

Palladium Books® Presents:

THE

# RIFTER®

Your Guide to the Megaverse®



*Inside this Issue...*

**Palladium Fantasy®: Barbarians!**

**Palladium Fantasy®: Slavery in Palladium**

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EVANS 07

# Warning!

## Violence and the Supernatural

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

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

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



**The Rifter® Number 38**

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

First Printing – April, 2007

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Palladium Books® Presents:

# THE RIFTER #38



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## Sourcebook and Guide to the Palladium Megaverse®

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

Editor: **Alex Marciniszyn**

Contributing Writers:

**James M.G. Cannon**

**Todd V. Ehrenfels**

**Michael Ferguson**

**Dennis Glover**

**Mark Hall**

**Craig Hatler**

**Justin Kugler**

**Kevin Siembieda**

**Joseph Larsen**

**John Philpott**

**Todd Yoho**

Interior Artists:

**Brandon C. Clark**

**Mark Dudley**

**Comfort Deborah Love**

**Allen Manning**

**Brian Manning**

**Apollo Okamura**

**Benjamin Rodriguez**

**Adam Withers**

Proofreader: **Julius Rosenstein**

Cover Logo Design: **Steve Edwards**

Cover Illustration: **Mark Evans**

Credits Page Logo: **Niklas Brandt**

Typesetting: **Wayne Smith**

Keylining: **Kevin Siembieda**

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

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

# Contents – The Rifter® #38 – April, 2007

## Page 6 – Art

This is a page of art by *Jeffrey Russell* from **Rifts® Dimension Book 10: Hades**. It only hints at the horrors, monsters and evil you'll find unleashed in the *Minion War™ Hell* series written by Carl Gleba. Jeffrey Russell has done something in the neighborhood of 30 illustrations for **Hades** (a *Rifts®/Phase World®* title), which launches an epic saga that we think people will be talking about for years to come.

## Page 7 – From the Desk of Kevin Siembieda

It is one year since Publisher, Kevin Siembieda, made his shocking announcement that Palladium Books had been cut low by treachery and embezzlement. One year later, Kevin presents the *State of Palladium*, what we've been doing, where we hope to be going and what you can expect from us for the rest of the year. It's all promising and good stuff.

## Page 8 – Palladium News

Erick Wujcik (author of the *Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtle® RPG*, *Ninjas & Superspies™*, *After the Bomb®*, *Rifts® China*, and *Amber® Diceless™*) is coming to the Palladium Open House!

**Robotech®** is still on track, and get your first glimpse at our plans for that game line. Palladium's short convention schedule, and **Rifts® Gold** sold out.

## Page 11 – Coming Attractions

The latest updates and descriptions of books currently in production and on our schedule for 2007.

**Rifts® Stamps**. No, your eyes aren't playing tricks on you. Just something fun to consider. (And yes, the postage will be the new 41 cents, effective May 8, not 39 cents as shown in the illustration.)

We're excited about the hot selling **Rifts® Sourcebook One, Revised** and **Rifts® D-Bees™** of North America is almost done, should be another hot seller and in stores by the end of April.

The **Minion War Series** is going to be a lot of fun. Two Hells, *Hades* and *Dyval*, at war, and how that war impacts the rest of the Megaverse® (plus tons of great artwork and cool new demons and monsters).

**Ramon Perez's Rifts® Machinations of Doom**, a 72 page graphic novel and 40 pages of sourcebook material is guaranteed to please.

What else is going on? Read about it here.

## Page 14 - Splicers®

### Great House Shiva, Part Two – Official Source Material

The War Mounts of House Shiva include the Agni Plasma Bird, Ganesh Personnel Carrier, Swoop Dragon, Naga Serpent and Nihilist Suicide Beast. Official Splicers source material written by *Todd Yoho*.

Art by Brian and Allen Manning.

## Page 25 – The Art of Role-Playing

### Game Master and Player Tips

We welcome new writing team *Craig Hatler* and *Todd V. Ehrenfels* to the pages of **The Rifter®**. With any luck, this is the first of an ongoing series of tips, advice and suggestions to make your gaming experience that much better.

Artwork by Comfort Deborah Love.

## Page 31 – Systems Failure™

### Warbirds

*Justin Kugler* provides the freedom fighters and Bug hunters of Earth decimated by the invasion of the "Bugs," with a host of aircraft. Stats for 12 aircraft, plus Flyboys and Barnstormers, a few bands of heroes and a couple NPCs. Optional source material.

## Page 39 – Rifts®

### Laser Mage™

*Dennis Glover* provides optional source material in the form of the **Priests of the Divine Illumination** and **Light Magic**. Includes, Laser Mage O.C.C. and 21 spells like Mirage, Crystal Bomb, Material Light, Shining Armor, and more. Unofficial source material.

Artwork by Benjamin Rodriguez.

## Page 45 – Palladium Fantasy RPG®

### Optional Source Material on Slavery

*Mark Hall* (author of the upcoming *Mysteries of Magic*) takes a look at elements of *slavery* in the Palladium World that you might not have considered. Includes Slavery and Alignments, Slavery Around the World, Slave Marks, Slave Prices, The Slaver O.C.C. and New Skills and more. Unofficial source material.

Artwork by Mark Dudley.

## Page 57 – Palladium Fantasy RPG®

### A Walk on the Wild Side – Barbarians & Savages of the Palladium World, Part One

*John C. Philpott* takes a look at a wide range of barbarians and primitive people of the Palladium World; their culture, habits and way of life. Unofficial source material.

The Rifter® is your source for gaming material and adventures for the Palladium Fantasy RPG®.

Artwork by Brian and Allen Manning.

## Page 80 – Rifts® and Chaos Earth™

### Darkvare and the Astral Plane

*Joseph Larsen* presents a new, foul entity from the Astral Plane, the dreaded Darkvare. This is one weird and dangerous creature, so Game Masters should have a ball with this powerful beastie. Players beware.

Artwork by Adam Withers.

## Page 89 – The Hammer of the Forge™

Chapter 38: A few old friends are reunited as events begin to converge in this latest installment by James M.G. Cannon. Read and enjoy.

Artwork by Apollo Okamura.

### The Theme for Issue 38

This issue's theme seems to focus on light and dark. Not just heroes and monsters, but issues like slavery and barbarism. We hope you enjoy it as much as we did putting it all together.

Another fun-filled issue designed to provoke your imagination, and inspire and motivate players and Game Masters alike to try new ideas and expand their gaming Megaverse®.

### The Cover

The cover is by artist supreme, Mark Evans, who jumped at the chance of painting up a Wolfen from Palladium Fantasy® facing down a northern barbarian. Who is the hero and who is the bad guy? We'll leave that for you to decide. Nice work, Mark.

### Optional and Unofficial Rules & Source Material

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

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

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

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

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

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



## The Rifter® #39

We should have concrete Robotech® news and a tentative release schedule, other news, and a peek at what's coming down the pipeline, along with the usual source material and fun from across the Palladium Megaverse.

We are doing another **Summer Swimsuit Issue**, but this one will be more than just pretty pictures. Each pinup depicts a *femme fatale*. A dangerous lady bounty hunter, assassin, super-villain or super-hero, or even a monster or demoness. Not to be missed.

- Summer Swimsuit Spectacular! More pinup art by great artists.
- Each pinup is a *femme fatale* statted out for use across the Megaverse®.
- Material for *Heroes Unlimited™*.
- Material for *Rifts®*.
- Material for *Palladium Fantasy RPG®*.
- News and other developments.
- The next, epic chapter of *The Hammer of the Forge™*.
- Source material for the entire Palladium Megaverse®.
- New contributors and fun. So please join us.
- Latest news and coming attractions.

**Palladium's games are found in stores everywhere**



# From the Desk of Kevin Siembieda

## The State of Palladium Today, April 2007

April marks one year since I made the announcement about the *Crisis of Treachery* and that Palladium was in dire trouble. So much trouble that we would go out of business without your help.

In my appeal, I stated that this was one of those rare occasions where YOU, our fans, as individuals, could make a *difference*. And boy did you ever.

The fans' response was amazing on every conceivable level. You helped bolster our spirits and give us the *courage* to press on regardless of the hardship, sacrifice and tremendous amount of work needed to persevere. *Your purchases*, which poured in from around the world, helped give us the shot in the arm we needed, when we needed it most. They enabled us to pay critical bills and begin the climb out of the deep, deep hole we were dropped into.

Your support allowed us to crawl away from the precipice of doom to survive another year. Your continued support has helped us stagger to our feet and walk again.

When I wrote that appeal for help, all of us at Palladium felt lost in the darkness of the treachery and the magnitude of the betrayal. Getting back on our feet seemed impossible. Making the appeal to you felt desperate. Some of Palladium's friends and advisors even told us that it was impossible. That we shouldn't make the appeal and that it would never work anyway. Some said it was time to close our doors and go quietly into the night. I couldn't do that. I bit my lip and took the plunge. The one thing I knew for certain, was that Palladium had the greatest fans on Earth. I'd been saying so for decades. I knew we had friends out there, I just didn't know how many. Nobody did. You blew us away with your caring, the ferocity of your support, and the magnitude of your response. You gave us a second chance.

## A Second Chance

Not everyone ever gets a second chance, but you have given Palladium Books that chance, and we don't intend to squander it. We've been working hard for the last year, building a new foundation and laying the groundwork for the future. Now, we're ready to make our move.

I would love to tell you that everything is wonderful and that Palladium will be around for another 25 years, but *we don't know yet*.

We have beaten the odds already by surviving this long. We have made tremendous strides and important inroads toward recovery. If you truly knew how bad things were just one year ago, you'd know how miraculous an achievement this has been, and you'd marvel at how far we've come so fast.

The fight is not over, but we feel stronger and emboldened by the past year's success. We know our plan for the future is a good one. We believe, thanks to you, that we can go all the way.

The year 2007 will be our final challenge. We must become self-sufficient. It's not enough that we stand and walk, we must run, leap and soar.

To do that, Palladium must increase our level of production as well as increase our sales and distribution. We are working hard in all of these areas, and seem to be winning those battles too. Time will tell.

Twelve months from now, another year from April, we will know for certain if Palladium is fully recovered or not. We hope you will be there with us *every step of the way*. Not only that, but we hope you'll spread the word and bring new friends with you into the amazing world of Palladium Books role-playing games. And we do plan to amaze you. We want to reignite that *sense of wonder* that made Palladium's games famous and counted among the best selling RPG titles in the history of the business.

Rifts® Ultimate Edition and Beyond the Supernatural™, Second Edition were just the *first steps*. Rifts® Sourcebook One, Revised and Expanded is just our opening salvo of 2007. It is selling like hot cakes. It shattered previous online sales record for a sourcebook and has surprised and pleased our distributors, retailers and fans alike.

You ain't seen nothin' yet. Rifts® D-Bees of North America™ is going to do the same. The Minion War™ "Hell series" starting with Dimension Book 10: Hades – Pits of Hell and continuing on with Dimension Book 11: Dyval™ – Hell Unleashed, Dimension Book 12: Dimensional Outbreak™, Armageddon Unlimited™ (crossing over into *Heroes Unlimited*™), and Megaverse® in Flames™ (crossing over into *Rifts*®) are going to *blow your mind*. And even that is only the beginning.

Palladium's second annual swimsuit issue of The Rifter® #39 will put a smile on your face as well as present source material for your games. A reminder that role-playing games are supposed to be *fun*.

Robotech®, Warpath™: Urban Jungle™, Mysteries of Magic™, sourcebooks for Nightbane®, Heroes Unlimited™, Palladium Fantasy® and a number of surprises are all in development.

Read the News and coming attractions section of this issue for details on all the exciting new books we have in the pipeline.

If they do as well as we anticipate (hopefully, even better), Palladium should be *rockin' and rollin'* by this time next year. In fact, we hope to be strong and on our feet by the end of 2007.

As I write this, March 9, 2007, a bunch of us at Palladium Books just returned from seeing the movie, *300*. It's about the *300 Spartans* who took a stand against impossible odds and held off *hundreds of thousands* of invading Persians for three days. It gave the rest of the Greeks the opportunity to regroup and survive. During that movie I couldn't help thinking about Palladium's struggle and you, our fans. *You are the 300*. You are Spartans! You have bought us the time to regroup, rebuild, reorganize and come back stronger and hopefully, triumphant against impossible odds. Where some saw the impossible, we saw courage, hope, and a triumphant future.

The fight isn't over, but it is a battle we intend *to win*. Stand with us and be part of the impossible.

– Kevin Siembieda, Spring 2007

# Palladium News

By Kevin Siembieda, the guy who should know

## Erick Wujcik's First Game Convention in Years – Palladium Open House in Taylor, Michigan

Erick Wujcik (author of the *Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtle® RPG*, *Ninjas & Superspies*, *After the Bomb®*, *Rifts® China*, and *Amber Diceless*) hasn't even lived in the country for the last two or three years, but his first appearance at any gaming convention in five years is the Palladium Open House.

Come on down to get his autograph, hear him speak and *play in his gaming events!* It's one thing to meet the man at a gaming convention, but it's another to have easy access to him, speak with him one on one, and *play* in his games!

Palladium Open House – May 4, 5 & 6, 2007 – 12455 Universal Drive, Taylor, MI 48180 – call (734) 946-1156 for more information or go to the Palladium website:

[www.palladiumbooks.com](http://www.palladiumbooks.com)

## Robotech® coming 2007 . . . we hope

Sometimes things don't materialize as quickly as you'd hope, and all you can do is keep plugging along. That's what we've been doing with the **Robotech®** license. We had hoped to nail the license down last winter and have the first RPG out by Spring 2007, but fate had other plans. For one reason or another, this deal just couldn't be done quickly. However, the entire time Harmony Gold expressed its excitement for Palladium Books getting the license and doing new **Robotech** RPGs and sourcebooks. And that's what we hope to do.

I suspect by the time you read this, we *will* have a signed agreement. If so, we will shoot to have the RPG out by August. Failing that, sometime this Fall. I'll let you know in the July issue of **The Rifter®**.

I will also let you in on the inside track regarding our plans for the series.

- The first book in the series will be **Robotech® The Shadow Chronicles**. Don't know yet, but it may include a lot of the New Generation/Invid Invasion/Mospeada information, as Shadow Chronicles picks up where Invid Invasion leaves off.
- It will be a 192-224 page "manga-sized" book. So will the subsequent supplements.
- Price will be an irresistible \$15.95 retail.
- The *Shadow Chronicles®* RPG will probably be followed by the Macross-based sourcebook, followed by Southern Cross and new stuff.
- Yes, we will be updating, correcting, and adding to the original books. These will not be reprints of our old titles.
- I am also *considering* doing a deluxe collector's, hardcover edition with some interior color pages, similar to what we did

with **Rifts®** Ultimate Edition at the usual 8 1/2 x 11 format. If we did, it wouldn't see publication until Fall or possibly early 2008. Everything is still in the planning and concept stage, so nothing is written in stone.

## Rifts® Gold Edition is sold out

The **Rifts®** Ultimate Gold has SOLD OUT! All that is left are approximately 90 signed and numbered copies and 40 Printer Proofs that Kevin Siembieda put on the side for future Grab Bags, prizes, and special promotions. A few copies may be made available at the Palladium Open House and the occasional convention. The future price on this sold out item will depend on the collector's market.

## A Megaverse® United Print – to be Discontinued May 31, 2007

This is your last chance to get this keepsake. A unique and important collectible that commemorates Palladium's struggle to survive a devastating treachery, theft and embezzlement, and Palladium fandom's valiant effort to save the day. To us at Palladium, the print has become a celebration of unity and triumph.

It will be gone May 31, 2007. We thought it was appropriate to stop selling this print one year after it was released. That's May 2007.

**Get your orders in while you can.**

- Limited edition print, signed and numbered.
- Signed and numbered by Kevin Siembieda.
- Personalized to YOU. Your name written in the "Thank You" portion of the print.
- Kevin is also drawing a small version of his trademark dragon's head in the lower left-hand corner.
- 11x14 inches, half-tone, black and white illustration by Kevin Siembieda.
- The name of ALL purchasers will be listed in a special **Rifts®** sourcebook.
- Limited to fewer than 2500 copies.
- \$50 plus shipping and handling.
- Discontinued May 31, 2007.

## Palladium's 2007 Convention Schedule

- **Palladium Open House** – May 4, 5 & 6 – Taylor, Michigan.
- **Gen Con Indy** – August 16-19 – Indianapolis, Indiana.
- **Gallowscon** – September 22 & 23 – Indiana.

That is all. We *may* also attend or pop in at a few local conventions (like Penguicon, U-Con and Youmacon) here in Michigan, but that's all folks. We are devoting our time to getting books out and Palladium back on its feet.

2008 is a different story, and convention organizers who might want Kevin, other Palladium creators or Palladium Books to attend as guests should contact us as early as possible. In 2008, Kevin would like to appear at 4-6 locations in other parts of the country. Give it some thought and give us a call. We'll work with you to make your convention something special.

# Palladium Open House

May 4, 5 & 6, 2007

## What is it?

A gaming convention devoted exclusively to *role-playing games*. And Palladium's role-playing games at that – *Rifts*®, *Heroes Unlimited*™, *Palladium Fantasy RPG*®, *Nightbane*®, *Ninjas & Superspies*™, *Beyond the Supernatural*™, *Splicers*®, *Robotech*®, *Chaos Earth*™ and more.

## Where?

At the *Palladium offices and warehouse* in Taylor, Michigan. That's why we call it an "open house" instead of a gaming convention.

## Who are the Game Masters?

The writers and creators who make your favorite Palladium role-playing games and sourcebooks. Game with *Kevin Siembieda*, *Erick Wujcik*, *Julius Rosenstein*, *Carl Gleba*, *Brandon Aten*, *Todd Yoho*, *Jason Richards*, *Levi Johnstone*, *Jason Marker*, *Carmen Bellaire* and many others, including expert G.M.s.

## Are there other guests?

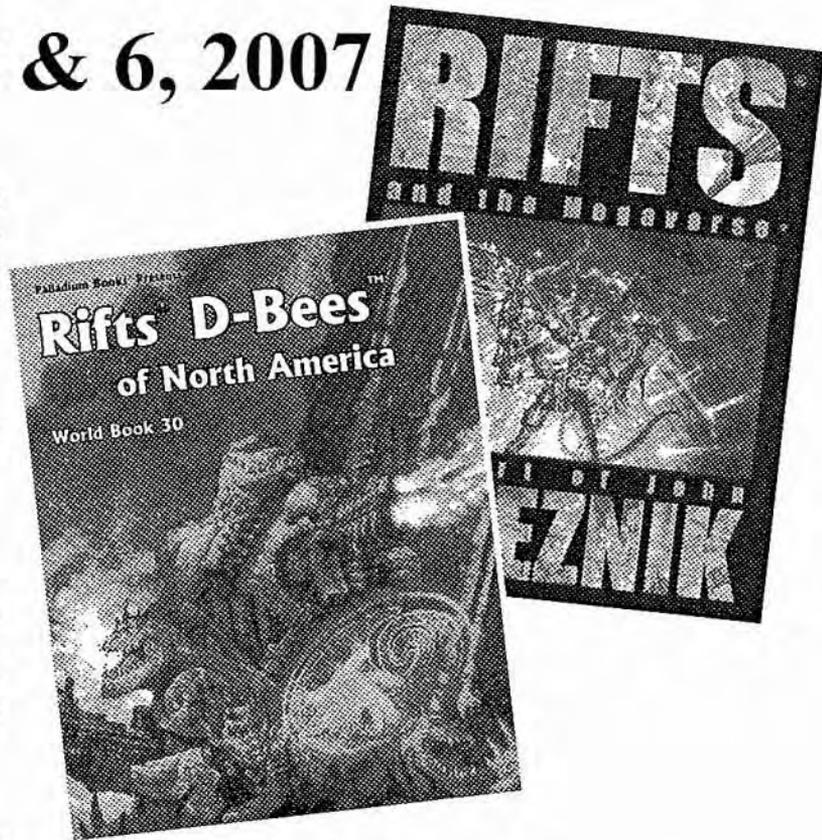
Artists and writers from around the county! Some notable artists include *John Zeleznik*, *Scott Johnson*, *Mark Evans*, *Ramon Perez*, *Apollo Okamura*, *Mark Dudley*, *Brian & Allen Manning*, *Kent Burles*, *Nick Bradshaw* and many more. And they are all there to chat, sign autographs and sell original artwork and prints. Plus fans come from around the world!

## Is there stuff to buy?

You betcha! Palladium role-playing games and sourcebooks, back issues of *The Rifter*®, out of print books, miniatures, original artwork, prints, posters, toys, and collectibles.

## What else do I need to know?

- All game events and panel talks are FREE with the price of admission. First come, first served basis.
- 60 Role-playing gaming events.
- 50+ Palladium creators, three times the number that has ever assembled at any convention in the world!
- **Costume Contest** – so dress up as your favorite Palladium character.
- **The Palladium staff:** Kevin Siembieda, Henry Siembieda, Wayne Smith, Alex Marciszyn, Julius Rosenstein and others available to chat and sign books for you. Bring your favorites to get autographed.
- Held at the Palladium offices and warehouse (17,000 sq. feet)!
- Large dealer's area.
- Artists alley.
- Rare collectibles and original art.



- Snacks, soft drinks and food.
- Ten minutes from the airport.
- Six minutes from the hotel.
- Meet fans from around the country.
- Meet Palladium's new and known writers and artists.
- An event you're likely to cherish for years to come.

For more information go to Palladium's website: [www.palladiumbooks.com](http://www.palladiumbooks.com) or call (734) 946-1156; an information and order line only.

**The Palladium Open House – May 4, 5 & 6, 2007.**

**12455 Universal Drive**

**Taylor, MI 48180**

**(734) 946-1156 order line**

**Please order admission tickets in advance** so we know how many people to accommodate in a wide range of games and panel discussions. We want nonstop RPG gaming and fun for everyone in attendance. 170 gamers are already booked! 300-400 expected. Yes, you can pay at the door, but it helps us to know how many are coming in advance. Thanks.

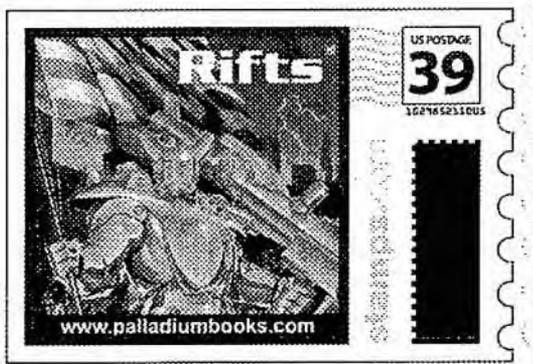
## Admission:

\$15.00 all day, 9:30 AM till midnight on Saturday. (\$18.00 at the door.)

\$15.00 all day, 9:30 till 5:00 on Sunday. (\$18.00 at the door.)

VIP Friday is sold out. It is a sort of premier party.

# Coming Attractions



## Rifts® 41 cent Postage Stamps

Here's a fun, unique item for your consideration.

Palladium discovered you can have speciality stamps created. Think "vanity stamps" sorta like vanity license plates for your car. They cost more, but they are made to your specific design.

We have created Rifts® postage stamps depicting Scott Johnson's famous *Glitter Boy in Flames* illustration as a 39 cent stamp. They look freaking great, and Kevin Siembieda, for one, can hardly wait to put them on his and Palladium's mail! We thought they'd make a nice promotional item, but then we thought some of YOU might want to order Rifts® stamps too.

Regrettably, the stamps are costing us around \$13.00 per sheet to create, so we have to sell them for \$15.00 plus shipping and handling (\$3.11 via First Class Mail). That means your cost for twenty, 39 cent stamps with a *face value* of \$7.80 will cost you approximately **\$18.11 per sheet**. Available only in sheets of 20 stamps. We're passing them on as cheaply as we can.

Despite the cost, we know *some of you* will want to get some for yourself, so we are making them available for a limited time.



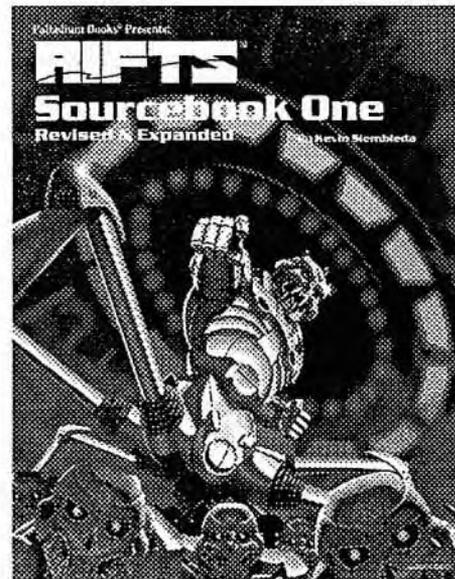
We don't think more than 400 sheets will ever be created, so this is a unique, fun collectible – or a fun way to surprise a friend.

**Cost: Rifts® 39 Cent Stamps (\$7.80 in postage) – \$18.11 per sheet** including shipping, packaging and handling. Sold by the "sheet only."

Must be shipped via *First Class Mail* or *UPS*. Not applicable for "Media Mail." Shipped in a sturdy card envelope. Available now.

Note: If fans want to see stamps for other Palladium game lines we may consider doing other stamps.

Available only to customers in the United States of America.



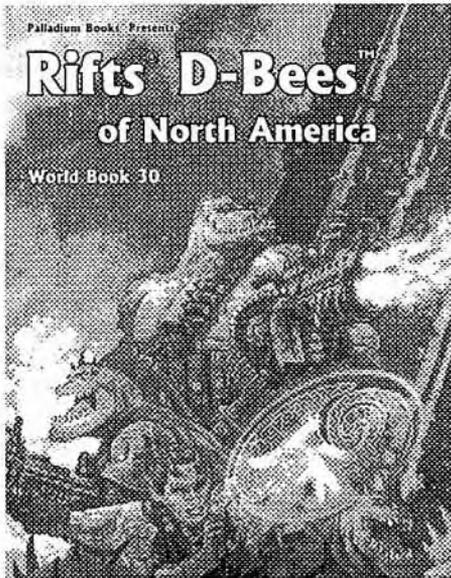
## Rifts® Sourcebook One, Revised & Expanded

– shatters previous online sales records for a supplement

Rifts® Sourcebook One, Revised & Expanded is a smash hit shattering previous online/mail order sales records and selling well for distributors and stores.

This book is an excellent companion to Rifts® Ultimate Edition and full of fun material for players and Game Masters alike.

- Robot creation rules!
- 20 robots and robot vehicles for use by players.
- Power armor, weapons and vehicles, new and old.
- Archie Three, the ultimate inhuman villain and his henchmen.
- Notable monsters, updated and with adventure ideas.
- The Republicans revealed for the first time.
- Republican power armor, weapons and schemes.
- A complete adventure involving Archie Three.
- Written by Kevin Siembieda. Cover by Scott Johnson.
- 160 pages – Cat. No. 801 – \$18.95 retail. Available now.



## Rifts® D-Bees of North America™

If you are reading about this in *The Rifter*®, then odds are that **Rifts® World Book 30: D-Bees of North America** is already in the stores. (It is scheduled to ship a short time after this issue of *The Rifter*®.)

This big sourcebook is the brainchild of freelance writer, *Levi Johnstone*, who suggested it at the 2006 Palladium Open House. A book that presents 36-40 *new D-Bees* (all very cool and different) and around 50-60 old favorites all gathered from other World and Sourcebooks into one handy reference guide. Old D-Bees have been updated and expanded a bit by Kevin Siembieda, and he also reviewed and tweaked the new characters to make sure they fit our plans for Rifts®.

Some of the D-Bees are dimensional travelers, others are as much victims of the Great Cataclysm as humans. Some are violent and aggressive. Others are peaceful and kind. A few are cute and funny. Others are mean and terrible. Some look almost human, while some are inhuman monstrosities composed of stone, plants or ectoplasm! And some are just plain weird, but weird in that provocative, fun, Palladium kind of way. All are "Dimensional Beings" – aliens from other worlds who have, for better or worse, made Rifts Earth their new home. All should provoke ideas for numerous adventures and encounters, as well as helping to define intelligent life in Rifts North America.

- 35-40 new D-Bees (alien beings from other dimensions).
- 50 favorite D-Bees collected from past World and Sourcebooks, with updates and new insight.
- Nearly 100 alien beings in all.
- Players have scores of aliens to choose as their character.
- G.M.s, every D-Bee should provoke ideas for adventures & encounters.
- All new artwork. Cover painting by Dave Dorman.
- Written by *Brandon Aten, Carl Gleba, Levi Johnstone, Jason Marker, John C. Philpott, Jason Richards, Kevin Siembieda, Josh Sinsapaugh, Taylor White, and Todd Yoho.*
- 192 pages – Cat. No. 874 – \$22.95 retail.
- Available April, 2007.



## Rifts® Machinations of Doom™ – Graphic Novel & Sourcebook

You demanded it, so we provide it.

At long last, Palladium is collecting **Ramon Perez's Lone Star** comic strip from the pages of *The Rifter*®, and adding 30-40 pages of RPG sourcebook material. Includes stats on all the characters in the comic strip (villains, heroes and monsters), as well as ideas for new adventures.

- 72 page comic, plus pinups and concept sketches by Ramon Perez.
- 30-40 pages of gaming source material for Rifts® by Kevin Siembieda.
- New color cover by Ramon Perez.
- 128 pages – Cat. No. 871 – \$20.95 retail.
- Ships to distributors May 2, 2007.
- Fans can get the book first at the *Palladium Open House*, May 4, 5 & 6, 2007, and have it signed and personalized by the artist, Ramon Perez, one of Palladium's special guests.

## Hell Unleashed!

The demons of **Hades** and **Dyval** have been part of the Palladium Megaverse for 23 years, but now, Carl Gleba brings them to life like never before.

For the first time ever, the two Hells are described and mapped in frightening detail. Gamers can now visit Hell, be taken to Hell, or escape from Hell. Certainly they'll have to deal with the minions of Hell as the **Minion War** shakes the entire Megaverse®.

**What is the Minion War™?** The concept is simple. Hades and Dyval are two different Hell dimensions who have been *rivals* for countless millennia. *Hades invades Dyval* to conquer and enslave it. *Dyval fights back* and the war spills into the *Megaverse® – Pits of Hell™* where humans and other races are caught in the middle.

**Rifts® Dimension Book 10: Hades – Pits of Hell™** is a stand-alone supplement book that maps and describes this particular plane of Hell. Includes all the minions of Hades: its sub-demons, demons, Worms of Taut, and new monsters. It also lays the groundwork to the Minion War crossover series. 192 pages. April release.

**Rifts® Dimension Book 11: Dyval™ – Hell Unleashed™** maps and describes the seven layers of Hell that are Dyval as well as the people, monsters and places within that dimension of Hell. It too is a “stand-alone” Dimension Book, but it also advances the Minion War storyline. 192 pages. May release.

**Rifts® Dimension Book 12: Dimensional Outbreak™** sees the war between Hades and Dyval spill out into *Phase World®* and the Three Galaxies. Much more is revealed about Center, four levels are mapped and described, and there are all kinds of action, adventure, demonic war machines, combat and intrigue. 192 pages. June or July release.

**Armageddon Unlimited™** for **Heroes Unlimited™**. The Minion War spills into the **Heroes Unlimited™** setting, where superheroes find themselves battling demons from the pits of Hell. Can they save their world from Hell unleashed? That is left in your hands. This could be the ideal vehicle for bringing **HU2** characters into the **Rifts®** or **Phase World®** setting and vice versa. 160 pages. July or August release.

**Megaverse® in Flames™** for **Rifts®**. All Hell breaks loose on *Rifts Earth* for the cataclysmic conclusion of the Minion War™ series. ‘Nuff said. 160 pages. Fall 2007.

**Note:** When this series is done, *Carl Gleba* will be recognized as one of the fabulous new writers in the Palladium Megaverse®. And he will be the author of one of the most epic adventures anybody ever created for a role-playing setting.

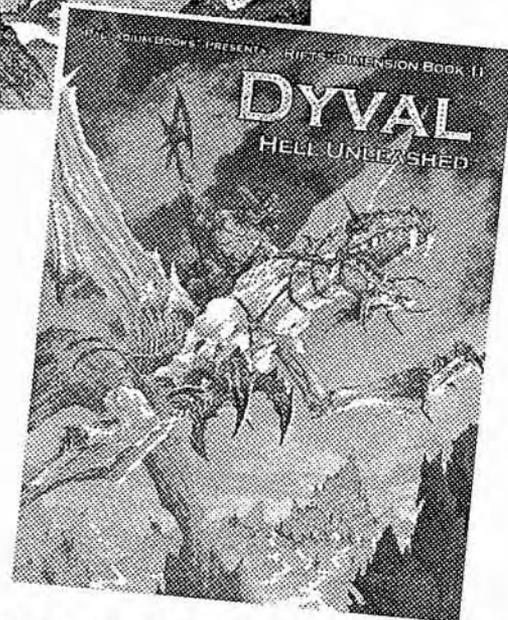
## Rifts® Dimension Book 10: Hades, Pits of Hell™

Imagine the planes of Hell described, new monsters, familiar demons, plans for dimensional conquest of a rival Hell, Dyval, and you start to appreciate the scope of this book and range of fun. Dimensional travelers and bold adventurers can explore the very pits of Hades! Breathtaking artwork.

- The hellish dimension of Hades mapped and described.
- Demons and monsters galore.
- Magic weapons and demonic riding beasts.
- World information and adventure ideas.
- A stand-alone Dimension Book that is also the first step in an epic, five book adventure.
- Artwork by Russell, Burles, and others.
- Cover painting by John Zeleznik.
- Written by popular Palladium author, Carl Gleba.
- 192 pages – Cat. No. 872 – \$22.95 retail.
- Ships April, 2007.

## Rifts® Dimension Book 11: Dyval™, Hell Unleashed™

The hell known as Dyval and all its evil residents and secrets are revealed at last, as these monsters clash with the demons of Hades in trans-dimensional war!



- The hellish dimension of Dyval mapped and described.
- Devils and monsters galore.
- Magic weapons and horrific war beasts.
- World information and adventure ideas.
- A stand-alone Dimension Book that is also the second step in an epic, five book adventure that spills across the Palladium Megaverse®.
- Artwork by Nick Bradshaw, Mike Mumah, and others.
- Cover painting by John Zeleznik.
- Written by Carl Gleba.
- 192 pages – Cat. No. 873 – \$22.95 retail. Ships May.

## Rifts® Dimension Book 12: Dimensional Outbreak™

The Minion War spills into *Phase World®*, the city of **Center** and the **Three Galaxies**. The epic scale of the Minion War just got bigger and even the Worlds of Warlock, the Splugorth and Naruni are involved.

- *Phase World's Center* described and mapped. Four new levels including the Gateland, Central Station, the Spaceport, Repo-Yards, Free Trade Zone, Warlock Market, notable merchants and places of business, and much more.
- Demon Knights, Star Slayers, demonic legions and more.

- Demonic spaceships, magic weapons and new horrors.
- Deevil fortifications and defenses.
- Space spell magic (new).
- Spaceships, power armor and other gear.
- The plot for conquering the Three Galaxies.
- A stand-alone Dimension Book that is also the third step in an epic, five book crossover that spills across the Palladium Megaverse®.
- Artwork by Apollo Okamura, Mike Mumah, and others.
- Cover painting by John Zeleznik.
- Written by Carl Gleba.
- 192 pages – Cat. No. 875 – \$22.95 retail.

## And that's not all . . .



### The Rifter® 39

#### – Summer fun and swimsuits are back

Yep, we're doing it again. People seemed to enjoy last year's swimsuit issue so much, we are bringing it back (may become an annual event).

This time it's *femme fatales*, and all these dangerous ladies are statted out for your gaming pleasure. Plus source material, gaming ideas, the latest news, fiction and fun.

- The eye-popping cover is by David Martin and is so gorgeous it's worth the cover price all by itself.
- 20+ Palladium artists are lining up to contribute.
- Game stats for all the deadly bathing beauties.
- Source material from various authors and artists.
- News and coming attractions.
- 96 pages – Cat. No. 139 – \$10.95 U.S. retail.
- Ships early July, 2007.

## Warpath: Urban Jungle™ RPG

### Coming Summer 2007

Jeff and Kevin would love to see the **Warpath™ RPG** debut at the Palladium Open House, but no promises.

**Warpath: Urban Jungle™ RPG** deals with the secret, untold war taking place on our very streets. Counter-terrorism, anti-gang and anti-drug operations and much, much more.

**The setting:** The dark underbelly of our modern world. The dark and dangerous places that suburbanites don't even know exist, the places where locals pray they survive.

**The player characters:** They consider themselves heroes and patriots, though others might see them as the elite, secret enforcers of a powerful government that knows no limits. They are men and women who fight the secret wars that never make the newspapers. They are the "spooks" and nameless "shadow warriors" who operate beneath the radar and outside the law. They are the elite selected from every branch of the military and law enforcement agencies to get the dirty jobs done.

**Their mission:** To strike down enemies from within and abroad. To keep "the people" safe without their ever knowing they were in danger. To fight and win battles on our streets without the media or the authorities ever knowing about the conflict. And if the conflict is discovered, without knowing who was involved, where they came from or where they disappeared to.

**Warpath: Urban Jungle™** is a new, hard-edged, combat role-playing game that deals with the secret war against crime, gangs, terrorism, sabotage and drugs going on in the shadows of our own streets. Police, FBI, CIA, NSA, Special Ops, and ex-criminals join forces under the auspices of a super-secret agency more covert and mysterious than the NSA.

**Warning:** This isn't a lightweight, touchy-feelie combat game for kids nor a superhero RPG, but a gritty game of espionage, violence and war. The name "Warpath" says it all: Hell unleashed in secret wars that take place in the Urban Jungle (our modern cities). The soldiers involved are given the authority to use extreme violence, deception, and whatever it takes to get the job done and save lives; provided they don't get caught.

Although it will not be for everyone, we suspect **Warpath: Urban Jungle™** will be the surprise hit RPG of 2007. Inspired by the novel, *Warpath*, by Jeffry Scott Hansen. Watch for it.

- Cover by John Zeleznik.
- Written by Jeffry Scott Hansen & Kevin Siembieda.
- Final page count and retail price yet to be determined. Expected to be 192-256 pages, \$22.95 to \$24.95 (\$28.95 if we go hardcover with it); Summer, 2007, anticipated release.

## Robotech® Returns

### – this Summer or Fall

Are you ready?

Check out the details under News in this issue.

# Splicers®

## Great House Shiva™, Part Two

By Todd Yoho

## War Mounts and Beasts of House Shiva

House Shiva has developed several types of War Mounts to aid them in their struggles. Other Houses that have had the misfortune of being on the receiving end of these beasts have copied them, so while they were developed by the Shivs, it's not uncommon to find Nihilists, Ganesh and Agni Plasma-Birds among the stables of other Houses. For now though, the Naga Serpents are unique to House Shiva. Game Masters interested in adding their own War Mount creations to House Shiva's stables should keep in mind that the Shivs have a certain aesthetic taste when it comes to their biogenetic creations. They like their War Mounts to be beautiful, and graceful, but wickedly deadly.

### Agni Plasma-Bird

Also known as the "Peacock."

The Agni Plasma-Birds were not designed to carry a rider, but instead act as independent drone artillery support, scouts, and perimeter defense. They are often sent into the field alone, in small groups to control an area, or in support of a small strike team. They aren't very big, but pack an impressive amount of firepower for their size, making them favorites for infiltration teams who want a little reassuring backup. Because they sometimes operate alone, or as support for strike teams, Agni Plasma-Birds are given a high degree of intelligence and incredible mathematical reasoning capability. They are at their deadliest when working in conjunction with a Forward Observer to relay coordinates.

The Agni Plasma-Birds are large peacocks with broad, flat, shovel-like beaks. Their bodies are covered with lustrous, mineral-like feathers, like colored mica, and their impressive tail feathers look like a fan of thin, but strong, iridescent, crystalline shards filled with a shimmering liquid. Almost like an incredibly thin lava-lamp. These "tail feathers" are actually feather-shaped crystalline rockets filled with plasma that explode on impact, spraying the target with shards and plasma; a combination useful against the Machine's forces and human targets. They are extremely accurate when firing their rockets, capable of delivering firepower directly on target if receiving information via a Bio-Comm system. Otherwise, they must rely on their own assessment of the situation and fire at will.

The Agni are engineered as lithovores so that they can operate independently for longer periods of time (no shortage of food) and to better grow their crystal-plasma rockets. Other metabolisms can be used, but take double the time necessary to regrow rockets as with the lithovore metabolism.

Weak hand-to-hand combatants, they rely on speed to extract themselves from close quarter battles and turn their plasma rockets to bear on the enemy. They prefer to fight from cover, laying down a massive volley of rockets rather than speed into combat.

**Class:** Close Combat Artillery Support

**Crew:** None.

**M.D.C. by Location:**

Neck – 75

Tail Feathers/Rockets (40) – 20 each

\* Legs (2) – 100 each

\*\*Head – 125

\*\*\* Main Body – 175

\* A single asterisk indicates a small, low profile, or shielded target that is difficult to hit. An attacker must aim and make a "Called Shot" to hit such targets, and even then is -3 to strike.

\*\* Destroying the head will stop the War Mount in its tracks, eliminates all optics and sensory systems, reduces the speed to 10% of max, reduces the number of melee attacks to one total and negates all bonuses for the animal.

\*\*\* Depleting the M.D.C. of the main body will shut down the War Mount completely, rendering it totally useless and effectively destroying and killing it.

**Speed:**

**Running:** 200 mph (320 km) maximum, but normal cruising speed is only 80 mph (128 km). The Agni can run all day at cruising speed without fatigue, but can only maintain maximum speed for three hours at a stretch.



Leaping: The Agni can leap up to 60 feet (18.2 m) high or across from a standing position. With a running start the Agni can leap 120 feet (36.5 m) high or across.

Digging: 10 mph (16 km) through sand or dirt, but half as fast through clay, rock or stone. Digging does not tire the Agni, and it can dig a hole deep enough to adequately hide itself in 30 seconds.

Swimming: The Agni is a weak swimmer, capable of paddling along at best, but it is naturally buoyant. If submerged, it can survive depths of up to 500 feet (152.4 m) and walk along the bottom.

Flying: Not possible.

**Statistical Data:**

Height: 6 feet (1.8 m).

Width: 3 feet (0.91 m).

Length: 3 feet (0.91 m).

Weight: 500 lbs (225 kg).

Cargo: The Agni can carry 400 lbs (180 kg) on its back, but can pull up to 1000 lbs (450 kg). Typically *not* used for hauling cargo.

Physical Strength: 1D4+15, Splicers P.S.

Production Cycle: One year gestation, plus one year growth time.

Operation Lifetime: 35 year life span.

Trade Value: 3 million credits for a healthy, undamaged unit.

Bio-Regeneration: 2D6 M.D.C. per hour for the main body, 1D4 M.D.C. per hour for all other locations. The Agni *cannot* regrow severed limbs.

Horror Factor: 8 against humans not familiar with the Agni, none against the machines.

Senses & Features: Standard, with the exception of #1 and #6, and also possesses Seismic Sense. The Seismic Sense enhancement is part of the Agni's ability to direct fire onto a target, feeling the impact of its rockets and adjusting to fire for effect.

Feeding: Needs to eat 100 lbs (45 kg) of rocks, dirt and minerals per day.

Sleep Requirements: Needs only three hours of sleep every 24 hours.

**Other Data:**

Alignment: Considered Unprincipled.

War Mount Attributes: I.Q. 1D4+8 (extremely high animal intelligence), M.E. 1D4+6, M.A. 1D4+3, P.S. see above, P.P. 1D6+18, P.E. 2D6+12, P.B. 1D4+18, Spd see above.

Number of Attacks per Melee: Four.

Combat Bonuses (in addition to any possible attribute bonuses): +2 initiative, +4 strike with ranged weapons, +4 *automatic dodge*, +3 roll with impact.

Equivalent (instinctive) Skills of Note: Dowsing 60%, Excavation/Mining 50%, Land Navigation 70%, Basic Mathematics 85%, Advanced Mathematics 70%, and understands the language of the House that created it.

Combat Capabilities: The Agni Plasma-Bird may engage in ranged combat or hand to hand, or a combination of the two.

Bite Attack: 2D8 M.D.

Restrained Kick Attack: 1D4 M.D.

Full Strength Kick Attack: 1D8 M.D.

Body Block/Ram: 2D6 M.D., and has a 01-25% chance of knocking an opponent up to 8 feet (2.4 m) tall off his feet and onto his back. If so, the target loses initiative and one melee attack. A body block/ram counts as two attacks for the Agni.

## Agni Plasma-Bird Bio-Weapon Systems:

**1. Crystalline Plasma Rockets:** The primary weapon of the Agni Plasma-Birds, the crystalline plasma rockets are beautiful and deadly. They can be launched one at a time or in volleys, propelled by the rocket's own fuel source. What is most amazing is that these rockets also have their own neurological bundle encased within the crystal, making them self-guiding. These rockets have one attack per melee round and are +5 to strike and dodge until it strikes its target, is shot down and destroyed, or until it runs out of fuel and dies within 2D4 melee rounds after being launched.

Primary Purpose: Anti-Robot and Anti-Armor.

Secondary Purpose: Assault and Defense.

M.D.C. of the Rockets: 20, and after launching the rocket is treated the same as a high-tech mini-missile and can be shot down as normal.

Mega-Damage: 1D8x10 M.D. at the point of impact and within a blast radius of 20 feet (6 m) for the plasma. The plasma continues to burn for 3D6 M.D. for 1D4 melee rounds until it becomes inert. The crystalline shards have a blast radius of 50 feet (15.2 m), and anything between 21 feet (6.4 m) and 50 feet (15.2 m) takes 4D6 M.D.

Rate of Fire: One at a time or in volleys of 2, 4, 6, 8, or 10. Whether a single rocket or an entire volley is fired, it counts as one melee attack. Roll once to strike; either all the rockets in the volley hit or they all miss.

Effective Range: 3 miles (4.8 km).

Payload: 40 rockets. It takes 3D6 hours to regrow spent rockets, 6D6 hours without the lithovore metabolism.

Bonus: In addition to the +5 to strike and dodge from the rockets' neurological bundles, the Agni can "program" specific coordinates into each rocket to increase its accuracy if the Agni is in Bio-Comm contact with someone acting as a Forward Observer (an FO). To do this, the person acting as the FO must make a successful skill check on Land Navigation. For every 20% that he succeeds on his skill check, the Agni gets a +1 to strike with the crystalline rockets for that melee round. For every 20% that the FO fails the check by, the Agni gets a -1 to strike with the crystalline rockets.

The same system of bonus acquisition can be used with the Agni's Seismic Sense. At the start of each melee round, the Agni can take an action to roll on its Seismic Sense detection, and for every 20% that it succeeds, it receives a +1 to strike with the crystalline rockets for the rest of that melee round. Conversely, for every 20% that it fails, the Agni gets a -1 to strike with the crystalline rockets. And yes, *it is possible* to use both systems in conjunction with one another, totaling the sum bonuses, or penalties, together.

**2. Crystal Feather Launchers:** The Agni can launch volleys of small, sharp, mineral rich feathers at opponents, that are capable of cutting Mega-Damage metals. These feathers can be recovered and used later as throwing knives, retaining their Mega-Damage quality.

Primary Purpose: Defense.

Mega-Damage: 1D10 M.D. per volley, 1 M.D. per single feather as a throwing knife.

Rate of Fire: Each volley of feathers counts as a single melee attack.

Effective Range: 50 feet (15.2 m).

Payload: 20 volleys, but each volley only requires two minutes to regrow.

Bonus: +2 to strike.

**3. Hand to Hand Combat:** Rather than us long-range weapons, the Agni Plasma-Bird can engage in hand to hand combat using its horns, head, feet, body and beak.

## Ganesh Personnel Carrier

The Ganesh is a colossal War Mount whose primary function is troop transport and support. These massive beasts will charge into a fray, weapons blazing, and disgorge a strike team directly onto the battlefield. Huge, elephantine beasts, Ganesh have been heavily engineered both internally and externally for their mission. Their heads are wide, flat and thickly plated, complete with a trunk that serves as their main cannon. Their ears are huge flaps of skin, just like an elephant's, but they can become rigid at a moment's notice, serving as front facing armored shields. Protruding from the beast's upper jaw is an array of spiked tusks, usually used to clear the ground of obstacles, but can also be launched like huge spears. The pilot sets on its neck, just forward of the shoulders, encased in a rubbery skin saddle. Along each of the front shoulders are batteries of shiny cell clusters, Super Light Cells that produce volleys of energy beams used against ground forces.

While the front end of the beast is armed and armored, the belly and flanks are covered with six human-sized, oval, translucent, fleshy blisters. These are the pods where the strike team rides while the Ganesh transports them into combat. While within the pod, the team cannot attack or defend themselves, but can communicate with the pilot and the beast itself via Bio-Comms. The pods look weak and flimsy when compared to the head and front of the animal, but the blister pods are quite sturdy and can take a pounding before the individual inside would be in any danger. When ready to disgorge the passengers, the pods split down the middle and burst open, flinging the strike team to the ground, ready for action. Loading passengers into the pods is equally easy, simply leaping up into the pod causes it to seal itself back up, ready for transport. Also, the Ganesh can use its prehensile trunk to assist passengers that are wounded or otherwise unable to reach the pods from the ground.

Interestingly enough, these personnel pods aren't just fleshy compartments, they are also healing receptacles; large scale *Slap Patches*. A Splicer wounded on the battlefield can be evacuated and treated all at the same time. While not meant to replace the ministrations of a Saint, the initial treatment by the pod can stabilize a wounded warrior until proper medical aid can be given.

Despite their size, the Ganesh are swift, often surprising their opponents with how quickly they can cover ground with their columnar legs. Fast, armored and thick with weapons, the Ganesh aren't just used to transport troops onto the battlefield. They are also used for "hot extraction," rescuing troops from almost certain doom. When they are on your side, the Ganesh are



godsend. When you're up against them, the Ganesh are gods of destruction.

**Class:** Troop Transport War Mount

**Crew:** One Rider, but can carry as many as six troops in its pods, up to six can ride on its back unprotected for a total of twelve troops. These six on its back are, however, unprotected from enemy fire, but can actively defend themselves.

**M.D.C. by Location:**

Personnel Pods (6, 3 on each side) – 200 each

Shield Ears (2) – 250 each

Front Legs (2) – 250 each

Hind Legs (2) – 325 each

Trunk – 200

\* Rider's War Saddle – 100

\* Feet (4) – 175 each

\* Tusks (6) – 100 each

\*Shoulder Super Light Cells (4, 2 on each side) – 50 each

\*\* Head – 300

\*\*\* Main Body – 750

\* A single asterisk indicates a small, low profile, or shielded target that is difficult to hit. An attacker must aim and make a "Called Shot" to hit such targets, and even then is -3 to strike.

\*\* Destroying the head will stop the War Mount in its tracks, eliminates all optics and sensory systems, reduces the speed to 10% of max, reduces the number of melee attacks to three total (including the rider's) and negates all bonuses from the animal, but the rider can still fire the weapon systems and make the War Mount walk (at a ponderous rate) for up to 12 hours after the head is gone.

\*\*\* Depleting the M.D.C. of the main body will shut down the War Mount completely, rendering it totally useless and effectively destroying and killing it.

**Speed:**

Running: 100 mph (160 km) maximum, but it takes a full melee round to reach that speed and three melee attacks to make a sudden stop. Normal cruising speed is 50 mph (80 km), and the act of running doesn't significantly tire the Ganesh. It can run all day, but does need at least six hours of sleep every 24 hours to maintain peak efficiency. If pushed without rest, reduce the number of attacks per melee by one and speed by 35% per day it goes without it.

Leaping: Not possible. The Ganesh is just too heavy.

Digging: The Ganesh can excavate trenches and fortifications with its tusks at a rate of 10 mph (16 km), but cannot actually dig to bury itself.

Swimming: 30 mph (48 km/26 knots). The War Mount can withstand depths of 800 feet (244 m) down, but riders are exposed and will probably need some type of diving gear or a suit of Host Armor to follow it.

Flying: Not possible.

**Statistical Data:**

Height: 30 feet (9.14 m) at the shoulder, 34 feet (10.36 m) to the crest of the spine.

Width: 19 feet (5.7 m) from shoulder to shoulder.

Length: 35 feet (10.6 m) from head to flank.

Weight: 9 tons.

Cargo: The Ganesh can carry a whopping eight tons of cargo and up to 16 tons can be pulled behind it if the cargo is on a wheeled platform, half if being dragged across the ground.

Physical Strength: 2D6+60, Supernatural P.S.

Production Cycle: 6 years gestation, plus 6 years of growth time.

Operation Lifetime: 100 year life span.

Trade Value: 15 million credits for a healthy, undamaged unit with all limbs and weapons intact.

Bio-Regeneration: 6D6 M.D.C. per hour for the Main Body and 3D6 M.D.C. for all other locations. The Ganesh *cannot* regrow severed limbs or weapon systems.

Horror Factor: 16 against humans not familiar with the Ganesh, none against machines.

Senses & Features: Standard.

Feeding: The Ganesh is an herbivore and needs to eat 300+ pounds (135+ kg) of vegetable matter per day.

Sleep Requirements: The Ganesh requires at least six hours of sleep every night.

Rider: The rider sets between the shoulders and the neck where he is provided with protection, but still has a clear line of sight.

**Other Data (used when the War Mount is without a rider):**

The Ganesh is able to operate independent of a rider thanks to its animal-like intelligence and instincts. Ganesh are particularly loyal to warriors, and will not hesitate to wade into the thick of battle to aid a fellow soldier.

Alignment: Considered Principled.

War Mount Attributes: I.Q. 1D4+3 (low animal intelligence), M.E. 1D4+6, M.A. 1D8+4, P.S. see above, P.P. 1D6+6, P.E. 2D6+18, P.B. 2D6, Spd see above.

Number of Attacks per Melee: Five.

Combat Bonuses (in addition to any possible attribute bonuses): +1 initiative, +2 strike with ranged attacks, +1 strike, +4 parry with tusks, +4 roll with impact, +6 vs Horror Factor, and totally immune to poison and mind control.

Equivalent (instinctive) Skills of Note: Begging 70%, Herding 75%, Identify Plants and Fruits 85%, Land Navigation 60%, Swim 55% and understands the language of the House that created it.

Combat Capabilities: The Ganesh may engage in ranged combat or hand to hand, or a combination of the two. Remember that the Ganesh's trunk-cannon is prehensile.

Restrained Head Butt or Stomp Attack: 2D6 M.D.

Full Strength Head Butt or Stomp Attack: 6D6 M.D.

Power Head Butt or Stomp Attack: 1D8x10 M.D., but counts as two attacks.

Standing Stomp Attack: 2D8x10 M.D., but counts as two attacks and leaves the soft underbelly exposed. Any such attacks inflict double damage to the main body.

Kick with Front Legs: 5D6 M.D.

Kick with Rear Legs: 1D6x10 M.D.

Body Block/Ram: 1D6x10 M.D., and has a 01-85% chance of knocking an opponent up to 15 feet (4.6 m) tall off his feet and onto his back. If so, the target loses initiative and two melee attacks. A body block/ram counts as only one attack for the Ganesh.

Body Flip/Throw with Trunk: 4D6 M.D., plus victim loses initiative and one melee attack.

Swat with Trunk: 2D6 M.D.

Full Strength Club with Trunk: 5D6 M.D.

## Ganesh Bio-Weapon Systems:

- 1. Prehensile Trunk Heavy Gore-Cannon:** The trunk of the Ganesh is a massive gore cannon that discharges digestive juices and bio-energy. Because it is prehensile, it can aim in any direction, including over its own back!

Primary Purpose: Combat Support.

Secondary Purpose: Assault and Defense.

Mega-Damage: 8D8+14 M.D.

Rate of Fire: Each blast counts as one melee attack.

Effective Range: 2200 feet (671 m).

Payload: 30 blasts.

Bonus: +2 to strike.

- 2. Tusk Spears:** Growing out of the Ganesh's upper jaw are six bone tusks, three per side. These are not the smooth tusks typical of mundane elephants, but are instead spiked and jagged, making them brutal slashing and bludgeoning weapons. They can also be fired from their sockets with devastating force.

Primary Purpose: Anti-Personnel.

Secondary Purpose: Defense.

Mega-Damage: 1D6x10 M.D. when used as a slashing weapon. 1D10x10 M.D. when launched, and Game Masters may also want to apply rules for impact damage and stun effects found on pages 116 and 117 of the **Splicers® Role Playing Game**.

Rate of Fire: Can be fired one at a time, each counting as one melee action.

Effective Range: 1000 feet (305 m).

Payload: Six spears total, three per jaw. It takes 3D6 hours to regrow a tusk.

Bonus: +3 to strike in hand to hand combat, +1 to strike when fired.

- 3. Super Light Cells (4):** Clustered on the front shoulders are four light cell arrays, two for each side. These fire beams of pure white light at anyone who gets too close.

Primary Purpose: Defense.

Secondary Purpose: Anti-Personnel.

Mega-Damage: 2D10 M.D.

Rate of Fire: Each blast or volley counts as one melee action.

Effective Range: 2000 feet (610 m).

Payload: Effectively unlimited.

Bonus: +1 to strike on an aimed shot.

- 4. Hand to Hand Combat:** Rather than us long-range weapons, the rider or a riderless animal can engage in hand to hand combat using its horns, head, feet, body and tusks. The rider may also use any weapons that are handheld or part of his Host Armor, but each attack counts as one of their combined melee attacks.

## Jhapattanaga

### Also known as the "Swoop Dragon."

The Swoop Dragon air assault beast is a fast attack aerial War Mount that operates as a solitary scout unit, in assault wings of five, or runs support for Ganesh and Dracos troop transports. They are closely related to the Naga Serpents favored

by the Naga Dancers, and are often thought of as their big brothers. The Jhapattanaga are shaped like a giant, black, green or brown, five-eyed cobra with a huge, wing-like hood spread out from behind the head that tapers off toward the middle of the beast. Rather than flap the hood, the mount has three organic thrusters where the Jhapattanaga's hood tapers into the body at mid-length for propulsion. The hood provides the lift necessary for flight and the mount has an incredible amount of minute control over the surface that it makes it deceptively maneuverable. The tail also has a large, flat rudder-like appendage at the tip that assists in steering the creature through the air. Because of the mount's powerful body, it can spring itself into the air from a coiled position, ride a blast from its thrusters and catch lift with the hood giving the beast a unique form of VTOL (Vertical Take-Off and Landing) capabilities. The rider controls the animal from a heavily scaled protective cocoon located behind the head, exposing only the rider's head, shoulders and upper arms to danger.

Many Jhapattanaga Outriders joke that the mount is armed to the teeth, but anyone on the receiving end finds little to joke about. The tail rudder houses a powerful bio-stinger, there are missile pods located around the thrusters and concealed within the hood, and it has a grappling tongue equipped with a venomous stinger. If that wasn't enough, the mouth is lined with rows of flesh-shredding teeth. The beast is large enough to snatch up a man-sized target with the tongue, reel them into the mouth, chew them up, and then drop their prey from dizzying heights.

While the Swoop Dragons are typically used for aerial reconnaissance and fast attack missions, they are very effective in ground and aquatic support roles as well. They are favorite perimeter patrol companions of Outriders and Roughnecks because they are so multi-purpose. In addition to their obvious flight abilities, they are deadly quick on the ground and good for patrolling the many rivers that cut through Shiv territory.

Above all else, they are patient, silent predators, just like their smaller serpentine cousins. However, also like the Naga Serpents, the Jhapattanaga have a cruel streak in them. They are often the first accused when immature War Mounts, and sometimes children, go missing near the serpent pens. Because of their size, and the amount of damage they could cause on a day that one is feeling particularly cruel, they aren't given near the same intelligence as their smaller cousins, and are bonded to an Outrider at a very early age. Like their smaller cousins, they become fiercely loyal to their master, the one person that can keep them in line.

**Class:** Aerial Attack War Mount.

**Crew:** One rider.

**M.D.C. by Location:**

\* Hood – 300

\*\* Hood Missile Pods (12) – 30 each

\* Organic Thrusters (3) – 130 each

\*\* Thruster Missile Pods (6) – 30 each

Rider's War Saddle – 100

\* Tail Rudder/Bio-Stinger – 250

\*\* Eyes (5) – 15 each

Mouth/Teeth – 100

\*\*\* Head – 200

\*\* Tongue – 80

\*\*\*\* Main Body – 360

\* Destroying the hood makes flying impossible while destroying the tail rudder reduces all flight dynamics by 25%. Destroying one thruster reduces maximum speed by one-third, destroying two reduces maximum speed by two-thirds, and destroying all three makes flight impossible.

\*\* A double asterisk indicates a small, low profile, or shielded target that is difficult to hit. An attacker must aim and make a "Called Shot" to hit such targets, and even then is -3 to strike.

\*\*\* Destroying the head will stop the War Mount in its tracks, eliminates all optics and sensory systems, reduces the speed to 10% of max, reduces the number of melee attacks to three total (including the rider's) and negates all bonuses from the animal, but the rider can still fire the weapon systems and make the War Mount walk (at a ponderous rate) for up to 12 hours after the head is gone.

\*\*\*\* Depleting the M.D.C. of the main body will shut down the War Mount completely, rendering it totally useless and effectively destroying and killing it.

#### **Speed:**

Running/Slithering: 120 mph (192 km) maximum, but normal cruising speed is 60 mph (96 km). The Jhapattanaga can reach speeds of 250 mph (400 km), but only for short bursts of 1D4 melee rounds, after which it must drop to cruising speed for the next 2D4 melee rounds or pull up lame. The War Mount can slither up inclines in excess of 80 degrees, and is capable of traversing sheer cliff faces. **Note:** The War Mount can slither all day at cruising speed without fatigue, but can only maintain maximum speed for 1D4 hours at a stretch, with an hour of rest or minimal movement in between each full speed rush.

Leaping: A powerful leaper, the Jhapattanaga can leap up to 150 feet (46 m) high or across from a standing position, an additional 50% of that distance with a short burst of speed, and double at full speed. The Swoop Dragon can leap 400 feet (122 m) high and 600 feet (183 m) across with the assistance of its organic thrusters.

Digging: 15 mph (24 km) through sand or dirt, but half as fast through clay, rock or stone. Digging does not tire the War Mount and it can dig a hole deep enough to adequately hide itself relatively fast. In sand or soil it only requires two melee actions to bury itself fully, but in clay, rock or stone it requires an entire minute.

Swimming: 100 mph (160 km/87 knots), this also does not tire the War Mount or rider. Maximum underwater depth is 3000 feet (914 m).

Flying: Maximum speed is 400 mph (640 km), with a cruising speed of 200 mph (320 km). The Jhapattanaga can reach speeds of just under Mach 1 (650 mph/1040 km), but only for short bursts of 1D4 minutes, after which the War Mount must drop down to cruising speed for the next hour. It can fly all day long without fatigue at cruising speed, but only four hours at maximum speed before needing to rest for at least one hour. The Jhapattanaga can push itself further, but suffers damage to the thrusters for doing so. For each 30 minutes beyond the initial four hours that the beast pushes itself at maximum speed it suffers 20 points of Mega-Damage to *each* of the thruster organs. This is extremely painful for the War Mount and it will rarely perform this service for the rider except under extreme circum-

stances such as self-preservation. Once the thrusters reach zero, the beast is unable to fly until they can be regenerated and/or healed.

#### **Statistical Data:**

Diameter: 4 feet (1.2 m) thick.

Length: 50 feet (15.2 m).

Weight: 8 tons.

Cargo: Up to 3 tons can be pulled behind the beast if towed on a wheeled platform with a special harness rig that fits around the beast's head. Doing so prevents the serpent's hood from being deployed and obviously, flight is not possible. They are ill suited for transporting cargo and it irritates the beast to no end.

Physical Strength: 2D6+25, Supernatural.

Production Cycle: 4 years gestation, plus 5 years growth time.

Operation Lifetime: 85 years.

Trade Value: 15 million credits for a healthy, undamaged unit with all weapons and features intact.

Bio-Regeneration: Enhanced Bio-Regeneration! 1D6 M.D.C. per minute for the main body and one M.D.C. per minute for all other locations.

Horror Factor: 16 against humans, none against the Machine.

Senses & Features: Standard for War Mounts. Also has the bio-enhancements of Forked Tongue, Heat Pits, Prehensile Tongue, and Silent Prowl, which is identical to the Skinjob ability of the same name.

Feeding: The Jhapattanaga is a carnivore and eats 400 lbs (180 kg) of live food every day.

Sleep Requirements: The Swoop Dragons only require four hours of sleep every day, but will take every opportunity to nap when it presents itself.

Rider: The rider sits behind the head, where he is provided with protection, but still has a clear line of sight.

**Other Data (used when the War Mount is without a rider):**

Alignment: Considered Anarchist.

War Mount Attributes: I.Q. 1D4+8 (high animal intelligence), M.E. 1D4+8, M.A. 1D4+6, P.S. see above, P.P. 2D6+18, P.E. 2D4+16, P.B. 3D6+2, Spd see above.

Number of Attacks per Melee: Five.

Combat Bonuses (in addition to any possible attribute bonuses): +2 initiative, +3 strike, +6 dodge, +8 *automatic* dodge while flying, +5 roll with impact, +6 vs Horror Factor, and totally immune to poison.

Automatic and "Instinctual" Skills of Note: Land Navigation 70%, Track (people) 65%, Track Animals 80%, Wilderness Survival 60%, and understands the language of the House that created it.

Combat Capabilities: The Jhapattanaga may engage in ranged combat or hand to hand, or a combination of the two.

Restrained Head Butt: 2D4 M.D.

Full Strength Head Butt: 3D6 M.D.

Power Head Butt: 6D6 M.D., but counts at two attacks.

Body Block/Ram: 1D6x10 M.D., and has a 01-85% chance of knocking an opponent up to 15 feet (4.6 m) tall off his feet and onto his back. If so, the target loses initiative and two melee attacks. A body block/ram counts as only one attack for the Jhapattanaga.

## Jhapattanaga Bio-Weapon Systems:

1. **Bio-Energy Expulsion Tail Stinger:** Mounted in the tail rudder is a powerful bio-energy vent used to protect the animal's rear. However, because the tail is prehensile, it can be aimed in any direction.

Primary Purpose: Rear Guard Defense

Secondary Purpose: Assault

Mega-Damage: 2D8+ bonus M.D. equal to the War Mount's P.E. attribute.

Rate of Fire: Each blast counts as one melee attack.

Effective Range: 1800 feet (549 m), but only 900 feet (274 m) underwater.

Payload: Effectively unlimited.

Bonus: +3 to strike on an aimed shot *only*.

2. **Thruster Missile Pods (6):** Mounted on each of the three thrusters are two organic missile pods, for a total of six missile pods.

Primary Purpose: Assault

Secondary Purpose: Anti-Personnel

Mega-Damage: 5D10 per individual Organic Rocket fired, with a blast radius of 10 feet (3 m).

Rate of Fire: One at a time, or in volleys of 2, 4, 6, 8, or up to the maximum number located on the War Mount.

Effective Range: One mile (1.6 km).

Payload: Each missile pod holds four missiles, for a total payload of 24 missiles.

Bonus: Each missile has a bonus of +5 to strike and dodge.

3. **Hood Missile Pods (12):** Mounted on the underside of the hood are twelve organic missile pods, six per side. These pods *cannot* fire unless the hood is deployed.

Primary Purpose: Assault

Secondary Purpose: Anti-Personnel

Mega-Damage: 5D10 per individual Organic Rocket fired, with a blast radius of 10 feet (3 m).

Rate of Fire: One at a time, or in volleys of 2, 4, 6, 8, or up to the maximum number located on the War Mount.

Effective Range: One mile (1.6 km).

Payload: Each missile pod holds four missiles, for a total payload of 48 missiles.

Bonus: Each missile has a bonus of +5 to strike and dodge.

4. **Retractable Tongue and Stinger:** Coiled within the Swoop Dragon's mouth is a long, prehensile tongue with a venomous stinger at the tip. It is primarily used to incapacitate and capture food, but is also an excellent weapon to spring on an unsuspecting enemy.

Primary Purpose: Anti-Personnel

Secondary Purpose: Feeding/Debilitation

Special Combat Effects:

**Tongue Lash:** Upon a successful tongue lash attack, the victim must make a *second* dodge roll against the Jhapattanaga's *unmodified* attack roll to avoid being latched onto. If successful, the victim has narrowly escaped and can attack or flee. If the victim fails the second dodge roll he is caught by the War Mount's tongue and is subject to being brought within range of the beast's powerful shredding teeth. Retraction of the

tongue counts as *half* a melee action, so the Jhapattanaga can retract the tongue and use its bite attack on a victim on its next melee action. Breaking free of the tongue requires a combined Splicers P.S. of 32, or destroying the tongue. The Jhapattanaga will also release a victim if it takes more than 30 points of Mega-Damage to the tongue in a single attack.



**Venom Stinger:** Instead of having venom-injecting fangs, the Jhapattanaga has a poison injecting stinger at the tip of the tongue. There are several types of venom that the beast is able to inject into its prey.

Mega-Damage:

**Tongue Lash:** 1D6+3 M.D., plus the effects as described above.

**Venom Stinger:** 1D6 M.D., plus the effects of the venom. There are three different kinds of venom. A character that is stung must make a saving throw vs poison at 15 or higher. Characters that fail are subject to one of the venom effects below. All penalties from subsequent bites are cumulative, in addition to penalties from other sources such as injury, fatigue, or chemical attacks. Onset of the venom takes 1D4 *melee actions*, and last for 3D6 hours *per dose*.

1. **Blindness:** The venom acts against the optic nerve, preventing information from the eye getting to the brain. The victim is -9 to strike, parry and dodge, all skills requiring vision are performed at -85%, and reduce number of actions per melee by half.

2. **Extreme Swelling:** The character's entire body swells up from an over-stimulated histamine reaction. The victim can barely move, and doing so causes extreme pain, especially in the joints. The victim suffers from a -6 to strike, parry and dodge, reduce Spd by 75%, and -8 to the P.B. and M.A. attributes.

3. **Hallucinogenic:** The venom is a powerful hallucinogen, reducing the victim to a barely cognitive state. He has trouble recognizing familiar faces and voices, and will see and hear things that are not there. The victim has only one attack per melee, no combat bonuses, -60% to skill performance, and all attribute scores are reduced to half.

Rate of Fire: Each lash or venom injection counts as separate, single melee actions.

Effective Range: The tongue has a maximum length of 50 feet (15.2 m).

Payload: The serpent has enough venom for eight doses of each type of poison. It takes 30 minutes for a dose to regenerate. Additional payloads can be purchased for 10 Bio-E points each, to a maximum of sixteen doses of each type of poison.

Bonus: +5 to strike, +5 to entangle; no other bonuses apply to the tongue's attacks.

5. **Shredding Teeth:** Lining the Jhapattanaga's mouth are a battery of small, sharp, backwards pointing teeth. They are primarily used for grasping at prey, but are also excellent close quarters weapons. The Jhapattanaga will use the teeth to bite an opponent, but they will never swallow one whole unless they are specifically intending to feed.

Primary Purpose: Feeding

Secondary Purpose: Anti-Personnel/Terror

Special Combat Effects: Characters brought into the serpent's mouth are at a serious disadvantage to try and escape because clothing, armor and skin are easily snagged on the backwards pointing teeth. Victims can attempt to wrench themselves free by using their melee attacks to make dodge rolls against the Jhapattanaga's original bite attack roll. A success indicates that the victim has escaped from the War Mount's maw, for the moment. Victims can also attempt to attack the serpent directly, but

all such actions are done at a -6 while the character is held within the serpent's mouth.

Mega-Damage: 1D4x10 M.D.

Rate of Fire: Each bite attack counts as one melee action.

Effective Range: Touch.

Payload: Effectively unlimited.

Bonus: +2 to strike.

6. **Constriction:** The Jhapattanaga can also ensnare an opponent in its massive, muscular coils. See pages 91 and 92 of the **Splicers® Role Playing Game** for specific information about this attack.

Primary Purpose: Capture

Secondary Purpose: Assault

Mega-Damage: 6D6 per squeeze.

Rate of Fire: Each squeeze counts at one melee action.

Effective Range: The Jhapattanaga can coil around an opponent within 50 feet (15.2 m).

Payload: Effectively unlimited.

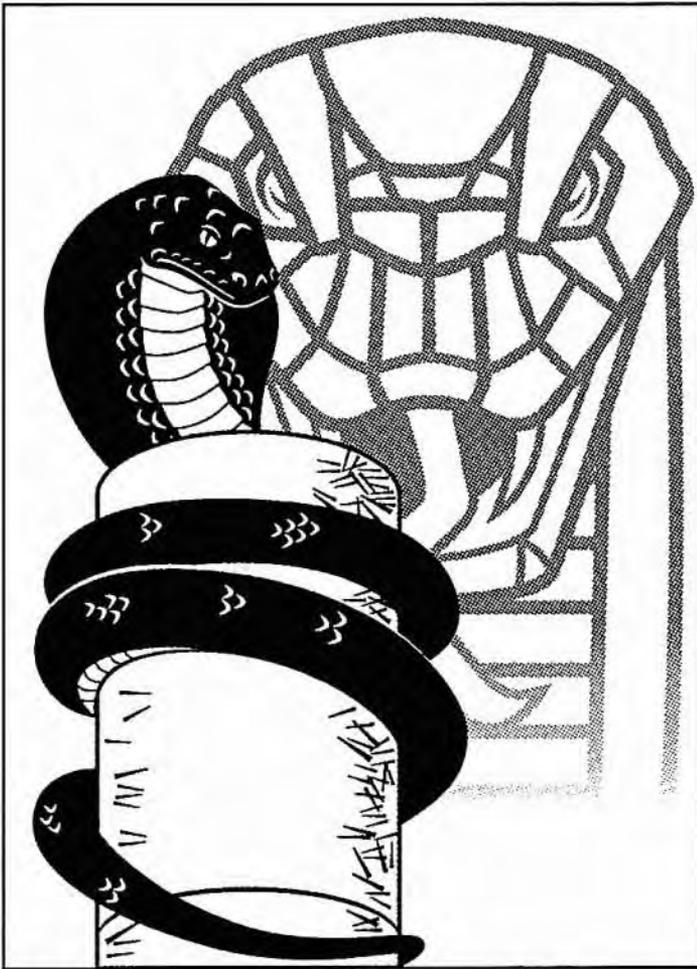
Bonus: +2 to strike.

7. **Hand to Hand Combat:** Rather than use long-range weapons, the rider or a riderless animal can engage in hand to hand combat using its horns, head, feet, body and tusks. The rider may also use any weapons that are handheld or part of his Host Armor, but each attack counts as one of their combined melee attacks.

## Naga Serpents

Naga Serpents are the bio-engineered companions to the Naga Dancers. They are a combination of cobra and alien DNA that has been spliced together to create a specialized servant. However, the Enlightened Librarian has taken it a step further and added *human* DNA to the Naga Serpents, giving them unprecedented intelligence. Of all the War Mounts, only the Agni Plasma-Birds come close to these snakes in raw brainpower. This level of intelligence has enabled the Naga Dancers to form a unique, some would say *psychic*, union with these snakes. Through a Bio-Comm, a Naga Dancer is capable of linking her mind with each of her serpents, able to scan their surface thoughts. But that's not all. The Naga Dancer can also enter into and, for all intents and purposes, *become* the serpent. The Dancer sees through its eyes, tastes with its tongue, feels with its scales, and can control its actions. When possessing the body of a Naga Serpent, the Dancer can also actually *speak through the animal*. The voice is low, strained, and composed mostly of hissing out the sounds, but it is speech nonetheless. In time, the serpent itself gains rudimentary speech abilities, capable of holding limited conversations with humans! This is a strange and wonderful ability, so strange that the Engineers aren't quite sure how it's possible: they only know that it is.

In appearance, the Naga Serpents look like very large, black and green cobras. When slithering across the ground they are smooth and silky wisps of muscle and scales. When they are threatened, or engaging in combat, they puff out their hood, expose their menacing fangs, and swell up their body, which extrudes their small, razor-edged scales. Anyone attempting to grab hold of a Naga Serpent when it is enraged is going to find



their hand crisscrossed with tiny slashes where the scales have cut them. However, it's actually much worse than that.

Most everyone fears the serpent's fangs with good reason, but what most people don't realize is that the bristling scales are also venom injectors! A Naga Serpent doesn't have to bite to inject its poison; it only needs to scratch the target with any of its scales. Swift-footed warriors have narrowly avoided the serpent's bite, only to be brought down by the serpent grazing its body against them.

Naga Serpents are loyal only to the Dancer to whom they have bonded. They find no kinship with other serpents, people, or animals, and delight in scaring unwary passersby. They have a cruel streak in them, not unlike a Naga Dancer playing with other people's emotions. These serpents also hate to be idle; always looking for trouble when not preoccupied with some assigned task. It's not uncommon to find Naga Serpents innocently coiled up in someone's bed, closet, or in front of a door, ready to surprise them. These incidents rarely result in anyone being harmed, but the only ones laughing are the serpents and the Naga Dancers.

Sleek, sly, and silent, Naga Serpents are expert spies and assassins. With their strange and unusual bond to the Naga Dancers, they may also be the hint of things to come in the strange and sometimes unpredictable science of genetic splicing.

**Class:** Scout, Spy and Assassin.

**Crew:** None.

**M.D.C. by Location:**

Hood – 20

\* Eyes (2) – 12 each

\*\* Head – 40

\*\*\* Main Body – 100

\* A single asterisk indicates a small, low profile, or shielded target that is difficult to hit. An attacker must aim and make a "Called Shot" to hit such targets, and even then is -6 to strike.

\*\* Destroying the head will kill the Naga Serpent in its tracks, but it is a difficult target to hit. An attacker must aim and make a "Called Shot" to hit such targets, and even then is -4 to hit.

\*\*\* Depleting the M.D.C. of the main body will shut down the Naga Serpent completely, rendering it totally useless and effectively destroying and killing it.

**Speed:**

Running/Slithering: While the Naga Serpent cannot run, per se, it can slither across surfaces with amazing speed. Top speed is 40 mph (64 km). It can traverse even the worst terrain with ease, slipping into and out of small places, even traversing smooth inclines in excess of 80 degrees vertical.

Leaping: 30 feet (9.1 m) high or across, double that if leaping from a coiled position.

Digging: 20 mph (32 km) through sand or dirt, half that through clay, rock or stone. To dig down enough to adequately bury itself and hide in sand or soil takes just one melee action. To hide itself in clay, rock, or stone takes one melee round.

Swimming: 60 mph (96 km/ 52 knots); an incredible swimmer, faster in the water than on land.

Flying: Not possible.

**Statistical Data:**

Length: Up to 9 feet (2.7 m).

Weight: Up to 150 lbs (68 kg).

Cargo: Cannot carry cargo, but could pull up to 100 lbs (45 kg).

Physical Strength: 1D4+12, Splicer P.S.

Production Cycle: One year gestation plus two years growth time.

Operation Lifetime: 100 years.

Trade Value: 1.5 million credits for a healthy, undamaged unit.

Bio-Regeneration: Enhanced Bio-Regeneration! 1D6 M.D.C. per minute for the main body and one M.D.C. per minute for all other locations.

Horror Factor: 14 against humans, none against the Machine.

Senses & Features: Standard per all War Mounts with the exception of #1, #4 and #6. Also has the bio-enhancements of Forked Tongue, Heat Pits and the following four abilities. See also the bio-weapons section below for explanations of the Naga Serpent's poison attacks.

**1. Silent Prowl:** Identical to the Skinjob ability of the same name.

**2. Near Human Intelligence:** Naga Serpents have intelligence that is near human; consequently they operate on a level above instinct. Naga Serpents can therefore select *one skill program* and *two secondary skills* at the Game Master's discretion to represent their training and experiences. Note:

Game Masters and players who may want to experiment with Naga Serpents as player characters are not discouraged from doing so. It can be a fun and interesting challenge!

**3. Near Human Speech:** When the Naga Serpent has been bonded with a Naga Dancer for three levels of experience, the serpent gains the ability of human speech. This is the rough equivalent of Partial Human Speech as described in the *After the Bomb® Role Playing Game*.

**4. Naga Dancer Bio-Empathy:** Through some yet unknown factor in the splicing process, Naga Serpents and Naga Dancers can share a mind bonding experience through a Bio-Comm System where the Naga Dancer actually takes control of one of her serpents' bodies. While their minds are linked, the serpent's mind is placed into a state of cognitive hibernation, while the Dancer's body goes into a deep trance. During this time, the Dancer's body is totally defenseless, and she is completely unaware of what is happening in her surroundings. Her only sensory input is through the serpent that she is possessing. While in the serpent's body, the Dancer uses its physical stats instead of her own. Should the Dancer's body be killed while possessing the serpent, she will be forever trapped within the body of the snake! Also, should the snake's body be killed while possessed, her conscious mind will die, and her body will soon follow 2D6 hours later.

The act of possessing a bonded serpent takes three melee actions, while coming out of the trance takes an entire melee round. After this time, both the Dancer and the serpent will be groggy, suffering from a -1 to strike, parry and dodge for 1D6 melee rounds.

Range: Six miles (9.6 km).

Limitations: Only one serpent can be possessed at a given time, and should it go beyond the six mile range, the Dancer will be forcibly driven back into her body. This is an unsettling experience resulting in a heavy headache and a -3 to all combat bonuses and a -45% to skill performance for 1D4 hours.

Feeding: Naga Serpents are carnivores, requiring 20 lbs (9 kg) of live food per week.

Sleep Requirements: Naga Serpents *require* only one hour of sleep per 24 hours of activity, but if given the opportunity, will nap and doze as much as they can.

#### **Other Data:**

Alignment: Considered Anarchist.

War Mount Attributes: I.Q. 1D8+8 (high *near human* intelligence), M.E. 3D6+1, M.A. 2D6, P.S. see above, P.P. 18+2D6, P.E. 12+1D6, P.B. 3D6, Spd see above.

Number of Attacks per Melee: Five.

Combat Bonuses (in addition to any possible attribute bonuses): +3 initiative, +2 strike, +6 *automatic* dodge, +4 roll with impact, +4 vs Horror Factor.

Automatic and "Instinctual" Skills of Note: Land Navigation 70%, Track (people) 65%, Track Animals 80%, Wilderness Survival 60%, Vital Points (organics), and understands the language of the House that created it.

Combat Capabilities: The Naga Serpent may engage in ranged combat or hand to hand, or a combination of the two.

Restrained Head Butt: 1D4 M.D.

Full Strength Head Butt: 1D8 M.D.

Power Head Butt: 2D8 M.D., but counts at two attacks.

Body Block/Ram: 4D4 M.D., and has a 01-35% chance of knocking an opponent up to 10 feet (3 m) tall off his feet and onto his back. If so, the target loses initiative and two melee attacks. A body block/ram counts as only one attack for the Naga Serpent.

## **Naga Serpent Bio-Weapon Systems:**

### **1. Toxic Bite and Scales**

Primary Purpose: Assassination.

Secondary Purpose: Debilitation.

Mega-Damage: The actual bite of a Naga Serpent does minimal damage, 1D4 M.D. to Mega-Damage beings while doing 1D4 S.D.C. to normal humans. A slash from the extruded scales does a single point of Mega-Damage to M.D.C. beings and a single point of damage to normal humans. There are four different kinds of venom. A character that is bitten by a Naga Serpent, slashed by its extruded scales or has the venom spit into his eye must make a saving throw vs poison at 15 or higher. Characters who fail are subject to one of the venom effects below. All penalties from subsequent bites are cumulative, in addition to penalties from other sources such as injury, fatigue, or chemical attacks. Onset of the venom takes 1D4 *melee actions*, and effects last for 3D6 hours *per dose*.

1. Blindness: The venom acts against the optic nerve, preventing information from the eye getting to the brain. The victim is -9 to strike, parry and dodge, all skills requiring vision are performed at -85%, and reduce number of actions per melee by half.

2. Extreme Swelling: The character's entire body swells up from an over-stimulated histamine reaction. The victim can barely move, and doing so causes extreme pain, especially in the joints. The victim suffers from a -6 to strike, parry and dodge, reduce Spd by 75%, and -8 to the P.B. and M.A. attributes.

3. Hallucinogenic: The venom is a powerful hallucinogen, reducing the victim to a barely cognitive state. He has trouble recognizing familiar faces and voices, and will see and hear things that are not there. The victim has only one attack per melee, no combat bonuses, -60% to skill performance, and all attribute scores are reduced to half.

4. Naga Dancer Venom: As described above in the Naga Dancer O.C.C. description.

Rate of Fire: Each injection counts a one melee attack.

Effective Range: The poisons can be spit from the serpent's mouth up to 30 feet (9.1 m) away.

Payload: The serpent has enough venom for five doses of each type of poison. It takes 30 minutes for a dose to regenerate. Additional payloads can be purchased for 10 Bio-E points each, to a maximum of ten doses of each type of poison.

Bonus: +5 to strike when spitting the venom, although this is the only bonus that applies to this kind of attack.

**2. Constriction:** The Naga Serpent can also ensnare an opponent in its massive, muscular coils. See pages 91 and 92 of the *Splicers® Role Playing Game* for specific information about this attack.

Primary Purpose: Capture

Secondary Purpose: Assault

Mega-Damage: 3D6 per squeeze.

Rate of Fire: Each squeeze counts as one melee action.

Effective Range: The Naga Serpent can coil around an opponent within 12 feet (3.6 m).

Payload: Effectively unlimited.

Bonus: +2 to strike.

## Nihilist Suicide Beast

Taking a cue from the Machine's Popper Mines, the Shivs have created an insidious self-destructing weapon of their own. Less of a War Mount and more of a specialized smart weapon, they are a type of mollusk with an outer shell made of locally occurring rock and a soft, fleshy, but highly volatile, organic component. They have a single, but incredibly strong, sucker-tipped tentacle that they use to either drag, push, or roll themselves along with. This tentacle is the only part of the beast exposed to the environment once the organism has been fully bonded to its stone housing. The Nihilist senses the environment around them through the tentacle, which acts like a snake's tongue, heat pits and antennae all rolled into one. While they are blind and deaf, they don't need much in the way of sensory organs to locate a target and eliminate it.

Used primarily as border security, the Nihilist Suicide Beast is also an excellent sabotage and terror weapon, makes a suitable distraction, and the smaller ones make for a good hand grenade in a pinch. The Nihilist is incredibly effective in its role in border security and sabotage and terror tactics because they are almost impossible to detect. With a rock carapace and few organic parts, they don't show up on infrared, and thanks to their pheromone masking ability, most organic senses dismiss them as harmless if they detect one at all.

A Nihilist will usually wait until a threat comes into range and either latch on with its sucker tentacle, or roll itself along until it is in close proximity, and detonate at point-blank range, sending out a powerful concussive force coupled with hundreds of pulverized, razor sharp rock fragments. These fragments are quite capable of shredding flesh and Mega-Damage hose, and can even penetrate armor plate, making them acceptable weapons against both humans and the Machine's forces.

As a sabotage and terror device, they are often slipped into ventilation shafts, or left behind in sensitive areas by infiltrating Naga Dancers. Because they look like random rocks, few are aware of the danger they pose, and will often ignore them. Once one of these dastardly little beasts does explode, the search to turn up more is often a maddening experience because they are so inconspicuous. House Shiva warriors have found that the smaller, hand-sized beasts make for great, if improvised, hand grenades. Some warriors will carry a satchel full of them and when in range, will throw the small beast at an opponent. Most opponents are taken unawares by these seemingly harmless rocks coming their way, and are often completely off guard when they start sprouting tentacles and exploding around them. Because of their many uses, and their murderous effectiveness, the Nihilist Suicide Beasts are favorites in the House Shiva arsenal.

**Class:** Self-Guided Munitions.

**Crew:** None.

**M.D.C. by Location:**

\* Tentacle – 5

\*\* Main Body – 15

\* A single asterisk indicates a small, low profile, or shielded target that is difficult to hit. An attacker must aim and make a "Called Shot" to hit such targets, and even then is -3 to strike.

\*\* Depleting the M.D.C. of the main body will detonate the Nihilist, however, the damage and area of effect are a mere one-tenth of the creature's maximum destructive potential.

**Speed:**

Running: Not possible, but it can drag, push and roll itself along by its tentacle at a top speed of 14 mph (22.4 km).

Leaping: 6 feet (1.8 m) high and 12 feet (3.6 m) across.

Digging: 20 mph (32 km) through sand or dirt, half that through clay, rock or stone. To dig down enough to adequately bury itself and hide in sand or soil takes just one melee action. To hide itself in clay, rock, or stone takes two melee actions.

Swimming: Not possible, sinks to the bottom, but can drag itself along at a maximum speed of 5 mph (8 km).

Flying: Not possible.

**Statistical Data:**

Diameter: 7 inches around to 3 feet around (0.1-0.9 m).

Weight: 10 to 100 lbs (4.5-45 kg).

Cargo: None.

Physical Strength: 1D2+12

Production Cycle: Two months gestation, plus one week growth time.

Operation Lifetime: Five years, after which the organism dies and decays away harmlessly, leaving behind a hollowed out rock shell.

Trade Value: 100,000 credits for a new, undamaged unit.

Bio-Regeneration: None.

Horror Factor: 9 individually, 14 in groups of six or more, none to the Machine.

Senses & Features: Nihilist Suicide Beasts do not have any of the standard features common to true War Mounts. Instead, they have the Antennae, Heat Pits and Forked Tongue Sensory Bio-Enhancements rolled into their retractable tentacle.

**1. Invisible to Infrared:** The organism is encased in a thick rock carapace which absorbs and blocks the creature's natural heat signature. This is not a special ability, per se, but rather the natural heat absorbing quality of the rock carapace. Sensory readings are at -65% to detect the creature using heat-sensing systems. Even then, it is likely to be overlooked as a very small rodent or other scavenger.

**2. Pheromone Masking Ability:** In addition to its innocuous appearance, the Nihilist relies on its ability to mask its own scent for its primary protection. The organism emits a shifting series of scents from the tentacle to mask and dilute its own, true scent. Characters trying to detect a Nihilist by scent or taste must first make a successful saving throw vs poisons at a 15 or higher. Failure to do so means that the character cannot separate the creature's true scent from the background smells of the area. Characters that do save can then roll on their appropriate sensing skill, but at a -15%.

Feeding: Nihilist Suicide Beasts are lithovores, requiring a mere 5 pounds (2.2 kg) of rock and soil to eat per day.

Sleep Requirements: Nihilists require only 2 hours of sleep per day.

Rider: Not applicable.

**Other Data:**

Alignment: Effectively Anarchist.

War Mount Attributes: I.Q. 1D4 (extremely low animal intelligence), M.E. 1D4, M.A. 1D2, P.S. see above, P.P. 1D12+8, P.E. 1D6+4, P.B. 1D6, Spd see above.

Number of Attacks per Melee: Two.

Combat Bonuses(in addition to any possible attribute bonuses): +6 to initiative, +1 strike, +2 parry, +2 dodge, +2 roll with impact.

Equivalent (instinctive) Skills of Note: Track/Locate by Sound (60%), Track/Locate by Scent (40%), Track by Heat (70%), Track by Taste (70%), Identify Specific Taste (50%), Identify Common Odors (80%), Identify Specific Scent (40%), Accurately Identify Common, Known Objects (60%), Identify Temperature of Object (80%), Detect Change in Air Temperature (80%), Detect Wind Direction and Speed (80%), Feel Vibrations of Approaching Objects (Constant).

Combat Capabilities: None, except for the tentacle grab.

**Nihilist Bio-Weapon Systems:**

1. **Annihilation Blast:** The Nihilist really only has one mode of attack, which is to destroy itself and do damage to its target. The damage is dependent on the size of the organism, ranging from small, apple-sized beasts, to ones the size of small boulders. The sucker at the end of the beast's tentacle does a single point of S.D.C. damage, but it is capable of latching onto smooth, slick Mega-Damage armor just as easily as it does flesh.

Primary Purpose: Assassination.

Secondary Purpose: Sabotage and terror.

Mega-Damage: Varies depending on the size of the creature:

**Small:** 1D6x10 M.D. to a 20 foot (6 m) area.

**Medium:** 2D6x10 M.D. to a 40 foot (12.1 m) area.

**Large:** 3D6x10 M.D. to a 60 foot (18.2 m) area.

Rate of Fire: The self-destructing explosion takes only one melee action.

Effective Range: Varies, as listed above.

Payload: Single use.

Bonus: +6 to strike with the sucker tentacle strike and the explosive discharge.

# The Art of Role-Playing

By Todd V. Ehrenfels and Craig Hatler

Role-playing is a peculiar hobby — one that is full of wonder. We who call ourselves gamers, or role-players, pride ourselves on our ability to think critically, speak and write creatively, devise solutions to life-threatening problems, and take decisive action to implement those solutions. Our hobby is undoubtedly among the most social activities imaginable; a moderator's game needs players, otherwise it's just an open-ended novel with decision points for the reader to take the story in one direction or another. We invent worlds that range from magic and monsters, to gaslight and steam or cyborgs and virtual reality, and all that exists entirely in our imagination — and we share our imagination with each other, connecting to a shared imagined reality like computers connecting to a network.

As a hobby, role-playing is an amalgam of other hobbies: people have been solving riddles and puzzles since Sophocles wrote of Oedipus and the Sphinx, and Theseus used Ariadne's ball of thread to find his way out of the labyrinth; games of chance have been played since Confucian China; characters have been brought to life on the stage since Shakespeare wrote of Hamlet and Macbeth. Our puzzles and riddles are different, but follow the same premise; our games of chance simulate the swinging of a sword; our stage is smaller, and our lines are improvised. All of these classic forms of art and entertainment are present in role-playing.

War games provided the origin for RPGs. Simulations involving battles from the Civil War or the Crusades, miniature lead or pewter figures were meticulously painted and arranged in rank and file, one player's army pitted against another's. Although wargaming is still a prosperous hobby to this day, there came a time when some wargamers wanted to focus instead on the actions of a single character, rather than a battalion or a regiment — but without background detail to bring that character to life, it was little more than an array of statistical information on a piece of paper. The stories of these characters emerged from the dank, lichen-infested dungeons where they first tread into the wild lands above them, and even later, into villages, towns and cities. After all, what's a dragon's hoard worth if there's no system to trade or sell it? There had to be more than killing monsters and taking their stuff. We developed extensive nations, different varieties of intelligent life, and even alternate dimensions to bring robustness and flavor to the continuity of our campaigns (even the terminology we use to refer to our story arcs originates in wargame thought).

Lately, however, the focus of our efforts and attention has shifted from role-playing and game play to mechanics. With the advent of computers, video games and home video game consoles, role-playing games have taken digital form. But even the most visually appealing graphics and complicated AI engines cannot provide the kind of boundless playground that the collec-

tive imagining of pen-and-paper RPGs can provide, and to compensate they have focused on combat and looting. This mindset has, unfortunately, turned around to influence pen-and-paper RPGs — emphasizing tactical board-game play and an arms race of special abilities, suborning storytelling to “winning the game.” Look back at your last five sessions — do you notice that most of your memories are of combat, and most of the discussion around the table was an argument about how the rules do or do not apply? Realistically, many of us have become more focused on the mechanics of what we do, and have lost sight of the soul of what it is to be a role-player.

So, what went wrong? The answer is that nothing went “wrong,” so much as the paradigm of the game shifted its focus. The problem with such a shift is that when these shifts occur, they tend to detract from the intended ideal of what they are doing. By providing more rules, we find ourselves in an endless cycle about debating the rules instead of playing the game. Is this the fault of the rules? No, however we need to recognize that the rules are only one part of the game, and that our focus should be on our shared imaginings. In a perfect world, collective storytelling within the confines of a trusted group of friends doesn’t require rules — however, such perfect circumstances are rare, and as a result, even a loose framework of guidelines is necessary to ensure fair play and balance between players and moderator.

## How to bring role-playing back into the game

First of all, we need to discuss what role-playing is. Sure, we can assume that everyone knows what role-playing entails, but for the sake of clarity within this article I think that it is important to come up with a working definition. Role-playing, within the confines of a pen-and-paper RPG that is, is generally the act of portraying one or more characters, interacting with the character or characters portrayed by other players, the characters and other “living” creatures portrayed by the moderator (typically referred to as the “Game Master,” or G.M.), and the environment of the setting. The moderator acts as the interface to that environment, displaying with description the sensory information the characters experience, as well as the impact of the characters’ actions on the moderator’s characters, creatures and environment. Oftentimes, interacting with other characters or the environment involves a chance of failure, or danger — in order to recognize this fact and represent that chance, some form of simulation is performed in order to determine success or failure, danger suffered or averted, or conflict resolved. I’ve heard RPGs referred to as “improvisational theater with dice”; I happen to think that sums it up quite nicely.

The tenor of these interactions is generally referred to as group or collective storytelling; both players and moderator achieve consensus on the type of game being played (this includes both genre as well as setting and subject matter, from epic to political intrigue), and the plot is dictated by a give-and-take between players and moderator (taking turns between being in proactive or reactive modes). These interactions may range from the simple activity of buying provisions to the complicated act of negotiating with an enemy or apologizing for starting a fight in an inn. Role-playing involves many spoken

forms, including monologue, inter-character dialog, and descriptive flavor of actions and situations.

These are the things that make ours a hobby of imagination and mental stamina, not the tiresomely endless debates about mechanical application of abstruse rules and regulations. Players were meant to soar on wings of the mind, not stumble upon a ground of platonic solids and numerical representations of character concept. So how do we correct this logical fallacy? What should we do to restore balance to the game that we all love? Well to start with, we have to develop the habits that will contribute to and promote good role-playing. To do that, we have to look first at ourselves as G.M.s. What we, as G.M.s, tend to forget is that role-playing is a two-way street; although our first instinct is to look askance at the players, all too often it is we who are to blame, and we must “practice what we preach.” This is actually the easiest part of fixing the problem there is, because the G.M. sets the pace and tone of the adventure.

Hopefully, by the end of this article, we will have provided you, the G.M., with examples of guidelines and habits to help you effectively flex your role-playing muscles. If you’re reading this and you aren’t a G.M., then perhaps you can show this to your G.M. (I presume you have one, if you’re in a gaming group), even if you don’t have any problems with your G.M.’s running style, or take these observations as confidence to work towards being a G.M. yourself in the future.

Before we begin our discussion, take a moment to consider the following questions. Don’t worry, there won’t be a quiz at the end! Think of them as a loose outline of what we will discuss ahead.

- What sort of play styles do your players enjoy (puzzle solving, political intrigue, action)?
- Do you find yourself having to start a session of your game with combat in order to capture your players’ attention?
- Do you challenge your players to speak in an active, first-person, “in-character” voice, speaking as their characters would (rather than how they would) and separating character knowledge from player knowledge?
- Do you encourage your players to write a story that talks about their characters’ backgrounds?
- Do your NPCs have clearly-defined motives, personalities and histories?
- Do you provide your players with a richly detailed world, allowing them to interact with it without unreasonable obstacles standing in the way of their imaginations?

## By Any Other Name

The first way to help you and your players along in this process is to avoid referring to your players by their own names. For the length of the session the player is the character, and an in-character (“IC”) mode should always be employed when addressing your players. Do not differentiate between the player and the character; instead of phrasing questions as, “What does Tarsil do?” phrase them as, “What is *your* reaction?” Always keep in mind that for the course of the session, the characters are the most important people in the room.

This particular step is difficult, and requires a lot of give and take between the player and G.M. The easiest way to start this

process is by refreshing yourself with your Player Characters (“PCs”) and their stories. Take time before the next session to acquaint yourself with all of the character back-stories, and look back over your storyline and plot to see where the characters’ histories come into play. If you do not have a back-story for the character, then get one or make one up, but make sure to remember that the players can only role-play with what they are given. You will need to get with your players and flesh things out — do not just think to surprise them with sudden insight into their character.

As for the players themselves, get them into the same mindset. If you start by referring to people only by character names during the setting, that will get the ball rolling, however it may not be enough. Players should also be using their character names when interacting with each other, and this should be encouraged as thoroughly as possible. Make sure that the player steps into the character as much as possible; this may require your coaching them in using an active voice and teaching them to avoid passive phrases like, “Tarsil says...” or, “I tell him that...” Players should always remember that they are the mental embodiment of their characters and as such, they should portray their characters in a manner that best fits the medium.

## All’s Fun in Love and War

There is a big difference between role-playing and being a ham. Each player should remember that the group is the star of the show, not the individual; while each player gets his moment in the spotlight, he should not detract from the rest of the table. This is especially true when it comes to RPGs that offer a tangible game-based award for accomplishing goals, such as Experience Points (known affectionately as XP or EP); a role-player should not perform for XP like some street mime or panhandler. If you are going over the top for a hope of reward, then you are not role-playing, you are hamming it up.

In addition, you should try to avoid adopting a shtick, or gimmick-based joke. These may provide a laugh or two right off the bat, but soon become really irritating. A joke or two makes for a fun game, but it is not always appropriate or warranted. A solemn moment can be completely destroyed by a poorly chosen character name, or a back-story that serves only to make a joke. Remember: there is a big difference between an appropriate bit of humor and a big distraction. Portraying your character to the enjoyment of everyone (yourself included) and towards the betterment of the story should be the goal, not cheap laughs and constant back-patting.

## NPCs Are Not Non-Performing Characters

Just as players have to deal with the descriptive and interactive elements of their characters, so too does the G.M. need to address a similar issue for his non-player characters (“NPCs”). All too often, NPCs must take a back seat to the PCs, however that does not give the G.M. license to make them boring. Quite the opposite is true, in fact. NPCs are an essential part of the scenery, and are all-to-often necessary to the telling of the story.

First and foremost, NPCs should never outshine PCs. While both players and the G.M. are there for the fun of all, it is the

G.M.’s responsibility to be the main “fun provider” to the players. That’s not to say that the G.M. can’t have fun, or shouldn’t, but the players should be the stars of the show, so to speak, and the G.M. should be as neutral as possible in directing how the story will flow. NPCs should rarely swoop in and save the PCs from a dangerous situation, otherwise the PCs will either doubt their own effectiveness or get lazy, thinking that they don’t have to put forth any effort because some favorite NPC of the G.M. will come and save them. Create a recurring villain with clearly defined goals, and motivations for having those goals, and your players will love to loathe his repeated appearances. Create an overpowered, indestructible villain who you just want to see beat up on the party, and the players will just give up.

Start by looking at the NPC as a person. Granted, he or she is a supporting cast-member at best, but the point is that he or she is not unimportant. This is especially true of villains and notable NPCs (governors, nobles, lords, or epic personages). Make sure that you understand their motives for their behavior, and keep in mind that they are all different people. Important and notable persons in your story should have backgrounds and back-stories just like the PCs. They might not be as fleshed out, but they should still be coherent and provide motivation for the NPC’s role in the current interaction.

This is not just true of your NPCs, but also of NPCs provided by the players in their back-story. Look at your players’ stories and find some notable NPCs in there to add into your story to make things a bit more personal. These may be mentors, family, peers, colleagues, even a personal nemesis. Make sure that you add a bit of dimension that relates the NPC into your story, or provides an alternative to that which was written in the original back-story.

## An Appropriate Description

For some reason, many of us think that descriptive monologue is the purview of the G.M. This is not the case. Players should use descriptive ‘flavor’ when possible to address their actions. One way to enforce this is to require a player to describe what he is doing during combat.

Mechanics balance the game and make the playing field even for everyone (both players and monsters), however they can also wash some of the vibrancy out of an encounter. In addition, simple mechanics may not make sense on the basis of common sense. Can a Gnome trip a Tyrannosaurus? Mechanically speaking, the answer is yes, however if the player cannot describe what he is doing to trip the Tyrannosaurus, then the Gnome should not be able to perform the action. Thus the following:

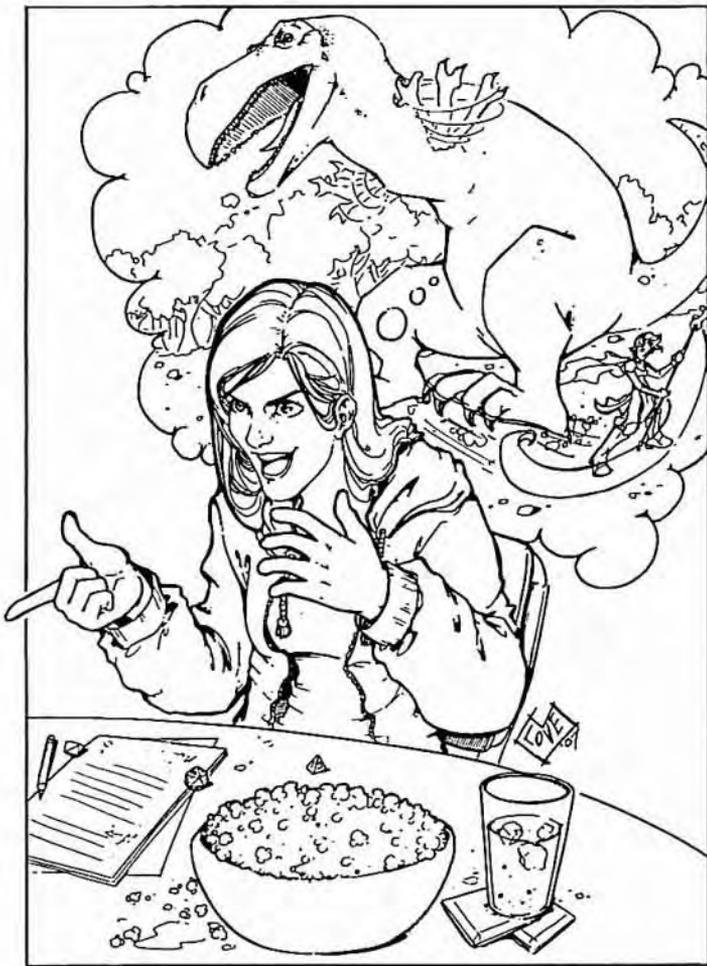
*Player: OK, Talia tries to trip the Tyrannosaurus Rex!*

*G.M.: How? It is a good 20 feet taller than you and much stronger.*

*Player: Umm, I run up under its feet and as it lifts its right leg to stomp on me, I ram my quarterstaff under its left foot and push down as hard as I can, using it as a lever to knock the creature down.*

*G.M.: Well, OK, let’s roll for it...*

While there is somewhat of a logical disconnect in that a 65 pound Gnome can topple a Tyrannosaurus Rex, the description provided might account for the result of the roll. Talia is catching the massive beastie off-balance and using her wits, she real-



izes that any boulder can be moved with the appropriate lever, so any dinosaur could be similarly moved. Sometimes, these sorts of tactics will not work; they would be situational by necessity.

## Darwinian Character Development

We must always keep in mind that mechanics do not exist in a vacuum. Descriptions can enhance role-play and provide a nice bit of scene-setting that makes an encounter more cinematic. As we evolve the story, so too do our characters evolve. They try new tricks and come to new and different conclusions. Mechanically speaking, these are 'skills and abilities' that are learned once the character goes up in level, however that knowledge does not just pop into the character's head.

Players should have some idea of the progression of their characters, and should role-play this progression out. Sometimes a thing will just occur to the character off the cuff (like a new use for a skill that he is developing a knack for using), but usually the character has better learned to handle and harness his nascent abilities. Encourage players to describe how and why characters are picking up skills or abilities by asking them what they did to obtain those tricks.

One easy example is a character's knowledge. Characters should be inquisitive, and seek out new sources of information. They may have books in their possession that they are studying as well as scrolls, treatises, theses, and such. Perhaps the character goes to the library, university, or bookstore to learn; this could potentially set up an interesting encounter.

Granted, making characters describe all of these increases is a bit of overkill, so don't go overboard with it. You should only make players describe these increases when they are part of the core competency of their characters. For example, if the character is a noted scholar, the above situation is appropriate, however if the character is a tumbling acrobat who is taking a Lore skill simply to fill a Secondary Skill slot, it is not really relevant. We must always keep in mind relative importance of issues to the characters in question.

A character's development should not be limited simply to what skills, abilities, or whatever terms the rules system uses to talk about a character's mundane and special abilities. Several systems ask a player to describe, in a sentence or two, his or her character's general attitude, or way of behaving. This is a perfect opportunity to consider quirks for your character, both positive and negative. While some systems have mechanics for what might be called "advantages" and "disadvantages," if the system doesn't have a direct mechanical representation for these character idiosyncrasies (meaning you don't get a bonus to carpentry skills just because your father was a carpenter, or you don't suffer a penalty to visibility because you're blind in one eye), that doesn't mean you can't incorporate them into your character's personality. To the G.M., if a player does incorporate these idiosyncrasies into his character's back story, make sure that they are being role-played — especially in the case where taking a "disadvantage" gives them some sort of benefit for taking the disadvantage!

## Moving the Pieces of Plastic

Role-playing games are about more than moving bits of colored plastic on a board. In some games, the system of combat and the extensive availability of miniatures have led to an over-reliance on those items to describe situations and combat. Miniatures are an incredibly useful tool, but one must be careful to avoid letting them dictate the pace and style of the game.

Since no little plastic or metal model will match any given character's description 100%, it is important to remember to describe the character's appearance in as much detail as possible (this should be done regardless of whether miniatures are being used, but especially if they are). It is also important to make sure that you remember what your character may be carrying that is not on the model - many players forget that they have a ranged weapon to hand because the model is carrying a big axe and no crossbow.

In addition to the model in question, there is the issue of terrain. Terrain can be an important part of the role-playing situation, and it can only aid players to keep it in mind when they are adventuring. Wandering in a city provides for a different set of issues from wandering in a swamp or in the high mountains. You should always make it clear what the environment is to provide the characters with new and interesting challenges. This also allows for better, more cinematic moments for the party to experience as you describe the scenery and they react to it. A claustrophobic character will react differently to a subterranean adventure than one who has no issues, so remind players who have expressed character issues about these things when they come into play.

Additionally, weather can make for incredibly fun role-play. A mild drizzle does nothing mechanically, but if one of your

characters is a chronic complainer, this might provide him with more grist for the mill. This can also be important for other reasons — the complainer may wind up in an argument with the Priest of a storm god over the utility of miserable weather, for instance. These situations transcend the miniatures and the game board, but are essential to both the mechanical as well as the role-playing aspects of the game.



## Why Can't We All Just Get Along

Oft-times, parties fall into internal conflict. This is natural, especially when some of the characters don't see eye-to-eye on basic ideals. A Thief and a Knight are not going to get along too well if the Knight in question catches the Thief in a bit of 'wealth distribution.' Equally, a Priest of a god of goodness, light, and life will not take to a worshiper of a death god in his company. Players should role-play around these difficulties, having their characters try to cope with the tensions around them instead of ignoring them.

There are many ways to resolve the intra-party tension that will lead to great role-playing moments for the players where they can shine. If the Priest in the above example decided to try to convert the worshiper, then this could lead to many serious discussions and arguments and may cause one, or both, to reach a position of understanding. This is an example of synthesis of viewpoints, and should be what we strive for when playing our characters.

An alternate tack to take on these situations is confrontational in manner. The Knight in the earlier example may decide to turn the Thief in to the authorities. The rest of the party may not be

in agreement, and the ensuing confrontation will result in either the Knight being shunned by his companions or the Thief ending up in jail. If the Thief ends up in jail, then the party may need to go to court to argue for his release. This might anger the Knight, but if there is a legal sufficiency for the release, then he may grudgingly accede to local authority. If the Knight gets shunned, then he may prove instrumental in saving the party in a later encounter, reconciling him with his companions.

As a G.M., you should try to avoid letting these situations get out of hand, however the players should never feel as though you are directing them, or limiting them. Allowing the players their collective freedom means that these situations may devolve into intra-party combat. This is all part of any narrative story, and though it should not be the first resort, it may be the only solution to the dramatic tensions building up in the party. Should this occur, be sure to counsel the players properly. Make certain that there is no other way to resolve the difficulty, and remember the environment. Starting a brawl or murdering a PC in a city will always have negative consequences.

## “Do as Thou Wilt Have Fun” Shall Be the Whole of the Law

Remember that the main objective of role-playing is to have fun. That being said, different people have fun in different ways, and this is especially true at the role-playing table. No two role-playing groups — nay, no two role-playing games — are alike. Different players and moderators have different tastes, and often these differing tastes clash (a player who wants more puzzle-solving in a game with heavy political intrigue, for example, or a player who wants a faithful interpretation in the course of a campaign set in an established campaign setting). Some RPGs emphasize stronger narrative control on the part of the moderator, and some players feel stifled by moderators who exert such control.

What's important to remember in cases like these is that communication is essential — players and their moderators must talk to each other on a regular basis to ensure that everyone is having fun, and should not feel hesitation when needing to address issues that might arise. I imagine that few of us genuinely want to verbally assault another player, or a moderator, for how some aspect of the game might be “un-fun,” and few of us want to hurt another's feelings — but it's better to be honest if there is something seriously affecting the fun factor of the table. In a group of friends this should rarely be an issue, but in situations where people game with other gamers who may not be in the same friend circles, play styles may clash — and it's important to come to a group consensus to ensure that everyone has fun.

That being said, there are truly problem players out there in the world, and for a variety of reasons. Some wish to hog the spotlight, making sure that all of the moderator's plots revolve around him or her; some wish to derail actual game play with off-topic conversation; and some are inveterately unreliable, showing up late or missing sessions frequently. When situations like these arise, it's essential that we in the gaming community remember simple manners of common courtesy — it means a lot to a moderator when a player tells him or her ahead of time that he is going to miss a session. The role-playing community

is small, and we must treat each other with respect if we want to see it thrive (especially if we want to introduce young people to the hobby).

The last thing we want to mention in this section of the article is the concept of Rule Zero, as it's referred to in some RPG systems. While most systems don't list their rules in any sort of order, the idea of Rule Zero is intended for effect and emphasis more than anything else. Essentially, what Rule Zero says is that the moderator's ruling takes precedence over any written rules system. This has given rise to the notion that, "The G.M. is always right," but I want to take things a step further than that. First of all, a G.M. should never feel as though something that takes place in his game cannot take place because, "the rules say it doesn't work that way." If the rules say it doesn't work that way, then change the rules — but (a) ensure that everyone at the table knows that a rule has changed, and (b) ensure that the new way of doing things is adjudicated consistently in the future.

This is why I think that the notion of the G.M. as *Game Master* should be altered to reflect the G.M. as *Game Moderator* — while the G.M. is the point person for the running of the game, there should be a level of consensus involved in decisions such as these. Everyone at the table is responsible for everyone else's experience at the table, and making that experience a positive one; several RPG theory circles throw around the idea of a "social contract," a concept that springs from philosophy and the social sciences. At the role-playing table, matters like trust, respect and consensus fall into the realm of social contract — often it's not a written thing, and a group that's been gaming

together for a long time often has an unwritten idea of right and wrong at their table, but in situations like role-playing conventions, the relationships between everyone present at a temporary table need to be taken into consideration to ensure that a fun time is had by all.

## Bringing It Together

So, what have we learned here? We have explored the potential risks and rewards of character interaction, and provided some framework for executing those ideas in the game. RPGs can be much, much more than "killin' things and takin' stuff"; and given the times in which we live, if we want to introduce our hobby to a new generation of potential gamers, then we need to rethink what RPGs are about in order to provide a viable alternative to video games that offer that sort of game play regularly. RPGs can be entertainment, education and art, all rolled into one experience; we have the tools available to us, we may just have to make slight alterations in how we play the game in order to accomplish this. No video game can provide what a role-playing experience can; the imagination is boundless, whereas even the most sophisticated computer simulation is limited by its programming.

Are these the only solutions to restoring the role-playing to your game? No, of course not, and they may not even work with your style of gamesmanship. We can only hope that you try these suggestions out and that they help you increase the level of interaction at your table.

Todd V. Ehrenfels and Craig Hatler are RPG enthusiasts from northern New Jersey, USA. Together they coordinate *Heroes and Rogues*, their local RPG community, which operates primarily out of the *Reality's Edge* game store in North Arlington, NJ. Craig is also a middle school math teacher in Rutherford, NJ.



# WARBIRDS

## Optional Source Material for the Systems Failure™ RPG

By Justin Kugler

There are three main categories of aviation in the skies over Free America after the Meltdown. The premier group is comprised of the *Warbirds* – aircraft from various eras designed for war and pressed into service for the Great American Bug Hunt or simply self-defense. Many of these are vintage World War II era aircraft restored before the panic and kept survivable thanks to their analog technology. Groups like the **League of Free Cities** and the **47<sup>th</sup> Independent Air Wing** are infamous for their strong Warbird contingents.

The Warbirds are often complemented by the *Whirlybirds* – helicopters that were once the workhorses of civil and military aviation. Whirlybirds have the advantage of being able to operate from any clearing or flat area big enough to land on and are extremely capable at low-level flight below Bugged radar networks. Unfortunately, their low-altitude, low-speed flight can be a double-edged sword. Whirlybirds are hopelessly outmatched against Lightning Bugs and Bugged USAF jets. The **Free Americans' Air Cavalry** has become legendary thanks to their ingenious use of Whirlybirds to hit the Bugs where it hurts.

The most common (and the most vulnerable!) aviators fly *Barnbirds* – commercial and civilian aircraft from before the Meltdown that have been converted and rebuilt in various ways to survive the dangers of the current era. These include crop dusters, kit planes, general aviation turboprops, and everything in between. Many of the small fiefdoms and mercenary groups that have sprouted up operate Barnbirds to patrol their territory and drive off unwanted guests.

Now, without the *Flyboys* and *Barnstormers* that take these birds up into the dangerous skies over Free America, none of this would mean anything. The can-do attitude and downright crazy determination of post-Meltdown aviators help keep the Bug Hunt going in a special way. Some are heroes, some are brigands, but they all hate the Bugs!

## The Warbirds

### Northrop P-61 Black Widow

The Black Widow was the premier night fighter at the close of World War II. It is a twin-engine, twin-boom, all-metal monoplane and was the USAAF's first night fighter designed from the onset to carry radar. It is armed with four 20 mm Hispano M2 cannons in the belly and four Browning M2 .50 cal (12.7 mm) machineguns in a dorsal turret. The turret can be either locked forward and controlled by the pilot or controlled by either the radar operator or a gunner. The typical three-man crew consisted of a pilot, radar operator/navigator, and a gunner.

The ultimate version, the P-61C, added turbochargers to the venerable Pratt & Whitney R-2800-65 Double Wasp radial en-

gines, added provisions for up to four drop tanks, and incorporated the gun-laying radar, remote control turret, and analog automated firing computer developed for the P-61B.

**Systems Failure Notes:** By the time of the Meltdown, only three flyable P-61s still existed. These airframes have all found service with established organizations as night fighters and strike bombers. In particular, the **Texas Lone Star Cavalry** has a customized P-61C upgraded with a Bug Reactor, Long-Range Bug Radar, a Fulton air recovery system, and clamshell doors in place of the aft station. The "Night Watch" can carry up to four commandos in its cramped aft bay.

**Length:** 49 feet, 7 inches (15.1 m).

**Span:** 66 feet (20.1 m).

**Max Takeoff Weight:** 40,300 lbs (18,135 kg).

**Maximum Speed:** 430 mph (688 km).

**Combat Range:** 2800 miles (4480 km).

**A.R.:** 7

**S.D.C. by Location:**

Main Body – 500

Wings (2) – 175 each

Tail (2) – 150 each

Engines (2) – 175 each

**Bonuses:** The gunnery systems add +1 to strike. The innovative spoilers and 'Zap flaps' give the P-61 amazing maneuverability for its size, granting +2 to dodge and +10% to piloting checks.

**Armaments:**

4x 20mm Hispano cannon: 2D4x10 per round, 2400 foot (731.5 m) range, 200 rounds each.

4x .50 cal Browning: 1D6x10+10 per round, 6560 foot (1999.5 m) range, 560 rounds each.

4 wing pylons – up to 6400 lbs (2880 kg) of bombs.

### North American B-25J Mitchell

The B-25 Mitchell, named after the maverick father of the modern American air force, is infamous for its use in the Doolittle Raid of mainland Japan shortly after the commencement of WWII. The J-variant of the Mitchell is one of the most heavily armed attack bombers of the war with no fewer than 18 Browning M2 .50 cal (12.7 mm) machine guns on the solid-nose version! Of these, fourteen could be brought to bear toward the front of the plane!

Two Wright R-2600 'Cyclone' radials provided the B-25J with 1850 hp each and kept the six-man crew in the air. The pilot, co-pilot, navigator/bombardier/gunner, turret gunner/engineer, radio operator/waist gunner, and tail gunner were all said to be very affectionate towards their forgiving planes. Mitchells were quite often flown until they fell apart. One B-25C even flew 300 missions by the end of the war (including 12 belly landings!) and was nicknamed "Patches" by the grateful crew for its 400+ patched holes!

**Systems Failure Notes:** Only a handful of B-25 Mitchells survived the chaos of Operation Clean Sweep. Most B-25s operated by enthusiasts were commandeered and made easy prey for Bugged jets. The remaining few are coveted for their heavy firepower. The **Free Americans' Air Cav** reportedly uses a B-25J

armed with fire-and-forget missiles to escort its ground support crews.

**Length:** 52 feet, 11 inches (16.1 m).

**Span:** 67 feet, 7 inches (20.6 m).

**Max Takeoff Weight:** 41,800 lbs (18,810 kg).

**Maximum Speed:** 275 mph (440 km).

**Combat Range:** 1350 miles (2160 km).

**A.R.:** 10

**S.D.C. by Location:**

Main Body – 450

Wings (2) – 200 each

Tail (2) – 170 each

Engines (2) – 175 each

**Bonuses:** +2 to luck rolls.

**Armaments:**

8x .50 cal Browning in nose: 1D6x10+10 per round, 6560 foot (1999.5 m) range, 250 rounds each.

4x .50 cal Browning in side blisters: 1D6x10+10 per round, 6560 foot (1999.5 m) range, 250 rounds each.

2x .50 cal Browning in dorsal turret: 1D6x10+10 per round, 6560 foot (1999.5 m) range, 250 rounds each.

1x .50 cal Browning in 2 waist turrets: 1D6x10+10 per round, 6560 foot (1999.5 m) range, 250 rounds each.

2x .50 cal Browning in tail: 1D6x10+10 per round, 6560 foot (1999.5 m) range, 250 rounds each.

**Bomb Bay:** Up to 3200 lbs (1440 kg) of bombs.

8 wing pylons: Typically armed with single-use rockets.

## Douglas A-26 Invader

The A-26 Invader was a fast, light attack bomber designed to supplant earlier designs as a premier ground support airframe. It was also intended to fly more like a fighter and only had a single pilot. Its two Pratt & Whitney R-2800-79 radial piston engines made it the fastest American tactical bomber of WWII. Invaders were even reactivated, under the designator B-26, for COIN (counterinsurgency) operations in Vietnam!

**Systems Failure Notes:** The A-26 is beloved by its crews for its speed and reliability. The **Free League Air Force** operates three Invaders from the **Fearless Falls Squadron** as interdectors. The “Fearless Flyers” have racked up an impressive number of Killer Bee scores and tend to be the first on the scene to deal with warlord incursions.

**Length:** 50 feet, 9 inches (15.5 m).

**Span:** 70 feet (21.3 m).

**Max Takeoff Weight:** 35,000 lbs (15,750 kg).

**Maximum Speed:** 355 mph (568 km).

**Combat Range:** 1400 miles (2240 km).

**A.R.:** 7

**S.D.C. by Location:**

Main Body – 500

Wings (2) – 180 each

Tail – 170

Engines (2) – 175 each

**Bonuses:** +10% to high speed piloting checks.

**Armaments:**

8x .50 cal Browning in nose: 1D6x10+10 per round, 6560 foot (1999.5 m) range, 250 rounds each.

2x .50 cal Browning in dorsal turret: 1D6x10+10 per round, 6560 foot (1999.5 m) range, 250 rounds each.

1x .50 cal Browning in ventral turret: 1D6x10+10 per round, 6560 foot (1999.5 m) range, 250 rounds each.

**Bomb Bay:** up to 6000 lbs (2700 kg) of bombs.

8 wing pylons: typically armed with single-use rockets.

## Consolidated PBY-5 Catalina

The PBY Catalina is considered the most successful American seaplane ever and one of the most versatile aircraft of WWII. It saw service in nighttime search and attack missions, search and rescue (SAR) operations, U-boat hunting, convoy escort, and even VIP transport. Catalinas evacuated Gen. Douglas MacArthur from the Philippines, spotted the Japanese carriers approaching Midway Island, located the German battleship *Bismarck*, and even find use today as firefighting planes.

Its nine-man crew (pilot, co-pilot, bow turret gunner, flight mechanic, radioman, navigator, x2 waist gunners, tail gunner) came to appreciate the innovations that made the Catalina so successful, including its cantilever wing, streamlined and retracting wingtip floats, and cruciform tail. While the Catalina was particularly vulnerable to fighters and concentrated anti-aircraft fire, it still became the workhorse of naval aviation during WWII and brought many a sailor home.

**Systems Failure Notes:** The Catalina and its many variants are the pride and joy of the **Gulf States**. The range and loiter capability makes the Catalina particularly well-suited as a spotter and SAR aircraft for gunship and fast attack boat raids. A converted firefighter filled with Bug Juice could be an exceptionally deadly aircraft against concentrated Bug groups, perhaps even towns. However, the Catalina is no match for Bugged USAF fighters and tends to stay on the periphery of a battle unless it has exemplary escort.

**Length:** 63 feet, 11 inches (19.5 m).

**Span:** 104 feet (31.7 m).

**Max Takeoff Weight:** 35,420 lbs (15,939 kg).

**Maximum Speed:** 200 mph (320 km).

**Combat Range:** 2645 miles (4232 km).

**A.R.:** 5

**S.D.C. by Location:**

Main Body – 350

Wings (2) – 180 each

Tail – 140

Engines (2) – 170 each

**Bonuses:** +15% to detect ambush, +10% read sensory equipment.

**Armaments:**

2x .30 cal machinegun in nose turret: 4D6 per round, 3000 foot (914 m) range, 500 rounds each.

1x .50 cal Browning in two waist blisters: 1D6x10+10 per round, 6560 foot (1999.5 m) range, 210 rounds.

1x .30 cal machinegun in tail: 4D6 per round, 3000 foot (914 m) range, 250 rounds.

4 wing pylons: Up to 4000 lbs (1800 kg) of bombs.

## Boeing B-29 Superfortress

This giant of World War II was designed originally as a "Hemisphere Defense Weapon" and pressed into service only four years after development began. The B-29 was solely used in the Pacific Theater and was dedicated to avenging Pearl Harbor. It is particularly infamous for its role in the firebombing of Tokyo and the atomic bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki.

The Superfortress is a 10-crew, heavy strategic bomber and a symbol of America's emergence from isolationism during the War. Its four Wright R-3350 radial piston engines provided 2200 hp each and allowed the B-29 an astonishing (for its time) top speed of 358 mph! The B-29 introduced self-defense turrets that were remotely operated by gunners using periscopic sights from within the fuselage.

Unarmed C-97 Stratofreighters were based on the B-29 airframe and used as military transports and air-to-air refuelers. Many were acquired by private operators when the US Air Force switched to jet tankers and converted into civilian transports and fire bombers. A handful remained in service up to the Meltdown.

**Systems Failure Notes:** The only confirmed Superfortress still flying is the mobile command and refueling post operated by the **Free Air Cavalry**. It is a C-97 refitted with turrets and parts supposedly from aviation museums and outfitted with the same technology that makes their infamous gunships impervious to the Bugs' control. "Eagle One" allows the Air Cav to conduct operational maneuvers independently of its ground crews and set up rally points far outside the apparent range of the individual aircraft.

**Length:** 99 feet (30.2 m).

**Span:** 142 feet, 3 inches (43.4 m).

**Max Takeoff Weight:** 141,100 lbs (63,495 kg).

**Maximum Speed:** 358 mph (573 km).

**Combat Range:** 3250 miles (5200 km).

**A.R.:** 12

**S.D.C. by Location:**

Main Body – 800

Wings (2) – 200 each

Tail – 180

Engines (4) – 175 each

**Bonuses:** +1 strike with turret guns.

**Armaments:**

4x .50 cal in dorsal nose turret: 1D6x10+10 per round, 6560 foot (1999.5 m) range, 1000 rounds.

2x .50 cal in ventral nose turret: 1D6x10+10 per round, 6560 foot (1999.5 m) range, 1000 rounds.

2x .50 cal in dorsal aft turret: 1D6x10+10 per round, 6560 foot (1999.5 m) range, 1000 rounds.

2x .50 cal in ventral aft turret: 1D6x10+10 per round, 6560 (1999.5 m) foot range, 1000 rounds.

**Manned Tail Turret:**

1x 20mm cannon: 2D4x10 dmg per round, 2400 foot (731.5 m) range, 1000 rounds.

2x .50 cal: 1D6x10+10 per round, 6560 foot (1999.5 m) range, 1000 rounds.

**Bomb Bay:** up to 20,000 lbs (9000 kg) of bombs.

## Raytheon Beech T-6A Texan II

The USAF and USN began taking delivery of their brand new Joint Primary Aircraft Training System (JPATS) vehicles in late 1998. The Raytheon Beech T-6A is a licensed redevelopment of the highly successful Pilatus PC-9 trainer intended to replace aging Air Force T-37 and US Navy T-34 training aircraft. It has one Pratt & Whitney PT6A-68 four-bladed turbo-prop.

These highly refined two-seater aircraft have a strengthened airframe, linear power delivery for easier trainee transition to jets, zero-zero ejection seats, and a cockpit canopy designed for improved birdstrike protection. The T-6A Texan II is considered a significant improvement over its parent design.

**Systems Failure Notes:** The US military was only just introducing these aircraft into service when the Meltdown came. The trainers were quickly refitted with wing hardpoints and used as spotters and for close air support during the ill-fated Operation Clean Sweep. Most of the undelivered Texans built at Raytheon's Wichita, KS, facility were flown out by Air Force and Raytheon pilots who linked up with **NORAD** or the **47<sup>th</sup> IAW**, but more than a few have found their way into private hands. Unlike many older warbirds, the T-6A has the benefit of modern machinery and widely-available parts built before the Meltdown. It is also a very hardy aircraft and easily customized.

**Length:** 33 feet, 4 inches (10.2 m).

**Span:** 33 feet, 5 inches (10.2 m).

**Max Takeoff Weight:** 6300 lbs (2835 kg).

**Maximum Speed:** 346 mph (554 km).

**Combat Range:** 1035 miles (1656 km).

**A.R.:** 10

**S.D.C. by Location:**

Main Body – 400

Wings (2) – 140

Tail – 150

Engine – 175

**Bonuses:** +2 dodge, +15% to piloting checks.

**Armaments:**

2 hardpoints on each wing – each can mount one weapon pod.

1) 2.75 inch (70 mm) Rocket Pod – 1D4x10, 20 foot (6.1 m) blast radius, 11,250 foot (3429 m) range, 19 rockets.

2) TOW Missile Pod – 2D6x100, 50 foot (15.2 m) blast radius, 6562 foot (2000 m) range, 2 rockets.

3) 30 mm Chain Gun – 2D6x10 per round, 6000 foot (1829 m) range, 400 rounds.

4) Mark 19 Grenade Launcher – 2D6x10, 50 foot (15.2 m) blast radius, 1 mile (1.6 km) range, 100 rounds.

**Additional SF Note:** The Slingsby/Northrop T-3A Firefly basic trainer was also brought into service in the late 1990s. Reduce weight, speed, and range by half. Reduce A.R. to 8. Wing hardpoints can carry either a rocket pod or a .50-cal machinegun. Only +1 dodge, +10% to piloting checks. Fireflies are most commonly sighted in Texas, where they were assembled.

## Rockwell OV-10D Bronco

The Bronco was developed in response to a US Marines request for a multirole utility aircraft that could perform armed reconnaissance and light attack missions. The OV-10 is uniquely suited for this role by virtue of its noteworthy configuration. Two crew sit in tandem and have room for up to six troops in the aft fuselage. The high, aft-mounted wing is braced by the twin-boom tail extending from the engine nacelles.

Many OV-10s saw extensive service in Vietnam as forward air controllers and counter-insurgency attack planes. Sponsons on either side of the fuselage carry four 7.62 mm machine guns and four hardpoints. The Bronco also has one centerline and two underwing mounts for additional weapons. Early in the 1980s, OV-10As were upgraded by the Marines to the OV-10D and gained all-weather capability. These aircraft sported an under-nose turret with a FLIR, laser designator, and automatic video tracker in addition to updated engines and extra underwing hardpoints.

**Systems Failure Notes:** Broncos are a perennial favorite of Flyboys and Freebooters operating from rural airfields because of their hardy design and short-takeoff capability. The Bronco can even run off high-octane (read: high alcohol content) or automotive fuel if necessary! They also pack a heck of a punch and have surprising cargo/troop capacity for such a relatively small aircraft. OV-10s are particularly favored by mercenary organizations.

**Length:** 41 feet, 7 inches (12.7 m).

**Span:** 40 feet (12.2 m).

**Max Takeoff Weight:** 14,444 lbs (6500 kg).

**Maximum Speed:** 280 mph (448 km).

**Combat Range:** 910 miles (1456 km).

**A.R.:** 10

**S.D.C. by Location:**

Main Body – 475

Wings (2) – 150

Tail (2) – 150

Engine (2) – 175

**Bonuses:** +1 strike, +1 dodge, +25% to short-takeoff piloting checks.

**Armaments:**

4x 7.62 mm machinegun: 6D6+3 per round, 6000 foot (1829 m) range, 500 rounds each.

4x hardpoint under sponsons – Each can mount one weapon pod, bomb, or missile.

1x hardpoint centerline – Can mount one weapon pod.

2x hardpoint on each wing – Each can mount one rocket pod or missile.

## The Whirlybirds

### Boeing AH-6J Little Bird

The Little Bird is the only light assault helicopter in service with the United States Army. It is operated by the elite Special Operations Aviation Regiment, the “Night Stalkers,” as a gunship (pilot and gunner only) and troop transport (up to six troops). It has a single Allison 250-C30/R3 turboshaft driving a six-bladed main rotor and the ultra-quiet NOTAR tail.

The AH-6J can be outfitted with a wide variety of weapons, including rocket pods, anti-tank missiles, miniguns, and even 30mm Chain Guns! This latest version of the Little Bird is also equipped with an integrated GPS/inertial navigation system, FLIR for low-level navigation, and extensive electromagnetic shielding. The gunner has a telescopic nose sight and a mast-mounted TOW sight for improved aim.

**Systems Failure Notes:** The Free Air Cav operates four AH-6Js “inherited” from the US Army as part of its much-vaunted helicopter gunship force. Its modern avionics are protected against Bug intrusion by utilizing an **Organitech dynamo** developed by an Egghead in the employ of the Cav. These coveted dynamos somehow convert kinetic energy generated by the turbines into safe bio-energy for the helicopter’s electronic systems.

**Length:** 23 feet (7.0 m).

**Rotors:** 26 feet, 4 inches (8.0 m).

**Max Takeoff Weight:** 2700 lbs (1215 kg).

**Maximum Speed:** 160 mph (256 km).

**Combat Range:** 290 miles (464 km).

**A.R.:** 12

**S.D.C. by Location:**

Main Body – 300

Rotor Blades – 115

NOTAR Tail – 130

Engine – 160

**Bonuses:** +2 strike, -15% to enemy Read Sensory Equipment checks.

**Armaments:**

2x Aerocrafter Plank weapons carriers – each can mount one weapon pod.

1) 2.75 inch (70 mm) Rocket Pod – 1D4x10, 20 foot (6.1 m) blast radius, 11,250 foot (3429 m) range, 19 rockets.

2) TOW Missile Pod – 2D6x100, 50 foot (15.2 m) blast radius, 6562 foot (2000 m) range, 2 rockets.

3) 30 mm Chain Gun – 2D6x10 per round, 6000 foot (1829 m) range, 400 rounds.

4) Mark 19 Grenade Launcher – 2D6x10, 50 foot (15.2 m) blast radius, 1 mile (1.6 km) range, 100 rounds.

### Eurocopter BK 117

The BK 117 multirole helicopter was a familiar sight in American skies before the Meltdown because of its widespread use as an air ambulance and as an air taxi for offshore platforms. It is powered by two Textron Lycoming LTS 101-750B-1

turboshafts turning a four-bladed main rotor and a two-bladed tail rotor. Despite its increased capability, the BK 117 was not as popular with militaries as the smaller BO 105 which preceded it. Only Japan, Iraq, and South Africa actually acquired the BK 117 for their armed services.

**Systems Failure Notes:** While many BK 117s were destroyed in the tumultuous invasion of America, some survive today performing much the same role as before. It is believed that the Life Flight helicopters from Houston were among the first that evacuated people to what are now the fiercely independent **Gulf States**. The BK 117 has seating for a pilot and 10 passengers.

**Length:** 32 feet, 9 inches (9.9 m).

**Rotors:** 36 feet, 1 inch (11.0 m).

**Max Takeoff Weight:** 7385 lbs (3323 kg).

**Maximum Speed:** 155 mph (248 km).

**Combat Range:** 440 miles (704 km).

**A.R.:** 10

**S.D.C. by Location:**

Main Body – 350

Rotor Blades – 125

Tail Rotors – 100

Engines (2) – 170

**Bonuses:** None.

**Armaments:**

Typically none; can be modified to carry 2 TOW missile pods or 2 Chain Guns.

1) TOW Missile Pod – 2D6x100, 50 foot (15.2 m) blast radius, 6562 foot (2000 m) range, 2 rockets.

2) 30 mm Chain Gun – 2D6x10 per round, 6000 foot (1829 m) range, 400 rounds.

## Sikorsky UH-60L Black Hawk

The Black Hawk was developed to replace the ubiquitous UH-1 Huey as the US Army's tactical transport helicopter. Its image became ingrained in the American psyche thanks to its use to great effect in the Gulf War and after the tragedy in Somalia. Conspiracy theories about unmarked government "black helicopters" also typically reference the Black Hawk. The UH-60 sports two General Electric T700 turboshafts renowned for their excellent performance and lifting capability. The Black Hawk has a three-man crew (pilot, copilot, gunner/crew chief) and capacity for 11-14 troops.

**Systems Failure Notes:** Several Air Force Special Operations variants of the Black Hawk made their way to **Laughlin AFB** in Texas and joined the **Independent Air Wing**. The **Free Americans' Air Cav** operates no fewer than eight AH-60L 'Direct Action Penetrators' modified for extended range and heavier firepower.

**Length:** 50 feet, 1 inch (15.3 m).

**Rotors:** 53 feet, 8 inches (16.4 m).

**Max Takeoff Weight:** 22,000 lbs (9900 kg).

**Maximum Speed:** 185 mph (296 km).

**Combat Range:** 370 miles (592 km).

**A.R.:** 12

**S.D.C. by Location:**

Main Body – 350

Rotor Blades – 125

Tail Rotors – 100

Engines (2) – 185

**Bonuses:** None.

**Armaments:**

2x detachable External Stores Support Systems – each can mount two stores pods.

1) 2.75 inch (70 mm) Rocket Pod – 1D4x10, 20 foot (6.1 m) blast radius, 11,250 foot (3429 m) range, 19 rockets.

2) Hellfire Missile Pod – 3D6x100, 50 foot (15.2 m) blast, 6562 foot (2000 m) range, 4 rockets.

3) 30 mm Chain Gun – 2D6x10 per round, 6000 foot (1829 m) range, 400 rounds.

4) Mark 19 Grenade Launcher – 2D6x10, 50 foot (15.2 m) blast, 1 mile (1.6 km) range, 100 rounds.

5) External Fuel Tank – Range extends to 1380 miles (2208 km) with 4 external fuel tanks.

## Agusta MH-68A Stingray

A little-known (and the newest) component of the United States' Coast Guard's air wing is comprised of modified Agusta A109 helicopters that form the Helicopter Interdiction Tactical Squadron (HITRON). It is the only airborne law enforcement group authorized to employ the use of force in the pursuit of drug interdiction and homeland defense missions.

These Whirlybirds are noted for their agility, speed, and accuracy. The pilot and copilot command two Pratt & Whitney 206C turboshafts driving a typical four-bladed main rotor and two-bladed tail rotor. The main gunner operates either an RC50 laser-sighted .50-cal sniper rifle designed to shoot through the engine block of a fleeing ship or a post-mounted M240 machine gun. The backup gunner mans a pintle-mounted M-16 and fires any hardpoint weapons. The MH-68A can also be armed with machinegun pods and rocket pods for self-defense.

**Systems Failure Notes:** HITRON Stingrays ended up in the service of the **Gulf States** and are considered their elite fighting force. They have survived this long thanks to original analog instrumentation and their relatively high speed. These Whirlybirds are precious operational systems and will be ordered to withdraw if a battle looks to be lost. The Gulf States simply can't afford to lose them!

**Length:** 37 feet, 6 inches (11.4 m).

**Rotors:** 36 feet, 1 inch (11.0 m).

**Max Takeoff Weight:** 6000 lbs (2700 kg).

**Maximum Speed:** 195 mph (312 km).

**Combat Range:** 480 miles (768 km).

**A.R.:** 10

**S.D.C. by Location:**

Main Body – 320

Rotor Blades – 115

Tail Rotors – 100

Engines (2) – 165

**Bonuses:** Gunner has +3 to strike and lowers his target's effective A.R. by 3 with the RC50 rifle.

#### Armaments:

M240 7.62 mm machinegun: 6D6+3 per round, 6000 foot (1829 m) range, 500 rounds.

RC50 precision rifle: 1D6x10+10 per round, 6560 foot (1999.5 m) range, 5 rounds, 10 reloads.

M16 assault rifle: 5D6 per round, 1320 foot (402 m) range, 200 round magazine, 5 reloads.

2x detachable store mounts – each can mount one weapon pod.

1) 2.75 inch (70 mm) Rocket Pod – 1D4x10, 20 foot (6.1 m) blast radius, 11,250 foot (3429 m) range, 19 rockets.

2) TOW Missile Pod – 2D6x100, 50 foot (15.2 m) blast radius, 6562 foot (2000 m) range, 2 rockets.

## Barnbirds – Homebuilt Warbirds

Not everyone can get their hands on a piece of military hardware, but that doesn't mean the enterprising, the innovative, and the insane can't take to the skies, too! Homebuilt kit planes and other civilian aircraft tend to be much easier to acquire – but they also require extensive and sometimes dangerous modifications to become warbirds.

### Cavalier Mustang Mk 2

Florida newspaper baron David Breed Lindsay, Jr. had the crazy idea to convert military surplus P-51 Mustangs into high-speed executive transports. His company, Trans Florida Aviation, actually rebuilt and sold several to those specifications in the late 50s and early 60s! This small success story caught the attention of the Department of Defense, which saw the Cavalier Mustang as ideal for counter-insurgency operations in 'friendly' South American countries. Refurbished Mustangs served in this role until 1984.

Systems Failure Notes: Cavalier Mustangs may find use in either South American campaigns or as a convenient source for the Flyboy that just has to have a P-51. These Mustangs sport the best in 1960s-era technology!

**Length**: 32 feet, 10 inches (10.0 m).

**Span**: 40 feet, 1 inch (12.2 m).

**Max Takeoff Weight**: 10,500 lbs (4725 kg).

**Maximum Speed**: 457 mph (731 km).

**Combat Range**: 2000 miles (3200 km).

**A.R.:** 8

**S.D.C. by Location**:

Main Body – 450

Wings (2) – 150

Tail – 150

Engine – 175

**Bonuses**: None.

**Armaments**:

6x 50 cal Browning in wings: 1D6x10+10 per round, 6560 foot (1999.5 m) range, 250 rounds each.

4x hardpoint on each wing – up to 5000 lbs (2250 kg) of bombs or rockets.

## Other Planes

The following aircraft use the single-engine plane or double-engine plane specifications on page 143 of **Systems Failure™** unless otherwise noted.

**Cessna 172 Skyhawk** – The world's most successful light aircraft with over 42,000 built. Capacity for 4. Single-engine. Wing can be strengthened to support two hardpoints.

**Cessna 208 Grand Caravan** – Single-engine, high-wing aircraft. Up to 14 passengers. 950 mile (1520 km) range. U-27 variant can be outfitted with a 20-mm cannon and six hardpoints or an optional sprayer system.

**Raytheon Beech King Air** – Highly successful twin-turbo-prop corporate aircraft. Two crew, 13 passengers. 1800 mile (2880 km) range.

**Fairchild PC-6 Porter** – Manufactured under license from Pilatus in the US. Armed counter-insurgency variant saw service in South America. STOL-capable. Single-engine. Single pilot, up to 10 passengers/paratroops. One side-firing 20-mm cannon, four wing hardpoints, one fuselage centerline hardpoint.

**Grumman G-164 AgCat** – Almost continual production since 1959, very successful single-engine biplane crop duster. One pilot. 400 gallon hopper capacity. 180 mile (288 km) range. **Max Speed**: 140 mph (224 km).

**Boeing Stearman** – Perhaps the most famous American biplane, saw extensive service as a crop duster and the plane of choice for older aerobatics teams. Tandem seating. +20% to low-speed piloting rolls. 350 mile (560 km) range. Single-engine. **Max Speed**: 110 mph (176 km).

**AT-802 Air Tractor** – Largest single-engine, purpose-built agriculture plane, first flight in 1990. Seating for two, dual controls, pilot and observer/passenger. 400 gallon hopper.

**Bell/Agusta BA609** – First corporate/utility twin-engine tiltrotor. Manufactured in Amarillo, Texas. Only a handful finished by the Meltdown. One pilot, six to nine passengers. VTOL-capable. 1200 mile (1920 km) range.

## Other Helicopters

The following aircraft use the helicopter specifications on page 143 of **Systems Failure™** unless otherwise noted.

**Boeing Commercial Chinook** – The CH-47 Chinook was originally developed as a heavy-lift, twin-rotor helicopter for the US Army. A civilian variant was created initially for oil rig support and found widespread use. 715 mile (1144 km) range. Two pilots, up to 44 passengers or 20,000 lb (9000 kg) of cargo. Up to 28,000 lb (12,600 kg) of cargo on external sling. **Max Speed**: 175 mph (280 km).

**MD 902 Explorer** – One of the most advanced civilian light helicopters, released right before the Meltdown. Uses NOTAR system for increased safety and reduced noise. Favorite of wealthy police departments. Max seating of 10. **Bonuses**: -10% to enemy Read Sensory Equipment checks.

**Erickson S-65F Helitanker** – Converted S-64 Skycrane helicopter. 9000-liter tank. Can refill tanks in 45 seconds with a nearby liquid source. Crew of two, space for one observer. 215 mile (344 km) range. **Max Speed:** 115 mph (184 km).

## Flyboys & Barnstormers

Some people and organizations stand out from the rest. Even in the tragedy that is post-Meltdown America, there are still heroes, victories, and just-plain-crazy stories. All prove that humanity is still alive and kicking. When the time comes to complete the Great American Bug Hunt once and for all, you can bet that these people will be involved.

### 47<sup>th</sup> Independent Air Wing

#### – Inheritors of Del Rio/Laughlin AFB, TX

**Laughlin Air Force Base** is located just six miles east of **Del Rio, Texas**, and connected to it by Highway 90. Laughlin was an important Air Force center conducting introductory training for new pilots. Its remote location and support focus served to keep Laughlin AFB off the initial Bug hit list. Protected hardlines left over from the base's days housing a U-2 strategic recon wing gave the personnel enough time to cut their outside lines, once the reality began to set in.

The 47<sup>th</sup> Flying Training Wing was among the first in the Air Force to use the new T-6 Texan II trainers for initial pilot training. These high-performance prop planes served to get new pilots in the air before transitioning to the venerable T-38 Talon jet trainers. Many of the airmen over Texas during the Meltdown diverted to Laughlin – where most of them had done their own pilot training – when it became clear that their home runways were being overrun by the enemy.

Three B-1B strategic bombers and six C-130 transports from Dyess AFB near Abilene, instructor pilots in T-38 Talon jet trainers and T-6 Texan IIs from Randolph AFB in San Antonio, F-117 stealth fighters from Holloman AFB in New Mexico, B-52 Stratofortress bombers from Barksdale AFB in Louisiana, two KC-10 tankers, and intelligence officers from Goodfellow AFB near San Angelo, all made their way to the relative haven of Del Rio.

The base commander, **General Thomas Collier**, suddenly found himself in charge of a heck of a lot more firepower than he was used to and the outside world falling apart at the seams. He immediately instituted martial law on the base and in the city. General Collier also realigned all of the newcomers under his command into a composite air wing where everyone worked together. The chain of command was strictly enforced to keep morale up and their lives as normal as possible.

The newly-created 47<sup>th</sup> **Independent Air Wing** was gearing up to join Operation Clean Sweep when their activities were discovered by Bugged F-16s operating out of San Antonio and Ellington Field near Houston. After a fierce air battle led by the veteran instructors (some of whom had served in the Gulf and Panama) and a bloody counterstrike against Bugged airfields and radar sites, the 47<sup>th</sup> emerged victorious - but too late to help their brethren.

The cost to the airmen was high. All but one of the F-117s and two of the B-52s were destroyed along with a third of the

hastily refitted training planes. In the aftermath of Operation Clean Sweep, some survivors trickled in and added their planes to the Wing. An air defense unit from El Paso took the long way through the desert to avoid Bug patrols and missed the battle. They stopped at Laughlin to fuel their trucks and ended up staying permanently; delivering much needed Patriot and Stinger ground-to-air missiles to the base.

General Collier is recognized by everyone as a genuine hero and the prime mover behind their continued survival. Rather than waste people and resources on all-out war, he keeps the fuel-thirsty bombers out of sight in secure hangars where they don't draw attention. There, they bide their time until they can be useful again. Regular patrols in the T-6s quietly and quickly identify approaching threats. The airmen have become experts at visual identification, relying on their own instincts more than fancy sensors. Alert teams in T-38s retrofitted with analog hardware can be up within five minutes to deliver a lethal response.

Del Rio and Laughlin AFB have become something of a snapshot of what life was like before the Meltdown. Though high barricades of sand and concrete encircle the base itself and the major approaches to the town (including the vital sections of Highway 90 that connect the two), everyone tries to keep on living as they did before. The civilians do all they can to support the base and the military does all it can to support the civilians. Until the tide turns and the Bugs can be pushed off the planet, every resident sees it as their responsibility to keep the pre-Meltdown American way alive.

### Eagle Pass Aquilas

#### – Privateers for a freebooter/arms manufacturer

**Eagle Pass, Texas**, is a border town and sits on the banks of the Rio Grande River. It has a long and proud history, having once been part of a major trade route with Mexico and home to an Army fort. During World War II, it supported Eagle Pass Army Air Field – yet another training base. Auxiliary fields used for touch-and-go landing training by pilots out of Laughlin AFB scatter the countryside around the town. In the years before the Meltdown, textile and arms manufacturing were the big employers for the town of roughly 20,000. However, Laredo and Brownsville had become the major transit centers.

Thus, Eagle Pass and its sister city of **Piedras Negras** were relatively quiet even as the rest of the world came crashing down. Residents smashed their computers, cut outside hardlines, and turned to their predominantly Catholic faith to see them through. **Aquilas Arms** was a leading manufacturer of shotguns and, by virtue of their product, became the de facto defenders of the town as their corporate security was much better trained than city police. City government worked with the company leaders to keep things running as smoothly as possible.

Before long, other towns sought trade and mercenary groups began passing through Eagle Pass looking for work and eager to buy weapons. This kept a steady stream of barter coming through what had essentially become a company town. Some merc groups even decided to set up shop in Eagle Pass, eventually setting the stage for a confrontation with Aquilas Arms. One particularly bold mercenary company flew in to the old municipal airport with a couple of heavily modified Cessnas and demanded service at gunpoint. By the end of the day, the mercs were dead and their planes were appropriated.

Aquilas Arms realized that their continued control over the town hinged on effective control of the airspace. They took over the municipal airport and slowly grew a small air force of Cessnas and a handful of Warbirds – including their prized **OV-10 Bronco** that is used for both special missions and close air support. The **Eagle Pass Aquilas** are the premier mercenary company in town... and everyone knows it. Other aviators are welcome to land at the airport, but they are escorted in by the Aquilas and trade for fuel and services at a premium. Smaller merc companies are allowed to operate from Eagle Pass, but they pay the Aquilas a “reasonable” percentage of their take to stay in business. Fortunately, this arrangement keeps the less scrupulous members of the Aquilas from preying on the townspeople during lean times.

## Dixie Whistlers

### – Barnstormers, freebooters, and general madmen

“Yew ain’t jes whistlin’ Dixie!” someone once said to **Rachael Wright** when she introduced herself as the craziest crop duster south of the Mason-Dixon Line. Somehow, that stuck with her even through the hell of the Meltdown. Her natural abilities at the control yoke and just a bit of crazy luck have kept her and her band of misfit pilots going. They’ll take on any job – no matter how dangerous – so long as the pay is good and so is the challenge.

They’ll run guns for the Warlords. They’ll drop Bug Juice on a particularly well-infested nest. They’ll ship chickens (or medicine) to your friends in the next county. The **Arkansas Razorbacks** are repeat customers, calling on the **Whistlers** frequently for close air support. If you need a crazy pilot, Rachael and her Whistlers are up for the task. She flies a heavily modified **Stearman** – the “Racy Rachael” – that sports two 7.62 mm machineguns and four underwing mounts for **B17 “Big Bang” Bug Bomb** rockets. It’s painted in a dark purple base with bright yellow stars and lightning bolts.

Rumor has it that Rachael started up her little venture by stealing a handful of Stearmans from an aerobatic flying group that abandoned their planes. Her plane and those of the oldest Whistlers tend to be in better condition and turn corners just a bit faster than one would expect, suggesting that the rumor is true. The fact of the matter is that Rachael and the founding crew are the original pilots! As far as Rachael is concerned, the story enhances her image and notoriety. The rest of the Whistlers tend to fly Stearmans and AgCats used before the Meltdown as crop dusters and fertilizer layers.

## Rachael Wright

### Flight Leader of the Dixie Whistlers

Before the end of the world as she knew it, Rachael Wright was a skilled aerobatic pilot who performed stunts at airshows and for private parties. She was a natural in the air and just crazy enough to push the envelope without getting herself killed. Rachael and her close-knit band of daring pilots found quickly that they could put their skills to good use by outflying the Bugs and helping people get what they needed. Despite the fact that Rachael is a fiery redhead with a temper to match her audacity, she really does care about people and sees the Whistlers as performing a much needed service.

Just as she awed crowds before the Meltdown, now “Racy Rachael” inspires people to defiance. This is a persona that she has projected to keep everyone’s spirits high – especially her own. Rachael lost most of her family, including her two kids, to the invasion. Only with her closest friends and behind closed doors does Rachael let her quiet, introspective side come out. They’re worried that she’ll burn out eventually... but, for now, the Flight Leader is too busy blazing a path across the sky to stop and take stock.

**Alignment:** Unprincipled.

**Attributes:** I.Q. 13, M.A. 22, M.E. 13, P.S. 10, P.P. 22, P.E. 22, P.B. 15, Spd 25.

**Hit Points:** 51, **S.D.C.:** 34.

**Height:** 5 feet, 7 inches (1.67 m), **Weight:** 130 lbs (59 kg).

**Age:** 38

**Gender:** Female.

**O.C.C.:** Flyboy (see **The Rifter® #8**, pages 21-23).

**Level:** 6

**Appearance:** Rachael has blazing red hair kept in a short, boyish haircut that keeps it out of her hazel, hawkish eyes. Of Irish-American and Indian-American descent, she’s quite attractive and has aged well, which can work to her advantage when dealing with men out in the field. Years of pushing the limit in the cockpit help keep her lean and physically fit, but she’s no powerhouse.

**Hand to Hand Combat:** Basic (6th Level).

**Attacks per Melee:** 6

**Bonuses:** +2 to roll, +2 to pull punch, +6 parry and dodge, +12% to save vs coma/death, +3 to save vs poison, +7 to save vs Horror Factor, +5 to initiative, +9 to strike with vehicle-mounted weaponry, +5 to strike, Critical Strike on a Natural 19 or 20.

**Skills:** Running, Climbing 70%, Military Etiquette 65%, Radio: Basic 80%, W.P. Rifle, Automotive Mechanics 55%, Aircraft Mechanics 55%, Basic Electronics 60%, Basic Mechanics 80%, Field Armorer 70%, Pilot Airplane 95%, Pilot Helicopter 84%, Pilot Jet Aircraft 89%, Pilot Jet Fighter 89%, Parachuting 89%, Navigation 95%, Read Sensory Equipment 75%, Weapon Systems 89%, Language and Literacy: American 95%, Basic Math 90%, Trust/Intimidate 70%, Kick Attacks: 2D4 karate kick or 1D6 snap kick.

**Secondary Skills:** W.P. Pistol, Find Contraband & Illegal Weapons 38%.

**Equipment:** “Miss Rachael,” as the Whistlers all call her, is never far from her beloved and heavily refitted Stearman aerobatic demonstration plane. Her weapon of choice is a Colt .45 service pistol inherited from her dad, an Air Force bomber pilot during the Cold War. She believes it brings her luck.

## Geoff Connelly – Callsign “Daedalus”

### Free American Air Cavalry

#### - Director of Strategic Planning

Geoff Connelly is the man who keeps the Air Cav flying free of Bug infiltration and develops the tactics and technologies to that end. Before the Meltdown, Connelly was an MIT-educated

systems engineer and worked on DARPA black projects as an independent contractor and troubleshooter. Most notably, he was part of a highly-classified project that was working on reverse-engineering an alien device that seemed to be a biological energy generator.

Connelly and his small team had figured out how to produce simple copies of the design that were analogues to the electrical generators hooked up to jet turbines. The idea was that Air Force Special Operations aircraft could use these new generators to provide their avionics and weapons systems with energy that could not be disrupted by enemy ECM or jamming. DARPA and the Air Force were conducting field tests on a retrofitted MH-60G Pave Hawk at a remote Montana airfield when all hell broke loose.

The military men fought off a Bug attack group while the scientists and engineers were evacuated on the Pave Hawk. Before long, they linked up with a group of Commemorative Air Force pilots out of the Great Lakes region that were flying towards safer airspace. Connelly knew of a DARPA/FEMA emergency supply depot that was not on the main hardlines and directed everyone there. From this depot, Connelly was able to access the secure satcoms and piece the situation together.

Over time, other surviving aviators found their way to the depot and joined with the fledgling force. Connelly and his scientists reconstituted their lab and began building Organitech dynamos for everyone at the base. They also devised conversion kits for the engines so that any high-octane fuel could be used. He realized that the only way to fight back against the Bugs was to be as mobile as they were and to use asymmetrical tactics.

Thus, the Free American Air Cav's mobile ground support units were born. Connelly even figured out how to transfer his entire lab onto a single eighteen-wheeler, thus removing their dependence on the depot. The link that holds all this together is Connelly's creative use of the existing satcom network and the converted B-29 "Eagle One." Air Force Special Operations burst communications satellites are still in orbit, kept aloft gyroscopically, and accessible by the Air Cav thanks to the code generator found at the DARPA/FEMA depot.

**Alignment:** Scrupulous.

**Attributes:** I.Q. 29, M.A. 22, M.E. 23, P.S. 16, P.P. 14, P.E. 21, P.B. 13, Spd 18.

**Hit Points:** 57, S.D.C.: 26.

**Height:** 5 feet, 8 inches (1.7 m), **Weight:** 160 lbs (72 kg).

**Age:** 43

**Gender:** Male.

**O.C.C.:** Egghead.

**Level:** 7

**Appearance:** Short, slightly stocky gentleman with close-cropped auburn hair and a matching moustache and goatee. Has taken to wearing flight suits most of the time for their versatility.

**Hand to Hand Combat:** Basic (Level 3).

**Attacks per Melee:** 4

**Bonuses:** +3 to roll, +2 to pull punch, +3 parry and dodge, +1 damage, +4 to save vs psionics, +6 to save vs insanity, +12% to save vs coma/death, +3 to save vs poison.

**Skills:** Radio: Satellite 45%, Radio: Basic 60%, Radio: Scramblers 50%, TV/Video 45%, Optic Systems 45%, Athletics, Computer Operation 95%, Advanced Mathematics 95%, Chemistry 95%, Biology 95%, Astrophysics 90%, Analytical Chemistry 90%, Automotive Mechanics 90%, Aircraft Mechanics 90%, Basic Electronics 95%, Advanced Mechanics 95%, Electrical Engineer 85%, Basic Mechanics 95%, Computer Programming 85%, Advanced Electronics 85%, Mechanical Engineer 80%, Weapons Engineer 80%, Field Armorer 90%, Pilot Airplane 89%, Pilot Helicopter 80%, Pilot Automobile 87%, Navigation 85%, Weapon Systems 75%, Language and Literacy: American 95%, Basic Math 90%, Trust/Intimidate 70%.

**Secondary Skills:** Read Sensory Equipment 70%, Hand to Hand: Basic, W.P. Pistol.

**Equipment:** Connelly has a mobile research lab run by a neural network computer developed by DARPA before the Melt-down and hooked up to an Organitech dynamo. If he's not there, he's on board "Eagle One" coordinating communications and troubleshooting or, after a mission, on the flight line working with the crews. He carries a Sig Sauer P226 pistol for self-protection. If he needs to go out in the field, Connelly has the original Pave Hawk at his disposal.



# Laser Mages

## Priests of the Divine Illumination

Optional Source Material for Rifts®

By Dennis Glover

The fall of Tolkeen, while catastrophic, was a flashpoint for magical discovery and innovation. Thousands of beings who would normally never venture further than the walls of their own churches were thrown to the winds and began to discover the world, and be discovered by it. One such case were the Priests of Divine Illumination. Before the fall of Tolkeen, these priests were nothing more than another harmless sect of sun worshipers. Honestly, they were looked down upon by most others, seen as lazy, stupid, and a mimicry of true worshipers. A typical day for these priests would include waking just before



dawn, breakfast on the rooftop of their church while watching the sunrise, a couple of hours of meditation and exercise, naps at midday during the sun's zenith, a couple more hours of meditation and exercise, another meal on the rooftop during sundown, then an evening in wistful conversation and music about how "awesome" the sun was that day.

Laser Mages, as they have been come to be called, gain their name from their curious ability to alter the light around them for miraculous effect. They have been shown to heal with the sun's touch, become nearly invisible at will, fire lasers from their eyes, and shrug off even the heavy lasers of Coalition power armor. A tiny number of their commune (2D4 at most) saw the need for them to defend refugees escaping from the fallen city-state and took places with its defenders, and the rest have taken to the road, helping the refugees on their trek south. Those who stayed proved themselves capable soldiers and powerful sorcerers, earning much respect. Those who left have spread their beliefs through unending acts of compassion and generosity, bringing hundreds into the fold and turning a small sun cult into a religious movement quickly embraced by the beleaguered refugees sick of too much death and war.

A direct link can easily be drawn between the Laser Mages and the Bohemians of pre-Rifts Earth. The air of freedom of thought and practice of belief is truly what feeds these new, modern "hippies." There is no competition within the sect, with every follower sharing his discoveries with every other follower. All of the priests work to better their church and each other, living together in harmony, and sharing ideas about how to make the world a better place. Before the war, a small commune within Tolkeen was the only known location that Laser Mages could be found, meditating on the powers of the sun and its effect on the world that circles it.

A straightforward answer has never been given by the Laser Mages about their true origins. Answers range from, "We are the children of the Mother Sun," to "Your world's strange yellow sun has granted us powers beyond mortal men." Their true origins are probably much more mundane. Through practice and meditation, the priests have simply devised spells that harness, alter, or mimic the physical effects of light. These spells, empowered by the increased P.P.E. levels on Rifts Earth, can do anything from ward off the undead to burn holes through power armor. The claim of mystic powers can be disputed by the fact that they are learned abilities, not natural talents. A growing number of refugees traveling with the Laser Mages have been taught these skills. Their small commune of 20 on a Tolkeen back street is turning into a growing church of sun worshippers numbering nearly 20 times that.

One of the first monks to leave the city was the son of a wealthy businessman, and used his connections to open a second commune in the American Southwest. This is the eventual destination for the majority of the converts and refugees, and is rapidly turning into a large community of refugees and castaways from the war. The commune is built atop the ruins of the old Wendover Air Force Range and Dugway Proving Grounds in Utah. The commune is really a tent city arranged around the few structures left standing at the base. The priests already in the area love it because it sits squarely in the middle of Great Salt Lake Desert and is mostly uninhabitable by any other creatures, and the only neighbors are native Indians and a few of the D-Bee Cactus People. Refugees have begun exploring the base and have yet to find anything of interest other than a large subterranean facility that had been abandoned or cleared by looters long before they moved in. Currently the facility houses almost 1,500 refugees from the war and other travelers from Tolkeen. Roughly 10% are Men at Arms O.C.C.s, 15% spellcasters of some form or another, and the rest are human or D-Bee settlers with nowhere else to go. Of the population, only 12 are Laser Mages. Neftalus Dominicus (6<sup>th</sup> level Laser Mage) originally founded the commune, followed later by two others (both 4<sup>th</sup> level), and the rest are converts trained along the way (ranging between 1<sup>st</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> level). Water has been brought from the (relatively) nearby Utah lake and trade has begun with nearby Indian tribes. If the Wendy Commune, as it's come to be known, continues to grow at its current pace it will soon become one of the largest human outposts in the West.

### Laser Mage O.C.C. Powers and Abilities:

1. **See all spectrums of light.** This includes ultraviolet, infrared, and all other known frequencies. The mage is impervious to illusions either magical or psionic in nature.
2. **Sense time.** The Laser Mage is so in tune with the sun that he can sense the time of day by the position of the sun, as well as feel the exact moment of sunset or sunrise.
3. **Impervious to the sun's effects.** The mage will not suffer from sunburn, dehydration, skin cancer, or any other ill effect associated with exposure to too much sun. Likewise, lasers will inflict half damage to an unprotected Laser Mage.

### Laser Mage Magical Abilities:

1. **Initial spell knowledge.** Like most Mystics, the Laser Mage's magical knowledge comes from his own meditations

and search for knowledge. At the appropriate time the mage will contemplate their nature, the nature of the universe, and his place in it. At the end of this period the mage emerges with a new understanding and a new spell to go along with it. Spells will generally reflect their nature, personality, and beliefs.

At first level, characters will know the spells Blinding Flash, Lantern Light, Globe of Daylight, Invisibility: Simple, and three other conventional spells. Selections are to be made from levels one and two only. The character also starts with four Light Magic spells.

**2. Learning new spells.** The mage intuitively knows when he has reached a new metaphysical plateau (new level of experience). At this point the character will meditate to achieve this new knowledge.

At second level of experience the character can select three new spells from either Light Magic or conventional spells from level one, two, or three. At third level the character can select two spells from Light Magic or conventional spells from levels one through four. At fourth level, and every subsequent level, the character selects one new spell from Light Magic or conventional spell magic up to the level corresponding to the character's current level of experience (i.e. a fifth level mage selects from levels 1-5, an eighth level mage, levels 1-8, etc.). Like traditional Mystics, Laser Mages cannot be taught additional spell magic outside of their own studies. Likewise, characters just don't bother trying to learn spells until the time comes naturally. Laser Mages accept this without question as just another way magic works around them. Note: Laser Mages can use Techno-Wizard devices and magic scrolls if literate.

**3. P.P.E.:** Like all men of magic, Laser Mages are batteries of magical energy. It is this energy that the mage draws upon to power their magic. Permanent P.P.E. Base: P.E. attribute plus 1D4x10+20.

Supplemental P.P.E.: Add 2D6 P.P.E. per additional level of experience. Unlike conventional Mystics, Laser Mages draw P.P.E. from the sun instead of ley lines. As such, Laser Mages cannot draw extra P.P.E. from ley lines, nexus points, or blood sacrifice. Mages can only draw energy from other mages who freely give it.

P.P.E. Recovery: Laser Mages recover P.P.E. at a rate of 10 per hour of rest during daylight, double for the hour before and hour after noon, and half during nighttime.

**4. O.C.C. Magic Related Bonuses:** +4 to save vs Horror Factor, +2 to save vs possession, +1 to save vs magic at levels 1, 3, 6, 9, and 12, +1 to Spell Strength at levels 4, 8, and 12, +1 on Perception Rolls at levels 2, 4, 6, 8, 10, and 12.

## Laser Mage O.C.C. Stats

**Alignment:** Any, but most tend to be good or Anarchist.

**Attribute Requirements:** I.Q. 8, M.E. 9, M.A. 9 or higher.

**Racial Requirements:** None.

**O.C.C. Skills:**

Language: Native at 98%.

Language: One of choice (+10%).

Sing (+15%)

Dance (+15%)

Play Musical Instrument: One of choice (+10%).

Lore: Three of choice (+15%).

Philosophy (+20%)

Wilderness Survival (+15%)

Aerobic Athletics

Athletics (General)

Hand to Hand must be selected as an O.C.C. Related Skill. Basic costs one skill, Expert can be selected at the cost of two skills, and Martial Arts or Assassin (if Anarchist or evil) for the cost of three skills.

**O.C.C. Related Skills:** Select seven other skills at level one, plus one additional skill at levels 3, 6, 9, and 12. All new skills start at level one proficiency.

Communications: Any (+5%) except Cryptography, Electronic Countermeasures, Laser Communications, Optic Systems, Sensory Equipment, and Surveillance.

Cowboy: None.

Domestic: Any (+15%).

Electrical: Basic only (+5%).

Espionage: None.

Horsemanship: Any (+10%).

Mechanics: Basic only (+5%).

Medical: First Aid, Holistic Medicine, and Animal Husbandry only (+10%).

Military: None.

Physical: Any (+15%).

Pilot: Any except aircraft, power armor, robots, or military.

Pilot Related: Any.

Rogue: Any (+5%).

Science: Botany only (+10%).

Technical: Any (+10%).

W.P.: Any except Heavy Military Weapons and Heavy M.D. Weapons.

Wilderness: Any (+15%).

**Secondary Skills:** Select five skills from the Secondary Skills List on page 300 of *Rifts® Ultimate Edition*, plus one skill at levels 4, 8, and 12. These are additional areas of knowledge that do not get any bonuses other than those from attributes. All Secondary Skills start at the base skill level.

**Standard Equipment:** Set of clothing, light suit of M.D.C. body armor that will rarely be worn unless trouble is expected, knapsack, backpack, 1D4 small sacks, 1 large sack, six wooden stakes and a mallet, bedroll, small silver cross, canteen, air filter and gas mask, one musical instrument of choice, a few personal effects, and one weapon of choice (if any). May own a horse or similar riding animal, maybe a motorcycle or hover vehicle with an open canopy, but never an enclosed vehicle.

**Money:** The sun will provide whatever the mage needs; as such, money accrued will quickly be spent on supplies, a pretty trinket, or just given to others. The mage will only have 1D4x100 credits at any given point plus 1D6x1000 in tradable goods, gems or precious metals.

**Cybernetics:** None. Will avoid any kind of unnatural enhancements, and is as likely to go without as to get Bio-Systems to replace a missing limb.

# Light Magic

## Blight of Light

**Range:** Touch only.

**Duration:** 1 month per level of experience.

**Saving Throw:** Standard.

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

The only true curse in the repertoire of the Laser Mage, Blight of Light acts to remove the warm embrace of the sun from the cursed. While not truly damaging, it shows the cursed the true importance of the sun in his life. Once cast, the victim will not be able to find the sun. To this one person the sun has become invisible, light is still cast but the sun itself cannot be found. Moreover, the character will grow very cold, no matter what he does. Not so cold as to cause any exposure damage, but enough to make the character sore, uncomfortable, and unable to sleep (-1 to strike/parry/dodge and -5% on all skills). The victim will also become very pale. No time in the sun can remedy this, and after a while (1D4 months), the character will become very depressed (alcoholic/addict characters may become suicidal) and see the penalties double.

## Control Light: Coloration

**Range:** 15 feet (4.6 m) plus 5 feet (1.5 m) per level of experience.

**Duration:** 1 minute per level of experience.

**Saving Throw:** None.

**P.P.E.:** 20

Alters the color (and therefore, frequency) of visible light.

Laser Mages have used this spell to perform a number of feats. Most impressively is to alter the frequency of lasers, allowing lasers to overcome otherwise resistant armors like the famed Glitter Boy.

## Control Light: Direction

**Range:** 10 feet (3 m) plus 5 feet (1.5 m) per level of experience.

**Duration:** 30 seconds per level of experience.

**Saving Throw:** None.

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

This is one of the most practical spells in the Laser Mage's repertoire. The spell allows the caster to control the direction of all light that comes within his range. Any light can be redirected, from a spotlight to a laser beam. The mage only has to know that the light is coming and he can change its course.

## Control Light: Intensity (Minor)

**Range:** Thirty feet (9 m) plus 10 feet (3 m) per level of experience.

**Duration:** 1 minute per level of experience.

**Saving Throw:** None.

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

This spell allows the mage the ability to control the intensity of light within a specific area. It only affects the visible spectrum of light within the caster's range. It affects only the inten-

sity of the light and can only be used to illuminate or darken a pre-existing source of light. A single 60 watt light bulb can be magnified until it gives off the same light as a Globe of Daylight spell or is completely dark, like it was turned off. In the case of brightness, this super light bulb is still considered artificial light so it has no ill effects on vampires, but they will tend to shy away from it or cover their eyes while in its presence.

## Control Light: Intensity (Major)

**Range:** Self only.

**Duration:** 30 seconds (2 melees) per level of experience.

**Saving Throw:** None.

**P.P.E.:** 25

Arguably the most powerful spell in the Laser Mage's arsenal, the mage can cause massive amounts of destruction with just a small light source. A pen light can be focused down into a powerful laser, a Globe of Daylight can obliterate a room full of vampires, and the sun itself can scorch the earth bare. Laser weapons will see their damages greatly increased, but with this increase is the potential for the excess heat to damage or destroy the weapon (30% +5% chance per shot fired). Listed below is just a reference point for damages and ranges, all being at the G.M.'s discretion.

Laser Pointer/Sight – 1D6 S.D.C. – range: 100 feet (30 m).

Pen Light – 1D6x10 S.D.C. – range: 150 feet (46 m).

Medium Flashlight – 1D4 M.D. – range: 150 feet (46 m).

Large Flashlight – 1D6 M.D. – range: 200 feet (61 m).

Small Spotlight/Vehicle Headlight – 4D6 M.D. – range: 200 feet (61 m).

Large Spotlight – 6D6 M.D. – range: 250 feet (76 m).

Laser Weapon – damage x10 – + 50% to range.

Globe of Daylight – 1D6x10 M.D. – range as per spell.

Daylight – 4D6x10 M.D. – range: special.

In the case of augmenting daylight, the mage can only affect a small area around himself. The range is limited to a small pillar 1 foot (.3 m) in diameter, up to 10 feet (3 m) away, +2 feet (0.6 m) per level of experience. Damage will be affected by cloud cover, poor weather, and time of day (i.e. more damage at noon on a sunny day than dusk under clouds).

## Crystal Bomb

**Range:** Touch to create but blast radius for damage and flash effect is 5 feet (1.5 m) per level of experience.

**Duration:** The bomb will last for 24 hours per level of experience before reverting back to its normal form. Flash effect lasts for 1D4 melee rounds per level of experience.

**Saving Throw:** Standard for flash, dodge for damage.

**P.P.E.:** 35

An example of the symbiosis between light and the crystals that reflect them, the mage can charge a crystal or jewel with enough magic energy to make the jewel explode in a brilliant flash. This bomb can be detonated by will at the mage's discretion (no range limit) and inflicts 3D6 M.D. per level of experience to a blast radius of 5 feet (1.5 m) per level of experience. Damage is inflicted by the discharge of magical energy and the shrapnel of the exploding crystal and the flash has the same ef-

fect as the spell Blinding Flash. Inflicts double damage to Vampires and Shadow Beasts.

## Curse of Piercing Light

**Range:** Line of sight.

**Duration:** One melee per level of experience.

**Saving Throw:** Standard.

**P.P.E.:** 25

While not a curse in the traditional sense, this spell can do considerable damage. The victim of this curse will receive double damage from all laser and light based attacks. Duration for effects from these attacks (i.e. Blinding Flash, Mesmerizing Light) will also be doubled. Also anything that uses a laser to target the victim will be twice as effective (double the bonus for laser targeting devices).

## Enlightening Touch

**Range:** Touch only.

**Duration:** One hour per level of experience.

**Saving Throw:** Standard.

**P.P.E.:** 15

Also known as the Blessing of the Sun, this spell is used most often to ease the suffering of those around the mage, and a big reason for the Laser Mages' reputation as kind and noble spirits. Recipients of the blessing will see their concerns and worries melt away as they turn their faces to the sun. Characters will be refreshed, rested, and rejuvenated. While not actually healed of any ailment, their pains will seem less and they will be more relaxed (+5% to all skills and +1 to all actions).

## Laser Blast

**Range:** 300 feet (91 m).

**Damage:** 1D6 M.D. per level of experience.

**Duration:** Instant.

**Saving Throw:** None, only dodge.

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

This spell allows the Laser Mage to shoot powerful lasers from his eyes. Due to the source of the attack, the lasers are very accurate (+3 to strike). Experienced mages (level 4 or higher) are able to change the direction of the blast midstream without using another spell. This allows them to fire around corners, without exposing themselves from cover, and redirecting the shots to hide their location. G.M. Note: Please apply appropriate penalties for shooting blind when applicable.

## Material Light

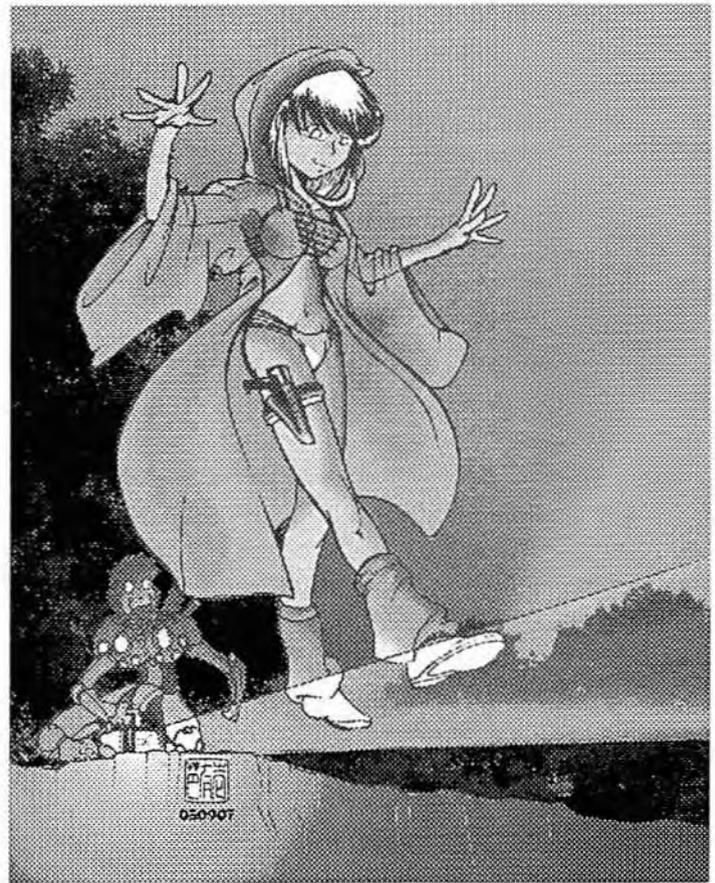
**Range:** Can be cast up to 5 feet (1.5 m) away per level of experience.

**Duration:** Five minutes per level of experience.

**Saving Throw:** None.

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

One of the most powerful spells dealing with light, this one has the ability to turn light into solid matter. The light's touch must be within the range of the spell caster for him to affect it. Once cast, the light in its strongest range (i.e. the column from a



flashlight, a sphere of light from a light bulb, etc.), will turn into solid matter. The new matter will have no weight but will have mass and volume matching its size. In its most practical form, this solid light can be used to capture an enemy and hold him with a spotlight, use a flashlight to create a bridge, or a make a tightrope with a laser.

Solid light has an M.D.C. of 5 per level of experience regardless of size.

## Mesmerizing Light

**Range:** 25 foot (7.6 m) diameter, plus 5 feet (1.5 m) per level of experience.

**Duration:** One melee per level of experience.

**Saving Throw:** Standard; intoxicated characters are -5 to save.

**P.P.E.:** 25

The mage creates a dazzling light show featuring hundreds of multi-colored lights dancing in spectacular patterns hovering overhead. The show, while brilliant, is also very distracting. Even characters who save will suffer a penalty of -2 on all actions and -15% to perform any skill. Characters who fail to save are mesmerized by the lights and will fail to notice almost anything happening around them until the duration elapses or they are physically shaken from their daze. Victims have no initiative and will only move closer to the light unless attacked. They will ignore their surroundings and remember little about what happened during the show.

## Microscopic Vision

**Range:** Self, or others by touch.

**Duration:** Two minutes per level of experience.

**Saving Throw:** None.

**P.P.E.:** 25

Another sight altering spell from the Laser Mage, this one allows close inspection of even the tiniest detail. Mages use this extensively for research and fine detail work. Magnification is possible up to 1000 times. This is enough for mages to study the structure of cells and other such minutia.

## Mirage

**Range:** Line of sight.

**Duration:** Five minutes per level of experience.

**Saving Throw:** Standard.

**P.P.E.:** 15

One of the varied illusion spells in Light Magic, Mirage creates a barrier of shimmering light like those radiating off of high heat sources like fire or deserts floors. The mirage distorts the image of what is on the other side of it, making targeting impossible (-10 to strike). Used mostly to hide escapes or set traps.

## Photosynthesis

**Range:** Self or others by touch.

**Duration:** Spell is in effect while the sun is shining upon the user or for a maximum of 4 hours straight. At the end of 4 hours the spell may be recast again if there is sufficient daylight remaining.

**Saving Throw:** None.

**P.P.E.:** 45

A bizarre name for a powerful healing spell, Photosynthesis uses sunlight to heal wounds. Once cast, the recipient need only rest with 30% or more of his body in direct sunlight (a Globe of Daylight spell has been used in a pinch, but at half potency). While the spell is in effect, the recipient will not feel hunger or pain, and will heal at a rate of 1D6x10 points per hour or 1D4 per minute. Damage healed can be Hit Points/S.D.C. or Mega-Damage. This spell is even powerful enough to regrow lost limbs or appendages. The magic will not reset bones or cure the diseased, but will lessen their suffering while in effect.

## Rainbow

**Range:** Line of sight extending for 1 mile (1.6 km) per level of experience.

**Duration:** One hour per level of experience.

**Saving Throw:** None.

**P.P.E.:** 25

This spell has no strict offensive or defensive properties of its own but practical applications to innovative spell casters are undeniable. The spell creates a humongous rainbow, 15 feet (4.6 m) around and stretching for miles through the sky. The rainbow is visible for miles around and radiates magic. Characters who can sense or see magic will notice it quickly and be able to follow it through even dense foliage and clouds. The starting and ending points are at the mage's discretion, but must be known (at least in general direction).

## Shining Armor

**Range:** Self or others by touch.

**Duration:** Two minutes per level of experience or until M.D.C. is expended.

**Saving Throw:** None.

**P.P.E.:** 20

This spell actually creates a second skin around the caster, made completely of light. The caster takes on the appearance of a shining star emanating bright light. The light is so bright that it makes looking directly at the character difficult (-3 to strike), and also makes discerning any detail other than general size or shape impossible. The armor affords protection of 10 M.D.C. per level of experience and makes the wearer impervious to lasers and light based attacks like Lightblade.

## Sphere of Invisibility

**Range:** Ten foot (3 m) sphere up to 50 feet (15 m) away.

**Duration:** One minute per level of experience.

**Saving Throw:** None.

**P.P.E.:** 75

The mage creates a sphere that renders anything within it invisible. Objects or persons within the sphere upon casting are invisible, and anything that is introduced after the spell is cast becomes invisible when it enters the sphere. Anyone watching from outside the area of effect will see things disappear as they reach the edge.

## Talisman of Light

**Range:** Touch to cast, talismans illuminate a circle of 5 feet (1.5 m) per level of experience.

**Duration:** One hour per level of experience.

**Saving Throw:** None.

**P.P.E.:** 5

Displaying the connections between Light Magic and crystals, this invocation allows the caster to imbue any relatively clear crystal or jewel with the ability to radiate light of its own. Color, size, cut or clarity have no real effect on the spell other than what color light the jewel will give off. A ruby will radiate red, a diamond white, and so forth. The light is not overpowering enough to be used as a ward against vampires but is sufficient to be used as an alternative light. Many mages use this spell to light their homes at night. The mage can cancel the magic at any time, and can also resume it at any point without extra P.P.E. as long as the initial duration hasn't elapsed.

## Telescopic Vision

**Range:** Self or others by touch.

**Duration:** Five minutes per level of experience.

**Saving Throw:** None.

**P.P.E.:** 25

This spell grants the caster crystal clear vision at incredible distances. The character's line of sight extends dramatically as if he were looking through a pair of high-powered binoculars. Characters can easily read a sign or recognize a uniform at one mile (1.6 km), plus one mile (1.6 km) for every level of experience.

## True Vision

**Range:** Self or others by touch.

**Duration:** Ten minutes per level of experience.

**Saving Throw:** Standard.

**P.P.E.:** 20

Showing the more magical side of Light Magic, this simple spell allows the mage to see through magical illusions, metamorphosis, transformations, and Aura-altering spells. This includes monster shaping tattoos, Changelings, and other supernatural shape-changers like dragons.

## Underwater Vision

**Range:** Self or others by touch.

**Duration:** Five minutes per level of experience.

**Saving Throw:** None.

**P.P.E.:** 5

This spell clears the distortion that water creates with light. Relatively clear water will allow the mage to see to the full extent of his vision. The murkier the water becomes, the less the mage will be able to see, but his vision will still be well beyond that of anything else in the water. The mage will also be able to see clearly into water as well. Once cast, a character looking over the bow of a boat can see clearly beneath the waves through distortion and glare. This spell also allows the recipient to see Water Elementals and other creatures normally invisible in water.

# How Much Is That Wolfen in the Window?

## Slavery on the Palladium World

### Optional Source Material for the Palladium Fantasy RPG®

By Mark Hall

**Note:** This article is meant to examine the institution of slavery in the fictional world of the **Palladium Fantasy RPG®**. Unfortunately, there are far too many real-world examples of slavery for me to draw inspiration from, be they historical or modern day, in name or in fact. It is not my intent to make light of the plight of slaves, past or present, but rather to provide a realistic framework in which games can operate. As always, you are only limited by your imaginations, but I also hope that good taste and the sensibilities of your group will play a major role in your decisions.

*The whip cracked, and Gerran blessed the cool touch of another's blood on his parched skin. The summer sun was a hammer, pounding all of the slaves into the ground. Gerran, who had been working in this quarry for an unheard of nine months, took no notice as they whipped another slave to death behind him. He simply set his shoulder to the rope and pulled, knowing that to fail to do so was to die, and that to die was to give up, and that to give up was... the thought was lost in the burn of muscles straining against rope, rock, and the world itself.*

*Next to Gerran, Orzek watched in indignation, his anger growing with each strike. He did not know the slave the overseers killed; he cared nothing for the Goblin, save that it brought him water each day, as was its job. His ire arose out of the fact that now he would not get water until night, which was still three hours away, unless the masters sent another Goblin, or let him step out of line to grab the Goblin's bucket. He heard*

## Palladium Fantasy RPG®

*the dull smack of a whip hitting the Goblin's dead flesh, and decided that he would survive until dark without water, or he would not... it was far more likely than being allowed to gain that Goblin's bucket.*

Slavery is nigh-ubiquitous on Palladium. Timiro thrives (and quivers) because of its massive slave population; the Byzantines happily trade slaves across the world. The Land of the South Winds makes extensive use of slaves in its fields and shops, the Eastern Territory has a thriving slave trade, and one need not even mention the Western Empire. Even the Wolfen are not above sentencing criminals to slave labor in the military. Only on Y-Oda, in a few small kingdoms in the Eastern Territories, in the Yin-Sloth periphery, and in parts of the Northern Hinterlands, is there no slavery whatsoever.

Slavery is so common that most people do not even notice the slaves which surround them, or think about the status of servants. Was the serving wench at the inn last night free or owned? Are you sure? Did you think about it? Does it matter? For most people in the Palladium World, including, perhaps, the serving wench herself, the answer is, "No." To others, however, it is a very important matter. It may be a matter of basic dignity, of life and death, or of simple business.

I feel, here, that it is important to note that I will purposefully NOT be dwelling on the sheer inhumanity and degradation possible in any system of slavery. I do not need to recount every possible way a slave owner can brutalize a slave for you to understand that such things happen and are part of daily life. For a great many slaves, life is a waking nightmare which bleeds into one which they barely sleep through. However, for a great many more, life is not much different than it is for free people in the



same trade, save for the collar on their neck, or the brand on their shoulder. I leave it to individual Game Masters to determine precise ratios in their games.

## Slavery and Alignment

Slavery occupies something of a gray area in alignment; it is not inherently evil to legally own a slave, though many good people prefer not to. Of course, a good character will not mistreat any slaves he owns. Principled characters tend to adhere to laws about what can be provided to slaves; when it is illegal to provide slaves with tools that can be turned into weapons, or with the knowledge of reading, then the slaves of a Principled individual are unlikely to have those. Scrupulous characters are far more likely to ignore such laws, but they are also less likely to own slaves in the first place; their love of life and freedom means that slavery is against their ethos. Similarly, Unprincipled characters are very unlikely to own slaves, and for much the same reasons. While both Scrupulous and Unprincipled characters will own slaves, especially if it's a temporary measure to save those slaves from immediate harm, neither one will make a living of it, nor will they "condition" any but the most dangerous of slaves.

Anarchist and evil characters, however, embrace slavery as an excellent tool. Conditioning slaves is simply the way to get the most out of them, though whether they condition them physically or psychically comes down to preferences (effectiveness vs cost vs love of blood and torture). Aberrant individuals make especially effective slave owners and slavers. They are less

given to wanton cruelty, but perfectly willing to use effective cruelty to get the most from a recalcitrant slave, and will generally treat their merchandise quite well, leading to larger returns on slave-taking ventures.

## How Does Someone Become a Slave?

Contrary to "romantic" images of slave raids on unsuspecting villages, most slaves in civilized nations are born, not made. The large population of existing slaves means that breeding slaves is a profitable business, and the opportunity to breed can always be held out as a reward for well-behaved slaves of both genders. Slave breeding is a science, much like horse or dog breeding; slaves are selected for their traits, and paired with partners who will produce offspring with the desired traits. Most successful slave breeders specialize in a certain type of slave, and are trainers, as well; they know what makes a good laborer, scribe, or warrior, and choose their breeding stock carefully, and carefully cull and train the offspring. Other slave owners are more haphazard about the breeding of their slaves, but concerted breeding programs are in place across the world.

Those who are born to slavery usually remain slaves for their entire lives; they know nothing else, and their ambition is confined to the world inside their ownership. Better food, a better place to sleep, a better position in their master's house or business, their own possessions, even a stipend or a spouse are all reasonable ambitions for a born-slave, and aren't all that differ-

ent from the desires of a free person of Palladium. Of course, a poorly-treated slave dreams of escape, and many slaves do dream of freedom, but for a reasonably-treated slave, the desire to escape is usually balanced by the fear of the unknown, the punishments if captured, and the security that comes with being owned by a master who is better than many they know. Those who make a stipend, or save any tips or other sources of income they may have, may buy their freedom, but the prices are so steep that it discourages many.

Of those slaves who were not born to it, the second largest group is criminals. Almost all kingdoms enslave criminals, either for a specific period, or for their entire life. Most such criminals are not sold to the public; those who are only enslaved for a period of time are entitled to be freed at the end of it, and a country which regularly made that impossible would soon find itself with angry citizens (both buyers and the enslaved), and those who are enslaved for life are often too dangerous to be in private hands. More often, they are on work gangs belonging to the nation (such as the Wolfen Imperial Army's Mulia, or Labor Corps), or are leased to companies within the nation, who use them in work too dangerous for free men. Thieves, murderers, rapists, highwaymen, grave robbers, temple defilers, and other types of "adventurers" frequently end up on such work gangs. Others will be sent to penal colonies in Ophid's Grasslands, the Yin-Sloth Jungles, the Baalgor Wastelands, or the Floenry Islands; they remain nominally free, however. If they care to risk a trek across the jungle or the burning wastes, or a swim across the ocean, they are free to leave.

It is also common to enslave people for excessive debt. If you are unable to pay a very large debt, and have nothing worth seizing, many countries (the Western Empire, especially) will allow you to sell your children or yourself into slavery. For some kingdoms in the East, this is a temporary measure; you are given work to do until you have paid off your debt (plus the cost of supporting you while you are working off said debt). For others, it is a permanent enslavement. Many skilled artisans and their children who have hit hard times enter slavery through this route; while a guild will often work to redeem an enslaved guild member, an independent merchant will be at the mercy of his creditors.

It is also common to voluntarily enter debt and use slavery as a way to pay it off. This is known as "indentured servitude." In indentured servitude, the servant is a free person who has a contract with the master. The master agrees to provide certain services (often room, board, transportation to a place, and an amount of money at the end of the contract) in exchange for a certain period of servitude. Many people in the Eastern Territory are also either indentured servants, or the descendants of such; unable to afford the move from the Western Empire, Timiro, or the Land of the South Winds themselves, they hired as servants with wealthy individuals who were going to the East, in exchange for transportation and land when their costs were paid. Indentured servants rarely bear any slave marks such as brands, tattoos, or collars; because they are still nominally free, they are somewhat above such things. A very common kind of indentured servitude is an apprenticeship; the apprentice is given food, a place to sleep, clothing, and instruction in a craft or trade in exchange for several years of servitude.

After debt-slavery is the practice of selling individuals into slavery who are not in debt, but happen to be "unattended." Some unscrupulous groups will kidnap people and sell them to slavers, who will then sell them elsewhere. It is not uncommon for the losers in gang wars, political skirmishes, and family squabbles in the West (and elsewhere) to find themselves spending time, if not their lives, as slaves. Young adventurers will sometimes be offered a "treasure map" that the owner "would follow if only he weren't so old (or sick)," which leads to an ambush by slavers. It is also not unheard of for mercenary contracts to wind up being little more than a way to gather warriors together for the slave pens.

Mentioned above is selling one's children into slavery. This is not terribly common, but it does happen. Poor families are especially known for selling children in lean years, gaining some money to buy food to feed the family, now with one fewer mouth to feed, while, hopefully, providing the sold child with a better place to live. Some families will whittle themselves away, year after year, selling one child at a time, until nothing is left. Other families will sell unwanted children, especially step-children, illegitimate children, or orphans who have been thrust upon them.

Lastly, and least common, are slaves gained from war, pirate raids, or a slave raid. While many such slaves enter the market every year, these slaves have several distinct disadvantages that make them less popular than other choices, though demand means they seldom go unsold.

The first is that most are in very poor condition. They were often injured while being taken, and many are mistreated during their captivity. Brutalization, rape, and even simple neglect can mean what seems to be a sound investment will require a fair amount of money to be a viable worker. While other slaves suffer these same mistreatments, slaves taken by violence are far more likely to have it go untreated.

Those who are fit to work are often not resigned to it; prisoners of war and those who were taken as adults tend to make rebellious slaves, and require extensive conditioning to be suitable, or they require constant guarding, which can be even more costly.

In the case of prisoners of war, there is also the possibility of there being an end to the war declared. While most nations will negotiate settlements which allow you to keep your property (or be compensated for it), there is a slight chance that your slaves will be taken because they once belonged to someone else (or, even worse, they may have once been someone with the ability to make your life difficult).

## Slavery Around the World

The Palladium World runs on the backs of slaves; in most nations of the world, slaves are a major component of the workforce. However, laws vary across the world as to who can be a slave, what forms of slavery are legal, and what rights a slave retains.

**Bizantium:** In the Far North, slavery is legal, and on the islands, every non-human is aware that they live just a breath away from slavery. The crown of Bizantium does not recognize *any* rights of non-humans. While Elves and Dwarves are respected, and thus unlikely to be made slaves (there are citizens,

especially nobles, who would stand against them being made slaves without cause), other non-humans can be enslaved at will if they lack a citizen to speak for them. It is somewhat better in the Shadow Colonies; while the laws are no different, the culture is much more accepting of those who are willing to work, and so the chances of random enslavement for being non-human are much lower.

**Wolfen Empire:** The Wolfen do not officially condone private slavery, except in the form of voluntary contracts of limited duration (i.e. apprenticeships and other forms of indentured servitude where the servant keeps their full rights). Certain prisoners are condemned to periods of servitude in the Mulia, the labor corps of the Wolfen Imperial Army, providing the majority of the hard labor. If there is a latrine to be dug, a tree to be felled, or a stump to be cleared, it will fall to the Mulia. Most of these "troops" are violent offenders, habitual drunks, or career thieves who have been placed in the Mulia because they are not worthy of execution, but the Empire judges it a waste to imprison them.

**Eastern Territories:** Each signatory of the Charter of Dominion makes its own laws regarding slavery. No major settlement has gone so far as to outlaw it completely, but some, such as Dain-Rurga, look upon slavery with a somewhat jaundiced eye. Of course, there are others, such as Kaash, which embrace it wholeheartedly, and the southern territories, near the Tegyn Peninsula, tend to hold a more Timiro-inspired view of slavery.

**Timiro:** Timiro views slavery as a natural part of its economy. Fields must be worked, iron must be smelted, ore must be hauled, and there must be slaves to do these things. Who better than Ogres, Orcs, Goblins, and Hobgoblins? It's not as if they were real people anyway... they're barely better than beasts! The people of Timiro are not known for abolitionist sentiments, but they have fairly clearly defined views on who is a slave; Orcs, Goblins, Trolls, Ogres, and Hobgoblins are slaves. Others, they're more willing to give the benefit of the doubt to... unless you're a Changeling, of course.

**Land of the South Winds:** The Land of the South Winds is not as provincial about who it enslaves as its neighbor to the east; it will quite freely enslave anyone who cannot afford to pay a debt. Human slaves are the most common, with "monsters" being the next most common; Orcs, Ogres, Goblins and the like are all frequently enslaved if they lack the money and influence to remain free.

**Mount Nimro:** Perhaps surprisingly to many humans and their allies, the Giants of Mount Nimro are not heavily involved in the slave trade. Instead, there is a system whereby "Shorties" attach themselves to an individual Giant, doing his dirty work in exchange for food or some measure of protection. Orcs in the Giant Kingdom have no rights, but are still paid soldiers who are free to leave rather than be thrown into constant, hopeless battle against a superior enemy... and dear GODS, what kind of Orc would want to leave instead of doing that? But the Giants do not enslave their own, nor do they have much need for slaves of the human-allied races. They love their freedom, and seldom act to deprive others of it.

**Baalgor Wastelands:** There is no central authority governing the Baalgor Wastelands to make or set any kind of policy on slavery. The Gromek of the mountains do not practice slavery; those who are weak enough to be captured are not worthy of being left alive, and are usually not brought back to their aeries.

The Free City of Troker, on the other hand, derives a significant portion of its income from slavery. Most of the wandering caravans and camps in the wastes aren't above trading a few slaves, but don't make a heavy practice of it; slaves consume valuable water and supplies, so while they can be useful, they're also somewhat more than commonly dangerous to keep.

**Yin-Sloth Jungles:** The small states of the Yin-Sloth Jungles have varying opinions of slavery. The Orcish Empire, the Commonwealth, and the Western Colonies all allow slavery to one extent or another, but two of the territories within the Commonwealth specifically forbid it. Regalda forbids slavery, going so far as to declare all slaves who enter their city to be free, while the town of Mishala declares such slaves free, but grants their owner one-half of the slaves' value. In both cases, this has led to problems between these cities and the rest of the Commonwealth, but their extremely small size (just over 100,000 in population between the two cities) and remote location means that they are obscure enough that their policies have not resulted in them being deluged with runaway slaves.

**Western Empire:** The slaves of the Western Empire have no rights, only privileges their masters choose to grant them. There is no protection under the law for a slave. However, some slaves find that their lot in life improves through enslavement to a wealthy household. After all, a wealthy master, providing the meanest of food, a clean set of clothes each year, and a place to sleep above the horses (or in the laundry, or in the scullery, or where have you), is far preferable to sleeping on the street, with no food, and no clean clothes. Not all find this an improvement (perhaps one slave in three), but enough do that slavery still seems an attractive option to the desperate amongst the Western poor.

**Isle of the Cyclops:** Unlike their mainland cousins, the Cyclops are enthusiastic slavers, with a well-developed slave trade with the Western Empire. Every race except for Cyclops is available for sale if one is willing to wait long enough; Wolfen are a particular favorite of the crowd, here, and are considered to be simple animals. Wolfen warriors will begin at 10,000 gold, and female Wolfen (who are reputed to be far deadlier, and are much rarer on the island) are worth two, three, or even four times as much. The Cyclops are avid sellers of all sorts of creatures, and lead frequent raids into the Yin-Sloth Jungles to capture beasts. See page 116 in *Adventures on the High Seas* for more details.

**Land of the Damned:** Whether or not someone is a slave in the Land of the Damned depends entirely on his ability to keep himself from becoming one. Except for a few small enclaves, there are no places with enough central order to maintain a slave trade, and many do not even take slaves, but instead look at captured enemies as food.

## Slave Marks

Slaves usually bear some mark of their owned status, easily visible; this is frequently a collar, a brand, or a tattoo. The collar is most common, especially for those slaves who are only temporarily enslaved, likely to be sold, or are important for their appearance. Collars are also cheap to make, relatively easy to maintain once the slave becomes accustomed to it (and develops the proper callouses), and easy to remove if one needs to be

changed to transfer marks of ownership; most slave owners do not have individual marks, but slave dealers do, and it's not uncommon for nobles to place a simplified coat of arms or signet on their slaves' collars to identify them. Extremely valuable slaves will have collars guarded by Wards; any attempt to remove the collar results in triggering an alarm, burning pain, or a charm. Rare magic-using slaves are often guarded with Warded collars, usually employing a Mystic Energy Drain (Magic) Ward, in addition to another effect designed to incapacitate the spellcaster, as well as an alarm.

Brands are common for slaves who will be doing a lot of physical labor, and about whose appearance and comfort their masters are less concerned. Brands are quick, easy, and permanent. A bit of strong wine to help with the pain, then a bit more to help clean the wound, and a strong slave will be fine in a day or two, and in top form in a week. Brands are nearly impossible to get rid of, save by magical healing or extensive psychic surgery, so a slave who is branded cannot run far without being identified for what (and whose) he is. For those with a large number of slaves, it is an ideal solution. Anyone with a Horsemanship skill, Animal Husbandry, or Breed Humanoids (see the new skill, below) can effectively apply a brand.

Tattoos are the least common, but they are favored in the south for expensive slaves; they're more aesthetically pleasing than a brand, but just as permanent. Tattoos tend to be placed on very prominent places on the body; the cheek is common, as is the back of the hand. Skill at tattooing is similar to the Art skill; having Art does not make one a tattooist, but you can use the Art skill's percentage and any applicable bonuses for tattooing.

It is also common for slaves to be chained or manacled to each other, to a location, or to their tools. Many slave owners will manacle slaves in place overnight (especially slaves on work gangs, who are too unruly to trust on their own), or together for transportation. Long chains of slaves manacled together, working a set of oars, or trudging from one market to another, are not uncommon sights in the harbors and caravansaries of Palladium.

## Conditioning a Slave

Most slaves are, to one extent or another, conditioned, or "broken," to their lives as slaves. For those who are born as slaves, this starts from birth. They are raised to know that they are slaves, that their place in life is as someone's property, and that they can advance by making that person (or his heirs, or whoever owns them) happy. In a calm situation, there's a fair amount of social pressure to not upset the master; slave uprisings often lead to problems for all slaves, so they are discouraged when most slaves are content.

This general conditioning is supplemented by object lessons of what happens to those who step outside the boundaries. There are always instances of slaves who overstep the bounds, and punishments vary from meals missed, privileges taken away, or family members sold, to savage beatings and even death. A slave who back-talks may simply be beaten a few times with a handy club or switch; theft might result in one's family being sold to make up for the lost gold; one who runs away may be maimed, see his family tortured, or simply be killed. Such punishments are public; they serve to instruct the other slaves in the consequences of misbehavior.



Slaves who are not born to slavery are a different matter. The psychological conditioning begins immediately upon being enslaved; they are punished severely for minor infractions, and some masters reward them for acting within the rules (others do not, viewing punishments to be sufficient). If taken in a raid, or otherwise bought by a slaver, the new slave will be reminded at every opportunity that he is not free, and that he will soon be bought by someone else, who may be better or worse, and that his fate will depend entirely upon that person. Other slaves often contribute to this, setting an example of behavior that is not earning a beating, or a loss of meals, and thereby setting a goal that the new slaves begin to work towards... thus co-operating, thus beginning their own acceptance of their slavery. As soon as the new slave accepts that he *is* a slave, he has been broken; he may one day remember freedom, but cooperation is the first step in becoming a slave.

This doesn't work with all slaves. Some people simply will not be slaves. Others are too important to leave to psychological conditioning. These are turned over to specially trained psychics – Mind Mages and Psychic Sensitives who enjoy the work – who use their powers to brainwash slaves into loyalty. Mind Mages are the most adept at the work, having more tools to work with (notably Mind Wipe and Insert Memory), but Psychic Sensitives tend to be cheaper and leave the minds they work with less damaged.

Psychic conditioning begins with the powers of Empathy and Telepathy and a period of gentle questioning to determine how the slave feels about his enslavement; some psychics discover this with a Mind Bond, following with a Mind Wipe to prevent the slave from learning anything about them. However, this carries risks, as Mind Wipe isn't always successful, and a full Mind Wipe is expensive. Additionally, the information from the Mind Bond will fade in a few days, and a key detail might be left out of any notes taken; therefore, most prefer to interrogate, rather than "mind rape."

After the interrogation, the psychic recovers his I.S.P. and begins the actual psychic conditioning. The most common method is to use Empathic Transmission to reinforce feelings of love, trust, and submission whenever the master is in view, and fear, hatred, or anger whenever treason, escape, or theft is suggested. At the same time, the psychic will bombard the slave with Hypnotic Suggestions. "You will be loyal to the master." "You will protect the master." "The master is good to you." The psychic will concentrate on anything that turned up as a problem in the questioning; breaking strong family bonds, curing a fear of fire, or simply breaking a strong will. Repeated suggestions and Empathic Transmissions ensure that at least some will take hold; repeating the same ones ensures that they all stick.

Other variations on psychic conditioning exist, of course. Some psychics prefer to use Insert Memory and Mind Wipe to make the person believe it was his own idea, in addition to other methods. Some use nightmares to drive the slave to the master, each time guiding the nightmare (through Telepathy) to where the master appears as a savior. Others will simply use Bio-Manipulation to punish those who are having "wrong thoughts" about their new masters, inflicting pain when the slaves think of freedom, or of their former life, and granting pleasure when they behave as they should.

Psychic conditioning typically requires a number of days equal to the M.E. of the slave. It is practically impossible to resist a dedicated psychic conditioner without the aid of Mind Block Auto-Defense or a huge store of I.S.P. to maintain a constant standard Mind Block; given all day to work, and significant time and resources to break the slave's defenses, psychic conditioning *will* take place. If the subject is a Minor or Major Psychic without Mind Block (standard), then the conditioning process will take a day and a half for every point of M.E. If he is a Master Psychic, or a Minor or Major Psychic who uses Mind Block to resist, then it will take two days per point of M.E. A Master Psychic with regular Mind Block will take three days per point of M.E.

## What Do Slaves Do?

Slaves are ubiquitous on the Palladium World. They are found working in mines and fields, in manufacturing and in scriptoriums, in brothels and in armies, in private homes and in government offices.

The slaves of the work gangs are almost all branded (if they are not, it is usually because they fell from someplace higher; even then, they will often be branded on top of whatever mark they previously had). After all, a collar might interfere with their work, and many situations in which they work might also provide many ways for a collar to either be cut free (if made of leather) or conceal something that could damage the slave or hurt a free man. The work gangs are simple labor; large-scale agriculture (such as the Orcs of Timiro), quarrying operations, logging, and construction, as well as rowers for ships. They will be watched by a mixture of overseers (free men) and trustees (slaves who are given some responsibility in exchange for better treatment). By far the most numerous, these slaves are almost always the backbone of any slave revolt; even when relatively well-treated, they are worked hard and have few luxuries, and the sheer physicality of their labor means that many have the



equivalent of the skills Athletics, Body Building, and Forced March within a few months of their enslavement. Any slave raised in such conditions will have the Vagabond O.C.C., or perhaps one of the Psychic P.C.C.s if he has exceptional talent. Also possible are Witch, Warlock, and Priest, though skill selections will be very limited. Some will also have learned the equivalent of the O.C.C.s Miner or Lumberjack, from *Northern Hinterlands*<sup>TM</sup>. They seldom have the equivalent of the Sailor O.C.C., even if they are rowers; they aren't given the liberty to learn much about ships, being just chained to an oar.

Many families will own a single slave, whose job is simply to be an additional member of the family, responsible for the menial labor of the household. This may be a nursemaid for the family's children, or a valet who prepares his or her master's clothes and food while the master works. Competent body slaves, as they are called, can greatly ease the lives of their masters, so that many masters come to rely on them completely, bringing them into their confidence and even turning over financial matters to them. A slave raised in this situation is likely to have the Vagabond O.C.C., or perhaps the equivalent of the Scholar O.C.C., if the family was particularly wealthy. Of course, P.C.C.s, Witchcraft, Warlockry, and Priestcraft are also possible for body slaves, though very unlikely, as they have very little privacy to practice such dedicated professions.

Other slaves are valued for their skills at trades. Craftsmen, entertainers and scribes are all highly valued on the market, whether they were born as slaves or entered due to debt, war, or some unfortunate twist of fate. Many masters will set up their slaves in trades, or have them aid the master himself in his own shop. Slaves with trade skills often make some money off of tips, which many masters allow them to keep to purchase such luxuries as they desire. Others, when their duties are done for the day, are able to make additional money at another job, if their master allows, earning their way towards freedom. Trade

slaves are likely to be of the Vagabond O.C.C., or one of the craftsmen O.C.C.s from *Northern Hinterlands*<sup>TM</sup>; Artisan, Blacksmith, or Fletcher.

Somewhat between a personal slave and a slave with a trade is the prostitute. Many prostitutes in the Palladium World are slaves, coerced into working by a combination of threats, magic, psionics, and drugs. Many slaver-pimps will use repeated Mind Wipes to simply temporarily erase mental scars, or Hypnotic Suggestions to “encourage” the prostitutes to forget things, and Insert Memory to manufacture more pleasant fictions for those lost periods. Charm spells, Domination, or, at the very expensive end, scrolls of Love Charm, allow magicians to enter this trade, as well, as do certain drugs (such as Fansolin) which let the flesh peddlers control their “product.” This leads to many slave prostitutes being very mentally unstable due to repeated psychic abuse and reconstruction, addicted to drugs, or repeatedly magically controlled. Seldom is one raised in this trade; those who are will likely have the skills of a Vagabond or perhaps a Thief. It is rare for them to practice another O.C.C., though Witchcraft has been known to arise from brothels, and some have unlocked their psychic talents.

Gladiatorial slaves are treated better than common slaves, as they have the potential to make substantial income for their owners. Top gladiators can expect magical or psychic healing, comfortable (not soft, but comfortable) quarters, and frequent rewards. However, they are carefully controlled; they are allowed few freedoms, due to both their value and their volatility. Gladiators have a reputation for being uncontrollable; one who is damaged in a tavern brawl is a waste of money; one who damages a noblewoman in a tryst is fast becoming an unnecessary expense. Gladiators are another category of slave who have a good chance of purchasing their freedom; some of their rewards are monetary, and wise gladiators will save towards a day when they might be free. Others will be freed after a particular act of valor, or when they reach an age where they can no longer fight (though those can also be used as trainers and breeders). Obviously, the most common O.C.C. here is Gladiator, from *Adventures on the High Seas*<sup>TM</sup>.

Some lords take the concept of gladiators and apply it to the battlefield, employing slave-soldiers, sometimes under slave-officers. Slave soldiers are usually required in instances when the lord is hated by his subjects, so the only option is to purchase his military. Slave-soldiers are more cost-effective, in the long run, than mercenaries, and their status as slaves allows the lord more leeway in conditioning them for loyalty. The ideal slave-soldier is of a different race from the population; an Orcish slave in a human city is unlikely to find much in common with any who wish to rebel, nor is a Dwarf in a city of Elves. As with gladiators, slave-soldiers will sometimes find themselves legitimately free; not only freed for some act of valor, but they may win rewards of plunder with which they can purchase themselves. Most slave-soldiers are of the Soldier O.C.C., though some are closer in training to Gladiators.

Especially rare are those slaves who have magical or psychic powers. These slaves are inherently dangerous, as it is very difficult to alienate these powers from someone who possesses them without lessening their value or killing them. It’s also almost impossible not to have them; many races will produce the occasional psychic, no matter how closely you breed them, Gob-

lins seem to have more Cobblers whenever you try to stamp them out, and you simply cannot prevent someone from becoming a Warlock or a Priest. However, for all the danger that these slaves represent, they are also incredibly valuable. Their abilities can win them special treatment, including better food and quarters, sexual partners (rarely breeding partners), and, of course, more elaborate collars with better protections and much more extensive conditioning. These can be of any O.C.C. or P.C.C., but most common are Wizard and Diabolist, followed by psychic healers and sensitives. The strong wills of Mind Mages make them difficult to break, and a Summoner who has been broken is practically useless. Warlocks, Witches, and Priests all have allies who make their subjugation somewhat inadvisable.

One final “job” for a slave is that of corpse. Some buy (or take) slaves simply to kill them, either desiring the pleasure of the kill, the meat for consumption, the mystic power (P.P.E.) gained from the death of a living being, or the many uses of a corpse. In many places, the one right a slave does maintain is the right to live, so simply killing a slave is not a common or approved practice. However, it does happen, especially in more decadent or evil societies. Necromancers and Summoners are especially known for purchasing slaves who are otherwise unsaleable, to sacrifice for their P.P.E., to take their body parts for magical reagents, and to animate the corpse. Corpses have the widest variety of O.C.C.s available to them. Those destined to be corpses can be of any O.C.C., P.C.C. or R.C.C.; indeed, the more powerful an individual is, the more likely he is to be considered for this job upon becoming a slave.

## Psionics and Magic in Slavery

It is almost impossible to wipe psionics out of a population which has that potential. Some rare few family lines are anti-psionic enough to resist its introduction, but psychic potential is something that can be very disruptive of the calm life that most slavers want to lead. As such, every slave owner who can afford it has his slaves psionically scanned for psychic abilities.

Of course, some psychic abilities are useful for both a slave and an owner. If a slave can resist thirst, hunger, or fatigue, then he will be able to work longer. A slave who can heal others with a touch will make all of your slaves healthier. One who can commune with animals may be just what you want to be hounds master; a slave who can sense evil and see the invisible may be the ideal bodyguard. But most of these abilities can be turned against the master, as well. A slave who doesn’t feel hunger is harder to punish by withholding meals. One who can heal others with a touch has great influence, which can be turned against you. If they can speak with animals, they can turn those animals against a master they’ve come to hate. The relationship between master and slave is so fraught with paranoia and power imbalances that such questions must be asked by a prudent master, and most prefer not to have slaves with psionic powers.

Similarly, it is almost impossible to wipe out Warlock abilities amongst slaves, and these powers are just as useful. Many Warlocks arise where affinity with an element is expected; colliers often exhibit skill with fire, farmers and miners with earth, and sailors with wind and water. These skills present a difficult situation for slave owners, however; such valuable slaves must

be treated carefully, but are still slaves. It often leads to Warlock slaves being paid a wage, lessened by the cost of supporting them, with which they are allowed to buy their own freedom; not an ideal situation for the owner, but certainly preferable to having an upset Warlock on his hands.

The final variety of power that is difficult to stop is Priestly power. The gods do as the gods will, and no peculiarity of ownership will stop them from granting their blessings to man, woman, Elf or Orc. Slaves worship many different deities; many masters encourage the same deities that they, themselves worship, even providing Priests of those deities to minister specifically to their slaves, and special dispensations to slaves who worship the same deities. No deity of Palladium goes so far as to say that you cannot own another member of your own faith, as has been the case in Earth's history, but many churches do encourage masters to show clemency towards slaves who share a master's faith.

When left to their own devices, slaves favor two distinct types of deities: those who promise succor, and those who promise revenge. Of the first type, Aco is popular (as she is popular everywhere), as are Apis, Epim, and Ippotomi. These religions ease some of the suffering of the slaves, but they can be the nuclei of resistance if the injustices grow too great; Epim, especially, tends to favor solving one's own problems when possible. In some cases, those who seek revenge will turn to Isis, Horus, or Rurga, if they believe their causes are just. Most who seek vengeance on their masters pray to Chantico, Set, Amon, Pith, and Yin-Sloth, however. Chantico, especially, has been active in recruiting amongst slaves; his priests have reasoned that, if these other gods are so cruel as to let their worshipers treat their slaves so, should not their slaves turn to one who is an avowed enemy of the gods? Is not the enemy of my enemy's friend my friend?

## Buying a Slave

How much does a slave cost? That highly depends on the slave, the purpose the seller thinks you should put him to, the race of the slave, and the races prevalent where the slave is being sold. For example, an Orc being sold in Timiro is likely to be very cheap; most people in Timiro are human and regard Orcs as essentially cattle. An Elven man being sold in the Western Empire, however, would be very expensive; some Elves would attempt to purchase him to ensure that he did not fall into hands that would demean him. Some Dwarves would attempt to purchase him simply because they fancy owning an Elf and treating him as the lowest of slaves. Others would buy him because they find him pretty, or because they wished a skill he possessed... but all would assume he had some sort of value, unlike the bidders for the poor Orc in our previous example, whose only perceived value was the strength of his back.

For people living on Earth, there is a difficult mental hurdle to overcome in talking about slaves, but on the Palladium World, slaves are viewed as livestock. Like livestock, they can be very valuable; horses, after all, can clear 64,000 gold in value. However, most are not worth nearly so much. Those who are not broken are worth very little. Those who are broken, but do not possess any special skills, are worth a fair amount; usually near 8,000-12,000 gold pieces. Slaves who have valuable

skills can command nearly 100,000 gold for a single individual. Those with magical or psychic skills are a different category altogether; they are covered separately.

**Humans:** Unbroken humans will generally bring about 2000 gold in most markets. If tamed and offered for a work gang, slave army, or prostitution, humans will usually bring 12,000-15,000 gold, up to 20,000 if exceptionally strong or attractive. Those with a demonstrable skill fetch between 15,000 (for those with amateur-level domestic or art-type skills) and 50,000 (complex trade or top-end, professional-level entertainment skills). Those with less demonstrable skills, such as scholars, will command 30,000-70,000. The value of human slaves is fairly regular; they're not wanted in the low-end trades amongst the Giants of Mt. Nimro (no use for them), though they are occasionally purchased as breeders by the Ogres there, some of whom pay top dollar for prime stock, and others who pay bent coins for anything they can get.

**Elves:** Unbroken Elves will usually bring about 2500 in most markets, though some bidding wars can develop, driving the price higher if the Elf seems particularly defiant; some evil people especially delight in breaking Elves. Elves sell particularly poorly to work gangs and slave armies, bringing in only between ten and twelve thousand gold, but one can expect the bidding to begin at fifteen thousand if an Elf is offered as a prostitute, and forty thousand is not uncommon. Those with demonstrable skills fetch 20,000-60,000, while scholars are likely



to see 50,000-100,000. For their part, Elves are avid buyers of Elven slaves. The majority of Elves hate to see Elves under the ownership of other races; while this occasionally stirs into abolitionist feelings, more often it is simply a matter of, "No one but another Elf."

**Dwarves:** Dwarves are notoriously hard to break, meaning an unbroken Dwarf is usually only worth 1000-1200 gold. However, a broken Dwarf is very valuable; in slave-armies or work gangs, they will bring 20,000 gold at the outset, and that's for the rare few who are not purchased to work in forges or as trustees in mines, jobs for which they cost 45,000-75,000. For non-Dwarves, other skills are almost an afterthought in a Dwarven slave, though Dwarves are a bit more discriminating. Dwarves tend to pay only 10,000 for broken Dwarven slaves with no skills aside from those in the forge or the mines, and 12,000-20,000 if they have a skill. Most Dwarves look down on a Dwarven slave; there was obviously something lacking in him if he allowed himself to fall to such a low state.

**Gnomes:** Gnomes are valued as slaves largely as a curiosity; they are so rare that few see them for sale, and so they bid to find out what they might be useful for. However, this means that they are very expensive; nearly 5000 gold for an unbroken Gnome, and 20,000 for a tame Gnome with only minimal skills (which, of course, at least makes them skilled in tunneling). Those with true skills usually find the bidding beginning at 50,000, and continuing up to 150,000, especially for trained masseuses; human noblemen in the Western Empire are especially fond of Gnomish female masseuses. For themselves, Gnomes seldom keep slaves, and are one of the few races where abolitionist feelings are widespread.

**Troglodytes:** It may be that more Troglodytes live in slavery than live free. Untrained, a Troglodyte adult is worth 1500 gold; one trained to combat (their only vocation aside from mining) may be worth 15,000, if especially well-known. Troglodyte young are a mere 500 gold, and Troglodyte eggs are 100 gold, if undamaged. Troglodytes do not keep slaves.

**Kobolds:** Kobolds are active participants in the slave markets, both as purchasers and as purchases. Unlike Dwarves, they have no qualms about owning their own; unlike Elves, they also have no problem with letting a Kobold go to another buyer. They are considerably easier to break than Dwarves, and more generally valuable than humans, meaning that an unbroken Kobold slave will bring 2000-2500 gold in most markets. Broken, they often begin in the 35,000 gold range, as their skills as weaponsmiths and miners are legendary; it is not uncommon for a Kobold to fetch as much as a Dwarf at auction, especially if no Dwarves are available. When sold as slave-soldiers, Kobolds are generally worth 15,000 gold.

**Goblins and Hobgoblins:** Goblins are almost worthless in the eyes of most human, Elven, and Dwarven buyers. They are almost impossible to breed, they work sporadically, and they have a distressing tendency to produce both Hobgoblins (bad) and Cobblers (worse). An unbroken Goblin is likely unsaleable as anything but meat; you may get 200-300 gold. A broken Goblin is worth perhaps 2000 gold, and will usually be put into a mine, chained to an oar, or sent to a plantation.

Hobgoblins are even worse. They are notoriously difficult to break, often refuse to work unless beaten, and frequently pick

fighters with other slaves. To make matters worse, they're hard to breed, meaning they're unlikely to give you a good return on your investment. On the other hand, they have no innate magical or psychic powers, so a rebellion by the Hobgoblins is less dangerous than one by mixed Goblins and Hobgoblins or other races. A broken Hobgoblin can be sold for 2000 gold, but breaking them costs twice as much.

**Orcs:** Orcs are wonderful slaves. Strong, weak-minded, and fecund, Orcs are the slaves that slavers love to take. A healthy, untrained Orc will sell for 400-1600 gold. A broken Orc is worth 4000 gold, though may go for as much as twice that if a particularly fine specimen, even if unbroken; breeders are often on the lookout for good specimens, and a well-formed, exceptionally fit Orc can improve their stock immensely. A broken Orc with a definite skill set (usually as a warrior; no one is interested in an Orcish poet!) may fetch as much as 10,000-40,000 gold, but only if his skills are evident. Orcs are not frequent purchasers of slaves, though they frequently take them; they will often use captives of many races as slaves for a time, before selling them to others or killing them (either for food or in anger).

**Ogres:** Ogres are expensive slaves to keep in human lands; in Giant lands, they are fairly common, however. In human lands, an Ogre slave will cost approximately 3000 gold if unbroken, and 10,000 if broken; 40,000 if combat trained. Many who field slave-soldiers or gladiators like to have Ogres in their armies as shock troops. Ogres will sometimes be purchased as breeding stock in civilized lands, though this is very rare; while it's known that an Ogre can father many Ogre children, it's also known as an expensive way to increase the value of one's slaves (the mothers often do not survive bringing an Ogre to term), and somewhat morally reprehensible. In Giant lands, unbroken Ogres are worth approximately 2000 gold, and 5000 if broken, but without a useful skill. A well-trained Ogre will fetch 15,000 for most domestic duties, or about 30,000 for most trades. Ogres have more manual dexterity and fine control than most Giants, owing to their smaller size, and are frequently made trustees in Giant lands.

**Trolls:** Trolls make wretched slaves. They constantly rebel against all authority even when free, and rebel three times as hard when enslaved. They are violent cannibals who look upon intelligent beings as perfectly acceptable sources of protein. Most Troll slaves are not for sale; they are prisoners. In the rare cases when they are for sale in human lands, they will command high prices; 30,000 or more for any Troll who doesn't seem completely feral. Even the completely feral will be purchased by arena owners as gladiators; placed in a ring and thrown into danger, Trolls provide a good show, whether they want to or not. In Giant lands, Trolls are worth slightly less than Ogres; though they're stronger and tougher, they're also less useful and more likely to cause problems.

**Changelings:** Changelings are never available openly. Slaves are usually checked for being Changelings, and any who are found to be Changelings are slain.

**Wolfen:** As a people, the Wolfen abhor slavery, except as punishment for a crime. Individuals may engage in slavery out of the reach of the Empire, but as a society, they have rejected all but indentured servitude. In other lands, however, Wolfen slaves are very popular, and come in two varieties: "Free-

Range” and “Western.” Included in these are Coyles, who are considered by most humans to be simply a smaller breed of Wolfen, and not their own race.

“Free-Range” Wolfen have been captured either recently or within the past two or three generations, and so are still much the same as Imperial Wolfen. They are available in markets worldwide (except, of course, in the Northern Wilderness itself). Unbroken, they can be worth anywhere from 1000 to 5000 gold, with the low end being in the Eastern Territories, and the high end being in the Land of the South Winds, where they’re regarded as a curiosity. Broken, their value is generally twice what it is in the local market. Those who have marketable skills are usually worth 15,000 gold in Southern, Timiro, and Western markets, while warriors will bring 30,000-50,000 gold. The Eastern market for Wolfen slaves is horrible; they are nearly worthless, and are frequently confiscated as spies and executed.

The Western Empire has been taking Wolfen slaves for two thousand years, and has bred them extensively, creating breeds of Wolfen slaves, much as humans elsewhere have created breeds of dog. As such, “Western” Wolfen are vastly preferred as slaves. They’re relatively tame, usually have a useful skill (even if it is simply farming), and are visually distinctive. However, they’re only available through Western slave brokers, and then only rarely; most Western Wolfen are part and parcel of Western landholdings. These occasionally slaves become available and are usually worth about 20,000 gold, though it’s not uncommon for the price to go up due to their rarity.

**Giants** are usually not available in human-run markets; they’re nearly impossible to keep, and really serve little purpose outside of the arena (and possibly rock quarrying). If one is available, he will bring at least 100,000 as a wild slave to throw in the arena, and far more is not unreasonable; a Giant at auction would be advertised well in advance and used to drum up business for any auction house.

**Other humanoids** are sometimes available; Ratlings are commonly available from Western slavers, Bearmen from the north, Grimbor and Tezcat from the south, the rare Hytril or Lizardman, and even members of more exotic races may show up on the block. As a general rule, anything with natural shape-shifting powers never becomes a slave; they either escape, or are slain as Changelings. Most humanoids are worth 1000 gold on the block if unbroken, twice that if broken, and five times that if given a decent trade, though proper marketing can drive that price sky-high.

**Psychic and Magical** slaves are very, very, VERY rare; they’re not even available every year in most markets, simply because breaking a Man of Magic or Psychic without destroying his talent is difficult to do, and it’s inadvisable to teach either of those disciplines to a slave. These slaves, regardless of race, start at 50,000 gold, and frequently go as high as ten or even twenty times that. In the case of Men of Magic, those who are members of a guild can sometimes count on their guild to reclaim them, but they then become indentured servants to their guild, required to pay off the great debt they owe to the guild that redeemed them from slavery.

## Selling a Slave

Selling a slave is not quite the same as buying a slave. Unless he has a direct buyer (someone who intends to purchase a slave for his own use), an individual is unlikely to see a large fraction of the auction price of a slave; it is usual for an individual selling himself to see only 30-40% of his own value, and those selling another to see no more than 50%. Of course, they are thinking about their profits when the slave goes to auction, but there is more to it than that.

Part of this is the natural caution of slave traders. While they may know the generalities of the market, they cannot know how a particular slave will do at the next auction. He may be handsome, she may move like a born warrior, but another trader may have a lot filled with more of the same available during that very auction, and the price will drop. If they choose not to sell, hoping for a better price, they then have to pay for room, board, and possibly training for this slave you’ve brought them.

There’s also the possibility that this slave might be stolen, or otherwise not the best one to resell. Unless you have a stellar reputation with the slave trader in question, he’s going to be less than certain that you came by this person legitimately, and that you have a right to sell him. Selling someone you should not sell is bad for business, in many quarters, and so he is going to try to avoid paying you a high fee unless you can prove ownership.

## The Slave Trade as a Profession

Many people of many O.C.C.s and P.C.C.s are involved in the Palladium slave trade. A quick glance at the price list for slaves shows that it’s a profitable business; five human slaves with domestic skills will gross 75,000 gold. Want a thunder hammer weapon that spits lightning? That’s the gross for those five slaves. All this money attracts people from many different levels of society, and many different professions.

At the top of most slave trade empires are Nobles and Merchants (usually individuals possessing those very O.C.C.s), or a consortium of such people. These people have the money and connections to get into the markets and run the organization. They will know slavers who can acquire merchandise, teamsters and sailors who can bring the merchandise to market, breeders who can provide them with better slaves, and market officials who can provide them with favorable access to the auction block. Most importantly, however, they will have money to fund these ventures. Others are involved in the sale of slaves, finding buyers for special purchases and running auctions for more common stock.

Slave breeders and trainers are also important parts of a slave trade empire. While many slave owners do not carefully breed their slaves (holding the privilege of mating as a reward for slaves who have done well), enough owners will use careful breeding that there is a market for slave breeders. There is also a market for slave trainers – those who can teach slaves the ways of a certain trade, or simply break them to slavery.

Slave breeders are often Scholars, Men of Magic, or the Priests of certain dark deities (such as Tolmet and Vald-Tegor),

who view this as legitimate research or as an obscure path to magical power. They possess the new skill, Breed Humanoids, and many use magical or psionic divinations to determine the results of certain breedings before they take place. They will also often have healing capabilities available to them; those make pregnancy less of a strain, aid in labor and make it far more likely that women will survive.

Slave trainers may be simple tutors who take on either slave or free students, such as the trainer in a gladiatorial school, or a dance instructor. However, they may also be that class of psychic who uses conditioning to break a slave's will to resist. These are most often Mind Mages and Psychic Sensitives. Psi-Healers not only lack the breadth of abilities, but also frequently have a healer's mindset, which makes so deliberately breaking a mind repugnant to them. Psi-Mystics are slightly more capable, but it is rarer to find one with the proper mix of introspection and desire to completely break someone's will for money. Those psychics who work with slaves often require the powers of Detect Psionics or See Aura in order to find psychically gifted slaves, Empathy and Telepathy to effectively interrogate them, Mind Block or Mind Block Auto-Defense to defend against any psychic attacks they may initiate, and a variety of powers to break down their resistance. Bio-Manipulation, Empathic Transmission, Hypnotic Suggestion, Induce Nightmare, Insert Memory, Mental Illusion, and Mind Wipe can all aid in destroying a person's sense of reality and making him more vulnerable to conditioning. Even such simple powers as Telepathy and Induce Sleep can be used to confuse a person. Some will also learn the power of Block Breaker to batter down any defenses they may encounter.

Slaves and slavers also need transportation. This means every slave empire will require a good number of ships, wagons, and beasts of burden, depending on where they are operating. Slave ships are usually fast, with good landing craft; slavers are usually unsuccessful at taking everyone in a village, and so leaving quickly, before resistance can be organized, is of great importance. Slave caravans and ships also have to bring a large amount of food and water for the return trip, as well as having a large amount of cargo space. The Western Merchantman is a common slave ship; it's solid, reasonably fast, and common enough that it blends in well with other ships. Carracks, the Eastern Mercantile, and most of the Byzantine fleet are also popular amongst slavers. What's desired is a low number of sailors required for a high cargo capacity and a good number of possible passengers (the slavers are counted as passengers; the slaves and food are the cargo).

At the cutting point there are slavers – those who actually make their money by taking and interacting with slaves. Slavers come from a variety of O.C.C.s; there are those who are of the special Slaver O.C.C., below, but there are Mercenary Warriors who are hired to provide muscle, Rangers and Thieves who provide intelligence and lead ambushes, and Men of Magic who control the slaves and quickly incapacitate them. Even a Wizard fresh from apprenticeship can cast a Cloud of Slumber to knock out many slaves without harm, or Globes of Daylight to make a nighttime battlefield easier for human slavers. Summoners tend to be the least involved in the slave trade, as there is little for their common magic to do, but a stealthy Diabolist can prevent escape through the use of Charm Wards or sow confusion

through the use of... well, Confusion Wards. Slavers also bring with them healers, both for injured slavers and injured merchandise; slaves who are injured bring less money at the end of the journey. Most standard Mercenary Warriors who accompany such ventures make only a flat rate (usually 2 gold per day, plus food, with another 200-400 for a successful mission, with success being defined in the contract), but many Men of Magic and professional Slavers work for a percentage of the profit, plus expenses. Most earn between half a percent and one full percent per level of experience.



## The Slaver O.C.C. (Men at Arms/Optional)

The Slaver is a professional. A mixture of mercenary warrior, merchant, and ranger, he is a hunter of merchandise. He is skilled in taking people down with a minimum of bloodshed, and is likely to know a bit about combined tactics with Men of Magic and psychics. Whereas a Mercenary Warrior asks how it can be done with a minimum of bloodshed on his own side, a Slaver has to be concerned with how it can be done with a minimum of bloodshed on both sides... because bloodshed is bad for the bottom line. Scars bring down value on most slaves.

In addition to raiding, Slavers also track runaway slaves, and work to control those slaves who get out of hand. They make

examples when they must, but they work through intimidation, charm, and peer pressure to put all of the slaves under their command in line. They know when a kind word will avail them; they know when a lash of knotted leather is all that's left.

**Alignment:** Slavers MUST be Anarchist, Miscreant, Aberrant, or Diabolic. While people who are other alignments may own slaves, the calculated cruelty that goes into capturing and breaking slaves means that most (75%) are Miscreant or Diabolic, with the rest being Aberrant (15%) or Anarchist (10%). Slavers who change alignment remain Slavers, though they need to find another way to apply their skills.

**Attribute Requirements:** I.Q. 8, M.A. 13, and P.S. 13 or higher. A high P.P. and Spd are suggested but not necessary.

**O.C.C. Skills:**

First Aid (+10%)

Interrogation Techniques (+10%)

Land Navigation (+15%)

Languages: Native Language at 98% and two of choice (+15%).

Streetwise (+10%)

Track Humanoids (+20%)

Wrestling

W.P. Net

W.P.: One of choice.

Hand to Hand: Basic

Hand to Hand: Basic may be changed to Hand to Hand: Expert for the cost of one O.C.C. Related Skill, or to Martial Arts or Assassin for the cost of two skills.

**O.C.C. Related Skills:** Select eight other skills of choice at level one, plus select one additional skill at levels three, six, nine and twelve.

Communications: Any.

Domestic: Any (+5%).

Espionage: Any (+10%).

Horseanship: General and Exotic only (+5%).

Medical: Any.

Military: Any (+10% to Camouflage and Surveillance).

Physical: Any except Acrobatics.

Rogue: Any (+10%).

Science: Any (+5%).

Scholar/Technical: Any (+10%).

Weapon Proficiencies: Any.

Wilderness: Any (+5%).

**Secondary Skills:** The character also gets to select four Secondary Skills from the previous list at level one, and two additional skills at levels 3, 5, 7, 10, and 13. These are subject to all the normal restrictions on Secondary Skills.

**Starting Equipment:** Two sets of clothing, cloak or cape, boots, a pair of gloves, belt, backpack, one-man tent, two large sacks, 30 foot (9 m) length of rope, 1D4+1 sets of arm and leg irons, 10 foot (3 m) length of chain (A.R. 14, 20 S.D.C.).

**Armor:** Starts with Studded Leather Armor (A.R. 13, S.D.C. 38). Like all Men at Arms, may use any armor with only the standard penalties.

**Weapons:** Begins with a weighted net (10 foot/3 m diameter; sufficient for most things Elf-sized or smaller), a blackjack or small club, and two weapons of choice. All are basic S.D.C. weapons of good quality. Many slavers carry whips; they're somewhat traditional, and they're also very effective at causing fear in opponents.

**Money:** Starts with 200 in gold; additional money will come from payment for services rendered. Most professional Slavers work on a commission basis, getting only food and board during a mission, but making 0.5-1% per level of the profit at the end of an excursion.

**Experience Table** is the same as a Ranger.

## New Skill

**Breed Humanoids** (Technical, Science): This is the delicate art of selecting humanoids for breeding and having a good chance of getting the desired features from their offspring. The first percentage represents the chance of getting specific physical traits in the offspring; the child will have at least two exceptional physical attributes possessed by at least one of its parents. The second percentage represents the chance of getting specific mental traits in the offspring, including psychic or magical aptitude; the child will have at least two exceptional mental traits possessed by at least one of its parents. The breeder may only choose a total of two traits, and must make a successful roll for each of them to determine the proper pairing, and must ensure that the proper pairing occurs. A failed roll means that the breeder chose poorly. A successful roll means that the breeder chose correctly; however, if the chosen couple does not mate, then no benefit is gained.

If the chosen couple does mate, all dice for the selected attribute are considered to roll at least a 4; if they roll less than that, roll them again until they roll a 4 or more. In the case of psychic powers, the child is automatically a Major Psychic, with I.S.P. gaining the same benefit as attributes. (If the offspring becomes a P.C.C. which uses D4s for I.S.P., reroll everything less than 3.) In the case of magical aptitude, the offspring will have great P.P.E. stores; reroll everything less than a 4 on D6s, and less than a 3 on D4s.

*Base Skill:* 20%/5% +5% per level of experience. Add +3% if the character has Animal Husbandry, Horseanship, or Breed Dogs (only add one bonus; all deal with the breeding of animals).

## New Psionic Power

### Block Breaker (Super)

**Range:** 60 feet (18.3 m), plus 10 feet (3 m) per level of experience.

**Duration:** 1D4 melee rounds (15 to 60 seconds).

**I.S.P.:** Varies; 30+.

**Saving Throw:** Varies, see below.

This power attacks a psychic's Mind Block in an attempt to temporarily lower the target's defenses. If the Block Breaker is successful, the character's Mind Block is removed for 1D4 melee rounds, at the end of which the victim may restore the block

by spending I.S.P. normally (a Mind Block Auto-Defense returns automatically at the end of this time). The character under attack by the Block Breaker gets to save versus psionic attack, but the attacker can raise the save difficulty by spending more I.S.P.

The base cost of the ability is 30 I.S.P., but the attacker can make his victim -1 to save at the cost of +10 additional I.S.P. For example, an attacker could spend the base 30 I.S.P., plus another 40 points (70 total) to make his intended victim -4 to save against the Block Breaker attack. If the defender fails to save, his Mind Block is temporarily down for 1D4 melee rounds, during which time he or she cannot shield himself from psionic probes and other psionic influences.

Originally printed in the *Nightbane*® sourcebook, *Between the Shadows*™, page 113.

# A Walk on the Wild Side

## The Barbarians and Savages of the Palladium Fantasy RPG®

### Part One

By John C. Philpott

Not all the Palladium World is civilized. Not all of this ancient world's vast stretches are covered in farms and cities or populated by urbanized cultures. Quite to the contrary, in fact; the largest expanses of this ancient and magical land are still wild and untamed, out of the reach of the so-called "civilized" world. These wild lands are populated not by the traditional lords, knights, and serfs, but by a far wilder bunch: barbarians, tribal villagers, and ruthless savages! In these primordial lands, where all but a handful of rangers and adventurers fear to tread, the untamed natives live out their lives without knowledge or concern for the great social upheavals of the civilized world. The growing might of the Western Empire and the coming conflict over the Disputed Lands in the east mean little to these simple folk, unless they are unfortunate enough to be caught in the middle (the Danzi!).

Urban folks often know or care very little about these "barbaric" folks, who live in small, tight-knit communities ("in their ignorance," the urban man might say). At best, these "barbarians" and "savages" are interesting curiosities; at worst, they are threatening menaces often "in the way" of civilized expansion. Few beings from the civilized world save the Rangers and Druids have ever even bothered to learn from or about these unique peoples. Yet the diversity of cultures among these "barbarians" is greater by far than amongst the urbanized nations of Palladium, each culture uniquely suited to their climate and in touch with the natural world in a way even a Ranger or Druid would

envy. Living isolated in their small communities has contributed to the diversity of the cultures as well, even amongst members of the same tribal "nation." Art, music, language, and even dress and beauty standards vary greatly from one tribal unit to the next, as do the social and political structures of the individual group. The only constant among these various peoples is that there are no constants.

The most prevalent of the barbaric peoples are members of the so-called "monster" races. Orcs, Ogres, Goblins, Hobgoblins, Trolls, Giants, Troglodytes, Coyles, Danzi, and Kankoran make up the most predominant barbaric races, though barbaric Humans, Wolfen, Changlings, Kobolds, and even the occasional barbarous Elf, Dwarf, or Gnome do exist. Many barbaric "tribes" are predominantly made up of one race or another, though multi-race tribes do exist. The most common areas of barbarian culture are the Old Kingdom, the Yin-Sloth Jungles, Ophid's Grasslands, the Land of the Damned, the Baaglor Wastelands, and even sections of the Eastern Territories and the Northern Wilderness.

Scholars of the Western Empire have classified the "backwards peoples of the Palladium World" (as they call the uncivilized folk) into three to four distinct classification types (O.C.C.s) from roughly twelve to fifteen distinct "cultures." These "types" include the Native Tribesmen (simple villagers similar to the peasants of the civilized world), the Savage Warriors (fierce and untamed warriors from beyond the confines of civilizations), and the legendary Wild Men (completely untamed feral men, more animal than human). Many Scholars further divide the Savage Warriors into two distinct groups of "Barbarian Warriors" (or Noble Savages) and "Savage Warriors" based on their degree of "civility," with Barbarians being the more civilized of the two classifications. Many of these barbaric groups are even known to employ the feared Berserkers, savage and bloodthirsty shock troops who fall into a form of mindless aggression when in combat! The barbaric "cultures" identified by the Western Scholars are defined below in the Native Origins section.

*Author's Note:* Throughout the course of human history, ever since the first "Civilized" urban cultures developed, urban cultures have often felt a sense of superiority to the "lowly" non-urbanized cultures, labeling them "savages" and "barbarians." They have felt that since these "barbaric" cultures have yet to urbanize, this somehow makes them "backward" or "inferior." However, if history has taught us any lessons, it has taught us how being urbanized and technologically advanced, or even industrialized, does not automatically imbue one's culture with "civility," none the less superiority. Certainly Hitler's Third Reich was "advanced" technologically, yet no one can dispute the barbaric and savage nature of this "civilized, industrialized nation." Many so-called "barbaric" cultures have flourished even in the face of an urbanized world. Some, like the medieval Celts, held strong to their cultural identity despite the encroachment and pressure of the "civilized" world. Others, like the Mongols and Vikings, have surprised and even overwhelmed the most civilized and urbanized of cultures. Over the course of Earth history, many different cultures have been dubbed "barbaric," often suffering at the hands of their "civilized" neighbors because of this. However, each of these has been rich and unique in its own way, some having sophistications of math,

medicine, and science greater even than the “civilized” cultures that overran them. I imagine the Palladium World to be no different than Earth in regard to civilization and savagery.

I have therefore attempted, as best as possible in these few pages, to pay homage to as many of the “barbaric” cultures of Earth as I can by creating their Palladium equivalents. Due to space considerations I had to make many generalizations of these cultures, often combining multiple cultures into one by merging their aspects. When one thinks of the fourteen “barbaric” cultures defined here as generalizations made by the “civilized” scholars of Palladium you can begin to see the way in which civilized, urbanized cultures can generalize and oversimplify the unique cultures that they think so little of (like how the European explorers and colonists generalized all of the diverse and unique Native American cultures under the classification of “West Indians”). As a result, many cultures and most individual tribes are ignored or forgotten. This, however, gives the players and G.M. a great opportunity to create their own tribe, culture, or clan to their liking, either to represent a culture I overlooked or to create their own original culture based on their own imaginations.

## Native Origins

Unlike the more “civilized” (standard urban) O.C.C.s of the Palladium World, the Barbarians and Savages of Palladium are directly linked to their environment, often living as a part of the natural world around them. A Savage within his own home terri-

tory is practically a part of the landscape, familiar with every rock, tree and creature within his domain. Take him out of his native soil, however, and he is lost and bewildered. In keeping with the wide variety of lands and climates on the Palladium World, an equally diverse number of barbarian subsets has arisen and grown to adapt to each unique land. Much as the North American natives of Earth formed diverse and differing cultures and skills based on the variety of climates of North America, so have the untamed peoples of Palladium adapted to the ecological variance of their continent.

The following list of Native Origins reflects the fourteen typical “classifications” of the “Barbaric Peoples of Palladium” as recognized by most Western, Eastern, Byzantium, and Timiro scholars. These fourteen classifications are a generalization of the many cultures they represent, and the descriptions below merely represent the “typical” tribe of a certain Barbarian culture. These by no means represent every tribe/clan/culture/nation within these generalized groups (for example, not all Highland Barbarians farm or live in villages; some are nomadic hunter/gatherers or live on raiding). Even the scholars themselves argue continually about which “tribe” belongs to which “origin,” or even the number and manner of the accepted origins themselves! Many noted scholars in the civilized world, for example, consider the “Jungle Savages” to be a subset of the “Forest People” or the “Highlanders” to be tribes of the “Agrarian Tribesmen.” Others consider the “Subterranean Savages” (Underground Cave Men) to be separate from the surface Cave Men. Some scholars even go as far as to classify each individual



culture as a distinct people, and each deserving of recognition as their own “nation” and “culture,” but few civilized scholars give any regard to such “unequivocal nonsense.”

To determine the native/tribal background of your Barbarian, Berserker, Savage, Native Tribesman, or Wild Man character, roll once on (or choose once from) the following Native Origins table. These backgrounds will both define your character and determine his/her skills, dress, and demeanor. Once an origin is chosen it is *final* and a new origin can not be selected later in life. Even a Barbarian who has lived in another part of the Palladium World long enough to become fully used to and acclimated to his “new home” will always be a member of their “childhood culture.”

### Native Origins Table

- 01-08% Agrarian Tribesmen (or Village Farmers).
- 09-12% Cave Men (or the Underground Savages).
- 13-20% Desert Nomads (or the Sand Walkers).
- 21-28% Forest People (or the Wild Woodsmen).
- 29-36% Highland Barbarians (or Highlanders).
- 37-44% Horse Barbarians (or the Grassland Hordes).
- 45-50% Ice People (or Arctic Nomads).
- 51-57% Jungle Savages (or the Tropical Forest People).
- 58-65% Mountain Men (or Mountain Hermits).
- 66-73% Northern Shipwrights (or the Sea Barbarians).
- 74-82% South Ocean Sea People (or the Paradise Boatmen).
- 83-90% Swamp Men (or Wetlands Barbarians).
- 91-97% Tropical River Boatmen (or Lake People).
- 98-00% Wandering Tribes (or the Lost Tribes).

Barbarian groups are typically classified by one of three categories, based on their size and sophistication. These are the Band, Tribe, and Chieftom. Barbarian **Bands** typically number less than 50 members and are typically part of an extended family or families. Bands are nomadic or semi-nomadic and are typically egalitarian, with power and responsibility divided roughly evenly. However, “big men” and “big women” (war chiefs, shaman, matriarchs, etc.) typically command the most respect and influence, even if they don’t generally receive additional resources or grander lodging. Bands are typically hunter-gatherer groups isolated from other bands of the same cultural-ethnic group, who they only occasionally encounter through periodic trade meetings. Isolated, these groups are unsure of how to interact with outsiders of any kind and rarely know any outside languages. This often makes them superstitious or gullible and often susceptible to outside diseases they have no immunity for. Barbarian bands are typically very tight-knit and xenophobic; after all, everything you need is within the community and strangers are typically raiders from rival groups, bandits, or the feared slavers from the civilized world! As a result, these people tend to be conservative and fiercely loyal to their fellow bandsmen, and tend to shun strangers. The barbaric player character from a Band will typically be a young tribesman, warrior, or shaman who has left his/her childhood home either to explore/find his/her way, due to exile/banishment, or as a result of some catastrophe that has befallen them or their village.

Barbarian **Tribes** are larger, extended clans of typically 100-1000 members. Unlike the egalitarian Bands, Tribes are

typically led by a chief, shaman, or matriarch/patriarch who lives in a larger structure and commands extra rations and valuables. Tribes may be led by a single, powerful chief or by a council of “big men and women.” Tribes are often sedentary or semi-sedentary with fixed villages/camps and set territory. Larger Tribes (those approaching Chieftom status) may have several confederated villages, united through culture, language, or trade. Some have seasonal migrations to “summer” and “winter” territories. Somewhat isolated, these groups are unsure of how to interact with outsiders from the distant reaches beyond their immediate area. This often makes them superstitious or gullible and susceptible to outside diseases they have no immunity for. Barbarian Tribes can be tight-knit and xenophobic, or relatively open and sophisticated. Most of what a tribesman needs is within the community. Strangers are typically raiders from rival groups, bandits, or the feared slavers from the civilized world! These people tend to be conservative and fiercely loyal to their fellow tribesmen and often shun strangers. Like bandsmen, the barbaric player character from a Tribe will typically be a young tribesman, warrior, or shaman who has left his or her childhood home either to explore/find his or her way, due to exile/banishment, or as a result of some catastrophe that has befallen them or their village.

Barbarian **Chieftoms** are the largest barbaric groups, with thousands of members – practically a small nation unto their own! Chieftoms are often united “nations” of tribes with large stretches of controlled territory. Chieftoms are typically led by a Chief or Warlord (typically a chief, shaman, or matriarch/patriarch) who is practically a petty king! The Chief lives in a commanding structure with a retainer of personal, loyal warriors, collects “taxes” of rations and valuables, or even claims ownership of all the Chieftom’s assets! Chieftoms can be amazingly sophisticated, with arts, division of labor, math, astronomy, and notable architectural achievements (such as large sculptures or standing rocks). Chieftoms are usually sedentary or semi-sedentary with fixed villages/camps and set territory, though there are exceptions (such as the Horse Barbarians). Some have seasonal migrations to “summer” and “winter” territories. While relatively isolated (they will have little concept of the world as a whole and know nothing of the great nations of the outside world), Chieftoms have experienced many outside groups and will treat all strangers as another “tribe” to evaluate for trade or conquest. These people tend to be conservative and fiercely loyal to their Chieftom and often shun strangers. The barbaric player character from a Chieftom will typically be a young tribesman, warrior, or shaman who has left his/her childhood home either to explore/find his/her way or due to exile/banishment.

## Agrarian Tribesmen (or Village Farmers)

Perhaps the most “civilized” of the barbaric peoples are the so-called “Agrarian Tribesmen.” These people have given up on the nomadic life and settled into small villages, farming small family gardens and living in simple one-room, semi-permanent, wood, mud-brick, or reed structures similar to huts/wigwams or longhouses. The design and build of the structures varies with

the culture, as does the population that occupies them. Some cultures have small structures housing only individual nuclear family units while others build large structures housing the entire extended family. Villages are typically led by a village elder (patriarch or matriarch) or a council of elders and/or important figures.

Cultures are often colorful and clan-oriented with many cultures relying heavily on music, dance, stories/legends, and ceremony. Clothing can range from simple loincloths and wraps/kilts to complex and colorful outfits. Musical styles vary wildly from culture to culture from slow and haunting to fast and vibrant, with most cultures relying on wind instruments and simple percussion/drums. Body ornamentation is usually simple hand made jewelry or simple-to-elaborate tribal tattoos. Some cultures are known to have detailed body paint and/or hair styles and elaborate and unique body piercing or other ornamentation. An Earth equivalent to the Agrarian Tribesmen might be African village cultures like the Ibo or Ashanti, the Celtic tribes of early Britain (Waelsh, Picts, etc.), or Native American village cultures like the Cherokee, Mohegan, and Pueblo.

**Lifestyle/Organization:** Fully or partially sedentary Bands or Tribes. Live in permanent or semi-permanent villages. Some cultures migrate from summer to winter ranges and vice versa as the seasons change.

**Technology Level:** Stone-age to copper-age level. Most weapons and tools are stone, copper, or bronze with the rare iron tool or weapon from trade, find, or capture. Weapons of choice typically include spears, axes, clubs/cudgels, simple maces, simple bows, slings, or throwing irons. Villages are rarely fortified by more than a simple fence, small stacked-stone wall, or hedge (all usually meant to corral animals rather than repel invaders). Weaving and pottery are the most common "industries."

**Food and Resources:** The village's food comes from small farms and animal herding supplemented by hunting, gathering, and fishing. Farming is typically limited to small, family-specific plots (essentially gardens) typically used for food, but occasionally used to grow flax, cotton, and other cloth-making materials or used to grow medicines and herbs. Crops include sorghum, flax, melons, and teff grain (Old Kingdom), squash, beans, potatoes, and corn (Eastern Territories), peas, lentils, wheat, rye, barley, rice or other grains and cabbage, lettuce, and various tubers (Western Empire, Northern Wilderness, and the Land of the Damned), and rice, soybeans, squash, and cabbage (Land of the South Winds). Some tribes grow tobacco for medicinal and/or recreational use. Domesticated animals include cattle, goats, sheep, and/or pigs and chickens with a small number of cultures having domesticated horses or other riding/pack animals. Domesticated dogs are sometimes also kept as hunters, guards, and companions.

**Primary Races and Classes:** Human, Orc, Goblin/Hobgoblin, Ogre, Gnome, or Kankoran. O.C.C.s common to the Agrarian Tribesmen include Native Tribesman (60%), Barbarian (25%), Savage Warrior (5%), Shaman (5%), Were-Shaman or Druid (3%), or other (2%). Alignments are predominantly Scrupulous, Unprincipled, Anarchist, or Aberrant, with the occasional Principled or Miscreant member.

**Range and Areas Settled:** Agrarian Tribesmen tribes are found in almost any part of the world, including hidden in the more out-of-the-way rural areas of the civilized kingdoms! They

are most common to areas of the Northern Wilderness/Disputed Zone (Kankoran, Coyle, Danzi, Wolfen, Human, and Elf typically), the Old Kingdom (Goblin/Hobgoblin, Orc, Ogre, and Human), and parts of the Land of the Damned and Orphid's Grasslands.

**Skills and abilities common to Agrarian Tribesmen:** All Agrarian Tribesman characters receive the following bonuses and skills regardless of O.C.C.:

Animal Husbandry (+10%; or +20% to the skill if already known due to O.C.C., etc.)

Two Domestic skills of choice (+5%; or +15% to the skill if already known due to O.C.C., etc.).

### Some Tribes/Clans of Note

*The Akunnolo of the Land of the Damned:* [ah kewn NO-lo] The most remote and mysterious of the Agrarian Tribes, the Akunnolo of the Land of the Damned suffer constantly at the hands of the demons that inhabit the land. As a result, they are secretive and suspicious, and many of the members are fierce warriors. Life is brutal and their legends are full of tragedy and brutality. The Akunnolo have bizarre tribal rituals that act out these stories with strange and frightening masks and odd music and dance. The typical Akunnolo member is an Orc, Ogre, Human, Goblin/Hobgoblin, or Troll. Villages are always fortified with low stone walls and led by a war chief or shaman/witch.

*The Nu-Chaka of the Old Kingdom:* [new CHA-kah] The Nu-Chaka are a unique culture of village farmers and hunter/warriors known for their intricate body piercing and body paint, and the way in which dancing and music have become an integral part of the daily life of the villages. Nearly every member of the village is skilled in some form of dancing, music, or song, and even regular daily events like hunts, harvests, and bathing are often ritualized with song and dance, often led by Shaman wearing elaborate masks and costumes. Civilized scholars have classified several Old Kingdom tribes as Nu-Chaka, though only a few of these are "true" Nu-Chaka tribes and others belong to vastly different tribal groups (the scholars seem to classify any Agrarian group of the Old Kingdom that practices unique body art and music as Nu-Chaka). Nu-Chaka live in dome-shaped, mud brick huts fenced in by simple stick-weave fences. The typical member of the many cultures identified as Nu-Chaka is Orc or Human, though Goblin/Hobgoblin and Ogre tribes and/or members exist. Nu-Chaka villages are led by a council of elders and/or people of means.

*The Van-nu-poh of the Land of the South Winds:* [van new POH] The Van-nu-poh are a culture of peaceable villagers and hunter/fishers who live in the woods in the north side of the Land of the South Winds. They maintain a strong and honorable warrior culture that places duty to clan and honor/respect to prey and enemy high on the list of virtues. The Van-nu-poh tend to show great respect to an honorable enemy, but little mercy to dishonorable ones. They tend to live quiet, calm lives when going about their daily village lives (wearing little ornamentation), yet paint up in fearsome war paints and enter battle with a savage ferocity during times of war. Van-nu-poh rituals follow a long shamanic tradition of chants and totem-finding ceremony, and tribes are typically led by a shaman or were-shaman because of this (otherwise it is led by a chief). The typical Van-nu-poh member is Human, Elf, Orc, Goblin/Hobgoblin, or Ogre, with the occasional Dogre or Troll.



## Cave Men (or the Underground Savages)

If the Agrarian Tribesmen are the most “civilized” of the barbarian cultures, then the Cave Men are certainly the most “savage.” Barely more civilized than the feral Wild Men, the Cave Men harken back to the days of the early Stone Age (Paleolithic): humanoids draped in animal skins taking shelter under overhanging rock shelves and shallow caves or living underground. The Cave Men come in two basic varieties: the surface cave dwellers and the underground dwellers. The former live in shallow caves and grottoes on the surface of the world, hunting and gathering on the surface during the day and using the cave as shelter, while the latter are mostly the underground races, living in the deep caves or abandoned Dwarven and/or Kobold mines and living off of underground fish, animals, and fungi.

In either case, males of the tribe are typically hunter/warriors while females are typically tribesman/gatherers. Hunting/gathering is the main form of nutrition, occasionally supplemented by fishing, stealing, or even scavenging. Culture is simple, clan-ish, and often brutish. Art is limited to cave painting and simple sculpture, music is basic percussion or woodwind reeds, and body ornamentation is usually simple, handmade shell or stone jewelry or simple tattoos. Clothing is rarely more complex than fur/hide wrappings. Tribal clans are usually led by a chief or warlord who rules by brute strength until toppled or killed by a rival who then assumes the role of chief. A similar Earth equiva-

lent might be the Paleolithic Cro-Magnon, the Clovis cultures of early America, or the Neanderthal humans.

**Lifestyle/Organization:** Partially-nomadic Bands. Travel by foot from shelter to shelter either following herd animals or seasonal food sources.

**Technology Level:** Early to late stone-age. Technology of the surface cave dwellers is at best Neolithic (late Stone Age) amongst these tribes. The most common weapons are simple stone spears (or sharpened sticks), stone axes, stone knives, simple clubs or cudgels, and the occasional sling. Structures more complex than simple lean-tos are rare and fortifications are unheard of. Technology of the underground cave dwellers is little better than the surface tribes’. The most common weapons are simple stone spears (or sharpened sticks), stone axes or adzes, stone knives, simple clubs or cudgels, and the occasional sling. All weapons typically serve double function as a digging or excavating tool. Stone-chipping and pottery are the most common “industries” and structures of any variety are almost never built.

**Food and Resources:** Strictly hunting, gathering, theft, and scavenging. No agriculture or herding. Almost no animal domestication exists beyond the rare “tamed” pet.

**Primary Races and Classes:** Members of the surface cave cultures are usually Troll, Ogre, Orc, Goblin, or Human. Members of the underground cave cultures are usually Troglodyte, Baalizard, Goblin, Kobold, Dwarf, or Gnome. O.C.C.s common to both surface and underground cave dwellers are Native Tribesman (45%), Savage Warrior (45%), Shaman (5%), Were-Shaman or Druid (3%), or other (2%). Alignments are predominantly Unprincipled, Anarchist, or Miscreant, with the occasional Scrupulous, Aberrant or Diabolic member.

**Range and Areas Settled:** Of all the barbaric tribes, Surface Cave Men are by far the most rare, having typically been killed off, enslaved, or driven away by other, more numerous and civilized groups. As a result, they are typically found in the most remote and isolated parts of the Palladium World. However, the occasional clan of surface Cave Men is found living hidden amongst the thick forests of the Eastern Territory (perhaps being sheltered/protected by the great Millennium Tree there) or in the Northern Wilderness. Underground Cave Men are found in isolated clans all through the labyrinthine tunnels beneath the surface, often occupying old Dwarf or Kobold mines abandoned by their builders when the minerals ran dry. They can theoretically be found anywhere under the Palladium World.

**Skills and abilities common to Cave Men:** All *Surface* Cave Man characters receive the following bonuses and skills regardless of O.C.C.:

Construct Stone Tools & Weapons (New!) (+10%; or +20% to the skill if already known due to O.C.C.)

Skin/Prepare Animal Hides (+10%; or +20% to the skill if already known due to O.C.C., etc.)

Two Domestic skills of choice (+5%; or +15% to the skill if already known due to O.C.C., etc.)

All *Underground* Cave Man characters receive the following bonuses and skills regardless of O.C.C.:

Construct Stone Tools & Weapons (New!) (+10%; or +20% to the skill if already known due to O.C.C.)

Skin/Prepare Animal Hides (+10%; or +20% to the skill if already known due to O.C.C., etc.)

Underground Tunneling and Underground Sense of Direction (as per the Dwarf character race; page 292, *Palladium Fantasy RPG®* main book).

## Some Tribes/Clans of Note

*The Fu of the Old Kingdom:* [foo] The Fu of the Old Kingdom may well be the oldest active culture of the Palladium World. First described by explorers of the Elven Empire and mentioned in the *Tristine Chronicles*, the Fu may date back to the Time of Chaos. Extremely xenophobic and shunning outsiders, the Fu typically avoid any and all contact with other beings. Their lifestyle is very simple, brutal, and pragmatically survivalistic, making chipped stone tools/weapons and wearing simple hides for clothing. They live in small, tight-knit family groups that typically migrate from place to place, living in simple caves or abandoned ruins and following the herds of pack herbivores that make up the Fu's primary food source. Constant persecution of the Fu and raids by other tribes have led many civilized observers to pity them. The Fu clans travel separately and rarely meet. When they do meet other Fu bands, they typically trade with one another (and sometimes arrange marriages), but always flee from outsiders. The typical member is an Orc, Ogre, or Human, but the occasional Troll, Goblin/Hobgoblin, or even Giant Fu members have been known.

*The Ce-pa of the Land of the Damned:* [Say-pah] The Ce-pa are another surface Cave Man culture, but tend to be more sedentary than the Fu, typically living in the same caves and wandering the colder northern stretches of the Palladium World. They are predominantly hunter-gatherers and have little contact with the outside world. When an outsider is seen he/she is considered a threat, causing the males of the Ce-pa tribe to brandish weapons and make loud noises and displays of strength to try to pause the stranger long enough for the women and children to escape. The males will then fight only if cornered or in order to defend the females/children; otherwise they too run. The Ce-pa are mostly Orc, occasionally led by an Ogre or Troll. Some Human, Goblin/Hobgoblin, or Giant members have also been reported, likely due to childhood kidnapping or adoption of orphans.

*The Gur of the Bru Ga Belimar Mountains:* [Ger] The Gur are an underground culture known to human scholars only through the Dwarves of Northholme and the Kobolds of the Bru Ga Belimar. They live deep underground as gatherer/scavengers and opportunistic hunters/thieves, typically living in abandoned Dwarf and Kobold (or Troglodyte) mines. They avoid any and all conflicts, but fight fiercely to the death if cornered or if their loved ones are threatened. They are primarily Troglodyte, though some Kobold, Goblin/Hobgoblin, or even Dwarven members have been reported.

## Desert Nomads (or the Sand Walkers)

Wandering the inhospitable wastes of the Baalgor Wastelands or the arid plains of the Old Kingdom, the Desert Nomads are a unique and diverse group of wanderers perfectly at home in any of the hot, dry expanses of the Baalgor Wastes. These groups are quite advanced socially and technologically despite

their "barbaric" nomadic lifestyle. They typically wander as a clan/tribe from oasis to oasis in large caravans of pack and riding animals (camels, Draybacks, and other desert beasts), living in tents and owning only that which they can carry with them. Food often comes from hunting, gathering, trade, or the large groups of livestock that travel with the caravan. Clans are led usually by the patriarch (eldest male) of the clan, but sometimes by a matriarch (rare, except with Eandroth) or shaman/priest.

Of all the barbarian cultures, the Desert Nomads are one of the most open to strangers, at least when it comes to trade and gossip or traveling together temporarily (if heading in the same direction). However, they remain quite clannish and tend not to truly accept strangers into the "inner sanctum" of the clan unless the stranger in question has done something of great help and honor to the clan, such as saving the lives of clan members. When and if the stranger *does* reach this level of acceptance they are treated with incredible love and warmth, often becoming honorary members of the clan. Members of the nomadic clans typically dress in long, flowing robes, and head cloths or turbans that help protect them both from the harmful rays of the daytime sun and the chilling cold of the desert night. Music is energetic with a lot of twanging string instruments, elaborate flute and other wind instruments, and a lot of small, 'tinging' chimes and bells, often accompanied by sensual dance by a solo performer or a synchronized small troupe. An Earth equivalent to the Desert Nomads might be the Bedouins of Saudi Arabia, the Pashtun of Afghanistan and the Libyan nomads of the Sahara.

The clans maintain a high sense of clan loyalty and honor; they typically have complex and detailed sets of rules and customs, and a friendly distrust towards strangers. Most see outsiders as potential trade partners and/or threats, but will open up amazingly to those who earn their trust and respect. This trust and friendship is hard-won, but true; however, if this trust is betrayed, the clan takes serious offense to the betrayal (clans have been known to harbor grudges over such slights that can last years or even generations!).

Lifestyle/Organization: Fully nomadic Bands or Tribes. Travel in caravans of horses, camels, and other riding and pack animals. Use no wagons or other conveyances. Make occasional short-term tent settlements at oases, seasonal creeks, or trade crossroads.

Technology Level: Bronze-age to steel-age level. Technology is surprisingly varied and any clan often possesses a myriad of interesting items from fine cloth to artfully done jewelry or statuettes to incense and fine foods to well-crafted steel weapons (armor is rare, typically being lightweight to avoid overheating the wearer). Language, writing, and mathematics are common among clan elders and leaders. Preferred weapons include knives, one-handed swords (sabers and scimitars in particular), maces, and bows/crossbows (including composite bows!), all of which can be used on the ground or from horseback/camelback. Desert Nomad weapons can sometimes reach quality standards on par with Kobold weapons! "Baalgor Steel" weapons are often a prized possession in many parts of the civilized world.

Food and Resources: Hunting/gathering and animal herding supplemented by trade and occasional raiding. Domesticated animals include horses, dromedary camels, Draybacks, goats, and cattle.

**Primary Races and Classes:** Members of the Desert Nomad cultures are usually Human, Elf, Dwarf, Gosai, Quarian, Dragonmen, Quillback, Eandroth, Goblin/Hobgoblin, Orc, Vrill, Troll, or even Kobold and Gnome. O.C.C.s common to the Desert Nomads include Native Tribesman or Vagabond (40%), Barbarian (35%), Savage Warrior (10%), Mercenary Warrior (5%), Shaman or Priest (5%), Were-Shaman or Druid (3%), or other (2%). [Author's Note: If the "Composite Bowman" variant of the Longbowman O.C.C. is allowed (see W.P. Composite Bow for more details) then include these members among the Barbarian's 35%.] The Desert Nomads typically maintain a high sense of personal and clan honor, and as a result, alignments are predominantly Principled, Scrupulous, Unprincipled, or Aberrant, all with a high sense of honor to self, clan, friends/comrades, and their god(s).

**Range and Areas Settled:** Desert Nomads are unique to the Baalgor Wastelands, with some clans venturing on occasion into the dry lowland grasslands of the western Old Kingdom.

**Skills and abilities common to Desert Nomads:** All Desert Nomads characters receive the following bonuses and skills regardless of O.C.C.:

**Animal Husbandry, Camelry, or Horsemanship:** General (*choose one*; +5%; or +15% to the skill if already known due to O.C.C., etc.).

One Domestic skill of choice (+5%; or +15% to the skill if already known due to O.C.C., etc.).

All heat-based damage to the character is reduced by 10%.

Character requires only half the normal amount of water to survive.

### Some Tribes/Clans of Note

**The Alganira Wanderers of the Baalgor Wastelands:** [al gan EAR ah] The Alganira are a very tight-knit community of Desert Nomads who travel together in large caravans. Alganira dress in flowing black or white robes and large black turbans and rarely wear any obvious ornamentation that is not religious or related to clan or family status. The basic Alganira unit is the extended family caravan, which travels together on Camel/Drayback from oasis to oasis, occasionally stopping at small towns/communities to trade or gossip. When family caravans meet they often stop for the night to celebrate, trade, gossip, and arrange marriages. If these caravans are traveling in the same direction they often travel together as far as their paths cross; otherwise they say their goodbyes and head in their separate directions. Sometimes multiple clans combine in this way into the rare super-caravan that can snake across the desert for miles! The typical member is Human, Gosai, Elf, or Goblin/Hobgoblin. Quorian members are rare, but known, and are known to be cordial (if not friendly) with Elvin and even Gosai Alganira.

**The Vor of the Old Kingdom:** [voar] The Vor are likely a group of displaced Desert Nomads who now travel the dryer (and therefore less populous) stretches of the Old Kingdom grasslands. They travel in caravans of various riding animals with the occasional wagon team (which sometimes confuses them with the Wandering Tribes) and dress in simple robes and head-cloths. They are one of the least-open of the Desert Nomad tribes and shun strangers except for brief, businesslike trade. The typical member is Orc, Quorian, Human, or Goblin/Hobgoblin.

## Forest People (or the Wild Woodsmen)

One of the wildest, most legendary, and most enigmatic of the barbaric cultures is that of the famed Forest People. These people live deep within the virgin forests of Palladium, hidden away from the civilized world. In fact, these people are so legendary that many Western Scholars swear they are mythical! Several distinct and unique woodland groups from all over the Palladium World fall under the blanket category of "Forest People," and as a result, this group is possibly one of the most diverse and variable in culture and custom. The majority are semi-nomadic, living in temporary "winter" and "summer" villages that are sometimes portable themselves! Shelters are often hide or flax/cloth tents, wood or reed lean-tos or wigwams, or simple dugouts. Some legends even speak of tribes of primitive Elves or other races living in elaborate villages in the trees, walking from tree to tree on simple bridges or swinging on ropes and vines! Forest People societies are run by a chief, clan elder, warlord, shaman, or tribal council (typically of elders or warriors).

Culture is often complex and rich, with complicated rites and ceremonies, music, storytelling, and dance. Dress varies, but typically includes pants or leggings of leather, and shirts or jerkins for colder weather or climate. Music is typically sprightly and wistful, with wind instruments and lively drums. Body ornamentation includes handmade jewelry and simple-to-elaborate tribal tattoos. Some cultures are known to have detailed body paint and/or hair styles and elaborate and unique body piercings or other ornamentation. Earth equivalents to the Forest People might include the Eastern and Pacific Northwest Native American cultures like the Cherokee, Mohegan, Shawnee, or Nez Perce, the forest cultures of primeval Russia, or the Germanic tribes of Roman-era Europe.

The Jungle Savages of the Yin-Sloth Jungles are sometimes considered by Scholars to be a subculture of the Forest People, and many tribes or "nations" of Forest People are sometimes classified as Agrarian Tribesmen.

**Lifestyle/Organization:** Partially sedentary Bands or (occasionally) Tribes. Travel by foot or with horse-, donkey-, or even dog-drawn drag-sleds (no wheels) between summer and winter camps.

**Technology Level:** Typically stone-age to bronze-age with a smattering of higher technology items (such as steel tools and weapons) due to trade, capture, or theft. Preferred weapons vary from tribe to tribe, but typically include spears, knives, clubs/cudgels, hand axes, and simple bows. Tanning and leatherwork amongst the Forest People is said to be some of the best in the Palladium World and pottery and weaving by these tribes is quite good in a functional regard.

**Food and Resources:** Hunting, fishing, gathering, limited farming, limited trade, theft, or (in lean times) scavenging. Crops include squash, beans, and corn and the occasional rice or grain crop. Tobacco is sometimes grown for medicinal, recreational, and/or ceremonial use. Domesticated animals are rare and typically limited to dogs and the occasional goat, pig, or chicken.

**Primary Races and Classes:** Danzi, Elven, Kankoran, Human, Coyle, Wolfen, Goblin/Hobgoblin, or Orc. O.C.C.s common to



the Forest People include Native Tribesman (50%), Barbarian (25%), Savage Warrior (15%), Shaman (5%), Were-Shaman or Druid (3%), or other (2%). Alignments are predominantly Scrupulous, Unprincipled, Anarchist, or Aberrant, with the occasional Principled or Miscreant member.

**Range and Areas Settled:** Forest People tribes are found in almost any heavily wooded area or forest, including hidden within the more out-of-the-way virgin forests of the civilized king-

doms! They are most common to areas of the Northern Wilderness/Disputed Zone (Danzi, Kankoran, Coyle, Wolfen, Human, and Elf typically), the Old Kingdom (Goblin/Hobgoblin, Orc, Elf, and Human), and parts of the Land of the Damned (such as Darkest Heart).

**Skills and abilities common to the Forest People:** All Forest People characters receive the following bonuses and skills regardless of O.C.C.:

Climbing (+10%; or +20% to the skill if already known due to O.C.C., etc.)

Skin/Prepare Animal Hides (+10%; or +20% to the skill if already known due to O.C.C., etc.)

One Domestic skill of choice (+5%; or +15% to the skill if already known due to O.C.C., etc.).

### Some Tribes/Clans of Note

*The Dan Zannur of the Disputed Zone:* [dahn zahn-NUR] A mostly Danzi tribe, the Dan Zannur are also known to have Elven, Kankoran, Coyle, or even Human or Wolfen members, with the occasional "monster race" member appearing every now and then. The Dan Zannur, like any Danzi tribe, are enigmatic and clannish and reject or avoid outsiders. Dan Zannur are masters of the Danzi Spirit Tattoos and one of the few Danzi tribes to allow non-Danzi tribe members unlimited use of them. Dan Zannur rituals are elaborate and include music, masks, and totem outfits. Their tribe is very Totem-oriented, and Were-Shaman hold a high place in their society. The Dan Zannur are closely allied with the Millennium Tree of the area and the forest spirits and Faeries of the Disputed Zone. Dan Zannur tribes come in contact with the occasional Eastern or Wolfen scout/patrol team, and have been approached by both sides with offers to do scouting or spying (the Dan Zannur usually refuse offers from both sides, preferring to live neutrally in peace). When the conflict between Man and Wolfen comes, the Dan Zannur are likely to be caught in the middle and suffer badly (as Gnomes did during the Elf-Dwarf War).

*The Graaah of the Northern Wilderness:* [grAAH] A predominantly Kankoran culture of hunter-gatherers who live in semi-temporary stick-and-hide shelters, the Graaah are a tight-knit community who try to live life to the fullest. The hunter/warriors live for the hunt and the fight. While they believe in avoiding unnecessary violence, they enter into battle with a bushido-like zeal when they feel conflict is inevitable. Graaah hunter/warriors have little respect for a mature male of any race who has yet to earn their "stripes" (battle scars). A Graaah hunter/warrior will often go to great and dangerous lengths to "prove" their valor and defend their honor. All Graaah love nature and the wild, and despise cities and urbanized cultures. They are mostly Kankoran, but have been known to accept Wolfen, Coyle, Danzi, Elf, and Human members into the tribe. Once a tribe member, you are respected as a full member and judged only on your performance, loyalty, bravery, and (if a male) "warrior's spirit."

*The Kiridoi of Dragon's Claw:* [kee ree DOY] This is the group of violent, quarrelling barbarians described on page 180 of the *Northern Hinterlands* sourcebook. The Kiridoi share some sort of cultural link to the Nyurg clans of the Northern Shipwrights. The Nyurg seem almost a cultural cross between the neighboring Alg and the Kiridoi, though it is uncertain

whether the Nyurg are former Alg colonists who interbred with the Kiridoi, or Kiridoi who adopted the Alg way of life, or a combination of both. See the Nyurg under the Northern Shipwrights for more information.

*The Lahlah of the Vequerrel Woodlands:* [LAH lee ah] A fun-loving and playful group, the Lahlah of the Vequerrel Woodlands are some of the few beings who actually *like* the regular presence of Faeries! They live deep in the Vequerrel Woods in semi-permanent villages (often close to Faerie rings) and regularly associate with their Faerie neighbors. They regularly consume Faerie Foods (frankly enjoying the odd effects) and have absorbed a lot of the Faerie culture and music into their lives. This close allegiance to the Faeries of Vequerrel has drawn the Lahlah directly into the conflict known as the Faerie Wars. Since they are located so deep within the Vequerrel Woods their direct conflict with the humans of the Western Empire has only just begun, but it is already looking like it will soon explode into a violent and bloody guerilla war with lasting consequences to the Lahlah. For the moment, the Lahlah remain childishly naïve of the war they are about to get involved in. Due to their close proximity to the Faeries, a lot of the Faeries' playfulness and child-like sense of fun and wonder has worn off on the Lahlah. Most members of the tribes speak fluent Faerie, understand Faerie culture and lore, and have a built-in resistance to Faerie Magic (all members, regardless of race or O.C.C., gain an additional +5% to the skills Language: Faerie-speak and Lore: Faerie if taken, and gain a +1 to save vs Faerie Magic). Members are typically Elven, Faerie, Goblin or Hobgoblin, Human, Gnome, or the occasional Orc, Orge, or Troll (all three rare). Interestingly enough, the close association to the Faeries has had a profound impact on the Goblin Lahlah members: a full 20% of all Lahlah-born-and-raised Goblins become Cobblers (double the typical 10%).

## Highland Barbarians (or Highlanders)

The tough and hardy Highlanders are some of the most feared and respected fighters in the Palladium World. Living amongst the rugged peaks and foothills at the edge of civilization, the Highland Barbarians are one of the most likely groups to come in contact with "civilized" peoples. Often "Highlanders" are the remnants of Agrarian Tribes driven out of the fertile lowlands by the encroachment of civilized men. These groups typically try to maintain their "individual" cultural identity in the face of the ever-encroaching civilized world, yet, due to the proximity of this encroaching civilization, often find their culture slowly melding with that of the civilized men.

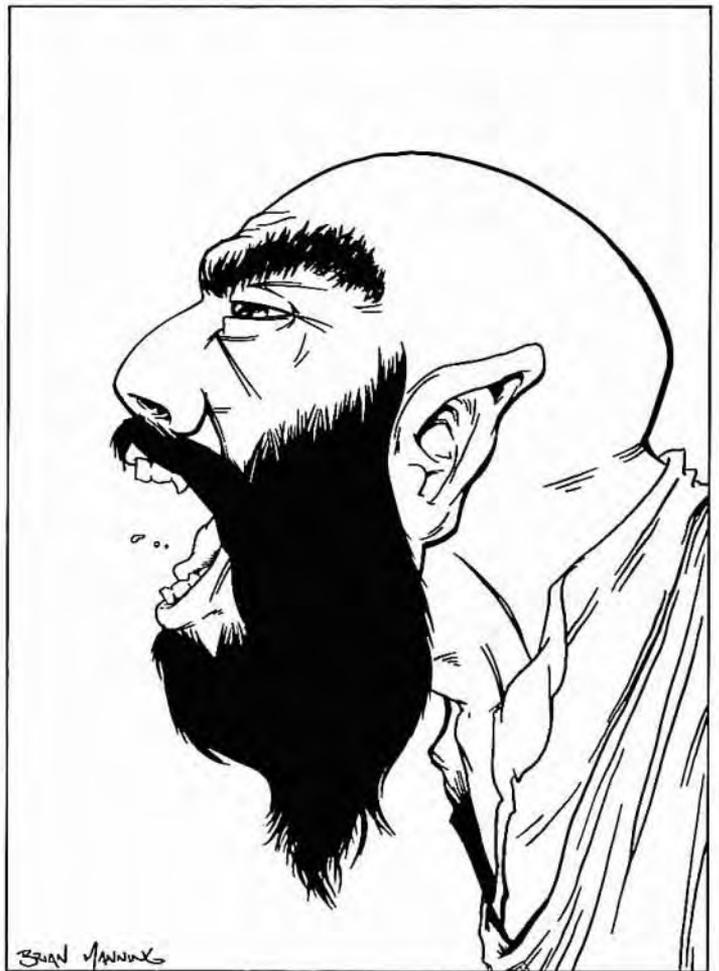
The Highlanders are typically agrarian farmers who live in small, clan village communities in shelters made predominantly of simple wood, stacked-stone, or sod houses, and often protected by fences, hedges, walls, or even enclosed wood or stone fortifications! Leadership for the clan is typically rule by the clan elder (can be male or female), a council of elders and persons of influence, by a priest/shaman/druid, or by a warlord. Some civilized nations, such as the Western Empire, have been known to appoint "Lords" to govern over the clan territories, but these lords are typically not recognized by the clan and can only

truly "rule" the clans by force. An Earth equivalent to the Highlanders would be the medieval Scottish and Welsh cultures of the British Isles, the Germanic cultures of Europe during the Roman Era, or the Papuan Highlanders of New Guinea.

Highland Barbarians are typically a culture in transition: old, traditional culture is diluted or influenced by the culture of the encroaching civilization. Old stories and rituals are often "updated" to reflect the encroaching civilized language, religion(s), and morality. Music is often a mix of festive and lamenting, in keeping with a culture that both tries to live life to the fullest – enjoying the time it has – and mourns the erosion of that culture and its limited time. Body ornamentation varies as traditional styles of dress, jewelry, tattooing, and body painting are supplanted by more "civilized" styles of dress and ornamentation. Often this new "civilized" style of dress and ornamentation is highly influenced by the earlier culture, and sometimes the traditional styles affect the culture of the encroaching civilization (much as how traditional Celtic language and knot designs have influenced British dress and culture and how Native American styles influenced the styles of the U.S., Canada, and Latin America).

**Lifestyle/Organization:** Fully sedentary Tribes or Chiefdoms. Highlanders typically live in permanent wood-, sod-, or stone-hut villages and only rarely travel beyond their borders.

**Technology Level:** Typically a mix of the original copper- or bronze-age society and the iron- or steel-age society of the encroaching civilization. As a result, you see an interesting mix of traditional art, pottery, weaving, and building with modern



metalsmithing and farming techniques. Preferred weaponry is typically reflective of the encroaching civilized society (standard weaponry found in the PFRPG® Main Book) or a cross between the traditional weaponry and these modern weapons (sometimes traditional weapons updated by modern metalsmithing). Many clans like swords and axes, with broadswords and large claymore swords being the favorites of the Western Empire Highlanders. Building often includes complex structures of wood and/or stone or thatch and fortifications can include Motte and Bailey fortresses or even modern mortared-stone keeps!

**Food and Resources:** Mostly farming and herding supplemented by hunting, gathering, fishing, and the occasional raiding of the encroaching civilization. Crops include oats, wheat, potatoes, rye, and barley with the occasional flax crop. Tobacco is widely grown for recreational use. Domesticated animals include all types of sheep, goats, cattle, pigs, horses, donkeys, dogs, cats, and pretty much any animal found in “civilized” lands. Generally speaking, most Highlanders have adopted the lifestyle, if not necessarily the culture, of the encroaching civilization.

**Primary Races and Classes:** Human, Dwarf, Orc, or Ogre, with the occasional Coyle, Troll, Gnome or Elf. O.C.C.s of the Highlanders include Native Tribesman or Vagabond/Peasant/Farmer (45%), Barbarian (25%), Ranger or Mercenary Warrior (20%), Priest, Druid, or Shaman (5%), Were-Shaman or Warlock (3%), or other (2%). Alignments are predominantly Scrupulous, Unprincipled, Anarchist, or Miscreant, and Highlanders typically have a great regard for their personal freedom and identity.

**Range and Areas Settled:** Highlanders are found in the rough foothills or smaller highlands on the outskirts of the civilized world, most often in small (clan) communities in the foothills of the Koerdian and Scarlet Mountains of the Western Empire or the Mound Hills and White Rock Mountain foothills of the Eastern Territory. Another group of Highlanders lives in the foothills of the Old Kingdom Mountains and is typically made up of Ogres, Orcs, Goblins, and Humans. One such group of Highland Barbarians lives in the southern highlands of the Old Kingdom Mountains within the borders of the Timiro Kingdom itself. It is made up of mostly escaped Ogre and Orcish slaves, and, despite Timiro’s best efforts to wipe them out, they remain a menace, often raiding far into the kingdom for food, supplies, weapons, and to free other slaves to fill their growing ranks.

**Skills and abilities common to the Highland Barbarians:** All Highlander characters receive the following bonuses and skills regardless of O.C.C.:

Animal Husbandry (+10%; or +20% to the skill if already known due to O.C.C., etc.)

Climbing (+10%; or +20% to the skill if already known due to O.C.C., etc.)

One Domestic skill of choice (+5%; or +15% to the skill if already known due to O.C.C., etc.).

+1 P.E. (due to the rough life and low oxygen of the barren highlands).

## Some Tribes/Clans of Note

**The Buael of the Koerdian Foothills:** [boo-AYE-el] The Buael are a dying culture. Once the native inhabitants of the lowlands around the Koerdian Mountains (their ancestry is actually from about a half-dozen distinct cultural groups who banded together against the Western Empire’s expansion), the Buael are now little more than small rural villages slowly being absorbed into the larger culture of the Western Empire. Little by little, the Buael as a distinct culture are going “extinct” as newer generations give up on older Buael traditions in favor of “better fitting in” with the Western Empire citizenry and/or avoiding the traditional prejudice experienced by Buael. Young Buael are rejecting their traditional clothing (consists of baggy woolen pants and frocks/sweaters and bright-colored caps) in favor of Western-style dress and speaking Western instead of their traditional Buael tongue. It is estimated that within three generations the Koerdian Highlanders will be completely absorbed within the larger society of the surrounding Western Empire unless things change drastically. Only a small number of die-hard Buael hold on to their cultural heritage, and, as the slow demise of the culture becomes more apparent, many of these “Buaelists” consider resorting to violence and guerilla warfare to “return the land to its rightful children.”

**The Cham-tu of the Mound Hills:** [cham-TOO] A proud and warlike race of hunter-warriors, the Cham-tu claim to be the rightful owners of the Peningshir peninsula and are more than willing to fight for it. Living among the valleys and highlands of the Mound Hills, the Cham-tu (mostly Orcs and Ogres with some Trolls, Humans, and Goblins/Hobgoblins) regularly launch raids into the “settled” lowlands below, taking supplies, lives, and slaves from the Eastern populace. In retaliation, the eastern kingdoms send groups of soldiers to “pacify” the “upstart raiders.” This cycle of violence has led to a protracted guerilla war of sorts between the various Cham-tu tribes and the Eastern soldiers and mercenaries (and occasionally with the Warnalla – see Swamp Men below). While the divided nature of the Cham-tu and their continued conflict with the Warnalla has continually stifled any attempts at a unified assault (and therefore earned these “bandits” low priority for the Eastern armies when compared to the “real” threat posed by the Wolfen), the continued raids by the Cham-tu will certainly lead to an eventual concerted effort to eliminate the “raiders and savages” in the Mound Hills. However, a prolonged war with the Wolfen may just give the Cham-tu the opportunity they need to reassert some control over their “native lands” from the Easterners...

**The Heira of the Scarlet Mountain Piedmont:** [HEAR-rah] The Heira are a proud and ancient people who, like the Buael, are suffering from the encroachment of Western expansionism. The Heira, however, have seen what has happened to the Buael and do not wish the same to happen to them. This has led to a split in the community, with some wishing to flee higher into the mountains, some wishing to seek diplomatic recognition of their “statehood,” and others willing to fight. The rough, hearty Heira, being the warrior-hunters they are, tend more and more towards the latter, and groups of Heira “nationalists” (the Western Empire would say “bandits”) are growing in size and audacity. The Heira, who share some sort of distant mutual ancestry with the Buael, live in simple stone houses and dress in either baggy woolen pants or kilts. Most are Human, Dwarven, or Orcish, with a smattering of other races.

*The Murkando of the Bru Ga Belimar Foothills:* [mur-KHAN-doh] The Murkando are a culture of Gnomes who, legends claim, have lived in the Bru Ga Belimar mountains since fleeing there during the Elf-Dwarf War. A peaceful, agrarian group of simple farmers who live in simple wood and stone huts or dugouts, the Murkando are friendly (if aloof) to strangers of any type as long as the strangers come in peace. The Murkando live in relative peace with both their Wolfen and Human neighbors to the north and south (and with the Dwarves of Northholme and Bru Ga Belimar Kobolds), though the coming conflict between Human and Wolfen worries many Murkando, who see shadows of the Elf-Dwarf War in the dispute.

*The Vulk Raiders of the southern Old Kingdom Mountains:* The Vulk Raiders are a “tribe” made up mostly of escaped Timiro slaves and prisoners – mostly Ogres and other members of the “monster races,” but with some Humans and other “beautiful” races. The Vulk claim independence from Timiro and sovereignty over their mountain refugee camps. Timiro does not recognize this independence, however, and considers all Vulk, even those *not* former slaves or prisoners, as “escaped prisoners or property.” All captured monster races identified (or assumed to be) Vulk “bandits” are immediately sold into slavery regardless of “origin” while “beautiful race” humanoids are executed for “conspiring against the crown with known bandits.” The Vulk are new as far as barbarian “tribes” go, being only about three generations as a self-identifying “people,” and most scholars do not recognize them as such (particularly Timiro scholars, who deny any specific “identity” to this group). Since they are new as a culture, few real “cultural” traditions exist, with most traditions being adapted from Old Kingdom or Timiro traditions, which are often combined together into composite ceremonies. Every year the ranks of the Vulk grow as more “free born” members are born into the tribe and as new members join from Timiro (usually former slaves) or the Old Kingdom. The Vulk are divided on how to proceed with their new “civilization,” with many wanting to live quietly and not provoke Timiro while others push for war and conduct raids into the kingdom for fun, vengeance, and the “liberation” of slaves for their ranks. Conflict seems inevitable as “hawks” on both sides press for war. Timiro’s official stance on the Vulk is that they are “bandits and brigands” and must be “dealt with accordingly.” The King has already requisitioned a task force to go into the highlands and do just that.

## Horse Barbarians (or the Grassland Hordes)

Of all the Barbarian tribes, perhaps the most feared and notorious are the Horse Barbarians, or the Grassland Hordes. These rough and able nomadic horsemen practically grow up in the saddle, becoming master horsemen to such a degree as to rival even the Knights and Paladins of the civilized world. Horse Barbarians live in large, extended nomadic clans that wander the vast grassy plains of the Palladium World. These groups live in simple portable tents and/or teepees made from leather/hides or simple fabric/linen. Food comes primarily from hunting and herding, while supplies typically come from gathering or raiding. With their nomadic nature, very little is needed and mem-

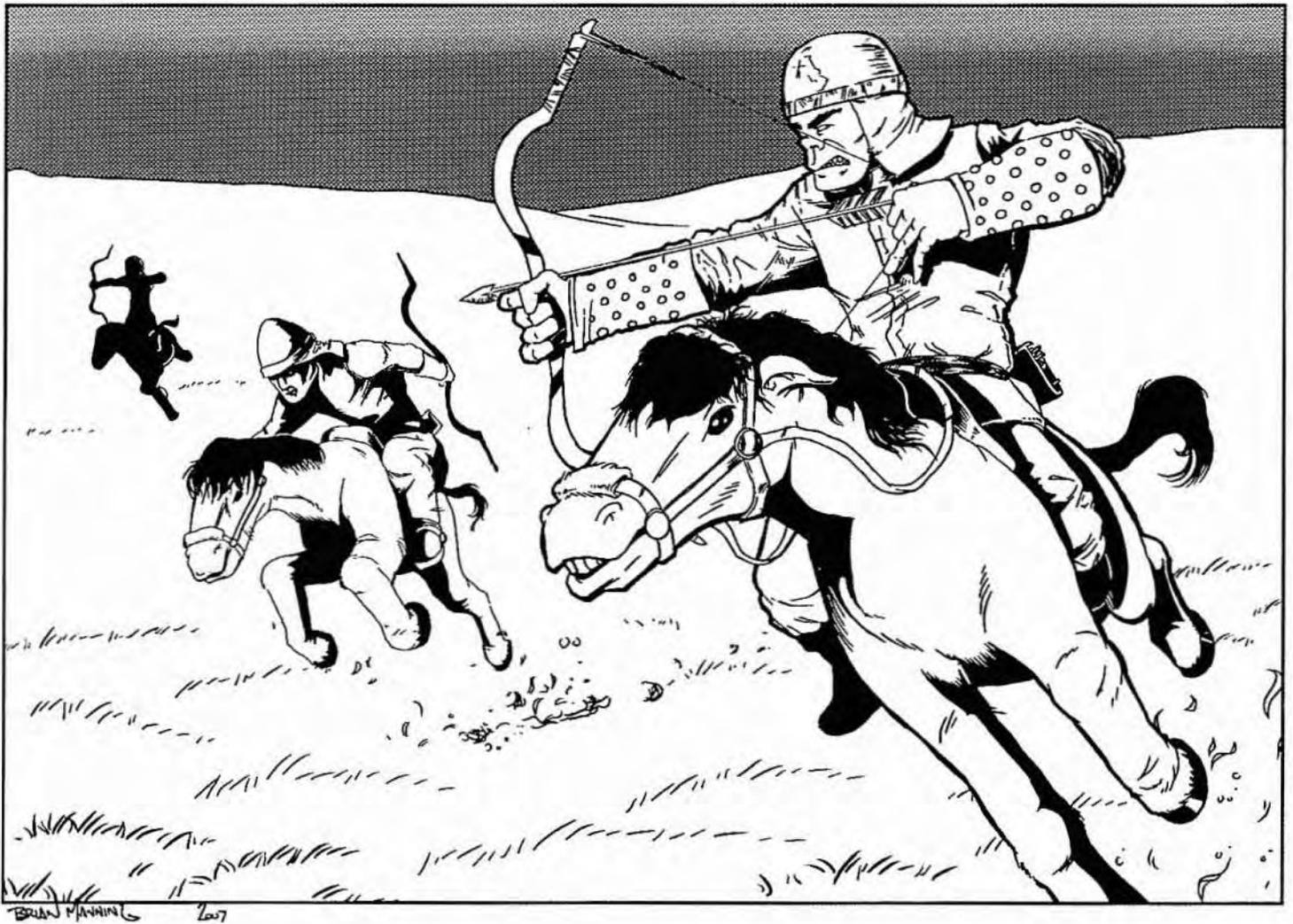
bers typically desire little that can’t be consumed or used as a weapon.

Horse Barbarian society is very tight-knit and extremely organized, with fluid social structures that allow those with talent to rise to the top, rather than those with seniority or of noble birth. The clans are led by a warlord/chief or shaman and occasionally a strong warlord (or Khan) will unite the clans into grand Hordes. These Hordes often go on large campaigns of raiding and conquest, sacking cities and extorting stiff taxes. Sometimes huge and powerful, but short-lived Horde Empires are built, only to collapse quickly when the great Khan dies and no suitable replacement is found. Such empires have risen and fallen many times over the years. The greatest and most famous of these great hordes was Gur’ror’s Horde of Bones, which briefly controlled nearly all of the Old Kingdom and the Eastern Territories during the chaotic times following the Millennium of Purification. The Horde of Bones even expanded deep into the Western Empire, reaching and laying siege to Arcadia before the death of Gur’ror – and the resulting power vacuum – caused the empire to collapse. The most recent horde of note was the Horde of the North Wind, which ruled most of Orphid’s Grasslands for several years during the early years of the Age of Man, conducting many raids deep into Wolfen territory.

Music is loud and boisterous, with lots of wind and percussion, and accompanies songs and stories of the great deeds and warrior prowess of legendary heroes or great warriors. Dress and ornamentation styles vary, but are typically quite pragmatically functional and simple: typically furs and simple leather pants and jerkins (or even loincloths), with leather or scale armor occasionally worn by some clans during times of war. In addition, many Horse Barbarian clans practice the *Yan*, a form or “pony express” style communications where a network of relay riders and way-stations is used to spread messages and information quickly – often faster than any method in the Palladium World short of magic! An Earth equivalent to the Horse Barbarians might be the Mongols of the Golden Horde, the feared Hun of Roman times, or the Native American “Plains Indians” of North America (such as the Comanche, Apache, Sioux, and Pawnee).

The Horse Barbarians have a hatred for civilization like no other culture (they consider civilization a destructive force that “neuters a being and turns him into a slave of his farm”) and have been known to destroy entire cities down to the last stone. The clans are very inclusive and distrustful of outsiders, yet a very open society within the clan. Members of the clan are judged by their actions, and members of different races within the clans get along like actual blood brothers (many *are* “ceremonial” blood brothers). Humans, Coyles, and Orcs (the latter two of whom gather in large herd or horde groups anyway) are the most predominant members of the clans and hordes, and all members are treated equally within the clan by all others regardless of race and are judged only on merit, honor, and warrior prowess. Even Changelings have been known to live openly in the hordes without fear of reprisal! Of course, this brotherhood/trust is absolute, and traitors are dealt with harshly and without mercy.

Lifestyle/Organization: Fully or mostly nomadic Bands, Tribes, or Chiefdoms occasionally united into Hordes. Travel by horse following herds of prey animals or herding horses and live in temporary or seasonal tent or teepee villages.



**Technology Level:** Stone-age to early iron-age with higher technology items present in many cultures. Horse Barbarian technology is an interesting mix of modern and ancient. For one, the nomadic living standards are barely Neolithic in measure, yet the warrior/hunter nature of the clansmen has led to incredible feats of metallurgy and weapon making that rival those of the civilized world. The fearsome Composite Bow (or Horse Bow) employed by the warrior/hunters of the Hordes rivals even the mighty longbow for range and power, yet is short enough to be used from horseback or from a kneeling position. Preferred weapons vary from tribe to tribe, but typically include bows, spears, swords, knives, clubs/cudgels, and axes. Cloth-making, leatherwork, and weapon-making are extraordinarily advanced for such a nomadic culture.

**Food and Resources:** Herding, hunting, fishing, gathering, trade, theft, or (in lean times) scavenging. Domesticated animals include (obviously) horses, but also goats, cattle, and other herd animals. Some Ophid's Grasslands tribes also herd Bactrian (two-humped) camels.

**Primary Races and Classes:** Orc, Human, Coyle, or Dwarf with the occasional Elf, Kankoran, or Goblin/Hobgoblin. O.C.C.s common to the Horse Barbarians include Native Tribesman (40%), Barbarian (35%), Savage Warrior (10%), Mercenary Warrior or Ranger (5%), Shaman or Priest (5%), Were-Shaman or Druid (3%), or other (2%). The Horse Barbarians typically maintain a high sense of personal and clan honor, and

as a result, alignments are predominantly Principled, Scrupulous, Unprincipled, Anarchist, or Aberrant, all with a high sense of honor to self and clan.

**Range and Areas Settled:** Horse Barbarians are most common to the vast, flat stretches of grassland plains common to Orphid's Grasslands and the Old Kingdom. They are nomadic and constantly on the move, often following wild herds of large herbivores like Buffalo or Wildebeest. Sometimes, during times of the "Great Hordes" when many tribes are united under a Khan, Horse Barbarian warriors can be found anywhere in the Palladium World. Sometimes aspiring Khans have engendered so much fear from "civilized" kings and lords that Horse Barbarian warlords are invited to royal and lordly courts as invited diplomatic guests!

**Skills and abilities common to Horse Barbarians:** All Horse Barbarian characters receive the following bonuses and skills regardless of O.C.C.:

Animal Husbandry (+5%; or +15% to the skill if already known due to O.C.C., etc.)

Horsemanship: Barbarian (new!) (+10%; or +25% to the skill if already known due to O.C.C., etc.)

W.P. Horse Bow (new!) (+1 to strike, +100 yard/meter range, +1 Rate of Fire (attack) at 3<sup>rd</sup> level)

Character requires only half the normal amount of food to survive.

## Some Tribes/Clans of Note

*The Golden Horde of Orphid's Grasslands:* A horde of Coyle raiders described on page 188 of the *Northern Hinterlands* sourcebook. They are rivals of the Kuvrali.

*The Kuvrali of Orphid's Grasslands:* [koo-VRA-lee] The fierce Kuvrali are a barbarous, yet highly-organized group of nomadic horsemen who travel in huge, extended clans across the expanses of Orphid's Grasslands. They are believed to be made up of "remnants" of Zanadari Hordes that may have once stretched all the way from the Old Kingdom in times now lost. Their society is a highly-structured hierarchy that makes a distinction between Warrior-Hunters (usually males) and Workers (typically the females), yet it is a society where ability, drive, honor, and loyalty take precedence over all else, lineage and seniority included. All members of the clan are trained on horseback from an early age, all becoming incredibly adept horsemen regardless of their clan "role." The best become Warrior-Hunters and the best-of-the-best become captains and chiefs. Occasionally, one chief/warlord rises to the very top and unites several clans into an extended Horde and becomes Khan (such as the infamous Horde of the North Wind under the Coyle Malkar Khan). Once assembled, such Hordes typically strike out on extended campaigns of conquest and war; burning the hated cities to the ground and taxing the remaining populace into stagnation – at least until the Horde collapses in upon itself, which eventually always happens. Kuvrali are mostly Coyle, Orc, Human, and Kankoran, though the occasional Bugbear or Centaur member or ally exists. They are nomadic and live in canvas or silk tents. Warriors wear metal helms and padded, leather, or scale armor during times of war/conquest. The Kuvrali are quiet at the moment, but it is only a matter of time before a new Horde grows under a new Khan.

*The Zanadari of the Old Kingdom:* [zan-na-DAR-ree] Like the Kuvrali, the Zanadari grow up in the saddle and are known for their highly-organized and structured society. Also like the Kuvrali, the Zanadari clans occasionally unite into great Hordes under the banner of a supreme Khan, who takes them on campaigns of conquest. Hordes that have in times past threatened even the mighty Western Empire. Cultural similarities and similarities in dress, language, and custom have led to theories that the Zanadari and Kuvrali were once the same culture and may once have had an empire that stretched from the Old Kingdom to Orphid's Grasslands or possibly beyond. The Zanadari are most famous for their bout of conquest under the Orcish warlord Gur'ror Khan, whose Horde of Bones briefly controlled nearly all of the Old Kingdom and the Eastern Territories during the chaotic times following the Millennium of Purification. The Zanadari are mostly Human and Orc with notable numbers of Ogre, Troll, and even Changeling! Rumors have recently circulated throughout the Western Empire that a new Khan named Vurulian is uniting the clans into a new Horde. These rumors remain unfounded, but, if true, may bode dark indeed for the residents of the Empire, the Eastern Territories, Timiro, and even the Wolfen Empire!

*The Zuriala of the Old Kingdom:* [zur-ree-AH-lah] Another feared and capable group of Horse Barbarians, the Zuriala of the Old Kingdom grasslands are a proud and capable group of hunter-warriors who travel the Old Kingdom, following the herds of Buffalo and Wildebeest that migrate across the plains.

This group, though similar in many ways to the Zanadari, seems to be a unique and independent culture content with maintaining their traditional ways and fighting only to retain their "hunting grounds." The Zuriala live in nomadic Bands or Tribes made of family clans and take shelter in easily-portable tepees or similar hide-and-wood tents. While not as overtly structured as the rival Zanadari, they are also not known to form into the huge, conquest-prone Hordes that the Zanadari typically form. They are also not prone to metalworking and typically use stone weapons or steel weapons gathered in warfare or raids. The typical Zuriala is Human or Orcish, with many Ogre, Troll, and Goblin/Hobgoblin members.



## Ice People (or Arctic Nomads)

Easily the most mysterious and elusive of all the barbarian cultures are those of the Ice People. Living way up in the frozen wastes of the tundra, or even the glaciers and ice sheets of the far north that few civilized people ever visit, little news of these cultures ever makes its way to the civilized world. What news does arrive is full of legend and embellishment. What *is* known is that nearly all tend to be nomadic hunter/fisher/gatherers with a small number of tribes herding reindeer or other arctic animals. Homes tend to be simple temporary shelters built from skins/hides or even cut blocks of ice! While little is known of their tribal government it is hypothesized that clans/tribes are led by a shaman, chief, village elder (patriarch or matriarch), or a council of elders and/or important figures.

Culturally, this group is reserved and very hard-working, since resources are so thin. Storytelling and scrimshaw (carved

ivory from walrus or whales) are the major art forms with occasional ceremonial dancing or a game/hunting practice that involves flinging members high into the air using tarps (members circle around the tarp and pull outward in unison to fling someone in the middle up to 30 feet/10 m in the air). This practice helps the person gain height to search for prey or outsiders. Music is typically simple wind or percussion instruments and is typically improvisational and performed by families as a bonding ceremony. Body ornamentation is usually simple handmade bone/tooth/scrimshaw or carved stone (jade) jewelry, or simple-to-elaborate tribal tattoos. Earth equivalents to the Ice People might be the North American Inuit and Eskimo, certain far-north Scandinavian tribes, or the Reindeer herders of the Siberian forests.

**Lifestyle/Organization:** Fully or partly nomadic Bands or Tribes. Travel by foot from summer to winter quarters living in temporary or seasonal tent, wigwam, or igloo villages.

**Technology Level:** Limited, rarely surpassing stone-age in level. Most weapons and tools are made from animal bone, tooth, or ivory with the rare stone or metal tool or weapon from trade, find, or capture. Temporary villages are never fortified by more than a simple fence. Most buildings, tools, clothes, weapons, etc., are made from animal remains, such as bones, hides, teeth, or innards. Leatherwork and stitching are quite advanced. Weaving and pottery are the most common "industries" with carved animal bones or whale/walrus ivory (scrimshaw) a major trade item.

**Food and Resources:** Mostly hunting, fishing, and gathering supplemented by trade, theft, or (in lean times) scavenging. A majority of the clan's food comes from hunting seals, whales, walrus, or other arctic creatures, fishing, or animal herding. Dogs have been domesticated as pack animals and hunters and some tribes practice caribou (reindeer) herding. Tribes are quite adept at the construction of simple sleds for dogs or sleighs for caribou, though most "civilized" people consider these sleds and sleighs "primitive" when compared to "modern" civilized equivalents.

**Primary Races and Classes:** Human, Coyle, Wolfen, Kankoran, Algor Frost Giant, Bearman, Goblin/Hobgoblin, Orc, Elf, or Gnome. O.C.C.s common to the Ice People are Native Tribesman (65%), Savage Warrior (15%), Barbarian (10%), Shaman (5%), Were-Shaman or Druid (3%), or other (2%). Alignments are predominantly Scrupulous, Unprincipled, Anarchist, or Aberrant, with the occasional Principled or Miscreant member.

**Range and Areas Settled:** Ice People tribes are found exclusively in the frigid far north, typically the Northern Wilderness, the northern Land of the Damned, or even the frigid glaciers and ice packs of the northern oceans! The possibility for far-southern Ice People exists, but none have visited the southern polar zone to report yes or no.

**Skills and abilities common to the Ice People:** All Ice people characters receive the following bonuses and skills regardless of O.C.C.:

Fishing (+10%; or +25% to the skill if already known due to O.C.C., etc.)

One Domestic skill of choice (+5%; or +15% to the skill if already known due to O.C.C., etc.).

Takes 10% less damage from cold attacks.

Character requires only half the normal amount of food to survive.

## Some Tribes/Clans of Note

*The Imnui of the Land of the Damned:* [im-NEW-wee] The Imnui are a remote and friendly group rarely seen by outsiders, since they prefer to live in the frozen reaches of the upper Land of the Damned, sometimes wandering onto the ice packs on hunting trips. Imnui reportedly live in simple stick shelters or ice-block igloos in small, isolated nuclear-family groups. Such groups are nomadic, but known to travel together and share shelters when two or more families meet (trade and marriages are also conducted at these rare meetings). Typical races include Kankoran, Coyle, Bearman, Human, Wolfen, Orc, Algore, and the occasional Goblin/Hobgoblin or Ogre/Troll. Since no one but the Imnui has any interest in the frozen reaches of their domain, war is rare amongst the Imnui, who remain quite innocent and peaceful.

*The Makimivo of the Northern Wilderness:* [Ma-key-MEE-voh] The Makimivo are a nomadic group of hunter/herders who travel the desolate woods of the Northern Wilderness. They live in semi-permanent villages of wood and hide huts and travel with great herds of reindeer and other arctic herd animals. The Makimivo are quite peaceful and known to take in/rescue lost outsiders. They freely trade with anyone willing, regardless of race or national allegiance, and have been known to serve as guides and scouts for the right price. The Makimivo are predominantly Kankoran or Bearman, with some Coyle, Wolfen, Elven, or Human members.

*The Wanderers of the Ice:* Known only through reports, the Wanderers of the Ice are reportedly groups of nomadic hunters who wander the frozen ice cap to the far north of the Palladium World. Little is known of this group since eyewitness reports are few and conflicting. Imnui legends also speak of "ice-walking giants," though it is not known if these refer to the Wanderers. Since there is no credible evidence of their existence, and since Imnui hunters are known to wander far onto the ice packs in search of game, most scholars discount the existence of the Wanderers.

## Jungle Savages (or the Tropical Forest People)

Possibly the most feared and misunderstood of the barbarian cultures are the mysterious Jungle Savages of the Yin-Sloth Jungles and the Land of the South Winds. Hidden deep within the primeval rain forests native to the far south of the Palladium World, these people are noted for being some of the most "uncivilized" of the savages. Rumors of dark cultism and even ritual cannibalism among the Jungle Savages persist in the civilized world. Some of the strangest styles of dress and ornamentation are known to these cultures, which is perhaps why they have gained such a dark reputation. Otherwise, little is seen of these people save the stories of the few adventurers (and slavers) who travel into the depths of the mysterious jungles and actually return alive.

Most Jungle Savages are nomadic hunter/gatherers or simple village farmers. Others live off of raiding and banditry. Shelters

are often hide or flax/cloth tents, wood or reed lean-tos or wigwams, or simple dugouts. Some legends even speak of tribes of primitive humans and Elves living in elaborate villages in the trees, walking from tree-to-tree on simple bridges or swinging on ropes and vines! Jungle Savage societies are usually run by a chief, clan elder, warlord, shaman/witch, or tribal council (typically of elders or warriors). Cultures vary, with some being tight-knit, carefree, and peaceful and others being bloodthirsty headhunters and cannibals! Music is typically loud, percussion-heavy, and energetic, with thunderous drumming and manic chanting, often integrated with elaborate and arcane dances and ceremonies with masked shaman. Body ornamentation includes handmade jewelry and simple-to-elaborate tribal tattoos, and some cultures are known to have detailed body paint and/or hair styles and elaborate and unique body piercings or other ornamentation. An Earth equivalent to the Jungle Savages might be the Bembe and Kongo of the African Jungles, the Papuan Highlanders New Guinea, or the Yanomamis of the Amazon.

Jungle Savage tribes are found in almost any heavily wooded Jungle or Rain Forest. The Jungle Savages of the Yin-Sloth Jungles are sometimes considered by Scholars to be a subculture of the Forest People, and many tribes or "nations" are sometimes classified with the Agrarian Tribesmen. The Jungle Savages, as a whole, are enigmatic, strange, and savage, making them a favorite for the Western Empire's gladiatorial games!

Lifestyle/Organization: Fully or partly nomadic Bands or Tribes. Travel by foot from summer to winter quarters living in temporary or seasonal tent, hut, wigwam, or longhouse villages. Some are semi-permanent farmers while others are fully nomadic.

Technology Level: Stone-age to bronze-age with a smattering of higher technology items (such as steel tools and weapons) due to trade or banditry. Favored weapons include spears, Maquahuilts (see New Weapons), clubs/cudgels, axes, and simple bows. Tanning and leatherwork, pottery, and weaving are the typical industries of these tribes.

Food and Resources: Mostly from hunting, fishing, and gathering supplemented by trade, theft, or (in lean times) scavenging. Some tribes supplement their diet by gardening beans, squash, potatoes, corn, rice, bananas, coconuts, pineapples, edible palms, tropical yams, and sometimes cotton, flax, or tobacco as well, though these groups are rare and sometimes classified as "Agrarian Tribesmen" by scholars. Domesticated animals include chickens and pigs. Most disturbingly, some tribes supplement their diets through the practice of cannibalism.

Primary Races and Classes: Tezcat, Orc, Ogre, Dogre, Grimbor, Lizard Man, Elf, Human, Giant, Goblin/Hobgoblin, or Troll. O.C.C.s common to the Jungle Savages include Native Tribesman (45%), Savage Warrior (30%), Barbarian (15%), Shaman (5%), Were-Shaman or Druid (3%), or other (2%). Alignments are predominantly Unprincipled, Anarchist, Miscreant, or Aberrant.

Range and Areas Settled: Throughout most areas of the Yin-Sloth Jungles, the western Land of the South Winds, or the jungles of the southern Old Kingdom.

Skills and abilities common to the Jungle Savages: All Jungle Savage characters receive the following bonuses and skills regardless of O.C.C.:

Prowl (+10%; or +20% to the skill if already known due to O.C.C., etc.)

Construct Stone Tools & Weapons (New!) (+10%; or +20% to the skill if already known due to O.C.C.)

Skin/Prepare Animal Hides (+10%; or +20% to the skill if already known due to O.C.C., etc.)

One Domestic skill of choice (+5%; or +15% to the skill if already known due to O.C.C., etc.).

## Some Tribes/Clans of Note

*The Chu Tak of the Yin-Sloth Jungles:* [chew TAHK] A savage and bloodthirsty tribe from deep in the Yin-Sloth jungles, the Chu Tak are noted for their propensity for murder and cannibalism! The Chu Tak, who are mostly Tezcat, Dogre, Ogre, Giant (primarily Gigante), Troll, and Orc, live in simple wooden hut villages surrounded by the staked or shrunk heads of previous enemies/victims. The Chu Tak wear an assortment of bizarre tattoos, piercings, ornamentation, and hair styles, and wear little more than loincloths. Their savage nature and frightening appearance are likely the cause of the association of "jungle tribes" as "bloodthirsty savages." Many peaceful, innocent tribes of humanoids have been attacked and slaughtered by outsiders due to negative stereotypes based on Chu Tak actions. One peaceful Jungle tribe (the Channah) was reportedly wiped out entirely after being mistaken for Chu Tak by Western settlers.

*The Mazeca of the Yin-Sloth Periphery:* [mah-ZEH-kah] The ancient Mazeca of the Yin-Sloth Periphery are an ancient and proud people who lay claim to an ancient civilized past. These predominantly Human people (some Elves, Gnomes, and monster races), who now live in simple huts, claim to be descendants of an ancient jungle empire whose monumental step-pyramid temples rose "like mountains from the forest." The Mazeca claim that their empire grew "corrupt in its power" and began a worship of "dark, monstrous gods" (Yin-Sloth and the Southern gods? The Old Ones?), which led to mass sacrificial executions that "made the stone streets run like choked rivers of blood." It was then that the great "feathered serpent" (a Kukukan?), who had guided the birth of the empire, allowed the destruction of the empire and the scattering of her people. Though no known record of such an empire exists (outside of, perhaps, a small cryptic paragraph in the *Tristine Chronicles*), the recent discovery of "great stone pyramids half-swallowed by the jungle" by Western Settlers raises some interesting questions. Currently the Mazeca have made contact with the settlers from the Western Empire and some limited trade exists. While no actual campaigns of conquest or enslavement by the Westerners has yet begun (so far, the Mazeca seem very open to peaceful "absorption" into this "great new empire of men") the idea hasn't yet been ruled out. Small groups of Mazeca "cultists" (who still worship the "old gods" and seek to reestablish the "ancient glory") do occasionally pop up, and may someday force a conflict with the Western settlers and incite just such a campaign of enslavement. Mazeca warriors have two special "Orders" of note: the noble "Eagle Warriors," who serve as a sort of warriors/priests/captains (mostly Barbarians, Shaman, Druids, or Savage Warriors) and the fierce "Jaguar Warriors," who serve as shock troops and elite infantry (Berserkers and Savage Warriors). Each is distinguished by their manner of dress, with the

Eagle Warriors adorned in feathers and eagle-head wooden helmets, and the Jaguar Warriors similarly dressed in jaguar skins and jaguar-head helmets.

*The Saytorrah of the Land of the South Winds:* [SAY-torrah] A group of mysterious “Jungle Elves,” the Saytorrah are a noble, if savage group. It is not known where the Saytorrah came from (their own legends speak of them as being “created as is by the great spirit”). Some theories claim them to be the “original” Palladium Elves while others claim them to be refugees of the Elf-Dwarf War. Either way, the Saytorrah shun strangers and keep to themselves deep in the jungles of the South Winds/Yin-Sloth borderlands. The Saytorrah reportedly live in “huts high in the trees” connected together by “great walkways and bridges.” They are fond of tattooing (most are covered from head to foot in tribal tattoos) and have an intimate understanding of magic (Mystic and Wizardry, no Summoning or Diabolism). As a result, they do not have the fear of magic most barbarians do (eliminate the “distrust and fear of magic/magic users” aspect of the barbaric O.C.C.s) but have an even greater revulsion to civilization (double the “aversion to civilization” penalties, where applicable; non-barbaric O.C.C.s suffer penalties equal to that of the Native Tribesman). The Saytorrah loathe Dwarves and will attack them on sight (or flee/hide from them if greatly outnumbered), and will attack anyone who is with the hated Dwarves (Elves who associate with Dwarves are always killed).

## Mountain Men (or Mountain Hermits)

Wandering alone or in small groups among the frozen heights of the tallest mountains of the Palladium World are the Mountain Men (or Mountain Hermits). Traveling further and further into the mountain tops to avoid the ever-encroaching civilized world, the Mountain Men seek to avoid contact with the outside world. They are likely the most elusive of the barbaric cultures, possibly spawning the Yeti legends. Sometimes these are individuals seeking to turn their backs on civilization (or Wild Men fleeing the civilized world); other times these are small groups, often of displaced Highlanders, who wish to maintain their unique cultural identity despite the loss of their traditional lands. This has made them tough and hardy people who typically can survive anything anywhere, but makes them more out of place in civilization than other groups. The rare Mountain Man clans are typically led by the clan elder (can be male or female), shaman, or chief.

Culturally, the Mountain Men are either the last bastions of a dying culture or are small groups or individuals too involved with day-to-day survival to form elaborate cultures. Music is often slow and lonely, with wistful flute and pipe solos that mirror the loneliness and desolation of their exile. Body ornamentation is limited as traditional dress, jewelry, tattooing, and body painting are ignored due to a lack of supplies or trained artists. The Mountain Men of the more ancient Western Empire are slowly dying out as a distinct culture as Western culture slowly seeps its way into their society. It is estimated that within three generations the Koerdian Mountain Men will be completely absorbed within the larger society of the surrounding Western Empire.

The Eastern Territories Mountain Men are still strong and defiant, however, occasionally launching raiding parties into the lowlands of the Tegyn Peninsula. An Earth equivalent to the Mountain Men would be the Sherpa of Nepal and Tibet.

The Mountain Men of the Western Empire are sometimes considered by Scholars to be remnants of Highlander cultures.

Lifestyle/Organization: Fully nomadic Bands or Tribes. Travel by foot living in temporary shelters such as caves, grottoes, tents, huts, or wigwams.

Technology Level: Stone-age to bronze-age with a smattering of higher technology items (such as steel tools and weapons) due to trade or banditry. In-tribe technology is typically very low, using any tools they can make, find, or steal. As a result, you see an interesting mix of primitive pottery, weaving, stone/bone/wood tools, and modern metal implements. Favored weapons include spears, clubs/cudgels, picks, axes, and simple bows. Shelter consists of caves and grottos or simple, primitive shelters of sticks and hides, ice, or simple dugouts. Pottery and weaving are the typical industries of these tribes.

Food and Resources: Mostly from hunting, fishing, and gathering supplemented by trade, theft, or (in lean times) scavenging. Mountain Men typically subsist any way they can. Farming is typically limited to remote mountain valleys and usually includes only cold-resistant grains like certain wheat and rye strains.

Primary Races and Classes: Typically Rahu-Man, Troll, Giant (typically Algor), Human, Dwarf, Orc, or Ogre, with the occasional Wolfen, Coyle, Kankoran, Gnome or Elf. O.C.C.s of the Mountain Men include Native Tribesman (45%), Savage Warrior (35%), Barbarian (10%), Priest or Shaman (5%), Were-Shaman or Druid (3%), or other (2%). Alignments are predominantly Unprincipled, Anarchist, or Miscreant, and Mountain Men typically have a great regard for their personal freedom and identity.

Range and Areas Settled: The high frozen peaks of the Palladium World’s many mountain ranges, particularly the Old Kingdom mountains, the Bru Ga Belimar, the Algor Mountains, the White Rock mountains, the Scarlet mountains, the Koerdian mountains, and the Baalgor mountains.

**Skills and abilities common to the Mountain Men:** All Mountain Man characters receive the following bonuses and skills regardless of O.C.C.:

Climbing (+15%; or +30% to the skill if already known due to O.C.C., etc.)

One Domestic skill of choice (+5%; or +15% to the skill if already known due to O.C.C., etc.).

Character requires only half the normal amount of food to survive.

+2 P.E. (due to the rough life and low oxygen of the barren highlands).

All penalties for visiting “civilized” areas doubled (minimum penalties that of Native Tribesman).

### Some Tribes/Clans of Note

*The Algor-dah of the Algor and Bru Ga Belimar Mountains:* The Algor-dah are a group of mountain hermits who live amongst the highest reaches of the Algor and Bru Ga Belimar Mountains. They are mostly Algor Frost Giants with a smatter-

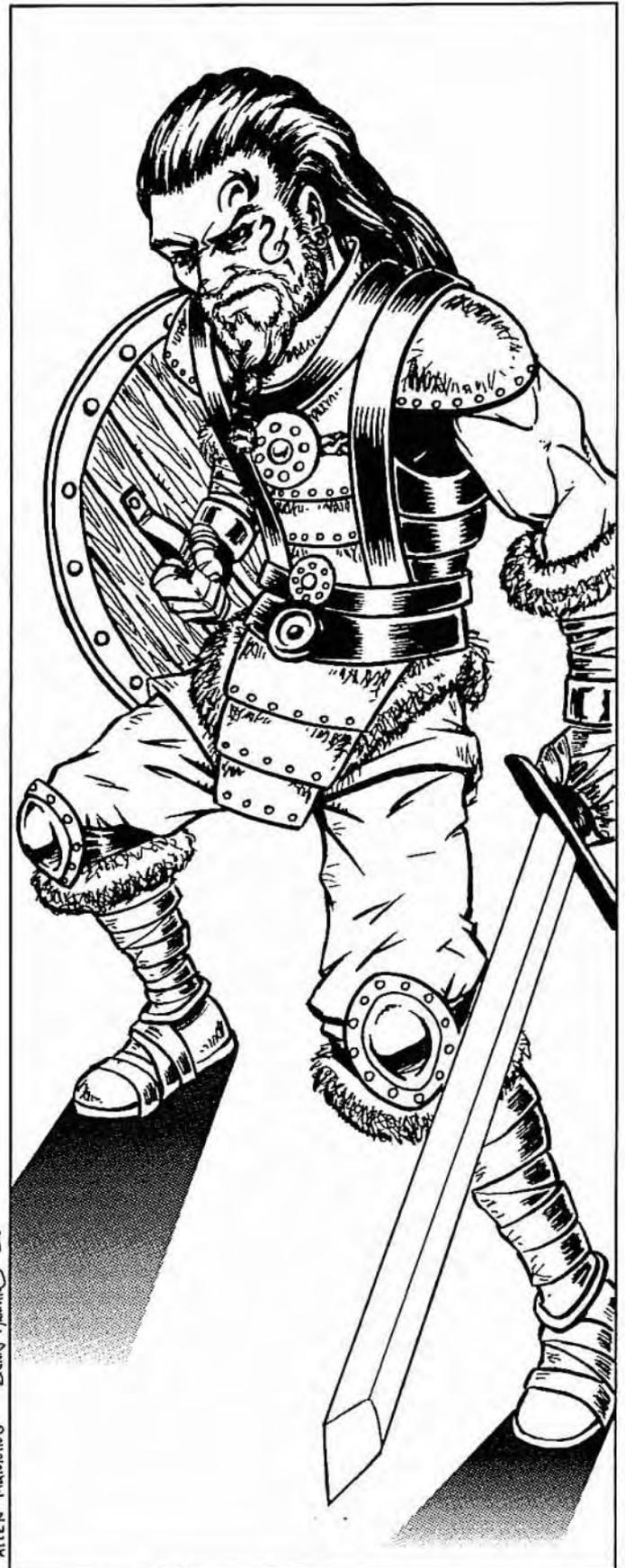
ing of Elves, Trolls, Ogres, Bearmen, and the canine races and may be refugees from the Elf-Dwarf War. The Algor-dah avoid contact with outsiders, preferring to remain hidden among the rocky crags of their mountain homes, but have on occasion traded with the Murkando Highlanders or the Dwarves of Northolme. They find the Wolfen Empire tolerable as long as the Empire leaves the mountains to the Algor-dah.

*The Buaeliah of the Koerdian Mountains:* [boo-ALE-lee-ah] The Buaeliah are really members of the Buel Highlanders of the Koerdian Foothills who have fled high into the inhospitable mountain crags of the Koerdian Mountains to “preserve their heritage” in the face of the Buel’s absorption into the Western Empire. They are one of the last bastions of “true” Buel culture and traditions. The Buaeliah live in far mountain caves or sheltered in small valley “cantons” (village-states) where they seek to preserve their Buel heritage. So far, their remote living has kept the Westerners out and so they remain peaceful isolationists who seek no direct confrontation with the Western armies. However, their habit of harboring “Buelist” raiders, who have fled from Western authorities into the mountains, may one day have them branded “Buelist terrorists” themselves.

*The Mudarah of the Old Kingdom Mountains:* [moo-DAR-rah] Another group of mountain hermits, the Mudarah live high in the frozen recesses of the Old Kingdom Mountains, living mostly in caves and simple shelters. Mostly Rahu-Man Giants, Titans, or Algor (with a smattering of smaller races), the Mudarah seek to ignore the world as such. Their remote choice of home has done well to keep outsiders away, though the occasional “trespasser” is usually chased away using ghostly scare tactics that may be the source of some Yeti sightings. They have gained a legendary reputation as sages and enlightened scholars and many young spiritualists seeking “enlightenment” have journeyed high into the Old Kingdom Mountains in search of these “enlightened hermits.” Little else is known of these xenophobic hermits.

## Northern Shipwrights (or the Sea Barbarians)

Plying the cold, grueling waters of the icy northern seas, the Northern Shipwrights (also called the Sea Barbarians) are a stout and hardy group. Piloting their surprisingly sophisticated longboats and navigating the oceans of Palladium, these seagoing barbarians are sometimes seen trading and/or raiding as far south as the Groff Estates or Kighfalton! Of all the “barbaric” peoples of Palladium, the Sea Barbarians are as infamous and feared by the civilized world as the Horse Barbarian Hordes. Known mostly as raiders by the hapless inhabitants of civilized coastal towns, the Sea Barbarians have gained such a feared reputation that the very sight of one of their dragon-headed longboats is often enough to cause alarm bells to sound and people to run for shelter, regardless of the ship’s reasons for the visit! Since the dragon-headed longboats of the Northern Shipwrights bear so much resemblance to the Dragon boats of the Wolfen Empire it is likely that Sea Barbarian raiders may be partly responsible for the bad reputation given to the Wolfen, particularly when Coyles or Wolfen are present in the raiding party!



The Northern Shipwrights live in small to medium village communities, typically in wooden longhouses shared by members of an extended family or clan. The clan/village is typically led by the clan elder (can be male or female), a council of elders

or warriors/shaman, or by a single warlord or shaman. The culture is as rich, complex, and advanced as many of the “civilized” cultures, with a long oral tradition of stories and epic poems, unique art, music, and ceremony, and a tradition of literacy among the intellectuals and leaders (speak and read their own unique languages which appear to share a common ancestor with the Druidic Oghrone). Body ornamentation is simple and straightforward, typically being limited to simple metal and stone jewelry, though the gold and silver wire-work are quite advanced. Dress is typically very functional and warm. In fact, the level of technological and social sophistication among the Northern Shipwrights is so good that most members of the Northern Shipwright communities consider themselves as much a nation as Byzantium, the Western Empire, or the Wolfen Empire and demand to be acknowledged as such! Were it not for their “barbaric” nature of dress, their enjoyment of raiding/pillaging, and their clannish, non-unified nature, they might well gain such recognition. An Earth equivalent to the Northern Shipwrights would be the medieval Vikings of Scandinavia.

The current Northern Shipwrights are significantly more subdued than they once were. Once feared as pirates and raiders, the presence of Byzantium and the Wolfen Empire has helped to quell many of the more bloodthirsty raiders who once were the plague of the coastal towns. As a result, many Northern Shipwright communities are turning more and more towards peaceful trade – particularly the Nyurg. Some clans, however, maintain their warlike ways – particularly the fierce Skyold of the Land of the Damned who, on occasion, even raid small villages of Byzantium! Byzantium has recently set aside a small fleet to end these raids, and hopes to have the Skyold raiders fully subdued in the next five to ten years.

**Lifestyle/Organization:** Fully or mostly sedentary Chiefdoms living in permanent towns, but fond of going on long exploration and/or raiding expeditions and with a history of settling and colonizing new lands.

**Technology Level:** Steel-age with advanced shipbuilding and boatbuilding. Technology is surprisingly high among the Northern Shipwrights. Their shipbuilding skill is at least as good as that of the Wolfen Empire, and even Byzantium has been known to study Northern Shipwright boatbuilding! Metallurgy is as good as is available in the civilized world (or better among the villages with Dwarfen and/or Kobold members). Armor is typically light for mobility and buoyancy at sea, though Dwarfen members are known to wear heavy armor even when at sea, figuring they’d sink anyway! Even some non-Dwarves wear such heavy armor, since the cold, rough seas of the north will kill a strong swimmer just as quickly as they would a weak one! Most villages are set close to the sea with an extensive system of docks, dry docks, and shipyards. Defensive walls made of sharpened logs or stockade fences are common and stone construction is not unheard of.

**Food and Resources:** Fishing, hunting, gathering, trading, and raiding, supplemented by farming and herding. Trade with (and raiding of) the civilized world has brought back an amazing variety of foods and valuables. Long trade voyages have even brought back a treasure-trove of exotic southern spices. Crops include wheat, rye, barley, oats, beets, turnips, carrots, lettuce, and cabbage. Domesticated animals include dogs (for hunting, companionship, and even war), cattle, sheep, goats, and pigs.

**Primary Races and Classes:** Human, Wolfen, Coyle, Dwarf, Kobold, Orc, Goblin/Hobgoblin, or Ogre, with the occasional Troll, Bearman, Gnome, or Elf. Sometimes Algor Frost Giants have been known to work with or live around these barbarians, though they almost never go to sea with them due to their size. O.C.C.s of the Northern Shipwrights include Native Tribesman or Vagabond/Peasant/Farmer (35%), Barbarian or Berserker (25%), Sailor, Pirate, or Mariner (20%), Ranger or Mercenary Warrior (10%), Priest or Shaman (5%), Were-Shaman or Druid (3%), or other (2%). Alignments are predominantly Unprincipled, Anarchist, or Miscreant, with the occasional Scrupulous, Aberrant, or Diabolic alignment, and the freewheeling Northern Shipwrights typically have a great regard for their personal freedom and identity.

**Range and Areas Settled:** The Northern Shipwrights are exclusive to the remote, frozen coasts and Fjords of the far north, predominantly along the coast of the Northern Wilderness and Hinterlands, the Dragon’s Claw, and the Land of the Damned. They sometimes live within territory claimed by the Barbarian Nations of the Northern Hinterlands. Legends from the Alg, however, also talk of great expeditions by Fjor the Discoverer across the great oceans to the east, reportedly even discovering and (temporarily?) colonizing a distant land (continent?) which he named “Far Land.” If the reports are true then there exists an undiscovered continent to the east. Most scholars discount this new land as barbaric myth, however.

**Skills and abilities common to the Northern Shipwrights:** All Northern Shipwright characters receive the following bonuses and skills regardless of O.C.C.:

Boat Building *or* Shipwright (+10%; or +20% to the skill if already known due to O.C.C., etc.).

Fishing *or* Seamanship (+5%; or +15% to the skill if already known due to O.C.C., etc.).

Navigation (+5%; or +15% to the skill if already known due to O.C.C., etc.)

### Some Tribes/Clans of Note

*The Alg of the Northern Wilderness:* [ahlg] The Alg are a proud culture of warrior-sailors known for their long, oceangoing travels, which often end in the savage raiding of coastal towns. The Alg, who inhabit the rocky fjords of the north coast of the Northern Wilderness, have settled down somewhat to a more peaceful maritime life, yet still launch the occasional raids of rival villages or down the coast of the Eastern Territories to as far south as New Crest! Past travels have gone as far south as the Floenry Islands and, if the legends of Fjor the Discoverer can be believed, far to the East to a new continent! The Alg were once greatly feared by the citizens of Byzantium and the once divided Wolfen tribes, raiding the coastal villages of both with great enthusiasm and once coming close to driving the Wolfen tribes from the northern coasts! Recently, however, increased naval vigilance by the Byzantium Navy and the unification of the Twelve Tribes into the mighty Wolfen Empire have posed too strong a threat to the divided feudal village-states of the Alg, who have given up raiding against both the Wolfen and Byzantium in favor of trade. In fact, a mutual “warrior’s respect” that has grown over the years of conflict between the Alg and the Wolfen and has led to a sort of quasi-cooperation: in exchange for trade concessions and an end to the raiding of

Wolfen villages the Wolfen do not interfere with the Alg's long raids into the Eastern Territories and have, in fact, aided many such raids in order to spy on and disrupt their southern rivals. Some Wolfen Senators have even proposed the peaceful admittance of the Alg into the Empire as their own member state! Alg are mostly Human and Coyle, with many Wolfen, Orcish, and Dwarven members and the occasional Algor. Alg are fierce devotees of the Northern gods, which is reflected in their speech with phrases like, "by the hammer of Hoknar!" and, "Od's Eye!"

*The Nyurg of the Dragon's Claw:* [nee-YURG] The Nyurg of Dragon's Claw are distantly related to the Alg and share a common ancestry. Culturally, the differences between the two are subtle and most outsiders can't tell an Alg from a Nyurg. The differences are great enough for the two to consider themselves vastly different, however, which has led to conflict in the past. This conflict has subsided somewhat as the two separate "tribes" make amends and grow closer every year in what the Nyurg have dubbed "Northmen's Unity." The Nyurg once savagely raided the rich coasts of Byzantium, even establishing colonies there and claiming rule of the island nation at one point. However, the new strength of Byzantium has turned the Nyurg to the more peaceful pursuits of fishing and trade with their former Byzantium victims and Alg rivals. They still launch the occasional raids into the Land of the Damned or islands of the Sea of Despair, particularly against the still-savage Skyold, but are mostly "civilized" now, with many clan elders calling for "Nyurg Unification" or even nationhood! Note that the Nyurg share a possible common ancestry and culture with the Kiridin Barbarians (see Forest People for more information).

*The Skyold of the Land of the Damned:* [SKEE-yold] Of all the Northern Shipwrights, the Skyold stick the closest to their piratical heritage, becoming the scourge of the Sea of Despair. They are fierce, bloodthirsty raiders who ply the northern waters raiding coastal cities for booty and slaves in campaigns of rapine and plunder. They take particular delight in raiding villages on the Island of Lemaria, which only heightens the Lemarian's hatred for men, though the increased defensive strength of the Lemarian army and navy have made these raids increasingly costly to the Skyold. The Skyold even raid some of the smaller Byzantium villages on occasion, using the fog as cover to slip in past the Byzantium naval defenses. These raids, despite the relatively little damage they produce, have caused such an outcry of rage from Byzantium's citizens that a plan is in the works to launch a "cleansing" armada of Naval and Marine forces to "sweep the seas and coasts clean" of the hated Skyold. Skyold are mostly Coyle, Human, Ogre, and Orc, with a good number of Dwarves and Goblins/Hobgoblins thrown in.

## South Ocean Sea People (or the Paradise Boatmen)

The South Ocean Sea People (also called the Paradise Boatmen) are either laid-back and easy-going groups known for their friendly demeanor and acceptance of strangers (a trait that sometimes proves disastrous when raiders and slavers arrive) or known as fierce, savage warriors and headhunters. Living in small communities along the warm tropical islands of the south

or the tropical rivers and lakes, the Paradise Boatmen live in, on, and around the sea. The Paradise Boatmen live in small tribal/clan communities close to the sea, from which a majority of their food and resources come. Shelters vary, typically being simple wood huts or stilt-elevated houses. Some groups are nomadic while others have lived in the same areas for generations. Communities are usually led by a chief or elder.

Cultures are either laid-back and laissez-faire, or clannish and robust. Often the monotony of daily life is broken up by elaborate music- and dance-driven festivals or ritual feasts. Music is typically fast, booming, and percussion-heavy. Dress is rarely more than a simple loincloth or grass skirt, since temperatures rarely drop much below room temperature. Body ornamentation varies from group to group but usually includes handmade shell and/or pearl jewelry and simple-to-elaborate tribal tattoos. Some cultures are known to have detailed tattooing (body and face) that serves as a sign of tribal rank/status and many include elaborate and unique body piercing or other ornamentation. Earth equivalents to the South Ocean Sea People might be the Polynesians of the South Pacific, the Arawak and Carib of the Caribbean Sea, or the Yali and Dayak of Indonesia.

The Paradise Boatmen of the Yin-Sloth Jungles are sometimes considered by Scholars to be a subculture of the Tropical River Boatmen or Jungle Savages, and many tribes or "nations" are sometimes classified with the Agrarian Tribesmen. South Ocean Sea people are often curious and friendly, swimming out to greet incoming ships from the civilized world. Civilized travelers beware, however, because a few tribes of these people are quite violent and even cannibalistic!

Lifestyle/Organization: Partly sedentary Bands or Tribes. Travel by boat from summer to winter quarters living in temporary or seasonal tent, hut, wigwam, or communal stilted long-house villages. Some are semi-permanent farmers while others are fully nomadic.

Technology Level: Stone-age with tools constructed primarily of shell and bone. Favored weapons include spears, clubs/cudgels, axes, and simple bows. Tanning and leatherwork, pottery, simple shell-based jewelry and carving, and weaving are the typical industries of these tribes. Some cultures have even been known to build huge monolithic statues of stone, many of which were built by cultures long since disappeared and lead to many an archeological mystery.

Food and Resources: The vast majority of their food comes from fishing and/or shellfish gathering and kelp gathering supplemented by simple farming, hunting, or occasional raid or trade. Crops include rice, bananas, coconuts, pineapples, edible palms, and tropical yams. Domesticated animals include chickens, pigs, and even seabirds. Some groups are even known to engage in cannibalism, either for food or ritual.

Primary Races and Classes: Usually Human, Orc, Ogre, Dogre, Tezcat, Elven, Goblin/Hobgoblin, Troll, or even Hytril! O.C.C.s common to the Paradise Boatmen are Native Tribesman (60%), Savage Warrior (20%), Barbarian (10%), Shaman (5%), Were-Shaman or Druid (3%), or other (2%). Alignments are predominantly Principled, Scrupulous, Unprincipled, Anarchist, or Aberrant.

Range and Areas Settled: Found all throughout the coasts and islands of the southern ocean. They are most common to areas of the Floenry Islands, the Land of the South Winds, or the coastal Yin-Sloth Jungles.

**Skills and abilities common to the South Ocean Sea People:** All Sea People characters receive the following bonuses and skills regardless of O.C.C.:

Boat Building (+10%; or +20% to the skill if already known due to O.C.C., etc.)

Fishing (+10%; or +20% to the skill if already known due to O.C.C.)

Swimming (+10%; or +20% to the skill if already known due to O.C.C., etc.)

## Some Tribes/Clans of Note

*The Miala of the Land of the South Winds:* [mee-AH-lah] Living along the southwestern coasts and islands of the Land of the South Winds, the Miala are a noble, yet often savage race of hunter-warriors. The distinguishing characteristic of the Miala is their profuse tattooing, which denotes family status, tribal rank, warrior/villager status, and ancestry. These tattoos cover the entire body, including the face! At various times in history the Miala have gone from peaceful fishers to savage headhunters and back, often depending on the chief in charge or the needs of the village. Times of want usually spur these bouts of violence and cannibalism, but the appearance of the occasional "Witch Doctors" (evil Shaman or Witches who drive the tribe into a murderous wrath) can cause this as well. The Miala once ruled most of the coast of the Land of the South Winds, but have been steadily pushed west by the growth of the Land of the South Winds, which has led to conflict with the Niminalli (see Swamp Men) as the Miala encroach on Niminalli lands.

*The Puoy of the Floenry Islands:* [pooh'WOY] The Puoy are a group of peaceful and friendly seagoers who ply the warm, tropical waters of the Floenry Islands in their dugout, outrigger canoes. They establish simple wood-hut villages along the coasts, fishing, gathering shellfish, and hunting the wild pigs that live inland. Dress is simple and utilitarian with simple shell ornamentation and simple tribal tattooing used mostly for decorative or ceremonial purposes. The Puoy, who seem to have no known enemies beyond the occasional pirates, raiders, or slavers, can sometimes be quite open and curious to outsiders, often even swimming out to the ship to greet the new explorers (at least until this friendliness backfires when slavers or raiders arrive). The Puoy are predominantly Human or Orc, with the occasional other race (including Hytril) added in.

## Swamp Men (or Wetlands Barbarians)

A seemingly savage and enigmatic group that inhabits the marshes and wetlands of the Palladium World, the Swamp Men (or Wetlands Barbarians) are a strong and mysterious group who are often as feared and shunned as the Jungle Savages. Living in the harsh, dangerous swamplands of the Palladium World, the Swamp Men have gained a reputation as a fierce and savage group, though a lot of this is speculation based on their appearance and place of living. Some of the strangest styles of dress and ornamentation are known to these cultures, which is perhaps why they have gained such a dark reputation. Otherwise, little is seen of these people save the stories of the few adventurers (and slavers) to travel into the depths of the murky marshlands and

survive. Rumors of dark cultism and even ritual cannibalism among the Swamp Men persist among the civilized world, although a lot of this is based on no real evidence at all.

In general, the Swamp Men are content to live by themselves and shun the outside world; however, they are fiercely independent and territorial, often killing outsiders on sight. This often leads to expeditions to "purge" the swamps of the "savages," which in turn, has often led to a cycle of violence and guerilla war. Most are nomadic hunter/fisher/gatherers or simple village farmers. Others live off of raiding and banditry. Shelters are often hide or flax/cloth tents, wood or reed lean-tos or wigwams, or simple dugouts. Swamp Man societies are usually run by a chief, clan elder, warlord, shaman/witch, or tribal council (typically of elders or warriors). Tribes are led by chiefs, shaman, or by elders or councils of tribal leaders.

Tribal societies are often robust warrior cultures, with loud, drum-heavy music and a "live life to the fullest, for tomorrow we die" attitude. Clothing is typically loincloths and leggings well adapted to the marshy conditions of their home. Body ornamentation includes handmade jewelry and simple-to-elaborate tribal tattoos. Some cultures are known to have detailed body paint and/or hair styles and elaborate and unique body piercings or other ornamentation. They prefer to live closely with the wetlands they inhabit and their tribal community and shun strangers, since such strangers are typically raiders from rival tribes, bandits, or the feared slavers from the civilized world! An Earth equivalent to the Swamp Men might be the Seminole of North America, the Karankawa of the Gulf Coast of Texas, or the Garifuna of Belize.

**Lifestyle/Organization:** Partly nomadic Bands or Tribes. Travel by foot from summer to winter quarters living in temporary or seasonal tent, hut, wigwam, or stilt-house villages. Some are semi-permanent farmers while others are fully nomadic.

**Technology Level:** Stone-age with tools constructed primarily of shell and bone. Favored weapons include spears, clubs/cudgels, axes, and simple bows. Tanning and leatherwork, pottery, simple jewelry and carving, and weaving are the typical industries of these tribes.

**Food and Resources:** The vast majority of their food comes from fishing and/or shellfish and plant gathering supplemented by simple farming, hunting, or occasional raid or trade. Crops include rice, beans, squash, cabbage, and in tropical areas, bananas and yams. Some groups are even known to engage in cannibalism, either for food or ritual. Domestication of animals is rare and is usually limited to dogs.

**Primary Races and Classes:** Usually Orc, Ogre, Dogre, Lizard Man, Human, Tezcat, Grimbor, Elven, Giant, Goblin/Hobgoblin, or Troll. O.C.C.s common to the Swamp Men include Native Tribesman (45%), Savage Warrior (30%), Barbarian (15%), Shaman (5%), Were-Shaman or Druid (3%), or other (2%). Alignments are predominantly Scrupulous, Unprincipled, Anarchist, Miscreant, or Aberrant.

**Range and Areas Settled:** Any warm tropical or semitropical march or swamp. They are most common to areas of the Yin-Sloth Jungles, the Land of the South Winds, or the Wynglade Marshes of the Eastern Territories.

**Skills and abilities common to the Swamp Men:** All Swamp Man characters receive the following bonuses and skills regardless of O.C.C.:

Boat Building (+10%; or +20% to the skill if already known due to O.C.C., etc.)

Fishing (+10%; or +20% to the skill if already known due to O.C.C.)

Swimming (+10%; or +20% to the skill if already known due to O.C.C., etc.)

+1 to save vs disease.

### Some Tribes/Clans of Note

*The Niminalli of the Land of the South Winds and Yin-Sloth Jungles:* [nim-in-NAH-lee] The Niminalli are not an individual tribe but a confederation of separate cultures that inhabit the swampy tropical marshlands along the coasts and river basins of the western Land of the South Winds and eastern Yin-Sloth Jungles. These confederated tribes, who vary in dress and style and even species, have banded together against the Western Slavers who occasionally appear at their shores. They are highly xenophobic and fear and avoid all outsiders, which is not surprising considering their troubles with slavers. The Niminalli (whose name means “people of the wet lands” in the Niminalli trade language) are further united in repelling the “painted invaders” from the east (the Miala; see South Ocean Sea People above). The various tribes of the Niminalli all share the habit of building stilt-houses (which house either nuclear or extended families, depending on tribe) and traveling in simple hide or dugout canoes, though the size and make of these canoes and houses do vary. Niminalli tribes vary by species but typically include Lizard Men, Ogres/Dogres, Tezcat, Humans, Orcs, Elves, Trolls, Goblins/Hobgoblins, or even Changelings.

*The Warnalla of the Wynglade Marshes:* [war-NAH-la] A noble and savage people, the Warnalla have been a thorn in the side of the Eastern Territories for years. Like the Cham-tu of the Mound Hills (see Highlanders), the Warnalla claim ancestral possession of the Peningshir peninsula and likewise fight a guerrilla campaign against the Easterners. Although their goals are similar, past rivalry and previous conflicts between the Warnalla and the Cham-tu have stifled attempts at a lasting alliance, though the two do occasionally join forces against a common foe (the Easterners). However, the two are just as likely to fight one another, which the Eastern armies have taken advantage of, pitting the two forces against each other. The Warnalla are mostly Human and Orcish (with a relative handful of other races, mostly Ogre and Goblin/Hobgoblin) and dress simply in loincloths and leggings and are decorated by tattoos, war paints, body piercing, and outlandish hairstyles.

*The Zazalli of the Great Bog of the Yin-Sloth Jungles:* [zah-ZAH-lee] The brutal and bloodthirsty Zazalli of the Yin-Sloth Periphery are as much a thorn in the side of the Western Empire colonists as the Warnalla (above) are a thorn in the side of the Eastern Territories. Unlike the Warnalla, however, the Zazalli (who live in the “undesirable” marshlands of the great bog) fight not for their home but merely for the joy of raiding the “weak” new settlers. The Zazalli worship Michla-Da, the Monkey Goddess, and thrive on the chaos she represents, raiding the Western Settlements (or neighboring native tribes) for booty, slaves, and trophy heads. Bizarre cannibalistic rituals are also common, particularly when a Witch or Priest of Darkness of Michla-Da takes control of the tribe(s). These raids have grown increasingly bold, forcing the Western Empire to launch numerous and costly

“cleansing” raids into the marshlands, which sometimes leads to the slaughter and/or enslavement of innocent tribes mistaken for Zazalli. Zazalli tribes are mostly Tezcat, Dogre, Ogre, Orc, Goblin/Hobgoblin, Grimbor, or Troll, with the occasional Human or Changeling.

## Tropical River Boatmen (or Lake People)

Living among the rivers, lakes, and bayous of the jungles and rain forests of the Palladium World, the Tropical River Boatmen are almost a freshwater equivalent of the Paradise Boatmen or a waterborne equivalent of the Jungle Savages. This has led many scholars to classify the various Lake People tribes as a member of either of those groups, or as members of the Swamp Man cultures. In fact, the Tropical River Boatmen classification may very well be the greatest point of debate among these scholars! Living along the marshy, tropical rivers and lakes of the southern jungles, the Lake People live in small tribal/clan communities close to the rivers and lakes. Some groups are nomadic while others have lived in the same areas for generations. Communities are usually led by a chief, shaman, or council of elders.

Culturally, the Lake People tribes are very diverse, with belief structures that revolve around the rivers or lakes they inhabit. All are as comfortable in the water as they are on dry land. Music is often eerie and resonant, indicative of running waters or exotic bird calls or insect noises. Dress is rarely more than a simple loincloth, since temperatures rarely drop much below room temperature. Body ornamentation varies from group to group, but usually includes handmade shell jewelry, elaborate feathered headdresses and capes, and simple-to-elaborate tribal tattoos. Some cultures are known to have detailed tattooing (body and face) that serves as a sign of tribal rank/status and many include elaborate and unique body piercings or other ornamentation. An Earth equivalent to the Lake People might be the Brou of the Mekong River in Cambodia, the Assurini of the Amazon River basin, or the Warao of the Orinoco River in Venezuela.

**Lifestyle/Organization:** Partly nomadic Bands or Tribes. Travel by boat from summer to winter quarters living in temporary or seasonal tent, hut, wigwam, or stilt-house villages. Some are semi-permanent farmers while others are fully nomadic.

**Technology Level:** Stone-age with tools constructed primarily of shell and bone. Favored weapons include spears, clubs/cudgels, axes, and simple bows. Tanning and leatherwork, feather-work, pottery, simple jewelry and carving, and weaving are the typical industries of these tribes.

**Food and Resources:** The vast majority of their food comes from fishing and/or shellfish gathering and plant gathering supplemented by simple farming, hunting, or occasional raid or trade. Some groups are even known to engage in cannibalism, either for food or ritual. Crops include rice, beans, squash, cabbage, bananas, and yams. Domestication of animals is rare and is usually limited to dogs, pigs, or chickens.

**Primary Races and Classes:** Usually Lizard Man, Tezcat, Human, Orc, Ogre, Dogre, Grimbor, Elven, Goblin/Hobgoblin, or Troll. O.C.C.s common to the Tropical River Boatmen are Native Tribesman (45%), Savage Warrior (30%), Barbarian War-

rior (15%), Shaman (5%), Were-Shaman or Druid (3%), or other (2%). Alignments are predominantly Unprincipled, Anarchist, Miscreant, or Aberrant.

**Range and Areas Settled:** Found all throughout the lakes, rivers, inland and delta islands, and swamps of the southern Yin-Sloth and South Winds jungles.

**Skills and abilities common to the Tropical River Boatmen:** All Tropical River Boatmen characters receive the following bonuses and skills regardless of O.C.C.:

Boat Building (+10%; or +20% to the skill if already known due to O.C.C., etc.)

Fishing (+10%; or +20% to the skill if already known due to O.C.C.)

Swimming (+10%; or +20% to the skill if already known due to O.C.C., etc.)

### Some Tribes/Clans of Note

*The Garrimo of the Land of the South Winds:* [gair-REE-mo] The Garrimo inhabit the inland lakes, river basins, and river islands of the Land of the South Winds and eastern Yin-Sloth Jungles where their isolation keeps them relatively safe from the slavers who threaten the more coastal groups. The Garrimo live in stilt villages and houseboats along the various tropical rivers of the area and have been classified by many as Jungle Savages and/or Swamp Men because of this. The main difference that has led to their special classification is their use of houseboats and their highly nomadic lifestyle. They dress simply in loincloths and/or strategically placed "loin-gourds" with tattooing restricted to blooded warriors and shaman/religious leaders. Typical members are Human, Goblin/Hobgoblin, Lizard Man, Tezcat, or Ogre/Dogre (surprisingly few Orcs), yet a large number of Hobgoblin members exist (one of the largest per capita Hobgoblin populations anywhere), leading to theories that they are refugees from a legendary Hobgoblin kingdom which may or may not have ever existed in the Land of the South Winds.

*The Nuala of the Yin-Sloth Jungles:* [new-WAH-lah] Living in strange, stilted, floating, or semi-floating lake barges, the Nuala have established a large, extended network of temporary trade and fishing villages. The Nuala frequently move from place to place (seemingly at random) where they will "test the waters" with the more permanent indigenous cultures and (if open and not hostile) will establish temporary trade arrangements with the natives before moving on. The more "fixed" structures in the villages are left behind and abandoned, sometimes to be used again when the tribe (or another Nuala tribe) returns to the area. The large percentage of Lizard Men amongst this group (75%+) has led many scholars to believe this quasi-nomadic lifestyle is a means of avoiding detection by Western slavers, who love to capture Lizard Men for the Arenas. The remainder of the tribe is typically made up of Grimbor, Elf, Human, Orc, Goblin/Hobgoblin, and Ogre/Dogre members.

## Wandering Tribes

The most familiar "barbarians" to any civilized man are likely to be the Wandering (or Lost) Tribes who wander the Palladium World in a truly nomadic life. Unlike most "true" bar-

barian cultures, the Lost Tribes (who *never* consider themselves "lost," however "non-directional" they might be at the time) never stay in one place or climate for long, instead traveling the world in nomadic caravans. This leaves them less "attuned" to any one climatic zone, but better able to cope with any climate, even urban! In many ways the Lost Tribes are the most truly nomadic of people, wandering through forest and farmland, jungle and tundra, wherever the fancy takes them. These groups are quite advanced socially and technologically despite their "barbaric" nomadic lifestyle. They typically wander as a clan/tribe from place to place in large troops or caravans of wagons and pack and riding animals (usually dependent on local climate), living in their wagons or tents, and owning only that which they can carry with them. "Troops" of Wandering Tribes are led usually by the patriarch or matriarch of the clan, but sometimes by a shaman/priest/mystic or by a council of elders.

Of all the barbarian cultures, they are the most open to strangers, at least when it comes to trade and gossip or traveling together temporarily (if heading in the same direction). However, they remain quite clannish and tend not to truly accept strangers into the "inner sanctum" of the clan unless the stranger in question has done something of great help and honor to the clan, such as saving the lives of clan members. When and if the stranger *does* reach this acceptance they are treated with incredible love and warmth, often becoming honorary members of the clan. The clans maintain a high sense of clan loyalty and honor (yet a very strong sense of independence and freedom), and typically have complex and detailed sets of rules and customs, and a friendly distrust towards strangers. Most see outsiders as potential trade partners, theft victims, and/or threats, but will open up amazingly to those who earn their trust and respect. This trust and friendship is hard-won, but true. However, if this trust is betrayed the clan takes serious offense to the betrayal, and clans have been known to harbor grudges over such slights that can last years or even generations!

The culture of the various troops and tribes varies dramatically, but is typically either very robust and flamboyant (with bright clothes and cheerful music) or else very dour and inclusive (with drab colors and mournful music). Members of the nomadic clans typically dress in a variety of styles that vary from clan to clan, some dressing in bright, extravagant colors while others dress quite plainly. The latter rarely adorn themselves with jewelry or tattoos while the former regularly cover themselves with both. An Earth equivalent to the Wandering Tribes would be the Gypsies of Europe, traveling acting companies and bards, or even the modern drifters and "motor-nomads" who travel in "packs" of motorcycles or RVs! Unlike most barbarian cultures, the Wandering Tribesmen usually actively *encourage* their members to go out on their own and "see the world" and/or "sow their wild oats" for a limited time before returning to the clan.

**Lifestyle/Organization:** Fully or partly nomadic Bands or Tribes. Travel by foot, animal, wagon, or other conveyance from place to place. Some tribes settle or squat in temporary or seasonal camps.

**Technology Level:** Typically iron-age. Technology is surprisingly varied and any clan often possesses a myriad of interesting items from fine silk cloth to artfully done jewelry or statuettes to incense and fine foods to well-crafted weapons or armor.

**Food and Resources:** Nearly all of their food comes from trade, theft, gathering, or hunting supplemented by herding large groups of livestock that travel with the caravan. The semi-sedentary tribes occasionally engage in limited farming based on whatever happen to be the local crops of choice. Domesticated animals include horses, donkeys, dogs, goats, and cattle.

**Primary Races and Classes:** Usually Human, Goblin/Hobgoblin, Elf, Gnome, Dwarf, Changeling, Orc, Ogre, Troll, Coyle, or Kobold. O.C.C.s common to the Wandering Tribes are Vagabond or Native Tribesman (50%), Thief or Assassin (25%), Barbarian Warrior or Savage Warrior (10%), Ranger or Mercenary Warrior (5%), Shaman, Priest, or Psychic (usually Psi-Sensitive) (5%), Were-Shaman or Druid (3%), or other (2%). The Wandering Tribes typically maintain a high sense of personal freedom and a let-the-buyer-beware attitude, and as a result, alignments are predominantly Unprincipled, Anarchist, Miscreant, or Aberrant.

**Range and Areas Settled:** Conceivably anywhere! Being so utterly nomadic it is possible to encounter Wandering Tribes anywhere in the Palladium World, although many troupes prefer to follow a set "migratory" path.

**Note:** Since the Wandering Tribes possess no "Native Soil" as such, the "barbaric" O.C.C.s (such as Native Tribesman or Savage Warrior) gain no special bonus to wilderness and wilderness-related skills for being on their "native soil." They instead gain a flat bonus to all Wilderness and related skills (as defined by O.C.C.) equal to *half* the normal bonuses earned due to "Native Soil" (this bonus applies to *all* climates, but bonus does not apply to non-barbaric O.C.C.s like Vagabond or Ranger). Also, their familiarity with the "civilized" world means that any penalties received by barbaric O.C.C.s for visiting "civilized" areas are cut in half.

**Skills and abilities common to the Wandering Tribes:** All Lost Tribe characters receive the following bonuses and skills regardless of O.C.C.:

Horsemanship: General *or* Teamster (+10%; or +25% to the skill if already known due to O.C.C., etc.).

Two Domestic skills of choice (+5%; or +15% to the skill if already known due to O.C.C., etc.).

All penalties for visiting "civilized" areas, if any, are halved.

Barbaric O.C.C.s possess *no* "Native Soil" as such, gaining instead a flat bonus to all Wilderness and related skills (as defined by O.C.C.) equal to *half* the normal bonuses earned due to "Native Soil." This bonus is applicable in *all* climates.

## Some Tribes/Clans of Note

**The Gallietta Elves of the Old Kingdom:** [gal-lee-ET-tah] Wandering the dangerous stretches of the Old Kingdom, the Gallietta Elves claim ancestry to the Elven Kings of old, and still claim the now-desolate stretches of the Old Kingdom and Baalgor Wastelands as their "birthright." However, the dangerous presence of "monster" races and "barbaric" tribes in these areas forces the Gallietta into a nomadic lifestyle, traveling in huge caravans of wagons, horses, and pack animals. Unlike the colorful, boisterous Valagi, the Gallietta dress drably (often in rags) and have little in the way of humor. Most drink heavily and complain about the "lost old days" they never knew (the oldest are still eight long Elven generations past the fall of Baalgor). They wander the wastes from "holy area to holy area"

(Imperial Elven ruins), avoid or, if necessary, fight monster/barbarian Hordes (they still call them the "barbarian invaders"), and pin all blame for anything that ever went wrong on the heads of the Dwarves. They are overwhelmingly Elf (90%+) with a smattering of others (mostly Gossai and Gnome), but with *no Dwarves (or Quorian)*, who they still hold a grudge against.

**The Morpherri:** [moor-FAIR-ree] The Morpherri Changelings are a group of ambiguous nomads who seek to always blend in wherever they go. Being mostly Changelings (95%+), the Morpherri are constantly on the move, hoping to stay mobile enough to avoid detection as Changelings and avoid the occasional Changeling Inquisitions. Morpherri "clans" are typically small family groups who use their Changeling abilities to assume the shape of the most plentiful race(s) of the area. The Morpherri will live "hidden" as a "plentiful" race in an area for a short time before finding an excuse to say "goodbye" to their friends and neighbors and move on to a new location. Once the elders have decided it is time to "move on," one of the clan (typically a Ranger or Barbarian/Savage) is sent scouting ahead to find a new place to settle. Once a potential site has been found, the "scout" studies it in secret, searching for any sign of excessive Changeling hatred or suspicion and determining the "most prevalent race(s)." Once a site has been chosen, the clan packs up and moves to the new location, assuming a new shape (if necessary) as members of a "prevalent" race along the way. Once every ten years Morpherri "reunions" are held in some remote, predetermined location. At the reunions "migratory" plans are worked out, news is exchanged (including warnings of Inquisitions or other acts of Changeling hatred), and mate couplings are arranged. The reunions end with farewells to friends and family members who have "joined a new family" and, with the selection of the location and date of the next reunion, they part company and break off all communication until the next reunion. The location of the reunion is known only to the "heads of the clans," who tell no one except their "heir" in case they die.

**The Wandering Valagia:** [val-LAH-jee-ah] The Wandering Valagia are the classic Wandering Tribe in many ways. Traveling together in small family "troops" from place to place at random (the leading "elder" often chooses to go "in that direction" as the whim takes him or her), the Valagia make a living trading goods (made or stolen) or services (often fortune-telling, whether the "seer" has any mystical ability or not) for food or other goods. This tendency for the occasional "necessary" theft or fraud has earned them a reputation with many as thieves not to be trusted ("never trust a Valag!" is a common saying). However, "true" Valagi seers (typically Psi-Sensitives or Psi-Mystics) are renowned for their accuracy and showmanship and often demand high prices. The Valagia are a mirthful and fun-loving, if clannish and opportunistic bunch who believe in living life to its absolute fullest. They sing loudly, talk loudly and with great embellishment, and dress in vibrant, outrageous clothing, including baggy pantaloons and silk scarves, and lots of jewelry and tattoos. Many are Bards, Minstrels, Actors, and/or other "Entertainer" O.C.C.s. Valagi are typically Human, Elf, Gnome, or Goblin/Hobgoblin with an occasional Orc or Ogre.



# The Darkvare and the Astral Plane

Optional Material for Rifts® and Chaos Earth™

By Joseph Larsen

## The Outer Layer of the Astral Plane

The mysterious Astral Plane affects our existence and everyday life in the same invisible fashion as the deepest secrets of science. Even more than all fields of science, we have yet to discover all of the baffling answers of why and how physical items interact the way they do with the Astral Plane.

As the closest dimension to our physical plane, the Astral Plane touches most, if not all, other dimensions as well. The barrier that the Astral Plane offers is very intimate and precarious. For as long as history can tell us, Humans have been breaching the membrane in many different ways both naturally and unnaturally. In fact, the Astral Plane naturally affects any mortal being while alive. Even though it is not “the” resting place of mortal’s souls, this realm is the bond that keeps our body in contact with the soul. This is why all beings have even a small amount of P.P.E. The death, or more specifically murder, of that mortal is the point when the soul is ripped from the mortal frame. For a few short moments the P.P.E. that holds the

body and soul together leaks out through the rip that results from the murder. At this point, the amount of remaining P.P.E. of the victim is doubled as it is released before the unnatural breach seals itself. Human sacrifice/murder for the sake of magic rituals have proven this to be the case. Humans have more P.P.E. as innocent youngsters and end up either losing or increasing P.P.E. as they develop their own talents and vocations. For mortal beings it doesn’t mean that they are closer to death. It just reduces their connection with their spiritual side and belief in such things.

Mortal beings who dwell in the Astral Plane will have immortal natural lives since the bond between the soul and the body will be very strong there. They can be killed, but it will be twice as difficult. Hunger and thirst will not be fatal and wounds will heal three times as fast. In the Rifts setting, this is probably why Psyscape decided to live on the Astral Plane if the rumors are true.

Matter and physics in the Astral Plane are much different than what we experience on this plane. All matter native to the Astral Plane is drawn together with P.P.E. bonding as opposed to electron bonding in our physical plane. This means that the Astral Plane is saturated with P.P.E. and could possibly be the source of magic for all dimensions. This means that objects that

become magically enchanted have the molecular bond changed at the atomic level. Such items absorb and exude magic at all times. Even beings who originate from the Astral Plane have unusual amounts of P.P.E. when they move to another realm through a Rift.

Since manifesting on one plane is different than transferring through a Rift, any manifested beings will need to have sufficient P.P.E. built up on the plane to be manifested in. Any being who is manifested here has to bond to the Astral Plane and are therefore manifested to a degree there as well. Any solid matter that is transferred through the barrier between the physical and Astral Plane must be saturated with P.P.E. first. Magic rituals and séances historically have provided the means to do this.

Anytime P.P.E. is utilized for magic or other supernatural activity on any other plane, the laws of physics of the Astral Plane are made manifest in that realm. This is why so many fantastic things can be accomplished by controlling P.P.E. for these purposes. To understand what the results might be for a particular action takes training and practice in the magic arts.

Ley lines as well as Rifts are larger and permanent rips in the barrier between the physical plane and the Astral Plane. These rips leak P.P.E. into our realm and provide many supernatural beings a pure, constant source of P.P.E. for their needs. At the point that ley lines cross, the rip is big enough for a Rift to form that can be used as a conduit to another dimension that the Astral Plane touches.

Experiences inside the Astral Plane are completely mind-boggling to most. There are three layers to the Astral Plane but it's the outer layer that affects the flow of P.P.E. to other dimensions. This cloudy, endless expanse exudes a glowing light from every particle of matter. The P.P.E. bond at the atomic level emits a glow out of all the particles that naturally occur there. Any physical being from our plane or another plane can easily be lost, especially since it is so expansive and touches so many dimensions. (Note: For more information on the other layers of the Astral Plane, see **Nightbane®: Between the Shadows.**)

Supernatural beings enjoy Post-Apocalyptic Earth since the rips in the dimensional barrier into this plane make it easy to gain power. They gain more abilities around the P.P.E. leak points (a.k.a. ley lines) while enjoying the crossing of the physics between this current realm and the Astral Plane.

## The Darkvare of the Astral Plane

The Darkvare are entities that exist on the Astral Plane but manifest themselves on the physical plane using light. They have commonly chosen a gargoyle-looking form for manifestation, though other forms have been utilized as well. Because optics detect the light refracting off of an object, the fact that they absorb light causes any form they take to appear to be pure blackness. They convert the light into P.P.E. to maintain their presence and utilize powers.

Due to the nature of their manifestation, these creatures are ethereal on the physical plane. Neither normal matter nor conventional weapons can harm them. Their powers consist of a dangerous combination of psionics, magic spells, and natural abilities dealing with light control. They are masters of hiding and stalking but are equally as cunning at luring prey to their clutches using light manipulation (including holograms and vi-

sion manipulation), magic, and psionics. Most terribly, they have the ability to draw (or "Steal") items into the Astral Plane. Any contact with these shadowy beings usually results in the painful and horrific demise of the poor soul who crossed their path. The victim soon discovers that their body is being drawn into the Astral Plane piece by piece. This cruel means of feeding is the Darkvare's process of drawing the P.P.E. from its victim, killing the body as needed. All the while they also feed from the fear emanating from their prey. The final stage of feeding involves the murder and final consumption of P.P.E.

These P.P.E. hungry beings gain strength by day from sunlight. At night they most often stalk undead for P.P.E. The undead is their primary choice for a P.P.E. source. The Darkvare's abilities are particularly potent against vampires and other supernatural beings that are sensitive to sunlight. Though the Darkvare stalk supernatural creatures, they will also utilize mortals for P.P.E. nourishment. Anyone throughout history who encountered them was usually a doomed victim.

Though dangerous, the Darkvare have been exploited by magic users in two ways. The first means of exploitation is when high-level magic users capture, store and carefully wield a Darkvare cocoon. They can make it into a powerful magical item. The cocoon becomes, in essence, a solar P.P.E. battery that also offers a few other powers to the wielder. Any wielder has to be very careful in the handling and use so that they don't allow the cocoon to hatch. If not, they'd end up as the next victim of this predator. At the same time, they must keep it from dying from the lack of light. It is a very delicate item to care for.

The second means of exploitation is when a magic user discovers a way to take advantage of the Darkvare's unusual ability of transferring solid objects into the Astral Plane. These resourceful people have been able to re-summon these items in an ethereal form. They call them "wraith" weapons or items.

## Darkvare in History

Many years ago, the Darkvare changed their manifested form from their original form in order to mimic cultural mythical creatures. Their favorite form originated in historical Europe, when they mimicked a monster called Gargouille. St. Romain had rid the countryside of that monster, and the people started to use the gargoyle's grotesque form in their architecture as a means of scaring off evil spirits and other malevolent beings. The Darkvare adopted the gargoyle-ish form in order to blend in. It created the perfect opportunity to blame other beings for their deeds, and in doing so it kept them from being hunted. They formed their bodies similar to a gargoyle, which had bat-like wings and tails. Their hands and feet appeared to be claws. Even though the grotesque form alone was believed to scare away evil monsters and spirits, it was the Darkvare's hunting activity that perpetuated the belief. Similarly, in other cultures they used the protection creature icon to blend in. Another example of an icon was the stone dragon in the Orient. They could be found in any culture, especially during the winter months. During the summers most would travel to the northernmost or southernmost regions to create cocoons for manifesting more Darkvare.

Once set in a culture, they dwelled on the rooftops near the guardian statues and gathered sunlight by day. They stayed invisible or made holograms to hide their presence. By night, they

prowled the streets stalking supernatural creatures and their victims for P.P.E. nourishment. Their method of nightly feeding commonly entailed following another predator and feeding off of the fear of the victim for a while. When the victim was almost dead, they would attack and feed from the creature(s) just enough to fend it off. This preservation was to allow them to come back later and continue the feeding cycle. This is why there often were witnesses to the gargoyle warding off or devouring a supernatural creature. Once the supernatural creature was gone, the Darkvare would sometimes deal the final deathblow to the human and consume the P.P.E. at the moment of death. Due to the types of wounds inflicted upon the victim, human investigators linked the cause of death to the supernatural predator, not the Darkvare. The supernatural creatures eventually avoided the buildings with the "protective" gargoyle statues because of their own encounters with the Darkvare. So, the Darkvare's hunger for supernatural creatures helped them perpetuate the gargoyle's reputation of scaring off evil spirits. No one knew that they were simply hunting for the tastiest prey. Neither did they know that their method was to feed off of the victim's fear, feed off of the supernatural creature and then finally feed off of the victim's death.

During times when the supernatural food was scarce they would just as easily prey off of humans as an alternative. They stalked places where fear was common or they would make their own fear by making hallucinations and holograms or by simply showing themselves in their original form. After feeding off the fear, they would proceed to feed off of a human's flesh by devouring it piece by piece. They wouldn't use the gargoyle form for hunting humans because that wasn't so feared by humans. In any case, their disposition was completely misunderstood by those who lived in these cities.

Their first physical plane shape originally was the same as their normal Astral Form. That form resembles a ragged cloak or cape flowing in the wind. Regardless of the shape of their bodies, any form was a dark shadow since they retained the light that they gathered. The only exception to this was when they flew faster than their usual form allowed. When they did this their bodies had to emit some of the light. Nighttime was a very conspicuous time for them, since any of the light that they emitted was easily noticed.

Because they have to emit some light to fly, it was easy to spot them flying at night. Since they were shaped like humanoids with wings and were "glorious" and bright, many superstitious people mistook them for angels. While emitting light, their brightness hid their true grotesque features.

Throughout their early history, the Darkvare were relatively rare beings who had few powers. As time went along, an experience/power creep occurred; those Darkvare whose light bodies were destroyed eventually came back with new manifested bodies. Despite this they didn't lose their memory, so any experience that they gained during the past encounter in the physical realm would still be valid in every successive manifestation. For this reason, some of the described powers didn't come to pass until later in time. This ability to be reborn was a great benefit for Darkvare, while being very dangerous for any other being who crossed them. As the Darkvare gained strength and experience, they were able to protect their cocoons better, thus allowing for more of them to be brought into the physical realm.

## Physical Plane Manifestation

In order to be manifested as light, the Darkvare need to inhabit a cocoon for 2-3 months with an uninterrupted source of bright light and P.P.E. Because the cocoon absorbs all the light that it is exposed to, its appearance is completely black. It appears to be solid even though it is ethereal. The cocoon constantly needs to be fed P.P.E. and/or light. Direct sunlight is the greatest and most potent source of light for them. Artificial light maybe used but it will hinder the cocoon gestation time by 1D4+1 months. Also, as cocoons, P.P.E. absorption isn't nearly as efficient as the light absorption. While a P.P.E. source is always optional, the amount of P.P.E. gained from this is only 25% of the normal rate of a normal magic user.

When they absorb light they convert it to P.P.E. and emit a slight glow during the process. Eventually, when the Darkvare in the cocoon has obtained enough P.P.E. and light, it is able to manifest itself on the physical plane. Even in the best-case scenarios, this would still take a few months. That being noted, magic users have found the un-hatched cocoons to be valuable magical objects. The cocoons can be sustained only on condition that enough P.P.E. and light are siphoned from it to prevent the cocoon from hatching, but at the same time keep enough so that it can subsist. Thus the magic user can have an extra P.P.E. source provided he keeps it in a controlled state.

Though the ideal habitat for the Darkvare is in the Arctic and Antarctic regions, they migrate in the winter months to other regions of the world. Areas that most often have clear days with a lot of sunlight are areas where these beings could be the most powerful and dangerous. Fortunately these areas are not conducive to Darkvare cocoon growth and hatching. The interruption of the day and night frequency prevents the cocoon from gaining enough strength to hatch.

Another dilemma with the manifestations is that a cocoon takes five full-strength Darkvare for creation. It is uncommon to find this many Darkvare in these other areas. But once the five are together, they can summon many cocoons. It is possible, however unlikely, that the Darkvare could someday be able to gain numbers in areas other than the Arctic and Antarctic Circles without help from others. There have been occurrences of people purposefully assisting a Darkvare cocoon with what it needs to create an artificial environment for cocoon hatching called lighthouses. These people who stick around don't often last very long because when a newly hatched cocoon feeds for the first time, these people are usually the first victim. Throughout history, the Darkvare have been the bane to those who encounter them. Some encounter stories have never been discovered, while others are too frightening to be recounted. But these lighthouses can be used strategically as well to perpetuate the Darkvare predators in undead or enemy infested areas.

## Silent, deadly predators

Their presence in the Arctic and Antarctic has been secreted well. Since their touch was necrotic, it was easily and often mistaken for frostbite. In the frigid regions of the arctic, they used snow blindness to cause hallucinations and fear. After sufficient mental torture was inflicted on the victim, it would strike and feed. Neither humans nor animals were distinguished for feeding.

Their presence in the modern world exploded with the invention and wide use of light bulbs. Darkvare easily settled at night in a lighted area for survival. Those people who knew better stayed away from flickering or dead streetlights. The only thing that was wrong with the streetlight was that there was a Darkvare siphoning all of the light off of it. However, since artificial lights were barely enough for a Darkvare to subsist, P.P.E. sources were still sought in the technology-filled world.

When the Darkvare feed off of a victim's P.P.E. it consists of extracting the P.P.E. by slowly killing the body. Unfortunately for the victim, he is drawn piece by piece into the Astral Plane. This slow death and the fear generated by the experience releases enough P.P.E. for the Darkvare to sustain itself. The experience is excruciating for any victim. If by chance the victim is rescued before too much damage is done, he will most likely gain intense insanities from the experience. His wounds either scar badly or never recover. On a few occasions, several Darkvare together have drawn a whole person into the Astral Plane completely, in a rapid frenzy. In such a case, the rapid transformation was so intense and inefficient that a small amount of victim's P.P.E. escaped and left essence traces behind. That soul's link to the Astral Plane was never completely severed. This escaped P.P.E., combined with the emotions of the victim, was the catalyst for creating a ghost or wandering soul. This was most likely the explanation for such phenomena in the cases where a body was never found. Any person to be completely transferred became a Haunting Entity for that area. They likely appeared on anniversary dates or times of greater astrological events. Whenever more than one ghost haunted a place, it's probable that the Darkvare were there to turn these souls into wandering spirits. This suggests that the Darkvare have affected highly haunted places such as New Orleans, the British Isles, and other unfortunate places. This could explain some of the ghosts that have been sighted throughout history.

Darkvare are also natural enemies to the undead. Their use of sunlight and P.P.E. makes them very damaging to any undead that is sensitive to daylight. Sometimes, instead of killing an undead (or any magic user for that matter), they herd it either by warding or by using their other abilities to trick the victim's senses to lead it to a cocoon haven as a P.P.E. source for hatching.

When an undead is fed from, the undead body simply crumbles to dust bit by bit. These wounds will heal like all undead wounds, but it will take twice as long as normal. These wounds are not like typical wounds from physical weapons that most undead can recover from as easily.

If an undead is pulled to the Astral Plane then it simply crumbles to dust. Its essence is gone and the body is completely obliterated with no trace of it on the Astral Plane.

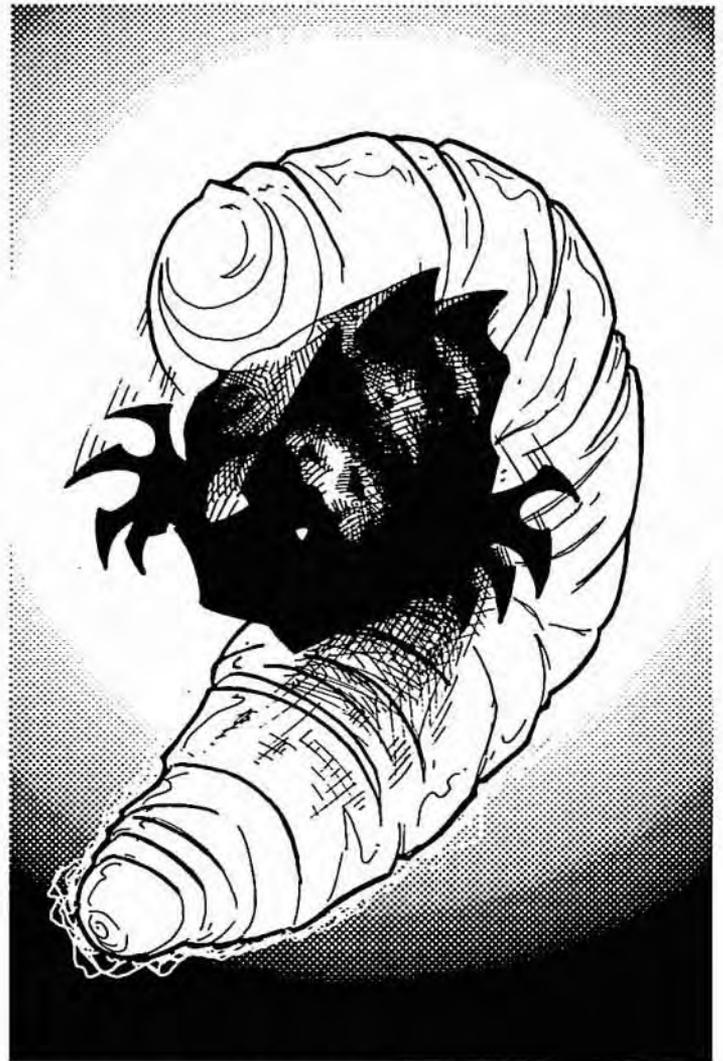
Both children and animals can detect invisible Darkvare. Children have an innate ability to detect and resist Darkvare. A Darkvare attacking children will primarily feed off of the valuable fear of a child rather than the P.P.E. Thus a Darkvare will leave a child unharmed physically but emotionally scarred.

## Darkvare "Stealing"

Another power that the higher-level Darkvare have is the ability to transfer physical objects into the Astral Plane of existence (see the Darkvare ability list for more details). That means

that the object is ethereal on the physical plane. A Darkvare's motive for transferring an object into the realm may be for several reasons. One reason is for the use of the object later. The Darkvare can use light to manifest the object in the physical plane. These items can take the blunt of combat and make the Darkvare look more menacing. Note: Items with moving parts will no longer operate. They may also Steal an object just for revenge, torture, or blackmail. Another reason to Steal an item is to keep the object from remaining a threat or in the hands of an enemy.

For magical items, those that are drawn into the Astral Plane need to have all of its P.P.E. at maximum. Then it can be Stolen. Even then the magic object leaves an ethereal shadow for a few hours. This makes it easier for magic users to create Wraith Weapons out of these.



## Cocoons for Manifesting

Darkvare cocoons are required for any Darkvare to manifest in this physical realm. Only a group of five Darkvare can create them. Each is approximately the circumference of about 12 inches (30 cm) and efficiently gain P.P.E. from light. They naturally gain the most energy from the sun. Indirect sunlight gives 50% of the benefit while artificial light only provides 20% of the benefit. Even though light alone is enough to provide enough P.P.E. to hatch, the cocoon can draw P.P.E. from any source other than light. This can be things or events such as

death, living victims, undead, or fear. No matter what the source of P.P.E., at least 1 hour of direct sunlight (or equivalent) is required for any cocoon to survive or hatch. All in all, it must obtain a total of  $2D4 \times 10 + 100$  (120-180) P.P.E. before hatching. Only the G.M. will know the actual amount of P.P.E. necessary for it to hatch. This makes them very volatile to work with because one never knows the threshold of the cocoon's P.P.E. needs until it's too late. Cocoons gain and lose P.P.E. at a faster rate compared to a Darkvare. Here are the rates:

#### Gaining P.P.E. (Cocoon only)

Direct Sunlight = 5 P.P.E. per hour.

Cloudy day = 4 P.P.E. per hour.

Dusk/shade = 3 per hour.

Artificial light (enough for normal human operation) = 1 per hour.

Contact with living victim = 2 P.P.E. per minute. (Note: Drawing all of a living victim's P.P.E. will cause them to die.)

Fear = 4 P.P.E. per victim.

Death of victim = Double the victim's remaining P.P.E. at the moment of death.

#### Losing P.P.E. (Cocoon only)

Night (with half or better moon) = -7 P.P.E. per hour.

Dark (less than half to moonless night) = -10 P.P.E. per hour.

Total darkness = -15 P.P.E. per hour.

Every cocoon is ethereal and will pass through any non-magical/non-ethereal substance. If the cocoon makes contact with any living being, it will begin to kill the victim in a very painful manner just as a full-grown Darkvare will. It draws the living parts it comes in contact with into the Astral Plane.

The cocoons will do more damage to a light sensitive supernatural creature than a Darkvare because of its higher sunlight concentration. Any part of the being that it comes in contact with will be obliterated in only a few moments.

Because a Darkvare is simply manifesting or re-manifesting, inside the cocoon could be a Darkvare of any potential experience level just waiting for its light body to be ready. But no matter what level the Darkvare, the new body will take some time to match its abilities. There is a natural growing rate of stability and ability in a light body that happens over time. It is also dependent on how much light and P.P.E. it is able to get. The standard rate of body readiness is 15 minutes of sunlight per level. So, a level seven Darkvare would take one hour and 45 minutes to gain full strength. Fresh out of the cocoon, the Darkvare can only perform its natural abilities (see list) that don't require any P.P.E.

### **Darkvare Stats**

**Alignment:** Diabolic.

**Attributes:** Physical are not applicable. I.Q.  $4D4+2$ , M.E.  $4D4+2$ , M.A.  $2D6+10$ .

**Speed:** They normally hover above the ground and travel at 120 miles (192 km) per hour when retaining their light. All Darkvare can fly  $1/4$  the speed of light if needed. They have to release 80% of their stored light to do this, which will also reduce their remaining P.P.E. by 80%. The benefit to doing this is that it makes them very dangerous and quick. But this

also makes them visually conspicuous, as the release of the light creates a bright flash and light streak as they fly.

**M.D.C.:**  $4D6 \times 10$  (+ $2D4$  per level) - Vulnerable to psionics, magic, long periods of total darkness and ethereal weapons.

**P.P.E. Base:**  $3D4 \times 10$  (+ $2D4$  per level). As the abilities are used, obviously the P.P.E. is reduced. If a Darkvare's P.P.E. is reduced to nothing, then it will dissipate from the physical realm. A Darkvare gains P.P.E. either by absorbing light, from a P.P.E. source (such as ley lines or from living victims), and/or from fear.

**I.S.P.:**  $1D4 \times 10$

**Vulnerabilities:** Psionics, magic, ecto-weapons, light manipulation powers and total darkness.



**Horror Factor:** 10 naturally, but can use holograms and psionics to increase or decrease their Horror Factor. Appearing as or making horrific creatures will add 1D6.

**Appearance:** Appearance is of a dark Gargoyle shape with a light aura visible just outside the form's body. Rarely does any light escape the Darkvare's body.

**Size:** The size of the body depends upon the level and the amount of light that the Darkvare has access to. At level one, they are 2-3 feet (0.6-0.9 m) tall and 2 feet (0.6 m) in length when they first emerge from the cocoon. The being can gain 6 inches (15 cm) in height every level. Maximum size is 9 feet (2.7 m) tall. It needs ¼ of its base P.P.E. to maintain its maximum size, though it can choose to be smaller than its maximum. Its maximum size will reduce by 6 inches (15 cm) for every 5 P.P.E. below ¼ its base P.P.E.

When no light source is available, a Darkvare can huddle and reduce its size to that of a cocoon. In this state, it can preserve P.P.E., consuming only 1 P.P.E. every 2 days. This is simply a survival tactic of recycling the gathered light in its body. In this state, a Darkvare can move, but it only has 1 attack per melee and only has a Speed of 3. It can continue to absorb any light that comes across it. When emerging from this stasis state, it will take 15 minutes to gain full strength.

**R.C.C. Skills:** Ambush, concealment, flying.

**Equivalent Level of Experience:** Chaos Earth™ and Beyond the Supernatural™: 2D4, Rifts®: 2D6+2.

**Attacks per Melee:** Five at level 1. +1 attack at levels 2, 4, 5, 7, 8, 10, 12 and 14.

**Bonuses:** +6 to dodge, +4 to strike, and +8 to save vs mind control.

**Magic:** (Level of ability is equal to level of experience): Invisibility (greater), See the Invisible, Sense Psychic and Magic Energy (same as Psi-Stalker), and Magic Shield.

**Psionics** (Level of each ability is equal to level of experience): Mind Block (Auto-Defense), Telekinesis (Physical), Psi-Sword, Telepathy, Empathic Transmission, Hypnotic Suggestion, Bio-Manipulation, Induce Sleep, Empathy.

**Enemies:** Undead, supernatural beings, magic users, psionic beings, and a group called the Kezel. The Darkvare fear yet respect the Crystal Dragons who exist in the Astral Plane. They will not dare challenge them, and strangely will aid and protect them from harm. It is possible the Crystal Dragons are treated as a sort of feared deity to the Darkvare.

The Darkvare do enjoy preying on Nxla's minions. Nxla has declared them an enemy to any of his followers. The Darkvare are so effective against the minions of Nxla that Psyscape and others have actually constructed "lighthouses" or places of constant light for the Darkvare to perpetuate. Cocoons have been imported and hidden at various times to introduce a steady presence of Darkvare in the Dark Magic zone. The result has caused an influx of Darkvare in the zone where the Soul Stealers are, much like using a leech to rid the body of diseased blood.

If a Darkvare's "soul" or essence is captured, it will continue to siphon the Soul Stealer's P.P.E. from within the Soul Stealer himself, at a rate of 2D4 P.P.E. per day.

**Habitat:** The Darkvare have thrived mainly in the Alaskan, Canadian and Siberian areas above the Arctic Circle. Some do

exist south of the Antarctic Circle as well. The long summer days are conducive to the Darkvare for breeding and surviving. Occasionally, a Darkvare would travel or be brought to an area of heavy sunlight. Though it would be a great menace at these places it wouldn't be able to create a cocoon by itself. Several Darkvare are necessary to create a cocoon. In addition, the cocoons need long periods of constant light in order to develop. So, the shorter days in these areas prevent a natural germination environment for the cocoons.

**Other Information:** To completely defeat a Darkvare (not just its light body on the physical plane), it must be killed on the Astral Plane.

**Natural Abilities:** Darkvare have the following natural abilities at no cost of P.P.E.: See all spectrums of light, immune to lasers, immune to heat, immune to non-supernatural physical attacks, sense P.P.E. at 250 feet (76 m) per level, convert light into P.P.E., and Deadly Touch (see the Unique Abilities list for details).

## Unique Abilities

### Deadly Touch

The Darkvare are intent on killing anything or a part of anything they touch in order to draw P.P.E. in their unique manner. The wounds that the touches create are easily mistaken for frostbite. They dissolve the bodies of undead wherever they touch.

**Damage:** 4D6 M.D.C. +1D6 every odd level on supernatural beings. (Does double damage against supernatural beings that are sensitive to sunlight.) Inflicts 2D6 S.D.C. +1D6 every odd level to mortal beings.

**P.P.E. Cost:** Does not use P.P.E., but instead gains P.P.E. at an average of 1 P.P.E. every 3 attacks of a deadly touch within an hour.

**Level:** None. Natural Ability.

### Convert Light and Fear into P.P.E.

Darkvare convert light into P.P.E. This is the source of their powers and abilities. The more light a Darkvare is exposed to, the more P.P.E. it can produce.

#### Gaining P.P.E. (Darkvare)

Direct sunlight = 3 P.P.E. per hour.

Cloudy day/shade on sunny day = 2 P.P.E. per hour.

Dusk = 1 per hour.

Night (with half or better moon) = 1 P.P.E. per hour.

Artificial light (enough for normal human operation) = 1 per hour.

Contact with living victim = 2 P.P.E. per minute. (Note: Drawing all of a living victim's P.P.E. will cause him to die.)

Fear = 3 P.P.E. per victim per incident.

Death of victim = Double victim's remaining P.P.E. at the moment of death.

#### Losing P.P.E. (Darkvare)

Night (less than half to moonless night) = -1 P.P.E. per hour (because of starlight).

Total darkness = -6 P.P.E. per hour.

**Level:** None. Natural ability.

## Blinding Flash

By focusing intense light, the Darkvare can instantly create a flash of light that even most mechanical or natural defenses might not be able to buffer. Usually, the experienced Darkvare will first reduce the amount of light in the area, causing the light sensors to strain before the big flash. An even more experienced Darkvare will reduce the light, but not always perform the flash in order to keep the enemy from predicting this tactic.

A flash will disable mechanical optics for 1D4 melees. Any person who looks unprotected at the flash will be temporarily blinded for 1D4 minutes. Even after that the victim will have a light spot that will reduce his strike with aimed weapons by -2 and delicate skills such as pick locks by -20% for an additional 2D4 melees.

Level: 2

P.P.E. Cost: 2 per flash.



## Light Manipulation

The Darkvare can redirect, store and intensify light and radiation waves. This is the core ability to using holographic abilities.

Level: 2

P.P.E. Cost: 2 per melee.

## Light-Sensitive Undead Warding and Killing

If a Darkvare is housing natural sunlight in its light body, then that sunlight can be used to damage or even destroy undead beings that are sensitive to sunlight. If it doesn't kill them, the Darkvare can pulse a flash of light to ward off any undead in a 3 foot (0.9 m) radius +1 foot (0.3 m) per level. It might do this to protect itself or even to protect its prey from the undead.

Level: 2 P.P.E. Cost: 2 for every 1 foot (0.3 m) of range affected.

## Laser Deflection

Since lasers are light, the Darkvare suffers no damage from any laser, and can even redirect incoming blasts to hit other targets of its choosing. There will be no loss of damage of the laser when it hits its final target.

Level: 3

P.P.E. Cost: 5 per redirection.

## Laser Creation

A Darkvare's body is the perfect tool for creating lasers. The Darkvare can focus the light with such intensity and efficiency that a potent laser beam can be created without much effort. The higher level Darkvare can control the amount of damage their laser blasts will do.

Damage: Base is 1D6 M.D. Add 1D6 every even level.

Level: 3

P.P.E. Cost: 4 per 1D6 M.D.

## Create Radiation/Light "Black Hole"

By controlling all the light in a specific area and absorbing it into its light body or even into an alternate focal point, the Darkvare can create a black hole from which no light or certain types of radiation can escape. This means that light and radiation (including radar) going through that area will all bend to succumb to the light absorption point. However, any type of radiation other than light must be expelled, in a direction chosen by the Darkvare, as the Darkvare only truly absorbs light rays. Using this power will slow the Darkvare down, since it will have to fight to retain the light in its own manifest body. If the Darkvare's body is absorbing all the light, then it will need to expel the extra energy within 1D4 melee rounds. Otherwise its light body will become uncontrollable and will have a 75% chance of dissipating completely. But during this period of time, the Darkvare will regenerate P.P.E. at triple the normal rate.

Level: 4

P.P.E. Cost: 10 per melee in the daytime, one per melee at night.

Duration: 5 minutes in daytime, 30 minutes at night.

## Holographic Disguise

As a result of the Light Manipulation power, the Darkvare is able to reproduce three-dimensional disguises by projecting holograms. It can also project a realistic holograph up to 3 times its height, as far as 300 feet (91.4 m) away.

Level: 4

P.P.E. Cost: 6 per melee.

## Radiation Redirection and Focus

Even though light radiation is the primary means of manifestation and control by the Darkvare, they have limited control over other radiation types. They can deflect radiation and even focus it for short durations. This allows them to foil radar systems either at the main source or at the target. They can even hide items and create false ones in order to trick the radar.

Level: 4

P.P.E. Cost: 7 per melee.

## Space Slip

A Slip means that the Darkvare will focus an amount of light to another location within sight. That focus point, however slight, will allow the Darkvare to completely release all of its inhabited light and slip through its dimension to that secondary light point of focus. A Darkvare will be able to perform this move successfully at a 45% chance +6% chance per level. Using this ability takes 1D4+1 attacks to create the point of focus. Another Darkvare could also take that time to create a focus point for the slipping Darkvare. This makes Darkvare fighting in groups even more formidable.

**Level:** 5

**P.P.E. Cost:** 16 per attempt.

## Transfer Physical Objects into the Astral Plane

### a.k.a. "Stealing"

A Darkvare can take an object and convert it to the Astral Plane. This can be a living or inanimate object. Anything living will die and the body will disappear. In order to transfer an object into the Astral Plane, a Darkvare must first engulf part of the object into its body. Multiple Darkvare can work together to convert an object or being more quickly. One Darkvare can convert 8 ounces (0.23 kg) of non-magical material per minute, per level, into the Astral Plane. So a level 6 Darkvare can convert 3 pounds (1.35 kg) of material per minute. For magical items, each Darkvare can convert 2 P.P.E. per minute per level. For living creatures, it must saturate them with P.P.E. and drain all S.D.C. and Hit Points in order to make the conversion. Obviously, this will kill any victim.

"Stealing" living beings usually leaves a trace of P.P.E. behind that causes ghosts to occur in that area. Any object that is "Stolen" will disappear from the physical realm. The objects will need to somehow become manifest in the physical realm if they are to be used. Weapons can become "Wraith Weapons." Though they have no physical elements to them, they can harm supernatural creatures, mortal beings and even ethereal beings. Thus, the Darkvare sometimes use these items to combat demons and other supernatural beings. The Darkvare may use them because they do more damage than their natural bodies, and also use them to parry and attack supernatural beings. That way, the item is damaged instead of its body. The weapon might originally have only inflicted S.D.C. damage on the physical plane and had no effect on supernatural items or beings, but once it is Stolen and re-summoned, it then inflicts the S.D.C. equivalent in M.D.C damage. Plus, it can harm what it couldn't before.

Magic users who have been able to steal or recover a "Wraith Weapon" need to find a way to hold the summoned item once it is manifested, whether it is a supernatural glove or a containment bubble. Some have even sacrificed part of their life-force to bond to and wield these weapons bare-handed.

**Level:** 5

**P.P.E. Cost:** 10 per 8 ounces (0.23 kg) of material.

## Possess a Living Being on the Physical Plane

**Duration:** Unlimited but can be exorcized or can leave on its own.

At level eight, a Darkvare may attempt to possess a living being and gain full control over the victim's body. The problem is that the Darkvare will lose its current manifested body. It will have to perform a Space Slip to exit the possessed body.

**Level:** 8

**P.P.E. Cost:** 50 P.P.E. per attempt.

## Darkvare Manipulation in Rifts®

### Darkvare Cocoon-Exploitation for Magic Usage

The Darkvare cocoon offers potential, though dangerous, abilities to the experienced magic user. Since the cocoon absorbs light, its appearance is black and shiny with a slight corona visible from all directions. Some daring, high-level magic users have been able to capture one and draw the P.P.E. from the cocoon as well as utilize its powers. They have even been mounted on the tips of magic staffs or rods.

The danger of doing this comes from not drawing enough P.P.E. from the cocoon or exposing it to too much light. Such cases of careless wielding will allow the cocoon to hatch. It's a balancing act, because the cocoon needs to maintain at least 75 P.P.E. and must have enough intense light daily or else it will dissipate.

Handling the cocoons requires use of one of the following: magically enchanted items, psionics, magic bubbles, or other ethereal items. Containing them is most often done using magic containment bubbles, magically enchanted glass globes or other enchanted material. The containment method needs to allow light in, since the cocoon needs to absorb the light.

The cocoon has its own P.P.E. base, and it refreshes the P.P.E. most efficiently from sunlight. But at the same time, it needs to be kept from the required hatching P.P.E. level in order to keep from hatching. If the cocoon hatches, then the magic user will need to deal with the terrible Darkvare that emerges. Upon obtaining the cocoon, G.M.s should secretly roll at that time to determine what level of Darkvare is in the cocoon, as well as how much P.P.E. is required to emerge.

A cocoon is most often used as a P.P.E. source for the magic user's own magic. But the cocoon can manifest some of the powers of the Darkvare, as well. The powers are the same as the hatched Darkvare.

Only magic users who are level 6 and higher can wield the cocoons successfully due to the constant cocoon essence's urging influence. It will try to manipulate the host into allowing it to hatch by hallucination and trickery. The level of manipulation depends on the level of the Darkvare waiting to hatch. The magic user won't know what level the Darkvare inhabiting the cocoon really is. There is always a likelihood that the Darkvare in the cocoon has previously been manifest in this realm and therefore already had some level of experience.

### Wielding Trouble

Depending on experience level, the cocoon may have a chance of enticing the wielder to do its bidding instead of vice versa. In order to maintain control, the wielder must be of a higher magic level than the cocoon's entity. He must also have an M.E. of 12 or greater. The cocoon will always try to entice or trick the wielder to be distracted and forgetful enough to do

something careless. It will try to make him do things such as set the cocoon by a place of intense light, or convince him that he can fight a Darkvare. Essentially, the entity will try to gain extra strength when it can. The wielder must make monthly rolls to save vs possession to resist these urges. Add +1 to save every time the wielder successfully resists possession. But add a penalty of -1 each time he succumbs.

If the entity is level 5 or higher, a Magic Containment Bubble must be used to contain the cocoon, because if a cage or other mounting piece is utilized, the cocoon will eventually "Steal" the object and escape. The only way to know if a cocoon can Steal is to use See Aura, which will reveal the experience level of the entity.

## Cocoon Abilities

Utilize Darkvare abilities according to its level.

A cocoon will only have 1D4 of the Darkvare powers. G.M.s or players can select which powers according to the entity's level. It is suggested that the G.M. select them since only the G.M. knows what level the Darkvare inside the cocoon really is. Another option is for the G.M. to make a list of possibilities first and then have the player make the final selection.

Warding or damaging sunlight-sensitive supernatural creatures (if the cocoon is not fully contained).

Damage is 4D6 M.D. or S.D.C.

P.P.E. Cost: 16

Wielder siphoning P.P.E. from cocoon.

The wielder of the cocoon can easily use the P.P.E. contained within. The only limitation is that if the cocoon's P.P.E. drops below 75, then it will likely dissipate within 1D4 melees if the P.P.E. is not restored either by sunlight or from another source.

# New Magical Spells

## Magical Containment Bubble

(Level 2 spell)

**Duration:** 14 days at a time. The spell may be re-cast prior to the duration expiration in order to ensure constant containment. Doing this would reset the duration.

**P.P.E. Cost:** 6 for a grape-sized bubble, 12 for softball-sized or Darkvare cocoon-sized (circumference of about 12 inches/30 cm), 24 for basketball-sized (circumference is about 30 inches/76 cm).

This is a magical bubble that can be as large as a basketball or as small as a small pebble. It can be opaque or transparent per the magic user's choice. It can even be partially opaque and transparent if he so desires. It can be used to store anything, including magical or ethereal objects.

Mages who are opting to wield a Darkvare cocoon or a "Wraith" item will most likely use this spell.

## Summon Wraith Weapon

(Level 5 spell for Rifts®)

**Duration:** 3D4 hours, plus 1D4 minutes per level of the caster's experience.

**P.P.E. Cost:** 25 P.P.E. to summon an item that the wielder has already acquired and "anchored" to the physical plane.

**Damage:** 3D4 M.D., +1D4 M.D. per level, to undead and supernatural beings; inflicts 2D4 S.D.C., +1D4 S.D.C. per level, to mortals.

**Skill for Wielding Such a Weapon:** Due to the weightlessness, ethereal nature and powers of the blade, a non-Darkvare wielder must roll a skill roll every melee round to utilize the blade effectively. If the roll is successful, then there is no penalty for use of the blade. If the roll is unsuccessful, then the wielder will have penalties of -4 to strike and parry with the blade. The base skill for such a weapon is 35% +7% per level.

A Wraith Weapon is a melee weapon that a Darkvare has "Stolen" into the Astral Plane. (Must be a simple weapon to work properly; items with moving parts will cease to function.) These weapons are very deadly and will injure mortals with unusual power. If a Wraith Weapon is summoned and is able to collect 1-2 hours of sunlight, then undead will be greatly injured by it as well. Any form of banishing spell can dispel the weapon; if the weapon is banished then the wielder may re-summon it, but he will have to wait 2D4 melees before he can do so.

Like the nature of the Darkvare's manifestation, the touch of one of these weapons will end up killing the part of any being's body that it touches. Living beings it touches will be drawn into the Astral Plane piece by piece as time goes by. These ethereal weapons will pass through any non-supernatural, non-magical item, including non-magic force fields.

Wraith Weapons in any form or flavor do both physical and psychological damage. Non-magical armor or items do not obstruct a Wraith Weapon that is not manifested around solid matter. No matter who is the target, a Wraith Weapon will always leave a grotesque wound as the wound is cauterized with the dead flesh left behind. For undead, it will turn any part it touches into ashes. The decaying effect is extremely painful and does not heal well. So much so that those who have heard about or have witnessed Wraith Weapons will be affected by a Horror Factor of 13.

Much like the Darkvare themselves, these weapons require light (sunlight is preferred) to sustain manifestation. Like the Darkvare Deadly Touch power, these weapons also draw P.P.E. from the victim. The weapon can use this extra P.P.E. to keep itself manifested.

## Wraith Weapon Acquisition

In order to be able to utilize such a weapon, the magic user must have the ability to do two important things. The first, and most obvious, challenge is to be able to locate such a weapon. The best way to pinpoint one is to grab one from a weapon-wielding Darkvare as it dies. Another way is by defeating or chasing away a Darkvare that has just drawn an item into the Astral Plane. The "Stolen" item's ethereal form will dissipate in 1D6x10 seconds.

The second challenge facing the potential wielder is that he needs to be able to handle the Wraith Weapon. Due to the necrotic nature of the weapon, it must be wielded using a supernatural glove, magical containment bubble or other magical item. If the wielder is a supernatural being, then he may permanently sacrifice 4D6+1 P.P.E. in order to wield the weapon with his

bare hands. The item will appear in the wielder's hand and will never leave his touch. The wielder may also use a physical weapon of similar shape in the same hand while the Wraith Weapon is manifested. This will allow both the benefit of harming and parrying physical items as well as supernatural items.

Non-supernatural magic users have to use these as Techno-Wizard items. A magical item that is "holding" the Wraith item is required even when it isn't summoned. This item is the wielder's key to making sure the item is still linked to the physical plane. There have been a few Techno-Wizard blades made where the hilt of a physical sword is also the hilt to the wraith sword.

# The Hammer of the Forge

## Chapter Thirty-Eight

### Aftermath

By James M.G. Cannon

The called it the Battle of Asgarth, a somewhat grandiose title for such a dirty little debacle.

The town of Asgarth, a trading center in the plains of post-Apocalyptic East Texas, was besieged by the forces of the self-styled King Macklin, a petty bandit chief with delusions of grandeur. It was true that his followers were violent enough, depraved enough, and well armed enough to slaughter the inhabitants of Asgarth, but the city's defenders proved to be capable themselves.

But it was Solo, the immortal psychic who had founded the town and ruled it in the manner of some Platonic philosopher-king, who had turned the tide. Still recovering from a pre-Apocalypse virus planted on her by Macklin, Solo had nevertheless managed to conjure up a field of force to surround the city, and projected a gigantic image of herself on the field of battle. Macklin's followers, already facing greater resistance than they had expected, finally broke and ran when an angry and vibrant Solo appeared, ready to unleash psychic destruction.

Caleb Vulcan, Cosmo-Knight, late of the Three Galaxies and even later of Arizona circa 1968, had been sidelined in the course of the battle. In the depths of space, facing down a fully powered and operational battleship, he was all but indestructible. But he had discovered that on this Rift ravaged Earth, slugthrowers, missiles, and rail guns were far more prevalent than energy weapons. That made him vulnerable. His armor had splintered in the onslaught, and his chest had been broken. Had Solo not appeared when she did, he might well have died.

All the times he had faced death as a Knight, or the deaths of friends and allies, and this was the first time he really felt the cold sting of his own mortality. It was not a feeling that Caleb much liked. In fact, he didn't like much of anything he had so far encountered on this changed Earth. Since waking up in South Dakota with the ruined mass of Mt. Rushmore looming

over him, nothing had gone right. He didn't belong here; this place didn't deserve to exist. These people didn't deserve to have to live here in this horrible place, a bare shadow of the world that had given birth to him. Caleb wanted to get away from this world as soon as possible.

He levered himself up from the dusty ground with a grunt. His silver shirt, the one that had been with him since Garouk-9, was gone, but his Forge-fueled body had repaired itself. He sucked in a sharp breath and surveyed the scene.

The field before Asgarth's main gates was strewn with bodies and wreckage. Many of the enemy's tanks and robots were half buried in tons of earth churned up by explosives carefully placed by sappers beneath Macklin's troops. Asgarth's forces were mopping up, dealing with the stragglers and wounded left on the battlefield when Macklin wisely retreated. To Caleb's surprise, rather than simply executing their foes, Asgarth's finest were disarming them, looking after the wounded, and taking the able ones captive.

"We're not the barbarians you think we are," a measured voice said at Caleb's side.

With a start, Caleb turned to face the speaker, the mysterious Hart, cold-blooded and capable, Indian and scout, the man who had brought Caleb down to Texas. He didn't have a scratch on him, which was strangely appropriate. In fairness, Hart and his team had been on the walls, manning one of the gun emplacements – and if any of the ordnance flying about the battle had hit him, Hart would be nothing but a carbon smear on the battlement.

"These men," Hart continued, "will be given the option of becoming citizens of Asgarth or of returning home. Those we deem of worth may be ransomed, depending on our needs. But they won't be slaughtered. We're killers, Caleb, but we are not murderers. There's a difference."

Caleb nodded. "I see." He didn't trust himself to say more, and felt vaguely embarrassed that, not only did he initially think the worse of these people, but Hart knew it. "You made it down here fast enough," he said instead, to change the subject.

"Not really. You've been lying there. . . laughing. . . for some time."

Caleb's fair skin reddened. "Sorry about that. It was either laugh or scream. This whole thing is such an absurd mess, a senseless waste of life and energy. Nothing that happened today needed to happen. This place. . . this land, used to be something great and wonderful. People here were once part of one big nation, and they helped one another through troubles. They didn't take advantage of one another, try to kill one another. Not like this."

Hart looked away, towards the Juicers and their captives. "You're talking to a full-blooded Comanche, Caleb. A lot of Earth's history was lost when the Rifts came, but not all. The world you describe never existed. Not the way you think it did. The Spanish, the Mexicans, the Texans, the Americans, and the Natives all fought over this stretch of ground just as savagely, just as violently, and just as pointlessly, for hundreds of years before you or Solo or the Rifts ever came along." Hart's cold eyes fell on Caleb once more. "So no lectures on how bloody-handed we are, Red Knight."

"Fine," Caleb said, "but you'll forgive me for hoping something better might have evolved by now. You can't justify present violence by invoking the past; that kind of reasoning just leads to more pointless deaths in the future."

Hart pointed at a smoking hulk a dozen yards away from where they stood. It looked vaguely familiar, and then with a cold stab in his gut, Caleb noticed the remnants of a ten gallon hat bolted to the head of the wreck. "My friend did not die pointlessly," Hart said. "He died defending 3200 men, women, and children from the Pecos Raiders." He paused, letting his words and the knowledge of the Marshal's passing sink in to Caleb's consciousness.

"I didn't come down here to argue with you. Solo wants to see you."

"Okay," said Caleb, chastened and a little chagrined. "I'm sorry." He was about to lift up into the air, thought better of it, and decided to walk to Solo's mansion. He passed through the huge double megasteel gates of the city, while other Asgarthian troops rushed to and from the battlefield, moving wounded, materiel, and captives back and forth. None of them spared him a moment's glance, but then he was much less impressive looking now, no longer encased in his red metallic armor. The citizens of Asgarth, who had looked to him as a savior, a demigod, when he brought the antidote to Solo, now barely noticed him. Which was not a problem, from Caleb's perspective.

Even with the sun setting and night fast approaching, there were teams of men and women in the streets, clearing rubble, offering medical aid to the needy, picking up the pieces. This was a ruined, broken world, but the people who lived here were not. There was hope here, and decency, and compassion. Perhaps the future was not so bleak as Caleb feared.

He found Solo on the veranda of her mansion, her robot butler Phineas at her side. Solo was a slight woman, petite and delicate. Almost elfin, Solo was an albino, wrapped in a voluminous white garment that included a hood to shade her features from the dying sun. "You saved us, Caleb Vulcan," she said as he approached. "My deepest and most sincere thanks."

Caleb shook his head, Hart's words still fresh. "I saved you. You saved all of us."

Solo's pink eyes focused sharply on Caleb. "Something is wrong."

"Not really. Hart just set me straight on some things."

"No," Solo said. "Something is *wrong*. Your prisoner escaped earlier today. While you were in space, actually."

The bottom dropped out. Caleb's prisoner, Geryon, was a Kreeghor scientist, Techno-Wizard, and admiral, a being who had created a weapon capable of creating black holes. Only it didn't quite work, instead creating unstable Rifts in space that mimicked the effects of a black hole. It was one of those "black holes" that dragged Caleb and Geryon to Earth in the first place. The quest to save Solo and keep Asgarth safe had sidetracked him from his previous mission, which was to ensure Geryon be brought to justice.

"Why didn't someone mention this before?" Caleb asked, looking from Solo to Phineas and back.

"It was just brought to my attention," Solo said. "Phineas thought it best to withhold that information until more pressing matters were dealt with. As it is, your prisoner killed three of my people during his escape."

"I'm sorry to hear that. I should have insisted on better security, but I thought his spirit was broken. I should have guessed he was shamming."

Solo shook her head. "Now is not the time for self-recrimination. You must find him, before he works greater evil. But he has fled Asgarth. He stole a hoverbike and escaped through Macklin's admittedly weak cordon."

Caleb grimaced. With several hours head start and no way to track him, there was no telling where Geryon might be. He slapped his fist in his open palm. "Qrun."

"Soothsayer and I may be of some use to you. We may not be able to tell you where he is, but we should be able to suggest where he might be in the future. Our talents predicted your arrival, and your ability to save me. We may be able to pinpoint Geryon's whereabouts for you."

"Thank you," Caleb said. *How long will that take?* he wondered. *Every minute allows Geryon to get further away and gives him the opportunity to hurt more people.* Geryon was of the royal bloodline, which meant he was of no small sorcerous skill. He might have already conjured himself a Rift back to the Transgalactic Empire. Or a dragon might have eaten him. One could never be sure on this planet.

He was no longer surprised at the alienation he felt for the world of his birth. Too much time had passed since he left and became a Knight of the Forge. He was more tightly connected to the far flung worlds of the Three Galaxies than he was to Earth. Terrible as it was to admit, he would be glad to get back into space, and hoped to never see Earth again. Even if that strange alien predicted he would return. There were entirely too many people looking into his future, Caleb decided, and seeing entirely too much.

While Solo and Soothsayer began to divine Geryon's whereabouts, Caleb set about helping the clean-up effort. Blessed with the strength and recuperative abilities of a Cosmo-Knight, he could work tirelessly clearing rubble, shifting tanks and giant robots, searching for bodies. It was grim work, but for a time Caleb was able to lose himself in it. His thoughts grew darker with each passing hour. He wouldn't even allow himself to entertain the fear that, once he recovered Geryon, he might not find a way back to the Three Galaxies. A random Rift had

brought them to Earth, after all, and there was no way to be certain they might find a way back. Perhaps Solo and her allies would be able to divine a means to reach the Three Galaxies as well.

Then he found himself thinking of Ariel and Sammadar and Vyking, and the friends who had helped him against Geryon's black hole projector. They had not materialized on Earth. What could have happened to them? He had told Sammadar to take her ship and get as far away as possible while the black hole was forming, but Ariel and Vyking, fellow Cosmo-Knights, had been right beside him during the space battle. He had to find them, make sure they were safe.

The scarred moon had risen and most of the other workers had retired for the night before Caleb finally sat down to rest. He had acquired a new shirt at some point, though he didn't remember when or from whom, and even with his superhuman vitality his body ached. At last, as the town settled down, and only the warning lights and the watchman on the battered walls remained active, Caleb stood up, sheathed himself in his centurion themed armor and took to the sky. He flew straight up, exited the atmosphere, and entered space. He felt the cold and the vacuum even through his armor, but it was a reassuring feeling. On the ground he felt heavy, sodden, burdened. Only here, in the quiet darkness of space, did he feel truly comfortable. At peace.



Another mile beyond Earth's atmosphere, he knew, were the k-sats, waiting to annihilate anything that got too close to them.

He had braved that gauntlet already and had no wish to repeat the experience. He turned away from the stars and looked down at the slowly spinning blue jewel beneath him. Earth was dark, lit only by the blue-white of the ley lines that crossed her surface. Still, the familiar arrangement of continents reassured him, made him feel slightly less alien. Then he noticed the extra continent, fairly ablaze with ley lines, smack in the middle of the Atlantic between Florida and Africa.

*What the hell is that? Could Earth have changed that much since I left? Or is it possible that this is just one of many Earths in the Megaverse?*

Caleb felt better, suddenly, and decided to return to Asgarth. He dropped like a stone back into the Earth's atmosphere and rocketed back towards that tiny town. He didn't need to sleep anymore, but he did occasionally need to rest, and he felt like this was one of those times.

\* \* \*

Morning came and some semblance of normal life returned to Asgarth. People who had retreated into the city, abandoning homes and farms as Macklin advanced, sent scouts out to their farms and homesteads to assess the damage. The Einherier, as the Juicers and other elite troops of the town were called, began to patrol the surrounding area, looking for stragglers from Macklin's forces, as well as any potential new threats. King Macklin and the Pecos Raiders were but one of many dangers facing the town of Asgarth and its people, and not the greatest of them.

Hart found Caleb sitting on a wooden carton in the mouth of an alley near the town's central market. "Solo wants to see you," he said. This time there were no hot words. Caleb simply rose and followed him to the mansion.

Caleb found an exhausted Solo and an unconscious Soothsayer in the study. Solo's pink eyes were sorrowful as she said one word. "Atlantis."

At Caleb's questioning look, she explained. And Caleb's mood grew darker.

That strange continent Caleb had spotted the night before proved to be Atlantis. It had risen from the depths when the Apocalypse rocked the world and the Rifts tore open the fabric of reality. While humanity struggled to recover from the worldwide changes, a species of interdimensional slavers had moved in and taken over Atlantis, and now used Earth as their home base. Caleb had heard of these creatures but never met one. They were called Splugorth.

Most of what he knew of Atlantis came from his friend Kassiopaea Acherean and the short time he spent on her homeworld, Alexandria. Kassy and her people were Atlanteans, descended from the people who had ruled that continent before it sank beneath the waves – or disappeared into a Rift, Caleb could never remember exactly how it went – and the Splugorth had usurped their ancestral home when it reappeared.

Geryon was due to appear on Atlantis in two days, looking for a route home, even though the Kreeghor and the Splugorth possessed a legendary hatred for one another. That suggested Geryon was desperate, and that he might not find the allies he needed. There was still a chance to recover him.

Caleb took to the sky with the setting sun and headed east. He hit the Gulf of Mexico and cut loose, going supersonic, keeping his eyes peeled for the first sign of Atlantis. There were monsters in the water beneath him, glimpsed momentarily as he blew past them at several times the speed of sound. Storm clouds gathered in the south, and something more ominous than lightning flashed within the darkening expanse. At one point he caught sight of one immense fish-eye just beneath the ocean's surface, larger than an oil tanker, but whatever was connected to it was hidden further beneath the waves. Caleb almost went back to take a better look, but thought better of it and kept to his itinerary.

Geryon and Atlantis awaited. And after that, the first bus out of town.

Even here, Caleb's cosmic awareness operated. He "felt" the looming bulk of the continent of Atlantis long before he saw it, and instinctively slowed down and dropped under radar range. That wouldn't keep normal, or not so normal, eyes from spotting his arrival. Or magical or psionic sensors, for that matter. Caleb sighed. This was kind of a fool's errand, he admitted, but it had to be done.

Jungle flashed beneath him. Caleb glimpsed more monsters thrashing within the trees, brightly colored shapes writhing in the green, heard the rumble of beasts, and witnessed the rending of trees as huge bodies slammed into them and knocked them down. Spider-like, multi-limbed humanoids spotted Caleb's hurtling crimson form, pointed and hooted and tried to follow him by flinging themselves through the trees, but he was too fast. The jungle rose up to a line of mountains, rising sharp-toothed from the island like the spines on a stegosaurus. Here, Caleb saw the works of sentient beings; huge slabs of stone walls and the spires of strange cities where winged giants moved about. Caleb gave them a wide berth, and even raised his altitude to keep from drawing the attention of the creatures.

As the mountains gave way to plains, Caleb dropped down closer to earth again and hugged the ground. He saw more evidence of sentient habitation: gleaming cities in the middle distance that would not look out of place in the Three Galaxies, huge hive-like structures in the distant east that made Caleb think of the Star Hives. He shook himself and angled his crimson form towards the north. Ley lines flickered in the darkness of night, and the shadows of wheeling winged creatures were momentarily outlined against the magical light.

The City of Splynn appeared, a great gleaming golden metropolis nestled in the heart of the eastern mountain range. Like old New York City, it seemed that Splynn was a city that never slept. Sneaking in would be a problem – but then, neither Solo nor any of her people believed he could navigate Atlantis undiscovered. Caleb had to admit he had been lucky so far. The continent was so sparsely populated and he moved so quickly that he so far evaded detection.

Unless he hadn't.

But there was no use entertaining thoughts like that; he might as well give up if he gave in to paranoia. No, better to trust that he had evaded the Splugorth's security so far. Slipping into Splynn would be more complicated than slipping over the border into the country.

Caleb landed in an empty field of waist high, yellowed grass and unslung the pack he had carried across the ocean on his

shoulders. He dispelled his Knight's armor and unpacked his disguise: a badly painted and scratched suit of Bushman plate armor, with some psychoactive crystals decorating the breastplate, gauntlets and greaves. A ragged cloak helped to blur the edges around him, to make him look a little more mysterious and potentially mystical. Solo had provided the armor and Soothsayer had added a mild enchantment to make anyone who saw Caleb in the outfit fail to look too hard at him. Soothsayer promised that it would work better than invisibility, not simply because so many supernatural creatures could see the invisible, but also because the Splugorth and their allies were not subtle beings and didn't tend to notice low level enchantments.

Caleb slipped into his disguise, adjusted the fit a little, tripped over the cloak, and began to walk towards the city. He whistled a Beatles tune and hoped he wasn't making the biggest mistake of his life. Man, he missed John, Paul, George, and Ringo.

Splynn's outskirts were similar to a medieval city, with a wall encircling it, but it lacked the buffer of farms or other settlements to distract from its majesty. Splynn simply rose, cyclopean and glittering, from the plain. Framed by distant mountains, the city winked like a jewel in a crown. There were no roads leading up to it, but there were gates set in the walls, though the entrances were not barred. Gargoyles, Kittani, and dragons guarded the portals, but they looked bored and indolent. Here and there the walls bulged with huge growths that looked like eyes, until Caleb drew close enough to realize they *were* eyes. Huge, distended orbs with a frightening, alien intelligence within their depths, the eyes lazily examined everything around them. Caleb had no doubt that what they saw, the Splugorth saw. He frowned and decided to settle down where he was, hidden within the grass, and watch for an opportunity to slip into the city.

Transports, winged creatures, and other flying things whizzed by overhead. It seemed most visitors to Splynn avoided land travel. But the gates and the guards were there, which meant that someone had to use them.

Caleb didn't sleep, but he did get bored. He found himself growing increasingly so with each hour that passed without any change. Beyond the nearest gate and the lounging Gargoyles outside it, the City of Splynn roared with all the ferocity, energy, and emotion of any major city. But nothing seemed to happen outside of it. He started to come up with some lines to feed the guards, something about his drinking buddies teleporting him out of the city for a laugh – Would they believe that? Could he sell that to a pair of hulking Gargoyle brutes? Did they even speak Trade Four? – when the sun began to rise, and Caleb noticed a convoy of dinosaur-like creatures being led across the plain by brutish, purple-skinned humanoids. At the same time, there appeared to be some kind of duty change at the gates. Caleb saw his chance and took it.

He slipped into the convoy without trouble, using the bulk of the dinosaurs to hide behind as they passed the threshold of the city. One of the purple-skinned humanoids gave him a look when he abandoned the group several streets later, but as no hue and cry went up, Caleb assumed he had escaped. Caleb hurried away, trying to look like he wasn't hurrying, and finally drew to a halt a few more blocks inside the city and had a look around.

There really wasn't much to it, he decided. True, it was an impressive display of power, technology, and magic for this planet, but Splynn still looked a bit backward and provincial compared to a place like Center. You could probably drop the entire city onto one level of Phase World's capital, and still have room for starship docks as well. A vaguely Arabian man in a veil walked past Caleb holding a rope. The other end of the rope encircled the waist of a beautiful, scantily dressed Elven woman with an elaborate mohawk. She in turn was followed by another servant, a woman hunched over and straining under a heavy bag thrown across her back. Unlike Center, Splynn was a city that carried its corruption, its danger, and its evil with pride. The Prometheans didn't care what sentient beings did in Center, but the sentient beings cared, and there were laws there that even Splugorth dare not break. Not here, though. Here, anything was legal. Anything or anyone could be bought or sold, and whether their destination be a plantation, a harem, or a sacrificial altar, no one cared.

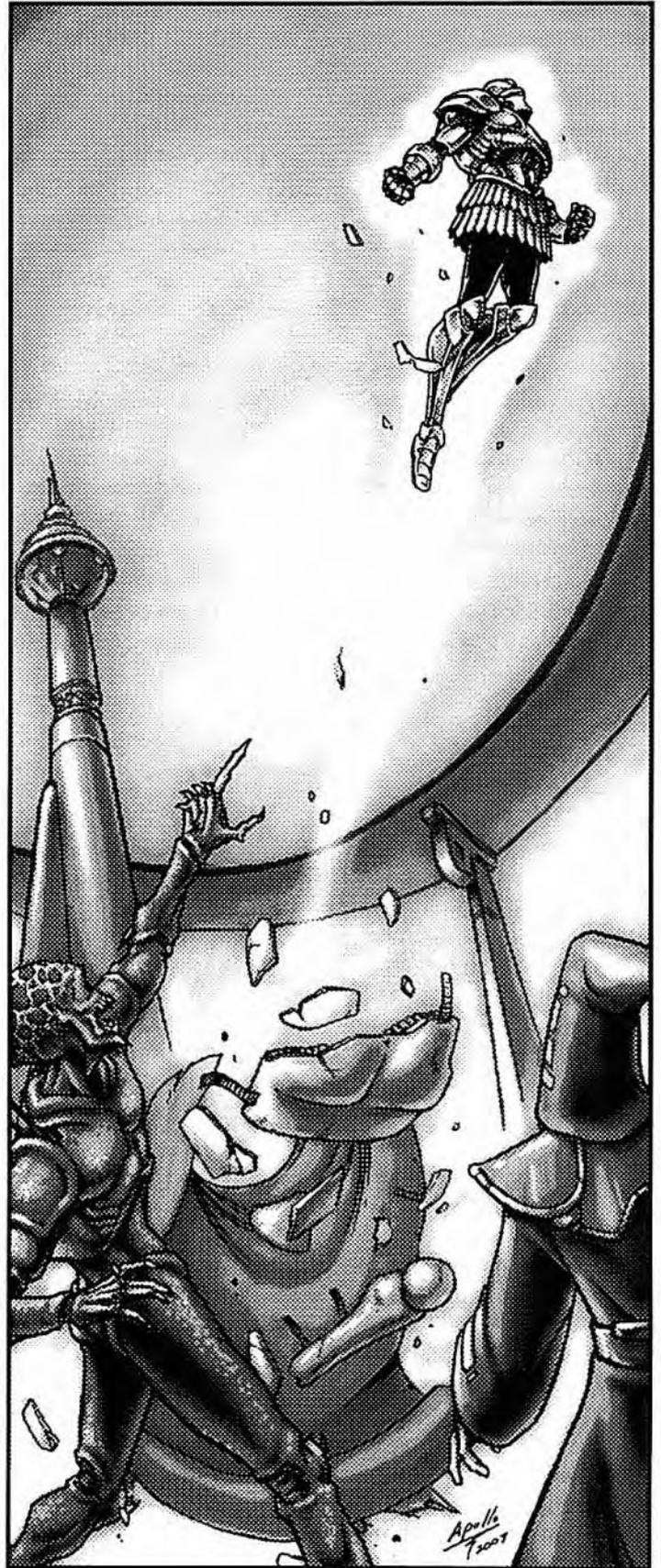
Caleb had to fight to keep himself from freeing the Elf. A blast from his eyes would serve to sever the rope and incinerate the slaver. But then Caleb would have blown his cover, and as powerful as he was, he couldn't fight a whole city single-handed. He would just get himself, and those he tried to save, killed. The knowledge didn't make him feel better. He watched the trio travel down the street, until one of those purple-skinned humanoids, this one in elaborate powered armor, started to walk towards him. Caleb ducked down the next side street and tried to look innocent.

He would have to come back to this Earth some day after all, he decided. If only to wipe this awful place from the planet.

For the next twenty-four hours, Caleb picked his way through the city. He learned the neighborhoods, the sounds and smells, sights and rhythms of the city. It was a brutal place, ruled over by supernatural monsters that cared little for anyone but themselves. Everything that Caleb saw disgusted him, angered him, made his heart twist with sorrow. He took action when and where he could, knowing full well that nothing he did would make much of an impact on the way this city ran. No matter how many people he saved, no matter how many slaves he freed, no matter how many overzealous slavers he beat senseless or street thugs he terrified, the city would go on. Devouring lives and souls at an astonishing, breakneck pace.

With a hundred Cosmo-Knights he could wipe Atlantis clean of the Splugorth taint. He'd find Ariel and Vyking, and the three of them would raze this kingdom to the ground and set the innocents and the land free.

And then, mid-morning on Caleb's second day in Splynn, the very same day that Solo had promised would bring Geryon to Atlantis, a ripple passed through the city. It was like a wave of invisible energy. One moment Caleb was standing on a street corner, craning his neck for some sign of a Royal Kreeghor, ignoring and ignored by all the passersby, and the next minute he was surrounded by dozens of angry, muttering sentient beings talking about an attack in the city's great market. Dimensional raiders were not uncommon, but these were audacious ones. Something about the muttering caught Caleb's attention. He turned to a wolf-headed being in a golden tunic. "What's going on?"



The creature shrugged and pointed over Caleb's shoulder. A huge vidscreen against a building wall, which moments ago had been showing highlights from some bloody gladiatorial game, now showed images of black clad individuals with guns blasting apart sections of the central market. As Splynnian citizens rose

up to attack them, the figures in black could be seen to touch exposed patches of skin, and a rainbow colored menagerie suddenly materialized out of thin air.

Caleb recognized the blue-white Gryphon that led the pack. And the shadowy figure in the trenchcoat and fedora, who took to the air on platforms of darkness.

Kassy and Abbot were here. In Atlantis. On Earth. Caleb didn't know how or why, but he'd seen more than his share of coincidence in the past, and he wouldn't worry about this development just yet. All thoughts of Geryon, Solo, Asgarth, and Earth fled. All that remained was the sudden knowledge that his friends were in trouble.

The Bushman armor and the tattered cloak exploded off of Caleb as his cosmic armor sheathed his body, summoned instinctively, without conscious thought. The people around him ducked for cover, more startled than injured by the outburst, and too stunned to react as he took to the air. The huge sledgehammer that was his chosen weapon materialized in Caleb's hands as he sped towards the central market.

Atlantean security, already alert, took note of the Cosmo-Knight's sudden appearance, and pursued. Kittani sky-skimmers and something that looked like a giant pyramid made out of chitin rocketed after Caleb, squeezing off bursts of energy that he evaded or ignored. Their attacks went wild, and scored rents in the rune-etched walls of the surrounding buildings. That only drew out more attackers.

*So much for secrecy*, Caleb thought. He reached the market, a scene of chaos. Massive explosions had rocked one end of the marketplace, and dozens lay dead or dying on the cobbles. Others were knitting their bodies back together with bio-regeneration, spells, or nanotech. Caleb stopped in mid-air to survey the scene, and his pursuers, lacking his control, shot past him. A Kittani sky-skimmer barely avoided hitting him, but in so doing managed to swing around and crash into one of its fellows. Both craft plummeted out of the sky and produced balls of flame on the ground below.

The pyramid-bug thing, slightly more agile, turned smoothly and faced Caleb. The carapace opened up, revealing a savagely toothed maw and a dozen tentacles that writhed in the air. The forward thrusting prongs beneath the tentacles glimmered with light, and then energy slammed into Caleb's chest, fizzled, and died. Caleb unleashed a barrage of his own, full power, and managed to crack the plates on the creature's left flank. It howled, but he could tell that all he did was bloody its nose. Most creatures wouldn't have survived such an attack, but all Caleb did was get this thing angry.

He bit back a curse and dove up and over the pyramid-bug, which angled itself smoothly and continued to fire its ineffective but pretty electromagnetic blasts at him. Caleb looked around desperately, and saw that the few creatures in the marketplace that were ignoring him were streaming south. If Caleb remembered correctly, the slave pens were in that direction. *What are Abbot and Kassy looking for?*

Tentacles wrapped around his right arm and squeezed. Caleb grunted, wondering how the pyramid-bug had sneaked up on him so completely. The tentacles dragged Caleb backward, towards that horrible looking maw. Caleb pulled back, easily tearing free of the tentacles' grip, and swatted the monster with the business end of his hammer. The carapace cracked, and the pyr-

amid-bug lost altitude, momentarily dazed. But behind it were a half-dozen angry Gargoyles, flying in formation and fast approaching.

"Right," Caleb said. "Time to go." He blasted away, heading south after Kassy and Abbot, following their pursuers. The whole situation was like a Keystone Cops sketch gone horribly wrong. Caleb harried his friend's pursuers, even as he dodged the attacks of the creatures he had picked up. He blasted back and forth with his eyebeams, swung his hammer or threw it to great effect, and even body-slammed another one of those pyramid-bug things into a building. All around him, spells and energy blasts, magicked arrows and thrown weapons buzzed. A few nicked him here or there, but to Caleb's relief, the technology level in Splynn was closer to Three Galaxies standard than elsewhere on Earth. He didn't have to worry about too many missiles or any rail guns, and none of the energy blasts could hurt him.

And then they reached the end of the line. A swarm of dragons, Gargoyles, flying craft, and other airborne beasts settled on a drum shaped building. Caleb saw a ragged hole blown through one of the walls, now almost filled with rubble. A pair of Gargoyles pushed the debris aside and prepared to enter, but Caleb shot past them at full throttle, startling them both. A huge ruckus erupted behind him as the Splugorth allies pursuing him reached the ones after Kassy and Abbot. They would sort their differences out quickly, Caleb knew.

He was forced to slow down. The corridors were too narrow and twisting for him to fly down them at top speed. Even though each step brought him past dead or wounded Splugorth troops, he didn't want to risk stumbling into a fresh squad, nor did he want to bounce like a pinball off the walls. He had to take it slow, even though he could hear the crashing tread of pursuit behind him. Then the lights went out, leaving Caleb in utter darkness. He lifted off the floor and drifted forward slowly, hammer ready, feeling a little uncertain. He loosed a crimson bolt of energy across the corridor, and when it failed to light anything, he began to really worry.

Crashes and weapons fire from below drew him onward, just as the noises behind him pushed him forward. He couldn't see in the dark, but he assumed at least some of the things after him could. No doubt the weird eye projections in the walls could see in the dark, too. What were those things, anyway – biomechanical security cameras?

The sounds of pursuit faded, but Caleb could still hear shouts and curses and other signs of combat coming from beneath him. He drifted in the darkness for a while, until he was certain he had completely lost his way. Just then, the darkness faded, and Caleb found himself in a box junction. A terrible grinding noise echoed up from deep beneath him, and Caleb had the sinking feeling that he had missed the party completely.

Caleb turned around, intending to go back the way he had come, and came face to face with two of the purple-skinned humanoids in heavy armor. One held a staff that was topped with a vial of fluid in which was suspended a thick, fleshy worm. The one with the staff pointed it at Caleb, and he felt a wave of agony wash over him. The other one hefted an axe, but before he could step up and swing it, Caleb loosed an energy blast that bowled over the humanoid with the staff. The pain receded instantly. Caleb dropped the other one with two well placed ham-

mer blows that splintered the being's armor and cracked his skull. Caleb raced down several corridors until he found a stairwell. He leapt over the railing and dropped down several levels until he zeroed in on the sounds of combat.

Beyond the stairwell was a scene out of Dante. The room was awash in carnage. The two Gargoyles who had moved the rubble at the top of the building still stood, but the floor around them was stained with pools of their bodily fluids. Though they staggered almost drunkenly, their supernatural bodies were already repairing the damage done to them. The Kittani in their power suits were battered, and some were dead, but most were still standing and ready to fight. There was one dragon in the room, a black-scaled, great horned beast who belched flame with every breath. The purple-skinned humanoids lay in scattered heaps, bloody and broken, having taken the brunt of whatever attack had damaged the Splugorthian forces. The walls, floor, and ceiling were scored with blaster fire, magic energy, and physical blows, decorated with the bodies of a dozen more supernatural creatures who, like the Gargoyles, were quickly recovering from the barrage.

One of the Gargoyles lumbered forward on unsteady legs and began to hammer on a pair of rune-carved doors splashed with blood.

"Hey," Caleb said. His voice carried and echoed off the high ceiling, bouncing around the room. All heads turned to regard the Knight in the scarlet armor. Caleb gripped his hammer with both hands and stared them all down. "I'm putting an end to this nonsense. Surrender now, or it will go badly for you. All of you."

The dragon's eyes narrowed, but the rest of the menagerie seemed unimpressed. Kittani rifles pointed in Caleb's direction, the remaining purple-skinned humanoids readied their weapons, and one of the Gargoyles turned towards Caleb, flexing his claws.

Caleb unleashed a barrage of eyebeams, the same level and intensity as he had used against the pyramid-bug thing, and the Gargoyle toppled to the floor, a flaming, broken wreck. He would not be rising. The Splugorth forces froze for a split second as the Gargoyle's death sank in, and the others began to realize what the dragon already knew. In fact, the dragon had already shapechanged into a less noticeable form and had departed the room, looking for less dangerous opponents or maybe reinforcements.

The rest of them gathered their courage and attacked.

Plasma bolts flashed across the room. The purple humanoids rushed forward, bent low under the Kittani covering fire, rune weapons in hand. The remaining Gargoyle flexed his wings and roared. Caleb was already airborne, flying over the purple humanoids, ignoring the plasma blasts, and hurling his hammer at the Gargoyle. Bones crunched, the Gargoyle flinched, and Caleb sent lances of red energy through its chest. A spear flashed through the air and slammed into Caleb's back, the ensorcelled tip easily shearing through his armor to the flesh beneath.

Caleb wrenched the spear free and threw it back at his attacker, adding a flash of crimson light from his visor for good measure. The Gargoyle swatted him out of the air. Caleb slammed into the floor with a crash that shook his bones. A Kittani in sinuous, serpentine armor raised a plasma axe and

prepared to bring it down on Caleb's head when the rune-carved doors swung open and the Atlanteans burst into the room. Energy beams flashed through the air, cutting through the Splugorth forces. Caleb bounded to his feet, disarmed the Kittani with one swipe of his hammer, and then shattered the Kittani's faceplate with another swing. The alien went down, unable to see, its armor's sensors blind.

Then there were purple humanoids with axes and swords and hammers all around Caleb, and he could tell by the runes etched into their metal that they were every bit as deadly as that spear. Caleb gritted his teeth behind his helmet and prepared to meet the charge. And then Arwen was there, glowing purple, her hands and feet like quicksilver. And Kassy joined them, a sword suffused with blue-white fire in her hands. Caleb grinned and hefted his hammer. It struck, hard.

In moments, the Splugorth forces broke and ran. Caleb followed Kassy, Arwen, and the other Atlanteans to the room behind the rune-carved door, which swung shut behind them.

"They'll be back, and in greater numbers," Kassy said, referring to the Splugorth.

Caleb nodded. "You have an exit strategy?"

"Abbot's working on it. We have a village of innocents to rescue. It's going to require a big Rift, and he's going to have to keep it open for some time. It's our job to make sure he lives long enough to do it."

"Okay," Caleb said. Kassy looked at him. "What?"

Kassy smiled that killer smile of hers. "Seven Hells, but you know how to make an entrance, Caleb." She wrapped her arms around him in a quick, rough embrace, her black Atlantean armor scraping against his cosmically forged armor. "What are you doing here?"

"Long story. I'll fill you in on the details later." Caleb suddenly remembered Geryon. *Qrun*, he thought, *the bastard's going to escape now*. Kassy just nodded, then rushed over to where Abbot sat cross-legged on the floor. On the other side of the room, a trio of wounded Atlanteans herded a mass of shocked and bewildered humans towards Abbot. Other Atlanteans were checking weapons and armor or patching wounds. Caleb saw Joriel, the winged Celestine, standing nearby. He looked like he had been nearly torn apart; great wounds covered half his body, and his wings were torn. One of his red eyes had gone dim and sightless.

"Vulcan," Joriel said with a nod, no sound of strain in his voice. But Joriel was an android, and it was possible he felt no pain. "Nice of you to join us. Where have you been?"

"You wouldn't believe me if I told you. You look like shivok, Joriel. You going to be okay?"

Before the android could answer, a thunderous blow struck the doors behind Caleb. "Back so soon," he said, turning to eye the door. It shivered as another blow struck it. His back already healed, Caleb was ready for more. But one glance at his companions told him they wouldn't survive another round with the Splugorth.

Just then, a shimmer of silver light formed in the air before Abbot. It grew with each passing second, taking on form and shape, until it became a vast doorway that glowed with light. The Atlanteans began to direct the humans into the Rift.

A crack formed in the golden, rune carved expanse of one of the doors as another blow fell. Caleb eyed his friends and spun the hammer in his hands. They were exhausted, wounded, and hard-pressed. Yet they were Atlanteans, and they would never yield, not against the particular foe they faced. *They'll make it through*, he swore silently to himself, *even if I don't*.

The doors shivered under another blow. Caleb moved forward and braced himself against the doors. They were hot, even beneath his gauntlets, and something heavy and strong heaved into them again and again. Caleb's Forge-born strength held the doors sealed, but he knew he could not last forever against whatever was battering the other side. Caleb's arms vibrated with each dreadful pounding, and eventually the doors began to give way. Caleb lifted up into the air, adding some thrust to his strength, laying his shoulder across the seam that separated the doors.

"Caleb!" Kassy's voice penetrated into his consciousness. He had the sense that she had been calling him for some time. He looked back at her, saw that she and Abbot were the only ones left in the room. The Rift towered over both of them, a silver doorway to an unknown destination. Caleb could sense that the moment he left his post, the doors would thunder open and the Splugorth would come crashing through. He smiled grimly, released his hold and flew toward his friends. Even as he scooped them up, the rune-etched doors smashed open and the hordes of Dyval itself stormed into the room. Mystic bolts and energy blasts and streams of flame from a dragon's mouth scorched the floor where Caleb had stood. Multi-limbed monstrosities, cyclopean creatures, and tentacled horrors slithered into the room, weapons blazing.

Caleb, Kassy, and Abbot entered the Rift and the demons howled behind them. Abbot held on to his fedora with one hand, and as his orange eyes winked, the Rift closed after them. They roared down a silver, shining tunnel.

"Where are we headed?" Caleb yelled, over the roar of the Rift.

"Alexandria!" Kassy said, just as loudly. "Let them try to follow us! Clan Acherean would love a chance to even the score with Splynncryth!"

Caleb nodded. He hoped that his friends had not just sparked and interdimensional war.

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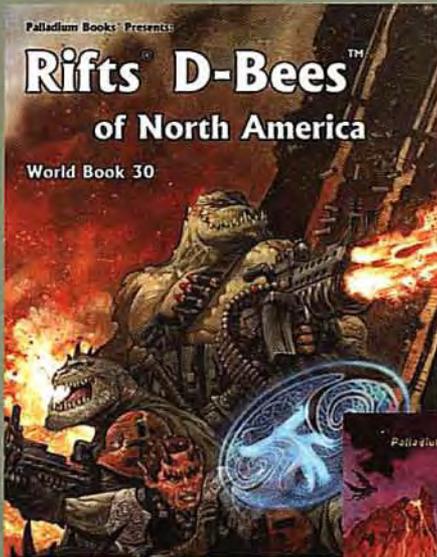
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