

The Rifts® RPG – Celebrating 25 Years of New Dimensions in Role-Playing

Palladium Books® Presents:

THE

RIFTER®

Your Guide to the Megaverse®



Inside this 96 page sourcebook...

Heroes Unlimited™ – super beings & adventure

Rifts® – Clean, Part One, short story

Rifts® – Arenas of Atlantis

Dead Reign® – Tampa Bay

Chaos Earth® – New Mexico

After the Bomb® – mutants and setting

Coming attractions, news, & more.

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The fictional worlds of Palladium Books® are violent, deadly and filled with supernatural monsters. Other-dimensional beings, often referred to as “demons,” torment, stalk and prey on humans. Other alien life forms, monsters, gods and demigods, as well as magic, insanity, and war are all elements in these books.

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 69

Your Guide to the Palladium Megaverse®!

PDF Edition – September 2016

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The slogan “A Megaverse of adventure – limited only by your imagination,” RPG Tactics, and titles and names such as Bizantium and the Northern Islands, Armageddon Unlimited, Aliens Unlimited, Arzno, Atorian Empire, ARCHIE-3, Beyond Arcanum, Beyond the Supernatural, BTS-2, Brodkil, Biomancy, Biomancer, Bio-Wizardry, ‘Burbs, ‘Borg, ‘Bot, Dimensional Outbreak, Dinosaur Swamp, Dyval, Elf-Dwarf War, Heroes Unlimited, I.S.P., Land of the Damned, Lazlo, Victor Lazlo, Lazlo Agency, Lazlo Society, Palladium of Desires, C.A.M.E.L.O.T., Chi-Town, CS, Coalition States, Cosmo-Knight, Crazy, Cyber-Knight, D-Bee, Dark Day, Dead Boy, Doc Reid, Dog Boy, Dog Pack, Dweomer, Emperor Prosek, Erin Tarn, Fadetown, Free Quebec, Gadgets Unlimited, Gargoyle Empire, Glitter Boy, Gramercy Island, Hardware Unlimited, Heroes of the Megaverse, Heroes Unlimited, HU2, Juicer, Ley Line Walker, M.D.C., Mechanoid Space, Mega-Damage, Mega-Hero, Megaversal, MercTown, Minion War, Morpheus, Mutant Underground, Mysteries of Magic, Merc Ops, Naruni, Naruni Enterprises, NEMA, Ninjas & Superspies, NGR, Northern Gun, The Nursery, P.P.E., Powers Unlimited, Psi-Stalker, Psyscape, SAMAS, S.D.C., Shifter, Siege on Tolkeen, Skelebot, Skraypers, Sorcerer’s Forge, Splugorth, Splynnecryth, Splynn, Techno-Wizard, Temporal Magic, Temporal Wizard, Three Galaxies, Tome Grotesque, Triax, Vampire Kingdoms, Warpath: Urban Jungle, Void Runners, Wilk’s, Wolfen, Wolfen Wars, Wormwood, Wulfen, Xiticix, and other names, titles, slogans, and the likenesses of characters are trademarks owned by Kevin Siembieda and Palladium Books Inc.

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Palladium Books® Presents:

THE RIFTER® #69

BRANDT - 97

Sourcebook and Guide to the Palladium Megaverse®

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concepts and Megaverse® created by **Kevin Siembieda**.

Special Thanks to all our contributors, writers and artists this issue, especially new contributors. Our apologies to anybody who may have gotten accidentally left out or their name misspelled.

– *Kevin Siembieda, 2015*

Contents – The Rifter® #69 – Winter, 2015

Page 6 – Art for the cover of The Rifter® #70

This issue's Page Six Art is the pencil sketch (and finished cover inset) for the cover for **The Rifter® #70**. The artist is *Charles Walton II*, who kicked out a high-flying aerial chase between a CS SAMAS and an angry dragon. The question is, did this SAMAS pilot bite off more than he can chew, or is he leading that dragon into an ambush?

Page 7 – From the Desk of Kevin Siembieda

Publisher Kevin Siembieda talks about **The Rifter®**, the things he loves about it and how you can contribute to it. You see, one of the things all of us like about **The Rifter®** is that it gives ordinary fans a place to flex their writing muscles, share their characters, adventures, and gaming techniques with other gamers via this publication. It also gives us a way to find and try out new writers. To make things easy for you, we've even included the Unsolicited Manuscript Agreement form used by both writers and artists. And we are always looking for new artists, too.

Page 9 – Unsolicited Manuscript Agreement form.

Page 10 – Palladium News

This issue has a lot of news. **Robotech® RPG Tactics™** Wave One products are now available in stores throughout the USA, Canada, European Union, Australia and New Zealand, **Bizantium and the Northern Islands™**, the first book for Palladium Fantasy RPG® in much too long, is out and in stores, as well as this issue of **The Rifter®**, and several other books are in full production. The latter includes the next issue of **The Rifter®**, **Robotech®: Expeditionary Force Marines™**, and **Chaos Earth® Resurrection™**, while other titles are in development.

Conventions are a big part of the news: *AdeptiCon*, *Pengui-Con*, *Gen Con* and especially the **Palladium Open House – May 14-18, 2015**.

Jolly Blackburn, the creator of **Knights of the Dinner Table®**, is one of our special guests at the Open House, but he is just one of 40+ Palladium Creators (including staff) at the 2015 POH. And in the intimate setting of the Palladium warehouse, you can meet and chat with them all. If you live in the area, do not miss coming to the POH, even if it's just for a day or two.

Page 13 – UPDATE: 2015 Palladium Open House

The Palladium Open House is like a giant, four day family reunion filled with Palladium creators and fans from around the world. Many of the games are run by the very people who create them. Meet the Palladium staff and 40-50 other Palladium artists, writers, editors, Rifter® contributors, etc. **Important:** You MUST reserve your *hotel rooms* by April 1, 2015 to get the special "Palladium Group" price. Come hang with all of us and make memories you'll never forget.

Page 15 – Coming Attractions

New books are out with more quick to follow. Many favorite titles are back in print, like **Chaos Earth® Rise of Magic**, **Sp Lynn Dimensional Market™** and **Rifts® Book of Magic**.

Learn what new books are coming your way, and be advised that **Robotech® RPG Tactics™** Wave One products are in stores around the world. This game is epic and Palladium Books has so much more planned for it. And if you are a fan of Palladium Fantasy, you have to check out **Bizantium and the Northern Islands™**.

Page 23 – Rifter® Super-Subscription Offer #342015 – Offer Ends April 30, 2015

The online offer happened throughout February, as always, but we don't want any of our loyal subscribers to miss out. We know some of you don't have Internet access and wait till this offer is announced in the pages of **The Rifter®**. Well, here it is, and it's a great deal. Offer #342015 ends April 30, 2015.

Page 24 – Rifts® Arenas of Atlantis™

– Optional Source Material for Rifts®

First time contributor, *Will Erwin*, presents an inside look at how the arenas of the Splugorth's Atlantis are managed and run. In addition to background information and details, there are plenty of adventure ideas too.

Page 25 – Running the Show and Setting the Stage

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Page 28 – Arena Events

Page 29 – The Maze: A Large Arena Event

Page 30 – The Drowning Mountain Event

Page 31 – Aftermath

Artwork by *Amy L. Ashbaugh*.

Page 32 – The Long Gull Islands

– Optional source material for After the Bomb®

Michael J. Osborne presents a unique **After the Bomb®** setting to explore and enjoy new adventures. Long Island, Nantucket and other areas in the State of New York after the cataclysm. New mutants and the background, history and people behind these refuges for mutants and survivors.

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Artwork by *Benjamin Rodriguez*

Page 50 – Heroic Hot Spots™

– Optional NPCs and adventure ideas for Heroes

Unlimited™ in the Century Station™ city setting

The prodigious *Glen Evans* gives us new people, places and hot spots in the District of Century Station for heroic adventures.

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Page 56 – Brisby Flats

Page 57 – Diego Verde

Page 60 – Century Station Police Dept.

Page 61 – Cyberworks Network Tank

Artwork by *Michael Mumah*.

Page 64 – Living through the Great Cataclysm,

one day at a time™

– Optional source material for Rifts® Chaos Earth®

Daniel Frederick presents the events of the Great Cataclysm and the Coming of the Rifts in a different part of the country – *New Mexico*. It is a compelling story that should provide plenty of fodder for adventure.

Page 72 – Map and Notable Cities.

Artwork by *Charles Walton II*.

Page 76 – Dead Reign® Tampa Bay

– Optional source material for Dead Reign®

Eric Sturm takes a look at the Zombie Apocalypse in the Tampa Bay, Florida area, taking note of some key locations good for adventure ideas.

Page 79 – Clean, A story for Rifts®

Irvin Jackson give us a riveting story of survival and adventure around the fortified city of Chi-Town. Life in the ‘Burbs, especially the Old Town ‘Burbs, may be better than out in the wilderness, but it’s no bed of roses. Read on.

Artwork by *Amy L. Ashbaugh*

The Theme for Issue 69

The theme of **The Rifter® #69** is places and people, but mostly places and the adventure that awaits those looking for it. Every issue of **The Rifter®** in 2015 shall feature a cover and adventure/source material to celebrate the **25th Anniversary of Rifts®**. Enjoy.

The Rifter® Needs You

We need new writers and artists to fill the next few decades of **The Rifter®**. You do not need to be a professional writer to contribute to **The Rifter®**. This publication is like a “fanzine,” written by fans for fans. A forum in which gamers just like *you* can submit articles, G.M. advice, player tips, house rules, adventures, new magic, new psionics, new super abilities, monsters,

villains, high-tech weapons, vehicles, power armor, short works of fiction and more. So think about writing up something short (even something as small as 4-6 pages). Newcomers and regular contributors are always welcome.

The Rifter® needs new material, especially when it comes to adventures and source material, for *all* of our game lines, especially *Rifts®*, *Chaos Earth®*, *Palladium Fantasy RPG®*, *Heroes Unlimited™*, *Ninjas and Superspies™*, *Beyond the Supernatural™*, *Dead Reign®*, *Splicers®* and *Nightbane®*.

Pay is lousy, fame is dubious, but you get to share your ideas and adventures with fellow gamers and get four free copies to show to your friends and family.

The Cover

Every 2015 cover of **The Rifter®** celebrates the 25th Anniversary of *Rifts®*. This cover is by **Madman Mike Leonard** and depicts an eclectic adventuring group.

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 – Palladium Online

The Rifter® #70

The Rifter® #70, Spring issue will present a nice variety of new source material for *Rifts®* and other Palladium RPG settings.

- Cover by **Charles Walton II**.
- Source material for *Rifts®*.
- Clean, Part Two, for *Rifts®*.
- Tips for Game Masters.
- Source material for two or more other settings.
- News, coming attractions and much more.
- And maybe YOUR submission. Send us something and see if you get published.

Bringing you infinite possibilities

limited only by your imagination™

Celebrating 25 years of Rifts®



NOTYF-J

From the Desk of Kevin Siembieda

I'm going to talk about **The Rifter®** in this editorial, and cover new releases and other goings-on in *News* and *Coming Attractions*.

Welcome to the Winter issue of **The Rifter®**. And yes, you are probably receiving it a week after the official start of Spring. Wayne and company continue to struggle to get issues of **The Rifter®** out on time. Our own workloads are so demanding it has been tough on us to hit a regular release schedule. However, because of the lateness, Wayne Smith and I have been trying to make every issue a standout, with material that should spark your imaginations and bring a smile to your faces. I think we've done that a great deal. I think most of **The Rifters®** in recent years have been pretty darn amazing.

The other thing I love about **The Rifter®** is that most of the material can be easily adapted to *any* of Palladium's world settings. In many cases a Game Master can just drop the material right into his game with little to no effort. Monsters, heroes, villains, magic, special abilities, and even settings and adventures designed specifically for one game setting can be quickly modified for use in many others. I also love that most of the articles and source material are written by Palladium *fans* – ordinary gamers, giving them a louder voice and another medium with which to share their ideas with the Palladium gaming community. These are gamers just like you sharing their ideas, characters and adventures so that you might enjoy the same fun they've experienced in their own games. One more way to connect with the Palladium family beyond the Internet.

The Rifter® #70 already in development

If all goes well, subscribers will be seeing **The Rifter® #70** about 6 weeks after they get this one, as we try to get back on track with our schedule. The cover for **The Rifter® #70** is by *Charles Walton II* and is already completely done. It's the artwork shown on Page 6. Talk about dynamic. Nice work, Chuck.

I have also sent out requests to many of Palladium's freelance writers and Game Masters to contribute some source material to future issues of **The Rifter®**. You'll definitely see some of that in **The Rifter® #70**. Particularly articles about running games, building adventures, and other aspects of role-playing. You just don't see that much anymore, and I thought seeing how other Game Masters approach and handle running and playing RPGs would be valuable information. We have a lot of good stuff planned for **The Rifter®**, new book releases, games and our on-line presence.

Maybe you should contribute to The Rifter®?

By the way, that means we are always looking for new material from gamers like you. Adventures, location settings (towns, cities, wilderness, space settings, alien worlds, etc.), super humans, heroes, villains, monsters, robots, weapons, gear, powers, and articles about gaming – you know, how to build worlds, how to develop ideas, how to develop stories, how to role-play, and so on. In fact, I'd love to see more adventures and articles about the "art of role-playing." Oh, and contributions do not have to be big. We're happy to receive a submission that is only 4-12 pages long.

So think about it and give us a try. Pay is lousy, but you see your name in print, get four free copies of the book, and you get to share your ideas and game materials with fellow gamers around the world. Pretty cool.

How to Contribute to The Rifter®

It's easy. First, take that step to write and submit your material. Start small. Send in that 4-12 page submission. Not a 30 page or 60 page submission. In fact, we prefer submissions that are under 40 pages, because it lets us include more contributors every issue. Big submissions often have to be divided and published over 2-3 issues.

Don't be scared to submit an article or source material. Trust your gut, write for gamers, have fun and take a chance. The worst that can happen is your work does not see print. You are not going to embarrass yourself. It takes guts to write anything in the first place, let alone submit it for publishing consideration. We know that, and appreciate your effort. I'm just inviting you to share some of your ideas, tips and adventures with the Palladium Family.

Second, don't over-think it. Have fun with the material. Write as if you were writing this for your own gaming group.

Third, keep it simple and to the point. And don't try to "be a writer." What I mean is, be yourself. Get the ideas across clearly and concisely. Don't try to use fancy words you wouldn't normally use. Don't try to be someone who you are not. Be yourself and have fun with the submission.

Fourth, send all submissions in a digital format. That means send it as an attachment in an email to rftersub@palladiumbooks.com – or on a thumb drive or CD in the mail. We only accept *digital submissions*. Sorry.

Fifth, please no special formatting. Submit in Microsoft Word, Rich Text Format, or WordPerfect, in 11 or 12 point type. We recommend Ariel, Courier New, or Times New Roman for a font; nothing weird. *No PDFs*. PLEASE do NOT waste your time making it look "pretty" or like the pages from a printed book, with columns and different sized headlines or any of the other print formatting you see in books. WE TAKE IT ALL OUT. So you are a) wasting your time, and b) making us do more work. (Btw, this applies to ALL submissions.)

Yes, please follow the way we do stat blocks and present information. Follow the example of the more recent book releases of the past few years, not the older titles. Include **bolds** and underlines and *italics*, but that's it. PALLADIUM BOOKS will format everything when we typeset and layout the book.

Sixth, we encourage you to make and include any applicable **maps**, but not artwork. Palladium will assign artists to every job. If you are a writer *and an artist*, you may, at your own risk and expenditure of time, submit artwork with your submission. Just don't be angry or disappointed if we do NOT use it. **Note:** There have been a number of times that we have used the artwork submitted by a writer (when they are the same person), but that is more of the exception than the rule. Likewise, do not have your girlfriend, boyfriend, or pal do art for your article, because it is not likely to be used. Artists should submit art separate of any writing submission.

Seventh, ALL submissions are considered “unsolicited” and made completely on “speculation.” That means whatever amount of time you spend on your submission – hours, days or months – there is NO guarantee Palladium Books will publish it, there are no kill fees, and no pay unless we decide to actually publish your work. This is another reason we suggest “small” articles, 6-12 pages long, especially at first. That way you have not spent a month or three of your life on something that may never see print.

Those of you who want to write an entire World Book or sourcebook, submit smaller articles to **The Rifter®** first. Seriously. Why? For the same reason above: you don’t spend months or a year of your life writing a big book that never sees print for any number of reasons. If you think you are that good that you should write an entire book, great, wow us with 3-4 submissions to **The Rifter®** first, and after they are published, then propose a full book to us and see what we say.

Eighth, fill out, sign and mail to us an Unsolicited Manuscript Agreement Form (included in this issue on page 9 for your convenience, and also found on the Palladium website). **Note:** Palladium will NOT look at a manuscript unless we have this signed agreement in our hands.

Ninth, pay is only \$10 per printed page of “text,” but as noted earlier, you see your name in print, get four free copies of the book, you catch our attention, and you get to share your ideas and game materials with fellow gamers around the world. Besides, half this stuff should be things you’ve already done for your own games, you’re just cleaning it up and making it presentable for publication.

Tenth, editing and changes will be made. Palladium reserves the right to edit, change, delete, expand, and combine submissions in its sole discretion, any way it deems necessary or desirable. In short, we may delete, change and rewrite some or all of your submission for publication. You need to know and accept that going in. If you don’t want any of your writing changed, that’s cool, but please do NOT submit it to Palladium Books for publication. That said, most people are professional enough to know their work is likely to be “modified” in some way for publication.

Eleventh, getting accepted. If Wayne likes what he sees, you get an agreement in the mail to sign, and your work gets published. Of course, Palladium Books owns all rights to these derivative works. Make sure you include all your contact info with the submission (your real name, street address, telephone number and email address).

So give it some thought, write something up and send it in.

Artist Submissions

We have a smaller need for new artists, as we have had a pretty awesome group for some years now. However, we are always looking for new talent, especially guys and gals who can draw mecha and machines.

The artist submission process is quick and easier. Fill out an unsolicited manuscript form, and send it to Palladium along with 8-12 samples of your art. That’s 8-12 different images/illustrations, sent as photocopies, on a disk or thumb drive or as an email with attachments. DO NOT send us original, physical artwork. ALSO please include a link to your website or Deviant Art page where we can see more of your artwork.

Submitting Entire Books

If you have a burning desire to submit an entire book manuscript, all of the above applies. HOWEVER, we strongly encourage writers to submit material to **The Rifter®** first. It gives us a good idea of your writing quality and your personality. And honestly, it helps us decide whether we think you can handle tackling a bigger project. As noted above, we suggest you submit 2-4 articles/source material/adventures to **The Rifter®** and see if you get accepted there first, before taking on an entire book. Writing even a small, 64 page sourcebook can take months, especially if you are writing after you get home from your “real job” or on weekends. That’s a big commitment, and you don’t want to spend all that time writing only to be rejected. Our experience has been that less than 10% of book submissions see publication.

The Rifter® Super-Subscription Offer

We ran **The Rifter® Super-Subscription Offer** online from the end of January til the end of February as is traditional. In fact, it was one of the most successful Rifter® Super-Subscription drives ever, so we must be doing something right with **The Rifter®**. That’s cool, but we also realize that some of our subscribers do NOT have Internet access and knew nothing about the subscription drive special. Normally, it appears in the Winter issue of **The Rifter** – that would be “this” issue! Don’t worry, we’ve got your back.

We don’t want any of our loyal subscribers to miss out on this year’s awesome offer of FREE gifts when you re-subscribe, just because Palladium was so late in getting this issue out. As a result, we are extending that offer to our regular subscribers and new people who see this print offer inside this issue (but you need to act fast, offer is only good till the end of April).

See **The Rifter® Super-Subscription Offer** elsewhere in this issue for complete details on the cost and selection of FREE gifts available (all you pay for is the shipping cost of the free gift). The long and the short of it is, include the following words in the Memo section of your check: **“Rifter Subscription 342015”** and indicate which gift selection you want, and you’ll get the free gift shipped right out to you. This applies to those of you who are *re-subscribing* AND for those of you who pick up **The Rifter®** at a store, convention or from a friend and would like to subscribe to get one of the FREE gift items. So old and new subscribers are welcome.

This offer only lasts till April 30, 2015, and is only being offered in the pages of **The Rifter®**. Place your order soon.

A few other things . . .

New releases are coming. The rest of you enjoy the many new game products coming out in the months ahead. They are all pretty awesome if we do say so ourselves. (Hey, we’re excited about the books coming out.) By the time you read this, **Bizantium and the Northern Islands™** for **Palladium Fantasy®** will be hitting store shelves along with this issue of **The Rifter®**, **Robotech® RPG Tactics™** is hitting store shelves around the globe, and I’m working on the **Robotech® Marines Sourcebook** and **Chaos Earth® Resurrection™** while coordinating several other new releases and all kinds of plans for **Robotech® RPG Tactics™**.

UNSOLICITED MANUSCRIPT, IDEA, AND ARTWORK AGREEMENT

Every week, Palladium Books, Inc. (“Palladium”), receives a number of unsolicited manuscripts, Rifter® submissions, and/or artwork. It is Palladium’s policy not to accept these works unless the person submitting them agrees to the terms stated in this agreement (below).

By signing this Agreement, you agree that Palladium is not in any position of confidential trust with you. You also agree to release and hold harmless Palladium, its agents and employees, against any claim of infringement of copyright rights, trademark rights, or other intellectual property rights in any way related to your submission. By way of example, but not limitation, Palladium’s receipt and review of your materials does not prevent Palladium from developing or publishing any similar work. Nor does Palladium become an agent of fiduciary of yours relative to these works.

You also agree that you will not submit these works to any other person, nor to allow their publication by any person other than Palladium until Palladium advises you that your works have been rejected if, indeed, Palladium ever does reject your works.

In addition, if Palladium ever accepts your works for publication, you will agree to assign any and all copyright, trademark and other intellectual property rights to Palladium, in exchange for Palladium’s standard payment.

If you wish Palladium to consider your submission on the terms stated above, please sign and return a copy of this document.

In any case, we thank you for your interest in Palladium, and wish you the best in your future endeavors.

/s/ W. Smith

Wayne Smith
Rifter Editor
Palladium Books®, Inc.

Submitter/Author/Artist

Name (Please Print): _____

Signature: _____ Dated: _____/_____/_____

Mailing Address: _____

Phone Number: _____

Email Address: _____

Website/Deviant Art Page: _____

Please come to the *Palladium Open House* – May 14-17, 2015 – it is going to be awesome. Jolly Blackburn will be there, Ramon K. Perez hopes to be there for at least a couple days, and dozens of Palladium creators, original art, rare collectibles, and lots of gaming and fun will be present for your enjoyment. I hate to say this (and I have said it before), but I think this may really be the last Open House. Sorry to say it, but we're going to make it an event to remember.

Read on for a lot of news and updates.

– With Appreciation – Kevin Siembieda, March 2015

Palladium News

By Kevin Siembieda, the guy who should know



Robotech® RPG Tactics™

Available around the globe

Now available in the USA, Canada, European Union, Australia and New Zealand! With product being shipped to (and already in the hands of most of) Palladium's Kickstarter backers around the globe, we can now ship to customers and retailers who want this dynamic game. The game pieces are detailed and gorgeous, the game play fast and fun. And most important to Robotech® fans around the world, it captures the look and feel of the Robotech® television series we all know and love.

Plus we are planning a ton of support for the game line. Wave Two game pieces, other game pieces to expand the scope of the game, additional and advanced rules, game scenarios, and much more. Like what? Like all kinds of bonus material we'll be offering for free online. We are behind this fabulous game 100% and have years worth of ideas and material for the **Robotech® RPG Tactics™** game line. The basic **Robotech® RPG Tactics™** game and expansion packs are just the beginning of something HUGE. Much more to come.

New for Palladium Fantasy RPG®

Bizantium and the Northern Islands™

Bizantium and the Northern Islands™ is hitting store shelves the same time as **The Rifter® #69**. If you see one, the other should also be on the shelf.



The **Bizantium** sourcebook is epic in scope, reveals never before known history and details about Bizantium and the Northern Islands, the Shadow Coast colonies, and the Northern Sea. The new continent of the *Great Ice Shelf* is revealed for the first time as are the legendary monsters known as *the Iceborn* – cannibals who wield Necromancy and travel across the Icy Ocean upon the animated corpses of dead sea serpents turned into monstrous warships. And that's just the tip of the iceberg. Bizantium presents new monsters and animals, new O.C.C.s, weapons, ships, ancient ruins, forgotten gods, magic relics and all kinds of ideas for adventures.

Books for many game lines in 2015

We've heard your requests to support Palladium's many game lines and we are doing just that. **Bizantium™** for Palladium Fantasy is just the first. In no exact order, coming this Spring, Summer and Fall: **Robotech®: Expeditionary Force Marines™**, **Chaos Earth® Resurrection**, **Chaos Earth® First Responders**, **The Rifter®**, sourcebooks for **Splicers®**, **Dead Reign®**, **Beyond the Supernatural™**, **Palladium Fantasy®**, and a whole lot more for **Robotech® RPG Tactics™**. As well as **Rifts® Heroes of Humanity™**, **Rifts® The Disavowed™**, **Rifts® Secrets of Atlantis™**, and other **Rifts®** titles. If we haven't mentioned a specific title or game line you are looking forward to, it does NOT mean it is forgotten or not coming out. We can only talk about so much at a time, and this is our current focus.

We need your support

Support is a two-way street. If you want to see more titles for all of Palladium's game lines on a regular basis, we need to see sales to support them. That's where you come in. Please show your support with purchases of these new releases (and back stock). More than that, please be vocal about your excitement for new releases and your favorite game lines. Spread the word about Palladium Books, its game system, new releases and how much you enjoy them. Talk about them online, post a photo and some comments on Facebook and all over the web, recommend them to your gaming friends and to your favorite game store. Make sure you let stores know you want them to carry our product lines, and let us know if your store is having trouble getting Palladium product.

We continue to get reports that some gamers (too many) don't seem to know Palladium Books survived the *Crisis of Treachery* way back when. We are dismayed to hear from fans and Game Masters running events at conventions and stores that too many people still think Palladium went out of business in 2006-2008. Grrrr. How can this be? Because the 2006 *Crisis of Treachery* and how Palladium Books was in danger of going out business became Front Page news that EVERYONE heard about. However, Palladium's survival was not headline news, so many gamers assume, incorrectly, that we went out of business 8-10 years ago! People are surprised and happy when they

learn we survived, but too many don't know it. The release of a high-profile game like **Robotech® RPG Tactics™** helps, but we still need you, our thousands of fans, to help get the word out about our games.

Palladium is making a big push with advertising where we can and thanks to our **Megaversal Ambassadors**, we have a wide range of gaming events, demos and tournaments planned throughout the year. That's hundreds and hundreds of events. Heck, there will be 100 at the Palladium Open House, 50+ at Gen Con, and hundreds more across the USA and Canada. *But we still need YOU to help us get the word out.* And that includes ALL our games. Don't assume that because of the Kickstarter and all the chatter online about **Robotech® RPG Tactics™** that everyone knows about this awesome game or that they should be checking it out, because it is soooo much fun to play, and we have so much planned for it. We need YOU to help us get out the positive word.

PLEASE help us make some noise by talking up exciting, new releases and game lines like **Bizantium and the Northern Islands**, **Robotech®: Expeditionary Force Marines™**, new **Rifts®** books, **Chaos Earth®**, **Heroes Unlimited**, **Palladium Fantasy®**, **Nightbane®**, **Robotech® RPG Tactics™ (RRT)**, and **RRT** and other Palladium gaming events at conventions and stores. Do not underestimate the power of a grassroots campaign.

Retailers, can't get Palladium products? Contact Palladium Books and we'll help

Retailers, we are hearing from a disturbing number of you that you want Palladium products, but are having trouble getting them from some of our distributors. That you are being told our products, sometimes even brand new releases, are sold out and not available. If that has been happening to you, please contact Palladium Books directly (734-721-2903) and we will help you get our products.

FYI: When Palladium releases a new title we always make sure we have an anticipated *one year supply* printed, and usually reprint quickly when a book sells out. That means 96-98% of Palladium's entire game line is sitting in our warehouse at any given moment. Right now you can order as many **Robotech® RPG Tactics™**, **Rifts®**, **Palladium Fantasy RPG®**, **Robotech®**, **Dead Reign®**, **Nightbane®**, **Heroes Unlimited™** and all the rest of our titles as you may want and we can provide them. If you are being told otherwise, call the Palladium office and we'll make sure you get the products you need. Call Palladium at 734-721-2903 or send an email to distrib@palladiumbooks.com.

Gamers, you can help again by letting your local stores know they can call us any time to ask questions about products, availability and to get assistance in getting our products!

Retailers – Contact Palladium if you want demos run in your store

Palladium has a growing list of volunteer demo teams and Game Masters who can run demos for **Robotech® RPG Tactics™** and **many of our role-playing game lines**. We cannot accommodate every store request, but we can for many. Want to do a special promotion? Contact Palladium to see if we can help. Let

us help you sell our games! Call the Palladium office at 734-721-2903 or send us an email at ambassadors@palladiumbooks.com.

Gamers, you can help again by letting your local stores know that if they contact us, we may be able to arrange a gaming event or special promotions.

AdeptiCon – March 19-22, 2015

This issue of **The Rifter®** will have shipped after AdeptiCon, but we hope we had the chance to meet some of you there. This is Palladium's first AdeptiCon, so we don't know exactly what to expect, but anticipate a fun and exciting weekend. Palladium has a few tables and we'll be bringing all **Robotech® RPG Tactics™** products and a selection of other game titles to sell. We also contributed to the *AdeptiCon Swag Bag* and *charity auction*. I think we're most excited about the big **Robotech® RPG Tactics™ Tournament – Battle for Macross Island** that is being run by *Kyle Toth* at the convention. It sounds fantastic. Thanks Kyle, we appreciate all your hard work.

PenguiCon – April 24, 25 & 26, 2015

– Southfield, Michigan

Palladium has added PenguiCon to its convention schedule – this April. We'll be there selling **Robotech® RPG Tactics™**, our latest book releases and other select RPG titles. Chuck Walton will be present selling original art and prints too. And since the Palladium warehouse is only 30 minutes away, tell us your special wants, and we can have them there later that afternoon or evening. Hope to see some of you there.

Palladium Books at Gen Con Indy

– July 30 to August 2, 2015

- 50+ Palladium gaming events.
- Huge selection of Palladium products.
- New releases and convention special items.
- **Robotech® RPG Tactics™** products, games and demos.
- Meet Palladium artists and writers.
- Get autographs and the latest news.
- Gen Con® specials in *Coupon Book*.
- Join us for the fun.

Gen Con Indy is always a spectacle and whirlwind of fun and excitement. This year, Palladium Books will again have 50+ gaming events thanks to the *Megaversal Ambassadors* and *volunteer Game Masters*. We always bring a expansive amount of product, new releases and specialty items. We are happy to chat with gamers and sign autographs. Meet artist *Charles Walton*, writer *Brandon Aten*, writer and artist *Mike Leonard*, artist and staffer *Jeff Burke*, editor and staffer *Wayne Smith*, Palladium founder and lead game designer *Kevin Siembieda*, and other Palladium maniacs.

Meet *Knights of the Dinner Table®* Creator at the Palladium Open House – May 14-17

Jolly Blackburn, renowned game designer, writer, artist and creator of the fan favorite **Knights of the Dinner Table (KoDT)** comic – to be released as an independent movie direct to video

this summer(!) – is one of the very special guests at the **Palladium Open House**. This is one of Jolly Blackburn's few appearances in the Detroit Metro-Area. He will be accompanied by his sweet wife Barbara.

Jolly Blackburn and I have been friends for . . . gosh, it must be going on 20 years now. We met in the 1990s and Palladium Books was one of the very first companies to advertise in *Shadis Magazine*. For several years, Jolly would create a short **Knights of the Dinner Table (KoDT)** comic strip special for each issue of **The Rifter®**, until the demands on his time became too great. We have remained great friends and I am tickled for myself as much as for you, our fans, to have the opportunity to hang with this truly brilliant author and delightful human being. For those of you who don't know who *Jolly Blackburn* is, check out KoDT at the Kenzer Company website (www.kenzerco.com) and see KoDT webcomics at www.kodtweb.com.

I need to point out that Jolly and Barbara Blackburn are just two of the more than 40+ Palladium creators – artists, writers, staff, etc., you can meet at the 2015 Palladium Open House; May 14-15, in Westland, Michigan. Go to the Palladium website for more information (www.palladiumbooks.com) or call the Palladium order line (734-721-2903).

Meet 40+ Palladium Creators More than any game event ever!

Meet 40+ Palladium Creators – artists, writers, game designers staff, Rifter® contributors, Defilers and others for one of the largest such gatherings *ever*. It happens only once every few years at the **Palladium Open House – May 15-17, 2015 – Westland, Michigan**. (Plus May 14 for those attending VIP Thursday.) The event takes place at the Palladium warehouse and offices. And this may be the last Open House, so do not miss out.

And this year, *special guests* include **Jolly Blackburn**, creator of *Knights of the Dinner Table*, and *Marvel Comics' Spider-Man* artist and long-time Palladium fan favorite **Ramon K. Perez**. They are special guests, because they are old friends and allies whom we love and never get to see enough. They are special to you, because both of these men have contributed to the gaming world and Palladium Books.

Meet 40+ Palladium creators who are just as special, fun-loving and worth meeting. Writers, artists, and game designers are coming in from coast to coast, like *Amy L. Ashbaugh*, *Brandon Aten*, *Carmen Bellaire*, *Greg Diaczuk*, *Mark Dudley*, *Carl Gleba*, *Madman Mike Leonard*, *Allen Manning*, *Brian Manning*, *Mike Mumah*, *Ben Rodriguez*, *Chuck Walton II*, *Taylor White*, and many, many others. And of course, myself (Kevin Siembieda) and the Palladium staff. Get the full guest list and all the details on the Palladium website (www.palladiumbooks.com), **highlights** are presented elsewhere in this issue. Or call the Palladium office at 734-721-2903. Any of our friendly and knowledgeable staff can help you.

Price of admission covers ALL events.

Play in games run by the very people who make them, in the building where the magic happens.

Get the latest news and happenings. Get the behind the scenes lowdown on events. Ask any question. Have a blast.

Palladium Open House (POH) – Game with the Game-Makers

Whether this is the last Palladium Open House or not, we are going to make this POH amazing and special. I mean, how often do any of us get to hang out with 40+ Palladium creators or a few hundred gamers from around the globe? Only at the Palladium Open House, it happens only once every few years. (The last one was in 2012).

The Palladium Open House is always like a big family reunion or four day party. This year, we'll also be celebrating *the 25th Anniversary of Rifts®* and 34 years of gaming with Palladium Books. There have been good times and bad times, and through it all we had Palladium fans at our sides and helping out, so this POH is a celebration of YOU, our fans, as much as anything else. So if you can, come and join us for what is going to be a non-stop party and gaming extravaganza.

I will be available to chat, sign autographs, run some games, participate in panel talks and be there for YOU from morning till 11:00 PM every single day. So will the rest of the Palladium staff and most of the creators, artists, and writers from around the world!

All Palladium product in stock is available for purchase, from prints and T-shirts to books and coffee mugs. And we always have a selection of *new T-shirts* and *specialty items* available for the first time ever at the Palladium Open House. This year, there is also a wide range of *original art*, *prints* and rare, signed and out of print book titles being made available. Some of the rarest and most unique items to be offered up in the *live auction*. IN ADDITION, many of the artists and writers bring original art, prints and specialty items for sale from them individually.

It all adds up to an incredible experience.

I know I've said this about past Palladium Open Houses, but for a variety of reasons, I think this one will truly be our last. So if you can make it, even for a day or two, come on down. You can pay at the door, but we ask that you purchase your *admissions in advance* so we can plan enough gaming events to keep everyone busy all the time. Thank you.

Open House – Game Masters WANTED

Run three or more games and get a **FREE special G.M. T-shirt** unveiled for the first time at the POH and a **30% Game Master Supreme discount** on Palladium's RPG books, T-shirts and most other items (sorry, *excludes* original art, limited editions, art prints, auction items and *Robotech® RPG Tactics* products). We need plenty of games to satisfy 300 gamers, so . . . **HELP!** Your help is appreciated and welcomed.

Contact us by telephone (734-721-2903) or by email at palladium-gm@palladiumbooks.com. Please contact us as **SOON** as possible. We want to post a schedule well in advance.

We're hoping to offer more than 100 gaming events so we need experienced Game Masters to run Palladium events for all of our game lines – *Robotech®* and *Rifts®* to *Nightbane®* and *After the Bomb®*. Run three or more events to get that special, debut T-shirt and special G.M. Supreme discount.

Palladium Megaversal Ambassadors, *Palladium creators*, and any experienced Game Master planning to come to the 2015 Palladium Open House – please let us know if you are planning to run one or more gaming events. Thanks.

Palladium Open House UPDATE

May 15-17, 2015 – Westland, Michigan

- Game with us at the Palladium warehouse.
- 100+ Palladium gaming events.
- Play in games run by Kevin Siembieda & other Palladium creators.
- Play-test a prototype *Rifts*® board game run by the game designer.
- Enjoy *Robotech*® RPG Tactics™ tournament, games, products and demos.
- Compete in the *Robotech*® RPG Tactics™ painting competition.
- Participate in panel talks and many question and answer chats.
- Meet 40+ Palladium creators, all available to chat & sign books.
- Bring your favorite game books to get signed.
- Meet Kevin Siembieda and the Palladium staff.
- Meet Carmen Bellaire and many other Palladium creators.
- Meet Jolly Blackburn, creator of *Knights of the Dinner Table*.
- Meet Ramon K. Perez, Marvel Comics artist – *Spider-Man: Learning to Crawl* and artist of many Palladium World Books and other comics.
- Meet fellow gamers from around the world: Brazil, Canada, England, Germany, Uruguay, USA and elsewhere.
- Every in stock Palladium product available for purchase, and 40 creators happy to autograph whatever you get.
- Commission select artists to draw your favorite character.
- Rare collector items, first printings, and signed books.
- Original art by Long, Siembieda, Walton and many others.
- Art prints, T-shirts and specialty items.
- *Robotech*® art from the 1980s and 90s by Kevin Long and others.
- “Live” Auction with rare collectibles and oddities.
- Get the latest news and other insider info.
- Price of admission pays for all events!
- Family reunion and party atmosphere.
- An intimate setting, unlike big conventions.
- May be the last Palladium Open House.
- Join the fun and make memories to last a lifetime.
- Make hotel reservations by April 1 to get special rate!

The Palladium Open House is three days (four for those who also attend VIP Thursday) of nonstop Palladium gaming. More than 100 gaming events – many run by the writers and artists who create your favorite games. And played in the building where the magic happens.

Enjoy many panel talks that include subjects like questions and answers, Game Master tips, player tips, game design, writing, licensing, Hollywood, running a game company, and chats with Kevin Siembieda and Palladium creators, as well as a *Robotech*® painting competition, live auction, and other events. All of it paid for with the price of admission.

The 2015 Open House is looking to have more than 40 Palladium creators (staff and freelance writers, artists, editors, etc.). All are available to chat and sign autographs. Many bring special

merchandise like art prints, original art and other good stuff to sell. And most guests are available to you throughout the entire event, so you have plenty of time and access to meet and chat with your favorite Palladium creators in an informal and intimate venue.

That’s the beauty of the Open House, it’s not like a big convention. You get to spend real time with me, the Palladium staff and our many writers, artists and creators, up close and personal. And this year that includes Ramon Perez and Jolly Blackburn.

We are all gamer geeks like you, happy to talk about gaming, the creative process, movies, comic books and all kinds of subjects. You can have in-depth conversations because the venue is so small and intimate, not at all like big conventions. We’ve been told repeatedly by those who have attended past POHs that the atmosphere is more like a family reunion where they feel welcomed as friends. That’s because you are welcomed friends invited into our facility. We are happy to spend this special week-end gaming and talking about games, writing, drawing and just about anything else you’d like to chat about. And you do it all in the Palladium office and warehouse where the magic happens.

A rare event, the POH is sort of like the Olympics in that we only host one every 2-4 years (the last one was held in 2012), making it all the more special. For a number of reasons, it is looking more and more like this may well be the last Palladium Open House, so if you can make it, come on over for our last grand party.

Please register for attendance soon to guarantee your admission, and so we know exactly how many games we need to keep everyone gaming and having fun. This helps us immensely. We can only accommodate around 350 people total – including 50 or so Palladium creators and staff.

The price of admission covers ALL events. The price of admission gives you access to all the guests, Kevin and crew, as well as the gaming events (first come, first served), panel talks, auction and other activities. Three days of non-stop Palladium gaming, laughs and fun.

100+ Gaming Events:

- After the Bomb®
- Beyond the Supernatural™
- Dead Reign®
- Heroes Unlimited™
- Nightbane®
- Ninjas & Superspies™
- Palladium Fantasy RPG®
- Phase World®/Three Galaxies™
- Rifts®
- Rifts® Chaos Earth®
- Robotech®
- Robotech® RPG Tactics™
- Splicers®
- and more . . .

- Special Event: *Robotech*® RPG Tactics™ tournament.
- Special Event: *Robotech*® RPG Tactics™ “Painting Contest” – bring your best painted mini and see if you win.

- Special Event: **Robotech® RPG Tactics™** games galore. Some run by *Carmen Bellaire*, the co-author of the RRT rules.
- Special Event (Saturday): **Live Auction** – rare collectibles and original art including some *Kevin Long Robotech® II: The Sentinels* artwork, animation cells, and rare *Kevin Siembieda* artwork.
- **Open gaming at the main site and designated hotel.**
- **Game with the very people who make your favorite games and sourcebooks like Kevin Siembieda, Julius Rosenstein, Brandon Aten, Carmen Bellaire, Matthew Clements, Greg Diaczek, Chuck Walton, the Mannings, and others.**
- **No fees for the individual games or panel talks. ALL events are covered under the price of admission.**
- **Meet 40+ Palladium creators – the largest gathering of Palladium creators in the world! Most available every day, the entire day.**
- **Chat with Palladium artists and writers from across the country.**
- **Get autographs from all the Palladium creators.**
- **Live panel talks and interviews.**
- **Live auction (Saturday evening) with rare, out of print books, original artwork, proofreader copies of manuscripts, collectibles, books from the Erick Wujcik collection, and more.**
- **Get new releases, back stock items and Palladium collectibles.**
- **Get original artwork and limited edition prints.**
- **See (and play games in) the Palladium warehouse.**
- **Intimate setting. Easy access to Palladium creators.**
- **Held at the Palladium warehouse and offices.**
- **Meet fans from across the USA and around the world – Canada, England, Germany, Spain, Uruguay, etc.**
- **Hours: 9:00 A.M. to 12:30 A.M. (possibly longer). For you all-night gamers, gaming continues at the hotel.**
- **MUST make hotel reservations by April 1 to guarantee getting a room and at the special \$109 rate!**

This is not a media event. It is a role-playing game event. That means ROLE-PLAYING GAMES for three days straight! (And for those of you who can make it, VIP Thursday too.)

In addition to scheduled games there is an area for “open gaming” for ANYBODY who wants to start a game.

Only weeks away! Order your admissions now!! And spread the word, bring a friend, and have the time of your life. *Reserve your hotel room today!*

Palladium Creators, Artists, Writers & Personalities

The vast majority of the people on this list have “confirmed.” Only those with an asterisk remain tentative.

- Amy L. Ashbaugh (Artist)
- Brandon Aten (Writer; Triax 2, Madhaven, The Sovietski, The Rifter®)
- Matthew Balent (Author of Weapons & Armor, Weapons & Castles, Monsters and Animals, and other titles; he was present at the start of Palladium Books!)
- Thomas Bartold (Defiler, writer; Island at the Edge of the World)
- Carmen Bellaire (Writer; Powers Unlimited 1-3, Splicers®)
- Joseph Bergmans (Honorary Staff Member, Helper and Consultant)

- Jolly Blackburn (Creator of Knights of the Dinner Table)
- James Brown (Game Master Supreme, Megaversal Ambassador)
- Jeffrey Burke (Staff Robotech® Consultant & Artist)
- Kent Burles * (Artist)
- Braden Campbell * (Writer; Fleets, Thundercloud Galaxy, The Rifter®)
- Matthew Clements (Writer: Northern Gun 1 & 2, and much more)
- Steven Dawes (Writer; Dark Places, The Rifter®)
- Greg Diaczek (Writer; Rifts® Lemuria and The Rifter®)
- Mark Dudley (Artist and Game Master)
- Scott Gibbons (Game Designer – play testing Rifts® board game)
- Carl Gleba * (Writer: Megaverse® in Flames, Minion War series, and many others, and awesome G.M.)
- Chris Guertin (Honorary Staff Member/Helper)
- Jeffry Scott Hansen * (Writer & Author; Warpath)
- Irvin Jackson * (Writer & Artist)
- Doug Lamberson (Honorary Staff Member/Helper)
- Lonnie Langston * (G.M. and Megaversal Ambassador)
- “Madman” Mike Leonard (Artist and Writer)
- Allen Manning (Artist)
- Brian Manning (Artist)
- Alex Marciniszyn (Staff Editor and Research)
- Mike Mumah (Artist)
- Mark Oberle (Writer; Nightbane® Survival Guide, Rifter®)
- Apollo Okamura * (Artist)
- Taylor Oltman (Artist)
- Ramon K. Perez (Artist for games and Spider-Man)
- Victor Peterson (Megaversal Ambassador & Game Master)
- Ben Rodriguez (Artist)
- Julius Rosenstein (Staff, Writer, Editor & Game Master)
- Jeff “NMI” Ruiz (Palladium’s Online Administrator & MA)
- Kevin Siembieda (Staff, Founder, Writer, Artist & Game Master)
- Kathy Simmons (Staff, Order Processing and Customer Services)
- Josh Sinsapaugh (Writer, Rifter® Contributor)
- Wayne Smith (Staff, Editor, and Editor-in-Chief of The Rifter®)
- Charles Walton (Artist and Concept Guy)
- Taylor White (Writer and Musician)
- And more.

Note: Must RESERVE HOTEL ROOM by **April 1, 2015** to guarantee a room and get the special \$109 rate! No Costume Contest this year, but you are welcome to appear in costume if you like, and maybe something special will happen.

Price of Admission

Advance Ticket Purchase Guarantees Your Admission – May 15, 16 & 17, 2015 (VIP Night, May 14, 2015 is an additional day and extra cost of \$87).

\$45 per person for the Three Day Weekend (Friday, Saturday & Sunday) when ordered in advance per each individual. (\$60 at the door and after April 20, 2015, if space is available.)

\$25 for Friday, 9:00 AM till Closing (about midnight). Same price at the door, if space is available.

\$25 for Saturday, 9:00 AM till Closing (about midnight). Same price at the door, if space is available.

\$12 for Sunday, 9:00 AM to 5:00 PM. Same price at the door, if space is available.

\$87 additional for "VIP Night" – Thursday, May 14, 2014; 3:00 P.M. till about Midnight. A few "cancellations" have made a handful of VIP night tickets available on a first come, first-served basis. VIP Night is a special, one-evening event limited to around 100 gamers. You get the delicious dinner catered by Palladium's very own Kathy Simmons (people rave about her food), plus you get an extra afternoon and evening of gaming, a more intimate chance to talk with Palladium staff, artists and writers, and first crack at rare collectibles, prints and original art.

Methods of Payment

Placing Your Order: Please include your FULL address and apartment number. Also include the complete NAME of EACH person you are ordering a ticket for, as well as your telephone number in case there is a problem and we need to contact you.

Credit Cards: Visa, MasterCard and most credit cards are accepted. All Credit Card orders must include: Credit Card No. – Name on the card – Address of the Credit Cardholder – Expiration Date – Telephone Number of the cardholder.

By Telephone: Call (734) 721-2903 – have your credit card information ready. You may place your reservation online in a similar way as placing a book order or you may use Palladium's order line 734-721-2903.

Check or Money Order by Mail: Sent via the USPS or other delivery service. Send check or money order to:

Palladium Books
Dept. POH
39074 Webb Court
Westland, MI 48185-7606

Please include your FULL address and apartment number. Also include the complete NAME of EACH person you are ordering a ticket for, as well as your telephone number in case there is a problem and we need to contact you.

All tickets are sold on a first come, first served basis, so get your reservations in as soon as possible! Due to space and parking limitations and safety concerns, attendance is strictly limited to approximately 350 participants.

Cancellation: You could cancel your Open House or V.I.P. order up to March 1, 2015 and get a FULL refund, but that date has passed.

We NEED to know in advance how many gamers are coming so we have enough games and events to keep everyone busy. The sooner you order, the better for Palladium. Credit Cards will be charged immediately.

All "advance" reservations must be in by April 19, 2015. A name must be assigned to each ticket. No refunds for cancellations after March 1, 2015. No refunds for no-shows.

Admission at the door is available, provided there is still room! **Kathy Simmons** will be handling reservations and tickets, so you know everything will be timely and organized.

Hotel Reservations – April 1, 2015

\$109.00 per night – Reserve your room as soon as possible. If you know you are coming, reserve your room NOW. The hotel does not charge your credit card till the day of the event and you can cancel up to a few days before the event. No risk. No cost to

you now. And you guarantee your room. Furthermore, the number of double beds is limited. Book your room NOW to get this great price and location (five minutes from the Palladium office). **Special Group Rate ENDS April 1, 2015.**

Hotel information:

\$109.00 (plus tax) per night at the *Comfort Inn*, a.k.a. "Plymouth Clock Tower Hotel." That's **\$109** (plus tax) for a room with *two queen beds*, or *one king with a sofa that has a pull-out sleeper*. ALL rooms have a *microwave & fridge*, **FREE** high-speed *wired/wireless Internet* and there is a **FREE hot breakfast** from 6 A.M. to 10 A.M. near the lobby.

Comfort Inn – MUST Reserve by April 1 to get Group Rate

40455 Ann Arbor Road
Plymouth, MI 48170
Phone: 734-455-8100

Group Code: Palladium Books – you MUST request the Group Code "Palladium Books" *at the time of booking* to ensure the correct rate will be quoted and billed to you.

Dates of the 2015 Palladium Open House (POH): May 15-17, 2015. May 14 is V.I.P. Night.

- Plenty of places to eat just down the road (Denny's, Wendy's, McDonald's, and many others).

- Palladium Books – 39074 Webb Court – Westland, MI 48185

Coming Attractions

Palladium's 2014 Release Checklist

March 2015 – ALL Available Now

- **The Rifter® #69** – Available and in stores now
- **Bizantium & the Northern Islands™** – Available and in stores now
- **Rifts® Chaos Earth®: Rise of Magic™** – Back in Print – available now
- **Rifts® WB 21: Splynn Dimensional Market™** – Back in Print – available now
- **Rifts® Book of Magic** – Back in Print – available now
- **Robotech® RPG Tactics™ Boxed Game** – Available around the world
- **Robotech® RPG Tactics™ Expansion Packs** – Available around the world
- **Robotech® RPG Tactics™ Rule Book** – Available now
- **Robotech® Dice Bag (NEW)** – Available only from Palladium Books

Spring 2015 Releases

- **The Rifter® #70** – April
- **Rifts® Chaos Earth® Resurrection** – April
- **Robotech®: Expeditionary Force Marines™** – April or May
- **Rifts® The Disavowed™** – Spring
- **Rifts® Heroes of Humanity™** – Spring

- **Rifts® Secrets of Atlantis™** – Spring/Summer
- **2015 Palladium Open House – May 15-17 – Join the fun**

Coming Later in 2015

- **The Rifter® #71 and #72**
- **Rifts® Chaos Earth® Sourcebook: First Responders**
- **More Rifts® Sourcebooks**
- **Splicers® Sourcebooks**
- **Heroes Unlimited™ sourcebook** (tentative)
- **Beyond the Supernatural™ Sourcebook: Beyond Arcanum™**
- **Beyond the Supernatural™ Sourcebook: Tomes Grotesque™**
- **Dead Reign® Sourcebook 6: Hell Followed™**
- **Robotech® RPG Tactics™ Wave Two Expansion Packs**
- **Robotech® RPG Tactics™ Advanced Rule Book**
- **Some BIG announcements** that should shake-up the Palladium Megaverse® (in a good way).
- **And maybe a few surprises.**

Notable Releases – All Available Now

- **Rifts® Megaverse® in Flames™**
- **Rifts® World Book 34: Northern Gun™ Two**
- **Rift® Sourcebook 2: The Mechanoids®** – Back in Print
- **Dead Reign® Sourcebook 5: Graveyard Earth™**
- **Future Visions™ – The Artistry of Charles Walton II**
- **Palladium Fantasy RPG® 30th Anniversary Hardcover** – Available only from Palladium Books.
- **Heroes Unlimited™ RPG 30th Anniversary Hardcover** – Available only from Palladium Books.
- **Robotech® RPG Tactics™ Boxed Game** – Available now in stores across the United States and Canada. Now also available in the European Union, Australia and New Zealand.
- **Six Robotech® RPG Tactics™ Expansion Packs** – Available in stores across the United States and Canada. Now also available in the European Union, Australia and New Zealand.
 - **UEDF Valkyrie Wing** (2x each, Fighter, Guardian, Battlepod) – Cat. No. 55201 – \$36.95 retail.
 - **UEDF Tomahawk/Defender Destroids** (2x Tomahawks, 2x Defenders) – Cat. No. 55202 – \$32.95 retail.
 - **UEDF Spartan/Phalanx Destroids** (2x Spartans, 2x Phalanxes), Cat. No. 55203 – \$32.95 retail.
 - **Zentraedi Regult Battlepods** (6x Regults) – Cat. No. 55401 – \$36.95 retail.
 - **Zentraedi Artillery Battlepods** (4x Artillery Battlepods) – Cat. No. 55402 – \$36.95.
 - **Zentraedi Glaug Command Pack** (1x Glaug, 1x Quel-Regult, 1x Quel-Gulnau) – Cat. No. 55403 – \$36.95.
 - Many additional **expansion packs** to follow.

Palladium RPGs are available in many hobby and game stores around the world. We encourage people to support their local stores. Going to a store enables you to see the product before purchasing it, and many stores are happy to place special orders for you, provided you pay in advance, enabling you to avoid the cost of shipping and possible damage in the mail.

Ordering from Palladium Books: You can also order directly from Palladium Books, but you will pay extra for shipping. For customers with access to a computer, we highly recommend ordering online. This provides you with information about the most

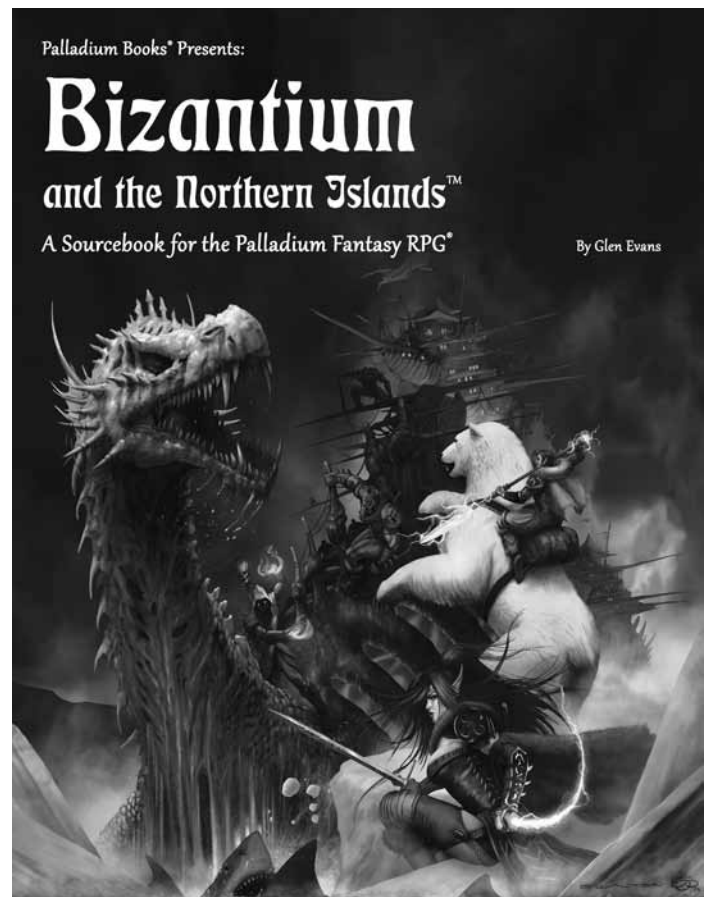
recent releases and Palladium's entire product catalog. It also provides you the most accurate shipping costs and more shipping options. You can also order by telephone; 734-721-2903 (order line only). For customers without such access, use the following "mail order" process.

1. Send the cost of the books or items being ordered.

2. In the USA: Add \$6 for *orders* totaling \$1-\$50 to cover shipping and handling. Add \$12 for *orders* totaling \$51-\$95. Add \$18 for *orders* totaling \$96-\$200. **Note:** For *non-book products*, including the **Robotech® RPG Tactics™** box game and expansion packs, add an extra \$6 per \$50 worth of product, on top of the shipping amounts listed above. This is because *non-book products* cannot ship via Media Mail, and must use a more expensive method of shipping. **Outside the USA:** Double the shipping amount for orders going to Canada, and *quadruple* it for overseas orders. Any and all additional costs incurred as a result of customs fees and taxes are the responsibility of the foreign customer, NOT Palladium Books.

3. Make checks or money orders payable to *Palladium Books*.

4. Please make sure to send us your complete and correct address, *including* apartment number. **Note:** These costs are for the least expensive and slowest method of shipping only. Allow 2-4 weeks for delivery. Order online or call the office for a superior but more costly shipping method.



NEW! Palladium Fantasy RPG® Sourcebook:

Bizantium and the Northern Islands™

To the civilized world, Bizantium and the waters and lands around it are frightening. A realm of sea serpents, monsters, and barbarians. To the heroes and people who live there, it is a realm of adventure, beauty and opportunity.

One might consider Bizantium as the center of adventure and mystery in the North. Many are the myths of ancient gods, lost treasures and strange creatures. On the mainland, there are the Wolfen and their canine kin, the Kiridin barbarians, the turbulent Shadow Coast colonies, and all manner of monsters and secrets in the Northern Hinterlands and Great Northern Mountains. Living near the edge of the Sea of Despair and in the shadow of the Land of the Damned, sea monsters and danger are but a short voyage away and make all too frequent visits to the Bizantium islands.

North of Bizantium is the Icy Ocean and Great Ice Shelf, places where only a handful of the bravest Bizantian sailors have ever set sail, and the rest of the world *knows nothing* about. For kingdoms in the south, only a few scholars have ever heard of the Great Ice Shelf or the cannibalistic Necromancers known as the Iceborn who make the frozen wasteland their home. Those who have heard tales of the land of ice and death are convinced they are nothing but the stuff of myth. Very soon, they will find out otherwise.

And these are but a few of the revelations presented in **Bizantium and the Northern Islands™**. Discover for yourself the wonders and horrors that await.

- **Waterchanter O.C.C. and 20+ magic spells new to the Fantasy setting.**
- **Necromancy revisited. Many spells new to the Fantasy setting.**
- **90+ spells in all, Ocean Magic, Necromancy and more.**
- **Serpent Chaser, Bizantium Marine & other new character classes.**
- **The Iceborn Raiders, Skinbinders and Sea Witches. A forgotten race of monsters who worship death, wield death magic, hunt humanoids, eat their flesh, and wear their skin. A villain you will love to hate.**
- **The Iceborn's Necroilus – massive vessels made from the remains of dead sea serpents and animated by Necromancy to prowl the seas.**
- **Vengeful gods, monsters and Sea Monster creation tables.**
- **The Seven Treasures, lost for centuries, waiting to be found.**
- **New and old Bizantium ships, new weapons and gear.**
- **Bizantium and the Northern Islands as never before revealed.**
- **The Great Ice Shelf – a new continent to explore.**
- **Bizantian history, society, culture, and notable places.**
- **Adventure hooks galore, and more.**
- **Written by Glen Evans, Matthew Clements and Kevin Siembieda.**
- **192 pages – \$24.95 retail – Cat. No. 474 – Available NOW!**

Rifts® Chaos Earth® Sourcebook

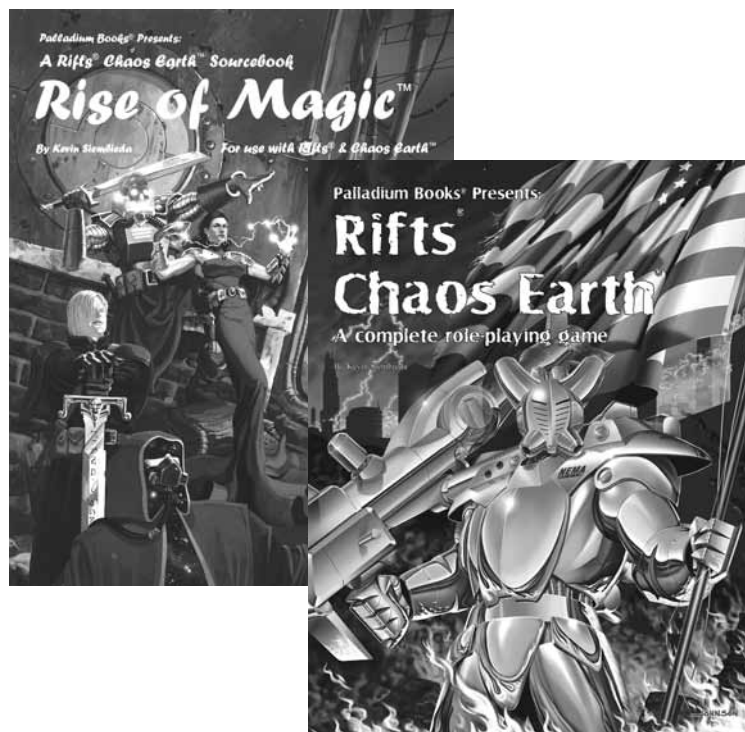
Rise of Magic™ – Back in print

We've all played "post" apocalyptic games. Now imagine playing as the apocalypse is happening. As the world you know is crumbling. As magic and monsters from myth become real and your world is reshaped by forces beyond your comprehension. That is the premise behind the **Rifts® Chaos Earth®** series. That YOU play through the Great Cataclysm as the apocalypse happens.

Rifts® Chaos Earth®: Rise of Magic™ is a key book in that continuing story (new books are coming this Spring and Sum-

mer). In **Rise of Magic™**, humans, particularly children, are discovering they can draw upon mystic energy and cast magic. The thing is, they don't really know what they are doing. Magic is just part of the chaos and the impossible that is happening all around them. Meanwhile, others have found they can summon and control monsters and demons, while still others make pacts with supernatural beings to become witches and worse. And some have learned they can harness the magic to animate and command the dead. Madness and more chaos ensues. All of this only complicates things for NEMA, Earth's defenders, as the line of distinction between "good guys" and "bad guys" begins to blur, and things go from bad to worse.

- **Chaos Magic, new magic specific to the Chaos Earth® setting.**
- **100+ unique Chaos Magic spells.**
- **New magic O.C.C.s like the Blue Zone Wizard and Chaos Wizard.**
- **New evil magic users like the Chaos Witch and Demon Caller.**
- **More on NEMA and the Demon Plagues.**
- **Written by Kevin Siembieda.**
- **Two new Chaos Earth® sourcebooks are coming soon.**
- **64 pages – \$12.95 – Cat. No. 662. Available now!**



Chaos Earth® RPG – Available now

The origins of **Rifts®** start here! It is a new beginning. But first everything that human civilization had become during the Golden Age of Science, more than eighty years in our future, must come to a crashing end. The Earth is in the process of being transformed into a place more alien than a thousand alien worlds. Ley lines erupt with even more power and ambient energy than what is known on Rifts Earth 300 years later. Rifts – tears in space and time – appear along ley lines to unleash legions of aliens, monsters, dragons, supernatural horrors, and ancient gods of myth and legend in a mad symphony of chaos and transformation.

You play survivors or the heroes of **NEMA**. The men and women of the Northern Eagle Military Alliance equipped with

their *Chromium Guardsmen* (Glitter Boys), *Silver Eagles* (SAMAS) and a host of other robots and power armor to stand against a rising tide of enemies and alien invaders. They are humanity's last and only hope to survive the apocalypse that will become known as the Great Cataclysm. These are the heroes you play in a world that can only be described as *Chaos Earth*.

- Overview of the Great Cataclysm as it unfolds.
- Introduction to NEMA and its weapons and resources.
- 11 different character classes, including robot pilots, the Para-Arcane, Demon and Witch Hunters, Chromium Guardsmen, & more.
- Weapons, robots, power armor, vehicles and equipment.
- Monsters, chaos and adventure. Written by Kevin Siembieda.
- 160 pages. A complete RPG – \$20.95 – Cat. No. 660 – Available now!
- Chaos Earth® Sourcebook 2: Creatures of Chaos™ – 30+ Chaos Demons, NEMA and more. \$12.95 – 64 pages – Cat. No. 661 – Available now.

Rifts® Book of Magic

– Back in Print

Rifts® Book of Magic is 352 pages of nothing but magic – 850+ spells, 370+ magic items, including Rune Weapons, Techno-Wizard items, Bio-Wizard Splugorth creations, and Iron Jugernauts, and more. That's cover to cover spells and magic items and a few related odds and ends like Atlantean Tattoos and the Nazca Lines. Everything collected from the first 23 World Books, Sourcebooks 1-4, and Siege on Tolkeen 1-6 into one giant reference of magical goodness. **NEEDED to use *Rise of Magic*™ and the *Chaos Earth*® RPG setting**

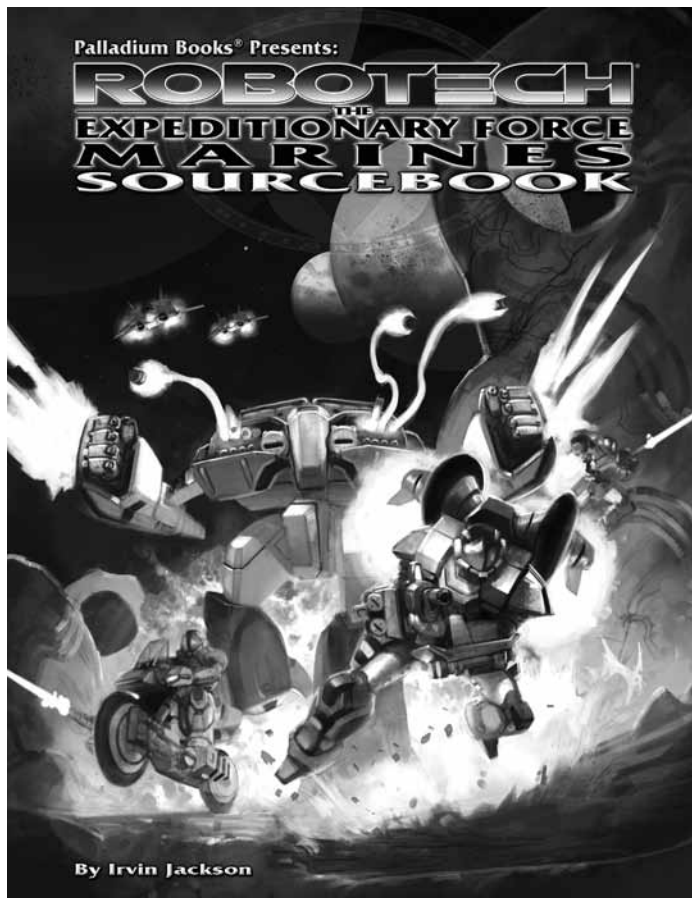
- More than 850 magic spells!
- Elemental Magic, Spoiling Magic, Conjuring & others.
- Magic Tattoos, Stone Magic, Temporal Magic and Living Fire Magic.
- Cloud Magic, Whale Songs, Ocean Magic and more.
- Biomancy, Bio-Wizardry, Necromancy and other dark forms of magic.
- Over 100 different Techno-Wizard weapons.
- Techno-Wizard vehicles and TW vehicle conversion tables.
- Techno-Wizard devices, Rune Weapons, amulets, fetishes, enchanted herbs, Millennium Tree gifts & other magic items.
- Optional rules & clarification on magic and more. **Note:** It is a vital reference for **Rifts® Chaos Earth®, Rifts® Federation of Magic**, the **Rifts® China** books and all **Rifts®** titles. Furthermore, spells and most magic items are easy to adapt to world settings like **Palladium Fantasy®** and **Heroes Unlimited™**. Don't get caught without it.
- \$26.95 – 352 pages – Cat. No. 848 – available now.

Rifts® World Book 21:

Splynn Dimensional Market™

This awesome sourcebook is, in effect, **Rifts® Atlantis Part Two**. It is said that anything you may desire – especially if it is dark, magical or alien – can be purchased, for a price, at the Splynn Dimensional Market. Anything. 'Nuff said.

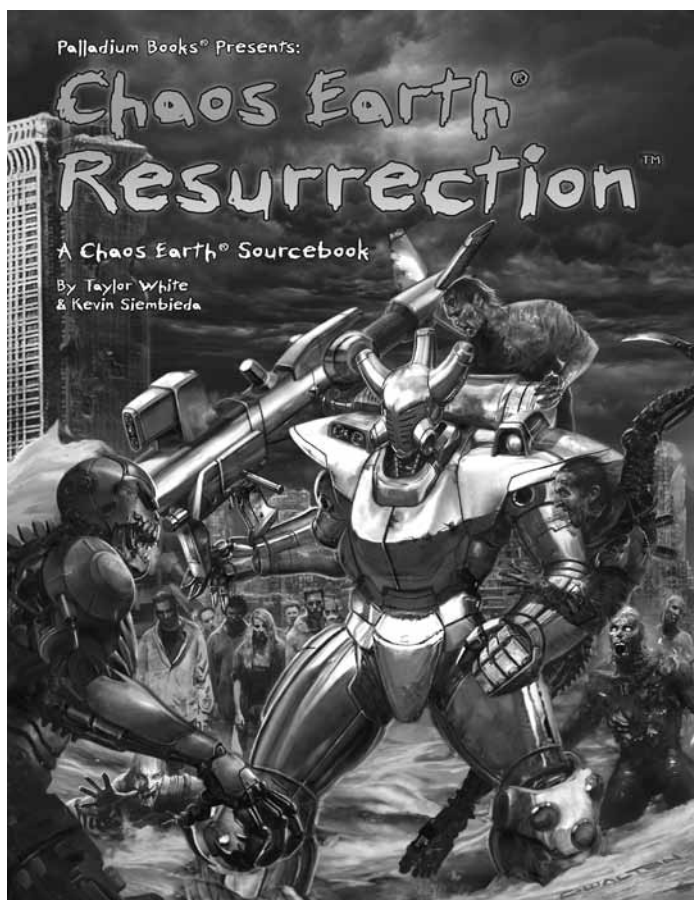
- 14 more monstrous Splugorth slave races.
- New Magic Tattoos and Bio-Wizard organisms.
- Dozens of Bio-Wizard weapons and magic items.
- The deadly Bio-Borg and Kittani weapons and equipment.
- The Splynn Dimensional Market described and key locations noted.
- Art by Ramon Perez, Mike Dubish, Burles, Breaux and others.
- \$24.95 – 192 pages – Cat. No. 836 – Available now!



COMING: Robotech®: Expeditionary Force Marines™ Sourcebook One

Robotech®: Expeditionary Force Marines sourcebook is set in space with the UEEF (United Earth Expeditionary Force) led by Admiral Rick Hunter. This valiant force of mecha-clad heroes travel across the galaxy liberating planets from the bondage of the Invid Regent, the Robotech Masters and other tyrants and monsters.

- New mecha and weapons of the UEEF Marines.
- New UEEF Marine character classes and background.
- Alien species and allies.
- Planet hopping, adventure and much more.
- Epic battles and adventure ideas galore.
- Written by Irvin Jackson. Additional text by Kevin Siembieda.
- 160 pages – \$20.95 retail – Cat. No. 553. April or May, 2015.



Rifts® Chaos Earth® Sourcebook:

Resurrection

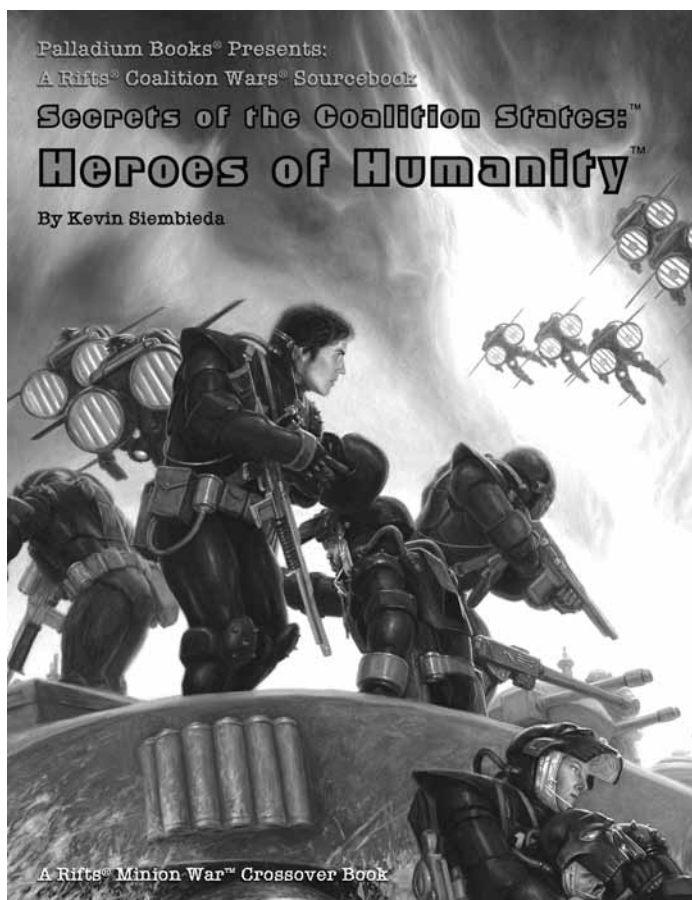
In the shattered depths of Wisconsin, survivors are besieged by the dead come back to life. Zombies. But not just any type of zombie, zombies done Rifts-style. And unless the source of the zombie plague can be found and neutralized by NEMA defenders, North America may be overrun by the dead.

This was actually something Taylor White and I have been kicking around for years, even before we released the *Dead Reign*® RPG line. We think you'll love it.

- Something has animated the dead in Wisconsin. It is up to NEMA heroes to find the cause and stop it before it spreads beyond control.
- Scrap Zombies of all types.
- Snatcher Ghouls, Carrion Cleaners, Screaming Puppet Ghosts, Sour Maggot Parasites, and other monsters.
- The Zombie Pox and other dangers.
- Setting background, adventure and adventure idea table.
- Written by Taylor White.
- 128 pages – \$16.95 retail – Cat. No. 666. Spring, 2015.

Rifts® The Coalition States – Heroes of Humanity

The events unfolding in **World Book 35: Megaverse® in Flames** threaten to change the entire landscape of Rifts® Earth as the demonic minions of Hades and Dyval seek to bring Hell on Earth and turn the planet into a dimensional gateway to Armageddon!



The Coalition States, along with Northern Gun and Lazlo, take the lead in the defense of North America. *Heroes of Humanity* explores the good and bad in the Coalition's efforts to save humanity and send this new threat back to the pits of Hell.

- **New Coalition weapons, armor and war machines.**
- **The Coalition States: are they heroes or villains? Or does it depend on whether you are human or not?**
- **Can the CS fight alongside mages and D-Bees if it means saving the world?**
- **How is the CS dealing with the Minion War on Earth?**
- **One plan to battle the Xiticix and who really pays the price.**
- **Adventure ideas and more.**
- **Written by Kevin Siembieda, Matthew Clements and contributors.**
- **Final page count and cost yet to be determined but probably 96 pages – \$16.95 retail – Cat. No. 889. Spring, 2015**

Rifts® Secrets of the Coalition States

The Disavowed

"Desperate times require desperate measures. War has nothing to do with morality or justice. It's all about winning or dying. We cannot bind our hands with high ideals, even our own, or worry about the laws of renegade nations or the rights of alien people. We must fight fire with fire. And you are the match."

– Colonel Lyboc addressing a Disavowed team

The Disavowed are so Top Secret that their existence is known only to a handful of the Coalition States' most elite, top echelon, with *Joseph Prosek II* the mastermind behind the Disavowed operation, and Colonel Lyboc its shadowy face. Find out who these men

and women are. How the Disavowed get away with using magic, traveling to other parts of Rifts Earth and even to other dimensions in pursuit of enemies and strategic information that cannot be had through conventional means. Learn about the secret parameters in which these hard-boiled warriors, secretly hand-picked by Joseph Prosek II, operate, why almost every mission is considered a suicide mission, and why they must forever be the Disavowed.

- **CS operatives so secret that even the top military and political leaders right up to Emperor Prosek *know nothing about them*. And if they did know, would they condone their activity or condemn it?**
- **Are the Disavowed heroes or renegades? Assassins or soldiers? Madmen or super-patriots? Or a little of them all?**
- **Unsung heroes who keep the CS safe, or thugs and pawns of a shadow agency within the Coalition government?**
- **What role does the Vanguard play in this group?**
- **How do they reward their D-Bee “teammates” when the mission is over?**
- **What happens to the Disavowed when they have seen or learned too much? Adventure ideas galore and so much more.**
- **Written by Kevin Siembieda and Matthew Clements.**
- **Final page count and cost yet to be determined, but probably 96 pages – \$16.95 retail – Cat. No. 892. Spring, 2015**

Rifts® Secrets of the Atlanteans

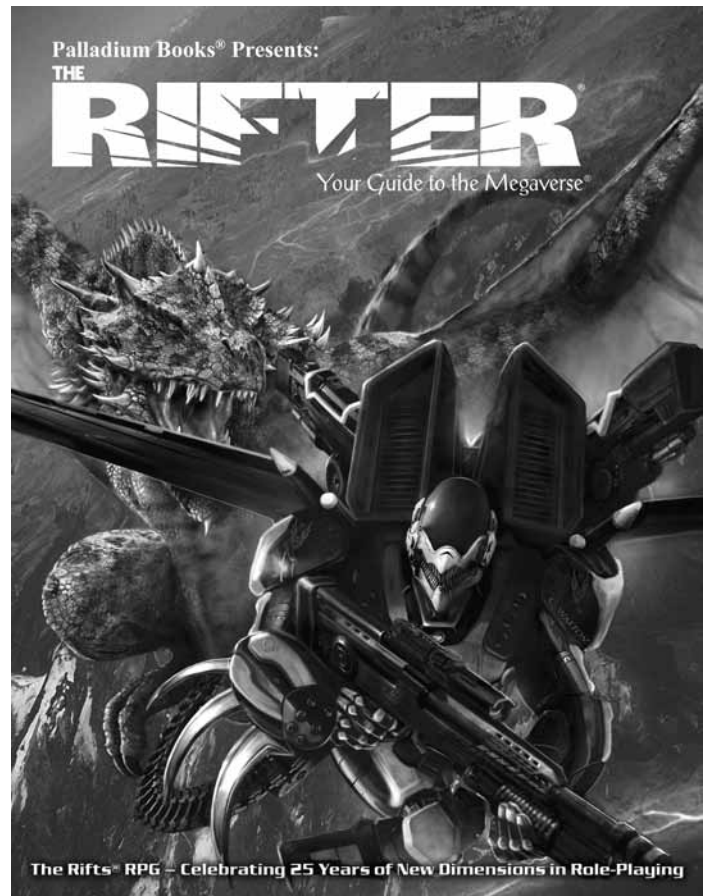
True Atlanteans are descendants from Earth’s past. The survivors of the sinking of Atlantis (really a dimensional mishap) and travelers of the Megaverse, wielders of Tattoo Magic and other lost mystic arts. Most people regard them as heroes, but are they? The Sunaj Assassins are mythic villains feared by all, yet they too are True Atlanteans who serve dark forces.

For the first time, much of the story behind True Atlanteans and their secrets are revealed.

- **True Atlanteans revisited.**
- **Optional Atlantean character creation tables including clan heritage and other factors.**
- **Secrets of the stone pyramids, different types/purposes and powers.**
- **Many new magic tattoos, magic spells, weapons and armor.**
- **Atlantean hideouts and secret communities across the Megaverse.**
- **The Sunaj Assassins, their secrets, history and plans for the future.**
- **Atlantean Monster Hunter O.C.C., Atlantean Defender O.C.C. and much more. And this is just the tip of what this book contains.**
- **Written by Carl Gleba. Additional text and ideas by Kevin Siembieda.**
- **Final page count and cost yet to be determined, but probably 160-192 pages – \$20.95-\$24.95 retail – Cat. No. 890. Spring or Summer 2015.**

The Rifter® #70

Every issue of **The Rifter®** is an *idea factory* that helps players and Game Masters to generate new ideas and keep their games fresh. It provides useful, ready to go, source material gamers can just drop into their ongoing games. A doorway to new possibili-



ties and numerous Palladium role-playing worlds. It offers new characters, O.C.C.s, powers, magic, weapons, adventure and ideas for your games. It presents new villains, monsters and dangers to battle, and new ideas to consider. Every issue has material for **Rifts®** and at least two or three other Palladium game lines.

With 2015 being the 25th Anniversary of **Rifts®**, every issue of **The Rifter®** will feature a **Rifts®** inspired cover and contain at least one **Rifts®** article.

The Rifter® #70 – Spring, 2015:

- **Rifts® source material.**
- **Palladium Fantasy® source material.**
- **Optional source material for 2-5 settings.**
- **News, coming attractions, product descriptions and more.**
- **Cover by Charles Walton II.**
- **96 pages – \$13.95 retail – Cat. No. 170. Spring issue.**

Robotech® RPG Tactics™ Rule Book

The Macross mecha, setting and time-line. Need an extra copy of the RRT rule book? Curious to see what the RRT game is like? Get the rule book and find out.

This is the same, full color, rule book that is included in the main game box, and is now available separately. Robotech® collectors will want this beautiful book as an addition to their collection for the artwork and paint guide alone.

- **The core rule book.**
- **15 page color guide with more than 100 mecha images.** The first time a complete color guide of Macross mecha has ever been collected.
- **112 pages, full color.**
- **\$20.00 retail – Cat. No. 55105 – Now available.**

Rifts® Chaos Earth® Sourcebook:

First Responders

The Great Cataclysm has devastated civilization, but humanity fights for survival. The struggles of civilian law enforcement, fire and rescue, and everyday men and women are some of the most epic tales to be told in a world gone to hell. They fight monsters, aliens, the paranormal, the elements, and each other, all with the hope of reclaiming their lives from the Chaos.

- **New D-Bees and monsters from the Rifts.**
- **First Responder O.C.C.s, skills and special equipment.**
- **New “average citizen” Occupational Character Classes (O.C.C.s).**
- **New equipment for NEMA “Roscoes” and other emergency personnel.**
- **Notable rescue vehicles, robot drones, and technology.**
- **Source information and stats for common Golden Age technology (weapons, vehicles, medical tech, etc.).**
- **Apocalypse Plagues brought from other worlds to Chaos Earth.**
- **Adventure ideas and more.**
- **Written by Jason Richards. Additional text by Clements & Siembieda.**
- **96 pages – \$16.95 retail – Cat. No. 665. Summer, 2015.**



Robotech® RPG Tactics™

Available now in store across the USA and Canada

Robotech® RPG Tactics™ is a fast-paced, tabletop combat game that captures the action and adventure of the **Robotech®** anime. Two or more players can engage in small squad skirmishes or scale up to massive battles. Relive the clashes of the First Robotech War, engage in stand-alone tactical games, or use the dynamic game pieces to enhance your Robotech® RPG experience. Or simply collect your favorite mecha from an expanding range of top-notch game pieces.

Mecha vs Mecha. Take command of the fighting forces of the *United Earth Defense Force (UEDF)* valiantly defending Earth from alien annihilation. Or lead the massive clone armies of the *Zentraedi Armada* to recover an alien artifact of immense power and enslave humankind.

Robotech® RPG Tactics™ Box Set – Cat. No. 55100

- **Size of Box:** Just over 11.5 inches by 11.5 inches by 6 inches tall.
- **112 page, full color, softcover rule book.** Includes a comprehensive 15 page color guide (more than 100 images) for all Macross mecha in the series.
- **24 Battle Dice, 12 UEDF and 12 Zentraedi.**
- **53 color game cards (unit cards, etc.).**
- **4x VF-1A Valkyries** (in Fighter, Guardian, and Battloid modes).
- **1x VF-1J “Officer” in all three modes.**
- **4x Destroids: 2 Tomahawks and 2 Defenders.**
- **12x Regult Zentraedi Battlepods.**
- **1x Glaug Officer’s Battlepod.**
- **1x Quel-Regult Recon Battlepod.**
- **1x Quel-Gulnau Recovery Pod.**
- **1/285th (6 mm) scale, high quality, multi-pose plastic game pieces** (40mm to 70mm tall). World-class sculpts from sculptors around the world.
- **Game rules use D6.**
- **Turn-based system of play.**
- **Scalable from small squad skirmishes to mass battles. Can accommodate two to several players.**
- **Combat is fast and designed to emulate the anime action.**
- **Measuring tape required to determine targets and distance.**
- **Assembly required. Game pieces come unpainted. Not a toy. Small parts, not suitable for children under the age of 13.**
- Brought to you by **Palladium Books®**, created with **Ninja Division** (the creative minds behind *Soda Pop Miniatures* and *Cipher Studios*).
- **\$99.95 retail price – Cat. No. 55100 (Main Box Game) – Now available!**

The First Six Robotech® RPG Tactics™ Expansion Packs

The first six expansion packs are also now available to retail! Here are the “official” SKUs and retail prices.

UEDF Valkyrie Wing

Build your fleet of Earth defenders with the Valkyrie Veritech Fighter; six figures total.

- **2 Valkyries in Fighter mode.**
- **2 Valkyries in Guardian mode.**
- **2 Valkyries in Battloid mode.**
- **Multiple heads for making the VF-1A, VF-1J, VF-1R and VF-1S.**
- **Plastic game pieces require assembly and painting.**
- **Not a toy. Small parts, not suitable for children under the age of 13. Adult supervision advised.**
- **Cat. No. 55201 – \$36.95 retail.**



UEDF Tomahawk/Defender Destroyers

Expand your army with these formidable walking tanks; four figures total.

- **2 Tomahawk Destroyers** – the main battle tank of Destroyers, brimming with powerful particle beam cannons for arms, and wielding a battery of missiles and an array of other weapons.
- **2 Defender Destroyers** – a long-range, anti-aircraft juggernaut capable of shooting down incoming Zentraedi Battlepods and Gnerl Fighters.
- **Plastic game pieces require assembly and painting.**
- **Not a toy. Small parts, choking hazard. Not recommended for children under the age of 13. Adult supervision advised.**
- **Cat. No. 55202 – \$32.95 retail.**

UEDF Spartan/Phalanx Destroyers

Add some long-range power and up-close punch to your army with these valuable Destroyers; four figures total.

- **2 Spartan Destroyers** – civil defense, riot control and deadly in hand to hand combat.
- **2 Phalanx Destroyers** – a walking, long-range missile artillery unit.
- **Plastic game pieces require assembly and painting.**
- **Not a toy. Small parts, choking hazard. Not recommended for children under the age of 13. Adult supervision advised.**
- **Cat. No. 55203 – \$32.95 retail.**

Zentraedi Regult Battlepods

Expand your Zentraedi forces with their main infantry battle mecha; six figures total.

- **6 Regult Tactical Battlepods** – the lightning quick Regults, armed with a pair of particle cannons and auto-cannons, attack in wave after wave.
- **Plastic game pieces require assembly and painting.**
- **Not a toy. Small parts, choking hazard. Not recommended for children under the age of 13. Adult supervision advised.**
- **Cat. No. 55401 – \$36.95 retail.**

Zentraedi Artillery Battlepods

Give your Zentraedi legion greater firepower with these artillery and support Battlepods; four figures total.

- **4 Zentraedi Support Battlepods, each of which can be made into any of the following:**
Gluuhaug-Regult – Light Artillery Battlepod
Serauhaug-Regult – Heavy Artillery Battlepod
Telnesta-Regult – Experimental Particle Beam Battlepod
Four figures total.
- **Plastic game pieces require assembly and painting.**
- **Not a toy. Small parts, choking hazard. Not recommended for children under the age of 13. Adult supervision advised.**
- **Cat. No. 55402 – \$36.95 retail.**

Zentraedi Glaug Command Pack

This diverse pack provides your Zentraedi forces with greater tactical capabilities; three figures total.

- **1 Glaug Officer's Battlepod** – the fast and deadly mecha of Zentraedi field leaders.
- **1 Quel-Regult Scout Battlepod** – the stealthy eyes and ears of your Zentraedi battle force; electronic warfare capabilities.
- **1 Quel-Gulnau Recovery Pod** – enhances the Glaug's ability to bring in Battlepod reinforcements. **Note:** This figure has NEVER before been offered by any company.
- **Plastic game pieces require assembly and painting.**
- **Not a toy. Small parts, choking hazard. Not suitable for children under the age of 13. Adult supervision advised.**
- **Cat. No. 55403 – \$36.95 retail.**
- **Palladium plans to release the mecha and settings for ALL eras of Robotech®. Many other details are still in development.**
- **Tournament play support is planned.**

Rifter® Super-Subscription Offer #342015

- Free gift(s)
- \$16 saving off cover price
- Free shipping of each issue in the USA
- Each fun issue delivered to your doorstep
- Each issue a sourcebook for the Palladium Megaverse®
- Must put “Sub Offer #342015” in the Memo area of your check.

Looking for fresh, bold ideas, adventures or source material for your games? Then **The Rifter®** is for you. Every issue of **The Rifter®** presents unofficial and/or official source material such as new monsters, magic, powers, weapons, hardware, villains, O.C.C.s, adventure, fiction and new ideas for at least three (often more) adventure settings, from **Rifts®** and **Splicers®** to **Heroes Unlimited™**, **Palladium Fantasy RPG®** and/or any variety of other Palladium world settings. It also presents the latest news, product release info, and peeks at new game releases. Many out of print issues are coveted *collector's items*. For a while, people were reportedly paying as much as \$70 for *issues #4 and 21*.

Super-Subscription Offer

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Arenas of Atlantis

Optional Material for Rifts®

By Will Erwin

Every day, people and creatures from across the Megaverse win and lose their fortunes, freedoms, and lives in Splynnncryth's stadiums. The events and games in these coliseums are great spectacles of the greatest power on Rifts Earth. The Splugorth's arenas epitomize the conflicting themes of Atlantis itself: wonder with dread, power with slavery, and opportunity with doom. The crucible of arena events provide a potent and dramatic way for a G.M. to bring together nearly any combination of characters from any of Palladium's settings.

The ultimate coliseum in Atlantis is the Arena of Champions in Splynn. The wonders of its magic shows astound accomplished wizards. The fantastic creatures shown, complete with their own imported habitats, amaze seasoned dimensional travelers. The brutal carnage of a tournament and the awesome power of the competitors astonish veteran warriors. Indeed, the Arena of Champions is the pinnacle of public entertainment on the continent. It is so popular that its business has long since grown far beyond its capacity; ticket prices are steep, and many events are broadcast and marketed as pay-per-view events. For all its grandeur, though, the Arena of Champions represents a mere fraction of the arena industry in Atlantis.

From the start of his dominion on the re-emerged continent, Splynnncryth has been making money by providing exotic and lavish entertainment throughout Splynn and the other cities of Atlantis. Across The Valley of Wonder, there is at least one large arena and several small ones in each city. These stadiums provide entertainment for visitors, bring in money, and keep his minions happy.

Running the Show

Although Splynnncryth owns all the arenas in Atlantis, each arena is operated by an editor, who is usually a high-ranking minion or dragon of considerable influence. Editors hire and fire talent, sell advertising to merchants and companies, supervise the gambling, and coordinate every aspect of the arena's business. In return, the editor gets 25% of the arena's profits. It's a high-pressure job. A good editor is part CEO and part showman, using every means he or she can think of to bring in huge profits. A bad editor will quickly be replaced. An editor who gets caught taking more than his share will put to death in his own arena!

Bringing in the Money

The purpose of an arena is to make money by putting on a show. Just like modern stadiums, they make money by selling tickets, food, drinks, advertising, merchandise, special services, and anything else they can think of. Unlike most modern sports stadiums, Splugorth arenas also offer a great deal of gambling, especially for gladiatorial events.

Large arenas have bazaars set up inside the structure itself. Beasts and sword-fodder slaves killed in the arena are often cooked and served in the box seats or the built-in restaurant. Magic mer-

chants offer to teach curious magic users the spells they see demonstrated in shows. Weapons dealers sell the same instruments of death and armor used by the gladiators. Travel services book safaris to see the exotic locations and beasts seen in the arena. Prices are inflated (2-3 times what a shrewd buyer could get in the market, sometimes more), but patrons often don't care.

Smaller arenas can't offer the same kind of spectacles as the major ones, but they have important roles, too. Like a minor league, the smaller arenas feed talent and acts to the larger ones. Some smaller arenas specialize in particular events or styles of gladiator combat. Prices tend to be far more reasonable, and the smaller venue allows fans to get a lot closer to the action.

Then there are the "pits." These are privately owned, small-scale operations with no official backing or controls. They're often an extension of other establishments like casinos, bars, and commercial businesses as a way of attracting clients. Splynnncryth's representatives keep close tabs on these bush leagues, and they are quick to buy out any establishment that gets big enough to cut into the Splugorth's arena monopoly.

Setting the Stage

The center of an arena, in its usual configuration, is a wide, flat area, usually covered in loose, sandy soil. For the pit-fighting leagues, this is enough. Proper arenas, though, have many ways to set their stages for shows and games.

Magic and technology combine to set the scene for every act. A crew of magic users and Kittani technicians adjust the lighting, sound, and weather to support the show. A small labyrinth underneath and around the arena serves as a support area with armories, a medical clinic, stables, garages, maintenance areas, and many entryways into the arena floor (most of them are hidden). These arenas also have several types of invisible barriers to keep the crowd and the events separate. Finally, they have enormous screens all around the arena for instant replays, announcements, and advertisements.

Large stadium-style arenas take this a big step further by making the entire arena floor into one giant teleportation circle! In this way, the editor can bring in and clear gigantic, specialized, elaborate sets in a few seconds. Splynnncryth has a number of "stage setting" circles out away from the city, where show stages are constructed, decorated, and set. At showtime, the whole set teleports in, only to teleport out at the end.

Splynnncryth's Atlantis is a hierarchical society, and those who pay more get more. Every arena has exclusive V.I.P. box seating for the rich and influential. The editor will do nearly anything possible to curry favor with these guests and will often grant them special favors, such as meeting the show participants and eating prime cuts of the ones that die (the rest either gets cooked up for the in-house restaurants or sold to local establishments like the "Fresh Meat" or "Help Yourself Buffet" in World Book 21).

Bringing in the Talent

Arenas lack the space to house gladiators, animals, or men of magic. Their editors lack the time to manage the talent. Their budgets lack the funds to support everyone who steps out onto the arena floor. Instead, they use connections with local businesses, guilds, authorities, and gladiator schools to bring in performers and shows for regular and special events.

Although the arenas have a well-earned reputation for blood sports, there are many shows between fights that don't involve direct violence, such as product demonstrations, magic acts, stunts, music numbers, comedies, audience contests, and special ceremonies. Sometimes these sideshows become popular enough to grow into big attractions. However, none of these nonviolent shows ever top the main events.

The biggest profits in the arena business come from combat and death. Fights and executions bring the crowd, fuel the gambling, and sell the merchandise more than anything else. Any editor who wants his arena to make money needs gladiators, for which he turns to the arena's symbiotic partners: the gladiator schools.

Gladiator Schools

Gladiator schools buy slaves, build and train them up, send them to fight in arenas, and sell them on the open market. Owning and running a gladiator school is a major status symbol among the minions of the Splugorth. Blood sports are so popular in Atlantis that the owners of gladiator schools can become as wealthy and influential as some editors.

Sanctioned Gladiator Schools

Not just anyone can enter a gladiator in an arena match. Atlantis spectators have high standards, so editors depend on gladiator schools to provide powerful, well-trained gladiators. The ruler of Atlantis enforces these standards by requiring his arenas to buy and hire gladiators only from schools that he sanctions with a special charter.

Sanctioned schools tend to be very wealthy, often owning hundreds or even thousands of slaves. All of them have their own in-house training, human augmentation (usually a Bio-Wizard or Tattoo Master), medical facilities, and security force. Sanctioned schools get inspected regularly by the Splugorth High Lords to ensure the slaves do not revolt or escape.

Unlicensed Gladiator Schools

There's nothing illegal about an unlicensed gladiator school in Atlantis. Many slave owners are fond of buying, training, and entering their slaves in show combat. Without a charter, however, these slave owners are restricted to small, unofficial pit-fighting leagues. The pits are nowhere near as profitable as the arenas. Most would-be gladiator schools lack the means to bust into the "big leagues" of arena fights and either go out of business or accept their lot, shipping off cheap, poorly-prepared gladiators to die in the meat grinder of the pit-fighting leagues.

A few gladiator schools do manage to amass enough wealth and influence to get out of the pit-fighting leagues. Splynncryth sometimes grants gladiator school charters as a reward to favored minions, loyal friends, or individuals who have done him a great service. More often, though, a would-be sanctioned school owner must agree to steep fees as part of the charter.

The School Itself

Life in a gladiator school depends on your position and the prosperity of the school. There is a strict hierarchy. This social structure is the backbone of a successful gladiator school, enforced by owners, servants, and senior slaves alike.

At the top are the chief owners, who enjoy the best of everything. Within their school, they do as they like and reap the profits from their slaves' blood. Although many chief owners augment their own gladiators or get heavily involved in day-to-day business, most tend to focus on politicking and making deals with arenas.

Most gladiator school owners have a few partners who also own a share of the school. These partners are on an equal social footing with the owner, but specialize in critical areas of the business. Their roles can include buying and selling slaves, augmenting gladiators with Tattoo Magic or Bio-Wizardry, overseeing security, and/or supervising training. Some of these partners may get ambitious and make a play for becoming the chief of the school, which can make for some interesting intrigue within the school's walls.

Next in the pecking order are the skilled servants, including the trainers, doctors, guards, armorers, and bookkeepers. These can be slaves or hired workers. Either way, they are treated well and afforded a good deal of respect.

The lowest in the pecking order are the slaves without valuable skills who take care of the ordinary domestic tasks. They aren't exactly treated badly; in fact, they enjoy more freedom and less abuse than the gladiators. However, they're the least-valuable people in the school. The best they can hope for is to be ignored and live out a quiet, anonymous life. Even most gladiators tend to look down on these slaves.

The gladiator slaves have their own pecking order. The gladiators tend to enforce this system upon each other. This system determines who gets the best living conditions, including food, equipment, and living space. It is a system of respect, deference, and often fear of the more-accomplished gladiators. Those who prove their abilities in the practice yard and the arena move up, while slaves that are weak, cowardly, or disrespectful of their betters get beaten, abused, or outright murdered.

Fresh Meat

The lowest of the gladiators are the new acquisitions. Theirs is a life of misery, pain, and often death. They live in the worst cells, get all the worst duties, and are subject to hazing from everyone, especially the other slaves. In these conditions, they must learn to fight quickly. Those who don't show enough potential become sword fodder, either killed in practice accidents at the school or killed in deliberately one-sided battles in the arena. Some schools require their raw recruits to pair off and fight one another to the death in order to move on to the next level. This may seem wasteful, but it's really a cost-saving measure. Before their training or augmentation begins, human slaves are cheap and expendable. Augmentation costs a great deal of money, which would be wasted on a weak or passive slave.

Gladiators-In-Training

Slaves who show some promise begin a serious training and augmentation program. The type of augmentation depends on the school; many schools have their own resident Bio-Wizards or Tattoo Masters. Most gladiators in Atlantis are Bio-Borgs, T-Monster Men, Maxi-Men, or Tattooed Archers, although a few schools have begun creating Juicers, Crazies, and full-conversion 'Borgs. This process generally takes several months. Although

discipline and training remains harsh, most gladiators-in-training are well-fed and aren't abused nearly as much as the fresh meat.

Blooded Gladiators

If there is a "graduation" from these gladiator schools, it is combat. Once a gladiator is "blooded" by winning a duel or battle in the arena, he or she becomes a marketable commodity. These duels are common events in the pits and smaller arenas of Atlantis. Blooded gladiators are rewarded with better living conditions. Although blooded gladiators continue training and augmentation, they are well cared-for as the school grooms them to be sold or entered in prestigious events.

Champion Gladiators

Well-known and famous gladiators often enjoy special privileges and pleasures in Gladiator schools. They get the finest living arrangements, training, medical care, and food available. These slaves are the pampered pets of the school owners. Champion gladiators often help run the training. Although champion gladiators still enter in duels and battles, the schools tend to be very choosy about which events they enter. After all, famous champions are valuable assets outside the arena as bodyguards, breeding stock, trainers, and advertisers. It doesn't do to have a major asset crippled or killed unless the school gets its money's worth. If a valuable champion dies in the arena, many schools will pay to get him or her resurrected.

Professional Gladiators

More than a few people freely choose to fight in the arena as professionals. Some of these are adventurers or supernatural creatures with no formal gladiator training looking to make a quick payday. Many freed champions take this path, returning to the life they know instead of putting it behind them. Many even return to their old gladiator school, where they enjoy a special status on par with the most important servants.

Prisoner Gladiators

From time to time, a "sword fodder" slave surprises everyone by surviving an execution event in the arena. They're still condemned, but their skills (or luck) have impressed the editor enough that he wants to see them again. Such winners are usually shipped off to gladiator school. In some cases, the slave embraces his or her new life and takes well to life in a gladiator school. More often, though, these slaves are too focused on their old lives and refuse to cooperate.

In other cases, blooded gladiators who have trained in the schools become unruly and try to escape or revolt. Splynnecryth puts a high priority on hunting down these upstarts, dispatching Conservators and offering large bounties for their return. When the gladiator escapees are returned, they lose all the privileges they used to enjoy.

These uncooperative fighters are prisoner gladiators. They get no training or special equipment. They're fed enough to keep them alive and healthy. Otherwise, they're kept subdued and locked up. Gladiator schools enter these slaves in events as often as possible in order to make an example of them to other slaves, get rid of these nuisances, and make some money in the process.

Former Gladiators

Although many slaves who enter gladiator school die either on the way to or inside the arena, a surprising number find second careers. Aside from escape, the best chance a gladiator has of avoiding death in the arena is by retiring. This can happen a few ways. Most gladiators who get out are sold in the slave market to new owners. Some are freed as a reward for a particularly great performance. A few outlive their fighting careers.

Merchants and visitors in the Splynn Dimensional Market often buy blooded gladiators as bodyguards. The presence of these famous fighters is often enough to deter would-be thieves and troublemakers. For local merchants, owning famous gladiators can be helpful for publicity and advertising, attracting fans and giving endorsements. For visitors, these slaves are an opportunity to bring an exotic and powerful new servant home.

Other minions and citizens around Atlantis often buy young gladiators who show intelligence and loyalty. Such slaves can be useful as expendable soldiers. Some trusted former gladiators may also perform special missions in human or humanoid areas or dimensions without attracting too much attention.

Occasionally, a gladiator will simply run away. The school will make a concerted effort to hunt escapees down, offering bounties or hiring trackers to recover their property. Escaped gladiators are bad for a school's reputation and business. A few escapees may go ignored by Splynnecryth's agents, but any sanctioned school that appears lax toward escapees will quickly lose its charter.

A few gladiators live to be past their prime. These grizzled veterans can make excellent trainers for a gladiator school, having lived through and watched the training process. A great trainer is even more valuable than a great champion, as he or she can improve the school's prospects for many years to come.

Running a Gladiator Campaign

If the players are gladiator slaves, then they'll likely share some common goals. Your group will likely want to escape, instigate a revolt, or get revenge against their enslavers/tormentors. Arena combat can be fun, though; the players may find they enjoy the thrills and challenges of the arena and seek freedom through victory.

Death is a real possibility for the characters in the arena, but it doesn't happen every fight. In most cases, once a character is unconscious or in a coma (reduced to or below 0 H.P./M.D.C.), the fight is over. Even if a character dies, a gladiator school may resurrect him purely as a business move; gladiators are expensive, after all.

Of course, some foes and special events are so deadly that there isn't enough of a body left to revive. As a G.M., you need to play up the deadliness of the event without killing off your player characters willy-nilly. One way to do this is by killing off friendly NPCs. Another way is to give a player character an incapacitating wound rather than killing him outright, encouraging the rest of the group to save him. Most gladiators are only looking out for number one, so a team that genuinely takes care of each other has a certain advantage.

If or when a player character does die, consider asking the player to simply give the same character sheet a new name, description, and background. New gladiators are always coming in, and some gladiator schools have been known to buy replacements from one of the pit leagues.

Playing escaped gladiators can be fun, too. The Liberated Underground has been known to raid gladiator schools, but it rarely does so, due to the extensive security at these schools. Alternatively, a minion may grow disillusioned with his/her life and help or even join a group of escaping gladiators.

Arena Events

Pit-fighting leagues are simple affairs. They're usually nothing but one-on-one combat in a confined space. Some have special hazards in the pit, like Vibro-Blades jutting out of the walls, and a few are large enough to have an extra fighter or two participate, but the pit-fighting leagues tend to keep things very simple, lest they attract too much attention from the Arenas and get bought or muscled out of the business. Most pit-fighting leagues have special rules restricting how powerful the gladiators can be.

Arenas often feature simple duels as well, but these fights tend to have powerful gladiators from sanctioned schools. They also put on a huge variety of shows, though most of them feature some kind of violence. Editors like to compete for business and influence by trying to outdo rival arenas. The results are expensive, but spectacular attractions. The bigger the arena, the higher the expectations.

The following tables are meant to help a G.M. come up with a memorable and dangerous event quickly, either with a roll of the dice or by choosing one or more options. The list of possibilities is not all-inclusive; editors are always looking for new and exciting events to bring in more business. See *The Maze* and *The Drowning Mountain* for a couple of fleshed-out, elaborate events.

Atmospherics: Choose or roll 1D6

1. Clear.
2. Thick patches of fog gives plenty of opportunities for concealment. The crowd's seating area is enchanted to allow them to see through the cloud. Unless they have some non-visual senses, characters are -9 to strike, parry, and dodge in the fog, and are +40% to prowling.
3. Rain beats down on the arena floor, making the conditions a bit more slippery (-2 to dodge, -2 to rolls against disarm attacks).
4. Snow falls on the arena floor, and the temperature drops below freezing.
5. Thunderstorm! Add occasional lightning strikes to rain conditions. These strikes happen at predetermined spots, and fit a pattern. Should a gladiator get caught in the wrong place at the wrong time, the lightning will do 3D6 M.D.C.
6. Storm, with an active tornado! The tornado will work its way around the arena under the control of the editor. If a fighter is unwilling to fight, or is too evasive, the editor will use the tornado to pick up and fling the fighter. This is a simple roll to strike that must be dodged. The twister does 1D6 M.D.C., plus the victim loses two attacks and lands at the feet of his opponent.

Stage: Choose one or roll 1D6

1. Flat and Sandy. The classic arena floor is still a favorite, and it comes with hidden trapdoors for dramatic entrances and surprises.

2. Hill. The arena floor rises to a round top in the middle. The slopes are just shallow enough to allow spectators to see the action on the far side.

3. River. Popular with team matches, the arena is divided up into two hills with a small river flowing between them. The depth and power of the river change according to the whims of the editor. There may or may not be a bridge across it.

4. Platform. The gladiators must fight on a raised platform. Usually there's some kind of nasty, certain death awaiting any who fall off (spikes, poisonous snakes, fire, whatever).

5. Fort. This is a popular option for unbalanced team events. A small fort is built in the middle of the arena.

6. Platforms and Ropes. Gladiators must fight on several platforms of different heights connected by ropes, rope bridges, and hanging ropes that the gladiators can use to swing across, Tarzan-style. Fighters beware: these ropes can be cut if they take more than 30 S.D.C. damage at any one point!

Type of Event: Choose or roll 1D10

1. Duel. A character squares off against a single foe. This may be with or without weapons.

2. Team event. The characters form part of a team that fights against another in an even (not necessarily in terms of numbers) fight.

3. Obstacle Course. The characters must negotiate or survive a series of nasty traps.

4. Escape and Evasion. Pitted against an overwhelming foe, the characters must stay alive for a set period of time.

5. William Tell marksmanship event: Characters must shoot a small object off a slave's head to win the slave. This could be a fun way to bring in a new player or NPC.

6. Beastriding. Competitors must stay on the back of an exotic (possibly supernatural), wild animal for as long as possible. The animal is often drugged and trained to be hostile and violent. Horsemanship skill is required to stay mounted, while dodging, running speed, and climbing is paramount for those who want to survive getting thrown off.

7. Strength contest. The characters may compete, or they may be used in the competition, a la dwarf-tossing.

8. Race (or chase!). The characters compete in a full-contact race, which may or may not include weapons.

9. The characters are players in a crude form of Rugby/Football, with few or no contact rules. Armor may or may not be provided.

10. The characters compete in dodgeball, but the balls have deadly surprises, like exploding on contact, jutting spikes out in all directions while in flight, sticking to a target and suddenly becoming 10 times heavier, or cracking open to release a small swarm of angry, stinging insects.

The Maze:

A Large Arena Event

This is a popular event meant to showcase exotic predators hunting in their natural habitats. Their prey: helpless humanoids. This show is a joint venture with the Splynn Zoo, which provides the predators, stage climates, and some technical assistance. This show is offered only at the larger arenas, since the entire stage must be prepared in advance at the Splynn Zoo and teleported in.

The Contestants

A large group of a few dozen prey, called “the herd,” enters the arena. Most editors prefer to use ordinary, powerless S.D.C. humanoids with no weapons and little or no armor. The most-favored contestants are captured Coalition soldiers, but only the richest editors can afford to kill off groups of these highly-coveted slaves. More often, the editor buys up weak, cheap slave stock that no one else wants and throws them in.

The other ‘contestants’ are the real attraction. They are exotic, often supernatural predators, usually the type that prefer to stalk humans and pick them off one at a time. Each predator is trained to kill its victims one at a time in the most ferocious, spectacular manner possible.

The Setup

The arena floor is divided up into a large maze with impenetrable walls. The walls are specially enchanted so that the audience can see through them, but the participants cannot. The Maze consists of four large, open areas linked by tight, twisting passages that worm through the walls.

Before the event starts, an overseer tells the humanoid slaves in the herd that they’re entering a maze, and if they can get to the end of it, they will be sent home.

Area 1: The Plains

Suggested monsters:

Demonrunners (*Rifts® World Book 21: Splynn Dimensional Market*, page 71)

Lions (*Monsters and Animals*, page 217)

Crawlies (*Rifts® World Book 3: England*, page 60)

The first area is a very open type of terrain, though it will allow for plenty of hiding spots. The climate could feature tall grasses, sand dunes, icy wastes, or some kind of alien flora. This area contains two categories of threats. The first are the chasers: large predatory animals released shortly after the herd enters the area. These could be native predators like lions or bears, or supernatural predators.

The herd will run away towards the far side of the area, and often, the chasers won’t follow them directly. Any relief from this is short-lived, with more dangers springing up from underfoot! The second threat in this area are predators that hunt by lying in wait on the ground and ambushing. Deadly vines like the Razorvine of Palladium Fantasy’s Northern Hinterlands are particularly popular.

Vines or no, everyone will soon realize that they have to get to the far side of this area as quickly as possible, because they’re utterly defenseless. The whole herd will sprint to the far side, only to find another cruel twist: the passage going into the wall on the other side is little more than a crawl space. Panic overtakes the herd as they try to worm their way in while the hungry predators close to feast on the unfortunates at the rear of the group. There’s more than one way into the wall, but they’re spread out.

Once everyone is safely inside the tunnel, the herd usually pauses, not wanting to leave the tight confines. That’s a mistake. The walls of the tunnel begin to heat up. If they don’t find their way through within five minutes, it gets hot enough to cause burns at an increasing rate (1D6 S.D.C. per melee at five minutes, 2D6 per melee at six minutes, 3D6 per melee at 7 minutes). Even worse, there are dead ends and wrong turns that can lead right back into Area 1.

Area 2: The Waterfall

The tunnel suddenly opens up to reveal an easy pathway leading down to a wide pool surrounded by tall cliffs. The pathway goes down into the pool and up to the next tunnel on the other side. On the side opposite the path, a waterfall pours down into the pool below.

The quick and easy way across is to follow the path. It’s also the most dangerous. The water gets about waist-deep, slowing down characters to ¼ their normal speed. Inside the pool is a giant, hungry predator (I suggest the Trelque-Huecuve from *Rifts® World Book 6: South America*, page 149) who will gladly devour those who take the path below. However, it will ‘only’ grab 1 victim at a time, and will take about 15 seconds to devour each victim. If the whole herd rushes through together (a rarity), they may only lose two if they move quickly. Of course, most won’t take this way after seeing the first victim get dragged under.

An alternate way that doesn’t look as dangerous is to follow a narrow, twisting path among the cliffs opposite the waterfall. There are a number of caves in this cliff, along with cliff/mountain climate predators (a mated pair of Erta will do). These predators will either take victims for themselves or throw them into the pool below, where they’re likely to be drowned and devoured before they can swim to safety.

The most difficult way is also the safest: to climb along the face of the cliff with the waterfall. The giant squid can’t reach there and the Erta don’t go there. Those with the climbing skill can make it without too much difficulty. Roll twice for making it under the waterfall, where the handholds are more treacherous; one success means the character gets through. Characters with Gymnastics or Acrobatics can get a final chance to avoid falling by rolling under their maintain balance skill. Those without the climbing skill can still try (50% chance of falling). Everyone else must risk the squid or the Erta. Note: Reduce players’ climbing skill by 1% for each point of heat S.D.C. damage taken in the previous tunnel; burned hands don’t work as well.

The far side of The Waterfall has a wider opening, with enough space for 2 to walk side-by-side. It too will heat up if the herd stays for too long (same rules as before, but the characters should be able to move through this area faster). As before, there are forks, dead ends, and wrong turns, which tend to slow down and spread out the herd even more.

Area 3: The Woods

The twisting maze opens up to reveal a forest with many types of trees. This area is all about forest-dwelling predators, both natural and native and supernatural alike (usually in different zones within Area 3). Threats come from above, below, and all around. Native bears and wolves might be mixed in with Yll Tree Climbers (*Rifts® Atlantis*, page 80), Kryygorth Hunters (*Splynn Dimensional Market*, page 73), or Scroll Worms (*Northern Hinterlands*). The Flora is equally treacherous, and can include young Terror Trees (from *Palladium Fantasy: Northern Hinterlands*), Razorvine, Snapper Hearts (*Rifts® England*, page 36), Cobra Vines (*Rifts® England*, page 34).

Although the previous areas will both thin the herd, The Woods tend to take out the vast majority of what's left. Quite often, none survive, and the event ends here. By luck, cooperation, or sheer weight of numbers, however, many editions of The Maze go on just a bit longer.

Those who make it to the far side of The Woods find an entrance into a long, winding stairway leading up inside a smooth stone tower. Once again, the editor will start to cook them if they take too long, but anyone who can walk should make it through quickly.

Area 4: Pest Control

The last of the survivors trickle in, emerging from the long staircase up a tower in the middle of the arena into a small, flat area at the top. A fountain bubbles in the middle, draining off into the waterfall for Area 2. Now the editor gives the group one final, horrible surprise: Only one of them will be allowed to leave alive. A number of Mega-Damage weapons (usually lower-damage melee weapons, maybe a pistol) appear around the fountain, and the editor cheerfully announces that only one of the herd may survive; they have one minute to eliminate the other survivors, or he will drop all the walls and set all the predators in The Maze upon them.

This is no idle threat. At the end of one minute, the mesa will drop swiftly to the ground level, all barriers will disappear, and the predators will be whipped into a killing frenzy.

Aftermath

Once the herd is dead (or reduced to a lone survivor), the V.I.P.s vote on the “best kill” of the event.

Survivors of The Maze are given to the trainer of the animal with the “Best Kill” award, along with all the weapons and equipment presented at the fountain.

They're doomed... or are they?

There is one forlorn hope for a group who wants to escape without murdering their fellow survivors. The Maze is governed by a legally-binding contract between the arena and the Splynn Zoo, and that contract has one tiny loophole. The animal that wins “Best Kill” must survive to the end. If enough slaves survive to the end, and they unite against the predators of The Maze, it is theoretically possible for them to kill all the predators of The Maze. In that case, the herd gets the “best kill” award, and they are given to themselves, which means they must be released.

No herd has ever done that before. Can your group be the first?

G.M. Suggestions: If you decide to put your players through this event, I suggest you give them some kind of special ability, insight, or opportunity that the editor doesn't know of or foresee. I suggest you have a rival of the arena's editor stack the deck in the group's favor by telling them about the hazards in advance and ensuring them that they get more potent weapons and equipment in Area 4 than normal.

Even with those advantages, The Maze is a meat-grinder. Pad the group with lots of sympathetic, but expendable NPCs and don't be shy about bumping them off.

A Splynn Arena Event: The Drowning Mountain

The Drowning Mountain is an elimination tournament of monumental proportions. Hugely expensive and complicated, it requires a lot of magic and technical resources to pull off. This tournament is a special event the Splynn Arena hosts once a year.

The Contestants

Wealthy slave-owners and gladiator schools act as sponsors and submit teams of four gladiators. All gladiators must be bloodied and proven prior to entry, and all must be slaves. None may fly or levitate; if they have that power, it must be disabled.

This tournament is not a tournament of champions. Most competitors are level 1-3, with only an occasional competitor having significant experience. The Splynn Arena advertises this as the chance for new blood to join the ranks of the great champions. In reality, the death rate for this event is so high that owners only enter those gladiators deemed “expendable.” The arena pays below fair market value for the contestants, but offers the sponsors many benefits, including advertising, prestige, and prize money depending on how well a sponsor's team does.

The Setup

The arena is dominated by a large structure in the center. Part step-pyramid, part castle, “The Mountain” is designed for a climactic series of vicious fights, spectacular deaths, and unexpected twists. There are a series of magic and physical barriers that divide one step of the pyramid from the next, and one sector of the pyramid from another.

As the event progresses, the arena floor and The Mountain will slowly sink, and the Deathlake will appear and steadily flood the arena through a series of waves, until only one team (a portion of it, really) is left at the end, at the top of The Mountain, surrounded by the Deathlake. 128 slave gladiators of low level enter. At most, four may emerge alive.

Wave 1: Arena Floor, “The Race”

32 teams emerge from the walls onto the plain surrounding The Mountain. They're in a wide, open “pie slice” of land, with impenetrable barriers to each side. To the front, the land rises gently towards the first wall. As they emerge, the entire Arena floor, Mountain and all, begins to sink slowly, and the Deathlake starts flooding in.

The type of Deathlake changes for each rendition of The Drowning Mountain. Sometimes it's plain water, populated with millions of ravenous leech-like fish, sometimes it's acid, sometimes it's liquid nitrogen. Whatever it is, it WILL KILL the gladiators quickly if they let it catch them. The team must run to The Mountain, but that's not all.

There is another team in their slice (only 16 slices total); the barrier between their slice of the arena floor and the pyramid will only drop when four gladiators inside their slice are dead. It's a race against time. If the characters prevail (they should, since strong teams are pitted against weaker ones here), they will win in time to climb to a 1/16th area (quarter of a side) on the first terrace of The Mountain. If they take too long, or try to avoid fighting, the Deathlake claims them.

The Editor (controller of the Arena) wants this wave to be quick, brutal, and decisive. This wave is meant to eliminate the weak and the hesitant. Should parts of both teams remain, they must figure out how to work together on the next wave. If they don't, they'll probably die.

Wave 2: First Terrace, "The Foot"

The survivors of the first wave have little time to recover. As soon as the Deathlake has advanced to the foot of The Mountain, half the barriers dividing up the first terrace disappear. The first terrace is now divided up into eighths. The Deathlake continues to rise. Again, four gladiators must die before the barrier to the second terrace falls. As if that wasn't enough, the surface of the First Terrace is treacherous! It might be oiled and slippery, it might have entangling vines, it could be a giant trampoline, or it could simply be a giant woven net, whatever. The point is that dodging is out of the question, and movement is difficult and dangerous. You can't be too cautious, though, for the Deathlake will claim any sector that can't kill four gladiators in the time allotted. When four gladiators remain, the next barrier drops, and they can climb up to a 1/8th section in the second terrace.

Wave 3: Second Terrace, "The Zoo"

Half the barriers drop again, and we're down to four sections. This section, however, is inhabited by vicious pest-type predators, whipped and drugged into a frenzy! Though they're not a serious threat to the gladiators, they're an annoying distraction. There are a few "safe spots" where the predators don't go (these are obvious/marked), but the teams must go through monster territory before they can reach and fight the other team. Occasionally, if one of the teams has no competition (killed by the Deathlake), "weaker" prisoners who are in the arena for punishment are put in and promised their lives/freedom if they can kill one of the gladiators. This rarely happens. Once only four gladiators remain, they are allowed to fight their way to the Third Terrace. As always, if the teams take too long, the Deathlake kills them, but the Editor usually keeps the sinking slow here, wanting a good semi-final.

Wave 4: Third Terrace, "Betrayals"

Two more barriers drop, and now there are only two sections, each in a fat "V"-shape. As the name suggests, this wave is about backstabbing intrigue. When the wave begins, the Deathlake pauses in its rise, and the gladiators are magically prevented from fighting by a short-term sanctuary spell. Instead, they are invited

to a spa-type area in the corner of the "V" for healing, refreshment, and a short rest. The gladiators' health, P.P.E., and I.S.P. are restored with special potions (product placement for vendors in the Market) served to them by beautiful slaves. The gladiators interview with a pair of "hostesses" (usually succubus demons) and mix/socialize with each other. Each gladiator is allowed a single request. If the Splynn Arena staff can grant it, they will. The only limitations are: it can't cost the arena more than 500,000 credits, only one thing can be requested, and it can't affect the rest of The Drowning Mountain. The most common requests are freeing a loved one and resurrecting a fallen teammate, if there's enough of him/her left (if the Deathlake claimed them, usually not). Other, stranger requests have included a pistachio, an autographed portrait of Splynncryth, the murder of a hated rival slave (outside the arena), and even a conjugal visit with the demonic hostess! Many of these gladiators are not entirely sane, and some of them go for shock value, hoping to exploit their fame if they win.

This pause usually lasts about an hour, during which the heaviest betting of the whole event takes place. It's a last breath of peace, which serves to emphasize the brutality of the event at the end when, with no warning, all hell breaks loose. The hostess and slave girls vanish, the sanctuary spell breaks, and now the gladiators must decide who they want to kill. By this point, it's very rare to have an intact team left, and even intact teams are known to break up in Wave 4. The Deathlake rises, but the fights here are always over well before it claims the Third Terrace. When four gladiators are left, they advance as a team to the top of The Mountain (it's rare, but possible, to have a team stay together to the final wave).

Wave 5: Top of The Mountain. "The Finals"

The final barrier drops, and the eight remaining gladiators must fight on an ever-shrinking island. The decorations and land-types change, but this level is designed to provide a climactic atmosphere, with flame spurts from the ground, lightning crashing above, and the crowd in a frenzy of cheering. Unlike previous waves, only one team can win, and that team must fight against even odds until the last combat. When the first gladiator dies, his/her killer falls to the ground, paralyzed by a special parasite implanted during the previous wave. He/she stays paralyzed until a teammate dies, or until his/her team wins. This way, the fight stays even all the way to the end. It's rare for more than two to survive the Top of the Mountain. Even if the other team doesn't kill any members, the Deathlake usually claims them. After all, who has time to drag a helpless body up a hill when you're fighting for your life?

Aftermath

When every member of one team is dead, The Mountain (really, the whole arena floor) rises, the lake recedes, and with the sound of dramatic music and thunderous cheers, the survivor(s) stands triumphant. Winners become instant celebrities who are given their freedom, offered professional gladiator contracts, offered all kinds of slave women for their pleasure (so the slavers can breed better gladiators), and offered advertising/endorsement deals, etc. Those who wish to leave are given money, equipment,

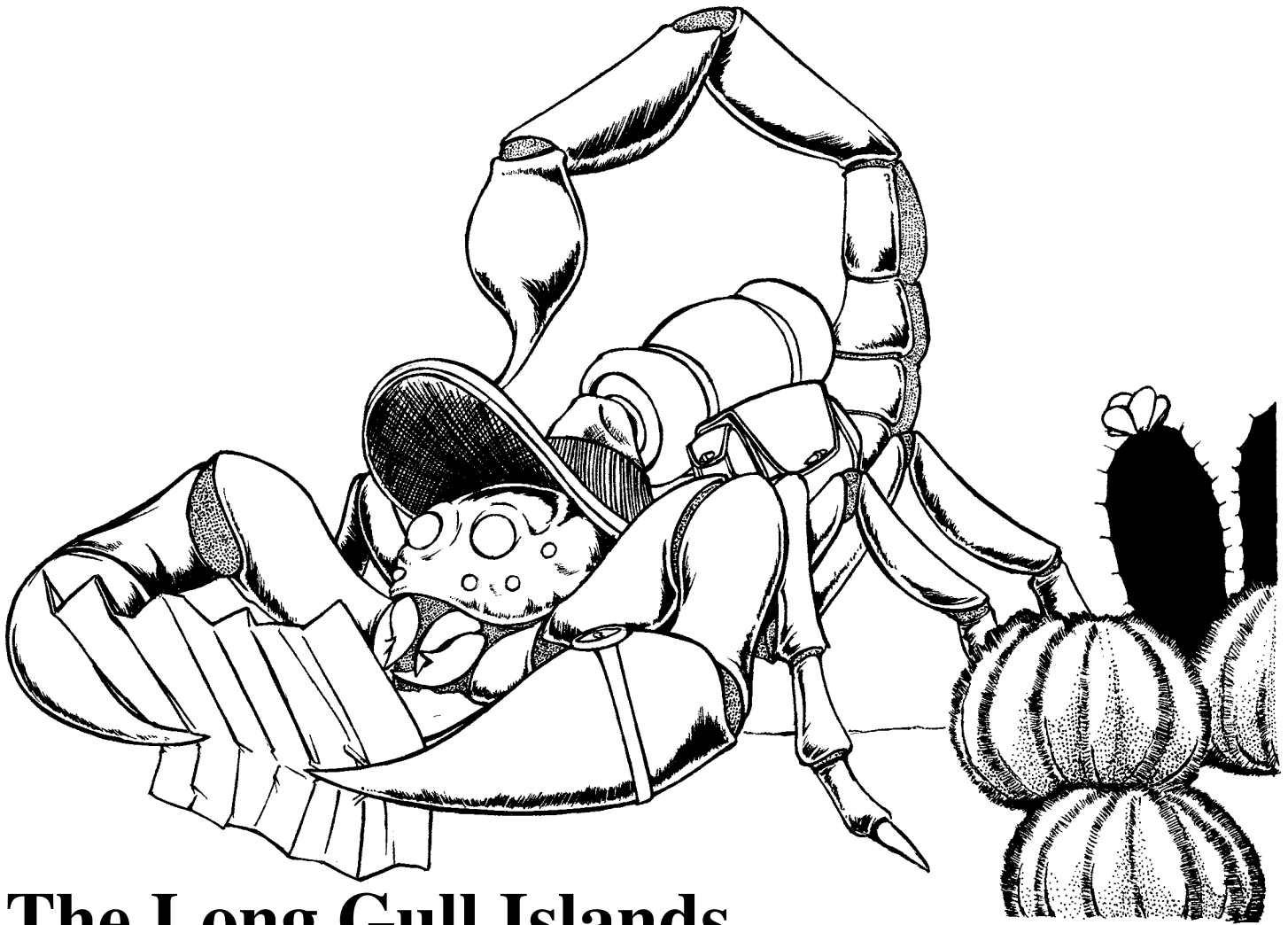
and a free ride to the dimension of their choice (or anywhere on Rifts Earth).

For the gladiators, this gives them a chance (albeit a small one) of catapulting their careers to the very top, winning freedom for themselves and someone they care about. It's a small hope that belies the reality that only one or two usually survive The Drowning Mountain.

For the owners, this is a chance to advertise. Schools and owners whose gladiators enter The Drowning Mountain gain prestige and make far more money selling and hiring out their gladiators to arenas across Atlantis. The cost of losing four slaves is well worth the publicity and additional income, especially if any of

them survive to Wave 4. Even if they don't, this is a good opportunity for them to get rid of gladiators who are becoming spirited or unruly.

For the Arena, the Drowning Mountain costs a large fortune, but it never fails to turn a profit. Vast amounts of money changes hands over the course of the Drowning Mountain. Ticket prices are steep, but most of the money comes from gambling. The Arena gives odds on every aspect of every wave. Odds range from very probable (More than 30 will die in the Deathlake) to the ultimate longshot: a single team will win The Dying Mountain intact. That last bet has never paid off in the Splynn Arena's history. Can your group beat the odds?



The Long Gull Islands

Optional Material for After the Bomb®

By Michael J. Osborne

Dedicación: El ganadero de Aprendizaje y el carácter Elfar están dedicados a mi mejor amiga. Usted siempre tendrá un hogar en mi corazón.

Introduction

When a movie sequel is written it is usually successful if it advances the storyline and stays true to the movie that came before it. This submission is intended to do just that: add to the fun and compelling story of **After the Bomb®**. I hope you enjoy it.

New Apprenticeship: Rancher Apprenticeship

In a world of intelligent mutant animals, many mutants find the idea of using non-intelligent animals as beasts of burden or food offensive. A mutant horse is not likely to ride a non-intelligent horse. A mutant bull is not likely to eat a beef hamburger. Since mutant animals still need riding animals and to mass-produce food, however, giant insect ranches were developed. These hardy ranchers are as tough and skilled as the cattle ranchers of old.

Main Skill: Breed & Control Insects (+20%)

Core Skills: General Repair and Maintenance, Herding Giant Insects (Herding Cattle) 30+5%, Horsemanship: Exotic, Imitate

Insect Sounds, Language: Native or Sign Language, Literacy: Native, Lore: Giant Insects (Lore: Cattle and Animals) 30+5%, Physical Labor and Roping 20+5%. All get a +10% apprenticeship bonus.

Military and W.P. Skills: Land Navigation, W.P. Knife, W.P. Rope, and W.P. Shotgun.

Domestic, Rogue and Cowboy Skills: Any three skills from listed skill list(s).

New Mutants

Early Hominid

Original Animal Characteristics

Description: These people are taller than modern humans. They have a lot of body hair and a protruding mouth, as well as a smaller cranial capacity, but, despite this, they can perform non-apprenticeship jobs. A few are brilliant and take up apprenticeships. They are social and see mutant animals as kindred spirits but have no qualms about hunting and eating non-intelligent animals.

Size Level: 12

Build: Medium.

Mutant Changes & Costs

Total BIO-E: 10.

Attribute Bonuses: None.

Penalties: Roll 2D6 for I.Q. If a Natural 12 is rolled, roll an extra 1D6. Characters with an I.Q. of 11 or lower can only take the Backgrounds: Feral, Raised on the Frontier, Guerrilla Warrior, Raised by Bandits, Freed Slave, or any other non-apprenticeship background. Characters with an I.Q. above 11 can take apprenticeship jobs.

Human Features

Hands: Automatically full.

Biped: Automatically full.

Speech: 5 BIO-E for partial, or 10 BIO-E for full.

Looks: Automatically partial. The character does not look like a modern man but more like Homo Erectus or Neanderthal.

5 BIO-E for full. The character looks fully human, though rather hairy, with a wide nose, prominent brow and slightly sloped forehead.

Natural Weapons:

5 BIO-E for 1D6 damage Claws (Hands).

5 BIO-E for 1D4 damage Running Claws (Feet).

5 BIO-E for 2D4 damage Teeth.

5 BIO-E for 2D6 damage Tusks.

Mutant Powers:

5 BIO-E for Brute Strength.

10 BIO-E for Beastly Strength.

25 BIO-E for Crushing Strength (Partial Looks only).

10 BIO-E for Extra I.Q.

5 BIO-E for Extra P.E.

10 BIO-E for Extra P.P.

10 BIO-E for Extraordinary Speed.

5 BIO-E for Advanced Vision.

10 BIO-E for Advanced Hearing.

10 BIO-E for Advanced Smell.

5 BIO-E for Advanced Taste.

5 BIO-E for Advanced Touch.

5 BIO-E for Leaping: Standard.

5 BIO-E for Thick Skin: A.R.: 6, S.D.C.: 15.

Vestigial Disadvantages:

-5 BIO-E for Color Blind.

-10 BIO-E for Diet: Carnivore.

-5 BIO-E for Diet: Herbivore.

-10 BIO-E for Nearsightedness.

-5 BIO-E for Reptile Brain: Predator.

-5 BIO-E for Vestigial Ears.

-10 BIO-E for Webbed Hands and Feet.

Psionics: Roll for Human Psionics.

Super Powers: Same as Humans.

Scorpion

Original Animal Characteristics

Description: Scorpions are small, eight-legged arachnids who sport a tail that is usually venomous.

Size Level: 1

Build: Medium.

Mutant Changes & Costs

Total BIO-E: 80

Attribute Bonuses: +10 Spd.

Human Features

Hands: Automatically starts with 1 pair of arms and 3 pairs of legs. The player can purchase Extra Limb: Arms, which will turn one pair of legs into arms. This can only be done twice. 5 BIO-E for Partial or 10 BIO-E for Full, per pair of hands.

Biped: 5 BIO-E for Partial or 10 BIO-E for Full.

Speech: 5 BIO-E for Partial or 10 BIO-E for Full.

Looks: 10 BIO-E for Partial or 15 BIO-E for Full.

Natural Weapons:

5 BIO-E for 2D4 damage Claws/Pincers (Hands, per pair).

10 BIO-E for 4D4 damage Claws/Pincers (Hands, per pair).

5 BIO-E for 1D4 damage Digging Claws, -10% to prowl (Feet, per pair).

10 BIO-E for 2D4 damage Digging Claws, -10% to prowl (Feet, per pair).

10 BIO-E for 1D6 damage Extra Limb: Barbed Tail.

5 BIO-E for 1D4 damage Teeth.

Mutant Animal Powers:

5 BIO-E for Extra Limb: Arms; one pair of legs are turned into arms. Bonuses: +1 Attack per Melee per pair of legs turned into arms. Penalties: -5 to Spd per pair of legs turned into arms.

15 BIO-E for Extra Limb: Flipper. Instead of legs the player may choose seal-like flippers. Bonuses: +1D4 to swimming speed per pair of legs turned into flippers, Skill: Swimming and the character is considered a natural aquatic. This will affect bonuses to Swimming: Advanced if chosen and some powers. Penalties: -5 to land speed, per pair of flippers.

10 BIO-E for Brute Strength.

15 BIO-E for Beastly Strength.

5 BIO-E for Digging.

10 BIO-E for Tunneling.

15 BIO-E for Excavation.

5 BIO-E for Extra Limb: Secondary Eyes. The character has an extra pair of eyes, with a maximum of 4 extra pairs, on the sides of his head. Vision is poor but does provide greater awareness. Bonuses: +1 to Initiative for each extra pair of eyes.

5 BIO-E for Advanced Vision.

10 BIO-E for Advanced Smell.

5 BIO-E for Advanced Touch.

5 BIO-E for Nightvision.

5 BIO-E for Ultraviolet Vision.

10 BIO-E for Hold Breath (5 BIO-E for natural aquatic).

10 BIO-E for a Light Exoskeleton: A.R.: 9, S.D.C.: 25.

20 BIO-E for a Medium Exoskeleton: A.R.: 11, S.D.C.: 40.

30 BIO-E for a Heavy Exoskeleton: A.R.: 14, S.D.C.: 60.

50 BIO-E for an Extra Heavy Exoskeleton: A.R.: 16, S.D.C.: 80.

15 BIO-E for Paralytic Venom Glands: Character must have at least one barbed tail to take this power. The venom gland contains a neurotoxin that paralyzes the victim for 2D6 melee rounds on a failed save vs Lethal Poison. The effects are cumulative. On a successful save the character feels nausea but is otherwise OK.

20 BIO-E for Food Storage Organ: Survive 1-6 months of Starvation. Roll 1D6 at the beginning of the starvation period to determine how many months the character can survive.

Vestigial Disadvantages:

-5 BIO-E for Fluorescent Skin/Exoskeleton: Chemicals in the scorpion make it glow purple when seen by creatures with Ultraviolet Vision. Penalties: -15% to Camouflage and Prowl skills when the observer has Ultraviolet Vision or Optics.

-20 BIO-E for Black Widow Syndrome: This is not a psychological problem but a vestigial instinct. After mating, this character has an urge to eat his or her partner. The player must Save vs Insanity at -5. A failed save means the character tries to kill and eat its mate! This, of course, will have serious legal and psychological ramifications.

-5 BIO-E for Color Blindness.

-10 BIO-E for Diet: Carnivore.

-5 BIO-E for Diet: Insectivore.

-15 BIO-E for Narrow Gut. This character can only digest liquified food.

-5 BIO-E for Nearsighted.

-10 BIO-E for Nocturnal.

-10 BIO-E for Prey Eyes. The character's main eyes grew where his secondary eyes should be.

-5 BIO-E for Tail. Can be taken twice.

-10 BIO-E for Vestigial Brain: Predator.

-5 BIO-E for Vestigial Claws per pair of legs. (Same penalties as hooves.)

-10 BIO-E for Vestigial Extra Limbs, per pair of limbs. (Same penalties as wings.)



Spider

Original Animal Characteristics

Description: Spiders are eight-legged arachnids that generally spin webs and come in all shapes, sizes and colors.

Size Level: 1

Build: Medium.

Mutant Changes and Costs

Total BIO-E: 75

Attribute Bonuses: +15 to Spd.

Human Features

Hands: This character starts with no hands, only legs and feet. The player may choose Extra Limbs: Arms, which will turn one pair of legs into arms. The player may spend 5 BIO-E for partial or 10 BIO-E for full hands for each pair of arms.

Biped: 5 BIO-E for partial or 10 BIO-E for full.

Speech: Character must first have the power of jaws before any verbal speech can be taken. Without jaws the character can still communicate with writing, sign language and Mind Speak if chosen. 5 BIO-E for partial or 10 BIO-E for full.

Looks: 10 BIO-E for partial or 15 BIO-E to full. They tend to be hairy, have bulging eyes and a short or no neck. Can pass for human in dim light or in disguise.

Natural Weapons:

10 BIO-E for Backward Strike: This permits the character to perform a hand or leg strike at anyone behind them. Character automatically gains initiative when performing a Backward Strike.

10 BIO-E for 2D4 damage Climbing Claws.

5 BIO-E for 1D6 damage Fangs.

5 BIO-E for 1D6 damage Teeth. Character must have jaws before teeth can be taken. If both fangs and teeth are taken, damage is cumulative, 2D6 damage.

Mutant Animal Powers (Special):

5 BIO-E for a Spinneret: This produces a silken cord that has the same S.D.C. value as a Nylon Cord, 2 S.D.C. It can withstand up to 400 pounds (180 kg) of weight before breaking. To

weave a nest, net or web, the character must have the sewing or rope works skill. To build a web trap, the character must have both rope works and trapping skills. Before a spider silk power is taken, a Spinneret must be chosen first. Only one silk power can be taken per Spinneret. A character can have a maximum of four Spinnerets, limiting the character to four Silk Powers.

Silk Powers:

5 BIO-E for Parachuting: The Spinneret produces fine silk strands that catch the air and permit a slow descent from a high fall. The character can jump from an airplane or a tall building and float to the ground like a parachute, but has little or no control over his descent.

10 BIO-E for Ballooning: The spider's silk is similar to the silk from the parachute, but instead of slowing the spider's fall, the silk fibers catch the wind, providing limited flight capabilities. The silk thread can carry a spider up to 2,000 feet high (610 m) and up to 200 miles (320 km) away. Roll 1D20 and multiply that by 10 to determine how far the wind carries the character. Roll 1D20 and multiply it by 100 to determine how high the character is taken. This is like riding in a hot air balloon, but the character has no control over his flight path. He is blown in the direction of the wind and can only go as fast as the wind permits. The character can descend at any time by shortening the cord, slowly reducing its ability to catch the wind.

10 BIO-E for Silken Cord: This is a non-sticky silken cord that can be used in almost any fashion, including building traps, nests, nets, lassoes and other rope items.

15 BIO-E for Sticky Cord: This is a sticky silk cord that can be used to weave webbing, traps and even sticky bola, nets or whips. Anything caught in a spider's silk cord must have a lifting strength in excess of 400 (180 kg) pounds to break free or a blade to cut themselves out.

A character with a Beastly strength of five could snap one silken cord. A silken thread of two intertwined cords would withstand 800 pounds (360 kg) before breaking and the character would need a Beastly Strength of 9 to break it. This lets the spider build a custom web to trap whatever creature he/she is hunting.

20 BIO-E for Chitin Cord: This is a silk cord that solidifies and hardens into a chitin-like substance. It has double the strength of a nylon cord. A hardened chitin cord could withstand 800 pounds (360 kg) of pressure and retain the light weight of a nylon cord. This can be used to make primitive weapons and traps, like a Stake Pit, or chitin arrows.

Non-Silk Powers:

- 5 BIO-E for Advanced Touch.
- 5 BIO-E for Advanced Vision.
- 5 BIO-E for Ultraviolet Vision.
- 10 BIO-E for Brute Strength.
- 15 BIO-E for Beastly Strength.

5 BIO-E for Camouflage. The spider has a natural camouflage pattern on his fur, skin or exoskeleton. This character starts with the camouflage skill at +10%.

5 BIO-E for Extra Limbs: Arms. This converts one pair of legs into arms. This can be done up to six times. Add one attack per melee and reduce speed by five for each pair of legs turned into arms.

10 BIO-E for Extra Limbs: Secondary Eyes. This can only be taken three times. These eyes are on the sides of the spider's head and have poor vision. Each pair of eyes provides +1 to initiative.

10 BIO-E for Extra I.Q.

10 for BIO-E for Extraordinary Speed.

Exoskeleton: Same as scorpion, light and medium only.

5 BIO-E for Jaws. Spiders do not naturally have jaws, however, other arachnids do. This spider has developed jaws.

10 BIO-E for Leaping: Feline.

5 BIO-E for Prehensile Feet: This power turns one pair of feet into prehensile feet. Add two non-combat melee actions per melee, per pair of prehensile feet. A character can have four pairs of prehensile feet and no hands.

15 BIO-E for Necrosis Venom Glands: Must have fangs to inject poison. The venom causes a bacterial infection.

Roll for a Save vs Non-Lethal Poison. On a successful save, there are no negative effects. The bite area will be bruised for a couple of days. On a failed save, the character suffers 2D6 S.D.C. damage and suffers -1D4 to P.P. The damage and penalties will last for 1D12 months. The wounded area looks like rotted flesh. When it does heal there will be a small scar.

20 BIO-E for Neurotoxin Venom Glands: Must have fangs to inject poison. The fangs inject a neurotoxin into the character.

Roll Save vs Lethal Poison. On a successful save, the character has no ill effects. On a failed save, the character suffers 1D6 Hit Point damage and muscle contractions as the venom attacks the character's nervous system. This can last up to 1D20 minutes. Penalties: -1D4 to P.S. and -1D4 to P.P. Damage is cumulative, so if you are bit twice in a melee round, and fail both saves, then you will suffer 2D6 damage, the penalties last for 2D20 minutes and -2D4 to P.S. & P.P.

Vestigial Disadvantages:

- 20 for Black Widow Syndrome.
- 5 BIO-E for Color Blind.
- 10 BIO-E for Diet: Carnivore.
- 5 BIO-E for Diet: Insectivore.
- 15 for Narrow Gut.
- 5 BIO-E for Nearsightedness.
- 10 BIO-E for Nocturnal.
- 10 BIO-E for Prey Eyes. The front eyes developed where the secondary eyes should be.
- 10 BIO-E for Reptile Brain: Predator.
- 5 BIO-E for Vestigial Claws.

Reverse Panda

Original Animal Characteristics

Description: Panda populations had suffered a severe population decline and it was feared the panda would go extinct. The best genetic researchers could not determine why the population was dwindling. Panda DNA was sent to the Animal Disease Center to determine the cause. The scientists guessed that the low protein diet of bamboo was likely the culprit. The low protein diet resulted in a severe lack of energy and malnutrition. They set about modifying panda DNA to bring out its recessive carnivorous traits while keeping its passive nature. If they could force the panda to eat meat instead of bamboo, then the animal would have more energy and would breed more successfully in the wild.

The result of their tinkering was unexpected. The new bear had similar panda markings, but the colors were reversed. Where a panda was white, this new panda was black, where the panda was black, this new panda was white. It was also an aggressive,

carnivorous and dangerous predator. They kept the Reverse Pandas in captivity on the island for experimentation, but determined that they were too dangerous to be set free.

Today the Reverse Pandas are on the top of the food chain on Center. They eat meat, are lean, energetic and have no problems with reproduction. Where they once used their powerful teeth and jaws to eat bamboo, they now use them to chew and eat the bones of other animals. This adds a lot of calcium to their protein diet. People from Asian cultures may see a Reverse Panda as bad luck or even a product of negative Chi.

Size Level: 10.

Build: Medium.

Mutant Changes and Costs

Total BIO-E: 30.

Attribute Bonuses: Brute Strength, +1D6 to P.S., +2D6 S.D.C.

Human Features

Hands: Automatically partial or 5 BIO-E for full.

Biped: Automatically partial or 5 BIO-E for full.

Speech: 5 BIO-E for partial or 10 BIO-E for full.

Looks: 5 BIO-E for partial or 10 BIO-E for full. A character with full looks will look like a muscular, lean human. The character will have dark tan skin on his head, neck and body, and pale skin on his ears, around the eyes, arms and legs. The head and body hair will be in the same proportions as a human but will have the Reverse Panda's hair texture and colors. The character can pass for human. The character will also have a round face to accommodate powerful molars and jaw muscles.

Natural Weapons:

10 BIO-E for 2D6 damage Heavy Claws.

5 BIO-E for 1D6 damage Teeth.

10 BIO-E for 2D6 damage Teeth.

5 BIO-E for Crushing Molars: This allows a bite attack to bypass an A.R. value. A crushing molar attack counts as two attacks. Crushing Molars do double damage from a bite attack in a Mega-Damage environment.

Mutant Animal Powers:

5 BIO-E for Advanced Hearing.

5 BIO-E for Advanced Smell.

5 BIO-E for Advanced Vision.

5 BIO-E for Nightvision.

10 BIO-E for Bestly Strength.

15 BIO-E for Crushing Strength.

5 BIO-E for Extra P.B.

5 BIO-E for Extra P.E.

10 BIO-E for Extraordinary Speed.

10 BIO-E for Predator Burst.

Vestigial Disadvantages:

Automatically has Diet: Carnivore and Reptile Brain: Predator.

-5 BIO-E for Color Blindness.

-10 BIO-E for Musk Glands.

-5 BIO-E for Nearsightedness.

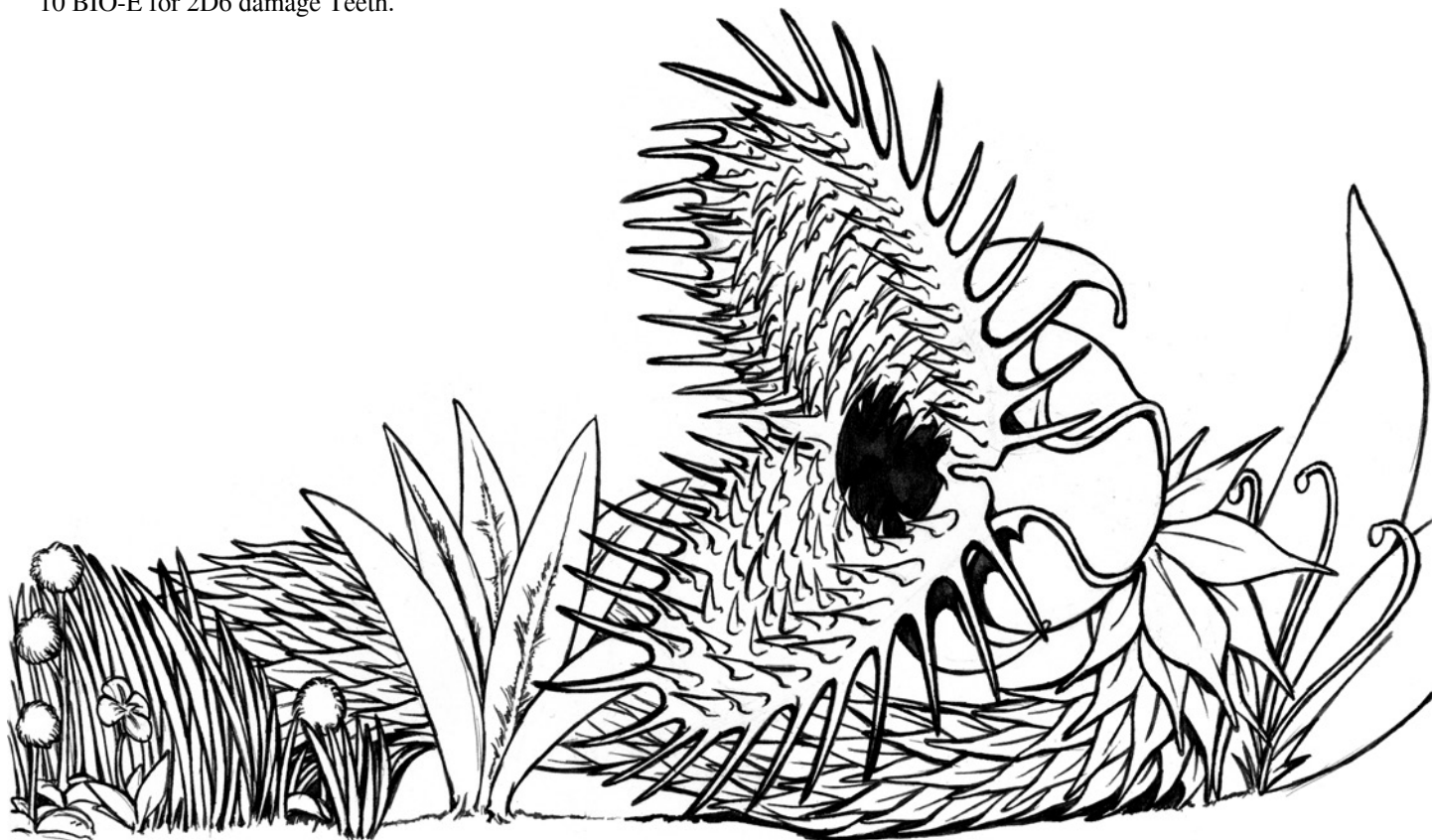
-5 BIO-E Vestigial Ears.

-5 BIO-E Vestigial Tail.

Wild Mutant Monsters

Nectar Snake

The Nectar Snake is a snake-like carnivorous plant, complete with thorn fangs and leaf scales. This living boobytrap has



“evolved” into eating the much larger prey that has come into existence since the Crash. Normally, this plant lays dormant in wetlands and conserves its energy. It produces a sweet nectar in its mouth that attracts different insects and animals. When the animal enters the plant’s mouth, it snaps shut, piercing it with its fangs. It swallows its prey and organic acids dissolve the carcass until only bone or chitin are left. This plant is not rooted in place and will slither off to seek out new prey when it is hungry.

The most unique aspect of the plant is that it has the psionic ability to See Auras. This is an innate ability that is always active. This lets the plant purposefully hunt prey when passive trapping is not working. On the hunt, the Nectar Snake will bite its prey, then coil around it and crush it, like a Boa Constrictor. The Nectar Snake, however, is not an animal. It is a plant, and has no brain, no eyes, no hopes, dreams or desires. How this plant developed psionic powers and why it behaves in the manner it does is anyone’s guess.

Despite the obvious dangers of this plant, it does have its value. The leaf scales of the Nectar Snake make a delicious sweet tea. Some cultures feed large insects to the plants to collect the chitin shells, or harvest the organic acid within the Nectar Snake itself. Herbivores find this plant tasty and nutritional.

Attributes: P.S. 4D6+4. P.P. 3D6. P.E. 3D6+2. P.B. 1D6. Spd 2D6.

Size Level: 10

Build: Long.

Hit Points: P.E.+1D6. **S.D.C.:** 35.

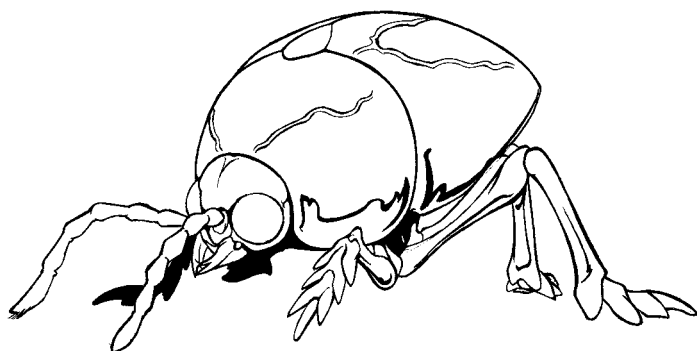
Natural Weapons: 2D6 damage Fangs.

Mutant Animal Powers: None.

Psionics: See Aura.

Attacks per Melee: 2. **Bonuses:** +1 to dodge and parry, +2 to strike.

Crush/Squeeze Attack: 1D4 damage per melee round.



Pygmy Albino Mutant Beetle

These are related to the giant mutant beetles on the mainland, but are much smaller and have striking colors, pure white shells with pink veins running through them. They are considered to be exceptionally beautiful by most people on the islands.

When the beetles are born they are Size Level: 1, with 1 Hit Point, 5 S.D.C. and have 1D4 pink veins running through the shell. As these insects grow, they acquire 1D4 veins and one size level for every year of life. Once the insect reaches its maximum Size Level, it stops growing and the veins stop appearing. These animals are nocturnal and are considered scavengers. Their meat is tender and delicious.

The shells from these beetles that are used for currency are from insects’ of size level 1-3. Any shells larger than that are considered too big for easy trade. They still have value for use as body armor, shields or home decoration.

Alignment: Anarchist.

Attributes: I.Q. 1D4. M.E. 2D4. M.A. 1D4. P.S. 3D6+4. P.P. 3D6. P.E. 2D6. P.B. 4D6. Spd 3D6.

Size Level: 6

Build: Short.

Hit Points: P.E.+1D6. **S.D.C.:** 90. **A.R.:** 14.

Natural Weapons: 2D6 damage Pincers.

Mutant Animal Powers: Natural Armor (already applied).

Vestigial Disadvantages: Nocturnal.

Attacks per Melee: 2

Combat Bonuses: +2 to dodge and parry.

The Long Gull Islands

History

This island chain lays off the coast of N’Yak. It was once known as Long Island until a series of super hurricanes transformed it. Hurricanes along the east coast of the United States started to become more frequent. Before the Crash, several Atlantic hurricanes started to descend on the east coast. Tourists fled inland, while most East Coast locals hunkered down to ride out the storms. The hurricanes rode up along the coast, not making landfall, nearing Long Island, and they were picking up steam.

Before the converging hurricanes made landfall, they merged into two super hurricanes. These storms dug out waterways, flooded lowlands, and widened canals and rivers along the island. Tens of thousands survived the storms, but that is a paltry number compared to the millions who once called the island home. Shortly after the storms the Crash hit and the world was changed forever.

The islands that now make up the chain are Center, Eastland, Man-Taukett, Osprey, Shell, Queens Land and the Freelands. There are other islands, but most of them are either uninhabited or unexplored.

Overview

The Long Gull Islands are primarily inhabited by mutant seabirds, but many other animals also inhabit them, like deer, turtles, owls and other wildlife. Some humans still live on the islands but not many. The technology level varies as you travel from island to island. The islands are all independent but generally work together for the common defense of the island chain. The exceptions are Center & the Freelands. The extreme weather patterns are long gone, but no one knows if they will return.

Shells as Currency

Most islands use polished shells as currency. The most valuable shells are the pink veined, white chitin from the pygmy albino mutant beetle. The more pink veins that run through the shell, the more valuable it is as currency. Each vein is the equivalent of one Buck, so a shell with ten veins is worth ten Bucks. These armored chitin shells are used as jewelry, from necklaces to orna-

ments to clothes and weapons. Shells can be added to belts, vests, hats, rifle stocks, shields and anything the shell is small enough to adorn.

One ounce of gold is worth 50 Cardanian Bucks or 50 veins of shells. One ounce of silver is worth one Buck or one vein of shells. One ounce of platinum is worth 56 Bucks or 56 veins of shells. One ounce of palladium is worth 33 Bucks or 33 veins of shells. One live, non-intelligent hog is worth 4 Bucks or four veins of shells. A young, trained non-intelligent horse is worth 19 Bucks or 19 veins of shells. The average riding insect costs 190 veins.

These are the prices in the Long Gull Islands; prices in Cardania are usually different.

Center Island

The land that makes up Center Island was once the site of an epidemiology center that focused on treating animal diseases, and one of the most advanced animal research and treatment institutes in the world. Unfortunately, with the popularity of genetic engineering, the disease center was upgraded to a facility capable of genetically engineering animals. After the Crash and the Bomb, these creatures escaped and now populate the island. Little is known about this island because no one goes there and the few that have gone there have never returned. Should the monsters be cleared out, the victor will receive the most advanced animal hospital in the world, capable of curing genetic diseases and fixing genetic aberrations – including unwanted vestigial traits.

Population: Unknown.

Language: English where applicable.

Species: Reverse Pandas are not necessarily the most populous species but they are at the top of the food chain.

Capital: None.

Government: Tribal where applicable.

Military: Not applicable. Most creatures use their natural weapons and abilities. Some more intelligent creatures will carry improvised melee weapons.

Technology: None.

Economy: None. Most creatures kill and take what they want, from food to weapons, trinkets or even mates.

Currency: None.

Chieftess Addie

Addie is the leader of the Exicugon tribe, one of several reverse panda tribes. She was abandoned as a child and had to survive on her own in a deadly environment, eventually adopted by a reverse panda tribe. When she came of age she killed and ate the former chief. Now she leads the tribe and watches those under her charge for anyone who might challenge her.

Species: Reverse Panda.

Alignment: Miscreant.

Attributes: I.Q. 14, M.E. 10, M.A. 11, P.S. 26, P.P. 14, P.E. 17, P.B. 26, Spd 13.

Age: 20. **Sex:** Female. **Size Level:** 10.

Weight: 185 pounds (83.3 kg). **Height:** 5 feet, 8 inches (1.7 m).

Hit Points: 28. **S.D.C.:** 72.

Disposition: Hot-headed and emotional. She is quick to anger and generally eats whoever angers her.



Human Features

Hands: Full.

Biped: Full.

Speech: Partial.

Looks: Partial.

Description: Addie looks like a Reverse Panda and human hybrid. She has large, white, furry ears on the top of her head. She has sharp teeth, powerful jaw muscles and molars. She wears the tanned skins and furs of her fallen enemies. Her teeth are kept clean, sharp and strong by constantly eating bones.

Natural Weapons: 1D6 damage Teeth. Crushing Molars.

Mutant Animal Powers: Bestly Strength, Extra P.B., Predatory Burst.

Psionics: None.

Vestigial Disadvantages: Automatically has Diet: Carnivore & Reptile Brain: Predator, Color Blind, Vestigial Ears.

Occupation: Tribal Chieftess.

Level of Experience: 3

Background: Feral.

Primary Skills: Climbing: 50/40%, Escape Artist: 40%, Hunting, Prowl: 35%, Tracking: 40%, Wilderness Survival: 40%, W.P.: Blunt, W.P.: Spear, Hand to Hand: Basic.

Secondary Skills: Body Building, Detect Ambush: 40%, Dowsing & Water Location: 30%.

Attacks per Melee: 4

Bonuses: Charm/Impress: 80%. +11 to Damage, +2 to Dodge, +1 to Initiative, +2 to Parry, +2 to Pull Punch, +2 to Roll with punch/fall/impact. 1D6 damage kick. +5% to save against coma/death, +1 to save against magic, +1 to save against poison.

Equipment: Soft Leather Armor, A.R.: 9, S.D.C.: 20. Spear: 2D6 damage. Club: 2D4 damage.

Man-Taukett Island

This beautiful and scenic island is the last island in the island chain. It has long, sandy beaches and woodlands, along with overlooks that provide breathtaking views of the island and ocean. The storms that created the island are a thing of the past and Man-Taukett now has normal weather patterns. Large piles of salvageable debris can still be found on the island. There are only two settlements, a community of mutant animals who have taken over Camp Sparrow, an old Air Force base at the north of the island. The other community is a coastal community of hominids on the south side of the island. The two communities are separate but have a mutual defense pact and support each other.

Man-Taukett Tribe

The humans who have survived the hurricanes genetically regressed into one of our hominid ancestors when the Crash/Bomb hit. The hominid survivors live at a primitive lifestyle and tech level. All hominids and mutant animals are considered equals in the tribe. They use canoes for small-scale fishing and have docks to not only support their fishermen but also to assist their mariner friends at Camp Sparrow. They also hunt non-intelligent animals, gather food and salvage Pre-Crash materials.

Population: 1,500 tribesmen.

Language: English, 5% are literate.

Species: Hominid, but there are also mutant dogs, deer and other mutant animals as tribesmen. Most of the mutant animals have full looks.

Capital: Queens Land (Unofficial).

Government: Tribal.

Military: Wilderness Scouts: 240 Scouts defend the tribe and work with the professional soldiers at Camp Sparrow. They are the equivalent of Guerrilla Warriors, however, replace the skills Demolitions and Demolition Disposal with Tracking and Trapping. They make their own equipment, arrows, spears and axes made with both stone and salvaged metal. Fifteen carry various black-powder rifles. Most of their equipment is made from leather. Most people carry some basic melee weapon usually made from stone or salvaged metals. Some individuals may carry black-powder firearms but they are rare. Arrows are preferred because the people can make their own arrowheads as opposed to powder and shot which must be traded for.

Technology: Primitive. There are no riding animals or vehicles in the tribe's territory. If you want to go anywhere you walk (or fly if you have wings). Most houses are huts cobbled together from salvaged material, which may include pieces of pre-Crash cars, trucks, houses, boats or anything else that is suitable. There

is no electricity or running water. Heating and cooking are done with fire pits or fireplaces. Bathing is done in the ocean and the woods serve as restrooms.

Economy: The tribe supports itself on clamming, fishing, hunting, gathering and salvage efforts. There are six docks that support not only the hominid fishermen but also fishermen from Camp Sparrow. Many of the old, deteriorating roads have been rebuilt using cobblestones carved from salvaged concrete chunks.

Currency: Shells and Barter.

Chieftain Tikaya

Tikaya was a bright child and, early on, could see the primitive nature of his tribe. In his late teens he left home for Camp Sparrow to learn a trade. He signed on with the merchant ship *Cascade*, and became a merchant captain. After earning his fortune he returned to his tribe. When the tribe's chief passed away, Tikaya was elevated to the position. His experience and worldly knowledge made him a perfect choice. He has led the tribe well and the people respect him.

Species: Hominid.

Alignment: Unprincipled.

Attributes: Any number in () was the original attribute, but has deteriorated due to age. I.Q. 16, M.E. 4 (5), M.A. 14, P.S. 15 (20), P.P. 6 (12), P.E. 11 (14), P.B. 4 (7), Spd 12 (20).

Age: 71. **Sex:** Male. **Size Level:** 12.

Weight: 282 pounds (127 kg). **Height:** 6 feet, 6 inches (2 m).

Hit Points: 37 (41). **S.D.C.:** 41 (68). **A.R.:** 6.

Disposition: Worry wart. Many years at sea has given Tikaya an overabundance of caution. He tends to micro-manage tribal affairs.

Human Features:

Hands: Full.

Biped: Full.

Speech: Partial.

Looks: Full.

Description: Chief Tikaya looks like a tall, skinny, older, Neanderthal. He has leathery sun and weather-worn skin due to his years at sea. He has clawed hands and tusks growing up from his lower jaw, like two massive teeth.

Mutant Animal Powers: Bestly Strength, Extra I.Q., Leaping: Standard.

Psionics: None.

Natural Weapons: 1D6 damage for Claws and 2D6 damage for tusks.

Vestigial Disadvantages: Diet: Carnivore. Reptile Brain: Predator.

Level of Experience: 6

Occupation: Man-Taukett Chief.

Background: Border Area.

Apprenticeship: Mariner.

Main Skills: Sailing: Ocean 98%, Core: Astronomy: 67%, Boat Building: 62%, Boating: 87%, Carpentry: 67%, Flag Signaling (changed from Radio: Basic): 60%, Fishing: 97%, Navigation: 87%, Read Sensory Equipment: 62%, Rope Works: 67%, Swimming: Basic 87%, Swimming: Advanced 92%, Teamster/Wagoner: 77%, W.P.: Grappling Hook, W.P.: Saber, W.P.: Targeting, W.P.: Rifle, W.P.: Automatic Rifle.

Primary Skills: Athletics (General), Climbing: 67/57%, Farming & Gardening: 62%, First Aid: 72%, Intelligence: 54%,

Recognize Weapon Quality: 52%, Running, W.P.: Archery, W.P.: Black-Powder Pistol, W.P.: Black-Powder Musket, W.P.: Knife, Hand to Hand: Basic.

Secondary Skills: Flint Working: 37%, General Repair and Maintenance: 62%, Language: English 67%, Literacy: English 57%, Sewing: 67%, Trapping: 52%, Tracking: 57%, Wilderness Survival: 57%.

Attacks per Melee: 3 (5).

Bonuses: +3 to dodge. +1 to dodge underwater. +3 to parry. +2 to pull punch. +3 to roll with punch/fall/impact. +1 to Strike. +10 to swimming speed. Critical Strike on Natural roll of 19 or 20. Kick attack does 1D6 damage.

Equipment: Studded Leather Armor: A.R.: 12, S.D.C.: 38. Custom Musket: A flintlock musket with a sighted, steel, grooved barrel. It has a shoulder stock and has a bayonet. Caliber: .45. Feed: Breech-loading. Range: 900-3,000 feet (274-914 m). Damage: 2D6. Bonuses: +1 to Ranged Strike.

Camp Sparrow

This town is built on a long-abandoned military base which had become a nature reserve. The residents are good people who want to help other mutants, including the mutant humans on the island they share. With help from Queens Land, the people of Camp Sparrow were able to rebuild the massive radar station at the camp.

Population: 1,000 citizens.

Language: English, 19% are literate.

Species: The community is so diverse there is no one dominant species. Seagulls, pheasants, horses, ducks, hominids, dogs, cats and turkeys are the most common and the rest are a mix of other animal species.

Capital: Queens Land (unofficial).

Government: Military. The military run this community and the community supports the military.

Military: 160 professional soldiers. These are full-time soldiers who train regularly and are ready to go to battle at a moment's notice. They use flintlock, smoothbore muskets in battle. Twenty-seven carry salvaged, pre-Crash military rifles. What makes this base special was the discovery of a powerful radar station that was repaired and put back into service by the new occupants. This radar system helps the military at Camp Sparrow identify incoming threats to the island and respond accordingly. The merchant and fishing ships can be mobilized to act as a navy when necessary and in times of trouble, the civilians can be pressed into service to help defend the island. There are also three large bunkers used to store food and can be used as shelter for the community due to storms or war. Everyone carries some kind of melee weapon. Forty percent of the citizens carry black-powder hunting rifles. Most of these weapons are Flintlocks.

Technology: Circa 1800s, however, the town does have two wind turbines dedicated to the rebuilt radar tower, providing it with power 24 hours a day. Houses are made from brick or wood and fireplaces and stoves heat homes and cook food. There is no running water, so most people have well water or cisterns and use outhouses.

Economy: There are farms, insect ranches, fishing vessels, merchant ships, mechanics, carpenters and even a couple of surgeons. It is a prosperous community that has established trade routes with many of the other islands. There are four large har-

bors that support the merchant ships. The community has good roads; most citizens either walk or ride mutant insects, but there are a few salvaged vehicles owned by private citizens.

Currency: Shells and Barter.

Commander Xeruhu

Xeruhu joined the engineering corps and worked diligently in both peace and war, earning several battlefield commendations for valor. Over time, he earned the respect of his peers and the citizenry. When the previous commander retired, Xeruhu jockeyed for the position and he was appointed Camp Commander. He works diligently to protect his island home and its people. He is fascinated by old human technology, and is always looking to uncover lost devices and reverse engineer them.

Species: Peking Duck.

Alignment: Principled.

Attributes: Any number in () was the original attribute, but has deteriorated due to age. I.Q. 13, M.E. 9, M.A. 15, P.S. 20 (23), P.P. 8 (12). P.E. 22 (25), P.B. 4 (6), Spd 13 (19).

Age: 61. **Sex:** Male. **Size Level:** 18.

Weight: 881 pounds (396 kg). **Height:** 8 feet, 6 inches (2.6 m).

Hit Points: 30 (31). **S.D.C.:** 89 (111).

Disposition: Schemer. He likes to take chances and sometimes stretches his forces thin, betting a particular endeavor will work.

Human Features:

Wings: No Tail or Wings.

Hands: Full, webbed, hands.

Biped: Full.

Speech: Partial

Looks: None.

Description: This is one big, skinny duck. He stands over eight feet (2.4 m) tall, has two fully developed arms and hands, but no wings or tail. He has pure white feathers and a dark orange bill. He is always dressed in his Commander's uniform.

Mutant Animal Powers: None.

Psionics: None.

Natural Weapons: None.

Vestigial Disadvantages: No wings or tail.

Level of Experience: 4

Occupation: Commander of Camp Sparrow.

Background: Elite Militia.

Apprenticeship: Mechanic.

Main Skills: Mechanical Engineer: 65%. Core Skills: Blacksmith: 55%. Electronics: Basic 55%. General Repair and Maintenance: 50%. Laser Systems: 35%. Locksmith: 40%. Literacy: English 45%. Mathematics: Basics: 79%. Mechanics: Automobile 65%. Mechanics: Basic 55%. Optic Systems: 35%. Pilot: Automobile 80%. Pilot: Construction and Farming Equipment 50%. Pilot: Military Vehicles: 40%. Pilot: Truck: 65%. Plumbing: 65%. Radio: Basic 65%. Read Sensory Equipment: 30%. Recognize Weapon Quality: 30%. Vehicle Weapon Systems: 50%.

Primary Skills: Athletics (General). Boating: 25%. Body Building. Boxing. Public Speaking: 30%. Running, W.P.: Targeting. W.P.: Black-Powder Pistol. W.P.: Black-Powder Rifle. Hand to Hand: Expert.

Secondary Skills: Camouflage: 20%. History: 40%. Land Navigation: 36%. Language: English 40%. Writing: 25%.

Attacks per Melee: 5 (6).

Bonuses: +5 to damage. +2 to disarm. +6 to dodge. +6 to parry. +4 to pull punch. +5 to roll with punch/fall/impact. K.O. on a natural 20 for 1D6 melee rounds. +2 to Strike. Save vs: +14% to coma/death. +4 to magic/poison.

Equipment: He is always dressed in his dress uniform and carries a smoothbore, percussion cap pistol. Caliber: .38. Damage: 2D6. Range: 60 feet (18 m).

Eastland

Eastland is one of the larger islands in the chain. There are several small farming communities and craftsman who make valuable hand-crafted goods for export. In addition to the Townies who live on the island, there is a large population of nomadic mutant deer, with a handful of separate villages. There is also a surprisingly large amount of wild bamboo. Some bamboo forests are harvested for building material but most are left undisturbed.

Population: 8,000 Townies. 800 Nomadic deer broken up into different tribes.

Language: English, 20% of Townies are Literate. 10% of the Nomadic deer are literate.

Species: Bats, Chipmunks, Cats, Crow, Deer, Dogs, Ducks, Frogs, Geese, Opossum, Owls, Quail, Rabbits, Raccoons and Turkey are common mutants found on the island. Less common animals include Cattle, Fox, Hawk, Horse, Moles, Pleasure Bunnies, Sheep, Skunks and Weasels. Other animals not listed may be on the island as a transplant or the offspring of an exotic pet.

Capital: Queens Land (Unofficial).

Government: Direct Republic. All of the villages on the island are independent and most are direct republics (no representatives).

Military: There are about 800 total militia members on the island and around 320 deer Wilderness Scouts. The militia tend to be armed with Flintlock Rifles. Some militias use mutant beetles as cavalry mounts. While there are several small and large fishing and merchant ships, there are no military vessels. The scouts tend to use melee weapons, bows and bamboo black-powder firearms. Most people carry black-powder hunting weapons. Most are flintlocks, but the wealthy carry wheellock weapons.

Technology: Circa 1800.

Economy: The towns tend to focus on farming, commercial fishing, hand-crafted goods, merchants and ranching. Many craftsmen, farmers and merchants use wagons pulled by mutant beetles to transport goods. Some people use insects to pull private carriages or as riding animals.

Currency: Shells and Barter.

Voya Gumap, Hermitess

Voya grew up in a small, hidden community of spiders. It was there she hoped to live and maybe raise a family. Unfortunately, she suffered from Black Widow Syndrome and cannibalized her lover, unable to fight against her own irrepressible instincts. She was traumatized and heartbroken, leaving home, ashamed of her actions. She was only 18 years old then, trying to build a life for herself. Today, she is a professional hunter. She uses traps to hunt all sorts of animals and sells their meat and skins to local

villagers. While lonely, she is careful not to develop close personal friendships so she does not fall in love again. She had built herself a log cabin and lives deep in the woods. Some people seek her for trade and others for information.

Species: Spider.

Alignment: Principled.

Attributes: I.Q. 12, M.E. 14, M.A. 8, P.S. 16, P.P. 10, P.E. 16, P.B. 8, Spd 25.

Age: 22. **Sex:** Female. **Size Level:** 7.

Weight: 97 pounds (44 kg). **Height:** 5 feet, 4 inches (1.6 m).

Hit Points: 34. **S.D.C.:** 47.

Disposition: Blabber-mouth. She does not get many visitors, so when she does she likes to talk. She will talk about the island, politics, nearby communities and anything else visitors may wish to know.

Human Features:

Hands: None.

Biped: None.

Speech: Full.

Looks: None.

Description: She is a young, ordinary looking mutant spider with rusty, red fur. She has two eyes on the front of her head, teeth and sharp fangs. She walks on all eight legs, but her feet are prehensile, allowing her to use all her feet much like one would use hands.

Natural Weapons: Backward Strike.

Mutant Animal Powers: Spinnerets (2). Chitin Cord. Sticky Cord. Jaws. Leaping: Feline. Prehensile Feet (4).

Psionics: None.

Vestigial Disadvantages: Black Widow Syndrome. Color Blind. Narrow Gut. Nocturnal. Reptile Brain.

Occupation: Hunter.

Level of Experience: 6

Background: Raised on the Frontier.

Primary Skills (Bonuses and penalties from Advanced Touch and Prehensile Feet have already been factored in where applicable): Farming & Gardening: 50%. Wilderness Survival: 50%. Fishing: 75%. Hunting. Tracking: 50%. Trapping: 40%. Domestic: Sewing: 55%. Skin & Prepare Animal Hides: 50%. W.P.: Archery. W.P.: Net. W.P.: Targeting. Physical: Gymnastics. Hand to Hand: Basic. Technical: Rope Works: 60%.

Secondary Skills: Carpentry: 45%. Cook: 50%. Dowsing & Water Location: 35%. General Repair and Maintenance: 45%. Imitate Animal Sound: 62%. Language: English 65%. Literacy: English 55%. Preserve Food: 45%.

Attacks per Melee: 5

Bonuses: Sense of Balance: 75%. Work Parallel Bars: 85%. Climb Rope: 70%. Climbing: 50%. Back Flip: 60%. Prowl: 55%. Leap: Standing Across: 24 feet, 8 inches (7.5 m). Standing Up: 30 feet, 2 inches (9.2 m). Down: 41 feet (12.5 m). Running Across: 37 feet, 2 inches (11.3 m). Running Up: 45 feet, 3 inches (13.8 m).

Combat Bonuses: +1 to Dodge. +1 to Parry. +1 to Pull Punch. +2 to Roll with punch/fall/impact. +5 to Strike (no actual bonus until level 12 when .5 turns onto +1). Critical Strike a natural 19 or 20. Kick: 1D6 damage.

Equipment: As a hunter, she likes to keep several sticky bolas on her as well as a sticky net. For personal defense she car-

ries a Wood Bow: Damage: 2D4, Range: 400 feet (122 m). Hardened Chitin War Arrows: +3 damage. She wears Studded Leather Armor: A.R.: 12, S.D.C.: 38.

Osprey Island

This peaceful island is controlled by a family of ospreys, and sports several unique features. First, the island is protected by a wooden stockade named Fort Sanctuary. This fort is used as a meeting place and training ground for the residents, as well as a defensive structure. Second, there is an ancient Greek temple on the island. Many residents have taken to praying at this structure, believing it to be a source of good luck. There are no formal towns on the island, but a collection of stone and wood houses built by the ospreys. The birds are very possessive of the island and are isolationists. Only birds may visit the island for trade, and no other animals are welcome for any reason. As a result, there are no docks or harbors anywhere on the island to assist in landing a boat or ship. If you don't have wings you should not be there anyway. If there is a threat to the entire island chain they may join a unified defense effort, but otherwise use their geographic isolation to remain separate and aloof.

It is not uncommon to see the ospreys on both sides of an armed conflict, especially if the sovereignty of their island is in doubt. If ospreys fight on both sides of a battle then they will always be on the winning side and can protect their claim of their island. The ospreys on the losing side are welcomed back to the island for doing their part, though publicly this is to rehabilitate the fanatic ospreys who were on the wrong side. This makes most people skeptical of the ospreys' motivation during any conflict.

Population: 100

Language: English, 44% Literacy. They possess a small pre-Crash library.

Species: Osprey. Other birds may visit, but may not stay permanently.

Capital: Queens Land (Unofficial).

Military: All ospreys are expected to defend the island from invaders. Any support for defense of the island chain would be done on an individual basis. The ospreys carry metal melee weapons and various black-powder rifles. They also have four Cardanian military rifles they acquired in trade. There is a wooden stockade fort named Fort Sanctuary with 1,300 S.D.C. It can garrison up to 100 men.

Technology: Circa 1700s.

Economy: The ospreys run a small plantation raising crops and albino, pygmy mutant beetles. The ospreys are self-sufficient but do trade for guns, powder and shot. They have a small blacksmith's shop to make metal tools and melee weapons. In the center of the island is an ancient, stone Greek temple with 1,000 S.D.C.

Currency: Shells and Barter.

Matriarch Yuten

Matriarch Yuten was born and raised on Osprey Island. As a child, she spent a lot of time in the library, studying history and planning the island's future. She served in the island's militia and spends a lot of time praying at the temple, usually asking for guidance. Her one goal is to protect the island and its people, and always invites visiting birds to her mansion for tea and a chat.

This seems like genuine hospitality, but is really Yuten's way of gathering information.

Species: Osprey (Eagle).

Alignment: Anarchist.

Attributes: Any number in parenthesis () was the original attribute, but has deteriorated due to age. I.Q. 16, M.E. 10 (11), M.A. 8, P.S. 13 (18), P.P. 15 (21), P.E. 6 (11), P.B. 9 (13), Spd 7 (11).

Age: 74. **Sex:** Female. **Size Level:** 5.

Weight: 39 pounds (17.5 kg). **Height:** 3 feet, 8 inches (1.1 m).

Hit Points: 52 (58). **S.D.C.:** 18 (30).

Disposition: Tough gal. She is a tough old bird. She still goes out on her own to catch her own fish and practice her marksmanship with an old black-powder rifle passed down to her from her father.

Human Features:

Hands: Extra Limbs: Pair of Human Arms and Hands.

Biped: Full.

Speech: Full.

Looks: None.

Description: Thin, tall.

Natural Weapons: 3D6 damage Beak. 2D6 damage Talons, feet only.

Mutant Animal Powers: Advanced Vision. Extra P.P. Raptor Flight.

Vestigial Disadvantages: Diet: Carnivore. Reptile Brain: Predator.

Level of Experience: 12.

Occupation: Osprey Family Matriarch.

Background: Academic Underground.

Apprenticeship: Artisan. Basic Artistic Fabrication: 95%.

Main Skills: Fabrication (Special). Core Skills: Antiquarian: 98%. Art: Drawing & Painting 96%. Blacksmith: 98%. Carpentry: 97%. General Repair & Maintenance: 98%. Literacy: English 97%. Masonry: 97%. Mathematics: Basic 98%. Musical Instrument: Violin 92%. Sculpting & Whittling: 97%. Sewing: 98%. Military Skill: Recognize Weapon Quality: 87%. Pilot Skills: Navigation 98%. Sailing: 98%.

Primary Skills: Acrobatics. Anthropology: 77%. Astronomy: 87%. Archaeology: 77%. Chemistry: 98%. History: 86%. Intelligence: 78%. Land Navigation: 82%. Locksmith: 82%. Lore: Religion 2%. Mathematics: Advanced 96%. Mythology: 2%. Public Speaking: 84%. W.P.: Black-Powder Pistol. W.P.: Black-Powder Musket. W.P. Net. W.P.: Targeting. Hand to Hand: Basic.

Secondary Skills: Brewing: 87%. Cook: 87%. Fishing: 98%. Language: English 87%. Read Music: 77%. Rope Works: 87%.

Attacks per Melee: 4 (6).

Bonuses: Back Flip: 98%. Climb Rope: 92%. Climbing: 84%. Leaping: 26 feet (7.9 m) high and 27 feet (8.2 m) across. Prowl: 85%. Sense of Balance: 82%. Walk Tightrope: 93%.

Combat Bonuses: +5 to damage. +6 to dodge. +6 to parry. +4 to pull punch. +6 to roll with punch/fall/impact. +4 to strike. Body Flip: 1D6 damage plus loss of initiative and one attack. Critical Strike on a natural 19 or 20. Kick Attack: 1D6 damage.

Equipment: She is always dressed elegantly and wears plenty of jewelry. When she feels her life is threatened she arms herself with a highly gilded and albino beetle-inlaid black-powder

rifle. Caliber: .85. Damage: 1D4x10, Range: 225-600 feet (68.5-183 m). Muzzle loaded with a flared muzzle for faster reloading. Bonuses: +1 non-combat actions.

Shell Island

The super hurricanes devastated this island, killing its human inhabitants. There are no surviving man-made structures left anywhere. The animals who fared the best were turtles, and as a result mutant turtles now dominate the island.

Population: 140.

Language: English, 5% are literate.

Species: Mutant turtles represent 50% of the island's population. The rest are varied species of wildlife. The turtles always welcome new residents.

Capital: Queens Land (unofficial).

Military: 14 volunteer militiamen. They are armed with melee weapons and black-powder weapons. They prefer not to get involved in the conflicts of the other islands. Most civilians carry primitive weapons like axes, staffs, swords and bows.

Technology: Circa 1400s.

Economy: The turtles have no major industry. They fish and other animals garden or hunt to provide tradable goods. There are no established trade routes. They have two small docks to support fishing vessels, but many turtles fish while swimming.

Currency: Barter only; they find Shells as currency offensive.

Queens Land Island

This is the economic and political center of the island chain and the largest of the islands. It is also the first island in the island chain which borders N'Yak. The bulk of the island borders N'Yak and remains relatively wide up to the open waterway that separates Queens Land Island from Eastland and Shell Island. At that point, a long strip of land stretches out like a curved blade as far as Man-Taukett. Representatives of the island chain's various people and communities meet here to discuss problems and mutual concerns. It is also the trade center of the island chain. Most islands send goods to this island for trade. The militia resides in rebuilt National Guard and military bases.

Population: 30,000 people reside on the entire island, including the nomadic deer population, divided into many communities.

Language: English, 54% are literate. 12% of the nomadic deer are literate.

Species: Since Queens Land is a diverse society, almost any urban, wild or exotic animal can be found on the island. There are also small communities of humans.

Capital: Queens Land. The actual capital city is named Queens Land City and it is on the west coast nearest N'Yak.

Government: Parliamentary.

Military: Island-wide, there are a total of 9,000 militiamen and deer scouts. Queens Land City has a professional army of 160 soldiers. In addition, all of the large cities will have a police force. Most firearms are percussion cap black-powder weapons, with black-powder grenades available as well. Queens Land has a full platoon of soldiers armed with salvaged pre-Crash military weapons. Queens Land also has a small navy of a dozen wooden sailing ships. This is more of a coast guard but it is enough to

keep pirates away from the main island. Most citizens carry hunting weapons and a few have military rifles.

Technology: Circa early 1900s. Black-powder weapons are still the norm but Cardanian and salvaged pre-Crash firearms can be found. There is a steam-powered train service, but no steam cars or power plants. There is limited electricity thanks to wind turbines, and long-distance communication is done with telegraph lines when sufficient electricity is available. City buildings are made with bricks and stone while more rural houses are made from wood. There are a few salvaged and modified pre-Crash vehicles.

Economy: It is the island of Queens Land where most of the firearms, powder and shot for the Long Gull Islands are manufactured. The firearms are all handmade and their prices vary based on quality. They have insect ranches, farms, fishing and a steam-powered train service. The largest cities use wind turbines to generate a few hours of electricity per day. Water and windmills dot the countryside to grind wheat and grain. They have the best roads in the island chain, with merchant wagons carrying goods from city to city and port to port.

Currency: Shells and Barter. No Cardanian bucks have yet arrived in the marketplace but merchants will be willing to trade for them. Should direct trade and diplomatic relations form with Cardania, Queens Land could become a paper economy.

Elfar, Queens Land Musketeer

Elfar was born in what was once known as Central America. She grew up on a ranch and, in her youth, learned a great deal about mutant riding insects and mutant cattle insects. When she was sixteen, she developed a severe case of wanderlust. She wanted to explore the northern territories and started a long and dangerous journey. When she reached the Long Gull Islands she settled in Queens Land Island and now calls Queens Land City home. She joined the Queens Land Regular Army and was tapped to join the Musketeer Corps. Since then, she has become a local celebrity. Her beauty and heroism has captured the hearts and minds of Queens Land.

Species: Rabbit.

Alignment: Scrupulous.

Attributes: I.Q. 10. M.E. 14. M.A. 18. P.S. 23. P.P. 18. P.E. 22. P.B. 21. Spd 27.

Age: 21. **Sex:** Female. **Size Level:** 8.

Weight: 108 pounds (48.6 kg). **Height:** 5 feet, 4 inches (1.6 m).

Hit Points: 32. **S.D.C.:** 65.

Disposition: Paternal. She is a loving and caring person who does what she does because she wants to protect her adopted homeland.

Description: She is a human-sized, fully bipedal rabbit with fully articulate hands. Elfar has soft, curly brown fur with blond highlights and warm, brown eyes, along with a tan, button nose. She has large, floppy rabbit ears that tend to get in the way, so she uses hair clips to keep her ears flat on her head. Despite her cuteness, there is a fierce, aggressive determination that boils under the surface. Elfar moves with swift intent and confidence. When dressed to impress, she wears spider silk gowns and dresses. When attending formal military events she wears her flashy dress uniform which has a Spanish cut to it.

Human Features:

Hands: Full.

Biped: Full.
Speech: Full.
Looks: None.

Natural Weapons: Running Claws: 1D6 damage. Powers: Extra Mental Affinity. Leaping: Feline.

Psionics: None.

Level of Experience: 3

Occupation: Queens Land Musketeer (Elite Militia).

Apprenticeship: Rancher.

Main Skills: Breed & Control Insects: 80/60%. Core Skills: General Repair and Maintenance: 55%, Herding Giant Insects: 50%, Horsemanship: Exotic 50/40%, Imitate Insect Sound: 60%, Language: Native Spanish 75%, Literacy: Native Spanish 65%, Lore: Giant Insects 50%, Physical Labor, Roping: 40%. Military and W.P. Skills: Land Navigation: 44%, W.P. Knife, W.P. Rope, and W.P. Shotgun. Domestic & Cowboy Skills: Dowsing & Water Location: 30%. Horsemanship: Cowboy 72/56%. Language: English 50%.

Primary Skills: Weapon Proficiencies: Black-Powder Pistol, Black-Powder Musket, Sword. Physical: Acrobatics, Boxing, Fencing, Upgrade Hand to Hand: Martial Arts. Pilot and Technical Skills: Navigation: 60%, Public Speaking: 40%.

Secondary Skills: Cook: 40%, Dance: 40%, Farming and Gardening: 48%, Identify Fruits and Plants: 35%, Wardrobe and Grooming: 58%.

Attacks per Melee: 5

Bonuses: Back Flip: 60%, Climb Rope: 74%, Climbing: 48%, Prowl: 40%, Sense of Balance: 64%, Walk Tightrope or High Wire: 66%. Fearless of Heights. Leaping: 6 feet (1.8 m) up, 7 feet (2.1 m) across.

Combat Bonuses: Automatic Knockout on a Natural 20 for 1D6 rounds. +2 to Disarm. +5 to Dodge. +2 to Entangle, +1 to Initiative. +5 to Parry. +5 to Pull Punch. +7 to Roll with Punch/Fall/Impact. +2 to Strike. Karate Kick: 1D8 damage. With Sword: +7 to Parry. +5 to Strike.

On Giant Insect or other mount: +1D4 to Damage when on Giant Insects. +2D6 to Damage from Charge Attack with pole-arm or spear. +7 to Dodge, +3 to Initiative. +7 to Parry. +9 to Roll with Punch/Fall/Impact. +2 to Rope/Ensnare. +4 to Entangle. +4 to Strike by Giant Insect.

Equipment: Standard adventuring and military equipment. She rides a giant grasshopper. Custom Musketoon: This highly gilded firearm is a breech-loading weapon with a sighted, brass, octagonal barrel and a wheel lock. It has a shoulder stock with a brass plate. Caliber: .69. Feed: Muzzle-Loaded. Weight: 10 pounds (4.5 kg). Range: 1,500-3,600 feet (457-1,097 m). Damage: 5D6. Payload: Single Fire. Bonuses: +1 to Strike. Ammunition: Ball Bearings, lead & minie balls. Dueling Pistols (2): Caliber: .38. Feed: Muzzle loaded. Weight: 2 pounds. Damage: 2D6. Range 60 feet. (18 m). Payload: Single Shot. Ammunition: Lead Balls. Money: 1,000 veins.

The Freelands

The Freelands are two islands which have become ports-of-call for pirates and smugglers. Everything is for sale in the Freelands, any service can be found, and life is cheap. There are many sandbars which make it easy for captains unfamiliar with the waterways to ground their ships and become victims of the rogues

who live ashore. Those who know the waterways have access to the ports and can make a decent, if unsavory, profit.

Population: 1,000.

Language: English, 7% are literate.

Species: The Freelands is a melting pot of thievery and vice. Any species with a wicked heart can call the Freelands home.

Capital: None.

Government: None. Power shifts between individual pirate lords as they gain and lose power and influence. Most pirates and smugglers will obey the order of whichever pirate lord seems to be in control at the time.

Military: 160 pirates and brigands. They tend to use the same percussion cap weapons used by Queens Land, but through trade with N'Yak, some pirates have access to more modern weapons used in Cardania. Most pirates use sailing ships, but a few have motorized boats acquired in N'Yak. Everyone is armed. In such a dangerous place, people are on guard and ready to kill first and ask questions later.

Technology: Circa 1700s. Most people live under the worst conditions. They walk along muddy streets, live in shacks and have no plumbing or electricity. Poverty is rampant on the islands despite the booming economy; only the pirate lords and smugglers enjoy a high standard of living. People working around the ports earn a decent living. The crime lords have plumbing and some even have private generators.

Economy: Booming. The villains on this island are doing very well for themselves and do a lot of business with the gangs of N'Yak. The pirates of the Freelands attack merchant ships and raid coastal communities for goods, including slaves, for trade. They don't limit their attacks to the Long Gull Islands, as raiding mainland coastal communities provides more varied resources.

Currency: Shells and Barter.

Pirate Lord Xai Odesr

Xai was born on one of the Freelands Islands to parents who were part of an assassins' guild. He was trained as a silent killer, but when he reached adulthood, he left the guild and became a pirate. He fought his way to a captaincy and eventually became a self-appointed pirate lord. He will ruthlessly defend his position and is confident he won't have the chance to die of old age.

Species: Scorpion.

Alignment: Diabolic.

Attributes: Any number in () was the original attribute, but has deteriorated due to age. I.Q. 19, M.E. 7, M.A. 9, P.S. 9 (13), P.P. 6 (11), P.E. 10 (14), P.B. 8 (11), Spd 17 (24).

Age: 65. **Sex:** Male. **Size Level:** 6.

Weight: 61 pounds (27.5 kg). **Height:** 4 feet, 3 inches (1.3 m).

Hit Points: 29 (38). **S.D.C.:** 40 (50).

Disposition: Mean, suspicions and vengeful. He is a killer at heart and got to where he is through murder. As powerful as he is, he stays alive by keeping others out of arm's reach but where he can find them if he suspects betrayal.

Human Features:

Hands: Full for lower set of hands.

Biped: Full.

Speech: Full.

Looks: None.

Description: A large scorpion with four legs and four arms. His upper set of arms have small but deadly pincers and his lower arms have fully articulate hands. He has a large, barbed, poisonous tail and a black, chitinous exoskeleton. He has two primary eyes on the front of his head and two secondary eyes on the sides of his head.

Mutant Animal Powers: Advanced Vision. Extra Limb: Arms. Extra Limb: Eyes. Light Exoskeleton: A.R.: 9, S.D.C.: 25. Paralytic Venom Glands.

Natural Weapons: Extra Limb: 1D6 damage Barbed Tail. 2D4 damage Pincers.

Vestigial Disadvantages: Diet: Carnivore. Fluorescent Skin. Vestigial Brain: Predator.

Level of Experience: 6

Occupation: Pirate Lord.

Background: Raised by Bandits.

Apprenticeship: None.

Primary Skills: Detect Ambush: 60%. Detect Concealment & Traps: 55%. Escape Artist: 45 (60)%. Locate Secret Compartments/Doors: 45%. Streetwise: 45%. Use & Recognize Poison: 49/41%. Physical: Hand to Hand: Assassin. Military: Intelligence: 70%. Land Navigation: 61%. Pilot: Sailing: 90%.

Secondary Skills: Language: English 70%. Mathematics: Basic 89%. Prowl: 40 (55)%. Swimming: Basic 80%. Tracking: 60%. Wilderness Survival: 60%. W.P.: Whip, Hand to Hand: Basic.

Attacks per Melee: 6 (7).

Combat Bonuses: +4 to damage. +3 to dodge. +2 to entangle. +2 to initiative. +3 to parry. +3 to pull punch. +3 to roll with punch/fall/impact. +2 to strike. W.P.: Paired Weapons.

Underwater Bonuses: +1 to dodge. +1 to parry.

Equipment: He dresses in a pirate-like fashion, with a billowy shirt, baggy pants and a large hat. He uses two bullwhips in combat to entangle an opponent and then paralyzes them with his stinger.

Black-Powder Weapons

For this submission, all you need to use a black-powder weapon is W.P.: Black-Powder Musket or W.P.: Black-Powder Pistol. You will use your Attacks/Actions per melee round to determine how many shots you can fire for each melee round.

Let's say you are in the local militia. You will most likely be taught W.P.: Black-Powder Rifle and W.P.: Bayonet, but not any hand to hand skills. Militia training time is limited because the members all have jobs and obligations outside the militia.

Muzzle-Loaded Muskets: We can break down the operation of a musket into five melee actions/attacks:

The *first action* is to take the preloaded paper cartridge from your ammo pouch and tear off one end.

The *second action* is to pour the pre-measured powder down the muzzle, then put the paper wad and ball down the barrel.

The *third action* is to ram your charge and ball with the ramrod and return the rod.

The *fourth action* is to prime your musket.

The *fifth action* is to cock your gun, aim & fire. A trained soldier can fire his weapon three times in 60 seconds. A melee round

is 15 seconds, so it would take the soldier four melee rounds to fire his weapon. More experienced soldiers will be able to fire more.

Let's imagine a militiaman without a Hand to Hand Combat skill. A third level militiaman will have two attacks per melee and three non-combat actions. He will use a non-combat action to take and tear his paper cartridge. His second non-combat action is to put the powder, paper and ball down the barrel. His third non-combat action is to use and return his ramrod. He will use a combat action to prime his pan. His last attack is to fire his weapon.

Breech-Loaded Muskets: The operation of this weapon can be broken down into three attacks/actions. You open the breech. Then you load your ball and powder, then lock your breech. Finally, you prime your weapon, cock your hammer and fire.

Let's take our third level militiaman. He uses a non-combat action to open his breech. He uses another to load and lock the breech. Then he uses an attack to fire. He has one extra non-combat action and one extra combat attack. These two can be used to reopen the breech and reload so he will be ready to fire right away at the beginning of the next round. This greatly increases the rate of fire over the muzzle-loaded rifle.

Black-Powder Firearm Construction

The three basic elements of a firearm are the lock, stock and barrel. The barrel holds the projectile and the propellant. The lock ignites the propellant. The stock braces the firearm for accuracy and fire direction. This is where the real customization comes into play. Is your firearm a double-barreled experiment with a bayonet? A mace with several barrels embedded into the mace head? A more traditional rifle? What your weapon looks like is solely based on your needs and imagination.

Step One – The Barrel: There is no limit to the number of barrels your weapon may have. Your barrel contains your powder and ammo, which is propelled out the muzzle. Throughout history, barrels have been made out of a wide variety of materials like bamboo, brass, bronze, iron and steel.

Should your weapon have multiple barrels you will have to roll to strike for each barrel. That includes weapons that are designed to discharge all barrels simultaneously. Remember, these weapons do not have targeting systems, only the most primitive sights, and are extremely crude compared to modern firearms. Multiple barrels that are designed to be discharged individually can greatly increase your rate of fire, but you will have to take the time to reload each barrel before they can be used again. Keep the number of your actions/attacks in mind when you build your super-cool, multi-barreled behemoth.

Step Two – Barrel Interior: What happens inside the barrel of your firearm greatly affects its performance.

Smoothbore: This is the least expensive and most common barrel type. Smoothbores are not very accurate, but they are easy to clean and can use a wide variety of ammunition.

Ammunition types may include ball bearings or gravel for a shotgun-like blast, good for hunting or close-quarters combat. They can also use round lead balls, lead minie balls or shaped stones. Smoothbore weapons can be converted into true shotguns or the barrels can be rifled by a weaponsmith.

Polygonal: This is the most expensive barrel type, and the least common. This is a special type of rifling that uses a twisting multi-sided barrel interior to spin a minie-ball as it travels through the barrel instead of grooved rifling. It is easier to clean than grooved rifled barrels and is still highly accurate.

These weapons use minie-balls instead of traditional rounded balls. Rounded balls increase the rate of fouling. If rounded balls are used, change the fouling limit from 50 to 25.

Grooved Rifling: This is a little more expensive than a smoothbore barrel. It uses traditional grooving to spin the musket ball as it travels down the barrel. This type of rifle has to be cleaned often or it will become fouled. It is accurate and can use minie-balls or lead balls.

Fouling: Black-powder causes residue and acid build-up in a weapon's barrel. If the weapon is not cleaned before fouling occurs your weapon will misfire. Prolonged abuse will force you to buy a new barrel. A musket should be cleaned with hot, soapy water and oiled after every battle or the acid will eat at your barrel. Subtract 1D4 from your barrel's S.D.C. if it has not been cleaned one day after a battle. If your barrel suffers 1/3rd damage due to fouling it will be ruined and will have to be replaced.

During a battle, if you reach your fouling limit and you don't clean your weapon it could misfire. The misfire penalty is 5% for each round fired after the fouling limit is reached. If you have a smoothbore barrel your fouling limit is 60. If you fire 62 rounds you have a 10% chance of misfiring your weapon. If your weapon misfires you will have to clear out the misfired round, clean your weapon, then reenter combat.

Cleaning your Musket on the Battlefield: The mutants use a brass brush attachment that screws on to the end of the ramrod. The brush will scrape off the hardened fouling and permit the person to continue firing. If no brush is available you can urinate down the barrel and shake the barrel to soften the fouling, then pour it and some fouling out. In a battlefield environment, the already hot barrel should evaporate the urine quickly, allowing further firing. It takes one melee to clean the fouling.

Range: Your range is affected by your barrel type and your ammunition. A rifled barrel will have a greater range than a smoothbore barrel and a lead musket ball will have greater range than gravel.

Step Three – The Caliber: This is the interior diameter of your barrel. This determines the size of your ammunition.

.08-.14 does 1D4 damage, .21-.22 does 1D6 damage, .32-.35 does 1D8 damage, .38-.45 does 2D6 damage, .48-.50 does 3D6 damage, .52-.577 does 4D6 damage, .68-.69 does 5D6 damage, .75-.80 does 6D6 damage and .85-.90 does 1D4x10 damage. Stone ammo tends to do about one die less damage than lead balls.

Step Four – Feed: Is your musket a breech-loading weapon or a muzzle-loading weapon? Muzzle-loading weapons are slower to load but are cheaper to build. Breech-loading weapons have a faster rate of fire but are more expensive.

Step Five – The Lock: This is the mechanism that lights the powder and fires the bullet. The most common are matchlock, wheellock, flintlock and percussion caps, but there are others. The advantage of a matchlock is that it is simple to build and use. All you need is a slow-burning wick. Animals with advanced smell will smell the burning wick. Flintlocks strike flint to steel,

sending white-hot shards of steel into the powder. The wheellock spins steel against pyrite to create sparks to ignite the gunpowder. Percussion caps are the most reliable firing mechanism, but unlike other methods, you have to replace the cap after every shot.

Step Six – The Stock/Handle: This is what the barrel and lock are attached to. This can be anything the builder likes. If you want a stout wooden handle attached to several barrels wrapped in iron bands you have a mace that can fire a short-range barrage of lead during a melee attack. Barrels have been attached to spear shafts as well as the now common shoulder stock. For a pistol, this would be the pistol grip. The chest stock had a pole that stabilized the weapon and the stock was placed against the chest for further stability.

Black-Powder Weapon Options

Step One: Type of Barrel

Bamboo: Cost: 2 Veins, S.D.C.: 25, Caliber: .08-.35.

Brass: Cost: 9 Veins, S.D.C.: 75, Caliber: Any.

Iron: Cost: 8 Veins, S.D.C.: 125, Caliber: Any.

Steel: Cost: 10 Veins, S.D.C.: 175, Caliber: Any.

Step Two: Type of Rifling

Smoothbore: Extra Cost: None, Ammo: Any, Fouling: After 60 rounds, Effective Range: 225 feet (68.6 m), Max. Range: 600 feet (183 m).

Grooved: Extra Cost: 8 Veins, Ammo: Minie & Round, Fouling: After 40 rounds, Effective Range: 900 feet (274 m), Max. Range: 3,000 feet (914 m).

Polygonal: Extra Cost: 16 Veins, Ammo: Minie, Fouling: After 50 rounds, Effective Range: 1,500 feet (457 m), Max. Range: 3,600 feet (1,097 m).

Step Three: Caliber & Damage

.08-.14: Lead: 1D4, Stone: Not applicable.

.21-.22: Lead: 1D6, Stone: 1D4.

.32-.35: Lead: 1D8, Stone: 1D6.

.38-.45: Lead: 2D6, Stone: 2D4.

.48-.50: Lead: 3D6, Stone: 2D6.

.52-.577: Lead: 4D6, Stone: 3D6.

.68-.69: Lead: 5D6, Stone: 4D6.

.75-.80: Lead: 6D6, Stone: 5D6.

.85-.90: Lead: 1D4x10, Stone: 6D6.

Step Four: Feed System

Muzzle-Loader: Standard; no extra cost.

Breech-Loader: Additional 2 Veins.

Step Five: Type of Lock

Flintlock: Cost: 11 Veins, S.D.C.: 50.

Matchlock: Cost: 8 Veins, S.D.C.: 25.

Percussion Cap: Cost: 11 Veins, S.D.C.: 50.

Wheellock: Cost: 26 Veins, S.D.C.: 75.

Step Six: Type of Stock

1-Handed Shaft or Grip: Cost: 2 Veins, S.D.C.: 35, Damage: As Blunt Weapon.

2-Handed Shaft: Cost: 4 Veins, S.D.C.: 75, Damage: 1D6 as per bayonet or short spear.

Chest Stock with Pole: Cost: 9 Veins, S.D.C.: Stock 40, Pole 5, Damage: 1D4 with stock strike.

Shoulder Stock: Cost: 10 Veins, S.D.C.: 40, Damage: 1D4 with stock strike.

Extras

Butt Plate: Cost: 1 Vein, Bonuses: +1 Damage with stock strike.

Flared Muzzle: Cost: 1 Vein, Bonuses: +1 Non-Combat action per melee round.

Sighted Muzzle: Cost: 1 Vein, Bonuses: +1 to ranged strike.

Necessities

50 Flint Stones: Cost: 1 Vein.

240 Grains of Black-Powder: Cost: 1 Vein.

Powder Horn: Cost: 6 Veins.

Ramrod: Cost: 2 Veins.

Ammunition

400 Lead Balls: Cost: 1 Vein, Bonuses: None, Penalties: None.

250 Ball Bearings: Cost: 1 Vein, Bonuses: +2 to Strike, Penalties: None.

20 Minie Balls: Cost: 1 Vein, Bonuses: +2 to Damage, Penalties: None.

Shaped Stones: Cost: None, Bonuses: None, Penalties: -2 to Strike.

Gravel: Cost: None, Bonuses: +2 to Strike, Penalties: -2 to Damage.

Bayonet: Cost: 4 Veins, Bonuses: 1D6 Damage, Penalties: None.

Note: Black-Powder Weapon Proficiencies are the same as their modern counterparts. Bonuses with W.P.: Black-Powder Musket are the same as W.P.: Bolt-Action Rifle.

Example Black-Powder Weapons

The Queenie: This is the Queens Land primary military firearm. It has a rifled brass barrel to provide a good spin to the lead balls it fires. It is equipped with sights and a bayonet. It is a breech-loaded weapon with a percussion cap mechanism.

Caliber: .50. **Feed:** Breech-Loaded. **Weight:** 8 pounds (3.6 kg). **Range:** 900-3,000 feet (274-914 m). **Cost:** 46 Veins. **Damage:** 3D6. **Payload:** Single Shot. **Bonuses:** +1 to Ranged Strike. **Ammunition:** Lead Balls or Minie Balls.

Snipper Rifle: Yes, that's "Snipper," not sniper. The Snipper Rifle is an all bamboo weapon used by some of the mutant deer tribes. The barrel is a stout bamboo shaft that is strapped to a bamboo spear. It is a matchlock weapon that fires shaped stones. This weapon is used in nomadic, primitive communities where metal resources are scarce. It is an ambush weapon where guerilla warriors will first fire their weapons at close range and then attack with the spear part of the weapon.

Caliber: .32. **Feed:** Muzzle-Loaded. **Weight:** 4 pounds (1.8 kg). **Range:** 225-600 feet (68-182 m). **Cost:** 20 Veins. **Damage:** 1D6. **Payload:** Single Fire. **Bonuses:** None. **Ammunition:** Any, they tend to use stones for combat and gravel for bird hunting.

Hawklette Musketo: This is the standard musket used by the soldiers at Camp Sparrow. It is a traditional smooth bore, flintlock, with a flared muzzle for faster loading. It is shorter than a normal musket so it can be used by both cavalry and shorter mutants. Since many of the mutant animals that run the camp are smaller than humans it was thought that the smaller Musketo was preferable to a full sized musket. The range is not affected by the shorter barrel.

Caliber: .75. **Feed:** Muzzle-Loaded. **Weight:** 10 pounds (4.5 kg). **Range:** 225-600 feet (68-182 m). **Cost:** 37 veins. **Damage:** 6D6. **Payload:** Single Fire. **Bonuses:** +1 non-combat action per melee. **Ammunition:** Ball Bearings, lead & minie balls.

Adventure Ideas

What Happens in Man-Taukett Stays in Man-Taukett

Hook: If the characters can read, they may pick up a copy of the local newspaper, the Daily Sparrow. The headline reads, "Entire Herd Slaughtered at Local Ranch." The story goes on to tell of a saddened rancher who went to bed after tending his herd and woke up to find the entire herd killed and eaten. He is distraught. Other ranchers are setting up nighttime patrols around their ranches. The local Sheriff is investigating the crime.

Investigation: If the players choose to investigate on their own and go to the ranch, they will find a family-owned establishment being supported by the local community. Some other ranchers have donated several insects to help restock his ranch. Militia groups have volunteered to guard his new insect herd at night. Any character with forensics skills, veterinary skills or heightened senses investigating the crime scene will discover that whoever killed these insects has clawed feet and fought on all fours, based on the prints in the dirt. Someone with biology or animal tracking may even notice that the claws are digging claws. They will also know the attackers had beaks (no teeth marks on the dead cattle).

Tracking the attackers is impossible at this point, they concealed their tracks well and too many volunteers have been searching the forest, destroying any useful tracks.

Line: Three days later, the Daily Sparrow has a new headline, "Three Dead Ranch Hands at Second Attack." The story goes on to tell of a second night attack at another ranch. This time the night watchmen tried to defend the insect cattle. They were killed, along with their livestock. The military is not getting involved yet, but are aware of the situation. The Sheriff and his deputies are keeping volunteers away from the ranch to preserve the second crime scene. The island's ranchers are up in arms, demanding the Sheriff do something. If they don't feel he is active enough they will get their own riders together and search every square inch of the island to find the assailants.

The Sheriff: If the players went to either the first or second ranch the following scenario will occur: later that day, one of the Sheriff's deputies approaches the players and tells them the Sheriff would like to have a meeting with them.

The Good: If the players have a good reputation as trouble-shooters, the Sheriff will want to hire them to track down the culprits. The ranchers are breathing down his neck and he does

not want them to go off half-cocked. He is afraid more people will die and the military will become involved.

The Bad: If the players are unknown or have an unsavory reputation, then the Sheriff will want to know what the players were doing at the ranch and why they seem so concerned. The Sheriff will naturally see the players as suspects. The Sheriff will offer the players the opportunity to clear their names by finding the attackers.

Either way, the players will be given unrestricted access to the second crime scene, which has been preserved. Characters with sharp eyesight will be able to identify a trail, as will characters with an acute sense of smell.

On Their Own: If the players have never gone to either ranch they won't have the advantage of examining the crime scene. Without being able to identify the attackers' scents or tracks, they will have to find an alternate way of identifying the culprits. They may notice a bill posted by one of the island ranchers seeking professional troubleshooters to guard his ranch at night.

Following the Trail: Assuming they have found the trail, it will lead them deep into the woods, south toward the central island hill. Traveling through the woods can be a dangerous journey with mutant plants, animals and "volunteers" looking for the culprits. Eventually, they will follow the trail to the creatures' burrows.

The Ranch Hands: While following the trail, the players hear a commotion. They come across a mixed group of mutant animal ranch hands and a Man-Taukett tribal scout. They have a mutant badger tied up and the ranch hands are preparing a hangman's noose on a sturdy tree branch. Two of the ranch hands will step forward, blocking the players' path.

One rancher will say, "We got one of them murderers and we is gonna hang'em."

The hominid scout pipes up, "Yesh, Yesh bub. We's tracked him up to dish point. Dish here bubbly ish gonna take a long dirt nap."

The badger does have digging claws and is a quadruped, but he has sharp teeth and, for any character with advanced smell, he does not smell like anything at either ranch. Characters with a good reputation are likely to be able to convince the ranchers they have the wrong man and will be committing murder. While disappointed, they will let the badger go. Characters who are unknown or have an unsavory reputation will either have to intimidate the ranchers to let the badger go, fight them to free the badger or go on their way, letting the ranchers hang an innocent man.

Finding the Burrows: The burrows are camouflaged and the creatures will smell and hear the adventurers coming. They are nocturnal creatures, so during the day they will try to stay hidden and only fight if their burrows are discovered. If they are found at night they will leap from their burrows to eat the intruders, fighting to the death.

Stakeout: Should the players guard the ranch of the rancher who posted the bill, the creatures will attack several nights later. They have learned to attack the guards first. They will prowl up to any fencing and dig under the fence. Once under, they will attack guards first and cattle second.

Sinker: These creatures are transplants from Center Island. Their populations have grown in recent years and a small group swam across the water to Man-Taukett. They have not started breeding yet, but will soon. All of these creatures must be de-

stroyed to prevent their populations from exploding. This will cost lives, damage the ecology and the island's economy. The only way to be sure they have not started laying eggs is to locate their burrows.

The Monsters: These are chimeras created at the animal research center for the specific purpose of being dropped behind enemy lines and destroying livestock. These hungry animals will dig burrows to live in and attack and eat nearby cattle. They were never deployed, but after the Crash, the creatures escaped captivity and bred on the island. Their population is kept in check on the island by all of the other vicious predators there. Until now, the animals were kept isolated on the island by the ocean.

Behavior: They hunt in small packs of 2D6. They prefer hunting easy targets like penned in cattle, but are fearless and will fight to the death if attacked. Each animal digs its own burrow and sleeps in solitude.

Description: An ugly, sheep-like creature with a raptor's beak, lizard scales and digging claws.

Alignment: Miscreant.

Attributes: I.Q. 1D4, Low Animal, M.E. 1D6, M.A. 1D4, P.S. Brute 4D6, P.P. 3D6, P.E. 4D6, P.B. 1D4, Spd 3D6.

Size Level: 6.

Build: Medium.

Hit Points: P.E. +1D6 per level of Experience. **S.D.C.:** 55, Light Natural Armor: **A.R.:** 9.

Disposition: This is a mean animal and cannot be domesticated. Human Features: None.

Natural Weapons: 2D4 damage Digging Claws. This animal does not tunnel. It digs burrows. 3D6 damage Beak.

Mutant Animal Powers: Digging & Excavation. Nightvision. Psionics: None.

Vestigial Disadvantages: Nocturnal. Reptile Brain: Predator.

Level of Experience: 1D6.

Instinctive Skills: Camouflage: 20%. Prowl: 25%. Tracking: 30%. Wilderness Survival: 25%. All skills go up as per level of experience.

Attacks per Melee & Bonuses: Same as characters with No Hand to Hand Combat Skill.

Value: The meat tastes bad but is edible. The animal's hide has a brown/green patterned color and has decorative value.

Time and Time Again

Time and Space Bending Gate (T.S.B.G.): For decades, scientists have theorized as to the ways that black holes bend time and space. It was thought that if a spacecraft could bend both time and space it could travel vast distances in the blink of an eye. Scientists started to develop gravity manipulation devices capable of creating the necessary conditions to warp time and space. These experiments were conducted under top secrecy at the military base now known as Camp Sparrow.

Hook: Every hour, on the hour, a strong earthquake strikes Camp Sparrow. These geological disturbances are worrying to the good people living there. Some are considering moving to other islands if the quakes persist.

Line: After twenty four hours of hourly earthquakes, the players receive word that the Camp Commander would like to see them. When they enter the Commander's office he stands up to greet them.

“Welcome. You are known as troubleshooters and we’re certainly in trouble now. As you know, we have been suffering from these unnatural earthquakes. We think we’ve located the epicenter, however – directly under this very camp. The quakes hit the same place with the same intensity every hour.

One of the most recent quakes opened a passage that was sealed up long ago by the previous inhabitants. We suspect that this passage leads to the fault and we believe it is man-made. We sent a scouting party in and they have not returned. We need you to investigate.”

Sinker: The earthquakes are man-made. The Air Force had been working on a Time & Space Bending Gate before the Crash, but the project was shut down after a series of fatal accidents. Closed off for years, a small earthquake has caused the Gate to reactivate and create periodic dimensional shifts. Every hour, the entire floor is transported to a different place in space, time or another dimension. This lasts for only 3D6 minutes, but anything that enters the shifted area is trapped there when it returns to its correct dimension. The Gate takes one hour to recharge before it shifts the area into another place and time for 3D6 minutes and the process starts all over again. Entering the passageway could lead the players into any environment, battle or the rescue of unwitting transplants from alternate dimensions and times.

The obvious dangers are the likelihood that creatures from different places will find their way out and threaten the lives of citizens. Another danger would be if the Empire of Humanity found out about the Gate and learned how to use it. It is possible that they could transport humans to and from other times in Earth’s history and repopulate the human race. This could lead to a successful campaign of genocide against the mutant animals. It is important that the Gate not only be shut down but destroyed.

Time and Space Bending Gate: Publicly, the old Air Force base was built to protect the eastern seaboard from hostile foreign powers and eventually integrated into the missile defense shield. Unknown to most base personnel, top secret projects were running in underground levels. Manipulating the raw fabric of time and space was one of their most promising projects. They realized early on in their experiments that they could not use their device reliably for space travel, but they could peer into the past and future. The researchers were fascinated by the past, but horrified by the future they saw. They turned the window they had made into a Gate and sent a special operations team into the future to try and make sense of the visions they had seen.

When you open a dimensional doorway it allows passage in two directions. When the special operations team went into the future, strange mutant creatures were pulled into the past, resulting in a deadly firefight between the security forces and the heavily armed mutants. Most of the scientists died trying to escape the intruders, and the project was shut down as a security risk. What happened to the special ops team is anyone’s guess.

Today, the Gate has opened up again, but without operators and regulatory controls it has malfunctioned, cycling through time, space and various dimensions and shifting the entire old underground laboratory and the cave system around it, allowing

strange creatures to come through. Luckily, most of the “visitors” fight amongst each other, limiting the number of potential bad-dies the players might encounter.

The Gate running haywire is a serious security risk to the base and needs to be destroyed. Another risk the players will face is exactly when to leave the Gate level. The entire lab and the caves around it are caught in another dimension for 3D6 minutes every hour. If they leave the level while the area is shifted without shutting down the Gate first, they will be trapped within that new dimension. This could be a fun way to run a crossover campaign.

The Osprey Way

Hook: The village/island the players find themselves in is up in arms. They are concerned that Canine troops have been spotted on Osprey Island. Considering the isolationist attitude of the ospreys, nearby communities are worried that they might be scheming with the Empire of Humanity.

Line: The people in the village/island fall into two camps. One wants to invade Osprey Island and clean out the duplicitous ospreys once and for all. The other camp wants to send scouts to the island and determine the truth behind the allegations. They are looking for volunteers to go to the island to take a look. Winged characters will be able to go to the island openly for trade. Non-winged characters will have to sneak ashore and remain unnoticed.

Sinker: New Kennel is planning on invading the island chain. They believe that the low-tech nature of the inhabitants offers the opportunity for an easy military and public relations victory. The rulers of New Kennel want to impress the Empire of Humanity by securing the island chain and exterminating anyone who is not human or canine. Before they invade, they want to get the lay of the land. New Kennel sent in Canine Rangers to identify the military strength of each island and the fighting will of the citizenry. They also want to see if there are canine communities that can be turned. Osprey Island is centrally located in the chain and is thought to be a perfect launching pad for an invasion.

The osprey leadership is cutting a deal with New Kennel. They are willing to let the canines use their island as a staging area in return for a promise that they will be spared and keep possession of their island. Canine troops have been coming ashore ever since, secretly building up their forces for a move on the other islands. What New Kennel does not know is that there is a rebellious splinter group of ospreys eager to sabotage New Kennel’s efforts. If the player characters can make contact with them without alerting the police or other authorities, they can find osprey volunteers who will openly fight against the Canines at the most opportune time.

Heroic Hot Spots

By Glen Evans

New People, Places, and Adventure Ideas for Century Station™



Optional Material for Heroes Unlimited™

New York City has Wall Street and Broadway. Chicago is known for Michigan Avenue and Rush Street. Whenever you think iconic streets of Los Angeles, Rodeo Drive and Hollywood Boulevard come to mind. In Century Station, its most famous streets are Silver Boulevard and Millennium Avenue. Both streets are eight lanes wide. They used to have elevated expressways, but they were taken down a year and half ago to cut down on the number of traffic accidents. The intersection of Millennium Ave and Silver Blvd (two blocks from the Standish Building) has achieved the status of an iconic world landmark.

The entire area is defined by animated, digital advertisements and upscale establishments.

Silver Blvd runs diagonally through Silver City's financial district, which comprises the offices and headquarters of many of the city's major financial institutions. Landmark buildings on the street include the Waterfront, Century Station City Hall, the Courthouse, and Center Station Plaza (CSPD Headquarters). Although the street runs throughout the entirety of Silver City, a two-block radius around Center Station Plaza has been closed to civilian traffic for the last six years.

Millennium Avenue runs diagonally through Silver City in the opposite direction of Silver Blvd. All along its route are upscale department stores, restaurants, high-end retailers, office buildings, and hotels, all catering primarily to tourists and Society Hill's wealthy elite. The area also has a high concentration of the city's major media firms and advertising agencies, including the Century Station Observer and WCTV, Channel 9. Landmark buildings on the street include the Standish Building, the Century Station Criminal Court, and the Watts Tower Hotel.

Society Hill

Century Station City Hall

Located on Silver Blvd in Silver City, this building houses most of the governmental functions, such as the office of the Mayor and the chambers of the City Council. The steps of City Hall frequently provide a backdrop for political demonstrations and press conferences concerning city politics. Fencing surrounds the building's perimeter, with a strong security presence by the Century Station Police Department (CSPD). Public access to the building is restricted to tours and to those with specific business appointments.

Century Station Courthouse (Supreme Court)

The Supreme Court for the District of Century Station is located in several buildings in Silver City. The civil branch is in the main Courthouse building on Silver Blvd. The Criminal Court, the Office of the District Attorney and the Circuit Court of Appeals are all located adjacent to one another on the same Millennium Ave block.

Center Station Plaza

This is the headquarters of the CSPD. Center Station Plaza is located across the street from City Hall. The building looks like a high-tech fortress. It stands 13 stories high, but it's the four underground facilities that are far more impressive. Located on the 1st underground floor is the War Front, an anti-crime computer network

which is essentially a large search engine and data warehouse operated by detectives to assist officers in the field with their investigations. The Major Case Squad and Joint Terrorist Task Force are located on the second underground level. Nobody but the CHIMERA Directors is allowed access to the third level. The fourth level is where CSPD keeps all super-powered prisoners in custody before they're sent to Gramercy Island. A two block radius around Center Station Plaza on Silver Blvd has been closed to civilian traffic for the last six years ever since **Sinistry** and a Colorpunk gang called **The Devil's Reign** (a group of 50-60 individuals) launched an all-out attack on the building with military-grade weapons in an effort to rescue Modul. Only CS law enforcement personnel and individuals with strict security clearance (defense and prosecuting attorneys, for example) are allowed to enter the defensive perimeter. CSPD asserts that it's necessary to protect its headquarters from future terrorist attacks, especially by a group of super-villains. Many Silver City residents are increasingly frustrated at the disruption caused by the closure of the vital thoroughfare. People who live nearby argue that the police department has placed a choke-hold on an entire neighborhood and that if Center Station Plaza is such an obvious terrorist target, perhaps it should be moved from a residential area. Members of the *Silver Hill Residents' Coalition* have been fighting the security perimeter around the building for years. According to overheard rumors, the building's rooftop is armed with four SAM (surface-to-air-missile) launchers and automated sentry guns. The grounds are patrolled by small, remote controlled, unmanned robot drones that look like radio controlled toys. Anyone not wearing a CSPD badge is heavily monitored, and even then no one gets in until he or she gets scrutinized by any of the half dozen checkpoints outside the building. It's even suggested that there are hidden defensive turrets all over the grounds.

The Mansion of Gemstone

The largest home in Truro Commons belongs to the international fashion model *Gemstone*. This sprawling six-acre estate, complete with two rectangular lakes and elegant garden, is more like a modest castle than a mansion. Whenever she comes to town, she throws lavish parties with invites going to key Century Station politicians, business figures, and celebrities. Many rich and influential men have fallen to her charms, some of whom are no longer living. She has never come under suspicion. This mansion is a recent acquisition given to her by a wealthy French dignitary who died in a skiing accident in the Swiss Alps. According to Gemstone, their affair was a private one. The man's family is still protesting the changes to the man's will. For additional information about Gemstone and the *Dark Tribunal*, check out *Villains Unlimited™ 2nd Edition*, pages 48-63.

New DT Alien Item: Lead Rings

The Dark Tribunal (DT) aliens come from a world of high radiation. As a result, their bodies give off dangerous amounts of radioactivity, so much so that it's hazardous for ordinary humans to spend prolonged periods around them. In the past, the DT wore protective clothing and suits to contain the radiation, unfortunately, the agents, particularly their leaders, walk among the human population so they cannot allow themselves to be seen wearing such obvious material. Nor is it possible for them to pass through security checkpoints (x-ray machines in airports for example). As a result, the DT technicians created special lead rings which create a dampening aura around the wearer that neutralizes any radiation emanating off them. This enables a DT alien to stand beside normal humans wearing only a bathing suit without exposing them to any harmful radiation. It also prevents radiation detectors from going off.

The Watts Tower Hotel

The Watts Tower is a 33-story, Five Star hotel comprised of 259 guest rooms, including 47 suites. The average price for a room for a single night is around \$600. The suites begin at \$1800 and the Presidential suite runs around \$10,000 a night. The hotel is located a short distance from world-class dining and entertainment on Millennium Ave. Virtually unmatched attentive service and the hotel's prime location attract sophisticated business and leisure travelers alike. The hotel features four restaurants, and two lounges (one being exclusive to Hotel members and guests), a world-class spa, a fitness center equipped with state-of-the-art equipment, a business center with support services and private "mini offices," and with 2,053 square feet of meeting space. All the suites, including the Presidential, come with a butler and/or chambermaid service. Built by the billionaire *Eddington Watts*, the hotel is a testimonial to his refined definition of luxury accommodations. The Watts Tower has become the hotel of choice for kings, queens, movie stars, and tycoons from all over the world.

However, no one would suspect that the hotel also serves to satisfy Eddington Watts' sadistic need to punish the wealthy. Watts was injured in a boating accident nine years ago, leaving him a quadriplegic and requiring a ventilator in order to breathe. Unable to enjoy his ultra-rich life, Watts went insane, developing an obsession to ruin the lives of those with money and able to enjoy it. He blackmails and extorts from those who stay in his hotel. He sells the stolen secrets to the highest bidder and he is heavily involved in the Mutant Slave Trade. Watts lives in secluded isolation within a hidden suite in the hotel, even his wife Agatha is unaware that he lives there. Watts is an Empowered with super powers that allow him complete and total control over the ENTIRE building. He has also linked himself directly to the hotel's mainframe, enabling him to view the inside of any room in the hotel from its windows, visible or hidden security cameras and surveillance devices distributed throughout the entire hotel; nearly in every room, hallway, elevator, stairwell, closet, etc. During the last eight years, a number of unexplained "accidents" have occurred in the hotel, from people being killed in or by an elevator, being electrocuted in the bathroom, or dying from hypothermia during the night because of the air conditioner. So far, all these incidents have been viewed as "accidents" and nothing suspicious or criminal has come from it. The bizarre accidents have not kept the ultra-rich and famous from coming to the hotel either. Helping Watts are three perfectly human-looking androids; Alvin (the hotel doorman), Guss (hotel desk clerk), and Mabel (his caretaker). Because of his abilities and technology, Watts can see and hear everything the androids can.

Adventure Hooks

Any super-hero/villain who stays in the hotel is likely to have his or her secret identity revealed to Watts. The evil hotelier will extort money from the hero or villain in exchange for keeping his or her identity out of the newspapers, T.V., internet, etc. Watts cannot confront heroes or villains directly because of his physical condition. However, his powers allow him such control over the building and the fact that no one except the three androids knows of his existence, makes him a sort of "ghost" that haunts and torments the player characters during their stay. Finding the hidden surveillance technology will possibly lead the players into doing a thorough investigation, but as long as they're conducting it in the hotel, Watts will know all about it.

Real Name: Eddington Watts.

Alignment: Miscreant.

Attributes: I.Q. 25, M.E. 20, M.A. 17, P.S. 1, P.P. 2, P.E. 3, Spd 0, P.B. 12.

Age: 38

Hit Points: 33, **S.D.C.:** 20.

Power Category: Empowered.

Level of Experience: 7th

Major Super Abilities: Inhabitation and Mechano Link. Combined together he has complete control over *everything* in the hotel.

Minor Super Abilities: Frequency Absorption, Mechanical Awareness, and Windows.

Vulnerability: Besides being a quadriplegic that can only move his head and neck (and slight movement in his fingers), he is hooked up to a ventilator. He cannot breathe on his own. The ventilator has a 12 hour backup battery. The ventilator is not linked to any computers that can be accessed via the hotel or a wireless connection. The same can be said about all of Watts' technology in his room.

Combat Bonuses: He cannot move, however his powers grant him a +2 to initiative whenever he engages someone in combat using technology.

Attacks per Melee: 2 attacks and 5 non-combat actions.

Saving Throws: +3 to save vs psionics & insanity, -8 to save vs disease, -6 to save vs drugs and poison, -5 to save vs magic, -20% to save vs coma/death, suffers 50% more damage and double the penalties and duration from illness and the side effects from drugs, poisons, and magic.

Other Bonuses: +11% to all skills and 45% charm/impress.

Skills of Note: Mathematics: Basic 98%, Business & Finance 98%, Computer Operation 98%, Law (Basic) 98%, Research 98%, Basic Electronics 98%, Computer Programming 98%, Computer Hacking 98%, Radio: Basic 98%, Radio: Scrambler 98%, T.V./Video 98%, Surveillance 98%, Optic Systems 98%, Sensory Equipment 98%, Laser Communications 98%, and Radio: Satellite 98%, Advanced Mathematics: 89%, Astronomy & Navigation 76%, and Read/Write/Speak Japanese 91%/87%.

Weapons: Besides everything within the hotel, he can cause electric outlets to send out electric discharges to strike opponents within 20 feet (6.1 m), doing 4D6 damage, but those capable of being linked to heavy industrial equipment can do 1D6x10 damage (for more details, see the Major Super Ability *Inhabitation* in **Powers Unlimited™ 3**, pages 70-71).

Equipment: He has state of the art computers (voice and eye actuated controls), monitors, communications, cameras, surveillance, and medical equipment in his room which link him to not only the hotel but provide him world-wide access. All in total, he has at least 7.8 million dollars of technology in his room. Equal to Superior Connections (30 points).

Watts' Suite

Anyone wanting to contact Watts has to do so solely by typing in a password using the lobby elevator. This is done by holding the close door button and after the doors close, spelling out the words W.A.T.T.S. using the buttons (2-3-1-2-0-2-0-1-9). Typing the password acts like a doorbell and provides him instant sensory and visual information on who is in the elevator (which he already has, but by entering the password, he is made aware that someone is making a request to see him). The elevator, like the rest of the hotel has video cameras in it that transmit real-time images to the central security room on the lobby floor and into Watts' suite simultaneously, only unbeknownst to everyone, the elevators have concealed microphones in the ceiling. Watts always monitors those in the elevator as they arrive at the 18th floor (the hotel has 20). There is nothing particularly

unusual about the 18th floor. Mabel's room number is 1813. All the hotel rooms require a card key in order to enter them. Mabel's has a card key lock on the door, but a card key is not used to gain entry. Mabel opens the door by staring at the peephole. An infrared laser is emitted from it. Once the laser acknowledges Mabel's electronic eye, the door unlocks. Anyone else trying to open the door by any other means will activate the trap underneath the carpet that causes a massive electric discharge to a 10 foot (3 m) area causing 1D6x10 points of damage. The infrared laser can fire a beam of energy directly into the eye of a person who happens to look into the peephole, causing 2D6 points of damage direct to the individual's Hit Points and destroys that person's eye (unless resistant or impervious to energy/laser attacks). Any attempt to bypass the security system and electrical lock is -70% and takes 6D6+12 minutes to circumvent.

Mabel's room looks like a Presidential suite (it's not listed in the hotel registry because she is a permanent guest). Everything about the room suggests the occupant is a wealthy single woman in her 30s. She has a closet door that can only be opened from the opposite side. Watts has to let her in via voice control, but in case of an emergency, there is an override voice command. Any attempt to open this door is done with a -50% penalty (4D6+6 minutes). Behind the door is Watts' Suite which looks identical to hers except all his technology and his sophisticated hospital bed takes up most of the available space. The bed can turn into a mobile wheelchair (A.R. 10 and 90 S.D.C.) with a speed of 5. The outside and inner walls, floor, and ceiling of the two rooms are reinforced (A.R. 12, 200 S.D.C.) per every 20 feet (6 m) area. All the windows are triple-paned with bulletproof glass (A.R. 13, S.D.C. 150). Anyone attempting to use a laser or light weapon on the glass has a 01-39% of having it reflected back at its original source if fired within 300 feet (91 m) of the windows. The windows are tinted and soundproof. Anyone climbing the Watts Tower will activate strategically placed heat and motion sensors, which will not only alert hotel security and the CSPD, but Watts too. Anyone flying up to Watts' and Mabel's windows will also cause heat and motion sensors to go off. Watts has plenty of unused electrical outlets in his room to use as weapons (he is insulated against electric attack). Hidden behind a painting above his bed is a concealed particle beam cannon with a special thermal and motion sensor (-15% to find with detect concealment). The cannon has a +3 to strike opponents (including invisible ones) and gets a +5 to initiative on its initial attack (which more than likely will be a surprise one), the rest will be +2. The particle beam will inflict 2D4x10 points of damage, but will not target or fire upon Watts or Mabel. The laser can fire twice a melee round and has an infinite power supply. The particle beam can hit anything in Watts' suite except for objects directly on top of the bed or if Mabel or Watts are in the way. The cannon and its sensor array have 40 S.D.C.

The Androids: Alvin, Guss, and Mabel (stats are all the same).

Alignment: Aberrant.

Attributes: I.Q. 18, M.E. 17, M.A. 9, P.S. 30 (Robotic), P.P. 24, P.E. n/a, Spd 20, P.B. 15.

Hit Points: None. **S.D.C.:** 225 plus 100 Body Armor (325 total).

Armor Rating: 12

Power Category: Robotics (Android).

Robot Intelligence: Advanced Artificial Intelligence.

Level of Experience: 5th

Age: They appear to be in their 30s, **Height:** 6 feet (1.8 m) for the men, 5 foot and 8 inches (1.72 m) for the woman, **Weight:** 350 lbs (157.5 kg).

Appearance: They look like normal everyday people working at a hotel.

Attacks per Melee: 4

Combat Training: Hand to Hand: Expert.

Combat Bonuses: +7 initiative, +1 to strike on all weapon systems, +8 to strike, +12 to parry, +12 to dodge, +15 to damage, +5 to roll with punch/fall, +8 to pull punch.

Saving Throws: +3 to save vs psionics & magic that affects A.I.s and impervious to organic attacks (poison, drugs, toxins, etc.).

Combat Skills: Punch 2D4+2, Power Punch 3D6+2, Knee 2D6, Elbow/Forearm 2D6, Karate Kick 2D6+2, Backward Sweep (cannot be parried, must dodge or knockdown, Tripping/Leghook (cannot be parried, must dodge or knockdown), and all Holds.

Other Bonuses: +11% to all skills & 45% charm/impress.

Robotic Skills: Basic Combat Program, Military Etiquette 98%, Climb 98%/98%, W.P. Handgun (+2 to aim/+1 to burst), Anthropology 94%, Law (general) 98%, Read/Write/Speak English, Spanish, Chinese, and Russian 98%/96%, Performance 90%, Public Speaking 98%, Housekeeping 98%, Read/Write/Speak Japanese and Arabic 54%/64%, Undercover Ops 56%, Wardrobe & Grooming 72%, I.D. Undercover Agents 60%, Streetwise 38%, and Prowl 41%.

Weapons:

Palm Spikes, **Range:** 90 feet (27.4 m), **Damage:** 1D4, **Rate of Fire:** 1 or a volley of 2, 4, and 6. **Payload:** 6; reload takes 2 melees, **Bonuses:** +3 to strike/+6 long-range.

Chemical Spray, **Range:** 10 feet (3 m), **Damage:** Varies, **Payload:** 1 before a reload, **Bonuses:** +2 to strike. They have access to all variety of chemicals, including knockout. Note: The Palm Spikes can be coated with the chemicals.

Beretta Model 92, 9mm Auto Pistol, **Range:** 180 feet (55 m), **Damage:** 3D6, **Rate of Fire:** Single shot or Semi-Auto, **Payload:** 15 round mag. Note: Only Mabel and Guss carry a pistol, **Bonuses:** +5 to aim/+2 to burst.

Special Equipment:

Advanced Audio System (See page 205 of HU2.)

Wide Band Radio and Transmitter, **Range:** 150 miles (240 km). **Note:** Each robot can receive or send a radio signal to Watts.

Radio Signal Scrambler System: Encrypted radio and cell phone transmissions. Must use Radio: Scrambler in order to intercept a robot's transmissions, and even then it's at a -25% penalty.

External Audio Pick-Up (See page 205 of HU2.)

Audio Recorder: Solid-state recording system.

Internal Video Receiver and Transmitter: Solid-state recording system. **Range:** 1,200 feet (366 m). **Note:** Each robot can send a secure video signal to Watts that he can watch on a monitor.

Single Voice Synthesizer (See page 205 of HU2.)

Sound Analysis Computer (See page 205 of HU2.)

Real Time-Sensor Link with the technology in Watts' room and the rest of the hotel's security systems.

Advanced Robot Optic Systems, **Range:** 2,000 feet (610 m).

Laser Targeting System, **Range:** 1,600 feet (488 m), **Bonuses:** +3 when using ranged weapons.

Combat Computer (See page 206 of HU2.)

Motion Detector and Warning System: **Range:** 60 feet (18.3 m). (See page 206 of HU2.)

SIGINT (Signal Intelligence) Gear: Enables the robot to receive radio or cell phone frequencies. It can monitor specific frequencies, or scan through a range of frequencies for a specific signal. Once the signal has been found, a radio directional finder will attempt to track the signal to its source (88%).

Radiation Detector: 60 feet (18.3 m).

Chemical Analysis System: In the nose of the robot. (See page 206 of HU2.)

Artificial Blood and Cosmetic Enhancements (realistic skin, body fluid secretions, real body hair, realistic eyes, and sculpted facial features).

Fortunatus

This exclusive restaurant sits high on top of the 101 story Jade Tower. Its menu consists of American Traditional and Steakhouse, but its owner/chef, Gian Lo Bianco, has found a way to combine excellent food with polished services in an atmosphere that caters specifically to the ultra-rich. The typical price range for a dinner for a single person is \$130. Open only after 6:00 p.m. and usually closed by 1:00 a.m., the restaurant is prohibited for those under the age of 18 (it strictly caters to adults). The only way to get in is to have a reservation, which requires money, patience, and often knowing the right individual. The restaurant sells private tables for a whopping \$5,000 monthly fee. Those who can claim they have dined at this restaurant are able to distinguish themselves over their peers who haven't, which is another sign that you are that much better than someone else is. The place also has the distinction of being the only restaurant in Century Station yet to be robbed by a single super-villain, possibly because those who frequent it want its luxury, comfort and tranquility maintained.

Millennium Castle

This is one of the most famous nightclubs in the world. People from every corner in the world come to spend a single evening in this modern-day castle in Bocatello. Seven stories tall, the castle has a medieval look on the outside, but inside it's a multilevel high-tech environment with a futuristic design and top of the line sound and lighting system. There are three 4000 square foot dance floors with live, international DJs spinning all night, as well as numerous rooms for private dining and lounging. The Castle is frequented by those who live on Society Hill, and by those able to afford its \$30 general admission fee, but only those who pay for the \$150 monthly membership fee have access to the private dining and lounge rooms. The nightclub has a strict dress code (one needs to look like they're nightclubbing, not coming off the street). The Club also hired Eagle Knight Security to ensure its patrons have little to fear of criminals, terrorists, and/or super-villains who want to make the club a target of their operations.

The Cosmodrome

Located in Bocatello and built to resemble a large planetarium, guests here are treated to an ever-changing visual landscape as they journey to different places in the galaxy while they enjoy an award-winning menu of American seasonal specialties, created from locally grown ingredients. The restaurant also has two private dining rooms; the Mars Room, which allows guests to believe they are having a power lunch or dinner on the red planet; and Space Station Alpha, which allows guests to experience fine dining 500 miles (800 km) above the Earth via advanced 3D visual technology. Anti-alien groups have the restaurant under constant surveillance, as do agents from Project Tyche. The owners of the restaurant, a former Russian cosmonaut, *Avel Zosimoff*, and his partner, American astronomer *Kyle Barrows*, seem to possess information about the galaxy that goes far beyond current understandings here on Earth. In actuality, they get their info from executive chef *Trin Nalo*, a Principled Reipoc

Doppelganger who has made Earth his home for the last 20 years. He is more than willing to share his galactic insight with friends and guests, although he withholds the fact that he used to hunt and eat the flesh of other humanoids. Trin is a celebrated chef and public figure in the city. It should be noted that eating here is an expensive experience (a meal for two can cost between \$150 to \$500). The restaurant requires reservations and a jacket.

Champions

This theme restaurant in Fleetwood is one the entire family will enjoy. Patrons are surrounded by movie, television, and real life super-hero memorabilia while eating a variety of foods, including salads, pastas, sandwiches, and award-winning burgers. The restaurant also boast a 60-seat Screening Room so when the latest super-hero movie comes out, patrons who want to dish out extra cash can watch the movie while enjoying a great meal. Often the restaurant is visited by costumed super-heroes and villains; the problem is no one can ever tell who is a real hero or villain and who is an employee. The place is a popular meeting place with Legionnaires and their contacts. Like Fortunatus, it boasts a distinction of having never been robbed (only a fool would try because you never know which super-hero might actually be in here). A meal for two can run \$30-\$50, yet the experience alone is worth the price.

Center City

M-Tech

Located in Ogilvie, Modern Technologies was once an advanced research, design and production facility for cybernetics and bioengineering. At one time it was one of the leading companies in the creation of cybernetics for medical and commercial use, namely with cosmetic implants and attachments to bio-systems, computer jacks, optics and sensory technology. *Nathan Tyler*, the company's founder and CEO, served as the Council of Industry's chairman. Unfortunately, the company suffered like so many other high-tech companies during the Daedalus scandal, with M-Tech taking a harder hit because it actually benefited from alien technology. The company went bankrupt and lost its status as a mega-corporation. A decade later, the corporation's new Chief Operating Officer (COO), *John Tyler*, (Nathan's son) is looking to rebuild M-Tech's reputation and reestablish its status in the global community. There are rumors that the company is trying to obtain a contract with the US military to gain rights to build military-grade bionics and cybernetics. However, the cost of federal, state, and city permits for manufacturing, researching, and development might bankrupt the company again before it can even show off a single prototype. This has led some to speculate that John Tyler might be involving the company in the criminal underground in an effort to cut the costs of production or raise capital illegally.

Eagle Knight Training Academy

Eagle Knight Security is a privately owned, professional military, law enforcement, security, peacekeeping, and stability operations firm that provides specialist security and risk management solutions to extreme threats, tailored for international clients, including governments, international agencies and the corporate sector. It is a registered and active UN contractor, a major security provider to the US government and security advisor to the United Nations. In short,

they are professional mercenaries. The US State Department employs Eagle Knight to provide support in danger zones that would be difficult for conventional forces. The US military employs them as guards to extremely high-ranking government officials in hot spots all around the world. Eagle Knight provides services for the Pentagon and indirectly assists in overseas theaters of operation. It also serves in advisory roles to help train foreign militaries to fight more effectively instead of intervening directly. Eagle Knight operatives are commonly observed in Century Station and other major cities acting as bodyguards and security personnel for corporate executives, celebrities, politicians, and the wealthy elite. Operatives are strictly forbidden to function as Legionnaires and any who do will be fired and possibly face criminal prosecution.

On the surface, Eagle Knight looks like any other security firm but nearly all its operatives are superbeings recruited from all walks of life, and intensely educated in all aspects of special law enforcement or military training. The super's educational expenses are paid for, as well as any additional amount of training wanted. Afterward, the individual receives their EKS badge; he or she will be given a protection detail. If the individual proves himself in the civilian sector, then he or she might be reassigned to a theater of operations overseas. Century Station is home to one of its four training academies. Located in Javarta near Route 918, it looks like a typical college campus, but this is all a clever facade. The grounds are used to train operatives to be able to handle any situation. A hidden tunnel goes under Route 918 and into Old Orchard where operatives conduct field exercises on secluded property.

Eagle Knight is run by billionaire *Reginald Knight*. He created the company on the belief that both the U.S. military and law enforcement establishments require capabilities far beyond the normal standards to keep the country secure both here and abroad. Reginald is a huge admirer of superbeings, and wishes he was one. Since his birth he's suffered from Severe Combined Immunodeficiency (SCID), which makes him extremely vulnerable to infectious diseases so he must live in a completely sterile environment (a plastic bubble). A result of having little contact with the outside world, he was home schooled and learned everything via television, radio, books, and computers. Reginald possessed an uncanny intelligence (he's not a Natural Genius, just a normal person) that he used to master the stock market at an early age, and in time make himself into one of the richest men in the world (Note: Reginald does not live in Century Station, he lives in a Jeffersonian mansion in Virginia).

Eagle Knight is backed by Reginald's crack law firm; *White and Knight* (1170 attorneys). He doesn't like the idea of his operatives having to deal with silly laws, or the Geneva Convention. Whatever works to get the bad guys is fine by him, even if the measures are unorthodox, so long as innocent bystanders are not put at risk, and the bad guys are taken down. White and Knight are quick to arrive to clean up any legal problems an operative might have in the course of performing his or her duties.

On the downside, Eagle Knight is not appreciated by US S.C.R.E.T. or CHIMERA. On numerous occasions, EK operatives have interfered in the course of their investigations. As far as CHIMERA is concerned, the entire organization is nothing more than a giant band of Legionnaires with far too much influence in the Department of Defense and Homeland Security.

Note to G.M.s: Eagle Knight Security represents a great start for player characters. All player characters coming out from Eagle Knight must be military, military specialists, or possess on the job training education. One skill program must include law enforcement.

DeTeluzzi Italian Diner

Located in Calaverada, this large Italian restaurant with full bar and summertime outdoor seating serves traditional dishes, wood-fired pizza and weekend brunch. It's family oriented and often crowded on the weekend. The pizzas and pastas are fantastic. Everything is homemade and tastes perfect. The place is well known for its friendly management and staff. On the downside, its prices are 30% higher than the cost of going down to a local pizzeria and get the same thing. It's also owned and operated by the DeTeluzzi crime syndicate, one of the largest in country, with the resources to hire an army of gunmen, assassins, and superbeings to do their bidding. Presently, this location is not on the OCCB (Organized Crime Control Bureau) watch list and the Don wants to keep it that way.

Park King

Located in Everett, this is not your run of the mill Cantonese-American cafe. The Szechuan, Cantonese and Mandarin dishes are excellent, as is the service. Vegetarian items and simple noodle dishes are offered as well. Bamboo-backed chairs, fresh white tablecloths and etched glass partitions make it an elegant setting, along with a lovely outdoor dining garden. Prices for a meal are between \$20-30. On the downside, the restaurant has ties to the Triads. *Gong Feng* uses the restaurant as a meeting place for his non-Chinese recruits.

Robo World

Located in Retropolis, a block from Sentinel Park, this fast-food restaurant is the first to be run entirely by robots. The only humans in the building are the patrons. Humanoid looking robots serve as staff members while mechanical limbs that look as if they were built by college students work in the kitchen preparing the food. People merely sit at a table and order via a microphone. Paying is done just as one would do at an automated service at a grocery or department store. The quality of the food is always excellent, despite being a burger joint. Kids and adults seem to enjoy themselves in this state of the art entertainment. Shortly after closing around 10:00 p.m., owner and creator *Chet Dawson* (a 5th level Hardware Electrical Genius) arrives to do a nightly maintenance check, count the drawer/do the books, and preprogram everything for the following day. The facility has a high-tech, state of the art, complex alarm system and Chet has yet to be held at gunpoint.

The Grinning Goblin

Two blocks from Paolo Jessup Memorial Stadium in Xenophon is this large theme restaurant decorated to depict a generic medieval Europe in the 12th century where warriors and wizards battle against Goblins and dragons. Life-like automatons battle it out on stage while in the arena, men and women dressed like knights participate in tournaments featuring medieval games, sword fighting and jousting. Magicians (not real wizards) display the arts of magic and illusion. There are two types of menus, ones from authentic medieval Europe (like black manger and entrayale) and American (pastas, burgers, seafood, steaks, and chicken). There is not a day that goes by that this place is not packed full of children (some claim they are the goblins). Of course this seems to be the opinion of out of towners while those in Century Station regard it as a tourist trap. General opinion is the food is overpriced and children under the age of 12 seem to have the most fun.

The Mutant Underground

Located in Quincy Flats, this mutant sanctuary operates in the interconnected basements of several abandoned buildings and the city sewers. Three years ago, the organization operated in Hannigan and boasted nearly 60 members. During that time a Colorpunk gang known as the Hannigan Hangmen (a group with 400 members) assaulted the Hannigan South Police Precinct, killing 40 police officers and two dozen innocent bystanders before torching the building, all because their leader had been gunned down by the police. Instead of blaming the problem on the gang, attention was turned on the several dozen mutants living in an abandoned warehouse who had nothing to do with the assault. Mayor Zardona and Police Commissioner Grover were able to successfully spin the attention away from the frightful Colorpunk gang armed with military-grade weapons toward the impoverished and innocent Mutant Underground. CSPD led a retaliatory strike against the organization, arresting dozens of vagrants, outcasts, and those less fortunate. They only arrested six or seven mutants, meaning most of the people were normal human beings. The mutants that managed to escape fled to Quincy Flats where they reestablished a new safe haven, in a more secure location. Many in the organization are angry and bitter over what was done. Some are planning a retaliatory strike against City Hall, but generally, most want to live in peace and solitude, away from the anarchy on the city streets. So far, calmer heads have kept the protectors from becoming terrorists and killers looking for revenge, but that could change with just the arrest or murder of a single mutant.

Brisby Flats

Club Inferno

This is not the place to go unless one is interested in Goth culture, fetishes, dark wave and industrial music. Located in Norwood, the outside looks like a warehouse with outdoor seating and a bar. Inside there are black walls, velvet drapes, mirrors, wrought-iron staircases, Victorian-style furniture, a large dance floor and full bar. The place is full of scantily clad dancers and acrobats (male and female). In the lounge upstairs, one can engage in kinky activities. Those not dressed the Goth part, or at least in black, will have to pay a cover charge of \$20. For the last three years, someone has been stalking first-timers and murdering them at their homes one or two nights later. So far, a dozen people have been killed. CSPD have the place under constant surveillance, but that doesn't stop all the drug use and displays of public intoxication.

The Chainsaw

The space was specially designed as a hot spot nightclub. When the economy of the city collapsed, so did the club along with the entire sub-district of Lennox. Two years later, the neighborhood was taken over by a Colorpunk gang called *Road to Ruin*, who worked for a deranged scientist who specialized in back-alley cybernetics. Not only did he design his own cybernetic attachments and implants, he possessed the medical knowledge to implant and remove them. Before long, every member in the gang had a half dozen or more cybernetic implants or bionic attachments on their body. The gang's central leader, *Arthur Roads*, otherwise known as *Chainsaw*, turned the building into a popular hangout specifically for hardcore punks. Today this nightspot attracts heavy metal and rock fans from all over the world. The club is still owned and policed by the cyber-gang. The

entire facility is decorated with mechanically operated chainsaws and other industrial machines and tools. The main floor is pretty much a gathering place, but it operates a 24-hour tattoo and body-piercing parlor. In the center of the main floor is a unique, wrought-iron spiral staircase that leads down to the dance floor and bar, which throbs until 4 am nightly. The real centerpiece of the dance floor is the mosh pit with live Death and Doom Metal bands from all over the world playing every night of the week. Thrashing, stage diving, crowd surfing, mic swinging, smashing instruments, and head banging are a nightly phenomena, as is the selling of numerous illegal substances. In the back of the building, *Lennard Vicker* continues to build, sell, and install back-alley cybernetics and bionics. The establishment is nothing more than a front operation, not to mention he can always find plenty of high-strung test subjects eager to wear one of his cyber designs. Many in the CSPD and city government are eager to take this obvious criminal haven down, but with a gang of heavily armed cyber-criminals and a club full of moshing adolescents, most fear the results of a raid.

Ground Zero

After the chaos of the Bloody Monday riot, *Nathan Barlow* renamed his deli to Ground Zero because by sheer luck, his establishment was spared from the destruction of the Winslow nuclear bomb by a mere 20 feet. One is actually able to peer into the crater caused by the blast from any of the building's windows. After the explosion, hundreds of police, fire fighters, emergency personnel, state and federal agencies, and volunteers came to help the Winslow neighborhood. Barlow opened his doors and offered food and beverages at half price, and in doing so, he packed them in. However, every time repairs and rebuilding began, riots would spring up from mutants (people supposedly effected by the radiation) demanding aid for their situation. After a month of this, the city halted its rebuilding effort, leaving the unfilled crater and the surrounding neighborhood in complete despair. The mutant population continues to rise in the neighborhood. Barlow believes it's only a matter of time before the city decides enough is enough and they begin again, and when it happens, he wants his café to be there. The place is full of memorabilia and newspaper clippings from that tragic day. Anymore it's more of a museum than a deli frequented by less than a few dozen tourists on any given day, although his nuclear sandwich remains a popular item with the locals.

The Graveyard

Shortly after Century Station was founded at the end of the American Civil War, a number of people were stricken by a mysterious virus that killed within 48 hours. In the end, thirty-one people died from the disease. These people were buried in a cemetery on the edge of town. As the years passed, the cemetery was utterly forgotten, with no records for the allocation of plots, with no deeds, contracts, or agreements. Eventually, the cemetery itself sunk into complete disrepair and the remaining monuments degraded into almost nothing. Seventy years later, the surrounding acres of land would first be transected by Route 273 and the location of an important exit in Napier Bay would pass directly next to the abandoned cemetery. A steel production plant and land development firms purchased the surrounding area, wanting to build a gas station precisely on the cemetery at the end of the southbound exit ramp. During the height of Project Daedalus, *Cormac Oxam*, a prominent city councilman, was able to convince the city to have the mortal remains removed and reburied in a location half a mile away in Orange Hills. Instead of a gas station, Cormac let his unscrupulous brother-in-law build a

three-floor concert hall/nightclub called the Odyssey. For a while, the establishment was doing quite well, despite all the mysterious and tragic accidents occurring once a month. When the city's economy completely collapsed, so did the finances of Cormac's brother-in-law, so he closed the club's doors. Three years later, Cormac sold the building to *Vladislav Barnost*, a Romanian actor of stage and screen. He remodeled the club for his wife *Vilma*, a former Romanian Olympic gymnast and dancer, then confined to a wheelchair. During the remodeling, Vladislav was shocked to discover that Cormac's construction company never removed a dozen graves and simply paved over them to make the club's parking lot. Instead of revealing this to anyone, Vladislav decided to embrace the macabre like setting and renamed the establishment the Graveyard. Today this nightspot is known throughout the world. The upstairs can hold 1500 people and has live bands and raves. The nightclub on the lower level has everything from 80s music to house foam parties to fetish nights. On the main floor is a quieter bar with pool tables and a spacious lounge. Vladislav and his wife (who recently acquired cybernetic legs) dress like vampires and proudly profess of the many "accidents" and "supernatural phenomena" occurring on the grounds. The establishment is frequented by the few magic practitioners who live in the city, but almost never by psychics, who insist the place is a haven for non-corporeal apparitions.

Drummond Mall

This super-regional shopping mall in Drummond has been abandoned for nearly seven years. When it opened during the height of the days of Project Daedalus, it was one of the largest enclosed malls in terms of retail space. Over 500 stores were arranged along three levels of pedestrian walkways, with a fourth level on one side. Its four anchor department stores are located at the corners. The mall enjoyed four years of success, until the city's economic collapse. Soon crime plagued the Drummond region, making it a failing, poverty-stricken sub-district. Many of the stores, including the anchors, were renovated several times in an attempt to bring in new customers, but in the end, nothing could keep the mall open. Ever since the mall closed, various abortive plans have been made to demolish or redevelop the structure, although none of these plans has ever come to fruition. The mall has been left to decay ever since, due in no small part to a lack of funds, political incompetence, general mismanagement and apathy. Vandals have broke in, damaging and looting the mall, and leaving a number of entrances wide open in the process. Lots of the metal worth salvaging has been stolen. Over time, weather and lack of maintenance have taken their toll on the building. The place has gained a reputation as a notorious crime magnet, with at least 4 murders and 3 rapes taking place inside, not to mention abundant gang and drug activity. There are full-grown trees in the parking lot and portions of the roof have collapsed.

The Conundrum

This 52-story office building in Kerguelen is something of an anomaly. Despite the worsening conditions of this sub-district, neither it nor its tenants have been affected or offended. The tenants consist of a Dutch Bank, an American company that offers financial advice and products, two magazine companies (one being a business magazine that reports on future technology and innovation, while the other targets entrepreneurs and small businesses), an art gallery, a small bio-tech firm, and office spaced used by architectural and engineering firms working on numerous projects in Century Station. There is still space available to lease on the ten uppermost floors. Since the building opened, several un-leased upper floors have been

used for events such as charity lunches, fashion shows, and black-tie galas. The owners of the building, a French company called *Fabricators, Inc.* use these events as a means to draw people to see the building, and to possibly get them to buy office space. **Note:** This building is owned and operated by the *secret criminal organization* of the same name as the French company. It is perhaps the most ambitious project the company has ever done, operating a building that caters specifically to all levels of the criminal elements within Century Station, from the Street Punks to the Criminal Masterminds and Super-Villains.

Diego Verde

Elysium Garden

Located in Truffault and far removed from the city, this diversified farming operation is not what it appears to be on the outside. Though it looks to be involved in row crops, beef production, cow/calf and draft horse operations, the truth of the matter is it's a rehabilitation camp run by retired super-heroes and burned out veterans.

Super-villains and criminals sent here are given the chance to reform themselves. The program is approximately 6 months long and includes full-time education programs, substance abuse treatment, and group, individual and family counseling. The man running the camp is *Colin Beard*, or as he used to be known as the *Halberdier* (9th level Ancient Weapon Master). He is 63 years old and used to be a champion of Victory City for 35 years as well as a full-time, active enforcer for *The Jury* for 11 years. The camp's head of security is *Ron Brown*, who makes sure those who are sent to the camp do what they are supposed to. This camp is an alternative to prison, namely Gramercy Island or being sent to a US S.C.R.E.T. Holding Facility, so if a judge grants the guilty party a chance to reform his or her ways by completing the program, it's a chance to obtain a clean slate. The camp has medium level security that's based on an honor system. Anyone who escapes from the camp will be hunted down by Federal law enforcement (G.I.G.M.A. and U.S. S.C.R.E.T.) and will be given a maximum sentence plus additional time at Gramercy Island or at a Holding Facility. What nobody realizes is Ron Brown is actually a duplicate of *Plexor* from the *Dark Tribunal*. He is using Elysium Garden as a means to contact human and/or mutant criminals to join their cause. Of course, those recruited will not be privy to the Dark Tribunal's ultimate goal; the enslavement and/or destruction of humankind and the establishment a new order ruled by them. For additional information about Plexor and the Dark Tribunal, check out *Villains Unlimited™ 2nd Edition*, pages 48-63.

Additional Information on the Century Station City Council

The Century Station City Council is the lawmaking body of Century Station. It has 25 members from 25 council districts throughout the four boroughs, although technically there should be 36 but ever since the economic collapse, some of the sub-districts have either lost or have yet to regain council representation. Whenever someone decided to run for city council, vowing to clean up his or her district, that person would end up assassinated or dead from an "accident." As a result, people refused to run in those areas (this happened in Norwood on four occasions). As a result, some council districts were combined together. In districts that have been labeled with "Dread zone" status, there is no city council member to represent them. As

a result, they must rely on the Century Station Police Department Operative Bureau for any representation (see below).

The City Council serves as a balance of power against the mayor in a “strong” mayor-council government model. The mayor has almost total administrative authority and a clear, wide range of political independence, with the power to appoint and dismiss department heads without council approval and little public input. The mayor also prepares and administers the city budget, although that budget must be approved by the City Council. Despite his vast executive powers, the Mayor of Century Station must consult with the city council on affairs regarding the changing of any current laws, tax structure, or widespread zoning changes. The City Council also has the authority to hold a vote of “no confidence” on the Mayor, which gives him or her three weeks to change the council’s mind, otherwise the council can vote on whether or not to eject him or her, appoint an interim mayor from the council, and hold new general elections within 60 days.

The City Council’s main duty is to monitor performance of city agencies and makes land use decisions as well as legislating on a variety of issues. Council Members are elected every four years and each member is limited to three consecutive terms in office. The head of the City Council is called the Speaker, and that person is currently *Rawdon Thill*.

The Council has several committees with oversight of various functions of the city government. Each council member sits on at least three standing, select or subcommittees. The standing committees meet at least once per month. The Speaker of the Council, the Majority Leader, and the Minority Leader are all ex officio members of every committee.

The Council Districts

1. Silver City
- *2. The Silver City Arcology (this area is separated from the rest of Silver City).
3. Battenberg Heights
4. Avalon and Victoria Beach
5. Bocatello
6. Fleetwood
7. Midgard
8. Retropolis
9. Everett
- *10. Javarta
11. Ogilvie and Willingham
12. Xenophon
13. Calaverada
14. Quincy Flats
15. Kilgore
16. CSPD Operative Bureau (Waingroh, Lennox, Hannigan, Ker-guelen, and Iron Beach)
- *17. Norwood and Zericho
18. Saratoba
19. Drummond and Orange Hills
20. Garden Valley
21. Old Orchard
- *22. Mignola and Ulster
23. Fairfix
24. Holbroke, Breckland, and Rattle Ridge
25. Truffault

*Notable City Council Members

Rawdon Thill, NPC Quick Stats

Rawdon Thill is the famed architect and developer of the Silver City Residential Arcology. Six years ago he was elected as the complex’s city representative because the residents in the arcology decided they wanted their own representative so they could be distinguished from the rest of Silver City. Thill has not disappointed his constituency, voting time and time again on their behalf and benefit. In Thill’s mind, the only people who do matter are those in the Arcology. He could care less what happens to the people in Center City and Brisby Flats, as long as their uneducated, criminal, impoverished populace stays away from the wealthy elite of Silver City. As the representative of the largest number of people within Century Station (its largest percentage of voters), he feels it’s his duty to look after their specific needs. Those who live in the Arcology live far removed from the goings-on of the city. Many of his colleagues believe he and those in the complex are out of touch with what’s going on in the city, much less the world in general. Thill’s reply is he prefers the Arcology and its people. In fact, he has plans to make even bigger complexes in other cities. He foresees a future where the upper middle class and wealthy elite will live safely in fortress cities. Thill is presently the Speaker of the Council; a position no wants him to have because of his lack of concern for the welfare of anyone except for those in the Arcology and the rest of Society Hill. Surprisingly, Thill is in favor of Operation Overlord, namely to remove the criminal threat and keep Society Hill safe from harm. Any attempt of a no-confidence vote against Mayor Zardona will require persuading Thill, and as long as the Arcology is safe and secure, he’s not at all concerned about the welfare of anyone else. Thill serves on a number of committees; Society Hill Redevelopment (which he is the chairperson of), Finance, Oversight and Investigations, Rules and Elections, Economic Development, and Transportation.

Alignment: Anarchist.

Attributes: I.Q. 20, M.E. 15, M.A. 19, P.S. 14, P.P. 7, P.E. 13, Spd 11, P.B. 13.

Age: 41

Hit Points: 42, **S.D.C.:** 10.

Equivalent Level of Experience: 7th level Ordinary Human/Architect and City Councilor.

Other Bonuses: +6% to all skills and 55% to trust/intimidate.

Skills of Note: Mathematics: Basic 98%, Business & Finance 98%, Computer Operation 98%, Law (Basic) 98%, Research 98%, Mathematics: Advanced 98%, Chemistry 98%, Civil Engineering (see **The Rifter® #25**), Architectural Design/Engineering 96% (see **HU 1st Edition**), Computer Programming 98%, and Pilot: Avtran Vehicles 86%.

Welcome Levy, NPC Quick Stats

Welcome Levy has the distinction of being rated one of the most powerful women in Century Station. Born blind, she became a famous sculptress and by the age of fourteen, had many of her works on displays in dozens of art museums all over the country. After graduating from college in New York, she returned to Century Station to become a professor of art at Copernicus University, hoping to become a pioneer for the physically and mentally disabled. After fifteen years of teaching, Levy decided to extend her talents beyond the limitations of the university and apply them to the city. She ran for city council for the 10th district and won in a landslide. Many in the Javarta sub-district are blaming her for not doing enough since the last election to prevent the rising crime rate prevailing through the

sub-district. Ever since she received her cybernetic eyes six months ago, Levy has not been her old self. The once champion of equal rights, comprehensive health care, improved schools, tenants' rights and affordable housing, has become someone who is always looking out for her own interests first and foremost. She is on her final term in office and appears to be debating about whether or not to make a run to be a U.S. Senator. Levy serves on committees for Health, Small Business, Women's Issues, Housing and Building, and Mental Health (includes alcoholism and drug use) & Disability Services.

Alignment: Formerly Principled, now Unprincipled.

Attributes: I.Q. 14, M.E. 13, M.A. 15, P.S. 12, P.P. 13, P.E. 11, Spd 8, P.B. 12.

Age: 52

Hit Points: 49, **S.D.C.:** 8.

Equivalent Level of Experience: 8th level Ordinary Human/Artist (Sculptress) and City Councilor.

Skills of Note: Mathematics: Basic 98%, Business & Finance 98%, Computer Operation 98%, Law (Basic) 98%, Research 98%, Art (sculpture) 98%, Play Piano 98%, Appraise Antiques (by touch) 65% (by sight) 98%, Land Navigation (without sight) 53% (with sight) 68%, and Public Speaking 90%.

Cybernetics: Two "Lifelike" Simulated Eyes.

Note: She spent 51 years being blind, resulting in a better than average sense of smell and hearing.

Kasper Gott, NPC Quick Stats

Kasper Gott grew up in Norwood and graduated from Norwood High School. On the night of his graduation, his family became the victims of a drive-by shooting that killed his father and younger sister. Determined to get out of Century Station, Kasper joined the U.S. Marine Corps. He spent three tours overseas rising to the rank of Gunnery Sergeant. One day he learned that his younger brother had been arrested for possession of narcotics and attempted robbery. Kasper returned home to post his brother's bail. He spent the night at home trying to persuade his brother of the error of his ways. Later during the night, a masked gunman broke inside the house. His target was his brother but instead Kasper awoke, shot, and killed the intruder who turned out to be a thirteen year old boy. After being cleared of any wrongdoing, Kasper left the service and became a passionate volunteer who organized block associations, tenants' associations, street clean-up campaigns, and community forums. He also became a strong advocate for increased participation in the local community Police Council, so that the police, working along with civic leaders, can better address the quality-of-life and public safety issues throughout Norwood. During these times, there were two assassination attempts on his life by street gangs. Finally, he decided to run for city council for district 17. When it was decided to combine Zericho and Norwood into one council district, Kasper moved to Zericho in the hopes of getting away from those trying to kill him. The move proved to be fruitful as it won him the election. Today Kasper Gott is an enemy of crime. Two additional assassination attempts have been made on his life but he refuses to give in. Since taking office, his efforts have kept both districts from being labeled as "Dreadzones" and he is hard at work convincing new corporations to come to Zericho to start up their businesses to give the entire city an economic boost. He finds many of his efforts are being thwarted by Thill who hates to see good money being wasted in areas of the city that should be written off. Gott fully supports Mayor Zardona and everything CHIMERA stands for, but he wishes everyone would recognize the value of the Legionnaires. Gott serves on committees for Fire & Criminal Justice (which he is the chairperson of), Higher Education, Land Use, Community Development, Public Safety, and Economic Development.

Alignment: Scrupulous.

Attributes: I.Q. 12, M.E. 11, M.A. 27, P.S. 13, P.P. 10, P.E. 22, Spd 15, P.B. 10.

Age: 34

Hit Points: 48, **S.D.C.:** 34.

Equivalent Level of Experience: 6th level Ordinary Human/Military and City Councilor.

Attacks per Melee: 5

Combat Bonuses: +1 to initiative, +1 to strike, +3 to parry, +3 to dodge, +3 to roll with punch/fall, and +2 to pull punch.

Saving Throws: +14% to save vs coma/death and +4 to save vs magic & poison.

Combat Skill: Punch 1D4, Power Punch 2D4, Knee 1D6, Elbow/Forearm 1D6, Karate Kick 2D4, all Holds, and Critical strike on an unmodified 19-20.

Other Bonuses: 92% to trust/intimidate.

Skills of Note: Hand to Hand: Basic, Running, Climbing 80%/70%, Forced March, Military Etiquette 75%, Radio: Basic 90%, W.P. Rifle (+3 to aim/+1 to burst), Pilot: APCs and Tanks 86%, Find Contraband 60%, Trap/Mine Detection 60%, Business & Finance 70%, Computer Operation 83%, Law (Basic) 70%, Research 98%, Streetwise 44%, Athlete, W.P. Handgun (+3 to aim/+1 to burst), and W.P. Shotgun (+3 to aim/+1 to burst).

Note: Because of the attempts on his life, he wears special bullet-proof clothing (A.R. 12 with 40 S.D.C.) and carries a .45 caliber pistol with 2-3 hidden clips on him.

Sean Krick, NPC Quick Stats

For a lifetime, Councilman Sean Krick has worked tirelessly to make Century Station a better place to live, work and raise a family. A fifth generation farmer and Stationite, Krick has always been deeply involved in the community. He is a graduate of Copernicus University and Century Station Law School and is a licensed attorney. He has been active in the community throughout his life. At 22, he rezoned his neighborhood in Ulster to prevent overdevelopment. Krick has also worked with and served on the boards of many local charities and political groups. He is a major supporter of People First. Sean has little tolerance of superbeings. He is one of the leading supporters that believes Mayor Zardona's actions are worthy of a no-confidence vote. Because he is vocal about his beliefs, Krick has recently found himself to be the target of recent attacks by superbeings claiming to be members of the Mutant Underground. Whether this is true or not, Krick wants Police Commissioner Kamal Aziz and Anja Balisong to organize something to hunt them down. His wife Cammy, an elementary school teacher, recently received a number of warning threats against her life. In the end, though he opposed the creation of CHIMERA, he might need their help if he wants to stay alive since he made himself a target of mutant zealots.

Alignment: Scrupulous.

Attributes: I.Q. 15, M.E. 24, M.A. 19, P.S. 15, P.P. 11, P.E. 12, Spd 15, P.B. 14.

Age: 44

Hit Points: 48, **S.D.C.:** 12.

Equivalent Level of Experience: 8th level Ordinary Human/Lawyer, Farmer, and City Councilor.

Saving Throws: +5 to save vs psionic attack and +7 to save vs insanity.

Skills of Note: Mathematics: Basic 98%, Business & Finance 98%, Computer Operation 83%, Law (Basic) 98, Research 98%, Animal Husbandry 98%, Gardening 93%, History 98%/98%, Hunting, Track & Trap Animals 85%/95%, W.P. Rifle (hunting),

and Identify Plants & Fruits 85%, Pilot: Truck 88%, and Pilot: Tracked Vehicles 94%.

New Information on Century Station Police Department (CSPD)

The Century Station Police Department Operative Bureau

The CSPD Operative Bureau is responsible for providing the security and delivery of police services to about 2.2 million people living in the sub-districts with extreme or intense crime areas to the point that these regions border on pure anarchy. On numerous occasions, police precincts and patrol officers have been assaulted by heavily armed color punks, crime syndicates, super criminals/terrorists and super-villains. As a result, CSPD will almost never respond to calls because they don't want to end up dead. In an effort to prevent complete anarchy and provide some semblance of authority (especially in parts of Hannigan), CSPD created this department. These police officers are stationed in 10 Police Service Areas (PSAs). They are almost identical to police precincts located throughout the Brisby Flats borough. None of these buildings look like a police precinct, but appear to be community shelters or halfway homes. Officers never dress in uniform (except on special functions) and always appear in street clothes. They are the eyes and ears of CSPD where it's impractical and unsafe to send a patrol officer. Most of the patrolling for an operative officer is vertically in buildings, making sure illegal activity does not take place in the halls, stairways, or on the rooftops. They also investigate things such as the general welfare of people, housing & buildings, public safety, disability services, and sanitation. They look for instances of stealing water or electricity, or people who are living in such poor conditions they are putting themselves and others in danger. The job of an operative officer is perhaps the most dangerous within the CSPD. They drive around in unmarked police cars, blending in within the general populace. Nevertheless, most of their patrols are usually done on foot.

CSPD Administration

CSPD is ultimately administered and governed by the Police Commissioner, who is appointed by the Mayor and technically serves a five-year term; however, as a practical matter and custom, the Police Commissioner serves at the Mayor's pleasure. The Police Commissioner also appoints numerous Deputy Commissioners. The Police Commissioner and his or her deputies are civilians under an oath of office, as opposed to the uniformed members of the force who are sworn officers of the law. However, a police commissioner who comes up from the ranks of the department will retain that status while serving as police commissioner. This has ramifications, in that any police commissioner who is considered sworn does not need a pistol permit to carry a firearm, and does retain the statutory powers of a police officer. Some commissioners (like the present one, Kamal Aziz) do carry a personal firearm, but have a full-time security detail from the Police Commissioner's (Detective) Squad. The Deputy Commissioners are administrators who supersede the Chief of Department (highest rank of a sworn police officer), and they usually specialize in areas of great importance to the Department, such as counter-terrorism, operations, training, public information, legal matters, intelligence, and information technology. Despite their role as civilian administrators of the Department, they are prohibited from taking operational control of a police or crisis situation (with the exception of the First Deputy Commissioner).

Kamal Aziz, Police Commissioner NPC Quick Stats

Kamal Aziz was born from Jordanian immigrants who came to the US looking for a better life. He graduated from a high school in Quincy Flats then went on to join the CSPD as a Trainee. He graduated first in his class from the Century Station Police Academy and actually passed the sergeant's test before he even spent a day on the beat. While working for CSPD, he graduated from Copernicus University receiving a Bachelors of Business Administration. He then left the city to get his Jurum Doctor from the Victory City University School of Law then went on to receive his Masters Degree in Law from Ultropolis University School of Law. During these times, he served in these city's police departments. Ultimately, he returned home to Century Station where he was appointed first deputy commissioner.

After the Bloody Monday incident, the mayor resigned, as did his entire staff. When Dwayne Zardona became Mayor of the city, he chose Aziz as the new Police Commissioner, namely because of the way he handled himself during the riot. Zardona instructed him to think of a way to make CSPD better. Aziz served on the SWAT team in Ultropolis and believed every patrol officer in CS needed SWAT-level weapons and training, while the real SWAT needed superior technology and firepower. Using his influence with the Council of Industry, Zardona managed to acquire such technology for CSPD with the help of Triton Industries, Avtran, and Orion Robotics.

Aziz is not entirely happy about having to report to Anja Balisong, the Director of CHIMERA. He feels whomever has the position should report to him. He agrees with CHIMERA concepts, he just doesn't like the idea of playing second fiddle. He feels the role of Police Commissioner is lost within the CHIMERA hierarchy, especially when he ends up having to talk to a Lieutenant Director whose role is to oversee CSPD as a branch of CHIMERA. As far as he is concerned, he already fills that role and should not have to report to anyone but the mayor.

Aziz is a gung-ho, guts and glory type who sees himself as a hero. Nothing makes him happier when there's word of a CS patrol officer kicking butt without the assistance of any "superbeing" or "government agent" standing behind his or her back. He doesn't like his men being the blunt instrument in getting the job done and not receiving the credit when it's done right, or taking a bulk of the blame if something goes wrong. His love of victory is balanced by his loyalty to the brave souls who put on the uniform and put their lives on the line. He refuses to send officers to be cannon fodder so Sector 10 and the Centurions can reap the rewards of their selfless sacrifice. As a result, Aziz gets criticized for spinning his wheels and not allowing the CSPD to get anything done or show any kind of successful results against the street gangs, the major crime syndicates, the criminal masterminds, or the villainous superbeings within the city. He wants the victory but is not willing to make the sacrifice. Perhaps it's because the average district patrol cop in Century Station has a 20% chance of dying on the job during his/her first 6 months. He's been to one too many funerals.

Police Commissioner Aziz has a Master's Degree in Business and Criminal Law. He has an extensive law enforcement background. He can take off the business suit and turn into a C-Swat officer in a moment's notice. He is a short and bull-shouldered Arabic American, with a mustache that is clipped too small for his face.

Alignment: Principled.

Attributes: I.Q. 22, M.E. 13, M.A. 25, P.S. 10, P.P. 13, P.E. 14, Spd 13, P.B. 12.

Age: 47

Hit Points: 40, S.D.C.: 28.

Equivalent Level of Experience: 8th level Ordinary Human/Police Officer & Administrator.

Attacks per Melee: 5

Combat Bonuses: +1 to initiative, +1 to strike, +3 to parry, +3 to dodge, +2 to damage, +3 to roll with punch/fall, +2 to pull punch, and +1 to disarm.

Combat Skills: Punch 1D4, Power Punch 2D4, Knee 1D6, Elbow/Forearm 1D6, Karate Kick 2D4, Body Flip/Throw 1D6 plus P.S. damage bonus (lose initiative and 1 attack/action), all Holds, and Critical strike on an unmodified 19-20.

Other Bonuses: +8% to all skills and 80% to trust/intimidate.

Skills of Note: Mathematics: Basic 98%, Business & Finance 98%, Computer Operation 98%, Law (Basic) 98%, Research 98%, Radio: Basic 98%, Crime Scene Investigation 98%, Intelligence 97%, Undercover Ops 98%, Detect Ambush 98%, Prowl 98%, Public Speaking 98%, W.P. Rifle (+4 to aim/+2 to burst), W.P. Handgun (+4 to aim/+2 to burst), W.P. Submachine-Gun (+3 to aim/+1 to burst), W.P. Energy Pistol (+4 to aim/+2 to burst), and Hand to Hand: Basic.

Cyberworks Network Urban Assault Tank (Aineias)

Using a Main Battle Tank in a large metropolis like Century Station is simply impractical. The sheer weight of the vehicle would destroy the highways and city streets (especially those with subway or large sewer tunnels beneath them). It wouldn't be able to cross bridges and lack the maneuverability to operate on a crowded city street. Furthermore, nobody wants the CSPD launching High Explosive (HE) rounds at a super criminal only to have them miss and destroy the lobby of an office building. Recently, the Cyberworks Network offered the Century Station Police Department the chance to test its prototype Urban Assault Tank before it tries to sell the concept to U.S. S.C.R.E.T. The engineers at Cyberworks felt Century Station would serve as the perfect battleground to give their tank a test run. Many in the Council of Industry don't like the idea of the mega-corporation doing business in their neighborhood, feeling it might encourage them to set up shop here. Cyberworks has no intention of doing business in Century Station. Nigel Cross, Cyberworks' current CEO and founder, says he wouldn't open a sandwich shop in Century Station much less attempt any commercial business there. Nonetheless, the city's hazardous environment is the perfect location to test his company's latest toy, and maybe if he's feeling extra generous, he might sell CSPD a couple of tanks, but only if the deal with U.S. S.C.R.E.T. goes through.

The Aineias looks similar to the M551 Sheridan, a light tank designed to incorporate tank-level firepower in a compact, mobile, and air-portable vehicle. The Aineias is uniquely designed to function in an urban environment. Unlike a true tank, all of the vehicle's armaments are for the most part, non-lethal, specifically to capture and immobilize targets while ensuring the safety of the crew. The vehicle's main armament consists of a single, auto-loading 106 mm multi-purpose recoilless rifle with carbon fiber and titanium inserts. Regardless of the situation, the Aineias will have the specific round for the right situation. Using sophisticated fire control, thermal sights, laser rangefinder and a gun stabilization system gives the Aineias excellent firepower while on the move, be it day or night. The secondary armament is a large, high-frequency microwave emitter that produces an intense burning sensation of extreme heat. While not actually burning the skin, the burning sensation is similar to that of a light bulb being pressed against the skin. The microwaves can penetrate thick clothing, glass, plastic, and ceramics, but cannot penetrate walls (wood or stone) or metal of any kind. The function of

this weapon is not to harm but to disorient and scare away. The vehicle's advanced ceramic-aluminum-titanium composite armor (impervious to magnetism) makes the Aineias one of the best-protected tanks in the world. The Aineias can go anywhere thanks to its carbon fiber/rubber composite threads, and is resilient enough to smash its way through a brick wall or city bus and keep on moving. Should the Aineias prove its worth on the streets of Century Station, there is no doubt that U.S. S.C.R.E.T. will be awaiting its arrival to join their fleet of ground vehicles like the Diomedes and the Ajax (see **The Rifter® #33**).

Armor: A.R.: 15. Stops pistol, rifle, heavy machine-gun (20 and 30mm) and fragments. The armor can reduce damage from energy attacks, armor-piercing bullets, explosive rounds, grenades, and light explosives by half damage when their roll to strike is 16 or higher (Penetration value 11).

S.D.C. by Location:

Main Body – 700

Treads (2) – 120 each

Turret – 300 each

Microwave Emitter – 75

Crew: 3 (pilot, gunner, and commander).

Length: 17 feet (5.18 m).

Width: 9.1 feet (2.8 m).

Weight: 11.5 tons.

Height: 7.5 feet (2.3 m).

Speed: 43 mph (69 km).

Range: 382.8 miles (612 km).

Total Vehicle Bonuses: +4 to strike with all weapons in addition to the gunner's skill bonuses.

Typical Armaments:

106mm Recoilless Rifle: Damage: Varies. Ammo: 12 rounds. Blast Radius: Varies. Range: 4,000 feet (1,219 m). Rate of Fire: The auto-loader allows the gun to fire twice in a single melee round. Bonuses: Each shell has a +3 to strike because it's guided.

The Aineias can fire any of the following guided shells:

Baton: This shell explodes like a shotgun shell, but instead of metal, it releases tiny, soft plastic balls. As long as this shell is fired from a distance of at least 100 feet (30.4 m), it will only inflict 1D4 points of damage to a 30 foot (9 m) blast radius, and that is only against bare skin. The plastic balls inflict no damage to anyone wearing body armor or heavy clothing (P.V. 1). However, if anyone gets within 30-99 feet (9-30 m) of the barrel, the victim will suffer 2D4 points of damage and is knocked down (loses one melee attack/action that melee round), but the pellets will still not penetrate body armor or heavy clothing. Anyone shot within 30 feet (9 m) of the barrel takes 2D6 points of damage regardless if they are wearing body armor or clothing. This is the primary weapon to disperse a crowd/riot or disorient targets.

Penetrating: This is a large shell used to penetrate heavily fortified barriers and then release CS gas. It will smash its way through wood and/or exterior brick (the side of a standard building or house). Anyone hit by the round would take 1D4x10 points of damage, but by using thermo-imagers, this shell can be used to see into most buildings and avoid hitting anyone behind the walls. Once the shell penetrates, it releases CS gas.

Irritant (CS): An extremely powerful version of tear gas. The gas will instantly affect all individuals without a protective mask or environmental body armor. The eyes burn, sting, and water profusely, causing great discomfort and seeing is nearly impossible. It also causes major irritation in the nose, mouth, and throat, making breathing difficult. Victims become heavily nauseated and the skin becomes irritated. The effects last for 3D4 minutes. The 30 foot (9 m)

cloud dissipates in about 5 minutes unless blown away by the wind (dissipating quickly in 1D4 minutes). The victims of CS are -10 to strike, parry, dodge, -3 on Initiative, and lose one melee action/attack for the next 1D6+1 melee rounds. There is no saving throw.

Stun/Flash: These types of rounds are used to confuse and disorient, especially when in a confined location. Each shell makes a loud, exploding boom and releases a bright flash of light (and some smoke) to startle and blind any onlooker within 200 feet (61 m). The flash is so overwhelming that even targets not facing the blast may be affected by light reflecting off walls and other large surfaces (01-33%). There is a blast radius of 3 feet (.9 m) around the impact that does 1D6 points of damage. Flare compensation devices will reduce penalties by half. Closing one's eyes does nothing to protect the eyes from the flash, nor does putting up one's hands in front of their face. Those observing the flash are -10 to strike, parry, and dodge for 2D6 minutes with no initiative and a loss of half attacks.

Smoke: These rounds release a cloud that covers a 20 foot (6 m) radius. The smoke obscures vision in and through the smoke cloud and causes minor difficulty breathing. Infrared optic systems cannot see into or through smoke. Those in the cloud are -5 to strike, parry, and dodge and -1 on initiative. Attacking or firing into/through the cloud is shooting completely wild! Aimed shots or controlled bursts are impossible (the shooters cannot see the target).

Sound: This shell releases a small, grenade-like device that emits a disturbing, high-pitched sound that distracts and irritates everyone in a 60 foot (18.3 m) area of effect. The sound is loud enough to be heard a mile away, but only directly harms those within the area of effect. Even after the shell falls to the earth, it continues to operate for at least another 3 minutes. Victims suffer the following penalties: -2 on initiative, -1 to strike, parry, and dodge and -10% to all skills. Those with a heightened sense of hearing suffer from double penalties unless they use protection for their ears to block or muffle the sound. Note: The sound doesn't bother or affect those inside the vehicle.

Chemical: The round is filled with either a smoke-producing compound or a type of gas that erupts on impact or an actual liquid. Regardless of the chemical or compound, it creates a cloud 15 feet (4.6 m) in diameter. Opponents whose vision is obscured by smoke are -6 to strike, parry, and dodge. The chemical can be tear gas/CS, tranquilizer (knockout) gas, pepper spray, or any of the chemicals found in the Bionic or Robot chemical sprays.

Chemical-Stink: This is a chemical liquid that produces a noxious smell (three times as bad as a skunk's) that causes immediate nausea, gagging/vomiting, and major levels of discomfort unless the victim makes a saving throw of 16 or higher with any applicable P.E. attribute bonus (no additional bonuses from a save vs poison). Otherwise, the victim is overcome by the extreme stench and is compelled to flee (effectively a Horror Factor of 16). Victims are -6 on initiative, and -3 to strike, parry, dodge, and all other combat maneuvers. Victims are also -30% to perform any skills and lose 2 actions or attacks per melee round. This noxious effect happens to any living thing touched by the chemical or comes within 30 feet (9 m) of the liquid or anything touched by it. To make matters worse, anything touched by the chemical continues to stink for at least a week or more even after a dozen times thorough the washing machine. Only a specific chemical compound can be used to neutralize the smell if it's used along with standard laundry detergent or bath soap/shampoo (it's urine). Another problem with the stink is CSPD K-9s are trained to track down the smell, which means anyone touched by it will be unable to escape detection or identification by the dogs (+20% for them to track and locate) unless the counter-agent is used to remove the smell.

Microwave Cannon: Damage: 1D4 per two melee rounds of exposure plus the victim loses initiative and all combat bonuses and attacks per melee round are reduced by half. Speed and skill per-

formance is reduced by 40%. The penalties and damage ceases the moment one is out of the beam's range or area of effect. Ammo: Effectively unlimited, but the beam cuts off after one minute, although it can be fired again repeatedly. Range: 1650 feet (502.92 m), Area of Effect: An ever-increasing cone to a maximum of 100 feet (30.4 m), however the cannon rotates on a 360 degree axis. It can also be elevated to a 60-degree angle. Note: The beam doesn't harm or damage the skin or flesh. It excites the water molecules within the skin (130 degrees F/54 degrees C). This means even those impervious to fire are affected by this weapon. Those who are energy/heat resistant or impervious to energy (heat) attacks, radiation, or microwaves do not feel the effects of this weapon.

Special Equipment:

Electro-Hydraulic Stabilizer System: This allows the main cannon to fire while the vehicle is moving. This results in no penalty when firing at a moving target.

Laser Rangefinder: This allows the vehicle to track and determine the distance of a target, even while it's moving. This results in no penalty when firing at a moving target or one at maximum distance.

Thermo-Imager: An optical heat sensor that converts the infrared radiation of warm objects into a visible image. The pilot and gunner can see in total darkness, shadows, and smoke. Range 1,600 feet (488 m).

Nightvision Camera: A passive nightvision optics system that amplifies existing, ambient light to provide a visible picture.

Radio: Range: 300 miles (480 km)

Laser Targeting System (see page 205 of HU2.)

Encrypted Burst Transmitter/Radio Scrambler: Range: 300 miles (480 km)

Radar Targeting Computer: Range: 30 miles (48 km), able to identify 20 targets and simultaneously track 20 targets flying at 600 feet (182 m).

Combat Computer with Heads-Up Display (HUD): +2 to Initiative rolls.

Multi-Optics Periscope and HUD

Radiation Shielding (See page 210 of HU2.)

Underwater Capabilities (See page 210 of HU2.)

Pressurized Cabin (Full protection from Nuclear, Biological, & Chemical Warfare/NBC.)

Life Support Unit

Glaser Rounds

In Century Station, the JG-76 Juggerman and the C-61 Peregrine are frightful sights to see. The Juggerman is armed with a .50 caliber assault rifle and the Peregrine has a 7.62mm Mini-Gun. Both weapons are capable of unloading a massive payload of firepower upon their targets, which means there's lots of opportunity for friendly fire incidents and destruction of property. Chasing down a fleeing felon and blasting away could result in millions of dollars of collateral damage, and the people living in Society Hill will simply not allow that to happen.

Triton Industries therefore came up with specially designed Glaser rounds. The shells are hollow casings with small beads of metal shot, like pellets in a shotgun shell. When the round strikes, it ruptures and shot scatters into the target, resulting in shallow lacerations. This decreases the lethality of a single round. However, although the bullets can produce large, shallow wounds in flesh, they could not pass through barriers thicker than drywall or sheet metal, much less the safety glass used in most high-rise buildings. So although the weapon could reduce a crowd of people to a bloody smear, if you hid behind a car, tree, phone booth, trash can, mailbox, or a storefront window, the bullets simply disintegrate on impact. This allows the Peregrine

and the Juggerman to do their best to take out the enemy but keep damage to surrounding buildings and windows to a minimum. The rounds inflict 1D6 *damage* and victims must make a saving throw of 16 or better (use P.E. attribute bonus) or victims lose ALL of his or her melee actions/attacks for the rest of the round and the following because of sheer pain and shock to the system. However, the range of the weapon is reduced by 5% and regardless of the duration of the burst (short, long, etc.), the damage will only be 1D6 against body armor and other hard structures, including tempered glass, plaster, soft metals, and wood. The bullets cannot inflict damage against stone or hard metals (iron, steel, titanium). They only have a P.V. of 1. Only the Juggerman and the Peregrine have access to these Glaser rounds. They are not used by any other division of CSPD.

CSPD Breaching and Riot Control Weapons (used primarily by C-SWAT)

APED (All-Purpose Entry Device)

Criminals and wrongdoers in Century Station are always coming up with new and inventive means to keep CSPD from getting inside a structure or building. CSPD has access to Halligan bars, battering rams, sledgehammers, and bolt cutters, yet all of these are limited by the strength of their user. This is where the APED or “Gorilla Gun” as it’s known by C-SWAT, comes into play. Designed by Triton Industries, this odd-looking piece of machinery is shaped like a machine-gun but it’s larger and longer, with one T-shaped level like a gear-shift on top of it and all kinds of slots, bolted-on clips, and slides and switches. It weighs around 30 lbs (13.5 kg) and even though its odd horn-shaped handles make it easy to hold, it’s not readily maneuverable. The front of the machine is placed against a door. From there its wielder can decide how he or she wants to gain entry. The device can release a concussion force powerful enough to crack or knock a gate or door off its hinges or force open or knock in any door that has the equivalent of 500 S.D.C. or less (equal to Superhuman P.S.). This same concussion force can be used against a reinforced concrete wall. In some cases, this might only slightly damage a door, gate, or objects (5D6 points of damage), but the concussion force is usually powerful enough that the hinges, doorframe, joint, connection or weak spots break/give way. In the case of a door that opens inward, the APED can create an implosion effect that pulls/tugs on a door or gate to tear from its hinges, padlock, or chain. The door itself may relatively be undamaged, but the joints, hinges, anchors, etc. will be torn away (equal to 250 S.D.C.). As a weapon, the APED is impractical because it can only be used on stationary objects no more than a foot (.3 m) away from the barrel. Presently, only C-SWAT has access to this piece of machinery, but the Century Station Fire Department is also looking into acquiring a few as well. Range: 1 foot (.3 m), Damage: 5D6 to stationary objects, with an optional knockdown result, Feed: 8 shot E-Clip, Mode: Single shot, Weight: 30 lbs (13.5 kg). Note: C-SWAT only has a dozen and that’s because TI gave them a special discount.

Stingball Grenade

This is a fragmentation grenade capable of discharging over a hundred, marble-sized, soft rubber pellets. It’s excellent for discouraging rioters and scattering street gangs without damaging the surrounding area. Thrown: 100 feet (30.5 m), Damage: 1D4 against bare skin, but does not damage to anyone wearing body armor or heavy clothing (P.V. 1), Blast Radius: 20 feet (6 m). **Note**: C-SWAT also has another type of stingball grenade that combines a powdered

CS irritant agent dispersed among the rubber pellets to provide a double effect.

Shock Gun

A rifle-like gun based on a 40mm discharger. The weapon shoots a collapsed cloth bag filled with metal shot. When fired, the bag spins and expands to a diameter of 75mm before striking its target with knockdown force. Range: 700 feet (213.36 m), Damage: 1D6 and the victim must make a saving throw of 16 or better (use P.E. attribute bonus) or the target is knocked down to the ground. The victim loses two melee attacks and all combat actions are reduced by half for 1D4 melees while the victim tries to get his or her head together. Wearing body armor or heavy clothing reduces the damage by half (takes none if it fails to penetrate the A.R.) and provides a +5 bonus to save. Feed: 1 shot, Mode: Single shot. **Note**: After the bag is fired, the weapon with its extended handle can be used as a club (1D6 damage).

Stun/Flash Grenades

Designed to disorient and confuse. The grenade makes a loud, exploding boom and emits a brilliant flash, followed by a shower of white-hot sparks and some white smoke. The flash, burning sparks, and smoke should blind and startle any character without environmental armor or protective goggles (shutting eyes doesn’t help as the flash passes through eyelids). The victims are –8 to strike, parry, and dodge, –1 on initiative and lose one melee attack/action for the next 1D4 melee rounds. Even those in armor should be distracted for at least 1D4 seconds and lose initiative. Covers a 20 foot (6 m) radius, and affects everyone unless they have eye protection (not sunglasses). Thrown: 100 feet (30.5 m).

Tearblast Shells

These are shotgun shells which work like CS/tear gas grenades but with about half the radius of effect; 10 feet (3 m), which is enough to fill a small room.

Multi-Shells

These shotgun shells release tiny, soft rubber balls instead of regular buckshot. Range: Same, Damage: 1D4 (knockdown if fired at point-blank range). They have a P.V. of 1 and can only inflict damage against the skin. They inflict no damage if the person is wearing body armor or heavy clothing.

TASER

These weapons can be legally carried in Century Station (concealed or open) without a permit. Range: 35 feet (10.6 m), Damage: 1 point of damage from the prongs plus the victim must make a saving throw vs non-lethal poison (16 and don’t use poison save bonuses, only those from P.E. attribute) or the victim becomes incapacitated for 1D4 melee rounds, which is enough time to handcuff and secure the individual. The victim has no initiative, is –8 to strike, parry, and dodge. Reduce Spd and number of attacks per melee by 70%. If the victim makes the save, he or she is initially unaffected, but the prongs must be removed in order to avoid making another save the following melee round, Feed: One-time shot, but the electric discharge can be done up to ten times before needing a new battery. Mode: Single shot, however those used by CSPD have “Drive Stun” capability, where the Taser is held against the target without firing the projectiles, to cause pain. This inflicts 1D4 points of damage per exposure and reduces Spd and the number of attacks by one-half for 1D4 melee rounds. **Note**: Those available to non-law enforcement consumers are limited to 15 feet (4.6 m).

Living through the Great Cataclysm One Day at a Time

The First Responders of New Mexico and their Stories

Optional Material for Rifts® Chaos Earth®

By Daniel Frederick

John Fell

December 21, 2098: New Mexico State Police Officer John Fell hung his state-issued Armored Long Coat in his locker. He reflected that it was time to get it cleaned and pressed; the long coat was a relatively new addition to the NMSP uniform. John had served eighteen years with the NMSP, of which he had only used the Armored Long Coat for maybe the last five. Before that he had been issued the old Super-Kevlar vest, which he still used in conjunction with his long coat, unlike some of the newer officers who only used the coat. Between the MIP-21 Ion Pistol and his armored covering, he felt like he was back in the military. Additionally, the new Interceptor hover cycles were much more fun to fly down the highway than the original police cruiser he had stated with. That old police car had wheels. Almost no one used wheels anymore.

John closed his work locker and grabbed up his heavy winter coat, a knock-off of an old-style military coat. He patted his pockets down. He had his wallet and his keys; his Ion Pistol was locked up, but he kept a .45 Auto-Mag on him when off-duty. Exiting the building, and having to use his ID-chipped implant three times to get past door after door, he finally stood in the freezing parking lot. Not much snow had fallen yet; it was reported to be a mild winter this year. Glancing at his Patrol Hover Cycle, stored under a covered awning, he thought about how exhausting the last few years had been. The new toys the department had issued were honestly the only reason he had stayed on the force this long. Tossing his Go Bag into his personal vehicle, he climbed in and started the engine. After warming it up for a few moments, he activated the hover feature and left the secured office parking lot, speeding off towards home, his wife and kids.

December 22, 2098: John removed his patrol helmet and rested it on the bike. He was parked at the moment, if one wanted to call hovering in place sitting on a hover cycle behind a billboard sign parked. Running his fingers through his short-cropped hair, he was startled almost right out of his seat, his safety harness the only thing stopping him from falling, when he heard a scream across the radio.

"Eleven Nine Nine!" the radio blared.

John knew the voice: Navarro. Navarro was one of the other hover cycle officers who did not use a hover car or have a partner with him. John had last seen Navarro about an hour ago, eating dinner in the police station's break room. John had stopped to say hi, but had not stayed long since Navarro was more interested in watching the National News Broadcast on his personal tablet more than chatting. As Navarro muttered something about two South American countries declaring war on each other, John had finished his coffee and let himself out. John really did not care to watch the news, especially national or international news, having lost his taste for big government after his time in the military. He still fancied himself a patriot, but John wanted to work on a smaller scale, closer to home.

John ramped up his cycle and with total disregard for his own personal safety, sped towards where he had last seen Navarro, yell-

ing over his comm-unit to dispatch, telling them to get some GPS coordinates and give him an exact 20 on Navarro.

John was the first officer to reach Navarro; the next unit was still 20 minutes away. A veteran officer, he had seen death before, but this was different, partly because it was a fellow officer, partly because it was so damn crazy. As John stood over Navarro he could see his tablet laying in the dirt, a light dusting of snow across his body. It was still on; big headlines scrolling across the screen, "Nuclear Warheads used in South American conflict." followed by, "Monsters sighted in St. Louis."

December 23, 2098: John painfully pulled his state-issued, armored long coat on, his left arm and shoulder sore and bruised. He finished snapping his belt keepers in place, attaching his second set of keys.

Even with the end of the world erupting around him and rumors of strange Blue Zones and monstrous creatures roaming the land, he had shown up to work today. His wife, Sheila, had urged him to pack up the family and head to Chicago. She had been listening to the radio on her wind-up emergency unit. The radio reported that a large NEMA Force was headed to Chicago. Sheila insisted that if the military was headed to Chicago, it must be safer than anywhere else. Besides, as Maria had pointed out to him, she had family there.

John wanted to make his wife happy, but he had served in the Army long enough to know that just because the military was doing something didn't mean it was the answer. In addition, he had not shared everything he had heard over the radio with her. Some of the information coming over the comm was pretty horrible. Dispatch broadcast news of aliens or demons terrorizing humans up near Raton, NM. More importantly, the secure Department of Public Safety Communications Center in Socorro had not lost power due to generators, and had access to televised newscasts. Dispatch was broadcasting news to all officers: the President was missing, presumed dead, and hordes of demons were coming out of tears in reality in the Chicago area. Dispatch had taped the broadcast and John had watched it twice before deciding that New Mexico was safer than the East Coast, for now at least. John hooked a portable radio to his duty belt and checked the power gauge on his energy clips, sliding one back into his pistol. He stared at the neural baton hanging on the wall. Did he even need non-lethal weapons at this point?

New Mexico may not have come under attack to the same degree as the East Coast, but that hadn't helped Navarro the day before. By the time John had arrived, Navarro was already dead, torn in half and tossed off the roadway into some pine trees, his hover cycle crushed, no sign of the culprit.

Later in the day when John had returned to the scene, he was attacked by a creature with red skin and an alien-looking bionic arm. The monster was almost twice his height but had come out of nowhere, suddenly becoming visible, swinging a wicked longsword at John.



John rolled off his hover cycle, keeping the bike between him and the demon. Landing on his feet, John had his energy pistol out, pointed at the demon, and had already blurted out a rapid succession of police code, detailing his situation and location. The demon hurtled over the bike and was still midair swinging that sword – when John pulled off three rapid shots, two to the main body and one to the head. Immediately after firing, John moved to put the bike between him and the demon. The creature had yelled in pain, slamming the blade of its sword two feet deep into the paved roadway. Turning to see where John was, it tore chunks of concrete out of the ground as it pulled the sword free. John had already fired four more shots into the thing's back and side before it fully turned to face him. Obviously in pain, the demon slashed the large silver sword with its odd runic writing straight through the hover cycle, tearing it in half with one blow.

As John took aim at the demon it suddenly turned invisible. He hesitated only a second before trying to roll, right, away from where he was standing. Pain sunk into his left arm and shoulder as large claws dug into his armored long coat. The demon reappeared in front of him and had a firm and painful grip.

John stuck the barrel of his pistol right into the eye of the demon and pulled the trigger over and over. Dropping the sword, the demon let go of his shoulder and simply fell backwards, dead on the asphalt. John, in pain, had reloaded his pistol one handed and trained the gun back on the demon. He shot it six more times in the chest until it was obviously dead. Panting, John barked an update to dispatch into his radio and sunk to his knees in pain.

When he tried to pick up the sword, pain had arced across his body and he immediately dropped the weapon. In his mind, John felt, more than heard, “No.” Wrapping the sword in his armored long coat, he placed it aside and waited for another officer to arrive and pick him up.

December 24, 2098: John sat on his hover cycle, overlooking the small community of Lake of the Pines, talking to his brother, Lockheed Martin head of security Henry Szandar Fell, or simply, Zan. They spoke briefly of family, asked if the other had visited their mother yet, but neither had. Zan swished the sword John had brought to him back and forth, with a wild look in his eyes, as he play-fought with the blade.

John watched Zan with a bit of trepidation and said, “Seriously, if I touch it Zan, it feels like it’s trying to hurt me. I feel...I *hear* a spooky voice saying no.”

Zan nodded and stopped swinging the blade about, “I don’t know bro. It doesn’t hurt me to hold it. I don’t hear anything”, Zan said. “A giant, red demon? That’s crazy scary”. Zan whistled and tossed the sword onto the hood of his old clunker of a truck.

Zan felt a small stab of pain in his head and heard, “*Show some respect mortal.*”

John quickly reached out and grabbed onto Zan’s shoulder to steady him before he fell to the ground. “Are you okay, Zan?”

Zan shook for a moment, then collected himself and said, “I’m okay. I definitely heard that. Did you?”

John looked worriedly at Zan and replied, “I didn’t hear anything.”

“Never mind.” Zan rubbed his temples and looked at the sword. “Okay John. I have everyone ready to go to the underground test facility. Haven’t heard from – what are you looking at?” Zan turned to see what his brother was looking at. In the distance, a man dressed in robes was waving his arms over his head.

“What the hell?” said John. “Look Zan, you head back down and get everybody ready to go and I’ll go check out the whacko over there. When you’re ready to go, bring everyone up here to the main road and we’ll escort you guys down there.”

John waited until Zan had placed the sword into his old truck and was headed back down to the community. He wondered still what it was that Zan and the others who worked at Lockheed Martin thought that they had at their base that could help them fight off demons.

John got back onto his hover bike and rode it over to the man. As he got closer to the individual he broadcast across his radio that he would be out with a pedestrian. John pulled up next to the man who turned around to face him. The old man simply nodded at John and said, “Don’t interrupt me, young man. The people of this community hold the key for success in the future.”

As John got off his hover bike and moved closer to the old man, he chanted a few strange words. Stopping dead in his tracks, John look down at the community, housing for employees of Lockheed Martin. The entire community started to shimmer and looked like it was slowly disappearing. The old man took a deep breath, sighed, and seemed to relax as John stared open-mouthed while his brother, and the entire community of Lake of the Pines, simply vanished.

John sputtered in amazement, “What happened... Sheila.”

The old man turned to face John and said, “Don’t worry, your descendants will meet them again. The people down there are safe for now. They are needed more in the future than they are here”.

Zan spun on the old man and demanded, “What are you talking about, old man?! Who are you?” John’s right hand rested on his pistol, still holstered.

The old man smiled and said, “Look John, I know you will miss your brother and the families that are down there, but trust me when I tell you they are needed for the second coming of the minions of hell.



Now, you need to gather the rest of those road runners you call state police and do your best to hold these demons at bay. In the weeks and months and hundreds of years to come, this world is only going to get darker and more dangerous. You need to protect your state while you still can."

John stared at the old man in disbelief, shaken and unsure. His training kicked in and he demanded, "Let me see some ID!"

The old man chuckled and said, "I'm afraid that I don't have any sort of identification I can give you. If you run my name through your computer systems I seriously doubt you'll come up with any sort of return on the name Thoth."

John briefly glanced back toward where the community had been. John wondered how it could simply disappear.

When John turned back to face the old man he was nowhere to be seen. John stood alone next to his hover cycle and scratched his head.

A few dozen officers on hover cycles pulled up next to him and disembarked. They looked out at the empty place that had been their homes. They had not seen the actual vanishing but were just as unsettled. Many of them had family that had disappeared.

John felt sick to his stomach and muttered, "Mount up, Road Runners. We have work to do."

January 4, 2099: John was not a sergeant, not a commander, not a chief. He was a patrol officer. He had no desire to run things. He did not want to be a paper pusher. All he wanted was to patrol the highways and byways of New Mexico. With four years left until re-

tirement, he had been looking forward to a pension and a long life of adventure with his wife. By adventure, he had thought of travel and of being a tourist with his wife. Now his wife was gone. His house was gone. His brother and every neighbor in Lake of the Pines were gone. Communications were down. No more dispatches. No news. No power and no more mild winter. As he stood next to his grounded hover cycle, he wrapped his long coat tighter around himself to stop the bite of the freezing weather. Snow. Frozen rain, ash, gravel and dark, dirty snow had been falling for days. The tremors of mild earthquakes came and went. It was the End of Days, much like what he had read in his mother's Bible. Not being overly religious, John had started to wonder if he should have paid better attention in Sunday school all those years ago.

Robert Waters, once in charge of public affairs for the state police, brushed snow off his NMSP long coat, the original dark blue now mostly gray from dirt and ash. "So what are we supposed to do?" he asked.

John barely grunted in response.

Officer Waters looked down at the motley group assembled at the main public entrance to the NMSP office.

"We could head to Colorado. Maybe even over towards Chicago..." Robert trailed off.

John slowly turned to face his friend and coworker. "No," was all he said, before John started to walk down the stairs towards those assembled in the public parking lot.

As John moved closer to those assembled, he thought about yesterday's contact with the red-skinned demons down near Socorro. John was trying to decide if he would head to Socorro or Santa Fe. Both had good facilities. Socorro was the NMSP Academy and Comm Center, and had the maintenance garages that maintained the vehicle fleet for the NMSP. Santa Fe was not quite so well equipped, but it seemed safer somehow. The volume of demons in the Socorro area was staggering, and it was much closer to the remains of the White Sands Missile Base. After what appeared to be a small nuclear strike on WSMB, John was worried about being close to possible radiation. Nowhere felt truly safe. Brushing ash off his eyelids he moved down to the last step, in front of those assembled.

Looking at the crowd, he whispered to Robert, "Are all the cells empty?"

"Everybody's out except for that kid, Jimmy James. Refused to leave. Still all shook up." Waters pulled out a little pocket computer, checking his notes. "I quote: 'I cast a spell and made all the demons in the house catch on fire.' End quote".

John chuckled, "Right. Cast a spell. I'll go talk to JJ after this."

"You figure out where we're going John?"

Fell just shook his head, then turned towards the others.

Yesterday, he had quietly made his way to the top of the hill and was looking down at Socorro. John wanted to go to Socorro. This needed to be the base of operations for what was left of the NMSP. It would be a perfect place to set up shop and build his Road Runners idea. Looking down at the remains of the city, he could tell that the NMSP buildings were all in what looked to be pretty good shape. Surrounded by high walls and patrolled by a pair of Robot Combat Drones (Dronies, as the guys called them), all seemed well. The hair on the nape of his neck stood up and he felt like something was wrong, though, so John turned around and pulled his Ion Pistol from the drop holster, pointing at nothing. Feeling stupid and paranoid, he was about to re-holster, but still felt like some kind of danger was present.

Just as he felt like he should leave, he heard it: chuckling. Deep and frightening sounds of laughter.

"You know I'm here, don't you, human?" Loud, but from an invisible source. John stood up, sighting his pistol back and forth to

cover the area where he felt the danger was. "Don't shoot me, human, and I will show myself to you. If I wanted to kill you I would have already, but there are things that I must know."

"Go ahead then. Show yourself," John said.

John actually relaxed a little when he saw what materialized in front of him, but only because he had killed one of these things before. The red demon with sharp fangs was easily ten feet tall, with a golden, bionic left arm. Unlike the one he had killed, this creature had some sort of bionic or mechanical wings attached to its back.

"Strangely calm. Most of your kind are horrified when they see my ilk."

John smiled and said, "And what is your kind called, demon? I've already killed one of you and I don't even know what you are."

The demon laughed again and said, "Have you now?" Its smile sent shivers down John's spine. "My kind is called Brodkil. We like it here. I want this place. Partly because you seem interested in it, I'll admit, but it will make a good crossroads to all the places I want to conquer. Now my turn for a question. Who are you, human?"

In John's ear he could hear Robert on the radio, "I have it in my sights. Say the word and I'll fire."

John smiled. "This is New Mexico. This is my home. And my Road Runners are going to kill every last one of you. Be sure of it, demon. Just you wait."

As he activated his hover cycle, the demon said, "There is a large group of Crimson Slayer Demons, not my kin, headed towards your small base. They will overrun you, I promise you that. You'll have to run to somewhere – and it won't be here, human. Vampires are to the south. Death Mages and Chaos Witches are all over the west of here. Monsters pour out of the Rifts to the southwest, summoned by Demon Callers who will not be able to control what they have brought forth. Maybe you should go north, human. I am going to rule here in Socorro. This will be my Demon City, ruled in the name of Lord Rekk."

John smiled, "We will see, Rekk. I'm John Fell. This is my Land of Enchantment. My New Mexico. Maybe you should think about heading south. Far south. Straight to Hell."

John sped off, hoping the demon would not try to stop him.

Now, he was standing before all these people who wanted hope. Direction. And it had to come from him. John took a deep breath and said as loud as he could in order to be heard by all, "Santa Fe! We head to Santa Fe and we build a shelter and safe place for everyone. We will lead you there safely! We will protect you! We will deputize anyone who volunteers. We will stay alive. But more importantly, we will take back our state!"

John turned away from the crowd and told Robert to "get everyone on the move before they start asking about the plan. I'll go get JJ. He can ride on my cycle." The two shook hands firmly. "I always wanted to be a cop. Not sure what the hell I am now. Move 'em out."

As John went up the stairs, Robert addressed the crowd, "You heard Commander Fell! Mount up. Let's get to Santa Fe!"

The small, underground area of the NMSP office that housed the detention cells was utterly dark. The power was out now and the only illumination came from his flashlight. As Fell started down the stairway, he turned the light to and fro, sweeping the area ahead of him. The echo of his boots on cement was the only sound.

"JJ, are you down here?" John called out. "Come on, kid. We gotta go."

Silence.

John sighed and moved down the hallway, searching each cell before moving onto the next. As he approached the last, JJ spoke up. "I'm not a kid," he said.

John shined the light into the last cell. Various junk food and sodas were collected into neat rows. JJ was sitting on the cot, looking

disheveled and alone, a half-eaten candy bar in his hand. Sweeping the light about, it came to rest on a line of salt drawn across the cell's open doorway.

John took a deep breath, let it out, and said, "Okay JJ, you're not a kid. You're what? Fifteen? That's a man in my book. And in the Army they taught me to never leave a man behind. There's people out there that need your help."

"My help?"

"That's right. Now come on, Jim."

JJ Deacon

Officer Fell said I should try keeping a journal. I think he's trying to find ways to make me feel better. He has no idea what I'm feeling. He is a good guy, though. I wish my father could have been more like him.

My name is JJ Deacon. I am going to be a wizard. I am going to figure out how magic works. I am going to kill as many demons as I can using these powers I am learning – and I will help save humanity.

I really don't know my own Dad. He is probably dead. I don't know. He left us when I was five. My Mom raised me alone.

Mom is dead. It hurts to think about that. She worked at the supermarket. I was going to start working there too in a few months. Not now though.

I was really looking forward to Christmas. I went back to my house yesterday. It's all burned. I'll never know if I was going to get that new phone. No cell service anymore anyway.

When the chaos came I was at home with my mother. I woke to her screams. She was already dead by the time I got downstairs. I have always had an interest in the mystical and magical. I read everything I could about it. Online stuff, books by authors who were laughed at, like Victor Lazlo. I made my own online site dedicated to studying paranormal things. I even donated to the Lazlo Society to be an honorary member.

Now I am becoming a mage.

Slowly. It's not easy. But I know for a fact I cast a spell that day in our house. Fire burned out of my eyes and I killed that thing that killed my mother. Burned it until it was just ash. I don't understand how I did it. But I did. It was me. I lit that monster on fire and accidentally burned the whole house down.

Since then I've managed to get the fire to return twice more, both times when it was a matter of life and death.

I can create fire. Float in the air. I want to see what else I can do. I've read about places of power, so I plan on checking a few out for myself. Officer Fell says we are all heading to Santa Fe in the morning so I need to go today before we leave.

My next entry will be about whatever happens today. I have my fingers crossed. Some of the guys who are working with Robert Waters are calling me a Chaos Mage. I know they are all scared of me too. Except for that Indian woman with them. She told me I am blessed, that I should explore my powers more. She claims her mother was able to create fire out of thin air. She whispered that last part. I think she was worried the others would laugh at her. I asked her where her mother was but she just looked sad and walked away.

I am JJ Deacon, and I am going to be a powerful mage. I think that's cooler than a new phone. I am going to use my powers to fight demons and help Officer Fell and the Road Runners save us all.

Robert Waters

Placing the coffee cup down on his desk, public affairs officer Robert Waters looked at his computer monitor. Sitting back in the plush, comfy chair, he brushed lint off his clean and pressed New Mexico State Police uniform and thought about what this meant for him. If news articles online were to be believed, demons were raging across the land. Not just here in the US, but all over the world. So many posted videos that it was impossible that so many people could be playing a prank. Between online accounts, and hardwired teletype prints which had come across the old emergency printer from NEMA, there was no answer other than demons or aliens or something evil invading the Earth. The only question now was how to respond. Staring at the unfinished entry he was trying to publish onto local social media, he was unsure how to best tell the population to remain calm. And was that even the right approach?

One teletype from NEMA had ordered all emergency response personnel to lead civilians to the Chicago area. Another claimed safe haven and protection by NEMA in Denver. Yet another said NEMA was rallying in Mexico City. The only thing these teletypes had in common as far as Waters was concerned, was no one knew what to do. Not even NEMA.

As he leaned in closer to his keyboard, the lights dimmed and flickered. Once they returned to normal, he looked back at the monitor and saw that his computer had lost its network connection.

Waters sighed and picked his phone up off his desk. No network available. The office suddenly shook and he felt a rumble like a small earthquake. Waters jumped up and stood in the open doorway to his office. Once the rumbling subsided, he chuckled at his response to such a small quake.

Heading out into the main area of the NMSP building, he decided he would say hello to the secretaries up front on his way to refill his coffee cup. Waters was charming, and well liked – and he knew it. Putting a genuine smile on, he headed towards the front office area.

As Waters walked into the main NMSP room he heard the two ladies speaking excitedly to each other. When he asked what the excitement was, figuring it was probably the quake, they told him that they had heard an officer on patrol near Las Cruces say something over the radio about a nuclear explosion near White Sands. That was the moment Waters knew life would never be the same.

Just three days later, Waters was on the front steps of the office, telling a crowd of scared civilians and fellow first responders the plan: head for Santa Fe. As his friend John Fell went back inside to convince that teenage kid to come up out of the cells, Waters wondered if any of them would live to see another day, let alone actually make it to Santa Fe. With sad thoughts in his mind, he addressed the crowd with a false look of hope and confidence. Smiling and nodding to the others, he tossed his Go Bag into the back of a patrol vehicle and tried to sound sure of his words as he told those around him that all would be well. Much harder to do in person than over the computer.

Bill Young

Bill's cheap phone rang again. It read "blocked number" when he looked at it, but he knew who it was. Work. Work had been calling him all morning since he hadn't shown up to the stupid photocopy center. CopyCo could wait.

There was no point in calling in today. What would he say to them? "Hi, it's Bill and I won't be coming in today on account of the impending apocalypse. How do I know? Well, the Dark One told me in my head just last week. Have a swell day."

No. There was no point trying to explain. They'd just look at him like his therapist had. He had been excited to be in contact with his new lord, the Alien Intelligence that described itself only as, "the Dark One." Without thinking, he had blurted out in session how things were going to get better and he would hold a new, enlightened place in the Dark One's new order.

Bill Young, he thought, a High Priest to this new, dark and wonderful God. With glee, he looked down at his handiwork. He had sewn together a large hooded cloak out of human skin. It might have looked makeshift and badly stitched to anyone else, but he was enormously pleased by his work. He donned the cloak with pride.

Turning around to look at himself in the mirror, he could see the landlady in the kitchen. She was tied up and softly sobbing. Bill peered around the corner and smiled at her.

"You should be excited Maria. Today you get to be part of something bigger than either of us! Isn't that great? I know you can't answer. I would remove the gag but I don't want you to scream. Just listen. Today is a great day, you see. The Dark One is coming! Not in the flesh. Not yet. Oh no. That time is yet to come. But today his power will live. Through me!"

Sitting down in the chair across from her, Bill toyed with the assortment of kitchen knives he had laid out onto the table. Smiling, Bill said in a reassuring voice: "Be glad. I didn't need you to finish up my new wardrobe. You will have the honor of being his first. When I cut your throat you will die, only for a moment, and then arise as his creature. Then you may walk immortal in his shadow. You will obey me and him forever. Together we will find others to raise in the shadow of his blessing."

Bill leaned back in his chair, looking at the glistening blade he held. His eyes rolled back in his head and he murmured as he quietly spoke, "The time nears. I can feel it coming. The hour of his arrival. I will lead you all in his shadow. Starting here in New Mexico until his power can spread across the world. The new race molded in his image as living zombies will work together as one for his and my pleasure!"

Bill stood suddenly, his chair knocked over to lay on its side, and gripped the handle of the knife tightly. Maria began to scream beneath the gag as Bill walked around the table to stand before her. He reached out with his empty hand, tangled his fingers into her hair and pulled her head back, exposing her neck.

With a warm smile and soft voice he spoke to her. "Be not afraid, for you are his disciple now." Bill raised the knife up above his head and saw that Maria had passed out from fear. Bill licked his lips and felt joy, knowing his new god was watching as he proved his worth, proved that he was suitable to lead the new race.

Rekk

Rekk growled at his second in command in the guttural language known as Demongogian. Pointing one long, red finger at his second, Rekk said, "You will obey your leader!"

Gorger, a large Brodkil demon, looked down at the ground, "I obey. I do not understand why we don't kill these humans."

Rekk kept his bionic other hand on the handle of his massive battle axe. Unfolding his bionic wings out to their full wingspan, he continued, "We will kill the humans. In time. I have a plan. But first we use them to help us rid our new lands of other creatures."

Rekk turned towards the setting sun and watched as three hover cycles sped across the snowy ground towards the city of Socorro. The snow had stopped falling and the land was covered by a bleak, gray coating of ash and snow. Rekk recalled snow from his home-world and missed its pristine and pure nature. This world was ugly. He tried to envision the land covered by white snow. His warriors

had been busy destroying the buildings which marred the land's natural beauty, trying to eliminate the human influence. Someday, his new home would be wonderful. After he returned it to a more natural state and removed the humans.

Turning back to Gorger, he said in English, "Tell the others to hide. Bring me six warriors and the human children we captured."

Gorger ran off to obey and Rekk laid his axe on a tree stump. Standing at his full height, he tried to look inviting by placing a smile on his face as the three hover cycles got closer.

John Fell, Robert Waters and a woman named Irma Runningbear flit across the dark slush, leaving a trail of wind-blasted white snow in their wake.

Fell spoke over the headset radios. "Ok. Time to turn on our mobile video recorders. You two look around as much as you can. I'll talk to our 'friend' over there."

Fell had wanted to set up his main base of operations here in Socorro, but had been run out by these demons. Now his headquarters was located in Santa Fe. Albuquerque might have been his next choice, but the majority of the city had come under attack by Entities and ghosts which they were not ready to fight. The majority of the Strife demons, as JJ called them, had been killed in Albuquerque, but it had still been easier to set up operations in Santa Fe.

Other than a loss of power to Santa Fe, things looked much as they had been before the cataclysm. If you ignored the massive amount of ash and dark snow, Santa Fe was relatively untouched. His biggest issue there had been keeping civilians calm and structuring the new organization of the Road Runners. He had to politely explain to others that they might have outranked him in the patrol but the patrol was gone. He was running the Road Runners. Waters had been instrumental in talking to the other first responder organizations of New Mexico and other state personnel in explaining that this new organization called the Road Runners was under John Fell's command. After all, it had been Waters' idea to form one new group; he had better be prepared to help Fell convince others.

Stopping about ten feet from the demon, Fell and the others turned off their hover cycles.

Fell stood still and stared at the huge creature. "Is that supposed to be a smile, Rekk? You look pissed. You invited us."

Six more demons approached them, with four teenagers in tow. The teens were chained up. They looked frightened.

Fell pulled out his side arm and pointed it at the demon. "Rekk, I'll give you thirty seconds to unchain those kids or you'll see just how good I've gotten at killing the supernatural."

Rekk started to reach out for his axe and growled, "I've become rather good at killing over the last few hundred years myself..." The demon trailed off mid-sentence and looked up at John Fell. "A lesson you will learn another time. Release them." Without taking his eyes off Fell, he growled to his troops in Demongolian. The six demons moved to unchain the teens who immediately ran free.

"So, Rekk. I brought two of my finest warriors. You want to explain why you're returning these kids to us? I assume you're not doing this out of the kindness of your heart."

Rekk proceeded to explain to the humans that they now had a common enemy. The teenagers had been running from a mass of zombies when they had driven a beat-up old jeep straight into Socorro looking for help, ending up right in the main Brodkil camp.

"I give you these children as a sign of good faith. I have seen the dead walk on many worlds. If you fight by my side, we may both live long enough to try to kill each other."

Fell glanced at Irma, at Waters. The demon seemed to be telling the truth. He looked at the snarling faces of the Brodkil warriors on each side of their leader. There was no guile there, no trickery.

"We can give it a shot," Fell said.

Robert Waters

Robert Waters held his breath, then breathed out slowly. Perfectly still, his high-powered rifle held motionless, he watched the lone man standing next to the house through the scope. The man hadn't moved in 20 minutes. *Just not natural*, Waters thought. In the last few minutes, Waters was sure he had seen movement to the right of the man. Something in the bushes. He could have been mistaken, and had just convinced himself it had been his imagination when he saw it again. Suddenly, he felt lightheaded. His vision exploded into vibrant colors and he could see six of the red demons that John Fell called Brodkil. His stomach hurt. He started to perspire. The six Brodkil were slowly advancing on the lone man who should have been able to see them until Waters realized that the Brodkil were still invisible. They must be. Either that or the man was dead. But Waters had seen the man walk out into the yard earlier. Trying to remain calm and wondering how he could see these invisible demons, Waters worked on controlling his breathing. The man must be dead. That's why they were all here after all. Some crazy report of zombies here in Magdalena.

And why not? In the last week, Waters had staked a vampire in Las Cruces, had a meeting with John Fell and some Brodkil demons in Socorro, spoken to a deranged army guy who was obviously suffering from radiation poisoning down by Truth or Consequences, and taken custody of some teenagers who were running from Magdalena right into the demon-infested city of Socorro. These kids claimed their hometown was overrun by cultists and zombies. The Brodkil demons told John Fell that they were about to feed the kids to some pit creature when they got the story. Now these same Brodkil which had told all humans to stay out of Socorro had invited the Road Runners to Socorro for a peace meeting.

Waters was starting to think anything was possible. Like seeing invisible demons. He knew he wasn't like JJ, who was able to literally cast spells. Nor did he want to be able to. Magic was an abomination in his eyes. Probably had something to do with his strong religious upbringing. Everything seemed wrong these days. Yesterday, Fell had levitated Rekk's axe, surprising both him and Irma. That night as they slept in the demon camp, trying to not be too worried about being surrounded by hundreds of Brodkil, Fell had explained to Waters and Irma that over the last few days he had startled himself by being able to move objects without touching them. Irma called it Telekinesis. Fell just grunted and called it a product of the end times. Now Waters was seeing things he shouldn't be able to see. It all frightened him.

The Brodkil were within a few feet of the man, still unaware of them. Waters was loath to have anything to do with demons, but Fell had convinced him that, if nothing else, they would get to see just how secure Socorro was under Brodkil rule.

It turned out that the city was infested. Big time. There were all kinds of demons there and they were well dug in. Fell told Waters that at some point the Brodkil would have to be fought. He said they were avoiding conflict with humans because they were waiting until humans could be a challenge. Working together would teach everyone involved a thing or two.

Thus far, the Brodkil had been willing to take point in the assault. The Road Runners were only providing cover fire.

Waters continued to watch as the Brodkil turned visible and one of them stuck the still man with a sword. The man fell back from the deadly blow, rolled into a ball – and sprang right up on his feet again. That blow would have killed a mortal man. The half-eviscerated body charged the Brodkil that had hit him. Tearing at the Brodkil with bare fingers, it tore the left eye out of the demon's face. Another Brodkil swung its bionic arm at the man/corpse. A shimmering blade

emerged from the bionic arm and cleaved the head off of the man thing. As it fell dead, Waters saw three more shambling out of the house towards the Brodkil. He opened fire, pumping high-explosive rounds into the things. Once they were dead, the Brodkil checked the house.

He waited patiently, blinking through the scope, but the Brodkil did not come back out. Waters saw Fell walking up to the house with Rekk and four more Brodkil. They entered, coming back out after a few minutes. Waters could see them through his scope. Both were covered in blood. He saw Fell key up his radio, and heard Fell's voice say: "Zombies. No other way to say it, Robert. Rekk and I are the only survivors. Regroup at the vehicles."

Waters crawled back down to the ground from the ruins he had been using for concealment. Wiping snow and ash from his face, he shivered, slung his rifle across his back and jogged the mile to the vehicles.

As he ran, Waters thought about what this all meant. Zombies. Demons. Magic. Why not? It seemed like all they were missing now were evil dragons. What else would they have to fight?

John Fell stood, holding a flyer he had found in the zombie-infested house, "CopyCo" printed across the back. Rekk had asked him what it said. Apparently the demon could speak English but not read it. Good to know.

Fell read the flyer out loud, "The Time of the Dark One has Come. Rejoice In his Shadow of Love." He tossed the flyer into a fire pit. "Whoever is behind these zombies is trying to advertise."

Ashley Danella

"Ash?"

A whisper. She heard it, closed her eyes tighter.

"Ashley. Where are you?"

Louder. Closer. She could almost feel his breath on her face.

"Ash, come out. I won't hurt you," he chuckled and continued, "Come on baby, don't make Logan search all night for you. Come out baby."

Ashley held her breath. She could see nothing in the total darkness of the sewer. The soft ripples of murky water parting as Logan moved closer. She could hear his breathing as he approached. Logan wasn't built for stealth. He was massive. A brick of muscle. Six and a half feet tall and pure evil. He was a killer before any of this happened. Most of his life he had been in and out of prison, more in than out, so she had heard. Now he was mayhem and destruction incarnate. He had killed a lot of people since the chaos started.

She had helped him kill. What else was she supposed to do? She was forty-five years old and what had she ever done with her life other than be a mom and cart kids to their activities? She had been happy. Her kids a joy. Her husband loving.

When the demons had arrived in Albuquerque, they had slain her neighbors and her family.

Logan had saved her. He had rolled into town on a motorcycle, loud as hell. He and twenty other men had ridden up to her house and, with ease, they killed the creatures that had slain her family.

She had thought that Logan and his gang, the Wastelanders, were heroes. Logan had stood over her. A giant of a man. Tattoos and muscle. He had offered her his outstretched hand. As she sobbed he held her, whispering, "Be calm baby. I'll protect you."

She had believed him. She had gone with him. She had sat on the back of his motorcycle. She had helped his Wastelanders scavenge goods out of houses all over Albuquerque. They had killed horrible creatures and saved people. Logan had seemed more and more like a hero to her. Nothing scared him and nothing stopped him. He was ruthless and hard. His brother was his second in command and he

was just as tough. They had helped people. Killed demons. Shown her how to stay alive. Given her a gas mask to help her breathe in all the ash and smoke. Given her a rifle, a good rifle. When the Wastelanders broke into a National Guard armory, Logan let Ashley keep a high-powered pistol and Vibro-Knife for herself.

Everything started to feel safe, as long as she traveled with Logan and his men. Each night, sitting around campfires while they were in Albuquerque, these men had been polite to her and the other people that they had saved. Everything seemed like it was as safe as anybody could ask for under the conditions. Her thoughts often returned to that night they had saved her. Her kids and her husband had been her life. Now they were gone. Only Logan dragging her along had stopped her from simply walking out into the storm, waiting for something to end her misery. After a few weeks scavenging in Albuquerque and helping these Wastelanders, she slowly felt like she might have a purpose. She had to live for her kids. To carry on without her husband. She had to fight and survive and help others in need.

Ashes fell from the sky. Heavy snow, too. The sun was blocked out for most of the day, every day. Sometimes it felt like she was living in a black-and-white movie. The only colors were gray or black or some mixture of the two. As bleak as things seemed, it felt like Logan and his men were new heroes for a new time.

Until they left Albuquerque. That's when things truly got bad. They had all traveled south down Interstate 25. Logan had stopped in the middle of the freeway. Getting off his motorcycle, he told Ashley to go stand with the other women. Turning to his men, Logan yelled, "This will do. Kill the men. Tie up the women. Collect the food and let's get some sentries out!"

As the Wastelanders started shooting the men they had rescued in Albuquerque, Logan snatched the rifle out of her hands and told her to set down the pistol. He told her that she could be his. He would protect her as long as she promised to be his.

Ashley was terrified. Dropping the pistol to the muddy snow next to his motorcycle she felt numb. Logan holstered the gun, "Good girl. Now tell Logan you promise. You promise to be mine so that I can protect you."

All she could hear was the barking of gunfire as the Wastelanders killed those who were not strong enough, and twisted enough, to become one of them. Tears streamed down her cold cheeks and she sank to her knees.

Kneeling in the cold muck, she cried. Logan pushed her head back, "Only the strong get to live. Are you strong, baby? Promise me you'll be strong." His brother had laughed and moved away from them, back to issue orders to the Wastelanders. Ashley watched him walk away with watery eyes and turned back to face Logan.

Logan started to point the old .45 pistol he held at her. Raising it towards her head, he said, "Promise."

Ash swung the Vibro-Knife up and flipped it on in as fast as she could. The humming blade sliced through the gun. She had been aiming for his wrist but he was fast and had pulled his hand back. As the front end of the gun dropped into the muck, Logan kicked her hard, in the chest. Ash flung back. Her back slammed into the motorcycle. Pain erupted in her chest and her side, and she gasped. She could tell at least one of her ribs was cracked. Logan swore and pushed her aside as he righted his motorcycle. He cursed at her for knocking it over. Then he cursed at her for running.

Ash ran as fast as she could to the road's edge. She slid across mud, snow and muck, crawling on her hands and knees until she slid into a sewer drain. It was just big enough for her to crawl through at first, but after ten feet or so it opened up and she could stand. She could run. She could hear Logan squeeze through and drop into the water behind her.

“Ash. Baby. I forgive you baby. Come to Logan. Promise me.” Logan had stopped, wading through the murky water. He too stood perfectly still.

She could feel him within inches of her. She still held her breath. Straining to not make a sound.

Logan sighed. “I know you can hear me! If I ever see you again I’ll gut you. Run girl. Run for it!” Logan laughed and Ash heard him moving away from her.

She stayed in the murky water. Slime. Cold. Pain. Silence. She breathed quietly. After a few minutes that felt like hours, she couldn’t feel her fingers or toes anymore, and started to crawl. She moved carefully towards the entrance, thinking to herself, *I am strong*.

Three days later she sat quietly, cold, hungry and alone. She had walked and walked until she thought that she would die of frostbite.

Now she sat watching a man sitting on a hover cycle. A State Trooper. He had been on the parked hover cycle for almost an hour now. She had walked to the top of this hill and seen him – then simply sat and watched. Ash was afraid. She wanted to believe he was a good guy. But she had made that mistake before. Shivering, she sat concealed by the trees and watched the trooper. *Maybe he was dead?* she thought. Why else would he be just sitting there?

“Hello? Hello?” She called out.

A quiet cough startled her. She clung to the Vibro-Knife and swung around.

It was Logan.

He smiled at her and said, “He’s dead. I killed that pig yesterday. Are you going to keep your promise to Logan or is it your turn too?”

She looked at Logan – and her eyes went wide. A massive, red demon emerged from the cover of the trees. It walked quickly and quietly, approaching Logan from behind. The demon had dark, metallic wings folded down behind its back, its red, bare chest was pure muscle. It had a golden, bionic left arm and a huge axe in its other hand.

Logan saw her eyes widen. He turned, gun in hand, but the demon sprang forward with blinding speed and slashed the axe down across his body.

The demon walked towards her, menacing, unstoppable. Ash dropped the Vibro-Knife and stood, meeting the monster eye to eye.

“I see you do not run.”

“Nowhere left to run to.”

“Lack of fear is a rare trait in a human.”

“There’s nothing left for me to lose. Go ahead. Get it over with, you freak.”

The big demon looked her up and down, impressed.

“No need to be impolite.” He stooped, picked up the Vibro-Knife, and handed it back to her. “You may have something to offer.”

“What can I possibly offer you?”

“You can tell me things I need to know. Things about this world. There are many forces that have arrived here. I must know what the natives know.”

“Who are you?”

“I am Lord Rekk, master of war. My apologies for your friend.” He gestured down to the body beside them.

“He wasn’t my friend. He was a bad guy.”

Rekk smiled. He set his axe down, dug his fingertips into Logan’s chest – and parted his rib cage with an easy motion. Rekk ripped Logan’s heart right out, gobbling it down.

“I’m sure he was.”

Lt. Mikael Chaine

The pounding was driving him insane. Thump. Thump. Thump. The heavy blast doors reverberated with each impact.

Mikael Chaine, First Lieutenant, covered his ears with his hands. He pushed, pushed hard, but it did nothing to stop the deafening sound. Tears streamed down his flush cheeks from sore eyes. Nine hours of this. The fear of what was to come haunted his mind even more than the shaking of the blast doors.

Ten hours ago, life had been normal. He was about to end his shift and head home. Chaine had stepped out the main doors, stopped to fish his keys out of his pocket – and looked up as all hell broke loose, blue energy crackled through the sky, and what could only be described as demons appeared across the parking lot, emerging right out of thin air. Sirens screamed as soldiers and response teams responded with bravery and professionalism to the attack, only to be cut down ruthlessly by wave after wave of the unidentified creatures.

Chaine pulled his pistol out, shooting wildly as he backed up into the main entrance of the White Sands facility. He watched as a detachment of soldiers were cut down as they emerged from a side entrance, each man following his training, advancing aggressively on the demons pouring across the parking lot. They valiantly pushed forward, not retreating, each one giving his life as scientists and civilians streamed back into the facility. In the end, Chaine had thrown the lever to shut the emergency blast doors himself. His own pistol was empty, though he couldn’t remember firing it more than once or twice.

As the doors closed, he looked around at the people with him, his own shock reflected in each of their faces. The wall of blue lightning, the demonic creatures – they had undergone drills to train them in how to respond to a terrorist attack, but this was something else entirely.

The pounding on the blast doors had started shortly after, and dragged on for hour after hour, a true testament to the engineers that had designed the door system. The scientists and other civilians had been sent down further into the facility, but Chaine had stayed behind to guard the doors as soldiers and security personnel were sent up. A dozen of them now watched with him, weapons trained on the entrance, yawning occasionally despite the terror and danger all around.

“Sir,” Chaine finally registered that there was a young sergeant crouched in front of the position where he had slumped against the wall. He must have dozed off a bit himself.

“Yes sergeant?” Chaine finally muttered, his eyes focusing on the soldier’s face.

“Time to go, sir.”

“What do you mean?”

“The commander’s given out new orders. He’s going to blow the whole base,” the sergeant said wearily. “But we need to hold these doors long enough to get everyone out on the underground trams.”

Chaine looked around, waking up more fully. He could see fire-teams of soldiers in heavy armor taking up positions around the area, replacing the lightly-armed security guards. Engineers were also placing a large explosive device near the blast doors. The sergeant helped him stand up.

“We’re gonna give up on the base?”

“We’ve got new orders. Nothing falls into enemy hands. Get a move on, lieutenant. I’ll take care of things here.” The doors were beginning to rattle and bolts were starting to shake loose. Chaine could see it now, the grim determination on the faces of the heavily-equipped reinforcements. They were laden with grenades and extra belts of ammo.

"I'm staying, sergeant," Chaîne said. He checked the E-Clip in his pistol, his last clip, and stood up.

The sergeant put a hand on Chaîne's shoulder, his face hidden by his armored helmet. A pair of Chromium Guardsmen stepped into position behind him, locking their weapons in place, pointing squarely at the door. The security guards looked like children next to them. Chaîne looked down at the puny pistol in his hand.

"We'll do what we can, sir. Get the civilians out. Nothing's coming through here."

Chaîne watched a soldier cross himself and aim his rifle at the blast doors. Looking at the sergeant, he said, "Good luck," but the man was already assuming a firing position, watching as daylight appeared and the crack between the doors began to slowly widen. Snarls and roars came from the world outside.

Chaîne turned and ran from the room. He had just enough time to stumble down a flight of stairs and slam a door behind him before the deafening echo of Boom Guns sent visible shockwaves ripping up and down the upper levels. The gunfire that erupted afterward sounded almost like music in the distance, eerily quiet as his ears rang.

He ran as hard and as fast as he could, past offices that had been emptied, break rooms with up-ended chairs, high-security laboratories with their doors left carelessly open. Sub level 6 was his destination, the underground trams that carried people back and forth between Alamogordo where most of the base's staff lived. The guards and other soldiers had left just moments before him, and the base had been full of people this morning, but Chaîne didn't see a single soul as he ran. He hoped that the trams would still be there.

He took a shortcut through the base's cafeteria, throwing open the doors, winding past scattered chairs and discarded trays – and stopped dead in his tracks. Sitting right in the center, in a clearing where tables and chairs had been pushed aside, were four thermonuclear warheads, bundled together with wires and connectors. A remote-trigger was perched atop the deadly package.

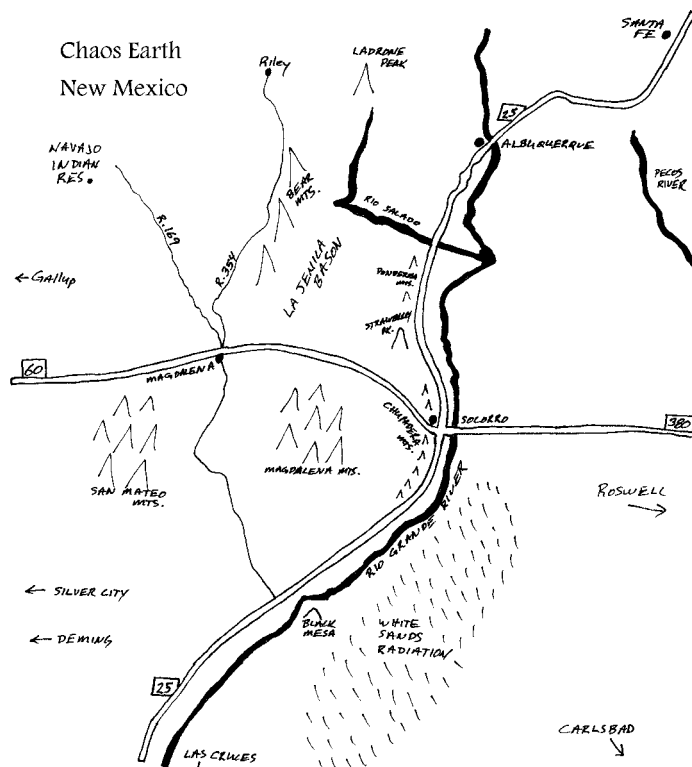
"I guess they're serious.." Chaîne said. He stared in awe for just a moment, then bolted out of the cafeteria with a renewed sense of urgency.

He found the stairs leading to the tram and practically leapt down them. Chaîne thought he could hear movement below, footsteps and voices, but he could hear the tram's electric motors too...

"Wait! One more!" With his ears still ringing, Chaîne had no idea how loud he was yelling. He raced through the passenger loading area, kicking his way through one of the plastic barriers that kept people in orderly lines. The tram was just ahead – pulling away from the platform.

Chaîne dashed the last few steps and vaulted into open air. He felt his hand close around a handle on the back of the little electric subway car, and a wave of relief washed over him. He clung to the platform on the back of the tram, catching his breath.

The tunnel shrank as the tram sped away, until it was just a point of light in the darkness. The last view Chaîne had of the White Sands Missile Range, where he had worked every day for the last three years, was a flash of fire and a swirling shockwave as the base was consumed by the titanic blast.



New Mexico, Chaos Earth

When the Great Cataclysm occurred on Earth, heroes were needed; brave men and women who could step up and fight for mankind. The Northern Eagle Military Alliance, or NEMA, is widely regarded in North America as the saviors of mankind, but even NEMA's reach could not extend to the entire United States. When the chaos came, entire states in North America were abandoned, the locals left to fend for themselves. The increasing number of disturbances erupting across the United States has left NEMA short handed and unable to be everywhere at once. Natural disasters and creatures from the Rifts, compounded by magic and strange powers, have left the world in a state of escalating chaos. Federal law enforcement, such as NEMA, has, by far, the best weapons and equipment available. However, NEMA is also spread far too thin. Local law enforcement, other emergency personnel and everyday citizens are needed to assist. Average people must step up and defend their neighbors and families – or face death. While NEMA forces converge on locations like Chicago, where they are building a safe haven for humanity, other places such as the West Coast, Mexico and Canada are left on their own. Among those left behind, the people of New Mexico find themselves isolated in the early years of the crisis with limited help from NEMA or other outside forces.

While federal broadcasts call for all Americans to head towards safe zones around Chicago, local law enforcement in New Mexico is telling people to take shelter in Santa Fe. The people of New Mexico are not able to safely travel north into Colorado. Rapidly shifting weather patterns, bizarre ley line storms and large volcanic eruptions in Colorado rain destruction down onto the northern portion of New Mexico. Coupled with vast amounts of demons and other supernatural menaces in southern Colorado and northern New Mexico, things are vastly out of control. The volcanic debris, extreme snowstorms, sheets of ash and rock which cover the main roads out of northern

New Mexico are covered by a blanket of hot ash and besieged by swarms of demons and other monstrosities.

Travel beyond Santa Fe is discouraged by local law enforcement. What's left of New Mexico's State Patrol and other First Responders have banded together. United in purpose, these men and women are trying to build a safe zone in Santa Fe.

In the eastern portion of New Mexico, near Clovis, Hobbs, Roswell, and the area around Carlsbad Caverns, people are encountering newly visible Blue Zones (Ley Lines) and Epicenters (Nexus Points), home to terrible ley line storms and hordes of supernatural beasts. Dimensional shifting, where the landscape alters as you cross it, is common. Fade Towns shimmer in and out of the area. Many of these Fade Towns simply disappear, those that live there gone forever.

To the south, where White Sands Missile Base once was, one cannot enter the area without special protective gear due to radiation from a nuclear explosion that was felt across the entire state. A large portion of the area will not be safe to travel across for hundreds of years. As those left alive in the area slowly learn the safe boundaries of the radiation zone, more people will die.

Things are even worse on the other side of the border. News that Mexico City was destroyed and offers no assistance is only the first of two major problems with Mexico. Rumors, and first-hand experience by some, has shown that Mexico has become ravaged by supernatural evil, including a few attacks that seem like they could only be the work of vampires just like those from legend and folklore.

Westward, toward Arizona, one heads into even worse weather conditions, with a mixture of sandstorms, flying rocks and snow, laden with dark ash. The people of New Mexico learn from refugees that massive tidal waves have drowned California and the rest of the Western Coast. Fear of rising sea levels and more fierce weather makes traveling west difficult or impossible. Between Arizona and central New Mexico, people are attacked by all manner of demons, zombies, and other supernatural threats. Demon cultists dominate the western portion of New Mexico, spreading disease and plagues across the land.

The central area of New Mexico is the most widely traveled. Interstate 25, from Socorro to Santa Fe, although still dangerous, is the safest area in the state. First responders from a variety of backgrounds have formed a new force to protect New Mexico's population, which they call the **Road Runners**. These men and women are former police officers, deputies, EMT's, National Guardsmen, firefighters, doctors, nurses, security guards, fish and game agents, NEMA support personnel, civilian militia and State Police, who, together with average citizens, serve as an emergency protective force. These Road Runners work day and night to create a safe zone and a fortified city for humanity.

The Road Runners have to contend with extreme bad weather, fallout from volcanic eruptions (which darkens the sky even during the day and dumps ash across the land), sickness, radiation poisoning and a plague of demons. Socorro, New Mexico is the most dangerous of threats due to its large number of demons who work together as one army, a group of Brodkil and many other types of other supernatural evil. The leader of the horde of Brodkil, a demon named **Lord Rekk**, has informed the people of New Mexico, in particular the Road Runners, that he will not attack them for one year. He states that he wants to give humanity time to become worthy adversaries. After one year, however, his horde of demons will obliterate humanity from New Mexico.

NEMA forces trapped in New Mexico have created the Road Runners to fend for themselves. Led by former State Police officer **John Fell** and public affairs officer **Robert Waters**, the Road Runners patrol New Mexico looking for survivors, helping people get to

Santa Fe, searching for weapons and vehicles, and fighting off evil as they try to retake the state for humans. Access to Police, EMS and National Guard facilities has helped them in their endeavor. Additionally, their weapons and vehicles have been augmented by experimental technology from Lockheed Martin that the Road Runners have managed to scavenge. There are several Lockheed Martin facilities in New Mexico, and although they have so far been unable to access the main underground test facilities, anything of value aboveground is being gathered and taken to Santa Fe. John Fell and a few others in the Road Runners organization are aware of the location of the main underground test facility near Albuquerque, New Mexico, but are unable to gain access due to the high-tech security system. Instead of breaking into this underground facility, the Road Runners have worked hard to hide its location from anyone else who may come along in the future and try to gain access.

Between ash clouds, a veritable nuclear winter, the nuclear blast and radiation in the White Sands Missile Base area, demons taking over Socorro, demon cults, zombies near Magdalena, the vampire incursion from Mexico and fellow humans who are not interested in saving anyone but themselves, the Road Runners have their hands full.

New Mexico is the Land of Enchantment, with many supernatural entities and creatures unleashed upon it, and new and old legends of the supernatural becoming reality across the land. Albuquerque is infested with ghosts and entities and has dozens of haunted locations, many of them churches. Throughout New Mexico, Brujas, witches and the occult flourish. Near Roswell, a mysterious thirty-three fallen demons terrorize the locals and are building up a reputation of horror. Vampires roam across the sands, seeking blood throughout the state. Demons known as Skin Walkers spread across the high plains in eastern New Mexico, sowing death and terror. Several Alien Intelligences vie for control of the area, bringing with them pain and death, zombies and human worshipers and both intelligent and wild vampires. Heroes such as the Player Characters, Road Runners, Curanderas Indian Healers and others face both human and in-human monsters.

Living in New Mexico has always meant living with magic, ghosts, supernatural happenings and strange forces. Prior to the Cataclysm, New Mexico had its share of witches, pagans and other occultists, and now these individuals have power to back their beliefs. The beautiful landscapes of New Mexico now lead to the unknown, and the fear of what might be lurking around the next cactus or hill. Night mists, haunted sites and creatures from the Blue Zones spread across the land, and the years to come will shape the outcome of this state for centuries. Cut off from much of the world and in need of assistance, the people of New Mexico need your help.

Notable Cities of New Mexico

Raton lies along the route of Interstate 25. Although with nuclear winter-type storms, hot ash, cold snow, and powerful winds blowing across the area, travelers generally cannot see the Interstate, which is completely covered. Additionally, there are little to no human survivors in the area. Between the weather and the demons roaming the area, there is no safe passage for humans here.

Santa Fe is the new home base of the First Responders who call themselves the Road Runners. The many different First Responders in New Mexico have banded together as one organization, comprised of emergency response personnel ranging from doctors to nurses, EMTs, police and many others. The Road Runners patrol central New Mexico and help people get to the fortified remains of Santa Fe. What was once the Academy for the New Mexico State Police

and the National Guard base adjacent to it has become the new primary base of operations for the Road Runners. The large fortified compound is expanded upon and grows, surrounded by the unsafe remains of the city which are occupied by hostile demons and unknown forces.

Albuquerque has been almost entirely laid to waste, with almost no building still standing in the once great city. Horrible weather and supernatural creatures dominate the area, and Albuquerque is infested with a large number of ghosts and other entities. First Responders quickly pulled out of the area due to overwhelming odds, evacuating as many civilians as they could. Road Runners frequently conduct raids in an attempt to cull the amount of supernatural creatures in the area. This wasteland once was one of the greatest cities in New Mexico and still has technological treasures and goods for anyone brave enough to venture into the area.

Magdalena is home to a new supernatural horror, an Alien Intelligence that seeks to establish itself on Earth. The nameless horror communes with its vassals and Demon Priests and used them to unleash a wave of zombies in Magdalena. The Intelligence has made it clear to its followers that they have a limited amount of time to increase the number of zombies on Earth or it will leave them to their fate and deprive them of their supernatural gifts and powers. Just how widespread this wave will become depends on the bravery and vigilance of local First Responders.

Socorro is home to a horde of Brodkil demons; their leader, Rekk, has promised the Road Runners he will not allow his Brodkil to fight with humans for one year. Rekk is a Megaversal warlord who wishes to have a worthy adversary to fight, and is biding his time. Unusually intelligent and a masterful tactician for a subdemon, Lord Rekk has a long-term goal in mind for the land and people of New Mexico. Of course, there are so many Brodkil demons that Rekk may not be aware of a few rogues under his command who may occasionally seek out confrontation with humans out of impatience or for the sheer fun of it, but the horde of Brodkil in Socorro are more interested in making sure other supernatural forces don't interfere with their plans. These demons work tirelessly to build a massive demon city from which they will rule over the state.

Taos, New Mexico is also referred to as the **Blasted Lands**, bombarded by heavy snow, ash and volcanic rock. There is also a strange phenomenon in Taos known as **the Hum**. Prior to the Great Cataclysm, the Hum was a phenomenon involving widespread reports of a persistent and invasive low, frequency humming, rumbling, or droning noise not audible to all people. First Responders who are in the area of Taos insist that the Hum has increased in both pitch and volume. Anyone who enters the area is able to hear the erratic and unsettling noise. The Hum is actually a Supernatural Intelligence trying to break into our dimension. Unlike other Intelligences, it is more animalistic and instinctive; it simply exists and feeds. Everyone can hear the Hum when they get close to the Blasted Lands, and staying in the area without full environmental body armor or some sort of sound-dampening device (ear plugs) can result in insanity. Staying in the area longer than a day has a chance of causing insanities in those who hear the Hum. In addition, the call of the Hum is alluring and can cause some people to seek it out, even while their life essence is being slowly sapped. Strange, cannibalistic creatures resembling tall, thin, gray-skinned men also roam the area; weird beings that are deaf and rely on radar much like bats.

Clayton, New Mexico. The locals in the area are excited to see what appear to be prehistoric dinosaurs. There are certainly dangerous dinosaurs, but the majority are peaceful herbivores. Led by a very religious "fire and brimstone" preacher, who encourages dinosaur hunting and human supremacy, outsiders are not very safe here.

Clovis, New Mexico. Just outside Clovis is a military base operated by a group of survivors from the U.S. Air Force, centered around the old Obama Airfield. There are several squadrons of advanced fighter jets housed here in addition to a few squadrons of SAMAS power armor. These pilots flew missions over New Mexico in the early months of the Cataclysm, but after a few months and losing many pilots and aircraft, they have become more conservative and remain near Clovis, primarily fighting to contain a force of Gargoyles which live in the area.

Avalon, New Mexico. This human city has a massive dam and reservoir and farming and fishing have become the chief means of survival. The dam is a large structure with a height of 60 feet (18 m) and a volume of 202,000 cubic yards. It is 1,360 feet (414 m) long and 53 feet (16 m) wide. The dam has three spillways and many people have set up camps around the dam to fish, raise livestock and make use of the water supply. With a large amount of magical influence in the area, and dimensional fluxes across the landscape, there are many new creatures and beings encountered nearby.

Hobbs, New Mexico. The people in the area have fortified a junior college with armor and weapons and struggle to survive. Hobbs is a crossroads to all of eastern New Mexico and Texas. Ranchers, cowboys and gear-heads work hard to maintain a safe location. The Pecos River runs through Hobbs and the small, relatively untouched community is prospering for now.

Carlsbad, New Mexico. The Carlsbad area, including the city of Carlsbad and the Carlsbad Caverns, are steeped with magic and open Rifts, fledgling magic users and many demons and supernatural beings. Inside the actual caverns are dozens of open portals to other worlds, some linking to constant locations, some shifting randomly. The visitor center of the caverns was destroyed by a group of Gargoyles who are now roosting in the elevators. The caves are full of creatures that slowly emerge from the safety of the caves and flee into the surrounding countryside. Virtually the entire interior of the caverns is dominated by one massive ley line that casts an eerie blue light throughout the caves.

Roswell, New Mexico. There are many ley lines and nexus points in and around Roswell. A massive ley line runs south through Roswell, all the way down to Mexico City. Many of the humans in the area are learning the ways of magic and how these ley lines influence its use. Rumors persist of a mysterious 33 fallen demons which terrorize the area. The 33 came to Roswell through an open nexus point. They are Death Demons from Hades led by a demented Baal-Rog demon whose desire is to conquer the area and bring more and more demons to join him. Most of the human population lives in fear of these 33 and other monstrous creatures which attack and enslave them.

Gallup, New Mexico. The citizens work day and night to erect a large wall around the entire city. The humans of Gallup are isolationists who are not friendly to outsiders and barely negotiate with those that pass near their lands. The more time that passes, the more these people will become isolationists and independent and unwilling to cooperate with any other humans.

White Rock is located in the northwest of New Mexico, with several Native American reservations in the area, the largest of which is located on a military base. Many Native Americans are willing to cooperate with outsiders and assist them, however the majority of the Native Americans in the White Rock area are isolationists, much like Gallup.

Las Cruces is near El Paso, Texas, right on the border of the radiation poisoning from the White Sands missile base. The majority of the population has fled to El Paso.

The TorC Empire, Truth or Consequences. Those who call themselves members of the TorC Empire are a large group of humans that have formed into a giant gang called the *Wastelanders*. These men and women are not saviors of mankind, they are scavengers who prey off the weak. They call their empire the TorC (TorC) Empire since it is located near Truth or Consequences. These marauders are nomadic, roaming across the wastes of New Mexico and scavenging anything they can get their hands on. They were led in the first days by two brothers by the name of Logan and Brad. Logan was killed, but Brad continues to lead these vile Wastelanders.

Deming, New Mexico. Apart from bad weather, Deming is relatively untouched by the coming of the Rifts. As one enters the city it appears to be completely untouched by monsters or demons. For miles around Deming, all seems safe. As one moves down the city streets it appears that the locals are happy and content and safe, much like before the chaos began. However, if people don't move on, as the locals will repeatedly encourage them to, night holds a different story. In reality, Deming is under control of a large number of vampires, and staying overnight almost guarantees some kind of attack or confrontation.

White Sands. The White Sands Missile Base was attacked in the initial stages of the cataclysm. The base commander, in an attempt to keep the unknown attackers away from top-secret material and weapons, detonated a nuclear device which has left the area radiated and uninhabitable to humans without protective gear. The radiation even keeps most supernatural creatures away, since radiation does seem to cause harm and injury to demons. What this irradiated land holds in the future, and what possible mutations may come about due to the radiation, is frightful to think about.

Other First Responders of New Mexico

The most notable First Responders of New Mexico are you, the Player Characters. Player Characters might be one of several O.C.C.s from existing Chaos Earth books. The main Chaos Earth books, Rifter articles, and even the Dead Reign books, have many civilian O.C.C. types which will work in this environment. BTS O.C.C.s also fit nicely into the area of New Mexico. Many of the Native American O.C.C.s in the Rifts Spirit West book also work. Game Masters and players can create their own character types based out of the many preexisting books in the Palladium line.

Characters in the Chaos Earth world can also have modifications due to advanced medicine and genetics. This is explained in the main Chaos Earth book. In New Mexico, students of state colleges and active or retired military personnel or emergency response personnel are likely to have received some sort of genetic alteration.

In the state of New Mexico there is also a small amount of NEMA weapons, vehicles and equipment available. Other items in the area will include police vehicles and fire trucks, civilian vehicles which can range from wheeled vehicles with tires to new state-of-the-art hover tech, to VTOL aircraft, jet packs and other impressive odds and ends.

New Mexico Adventure Ideas

1.) A US Special Forces Juicer named Thomas Rogers was on leave, home for the holidays. He was in New Mexico to visit his parents when the end of the world erupts around him. Rogers has decided he is going to set himself up as king of the small town here in New Mexico.

Rogers has begun his "kingdom" by stockpiling food, taking over the local supermarket by force and determining who gets to eat. He is using brute force to control the locals.

This Juicer needs to be stopped. The local deputies in the area are scared, unsure how to respond to this living tank of a tyrant and decide a bad leader is better than no leader. They are doing what Rogers says to do, for now. Can the Player Characters sway the deputies? Or will they have to stop Rogers alone? Once free, what do the Player Characters do with the sixty locals?

2.) Deming, NM seems completely undisturbed by the end of the world. Granted, bad weather, heavy snow and ash pour down on the town, but the people have gathered supplies, sealed the roads and morale is running high. They offer food and shelter to the Player Characters and there is talk of a town meeting to be held the next day where a decisive plan will be put in effect. It is not until night comes that the players realize that Deming is not what it seems. Vampires have taken over the town, striking and spreading in the first days after the apocalypse. Many of the people of Deming are mind slaves, and the rest are hesitant, afraid, or unaware of what is truly going on. Some will encourage the Player Characters to move on before nightfall, while others will try to lure outsiders in for their undead masters.

3.) Rumor has it (and the giant blast crater confirms) that the White Sands Missile Base area has been obliterated by a nuclear strike. There are numerous smaller facilities around it that have survived the blast, but are now awash in radiation. With radiation suits or good environmental armor, however, a few bits of high technology might be salvaged. As one gets close to the area, a presence is felt, and not a friendly one. There are strange creatures who feed on radiation that have moved in since the blast – and they don't want to be disturbed.

4.) Rumors have been spreading regarding Lord Rekk, master of the Brodkil legion that has taken Socorro and threatens all of New Mexico. Supposedly the D-Bee warlord is being advised by a human woman known as "Ash." Some say that she is a prisoner, others a willing servant, but it becomes obvious by the Brodkil's sophisticated actions and use of human infrastructure that the information is helping them secure their grip on Socorro. Trying to get a look at the city, the Player Characters dispatch a few Brodkil scouts, before running into Ashley Danella herself, out looking for human goods that the Brodkil could care less about. Do the players try to rescue her or execute her on the spot? Is she a willing participant in the Brodkil's plans, or are there guards watching her from close by, ready to recapture her if she tries to make a run for it?

5.) There are reports of zombies across portions of the state, rising from the dead and attacking survivors already beleaguered by the Coming of the Rifts. The strategic locations where they first appear seem to indicate some sort of intelligent planning behind this outbreak of undeath, but the zombies themselves are little more than ravening, mindless corpses. What's more, there are flyers posted throughout the areas where zombies are encountered, all of them printed on CopyCo-brand stationery. What the players don't know is that Bill Young is building himself an empire of animated corpses and even recruiting other living humans to serve as his followers. Killing Young himself is the only way to stop the outbreak, but he and his disciples have been outfitting zombies in makeshift Mega-Damage armor (5D6 M.D.C.) in order to make them more resilient, and are planning on making further pacts with demons and dark powers.



Dead Reign® Tampa Bay

Optional Material for Dead Reign®

By Eric Sturm

A Short History of the Region

The Wave

June 2012, the Wave strikes throughout the world, and heavily in Tampa Bay. The many hospitals in Tampa Bay were immediately overwhelmed. Quickly, public stadiums and most public buildings were converted into medical screening and care for the hundreds of thousands stricken citizens.

The public reacted with panic, they rushed the stores for supplies and looting, crime and fear combined in an escalating swirl of vio-

lence. The Florida National Guard was fully activated later that first day and bravely marched to every nook and cranny of the state to preserve order, to find the ill and offer what help they could. Calls to Washington for further help went unanswered.

The National Guard enclosed Tampa Bay while the US Coast guard was sent to enforce a blockade of the bay. All aircraft were grounded, the roads are closed by checkpoints, riots and vigilantes are put down, while MacDill Air Force base stayed on lockdown. Calm and security creeps back while the citizens huddle at home in front of their televisions, feeling like this was part of their usual hurricane experience. Then the dead began to rise.

Rise of the Dead

Nightmares begun to pour from hospitals, stadiums, fire stations and most public buildings to overwhelm the police and Guard units. Huge zombie mobs formed as their numbers grew that shook the earth and tore down buildings through Pinellas County, the most densely populated county in the state. The dead tore into condos and trailer parks like paper, they swarmed over homes as they continued to grow. Architecture worked against the citizens, ranch homes offered nowhere to hide and little to no protection and one dead moan would call a hundred zombies that could take down the walls. People fled ahead of the undead choking the roads, and every main road became a line of zombies feeding and continuing onward.

The US Coast Guard was truly heroic, moving with furious speed to pull people from risk, filling their facilities with refugees, until these facilities finally fell too. When Captain Stevens of the US Coast Guard realized he was senior in command he shifted tactics to dropping survival kits and establishing caches instead of picking up survivors they could not protect. His shift in tactics and acceptance of the severity, the totality of the tragedy before him saved many lives.

Three days after the dead walked, the power and water failed the holdouts, the government was gone and the USCG was only trying to prepare who they could for the new world reality. Lack of water became an immediate issue for the survivors. The hordes dispersed into smaller groups and individuals hunted the urban landscape, looking for survivors struggling to find a safe place to hide.

Fires burn around the city, the dead are victorious. For the next few weeks, the remaining people struggle to find water and food, the hardy few plan how to survive long-term alone and hidden. All their hopes and progress are damaged by a hurricane and flooding that comes three weeks after the Rise.

World of the Dead

After a month, only the quick, the tough and the dead are in Tampa Bay, coping with gators, fire ants and disease. 1.6 million people were whittled down to several thousand scattered, scared, hungry and helpless people hiding out.

The collapse and natural disasters were all so complete and quick to make the area a dangerous treasure trove for scavengers and survivors. The small homes offered no protection but larger Spanish-style homes offered hiding spots, with old stone architecture that could offer shelter. Large waterfront homes offered the hope of fishing for food but less security. The barrier islands, devoid of water and much farmable land, were overrun and lost completely and quickly.

Flooding is a major concern, the hurricanes and rains have damaged the sewers and drainage systems; there is no mosquito control and they grow to spread disease. The area is hard to farm and burning under the sun, but collecting the rain, scavenging and gardening keep hardy survivors alive.

A large portion of South Saint Petersburg has been flooded and damaged by the hurricane, the flooding has also heavily affected the neighborhood of Feathersound and South Tampa. Fires have ravaged a line from US19 through Pinellas County as well as the port of Tampa. In fact, the phosphorus fires will still be burning years later at the port.

All of the roads are clogged with dead vehicles and thick with zombies. The Sunshine Bridge collapsed from damage when a container ship collided with it; the ship is still there amid bridge rubble. The Gandy Bridge is also extremely hazardous.

Safe Havens of Tampa Bay

Port Tampa Library

- Location – South Tampa, Port Tampa Neighborhood.
- General History – Kiel Paxton lived in South Tampa, a hiker, shooter and a bit of a loner. He fought and crawled from his townhouse to the Port Library which could be fortified. Along the way and since while scavenging, he has collected nearly a score of children he protects and cares for in the library. He and the kids use the library to learn urban survival skills and have had good luck.
- Food Production – Water catchers to collect the rains, water storage, and a green roof garden have been created while the residents are working on creating a fish farm to help achieve sustainability. The facility is well stocked with canned food and even 200 MREs.
- Political Organization – Parental family.
- Industry – Extremely limited, electrical power is available via a bicycle generator, basic carpentry, plumbing and so forth, is doable. Knowledge is available in the library books but resources are scarce.
- Population – Kiel as above, Phil, a Special Forces veteran rendered legally blind in Iraq before the wave, and 15 children of ages five to twelve.
- Armaments – Kiel has collected 10 M4 rifles with 3000 rounds, and 12 M9 pistols with 1500 rounds, as all as many axes and knives, plus 8 12-gauge shotguns with 100 shells.
- Special Resources – The Library itself for its shelter and its books.
- Transport Available – A large moving van is ready on site for evacuation.
- General Notes – Knows of and assists the Mom House. Seeking a large boat to equip and leave the area someday, Kiel wants to make for Saint Augustine or Pensacola to inhabit one of the historical forts.

Mom House

- Location – South Tampa waterfront, Clubreath Isles.
- General History – During the Wave, Natalie Purser took in her neighbors and servants for protection, many had husbands traveling or were alone as she was, forming a collection of lost, confused housewives and children. They have had to toughen up, innovate, sacrifice and survive. Today they protect and raise the children communally and take calculated risks to scavenge the community, knowing that hiding is their best protection. They have lost much during the Wave and have since survived by staying calm and thinking through solutions.
- Political Organization – Natalie is clearly the den mother while her former nanny, Evelyn, is seen as her second in command, so no other organization is needed or exists.
- Food Production – Fishing in the Bay, rain barrels, a fish farm in the pool, limited gardening and by scavenging.
- Industry – Cottage textiles by hand and canning.
- Population – 9 adult women and 15 children from ages four to thirteen.
- Armaments – The Mom House has built up a collection of 10 38 caliber revolvers with 250 rounds, as well as 6 12-gauge shotguns with 45 shells, and a collection of knives, axes and hatchets.

- Special Resources – 9500 square foot, 3 level waterfront home in a gated community, since fortified.
- Transport – 3 minivans and a Hummer are available and ready for use.
- General Notes – Can reply on the Library as an ally for defense, trade and scavenging. Among the adult women is a former nurse.

The Mad Paddlers

- Location – Upper Tampa Bay Park in Northwest Tampa.
- General History – A rag-tag collection of survivors who took refuge in the Upper Tampa Bay Park and found each other in need of each other for survival. The park provides a place to hide but is not fortifiable, yet retreat to the water is quick and the water access provides food and regional transport. They survive by hiding, running and scavenging.
- Political Organization – Elected political council of three.
- Food Production – Fishing and large-scale gardening.
- Industry – Woodworking, minor boat repairs, sail making.
- Population – 23
- Armaments – Each community member is armed with a large or medium pistol with 15-40 rounds, and a knife.
- Special Resources – Boat launches and boating equipment, river access, cabins.
- Transport – Many kayaks and canoes, outboard motors and row boats.
- General Notes – 2,144 acre County Park and preserve.

Fort Harrison Scientologists

- Location – Downtown Clearwater.
- General History – The Scientology faith has always been a tight community, so facing the rise of the dead they were able to support each other and establish a safe haven right away at the historic Fort Harrison Hotel in downtown Clearwater, a jewel of their properties.
- Political Organization – Religious.
- Food Production – Rooftop gardening, rain cisterns.
- Industry – None.
- Population – 63
- Armaments – Well-armed, from security guard and police arms.
- Special Resources – None.
- Transport – They keep a cache of small fishing vessels at the water.
- General Notes – Xenophobic and scared, they will not help or open up to anyone not of their faith. However, they do not hold ill will to others.

Boat Community in the Intercoastal

- Location – Intercoastal waterway.
- General History – When the dead rose, many took to the sea but encountered the naval blockade, then storms and limited supply. Those who stayed local and survived began to rely upon each other. This is one of those groupings who met up weathering a storm at a large anchorage and now support each other with their skills, determination and local knowledge. They scavenge carefully, they are not fighters and not well armed, so they use distraction and stealth.

- Political Organization – A council of captains elects the flotilla commander who runs things day to day but defers to the council for long-term planning.
- Food Production – 7 boats used for farming.
- Industry – Gardening, boat repairs, sailmaking.
- Population – 48 adults and 13 children.
- Armaments – Limited to seven rifles and 5 pistols of varied calibers with limited ammo, and a variety of melee weapons.
- Special Resources – None.
- Transport – 22 habited boats (sail and powered of varied sizes) with many having smaller ribs (rigid-inflatable boats) and storage boats alongside.
- General Notes – An isolationist and struggling community.

Lords of the Manor

- Location – Safety Harbor Waterfront Home.
- General History – Crisis can bring out the best or worst in people, and the Lords of the Manor are the latter. Simple men who have been broken by the apocalypse, and who find themselves without hope or civilization gave in to their dark sides and ravage the area, preying on survivors.
- Political Organization – A gang led by their strongest.
- Food Production – None.
- Industry – Limited ammunition reloading.
- Population – 18 members plus seven slave servants.
- Armaments – Five 12-gauge shotguns with 144 shells issued, six 9mm pistols with 200 rounds and 2 30-06 rifles with 204 rounds issued, as well as many melee weapons.
- Special Resources – Cache of preserved foods (canned, MREs, etc.) for 415 man-days of sustenance.
- Transport – 4 motorcycles, several canoes.
- General Notes – These men are cruel savages.

Edgemont Key Lighthouse

- Location – Edgemont Key at the mouth of Tampa Bay.
- General History – A US Coast Guard listening post, they are working to ascertain the situation in Tampa Bay and are doing so quietly. They are not in a position to assist or even get very far inland, but they are simply observing and collecting information as their primary mission, though they will offer assistance. They will not offer information as to their mission, chain of command if any, and only say they are survivors from a sunken Coast Guard cutter.
- Political Organization – Military Hierarchy under the command of Lieutenant Stungis.
- Food Production – Corrals for sheep/goats/cows, and farming.
- Industry – Limited, with a small, portable machine shop.
- Population – 21 men and women.
- Armaments – All personnel have an M4 rifle and M9 pistol with a full combat load.
- Special Resources – Solar panels installed, wind generators, diesel generators, corrals for sheep, goats, cows and farming.
- Transport – 2 large, rigid-inflatable boats with machine-guns.
- General Notes – They are reporting to a higher command, a few surviving US Coast Guard ships that are plying the coast seeking refuge or supplies and doing so by dropping teams in isolated locations to reconnoiter.

Further Notes on the City

These are areas or groups which may affect the characters as they travel through the area at some point, or a specific find they may stumble across. The Game Master may use his discretion to include them or judge them too unbalancing for his campaign and hence, as always is his right, to delete or modify them as he sees fit.

Port Tampa Bay

Not to be confused with the old port neighborhood, this is the large commercial port of Tampa located near downtown Tampa. Operations ceased during the Wave, and the rise of the dead brought fires that caught the fuel bunkers and phosphate docks, and the fires still burn years later.

Port Tampa

Located in the southwesternmost portion within the city limits of Tampa, Florida, on the western end of the Interbay Peninsula. The original and now smaller port operation in Tampa, this was used as a quarantine point for sea-going vessels. Still moored, a small cruise ship sits in the bay (19,000 tons, 550 feet/167.6 m length overall, width/beam of 55 feet/16.7 m with 100 passengers cabins and crew quarters for 33 who were lost to zombies), along with an ocean car ferry, and a dozen yachts.

Rattlesnake Point

On the west of the South Tampa peninsula is a scavenger-rich target containing the small Riverhawk Marine shipyard, a large, dry storage facility for boats (3 stories high, will need an operating forklift to get to any boats), and a National Guard post. The area was used as a staging point by inserted National Guard forces, and they eventually fortified the Peninsula before falling to a zombie mob. Today an Apache AH64 sits on site, there are school buses, boxes and crates strewn everywhere, corpses, gaping holes in the chain-link perimeter fence, collapsed decontamination sheds, a couple of military Trucks, and even a heavy fuel truck. All trucks have over half a tank of fuel, the tanker is $\frac{3}{4}$ full.

US Coast Guard Air Station and Clearwater Airport

Site of the valiant aircrews who worked the impossible mission to save lives, the secure airport was used as a rally point for survivors till overrun. There are still hundreds of zombies on site, though the facility is a treasure trove for foolhardy scavengers. Interestingly, most all aircraft and naval vessels are gone.

US Coast Guard and University of South Florida, St. Pete

This facility held out the longest during the initial rise of the dead though being attached to the urban center of Saint Petersburg meant its doom. Several hundred zombies are on the site though anyone foolish or able enough to gain entry would find stacks of foodstuffs, arms, ammunition and transportation.

MacDill Air Force Base

The airbase went on lockdown during the Wave. The facility housed Special Operations Command and Central Command so was deemed too important to risk.

Tampa International Airport

Located close to Raymond James Stadium and Saint Joseph Hospital, the airport was overrun in the first hours of the dead rising, and lightning strikes have led to fires that have destroyed anything of real value.

Waterfront Home Dock

The mansion has a 35 foot Catalina (sail) boat named *Liquid Assets* docked on a lift, equipped with solar panels, scuba gear, a flare gun with 2 rounds, and 14 man-days of canned food. One zombie is aboard. The house has been gutted by flame.

Rocky Point

Yacht, the *Expiscater*, a 118-foot (36 m) Hatteras cockpit motor yacht tied up at dock with 4 zombies aboard. 7 cabins (2 with crew bunks, 4 guest rooms and one master suite). Equipped with a water osmosis machine, solar panels, radar, long-range radio, fishing equipment and food supplies for a full complement at sea for over a week. The supplies show use after the Wave and rise of the dead. The vessel was probably tied up by a scavenging crew nowhere to be found, their fate unknown.

Clean

A Story for Rifts®

By Irvin Jackson

Part One

As a species, humanity likes to try and explain evil. It comforts us to know that someone was driven to kill by an abusive parent. We nod knowingly when we learn a violent criminal grew up in abject poverty. We feel sympathy when someone snaps after life has screwed them over.

What we don't like is unexplained evil. Evil for no good reason.

Matthew Heath was born in New Colfax, one of the so-called "Old Town" 'Burbs outside of the fortress city of Chi-Town. His parents stayed together until their deaths and raised him and a younger brother in a loving household where, if money was short, the children never knew it. Heath did not see his first D-Bee until he was 12, and did not see his first Dead Body until he was 16. No one abused him. His parents died of health problems long after his heart had turned black. No woman had broken his heart. He never ripped the wings off flies as a child. There was no good reason for Matthew Heath to be what he was.

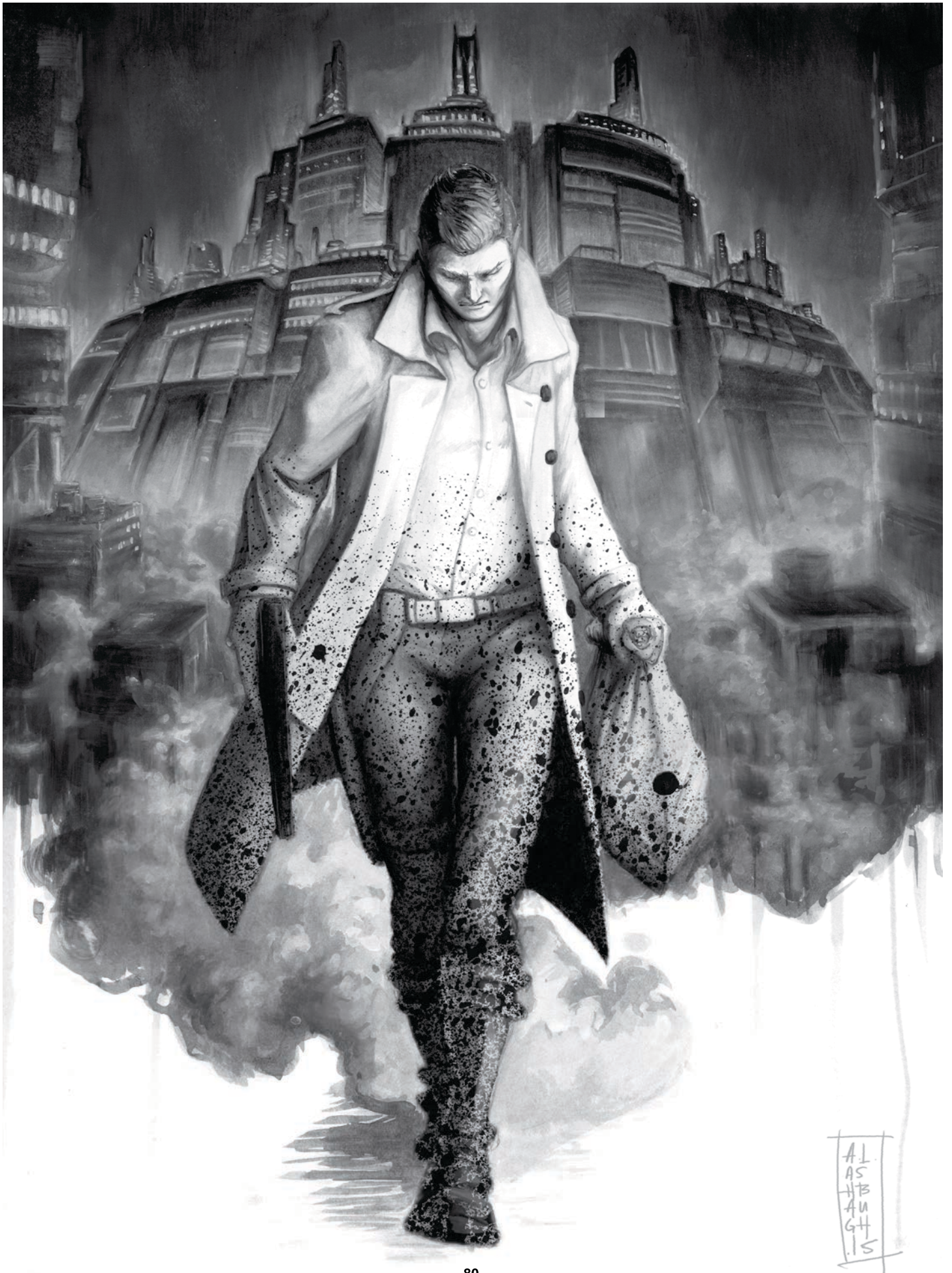
Sometimes evil simply is.

Kara Sinclair, lying stunned on the floor of a dark alley in the 'Burb known as Firetown, was beginning to understand that.

The mercenary had met Heath just a couple of hours ago in a bar. She had accepted a drink, let him charm her, and then walked out with him.

It was a decision that would cost the mercenary her life.

Kara was a Headhunter; one of a select breed of warriors who augmented themselves with cybernetic and bionic attachments. At only 24 years old, she had three campaigns under her belt, and a reputation among her fellow mercenaries for being reliable, tough, and independent.



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The tall blonde was used to getting drink invitations, and even more used to brushing them off. But she had not been to Firetown, or civilization in general, since leaving the ‘Burbs for a three-month expedition into the swamps of the Deep South.

When Matthew Heath approached her he was charmingly aloof, and moved like a man who could take care of himself. But, perhaps most important to someone who had just spent weeks slogging through mosquito-infested swamps, he was immaculately clean.

Tall, Kara figured he was several inches over six feet. Except for the crew cut of black hair, he was extremely clean-shaven. Dressed in a white duster and jet black shirt and pants, Heath was better groomed than a Coalition officer in a parade. His clothes glistened, almost like rubber, but even then they looked pressed. His dark eyes had the look of a predator, which only made Kara more interested.

But above all, he was clean. His nails, cut almost uncomfortably short, were dirt-free. He smelled of fresh, clean soap, with not a hint of any perfume, cologne or deodorant. She had wondered about the black attaché case he carried with him, but in the ‘Burbs you just didn’t ask questions about those kinds of things.

All it had taken was a few words, a couple drinks, and a stun gun in the small of her back.

Looking up at her assailant as he leered over her, the mercenary could not help but fixate on the attaché case again. She had seen those before in the office of numerous Cyber-Docs, her heart sinking as realization set in. She was about to be violated in a way that was only possible in the Hell on Earth that passed for a society in 109 P.A.

Heath calmly kneeled next to her inert body. It was only then that she saw the stun pistol he had used to shoot her in the back. Still having some control of her facial muscles, he saw her wince.

“It’s always the simple things that get us,” Heath said, guessing rightly the thoughts behind her pained expression. With a nearly painstaking effort to avoid touching the ground with anything but the bottoms of his boots, Heath laid out a white cloth, and then the black attaché case.

Looking her over to ensure she was sufficiently stunned, Heath knelt carefully onto the white cloth, opened the case and removed a cleaned, well-kept Wilk’s laser scalpel.

Kara began to cry.

“No, don’t... don’t do that,” Heath said. “It won’t help you. Not with me.”

He stood, checking the charge on the scalpel before walking over to her. Kara noted, even through her rising panic, that his footfalls were markedly muffled and nearly silent even to her amplified hearing.

“Kara Sinclair,” Matthew Heath began, lighting the laser scalpel and adjusting the intensity of the beam, “just so you know, someone with far more money than you will ever have desires your left leg. It is a Series-7, Triax-manufactured Zweites Erzeugung Schnell cyber-leg, correct?”

Kara, of course, did not respond.

Heath nodded to himself, kneeling over her and slitting the young blonde’s expensive leather pants from knee to groin with a deft flick of the laser scalpel. Kara’s heart raced every time the tiny, inch-long, red hyphen at the scalpel’s tip disappeared from her limited field of vision.

“Unfortunately for you, there is a young woman in Chi-Town who is just about exactly your size and in need of a leg. She loved to run, according to her parents,” Heath said, clearing the rest of the leather from her leg. “The Coalition doesn’t allow legs that propel a person over a certain speed, so your particular Triax-made leg is technically illegal. That means her family had to resort to... alternative... methods of acquisition.”

Kara, unable to move her head to look down, could only stare at the pitch blackness of the alley as he began to work in earnest. The smell of the synthetic flesh cooking as he sliced through it burned her nostrils. She forced herself to remember that the skin was not hers, and that she might just survive this if all he wanted was her leg.

“Please do not hope to live through this,” Heath said, reading her face. “Unfortunately, this particular model requires that I slice through your femoral artery for swift and efficient removal. I will leave you in this alley to bleed to death, but I chose this alley because there’s a particularly nasty nest of vampire flat worms just under us. They will finish what I have begun.”

Kara Sinclair, stun gun or not, began to cry again.

“I tell you this not to be cruel,” Heath said, peeling the last of the synthetic skin away, revealing the connection point between Kara’s human hip and her artificial leg. “But to be honest, there is nothing crueler than false hope. If you believe in any god or gods, make your peace with them.”

He saw Kara’s lips begin to move silently as some feeling must have been returning to her body.

Heath stopped, waiting until she was finished before making the final few slices, quickly lifting himself and the bionic leg up and away from the inevitable gush of blood from the severed artery. He cocked his head, reading her lips.

“Catholic? Rare breed these days,” Heath said, turning off the laser scalpel and returning it to the case. He wrapped the leg in heavy, black plastic, and lifted it easily over his shoulder.

Kara, feeling the warmth of her life spill out, felt the ground under her vibrate and roll slightly.

With a Herculean effort, Kara’s lips formed one last request, one last plea for mercy, even as she felt the first sting of a probing bite from the mass of large, pale white worms against her back.

Heath read the words formed by her lips and, still packing up, shook his head.

“Energy clip recharging costs money, Kara. Having mercy would cut into my profit margins,” he said. “I’m sure you understand. It’s business.”

With everything packed up, Heath took one more look around the alley, making sure there was nothing left behind that could link him to the woman’s demise. He noted with disinterest that the worms were now emerging from the rough gravel in earnest as he slipped out of the alley and casually began to stroll back toward the bar.

Still heavily stunned, there was no way for Kara to even scream as the six-foot long, vampiric scavengers began their work.

But she did her best to try.

* * *

Matthew Heath was a Cyber-Snatcher. He made a good living out of stealing the cybernetic and bionic attachments from others, and then selling them to underground doctors who performed illegal cybernetic enhancements. He was not proud of what he did for a living, but he felt no guilt either. In the so-called ‘Burbs that surrounded the fortress city of Chi-Town, he was far from the only man with no guilt, and no conscience.

At the end of the 21st Century, humanity’s time had almost run out. A limited nuclear exchange that killed millions in an instant caused a cascade of mystical energy that transformed the planet, opened the world to a thousand dimensions, and had almost driven mankind to extinction. Everything men had built was virtually obliterated in a series of world-wide tsunamis, planet-rattling earthquakes, freak storms, weather, and a host of alien beings from other worlds that were dumped on Earth by dimensional forces beyond human comprehension. Humanity was almost a minor footnote in Earth’s long history.

Almost.

Three things kept the human race from dying out. The first was simple tenacity. Some of them just could not lie down and die. The survival instinct was too strong in too many of the survivors. Where there appeared to be no way to survive, they found a way.

The second was the return of magic and psychic abilities. The deaths of those initial millions had unleashed a flood of what would eventually become known as Potential Psychic Energy. Every living being has it, and it is doubled and released at death. It is the essence of magic and the supernatural. However, at no point in human history had several million humans died in an instant and had all that energy released at once, and in one place. What had been so small as to be immeasurable with the death of one, or even hundreds of humans before, became a raging torrent. That torrent changed the face of the Earth, and billions perished. Each victim's life energy added to the flood, re-energizing the carnage, claiming more lives. But in its wake were the ley lines; rivers of magic energy that dissect the globe. Men learned to tap that energy, and in some of them, long dormant psychic abilities began to manifest. Some humans, at times coached by the strange beings from beyond the dimensional tears known as the Rifts, even learned to do magic.

The third factor in mankind's survival was technology. Humanity had been at the height of a golden age of human augmentation, medical advancement, and robotic and cybernetic technology. Nowhere was this more apparent than in the men who were sent to war. Infantry soldiers came wrapped in advanced polymer armors that could deflect 20th Century tank rounds. Special forces units had their bodies amped up by computer-monitored and released drug cocktails or even brain implants that gave them superhuman strength, agility, endurance and reaction times. And some had even learned to replace man's fragile bodies with machines.

Even with all of that, it took centuries for mankind to claw its way out of a post-apocalyptic Dark Age. When it did, the Coalition States were born.

The Coalition States were founded by the rulers of several North American city-states that relied almost exclusively on technology left behind by their ancestors. They used advanced building techniques to shelter their capitals in cocoons of nearly impregnable materials. They gave their soldiers cutting-edge weaponry and equipment, from firearms that spat plasma and particle beams to hulking giant robots that could single-handedly level entire towns. They barred all other-dimensional beings (known as "D-Bees" to most) and magic from their borders, declaring Earth for humanity only.

The massive city-states, like the Coalition's capital city, Chi-Town, quickly filled with refugees, until they virtually stopped taking new citizens. But still, the people came. Barred entry to the fortress cities, refugees from across the wasteland that was once North America simply camped outside of the massive city walls, hoping against hope that they would be one of the lucky few chosen to be a new citizen of the Coalition States. After nearly 100 years, many have given up, but with nowhere else to turn and nowhere else to go, they stayed.

In many cases, tent cities gave way to shanty towns, and in some cases, shanty towns gave way to nearly modern cities. If they could not be protected within the walls of the fortress cities, they could be content, at least, to be protected by their shadows.

Some, however, simply like living in shadows.

* * *

Matt emerged from some of those shadows back onto the main drag through Firetown, nonchalant despite the oddly-shaped, plastic parcel over his shoulder and the attaché case in his hand. He had little to fear from those out on the streets in Firetown. If you were out after

dark here, there was a good chance you were up to no good anyway. Besides, it did not pay these days to ask questions.

He had parked his Rolling Thunder All-Terrain Vehicle a good three blocks from the bar, and took a roundabout route to get back to it. He knew Kara had been at the bar alone, but that did not mean she had no friends nearby at all. What was more, someone was likely to ask what had happened to her, and he wanted as little connection to the incident as possible. Nobody at the bar knew him. It wasn't the kind of place he would frequent. Her friends could try and interview people if they wanted to, but Matt wasn't worried about that. Residents of the 'Burbs were notoriously inept at remembering faces.

Matt walked easily, but alertly, past families huddled around barrels of burning debris on the side of the road, and past hookers whose clients were content to be served just a few feet into darkened alleyways. None of it bothered him. His only concern was that none of them touch him. That none of them got him dirty.

Reaching the gloss-black, large-wheeled ATV, Matt hauled himself up the raised running board to the driver's side door, deactivating the alarm and kill switch with a swipe of his thumb over a concealed print scanner. He opened the heavy, armored door, tossing the pilfered leg onto the passenger seat and closing the door firmly shut.

Snatching a box of disinfectant wipes out of his coat pocket, he thoroughly scrubbed the pad of his thumb where it had touched the door. There was always the chance someone had touched it in hopes that he'd left the door open.

With another swipe of his thumb, this time over the ignition button, the powerful gas motor rumbled to life, and Matt hauled the large, rounded, armored combat car onto the street.

His preference would have been to go home first, and shower thoroughly, but business came first.

The Cyber-Snatcher aimed the vehicle toward Staunton Heights, one of the more respectable of the new 'Burbs, leaving the squalor of Firetown swiftly behind him.

About 20 minutes later he pulled up to a darkened office on one of the numerous hills that made up the Heights. The building was a squat, two-story slab of concrete with no outward adornment; glass-block windows that let in light, but little else, and a heavy metal door. The lawn covering the small patch of dirt that stood between the building and the gravel street had died long ago. Matt pulled the huge, black car right up onto it, as close to the door as possible.

It wasn't that he cared if anyone saw him bringing a cybernetic leg into Doctor Halloway's office. Matt was sure most, if not all, of the Doc's neighbors knew what kind of business he ran. Hell, half of the neighbors had probably used his services, Matt figured. Staunton Heights was a 'Burb known to cater to wealthy mercenaries and adventurers, who regularly dealt with people of less than questionable moral character. People like him.

Matt should know. He lived only a few blocks away.

Being seen was not the problem. But more than anything, Matt tried to avoid walking in the brown stubble-shrouded dirt outside Doc Halloway's door.

Nimble hopping from the running board to the small step, Matt did not have to knock on the door; a bleary-eyed Doc was already holding it open with one hand, while the other gripped a large ion pistol.

"Geez, Matt, couldn't it wait until morning?" Doc asked, tiredly eyeing the plastic bundle Matt dragged from the passenger's seat. "Not like it was going anywhere."

Matt grunted as he pushed past the doctor into his house, regardless of the pistol.

"You know I can't take this thing home. I had to sever her femoral artery to get it off. She bled like a stuck pig," Matt said, looking around the front of Halloway's makeshift home office to ensure they

were alone. Matt didn't need anyone knowing his business who did not have to.

He eyed the doc over, making sure he was sober. The tall, lanky, silver-haired doctor looked haggard, hollow-eyed and like he had not shaved in several days, but that was how he normally looked. Tired though he looked, Matt could tell the doctor was on his game.

Halloway shook his head at Matt's concern.

"Take it back into my operating room and set it on the table while I make some coffee," Doc Halloway said. "Just leave it wrapped. I'll clean it up later."

Matt nodded and hauled the leg toward the door in the back. The front of Doc Halloway's house looked like a typical home office. It had a small sofa and loveseat on either side of a low-slung, steel coffee table, a wall-screen television, a wet bar and a bookshelf full of both micro laser discs and actual books made from real paper. There was a flight of steps that presumably went up to the Cyber-Doc's bedroom and more private area, but Matt had never been up there. Matt figured it was safe to assume the doc did not sleep on the cold, metal operating table beyond the thick metal door at the back of the room.

Matt slipped into the back room and quickly dropped the leg onto Halloway's pristine operating table. The room was in sharp contrast to the homey, lived-in look of the rest of the house. This room was all white tile and surgical steel. Stark lighting and the smell of bleach disinfectant.

It was clean.

Matt took a moment to inhale a few breaths and relax, leaning against a tiled wall and letting the tension ease from his body until the smell of coffee wafted through the door. Straightening up and regaining his composure, he returned to the front room, where Halloway was pouring himself a cup.

"Want some?" Halloway asked, dropping his tall frame into the dark blue love seat. He raised the tray to Matt, who eyed it dubiously.

"Not unless I watch you make it, you know that," Matt said, lowering himself gingerly onto the very edge of the sofa.

"You think I'd poison you? My best Snatcher?"

Matt raised an eyebrow. "Hardly. You know what side your bread is buttered on. I hope. But unless I crack open the safety seal on the water, and the coffee grounds, and supply the cup myself, I don't drink what others give me."

Halloway shook his head and took a sip of his heavily creamed and sugared coffee. "How the hell you survive here with that affliction of yours is beyond me."

"Affliction? I like to stay clean and I like to know what's going into my body," Matt said defensively. This was not the first time they'd had this conversation. "When did that become an affliction?"

"When you go to the extremes that you go to in order to stay clean, it's an affliction," Halloway countered. "I can't imagine what your house is like."

"Clean. That's what it's like," Matt said. "Look, you know how people say that self-control and conquering our instincts is what separates us from the animals?"

The doctor nodded, eyeing Matt over the rim of his cup.

"Well, I think they're wrong," Matt continued. "It's the ability to clean up our mess, scrub away the dirt and grime, and get ourselves truly clean, that's the mark of society. That's the sign of a higher species."

"Cats clean themselves all the time," the doctor countered.

"Yeah, well if you consider licking your own ass a mark of sanitary upkeep, I'm never letting you operate on me."

"Point taken," the doc conceded, draining his cup. "Speaking of keeping your ass clean..."

"I dropped her off in that alley I told you about. No worries," Matt said, heading off Halloway's question. "There won't be enough of her left for her friends to be able to track back to me... if they ever find the body anyway. Two-legged scavengers will make off with whatever the flatworms don't eat."

"Well, good work anyway," the doctor said, fishing out a small black card and handing it over to Matt. "That's 4,000, like we agreed. Combined with what you probably got off of her..."

"Nothing," Matt said. "I didn't get anything off of her but the leg."

Halloway raised an eyebrow. "You'd think the girl would have at least stocked up on creds if she was going out."

"Oh, I don't doubt she had quite a bit of money on her," Matt said. "I just didn't take it."

"Why the hell not?"

"Mages and psychics. I've heard they can focus on items that used to belong to someone and see who has them," Matt said. "I'm not taking that kind of chance. I don't screw with magic if I can avoid it. I'm a Cyber-Snatcher. Cybernetics destroy the body's ability to make magic. Nobody I face down can do as much as pull a rabbit out of their hat."

The doctor nodded, seeing the logic. He leaned back and took a moment to size Matt up. Always tense. Always alert. Posture nearly perfect. Immaculately groomed.

Matt cocked his head at the scrutiny.

"You know, I've heard you turned down an offer to join the Black Market," Doc said. "Why?"

"Control," Matt answered. "You're a soldier at that point, taking orders. You jump when they say jump. That's not my thing."

"You could be making triple the money you make with me, though," Doc speculated. "Hell of a trade-off."

"Depends on what your priorities are," Matt said, eyeing Halloway closely. "Why the inquisition?"

"I've got a special order that came in," Halloway said, seeming to have come to an internal decision. "Big payoff. But not sure it's your kind of gig."

Matt leaned forward a bit. "A snatch? What kind of snatch wouldn't be my kind of gig?"

"Because, near as I can tell, they're not after a specific piece of hardware, but instead a specific person," he replied.

Matt frowned, leaning back in disappointment.

"Sounds like wet work," Matt frowned. "Why would they come to you, and what's the connection to my line of work?"

The Cyber-Doc glanced ruefully down at the empty cup in his hands, and then set it down.

"They want someone to remove every piece of bionics and cybernetics in the target," he said. "From bionic arm to headjack."

"Ouch. Somebody knows how to make enemies," Matt said. "How much are we talking?"

"One hundred thousand credits," Halloway said with mock casualness, watching closely for Matt's reaction.

If he was expecting a more graphic display of emotion beyond a slight widening of the eyes, he was disappointed.

"Must be somebody special," Matt said. "Or someone really, really pissed someone else off. Who's the mark?"

"If I tell you, it means you're taking the job," the Cyber-Doc cautioned.

Matt thought it over for a moment. Then nodded.

"Target's a Captain Simon Fielding, Coalition Military Intelligence."

"Damn it, Halloway," Matt snarled. "You know I can't get into Chi-Town now, not after the war..."

"No worries," Halloway raised his hands defensively. "He has a special friend in the Stockyard that he visits whenever he's in town. He's coming back from a mission in Tolkeen in the next few days, according to the client."

Matt bit back a laugh. "The Stockyard is blue collar 'Burbie heaven. What the hell is he doing there?"

Halloway smiled. "That friend of his is not the kind of friend an upstanding Coalition intelligence officer should be having, let's put it that way."

"Working girl... of the inhuman variety?"

Halloway nodded. "Irony... it's why I believe in a higher power."

Matt chuckled, rising. "It's usually why I don't."

"Go see Twitch in the morning," Halloway said. "She's got something that will help. Remember, if Captain Fielding wasn't born with it, take it."

"Got it," Matt said, making his way to the door. "Hope the poor guy doesn't have fillings."

"Good hunting, Matt," Halloway said, placing his cup, spoon, cream and sugar back on the coffee tray. He paused as Matt reached the door, however. "Wait, Matt. Those mages. Could they do that tracking trick through someone's cybernetics?"

"You know, I've wondered that myself," Matt shrugged. "If I hear someone's turned you into a frog, I'll have my answer I guess. In the meantime, you notice I never hang out here more than ten minutes after a job?"

"Paranoid son of a bitch," Halloway muttered under his breath, forgetting briefly about Matt's amplified cybernetic hearing.

"Keeps me breathin', Doc," Matt said, not looking back as he walked through the door.

Halloway did not sleep well that night, which he was sure was Matt's intention.

* * *

It was after 2 a.m. when Matt finally pulled up to the squat gray, one-story chunk of cinder block he called a home. The unremarkable, unadorned house was attached to a large, reinforced garage where Matt stored the Rolling Thunder.

The garage also allowed him to move into and out of the house unseen. Most of Matt's neighbors had no idea what he looked like.

Staunton Heights was built into a series of hills that overlooked most of the 'Burbs. Each street was another step up the hills. This allowed most homes in Staunton Heights to have a good view of the 'Burbs and the looming bulk of Chi-Town itself. The higher into the hills you went, the more affluent and prestigious the homes and their owners.

There were two reasons for moving to Staunton Heights for most of its residents. First, it marked you as successful in professions most considered dangerous. Mercenaries, explorers, assassins, scouts, smugglers, and anyone whose livelihood involved either a gun or going someplace most sane men and women would avoid like the plague, made up the bulk of Staunton Height's residents. It marked you as successful in your field to live there.

The second reason was for the view. And Matt's home had no windows.

After locking down both the ATV and the garage, Matt went to a corner of the garage and opened a small utility closet, taking out a bucket and a mop, and a pair of heavy rubber gloves. He then moved over to a small metal sink, filling the bucket with steaming hot water, lye soap and bleach. Moving behind the Rolling Thunder, he spent the next 15 minutes furiously mopping away at any dirt the vehicle had tracked into the garage.

Once he was finished, he scrubbed the bucket and mop clean. Then he wrapped the mop in plastic after wringing it out, so that it did not drip onto the utility closet floor.

Matt stepped into the house itself after removing his shoes at the door. All of the floors were tiled. There was no carpeting. His home was sparsely furnished in colors of white and steel. It would be obvious to anyone that the owner never intended to have guests. There was almost never more than one chair in a room, and most of the tables were the size of nightstands. There were no wall decorations of any kind. And there were no windows to break the monotony of the white-washed cement walls.

Moving through what barely passed for a living room, Matt hurriedly went into the expansive bathroom, the one place in the house that was truly given over to luxury and excess. It was one of the larger rooms in the house, with a multi-head, glass-enclosed shower, separate Jacuzzi tub, and industrial-sized double-sink.

One wall was entirely given over to various cleaning products, sponges, brushes, and towels. Each product had been removed from its original container, poured or otherwise placed into sterilized glass bottles and then labeled in clear, bold lettering.

Matt quickly stripped out of his clothing, ignoring the painful cold of the floor. He flipped a switch on the wall that activated a brutally efficient dehumidifier before turning the shower's hot water on full blast. Beside the shower there were two squat, industrial autoclaves. In one, which used water, he dumped most of the tools he'd used on Kara Sinclair, except for the valuable electronics of the Wilk's Laser Scalpel, which he would clean himself later. The other autoclave used chemical steam to sterilize things, and into this he placed the clothing he had worn.

Finally, he stepped into the searing hot shower, and truly relaxed for the first time in many hours. After several minutes just soaking in the hot spray, Matt looked himself over and decided he needed only a mild cleaning tonight, grabbed a stiff wire brush and began scrubbing.

It was a long time before he climbed into a bed covered with sheets that themselves went into the autoclave every morning, checked the charge on the heavy laser pistol he kept next to the bed, and went to sleep with the lights on.

* * *

The next morning, after a repeat of the same ritualized cleaning he did before he went to bed, Matt set out for the 'Burb of Center Court. Since it was a short walk of only about two miles, he left the Rolling Thunder secure in the garage. There would be no safe place to park it where he was going.

Due to the lack of infrastructure, an inability of mankind to re-establish itself in space and true telecommunications, and the general nature of many of the 'Burbs' residents, there was no telephone system. Many people communicated by radio, but there were a couple million people in the collective 'Burbs surrounding Chi-Town, and no regulating agency that could effectively decide who got to use what frequency. Throughout the 'Burbs there were wireless communications emitters, once known as wi-fi before the Rifts, but they were notoriously spotty and insecure, and primarily the purview of underground computer hackers. That made communicating in the 'Burbs via long distance rather impractical, so if you wanted to talk to somebody, you went to see them.

Matt had heard that one of the Old Town 'Burbs had tried to install a telephone system for its residents, but scavengers had repeatedly vandalized both the fiber optic wiring and the utility boxes for valuable parts to sell to local junk dealers. The main means of mass communication was from television and radio signals blasted out of Chi-Town 24 hours a day in the form of "Public Service Announce-

ments” and news feeds that trumpeted the successes and superior values of the Coalition States and its ruler, Emperor Prosek.

Of course, one had to prepare for a trip through the ‘Burbs, especially if you were going somewhere like Center Court. Matt’s primary means of protection was a suit of Huntsman light body armor. The suit relied on padding constructed of advanced polymers and strategically placed ceramic plates, yet was light enough to be worn without drawing attention to oneself. Its primary disadvantages were that it would not be effective in a long firefight, nor did it offer fully environmental protection like many armors currently on the market.

However, Matt figured that if he handled his business the right way, he wouldn’t need either feature.

Besides the armor, he wore a surgical mask over his face whenever he left the house. This wasn’t too unusual in the ‘Burbs, however, especially the New Town ‘Burbs and shanty towns. Many places around Chi-Town were under a perpetual cloud of pollution that wreaked havoc on the human respiratory system.

For more active means of self-defense, Matt carried a Vibro-Knife in a belt sheath, and a Wilk’s Hold-Out pistol in a concealed shoulder holster. While both were hidden from casual inspection, Matt made sure that anyone looking closely could tell they were there. That generally prevented him from needing to actually use them.

Matt could have caught one of the numerous so-called “gypsy cabs” or rickshaws that hawked their services along every road in the ‘Burbs, but he elected to walk. One could learn a lot about what was going on in the ‘Burbs simply by walking through them and observing. Additionally, the amplified hearing from his cybernetic ear implant allowed him to hear every whispered comment and hushed conversation in a block radius.

As its name suggested, Center Court was placed close to the center of most of the New Town ‘Burbs. A raucous collection of shops, markets and open lots filled with vendors of all kinds, the small ‘Burb had become the center of trade in the sprawling mass of humanity that perched on Chi-Town’s doorstep.

Many of the communities had, over time, developed building themes and a general sense of architecture and design that dominated most buildings in that ‘Burb. But not Center Court. Every building seemed to have been built with no thought to the structures it would be neighboring. There was also little regard for street plan, future expansion, comfort or safety. There was a building wherever someone could cram enough floor space to open a shop. Many were not even buildings. Many shops consisted of tents, lean-tos and even free-standing awnings meant to keep shelves of goods dry from the rain.

Center Court was always crowded, but less so in the early morning hours in which Matt had chosen to visit. Most transactions being conducted this early were at the frequent noodle and stew stands that were peppered in massive numbers across all of the ‘Burbs.

Matt never ate at them, however. The thought of using one of the barely washed bowls and spoons to shovel who-knows-what into his body filled him with near-horror. He generally existed off of a diet of Coalition Meals Ready to Eat (MREs) and water that he ran through his own personal filter.

He was not here for breakfast anyway. Passing through a couple alleys, stepping over more than one body, Matt found his way to a small, dead-end street, barely wide enough for four men to walk abreast. The small corridor was surrounded by three-story buildings, some of which looked like they threatened to fall over and crush the crowd of more illicit vendors that set up carts there.

Matt zeroed in on a small electronics shop that was closed this early in the morning. Banging on the wrought-iron grating that barred the door before normal business hours (which for this shop, started at noon), Matt looked up to where he knew a hidden camera was staring back at him.

“Twitch, open the damn door,” he muttered, knowing the directional mic would pick the comment up.

There was a buzzing sound and the grate clinked imperceptibly as the magnetic lock released. He pushed the grating to the side and opened the door into the shop, which was little more than a front room crowded with computer parts, video and audio equipment, and tools for fine computer work scattered about on a haphazard arrangement of tables.

Being careful to close the grate and the door behind him, Matt walked through the room to the back door just as it opened to let him in. Holding the door open with one hand, partially shielding herself with it, was Twitch.

“Put the gun down, Twitch,” Matt said. “It really is me.”

Twitch nodded sleepily, closing the door behind her and putting the C-18 Coalition Officer’s Pistol onto a table. Beckoning Matt to follow, the young woman ran a hand through her short, mousy-brown hair and stomped up the steps to her private apartment.

Twitch led Matt up into a cluttered, studio apartment consisting mainly of a bedroom and small bathroom. Circuit boards, wiring, small tools and computer parts cluttered every surface, including the unmade bed that seemed to be set randomly in the middle of the room. Matt only suffered visiting the girl because he considered her a genius.

Barely topping five feet, and looking chronically underfed, Twitch had made a name for herself as something beyond the typical street-raised computer hacker that frequented the ‘Burbs. She was a programmer extraordinaire who specialized in writing tailor-made computer code for very specific purposes, most of them illicit. Matt had heard that she’d been offered a position at Northern Gun to help write robot protocols, but she got angry whenever the topic was raised, and he did not care enough to risk alienating her.

She had features most would consider to be cute, with very pale blue eyes, a small, pert nose and clean features that spoke of a blend of Asian and Nordic heritage. She had tried to get Matt to climb over the scattered circuitry and programming discs and onto her bed on several occasions, but Matt had declined.

She sometimes assumed it was because she was about half his age, and he was barely over thirty, but in truth it was her aversion to showering on a regular basis. It was also the fact that Matt suspected that the denim cut-off shorts that were a size too large and fell too low on her hips, and the old T-shirt depicting Emperor Prosek with a single bullet hole in his forehead, made up the bulk of her wardrobe. And he could not recall a single time he’d ever seen her in a pair of shoes.

Scratching chronically at the back of her shorts, Twitch crawled back into her bed and crossed her legs, pulling over a portable computer and rolling up the flexi-screen. She reached to a small port on the computer and pulled out a thin cord, flipping up the hair on the right side of her head and plugging it into the headjack just behind her ear with practiced ease.

“Doc told you I had something for you? Or is this a courtesy visit?” she said with feigned hope.

Matt grunted, finding the relatively cleanest spot on the floor and standing there. “Business,” he said, knowing she knew that already from the way she’d immediately plugged in. “He told me you had something I’d need for a special job he’s got me on.”

“Yep,” she nodded, partially preoccupied with scrounging around the clutter on the headboard for a cup of noodles that she’d started working on sometime last night. Using a system of trial and error sniffing, she sorted through several half-eaten bowls before finding the one that apparently was fresh enough to pass muster.

Matt reflected on the fact that, as much as she had worked for Halloway, the Cyber-Doc had never met her. Most of Twitch’s cus-

tomers, in fact, had never seen her face. The customers who bought supplies from her store had no idea that she was the somewhat well-known hacker. Matt was not sure why he had been privileged to know what she looked like and who she really was; Twitch had been the one to initiate a face-to-face meeting with him a little over a year ago.

One had to be patient with Twitch, Matt knew, but still it was a trial. She seemed to live in a state of permanent distraction. Her attention was never fully on anything. It had taken a year before Matt realized why that was. When she was plugged in to her laptop, she had the Coalition's cyber news feed scrolling across one half of her screen, a local pirate cybercast that was beamed wirelessly across Center Court on the other half, and was just as likely to be writing a program and memorizing it solely in her mind.

Still, it was sometimes infuriating when she seemed to forget you were there while rummaging for noodles that had managed to stay somewhat edible throughout the night.

"Twitch..."

"Right!" She placed the bowl to the side, becoming more animated, her eyes focusing on Matt again. "Yeah, I've got something you might find really useful."

She tossed back the sheets and flipped through a small pile of micro-disc cases before finding the object of her search. Holding it up in triumph, she showed it to Matt as though that action alone was worthy of applause.

"What is it?"

"It's a program, silly."

"Twitch..."

Matt got a certain tone in his voice that Twitch recognized. Frowning at his apparent lack of a sense of humor, she popped open the case and slipped the disc into her computer, turning the screen towards him.

"Doc said you'd need a way to find every bit of bionics and cybernetics in a person's body," she said, taking a moment to shovel some more noodles into her mouth before continuing with a slurp. "So I took one of the diagnostic programs Cyber-Docs use to tell what's wrong with someone's internal hardware, and added a search routine."

Matt nodded. It sounded straightforward enough.

"I take it they have to have a headjack?"

"Yeah," Twitch frowned. "Most Cyber-Docs have a diagnostic scanner hooked up in their operating room, but those things are like 200 pounds and cost a small fortune. This way, you just plug in and mass download everything they've got."

"I didn't think the headjack connected to every piece of cybernetics someone had," Matt frowned.

"Well, when you start putting multiple pieces of hardware into the human body, you have to coordinate things somehow," Twitch explained. "If you have a cybernetic eye with a targeting computer, it has to sync with the ion gun in your cyber-arm, otherwise there's no point in having it."

She pressed a couple buttons on the computer and used herself as an example. Her gear was almost all headware; the headjack, one eye, a gyro-compass and clock calendar. What surprised Matt was that she had an artificial heart and lung system.

"When did that happen?" he asked.

"Oh, they were defective when I was born. My parents had them replaced when I was a kid, but it stunted my growth a bit," she shrugged. "I forget they're there sometimes."

"You must have come from money," Matt said. "That type of gear isn't cheap, especially sized for a child."

"Not really," Twitch shrugged, popping a second disc into her computer. "They hired... someone like you."

Matt raised his eyebrows.

"I always wondered what your fascination with me was," he said. "What were you hoping? To find someone decent underneath the surface?"

Twitch rolled her eyes.

"No. It wasn't like that at all," she frowned. "I know who and what you are. But I'd be a hypocrite if I criticized you for it. If it weren't for someone like you, a lot of people wouldn't be here."

Matt shook his head.

"I hope you don't think that's why I do it," he said. "I took you for smarter than that."

"Naw, you do it for the creds. I know that," Twitch grinned, nimbly ejecting the disc and placing it in a small case. She tossed it to Matt casually. "Two grand, sweetie."

Matt grimaced. "That program took you all of, what, two hours to write?"

"Ninety-five minutes, thank you very much," she feigned offense. "But that's not just the usual one-job program. You'll be able to use that for as long as you're in business."

Matt stood, slipping the disc into his pocket, and pulling out a Black Market Credit Voucher. He put his thumb over a small square on the card and waved it past the optical scanner on Twitch's computer. She glanced at the screen and nodded in satisfaction as it quietly announced the 2,000 credit transfer.

"So, I just connect their headjack to my portable and run the program?"

"Ha! Like I'm such an amateur," Twitch grinned. "It'll detect the moment you connect a headjack to your computer. Plug and play, baby."

"Good deal," Matt said, stepping gingerly over the clutter towards the door. "If it doesn't work, I'll want my money back."

Twitch rolled her eyes. Her programs always worked.

As Matt reached the door, he could feel her eyes boring into his back. He turned and saw her sitting there, staring at him.

"You know, one day I looked her up," Twitch said thoughtfully.

"Who?"

"The girl my lungs and heart came from," Twitch said. "I think... I was hoping that..."

"You were hoping to find out something horrible about her, to make yourself feel better," Matt finished. She nodded. "And did you?"

She shook her head, not looking him in the eye.

"Nobody actually deserves it, Twitch," Matt said, opening the door to the steps.

"Then why do you do it?"

"Because it's what I'm good at, I get to set my own hours, and the money's fantastic," he quipped, before closing the door firmly behind him and heading back into the early morning chaos of Center Court.

* * *

It took the Cyber-Snatcher three days and about 500 credits in bribes before he was able to find out which whorehouse in the Stockyard Captain Fielding frequented, when he usually was in attendance, and which girl was his favorite. This was not because the Captain's trail was easy to follow, quite the opposite. Fielding had made good use of his intelligence background to make his activities very hard to track.

But there were two problems that Fielding had overlooked. Firstly, he was a Coalition soldier. There was always someone in the 'Burbs who was willing to roll over on a Coalition soldier. While most feigned sympathy for their cause and many prayed for the day they would be accepted into the fortress walls of Chi-Town, there

were still plenty of malcontents who hated everything about them. They lived in the city's shadows out of practicality.

Life was terrible in the 'Burbs for most of its residents, but that was nothing compared to the Hell on Earth that existed outside of the Coalition's sphere of influence. True enough, there were cities and nations beyond the Coalition that were just as safe, and some with more freedoms and more tolerance for beings of all types, but getting there across the uncontrolled wastelands of North America was easier said than done. Heath, for instance, had never been beyond the borders of the 'Burbs.

The other reason it was fairly easy to find Captain Fielding was because he was a Coalition officer frequenting an inhuman prostitute. The Coalition had a stern policy against nonhumans. That policy often was expressed by the barrel of a gun. As a result, D-Bees were not interested in keeping a Coalition officer's secret. Matt hoped this extended to the prostitute he frequented.

Finding the right brothel was a simple matter. Most of them only employed human women. This was still the 'Burbs, after all, where many residents hoped to gain citizenry to Chi-Town. Fraternizing with D-Bees was definitely not the way to endear yourself to the human supremacist empire. So most businesses tried to, outwardly at least, match the Coalition's human supremacist views. That even included many of the whorehouses.

Matt figured that, also, Fielding wasn't going to go someplace that was too disreputable, dangerous and dirty. So what he needed was a "reputable" and relatively clean brothel that employed some D-Bees, probably human-looking.

Most of the Stockyard was factories and industry, many of them owned by corporations headquartered inside Chi-Town who took advantage of the cheap labor of the 'Burbs, and the fact that nobody could complain when they dumped tons of pollutants in the air and water. Here there were no unions, no regulatory agencies and no workers' rights. Shifts lasted, on average, 12 hours a day for six to seven days a week. Pay was decent for 'Burbs industrial jobs, which was to say that unless you had a specific skill, it was barely enough to get by from one day to the next.

This was what it meant to be "blue collar" in 109 P.A. in the shadow of Chi-Town. Grueling hours, backbreaking work, nonexistent safety precautions, and meager pay. Still, the factories and plants supported a large segment of the economy of the 'Burbs, and most residents were grateful they were there. While the pay may have been pathetic for one person, in many cases whole families worked in one factory, or were spread across several. Mother, father, children, grandparents; all often worked their lives away in the Stockyard. When they pooled that money, many were able to carve out a frugal, but passable, living.

If you were fortunate enough to make foreman, or had an aptitude with an actual marketable skill, you got paid something close to a halfway decent salary. Many of the people who made that kind of money wanted to occasionally spend it on something besides food.

Like all blue collar communities throughout human history, the Stockyard gave rise to blue collar entertainment. Bars, pubs, underground movie houses, casinos and brothels, all found ways to relieve the overworked people of the Stockyard of any spare cash they thought they might have. Most, as one might expect, were dives.

So it was fairly easy for Matt to pick out the brothel frequented by Captain Fielding from its more run-down competitors. A word on the street here and there about where to get the cleanest, best, and most expensive and exotic girls led him to Good Karma's.

The four-story building appeared to be an actual original structure salvaged from before the time of the Rifts that may have still stood on the site when squatters first moved into what eventually became the 'Burbs. That alone categorized it as a business of higher-than-

usual standing. The first floor of the building had a large porch that stretched from one side to the other across its broad facade. About a dozen girls were lounging on a variety of folding chairs, fanning themselves in the summer heat. Some were looking for prospective customers, while others chatted to current customers or each other. Most were scantily dressed, although they apparently practiced the art of leaving just enough to the imagination to entice. A lot of brothels did not show such restraint.

Matt scanned the porch as he walked up the cobblestone steps, causing several girls to straighten up and pose a bit to get his attention, but as all of them were human, he ignored them and headed for the large French doors. The glass in the doors had long ago been broken or stolen, and had been replaced by metal plates.

Stepping out of the mid-day sun, Matt was stopped by a powerful hand to his chest, which seemed to shoot out from the shadows at the side of the door.

"No guns," said a slightly synthetic voice.

Matt followed the arm to a large, heavily-scarred man dressed in body armor comprised of heavy plates painted in urban camouflage colors. At just a glance, Matt knew the man was, at the very least, a Partial Conversion Cyborg. The arm that had stopped him was obviously a bionic replacement. He hadn't even bothered with an artificial skin covering. His right eye was also obviously a cybernetic replacement; a round, black ring surrounding a glowing red cyber-eye.

The side of the face with the eye was a mass of scar tissue that went down his neck into the armor. Since the bionic arm was also on his right side, Matt assumed that most of that side had been replaced with cybernetics and bionics due to some unfortunate incident. He shifted his weight minutely to the right as he faced the bouncer, intending to strike at his left side if it came to that.

Matt slowly opened his coat and pulled out his pistol, handing it over butt first. He made no move toward the Vibro-Blade on his hip, keeping it covered with the coat.

The cyborg took the pistol respectfully and turned to the wall behind him, which held about two dozen small lockboxes. He put the pistol inside of one, locked it, removed the key, and handed the key to Matt.

"You get it back when you leave," he said. "The knife you can keep."

The bouncer chuckled at the look on Matt's face and leaned back against the wall, already considering Matt yesterday's news.

Continuing into the foyer, pocketing the key, Matt approached the main desk. Behind it was an older, dark-haired woman who was beginning the shift from simply heavy-set to genuinely corpulent. On the wall behind her was a large photograph that Matt recognized as being her from several decades ago. Back then, she had been stunning. Those days had long since passed.

As opposed to some high-minded principle of universal justice, Good Karma's was named after its proprietor, Karma. She eyed Matt over carefully, making a snap judgment that came from years of dealing with street life in the 'Burbs.

"We sell two things here," she said, barely looking up from a small computer pad on the desk. "Women and books. The women are legal, the books ain't."

"Why the hell are you telling me that, then?" Matt asked.

"Cuz you ain't here for women," she said resolutely. "So I'm assuming you're here for the books."

Matt wondered if he'd just been insulted.

"I don't mean it that way," she laughed, apparently seeing the look of consternation on his face. "It's just that guys that want company carry themselves a different way when they come in here."

Matt nodded. "Well, you're halfway right. I'm not here for women. But I'm not here for books either."

Matt watched her hand casually stray beneath the desk.

"What are you here for then?" she asked.

"Information," he said.

"Oh, we sell that too," she laughed, bringing her hand back above the desktop. "But it can be more expensive than the whores or the books, depending on what you're asking."

"Who's Captain Fielding's favorite girl?" Matt asked bluntly. Karma's face lost much of its joviality.

"Well, you see, that's one of those things that's more expensive than whores or books," she said, with a tight smile.

Matt slapped a 200 credit voucher card down on the desk. Karma shook her head.

"That wouldn't even get you a book, much less information," she shrugged. "It'd get you a girl though..."

Matt doubled it, and she quickly snatched the two cards.

"Valana is his girl," she said, slipping the two cards into an ample bosom. "I'll call her for you, but I don't want you to start any trouble, got it?"

Matt glanced back at the foyer, where the partial reconstruction cyborg bouncer was watching intently for trouble.

"Our conversation will be trouble-free," he said. "I promise you."

She nodded, satisfied, and got up with a great effort. Matt kept a wince to himself as she got clear of the desk, noting that Karma still dressed like she was 20 years younger and about 150 pounds lighter. Picking up a small oriental fan and heaving her bulk over to a stairway, she hollered at the top of her lungs.

"Val! Visitor!"

Before the girl got down the stairs, Matt handed Karma another 100 credits. She cocked her head curiously, fanning herself furiously. Apparently, just the effort of moving from behind the desk to the stairs had set her sweating profusely. Matt adjusted so as not to be downwind.

"I want privacy," he said.

She nodded and hustled out through the foyer and onto the porch. Matt looked back and saw the bouncer hesitate in the foyer, hand on the door. He shot Matt a meaningful look before stepping outside.

A moment later, Valana peered cautiously down the steps. While D-Bees were not his thing (though he was far too practical to be a supremacist), he could understand on some level why the Coalition officer found the woman appealing.

Valana was, for the most part, very human looking. She had a lithe, but curvaceous, compact frame with a nearly exaggerated hourglass figure. Her skin was a shade of bronze that just barely strayed outside of normal human parameters, and her ears came to tall points that made them twice as tall as a human's. A fountain of jet black hair seemed to explode from a series of coral hair clips from the top of her head. Emerging from the topknot, her hair fell in luxurious waves down her back and partially over one shoulder.

Besides the ears, the only obvious signs of her inhuman heritage were a chin that was just slightly too pointed for a human being, and beautiful blue, woad-like markings that decorated much of her body, from what Matt could see of it through the gray, scandalously short sundress she was wearing.

What surprised the Cyber-Snatcher was that it was obvious, from his experience, that she was not raised on the street.

Her eyes were alert, but not in the way of someone who was trying to keep herself safe in a dark alley. Her hands were soft and free of calluses, and there was not a scar apparent anywhere on the ample amount of flesh she was showing. When she spoke, it reinforced his first impression. She spoke American like she learned it in a school, instead of picking it up piecemeal on the streets of a shanty town, like most 'Burb D-Bees learned it.

Tolkeen refugee, Matt thought, and he began to get an idea of how she and the Captain became paramours.

Confused, she stopped at the base of the steps.

"I'm sorry," she said, obviously looking around for Karma. "I'm not accepting new customers right now."

A whore who thought she could choose her customers? That cinched Matt's theory.

"Where did he rescue you from? Solomon? Freehold? Surely not from Tolkeen itself," Matt said, stepping closer.

Her eyes narrowed, and she took a step back up the steps.

"Who are you?"

"I'm someone who has a keen interest in when the next time Captain Fielding will stop by for a conjugal visit," Matt said, slapping another 100 credit voucher on a small stand at the base of the steps. "And you're someone who's going to tell me."

The alien woman frowned, almost sneered, in the way of someone not used to being addressed that way.

"What makes you so sure?" she asked, eyes only briefly dancing over the shiny black card on the small table. "You would have to have a lot more than that."

"No, you'll take the 100 credits, and you'll tell me everything I want to know," Matt said. "You'll take it because you have no real love for a man that helped destroy your country. You'll take it because all I have to do is mention your special relationship with one of the Coalition's finest, and Psi-Net will steam, press and starch your brain on suspicion alone, and then when they find out it's true, they'll let a pack of Psi-Hounds use you as a chew toy."

Whatever she was expecting his response to be, it wasn't that. Matt was glad she was intelligent, however, because she quickly saw the truth in both his words and his eyes.

"Alright," she said curtly. "What do you want to know?"

"Everything," Matt said.

She told him that Fielding had just recently returned to town from a mission in the occupied territory of Tolkeen, and that he had sent a runner with a private message that he would be visiting her in two days. She also told Matt that he traveled with two other Coalition soldiers who acted as personal bodyguards when he was off-duty. They knew his secret, but apparently the three of them were close enough that he trusted them. She told Matt that he came lightly armed and would be hesitant to make a fuss, for fear of their relationship being found out.

In return, Matt promised Valana that he wouldn't cause any trouble at the brothel, and that he just wanted to ask Fielding some questions.

Neither of them was telling the whole truth.

* * *

The day before Fielding's scheduled appointment with Valana, Matt took a trip back to the brothel, carrying his laser scalpel kit and a Neural Mace, to see what the reaction of the bouncer would be. He was delighted to find that the bouncer was only interested in ranged weaponry. Matt could not fault the bouncer for that. The Neural Mace was a small, blunt weapon that, when charged, scrambled the nervous system of anyone hit with it. Most people considered it non-lethal. The laser scalpel was a tool, and no one considered it a real weapon.

Also, while at the brothel, Matt had surreptitiously recorded one of the girls entertaining a guest through her bedroom door. He made sure the recording was of high quality, and put it with a small pocket recorder that connected to a universal headjack, allowing the recording to play in a person's head.

He also found a small repair garage that allowed him to rent space for the Rolling Thunder. The garage was only about two blocks away

from the brothel, and on a main thoroughfare. He dropped the ATV off at the garage a day before the meeting, but only after he made sure the owner of the garage knew, in great graphic detail, what would happen to himself, his family, his house, and any pets he might own, if something happened to Matt's car.

The night Fielding was to meet with Valana, Matt made certain to get there an hour early. The bouncer barely paid him any notice this time, but Karma shot him a suspicious look after glancing at an old clock on the wall. Matt figured that she made it her business to know when one of her inhuman whores was planning to have a dalliance with a Coalition intelligence officer. As Matt went up the stairs to Valana's room, he saw Karma trundle over to whisper with the bouncer, and feared he might have to adjust his plans for the night.

Upon entering Valana's room, Matt was forced to promise yet again that he would not cause trouble nor hurt Fielding. He agreed whole-heartedly, even as he stepped into the bathroom, closed the door, and began assembling the laser scalpel.

Wearing his Huntsman armor, with a Neural Mace in one hand, a Vibro-Knife in his belt holster, and the laser scalpel kit open and prepped at his feet, Matt waited in the bathroom of a Stockyard D-Bee whore for what he hoped was the biggest payoff in his life.

Matt had been pleasantly surprised by the condition of the bathroom. It was clean, scrubbed, and well-kept. Matt was impressed. Then again, he would have been impressed just by her having toilet paper.

Apparently, Fielding and the boys had stopped to get a drink or two on the way, because they were 20 minutes late and loud enough that Matt heard them downstairs in the foyer.

He picked up three distinct voices. One was competent, level, and excited. Fielding, Matt figured. The second was deep, rumbling and coarse in language. The third man barely spoke three words. That was the one Matt decided he'd worry about.

Fielding didn't waste much time chatting with Karma, which suited Matt just fine. He'd worried they might be more than acquaintances, but the tone in Karma's voice when she had greeted the intelligence officer was cool, but cordial. He was someone to be tolerated, her voice seemed to say. Matt wondered whether Fielding noticed.

Fielding's two friends seemed to be involved with a couple girls in the sitting room on the main floor, and Matt heard Fielding come up the steps alone. All the better, he thought.

Fielding came into the small bedroom like he owned the place, and rushed to Valana, sweeping her into a hungry kiss. Deftly, but hesitantly, she angled his back toward the bathroom door just as Matt opened it and slipped out, Neural Mace in hand.

Matt had told her that this was the best way. He could come up behind Fielding and stun him with the mace without harming him unduly, he had said.

So he couldn't help but wonder what gave his intentions away. Had he been holding the Neural Mace too aggressively? Had she seen, at the last moment, the laser scalpel kit through the bathroom door? Or had she simply looked into Matt's eyes as he approached and seen the cold, calculating stare of a predator?

Whatever it was, she gasped and tried to turn the Military Specialist toward Matt just as he got within a couple feet of Fielding's back.

Fielding, to his credit, was quick on his toes. But then, he was a trained Coalition intelligence officer. Matt expected nothing less.

Fielding gave Valana a shove toward the bed off to the side, while at the same time lashing out with the knife edge of his foot, trying to knock Matt back far enough to give himself some fighting room. Matt twisted and dipped his shoulder, however, letting the blow deflect off his arm. Still, Matt felt the power behind that kick, and decided it was best if he could finish this fight not only quickly, but without letting Fielding land a solid blow.

Matt sent the Neural Mace sweeping up and out in a wide arc, forcing Fielding back on his heels. Matt noted that Fielding was dressed in street clothes that, while possibly armored, would be no defense against the Neural Mace. But it was also clear to Matt that Fielding was a far superior fighter, and he knew it.

Confidently balanced on his toes, Fielding took the more aggressive stance. Charging in at Matt, hoping to pin him between the bathroom door and a vanity, Fielding extended his left hand out and open to grab or deflect the arm with the Neural Mace. At the same time, he curled the fingers of his right hand and shot out with the arm, attempting to palm strike Matt in the nose, possibly driving the cartilage into Matt's brain and ending the fight.

What he did not expect was for Matt to simply lock the Neural Mace in the "on" position and let it drop to the floor as he rushed in to finish the Cyber-Snatcher off. Fielding tried to change course, but his momentum was committed, and the Neural Mace got tangled in his legs for an instant.

The effects were instantaneous. The Neural Mace released a powerful electric shock through Fielding's body, disabling his nervous system, and causing his muscles to seize up. Matt deftly side-stepped the Captain and the tumbling Neural Mace, wincing at the heavy thud as the body hit the floor.

Matt quickly scooped up the Neural Mace and turned toward the bed, just as Valana made a rush for the door. The Neural Mace is not the most aerodynamic weapon, but at less than 10 feet, it did not have to be. Matt whipped it overhanded at Valana, catching her on the side of the head. She crumpled to the floor.

Matt stopped for a moment, listening. After about a minute, Matt could detect no change in the rhythm of conversation and other noises throughout the building. He figured either nobody had heard the two bodies hitting the floor, or perhaps you just took occasional thumps and thuds for granted when you worked in a whorehouse.

Scooping up the Neural Mace carefully, Matt cracked the door and looked out into the hallway. No one was running toward the door to see what had happened, and he could still hear, via his amplified hearing, the two Coalition soldiers who had accompanied Fielding talking on the floor below.

At the sound of the metal doorknob jiggling in his grip, Matt looked down. He jiggled the knob again from the inside of the room, and nodded in satisfaction as the doorknob on the other side of the door, facing the hall, shook in response. He stepped back inside the room, closed the door and looked around.

Spotting a small nightstand by the bed, Matt picked it up and placed it carefully next to the door and, specifically, the doorknob. He then carefully propped the Neural Mace on the nightstand so that the charged end was leaning against the doorknob. Making sure it was stable and not going to fall, he turned the Neural Mace on.

Matt did one more check of Valana, assuring she was out cold, and then checked on Fielding, who was also out cold.

Matt dragged the body into the bathroom, and, with some effort, hauled Fielding up and into the tub. He turned the cold water on low and let it stream down over Fielding's body from a small showerhead jutting from the wall. He'd need it to sluice away the blood, he figured. He had no preconceptions about this job being neat... or clean.

It took Matt several precious minutes to find Fielding's headjack, which was cleverly concealed under a flap of artificial skin behind his ear. Matt wondered what level of deep cover would require someone to have to pretend not to even have a headjack. His career was moot at this point, Matt thought to himself, as he grabbed his attaché case and took out the portable computer.

Deftly sliding the jackplug from his computer into place in Fielding's head, Matt was satisfied to see Twitch's program immediately engage, as promised. He frowned at the amount of information

downloading onto his computer. He hadn't thought there would be that much data. However, it was only a few moments before a schematic of Fielding's body popped up on the screen, with each piece of cybernetics and bionics conveniently highlighted and labeled.

Matt was surprised at the actual lack of hardware. Fielding had the headjack, an eye that worked as a camera and thermo-imager, both ears had amplified hearing and sound suppressors, a clock calendar, gyro-compass, and a sub-dermal transceiver embedded in his jawbone. He also had a pair of cybernetic lungs with an air filter. But no arms or legs, as Matt had anticipated.

Frowning, Matt reran the diagnostic program, just in case. Hearing a slight groan from the bedroom reminded him that time was of the essence, however, and he reached into the attaché case and retrieved the laser scalpel. The program showed the same results, so he turned the sleek, black, laser scalpel on and considered the most expedient way to end the life of Captain Simon Fielding.

The choice was taken from him by a weak gasp from behind. Matt whirled to see Valana in the doorway to the bathroom. He saw her eyes drift from the open attaché case, to Fielding, to the laser scalpel in his hand. He could almost imagine the neurons in her brain firing, making the connection, divining his true intentions.

To her credit, and Matt's surprise, she recovered from the shock much faster than he would have anticipated. But instead of running, as Matt had feared, she began to chant.

With a lunge, Matt slammed the lit tip of the laser scalpel into Valana's throat. Fortunately for her, he had not had the scalpel on full power, or else it would have severed her head from her shoulders. Instead it sliced, and cauterized, her vocal chords. She would have suffocated still, but the laser scalpel left a neat hole in her neck.

Matt caught her body before it fell to the floor as she writhed in sudden agony, whatever spell she'd been attempting to cast having slipped from her mind amidst the blinding pain. Matt looked her over and saw that she would survive.

"A spell caster? A Coalition officer with a D-Bee spell caster?" he said to her, noting that her eyes focused on him despite the pain. "What the hell was going on in here?"

Getting up, Matt quickly ripped off her skirt, tore it in half, and used it to bind her hands and feet. He then lifted her light body easily and tossed it onto the bed.

"I hope for your sake Karma takes good care of her whores," he said, turning back to the bathroom, aware he'd have to work fast now.

When he entered the bathroom again he saw Fielding struggling to regain consciousness. He was disoriented and half-blinded by the spray of water, and missed Matt's approach.

"Bad luck for you," Matt said, grabbing the struggling Captain by the neck before he could get up, using his leverage to keep him prone in the tub. "You were better off unconscious."

Matt cranked the laser scalpel up a bit in power, deciding the first thing he should do is remove the radio in Fielding's jaw before he could call for help.

With deft, merciless strokes, Matt began to cut the cybernetics out of the head of the struggling Captain Fielding.

Once the cybernetic transceiver had been removed, Matt took the recording he had made on his previous visit, and played a few seconds into the jaw microphone. He paused, expecting to hear chuckling from Fielding's cohorts below. Instead he heard silence.

Matt's eyes narrowed and he turned the laser scalpel up another notch in power, and decided to work faster.

It took only seconds to cut out the cybernetic attachments in Fielding's head, but only because Matt was getting no points for neatness. The lungs took longer, but only because of the rib cage. All

of it went into a waterproof, rubber sack. As Matt stood up, he heard voices in the hall.

He quickly scooped the scalpel and computer into the attaché case, grimacing at the mess he had made in the tub and, more importantly, of his clothes. He swallowed the small voice of panic inside his head at the possibility that some of the blood may have gotten on him.

"Hey! Captain!" the deeper of the two voices Matt had heard accompanying the Coalition officer shouted. "What the hell is going on in there?"

Matt looked desperately around the room, spotting a window next to the bed. About that time the door handle jiggled. The doorknob, as Matt had suspected, was metal all the way through, a perfect conductor for the electrical charge of the Neural Mace he'd propped against it. There was a scream, and he heard something heavy hit the floor just outside the door. One down.

He looked ruefully at the Neural Mace, wondering if there was any way to grab it. Then he looked at Valana, who had been struggling, teary-eyed, to remove the binding on her wrist with her teeth.

He grabbed the bed and pushed, gritting his teeth as it ground across the hardwood floor with a kicking, gasping Valana along for the ride. Propping the bed firmly against the door just as it rattled against its hinges from a kick, Matt looked down at Valana one last time.

"Better hope they don't decide to shoot their way in," he said, grabbing the Neural Mace by the handle and turning it off. Clipping it to his belt, he snatched the attaché case and the bag of the late Captain Fielding's cybernetics and moved quickly toward the window.

A Vibro-Blade slicing through the door was the last Matt saw of the room as he threw open the window and leapt from the second story window onto the awning covering the porch. Letting himself slide neatly down to the street, Matt hit the ground running, only glancing back once.

As he had suspected, the ruckus had caused Karma's cyborg bouncer to go upstairs to see what the noise was about. Had he stayed at the door, Matt had no illusions about his ability to outrun the bionically-augmented man.

Matt darted around the side of the building, crossed the street into an alley, and then cut directions two more times between two more buildings. Stopping for a moment, he attempted to listen through his augmented ears for any sign of pursuit. Hearing none, he jogged toward the garage where he had stored the Rolling Thunder.

By the time Fielding's men had seen their commanding officer's body and hit the street in pursuit, Matt was already driving down the main strip out of town, the windows on the Rolling Thunder tinted nearly to opacity.

Matt's original intention was to drive straight to Holloway's house, but seeing his clothes, the seat of the car, and all of his tools splattered in red, he had to go home first. Once he got there, nothing would do but three hours of scrubbing himself and every surface of the car he had touched or even been close to touching. He hadn't even waited to get inside the house, using the sink and industrial soap in the garage to wash the worst off of himself first.

He spent the bulk of the time in the shower, nearly scalding himself as he went over everything that had happened. In the end, however, he had no answers as to why a Coalition intelligence officer would be sleeping with a magic user.

Why would a magic user even be working at a brothel? Matt asked himself. Anyone who could wield the powers of magic could make a small fortune selling their abilities, as long as they went outside of Coalition territory to do it. And what made his men respond so fast? Matt had thought he'd covered his tracks well enough to give himself more time.

At first, Matt wondered if the relationship between Valana and Fielding was a sham, but he'd seen how Fielding greeted her. Had she been grooming him to betray the Coalition? Was she a terrorist from Tolkeen, the magic-using kingdom the Coalition had recently defeated in the old Minnesota territory?

Matt did not care about the particulars, really. What he wanted to know most of all was how it might affect him. Who might be after him for that murder? And what they thought the stakes would be.

One thing is certain, Matt thought, *I should have asked for more money.*

Once Matt had triple-checked to make sure not a drop of blood was on him, he dressed in fresh clothes, put on his armor, and grabbed his heavy laser pistol, a Wilk's 237. The sleek, black weapon was an urban favorite. It sacrificed the normal range of a laser for increased stopping power. It was also incredibly well balanced, which meant even a novice could shoot straight with it. It wasn't that Matt expected any trouble at Halloway's, but he also wasn't sure the getaway was perfectly clean. There could always be a hidden tracker in Fielding's headware, so it was better to get it to Doc as fast as possible.

Matt arrived at Halloway's house at about the same time as he had several nights before. But this time the Cyber-Doc was up and waiting. He stood in the doorway as Matt drove up, grabbing the bag as the Cyber-Snatcher stepped down from the ATV.

"You're late," he said. "About three hours late."

Matt shrugged. "I had something to take care of first. Let's get inside."

Once inside, with the door locked, Halloway took a moment to look Matt over. Matt hadn't sat down since he had come inside, and his eyes kept looking back to the black rubber bag that held the pilfered cybernetics.

"I take it not everything went as planned?" Doc said cautiously.

"It went down alright in the end," Matt said, visibly trying to relax himself. "But something stinks here."

Doc's eyes narrowed. He knew Matt had good instincts for the street. "Go on..."

"It's like... like I can't step back far enough to see the whole picture," Matt said. "Fielding's whore? I think she was a Tolkeen operative. Fielding's men either knew he was dead or..."

Matt paused, rubbing his own jaw.

"Or what?" Doc asked.

"Or they knew that Fielding wasn't there to have sex with her," he said.

"You lost me, Matt," Doc said, sitting down and waving Matt down into a chair.

"I recorded a customer and a girl the other day, then played a brief snippet through Fielding's radio," Matt explained. "I was hoping they'd hear it, think he keyed his mic by accident, and not worry about any noises they heard from the room."

"But I take it things didn't work out that way," Doc said, urging him to continue.

"No. It seems like the moment they heard that sound, the jig was up and they came running," Matt said. "Something else was supposed to happen in that room."

"Did you get away clean?" Doc asked, eliciting a quick nod from Matt. "Well then, whatever the late Captain Fielding was up to is irrelevant, and none of our concern."

Matt looked up as Halloway emphasized the last four words. He nodded in agreement and tried to push the evening's events to the back of his mind.

"Alright, let's talk about something that is my concern," Matt said, all business again. "When do I get my money?"

"As soon as the client checks on the goods, and confirms that things were done to their specifications, we both get paid," the Cy-

ber-Doc said. "I'll let you know. Go home, get some rest. My calendar is clear and I got no work for you right now."

Matt nodded tiredly, stood up and, with a last glance at the rubber sack, left for home.

It was the afternoon of the next day, while cleaning his equipment, that Matt realized there was a problem with his computer. It did not take long for Matt to realize why. It was out of memory.

"Damn, Twitch," Matt muttered to himself. "You didn't tell me it would take up this much space."

When he tried to erase the data he had downloaded from Fielding and couldn't, he began to wonder whether it was Twitch's program. Packing the computer up and grabbing his pistol, he walked down to Center Court.

When Matt arrived at Twitch's store, he barely waited for her to finish selling some programs to two hackers wearing gang colors before shutting the door and gate firmly behind them. Twitch, dressed just as he'd seen her the other day, was straightening up behind a makeshift counter.

"How did that program work for you?" she asked, stuffing a couple Black Market credit cards into her pocket.

"That's what I came to talk to you about," he said, clearing a space on one of the tables and placing his small, portable computer on it. "Take a look at this and tell me what you think."

Twitch sidled up besides him, turning the computer on. Matt watched her face more than he watched what she was doing. He saw her go from curiosity, to surprise, to concern. She took a small cable out of her pocket, attached it to her headjack and then plugged into the computer. Within a couple seconds she ripped it out.

"You got a problem, Matt," she said, breathlessly touching her temple.

"What kind of a problem?"

"Okay, the program I wrote was just supposed to quick-dump all the data the headjack stored, then filter through it for standard cybernetic diagnostic programs," she explained. "I designed it to be quick, because I know you don't have all day with these kinds of things."

Matt nodded.

"So what went wrong?"

"Nothing. It worked perfectly," she said. "That's the problem. It grabbed everything in that guy's head. That includes a massive encrypted file that must have been stored on a special chip as part of his headjack."

Matt leaned back, the wheels in his head turning.

"Can you crack the encryption? That might be worth a lot of money," he asked.

"I suppose I could try. But this is some pretty high-level Coalition encryption," she said. "Just plugging into it almost unleashed a virus that tried to fry my headjack."

"A virus? Well, why didn't it fry my computer?"

"I think it was designed to be dumped from his head just one time, and then prevent any efforts at being copied," she said.

Matt swept a few circuit boards from a stool and sat down heavily.

"All his cybernetics," he said. "That's what they asked for. Doc and I thought they were on some revenge kick."

Twitch shook her head. "This is what they were after. And I bet they're going to be pissed when they don't get it."

"Don't get it? But I gave them the headjack with the rest of the cybernetics."

"Doesn't matter," she said. "When that hard drive in his head dumped onto this computer, it erased itself. They got nothing."

"That doesn't bode well for me getting paid, Twitch," Matt frowned. "But I guess I can just give them the computer."

Twitch shook her head.

"Whatever this data is, it wasn't meant to be downloaded to your computer. The decryption key is probably actually hardwired into the device it was supposed to be downloaded into. You need that device, or a copy of it."

"I thought you said you could try to break the encryption yourself?"

"I can try," she said. "But it would take about a week. You got that long?"

"Somehow, I doubt it," Matt said.

He looked at the computer and weighed his options. As far as Matt was concerned, Twitch was the best chance he had for decrypting that information. There was always the possibility that whoever had hired him had the decryption programming needed, but somehow he doubted that as well.

Twitch watched him in silence for a moment, and then tugged his sleeve to get his attention.

"What do you want me to do?"

"Work on it," Matt told her. "Do the best you can. I have to see Doc."

Leaving the computer there, Matt left and headed back to Staunton Heights. Doc, however, was not home. There was nothing else for Matt to do but go home himself.

* * *

One of the only disadvantages that had ever occurred to Matt about the way he lived was that he could never tell what time it was when he awoke. Without windows, there was no way for sunlight to enter the house. And Matt always slept with the lights on. To fix the problem he had an internal clock and gyro-compass implanted in his head, but he had found that when you first woke up it took a moment to focus enough to mentally activate it.

Therefore, there was no way for him to tell, initially, what time it was when the first explosion knocked him out of bed to the floor. It was more of a wall of heat, really, than an actual shockwave, like someone had opened the door to a blast furnace next to his bed. Keying on the internal clock compass in his head, a quiet monotone voice told him it was shortly after midnight even as he peered over the edge of his bed at the conflagration that had consumed his living room.

While his first instinct was that his home was somehow under attack, Matt knew that wasn't necessarily the case. The 'Burbs were, in many ways, lawless and uncontrolled. On any given day, combat between power armor pilots, psychics, mages and even supernatural beings such as demons and dragons, could just roll through your neighborhood and destroy everything you owned. There were no insurance companies to clean up the mess, and as long as the fighting did not appear to be a threat to the Chi-Town fortress city, there would be no intervention by the Coalition. If you even got an apology for your entire life being blown to hell, you were ahead of most.

Cursing, Matt reached under his pillow and grabbed the laser pistol and scrambled toward a small footlocker at the end of his bed, keeping the bed between himself and the heat radiating from his living room.

Reaching the footlocker and opening it, Matt waited for a second, wondering if the apparent attack on his home was finished. If he'd just taken the one hit, it was likely that he was just an unfortunate bystander in someone's personal little war. He hoped that was the case, even as he checked the charge on the laser pistol and flipped open the lid on the footlocker.

Several seconds went by without any activity, and Matt began to relax and focus on how in the hell he was going to put out a fire that had already consumed half his living room. Almost as if in response, there was a loud whoosh of air, a hiss, and then an explosion of intense heat from the front room. A rumble told him that the front wall

had given way, and Matt hurriedly grabbed his Branaghan armored long coat from the locker, throwing it over his shoulders. Styled like a duster from the Old West, the coat used advanced synthetic ballistic and heat dissipating fibers to allow it to resist small arms fire from slug throwers and energy weapons alike. However, it was generally only considered good for one or two shots.

The roar of flames from the front room, which were now beginning to encroach through the doorway into the bedroom, nearly drowned out his amplified hearing. But even above the sound of everything he owned being incinerated, Matt could hear at least two voices, one of which seemed to be walking right up to the house. He could not, however, make out what they were saying.

Dressed in nothing but a loose pair of jogging pants and a white, armored long coat, Matt gathered himself up and darted for the door into the bathroom, a room which did not appear to yet be on fire. Not knowing what to expect, Matt hit the door like a linebacker, his momentum carrying him right into the empty Jacuzzi tub.

The tub probably saved him from the fireball that streaked over his head, slamming into the wall of glass bottles filled with cleaners. Several of them were flammable, and Matt ducked down in the tub as burning chemicals and shards of half-melted glass rained down from above.

The coat kept the worst of it off of him, but several hot shards of glass, sliding across the slick surface of the tub, gathered at Matt's feet, burning them. The mixture of burning chemicals and smoke made his eyes water and his nose run, and a tightening in his lungs told him that he needed to get out of the cloud of burning solvents and cleaners as soon as possible. But the only routes out of the bathroom were into the living room or back into his bedroom. Matt was sure his unseen assailants would just love for him to rush out into the living room to be conveniently gunned down.

He reached over to the spigot for the tub, cursing when the metal fittings burned his hand, and turned on the water. Grabbing a towel, he ran it under the flow, sighing in relief as the water filled the bottom of the tub and sluiced over his feet. He then took the towel and wrapped it around the lower part of his face, so the wet fabric could block out some of the acrid chemical fumes and smoke.

Trying his best to haul his feet out of the hot, melted glass, Matt propped them against the side of the tub, wedging himself into the corner opposite the door, hoping for a clear shot at his assailants. But the fire, smoke and debris from the living room were too intense. And, briefly, Matt thought he saw someone walking through the flames.

A Burster, Matt thought, and began to look for a way to escape the bathroom. Going into the living room was right out. If his attacker was a Burster, as Matt suspected, then the psychic pyrokinetic could simply walk through the flames without discomfort. That would put Matt at a horrible disadvantage as he fought heat, flames and smoke inhalation as he blindly tried to fight his way out. Looking through the door back into the bedroom, he now saw that the fire had claimed that room as well. The red tongues were now devouring his bed and beginning to creep up the back wall.

There was only one way out that Matt could rely on. Energy weapon technology before the Coming of the Rifts had risen to new heights, and that technology had been salvaged by the surviving members of humanity. Even a handheld laser weapon, like his Wilk's 237, could vaporize all but the most advanced armors and protective substances.

That meant it also made short work of concrete walls.

Mat turned the gun to the wall to his side, the one separating the house from the garage, and opened fire.

Several thin beams of whitish-blue energy connected the pistol to the wall, and everywhere the line touched the wall, it seemed to dis-

appear. It only took two or three shots to make a hole large enough for Matt to scramble through. But even as he did, he saw a flaming figure step from the living room into his bathroom.

There was no doubt now that at least one of his attackers was a Burster, a psychic who had mastered the mental creation and control of fire. Bursters were so adept at their mastery of flame that they were able to wrap their bodies in an aura of fire without burning themselves or anything they carried. Matt could see the tiling of his bathroom floor melt with each step the Burster took.

The red hot eyes of the Burster turned toward Matt as he got ready to make a dash for the ATV. As he raised his hand, presumably to incinerate Matt on the spot, the Cyber-Snatcher took aim and fired. The shot missed the Burster by several feet, eliciting a smile from the flaming assassin.

But Matt had not been aiming at him. He had been aiming at the chemical autoclave that was still churning away at over 200 degrees on yesterday's laundry load.

The beam easily carved into the sensitive mechanics of the cleaning tank, and a blossom of pressurized chemicals sprayed into the bathroom. Once they hit the flaming aura of the Burster they evaporated, filling the bathroom with a pungent, toxic mist that caused even the Burster to reel back toward the living room in alarm.

Matt did not wait to see if he would recover. He lunged from the hole in the wall and onto the garage floor in an attempt to make a run for the Rolling Thunder. He hoped his luck held out and that his attackers did not know the vehicle was there, or had not yet penetrated the garage.

This was not Matt's lucky day.

No sooner had he gotten to his feet, and looked up at the realization that most of his garage door had been peeled back like a sardine can, than he had to drop to the ground hard to avoid the armored tire of the Rolling Thunder sailing over his head.

Matt was firing and rolling for cover behind the front end of the Rolling Thunder so fast that he barely registered who had thrown the tire at him. At first, he had thought his eyes were playing tricks on him, because it looked for all the world like a normal human woman in a leather business suit and skirt.

Since he'd been firing to give himself some cover, he had no idea whether he had hit or not. Making sure most of his body was covered by the tire, he took a quick peek underneath, only to catch the woman who had apparently thrown the other tire doing the same thing. The difference, fortunately for Matt, was that he had a laser gun in his hand.

Two shots caught her; one in the face and one in the shoulder, before she could jerk back, screaming. Now, in most cases, a shot from the heavy laser pistol would have vaporized most of the upper half of someone's body, let alone the head. But, while her head and shoulder were smoldering, she was still standing. Matt risked looking over the hood to see if he could finish her off, just as she took her hand away from her damaged face.

Matt caught a glimpse of metal at both her face and shoulder, sparking where the shots had connected. Matt surmised she was a cyber-humanoid; someone who got a full suite of cybernetic and bionic replacements and enhancements, but worked painstakingly to keep their human appearance. Realistic synthetic skin, bionics that were slimmed down to human proportions, and even fake sweat and blood, were all necessities for keeping the look of a normal human while carrying most of the muscle and protection of a Full-Conversion Combat Cyborg. On the street they were known as Hidden 'Borgs.

Matt popped off another pair of shots at her, hoping to finish her off with blasts to the head, but even damaged, she was too quick and leapt at him over his shots and over the hood of the car. She may

have looked like she weighed about 120 lbs, but in truth she weighed triple that, and Matt felt every pound of it slam into his armored chest, driving him back against the wall.

Faster than he could bring the gun around to fire at point-blank, the 'Borg slapped the inside of his wrist. The shock from the blow radiated up Matt's arm, and the gun dropped from numb, lifeless fingers. The woman was tall, over six feet, and appeared to be in her early 30s, with almost model-like features, violet cyber-eyes that glowed softly, and black hair pulled into almost a schoolmarm-like bun, contradicting the black leather suit jacket, tie and miniskirt over a white blouse.

But Matt did notice that she carried a shoulder holster, and he could see the butt of a gun still inside of it. Matt quickly feinted toward the gun he'd dropped, and she lashed out with her foot, kicking it away. By the time she realized her mistake, it was too late, as Matt grabbed the gun in the holster, jammed it into her side, and prayed she'd taken the safety off as he pulled the trigger as many times as possible.

At point-blank range, several blasts from the small ion pistol erupted against the 'Borg's side, disintegrating synthetic flesh, and twisting, warping and partially melting the nanotube titanium weave that had replaced a once human rib cage.

In a rage and in agony, she slapped Matt away with a blow that would have felled a prize-fighter, hurling him through the door to the garage closet. Matt recoiled in horror as his arm slipped into the dirty, wet bucket, drawing the arm out as if he'd dipped it into molten lava. His reaction only caused him to fall further into the closet and become more tangled up in the broom handle, mop and bucket.

Matt tried desperately to extract himself, but by the time he was able to clear the shattered door of the closet and untangle himself, there was nowhere to run. The cyborg, clutching her side angrily, had been joined by the Burster and two men in heavy body armor. He could see neither of the two men's faces, which were hidden by helmets and visors.

Matt held up his hands and sat heavily on the upturned bucket, his left eye swelling shut where the cyborg had struck him, eyes watering relentlessly from the smoke of his burning home. Even then, and with what felt like at least a couple busted ribs, he looked longingly toward the sink, his arm itching furiously from just the thought of the multitude of germs and bacteria that might be covering it.

One of the armored men, carrying an elegant, but expensive-looking, laser pistol stepped forward. He was somewhat short, and the armor seemed to be hiding a more rotund figure. From his build, his weapon and since he was doing the talking, Matt figured him for the leader.

"Mr. Heath?" the armored man asked.

Matt gestured at his burning house. "If I wasn't, boy would you be embarrassed."

The man knelt next to Matt, gesturing casually with the pistol.

"You were hired recently to do a job. A job, by all reports, you did," he said.

"Most people would pay me, not burn my house down and start manually rotating my tires," Matt shot back, nodding in the direction of the Rolling Thunder, which was now leaning toward the back driver's side.

"Yes well, that's because you tried to have it both ways," the man said. "You were to deliver everything you took out of his body to Doctor Hallowsay. Everything."

"Everything I cut out of Fielding was in the bag I gave to Doc," Matt said. "If you were looking for something specific, you should have told me."

The man gestured to the Burster and the cyborg and stepped back. The cyborg grabbed Matt by the neck and slammed his back into the

wall next to the closet. The Burster then simply smirked at Matt and the bottom of the armored coat he was wearing erupted in flame.

Matt tried to struggle away from the flames, but the cyborg held him in place as the fire devoured its way up the coat. The heat seared the back of Matt's legs and then live flame itself began licking at the small of his back. Matt screamed.

With a nod from his employer, the Burster dismissed the fire eating away at Matt's coat and flesh with a wave of his hand. The cyborg let Matt drop to the hard cement floor and he stumbled back into the wreck of a closet.

Matt noted, through the burning pain in his back, that his hand was grasping something cool and smooth under the shattered remnants of the closet door.

Matt looked up at the three of them, fighting to catch his breath from the pain.

"I'm not going to get paid, am I?" Matt asked ruefully.

"Give me the encrypted data you took from Captain Fielding's head and you will profit with your life," the man replied.

"I don't know what you're..."

Matt never finished, the cyborg's blow fell so quick and so hard that for a moment he was confused as to why he was on the floor staring at one of his molars.

"Mr. Heath, we know you left home today with a personal computer. We know you took it down to Center Court, and we know you came home without it," the man said. "We just don't know where you took the data, or else this conversation would not be happening."

"Then maybe I might still get paid," Matt said. "Look, let me go and I'll get you that data. Then you pay me what I'm owed."

"Why should I spend 100,000 credits on something I can have for free?" the man asked.

"One hundred thousand?" Matt said incredulously. "You owe me a hell of a lot more than that!"

The cyborg raised her hand.

"Bitch, hit me again and you'll lose that hand," he snapped.

The hand fell, as Matt knew it would, aiming another blow toward his face. This one was lighter, fortunately, more of a rebuke, and only rocked Matt's head back against the wall. In return, he whipped the Wilk's laser pistol he'd felt out from under the door, the one the cyborg had kicked away, and shot her in the hand before the other three men could react. The bionic hand exploded as the laser beam lanced through it, the explosion and surprise of the move causing all of Matt's assailants to jerk back.

Matt was halfway out of the garage and firing a slew of bolts behind him before they could recover. Fortunately, his legs worked fine, and the one attacker who had the best chance to catch him was in shock from losing her hand.

Still, Matt ran as hard as he could, firing an unceasing stream of laser fire back into his own garage until the energy clip was empty. But he wasn't firing at his attackers. When the cyborg had ripped the wheel off of the Rolling Thunder, causing it to fall to one side, she had exposed its gas tank. Many people in 109 P.A. bought their vehicles equipped with electric engines, or, in the case of the very rich, with small nuclear batteries. But Matt had found electric motors to be less responsive and nuclear just too expensive. And, mostly ethanol made from Coalition-grown corn, gasoline was readily available in the 'Burbs, even if it was scarce in the rest of the world.

But at that moment, the biggest benefit for Matt was that it still went "boom" when subjected to a large amount of laser fire. The explosion nearly blew Matt off his feet, and brought the entirety of the garage down on his attackers.

Matt held no illusions that he could kill them all, and with their armor and the Burster's immunity to fire, he'd be lucky if he offed even one of them. But it did give him time to run his ass off, cutting

through yards and between houses downhill, headed for the sprawl of Center Court.

By the time the four of them could extricate themselves from the wreckage of Matt Heath's garage, he was lost among the glut of mismatched buildings, shops and bargain-hunting crowds.

It was only after three or four blocks, when Matt was sure they were not going to try to follow him, that the enormity of what had just happened sunk in. As the adrenaline began to filter its way out of his veins, and as he began to experience a case of shakes that threatened to rattle his remaining teeth out of his head, Matt's brain locked onto a new, primary concern of the moment.

He had nowhere to get clean.

Keeping his head down and the ragged remains of his burned coat wrapped around him, Matt tried to scrub away the dirt, soot, and blood that seemed to cover every inch of him. Everything else seemed to disappear from view, except the sight of his soiled arms and hands. Even the pain from his burned back, fractured jaw and broken rib were a distant ache, blotted out by an unreasoning fear of what could be penetrating his skin, getting into his flesh, poisoning his blood.

The only reason he even noticed the noodle stand he crashed into was because someone spilled hot noodles on him. He hissed, more at the new stain on his pants than from pain. The large, gorilla-looking D-Bee he had run into snarled at him, but backed off at the sight of the large pistol still clutched tightly in Matt's grip. Matt eyed him disdainfully and staggered off, still trying to scrub away the grime.

He paid little attention to where he was going, but was not surprised to find himself at Twitch's door. There was no answer, and Matt wondered if his attackers had already been here. But the door looked secure, and he could attest to the fact that they didn't seem to be the "sneak in through the window" types.

He had nowhere else to go, and could really do nothing else, so he sat on her stoop, found a clean spot in the lining of his coat, and scrubbed.

* * *

"Matt! Damn, what the hell happened to you?"

Jerking awake, Matt looked up through his one good eye at someone doing a fair imitation of Twitch. If it weren't for the silvery short dress, red boots, cleaned skin and the slight scent of perfume, he'd have been fooled.

"Matt? You still with us?" Twitch leaned down and lifted his chin, trying to see if his eyes would focus. "Wow. Somebody kicked your ass."

"Thanks for the newflash," Matt mumbled, finally accepting that it was really Twitch and not some hot twin sister she'd never told him about.

"Let's get you inside and off the street," Twitch said, offering an arm to help him up, which he refused. Respectfully, Twitch stepped back and watched Matt rise to his own feet. She then keyed open the gate and door and led him inside and up to her apartment.

Matt would not even talk to her until she had shown him the shower, and then after finding all of her washcloths unacceptable, she finally gave him a brush she used to clean off circuit boards and winced as he attempted to put her hot water bill out of financial reach.

After scouting around the apartment for a clean shirt and pants that might fit him, Twitch took the clothes and a clean towel into the shower. Twitch half-grinned as she went to sneak a peek at him through the translucent shower curtain, but gasped as she saw blood splatter against the inside.

Yanking the curtain open, she saw Matt had scrubbed off several layers of skin in some places, and was about to go to work on his own

face with the stiff brush. Twitch, ignoring the steaming hot water, threw herself into Matt, wresting the brush away from his face.

"Matt! Look at what you're doing to yourself!" she screamed, trying to jar him out of the nearly trance-like state he was in.

Matt looked, but at first all he saw was Twitch. The silver dress was soaked, her hair matted down, and she had him pressed hard against the shower wall. It was just enough to bring him back to his senses.

As Twitch, aware of their position, began to relax and become more pliable against him, Matt's face hardened.

"Twitch..."

"... right."

Crestfallen, she took a step back, letting Matt step past her to the towel and pile of clothes.

Matt grimaced as he picked the towel up and Twitch dared to step close again.

"You need to see a doctor, Matt," she said.

"Yeah, I do," he said. "You heard from Holloway?"

She shook her head, giving him a hand with the towel despite the glare it earned her.

"That's not the doctor I was talking about and you know it," she said. "Who did this to you, anyway?"

"I don't know, but I sure as hell intend to find out," Matt said.

Twitch tried to get Matt to get some sleep, but that only resulted in him sitting her down and having a serious conversation about the fact that bed bugs were real. In the end, he borrowed some credits from her, and went out into Center Court to buy fresh sheets and clothes. She didn't have enough for him to buy any body armor, and Twitch did not own a set. Try as he might, however, he could not convince her to burn or fumigate all of her existing bedding.

Hanging between them, unspoken, was what Twitch had seen him doing to himself in the shower. She wanted to bring it up, but she could tell by the look in his eyes that it wasn't a topic conducive to her continued good health. Twitch had known he could be anal about hygiene, but she had never known to what degree until then.

She began to clean her apartment, as best she knew how, to make him feel more comfortable. But she usually just ended up revealing another layer of dirty clothes she'd forgotten she owned; old, molded computer magazines; and several nests of tiny things that usually resulted in screaming, stomping, and in one case, required the use of a small blowtorch. So instead of tackling the whole apartment, they settled on cleaning a clear path from the door to the bed, to the bathroom, which Matt began to refer to as "the gauntlet."

Twitch volunteered to go back to his house and salvage whatever might be recoverable, but Matt vetoed that. He told her that whoever attacked him might have left someone to stake the place out. When Twitch tried to make something of the fact that he was concerned for her well-being, he corrected her. She was a valuable resource, Matt told her, and he also didn't trust her not to give him away under torture. This also required him to give her a stern warning about repeatedly sticking her tongue out at him.

Once Twitch had gotten Matt to see a real doctor, who used nanobots injected into his bloodstream to mend his broken rib and fractured jaw, Matt began to hit the streets.

His first order of business was getting together resources. He had kept at least one stash of money and equipment at a storage facility in Proseville, which was a relatively crime-free and secure "Old Town" 'Burb. There was about 10,000 credits and a laser scalpel kit. He would have stashed away more, but the facility did not allow weapons, and it charged per month by weight.

Calling in a few favors netted him a couple more grand, and a suit of used Urban Warrior body armor, which was used most frequently by law enforcement agencies. It was bulky, with its protec-

tions based mostly on strategically-placed ceramic plates underneath an advanced, high-tensile Teflon and Kevlar blended weave. The suit was in urban camo colors of gray, white and black. The helmet was a sealed affair, reminiscent of old motorcycle helmets from the 21st Century, and he could control the tint on the visor. He also got the E-Clip for his Wilk's 237 recharged, and a new holster.

Once he was prepared, or at least as well-prepared as he thought he could get, he went to see Doc.

Twitch had checked on Doc's several times in the last couple days, planning to claim she was a prospective patient to cover her identity, but there was never an answer. She had offered to hack the magnetic lock sealing the door, but Matt decided it would be best if he went in. If someone was watching the house, and something had happened to Doc, they might dismiss her as a concerned friend or anxious customer. But if she broke in, they might decide to take a closer look at her.

Matt figured that if someone was watching the house they would not be able to recognize him in the new body armor, especially with the tinted face visor. What's more, he was far more capable in a firefight than Twitch, if it came to that. He also, quite frankly, did not trust Doc at this point.

Matt and Doc had worked together for several years, but the 'Burbs were a rough place where almost every friendship had a price. The better friends you were, the higher the price, generally. And Doc and Matt had never been truly friends, at least not in Matt's mind. Then again, he could not really think of anyone he considered a true friend, though Twitch was bucking for the position.

Matt went up to Doc's about mid-day, visibly armed and armored. He put the holster for the pistol on his hip instead of his shoulder, and slightly adjusted his gait, hoping to further give anyone watching the impression that he was someone else. He had scouted out the house for an hour, however, and saw no sign that anyone had it staked out.

Using a small device Twitch had cobbled together for him, hacking the magnetic door lock was easy. A quick flick of a Vibro-Knife made a mockery of the deadbolt. Matt told himself that he would tell Holloway to get better security, assuming he was still alive and had not sold Matt out.

Gently pushing the door open, with an eye out for tripwires or dead switches, Matt eased himself into Holloway's front room, gun drawn. Doc, in general, kept a very tidy place, and it was in just that condition when Matt entered. It had not, at least outwardly, been ransacked or wrecked. There were also no obvious signs of any combat.

Matt stepped through the main room, peering into the kitchen. The dishes were all done, and none were even in the strainer next to the sink. There was no food left out.

Moving toward the back, Matt tried the handle to the operating room, but found it was locked. Frowning, he plugged in the degaussing tool Twitch had given him for the front door, and tried it on the lock. With a satisfying hum and click, the door swung open.

Clean. Sterile. Tools all in their appropriate niches.

Reversing his way through the house, Matt looked up the steps to the door leading to the doctor's private area. The door was partially open, and Matt tried to recall whether he'd seen it open in the past when he visited. But he could not remember if Holloway consistently left the door open or closed.

He took the steps quickly, but quietly, fairly certain now that there was no threat inside the house. If there had been someone here, he was sure they would have tried to ambush him by now.

Opening the door all the way, he looked in on an empty bedroom. It wasn't just empty of occupants. It was empty of everything. There was no bed, no furnishings, and the closet looked as though it had never even contained clothes or hangers. Matt stared hard at the empty space for some time, trying to piece together what it could mean.

Seeing that there was, literally, nothing of interest upstairs, he went back down the steps, mystified. Head down, mulling over what he'd just seen, he almost missed the flyer on a table next to the stairs. It had on the front a drawing of two men, done in a style that was supposed to be reminiscent of ancient Rome. The Red Sands, it said. Matt knew of the place, and pocketed the flyer.

Matt frowned. He was both relieved and concerned. He had come in half expecting the place to be a shambles and Holloway lying in a pool of his own blood. But if anything bad had happened to Doc, it did not appear that it had happened at home. He did not know if Doc had been snatched off the street, or perhaps had simply read the prevailing winds, packed up, and decided to disappear for a while. And he had no way to explain the empty upstairs.

Taking one last look at the flyer, Matt backed out, careful to re-engage the magnetic lock on the front door. There was nothing he could do about the deadbolt, except pay Doc for another one. And what Doc didn't know, wouldn't hurt him, Matt figured.

Back at Twitch's, Matt took out the flyer and looked it over. He had heard of the Red Sands a few times. It was an underground arena that specialized in illegal blood sports. Its specialty was combat between augmented humans. Drugged-up Juicers, Combat Cyborgs, even some of the bigger, badder D-Bee species would fight for both their lives and a chance at a large purse. The combat was often to the death. It also was an arena for a sport known as Deadball, a game that blended Jai-Alai and football. Opponents lobbed a ball back and forth that would occasionally unsheathe deadly Vibro-Knives, severing fingers and hands, or simply explode like a grenade. Anyone who lived, unmaimed, through more than a dozen games was considered a legend.

The Red Sands was also known as a prime meeting space for members of the top segment of the Chi-Town 'Burbs' underworld food chain. There were rumors that quite often the opponents in those arenas were "recruited" from the unfortunate enemies of many of the regulars. Matt suspected Holloway must have met with his would-be employers there, as the doctor never seemed the type interested in blood sports.

The Red Sands wasn't the kind of place you entered lightly, but it was the only lead Matt had. It was not a place Matt would go, given a choice. While one might end up facing down a Juicer in the arena, which for most normal people was a death sentence, the real danger was not physical. The real danger was in saying the wrong thing to the wrong person. The real danger was not knowing whose rear end to kiss, who wanted genuine respect, and who simply wanted people to fear them. Matt had never been good at any of that.

It was one of the reasons Matt had stayed a Cyber-Snatcher. He could have been more. He'd had offers from the Black Market that were extremely lucrative. But a major part of survival in the 'Burbs was understanding who you were. And Matt knew that in the higher strata of the criminal world, your very survival depended on your ability to smile when you wanted to snarl, and to laugh when you wanted to spit in someone's face.

He doubted that he would last a week in those conditions. Fortunately, he figured, he'd only have to last a few hours at most.

"You know, I've been there," Twitch said from over his shoulder, interrupting his musings.

He turned and raised an eyebrow. "When?"

"I did some computer work there. They've got a great internal security system," she said. "Thanks to me, of course."

Matt turned toward Twitch with a grin.

"You installed their security system?"

Twitch's eyes narrowed.

"Oh no. No way," she said firmly, folding her arms. "When I do a system for someone, I don't give up the secrets to that system. Not for anything."

"Your attempt to have a system of ethics is cute, Twitch, but sometimes it can be a pain," Matt frowned.

"It's not just that, Matt," Twitch said, sitting back down on the bed. "It's also just good business. Look, if I gave you a back door to this place, would you ever be able to trust me with your programs again? And how does it look for me if some Cyber-Snatcher is able to just walk past a security system the Black Market paid me top dollar to install? I'd be selling pocket calculators on the corner within a month, if the Black Market let me live."

Matt mulled that over.

"I see your point."

Twitch furrowed her brow, leaning back.

"Why do you want to go there anyway? I didn't think beefed-up guys slicing on each other was your idea of a good time... assuming you've ever had a good time, that is."

Matt ignored the barb, studying the flyer. "I found this at Doc's place. I think it might be the only chance I have of finding him, and finding the people who hired me to do that job on Fielding."

"What are you going to do when you get there, flash around a holo of Doc?" Twitch laughed. "Look, if you are going to go there you need to know the right people. Information is more valuable than gold to the kind of people that hang out at the Red Sands. And if the place has some connection to Doc and the people who hired you to snatch Fielding's bionics, you can bet someone at the Red Sands knows about it."

"Alright," Matt said, satisfied. "It sounds like you do know a little bit about this place. Who do I talk to?"

"You ever heard of Kyle Wilport?" she asked, eliciting a wince from Matt.

"Yeah. He and his crew are basically sanctioned killers for Coalition Intelligence," Matt said. "He's sadistic, but I hear he gets results. Why would I want to talk to him?"

"Well, when I was setting up the security at the Red Sands they were 'under new management' if you know what I mean," she answered. "Wilport whacked the previous owner under orders from his boss in the Coalition. Supposedly it was because the guy was selling weapons to D-Bee villages through the Black Market."

"Wilport works for Colonel Lyboc, Twitch," Matt began to knead the spot between his eyes. "The guy I hit was CS Intelligence. I can't go to him about this."

"Oh," Twitch said, slumping. She'd been getting really excited about actually being able to give Matt information he could use.

Both of them sat in silence for a second, Matt musing over the flyer. Twitch quit frowning after a few moments, and nudged Matt.

"You could simply not tell him," she suggested.

"I could," Matt said. "But why do you think talking to him would even help?"

"Because, when I was wiring that place up, I noticed that Wilport had someone install a surveillance system that permeated the whole place," she said. "I mean that place is totally wired. You can't even mutter to yourself in the bathroom in the Red Sands without Wilport having a copy somewhere on disc. If Doc met there with the guys who hired him, I bet they've got it on disc."

"Not bad, Twitch," Matt conceded. "But why would they sell it to me?"

"With this guy Wilport, everything is for sale," Twitch replied, basking in the praise, limited as it was. "The real question is whether you can afford it."

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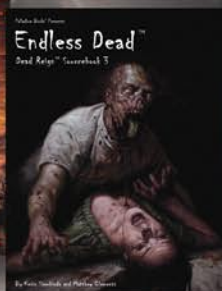
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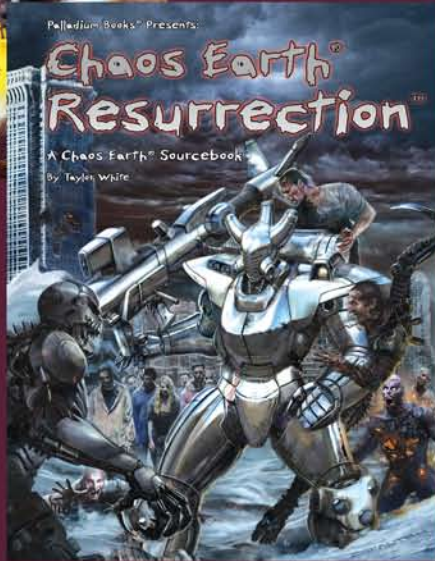
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