate a physical humanoid body constructed of materials at hand, in this case, the rubble in the dungeon. The physical body is a lifeless puppet that is immune to pain, cold, fire, gases, drugs, poison, and does not need air to breathe, though it is vulnerable to basic S.D.C. attacks. The good news is that the Entity cannot construct a new body once its first is destroyed, for 12 hours.

**Attacks per Melee:** 3 via psionics or 4 physical.

**Bonuses:** +1 on initiative, +3 to strike, +2 to parry and dodge, +2 to save versus magic, +1 to save versus psionic attack, +10 to save versus Horror Factor. Attackers who cannot see the invisible are -8 to strike the Entity outside of its body/construct.

**Damage:** 4D6+15 from its stone body.

**Magic:** None.

**Psionics:** Initial I.S.P. is 20, but they can absorb 20 I.S.P. or 5 P.P.E. from others as a psionic attack. P.P.E. is converted to I.S.P. at a rate of 4 I.S.P. per point of P.P.E. absorbed. Powers include: Empathic, Mind Block, Presence Sense, See the Invisible, See Aura, Sixth Sense, and Telekinesis. Equal to a 4<sup>th</sup> level psychic.

**Appearance:** To those who can see the invisible, the energy being appears as translucent ball of energy about 4 feet (1.2 m) in diameter. The physical body will be made of stone and iron bars and stands 12 feet tall (3.6 m).

If the players search the rubble of the torture chamber, they will find a few rusted and broken weapons, but nothing of any real value. Eventually, as they explore more of the sublevel, they should find the crypt (through a natural crevasse in the torture chamber wall that was created by an earthquake long ago), containing several recessed shelves and a single stone sarcophagus in the chamber's center. A third of the shelves hold clay urns with various names painted on them (though by now, most of the names will be faded beyond recognition). The remaining two thirds are empty. As the players enter the chamber, they will be attacked immediately by a Shedim Lesser Demon. This demon was summoned by none other than Vortan the Undying, who learned of Kortag's plan to scatter the pieces of Castlerake. Trapped within the Eternal Torment in the Land of the Damned, Vortan sent the Shedim to slay or chase off the remaining members of Kortag's line and remain to guard over the sixth piece of the rune sword (the demon cannot open the crypt to take the piece for himself). The demon is to remain in the crypt until someone with sufficient power to defeat it arrives to claim

Castlerake's centerpiece diamond. The Shedim is to put up a convincing fight until half of its Hit Points are depleted, then it is to attempt to escape and return to Vortan with intelligence on whomever is questing for the sword. The Shedim will attempt to teleport when the battle goes poorly for it. If this fails, it will try to run for it. Even if it is killed, Vortan will still know that the quest is underway, though he will not immediately be aware of who is searching for the sword.

**Gronn, Shedim Lesser Demon:** Bound to the crypt until down to ½ of its Hit Points.

**Alignment:** Aberrant.

**Attributes:** I.Q. 7, M.E. 13, M.A. 6, P.S. 23 (Supernatural), P.P. 22, P.E. 22, P.B. 9, Spd running 28 (cannot fly).

**Size:** 12 feet (3.6 m) tall; 800 pounds (360 kg).

**Natural A.R.:** 12

**Hit Points:** 45

**S.D.C.:** 70

**P.P.E.:** 30

**Horror Factor:** 14

**Attacks per Melee:** 5 physical.

**Bonuses:** +2 on initiative, +6 to strike, +5 to parry, +5 to dodge, +4 to pull punch, +4 to roll with impact, +10 to save versus Horror Factor, +5 to save versus magic, +1 on all other saving throws.

**Damage:** Hand and foot claws 5D6+8, leap kick with clawed feet 6D6+8, bite 1D6.

**Natural Abilities/Skills of Note:** Nightvision 100 feet (30.5 m), hawk-like day vision, track by scent (40%), fire and cold resistant (half damage), natural gymnast (5<sup>th</sup> level skills), leap up to 40 feet (12.2 m), running leap up to 80 feet (24.4 m), teleport (20%), dimensional teleport (19%), knows all languages, bio-regenerate 3D6 S.D.C. or Hit Points once per melee round.

**Magic:** None.

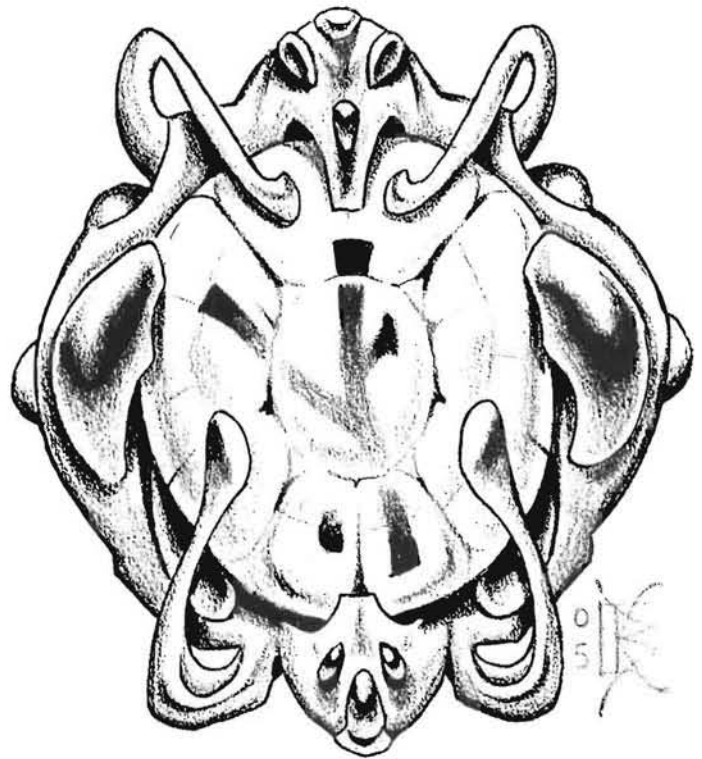
**Psionics:** None.

**Appearance:** Looks like a giant, wingless, bipedal hawk with massive, powerful clawed hands and legs.

When the demon flees or is defeated, the players will be able to open the crypt. When they do, any lights will dim and a shimmering figure will suddenly appear over the opened stone lid. The ghost is an elderly Orc dressed in ancient armor. He will look at each of the players in turn, then ask them in a voice that speaks in each character's native language what they want with Castlerake. Through Empathy, the ghost will know if they are lying, but regardless of how honest and/or noble their answers are, it will respond with the following statement:

*"Whatever you believe your reasons are for seeking the bane of kingdoms, they are false. Events unfold of which you are not yet aware, but which will seek to ensnare you. Even now, you are the unwitting pawns of an evil fate; still you may yet be that evil's undoing. Take the centerpiece gem and seek out the others. Did I not say long ago that I take it to my rest until the need arises in some distant future? That times draws near." And with that, the ghost vanishes.*

Inside the sarcophagus the players find the linen-shrouded skeleton of an Orc with a pendant hanging around its neck. This pendant is the first piece of Castlerake - the diamond centerpiece.



**Castlerake's Centerpiece Gem:** A medium-sized, faceted diamond with a single rune floating inside its crystalline depths. The gem radiates strongly of magic and contains 75 P.P.E. that can be used by a magic user. If this P.P.E. is depleted, the gem will recharge at a rate of 1 P.P.E. per day, or faster if willingly filled by a magic user or set upon a ley line or nexus (from page 229, *Dragons and Gods*).

As soon as a player picks up the gem, they will automatically feel a sensation drawing them south southeast, seemingly towards the heart of the Timiro Kingdom.

If the players make a successful Locate Secret Doors & Compartments skill roll while searching the crypt, they will discover a secret panel hidden against the far wall. The skill roll is made at +10% as centuries of settling and the occasional earthquake has caused the foundations to shift, offsetting the stone covering enough to make it easier to detect. However, these very same forces have jammed the panel in place, requiring either a combined strength of 35 to open it or over an hour of excavation (half that time if a successful Masonry or Underground Architecture skill roll is made). Down a low, narrow tunnel, the players will discover a small treasure vault. A stone at the end of the low tunnel right before the entrance to the vault is actually a trigger for a trap. Due to the confined space, a normal-sized humanoid will most likely trigger the trap (75% per passage), while larger players (Wolfen and Ogres) will trigger the trap 100% of the time. Dwarf and Gnome-sized characters will only trigger the trap 25% of the time. Troll and Giant-sized characters will be unable to fit. When the trap is triggered, a cascade of stones will collapse at the entrance to the tunnel, sealing anyone

within. This trap was designed to leave robbers trapped until they ran out of air (the air in the chamber will last several hours). However, the players should be able to dig their way out in just under that time. A successful Detect Concealment & Traps skill roll will warn the players of the trap, allowing them to carefully crawl over the trigger plate without setting it off.

The total amount of treasure is not great as most was already taken when the Orcs abandoned the keep when the Shedim arrived centuries ago. However, the players will find 6875 in Old Kingdom Gold, approximately 12,500 in various precious and semiprecious gemstones (Game Master's choice of type), and two items that register magic.

The first is a Demon Slayer Ball and Chain (3D6 damage, x2 damage to demons). The second is a simple silver bracelet with no discernable markings. At first, other than radiating magic, the bracelet will have no obvious abilities, but if a person claims it, the item will begin to communicate empathically and eventually, telepathically, with its owner, promising power and fame if it follows its advice. While it will not claim to be a rune item itself, it will not deny any assumptions made by its possessor. In truth, the bracelet is inhabited by a Diabolic Syphon Entity, who has been trapped in the treasure vault for a very long time and will use its powers to slowly, subtly manipulate its owner into causing evil.

**Syphon Entity:** Inhabits the silver bracelet found in the treasure vault.

**Hit Points:** 37 (for the Entity only).

**S.D.C.** (of the silver bracelet): 30 with an A.R. of 10 (damage to the bracelet will only destroy the Entity's current home, forcing it to inhabit another item, but will do no harm to the energy being itself).

**Horror Factor:** 10

**P.P.E.:** 6 (initially).

**Attributes:** I.Q. equivalent of 14 or 15, energy being flies at a Speed of 44.

**Natural Abilities** (in its energy state): Invisible, intangible, fly at speed 44, immune to non-magical attacks, gases, and drugs, but vulnerable to all magic and psionic attacks. It is a natural telepath (costs no I.S.P.) and possesses the ability to inhabit small, inanimate objects.

**Attacks per Melee:** 2 via psionics only.

**Bonuses:** +2 to dodge as an energy being, +2 to save versus magic, +1 to save versus psionic attack, +15 to save versus Horror Factor.

**Damage:** By psionics only.

**Magic:** None.

**Psionics:** Initial I.S.P. is 20, but they can absorb 20 I.S.P. or 5 P.P.E. from others as a psionic attack. P.P.E. is converted to I.S.P. at a rate of 4 I.S.P. per point of P.P.E. absorbed. Powers include: Telepathy (automatic, no cost), Empathy, Empathic Transmission, Mind Block, Presence Sense, See the Invisible, See Aura, Sixth Sense, Levitation, Bio-Manipulation, and Hypnotic Suggestion. Equal to a 6<sup>th</sup> level psychic.

**Appearance:** To those who can see the invisible, the energy being appears as ghostly, glowing energy snake or worm about a foot long (0.3 m) with a short trunk, small, wispy tentacles, and small, translucent insect wings.



## Chapter Three: Danger on the High Seas

Whether the journey through the Timiro Kingdom is an easy one or proves difficult is left to the Game Master to decide. At present, the Timiro Kingdom is a hotbed of slave unrest and traveling across it could be risky, with the players encountering bands of escaped slaves, warriors from Master Slayer's invading Orc and Ogre army, or cavalry patrols as the kingdom's army searches for either of the previous two groups (see *Old Ones*, PFRPG Book 2, for details). At any rate, the players will still be drawn south through the guidance of the diamond centerpiece as it leads them towards the second piece of Castlerake. Eventually, they will end up in one of the port cities or towns along the southwestern coast of the kingdom. At this point, as they stand looking across the waves towards the southern ocean, it becomes clear that their quest will take them out to sea.

They will find that the only ship making ready to sail towards the Floenry Isles and take on passengers is an Eastern Mercantile ship by the name of *Fortune's Folly*. Her captain is a 7<sup>th</sup> level Elf Mariner by the name of Captain Banax. Banax is Unprincipled and cautious, but will not ask too many questions about why the party wishes to head south. He has just dropped off a shipment of Eastern Territory artwork and picked up a load of Timiro spice to ship to Enry Island. He will transport them for 400 gold each (+250 per horse) and provide them with a private bunk and meals in his officers' mess. He will explain that



the trip should take them between two and three days with a favorable wind and fair weather, longer if the wind shifts or a storm blows up.

Captain Banax is actually a very friendly person once he feels that he can at least trust that they are not going to try to take over his ship, and during the first evening's meal, he will try to get them to tell tales of their exploits while he entertains them with his own stories. All the while, he will try to charm them into revealing something about why they wish to sail to the islands (P.B. 23, 65% charm and impress). He is actually merely curious and has no ulterior motives.

**Captain Banax** (real name is Heneris Bancs): 5<sup>th</sup> level Elf Mariner O.C.C.

**Alignment:** Unprincipled.

**Attributes:** I.Q. 15, M.E. 6, M.A. 8, P.S. 16, P.P. 21, P.E. 16, P.B. 23, Spd 11.

**Size:** 6 feet (1.8 m) tall; 150 pounds (67.5 kg).

**Natural A.R.:** N/A.

**Hit Points:** 31

**S.D.C.:** 38

**P.P.E.:** 17

**Horror Factor:** N/A.

**Attacks per Melee:** 3 physical.

**Bonuses:** +4 to strike (+6 with weapons), +5 to parry (+7 with weapons), +5 to dodge, +2 to pull punch, +4 to roll with impact.

**Damage:** Karate-style kick does 2D4+1 damage, Scimitar does 2D6+1, Knife does 1D6+1. Wears enchanted chain armor (A.R. 14, S.D.C. 44, magically lightweight).

**Natural Abilities/Skills of Note:** Nightvision 60 feet (18.3 m), Astronomy and Navigation (70%), Sailing (70%/55%), Seamanship (53%), Rope Works (55%), Swimming (70%), Identify Sea Life (53%), Castaway/Shipwreck Survival (54%), Gymnastics - Sense of Balance (50%).

**Magic:** None.

**Psionics:** Minor Psychic with the following two abilities: Telekinetic Leap and Resist Thirst. I.S.P.: 33.

**Appearance:** A handsome Elf with long, light brown hair tied back in a ponytail. He has a bright face with a constant smile and a sparkle in his pale blue eyes. Dresses in fine but not flashy clothes and always wears a wide-brimmed hat.

Halfway through the second day, a sudden, intense storm will blow up out of nowhere and overtake *Fortune's Folly* with ease. Everyone will be called to the deck to help secure the rigging and drop the sails to prevent the intense winds from tearing the sails or snapping the mast. Game Masters should have characters with Seamanship or Rope Works skills make several appropriate rolls to offer help. Those without can elect to either stay below decks or aid in getting the loose cargo below deck as soon as possible. After several melee rounds of effort, the players will be drawn to the sounds of a sailor's scream as the nearest man is suddenly swept overboard. At first the players may think it was the wind or waves, however, when another man is yanked backwards, one of the players will notice that a massive horn-covered tentacle wrapped around his body. Suddenly, the vessel will lurch as if struck below the waterline. Players will

need to attempt to maintain balance or be thrown overboard (01-50% players are tossed overboard). The tentacles continue to snatch more and more of the crew as repeated attacks cause the ship to lurch until it is obvious from the steep angle of the deck that *Fortune's Folly* is taking on water at a rapid rate. Eventually, everyone will end up in the water amidst the screams of the drowning and those being captured by the giant tentacles. A successful skill roll for Lore: Demons and Monsters or Identify Sea Life will positively identify the creature as a legendary Kraken, a massive squid-like monster capable of summoning hurricanes (as well as other Elemental Magic) and capsizing entire vessels.

Use the rules for heavy armor and lack of maneuverability for overboard players (pages 47-48, *Adventures on the High Seas*) who are unable to secure themselves to some large piece of floating wood. Heighten the tension with cries for help and dark images of people being dragged screaming underwater by the giant tentacles. It should also be noted that players will only have whatever possessions they had on them at the time that the storm began and any attempt to try to retrieve them once the Kraken begins its attacks will almost certainly result in the character drowning unless some magic/psionic precaution is taken.

Eventually, the players will feel something grasping at their legs to pull them underwater. Players may resist, but eventually the pull will become too strong. Even as the characters sink, two things will become obvious: First, they are being grabbed by hands and not giant horned tentacles; second, they will find that they are able to breathe perfectly normally after they finally give up trying to struggle. With the storm clouds raging overhead, the water is too dark to see clearly; however, the players can make out the vague forms of large silver-gray fish with large, muscular arms. Anyone who makes a successful Lore: Demons and Monsters or Identify Sea Life skill roll will be able to identify their rescuers as Kreeel-Lok. A Kreeel-Lok Water Warlock was able to place Breath Without Air on all of them (as well as half a dozen sailors) and get them to safety while the rest were killed by the Kraken.

## Chapter Four: Unexpected Allies

When the players finally surface at last, they will find that they have been guided to a small tropical island in the middle of nowhere (they are about two-thirds the distance to the Floenry Isles). They and half a dozen sailors, including Captain Banax, are seemingly stranded on the island with no supplies and no immediate means of escape. The players have seemingly been left to ponder their fate and the realization that while they may have been spared a painful but quick death in the arms of the Kraken, they will be doomed to a slower death by dehydration. Tensions should rise between the players and the survivors of the *Fortune's Folly* as the sailors and Captain Banax blame the players for the attack of the sea monster (after all, they have sailed these waters countless times before and never before encountered such a beast).

Shortly after tensions begin to rise, several Kreeel-Lok will emerge from the waves. This could also be another source of

tension at first as the sailors conclude that they are responsible for the loss of their ship instead. Players will need to convince the others that it was, in fact, the Kreeel-Lok who saved them from drowning. After they do this, the Kreeel-Lok will offer to provide the castaways with food and fresh water salvaged from the wreckage of *Fortune's Folly* until a messenger can be sent to one of the Floenry Islands to fetch a rescue (generous and forgiving Game Masters may use this as an opportunity to restore any lost items that were not in the possession of the players when they were thrown overboard). While the sailors and Captain Banax will be initially suspicious of this offer, they will soon realize that they have no alternative.

It is at this point that the player who is in possession of the first piece of Castlerake will realize that the diamond is no longer drawing them southward. Instead, the player will feel drawn westward and, unmistakably, downward, beneath the waves. While the sailors go off to the other side of the island to await their inevitable rescue (which the Kreeel-Lok explain will take about four or five days to arrive), the players will realize that they have no choice but to seek the aid of the fish-folk in exploring the deep in search of the second piece of Castlerake.

Exactly how the players decide to approach this is best left to creative role-playing. Kreeel-Lok are a simple, good-natured race who have grown to distrust surface folk because they are often hunted by pirates and fishermen. As such, they will not be willing, initially, to take the party underwater with them. If the players reveal exactly what it is that they are seeking, ironically, they will get curious stares from the Kreeel-Lok who do not understand the need for a weapon that can break stone walls (as they have none themselves). However, if the players indicate the direction they wish to explore, the Kreeel-Lok will suddenly swim away out of earshot. After an obviously heated discussion, the Kreeel-Lok return.

They explain that in that direction, there is a tribe of Kappa, strange, little crustacean-like creatures who share none of the Kreeel-Lok's hospitable tendencies. Normally, the nomadic Kreeel-Lok have had little conflict with the evil-natured Kappa, but recently, a new arrival to the Kappa tribe has managed to whip them into a frenzy that has begun to threaten not only other sea life, but also surface ships passing through the southern waters. It seems that this newcomer is some form of mystic that has the power to control all manner of aquatic life, including a Kraken that has, until recently, lived in much deeper waters.

The Kreeel-Lok agree to give the players the power to survive underwater and to guide them to the edge of the Kappa domain if they agree to "deal with" this new Kappa mystic. They believe that without him, the Kraken will wander back into deeper waters and threaten the Kreeel-Lok no more (as well as passing boats, for that matter). They also hope that the Kappa will return to just being downright mean instead of aggressively evil.

**Six (6) Kreeel-Lok:** Equivalent to 4<sup>th</sup> level Soldier O.C.C.

**Alignment:** Scrupulous and Unprincipled.

**Attributes:** I.Q. 13, M.E. 7, M.A. 13, P.S. 18, P.P. 12, P.E. 17, P.B. 4, Spd 20 (underwater).

**Size:** 7 feet (2.1 m) long; 900 pounds (405 kg).

**Natural A.R.:** 10

**Hit Points:** 50

**S.D.C.:** 32

**P.P.E.:** 11

**Horror Factor:** 15

**Attacks per Melee:** 4 physical.

**Bonuses:** +1 on initiative, +2 to strike (+4 with weapons), +3 to parry (+5 with weapons), +3 to dodge, +5 to pull punch, +2 to roll with impact, +5 to save versus Horror Factor, +1 to save versus magic, +2 to save versus poison.

**Damage:** Each carries a trident (2D6+5) and a coral knife (1D6+3). Bite does 1D6, Claws do 2D4+3, and Tail Swipe does 1D4+3 (P.S. bonuses factored in).

**Natural Abilities/Skills of Note:** Nightvision 300 feet (91 m), breathe underwater, breathe air (can be out of water for 1D4 hours before dehydration), track by scent (80%, can smell blood up to 1 mile/1.6 km away), Swimming (98%), unlimited depth tolerance.

**Magic:** None.

**Psionics:** None.

**Appearance:** Looks like a large fish with a pair of muscular arms.

Once the players agree to the Kreeel-Lok's terms (they really have no choice), they will be instructed to swim into the water. The Kreeel-Lok will explain that they are going to give them a special charm that will allow them to function underwater indefinitely as long as they do not surface, for once they do, the magic is lost until the charm is restored (see description below). When the players are deep enough, they will be told to submerge and, when they do, the Kreeel-Lok will place a small necklace with a shark's tooth dangling from it around their necks.

**Kreeel-Lok Shark Tooth Charm:** This charm looks like an ordinary shark's tooth, except that it radiates magic. When worn, the player possesses the following abilities: breathe underwater, tireless swim 90% (swim speed is equal to their running speed), perfect underwater vision (though at depths in excess of 300 feet (91 m), little sunlight penetrates and players without some form of Nightvision will find themselves in darkness), and a depth tolerance of up to 1000 feet (305 m). Furthermore, the charm allows surface folk to function normally underwater with regards to speed and movement. The duration of the magic is unlimited as long as the person wearing it remains underwater. However, once the charm is exposed to open air, it will cease to work and must be placed in water for one hour before working again. Also, while surface dwellers will be able to function perfectly well underwater, they will be unable to communicate in any fashion other than through the use of hand gestures or telepathy/empathy. Value: In coastal communities, the charm could fetch as much as 5000 gold (it would be worth much more if its powers were not negated by contact with air, severely limiting how it can be carried around on one's person).



## Chapter Five: Kappa Territory

The Kreeel-Lok agree to guide the players towards the Kappa territory and help them with any resistance they might encounter, at least until they encounter the mystic. Game Masters should feel free to add any underwater encounters they wish, letting the trip take as long or short as seems fit. Ultimately, they will reach an area where the sandy bottom is spotted with numerous sinkhole depressions (the entire area is like parts of Florida with sinkholes and submerged cave systems, only underwater). The Kreeel-Lok will try to indicate with gestures that the Kappa live in the sinkholes and connecting caverns (if a player uses the Tongues wizard spell, he or she will be able to communicate perfectly well with the Kreeel-Lok even while underwater). In this case, the Kreeel-Lok will explain that the Kappa tribe, some 50 strong, live in the tunnels and sinkholes but that the mystic seems to dwell outside of the network on the far end of the field (which, as it just so happens, is in the same direction as the second piece of Castlerake). At this time, the Kreeel-Lok will wish them luck and swim off, having agreed to meet again on the island later to await their rescue.

On their own, the players must attempt to circumvent the Kappa territory without detection. The typical patrol consists of four Kappa soldiers who scout the perimeter of the sinkhole fields in search of interlopers and Kreeel-Lok spies. If the players are clever (or lucky), they might find a network of caves that

circumvents the Kappa settlement and guides the players almost directly to the Kraken's lair.

**Four (4) Kappa of the Southern Ocean:** Equivalent to 3<sup>rd</sup> level Mercenary O.C.C.

**Alignment:** Miscreant.

**Attributes:** I.Q. 7, M.E. 9, M.A. 7, P.S. 21, P.P. 12, P.E. 11, P.B. 10, Spd 16 (160 underwater).

**Size:** 3 feet (0.9 m) tall; 50 pounds (23 kg).

**Natural A.R.:** 13

**Hit Points:** 66

**S.D.C.:** 35

**P.P.E.:** 11

**Horror Factor:** 12

**Attacks per Melee:** 2 physical.

**Bonuses:** +2 to strike with weapons only, +2 to parry (+3 with weapons), +2 to dodge, +4 to pull punch, +2 to roll with impact, +2 to save versus Horror Factor.

**Damage:** Small clawed arm inflicts 1D4+6 and large pincer inflicts 2D6+6. Each carries a jagged coral short sword that inflicts 2D4+6

**Natural Abilities/Skills of Note:** Climb (50%/40%), Nightvision 120 feet (36.5 m), day vision 40 feet (12.2 m), breathe underwater and air, Swimming (98%).

**Magic:** None.

**Psionics:** None.

**Appearance:** Looks like a cross between a crab and a scarab, with one small, clawed hand and one large pincer.

Ultimately, the person with the centerpiece diamond will be drawn towards a particularly large sinkhole some distance from the Kappa territory. As they approach, they see the rotting remains of a sunken ship. The diamond seems to indicate that the second piece of the rune sword is somewhere within the ship. However, as the players descend into the hole to explore the wreck, they are attacked by a 6<sup>th</sup> level Were-Shaman whose animal totem is fish (obviously) and reptile. The Were-Shaman will summon the Kraken which dwells in the connecting caves, and then transform into a shark to attack the players.

**Creeee'lokna, Kappa Mystic:** Equivalent to 6<sup>th</sup> level Were-Shaman O.C.C.

**Alignment:** Diabolic.

**Attributes:** I.Q. 9, M.E. 5, M.A. 4, P.S. 12 (33 as a shark), P.P. 8 (19 as a shark), P.E. 19 (32 as a shark), P.B. 10, Spd 127 (underwater) (16 as a shark).

**Size:** 3 feet (0.9 m) tall; 50 pounds (23 kg) (28 feet/8.5 m long and 2 tons as a shark).

**Natural A.R.:** 13 (8 as a shark).

**Hit Points:** 68

**S.D.C.:** 27

**P.P.E.:** 14

**Horror Factor:** 12 (14 as a shark).

**Attacks per Melee:** 3 physical.

**Bonuses:** (+3 on initiative as a shark), +1 to strike (+6 as a shark), +2 to parry (not possible as a shark), +7 to dodge (+4 as

a shark), +2 to pull punch (not possible as a shark), +2 to roll with impact (not possible as a shark), +2 to save versus magic (+8 as a shark), +2 to save versus poison (+11 as a shark), Critical Strike on a Natural 19-20 (Critical Strike on a Natural 20 as a shark), (+10 to save versus Horror Factor as a shark).

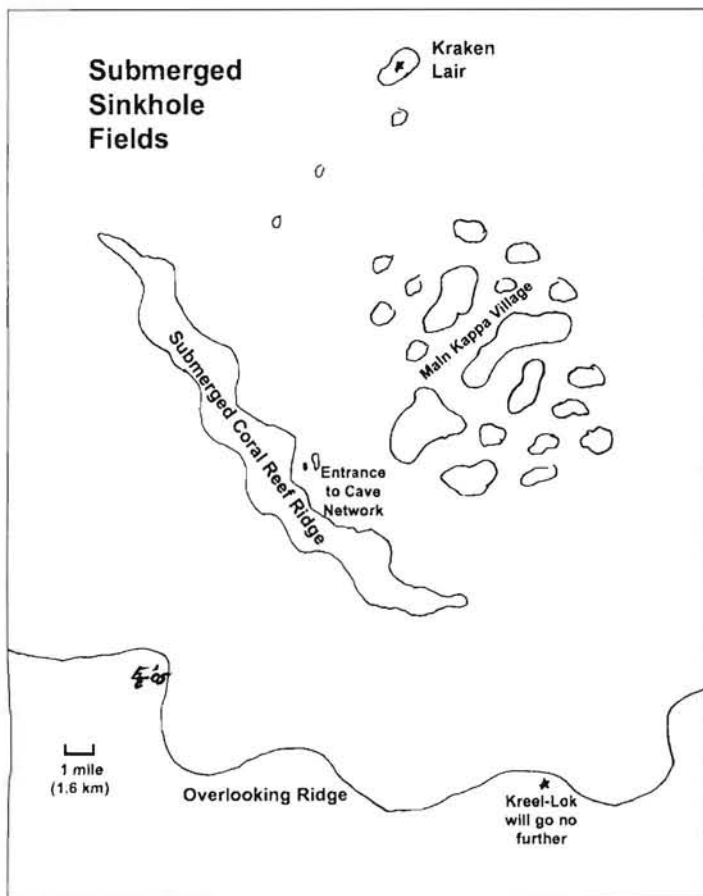
**Damage:** Small, clawed arm inflicts 1D4 and large pincer inflicts 2D6. As a shark, a nip does 2D6, a full strength bite does 6D6, slashing tail 2D6, head butt 1D6, and body ram 2D6.

**Natural Abilities/Skills of Note:** Climb (70%/60%), Nightvision 120 feet (36.5 m), day vision 40 feet (12.2 m), breathe underwater and air, Swimming (98%). Natural Abilities as a shark include Swimming 100%, Nightvision 3000 feet (914 m), locate objects in water by hearing (90%) up to 3000 feet (914 m) distance, sensitive to movement in the water (allows it to detect any movement within 60 feet/18.3 m even if it cannot see), and can smell blood up to one mile (1.6 km) away.

**Magic:** Animal Totem (fish and reptile - bonuses already factored in), Empathic Rapport with Totem Animals (empathy, befuddle, calm, and control 60%, 2D4 minutes per level), Summon Totem Animals (requires 2 minutes of concentration, drains one point of P.E. - 52%, 2 minutes per level), Animal Metamorphosis (6 hours, always turns into a Great White Shark, 60% chance of success, 50% chance of temporary reversion to animal I.Q., 36% chance temporarily frozen in animal form), Familiar Link (was another Great White Shark, but it was recently killed). For a full description of the Were-Shaman O.C.C., consult page 47 of *Mount Nimro*, PFRPG Book 10.

**Psionics:** None.

**Appearance:** Looks like a cross between a crab and a scarab, with one small, clawed hand and one large pincer; or a full-sized Great White Shark.



**The Kraken:** Under the control of the Kappa Were-Shaman.

**Alignment:** Diabolic.

**Attributes:** I.Q. 8, M.E. 17, M.A. 5, P.S. 100 (Supernatural), P.P. 13, P.E. 35, P.B. 1, Spd 52 (underwater).

**Size:** Head/body is 100 feet (30.5 m) long and 50 feet (15.2 m) wide. Each tentacle measures 300 feet (91.5 m) long; 11 tons.

**Natural A.R.:** 10

**Hit Points:** 145

**S.D.C.:** 150 for the body, 70 for each of its 8 tentacles.

**P.P.E.:** 140

**Horror Factor:** 16

**Attacks per Melee:** 4 physical, 2 by magic.

**Bonuses:** Immune to Horror Factor, +3 to save versus magic and psionics.

**Damage:** A restrained tentacle strike 2D6+30 damage, a full strength strike 1D6x10+30, and a power strike does 2D6x10+30 but counts as 2 attacks. The Kraken can also crush anyone caught in its massively powerful arms for 1D6x10 damage per melee or simply toss them in its toothy maw to be chewed for 1D6x10 before being swallowed whole. Swallowed victims (who survive) suffer 4D6 damage per melee due to stomach acids, though they can try to hack their way out of the creature.

**Natural Abilities/Skills of Note:** Breathe underwater, Swimming (98%), detect surface movement up to one mile (1.6 km, 76%), track blood scent in water up to 10 miles (16 km), bio-regenerate 4D6 S.D.C. per melee.

**Magic:** Instinctively knows the following Water Elemental Magic: Command Fish, Communicate with Sea Creatures, Whirlpool, Hurricane, Part Waters, Summon Sharks or Whales, Summon and Control Storm, Tidal Wave, and Calm Waters.

**Psionics:** None.

**Appearance:** A nightmarish combination of a giant squid, hammerhead shark, and some kind of giant aquatic dinosaur. For full details on the Kraken, consult page 114 of *Library of Bletherad*, PFRPG Book 12.

It is up to the Game Master to determine if the blood in the water from the battle attracts additional sharks to the area or not.

After the players defeat the Kraken and Kappa Were-Shaman, they will be able to explore the remains of the sunken vessel. Too far gone to clearly discern its design, the hulk is so unstable that spending too much time rummaging around will likely cause the entire remains to collapse inward upon the clumsy players. However, guided by the diamond, the players will quickly be led to the skeletal remains of some humanoid (a successful Medical Doctor or Anthropology skill roll will reveal the skeleton to be that of an Orc). Fastened to a chain around its waist, the players will see a 1.5 foot long (0.45 m), dull piece of gold metal with an opening in its center. Anyone familiar with swords will instantly recognize it as a crosspiece designed to be fitted with a blade. Notches on one of its sides and on either end show where gemstones would be placed. As soon as the center-piece diamond is placed within a few inches of it, it will magically fit into the center notch with a blinding flash. This is clearly the second piece of Castlerake.

**Castlerake's Crosspiece:** A one and a half foot (0.45 m) long, dull piece of gold metal with a small hole in its center designed to be fitted with a blade. The crosspiece radiates strongly of magic and contains 10 P.P.E. that can be used by a magic user. If this P.P.E. is depleted, the gem will recharge at a rate of 1 P.P.E. per day, or faster if willingly filled by a magic user or set upon a ley line or nexus (from page 229, *Dragons and Gods*).

Whoever is holding the crosspiece/diamond fixture will suddenly feel a force drawing them in an east-northeasterly direction, seemingly back towards land in the direction of the Land of the South-Winds or the Yin-Sloth Jungles beyond.

Beside the Orc skeleton, the players see a heavy wooden chest that has been magically preserved to resist water. It will require a combined P.S. of 35 to heave the chest out of the wreckage to safety. Inside the chest, the players will find 65,300 in gold, silver, gemstones, and jewelry (a fitting reward for having just survived an encounter with a Kraken). Also in the chest, the players will find the following magical items: an indestructible dagger, a short sword that transforms into a flaming sword 3x daily (10 minute duration each, 4D6 damage), a ring that provides Protection from Undead (holds them at bay unless they save versus a Horror Factor of 14, and makes wearer impervious to undead charm and hypnosis), a necklace of Superhuman Strength (as the spell, 10 minutes, 3x daily), an Eye of the Eagle magic gem (see distances up to 2000 feet/610 m), and pair of Gryphon Claws (indestructible, retractable claws, +10% to Climb, +1 on initiative and to parry, 2D6 damage per swipe).

When the players return to the island, they will find that the Kreeel-Lok are waiting for them. Extremely grateful, they will explain that they have not only aided the fish-folk, but also any surface dwellers who might pass in the waters overhead from the terrible fate of a Kraken attack. A Kreeel-Lok Psi-Healer will heal the wounds of the party while they await the arrival of the *Sea Sprite*, which will arrive in three days to take them to the Port of Truth on Enry Isle. The captain of the *Sea Sprite*, Thomas Penshar, is one of the few human mariners who understands how helpful a friendship with the Kreeel-Lok can be and has often come to their aid and vice versa in the past.

## Chapter Six: Dogres and Tezcat and Krogs, Oh My!

At the Port of Truth on the south side of Enry Isle, the players will find that there are few places to properly provision for the next phase of their journey. While they will be able to find common items and maybe even a few quality weapons, most of what is available is secondhand or has been repaired. Armor is almost impossible to find except for secondhand and damaged/repaired. If they ask about magical goods and services, their responses will be met with suspicion and if they persist, they will be turned away quickly. Players will soon learn about the recent conclusion of the civil war between the devout followers of the

Church of Light and a fanatical Anti-Thoth cult that erupted over the true nature of the origins of the God of Light, Thoth (for full details, see *Adventures on the High Seas*, PFRPG Book 3, and *Island at the Edge of the World*, PFRPG Book 6). If they are discreet, however (making a successful Streetwise skill roll), they may find a member of the magic-user dominated Anti-Thoth cult willing to trade a minor magical item or weapon for some other item. If the players decide to journey across the island to the larger Port Miro, they will find an only slightly wider array of goods and services, but it will become immediately apparent that Port Miro is firmly in the grasp of the original Church of Light and, though the conflict is over (or is it?), it is obvious that these people not only distrust magic, but outright despise it. How much the players get involved in the internal politics of the Enry Isles is left to the Game Master.

After a few days on the island, the captain of the vessel *Sea Sprite* will be ready to depart for the port of Sulanok on the Peninsula of Pendaltor in the Land of the South-Winds (he has agreed to ferry the players to the mainland at no charge since he is heading there anyway - another arrangement made with the Kreeel-Lok). If the players have taken any time to consult a map of the southern part of the world (and made a successful Astronomy and Navigation skill roll), they will see that the third piece of Castlerake must lie somewhere either along the southern edge of the Land of the South-Winds or deep within the Yin-Sloth Jungles. Given a fair bit of weather and no unforeseen events, Captain Penshar feels that they should make it to Sulanok in a few days. As they travel and the orientation of the pieces of Castlerake move relative to one another, the person holding it



may be able to use a map (another successful skill roll will be required) to triangulate the location of the third piece. If successful, they will realize that it must lie well within the heart of the jungles and not in the closer Land of the South-Winds.

In Sulanok, the players will find a wider variety of goods and services available to them. However, they will need to be much more careful, as Sulanok is a pirate haven and the unwary visitor could lose more than a coin purse (again, how long they stay and how much trouble they get in as they look for weapons, armor, and magic items is left to the Game Master). Ultimately, they must decide how best to continue their quest. If the players have made successful map-reading rolls, they will realize that the next piece of the rune sword is deep within the dangerous jungles and that travel by sea may be a safer (not to mention much quicker) route than going across land. If they have come to this conclusion, they will need to negotiate with Captain Penshar for passage. While he was already on his way to Sulanok and willing to take them that far, he had no intention of journeying further west as there are few ports along the southern edge of the Yin-Sloth Jungles. Still, for a fee of 2000 gold per passenger (steep, but well within their means given their recent treasure find) he will ferry them as far west as the port town of Zantos, midway along the jungle's southern coast, but no further. He gives them one more day to make preparations while he goes out to buy some cargo to make the trip profitable.

This journey will last much longer (several weeks depending upon conditions at sea) and may be fraught with troubles or uneventful (Game Master's discretion) but at last, the players will arrive at the small port village a few miles away from the town of Zantos (for Game Masters who do not have *Yin-Sloth Jungles*, PFRPG Book 7, this is halfway along the coast between the Dragon's Gate Mountains and the Giant's Run Mountains along the southern coastline). When they arrive in the late afternoon, they are met by officials from the village who begin negotiations with Captain Penshar over mooring fees and taxes on the imports. If the players are paying any attention to the work on the dock, they may notice a number of large, Ogre-looking individuals are milling about, not really doing anything but steadily making their way towards the cargo being off-loaded. Suddenly, a worker gives a strangled cry as a massive "Ogre" smashes his head in with a large, nasty wooden club. The others immediately attack, half trying to kill the dock workers, the other half beginning to grab whatever they can and run away with it into the jungle.

**Twelve (12) Dogres:** Equivalent to 3<sup>rd</sup> level Mercenary O.C.C.

**Alignment:** Miscreant.

**Attributes:** I.Q. 6, M.E. 4, M.A. 5, P.S. 26, P.P. 18, P.E. 18, P.B. 10, Spd 16.

**Size:** 13 feet (4 m) tall; 550 pounds (248 kg).

**Natural A.R.:** 4

**Hit Points:** 60

**S.D.C.:** 34

**P.P.E.:** 6

**Horror Factor:** 12

**Attacks per Melee:** 2 (4 during a frenzy).

**Bonuses:** +5 to strike (+7 with weapons), +6 to parry (+8 with weapons), +5 to dodge, +4 to pull punch, +4 to roll with impact,

+4 to save versus Horror Factor, +2 to save versus magic, +2 to save versus poison.

**Damage:** Each carries a massive war club (3D4+11), claws do 2D6+11 damage and bite does 2D4 damage.

**Natural Abilities/Skills of Note:** Nightvision 40 feet (12.2 m), Blood Lust - when a Dogre loses half of their Hit Points or kills an opponent, they enter a frenzied blood lust. During this period, the Dogre gets a +4 to strike, +10 to damage, +8 to save versus Horror Factor, 2 additional attacks, and is impervious to pain and fatigue. However, they suffer s -3 on initiative, a -4 to parry, and usually refuse to dodge. The frenzy lasts until everything within a 10 foot (3 m) radius is killed and no immediate threats are within view. After the frenzy, Dogres function at half speed and combat ability for the next 15 minutes.

**Magic:** None.

**Psionics:** None.

**Appearance:** Looks like an overly primitive (if that is possible) Ogre that is taller and more powerfully built. Short hair covers most of their body.

These Dogres are part of a tribe that has migrated from the Giant's Run Mountains to the east and have gotten into a vicious three-way war with a tribe of Tezcat and a clan of Krogs who inhabit the jungle around Zantos. These brutes were watching the village for the next arrival from sea in the hopes of stealing something of value, as they possess no real skill to produce their own goods and equipment.

If the players want, they can rush ashore and try to drive off the Dogres or save the dock workers. Or they can wait on the boat which will most likely be left alone by the jungle Ogres. However, after 1D4 melees of combat, a war cry from the neighboring jungle will announce the arrival of a war band of Tezcat who had been trailing the Dogres. They will seem to be on the side of the dock workers and attack the Dogres, but, in truth, will also attempt to seize any goods they can and will not discriminate between Dogres, dock workers, or players.

**Eight (8) Tezcat Warriors:** Equivalent to 4<sup>th</sup> level Mercenary O.C.C.

**Alignment:** Miscreant.

**Attributes:** I.Q. 9, M.E. 7, M.A. 5, P.S. 11, P.P. 20, P.E. 18, P.B. 10, Spd 14.

**Size:** 6 feet (1.8 m) tall; 150 pounds (68 kg).

**Natural A.R.:** N/A (see armor).

**Hit Points:** 36

**S.D.C.:** 29

**P.P.E.:** 12

**Horror Factor:** 10

**Attacks per Melee:** 3 physical.

**Bonuses:** +5 to strike (+7 with weapons), +6 to parry (+8 with weapons), +6 to dodge, +4 to pull punch, +3 to roll with impact, +2 to save versus Horror Factor, +2 to save versus magic, +2 to save versus poison.

**Damage:** Bite and claws inflicts 1D4 damage. Punch inflicts 1D6 and a kick inflicts 2D4 damage. Each carries a stone axe (2D4 damage) and 4 throwing sticks (2D4 damage). Each weapon is coated with a Burning Poison which causes the vic-

tim to lose initiative and suffer a -1 to strike and parry for 1D6 melees. Effects are cumulative per poison strike. This potent poison requires a 15 or higher to save against. Each Tezcat warrior also wears a suit of jungle bamboo armor (A.R. 9, S.D.C. 20).

**Natural Abilities/Skills of Note:** Nightvision 30 feet (9 m).

**Magic:** None themselves, but they are currently under the influence of a Shamanistic Chant of Blessing that endows them with an additional +1 on initiative, +1 to save versus magic, and +2 to save versus poison.

**Psionics:** None.

**Appearance:** Black-skinned sub-humans with pointed teeth, a large, flat nose, and large ears.

Once again, the players can elect to fight to defend any dock workers who have not yet been rescued or killed or they can engage the newcomers, though for the most part, the Tezcat seem to care more about killing the Dogres than killing the dock workers or fighting the players. Within another 1D4 melee rounds, another commotion will erupt from the jungle as a band of Krogs, drawn to the dock by the bloodshed, will emerge to attack everyone they can. They are not at all interested in revenge or stolen goods but merely want to kill. Anyone who gets in their way, Dogre, Tezcat, dock worker, or player, will be attacked.

**Twelve (12) Krogs:** Equivalent to 3<sup>rd</sup> level Mercenary O.C.C.

**Alignment:** Diabolic.

**Attributes:** I.Q. 5, M.E. 8, M.A. 7, P.S. 16, P.P. 18, P.E. 12, P.B. 11, Spd 11.

**Size:** 5 feet (1.5 m) tall; 200 pounds (90 kg).

**Natural A.R.:** 7

**Hit Points:** 25

**S.D.C.:** 25

**P.P.E.:** 14

**Horror Factor:** 8

**Attacks per Melee:** 3 physical.

**Bonuses:** +1 on initiative, +4 to strike (+6 with weapons), +5 to parry (+7 with weapons), +5 to dodge, +4 to pull punch, +3 to roll with impact, +2 to save versus Horror Factor, +2 to save versus poison, +6 to save versus gases.

**Damage:** Each carries a stone axe (2D4+3). Bite does 1D6, Claws do 2D4+3.

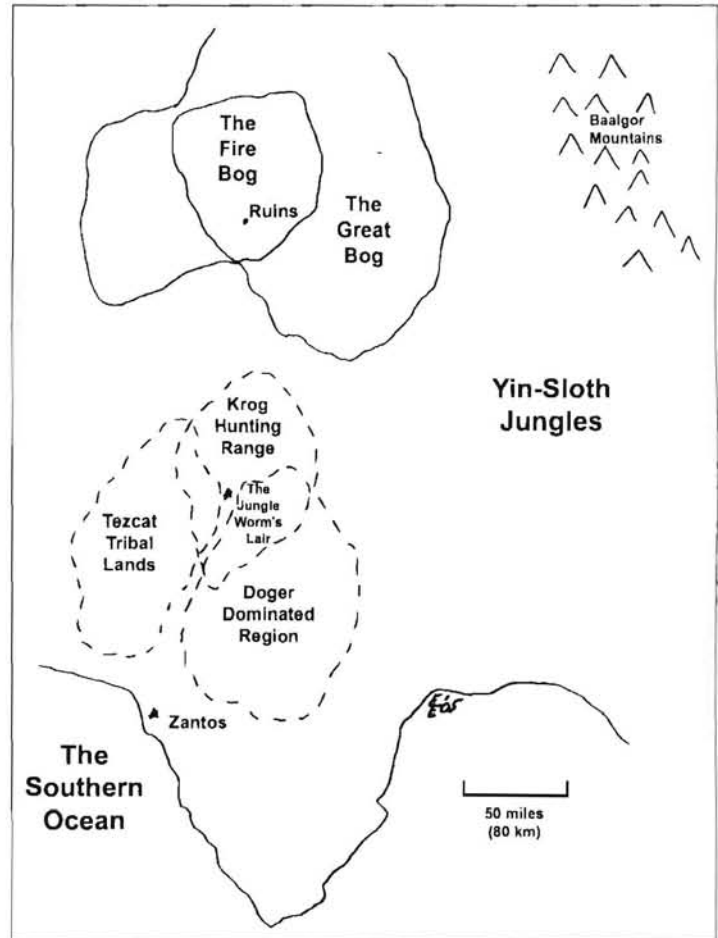
**Natural Abilities/Skills of Note:** Swim 95%, Climb 65%, hold breath underwater for 30 minutes.

**Magic:** None.

**Psionics:** None.

**Appearance:** Looks like a hulking humanoid frog with dull greenish-brown skin and sharp talons.

By this point, most of the dock workers will have been rescued or killed and the three rival factions will fight it out on the docks with or without the players' interference. Only the Krogs may try to climb into the boat to spread the killing. Eventually, a patrol of soldiers from Zantos will arrive to kill or drive off the survivors and secure the dock.



## Chapter Seven: Running the Jungle Gauntlet

The players will be escorted to Zantos by the local militia. As they go, one of the soldiers will explain that all humanoids are welcome to Zantos and that any serious lawbreaking against members of the kingdom will result in a trial before King Zantos himself and, if found guilty, a public beheading. This is followed by a warning that violence in any form is not tolerated. They will also be given a warning about venturing too far from the protective region of the town, citing the growing tribal war between the native Tezcat (those who still dwell in the jungle and not Zantos), Krogs, and Dogres.

In Zantos, the players find that the majority of the citizens are Tezcat, while the rest of the city's population consists of dark-skinned, human jungle natives with a few Lizard Men. Only the occasional member of another race is seen in passing. Finding places to purchase field equipment for exploring the jungle outside the town limits is easy, but players will soon discover that purchasing non-native (wood, bone, and stone) weapons and armor is almost impossible, as metal is scarce in the jungle and the waiting list for metal goods is extremely long, with special rush jobs still taking a week to fill and costing 500% or more of the listed book value.

If the players are not in a hurry to continue the quest, they will find a casino that appears to be down on its luck and a gladiatorial arena which features daily entertainment, mostly in the

form of criminals sold to the arena to fight one another, monsters, or challengers who enter for sport or "easy" money. The crowd favorites are a pair of gladiators named Skull and Fang. Skull is a 7<sup>th</sup> level Headhunter and Fang is a 6<sup>th</sup> level Ratton Mercenary Warrior, neither of whom has been defeated. (For full details on Headhunters, Rattons, and Zantos in general, see *Yin-Sloth Jungles*, PFRPG Book 7).

Ultimately, the players will need to decide how best to continue north into the jungles after the third piece of Castlerake. If they choose to venture out on their own, they will encounter numerous wandering bands of Tezcat, Dogres, and Krogs who, while mainly looking for one another to ambush, will also attack any outlander they encounter. This, not to mention the numerous other dangers of the jungle (bogs, quicksand, countless jungle monsters), will most likely result in the players never reaching their goal. As the players provision for their trip, the Game Master might have a local shop keep mention that if obvious outlanders such as themselves really want to brave the jungle, they will want a guide.

If the players inquire about a guide, they will find that no one is willing to take them into the jungle north of Zantos for two reasons. The first is the current feud between the Tezcat, Dogres, and Krogs which has made the jungle almost impossible to safely navigate without encountering one of these hostile groups. The second reason is that beyond the dangerous northern jungle lies the Great Bog, a shifting quagmire of lethal sucking mud and foul creatures. No one can be found who is willing to brave either of these two dangers. No one, that is, except Gray Tail.

Finding Gray Tail is easy. He is something of a local figure who is frequently found at The Pit, a rough looking tavern adjacent to the arena. Gray Tail is an old, 9<sup>th</sup> level Lizard Man Ranger who knows the surrounding jungles and bog regions like the back of his tail. He will listen to the players, not ask why they wish to head north, and agree to guide them under the following conditions: 1500 gold up front, he will only fight to defend himself, and he will not enter the Fire Bog at the heart of the Great Bog. If they ask about the Great Bog or the Fire Bog, Gray Tail will explain that legends say that ages ago, a battle between the young gods corrupted the entire southern jungle, but the area of the Great Bog was hardest hit. Unstable magic and foul curses turned it into a dangerous quagmire of mud pits, foul-smelling sinks, and dangerous creatures. And at the center is a desert of "literally" burning sands and fire spouts called the Fire Bog. This, he claims, was ground zero of a massive magical battle between the gods. If the players ask why he is willing to take them when no one else will, he will simply smile and tell them to meet him in the morning on the northern edge of town for their answer.

**Gray Tail** (real name is Sillonakk): 9<sup>th</sup> level Lizard Man Ranger O.C.C.

**Alignment:** Unprincipled.

**Attributes:** I.Q. 13, M.E. 4, M.A. 10, P.S. 11, P.P. 22, P.E. 13, P.B. 12, Spd 9 (x2 when swimming).

**Size:** 5 feet (1.5 m) tall; 120 pounds (54 kg).

**Natural A.R.:** 9

**Hit Points:** 64

**S.D.C.:** 25

**P.P.E.:** 4

**Horror Factor:** 13

**Attacks per Melee:** 4 physical.

**Bonuses:** +5 to strike (+9 with sword, +8 with knife, +9 to throw knife), +6 to parry (+9 with sword, +10 with knife), +6 to dodge, +2 to pull punch, +3 to roll with impact, +2 to save versus Horror Factor, Critical Strike on an unmodified 19-20, Body Flip/Throw.

**Damage:** Karate-style kick does 2D4+2 damage, magical long sword does 2D6+6 (Super-sharpness - reduces roll needed for a Critical Strike by 2 points - Natural 17-20 for Gray Tail), magic knife does 1D6 (double damage to Giants), 4 bone throwing sticks (2D4+2 damage). Wears enchanted leather armor (A.R. 13, S.D.C. 50, keeps wearer comfortable even in the jungle heat).

**Natural Abilities/Skills of Note:** Breathe underwater, Swim 85%, Climb 70%/60%, hold breath underwater for 1D4+3 minutes, leap 6 feet (1.8 m) high or 8 feet (2.4 m) lengthwise. Land Navigation (82%), Identify Plants and Fruits (85%), Area Knowledge: Yin-Sloth Jungles (62%), Holistic Medicine (70%/60%), Holistic Chemistry (70%/60%), Hunting (65%/45%), Track and Trap Animals (85%/95%), Track Humanoids (80%), Wilderness Survival (90%), Prowl (67%).

**Magic:** None, but has a number of magical items he has managed to acquire throughout his career. These include a Gem of Direction (always points north), an Eye of the Cat crystal (Nightvision 40 feet/12.2 m), 12 magic bandages (immediately





stops blood loss) and a small leather pouch on a strap around his neck that acts as an Anti-Venom charm (if wearer fails a saving throw versus poison/toxin, the charm negates the poison - still has 9 charges left).

**Psionics:** None.

**Appearance:** A humanoid reptile with a long tail. Gray Tail gets his nickname from the fact that his skin faded to greenish-gray long before he actually grew old. Though quite wealthy by Lizard Man standards, Gray Tail only carries 250 gold on his person and another 2000 worth in small gems (used mainly to trade with natives, who prefer the shiny gems to gold).

Gray Tail will meet the players north of town on the edge of the jungle the following morning. Once they have traveled an hour north of Zantos, he will explain that he knows of a narrow passage of connected bogs that runs between the hostile factions but is avoided by most. The main reason, he explains, is that few know a safe route through the bogs that leads around the thick pools of muck and quicksand. He also adds, with a smile, that local legend tells of a giant jungle worm that lives in the bogs, though he himself has never seen it, and he says that he has traveled this route many times in the past. With that, he turns and leads them deeper into the jungle.

Game Masters may wish to make the jungle journey difficult or easy depending on how quickly they wish to further the storyline. Those with the Yin-Sloth Jungles sourcebook should read up on penalties for wearing heavy armor in the sweltering jungle, as well as the chance of catching an infectious disease, encountering bogs and quicksand, and the list of creatures common to this part of the Yin-Sloth Jungle. However, Gray Tail is truly an expert and will be able to lead them around most of the dangerous bogs and quicksand traps, as well as looking for obvious signs of predators. In any event, the journey to the Great Bog and the edge of the Fire Bog will take ten to twelve days of arduous hiking through the stifling heat and unyielding vegetation of the jungle.

On the seventh day from Zantos, as the players are camped out on one of the few patches of solid ground Gray Tail has led them to, the pools around them will begin to shake and slosh as if something large were coming. Then, without further warning, a massive worm will burst forth from the mud and attack.

**Blow Worm:** The Jungle Worm of local legend.

**Alignment:** Anarchist.

**Attributes:** I.Q. 2, M.E. 5, M.A. 4, P.S. 40, P.P. 12, P.E. 27, P.B. 5, Spd 5.

**Size:** 175 feet (53.3 m) long; 3 tons.

**Natural A.R.:** 7

**Hit Points:** 100

**S.D.C.:** 90

**P.P.E.:** 4

**Horror Factor:** 14

**Attacks per Melee:** 3 total; 1 mucus glob, 2 thrashing.

**Bonuses:** +1 to strike with body, +3 to strike with mucus glob, +5 to save versus poison and other toxins, +2 to save versus magic and psionics.

**Damage:** Crushing/slamming into something by accident in-

flicts 1D6x10 damage. Mucus Glob attack - the Blow Worm can spit a massive blob of mucus up to 60 feet (18.3 m). Victims who do not dodge will be covered by the thick stuff, which reduces their attacks to one and their speed to one eighth (characters with a P.S. of 24 or higher find their speed reduced to 1/3 and their attacks are halved). It takes ten melees of intense effort to remove enough of the stuff to breathe, but unfortunately, the player will most likely fall unconscious within four rounds and suffocate two minutes later (8 rounds) unless someone helps. Fortunately, the Blow Worm will not swallow its victim until it is completely motionless. Even after the character removes enough of the stuff to breathe and move, it will take another 1D4 hours of effort to clean the disgusting, foul smelling mucus out of their armor and possessions.

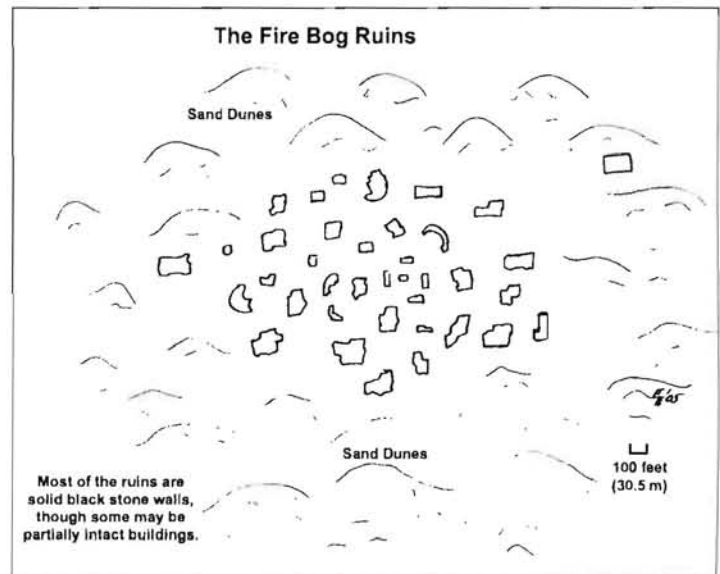
**Natural Abilities:** Swim 95%, Climb 65%, hold breath underwater for 30 minutes.

**Magic:** None.

**Psionics:** None.

**Appearance:** Giant, green-brown segmented worm with a gaping, toothless maw.

This massive beast is usually lethargic and easy going, seldom attacking in anger unless hungry or provoked. As it tends to live in its lair deep in the mud, avoiding contact except to occasionally hunt, Gray Tail has never encountered it before (which is why he dismissed its existence until now). In this case, however, the beast has recently been disturbed from its usual lair by the ongoing conflict between the Tezcat, Dogres, and Krogs. The Krogs decided it would be fun to anger the creature and then let it run amok through the jungle.



## Chapter Eight: The Abomination

Should Gray Tail survive the encounter with the Blow Worm, he will still lead them to the edge of the Fire Bog but no further. If the Lizard Man did not survive, the players will have learned enough from him to know what to look for to avoid the worst of the dangers between them and the Fire Bog.

When they reach the Fire Bog, they will notice an abrupt change in the landscape. Though still oppressively hot, the air is suddenly dry. The dense jungle suddenly gives way to dark red sand dunes streaked with bright white sands (Fire Sand - an ounce/28 g burns for 1D4 damage, while igniting a patch will cause an explosion of 2D4x10 damage and a flame that burns for 3D4 minutes). Here and there, twisted, alien vegetation grows in patches, thick with fleshly, undulating vines, giant flytrap-like maws, and razor-sharp, blade-like leaves. Gray Tail will warn them about the Fire Sand as well as the fire geysers that frequently erupt, igniting patches of sand into lethal fire storms. Then, with another of his trademark smiles, he settles down on the edge and waves them off, promising to be nearby when (he says with a sarcastic laugh) they return. (Game Masters may wish to consult *Baalgor Wastelands*, PFRPG Book 9, for rules concerning travel across and weather considerations within desert environments.)

After a day's travel across the desert, the players notice a series of odd tracks. Anyone who makes a successful Track and Trap Animals skill roll at -20% will notice that they are not unlike the tracks made by small desert insects across sand dunes. However, these tracks suggest that these insects are at least the size of a man, if not larger. The player will also notice that the tracks run perpendicular to the direction in which they have been traveling. If the players follow them anyway, they will eventually encounter a band of 9 Fyr-kree Insectoids. The giant, ant-like bugs will not attack unless attacked or interfered with first and will merely make a few clicking sounds before moving on past the players. If any player tries to use the Tongues spell to communicate with them, they will find the Fyr-kree surprisingly friendly. If the player asks about what might lie in the direction of the third piece, the bugs will warn them not to venture much deeper into the desert or they will incur the wrath of the Abomination. They will say no more and will hastily move on.

**Nine (9) Fyr-kree Insectoids:** Denizens of the Fire Bog.

**Alignment:** Extremely honorable (Principled or Aberrant).

**Attributes:** I.Q. 9, M.E. 17, M.A. 18, P.S. 21, P.P. 16, P.E. 25, P.B. 4, Spd 24.

**Size:** 8 feet (2.4 m) tall; 900 pounds (405 kg).

**Natural A.R.:** 18

**Hit Points:** 55

**S.D.C.:** 300

**P.P.E.:** 6

**Horror Factor:** 12

**Attacks per Melee:** 4 physical.

**Bonuses:** +2 to strike (+4 with weapons), +1 to parry (+3 with weapons), +1 to dodge, 50% trust/intimidate (if you could communicate with one), +1 to save versus psionics, +5 to save versus magic, +5 to save versus poison, +4 to save versus Horror Factor.

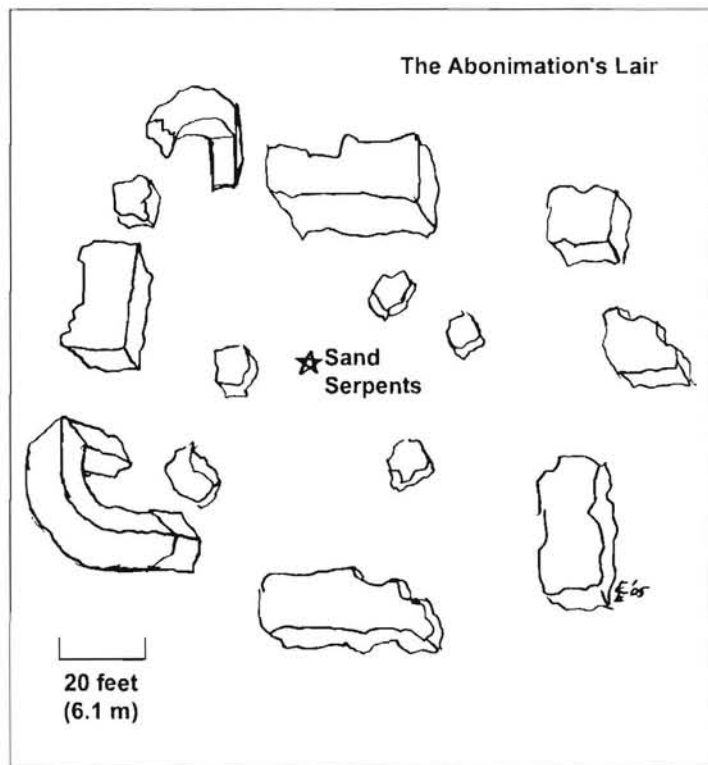
**Damage:** Each carries a scythe-like pole arm that does 3D6+6 damage. Bite does 2D6, Claws do 2D4+6.

**Natural Abilities/Skills of Note:** Never ending endurance, excellent diggers (95%), excellent climbers (95%), fair swimmers (40%), keen hearing, good vision, and are impervious to normal heat and fire (half damage from magical fire).

**Magic:** None.

**Psionics:** None.

**Appearance:** Look like giant black ants whose front third is held erect like a Centaur.



After another day's travel through the Fire Bog, the players will come across the half buried, giant black stone ruins of some ancient structure. Even players who make a successful Masonry or Archaeology skill roll will not be able to identify the origin of the remains, though they will be able to tell that the scale of the ruins suggests that the inhabitants were huge (bigger than Giant-sized). As the players approach, the sands will suddenly come alive as a pair of Sand Serpents burst forth from the dunes and attack.

**Two (2) Sand Serpents:** Desert predators.

**Alignment:** Diabolic.

**Attributes:** I.Q. 8, M.E. 11, M.A. 3, P.S. 21, P.P. 9, P.E. 9, P.B. 6, Spd 5.

**Size:** 7 feet (2.1 m) tall; 330 pounds (149 kg).

**Natural A.R.:** 10

**Hit Points:** 49

**S.D.C.:** 40

**P.P.E.:** 10

**Horror Factor:** 13

**Attacks per Melee:** 3 physical.

**Bonuses:** +1 on initiative, +2 to strike, +2 to parry, +3 to dodge, +2 on all saving throws.

**Damage:** Talons inflict 3D4+6 damage, Bite does 1D6 plus an additional 1D6 from poison unless a successful save versus poison is made.

**Natural Abilities/Skills of Note:** Track by smell 70%, Dig 85% (leaving no trace), can hear a footfall beneath 10 feet (3 m) of sand or up to 30 feet (9.1 m) away on the surface (cannot be sur-

prised), does not breathe, normal fire does half damage (magical fire does full damage).

**Magic:** None.

**Psionics:** Natural psionics with the following abilities: Presence Sense, Resist Cold, Resist Thirst, Resist Fatigue, Resist Fire, Sense Magic, Bio-Regeneration, Death Trance, Levitate, Mind Block, Nightvision, Sense Traps, and Negate Poison equal to a 3<sup>rd</sup> level psychic. I.S.P.: 120.

**Appearance:** A humanoid snake with a massive cobra-like hood, a long tail, and mottled, light and dark brown scaly skin.

This pair of Sand Serpents takes advantage of the "Abomination" by living in the sands of its lair and stealing the occasional corpse to implant their eggs in. They will fight the players for 1D4 melees but afterwards, they will abruptly dive into the sands and within a melee action disappear beneath the dunes. One round later, the Abomination will appear - a horribly mutated Gigante Warlord!



**Krull, The Abomination of the Fire Bog:** 7<sup>th</sup> level Gigante Warlord O.C.C.

**Alignment:** Diabolic.

**Attributes:** I.Q. 2, M.E. 1, M.A. 11, P.S. 36 (Supernatural), P.P. 15, P.E. 22, P.B. 4, Spd 25.

**Size:** 15 feet (4.6 m) tall; 2000 pounds (900 kg).

**Natural A.R.:** 11

**Hit Points:** 55

**S.D.C.:** 152

**P.P.E.:** 50

**Horror Factor:** 14

**Attacks per Melee:** 6 (4 physical +1 tail attack and +1 acid spit attack).

**Bonuses:** +1 on initiative, +2 to strike (+5 with weapons), +3 to parry (+5 with weapons, +4 with tail blade), +4 to dodge, +2 to pull punch, +3 to roll with the punch, +4 to save versus magic, +4 to save versus poison, +4 to save versus Horror Factor, Critical Strike on a Natural 18-20, Paired Weapons, +4 to maintain balance.

**Damage:** Krull carries two massive non-magical weapons in its muscular upper arms, a giant-sized battle axe (4D6+19 damage) and a massive war club (3D6 +19 damage), which he uses as paired weapons. Head butt inflicts 1D6+19 damage, mouth tusk gore/slash does 3D6 damage, full strength punch with upper arms inflicts 6D6+19 damage, claw slash with lower arms inflicts 5D6+19, tail blade slash does 3D6.

**Natural Abilities/Skills of Note:** Nightvision 50 feet (15.2 m), flight (as per Fly as an Eagle spell - duration 2 hours before needing 10-15 minutes rest), impervious to poison, impervious to electricity (including magic), see the invisible, spits acid up to 20 feet/6 m (4D6 damage), impervious to fire.

Krull has the following genetic defects: Susceptible to cold, silver weapons, and holy weapons (x2 damage), and animals will attack or flee when in Krull's presence. Krull also has absolutely no short-term memory whatsoever (which is why the pair of Sand Serpents are able to steal food from him without his noticing it).

**Magic:** None.

**Psionics:** None.

**Appearance:** Krull has the following physical mutations: Hunchbacked body with a Neanderthal-like head covered in knobby bone protrusions, three blue snake-like slitted eyes placed evenly across the forehead, no nose (or sense of smell), and a large mouth with protruding tusks. Krull has two sets of arms. The larger, upper set is huge and incredibly muscular, while the lower set is thin and ends in gnarled hands with clawed fingertips. From the waist down, Krull's body becomes a snake-like trunk with a long tail that ends in a sharp blade-like bone. Krull's red hair is a massive mane that runs down the length of his back until it reaches the snake-like trunk and tail, and his skin is covered in light and dark green, small reptile-like scales.

If the battle begins to go poorly for the Gigante Warlord (or if the players prove too powerful), the two Sand Serpents might emerge from the sand as a surprise attack in order to come to the aid of their meal ticket and unwitting protector.

After Krull is slain, the players will have 2D6 minutes to search the sands of the ruins for the third piece of Castlerake before the pair of Sand Serpents reappear (having bio-regenerated via psionics) and attack again (if they have not already joined the battle or been slain). If the players make straight for the place where the first two pieces of the rune sword guide them, they will have to dig through only a few feet of sand before uncovering a tarnished silver necklace with a shining emerald hanging from it.

**Castlerake's Left Gem:** An emerald with a smooth, rounded surface that seems to contain two runes in its crystalline depths, one overlaying the other. The emerald radiates strongly of magic and contains 50 P.P.E. that can be used by a magic user. If this P.P.E. is depleted, the gem will recharge at a rate of 1 P.P.E. per day, or faster if willingly filled by a magic user or set upon a ley line or nexus (from page 229, *Dragons and Gods*).

As soon as the emerald is taken off of the chain, it will fly towards the crosspiece and attach itself with a flash of light to the left side. Immediately, the person holding the three pieces will suddenly feel drawn towards the northeast, in the direction of the distant Baalgor Mountains which can be faintly seen over the horizon. If the players spend 1D4 hours searching the sands, they will uncover a small treasure worth 7,543 gold in jewelry, Old Kingdom coins and gemstones, as well as a magical mace (does 2D6+2 damage and emits a Blinding Flash 3 times daily), a bracelet that confers Impervious to Cold (60 minutes, 2 times daily), a Ring of Deflection (adds a +2 to parry), and a Helm of Telekinesis (identical to the 3<sup>rd</sup> level Wizard spell of the same name, 20 minutes, 3 times daily). Also buried in the sand are numerous gnawed bones of a wide variety of creatures, both animal and humanoid.

In addition to these more "mundane" items, a rare rune book is also hidden in the sands. The cover of this completely black tome is covered in tarnished silver runes that read, "Only in the Light That Is Not Light can my secrets be revealed." This is the *Book of Lost Shadows*, perhaps the only surviving collection of magic from the lost art of Shadowcasting.

## The Book of Lost Shadows

**Type:** Rune Book; Greatest Rune Creation.

**Damage:** Via spell magic only, see below.

**I.Q.:** 15

**Alignment:** Miscreant.

**Appearance:** A thick book covered in what appears to be pitch-black leather. Inscribed in tarnished (almost black) silver runes, the cover bears the book's name as well as the following inscription written in Elven: "Only in the Light That Is Not Light can my secrets be revealed." Turning the pages will reveal only featureless pages of black parchment.

**Powers:** In addition to the usual Rune Item powers, the Book of Lost Shadows possesses the following abilities and confers the following bonuses to its wielder:

+3 to all saving throws versus darkness/shadow magic (this does not mean evil magic or Necromantic spells, only spells related to shadows and darkness).

-1 to saving throws against light magic (again, this does not mean "good" magic or even Spirits of Light, simply spells related to brightness and illumination).

Doubles the character's natural Nightvision. If the person does not have Nightvision, the book confers Nightvision at 60 feet (18.3 m).

**Magic Abilities:** The Book of Lost Shadows knows ALL Shadow Magic spells as described in the *Library of Bletherad* sourcebook as well as issues #20 and #28 of *The Rifter*®. It possesses 150 P.P.E. (regains 10 per hour) and can use it to cast any

of the spells it knows, at 10<sup>th</sup> level experience, though it rarely does this, preferring to pass on its mystical knowledge to whatever unsuspecting magic user comes across the book in the hopes of reviving the lost art of Shadowcasting.

The book itself can see in absolute darkness but is blinded in bright light. It can also create Darklight (as per the Shadow Magic spell) indefinitely.

The Book of Lost Shadows can only be viewed in absolute darkness. If even a tiny amount of light is present (even starlight), then the pages will appear as nothing more than pitch black parchment. Only the runes on the cover can be read under normal light. What this means is that the reader must have some ability to see in absolute darkness or have some other way of illuminating it without actually creating light. The Shadow Magic spell Darklight will illuminate the book perfectly, meaning that if the book wishes to be read, it can create its own "light" in order to allow itself to be seen.

**Curses:** None per se, however, the Book of Lost Shadows contains the trapped essence of a Shadow Lord (pages 90 and 91 in *The Rifter*® #28), who will seek to corrupt the book's possessor by teaching the lost art of Shadowcasting (which is an inherently corrupting form of magic). Also, the book will not willingly impart any of its spell knowledge unless the reader commits to becoming a Shade Mage O.C.C. (See *The Rifter*® #20). However, a strong-willed Wizard could attempt to read the spells directly from the book in order to learn them, but in order to do this, he must undergo a battle of wills against the entity within the book (as per the Summoner O.C.C.). If the magic user wins the requisite three out of five battles, he can attempt to learn one of the spells known to the book by making a successful Scroll Conversion skill roll (usual conditions apply, though the spell does not vanish from the Rune Book if the conversion fails). Of course, the mage must also be able to read runes, as that is what the book is written in, after all. If the reader is willing to undergo the training to become a Shade Mage, then the entity within the book will provide the conduit whereby the energies from the Shadow Realm can enter the mage's body and impart the initial Shadow Magic, thus transforming the player into a 1<sup>st</sup> level Shade Mage O.C.C.

The lost art of Shadowcasting was stamped out during the Millennium of Purification following the Great War, because it was seen as inherently cruel and evil. In many ways, learning Shadowcasting is similar to how a Witch gains power from a union with a supernatural intelligence. In the case of a Shade Mage, however, the magic user allows energies from the corrupted Realm of Shadows to enter his body and infuse it with power (for full details on this, consult *The Rifter*® #20).

**Personality:** The Book of Lost Shadows is interested in only two things: Spreading evil and misery through deception, and reviving the lost art of Shadowcasting. To this end, the book will only willingly serve a magic user who agrees to become its apprentice and undertake the training of a Shade Mage. As described above, it is possible for a mage to learn Shadow Magic from the book without agreeing to the conditions described below. In this case, the book cannot use its powers directly against its owner other than to be generally annoying and uncooperative. It will also seek to find a way to abandon its current wielder in favor of a more willing, pliable mage.

When the players retrace their steps, they will eventually find a very surprised Gray Tail waiting for them right where he said he would. Much more impressed with their abilities, the Lizard Man Ranger will gladly guide them back to Zantos and will ask them to repeat their tale, over and over again.



## Chapter Nine: The Olympics of Lopan

Exactly how the players travel to get to the next piece of the rune sword is best left for them to decide. If they have already figured out how to determine the position of the fourth piece of Castlerake using a map to triangulate the next position, they will be able to determine that their next destination is somewhere in the Inland Sea, most likely near the islands of Phi or Lopan (even if they have already figured out this method, they will still need to make a successful Astronomy and Navigation skill roll). If, however, they have just been blindly following the guide of the pieces in their possession so far, then they will be forced to make the arduous cross-country journey around the Baalgor Wastelands, through the Old Kingdom, and across the Inland Sea. Either way, the journey has the potential to be fraught with danger and adventure, whether they go across the wilderness expanses over land or if they take the quicker but longer trek at sea (which will entail running the Western Empire's blockade of the

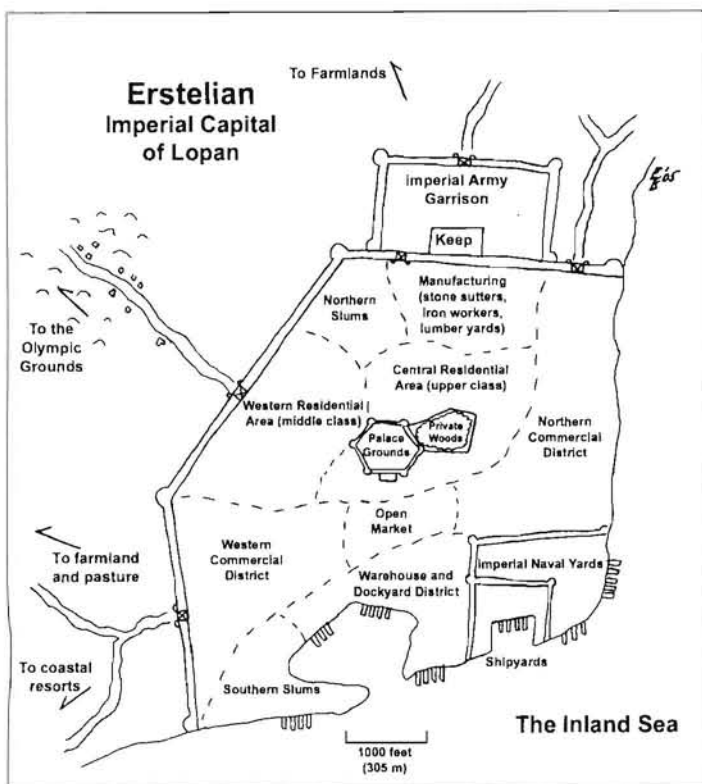
Inland Sea at the Gedorma Strait). In either case, the journey will take one or more months to complete.

What the players will find, regardless of their method of travel, is that when they arrive at the island kingdom of Lopan, the fabled Olympic Games of Lopan are about to begin. Held every five years at the island's capital city of Erstelian, the games are ostensibly supposed to be a symbol of unity for the entire world, where each nation is invited to set aside their differences and compete in the name of friendship and expanding international relations. In truth, it is far from that. Each nation that does participate sees it as an opportunity to show off their best warriors and mages as a manner of intimidation, as well as to try to spy on what their rivals are up to. And far from espousing international cooperation, only major human nations and their allies are allowed to participate. So far, no Wolfen delegation has taken part in the games; neither have official representatives of the Orcish Empire or the Kingdom of Giants (which does not particularly mind, as it is in no hurry to make its presence known to the rest of the human world). While a number of smaller nations do send representatives, the major players include the Western Empire, the Dominion of Man, Llorin (repre-

senting itself), Lopan (also representing itself), the Timiro Kingdom, Phi, the Dwarves of Northholme in the Bruu-Ga-Belimar Mountains, the Elves of Sulistan in the Old Kingdom, and the Island Kingdom of Bizantium. While the Commonwealth of the Yin-Sloth Kingdoms and the Land of the South Winds also send athletes and warriors, they seldom rank very high in the games. Although the human Kingdom of Havea has tried to enroll its own participants for several years now, they are regarded as traitors by the rest of the human world for willingly joining the Wolfen Empire.

The players will find the city bustling with activity, as foreigners from every major human kingdom wander around in a near carnival-like atmosphere. The streets are crowded with tourists, mainly the world's wealthy and elite, looking for exotic items to bring back home as souvenirs of the games. While this means that all manner of exotic items, from food and spices to silks and fine crystal, are readily available (though still expensive), finding the more mundane necessities that adventurers often require will be much harder (and far more expensive than normal - 500% of the book cost). And the sale of weapons and armor, while not impossible to find, is restricted in the interests of safety (this does not mean that they cannot be purchased, only that they will be extremely expensive as well). Magic items, likewise, will be more expensive than normal as most Alchemists feel that with the elite of the world's nobility in town, they can hike up their prices and still sell out of their inventories.

After settling in, the players will need to once more try to find the fourth piece of Castlerake. The closest they can get, however, is the edge of the Palace of Empress Jeslynn, ruler of the Kingdom of Lopan. From the guards patrolling outside the compound, it is clear that even the most skilled of thieves will find it impossible to get inside. However, the players will not need to wait too long before discovering the location of what they seek.



The next day, in the Olympic Coliseum which is located on the Olympic Grounds about 5 miles (8 km) northwest of Erstelian, the opening ceremony of the games will take place. At the ceremony, the Empress herself will welcome all of the delegates and participants from the nations of the world in the spirit of fellowship and peace (there will be more than a few laughs from the crowd at this point), and will announce that there are still a few more days left before the games begin for nations to submit their champions for competition. Then, holding up a circlet of gold and gems, she will explain that this year's grand champion of the games will be rewarded with the Ring of Erudan, the most valued piece of treasure from the recently deceased Erudan the Great. As soon as the circlet of gold is revealed, the person holding the pieces of Castlerake will instantly become aware of the fact that one of the gems in the crown must be the fourth piece of the rune sword. Anyone who makes a successful Lore: Magic (general knowledge) skill roll will recognize the name of Erudan as a famous Alchemist loyal to the Kingdom of Lopan. Exactly what powers the Ring of Erudan might possess are a mystery, though Erudan himself was never seen without it.

With the next piece of the sword guarded deep within the Imperial Palace, the players will have no choice but to find a way to enroll as participants in the Olympic Games. The hardest part of this will be bluffing their way through registration as representatives of some participating nation or power, something that should be accomplished through a combination of clever ideas, inventive role-playing, and, most likely, a generous bribe (a few hundred per player). Non-humans will be allowed to play as long as they are "official" representatives of one of the participating nations. In such cases, non-humans will usually be pitted against other non-humans of similar race (Orcs against other Orcs or Ogres, etc.). And though Wolfen are allowed as representatives of other nations (though, ironically, not from the official Wolfen Empire), the bribe a Wolfen player will need to pay for participation is going to be even greater. Women will also be allowed to fight and are usually paired up against other women in their events (except for the Horsemanship events, the Mystic Challenge, and the Psionic events in which gender does not have a significant effect).

Players will find that in addition to a variety of athletic events not unlike the traditional Olympic Games of ancient Greece (wrestling, boxing, shot put, javelin, running, etc.), there are a number of games tailored towards the fantasy setting. These include dueling (categories for each general weapon type can be found), archery/targeting, magical skill, psychic abilities, and combat against powerful supernatural opponents.

Players will need to decide how many of their party should enroll in the games. Given the wide variety of competitions, there should be something for almost everyone to do. If they ask about the Grand Champion, the Olympic officials will explain that regardless of the champions of the individual games, one overall Olympic Champion will be chosen by the judges as the Grand Champion. Each year, the individual champions receive 10,000 gold as a reward for their accomplishments (2<sup>nd</sup> place receives 5,000 gold and 3<sup>rd</sup> place receives 1,000). The Grand Champion of the Olympics not only receives the 10,000 for being the individual champion in his or her events, but also receives a special unique reward granted by the Empress herself.

In most cases, this is some priceless piece of jewelry (usually with some magical qualities) donated by a wealthy family who wishes to gain favor with the Imperial Court and Empress Jeslynn specifically. This year, Jeslynn has elected to donate the Ring of Erudan, which was bequeathed to the Empress for just that purpose (Erudan was a big fan of the games and an ultra-loyal patriot). Since the Grand Champion can come from any of the different events, that means that the more players who participate in the games, the more likely that one of them will have a shot at getting the Ring.

**Game Master Note:** Erudan did know that the gemstone that was the centerpiece of his circlet was in fact one of the pieces of Castlerake. He chose not to pursue it for a variety of reasons, including his advanced age and failing health. But most of all, he loved his country so much, and his Empress in particular (rumors constantly flew around the Imperial Court about the nature of his relationship with the young Empress), that he did not want to see her or his beloved country destroyed by its neighbors if word got out that they possessed or were searching for Castlerake.

#### Events of the Lopan Olympic Games (related skills in parenthesis):

Wrestling (Hand to Hand Combat and Wrestling).

Boxing (Hand to Hand Combat and Boxing).

Martial Arts (Hand to Hand Combat: Martial Arts).

Swimming - a variety of distances both in a pool and across Erstelian Bay (Swimming).

Running - a variety of distances from sprints to a marathon length race (Running and Forced March).

Horsemanship - a variety of competitions, including dressage - jumping and precision riding, races, chariot races, and trick-shooting while on horseback (Horsemanship and Targeting).

Archery - a variety of bow sizes (Targeting and Archery).

Javelin - (Targeting and W.P. Spear).

Shot Put - (Targeting and W.P. Blunt).

Knife Throwing (Targeting and W.P. Knife).

Acrobatics - a variety of skills (Acrobatics, Gymnastics and Tumbling).

Pole Vault (Tumbling).

Standing Long Jump (Acrobatics and Tumbling).

Running Broad Jump (Acrobatics, Tumbling, and Running).

Weightlifting (Weightlifting and Body Building as well as raw P.S.).

Monster Slaying - a no-holds-barred, raw hand to hand battle between the participant and some non-magical monster (Hand to Hand Combat, Wrestling, and Boxing).

Dueling - broken into three categories: Swordsmanship (W.P. Sword only!), Barbarian Weapons (W.P. Blunt, Chain, and Battle Axe) and Staves and Pole Arms (W.P. Spear, Formed Weapons, and Staves).

Telekinetic (TK) Triathlon - a demonstration of raw TK strength, TK targeting, and a TK duel against competing psychics (two classes - major Physical Psionics and Super Psionics).

Psychic Dueling - a no-holds-barred duel between competing Mind Mages.

The Mystic Challenge - who knows? Rumors include battling a dragon or demon, dueling other Wizards, performing Spells of Legend, etc. The only requirement is that the participant be a true practitioner of magic - Wizards, Warlocks, Undead Hunters, Witch Hunters, and Conjurers (Game Masters may feel free to include any optional magic user O.C.C.s described in issues of *The Rifter*®). No Witches, Necromancers, Priests, Shaman, Druids, Summoners, or Diabolists allowed.

Scoring for all of the competitions is based on a point system, and they are not (usually) to the death (except for the Monster Slaying Event), though deaths are frequent in the dueling events and the mysterious Mystic Challenge. While weapons of exceptional quality can be used (bonuses to strike, parry, and damage), the use of poisons, magic and psionics is not allowed in any of the events other than the Mystic Challenge and the psionic competitions. Magic weapons, armor, and items are also not allowed in any of the competitions and Olympic officials check weapons before they are used (Sensitive Psionic power of Sense Magic and the Wizard spell Detect Poison).

## Chapter Ten: Let The Games Begin!

How the Olympic Games are run is left up to the Game Master, but in the original play test, each participating player roleplayed the finals in the various competitions. In order to expedite matters, it was assumed that the players won earlier trials of the various events, leaving them to compete in the semifinals and finals of their respective events. The only event that does not have a preliminary trial is the Mystic Challenge (described below).

The Olympic Grounds are located in the hills several miles northwest of Erstelian. The road between the Imperial Capital and the Olympic Grounds is lined with all manner of inns, taverns, and shops catering to the visiting spectators and athletes. Most of these are seasonal places that only do real business when the Olympic Games or some other major event is being held. Below is a brief description of the Olympic Grounds.

**1) The Main Arena:** This facility will seat many thousands of spectators and has a number of special seating areas for visiting dignitaries and the members of the Imperial Court. Facilities are located in a building along the northeast side of the arena for the Athletes to prepare for their upcoming events. Events held in this arena include: Boxing, Wrestling, Martial Arts Matches, Dueling, Weightlifting, and Monster Slaying. The opening and closing ceremonies are also held here, including the presentation of the Grand Champion.

**2) Swimming Pool:** Though the long-distance swimming takes place back in Erstelian Bay in the capital, the shorter distance swimming races are held in this pool. The west side of the pool has rows of bleachers for higher prices while the poorer spectators must watch from the hillside to the east.

**3) Track and Field Stadium:** Like the swimming pool, one side has seating while the other is just an open hillside for public viewing. Events held here include: Archery, Pole Vault, Javelin, Shot Put, Knife Throwing, Running (other than the marathon, which is a 25 mile/40 km race along the country roads around Erstelian), Jumping, and Acrobatics.

**4) Hippodrome:** This elongated arena is where the horse-related events take place, including races, chariot races, trick-shooting, and dressage. To the north a vast area is used to allow the horses to warm up prior to their competitions. Two large stables are also available, though some of the less trusting competitors will keep their horses in private stables until their events.

**5) The Mystic Arena:** Roughly the same size as the Main Arena, this facility is used exclusively for the magic and psychic events of the Olympiad. A small facility is located on the northeast corner of the arena where the contestants wait between events.

**6) Vendors:** Several small shops catering to both the athletes and spectators, mainly serving a wide variety of food, clothing, and souvenirs.

**7) Religious Shrines:** The most prominent shrine where the athletes make prayers is that of the Juggernaut. The shrine of the Church of Light and Dark is also frequently visited by both athletes and visitors. As the Pantheon of Rurga is growing throughout the Eastern Territory, that shrine is frequently visited as well by many of the athletes involved in the combat related games. A number of other shrines that represent several of the other major religious are also present, though none of the more evil/diabolic

gods are venerated (at least openly) on the Olympic Grounds. Priests may or may not be present at any given time, though as the Juggernaut's shrine is the most popular, there is almost always one of his priests present.

**8) The Graves of the Fallen and Famous Athletes:** Though never intended to be fatal, often deadly injuries are sustained throughout the games, especially in the combat games as well as the magic and psychic competitions. It is considered an honor by many athletes (as well as their home nations) to have their remains buried on the Olympic Grounds, especially if death occurs in victory. Professional athletes will also often request that their bodies be transported to the Olympic Grounds for burial even if their death occurs sometime other than during the games. In such cases, however, the athlete must have been a participant in at least one Olympiad. Strangely enough, there are no Haunting Entities present and the graveyard is guarded by 10 Imperial Guards (all mid-level) 24 hours a day to prevent grave robbers, unscrupulous souvenir hunters, and Necromancers from disturbing the remains of the famous fallen athletes.

**9) Training and Practice Grounds:** This fenced-in area is the area where the athletes often train and practice prior to their competitions. Oftentimes devoted fans will congregate around this area in the hopes of catching the eye of their favorite competitor.

**10) Athlete Dormitory:** Though some athletes from the more affluent nations will stay at their respective embassies in Erstelian, most live within the large dormitory complex.

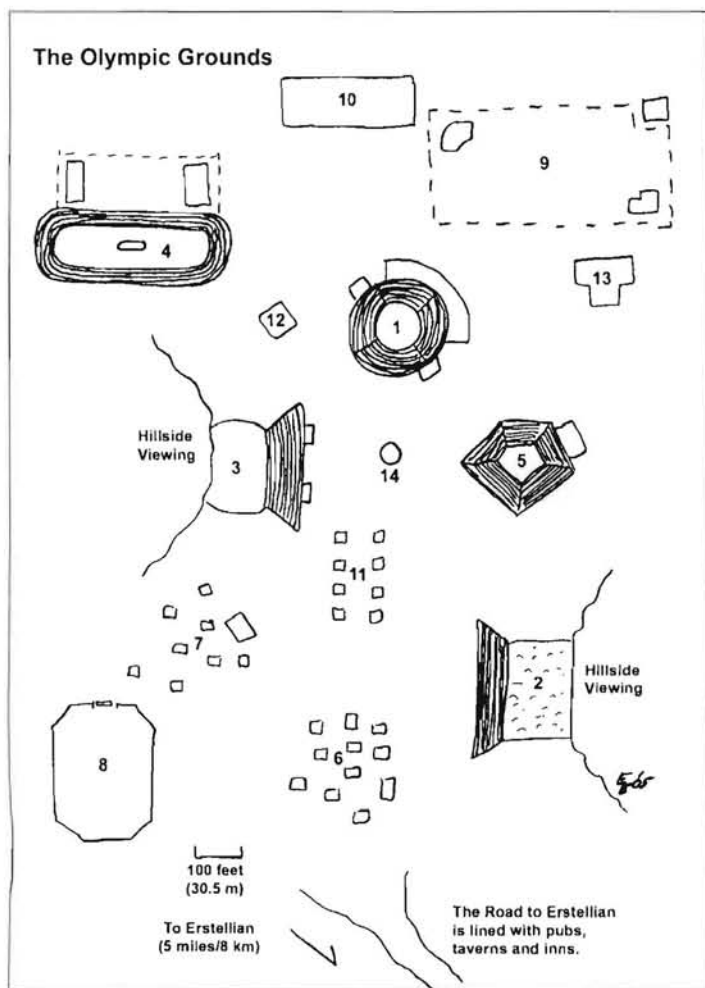
**11) Artist Pavilions:** Set aside from the other vendors, these artists, mainly sculptors and painters, will render statues and paintings of various athletes for both visitors as well as for official records and ceremonies honoring the athletes. Prices are usually quite high; the smaller items and paintings are somewhat affordable, though the workmanship is of a lower quality. Large orders or particularly large statues or paintings will take longer to complete.

**12) Olympic Officials and Judges' Area:** This small stone tower houses the offices of the Olympic Officials as well as the Judges when not observing the games. Off limits to most to help avoid any obvious signs of corruption, new athletes must come here to register. Also, any complaints about cheating or corruption must first be filed here before they are investigated.

**13) Hospital:** Owing to the danger inherent in the Olympic Games, a fully staffed healing facility is located on site to provide not only traditional medical care but also magical and psychic healing for both athletes and visitors (free for the athletes, but spectators who require their services must pay; prices are fair and reasonable).

**14) Statue of the Juggernaut:** In addition to the shrine, the Juggernaut is honored with a 100 foot (30.5 m) statue. As the patron deity of all athletes, the founders of the Lopan Olympiad long ago commissioned this marvelous work which can be seen from almost anywhere on the grounds as well as the surrounding countryside.

In the playtest, for the semifinal and final in each event, an opponent with slightly higher comparable skills and physical attributes was designed to challenge the player character. This forces the players to rely not only on their own skills and abilities, but also a degree of strategy and raw luck. Examples of a





variety of competitors are given below (Game Masters, feel free to adjust these statistics to challenge the players - remember, however, they are competing against the world's premier athletes).

## Wrestling/Boxing/Martial Arts Competitor

Human with the following statistics: P.S. 23, P.P. 19, P.E. 21.

**Hit Points:** 50

**S.D.C.:** 63

**Attacks per Melee:** 5

**Bonuses:** +8 to damage, +4 to strike, +7 to parry, +7 to dodge, +5 to pull punch, +6 to roll with the punch, Critical Strike on a Natural 18-20, knockout/stun on a Natural 18-20 (boxing only), pin/incapacitate on a Natural 18-20 (wrestling only).

**Types of Attacks:** Human punch (1D6+8), Power Punch (double damage, counts as two attacks), Karate strike (martial arts only), all kick attacks (including jump kicks) and leap attack (martial arts only), body block/tackle and crush/squeeze (wrestling only). Remember that in traditional wrestling, the objective is not to cause actual damage but rather to pin/incapacitate your opponent for a short duration.

Boxing matches are usually until a knockout or until one of the combatants is reduced to 0 S.D.C. Wrestling matches usually last until one of the opponents is pinned. Martial Arts, like boxing, last until a knockout or until S.D.C. is reduced to 0 and the first Hit Point damage is suffered.

## Swimming/Running Competitor

Human, Elf or Wolfen (for running events only) with the following statistics: P.S. 20, P.P. 15, P.E. 24, Spd 40 (43 for Wolfen).

**Skills of Note:** Swimming (95%), Running, Forced March (for marathon runners only).

## Horsemanship Competitor

Human or Elf with the following statistics: P.P. 20.

**Attacks per Melee:** 3

**Bonuses:** +3 to strike while moving on horseback (constant practice has overcome most of the usual penalties associated with this; only a Long Bowman can fire from a moving mount without any penalty to strike).

**Skills of Note:** Horsemanship: Palladin (80%/75%).

## Archery/Javelin/Shot Put/Knife-Throwing Competitor

Human, Elf, or Dwarf (for shot put only) with the following statistics: P.S. 18 (23 for shot put), P.P. 20.

**Bonuses:** +8 to throw (knives, javelin), +6 to throw (shot put), and/or +12 to strike with bows.

**Skills of Note:** W.P. Knives, W.P. Targeting, W.P. Spear, and/or W.P. Archery, Sniper.

## Acrobatics/Pole Vault/Jumps Competitor

Human or Elf with the following statistics: P.S. 18, P.P. 22, P.E. 19, Spd 35 (for long jumper only).

**Skills of Note:** Sense of Balance (75%), Walk Tightrope (51%), Back Flip/Somersault (75%), Parallel Bars and Rings (51%), Climb/Scale Walls/Rappelling (75%), Standing Leap (9 feet/2.7 m long and 6 feet/1.8 m high) +1D4 feet, Running Leap (18 feet/5.5 m long) +2D4 feet, Pole Vault (85%, 15 feet/4.6 m high) +1D4 feet (all of these skills come from the Acrobatics, Gymnastics, and Tumbling skills). Long Jump competitors will also have the Running skill

## Weightlifting Competitor

Human or Dwarf with the following statistics: P.S. 25-28 (the higher number for Dwarves).

**Skills of Note:** Weightlifting and Athletics (General).

## Monster Slaying Event

In this event, always a crowd favorite, participants are usually pitted against some non-magical creature and must fight to the death. Depending upon the ferocity of the beast, this may include weapons or the player may be forced to fight bare-handed. The use of magic and psionics is not allowed and psychic observers are always present to detect its use and disqualify the participant. For the bare-handed combat, the usual monsters, most imported from distant lands, can include: Grimbor, Gromek, Dogres, Lizard Men, Minotaurs, Timrek, as well as normal bears, mountain lions, lions, tigers, and gorillas. Wolfen and Bearmen were once also used as monsters in the competition, and while many in the human lands do not understand the reason for the change, the officials of Lopan have decreed that Wolfen are no longer allowed to be used in that manner (Lopan, with its larger than average Elf population, does not consider the Wolfen to be the savage, baby-killing monsters the rest of the Dominion of Man makes them out to be). This mentality may someday drive a wedge between the rest of the Eastern Territory and the Kingdom of Lopan, especially as hostilities in the Disputed Territories come to a head.

For the no-holds-barred events where weapons and even magic/psionics are allowed, the monsters are rarer and often more powerful. In the most extreme cases, there is even a team event where an entire team of up to four fight a much stronger monster. These more powerful monsters can include: Beast Dragons, Bug Bears, Catoblepa, Chimera, Eye Killers, Manticores, Melech, Owl-Thing, Scorpion Devils, and Tuskers. On very rare occasions, even young Great Woolly Dragons may be fought. In these more violent fights, groups of magic users and soldiers surround the arena in case things get too out of hand.

## Dueling Competitor (all weapon styles)

Human, Elf, Dwarf, or Orc with the following statistics: P.S. 20, P.P. 18, P.E. 18.

**Hit Points:** 54

**S.D.C.:** 50

### Attacks per Melee: 5

**Bonuses:** +5 to damage, +4 to strike (+7 with weapons), +7 to parry (+10 with weapons), +7 to dodge, +4 to pull punch, +4 to roll with punch, Critical Strike on a Natural 18-20, Paired Weapons, Disarm.

**Skills of Note:** Hand to Hand: Expert, Boxing, Athletics (general), and any appropriate W.P.

**Weapons:** Weapon of choice (usually either well balanced with a +1 to strike and parry or extra weight/extra sharp with a +3 to damage). Also knows kick attacks (2D4+5 damage) and body flip/throw.

**Armor:** Each combatant is issued a suit of Studded Leather Armor (A.R. 13, S.D.C. 38).

The fight is usually until the first opponent is reduced to 0 S.D.C. and their first Hit Point damage is suffered. However, owing to the unpredictability of armed combat, deaths are frequent and, as long as they are clearly accidental (a lucky shot before S.D.C. is reduced), then the victor is not penalized or charged with a crime.

## Telekinetic Triathlon Competitor

Major or Master Psychic of any race is likely except Changeling (though, who would know?).

**Statistics for major psychic:** M.E. 17, I.S.P.: 52, for master psychic: M.E. 21, I.S.P.: 257.

**Psonics:** This competition tests mastery of Telekinesis and similar powers through a variety of events. As such, while the Major and Master Psychics will know a variety of additional powers, the disciplines they will be using will include the following: Float, Levitation, Telekinesis (normal), Telekinetic Punch, and Telekinetic Leap. In the Master division, the following additional powers will be present: Telekinesis: Super and Telekinetic Force Field. All are equal to 8<sup>th</sup> level strength.

The three events are as follows: 1) Lifting items of increasing mass until one of more runs out of mental strength (I.S.P.); 2) A telekinetic archery event targeting arrows at increasingly distant and difficult (moving) targets; and 3) A telekinetic duel where psychics may use only telekinetic-related powers to beat their opponent into submission (usually until S.D.C. is reduced to 0).

## Psychic Duel Competitor

Master Psychic of any race is likely except Changeling (though, who would know?).

**Statistics for Master Psychics only:** M.E. 23, I.S.P.: 259.

**Attacks per Melee:** 3 physical or psionic.

**Bonuses:** +1 to strike, +2 to parry, +2 to dodge, 2 to damage, +2 to pull punch, +2 to roll with the punch, Critical Strike on a Natural 19-20, +4 to save versus psionics (as a Master, this means they will save on a 6 or better), +6 to save versus insanity, +6 to save versus mind control, +5 to save versus possession, +3 to save versus Horror Factor.

**Psonic Powers:** As Master Psychics/Mind Mages, they have a full range of powers to select from: choose six from each of the three lesser categories and ALL of the Super Psonic powers except one (Game Master's choice). Considered an 8<sup>th</sup> level Mind Mage.

This battle is a no-powers-barred contest which officially ends when one of the opponents is rendered unconscious, but usually ends in death. This is quickly growing into a crowd favorite as well.

## The Mystic Challenge Event

This event has long been the crowd's favorite as it draws some of the most skilled Wizards and men of magic from around the world for what is always a spectacular and often deadly contest. Held as the final event before the crowning of the Grand Champion, the exact nature of the event is a closely guarded secret and changes with each passing Olympics. In the past, the event has included a mystical maze to navigate, battling extremely powerful monsters, solving puzzles (this one was not as well received as it was not very flamboyant compared with the other variations), demonstrating the use of extremely complicated (and showy) spells, and outright Wizard duels.

This year, the planners have managed to acquire one of the most dangerous and magically resistant monsters in the world: a Zavor. Keeping it locked in an extremely solid cell, the Olympic officials use magic to replicate the beast and separate the duplicate from the original to challenge the wizard. (This has proven to be such a dangerous task, not only for the Wizards, but also for the handlers and, in one incident, the crowd, that it is unlikely to be used again, despite the praise it has received as being one of the best events to grace the Olympic Games in many generations.)

A platoon of high level soldiers with non-magical weapons stands guard as the event begins in case things get out of hand. Each participating Wizard is kept in a separate chamber until they are called forth to compete in the event, so that they have no knowledge of what to expect. They are told only that they will need all of their cunning and resourcefulness to accomplish the task and that they are allowed to bring whatever weapons and equipment they want with them. The arena is lined with a variety of quality iron and wooden weapons (most doing 2D4 or 2D6 damage) in case the Wizard suddenly finds himself facing the Zavor with only magical weapons or spells that either do not work or serve only to duplicate the damnable creature.

To win the event, the Zavor must be slain. Higher scores are awarded for resourcefulness and not causing the monster to duplicate too many times. If more than five Zavor are created, the participant is disqualified and the platoon steps in to slay the beasts before they attack the crowd and get out of the arena (as was the case in the one incident where spectators were injured - the Wizard was killed very quickly, but the Zavor picked up his magical sword and, before the platoon could step in, used it to make several clones that overwhelmed the troops and attacked before more troops arrived).

In the event that a Wizard does not wish to complete the event, each is given a red scarf that they can throw down if they give up without being killed in the process, though most Wizards do try to battle the creature.

**One (+) Zavor:** The current Olympic Game's obstacle in the Mystic Challenge.

**Alignment:** Diabolic.

**Attributes:** I.Q. 7, M.E. 8, M.A. 8, P.S. 9, P.P. 13, P.E. 8, P.B. 5, Spd 6.

**Size:** 3.5 feet (1.1 m) tall; 70 pounds (31.5 kg).

**Natural A.R.:** 8

**Hit Points:** 28

**S.D.C.:** 70

**P.P.E.:** 8

**Horror Factor:** 16

**Attacks per Melee:** 3 physical.

**Bonuses:** +2 to strike, +3 to parry, +3 to dodge.

**Damage:** Bite and claws both inflict 1D6 damage, or by weapons (it will try to grab for any of the weapons around the arena).

**Natural Abilities:** Nightvision 90 feet (27.4 m), see the invisible, Prowl (50%), Climb (60%), impervious to fire and cold (no damage), impervious to magic and magic weapons, impervious to ordinary S.D.C. weapons except those made of wood, silver, or iron.

**Magic:** None per se, however, any magical energy attacks (Fire Ball, Call Lightning, River of Lava, Paralysis Bolt, Energy Bolt, Wall of Fire, etc.) or hits by magical weapons (including Rune Weapons and Holy Weapons) will cause no damage whatsoever. They will, however, cause the vicious creature to split into two identical Zavor (right down to Hit Points and attributes). Likewise, physical attacks by creatures of magic will also cause the Zavor to duplicate. Only spells that create a physical barrier of some sort (Wall of Stone, Wall of Thorns, Wall of Ice, etc.) or some other physical effect (Wind Rush, Quicksand, Hopping Stones) can impede or stop the creatures, though not damage them unless somehow made of wood, iron, or silver. Entirely magical barriers (Impenetrable Wall of Force, Immobilize, Carpet of Adhesion, etc.) have no effect whatsoever. Fortunately, in addition to being vulnerable to weapons made of silver, wood, or iron, they are also completely vulnerable to psionic attacks (which do full damage and will not cause the creature to duplicate).

**Psionics:** None.

**Appearance:** A small, hunched humanoid with lumpy brown skin, an oversized maw filled with broad flat teeth, a short, stubby tail, and two long claws on its feet.

If the magic user is wise and familiar with the Zavor (either by having encountered one before or by making a successful Lore: Demons and Monsters skill roll), then the Mystic Challenge may not be so difficult. However, if not, then the entire event could quickly become a blood-bath.

Whether or not any of the players becomes the Grand Champion depends upon the Game Master. If not, then the players may find themselves with the additional challenge of somehow acquiring the centerpiece gemstone from the Ring of Erudan from the true Grand Champion (an adventure I leave to creative Game Masters who do not feel that their players have been challenged enough already). Also, Game Masters may feel free to include additional elements to the Olympics, including accusations of cheating, interfering fans, attempts at sabotage, approaches by the local Thieves' Guild or other elements of organized crime, etc.

However the players acquire the Ring of Erudan, they will find that it is a circlet of gold with seven gems set evenly around its length. The item clearly registers magic, though exactly what it does is unknown (Erudan never revealed its powers - Game Masters, feel free to make up its powers, however, once the center gem is removed, it is powerless or at least greatly diminished). The center gem is clearly recognizable to the bearer of the other pieces as the fourth piece of Castlerake.

**Castlerake's Right Gem:** An emerald with a faceted surface that contains a very small rune in its crystalline depths. The emerald radiates strongly of magic and contains 40 P.P.E. that can be used by a magic user. If this P.P.E. is depleted, the gem will recharge at a rate of 1 P.P.E. per day, or faster if willingly filled by a magic user or set upon a ley line or nexus (from page 229, *Dragons and Gods*).

When the gem is removed from the circlet, it will fly to the others with a flash and fit itself on the right side of the crossbar. Immediately, the player charged with possessing the pieces will feel a now very familiar sensation drawing them northwest across the Inland Sea and into the Northern Hinterlands.

Any money they might have won should allow the players plenty of opportunity to provision before the next leg of their journey. However, they will soon discover that they have a new problem. Since the presentation of the Ring of Erudan was a very public spectacle, others will have begun to speculate that the center gem of the gold circlet might be one of the pieces of Castlerake (after all, the rune sword is perhaps the most famous blade in history). Word will spread like wildfire through Erstelian that the Grand Champion is about to embark on a quest to find the rest of the sword and use it to take over the world in the name of whatever land he claimed to have represented (especially if the players spent time buying supplies and asking questions about Ophid's Grasslands and the Northern Hinterlands). The longer the players remain on the island of Lopan, the more likely that attempts will be made to steal the pieces or that they will be attacked by Assassins from some major nation in an effort to acquire the gemstone (this will also give the players a taste of what will happen whenever they do find all of the pieces and reintroduce Castlerake to the world, especially if they are on a mission for a particular nation).

## Chapter Eleven: Stolen!

As Lopan has a colony established along the southern coast of the Great Northern Wilderness, finding passage across the Inland Sea should be relatively easy and cheap. However, the longer they remain in Erstelian, the more attention they will attract as word gets around of their possibly having one of the pieces of Castlerake. (Game Masters may decide to have Thieves and Assassins begin to bother the players if they remain too long or continue to attract too much attention.)

Located in the southwestern corner of the Great Northern Wilderness on the shores of the Inland Sea, Lophara is about 200 miles (320 km) east of Ophidia, the Western Empire's colony on the southern edge of Ophid's Grasslands. Equipping for the Northern Hinterlands should not be much of a problem once they arrive in Lophara, however, they will not find many magi-

cal services once they are off the island (minor items and potions, no weapons or armor). Worse, though they are away from Erstelian, word that the Grand Champion has arrived will spread like wildfire followed swiftly by the rumor that they have one of the pieces of Castlerake and are searching for the others. This will not give them much time to outfit for the next phase of their trek. Worse, they may find it hard to find a guide who does not have some ulterior motive for taking them into the wilderness. In fact, finding a legitimate guide will prove surprisingly difficult as it is Summer and most of the experienced trappers and hunters are off in the woods already, making the most of the snow-free season.

If they move quickly they will be able to find one local who does not seem to be interested (or even very impressed) about the Grand Champion of the Olympic Games. She is a Kankoran Druid named Crish who tends to be overlooked by most of the humans from Lopan who are unwilling to trust a canine guide. While not a true Ranger, she does know a great deal about the surrounding woods, though once they cross into the Hinterlands, her knowledge of the countryside is very sparse as she has truly not spent much time in the grasslands. Still, she is willing to share her experience with the party for a relatively small fee (700 gold plus a cut of whatever treasure they might find).

**Crish** (real name is Anka'ra Crish): 4<sup>th</sup> level Druid O.C.C.

**Alignment:** Unprincipled.

**Attributes:** I.Q. 8, M.E. 8, M.A. 6, P.S. 12, P.P. 16, P.E. 21, P.B. 14, Spd 15.

**Size:** 4 feet, 8 inches (1.4 m) tall; 100 pounds (45 kg).

**Natural A.R.:** 6

**Hit Points:** 42

**S.D.C.:** 26

**P.P.E.:** 80

**Horror Factor:** 12

**Attacks per Melee:** 3 physical.

**Bonuses:** +3 on initiative, +1 to strike (+3 with sword, +4 with short bow), +3 to parry (+5 with sword, +4 to staff), +3 to dodge, +4 to pull punch, +2 to roll with impact, +7 to save versus Horror Factor, +4 to save versus magic, +3 to save versus poison, +2 to save versus disease, +1 to Spell Strength.

**Damage:** Staff does 2D6, Short sword (seldom uses it) 2D4, two daggers inflict 1D6 damage. Also, Claws do 2D4, Kick does 2D6, and Bite does 1D4 damage. Wears soft leather armor (A.R. 10, S.D.C. 20).

**Natural Abilities/Skills of Note:** Nightvision 40 feet (12.2 m), keen smell and hearing, suffers no penalty to prowl in the Northern Wilderness. Track blood scent up to 1000 feet (305 m) away at 42%, Recognize Scent of others up to 50 feet (15.2 m) away at 32%. Astronomy and Navigation (60%), Botany (60%), History (65%), Holistic Medicine (60%/50%), Land Navigation (67%), Lore: Faerie Folk (60%), Identify Plants and Flowers (55%), Wilderness Survival (60%), Track and Trap Animals (50%/60%), Prowl (40%), Literacy: Oghrune (Druid Runes 65%; 50% to read regular runes), Regional Knowledge of Northern Wilderness (55%), Knowledge of Sacred Sites (50%), Recognize Enchantment on Animals (50%), Druid Versification (45%).

**Magic:** Control Forces of Nature (35% for powers she unleashes), See and Use Ley line, Ley line Drifting, Ley line Rejuvenation, Healing Touch to animals (4D6 - costs 7 P.P.E.), Druid Astronomy (35%), Weather Identification (35%), Druid Prophecy (35%), plus the following spells: Globe of Daylight, Repel Animals, Chameleon, Faerie Speak, Negate Poisons/Toxins, Healing Touch, Control the Beasts, and Familiar Link (see below for Crish's familiar).

**Psionics:** None.

**Appearance:** Like all Kankoran, Crish looks like a humanoid fox with gray fur and reddish orange highlights and blue eyes. She does not have too many stripes (scars), which is a sure sign of her low level of experience.

Crish's familiar is a Red Tailed Hawk she has named Grynna. Grynna has 28 Hit Points and is an excellent huntress. Crish will never go far without Grynna and is often seen with the bird resting on her shoulder. She will never intentionally allow the bird to come to harm and will usually send her flying when trouble arises. Grynna will, however, often fly ahead and scout out a region before the Kankoran moves in.

Though lacking the talkative nature of Gray Tail, Crish is still a competent scout who expertly guides the players through the southern edge of the wilderness towards Ophid's Grasslands without too much trouble. After several days, she will lead them to Wood's End, a hearth and home situated an hour's travel from the edge of the woods. Sitting at the center of an artificial clearing, twenty-foot (6.1 m) tall logs surround this compound. Through the large double gates, the players see a massive pine lodge easily two stories tall with several stone chimneys sprouting from the roof. Several smaller wooden buildings, a stable, a smokehouse, a few storage sheds, and an outhouse, surround the hall. At the moment, the place is fairly empty with most of the "locals" consisting of trappers and hunters who are out in the wilderness for the summer. In the Winter, Crish will explain, places like these are packed with folk all staying together to keep warm and survive. This is the last outpost before the grasslands begin. Crish will suggest that they stay for the night, and see if they can learn any news before setting out. She readily admits that she has seldom ventured far into the Hinterlands and though she still offers her skills and services, she does not really know much about the lands beyond the edge of the woods.

Staying one or two nights at Wood's End is free, though it costs a few gold for a hot meal (simple fare, but good). The only other services offered include buying trapping and hunting equipment and other wilderness field gear. The head of the family that runs the place is an ex-lumberjack from Havea named Igor who lives there with his wife and three daughters, ages 2, 7, and 9. They also have four older boys who are not at the hearth and home during the Summer, as they are all expert hunters and trappers who spend the warmer season gathering food and furs for the long Winter cold. Igor is an imposing figure with a broad chest, a full black beard and one arm. He lost his right arm, as well as his left eye, in an accident many years ago that forced him into an early retirement. Despite the loss of limb and eye, he is still a powerful man who will defend his beloved family and home to the death. He is also much loved by the "locals" who begin returning to Wood's End in the Fall and spend their Winters with the cheerful family. The few who do visit Wood's

End during the Summer are also very fond of the family and will defend them as if they were their own.

On the evening after their arrival, there will be a small crowd in the massive common room. Despite being Summer, the nights are still cool and there is a roaring fire in the western wall. A small crowd of Summer trappers has arrived to trade furs, sell meat, and enjoy a few hours inside a warm, friendly building. Chief amongst the crowd, in addition to the players, is a quiet group of humans sitting against the eastern wall and talking in hushed tones to themselves (Western Empire agents from their neighboring colony who have already learned that the Grand Champion and his or her party may have been heading this way), a pair of burly Wolfen who make no effort to conceal the fact that they are Imperial Officers, and a party of Gnomes who are enjoying a number of drinks and getting increasingly loud and jovial as the night progresses.

At one point, a Gnome, presumably from the party of Gnomes, will approach the players and offer to buy them a drink. Introducing himself as Trebin, he will then ask them if they will join him in a friendly game of cards. Trebin is actually a Leprechaun, but he is very skilled at blending in with Gnomes (any players asking for a skill roll on Lore: Faerie Folk will make it at a -30%). Ignoring any refusals, he deals out a hand and begins to play, anteing up a few gold. Owing to his charming nature, players should be encouraged to play. The game starts friendly enough, with the players winning a few hands and making a small amount of profit (6D6 gold each). Players with the Card Shark skill should double their winnings. Trebin will continue to buy drinks and keep the mood friendly, even when he slowly begins to win back some of his gold (he is very good at what he does and it should not be readily apparent to the players that they have been had). Eventually, Trebin will “accidentally” reveal that he has been cheating, a charge he will flatly deny. In a seemingly drunken state, he will shout out that his honor has been sullied and demand justice. As Igor and a few of the other large huntsmen attempt to defuse the situation, someone (?) will throw a punch. As the situation degenerates into a brawl, Trebin will disappear. How the players get out of this will depend greatly upon their role-playing skills. Ultimately, the Western spies will vouch for the players, claiming that it was the Gnome who started the whole affair. Warning them that they had best leave by daybreak, Igor returns to the bar and, after a few moments, the quiet conversations begin again. If asked about Trebin, the other Gnomes will honestly admit to having never met him before.

Eventually, after everyone has calmed down, one of the players will realize that the pieces of Castlerake have been stolen.

**Trebin** (real name is Tre'belin): Leprechaun Thief.

**Alignment:** Anarchist.

**Attributes:** I.Q. 10, M.E. 10, M.A. 14, P.S. 9, P.P. 18, P.E. 13, P.B. 12, Spd 21.

**Size:** 2 feet, 3 inches (0.7 m) tall; 70 pounds (31.5 kg).

**Natural A.R.:** 8

**Hit Points:** 78

**S.D.C.:** 16

**P.P.E.:** 200

**Horror Factor:** 8 (but only when his true nature is revealed).



**Attacks per Melee:** 5 physical or two using magic.

**Bonuses:** +2 on initiative, +2 to strike (+4 with weapons), +3 to parry (+5 with weapons), +4 to dodge, +2 to roll with impact, +2 to save versus Horror Factor, +3 to save versus magic, +2 on all other saving throws.

**Damage:** A short staff that does 1D6, and a small knife that does 1D4 in addition to a paralyze charm (save versus magic at 12 or higher or paralyzed for 2D6 melee rounds). However, he will seldom use these weapons as he prefers to rely on his charm and magical skills to get him out of situations.

**Natural Abilities/Skills of Note:** Nightvision 60 feet (18.3 m), keen day vision, turn invisible at will, Ventriloquism (88%), sense secret compartments and doors (64%; automatic, innate ability). Prowl (40%), Climb (60%/50%), Palming (60%), Concealment (60%), Pick Locks (55%), Pick Pockets (82%), Card Shark (52%).

**Magic:** Escape, Chameleon, Charismatic Aura, Detect Concealment, Concealment, Reduce Self to Six Inches, and Fool's Gold. Victims must roll 16 or higher to resist Faerie Magic. Casting spells does not cost Trebin any P.P.E., but he can only cast a specific spell (successful or not) on the same person other than himself once per 24 hours.

**Psionics:** None.

**Appearance:** Trebin looks like a well dressed (for the wilderness, at any rate), slightly overweight Gnome. He is wearing a tailored adventurer's cloak and his outfit, though simple, does not look like it has seen anything resembling the wilderness at all - very clean. He has white hair and sparkling black eyes.

If by some chance, the player in possession of Castlerake's pieces does not actually have it on his or her person at the time, then the entire encounter will not take place as described, though the Leprechaun will still entice the players into gambling and drinking before he slips away to steal it from their room. If the player has placed the spell Mystic Alarm on the pieces, it will make no difference except that they will discover the theft even sooner, though they will not be in a position to catch the thief in the act as he will slip away via invisibility as soon as the brawl begins and he has the item. (Game Masters, regardless of the precautions the players may have taken with the item, the mystical Faerie will be able to steal it from them.) Ironically, Trebin has no idea what it is that he is stealing, he has simply marked the players as an easy con (he loves this sort of game and has become very good at it, though the number of hearth and homes that he is now known at is steadily increasing, forcing him to move on to "greener pastures.")

## Chapter Twelve: Ophid's Blight

When the players rush outside, they will find that Trebin is nowhere to be seen. However, anyone making a successful Track Humanoids skill roll should be able to find a set of Gnome/Leprechaun-sized tracks leading away from Wood's End in the direction of Ophid's Grasslands (if none of the players possess this skill, Crish will be able to find the tracks even with the -20% penalty applied to tracking humanoids with the Track and Trap Animals skill). The reason for this is that Trebin has made no effort to conceal the direction he traveled. He wants them to follow him into the wilderness. His usual M.O. is to entice a party to follow him into the wilderness after either stealing something from them or simply by angering them to such a degree that they will want revenge. He then leads them to a region about a day's march into the grasslands, locally known as Ophid's Blight.

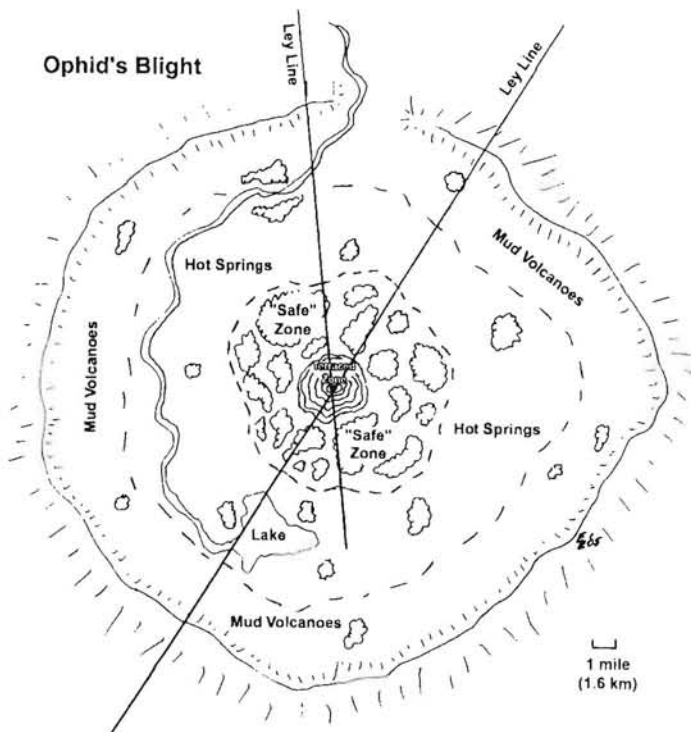
Within an hour, the forest thins completely and rolling plains of green grass stretch as far as the eye can see. Trebin's trail is still clear and still heads in a straight line towards the northwest. On the morning of the second day since leaving Wood's End, the players will notice that the ground begins to rise slightly. When they crest the top of the next rise, the players will see a humid, mist-shrouded depression that stretches out for many miles ahead of them. Unlike a morning mist which is chilly and vanishes with the rising sun, this mist is a warm vapor that clings to the region even in the afternoon. When a stiff breeze blows across them, the closest of the mists are swept away, treating the players to their first sight of Ophid's Blight.

Ophid's Blight is a thirty mile (48 km) diameter caldera, filled with geysers, mud volcanoes, and hot springs. Eons ago, an ancient volcano erupted with such force that it collapsed in on itself. However, the magma chamber deep below still heats the groundwater that sinks in after the snows melt and the spring rains come. This heated water bubbles back to the surface mixed with sulfur and other minerals, sometimes forming beautiful but deadly springs of boiling hot water, other times mixing with the wet soil to form thick, stinking, boiling mud. And in places, it

erupts at regular intervals as gigantic geysers of super-heated water and steam. The mineral rich groundwater ends up killing most of the trees, though grass still grows in patches here and there. Because of this, the entire scene looks like a terraced desert of hot steam, stinking sulfur, and the constant rumble of churning water and mud.

The biggest danger that the hot springs presents is that because so much of the sub-surface has been inundated with this boiling, mineral rich water, the surface of the ground can, in places, be only a few inches thick. Even the weight of a full grown human could cause it to crack, plunging the unfortunate soul into a deadly spring of boiling water. Many an animal, not to mention wandering human, has met an unfortunate end in the Winter when the steam from the hot springs and geysers keeps most of the snows at bay to some degree, creating a deceptively friendly environment in the harsh cold. While at least some of the local plains animals - bison, grizzly bears, Catoblepa, Tuskers, Oboru, and Arrowhead - know instinctively where to step to avoid most of these dangers, most unaware Winter travelers think that this steamy region with its warmer air and thinner snow covering must be safe and end up falling to a boiling death. Game Masters, to really understand what this place is like, look up images of the geysers and hot springs of Yellowstone National Park.

When the players first see this hell on earth, they need to make a saving throw versus a Horror Factor of 10. Crish will know at least enough to be aware of the general dangers of the place, though she has never been to Ophid's Blight before. Advising them not to venture too close to the geothermal features (though this is not 100% safe, it will reduce the danger significantly), she guides them down into the steaming bowl, looking for any animal tracks that might guide them safely around the dangerously thin ground. Ironically, Trebin's tracks are still quite clear, but they lead in a direction that Crish warns will lead them too close to the mud volcanoes.



Ophid's Blight is divided into three regions. The outermost ring consists of about three miles (4.8 km) of mud volcanoes. In places, these rumbling, stinking mounds erupt, spewing splatters of hot mud. While they are only dangerous if the players are too close, the entire region reeks of sulfur to the point of distraction. Players will need to make a saving throw versus non-lethal poison (16 or higher) or suffer a -3 to all combat bonuses. Players who roll a 5 or less will be so overcome by the stench that they will retch on the spot and be unable to enter the region until an hour has passed (he or she will need to still make a successful saving throw to avoid the negative effects). It will take Crish about 4 hours to safely navigate the region. Any faster, and there is a 10% chance per fifteen minutes of travel of a player accidentally stepping through a thin crust of ground cover and falling into thick, super-hot mud (1D4x10 heat/scalding damage per melee until rescued or they die). Rescued characters will be covered in painful second-degree burns and blisters (-5 on initiative and to strike, parry, and dodge for 1D6 days until they begin to heal unless magic or psionic healing is administered). There is also a 10% chance each half hour of a nearby mud volcano erupting with enough force to splatter steaming mud on the players. If this happens, each player will suffer 2D6 damage and first-degree burns.

The next section of Ophid's Blight is perhaps the most beautiful. Springs of blue, green, yellow, and red sparkle in the sunlight when the breeze blows away the steam. Players must once again roll to save against Horror/Awe Factor of 12 or be temporarily overcome by the majesty and beauty of the scene. However, this is a deceptive beauty as the sub-surface boiling waters in this region are more extensive. Crish will take another seven hours to navigate this five mile-wide (8 km) region. However, while the stifling smell of sulfur is almost gone (it still lingers, but there are no penalties), the chance of falling through the crust is greater. If the players wander away from Crish or urge her to travel faster, there is a 25% chance per fifteen minutes of travel of falling into a deep pit of boiling water, suffering 2D4x10 damage per melee plus the second-degree burns described before. Even where Crish leads, there is still a 5% chance per half hour of someone breaking the thin crust and falling through (Game Masters may allow the player to make a successful dodge of 12 or higher to avoid falling in - only suffers 4D6 damage from the initial splash). There is a 25% chance per half hour of a massive geyser of superheated steam erupting nearby and enveloping the players in a cloud of hot steam (same effects as a Cloud of Steam spell) lasting 1D4 minutes and making travel dangerous until the cloud dissipates.

The next five miles (8 km) of Ophid's Blight seem to suggest that they are out of danger. Other than the occasional patch of dead trees marking a hot spring or mud volcano, this region is mainly lightly wooded and hilly. Places where the ground is dangerously thin in this area are easy to avoid and Crish is able to make quick time, taking only an hour to guide them through this area. However, there is still the slight danger of a nearby geyser erupting unexpectedly (same effect as described above, only 5% chance per half hour of travel). Also, the ground is beginning to rise slightly but steadily as they continue. One of the players or Crish will point out what looks like Trebin's small Gnome-sized tracks still heading towards the center of the Blight.

When the woods give way once more, the players will see that the slope gets abruptly steeper. At first glance, it appears as if the hillside is covered with giant, glistening, white and brown steps. However, upon closer inspection, the players will realize that these terraced steps are filled with more hot spring water. Boiling mineralized water gradually deposited Travertine (limestone) in giant terraced steps as it slowly flowed down the hill over the ages. This last rise, approximately one mile (1.6 km), will be the slowest going, taking them another 3 hours to traverse. It will also be the most dangerous, not only because of the likelihood of breaking through the thin crust and falling into the boiling water beneath, but also because of the increased amount of geyser activity in the vicinity. The chance of breaking through the ground in this area is 10% per half hour even where Crish leads them (50% if they wander off). Also, geysers are more frequent in this area, and the likelihood of a nearby one erupting is 40% per half hour.

**Game Master's Note:** With all of these dangers, one might wonder why the party does not simply fly over Ophid's Blight? For one thing, unless everyone can be endowed with flight, someone will be left behind. Second, the thick clouds of steam will make it almost impossible to see anything from above. Third, it will be impossible to track Trebin from the sky. And finally, there is an inherent danger in flight over Ophid's Grasslands in general, owing to the possibility of attracting the attention of an airborne predator, such as a dragon, demon from the distant Northern Mountains, Dragondactyl, Gryphon, Peryton, etc.

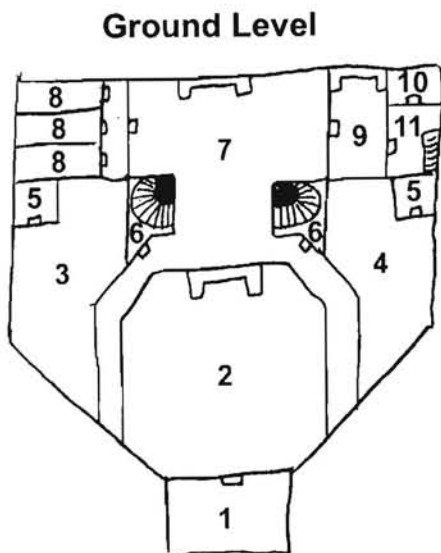
Ultimately, the players will crest the top of the hill and be free of the hot springs and geysers. Though the mists are still thick, blown up from below, players can tell that they are on solid rock. The center of Ophid's Blight is an ancient lava dome that was once the center of the extinct volcano. The solid rhyolite outcrop of pinkish-gray stone forms a level plateau. A small cluster of trees crowns this rise and, through the mist in the center of the trees, the players can barely see the top-most blocks of a stone keep. Also evident are Trebin's tracks, which lead unmistakably towards the trees. By now, magic-users, psychics, and clergy within the party can also sense the distinct presence of being within half a mile of a nexus.

Some forgotten people somehow managed to build a small keep in this isolated corner of Ophid's Grasslands, no doubt with the dual purpose of keeping out the curious and utilizing the ley line nexus that the keep is built upon (one of the ley lines of this nexus is one of the four that connect to the Devil's Mark in the northern part of the Hinterlands, and whenever there is major inter-dimensional activity at that cursed place, this one also erupts, as do all of the geysers in the basin). Exactly what became of the people who built this place, none can say. Now, the keep is home to an Angel-Demon Serpent who has taken up guardianship of the nexus.

The layout of the ruined keep is detailed below. Most of the chambers are empty except for the crumbling remains of rotting wooden furniture. No weapons or any real valuables can be found (except for the collection of items Trebin has managed to "acquire" over the years). The keep was originally designed to house only a small force of minion mercenaries (Orcs, Kobolds, Goblins) to serve the Summoner/Wizard as servants, as soldiers to waylay nearby travelers for supplies and loot, and most im-

portantly, as muscle in case it was needed to subdue something summoned from the nexus in the basement. The ley lines that run through Ophid's Blight actually cross to form their nexus a few feet underground, which was why founder of this forgotten keep had the summoning chamber built as a basement to open access to the nexus. Though no truly powerful supernatural or evil beings have been able to take up residence in the keep, as they would have been slain by the Angel-Demon Serpent, less powerful evil creatures, including some of the meaner variety of Faerie Folk, as well as several Entities, haunt the ruins. Eventually, the players will reach the center of the keep, a massive chamber that houses the nexus (or more precisely, was built around it).

## Antar's Keep



## Ground Level

**1) Entry Hall:** Empty except for a pair of 2 large centipedes that are crawling in one corner. The centipedes are really a pair of mischievous Bogies. There is nothing of value in this room.

### Two (2) Bogies

**Alignment:** Miscreant.

**Attributes:** I.Q. 5, M.E. 3, M.A. 7, P.S. 1, P.P. 15, P.E. 14, P.B. 5, Spd 15.

**Size:** 8 inches (0.2 m) tall; 8 ounces (0.23 kg).

**Natural A.R.:** 10

**Hit Points:** 42

**S.D.C.:** 14

**P.P.E.:** 600

**Horror Factor:** 9 (10 as unusually large centipedes).

**Attacks per Melee:** 4 physical or two using magic.

**Bonuses:** +2 on initiative, +2 to strike, +2 to automatic dodge, +2 to roll with impact, +3 to pull punch, +6 to save versus Horror Factor, +2 on all other saving throws.

**Damage:** None per se. These two Bogies will only attack with their magic until detected, at which point they will flee.

**Natural Abilities/Skills of Note:** Nightvision 90 feet (27.4 m), keen day vision, see the invisible, and metamorphosis into a large spider, centipede, or scorpion at will.

**Magic:** Wind Rush, Fear, Wisps of Confusion, Purple Mist, Befuddle, Animate Objects, Repel Animals, Ventriloquism, and Globe of Daylight. Victims must roll 16 or higher to resist Faerie Magic. Casting spells does not cost the Faerie Folk any P.P.E., but each can only cast a specific spell (successful or not) on the same person other than himself once per 24 hours.

**Psionics:** None.

**Appearance:** In their natural form, the Bogies look like a cross between Faeries and insects with black, spindly bodies.

**2) Main Hall:** This large, empty chamber was where the original denizens of the keep spent most of their time, lounging, gaming, fighting, and waiting for something to do. A large empty fireplace dominates the wall opposite the entrance. Doors on either side of the chamber lead into empty connecting hallways.

**3) Barracks:** Once one of two barracks for the resident mercenaries, it is now empty except for broken and rotting bunks and empty wooden lockers. It is currently occupied by five Goblins, one of whom is a Cobbler. The Goblins will only fight if their Cobbler leader can use his magic to confuse or incapacitate the intruders. Otherwise, they will flee if threatened, but may sneak around to cause trouble or alert the other inhabitants.

**Five (5) Goblins:** Four 3<sup>rd</sup> level Vagabonds and a 5<sup>th</sup> level Cobbler.

**Alignment:** Miscreant.

**Attributes:** I.Q. 9, M.E. 9, M.A. 5, P.S. 9, P.P. 15, P.E. 13, P.B. 10, Spd 12 running, 3 digging.

**Size:** 4 feet (1.2 m) tall; 70 pounds (31.5 kg).

**Natural A.R.:** N/A.

**Hit Points:** 24 (35 for the Cobbler).

**S.D.C.:** 18

**P.P.E.:** 18 (88 for the Cobbler).

**Horror Factor:** N/A.

**Attacks per Melee:** 2 physical (3 physical or 2 by magic for the Cobbler).

**Bonuses:** +2 to strike with weapons, +2 to parry (+3 with weapons), +2 to dodge, +2 to roll with impact, +2 to pull punch, +1 to save versus Faerie Magic, +2 to save versus Horror Factor. The Cobbler also has an additional +1 to strike in hand to hand and +2 to strike with weapons, as well as +1 to save versus all magic, +3 to save versus Horror Factor, and +1 to save versus possession.

**Damage:** Basic Blunt Clubs (1D6 damage) and kick attacks (2D4 damage).

**Natural Abilities/Skills of Note:** Nightvision 90 feet (27.4 m), but mostly unskilled.

**Magic:** Only the Cobbler possesses the following magical abilities: Metamorphosis into a small animal (black cat, rat, toad, weasel, raven, etc.), and can cast the following spells at 3<sup>rd</sup> level strength twice per 24 hours: Mend Wood, Wither Plants, Sense Magic, Charm, Tongues, and Darkness (does not cost P.P.E. to cast).

**Psionics:** None.



**Appearance:** Typical Goblins dressed in dirty, filthy smelling rags.

**4) Barracks:** Once one of two barracks for the resident mercenaries, it is now empty except for broken and rotting bunks and empty wooden lockers. It is currently unoccupied.

**5) Privy:** Empty though still foul smelling, as it is used by at least some of the current residents.

**6) Spiral Stairs:** These stairs lead directly down to #13 and provided rapid access for the mercenaries when needed outside the summoning chamber.

**7) Mess Hall:** Like the rest of the keep, the mess hall is empty except for piles of rotting wood that was once a collection of tables and benches and chairs. A massive empty fireplace with a long metal pot hook dominates the northern wall. Two other doors exit the mess hall, one to the kitchen area (#9) and the other to a connecting hallway. Three large toads may be seen in the room. They are actually metamorphosed Toad Stool Faeries who will attack when the party lets down their guard, and fight to the death.

### Three (3) Toad Stools

**Alignment:** Miscreant.

**Attributes:** I.Q. 10, M.E. 8, M.A. 7, P.S. 2, P.P. 20, P.E. 10, P.B. 1, Spd 11.

**Size:** 3 feet (0.9 m) tall; 47 pounds (20 kg).

**Natural A.R.:** 10

**Hit Points:** 30

**S.D.C.:** 20

**P.P.E.:** 200

**Horror Factor:** 10 (none as unusually large toads).

**Attacks per Melee:** 4 physical or two using magic.

**Bonuses:** +1 on initiative, +5 to strike, +5 to parry, +5 to dodge, +2 to roll with impact, +6 to save versus Horror Factor, +2 on all other saving throws.

**Damage:** Claws (1D6 damage) or Bite (2D6 damage). Also poison breath does 1D6+2 damage and must save versus poison (16 or higher) or suffer from fever and nausea (-3 to dodge and parry and -10% to skills for 24 hours).

**Natural Abilities/Skills of Note:** Nightvision 90 feet (27.4 m), can see in absolute darkness, keen day vision, holds breath for 30 minutes, metamorphosis into a large toad.

**Magic:** Summon Fog, Animate Plants, Spoil (water only) and Repel Animals. Victims must roll 16 or higher to resist Faerie Magic. Casting spells does not cost the Faerie Folk any P.P.E., but each can only cast a specific spell (successful or not) on the same person other than himself once per 24 hours.

**Psionics:** None.

**Appearance:** In their natural form, the Toad Stools look like massively ugly, giant toads with a gaping maw and putrid breath.

**8) Officers' Quarters:** These three rooms were used by the mercenary officers (i.e., the strongest and most brutal of the Orcs) who served the keep's Wizard master. The center one is occupied by a Haunting Entity that believes it is the murdered spirit of an Orc who was killed by an up and coming junior officer. The spirit will offer no help and will only belittle and harass the intruders, hurling bits of wood at them if they do not leave it alone.

**Haunting Entity:** "Ghost" of a fallen Orc mercenary.

**Hit Points:** 80

**S.D.C.:** Not applicable.

**Horror Factor:** 14

**P.P.E.:** 8 (initially).

**Attributes:** Invisible, intangible, fly at speed 31, immune to non-magical attacks, gases, and drugs, but vulnerable to all magic and psionic attacks. Can become visible and solid (semi-transparent) for 3D4 minutes via ectoplasm.

**Attacks per Melee:** 3 (psionic only).

**Bonuses:** +1 to dodge, +3 to save versus magic, +2 to save versus psionics, +15 to save versus Horror Factor. Attackers who cannot see the invisible are -8 to strike when it is invisible.

**Damage:** By psionics, thrown object (1D4 damage) or weapon only (the ghost will telekinetically try to grab the largest of the intruders' weapons if they do not leave after a while).

**Magic:** None.

**Psionics:** Initial I.S.P. is 30, but they can absorb 1D4 per round from others and convert it to I.S.P. at a rate of 4 I.S.P. per point of P.P.E. absorbed. Powers include: Empathy, Empathic Transmission, Mind Block, Presence Sense, See the Invisible, Total Recall, Telepathy, Telekinesis, and Ectoplasm. Equal to 8<sup>th</sup> level psychic.

**Appearance:** When visible, appears as a murdered Orc mercenary with a slit throat and bloody face and front.

**9) Kitchen:** Nothing of value remains in this chamber. All of the cabinets are rotten and crumbling. Any remaining utensils are bent or broken and rusted. However, a thorough search of the area will reveal a very tarnished silver service set bearing a small family crest (a successful History or Heraldry skill roll will reveal it as a small noble family from the Eastern Territory). It is worth 1200 gold or perhaps more as an antique in the Eastern Territory.

**10) Cold Larder:** This small room was used for the storage of meats, cheeses, and other perishable food stores. It is completely empty.

**11) Larder:** Like #10, except for the storage of dry goods. Four Giant Timber Spiders have spun a web across the trap door to the stairs that lead down to #12. They will only attack if their net is disturbed or if only one or two intruders are present.

### Four (4) Giant Timber Spiders

**Size:** 3 feet (0.9 m) tall; 30 pounds (13.5 kg).

**Natural A.R.:** 7

**Hit Points:** 24

**S.D.C.:** N/A

**P.P.E.:** 1

**Horror Factor:** 12

**Attacks per Melee:** 2 physical.

**Bonuses:** +2 on initiative, +2 to strike, +4 to parry, +4 to dodge.

**Damage:** Bite (2D4 damage) plus poison. Victims must save versus poison (16 or higher) or suffer from fever and nausea (-1 to strike, -2 to dodge and parry and -10% to skills, and loses one melee attack for 24 hours). Poison takes 20 minutes to take effect and multiple bites have a cumulative effect.

**Natural Abilities/Skills of Note:** Nightvision 100 feet (30.5 m), Prowl (60%), Climb (80%), leap 8 feet (2.4 m) high and 10 feet (3.1 m) long.

**Appearance:** Large, hairy, dark brown spider.

**Attributes:** I.Q. 8, M.E. 7, M.A. 6, P.S. 5, P.P. 17, P.E. 6, P.B. 16, Spd 12 running, 110 flying.

**Size:** 6 inches (0.15 m) tall; 6 ounces (0.11 kg).

**Natural A.R.:** 8

**Hit Points:** 36

**S.D.C.:** 20

**P.P.E.:** 100

**Horror/Awe Factor:** 8

**Attacks per Melee:** 4 physical or two using magic.

**Bonuses:** +2 on initiative, +2 to strike, +3 to parry, +3 to dodge in flight, +2 to save versus Horror Factor, +1 to save versus magic.

**Damage:** These little Faeries have small, poisoned daggers (1 point +1D6 from poison if saving throw fails; 16 or higher) but are really too drunk to put up much of a physical fight.

**Natural Abilities/Skills of Note:** Nightvision 120 feet (36.6 m), keen day vision, see the invisible.

**Magic:** Befuddle, Blinding Flash, Mend Cloth, Mend Stone, Mend Metal, Invisibility (simple), Turn Self into Mist, Tongues, and Faeries' Dance. Victims must roll 16 or higher to resist Faerie Magic. Casting spells does not cost the Faerie Folk any P.P.E., but each can only cast a specific spell (successful or not) on the same person other than himself once per 24 hours.

**Psionics:** None.

**Appearance:** Naked Faeries with dark green complexion, dark brown hair, and luminous blue, gossamer wings.

**13) Staging Area:** This area was once where the mercenaries would wait until called for when the Wizard/Summoner was attempting to summon and control demonic creatures. Now it is empty except for a pair of Bug Bears who will instantly attack whoever descends from the stairs (#6).

**Two (2) Bug Bears:** 6<sup>th</sup> level Mercenaries.

**Alignment:** Diabolic.

**Attributes:** I.Q. 6, M.E. 6, M.A. 5, P.S. 21, P.P. 12, P.E. 14, P.B. 10, Spd 18.

**Size:** 5 feet (1.5 m) tall; 150 pounds (67.5 kg).

**Natural A.R.:** N/A.

**Hit Points:** 32

**S.D.C.:** 37

**P.P.E.:** 100

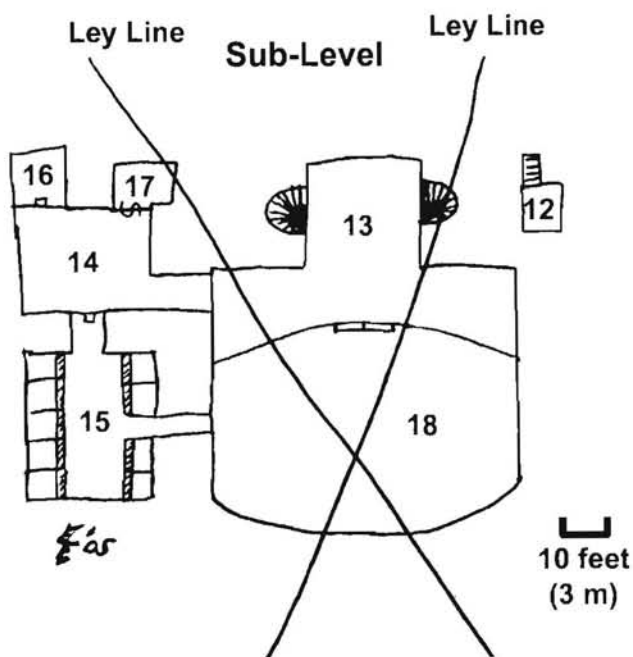
**Horror Factor:** 12

**Attacks per Melee:** 4 physical.

**Bonuses:** +1 on initiative, +3 to strike, +3 to parry, +3 to dodge, +2 to save versus Horror Factor, +2 to save versus magic, +3 to save versus poison/toxins.

**Damage:** As a Bug Bear, Bite (1D6) and Claw (2D4+6). When metamorphosed into a full-sized bear, Bite (2D4), Restrained Claw (2D6+6), and Full Strength Claw (5D6+6).

**Natural Abilities/Skills of Note:** Nightvision 60 feet (18.3 m), see the invisible, metamorphosis into a full-sized bear at will for up to 20 minutes, turn invisible at will (+7 to strike, parry, and dodge unless opponent can see the invisible), and teleport at will up to 40 feet (12 m) once every other melee round.



## Sub-Level

**12) Wine Cellar:** This once held the keep's supply of wine and liquor (mainly for the Wizard and officers). Now the alcohol has all turned and is spoiled. However, six Night Elves have taken up residence and are turning the spoiled beverage into Faerie Wine (most of which they are busily getting drunk on). There are five small casks of wine, and one small cask each of Bubbly Wine, Burgundy Wine, Sloe Wine and Blossom Wine. There are also 4 small casks of Mushroom Tonic. While the magical transformation has restored the quality of the alcohol, it has instilled the usual Faerie Magic side effects (something that the Night Elves do not mind). The Night Elves enter and leave the cellar through a small hole in the trap door to room #11 that allows them to slip under and around the spider web. If the intruders do not leave the room, the Night Elves will try to chase them off with their magic (they are not in any real condition to fight otherwise).

**Six (6) Night Elves**

**Alignment:** Anarchist.

**Magic:** None other than natural abilities.

**Psionics:** None.

**Appearance:** In their natural form, squat, broad little bear people.

**14) Laboratory:** This chamber was once used by the keep's master for magical experiments and torturing summoned creatures. A variety of rusted and broken torture implements are scattered about on various old, heavy wooden counters. Nothing of real value is in this room; however, there are four Poltergeists present that will harass the players as long as they are within the room.

**Four (4) Poltergeists:** Mischievous spirits drawn to this site of suffering.

**Hit Points:** 25

**S.D.C.:** Not applicable.

**Horror Factor:** 10

**P.P.E.:** 4 (initially).

**Attributes:** Invisible, intangible, fly at speed 44, immune to non-magical attacks, gases, and drugs, but vulnerable to all magic and psionic attacks.

**Attacks per Melee:** 2 (psionic only).

**Bonuses:** +2 to dodge, +10 to save versus Horror Factor. Attackers who cannot see the invisible are -8 to strike.

**Damage:** By psionics, thrown object or weapon only.

**Magic:** None.

**Psionics:** Initial I.S.P. is 10, but they can absorb 1D4 per round from others and convert it to I.S.P. at a rate of 4 I.S.P. per point of P.P.E. absorbed. Powers include: Empathic receiver (automatic, no cost), See Aura, See the Invisible, Sense Magic/P.P.E., Levitation, and Telekinesis. Equal to a 4<sup>th</sup> level psychic.

**Appearance:** To those who can see the invisible, they appear as translucent, jellyfish-shaped balls of energy with glowing tendrils hanging from the main body of the sphere.

**15) Holding Cells:** This was where the Summoner kept his victims before he began experimenting upon them (as well as after he was done if they were still alive). The cells are all open and the bars are rusted and easily broken with some effort. If the players are observant, they will notice the remains of several Mystic Energy Drain Wards designed to keep the occupants from using magical powers to escape. All except one is expired. If the players search the cell in the southeast corner, they will trigger it. Three Haunting Entities reside in here, bound to the place of their horrible deaths. Game Masters: feel free to make these ghosts as exotic as you wish as they would be the spirits of some of the creatures summoned in the adjacent chamber. However, no matter how powerful and demonic they might have once been and may still appear, they are still just Entities. Depending upon what they were in life, they may or may not attack. Nothing can be done to release them as they are also bound by the ley line nexus and can only be dispelled or destroyed.

**Three (3) Haunting Entities:** "Ghosts" of tortured, summoned demons.

**Hit Points:** 70

**S.D.C.:** Not applicable.

**Horror Factor:** 14

**P.P.E.:** 8 (initially).

**Attributes:** Invisible, intangible, fly at speed 31, immune to non-magical attacks, gases, and drugs, but vulnerable to all magic and psionic attacks. Can become visible and solid (semi-transparent) for 3D4 minutes via ectoplasm.

**Attacks per Melee:** 3 (psionic only).

**Bonuses:** +1 to dodge, +3 to save versus magic, +2 to save versus psionics, +15 to save versus Horror Factor. Attackers who cannot see the invisible are -8 to strike when it is invisible.

**Damage:** By psionics, thrown object (1D4 damage) or weapon only (the ghosts may telekinetically try to grab the largest of the intruders' weapons if they do not leave after a while).

**Magic:** None.

**Psionics:** Initial I.S.P. is 30, but they can absorb 1D4 per round from others and convert it to I.S.P. at a rate of 4 I.S.P. per point of P.P.E. absorbed. Powers include: Empathy, Empathic Transmission, Mind Block, Presence Sense, See the Invisible, Total Recall, Telepathy, Telekinesis, and Ectoplasm. Equal to 8<sup>th</sup> level psychic.

**Appearance:** Resemble semi-transparent versions of whatever they were in life, all showing signs of having been experimented upon, mutilated, and tortured.

**16) Wizard's Private Chambers:** The contents of this room look to have been burned long ago. All that remains are piles of ash and burned bits of wood that will crumble when handled. A much newer small, wooden cot resides in one corner with a pillow, heavy blanket, and a jug of wine (actually Faerie Wine). This was once the dwelling of the keep's Wizard/Summoner, who was ultimately burned when the residents of a nearby village (now long gone) braved Ophid's Blight, stormed the keep, and burned the diabolic human in his very bed chamber. Though currently not present, this is the home of Trebin. While the Leprechaun does not keep his personal treasure here, if the players search beneath the ash in the northeast corner and make a successful Locate Secret Compartments skill roll, they will find a loose block that hides a bundle of old journals.

Three of the journals detail all manner of anatomy (one about the main races, one about non-magical animals and monsters, and one about demonic and supernatural creatures) procured under the Wizard's various methods of torture (include references to pain tolerance and duration of life under extreme duress). Extensive study of these books will give a permanent one time bonus of +10% to the following skills if already possessed: Lore: Demons and Monsters, Animal Husbandry, and Surgery/Medical Doctor. However, the first time anyone attempts to read them, they must make a successful save versus Horror Factor of 18 or be so repulsed by the drawings and descriptions that they will be unwilling to take another look (these books, while incredibly informative, are truly disgusting). To the right buyer, one could fetch as much as 2000 gold each. The fourth journal is a small spell book with the following rituals that can be studied and learned by a Wizard: Summon and Control Animals and Summon Lesser Being (*Rifts® Book of Magic*, page 149).

**17) Treasure Vault:** Hidden behind a secret panel in the laboratory (successful Locate Secret Doors skill roll is required), this room is where the Wizard once kept his valuables, and now Trebin keeps his collection of stolen goods. These include a small treasure in gemstones and precious metals (totaling nearly 23,500 depending on the buyer), as well as a few magical items, including a Fire-Ice Crystal (can radiate heat equal to a sizeable campfire twice per day, melt a basketball-sized chunk of ice, thaw frozen food, and dry and warm clothing in 2D4 minutes with no ill effects to the owner, and will ward off Winter Ice Demons and other supernatural creatures of ice and cold up to 100 yards/91 m), two environmental tents, a Container of Much Water, 3 magic scrolls (Game Master's choice of spells - low to mid-level only), and a Lesser Rune Dagger named Grenling (Scrupulous alignment, I.Q. 10, 4D6 damage, and in addition to the common Rune Weapon attributes, it has 50 P.P.E. to cast the following spells: Create Bread and Milk, Negate Poisons/Toxins, Sense Evil, and Ignite Fire). At the Game Master's discretion, Grenling may have one of the minor curses common to Rune Weapons. The only other magical item is a dull silver ring bearing a single small, clear crystal. If a player makes a successful Gemology or Lore: Magic skill roll (at -20% due to the rarity of these minerals), they will recognize it as a ring made of the magically conductive metal Gantrium and the ordinary white crystal is actually a piece of Xanthine. If worn by a magic user, Gantrium will allow him to cast spells at *half* the listed P.P.E. cost and recover his P.P.E. at twice the normal rate. The Xanthine crystal is a 4 karat stone, meaning that it can store up to 80 P.P.E. for later use. Together, this item would be worth an easy 250,000 or more to other magic users.

**18) Main Summoning Chamber:** This room was where the Wizard performed his summonings, aided by the power of the ley line nexus that runs through the ground and into the center of the chamber. Any player making a Lore: Magic skill roll will instantly recognize that this chamber was clearly designed to utilize the nexus for summoning purposes. Here is where the Angel-Demon Serpent, Antar, awaits. As is common for his race, Antar has no recollection of events that happened more than about 1000 years ago. All he does remember is that something drew him to Ophid's Blight, and there he has remained ever since to watch over the dimensional nexus and slay anything that might come through it. A few short hundred years ago, Antar was befriended by Trebin, who sought sanctuary from a group of Coyles he had managed to anger. Antar slew them and the two have formed an unusual partnership. Actually, Trebin always tends to lead his victims through the Blight (most never make it to the keep, either abandoning the hunt or perishing in the geyser fields), where he seeks protection from Antar, who never manages to see the mischievous, evil nature of the little Faerie. Ironically, Trebin has, despite himself, grown to like the Angel-Demon and he would never lead anyone home who he thought might actually kill his big protector.

**Antar** (real name is unknown/forgotten): Angel-Demon Serpent guardian of Ophid's Blight.

**Alignment:** Unprincipled with leanings towards Aberrant.

**Attributes:** I.Q. 16, M.E. 3, M.A. 15, P.S. 23, P.P. 17, P.E. 19, P.B. 16, Spd 23 running, 55 flying.

**Size:** 17 feet (5.2 m) long; 900 pounds (405 kg).

**Natural A.R.:** 10

**Hit Points:** 118

**S.D.C.:** 56

**P.P.E.:** 260

**Horror/Awe Factor:** 11

**Attacks per Melee:** 5 physical or two using magic.

**Bonuses:** +2 on initiative on ground, +4 on initiative in the air, +6 to strike, +7 to parry, +7 to dodge on ground, +9 to dodge in the air, +3 to pull punch, +3 to roll with impact, +6 to save versus Horror Factor, +2 to save versus magic, +6 to save versus possession, charm and impress 30%, Paired Weapons, Critical Strike on a Natural 18-20.

**Damage:** Punch does 2D4+8, Tail Slash does 2D6+8, and Bite does 1D6. His weapons of choice are the Warlock spells Fire Whip (4D6 damage, +1 to strike) and Frostblade (3D6+8 damage) which he wields as paired weapons. (Don't forget that since Antar is on a ley line nexus, these actually do double damage at present.)

**Natural Abilities/Skills of Note:** Hawk-like vision, Nightvision 2000 feet (610 m), see the invisible, impervious to cold, resistant to heat (half damage), impervious to poison and disease, impervious to supernatural possession.

**Magic:** Knows all Fire and Water Warlock spells levels 1-5, plus any other Warlock spells dealing with cold or ice, and Eternal Flame, Flame of Life, and Fire Whip. Casts spells equal to a 7<sup>th</sup> level Warlock.

**Psionics:** Minor Psychic with the abilities of Meditation, Mind Block, and Empathy. I.S.P. 33.

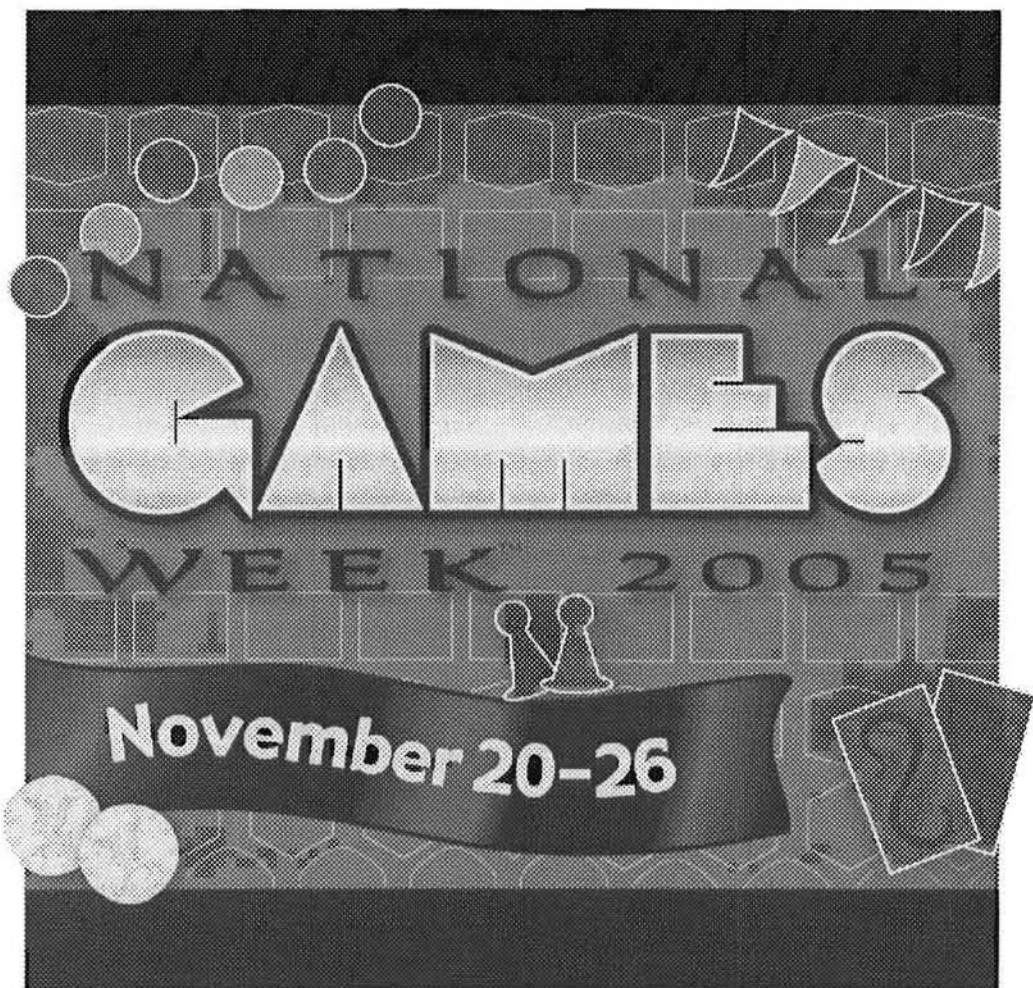
**Appearance:** Antar has the upper body of a handsome male Elf with gold skin and golden hair. His lower body is that of a giant green serpent. Sprouting from his back is a pair of wings, one being an angel's with white feathers, and the other being a black, demonic-looking bat's wing.

How this plays out depends greatly upon how the players react to the fearsome Angel-Demon Serpent. If they know about this creature (successful Lore: Demons and Monsters skill roll), they should know that if they can appeal to the good side of its dual nature, they can possibly persuade it to help them. If not, especially if they attack without trying first to communicate, then Antar will be merciless, pausing only when the party is in bad shape, to demand their reasons for entering his sanctuary. If and when the players explain why they are in the keep and about Trebin, Antar will let out a mighty, bellowing laugh. He will then become savagely angry and scream for Trebin to show himself. A sheepish Trebin will appear from the shadows where he was invisibly watching the whole scene. Antar will demand that he explain himself, then with the attitude of a parent blinded to their own child's misdeeds, he will extend his hand and Trebin will hand the pieces of the Rune Sword over. Antar will give them to the players and demand they leave at once.

Should the players actually manage to kill Antar before he can question them, then it is up to the Game Master how best to continue with the quest. In all likelihood, the sight of his protector slain will cause Trebin to run far away, but not before abandoning the pieces of Castlerake somewhere in the keep for the players to stumble across.

With the pieces of Castlerake once more in their possession, the players can continue their journey headed northwest, across the Northern Hinterlands.

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# A Komplex Problem

## Optional Adventure and Source Material for Rifts®

By Brandon Aten and Taylor White

*"Excuse me, sir. Do you have an appointment?"*

The young woman behind the receptionist desk was attractive, yet an air of arrogance hung around her. The man who had just rushed in the door didn't even see her on his way to the office on the other side of the large waiting room. He was late for his meeting and from what he had heard, the Colonel was not someone to be kept waiting.

"Yes," the man said hastily, "I'm Dr. Dieter Koenig. I have a ten o'clock with Colonel Eisenfaust." He watched as the young woman flipped through a holographic appointment book. She raised her eyes to meet his for a moment and then looked back at her computer.

"Good, the Colonel is expecting you, Herr Doctor." The young woman began to type rapidly, completely ignoring Dieter, as if he had already made his exit.

Dieter briskly walked past the receptionist and through the heavy oak doors into the office of Colonel Eisenfaust. He closed the large door behind him and took a deep breath to collect himself. The Colonel's office was decorated with old photographs and spoils from past battles. The large windows around

the room lit the massive space enough that the small reading lamp on the large oak desk seemed almost comical. The smell and the thin veil of smoke hinted of expensive cigars. Hunched over his desk, perusing some paperwork was the Colonel. He was older than Dieter expected. What little hair the man had was white, yet his skin was tanned and rough like old leather. He removed his glasses when he looked up from his papers; obviously they were only for reading. The Colonel slowly stood and extended his palm outward. Dieter shook his hand and returned the greeting.

"Dr. Koenig, I presume. It is a pleasure to meet you," said the Colonel. "Please, have a seat."

Dieter dabbed at the sweat on his forehead with his sleeve "I apologize for my tardiness, Colonel. Punctuality is not one of my strong points."

"Don't concern yourself, Herr Doctor. To be honest I had totally lost track of time." The Colonel chuckled.

Dieter nervously cleared his throat. "I assume you've read my report?"

"I have," said the Colonel. Dieter thought he saw his eyes narrow into a glare for a moment, but when he looked again the cool gaze of the man had returned, "But let's not rush. I'd like

to get to know you a little bit first... unless you have something better to be doing?"

"I guess that's what this meeting will decide, Colonel."

"I see." The Colonel paused. "So where are you from, Herr Doctor?"

"Berlin," Dieter said. "My family has lived there for many years."

"Ah, Berlin, what a wonderful city. A magnificent city. The very heart of the New German Republic," Colonel Eisenfaust sighed. "So what brought you all the way here to Pforzheim?"

"Work. I got tired of living in that huge fortress city. Triax makes sure that the pay and benefits are better out here, closer to the Monster Territories."

"And what kind of work do you do?" the Colonel inquired.

"I'm a weapons engineer. I compile data from weapon prototypes and devise ways to make them more efficient in the field." Dieter held his tongue so as not to sound irritated. He watched the Colonel sit back in his leather chair and grin smugly. His relaxed demeanor and the small talk were starting to get to Dieter. He wasn't here to chat.

There was a brief pause and then the Colonel leaned forward, put his hands together, and rested his elbows on his desk. "You know, Herr Doctor, weapons research is very important to our nation. But I'm sure you know that. The New German Republic has some of the most advanced weaponry in the known world, and it's because of workers like you."

"You flatter me, sir."

"No, I do not flatter you when I say that the survival of our species depends on our technology," said the Colonel. When he spoke, he did so with a sharp intensity of a dedicated soldier and patriot. "Our greatest asset against the Monster Hordes is our ability as humans to think through them. We fight smarter, not harder. And that's why we will beat them."

The Colonel opened a drawer in his desk and removed a small, black metal case. A small silver logo of a skull was on the outside. The case opened and revealed a row of cigars, packed tightly together. The Colonel put one between his lips and with a few smoky puffs, it was lit. "Do you smoke, Herr Doctor?"

"Cigarettes, occasionally," replied Dieter.

"These are Coalition cigars." He added to the thin gray haze as he exhaled, "they're terrible. I only smoke them because I paid entirely too much for them and I hate to see the money go to waste. Are you sure you wouldn't like one?"

"No, thank you, Colonel. Forgive me for speaking frankly, sir, but this is not what I wanted to discuss with you." Dieter nervously adjusted himself in the burgundy leather chair, "If you've read my report, you'd see that this is a very serious matter. I would appreciate it if we could resolve it as soon as possible."

"You don't like to waste time, do you, Dr. Koenig? And you aren't afraid to speak your mind. I like that in a man. But not in a soldier." A grim expression fell over the Colonel's face. He stared intensely into the eyes of Dr. Koenig but was met with an equally intense icy glare.

"I am not a soldier, sir," replied Dieter.

"I am aware of that, Herr Doctor." The Colonel brought out a thick file from his desk and laid it down on the hard wood with

a dull thud. He set his cigar in an ashtray and started flipping through the papers in the file.

"Your report basically amounts to this. Correct me if I make a mistake." The Colonel cleared his throat. "You were working, trying to find one of the records rooms. This was... the 15th, am I right? You took a wrong turn down an elevator that was unfortunately unguarded at the time." At this the Colonel looked up. "That, I have to apologize for. A scheduling error left that post unguarded for nearly two hours. That elevator is beyond your security level, and by no means were you intended to have security clearance for that area. But I understand, it was not your fault. That particular elevator only goes to one floor, the developmental weapons testing facility. Once there, you wandered around until you found what you describe as 'a scene of grotesque horror.' These are your words?" Colonel Eisenfaust set the papers aside and removed his reading glasses. "I don't need to read the rest of your report to know what you found down there."

"Oblige me, Colonel. What did I see?" inquired Dieter.

"You found rooms where the weapons you helped design were being used against enemy captives. You found scientists recording the results of this testing."

"I found a verdammt torture chamber, Colonel!"

"Watch your language, Herr Doc..."

"Rooms where Gargoyles and Brodkil were chained up, disemboweled. I saw them saw the head off a Gargoyle just to see how long its regenerative abilities would function. I saw scientists poking the brain of a vivisected Brodkil, testing the limits of M.O.M. implants, trying to accelerate the breakdown of the creature's sanity from months to minutes." Dr. Koenig had to pause as if replaying all of the occurrences again over in his head so as to know what atrocity to mention next. "I saw them subject another one to massive amounts of gamma rays. I stood there and watched the creature be cooked by the radiation, screaming and pleading for mercy until it succumbed, letting its healing abilities take over."

Coldly, Colonel Eisenfaust replied. "And you have a problem with what you saw, I assume."

Dieter was without words. He suddenly felt very tired and very old.

Colonel Eisenfaust got up from his seat and strolled through the room, gazing at his framed photographs as he talked. "I'm not going to fill your head with empty military rhetoric, Herr Doctor. I could say, 'we are at war with those creatures.' I could say 'they would do the same to us.' Every once in a while, someone working in this facility develops a distaste for the work we do here. We have a video and a booklet we give them, showing graphic depictions of Gargoyles burning our cities, and Brodkil raping our women. But I don't think that program is right for you.

"A couple of years ago, Triax made a breakthrough in our war against the Monsters. Uranium and Depleted Uranium rounds were found to have a profound effect on the enemy. It completely negated their ability to heal themselves, and the weaker creatures died of radiation poisoning." The Colonel paused and turned back to Dr. Koenig. "Do you know who first discovered that? It was a scientist at this very facility. Of course, to get that knowledge, several hundred test subjects en-

dured many agonizing hours of research. What loyal citizen of the NGR cares if there are several hundred monsters less in the world? And we have new technology to aid us in our struggle. This, Doctor, I think you understand."

"Yes, Colonel, I understand. And the mathematical, logical side of me agrees with you. Sacrifice a handful of the enemy to save a multitude of humanity. It makes perfect sense." Dieter shrugged, and turned in his chair to face the Colonel. "But the ethical, moral side of me; the emotional, irrational side, is sickened by what goes on in this place. No living creature should be treated like that. No one should be exposed to that kind of torture. They were begging to die, Colonel. Their cries were of pain and fear. Not hate. Our wonderful technology does not give us the right to treat anything this way."

A chuckle seemed to be mixed in between the short, quick puffs the Colonel took off his cigar. "I suppose now comes the cliché about how we are becoming like the monsters we fight? That we are becoming the very thing we hate? So to speak."

"What bothers me even more," said Dieter, "is your attitude towards all of this."

"Believe me, Herr Doctor, you are not the first worker to come into my office with these complaints." The Colonel returned to his seat while puffing slowly on his cigar. He looked the doctor up and down as if sizing up one of the monstrous opponents he had undoubtedly faced on the battlefields countless times before. "However, you concern me the most. I sense a fighting spirit within you. You're thinking about doing something foolish."

"Are you reading my thoughts, Colonel?" Dieter asked concernedly.

"I don't have to, Herr Doctor. It's all over your face." Eisenfaust stared directly into Dieter's eyes with an intensity that sent a chill down his spine. "You have a question to ask me, and it seems that you're the only one with the guts to actually ask it. Out with it, then."

Dr. Koenig had entered into this office knowing what he may have to do. He thought of his job, his family, and his own life. He knew what must be done. From this point forward there would be no turning back, but the question had to be asked. Dieter knew the consequences and knew he had to see this through. He took a deep breath and spoke.

"If what goes on here is so innocent, and so necessary, then why all the security? Why do the people living in this town not even know about what goes on here? And what would happen if they did know? What would happen if the horrors going on in this facility were exposed for everyone, the military administration, the executive board of Triax, the government, the citizens, and even the monsters, to see?"

"Careful, Doctor Koenig. You're walking a dangerous line between healthy dissent, and treason."

"Are you threatening me, Colonel?"

"I think the question is," said Eisenfaust. "Are you threatening me?" Silence filled the room as the thin gray haze danced in the sunbeams entering through the windows. Dieter could see small beads of sweat forming on the Colonel's forehead, catching the light.

"Good day, Colonel. I will turn in my resignation to the administration." He stood, never taking his eyes away from Colonel Eisenfaust.

"Good day to you too, Herr Doctor."

Dieter left the office, closing the door softly behind him.

## A Question of Ethics

A good question, no doubt. When does research become torture? When do we exceed the limits of scientific integrity? What line do we cross to become as monstrous as our enemies? Or is there no limit? Is there no line at all? Do the ends always justify the means?

We can't tell you that. We're just writers. What do I know about ethics in warfare? But you, you have an opinion on this, don't you? And we'll bet your friends, players, and G.M. will too. You may think that the NGR is going too far in their weapons development. You may think they're becoming more like the Coalition States every day. Or you may think their actions are totally justified. You may believe that they are doing what is necessary to ensure their survival.

It is an interesting question. The following adventure scenario takes that question and puts it into RPG form. Dr. Dieter Koenig is going to reveal to the country what is happening at the Pforzheim Komplex, and it will be up to the player characters and their G.M. to choose a side in this matter. Will they help Dr. Koenig expose the atrocities being committed, or will they silence him and keep the information from the people?

Another question must be asked: What will happen if the people are made aware? Certainly there will be a percentage who will be outraged. And there will be a percentage who will understand the necessity for such actions. At the very least, there will be much controversy. At the worst, this knowledge could incite revolution from the people, or revenge attacks from the Gargoyle and Brodkil armies.

In any case, the characters become involved, and must choose a side.

## Choosing a Side

"The date is March 28<sup>th</sup>, 109 P.A. I fear this will be my final journal entry. Military operatives have been spying on me for the last couple of days. They're acting on orders from Colonel Eisenfaust, waiting for me to make a move, so they can arrest me, or worse. There may even be mercenaries after me. I don't know.

Eisenfaust is going to try to kill me. I scared him with my talk about showing everyone what's going on in his facility, which lets me know that this information needs to come out. So I'm going to do it. I'm going to blow this wide open. Because I know I'm right. And if nothing happens, fine. But at least they'll all know.

To do that though, I need evidence. There's no way I can get back into the facility. They'll arrest me if I even go near the place. Ah, but all is not lost. I contacted an old friend of mine. I haven't spoken to Jens in years. But he'll help me. He can get me mercenaries. Hopefully who will work cheap, for a good cause. Mercs can get into that place and gather enough evidence to shut it down for good. And they'll protect me, too.



*It will cost me everything I have to do this, but I don't care. If Colonel Eisenfaust has his way, I'll be a dead man anyway. So what have I got to lose?"*

The easiest way to introduce characters into the story is to have them already in the NGR. Form a general consensus among the group to side with Dr. Koenig or Col. Eisenfaust. From there, it should be easy to get them involved.

If the group wants to work for Colonel Eisenfaust, have them approached by an NGR officer. This works especially well if the group is already friendly with the NGR army. They will be escorted to the Pforzheim Komplex where they will meet personally with Colonel Eisenfaust. He will show them a dossier on Dr. Koenig and then explain that he is a dangerous subversive who must be quieted. The Colonel will not elaborate much on why the doctor is dangerous, and may even lie to nosy characters, or inform them that it's not their business. If the characters accept, they'll be paid 200,000 credits if they kill Dr. Koenig, but 500,000 if they can bring him back in one piece. If the characters are NGR military, they will simply be informed of the situation and sent out to retrieve the doctor with no cash incentive.

If the group decides to help Dr. Koenig, get them to Berlin for a couple of days. There, at a seedy bar or strip club, or while looking for non-military mercenary opportunities, they'll meet Jens. Jens and Dieter grew up together and were best friends for many years, but Jens traveled on a much darker path than his friend. Jens is a City Rat with ties to the German Black Market. He knows the streets well, and has his ears low to the ground. He is a little ambivalent to the whole matter of monster torture, but he wants to help his old friend in any way possible. The group will be sent to Pforzheim to meet with Dr. Koenig at a secret location. They will only be paid 85,000 credits; which is Dr. Koenig's entire life savings. If they complain, he will be able to scrape up another 30,000 by selling his car and some personal possessions.

## Silencing Dissent

### For the Game Master's Eyes Only

This section follows the events from Colonel Eisenfaust's perspective. If the group sides with or is a part of the NGR army, their path should follow something close to this. As the Game Master, though, be prepared for your players to take this in directions you had not even considered. Trust me, they will. Because of that, I have tried to keep this fast and loose, so that you can fill in details and keep things relatively free-form.

However, there are still events that will transpire regardless of whether the player characters will be there to witness them. Dr. Koenig is going to try to reveal to the country the horrors of Pforzheim. Whether or not he can be stopped is up to the player characters.

### Gathering Intelligence

Finding Dr. Koenig will be easy as *küchen* (German for cake). Triax still has his employee records, and the group will have no problem finding his apartment. Dr. Koenig only leaves

once or twice a week for groceries, but otherwise stays inside with the shutters drawn. He knows he's being watched, so his telephone conversations and e-mail with Jens or anyone else will be brief and ambiguous. His mother calls once a week to check up on him and bug him about finding a wife. He tries to play it off, but cuts the conversation short when she asks him why he sounds so nervous.

Legally, the player characters aren't allowed to do anything to Dr. Koenig until he starts taking action against the NGR military. If they decide to arrest him out of impatience, he will get off scott-free and disappear.

So this means they wait. And they watch. If the group is military, they'll have full access to surveillance gear, including binoculars, cameras, tracer bugs, e-mail and internet spyware, and various other equipment. If the player characters are mercenaries, they can buy commercial surveillance gear, or get some good stuff from the German Black Market. Everything they view should be recorded on mini-video discs to be used as evidence in court.

## The Opposition Grows Stronger

Eventually, through their constant surveillance, the group should learn that Dr. Koenig is meeting with a man named Jens later that night. Their plan is to meet at a popular nightclub where Jens will introduce Dr. Koenig to some people who will help him. By listening to the telephone bug, they will hear the following conversation.

*"...Jens, remember that club back home that Monika used to take us to?"*

*"Yeah, the..."*

*"Don't say the name," Dr. Koenig interrupts. "Look, there's one here in Pforzheim. I guess it's a franchise. We'll meet there."*

*"Should I bring my friends?"*

*"Absolutely. I want their protection as soon as I can get it..."*

From this point, it's simply a matter of trailing the Doctor to the club. He will try to ditch the player group if they follow him. He will take his own car halfway there, then switch cabs three times, and walk about two more miles (3.2 km) through alleys and side-streets. If the player group has the Tracking skill, let them roll it, and let Dr. Koenig roll Counter-Tracking against them a couple of times. Dr. Koenig is clever, and should get a decent chance to lose the group. He may even lead them through some bad neighborhoods (Pforzheim has two) in hopes that the group will get harassed by gangs.

Whether or not he loses the characters, Dr. Koenig arrives safely at Der Oberdorfer nightclub. The place is jumping to-night, and it will be easy for the doctor to hide among the crowd. About fifteen minutes later, Jens comes in, followed by a group of mercenaries.

The mercenaries will be the player group's main opposition. They are here to protect Dr. Koenig and aid him in his quest to reveal the truth. They will be moderately armed with tucked weapons, and may have magic or psionic abilities. I leave the exact composition of the mercs to you, the Game Master. Be sure to make them tough enough-looking to give your players a

second thought about confronting them directly. Jens recruited mercs who not only look tough, but have infiltration abilities. They will be key in the next step of the doctor's plan.

If something happens and some triggers get squeezed in the club, the place erupts into a panicked frenzy. People stomp over each other to escape the fight, and the danger of a fire started by energy weapons is of great concern. If the player characters are not careful, they could make this into quite a fiasco. In any case, Jens and the mercs shoot it out with the group simply to cover their escape. Following them will be very difficult through the commotion.

No matter what, Jens, Dr. Koenig, and the mercenaries will flee the area and check into a cheap hotel in the outskirts of town. The mercs discreetly set up a perimeter defense and take turns between patrolling the area, standing guard outside the room, and sleeping. Inside, Jens and Dr. Koenig discuss their plans for the next couple of days. Any characters who track them to the hotel run a high risk of being attacked by the mercenaries, who will try to ambush and capture the characters if they can.

## What Now?

Hopefully, your group has not arrested or killed Dr. Koenig yet, and he managed to escape, because things are going to escalate now. And if the characters lost track of him, they may not know where to go next.

If they go back to his apartment, they find he has not returned since he left the nightclub. If they return to the club, they find the remnants of a wicked party the night before (or the aftermath of a riot, depending on your group).

Eventually, they will run out of ideas, call Colonel Eisenfaust, or return to the Komplex. Dr. Koenig's mercenaries are there, too. They have infiltrated the base to retrieve evidence of the testing subjects and are communicating with Dr. Koenig from his hotel through scrambled radio signals.

If the player group thinks to watch security footage or otherwise starts watching and patrolling the research facility, they will recognize at least one of the mercs from the night before. If they are careful not to get noticed, they will see the mercs, cleverly disguised as scientists (even if they have more advanced methods of sneaking around such as magic or psionics) taking video footage and downloading computer files. Any scientists or security personnel who see this will be quickly incapacitated and shoved in a closet.

## Taking Action

What the group chooses to do now is crucial. More than likely, they will attempt to confront the mercenaries directly. This intrusion constitutes an attack on the NGR army, so force is now authorized against Dr. Koenig and his mercs.

The mercenaries will once again try to avoid a battle. They will take whatever evidence they have (no matter what, they get enough to implicate everyone at the facility in what the courts will call "Crimes Against Nature") and bid a hasty retreat. But they aren't afraid of going through anyone who tries to stop them. The mercs are more heavily armed than the night before, and will blast anyone who gets in the way.

As a distraction, the mercenaries will release a couple of the Monster Test Subjects into the facility. These Gargolyes and Brodkil are way too weak and injured to put up much of a fight, but they will kill any scientist they come across, and may destroy equipment as a means to lash out against their captors. One or two may even make it outside onto city streets, which would be very bad to say the least.

## Running Out of Time

If the mercenaries manage to escape, they will head back to Dr. Koenig with the evidence. They will move quickly during the ensuing chaos, before the facility soldiers have a chance to mobilize. Each mercenary has a very fast form of transportation hidden nearby. Most will have either a Shark Bullet Bike or a Wilderness Cruiser, but may have other vehicles or magical means of transportation.

Their plan is to split up and lose any pursuers through the twisted, winding streets of Pforzheim before meeting back up with Dr. Koenig. From there, they are all going to leave town and go to Berlin, and the head of the NGR government. They will move fast the entire time, and will only fight to cover an escape. They may, however, stick around to eliminate a threat if they vastly overpower it.

If Dr. Koenig reaches Berlin, the mission will be a failure. He will use every resource he can think of to inform the people and the Government of the horrors of the Pforzheim Research Komplex. Within a matter of days, the story will be on the front page of every newspaper, at the forefront of every TV news program, and will be all over the German information network.

## Worst-Case Scenario

If it gets so far that the public knows of the atrocities being committed, the story will be out of the hands of the player characters. Their job is over. Everything will be up to the people and the politicians. What will happen to the Pforzheim Research Komplex? What will happen to Col. Eisenfaust? Who will be outraged, and what will they do about it? Who will step forward to defend the actions of Col. Eisenfaust? Does the NGR government already know about the operations at the Komplex? What happens when word of this flows into the Monster Zones? Will there be retaliatory strikes?

The worst that can happen is this: The topic will polarize NGR citizens for months. Politicians will snap at each other, debates on the topic degrade into name-calling and fistfights, and people start to adapt a "with us or against us" mentality. Nothing so controversial has ever entered the minds of the people of the NGR, and most will not know how to handle it. The line between "good" and "evil" has always been so clear-cut that, when that line is grayed, most will become angry and hostile as a result. People will start trying to draw the lines back, further polarizing other human citizens. The political landscape will become a very unfriendly place for a while, and the media will refuse to shut up about it, further feeding the problem.

Pforzheim will suffer the worst. People living there will become angry and terrified that monsters have been kept this close for so long. They believe the military has taken too many risks, and the facility needs to cease its testing on monsters. Protests

will occur frequently with a constant 1D4x100 people outside the Research Komplex with signs and megaphones. The protests may occasionally become violent, but the angry citizens are no match for well-trained NGR police officers. Offenders are arrested and sometimes beaten, bringing up issues in the media on police brutality. Whether or not anything really bad happens is left up to the Game Master, but whatever happens, Dr. Koenig is never seen again.

## **This Can All Be Avoided**

If at any time, the PCs can kill all of the mercenaries or arrest Dr. Koenig, their mission will be successful. Dr. Koenig cannot make the trip to Berlin by himself. He will try, and be found dead weeks later. Of course the characters will not get paid if he escapes, so every effort must be made to capture him alive.

If Dr. Koenig is captured, he will be given a speedy trial with a fabricated list of crimes, and sent to prison for the rest of his natural life. There, he will appeal to the courts, but his letters never leave the prison. For all intents and purposes, he disappears, and the experiments at Pforzheim continue.

# **The People Have a Right to Know**

## **For the Game Master's Eyes Only**

This section follows the events from Dr. Dieter Koenig's perspective. The player group, mercenaries hired by Jens, should follow a path somewhat close to this. As the Game Master though, be prepared for your players to take this in directions you had not even considered. Trust me, they will. Because of that, I have tried to keep this fast and loose, so that you can fill in details and keep things relatively free-form.

However, there are still events that will transpire regardless of whether the PCs will be there to witness them. Col. Eisenfaust will not allow confidential military information to be released to the public. Whether or not he can be stopped is up to the player characters.

## **The Road to Pforzheim**

Pforzheim is located near where the pre-Rifts city of Passau once stood. It stands dangerously close to both Gargoyle and Brodkil territories, which is one reason why this place was chosen to house the Research Komplex. The characters start their adventure in the NGR capital city of Berlin. Pforzheim is nearly 380 km (237.5 miles) directly south of Berlin, but that route will take them straight through Brodkil territory. Going around the Monster Zone will take another day of travel, but is much safer. Give the players one enemy encounter for taking the safe route, but 1D4 for taking the fastest.

Mercenaries and other monster-hunters are fairly common in Pforzheim. The characters won't get bothered by the military police unless they brandish their weapons in public. D-Bee and

mutant player characters may catch some glares and the occasional rude remark, but will otherwise be unharmed.

## **Meeting with Dr. Koenig**

Jens will have to act as the player characters' guide for a while. After arriving in Pforzheim, he will allow the characters a little time to walk around and get a feel for the city. They can visit the tourist office for local information, or buy gear, weapons, food, or other items. There are a couple of bad neighborhoods in Pforzheim, and wandering through them alone may get the character assaulted or mugged.

That night, the characters meet back up with Jens and they all go to Der Oberdorfer, a popular nightclub franchise with locations in all major NGR cities. Drinks here are watered down and very expensive. In the center of the club, people dance while colored lights swirl about them and a DJ plays German Electronic music, which is all the rave in the NGR.

Jens introduces Dr. Koenig to the group, and he explains what his plans are. The doctor wants the group to infiltrate the Pforzheim Research Komplex and obtain evidence of the horrible experiments being conducted there. He says they don't have a lot of time before the military catches up with him, so this has to be quick. He then thanks the characters for believing in him and "doing the right thing."

Just then, the lights go out in the club. The dancing stops and people start complaining. No one panics until armed men swing in through the windows, shattering the glass and causing people to stumble over each other in confusion. Any of the characters with night vision (whether by psionics, magical, or otherwise) will see a number of individuals (2 for every player character) wearing stealth gear and night-vision goggles, and armed with a low-powered energy rifle, quickly making their way to Dr. Koenig. It should be obvious what is happening. Dr. Koenig is in trouble!

The stealthy individuals are NGR special forces soldiers who have been dispatched to bring the doctor back alive. They are a highly trained unit and will fight only to subdue and buy themselves time to snatch the doctor. They are counting on the confusion of a darkened, highly congested area to cover their maneuvers. If the characters cannot stop them, they grab Dr. Koenig, run out the back door, load him into a black van, and drive to the Research Komplex.

Assuming the characters escape, they need to get to a place to hide out. Dr. Koenig has a modest apartment, but it is under constant surveillance and he won't return there. He suggests renting a hotel, but if any of the player characters has a better idea of where to stay for the night, he is willing to listen.

## **Infiltrating the Facility**

The Pforzheim Research Komplex is one of the most heavily-defended facilities in the New German Republic. Infiltrating it will be very difficult. The players will need to exercise much caution. However, there are breaches in its security. Dr. Koenig relates to the group a number of options for getting into the Komplex.

The biggest weakness of the Komplex is its vast bureaucracy. Everything here is done strictly by the book, with little room for

deviation. This means a couple of things. First, it means that most of the workers (scientists, soldiers, factory workers, and others) know only their job in their department in their section of the facility. Research Scientists know very little about operations in the factories, and vice-versa. If questioned by a scientist in one department about the characters' presence in another, they could make up an imaginary department, and the scientist may not know the difference. And he'll be just too busy to be bothered with such things.

Another aspect of this is that there are a large number of people working at the Research Komplex. Although there are security cameras everywhere, the men watching them cannot possibly remember the face of everyone who works there. The likelihood of the characters being recognized is extremely slim. And security doesn't have time to run a check on every single person anyway. They have more screens to watch.

Because of these reasons, Dr. Koenig suggests disguising the characters as scientists might be their best option. Jens can forge ID cards for the characters (the cards look totally legit from a distance, but there is only a 60% chance they will hold up under intense scrutiny), and clothes can be bought at a local uniform supplier store for cheap. There is a shift change at 7:00 am, which is the perfect time for the characters to sneak in.

Upon entering the facility, the characters will be subject to a light frisk, and their ID cards will be checked (the guards just glance at them, no need to roll). Allow the characters to roll their Concealment skills to bring in weapons, but no more than one pistol or knife. Cameras and computer disks are allowed in the Komplex, as they are seen as part of the science team's work.

As an alternative that will allow the characters to bring in more gear with them, they can try to sneak in through the underground sewage system. The Komplex's waste runs in the same lines as the rest of the town, so it will be a matter of finding which tunnels will bring them the closest to the facility. If they plan correctly, they should be able to come up in an old boiler room, then into a maintenance area, and finally, into the halls of the Komplex itself. They will still have to pose as scientists in order to walk around unnoticed, but this way, at least, allows them more weapons and equipment.

Dr. Koenig has supplied the characters with tiny devices that fit in their ears. They will allow them to send out scrambled radio signals to each other. They will need the doctor's directions in order to find their way to the basement. As long as the characters do not make their conversations too obvious (like chatting to each other in a crowded elevator), no one really notices.

As Dr. Koenig leads them to the elevator, give the characters chances to do some role-playing with other scientists. Maybe they can find out some information. They should be stopped and questioned at least once, maybe by a scientist who thinks he knows who they are, and "needs those reports on his desk by noon." Be creative and have fun with it. Make your players nervous about getting caught, but not so nervous they freak out and shoot the place up.

There is a guard at the elevator and, unlike the rest of the guards, he knows who belongs in the basement and who does not. Simply approaching him will get the characters turned away. Pressing the issue will have them detained and questioned, and found out. Not only that, but there are cameras

watching the elevator, and if anything "odd" happens (such as if the guard leaves his post or disappears), 2D4 guards will be there in minutes to investigate. The characters will have to rely on their powers, cunning, and resourcefulness to get into the elevator. Psionics or magic would be a big help, as long as the characters are not too flashy about it.

The elevator goes down into the Practical Applications Testing Department (the official name for what Dr. Koenig refers to as the 'chamber of horrors'). Security down here is very light. There are few cameras, none pointed at the testing chambers, and one security guard who is lazy and incompetent. The brass figures there is little need to guard the inside of this department since the rest of the Komplex is so heavily defended. Another critical flaw, thanks to the bureaucracy. Therefore, the characters will have free rein down here to take pictures and copy computer files. As long as the characters stay discreet, the other scientists will barely notice.

And there they stand, in the Practical Applications Testing Department. Before them are hallways and catwalks that lead into huge rooms. In those rooms, the weapons of the NGR are being tested on monsters. Game Masters, be creative with this area. Remember that this area is the reason for all that has come



before. It is not enough that the characters do this for money. They need to feel that the experiments here are truly a crime against nature, and that no living being deserves this suffering. I will list some examples, but I strongly urge you to come up with your own ideas. You will be able to deliver it better if it comes from your own imagination.

**Some examples of things the characters will see include:**

1. NGR scientists testing a large turreted cannon that fires concentrated gamma rays. The Gargoyle they are testing it on tries to regenerate the damage, but instead, mutates horribly and grows large tumors within minutes. Scientists record the results and try again with the cannon on different frequencies.

2. Brodkil demons, with their heads cut open, have devices installed into their brains that emulate M.O.M. technology. These devices are hooked into a central computer. The scientists are running tests to see the results of M.O.M. tech on the creatures. The Brodkil are still alive, but barely aware of their surroundings.

3. A living D-Bee or monster is precisely vivisected by a large machine with whirling blades and drills. The scientists are testing the creature's limits of pain and damage capacity. They inject it with chemicals which inhibit its body's ability to produce natural painkillers. If the creature passes out from the pain, they wait until it wakes up and continue the experiment. If it dies, a new one is brought in within minutes.

4. In order to learn how psionic powers work, scientists have cut open a D-Bee and kept it alive. They poke and prod its exposed brain and subject it to visual and auditory imagery in order to try to provoke a psionic response. The effects are noted, and new imagery is introduced.

Allow the characters ample time to walk around and explore the department. They may be questioned by other scientists as to their opinions of the experiments. Many of the scientists are friendly, but take a cold and business-like approach to their work. If questioned about the ethics of their work, they seem curious that a question would even be asked. None of the scientists will say anything to betray their experiments, but psionic powers like Telepathy or Empathy will reveal that at least 60% find their work detestable but necessary, and an additional 10% hate their work and want a way out.

## **Making an Escape**

If the player group handles the previous chapter well, then escaping the facility should be a snap. They can simply leave the way they came in. Unless they are in the Research Labs for a very long time, very little will change around the area. If guards are changed in the meantime, however, they may be questioned on their way out.

If the player group has been discovered or has set off an alarm, things become much more difficult. The Komplex will most likely go to full alert. All of the facility's soldiers will be assembled in full armor and weapons in 1D4 minutes. The power armor troops will be dispatched in 2D4 minutes. All unnecessary passages will be sealed off with heavy blast doors (300 M.D.C.). Robot drones will be released to check the air shafts and maintenance areas. Communications Officers will be watching the whole thing from hidden cameras positioned all

over the place. They will instruct the soldiers on where to find any unauthorized personnel.

At this point, the characters will have precious few options. They can try to sneak out, they can try to simply shoot their way out, they can take some hostages, they can barricade themselves and hope for the best, or they can cause a distraction and run out during the chaos. Your group will undoubtedly come up with a plan not listed here. Be patient with them, but realistic considering their situation. If they screw up, don't make it easy for them.

Sneaking out may be the best solution. It will be extremely difficult, however. There are hidden cameras to worry about, as well as motion sensors and electric eyes. Trying to sneak through the air vents will lead the characters into confrontations against robot drones, dead ends, and traps. The Communications Officers will even try to immobilize or kill the intruders by adjusting the thermostat in that part of the air system to levels that are harmful to humans (whether that affects the characters will depend on their powers and abilities).

Shooting their way out is suicide, plain and simple. Inform the group, out of character if you need to, that there is a very slim chance of survival. The group will have to contend with 80% to 100% of the facility's armed guards, as well as robot drones, power armor, and automated sentry guns. If they really want to throw their characters away like that, let them, but at least warn them first.

The taking of hostages, and/or barricading themselves up should not be the whole plan all by itself, but may be involved in the escape. NGR soldiers will not fire upon someone with a hostage unless the characters venture outside. Snipers, firing from hidden locations, will try to disable or kill the character with a hostage when and if they get a good shot. Barricading simply will not work. The Communications Officers have complete control over the base, and will send everything from poison gas to robot drones to take down the intruders. At best, the characters will have 3D4 minutes before robots or soldiers storm into the room and demand their surrender.

The best possible way to create a distraction would be to release the monsters in the Research Labs. These Gargoyles and Brodkil are way too weak and injured to put up much of a fight, but they will kill any scientist they come across. They may also destroy equipment as a means to lash out against their captors, which will start fires, knock out power, and disrupt communications. One or two may even make it outside onto city streets (which would be very bad). Certainly the facility's troops will have their hands full trying to contain the monsters, giving the PCs a greater chance of escaping.

Once the characters are out of the Komplex, it will be time to leave Pforzheim. And they must leave now. No matter how good their plan to infiltrate the labs was, someone will check the security files and notice that something is wrong. Troops will be dispatched immediately. They won't hesitate to destroy half the city to take the characters down, either. Their best bet will be to grab Dr. Koenig and run, fly, or drive as fast as they can for Berlin.

## **Incriminating Information**

Colonel Eisenfaust guessed that Dr. Koenig might return to Berlin. He alerts the military police, informing them that the

doctor is a dangerous subversive terrorist, and an enemy of the state. The player characters won't know this unless they keep an ear open on encrypted Polizei Radio. If the doctor is seen in public, there is a 50% chance (roll percentile) that someone will recognize him and alert the police. Roll every hour, as well as any time the doctor's name is mentioned to an NPC or said aloud by the characters. The Polizei will arrest everyone, and only shoot to maim.

The player group's last responsibility is to escort Dr. Koenig to a safe house that Jens has set up. After that they can take care of themselves. The characters are paid their money and thanked again for helping Dr. Koenig. They suggest the player characters get out of Berlin for a while, and leave the NGR if they can.

## Expected Consequences

Once Dr. Koenig is safe and he releases his evidence into the public forum, everything will be up to the people and the politicians. What will happen to the Pforzheim Research Komplex? What will happen to Col. Eisenfaust? Who will be outraged, and what will they do about it? Who will step forward to defend the actions of Col. Eisenfaust? What happens when word of this flows into the Monster Zones? Will there be retaliatory strikes?

Dr. Koenig knows that this will be a huge news story. He's right. The media is all over it. The photographs and video footage are all over the evening news and the internet. Many people claim it is a hoax until former workers of Pforzheim start to come forward to share their stories. It turns out things are worse than Dr. Koenig knew. Monsters weren't the only ones who were being experimented on. D-Bees and human mutants were also victims of the atrocities, though in much smaller numbers.

The nation is polarized between the two sides. One side says that the monsters deserve what they get, and it is no problem to let them suffer to teach humanity ways to kill them more efficiently. The other side wants the experiments to stop, and weapon research to be carried out with more humane methods. Each side *knows* the other is brainwashed, corrupt, and totally wrong.

There are many protests at the Pforzheim Research Komplex. The city experiences a slow drain of its economy when more than 40% of its population moves away over the course of the next year. Word of the experiments gets to the Monster Zones, and the monsters are not happy.

Whether or not anything really bad happens, I leave to the G.M., but whatever happens, Dr. Koenig is never seen again.

## Don't Screw Up

If the players cannot prevent the killing or arresting of Dr. Koenig, their mission will be a failure. Also, if they abandon him for any reason, he will not survive. Dr. Koenig cannot make the trip to Berlin by himself. He will try, and be found dead weeks later. Of course the characters will not get paid if this happens, so every effort must be made to keep him alive and out of prison.

If Dr. Koenig is captured, he will be given a speedy trial with a fabricated list of crimes, and sent to prison for the rest of his natural life. There, he will appeal to the courts, but the letters

never leave the prison. For all intents and purposes, he disappears, and the experiments at Pforzheim continue.

An attempt will be made to capture or kill any character who is easily identifiable by security footage or eyewitnesses. Depending on how much trouble they cause, the player characters could be hounded by Special Forces soldiers and bounty hunters for a very long time.

## Cast of Characters



### Dr. Dieter Koenig

#### Triax Research Scientist

**Name:** Dieter Koenig.

**Alignment:** Scrupulous.

**Attributes:** I.Q.: 22, M.E.: 13, M.A.: 12, P.S.: 10, P.P.: 11, P.E.: 16, P.B.: 10, Spd: 14.

**Height:** 5 feet, 11 inches (1.8 m). **Weight:** 150 lbs (67.5 kg). **Age:** 32.

**Hit Points:** 45, S.D.C.: 24.

**Level of Experience:** 6th

**P.P.E.:** 4. **I.S.P.:** 10.

**Skills of Note (Includes I.Q. bonuses):** Language: Euro (native), Language: American 80%, Literacy: Euro 90%, Radio: Basic 80%, TV/Video 70%, Basic Electronics 90%, Electrical Engineer 85%, Robot Electronics 75%, Computer Repair 85%, Basic Mechanics 90%, Mechanical Engineer 85%, Weapons Engineer 85%, Nuclear, Biological, Chemical Warfare 70%, Recognize Weapon Quality 60%, Computer Hacking 50%, Biology 70%, Chemistry 75%, Chemistry: Analytical 50%, Math: Basic

98%, Math: Advanced 80%, Computer Operation 98%, Computer Programming 90%, Lore: Demons & Monsters 60%, Lore: D-Bee 50%, Research 80%, Writing 60%, Pilot: Automobile 98%, Tracking 50%.

**Appearance:** A thin, pale man with messy brown hair. Dr. Koenig doesn't have much of a life outside his work, and it shows. His apartment is a disaster. Half-eaten doughnuts, burger wrappers, empty beer bottles, old newspapers, and other sorts of trash cover the place. Dieter cares very little about the appearance of his apartment or himself. His eyes are very intense and constantly moving, as if he is always taking in and calculating the details of his surroundings.

**Disposition:** Dieter is a passionate man with strong principles. He holds his beliefs firmly, and will not waver. These traits make him a dedicated scientist, able to commit long hours to his projects. He cares about his work because he knows how important it is to have advantages over the enemy. However, Dieter is also very bad at following orders, much more preferring to do things his own way. He is Upper Management's worst nightmare: insubordinate, but a genius.

**Psionic Powers:** None.

**Magic Knowledge:** None.

**Combat Training:** Hand to Hand: Basic.

**Attacks per Melee:** 5

**Bonuses:** +1 to strike, +2 to parry, +2 to dodge, +2 to pull punch, +2 to roll with impact, Critical Strike on a Natural 19-20.

**Weapons of Note:** None.

## Jens Kessler

**Name:** Jens Kessler.

**Alignment:** Unprincipled.

**Attributes:** I.Q.: 13, M.E.: 16, M.A.: 14, P.S.: 12, P.P.: 15, P.E.: 15, P.B.: 9, Spd: 18.

**Height:** 5 feet, 8 inches (1.7 m). **Weight:** 130 lbs (58.5 kg). **Age:** 31.

**Hit Points:** 50, S.D.C.: 38.

**P.P.E.:** 3, I.S.P.: 20.

**Skills of Note:** Language: Euro 98% (native), Literacy 80%, Streetwise 80%, Math: Basic 90%, Radio: Basic 80%, Running, Prowl 70%, Palming 90%, Pick Pockets 90%, Gambling (standard) 60%, Computer Operation 95%, Concealment 80%, Cryptography 60%, Optic Systems 70%, Surveillance Systems 80%, Pilot Automobile 95%, Pilot Motorcycle 95%, Pilot Hover Vehicle 90%, W.P. Paired Weapons, W.P. Knife, W.P. Energy Pistol.

**Appearance:** Jens always looks like he's about to attend some really hip party. He keeps up on the latest fashion trends for City Rats, even though he's getting to be too old to be partying like he does. He loves black leather, chains, and spiked hair (which is the style now among City Rats).

**Disposition:** Jens is a good-natured fellow. As a criminal City Rat, he is a cheat, a liar, and a scoundrel, but he knows when it is time to put those things on the shelf. To those he respects, he is a true friend. Risking his neck for Dieter is something he would rather not have done, but he knew that he would hate himself if he didn't.

**Level of Experience:** 7<sup>th</sup> level City Rat.

**Psionic Powers:** None.

**Magic Knowledge:** None.

**Combat Training:** Hand to Hand: Expert.

**Attacks per Melee Round:** 5

**Bonuses:** +3 to parry, +3 to dodge, +2 to strike, +2 to pull punch, +2 to roll with impact, Critical Strike on a Natural 18-20.

**Weapons:** Vibro-Knife (1D6 M.D.), TX-24 Ion Pulse Pistol (2D4 M.D.).

**Armor:** Gladiator (70 M.D.C.).

## Colonel Heinrich Eisenfaust

**Head of Military Operations**

**for the Pforzheim Research Komplex**

**Alignment:** Anarchist.

**Attributes:** I.Q.: 18, M.E.: 23, M.A.: 20, P.S.: 20, P.P.: 22, P.E.: 18, P.B.: 11, Spd: 24.

**Height:** 6 feet, 1 inch (1.85 m).

**Weight:** 184 pounds (82.8 kg).

**Age:** 49

**Hit Points:** 65, S.D.C.: 87.

**Experience Level:** 12<sup>th</sup> level Intelligence Officer.

**P.P.E.:** 6, I.S.P.: 41.

**Skills of Note:** Math: Basic 98%, Literacy: Euro 98%, Language: Euro 98%, Literacy: American 98%, Language: American 98%, Radio: Basic 98%, Radio: Scramblers 98%, Radio: Laser 98%, Surveillance Systems 94%, Computer Operation 98%, Disguise 98%, Escape Artist 98%, Intelligence 98%, Robot Combat: Elite Jaeger, Pilot Jet Pack 98%, Pilot Robots and Power Armor 98%, General Athletics, Climbing 98%/98%, Swimming 98%, Palming 89%, Streetwise 78%, Military Etiquette 98%, Interrogation Techniques 79%, Sniper, Boxing, Prowl 93%, Running, Gymnastics, Sense of Balance 98%, Work Parallel Bars and Rings 97%, Climb Rope 98%, Back Flip 98%, W.P. Energy Pistol, W.P. Energy Rifle, W.P. Heavy Energy.

**Appearance:** The Colonel has a tough, leathery face and white hair which is always kept in a clean military haircut. He always stands with poise and confidence as though he is always under scrutiny. His toned physique and poised posture distinctly label him as a military man.

**Disposition:** The Colonel is a die-hard patriot. He will stop at nothing to ensure the safety of the NGR and has no problem carrying out missions which others would call immoral as long as he can justify it. He faked his own death and abandoned his wife and only son in order to keep the secrets of the facility safe so it is a safe bet to say that the life of one scientist means nothing to him. This is a man who has sacrificed everything in order to keep his nation safe from the Gargoyle menace and is disgusted at those who don't see the rationale behind the secret experiments at the facility.

**Psionics:** Minor Psychic. He has the powers of Empathy and Sixth Sense.

**Magic Knowledge:** Knows a bit about magic but is by no means a scholar on the subject.

**Combat Training:** Hand to Hand: Assassin.

**Attacks per Melee:** 8

**Combat Bonuses:** +3 to initiative, +8 to strike, +9 to parry, +10 to dodge, +10 to damage, +2 to entangle, +5 to pull punch, +7 to roll, +4 to save vs psionics, +6% to save vs coma/death, +2 to save vs magic.

**Other Combat Bonuses:** Kick attack does 2D4, knockout/stun on a Natural 17-20, Critical Strike on a Natural 19-20, automatic knockout on a Natural 20.

**Weapons of Note:** Eisenfaust has access to any weapon or prototype developed by Triax. He likes to “assist” in the testing of weapon prototypes created within the Pforzheim Komplex. He also has access to every level of the facility and any vehicle, weapon, or robot contained within, though he still prefers the Jaeger Power Armor. He was a big promoter of the creation of more of the interchangeable weapon systems for the Jaeger and sees it as the most versatile weapon in the NGR’s arsenal.

# The Town of Pforzheim

**History:** The inhabitants of Pforzheim trace their roots back to the pre-Rifts town of Pforzheim, which was decimated by demons during the Great Cataclysm. They uprooted themselves and traveled east, before finally stopping at Passau. The town of Passau had been relatively untouched by the chaos of the Rifts, but its inhabitants had mysteriously vanished. The refugees renamed the city Pforzheim in memoriam of what they had lost.

Over the decades, Pforzheim has suffered numerous attacks from Gargoyles and Brodkil, and has more than once fallen under the control of monstrous beings, only to be rescued by the military of the NGR. Since construction first began on the Pforzheim Research Komplex in 26 P.A., the NGR army has made sure to station enough troops to properly defend the city and the nearby border. In 29 P.A., the Brodkil made a large effort to take the city, and were wiped out by the overwhelming NGR forces. Since then the monsters have kept their distance.

Residents enjoy all of the modern conveniences offered to any NGR city. They have indoor plumbing, electricity, high-speed internet access, state-of-the-art computers, robot drones, and hover vehicles. There are a number of scenic parks and recreation areas. Unemployment is very low, and nearly everyone has a high standard of life.

Crime is occasionally a problem in Pforzheim since the region attracts many mercenaries and freelance monster-hunters. This naturally brings in weapons dealers and other operatives of the German Black Market.

**Pforzheim Population:** Approximately 10,000 residents. At any given time, Pforzheim has 2D6x100 visitors; mainly mercenaries and monster-hunters.

## Approximate Population Breakdown:

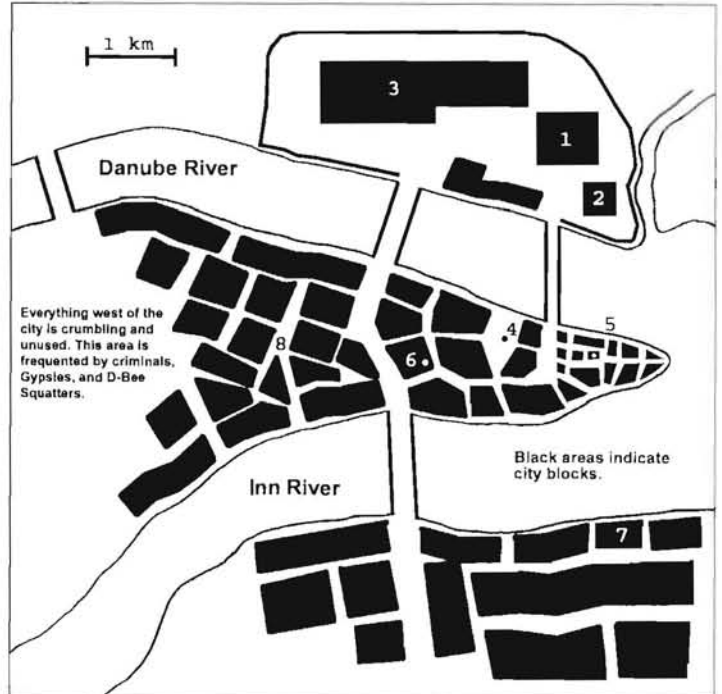
70% Triax Employees. A full 80% of those are employed at the Pforzheim Research Komplex.

10% military personnel.

15% employed in other fields (artisans, entertainers, private businesses, service industry).

5% chronically unemployed (homeless, retirees, criminals).

**Geographic Location:** Where the city of Passau once stood, near the Germany/Austria border.



## Places of Note:

**1. Pforzheim Research Komplex – Main Facility;** houses the Research Laboratories and Prototype Development and Testing Departments.

**2. Pforzheim Research Komplex – Administrative Offices,** and the Pforzheim Military Technology Museum.

**3. Pforzheim Research Komplex – Production/Assembly** Factory.

**4. Town Square –** Festivals are held here during holidays. There is always much singing, dancing, and, of course, beer drinking. The square has a large stone fountain in the middle of it, which is rumored to have originated in another world. Surrounding the fountain are beautiful beds of flowers.

**5. City Hall –** The seat of government resides here. Also doubles as the city courthouse.

**6. Der Oberdorfer nightclub.** Most popular night spot in Pforzheim.

**7. Dr. Koenig’s apartment.**

**8. Tonkünstlerplatz.** This is the major business and cultural area of Pforzheim. All of the best shops and Bier Gartens are here.

## The Pforzheim Research Komplex

The Research Komplex at Pforzheim is one of the oldest research facilities in the NGR. It has long been a part of the vast research and development division of Triax Industries, and is the birthplace of many of the most innovative technologies that the NGR uses in its fight against the ever-present Gargoyle armies. Uranium and Depleted Uranium rounds were first developed at the Komplex, and it is common knowledge that they



were the developers of the new Devastator Mk. II, which is quickly becoming a new symbol of national pride.

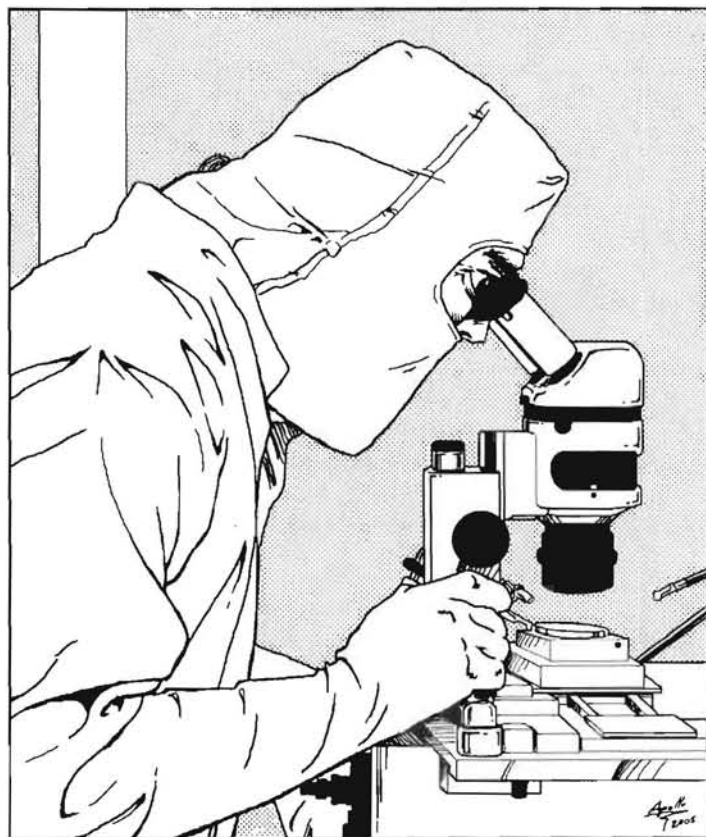
Construction was started on the Komplex in 26 P.A. in the village of Pforzheim and was completed two years later in the summer of 28 P.A. in what was seen as a great achievement for the German people. The site was chosen for its military value as a border outpost and its relatively unassuming facade in the tranquil little town. A few months later, in the cold of winter, a massive army of Brodkil made a large, coordinated effort to take the village. Knowing that the villagers stood no chance in defending themselves, the troops in the Research Komplex pulled the citizens behind the massive walls of the facility and went out to face the enemy. The Brodkil were slaughtered by the NGR troops, losing over 4,000 of their number, while there were only 113 reported casualties on the side of the Germans.

Since then, the town of Pforzheim has grown slowly, but still remains a peaceful place to live under the watchful eye of the military presence located at the Research Komplex. Triax has spent a large sum of money improving the infrastructure of the town around the complex, and even more on the further development of the Komplex itself. Since the research facility was built, Triax has been continuously adding on to the Komplex, with the most recent addition being the Military Technology Museum which houses many pre-Rifts artifacts and newer developments by the scientists at the research facility.

Built in 88 P.A., the Production Factory is also a newer development. This addition effectively made the research facility a self-supporting military outpost by creating standard robot and power armor units, as well as being able to produce the new designs and prototypes created at the facility. Much of the production output is currently used to reinforce the field armies of the front line, and is exported to various parts of the NGR.

The Administrative Offices house the bureaucratic element of the facility. Most of the records of the various functions of the facility are stored, processed, and composed here, though the research division has its own records storage. Most of the research records are actually stored in various rooms in the research facility, not in this building, but they rarely ever see the light of day unless it is by someone with top security clearance. The offices of the military forces stationed at the facility are also in this building on the sixth floor, with access to their own meeting rooms, holding cells, communications center, and direct access to their private motor pool.

The Main Research Facility of the complex is the real gem of the Pforzheim Research Komplex. Here all types of weapons research and development take place, ranging from the development of new field weapons to the creation and design of new robots and power armor. The Triax Research and Development Division has become the shining star of the NGR, but at this facility and many others, there is a dark secret. Deep under the facility is a multi-leveled secret complex not much unlike the Lone Star Complex of the Coalition States. While smaller than the Lone Star Complex, the idea behind the facility at Pforzheim is much the same; develop secret weapons without the knowledge of the general public. Even some members of the NGR military do not know of the facility's existence other than the pristine exterior.



## Triax Research Scientist

Based on ideas by Brandon K. Aten, Taylor White, Michael J. Allen, and Tad Allen.

Being the largest and most prominent industrial power in the NGR, and possibly the world, Triax has a constant need for intelligent, innovative men and women to develop new products. With the full militarization of the NGR in 104 P.A., Triax had almost doubled the amount of researchers that it employed in order to produce new weapons, robots, and vehicles to fight the Gargoyle horde. Triax had made sure to hire the best minds that money could buy. The top corporate executives of the Triax Corporation decided well in advance of the 104 Militarization Agreement to diversify its research divisions in order to "think outside the box." The corporation started scanning the globe for the most promising minds in the fields of robotics, bionics, and weapons technologies and made them offers that they could not refuse. The end result includes scientists from all over the world, including Russia, Free Quebec, Northern Gun, and the Coalition States.

The Triax Research Scientists are some of the most important people to both the Triax Corporation and the NGR, since it is their innovations and inventions that help the soldiers fight against the enemies of the New German Republic. Oftentimes countless man-hours go into the development of these new technologies which can change the tide of battle when they make their appearance on the battlefield. The scientists of the Triax Research and Development Division were the ones who discovered the detrimental effects of Uranium and Depleted Uranium rounds on the regenerative capabilities of supernatural creatures.

While each scientist may have his own agenda or specialty, each is required to participate in a group methodology course

which teaches them the benefits of group dynamics. Because of this, even the most introverted and standoffish scientist can work in a group if needed. By working in this group setting, a prototype of a new weapon or technology can be developed in months, not years, often with different groups working on different elements of the same prototype unknowing of the finished product. The Devastator Mk. II was one such technological marvel to benefit from this efficient development process. Over the past years since the militarization, Triax has focused on the use of these specialized groups to advance their technology to previously unthinkable levels.

The research of the Triax Research Scientist grants them security level access to many of the research facilities throughout the NGR, but there may be sections of the facilities to which even they may not be granted access. They are often assigned to expeditionary groups that may have a chance of encountering new or alien technology, or where their expertise may be needed. Currently, there are 22 Triax Research Scientists throughout Europe, Russia, and Northern Africa assigned to long-range reconnaissance groups.

## Special O.C.C. Abilities:

**1. Research and Development:** The Triax Research Scientist and his associates are almost solely responsible for the creation of new technologies used by the armed forces of the NGR. As long as they have the resources (and Triax makes sure that they do) and enough time, they can develop new prototype weapons and tools that may be able to help soldiers, adventurers, or other scientists. Below is the formula for figuring out how long the development of such technological prototypes would take. The formula is based on three variables, which are availability of the technology, the I.Q. of the research group, and the I.Q. of the project leader (referred to as the management bonus). Ultimately, it is up to the G.M. whether or not to allow the player character's creation to succeed based on the relevance of the invention to the campaign.

(NOTE: The following section contains a somewhat simple formula for calculating the man-hours needed to develop the various new technologies. For those gamers who find the mathematical elements of this ability too daunting, they can be ignored and G.M.'s discretion can take precedence.)

Each level of availability is assigned a numerical value from one to five based on the level of the desired technology and whether or not it is readily available. The levels are as follows:

**1. The desired device is common tech item.** Example: Laser distancer or language translator.

**2. The desired device is of medium- to high-tech.** Example: Laser pistol or Vibro-Blade.

**3. The desired device is of high-tech.** Technology exists and is superior quality. Example: Rail gun, power armor, heavy laser rifle.

**4. The desired technology is theoretically possible** but has not been totally developed yet. Example: Force field generator.

**5. The desired technology doesn't exist and is very radical.** The majority of super-high-tech devices fall into this category.

This tech number is used to find the multiplier for the formula. Now depending on the numerical value selected, another multiplier is assigned as follows:

1 - 2	
2 - 18	4 - 104
3 - 52	5 - 174

This value is the value for **X** in the final formula. There are two more variables, **Y** and **Z**. **Y** is the total I.Q. of all the researchers in the group, including the project manager, and **Z** is the I.Q. of only the project manager, which represents the manager's ability to delegate responsibility within his group. (The project manager is selected by the group before research begins and is one of the most important positions.) The selected values are then put into the following equation to get the total amount of man-hours.

$$(50,000 \times X) / (Y \times Z) = \text{total man-hours.}$$

**Example:** A group of four Triax Research Scientists decides to develop a new heavy laser rifle. Three of the scientists have an I.Q. of 15, while one has an I.Q. of 18. The scientist with the I.Q. of 18 is selected as the project manager, making the value of **Z** equal to 18. By adding the I.Q. values together we can find the value of **Y** to be 63. Since the tech level of the desired product is a 3, the multiplier (value of **X**) is listed as 52. By plugging the values into the formula it would look like this:

$$(50,000 \times 52) / (63 \times 18) = 2293 \text{ man-hours (rounded up).}$$

With all four scientists working forty hours a week, it would take a little over 14 weeks to get an experimental weapon from the drawing board to a working prototype. Sometimes researchers will work 60 to 80 hours a week just to rush a prototype to production. G.M.s can add any penalties they deem necessary for a rushed prototype.

**2. Recognize Prototype Weapon Quality:** The Triax Research Scientists can recognize the durability, reliability, and quality of a prototype weapon by physically examining it. Because of the temperamental nature and delicate condition of most prototype weapons, special care must be taken not to damage the unit before it can be delivered to the laboratory or production facility. **Base Skill:** 25% +5% per level. **Note:** Reduce this ability by half if the weapon is only seen but not handled.

**Attribute Requirements:** I.Q. 10 and an M.E. of 10 or higher.

### O.C.C. Skills:

Math: Basic (+20%)

Math: Advanced (+20%)

Language: Euro at 98% and one other of choice (+30%).

Literacy: Euro (+30%)

Chemistry (+25%)

Biology (+20%)

Computer Operation (+20%)

Computer Programming (+20%)

Lore: Demon/Monster (+20%)

Basic Electronics (+25%)

Electrical Engineer (+20%)

Robot Electronics (+15%)

Basic Mechanics (+20%)

Mechanical Engineer (+15%)  
Robot Mechanics (+15%)  
Weapons Engineer (+15%)  
Radio: Basic (+15%)  
W.P. Blunt  
Hand to Hand: Basic

Hand to Hand: Basic can be changed to expert at the cost of two other skills. No other Hand to Hand skills may be selected.

**O.C.C. Related Skills:** Select four skills from one of the following areas of special training: Communications, Electrical, Mechanical, Medical, Science, or Technical. All of these special skills get a +20% skill bonus. Five other skills may be selected from any of the following categories at level one, and two at levels four, eight, and twelve.

Communications: Any (+15%).

Domestic: Any.

Electrical: Any (+10%).

Espionage: None.

Mechanical: Any (+15%).

Medical: Any (+15%).

Military: NBC Warfare, Demolitions, Demolitions Disposal, and Field Armorer only (+15%).

Physical: Any, except Boxing, Acrobatics, and Gymnastics.

Pilot: Any (+10%) except robots, power armor, tanks, APCs or combat aircraft.

Pilot Related: Any (+10%).

Rogue: None.

Science: Any (+15%).

Technical: Any (+10%; +20% to Lore, Language, and Literacy skills).

W.P.: Any.

Wilderness: Any.

**Secondary Skills:** The character gets four Secondary Skills at level one, and two additional skills at levels three, six, nine, and twelve from the previous list. These are additional areas of knowledge that do not get the advantage of the bonus listed in parentheses. All Secondary Skills start at the base skill level.

**Standard Equipment:** PDD pocket audio recorder, fine leather gloves, a box of disposal surgical gloves (100 gloves per box), PC3000 computer, portable tool kit, laser scalpel, pocket flashlight, portable video camera, portable language translator, pocket laser distancer, air filter and gas mask, 2 lab coats. Weapons consist of a Vibro-Knife and a Triax pistol of choice.

**Equipment Available upon Assignment:** Sensory equipment, camera/film, medical equipment, communications equipment, EOD equipment, experimental weapons and equipment, radiation suit, and vehicle. The Scientist has full access to standard research facilities but may be denied access to some secret developmental areas. Usually has high security clearance.

**Money:** Scientists are given a nice apartment, with one bedroom and separate living and dining areas. Salary is 2400 credits monthly. The Scientist is also given access to the vari-

ous military recreational facilities of the NGR soldiers stationed at the research centers. Starts off with 1D6x1000 credits.

**Cybernetics:** None to start.

**Experience:** Same as the Rogue Scientist.

## New Weapons

The researchers at the Pforzheim Research Komplex are constantly researching new and innovative weapon technologies to give the soldiers of the NGR an advantage over the supernatural abilities of their Gargoyle adversaries. The massive research division stationed at the Pforzheim Komplex has developed some of the most influential technologies that the NGR currently employs and is partly responsible for the pristine reputation of the Triax Corporation among technological circles.

When the NGR decided to fully militarize, they needed better weaponry at a lower price, and they turned to Triax. In turn, Triax has been able to produce a wider variety of energy weapons, new rail guns, and a great many other weapons for the NGR. Through trade treaties with Free Quebec, and a limited trade agreement with the Coalition States (bolstered by a little "creative acquisition" of new technologies), Triax has been able to make smaller, more effective missiles which are currently being used by the majority of front line troops. (Use the Missile Chart on page 97 of *Coalition War Campaign*.)

Among the other projects approved by the NGR were improved 'Borg/Heavy infantry weapons, energy weapon research, Jaeger modifications (strongly supported by Colonel Eisenfaust) for squad based combat, and the Devastator Mk. II. The hard work that goes into all of these technologies may seem fruitless to some, but any soldier on the battlefield is more than grateful to have the Triax techs giving them new weapons to better protect their homeland.

### TX-SS01 Super Shotgun

The TX-SS01 was developed by the Triax weapons engineers to fill a request by some of the Cyborg shock troopers of the NGR. A heavy weapon that could be used for fighting in close quarters and urban environments was requested as the attacks of the Gargoyle invaders came closer to the cities and villages of the NGR. The Super Shotgun is a fairly bulky weapon that uses rail gun technology to fire a variety of rounds from its large-bore barrel. The two most popular rounds used are the solid slug round which is used mainly for anti-armor purposes, and the buckshot round which is used for anti-personnel purposes. Smoke and tear gas rounds are also available, but are rarely used. A P.S. of 26 is required to use this weapon. Any user with a lower P.S. can fire the weapon, but will be -4 to strike and knocked down, losing initiative and one attack.

**Primary Purpose:** Anti-Armor & Anti-Personnel.

**Weight:** 15 lbs (6.75 kg), plus 5 lbs with ammo drum (20 lbs/9 kg).

**Mega-Damage:** Solid slug does 1D4x10+12, Buckshot round does 5D6 to all targets within a 6 foot (1.8 m) radius. When the slug shell is used, man-sized targets, armored troops, and Gurgoyles must roll a D20 against the attacker's roll at a -6 pen-

alty. They must surpass the attacker's strike roll or be knocked down, suffering the loss of initiative and one attack.

Rate of Fire: Single shots only.

Range: 600 feet (183 m).

Payload: 8 rounds. Single rounds can be hand-loaded.

Cost: 30,000 credits.

Special: The weapon has a Horror Factor of 9.

## TX-46 Particle Beam Rifle

Seeing the need for heavier infantry weapons, the weapons researchers at the Pforzheim research facility took the reliable TX-45 Particle Beam Rifle and modified it to have an increased range, and increased potential for damage. The modified weapon has a much larger barrel, an independent laser targeting site, full stock, and still takes advantage of the FSE-Clip. Fans of the original TX-45 Particle Beam Rifle have already purchased a number of these weapons, and have been very complimentary of their performance in the field.

Being one of the only nations in the world that still experiments with Particle Beam technology, the NGR was very limited in their ability to trade information with other nations. The design of the TX-46 was a cooperative endeavor by the scientists of Triax and Free Quebec as both nations saw the benefit of having such a powerful technology at their disposal.

Primary Purpose: Assault.

Range: 2000 feet (610 m).

Weight: 9 lbs (4 kg).

Payload: 15 shots.

Mega-Damage: 1D4x10+6

Bonus: +1 to strike.

Rate of Fire: Single shots only.

Cost: 40,000 credits.

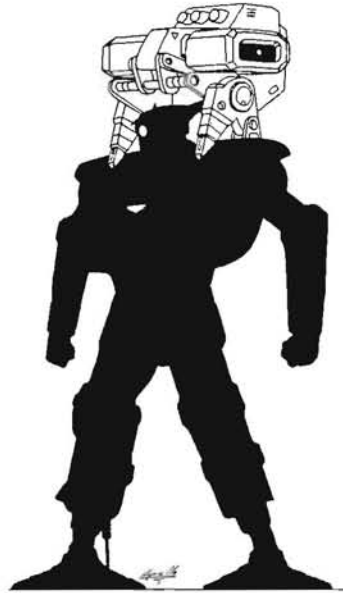
# New Triax X-535 Interchangeable Devices

After witnessing the superior versatility of the Glitter Boy legions of Free Quebec, the top military minds of the NGR wanted to make the X-535 Jaeger even more of a well rounded unit. The program received much support from the top brass who already saw the Jaegers as one of the best units fielded by the NGR. Colonel Eisenfaust, the project's staunchest supporter, made hundreds of calls and pulled dozens of strings just to get the development program assigned to the Pforzheim Research Komplex where he could observe its progress firsthand. Overall, the program has been deemed a success by the military top brass and the power armor commandos as well. **NOTE:** All of the interchangeable devices for the Jaeger have an independent power supply.

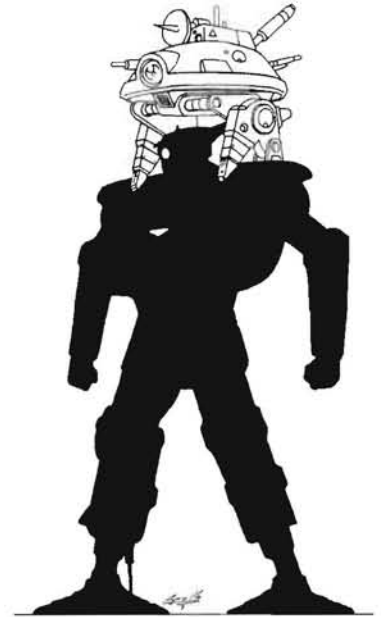
## TX-917FF Jaeger Force Field

The Jaeger Force Field is a modified version of the force field generator from the X-1000 Ulti-Max. It forms a force field dome over the unit that has a 30 foot (9.1 m) radius, which can be used to provide protection to infantry and power armor troops. In simulations and trials, there was generally one Jaeger unit with the TX-917FF per squad. The force field has 100 M.D.C. If the M.D.C. of the force field is depleted, the unit will shut down. Moderate damage (50 M.D.C.) requires one hour to

regenerate. Damage can only be regenerated if the unit is shut down. Since the unit has an independent power supply like all of the interchangeable devices, all weapons of the Jaeger can still be used while it is regenerating. The unit itself weighs 2 tons and has 200 M.D.C.



TX-917FF Jaeger Force Field



TX-411R Jaeger Sensor Dome

## TX-411R Jaeger Sensor Dome

With the Gargoyle adversaries finding new technological and magical ways to conceal themselves and their reinforced positions, the need for a wider variety of sensory equipment in the field was imperative. The weapons developers at Pforzheim combined some of the most advanced sensory systems into one large unit that grants the Jaeger a wide range of sensory capabilities. A Jaeger with a TX-411R is often assigned to recon squads or seek and destroy squads as well as remote outposts where their long-range communication equipment is often used. The unit itself weighs 2 tons and has 200 M.D.C. All systems are in addition to the standard equipment for all Triax Robots and Power Armor.

### Special Equipment:

- Advanced Radar:** Extended radar range of 200 miles (320 km). Can track 120 units simultaneously.
- Long-Range Laser communications:** Range 1200 miles (1920 km).
- Radio/Radar Scrambling Unit:** Can scramble enemy radar units and radio communications to all units within 10 miles (16 km). Targets must make rolls on Radio and Sensory Equipment skills with a -35% penalty.
- Laser Targeting:** This is primarily used to "tag" a reinforced position for an air strike or mortar strike. The infrared laser has a range of one mile (1.6 km) and is invisible unless an observer has enhanced optics which allow them to see in the infrared spectrum. If the unit with the TX-411R keeps the target tagged, the roll to strike for the attacker (the mortar team or the aircraft) is made at +10.

## TX-898M Jaeger Mortar

The TX-898M Mortar unit is actually a Triax version of the mortar system of Free Quebec's Taurus Glitter Boy. Instead of having to carry the two large mortars, the units are actually back-mounted and swing into position when the coordinates are entered by the pilot or forward scout. The TX-898M was developed because of the need for long-range fire support for the ground-pounding units, and has quickly become a favorite addition to squads of power armor commandos.

Weight: 1 ton.

Primary Purpose: Artillery Strikes.

Secondary Purpose: Anti-Fortification.

M.D.C.: Each mortar cannon has 150 M.D.C., the mounting unit/ammo drum has 200 M.D.C.

Mega-Damage: 1D6x10 per single mortar to a 20 foot (6.1 m) blast radius, 2D6x10 for a simultaneous double blast (counts as one melee action).

Rate of Fire: One at a time or a volley of two.

Range: 2.2 miles (3.5 km).

Payload: 24 total. Each gun contains a payload of six. The unit will automatically reload the cannons when they are out of ammunition. This automatic reload takes one melee round.

Bonus: +10 to strike if the unit is "tagged" with a special laser targeting device (see the TX-411R). If a TX-411R is not in the squad, the mortar bonuses are as follows. +1 to strike if the target is within one mile (1.6 km), an additional +1 if the target is in the open and clearly visible, and an additional +2 if the target is a large, slow moving target.

Penalties: -2 to strike a specific power armor-sized target.

-3 to strike when the target is under cover or out of the line of sight.

-6 to strike a small or fast moving target like a dodging Juicer or a flying Gargoyle.

## Jaeger Melee Package

The Jaeger Melee Package was one of the most controversial developments by the weapons engineers and design teams during the duration of the Jaeger weapons project. Most of the top brass of the NGR military desired more heavy weapons for the Jaeger units, but through many interviews with active combat pilots it was discovered that they desired more weapons for close in or melee combat. Once the first prototype Jaegers came back from field testing, the development of the Jaeger Melee Package was never questioned again. Two Jaegers with the Melee Package had been pitted against two Gargoyles and had emerged with barely a scratch on them.

The Melee Package effectively adds large armor vambraces to the forearms of the Jaeger, which contain three large, retractable Vibro-Blades each. On the underside of the vambrace is housed a special type of Neural Mace which can shoot into the hand at a moment's notice. Unlike the Neural Mace of the Coalition States, this new device can actually affect Mega-Damage creatures like Brodkil and Gargoyles. While not nearly as effective on the supernatural creatures as Neural Maces are to humans, the stunning effect is still enough to give the Commando an edge in combat.

Weight: Adds 600 lbs (270 kg) to the weight of the Jaeger.

Primary Purpose: Melee Combat.

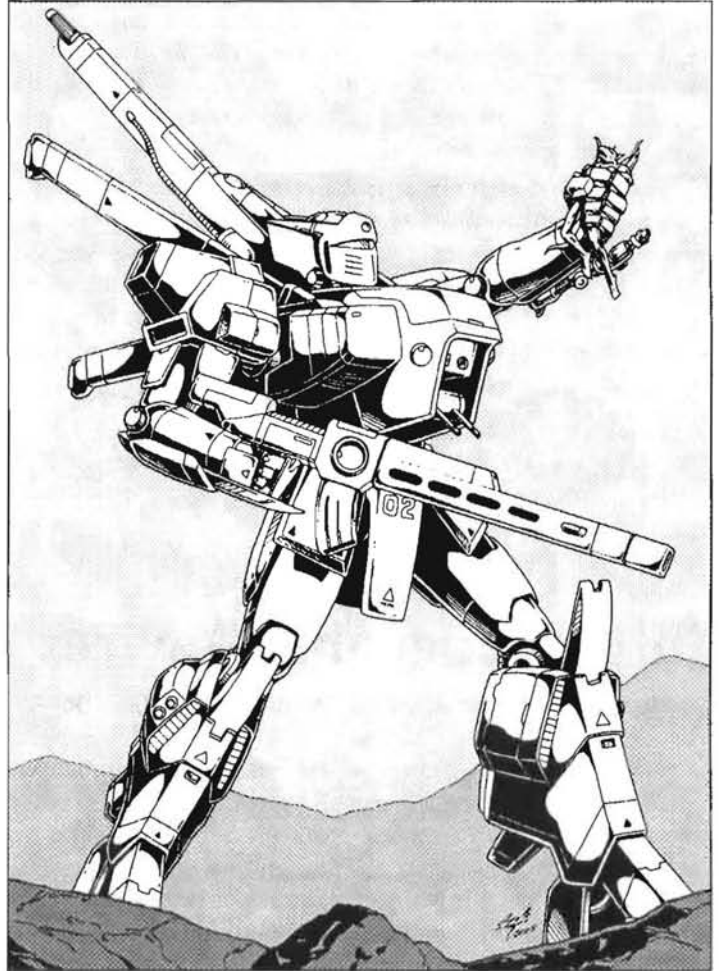
Secondary Purpose: Defense.

M.D.C.: Adds 150 M.D.C. per arm.

Mega-Damage: Vibro-Blades: 3D6 in addition to punch damage. Neural Mace: 2D6 in addition to punch damage. The target is -4 to strike, parry, and dodge for 2D4 melees. Each strike extends this duration by 2D4 melees.

Range: Melee.

Payload: Vibro-Blades: Unlimited, linked to the power supply of the unit. Neural Mace: 10 strikes before needing to be returned to its place in the vambrace for charging. Recharges at the rate of one charge per 30 minutes.



## Triax X-5001 Devastator Mk. II

The Triax X-5000 Devastator has long been one of the most iconic robot vehicles for the troops of the NGR. With the large arsenal of heavy weapons that it commands, it has very often been the cornerstone of large assault forces. Many times the X-5000 has valiantly stood its ground against seemingly insurmountable odds to emerge victorious over the Gargoyle hordes. But many times it has been the crew of the X-5000 that stays to cover the retreat only to fall to a vicious onslaught of Gargoyles, Gargoyles and their machines of war. It is these instances that

made the top brass of the NGR military to request a new Devastator, one that remains a heavy weapons platform, but yet has a fighting chance against the relentless waves of close-range combatants.

Since the full scale militarization of the NGR towards the end of 104 P.A., the Triax Research and Development teams have been working almost constantly, developing new weapon technologies for the Devastator to better fight the Gargoyle Empire. Because of major advances in weapon micronization and energy weapon technologies, the weapons engineers of Triax have been able to make the Devastator Mk. II much more deadly than its predecessor both in long-range artillery bombardments and in close-combat fighting. While the Mk. II is still a heavy weapons platform similar to the original Devastator, it has been outfitted with many smaller short-range weapon systems and anti-personnel devices in order to support infantry and robot troops.

The first X-5001 Devastator Mk. II rolled off of the Pforzheim assembly line on July 6<sup>th</sup>, 109 P.A. in what was a huge spectacle of an event. The unveiling ceremony was televised throughout the entire NGR, touting this new robotic unit as one which could lead the human defenders of the NGR to victory over the Gargoyles and Brodkil. Public support for the program soared after the ceremony and the Devastator Mk. II became a symbol of national pride. The NGR leadership was amazed at the product which Triax delivered, and despite the cost of the robot, they tripled the project's funding with orders for two Devastator Mk. IIs to be delivered to each mechanized unit, three to the units in Munich, and six to the units in Berlin. So far only two units are in operational service, one in Pforzheim, and one in Berlin.

## X-5001 Devastator Mk. II

### Exclusive to the NGR Military

**German Name:** die Verwuestung Mk. II.

**Model Type:** X-5001

**Crew:** Three. One Pilot, One Gunner, One Secondary Gunner/Communications or Intelligence Officer. The Giant Robot can accommodate as many as 6 additional human-sized passengers comfortably, and ten in cramped conditions. 4 power armor suits are also kept. Typically, the T-31 Super Trooper, X-10A Predator, or basic X-535 Jaeger.

### M.D.C. By Location:

Super Laser Cannon (1; handheld) – 350  
Super Ion Cannon (1; back) – 350  
Long-Range Missile Launchers (2 per shoulder) – 400 each  
Medium-Range Missile Launchers (2; back) – 200 each  
Mini-Missile Launchers (4; chest and legs) – 100 each  
Slammer Missile Launchers (2; legs) - 150 each  
\*Belly Gun - 100  
Cooling Pylons (6) – 150 each  
Upper Arms (2) – 350 each  
Forearms (2) – 350 each  
Forearm Vibro-Blades (2) - 100 each  
\*Forearm-Mounted Boom Gun (1; left arm) – 200  
Shoulders (2) – 400 each  
Hands (2) – 220 each

Legs (2) – 600 each  
Feet (2) – 400 each  
\*Leg Searchlights (2) – 25 each  
\*Leg Spotlights (2) – 5 each  
\*Head Searchlight – 10  
Main Hatch (1; lower back) – 300  
\*Emergency Escape Hatches (2) – 30 each  
Head and Sensors – 450  
\*\*Main Body – 2250  
Reinforced Pilot's Compartment – 300  
\*\*\*Force Field – 750

\* A single asterisk indicates a small or difficult target to hit. They can only be hit when the attacker makes a Called Shot, and even then the character is -3 to strike.

Destroying the sensor head will eliminate all forms of optical and sensory enhancement. The pilot must then rely on his own human senses without any of the bonuses granted to him by the Robot Combat skill.

\*\* Depleting the M.D.C. of the Main Body will shut the robot down, rendering it useless.

\*\*\* Depleting the M.D.C. of the force field will shut the system down completely. All subsequent damage is to be taken from the main body. It will take 6 hours to fully regenerate. Moderate damage (100 M.D.C.) requires one hour to regenerate. Damage can only be regenerated if the force field unit is shut down.

### Speed:

Running: 40 mph (64 km) maximum. Cruising speed is usually 20 mph (32 km).

Leaping: Not Possible.

Flying: Not Possible.

### Statistical Data:

Height: 58 feet (17.7 m).

Width: 25 feet (7.6 m) shoulder to shoulder.

Length: 16 feet (4.8 m).

Weight: 160 tons.

Physical Strength: Equal to a Robot P.S. of 60.

Cargo: Lockers for the crew, power armor storage bay, and an 8 x 8 x 8 foot (2.4 x 2.4 x 2.4 m) storage bay.

Power System: Nuclear, average energy life is 20 years.

Black Market Cost: NOT AVAILABLE OUTSIDE OF THE NGR MILITARY.

### Weapon Systems:

Much like its predecessor, the power of the X-5001 lies in its super-destructive armaments, massive payload of missiles, and thick protective armor.

**1. TX-5050 Super Laser Cannon (1):** Based off of the huge, rifle-like weapon of the original Devastator. Over the past 6 years, the weapons engineers of the Pforzheim facility have made astounding leaps in energy weapon technologies. The end result is a truly massive energy weapon capable of dealing out a very high-powered and concentrated energy blast.

Primary Purpose: Anti-Armor.

Secondary Purpose: Anti-Aircraft/Gargoyles.

Mega-Damage: 2D4x10 M.D. per single full power blast. 1D4x10 per low-powered blast.

Range: 11,000 feet (3353 m).

Rate of Fire: Equal to the number of hand to hand attacks of the pilot.

Payload: Effectively unlimited.

Special Feature: Coordinated targeting system. Adds a bonus of +2 to strike, in addition to other targeting bonuses.

**2. TX-5051 Super Ion Cannon (1):** As with the TX-5050, this weapon is also modeled after its predecessor. Benefitting from the same advances in energy weapons technology as the Super Laser, the Super Ion Cannon is one of the most destructive new weapons in the NGR's arsenal. Mounted on the back, this big gun shifts to the side and swings down over the right shoulder to fire. It can fire in any position, even when locked and stowed.

Primary Purpose: Anti-Armor.

Secondary Purpose: Assault.

Mega-Damage: 2D6x10 M.D. per single full power blast.

Range: 8,000 feet (2438 m).

Rate of Fire: Equal to the number of hand to hand attacks of the pilot.

Payload: Effectively unlimited.

Special Feature: Coordinated targeting system. Adds a bonus of +2 to strike, in addition to other targeting bonuses.

**3. Long-Range Missile Launchers (2):** Mounted in each shoulder is a long-range missile launcher.

Primary Purpose: Anti-Armor.

Secondary Purpose: Anti-Aircraft.

Missile Type: Any long-range missile can be used but the standard issue is the new long-range missiles. (Refer to the missile chart on page 97 of *Coalition War Campaign*.)

Mega-Damage: Varies with missile type.

Range: Varies with missile type.

Rate of Fire: One at a time or in volleys of 2, 4, 5, 10, 20, or all 40!

Payload: 40; 20 per launcher.

**4. Medium-Range Missile Launchers (2):** Mounted on either side of the Super Ion Cannon is a concealed medium-range missile launcher.

Primary Purpose: Anti-Armor.

Secondary Purpose: Anti-Aircraft.

Missile Type: Any medium-range missile can be used but the standard issue is the new medium-range missiles. (Refer to the missile chart on page 97 of *Coalition War Campaign*.)

Mega-Damage: Varies with missile type.

Range: Varies with missile type.

Rate of Fire: One at a time or in volleys of 2, 4, 6, 12, or all 24!

Payload: 24; 12 per launcher.

**5. Mini-Missile Launchers (4):** Chest-mounted launchers and 2 launchers above the knee joints house the robot's mini-missiles. The onslaught that can be unleashed by this weapon system is simply awe-inspiring. Entire waves of Gurgoyles can be wiped out by this destructive barrage.

Primary Purpose: Anti-Personnel.

Secondary Purpose: Anti-Missile.

Missile Type: Any mini-missile can be used but the standard issue is the new mini-missiles. (Refer to the missile chart on page 97 of *Coalition War Campaign*.)

Mega-Damage: Varies with missile type.

Range: Varies with missile type.

Rate of Fire: One at a time or in volleys of 2, 4, 6, 12, 24, 48, or all 96!

Payload: 96; 48 per launcher.

**6. Slammer Concussion Missile Launchers (2):** On the lower legs of the robot are launchers for the Slammer Concussion Missiles made famous by the Triax Dyna-Max.

Primary Purpose: Anti-Gargoyles.

Secondary Purpose: Anti-Personnel.

Missile Type: "Slammer" Concussion Missiles.

Mega-Damage: 2D4x10 M.D. from a direct hit by the missile. More importantly, the concussion effect has a blast radius of 90 feet (27.4 m) in diameter. All within the blast radius suffer 1D4x10 M.D. and are likely (01-88%) to be knocked off of their feet and perhaps stunned (01-65%). If only knocked down, the victim of this attack will have ringing ears and a headache, but only loses one melee action/attack and initiative. A victim of a direct hit is always knocked off of his feet.

If stunned, the victim is dazed, -10 to strike, parry, dodge, roll with impact or pull punch, is the last to attack, and loses half of his attacks per melee for 1D4 melee rounds! Speed is also reduced by half.

Range: 6,000 feet (1829 m).

Rate of Fire: One at a time or in volleys of 2.

Payload: 20; 10 per launcher.

**7. Ion Belly Gun Turret (1):** The ion belly turret is designed to counter ground troops and can rotate up and down 90 degrees. The turret can fire one barrel or both simultaneously.

Primary Purpose: Anti-Personnel.

Secondary Purpose: Defense.

Mega-Damage: 4D6 M.D. per single blast. 1D4x10 per dual simultaneous blast.

Range: 4000 feet (1219 m).

Rate of Fire: Equal to the number of hand to hand attacks.

Payload: Effectively unlimited.

**8. Forearm Vibro-Blades (2):** Mounted in special forearm housings are retractable Vibro-Blades. These blades have been extremely useful against the larger of the Gargoyle 'bots in melee combat, giving the Devastator Mk. II another weapon at its disposal.

Primary Purpose: Melee Combat.

Secondary Purpose: Defense.

Mega-Damage: 5D6 M.D. in addition to hand to hand damage.

Bonuses: +1 to strike and +2 to parry when engaged in hand to hand combat.

**9. Forearm-Mounted Boom-Gun (1):** Mounted within the left forearm in a special housing is one of the infamous Boom Guns. Since the Devastator Mk. II weighs so much, there is no need for the recoil suppression system of the Glitter Boy. This weapon is usually used as a last resort since it has a limited payload and may have detrimental effects on the sur-

rounding troops. Regardless, the pilots of the Mk. II prototypes and the combat ready units rave at the idea of having such firepower as a secondary weapon system.

Primary Purpose: Anti-Armor.

Mega-Damage: 3D6x10 M.D. Characters without head/ear protection will be temporarily deaf for 2D4 minutes and are -8 on initiative, -3 to parry and dodge. Characters clad in environmental body armor will be deafened for half the time and suffer the same penalties. The sonic boom will shatter conventional windows and shake buildings and vehicles in a 300 foot (91.4 m) radius.

Range: 11,000 feet (3353 m).

Rate of Fire: Equal to the number of hand to hand attacks.

Payload: 100 rounds. Can only be reloaded at an NGR maintenance facility.

**10. "The Shocker" Electric Field Generator:** One of the most innovative weapon systems of the Devastator Mk. II developed from a problem with the original Devastator. When an enemy breached the defensive lines, the Devastator could often find itself covered in a horde of Gurgoyles trying to tear it apart plate by plate. To avoid this problem, the Pforzheim weapon designers created "the Shocker" which supercharges the metallic alloy plates covering the hulking body with M.D. electricity, resulting in many shocked and hurt Gurgoyles.

Primary Purpose: Defense.

Mega-Damage: 3D6 M.D. per action to anything touching the surface of the robot. Living creatures either in environmental body armor or fully exposed will also lose initiative and one attack. This effect is cumulative for every time a creature is damaged by the weapon.

Range: The outer hull of the unit.

Rate of Fire: Equal to the number of hand to hand attacks.

Payload: Effectively unlimited.

**11. Hand to Hand Combat:** Rather than use a weapon, the pilot can engage in Mega-Damage hand to hand combat.

Bonuses & Damage from X-5001 Devastator Mk. II Combat Training:

Restrained Punch – 4D6 M.D.

Full Strength Punch – 1D6x10 M.D.

Power Punch – 2D6x10 M.D.

Crush, Pry, Tear – 1D6x10 M.D.

Kick – 1D6x10 M.D.

Body Flip/Throw – 4D6 M.D.

Body Block/Ram – 1D6x10 M.D.

Stomp – 6D6 M.D. against targets 15 feet (4.6 m) tall or smaller.

+2 to strike. +2 to parry.

No bonuses to dodge. Must rely on the skill of the pilot.

No bonuses to roll. Must rely on the skill of the pilot.

+1 to pull punch.

+1 additional melee attack at levels 2, 5, 9, 13, and 15.

Note: Reduce combat bonuses by half if there is no co-pilot to serve as a gunner. Also reduce the number of attacks per melee by two.

**13. Sensor Systems Note:** The X-5001 has ALL the most advanced optic, sensory and radio equipment, plus all the features common to most robots.

# Sunhammer Consolidated Freightways, Ltd.

Optional Material for Rifts® Phase World®

By Jason Marker

If you're looking to move a person, package or important cargo from Center to anywhere in the Three Galaxies and you're looking to do it in an efficient and professional manner, you go to the polished and professional freighters of Interplanetary Express. If you need it there yesterday, quietly and with few questions asked, you go to a small, grubby office in Spacetown, the home of Sunhammer Consolidated Freightways.

Malleus Sunhammer, Dwarf, occasional smuggler and notorious skinflint, is gruff, crabby and occasionally lewd, with a keen business sense. He started SCF fifteen years ago with the founding philosophy, "Those nancies over at Interplanetary are utter crooks who couldn't fly their way out of a wet sack." His sole operating plan is "Whatever you want, we can do." He founded SCF after Interplanetary Express lost a birth blessing gift he had made for his infant niece, then refused to reimburse him the shipping and compensate him for the item. He figured he could do a better job of freight shipping than a bunch of flashy wimps in fancy suits. He knew what it took to move freight, he'd done it for years illegally. All it took was a quick mind, good money sense and a strong right hand. It also took the ability to look at a person and see exactly how much that person was willing to pay for a given service.

Malleus' idea of customer service is a little unorthodox. As he says "I might only come up to your behind, mister, but I ain't kissin' it!" The best a customer can expect is a terse "sure," "right" or "yup" when making arrangements. Of course, when the time comes to talk about money he's darn near effusive. His haggling and bargaining skills are legendary in Spacetown. It's said he can "squeeze a Center 10 UTC piece 'till Thraxus cries uncle." His prices are higher than most, but you get what you pay for. "Sure you could ship with Interplanetary, their prices sure are lower than mine. 'Course, your package prob'ly won't get there, but you can rest assured it looked mighty good getting lost in one of their shiny, new ships." Of course, people who come to Malleus are usually not the kind of people who would balk at the idea of paying a few extra UTCs for security.

SCF is primarily a small cargo/shuttle service. They ship individuals, groups up to twenty-five and cargo up to 100 tons. Most of the cargo Malleus deals with could best be described as "delicate." Political documents, emissaries, ambassadors, all sorts of prototypes, contraband and secrets. He's not too concerned about contraband, "because everything is contraband somewhere." The only question he asks about cargo is how fast it needs to get there and how much someone else might like it. These two questions help him decide which of his crews to trust with the shipment. SCF's prices are fifteen to twenty percent



higher than their competitors, but no one else can seem to get the job done like they can. Malleus has also been known to do jobs for free, if he is feeling charitable and the cause is one he can get behind. This, however, is not common knowledge.

SCF doesn't own any of its ships, they are a freight brokerage company. Each ship (there are currently four) is owned and operated by an independent pilot and his or her hand-picked crew. Each crew is paid by the load and a flat per light-year rate with Malleus taking fifteen percent off the top. The crews are a ragtag mix of spacers, smugglers, reformed pirates and heavies of every stripe. Malleus is an equal opportunity employer and can spot a good pilot or crewman a mile away. He is generally lenient in his employment policy but will not tolerate theft from the company or cowardice in the face of duty. The fact that SCF hasn't lost a single ship or cargo, either to accident or piracy, in fifteen years speaks volumes more than any advertising.

The SCF headquarters is located in Spacetown, Center Level 2-B, Phase World. HQ consists of a squat, rundown building in a poorer section of town. It houses Malleus' office and the offices of his executive assistant and the ship pilots. There is a crew lounge with a good A/V system, shabby but comfortable furniture, some video games, a pool table and a dartboard. HQ houses SCF's computer mainframe and communications hub as well. The warehouse and hangar are in the Shipyards. These buildings are sealed tight by a high-class security system and roving patrols of sharp-eyed Dwarven guards.

### Sunhammer Consolidated Freightways, Ltd.

**Sponsorship:** None - 0 points. The company is owned by Malleus Sunhammer.

**Outfits:** None - 0 points. Pilots and crews supply their own outfits, but everyone is issued a patch with the company logo to wear.

**Equipment:** None - 0 points. Pilots and crews are expected to supply their own gear.

**Vehicles:** None - 0 points. The ships in the SCF fleet may not look like much, but they're stripped down, hot-rodged, run like clocks and carry some heavy firepower for their size. That's how they get the job done.

**Weapons, Power Armor and 'Bots:** None - 0 points. Captains and crewmen are responsible for their own weapons.

**Communications:** Deluxe Communication Network-25 points. The company has an excellent dispatching and cargo-tracking network.

**Internal Security:** Tight - 10 points. A high-tech security system and roving teams of ruthless guards protect the shipping warehouse and hangar. HQ, which includes the office and crew lounge, is pretty lax. The computer system is pretty near Ironclad.

**Permanent Bases:** Headquarters - 10 points. HQ consists of the warehouse, office and crew lounge, and the hangar which can hold about five ships.

**Intelligence Resources:** None - 0 points.

**Special Budget:** Small potatoes - 15 points. The company has 10,000,000 UTC set aside for emergencies.

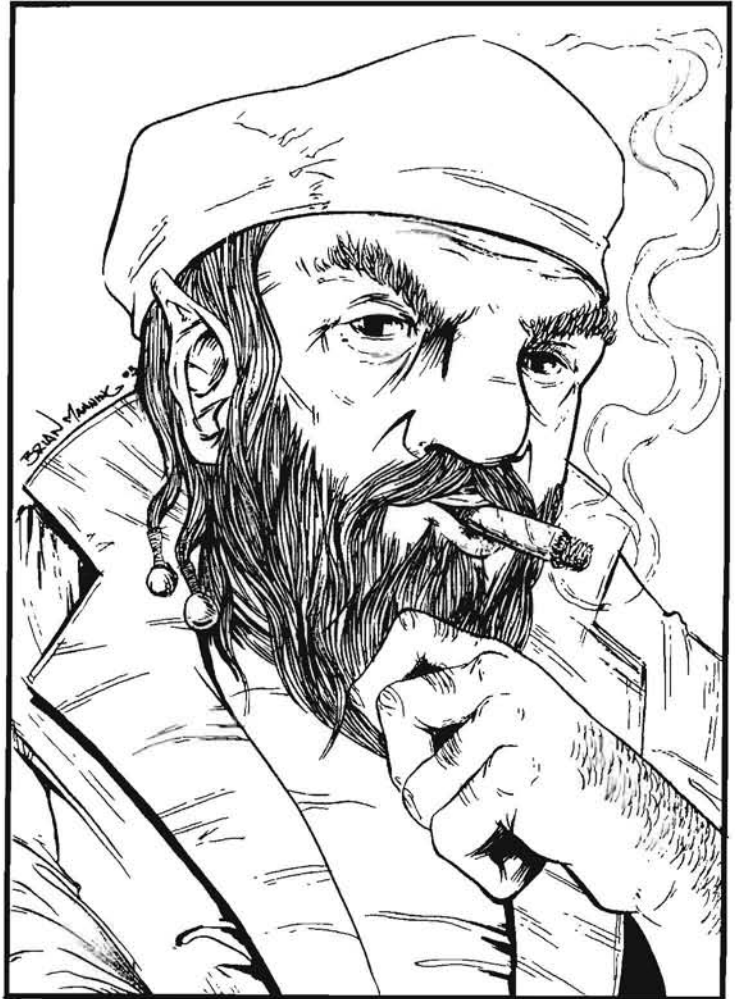
**General Alignment:** Anarchist, Unprincipled and Scrupulous - 6 points.

**Criminal Activity:** Smugglers - 15 points. The company has been known to do some smuggling if the price is right and when Malleus thinks it's a good idea.

**Reputation/Credentials:** Known - 10 points. The company has proven itself as a reliable and efficient player in the cutthroat game of intergalactic shipping.

**Salary:** Freelance and pittance - 7 points. Each pilot and crew is an owner/operator and as such, they are independent contractors. They are paid by the load, mileage, and bonuses for exceptional performance, i.e. faster than expected delivery, protecting cargo, style, etc. Guards, IT, porters and clerks are all full time and paid a decent salary with good benefits. Malleus is a cheapskate, but he knows the value of taking care of his employees.

**Total Point Value:** 82 points.



## Malleus Sunhammer

**President of Sunhammer Consolidated Freightways**

**Alignment:** Unprincipled.

**Race:** Dwarf.

**Attributes:** I.Q.: 17, M.E.:14, M.A.: 8, P.S.: 22, P.P.: 16, P.E.: 25, P.B.: 10, Spd: 11.

**S.D.C.:** 45, **Hit Points:** 57.

**Weight:** 195 lbs (88 kg). **Height:** 3 feet, 9 inches (1.1 m). **Age:** 145.

P.P.E.: 4. I.S.P.: 56.

**Disposition:** Crabby, lewd and tighter than a duck's bottom. Malleus also has a well-hidden heart of gold and secretly gives money to Dwarven and a few worthy human charities.

**Experience Level:** 11<sup>th</sup> level Runner.

**Magical Knowledge:** Lore only.

**Psionics:** Object Read, Telepathy, Empathy, See Aura and Total Recall.

**Combat Skills:** Hand to Hand: Expert.

**Attacks per Melee:** 6

**Bonuses:** +2 to strike, +3 to parry and dodge, +2 to pull punch, +2 to roll with fall/impact, +10 to damage, +20% to save vs coma/death, +5 save vs poison/magic, Critical Strike on a Natural 18-20, body flip 1D6 damage and victim loses initiative and one attack, KO/stun on a Natural 18-20.

**Weapon Proficiencies:** Blunt, Axe, Knife, Paired, Energy Pistol, Energy Rifle, Submachine-Gun, Heavy Energy Weapons.

**Weapons of Note:** Always wears an NE-6 Magnum revolver. Also has a NE-300 Stutterer if heavy fighting is expected.

**Armor:** Custom built suit of combat armor with space capabilities. 85 M.D.C., -10% to Prowl.

**Skills:** All Runner skills at 11<sup>th</sup> level plus Law: CCW/Phase World, Law: Three Galaxies, Space Contacts, and Salvage.

**Cybernetics:** Advanced headjack and ear implant, multi-optic eye, Bionic lung and oxygen cell.

**Vehicles:** Malleus owns a personal ship, the light freighter *Kleiner Mitternacht* or *Little Midnight*. This is his old smuggling ship, but since Malleus is retired from "the Life," the ship is now basically a fast commuter.

**Description:** A middle-aged Dwarf with a full head of silver hair and a silver beard, and a perpetual scowl on his face. He smokes cigars constantly and his forearms are covered in spacer tattoos.

# Ships and Crews

## The Veronica

*The Veronica* is a Bronco class light freighter from the Spacelances Corp. shipyards, although her designer would hardly recognize her. Originally designed as an inter-system short hauler, she has been radically modified by her loving captain "Cowboy" Jack Callam. She holds four crew and can carry either twenty people in relative comfort or about sixty tons of cargo. Sleek and angular, she's flat black with some red and silver accents. On her nose, under the main canopy, is a painting of a curvy young brunette in a revealing cowgirl suit astride a cartoony rocket. The rocket is blasting off and the girl is holding her hat aloft and has a wicked grin on her face. Painted on a rocker beneath is the name "Veronica" and "Leased to SCF Ltd."

*The Veronica* is one of the lighter armed ships hauling for SCF, but it's probably the quickest. She usually hauls dignitaries or cargo that needs to get to a destination as quickly as possible.

**Model Type:** Modified SpC-04B Bronco.

**Class:** Shuttle/Cargo Ship.

**Crew:** 4: Pilot, Co-Pilot, Gunner and Communications.

**M.D.C. by Location:**

Bridge: 500

Engines: 500

Main Body: 2200

Force Field: 300 per side

**Speed:**

Driving: Not Possible.

Flying: Mach 20 in space and Mach 6 in atmosphere. 7.5 light years/hour in FTL.

Star Drive: CG-Drive.

Sublight Drives: CG-Drive.

Range: 600,000 miles (960,000 km) on the sublight drives. FTL is limited only by supplies.

**Statistical Data:**

Height: 35 feet (10.7 m) at the bridge.

Width: 70 feet (21.3 m) from wingtip to wingtip.

Length: 175 feet (53.3 m).

Weight: 250 tons loaded plus 60 tons of cargo.

Cargo: The cargo holds are two 10 x 10 x 15 foot (3 x 3 x 4.6 m) compartments at the bow of the ship beneath the bridge separated by a five-foot (1.5 m) corridor. Each is pressurized and can be configured to carry passengers or cargo.

Power System: Nuclear.

**Weapons:**

1. **GR-1000 Autocannons (2):** Two autocannon pods are mounted on the bottom bow of the ship. They are fixed forward and are *the Veronica's* main guns.

Primary Purpose: Anti-Ship.

Secondary Purpose: Defense.

Damage: A burst is 20 rounds and does 4D6x10 M.D.

Rate of Fire: Equal to the combined Hand to Hand attacks of the gunner.

Effective Range: 16 miles (25 km) in space, one-third that in atmosphere.

Payload: *The Veronica* carries one ton of ammo for each autocannon, good for 500 bursts each.

2. **Pinpoint Defense Laser Turrets (3):** *The Veronica* packs three PDL turrets, one on the bottom aft near the engines and two on top aft near the engines. The turrets have a 360-degree range of rotation and a 180-degree fire arc.

Primary Purpose: Anti-Missile.

Secondary Purpose: Anti-Robot/Fighter.

Damage: 1D6x10 M.D.

Rate of Fire: Equal to the combined Hand to Hand attacks of the gunner.

Effective Range: 10,000 feet (3,048 m).

Payload: Unlimited. Tied directly to *the Veronica's* power source.

## Captain "Cowboy" Jack Callam

"Cowboy" Jack Callam is "from out of town," as they say in Spacetown. He hails from a faraway country called Texas. He appeared on Phase World about eight years ago, Rifted into one



of Center's many massive slums. Thanks to quick thinking and a good turn of speed, he was able to make it out alive. He wandered up to Spacetown and he couldn't believe his eyes. He was a long way from home. The first person he met who didn't try to mug him was a fiery Catyr pilot named Marla. He was impressed by her alienness and good-looking frame under her flight suit and she was completely taken by his rugged good looks and stunning naïveté.

Over a cup of coffee he spun his story of driving cattle and a horrible storm and the lightning bolt he was sure had killed him but had apparently deposited him here. She told him about Center and Phase World and bits about the Three Galaxies. She got him a job as muscle on the ship she was on and they worked together for three years as friends, colleagues and on-again, off-again lovers.

Eventually, Jack learned the skills he needed and struck out on his own. With his savings and a few loans, he was able to buy *the Veronica* secondhand and start his own short-haul business. Later on he fell in with SCF and has been a successful broker pilot there for three years.

**Alignment:** Scrupulous.

**Race:** Human.

**Attributes:** I.Q.: 13, M.E.:14, M.A.: 17, P.S.: 15, P.P.: 25, P.E.: 16, P.B.: 17, Spd: 19.

**S.D.C.:** 30, **Hit Points:** 45.

**Weight:** 180 lbs (81 kg). **Height:** 6 feet, 2 inches (1.85 m). **Age:** 32.

**P.P.E.:** 4. **I.S.P.:** 0.

**Disposition:** Quiet and easygoing, he always seems to be half asleep. Jack's outward laconic and laid-back personality covers a quick wit, fast reflexes and a strong sense of duty. Not many people know it, but Jack is a talented poet in the grand tradition of cowboy poets/philosophers.

**Experience Level:** 3<sup>rd</sup> level Cowboy, 7<sup>th</sup> level Spacer.

**Magical Knowledge:** Lore only.

**Psionics:** Lore only.

**Combat Skills:** Hand to Hand: Basic at 7<sup>th</sup> level.

**Attacks per Melee:** 5

**Bonuses:** +6 to strike, +7 to parry and dodge, +2 to pull punch, +2 to roll with impact/fall, +2 to damage, kick attack does 1D6 S.D.C., Critical Strike on a Natural 19-20, 35% charm/impress, 45% trust/intimidate.

**Weapon Proficiencies:** W.P. Revolver, W.P. Energy Rifle, W.P. Knife, W.P. Shotgun.

**Weapons of Note:** Jack carries a CFT Walker (4D6+10 M.D., 600 foot/183 m range, six shot payload).

**Armor:** NG Maverick (40 M.D.C.) and a hard vacuum suit (50 M.D.C.).

**Skills:** Cowboy skills frozen at 3<sup>rd</sup> level and Spacer skills at 7<sup>th</sup> level.

**Cybernetics:** None, doesn't like them.

**Vehicles:** *The Veronica*.

**Description:** Jack is 6 feet, 2 inches, 180 pounds of pure Texas prime beef. He's long and lean, with ropy muscles wrapped around his lanky frame. He has chiseled good looks, sandy hair and blue eyes. He usually wears a worn-out pair of dungarees, a white T-shirt, a spacer vest with his *Veronica* and SCF patches on it, his old cowboy hat and cowboy boots. He always wears the Walker.

### Other Crew:

**Hoss:** 5<sup>th</sup> level full 'Borg, Unprincipled alignment, Gunner.

**Penny:** Human 6<sup>th</sup> level Operator, Scrupulous alignment, Engineer and Co-Pilot.

**Sal:** Human 5<sup>th</sup> level Spacer, Unprincipled alignment, Communications.

## The Gypsy

*The Gypsy* is a Stargazer ST-11L light freighter. She looks like a big, sleek mechanical scorpion painted a dull white with red and bronze highlights. She is piloted by Marla, a seasoned Catyr Spacer and pilot, and crewed by a band of misfits who are just as likely to be seen at their stations as in the local hoosegow for drunken & disorderly or creating a disturbance. Marla looks after her crew like a stern but loving matriarch and always bails them out after a night of partying, but not without a stern lecture.

*The Gypsy* is nearly as fast as *the Veronica*, but is more heavily armed and armored and carries a bigger payload. Marla usually gets the jobs carrying weapons and vehicle prototypes. Painted under the bridge is a dark-skinned girl in a headscarf and a colorful dress, spinning and clapping her hands. Beneath on the rocker is painted "Gypsy" and "Leased to SCF Ltd."

Marla is close friends with "Cowboy" Jack Callam and is looking to rekindle their on-again, off-again romance. So far, this has been thwarted by Jack's flying schedule and his pretty and persistent co-pilot Penny. She can wait though, she's got the time.

**Model Type:** Stargazer Corp. ST-11L.

**Class:** Light Freighter.

**Crew:** Six: Pilot, Co-Pilot, Gunner, Communications and two Lumpers (loaders).

**M.D.C. by Location:**

Bridge: 600

Main Body: 2800

Engines: 600

Force Field: 300 per side

## Speed:

Driving: Not possible.

Flying: Mach 4.8 in atmosphere, Mach 17 in space, and travels at 6 light years/hour in FTL.

Star Drive: CG-Drive.

Sublight Drives: CG-Drive.

Range: Effectively unlimited, carries enough supplies for six months in space.

## Statistical Data:

Height: 30 feet (9.1 m).

Width: 30 feet (9.1 m).

Length: 200 feet (61 m).

Weight: 400 tons.

Cargo: *The Gypsy* can carry upwards of 75 tons of cargo.

Power System: Nuclear.

## Weapons:

**1. Medium Particle Beam Cannons (4):** These are mounted in *the Gypsy's* "pincers" and are fire-linked so they can be fired one at a time, in pairs, or all four at once.

Primary Purpose: Assault.

Secondary Purpose: Anti-Ship.

Damage: 2D6x10 M.D. for a single shot, 4D6x10 for a double shot and 8D6x10 M.D. for all four cannons at once.

Rate of Fire: Equal to the combined Hand to Hand attacks of the gunner.

Range: 3 miles (4.8 km) in space, one-third that in atmosphere.

Payload: Unlimited, linked to *the Gypsy's* power supply.

**2. Medium Range Missile Launchers (2):** Two launch tubes run along the bottom of the ship. Marla usually uses plasma missiles.

Primary Purpose: Anti-Ship.

Secondary Purpose: Defense.

Damage: 4D6x10 M.D.

Rate of Fire: One at a time or in volleys of two, four or eight missiles.

Effective Range: 40 miles (64 km).

Payload: Marla keeps two tons of missiles on board at all times. One ton is 48 missiles. Each launcher holds 24 missiles at once.

**3. Pinpoint Defense Lasers (4):** Marla has a brace of four single-barrel laser turrets placed on the ship for anti-missile/fighter work. Two on top and two on the bottom of the ship.

Primary Purpose: Anti-Missile.

Secondary Purpose: Anti-Fighter.

Damage: 1D6x10 M.D.

Rate of Fire: Equal to gunner's Hand to Hand attacks.

Effective Range: 6500 feet (1980 m).

Payload: Effectively unlimited, tied to *the Gypsy's* power supply.

## Captain Marla

Marla is tall, copper-haired and every inch the Catyr space pilot. She's just over seven feet (2.1 m) tall, terribly fit and looks like she was cast from a block of dark bronze. Talking to

Marla is like talking to a Phys-Ed teacher. She's loud, brash, blunt and believes in keeping an active and healthy lifestyle. She often organizes sports outings between SCF and other shipping companies with mixed, usually hilarious results.

She's a thirty-year veteran of the spacelanes and has been just about everywhere. She's professional and affable enough, but tends to be a little hard-edged and treats her crew with an almost motherly tough love. She works hard and plays hard and expects the same from her crew. Of course, her idea of playing hard is spending hours playing any number of very physical and full contact club sports, while her crew's idea of playing hard is getting loaded and starting fights.

Aside from their stunning ability to exhibit every negative character trait of sailors on shore leave, Marla's crewmen work well together and are very loyal to their captain. She repays their hard work with adventure and good wages, and regular stops in the pleasure zones.

Marla has worked for SCF for just over four years. She brought Cowboy Jack into the dysfunctional SCF family and is always on the lookout for good crews and pilots. She is SCF's most vocal recruiter and cheerleader.

**Alignment:** Scrupulous.

**Race:** Catyr.

**Attributes:** I.Q.: 14, M.E.: 12, M.A.: 20, P.S.: 32, P.P.: 28, P.E.: 27, P.B.: 22, Spd: 19. P.S. and P.E. are Supernatural.

**M.D.C.:** 282

**Weight:** 270 lbs (121.5 kg). **Height:** 7 feet, 1 inch (2.2 m). **Age:** 85.

**P.P.E.:** 9. **I.S.P.:** 0.

**Disposition:** Bold, forward, blunt and very energetic. She has a pretty black and white view of things but she's nobody's fool. She also enjoys physical exercise and sports of all kinds.

**Experience Level:** 7<sup>th</sup> level Spacer.

**Magical Knowledge:** Lore only.

**Psionics:** Lore only.

**Combat Skills:** Hand to Hand: Martial Arts, Boxing.

**Attacks per Melee:** 6

**Bonuses:** +1 on initiative, +9 to strike, +10 to parry and dodge, +3 to pull punch, +3 to roll with fall/impact, +1 to entangle, +2 to disarm, +17 to damage, 60% trust/intimidate, 60% charm/impress, +24% to save vs coma/death, +6 to save vs poison and magic, restrained punch does 5D6 S.D.C., punch/Karate kick does 4D6 M.D., power punch/jump kick does 1D4x10 M.D. (takes two attacks).

**Weapon Proficiencies:** Paired, Energy Pistol, Energy Rifle, Knife, Blunt.

**Weapons of Note:** Always carries a GR-10P pistol. If she knows a fight is coming she'll use her GR-45HP.

**Armor:** Marla has a custom-built spacer suit.

**Skills:** Spacer skills at 7<sup>th</sup> level.

**Cybernetics:** Advanced headjack with ear implant, multi-optic eye, clock/calendar, gyro-compass.

**Vehicles:** *The Gypsy*.

**Description:** Marla is fit, muscular and almost glows with health. She stands just over seven feet (2.1 m) tall and usually wears black BDU pants, tank tops and spacer boots. She also

takes very good care of her skin and hair and spends a lot of money on fancy soaps and lotions.

### Other Crew:

- Jann:** Dwarf, 4<sup>th</sup> level Spacer, co-pilot/engineer.  
**Thom:** Human, 5<sup>th</sup> level Spacer, Communications.  
**Tak:** Seljuk, 5<sup>th</sup> level Spacer, Gunner.  
**Billy:** 2<sup>nd</sup> level 'Borg, Lumper.  
**Argyl:** 4<sup>th</sup> level Promethian, Lumper.

## The Morgenstern

*The Morgenstern*, or *Morning Star* in Trade 3, is an Osbourne and Thrustweight Shipyards Mule medium freighter. O and T Shipyards are a UWW based company known for tough and innovative designs combining high-tech and magic technologies. *The Mule's* unique modular design is similar to a semi-truck. The ship itself resembles a huge streamlined locomotive from the early 20<sup>th</sup> century on Earth. The sublight engines are mounted on the bottom and the FTL drives are in two outboard pods. The bridge is at the aft of the ship and the rest of the ship holds crew quarters, weapons, power plant, etc. The ship pulls cargo modules behind it like a semi-truck. These modules come in many sizes, look like train cars, and each carries its own power plant, shield generator and pinpoint defense turrets. *The Morgenstern* can pull up to three of these modules and they can be configured to carry cargo or people.

The Mule medium freighter utilizes Traction Drive for its sublight drive. This is a new style drive that basically attaches itself to the space/time continuum and drags the ship along behind it. It's not the fastest thing out there but it runs on electricity, has constant acceleration and absolute braking, making it very maneuverable for its size. The FTL drives on the Mule are Rift Drives.

Gertrude Sunhammer, Malleus' sister, captains *the Morningstar*. The ship is painted a dark battleship gray with green highlights and is the only ship in the fleet to fly the SCF logo as her colors. *The Morningstar* is crewed by Dwarven women, including Gertrude's fifteen year old daughter Willa. Malleus calls them the Hearthguard after the ancient, all female Dwarven home defense corps. They are no-nonsense, professional and super efficient. *The Morningstar* is SCF's slowest ship but it's the toughest and can carry the biggest cargo.

**Model Type:** Osbourne and Thrustweight Shipyards OT511-M Mule.

**Class:** Medium Freighter.

**Crew:** 6: Pilot, Co-Pilot, Engineer, Cargo Master and two Gunners.

**M.D.C. by Location:**

- |                 |  |
|-----------------|--|
| Bridge: 800     | Engines: 800                           |
| Main Body: 3200 | Force Field: 450 per side (2700 total) |

**Speed:**

**Driving:** Not Possible.

**Flying:** Mach 8 in space, Mach 3 in atmosphere. 4 light years/hour via Rift Drive.

**Star Drive:** Rift Drive.

**Sublight Drives:** Traction Drive.

**Range:** Effectively unlimited, carries enough supplies for twelve months in space.

**Statistical Data:**

**Height:** 25 feet (7.6 m).

**Width:** 25 feet (7.6 m) at the engines, 18 feet (5.5 m) at the top.

**Length:** 57 feet (17.3 m).

**Weight:** 400 tons.

**Cargo:** Modular containers come in 26- and 52-foot (7.9 & 15.8 m) lengths and are 20 feet (6.1 m) high and 15 feet (4.6 m) wide. A 26-foot module can carry 50 tons and a 52-foot module can haul 120 tons. Only the 26-footers are converted to haul passengers.

**Power System:** Nuclear and a P.P.E. generator that produces 500 P.P.E. per hour and can store 2000 P.P.E. at a time. Activating the Rift Drive costs 2000 P.P.E., and the magic weapon systems also tap energy from the P.P.E. generator.

### Weapons:

**1. Death Cloud Cannon:** This is *the Morgenstern's* main cannon. It's mounted on the front of the ship where a locomotive's headlight would be. It opens a gate to the elemental plane of water and dumps a cloud/chunk of ice 500 feet (152 m) on a side directly in the path of an oncoming ship.

**Primary Purpose:** Anti-Ship.

**Secondary Purpose:** Defense.

**Damage:** 4D6 x Mach speed of the target ship. x10 for ships from 10,000 to 40,000 tons. x20 for ships 40,000 to 100,000 tons and x100 for ships 100,001 tons and up. Small ships are -6 to dodge and large ships are -8.

**Rate of Fire:** Once per melee.

**Range:** 10 miles (16 km).

**Payload:** Can be fired ten times in a twenty-four hour period, then it will need a 500 P.P.E. recharge from the P.P.E. generator.

**2. GR-1500 Autocannons (2):** These are secondary assault cannons and are mounted in turrets on the lower fore sides of the ship. They have a 90-degree rotation and a 90-degree fire arc.

**Primary Purpose:** Anti-Ship.

**Secondary Purpose:** Defense.

**Damage:** One burst is 20 rounds and dishes out 5D6x10 M.D.

**Rate of Fire:** Equal to the gunner's Hand to Hand attacks.

**Range:** 16 miles (25.6 km) in space, one-third that in atmosphere.

**Payload:** Gertrude likes to keep two tons of ammo on hand just in case. One ton is 500 bursts.

**3. Bottled Demon Missile Batteries (2):** Two launch batteries mounted on the lower aft sides of the ship.

**Primary Purpose:** Anti-Ship.

**Secondary Purpose:** Anti-Missile.

**Damage:** 3D6x10 M.D. of magic energy.

**Rate of Fire:** One at a time or in volleys of two, four or eight.

**Effective Range:** Once fired, the missile will pursue its target at Mach 3 until it hits or is destroyed. The missiles act as smart missiles and are +4 to strike and +5 to dodge, three attacks per melee.

Payload: 32 per battery with enough missiles carried for three reloads per battery.

**4. Lightning Rods (6):** These magic cannons act as the pinpoint defense weapons of *the Morgenstern*.

Primary Purpose: Anti-Missile.

Secondary Purpose: Anti-Fighter.

Damage: 1D6x10 M.D.

Rate of Fire: Equal to gunner's Hand to Hand attacks.

Effective Range: One mile (1.6 km) in space, half that in atmosphere.

Payload: Unlimited, but the TW enchantment must be renewed every two months whether the weapons are used or not.

**Note:** No matter what size they are, the modular cargo units have 500 M.D.C. each with a small force field generator that puts out 150 M.D.C. on a side. Each module is armed with 2 pinpoint defense particle beam cannons, one on the port and one on the starboard side, in turrets with 360-degree rotation and 180-degree fire arc.



## Gertrude Sunhammer

### Captain of *the Morgenstern*

Gertrude Sunhammer is Malleus' younger sister. She's a veteran of the UWW Marine Corps, where she served with distinction for sixteen years as a combat transport pilot. She retired from the Marines after the birth of her daughter, with full honors as one of the most decorated Dwarven pilots of either sex. After she retired, she moved to Center with her husband and infant daughter to be closer to Malleus, who is the only remaining member of their immediate family.

Gertrude found her new life as a civilian dull and unfulfilling. She began hanging out at SCF, helping her brother out and occasionally borrowing *the Kleiner Mitternacht*, Malleus' personal ship, to do small inter-system runs nobody else wanted. Her husband Willam suggested she buy a ship of her own and go full time as a freelancer for Malleus. She jumped at the idea and with her Corps pension and a little money she had saved up, she bought *the Morgenstern* and started hauling full time for SCF.

Gertrude has flown for SCF for ten years now and is the senior fleet pilot. She and her crew get the pick of the jobs, but she

tends to take jobs that are the most dangerous. She is fiercely proud of her job and her brother and will not stand for insults to either. Her daughter, now fifteen, is learning the flying trade on *the Morgenstern* and is showing promise as a pilot in her own right.

**Alignment:** Scrupulous.

**Race:** Dwarf.

**Attributes:** I.Q.: 12, M.E.: 19, M.A.: 11, P.S.: 19, P.P.: 20, P.E.: 24, P.B.: 11, Spd: 15.

**S.D.C.:** 95, **Hit Points:** 64.

**Weight:** 160 lbs (72 kg). **Height:** 3 feet, 8 inches (1.1 m). **Age:** 120.

**P.P.E.:** 3 **I.S.P.:** 0.

**Disposition:** Stern, cool and professional. Gertrude drives her crew hard and works twice as hard along with them. She wouldn't ask anything of her crew she wouldn't do herself. She is very proud of her service with the Corps and of her current position with SCF. It's not well known, but she has a beautiful mezzo-soprano singing voice, and when she's drunk she has been known to sing old Dwarven songs and some of the bawdier spacer songs she learned in the service.

**Experience Level:** 10<sup>th</sup> level Marine Pilot.

**Magical Knowledge:** Lore only.

**Psionics:** Lore only.

**Combat Skills:** Hand to Hand: Expert and Boxing.

**Attacks per Melee:** 7

**Bonuses:** +2 to initiative, +6 to strike, +7 to parry/dodge, +3 to roll with fall/impact, +4 to pull punch, +7 to damage, +3 to save vs magic, +3 to save vs mind controlling psionics and drugs, +5 to save vs poison, +2 to save vs disease, +8 to save vs magic, +2 to save vs psionics, Critical Strike on a Natural 18-20.

**Weapon Proficiencies:** Paired, Sword, Blunt, Energy Pistol, Energy Rifle.

**Weapons of Note:** Carries an EP-5 pulse pistol (3D6 M.D.) and an NE-300 Stutterer (5D6 or 1D6x10+10 M.D.).

**Armor:** UWW Marine Combat Armor: Gertrude still has her armor from the service. Hers is a lighter model issued to pilots and support personnel

**Skills:** All UWW Marine skills at 10<sup>th</sup> level, except replace Pilot: Tank with Zero-G Combat and Movement, and add Pilot: Small Spacecraft and Pilot: Starship.

**Cybernetics:** Advanced headjack and ear implant. Bionic lung and oxygen cell. **Vehicles:** *The Morgenstern*.

**Description:** Gertrude is built on a slightly smaller frame than her brother. She is solidly built but with curves that drove many a young Dwarven marine crazy. Dwarven women can be described as "Reubenesque," and usually have smooth but ruddy complexions. Dwarven women cannot grow beards, but they can grow sideburns, although current fashion dictates the tasteful shaving of sideburns for Dwarven women. Gertrude always stayed clean-shaven in the military and continues to do so to this day, and keeps her straw-colored hair cut short in a Corps spec bob. She still wears her Corps flight suits and jump boots.

### Other Crew:

**Willa Sunhammer:** Dwarf, 2<sup>nd</sup> level Spacer, Co-Pilot and Gertrude's daughter.

**Adelaide Goldcap:** Dwarf, 8<sup>th</sup> level Spacer, Cargo Master.  
**Leona Bellows:** Dwarf, 7<sup>th</sup> level Techno-Wizard, Engineer.  
**Delana Starcrusher:** Dwarf, 7<sup>th</sup> level Spacer, Gunner.  
**Matilda Ironeye:** Dwarf, 8<sup>th</sup> level Spacer, Gunner.

## The Take That!

*The Take That!* is a Kittani Longbow combat shuttle that has been severely modified to make it a light freighter. The Longbow was designed as a small unit drop-ship and looks like a smaller and sleeker version of the CAF Assault Shuttle. *The Take That!* is painted mostly dark gray with patches of dull red and flat black where repairs have been made and left primed. Painted on the nose of this seeming bundle of flying wreckage is a red circle with a cartoony fist inside, surrounded by a yellow star and the words "Take That!" painted on the rocker beneath. The rest of the hull is covered in dings and blast scars. Her captain, Moe, a crusty old Octoman and former "long-term guest" of the Splugorth, couldn't give an Ugglie's rear end how the ship looks, as long as it's fast, tough and gets the job done.

*The Take That!* is the sleeper of the SCF fleet. Under all that primer and dented hull plating is a finely tuned machine that packs a surprising punch. She's the most heavily armed ship in the fleet and is surprisingly quick. Many pirate and law enforcement vessels have come out the worse for underestimating a tangle with Moe and *the Take That!*

**Model Type:** Kittani KT-400L Longbow.

**Class:** Combat shuttle/light freighter.

**Crew:** Five: Pilot, Co-Pilot/Engineer, Communications and two Gunners.

**M.D.C. by Location:**

Bridge: 625	Engines: 625
Main Body: 1900	Force Field: 350 per side (2100 total)

**Speed:**

Driving: Not Possible.

Flying: Mach 15 in space, Mach 5 in atmosphere, and 6.8 light years/hour in FTL.

Star Drive: CG-Drive.

Sublight Drives: CG-Drives.

Range: Effectively unlimited, carries enough supplies for six months in space.

**Statistical Data:**

Height: 30 feet (9.1 m).

Width: 30 feet (9.1 m).

Length: 125 feet (38 m).

Weight: 300 tons.

Cargo: *The Take That!* can carry up to 65 tons of cargo.

Power System: Anti-matter.

**Weapons:**

**1. Medium Particle Beam Cannons (2):** These are the main guns of *the Take That!* Not a stock item on the Longbow, but then again, not very much of this ship is stock anymore.

Primary Purpose: Assault. Secondary Purpose: Anti-Ship.

Damage: 1D6x100

Rate of Fire: Equal to gunner's Hand to Hand attacks.

Effective Range: Six miles (9.6 km) in space, one-third that in atmosphere.

Payload: Unlimited.

**2. GR-1000 Autocannons(4):** Four of these autocannons are mounted in turrets on *the Take That!* They're great for secondary guns and anti-fighter/robot actions.

Primary Purpose: Anti-Ship.

Secondary Purpose: Anti-Robot.

Damage: 4D6x10 per 20 shot burst.

Rate of Fire: Equal to gunner's Hand to Hand attacks.

Effective Range: 16 miles (25.6 km) in space, one-third that in atmosphere.

Payload: Moe likes to keep two tons of ammo on hand just in case. One ton is 500 bursts.

**3. Medium-Range Missile Launcher (1):** This is a four-tube, turret-mounted missile launcher mounted at the aft of the ship above the engines. Moe usually keeps the tubes stocked with armor piercing missiles.

Primary Purpose: Anti-Ship.

Secondary Purpose: Assault.

Damage: 4D6x10

Rate of Fire: One at a time or in volleys of two, four or eight missiles.

Effective Range: 100 miles (160 km) in space, 60 miles (96 km) in atmosphere.

Payload: The launcher holds 32 missiles, with another full reload stowed.

**4. Pinpoint Defense Laser Turrets (4):** *The Take That!* packs four PDL turrets. The turrets have a 360-degree range of rotation and a 180-degree fire arc.

Primary Purpose: Anti-Missile.

Secondary Purpose: Anti-Robot/Fighter.

Damage: 1D6x10 M.D.

Rate of Fire: Equal to the combined Hand to Hand attacks of the gunner.

Effective Range: 10,000 feet (3,048 m).

Payload: Unlimited. Tied directly to *the Take That!*'s power source.

## Moe, Captain of *the Take That!*

Moe was born into slavery on a Splugorth stock planet. He was sold off at an early age, and like so many of his race, was pressed into service as a mechanic on a Kittani star cruiser. From the moment he got aboard he planned an escape. He was patient like a spider and kept his eyes open. For ten years he worked hard and watched. He ingratiated himself to his masters and was taught all sorts of advanced mechanical and piloting skills. One morning, the Kittani shuttle he was ferrying to dry dock disappeared. An investigation team was dispatched to his last known location and found only wreckage, their property had apparently been attacked and destroyed by space pirates.

Pirates, however, had not jumped Moe. He had rigged the shuttle to seem damaged and suggested it be sent to dry dock for an overhaul. Since he was this ship's chief mechanic he volun-

teered to fly the ship, dangerous though it was, to be repaired. Since he was a loyal slave and favored by his masters, he was permitted to go. He took a load of scrap packaged as “recalled parts,” dumped them, and flew off to his freedom.

For six years Moe worked for the slave underground, smuggling escaped slaves. His cell leaders put up a lot of money to overhaul the Longbow shuttle and turn it into a stealthy smuggler. He collected a talented but motley crew of escaped slaves and they helped untold numbers of beings to safety. Sadly, about a year ago his underground cell was busted by the Splugorth, and Moe and his crew barely escaped.

They wandered for a while, getting work where they could, sometimes even resorting to piracy to get food and supplies. Finally, on a whim, Moe flew to Center to find them some steady work after he was confident the heat had died down, and found SCF. That was six months ago. Since then, Moe and his crew have proven to be competent, if somewhat hotheaded haulers.

**Alignment:** Anarchist.

**Race:** Octoman.

**Attributes:** I.Q.: 13, M.E.: 12, M.A.: 10, P.S.: 18, P.P.: 26, P.E.: 15, P.B.: 3, Spd: 16.

**S.D.C.:** 70, **Hit Points:** 55, **A.R.:** 11.

**Weight:** 175 lbs (78.7 kg). **Height:** 4 feet, 7 inches (1.37 m) normally, but can stretch as tall as 13 feet (3.9 m). **Age:** 35.

**Horror Factor:** 13

**P.P.E.:** 19. **I.S.P.:** 0

**Disposition:** Gruff, surly and sarcastic. Moe also has a vengeful streak a mile wide. He secretly fears being recaptured by the Splugorth and suffers insomnia due to nightmares. Oddly enough, he’s a fabulous cook and enjoys studying cookbooks, watching cooking shows and cooking massive and exotic meals for his crew and colleagues at SCF.

**Experience Level:** 7<sup>th</sup> level Operator.

**Magical Knowledge:** Lore only.

**Psionics:** Lore only.

**Combat Skills:** Hand to Hand: Basic.

**Attacks per Melee:** 5

**Bonuses:** +3 to initiative, +8 to strike, +12 to parry, +8 to dodge, +2 to pull punch, +2 to roll with fall/impact, +3 to damage, +3 to entangle, +2 to disarm, Critical Strike on a Natural 19-20.

**Weapon Proficiencies:** Paired, Knife, Blunt, Energy Pistol.

**Weapons of Note:** Moe has a collection of all kinds of knives, from regular mundane blades to Vibro- and Phase Knives. He also packs two HI-10 Heavy Laser Pistols (3d6+3).

**Armor:** Custom-made hard spacer suit and a custom-made suit of light armor.

**Skills:** All Operator skills (including all Mechanical, Engineering and Electrical except Robot), Lore: Galactic, Lore: Splugorth, and Cook at 85%.

**Cybernetics:** Multi-optic eye and advanced headjack and ear implant.

**Vehicles:** *The Take That!*

**Description:** Moe looks like a big octopus that walks around on its tentacles. His coloring is a pale gray with dark rust-colored

spots and his eyes are an iridescent gold-green. He had his slave ID tattoo covered up with a tattoo of a hand reaching up from beneath choppy waves, clasping a hand reaching down from a cloud, with a banner beneath that reads “Save Me.” Clothes don’t really work on him, but he does wear a utility belt and a gun belt.

### Other Crew:

**Grinder:** Minotaur, 5<sup>th</sup> level Operator, Co-Pilot/Engineer.

**J’darne:** 6<sup>th</sup> level Rulian Translator, Communications.

**Yevgeny:** 5<sup>th</sup> level alien full conversion ‘Borg (Russian), Gunner.

**Anichka:** 6<sup>th</sup> level Staphra Warrior, Gunner.

## Major Antagonists

### Abelard, Wulfen Quatoria

Abelard is a lawman with a mission. His mission is to see Malleus Sunhammer and every one of his stinking smuggler cronies breaking rocks on a particularly harsh prison world. He pursues this mission with all the passion of a religious zealot. He’s constantly shadowing SCF ships, hiring spies to infiltrate their ranks and hackers to break into their mainframe. He knows they’re dirty, the lot of them, and is waiting for them to slip up so he can haul them all off for some hard labor.

Years ago, when Abelard was a young Star Marshal, he caught Malleus Sunhammer red handed, smuggling contraband weapons. He took Malleus into custody and charged him with smuggling, possession of military hardware by a civilian and resisting arrest, all felony offenses. Malleus was looking at some serious time behind bars. The trial came and the evidence was damning, but Malleus’ lawyer was crafty and got his client off on a technicality. Abelard had failed to follow one of the many byzantine arrest guidelines and he had to watch Malleus walk free with a smug look on his bearded face. From that day forward, Abelard vowed that he would see Sunhammer behind bars, one way or another.

It’s not that Abelard is crooked, far from it. He’s a very well loved and respected lawman in his sector, but he is single-minded in his quest to put Malleus and all the SCF pilots in prison. He will do anything in his power to catch or entrap Malleus or any of the SCF crews with their hands dirty. He has come dangerously close on more than one occasion to breaking his oath to law and order.

**Alignment:** Aberrant.

**Race:** Woven.

**Attributes:** I.Q.: 14, M.E.: 15, M.A.: 11, P.S.: 40, P.P.: 22, P.E.: N/A, P.B.: 14, Spd: 88.

**M.D.C. by Location:**

Body: 350	Hands: 25
Head: 90	Legs: 120
Arms: 75	

**Weight:** 850 lbs (382 kg). **Height:** 9 feet, 2 inches (2.7 m). **Age:** 75.



**Horror Factor:** 14 (only when outer shell is damaged and endoskeleton is revealed).

**P.P.E.:** 2. **I.S.P.:** 0.

**Disposition:** Stiff and by the book. Abelard is the consummate lawman except for his obsession with Malleus Sunhammer. He is also a leading authority on the history of criminal justice in the CCW.

**Experience Level:** 11<sup>th</sup> level Quatoria.

**Magical Knowledge:** Lore only.

**Psionics:** Lore only.

**Combat Skills:** Martial Arts.

**Attacks per Melee:** 7

**Bonuses:** +3 to initiative, +7 to strike, +8 to parry, +7 to dodge, +5 to pull punch, +5 to roll with fall/impact, +1 to entangle, +2 to disarm, +6 to save vs psionics, +2 to save vs Horror Factor, Critical Strike on a Natural 18-20.

**Weapon Proficiencies:** Energy Pistol, Energy Rifle, Heavy Energy, Grenade, Knife, Blunt.

**Weapons of Note:** 2 NE-6 Magnum revolvers, HI-80 Heavy Pulse Rifle.

**Armor:** Heavy combat armor, 90 M.D.C., -15% to Prowl.

**Skills:** All Quatoria skills at 10<sup>th</sup> level plus all Law/Lore: CCW, Law/Lore: Three Galaxies, and History: CCW skills.

**Cybernetics:** Full Conversion. Living shell, nano-machine regeneration (2D6 M.D.C. per hour), psionic dampers, multi-optic eyes, ultra-ear, sensory suite, sound filtration, bionic lung with gas filter and oxygen cell, translator, loudspeaker, radio transmitter-receiver, retractable forearm Vibro-Blades, advanced headjack, garrote wrist wire, finger camera, micro-recorder, chemical spray, retractable silver knuckle spikes, wrist needle and drug dispenser.

**Vehicles:** Abelard flies a modified Naruni FB-99B Firebreather set up for patrol duty. It can carry two prisoners in their own secured compartment.

**Description:** Abelard looks like your typical Wulfen. He's big, has a steely gaze and speaks in a low, steady voice. He never shows visible emotion.

## Michael

Michael comes from a very privileged and wealthy background. His father is a very successful shipping magnate, and his mother is a well-known media star. Michael, whose real name is only pronounceable in the language of the Plane of Shadow, grew up wanting for nothing. From an early age he showed a quick intellect and an aptitude for space piloting. His parents invested in the finest instruction and academy schooling for their only son.

Michael was restless and rebellious in school. He chafed at the rules, and the schooling left the talented young man bored and unchallenged. He was kicked out of school in his last year for stealing a prototype starfighter from the school's design lab and using it to run a Quatoria blockade to see a girl.

After being kicked out of school, his doting parents helped set him up as the head of a shipping company. He did well as an administrator, but sitting behind a desk could not fulfill his insa-

table lust for adventure. He began funneling company profits toward a custom-built smuggling ship. He outfitted it with the finest sensors and stealth equipment, paid exorbitant prices for a hot-rod engine and began assembling a crew of like-minded Silhouettes. His embezzling nearly broke his company, and one night, with the creditors closing in, he took his new ship and disappeared into space.

Months later, an unknown ship and crew broke a Kreeghor blockade of a planet with a load of weapons for the rebels on the surface. The mystery ship fought its way out through the blockade and disappeared back into space. Michael was now in the smuggling business, he had finally found his niche. He took the name Michael as a joke in reference to his ship's name and because he thought it sounded rakish.

## Michael, Captain of the *Onyx Angel*

**Alignment:** Anarchist.

**Race:** Silhouette.

**Attributes:** I.Q.: 20, M.E.: 16, M.A.: 23, P.S.: 13, P.P.: 26, P.E.: 19, P.B.: 23, Spd: 22.

**M.D.C.:** 81

**Weight:** 165 lbs(74 kg). **Height:** 6 feet (1.8 m). **Age:** 124.

**P.P.E.:** 408. **I.S.P.:** 50.

**Disposition:** Arrogant and haughty, Michael is the epitome of the pampered rich boy. He's also got a devilish streak, is an adrenaline junkie and fancies himself a ladies' man. All of this wouldn't be half so bad if he wasn't such a talented pilot and smuggler and didn't have to beat women of all races off with a pipe. He is also extremely condescending and arrogant to people and races he considers beneath his class. This includes pretty much every race save Silhouettes and everybody at SCF. Michael is a huge fan of opera from the collected worlds of the TGE, and spends a fair bit of money on recordings and show tickets.

**Experience Level:** 8<sup>th</sup> level Runner.

**Magical Knowledge:** Has all the powers of a Line Walker plus the spells Cloud of Smoke, See Aura, Extinguish Fire, Fear, Manipulate Objects, Armor of Ithan, Sonic Blast, Wisps of Confusion, Negate Magic, Sub-Particle Acceleration, Constrain Being, Agony, Mental Shock, Apparition, Sleep, Energy Disruption, Magic Net, Carpet of Adhesion, Negate Mechanics and Frequency Jamming.

**Natural Abilities:** Shadow Meld at will, reduce illumination in a 50 foot (15.2 m) radius by 95%. Darkness and shadow grant him +6 to P.S., +50 M.D.C., and Prowl at 85%.

**Psionics:** Telemechanics.

**Combat Skills:** Hand to Hand: Martial Arts, Boxing.

**Attacks per Melee:** 6

**Bonuses:** +1 (+3) on initiative, +8 (+10) to strike, +9 (+11) to parry and dodge, +3 (+7) to roll with fall/impact, +3 (+7) to pull punch, +1 to entangle, +2 to disarm, 75% trust/intimidate, 65% charm/impress, +8% to save vs coma/death, +2 to save vs magic, +4 to save vs Horror Factor, Critical Strike on a Natural 18-20, Karate kick, jump kick, leap attack. (Bonuses in parentheses are in darkness/shadow.)

**Weapon Proficiencies:** Paired, Sword, Energy Pistol, Energy Rifle.

**Weapons of Note:** Michael believes the sword is the weapon of a true gentleman, and carries an ornate Phase Sword (4D6 M.D./S.D.C., bypasses armor). He also carries an EP-5 pulse pistol (3D6 M.D.).

**Armor:** Michael wears a fashionable suit of light armor with space capabilities and a medium force field.

**Skills:** All space related and Rogue skills plus Pilot Hovercraft, Automobile, and Motorcycle at 8<sup>th</sup> level. Michael speaks and reads all Trade languages and a handful of other languages. Also Law/Lore: CCW, Law/Lore: TGE, Law/Lore: UWW.

**Cybernetics:** None.

**Vehicles:** *The Onyx Angel* and a sleek, expensive hover cycle.

**Description:** Michael is tall and extremely handsome with the jet-black skin and chameleon eyes of his people. He is very fashion conscious and wears only the latest fashions and hairstyles. He considers himself a ladies' man and gentleman rogue, and as such carries himself with a swashbuckling swagger. He is very free with his money and compliments. It's a rare woman who can resist his charms.

## The Onyx Angel

*The Onyx Angel* is a Tharalass Stiletto Heavy Scout. She has been redone from the hull up to be a fast and light smuggling ship. The Angel is shaped like a thick, spade bladed throwing knife with sharp little wings that sweep out and down from her ventral surface just fore of her engines. She's painted a deep, glossy black with white highlights.

Fore of the bridge, on the nose of the ship is painted a beautiful woman with ebony skin and white wings growing from her shoulders. She's in profile, proud chin held high and black hair flowing around her. She's dressed in a flowing white robe, one foot drawn up to the other knee and she's holding aloft a long sword. The woman is set against a white circle and beneath is painted "Onyx Angel" and the name of her pilot, the insufferably arrogant Silhouette, Michael.

Michael and his crew of spit-shined Silhouettes are a constant thorn in SCF's side. He is forever trying to lure their contracts away and loves to mock them every chance he gets. The most frustrating thing is that his arrogance comes naturally. He's a genuinely talented pilot and has great skill slipping through blockades and pickets.

**Model Type:** Modified Tharalass T-99S Stiletto.

**Class:** Heavy Scout/Light Freighter.

**Crew:** 5; Pilot, Co-pilot, 2 gunners and an Engineer.

**M.D.C. by Location:**

Bridge: 450

Main Body: 2500

Engines: 450

Force Field: 400 per side (2400 total)

**Speed:**

Driving: Not Possible.

Flying: Mach 4.5 in atmosphere, Mach 11.2 in space, and 4.3 light-years per hour in FTL.

Star Drive: CG-Drive.

Sublight Drives: CG-Drives.

Range: Effectively unlimited, carries enough supplies for six months in space.

**Statistical Data:**

Height: 25 feet (7.6 m).

Width: 30 feet (9.1 m) at its widest.

Length: 125 feet (38 m).

Weight: 285 tons loaded.

Cargo: *The Angel* can carry up to 70 tons of cargo.

Power System: Nuclear.

## Weapons:

**1. Medium HI-Laser Cannon (1):** This monster is *the Angel's* main cannon.

Primary Purpose: Assault.

Secondary Purpose: Anti-Ship.

Damage: 1D4x100

Rate of Fire: Equal to the combined Hand to Hand attacks of the gunner.

Range: 5 miles (8 km) in atmosphere, 16 miles (25.6 km) in space.

Payload: Unlimited, linked to *the Angel's* power supply.

**2. Medium-Range Missile Launchers (2):** Two launch tubes run along the bottom of the ship.

Primary Purpose: Anti-Ship.

Secondary Purpose: Defense.

Damage: 4D6x10 M.D.

Rate of Fire: One at a time or in volleys of two, four or eight missiles.

Effective Range: 40 miles (64 km).

Payload: Michael keeps two tons of missiles on board at all times. One ton is 48 missiles. Each launcher holds 24 missiles at once.

**3. Point Defense Particle Beams (4):** Four single barrel PB turrets for point defense. Two on top and two on the bottom. They have 360-degree rotation and a 180-degree fire-arc.

Primary Purpose: Anti-Missile.

Secondary Purpose: Anti-Fighter.

Damage: 1D6x10

Rate of Fire: Equal to gunner's Hand to Hand attacks.

Effective Range: 2 miles (3.2 km) in space, one-third that in atmosphere.

Payload: Effectively unlimited, tied to *the Angel's* power supply.

## Other Crew:

**Uziel:** 7<sup>th</sup> level Silhouette, Co-Pilot.

**Raphael:** 6<sup>th</sup> level Silhouette, Engineer.

**Gabriel:** 6<sup>th</sup> level Silhouette, Gunner.

**Dina:** 7<sup>th</sup> level Silhouette, Gunner.

# The Hammer of the Forge

By James M.G. Cannon

## Chapter Thirty-One

### Black Hole Sun

Just a moment ago, Caleb Vulcan had been bored out of his skull.

A Cosmo-Knight in the service of the Cosmic Forge, Caleb had joined up with his fellow Cosmo-Knights, Sol Vyking, a human, and Ariel, a Titan, in order to track down a giant super-weapon designed and built by the Transgalactic Empire. To that end, the Knights had recruited the help of a Sinestrian scientist named Vodál Kee, a squad of Consortium Space Marines, and the services of a galactic tracer named Sammadar Orak. Orak's possession of a highly advanced alien ship, stolen from the mysterious K!ozn Continuum, allowed the group to slip undetected into Transgalactic Empire space. For the last few days, Orak's ship had navigated its way deeper and deeper into Kreeghor controlled territory, with no clear idea of where the super-weapon might be located. Vyking's plan had been to scan for the weapon's unique energy signature and then rush to the scene before it could escape; but since the device was designed to create black holes, that meant its every use meant the deaths of countless innocents.

Caleb thought it was a horrible plan. But he had none better, so he had waited patiently aboard Orak's ship for something to happen. A brief spike of activity was offered by the captain, who turned out to be a very attractive and vivacious woman beneath the power armor she habitually wore. As far as Caleb knew, he was the only one aboard aware that Orak was a woman at all. Keeping that, and the relationship itself, a secret from everyone else on the ship was beginning to irritate Caleb, and so he had gone for a late night walk around the ship. Eventually he ended up on the bridge.

Which was where he now stood, his mouth drying and a pit forming in his gut. Somehow, the Kreeghor super-weapon had turned the tables on them. There it was on the viewscreen in front of Caleb, drawing closer and closer, a malevolent crustacean of cyclopean proportions and deadly power.

The *Shadowstar*.

If Vyking and Vodál Kee were to be believed, besides carrying the full destructive power of a TGE dreadnought, the *Shadowstar* could also eat suns. As if that wasn't enough, another ship emerged from under the dreadnought's shadow, a Berserker destroyer craft bristling with weaponry. As well, a cloud of fighters emerged from the dreadnought and began to rapidly close the distance between it and the K!ozn ship.

"I repeat," Caleb said in the comm unit he habitually wore around his neck, "we are under attack. The *Shadowstar* has found us and it looks pretty unhappy. I could use some backup here." He looked around the console for weapon systems or shields or something, but the ship's alien construction defied Caleb's knowledge of starships. Aside from the viewscreens and

the pilot's stand in the center of the room, he didn't see much to suggest controls.

Sol Vyking came skidding into the bridge. Of medium height and build, Sol kept his black hair long and his beard neatly trimmed. Despite his penchant for Hawaiian-style shirts, cargo shorts, and sandals, he was as straight-laced and professional as they came. "What do you mean, they found *us*?" he demanded. "Are you certain it's the *Shadowstar*?"

Caleb wordlessly nodded at the viewscreen.

"Damn," Vyking said. He clicked his own comm. "Orak, I thought you said your ship was undetectable?"

Orak's metallic voice came over the comm. "By any conventional method. The stealth cloak enabled me to reach Thelagg Vohan and rescue Vodál, after all. There's no way the Kreeghor would notice us – unless someone tipped them off."

Vyking looked sharply at Caleb, who could only shrug. "Don't the Kreeghor use magic as well as tech?" Caleb asked.

Vyking's frown deepened. "I bloody hate bloody magic," he muttered.

Caleb gritted his teeth and resisted the urge to slap him. "New plan?" he said instead. "We should run. We're flat-footed and outgunned."

"No," Vyking said, "the three of us are staying." By which he meant the three Cosmo-Knights. "Orak will get the marines and Kee out of here."

"My ship, my rules," Orak said as she stormed onto the bridge. She kept her voice and her features hidden behind the insect-like façade of her power armor, painted a half-dozen clashing day-glo colors. "I'll retreat when I have to, and not a moment before." Orak climbed into the pilot's frame in the center of the room and jacked into the ship's systems.

On the viewscreens, the Kreeghor fighters were coming into range, and a few eager pilots already began to unload crimson bolts of energy in the direction of the K!ozn ship. "Shields up," Orak barked, to no one in particular. "Weapons cascade online. Give me targets, my dear, give me targets."

Orak's bug-like helm inclined in the direction of the Knights. "Shouldn't you two be finding an air-lock before this gets too hairy? I'm not doing this alone, am I?"

Vyking shot her a venomous look and hurried out of the room. Between one step and the next he encased himself in his metallic blue plate mail, complete with horned helm. Caleb paused a moment before following him. "Be careful Sam," he said. "This is going to be rough. Don't hesitate to cut and run if you have to."

"Don't you worry, lover," Orak said. Caleb imagined her pixyish features turning into a wicked grin. "I'm not about to throw my life away. But when I get paid to do a job, I mean to get that job done. Now get out there and back me up. Let's save the universe and all that qrun."

Caleb shook his head and departed, brushing past the marines and Vodál Kee coming the opposite way. Kee shot Caleb a worried glance, but Caleb didn't have time to offer reassuring words

to the scientist. He had a bad feeling growing in his gut. This whole situation stank, and Caleb didn't like it one bit.

Flying Fang was waiting for him impatiently at the nearest airlock. He opened the inner door as Caleb approached, jumped into the lock and jammed the door closed as soon as Caleb stepped in after him. Caleb summoned his own red and black Centurion-themed armor as the outer door cycled open and the cold, forbidding blackness of space rushed into the chamber.

Azure and crimson bolts of light erupted from the K!ozn ship, soon joined by a silver one as Ariel exited the cargo hold. Caleb allowed himself to momentarily relish the return to the vacuum of space, its purity and emptiness denied him during the many days aboard the ship, and then focused his attention on the matter at hand.

Flying Fang interceptors swarmed towards the ship, firing indiscriminately at the larger craft. But the K!ozn ship was far from helpless. While the exterior resembled nothing more than an asteroid, the ship was much more than mere space debris. The K!ozn Continuum was an alien and xenophobic culture, far more advanced than most of the Three Galaxies, and the shields held easily against the Flying Fangs' endless barrage. Small panels slid open in the K!ozn ship's surface, and out popped the ship's armaments. Lines of blue-white light split the emptiness, tagging the Flying Fangs. The energy beams punched through the fighters' shields with appalling ease, blowing them to bits. The Flying Fangs died with small puffs of flame that were quickly and silently snuffed out by the vacuum.

Orak and the others would be fine. The Cosmo-Knights turned wordlessly in the direction of the *Shadowstar* and propelled themselves toward it.

\* \* \*



On the bridge of the *Shadowstar*, the crew worked frantically, trying to get the ship's scanners to recognize the presence of the alien craft that appeared on the viewscreen. So far, none of the sensors could even see it, and it took visual confirmation to even note it was there. It was only fear of Admiral Geryon's displeasure that motivated the crew to check out this empty expanse of space in the first place. They all thought Geryon a little mad, though none would admit it for fear of being ripped open and fed to his bloodhounds. Certainly a legitimate fear, even in Geryon's estimation.

Geryon had, after all, slaughtered a dozen members of the crew to enact the Necromantic ceremony that led him here to this lonely quadrant of space in the first place. Distance and time were nothing to the dead; they had promised Geryon that his enemies would be here, and so they were. Hidden in some sort of Consortium of Civilized Worlds stealth craft, cunningly designed to resemble an asteroid. That a simple asteroid didn't show up on any of the *Shadowstar's* scopes was the first clue, but when the thing altered its own trajectory slightly, Geryon knew he had them. TGE spies had alerted Geryon to the Consortium's intentions, the dead had brought him here, and now his own clawed hand would bring about justice.

Suddenly the *Shadowstar's* scanners flickered to life. The asteroid ship had activated its shields, killing its stealth mode, and the *Shadowstar* could see it now. Beside Geryon, Captain Dorset watched in growing alarm as her squadron of flying fang interceptors was rapidly and soundly blown to pieces by the craft. "What is that thing?" she said under her breath.

"The Consortium's own secret weapon," Geryon answered her. "Inform Captain Abakham that I want the ship captured rather than destroyed, if possible." Captain Abakham commanded the destroyer that served as the *Shadowstar's* escort. He was a simple man without much grasp of basic military tactics, but lived in fear of displeasing Geryon despite being assigned to the duty by one of Geryon's rivals. Abakham could at least be counted on to destroy most opposition, even if on occasion he required the aid of the Invincible Guardsmen stationed on the *Shadowstar*.

Dorset acknowledged Geryon's order and passed it on to Abakham. The Berserker moved to intercept the Consortium craft, already angling its deflector shields to absorb the enemy's fire.

Dorset's frown grew deeper and she looked up at Geryon. Her voice held a note of alarm as she said, "Admiral, three humanoid-shaped objects just detached from the Consortium ship. By their energy signature, they appear to be Cosmo-Knights."

Geryon nodded. Both his father and the dead he had summoned had warned him of this. Outwardly, he showed no concern. He knew most Kreeghor scoffed at the power of Cosmo-Knights, decrying them as weak-willed sycophants of the corrupt and decadent Consortium of Civilized Worlds. The Kreeghor believed in the strength of the armada, the might of their army, and most of all in the abilities of the Invincible Guard to check the Cosmo-Knights. But most Kreeghor had never seen a Cosmo-Knight in action, never seen them ignore energy blasts that could scorch a planet's surface, never seen them pick apart a squadron of fighters single-handed, never witnessed a Cosmo-Knight slaughtering a brigade of troops. Geryon, however, was well acquainted with the difference between Imperial propaganda and practical experience.

Although, even three Cosmo-Knights could hardly stand against the *Shadowstar*. It was, first and foremost, a fully functioning dreadnought. Even heavily modified to accommodate the singularity projector deep within its belly, the *Shadowstar* carried enough personal firepower to lay waste to a small planet or a fleet of ships.

Not that it paid to be overconfident. Cosmo-Knights had a knack for surviving when they shouldn't. Geryon shifted his attention to the group of Invincible Guardsmen standing at attention on the bridge. The burly Kreeghor with the burnished green scales, Major Elket, lead the squad. He inclined his head in Geryon's direction. "Admiral," he said. "With your permission, I would like to handle these whelps of the Cosmic Forge myself. It has been some time since I killed a Cosmo-Knight."

"Permission granted," Geryon said. "When you're finished with them, board the Consortium ship. Slaughter any who offer resistance, but try to capture the science officers alive."

Elket saluted. "By your command."

\* \* \*

The *Shadowstar* grew larger as Caleb and the others drew closer. And then larger still.

Caleb suppressed the urge to gulp. The dreadnought was an impressive craft, a polished red and black squid that looked miles long. Its weapon systems remained ominously quiet, even as the destroyer and the squadrons of fighters swooped in on Orak's ship. Caleb had some doubts that the K!ozn craft, however advanced, would survive a barrage from the dreadnought. In the back of his mind, he doubted that he, even with the blessings of the Cosmic Forge, would survive.

Those guns looked *big*.

"Tell me there's a small thermal exhaust port beneath the main port," Caleb said. Only Vyking and Ariel could hear him. In space, Cosmo-Knights could communicate through the bond they shared with the Forge. It wasn't telepathy, and it wasn't spoken; it was something else, and even after all the time Caleb had spent in the Three Galaxies, he still wasn't sure how it worked. "And hitting it will set off a chain reaction that will blow the whole thing to pieces." He sighed. "Something, anything. Lie to me! I don't care. I'm looking at this thing right now and all I can think is that Vyking doesn't have a real plan."

"I always have a plan," Vyking said. He sounded indignant.

"It had better be a good one," Ariel chimed in. "I'm beginning to sympathize with Caleb. That ship is more than twice as large as a CCW battleship, and it eats suns for breakfast. Did Kee locate any weak points?"

"Not yet," Vyking said. "The Kreeghor are very militarily minded. This thing doesn't have any particular weaknesses – except that it can't make use of its shields or weapons batteries when the singularity projector is engaged. The power drain is too much otherwise."

Caleb snorted. "So we make them fire up their doomsday device, and then sucker punch them a split second before we all get swallowed by the black hole."

"It won't come to that," Vyking assured them.

"How do we break it, then?" Ariel asked.

Vyking sighed. "I expect this from Caleb, but you're a native of the Three Galaxies, Ariel. You should know better. The Kreeghor always project their force fields a good ten meters from their ship hulls to negate the effectiveness of missiles. All we have to do is slip through the force field, and then it will be a cinch to crack open the hull and get inside. Zip down to the reactor, set it on liquefy, and then escape in the confusion. Easy as pie."

Ariel forced a chuckle. "You're forgetting the fact that the Kreeghor also use *variable* force fields, which means they regenerate. How do you propose slipping past them?"

Caleb cleared his throat. "Um, I move we table this discussion. We have bogies." He had noticed the approach of four humanoids in the distinctive red and black enameled megasteel armor of the Invincible Guard. The leader was a green-skinned Kreeghor with a cape that flowed nicely in space. A massive Seljuk and a Wulfen glowing with blue light flanked him, while a heavily-muscled human woman brought up the rear. None of them appeared to be the least bit discomfited by the lack of atmosphere or the crushing vacuum.

"Invincible Guard," Vyking snarled. A blue light appeared in his hand, coalescing momentarily into a longsword the same color as his armor. "Hit them hard and fast, don't let them slow you or get you off target. The *Shadowstar* is our primary concern."

A two-handed sword twelve feet long appeared in Ariel's hands. It didn't quite match the Greek hoplite style of her armor, but it looked plenty fearsome. Caleb brought his own weapon to hand, a massive sledgehammer that mirrored the image emblazoned across his breastplate.

The Wulfen sent a blast of green energy at Caleb. For a moment he was worried, used to the magic of the United Worlds of Warlock, but the energy impacted harmlessly against his armor. Caleb grinned and lobbed his hammer at the Wulfen. It smashed through a hastily raised force field and nearly took the Wulfen's head off. The Wulfen looked surprised and worried.

Vyking rushed forward to meet the Kreeghor, who tried to slam hard into the Knight, but Vyking twisted aside and raked the Kreeghor's side with his blade. The Guardsman's armor parted, but the scales beneath appeared to hold. The Seljuk moved rapidly to support his companion. As he closed on Vyking, the Seljuk's flesh flowed and contorted, forming tendrils of rosy flesh that reached out to snare Vyking's limbs.

The human moved faster than Caleb's eye could follow. She closed on Ariel and launched a barrage that left nearly a dozen fist-shaped dents in Ariel's silver armor.

Then Caleb lost sight of his companions as he followed his hammer's trajectory and slammed bodily into the Wulfen. Green light enveloped him, and would have blinded him if his eyes were not adapted to function at the heart of a star. Emerald energy washed over Caleb in waves, but it was far too weak to affect him. He cuffed the Wulfen on the side of the head and summoned his hammer back to his hand. The Wulfen retaliated by forming a huge claw of green energy and slashing at Caleb with it. He felt it rend into his armor, leaving three long gashes in the metal. The Wulfen's muzzle twisted into a grin.

Caleb made it disappear with a swift hammer strike to the head that sent the Wulfen spinning in space, momentarily dazed.



His personal force field held, however, and he rapidly came to. As another claw formed in space between them, Caleb noticed that the green light seemed to emanate from a point on the back of the Wulfen's right hand. There was a tattoo of some kind, like a rune or symbol of Bio-Wizardry carved into his flesh, and it appeared to fuel his power. As the claw flashed towards Caleb, he focused his gaze on the Wulfen's wrist and let the power of the Forge flow through him. A ruby beam of light flashed from Caleb's visor and slashed through the Wulfen's wrist. The green light died. The Wulfen had a moment to look surprised. Space did the rest.

It was not a kind death, but Caleb reminded himself that the Guardsman was defending a weapon that could destroy entire star systems. He turned on his axis to check on his companions.

Ariel punted the human away from her, shattering the Guardsman's armored midsection in the process, and then followed up with a cruel swipe of her blade. Instinctively, the human raised her arms, apparently hoping to block the sword with the oversized bracers she wore. But Kreeghor manufactured megasteel was simply not designed to hold up against the Forge-strengthened thews of a Titan, and the Guardsman soon found herself handless, watching her blood crystallize in the vacuum as it pumped slowly from her stumps. Ariel cut her down before she could make another move.

Vyking and his attackers were spiraling away from Caleb and Ariel. The Knight slashed away at the tendrils of the Seljuk, but new ones sprang up to keep him occupied while the Kreeghor hammered away at Vyking with hands and elbows, knees and

feet. Despite this, Vyking was aiming himself at the *Shadowstar* and forcing the Guardsmen to follow. The Kreeghor maneuvered around to Vyking's rear and grabbed him by the horns, wrenching his head back and exposing his neck to the Seljuk. The Seljuk's muzzle, naturally equipped with Tyrannosaur-like dentition, grew more deadly as the Seljuk expanded his jaw and doubled the number of teeth. The mouth snapped towards Vyking's throat.

Vyking's open faced, featureless helm suddenly shimmered with blue light. The Seljuk's head snapped backward, smoldering but still whole. The damaged flesh was swallowed up as the Seljuk's body shifted again, healing itself in the blink of an eye. Vyking ignored him, though, except to wrench his right arm free of the Seljuk's embrace, so he could drive his sword point first into the Kreeghor's shoulder.

The Kreeghor howled soundlessly and leapt away from Vyking, wrenching the Knight's sword from his hands. Caleb shot forward and caught the Kreeghor from behind with a body slam that momentarily sent the Kreeghor spinning in space. The Guardsman righted himself easily enough – he could fly, after all – and twisted around to face Caleb. The Kreeghor, perhaps instinctively, unleashed a blast of red light from his eyes that connected harmlessly with Caleb's breastplate.

Caleb shook his helmeted head, almost pantomiming the movement to get his point across. From the grimace on the Kreeghor's face, it appeared he got through. The Kreeghor reached up to wrench free the sword sticking out of his shoulder only to discover it was gone. Vyking had summoned it back to

his hands. While this knowledge dawned on the Guardsman, Caleb blasted forward and pasted him hard across the forehead with the hammer. The vibration of impact shivered up through the weapon and into Caleb's arms; shards of green scales drifted away from the Kreeghor's forehead, and black blood seeped into the vacuum.

The Kreeghor snarled and smashed Caleb hard in the chest, denting his armor. So Caleb hit him again. And again. And again. Until at last, the Kreeghor stopped fighting, and hung listlessly in space, slowly drifting.

Then the world turned red and for the first time since becoming a Cosmo-Knight, Caleb *burned*.

\* \* \*

On the bridge of the *Shadowstar*, Admiral Geryon was slowly growing more and more concerned.

This little ambush he had planned was rapidly getting away from him. The Consortium ship was no scout craft, but some kind of highly advanced warship; Captain Abakham was barely holding his own against her despite being nearly twice her size. Then there were the Cosmo-Knights. Alone aboard the ship, Geryon understood the full destructive power possessed by a single Knight of the Forge. Yet even he found himself surprised and alarmed at how easily the three had dispatched the Invincible Guardsmen sent after them. Geryon had seen the quartet of Guardsmen take on whole fleets of Free-Worlders and emerge victorious. But three Cosmo-Knights had ripped them to shreds in nanoseconds.

"Fire the main guns," Geryon said, his voice a rasp.

Captain Dorset looked up at him. "At what?"

Geryon backhanded her casually. Her neck snapped and she fell to the floor a lifeless heap. He pointed a finger at the weapons officer. "Knock those Knights out of the sky!"

The weapons officer was a Kreeghor and hurried to obey. Geryon felt a momentary twinge of regret at killing Dorset, but he brushed it aside. She was only human, and could be replaced.

The heavy cannons of the dreadnought, shaped like curving horns, burned red for a split second and then beams of superheated light rent the vacuum and enveloped the three Cosmo-Knights, as well as the bodies, unconscious or dead, of the Invincible Guardsmen. Geryon knew that Cosmo-Knights were supposed to be able to ignore heat and light, but he also knew that the main guns of a dreadnought were designed to destroy anything. Twenty-three dreadnoughts led the Imperial fleet, and it was said that their combined firepower was enough to crack open a planet. Not that anyone need concern themselves with such impractical displays any longer, now that the *Shadowstar* existed.

Geryon focused on the viewscreen, where three Cosmo-Knights still hung in space. Of the Invincible Guardsman, there was no sign. Even as Geryon watched, and prepared the signal another blast, the Knights apparently recovered and blasted out of the killzone. They split up and converged on the *Shadowstar*, quick and maneuverable. Geryon gritted his teeth. As deadly as the main guns were, they were designed to destroy cities and battleships, not to track two meter tall bipeds. Even the Titan Knight was smaller than a fighter.

The Cosmo-Knights would close with the *Shadowstar*. They would slip past the force field, and once that happened, the battle would be over. Even now, Abakham's frenzied voice came over the comm, announcing heavy losses and begging for the opportunity to retreat.

Geryon allowed himself to fume for a moment. He thought of his father's reaction to his miscalculation, his arrogance, his failure. "I need only one Berserker as escort," he had said to his superiors, trusting in the tremendous firepower and destructive potential of the *Shadowstar*. He could have had a flotilla of Smashers and more Berserkers besides, but he had insisted. The *Shadowstar* was his project, conceived and implemented by him, and he would reap all the glory. He would, apparently, take all the blame as well.

He could fall back, lick his wounds, and return with reinforcements. That was an option, and perhaps the best one.

But Geryon was his father's son, after all. He turned to the first mate, who now stood over the corpse of Captain Dorset. "Commander Farshag. Initiate the inertial drive."

The redoubtable Kelesh paled. He knew as well as Geryon did that firing up the inertial drive was the first step in powering up the *Shadowstar's* singularity projector. He also knew that the power drain from that mighty weapon would kill the shields and all other weapons systems. Farshag took a careful look at Dorset's cooling body and nodded crisply. "At once, Admiral."

While Farshag began firing orders at the bridge crew, Geryon lumbered towards the lift at the rear of the bridge. "Launch all fighters," he added, "and the Warlords. Have my personal armor prepared."

This time, Farshag couldn't hold his tongue. "Admiral? Are you sure you want to be out there?"

"The fighters and the power armored troops will hold the Knights off long enough for you to complete the deployment of the tendrils. Whatever happens here today, *Captain* Farshag, the Empire will not fail."

The lift doors closed before Farshag could say anything further. In the small space, Geryon's white eyes narrowed and his mouth twisted into a grimace. He would kill the Cosmo-Knights himself. Before the black whole swallowed them all.

\* \* \*

"Yowch!"

The dreadnought had fired on Caleb, his companions, and the remaining Guardsman, encompassing all four of them in a single beam. The Guardsman was incinerated, blasted to atoms, but the three Cosmo-Knights survived. Wounded, but alive.

"Caleb, are you alright?" Ariel said. The edges of her armor looked melted, and the crest of her helm had been sheared off. Vyking bobbed nearby, his armor actually cracked open and showing burned flesh beneath.

Caleb found his voice. "Yeah. I'm okay. You guys?"

"Burned but alive," Ariel said. "We need to scatter, give them too many targets to focus upon." Suiting words to action, she blasted away from the other two, making for the *Shadowstar*. Vyking grunted and flew in a parallel direction, holding one hand weakly against his ragged breastplate.

Caleb paused momentarily, his nerve endings still jangling from the laser blast. He shouldn't have been harmed; as a Knight of the Forge he was immune to energy attacks. He could fly through the heart of a sun, after all. Not that he'd ever done that yet. He looked hard at the looming, crustacean-like mass of the *Shadowstar* and followed his friends. "What the hell was that?" he couldn't resist asking. "Some kind of back-up super-weapon?"

Vyking chuckled darkly. "Battleships mount cannons more than capable of generating enough power to hurt us – or hurt other battleships. But while they're designed to punch through another ship's shields or raze a planet's surface, they're not designed to pinpoint humanoid sized targets. Lucky for us. Just keep moving, don't let them put you in their cross-hairs, and you'll be fine."

"Hardly seems fair to me," Caleb muttered, mostly to himself.

Ariel laughed. "Don't start thinking the 'verse has it in its mind to be fair to anyone, Caleb. If it was, the Forge wouldn't feel a need to ensure we exist."

Caleb approached the dreadnought. Small arms fire knifed through space, trying to catch him. Missiles exploded nearby, but he was far too graceful and maneuverable to be caught in the explosions. He raked the ship with his own energy beams, but the force screen protecting the ship merely shimmered at his efforts. They showed no sign of weakening at all.

And then, suddenly, they just collapsed. The cannons and missile banks running along the surface of the dreadnought grew silent. Caleb frowned. Why did that worry him?

Hangar doors and airlocks blew open, venting a rush of gas into space. A moment later, hundreds upon hundreds of Flying Fang interceptors jettied from the ship, backed up by troops in demonic looking power armor. At the same time, the huge pylons jutting from the prow of the ship, giving it the look of some monstrous, bio-mechanical squid, began to move.

What was it that Vyking had said? To utilize its black hole projector, the *Shadowstar* had to drop its shields and shut down its weapon systems. Apparently that didn't leave the ship nearly as defenseless as Caleb had hoped.

Flying Fangs swirled around Caleb, blasting away ineffectually at him with laser blasts, and a little more effectively with the autocannons hidden in the nose. The power armored soldiers moved in close; they had rifle-sized autocannons, and they sent a spray of gravity accelerated bullets straight for Caleb. But he was quick and careful and moved through space like a dolphin at sea. He knifed through space, spiraling and twisting, looping around and alongside ships, using the fighters as cover. The static mounts of their weapons insured that they couldn't fire at him if he flew on top of one, and he assumed that the Kreeghor would be at the very least reluctant to fire on one of their own just to get to him.

The first ship to disintegrate beneath him under an onslaught of friendly fire disabused him of that notion rather quickly. A hail of bullets slammed hard against his breastplate, flattening like coins against the metallic red armor. The impact should have sent him flying in the opposite direction, but with the speed at which he was flying, he simply absorbed the blow and kept moving. Underneath his helm, Caleb gritted his teeth and tried to ignore the pain.

He retaliated as best he could, using eye blasts, hammer, fists and feet. He targeted cockpits and gun mounts and the belt feeds of the power armors' main weapons, depriving them of attack modes or pilots. He didn't have the time or the patience to destroy any of them. Caleb simply wanted to get to the *Shadowstar* itself, preferably alive if not whole. As he fought his way to the dreadnought, he tried to keep the pylons in sight. They were nearing full expansion and a strange light emanated from the *Shadowstar*. Caleb saw a kind of distortion effect, somewhat like waves of heat rising into desert air, envelop the *Shadowstar*.

It was beginning. How long did they have to stop it? How long before the *Shadowstar* built to critical mass and created a black hole in the middle of the battle, killing the Cosmo-Knights, the Kreeghor, and Orak?

Orak.

Crap.

Caleb tongued the comm he always wore around his neck. There was enough air trapped between his armor and his body for him to converse, even in space. "Sam, you have to get clear."

The comm crackled and Orak's normal voice, unenhanced by the armor she wore, echoed in Caleb's ears. "We've almost got this Berserker clipped, Caleb. She's listing hard and her force screens are getting flickery. I'm tracking three hundred Flying Fangs coming to reinforce, but I think I can punch through them and get to you."

"That's rather selfless of you, but it's likely to get you all killed. Make a run for it."

There was a momentary pause. "I'm not leaving you behind, Caleb."

Caleb felt a burst of bullets shred his left leg. The armor crumpled, and he grunted as the bullets passed through his thigh. "Not a very mercenary attitude, Sam."

"What can I say? You're growing on me, Caleb."

Caleb would have smiled, if not for the crippling pain in his leg. He threw his hammer at the armored soldier who had shot him. The weighted mass of the hammer smashed into the armor's helm, cracking it open and sending the trooper spinning through space.

The *Shadowstar's* distortion effect was growing. The pylons appeared to be in place, locked in position. For a moment, Caleb wished he could communicate with Ariel or Vyking as easily as he did with Orak. But even the soundless language the Cosmo-Knights used in space had its limits; out of sight, the others were also out of mind. He had no idea if they were as hard pressed as he was, whether they had broken through the Kreeghor line and reached the ship, or even if any of them were still alive.

"I appreciate the sentiment," Caleb told Orak, "but I'd appreciate some self-preservation a great deal more. Get clear. If we fall here, someone has to get word to the CCW."

A bright light blossomed in the far distance, and for a heartbeat Caleb thought it was the black hole coming to life. But then he realized it was the Berserker exploding in a rain of fire. "Now's your chance, Sam. Retreat."

Further conversation proved impossible, as a huge armored mass slammed into Caleb from behind. Caleb was knocked forward but twisted about, unleashing an energy blast even as his eyes fell upon his attacker. It was another power armored



trooper, but much larger than the others, with a sinuous, crouching posture that exposed a massive, humped back and placed the head near the center of the chest. A heavy gun and two sharp blades hung from each arm. It was painted a dark crimson and a deep black, almost a monstrous mirror of Caleb's own armor.

A deep, sibilant voice issued from Caleb's comm. It was the figure in the stylized armor, a Kreeghor without doubt. "No one escapes today, Knight. Everyone dies."

The fighters and other armored troops fell back, clearing the area between Caleb and the Kreeghor. Behind the Kreeghor, Caleb saw a flickering energy screen begin to form between the outstretched pylons.

"You're the high muckety-muck of this operation, aren't you?" Caleb realized. "You're the guy they sent out to kill whole solar systems. How many people have already died thanks to you?"

"Not enough," the Kreeghor said with a growl. "I am more than the mere commander here, Knight. The *Shadowstar* is my invention, my gift to the Empire."

"Cosmic genocide is a 'gift'? You're insane." As he spoke, Caleb eyed the powerful looking armor, searching for weak points. The weapons were mounted on the forearms, the joints less heavily armored than the chest and head. The head itself was a small target, but centrally located, and a narrow visor allowed the pilot to see. If Caleb could crack that open, the environment would take care of the Kreeghor for him. Maybe Caleb would have a chance to knock out one of those pylons, halt the process, and save the day.

Maybe.

The Kreeghor sprang at Caleb, moving a lot faster than something of that size should have been able to move, and slashed at him with the forearm blades. They slashed across his midsection, but the armor held. Caleb spun the hammer between them and clipped the side of the Kreeghor's head. Antennae crumpled, but the helm held. The Kreeghor followed up with more slashes and a close burst of the autocannon on his left arm.

Caleb looked at the gun hard, channeling the power of the Forge through the lenses of his eyes, and the weapon melted to slag. The Kreeghor twitched away, his left forearm glowing hotly. Caleb slammed him across the brow again with the hammer. The Kreeghor howled in Caleb's comm and drifted away.

Caleb was about to drop the final blow, with enough strength to split the helmet open, when he suddenly felt his limbs grow heavy. Too heavy to move. He turned his neck with considerable effort. His blood turned cold as his eyes fell upon the shimmering field of pure black hanging in space before the *Shadowstar*. A huge pit of emptiness, where once a field of stars had winked in the dark. The edges of the blackness swirled, sucking in light and heat and mass. Already, flying fangs and armored troopers were being sucked inexorably closer to the field.

Caleb felt the pull himself. Curiously, the dreadnought hung motionless. Caleb couldn't see the K!ozn ship at all. He hoped Orak had escaped, but the ship could just as easily be obscured by the black hole.

Pain exploded across Caleb's senses as the Kreeghor took advantage of his reverie to attack. The right forearm blades sank into Caleb's shoulder. He felt them cleave through flesh and grind between his bones. The other hand came up to wrap around Caleb's head and twist it away, to keep him from looking directly at his attacker or using his eyebeams. The impact also negated whatever concentration had kept Caleb stabilized. He felt himself begin to drift towards the black hole, still connected to the Kreeghor.

"I go to Hell," the Kreeghor growled, "but I take comfort that I take one of the hated Forge-spawn with me and with the knowledge that the *Shadowstar* will outlive me. My name shall live forever in the annals of the Kreeghor race, long after the Empire has expanded to encompass the whole of the Three Galaxies."

"You talk too much," Caleb said. He loosed his eyebeams anyway, shearing off the hand holding his head in place. He was only mildly disappointed to see wires spark. The limb was part of the armor, and already the armor's defenses were sealing the wrist port in order to maintain its integrity. Not that it mattered. Not anymore.

The two of them spun wildly in space, their own momentum warring with the inexorable pull of the black hole. Caleb tried to pull away from the Kreeghor's embrace, but the blades were embedded deep within his shoulder. The Kreeghor battered Caleb's head and shoulders with the stump of his left hand. It must have taken incredible strength to do, because Caleb could barely move.

Over the Kreeghor's spiked shoulder armor, Caleb could see the *Shadowstar*, spinning slowly as Caleb's perspective changed. The rear of the dreadnought suddenly blossomed with flame as the engines exploded in a shower of megasteel and quickly snuffed out flame.

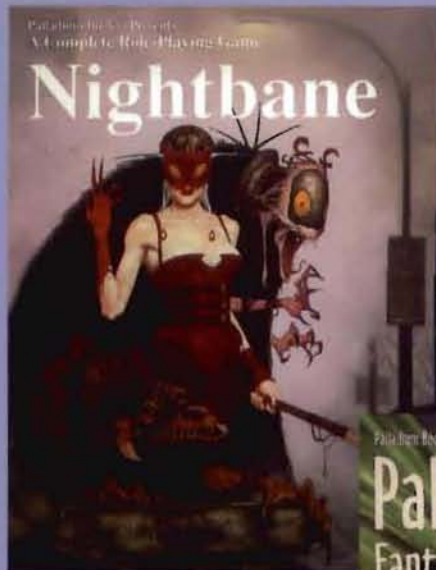
The Kreeghor groaned. "The inertial drive."

Caleb started to laugh. Ariel, or maybe Vyking, had gotten through after all. They had done in the *Shadowstar*, quite ably. Largely by accident, Caleb had kept the Kreeghor occupied while the others saved the day. "Looks like you lose after all. You don't get your name in the history books, or even the funny pages."

They continued to drift towards the black hole, moving more quickly as the pull upon them increased. But now the *Shadowstar* itself followed them. The stress of the black hole's gravity began to show; pylons cracked and split. Armor plating crumpled. The huge, horned crustacean began to break apart.

Caleb himself felt enormous pressure bearing down upon him. His muscles felt drawn tight, and a dull ache formed in his head, as though a vice were squeezing against his temples. He knew the end was coming soon, and he decided to face it directly. He gripped the Kreeghor hard and aimed himself towards the black hole. No longer trying vainly to fight it, he would fly straight down its gullet.

In a blast of crimson light, Caleb Vulcan, Earth-born Knight of the Cosmic Forge, went to meet his fate.



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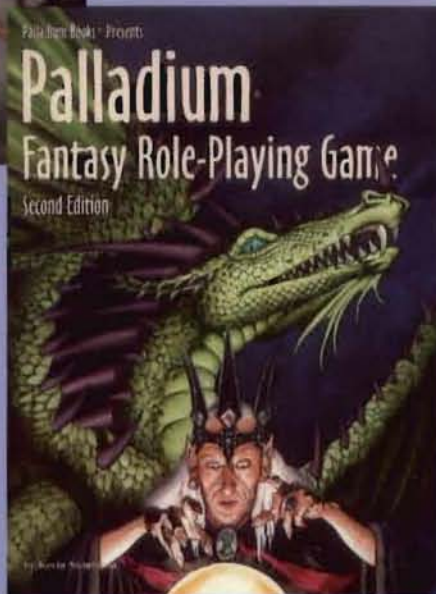
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