

SLA Industries RPG writer's bible/style guide

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Style guide and settings clarifications

IT ISN'T ABOUT BIG GUNS!!!

SLA Industries is about horror, paranoia and oppression. The guns just up the stakes. We do not want to promote SLA as a gunfest, and material which focuses heavily on combat, the war worlds or plain violence will, in all likelihood, be rejected.

Don't refer to Mr. Slayer by name unless it is directly appropriate; refer to the company instead. Mr. Slayer (only his enemies call him just 'Slayer') makes 4 or 5 public appearances a year. These are usually on the Vid.

Submissions are often informal and personalised. This is OK in small doses, but the feel of the material should be dark and oppressive, not witty. One further thing to bear in mind is to avoid sounding judgmental about any aspects of life - quotes about 'scummy unemployed', 'how sad, he still lives with his mum' or other things of that nature are highly offensive to many people.

Remember that the Operatives (Ops, Slops) aren't perceived by the general public to have much in the way of authority. OK, they can kill you due good reason, but if an Op told a civilian (Civvies, Civs) (or a Shiver!) to clean his shoes, he'd be told to "piss off". If he then got violent, it is likely that Cloak Division would take an unhealthy interest in this budding new Serial Killer.

HUMOUR

Often, there is a strong element of comedy in text. In many cases this would be fine. However, in SLA, any humour has a dark, unfunny side to it. The World of Progress is a dark place of no hope. Joy and happiness come in short supply - a cigarette after sex, a too- short orgasm, a cold beer, that double chocolate cookie, these are the only real forms of happiness to be found; five seconds here and there before the oppressive world of progress comes crashing back in.

CORPORATE WHEELING AND DEALING

Corporates do not get involved with the Black Market or with Soft Companies, except in **very** unusual circumstances. Yes, in general, they're treacherous, supercilious and think that Ops are cattle. Yes, in general, they'll stab the Ops in the back if they think it is appropriate. Some are honourable. A few are actually pleasant. Very, very few are stupid.

OPS

Not all Ops are callous, cynical and greedy. Do not encourage this attitude in the form of general statements; specific statements (or moans from Civs/Shivers) are fine, but don't give the reader the impression that s/he has to play a cold, greedy, species-ist psychopath. Ops are not mercenaries; they are elite police trying their best to do a very hard job in a basically hostile environment.

OPS & CIVILIANS

Operatives do not have total control over the civilian population of Mort. The only reason the civvies do as they are told is because the Op is carrying a gun - wouldn't you?. In the World of Progress, the population has the illusion of free will & choice, including any interest in or loyalty to SLA. Civilians have little (if any) respect for the Ops and show this in their treatment of them. This comes from the hatred of the Shivers that maltreat and abuse civilians for a number of reasons. Shivers work for SLA. Operatives also work for SLA, therefore Operatives and Shivers are the same and should be treated the same.

Operative attitudes - particularly human ones - vary considerably. Do not say that all Ops are "greedy, cold, bigoted bastards", because that is giving the players strict - and unwanted - instructions. As a rather contradictory statement, please also note that all non- human NPC characters should fit their general racial stereotypes. In particular, remember that Ebons are ALIENS. They are NOT human, and they do not see the world with anything even faintly resembling a human mindset.

OPS & SHIVERS

"Shivers just seem to be there for target practice" Try it, and you may find yourself in serious problems. If you screw around with Shivers, then remember that there are several million more of them than there are of you. Some of them - particularly Enforcer Shivers - are also going to be considerably more dangerous. OK, they resent the higher rank & status of Ops and the requests that Ops can make of them, and they can be extremely obstructive and irritating. They are still SLA employees, and are ordered to report maltreatment to their superiors. Bully them, and you'll get stonewalled. Harm them, and you'll be up in front of Cloak Division before you can say "Eat HESH, you Shiver Scum".

3IRD EYE AND BLUE PRINT NEWS FILES (BPNS)

Third Eye (3ird Eye) news teams are not at the "disposal of the Ops". The news teams make the news. If they don't like what the operatives are doing then the cameras go off. If the operatives try to complain, then "Freedom of the press" is the battle cry for all Third Eye news teams and they are right - 3ird Eye teams normally hold good SCLs to make sure that they have the complete freedom to report what they want. If a squad is trying to hunt down a serial killer then there is all the more reason for 3ird Eye to be with them all the time. Serial killer hunts make good TV.

Nearly everyone hates a particular type of BPN. Personally, I dislike Yellow operations. However, you should never refer to any BPN type in a scornful or offensive manner.

SLAYERS CRIB & ACQUIRING BPNS

"...stare at vid screens mindlessly until you see a BPN you like."

The whole process is nowhere near that easy. Forms have to be filled in and much waiting done. The halls are really dark, depressing places that demoralise.

We see it like this:

The queue of Operatives seems to stretch out forever, the shifting mass of bodies slowly shuffling forward to the reception area, to be met by the smiling faces of the corporate clowns that operate the authorisation system for the BPN circus.

To get a BPN, you must have the correct paperwork which consists of a number of forms that must be completed in triplicate. These forms all have the same questions, just set out in different formats to fool people into thinking they are all different and all necessary. These crucial forms can only be obtained by the Operatives at the front desk, which is currently a long way away at the front of that long queue.

The air in the long, tunnel-like hall is damp and musty, filled with the stale smell of cigarette smoke and the overly sweet odour of Slosh. Operatives move to and fro, impatient in the bureaucratic limbo of the BPN office. Fast food couriers filter in and out of the waiting room with deliveries for those long suffering Ops who have made it past the red tape of the front desk. The more artistic pessimists adorn the floor and walls of the hall with personal messages of dissatisfaction at the administrative arrogance of the corporate management.

Having eventually reached the front desk, obtained the right forms and an eternity of form-filling later, you are allowed through into the waiting room, where - if past experience is any guide - they will spend the rest of the afternoon.

Ah, the waiting room.

This is the last bastion of bureaucratic irritation before Operatives are free to leave with the rewards of their ordeal - a BPN. Scattered across the hall like unwanted toys, the Operatives huddle round tables - some two to a chair in the crush of this demoralising delay. The smoke of a thousand cigarettes hangs above them like a pall, a visible expression of the aura of depression that fills this gallery of gloom. And alongside it all, the smell of cold food, stale smoke and muddy, oily rain. The litter bins are overflowing with cans, cigarette stubs and food cartons.

Stormers lumber back and forth, impatient at this enforced inactivity. Brain Wasters look from side to side, hoping to meet the gaze of an unsuspecting Operative and relieve their boredom with a diverting interval of violence. Wraiths scan the hall, trying to look as though they are above the boredom and frustration suffered by the other races. Frothers sit, stand or stagger in the drugged state of delirium that helps them survive the waiting. Ebons gather in huddles, preferring the company of their own kind to that of the unenlightened. Soft chants and mutterings emanate from the Shaktars who sit here and there, deep in meditation and beyond the reach of time, boredom and frustration. Humans mingle and merge into every corner of the hall, taking on all of the aspects of the other races in the blind confusion known as mankind.

The doors that line the back of the hall are lavishly adorned with the angry graffiti of aggravated Operatives. The lights above them flip constantly from "Enter" to "Busy" and back again. The high-pitched squawk of the PA cuts through the general drone of conversation regularly, tinnily announcing the office numbers allotted to those lucky squads whose wait has ended. Its voice seems to have been tuned to the precise pitch of fingernails on a blackboard. It all just adds to the happy, friendly atmosphere.

Tempers fray easily here, and fights are common. The long wait, the Endless red tape, the air and the overcrowding can work on an Op's nerves after hour upon hour of enforced idleness. Most disputes begin with small things, like taking someone else's seat, jumping the queue, or simply having a face or an attitude that someone doesn't like.

Fighting in a BPN office is discouraged, and can lead to the Operatives involved acquiring a no-good BPN or none at all. If things get serious, the guards (provided by Cloak Division) will step in, and some serious hurting will be done by all participants. All Ops know this, and they also know that at least some of the corporate who work in the BPN halls get their kicks out of pushing Ops to the limit to see if they'll crack. Sometimes, however, you just don't care.

When you finally get to chat to an official, he'll be contemptuous, sneering and offensive. If you do anything other than grovel, he'll generally give you a sewer BPN. Be pleasant, polite, and grateful for small mercies.

When you're finally out, you can get to work. At last.

WAR WORLDS

These worlds are not like Vietnam. You sign up for a 6- month tour (or are built by Karma to fight until dead), unless a particularly evil Green/Black/Platinum BPN takes you to one of them. Troops have an average survival time of 28 hours on a war world; very, very few make the whole tour. Those who do are left insane, usually crazed psychopaths (on what they see as a holy mission for SLA) who are dropped in the Cannibal Sectors with all their armour and weapons. People on special missions may survive longer, but will pick up several ranks of psychoses. Not even NPCs flit in and out of War Worlds. Do not use them much, unless it is absolutely appropriate - a bit like Mr. Slayer.

Why War Worlds at all? Well, there are several things to bear in mind.

A few planets have unique resources, such as: Ores that can't be found elsewhere; special biomystical/ebb fields; a certain chemical, polymer or gene pattern in the biosphere; special environmental conditions; or some other such unrepeatable bonuses. Other planets are intrinsically ordinary, but one of the three powers builds a key base deep underground, or in some otherwise super-safe location. Finally, some planets manage to just piss off the three major powers, like Cross.

Any one of these planets can become a war world.

A war world occurs when a planet holds some element so vitally useful to one major power that one or both of the others cannot tolerate allowing that element to fall into the current occupier's hands. When that element is important enough to defend -- huge labs the size of a planet's core developing a new super-weapon; a unique ore of key importance; &c -- and the planet is not already defended with heavy-duty defences (to keep it low profile), a war world can result.

In some cases, the element in question will be destroyed and rendered obsolete. At this point, the war on that world will cease. In others, it does not lose its value, and the war will continue. Some war-worlds, like Dante, have been going on long enough to see continual intensification of the fighting to the point where it is simply not possible to cram any more ordnance on to it, and the average survival time is measured in minutes; in others, like

Charlie's Point, the war is much lighter, and takes the form of continual skirmish and ambush. Occasionally, sometimes, one of the powers even manages to dislodge its enemy/ies for long enough to seize the resource they were after; more often, it is simply obliterated or fought over so long it's no longer important.

You can guarantee, though, that for every war world that is finally abandoned, another will suddenly fall into the spotlight.

THE SPOOKS: CLOAK DIVISION, INTERNAL AFFAIRS, DARK FINDERS & STIGMARTYR

Cloak Division are the only public face of the entire wing of spooks. Dark Finders are their elite trouble- shooters, Internal Affairs are a rumour, and Stigmartyr are a barely-whispered source of terror. No IA agents will identify themselves as such - they'll normally say 'Cloak Division' if they have to say anything. Internal Affairs are called in by Cloak Division when things get really serious - not just naughty or mistaken, but actively corrupt.

If either division decides that a hit is necessary, or if a situation is going to be particularly dangerous, then the Dark Finders are sent out. Specially enhanced by Karma, Dark Finders have little in the way of feelings, and feel only an intense loyalty to SLA. They are extremely dangerous, and outrank both Shivers and Ops.

Stigmartyr deal with the suppression of the Truth and related subjects, powers and entities. To see them, in general, is considered fair warning that your life expectancy is down to about 2 seconds. Many Ops wonder what they look like - those that do find out are unable to spread rumours. When they want to look obvious, Stigmartyr Agents wear (clean) white Dogeybone with a red Templar cross stencilled over the breast. The armour is pretty pointless compared to their abilities. When they want to look subtle, you wouldn't be able to pick them out of a crowd they wanted to blend into.

WHO OUTRANKS WHOM?

Like any Machiavellian governmental system, SLA has several fairly discrete tiers of power, each tier having its own cabals and jyhads (to use a couple of funky words with little provocation). At the top is Slayer, assisted and advised as appropriate by his little coterie of thugs, Teeth, Taarnish, Intruder and Senti - but particularly the good Preceptor. These are the people who don't need an appointment, who hold SCL1 and know the Truth.

The first real tier of power lies beneath these legends, with the important departmental heads, planetary and system-wide governors and region coordinators, and other movers and shakers; Matt Cradle, Jacob Vayde, Alexander Xavier, Ernest Strand, Max Hagen and others. These are people who get to talk to Slayer in person, if it's been a very bad week. Like any circle of councillors, they are not friendly with each other, and spend a lot of time trying to undermine each other while they jockey for position. I classify these people as Illuminati - the people behind the scenes, making the day-to- day decisions. Only when stuff gets fucked up does Slayer take much notice. This tier includes aides of each of the major players; even if the aides have no actual influence per se, everyone needs advisors. Illuminati have mighty SCLs, but they don't actually know the truth.

Beneath them are the influential - lesser department heads, important subordinates, the Deans of the universities, governors of cities, Lord Shahantian, major media figures, brilliant scientists, and so on. These are the great and the good, the highest tier to which any PC could ever aspire. They would not ever have contact with Head Office, unless Slayer summoned them.

The last rank of corporate influence is made up of everyone else with any faint sniff of power; middle managers, foremen, minor celebs, news editors, professors & head researchers, &c &c. These are the insignificants. They are the tier with which the vast majority of game-to-game plotting will take place.

So, in order of decreasing influence, we have legends, illuminati, influentials, and insignificants.

WHAT DO THE VARIOUS SECURITY FORCES DO?

The different security forces have similar roles, but with different mandates, and they tend to work at cross-purposes. I'll start from the bottom and work up, trying to compare the different forces to real equivalents. If you haven't read the section above, "Who outranks whom?", then please do so first.

Monarchs are store guards and mall security; little people with nothing to say who are nevertheless determined to say it as loudly as possible. They're controlled by anyone and everyone.

Shiver units & SCAFs are county police. They deal with the community, keep it doing more or less what it is supposed to, and make sure that the good citizens feel that they are being protected on a day to day basis. Like most fictional local police, they are at the beck and call of the insignificant power tier.

Ops are the FBI, but gone freelance. They're there to take care of the big things that we all know and love, like riots, subversives, killers and the like. They're the meat and bones of society's defense structure, not SLA's. They too are at the beck and call of the Insignificant power tier, even if they don't much like the fact.

Cloak Division is the CIA. They're there to take on the jobs that require a degree of central coordination, need sensitive handling, or are supposed to be kept secret. Also, like the CIA, they are in charge of operations which the "unenlightened" man on the street might consider detrimental to the public at large - the SLA equivalent of running drugs to the Contras, for example. Everyone knows they're sneaky and nasty, and they exceed their mandate. Although they are represented in the Illuminati, they work with the Influential. Their mandate is very broad indeed.

Dispersal Shivers are the National Guard - they are there to maintain peace and order in the face of severe public disturbance. The Influential have a degree of control over them - that is the tier they are responsible to, in effect - but their mandate is narrow: keep the public in their place.

Enforcer Shivers are more like a Black Ops hit squad. When someone or something everyday needs to be destroyed in the interests of the greater good, they get the job. They answer to the Illuminati, and don't really possess personalities. Think of them as drones.

Internal Affairs are the NSA. In theory, they're supposed to make sure everyone is a good, loyal little citizen. In practise, they take care of Black projects, internal surveillance operations, monitoring and control of destabilising groups, and jobs which are not so much detrimental to the man on the street as fatal to him. They are more or less controlled by the Illuminati. They're secret in the same sort of way as MI6 is - It doesn't exist, but everyone knows where their offices are anyway.

Dark Finders are field agents; they are, in effect, to Cloak and IA investigators as the Ops are to the Shivers - the ones who get it done. They're the being in the field who gets to do what the planners and intelligence agents have decided is necessary. They are also responsible for sensitive assassinations; the Enforcers are not used where secrecy is required. Some Dark-Finders are recruited and bio-enhanced from other services, while others are vatgrown. For real emergencies, there are rumours of a Darkfinder vatgrown variant that stands some 15-20 feet tall. Either way, part of the conditioning involves psychological manipulation to ensure loyalty and obedience. They do not know the Truth.

The Ebon Guards are little-mentioned, but they're the special Ebb-using forces. Their deathsuit helmets are modified to ensure SLA loyalty and obedience, and they are highly enhanced beings. This makes them the Ebb equivalent of Darkfinders. In theory, they too are field agents for Cloak and Internal Affairs, but the nature of modifications made tends to divide the two forces into the Karma - Dark Lament rivalry. They are not Necanthropes - Neccies in the Intelligence community work for Cloak, IA, Stigmartyr or the Black Chapter only - but their powers, augmented by their training and special kit, are Necanthrope grade. They report to Teeth, but are at the disposal of the Illuminati. They do not know the Truth.

Stigmartyr are more like the British military's special intelligence taskforce code-named SI-8. They're so secret that almost no-one has even heard of them, and those that have don't know what it's all about. Even within the Illuminati, information about them is very scarce indeed. They report directly to Teeth, and hold a James Bond style 000 rating - they can kill, destroy or sieze anything they want to at any time without any shred of proof whatsoever, and don't even have to give a reason. All Stigmartyr agents know the Truth; all SLA-loyal individuals who know the Truth - apart from the Legends - are Stigmartyr agents, or dead. There is no middle ground. Stigmartyr's sole concern is to keep even the slightest hint of the Truth suppressed.

Finally, the Black Chapter are Slayer's private force. Their mandate is to do whatever Slayer wants them to do. They are all fanatically loyal and ludicrously dangerous, but whether they actually have minds or not is open to question. They won't talk to anyone else who isn't Slayer, let alone take orders from them.

WHAT'S A DOOBRIE?

Doobries are a semi-humorous background addition to the World of Progress that will probably never make it into a product and should not really be mentioned directly, but it may be useful to know what they are. Biogenetic Karma pets, about 6" high, they are made out of leftover Vevaphon material and forced into permanent shapes, then programmed accordingly.

You can buy lots of different generic human doobries, ebon doobries, wraith doobries, &c &c; also celebrity doobries like HJ, Mr. Slayer, Delia, and so on. They look like little dumpy manga cartoon versions of the thing or person in question. They're semi-intelligent, will show affection and interest, they'll tidy up rubbish and dust the place for you, pretend to be the thing they look like -- little BW doobries will pretend to formulate, for example -- and generally be cute and irrelevant. Once a month or so, they'll find a copy of the Karma Doobrie catalogue that comes with each one, flick through it, pick an item on the accessories list -- everything from handbags to trampolines and climbing kits -- and then let you know about it and sulk horribly until you buy it for them. The celebrity ones act in accordance with their namesake's personality; the HJ doobrie has a little working chainaxe and will murder its way through the rest of your doobries. The Slayer one (which is a foot tall) will organise all the others into little work gangs and get them to build him a pyramid of whatever bits and pieces are lying around, then sit on top of it glowering out at them and making them work more efficiently. They range from about 25c for a basic 'generic human' doobrie up to tens of thousands of creds for a rare, special limited edition model on the collector's market. Like Stormers, doobries do not age and regenerate minor scratches and cuts.

OVERVIEW OF THE WORKINGS OF THE EBB

WHAT IS FLUX?

Instability in the fabric of reality.

WHERE DOES FLUX COME FROM?

The potential caused by probabilities that didn't happen, or by uncertainties in the universe that are not resolved (ala Shroedinger's Cat). Collectively, they contribute to a vast universal sea of flux that sits just behind and outside of reality.

HOW DOES THE EBB-USER DRAW/REGENERATE HIS OWN FLUX?

The Ebon mind is able to subconsciously perceive the uncertainties and probabilities of the universe and tap into that quantum uncertainty for its own ends. The mind can handle certain amounts of that uncertainty before collapsing, and rest allows it to recharge that capacity. Drawing too much flux (ie beyond your limit) would destroy the mind completely, which is why the subconscious only allows the Ebon to draw as much as she can handle. Devices help by providing a reservoir of certainty to counterbalance the flux. Non-Ebons successfully opening their mind to such quantum uncertainty would have their brains turned into protein broth as cell atoms became non-determinate.

HOW DOES FLUX, FED THROUGH A FOMULAIC EQUATION, BECOME THE EBB EFFECT?

With the aid of a glyph that feeds the necessary environmental factors and channels to the Ebon's mind, she calculates the probability of what she desires being actual rather than potential, and the effects that would be required to bring that probability into existence, and their probabilities, and then having calculated all that information into a path for reality to

move down, channels the universal uncertainty (up to their limit) to bring that event into causality.

But the fact that the formulae are well-founded and have a long historical heritage makes them far more probable than just the calculations they involve would permit. Billions of people *know* the equations work, so the universe is prepared to let probability be warped into their paths. Trying a related calculation without that weight of knowledge -- trying to invent a new formula, in other words -- is incredibly hard. It would have to be built up painstakingly by teams of Unions from tiny first principles that were already probable in their own right, and practiced time after time at each stage to bed the formula's elements into reality before moving to the next stage.

For example (and a rather poor example too *grin*), if Dark Lament wanted to develop a formula for creating food, they would need to start off with something like the probability that, having called a pizza delivery, it would be delivered to the research lab within a tight but reasonable time limit, and group-formulate that particular calculation 4000 or 5000 times before it became acceptable to the universe. Then they could slowly bring the time limit in tighter and tighter -- when you have your pizza being delivered within 5 minutes as acceptable, having it delivered in 4 mins 30 becomes reasonable, even though the rest of the city has to wait half an hour -- until delivery was instantaneous after making the phone call to order it. Then they could start working to have it mis-delivered as a result of someone else's call so it didn't need ordering, and, finally, (because it would now be acceptable to have your correct pizza mis-delivered to you instantaneously) work on the chances that it would be able to arrive without delivery or payment. At that point, other types of food delivery could be pushed down the same process (which would be getting easier all the time), and finally you'd arrive at a situation where the universe accepted that it would be reasonable for food to appear in front of an Ebon. The whole process would take about a hundred Necanthropes about 50 years, involve hundreds of millions of take-away dinners and a billion credits in fast-food alone, and piss off all the Necs totally as they don't eat any more (can you imagine the stench of a hundred million pizzas, in their boxes, rotting in the corner over 50 years *GRIN*? Just think of the cockroaches...!) Hardly justifiable to save some poncy brain-waster the 5c for a Meat Feast, which is why it hasn't been developed, and why I get twitchy about Feral Ebons producing random effects as they see fit 'with the power of their emotions', rather than with the Glyph Cards they're supposed to use *g*. It does also mean though that there may be all sorts of ancient, suppressed formulae that were considered too dangerous lurking around to be found, because they would already be bedded in to the universe.

Incidentally, I've talked about the WoP as finding things acceptable. That isn't to imply that the universe is sentient, rather than as an event happens, it leaves behind a degree of probabilistic residue that makes it slightly easier for an almost identical event to happen again. Another part of the reason why formulae have to be so precise.

WHAT HAPPENS WHEN THE EQUATION FAILS AND THE EBB-USER LOSES HIS FLUX?

Other probabilities are too strong for the Ebb-user to overcome, and the probability she has channeled flux into fizzles.

You could work it so that an unbounded mis-calculation (ie a calculation based on a glyph with open environmental variables -- a glyph card rather than a DeathSuit, which is fully

bounded -- causes all sorts of probability effects and/or brain-turning-to-mush effects, which is what makes Glyph Cards so dangerous. One of the reasons DeathSuits are so big is that they contain all possible bounding variable data items padding all the various formula glyphs. A glyphless formulation would contain no variable data at all, and so immediately spin away from the Ebon creating all sorts of completely random effects and dealing incalculable (ie immediately lethal) damage to the Ebon's mind. Psych blocks to prevent this are installed during training. Untrained Ebons that somehow learn how to formulate either get the hint, or die immediately on their first -- foolish -- trial formulation.

IS IT POSSIBLE TO HAVE TOO MUCH FLUX / TOO LITTLE FLUX

The Ebon does not really have the flux per se. It might just be possible (theoretically) to override the self-protection mechanism, channel too much flux, and be destroyed. It is not possible to draw too little flux. An Ebon in a dead zone (zero-flux area) will be in extreme pain and be disorientated, but will not deteriorate or otherwise come to lasting harm.

IS FLUX ONLY PRESENT FOR THE USE OF THE EBB-USER OR DOES IT SERVE SOME OTHER PURPOSE / CAN IT HAVE SOME OTHER EFFECT?

It is an automatic effect kicked up by the passage of time and by random events. If it has any other purpose, it is unknown.

DO FLUX AND THE TRUTH HAVE ANY RELATIONSHIP OR CORRELATION?

No, not at all. The Flux is entirely different, a normal and inherent part of any universe, and nothing to do with the Truth.

THE TRUTH

THE CARRIENS

The Carrien races were an early Karma experiment that failed. The Carrien were to be a production model for a class of genetic soldier similar to the Stormers that SLA uses today, but because only rudimentary creative processes were available the Carrien never became what was expected. They developed independent thought and intelligence of a feral sort and proved impossible to control properly so they were released into the Cannibal Sectors to 'clean them up' (pest control on the cannibals). The project controllers expected them to die out fairly quickly, but they had underestimated their creations. The Carriens, built with a flexible genetic code, were proving to be adaptable enough to cope with almost any circumstances, and they possessed the capability to breed. They quickly spread over the Cannibal Sectors to become a bigger pest than the cannibals and crazies had ever been. SLA Industries decided that it would be in its best interest to cover up the fact that the Carriens were their creation because of the havoc they were creating. SLA's most successful creation (because of their ability to adapt to survive) was their greatest failure. SLA could not be seen as having failed. The Carriens were not created in quite the same way as most Stormers. Carrienisation was a process applied to humans in the hope of producing a cheaper super-

soldier than fully vat- grown stormers. It meant that as the people degraded into twisted monsters, they kept a lot of basic biology -- which is why Carriens can breed, why they're so adaptable, and why they were impossible to wipe out.

And, for the record, there are some human-intelligence Carriens, and yes, they can be recruited -- even into SLA -- but they are rare, it doesn't happen often, and they are still more likely to be the target of Green/Black BPNs. There is one on the Downtown Contract Circuit, though. He's called Snake Eyes...

THE DAY OF THE DOG

As the Carriens were a failure, so too are the Domino Dogs. The Domino dogs were developed to eradicate the Carrien mistake that Karma had created. This time the project was a success. They behaved as ordered and showed no signs of disobedience or extra intelligence. In the future, however, they will start to break their 'conditioning' and go rogue. The beasts will turn on their masters in a horrific wave of carnage that will become known as "the Day of the Dog".

This is due to the type of memory that they were given when created, a parallel memory of sorts. A Domino Dog remembers each target as it encounters it and stores the encounter in its memory. When the portion of its memory that holds this information becomes full, in about two years, it will then start to eat into the core memory (the bits that, amongst other things, tell the Dog the difference between friend and foe). When this happens all hell will break loose in the Cannibal Sectors and Lower DownTown.

DARKNIGHT

The Soft Company DarkNight was created by SLA Industries, a fact that is unknown to all DN employees apart from the leader, and is unknown to all of SLA Industries except Mr. Slayer, Intruder and Senti. DarkNight, in turn, is behind almost all the other Soft Companies; in terms of funding, if nothing else. This is one of the best kept secrets in the World of Progress. Slayer created DarkNight as a rival agent for several reasons:

1. It gives him someone to blame when things do not go as planned - they are the fall guys. This aids SLA in many ways. One of the most common uses of this is to blame natural Mort disasters on DarkNight - the collapse of a building due to structural failure becomes a DarkNight terrorist attack on a civilian target.
2. It provides a real testing ground for SLA Operatives. Slayer wants his 'army' ready for when he has to use them, and pitting them against DarkNight in its myriad forms keeps them 'fit for battle' and on their toes. It also helps weed out the weak from the strong (in Slayer's Big Picture, only the strong, versatile and creative are of use to him).
3. When DarkNight destroys a factory complex or a housing block, who do the people of Mort turn to for help? SLA Industries. This is Slayer's way of making the people grateful and dependent on him and his company.
4. It allows SLA Industries to cover up messy details and mistakes without having to involve themselves. It has been known for DarkNight to assassinate key members of

important projects just when they seem to be doing well (too well for Slayer). In addition, certain sensitive missions are given to Ops. Once they have completed it, the Ops are arrested for being DarkNight & killed in public.

5. Question: What is the easiest way to keep an eye on the true subversives? Answer: Have them join a subversive organisation that is actually controlled by you (i.e. DarkNight), then sit back and watch every move they make (including the moves they make for you without even realising).

DarkNight is a huge operation, and is genuinely trying to overthrow SLA. The rank and file DN members have no idea that they are being manipulated. Only Slayer and the few other privileged cognoscenti know that it can and will never succeed.

THRESHER

Threshers are absolutely genuine. There are no special secrets about Thresher (other than the fact that all the conflict war technology in fact dates from 0 SD - see later).

THE STORMER ABOMINATION

Stormers are created in Biogenetic labs using a technique called Deathwake. This technique pulls Real Time souls at the point of death into the Deathwake device and from there into the Stormers (all variants). The souls are subverted from their normal path to the afterlife and into the device. Senti originally performed this technique manually, before the creation of the Deathwake Device.

SLA also creates both male & female stormers designed specifically to be fabulous in bed, for use in sponsored brothels. For a *BIG* price, you can even purchase sub-intelligent stormer-variant clones of a wide range of famous contract killers & other stars (usually not until they're dead in the WoP though) -- sort of like full-size, gorgeous, nympho doobries, if you want to think of it that way -- and there are also plenty of pleasure-grade Vevs (in fact, that's how Vevs started out) knocking about in rest salons and brothels.

DEATHWAKE & DIGGER

The Deathwake had to be stored somewhere it would never be found or destroyed, so Slayer and Senti created Digger to house the Deathwake. Digger is the first and most powerful of the Manchines. He was designed to be one of the deadliest killing Machines ever created, and where better to keep so great a secret? He 'lives' in Cannibal Sector one (inside the remains of Salvation Tower), where he will guard the secret of Deathwake forever. Digger was constructed as indestructible by any mortal hand and over the years of "sucking souls" he has gained a great deal of strength of his own. Digger now spends his time slaughtering the inhabitants of Cannibal Sector One and Lower DownTown.

SOUL DEGRADATION - REMEMBRANCE

Every so often a Stormer will 'malfunction'. The prime case is the Stormer suicide. A Stormer will sometimes hear or see something that its stolen soul remembers from its Real life. (Many aspects of SLA are linked back to Real Time, for reasons that will become fairly obvious.) This remembrance causes massive trauma in the Stormer, and usually leads to death.

There is only one official documented case of a Stormer who committed suicide because he remembered who he had been and couldn't live with what he had become (the only part documented is that he committed suicide). These cases are very rare indeed.

LIFE AFTER DEATH

LAD is a two-pronged process. It allowed Slayer to bring back Delia to keep the public pacified, and distract attention from her odd death, and by the same token it allows his warriors a second, third, fourth chance. But every time you are revived, you lose a part of your soul - humour, dreams, hope, compassion, love - until all that is left is the blind obedience of DarkFinders.

NECANTHROPES

Necanthropes are dead, which is why they don't age. They are souls dragged back from their journey to the afterlife by their own ambitions and passions, their bodies the accretion of their personas, flux taken form around warped soul. The bulks are loyal to Slayer, but few have any respect for the living.

HALLOWEEN JACK AND WAVE LINDSAY

Wave Lindsay wrote 'Integration Twenty', an unreleased newspaper article that, if it had ever reached print, would have destroyed the entire World of Progress. All the information in this writer's guide is in Integration Twenty, and then some. Lindsay was reported to have died when the offices of DownTown Phoenix (Lindsay's subversive newsletter) went up in flames the night before the paper was to be released. All employees of DownTown Phoenix were reported to have died in the blaze. Wave Lindsay's body was never found. Sometime later a new serial killer appeared on the streets, his name, Halloween Jack. He wore a pumpkin-head mask and never spoke a word. His weapon, the Chain-axe, quickly spread fear throughout the whole of Mort. Nobody knew who he was or where he came from. The truth behind Mort's best known (and best loved?) Serial Killer is that he is Wave Lindsay, or what was left after the fire.

Why is Halloween Jack so impossible to kill? An Entity called Bitterness provided him with the power to defeat his enemies - SLA Industries and all its supporters. Bitterness did this by making Lindsay an avatar of his power, a vessel for a portion of Bitterness's rage. He cannot die (through normal means), and will remain this way until Bitterness tires with him.

Why did Bitterness transform Lindsay? No reason other than that he was able to. Bitterness is Slayer's only true enemy, the cause of most of his problems. He is the ruler of White Earth, a planet with vague mentions in the SLA Industries' rule book. White Earth is Earth's counterpart in the SLA universe, a vast desert planet ruled by Bitterness, a corruption of nature, a blasphemy of creation. Chaos and destruction are the main features of the planet and its mad, life-hating 'god'.

WHO IS BITTERNESS? WHO IS SLAYER? WHY DO THEY EXIST AND DO WHAT THEY DO?

To answer these questions we must examine what came before SLA Industries and the World of Progress.

THE BEGINNING

Realities are not born in fire, as our physicists currently think. They grow from seeds planted in earlier, already-finished ones. They germinate and develop, and then finally, when the time is right, they spring out into the multiverse from the parent universe, as solid and real as any other. The ground that a fledgeling universe grows within is consciousness, and its germination occurs when that consciousness dies in its original reality, and becomes the god - the True Creator -- of the new one.

The key to the WoP lies in Real Time, the place where we live, earth today. This is where SLA Industries was truly born, its universe created in the way that all universes are. A young man named Brent Walker lived a scared, sheltered life. Alone in a small town, just outside Glasgow, Brent had spent most of his time existing in a world that didn't care, a heavy, lifeless world. He could see and hear things that he couldn't account for, his secret world. His only friend was Tide, a voice that existed in the back of his mind. His restricted world - unpleasant as it was - and Tide's voice were the only things that held him together. It was a voice that protected Brent from the harsh cruelty of reality and life.

Together, Brent and Tide lived, and slowly Brent lost touch with everything around him, except Tide. He rarely left his room, and he wanted no part of the outside world, a bleak world that could never understand him.

Until that point, Brent's father had denied him medical treatment because he thought it's "all in Brent's mind" and "He'll grow out of it". This was until the day that Brent's father had an argument with him about getting a job. Eventually, Brent tried to kill him. That day, Brent's father booked an appointment with a psychiatrist called Dr Burnen.

Dr Burnen quickly became fascinated by Brent, who remained quiet and reserved throughout his treatment. Burnen could not make any progress with Brent, who seemed guarded against all of Burnen's efforts to cure him. Tide was looking after Brent, by working around the 'psychobabble' of the good doctor. Tide analysed all that Burnen said and did and prepared answers for Brent. Burnen knew there was something more to this boy and wanted to learn the truth behind him, but Brent and Tide worked to well as a team to guard the secrets from him. Burnen needed aid to 'crack the kid' and learn these secrets that he had only a glimpse of, so he approached the hospital board for help, and unfortunately, he got it.

CRANTHAM

The next day, a new research team appeared in Burnen's office. They were led by a Doctor Crantham, a charming man with an immaculate black suit and a poppy-red tie. Crantham ordered all information pertaining to Brent Walker to be handed over to him immediately, stating that Burnen was no longer on the Walker case. Burnen started to argue. Before he could understand what he had started, he was given extended leave and told his position within the psychiatric profession would be reviewed in one month's time. Burnen appealed,

but he knew this would be useless. Whoever this Crantham was, he had government backing and security clearances that could get him anywhere. That scared Burnen, that and talk of the 'Walker subject' - to them Brent was nothing more than property, owned by the British government, and, more importantly, by Crantham.

Crantham talked extensively with Brent, telling him exactly what Brent wanted to hear. Brent viewed Crantham as the answer to all his prayers; at last there was someone who understood. Crantham explained to Brent that he was gifted - with his sight of his restricted universe - and there were others who existed with this gift. He also explained that he had been gathering these gifted people 'for their protection from a harsh and unsympathetic society'. He had gathered them within the Crantham Foundation, a society set up by Dr Crantham himself for this very purpose. Crantham also explained that he would rather develop Brent's gift than cure it, it would be better for Brent in the long run. Tide warned Brent not to trust the man; there was something not right about the whole situation. Tide despised Crantham. He suspected that the whole situation was a trap. He was right.

REATHANOL

Crantham gave Brent his first dose of Reathanol, a mind altering 'psycho-reactive' drug that helped to unlock his gift. At this point, the world around Brent started to change. It became a more sinister and unpleasant place. Reathanol was a stimulant like no other. It enhanced the brain's creative capabilities - ideas formed every second, and potentials were pushed beyond all normal limits.

In the hands of writers or artists, Reathanol would allow them to be producing new works every minute of the day. It would make you feel alive, keeping them awake and free from fatigue until they had finished. One of the major side effects was that the barriers between what was real and imaginary break down, leaving confusion. The other side effect was that people usually only survive about six months to a year after taking Reathanol. It was a destructive and addictive drug. Death through Reathanol addiction was not pleasant. First comes insanity, then brain haemorrhage and death.

THE CRANTHAM FOUNDATION

Brent was taken to the Crantham Foundation, an eerie looking asylum on the outskirts of Glasgow. Once inside the asylum, Brent was placed in a straitjacket and left in a cell on his own. Brent now realised that this was where he would spend the rest of his days, hooked on Reathanol until he died. Slowly, he slipped into the world of his and Tide's creation, fuelled by the Reathanol fixes he received.

His world started to take shape and form, diagrams depicting races and cultures, attitudes and beliefs scrawled across his cell walls - paper had long since run out. Brent became lost in creativity. He had forgotten his one and only friend, Tide. Tide was left alone, scared and jealous of what Brent was doing. Tide wondered what would happen if Brent did create this place. Would Tide be lost and forgotten forever?

TIDE

Tide understood that Crantham was responsible for Brent's immersion into his own world and his slow self- destruction. Tide knew this was a trap and that Crantham had reasons for

bringing Brent there. The creation of this universe in Brent's mind must have been the reason. Tide took over Brent's body to take care of Crantham, but was not prepared for Crantham's response.

HONEYED TRUTHS

Crantham told Tide that Brent had abandoned him and that he had retreated into his world alone because he wanted it for himself and would not share it with anyone. Crantham then told Tide that Brent didn't need him anymore, not since he had his own world and his fix of Reathanol.

Tide was lost in fear and despair. Crantham consoled him and soothes him with honeyed words. He told Tide that he was the one that the doctor truly wanted, not Brent. He told Tide that he knew how he could become independent of Brent completely, truly real in every sense. Tide made one mistake - he believed him. Tide listened to Crantham and managed a separate quasi-existence from Brent, where he and Crantham talked about Crantham's plans for Tide.

NEW FRIENDS

For the first time since he had been admitted, Brent was allowed to meet the other inhabitants of the Crantham Foundation. He was surprised to find that only five others were there (although he found out that there were other locations like it all over the globe). The other residents were:

- Gideon Dean, a 55 year old failed priest and morphine addict.
- Romane Bouraeff, aka The Flail, a 26 year old serial killer from Hungary who killed religious cult leaders (he himself was a fanatic of his own religion).
- Jane Burrows, a 20 year old with a long list of drug addictions. She made regular escape attempts from the asylum (the wardens could set their watches by her).
- Harvey Everton, a 24 year old rebel with a criminal record as long as your arm.
- Jean Marceau, an 8 year old from Paris, the youngest inmate and the one with the least idea about what was truly going on.

Brent, Harvey and Jane formed an immediate friendship and managed to keep each other amused in the face of such morbid and depressing surroundings. As their time together progressed, they learnt a great deal about each other and themselves. Brent started to experience frequent dizzy spells and often lost track of periods of time. Sometimes he remembered events that he was not part of, at least not really part of. What Brent didn't understand was that slowly Tide was changing, and he was taking over Brent's mind and body.

END OF A FRIENDSHIP

Brent and Tide were thrown together again during one of the daily doses of Reathanol, and Brent reacted violently to both the drug and Tide's reappearance. He fell to the floor and convulsed painfully. He called to Tide for help, but when Tide appeared to him, he seemed changed, more real than before, more sinister and dangerous. Tide explained that he didn't need Brent anymore; he had his own existence to lead and didn't need a nobody like Brent under his feet, ruining his new-found existence. Brent feared what Tide had become. He had

always known that Tide had power, but he'd never allowed him access to the outside world. Tide just did not belong there.

TRUTH

Brent wondered how Tide had done this and who had helped him. Tide was only too pleased to tell Brent all of Crantham's schemes and plans. He told Brent how Crantham was using everyone in this asylum (and others like it) for his own ends. He was the puppet master who controlled all the strings in a truly grand scheme, the Real Time Project.

REAL TIME

All the inmates were involved in this project, which was linked to the government and the military, but was essentially controlled by Crantham. Each of the participants of Project Real Time would go on to create their own universes upon their deaths. The universes that had existed only in dreams and vague shadows until then would become real upon the deaths of their creators - but the one who outlived the others, the strongest, would create the most viable, most stable universe. Without a chance to complete the creation of the universe, it would quickly collapse. It had to be self-consistent to remain, and Crantham desperately needed an enduring creation, so that he could make use of it. Crantham convinced each of the inmates that they had the best potential on the project. He told them that they had reached the final point in the programme. The final goal he gave them was to eliminate all the other inmates, 'for the sake of Real Time'.

Crantham started with Gideon Dean. Gideon had made a deal with Romane to share their universes between them. All Crantham wanted Romane to do was kill Brent Walker for him. Gideon knew all about Tide, and decided that he was the opposite of all his faith stood for. Romane shared several religious views with Gideon, and they had both agreed that Tide was evil and had to be destroyed.

Crantham knew he would not be able to sway Brent to kill his friends, so he concentrated on Tide. Tide had no problems with killing the others. They only stood in the way of what he viewed as his 'Big Picture'.

The next day Gideon Dean was found dead in his cell. He had hung himself. A note in his cell explained that he had heard the glorious sweet truth of God and had decided to pass onto the next level of understanding. The author of these sweet truths was found lying outside Gideon's cell door, asleep. Jean Marceau could not remember how he got there. Tide had filled Jean's mind with thoughts of darkness and death and sent him to visit Gideon. Crantham had Jean removed from the program. He was sent home to Paris to die, no longer any use to the program. He was not to be the one.

Harvey Everton was Crantham's next subject. Harvey was ready for Crantham and he explained how he knew that Crantham was cheating them all with lies and broken promises, and how he had committed many crimes in his 'progress'. Crantham listened intently, then had Harvey removed. That was the last time he was seen alive. His universe was never to be finished. Harvey never really wanted it anyway.

Brent could now only see death all around, which started making him even more dark and brooding. He was trying desperately not to become a monster, but Tide was pushing grim

thoughts to the surface of Brent's mind. These thoughts changed the universe that was being created there; the darker the thoughts, the darker and more foreboding the universe became. It grew horrible and desolate, a harsh and merciless place with no love and no hope. Brent didn't want to die to create a place like that.

Tide was slowly picking his way through the inmates. He had decided to kill Jane last; to 'save her for later' (she posed no immediate threat). Romane was in solitary confinement (as usual - he was far too dangerous to allow free range of the asylum). He could pose a problem, and he wanted Brent dead more than anything else. Tide decided that he would free himself from Brent for good - it was time.

THE WORLD OF PROGRESS

Tide made Brent's body take an overdose of Reathanol. His mind was pushed well beyond even its enhanced limits. His world started to finally click into place, but it was not the world Brent had dreamed of. Not his world, but Tide's. The World of Progress was being born, an ugly and desolate universe of despair. This was the world Tide had been talking of; not the one Brent existed in, but an oppressive realm of sorrow.

Worlds and peoples were born, histories created, life breathed into an otherwise empty universe. As Brent's mind (coupled with Tide's influence) placed the finishing touches on the World of Progress, a roar of triumph bellowed throughout the asylum. Crantham had decided that it was time to speed up the project's conclusion - he had released Romane Bouraeff, the Flail. He was coming to kill Brent.

END GAME

The Flail had wrenched chains from the asylum's grounds and bound them together to form a crude version of his namesake, a flail - a crude but effective one, as several orderlies have already found out. He found the door to Brent's cell already open and Brent waiting inside for him, a strange and twisted grin on his lips. As he stepped into the cell, the door swung closed. The screams from within echoed throughout the building. The Flail was eventually removed from the cell in a body bag. The orderlies had found him chained to the light fittings by his legs, his blood adorning the walls of Brent's cell, his universe half-formed. Each drop of blood identified the location of a different cult in the World of Progress. All that remained of the project were Brent and Jane. Crantham had them locked in the recreation room together.

Jane and Brent sat on the recreation room floor, waiting for what would happen next. Sleep soon overtook their bodies. "Now it is time to play," decided Tide. He had decided he would not kill Jane after all, but instead destroy her mind and the world inside it. In his study Crantham sat patiently, thinking "Tonight we play out the end game, my children".

BROKEN DREAMS - THE PROMENADE

Brent awoke on a beach. It was not an ordinary beach, but a promenade of pain and suffering. Blood-drenched bodies floated on a sea of broken glass. White seagulls lay impaled on the rusted railings that lined the sea front. It was a child's dream gone sour, made twisted and evil. A wave of bodies and broken glass crashed against the shore to a chorus of dying gulls. The wave retreated as fast as it came in, mocking laughter following it.

"Tide!" Brent cried. Tide had ruined this world as he had ruined the dreams of the others, Brent's included. This had been a child's dream, Jean Marceau's world, destroyed and perverted by the twisted mind of Tide. Brent knew Tide was there somewhere, waiting for him. Brent heard a scream and followed the sound to an old, broken-down barbers shop. Tide was inside with Jane. She was strapped to the barber's chair with razor wire, her body slashed and broken, butchered without mercy. Tide looked at Brent. "So you have arrived, and just in time. I saved the last cut for you".

Tide handed Brent a knife and explained to Brent that he was not actually harming Jane's body. All the damage was in her mind. Brent told Tide to sit back and watch him perform the last stroke. As Tide sat in the chair, he found himself trapped by Brent's creativity. The chair swivelled to face the barber's mirror. Tide had committed irreversible damage to everything around him, and now, on everyone else's behalf, Brent was going to do the same to Tide.

SLAYER

Brent cut and slashed at Tide's face. The blood-splashed mirror showed the results. Brent had skinned Tide's face, almost to the bone in places. He had shredded the cheeks and cut the nose out completely. Brent had decided that this horror was no longer Tide; Tide was a caring and protective person, friend. What sat in the chair was an uncaring monster, a killer, an animal, a slayer. "Yes, a slayer is all you are now. In your honour, I rename you Slayer, to suit your new face". Tide/Slayer looked in the mirror and, for the first time in his existence, screamed in sheer horror at what he had become. With the scream came a lock of white hair in his raven black mane, from brow to back.

Brent left Slayer sitting in his chair, staring at what Brent had made him into. Brent crossed the room to see Jane. He couldn't wake her; shock had driven her away, and she was in a coma. Slayer had got her after all. "You have your damned world now, Slayer. Enjoy it." Brent walked out the barbers shop and along the promenade. He could feel the end of this game approaching fast.

Brent awoke in the Crantham Foundation. All the cells were empty. The place had been cleared. He puts on his clothes and left. As he reached the front gates, he found a note and a bundle. It simply said "I knew it would be you. Crantham." The bundle contained, amongst other things, a dagger - a present that Brent's parents had brought back from Paris for him several years before. He decided to go home.

Eventually, the body of Brent Walker was found in an abandoned Glasgow tenement block. He had slashed his wrists and died of blood loss. A man in a black suit and poppy-red tie turned up with the authorities and taken the body. A few days later, a still-comatose Jane Burrows died from cardiac arrest.

BITTERNESS

Brent awoke yet again in another world. A world of bleached white sand lay in all directions. It was Slayer's final trap for Walker. Slayer had sent Brent to a distant backwater planet in the World of Progress, imprisoned there for eternity by arcane rules of existence. Pain coursed through Brent's body. He realised why when his body started to twist and change. Technically Brent couldn't exist in his own creation, so his surroundings were changing him. The planet

was linked to him, and he was becoming part of it. He realised that he had control of this world, it was his.

Yet this was not enough. Slayer had trapped him here, and he had to get revenge. Hate and anger poured from Brent's thoughts, his bitterness at all that had happened consuming every other thought. His body finally stopped changing and conformed to a shape that was fit to house the only emotion left in his body - bitterness at Slayer. His enraged thoughts scorched across the planet, destroying everything they touched in a storm of rage and hatred. When the storm settled, a figure walked from the dust cloud, bloody tears streaming from his milk-white eyes. This was the birth of Bitterness. He had become a vessel for his rage. He was bitterness in physical form as well as in name.

WHITE EARTH

Bitterness named his planet 'White Earth', in honour of his lost home, and because of the bleached sand covering its surface. For the next 900 years, Bitterness walked the dunes of White Earth, his hatred (and his madness) growing with each step. He has evolved the planet into a world of nightmare, a realm of entropy and madness, where the real and unreal are the same. All those from the World of Progress who visited White Earth have either left totally insane or have never returned at all. Bitterness has been busy over the last 900 years, building himself a twisted empire in the shadow of his planet, a tumorous growth on the Universe of the World of Progress - beyond White Earth, accessible only through or around it. Plans of death and destruction are all that he ever considers. He wants everything in both this universe and in Real Time destroyed. No life should exist anywhere, and all must die.

SLA INDUSTRIES

Slayer has reworked the World of Progress into his own personal universe. It is based around power, lies, deceit, and glory through violence. Not for one minute does anyone in the World of Progress realise that they are the creations of Slayer's mind, the product of a warped imagination.

This knowledge would destroy most people outright. Nobody knows that the whole thing is a grand work of fiction, there never were any Conflict Wars, nothing existed before 0 SD - before Slayer created it (in Brent's mind). All of history is one big lie, made up to fill in the gaps in peoples minds, to give them a reality and stability. If anyone ever found out, the awareness of personal unreality would drive them from existence, rationality and logic destroying them (or driving the truly strong-minded insane). In the World of Progress, if you question your reality, you cease to exist. Slayer set up a company, his company, which would run the whole universe, and protect the people from both Bitterness and from discovering the truth behind their personal existence. He is the head of this company, located in it's power base on his capital planet, a dead hulk that had never lived - aptly named Mort - and its physical impossibilities (the constant rain, the huge size but earth-standard gravity) are explained away (ie made non-paradoxical) by entirely fake "atmosphere generators". The company is called SLA Industries, and its planet never was; the peculiarities are all part of the way it was created.

Within SLA Industries, he created Cloak Division, to maintain the loyalty of the public (and his 'loyal' soldiers). As well as this he created an enemy for SLA Industries, called DarkNight. DarkNight is a scapegoat for SLA's more unjust activities. Dark Night is used to make SLA

Industries popular, by turning the people towards SLA for help when DarkNight bombs their homes, or kills their families. It is important to the coherency of the universe that the people have the illusion of free choice, and feel that if they try, they can make a difference. The public do not (and never will) realise that DarkNight is part of SLA Industries. All the money and goods stolen are returned to the company. Slayer is the only one who knows the truth. He has his own people fighting each other for the sake of the universe's integrity.

STIGMARTYR

Slayer also formed a company division named Stigmartyr. These were his most loyal followers. They have the job of repressing all mentions of White Earth and Bitterness, including hunting down his agents - called Shards or Monitors, depending on function - who frequently appear on Mort to cause havoc.

Most of the citizenship of Mort has never even heard of White Earth or Bitterness (those who have are now in hiding, dead or worse, though usually they are dead). Stigmartyr are very rarely seen and even more rarely survived. Their function is not known by most members of the company, and few people outside of SLA Industries have even heard of them.

What is known, however, is that to see them generally means death. What is not understood is that Stigmartyr is protecting the people from a truth that would destroy them completely - imagine finding out that you are living a lie; you are only a figment of someone's imagination? Stigmartyr are specially trained to resist destructive effects of the knowledge, but after a few years, most of them start to slowly lose reality and eventually cease to exist.

Bitterness often attempts to make trouble, by doing paradoxical things. He rarely leaves White Earth; one of the rules is that if he leaves, Slayer can go in and cause havoc there. He was behind Icon's killing of Delia; a child murdering the top contract killer was a very subversive act, and weakened people's faith in the order of things.

THE WORLD OF PROGRESS

The problems in the World of Progress have generally been created by Slayer as a diversion from the truth. Most of these diversions have mutated and grown beyond anything that Slayer would have wanted. For example, the growing violence bred the high rate of serial killers, and the fake subversive propaganda created genuine terrorist activity (although usually bought under the wing of DarkNight).

Experimental technologies and abilities (like Biogenetics and the Ebb) have played havoc with their surroundings, with pollution rising beyond habitable levels on some planets. Slayer has watched the world around him grow on its own and all he can do is desperately grasp at the reins of power and hold on as tightly as he can. Slowly, he feels those reins slipping, and he knows that he can't hold on forever. He also knows that Bitterness is never idle - he seeks constantly to destroy the coherency of the universe - and one day they will come head to head. The World of Progress is a sick animal, each day bringing it closer to death: a death that Bitterness, now completely mad - evil, irrational and chaotic - eagerly awaits.

THE SERVANTS OF BITTERNESS

Bitterness sits and cultivates his planets. His ghastly natives are brought up to worship 'the Walker', acting out grim rituals and blasphemous acts which to them are a way of life. His followers are members of the Shi'an blood cult, 'the Order of the Shard', blood crazed warriors and shamans who carry out his will and defend his faith. He also has his 'Shard Angels', his truly chosen followers.

The Shard Angels perform the tasks of nourishing him and are his lovers. Their pain and sorrow feed his dark lust for revenge. His Monitors travel the World of Progress as spies and investigators, keeping him up to date with current affairs. Bitterness will accept anyone as a Monitor - all they have to do is swear eternal allegiance to Bitterness and to White Earth (provided that they survive the meeting with Bitterness, that is).

THE BLACK STUMP

Beyond White Earth is the domain known as The Black Stump. This has been created by Bitterness as his 'playground'. The Black Stump is a chaotic, darkly insane realm filled with the hostile creations of Bitterness's warped mind.

MANDRAKE

Slayer once sent an expeditionary force out to The Black Stump. The Foldship Yung was sent out, with Mandrake as the expedition leader (see SLA Industries RPG page 24). As the ship passed White Earth, its influence reached out and changed those on the ship. Some did not realise they had been changed, but others (the family of Manticore) had been radically warped. These were abandoned to their own fate on a small planet called Assaine.

The rest of the ship travelled on beyond The Black Stump where the true effects of White Earth's influence hit them. Mandrake decided that he would no longer bow to Slayer, but would take The Black Stump for himself. He is finding it hard to bring his rule to this realm as Bitterness has spread his word everywhere. Combined with the other factions here, and the total chaos that dominates the realm, this makes his conquest harder. Unlike Slayer, Bitterness does not control his creation but lets it develop on its own. He created it as a playground, for his manipulation and amusement.

THE CONFLICTING FACTIONS

There are several factions at war within The Black Stump. They are:

MANDRAKE

He and all the Ebons who left Mort with him are now Necanthropes, of sorts. The strange reality of The Black Stump has warped them into their own breed. They are no longer what the Ebon race know as Necanthropes, but terrifying entities of great power (greater than most 'normal' Necanthropes), with Mandrake being the most powerful of their 'family'. Mandrake is gathering strength for his return to the World of Progress, where he will make a bid for power. At present time, he is on a quest for the BloodBound Book. Mandrake does not know the true purpose of the book - he thinks it will grant him knowledge and power.

THE BLOODBOUND BOOK

An artefact of great power, said to contain the power to control the World of Progress and beyond. The book itself is made from the skin, flesh and blood of a Real Time woman called Zoe Hansen whom Bitterness pulled into the World of Progress in order to help destroy it. If the book is ever found and opened, it will be the final undermining pin - it will annihilate the World of Progress and everything within it. When that happens, Bitterness will finally laugh, as he escapes to start work on Real Time. There are several rumours of its whereabouts. Most of them tell of the book being somewhere in the World of Progress.

THE FOLLOWERS OF BITTERNESS

Monitors and Shard Warriors fight with great ferocity for their lord and god, the Walker of the sands. Shard Angels lead these savages on brutal assaults, not really caring if they win or lose.

THE CADAVAROUS

When Cadavar and the House of the Black Church departed from Slayer's company (SLA Industries page 18), they decided to travel into unknown territory - The Black Stump. Cadavar has been gathering and training a force which he has named 'The Cadavarous', an army that one day, when they are ready, will return to Mort and attempt to wrench control of the World of Progress from Slayer and SLA Industries. The Cadavarous side with the forces of Bitterness - they find themselves in the same battle - due to a promise made by Cadavar to Bitterness in the early years of SLA Industries. He has recently heard of the BloodBound Book, and like the others, he is frantically searching for it.

ROOT DOGS

A dreaded alien race who have taken Biogenetics to new levels of unholiness. They mould flesh and form into new deadly creations, abominations of nature. They create deadly viruses that they will unleash on anyone who crosses their paths. Little is known about them as very few people have survived their assaults, and those who have are no longer what they were, their shapes mercilessly changed.

KILNECK

Once Slayer's most trusted and loyal bodyguards, they were disgusted by his ruthless methods and have left his service, vowing never to return. The Kilneck have made it their job to destroy the Root Dogs and the forces of Mandrake whenever they cross paths. Although few in number, the Kilneck are actually people who entered the SLA universe from Real Time, and they are aware that it is created, which increases their power hugely.

There are the other races that are indigenous to The Black Stump, but these are many and varied. Bitterness creates and destroys at his whim. The Black Stump is a melting pot of races and cultures, where there is no such thing as normal.

WHO IS INTRUDER?

Intruder is what was left of Brent Walker's persona after all the rage and hatred had left to form Bitterness. Intruder is a shadow of what Brent could have become if his world had

succeeded without the interference of Tide or, later, Slayer. He is Slayer's final insult to Brent Walker, a living memorial. Slayer has 'moulded' him to be his watchdog, his loyal servant, his mouthpiece.

Intruder does Slayer's dirty work without question and never falters in his duty. Although Intruder carries out his work for Slayer without question, he does have grave reservations about it - so much so that he is slowly changing and going mad through the amount of purely evil things that Slayer makes him do. This has led to a number of cover-up operations involving Intruder. Some of these are of a violent nature, some are sexual, but all are disturbing - someone with the power of Intruder can inflict their own gruesome nightmares on whomever they please. If he were to regain his individuality as Brent Walker, his power would match that of Slayer's and Bitterness's.

THE BIG PICTURE

Slayer has one ideal, the Big Picture that he is working towards and has been aiming at since the formation of the World of Progress. He is training all of his 'subjects' for war, a war that will settle everything conclusively. Slayer has always known that Bitterness and the other factions would one day come for him, so he has spent his time 'readying his troops for battle'.

All the harsh conditions and deceptions that exist in the World of Progress are tests which Slayer has been setting for everyone to prepare them for the onslaught. It is Unnatural Selection on Slayer's part - survival of the fittest and most versatile. Slayer wishes only the best to be at his side when the time comes.

THE PLAYER CHARACTERS' ROLE

The PC's tasks in all this are simple:

- Increase their Security Clearance Level (SCL). Progress through the ranks of the company without learning too much about the company they work for.
- Be 'good little soldiers' of Slayer. Do as they are told, and make the company look good.
- Don't make waves. A little knowledge is enough. Never try to learn too much. Player Characters are a dispensable commodity to SLA Industries, nothing more.
- Rise above the mire of Down Town. Better their lifestyle. Fight the good fight against the face of growing terrorism and all those who oppose SLA.
- Survive in a world set against them in every way. At every point in their life they will be challenged, it is their duty to survive, to struggle on towards the greatness that can be achieved. The easy life does exist; it is just hard to reach.
- As an ultimate goal, the PCs have to try to ensure that their universe does not collapse around them. Slayer cares, and for good reasons. At the moment at least, it is in their best interests to do as he says.

HOW IT AFFECTS THE GAME

Reality - the influence of Real Time - is dangerous. SLA exists on an entirely different level from Real Time, and the World of Progress should have no involvement or dealings with it. Unfortunately, Bitterness is still a part of reality - because he derives so strongly from Brent Walker - which is why his body is so fucked up. As a consequence, reality seeps through him

and into the World of Progress, wreaking havoc. Bitterness is chaos on a variety of levels. He's also a dedicated super-sadistic rapist, but that's another matter. The influence of Real Time is power, and makes one hell of a weapon if you know how to use it. That's more the province of Stigmartyr and Monitors, though.

The true history of the WoP makes little practical difference to everyday life on Mort. The conflict wars never happened, the conflict races never existed, and Thresher make use of technology that was put there to back up the lie. But there's still serial killers to wipe out, and DarkNight to take on. Carriens may be a Karma mistake, but they're still there. The main change is perspective. The players are actually caught up in a battle for the survival of the universe - and it may be a crummy job, but it's the only universe the characters have. If Bitterness pulls the plug, everything goes down. The World of Progress may only be a few Earth years old (time between the two does not have any direct correlation; sometimes the WoP runs faster, sometimes slower), but it is real, and not all the souls that Deathwake grabs come from inside. Bitterness is a mad God, trying to kill himself the only way he can - destroying everything. Slayer may be bad, but he's trying to hold it all together. Within the World of Progress itself, there can be traffic between the universes, or to the half-finished universes that the other Reathanol victims were able to form. Bitterness will also cheerfully do anything he can (but remember, like motion, for every action he takes, Slayer tries an equal and opposite reaction) to undermine things, and the results of this often look very peculiar to the Op on the street.

Slayer keeps it all absolutely quiet, but on Mort, things can get rather strange...

COMMON QUESTIONS & ANSWERS

WHO OR WHAT IS SENTI?

Apologies; Brent Walker was a topic that was going to have a lot more written about him, Detailing how SLA evolved and showing it's origins in Real Time. Nightfall ended though, so it went no further. In the storyline, Brent flees from the Foundation after the Endgame. In his travels, he meets a girl called Jan Forest who has the same affliction as Brent (the whole Slayer thing; she has the special type of independent entity voice that the Reathanol patients all had), except her voice's name is Senti. Brent tells her about the World of Progress, and when Jan dies - she hangs herself - her spirit appears in SLA Industries. She is a complete entity, fully united, not segmented like Bitterness/Slayer/Intruder.

WHAT IS THE WHITE?

The White is an excuse, a power vehicle, nothing more. Slayer is a man who very concerned with the proper application of power towards individuals. If Slayer wanted an Ebon to be a Necanthrope, he could just do it. But he doesn't want it to be that simple. It's too far a stretch from 'reality', so he creates a white void where things get 'created' and because it's so mystical and spectral, people don't ask too many questions about it. It helps to avoid paradoxes and chaos. Slayer was taught to cover up questionable realities by Dr Crantham.

LAD is just another trick, too, a technology invented by Slayer on the spot when Bitterness killed Delia - it's Slayer justifying, in terms of his rules of reality, a way of keeping his best Ops alive. Now he's done it, the tech is there and it works -- but it's really just a dodge, a

short-cut to avoid paradox. The Atmosphere generators all over again. The Deathwake is the genuine article, however.

WHAT ABOUT REATHANOL, REAL-TIMERS AND NESTED UNIVERSES?

A character from Real Time entering SLA has the same invincibility as Intruder, Bitterness etc. But they have no other power, or special abilities, I mean they're real normal people after all. Real Time people can also be driven mad - they're not meant to see SLA any more than ops are meant to see Kansas. To actually have power, you need a much better understanding of the nature of the World of Progress. If a normal guy was pulled in, he'd be totally out of his depth. He couldn't affect anything, because he wouldn't understand.

If a character from SLA enters the Real Time, bullets and Knives will hurt, but not that much, and they will retain their powers. If a Necanthrope jumped out at you in a New York alleyway and threatened to fry your mind, you'd believe it because it was so totally alien to you.

If anyone RT takes Reathanol they have the ability to create universes, but there are rules...

1. You have to have 'the voice' - Tide, Senti, &c. This is extraordinarily rare.
2. You've got to develop the whole thing within a year and a day, and without dying from brain damage.
3. You need guidance to make it all hang together, and only Crantham really knows how it works and how much reathanol to supply. People like Brent, Jane and Romane are ultra rare, they're specially chosen because they're the 'ones'. It is however highly possible that characters within SLA are capable of creating new worlds - but they'd need Reathanol, and Crantham...

WHO IS REAL-TIME, APART FROM SLAYER & BITTERNESS?

Senti is, the Kilneck are, and in the most obscure manner, so are Stormers simply because they have souls obtained from the Deathwake. Characters like Senti and the Kilneck have 'power' because they are 'in touch' with their souls.

DO PCS HAVE RT SOULS?

In the future, all SLA ops will have to be 'soul grafted' to protect themselves against characters that can use reality as a weapon. If reality damages you, you are 'de-created' and you cease to exist. Nasty. The most powerful characters are those who obtain a soul, and 'sync' with it without going mad in the process.

Stigmartyr agents are 'trained' in reality, as such. The trouble is, using it is bloody dangerous, and if you mess up you're worse than dead, you're nothing. Some people in SLA are better suited than others to withstand, 'gifted' in a way. Some are born with RT souls (by fluke), while others just 'understand'. Typically, either, once discovered are either snapped up by Stigmartyr or Monitors from White Earth to fight in the war.

PCs can be like this if the GM so chooses.

IF INTEGRATION 20 WAS RELEASED SOMEWHERE ISOLATED, WHAT WOULD HAPPEN?

If the incident is isolated, it won't spread until it is destroyed or discovered, in which case the problem may start over again when the finder sees a mass of reality-mangled and part-evaporated bodies.

WHAT ARE THE ROOT DOGS?

The Root Dogs were created by Slayer and Bitterness, technically. When Slayer began the SLA realm, he had to create a history and install memory in everyone built in year 0. So he conjured up things like the Root Dogs, a powerful and vicious race that SLA destroyed to create the WOP. They never existed, it was meant to be just window dressing for a make-shift 'history'. Bitterness however, in a vengeful rage, created them after hearing Slayer's lies during 100 SD. He also created them with the memory of Slayer, and his betrayal. So sooner or later, the Root Dogs will reappear on Mort looking for revenge for a war that never happened! Doh! (Slayer's voice)

WHERE ARE THE KILNECK AND WHAT ARE THEY UP TO?

The Kilneck are currently in the Black Stump, fighting the Shards and Root Dogs. They know how bad it's getting and soon they will return to Mort to warn Slayer, one last time, that a holocaust is coming. If all negotiations work out, Slayer and the Kilneck will reunite (grudgingly) to fight against White Earth. A new generation of Kilneck will be created (player character options) who become part of the growing army in the WOP.

WHO ARE THE KILNECK?

The Kilneck were friends of Brent Walker. They knew what was going on at the Crantham Foundation. In an attempt to conceal the truth, Dr Crantham had them killed. Both Brent and Tide were so enraged by the murders that the dead friends were 'born' into the new world. The Kilneck are powerful characters. They remember the past, and real time. They can't be affected by reality because it's where they come from (an ensouled character who came to terms with his or her new existence would be similarly protected). They call the use of reality the "Killing Moves". Some of them use it, others know it to be dangerous and avoid it. Intruder knows the Killing Moves, but he is prevented from using and teaching them, although, to some extent, the Ebb is an abbreviated version of it, rewriting the universe according to the rules.

The Kilneck are:

- Intruder (although obviously he wasn't a 'friend' of Brent's *grin*)
- Vemon
- Mitz
- Mirage
- Tapisstry
- Temp
- Silhouette
- Babble

WHAT ARE ANGEL AND TAARNISH? ARE THEY SPECIAL?

Angel and Taarnish are just two powerful Stormers, nothing more. They have strong soul, and that makes them powerful.

HOW DOES DEATHWAKE GET ENOUGH SOULS?

The souls taken transcend time. They can come from any era in earth's history, and can be snatched many more times than just once.

ARE LAD PATIENTS ALIVE OR DEAD?

It's like the Tuatha De Dannan dead that are thrown into the cauldron and brought back from the dead. The loyal are rejuvenated to continue the battle. Like a machine that was switched off but is switched on again.

WHAT ARE BRAINWASTERS?

The Brain Wasters are Ebons that are cursed by Bitterness, sort of. The reason they have charred features is because the first, Albrecht saw Bitterness the moment just before he was born and the sight was burnt into him. Ever since then, Brain Wasters have had mean streaks a mile wide, and the gap between the unity of the Ebons and Brain Wasters has never truly been bridged.

WHO HAS SOULS AND HOW STRONG ARE THEY?

Deathwake gives Real Time souls to the stormers. At the moment, other Ops do not have RT soul. Slayer will make sure they get them when the shit hits the fan. He's held off from doing it so far because he wants nothing to do with reality. Slayer barely tolerates the use of the Deathwake Device. If Slayer could have his way, there'd be no White Earth, or Real Time influence over the World Of Progress. He wants SLA to be a complete universe without paradoxical flaws screwing up everything. But he's really only got himself to blame. If he hadn't 'created' Bitterness, by betraying Brent Walker, most of the problems in SLA would never have existed.

WHO IS CADAVAR? DO HIS BIOGENETICS WORK?

Cadavar is a native of the World of Progress, who heads up another large, dangerous army on the verge of heading for the WOP in search of the Blood Bound Book. The Cadavarous are a massive faction who spend most of their resources fighting Mandrake. Cadavar is yet still remains unsuccessful in the reproduction of BioGenetics, (he can't get his head around reality grafting) however if the destructive force of reality in SLA is nullified he could quite easily become one of the most dangerous rivals.

HOW ABOUT THE UNIVERSES OF THE OTHER REATHANOL PEOPLE?

Okay, these universes exist. They just aren't as complete as the World of Progress. They're always on the brink of utter destruction because they're not 'finished' as such. Try not to go there ;-)

ISN'T THIS JUST AN 'IT'S ALL A DREAM' COP-OUT?

No. The World of Progress is every bit as real and physical as our universe - it was just created much more recently than its inhabitants believe, and from somewhat tortured and tenuous underpinnings, which makes it unstable. These instabilities can ripple through it and can be very, very dangerous to natives. Also, because inhabitants are not on as secure a platform of reality as they think, doubts about their own existence can be instantaneously fatal. Our universe is far more stable - it's more mundane, and far older - so it's a good source of extra stability for Slayer to leech, hence soul transfer.

HOW DOES THIS ALL AFFECT EVERYDAY GAMES?

Well, it doesn't. It's background, to help explain about the nature of the World of Progress, and some of the concepts within it. It has nothing to do with playing SLA. Killers & Gangs still have to be subdued. What it does do is explain why things are as fucked up as they are, and it provides a backdrop for epic campaigns. But, like everything else, if you don't like it, don't use it!