

STARSHIP TROOPERS™

THE ROLEPLAYING GAME



EVERYBODY FIGHTS, NOBODY QUILTS



STARSHIP TROOPERS™

THE MINIATURES GAME

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STARSHIP TROOPERS™

THE ROLEPLAYING GAME

BOOT CAMP

RETINAL SCAN: COMPLETE
IDENTIFICATION: CONFIRMED
PERMISSION TO PROCEED:
GRANTED

CREDITS

Squad Leader

Cpl. Rosenberg, Aaron MI77-74

Strategic & Tactical Support

Sgt. Maj. Allen, Christopher MI24-34

Additional Tactical Support

3rd Lt. Barstow, Ian MI06-88

External Propagandist

Sgt. Brady, Jim MI11-17

Internal Propagandists

Sgt. Brady, Jim MI11-17, Pvt. Parker, Tony MI88-47,
Pvt. Yanner, Kieran MI13-24

Military Intelligence Liason

3rd Lt. Barstow, Ian MI06-88

Military Intelligence Officer

Lt. Col. Fennell, Alexander [DESIGNATION CLASSIFIED]

Data Analysts

Sgt. Quinnell, Sarah MI77-03

Forward Reconnaissance

Cpl. Vail, Sam MI91-09, Pvt. Chabot, Andre MI89-04,
Pvt. Hall, Robert MI15-08, Pvt. Kerslake, Trevor MI88-
17, Pvt. Marson, Alan MI20-060

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INTRODUCTION

'Pathetic.'

The Sergeant looked us up and down, glaring about as he stalked past. We struggled to stand straight, to keep our eyes locked straight ahead. Sweat was pouring down us – I know I was drenched.

'They told me they were sending me recruits!' he snarled, still eyeing us with disgust. 'Where are they? All I see here are mewling little kittens! Did you lot get sent here by mistake?'

The Sergeant held up his hand then to forestall comments. 'No, don't answer that. I know, you think you enlisted. You think you're Mobile Infantry. Well, let me tell you something.' He stopped pacing and turned to face us. His voice dropped to a cold whisper more frightening than his bellows. For all that they were soft, his words carried. I heard each one clearly, and it burned into my brain.

'You are Mobile Infantry when I say you are. Not a moment before – and until I believe you fit to carry on that fine tradition, you are nothing. Less than nothing. I will break you and mangle you and grind you beneath my boots. You will beg to be released. You will beg for death – for anything that might save you from me. And I will let you go. Because I don't want you here. No one does. You think you have what it takes? We are about to find out.'

This wasn't what I'd expected when I signed up. As the Sergeant called one of his Corporals over to take charge of us, I wondered if it was too late to back out.

The Corporal hurried over and grinned at us as the Sergeant walked away. 'Welcome to boot camp.'

CONGRATULATIONS ON JOINING the Mobile Infantry, the backbone of the Federation military. This book will teach you everything you need to know about being part of this elite fighting force. You will learn how to fight, how to think, and how to survive. You will learn to use power suits, Morita rifles and other tools. You will learn how to stare death in the eye and laugh.

This book details the process of becoming Mobile Infantry. It covers every step from recruitment through the first mission. If your players all want to



MEN AND WOMEN

SICON includes both men and women and neither gender is barred from any career. This includes Mobile Infantry – women can become Mobile Infantry the same as men. More men enlist than women, however, and more men are chosen for the Mobile Infantry if only for their greater size and strength. Conversely, more women become pilots – it is claimed that they possess faster reflexes and better manual dexterity than men, while male pilots argue that space is simply limited on the flight deck and smaller female pilots can squeeze into cockpits more easily.

The male pronoun is used throughout this book and most sections talk about men rather than men and women. This is only because the majority of recruits are men, and is not meant to discount female recruits or female soldiers in any way. The issue of men and women bunking together is addressed in Section Two, and the question of male and female Mobile Infantry troopers is mentioned again in Section Three with regards to Bulkhead Thirty. In most respects, however, women in the Mobile Infantry receive exactly the same treatment as their male counterparts, and they undergo the same basic training.

be Mobile Infantry, this book provides adventures at every stage – you can run them through select pieces or use the entire book as an introductory campaign. If the Player Characters are not all Mobile Infantry, this book can be used to provide the ones who are with valuable background. The *Starship Troopers* corebook provides all the rules necessary to create Mobile Infantry characters, but it does not go into details about their training. This book does that, offering players a chance to see exactly what their characters went through and thus think about how those events affected them. Players who read this book will have a better grasp of their Player Characters, and can create more

believable figures because they know understand the Player Character's history.

Boot Camp is divided into four sections. The first section deals with how characters become recruits. The second section talks about the training itself, and details the boot camp where training takes place. The third section discusses the characters' placement after their graduation from recruit to private, and gives suggestions for introductory missions. The final section, Escort Duty, provides a full adventure that ties back to the training characters received in Section Two. Each of the first three sections offers smaller adventure suggestions and these can be used to fine-tune Player Characters and solidify the group before the larger scenario at the end. But whether you choose to use one section or the entire book and, whether you are a player or the Games Master, this book will tell you how the Mobile Infantry are created from lesser men, and what rites of passage they must endure to gain that privilege.

MOBILE INFANTRY



MAKE A DIFFERENCE

SECTION ONE: FRESH MEAT

NO MAN IS born a soldier – he has to be trained. Before even that, he has to be selected, which means he has to make the initial choice himself. The military training process is specifically designed to test every recruit's commitment and weed out those who do not want a military career. After all, anyone who does not want to be in the military will not give his all, and that could get him and his teammates killed.

WE WANT YOU!

The Terran Federation always has a military, even in peacetime. Someone has to man the borders, maintain the listening posts, and demonstrate to any outsiders that the Federation is ready to defend its own and to strike back against any aggressors. During peace, however, this is largely a formality. Not that soldiers are trained with any less severity or allowed any laxity – war could break out at any time, and the military must be prepared for it. But in peace the Federation has more time to consider each candidate and more freedom to dismiss soldiers who do not measure up.

When the bugs attacked, all of that changed. Suddenly the Terran Federation was in a war, fighting for



ZERO-LEVEL GRUNTS

Player Characters who have not yet joined the military clearly have no character class. They will become Mobile Infantry after their training is finished, but not before. For now, they are 0th-level characters.

0th-level characters still have skills, of course. In order to enlist, a man must be at least 18 and have completed his high school education. No one spends 18 years without learning something. At the same time, 0th-level characters do not have a class and so have no class abilities, no specialised skills and no attack bonus.

The easiest way to create recruits as 0th-level characters is to use the standard Mobile Infantry rules, with a few modifications. The character will have only half the standard starting hit points, or half their Constitution score. He has only half the normal starting skill points as well, or $(5 + \text{Intelligence modifier}) \times 2$. The character cannot put more than two ranks in any single skill. The character receives one feat rather than the standard two and does not gain any of the class features or the Action Points. These will appear at 1st level, when the character has completed basic training.

Playing a 0th-level character may seem demeaning and the characters themselves may look useless and weak. They are – that is part of the point. Most recruits have not yet begun their lives. Young men sign up for the military upon turning eighteen, before they have had a chance to develop. The military actually prefers it this way, because the mind is not developed either. These young men are easy to mould into proper soldiers because they have fewer preconceived notions.

Older characters are a different matter. An older character that is still 0th-level has never applied himself to any one career. Perhaps he has moved from job to job, never staying long enough to develop a real skill at any of them. Perhaps he does have one steady job but it is something that requires little to no skill. Any character that works in the same career for two years or more has learned the skills for that career, which translates into being at least a 1st-level civilian.

Any 0th-level recruit who survives basic training becomes 1st level. The exact timing of that transition is discussed in Part Two.

its very survival. Training regimens were shortened, and then shortened again. Boot camp enrolment skyrocketed and sessions abbreviated. Soldiers graduated in half the time and often with half the knowledge, because the Federation no longer had time to wait for men to replace the dying. As a result, many new soldiers did not have full training and were not truly prepared for the horrors that awaited them.

All that comes later, however. For now the Federation is on a peacetime footing. Skirmishes have occurred but no true battles, and the Federation is wary but calm. Recruits can still be selected slowly and carefully, rather than with haste.

The military does need a constant infusion of new soldiers, even during these quiet years. The Terran Federation is constantly exploring, pushing the boundaries of known space. New planets are located, surveyed, explored and then claimed. The military helps secure these new holdings. It provides protection for colonists, researchers and scouts. Any time a colony or base is attacked, a ship is dispatched to examine the situation and render whatever aid proves necessary. Each such ship has at least one squad of Mobile Infantry on board. In some cases, the problem proves mundane – volcanic eruptions, tectonic shifts, strange atmospheric conditions and other natural anomalies. The Mobile Infantry still does what it can, lending aid in treating the wounded, locating and retrieving any missing civilians, scouting and studying the danger. If possible, the danger is eliminated. If not, the civilians are relocated to a safe area, whether that means a new camp in a different part of the same island or return to the nearest Federation base for reassignment.

In some cases, however, the danger is not so impersonal. Native animals may be tearing apart the colonists. Or, as has happened with the bugs, a rival starfaring race may be trying to claim the same planet, and killing anyone that gets in its way. In these situations, the Mobile Infantry wades in to cut down the attackers and pacify the area. Sometimes that is as simple as men in powered armour waiting for the oversized six-legged leopards to attack and then slaughtering them. In other places it means sending the civilians away, summoning reinforcements and plotting a strategy to

retake the planet from intelligent organised hostiles. Regardless, the Mobile Infantry is up to the challenge. This is why SICON continues to enlist and train new members, however – without them the military would soon be depleted, or spread too thin for effective use.

THE PRIZE

Why do people join the military? According to some cynics, it is simply to wear a pretty uniform and impress the girls (or boys). But is that the real reason?

Most young adults have one or more of the following reasons for joining the military:

1. REBELLION

Many young adults discover that their parents have planned their whole lives already: where to go to college, what to study, what job to take when they graduate. The wealthier the family, the more likely this is. These youths have just graduated high school. They are sick of being told what to do. The first real choice they have once they turn 18 is whether to enlist. Their parents cannot stop them. These young adults march eagerly into the enlistment centres and demand to sign up. They get angry when told to wait, and want to rush through the process, as much out of nerves as from a fear that their fathers will catch them and drag them home again.

2. POVERTY

Not everyone has the opportunity to go to college. Some cannot afford higher education or do not pass the entrance exams, and without it their career options are limited. The military does not care how much money someone has. It provides food, lodging, clothing, and equipment for all its members, and trains them as well. For the poor youths, the military may be the only way they can guarantee eating every day, or having clothes that fit, or learning skills that could lead to a real job later. These young adults are often both hesitant and angry. Their poverty embarrasses them and the idea of enlisting is terrifying, yet strangely comforting. They resent anyone asking them to reconsider, or suggesting that they do not belong, and angrily agree to everything without really listening.

3. PATRIOTISM

Some enlist not because they have to but because they want to. These idealistic youths believe that the Terran Federation is the greatest government in all history and are proud to be a part of it. They want to support the system in any way possible, including dying for it. These youths enlist because they feel the government needs them and because they want to do their part. Patriots are rare and think little of themselves – everything is about the government as a whole. While enlisting these young adults are quiet and serious but filled with an obvious enthusiasm. They are respectful but eager and accept any delays but clearly chafe under them.

4. IDENTITY

Most young adults are interchangeable – the same age, roughly the same height, all in good health, all high school graduates. Each youth has lived less than two decades and so has not yet formed a distinct personality. They are still children and some of them realise this. These young adults wake up one morning understanding that they have no personality, no depth and no colour. They are blanks, faceless mannequins waiting to be moulded by their experiences. The military offers a clear path to provide an identity. During basic training, all of the baby fat is boiled away, revealing the man or woman beneath. Those who survive the training and become soldiers have undergone ordeals that shaped them, and they know who they are now. Each soldier has the same basic skills but a unique personality, forged in part during the training process. These young adults desire that more than anything else. They need to know that they are individuals, not faceless members of the crowd.

5. FANTASY

The Terran Federation makes no attempt to romanticise the military or its activities. But that does not stop civilians from doing so on their own. Soldiers are considered heroes even in peacetime, because they would lay down their lives to protect others. Many youths grow up with this notion and consider soldiers to be like medieval knights, men and women of chivalry and honour who battle evil and make the world safe for lovely admirers, wise rulers and handsome children.

These youths want to be part of that tradition and enlist thinking that they will undergo a cleansing and relaxing ritual. They assume that training is more spiritual than physical and it quickly rids the body of fat and sluggishness, transforming each recruit overnight into a veritable killing machine. These youths stand in the line without even noticing and sign the forms without reading them. Their eyes see other worlds, worlds where they are already soldiers and heroes.

6. ESCAPE

The military will not accept anyone who has a criminal record. But it does take people who have had minor brushes with the law and those in danger of becoming criminals. Though the military is not the ideal way to escape a life of crime, it is sometimes the only alternative. In some cities criminals are offered the chance to commute their prison sentence into military service, though only suitable candidates are given this opportunity. Youths can be reckless and headstrong, however, and some have done things they regret and cannot face. The military protects its own and when someone joins the military their slate is wiped clean. For some young adults – and some older ones – this is the only way to escape being labelled a criminal and punished for one or more crimes.

7. CITIZENSHIP

Finally, many young adults join the military to gain citizenship. Most of the people who live in the Terran Federation are not technically citizens – the Federation relaxed strictures against resident aliens long ago and made true citizenship an elite privilege. People can live their entire lives as resident aliens and never experience any difficulties from their status – many of them grow wealthy and respected. Yet they can never have the full respect of true citizens. Citizenship can be gained in several ways, but the easiest and best known is through military service. Anyone who completes a full term of service in the military becomes a citizen of the Terran Federation. That status does not bring any money, but it does carry respect and can lead to far better job opportunities. For some, being made a citizen is the only way they can hope to survive or prosper.

PRE-RECRUITMENT ADVENTURES

As the above shows, people enlist for many different reasons – and that variety provides many roleplaying possibilities.

If the entire group is enrolling, particularly from the same city, the Games Master has some interesting opportunities. The characters can meet while waiting to be interviewed, or on the steps of the enrolment centre. They can talk, exchange histories and discuss why they want to enlist and what they hope to do. Talking like this eases people's fears, and nervous young men are liable to say far more than they intended.

One way to make matters more interesting is to introduce a threat on the way to the enlistment centre, or at the centre itself. Some madman may set a bomb in a nearby building, for example. The characters are arriving to enlist, separately but at the same time, and hear people screaming. If they investigate, the characters discover the problem. What will they do about it? This gives the characters a chance to forget their concerns about the military for the moment while they take care of the immediate threat. It also shows the government how these young men react to danger and what aptitudes they might possess. For an additional twist, the Terran Federation might have set that bomb itself, as a decoy. The real goal was to watch the Player Characters and how they react to a threat. With this information the government can see what military branch each character will fit.

Another possibility for a pre-recruitment adventure is to create a story geared specifically toward the characters and their backgrounds. One of the characters may be a wealthy young man, the son of a successful local businessman. His father is furious at his enlisting, and determined not to let him go. So he locks his son in a warehouse and makes plans to ship the boy to Mars where he will not have access to an enlistment centre. The other Player Characters may be friends of the abducted boy, or classmates who find a clue that he needs help. They could also be other would-be recruits who the father grabs as well, perhaps because it was easier to kidnap all of them at once. This gives the Player Characters a chance to meet and lets them show off their characters' abilities before getting to any of the military training.

The key to a good pre-recruitment adventure is to avoid anything too military. An invasion of Bugs would be better suited to a standard military episode, which can be done once the characters graduate their training. These early adventures should focus instead upon the characters' backgrounds, upon who they are and why they want to enlist, and on what they are leaving behind.

THE VOLUNTEER SYSTEM

SICON, the Strategically Integrated Coalition of Nations, is a volunteer system. No one is forced to join the military, even during full war conditions. Forcing a man to enlist and serve would be not only useless but also counterproductive. He would resent having been bullied, would hate participating and would actively shirk duty whenever possible. This would make him far worse than useless – his carelessness and lack of interest could easily get someone killed or cost SICON some vital mission.

To avoid this issue, SICON never requires anyone to serve. Those who enlist do so of their own free will, understanding all the consequences of their actions. This way no one can resent SICON for stealing their lives, or complain that they do not belong in the military. Everyone in the Mobile Infantry, as with any other branch, is here because he wants to be. Anyone who decides he would rather go back to civilian life can petition for an early release of service or simply go AWOL. SICON will not chase him down and he can go some place where the law and the military never go, and start a new life there.

Of course, the fact that SICON uses a volunteer system has created some problems. The single biggest problem is that SICON cannot afford to be fussy but at the same time it cannot allow utter incompetence. Technically, SICON cannot refuse anyone who wants to enlist, provided he is 18 or older and has completed high school. That means that anyone can apply and be accepted into the military, even those clearly not suited to the task. In order to avoid putting incompetents in critical positions, SICON has developed several methods for weeding out most people who are unfit to serve.

History and Moral Philosophy

SICON's first defence against accepting those unfit to serve begins long before the youths go to enlist. Every member of the Terran Federation is required to attend education up to high school. In high school, every student has certain mandatory classes. One of those is History and Moral Philosophy. This strange lecture class covers a variety of topics and historical periods,

but it always comes back to certain basic questions. One of those questions is 'what is duty?' 'Is war good or bad?' is also a popular topic. The instructor, who only teaches this one class, poses the questions and calls upon students to answer. Usually he then ridicules their responses, pointing out the flaws in their logic. Most high school students resent having to take History and Moral Philosophy and grow to hate their instructors. They slowly realise that the instructor believes that war is necessary and that anyone who disagrees is weak. The instructor also states that the world cannot survive without violence and that anyone not willing to die for the government is a coward. He belittles the students, laughing at their ignorance and idealism and lack of conviction. He challenges them to think, to push the envelope, and grows disgusted when they pull back.

This class is designed and funded entirely by SICON. The instructor is always retired military, usually Mobile Infantry but always someone who has served a full tour of duty and earned citizenship. The instructor is specifically ordered to berate the students year after year, driving home the fact that they know nothing about how the world works and lack the courage to find out the truth.

The class has two underlying goals. The first is to convince the children that SICON is not evil and that at times war is both just and necessary. The instructor drills into the students the concept that SICON, and the Mobile Infantry in particular, are all that stands between the Federation and utter annihilation. It slowly forces them to see soldiers as men worthy of respect.

The second purpose is to separate wheat from chaff. Though only a cursory attempt, this class does incite students to talk back, to argue, even to curse. It urges them to speak their own minds, not parrot whatever they heard that day in class. The class tests how far each student will go. Some will never talk back, not to a teacher, not for any reason. These students would be useless in the military, because they have no imagination or at least no impetus. Despite long-standing beliefs, the military does not want soldiers who do exactly what they're told and no more. Such people are fine

in an extremely simple situation, but the moment events shift they become completely helpless until they receive new orders. Proper soldiers obey orders but can think matters through on their own, and know when something needs the opinion of a higher officer. Other students argue about everything, refusing to take anything the teacher says at face value. These people are also no good for military service, because they are the opposite of the mindless drones – these students want to fight about anything and everything and cannot accept orders without debating them. The military does not want soldiers who obey mindlessly, but it does not want a soldier who will not listen, either. The ideal is a young man who listens carefully to his orders, considers them, forms his own opinion, and does the job – he might argue the orders before the job begins, but once he is on the bounce he will do exactly as he is been told. At the same time, this young man is smart enough and observant enough to notice if something is not right and confident enough to raise the issue with his superior officer.

As with military enlistment in general, no one ever actually fails History and Moral Philosophy. Students can get an Unsatisfactory, a Satisfactory, or an Acceptable, which is high praise indeed, considering the instructors involved.

This class is the closest SICON comes to actually recruiting soldiers. No one, even the instructors, ever says how wonderful the Mobile Infantry is, how widely respected its members are and how important its mission is now. Instead the instructor pokes and prods, urging each student to break free of all misconceptions and seriously consider the morality of war. At the same time, by constantly telling the students how weak they are, how foolish, how ignorant and soft and useless, the instructor gives the students a goal: to prove him wrong. Many young adults find themselves hating their History and Moral Philosophy instructor but desperately wanting his good opinion. These same youths often wind up enlisting, not realising that they are doing so because their instructor's lectures on the necessity of war and of personal involvement finally sank in. Even those students who do not enlist come away from the class with clear ideas about duty,

FAILING GRADES

Saying that SICON requires recruits to pass their Federal Education tests is not entirely true. After 12 years of schooling, students take exams to demonstrate their proficiency in the materials they have been taught. Those who pass are allowed to take four more years of schooling, or to enrol in SICON. Those who fail must select a vocation immediately – or enrol with SICON.

Is this contradictory? Yes and no. Students who fail their 12-year exams can enlist, but will only be given drudge jobs. SICON will not refuse such recruits because it has need of janitors and ditch-diggers, but these people will never have an opportunity to rise above such menial tasks. Only those youths who pass their exams, thus demonstrating both native intelligence and the ability to absorb and retain information, are eligible for other SICON careers, including the Mobile Infantry.

honour, and military force. Most classes in high school teach how to use a particular set of tools, like physics or algebra or literary composition. History and Moral Philosophy teaches how to use your brain and your honour, separately and together.

Basic Requirements

SICON cannot refuse anyone who wants to enlist and meets the two basic requirements: age and education.

All potential recruits must be at least 18 years of age, and must have valid picture identification to prove their age. The candidates also need to have finished high school, which means taking and passing the appropriate high school classes. Since this includes History and Moral Philosophy, technically an instructor could prevent undesirables from joining the military simply by failing them. That does not happen, however. Instead, SICON may decide that an Unsatisfactory in a mandatory senior class is enough to disqualify someone from entering military service.

The other way SICON could block a potential recruit is by its demand for valid photo identification. Everyone

has a picture Identification Card, and those with licenses for small aircraft have a second. But, in an extreme case, SICON could claim that an identification card is not valid, leaving the candidate with no proof of age.

This would require an extreme circumstance, however. SICON has yet to resort to such measures. Any candidate who can demonstrate age and education, by presenting his Identification Card and his Federal Education scores, is eligible to apply for military service and is guaranteed some sort of position with the military.

The requirements above do offer an opportunity for a small pre-recruitment adventure, however. Every child is assigned a unique identification number at birth, and receives his first Identification Card somewhere between his third and 12th year. These cards are usually updated again at the start of high school, so four years later they barely look like the same person. That makes it very easy to forge identification – or to steal it. If one or more Player Characters' Identification Cards are stolen, they will need to find and retrieve them, particularly for anyone interested in enlisting. Who stole the cards and why is less important than pushing the characters together and giving them a common goal to focus upon.

Federal Education scores are both easier and harder to steal. The scores are input at the local high school by the various teachers, and can then be pulled up by any educator of sufficient rank and by the student himself. He can look at his grades any time he wants. When he goes to enlist, the young man can print out his test scores and bring them along. If someone else somehow got into the computer system, he could also print out those test scores. When the real young man arrives to enlist, he may find that he cannot because someone using his name and holding his test scores has already signed on. Alternatively he may discover that something is wrong with the central computers and that printout is the only proof that he has graduated and is eligible to enlist. If all of the Player Characters have had their identifications or scores copied, shifted or stolen, they may have enough reason to work together at solving this mystery.

FAMILY MATTERS

The decision to enlist may be the first choice a young man can make entirely for himself, but he is hardly the only person involved. His choice will effect his friends by altering their social circle but more importantly it will effect his family and the relationship he has with each family member. The attitude of family members can be broadly categorised as encouraging, neutral or disapproving.

Some family members wholeheartedly endorse the notion of the young man's enlisting. They may see the value to his learning discipline, or feel that the military is a good place to burn off his youthful exuberance and temper his reckless enthusiasm. Some feel that the military is an important aspect of the Terran Federation and encourage their sons to lend support to that organisation by joining its forces. Others see only the prize of citizenship and the rewards that can have for their son and, by extension, themselves.

The most enthusiastic supporter is an older sibling, cousin, aunt or uncle or even parent who is in the military. Not only will these veterans extol the virtues of military life, they can help prepare the youth for his own entrance and training. By telling him what boot camp is really like and getting him started on various endurance and strength exercises before enlistment, these family members can ease his transition into the Mobile Infantry and increase the chances that he will not only survive but flourish and perhaps even become an officer. This also adds another reason for the young man's interest in enlisting. He may have grown up idolising that relative and want to follow in the veteran's footsteps.

A supportive family member can be a great comfort, lending moral support when the young man wonders if he is doing the right thing. It can also cause tremendous pressure, especially if the supporter is more convinced than the youth himself. Some men join the military not because they want to but because their parents or relatives pushed them into it. A few of these recruits discover reasons to stay and to make the military path their own but others wash out of training because they were never motivated to succeed for themselves.

While some people are willing to encourage a young man's military aspirations, others are less understanding. A father may expect his son to stay home and take over the family business. A mother may assume that her little boy will always be nearby. Younger siblings may admire their older brother and assume that he will always be there to help them when they need it. Grandparents may see the young man as the prop of their old age and expect that he will help ease their troubles as age and infirmity reduce their own abilities. These family members can be a major problem for the young man. They cannot stop him from enlisting, of course – once he turns 18 he is free to determine his own path. Family can make life difficult for him, however, if he chooses a career they do not agree with – and many do not support the military. Some consider it an archaism, outdated and unnecessary in this age of space exploration and ongoing peace. Others feel that the military is a dead-end career for those who cannot find success in the real world of civilian businesses. Still others believe the military is little more than a haven for murderers and glory hounds and suicide-seekers, all intent upon violence and headlines and finding an early and messy death.

When the young man announces his intentions, he may get a variety of negative reactions. Family members may scream at him, or insult him, or break down crying. They may attack him physically, or ply him with guilt over leaving his family behind. His mother may appeal to his love for her, and his father to his sense of familial duty. His younger siblings may claim that he no longer loves them and is only thinking of himself – grandparents may take a similar tack. Aunts and uncles and cousins may pretend they are more objective and simply point out that by leaving he will be devastating his parents and siblings.

When such remonstrances fail, the relatives may try other approaches. His father may bribe him to stay, whether with money or gifts or the promise of a good job. His mother will make all his favourite dishes and revert to using her pet names for him, attempting to reduce him to her baby boy again. Siblings may refuse to speak to him. His father may also threaten to disown him and to toss him out of the street if he

persists in this nonsense – this is foolish, since it only makes cutting ties easier, but by this point the parents may be beyond reason.

Family members can be neutral on the subject, of course. Some are wise enough to see both sides of the issue, and may offer to play devil's advocate just to make sure the young man has considered the choice carefully. Others have an opinion but keep it hidden, recognising that he must make his own decision and weighing in will only confuse the issue. These relatives can be a godsend, blocking other family members from railing against him or cheering him on, giving him a quiet space to think matters through fully. Siblings close to his own age are most likely to fill this role – they are old enough to be facing the same choice soon and to understand all his concerns and fears, but respect his independence more than their parents.

Attitudes toward the military and toward a young man's enlistment may change drastically once the Bug War begins. The Terran Federation switches from peacetime to wartime and declares a state of emergency for every world and colony. Cities are destroyed even on Terra herself, proving that no one is safe. Though still a volunteer force, SICON requests that more young men enlist to help stop this threat. Parents who were dead-set against their son's enlistment may now acquiesce, knowing the military needs more men. On the other hand, parents who were willing to let him go may now cling tight, convinced he goes to his death. Many relatives who were neutral may find themselves taking sides, and those who had opinions may decide this is too important not to speak about openly. The young man may still face different reactions from various family members, but how each one reacts may have changed. This is particularly interesting to roleplay if the Player Character began considering enlistment right before war was declared, so he sees how his family reacts during peacetime and then how their attitudes change in time of war.

In most families there will be at least one member who takes a negative view of the would-be trooper along with at least one neutral or positive member. This creates tension within the family group, and the youth is right

WAITING IN LINE

Another game SICON likes to play is testing candidates' patience. Their favourite way to do this is to make the candidates wait. They have to wait for someone to give them a physical, they have to wait for someone to witness their results and they have to wait for someone to swear them in. SICON hopes that some people will simply get tired and fed up and walk away.

This waiting presents another opportunity for roleplaying. Even if the Player Characters did not know one another beforehand, they could easily meet in the enlistment centre, especially if each of them is waiting partway through the process. While sitting around waiting to be called, the characters can begin talking, and they can all sympathise with each other. After some time has passed without any of them being called, the characters may start getting restless and demanding to know what is going on.

Another possibility is for the Player Characters to all stand in the queue. This queue may be for the elevator, for the bathroom, for the doctor, or for the testing room. It does not matter. The important part is that everyone is in the queue together. Then the enlistment centre staff starts the latest test, which is one of patience. A staff member comes out and says something that sounds suspiciously like 'come with me,' but none of the Player Characters can tell who he requested. The staff member stops and repeats himself when he realizes no one is moving, but they still cannot understand what he is saying. At that point he throws up his hands in disgust and wanders away again. Someone else comes out has the characters shuffle about so that the queue is in order of height. A few minutes later, a different staff member organises them in terms of weight instead. Or age. Or test score. They keep moving the Player Characters around, sometimes even leading them to different rooms but generally just wasting their time. The goal is to test the candidates' patience because a lot of military life involves waiting for something to happen or following orders that seem silly or pointless.

The staff members may be bored themselves, in which case they may decide to get creative. They start playing pranks, like throwing a rubber snake at one character to test reflexes and general response to danger. Sudden sounds startle the characters. Doors close before they can pass through them, and others open unexpectedly. The staff members might even create a false danger, like a madman running loose or a bomb hidden somewhere in the building, to goad the Player Characters into doing something. Again they do have a real reason for these strange actions – examining the candidates during such events, the staff can see who panics and who runs and who takes charge and many other details. The Player Characters do not know this, of course, but if they do get fed up with the waiting and the strange line instructions they may decide to find out what is going on.

at the centre of it, causing the conflict. Acting out this drama gives the player a chance to develop his Player Character further and to cement the reasons why his character is joining the military. It also sets up conflicts with the family that can influence his decisions down the line, especially if he ever decides that he may have made the wrong choice.

ENLISTMENT CENTRES

SICON does not have recruitment centres; it has enlistment centres. A recruitment centre actively pursues people and encourages them to join. An enlistment centre is simply a central place making it easier for those who wish to enlist to do so.

Most enlistment centres are located in spaceports. The buildings are large, clean and cheap. The location makes it easier to ship out, once the recruit has reached that point. At the same time, spaceports are usually set off to one side of the city (because of the fumes), which means getting to them is a trek for most people. No one wanders past the spaceport, or just happens to walk by the enlistment centre. Approaching it requires a conscious decision, as does entering. This helps cut down on the number of recruits who enrolled on the spur of the moment and regretted it later.

All of SICON's enlistment centres have the same style and the same basic feel. A low but wide gallery stands in front, all glassed in, with a single large desk facing the front doors. Behind that are elevators leading to the top floor. The walls are painted a soothing colour, the carpeting is smooth and soft but firm, and small lights hidden along the upper edge of the wall provide a soft, even light. It is a very calm scene, very mundane, with no trace of the military anywhere – until candidates notice the man waiting behind the front desk.

The Amputee

Like the instructor of History and Moral Philosophy, the man behind the desk is a veteran, retired from active duty. Like many instructors, this man has seen some harsh wounds. Each of the men who sit behind the desk has lost at least one limb, often more. Many of them are missing an arm and a leg, or both arms and a leg, or one arm and both legs. These men are

always polite and able to answer questions about the enlistment process and about SICON and the Mobile Infantry in general. They are also gruff and warn the boys not to enlist.

These men are selected for one reason and one reason only – their lost limbs. In fact, each of these veterans is a particularly graphic example of the grotesque results of combat. This is the first thing potential recruits see when they walk into the enlistment centre. The calm, quiet setting makes the sight even worse because it does not match. These young men expect to see a kindly older man sitting behind that desk, waiting to welcome them to the service and show them the ropes. Instead they get a grumpy old man, lean as a scarecrow, who has lost one arm at the shoulder, one leg at the knee and the other leg halfway up the thigh, perched on a comfortable upholstered chair, eyeing them with distaste and a little disgust. The shocking reminder of how real war can be, and how much damage the human body could sustain before finally collapsing, fills most men with dread. This is enough to dissuade the more weak-willed, particularly when the veteran waggles his stump at them and warns that they could wind up the same way.

The veteran's grumpiness is also deliberate. Potential recruits think that the military wants them, even needs them, and so they expect to be treated with respect and appreciation. This partial man laughs in their faces and calls them puppies and babies and fools. He tells them how little SICON cares whether they join, how actually SICON would prefer if they did not enlist at all. This is actually true. At least half of all would-be recruits wash out somewhere between being sworn in and graduating from basic training. That means that, for every hundred-man unit, SICON had to pay for the training of between one hundred and fifty and two

hundred men. It would save time and money if those who were not fit to serve left before ever taking a single test or filling out a single form. The man at the front desk is there to encourage that decision.

Of course, SICON is not above staging a show for the candidates' behalf. Veterans who lose limbs in battle are fitted with powered prosthetics as effective as the original limbs and sometimes better and, with clothes on, it is impossible to tell the difference. These veterans are not really that grouchy, either. They are instructed to be surly and condescending and rude, in order to scare away young kids who cannot take criticism. It is a deliberate demonstration and has proven very effective



at reducing the number of youths who make it to the next stage.

Physicals

Once a candidate has met the basic requirements and passed the front-desk amputee, he is sent upstairs for his physical. This is not a simple quick once-over, however. The civilian doctors at the enlistment centre have been given specific instructions. Each physical is painstakingly thorough and drags on for hours on end. Every possible nook and cranny of the recruit is probed, poked and pricked. Blood is taken from multiple points. Blood pressure is checked constantly, as are heart rate, temperature and cholesterol level. The candidate is hooked to at least three different monitors at all times, covered in electrodes, given an IV, and equipped with a catheter – it is not uncommon for a recruit, upon seeing the catheter, to protest that the examination will not take that long. The doctors and nurses usually respond with a knowing smile and a deliberate glance at the thick sheaf of papers to be filled out. Several hours later, the recruit discovers that the catheter was useful after all. Samples of every possible bodily fluid are taken, as well as samples of bodily wastes. These are each labelled and analysed, and the results carefully noted.

The physical serves several purposes. First, it is yet another test of the candidate's perseverance and tolerance for abuse. Anyone who cannot endure five hours of medical tests will not survive sitting motionless in a ditch for hours on end. Not every member of the military faces a situation where such a skill is necessary, but enough do that SICON makes sure all of its people can accomplish that task when required. Waiting downstairs was the first test of patience, but the physical is more difficult because it involves movement and dealing with other people.

The doctors are not quiet while administering the physical. When not giving the nurses orders, or asking the candidate questions, the doctors are talking about the various soldiers they have treated over the years. They go into sickening detail about illnesses, diseases and war wounds, lingering on what was removed and how and what complications occurred. The nurses

reply with reminiscences of their own past patients, trying to top the doctors' stories. At the same time, the doctors talk about how hard it is in the military, what a difficult life it can be, how little reward it offers for such exertions and such danger, and so on. Many candidates have cracked when faced with these graphic descriptions of the wounds they could suffer and retreat from this unbiased account of military life from civilians who have certainly seen it all.

The physical also tests a candidate's ability to follow orders. The doctors and nurses demand various motions and activities from the candidate, including the answers to many very personal questions. Candidates are expected to reply immediately and to obey every order at once. After the third time that the doctor tells him to bend his left knee or hop up and down on one foot or stick out his tongue, most candidates get irritable. Many demand to know why they have to do this again. Some refuse. The doctors are very clear on the matter: 'do what I say or you fail the physical and are barred from military service.' This is a lie, of course. The doctors cannot fail anyone, any more than SICON can reject anyone. If a candidate is able to convey his intelligence, independence and interest in joining the military, SICON is required to enlist him and find him a job that matches his physical capabilities. However the candidates do not know this, and that bluff is enough to scare away many would-be recruits, particularly those who have been rethinking the idea since entering the enlistment centre.

Because the candidate strips at the start of the physical, and is not allowed to dress again until the ordeal is



finished, the physical also tests composure and self-confidence. Many young adults are cocky and overconfident, but that changes quickly when forced to parade about naked for several hours. The fact that the doctors and nurses are all fully clothed only heightens the discomfort. The doctors often select one male recruit and one female recruit to examine simultaneously, which means these two young adults are forced to spend several hours unclothed in each other's presence, trying not to stare. The doctor and nurses comment on the candidates' physical attributes throughout, comparing sizes and shapes and other details until most candidates find themselves squirming and blushing. Soldiers cannot afford to be squeamish, particularly about their own bodies and this tests the candidate's ability to handle such situations.

Despite having to accept everyone, SICON does want to know a candidate's physical condition. Those who are pronounced fit can take part in regular training and have a wider variety of potential jobs. Those with disabilities require specialised training and are ineligible for any career that requires full and easy movement. The Mobile Infantry, for example, does not take anyone not in excellent health and fully mobile. The suits mirror the body's movements, and someone with impaired motion would not be able to utilise the suit properly.

The physical also includes a subtle array of psychological tests. The doctors find out how well the candidate responds to authority, to orders, to mindless routine, to unnecessary repetition, to long delays, to an utter lack of privacy and many other details. By the end of the physical, the doctors know everything about the candidate's physical condition and a great many things about his mental and emotional state as well. They can detail the candidate's previous diet and exercise levels, estimate the level of stress, discuss the candidate's physical strengths and weaknesses, and make an educated guess about lifespan (aside from external dangers, of course). All of the forms have been filled out and copied, and these are placed in the candidate's military dossier. If the candidate chooses not to enlist, or leaves the military before graduating, the dossier is moved into the civilian database but it is

not destroyed. That information about the individual could prove useful at some later point, whether to provide the candidate with useful information about his own health or as a way to gain some power over the individual.

Bombs Away!

During the physical is an excellent time to drop a bomb on the Player Characters – literally. Once the war began, the bugs bombed Buenos Aires with an asteroid hurled through space. It is entirely feasible that they would also launch smaller projectiles at other targets on Earth. Spaceports would be an obvious target, since hitting them not only causes massive damage but also cripples the cities' escape routes and destroys any ships that could have responded to the attack. The enlistment centres are usually located in the spaceport, which means if the city gets bombed they may be hit. The candidates may suddenly find themselves facing real wartime conditions, with no training, no weapons – and no clothes.

Picture a potential recruit getting a physical. He has wires and electrodes and tubes everywhere. He is naked, tired, hungry, stressed and dazed. Suddenly the building shudders. He is tossed to the floor, the doctors and nurses falling around him. Then the ceiling collapses, raining concrete and steel down upon them. His ears are ringing, he is coughing from the debris and his eyes are watering. He is naked save for those wires and electrodes. Yet the doctors and nurses are civilians, and are either stunned or wounded or hysterical. What can he do? What will he do?

This makes an excellent starting adventure. It gives the Player Characters a chance to do something after all the long waits and the discouraging lectures and the paperwork. They can finally act. There are no bugs here, which is a good thing – even a trained Mobile Infantryman in a power suit has difficulty against the bugs. An unarmed, untrained potential recruit would be dead in an instant against even one of the warrior Arachnids. Yet there is a crisis, and someone has to take charge. The few veterans in the building are all retired and all suffering multiple wounds – most are missing at least one limb. The amputee is down by the

front desk, attempting to calm the people down there, and the placement officers are in their offices, whose doors have been jammed by falling debris. The only people on the medical level are the doctors and nurses and those candidates currently undergoing physicals – meaning one or more Player Characters. All of the Player Characters might be here at once, in separate rooms – the doctors may have deliberately left doors open to embarrass these young men, or at least see if they were embarrassed.

The goal here is not to stop the enemy – the bombing was long-range. The idea is to gather up the civilians and help them out of the building. No combat is involved, but quick thinking will be necessary, as the building has suffered an indirect hit and is very unstable. Floors keep crumbling and walls collapsing. The lifts have all shut down as a safety precaution, though the shafts are still accessible and may be the best way to the main floor. Fires have begun where wiring

was sheared through and on the medical floor where chemical containers shattered, mixing their contents and producing a ball of flame that set the surroundings alight.

This is an opportunity for Player Characters to see how they react in a crisis. It also gives them a chance to bond and to regain some of the dignity that has been stripped away during the first half of the enlistment process. Note that this is a real attack and not a drill or set-up. SICON would never deliberately endanger its employees, especially the civilians.

This should be a mini-adventure with few lasting consequences. If the Player Characters manage to get the civilians out of the building without incident, they will receive commendations. They may also be offered a wider variety of military careers as a result. If the characters get trapped, Mobile Infantry arrive to save them – the nearest Terran Federation ship took off the

THE SICON MILITARY SERVICE OATH

I, being of legal age, of my own free will, without coercion, promise, or inducement of any sort, after having been duly advised and warned of the meaning and consequences of this oath, do now enrol in the Federal Service of the United Citizens' Federation for a term of not less than two years and as much longer as may be required by the needs of the Federation.

I swear to uphold and defend the Constitution of the Federation against all its enemies, be they foreign or domestic, to protect and defend the Constitutional liberties and privileges of all citizens and lawful residents of the Federation, its associate states and territories, to perform such duties of any lawful nature as may be assigned to me by lawful direct or delegated authority.

I swear to obey all lawful orders of the Sky Marshal-in-Chief and of all officers or delegated persons placed over me.

I swear to require such obedience from all members of the Service or other persons or non-human beings lawfully placed under my orders by the authority of my commanding officers as defined by the regulations of the Strategically Integrated Coalition of Nations.

I, on being honourably discharged at the completion of my full term of active service or upon being placed on inactive retired status after having completed such full term, promise to carry out all duties and obligations and to enjoy all privileges of Federation citizenship including but not limited to the duty, obligation and privilege of exercising sovereign franchise for the rest of my natural life unless stripped of honour by verdict, finally sustained, by a court of my sovereign peers.

instant the asteroids were sighted, and it drops several soldiers onto the building's roof to secure the area. The worst that will happen is the Player Characters will receive minor injuries, nothing more severe than a broken arm and will have Mobile Infantrymen laughing at them and suggesting they reconsider enlisting.

Swearing In

After the physical, the candidates are sent back downstairs to see the amputee veteran at the front desk. They have their medical reports and the doctors and nurses do not accompany them. This is not a sign of trust. Rather, it is yet another chance for the candidates to back out. Any candidate who returns to the front desk without his medical report is simply sent home.

The veteran at the front desk glances at the medical reports then asks each candidate if he still wants to enlist. If the answer is 'yes,' the veteran calls in two witnesses. These are also military personnel, usually administrators at the enlistment centre. Some are veterans like the amputee, but others have simply pulled light duty. The witnesses are asked to examine the medical reports, and inspect the candidates themselves – these are cursory examinations only, purely as a formality. Then the veteran asks the witnesses if they have examined the materials, and they affirm that they have. He asks if they see any reason the candidates should not be accepted for service, and they reply no. They then warrant that each candidate seems fit, prepared and present of his own volition. The veteran then turns to each candidate and asks him to raise his right hand and repeat the SICON Military Service oath.

After taking the oath, the veteran gives each candidate a copy of the oath to sign. The witnesses sign as well and then congratulate the new recruits, who have now formally enlisted in the Terran Federation military.

For many, the swearing in is a letdown. After all the waiting and testing and second-guessing, after having so many people ask again and again if they really want to join the military, the actual oath-taking is quick, painless and undramatic. Receiving a pilot's license

involves more fanfare. As with every other aspect of military life, this is not accidental. SICON wants its soldiers to be proud of who they are and proud of their service, but not for flashy reasons. It does not give many awards and its uniforms do not have many frills, even the dress uniforms. This swearing-in ceremony is the first indication that the military is a serious place and not the grand adventure many potential recruits dream about.

SERIOUS CONSIDERATION

Now that the candidates have become recruits, they may expect the amputee veteran's attitude toward them to change. It does not. He congratulates them on enlisting, hands them their papers and tells them to be back at his desk in 48 hours. Many recruits ask why they have 48 hours and he tells them it gives them time to set their affairs in order, say their good-byes, tell their parents and so forth. He also tells each recruit what will happen if he does not return at the appointed time: absolutely nothing. Any recruit who does not reappear as instructed has his dossier stamped 'Term Not Completed Satisfactorily.' No fines are levied, no punishments handed out. The only consequence of that stamp is that the former recruit can never again apply for military service. He can, however, still earn his citizenship through other routes. After explaining this and pointing out that many young men never do return, the veteran says good-bye and turns away, leaving the young recruits to their own thoughts.

The Cool-Down

The next two days are tense ones. Many recruits did not tell their parents they were joining – even for those who did, their parents may not have believed they would go through with it. When these young men return home and reveal that they are now soldiers, they may face anger, grief, denial and even ridicule. For the next two days the parents may avoid them or plead with them, yell at them or bribe them to set aside this foolishness and not go back. Many recruits cave at the pressure.

Nor is all the pressure parental. Friends often rally to sway the recruit, as do girlfriends and boyfriends, teachers, co-workers and other relatives. Explaining to

a sibling can be difficult, particularly a younger brother or sister who idolises the recruit.

The worst pressure, however, comes from within. Before going to the enlistment centre, joining the military sounded like a grand, heroic, wonderful thing. It was an adventure, offering travel, training, lasting friendships and adventures to impress relatives and admiring civilians later on. The enlistment process changed all that. Now the recruit realises his notion was merely a fantasy and nothing like the reality. If the enlistment was any example, military life is cold and rough and embarrassing, filled with long, boring pauses and meaningless orders. Soldiers are treated more like objects than people, or perhaps like animals, told to sit and stay and left alone for hours. Is that really worth doing?

This is an excellent opportunity for character development. It also provides another chance to bring the Player Characters together if they met during the enlistment process. No civilian can understand the allure of the military, or appreciate the sudden reality adjustment – but other recruits can. They can gather and discuss the situation, go over reasons for joining and reasons for staying home, and talk each other through the decision.

In the end, of course, the Player Characters will wind up going back to the enlistment centre as ordered. They are intended to be military personnel, after all. That does not mean the decision should be an easy one. The Games Master should throw obstacles in their path. The obvious barriers are disapproving parents but other people and activities tug at the recruit. If he had an after-school job or a summer internship, they may offer him a full-time position. A college may offer him a scholarship. His friends may plan to start their own business or band and invite him to join them. His parents may try to bribe him with a trip somewhere, or his own car, or some other luxury.

Other stumbling blocks may be less personal. The news reports talk about recent skirmishes with the bugs and about the soldiers who were killed. Footage shows Mobile Infantrymen being carried out on stretchers or

in body bags. This reminds the recruit of the doctors' stories and of the amputee. Is the thrill of being a soldier, even the lure of citizenship, worth the risk of losing a limb or one's life?

Each recruit has his own reasons for going back even after the reality sinks in. Some return out of duty, still believing this is the best way to repay the Federation for all it has given them. Others go back out of honour – they swore an oath and mean to uphold it no matter how much they now regret it. Some still let anger guide them, furious at parents and friends for trying to control them and determined to get away and start over. For a few it was never a choice – the life they leave behind has nothing to offer and anything looks good in comparison.

Aptitude Tests

Upon returning and presenting his papers, the new recruit is sent upstairs to meet with the Military Careers Officer. This is a retired officer, usually part of the psychological warfare or occupational therapy units. He already has the recruit's Federal Education scores and a copy of the doctors' report, which show the recruit's physical capabilities and educational background. The officer's job is to decide each recruit's military potential and put him in the career that will best match his abilities. The recruit's interests are not a concern.

The recruit is given a form listing every career in the military. He ranks them in order of preference, highest to lowest. The Military Careers Officer examines the resulting list and may comment. More often he pulls out a sheaf of standardised tests and selects one for the recruit to take.

Most recruits put 'pilot' at the top of their list because that is considered the most heroic and prestigious job in the military. Fortunately, it is very easy to determine whether a candidate is actually suited for that occupation. Math is critical for a pilot and a series of escalating questions tests the recruit's ability in that area. Those who pass are given a series of additional tests, particularly reflexes and spatial perceptions. If they pass both of those with high enough marks, they are

sent to flight academy. Few pass – piloting is extremely difficult and requires not only excellent reflexes and hand-eye co-ordination but also superlative spatial perception and an intuitive grasp of higher math.

In most cases the officer will focus on each job the recruit listed in order of preference, starting with the highest. Some have overlapping skill sets and can be eliminated together. Those recruits whose first choice is something other than pilot usually have a good reason for their selection, like the mechanical wizard whose first preference is Engineering or Research & Development. As a result, they stand a much better chance of getting their first choice. This is particularly true for anyone who has advanced training.

The two other careers that can be determined immediately are Special Services and K-9 Corps. Recruits either have psychic abilities or not – those with psychic abilities can be sent to Special Services to hone their skills through training but a non-psychic will never become one. The K-9 Corps works with Neodogs, and each soldier is bonded to a single animal. The pairing is intense and intimate and only those who truly love animals, and dogs in particular, are suited for the task.

Some people assume that Mobile Infantry is the lowest career available and is the job assigned to any recruit too incompetent to qualify for anything else. This is not true. Many people are discounted for Mobile Infantry for physical reasons, whether matters of health or of mobility or of sensory perception. Others are barred from that service for psychological reasons. In between taking the aptitude tests, the officer chats with the recruit. These officers are expert at psychology and their seemingly idle conversation is a series of questions and verbal openings designed to draw the recruit out and study his mind. By the end of the placement process, the officer knows how the recruit thinks, what he wants, what he is willing to do and what he is capable of doing.

The testing process can last anywhere from hours to days, depending on how long it takes to find a suitable match. The officer will place the recruit in the first

position on his list that actually fits, unless the recruit has a change of heart and wants to revise his preferences. Thus some recruits prove their own judgement and fit their top choice, while others go down their entire list, being rejected for one career after another.

As mentioned before, SICON cannot turn away anyone who volunteers and fulfils the basic requirements for service. That means that the most uneducated, untalented, uncoordinated, unintelligent recruit will still receive an assignment. Veterans joke about bottle-washers but even the military does need people to dig latrines, empty garbage and scrub sinks.

Assignments

In between tests, the recruit is housed in a small barracks in a neighbouring building. Everyone else enlisted within the last week or two is there as well, either undergoing the same process or waiting to be shipped out. This is another opportunity for the Player Characters to meet and to become friends. It is also the first taste of military life, but time in these barracks is nothing like real training – the recruits are left to their own devices when not taking tests, and other than meals and lights-out no one tells them what to do.

After taking the last tests, the Military Careers Officer calls the recruit back in to discuss the results. He is open about the recruit's failures and will go down the list of possible careers one by one, explaining why the recruit was not eligible for them. Then he explains why he put the recruit where he did, in the Mobile Infantry.

Some recruits are thrilled to be in the Mobile Infantry. Others are less enthused, believing that they have been relegated to the role of grunts. Whenever a candidate seems disappointed, the officer waits until he leaves and then sends a specific signal downstairs. The veteran at the front desk or one of his cronies makes sure to 'accidentally' bump into the recruit on their way out and ask what career the recruit has received. Upon hearing that it is the Mobile Infantry, the veteran gets enthusiastic. He was Mobile Infantry and he begins to talk about the virtues of that branch, and how important it is to the Federation's defences. This

boosts the recruit's spirits, at least until he reaches boot camp.

Within a day of receiving a career, the recruit also receives his orders. These tell him which training camp he will be attending, what ship he is taking and when it leaves. Sometimes the ship leaves within hours. Other times it can be up to ten days, particularly if the ship has to pick up a full complement before making the trip. This provides more time for the recruits to socialise. It also gives each recruit a chance to adjust to the idea of his new career. He is no longer just a new soldier – now he is a new trainee pilot or a new technician or a new Mobile Infantryman.

Some recruits try to change their assignments. Usually this is because they know someone at another facility, or want to stay in town for a particular upcoming event, or dislike the climate of their future home. Each of these requests is met with a simple denial, not rude but utterly inflexible. The military does not negotiate with its enemies and it does not negotiate with its own personnel. For those who do ask, this is the first hint that the military will not tolerate foolishness and does not coddle its people. Those who persist in demanding an assignment change may get their wish, but not in the way they want – their departure may be moved up to an immediate takeoff and their location may be switched to some place far colder or warmer or more isolated. Requests to speed up the departure are also met with a firm no. The military has its own pace and its own reasons for everything it does. Soldiers do not need to know those reasons or approve of them – all a soldier has to do is follow orders.

Packing

While the recruit waits to depart, he packs. Many recruits report to the enlistment centre with a large trunk, a backpack and one or more suitcases. They are quickly disabused of this notion. Each recruit is handed a regulation military rucksack upon entering the barracks. That one rucksack holds everything the soldier owns, including uniforms. Anything that does not fit in the rucksack has to be sent back home, or given away, or sold, or simply tossed but it will not be accompanying the soldier when he leaves.

This is a difficult moment. It is a symbolic severing of ties, cutting the past loose and letting it drift away. The military wants this to happen, which is why they keep the rucksacks small. Training involves moulding these young men into proper soldiers and specifically into SICON soldiers who think the way SICON intends. That is difficult when the recruits dream about their old lives and the friends they left behind. Removing mementoes of the past helps to set the past itself aside, so that the recruits are more receptive to training and to forming new habits.

Every barracks has at least one veteran in charge and he often wanders the halls, laughing at the recruits in their eagerness and ignorance. He is rarely pleasant, and often insulting, but he will answer one question: 'What should we pack?' He suggests that anything small or valuable should be sent home if possible – it will only get damaged or stolen. Glass should also be sent back, since the rucksack and its contents will see hard use. Most recruits are cautioned to bring only a few photos, a civilian set of clothes (for leave), one or two small items like favourite books and tools for a favourite hobby, like woodworking or painting or playing guitar. Musical instruments are the only objects recruits can carry outside their rucksack and those who play and have instruments are encouraged to bring them. The recruit is also given a set of basic military clothing, consisting of underwear, trousers, undershirt, overshirt, socks, shoes, jacket and hat. These are simple, sturdy garments. They may not fit very well, because the military does not bother to measure soldiers. Anything that does not fit well enough the soldiers are encouraged to mend themselves, or pay someone else to repair.

Finally the day arrives. The recruit shoulders his rucksack, checks to make sure his papers are in hand and walks out of the barracks and over to the waiting military vessel. He presents his papers to the soldier waiting there and climbs on board, leaving his old life behind.

FIRST IMPRESSIONS

Military training begins the moment a recruit returns. New skills may not be taught until boot camp but certain ideas are planted from that first moment. The

first and most important idea: the military is your family. SICON wants soldiers to think of the military first, before parents and friends and lovers. The military is both mother and father – it protects, nurtures, teaches and punishes when necessary. In order to foster that idea, SICON has to tear the recruits away from all their old attachments and give them reasons to form new ones.

The first inkling of this is the testing process. The Military Careers Officer treats the recruits with cold professionalism. He clearly sees each recruit as a test case, a riddle to be solved, rather than as a person. The veterans in charge of the barracks are swaggering bullies, picking on all the new recruits, making fun of them and laughing at their chances of even surviving boot camp. The other military personnel are all aloof, looking down their noses at the recruits. The pilots are particularly brusque and say little more than telling the recruits where to sit and to buckle up for the flight.

This is also part of SICON's training strategy. The military is a team and every member has to learn to work together in a team. Soldiers depend on one another for safety and that requires absolute trust. The military uses the herd mentality to build this tight bond. By driving recruits away from everyone else, SICON encourages them to turn to one another for support. The military wants each soldier strong but far stronger in a group. Safety lies in numbers. The characters may dislike members of their squad but trust them completely and the squad functions as a single unit, protecting itself and its members. The trip to boot camp reinforces that message, as the recruit looks around and recognises at least one person who enlisted when he did and got the same career path he did.

The trip to boot camp also drives away all memory of the recent enlistment barracks. The days or weeks spent there were a transition only. Boot camp is far more difficult and recruits begin to realise this on their flight out.

Red-Eye

SICON is in no rush for its recruits to begin training and has other things to show them along the way. It

sends its military transports, those used to ferry recruits to their first assignments, to bring the recruits to their new homes. The ride is not the shortest or smoothest it could have been. In fact, the ride is the longest, slowest, most turbulent route possible. The entire purpose of this delay is to keep the recruits awake. After receiving assignments, most recruits do not sleep for the first night, sometimes the second as well. The veterans deliberately roam the barracks halls at night, speaking loudly and running into objects and waking everyone up. The idea is for the recruits to stay awake until they reach their training camp and be exhausted when they arrive. The military transports used for these trips have also been slightly modified. Military engineers made the engines as loud as possible. They still work fine, but now they sound like an old man having a coughing fit. This is meant to keep the recruits awake but also to stop them from talking to one another. The military wants the recruits to bond with their own squadmates, to the exclusion of other friends. Those other new recruits are also following their training assignments but they may not be in the same squad, and that is important. The roar of the motors blank out all conversation and then once they arrive at boot camp the recruits get sorted into their respective squads. Suddenly best friends since childhood are in a different squad and can only be visited on weekends. In the meantime the recruits spend every waking hour with their own squad and soon learn to trust their squad mates completely.

THE GAUNTLET

At the enlistment centre each recruit underwent a series of physical, psychological and educational tests. All of that information is sent to boot camp ahead of them, so that the officers can read the dossier at leisure. Despite this prior knowledge, the camp commander arranges for each recruit to run a gauntlet immediately upon arrival.

The Gauntlet is a combination of obstacle course, hunt and mock combat. Most are set up along the following lines:

A portion of the training field is marked off with stakes and ropes. Hills and holes are created within this space, along with rocks, paths, valleys and niches.

In some locations the obstacle course includes the nearby woods, a neighbouring river or any other natural obstacles the area provides. Those soldiers already partway through their training help prepare the Gauntlet for use. Everyone in camp takes part, often spurred on by personal Gauntlet memories.

Once the recruits arrive, they are shuffled off to present their papers to the base commander. Then they are told they can go sleep as soon as they have run the Gauntlet successfully. Most recruits agree and stumble immediately toward the starting line. Smarter recruits take a minute to catch their breath.

The Gauntlet is always run at dusk, when the sun begins to sink below the horizon. There is still enough light to run, but the rays can be blinding to anyone facing the direction.



Running the Gauntlet can be another early adventure, particularly if several Player Characters arrive together. Since they are the new kids, the other soldiers shun them or mock them and the Player Characters will once again turn to each other for support.

The first portion of the Gauntlet is simply an obstacle course. Some of the obstacles are clearly visible, like the hurdles, but others are less obvious. This portion is designed to throw the recruit off-kilter, making him rely on his intuition to complete the route in one piece. Several veterans armed with simple staves lurk above the maze portion, ready to attack anyone who tries to dart past. A small wall has been erected for the recruits to climb over, plus the section has ropes in many places, and a series of tiny ponds or brooks as well. It is pretty uneven and it is easy for the recruit to lose his footing and fall.

The second part of the Gauntlet is a hunt or race. The recruits complete the maze and are now standing near the front of the camp. But the veterans who were attacking them are right behind – recruits are not allowed to carry weapons and have not been issued any since arriving. The recruits are told that a tent on the far corner of the marked area is their safe zone and destination – they have to get to that tent by nightfall. This becomes a race between the recruits and the soldiers, to see who gets there first and whether the recruits can evade the soldiers' attacks.

The third portion of the Gauntlet is combat. Upon reaching the tent, each recruit is handed a bamboo switch and told to go back out and fight. If he refuses, the soldier comes in to get him. The soldier will attack even if the recruit does nothing, though he will never go for a killing blow or disfigurement.

The Gauntlet has two purposes. The first is to set the tone for the rest of training: short, violent, nasty and way too early. It is impossible to go through the Gauntlet and still think that military life will be fun and relaxing and mildly entertaining.

The second purpose is to gauge each recruit's abilities. Even with the medical records in hand, camp commanders like to assess each new recruit personally.

He watches from just outside the marked-off area, as does the company sergeant. They note down what each recruit does and by the end of the night have an accurate assessment of each recruit's strengths and weaknesses.

The Gauntlet should definitely be a mini-adventure. The Games Master can add any embellishments he likes, with a few suggestions:

Nothing about the Gauntlet should be lethal except by accident. Guns are not used during the course, and those weapons that are used will leave bruises but are unlikely to seriously injure someone.

The Gauntlet cannot have any permanent structures because the entire camp is temporary buildings and tents. Earthworks can be dug and piled and tamped, but little else can be altered.

The Gauntlet is designed to test reflexes, co-ordination, agility, stealth, perception and intuition. It does this by throwing surprises at people, who then react accordingly. It is not intended to simulate real combat conditions and the armed veterans are allowed to bruise and slightly batter but nothing more.

The Games Master can handle the Gauntlet in two ways in terms of the Player Characters. It can be a solo test, requiring each recruit to complete the entire course before another can take a turn. This makes the process far more competitive and each recruit is encouraged to finish the course as quickly as possible. The other option is to send all of the recruits through at once. This gives them more chance to form an alliance, especially against the shadowy attacks halfway through the course. Even when done cooperatively, the Gauntlet still has a race element to it and each recruit is encouraged to get the best time. There is no award for doing so, beyond the respect of the other soldiers and a close watch by the staff sergeant.

No one is allowed to leave the Gauntlet partially finished and soldiers will be sent out to goad along any recruit who pauses too long in one spot. Those who collapse or pass out are awakened by a bucket of water

and told to continue. Those who are defeated by the other soldiers, usually everyone, are informed that they have just died and are miserable excuses for human beings, much less would-be soldiers. This also sets the tone for the rest of boot camp.

COLLAPSE

After all of the recruits have finished the Gauntlet they are returned to their barracks and allowed to sleep for several hours. Note that no one leaves until all of them have finished the obstacle course, however long that takes. Veterans have learned the knack of sleeping anywhere and so those standing guard just beyond the staked-out area are deep asleep with their eyes open. The recruits are not that lucky. They have already endured a hellish flight, followed by an awful obstacle course through mud and dirt and slime, followed by a beating from a soldier they do not even know. Most of the recruits are completely exhausted and barely staying upright. By the time they do reach their cots, the recruits are so exhausted they collapse upon them and fall asleep immediately. This also builds a strong association, linking bed with comfort and safety in their minds.

Some recruits are too wired to sleep, even after so much exertion. A few are thrilled at the exercise and activity, and far too cheerful so late at night and after so much exertion. Others cannot move without groaning and hate their life, the camp, the city, everything. They want to go back to their cosy little house and fancy little car and rich little friends and find a job that pays more than the whole web combined. These recruits often slip away that night, or see the camp commander first thing in the morning about resigning. They are given Honourable Discharges and sent home. For the rest, this is the first night of the rest of their lives. For days afterward their bodies will ache from the event, reminding each recruit what he went through and how much he still has to learn.

SECTION TWO: WELCOME TO HELL

THE RECRUITMENT PROCESS is now complete. Young men and women have sworn an oath to uphold the Terran Federation and protect it against all dangers. They have been tested and given a military career, and have been assigned to a training camp. Now the training begins, and the children become adults who become soldiers who become Mobile Infantrymen.

CAMP CURRIE

Camp Arthur Currie, home of the Third Training Regiment, Mobile Infantry, sits in the middle of Iowa. All around it is nothing but empty prairie, ranging from flat plains to rugged hills. Most of the land is covered in corn, wheat and tall grass, though the hills have short trees as well.

Camp Currie is considered one of the two finest Mobile Infantry boot camps. The other is Camp Ivan Denisovich located in Siberia. SICON has many other camps all around the world and most have similar training regimens, but Currie and Denisovich have the best ratio of entering recruits to graduating troopers, and a much higher ratio of troopers who go on to distinguish themselves in combat and in command. Thus far, almost all Mobile Infantry troopers who have risen to the rank

of Lieutenant Colonel or above have graduated from either Currie or Denisovich.



Although Camp Currie has been operational for more than 20 years, it is still quite literally a camp rather than a base. Only a few buildings litter the grounds and these house important equipment like the communications gear and the weapons. For everything else the camp uses tents. The barracks are large tents, big enough to fit 20 beds down each side with a wide walkway in between. The mess tent is even bigger and has long tables with benches on either side. Most training takes place outdoors and areas have been marked off for the parade grounds, the firing ranges and the combat rings.

The Third Training Regiment has the standard four battalions, and each battalion has its own section of the camp. These sections have exactly the same layout so soldiers can find their way around no matter which battalion area they approach. The parade ground sits at the centre, with battalion headquarters right beside it and the battalion commander's private tent next to that. The sergeants' tent sits on the other side of the headquarters and past that are the officers' showers. The mess tent runs along the opposite side of the parade ground, facing headquarters. Behind it are the four barracks. Behind them are the firing ranges. The combat rings are marked out to one side of the parade ground and the remaining side has the armoury, the infirmary and the power suit hangar. A garage for ground vehicles and a helipad are behind the battalion headquarters.

The ground around the camp itself has been stripped of crops and the grass is kept cropped short. The parade ground and combat rings have had even the grass removed, until only hard-packed dirt remains. None of the tents have true floors and their walls are only thick canvases. Heavy flaps form the doors and stout wood poles down the centre provide support. They have no windows.

Camp Currie was designed to house an entire regiment, close to three thousand men. Each of the four battalion areas can accommodate almost seven hundred men, including officers. The battalions are broken down into four companies, which contain

four platoons, which contain four squads. A full squad contains ten men.

For combat units, a squad should have a corporal and a sergeant, a platoon should have a Sergeant Major and a lieutenant, a company should have a captain, a battalion needs a major and a regiment requires a lieutenant colonel. Training regiments are not combat units, however, and less rank is required to command at each level.

The following are some of the officers of Camp Currie. Note that not all the positions have been listed. This provides the Games Master with space to insert his own Non-Player Characters into the camp hierarchy.

Major F. X. Malloy is the regimental commander of the Third Training Regiment. He runs Camp Arthur Currie from his regimental headquarters in the centre



of camp. Malloy is a career soldier, a decorated Mobile Infantryman who lost an arm and an eye in one of the first bug incursions and was removed from active duty. A long, lean man with a heavily scarred face, a gleaming scalp and an iron-grey beard, Malloy takes the Mobile Infantry very seriously. He does his best to uphold the Infantry's traditions by making Camp Currie the strongest, toughest training camp on Terra. Major Malloy rarely leaves his headquarters and only visits the battalions on the day new recruits arrive and on the day the survivors graduate.

Lieutenant Jacques Spieksma is the battalion commander of First Battalion. A tall rangy man with dark skin, dark curly hair and a long jaw, Spieksma was a civilian and a lawyer before he decided to enlist. He was allowed to serve only one tour of active combat duty before being recalled, promoted and assigned to Camp Currie as its resident adjutant. Spieksma is an easy-going man with a ready smile but a quick frown. He hates disciplining his men but will do so without hesitation. He particularly dislikes bedroll lawyers – soldiers who think they know the rules and can argue around them.

Captain Ian Frankel is the battalion commander of Second Battalion. A small, slender man with neat dark hair and moustache, Frankel is one of the rare Mobile Infantrymen who applied for Officer Training and became an officer but wound up being barred from active combat duty. Instead he was placed at Camp Currie, the same camp where he received his training. An expert at savate kickboxing, Frankel is a quiet, thoughtful man. He usually wears a grin and seems to treat life as if it were a game. His martial arts has given him the grace of a dancer and Frankel seems like the opposite of a hardened soldier as he glides across a room, but he is deadly in combat nonetheless. He also cares deeply for the recruits under his command but rarely lets it show.

Career Sergeant Charles Zim is the company commander of H Company in Second Battalion. A big, powerfully built man with close-cropped light brown hair and a rugged, almost ugly face, Zim is a career soldier. He trained at Camp Currie and then

went on to spend four years as a Mobile Infantryman, rising to the rank of Corporal. When several instructors at Camp Currie retired, he was transferred there – one of his first recruits was a skinny little fellow named Ian Frankel. Years later, when Frankel became a battalion commander at Currie, he promoted Zim to Sergeant and put him in charge of H Company. Zim is an expert at hand-to-hand combat and trained under General Shujumi, who is considered to be the finest martial artist in SICON. Zim's true love is knives, and he crafts his own by hand. He is an excellent instructor and seems to hate and despise all of his recruits equally. Yet beneath that craggy exterior Zim is very fond of his charges, so much so that he has to make sure he does not slip up and grow careless around them.

Corporal Jones is one of Sergeant Zim's corporals. A short, stout fellow with a reddish complexion, Jones rarely says anything unless he has to, and never uses more words than necessary. He served only one tour of duty before requesting a spot as instructor, and was granted the transfer immediately – Jones' evaluation said that he was very good at discipline and very bright but hesitated in combat, which could get him and his squad mates killed.

Corporal Mahmud is also an instructor under Sergeant Zim. Mahmud is average height and slender, with dark skin, dark curly hair, a neat beard and a friendly smile. Despite his appearance he is not a friendly man and does not fraternise even with other officers. Mahmud was busted out of his combat unit for insubordination but, rather than discipline him or court martial him, the ranking officer made him an instructor. Mahmud is too cruel and too literal to ever rise above the rank of Corporal but he is content with his position and does his job well.

Corporal Bronski is the third of H Company's instructors. A tall, beefy man with straight brown hair and battered features, Bronski was a farmer before he became a soldier and grew up not far from Camp Currie. He served for three years in a combat unit but his superior officer recommended him for an instructor position when one opened and Bronski decided that he did not mind the notion of going back home. A warm,

friendly man, Bronski is well-liked by the recruits of H Company – he is the most approachable of the instructors. He is always very careful not to fraternise, however, and Zim has never had reason to reproach him.

PECKING ORDER

The recruits are divided up into companies, and each company trains on its own. Within the companies, the men are assigned to platoons. Each platoon has 40 men and these recruits share a barracks. They train together, work together, eat and sleep together. The platoons within a company see each other on the parade ground and sometimes on the firing range or in the field, but only in passing. They do not fraternise – each platoon has its own Corporal, its own bunks and its own training schedule.

Each platoon contains four ten-man squads. These men have their bunks near one another. They eat at the same table in mess. They stay in formation together during reveille and when on parade. The squad is the core unit for Mobile Infantrymen. These ten men are closer than brothers, closer than best friends, closer than lovers. They know everything about each other and are expected to help each other over any difficulties.

Every squad has a squad leader. This is simply the recruit who has been selected to wear the chevrons and relay the corporal's commands to the squad. Squad leaders are responsible for their squad, which in practical terms means they get punished if any of the other nine step out of line. Squad leaders have no real authority – they are still just recruits rather than soldiers and have exactly the same amount of training and experience as their squad mates. Corporals tend to select the oldest man in the squad first. No one stays squad leader for long – at the first failure the chevrons are stripped away and given to someone else. Sometimes the replacement is carefully selected. Other times the corporal awards them at random. By graduation each member of the squad has been squad leader at least twice, often for as little as a day or as long as a month.

The rotation is no accident. Though they have no true authority, squad leaders do take responsibility for their

ARTHUR CURRIE

General Sir Arthur William Currie (5 December 1875 - 30 November 1933) was the first Canadian commander of the Canadian Corps in World War I and one of the greatest Allied generals in Canadian history. He participated in every major action of the Canadian forces during the war and directed the assault on Vimy Ridge. He is credited with keeping the Canadian fighting force united throughout their first appearance as an independent national command in a major war.

Currie was born in Napperton, Ontario and attended Strathroy Collegiate Institute in Strathroy, Ontario. He moved to Victoria, British Columbia in 1894, teaching school and selling real estate before joining the army. He and his regiment went to Europe when World War I broke out in 1914. He commanded a brigade in 1915 and in 1917 he became the first Canadian to be promoted to general during the war.

Currie frequently opposed his superior officer, General Douglas Haig. Haig's tactics involved sending wave after wave of soldiers to their deaths, while Currie preferred to win battles with minimal casualties. In 1918 Currie refused to carry out Haig's orders to attack a fortified German trench on the Canal du Nord. Instead his engineers assembled bridges to cross the canal at night and surprise the Germans.

Despite his success, even his own men considered Currie arrogant. They respected but did not like him. Currie also argued with his superiors and refused to accept orders if he did not agree with their tactics.

After the war Currie became President of McGill University in Montreal. He was knighted in 1917 and received several other honours, including the British Order of the Bath, Knight Commander of the Order of St. Michael and St. George, the French Légion d'Honneur and Croix de Guerre, and the U.S. Distinguished Service Medal.

Currie died shortly after the 15th anniversary of the Armistice, on 30 November 1933. He is interred in the Mount Royal Cemetery in Montreal, Quebec.

teammates. This gives the recruits their first taste of authority and shows them what to expect if they ever make corporal or higher. Not every soldier is cut out for rank – many panic and freeze when responsible for more than their own conduct. It is important to learn this quickly, to avoid getting good people killed later.

Though technically every recruit has the exact same rank – Rct., or Recruit – not all recruits are equal. In the eyes of the sergeant and the corporals they are, but within the platoon someone always rises to the top. This may be a recruit with relatives in the military – he knows more about what to expect and may have more physical training. It could be a recruit who comes from money and is used to ordering others about – if he possesses enough charisma to get away with it, the other recruits will listen to him. Or it could just be a recruit who seems smarter, wiser, older and calmer than the rest and so is turned to for leadership. Recruits need leaders. This is something the military trains into them, the idea that they are meant to follow orders. As long as someone can give them orders, most recruits are happy. The orders themselves are unimportant, though the less authority the order-giver has the more an order has to make sense. Within the platoon, recruits will not follow stupid or nonsensical orders. The best leaders give orders that make perfect sense and are even obvious – they tell the others to do things they would have done anyway, but by telling them it becomes an order and cements that recruit's authority.

Most platoons shake themselves out in the first week. Every recruit who thinks he should be leader steps up during that time and does his best to bully, cajole, convince, or bribe others into following his lead. This is a dangerous time in the platoon, and rivalries can turn ugly quickly. Would-be leaders often form alliances, promising each other to share power in exchange for removing a third rival, but that never works. In the end only one man can rule the roost and everyone knows it.

This first week makes an excellent adventure for starting characters. One or more of the Player Characters may want to buck for leader himself. Others are content to watch the conflict and wait for the dust to settle.

No one can stay completely aloof. Every recruit has to pick a leader, or declare for himself and gather his own followers to his banner. Speeches are made, as are threats. Gifts are given, as are blows. The corporal stays well out of it. He knows what is happening, of course, and makes sure that no one gets killed but he also knows better than to interfere. The platoon needs a boss and better that he asserts himself right from the start. Sometimes two or more recruits are so evenly matched no one can gain complete control. The platoon has two or more masters and limps along for several weeks without a proper focus. The tension builds as the platoon watches others passing it in skill and precision, until finally the leaders fight – this will not necessarily be a brawl but could end up as a verbal match of wits. One man walks away victorious and within days the platoon is a single unit.

The Games Master should seed the platoon with certain archetypal recruits. If a Player Character fits one of the archetypes, the Games Master can either leave that type alone or add a second but at least one of each should be present to provide a full platoon and create a variety of roleplaying options. The basic recruit types are:

THE CHARMER

Whether good-looking or not, he has a way about him that makes people like him. Men admire him, women desire him, superiors respect him and inferiors imitate him. The Charmer is a natural leader, not because he is smart or tough but because people want his approval. He makes a very good soldier once he realises that his charm alone is not enough to get him through. The Charmer has to learn the skills like every other Mobile Infantryman but once he does, his charm can calm disputes within his squad and help everyone function more smoothly.

THE BULLY

Every platoon has at least one. Usually large and powerfully built, bullies use their muscles to get what they want. Anyone weaker deserves to be leaned on – anyone stronger is a threat and has to be removed. Most bullies are insecure but hide their self-consciousness by acting tough. Bullies fancy themselves leaders but really they are enforcers for others. They are excellent

soldiers because they will follow orders from anyone stronger than they are and will turn on anyone else who does not step into line behind them.

THE PRANKSTER

Everything is a joke to him. On a good day, everyone likes him because his laughter lightens the load. On a bad day, his pranks make frayed tempers snap and his cavalier attitude leads to carelessness, accidents and injuries. Pranksters can be excellent soldiers as underneath their grins and jokes they are often very perceptive. They joke to ease the tension and to hide their own fear.

THE FOLLOWER

He hates to make decisions for himself. He does not want to be responsible, not even for his own hide. The Follower joined the military because he figured they would tell him what to do. Civilians and other recruits assume he is the perfect soldier because he lives to follow orders. Unfortunately, a true soldier has to be independent when necessary – he needs to follow orders but be able to adapt to new situations. The Follower cannot do that. He can only do what he has been told, and nothing more.

THE RICH KID

He has never had to work for anything or want for anything. Whatever he desired was his. Most Rich Kids are good-looking, either because they were naturally so or because they bought their looks. They are always very healthy because they had the best food and the best care. Rich Kids expect to be waited on hand and foot and cannot understand having to do their own work. They treat officers with thinly veiled derision and see the other recruits as ready-made servants. Most Rich Kids do not make it through basic training – if they do, they have lost their superior attitude and have become a completely different person.

THE LONER

He does not want anything to do with the other recruits. His bed is on the very end and he sleeps with his back to the rest of the barracks. At meals he huddles over his food, never speaking. He rarely speaks, and usually in monosyllables. The Loner is a terrible soldier. Despite

what people think, the military is not a good place to be alone. Soldiers are expected to be strong enough to survive on their own but they work best as part of a unit. Loners either come out of their shells or resign from military service.

THE WARRIOR

He joined the military for one reason and one reason only – to fight. He does not care about discipline or about orders or about learning how to march or hunt or survive. Warriors are different from bullies because they love a challenge and enjoy a good fight with an equal or better. Most Warriors realise quickly that military discipline can make them even stronger fighters and they throw themselves into the lifestyle. A Warrior who understands this is the ideal soldier. Those who continue to buck the system are punished and eventually discharged from service.

THE TEAM PLAYER

He has a natural inclination to help others. He offers advice, lends a shoulder for support, covers for a tardy teammate and generally does everything possible to help the squad and the platoon. Team Players are often selected as Squad Leaders but rarely last because they cannot prioritise. Every issue seems important and has to be dealt with at once. Team Players are well-liked among the squad and within the platoon but are not leaders. They prefer to be in the background, helping others to do better. The hardest things for a Team Player are learning when to leave a matter alone and accepting that he has to put himself first sometimes.

THE GROUCH

Everyone complains when times get tough. For the Grouch, complaining is a way of life. He gripes about getting up early and about going to bed late, complains about the food, complains about their chores and the various training activities. He is never happy – or at least he is always complaining. Grouches can go one of two ways: either they really hate everyone and everything or they just become the voice of the squad's discontentment. If the former, other recruits quickly grow to hate him for his constant negativity. If the latter he can actually boost morale by saying what everyone is thinking and getting it out in the open.

Some Grouches are actually very even-tempered, pleasant individuals – they complain about how hard the work is while doing it flawlessly and gripe about helping anyone else while lending a hand and going beyond what was required. This type of Grouch makes a good soldier and the instructors know better than to shut him up.

THE CHEERLEADER

‘You can do it’ is the Cheerleader’s motto. He encourages everyone to do their best and points out ways things could be worse. On a good day, the Cheerleader is a lifesaver and morale booster – he helps the rest of his squad get over the hump. On a bad day his constant optimism becomes grating and his attitude seems either condescending or merely short-sighted. Cheerleaders make good soldiers provided they do not forget to do the work themselves while encouraging others.

THE REBEL

He walks when people say run and runs when they say walk. He goes left when everyone else goes right. He joined the military because people told him he shouldn’t. The Rebel lives to oppose authority. He enjoys creating a scene and making leaders uncomfortable. He deliberately annoys the sergeant and the corporal, pushing them to see how much he can get away with. Then he pushes a little more. A smart sergeant or corporal knows that breaking a Rebel renders him useless – take away his drive and he becomes a weak, despondent figure. The military does have room for Rebels. These men can become assets, particularly as scouts, because they follow their own instincts no matter what the rulebooks say. However, a Rebel in the military has to know when to stand up and when to shut up. If he cannot learn that, he eventually goes too far and gets discharged.

Not everyone fits one of these archetypes, of course. Most people have aspects of several within them. Each platoon is likely to have at least one of each, possibly along with other archetypes not detailed here. Between the Charmer, the Bully, the Prankster, the Follower, the Rich Kid, the Loner, the Warrior, the Team Player and the Rebel each platoon will have ample tension, especially as the Charmer, the Bully, the Rich Kid and the Rebel vie for leadership.

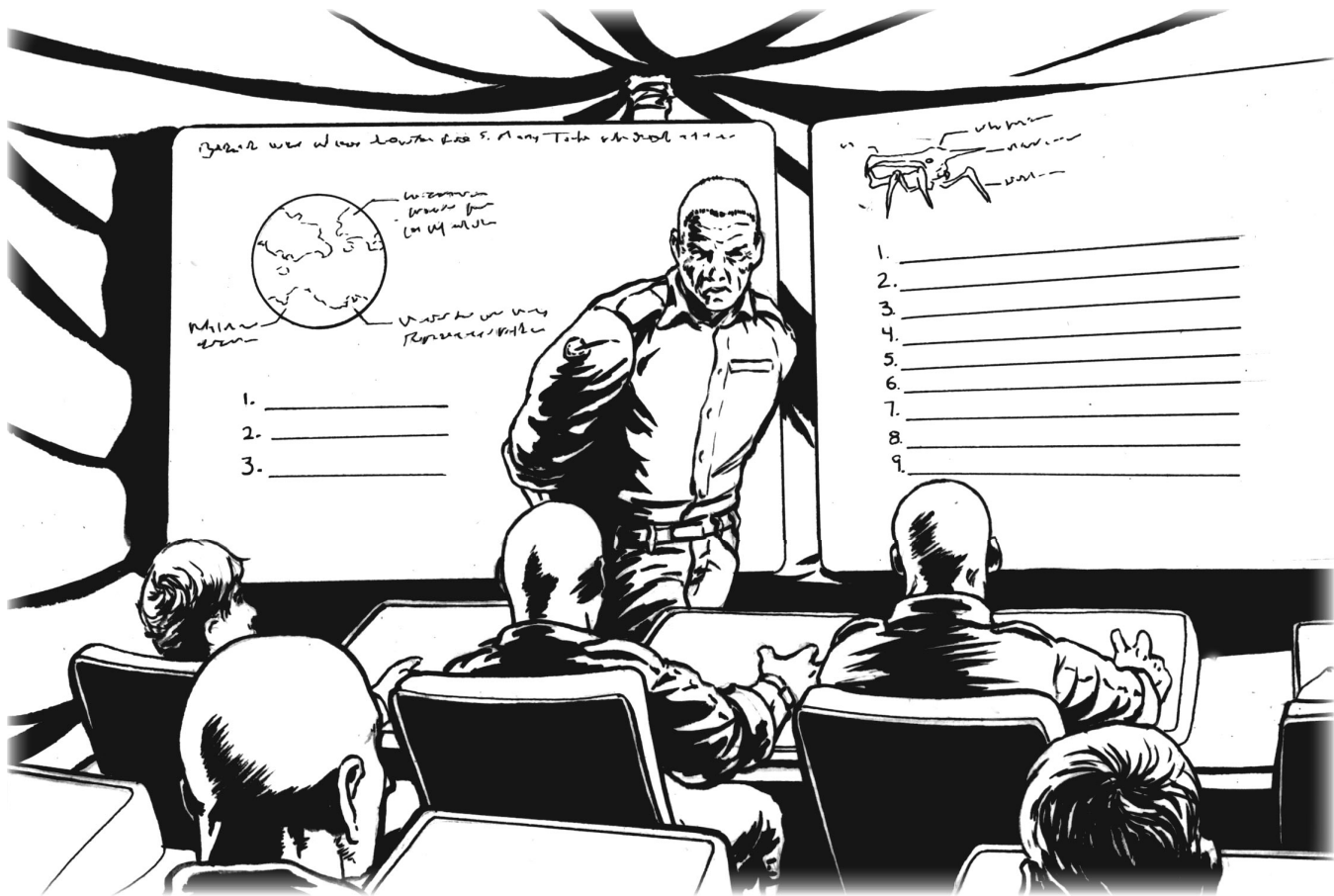
EQUAL SEXES

Both men and women are assigned to the Mobile Infantry. SICON does not have separate camps for the different genders. Within each camp, it does not have separate quarters, or even separate facilities. Recruits sleep together, eat together, bathe together, or use the toilet together, regardless of sex. Many recruits find this awkward at first, particularly using the group showers or the doorless toilet stalls – or, when in the field, the bushes and trees and ditches. This is all part of SICON’s strategy.

Young men and women are very conscious of gender and sexuality. Most recruits are young and healthy, and thus have good bodies. At first, the men cannot help but stare at their female counterparts and vice-versa. After a few days, the novelty wears off. After several days of sweating together, bleeding together, fighting together, and marching together, the recruits do not even notice sex. They stop seeing men and women and only register each other as bunkmates, squad mates and allies. This is what SICON wants. Mobile Infantry troopers have to rely upon one another completely and often have to react in an instant. Any hesitation, even the knee-jerk reaction of ‘but she’s a girl!’ can be enough to get them all killed. The camp instructors make sure each barracks contains a good mix of race, gender and age, to force the recruits to overcome any prejudices. The recruits learn to see each other as equals, regardless of such factors.

This does not mean that having men and women train together is without problems. Currie has fewer women than men, which means that any female recruit can find male companionship easily if she wants it. Her combat training gives her enough skill to fend off unwanted advances, but some recruits of both genders want intimate relations. The instructors have no problem with this as long as it does not interfere with training. If two recruits become too attached, to the point that they ignore other barrackmates who need support, the two will be separated and assigned to new barracks. If two recruits form a relationship and then end it badly, the instructors may separate them as well, to prevent the tension and anger from endangering anyone. Most often, after a week or two, the recruits discover that casual relations are a nice way to blow off steam after a tough day and nothing more.

Amusingly, once the recruits are allowed leave some male recruits become very protective of their female counterparts, taking on the role of big brothers. Most female recruits quickly disabuse the men of such attitudes and shrug off any attempts at protection, seeking and later bragging about conquests as aggressively as their male friends.



Peer Instructors

Every recruit has the same official rank, and even the regiment commander cannot change that – until graduation every recruit is one rank below Private. But sergeants do have the authority to hand out a temporary, unofficial rank to deserving recruits: that of Peer Instructor.

A Peer Instructor is a recruit expert enough in one skill to teach others. Usually this means he is at least equal to the sergeant in that skill and may even surpass him. The most common speciality for a Peer Instructor is unarmed combat. Some young men have spent their entire lives training in martial arts, particularly if their fathers and brothers were experts before them. The sergeant and his corporals teach unarmed combat at Camp Currie but having an extra instructor never hurts – it allows each instructor to focus on fewer recruits and thus give each man more personal attention. In order to prove himself worthy to be a Peer Instructor

in this area, a recruit simply has to fight the sergeant to a draw.

Recruits can become Peer Instructors in other areas, however. A recruit who grew up in the mountains and has been hunting all his life may be an expert marksman, an expert tracker, a talented woodsman or simply a superb all-around hunter. He may know more about mountain survival than even the sergeant, simply because the recruit has used these skills constantly for most of his life. A more technology-oriented recruit might prove to be an expert in engineering, communications, or equipment repair. Someone who grew up around vehicles may be an expert mechanic or a talented driver. Recruits whose fathers owned and operated aircraft might be talented pilots despite their young age – legally a young man must be at least 16 to pilot an aircraft or helicopter solo but of course some boys are allowed to fly younger as long as no one notices or asks their age.

If a recruit has any skill modifier of +5 or above then he may be considered an expert in it, especially compared to the other recruits. This requires the Games Master to think about the particular skill, how common it may be and how useful it will be in the military. For example, any recruits from the Midwest may have some skill in Handle Animal from working with livestock. Just because one of the Player Characters has a +5 skill modifier in Handle Animal does not mean he will be appointed a Peer Instructor in animal handling, because the Mobile Infantry does not need its troopers to know how to work with animals. The skill may point a Player Character toward becoming a Neodog handler but that is a separate area and the instructors there are considerably more skilled. A Player Character with a +5 skill modifier in Demolitions is impressive, however, because few of his fellow recruits know anything about demolitions and that is a skill the Mobile Infantry wants its troopers to master. Every high-ranking skill should make sense given the Player Character's background, of course.

Being appointed Peer Instructor does not convey many benefits. The recruit still has to do all the same work as everyone else and undertake the same training assignments and endure the same classes and exercises. He still sleeps with his squad, still eats with them in the mess and still has the same uniform and equipment. He is not exempted from any activities and simply has another job on-base. Peer Instructors work not just with their own platoon but with the other platoons in their company and often the other companies in their battalion. A recruit who is expert in a rare skill may even wind up teaching recruits in the other battalions of the regiment, though his sergeant will make sure he still has just enough time to complete his other duties. Personal time is the most likely to suffer from this busy schedule.

During a class on the appropriate subject, the Peer Instructor teaches alongside the sergeant and the other instructors. If his speciality is something even the sergeant does not know, the Peer Instructor may teach alone, though he will always have at least a corporal there to maintain discipline. During instruction the other recruits must refer to the Peer Instructor as

'Instructor,' answer his questions and obey his orders – the corporal makes sure none of these orders are frivolous, pointless or vindictive. This temporary authority does not extend beyond the classroom, except that a Peer Instructor can assign limited amounts of homework in a related topic.

Peer Instructors may face ridicule outside the classroom. Their squad mates and platoon members may mock them, bowing and pretending to be subservient. Some recruits may also turn nasty, particularly if the Peer Instructor showed them up in class or has assigned a difficult assignment. Anyone who becomes a Peer Instructor will have to face the challenge of still being a lowly recruit while instructing friends and even enemies for limited periods.

Unfortunately, this tension is not always limited to the recruits. Sergeants and corporals are expected to stay above such pettiness but a few still take it as a personal slight when a recruit betters them at anything. Seeing this same recruit teaching others can be galling and some corporals and sergeants grow to hate Peer Instructors. They deliberately judge the recruit more harshly than everyone else, taunting them that an instructor should be beyond any inexperience or mistakes. The recruit can appeal to a higher power, of course, but the sergeant will usually back his corporals and the major will back his sergeant, saying that if it gets too tough the recruit should simply resign.

This begs the question of why a recruit would agree to be a Peer Instructor. Most agree for one of two reasons: pride or duty. A recruit may be justifiably proud of his own abilities and want to share them with others, particularly if the military decides they are useful. Others may feel that these skills will help the other recruits be better troopers and will give them a better chance to survive and succeed. They may see it as their duty to give whatever they can to help SICON in general, up to and including sharing their own hard-won expertise.

A DAY IN THE LIFE

First reveille sounds at 0600, which is the crack of dawn. The recruits are mustered out of bed and into

ranks. They have 20 minutes between the first bugle and second reveille, enough to shower, shave and pull on clean clothes if they hustle.

During the morning muster, the sergeant and his corporals announce the day's activities, if they choose. They also read any notices and relay any important news. Reveille is brief, usually ten minutes or less.

Reveille is followed by one hour of vigorous callisthenics, to get the blood flowing. Then the recruits are dismissed for breakfast.

40 minutes later, at 0800, the recruits muster again. Now the day begins.

The morning is used for classes, hikes, or combat training. Classes range from tactics to history to languages to rock formations to demolitions, and are often held out in a field with the recruits gathered around the instructor. Hikes start at the camp and range into the hills and back again. Combat training is always held in the combat rings, unless it involves firearms in which case it occurs on the firing range.

At 1130, the recruits take lunch. This lasts half an hour. Mail call often occurs during lunch, though it can happen any time the post arrives.

The afternoon is similar to the morning but more strenuous. Hikes are longer and over more difficult terrain, classes cover more complicated subjects and combat training is more aggressive.

The recruits are mustered again at 1930, or 7:30pm in the evening. They parade for half an hour, in formation.

Dinner is at 2000 hours, or 8:00pm. It lasts half an hour.

After dinner, the recruits have personal time. They can use the next 90 minutes for anything they like. Many play cards or write letters or practice their music. Some sit quietly, or draw, or read. This time is often used for studying, or any homework that was assigned, or for

personal maintenance like polishing shoes or trimming hair or tailoring uniforms.

Lights out is at 2200 hours. All recruits must be in bed at this time. Anyone moving about between lights-out and reveille, except for quick trips to the bathroom, gets written up and earns extra duty the next day.

Of course, this is a standard day at boot camp. Standard days are uncommon. Often the recruits go on all-day marches and do not stop for lunch. Sometimes they go on extended marches and do not stop for lunch or dinner. Classes can take an entire day, as can combat training. Exercises usually take anywhere from four hours to a week, though these are held out in the field rather than at camp. Food is often withheld, as is sleep, to toughen the men. During a march the recruits do not stop for breaks, they shift to a different speed. The only two guaranteed events each day are reveille in the morning and mail call as soon as it arrives.

Somewhere during all this, the recruits also have to do their work. The Mobile Infantry's motto is 'Everyone works. Everyone fights.' That means that everyone pulls their own weight both in combat and out. Boot camp does not have staff beyond the officers and instructors. The recruits handle everything else.

Upon arriving in camp, recruits are asked a series of questions by their corporals. Anyone who has skill in cooking is sent to the kitchens. Those with experience in construction go to work digging latrines, shoring up tents, and repairing the few permanent buildings. Recruits who can type and file may get administrative duty in the battalion headquarters. But everyone has a job to do. For many recruits, the job is whatever needs to be done that day – their corporal or the sergeant details them to a particular task at morning reveille, and they continue at that until either the task is complete or they are transferred to another job. Others like the cooks have the same job every day. The schedule does not allow a specific block of time for these tasks – they are squeezed in around everything else.

On Saturday nights dinner occurs at 1900 hours and lasts for a full hour. Then the recruits have two hours of personal time before lights-out.

On Sundays the recruits stand at attention for a full hour in the morning, while the Sergeant reads the disciplinary articles. Then the company padre gives a short sermon and the recruits are sent to breakfast without callisthenics.

Food at boot camp is not fancy, but it is good. The military knows better than to serve substandard rations if they want their soldiers to stay fit. Nor do they stint on portions – soldiers can eat as much as they like during meal times. Breakfasts consist of eggs (fried, scrambled or over easy), bacon, sausage, biscuits and gravy, oatmeal, cereal and whatever fresh fruit can be found. Lunches are usually sandwiches, meat and lettuce and tomatoes on bread. Dinners include a meat dish, pasta or starch, a vegetable and bread or rolls or

The Lash

The most common form of punishment in boot camp is extra duty. This can mean anything from cleaning latrines to scraping potatoes for dinner to stacking equipment to running errands for the battalion commander. Extra duty is measured in hours and is carried out the same day it is assigned, or the first day back at camp if the recruits are currently in the field. The instructors and the camp officers can assign extra duty for any reason, including none at all or a dislike for a recruit's attitude. Most often, they assign punishment for tardiness, slovenliness, disobedience, insubordination, and carelessness. Showing up untidy at reveille can earn a recruit two hours of extra duty.

Other punishments are sometimes tacked on, suited to the situation. The punishment for attending reveille without having bathed is an hour or more of extra duty. The sergeant may also decide, however, that the recruit needs help with his personal grooming. Several other recruits are given rough scrub brushes and buckets of soapy water, and are ordered to scrub the offending recruit clean. Likewise, a recruit who lags behind can be given not only extra duty but also a five-mile jog around the camp. These additional activities are never counted toward the extra duty.

More severe crimes may require disciplinary punishment. The disciplinary articles posted outside the battalion headquarters and read out every Sunday detail what offences require such action. They include deliberately harming another recruit, deliberately disobeying an order in the field, violating established procedures during a combat exercise and striking an officer. Many of these offences result in a court martial, leading to a Dishonourable Discharge and the former recruit being barred from military service or citizenship. They also require a public lashing.

A thick wooden post is erected at one end of the parade ground, with a heavy iron hook near the top. The prisoner is manacled and led out under guard. The manacles are hung from the hook, forcing the prisoner to stand straight with his arms fully extended above him, facing the post. His shirt is pulled off, and his undershirt is sliced away if he has one on. Then an instructor from another battalion steps forward with a whip. The commanding officer recites the count.

Lashings are terrible things, both for the recipient and for the observer. They are incredibly painful – most men are reduced to tears by the third stroke. A lashing for administrative punishment – a mistake too severe for extra duty but not major enough to merit a discharge – can go as high as five lashes, though most only merit two or three. A court martial punishment can rate ten lashes.

As painful as a lashing is, watching one can be worse – particularly watching a friend or former comrade. Grown men, tough soldiers, have been known to faint at a lashing, unable to stand the sound of the whip striking flesh and the sight of the victim's body jerking as the rawhide cuts deep.

No one who has ever seen a lashing forgets it. In most battalions if a lashing occurs once it is never necessary again.

The good news about a lashing is that, for administrative punishments, it has no more lasting effect than extra duty. The recruit's record shows that he received the punishment and for what offence, but when he graduates that record is wiped away. A skilful lashing does not even leave a scar – at least on the outside.

tortillas. The recruits can ask for juice, milk, coffee, tea or water at each meal.

Accommodations are not spacious or luxurious but they are clean and tidy. Every recruit receives a good thick blanket and a good lightweight blanket when he arrives at camp, along with a pillow and clean sheets. He also gets two pairs of pants, two undershirts, two overshirts or tunics, three pairs of socks, three pairs of underwear, one pair of boots, one pair of gloves, one jacket and one hat. Each bunk in the barracks is the same. It has a simple fold-up bed and a foot locker. The recruit's rucksack can be stowed under the bed or inside the foot locker, along with the recruit's new clothes, toiletries and other items. After three or four weeks of training, the corporals have the recruits fold up their beds and carry them back to the supply shed – after that they sleep on the ground, with only their blankets. The foot lockers remain.

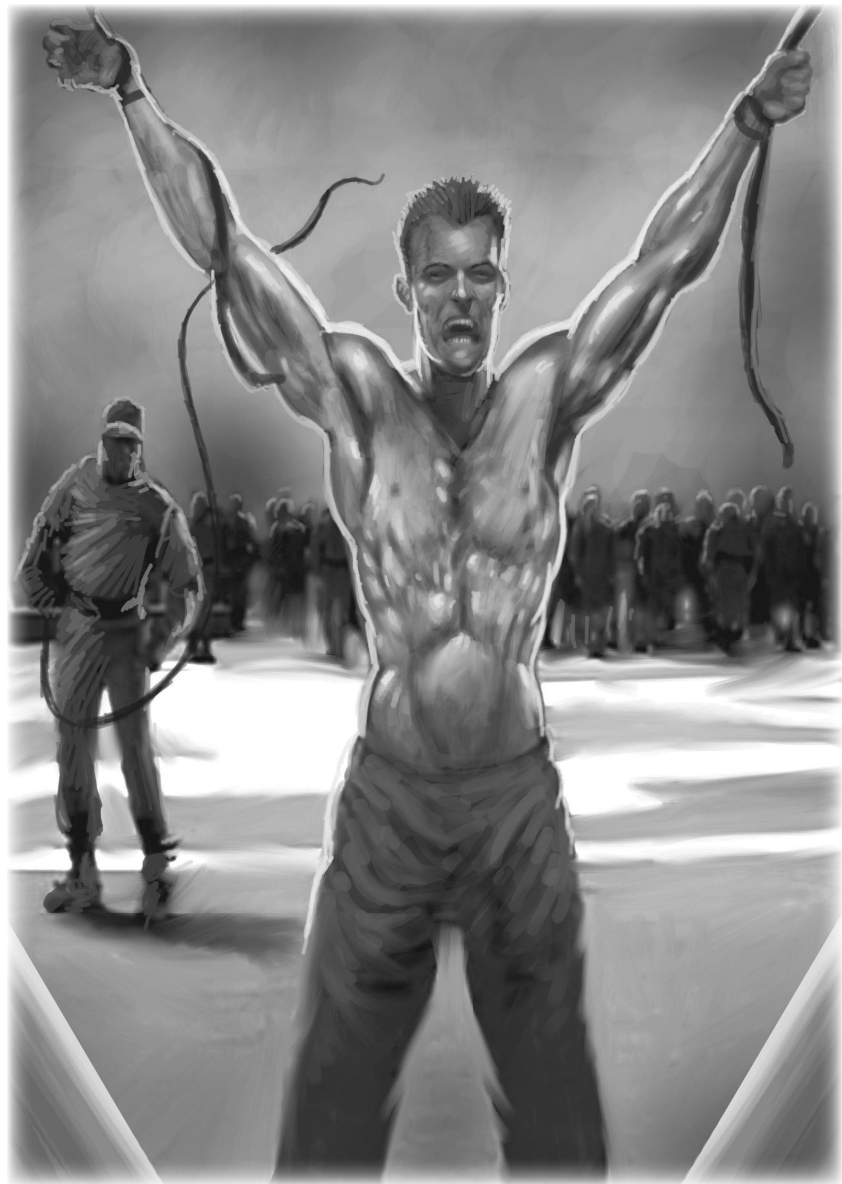
Recruits are not left with much time to think. Every day they are worked hard, and every night by lights-out they are exhausted. The one thing this teaches is the value of sleep. A soldier learns to sleep anywhere, anytime, under almost any circumstances. Two months into training most recruits can sleep on the ground, in a chair, or standing up. Many can sleep while walking, and can march in formation without waking up. A talented few can even follow simple commands, like pacing a beat, without stirring. The sergeant will wake up any man he catches sleeping but the military does not disapprove of such behaviour. On the contrary, they encourage it – the sergeant's actions are designed not to stop recruits from sleeping but to teach them to be subtler about it.

In theory, recruits get eight hours of sleep, from 2200 hours to 0600 the next morning. Frequent interruptions

disrupt this period, however. The sergeant and his corporals often call surprise inspections, or sudden drills, or midnight marches. They want their recruits ready to roll in an instant and always on the bounce. This is good training and most recruits quickly learn how little sleep they really need at night and how much sleep they can catch up during the days.

TESTING, TESTING

Recruits are constantly tested on their knowledge, their reflexes, their physical conditioning, their willpower and their training. These tests take many different forms. The most basic test is seeing whether the recruit can



roll out of bed for reveille every morning. As training progresses, the recruits get less and less sleep at night yet are pushed harder than ever during the day. Those who cannot handle the fatigue and exertion collapse or resign. The rest learn their threshold for pain, labour and sleep deprivation, and also learn that they can push that boundary when necessary.

The camp is filled with psychological tests as well. Many come from within the platoon but the sergeant and the corporal also test the recruits. The instructors probe recruits constantly, looking for weaknesses and exploiting them. A recruit who misses his family is ridiculed for his homesickness or taunted with a three-day pass to his hometown. Recruits who love to eat are alternately assigned kitchen duty and given mandatory fasting to either break them of their food obsession or let it consume them. Men who dislike being dirty are sent on week-long camping trips up in the hills, where the rain has turned everything to mud.

Other tests are more straightforward. Quizzes are given in most classes, followed by longer tests in the middle and at the end. Recruits are paired off in combat classes and set against one another. These often lead into elimination tournaments.

These tests can be used as miniature adventures for the Player Characters. For example, the next hand-to-hand tournament will occur next week. Everyone in the platoon, including the Player Characters, will be competing. The winner will be given squad leader chevrons. More importantly, he will receive a three-day pass. Some recruits want to win for the pass. Others want the honour of being squad leader again. Some want to impress the sergeant. Still others just want to win for the sake of victory. Many recruits spend their free time for the next few days working out, practising moves and generally preparing for the tournament. Others prepare in their own way, trying to bribe people into throwing a match or charming the instructors to tell them about any special arrangements or studying each competitor and analysing his fighting style, focus and possible weaknesses. The tournament also gives the Player Characters a chance to realise everything they've learned since enlisting. Beforehand they were

weak civilians – now they are hardened soldiers and expert fighters.

Of course, tests can make the winners arrogant, so the instructors take steps to curb such egotism. The winner of the martial arts tournament, for example, might be invited to demonstrate his skill against Sergeant Zim in front of everyone. Zim will almost certainly mop the floor with him, thus pointing out that no recruit can take a real soldier.

Tests can be competitive without being combative. Foot races are often held at the camp, though they usually involve running into the hills and to a certain point, then coming back. An instructor is stationed by the turning point to confirm that contestants did reach it before turning back. Swim meets, obstacle courses, even marksmanship competitions are not combative because the recruits are not attacking one another. Each recruit wants to do the best he can on every test and measures his success against his peers. While most people want to win, if beaten by someone who is clearly a master of the subject or activity they feel respect and awe instead of anger and disappointment.

When assigning tests, particularly for use during an adventure, the Games Master should try to keep things fair. Some people are better at fighting or tracking or riding or demolitions than others. In a competition, these characters will probably win. However the recruits can put up a good fight and something new may appear from the ashes of the old.

Of course, tournaments and other tests are given enormous weight in camp simply by having the sergeant talk about them. People start bragging about how they will win the tournament and many small bets are placed. Technically the military frowns on fight-betting. In practice, however, it looks the other way, provided a recruit does not believe he has learned everything there is to learn. Though each bet is small it adds up to substantial amounts of money, far more than most recruits ever see. The real reward, however, comes when the company sergeant reads the recruit's name in the 'Special News' portion of reveille. The look he gives the recruit will be the mildest he has ever

seen, and even has a twinge of respect mixed with the arrogance and disdain. This attitude never lasts, but for several days after completing the tournament the recruit gets the thrill of recognition and respect from everyone else at camp.

If that is not enough incentive to win a competition, add something else. It can be buttons from an old uniform, a pass from camp, a new knife (perhaps even one Sergeant Zim created by hand), jewellery (if on the approved list) or anything else they might still like. Most recruits would settle for an extra hour of sleep every night for a week and be the envy of all their bunkmates.

LIVE FIRE

Combat training and testing fills the time at Camp Currie. The recruits are expected to be soldiers when they graduate and the most important thing a soldier does is fight. Without the proper training, soldiers will simply be civilians, not only useless in a fight but actually dangerous to the rest of the squad.

Combat training starts with martial arts. Each instructor is a master in at least one hand-to-hand fighting style. Bullies often try to assert themselves during the first combat sessions. If none of the other recruits tries to stop him, the bully is allowed to get into a real fight with the sergeant or two or more corporals. That teaches humility quickly. The recruits learn to fight using hands, feet, elbows, fingers and heads. They face one another in pairs, then graduate to small groups, then medium-sized groups, and finally take on all their remaining classmates at once. Because each instructor favours a different fighting technique, the recruits learn a hodgepodge of skills and information. The overall fighting style can depend upon speed or strength. It focuses on taking an enemy down quickly, incapacitating him and grabbing his weapon and supplies. Competitions are often held squad against squad, which fosters a greater bond between the squad mates and gives them even more incentive to

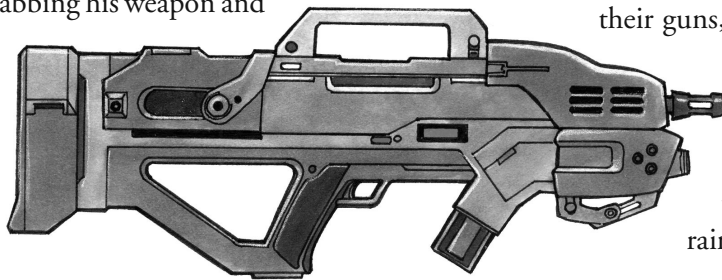
win – the opponent is not some faceless entity, but the obnoxious recruit from the fourth of H Company's platoons. He deserves to lose and to have the other soldiers see his failure and laugh at his weakness.

After martial arts training comes melee training. The instructors start with knives, the smallest and simplest of a Mobile Infantryman's weapons. Many argue that knives are now obsolete and utterly ineffective during a war. The Mobile Infantry, however, feels that some day a soldier might be stuck in the wilderness on some planet with no suit, no guns, no ammo and no shelter. It is impossible for even the brightest recruit to rebuild a Morita rifle if he does not have any of the parts but a crude knife can be made from several items, most easily from chipped rock. Thus the recruits are prepared for that eventuality – even without other weapons, a soldier can equip himself with a sharp blade in under ten minutes and the instructors make sure he knows how to handle that particular weapon, just in case.

Other martial weapons are covered, particularly the club. Like the knife, this is included because it is so easy to find or create. Rifles make excellent clubs and the recruits practice firing until empty and then using the rifle itself on opponents.

After martial weapons come firearms. The three combat types overlap, of course – recruits begin shooting rifles during the first week at boot camp and take their first unarmed combat and martial combat lessons that week as well. However, in order of complexity, firearms come third. Though the recruits are taught to shoot immediately, several weeks go by before they begin to learn about guns properly. They learn the different types of firearm available and how each works, including historical blackpowder weapons. They learn how guns are made and how the pieces are assembled. The

recruits practice assembling and disassembling their guns, until they can strip a full Morita rifle and put it back together in mere minutes. Then they practice doing the same thing but at night, in the rain, in the dark and under



other adverse conditions. The recruits also learn about ammunition – what it is made from, how it is made, how it should be stored, when not to use it and other details. Their target practice continues through these other lessons and the targets grow smaller and smaller, and farther away. Then they become mobile. Then camouflaged. Then aggressive, as small automated targets fly at the recruits and can even knock them down.

The recruits learn about bugs and see films of the arachnids in action but they do not encounter any during basic training. Warrior bugs are incredibly hard to capture and worker bugs are useless even as examples of the species – though they look similar to warrior bugs, the worker bugs are completely non-aggressive and so lack that unconscious deadliness that makes the warriors so frightening.

Ammunition is carefully monitored throughout training. On the firing range, the recruits are handed weapons and ammunition when they arrive, and return the weapon and any unspent rounds when they leave. Each recruit is also responsible for picking up his own spent rounds. They return these as well, though a few always gets filched and made into cigarette lighters, key chains and necklaces.

After a month of training, the recruits are handed rifles during field exercises, including marches. At first these weapons are not loaded at all – they are simply for weight and bulk, so the recruits get used to hefting them along with their kits. Then dummy rounds are added when the marches expand to include firing at an enemy, or laying down suppression fire. Dummy rounds are nothing more than a loud bang and a little smoke, and the military needs its soldiers to learn caution around firearms and care when firing around teammates. To help teach this lesson, live rounds are handed out.

Not every round of ammunition is live – that would be a tremendous waste of resources. One out of every five hundred rounds is live and the rest are dummies, but the placement is random. A soldier could wind up with two live rounds in a single magazine one night

and then nothing but dummies for a week. The fact that live rounds could appear keeps everyone on their toes, however, which is the point.

If the recruits become lax about safety again, the ratio increases to one out of one hundred rounds. Then one out of 50 rounds. No training company has ever needed to go beyond that – with one out of 50 rounds live, every recruit fires a live round once each night during exercises. They learn quickly to watch where they shoot.

Accidents do happen, of course. Recruits get shot with live rounds on occasion. Others get stabbed during knife-fighting practice, or clubbed too hard with a rifle butt, or they dive into a ditch the wrong way and break a limb in the process. Those who can be treated are sent to the infirmary and put on bed rest or light duty afterward if necessary.

Recruits who die while at boot camp are posthumously promoted to the rank of Private First Class and buried with full honours. Unless otherwise specified, that means they are cremated and their ashes interred at the SICON mausoleum on Sanctuary. Deaths rarely occur, however – out of two thousand recruits each session, fatalities seldom exceed single figures. Injuries are far more common. Most recruits break at least one bone while in boot camp and suffer numerous sprains, twists, scrapes and cuts. These are not major enough to require being sidelined, however. Unless specifically ordered to bed rest or light duty by the camp doctor, a recruit is expected to maintain standard hours, duties and activities.

PHASE ONE COMPLETE

The first half of basic training takes four months. This is during peacetime – during war that process is accelerated. By the end of this time, the recruit is capable of marching for two days without pause, covering more than 50 miles each day while carrying a full kit and a loaded rifle. He can strip the rifle and reassemble it with his eyes closed and hit a moving target at the edge of his vision. He can tell his position by the sun or the stars and the time as well. He can survive for a week without food or water and sit or lie

in any position without moving for a full day. He sleeps while marching, while sitting, even while eating, but is instantly alert at the slightest sound. His reflexes are sharp enough to catch a fly in mid-air and his responses are so ingrained he can kill or incapacitate an attacker before realising he has been attacked. These are the men who were once raw recruits whimpering about getting up with the sun and collapsing after jogging a mile.

At this point the recruits are given their first major exam. This is their mid-term, to prove they have absorbed the lessons of the past four months. The mid-term is very simple: each recruit is taken, stripped naked, flown up into the mountains in a small plane or helicopter and kicked out in mid-air. The ground is less than ten feet below, so the recruit has no trouble surviving the drop. He has been told the approximate locations of two camps, both within one hundred miles of him but at least 30 miles away. The recruit's task is to orient himself and make his way to one of those two camps alive and generally unharmed. He has three days.

Those recruits who succeed and present themselves by the deadline pass the first portion of their training. They can now move on to the second half, which includes power suits. Those who fail, either by not reaching one of the bases or by missing the deadline, are ordered to resign. Many choose to resign rather than take the test at all. The location is carefully chosen – it is isolated enough that the recruit will not find any help, rugged enough that climbing down will be challenging, and wild enough that several native animals can pose a real threat.

This mid-term provides a good solo adventure for the Player Characters. It can also be modified for group play. For example, the group could be dropped into a mountain region and told that a camp exists within a two hundred-mile radius. They have to find the camp and reach it within five days. Mountain lions, bears, wolverines and other animals stand in their way. So do their instructors, hidden among the trees and in the grass to observe, hamper and misdirect them. Now the group has to work together, finding weapons, scouting the area and selecting a course of action.

FIRST LEVEL

After the mid-term exam is a good time for the characters to go from 0th-level grunts to 1st-level characters. They have not actually graduated yet but they have endured several months of basic training and have definitely gained many basic military skills.

The change can occur gradually or all at once. A gradual change is more realistic, as the recruit slowly acquires new skills and certain class abilities. The sudden elevation is more dramatic, however, and fits well with the notion that the mid-term was 'the hump,' the toughest moment in a recruit's training.

The recruit has gained several valuable new skills during the first half of basic training. It makes sense then, if his skill points go from the abbreviated 0th-level points to the standard points for a 1st-level Mobile Infantry trooper.

Because of constant activity, the recruit is now in excellent physical condition. His action points should increase to the full amount for a 1st-level character, as should hit points.

A 1st-level Mobile Infantry trooper gains three feats: On the Bounce, Basic Training and a bonus feat. The recruit has not yet learned to handle power armour and has not actually finished basic training, so the Basic Training feat should wait for graduation. On the Bounce applies, however. The bonus feat could be added now or saved until graduation as well.

The character can also gain his Base Attack Bonus now, along with his Defence Bonus and his Saves. The Prestige Bonus should wait until he has graduated and is a full Mobile Infantry trooper. At that time he will have more confidence and can be treated as a real soldier instead of a probationary one.

The numerical changes from a 0th-level character to a 1st-level character may not seem great, and they are not. The change is more important from a character-development standpoint. As a 0th-level the Player Character has not truly entered his chosen career. He still has no experience, no training and no related skills or abilities. He wants to be a soldier, but does not yet know how. As a 1st-level character, he has mastered at least the basics of the career. Though still a recruit, he has changed from the civilian he once was and is well on his way to becoming a proper soldier. This is a major step for the character, and it makes sense to mark that by changes to his statistics, skills and other abilities.

For those older characters who had at least one level in another class, Mobile Infantry trooper should now become their primary class. This also means they may lose whatever class abilities they had from their former occupation, depending upon the ability and its restrictions. Even if the mechanics do not require such limitations, the Games Master might suggest that the player voluntarily restrict his character's former class abilities. This can be a very important moment in the character's life as he realises he is no longer a barber or a banker or a bricklayer. Now he is truly a soldier.

SPOOKY OR SMOKEY?

No references to a historical Sergeant Spooky Smith can be found. SICON may have been referring to Sergeant Smokey Smith instead.

Sergeant Ernest Alvia 'Smokey' Smith, VC, CM, CD (1914-) was born in New Westminster, British Columbia. He enlisted in the Seaforth Highlanders of Canada in 1940 and was sent overseas a few months later. In 1944 he was awarded the Victoria Cross for his conduct at the Savio River in Italy. The Seaforth Highlanders had been ordered to attack across the river but torrential rain prevented the tanks and anti-tank guns from supporting them. When three German tanks appeared, Private Smith led the two men in his PIAT (projector, infantry, anti-tank) unit across a field. Leaving one man and the PIAT to hold the first tank, Smith found a second PIAT and prepared it. The tank fired first, wounding the first man, but Smith was able to disable the tank with his PIAT, blocking the other two from approaching. German infantry piled out of the tanks but Smith drove them off with his Tommy gun. He held his position and patched up his wounded comrade until help could arrive. Thanks to his efforts the army took the river and later captured the San Giorgio Di Cesena. Smith left the army after the war but rejoined in 1951 and served as part of the Tri-Service Recruiting Unit. He was promoted to sergeant and had worked at the Headquarters of the British Columbia Army Command in Vancouver. He retired from the military in 1964. In 1995 he was made a member of the Order of Canada.

Another possibility is that Sergeant Spooky Smith is simply a fictional soldier. The Games Master can create a biography for this soldier if he prefers, or switch the name of the camp to Smokey and use the real-life biography above.

The military is certainly not above adding complications to the exam such as an ambush by the instructors. They could shift the focus of the test by loosing an entire squad at once, designating one member as the fugitive, and ordering the others to catch him. If the fugitive can stay hidden and free for four days, he wins. If the

rest of the squad catches him and brings him in, they win. The only drawback is that the recruits should not be booted out of training if they fail this mission – instead they might receive extra duty, or have to take the solo drop as well.

A civilian might argue that the exam is pointless. It does not demonstrate any of the skills a soldier actually needs in a modern army, like the ability to fire a rifle or to wear power armour. This is not true, however. The test shows that the recruit can handle himself in a difficult situation. It shows that he keeps his cool when dropped onto an unfamiliar location and that he can survive a hostile environment with nothing but his skills and his own body. He can orient himself and reach his destination – most importantly, he can do so on time, which shows he can follow orders. Firing a rifle is the easy part and power armour is designed to be easy to use. The trick is learning discipline and gaining the reflexes necessary to survive in battle.

SWITCHING CAMPS

After the mid-term exam, the Games Master has two options. He can let the recruits return to Camp Currie to finish their training or he can move them to a new location.

Camp Sergeant Spooky Smith sits high in the Canadian Rockies, a few hours from Vancouver. It is laid out much like Camp Currie but has only one set of buildings and grounds. The eight barracks stand side by side behind the mess tent, four across and two deep, and each holds 50 men.

The reason Camp Sergeant Spooky Smith is so small is because so many recruits have left. Camp Currie had almost 3000 arrive together but now only 400 are left in the Third Training Regiment. Each battalion has roughly 100 men and each company has 50 or less. Entire companies share a barracks now. Platoons and squads have merged together, since anywhere from five to 20 men are left from each platoon.

Besides being smaller, Camp Sergeant Spooky Smith has one other major difference – its terrain. Camp Currie sat on a Midwest prairie, with flat fields for



miles around. The hills half a day's march away were the closest thing to terrain in the area. Camp Sergeant Spooky Smith is the opposite. Nestled in a small valley between two major peaks, the camp is surrounded by high cliffs and sharp walls. Snow covers the ground even in summer and the only two ways in or out are by helicopter or by climbing. This gives the recruits a chance to work and train in a different environment, going from warm farmland to cold mountaintop. It also provides a more challenging location for working with power suits.

From a roleplaying perspective, the move to Camp Sergeant Spooky Smith would be a good one. By the time of the mid-term the Player Characters knew everyone else in their platoon. Relationships had been formed, both good and bad, and were stable. Now all of that has changed. Each platoon has shrunk and the four platoons of the company have all been moved in together. New, unfamiliar recruits are now sharing the same space and the jockeying for dominance begins

again. This is more difficult, however. Before, many of the men who wanted the leadership were not well-suited for it. Now each platoon has its own unofficial leader, who may have been in charge ever since the start of basic training several months ago. That leader has a solid power base already and will not give it up without a fight.

Even those who are not leaders may find their places threatened. Does a single barracks need two Pranksters? If not, one of them will have to go, either by leaving or by changing to a different character archetype. Neither of those are easy choices, so the two Pranksters may wind up fighting to settle their differences. Everyone is forced to form new alliances and may wind up creating new enemies as well, as the four groups learn to live together and slowly morph into a single unit.

The Third Regiment still follows the same daily schedule. Now, however, classes are held within the mess hall tent. The battalion commanders are more

SUIT MENTALITY

Learning how to operate one suit of power armour is bad enough but recruits have to learn two – standard and Stryker. M-1S7 Stryker suits are designed for scouting. They have stronger jets and better sensors but weaker armour. The basic systems are still the same and once a recruit can handle a standard suit it takes him very little time to adjust to a Stryker suit. The key is in shifting his attitude.

Stryker suits are still proof against most small weapons and against any creature except a bug. They are not designed for front-line combat, however. A soldier in a Stryker suit is an advance scout, sent to survey an area, rate the opposition and report back. He is not meant to wade into battle, particularly against bugs or Skinnies. After mastering a standard suit and learning to trust it for protection, this is difficult to accept.

Every recruit spends time in a Stryker suit, learning its additional sensory inputs and how to get the most out of its higher manoeuvrability and greater speed. To drive the lesson home, the instructors set up hide-and-seek games: one recruit in a Stryker suit and the rest in standard power armour. The suits are fitted with dummy rounds, just as the recruits themselves were during earlier training exercises, but the suits register each hit as real. The Stryker's mission is to scout the targeted area and retreat. The other recruits simply have to hunt him down and 'kill' him.

Most Strykers make the same mistake their first time out – when they see another suit approaching, they stand and fight. Most 'die' within seconds. After two or three recurrences, the Stryker learns to stay hidden. He discovers the suit's stealth components, and learns how to evade notice. The first time a standard suit pursues him, he also realises just how fast his Stryker suit is and how easily he can outdistance the opposition.

Some recruits take naturally to the Stryker suits and are recommended for scout duty when they graduate. Still, every recruit learns how to handle a Stryker and how it differs from the standard suit. This is both so any soldier can operate a Stryker if necessary and so the squad knows what to do to help their mate in the Stryker to get home safely.

visible and more involved in the training, spending most of their time teaching classes and leaving the paperwork to the regimental commander in his headquarters. The sergeant and his corporals can offer more personalised instruction, which is good because the recruits get more attention and assistance and bad because it means every recruit has to stay alert and focused. It is much harder to sleep while standing if the sergeant can see you clearly instead of hunting for you at the end of the row.

Switching to Camp Sergeant Spooky Smith is not required, of course. The Games Master could keep the Player Characters at Camp Currie instead. But Camp Spooky does offer new opportunities for roleplaying, for character development and for arctic adventures. It also provides a natural progression from safe and calm to wild and dangerous – from a calm little enlistment centre to a camp surrounded by wheat fields to a camp surrounded by imposing crags and peaks and ultimately out into space.

SUIT UP

Now that the recruits have proven capable with their own bodies they are allowed to work with more advanced equipment. Specifically, they are trained to use the power armour. The power armour is the trademark of the Mobile Infantry and sets them apart not only from other members of SICON but from every other soldier in Terran history.

The standard suit of power armour, the M-1A4 Power Suit, has already been detailed in the *Starship Troopers* sourcebook. It is a marvellous, miraculous invention, designed to boost a soldier's strength and heighten his senses while protecting him from harm and providing weapons and other tools for his use. With a suit of power armour a single Mobile Infantry trooper can lay waste to a small city and kill or incapacitate not only civilians but also any conventional ground forces.

Operating a suit has hidden complexities despite its apparent ease of use. The suits are designed to mimic the body's natural movements. If the soldier turns to the left, the suit's servomotors allow the torso to swivel to the left. If the soldier reaches down, picks

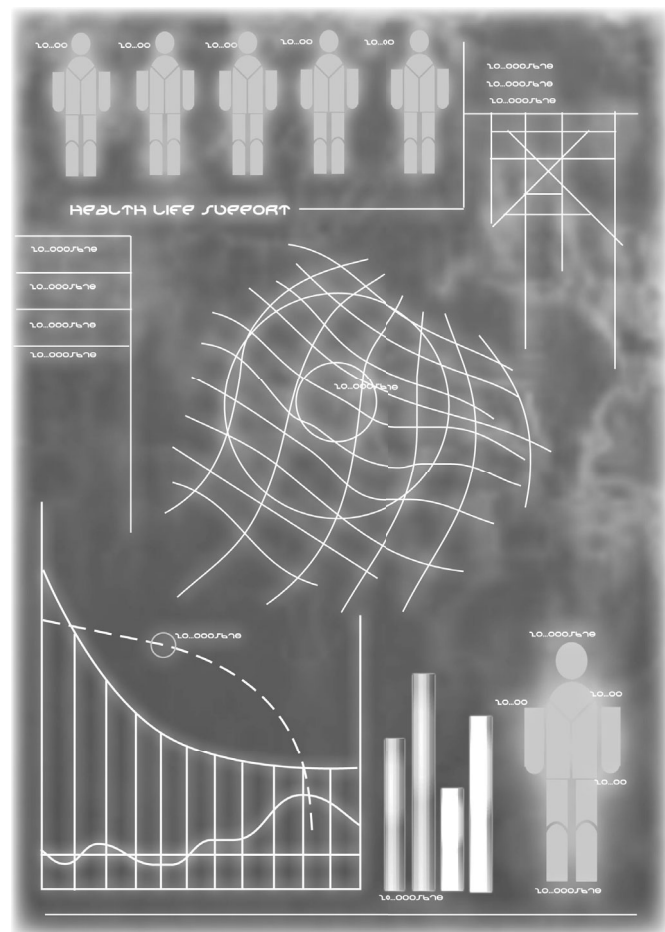
something up and tosses it, the servomotors copy that motion. It looks like the soldier is simply moving and the suit is moving with him, as with a normal uniform or nonpowered armour. Powered armour is too heavy to move by muscle alone, however. In reality the soldier is moving and the suit is matching his motion and moving around him.

The suit also translates certain movements into other activities. If the trooper leaps up, the suit activates its jumpjets to carry him in that direction. When he twists his body to land, the suit's smaller directional jets kick in to bring him back to earth. Certain arm and wrist movements activate weapons, while head gestures can activate a variety of screens and other sensory devices.

This means, however, that the recruit needs to learn how to move all over again. Walking in a suit is different from walking without one – he has to master using the suit's motors, particularly controlling their immense power. Without control, every step would send him bounding dozens of feet into the air and he would leap out of the mountains in a matter of seconds.

Once the recruit has learned how to walk again and how to fly (which is basically jumping while armoured), he moves on to other motions. He learns how to pick up objects without crushing them instantly – this is particularly important when hefting a fallen comrade or lifting a civilian to safety. He learns how to twist through narrow spaces without corkscrewing himself into the ground, and how to dodge a missile without digging a deep furrow at his feet.

When he can move easily, executing tight turns and sudden stops, the recruit is allowed to pick up weapons again. These have to be relearned as well, though not for the same reasons. A suit of power armour has built-in sights and range finders and most of its primary weapons are tied into the suit's other systems, so hurling a grenade is little more effort than an unarmoured man tossing a ball. It takes practice, however, to synchronise the various systems together and to use the targeting systems properly. Accuracy is the goal and each recruit struggles to relearn the skills he already mastered without such fancy equipment.



Perhaps the hardest thing to master with a suit is the bewildering array of displays. A suit shows the ambient temperature, its own temperature and the temperature of the soldier wearing it; it gives an infrared display of the surrounding area; it monitors radio frequencies and shows which bands are active and by whom. Every suit has a locator beacon, and the suit shows not only the status of its own beacon but also the location of every other beacon in the squad, as well as the beacon of every command suit in the platoon. It tracks any missiles in the area, both friendly and hostile, and shows nearby energy emissions. It displays any landmarks the soldier has designated on a small three-dimensional map. A digital readout shows the time in Terran Federation Standard and below that is a mission countdown – a third readout appears when the recall beacon sounds, showing time to lift-off. More information is crammed inside the helmet displays, tracking every detail of the suit, its wearer, and its environment. Keeping track of

this information seems like a full-time job, especially at first. When the recruit puts on a suit for the first time and jumps into the air, he suddenly discovers that he has a readout showing him how high he has jumped, what the ground looks like ahead of him, what his current trajectory is, what the wind velocity is around him, what angle the jumpjets are firing from and how much fuel they have left. Most recruits get so bewildered by all the numbers and symbols and graphs that they freeze – the suit responds accordingly, locking its limbs in place, and the jumpjets cut out, to send them crashing back to the ground.

With practice, the numbers fade into the background. A seasoned Mobile Infantryman knows which displays to watch, which to ignore completely and which to notice only when they start flashing. He learns to prioritise the information and to adjust his activities based upon what the displays reveal. Some mechanically-oriented soldiers even tinker with their suits, enlarging some displays and shunting others aside until they only see the displays they want. This is technically against regulations but as long as the soldier does his job properly, his squad leader and platoon commander look the other way.

As difficult as mastering a suit is, learning to live without it is just as hard. Recruits spend a week at a time in their suits, until they can walk and crouch and spin as easily as a gymnast. When they climb back out of the power armour everything feels strange. The instructors laugh as recruits hop over a puddle and then splash down into it, surprised that their jumpjets did not cut in. Some recruits get distracted looking for numbers that no longer hover around their face and seem lost when asked something as simple as the time. For weeks the recruits relearn their old skills and grow comfortable both in the suit and out of it. Mobile Infantry are experts at using power armour but they are immensely capable without it as well, and the instructors make sure their recruits never grow dependent on the equipment.

THE DROPS

Learning to control a suit of power armour is difficult enough but it is of no use if all the recruit can do is

walk across a field or fire at a stationary target. Power armour is designed for war and the recruits have to practice using the suits in appropriate situations.

While training against live and hostile bugs is not possible, instructors in power suits make an admirable replacement. While several beat up on the recruits and cut them down with simulated gunfire, others watch the process from a small base camp, using a command suit to keep track of the action. Command suits are the same as standard suits but with stronger jets and more powerful communications arrays. They can monitor everything about every standard and Stryker suit in the area simultaneously and play back the records on external monitors. This allows the instructors to show play-by-play recounts after the exercise and mark exactly what each recruit did wrong. Command suits also have special circuits allowing them to take control of standard armour when necessary. A lieutenant or sergeant can use these circuits to pilot a wounded trooper back to the retrieval boat when the soldier is either unconscious or too badly hurt to control his own suit. In training, the instructors also use these control circuits to simulate sudden errors in recruits' suits and to freeze the recruits when they have done something wrong. It is disconcerting to find your armour locked in mid-leap or start to straighten from a crouch and find that you cannot move.

Once the recruits have learned how to use the armour in combat situations, training moves to the final stage: drops. A power suit is a large and heavy object, and ferrying it down to a planet by ship is suicide. The process would take too long and both the ship and the troopers would be vulnerable the entire way down. The easiest way to get a power suit down is to simply drop it from orbit. The suits are designed to withstand this abuse and to protect the men inside them at the same time. It is more efficient, after all, to suit up while still on ship and have a mechanic there to check the displays and joints and ammo lights. During a peaceful mission a trooper could suit up planetside but in combat that will get him killed before he can get inside the armour safely.

Drops are very simple procedures. The recruits and their suits are loaded onto a transport ship and flown up into space. Then the recruits climb into their suits, check status, and seal in. Once they are ready and their suits have been checked over, each recruit is led to an M2 drop capsule. These are roughly humanoid and are barely larger than the suits themselves. The recruit climbs into the capsule and is sealed in.

Then the waiting begins. The recruit lies in his capsule as it slides down the track and then waits to be loaded into one of the ship's drop tubes. He waits until the instructor gives the all-clear signal to the pilot. Then the capsules are dropped toward their target. Most ships have only a few drop tubes and, while squads are generally released at the same time, it takes several minutes to release the capsules, load the next set into position and drop them in turn. Thus a recruit could wind up waiting for 20 minutes or more, locked inside his tiny, dark metal shell, before his turn arrives. He can feel the hard shift as the cartridges cycle into the tubes, one at a time, but there is no difference between shifting into the drop tube and shifting into position three capsules away. The recruits are not told the firing order when they enter their capsules, in part because even the instructors may not know that – the order depends upon the speed of each drop tube and the skill of the ship's crew controlling the procedure. The instructors drop first however, and their capsules have communications circuits to broadcast last-minute data to the recruits.

One second a recruit is lying in his capsule with no sense of the world around him. At intervals he feels a heavy impact from the capsule slamming into the next groove in line. Then an explosion occurs, sounding enormous in the tiny space, and the capsule is thrown clear of the ship. It is exactly like bullets in an old revolver, rotating into place and then being fired along the barrel.

Most veterans relax after their capsule has launched. The waiting is the difficult part, especially waiting in the dark unable to move. If enemy fire hits a transport ship, every soldier within the tubes is helpless. Once a capsule has fired, however, the soldier within is free of

that imprisonment and falling rapidly toward his target. Recruits do not always feel this way, however. For them, especially on their first few jumps, being in the ship at least means someone else is in control. Between the release and the landing the recruit has no one but himself and has to handle everything properly or he could wind up smashed flat on the planet's surface.

Drop capsules incorporate layers of protective materials into their construction. The outermost layer is thin but heat-resistant and absorbs the heat from atmospheric entry. It burns away as the capsule falls. The second layer is thicker, and breaks off in large pieces. These have enough metal in them to look similar to suits on radar, confusing anyone watching from below. Jets on the M2 help decelerate, accelerate and otherwise adjust the recruit's course as he drops. The capsule also sheathes him in a layer of armour and is fitted with an evasion pack that will automatically adjust his course to avoid incoming fire.

The recruit takes a proximity reading, comparing the topography below to his original target. Wind and other variables may have thrown him off-course by as much as 50 miles and, if not corrected, that gap will only increase. Once the first part of the drop is complete, an explosive charge blows the capsule apart, sending its pieces hurtling away – each piece is roughly as large on radar as a suited trooper, providing yet another level of cover. Now the recruit is falling free in nothing but his power armour. He has already lost most of his velocity and the suit can handle the rest of the descent easily. He has time to sit up, look around, take readings, use the suit's own parachutes to lower his speed and shift his angle of descent and, finally, use his jumpjets to land safely – weapons out and ready, sensors on alert.

The first few practice drops are simply that – drops and nothing more. The recruits are fired out of the tubes, talked through the descent and collected when they touch down. Drops take place in different climates, during different times of day and night and over different terrain. The recruit learns to drop into water and onto solid land, through heavy foliage and onto wide open plains. He also learns to change his landing

in mid-air, using chutes and jets to put himself back on course when the winds and the initial firing angle tossed him out of alignment.

After the recruit has shown he can handle drops, they become backgrounds for the rest of the mission. The recruits are now expected to drop and immediately scramble to their assigned position. Then they follow a set pattern of approach, pinching in or spreading out depending upon the objective. They quickly learn to use their drop time to prepare for the rest of the mission, going over their assignment mentally and rehearsing their next few steps even before jettisoning the M2.

Some recruits handle every aspect of training fine until they reach the drop. Then they cannot bring themselves to enter the capsule. Nothing can be done about that – either a man can entrust himself to the ship captain and his own lieutenant or he cannot. If he cannot, he has no place in the Mobile Infantry and is quietly given an honourable discharge. The instructors do not insult him or berate him – they know that a man can face death in many forms but be unable to cope with it in one particular guise. Other recruits shake every time they get into a capsule but manage to drop despite that. These men still shake with every drop, even years later as seasoned veterans. No one laughs at them. As long as they can drop successfully and maintain their end of a mission after that, it does not matter.

LIFE INTRUDES

Boot camp is its own little world, cut off from everything else around it. The instructors want recruits to focus all their energy on their studies and their training. Letters are allowed and sometimes a radio broadcast is heard, but most news is held at the camp perimeter. The battalion commander speaks to his superiors every week and is kept updated on military matters, since these can affect how soon his men must be graduated. He tells his instructors whatever he thinks they need to know and keeps the rest from them to avoid further distractions.

Sometimes, however, life intrudes. The camps do not exist in vacuum, much as the instructors might wish. Camp Currie sits in farmland, which is subject

to tornadoes, torrential rain, floods, droughts and blizzards. These can affect the camp and the handful of farms and houses scattered throughout the countryside around them. Camp Spooky sits in the mountains, which get avalanches and blizzards and springtime floods. Vancouver is only a few hours away.

Whenever a natural disaster hits the camp's area, the instructors order the recruits to stow everything that can be tucked away and bolster the rest. Then they check if any of their neighbours require help. During drought season, a lightning strike can start a fire raging across the plains – left unopposed the blaze could devour hundreds of acres, and every human and animal caught within, in a matter of hours. The recruits are tasked to stop these disasters with every tool at their disposal. Power suits are surprisingly effective against fires, using explosions to create firebreaks and block the blaze from spreading. The suits also make short work of rescue efforts, since an armoured recruit can grab several civilians and leap to safety.

The camps help during a crisis for several reasons. First, they are part of the Federation's defence and that includes defence against natural threats. Second, it is a welcome break for instructor and recruit alike to put down training manuals and dummy ammunition and do something practical and helpful. Getting an assignment right does not compare to the thrill of saving real people's lives. Third, it reminds the recruits that, while they march and fight and study within the camp, the world spins on around them. They are still part of the larger unit, and should care what happens to those around them. Some troopers go into battle because they love to fight and love to kill. Most, however, go because they want to protect the world they left behind. Stepping in to fight a fire or locate a little girl lost in a storm reminds the recruits what they are fighting to protect.

Mail is another intrusion, though usually a welcome one. Recruits, and veterans as well, love to get letters from family and friends. However the news is not always good, and a depressing letter can wreck a man's focus and leave him despondent and listless. The instructors do their best to keep the men concentrated

on daily activities rather than letting them mope, and encourage the company padre to speak with any man who is having problems. Most recruits recover after a few days, realising that the Mobile Infantry is their world now and that their happiness here depends entirely upon their own efforts.

The most severe intrusion occurs when the Federation's status changes from peace to war. Suddenly everything in the camp speeds up. The battalion commander's job now is to graduate the recruits as soon as possible so that he and his instructors can prepare for the next batch of potential soldiers. A fine line separates abbreviated training and insufficient training, and the commander does his best to stay on the correct side of it while shaving as much time as he can. If the war goes badly, however, he may receive orders to finish the training more quickly regardless of the consequences and get the new soldiers out onto the field.

These intrusions, particularly natural disasters, can provide a nice break from training exercises. The Player Characters will get a chance to do something off base for once and to help real people with real problems. They may also discover that all their training is useless against something as simple as a flood or a fire.

ABOVE AND BEYOND

During the first half of boot camp every recruit receives the same training. After the mid-term, some soldiers are given specialities based upon their aptitudes and interests. These mean additional work for the recruit, and often require time spent at a different base. No recruit is ever forced to specialise – his battalion commander calls him into headquarters and suggests it, but it is always the recruit's decision.

Normally, specialising means beginning one of the cross trained speciality classes listed in the main rulebook: Comms Technician, Engineer, Field Medic, Marauder Driver, Neodog Handler, Officer Cadet or Sniper. Keep in mind that a Mobile Infantry trooper cannot cross train in more than one area. He can refuse the offer to pursue a speciality and later accept the same offer or a chance at a different speciality, but once he selects a speciality he either finishes his cross training

or goes back to being a trooper forever. Attempting a speciality and not completing it also guarantees that the trooper will never be allowed into officer training.

At this stage the recruits will not be able to fulfil the prerequisites for the cross training classes. However, their instructors will note any particular strengths and aptitudes the recruits have and, if this would make them suitable to enter a cross training class in the future, then they are offered the chance to begin their instruction now rather than having to request it at a later date. This ensures that as soon as the recruit fulfils the prerequisites for the particular cross training class they are instructed in, they can enter it with the minimum of fuss and administration.

Some specialities, like Officer Cadet, are only offered to more experienced soldiers. A raw recruit cannot apply for officer training. Nor can a recruit become a Veteran – he has to survive several combat drops first. The other specialities are available while still in boot camp, however.

Neodog handlers transfer from boot camp to a special camp for several weeks. Each recruit is assigned to a single Neodog and the two are left alone to bond. Until they bond they will not see another living soul – food is supplied through a small service hatch. The bonding process can take as little as a day or as long as two weeks. If they have not bonded by the end of the second week the recruit is sent back to boot camp and the Neodog is passed to another candidate.

For those who do succeed at bonding, they split their time between regular combat training and training with their Neodog. The two share sleeping quarters, food and chores, spending every moment together. They slowly learn each other's habits and moods, and shift from two separate beings to halves of a whole. The recruit also has to learn a new way to fight – his main purpose in combat is now to protect his dog because the Neodogs are scouts rather than fighters.

The other speciality classes involve short sessions elsewhere but most of their training can take place at boot camp. Guest instructors are brought in

specifically for these recruits, who are still responsible for the regular courses and must attend and complete the regular training exercises.

Comms technicians spend time in battalion headquarters, working with comms experts and going over every aspect of the equipment. They learn to take a comm unit apart and put it back together without reference to a manual. They practice repairing damaged units and even building new units from scrap materials. A good comms technician can transform antique phones and a broken radio into a functional field unit. The recruits also train in sending, receiving and decoding messages. They study several major languages and create simple algorithms to code their transmissions. These recruits also study meteorology, since weather patterns can both improve and disrupt communications.

Engineers spend more time with power suits than any other recruit. They learn not just how to use a suit but how it works and how it is assembled. Even the sturdy power armour can get damaged during field exercises and these recruits always have at least one suit to practice repairs upon. They learn the tolerances of the suit motors, displays, sensors, batteries, joints, jets and weapons, and how to both fix things properly and jury-rig them for a temporary solution. Engineers spend almost as much time reading as they do tinkering, poring over manuals about circuitry, wiring and military hardware. They know more about what a suit can do than any other soldier, even though they spend less time suited up than most.

Engineers are also demolitions experts and spend many hours mastering that subject. Every recruit learns the basics about explosives but engineers are taught about specialised explosives, unconventional materials, advanced placement techniques and other topics. They learn how to fashion explosives from anything, how to place them anywhere and how to detonate them with a variety of mechanisms and effects. Engineers are also taught how to disarm explosives, and practice until they can recognise most explosive triggers at a glance and disable most simple mechanisms in seconds. Because explosives are so dangerous, engineers practice

on dummy explosives first, then move on to materials that have been diluted to reduce potency, before finally training with live explosives at full power.

Field medics work with the base doctor and nurses. They learn anatomy, biology, pharmacology and herbalism. This class is not for the squeamish. At first the recruits merely help the doctors treat on-base injuries, most of which are sprains and broken limbs and concussions. After enough time the doctor sends the recruit out on a ship to see and treat real combat injuries. These can be horrifying and some recruits discover they cannot stomach the sight and smell and sound of a man's insides spilling onto the floor at his feet. Those who can handle it learn to treat a variety of injuries with professional supplies and makeshift bandages, official drugs and local plants. The most important lesson for a field medic, however, is learning when a patient is too far gone to save.

Marauder drivers spend as much time with power suits as engineers but focus on one particular type of armour. The Marauder suit is even heavier than standard power armour – it has thicker plates and considerably more firepower, at the cost of size and manoeuvrability. In many ways the Marauders are less suits than personal tanks. Every recruit learns to handle a Marauder, just as they all learn to operate a Stryker, but most train just enough to use the Marauder if necessary. A few recruits demonstrate an affinity for the oversized war machines, however, and receive specialised training. These recruits are each assigned to one particular Marauder – if they pass the training and graduate from boot camp it becomes their own personal suit of armour and travels with them when they are assigned to a unit. These recruits spend every spare moment with their Marauder, crawling over it, climbing into it, poking and prodding to learn every nook and cranny. They repeat all the old training exercises and practice several new ones, wearing the Marauder until they know its capabilities better than their own. Marauders have fewer displays, which means less distraction, and they are all about dealing massive amounts of damage very quickly. The men who become Marauder Drivers are the mainstays of a combat unit, fixing upon the heavy

targets while the other suits harry enemy forces and give the Marauders a chance to destroy the objective.

Snipers are weapons specialists of a particular sort. Every recruit learns how to fire a rifle effectively, and must be a decent shot in order to graduate. Some men have a true gift for shooting, particularly when it comes to accuracy and distance. These men are selected to become snipers. In many ways they have to unlearn part of their previous training first. The recruits are taught to take down opponents as quickly as possible, whereas a sniper will wait for the perfect shot to appear. He never takes a shot unless he is sure it will kill, maim or stun whichever is required, while a regular trooper will fire off several rounds just to distract the enemy and make them run for cover. Snipers are given specialised rifles with long-range targeting sights and built-in silencers, and learn to adjust for wind, gravity, the planet's curvature and other factors. They also learn stealth, because Snipers wear Stryker suits rather than the standard power armour, which is too heavy to let them take precise shots effectively. A proper Sniper can sneak into an enemy camp, perch above it and sit motionless for days until the enemy commander appears – then he puts a single bullet through the commander's neck and is gone before the sentries can track the shot back to his position.

Recruits who begin cross training often get ribbed by their squad mates for brown-nosing, bucking for promotion and looking for ways off the front line. They do spend less time with their squad mates and more with various instructors and may feel cut off from their friends at first. The instructors impress upon them the importance of these specialities and soon the other recruits realise their value as well. Once the cross-trained recruits have reached a certain level of competence, they are allowed to practice their speciality during regular field exercises. Suddenly a game of powered hide-and-seek changes when one side has a Marauder or the prey begins picking off hunters from a mile away.

Cross training can offer a good roleplaying opportunity for one or more Player Characters. It is unlikely that an entire group will train for the same speciality – but that is for the best. The characters have spent a great deal of time together by this point and now they are broken up and each tasked to study a different subject. This can create tension among the characters as they struggle to maintain their bond while still pursuing these new interests. The tension is even greater if one or more of the Player Characters does not pursue a speciality – now some members of the group are off learning new things and the others are left behind. These problems can destroy a group of friends if those left behind feel that they are treated as inferior. It can also make group stronger as they realise that each of them has something unique to offer.



PLEASE LEAVE

Recruits are taught to live, sleep and breath military. Their entire world contracts to the camp and its occupants, except for letters and the occasional outside intrusion. This isolation allows them to focus on their training and absorb more information and experience than they would in a more social setting.

The military recognises, however, that it cannot keep its men secluded forever. Soldiers are still human and still need to interact with other people. Those who survive their tours will also retire and become citizens, and it helps if a soldier can speak to civilians before he becomes one himself. Companionship is also an issue – some recruits can survive forever without socialising with the opposite gender but others go crazy if forced to repress themselves. To combat all these problems and remind the recruits yet again what they are fighting for, recruits who have passed their mid-term exams are occasionally allowed to go on leave.

Leave comes in three varieties: compassionate, medical and recreational. Compassionate leave is given when a recruit's parent, sibling, spouse or child dies. He is allowed to attend the funeral and given at least one day to spend with his surviving family. Fortunately, these tragedies do not occur often, especially during peacetime.

Medical leave is only used when a recruit is so badly injured the base doctor cannot help him. He is sent to the nearest hospital with sufficient facilities and allowed to stay there until he is recovered enough to return. Of course, he is expected to keep up with his studies while on leave and to make up any training exercises once he comes back. Many recruits who go on medical leave file to resign rather than return – after a week or more without the constant running, the backbreaking labour and the frequent abuse, the recruit realises that he has better things to do with his life. The military pays for his medical care and then releases him back into the civilian population afterward.

Recreational leave is by far the most common of the three. Leave can be granted as a reward for good behaviour or excellent performance on an exam or

exercise, or simply to let the recruits burn off some steam. Most leaves are three-day passes, which begin the minute the recruit walks out the camp gates. The recruit can go anywhere and do anything he wants during his three days, provided he does not commit a crime. He is expected back at camp at the end of the third day, in good condition and ready to resume his training.

Camp Currie is located in the middle of a prairie, which means it is a fair distance away from the nearest town. Soldiers who are given leave here often spend their time just wandering through the hills, enjoying the quiet and the break from following orders. Camp Spooky Smith is in the Canadian Rockies, however, and only a few hours from Vancouver. The sergeant even arranges for a bus to take the recruits there and bring them back after three days.

A recruit's first leave can be a big shock, especially for those recruits who were happy and sociable before they joined. They walk into town and discover that they are no longer the same man. Everything looks strange. Vancouver is a nice city, not too big and not too old or new, but to the recruit it has too many solid buildings, too many tall structures, too much extra noise and far too many people. The colours are also bewildering – after weeks of nothing but tan, grey, black and green, seeing so many colours and patterns everywhere stabs at the eyes. Everyone has different clothes, different hair, different accessories and people are walking a different way and at different speeds – after the orderly chaos of the camp, Vancouver seems like a madhouse where nothing makes sense.

Then there are the girls. Male recruits have not seen 'women' since they joined – they no longer think of the females amongst their fellow recruits as women, only as soldiers. Suddenly they see women everywhere, wearing decidedly unmilitary garb, brushing past them on the streets, smiling as they walk by, sitting and reading on park benches. Female recruits have a similar but lesser response – they are surrounded by men at all times but by military men, men in uniforms, men they no longer think of as anything other than fellow soldiers. On leave they suddenly see men with facial hair, men with

jewelry, men wearing handsome clothing, men who lack the rigid posture they have come to expect. Many recruits just stop and stare: at the people, at the lights, at the tall buildings, at the cars. It is more than they can handle, especially without a sergeant or corporal to tell them what to do.

Fortunately, Vancouver has experience dealing with soldiers. A social centre downtown is staffed with pretty, friendly girls who greet the soldiers, help them find a place to stay, suggest places to eat and recommend sights to see and activities to keep them busy. Every Saturday the social centre has a dance for the soldiers, veteran and recruit alike, and makes sure that enough women attend to provide every soldier with a dance partner. These partners range from single young women just out of high school to older married women with grown children of their own. When female recruits arrive, the social centre includes local men as well but only enough to provide each recruit a choice of partners – otherwise the local men might wind up dancing with the local women, which would defeat the purpose. The military helps run the centre and has a few soldiers on hand to keep the men in line – anyone getting too aggressive with a partner is ordered to stand down. Drinks are served, including some alcohol, and the centre has tables where people can sit and play cards or board games or just talk. It also has a small barracks for soldiers who cannot find another place to stay, have run out of money or simply prefer the feel of a military bunk.

Not everyone in town likes soldiers, however. Some men, particularly in peacetime, feel that the military is a drain on the Terran Federation's resources and on their own earnings in particular. These men think that soldiers do nothing but parade around in their uniforms, stealing local girls away and being a general



nuisance. Not surprisingly, most of these are working-class men who like to drink together after work. When they happen across a soldier on leave or when a soldier is foolish enough to wander into their local bar, these men can get obnoxious, insulting and even violent. Such fights end quickly – the locals are decent brawlers but even a recruit is trained to dispatch other expert combatants and dealing with a few drunks is hardly a challenge. These encounters typically end with the drunks in a heap and the soldiers walking away untouched. Sometimes the police are called in but most recruits will not press charges because they do not want to get in trouble. The police know enough

to realise who started these fights and let the soldiers go with suggestions on bars they might find more welcoming.

Recreational leave to Vancouver or some other nearby city makes an excellent mini-adventure. It forces the Player Characters to recognise how much they have changed during their training, and to re-evaluate themselves as soldiers and as men. Leave can also offer an opportunity for nonlethal combat, as described in the bar scene above. A barroom brawl between soldiers and locals is a familiar image, and some characters may even see it as another necessary rite of passage. It can also help a group of soldiers bond together, fighting for the first time against a common enemy – even if it is just some drunken thugs.

HELL WEEK

After eight months of training, the recruits are pronounced to be as ready as they will ever be. They have learned everything the sergeant and his corporals can teach them and have changed from weak, flabby, hesitant civilians into strong, hard, resolute soldiers. That is the theory, at least.

The test, the final test, is the last exam. This is called Hell Week, and the name suits it. For one thing, it lasts an entire week. There are no more classes, no more training exercises, no more jobs around the camp. For this last week, the recruits have only a single objective: to complete their mission and survive the week.

The night before Hell Week begins, the recruits go to sleep as normal. They are awakened in the middle of the night and ordered to muster out. Then their corporal leads them to a row of waiting helicopters and orders them in squad by squad. Each squad gets its own helicopter, manned by a single pilot. The pilot does not tell them where they are going or what they are doing and the flight lasts for several hours. The windows have all been covered as well, so the recruits cannot even tell time of day or which direction they are travelling.

Finally the helicopter lands and the recruits are ordered out. They find themselves in a spaceport, standing

across from a waiting military transport. An unfamiliar corporal orders them inside and they follow him to the Mobile Infantry bay. The ship takes off immediately.

Two hours later, the corporal tells the recruits to don their power armour and prepare for a drop. He also details their mission.

The squad will be dropped at an undisclosed location. An enemy command post is nearby. The squad is to scout the area, locate the command post, neutralise the guards stationed there and hold the post until reinforcements arrive. The reinforcements will sound a call, similar to a combat recall. Anyone who arrives without such a call is a hostile, and must be eliminated.

Then the recruits are prepared for drop. If they have specialities, the appropriate gear (or creatures, in the case of a Neodog Trainer) has been provided. Everyone else gets a standard power suit. Batteries are at full, as are weapons – the ammunition is fake, as with other training exercises.

Hell Week is well-suited to being run as a mini-adventure for a group of Player Characters. It gives 1st-level troopers a chance to test their skills and equipment, and completes the bond between them by thrusting the group into real combat together. The fact that the weapons fire is fake should not deter from the tension, or lower the importance of winning. Even if the Player Characters were not originally in the same squad, they may be thrown together for this exam to see how well each recruit works with strangers.

The actual location for this exercise is a medium-sized island in the middle of the Pacific Ocean. It is uninhabited and the Terran Federation uses it only for such training exercises. The island is large enough that a soldier would need a full week to cross it and a month to circle it on foot. A man in power armour can cross the island in a day and circle it in four or five. The island is tropical and has lush jungles covering the interior. A white-sand beach runs around much of the edge and a single small volcano pokes up north of the

centre. The volcano is active and frequently releases puffs of steam and smoke.

The command post is actually a walled compound a little southwest of the island's centre. It has a high log wall, sharpened at the top, and a catwalk runs around that on the inside. Sentry towers have been placed at each corner. Within the compound are a small barracks, an equipment tent, a mess tent and a wooden command building.

The entire island is a trap, of course. This exam is designed to test the recruits' skills and also their military intuition. The post is manned by five soldiers on leave and by four instructors. Each of them has a power suit. Two of the soldiers and one of the instructors are Snipers with Stryker suits. One soldier pilots a Marauder. One is a neodog handler. The instructors have command suits and will use them to create random malfunctions in the recruits' suits – nothing life-threatening, but small problems that can hinder the team's performance unless fixed or worked around.

A pit has been dug around the outside of the compound wall. It is covered with a woven mat and a layer of dirt and leaves, requiring a Spot check (DC 20) to notice. An infrared scan will not show the pit, and a normal man can walk across it without difficulty, but the mat will collapse under the weight of a power suit, even a Stryker. The pit is deep enough to completely contain a suit, and narrow enough that anyone falling into it will have to react quickly to avoid being pinned, requiring a successful Reflex save (DC 15).

The Snipers are not on the towers – those are decoys. Two have perches within the surrounding jungle. The third has a small stand near the mouth of the volcano. Its heat signature prevents anyone from seeing him on infrared, or hearing him even with sound buffers.

The men in the compound take turns walking around it unarmoured. Their power suits are kept within the 'mess tent,' which has special shielding to hide the suits from view and from all but the most intensive scans.

If a recruit gets 'killed' during this mission, his power armour will lock up, trapping him inside. Since this could prove extremely harmful or even lethal if a recruit suffered a 'kill' early on and had to stay in one posture for the rest of the week, monitoring aircraft regularly drop down to the island every few hours on the trail of the recruit teams, picking up and evacuating the 'casualties'.

Taken on its own, this mission is moderately difficult. The defenders know the squad is coming and can track their progress through the command suits. The teams are roughly even in manpower but the defenders have more training, several specialised soldiers and the home advantage. A smart squad can find ways to neutralise their defences, however, and can get in before most of the soldiers can suit up for battle.

The real complication, however, comes from outside the compound. The Player Characters are not the only squad approaching the island. Each of the squads dispatched from camp has been given the same mission and sent to the same location. The drops are staggered around the island over a four-hour period. As per the corporal's instructions, none of these drops have a reinforcement call with them, and so each squad is expected to treat the other recruits as hostile.

Now each team is playing both against the defenders and against the other invaders.

After one full week, the reinforcement call sounds and the sergeant and the corporals arrive, fully armoured. This is the end of the exercise. Anyone whose armour had locked is unfrozen and helicopters arrive to take everyone back to boot camp. The recruits are given one full day to recuperate and are then gathered for evaluation. The sergeant has spliced footage from the various hidden cameras around the island and presents a rundown of each squad's activities in turn. He discusses both victories and blunders, and talks about both the individual recruits and their performance as a squad. If one team took the command post, it is declared the clear winner. If no one took the command post, the team with the fewest casualties (or fewest wounds, if none of the squads lost anyone) and most kills is the



winner. Any teams that cooperated with other squads are disqualified for breaking the rules.

The winning squad gets a one-week pass and graduates with honours. Every squad that acquitted itself well graduates, however. The only people who fail are those who blatantly disobeyed orders (such as anyone who teamed with another squad), those who abandoned their teammates and anyone who displayed utter ineptitude with power armour. Anyone that inept will be held back and forced to repeat boot camp, unless he simply resigns. Recruits who violated orders or abandoned their squad are given Dishonourable Conduct Discharges – the Mobile Infantry has no

place for anyone who cannot follow directions and cannot work as part of a team.

GRADUATION DAY

After Hell Week the recruits are soldiers in all but name. That occurs a week later, after the winning squad gets back from leave. The entire regiment gathers to honour the remaining recruits. Major Malloy presides over the ceremony and both recruits and instructors wear their dress uniforms. Each recruit is called up by name and presented with a certificate certifying that he has completed his basic training and is now a Private Trooper, or a trooper with the rank of Private First Class. After all the certificates have been awarded, the Major gives out a few additional awards: Best Marksman, Best Trooper (for the recruit who handled power armour best), Best Unarmed Combatant and so on. After the awards the Major makes a short speech and the Battalion Commanders order their battalions to form up for review. The new soldiers march past the Major and salute. He salutes them in turn and then wishes them good luck and Godspeed and dismisses them. Now they are recruits no longer.

After the ceremony there is still work to be done. The soldiers pack up their gear and collapse and stow their beds for the last time. They tidy up the camp and place most of its equipment and furniture in the storage shed. It will sit there until the next group of hopeful young adults arrive, eager to be soldiers.

SECTION THREE: KICK BUTT AND TAKE NAMES

THE RECRUITS ARE now soldiers, and have left boot camp behind them. Yet just as 'boot camp' includes the entire process of enlistment, it also includes the period after graduation. It describes the process of transforming a young civilian into a hardened soldier and stretches from his first thoughts of a military career to the end of his first successful combat mission.

ASSIGNMENTS

The day after graduation, every new soldier receives an envelope at morning mail call. The envelope contains a note of congratulations from the Sky Marshal-in-Chief himself and a slip of paper. The slip has four names, a time and a date. The first name is the lieutenant the soldier will report to. The second name is the company he is about to join. Third is the name of the ship that houses the company and fourth is the spaceport where the ship will dock at the time and date provided. The soldiers have their orders and anywhere from four hours to four days to report to their first military station.

These last few days can be very touching. The soldiers have been through hell together and survived. Along the way they formed deep, abiding friendships and learned to trust each other as they have never trusted anyone before. Men who went through boot camp

together may hate each other's guts but they will trust each other with their lives.

Of course, two or more recruits may get the same assignment. Companies can get hit hard during a mission and wind up with several empty bunks. This is an easy way to keep the Player Characters together by assigning them to the same company. It is also a good time to bring in new Player Characters who may have trained at a different boot camp or may have transferred from a different company.

In rare cases, a new soldier will be sent to another camp for additional training. Anyone with cross training might receive supplemental training before being given a combat assignment. This is not because his superiors do not trust his skills. It is actually a compliment, offering him even more opportunity to perfect his talents and rise above the common troopers.

The time between leaving boot camp and reporting for duty has many possibilities. Most new soldiers go drinking to celebrate. Many also chase girls, since they have been away from women for months at a time and are about to embark on a tour of duty. Some go home to visit family and friends. Others simply lose themselves in a big city, enjoying a few days of luxury and fun before returning to work. Many new soldiers



get in over their head and wind up in jail or in an alley or in a hotel room they do not recognise with a woman they do not remember. All of these can lead to adventures and, no matter what happens, the soldier knows that he has to get to the docking bay by Tuesday at 0600 hours.

THE GANG'S ALL HERE

At the appropriate time and place, the new soldiers report for their first assignment – and get a rude awakening.

Boot camp is a difficult ordeal for anyone. It tests a recruit to the limits of his patience, his understanding, and his endurance. It strips away old habits and creates new ones in their place, moulding the young man into a soldier. By the time he graduates, he thinks that he

knows it all. He is ready, capable and confident. He is a trained soldier, prepared for anything.

Then he joins his new unit and learns just how much he still does not know.

The first week with the unit is an eye-opening experience. At boot camp, many of the activities were designed to test the recruits, to stress them and to wean them from bad habits. The actual outcome was less important than the process – no one really cared if the grass along the parade ground was regulation height or the combat ring's edges were kept hard-packed and perfectly straight. On ship, nothing is done without a reason. No effort is wasted. The process is still important but less so because the soldiers are expected to already know how to act. The outcomes are more important now, however, especially since the trooper has fewer people overseeing his work and catching his mistakes. That does not matter much when cleaning the latrine or scrubbing the bulkhead or repainting the bunks but it can be critical when repairing a suit or loading ammunition or checking the catches on drop capsules.

When the recruits arrived at base camp they were tested and quizzed to discover any aptitudes. The same is true on ship, except that the new soldier's military record has preceded him. His new squad leader and section leader already know what he did during boot camp. The record does not show any punishments he received since those were stricken from his record when he graduated, but it does show what classes he took, what grades he received in each subject, what jobs he held, and what other activities he pursued. The lieutenant is far easier to deal with than the training sergeant was – he is not interested in breaking his men or in pushing them to their limits and beyond. He wants each soldier to be alert, active and as happy as possible. To that end, he will do his best to give each new soldier a job that suits his interests and skills. Those handy with a soldering gun could wind up working on the suits or the drop capsules. Anyone with culinary skills goes to the kitchen. Those handy with construction get assigned to general repairs, since the Mobile Infantry takes care of its own section on the ship. Everyone

has a job to do and, unlike boot camp, these positions do not rotate – once assigned, a soldier can request a different job but barring that or poor performance his shipside job is his for the duration of his assignment to that unit.

Joining a unit presents a new aspect of the military to Player Characters and gives the Games Master room to create new relationships. The soldiers are fresh from their victorious graduation and think they know everything, when in fact they know very little beyond the technical, the theoretical and the classroom. Now they have to adjust to living on a ship – one thing boot camp did not prepare them for, particularly Camp Currie with its wide open spaces – and to the notion that they are no longer playing at being soldiers. The training wheels have been removed and it is time to glide on their own.

ALVAREZ'S ANGELS

The new soldiers are assigned to the Third Platoon, Second Company, Third Battalion, First Regiment, Third Mobile Infantry Division, Second Brigade, Sixth Army, also known as Alvarez's Angels. Every unit – meaning every Mobile Infantry group that ships out on its own – has such a name, always based upon the name of the commanding officer and an alliterative noun. It is easier to say 'I'm with the Angels' than to recite the string of numbers denoting the unit's exact place in the Mobile Infantry structure.

Alvarez's Angels is a platoon, which means it has a total of 42 men including officers. It contains four squads, each run by a corporal and a sergeant. The platoon is sometimes referred to as a section, with the lieutenant as the section leader and the sergeant major as the assistant section leader.

Lieutenant Miguel Alvarez is a small, swarthy man with surprisingly broad shoulders. He has tight black curls and a pencil-thin moustache, and his words are clipped and quick and rarely above a whisper. Alvarez is a career soldier and a padre – it is unusual to have a padre rise to command rank, but not unheard-of. What this means, however, is Alvarez is both the unit's military commander and its spiritual leader – he is the platoon's

father in every sense but the purely genetic. Alvarez takes his duties very seriously and makes sure his men get what they need. He does not coddle, however, and feels that occasional hardships only make a soldier stronger. Alvarez has a quick mind and in combat he hangs back and organises his troopers. When he does take a shot himself, it is precise – he had the makings of a top-notch Sniper but chose to enter Officer training instead. On ship Alvarez is quiet and approachable. His door is always open and any of the troopers can come to him to discuss problems of any sort. Everyone quickly learns not to abuse this privilege, however.

Lt. Alvarez, Miguel MI25-30

Mobile Infantry trooper 5; hp: 18; **Init:** +4; **Spd:** 35 ft.; **DV:** 25; **DR:** 4; **BAB/Grp:** +5/+7 (+9 in armour); **Atk:** Morita TW-203-a +9 ranged or TW-102-s +9 ranged or combat knife +8 melee; **Full Atk:** Morita TW-203-a +9 ranged or TW-102-s +9 ranged or combat knife +8 melee; **Dmg:** Morita TW-203-a 2d8+2, x2 or TW-102-s 2d6+2, x2 or combat knife



1d4+3, 19 -20 x2; **Space/Reach:** 5 ft.(1)/5 ft.(1); **SA:** -; **SQ:** Advanced Training, Basic Training, Battle Hardened (saving throws), Fearless (tanker bug, warrior bug), Hard-Hitting, On The Bounce!; **SV:** Fort +4, Ref +6, Will +4; Str 13 (17 in armour), Dex 17, Con 10, Int 14, Wis 16, Cha 14; **Skills & Feats:** Acrobatics +6 (+3 in armour), Athletics +6, Computer Use +3, Drive +4, Escape Artist +3, Investigate +3, Knowledge (alien species)+5, Knowledge (tactics)+5, Perception +8, Persuasion +6, Repair +5, Stealth +8 (+5 in armour), Survival +5; Alertness, Confident, Far Shot, Knockout Punch, Language (SICON), Precise Shot, Point Blank Shot, Quick Draw, Weapon Focus (Hawkeye); **Prestige:** +3

Equipment: Field rations (1), Canteen (2), three magazines (90 rounds), Combat Knife, Brunham TW-102-s 'Peacemaker' Pistol, Morita TW-203-a assault rifle, M-1C8 power suit, combat belt, lizard line

Sergeant Major Rita Case is Alvarez's right hand and assistant section leader. Her job, both on ship and in combat, is to handle the fine details and let the Lieutenant worry about the big picture. Case is a tall, lanky woman with a long jaw and close-cropped bright red hair, who slouches along and speaks slowly, barely glancing up from beneath permanently half-shut eyes. Despite looking like she is always half-asleep, very little gets by Case and her easy-going manner hides unbending authority and a demand for excellence in all things. The other Angels like and respect Case a great deal and, between her and Alvarez, there is the perfect combination of quiet and friendly, thoughtful and (seemingly) thoughtless. Both are very protective of their men however, and both refuse to accept slacking off from anyone in even the most meaningless task.

Sgt. Maj. Case, Rita MI31-94

Mobile Infantry trooper 4; hp: 23; **Init:** +3; **Spd:** 35 ft.; **DV:** 24; **DR:** 4; **BAB/Grp:** +4/+6 (+8 in armour); **Atk:** Morita TW-203-a +7 ranged or TW-102-s +7 ranged or combat knife +8 melee; **Full Atk:** Morita TW-203-a +7 ranged or TW-102-s +7 ranged or combat knife +8 melee; **Dmg:** Morita TW-203-a 2d8+2, x2 or TW-102-s 2d6+2, x2 or combat knife 1d4+4, 19 -20 x2; **Space/Reach:** 5 ft.(1)/5 ft.(1); **SA:** -; **SQ:** Basic Training, Battle Hardened (saving throws), Fearless (tanker bug,

warrior bug), Hard-Hitting, On The Bounce!; **SV:** Fort +5, Ref +4, Will +2; Str 14 (18 in armour), Dex 15, Con 13, Int 12, Wis 13, Cha 16; **Skills & Feats:** Acrobatics +4 (+1 in armour), Athletics +6, Computer Use +3, Drive +4, Investigate +6, Knowledge (alien species)+5, Knowledge (tactics)+4, Perception +7, Persuasion +6, Repair +5, Stealth +4 (+1 in armour), Survival +5; Alertness, Confident, Language (SICON), Point Blank Shot, Quick Draw, Toughness; **Prestige:** +2

Equipment: Field rations (1), Canteen (2), three magazines (90 rounds), Combat Knife, Brunham TW-102-s 'Peacemaker' Pistol, Morita TW-203-a assault rifle, M-1C8 power suit, combat belt, lizard line

Sergeant Ian Donovan commands First Squad of the Angels. A tall, good-looking man, Donovan has the grace of an acrobat, the wit of a comedian and the flair of a natural actor. Everything he does has style and he is the closest thing a Mobile Infantry trooper can get to an old-fashioned swashbuckler, right down to the ornaments hanging from his power armour. Despite this, Donovan does not joke about missions. He always knows where every member of his squad is and in what condition, and can choreograph them into near-perfect unison. His men respect him because he always takes point and will never send a man to do something he would not do himself. Donovan rarely curses, and rarely uses insults - his offhanded rebukes are far more biting and his squad members learn that despite his flamboyancy he does not let disobedience or carelessness slide.

Sgt. Donovan, Ian MI75-75

Mobile Infantry trooper 3; hp: 14; **Init:** +8; **Spd:** 35 ft.; **DV:** 24; **DR:** 4; **BAB/Grp:** +3/+5 (+7 in armour); **Atk:** Morita TW-203-a +7 ranged or TW-102-s +7 ranged or combat knife +7 melee; **Full Atk:** Morita TW-203-a +7 ranged or TW-102-s +7 ranged or combat knife +7 melee; **Dmg:** Morita TW-203-a 2d8+2, x2 or TW-102-s 2d6+2, x2 or combat knife 1d4+4, 19 -20 x2; **Space/Reach:** 5 ft.(1)/5 ft.(1); **SA:** -; **SQ:** Basic Training, Battle Hardened (saving throws), Fearless (warrior bug), Hard-Hitting, On The Bounce!; **SV:** Fort +3, Ref +5, Will +1; Str 14 (18 in armour), Dex 17, Con 10, Int 14, Wis 11, Cha 18; **Skills & Feats:** Acrobatics +6 (+3 in armour), Athletics +6, Computer Use +3, Drive +4, Investigate +3, Knowledge (alien

species)+3, Knowledge (tactics)+3, Perception +5, Persuasion +6, Repair +2, Sleight of Hand +4, Survival +5; Alertness, Dodge, Improved Initiative, Language (SICON), Point Blank Shot, Quick Draw; **Prestige:** +2

Equipment: Field rations (1), Canteen (2), three magazines (90 rounds), Combat Knife, Brunham TW-102-s 'Peacemaker' Pistol, Morita TW-203-a assault rifle, M-1C8 power suit, combat belt, lizard line

Sergeant Paul DeLaine of Second Squad is a wiry man of average height, with a boyish face but prematurely white hair. He does not speak often and, when he does, it is clipped and formal. Everything about DeLaine is formal – his uniform is always perfectly pressed, his shoes are always polished mirror-bright and his reports are neatly typed. DeLaine is a fiend for punctuality as well and insists upon it with his men. Though not the most popular squad leader, DeLaine's precision has its value, and he is the best sergeant for making sure his troops are properly supplied and their equipment well-serviced. He does not lack courage either and will charge into battle when so ordered, but he has little imagination and refuses to stray from an order without a superior's consent.

Sgt. DeLaine, Paul MI58-41

Mobile Infantry trooper 3; hp: 16; **Init:** +4; **Spd:** 35 ft.; **DV:** 23; **DR:** 4; **BAB/Grp:** +3/+5 (+7 in armour); **Atk:** Morita TW-203-a +6 ranged or TW-102-s +6 ranged or combat knife +7 melee; **Full Atk:** Morita TW-203-a +6 ranged or TW-102-s +6 ranged or combat knife +7 melee; **Dmg:** Morita TW-203-a 2d8+2, x2 or TW-102-s 2d6+2, x2 or combat knife 1d4+4, 19 –20 x2; **Space/Reach:** 5 ft.(1)/5 ft.(1); **SA:** –; **SQ:** Basic Training, Battle Hardened (saving throws), Fearless (warrior bug), Hard-Hitting, On The Bounce!; **SV:** Fort +4, Ref +5, Will +2; Str 14 (18 in armour), Dex 15, Con 12, Int 16, Wis 13, Cha 12; **Skills & Feats:** Acrobatics +3 (+0 in armour), Athletics +4, Computer Use +5, Concentration +3, Drive +4, Investigate +4, Knowledge (alien species)+4, Knowledge (tactics) +4, Perception +6, Persuasion +2, Repair +5, Stealth +6 (+3 in armour), Survival +5; Alertness, Educated, Iron Will, Language (SICON), Point Blank Shot, Studious; **Prestige:** +2

Equipment: Field rations (1), Canteen (2), three magazines (90 rounds), Combat Knife, Brunham TW-102-s 'Peacemaker' Pistol, Morita TW-203-a assault rifle, M-1C8 power suit, combat belt, lizard line

Sergeant Mick Ivan, the leader of Third Squad, is average height and build with glossy dark hair and beard and a winning smile. He enjoys his comforts more than most and always has wine or beer that he has somehow smuggled on board. His bunk is the fanciest in the unit, with its silk sheets and thick quilt, and he has a silk dressing robe that he wears to the showers each morning. The men often laugh at Ivan's decadence, and he joins in the joking easily, mocking his own weakness. There is truly nothing weak about Ivan, however, and the fripperies can fall away in an instant to reveal the strong leader beneath. He is the Angel's quartermaster, handling all their supplies, and does his best to make sure the rest of the unit also gets luxuries from time to time – Ivan does not care about lording it over the other troopers or flaunting his possessions. He simply sees no reason not to indulge himself when he can. He is also renowned for his skill with the ladies and he and Sergeant Donovan often have contests to see who can woo a woman more quickly when on leave.

Sgt. Ivan, Mick MI72-83

Mobile Infantry trooper 3; hp: 18; **Init:** +4; **Spd:** 35 ft.; **DV:** 23; **DR:** 4; **BAB/Grp:** +3/+5 (+7 in armour); **Atk:** Morita TW-203-a +6 ranged or TW-102-s +6 ranged or combat knife +7 melee; **Full Atk:** Morita TW-203-a +6 ranged or TW-102-s +6 ranged or combat knife +7 melee; **Dmg:** Morita TW-203-a 2d8+2, x2 or TW-102-s 2d6+2, x2 or combat knife 1d4+4, 19 –20 x2; **Space/Reach:** 5 ft.(1)/5 ft.(1); **SA:** –; **SQ:** Basic Training, Battle Hardened (saving throws), Fearless (warrior bug), Hard-Hitting, On The Bounce!; **SV:** Fort +5, Ref +4, Will +3; Str 14 (18 in armour), Dex 15, Con 14, Int 12, Wis 15, Cha 18; **Skills & Feats:** Acrobatics +3 (+0 in armour), Athletics +6, Computer Use +3, Drive +4, Investigate +3, Knowledge (alien species)+4, Knowledge (tactics) +5, Perception +5, Persuasion +6, Repair +4, Stealth +3 (+0 in armour), Survival +4; Alertness, Confident, Knockout Punch,

Language (SICON), Point Blank Shot, Quick Draw;
Prestige: +2

Equipment: Field rations (1), Canteen (2), three magazines (90 rounds), Combat Knife, Brunham TW-102-s 'Peacemaker' Pistol, Morita TW-203-a assault rifle, M-1C8 power suit, combat belt, lizard line

The Angels have one other sergeant and four corporals. These are left to the Games Master's imagination, so that he can flesh out the unit to meet his own requirements. Each sergeant oversees one corporal and eight privates.

The easiest thing for the Games Master is to put all of the Player Characters in the same squad. They can be spread throughout the platoon, however, and this will not pose any difficulties – the Angels eat together, bunk together, work together, take leave together and drop together. The only time the squads separate is during combat, when each squad has a different place in the formation and sometimes a specific task as well. The Lieutenant and the Sergeant Major still oversee all of them, and the four squads still work toward the same larger goal.

On very rare occasions, a mission will be too small to require the entire platoon. Usually when this occurs Alvarez picks one or more squads to handle the assignment. He only breaks up squads when particular talents are required, such as a mission that needs two snipers and a Marauder.

The Angels are well-known throughout their battalion and most Mobile Infantry troopers in the Second Brigade have heard their name. Alvarez has a reputation for a quiet, careful man whose caution is offset by his courage, and his platoon is considered one of the finest in the infantry, particularly with rescue missions and infiltrations.

THE INVISIBLES

When the recruits first arrived at boot camp they had to find their place in their new platoon's pecking order. The same is true in Alvarez's Angels – each new soldier fits into the family somewhere, not only in terms of a

job but also in its informal hierarchy. First, however, the other soldiers have to notice them.

Each soldier will handle his entry to the unit differently and this is a good place for the Players to inject a little more personality into their Player Characters. Some soldiers will walk in confidently, acting like they have been part of the Angels forever. They will call other troopers by name, laugh, tell jokes and generally cover their own discomfort with a cavalier attitude.

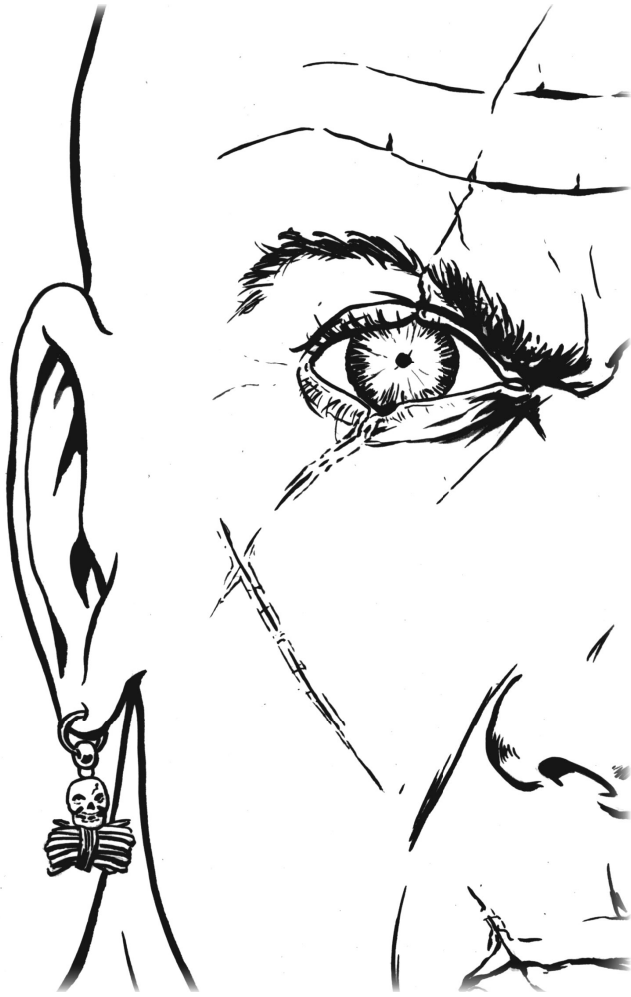
Others will approach more diffidently, asking permission before sitting down or taking a drink or doing anything. They will introduce themselves to the veterans but not say much else.

A few will seek out the biggest, toughest-looking veteran and pick a fight immediately. A trooper with this attitude believes that showing he can handle himself and that he will not take insults from anyone is the best way to convince the veterans to accept him.

All of these approaches, and any other ones people try, will be greeted with the exact same response: utter indifference. The veterans do not speak to the newcomers – at least, the privates do not. The sergeant major escorts them in, announces their name to the others and then introduces them to both Alvarez and their respective sergeants and corporals. Each new trooper's corporal shows him to his new bunk, and tells him when to report for duty assignments and when to report to the mess for chow. The other veterans do not say a word. They do not acknowledge greetings, answer questions, or move aside for newcomers in their way. Any new trooper who picks a fight with a veteran will find himself tossed aside but the veteran pays no more attention than he might to a mosquito. Bribes and gifts do not work. Neither do insults or attacks. The veterans act as if the newcomers are not even there.

This continues until their first drop.

As the newcomers may realise later, they have joined the Angels because the platoon has empty bunks. It has empty bunks because several troopers died during its last few missions. Every bunk belonged to a man



who was part of the unit, and the other veterans are his friends and squad mates. Thus, to the veterans, each new trooper is replacing a friend. That does not make the newcomers bad people – it is not their fault the other troopers died and, without replacements, the Angels would eventually dwindle below the One-Fourth rule and be disbanded, its members transferred to fill out other units. In time, these newcomers will be part of the team.

For now, however, they are pretenders. They are not yet part of the Angels and they have never been on a real combat drop so they are completely untested. Boot camp means nothing – only a real combat drop shows whether a man is a soldier or a coward.

Once the new troopers have survived their first combat drop with the Angels, everything changes. They have proven themselves as soldiers and are judged adequate

SKULL AND BONES

Soldiers are not allowed to wear jewellery of any sort during a drop and are discouraged from wearing jewellery while on ship. The three exceptions are insignia of rank, medals on a dress uniform and the skull and bones.

The skull and bones is a small earring. Made from raw yellow gold, it has a tiny, beautifully made gold skull. Beneath the skull are bones, human arm bones like the ancient Jolly Roger emblem used by Terran pirates long ago, but the bones are stacked beneath the skull rather than crossed behind it. Some have only one bone, some have several, some have too many to count, tightly bundled rather than loosely piled. The earrings do not come in pairs – a trooper wears one or none at all.

These earrings are allowed among the Mobile Infantry because they are more than mere ornament – they are badges of honour. Each bone represents a combat drop where the unit lost either its assistant section leader or its section leader. These are tragedies and the skull and bones commemorates the unit's loss.

A skull and bones cannot be purchased from a normal jeweller or even through the standard military supply channels. Certain jewellers craft them specifically for the Mobile Infantry and a good quartermaster knows how to contact these men. After such a loss, every surviving member of the unit is offered the chance to purchase a skull and bones. If he already has one, he can buy an additional bone and have it mounted with the others.

No one ever talks about the skull and bones and it is considered tactless to comment on them. A trooper knows he is part of the unit when he figures out what the small earrings mean and is a true part of the family when he earns his own, though the cost is far too high even for such an arresting piece.

to replace those who came before them. Suddenly the veterans are speaking to them, looking at them, arguing with them and laughing with them. The troopers are now part of the family.

This means that now they have to find their proper place in that family.

Smart troopers will take advantage of their initial invisibility. By watching the veterans interact, a trooper can figure out who runs each squad and who runs the entire platoon. He can identify each member of the Angels as a Charmer, a Joker, a Cheerleader or any of the other archetypes mentioned in Section Two (on page 28). This gives him a strong advantage. By the time the veterans decide to acknowledge him, he knows the Angel hierarchy and has made some plans on where he will fit and how he will accomplish that. This saves a great deal of time and effort – for example, if he bullies one man successfully, everyone below that trooper will also fall into line behind him. Knowing which veteran to obey and which to defy is crucial here, and those new troopers who did not pay attention beforehand are in for the same experience they had in boot camp, only worse. This time the section leader will not break up fights – he knows that, for the Angels to function properly, everyone has to know their respective place. If he intervenes the soldiers will only know that he is in charge and will have no structure beyond that. It is far better if he lets them create their own hierarchy beneath him, and that means staying out of the way while the new members are taught their place.

This process can be very dramatic and very violent, or very subtle and cerebral. It depends entirely upon how each new trooper handles himself, who he stands up to and how he treats each potential confrontation. Most of the veterans will hang back and watch as certain members test the newcomers, using that to gauge whether the next person up or down in the chain should also try to dominate them.

The testing process can take place on ship or on leave. It is put on hold during drops, however. No matter what the hierarchy between combats, during a mission the squad answers to its assistant squad leader and

squad leader, the squad leaders answer to the assistant section leader and everyone answers to the section leader. Personal matters are not allowed to intrude, and anyone who lets them will receive a severe tongue-lashing and a black mark in his file after the mission ends. This assumes that the offender makes it back alive – letting personal issues distract during a mission is careless and can lead to an early demise.

WE ALL LIVE IN A . . .

Alvarez's Angels are based out of the Combat Transport (TFCT) *Magsaysay*. This is the platoon's permanent assignment and the characters' new home.

Combat transports are a common sight in the Terran Federation military fleet and often used as bases for the Mobile Infantry. Each combat transport is roughly one mile long and five levels deep. Bulkheads divide major ship sections on each level, and are numbered starting from the front of the ship – Bulkhead One separates the bridge from the communications bay right behind it. A combat transport carries 218 crew members, both flight crew and ship's crew. Despite its size, it has only two drop tubes and space for only one Mobile Infantry platoon. The Mobile Infantry section is the middle of the ship, between Bulkheads Forty-five and Sixty. Past Bulkhead Sixty are the cargo sections and the hangar. Each combat transport has enough room to carry two smaller vessels – this space is usually reserved for the Mobile Infantry retrieval boats, which double as shuttles.

The *Magsaysay* is one of the newer Combat Transports. It was commissioned after the first bug encounters and is only three years old – old enough to have shaken all the kinks from its system but new enough to still have many original parts. Despite this, the *Magsaysay* has seen enough combat to bear scars and its hull is every bit as battered, dented and scuffed as an older vessel.

One advantage of a newer ship is that the *Magsaysay* has certain upgrades its predecessors lack. For example, instead of standard military shuttles it uses two Skyhooks as its retrieval boats. These vessels are heavily armed and armoured, capable of attacking both aerospace and near-orbit vessels themselves, and

RAMÓN MAGSAYSAY

Ramón Magsaysay (1907-57) was the third president of the Third Republic of the Philippines. (1953-57). Born in Iba, Zambales to a blacksmith and a schoolteacher, Ramón attended high school at Zambales Academy and entered the University of the Philippines in 1927. He studied pre-law but switched to engineering before illness forced him to drop out. He later went back to school, studying commerce in Jose Rizal College and graduating in 1933.

When Japan invaded the Philippines in 1941, Magsaysay joined the army, entering the motor pool of the 31st Infantry Division as a captain. After Bataan fell in 1942 he organised the Western Luzon Guerrilla Forces and led them throughout the Japanese occupation.

In 1945 General Douglas MacArthur appointed Magsaysay military governor of Zambales province. The following year he was elected to the Philippine House of Representatives, on the Liberal party ticket. Magsaysay served as a Representative for four years before being appointed Secretary of National Defence. During this time he spearheaded efforts to subdue the Hukbalahap guerrillas. In 1953 Magsaysay resigned his post, left the Liberal party and ran for president on the Nationalist ticket. He won the election by a large margin.

As President, Magsaysay worked closely with the United States and spoke out against communism. He encouraged land reform and government reform. The people loved and admired him and he was heavily favoured to win a second term. Unfortunately, he died in a plane crash on March 16, 1957, on his way to Cebu to speak at a school. More than two million people attended his funeral.

provide substantial fire cover for the troopers during recall. The ship's drop tubes are also more advanced – instead of capsules sliding along a long rail that feeds into the tubes, the drop capsules of the *Magsaysay* drop down into a chute while the next capsule lowers into position for its trooper. This is a more efficient method, requiring less ship space and less time to lock and load each capsule, which allows the *Magsaysay* to fire them

more rapidly. An older combat transport needs 20 minutes to drop a full platoon. The *Magsaysay* can complete a drop in 12 minutes, which means eight less minutes for the enemy to spot the ship, target it and scramble its own defences to meet the troopers when they land.

The ship has other upgrades as well, many of which are not combat-related. The stairs retract at the push of a button, for example. In theory this is used only when the vessel is in danger of being boarded, leaving a flat wall and two side rails for intruders to scale. In reality, whenever a crew or a trooper is descending and no one is coming up the same stairs, they push the button at the top and retract the steps, then grasp one rail and slide down fireman-style. The retraction buttons have to be twisted to lock the stairs away – without that the staircase swivels back into place after ten seconds. A small alarm sounds whenever the stairs are retracted, and those stationed on the *Magsaysay* quickly learn to recognise the sound. If they are also heading down they can hurry and slide down before the stairs pop back, while if they are ascending they can count to ten and reach the stairway just as the stairs return.

Every ship has its own recall song. The *Magsaysay*'s is 'Fly Me to the Moon.' Though military vessel decoration is technically restricted to the ship's SICON emblem and registration number, most have a few additional images painted on the hull. The *Magsaysay* is no exception. On one side of the nose it has the ship name and on the other is a picture of Ramón Magsaysay's head with the Philippines flag behind it. Amidships on both sides is an image of cherub, complete with wings, halo and harp but also sporting a pencil-thin moustache. Though power armour is not allowed to have any decoration beyond the suit number and its occupant's last name, most units personalise their suits as well. The Angels have halos painted on one side of their helmet, and wings painted across their jumpjets in black.

For new troopers, living entirely on-ship is a difficult adjustment. The barracks itself is similar, although the walls are metal instead of thin canvas and the floor is hard metal as well instead of dirt. The lights are stronger and the walls have windows in them, which can be shut

at the flick of a button. The presence of windows may be all that keeps these newcomers from going insane. After months in a camp where the mess hall and the barracks were a short jog apart, now they live in an area where the mess hall is one door away from their bunks. The Mobile Infantry section is not cramped but not spacious either, and no room is wasted. That and the constant presence of hard, cold metal walls seem strange after open spaces and thin tents.

The Mobile Infantry's living quarters – barracks, lavatories and mess hall – are all on one level. The mess hall doubles as a break room between meals, particularly after dinner. The level above has offices for the lieutenant and his officers, as well as the Angels' communications bay – this is separate from the *Magsaysay*'s communications array and sensitive information about a mission may go directly to the Angels although general mission parameters are sent to both locations. The level below living quarters



holds most of the Angels' workstations, including engineering and the armoury. The active suits are kept here. The next level down has cold storage for those suits not currently live and for any equipment not regularly used in a drop. The company's stores are also here, containing additional ammunition, emergency rations and spare parts for various communications devices. The lowest level holds the drop tube capsules, though the chutes start at the third level. A mission alarm sounds when the *Magsaysay* has dropped out of Cherenkov flight and back into real-space approaching the target. At that time the troopers file into the suit room, suit up, check their systems, seal in, take their weapons and listen to the padre's prayer and then line up on either side to wait for their capsules.

The other adjustment for new troopers is the amount of free time. At boot camp every minute was regimented during the day – the recruits had 90 minutes to themselves between dinner and lights-out, two hours on Saturdays. On the *Magsaysay*, as on most ships, the schedule is more relaxed. Every trooper has his job during the day. Beyond that and meals, however, a trooper's time is his own between drops. Some jobs have tasks that can be done anywhere within their area and troopers will sit in the mess hall or in the barracks, soldering components or stitching uniforms or reassembling a pistol or rifle while chatting, laughing and listening to music. The Lieutenant allows this as long as the work gets done properly and on time, which his dergeants make sure is the case. The first week of this sudden freedom can be overwhelming for a new trooper – he may keep glancing over his shoulder while sitting around, expecting his sergeant to show up and reprimand him for slacking. Some newcomers go overboard, drinking and staying up until all hours. They quickly learn to pace themselves and discover that they will get chewed out if their partying leads to inefficiency on the job and punished severely if it leads to incompetence during a drop.

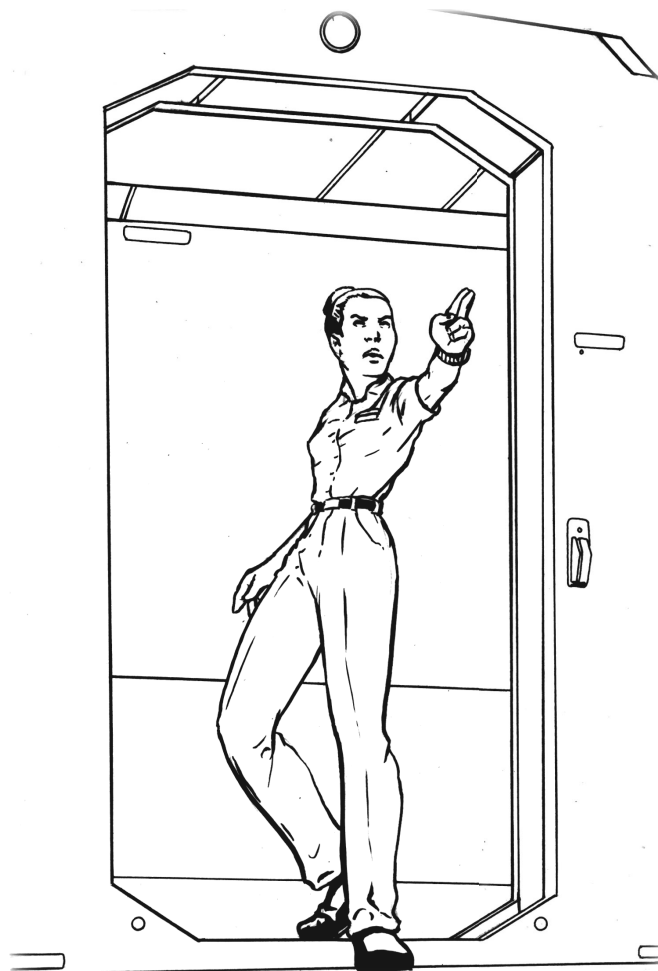
Crew

The *Magsaysay* has 218 crewmembers, including its officers. Most of these Navy personnel stay in their own sections and interact with the Mobile Infantry only when necessary. Nonetheless, here are a few key

personnel the troopers will either meet or hear about, and whose presence and personality affects the life of everyone on board.

Captain Jessica 'Bombshell' McAdams is a tall, powerfully built woman with thick dark red hair and a striking face and figure. Her nickname does not come from her good looks, however. As a lieutenant, McAdams flew a Thunderbolt TAC Fighter. During one bombing mission, the small, fast two-man aircraft was spotted and took enemy fire. McAdams' partner was hit and killed, and the ship's drop system was badly damaged, preventing bombs from being dropped automatically. McAdams refused to turn back and flew directly toward her target, ignoring stealth and altitude in favour of speed. When she was almost over the target, she abandoned her chair, shimmied down into the bomb array and manually released a bomb. Without its normal firing system the bomb dropped like a stone – directly onto the target. The resulting explosion tossed the Thunderbolt aside like a rag doll but McAdams managed to climb back into the pilot's seat and ride the concussion blast long enough to set her ship down safely beyond enemy range. Her only comment when the retrieval boat arrived was 'If I'd known it would take this long, I would have flown the damn thing home myself.' McAdams is widely regarded as a rebel within the Fleet. She is a superb pilot and an excellent ship captain and will stop at nothing to complete a mission successfully, including disobeying standard regulations and executing near-suicide manoeuvres. Her crew has learned to trust her implicitly, however, as has Alvarez. A good captain can align her ship to target drop capsules precisely, and McAdams is very good. This means most Mobile Infantry drops are exactly on target and her retrieval boats arrive precisely on time and on location.

Commander Andrea 'Andy' Dansker is the second-ranking officer on the *Magsaysay* and McAdams' executive officer. Dansker is a petite no-nonsense woman with sharp features and dark hair pulled back in a severe bun. She does not socialise with crew or even with other officers any more than necessary. No one on the *Magsaysay* likes Dansker personally but she is well-respected for her ability and her precision. Captain



McAdams is precise in her piloting, but Dansker is precise with everything and knows every aspect of the *Magsaysay* and every detail of its current status. Others on-ship refer to her as 'Andy' or 'Commander Andy' – but never when she is nearby.

Lieutenant Commander William 'Nancy' Nance controls Engineering. Rumour around the *Magsaysay* says that Nancy should have his own ship command but refuses to leave McAdams as long as she is Captain. Other rumours point to a long-standing affair between the two, though no one ever talks about this within earshot of them or of Dansker. Whatever his reasons, Nancy is a fine officer and well-liked by the crew. Tall and a little too narrow to be truly handsome, he has a razor-sharp wit and a phenomenal memory, enough to recall every incident with every crew member he has ever met, down to the exact words used. Despite this, Nancy is easy to get along with as long as his section



is running smoothly. He is generally polite, though his comments tend toward the sarcastic, and he shows great respect for Alvarez and his troopers.

Lieutenant James ‘Smitty’ Reece commands the ship’s crew. A short, round man with thinning blond hair and a cherubic face, Smitty got his nickname when he was an ensign and accused of being smitten with his ship captain. The name stuck, though few remember its origins. Smitty is a good leader, though a bit lax with his crew. He allows them to take liberties with dress, language and conduct as long as they get their jobs done and do not get reprimands from Captain McAdams. Most people like Smitty, including the Angels, in part because he is always willing to poke fun at everyone, including himself.

Flight Lieutenant Mindy de la Hera is the *Magsaysay’s* navigator, and can usually be found on the bridge, much to the regret of the ship’s male crew. Short and curvaceous, with a pretty face, dark eyes and a tidal wave of black curls tied back during duty hours, de la Hera has cut a swathe through the *Magsaysay’s* men, flirting and occasionally dallying with each in turn.

Rumours state that only Nancy has resisted her charms and that Smitty has been chasing her since she first came on board. De la Hera even flirts with Mobile Infantry troopers on the rare occasions when she sees one and her looks and activities are a favourite topic among the Angels.

Flight Lieutenant Sarah ‘Ringer’ Cavanaugh is a tall, plain-faced woman with the blond hair and rosy complexion of a farm girl, a Midwestern drawl and the eye and reflexes of a brilliant pilot. She is the *Magsaysay’s* best pilot after McAdams herself, though some say Ringer may even beat the Captain at speed, and she pilots one of the two Skyhooks which she has named *Talon*. Though not pretty, Ringer is a friendly young woman and most of the Angels will gladly hurt anyone who disparages her – on leave she is often surrounded by the troopers, who treat her like their little sister.

Master Malcolm ‘Dice’ Sahoya is the liaison between the *Magsaysay’s* flight crew and its Mobile Infantry complement. Trained as a Ship’s Engineer, Dice handles interactions between the Angels and the other

crew, except in cases where the Captain gets directly involved. A tall, beefy man with thick brown hair and a neat moustache, Dice was chosen both because he knows and respects the Mobile Infantry – his brother is a sergeant major in another unit, Wilcox's Wildcats – and because he is easy-going and likeable. Dice is the only member of the *Magsaysay's* crew to socialise regularly with the Angels and can often be found playing cards or shooting dice or just trading stories with them. He has an office on the first level, next to Alvarez, and is always available if a trooper needs to discuss any issue involving the flight crew or ship's crew, or any concerns about the ship itself. Dice has become an unofficial second padre to the troopers and many of them speak to him about personal issues, since he is not technically their superior and they know he will not reveal anything that does not impinge upon the effectiveness of the ship.

The *Magsaysay* has several more officers, including sub-lieutenants in charge of each level of the ship. Every member of the flight crew is ranked lieutenant or above. Most of the other positions have been left for the Games Master to fill so that he can create characters for his own stories involving the *Magsaysay* and Alvarez's Angels. Talented officers can also get promoted and transferred to other ships, which makes it very easy to swap out any of the above crew with characters of the Games Master's creation.

Ship's Crew vs. Flight Crew

Though the *Magsaysay* is only one ship, it has three separate groups stationed on-board. Alvarez's Angels stay within the Mobile Infantry area unless specifically invited to go elsewhere and rarely interact with the crew beyond Dice, the Captain, and the Skyhook pilots. The other two groups, the ship's crew and the flight crew, work together on a daily basis. The tension between these two groups can create difficulties for everyone and the Mobile Infantry troopers occasionally find themselves dragged into the middle, particularly new troopers who do not know any better.

The flight crew commands the ship, controls the bridge and oversees every major element of ship operations. The ship's crew handles the ship's actual physical

components, from engineering to hull repairs, and does all of the heavy lifting. The highest a member of ship's crew can rank is lieutenant, which is the lowest a member of the flight crew can rank. This means the most senior ship's crew member is at best the same rank as the most junior pilot or bridge officer.

Many ship's crew members resent this. They see the flight crew as arrogant, overly educated young fools who can quote rules and regulations but rarely have any real experience and never get their hands dirty. Ship's crew does all the work and flight crew gets all the credit. It galls many of them that Lieutenant Reece, their senior officer, is so undemanding – he lets the flight crew walk all over him, which in turn means the rest of the ship's crew have to take abuse as well. The Mates wish their boss would stand up to the flight officers more often and demand their respect. His failure to do so makes them resent him and hate the officers who lord it over him and over them.

For their part, the flight crew rarely notices this attitude. The officers are busy running the ship and assign the ship's crew to whatever tasks are necessary. Some of them, particularly the newer lieutenants, see the ship's crew as uneducated louts who can only follow simple instructions and who require constant supervision to prevent slacking. Others acknowledge the value of skilled ship's crew but see the men there as narrowly trained and incapable of rising beyond their limited station.

On rare occasions, a member of ship's crew can be promoted to lieutenant and assigned to a flight crew instead. If the new officer remains on the same ship, this can breed hatred from his former friends, who see him as a class traitor. However these new officers are often the best at bridging the gap between the two fleet units – they know what it feels like to be ship's crew and treat Mates with more respect but they also realise now how much the flight crew does to keep the ship running properly.

Tempers can flare between members of the two groups. Irritated flight crew accuse the ship's crew of being lazy, stupid and deliberately disobedient. Annoyed

ship's crew call the flight crew arrogant, airheaded and incapable of real work. These disputes rarely lead to blows – more often they create a strain between officers and crew, as the Mates turn sullen and stop performing their jobs as well in order to taunt the officers, who grow incensed when the ship's efficiency drops and their section is found responsible.

Though troopers are not involved in these activities, they can get pulled into the fray. Most ship's crew see the Mobile Infantry as fellow grunts and expect the men to side with them against the uppity flight crew officers. Some flight crew know how much training the Mobile Infantry receives, however, and treat the troopers as fellow elite, expecting their support against the unwashed and uneducated ship's crew. Smart troopers steer well clear of the conflict, complimenting both sides and then walking away. New troopers often fall prey to troublemakers in one or the other, however, and are used as pawns in the constant tussle for respect and control.

This can make a good adventure between combat drops. The new troopers find themselves embroiled in a shipboard dispute, with everyone else watching to see how they handle themselves in the tense situation. Alvarez will intervene if his troopers are about to do something that violates Mobile Infantry regulations but otherwise he will sit back and see what his newest members do to extricate themselves, or just how badly they fall victim to the power plays of the crew members.

Bulkhead Thirty

The *Magsaysay* is a mixed-gender ship, carrying both men and women. Many of the flight crew are female, while all of the ship's crew and most of the Mobile Infantry are men. This may be another reason ship's crew sometimes dislike flight crew – women who join the Fleet are almost always assigned to flight crew, which means they are put on a career path to quickly outrank many Mates with years of experience. The ship's crew may also dislike the flight officers because they get to fraternise with women on a daily basis.

The *Magsaysay* has five levels and a total of 62 compartments per floor. A bulkhead with a single door separates each compartment. The doors can be locked manually or from the bridge. Some compartments can only be accessed on a single level, while others have doors on each floor.

The Mobile Infantry are stationed between Bulkheads Forty-five and Sixty. The two compartments past them are the hangar and the cargo section. Bulkheads Thirty-one to Forty-five are ship's crew. Bulkheads One to Thirty are flight crew and before Bulkhead One is the bridge.

This means that all the women on the *Magsaysay* are before Bulkhead Thirty, in officer territory. That makes Bulkhead Thirty a magical place. Only one door pierces this bulkhead, on the second level. Two Mobile Infantry troopers, in full powered armour and carrying loaded rifles, stand guard on either side of the door at all hours. During a drop the door is locked from the bridge, since every Angel is off ship.

Note that Alvarez's Angels does have female troopers, yet these are not perceived as 'women' in the same way as the female flight crew officers behind Bulkhead Thirty. Female troopers have received the exact same training as their male counterparts and are every bit as tough and every bit as dangerous, in armour or out. Within the Angels, as elsewhere within the Mobile Infantry, troopers are not considered men and women, merely troopers. Anyone who makes mistake of approaching a female Angel poorly quickly learns his error, as first she trounces him and then her squad mates step in to finish the process. Of course, the fact that female troopers often have the same bristly haircut, scars, tattoos and massive arms as their male peers could also effect people's perceptions.

Guarding the door is an ancient tradition and probably not necessary any more. Ship's crew and Mobile Infantry know the penalties for harassing a female officer are severe, up to and including court martial. Every member of the flight crew also went through Fleet officer training, which includes unarmed combat – the women can take care of themselves, even against

big strong troopers. Yet the policy remains. It insures that the men do not get any ideas.

A female officer can come south of Bulkhead Thirty, though most do so only on duty. Flight Lieutenant Callaghan spends most of her time past Bulkhead Sixty, checking on her Skyhook or fine-tuning its systems, and often stops to chat with the troopers as she passes through their mess hall. At times a female officer is assigned to oversee cargo and has to go through the Mobile Infantry area to reach the cargo hold at the tail end of the ship, behind Bulkhead Sixty. Beyond that, however, most female officers stay in their own section of the ship, both because their duties require it and because they feel safer.

In some SICON ships, the Mobile Infantry officers have their offices with those of the flight crew. This means that the Lieutenant and Sergeant Major and sergeants are stationed beyond Bulkhead Thirty, and troopers are often called past that barrier to report. The *Magsaysay* is set up differently, however. It has enough space in the Mobile Infantry section to allow officers' quarters and so Alvarez and Case and the others stay safely behind Bulkhead Forty-five as well.

The one exception to this is meals. The Captain and her officers dine together for every meal, and the Mobile Infantry officers are also invited. On some ships the platoon leader eats every meal with the flight crew but Alvarez is not big on ceremony and would rather spend more time with his men. He cannot evade the invitation completely, however. As a compromise, he dines with the Captain and her officers every Saturday and Sunday evening, as does Sergeant Major Case. On Sundays the sergeants also accompany them. This gives Alvarez a chance to speak with the Captain informally about Mobile Infantry matters and about other issues concerning the ship and its crew and lets the flight crew officers get more comfortable with him and his own officers. It also helps his officers grow accustomed to the idea of dining with female officers, since some day they may command their own platoons and be required to dine with the Captain themselves.

The ship's crew does not appreciate being barred from women – not that most of them would dare try anything, but they dislike being forcibly restricted. The fact that Mobile Infantry troopers enter their territory specifically to bar Bulkhead Thirty is even more galling. The troopers standing guard often get jibes from ship's crew, especially when one or both of the guards are women themselves. This is also a prime time for the ship's crew to complain about flight crew attitudes, in the hopes of winning sympathy from the Mobile Infantry.

During combat drops the door in Bulkhead Thirty is sealed. However, other crises can occur on a ship and if they happen past that barrier the troopers on guard may face a dilemma. They are charged with barring the door against any nonofficer, including other troopers. If someone calls for help from the other side, should they ignore it or lend assistance? Technically they are not allowed past the bulkhead without specific orders but, if someone is hurt or in danger, there may not be time to wait on technicalities. If the trooper winds up charging in and saving someone's life, they may still be reprimanded for form's sake but commended privately. On the other hand, if the call is a false alarm or creates more problems by leaving the door unprotected, the trooper could receive a formal reprimand, which goes on their permanent record.

FACE TO FACE

Boot camp can only teach so much – it instills the basics, sets the reflexes and starts the patterns the soldier will follow for the rest of his military career. Yet it cannot cover every detail. The most important thing it misses is the tension. During a training exercise, the instructors do their best to simulate a real mission. The ammunition is not live, however, and the targets do not really shoot back. Someone is monitoring the recruits every step of the way, ready to step in the instant something goes wrong. Accidents happen, deaths occur but they *are* rare – usually a problem can be countered in time. This is not the case in real combat.

The new soldier discovers on his first mission that no one is there to catch him when he falls. His squad leader keeps an eye on him and offers advice, orders

and support where possible. So do the section leaders. Things happen very quickly in combat, however, and no one can react fast enough to protect everyone. The leaders have to worry about the team as a whole and about the mission objectives. Each trooper is expected to fend for himself. The ammunition on both sides is very real. So are the injuries and the fatalities.

When possible, a new soldier's first mission is a cakewalk – an easy assignment with little or no risk. His squad may be sent to locate and pacify rebels on a colony world, or to find and eliminate native predators. Neither is a threat to a man in powered armour but they give the soldier a chance to adjust to working with live ammunition and to the concept that his life is on the

line every time he makes a drop. Unfortunately, such missions are a luxury. Most troopers' first missions are into combat against heavily armed insurgents or against bugs. Some fresh privates never see a second drop.

Nothing can prepare a trooper for his first encounter with the bugs. At boot camp he sees videos, reads transcripts and studies sketches and computer renderings. It is not the same as the real thing. The Arachnids are as tall as a big man in power armour and twice as wide, though much of that is their limbs – they can snake through tiny openings and move almost as quickly as a Stryker suit. The Arachnids are also extremely quiet, particularly in darkness or shadow, and can sneak up on troops before sensors register their presence. Their mandibles and claws can rip through power armour as if it were silk and a single Arachnid warrior can pick up, tear apart and hurl aside an armoured trooper in the blink of an eye.

That is not what makes them terrifying, however. Various animals on the assorted colony worlds are bigger, stronger and faster than even Mobile Infantry troopers. They are dangerous and are treated with caution, but do not create the same terror as an Arachnid. The difference lies in their shape and in their intelligence. Humans have always feared spiders and their kin. Something about that many limbs and eyes all at once and about the way a spider moves, its legs rising and falling in a hypnotic pattern, produce terror. The spider's speed, grace, and relative strength are awe-inspiring and most people who watch a spider preying upon hapless flies finds himself thinking 'thank God they are so small, and no threat to me.' The Arachnids are large enough to threaten people, however. They are large enough to threaten Marauders and they move exactly like a Terran spider would if it had human intelligence.

That is the other terrifying aspect of an Arachnid. It is no dumb insect. Spiders



are canny but not smart – they cannot follow complex reason, or deliberately break a pattern. This makes them easy to outthink and to trap – put an obstacle in the spider's path and it will move around it, throw a shoe at it and it will retreat to its web. The Arachnids are smarter than that. Individual warriors can respond to bluffs, feints, misdirections and long-range planning. The Arachnid Empire's hive mind makes them even more frightening. These creatures think as one, and anything one knows its fellows know as well. Mobile Infantry troopers communicate with one another through their suits, reporting on situations and allowing the suit cameras, sensors and microphones pass along additional information. This takes time to send and to process, whereas bugs have no such delay. If one bug warrior encounters a Mobile Infantry squad, every other bug in the area knows it instantly as if they were there. Bugs higher in the chain of command know as well and immediately issue orders. The warriors obey at once. There is no delay from giving different orders to different bugs – they each receive their orders at the same time and know what the other bugs are doing as well. This allows them to coordinate on a scale SICON only dreams about. It also means that a bug fighting force can respond to a Mobile Infantry attack more quickly than the troopers can comprehend and can adjust its tactics instantly to handle any new information. That makes the bugs even more dangerous – they move more quickly than humans, and react more quickly as well.

Most Mobile Infantry troopers panic the first time they see a bug in person. Many freeze completely when faced with the seven-foot-tall Arachnids and, if a squad member does not intervene, the new soldier dies right then and there. Others start firing uncontrollably, screaming the entire time. This is a much better response, since their training allows the soldiers to aim without thinking about it – most troopers who take this route discover that they have killed the bug in question but burned through the ammunition in that particular weapon. If they are lucky, the bug was alone or the rest of the squad has killed its companions and the trooper has time to breathe and reload.

Some troopers become irrational upon seeing a bug. Many have tried to step on it, convincing themselves

that it is a regular Terran spider that only seems larger. These men die quickly. Others charge the bug with a knife or with their bare (though armoured) hands, fear driving all rational thought and all combat training from their mind and leaving only rage. They die as well. Others run. While not the most useful response, at least this leaves the new trooper alive. Once the bug is out of sight the squad leader can talk to the trooper through their suits, calm him down and bring him back for a second attempt. Now that he knows what to expect, the trooper is more likely to fall into the 'kill it with everything available' response, which at least eliminates the bug and teaches the trooper that it can be killed.

Once a trooper has killed his first bug he feels better. Fear is often replaced by rage – these creatures are so utterly inhuman they do not deserve to live. Bugs, with their multiple arms and many eyes and glittering black skin, look evil. They look like they need to be killed. Unfortunately, this second reaction can also get troopers killed if they forget to be careful. Their squad leaders try talking them through it, reminding them that bugs are evil and ugly and should be killed. They are also extremely dangerous and need to be approached cautiously. It is much like dealing with a large rabid dog – the creature needs to be put down, but it is deadly enough to be treated with respect.

Some troopers, having run from a bug once or having been rescued by a squad mate, cannot face the aliens again. They begin to shake at the mere thought of a bug, have nightmares about the one that they saw and freeze the instant they see anything that reminds them of the Arachnids. Even Terran spiders produce an intense fear. Military psychologists work with these soldiers, trying to overcome their fears and channel the emotions into more productive avenues. Some troopers recover and learn to face the bugs, using their fear to stay alert. Others never cope and are given medical discharges or transferred to a non-combat unit.

The first encounter with a bug should be a major moment for a Player Character. Games Masters should not drag out the encounter but they should not minimise it either. This is the first time the soldier has

met the enemy in person and nothing has prepared him for the bugs' size, speed, intelligence and deadliness. At the same time there is something horrifyingly beautiful about an Arachnid as it moves and as it kills. No motions are wasted and all its limbs operate in perfect concert. When two or more bugs are present the sight is even more frightening and more fascinating. Because they are a hive mind, every bug knows exactly where it stands in relation to its fellows and knows what each member of its unit will do the instant that warrior decides or receives instructions. This allows the bugs to work as a cohesive unit, spinning around one another without pause, stepping aside without looking. People can work together for years to achieve a pale semblance of this unity, learning to sense their partners' proximity and accommodate their actions. The bugs can all do this perfectly, no matter how many are present – two bugs never collide unless an armoured trooper throws one backward and, even then, they twist to avoid a full collision.

Despite these severe reactions, men are not the worst affected by the bugs. The first neodogs to encounter bugs went completely insane. Several thrashed so violently they broke their own necks. Others turned on their trainers and their pack mates, attacking anything and everything until they had to be killed. Others curled into a ball and lay there whimpering until they were slaughtered or rescued. The problem is that neodogs are less intelligent than humans are, though not by much, and think along more rigid lines. Bugs violate everything they know about insects and about human-sized enemies, and the neodogs' brains short-circuit trying to accommodate those discrepancies. Over time SICON has learned how to raise neodogs that are taught about bugs from birth. This prevents the animals from going into shock when they first encounter a bug – most neodogs are trained to respond with a murderous rage or with all-out flight instead. neodog handlers, of course, have the same problems with bugs that most troopers experience. They have to keep their mind on their partners, however, since a neodog is most vulnerable when running and forgets much of its own training when blindly attacking.

SALLY FORTH!

The *Magsaysay* is the Player Characters' new home base and the starting point for any combat missions as well as any stories involving leave. However, the ship is far more than a launching pad – it is the team's home and can be the setting for several adventures contained entirely within its hull. Here are a few example ideas:

SNEAK THIEF

Someone has been stealing supplies from the cargo hold. Technically anyone on ship has access to that area. In reality, however, the cargo hold is in the tail of the ship, behind Bulkhead Sixty-Two – which means that all of Mobile Infantry territory lies between it and the rest of the ship. If the thief is ship's crew or flight crew, he must be cutting through the Mobile Infantry section without their noticing him, which is not a good sign for the platoon's attentiveness. On the other hand, the thief could be a trooper himself. Either way, the Angels have to find and stop the culprit to salvage their own reputation.

SABOTEUR

An alert sounds on the *Magsaysay* as one of its engines suddenly fails. Captain McAdams manages to bring the ship out of Cherenkov drive safely and parks it in orbit around a small planet. But what happened? The engines had been tested recently and passed inspection without a problem. Examination reveals deliberate tampering – the ship has a saboteur onboard! Since the *Magsaysay* has no other security team, Lieutenant Alvarez is asked to take charge of the investigation. Now his Angels have the run of the ship for once but are too busy trying to catch a traitor to enjoy their newfound freedom.

FRESH FACES

The *Magsaysay* rendezvous with another SICON ship and Master Sahoya transfers to the other vessel. He has been accepted to Officer Training and, if he graduates successfully, he will become a lieutenant and be assigned to some other ship as flight crew. Unfortunately, that means that the *Magsaysay* gets a new Master to serve as liaison between the Angels and the officers. Master Barbara 'Harridan' Simmons is a no-nonsense former lieutenant who seems to take her

demotion and assignment as a personal insult. She is unfriendly, arrogant, short-tempered and completely dismissive of the Mobile Infantry and their problems. Despite all this, she is very attractive and is stationed in Mobile Infantry territory, well below Bulkhead Thirty. The Angels cannot decide if they want to kill her or date her. Either way, something has to change soon!

TURF WAR

The ship's crew is fed up. The flight crew officers have insulted them for the last time. A Mate named

Carruthers, a big surly man who is always shooting off his mouth, whips his shipmates into frenzy. They refuse to do their work and march toward Bulkhead Thirty with a list of demands. Many of the ship's crew are furious at recent insults and spoiling for a fight. Two Mobile Infantry troopers stand in their way. The troopers could kill every member of the ship's crew easily but that will not solve the problem. They have to find a way to settle the differences between the ship's crew and the flight crew without violence – and diplomacy is not the Mobile Infantry's strong suit!



ALIEN INTRUSION

A bug is on board! At least, one of the sub-lieutenants has been killed, his body torn to shreds in a manner that matches a bug attack. How would an Arachnid warrior have gained access to the *Magsaysay*? Their last drop did involve squashing a bug incursion but none of the warriors were seen anywhere near the recall point, while the Skyhooks were routinely searched before and after docking. Did a bug sneak onto the ship? If so, the Angels have to find it and kill it before it hurts anyone else. Finding the ship bug-free would not make matters easier, however – that would mean that one of the people onboard, someone the Angels know and have served with, is a vicious killer!

RELUCTANT HOST

The *Magsaysay* is ordered to ferry a group of Terran Federation officials to an outlying colony. This is not part of their normal duties but they are the closest ship available and it is urgent the officials reach the colony on time. The officials prove to be unpleasant, domineering and secretive. They lord it over everyone, including the Captain, and expect the Mobile Infantry to serve as bodyguards. What is so important

about this meeting? Will the officials, who are offending everyone, survive the trip?

QUARANTINE

One of the ship's crew reported back from leave with a strange blue discoloration on his cheek. Two days later he is unable to get out of bed and a day after that he falls into a coma. His two best friends have similar marks on their faces that were not there when the *Magsaysay* left port. Whatever the one Mate had is clearly contagious. Captain McAdams calls in the situation and is told to head toward the nearest SICON base rather than going back to the outpost they just left. She is also told to place the ship under quarantine. Each of the three sections is sealed. Only properly suited troopers are allowed through and then only under strict orders. Now the flight crew, the ship's crew and the troopers are each trapped in their respective areas, while a deadly illness sweeps through the entire ship. What is this strange blue splotch? Was the Mate simply careless, or was he deliberately infected for some reason? Will they find a cure in time?

FIRST CONTACT

The *Magsaysay* intercepts a strange transmission coming from an unexplored solar system. The signal is clearly intelligent in origin but does not match any known Terran language. Is it a bug transmission? The Arachnids have never shown this type of communication before – if it is them, the signal could reveal critical

information about their species, which would help in the war effort. The transmission could even provide a way for the two races to communicate and perhaps settle their differences. Or it could be a signal from a completely new race and potential ally. The *Magsaysay* is ordered to investigate, but with caution. They circle the planet and Alvarez's Angels are sent down to locate the source of the signal itself. What will they find?

Of course, the troopers will also have combat drops, noncombat missions and various recreational leaves. These will all take them off the *Magsaysay* for a time, and each can be a separate adventure. When those occur, the *Magsaysay* may simply be a safe haven after an adventure resolves. The Games Master should not let the ship fade into a mere backdrop, however. The *Magsaysay* is an interesting environment in its own right and the Games Master should expand it into a true setting. Give the ship its own personality, and detail all of the crew and various levels. Create internal politics, love affairs, rivalries, and other machinations to give it a sense of real interaction. The Mobile Infantry is partially shielded from these activities, since their territory is very clearly defined and they rarely travel through the other portions of the ship, but that does not mean they will not notice. These occasional reminders that life does exist past Bulkhead Forty-five helps keep the platoon grounded in reality and reminds them to work at meshing their activities with the lives and goals of the people around them.

SECTION FOUR: ESCORT DUTY

THIS SECTION PRESENTS a complete Starship Troopers adventure. It can be used for experienced troopers but works best if used as the first significant mission for the Player Characters after their graduation and assignment to Alvarez's Angels. The Games Master can send the unit on one or more smaller missions beforehand if he wants to make sure the Player Characters are now considered full members of the team.

This mission is designed to take less than a week of time in-game. It can be played in a single four- to six-hour session or extended to last three or four game sessions, depending on the characters' actions and any side plots the Games Master includes.

The goal of this adventure is to throw the former recruits into the thick of things. They are used to training exercises with their clear-cut goals and inflexible structures. This mission leaves too much open for interpretation and demands too much independent thought. It will also throw the troopers up against bugs for the very first time, teaching the newcomers the meaning of fear. This mission should help cement the rookies' place in the unit and give the players a chance to show what sort of soldiers their Player Characters have become.

BACKGROUND

Three months ago a small two-man scoutship experienced mechanical difficulties and came out of Cherenkov space earlier than planned. The pilot, Sgt. Molly Banks, set down on an uninhabited planet to make repairs. While she worked on the ship, her partner, Sgt. Will Cuhain, kept watch. He did not see any signs of bug activity, or of anything beyond small

insects. Just before leaving Cuhain selected a small blue-grey rock as a souvenir. Upon their safe return to Terra, Cuhain sets the new rock on his desk with the rest of his collection. He has one rock from every planet or moon or asteroid he has visited.

Two months pass. One night Cuhain is home relaxing. He has a glass of wine after dinner and sets it on his desk as he sits down to read a book his sister sent him for his last birthday. Some time later, still engrossed in the book, he reaches for the glass but does not look up and misjudges its location. He knocks the glass over and wine spills everywhere. Some of it lands on the rock he brought back from that planet.

The resulting explosion destroys Cuhain's apartment completely and devastates the apartments around it. Cuhain is killed instantly. Three of his neighbours die as well, and 12 more suffer injuries.

SICON investigators sift through the rubble, seeking the cause of the destruction. They find traces of an unfamiliar explosive that is handed over to the science division. Sgt. Banks is questioned and mentions Cuhain's rock collection. By examining their mission logs, SICON creates a list of the places Banks and Cuhain visited. Many of these they eliminate immediately because those worlds have known chemical compositions. But the planet where they made repairs has never been surveyed fully. SICON decides to investigate. If the rock did come from that world, it could provide a new type of explosive more powerful than anything currently in use. That could help turn the tide of the war.

ON THE BOUNCE

The *Magsaysay* receives orders from SICON and changes course, activating its Cherenkov drive as soon as the coordinates are plugged in. Lieutenant Alvarez receives orders as well and calls the unit together to brief them.

Operation: Big Brother

Your platoon will be inserted onto the surface of UG-1770D as soon as possible.

One ten-man research team, headed by Doctor Andres Hasse, is also en route to UG-1770D. Your platoon will locate Dr. Hasse's team when they touch down. Dr. Hasse will be conducting a survey of the planet and taking various mineral samples. Your troopers will accompany him and his scientists at all times and provide any necessary assistance and protection while on UG-1770D. When Dr. Hasse has completed his survey, his team will be removed via transport. Your platoon will wait until his team has been successfully evacuated before calling for your own retrieval.

Note that this is not a combat mission. Do not engage in combat unless absolutely necessary. Do not explore UG-1770D or its surroundings. Provide protection and security only.

Mission Type: Security.

Mission Duration: High command estimates that your platoon will be required to escort the research team for 14 standard days. The exact duration will depend upon Dr. Hasse's assessment, however.

Mission Equipment: Standard outfit only.

UG-1770D, Alvarez adds, is an uninhabited planet roughly halfway between Terra and Cincinnati. The Angels' job is simply to escort the researchers as they travel around the planet and collect soil and rock samples. They are not, Alvarez stresses, to engage in scouting of their own. They are not to engage in combat either

unless in self-defence. If bugs are sighted, they are to report the sighting and retreat, avoiding contact and protecting the researchers.

Alvarez does not seem very happy about their new orders and neither does Case. If asked, the veterans offer their own guesses as to the boss's displeasure:

The Angels are a combat squad, not nursemaids. They should be going somewhere to fight bugs, not playing nanny to a pack of eggheads.

Being told not to investigate or fight means there must be something worth investigating and something that needs fighting – most likely bugs. So the Angels are being sent to a bug stronghold but have been ordered not to do anything about it.



This Dr. Hasse has a ten-man team. Why does he need an entire platoon of troopers for protection? Alvarez's Angels is at full strength right now, which means 42 troopers. That means more than four troopers per researcher. Is SICON simply being extra-careful with the research team, or do they have reasons for sending so many soldiers to guard so few civilians?

The more-informed veterans confirm that bugs have been sighted in that area, if not in that specific solar system. Why not send them to deal with those bugs so the scientists can work in peace? Is some other platoon going after the bugs and earning all the glory while the Angels sit around and watch some rock-happy researchers bag bits of dirt?

What is so special about UG-1770D that scientists want to study it? Whatever it is, SICON considers it important enough to send a platoon for protection. That is strange, and the Mobile Infantry does not like strange. Dangerous, yes, but strange means uncertain and that causes problems.

This is indeed a very strange mission. The Angels usually get straight search-and-rescue missions, or combat drops into known bug territories. The change may be because they are the closest to this planet, or because the mission requires a unit with their skills. It could also be political, someone who does not like Alvarez giving his team a silly little nothing of a mission to disgrace them and keep them busy while the meatier missions are handed off to someone else.

Alvarez may be concerned that the rookies are too green to follow orders properly, or to understand directions. He may also worry that they cannot read, write, fire a gun or go to the bathroom without help.

If asked directly, neither Alvarez nor Case will comment on the mission beyond saying they have orders and will follow them as always.

The *Magsaysay* takes eight days to reach UG-1770D. During that time the Angels ready themselves for the drop. Suits are checked and double-checked. Weapons are emptied, stripped, cleaned, reassembled and

reloaded. Drop capsules are brought up and checked, and the tubes are dry-run. Alvarez meets with Case and then with Sahoya, McAdams, Cavanaugh and the other Skyhook pilot to study whatever they know about UG-1770D and decide upon recall times and locations.

The veteran troopers settle into a state of quiet anticipation. They still joke and drink and sing but a new tension has appeared beneath the humour and everyone is on edge. For the rookies this is a difficult time, perhaps the worst they have faced because they do not know what will happen next. An experienced trooper knows he can handle himself in a crisis and knows that if something goes wrong he will react calmly and professionally. The rookies have been on only a few drops before this and none of them significant. They are still unsure whether they can fire at a bug, or avoid locking up when attacked.

Alvarez and Sahoya do their best to calm the rookies' fears. They will meet with any trooper who asks and discuss drops, combat, bugs and how to handle dangerous situations. Alvarez reminds them this is not a combat mission. SICON does not expect them to fight, which means they should not encounter anything worse than a few wild animals. He assures the newcomers that he has every faith in them and says they are Angels and will make him proud on the mission. Sahoya relates how his brother pissed his own power armour on his first drop and had to scrub it clean afterward but otherwise performed admirably. The sergeants and corporals each treat the men's fears in different ways. Donovan laughs and tells the troopers just to follow his lead. DeLaine warns them not to let fear make them careless and cautions them to check over their suits and weapons carefully beforehand. Ivan offers them drinks and points out that they would not be here if Alvarez did not believe they could handle danger. Several of the other officers, including Case, refuse to acknowledge the possibility that any of their men might not be capable and laugh if anyone suggests it.

Note that, if the newcomers have not been on a drop with the Angels before, the officers will still react the

same way but the other privates may not. If this is their first drop the newcomers are still considered invisible by the veterans and will not be spoken to directly. The veterans will make offhanded comments about rookies, however, claiming that most new troopers do not survive their first mission because they panic and shoot themselves in the head or self-destruct their suits or some other nonsense. Many of the veterans mock-plead with Case not to send them out alongside empty suits, meaning the rookies, saying that such ghost armour is no help to anyone and merely gets in the way.

If the rookies have made a drop with the Angels before this, they are considered part of the team. The veterans acknowledge them and some will talk them through their fears. Others will laugh at their concerns, but good-naturedly. It is the difference between night and day, the veterans either spurning the men who need them most and predicting their failure or lending support and reassurance to the newest members of their family.

One thing that sticks in everyone's head is the nature of this mission. This is not a combat mission, Alvarez mentions repeatedly. However, the Mobile Infantry is a combat organization. Its troopers are trained for combat. In many ways, a normal combat mission would be easier. The troopers would be told where to go and what to shoot and they would follow orders. This is a departure from their routine and outside what the rookies were taught to expect. That makes everyone nervous.

UGLYTOWN

After eight days the *Magsaysay* drops out of Cherenkov and back into real-space. Before it blazes a Class-F star, UG-1770. Four planets revolve around it – the fourth, UG-1770D, is their target.

Captain McAdams pulls the *Magsaysay* into orbit and does a surface scan. She, Lieutenant Alvarez and the two Skyhook pilots go over the resulting map and compare it to one SICON sent along with the orders. The research team has selected a likely point for arrival, and McAdams and Alvarez agree to use this location

for their own drop and retrieval. This should make it very easy to rendezvous with the scientists once they arrive – Alvarez will simply keep his Angels close to that location.

While the Lieutenant discusses drop and retrieval plans, Sergeant Major Case assembles the Angels and goes over the map with them. She also tells them what little they know about this world.

UG-1770D

DISTANCE FROM UCF CENTRE: 13.1 light years

COLONY WORLD OR MOON: Runt

CIRCUMFERENCE: 14,617 miles

POPULATION: None

ORBITAL PATH: Fourth

PRIMARY RESOURCE: Mining, outpost, listening post, early warning station

RETENTION INDEX: 1

The outermost planet in a Class-F solar system, UG-1770D has little to recommend it. Small and cool, much of the planet lies beneath water and the exposed land is covered in thick jungle or thin scrub. No signs of native life have been found above the plant and simple insect level. Though technically habitable, UG-1770D's atmosphere is too nitrogen-rich to be pleasant and the planet emits enough background radiation to make long-term residency dangerous. The planet's density does suggest the possibility of valuable mineral deposits, which may merit a mining operation.

Sergeant Ivan immediately dubs the world 'Uglytown,' and the name sticks. Looked at from orbit it is certainly unappealing – a small planet, only twice the size of Luna, with dull gray-blue water broken by patches of blue-green and green-brown. Thin clouds swirl above the surface, more yellow than those on Terra and more angular, almost jagged. Even the moon, which Ivan dubs Runt, is unattractive. A tiny misshapen rock, it whizzes by in an elliptical orbit.

Once McAdams has manoeuvred the *Magsaysay* into position, she sounds the alert and the Angels scramble for their suits and the drop capsules. The rookies may

have wondered why the Skyhooks did not fly them to the surface, assuming that the no-fighting order meant the planet was not a combat zone. If they ask, however, the veterans or their corporal correct them. If Uglytown were not dangerous the orders would not have needed to say not to shoot. Unless a situation is known to be nonthreatening the *Magsaysay* will not risk its Skyhooks or the Mobile Infantry on a landing when it can use the quicker and safer drop instead.

The drop should go smoothly, McAdams demonstrating her usual skill to place Alvarez perfectly on top of the designated location. The Arachnid presence on Uglytown will not detect the Mobile Infantry at this point and will not move to reveal itself so there are no obstacles or unexpected events unless the Player Characters cause trouble themselves. Once on firm ground, Case orders the troopers to form up, and then divides them into their squads.

As they gather the troopers will get their first real look at Uglytown. The name definitely suits it. The sky is a flat slate-grey overhead with the clouds showing as patches of yellow haze. The landing location has only tough brown grass and a few scattered bushes with tiny dark green leaves, long thorns and oily black berries. Down below they can see a patch of jungle, thick trees with wide, wickedly edged leaves drooping down to cast a heavy shade upon the leaf-littered ground. Thick ropy vines, more black than brown at this distance, twine their way up the trees and drape across the branches. In the distance they can make out the shore, where the dirt and grass give way to ugly grey rock constantly battered by a raging sea of mottled greenish blue. The air smells bitter and is filled with the scent of rotting plants and sea salt. The only sound is the dull roar of the ocean and the whistle of a thin wind across the low hills surrounding the site.

Case has brought a stand-alone retrieval beacon, which she stabs into the ground at her feet and activates. The *Magsaysay*'s recall song, 'Fly Me to the Moon,' is audible only through power armour, but anyone suited within one hundred miles will hear it. After thirty seconds the song stops but the beacon is now active and linked to the *Magsaysay*'s shipboard systems. When the Skyhooks

are sent down for retrieval, their pilots will activate the beacon by remote and it will play the recall song, letting the Angels know to regroup and prepare for evacuation. In the meantime, Alvarez sends his four squads of Angels to scout the immediate area. He points out they are only patrolling to familiarise themselves with the lay of the land, not to glean any information about the planet or its potential importance to SICON.

COME ON DOWN

For the next four hours the squads patrol their surroundings, during which time each Player Character may make a Perception check (DC 20). A successful check allows the trooper to locate faint scuff marks in the ground, possibly old tracks of some sort. They are far too large to belong to any of the local insects, which are no larger than small birds. There are too few traces left for a trooper to use the Track feat and follow them.

After covering a two-mile square around the beacon, Alvarez establishes a perimeter guard. The rest of the Angels hunker down to wait.

Another two hours should pass uneventfully. After this time, Player Characters can make another Perception check (DC15). Those who succeed will hear a faint clatter, seeming to originate among the hills somewhere. The topography makes the echo impossible to pinpoint.

Finally McAdams radios down. Another SICON ship has arrived and its Skyhook has been deployed. The research team is en route.

Alvarez will pull the Angels back to stand guard. Anyone watching the planet will see the Skyhook's descent and marking its landing site will be far too easy. If the bugs are here, they may not be able to resist attacking – and the earlier traces and noises may have roused the troopers' suspicions that they are not alone.

As yet, however, the bugs are likely to still be unaware of the human presence on the planet unless the Player Characters have managed to cause some sort of significant commotion or blunder. As such, the

landing should go smoothly. As soon as the researchers have disembarked and grabbed their gear, the Skyhook takes off again. Alvarez steps forward and introduces himself, then suggests they move off to one side.

One of the researchers nods and motions to the others. The group of civilians all follow Alvarez to a small stand of trees several yards away. He introduces Case and the other officers, and the lead researcher nods. 'My name is Andres Hasse,' he says.

Then he introduces the rest of his team.

Rock-happy Eggheads

Dr. Andres Hasse has nine other researchers with him. Though civilians, the researchers work for SICON's science division, helping SICON develop new ways

to fight the bugs. Since they work for SICON they have each been awarded the honorary rank of Captain except for Hasse, who is an honorary Major. This means that any of the researchers can give an order and require even Alvarez himself to obey. Worse, these ten men and women are civilians and not part of the normal military structure. They do not know the proper protocols and have no qualms about violating procedure. SICON tolerates this behaviour because the researchers have proven useful. Normally the scientists stay in a compound on Terra or one of the other protected worlds and are not allowed to leave for their own safety – this prevents them from issuing too many problematic orders as well. But this situation required Hasse to examine Uglytown firsthand and he insisted on bringing the rest of his team.

Dr. Andres Hasse is a slender man of average height and average looks. He wears his dark brown hair in a crew cut and is always clean-shaven. His dark eyes glitter like black pearls and those who have met him say that they must be cybernetic. His knowledge of geology and mineralogy are unparalleled. Hasse is not a nice man, or a pleasant one. He knows that he is very good at what he does, that what he does is important and that the Federation values his services. This makes him intolerably arrogant. He also hates to waste time and will walk away from a conversation if it bores him or if he has already learned what he needed. Hasse's job suits him perfectly because he is allowed tremendous leeway on what he studies and how he studies it. He does not bother with protocols unless they work in his favour and despises men like Sergeant DeLaine who slavishly obey every command and abide by every regulation.

DR. ANDRES HASSE

Civilian 10; hp: 13; Init: +1; Spd: 30 ft.; DV: 15; DR:–; BAB/Grp: +3/+2; Atk: punch +2 melee; Dmg: punch 1d3-1; Space/Reach: 5 ft.(1)/5 ft.(1); SA:–; SQ: Background (technician/scientist), Expertise (Knowledge (earth & life sciences)), Government Notice, Motivated (+3 bonus to Will saves) Reputation, Ubiquitous; SV: Fort +3, Ref +6, Will +7; Str 9, Dex 12, Con 10, Int 16, Wis 8, Cha 12; Skills & Feats: Computer Use +9, Concentration +1, Demolitions +4, Investigate +3, Knowledge (earth & life sciences)



+13, Knowledge (physical sciences) +10, Knowledge (technology) +6, Perception +2, Persuasion +1, Repair +5, Research +12, Technical (chemical) +10, Technical (electrical) +3, Technical (mechanical) +2; Confident, Educated (Knowledge (earth & life sciences) & Knowledge (physical sciences)), Endurance, Language (Latin-Based), Language (Slavic), Language (Germanic); **Prestige:** +5

Equipment: chemical kit, databox, demolitions kit, basic evidence kit, multipurpose tool

Holly Ayers, Andres' right-hand, is a short round woman with plain features and mousy brown hair. She is a pleasant enough woman, bright and a bit sarcastic. Holly does not suffer fools well and will snap at people who get in her way or who do or say idiotic things. She idolises Hasse and obeys him without question. While Hasse has more general geological knowledge, Holly understands practicalities better. She is also better with explosives.

HOLLY AYERS

Civilian 5; hp: 11; **Init:** +1; **Spd:** 30 ft.; **DV:** 13; **DR:**—; **BAB/Grp:**+1/+0; **Atk:** punch +0 melee; **Dmg:** punch 1d3-1; **Space/Reach:** 5 ft.(1)/5 ft.(1); **SA:**—; **SQ:** Background (technician/scientists), Expertise (Demolitions), Government Notice, Motivated (+1 bonus to Fort saves), Ubiquitous; **SV:** Fort +2, Ref +4, Will +2; Str 9, Dex 12, Con 10, Int 16, Wis 8, Cha 15; **Skills & Feats:** Computer Use +7, Concentration +1, Demolitions +8, Drive +2, Knowledge (earth and life sciences) +7, Knowledge (technology)+8, Perception -1, Persuasion +3, Repair +5, Research +7, Sabotage +5, Technical (electrical)-1; Confident, Educated (Knowledge (earth and life sciences) & Knowledge (technology)), Endurance, Language (Latin-Based), Language (Slavic), Language (Germanic); **Prestige:** +2
Equipment: chemical kit, databox, demolitions kit, basic evidence kit, multipurpose tool

Gamal Malik is a short, swarthy man with dark curls and a neat beard and moustache. He is quiet but friendly and surprisingly heavy on his feet for such a small man. His specialty is mineral deposits and topologies. He knows very little about practical applications, however – his interest lies entirely with minerals still in the ground.

GAMAL MALIK

Civilian 5; hp: 11; **Init:** -1; **Spd:** 30 ft.; **DV:** 11; **DR:**—; **BAB/Grp:**+1/+0; **Atk:** punch +0 melee; **Dmg:** punch 1d3-1; **Space/Reach:** 5 ft.(1)/5 ft.(1); **SA:**—; **SQ:** Background (technician/scientists), Expertise (Knowledge (earth and life sciences)), Government Notice, Motivated (+1 bonus to Fort saves), Ubiquitous; **SV:** Fort +2, Ref +2, Will +3; Str 9, Dex 8, Con 10, Int 15, Wis 10, Cha 15; **Skills & Feats:** Athletics +3, Computer Use +7, Concentration +1, Demolitions +1, Drive +2, Investigate +2, Knowledge (earth and life sciences) +3, Knowledge (physical sciences) +7, Perception +4, Persuasion +3, Repair +1, Research +4, Survival +1, Technical (structural) +3; Confident, Educated (Knowledge (earth and life sciences) & Knowledge (physical sciences)), Endurance, Language (Latin-Based), Language (Slavic), Language (Germanic); **Prestige:** +2

Equipment: chemical kit, databox, surveying equipment, basic evidence kit, multipurpose tool

Katarina 'Trina' Foubert is a stunning woman. Barely five feet tall, she has a trim, athletic figure and a pixieish face accentuated by the bright red hair she wears up in a ponytail. She dresses well and wears small but tasteful jewellery. Trina loves attention, particularly from men – rumors claim that she joined the science division less because it gave her a chance to study cave formations (her specialty) than for the chance to be around so many men in uniform. Trina loves to manipulate men and has seduced several officers with no concern for the consequences.

KATARINA FOUBERT

Civilian 5; hp: 11; **Init:** +2; **Spd:** 30 ft.; **DV:** 14; **DR:**—; **BAB/Grp:**+1/+0; **Atk:** punch +0 melee; **Dmg:** punch 1d3-1; **Space/Reach:** 5 ft.(1)/5 ft.(1); **SA:**—; **SQ:** Background (technician/scientists), Expertise (Knowledge (earth and life sciences)), Government Notice, Motivated (+1 bonus to Fort saves), Ubiquitous; **SV:** Fort +2, Ref +5, Will +4; Str 9, Dex 14, Con 10, Int 12, Wis 12, Cha 17; **Skills & Feats:** Acrobatics +3, Athletics +8, Computer Use +3, Concentration +1, Escape Artist +3, Demolitions +4, Investigate +2, Knowledge (earth and life sciences) +7, Knowledge (physical sciences) +4, Perception +3, Persuasion

+8, Repair +1, Survival +4, Technical (structural) +1; Confident, Educated (Knowledge (earth and life sciences) & Knowledge (physical sciences)), Endurance, Language (Latin-Based), Language (Slavic), Language (Germanic); **Prestige:** +2

Equipment: climbing gear, chemical kit, databox, demolitions kit, basic evidence kit, multipurpose tool

Miguel Ceserre is a stout man of average height. He looks fat but is all muscle. His round face, dusky skin, glossy black hair and neat beard make him look sophisticated but approachable, a look he cultivates and encourages. Ceserre is constantly trying to better himself by reading classic literature or studying fine wines or art history or some other aspect of high society, past or present. He is extremely pretentious and can be a tremendous bore. His teammates do not particularly like him but they value his abilities and his loyalty. Ceserre is the team's fabricator and builds all of their prototypes. He also crafted – and in many cases designed – their tools.

MIGUEL CESERRE

Civilian 5; hp: 15; **Init:** +3; **Spd:** 30 ft.; **DV:** 15; **DR:**–; **BAB/Grp:** +1/+3; **Atk:** punch +3 melee; **Dmg:** punch 1d3+2; **Space/Reach:** 5 ft.(1)/5 ft.(1); **SA:**–; **SQ:** Background (technician/scientists), Expertise (Technical (mechanical)), Government Notice, Motivated (+1 bonus to Fort saves), Ubiquitous; **SV:** Fort +4, Ref +6, Will +2; Str 14, Dex 16, Con 14, Int 14, Wis 8, Cha 8; **Skills & Feats:** Computer Use +3, Concentration +4, Demolitions +6, Drive +3, Knowledge (physical sciences) +5, Knowledge (technology) +8, Perception +3, Repair +8, Sabotage +8, Sleight of Hand +3, Survival +1, Technical (chemical) +7, Technical (electrical) +6, Technical (mechanical) +8; Confident, Educated (Knowledge (technology) & Technical (mechanical)), Endurance, Language (Latin-Based), Language (Slavic), Language (Germanic); **Prestige:** +2

Equipment: chemical kit, databox, demolitions kit, metalsmithing tools, basic evidence kit, multipurpose tool

Dana Bridger is tall and slender, with a pretty face, long dark blond hair and a willowy figure. She has never

thought of herself as attractive and does not bother to dress up, preferring comfortable clothing. Dana does not wear makeup or jewellery either. She is very soft-spoken and more than a little shy around new people but has a surprisingly sharp sense of humour once she relaxes. She is the team's computers expert and also their seismologist.

DANA BRIDGER

Civilian 5; hp: 11; **Init:** +2; **Spd:** 30 ft.; **DV:** 14; **DR:**–; **BAB/Grp:** +1/+0; **Atk:** punch +0 melee; **Dmg:** punch 1d3-1; **Space/Reach:** 5 ft.(1)/5 ft.(1); **SA:**–; **SQ:** Background (technician/scientists), Expertise (Computer Use), Government Notice, Motivated (+1 bonus to Fort saves), Ubiquitous; **SV:** Fort +2, Ref +5, Will +4; Str 9, Dex 14, Con 10, Int 15, Wis 12, Cha 15; **Skills & Feats:** Code-breaking +6, Computer Use +8, Concentration +3, Demolitions +4, Knowledge (earth and life sciences) +7, Knowledge (technology) +8, Perception +3, Repair +2, Research +6, Sabotage +3, Survival +2, Technical (electrical) +3; Confident, Educated (Computer Use & Knowledge (earth and life sciences)), Endurance, Language (Latin-Based), Language (computer), Language (Germanic); **Prestige:** +2

Equipment: chemical kit, pair of linked databoxes, seismic measuring tools, basic evidence kit, multipurpose tool

Nathaniel 'Nate' Atkins is a short, slight man with close-cropped black hair and fine features. A quiet man with a soft voice and a shy smile, Nate's specialty is chemistry, particularly distilling and purifying natural materials to create new compounds. He and Cesarre often work closely together, and Nate tolerates Cesarre better than most of his team mates.

NATHANIEL ATKINS

Civilian 5; hp: 11; **Init:** +1; **Spd:** 30 ft.; **DV:** 13; **DR:**–; **BAB/Grp:** +1/+0; **Atk:** punch +1 melee; **Dmg:** punch 1d3; **Space/Reach:** 5 ft.(1)/5 ft.(1); **SA:**–; **SQ:** Background (technician/scientists), Expertise (Technical (chemical)), Government Notice, Motivated (+1 bonus to Fort saves), Ubiquitous; **SV:** Fort +2, Ref +4, Will +4; Str 10, Dex 12, Con 10, Int 16, Wis 12, Cha 12; **Skills & Feats:** Computer Use

+7, Concentration +6, Demolitions +4, Knowledge (earth and life sciences) +3, Knowledge (physical sciences) +8, Knowledge (technology) +4, Perception +2, Persuasion +1, Research +5, Survival +1, Technical (chemical) +8, Technical (electrical) +1; Confident, Educated (Knowledge (physical sciences) & Technical (chemical)), Endurance, Language (Latin-Based), Language (Slavic), Language (Germanic); **Prestige:** +2
Equipment: extended chemical kit, databox, demolitions kit, basic evidence kit, multipurpose tool

Lena Mattheson is a large muscular black woman with broad shoulders and chest, a handsome face and dark hair cropped close. Lena is the team's prospector and driller – once Gamal, Dana, Trina and Link locate the deposits, Lena blasts or digs or hacks them free. She enjoys her work immensely. Unlike the rest of the team, Lena was not originally a scientist. She was a miner, drilling and digging for ore on various planets before a supervisor noticed her and recommended her for additional schooling and advanced training. Though intimidating, Lena is surprisingly friendly provided people are honest and direct with her. She gets along well with soldiers because, like them, she is very physical and very direct.

LENA MATTHESON

Civilian 5; hp: 15; **Init:** +0; **Spd:** 30 ft.; **DV:** 12; **DR:** –; **BAB/Grp:** +1/+4; **Atk:** punch +4 melee; **Dmg:** punch 1d3+3; **Space/Reach:** 5 ft.(1)/5 ft.(1); **SA:** –; **SQ:** Background (blue collar), Expertise (Demolitions), Government Notice, Motivated (+1 bonus to Fort saves), Ubiquitous; **SV:** Fort +4, Ref +3, Will +4; Str 16, Dex 10, Con 14, Int 13, Wis 13, Cha 14; **Skills & Feats:** Athletics +4, Concentration +3, Demolitions +8, Knowledge (earth and life sciences) +4, Knowledge (physical sciences) +4, Knowledge (streetwise) +2, Knowledge (technology) +3, Perception +1, Persuasion +3, Repair +3, Sabotage +5, Survival +5, Technical (electrical) +1, Technical (mechanical) +3; Confident, Educated (Knowledge (physical sciences) & Knowledge (technology)), Endurance, Language (Latin-Based), Language (Slavic), Language (Germanic); **Prestige:** +2
Equipment: chemical kit, databox, demolitions kit, personal drilling rig, multipurpose tool

Carl Rory is average height and slightly stocky, with thick brown hair that stands up in clumps all over his head. When excited he tends to tug on these clumps, which makes them stand up even more. Carl always looks ruffled, like he slept in his clothes. Often he did. He is very focused on his work and very absent-minded about everything else. Carl is a theoretical xenogeologist, which means his specialty is imagining what rock formations and mineral combinations other planets might possess and how those could be useful.

CARL RORY

Civilian 5; hp: 9; **Init:** +0; **Spd:** 30 ft.; **DV:** 12; **DR:** –; **BAB/Grp:** +1/+0; **Atk:** punch +0 melee; **Dmg:** punch 1d3-1; **Space/Reach:** 5 ft.(1)/5 ft.(1); **SA:** –; **SQ:** Background (technician/scientists), Expertise (Knowledge (earth and life sciences)), Government Notice, Motivated (+1 bonus to Fort saves), Ubiquitous; **SV:** Fort +1, Ref +3, Will +2; Str 9, Dex 11, Con 8, Int 17, Wis 8, Cha 10; **Skills & Feats:** Computer Use +4, Concentration +7, Demolitions +2, Knowledge (alien species: bug) +3, Knowledge (earth and life sciences) +5, Knowledge (physical sciences) +8, Knowledge (technology) +2, Perception –1, Survival –1, Technical (electrical) +2; Confident, Educated (Knowledge (earth and life sciences) & Knowledge (physical sciences)), Endurance, Language (Latin-Based), Language (Slavic), Language (Germanic); **Prestige:** +2
Equipment: chemical kit, databox, basic evidence kit, multipurpose tool

Lincoln 'Link' Solomon is a small wiry man with dark hair already showing silver and a thick silvery beard. He does not socialise well and frequently sits off to one side mumbling to himself. Link is a 'rockhound.' He is an expert at finding and identifying rocks and minerals but does not use established scientific methods. He simply feels the location of the rock, just like an old-world dowser feels the presence of water. Hasse has speculated that Link may be psychic, but thus far testing has not revealed any psychic ability – if he is psychic, the power is too narrowly focused and too weak to register on the normal tests. The other scientists often tease Link about his smelling rocks and several of them look down upon him for his lack of science but they all respect his ability.

LINGOLN SOLOMON

Civilian 5; hp: 13; **Init:** +2; **Spd:** 30 ft.; **DV:** 14; **DR:**—; **BAB/Grp:** +1/+1; **Atk:** punch +1 melee; **Dmg:** punch 1d3; **Space/Reach:** 5 ft.(1)/5 ft.(1); **SA:**—; **SQ:** Background (technician/scientists), Expertise (Knowledge (earth and life sciences)), Government Notice, Motivated (+1 bonus to Fort saves), Ubiquitous; **SV:** Fort +3, Ref +5, Will +6; Str 10, Dex 14, Con 12, Int 13, Wis 16, Cha 11; **Skills & Feats:** Athletics +6, Concentration +8, Demolitions +2, Escape Artist +2, Investigate +4, Knowledge (earth and life sciences) +4, Knowledge (physical sciences) +2, Knowledge (technology) +2, Perception +8, Sabotage +2, Stealth +2, Survival +3; Confident, Educated (Knowledge (earth and life sciences) & Knowledge (physical sciences)), Endurance, Language (Latin-Based), Language (Slavic), Language (Germanic); **Prestige:** +2 **Equipment:** chemical kit, databox, demolitions kit, basic evidence kit, multipurpose tool

BASE OF OPERATIONS

Once the introductions are made, Alvarez suggests they set up camp.

'Absolutely,' Hasse agrees, and begins pointing to various spots around them. 'My sleeping quarters will go there, and the laboratory should be there. We'll need a storage shed – that can go there. The others can select their own sleeping sights.'

Alvarez actually looks shocked for an instant before he regains control. 'With all due respect, Doctor,' he says, 'this is not the best place to set up camp. The Skyhooks are difficult to miss and any hostiles nearby will know our exact location already. I suggest we move into the hills behind us and find a more defensible location.'

Hasse looks at Alvarez as if the Lieutenant were insane. 'This is a perfectly good spot,' he insists. 'Level enough, open enough and there's water nearby. Besides, we're already here.' When Alvarez starts to object again, Hasse cuts him off. 'I insist, Lieutenant,' he says, and walks away.

The Lieutenant sighs and salutes. 'Yes, sir!'

Alvarez then turns to Case and tells her to get it done. Case assigns various Angels to assembling the camp. The Player Characters will be tasked with setting up tents or digging latrines or carrying the researchers' belongings to their respective sleeping quarters. The Angels do not bother with tents for themselves but stake out an area on one side of the camp, closer to the hills, to stretch out.

This work is not difficult and troopers have plenty of experience pitching tents and carrying crates. For the Player Characters this is almost like a return to boot camp. Most of the researchers alternate between staying out of the way and hovering protectively by their belongings. Lena carries her own gear, however, and pitches her own tent.

Once camp has been set up, the researchers effectively ignore the Angels. Alvarez sets up watches with an Angel at each compass point and three more circling plus one up in the hills as an advance lookout. The rest of the troopers are allowed to relax, though Case warns them to stay sharp. If the researchers ask for anything, the Angels are expected to comply, from fetching some water to repositioning a tent to accompanying someone into the hills.

For the next few hours the researchers stay in the lab tent. They have brought a portable toilet which is in the back corner of that tent, so none of them even come out to use the latrine. The tent material muffles noise well and no loud sounds emanate from within. The sentries report no signs of movement or activity. All is quiet.

EXPLORATIONS

Finally Hasse and the other researchers step out of the tent. Gamal, Trina, Lena and Link are with him.

'We need to look around,' Hasse announces, already walking toward the hills, and Alvarez quickly gestures several Angels to accompany the scientists. 'I want two of you with each of them at all times,' he tells the 15 men selected. 'Someone else take point, someone take rearguard and the rest of you set up a roving patrol.'

Donovan is one of the men included and he immediately assigns various troopers to the researchers. The Player Characters are among those selected.

Hasse does not slow down but the others will stop and wait for the troopers to surround them. Gamal and Lena are friendly, Trina flirtatious, while Link stays quiet and focused.

The entire group enters the hills and pauses while the researchers confer. Then they split up. Gamal heads for the highest hill in sight, carrying his surveying equipment. Trina heads for a stretch of low, rocky hills. Link makes for a small valley. Lena and Hasse seem to wander aimlessly, though away from each other and the rest of the team.

Gamal will stay on his hill and survey the area. Trina hopes to find caves in the lower hills and will start exploring them. Link, Lena and Hasse are simply walking around looking for anything interesting. Gamal will welcome the Angels' company and help, though he gets quiet while actually surveying. Trina will continue to flirt with her escort, though she forgets about them once she's actually in the caves. Lena chats amiably with her guards. Link and Hasse ignore the troopers completely. The PCs can make an Perception check (DC 10) if watching the researchers carefully. Success means the PCs notice the researchers collecting samples of local rocks and dirt. None of them will talk about what they took or why, however, even when asked directly.

While roving around, the Player Characters should make Perception checks (DC 15). Success means they have noticed subtle hints that something large has moved through the area recently – something at least the size of an armoured trooper. Those who get 20 or higher will also notice that several 'somethings' have passed by within the past week. Uglytown has not shown any wildlife larger than a small bird, which means either the planet has some surprises for them or the troopers and the researchers are not alone here.



If this is reported to Alvarez, he warns the Angels to stay alert but reminds them that this is not a combat mission. They are to take defensive action only.

Bug Complications

At least one of the sets (researcher plus two troopers) will see bugs. The Games Master can choose randomly, or select the set most likely to have an entertaining reaction. The Angels patrolling may also spot bugs, but it is more interesting to have the researchers involved in the situation.

The bugs in question are patrolling packs of warriors, each pack consisting of $d3+1$ creatures. The packs are roving around the area near to their nest and, while not actively aware of the human presence, they will relentlessly pursue any troopers or researchers if they locate them.

If Hasse sees bugs he will become annoyed and start saying how he is never allowed to work in peace. He may even rant at the bugs themselves until they get within one hundred feet. Then he will become terrified and freeze.

Gamal gets worried when he sees bugs. He quickly packs up his gear and asks the Angels what they should do. He will follow the troopers' directions without question until safely back in camp.

Trina will act terrified. She is scared but deliberately plays it up to get sympathy from her escort. Her first instinct is to move deeper into the caves where she is more comfortable. This is a bad idea, of course, since bugs are adept at tunnelling and attacking while underground.

Lena gets excited when she sees the bugs. 'All right!' she says. 'I've always wanted to blow up some of those ugly critters!' She will follow the troopers' directions but is disappointed if they don't stand and fight.

Link barely notices the bugs and has to be forcibly restrained from wandering into their path. When told why he will shrug and smile, clearly a little embarrassed. After that he will follow the troopers' directions meekly.

The troopers have three choices once they see bugs. They can run, they can fight or they can hide.

Since the Angels have been specifically ordered to avoid combat when possible, the troopers should run or hide. Hiding would avoid the risk of drawing more attention, though if they hide and are found by bugs the troopers and their researchers may be outnumbered and unable to escape or call for help. Running may actually draw attention, since the bugs are alert to sudden motion. The bugs are also fast enough to catch up to the unarmoured researchers easily, even if they have a significant head start. While simply picking up the researcher and using jump jets to bounce back to base rapidly will easily outdistance the warriors, it is also a very visible and undeniable confirmation of human presence and may also provoke the bugs into



bringing out their aerial assets in retaliation. Fighting will confirm SICON's presence on Uglytown, though if the bugs have seen troopers this will be a moot point. It will attract every bug in the area, however, and the survey team will quickly find itself surrounded and outnumbered.

The other issue for the Angels are the researchers they have been charged to protect. Trina is an expert at rock-climbing and spelunking and can easily hide herself deep in the caves. She will not make a sound once she's hidden and anchored. Gamal will be quiet and attentive but he is slow and clumsy and awful at hiding. Lena is reasonably fast on her feet but not very subtle. Link is quick enough but does not really understand the dangers involved. Hasse understands completely and is paralysed with fear. A pair of troopers on their own could run back to base camp and evade any bugs in the area but carrying or herding or restraining a researcher does not help matters.

Groups trying to hide will need to make Stealth checks, opposed by the Perception checks of the warrior bugs. The environment in which they try to hide will affect their check – hunkering down on the top of a hill imposes a -2 circumstance penalty to the Stealth check while groups taking cover in the caves benefit from a +2 circumstance bonus instead. Success means the bugs have not noticed them and will not detect them unless the troopers or researcher make a sudden noise or a violent movement. The bugs will search the area thoroughly for the next ten minutes before moving on to a different part of the hills.

Running becomes a straight Athletics check (DC20, increased to 22 if crossing a hill) with a -2 circumstance penalty if carrying or hauling a researcher. Success means the troopers have outrun the bugs in their area. Running and avoiding notice involves both the Athletics check and a Stealth check as detailed above. Success means the bugs have not noticed them at all. Failure on the Stealth check means the bugs did notice but (depending upon the Athletics check) could not catch up in time. The bugs will give chase to anyone they see and will begin actively searching for a camp if the runners disappear or pass from view.

The PCs will only encounter a handful of warrior bugs among the hills. However, if the bugs see people they will call for reinforcements and more than 20 warrior bugs will arrive within the next 3d6 minutes, as well as 1d6 rippler bugs if the Mobile Infantry start using jump jets. Once the bugs have spotted people, Uglytown becomes a war zone and Alvarez immediately puts his troopers on full alert and notifies Captain McAdams of the change in plans.

The researchers react differently to the possibility of danger. Hasse will scorn any warnings and continue his examinations of the area until he himself sees bugs or he is forced to retreat. Gamal will stop everything the minute he hears bugs have been sighted and packs up his gear immediately. Trina will continue her explorations until told to stop, though her flirting does trail off as she becomes more focused. Lena urges the troopers with her to seek out the bugs and kill them, and she offers to help. Link is oblivious until told specifically about the danger. Then he shrugs and goes back to wandering until the troopers force him to retreat.

Alvarez wants to abort the survey and get the researchers and his own Angels off Uglytown immediately. Hasse refuses. If he did not see bugs himself he laughs at the notion of danger and says that no oversized insect will drive him from the find of a lifetime. 'We have you to protect us,' he tells Alvarez with a sneer. 'So, protect us.' Several of the researchers look worried but Hasse assures them that the Angels will keep them all perfectly safe and urges or bullies the others into returning to the lab tent and getting back to work.

If Hasse did encounter bugs, he is very shaken. He vents his fear by shouting at Alvarez, demanding to know why his men allowed the bugs to get so close. Hasse accuses Alvarez of incompetence, telling him the Angels had one simple job and they blew it. He still refuses to consider leaving, however. Instead Hasse tells Alvarez that the research will continue as planned and that he will hold Alvarez personally responsible if any of his staff are hurt.

SIDE PLOTS

Depending upon how long it takes the Player Characters to decide about the mission, what they choose and how long the Games Master wishes this adventure to last, he may want to add side plots to further complicate the story. Here are a few possibilities:

DOWN THE LINE

Trina is a lovely woman and she knows it. She enjoys flirting with and, frankly, seducing military men. Here she has an entire platoon of Mobile Infantry troopers to play with. She picks one at random, seduces him and then moves on to another. This can create tensions among the men and lead to arguments, competitions and even fights. Nor are the officers immune – both Donovan and DeLaine are vying for her attentions.

CALLED AWAY

Bugs have been sighted but not yet engaged. Alvarez receives a communication from Captain McAdams. The *Magsaysay* has picked up a distress call from a civilian ship a light-year away. Upon reporting the call, SICON ordered her to render all possible aid immediately and then return for the Angels and the researchers afterward. She is preparing for departure while speaking to Alvarez and signs off to take the ship back out of orbit and out of the system. Now the Angels and the researchers are stranded on Uglytown. Hasse, of course, feels this means Alvarez has no choice but to let them continue their work. Alvarez may agree or he may decide that they need to set up better defences and a more hidden location if they want to survive until the *Magsaysay* returns.

CENTRE MASS

Gamal gives his surveying information to Dana and Trina shares her information as well. Dana uses that to create a computer model of Uglytown, inside and out – and discovers an anomaly. The mass readings are indicating there must be a substantial hollow in the planetary crust somewhere in the vicinity – exactly the kind of presence that a bug community would have. Now Alvarez has more reason to suspect bugs nearby but his orders have not changed.

WAYWARD SHEEP

Link wanders off in search of rocks and gives his escort the slip. Hasse is furious and so is Alvarez. The rest of the Angels are organized and sent on a search-and-rescue to locate the missing researcher. Will they find him before the bugs do?

TRAINING GROUND

Cesarre needs a firing range. He does not say why, and he does not carry a weapon – none of the researchers do. Still, he tells Alvarez to build him a firing range and the Lieutenant immediately details several troopers to handle it. What does the researcher want the range for? Does it have anything to do with their presence on Uglytown? If he does start firing off weapons, how will they continue to avoid attention from bugs?

CAVE-IN

Trina and her escort are exploring a cave when Uglytown experiences a small tremor. The seismic waves shake loose several large boulders which seal the cave. Alvarez dispatches a handful of troopers to dig the trio back out.

BACKING OFF

Captain McAdams contacts Alvarez to tell him that bug activity has been spotted on UG-1770C, the third planet in the system. She has reported this to SICON and they ordered her to pull the *Magsaysay* out of the system before it is spotted and compromises their interest in Uglytown. McAdams is willing to violate protocol and make one fast pickup attempt before she breaks orbit but it has to occur immediately. This pressures the Angels to decide their course right away and to overrule Hasse if he decides they should stay. Otherwise they will all be stranded on this world until SICON feels it is safe to send the *Magsaysay* back in.

OUT FOR BLOOD

Lena gets along better with the Angels than the rest of the researchers. She has struck up a friendship with her escort and is fascinated by their weapons. Eventually she coaxes them into letting her try firing the Morita. She proves to be a natural with it and is thrilled. Two days later Lena is missing at breakfast – and so is one of the Moritas. Where did she go? Why did she need

the rifle? She was the only researcher excited about the idea of fighting bugs – could she have gone looking for them?

ON THE OFFENSIVE

At some point Alvarez (or, if he's hurt, Case) may decide that enough is enough. Their orders are to avoid combat unless necessary but that 'necessary' is nicely vague. If the bugs have marked their presence here and start attacking the Angels can justify fighting back in self-defence and in protection of the researchers. Yet what if the bugs have not yet attacked? At what point can they justify hunting bugs instead of waiting to be hunted?

There is also a question of official orders versus unofficial suggestions. Alvarez and Case are no happier about their orders than the troopers. They would rather find and kill any bugs nearby, rather than looking over their shoulders constantly. Case may even suggest to some Angels that they take a walk through the hills 'and be noisy about it.' After all, if the bugs find them and attack first the Angels are allowed to fight back. With enough deliberate blundering the Angels are sure to draw bug attention and get the fight they are craving.

Individual troopers, especially the Player Characters, may even take it upon themselves to search for bugs. If a pair of Angels locates a pack of bugs and attacks, they can always lie later and say the bugs attacked first. Case and Alvarez may reprimand them privately but the officers will all support them publicly.

If the Angels have thus far managed to maintain a low profile and keep the researchers quiet, the bugs will not yet notice them. This situation cannot last indefinitely, however. If nothing else, when Cesarre begins experimenting with his first experimental explosives on the firing range, the bugs will notice the disturbance. At that point the Angels will find themselves on the defensive unless they have already begun fighting the bugs. The Games Master should keep track of the researchers and the troopers, however, and watch for situations where their actions might draw bug attention and force the issue.

AN EXPLOSIVE SITUATION

Hasse has been secretive about his reasons for studying Uglytown and has ordered the other researchers not to talk about their studies or the results. This is a small camp, however, and it is difficult to maintain a secret here, especially since the researchers grow more excited as their tests yield results.

Player Characters can make Investigate checks (DC 10) to pick up clues about the purpose of this mission and of Uglytown's worth. Player Characters who have formed a friendship or bond with any of the researchers they are guarding will benefit from a +2 circumstance bonus to this check. Those who succeed will learn some or all of the following from the researchers, at the Games Master's discretion:

- ⊕ The planet has nothing of value on it – but is valuable itself.
- ⊕ Uglytown could be a major weapon against the bugs.
- ⊕ This would be a lousy place for an alcoholic.
- ⊕ It is a good thing Arachnids don't drink.
- ⊕ Several members of the team, including Hasse himself, enjoy a drink or two after hours but they are all utterly sober on this trip and bemoaning that fact.
- ⊕ Most of the researchers are not just geologists. They are demolitions experts.
- ⊕ Cesarre has begun fashioning small objects in his corner of the lab tent.
- ⊕ Hidden away in the storage tent is a case containing wine. It is carefully packed and sealed, far more carefully than would normally be required. The storage tent also has a thin plastic sheet under it and the case is set atop another box.

These clues should be dropped in casual conversations with the researchers or learned through looking carefully around the camp.

A week after their arrival, the researchers can no longer keep their interests secret because Cesarre begins his testing. He steps out to the firing range and sets down a life-sized dummy and a small rock. The rock is the ugly gray-green-brown of Uglytown. Then he steps

back to the far end of the range and pulls out an old-fashioned slingshot and a small glass vial. Cesarre sets the vial in the sling and fires it at the rock, scoring a direct hit. The vial shatters upon impact – and a large explosion vaporizes the dummy and digs a small crater in the ground around it.

Now that the secret is out, the researchers want to brag. Certain chemical compounds found as rock formations on Uglytown are highly explosive, Hasse reveals. In fact, they are one of the most powerful naturally-occurring explosives discovered and, furthermore, are easily accessible and abundant here.

The real beauty of the Uglyrocks is their stability. They are completely stable and cannot be detonated by any means, electrical, chemical, or otherwise, without the trigger – tannic acid, the acid found in wine. Once that is added, however, the rock becomes completely unstable and will detonate without further encouragement. Fortunately, Arachnids seem unfamiliar with wine and with fermentation in general. Xenobiologists theorize that tannic acid may actually be poisonous to the bugs. This means the bugs have no chance of realizing what the Uglyrocks can do or of creating weapons from them. Uglytown's crust is riddled with deposits of this rock and with an entire planet to mine for raw materials, SICON is eager to safeguard the system and begin extracting Uglyrocks and creating new weapons for the war against the bugs.

Hasse now enlists the troopers in helping them test the explosives. They try different sizes and shapes of rock, and different amounts of wine delivered in different ways. The results are uniform. No matter how large or small the rock, a single drop of wine is enough to start the chain reaction that detonates the entire mass. In

theory, if wine were spilled in a cave then a large part of the planet's crust could be blasted to pieces, although the likelihood of a single such concentrated deposit is unlikely.

After several days testing the rocks themselves, Cesarre unveils his invention: the shaker. This is a small hollow ball of thin plastic. Inside it are an Uglyrock, loosely padded, and a glass vial holding several drops of wine. When the shaker is hurled at something, the padding keeps the rock and vial separate and the vial intact during flight. Upon impact the plastic shell crumples, the vial shatters and the rock and wine connect. The result is an impressive explosion. The shaker is roughly the same size and weight as a TOAD charge, four times more powerful and completely inert as long as the vial remains intact.

If the bugs have attacked, Cesarre will speed up the testing and manufacturing process to produce the shakers more quickly. Hasse will speak to Alvarez in private and explain about the rocks. He will then offer to supply the Angels with shakers to use against the bugs. This is why SICON sent his team to Uglytown, after all. If the shakers work they will provide a cheap and effective way to destroy whole packs of bugs at once and an easy method for sealing hives.

Cesarre has a long table in the back corner of the lab tent. His tools are spread haphazardly across the surface, along with rock chips, plastic shavings and several prototype shaker casings. The completed shakers are kept in a small covered box under the table. Cesarre is slightly paranoid and has rigged his own security system, a series of infrared beams projecting from fingernail-sized emitters placed at the table corners and attached to the legs down below. Any movement on

UGLYTOWN EXPLOSIVES

Weapon	Direct Hit/ Damage	Damage Type	Burst Radius	Reflex DC	Range	Size	Weight	Req. DC
Uglyrock	3d10	Explosion	30 ft.	18	Placed	Diminutive	.5 lb.	-
Uglytown 'shaker'	10d6	Explosion	50 ft.	22	40 ft.	Diminutive	2 lb.	-

Note: Uglytown explosives are not available for normal Mobile Infantry missions as SICON will need some time to set up mining facilities on the planet and then process the rocks into refined explosives.

the tabletop or under the table will set off the alarm, which sounds a small siren and also beeps Cesarre's databox. Disarming the alarm requires a Dexterity check or a Technical (electronic) check (DC 20). The alarm can also be deactivated from Cesarre's databox, which he keeps on him at all times. Getting into the tent itself is easy, since most of the researchers do not stay up late and they have separate sleeping quarters. Getting in and out unnoticed is more difficult and requires a Stealth check opposed by the Perception check of any troopers watching the area or any alert and awake researchers. The tent is standard material and can be cut open using a combat knife. If Cesarre's alarm is disabled, someone could cut open the tent behind his table and pull the box of completed shakers out through the gap.

BUG CENTRAL

Unless the researchers curtail their survey, after 1d6+2 days they find a large cave opening in the side of a hill near the edge of the hilly region. The opening is easily 20 feet to a side and almost smooth along the edges. Right before it is a small clearing. Anyone with bug experience recognizes it as a hive entrance.

The bugs have other entrances, of course, in the form of small tunnels that end just below the surface. A warrior can break through in less than a minute and attack intruders from the side or from behind. Those tunnels are too small for more than a single warrior to emerge at a time, however. This is the only large entrance and it is the one commonly used by the bugs. It has not been left unguarded. Cliff mites adhere to rocks around the clearing and transmit their perceptions to the brain bug beneath, alerting him the instant a trooper or scout appears. A tanker bug has burrowed up just below the clearing, right before the cave entrance, and will attack when sufficient foes have gathered above it.

Once Alvarez is told about the hive entrance, he sends troopers to verify it. Then he, Case and the other officers confer on the next step. They can enter the cave and explore the tunnels but the bugs will certainly have the entrance watched and will send warriors to stop them. They can blow the entrance, trapping the

bugs temporarily and allowing them time to escape and report back to Military Intelligence, though the bugs themselves will be unharmed. Alternatively they can set patrols to watch the entrance and alert them whenever bugs emerge, using that information to help them avoid any direct encounters. The Player Characters might be sent to verify the entrance's presence or assigned to whatever final course of action is chosen for dealing with the Arachnids.

If the Angels have not encountered bugs on Uglytown yet, Alvarez will decide to maintain non-combat status and continue the mission as instructed. He posts rotating sentries to watch the entrance and report any bug sightings, and he warns the troopers to stay out of sight.

If the Angels have fought bugs on this world already, Alvarez reasons that they have nothing left to lose by attacking. He orders his troopers to blow up the hive entrance. Hopefully this will pin the bugs down until the researchers and the Angels are safely off-planet.

Alvarez will not enter the hive itself unless he must. If the bugs have abducted any researchers or troopers, he will send his troopers in to rescue them. Likewise, if anyone has been foolish enough to wander into the hive voluntarily, the Angels will be tasked with getting them back out safely.

If the Angels attack, Alvarez will have them skirt the centre of the clearing and approach the entrance. The tanker bug emerges but the troopers are surrounding it rather than atop it and they may be able to make short work of the ungainly Arachnid. The cliff mites may also attack but, while small and fast, they are easy to spot in full daylight and can be picked off by alert troopers while still a safe distance away.

The hive is not a large one because it was only recently formed. It has six full levels and close to one hundred tunnels, however, and is roughly ten miles in diameter. Commanding the hive is a single brain bug with a large retinue of harmless chariot bugs to carry it through the tunnels. There are also roughly 50 cliff mites, 50 ripplers, 100 blister bugs, 100 warriors and 500

workers. The tanker bug beneath the nest entrance is the only one of that bug strain to have yet been bred in the hive but there is also a plasma bug hidden within its tunnels, not yet fully grown but capable of hurling devastating plasma nonetheless. The brain bug resides in the very centre of the hive while most of the workers are along the perimeters, digging to extend the tunnels and carve new levels in the rock. The rippers have a cavern dug near the hive entrance so they can fly out easily. They will of course not be very effective once the troopers have entered the hive, however, because the tunnels are not wide enough or high enough for them to fly effectively. The blister bugs and warriors are spaced throughout the hive to stop intruders and will mass to block the troopers' approach. The plasma bug is kept in reserve until the bugs can bring it to bear on any aerial assets that the Angels call down from the *Magsaysay*, though a particularly successful assault on the hive might locate and destroy it before it can ever leave the dark tunnels.

Anyone who enters the hive will face a large number of bugs. The blister bugs are fragile and can be destroyed quickly if caught unawares. Warriors are fierce opponents but the Angels can hold their own unless the bugs have an opportunity to surround and swarm them.

Reinforcements

Despite the use of shakers, the troopers may still be overwhelmed. Though not a large hive, this enemy camp does possess enough bugs to annihilate a lone platoon, particularly if its troopers get careless or make poor choices. The Games Master has several options if this occurs:

The platoon may be wiped out. If under serious threat, Alvarez will send an emergency recall both to the *Magsaysay* and to his unit, ordering everyone to retreat immediately. Any surviving Player Characters can try to make it back outside and head for the clearing. Alvarez is willing to sacrifice himself so his men can escape and it is likely that several other officers die as well in such a grave situation, along with a large portion of the platoon. Bad choices and carelessness will lead to the Angels being reduced to less than one-fourth

their full strength, which means the platoon will be disbanded and its survivors reassigned. The researchers are unlikely to take heavy casualties themselves as they will be kept away from the main conflict by Alvarez if possible.

Hasse and his team may instead commit themselves to the battle. They had already produced explosives for the troopers to use but now they are actively placing explosives themselves and most of these scientists are experts at demolitions. With the troopers providing cover fire, the researchers manage to blow up the plasma bug and destroy all the hive entrances. This should buy them and the Angels enough time to escape.

A second platoon can appear via drop from orbit to lend a hand. In this case, McAdams has radioed in her report and forwarded Alvarez's, and SICON dispatched another nearby ship in case they needed help. The new unit could be Tamar's Tigers, Rico's Roughnecks, Wilcox's Wildcats or any other Mobile Infantry unit but they are trained and fully armoured and under orders to help the Angels destroy the hive and help them and the researchers depart safely.

Obviously the Games Master should not make this too easy for the Player Characters. Actions have consequences – if the Player Characters made bad decisions they should pay the price for their mistakes, along with the rest of their platoon. At the same time, the Player Characters may have acted correctly but simply been unprepared for such a large force of bugs. This is particularly true of this is the first combat mission for them and thus their first actual encounter with the Arachnids. The goal is to make the adventure challenging and make sure the Player Characters are active participants. Even if another platoon arrives to save them, the Angels should acquit themselves well and be able to recount the incident later with pride. The Mobile Infantry is a family and there is no shame in accepting help from relatives.

ROUGH DEPARTURE

It is possible that Alvarez's Angels successfully follow their orders and manage to keep the researchers away from the bugs and out of trouble. If they stay well clear

of the hive entrance and manage to evade any bugs loose on the surface, Cesarre will eventually perfect the shaker design and produce an entire crate of samples. Finally Hasse will decide that he has enough material to take back with him, and tells Alvarez to arrange for pickup. Alvarez contacts Captain McAdams and she sends the two Skyhooks down to retrieve both teams.

Unfortunately, this is when things go wrong.

As the Skyhooks come in to land, a swarm of airborne bugs appear from over the hills. These turn out to be the ripplers from the nest and they target the two Skyhooks with their barbs, riddling both ships with spikes as they fly past. The two pilots escape damage but both Skyhooks have numerous punctures, including their fuel cells. The pilots need time to repair them, if that is even possible here.

Alvarez immediately issues orders. The objective is to lead the warriors away from the clearing and distract them long enough for the pilots to repair at least one Skyhook. He warns his men to evade capture if possible and avoid conflict when they can – the goal is less to

kill these bugs then to draw them away. He tells Hasse and the other researchers to stay close to the Skyhooks and details several troopers to stand guard over them. Hasse does not argue. He has his samples and just wants to get off-planet safely.

Anyone who does not volunteer for guard duty is divided into squad and sent to catch the bugs' attention and then lead them out of the area. The Player Characters can choose to kill the bugs, reasoning that a dead bug is no longer a threat, or simply to distract them.

The adventure at this point may become a game of hide-and-seek, with the troopers playing 'It' and the warriors hunting them down. The bugs have already revealed their warriors and ripplers. They now release the swarm of blister bugs, which follow the Warriors and mop up any additional opposition – if not stopped the blister bugs will head directly for the clearing and use their acid to destroy the Skyhooks and anyone near them. The single tanker bug remains by the front entrance to the bug hive and will not reveal itself unless troopers enter its limited range. The bug





workers are non-combatants and stay underground during this activity.

If the Player Characters decide to stop running and kill the bugs a pitched battle will ensue. The Games Master should balance the bug forces to give the Player Characters a challenge but allow for their possible victory. This is not a major bug hive and does not have a large number of warriors available yet, though within a month that could change as more hatch every day.

The Player Characters may find some way to disable the initial bug attack or distract the rippers long enough for everyone else to board the Skyhooks and take off. At that point the other Angels lay down suppressing fire so the Player Characters can board as well and both Skyhooks take off.

This will be when the bugs reveal their hidden weapon – their plasma bug.

It is not a full-grown bug (Huge instead of Gargantuan) and its attack does only 25 points of damage per sphere but this is enough to disable both Skyhooks. The pilots scramble to crash-land and are skilled enough to keep most of the troopers from taking damage but both ships are destroyed in the process. Now the two units are definitely stranded and the *Magsaysay* does not have additional retrieval boats – McAdams will have to radio for help, or break orbit and return to the nearest SICON base to pick up new ships she can send down for the Angels and the researchers.

No matter what happens, the Angels should not manage to leave Uglytown without being attacked. Alvarez's orders did allow his platoon to fight in self-defence and that gives him some latitude. The minute the bugs attack them the Angels can open fire in return, and tracking and destroying the bug forces afterward can be seen as insurance against an additional attack. Thus the bug attack lets the Angels fight with a clear conscience – even DeLaine will admit that they have followed their orders precisely.

HOME SWEET HOME

How the mission ends depends entirely upon what happened. The Angels and the researchers – whoever survived Uglytown – should wind up back at the nearest SICON base. Alvarez and Hasse are ordered to report to their respective superiors, and the result of those interviews and of the mission's outcome determines the results.

If the Angels avoided combat with the bugs their mission is a success. Alvarez's superiors approve of his actions, since he followed their commands to the letter. The Player Characters receive 400 XP each.

If the Angels only fought the bugs when necessary and brought all ten researchers back alive the mission is still a success. The Player Characters get 400 XP each.

If the Angels wound up destroying or at least sealing the hive they technically violated their mission orders but still performed a valuable service. This is particularly true if all the scientists come back alive. The Player Characters get 450 XP each.

If any of the researchers died, the mission is listed as a failure and Alvarez earns a rebuke. If he attacked the hive and researchers died he also receives a black mark on his permanent record. The Player Characters receive 300 XP each.

Provided Alvarez has not been rebuked and the Angels were not reduced to one-fourth strength or less, the platoon is allowed to continue and to return to the *Magsaysay*. New troopers are transferred in to fill the empty bunks, and now the Player Characters are the veterans ignoring the rookies. The hive's destruction means commendations may be awarded all around, and some promotions – Case will transfer out to command her own platoon, Donovan will move up to Sergeant Major and DeLaine will request reassignment. Several veteran troopers may move up to Ccorporal, including some of the Player Characters.

If the mission was successful and the platoon is still at more than one-fourth strength but Alvarez died, Case is promoted to take his place. The platoon stays together and is renamed Case's Cutthroats.

A rebuke for Alvarez means the Angels are on shaky ground. If the squad fell below half its full strength it is disbanded and the survivors farmed to other units. If a trooper performed particularly poorly and it was reported, a black mark may be placed on their records. This may block a Player Character if they try for promotion, particularly if they apply for officer training.

Provided Hasse or any of his researchers survived the Angels and SICON's science division now have a history. If they worked well together, the Player Characters now have contacts within the science division. They may also find themselves requested for strange assignments by one or more researchers. If the two groups did not cooperate, the Player

Characters now have enemies with access to privileged information and authority that circumvents standard military channels. Unfortunate accidents may occur, supplies may be delayed or shorted or rerouted, new transfers may be mysteriously rejected and the platoon may find itself in one ugly situation after another. This one mission could have far-reaching implications for both individual characters and the team as a whole, and could lead to a variety of additional stories.

If the Angels were reduced to one-fourth but received commendations Alvarez requests that the team be reassembled. Mobile Infantry grants his request as a reward for their recent success. Any surviving Player Characters may earn promotions to corporal or even sergeant, as Alvarez tries to move his remaining troopers into positions of authority over the newcomers.

Even if Alvarez was rebuked, if the Angels have at least half their original number left the platoon will survive and be returned to the *Magsaysay*. The troopers may discover ugly rumours about their activities, however, the next time they are on leave or meet up with other Mobile Infantry. Several successful missions will be required for the Angels to repair their tarnished reputation.

At this point the adventure ends. The troopers are now experienced soldiers, having survived a major bug battle. They have seen how seasoned warriors handle themselves and watched their own officers in action. Those who were wounded are treated and those who were uninjured either return to their duties or receive leave (depending upon whether the mission was a success). After everyone is back on board Alvarez receives new orders and Captain McAdams sets new coordinates. The *Magsaysay* moves out, carrying its Mobile Infantry to their next assignment. Training is over and the veterans of Alvarez's Angels are ready for action.

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