

GHULHU TARCH

Burning Horizon



CREDITS

CTHULHU^{TECH} AND FRAMEWORK CREATED BY
MATTHEW GRAU

WRITTEN BY
DR. BOB ARENS, ROBERT GLASS, MATTHEW GRAU, BRUCE
GRAW, STEPHEN MCQUILLAN

INTELLECTUAL PROPERTY DEVELOPER
MATTHEW GRAU

EDITING
JONNI EMRICH, MATTHEW GRAU

ART DIRECTION & LOGO DESIGN
MIKE VAILLANCOURT

LAYOUT & TYPESETTING
MATTHEW GRAU

COVER ART
TY CAREY

INTERIOR ILLUSTRATION
TY CAREY, LUIZ NUNEZ DE CASTRO, ZACHARY GRAVES,
ALEX IGLESIAS, CHAD KING, MACIEJ JANASZEK, JEFFREY LAI,
BLAKE MCDERMOTT, MARK MOLNAR, ALEXANDER NA-
NITCHKOV, MOZY RYZEL, MIKE SASS, ADAM SCHUMPERT,
MAREK TARNAWSKI, MIKE VAILLANCOURT, KIRSTEN ZIRN-
GIBL

WILDFIRE OPERATIONS MANAGEMENT:
FRASER MCKAY

THANKS TO

All our awesome fans and everyone on the *CthulhuTech* forums,
yog-sothoth.com, rpg.net

SPECIAL THANKS

- All of our Gen Con Storyguides – you know who you are.
- Jonni Emrich, for rocking so hard one time it killed a guy.
- The staff and volunteers of Gen Con for their commitment to the industry.

www.cthulhutech.com
Forums, Information, & Downloads

WildFire LLC
23321 SE 291st St.
Black Diamond, WA 98010
www.wildfirellc.com

Black Sky
www.blackskystudios.com

First Printing. ©2011, WildFire LLC, used under exclusive license from Matthew Grau dba Black Sky Studios. All Rights Reserved. *CthulhuTech* and *Framework* are trademarks and/or registered trademarks of Matthew Grau dba Black Sky Studios, in the United States and/or other countries. All characters, names, places, and text herein are copyrighted by Black Sky Studios, used by WildFire LLC under license. No part of this work may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted in any form or by any means, without the prior permission in writing of the Copyright Owner, nor be otherwise circulated in any form other than that in which it is published. References to the works of H. P. Lovecraft are from and remain in the public domain. The Sandstorm logo is a trademark of Sandstorm Productions, LLC.



DISCLAIMER

CthulhuTech is a game. It is a work of fiction intended as entertainment. Everything contained within is a product of imagination. None of it is real.

This book uses the supernatural for settings, characters, and themes. All mystical and supernatural elements are fictional and intended for entertainment purposes only.

FOR MATURE AUDIENCES ONLY

This book is intended for mature readers. It contains dark and disturbing content and images. Reader discretion is advised.

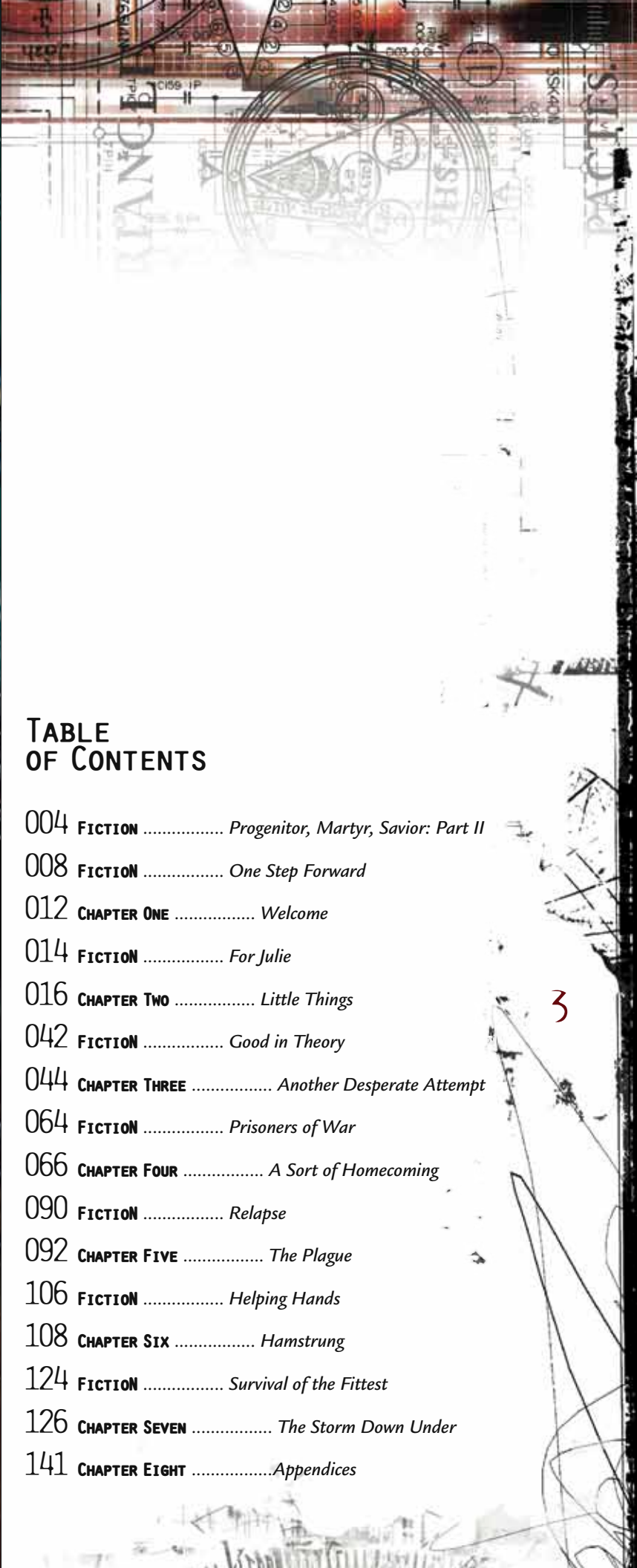


TABLE
OF CONTENTS

004 FICTION *Progenitor, Martyr, Savior: Part II*

008 FICTION *One Step Forward*

012 CHAPTER ONE *Welcome*

014 FICTION *For Julie*

016 CHAPTER TWO *Little Things*

042 FICTION *Good in Theory*

044 CHAPTER THREE *Another Desperate Attempt*

064 FICTION *Prisoners of War*

066 CHAPTER FOUR *A Sort of Homecoming*

090 FICTION *Relapse*

092 CHAPTER FIVE *The Plague*

106 FICTION *Helping Hands*

108 CHAPTER SIX *Hamstrung*

124 FICTION *Survival of the Fittest*

126 CHAPTER SEVEN *The Storm Down Under*

141 CHAPTER EIGHT *Appendices*

ARKHAM, MASS. 2019.

NO! NO,
YOU IDIOTS,
NO!

LET ME
GO!

THERE'S A
JUNCTURE COMING!
NO!

NOT LONG AGO, TERESA ASHCROFT WAS A
PROMISING YOUNG DOCTORAL STUDENT.

SIMON!
STOP THEM!
DON'T DO
THIS!

THAT WAS BEFORE HER OBSESSION WITH
NON-EUCLIDEAN MATHEMATICS CLAIMED
HER LIFE.

AND HER PART IN THE STORY IS ABOUT
TO END. FOR NOW...

WHY ARE
THEY TAKING
HER?

SHE'S JUST ILL.
THIS IS FOR HER OWN
GOOD.

NO, IT ISN'T.
YOU SHOULD HAVE LEFT
HER ALONE.



2021. NEARLY TWO YEARS LATER



THIS ISN'T A
GOOD TIME

IT'S NEVER A GOOD TIME
FOR YOU, TERESA.
THAT'S WHY WE HAVE THESE
SESSIONS.



THEY'RE NOT HELPING
BECAUSE I'M NOT
CRAZY.

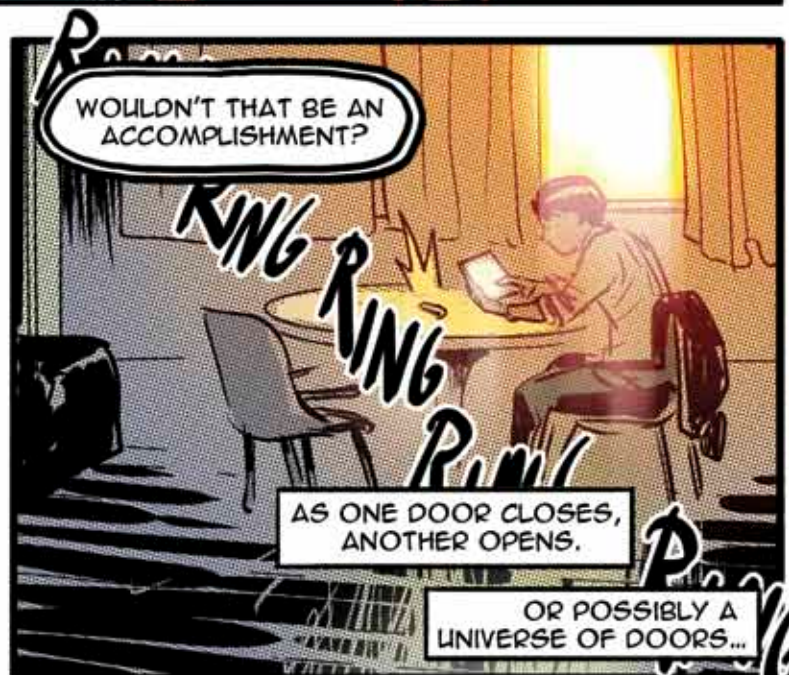
I'M IN CONTROL
AGAIN. PLEASE
LEAVE.

HOW LONG
DO YOU PLAN
ON STAYING IN
HERE?

UNTIL YOU
LET ME OUT.

OR UNTIL I
FINISH...





Out there, somewhere, something burned.

The void rushed past, though the stars barely moved. Balls of rock, then a giant asteroid field, then a small, cold, dark planet.

Inside, things shrieked. Alien things. Shooting below the planet's surface, flying creatures that looked something like terrestrial insects scrambled in panic. Fireballs bloomed throughout the enormous cavern.

Something else was out here.

.

"Captain! Sam!" Something shook her.

The world returned, as if flying back down a long tunnel, the vision receding. She was cold. She blinked her eyes and looked up at Lt. Kanwar. It looked like his eyes were going to pop out of their sockets.

"I'm good. Relax," said Sam.

She took a minute to take stock. A vision had taken her during lunch. Her forkful of barbecued pork smeared the floor next to her and she quickly discovered why she was cold. Sam had managed to dump a full glass of water into her lap. These things could be like seizures sometimes.

Standing up, she began to try to mop the water off of her, but it had already sunk into her clothes. She'd need a dryer. Dryer, heat, fire. Her vision came flooding back.

Sam turned and ran out of the Officer's Mess, pants still wet, napkin still in hand.

.

The War Room in Unified Force Command isn't someplace many people get to see. Depictions in the media are only fantastical creations and none were very close. It is one of the most important nerve centers in the New Earth Government, a place where the mortal races of Earth carefully planned their survival.

Physically, it is what one might expect. A large conference table with advanced communications equipment, screens both above the table and on the walls, each filled with some sort of video or data feed, bomb-proof walls, and both physical and mystical security of the highest caliber. It was, simply put, the highest tech bunker in existence.

Sitting here, as he often did, was Field Marshal Anton Tilden. The gently-graying, charismatic career-officer spent a lot of his time here, analyzing data for that hidden prize. The staff of the War Room buzzed around him, keeping all the pieces in place that allowed Field Marshal Tilden and the other Marshals and Admirals to make the tough decisions. The ones that cost lives.

Not that Anton wasn't used to the War Room door bursting open with urgent news, but it still made him jump almost ev-

ery time. Captain Samantha Masters was a mess, a wet stain all down the front of her. Field Marshal Tilden knew instantly what had happened.

"Captain, what did you see?" he asked.

Sam took a second to catch her breath. "Pluto. Something's happening, or is going to happen, on Pluto."

The Field Marshal's blood ran cold. "What kind of something on Pluto? The Migou can't possibly have more reinforcements coming. What's the status on the second Hive Ship?"

Lt. Detenamo, Tilden's aide, punched up the pertinent data. "All sources show it is still on approach."

"Get me feeds on Pluto. Tap the telescopic feeds to get me the best picture you can." The Field Marshal got up and began to pace. Sam stood, waiting with baited breath.

It took a minute to cycle up all the resources to point at Pluto. The planet was very distant and all the New Earth Government had left to monitor the planet were optical and radio telescopes.

Lt. Detenamo glanced back and forth between the screens, her attention deficit disorder once again working to her advantage. "All signs point to the planet being quiet, though there is some unusual activity on the radio telescopes."

Something rang in the back of Sam's head. "That's it," she shouted. "Wait for it."

The young lieutenant kept her eyes flitting back and forth over the data. Then she stopped. "Something's going on. I can't tell what, but something is going on."

Field Marshal Tilden rushed over to look at the screen. "What, though? Are the Migou building something? Have they fired something?" The whole room exploded into motion, centered on the new stream of data from the dwarf planet.





Sam shook her head, letting herself smile just a little. "I don't think they're doing anything, sir. I think they're being attacked."

.

Days had gone by. The War Room was in overdrive, trying desperately to figure out what had happened. All the hard work yielded few results. Pluto had indeed been attacked by an unknown force.

For some reason, during all of this, Sam had insisted that someone carefully monitor the second Hive Ship on its approach. Given her abilities, no one questioned why and simply complied.

Nothing more came. There was no further attack. Pluto seemed to go quiet again. It seemed anti-climactic.

"Do we have nothing new on the force?" asked Field Marshal Tilden, his frustration apparent.

Field Marshal Sanrkiene searched through the latest data. "The vessels were not Migou in construction. They appeared to be, from what little we have gleaned, more traditional in construction."

Captain Masters hadn't been paying attention to any of them. Something cosmic pulled at her heart. Suddenly, it surged. She slapped the table, startling the assembly. "Now. Now is when it happens."

Somewhere in the room, something insistent beeped. The junior officer assigned to Sam's special project stood up and nearly passed out. The room stood on pins and needles during the second it took for him to regain his composure. Overcome, all he could do was patch his feed through to the main monitors.

There it was, in as much glory as the optics could give it, a marble floating through space. A marble that spelled the end of humanity when it finally arrived. And something was indeed happening.

The second Migou Hive Ship was turning around.

.

Sam waited with baited breath. Frankly, it seemed like she waited with baited breath a lot of the time since her parapsychic abilities had erupted. But this wasn't like so many of the times. This time she waited, with a sense of hope she hadn't felt in a very long time.

The ship was on the kind of approach that should've done serious damage to any Human or Nazzadi, but it was broadcasting a legitimate New Earth Government code. Admittedly, this code was more than a decade out of date, but it was of the kind of security clearance that made the powers that be sit up and take notice. The ship appeared to be of New Earth Government origin, but only vaguely. So here they were at Cape Canaveral, hoping that this was on the level and not yet some other new threat in the Strange Aeon.

The landing area was schizophrenic, to say the least. All around were heavy defenses, the kind to make any sort of invader blush. However, the New Earth Government had long since realized that such defenses weren't always enough. The rest of the assembly were the honor guard, those ready to receive what may very well be diplomats of allies – and the NEG simply didn't have enough allies in the world these days.

Sam sat with Field Marshal Tilden and the diplomatic detachment, though the part of her that was once an Engel pilot felt the tension of those that were there to defend. She felt the longing inside her that was Remiel, missing her monstrous cyborg companion as she did so often these days. If all went well today, she would make a point of spending time with him as soon as she could. But that was a pretty big if.

The fighter escort above kept pace, but only barely. The ship, which appeared to be of Human origin on even closer inspection, was coming in extremely hot. The fighters in question had to slow down, for fear of not being able to break out of their descent, leaving the interloper to its own devices. Sam began to wonder if it was a *kamikaze*, intent on slamming into the area at top speed and leaving corpses strewn around a giant impact crater. Then, suddenly, it whipped around to fire thrusters in the opposite direction and slowed itself to land. That maneuver, Sam knew, had enough G-forces to kill a mortal pilot. It was, frankly, impossible. The media swarmed to get the best coverage possible, and Sam hoped they weren't merely filming the next Aeon War catastrophe.

The ship settled down on the landing platform, still hissing a little from re-entry into the Earth's atmosphere. A hatch

opened up, and a landing ramp descended. Through the steam, something approached. Sam could feel the soldiers all around her tense, and she hoped desperately she hadn't come to another blood-bath. Thankfully, something that appeared to be Human descended the ramp – though not the kind of thing that caused the New Earth Government to relax. Fierce, armored things began to descend, carrying assault rifles in a state of passive readiness. The armor they wore was not dissimilar to the armor worn by NEG marines more than a decade ago...

Before anyone had a chance to bristle, an aging Asian woman stepped off, carrying herself like a woman of authority. She stopped at the top of the ramp as the marines around her took position. There was a moment in which Sam could hear a pin drop. Finally, the woman brought up a communicator, linked to a loudspeaker on the ship. She paused for a moment. Sam was just close enough that she could see something in the woman's face, something she didn't expect at all.

Tears rolled down her face. Tears of joy, tears of relief, but definitely not tears of sorrow.

Composing herself, the woman spoke words that would forever find a home in the annals of history. "Children of Earth, we are your lost siblings, now the Children of the Void. We return in peace, to join forces to liberate humanity from the tyranny of dead gods and monstrosities. However, we are not part of your New Earth Government. We are the Independent Solar Colonies and we are your friends. It is truly good to see you, after all these long years."

To punctuate her words, the woman's guards placed their weapons on the ground and removed their helmets. Humans and Nazzadi every one, smiles on their faces.

All around Sam, the assembly stared in awe. Everyone was too shocked to do anything. Could it actually be true? Could the colonies have survived? Could all those thought dead actually have come home? It seemed too good to be true.

Then, somebody came to their senses and started to cheer. That was all the assembly needed. Good news was so rare these days that the emotional reaction was intense and almost out of control – caution be damned. Soldiers put down their arms to cheer, clap, and laugh. The diplomatic detachment around her began to hug each other. All throughout, tears rolled down people's faces.

Sam couldn't help but burst into tears herself.

.

This was bad and strangely Sam had never even seen it coming. They'd thought it was a flu outbreak at first, but then people started to bleed out. No one knew what to do and emergency hospitals were being set up all over the place.

Then Varika's mother got sick. Gwen was practically Sam's mother-in-law at this point, despite the ways she was sometimes oddly distant. Naturally, Varika was freaking out.

Fortunately, the privilege of having your husband be a former diplomat and your son a current member of the Armed Forces

meant that Gwen was rushed to a military hospital, instead of one of the many facilities that had popped up in gymnasiums. She was likely to get the best care available.

Gwen had been rushed to intensive care, but that really didn't mean much at the moment. The entire hospital had been converted to intensive care. Doctors had been examining her and running a battery of tests. Baruba, Varika's dad, was a mess. Sam wondered if the man had ever looked even close to this scared in his days of battle during the First Arcanotech War.

Her boyfriend sat, buried in a magazine. If one didn't know better, he'd look like he was doing his best to distract himself. However, *Contemporary Fishing* wasn't really Varika's speed and he'd been staring at the same page for the last fifteen minutes.

"How you holding up, lover?" asked Sam, gently stroking his hair.

This question was met with a big sigh. The xenomix folded the magazine and looked up at her. "I just wish someone would tell us something."

It had been a while without hearing anything from the medical staff. It's not like they were invisible - they were rushing everywhere. They just weren't talking to anyone other than themselves.

Sam sat down next to Varika and took his hand. "Oty's strong. I'm sure she'll be okay."

"Sam, you've seen the gurneys. They're rolling dead bodies out of here every half hour. I'm not going to pretend that this isn't serious."

It was true. Whatever the hell this was, it was lethal and the staff couldn't get the dead bodies out of here fast enough.

"I never said it wasn't serious. All I said is that your mother is a fighter. After all the garbage she's had to put up with in life, I certainly hope it isn't a juiced up flu that takes her out."

Varika couldn't help but smile a little. "Yeah. That's for sure."

Finally, a doctor appeared to be zeroing in on them, making his way inelegantly through the rushing bodies that were the hospital hallways. He was young, unshaved, and looked like he hadn't slept in about three days. That impression was only supported by the way he gulped his coffee like a man in the desert who'd finally found water. He approached Varika's father.

"Mr. Baruba? I'm Dr. Stone."

Baruba looked up, his skin blanching in the Nazzadi equivalent of turning white as a sheet. "I am he."

Stone swallowed another gulp of coffee before speaking. "Mr. Baruba, I've been up way too long and sent way too many bodies

to the morgue in the last couple of days to have any kind of bedside manner left. If you want to punch me when I'm done, feel free. I need an excuse to sleep."

Naturally, no one said anything. How could they after such an awkward moment?

"You're all military or ex-military personnel, so I'm going to lay it out for you. We're starting to figure out what's going on. This isn't the flu. It's being termed the Migou Hemorrhagic Virus. It's a designer plague that the bugs have suddenly decided to unleash."

Sam was the only one with the ability to say anything. "Wait. This is intentional? The Migou did this?"

Stone nodded, somehow knocking back more caffeine at the same time. "We've often wondered why the bugs haven't tried this before. Apparently the fact that we left several smoking craters in the Hive Ship last March finally sealed the deal. They're definitely sore losers."

"What is this plague?" asked Baruba, the mention of his former masters bringing him back to his senses.

"As I said, it's hemorrhagic in nature. Like ebola. People first come down with flu-like symptoms and then appear to get better. Some really do. The rest have to deal with the real virus. Gwen's one who's having to do that."

Sam, Varika, and Baruba could do nothing but wait for him to say more, staring at him wide-eyed.

Dr. Stone continued. "I'm not going to mess with you. The odds of her surviving are extremely slim. I'd go so far as to say none. She's probably got about another day, but it's going to get progressively worse. If I were you, I'd go right after this and say whatever you need to say to say goodbye. I'll do whatever I can to make her comfortable."

The three that considered themselves Gwen's family sat in stunned silence.

"Listen, I am sorry," Stone looked like he was about to collapse. "I've had to deliver this horrible news to a lot more people than I ever would have wanted to in the last week. That's not to mention the terror I have every minute of every day that I'm going to catch this death-sentence trying to ease the pain of the people who've had the crap luck to have caught it."

There was a crack as Baruba snapped the arm rest of his chair off.

"If there's one thing I can offer, it's this. Take that pain and suffer. Then take that suffering and turn it into hate. Take that hate and turn it into something. I want to see those goddamn bugs burn. Do that for me. Make them burn. Make them suffer. I can't do that, but you can. Make them hurt. Promise me you'll do that."

Sam and Varika nodded as best they could. Then Stone rushed away in a blur of white, like the Angel of Death he'd become.

chapter one

WELCOME

Time marches on. Days pass, the world changes. The Aeon War grows and the Shadow War rages. In that vein, you hold the evolution of the *CthulhuTech* setting in your hands. Welcome to 2087. Welcome to *Burning Horizon*.

Burning Horizon is the second *CthulhuTech* story book and it is a very different kind of book than other *CthulhuTech* resource books. It covers the major story developments in the *CthulhuTech* setting over the year 2087 and it changes what the setting is in the process. *CthulhuTech* will never be the same.

This short chapter will give you a road map to this book, how to use the material in several ways, and show the physical structure of the text.

Good luck and good hunting. You'll need it.

REFERENCES

Burning Horizon builds on material that has already been presented as part of the *CthulhuTech* product line. While you can use this book only having read the *Core Book*, parts will be confusing if you have not also read the *Damnation View* – the first *CthulhuTech* story book. It is also recommended that you are familiar with the material in *Vade Mecum*, and the information from *Mortal Remains* might also be useful. The *CthulhuTech* setting is meant to be inclusive of all elements and *Burning Horizon* brings them all together in one place.

STORYGUIDES VS. PLAYERS

Burning Horizon is primarily written for Storyguides. The events of 2087 are presented to be used as story elements or full-blown stories for your games. They reveal important secrets and events in the *CthulhuTech* setting and metaplot. If you're a player, you may compromise your enjoyment of this material if you read it before you get the chance to experience it unfolding as part of your story.

However, we know that Storyguides are not the only people who are interested in buying and reading this book. The good news is that there are ways for you as a player to enjoy *Burning Horizon* without ruining your play experience. Our best recommendation is to let your Storyguide read the book first, so he can tell you which sections he will be using in your game. Then you can avoid reading the parts that may spoil your experience, while still enjoying the rest of the book. After all, *Burning Horizon* covers events all over the *CthulhuTech* setting and it is unlikely that you will play them all in your game. Many of them may only be things your Character reads about in the news, but you want to know the details.

If you're a Storyguide, you may have to deal with players that are going to read the whole book anyway. If that's the case, our best advice is to use the story details as inspiration on where to take your own game. You know the broad strokes of what's going to happen and you may know where you want to end based on the metaplot, but you can change up the details any way you want.

BURNING HORIZON?

You may be wondering why the book is called what it's called. 2087 is an interesting year. Many dark and terrible things have happened over the last year, but something new is coming. From the right perspective, there's a fire burning on the horizon.

It's a little more work, but you will keep your players guessing and everyone can enjoy this book.

THE CTHULHUTECH STORYLINE

The overarching storyline of *CthulhuTech* is referred to as the metaplot – in other words, the way the setting evolves in a large sense. You will create and play many plots as part of your own personal stories, but the setting will grow and change independent of them to simulate how things happen in the real world. Those things are the metaplot.

There are some game enthusiasts who do not like metaplot as a part of their games. They do not like a setting that evolves outside of their control. If you are one of these people, that does not mean that *Burning Horizon* cannot be of use to you. This book delves further into different aspects of the setting that may not be explored elsewhere and provides new technology, monsters, and character options. You can use these to enhance your own game and you may well be inspired to write stories of your own design based on some of the stories presented here.

While we have no intention of telling you how to run your game, we will be taking a stand on how sections of the metaplot turn out and we will be developing further story material based on that. Again, use what you want, modify what you want, and throw away the rest.

USING THIS MATERIAL

Burning Horizon presents you with a series of both minor and major plots. The minor plots each give you an overview of the plot and possible events, ways to integrate them into your game, and several important supporting cast characters. The major plots each give you an overview of the plot, background surrounding the plot and the players involved, the important events of the story along with locations and members of the supporting cast, ways to integrate the plot into your already existing game, and several possible outcomes.

If you like what you see, this book is designed to get you up and running with the material as quickly as possible. The broad strokes are all done for you and all you need to do is add the appropriate details for your story and Characters and customize it in any way you see fit.

If you find that you like the ideas but not the execution or are the kind of Storyguide that simply generates everything from scratch, then use the material in this book as inspiration and something from which to build. We're not here to tell you how

to run your game. *Burning Horizon* is intended to be a resource for everyone, whether you use the material as it is written or take it entirely in your own direction.

INTEGRATING CHARACTERS

Burning Horizon is designed to bring your Characters front and center for the biggest world-shaking events of the *CthulhuTech* story. Your Dramatic Characters are the most important characters in your game, so there's no reason they shouldn't be the most important characters in the setting. If they participate in these events, and in the events of upcoming story books, they will become legendary, among the most renowned people to live in this era.

Of course, such events are dangerous and some Characters may well perish in their pursuits. They will be memorialized when all is said and done. However, we encourage you as a Storyguide not to allow Dramatic Characters to die unless it is in a critical and dramatic moment and in a cinematic fashion. Anything else may be anti-climactic.

Overall, Characters need to be up to the challenges in front of them. Throwing newly designed, rookie Dramatic Characters into the major events of the setting may be too much too fast. Characters will accrue Experience while they are playing these events, but they should be on solid footing before that even happens. If you, as a Storyguide, are willing to play with the power levels of the plots in this book to fit your Characters, this won't be a problem – however, it may not be as believable. After all, major forces in play are major forces in play and bringing anything less than their full force to bear may not create a powerful story. It is best if Characters have been playing for a while and have had a chance to increase those things important to them – that warriors have advanced fighting skills, that sorcerers have learned an array of spells, that para-psychics have developed their powers to use them effectively, etc. They don't have to be fully experienced Characters as we define experienced among the supporting cast, but they should have some exploits under their belt.

WE LEARN

Burning Horizon is different in some ways from its precursor, the *Damnation View*. While fans liked the storylines presented in the *Damnation View*, many weren't as pleased with the way those storylines were presented. We utilized story paths to present the stories and there are those who felt those created too finite a progression.

We have listened to the requests of our fans and we have adapted. Instead of story paths, we will present these stories according to key events, leaving plenty of open space for Storyguides to mold them to work inside of their own games. We want to provide you with useful information, without compromising your intentions.

We want you to have the best *CthulhuTech* experience possible.

IF YOU DOWNLOADED THIS BOOK
So if you're one of the people who has downloaded this book illegally off the internet, let's talk. We want to stay in business. We don't get to stay in business if you don't buy our products but you use them anyway. In more personal terms, if you like *CthulhuTech*, please go out and buy the books, because if you don't we go out of business or we kill the line because sales suck and boom – no more *CthulhuTech*. You lose, we lose, everybody loses. Everybody loves something for nothing, but this sort of thing comes with a price whether it's money or not.

THE BOOK

This book is divided into a series of chapters, each addressing a major section of 2087's story development. Here's a breakdown of those chapters, both to give you an idea of what's ahead and to help you find something specific if you're interested. Interspersed between these chapters are short pieces of fiction to help you get a better feeling for what the *CthulhuTech* setting is like.

Chapter One: Welcome is what you are reading right now. It's meant to help ease you into the vision for this story book and give you a reference for what this book contains.

Chapter Two: Little Things introduces a series of smaller plots, including new technological developments, new arcane developments, and a few social happenings that may change things for the worse. It also includes a discussion of pop culture in the year 2087, to better immerse players in the setting.

Chapter Three: Another Desperate Attempt presents the story of the New Earth Government executing the do-or-die Operation Final Strike against the Migou Hive Ship. It also brings into play new rules for spaceships, zero-g combat, and zero-g mecha.

Chapter Four: A Sort of Homecoming unveils a new ally for the New Earth Government in the Aeon War, and answers the important question of what happened to the solar colonies after the start of the Second Arcanotech War. It also expands upon the new spaceship rules and adds new types of Characters and games.

Chapter Five: The Plague presents an answer to the question of why the Migou haven't unleashed an engineered disease into the New Earth Government. It is a dark series of days as the citizens of the New Earth Government try desperately to cope – and survive.

Chapter Six: Hamstrung introduces the pain of the Office of Internal Security, as it strays further into the Shadow War. The Eldritch Society tries desperately to help from the shadows as the Chrysalis Corporation makes things very difficult for the thorny government agency.

Chapter Seven: The Storm Down Under presents the newest front in the fight against the monstrous hordes of the Disciples of the Rapine Storm. Since the fall of China, it is now Australia that bears the brunt of the Rapine Storm's wrath.

Chapter Eight: Appendices includes the index.



The non-stop flash of cameras. Screaming fans. Broadcast crews everywhere. All the icons of pop culture strutting their stuff in outfits that cost more than some people make in a year, their vanity getting the validation they so desperately crave.

There it was. The famed Red Carpet. It was a thing many people dreamed about, dreamed that they one day would have the rare opportunity to be one of the beautiful people.

Now, after years of such dreams, Sorena just wasn't in the mood.

The Nazzadi buzzed the limo driver. "Do another lap. A longer one this time."

Across from him sat his oldest friend, a man who looked like he'd been to hell and back. Roy was supposed to be his bodyguard, but the Vampire inside Sorena made such a thing almost laughable. Still, appearances were an important thing to maintain.

Roy knocked back the last of his glass of bourbon. "Quite a zoo out there. This kind of fame is going to require some serious management."

Sorena quietly nodded and looked out the window at the passing buildings. "I don't think I've ever been in a car inside the arco before, have you?"

"Nope," responded his friend. "I guess it's just perks of the biz."



Roy waited, watching to see how Sorena might react. Nothing. "Hey man, we're going to have to get this over with sooner or later."

"I know. But last year, this was Julie's show."

It was always nerve-racking playing new remixes for celebrities. Sorena had worked with a couple, but Julie Rain was the biggest. She'd seemed cool so far, but one never knew when pop stars were going to flip their lids and throw a temper tantrum.

Her company was certainly enchanting. She was one of those few celebrities who was actually more beautiful in person. Tall, willowy, short hair that was blonde in front and dark in the back (she clearly had a Nazzadi stylist), with a fine featured face and the bluest eyes. And a great smile.

The first track he'd picked to play her was "Tequila Sunrise" which, in its native form, was a poppy dance song on most Secondary School students' music players. He'd taken it in a whole new direction - Shadowbeat. Julie's voice was distant and eerie, like she was singing from a sepulcher. She was heard to read, but it was more from her being intent on listening to the track than it was from her putting on that stone face they do when they aren't sure they like what they're hearing.

The remix ended and Julie sat in silence. Sorena, never one to break his cool, simply sat back in his chair and watched. Slowly she turned and she did not look happy. Finally, she spoke. "I effing love it!"

With that she burst into a smile, got up out of her chair, and rushed over to hug him.

"I never would have thought to take it in that direction! But it totally works. I suck at it, but you know what I've always heard in my head? This song remixed as like dark, retro drum and bass."

That started it. Julie had a much greater knowledge of dance music than Sorena would have ever guessed. Before they knew it, night had fallen and they'd spent hours geeking out over Sorena's music collection and coming up with all kinds of new ways to take Julie's hits into different styles.

Sitting on the couch, well into their second bottle of wine, Julie smiled at him a little more personally than she had earlier. "How come we never had this kind of talk before you started?"

"Two words. Your manager," replied Sorena, wearing his best devilish grin.

"That settles it then. You're going to be seeing a lot more of me."

There are those moments when eyes meet and sparks fly. This was one, and they both knew.

It was a good thing she didn't know that not more than a few hours ago, Sorena was pulling the eyes out of a Chrysalis executive and enjoying every moment of it.

Roy snapped Sorena out of his reverie. "Hey man... you know I'm no good at this. But you must have really loved her."

"Yeah. Yeah, I did."

"How did I miss that?"

Sorena chuckled grimly. "Because we kept it quiet. Plus, my friend, you can be pretty dense sometimes."

The limo pulled up again. The nearby handlers waited for some sign that this time someone was going to get out.

Under normal circumstances, there was always an obvious someone - or something - that Sorena could hate. Someone he could find, take, and make suffer for the pain. It always made him feel better.

This was one time the pain wasn't going to go away. This was one time he was just going to have to live with it.

Pulling up the hood on his custom black coat, Sorena grit his teeth and opened the limo door. He only hoped the cameras wouldn't catch the tear that hung at the corner of his eye now, the way it did at so many other times these days.

There are wounds from which even a Tager can't heal.

chapter two

little things

THE STATE OF THE WORLD

2086 was a busy year. Much happened that changed the state of the world, setting the stage for the events to come this year. The New Earth Government failed in military efforts in both China and Alaska, the Eldritch Society fouled the Chrysalis Corporation's efforts to bring over another avatar of a powerful Old One, and the Esoteric Order of Dagon unearthed something very useful in their quest to raise their lost home. This is all not to mention the stuff on the home front, like the unfortunate increase in the crime rate.

There are a number of things that should carry over from the *Damnation View*, our first story book, which we will not especially be focusing on in *Burning Horizon*. Here is a brief exploration of them.

ALASKA

The New Earth Government mounted an attempt to retake Juneau from the invading Migou forces. The powers that be felt that a Migou beachhead that far south into mainland North America was a threat to the sanctuary that has been this part of the world. Unfortunately, it failed miserably.

The Migou lured the New Earth Government into a trap. They hid large numbers of forces inside buildings hidden by experimental stealth technology. The Armed Forces arrived only to discover that they were hopelessly outnumbered and out-gunned. Those soldiers that made it out were lucky.

Since this event, the New Earth Government has declared Juneau lost. While small covert units may still be sent to infiltrate the city and either gather intelligence or rescue important things, there are no plans to re-enter Juneau in any other way. The Armed Forces have created a defensive perimeter in the territory surrounding Juneau in an attempt to keep the Migou contained as best they can.

However, the Migou are not content to stay put. Recon patrols are reaching out from Juneau to explore northern and western Canada. They are gathering information and slowly testing the NEG's defenses. However, they are also up to far more sinister plans, as revealed in *The Plague*, starting on p. 88.

Though the media has attempted to buffer the blow, the failure in Juneau has still been a demoralizing factor to the citizens of the New Earth Government. Though no action is going to be taken, it is likely that Characters will still hear the event spoken of in public or at parties. It remains a topic of conversation and debate on a fairly regular basis.

CHINA

China has been one of the worst fronts of the Aeon War for years, as brave soldiers have attempted to hold back the monstrous hordes of Hastur. It's a place that soldiers dread to go, a place that has been likened to hell on Earth.

Last year, the forces of the Disciples of the Rapine Storm managed to finally make their own cracks in the fronts held by the

New Earth Government in southeast Asia. In one fell swoop, they managed to bring the whole thing down, running wild across China. The hordes forced the New Earth Government to run screaming for safer lands, slaughtering hundreds of thousands of innocent people in the process. The Armed Forces, unprepared for an evacuation on this scale, was forced to leave many behind, sealing their death warrants. It was a complete disaster and a nightmare many will not soon forget.

Naturally, the Ministry of Information tried to put a spin on the situation that would lessen the blow to the world. The media has stated that the situation was not as bad as it was made to seem and that New Earth Government forces are still rallying and forming new strategies with which to go back into China and drive back the Disciples of the Rapine Storm. Of course, this is an outright lie. The NEG knows that it has lost China and there's no chance, given current circumstances, that they'll be able to make any real progress in southeast Asia.

Instead, the reality is that the Disciples of the Rapine Storm have begun to push their way down into northern Australia and New Zealand, unleashing new horrors there. The New Earth Government is fortifying those areas, determined to draw a new line in the sand. This is described in *The Storm Down Under*, starting on p. 124 of this book.

THE QUEST FOR R'LYEH

The Esoteric Order of Dagon is closer than ever to their goal of raising the sunken city of R'lyeh and awakening their sleeping deity. They have found a lost temple hidden in the Mid-Atlantic Ridge, which contained a celestial map that showed them when the sunken city will be in a place dimensionally so that it can be brought into this world. It didn't give them a where or a how, but it did give them a when. While the date is uncertain to the forces of the New Earth Government, it is most certainly soon.

This was a big victory for the Esoteric Order and it has left them on a high. There is a certain arrogance that taints them now and that will bleed through to any encounters with the cult during 2087. The EOD will continue to search for any clues to R'lyeh this year, as well as their usual activities that involve breeding and arming their growing army. However, they do have another trick up their sleeve, as described in *Something Fishy*, starting on p. 34 of this book.

THE SEATTLE AREA

The residents of the Seattle area are still reeling from several unusual events last year. The most obvious is the unexpected eruption of Mt. Rainier, which destroyed the coastal town of Tacoma and killed tens of thousands of residents. It was a great tragedy, which was later discovered to be a plot perpetrated by the Migou and their experimental seismic generator. Fortunately, the heinous device was seized by the New Earth Government.

This discovery led to another even greater one – that the Migou have another Hive Ship on the way. Humanity has had a difficult enough time trying to repel the forces from one Hive Shop, much

less two. There are very few inside the New Earth Government who even know this secret, as it is too terrifying to let it be more common knowledge. If that second Hive Ship reaches the Earth, it will pretty much spell the end of things for the mortal races. The Migou will first enslave the Human race and exterminate the Nazzadi, and then turn their attentions towards the Cults. Desperation has set in at the highest levels of government and the military, as they search vainly for a way out. Some of their plans are described in *Another Desperate Attempt*, starting on p. 42 of this book.

On top of all that, behind the scenes the Eldritch Society thwarted a massive effort on the part of the Chrysalis Corporation to bring forth an avatar of Shub-Niggurath. The crescendo of the ritual brought with it all kinds of surprising and aberrant weather and natural phenomenon, including several small but lengthy earthquakes. While most people have no idea of the cause, they are still sufficiently freaked out by the occurrence.

To go along with that, Seattle is a dangerous place for members of the Eldritch Society right now. The Chrysalis Corporation is angry and they have decided to dedicate the significant amount of freed-up resources to bear against the Society. Dhohanoids and fire teams hunt Tagers on an almost nightly basis still, and this animosity has spread to the Vancouver and Portland arcologies as well. Of course, there are other efforts afoot that take time away from their revenge, as described in *Hamstrung*, starting on p. 106 of this book.

STREET CRIME

The Disciples of Death's Shadow have done a fine job of bringing the world of street crime to new heights. Many people are afraid for their safety now, even inside arcologies. Muggings and burglary are commonplace, not to mention the rampant graffiti and vandalism. Street gangs have become a regular menace to society. The sex trade has gone to a dark, dark place. While this has created cause for concern within society, it has not caused the kind of alarm that makes people believe that it is a conspiracy. The Death Shadows are too smart and too careful for that kind of thing.

However, the Emergency Crime Act was passed by the New Earth Government's Parliament and it remains in place. Its effects are recent at the start of the year, having only been passed in December of 2086. The ECA dramatically decreases the average person's rights when it comes to search, seizure, and prosecution. Law enforcement is now able to arrest and detain anyone they even thinly suspect of criminal activity and hold them for up to a week without charge. Suspects are not allowed any sort of communication with the outside world for up to 72 hours, during which time they are brutally grilled by interrogators. These relaxed rights apply to all branches of law enforcement.

There are those in civil rights arenas who actively protest the ECA, for all the good it does them. They usually end up finding out just how far civil rights go under the Act, and wind up incarcerated for several days at a time.

While Characters that are involved with the military are unlikely to feel the effects of the ECA, other types of Characters will. Those who are members of law enforcement agencies, such as the Federal Security Bureau or the Office of Internal Security will enjoy the increased latitude they have with which to execute their duties. However, those who run with the arcane underground or those who are affiliated with the Eldritch Society will likely find themselves on the other end of the stick. They'll have to be extra careful and they are, regardless, likely to run afoul of law enforcement and spend at least some time in custody.

While the Emergency Crime Act does help, street crime will still plague the citizens of the New Earth Government this year.

VIOLENCE AGAINST NAZZADI

Last year, the Nazzadi Missing Person's Index began to increase. As the year went on, incidents of violent crimes ending in the death of a Nazzadi victim likewise dramatically went up. The most interesting part is that this is not making the news. It's almost as if it is quietly being covered up the Nazzadi community all over the world.

There are those, however, that have begun to notice. They have begun to research what is going on and why no one is saying anything. Unfortunately for them, it is a conspiracy that runs deep and one that is unlikely to be rooted out.

The reality is that the number of Nazzadi Migou sympathizers (and Loyalists) has begun to increase with the realization that the Aeon War is not going in the favor the New Earth Government. There are those within the Nazzadi community who have taken it upon themselves to silence such sympathizers, knowing that they are poison in the well. Their more recent activities are described in more detail in *Still Not Asking, Still Not Telling*, starting on p. 26 of this book.

GRANT WALKER'S CRUSADE

Last year saw the creation of something the Children of Chaos never thought possible – the birth of unique, incredibly powerful Dhohanoids. The creation of such beings is difficult and requires a rare natural resource known as a m'ya stone. Currently there are only three unique Dhohanoids.

One of these new children is Grant Walker. He suffered a psychotic break upon his rebirth and the man that emerged months later was not the Grant Walker anyone remembered. Now, he is a powerful tyrannical sociopath who has dedicated himself to eradicating the Eldritch Society.

To that end, he has formed a special task force whose job it is to hunt Tagers and ultimately root out the Eldritch Society. While there have been others before him, Grant's special powers make him uniquely capable to succeed where they have failed. His transformation has gifted him with para-psychic-like powers that enable him to reach into people's brains and pull out information, as well as plant post-hypnotic suggestions. Grant has become a Dhohanoid puppet-master.

THE REST OF 2087

Not everything that happens in 2087 is big enough to warrant its own chapter. Some things happen in secret, others quietly behind the scenes. However, each of them is important – some of them more important than they might seem at first – and they are what we will look at here.

Presented first is a timeline of the events that happen over the course of the year. Each of them will become more clear to you as you become more familiar with the material presented in this book. As you can see, it's a busy time and much is afoot.

TIMELINE

First Quarter (General)

The Children of Chaos Begin Infiltrating the Office of Internal Security – Deeply upset by the interference of the OIS in the plot to bring forth the Old One known as Shub-Niggurath into this world, the Chrysalis Corporation is told by the Director to do something about this mundane threat. Agents of the Cult begin to infiltrate the Office of Internal Security's ranks, many times starting out at the lowest rungs of the ladder. (Presented in *Hamstrung*, starting on p. 108.)

Nazzadi Purges Continue – The Helasi continues to purge Migou Loyalists from their ranks, sometimes in media-grabbing fashion. However, the Loyalists begin to find each other and start to organize into their own opposition to the Helasi's self-declared authority. (Presented in *Don't Ask, Don't Tell Pt. II*, starting on p. 36.)

January

Fu-Li Feng Attacks Thailand – The former Buddhist monk turned Desolate One known as Fu-Li Feng gathers monstrous forces under his control. After being sent on his way by the consort, Feng stretches his wings in an attack on Bangkok. He then makes his way through Pulau Pinang and Ipoh, finally making his way to Kuala Lumpur. (Presented in *The Storm Down Under*, starting on p. 126.)

February

Fu-Li Feng Invades Indonesia – The monstrous Rapine Storm hordes under control of this Desolate One move first to crush Sumatra, moving on and hopping islands until they come to Timor. They encounter little organized resistance from the New Earth Government, who nervously watches and waits. (Presented in *The Storm Down Under*, starting on p. 126.)

March

Fu-Li Feng Moves Into Australia – Driven by an insane hunger, the Disciples of the Rapine Storm under Feng's control cross the ocean and invade Australia. Though they die in droves, they destroy the city of Darwin and cement their presence in Oceania, taking the Rapine Storm to a new continent. (Presented in *The Storm Down Under*, starting on p. 126.)

The Esoteric Order of Dagon Hacks the Rite of Transfiguration – Much to the chagrin of the Children of Chaos, the Esoteric Order of Dagon steals a complete copy of the Rite of Transfiguration. After much fruitless experimentation, the Cult manages to manipulate the powerful ritual to manifest new monstrous amphibious forms that will be useful to the Esoteric Order's ends. (Presented in *Something's Fishy*, starting on p. 34.)

Operation Final Strike Commences – The New Earth Government, using newly developed technology and arcanotechnology, launches a surprise attack on the Migou Hive Ship. They manage to destroy sections of the ship and come back with prizes. Presented in *Another Desperate Attempt*, starting on p. 44)

Second Quarter (General)

The Monkey-Wrenching of the OIS Begins – The Children of Chaos begin to implement their plans to hamstring the Office of Internal Security. In ways both big and small, the Cult begins to make the work of the OIS far more difficult than it should be, and it takes its toll on the agency's effectiveness. (Presented in *Hamstrung*, starting on p. 108.)

Loyalists Begin Media Campaigns – Despite the best efforts of the Nazzadi loyal to humanity, the Loyalists begin to use the media to gain sympathy for those murdered in the name of independence. (Presented in *Don't Ask, Don't Tell Pt. II*, starting on p. 36.)

April

The Independent Solar Colonies Attack Pluto – In the wake of the launch of the second Hive Ship, it appears that the Migou have overextended themselves. The rag-tag fleet composed of the former colonists see an opportunity and strike at the Migou home-world. (As presented in *A Sort of Homecoming*, starting on p. 66.)

Fu-Li Feng's Battle at Pine Creek – Approaching the town of Katherine, the Rapine Storm fights against Marshal Kauhautu's forces in Pine Creek. Though the Desolate One takes the town, the NEG has stripped the town to leave him with nothing. (Presented in *The Storm Down Under*, starting on p. 126.)

May

Marshal Kauhautu Defeats Feng's Hordes – The obsessed but brave Marshal Kauhautu draws out the Rapine Storm in the battle for Katherine. Ultimately, the New Earth Government leader sacrifices himself to ensure the destruction of Fu-Li Feng and the bulk of the Rapine Storm in Australia. The threat ends, scattering the forces of the Storm. (Presented in *The Storm Down Under*, starting on p. 126.)

June

The Independent Solar Colonies Assess Earth – The ISC fleet flies into the shadow of Jupiter to assess the situation on Earth. This is the first time they've been this close in decades. (As presented in *A Sort of Homecoming*, starting on p. 66.)

Grant Walker Arrives in Chicago – The Chrysalis Corporation's foremost Tager hunter comes to Chicago. He has been charged with dissuading the Eldritch Society from further involvement in the Cult's actions against the Office of Internal Security. (Presented in *Hamstrung*, starting on p. 108.)

July

The Independent Solar Colonies Race to Earth – After careful reconnaissance, the ISC sends a fast attack ship carrying diplomats to penetrate the Migou picket of Earth. The lost children of Earth return. (As presented in *A Sort of Homecoming*, starting on p. 66.)

The Migou Hemorrhagic Virus Begins – The first victims of the Migou-engineered plague surface, though they are not recognized as such. (As presented in *The Plague*, starting on p. 92.)

Sergei Katov Discovers Friends – One of the remaining underlings of Fu-Li Feng joins forces with another Desolate One known as the Revenant. The future of Australia does not look assured. (As presented in *A Study in Collision*, starting on p. 38.)

August

The Assault on Grant Walker's Hive – When the Eldritch Society discover that Grant Walker has taken over a Hive in Chicago as his base of operations, they begin to plan. Then, they launch an assault of surprising proportions, halting the Children of Chaos' initiative against the Office of Internal Security. (Presented in *Hamstrung*, starting on p. 108.)

The Coalition is Formed – After intense negotiations, the New Earth Government and the Independent Solar Colonies reach an accord. The union is called the Coalition. (As presented in *A Sort of Homecoming*, starting on p. 66.)

First Reports of Migou Biological Weaponry – The spread of the Migou Hemorrhagic Virus is termed the use of Migou biological warfare, though it is beginning to spread among the civilian population. (As presented in *The Plague*, starting on p. 92.)

The Rapine Storm Discovers Migou Digs in Australia – Sergei Katov and the Revenant discover that the Migou are searching for something in lost ruins. (As presented in *A Study in Collision*, starting on p. 38.)

Migou Forces Build – As the Migou Hemorrhagic Virus sets in, the Migou position themselves for military action. (As presented in *The Plague*, starting on p. 92.)

September

Migou Eliminate Anti-Satellite Emplacements – Given the spread of the Migou Hemorrhagic Virus, strike teams are sent to eliminate New Earth Government anti-satellite emplacements to help cement the bugs' orbital superiority. (As presented in *The Plague*, starting on p. 92.)

The Migou Hemorrhagic Virus Enters the Population – Though initially attributed to smaller segments of the population, the MHV enters the population at large. The New Earth Government enacts quarantine policies and begins to restrict travel. Many begin to die from the new plague. (As presented in *The Plague*, starting on p. 92.)

Nazzadi Internal Struggles Intensify – The forces of the free Helasi fight viciously against the newly unified traitorous Loyalists. (Presented in *Don't Ask, Don't Tell Pt. II*, starting on p. 36.)

Fourth Quarter (General)

Nazzadi Civil War Threatens... Again – Things heat up with the conflict between the Helasi and the Loyalists. The Nazzadi population teeters on the brink of quiet civil war, mimicking in many ways the conditions at the end of the First Arcanotech War. (Presented in *Don't Ask, Don't Tell Pt. II*, starting on p. 36.)

October

Migou Actions Continue – In the crippling wake of the Migou Hemorrhagic Virus, the Migou commence attacks against both train stations and manufacturing facilities to start crippling New Earth Government infrastructure. They begin to build up forces north of Chicago. (As presented in *The Plague*, starting on p. 92.)

November

Migou Launch South American Campaign – The Migou take further advantage of the crippling effects of the MHV, and begin to draw new boundaries in South America. It appears that they are actively searching for something, though no one knows what. (As presented in *The Plague*, starting on p. 92.)

Th'aranoids Become Common Among Esoteric Order of Dagon Forces – Given months to perfect their perverted Rite of Transfiguration, the newly minted Th'aranoids become a regular sight within the forces of the EOD. They are a new and clearly dangerous threat. (Presented in *Something's Fishy*, starting on p. 34.)

December

The New Earth Government Discovers Cure for the MHV – Finally, after working with samples of pure Migou DNA taken from the Hive Ship, the NEG creates an inoculation against the Migou Hemorrhagic Virus. The plague ends. However, there are many who feel that the cure is more dangerous than the cause. (As presented in *The Plague*, starting on p. 92.)

POP CULTURE

As the broader world changes, so does the world of pop culture. Everything from cars to personal electronics to fashion and moves undergo their own transformation in 2087. Presented here are a few of those important changes, to help you add flavor and life to your Strange Aeon.

FASHION

As usual, the world of fashion remains heavily influenced by Nazzadi designers. Let's take another look at some of the top fashion designers before we take a look at each season of the year.

Notable Designers

The fashion world, like any other, has its stars. Five A-list designers stand out above the others in 2087. Four of them remain from last year, but there is one surprising newcomer.

As usual, Daria Tokugawa concentrates her efforts on making sure that the everyday person can have some fashion in his or her life. This down-to-earth middle-aged designer is most prevalent in what you might find on the street or in the workplace, as opposed to what the celebrities might be wearing. Daria is one of the year's top designers because not only are her fashions the most affordable, she also makes the average person look good.

Gaius McCreavy has been a top designer for years and shows no sign of going anywhere. If fashion designers were royalty, he would be the crown prince – if for no other reason than his shameless self-promotion. A flamboyantly gay man, he brings with him an undeniable charisma and a knack for finding drama

wherever he goes. His designs are sometimes high fashion and sometimes accessible, but they are always designed to get someone noticed – and one pays for that privilege. His popularity is at an all-time high, as his reality serial “Up & Coming Fashions” enters its fourth season. It is rapidly becoming the show to watch for anyone who cares how they're dressed.

Dominating the red carpet again this year is the brilliant Irvy. A designer who pays attention only to women's fashion, and high end ones at that, it is Irvy who designs the gowns that the world's favorite celebrities are seen wearing at any important event. Any woman who pays attention to pop culture covets her work, but few can afford it. Irvy herself is beautiful, described as statuesque, and is a lovely fixture at any event worth attending.

One wonders when Irvy's brother, Prevana, will go too far. A subscriber to the philosophy “less is more,” there are those that speculate that Prevana will one day parade nudity as the next high fashion. Described as titillating by some and scandalous by many, his fashions run the gamut from the everyday to the out-on-the-town – but all are sexy and lustful. A person has to be both fit and bold to dare wear Prevana's style out in public. It is





no wonder that his clothing is the choice of those porn stars who get the attention of the wider media. A gorgeous man himself, Prevana is the subject of many a celebrity sex scandal.

The world once again proves that an iconoclast can only go so far if he or she doesn't fundamentally embrace commercialism. For the last several years, Tacirany has been the godmother of counter-culture. However, it appears she's taken her "screw the media and pop culture" attitude a little too far. Out of nowhere, another teenage prodigy has risen to take her place. Hakury is cute in the way every faux counter-culture girl wants to be. Her fashions are rebellious, but in the way that sell in malls. The young Nazzadi designs clothes that walk right up to the acceptable edge and stay there. Her media persona is likewise cute and acceptably rebellious.

Spring

"A Spring in Your Step" seems to be the theme of this year's spring collections. Flashy colors, like brilliant reds and vibrant blues are the order of the day, in tight, stretchy fabrics. Necklines are low and hemlines and heels are high, with flirty fashions to capture the eye and stir the blood.

In answer, Daria Tokugawa ignores the flirt, but keeps the fun in businesswear. Her collections bring an air of daring to the typically conservative business attire, making the office a more enjoyable place to be.

Summer

"International Summer" is the theme of the summer months, as designers draw heavily from styles all over the world. The

predominant fashions are billowy, like many of the traditional clothes of the indigenous people of the Middle East and parts of Africa. Sandals are favorites this season, as are light colors.

Prevana is usually the king of the summer, though this year sees him toning back in many ways. Instead, his designs favor tight fits, very short shorts, and bare mid-riffs. While certainly sexy and suggestive, it is a far cry from his barely covering fashions of last year. His swimsuits, however, make up for it, being micro bikinis for women and tight trunks for men – both of which are designed to be completely see-through when wet.

Fall

The fall of 2087's theme seems to be "Halloween." Lots of blacks, oranges, and reds dominate, with dramatic lines. There's a playful costume-like quality to the fashions of this season.

Hakury owns the "back to school" fashions for the youths of the year. She embraces the general feel of the season with her "Samhain" collection, which gives the wanna-be counter-culture teens of the world an acceptably freakish wardrobe.

Winter

The winter collections fall into the world of "Arctic Flower." Colors are dominated by lighter blues and whites, with encompassing collars and hem-lines.

It's Gaius McCreavy who is the spirit of winter this year, as he brings the festivity of the holidays to his fashions. Embracing the spirit of the colors, his designs favor an almost Christmas-like quality that many find charming.

CARS

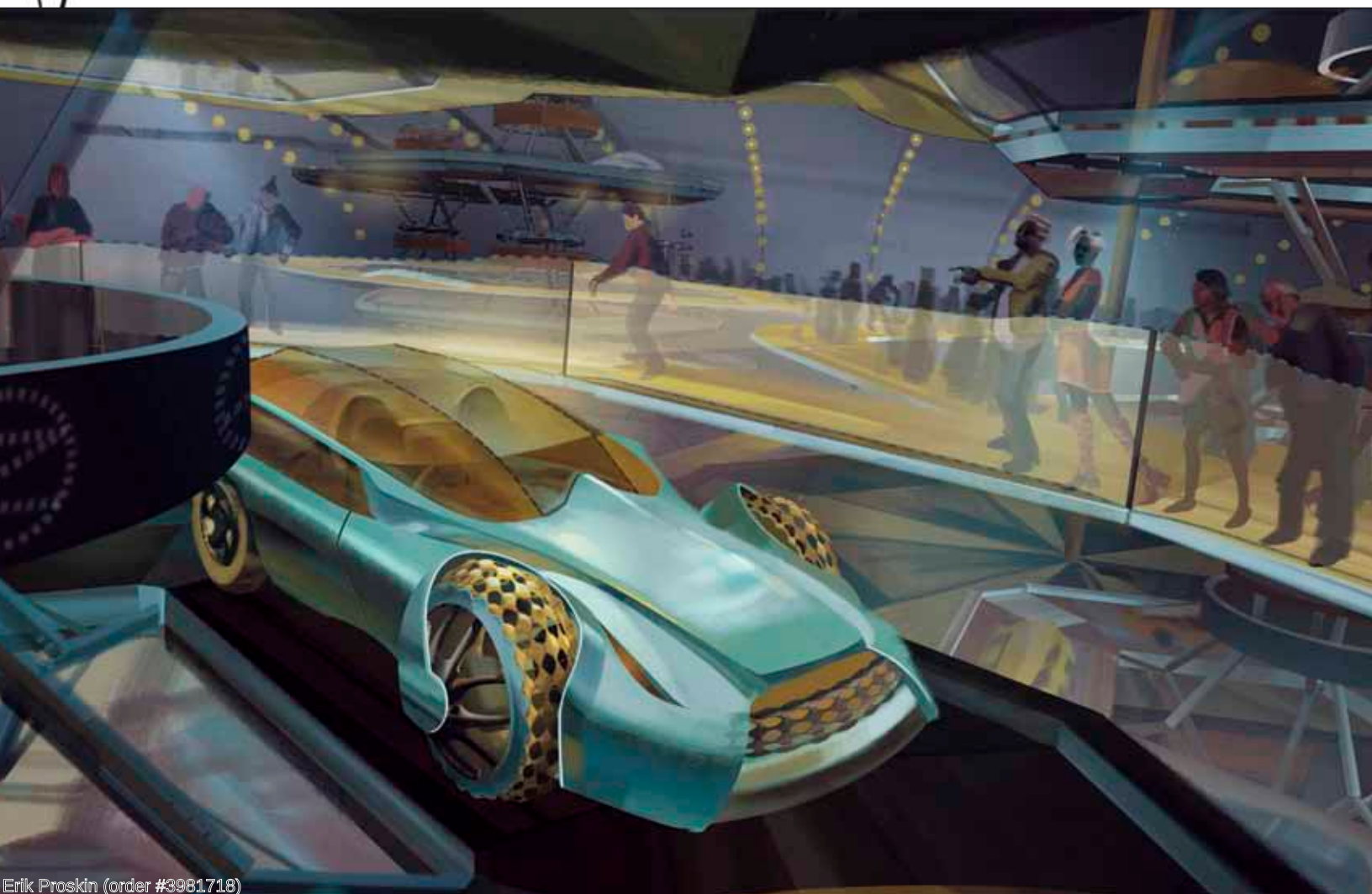
Personal transportation is something people are unlikely to give up until personal teleportation exists. Even in a world where people get most places via public trains or on foot, most still own a motor vehicle. Cars are a symbol of independence, as they always have been, and people need that in the world of today.

The limited autodrive function that is becoming the standard in all new vehicles continues to be refined. The primary limitation on this feature is that it has highly sensitive though not sophisticated safety systems. Construction, road debris, bad potholes, and more have all been causes of stopping a car with limited autodrive in its tracks. The recent advances in limited autodrive have lessened these problems. Now, such vehicles can progress through certain types of potential hazards the way they couldn't before, but the compensation is that they do it very slowly. It is still a hassle, because the car takes forever to get through trouble areas, but at least such vehicles do so now. Like all technology, limited autodrive won't be where it needs to be for several iterations yet.

The revival of muscle cars continues. The recent model Tri Motors Stallion and Gladiator continue to be favorites and continue to deliver on style combined with power. Matsumi's Thun-

derhawk is a close second, with a new suspension system that makes it superior to last year's model. The Naddazi Design Systems Mako is even more stylish and powerful this year, and even more expensive to go with it. It is by far the muscle car of choice for the elite. EuroWagon continues to try to compete with its redesigned Panther, but the new model only proves that European's have a different sensibility when it comes to making cars. Most people don't like it and say it just feels wrong. That, and it seems to like to spend time in the shop.

Though odd, this renaissance of muscle cars has brought about a resurgence of the phenomenon known as the road trip. For many, the idea of a road trip went out the window when the world got as dangerous as it has. There are many hazards on the open road now, but that doesn't seem to be stopping people. Perhaps it's a rebellion, a way for people to stick up their middle finger at the world that's trying to kill them, a bold statement of independence. The advantage that muscle cars bring is that there are many situations that can be avoided by a fast car with great acceleration. Still, people don't venture more than a couple of hours outside of metro areas, not wanting to push their luck. However, it has given many the sense of somehow taking their world back and given many their first sense of the outdoors in years.





TECHNOLOGY

Perhaps the biggest technological craze of 2087 is the continued adoption and improvements to Oshiro's ARt system. The ARt takes movement-based augmented reality gaming to a whole new level. Players strap on control sensors to their hands, arms, torso, legs, and feet so that the system can sense their slightest movement. They also wear a headpiece that covers their eyes and ears (with intense noise-cancelling features). Games are uniquely designed to utilize a player's surroundings and massive multi-player games take place through augmented reality overlays.

This year sees a more refined and certainly more portable version of the ARt, that allows people to go out further into the world with their augmented reality than ever before. In addition to a significant number of popular games, design studios have begun to offer what they call "reality overlays." These pieces of amazing software literally create an alternate augmented reality for those who use them. A user might purchase a feudal Japan reality overlay, which makes everything in the world appear to be from that genre and time period. Another might purchase a traditional fantasy reality overlay, an overlay that turns everyone into pretty people, or a sleek sci-fi reality overlay. The possibilities are literally endless and they create an environment of nearly total immersion for the user.

Naturally, this has had quite the impact on society, especially given that many people want to escape from the sometimes oppressive-seeming world of the Aeon War. There are people who wake up in the morning, strap on their ARt and load their

favorite reality overlay, and don't take the device off until they go to sleep. This has led to some interesting incidents of delusional behavior and quite a few unfortunate accidents. Some people eventually become addicted to the false world portrayed inside their ARt and lose the ability to function in normal society. Towards the end of the year, support groups begin to pop up for people who feel that they've become addicted to their reality overlays.

That doesn't even include the people who are simply careless in their use of the ARt. Such high-immersion augmented reality can cause a number of problems for those who don't have the necessary survival instinct. There are those who don't pay proper attention to all the details in their environment and wander into a construction zone or in front of a delivery truck. There are those who don't pay attention to the fact that they just wandered into a real-world gang-controlled neighborhood and find themselves shot. All reality overlay products come with very serious warnings, for liability reasons, but there will always be those who pay no attention.

In other technologies, Imagine Technologies continues to dominate the hand-held market with the next generation of the iPeek. Though rivals begin to produce truly competitive products, the style and design of Imagine Technologies continues to win – along with an award-winning marketing campaign.

Otherwise, noise-cancelling pad technology continues to likewise improve, giving the average arcology dweller the ability to crank up their musical selections or home theater systems, as well as have parties, without disturbing their neighbors.

MOVIES & SERIALS

The Ministry of Information is an integral part of nearly all mainstream entertainment. Their job is to help guide movies and serials (what were once known as TV shows) to not just entertain, but to also fully distract the public, helping take them away from the real concerns of the world and the Aeon War. Propaganda has become so commonplace and elegantly executed that most people wouldn't even notice if it were pointed out to them.

Blockbuster Studio Films

There's a focus on comedies and feel good movies, given that the population is in need of a pick me up after recent events.

"Love, Fashion, and a Really Good Martini" is a spring romantic comedy aimed at the Nazzadi audience. The story follows a group of Nazzadi friends in their early adulthood as they experiment with finding companionship and real relationships, ultimately finding true love in those who have been their friends all along.

The big summer release is an action comedy called "6 the Hard Way." It is a star-studded romp about a group of former special forces soldiers who work as mercenaries in the corporate sector. They are employed by a company that is an obvious analog to the Ashcroft Foundation, which is the victim of corporate espionage. A dangerous experimental drug, one with potential for massive profits on the streets, is stolen, and it is up to the team to find out who is behind it. Their investigation takes them deep into the criminal underground and they triumph in the end – naturally.

The holidays see the animated sequel to last year's hit – "Patches the Mighty 2." Patches is a cat who has survived much, but who has new loving owners. However, this year cultists come to his neighborhood and take his owners hostage. Gathering his animal friends from the streets, Patches takes on the bumbling cultists and saves the day.

Independent Films

"Exploration" is a film that follows a pair of childhood best friends as they try to break open the boundaries of consciousness. They experiment with hallucinogenic and dissociative drugs, mentally breaking past dimensional boundaries in the arcane underground, and even near death experiences. While the film contains some powerful messages and amazing acting, it does not have a happy ending.

"Candelabra" is a film that explores the world of polyamorous relationships and the difficulties that beset them. It follows two couples, as well as their other lovers, through the good times and bad, as jealousy eventually rears its ugly head.

Major Serials

The hit serials haven't changed much at all over the last year. People get hooked on their favorites and those favorites remain – especially those backed by the Ministry of Information.

The military drama "Tension Room" is in its third season. No longer regarded as a new show, its third season is wildly popular and the strongest so far. The story follows command post officers who are forced to make critical decisions to ensure New Earth Government victory at any cost, despite their personal feelings and ethical dilemmas. The Ministry of Information peppers this show with whatever military propagandist message is required for their goals at the time, but it is woven in such a way as to simply fit the story-line.

The popular situation comedy "The Block" is in its ninth season. The show is still considered consistently funny, something that is difficult to maintain over nearly a decade. The story follows the antics of the residents of a hip urban residential block, playing on the interpersonal relationships, stress, and uncomfortable situations of modern arcology dwellers. The biggest difference this season is that Monica Van Zante, who plays the neurotic but sexy Ashley Wynn on the show, is absent for many of the episodes. Her movie career has taken off, so bigger projects beckon. There are rumors of Monica leaving the show, though she is one of the anchors and most popular characters.

In its amazing seventh season is the reality show "Front Line," which takes viewers to the battlefronts of the Aeon War. The show follows the brave soldiers of the Aeon War in hot spots all around the globe, especially now Australia, Canada, and Eastern Europe. Naturally, there are things the Ministry of Information doesn't want people to see, so the show is carefully and heavily censored to the point where some of its scenes are staged.

The reality show "Two Worlds," which explored the world of xenomixes growing up in society, was not renewed for a second season due to its abysmal ratings in Nazzadi demographics.

Big Talent

The leading couple of Hollywood is still the same – the pair of Jameson Cain and Jaraely. The handsome and tasteful Cain is not well-liked by some of his contemporaries, as he often calls them out for behaving like children. He is an active supporter of veterans and veterans organizations, coming from a military family himself. Jaraely continues to be a fixture on eZine covers, an icon of feminine power. She has her own altruistic causes, supporting organizations dedicated to helping war orphans. She travels the world to raise awareness and donations for such groups. Though the pair is often romantically linked in tabloids, they have never so much as kissed off screen.

Coming up the ranks is the fiery young star, Minika Omotoso. Her magnetic on-screen presence is only eclipsed by her off-screen antics. She, like so many before her, threatens to spin off the rails as she parties her way through the world of the elite. Fortunately, she is a massive box-office draw.

The mysterious director M. Noman gives his first-ever interview this year, though it is not what people expect. It contains no pictures and while he talks a lot about movies and his work, he says nothing at all about himself.

MUSIC

In 2087, the music scene rages on. Though the pieces may shuffle around, the overall playing field remains the same.

Top 40

As has been the case for the last six years, Fuzion, a Nazzadi-created musical style, dominates the pop charts. It has been likened to an evolved version of what was once known as “world music,” which was a style that mixed musical traditions from around the globe. Fuzion takes it a step further, drawing on the Nazzadi habit of bringing together elements in an unusual way, typically with interesting and often enjoyable results. Spirit Soundsystem out of Europe combines Celtic, Australian Aboriginal, Zydeco, and Japanese instrumentation into a fusion that is catchy and just a little bit danceable. Their album entitled “Funnel Cloud,” the follow-up to “Somewhere, Sometime,” is in heavy rotation over the summer on nearly every pop broadcast station.

While the usual cast of lone superstars continue their parade through the pop charts, one stands out from late 2086 through 2087. Tirala is known especially for his songs of war, both ballads for the fallen and rallying cries for the people. Given the spate of military tragedies in 2086, and the actions of 2087, the people need a voice like his to keep their spirits up. It is suspected by conspiracy theorists, and rightly so, that the musician is getting a leg up from the Ministry of Information.

The pop charts still reel after the death of media icon Julie Rain. The young singer’s suicide has left a void that has yet to be filled. The forces of film in the world are determined to cash in on the phenomenon, and the Julie Rain biopic is currently in production. A young unknown from the United Kingdom named Kaley James has been cast to play the legend.

Alternative

This year’s alternative scene is again dominated by emo, dark-side, and black noise. The maudlin world of emo is still led by Bloodrose with the ever popular tragically romantic lead singer Warren White. While they are in the studio for most of 2087, the first single “Sweat and Tears” off of the tentatively named “Desperation” album hits rotation in the fall.

Fans of the angry, dark, and morbid get their Darkside fix with Razor Wire’s new album “The Ecstasy of Flayed Flesh.” The single on every darksider’s digital music player may be one of two – “There’s a Void” or “The Long Dark Night of My Soul.”

Embracing the lost and forlorn is Black Noise’s foremost act, the Bonegrinder Foundation. Riding on the tales of their 2086 holiday release entitled “Black Christmas,” the single “Shock Collar” dominates the genre.

Dance

Caliente, a sexy grinding dance genre, dominates most clubs that aren’t playing Top 40 this year. People need a distraction after the news of the last year plus, and a dance music style with

an overactive libido delivers. The hottest single of the year is “No Means Yes” by the production team of Perrin & Ozala.

Sometimes described as “dancing under the blood moon,” Shadowbeat combines dark atmospherics with a slower danceable beat. It is for those who need to get the darkness inside out, giving it a reflection on the dance floor. The hottest single of 2087 in this growing genre is “Radiant Decay,” by the band known as Distant Stare.

One of the biggest hits of the dance scene this year is DJ Sorena’s tribute to Julie Rain. This mournful album of remixed tracks, some of which were completed with Julie while she was alive, is entitled “Kiss for the Dying.” Though not officially romantically linked, the Nazzadi DJ has worn only black on his club tour and has eschewed the spotlight regarding this album – something that has only served to spur his and its popularity, and rumors of the two’s quiet love affair.

Retro

While punk forges forward with its timeless messages of social outcry and the hopelessness of the future, the retro scene is dominated by the continuing return of Big Band. The big beat, big horn, fancy dancing crowd is no strange sight in any civilized neighborhood of 2087. There’s something about the Big Band sound and accompanying culture that speaks to an era of innocence, especially in the face of the madness that is the year. Ty Roosevelt and his Big Badass Band make several appearance on broadcast, performing their hit “I’m on Top,” while the Midnight Howlers trail not all that far behind with their single “Bar Fly Blues.”

Underground

Combining rap lyrics with industrial music, with its aural montages of real machine sounds, Urban Smack carries on with its head held high. Crafty G, king of the street poets, brings his unique perspective as a survivor of the Rapine Storm in Eastern Europe. Early year sees a new effort from this iconoclast, “The Beast Within,” which is immediately heralded as one of the best efforts in the genre.

Big Tours

Spirit Soundsystem is always on tour when they aren’t in the studio. As soon as “Funnel Cloud” drops, they’re on the road again hitting every major NEG market. As usual, they gain a huge amount of publicity and public support by performing for the troops on the lines, anywhere that could be considered safe by their security staff.

While a consistent heavyweight in the dance music scene, DJ Sorena has been virtually unknown to the greater world of music. However, his club tour to support the release of the “Kiss for the Dying” remix tribute to Julie Rain gets him a lot more attention, packing clubs past capacity in major arcologies across the world. While it’s a big boost for his career, he practically hides from the cameras in mourning.

DON'T ASK, DON'T TELL, PT. II

Beginning in late 2085, the violent crime rate within Nazzadi communities steadily grew as a group known as the Helasi quietly murdered any Nazzadi with Loyalist tendencies. As the Helasi grew bolder, they staged much more public killings to drive home their message to any Nazzadi who dreamed of returning to the Migou – death to the Migou and death to their allies.

Many of the Helasi were from the older generation who had fought in the First Arcanotech War, bearing the strain of false memories implanted into their minds by the Migou war machine. Now, they turned the skills that they had been given, and the tenacity they had been instilled with, against those they viewed as traitors to the cause. They viewed the loyalists as threats to the new society the Nazzadi were building for themselves. Driven by the fervor of their new society, the Helasi had forgotten that many of the Nazzadi had stayed silent when their leadership chose to betray the Migou and join forces with the New Earth Government. When the silent ones found their voices, the community was forced to stare back into the broken mirror of their values.

SHATTERED REFLECTIONS

Despite their ideological differences, the Helasi and the Loyalists both pull from the same knowledge base. The dark secret that many of the leaders in both camps have come to realize is that some of them share the same decanted memories, implanted by the Migou. While their personalities have changed greatly based on the different experiences each has faced, the core of their being is very much the same. These similarities are evident in the format of the conflict that each side wages. With a balance of insurgent and counter-insurgent tactics, each faction forms small cells to maintain their secrecy, wages a terror-based campaign against the other side, and they play the community and government against each other.

Within their similar tactics, both sides deliver their messages to the same group differently. The Helasi can never come out to a Nazzadi family and say that they murdered their child or brother, just as the Loyalists cannot fully disclose why he was the target of such actions. Instead, the Helasi are forced to insinuate and suggest that the death was for the best, hinting at possible treachery and betrayal. After they leave, the Loyalists have their own representatives talk with the family, to illustrate how the victim was a good person and that the murderers are actually terrorists who sought nothing more than to cripple the Nazzadi from becoming a free people to stand as equals to the Humans, rather than in their shadow.

THE HELASI

Structured in cells, the Helasi are integrated fully into New Earth Government society at every level, from active and retired military and government officials, down to beat cops and teachers. Each cell leader is in contact with one or two other cell leaders in order to form a chain across the globe without the ability for a single individual to cripple the entire organization. While they are a global entity, the Helasi remain very small, with a group of only seven to ten individuals within an arcology or city. Their

strength comes from the covert tactics that are implemented and from the Nazzadi cultural base to support them. None of the Nazzadi families want to believe that they harbor a traitor to their race, but even fewer are willing to risk the public shame and ostracizing that can come from such knowledge becoming known.

The Helasi use their influence to identify suspected Loyalists. Once a Loyalist is identified, they begin an in-depth investigation into the person's life – when they have had contact or suspected contact with Migou forces, the target's true political leanings, who the target's circle of friends are, etc. When the first few killings happened in 2085, the Helasi were not as thorough and a few of the targets who were kidnapped, tortured, and killed, were later discovered to have been dysfunctional Nazzadi, but they weren't Loyalists. They don't want any more mistakes.

Once a target's full life story is laid out, a circle of the five eldest Nazzadi within the cell sit in judgment over the accused. All five of them need to agree that the target is a Loyalist, guilty of betraying his species. If the vote passes, the cell devises the plan to eliminate the target. Depending upon the nature of the crimes, and how much information is believed to have been passed to the Migou, the target can simply vanish and be murdered quietly, or a public spectacle such as with the family of Zenia and Erelly can be made.

Because of their nature as a vigilante organization, the Helasi are forced to hide their activities from the New Earth Government and its investigative branches. They combine classic terror tactics, masks and panel vans, with covert operations where operators hack through a home security system and unlock the doors without leaving any traces. Their integration into the upper echelons of the NEG also makes it easy for them to curtail investigations, or modify evidence without any traces in the chain of custody. While none of the Helasi agents and operatives openly tell the New Earth Government about what is happening, there are several within the government who express opinions that the only solution for a treasonous cancer is to cut out the growth with all due haste.

THE LOYALISTS

Many of the Loyalists begin as loners, disaffected individuals who look at the New Earth Government and see the lie that it has been spewing. The NEG said that Humans and Nazzadi are equal, but racism is ever-present and the truth is that most Humans cannot stand to look at Nazzadi without wanting to kill them for families lost in the war. The New Earth Government says that they are winning the war and will rid the world of the Migou menace and the creatures from beyond creation, and the truth is they are losing. The disaffected see the truth all around them and some go mad with it, tearing out their own eyes and sliding over the precipice of sanity into the loving arms of a straitjacket. Others see the truth that their creators, the Migou, could again be their salvation. Returning to the fold, proving their loyalty to them, the Loyalists serve the Migou without apprehension or regret.

Amongst the older generation of Nazzadi, there were thousands of former soldiers and operatives who held their tongue when Field Marshal Vreta and the others betrayed them. These men and women were patient, hoping that the Firstborn were simply lulling humanity into a sense of peace before they exacted their revenge and claimed Earth as their rightful conquest. Months became years, and it was clear that the Firstborn had lost the Way. Then, those loyal to the Migou, but also to the true purpose of the Nazzadi, worked to keep their proper teachings, knowledge of the Way, fresh in the minds of the young. When the Helasi began their campaign of terror, the older guard began to organize and identify the younger folk who were becoming disaffected, and gave them a clear purpose.

The Loyalists at their core pursue two goals – save the Nazzadi from humanity's influence on them, and support the Migou military campaign. While most Loyalists only see themselves working on one of the goals, their actions end up supporting the other. Only the eldest among them, former officers and strategic commanders, are able to understand both sides of the battle. The first step and common ground for both goals is manipulating the language used around the conflict and within the community. Helasi translates roughly to “the free” in Nazzadi, and the Helasi rhetoric has been focused on concepts of faithlessness, betrayal, and guilt. The Loyalists work within the Nazzadi society to maintain faith and belief in the Way, and integration of the community as a whole. They work to turn the very rhetoric of the Helasi back against them, and to show that the Helasi are the ones who betray the community and murder innocent families in the night.

In addition to manipulating the community of Nazzadi, through religion and linguistic techniques, the Loyalists actively feed information to Federal Security Bureau investigators and special agents in charge of finding the truth behind the murders and disappearances. Agent Lancombe Charet receives a large amount of information through third parties, though the information, while factual about the activities of certain Helasi, has subtle lies woven through it. The Loyalists also engage the Ministry of Information, through their own high-placed sources, to apply pressure to not let these matters be swept under the rug. They illustrate the positive side of each life, forcing the Helasi and others to be seen as mudslingers and sensationalists if they try to slander the names of the dead. While the murders and investigations are no longer being featured hourly in global broadcasts, the Loyalists are able to keep local news agencies on board with discussing the murders and keep each new tragedy fresh in the minds of local Nazzadi.

By turning the light of the media inwards at the Nazzadi community, the Loyalists hope to undermine the Helasi efforts. Both sides know, due to shared memories and training from the Migou, that the key to successful genocide is to demonize the intended victims, remove the support for the victims from the majority, and encourage either participation or mass acquiescence to the practice. The Loyalists work to undo the foundations that the Helasi have laid down in the process.

While manipulating the communities, the Loyalists also seek to support the Migou military advances. The constant thorn of information being fed to the Federal Security Bureau and other groups cause the agencies to be spread thin trying to chase shadows and hunt their own. If the Loyalists succeed at exposing the Helasi ingrained deep within the government, it would cause a crisis of conscience that can be exploited. Beyond this, the Loyalists work with Blank agents to wage their own campaign of terror against the New Earth Government through car bombings and terrorist attacks on military and government targets. When the Migou prepare to launch the Hemorrhagic Virus, many of the Loyalists are trained to work with the Blanks to spread the disease.

DEATH DOESN'T CARE

As the Migou Hemorrhagic Virus takes hold throughout the arcologies and cities of the New Earth Government, the Loyalists begin to lash out directly at the Helasi. With the heightened violence against their agents, the Helasi respond in kind. While the Nazzadi are focused on killing each other, and the plague rages around them, the Blood Brigade and other xenophobic cults also begin to lash out at innocent Nazzadi.

The Helasi view MHV as a final stroke from the Loyalists who are no longer content with simply feeding information to the enemy, but have gone to wage full-out genocide on the Nazzadi and Humans alike. They end the required tribunals and begin to take action against every suspected Loyalist. Kidnappings and murders scale up very rapidly, though the death count is difficult to track due to the successes at hiding the bodies and immolating the remains. While the Helasi hunt Loyalists down, their high-ranking government officials begin to post official watch-lists for suspected terrorists. These watch-lists include arrest warrants for Nazzadi Loyalists, as well as cultists and individuals of interest in the investigations surrounding the release of the virus into mass transit systems.

The Loyalists develop a list of possible individuals to hamper the investigations into the Helasi murders. Starting with that list, their covert and military trained members begin to kill any

RUMORS AND LEADS

Starting in late 2086, right feet begin to wash ashore along the Seattle coastline and the San Juan islands. DNA matching is difficult due to the detrimental effects of exposure to salt water. The only lead investigators have is that all the feet bear the marks of first generation Nazzadi.

Refugee Nazzadi begin pouring into Buenos Aires and other South American cities as the Migou sweep across the jungle. Amongst these refugees, the Migou have seeded Loyalists and Blanks to keep the NEG from responding quickly.

The Loyalists are beginning to use neuro-linguistic techniques in spreading stories about the Way to further influence Nazzadi.

Nazzadi who is party to the Helasi murders. While some of these killings are public, the Loyalists also use injections of blood from Stage II victims to spread the disease into Helasi families. They hope this will serve as the terror tactic which the Helasi have tried to use against them. Some of the higher-ranked Loyalists also arrange for the younger members which have spread the virus into water supplies, or released MHV in aerosol form, to be captured. By participating in the active capture and arrest of fugitives, the higher-ranked Loyalists ensure their names will stay clean. They view the loss as an acceptable and necessary casualty rate.

With a burgeoning epidemic on the horizon, many of the cults begin to blame the Nazzadi for betraying humanity and bringing death from the Migou. The Blood Brigade in particular, begins a violent campaign of attacking Nazzadi on the street. These attacks range from brutal beatings, kidnapping and torture, to arson. Unlike the attacks by the Loyalists and the Helasi, the Blood Brigade and other cults do not selectively target, but choose at random any Nazzadi who makes the mistake of crossing their path. With the Blood Brigade claiming full credit for certain attacks, and denouncing their participation in others, law enforcement groups across the globe are forced to pick and choose their investigations. Task forces are set up to deal with many of the attacks, but the sheer amount of violence makes it difficult to follow up on every crime. The quarantines help alleviate some of the stress on several arcologies, and federal agents are dispatched to investigate the most heinous crimes.

Reports from the Federal Security Bureau are clear. Even if the New Earth Government wins against the Migou, humanity and the Nazzadi are currently on a crash course to destroy themselves.

WEAVING CHARACTERS

NEG Government Games

Characters who are agents in the investigative branches of the government will be the most likely to be pulled into the intrigue and violence between the Helasi and the Loyalists. As they go through their investigations, data may become classified beyond their pay grade, or sources come out of the wood work to provide information. Going through the investigation, the idea of who is a “good guy” and who is a “bad guy” should reverse several times. As pieces of the story start to come together, it should become obvious that good men are doing horrible things, and that people who might otherwise be scum and traitors, are helping the characters to undo the horrible things.

As the investigation comes to a conclusion, the Characters may be pulled from the case and reassigned. It is up to them to decide whether they want to risk everything and see the case through, or accept their new assignment and have a cold case in the back of their desk drawer for later. Characters who interacted with some of the initial killings may already know Irury or Agent Charet and have formed opinions about them. This gives a chance for those skeletons to come out of the closet again.

Arcane Underground

Within the arcane underground, anyone who noticed the first set of killings will feel that the heat just turned up a few more degrees. With the Loyalists working both in the shadows and the light, Characters may see Nazzadi working the underground and then show up on a newsfeed the next day decrying the atrocities being wreaked upon their community. Rumors will start spreading of a secret organization within the Nazzadi community that is killing their own kind. Talk of ritual sacrifice and dark rites will scurry from shadow to shadow all across the underground.

Cult Games

While the more esoteric cults may hear the rumors among the underground about Nazzadi blood magic, it is the street walking thugs, like the Blood Brigade, that get most involved. For cults such as the Blood Brigade, both sides of the conflict pose problems – the Helasi are interlopers who are killing people that the cult should be allowed to kill, and the Loyalists are drawing a lot of media attention to the situation making it harder for the cults to kill people. As the hemorrhagic virus takes hold and both sides of the Nazzadi start growing violent, they overextend. This becomes the perfect time for the Blood Brigade and others to try to organize an attack which will cut both sides out of their turf.

For Nazzadi Characters

While these stories are tragic, they provide a chance for Nazzadi Characters to dive into the full breadth of their community and explore both sides of the argument. The Characters will come face-to-face with race traitors, but have to decide which side – Helasi or Loyalist – is really the traitor. Some may decide that both sides are traitors, or side with one faction or another. In some ways, these events can be viewed as an ideological war for the heart of the Nazzadi, with families turning on their own. While the Characters may see the threat that Loyalists offer by serving the Migou, there should also be the redeeming qualities such as their community service and upholding of core values, that makes it hard to classify them. The Loyalists are complete monsters like the Migou and creatures from the Rapine Storm. Drawing out that conflict, and forcing Characters to watch as an otherwise innocent person is killed, or a murderer is set free, just because of their ideology, can create dramatic tension and great roleplaying hooks.

IMPORTANT CHARACTERS

Storytellers should familiarize themselves with the Characters on p. 42 of *Damnation View* for additional Characters which can be present in the drama.

KYAZA

Nazzadi Loyalist Leader

Born in the second generation of Nazzadi, Kyaza was an intelligence officer during the First Arcanotech War. Since the betrayal of the Nazzadi by Field Marshal Vreta, Kyaza served in the Office of Internal Security and after retiring serves as a chaplain and youth counselor. His training and service in the intelligence community has led Kyaza to have two distinct personas – his public, gregarious face which he uses with troubled teenagers

and soldiers returning from the front, and a cold, calculating snake deep inside which measures every word before speaking it. Within the Seattle arcology, no one knows of Kyaza's real background before he settled there five years ago. All of his history is a carefully fabricated lie, fully endorsed by the New Earth Government, to protect their secrets and his own.

Virtue/Flaw: Loyal/Meticulous

Experience: Veteran

Noteworthy Attributes: Intellect 9, Perception 9

Noteworthy Skills: Bureaucracy: Master, Education: Master, Law Enforcement: Expert, Surveillance: Expert

Noteworthy Qualities: Dark Secret (3), Eidetic Memory, Minor Empathy

LARUNY

Loyalist Pawn

Dark and sensuous, Laruny grew up in the Nazzadi enclaves wanting to be a dancer. She loved to listen to the stories of the Way, especially the tales about the goddess she was named after. When a classmate vanished from school, she began to worry, but let it go. Then her father and uncle were killed. Laruny knows they were killed and doesn't believe the coroner's ruling of a car accident. She has heard the rumors from within the community, dark whispers of killers within the community murdering families that are believed to be loyal to the Migou. Scared by the tales, Laruny has spent a lot of time with the community showing that she wants nothing more than to defend the Nazzadi way of life. During her community service, she has often spoken with Kyaza about how life should be.

Virtue/Flaw: Athletic/Shy

Experience: Inexperienced

Noteworthy Attributes: Agility 7, Presence 7

Noteworthy Skills: Culture (Nazzadi): Adept, Hobby (Dance): Adept, Seduction: Novice

Noteworthy Qualities: Damaged, Sexy Voice

CAPTAIN TRADA

Police Precinct Captain

Captain Trada was just a boy when the warfleet arrived. When the Nazzadi settled and began to build a permanent life for themselves on Earth, Trada joined their internal police organization. As the years went on and the Nazzadi integrated with the New Earth Government, the beat cop traded one uniform for another. He eventually worked his way up to Captain of the Southern Seattle Arcology. Trada doesn't side with the Helasi or the Loyalists, and believes that both factions are equally criminal.

The Captain has worked closely with NEG investigators to ensure that there is full cooperation and disclosure between his office and the investigative branches, like the FSB. He hates the politicking that happens between local and global enforcement and is on a one man mission to keep it from interfering with law enforcement in Seattle.

Virtue/Flaw: Inquisitive/Inflexible

Experience: Veteran

Noteworthy Attributes: Presence 9, Tenacity 9

Noteworthy Skills: Bureaucracy: Expert, Education: Master, Intimidate: Expert, Law Enforcement: Master, Observation: Expert

Noteworthy Qualities: Authority (3), Commendation (2), Duty (3)



NUTECH

As the drums of war continue to beat around the world, the New Earth Government establishment continues to seek out the technological advancements that will not only allow them to survive the Aeon War, but to also eventually turn back those who so adamantly seek our destruction. From the vaulted halls of the Ashcroft Foundation to small research offices hidden away in the basements of universities throughout the remaining arcologies, the search continues for that key breakthrough that will shine a light on the dark future humanity faces. Over the last year, there have been a number of developments across a wide variety of fields. Some of these are small incremental advancements that will likely go unnoticed by most. Others are much more momentous, giving some the first rays of hope they have allowed themselves to feel in many years.

MEDICAL ADVANCES

War is harsh, cruel and ugly. It leaves in its wake a field of broken and shattered bodies. Human or Nazzadi resources are a precious commodity, more precious than most really understand. As a result, a great deal of time and money is spent figuring out how to mend the broken bodies that accompany the battleground.

I.C.C.

One of the most difficult aspects of the Aeon War for the military to deal with is the pure 'horror' factor that is an unavoidable side effect of battling beasts that look as though they were pulled from nightmares. No matter how much training or experience a soldier may have, it is difficult to hold ground when faced with a beast whose entire front is bisected by a massive maw filled with razor sharp teeth. More than one battle has been lost because soldiers have allowed their most primal instinct – that of fight or flight – to take over.

I.C.C., which stands for Impulse Control and Countermand, is a new drug being developed by the New Earth Government. Colloquially referred to as Ice, its sole purpose is to nullify the fight or flight instinct that is a part of being Human or Nazzadi. Without the need to fight the desire to run from a situation, the soldier will be free to fully concentrate upon the task at hand. Commanders will no longer need to worry about their lines falling apart because one too many individuals succumb to the stress and either flee or, sometimes worse, start a headlong charge into the enemy. However, not everyone is on board with this new drug.

The idea of repressing the most ancient of survival mechanisms is something that many people find both repulsive and immoral. Some say the drug makes someone less than mortal, removing emotion from a situation that is very emotional. Others fear that a soldier that becomes used to the drug will not be able to cope with everyday life after the war. They will have lost their empathy or will become hyper-sensitive to even minor things that will cause them to act unreasonably. In the clinical trials, evidence of all of this has been seen. Even so, there are many who are pushing hard for the drug to be distributed to soldiers. It will likely be months before a final decision will be made.

Migou Immunogenic Inoculation

Following the strike on the Hive Ship, the Migou unleash a devastating plague on the huddled masses of humanity. It is the type of attack that the New Earth Government elite has always feared. There was no real way to prepare a defense for it. Anyone in the 'know' understood that if the Migou did resort to a biological attack, their only defense would be to react decidedly and swiftly. More details on the deadly attack are found on p. 92.

As the virus sweeps across the globe, the answer to what many fear to be unanswerable comes from an unexpected source. During Operation Final Strike, the same forces that board the Hive Ship luckily stumble on a Migou nursery. The commander on the scene understands the significance of the find and immediately takes the initiative to change operational plans and secure the facility, spending the time they can collecting samples and whatever other articles they can understand. As a result, the NEG medical community has in their possession the keys to a vaccine in the form of pure, unaltered Migou DNA. It is a godsend and, when the nature of the virus is understood, the road to a cure is much shorter than any had thought possible.

Portable Nanite Triage Units

The modern battlefield is every bit as barbaric as those of the Dark Ages. Modern weapons are not gentle and leave victims horribly maimed. Thousands die of these wounds, as medical units are stressed beyond capacity and the doctors and nurses simply cannot get to victims in time to save them. Given the time and cost of training a soldier, never mind a powered armor or mecha pilot, improving the survival rates and recovery times of soldiers in the field is of highest priority for the New Earth Government. In the past, research has been done with an eye on using nanites to repair the damage done to bodies. Efforts, however, have been limited at best as the repair of a human cell is a much more complex matter than building a weapon barrel. One researcher, however, looked at the problem in a new way. Doctor Sarah Cord, a trauma surgeon on the Australian front, took another look at the idea of using nanites in treating the wounded. However, instead of using them to repair the damage, she postulated that they be used instead to simply patch the wound so the patient could survive long enough for the doctors to get to him. Portable Nanite Triage Units were born from her idea. Instead of trying to heal or cure a patient, these units instead focus on isolating and stabilizing the damage. When unleashed, the nanites flood into a wound, seeking out ruptured vessels, torn muscle, broken bones, and other damage. They then form a protective, sterile, flexible patch over the wound. Blood vessels are sealed, preventing any additional bleeding. The nanites seek out dirt and other contaminants and eject them from the wounded flesh, though true shrapnel is beyond their capabilities. The effect is to temporarily stabilize a patient long enough for the doctors to get to him. These units have not yet reached the field, but are expected within weeks.

DEFENSIVE SYSTEMS ADVANCES

Given the nature of the Aeon War and the fact that humanity has been on a perpetually defensive footing since its inception

it is no surprise that new defensive systems are constantly being sought. These systems range in function from better encryption techniques for communications to ever smaller stealth systems.

Powered Armor Stealth Systems

Up until recently stealth systems have been limited to nothing smaller than a small mecha such as a Rapier. The system has been too bulky to use in anything smaller and had a power requirement that the smaller energy systems of powered armor simply could not handle. Recent advances, however, have begun to eat away at these limitations. The Kris powered armor suit is the first such system to utilize a type of stealth suite on such a small chassis. When properly synced with a Noisemaker EW platform and within its operational sphere, the Void Stealth Suite emits its own electronic noise that interacts with the signal of the Noisemaker in such a way that a virtual shell is created around the powered armor. Radar, LADAR or any other modern sensor simply receive no return signal, resulting in the powered armor not showing up on anyone's screens and being unnoticed by fire control AI systems.

Scatter-Pods

Ever since the revelation of Migou Blinds in the failed Juneau assault, New Earth Government engineers have been trying to replicate the technology that allowed the alien race to so effectively ambush their military. With nothing to go on other than the knowledge that it can be done, progress in recreating the technology has been slow. However, the effort has not been wasted – the idea of the Scatter-Pod evolved from the basic idea of the Blind.

Scatter-Pods are designed to screen sub-surface forces from prying eyes – especially those of the Migou in orbit. They work by energizing a thin layer of molecules in a very specific manner that causes them to literally shake as though they were afflicted with a nervous jitter. The effect is to create a wall of white noise that blinds virtually all sensors that are used underwater. As the waves of sonar or similar sensors hits the wall of the nervous, jittering molecules, they are broken up and scattered about randomly – hence the name. For units underwater, the shell appears as a wall of white noise beyond which they have no way of knowing what is happening. Anyone above the surface of the water won't even notice that – they will just fail to get any returns on their sensors. The first deployment of these systems is around the Los Angeles facility that is responsible for launching Operation Final Strike. It prevents the Esoteric Order of Dagon from knowing exactly what is happening and keeps the Migou completely oblivious that anything is happening under the waves.

OFFENSIVE SYSTEMS

No comment on developing technologies would be complete without touching upon the important developments in weaponry. It is and will always be the field which receives the most attention by the military, especially in the days of the Strange Aeon. As they say, 'the best defense is a good offense,' and there are many in the military that are dying to reverse the defensive nature of the war.

Advanced Neural Interface

The ability to control a computer or other high-tech system with but a thought has been a thing of dreams for researchers and tech geeks alike. There are few who would try to argue that a direct neural link to a computer would be the fastest, most efficient way to control such a system. The ability to feed commands into a computer at the speed of thought would increase efficiency by an order of magnitude, especially given the power of the modern processor. Unfortunately, until recently the technology was simply too dangerous to be practical. Volunteers have invariably suffered severe brain damage after only a short period of time.

Over the last several years, a number of major advancements have been made in technology that has the potential of making direct computer links something no longer relegated to the dreams of futurists and researchers, and a number of successful projects have been widely publicized. Volunteers have been shown moving throughout the menus and applications of a standard computer interface purely through the power of their minds. Many are excited at the prospect, not the least of which is the military, as it could lead to faster reaction times for mecha and fighter pilots, giving them that small edge they may need in combat. These successes, however exciting, have led researchers into another technological corner that has stumped everyone.

While the ability to control the computer with a simple thought is exciting, the actual increase in efficiency has turned out to be less than first expected. This has been a bit of a disappointment for many, especially in light of the cost and inherent dangers that saddle the technology. The limitation in question is the ability of the user to take in and process data. Advanced Neural Interface (ANI) users must still absorb the data thrown at them in the traditional methods, reading it off a screen or AR display. While they may be able to launch an application faster or type a document at the equivalent of 300 words per minute, they simply cannot absorb the resulting data fast enough to be useful. The obvious answer is to reverse the process, allowing a computer to inject its data directly into one's mind, but for many the very idea is not only perverse, it hides dangers too numerous to counter. If you can absorb the data from a corporate spreadsheet, what is to stop the same technology from inserting a virus into a brain? The New Earth Government has thus far been reluctant to authorize serious research into the idea and, as a result, it will likely be some years yet before ANI technology will reach a point where it is feasible.

Arcanowave Technology

The Ashcroft Foundation has not been sitting idle in the last year since it made its breakthrough in arcanowave weaponry. There has been a steady pressure to perfect the technology to the point that it could start being deployed in the field. Most in the New Earth Government fully believe the weapon will be a game changer, and to prove their point they lobby for the new weapon to be deployed for the first time in Operation Final Strike. The Ashcroft Foundation has to scramble to ready the technology for a limited field test, but their efforts are successful. The tech-



nology proves to be every bit as effective as promised, giving something the size of powered armor the capability of piercing even the thick armor that protects the Migou Hive Ship.

Even after the successful field test of the technology, it is still a good distance from a general deployment, as there are numerous problems that still must be mastered. Heat is a major problem, especially on such a small suit. During the orbital operation this is largely negated by the extreme cold of space, allowing excess heat to be easily vented into space. On the surface, however, this heat cannot be as easily dumped. Even so, the massive amounts of data that is obtained during the offensive against the Hive Ship will likely accelerate a general deployment of the technology.

Damocles Class Assault Ships

Over the last year, with the help of the strategists behind Operation Jericho, the Victory-class battlecruisers, once the pride of the New Earth Government, have fallen out of favor. They are expensive, require massive construction yards, and take entirely too long to build. Add to that their incredible value as a target and it is easy to understand why this has happened. However, the NEG still needs the ability to effectively destroy Migou Swarm Ships, as no mecha are up to the task. Even if and when arcanowave weaponry begins to enter general deployment, mecha will still not be an effective weapon against the Migou craft. To this end, the New Earth Government has begun plans to deploy what is being called the Damocles-class Assault Ship.

A Damocles is a much smaller warship than the Victory. It has no troop carrying capacity and virtually no defensive weapon systems. Instead, each one is literally built around a single spinal weapon – a new generation of charge beam – which has the ability to punch through the thick armor of a Hull-scale warship. Powerful engines give this small ship the speed and maneuverability it needs to close to the relatively short range it needs for the main gun to do its work. Many have likened this new weapon to the PT boats of World War II – they are fast, fragile, and carry enough firepower to break a ship many times their size.

N-Dimensional Computer Core

The discovery of non-Euclidean mathematics was the catalyst that triggered the events of the last several decades. From the invasion of the Nazzadi, to the Rapine Swarm sweeping across the Asian continent, to the emergence of the long-hiding Dagonites, the knowledge discovered within the hallowed pages of *The Mysteries Within* unleashed horrors on humanity that few could have imagined. Even so, that same knowledge opened up new realms of science that provided answers to some of the most difficult puzzles that humanity was facing. Some would even say that its discovery is the only reason humanity has unified into one people. However, even after decades of research into what is now known as arcanotechnology, progress is still slow, carving a path both exciting and deadly for the researchers involved.

One of the biggest hindrances is the arcane nature of much of the research. The core knowledge, the foundation of the arcane,

is still lost to us. In many ways, researching advances into the arcane is much like building a house without knowing where the foundation lies. If you guess correctly, the house will be strong, but if you are wrong, all the work will collapse in short order – sometimes taking lives with it. Compound this with the inability of modern computers to be able to process the arcane formulas and it is understandable why so little is still understood.

The N-Dimensional Computer Core has been a project within the Ashcroft Foundation for almost two decades. Its purpose is to create a computer that can work with the dimensional nature of the arcane. Traditional computers are rooted in more traditional forms of mathematics and computations. While arcane formulas, once fully mastered by researchers, can be adapted to the limitations of modern computers, the research into the formulas must be done manually. The result exposes the mortal mind to things it was not designed to comprehend and has led to a great many losses of sanity. The new computer cores will literally operate within several dimensions at once, giving them the ability to view and interpret the arcane formulas in the format in which they were originally created, and feed the resulting data to researchers in a relatively safe format. Specially designed LAIs will assist in this effort, though there are concerns to the effect these formulas may have on their programming. For this reason, a great many safety protocols are being incorporated into the new systems to safeguard against the possibility of an LAI going insane or, even worse, evolving into something not anticipated as it interacts with the rituals and energies they may release.

While the first operational cores are still being built, the Ashcroft Foundation is confident they are mere months away now. Many within the Foundation are nervous about the project. It has taken a huge toll on those researchers involved, and there are some fears that when all the effort finally bears fruit, the final product will be as dangerous as any beast of nightmare that have taken root in our own world.

Rapid Discharge D-Cell

The advent of the D-Engine was a revolution in technology unlike any that had preceded it. The steam engine, internal combustion engine, nuclear power plant, or microwave power transmission are nothing more than footnotes in the annals of history when compared to changes the introduction of the D-Engine brought. No one had ever believed in the idea of perpetual energy, and for good reason. Within the normal confines of the laws of physics, it was simply impossible. The energy available is a constant and the creation of one form of energy requires the expenditure of another. It is simply the state of that energy that changes. Arcanotechnology changed all this. Suddenly, physics as we knew it was turned on its end as non-Euclidian mathematics opened up entire new realms of possibility researchers had never before imagined.

Given the relatively large size of even a small D-Engine, researchers took the theories that made it possible and applied it to batteries. The result is the commonly available D-Cell. Nearly all forms of technology, especially those available to civilians, get their power from some sort of D-Cell. They are as ubiquitous

today as AA batteries were 80 years ago. However, D-Cells are limited. While they can store a tremendous amount of energy, they are limited in how quickly they can discharge this energy. As a result, weapons such as portable charge beams and laser cannons have been beyond the reach of military forces. The Rapid Discharge D-Cell (often referred to as R-Cells) has shown promise in overcoming this limitation.

Where D-Cells are designed to provide a constant stream of energy for an extended period of time, the R-Cell is designed to provide a single massive burst of power. Unlike a D-Cell which stores its power in a manner similar to batteries of old, R-Cells have an actual trans-dimensional element to them. This pocket dimension is filled with the energy generated by a traditional D-Engine, in quantities not possible until the fabric of the dimension nearly ready to burst is contained with a simple arcane valve. Some scientists have likened this to filling a balloon with water. When the energy is needed, the valve is released opening a conduit to our own dimension. The expanded pocket-dimension collapses forcing the energy out.

As a result of this new development, military strategists have begun looking again at man-portable charge beams. While some thought man-portable laser cannons would be important as well, it was determined that the damage potential of these weapons were too low. RPGs and missiles are more effective and significantly cheaper. Charge beams, however, are devastating close-ranged weapons and will provide infantry with a deadly, albeit limited use ambush weapon that is capable of taking down even the largest enemy mecha or beast. The development of both the R-Cells and portable charge beams are being fast tracked with hopes that they will begin deployment with the next ten to sixteen months.

SOMETHING FISHY

The Rite of Transfiguration is the Children of Chaos' most prized possession and the backbone of their power. It is a secret they guard jealously, the thing that allows them to bestow on their adherents the form that will allow them to survive the return of the Old Ones and ultimately become their servants.

And now the Esoteric Order of Dagon has gone and stolen it.

The Children of Chaos have always thought themselves to be on good terms with the Esoteric Order. They have helped the cult of the fish god in all kinds of ways. They have passed along key information that might help the Esoteric Order find their lost city of R'lyeh. They have bailed out cells of the cult that have found themselves in trouble too far inland. They have even funneled money, weapons, and supplies to the typically anti-social cult to help them out with worldly needs.

The Esoteric Order of Dagon has never been known for sharing. They have a rather cold-blooded view of things. They see something that might help them and they take it. This time, the win was big – but then again, so have been the consequences.

STEALING THE RITE

The theft of the Rite of Transfiguration is not something that happened suddenly. Security within the Children of Chaos is much tighter than that. However, it wasn't long after the Children of Chaos found and agreed to help the Esoteric Order of Dagon that the cult of the fish god realized that the Rite of Transfiguration was something that they desired for their own ends.

The Esoteric Order has always had powerful sorcerers and the ability to train more. It was pretty clear that the Children of Chaos needed powerful sorcerers to help them realize their dream – creating an army of Dhohanoids. Thus, it made sense for the Esoteric Order to train some of its key sorcerers as infiltrating agents. There were plenty of challenges. Becoming a part of the Children of Chaos requires that a person become indoctrinated to the worship of Nyarlathotep. The Esoteric Order spies needed to have the strength of will necessary to remain faithful to their own god. This alone left the cult with few such agents.

Though the Esoteric Order knew there was a secret group that pioneered the Chrysalis Corporation's key occult research, they knew nothing more about the T99 Division. Therefore, it was regarded as far too difficult to infiltrate – especially when an easier target presented itself. The Children of Chaos had begun to create Genesis Pits, where circles of sorcerers worked in an almost assembly line-like fashion to create new Dhohanoids. The Esoteric Order's agents began to infiltrate the Genesis Pits, becoming regular practical users of the Rite of Transfiguration. It was hypothesized that with this practical knowledge and training, the agents would return with enough that the Esoteric Order could pick up the pieces and run with them.

Though it took years, they were absolutely correct. They have just now truly worked things out for themselves.

HACKING T99'S CODE

The legendary T99 Division of the Chrysalis Corporation has been working for years to find a way to either call new manifestations of Dhohanoids, or to control what types of Dhohanoids manifest. For the most part, they've failed miserably in both efforts.

However, last year, a genius named Dr. Aina Eeze discovered a way to modify the Rite of Transfiguration. Using a very rare natural geological formation known as a m'yas stone, she has managed to call forth three Dhohanoids that appear to be unique. Each of them is incredibly powerful, but the creation of such a creature is limited by the number of m'yas stones in the world and in the possession of the Chrysalis Corporation.

Given the secretive nature of the Esoteric Order of Dagon, there are few who truly understand the depths of magical knowledge at their disposal. The Deep Ones are an ancient race, guided by the even more ancient Spawn. They have occult power that has been handed down from the days of R'lyeh itself, and it is this power that made the masters of the cult believe that they could do something with the Rite of Transfiguration no one else had.

The inner circle of Esoteric Order sorcerers didn't need to wait until they had acquired a complete version of the Rite of Transfiguration. They've been working on finding holes which they can exploit inside of the magical code, if you will, for quite some time. This task was no mean feat. The end result is so complicated that none but the most gifted occultists or sorcerers could even begin to comprehend.

The physical pieces of the equation were the easy part. While the modified Rite doesn't require anything so rare and precious as a m'yas stone, it does require some very rare components. These special ingredients can only be found in the depths of the ocean, in places where mortals do not and have not tread. This alone would have prevented the Children of Chaos from attempting an experiment such as this, but there is much, much more.

There are two main components to the Esoteric Order of Dagon's modification. The first is R'lyehan magic, the ancient kind kept only in the hands of the Spawn. There are those yet alive who are part of the primary lineage that served Cthulhu as his priests, inheritors to knowledge unknown to those who breathe air. By substituting analogous R'lyehan magic for the similarly powerful magic of the Forgotten Ones, the Esoteric Order was able to steer the Rite more in the direction they wished. The second component is the mystical So-Th'a formula. This mystical formula takes the place of the Dho-Hna formula in the Rite, opening the ritual up to the energies that bathe R'lyeh from the higher dimensions where the bulk of Cthulhu dwells. Again, this is something only in the hands of the Esoteric Order.

If this all sounds like what one might term a hack, that's because it is. What the Esoteric Order had done is the mystical equivalent of jury-rigging and it is about as stable. This has two immediate effects.

The first effect is that the modified Rite is much more delicate. While the Chrysalis Corporation can perform the standard Rite of Transfiguration on up to six nights during a month, the Esoteric Order may only perform their version on the single night of the full moon. Even then, there's no guarantee it is going to work and it has a failure rate around 30%.

The other effect is its instability. Functionally, the Esoteric Order's version of the Rite is far more likely to explode. So far there has been about a one in ten chance that the sorcerers performing the Rite will suffer a magical mishap, even if it fails – far greater than normal, especially for a ritual that is this powerful. There is also a chance, unlike the standard Rite of Transfiguration, that the ritual recipient will die. The energies of the ritual are barely contained, and sometimes they spin out of control in a way that rips the person to be transfigured into pieces. This happens in about one in 50 cases.

TH'ARANOIDS

Because of the inclusion of the ancient So-Th'a formula, and because they are children of a different master, those that are transfigured by the Esoteric Order of Dagon's modified Rite are known as Th'aranoids, rather than Dhohanoids.

Two existing types of Dhohanoid also manifest as Th'aranoids and they are types one might expect – the Dua-Sanaras and Patul manifestations. There are slight cosmetic differences that help differentiate them from their Dhohanoid siblings, but those are the only differences between the two. Dua-Sanaras Th'aranoids take on dark patterned markings, not unlike those of a tiger shark. Patul Th'aranoids become a sickly mottled black and green, shedding the brighter colors of the Dhohanoid cousins.

There are those that are surprised that these manifestations are part of the modified Esoteric Order Rite, but the cult simply sees it as justification that the ritual was meant for them all along. Given the tensions now between the Children of Chaos and the Esoteric Order of Dagon, there is rivalry between these shared manifestations. This rivalry is strictly due to cult loyalty, as the two are said to feel a strange kinship with one another. To them, a minion of the Old Ones is a minion of the Old Ones, after all.

The first of the new Th'aranoid manifestations is known as the l'chask. It is a savage and vicious manifestation, combining the elements of shark and man in an unsubtle way. They are as predatory as one might expect, creatures of hunger and bloodshed. In terms of power, they are more on the level between Elib and a Zabuth. The Deep Ones are concerned by the power displayed by these beings and labor to create more and more justification as to why the l'chask are "less holy." Fortunately, these Th'aranoids are too hyper-focused on their bloodthirst to entirely notice the discrepancies.

The second new manifestation is the Th'aranoid known as the Ool'sha. It is easily one of the most alien of all the creatures made by the Rite of Transfiguration, in the same category as the Ciraqen or the Jjia-sin-dumash. An Ool'sha appears to be a

horrific kind of alien jellyfish, with appendages that allow it to move on land. The unknowable nature of the deep is most certainly manifest in them, as they have difficulty relating to people, or even mammals, of any kind. They have a great capacity for lateral thinking and a patience that can make the other cold-blooded creatures within the Esoteric Order seem impetuous. If they have any problem with their place within the cult, they have not yet let it be known.

Since the Th'aranoids are new and there is great difficulty in creating them, there are not that many in the world. One might estimate that there are less than a thousand in total, though the Esoteric Order works to create more and more every month that passes.

THE MORTAL PART OF THE EQUATION

Up until now, the monstrous hierarchy of the Esoteric Order of Dagon hasn't thought much of the Human or Nazzadi parts of the cult. For the most part, they were worshippers who were groomed to be laborers, recruiters, mecha pilots, or breeding stock and not necessarily treated with the respect they deserved. Now, with the advent of this modified Rite of Transfiguration, the mortal contingent of the Esoteric Order has taken on a new importance the likes of which they've never seen.

In order to populate their new Th'aranoid ranks, the leaders of the Esoteric Order are searching through their mortal ranks for those they feel are best suited for transfiguration. It is presented to these cultists as a way for them to elevate themselves as never before possible, to become closer to their betters. None have refused, even once rumors of those who die during the process have quietly spread through the ranks. It is regarded as a way to cast off their disgusting ape-forms forever and the risk is well worth the reward.

Eventually, should this program continue, it will be expected that all mortal cultists within the Esoteric Order of Dagon will undergo the modified Rite of Transfiguration. It will be a while before that happens, however. The Esoteric Order of Dagon does not have the resources of the Chrysalis Corporation. Combined with the inherent limitations of this modified Rite, it means that making Th'aranoids will take time.

Th'aranoids are fully accepted by the inhuman members of the Esoteric Order. They occupy a place on the food chain about equal to lower strata Deep Ones or Hybrids, though they can elevate themselves no higher. After all, though they have cast off their ape-forms, they still remember how to wear it. Time will tell if Th'aranoids are capable of growing in status within the cult, but there is a ceiling for now – though a much higher ceiling than that which keeps mortal cultists at the bottom. For now, there are few that question it.

Naturally, this modified Rite of Transfiguration is a jealously guarded secret within the Esoteric Order of Dagon. Even though they stole it, they have no desire or intention of sharing the ritual's power with anyone else.

THE RIFT BETWEEN THE CULTS

The Children of Chaos are not pleased with this sort of dirty pool. In their eyes, they have the same goals in the end as the Esoteric Order of Dagon and it was completely unnecessary for the cult of the fish god to infiltrate and steal their secrets. It is Chrysalis Corporation company policy now to cease any and all aid to the Esoteric Order, for as long as is necessary to teach them a lesson. No more money, no more goods, and most importantly, no more information or artifacts.

As far as the theft of the Rite goes, the Esoteric Order of Dagon believes themselves to be perfectly justified. They saw something that would speed them on their way towards the resurrection of their sleeping god and it was being kept from them. They took the actions necessary to acquire it and put it to use and now they are going to use these new tools in their quest for R'lyeh. It is that simple and the cult, as a whole, believes the Children of Chaos to be over-reacting.

However, the Esoteric Order is angry with the Children of Chaos, but not over the theft. They're angry with the cult because the Chrysalis Corporation has withdrawn all support as "punishment" for their actions. In the eyes of the Esoteric Order, this is ridiculous. First, the Children of Chaos were withholding an important tool that would clearly help them, and now they're withholding further key support because they're pouting about finally having to share it. The Esoteric Order is questioning the Children of Chaos' motivations, particularly their dedication to finally bringing the Old Ones back into this universe. Perhaps they've fallen from their way.

There are those who wonder how the Director could have let this happen. He is, after all, an avatar of the Endless One Nyarlathotep and a being of amazing power, as well as a being who has dealt directly with Dagon and other forces in charge of the Esoteric Order. Some have chosen to see these as a sign of the Director's fallibility, while others believe that this was carefully planned from the beginning. Perhaps it is merely an experiment coordinated between the Director and Dagon, just to see what might happen.

While the rift between the two cults does not mean there are open hostilities, it does mean that the two give each other wide berth. The Chrysalis Corporation is giving the Esoteric Order plenty of room for their own operations and vice versa, although to be honest the Esoteric Order is still pretty much going anywhere they please. In response, the Chrysalis Corporation phones in a tip to the Office of Internal Security from time to time, when the Esoteric Order gets too big for their britches.

In the end, the Children of Chaos expect that the Esoteric Order of Dagon will discover that life without their assistance is far more difficult than they expected, and the Esoteric Order expects that the Children of Chaos will come to their senses. For now, it is a stalemate that is gently stalling the end times and giving the New Earth Government a little more time to make a difference in their survival.

However, the repercussions have been felt within the Children of Chaos. Now all sorcerers who are going to participate in the Rite of Transfiguration, regardless of role, must be subjected to the scrutiny of the Circle. The Circle, while not especially a proponent of the Rite, cooperates out of a general sense of loyalty. There are those who have said the Blind Lady has plans that involve having the Circle so close to the Rite now, but such things are only whispered rumors.

USING IN YOUR GAME

There aren't really a set of events that herald the arrival of the Th'aranoids, at least from the average player's perspective. For most groups that run the risk of encountering Esoteric Order of Dagon activity, one day they will simply run into what appear to be normal cultists that transform into horrific new creatures. Unless the Characters are really hooked into the arcane underground and cult activity, it will take them a while before they can figure out what the heck is going on. Eldritch Society characters may naturally have a better educated guess, given that they understand the secrets of the Children of Chaos better than just about anyone.

One way to foreshadow the introduction of Th'aranoids is to spin up the rumor mill. The Characters could hear through their network of contacts or through their organization about a mission or events that went wrong. Perhaps the mission in question was into Esoteric Order territory or perhaps the event is one that would have expected resistance from the cult. In any event, seemingly mortal cultists warped into dangerous monsters and turned the tables in the Esoteric Order's favor. In these cases, feel free to provide slightly warped and inaccurate descriptions of the Th'aranoids and their abilities, just to keep your players guessing. It is, after all, the rumor mill.

Even if the Esoteric Order isn't a regular part of your game, there are ways that players might encounter Th'aranoid foes. If you're playing an arcane underground game, there are plenty of circles in which Esoteric Order cultists walk. Cross one at the wrong time and suddenly be intimidated by an angry l'chask. If you're playing a law enforcement game, especially the Office of Internal Security or Special Services, it is likely that the Characters will come across something related to the Esoteric Order – with their new unexpected members. If you're playing an Eldritch Society game, there are plenty of opportunities to deal with Esoteric Order recruiting cults or infiltration operations. Suddenly the mortal cultists are a more dangerous, and somewhat familiar foe.

However, if you're playing a some kind of nefarious cult game, things could get interesting. If your Characters have any regular contact with the Esoteric Order of Dagon, Th'aranoids could begin to show up. The cult will be tight lipped about their origins, but suddenly their presence and power will be kicked up a notch. Things get really interesting if you're playing a Chrysalis Corporation game. Characters may be sent out to spy on the cult to see what they're doing or how they're making Th'aranoids, or simply to monkey-wrench Esoteric Order operations, just out of spite.

I'CHASK

The idea of a shark-man walking on land has been regarded as humorous in fiction. However, the reality is nothing short of terrifying. The I'chask looks like a cross between an alien shark, eel, and humanoid being. A shark-like body, complete with a powerful maw of sharp teeth, gives way to a thick eel-like tail, with clawed finned arms and legs that don't really look strong enough to propel the creature on land. But propel them they do, at frightening speed – but not as fast as the predator can move under the waves. There is no doubt that the I'chask is the Esoteric Order of Dagon's new favorite killer.

The I'chask are suffused with the primal nature of the ocean's apex predators. Even as people, they always appear to be sizing up their next meal. Eerily, they seem to blink infrequently and have a tendency to shamelessly stare with black irised eyes. As monsters, they are purely savage, acting more often on bloodthirsty instinct than on carefully planned actions. They also have little or no body-hair and men have difficulty cultivating facial hair.

Special Rules: I'chask are fully amphibious and can breathe underwater indefinitely. They can function in the cold and intense pressure of the deep ocean, all the way to the bottom of the trenches.



Average I'chask (Experienced)

Allegiance: Esoteric Order of Dagon

Scale: Vitality

Size: Medium (12 to 14 ft. long with tail)

Attributes: Agility 8 (+1), Intellect 5, Perception 8 (+1), Presence 6, Strength 12 (+4), Tenacity 11 (+4)

Secondary Attributes: Actions 2, Orgone 13, Reflex 7

General Skills: Athletics: Expert (3), Criminal: Novice (2), Education: Novice (2), Intimidate: Adept (3), Misdirect: Novice (2), Occult: Novice (2), Observation: Expert (4), Security: Novice (2), Stealth: Expert (4), Streetwise: Novice (2), Survival: Expert (4)

Combat Skills: Armed Fighting: Novice (2), Dodge: Adept (3), Fighting: Adept (3), Marksman: Novice (2)

Weapons: Claws (+0), Bite (+2), Locking Bite (+2 + entangle), Tail Swipe (+1)

Damage Bonus: +3

Vitality: 16

Armor: 2/2

Regeneration: 2 points

Fear Factor: 16

Temperament: Bloodthirsty & Savage

Senses: Acute Smell & Taste, Nightvision, Sonar, Thermal

Movement & Speed: Land [19 mph (47/11 ypt)], Swimming [57 mph (141/33 ypt)]

OOL'SHA

The thing is not right. It is an alien thing, a translucent gelatinous mass surrounded by long writhing tentacles – some almost 20 yards long. Tinges of multi-colored phosphorescence shoot throughout the creature. It is impossible to tell if the thing has sensory organs, but it behaves as if it does. Floating through the water, it would be beautiful if not for the menace surrounding it. While capable of functioning on land, it is not pretty to watch. Its speed is compromised by solid ground and, though still deadly, it looks like the proverbial fish out of water. It is an Ool'sha, the strangest new ally of the Esoteric Order of Dagon.

The unknowable nature of the deep is most certainly manifest in the Ool'sha. They have difficulty relating to people, or even mammals, of any kind, instead requiring the company of other unnatural creatures. They have a great capacity for lateral thinking and a patience that can make the other cold-blooded creatures within the Esoteric Order seem impetuous. As people, they move in an unnatural flowing way. They also have little or no body-hair and men have difficulty cultivating facial hair.

Special Rules: Ool'sha are fully amphibious and can breathe underwater indefinitely. They can function in the cold and intense pressure of the deep ocean, all the way to the bottom of the trenches.



Ool'sha are also poisonous. Their tentacles can introduce a painful toxin into the body of a victim. This poison requires that a bite do at least one point of Vitality damage to be administered. Anyone affected by the poison must succeed at a Hard Tenacity Feat Test to resist. If this Test is failed, the victim suffers a -3 Test Penalty to all Actions for one to ten minutes (roll one die). Only one Test needs to be made per turn affected by the Ool'sha's poison and the pain-inducing effect is not cumulative. A target may be affected on the turn following his recovery from the last dose.

Average Ool'sha (Experienced)

Allegiance: Esoteric Order of Dagon

Scale: Vitality

Size: Medium (10 to 11 ft. long)

Attributes: Agility 6, Intellect 13 (+4), Perception 7, Presence 6, Strength 6, Tenacity 8 (+2)

Secondary Attributes: Actions 1, Orgone 15, Reflex 8

General Skills: Athletics: Expert (3), Computers: Adept (3), Criminal: Novice (2), Education: Adept (3), Intimidate: Novice (2), Larceny: Novice (2), Misdirect: Novice (2), Occult: Adept (3), Observation: Adept (3), Security: Novice (2), Stealth: Adept (3), Streetwise: Novice (2), Survival: Novice (2)

Combat Skills: Dodge: Adept (3), Fighting: Adept (3), Marksman: Novice (2)

Weapons: Tentacles (+1 + poison)

Damage Bonus: +0

Vitality: 12

Armor: 1/1

Fear Factor: 16

Temperament: Creative & Patient

Senses: Long Range, Nightvision, Sonar, Thermal, X-Ray

Movement & Speed: Land [7 mph (17/4 ypt)], Swimming [33 mph (81/18 ypt)]

A STUDY IN COLLISION

After the destruction of Fu-li Feng's horde of creatures just outside the Australian city of Katherine, as described starting on p. 126, the surviving Rapine Storm elements disperse into the wilderness. Some revert to mindless slaughter, others to pack hunting tactics. A few are swept up by newly arriving Desolate Ones sent by the Consort to harass the New Earth Government across the continent. Finally, a few were collected by the glory-seeking Desolate One named Sergei Katov.

Sergei Katov's army, such as it is, constantly shifts in size, shrinking as its numbers are whittled away in pointless raids, and swelling once again as he comes across more loose monsters to command. Sometimes, in his nomadic wanderings, he meets another Desolate One, and such is the case one late evening about a month after the destruction of Katherine. In this particular instance, the Desolate One known as the Revenant chances upon him entirely by accident.

Originally known as Ariel Leighton, a former British scholar and heiress who'd squandered her fortune searching for ancient secrets, the Revenant arrives on the western coast of Australia with a company of monsters that she has handpicked for their loyalty, weeding out any that were difficult to control or possessed any sort of strength of will. She actually intends to disappear into the Outback, but such is not to be. About a week after arriving, she happens to move her small army into the same dry riverbed that Sergei Katov is using as a base camp.

At first pleased with the arrival of new reinforcements, Katov immediately sets about taking command of the Revenant's small company, as he's done with every group of Rapine Storm he's come across. However, he finds a strong, willful rival in Ariel Leighton. Despite his clear seniority and higher rank, she refuses to give up control of her creatures to him. He challenges her directly, and wins the resulting duel, yet her monsters remain loyal to her and resist his commands. Katov is on the verge of slaying her, until he realizes that doing so will result in a pitched battle between his own forces and hers – a contest which can have no winner.

In the end, he proposes a compromise – she will continue to command her beasts, while he remains in charge of their new, consolidated warband. Ariel thinks about it for a while and initially agrees, but she has other plans. She doesn't want to be around anyone else, certainly not someone on the brink of madness, as Katov is proving to be. So, in the dead of night, she and her company quietly slip out of the camp, making their way through the dark canyon. In addition to choosing servants that are mindlessly loyal to her, she also has chose the ones that are nocturnal, in order to better move about in the Outback undetected.

Katov is aware she's left, of course – she can hardly hide the movement of several dozen creatures, after all. Instead of risking immediate conflict, Katov chooses instead to send a few to keep tabs on her, to gain a better tactical advantage. His pride will not permit Ariel's challenge to his authority to pass. So, as

the sun rises over the edges of the canyon, he moves to pursue the Revenant.

Katov expects Leighton to stop moving once the sun comes up, but she doesn't. While his own scouts burrow to avoid the heat, she slips out of the canyon and out into the desert. By the time he comes upon her exit point, she is out of sight, having left no tracks of any kind. Sergei is forced to guess which way she has gone and he guesses wrong. Noticing a series of stone spires on the horizon, he assumes these are rock formations cut by the wind and natural erosion and makes his way towards them. They seemed like just the sort of things the Revenant might use for cover. Unfortunately for him, they are something else entirely.

KATOV VERSUS THE MIGOU, PART ONE

Actually, the spires mark a spot where a city of the Great Race once stood long ago. These aren't simple stone formations – they are fragments of fantastically old structures now fallen into ruin. The vast remnants of an ancient metropolis lay just beneath his feet, but Sergei has no clue this is the case. Instead, he blunders onward, searching amidst the rocks for any sign of burrows or caves the Revenant might be using for shelter. Though he doesn't know it, he is being watched.

Some months before, the Migou came to this part of Australia on a mission of utmost secrecy. They were investigating the ruins of a Great Race city, and they dared not let anyone else know it – least of all the Rapine Storm. So when they see Sergei Katov and his 150+ company of horrific creatures marching directly towards their dig site, they are understandably concerned. There seems to be no chance he will simply pass them by, as the army is actively searching as it marches. How has he found out about the dig? How many more Rapine Storm forces are in the area? The Migou have little idea, but they have to act. There is at least a small chance that the Storm is here entirely by accident, but even if not, they still have to be destroyed.

The Migou force is not well-prepared for combat. Most of the aliens at the site are workers and scientists, not warriors. They have been counting on secrecy to avoid any kind of engagement. Now, with a battle forced upon them, they use surprise as their primary weapon. Positioning their limited forces at the mouth of the four small caves they've been using to access the underground dig site, they intend to strike once Katov moves in between them, surrounding the hapless Storm group and focusing fire upon it from all sides.

Unfortunately for the defenders, one of Sergei's scouts spots a cave early and he turns his forces directly towards it. The Migou can wait no longer and swarm out of their hiding places, catching the Desolate One off-guard. He isn't terribly surprised at coming under attack, for he's expecting the Revenant to be prepared for battle. However, the appearance of Migou is a shock. He hasn't faced Migou since leaving China and most of his cobbled-together force has no combat experience with them. Furthermore, many of his troops are caught in the open and destroyed in the first volley, taking away his advantage of numbers.

The battle is swift and bloody. Since he's turned aside at the last minute to investigate the cave, Katov avoids encirclement and escapes being outflanked. He collects his troops into an effective formation almost immediately and pulls back to a defensive position. Despite any other personality flaws he might possess, Sergei Katov is an effective commander, at least at the company level. The Migou strike at him from three directions, yet he fights back tenaciously, inflicting losses the bugs simply can't afford. Once their initial rush peters out, the Migou find themselves being counterattacked and their inexperienced fighters fall back, letting their few warriors take the brunt of the Storm's blows.

Katov has no idea what he's stumbled onto. He probably could've crushed the Migou at this point had he set his monsters loose, but he couldn't afford to risk a decisive engagement. He is already sensing that this Migou outpost is his chance at glory. Surely if he destroyed it, he would regain the Consort's favor. Yet now he has a rival, the upstart Revenant who is lurking somewhere close by. Perhaps she's even led him into this ambush. She will surely steal his thunder should he try to destroy these bugs and fail. Katov cannot let her get away with this.

So he retreats, and the Migou, having suffered far too many losses, have no choice but to watch him go.

THE REVENANT'S PLOT

Ariel Leighton hasn't been close enough to intervene in the fight, but her scouts take notice of it. She'd eluded pursuit earlier in the day, but keeps several pairs of eyes on Katov just to make sure he isn't going to pick up her trail again. When they observe the battle, they bring word immediately and Ariel has a choice to make. She can simply keep going and leave Sergei to his own devices, or she can join him and fight the Migou.

Ariel wants to be alone, but she also wants to free herself from the guilt that still tugs at what remains of her soul. Isn't that the purpose of her walkabout, after all? What has been done to her was never her choice, but she is stuck with what she has become. There can be no going back. So what options does she have? She can return to the Rapine Storm and a life of killing, or she can hide in the Outback forever, if necessary. What if there is another way, though? What if she can rejoin humanity, even in the form of a Desolate One?

So she begins to quietly contemplate what amounts to defecting to the New Earth Government. They won't accept her at face value, of course. At least, not without some proof she is truly ready to change sides. The situation here in the desert might just provide that opportunity, though. If she can somehow destroy the Migou base, and Katov as well – preferably at the same time – that might just do the trick.

So, when Katov begins his retreat from the dig site, Ariel brings her company up to join him as reinforcements. Upon seeing her approach, Sergei initially prepares for another fight, but she comes forward under flag of truce. Offering her apologies for leaving without a word, the Revenant claims she's made a mis-



take and is willing to submit her troops to Katov's command. Sergei is suspicious, but since he needs replacement troops so badly (having lost almost half his own monsters in the Migou battle), he accepts her offer.

Ariel's company is well-stocked and she shares her food supplies with Katov, allowing him to believe he's taken complete control of the warband. Her plan is simple: she will wait until their combined force has defeated the Migou, and then, at an appropriate moment, she'll order her creatures to fall upon Katov and consume him. In the ensuing confusion, any of Sergei's monsters that try to fight for him will be slain, and any that aren't will likely continue sparring with the Migou. Then, once the battle is over, she will signal the New Earth Government, request asylum, and present the dig site as a gift.

It seems like a foolproof plan, but unfortunately for her, the Migou have other ideas.

KATOV VERSUS THE MIGOU, PART TWO

The dig site is by this point a honeycomb of tunnels underneath the hard-packed desert soil, with only four small cave entrances allowing egress to the site. The Migou know full well they couldn't stand up to another attack by the Rapine Storm, especially since they've seen the Revenant's company arriving as reinforcements. Ariel hasn't made any attempt to hide her approach, and the barren desert does little to conceal the small army.

So what can the Migou do? Their choices seem to be fight or leave, but if they summon a pickup at this point, the arriving aircraft will give away the location of the dig site to the NEG. At least at the moment only the Rapine Storm know of it. If the Migou can somehow defeat the Storm, that might preserve the site's secrecy.

Of course, all the Storm has to do at this point is leave to gather more forces and the Migou will stand no chance. They can't face two companies of monsters out in the open, so pursuing the assembled forces is impossible. The Migou have to hope the invaders will return soon and try to penetrate the dig directly without any further reinforcements. Any other result will be a disaster.

To their great surprise, the Rapine Storm do exactly what the Migou want – they return the next morning to renew the attack. The Migou have been busy overnight, prepping defenses around the cave entrances. Two are set up as suicide holes, designed to collapse as soon as anything gets far enough inside. The others open up into a maze of tunnels ideally suited for defense. Anyone moving through those caves can be ambushed, sniped at, and harried at every turn. Furthermore, the Migou know those tunnels well and the attackers do not.

This doesn't stop Sergei Katov, of course. He is supremely confident of victory, having taken the defenders' measure the previous day. He correctly realizes that what he is facing isn't battle-hardened Migou troops, but a cobbled-together force of primarily non-combatants trying to defend a small scientific outpost. He

orders his forces forward boldly, wisely sending in burrowers to investigate the outer caves, thereby avoiding significant losses in the suicide entrances when they collapse. Unfortunately, many of the ones in the other caves are cut down by defenders behind murder holes hastily constructed the night before. Katov loses over a dozen monsters just trying to cut his way past these fortifications.

The smell of blood sends his lead elements into a frenzy and they advance swiftly down into the caves, attacking without any regard to tactical sense. Within minutes, one-third of Katov's army is dead or dying in the tunnels. However, they inflict terrible damage as well, relentlessly pursuing and killing any Migou they can find. The bugs are forced to retreat again and again. They set off improvised explosives and other traps, killing still more of the Storm's monsters. In the end, it is obvious they are doomed.

The Migou has one last desperate trick up their sleeve, however. During their digging, they'd broken into a cavern that was once the interior of a Great Race structure. It is here that they will make their final stand. Leading out from this building is another tunnel that opens into another, larger room that is only partially excavated. The Migou choose to leave a small contingent hidden there, along with a smattering of supplies which are enough to keep the operation going if they aren't discovered. They then barricade the entrance and set it up to look like a dead end, hoping beyond hope that the invaders won't find their hiding place.

THE GREAT BETRAYAL

The rest of the Migou defenders have their backs against the wall. They have nowhere to go and their only thought now is to fight to the death, hoping to convince the invaders they are the last surviving bugs in these tunnels. They are prepared to die, but then something happened that surprises even them.

As the Storm's monsters begin the final assault, they suddenly turn on each other. The Revenant, confident that the time for betrayal has come, springs her trap and orders her loyal creatures to strike at Sergei Katov. He has been slightly wounded in the invasion and is at the rear of his forces, which quickly take up a defensive position around him. When it becomes obvious that most of his loyal monsters are too busy chewing up the remaining Migou to assist, he leaps onto the back of a Chiranae and flees the tunnels, vowing vengeance on the Revenant should they ever meet again.

Ariel declares victory and calls upon the remaining creatures in the caves to rally to her and destroy the rest of the Migou. They respond with confusion and many fall upon each other, mindlessly slaughtering friend and foe alike in the absence of their leader. The Migou, not sure exactly what is happening, choose that moment to counterattack. The ones still hiding in the secret chamber burst forth and let loose with a scathing barrage of weapons fire, further adding to the chaos.

The Revenant realizes defeat is upon her and calls for a retreat. She has beaten Sergei Katov, but the Migou will have to wait.

She can quite easily regroup outside, gather more troops under her banner, and renew the assault at a time of her own choosing. With about thirty creatures fighting a rear guard action, she backs out of the caves and into the sunlight. The Migou don't follow, content for the moment with their victory, despite the cost. They do send a few scouts to watch the Storm's retreat, hoping perhaps to see Katov return and the two factions destroy each other, but something else comes to their rescue instead.

Early that morning, a high-altitude New Earth Government reconnaissance flight spots the two companies of Rapine Storm monsters gathering in the desert. A strike force is called in to deal with them and this battle force arrives just as the Revenant's surviving troops are regrouping outside the caves. The resulting fight is short and sweet, resulting in her death and the total destruction of what is left of her company. The NEG, well aware that the initial scout fly-over indicated far more Storm forces in the area than they'd actually encountered, quickly vacate the area with only a cursory examination of the caves, which show no evidence of the Migou – the fighting all took place farther underground.

As a result, the Migou manage to completely avoid discovery by the New Earth Government, and the threat from the Rapine Storm seems to have been wiped out. They remain wary, of course, fearing the arrival of more Storm forces, but so far none are forthcoming. With their numbers greatly diminished, the Migou digging efforts proceed very slowly, but they remain confident they'll eventually find something – anything – of value to justify their presence here.

As for Sergei Katov, he remains at large somewhere in the desert, trying to rebuild his army. What he'll do next is anyone's guess.

WEAVING IN THE CHARACTERS

Knowing all this, how do the Characters get involved in this story, and what influence might they have on these events?

Clearly the easiest way to involve the Characters is if they're part of the military. As mentioned, the New Earth Government discovers the Rapine Storm via a recon flight. If the Characters are stationed in Australia, they might well be sent in on the cleanup mission. If they take the initiative and think to look around for signs of an additional Storm presence, they might stumble upon the hastily concealed cave entrances to the underground complex. The results could be a pitched battle against desperate Migou trying to protect their secrets – a defense destined to fail, as the bugs' defenses are still reeling from the just-ended Storm attack.

Another possible outcome is a hunt for Sergei Katov, who slips away during the preceding events. The Characters could be assigned to track him down in the desolate Outback. Once they do catch him, what then? A battle would surely result, but Katov is a coward at heart and, should defeat become inevitable, he'll do anything to save his own life – such as offering vital information to the Characters in exchange for leniency. In such a situation,

he'll certainly reveal the location of the Migou outpost, in which case proceed as above.

Once the Characters actually enter the outpost and defeat the Migou, what then? The bugs are clearly there looking for something. The NEG will want to know and will certainly begin studying the place themselves, and a specialized team might just be needed down in those ancient tunnels. What long-forgotten defenses might still be active, deep under the Australian desert? What secrets might be revealed if the place is thoroughly searched? These answers are limited only by the Storyguide's imagination.

Of course, unless the New Earth Government is very quiet about their discovery of the Migou dig site, the bugs won't be long in finding out the NEG know about it. Naturally, they don't want anyone else finding anything the Great Race might have left behind.

If the Characters aren't part of the military, there are still opportunities to get involved in this story. One obvious method is to learn of the Great Race ruins through some ancient text or other reference, leading them to the Outback, where they encounter the surviving Migou hiding out in their secret site. If they can fight, the Characters might try to clear out the bugs and investigate the place themselves, but if not, the Migou will almost certainly pursue them if they flee. They don't want the location of the dig site getting out, and will do almost anything to stop the Characters from escaping with this news.

Finally, there's the question of what exactly is it the Migou are looking for and what happens if they find it? Again, this is limited only by the Storyguide's imagination. If what they find is some kind of ancient technology, perhaps a weapon or defensive device, they will try to take it back to Antarctica for study. As soon as they move from the dig site, they might be picked up by New Earth Government reconnaissance and attacked. Or, if they try to be stealthy, they could try to sneak across Australia, and the Characters might be dispatched to track them down.

Alternately, the Characters could run into them entirely by accident, thereby starting a completely different story in which they try to figure out exactly what it is they've just captured, and why the Migou seem to want it so badly.

This was absolute madness. It sounded good in the plans. Risky, but good. But the strategists who came up with those plans had never had to stare down the leviathan known as the Migou Hive Ship face to face.

Lt. Waylen had served on many fronts. He'd been in dog-fights with Quetzalcoatl and faced down Spawn over the open ocean. However, nothing inspired more immediate and raw terror than flying straight at the Hive Ship, knowing that he'd have to get close enough to land on it.

Now it just seemed like suicide. He might as well have been landing on the moon. Except for the fact that the moon didn't have enough weaponry to level a large city if it had the mind to.

It wasn't long now. It was just about time to let loose his cargo of Hakari fighters and the amazing Kris powered armor. If he was freaking out, he couldn't imagine what the madmen in that experimental powered armor must be feeling. Arcanowave tech was brand new and hadn't really been field tested. And yet these guys climbed into what were functionally prototype suits of orbital powered armor based on that arcanotech, hoping to drop right down onto the surface of that alien behemoth so that they could burn holes into its nigh-impregnable surface in order to allow boarding parties entry.

The more he thought about it, the more Waylen was convinced this was insanity. He didn't know how he ever could have thought such a thing was reasonable. It's funny how soldiers will swallow almost anything when it's presented in a calm, logical, and high-level fashion. That's when it makes sense. The reality is always a different thing. Waylen wondered why he hadn't learned that by now.

In the end, it didn't matter. It was either this or the bugs would continue to crush the New Earth Government at almost every turn. This was survival of the fittest and Waylen was out to prove that humanity was the fittest.

That was the thought he needed to regain his focus. That primal defiance built into the Human (and Nazzadi) race that always surfaces when things are the darkest. The survival instinct is an amazing thing, especially when one can understand it on such a large scale.

Tuning his instruments, Waylen zeroed in on his target zone. It was hard to tell what was what on the alien vessel, but intel had given him coordinates and he identified where he was supposed to go.

Sensors started to light up. Swarm ships from other places in orbit had begun to change their trajectory. Some kind of space fighter had begun to fly out of the Hive Ship. The fight was finally starting. Waylen triggered the comm.

"Waylen to Hakari wing. It's time. Good hunting."

He pressed a button and opened the bay. A flight of brand new Hakari space superiority fighters dropped out into the black and blazed off, intent on engaging the as of yet unknown and untested Migou fighters. That was sort of the theme of this mission. Unknown and untested.

The other Mantas in the attack had done the same and the void was now alight with fighters beginning to engage one another. Waylen could hear the chatter and, amazingly, it wasn't going all that badly. Things seemed pretty evenly matched for the first time in a long time.

The Hakari pilots were doing an amazing job of keeping the Migou off Waylen's back. He kept himself keyed in on the target zone and got closer and closer to the Hive Ship, to the point where it filled his view screens.

There was a point where Waylen's Manta was past the first wave of fighters that had a sense of calm, like the eye of a storm. He knew it was only an illusion, but there was something entirely strange about it. Then, as it appeared he had a clear path to his target, it struck him.

There were no point-defense systems on the hull of the Hive Ship. It was as if the Migou designed the thing never taking into account the thought that someone someday might actually try to get close to it. All their defenses were designed to take out large craft, like battlecruisers or dreadnoughts, but the New Earth Government had learned. Their fighters weren't enough to fend off a surprise attack like this and the swarm ships were too far away to be of much use yet.

Maybe, for once, the New Earth Government had caught a break.

Miraculously, Waylen landed his Manta just a hundred yards off of his target zone. He keyed the comm.

"Ladies and gentlemen, somehow we have arrived. Kris units, get your bad selves out there and make us a hole!"





He hit a button and opened the bay that contained the experimental Kris powered armor units. They floated out onto the hull of the Hive Ship and fired up the strange field that was the arcanowave system. Then, they started to burn through that alien hull with a power that was something totally new. Waylen couldn't help but be captivated as he secured the Manta, latching to the surface of the Migou's floating moon.

All they'd hoped for, all they really needed, was a hole big enough for powered armor and the associated strike teams to enter the ship. It took longer than was comfortable. Fortunately, many of Waylen's fellow Manta pilots had found their ways in as well, releasing their payloads of new mecha like the Jian or the Switchblade. Just in time, too, as the hull of the Hive Ship had begun to crawl with strange biomechanical Migou mecha, releasing swarms of explosive rockets at their foes.

Without formality and with absolute amazement, the report came. "We're in."

Kris units began to pour into the Hive Ship, followed by any other nearby New Earth Government unit that could fit. Strangely, it reminded Waylen of ants invading another hill to destroy the enemy queen. No one knew if the Migou had queens, but he hoped that if they did, that bitch would die today.

That was it. It was done. New Earth Government forces were inside the Hive Ship – something no one thought could be done. It was up to them now. All that was left for Waylen to do was to wait patiently to bring them home, hoping that the brave fighter and mecha pilots could keep the Migou away.

It was almost kind of peaceful. It was certainly satisfying.

chapter three

another desperate attempt

A DESPERATE PLAN

PAST MISTAKES

There can be no doubt that the events and planning that led up to devastating defeat at the hands of the Migou when the New Earth Government attempted to retake Juneau were the results of a systematic failure on a number of levels within the NEG hierarchy. Fortunately even the worst defeat can have a silver lining and the events on that cold Alaskan morning are no different. For months following the failed attack on the former Alaskan capitol, intelligence analysts and military strategists huddled in darkened rooms for long hours. Their singular goal was to glean every ounce of information they could so that future operations would not suffer the same fate.

INTELLIGENCE...WHAT IS THAT?

There is no one within the New Earth Government military structure that does not agree that the root cause of the failure of the Juneau operation lay not with any particular failure of the forces in the field, but rather with the inability to provide those forces with a level of intelligence that would give them a hint as to what they should expect. The months leading up to the operation were shrouded in a nearly paranoid level of secrecy that actually worked against the very people who were planning the operation. None, outside of a very limited group, even knew of the burgeoning plan to retake the city and deny the Migou the foothold they needed on the North American continent. The left hand literally did not know what the right hand was up to.

So paranoid were military leaders of providing the Migou any hint of the plan that no efforts to obtain on-the-ground intelligence were made. All the data used in the planning was obtained via long-distance surveillance and the occasional unmanned recon drone. In many ways, it has since been proposed, the dearth of reconnaissance patrols and cautious probes into the lost territories likely alerted the Migou that something big was in the works. With such an utter lack of eyes on the ground, the Migou were free to let the New Earth Government see, from a distance, what they wanted us to. They had no need to heavily patrol the periphery of their new territory, allowing them to even more effectively keep the strategists guessing at what sort of forces the Migou had staged in the region. It also meant there was no chance of discovering the newly deployed Blinds, making their revelation during that disastrous battle all the more effective.

A FAILURE TO APPRECIATE

While the intelligence failure that accompanied the planning of the Juneau Offensive was a major facet of its eventual and inevitable failure, the New Earth Government also failed to appreciate just how great an advantage the Migou's control of orbital space afforded them. Throughout most of the war, the NEG had been on a defensive footing across the planet. Major offensive operations were the exception for humanity's forces and they were generally aimed at stalling the Migou or Rapine Swarm advance. As a result, the Migou almost always used their orbital superiority to enhance their own mobility and support their own

offensives – it had never been used in a defensive capacity. As a result the NEG strategists failed to factor in the effect it could have if it were used in such a fashion.

The operational planners also failed to consider the possibility that the Migou wanted the New Earth Government to attack Juneau. The aliens were very much aware that the NEG could scarcely afford to allow them to maintain a foothold on the continent. As a result, rather than continue their advance as was their normal tradition, they shored up their defenses and did all they could to invite the attack. Fighting on their own terms would let them bleed the New Earth Government defensive forces on the continent, making the eventual assault on Seattle and Chicago all the easier. While there was some puzzlement by the NEG strategists relating to the lack of any sort of movement in the Alaskan wilds, most believed that the Migou had overreached and were not yet prepared to commit to any further advances into the continent. It was a devastatingly false assumption.

DOOMED TO END IN FAILURE

The attack on Juneau was doomed from the moment New Earth Government forces boarded their transports and headed for Alaska. At first, the offensive was text book in execution. The NEG forces successfully landed in the regions surrounding the former Alaskan capitol. They began their advance towards the city, as well as a number of other secondary objectives. As the human forces closed in on the capitol, early clashes with Migou forces ended in the aliens retreating towards Juneau or deeper into the Alaskan wilderness. Unfortunately, the soldiers on the ground had no way to know everything they were encountering, every minor victory they had, were all part of a well executed Migou strategy. When the Blinds were revealed and the true extent of the Migou presence became evident, it was far too late for the NEG to adjust.

To their credit, the New Earth Government command structure was quick to realize what they had just fallen for and almost immediately called for a retreat. Unfortunately the hasty briefings and operational directives given to the soldiers in the field had not included a cohesive plan of withdrawal. Each platoon and company had to improvise as everyone competed for attention with high command in coordinating their pick up. Some units simply attempted to find their own way home. A surprising number of these were ultimately successful – the Alaskan and Canadian wilderness is vast and there are a lot of places to hide, even from orbital eyes. Others retreated back towards drop-off points hoping their transport would be waiting. In two cases they were, but unfortunately the Migou had been holding back.

As the transports retrieved any survivors they could and turned to head back, swarm ships screamed in from low orbit. They had been waiting until the transports were loaded down before attacking. The result was the complete loss of two battlecruisers and their entire complement of troops and crew. It was a devastating blow to the New Earth Government, but one that would shape their thinking for future operations.

In the aftermath of the operation, nearly every senior strategist was forced out of the service. If not for the need to hide just how complete the defeat in Alaska had been from the common civilian, many of them would likely have been tried for incompetence. Instead, they were simply allowed to retire quietly and ordered to keep out of the spotlight.

DEFEAT IS THE BEST TEACHER

Despite the devastating defeat the New Earth Government suffered, they did not walk away empty-handed. Beyond the revelation of the Blind technology possessed by the Migou, they also gained more insight into their operational deployments and were able to reassess the troop levels of the Migou in Alaska. More importantly, however, was their renewed appreciation of the severe advantage control over orbit gave the Migou.

The attack had left the NEG with only four battlecruisers in inventory and orders were immediately given to move the timeline forward for the deployment of the next four that were in process. The realization also led to some taking a second look at an operation that had been slowly cooking away in the background, but which had been largely ignored by the military brass. Until this point the operation had been deemed wishful thinking, but the results of Juneau made one thing very clear to the New Earth Government – they would need to deal with the Hive Ship sooner rather than later. Plan Jericho was suddenly given priority.

THE EVOLUTION OF THE PLAN

The NEG had always been aware that they would one day need to deal with the Migou Hive Ship. New Earth Government command knew it was integral to the Migou's efforts on the planet. Unfortunately not only was it well defended by a screen of swarm ships, it also maintained an orbit just beyond the moon's own, making it very difficult to get at. The earlier nuclear missile strike against the Hive Ship had aptly demonstrated just how difficult a target it would be, especially at that kind of range. Add to this the difficulty of the NEG simply not having enough battlecruisers to dance toe-to-toe with the swarm ship screen and one could easily understand why the military had been so hesitant to seriously consider a strike on the Migou's mother ship.

A CHANGE OF PLANS

In the aftermath of Juneau two things change that lead Jericho strategists to make some radical shifts in their thinking. First, and perhaps most importantly, the Migou, for reasons only known only to them, have moved their Hive Ship from beyond the orbit of the moon to a high orbit over Earth. While the ship is still out of effective range of any conventional planet-based weapons, mobile units, such as purpose-built mecha, can realistically reach it. Furthermore, the NEG has recently developed arcnowave technology. By every measure the NEG can make, the armor of the Hive Ship is virtually impervious to anything smaller than the main cannon of a battlecruiser. However, it is believed that this new weapon system, when employed at extremely close ranges – say from surface of the Hive Ship itself – can burn its way through the armor, if given enough time.

The original specifications of Plan Jericho revolve around the use of a core group of battlecruisers, which would punch through the swarm ship screen to get at the Hive Ship. Unfortunately building the necessary number of battlecruisers is not just slow but also costly. Most importantly, the production facilities have to be well-hidden from orbital eyes. To this end, a shipyard has been nearly completed off the coast of California not far from the Los Angeles arcology. Being so close to such a major population center, the New Earth Government has taken great steps, at great cost, to discourage the Esoteric Order of Dagon from getting too close. Over 90% of the facility is completely under the bottom of the ocean. Coupled with newly developed scatterpods to help enhance the normal scattering effect that water has on sensors, the facility is virtually undetectable from orbit. Resupply has even been conducted via tunnels that lead from underneath the LA arcology, removing any chance of traffic to the facility alerting orbital eyes. The shipyard is the perfect facility to support the new direction Plan Jericho is taking.

The destruction of the two battlecruisers and their complement of troops and crew lead Jericho strategists to one simple conclusion – battlecruisers are too juicy and easy a target. A single battlecruiser represents a not insubstantial investment and the NEG has thus far been sparing in their use. In general, they have been relegated to a defensive role, making them one of the most expensive garrison units in the history of Earth warfare. The brains behind Jericho make the radical decision to shift away from the use of battlecruisers in the assault on the Hive Ship to the use of many more, and much cheaper, purpose-built mecha and space superiority fighters. The shift in the plan is initially ridiculed and rejected out-of-hand. In time, as others begin to understand the logic of the new plan, this attitude changes.

The basic logic of the plan is simple in premise, if somewhat complex in execution. Swarm Ships are designed, much like the Victory-class battlecruiser, to engage enemy capital ships. By denying them this sort of target, much of the major threat they represent to an approaching space force is severely diminished. In addition, the Swarm Ships can only target and engage so many attackers at once. Add to the mix a healthy use of electronic-warfare platforms to further confuse the Migou's targeting systems and the likelihood of an attacking force penetrating the swarm ship screen increases dramatically. Further, by using launch vehicles that hold, at most, a single platoon of mecha, the loss of one during orbital insertion maneuvers will mean a much smaller loss to the overall strike force than the loss of a single battlecruiser entails. In effect, the smaller individual units have a greater chance of survival and success.

NEW SYSTEMS AND TECHNOLOGY

The most difficult aspect of Plan Jericho is the overwhelming need to design purpose-built systems for the eventual attack on the Hive Ship. While, as a number of critics point out, most mecha currently deployed can technically operate in a micro-gravity, they are not really designed for it. A number of models, such as the Rapier and Saber, have integral A-Pods giving them flight capabilities. However they are not designed for the unique

challenges of battle in space. The A-Pod system they use are designed to allow limited flight, but are distinctly not intended for the agile maneuvering that is going to be needed. Fortunately, given that there has always been a group within the New Earth Government that has seen an eventual assault on the Hive Ship as not only important but necessary, a number of these systems have already been designed or at least are far along in the process. All that remains is finalizing the designs and getting the nanite fabrication facilities that are being installed in the LA complex to work. However, not even those who have foreseen the need to take the fight to the Hive Ship can predict everything that will be needed.

Two key systems have to be developed from the ground up. The NEG pours a significant amount of resources into making this happen – fortunately both systems are relatively simple. The first and perhaps most important system is the orbital insertion vehicles. These vehicles need the capacity to lift a platoon of mecha or powered armor, or a wing of space superiority fighters, into orbit and return them home. To keep the design as simple and inexpensive as possible, the platforms have no weapon systems or notable armor as they are not supposed to get close enough to the enemy to need them.

The second and more complex system is the arcanowave-armed powered armor system. At first, the idea of using the Stiletto is bandied about, but the experimental prototype powered suit is simply not designed for operational deployment. A new suit is instead designed that can better handle the rigors of combat and operate effectively in an orbital battle. Fortunately, the most important aspect of this system, the arcanowave weapon itself, is already designed, so it is just a matter of building a new chassis around it.

In all, six new systems are designed and built to carry out the attack on the Hive Ship. Some argue that the resources being put into the operation are too great for weapon systems that have a very limited use, but supporters of the plan point out that if the operation is as successful as hoped, the New Earth Government would need assets that can continue to secure the orbital space around Earth. Even if the operation were to fail, the NEG will now have weapons that can take the fight to the Migou in space at some future point. It will be something the Migou will have to take into account in their future planning and potentially result in some resources being held in reserve for just such an eventuality.



OPERATION FINAL STRIKE COMMENCES

On March 13th, 2087 the first elements of what is being called Operation Final Strike begin their part of the mission. It is hoped when complete Operation Final Strike will mark the beginning of the end of the war with the Migou. Only a decade earlier, the idea of planning and launching such a monumental military operation in just a few months would have been unthinkable. Two key factors, however, allow for the operation's extremely brief timetable.

First, many of the new systems have been on the drawing board for years – they simply needed to be pushed that final little bit. Even the Manta launch vehicles and Kris-class powered armor, which are newly born, primarily utilize existing systems and have been kept as simple as possible to ensure they can meet the operational timetable. The second factor is the massive improvements in the nano-factories. They are much faster and, with each factory that has been installed within the LA facility dedicated to a singular system, they can be programmed for extreme efficiency and speed.

PLANNED TO FAIL

In the opening hours of the operation, the LA facility is quiet. Elsewhere in the world, however, things become a bit more interesting. The initial stage of the operations is designed to give the Migou something to occupy their attention. While there is no expectation that the strike force's launch will go unnoticed, it is hoped that, at worst, the Migou will be forced to divide their attention between the strike force and the other offensives being played out against them.

Two major operations are launched against the Migou. The first is a second offensive directed toward Juneau. A single battlecruiser supporting a large array of mecha, infantry, and armored units deploys in a wide arc along the Alaskan/Canadian border and begins a move against the Alaskan capitol. The second offensive is directed against Migou facilities in Antarctica. For this operation, the New Earth Government dedicates two battlecruisers, along with a heavy contingent of other flight-capable units. It is the first time the NEG has deployed the battlecruisers since Juneau and they know they risk losing 75% of their remaining fleet in deployments that are designed, ultimately, to fail.

The Migou have been aware of a steady build-up of New Earth Government forces in the Canadian wilderness for some time and the attack on Juneau is not a surprise to them. However, the massive air assault heading towards Antarctica does take them by surprise. In response, several swarm ships are deployed to counter the pair of battlecruisers. This has been exactly the response the NEG strategists are hoping for, since it thins the screen that protects the Hive Ship itself.

THE STRIKE FORCE LAUNCHES

As Migou and New Earth Government forces clash in the Canadian and Alaskan wilderness, the NEG tracks the progress of the swarm ships that seem to be heading towards Antarctica to defend against the battlecruisers and their attached fighter and

mecha screen. As the Swarm Ships reach a point in which they are well out of range to return to help the Hive Ship, a barrage of intercontinental missiles are launched. These missiles, however, do not contain the traditional nuclear warheads that one would expect. They are not intended to target the Hive Ship or any of the remaining swarm ships. Instead, these warheads are set to deploy thousands of sensor-clogging white-noise emitters, which will blind Migou sensors from spotting the strike force as it launches.

While there is no doubt that the Migou ships will spot the strike force long before they enter weapons range, even before they have fully achieved orbit, it will prevent them from potentially launching a nuclear strike designed to take the Mantas out before they leave the atmosphere. The white-noise generators are spread along a large arc of space that will prevent a Migou ship from maneuvering to see what they are hiding in time to respond and deny them the ability to know where to launch such a strike. Most New Earth Government strategists agree that, given that the Migou have thus far avoided nuclear saturation of any region, they will continue to follow such a policy. Of course, the attacking forces are going to be blinded as well and will not know how the Migou are reacting.

As the white-noise screen comes to life, the LA facility erupts in a chaos of activity. People on the still popular Southern California beaches watch in awe as almost four dozen Manta-class orbital insertion vehicles break the surface of the Pacific in massive geysers of water. Each one carries a full platoon of mecha, powered armor suits, or a pair of Hakari space superiority fighters. Nearly every system contained within the fragile hulls of the orbital insertion vehicles are untested and unproven in anything beyond simulations, and every pilot and soldier is well aware of it. Their nervousness at this reality is matched by their determination to strike a blow that will set the Migou back and give humanity much needed breathing room.

As the first Mantas pierce the cloud of white noise, the pilots hold their breath in anticipation of the Migou's reaction. Will it be faster and more aggressive than expected, or less? Will they have units in position to destroy the Mantas before they can deploy their critical cargoes? What they find is a mixed blessing. As sensors clear, the New Earth Government forces find their deployment zone clear of enemy units. However, the Migou have not been idle as the Mantas have rocketed through the sky. They have indeed deployed units, but the Migou forces are kept close to the remaining swarm ships and the Hive Ship. Even with the swarm ships that have been sent off to deal with the diversionary attacks, the density of the defensive screen the NEG pilots now face is daunting.

COLD FIRE

The New Earth Government strike force successfully reaches low orbit without the loss of a single unit. It is more than the strategists have dared hope. Most have expected a couple blind shots to be fired through the sensor screen, or for the NEG Mantas to be forced to deploy while under fire. Instead, the forces



held within the unarmored hulls are able to deploy unmolested, forming into their pre-arranged formations and beginning their advance into the waiting defensive lines of the Migou fleet.

It is evident early on that the Migou have deployed as yet unseen units in the defense of their Hive Ship. The bulk of the defensive screen is made up of two new weapon systems: a fast and agile space fighter that gains the nickname of Firebug and a larger missile-laden mecha that quickly becomes known as the Yellow-jacket. Both appear to be purpose-built for battles in space. The only other mecha that seem to be present in any quantity are the Migou's scout mecha, the Dragonfly, though a smattering of other traditional Migou units also make appearances as the battle is joined.

As the New Earth Government strike force closes, it is unsurprisingly the swarm ships which initiate the first attacks. The large ships begin laying down a dismayingly thick cloud of fire that requires a deft hand to navigate, and more than a few NEG mecha and fighters fall to the long-ranged attacks. However, months of constant drills, simulations, and commanders pounding the plans and tactics into their pilot's heads pay off. Almost as though the strike force is part of a dance troupe, the mecha, powered armor, and fighters spiral through the heavy flak cloud that is between them and their ultimate target. Losses are inevitable, with the light and vulnerable powered armor troops suffering the heaviest casualties. Fortunately, none of the critical and rare arcanowave-equipped Kris-class go down in this initial approach.

As the NEG forces their way through the flak and suppression fire, the rest of the defensive forces jump in. Wings of Hakari dance with enemy Firebugs, as each tries to gain space superiority over the region. The Migou's experience with operating in the micro-gravity of orbit quickly becomes apparent, though it is not enough to turn back the New Earth Government. Soon mecha from both sides join in their own deadly dance, as scores of missiles and lasers tear at the armor of each. The purpose-built NEG force quickly begins to prove its worth as they close steadily and rapidly on the Hive Ship.

Not long after the strike force punches through the defenses, the decision to deploy small, agile units rather than try to fight primarily with battlecruisers and other spacecraft bears fruit. As the New Earth Government forces close the range, the Swarm Ships, despite their impressive firepower, become less and less of a factor in the battle. Their large weapons become useless as NEG mecha and fighters are simply too fast, agile, and numerous to track at close ranges. While the lighter weapons take their toll, it is simply not enough to make a real impact on the outcome. Inevitably, the NEG manages to punch several holes through the defensive screen. As soon as the holes open up, those units that have been assigned the task of boarding the Hive Ship, units which have been keeping to the periphery of the battle, go into action. They make a break for the openings, shooting clear of the heaviest fighting before the Migou have the opportunity to close the holes in their screen.

BREAKING IN

As the New Earth Government boarders break through the defensive screen, the Hive Ship seems to wake up. Thus far during the battle, it has remained quiet and some of the Human and Nazzadi pilots have started to hope that it was unarmed. However, a cloud of flak, even thicker than the swarm ships had put up, suddenly appears, as defensive weapons on the massive vessel speak for the first time. However, it is not enough to deter the NEG. Powered armor platoons take cover behind the larger mecha, as the strike force plows into and through the flak cloud. A number are naturally lost, including a Kris, but the strike force hits the cloud at such a speed that it takes only a few seconds to break through. Moments later, the forerunner New Earth Government soldiers and pilots become the first in history to come into contact with the Migou's Hive Ship.

Immediately, the New Earth Government boarders scatter along the surface of the ship. Each has his assignment. While the bulk are destined to break into the interior of the ship, others set out to search for vulnerable thrusters and the Migou equivalent of A-Pods, as well as sensor clusters, communication arrays, and anything else useful they might be able to damage and destroy. In the meantime, the boarders deploy to their designated boarding points and the Kris pilots go to work burning a hole through the thick skin of the ship.

As arcanowave weapons begin to peel away at the many layers of armor, the Migou are quick to react. Within moments of boarders touching the hull of their ship, Migou forces swarm out of the ship to engage them. At this point the battle takes on a strangely familiar feel, with the hull of the ship becoming much like any normal battlefield on Earth. Even the battle that is still raging overhead seems like the air battles that often take place over ground fights.

In a reversal of the opening stages of the battle, it is now the New Earth Government who is playing defense. Infantry and mecha form defensive screens around the Kris powered armor, giving the new weapon time to do its job. Even with the incredibly destructive potential arcanowave weapons contain, it takes time to burn through the thick skin of the massive Migou ship. Elsewhere on the hull of the ship, the Migou work to defend the more exposed systems the NEG are obviously targeting. Casualties begin to mount for the New Earth Government forces as the Migou continue to pour out a seemingly endless supply of defenders. As some begin to wonder if they are going to have the time needed to break into the ship, Kris pilots begin to report success. In all, the NEG manages to penetrate the hull in three places. Elsewhere, the boarding forces are overwhelmed and survivors of these battles make for the breaches as quickly as possible.

INSIDE THE HIVE SHIP

As the skin of the massive Migou ship is peeled open, New Earth Government forces swarm inside. The vast majority of the boarders are specially trained infantry protected by the latest powered armor the NEG has produced. The basic logic behind the decision lies in the expectation that a great many of the cor-

ridors and rooms inside the Hive Ship are designed for Migou going about their daily business. There is no reason to expect them to be conducting day-to-day activities in such a secure location cocooned inside some 25-foot tall mechanical monster. The prediction turns out to be spot on.

New Earth Government forces break through in three places. The first penetration occurs in what appears to be a raw materials storage chamber. Stacks upon stacks and rows upon rows of pallets (or at least the Migou equivalent) dominate the cavernous chamber, providing plenty of cover for the infantry as armored Migou immediately set to repel the boarders.

The second point the New Earth Government manages to burn through leads into what is obviously a manufacturing node. Bio-mechanical machinery, as alien in design as the Migou, fills the room. As the bulk of the NEG infantry begins moving deeper into the ship, fighting Migou soldiers as they go, a small contingent stays behind and plants demolition charges.

The third point of entry proves, in some minds, to be the most pivotal. The initial infantry that enters the chamber are killed almost before they have managed to set foot inside the ship – this particular boarding action proves to be the most costly of the three. The Migou fight with an almost fanatical determination that has never been seen before. However, the New Earth Government forces are determined and soon gain a foothold inside the ship. It becomes obvious quickly what has prompted such a determined resistance – the NEG has burned their way into an actual Migou nursery.

At first, the commanders on scene do not understand what they're seeing. No Human, or Nazzadi for that matter, has ever seen a Migou nursery. That they existed, in some form, was a forgone conclusion. That the Hive Ship would have some was also a safe assumption. However, no New Earth Government strategist has ever anticipated actually finding one. The deployment orders shift from one of penetrating deeper into the ship to holding the nursery and the corridors leading to it. As the NEG fights to maintain their foothold, boarders secure samples, videos, and even intact young as best they can. The boarders are not equipped to bring back specimens, but the opportunity is simply too great to pass up.

Elsewhere in the ship, the New Earth Government fights their way deeper and deeper into the labyrinthine ship. The interior is a maze of corridors and chambers that do not seem to follow any sort of traditional layout. Corridor junctions not only split off left or right, but up and down as well. While this is expected to a degree, given limited familiarity of Migou bases on the surface, the somewhat bizarre format drives into the NEG soldiers just how alien the Migou are. The strange interior design also provides the Migou a distinct home-field advantage.

The original goal of any boarders who manage to get inside the Hive Ship is to try and make their way to either some sort of command center or engineering department. It is felt that these

two locations will provide the New Earth Government the greatest chance of doing major or crippling damage to the vessel, even if they are unable to ensure its complete destruction. The task proves much more challenging than the operational strategists had hoped and as time passes, Migou resistance grows steadily as they utilize their superior knowledge of the Hive Ship's layout to their advantage. Some NEG units are divided and defeated in detail. Others manage to avoid this fate, but find their ability to continue their advance into the ship impossible. Finally, when it is obvious that their original goals are unrealistic, a retreat is in order. No team manages to find anything that resembles an engineering department or command center. That does not mean, however, that the boarding forces have failed.

As the boarding action continues inside the ship, the battle in the space around it continues to intensify. Even after the NEG gains access into the ship, the Migou continue their assault on those units that are scrambling across the outer hull. Eventually, the manufacturing facility breach is overrun with the surviving New Earth Government mecha retreating towards the third breach in the hull. Those boarders who have entered from that direction soon find themselves completely cut off, with no hope of escaping. The Migou are also forced to contend with raids against exposed systems. The NEG continue to seek out maneuvering ports, communication arrays, and more, in their bid to cripple the massive ship. Above their heads, their comrades continue to fight to keep the retreat route open – a feat made easier as the Migou recall a number of units to reinforce defenders on the hull.

As the boarding action becomes untenable, the New Earth Government calls for a retreat. Unlike the assault against Juneau last year, this retreat has been well-planned and the NEG forces make an efficient and ordered withdrawal. Only those who have entered through the manufacturing facility are unable to complete the retreat. Soon boarders are exiting at the same points they entered and those who are still fighting on the surface take flight. New Earth Government covering forces move in as planned, providing the retreating mecha and infantry the cover they need to make good their escape as they fall back into a lower orbit and rendezvous with the transports waiting to take them back to the surface. To help cover the retreat, the NEG sends up a flight of nuclear missiles to detonate behind the retreating forces scattering the bulk of the Migou pursuers.

As the New Earth Government forces rendezvous with the waiting Mantas, the Migou are given one last present. Throughout the ship, dozens of large explosive packages have been planted as the NEG moved deeper and deeper into the ship. Explosions ripple throughout the ship. Three of the packages are re-purposed nuclear warheads. Entire sections of the Hive Ship are consumed in nuclear and conventional fire. The manufacturing facility and nursery are utterly destroyed, leaving glowing craters.

THE AFTERMATH

While critics of the plan to attack the Hive Ship point to its continued presence as proof that the mission was a foolish waste



of man and materials, most within the New Earth Government consider the operation, at minimum, a partial success. On the surface, the battle did end in defeat, but it was very costly for the Migou. Beyond the obvious losses the Migou suffered during the battle, NEG specialists have managed to penetrate some Migou systems, pulling difficult to decipher tactical and strategic data, as well as some equally difficult to decipher general information on current Migou R&D efforts. Given time, these could provide NEG analysts valuable new information they can use as the effort to force the Migou off the planet continues. The retrieved samples are also a blessing, giving researchers the raw material they need to crack the code of who the Migou are.

On the ground, things have gone better than expected. The Antarctica group never reaches the coast of that inhospitable continent and loses one of the two battlecruisers. However, in exchange, they manage to take down two swarm ships. In Alaska, the fight goes even better. New Earth Government forces give better than they receive, even taking control of a Migou Blind and pulling key systems and technology out before a swarm ship destroys the facility from the air. Overall, the losses are lower than expected, though the loss of the battlecruiser leaves a number of people grumbling.

The first field test of the new arcanowave weapon system is also considered a complete success and provides engineering invaluable data that will allow them to fine-tune the technology. It is expected now that the new weapon will see a faster deployment than was originally expected.

In space, the Migou are reeling more than anyone knows. While the Hive Ship is far from crippled, it has been severely damaged by the nuclear and conventional explosives that detonated inside the thick-hulled ship. Those New Earth Government boarders who are cut-off from retreat continue to battle their way deeper and deeper into the ship, until the last survivor detonates the nuke. The explosion destroys several large manufacturing centers, setting the Migou's ability to resupply a number of key components to the forces on the ground back by several months. Almost immediately, orders are passed down to commanders on the ground to make more effort to capture NEG manufacturing facilities intact.

More devastating, however, than the temporary loss of manufacturing capabilities is the destruction of the nursery and the surrounding nurturing centers. These are something the Migou cannot replace. Their greatest liability in this war is their inability to replace their own soldiers, and the New Earth Government has inadvertently managed to kill almost a third of the next generation. While the loss is not going to affect immediate operations, it will be severely felt in the not too distant future.

WEAVING CHARACTERS INTO THE EVENTS

The events leading up to and during Operation Final Strike are filled with potential stories for your Characters. While the events as described are how things play out in the metaplot of the *CthulhuTech* universe, it does not mean that they will necessarily follow

the same path in your own game. The actions of the Characters can and should have an impact making your game just that – yours.

What follows are a number of key events that you may wish to touch upon in your own games. Your Characters will be in the thick of things, watching from the inside as Plan Jericho and Operation Final Strike take shape. However, we are only providing some high-level guidance. As every game is unique, it is impossible to provide all the details needed to make these events your own. That is a task best left to individual Storyguides.

TYPES OF CAMPAIGNS

Operation Final Strike is a military-centric series of events. The Characters most suited for participating in the build-up and attack against the Hive Ship are pilots and soldiers, military officers, and even Ashcroft researchers to a more limited extent.

Games based around the Shadow War are more difficult to weave into the events detailed here. With anything as massive as the Hive Ship attack however there is bound to be opportunities for both the Chrysalis Corporation and Eldritch Society to become involved peripherally.

Street-level games, those focusing on the Federal Security Bureau, the Office of Internal Security, and the arcane underground or similar veins will be the most difficult to work into the events, and are the least suited to try and tie to the attack on the Hive Ship. Instead, these kinds of Characters are going to hear of these events as they play out from the news and official sources.

THE POLITICS OF JERICO

The formative weeks of Plan Jericho are filled with more political intrigue, back-room deals, and secret handshakes than perhaps any other major operation in the New Earth Government's history. Despite the relative unified front of those behind it, on the outside there appears to be two highly competitive factions at work. The first, known affectionately as the Hammer Group, is pushing hard to accelerate battlecruiser construction. They firmly believe the large ships are the secret to success – they only need to be wielded more effectively and in concentration.

The second faction, known simply as the Nuevos because of their new way of looking at things, believe that the answer lies in the use of purpose-built systems that can be built rapidly and in enough quantity to simply overwhelm the Migou's defenses. They believe the age of the battlecruiser is at an end, in much the same way as the era of the dreadnought and battleship ended as carriers took to the sea in World War II.

These two factions fight an intense political battle for control over the direction that Plan Jericho will take. In the middle of this firestorm, the Ashcroft Foundation struggles to keep the two factions from unravelling the plan before it is born. They know Plan Jericho and Operation Final Strike are going to be critical to the continuing survival of humanity. This political battle is an opportunity for Characters to step out of their mecha for a

bit and exercise their social side. Their superiors may pull them in to help research their case or to meet with the 'help' of their counterparts in the opposite faction. Ashcroft may enlist their aid in delivering messages as intermediaries so that the Foundation might try and keep a publicly neutral stance. There might even be some covert missions to penetrate the offices of their political foes. The important thing is that the Characters begin to understand that something huge is gathering on the horizon.

SHADOW WAR SPILLOVER

An operation as massive as Final Strike could never be completely secret, no matter how much the strategists wish. The logistics involved are simply too massive to hide and civilian contractors, on some level, are required. As a result, while the Chrysalis Corporation never knows precisely what is cooking under the seas off the Pacific coast, they know something big is happening in the LA region. The seeming blackout of concrete intelligence simply fuels their curiosity, and concern, even more.

Eventually, they are able to piece together that the Ashcroft Foundation has made a major breakthrough of some type. They don't know what the nature of the breakthrough is, but they do learn that the bulk of the personnel involved are transferred to a location in or around the LA arcology. Anything involving the Foundation is always a concern to the Corporation as it could have unpleasant repercussions for Chrysalis further down the road.

Fortunately for everyone involved, the Eldritch Society doesn't miss Chrysalis' sudden interest in the LA region. A fair amount of conflict between the two enemies flares up as the Society works to unravel whatever the Corporation is up to. There is a lot of potential material for bringing a pack of Tagers into the action, even if it is limited to the shadows around the actual events. More than likely they won't even know for certain what the Corporation is against – only that they're working to sabotage an important New Earth Government operation. Later, after Operation Final Strike hits the newsfeeds, will the Pack understand what they have managed to accomplish.

THE ALASKAN CAMPAIGN

The opening strokes of Operation Final Strike involve attacks against Alaska and the Antarctica. While there is limited potential for meaningful interaction with the Antarctica operation, the Alaska operation can provide a good deal of action for the Characters.

The most important result of the attack in Alaska is the Blind technology the New Earth Government manages to secure. Giving the Characters the task of tracking down a Blind, fighting through its defenses, and stealing the valuable technology contained within should provide them a solid feeling of accomplishment and making a difference.

THE BATTLE OVERHEAD

Of course the biggest, most glorious action to be had for the Characters happens high above the arcologies. Being a part of

the elite force that is chosen to take to the skies and bring the fight to the Migou will not just provide them a massive gold star in their service record, it will make them *bona fide* heroes in the eyes of their peers. If they help their superiors win the political battle that revolves around Plan Jericho, it is likely a spot on the strike team would be readily available.

The operation in space will begin in the LA facility, where they tensely wait in their assigned Manta, listening to feeds of the Antarctica and Alaskan campaigns. Once launched into space, they need to fight through the rabid Migou defenders while protecting the Kris-class powered armor until the Hive Ship is breached. Those in some of the new powered armor will then get to be among the first Humans to see the inside of a Migou Hive Ship.

HOW THINGS CAN CHANGE

Your *CthulhuTech* game is yours. Even if you are trying to follow the metaplot, there is no reason to try and make every event true to what we have outlined here. The actions of the Characters can and should have the potential of shifting these events in either direction.

Jericho Takes a New Form

One of the biggest impacts the Characters can have is in the influence they levy for one faction or another if they get involved in the politics of the operation. Should they come down on the sides of the Hammers then the entire assault on Hive Ship would take a very different form. Battlecruisers would form the core element of the attacking NEG. It is still possible that they might battle their way through the Migou but they would have to contend with more Swarmships since the battlecruisers would not be available for either the Antarctica or Alaskan campaigns.

Antartica Landfall

If the characters should take part in the Antarctica campaign it would still ultimately fail. However, the characters could find themselves as part of a small strike force that manages to make landfall. From there they would be able to wreak havoc in the Migou's backyard while simultaneously trying to figure out how to get home in one piece.

Foothold in Alaska

It is entirely possible that the NEG could gain a solid foothold in Alaska. While they would not be in a position to take Junea, they would be in a position to actually give the idea of a second assault a realistic look. Using some of the stolen Blind technology they may even be able to build up a sizeable force right under the Migou's cilia.

Destruction of the Hive Ship

This is one outcome that we recommend against. The impact this would have on the Migou would be devastating. It would spell an almost immediately end to their part of the war. While the NEG would have to spend months chasing down stragglers and the fight to break open the Antarctica fortress would be a

rough battle it would have a major impact on many other events in the CthulhuTech universe.

THE STORY IN THE BATTLE

What follows is a framework for running large-scale engagements within the confines of your game – both those in space and those on the ground. This framework is not intended to play out every detail of a battle. It is not a miniature or war game in any sense. Instead, it encompasses an abstracted system that will allow you to weave the events of the battle into your game and provide your players a way to have a meaningful impact on how the battle plays out.

THE FIELD OF BATTLE

Because this is an abstract system designed to give a general feel for the progress of the battle, it is not fought on a detailed map. Instead, the battlefield is divided into a number of key sectors, with each sector representing some key point of the battle. The exact manner in which you set up your battlefield depends upon the story behind the fight, so there are no hard and fast rules. However, to get you started, we have provided a sample battlefield that could be used in the New Earth Government's assault on Migou Hive Ship. A basic explanation of what each sector represents follows:

- **Orbital Arrival:** This is where the NEG forces first hit orbit and begin deploying from the insertion vehicles. No actual fight occurs here, as it is just the staging point.
- **Approach:** The approach sector is a buffer zone between the insertion vehicles that need to stay intact in order for the strike force to return to Earth. The NEG leaves a rear guard here to dissuade any adventurism from the Migou. Again, no significant battles occur here. However, it is a potential region of conflict, should things go especially bad for the New Earth Government. The NEG Strike Force tasked with boarding the Hive Ship waits here for their opening.
- **Migou Screening Sectors:** This is where the battle really begins. The NEG splits into three elements, each working to find a weakness in the Migou defensive line. This is where some of the heaviest fighting occurs as the NEG tries to open a hole for the strike force to exploit.
- **Hive Ship Approach:** These two sectors mark the final approach to the Hive Ship. The central attack force has a chance to pick the most vulnerable approach based on which flanking force was most successful. Once a hole has opened up in one of the screening sectors the NEG strike force fights through the Migou's final screening elements before reaching the Hive Ship itself.

- **Hive Ship:** The ultimate goal of the fight, the Hive Ship. Success here means the NEG can begin boarding operations against the Hive Ship. This area represents the battle that takes place around and on the surface of the Hive Ship before the NEG manages to penetrate its hull. The fight inside the ship itself is not represented as part of this battle.

Each sector on a battlefield is a distinct region with the events in one section having very little direct impact on what is happening in another section. The arrowed lines indicate the acceptable routes of advance. Again, these should be set up to represent the overall goals of the fight and the way you see things flowing. For example, you'll notice that there is no moving between the three Migou Screening sectors on the map – each sector is on its own during the fight.

Sector Narratives

Creating a narrative for each sector can help make the battle feel more real and exciting. The narrative can be as simple as a brief description of what is happening in the strategic and tactical goals of the sector, a brief summary of the forces involved, and so on. These narratives can be keyed to certain events to help add color as the battle plays out.

Here is an example of narrative that might be read to players as battle in one of the Migou Screening Sectors opens up:

"In front of the New Earth Government forces, the Migou have hastily deployed a defensive screen thick with mecha and fighters. As the two forces close, a Swarm Ship also arrives lending its support to the Migou defenders."

Once the NEG forces manage to punch a hole in the defensive screen, the following might be read to them:

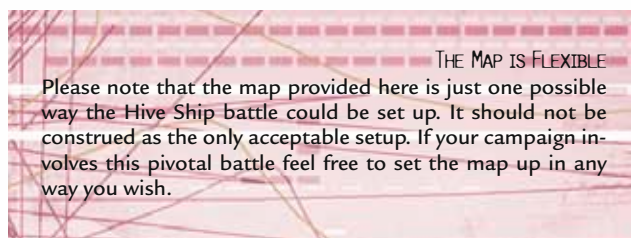
"Brilliant explosions rip across the black, as mecha and fighters dance with one another in a deadly, desperate ballet. Suddenly, space lights up as explosions ripple across the Swarm Ship, its fire becoming sporadic then ceasing altogether. The Migou seem stunned by this turn of events and their line falters. The NEG Strike Force that is loitering in the background sees the opening and suddenly leaps forwards, breaking through the broken screen of defenders."

Sector Goals

The path to victory in the larger battle lies in securing objectives within each sector of the battle. There are two types of goals that come into play in each sector: Battle Goals and Character Goals. As the Characters achieve the goal or goals that have been set for them in a sector, they will provide bonuses for their allies in the larger battle. In essence, Character Goals that are achieved make it easier for the Battle Goals needed to secure a sector to be achieved.

Battle Goal

The Battle Goal is a number of Battle Goal Points that a side must score in order to win a sector. By scoring these points, it is possible to win a battle for a sector without completely destroy-



ing the enemy forces in the sector. Each sector should have a Battle Goal assigned to it. Less important sectors will have a lower rating, reflecting a force's willingness to pull out before suffering too many losses, while a higher level indicates their desire to hold the sector at all costs. The goal points assigned are the number points the enemy must score to win the sector. Each side may have a different goal level based on their objectives.

For example, an NEG force is assaulting a Migou defended sector in the wilderness of Canada. The Migou do not consider the sector critical. As a result they are willing to withdraw rather than suffer major losses. As a result their goal level is set at four. The NEG, on the other hand, really needs to take control of the sector and are willing to suffer greater losses. As a result the goal points for them are set to eight, meaning it will be difficult to force them out without utter defeat.

Character Goals

Character goals are more detailed objectives that the Characters must achieve during the battle. Each of these objectives is represented by a mini-adventure, as the Characters are sent on one or more missions designed to support the overall battle efforts.

As an example of how to set up these Character goals, let's take a look at the battle to secure a Migou Screening Sector as the NEG fights to board the Hive Ship. As the NEG forces fight their way through the sector, the Swarm Ship arrives. Its firepower threatens to tip the balance of power against the NEG, forcing a potential withdraw, if not outright defeat, in the sector. In response, the Characters are given a mission: fight to the Swarm Ship, then locate and destroy the warship's primary targeting arrays, thereby severely limiting its ability to meaningfully contribute to the battle. If the Characters successfully complete this goal, it will provide an immediate bonus to the rolls that resolve the rest of the fight in the sector. The key points of this mini-adventure might include:

- The Characters advance on the Swarm Ship using a combination of the chaos of the battle and allied EW platforms masking their approach. During this part of the adventure they would need to defend the EW platforms from enemy aggression.
- Landing on the surface of the Swarm Ship and searching for key targeting arrays and other potential weak spots. They are not here to destroy the Swarm Ship, simply temporarily blind it. As their mission proceeds, they would likely find themselves in a running battle against defending Migou mecha.

Character goals can take on just about any form you, the Storyguide, can imagine. The key is that they fit with the overall theme of the battle and give the players the sense that they are providing meaningful and important contributions to the larger fight.

THE SUPPORTING CAST

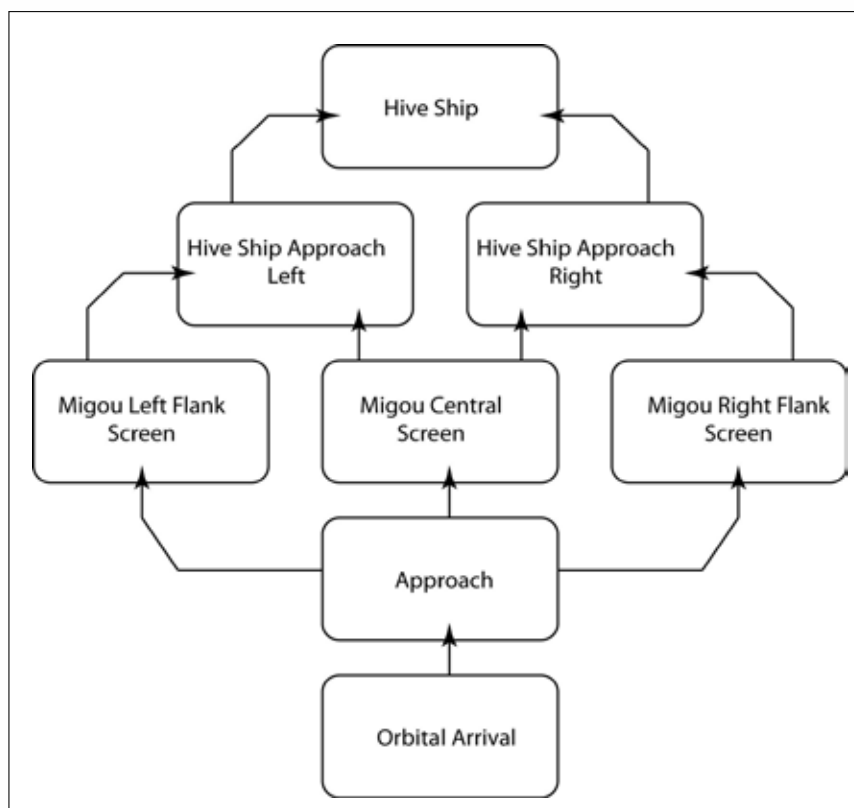
A major battle is far too large for the Characters to win on their own. They are a small piece of a much larger puzzle, though they are an important piece. However, it is the Supporting Cast that bears the brunt of the work in winning the battle for a sector.

Because we are not trying to play out every detail of a battle, the Supporting Cast is represented in an abstract manner designed to convey a basic idea of their capabilities, without going into the nitty-gritty of the exact makeup of each side's forces, what weapons they are firing, or even specifically who they are firing on. Instead, each side of the conflict is represented by a common set of characteristics as defined below.

Defense: This rating provides a general representation of the force's ability to deflect and absorb attacks. The higher the defense the better it can withstand attacks.

Offense: This is the pure offensive power of the forces in the sector. The more offense a side has the more true damage they can cause the enemy.

Long Range: This represents the force's general ability to engage the enemy at extended ranges. The advantage of Long Range is



that it erodes the enemy's defense. However, the enemy cannot be defeated through long range attacks alone.

Damage: This is a reflection of the force's ability to take actual damage. Once damage has been reduced to zero, the force involved is considered completely destroyed or routed.

Each of these characteristics (with the exception of Defense) represent a pool of dice that are rolled during each combat turn. The exact manner in which they interact with one another is covered below.

As part of your planning for the session, you should assign each force in a given sector a value in each of the above characteristics. When doing so, consider the makeup of the forces involved and the goals of the battle for that side. For example, if a force is made up mainly of infantry and long-ranged units like the Scimitar, they would have a higher Defense (the dug-in infantry) and Long Range ability, but would have a lower Offense and Damage characteristic. It is not necessary to know exactly what every unit involved in the battle is – just have a mental picture of their general capabilities.

RESOLVING A SECTOR BATTLE TURN

A single turn, when using this system, represents roughly two hours of time. During this period, each side will likely engage the other in several positions around the sector. To determine the general results of the turn, the following process should be used each turn.

Allocating Forces

A battle commander has some flexibility in how he deploys his available assets during a battle. As a result, the dice pools for each side can shift around somewhat each turn.

Each pool begins with a number of dice in it equal to the appropriate characteristic. For example, the forces in a sector have the following characteristics – Defense: 6, Offense: 8, Long Range: 2, Damage: 8.

It has six dice in its Defense pool, 8 in its Offense pool and 2 in its Long Range pool.

Before rolling any dice, these pools may be shifted to some extent. Long Range dice can be shifted to Offense on a one-to-one basis. Offense can be shifted to Defense on a one-to-one basis while Defense can be shifted to Offense on a two-to-one basis.

Players should be allowed to allocate the dice for their side, while the Storyguide is responsible for allocating the dice of the opposing force. This allocation should be done in secret.

Resolving the Turn

To determine what happens during the turn, the dice in each pool are rolled. Each die that results in a 7 or better is considered a 'success' in the battle.

First, each side should roll their Long Range pools. Each success results in the loss of one die in the opponent's Defense pool (for this turn only). These dice are removed from the pool immediately. This represents attacks that the enemy cannot easily respond to that chew away at their defensive assets.

Next, one side makes their offensive attacks while the other defends. It does not matter which side attacks first as both are assumed to be attacking one another simultaneously (each side attacks and defends each turn). Each successful offensive die is considered a 'hit' against the enemy. However, each successful defensive die negates one of these hits. If any 'hits' remain after this, the Damage of the defending force is reduced that number of points. If a side is reduced to 0 defense it has been thoroughly defeated.

Each two points of damage suffered results in one die being lost out of a dice pool. The opponent may select where these dice are lost, but he must distribute any losses as evenly as possible. So, for example, if a side loses four damage points, two dice are lost. Their opponent opts to remove one from the Defense pool and one from the Long Range pool.

Awarding Battle Goal Points

Assuming neither side is completely defeated, play moves on to determine if any Battle Goals were met during the turn. This is detailed below. Most battles for a sector do not result in the utter destruction of one force or the other in the sector.

A battle point is awarded for each '10' that was rolled on a given side's Offense dice (including those hits that may have been countered by defensive successes). This means that it is possible for a side that may not have fared well in the fight to still manage to score some battle points. In essence, it represents that a side managed to achieve important objectives during the fight. Those successes simply came at a cost.

If one side or the other should manage to score a number of Battle Goal Points equal or greater than the goal their enemy set, they have won the sector and the enemy makes an orderly withdraw.

Shifting the Battle

Once one side wins a sector, the battle shifts to the next sector down the line. If the defenders were not completely wiped out, they will act as reinforcements to any units in the next sector. Increase each of the dice pools by one. If a given dice pool belonging to the retreating force has been reduced to 0, then the corresponding dice pool for that side will not be increased.

The surviving attackers will also shift some of their forces into the next sector. Along with any forces already assigned to attack the sector, the survivors of the victorious force gain +2 dice in one pool and +1 die in each of the other pools. Again, if a particular dice pool had been reduced to 0, then the corresponding dice pool does not gain a boost.

In some cases, it may be possible for a battle to shift to more than one sector. When this is the case, the defenders and the attackers each decide which sector they will fall back to (in the loser's case) or move to attack (in the winner's case). It is possible that each side may shift their efforts to different sectors.

Fights in Multiple Sectors

In some battles, such as the attack on the Hive Ship, action may be occurring in several sectors at once. When this is the case, resolve one turn for each sector before moving on to the next turn of the battle. As sectors are won or lost, forces in those sectors will shift to other sectors as discussed above. The sector map the Storyguide drew up to represent the field of battle will dictate where each sector's forces can go. This can result in a sector gaining reinforcements in the middle of its own fight.

Special Features

Some sectors of a battle may have special features included in the sector. This can include such things as heavily entrenched defensive positions, spacecraft, heavy weapons emplacements, and so on. Many times these special features will play a key role in mini-adventures in which the Characters will be involved. These special features are represented by their own set of characteristics that set them apart from the regular battle forces in the area. Below are a number of features that can be used as written or as a guideline on how to craft your own. A given sector can potentially have more than one of these features, but care should be given not to overdo it.

Fortified Defensive Position

A Fortified Defensive Position represents heavily built-up positions designed to allow a defending force the ability to repel attacks from significantly larger forces. They include heavily armored bunkers, weapons emplacements, and any other potential advantage planners can provide.

FDPs provide a boost to the owning force's Defensive dice pool. These bonus dice are dedicated to defense and cannot be shifted to the Offensive pool. In addition, the defensive positions have their own Damage characteristic, which must be destroyed before causing damage to the defending force. Finally, no Battle Goal Points can be scored by the opposing force until the FDP is destroyed, though destroying it automatically awards a number of points equal to half the Damage rating of the position.

Artillery Emplacement

Artillery Emplacements are concentrations of large caliber artillery weapons. They are usually static in nature (or at least not designed to be moved quickly). They have especially long ranges and can offer their support to nearby sectors.

Artillery Emplacements can dedicate their dice to attack forces in their own sector or any sector that is adjacent to its sector (as defined on the Field of Battle map the Storyguide creates). Each emplacement has a Long Range dice pool and a Damage characteristic. The dice pool is dedicated to long range attacks and cannot be shifted.

The opposing force can dedicate any damage points they generate in the sector to the Artillery Emplacement instead of the opposing force. It will lose dice from its dice pool in the same manner as a normal force. Destroying the Artillery Emplacement awards an automatic Battle Goal Point. If the owning forces in the sector are destroyed, the Artillery Emplacement is considered overrun and destroyed but awards no Goal Points.

Integrated Sensor Network

When a force knows a major conflict is going to occur in a region, they may take the time to seed a dense network of sensor pods that can be used to track the enemy as they enter the sector.

If a sector has an Integrated Sensor Network, it will give the owning side a significant strategic advantage while it is operational. The Offensive dice pool gets +2 dice while the Defensive pool gains +1 die. The Sensor Network should be given a Damage characteristic of its own. The opposing force can opt to apply any damage points they generate to the sensor network. Once destroyed, the bonus dice it generates are no longer available. These networks are generally delicate in nature, so they should have low damage ratings (2 or 3 points).

Special Operations Teams

Spec Ops Teams are small units of highly-trained individuals who are dedicated to causing as much havoc to the enemy as possible. They are generally assigned to operate in a particular sector.

A Spec Ops Team provides a +2 bonus to the owning force's Offensive dice pool. However, they can be specifically targeted by the enemy for destruction. Each time the enemy assigns a point of damage to the spec op team, a d10 is rolled. If this results in an 8 or greater, the team has been isolated and destroyed.

Unlike other features, surviving spec ops teams will travel to adjacent sectors when their sector has been secured.

Warships

Warships are large craft that can usually operate either in space or above a planet-based battlefield. The NEG's Victory Battlecruisers and the Migou Swarm Ships are both examples of warships.

Warships tend to complicate the strategic picture for any opposing commander. They are large and virtually impossible to destroy with conventional forces, but they cannot be ignored as the firepower they bring to a battle can easily turn the tide.

Warships use a slightly different set of characteristics than normal forces, to represent their more unique nature on the battlefield. These characteristics are defined below.

Defensive Firepower: A warship's Defensive Firepower represents its capabilities to defend itself against more conventional combatants, such as mecha and fighters.

Offensive Firepower: This represents a warship's ability to attack and destroy opposing enemy warships. It can also be used against conventional forces, though it is less effective in this role.

Armor: Used to defend against direct attacks by other warships.

Structure: Used to indicate how much damage a warship can sustain before being destroyed.

Efficiency: Efficiency is what conventional forces attack when they direct their rage against enemy warships. Their smaller weapons have virtually no hope of outright destroying the ship, but they can reduce its effectiveness by destroying vulnerable exterior systems, such as weapons emplacements and maneuvering systems.

Warships in Battle

Each warship present in a sector is represented on an individual basis. Each one must be targeted individually by both conventional forces and enemy warships.

When attacking with a warship, it may direct attacks against both any conventional forces in the sector and against any single enemy warship in the region.

To attack enemy conventional forces, the warship rolls a number of dice equal to its Defensive Firepower characteristic. If no enemy warships are in the region, it may also add up to half its Offensive Firepower dice to the attack. Each one that results in a 7 or greater is considered a success and adds one point of damage to the damage that force suffers during the turn. These are negated by Defensive dice in the normal manner described earlier.

To attack enemy warships, the attacking vessel rolls a number of dice equal to its Offensive Firepower. Each one that results in a 7 or greater is considered a success and adds a point of damage caused to that enemy warship during the turn.

A warship that is damaged by enemy warships rolls a number of dice equal to its Armor rating. Each one that results in a 7 or greater cancels one damage point caused to it. All damage a warship suffers during a turn is lumped into a single pool, which the Armor dice defend against as a whole – don't make this roll until after all attacks against it have been resolved.

Any damage that is remaining is subtracted from the Structure of the warship. If the ship's Structure is reduced to 0, it is considered destroyed. Each two points of Structure lost also reduces both its Offensive and Defensive Firepower characteristics by 1 each.

When conventional forces attack a warship, they are more limited in what they can do to it. A force may only direct up to one half (round down) of its Offensive pool against the warship. It may also direct the entirety of its Long Range pool against it. Any special operations forces may also have the bonus dice they lend to the Offensive pool directed against the warship.

Damage caused by conventional forces is directed against its Efficiency characteristic. The warship gets no armor roll against this damage. Each time a number of points equal to the Efficiency rating is applied, the warship loses one Offensive Firepower and one Defensive Firepower point. So, if a ship has an Efficiency of 4 and takes 5 points of damage from conventional forces, it loses one die from each pool.

Warships that are still operational when a battle shifts from one sector to the next will move with the battle.

THE CHARACTERS' ROLE

Characters that are involved in a battle can influence the outcome of the battle in a couple of different ways. First, as discussed above, a number of mini-adventures can be crafted with the outcome of those adventures having a direct impact on the battle in the sector in which they are operating. Normally, the successful conclusion of these mini-adventures will result in an immediate Battle Goal Point (or even two) being rewarded to the Characters' side of the fight. It may also take out special features in the sector, such as enemy Artillery Emplacements.

Character Skill Tests

To help create the feeling of the Characters having a meaningful impact in a large battle, or at least an impact on that sector of the battle, there are a number of Skill Tests they can perform which can have an impact on the outcome of the battle. Each turn of the battle, each Character can make a number of skill checks equal to his Actions rating. No Character can make the same Skill Test more than one time per turn. Each possible Skill Test and how they affect the overall battle are described below.

Before making any Tests, each Character must say which Test or Tests he is attempting. The more Characters that attempt the same Test, the more impact it is likely to have on the battle. Each Character after the first that is making the same Skill Test provides all participants a +1 bonus to their roll. The actual success level of the test is determined by the most common level of success rolled, with ties always going to the higher result.

For example, if four Characters make a Test, they would each receive a +3 to their roll. If one of the Characters had achieved an Easy success, two achieved an Average, and one a Hard success, the overall result would be considered Average.

In some cases, the order in which Tests are performed can also be important. This will be self-evident in the descriptions that follow.

Pilot: Characters need to be at the right spot at the right time and will often need to push their vehicle's abilities to the max to achieve this. The result can often mean catching the enemy before they were prepared, forcing the engagement on the Character's terms.

- Easy Success or less: -1 die to the Defense pool for the turn, as the Characters are caught out of position.

- Average Success: No effect.
- Challenging Success: +1 die to the Defense pool for the turn.
- Hard Success: +1 die to the Defense and Offense pools for the turn.

Surveillance: The Character uses his skills to scout out the enemy, providing his team critical information about their positions and intents. Note that all Characters who make either a Pilot or Marksman Test later this turn benefit from the results of this Test.

- Easy Success or less: No useful information.
- Average Success: +1 to either a Pilot or Marksman test during this turn.
- Challenging Success: +2 to either a Pilot or Marksman test during this turn.
- Hard Success: +3 to either a Pilot or Marksman test this turn.

Marksman: Taking the fight to the enemy is what it is all about. Cool accurate fire is always more effective than wildly spraying energy and bullets across the battlefield.

- Easy Success or Less: -1 damage inflicted on the enemy.
- Average Success: No effect.
- Challenging Success: +1 damage inflicted on the enemy. This cannot be reduced by Defense dice.
- Hard Success: +2 damage inflicted on the enemy. This cannot be reduced by Defense dice.

Support Weapons: The proper use of support weapons at the right time can make all the difference in the world.

- Easy Success or Less: No Battle Goal Points can be scored this turn.
- Average Success: +1 Battle Goal Points scored this turn.
- Challenging Success: Battle Goal Points can be scored on a 9 or 10.
- Hard Success: Both the effects of Average and Challenging successes.

Fighting: Sometimes battles, even in modern times, comes down to Hyperedge Blades or Claws.

- Easy Success or Less: +1 to Damage suffered by the player's side this turn. This cannot be reduced by the Defense pool.
- Average Success: No effect.
- Challenging Success: -1 to the Damage suffered by the player's side this turn.
- Hard Success: -2 to the Damage suffered by the player's side this turn.

FINAL NOTES

It is important to remember that these rules are not designed to feel or play like a wargame. Instead, they are a way to work a large battle into the scope of a storytelling game. It is important

to keep a lively narrative going as the results of the battle progress. Simply rolling the dice and noting the results will feel less than satisfying for the players. Instead, give a good narrative that lets your players visualize what has been happening in the battle, working in any actions they themselves may have accomplished during the turn.

For example, here is one such way to present the events of the battle for a turn. The Characters are participating in the second attack on Juneau shortly before the NEG launches their attack on the Hive Ship. They are currently operating in the cold wilderness about 30 miles outside a city near Twin Glacier Lake. It was a fairly successful turn for the players' side, with two goal points being scored and serious damage visited upon the Migou. The players' helped out with a Challenging Success in a Surveillance Test, followed by an average Marksman Test. A short narrative of what happened may go along these lines:

"The advance towards Juneau has been moving forward slowly but steadily. There have been a number of quick skirmishes in the battle so far, with the Migou beating feet each time. Some of your comrades are a little nervous, feeling that this may be a trap again, but you're not getting the same sort of vibe.

One of your squadron mates radios in. He's been detached four minutes ago, to scout ahead and search for any potential enemy contacts. He's found one in the form of one of the infamous Migou Blinds that caused so much damage in the last attack on the Alaskan city. As the report comes in, the order was quick to follow. You and the rest of your company moves in to take control of the Blind. The geeks back home would love to get their hands on the tech behind the Blinds.

Your company quickly moves in, encircling the Migou position. The aliens are quick to react as soon as they realize their position has been compromised. Migou mecha jump to the attack and soon rail guns, lasers, and charge beams are splitting the cold Alaskan air. The fight is brutal as both sides use the rough mountainous terrain to their advantage, but the Migou are outmatched. The defenders are crushed before they had a chance to scuttle the facility. The techs at home will be very happy."

NEW EQUIPMENT

The vicious battle that takes place in the cold vacuum around the Migou Hive Ship sees the introduction of a number of new weapons of war. Each are specifically designed for the unique rigors of doing battle in the micro-gravity environment found in orbit. These systems, weapons, mecha, and fighters are all described below.

New Systems

Auto-Sealant System (SF Code: M): The cold of space is unforgiving and a small breach in armor can be disastrous for the crew of a mech or fighter. Auto-Sealant Systems detect these sort of breaches and automatically seal them with a specially formulated epoxy within one turn of the breach occurring.

Extended Endurance Environmentals (SF Code: S): E3, as the system is more commonly referred to, provides a fighter or mech with the ability to operate for a full 48 hours without a need to recharge. For those units that operate in space, this extended duration is seen as absolutely essential as missions can sometimes last much longer than the few hours traditional life support systems provide.

LADAR (SF Code: M, Active, 360): LADAR utilizes specially-designed lasers to scan the space around the mecha or fighter. Designed to operate in a vacuum, the reflections returned by LADAR provide a very accurate picture of everything around the mecha or fighter. Unlike radar, LADAR is not susceptible to jamming by ECM transmitters, making it ideal in heavy electronic warfare environments. Its primary drawback is its limited utility within the atmosphere, where its effective range is reduced almost 75%. In space, this system has a range of 8,000 yards. LADAR is completely ineffective against stealth systems.

Micro-Gravity Maneuvering Systems (SF Code: S): These highly specialized maneuvering systems allow a vehicle or mech to operate effectively in a micro-gravity environment. These systems automatically compensate for the vagrancies of near zero-G environments, allowing the pilot to concentrate on the battle or task at hand – instead of worrying about the continuous corrections and adjustments that would be needed to keep a mech or fighter in orbit and on course. A vehicle without this system suffers a -2 Test Penalty which operating in a micro-gravity environment.

Noisemaker EW Platform (SF Code: M): The New Earth Government needs to maximize their chances of breaking through what is expected to be heavy resistance as they make their move on the Hive Ship. The Noisemaker plays a pivotal role in this goal. The EW platform floods the region around it with a multi-frequency electronic white noise that makes targeting anyone within its sphere difficult at best. To prevent it from affecting NEG units, a single rotating band is left clear. So long as the units it is operating with are synced with the Noisemaker, their own targeting abilities are unhampered. This system is effective against LADAR.

The Noisemaker has a 500 yard radius of effect. Any enemy trying to target something inside the region suffers a -3 Test Penalty. Syncing with the Noisemaker requires success at an Average Computer Test. So long as a friendly unit is synced, the platform will have no effect on them.

Orbital Insertion Rockets (SF Code: M): These massive boosters accelerate the Manta transport to orbital velocities. These internal rockets are the most efficient rocket of its type ever produced by humanity. They contain enough fuel for a single orbital boost and must be refueled between missions. This takes approximately 24 hours.

Orbital Life Support Pod (SF Code: Cr): Similar in function and form to a traditional life support pod these variants are also heat shielded and have a rudimentary maneuvering system that will allow them to survive re-entry and guide the occupant safely to the surface – though not necessarily in friendly territory.

Void Stealth Suite (SF Code: M): With the advent of the Mimic and Limited Stealth Systems that have been deployed on the Nazzadi Sunspot Powered Armor, the New Earth Government has been hard at work trying to perfect the technology on a small scale. Unfortunately the power requirements for true stealth are proving difficult, at best, to overcome. Humans are however industrious and always look for ways to get around annoying problems such as power consumption rates and excessive heat build-up. In this case, they have created a system that works in a symbiotic nature with the Noisemaker Electronic Warfare platform.

When properly synced with a Noisemaker platform and within the platform's operational sphere, the Void Stealth Suite emits its own electronic noise that interacts with the signal of the Noisemaker in such a way that a virtual shell is created around the powered armor. This shell catches and dissipates all electronic signals creating an electronic hole around the suit. Radar, LADAR, or any other modern sensors simply receive no return signal, resulting in the powered armor not showing up on anyone's screens and remaining unnoticed by fire control AI systems. Unfortunately, this is two way street and while operational the pilot of the powered armor cannot communicate with his allies or know what is happening beyond his visual range. The system also does not seem to work on anything larger than a power armor suit, as the shell becomes unstable as its size grows.

Anyone targeting a powered armor suit with an active Void Suite that is within range of a unit with an active Noisemaker treats all attacks against the suit as long range attacks. Attacks from actual long range suffer an additional -4 Test Penalty.

New Weapons

Arcanowave Weapon (SF Code M): A marvel of weapons design, these prototype weapons have an unmatched damage potential and may very well shift the balance of power radically in

NEG's favor. Currently only a small model of this weapon exists, but it makes even something as small as powered armor a threat to the largest mech. The ranges listed below are when used in a vacuum – if used in an atmosphere these ranges are halved.

Range: 50/75/150
Shots: 1

Damage: +4 Hybrid/Hull
Rounds: Infinite

Scatter Missile Pods (SF Code S): These missile systems fire dozens of micro-missiles that saturate a target, making them nearly impossible to dodge and evade. Dodge Tests against attacks from SMPs suffer a -2 Test Penalty.

Range: 100/500/3000
Shots: 1

Damage: +2/+3/+4
Rounds: 10/20/30

Vacuum-Tuned Laser Cannon (SF Code Cr): These systems are nearly identical to the laser cannons commonly deployed across the planet, but have been tuned to operate in a vacuum and it enhances their range in the process.

Range: 50/300/2100
Shots: 3

Damage: +1/+2/+3
Rounds: Infinite

New Mecha Descriptions

Orbital Speed: This refers to the unit's speed when maneuvering in orbit or deep space. The speed listed is used for general travel. When in combat, these speeds are impractical. While conducting combat maneuvers, a mech is limited to its ground speed. Space superiority fighters, on the other hand, can generally operate at about 50% of their orbital speeds while in combat.



OIV-40 MANTA

The Manta Orbital Insertion Vehicle is a vehicle with exactly one job – to get its cargo from the surface of the planet to orbit. Designed and put into production in less than a year, the designers put in only what was absolutely necessary for the craft to fulfill its mission. Completely unarmed and unarmored, the Manta is vulnerable to even the lightest enemy units. However, its ability to carry a full platoon of mecha, powered armor, or space superiority fighters to orbit and bring them back again makes the Manta an invaluable asset as the New Earth Government begins to try and reassert their authority in the orbital space around Earth.

Type: Orbital Insertion Transport
Size: Behemoth (180' long) (10 AP)

ATTRIBUTES

Control Response (*Agility*) 0
Sensors (*Perception*) +1
Frame (*Strength*) 7
Multi-Task Systems (*Actions*) 0
Warning Systems (*Reflex*) +2

SENSORY SYSTEMS

LADAR
Radar/IFF
Thermal

SUPPORT SYSTEMS

0-G Systems
Auto-Sealant System
Cold Resistance
Extended Endurance Environmentals
Heat Resistance
Life Support
Orbital Life Support Pod

MOVEMENT

Air/Water Speed: 900 mph (2220/540 ypt)
Orbital Speed: 2400 mph (5920/1440 ypt)
Acceleration Code: E (3/3)
A-Pods
Orbital Insertion Rockets
Micro-Gravity Maneuvering Systems

STRUCTURE

Integrity 30
Armor 0/0
Damage Control Systems 1/turn

WEAPONS SYSTEMS

None

OF-99 HAKARI

With a need to control the approach path of the strike force, the New Earth Government developed its first dedicated space superiority fighter. Designed exclusively to operate in the micro-gravity world of an orbital and near-space battlefield, the Hakari has no atmospheric capabilities. With the need to rush these fighters into production, there was simply no time to give them the dual-capabilities that many would have preferred. Even so, in its role as a space superiority fighter, it proves its effectiveness dancing toe-to-toe with the Migou's Firebug. With more experience, it is expected that Hakari pilots will easily be able to dominate their Migou foe.

Type: Space Superiority Fighter (8 AP)
Size: Large (40')

ATTRIBUTES

Control Response (*Agility*) +2
Sensors (*Perception*) +1
Frame (*Strength*) 4
Multi-Task Systems (*Actions*) +1
Warning Systems (*Reflex*) +1

SENSORY SYSTEMS

LADAR
Radar/IFF
Targeting (+1)
Thermal

SUPPORT SYSTEMS

0-G Systems
Auto-Sealant System
Cold Resistance
Extended Endurance Environmentals
Life Support
Orbital Life Support Pod

MOVEMENT

Orbital Speed: 3400 mph (8387/2040 ypt)
Acceleration Code: C (2/2)
Micro-Gravity Maneuvering Systems

STRUCTURE

Integrity 15
Armor 2/2
Damage Control Systems 2/turn

WEAPONS SYSTEMS

Vacuum-Tuned Laser Cannon (Medium)
Scatter Missile Pod (Medium)

FIREBUG

When the New Earth Government forces begin their attack on the Hive Ship, they discover that the Migou have their own dedicated units. The Firebug quickly proves to be a dangerous opponent that, while slower than its NEG counterpart, mounts more powerful weapons in the form of a pair of linked plasma cannons. The Migou's greater experience in operating in a micro-gravity environment gives them the edge they need to outmaneuver the faster and more agile Hakari, while its heavier weapons let it quickly burn through even the heavily-armored Jian. However, like the Hakari, this craft is designed to operate exclusively in space.

Type: Space Superiority Fighter (8 AP)

Size: Large (35')

ATTRIBUTES

Control Response (*Agility*) +1

Sensors (*Perception*) +1

Frame (*Strength*) 5

Multi-Task Systems (*Actions*) +1

Warning Systems (*Reflex*) +1

SENSORY SYSTEMS

LADAR

Radar/IFF

Targeting (+2)

Thermal

SUPPORT SYSTEMS

0-G Systems

Auto-Sealant System

Cold Resistance

ECM (Triple Normal Range)

Extended Endurance Environmentals

Life Support

MOVEMENT

Orbital Speed: 2900 mph (7153/1740 ypt)

Acceleration Code: B (2/1)

Micro-Gravity Maneuvering Systems

STRUCTURE

Integrity 10

Armor 2/2

Damage Control Systems 1/turn

WEAPONS SYSTEMS

2 Linked Plasma Cannons (Medium)

OPA-9 KRIS

Type: Orbital Powered Armor (4 AP)

Size: Tiny (10' tall)

The Kris powered armor is conceived for the express purpose of delivering the Ashcroft Foundation's arcanowave weapon to the Hive Ship. The massive destructive power of the weapon is the only hope the New Earth Government has of breaching the thick armor of the Migou's mother ship. Even so, the NEG is very sensitive to the new technology falling into enemy hands, so they have equipped the Kris with state of the art stealth technology and added enough defensive weaponry to keep the powered armor safe. In a worst case scenario, the suit is also equipped with a self-destruct device that automatically detonates should the pilot die or someone try to force the armor open.

ATTRIBUTES

Control Response (*Agility*) -1

Sensors (*Perception*) -1

Frame (*Strength*) 1 (-1 damage)

Multi-Task Systems (*Actions*) 0

Warning Systems (*Reflex*) -1

SENSOR SYSTEMS

LADAR

Radar/IFF

Thermal

SUPPORT SYSTEMS

0-G Systems

Auto-Sealant System

Cold Resistance

Extended Endurance Environmentals

Life Support

Void Stealth Suite

MOVEMENT

Ground Speed: 30 mph (74/18 ypt)

Orbital Speed: 800 mph (1973/480 ypt)

Acceleration Code: B [2/1]

Jumping Distance: 2/1

Micro-Gravity Maneuvering Systems

STRUCTURE

Integrity 5

Armor 1/1

WEAPONS SYSTEMS

Arcanowave Cannon (Small)

Hyperedge Blade (Small)



OMV-18 SWITCHBLADE

Type: Orbital Electronic Warfare Mech (5 AP)

Size: Small (18' tall)

The operational goal of any Switchblade pilot is to protect his comrades from the aggressions of their enemies. When the Noisemaker is active, getting clean target locks on New Earth Government units in the area of effect becomes incredibly difficult at best. Pilots of these mecha are constantly on the move, as they seek to bolster the defenses where they are needed the most. Their stealth systems make it difficult for the enemy to track them down, but when forced into a fight the Switchblade generally finds itself outgunned by similarly-sized opponents.

ATTRIBUTES

Control Response (*Agility*) 0
Sensors (*Perception*) +1
Frame (*Strength*) 2 (-1 damage)
Multi-Task Systems (*Actions*) 0
Warning Systems (*Reflex*) 0

SENSOR SYSTEMS

LADAR
Radar/IFF
Targeting (+1)
Thermal

SUPPORT SYSTEMS

0-G Systems
Auto-Sealant System
Cold Resistance
Extended Endurance Environmentals
Life Support
Noisemaker EW Platform
Orbital Life Support Pod
Stealth System

MOVEMENT

Ground Speed: 30 mph (74/18 ypt)
Orbital Speed: 900 mph (2220/540 ypt)
Acceleration Code: C [2/2]
Jumping Distance: 5/2
Micro-Gravity Maneuvering Systems

STRUCTURE

Integrity 10
Armor 1/1
Damage Control Systems 1/turn

WEAPONS SYSTEMS

Vacuum-Tuned Laser Cannon (Small)
2 x Hyperedge Blade (Small)



OMV-19 JIAN

Type: Orbital Battle Mech (9 AP)

Size: Medium (24' tall)

The Jian was designed as the primary front-line unit in orbital space. Armed with a vacuum-tuned laser cannon, a pair of rocket pods, and a hyperedge blade, the Jian can generally stand toe-to-toe with any foe of similar size. Unfortunately, like most of the systems designed for Operation Final Strike, this mecha is limited to strict orbital or deep space operations and relies on a lift from a Manta to get there.

ATTRIBUTES

Control Response (*Agility*) 0
Sensors (*Perception*) 0
Frame (*Strength*) 8 (+1 damage)
Multi-Task Systems (*Actions*) 0
Warning Systems (*Reflex*) +1

SENSOR SYSTEMS

LADAR
Radar/IFF
Targeting (+2)
Thermal

SUPPORT SYSTEMS

0-G Systems
Cold Resistance
Extended Endurance Environmentals
Life Support
Orbital Life Support Pod

MOVEMENT

Ground Speed: 60 mph (148/36 ypt)
Orbital Speed: 1000 mph (2467/600 ypt)
Acceleration Code: C [2/2]
Jumping Distance: 10/5
Micro-Gravity Maneuvering Systems

STRUCTURE

Integrity 20
Armor 3/3
Damage Control Systems 2/turn

WEAPONS SYSTEMS

Vacuum-Tuned Laser Cannon (Medium)
Hyperedge Blade (Medium)
Scatter Missile Pod (Medium)



OPA-14 KATARA

Type: Orbital Powered Armor (3 AP)

Size: Tiny (10' tall)

With the expectation that the interior of the Hive Ship would not accommodate the Jian in most areas, the New Earth Government developed and deployed the Katara powered armor suit. Like all powered armor, it allows the common infantry to go places a mech never could, while providing enough protection to significantly raise their expectations of survival. The Katara is developed with close quarters combat in mind, as its proving grounds are likely going to be cramped and confined. As a result, its primary weapon is a hyperedge blade with a laser cannon backing it up.

ATTRIBUTES

Control Response (*Agility*) -1
Sensors (*Perception*) -1
Frame (*Strength*) 1 (-1 damage)
Multi-Task Systems (*Actions*) 0
Warning Systems (*Reflex*) -1

SENSOR SYSTEMS

LADAR
Radar/IFF
Thermal

SUPPORT SYSTEMS

0-G Systems
Auto-Sealant System
Cold Resistance
Extended Endurance Environmentals
Life Support

MOVEMENT

Ground Speed: 30 mph (74/18 ypt)
Orbital Speed: 800 mph (1973/480 ypt)
Acceleration Code: B [2/1]
Jumping Distance: 2/1
Micro-Gravity Maneuvering Systems

STRUCTURE

Integrity 5
Armor 1/1

WEAPONS SYSTEMS

Vacuum-Tuned Laser Cannon (Small)
Hyperedge Blades (Small)



YELLOWJACKET

Type: Orbital Battle Mech (10 AP)

Size: Medium (26' tall)

When the first Yellowjacket appeared in the battle in orbit, no one could believe the sheer amount of missiles it launched in a single salvo. It quickly became apparent that the mech was armed with a system strangely similar to the scatter missile pods deployed by the New Earth Government. Some now believe that a Blank spy managed to steal the plans at some point before Operations Final Strike was put into motion. When a Yellowjacket targets an enemy, it is virtually impossible to escape the onslaught it lets loose.

ATTRIBUTES

Control Response (*Agility*) 0
Sensors (*Perception*) 0
Frame (*Strength*) 11 (+2 damage)
Multi-Task Systems (*Actions*) +1
Warning Systems (*Reflex*) +1

SENSOR SYSTEMS

LADAR
Radar/IFF
Targeting (+1)
Thermal

SUPPORT SYSTEMS

0-G Systems
Auto-Sealant Systems
Cold Resistance
Extended Endurance Environmentals
Life Support

MOVEMENT

Ground Speed: 60 mph (148/36 ypt)
Orbital Speed: 1200 mph (2960/720 ypt)
Acceleration Code: C [2/2]
Jumping Distance:
Micro-Gravity Maneuvering Systems

STRUCTURE

Integrity 20
Armor 2/2
Damage Control Systems 2/turn

WEAPONS SYSTEMS

2 x Pincers (Medium)
2 x Scatter Missile Pods (Medium)





They hung silently, hidden by the edge of the enormous Kuiper Belt, in shadows where the sun barely reached. It had been more than a month since the second Hive Ship had left Pluto and the dwarf planet lay curiously silent. Migou patrols were scarce and it seemed as if the forges of Hydra lay dormant. It was the first time in more than a decade they could move anywhere freely. That freedom was about to be put to good use.

Admiral Frost stood on the deck of the *ISC Edmund Fitzgerald*, watching the monitors. The CIC was quiet, the tension of the crew filling the air as if they were vibrating. Behind them lay nearly the entire ISC battle fleet, or at least what could be spared for this offensive. Though she had drawn the plans herself, Katie Frost silently hoped that it was enough. There would be no second chance, but if they succeeded, it would be worth it.

She nodded and the transmission was sent – Phase One was a go. Reaper fast attack ships gently crept from their hiding places in the Belt, keeping slow enough so that their stealth systems could compensate. Fortunately, the shimmering of stars and the cold void are an easy thing for chameleon panels to simulate. Once they got close enough, the Reapers kicked into overdrive, screaming down on the Migou intelligence satellites. Before the bugs could mount any effective resistance, their orbital eyes had been plucked.

As the frigates and capital ships then moved out of the Kuiper Belt, gliding like sharks descending on their prey, wings of fighters launched to assist the Reapers. The fast attack ships made their way towards the planet, strangely encountering no resistance – until automatic defenses kicked in. Computer-guided laser turrets rose from their icy burrows, deadly beams of light lancing through the sky at



the oncoming interlopers. Prepared, the Reapers wove their way between the fire, honing in on the sources that would prevent their landing.

As space-suited marines disembarked onto the planet, Migou fighters finally flew up from a hidden hanger bay. Even then, it was a sparse group at best, and most certainly not up to the task ahead of them.

Admiral Frost smiled. The Migou had really spread themselves this thin. After twelve years of hiding, pay-back was long overdue.

.

The initial invasion had gone well – well enough that Admiral Frost was now entering the Migou city on foot.

The place was massive and clearly not designed for Human beings. The low gravity was a benefit, but even still the engineers had to rig lines to help the marines navigate the alien landscape.

Corpses, some Human or Nazzadi, some Migou, littered the entrance to this cavern. The firefight had

ended scant minutes ago and the Admiral's troops were already setting explosives inside what appeared to be a nursery. She was already getting reports of other areas, most of which appeared to have some kind of strategic value, where demolition charges had already been set. That was the plan – get in, set charges, get out, and blow up as much of the Migou city as possible.

From somewhere else in the gigantic underground city, Captain Sung's voice interrupted her. "Admiral, there's something you need to see."

.

Captain Sung Jie's troops stood outside the chamber, on edge. Something had spooked them – all of them.

Admiral Frost dropped off the line onto the ledge. "Captain, we don't have a lot of time left here. This had better be good."

The wiry Chinese man shook his head, still wide-eyed. "You'll see. Follow me."

The chamber was, like most things down here, organically carved out of rock. As they entered, glowing balls sprang to life, bathing the room in a sickly yellow-green light. The chamber was long and narrow with tall walls covered in evenly placed shelves. On the shelves were nothing other than shiny metal tubes, set on end. Each must have been eight inches across and about as tall, connected to one another through a series of ports.

And it sounded like they were whispering.

Admiral Frost stopped in her tracks. The hushed chatter sent chills down her body, like someone had just walked over her grave. Captain Sung followed suit. There was something in the whispers that seemed familiar to Frost, something she couldn't immediately discern. Then it hit her. She recognized the languages. These things were whispering in the languages of Earth.

Gently, Admiral Frost walked over to the nearest shelf. She reached out and turned the tube a little this way, a little that way. The top appeared to be something that was screwed on, so she gave it a twist. The whispers became more intense. The top came off easily and she peered inside. There, suspended in an electric blue fluid, was a Human brain inside a web of filament wires.

Stumbling back, Frost almost fell over. Sung caught her and held her long enough to regain her composure. "What have they done?" she managed to get out before noticing that the a light was now blinking on the tube. Inspecting, she discovered a small stud with what might be a sound plate below it. Not knowing what to expect, Admiral Frost pressed the button.

There was a small hum, and then a voice – an almost Human voice. "Thank you. My name is J. Alfred Prufrock," said the brain in the tube. "And it is truly good to sense you. We've been waiting so long."

"H... How many of you are there?" stammered Frost.

"Us, plus many others," replied the brain called Prufrock. "They use us in their computers, among other things. Please, take us from this place. Save us. Take us home."

Whatever else she thought, that struck a chord – a familiar chord. Frost punched in the comm code for broad address. "This is Admiral Frost. All forces in Sector 12, stop what you're doing and proceed to my location. We have POW's in need of rescue." It seemed as if it were time for all the lost children of humanity to be reunited.

The voice from the case spoke again, with weary relief. "Thank you."

Perhaps there was still light in the darkness, even out here deep in the void.

chapter four

a sort of homecoming

There are many who wonder about the fate of the solar colonies. The last anyone on Earth heard from them was before the start of the Second Arcanotech War. Then, the Migou came and wiped out communications and they were gone. There have been attempts to contact the colonies, but to no avail. Most assume that the colonists are gone, destroyed or enslaved by the Migou. However, there are those families with loved ones out in the black who hope and pray for a miracle.

In 2087, that miracle comes. The solar colonies come back.

THE WAY THINGS WERE

There were technically once five colonies spread throughout the solar system. Tranquillity on the Earth's moon was hardly the most exciting or adventurous of them, but it was the first. Mars was home to two colonies, Olympus and Mariner Bay. Further out, Ganymede, one of the four Galilean Moons of Jupiter, became a mining colony. Nearby, Callisto became a scientific outpost and base for further exploration. Saturn was the farthest the New Earth Government had reached, setting up a home on Titan, where the first attempts at terraforming began.

Life among the colonies wasn't easy, but people have always been attracted to new frontiers. The solar colonies continued to grow until the First Arcanotech War. The colonies suffered little compared to Earth during that war. There was little the colonies could offer in resistance against the Nazzadi fleet, who conquered them easily. Fortunately, the invaders set up fair rule under their occupation and ultimately surrendered the colonies when peace was negotiated.

During the years between the First and Second Arcanotech Wars, the New Earth Government increased its military presence in the solar system. This created a boom in population among the colonies, as the hope of the post-war era created a sense of overall optimism. As time went by, the solar colonies began to resent being ruled by a governing body that was so far away and beholden to a larger population who had radically different needs and concerns. Movements for autonomy began.

THE SECOND ARCANOTECH WAR

However, this argument never reached a climax, as the Migou invaded with their own military force. They quickly cut off communication as they rolled through the solar system, but some of the early reports from the outer colonies were frightening. As the Hive Ship approached, the citizens of Tranquillity and the Mars colonies were evacuated to Earth.

The Migou quickly gained orbital dominance over the Earth. Nothing was getting on or off the planet, not in the shadow of the gigantic Hive Ship and its resources. Soon, it had been months since anyone had heard from the colonists and the New Earth Government had bigger problems.

Since then, it has been popular opinion that the Migou have scoured any trace of humanity from the rest of the solar system. It was just another tragedy among tragedies.

THE HIDDEN TALE

The rest of the story is known only to the survivors. The truth is, the Migou did come through the solar system and attack any colony that was close to the Hive Ship's path towards the Earth. However, it's not like such a huge spaceship didn't raise a few red flags before it got into firing range. It was certainly unexpected, but the colonists were used to a level of gentle paranoia that was required for survival out in the void. The Hive Ship appeared and emergency plans immediately became a priority.

It became readily apparent that the Migou were intent on first destroying communications satellites and jamming any colonial transmission they could. This only served to speed up the evacuation plans of the outer colonies, who knew that aid from Earth would never get there in time. Worse yet, the colonial authorities knew there was no way to run for it. The Hive Ship was faster and built on better technology. They had to get well out of the Migou's way and find somewhere other than Earth to go. Anything they came up with seemed like a stop-gap measure at best.

When the Migou finally arrived at each of the outer colonies, they found little to concern them. There were only a few of the "you can have my gun when you pry it from my cold dead fingers" types left, the kind of people who are stubborn enough to die rather than leave what they perceive as "theirs." They didn't survive and the Migou continued on towards their real intended target – the Earth.

Survival had always been the primary concern of anyone daring or foolhardy enough to live on the outer colonies, but now survival took on a new game. The question was where to survive? The Migou left patrols not far from the outer colonies, apparently being thorough. This meant that there was really no way to return to them for any length of time. There was only one good option left to them – go further out.

The Kuiper Belt was always suspected to be a wealth of resources. The enormous belt was filled with asteroids and dwarf planets, a perfect place to hide from the Migou. The ragtag colonial fleet made its way deep into the Kuiper Belt, searching all along the way for the resources they needed to gather or mine in order to keep their nanofactories going. It wasn't pretty, but it was a plan that allowed them to survive.

THE RUINS

The decision was made to keep on the move. The colonists did not trust that they would be able to evade the Migou in the long-term if they settled anywhere for any length of time. Furthermore, finding someplace worth settling for any length of time was difficult at best – the worlds of the Kuiper Belt are not designed for human colonization. This meant that the colonial fleet found themselves exploring further and deeper in the Kuiper Belt than even any probe ever had.

For the most part, things were bleak survival as usual. Then, one day almost eight years ago, a team mining water ice came across something very out of the ordinary. They found ruins. From or-

bit, these ruins were so covered with ice that they were invisible. They gave off no heat or recognizable energy. It wasn't until the mining team came within good old-fashioned sight of the towering obelisks that they realized they had discovered something amazing.

Whatever had left these ruins were clearly possessed of technology far beyond that of the mortal races of Earth, still powered by something the equivalent of an alien D-engine. Colonial scientists immediately began to gather whatever they could from within. The ruins, while wondrous in and of themselves, were limited in scope. They weren't a complete city, but rather a colony or outpost of some kind, for a race that bore little resemblance to the bipeds of this solar system. The scientists had great difficulty manipulating the advanced computer technology left behind, but had some limited success.

While attempting to decipher its function, the Colonial scientists managed to trigger a powerful nanofactory. Something had been loaded into the device's memory and it began to create a large piece of machinery. When it was done, it beamed the plans for the device to the team's computers and lay silent once again. All that was left was to figure out exactly what it did.

However, time was cut short. Colonial scientists had also triggered something that appeared to be a signal device, perhaps a distress beacon. The colonial fleet had enough enemies and they didn't want to risk that whoever these beings were might not be friendly. The decision was made and the ruins were abandoned, though their location was logged into all important navcomps throughout the fleet.

A MIRACLE

Though not readily apparent at first, the plans that had been given to Colonial scientists for the alien device were in a language not entirely alien to them – tsath-yo. Fortunately, there were those among the fleet who were fluent in the ancient dead occult language, which is said to have been one of the most ancient languages of man. It was incredibly strange that such a thing could have occurred and ranking colonial officials were understandably nervous.

Using all the safeguards available to them, colonial scientists continued to explore and decipher. Though they eventually began to understand the language in which the plans were written, the technology was well beyond that with which they were accustomed. The device itself was just as strange as the plans that



created it – it was somehow designed to interface with colonial technology. However, not knowing what it was, those in charge were not keen to hook it up to see what would happen.

Years went by and researchers spent countless hours examining the alien technology and banging their collective heads against the wall. Finally someone convinced those in charge that it was time to start trying to use the device. All the tests they had run up until that point had proven benign and there was enough evidence to suggest that such action most likely would not be foolhardy. Furthermore, they had to face the fact that the colonial fleet was desperate and, if they wanted to survive in the long-term, they needed to take desperate measures. This thing could be the key.

After much experimentation filled with folly and error, they finally discovered its purpose. The device was intended to plug into a ship's drive, where it tapped into the massive power of the vessel's D-engine. The device then extended an energy field across and throughout the ship which dampened the inertia of acceleration and deceleration. The practical upshot meant that the ship equipped with the inertial dampener could suddenly fully utilize the power of its drive to speed up and slow down at velocities that would normally liquefy mortals. Furthermore, the energy field increased the stress tolerances of the ship, allowing it too to endure greater inertial forces without damage.

The tactical advantage such a device could afford the fleet was not lost on anyone. Being able to fly across the solar system, stopping on what was the spatial equivalent of a dime, was perhaps the edge the colonial fleet needed. It might even allow them to contact the Earth again. The only problem now was learning how to manufacture inertial dampeners and making enough of them.

Fortunately, the handy plans provided by the alien nanofactory could be appropriately scaled to allow colonial nanofactories to begin production. Even if colonial scientists didn't really understand how the inertial dampeners worked, they could still understand the basic manufacturing principles behind them. Thus, the colonial fleet's mission changed from one of survival to one of purpose – scouring the Kuiper Belt for the resources necessary to keep their nanofactories churning.

Though it took time, eventually every single ship in the colonial fleet was outfitted with an inertial dampener. It was time for the colonists to choose what was next, now that they finally had a choice.

REVENGE

Naturally, the first thoughts were those that involved Earth. It had been almost twelve years. Every single person that was part of the colonial fleet still had loved ones on Earth, whose fates were uncertain. They wanted to know who was alive and who was dead, if anyone anymore. Plans were discussed on what it might take to deal with the Hive Ship they knew had made its way to Earth.

But then something nobody could have foreseen occurred. From the shadow of Pluto, the Migou launched another Hive Ship. The colonial fleet watched in awe and terror as the gigantic vessel left on a trajectory for Earth. All they could do was watch – and hide from the Migou patrols they felt sure would be coming.

The patrols never came. The colonial fleet watched for weeks as Pluto suddenly lay silent. The usual activity around the planet was almost entirely gone. Scans of the surface showed nothing more than automated defenses. It seemed like the Migou had perhaps finally over-extended themselves, committing the last of their resources towards the war on Earth. If that was true, that meant that Pluto was relatively undefended. Thoughts immediately turned to revenge.

Utilizing every resource at their disposal, the colonial fleet gathered intelligence on Pluto and its defenses. Their suspicions about the Migou were correct. It was much easier for the fleet to gather at least enough basic intelligence that they could plan an attack.

However, the fleet did not have enough firepower to mount the kind of attack that they really desired. They would have to settle on a surgical strike, the kind that could insert teams into the undercities of Pluto. The teams would spread out and plant bombs in key strategic locations, leaving before what Migou were left could mount an effective resistance. They may even be able to gather valuable intelligence from within the undercities, or steal technology that may be beneficial in the long run.

When the time was right, the colonial attack fleet descended upon the dwarf planet. Migou automated defenses were effectively overcome, though not without the loss of life. The teams were inserted into the planet and began to locate their targets and plant explosives. Though they were disoriented in many ways, the teams found targets that were of obvious importance, such as nurseries, power centers, and the like. Most of the technology was so alien that the colonials had no idea what was of strategic importance and what was the Migou equivalent of a toaster. They did, however, stumble onto something unexpected – and deeply disturbing.

There had been rumors and tales for generations of the Migou having a fascination with the human brain, sometimes going so far as to remove the brain from a subject. These brains would be kept alive in metal tubes, each of which had ports for various communications equipment and connections. It was said that some stayed on Earth with the Migou, while others were taken back to Pluto. The stories turned out to be true, as one of the teams stumbled across a vault of these brains – all still alive, even though some were centuries old. While it took a moment to recognize, the colonials soon realized what the tubes were, much to their horror.

Directives were immediately changed for some of the teams. There was no way they could leave their own here as slaves of the Migou, no matter what state they were in. The brains were still

conscious and therefore still people in the strictest sense. They were prisoners of war and it was time to rescue them. The colonials gathered up as many of the tubes as they could in the time they had left, loading them back up into their ships.

The explosives set, the teams evacuated, the colonials fled the scene of the crime. They flew back into the Kuiper Belt and waited to see what would happen.

No one expected what came next. The colonials really never had an idea of what their actions might bring, but they did expect the second Hive Ship to turn around. The Migou never believed they could be assailed by humanity in the seat of their power. The colonial strike created a new front to the Aeon War, one that must be fiercely defended against an unknown enemy of unknown capability. The second Hive Ship had to return to Pluto until its safety could be assured.

The Migou on Earth wouldn't get their massive reinforcements. The colonials had damaged the Migou in their home and rescued their own. They had the technology to outrun the Migou nearly anywhere in the solar system. Revenge was finally theirs. But it was not complete.

THE RETURN

The time had come to send scouts to gather intelligence on the situation back on Earth. The fleet moved into a tactical position in the shadow of Jupiter and sent scouting flights from there. The situation was better than expected, but the Earth was still locked off from the rest of the solar system by the orbital superiority of the Migou Hive Ship. However, the colonial scouts picked up transmissions from Earth detailing the situation and asking for help. They had clearly gotten some kind of inkling that Pluto had been attacked and knew that there was a new player in the game.

While the colonial fleet knew it could contact Earth, the key was in how to do it. They had to keep their existence a secret and beaming transmissions would reveal too much. Furthermore, there was the question of how they would fit in once they had again come back into the fold. This was a question they'd never before considered. Did they want to simply fall back under the governance of Earth? Many of the colonials were those who had cried out for colonial reform before the Second Arcanotech War. Many others believed that they had survived on their own and governed themselves for more than a decade now and chafed at the idea of being folded into someone else's war effort without proper representation. It was an odd conversation for most to be having, perhaps the first that didn't involve simple survival in a long time.

The talks completed, the colonists voted. In an overwhelming majority, the Independent Solar Colonies were born. It was time to announce themselves to the New Earth Government and join the war to liberate Earth. One single Mamba fast attack ship was chosen to carry diplomats through the Migou picket and down to Earth. They would broadcast an old colonial IFF iden-

tification so that the New Earth Government would know that the approach was friendly. Ideally, they would encounter little resistance once they hit atmosphere, but they were prepared for anything. After all, they had little idea of the capabilities of foes like the Disciples of the Rapine Storm or the Esoteric Order of Dagon. If they hit too much resistance, the Mamba was ordered to turn back around and head home – another plan would be tried.

All the pieces in place, the day comes and the Mamba is launched on a high-speed trajectory towards Earth. It takes a reasonable amount of time for the Mamba to make its way from the shadow of Jupiter to Earth-space, but everyone reacts as it does. At first, the New Earth Government fears the worst – as they have been trained to do. However, the old colonial broadcast code combined with the Migou's immediately hostile reaction move the NEG to create a defensive corridor for the ship to land safely planet-side. Once in sight range, though moving faster than they would ever have suspected, pilots identify the Mamba for what it is – New Earth Government technology. The first hopes that humanity's lost space-faring siblings have returned are voiced.

The ship is given instructions to land in Cape Canaveral in North America's Florida – one of the few former spaceports that will allow such a landing and still be defensible. The Mamba lands amidst fighter escort, as patrols make sure the water is clear of Esoteric Order of Dagon incursion. Fearing for the President's well-being, the New Earth Government sends Field Marshal Anton Tilden, a decorated soldier and diplomat. Meeting her amidst fierce and armored Independent Solar Colony marine guard is newly elected President Lian Xiao, a former teacher and long-time voice of reason in the colonies. The words she speaks will ring out through history, spoken through teary eyes, captured by the insistently-present cameras.

"Children of Earth, we are your lost siblings, now the Children of the Void. We return in peace, to join forces to liberate humanity from the tyranny of dead gods and monstrosities. However, we are not part of your New Earth Government. We are the Independent Solar Colonies and we are your friends. It is truly good to see you, after all these long years."

Across the world, people breathe a sigh of relief. Many eagerly await the news if friends and family they thought lost are miraculously still alive. It is the dawning of a new day in the Aeon War, a day when humanity is united in their stand against the darkness.

THE COALITION IS BORN

It's no secret that the New Earth Government needs all the allies it can get. Representatives from the Independent Solar Colonies meet with diplomats from the New Earth Government and begin talks immediately.

The first order of business is for the ISC to furnish a list of survivors, so that the friends and families within the NEG can know if their loved ones have survived out in space. Independent Solar Colony diplomats have already anticipated this and ask for the same in return. While there are many on both sides whose fears

are confirmed, they can finally gain the closure they desperately needed. On the other hand, there are many who receive good news the likes of which they never thought they'd get and plans are made to reunite those long-lost to each other.

The second order of business is to assess the tactical capabilities of the ISC fleet and how it might compliment the New Earth Government's war machine and current situation. The alien technology that powers the Independent Solar Colonies' inertial dampeners is of great interest to the NEG, but such research will have to wait. Both sides spend days in strategic discussions, as the ISC had the forethought to send Admiral Matvei Nikitin as just such an expert. Tilden, Nikitin, and others quickly form a way to combine forces into one effective war machine, the kind that will give their enemies in the Aeon War pause. However, the Independent Solar Colonies are stunned at the situation on Earth, having had no idea how many enemies are afoot planet-side.

Through lightning fast diplomatic agreements and hand-shake deals, the Coalition is formed – the combined forces of the New Earth Government and the Independent Solar Colonies working together to rid the solar system of the insidious Cults and the hateful Migou. The Ministry of Information wastes no time spinning the story for the public – though little spinning is required.

To most, the Coalition is a beacon of hope in a time where the world needs hope in the worst way.

KEY EVENTS

The return of the Independent Solar Colonies is primarily intended to be a background event for most *CthulhuTech* games. It is a stunning time that should bring hope to Characters and herald the dawn of a new phase of the Aeon War. However, presented here are a few ways in which the return of the ISC might be integrated into certain types of games. The events presented here are also designed to give you a new way to play *CthulhuTech*.

Honor Guard

When the Independent Solar Colony diplomatic Mamba lands in Cape Canaveral, the only people who might be present are members of the military or possibly the Global Intelligence Agency. Your Characters could be among those who have distinguished themselves enough to be chosen to be on the honor guard that greets the ISC. There will be plenty of tension leading up to the landing, as the New Earth Government still isn't sure this isn't an elaborate trap. Furthermore, that tension will increase until the diplomats exit the Mamba and the NEG is assured that all is well – for now. If you'd like to really spice things up, you could introduce interference on the part of the Esoteric Order of Dagon. This is clearly important to the New Earth Government, based on the level of security, and the EOD might just want to monkey-wrench. After all, Cape Canaveral is so close to the ocean. Esoteric Order mecha or creatures of all kinds could give the ISC the kind of welcome they absolutely don't want.

To take this one step further, your Characters could be those assigned as New Earth Government guards or liaisons to the Independent Solar Colony delegations, putting them on the front lines for this historic event.

Planetfall

On the other hand, you could use the rules presented in this chapter and have your Characters be the Independent Solar Colony delegation that is coming to Earth. You could play out the days as the plan is being made within the ISC, leading up to the tension that is the run at Earth. At no point is the delegation certain that they will make it past the Migou picket in orbit, and such a trip is suicidal if they cannot. Furthermore, the tension continues all the way down to the planet, as the colonials have no idea what awaits them planet-side.

Again, in addition to the tension that builds with regards to New Earth Government reactions, you could have someone like the Esoteric Order of Dagon take notice. Then, you'll have some potentially hair-raising and awesome combat once the Independent Solar Colony delegation gets close to the planet.

You could also place your ISC Characters in the position of guarding the diplomats once they reach Earth. There are plenty of cordial airs, but security in a time like this is security. Your Characters idea of what is the right thing to do will almost certainly clash with what the New Earth Government's is.

INTEGRATING CHARACTERS FROM TWO WORLDS

In many types of games, especially going forward, the worlds of the New Earth Government and the Independent Solar Colonies will need to be integrated. There are several pieces of culture shock that will come from this, as can only be expected.

The Nazzadi are just such a case. While those on Earth are very used to seeing the Nazzadi and are fully integrated with them – to the tune of 40% of the population – the world of the Independent Solar Colonies is quite different. On Earth, humanity had the benefit of seeing the Nazzadi turn on each other in civil war, followed by a decade of racial turmoil, ultimately ending in a bonding that could only come from a full-scale invasion by the Migou.

The colonies had a very different experience. They were first invaded and taken as territories by the Nazzadi fleet. After dealing with Nazzadi rule, the few Nazzadi that stayed out in the colonies had to deal with plenty of racial tension. However, they stayed segregated from the Human population and, given the reduced population, never had to deal with the same types of problems their Earth-bound sibling did. Then, the Migou invaded and they had to escape on ships, spending the next decade plus out in deep space. The situation did not breed the same kind of integration between the two races as the Second Arcanotech War did on Earth.

While colonial Nazzadi are still similar to their terrestrial siblings, in that they are experimental and reject the lies told them by the Migou, they are a more insular bunch. They are cooperative with their Human friends, but that's it. They don't mix and they don't have an interest in each others' cultures. If one were to compare the Nazzadi of Earth with the colonial Nazzadi, one might say that the Earth-bound Nazzadi were further along. The colonial Nazzadi might have something nasty to say in retort.

Colonial Tagers are a different case as well. The Tagers of Earth have been fully embroiled in the Shadow War for decades now. They see the growth of the Chrysalis Corporation and the Children of Chaos and they have fought desperate battles to prevent the Cult from doing more damage than it already has. They have integrated with New Earth Government society to be more effective and they enjoy the support of several specialized networks. The Tagers of the Independent Solar Colonies have led a very different life out in the black. Most importantly, there was never any way to make more Tagers in the colonies. There were not enough qualified sorcerers from the Eldritch Society with the right secret knowledge to initiate the Rite of Sacred Union, so the Tagers that were in the colonies when the Migou invaded were it. Fortunately, the same went for the Dhohanoids of the

Chrysalis Corporation. The Tagers spent the first several years doing nothing but hunting down the Dhohanoid population, which they did quite effectively. Then, at a loss of their primary enemy, they took to policing the colonial fleet to rid it of any other destructive cult influence. Colonial Tagers have become full-blown cult hunters of cults of all kinds, and no longer regard the Chrysalis Corporation and the Children of Chaos as their only enemies.

Another important difference is with regards to mecha pilots. Certainly, colonial mecha pilots will enjoy the advances made to mecha tech in the last decade plus. However, the real surprise will come when they are finally introduced to Engels. The very thought may make many colonial mecha pilots cringe, that someone might want to have something stuck in his head to be in communion with a giant cybernetic monster. However, there will be others who are fascinated, who think the idea is truly marvelous and would love to see such a thing implemented for zero-G applications. In fact, they may volunteer to help hasten such a thing along.

This is not to say that culture shock won't exist on a variety of other levels. These are simply the most obvious.



ISC CHARACTERS

Now that the colonies have returned, you may want to portray Characters that are part of the Independent Solar Colonies. In fact, you might have the desire to play an all ISC game. There are a few new things that go along with these new Characters that differentiate them from their regular New Earth Government counterparts.

RACE

The subject of race within the Independent Solar Colonies is different than it would be within the New Earth Government. Humans were a strong majority in the colonies, as the Nazzadi were not widely accepted after their occupation during the First Arcanotech War. The few Nazzadi that were part of the original colonist fleet are those that came late to the game, after there had been some efforts at integration. Even then, they weren't exactly welcomed with open arms.

Things have changed with regards to race relations, much as they have in the New Earth Government. Life for the colonists turned into one solely of survival and people tend to forget the trivialities of race and culture when they are forced to band together under such circumstances.

Let's take a look at how the unique environment of the Independent Solar Colonies has affected Character choices when it comes to race.

Humans

Like their terrestrial counterparts, the Humans of the Independent Solar Colonies are a hardy breed of people. They are self-reliant, though they have a strong community that binds them together. However, their situation has made them a little insular and distrusting. They have the strongest loyalties to those who are part of their extended families or ships, but will have difficulty truly connecting with outsiders. They are, in their own way, a lot like residents of small communities.

Physically, the years of being so far out from the sun have changed them as well. They are, despite Vitamin D treatments, a very pale people among those who are not naturally pigmented. They are also uncomfortable in direct bright light, but typically see better than their Earthbound siblings.

In game terms, Humans from the Independent Solar Colonies still have a free floating +1 to one of their Attributes, but they only gain 1 additional skill point. However, they gain Low-Light Vision like Xenomix Characters, as found on p. 30 of *Vade Mecum*.

Nazzadi

While the Nazzadi have become more fully integrated into the culture of the Independent Solar Colonies, they have not fully mixed in. Survival necessitated integration with the Human population, but the two races have mostly remained separate. Nazzadi may work side by side with Humans and may even live next door, but they do not normally socialize with one another. Both are polite and friendly, but not close. However, one would die for the other, if necessary.

Like their terrestrial counterparts, Nazzadi among the colonies have adopted a culture of experimentation. On the other hand, they haven't had as many resources or as much luxury to indulge such experimentation.

The ingrained insular nature of the ISC culture is as much a part of the Nazzadi as it is the Humans. It is difficult for the Nazzadi to trust outsiders, perhaps even more so than their Human compatriots, simply because of the hurdles they've had to overcome by the nature of their race and its previous antagonism to their current allies.

Xenomixes

While Human-Nazzadi relations among the colonists have come a long way, they haven't come so far that the two races have gotten to interbreeding. The two still remain separate and there are cultural taboos on both sides regarding interracial dating and sex.

Xenomixes are not eligible to be Characters that are part of the Independent Solar Colonies.

Ghouls

There are no Ghouls that are a part of the Independent Solar Colonies. It was way too dangerous for them to venture out into enclosed environments where they could be more easily discovered. Furthermore, the low population density made it so that food would have been less than plentiful.

PROFESSION

Most of the professions found in the *Core Book* and in *Vade Mecum* apply to Characters from the Independent Solar Colonies, with a few exceptions and modifications.

- Instead of the standard Mecha Pilot profession template from the *Core Book*, a new ISC Mecha Pilot profession template is found on p. 75, detailing the nuances of being a zero-G mecha pilot.
- Instead of the Soldier template from the *Core Book*, a new ISC Marine profession template is found on p. 74, detailing the specific needs of the space-born warrior.
- Instead of the Tager profession template from the *Core Book*, a new ISC Tager-in-Hiding profession template is found on p. 77, detailing the important differences in those Taggers that have been cut off from the Eldritch Society.
- The new ISC Pilot profession template is presented on p. 76, detailing this important space-faring profession.
- There are no Engel Pilots that are a part of the Independent Solar Colonies, as that technology was developed long after the colonies were cut off from the New Earth Government.
- Intelligence Agents, as found in the *Core Book*, don't really have a place in the Independent Solar Colonies, though you

might use this template to simulate former covert agents stuck in the colonies when the Migou invaded.

There are no Zoners, as found in *Vade Mecum*, in the Independent Solar Colonies. The Zone did not come into existence until after the Migou had invaded.

NEW ASSETS

SPACER (2)

Prerequisites: Athletics

Your Character has spent so much time in space that there is nothing about it that disorients him. He is naturally adept in zero-g or in microgravity – even to the point of being highly effective in combat situations. He suffers no Test Penalties whatsoever for operating in low gravity and is not required to make Tests unless what he wants to do is something seriously outside the ordinary – as determined by your Storyguide. Furthermore, he gains a +1 Test Bonus in combat against those who don't know how to function in low-gravity.

NEW DRAWBACKS

XENOPHOBIA (2)

Your Character has been out in the black for too long. He is no longer comfortable with people he doesn't know, or members of other races (Nazadi if Human, and vice versa). Further more, he no longer trusts them either. While he can function with anyone from the ISC just fine, as long as they are of the same race, he suffers a -3 Test Penalty to all other social interactions.

IMPORTANT SKILLS & SPECIALIZATIONS

Things work very differently out in space than they do on a nice planet like Earth that has an atmosphere and gravity. People have to learn to move and live in microgravity or zero-gravity and all the tools designed to operate in such environments work differently.

Detailed here are a few important skills and the specializations that accompany them, so that you can build them into your Independent Solar Colony Characters.

Arcanotech Engineering: Alien Technology

While there are those people who have to keep the alien inertial dampening technology of the Independent Solar Colonies in working order on a daily basis, there are those intrepid souls who actually had to figure it out – at least enough to manufacture and install it. For those people who have to design things using the stuff, use the Arcanotech Engineering skill, or the Alien Technology specialization.

Arcanotechnician: Alien Technology

The Independent Solar Colonies have come to depend upon their alien inertial dampener technology and such technology is not foolproof. For those people who have to keep such alien technology in working order, even if they don't understand it, use the Technician skill, or the Alien Technology specialization.

Athletics: Zero-G

Human beings are designed to function in the equivalent of Earth gravity, or 1G. Trying to maneuver in a weightless environment is difficult and requires practice. Use Athletics to manage this, or the Zero-G specialization.

Pilot: Astrogation

Getting from Point A to Point B in the three-dimensional, ever-shifting environment that is the solar system isn't easy. Use the Pilot skill to plot courses or, more appropriately, the Astrogation specialization.

Pilot: Spacefaring Types

The Pilot skill requires that you choose one type of vehicle with which you are competent for each level of expertise. There are two primary kinds of vehicles within the Independent Solar Colonies. The first are Spacecraft, which qualify as things like fighters, smaller transports, cutters, and anything that isn't gigantic. All the much larger ships qualify as Capital Ships.

Support Weapons: Gunnery

Firing a ship-mounted gun from the weapons command console is a lot different than pointing a firearm and pulling the trigger. To effectively fire such weapons, use the Support Weapons skill, or the Gunner specialization.

Technician: Environmental Suit

For most, all that stands between them and a vacuum, when not aboard a ship, are a few layers of composites. These environmental suits are key to the ISC's survival and their repair is of the utmost importance. Use Technician to maintain and fix such things, or the Environmental Suit specialization.

GEAR IN THE ISC

While Characters in the New Earth Government might have a startling array of high-tech toys from which to choose, their compatriots in the Independent Solar Colonies do not have that luxury.

ISC Characters will have several restrictions regarding their personal gear. Resources have been at a premium for more than a decade. Technological development has ground almost entirely to a halt, unless it had to do with survival or the inertial dampeners. Therefore, ISC Characters will not have access to new technology, nor will they have access to weapons tech that is less than a decade old.

As a Storyguide, it is your duty to work out what things that are presented in the *Core Book* and *Unveiled Threats* that might be appropriate for your ISC Characters. If you want to play before the Independent Solar Colonies make contact with Earth, then you may want to be very restrictive. If you want to play after, then you may want to be more lenient.



ISC MARINE

The ISC Defense Force doesn't require soldiers as they are traditionally used. Instead, each ship has a contingent of marines, trained in the specifics of zero-g combat. Their job is to defend the spaceships of the Independent Solar Colonies from boarders or other hostile actions that might take place on board. They are also keepers of the peace, doubling as a police force when such a thing is necessary. They are trained in investigative and other law enforcement techniques to round out their skill set.

Marines are also used as away teams, the first off ships sent to make sure that a new place is safe for the rest of the fleet. They inspect sites of potential resource mining, as well as other points of interest.

Many ISC marines are also trained in the use of powered armor, for those suits that have survived as part of the fleet. Such troops are typically used as heavy support, usable only in the larger corridors of the ships – fortunately, they have been tested only a few times.

While many of the marines of the Independent Solar Colonies were trained by the New Earth Government Armed Forces, there are many who have chosen to serve since the fleet was cut off from Earth. These troops know a different dedication and discipline than their terrestrial counterparts, nearly fanatical in the execution of their duties.

Attributes: Higher than average Perception and Tenacity recommended.

Suggested Skills: Armed Fighting, Dodge, Law Enforcement, Marksman, Medicine

Required Qualities: Authority (2), Duty (3), Fanatical (1-3)

Special Gear: A suit of combat armor (such as either Light or Heavy Spectrashield Combat), a sidearm (such as a UT-7 Hornet, CS-40 Defender, or CS-44 Enforcer), an assault rifle (such as an AR-25 or a HKS-192), a composite combat knife, and a survival kit.

Sample Attributes:

Human/Nazzadi

Agility 6/7

Intellect 5/5

Perception 7/7

Presence 5/5

Strength 6/5

Tenacity 7/7

Sample Skills:

Armed Fighting: Novice

Athletics: Student (Novice if Human), Zero-G Focus

Dodge: Adept

Fighting: Novice

Hobby: Student

Languages (Per Race): Per Race

Law Enforcement: Novice (Adept if Human)

Literacy: Novice

Marksman: Adept

Medicine: Student, First Aid Focus

Observation: Novice

Regional Knowledge: Novice

Survival: Novice



ISC MECHA PILOT

Most of the mecha jocks that fight for the Independent Solar Colonies are those who were actually trained by the military before everything went to hell. They've had to take on training a whole new crop of mecha pilots, ones who have had to learn to fight in the battleground of zero-gravity instead of the old world of terrestrial combat.

Since the ISC is fundamentally a mobile fleet, mecha do not see the regular use that they do as a part of the New Earth Government military. They typically provide close-in protection for other ships, functioning as mobile gun platforms or units to repel boarders, clinging magnetically to the hulls of much faster ships. These changes in tactics would make the pilots of terrestrial mecha useless, as they are so fundamentally different from how they were once trained to fight.

Though there are fewer types of zero-gravity mecha, primarily due to limited resources and manufacturing capabilities, most mecha pilots in the Independent Solar Colonies tend to specialize in one type of mecha. Also like their terrestrial counterparts, ISC mecha pilots utilize colorful callsigns to identify each other, though in a similar dark and dangerous sounding vein.

Attributes: Higher than average Agility and Perception recommended.

Suggested Skills: Armed Fighting, Dodge, Fighting, Marksman, Pilot

Required Qualities: Authority (3), Duty (3)

Special Gear: A suit of concealed armor (such as Sentrytech Mk-IV or Mk-V), a sidearm (such as a UT-7 Hornet, CS-40 Defender, or CS-44 Enforcer), and a mech to which the Character is normally assigned (see p. 83).

Sample Attributes:

Human/Nazzadi

Agility 7/8

Intellect 5/5

Perception 8/7

Presence 5/5

Strength 5/5

Tenacity 6/6

Sample Skills:

Armed Fighting: Novice

Athletics: Novice, Zero-G Focus

Fighting: Novice

Dodge: Adept

Hobby: Student

Languages (Per Race): Per Race

Literacy: Novice

Marksman: Adept

Observation: Student (Novice if Human)

Pilot: Novice (Adept if Human), Zero-G Focus

Regional Knowledge: Novice

Support Weapons: Novice

Survival: Student



ISC PILOT

While mecha may be the primary weapon of the New Earth Government, it is spaceships that are the backbone of the Independent Solar Colonies. It is the pilots of those spaceships who are charged with keeping the fleet agile and the people within it safe from harm.

Some of the pilots within the ISC were once commercial pilots who have had to learn how to be combat pilots very quickly. Some of the pilots were military to begin with. Many are those who have learned how to fly since everything went to hell. However, all have had to learn new ways to pilot, as there was little that could have prepared them for what ultimately happened. No one expected to have to survive on the run in the deep of space for the last decade plus. Furthermore, the addition of the alien inertial dampeners has created new ways to fly spaceships, something they've invented on the go.

Pilots are some of the most important people in the fleet, other than the people who keep the ships going and the people fed. They are well-respected and treated well by the powers that be within the ISC.

Attributes: Higher than average Agility and Perception recommended.

Suggested Skills: Dodge, Marksman, Pilot, Support Weapons

Required Qualities: Authority (2), Duty (3)

Special Gear: A suit of concealed armor (such as Sentrytech Mk-IV or Mk-V), a sidearm (such as a UT-7 Hornet, CS-40 Defender, or CS-44 Enforcer), and a ship to which the Character is normally assigned (see p. 85).

Sample Attributes:

Human/Nazzadi

Agility 7/8

Intellect 5/5

Perception 8/7

Presence 5/5

Strength 5/5

Tenacity 6/6

Sample Skills:

Athletics: Novice, Zero-G Focus

Communications: Novice (Adept if Human)

Dodge: Adept

Hobby: Student

Languages (Per Race): Per Race

Literacy: Novice

Marksman: Adept

Observation: Student (Novice if Human)

Pilot: Adept, Zero-G Focus

Regional Knowledge: Novice

Support Weapons: Adept

Survival: Student



ISC TAGER-IN-HIDING

Prerequisite: The symbiont that makes a Tager has a will of its own and a candidate must be able to master it during the Rite of Sacred Union. Tager Characters must start with a Tenacity of at least seven.

Like their planet-locked siblings, Tagers that are part of the Independent Solar Colonies are those who have undergone the Rite of Sacred Union to merge with a supernatural symbiont. They remain part of the secret Eldritch Society, but the years of isolation have made them a little different.

The biggest difference is that Tagers who have survived among the ISC haven't seen a Dhohanoid in years. As the fleet banded together, the remnants of the Eldritch Society from the colonies likewise banded together. There was a finite amount of space to cover within the fleet and a finite number of people. It didn't take the Tagers long to exterminate all Dhohanoids – and anyone who was high enough ranked in the Chrysalis Corporation to be considered a threat.

In the absence of their primary enemies, they have instead taken to being fanatical cult hunters – the kind that might make their terrestrial siblings a little uncomfortable. The threats that cults bring are even more pronounced within the ISC fleet and the Eldritch Society there has taken to being ruthless protectors. Cult activity within the fleet is at a minimum, due to their draconian efforts.

Otherwise, they are similar to regular Tagers in all respects, including the many ways a symbiont will change the host's personality.

Attributes: Higher than average Agility recommended. Minimum Tenacity of 7 required.

Suggested Skills: Athletics, Dodge, Fighting, Marksman, Occult

Required Qualities: Tager (4), Tager: Exceptional (2) and/or Tager: Rare (1) – for special types of Tager, Duty (3), Fanatical (2-3)

Special Gear: A sidearm (such as a UT-7 Hornet, CS-40 Defender, or CS-44 Enforcer) and a symbiont to which the Character is bonded (see the *CthulhuTech Core Book*, *Vade Mecum*, and *Ancient Enemies*).

Sample Attributes:

Human/Nazzadi

Agility 7/8

Intellect 5/5

Perception 6/6

Presence 5/5

Strength 6/5

Tenacity 7/7

Sample Skills:

Athletics: Novice

Computer: Student

Criminal: Student

Dodge: Adept

Fighting: Adept

Intimidate: Student

Languages (Per Race): Per Race

Law Enforcement: Student

Literacy: Novice

Marksman: Novice

Observation: Novice

Occult: Novice

Regional Knowledge: Novice

Security: Student

Stealth: Student (Novice if Human)

Trivia: Student (if Human)

STORYGUIDING THE ISC

Now that this chapter has presented the Independent Solar Colonies, it's likely that you'll want to use them in your game. The pages previous provides the rules necessary to design ISC Characters, but this section will go over some of the consequences and special rules associated with the Colonies in games. It will also provide some suggestions for using them in your game.

TIMELINE

The events that take place in this story don't occur all at once. They start slowly and build, for the most part, quietly in the background. Ultimately, you can place these events into your game whenever you want, but we suggest starting the timeline in April of 2087. From there, the major events play out in this basic order.

April 2087 (T)

The event that starts this all off is the Independent Solar Colony attack on Pluto. The New Earth Government picks up only the faintest of signals to let them know something is going on out there, but they can't figure out what.

June 2087 (T + 2 months)

Travelling through the solar system at great speed, the Independent Solar Colony fleet takes up orbit in the shadow of Jupiter. From there, they do what they can to learn about the state of things on Earth, as well as plan their entry to the planet.

July 2087 (T + 3 months)

Without warning, the diplomatic delegation from the Independent Solar Colonies races from Jupiter to Earth. It makes its way through the Migou picket. The delegation immediately begins diplomatic discussions to unite the Children of Earth under one banner.

August 2087 (T + 4 months)

After exhausting hours of talks, a diplomatic agreement is reached between the New Earth Government and the Independent Solar Colonies. The Coalition is formed.

THE ISC VICTORY

The Independent Solar Colonies have the most decisive victory against the Migou to date. They actually were able to attack the barely defended Pluto, once the second Hive Ship launched and began to make its way towards Earth. In doing so, they rescued a bunch of brain tubes containing the remnants of lost Human, as well as destroying chunks of Migou cities.

Not only is this a shot straight into the heart of the Migou, it has forced the second Hive Ship to turn around to go back and defend Pluto. This has consequences for the Migou war effort on Earth. The Migou's long-term plans have relied on the reinforcements and resources that the second Hive Ship would bring. Every plan they have made in the last several years incorporates such things. The Migou are now left with useless strategies and must face the fact that the forces and resources they currently have are pretty much all they're going to have – other than what

they can convert or take from the New Earth Government or the Cults. The Aeon War has changed.

Combine that with the New Earth Government's eventual defeat of the Migou Hemorrhagic Virus and the Migou are going to lay low for a while, as they reassess their war strategy.

THE BRAIN TUBES

For longer than the Human race has had written records, the Migou have been kidnapping them and removing their brains for experimentation and transport to Pluto. Advanced Migou technology allows them to remove a healthy brain and keep it functioning and alive indefinitely inside a metal cylinder.

Essentially, each brain tube is a metallic cylinder filled with a nutrient fluid and computer and electronics equipment. There are several ports on the tubes, which are used to hook the brains into computer networks, hook them together so they can communicate, or to attach audio-visual apparatus to allow the brain to function and communicate more normally. They really are truly amazing devices.

While the Migou had many of their own reasons for wanting to create such devices, they did not necessarily have the interest in how such disembodied brains fared from a psychological perspective. Some simply could not handle the transition and have gone irrevocably insane. Others were of steel will and it is they who began to form the communities. Fortunately, the Migou left the brains hooked together most of the time, so the brains have kept each other engaged in conversation and intellectual exercises. They have supported each other and kept each other in touch with reality, as it were. As such, the brains are tightly knit and very loyal to one another.

The brain tubes are just being integrated back into the New Earth Government in 2087, so they may or may not play a part in your game. If they do, create them according to the normal rules for Supporting Cast, with a few exceptions.

- Brain tubes only use the Intellect, Perception, Presence, and Tenacity attributes. Assign them 60% of the usual points.
- Brain tubes cannot have any physical skill. Assign them 60% of the usual points.
- There are many Qualities that do not apply to disembodied brains, and they should be obvious.
- Brain tubes are physically treated as objects that have a Vitality of 5 and Armor of 1/1. The brain inside has a Vitality of 1.
- Brain tubes can take 1 Action per turn and have a Reaction of 2.
- Brain tubes must rely on external apparatus to communicate and cannot take actions for themselves.
- There are no para-psychic brains in tubes. The Migou used them for other experiments designed for such special brains.

RUNNING ISC GAMES

This chapter presents you with what is functionally a toolkit for making Independent Solar Colonies Characters and for telling

ISC stories. They present you with enough information and new rules so that you can run a game set in the time of the ISC's attack on Pluto and return to Earth – or even during their years of wandering out in the Kuiper Belt. Other than that, the rest is up to you – for now.

However, in order to be complete, there are a few important questions that must be answered.

Population

Just how many people survived to become the Independent Solar Colonies? There were originally a couple hundred thousand colonists living among the outer planets. Of those, most made it onto cramped transports to flee into the Kuiper Belt. There were certainly deaths due to accident, disease, or cultist influence during the time the colonial fleet was in hiding. These deaths were roughly offset by the birth of new babies. All in all, there are still about a quarter million fiercely independent colonials. Of that quarter million, about 15% of the population are Nazzadi.

Infrastructure

The government of the ISC is a true democracy. Every person over the age of 18 is allowed to vote for publicly elected offices and the popular vote is the winner. Military officials are appointed by elected officials, and policing of the colonial fleet is done by the marines. While there aren't taxes *per se*, each colonial citizen is required to provide a certain amount of their time in community service, whatever that may be. Likewise, there are laws to govern anti-social behavior, but far fewer than there would be on Earth. The general rule in the Independent Solar Colonies is that the needs of the many outweigh the desires of the individual, but that it is not necessarily the government's job to enforce that on every level. The system has become self-regulating, in that the people, for the most part, police themselves. Fortunately, with the exception of cults, anti-social behavior wanes dramatically in the face of daily survival needs.

NEW RULES FOR SPACE

With the addition of space as a viable play option comes the addition of some new rules to help simulate such an experience, most especially gravity and atmospheres.

Gravity

Gravity is essential for Human and Nazzadi physiologies. Without it, things start to go wrong. Bones and the heart weaken, muscle is lost, dehydration and anemia set in, and the immune system becomes compromised, among other lesser things. Every colony or large spacefaring vessel must have some way to simulate gravity for its inhabitants, or people will get sick and eventually die.

Artificial gravity is incredibly difficult to create. The Migou have managed it in vessels like their Hive Ship, but such technology is still beyond the grasp of the New Earth Government. Therefore, gravity on a ship (or in the old colonies) was something that lived only in rotating sections.

Every ship that is designed to carry passengers long-term is built with one or more rotating rings within it. These rings utilize centrifugal force to simulate gravity – they spin at a rate where the outer edge of the ring is the equivalent of 1G. Typically, living quarters and exercise areas are built into the ring, leaving the rest of the ship for the stations and technology that operate and power it.

Moving around in less than 1G is a challenge for most people. Those that do not have some skill in Athletics will have the most trouble, suffering a -4 Test Penalty to all physical Actions – on top of the half die that comes from being unskilled. Those with the skill reduce this to a -2 Test Penalty if they can succeed at an Average Degree, or negate it completely against a Challenging Degree. These rules apply to situations involving from .6G to 0G – halve these Test Penalties for anything from .61 to 1 G.

The only place in the solar system, practically speaking, where one might encounter gravity greater than 1G is the surface of Neptune. However, the gravitic shift is not so great that it will significantly impair function, so there are no special rules to govern it. The only other places in the solar system that experience gravities greater than 1G are approaching the cores of gas giants such as Jupiter or Saturn – the places are unlikely settings for adventures. If you find your Character there for some reason, simply adapt the rules for operating in microgravity, but in the opposite direction.

Atmospheres

The rules for environmental conditions are found on p. 126 of the *CthulhuTech Core Book*, which are of importance for this discussion. A Character who finds himself unprotected against a toxic atmosphere, such as that found on Venus, is considered to be in life-threatening conditions, taking 4 dice of damage per turn. A Character who is exposed to the vacuum of space without protection likewise suffers 4 dice of damage per turn. Something smaller, such as critically failing life support or a puncture that is sucking the air out of a room, could be considered hazardous conditions, causing 1 die of damage per turn.

ISC VESSEL NOMENCLATURE

Every culture has their own practices for naming their important vessels. Some name them after royalty or war heroes, some name them after places or politicians, while others name them after important concepts.

The Independent Solar Colonies took to a slightly darker practice after being cut off from Earth and forced to flee into the cold and distant Kuiper Belt. Their ships are named after famous sunken vessels in a kind of morbid homage – and kinship.

Some examples of vessel names include the *ISC Andrea Doria*, the *ISC Bismark*, the *ISC Carpathia*, the *ISC Edmund Fitzgerald*, the *ISC Lusitania*, the *ISC Titanic*, the *ISC Wilhelm Gustloff*, and the *ISC Yarmouth Castle*.

SPACESHIP COMBAT

Spaceship combat works similarly to basic or mecha combat, though the scale is different from either. In general, a ship enhances the abilities of the pilot, so you will still primarily be using that Character's Attributes and skills – while using the machine's sensors, weapons, and armor.

HULL SCALE

Just as Integrity is an order of magnitude greater than Vitality to represent how buildings, machines, and the like can take a greater level of punishment than smaller, living things, Hull is an order of magnitude greater than Integrity.

One point of Hull is equal to 50 points of Integrity, or 250 points of Vitality. This means that a weapon designed to do Hull damage is likely to destroy an Integrity-scale thing instantly – and anything Vitality-scale wouldn't stand a chance. There is also Hull-scale armor, which works similarly.

As with Vitality vs. Integrity, Integrity-scale weapons can conceivably harm a Hull-scale thing, if it is unarmored or has taken enough damage to no longer have effective armor. In these cases, the Hull-scale thing loses one Hull for every 50 points of Integrity done to it. Hybrid weapons function just the same as Integrity-scale weapons for this purpose.

Not all of the weapons on a Hull-scale ship are designed to do Hull-scale damage. Such weapons are large and unwieldy, typically only of use against other large and relatively slow maneuvering Hull-scale craft – they take significant penalties when trying to hit smaller targets. Most such ships are equipped with arrays of Integrity-scale weapons that are more than capable of destroying incoming mecha and fighters.

THE SPACESHIP COMBAT TURN

Like mecha combat, spaceship combat works similarly to any other form of combat in *CthulhuTech*, with a few important differences. Let's take a look at the combat turn first.

1. Determine Initiative

Most spaceships will have some sort of modifier that applies to the pilot's Reflex. To determine Initiative, roll one die and add it to the pilot's modified Reflex. The ship with the highest result gets to act first and then down in descending order of Initiative results. Ties act simultaneously.

For larger engagements, follow the rules found on p. 129 of the *Core Book* regarding large mecha engagements.

2. Declare Number of Actions

Most spaceships modify the number of Actions a pilot can take in a turn, but otherwise this step works the same as it does in basic combat. Multiple Action Penalties, as found on p. 129 of the *Core Book*, apply as usual. However, the exception to that rule are large-sized ships, such as destroyers, frigates, or dreadnoughts. The pilots of these vessels can take their usual number of actions

a turn, which are usually related to basic movement, sensor use, and other such things. In general, such ships carry more than enough crew for them to fire each weapons system once per turn until such systems are destroyed by damage.

Like mecha, a ship's limited artificial intelligence (LAI) gives a pilot one additional free action each turn which can be used to activate sensors or communicate with other pilots. Frigates and dreadnoughts have more significant LAI systems which give them a total of two and three free actions each turn as well, respectively.

3. Engage in Attack & Defense Contests

Most spaceships modify the pilot's Agility and Perception, but otherwise engaging in attack and defense Contests works the same as in basic combat. However, the sizes of the targets involved in these Contests may provide a modifier. If the attacking ship is of a larger size class than the defending target, he will suffer a negative Contest Modifier. To determine this penalty, consult the following table – subtract the modifier of the larger ship from the modifier of the smaller target. If the attacking spaceship is equal in size class or smaller than the defending target, there is no Contest Modifier.

SHIP SIZE	MODIFIER
Dreadnought	6
Frigate/Battlecruiser	5
Destroyer/Transport	4
Fighter	3
Behemoth or Large Mecha	2
Medium or Smaller Mecha	1

For example, a Migou Swarm Ship (a battlecruiser) fires a pair of linked Integrity-scale laser cannons at a ISC Mamba (a fighter). The pilot of the Swarm Ship would suffer a -2 Test Penalty to his attack – the modifier for a battlecruiser is five from which we subtract the small-sized fighter's modifier of three.

If a spaceship equipped with a Hull-scale weapon chooses to fire it at anything other than other large relatively slow maneuvering Hull-scale craft, such attacks suffer an additional -8 Test Penalty.

Larger ships will often have a variety of weapons systems that are not controlled by the pilot, and could not be if they were to be maximally effective. Typically, each weapons system (or bank of like weapons systems) will be controlled by gunners, each with their own individual levels of expertise in the Support Weapons skill. Your Storyguide will determine those gunner's ability based on the needs of your story – otherwise, assume they are Adept.

4. Roll Damage

To determine damage, use the same process as the one used in basic and mecha combat – add up a number of dice determined by the amount you beat your target's defense roll and the weapon. However, the damage done is Hull- or Integrity-scale, as appropriate.

5. Check Damage

Ships have six different Damage Levels, the same as Integrity-scale things. All Hull damage is applied to the Damage Scheme the same way you would apply Integrity damage to a thing's Damage Scheme. Armor works the same, but on the Hull scale. Integrity-scale ships use the regular rules for Integrity-scale.

In addition to the normal penalties associated with Damage Levels, you'll have to pay attention to Systems Failure, which represents the different systems of your ship breaking down. This works the same as it does on p. 131 of the *Core Book*.

6. Additional Actions

Once each pilot or group of ships has taken their first Actions, go back and take any second Actions in the same order of Initiative. Repeat this same process for any other Actions, remembering to apply Multiple Action Penalties.

Once Step Six is complete, go back and start at the beginning for the next turn until the conflict is resolved.

SHIP SPECIAL SITUATIONS

Most of the rules presented in the Special Situations section for Basic or Mecha Combat apply to Spaceship Combat. However, here are a few additions and differences.

COVER MODIFIERS

Some battlefields will provide cover. While cover is taken into account with normal defense skills, sometimes you'll want to actively enter into heavier cover that will give a ship a defense bonus. Light cover, which is classified as things that aren't very thick, strong, or entirely covering, gives a Test Penalty of -2 to those attacking you – this might include a debris field. Heavy cover, which is classified as thick, strong, or heavily covering, gives a Test Penalty of -4 – this might include an asteroid field. To get this bonus a Character must use an Action to pilot into cover.

DAMAGE LEVELS

The Damage Levels used for Hull-scale things is similar to those used for Integrity-scale, with the following differences.

Undamaged – A ship is only Undamaged if it is unharmed.

Cosmetic Damage – The ship's appearance has been marred.

Light Damage – The ship's structural systems suffer minor damage. The mildly impaired capabilities cause a -1 Test Penalty to all piloting or use Actions.

Moderate Damage – The ship's structural systems are seriously damaged. The obviously impaired capabilities cause a -3 Test Penalty to all piloting or use Actions, the crew can take a maximum of two Actions per turn, and movement is reduced to half maximum. Armor is likewise cut in half (round down) – this can reduce these systems to zero.

Serious Damage – The thing's core systems are seriously damaged. The badly impaired capabilities cause a -6 Test Penalty to all piloting and use Actions, the crew can take a maximum of one

Action per turn, and the ship can barely move. Re-entry or atmospheric movement is now prohibited. Armor fails – the ship now takes full damage from all attacks. Pilots (or applicable crew) now take half the equivalent damage of any successful attack in Vitality, as the structural systems protecting them begin to fail.

Critical Damage – The ship is all but falling apart. The barely functional core systems prohibit Actions or movement of any kind. Pilots (or applicable crew) now take the full equivalent damage of any successful attack in Vitality as the structural systems protecting them completely fail. All armor is destroyed.

Destroyed – The thing has been destroyed.

RAMMING

Barreling into something at top speed is both a good and a bad thing – it's going to cause more damage to the thing you hit but it's also going to cause damage to you. In order to make a charge attack of any significance you must be moving at more than 250 mph. If traveling at 251 to 1000 mph, a successful charge attack does four dice to the overall damage on top of success. Traveling at 1001 to 2000+ mph increases the bonus to eight dice. An unsuccessful charge attack simply means you fly right by your target.

On the other hand, you take half the total damage from the charge attack rounded down. Armor applies as normal.

SPEEDING TARGETS

Sometimes ships will be moving at significant speeds and that can make them harder to track. The difference in speed between attacker and defender can provide a Test Penalty to attacks. If a difference in speed is from 500 to 1000 mph, attacks suffer a -2 Test Penalty, from 1001 to 2000 mph the Test Penalty increases to -4, and from 2001+ mph it increases to -6.

SPOT DAMAGE

Many times, a much smaller ship won't really be able to harm a much larger ship, such as when a fighter attacks something the equivalent of a battlerecruiser or dreadnought. Sometimes a much smaller thing will have the ability to do the kind of damage that is of some kind of tactical advantage, but which won't ultimately compromise the greater functioning of the vessel – as in the Kris powered armor burning through the hull of the Hive Ship. These types of situations are governed by spot damage rules, which cover Integrity-scale weapons doing damage to Hull-scale things.

The first step in implementing such an attack is determining the precise effect, which must be attainable. A fighter could not, for example, hope to disable the engines of a frigate. It could, however, hope to create a breach near the engines or take out one weapon. Such attacks suffer a -2 Test Penalty for their precision. However, the object in question is treated as being of Integrity-scale instead of Hull-scale for purposes of how damage is dealt. However, the Damage Levels must be tracked for that one thing, as it ultimately does not effect the rest of the vessel's functions. This also allows Hybrid weapons to have effect, such as placing explosives to create a breach. Ultimately, it is up to your Storyguide what will and will not work.

OTHER FACTORS

ACCELERATION

A ship's Acceleration Code tells you how fast it can accelerate to top speed and decelerate from top speed, in turns. A spaceship with an Acceleration Code of E can accelerate to its top speed in three turns and decelerate in three. This means that it accelerates and decelerates a third of its top speed each turn. A spaceship with an Acceleration Code of A on the other hand can accelerate to and decelerate from top speed in only one turn – which combined with a high top speed can be scary. These ships are usually equipped with the ISC's alien inertial dampeners.

X, Y, & Z AXIS

Tracking where spaceships are in relation to one another can be a tricky piece of business. Just do your best to imagine where things are on an X, Y, and Z axis, as it's difficult to do on the table-top. If you don't want the hassle, feel free to do what many board games have done in the past and eliminate the Z axis altogether.

Differences in relational space often lead to challenges in calculating range. To be precise you can use the Pythagorean theorem. $AA \times BB = CC$, or A squared plus B squared equals C squared. A is how far away, B is how far up, and C is the actual distance between you and your target. Or you can just take the longer measurement and add half the shorter measurement as an estimate.

MOVEMENT

Determining how a spaceship moves is similar to determining how mecha move. Follow these steps:

1. First, determine if you are maintaining speed, accelerating, or decelerating. Every spaceship has a maximum speed and an Acceleration Code. This lets you know how fast it can go at top speed as well as what sorts of speed changes it can make in one turn.
2. Once you've figured out your speed for the turn, determine how many yards you get to move.
3. You may move any time the pilot takes an Action during a turn. You may move all of it on his first Action, all on his last Action, or spread it out over the turn. Any unused

movement must be used by the end of his last (or only) Action.

PILOTING

The Piloting skill, unlike with mecha, is of critical use when operating spaceships. The Operator Side-Effect is of great use when piloting mecha, as they are designed to take advantage of the sapient form; spaceships are wedges flying through the vacuum. Any time a pilot wants to do anything out of the ordinary, such as fly in combat or navigate an asteroid field, he must make Piloting Tests.

TERRAIN

Occasionally, spaceships will need to move through less than hospitable types of terrain. There are four different classifications of terrain. Clear terrain is terrain that a spaceship can move through easily, such as open space. Difficult terrain is terrain that a spaceship can move through but it's going to take a little work, such as a light meteor shower. Severe terrain is terrain that is very difficult to move through, such as an asteroid field. Impassable terrain is just that – it's going to take something special to get through. It might include the rings of Saturn or the like.

The type of terrain limits the maximum speed at which a spaceship may move through it and some types may provide additional cover. Difficult terrain limits speed to half of maximum and Severe limits it to a quarter.

AN APPROXIMATION

The rules provided here are a simplification of how spaceship combat might work. They are hardly comprehensive. If you'd like to do more detailed battles, you can use the many conditional rules provided for mecha combat and interpolate the way they might work on a greater scale. We just wanted to make sure you could use the various spaceships provided in this book in a meaningful way to simulate the amazing events that have occurred in 2087.

MV-111 ORION

Type: Multi-Purpose Zero-G Main Battle Mech (10 AP)

Size: Medium (26' tall)

It is no surprise that the mainstay of the Independent Solar Colonies' mecha contingent is the 0-G version of the Broadsword. Like its terrestrial counterpart, the Orion is a tough customer, capable of dealing with its fair share of punishment. In fact, it is very nearly identical in its function, right down to the signature heavy armor. However, instead of being designed as an amphibious unit, it has shed those systems to become exclusively a mecha for the void of space. For the last decade, these reliable war machines have been the primary unit used to protect ISC operations within the Kuiper Belt. They stand vigilant as a sign that the colonists will never give up.

ATTRIBUTES

Control Response (*Agility*) 0
Sensors (*Perception*) +1
Frame (*Strength*) 5
Multi-Task Systems (*Actions*) +1
Warning Systems (*Reflex*) +1

SENSOR SYSTEMS

Broadband Audio
LADAR
Radar/IFF
Targeting (+2)

SUPPORT SYSTEMS

0-G Systems
Auto-Sealant System
Cold Resistance
Extended Endurance Environmentals
Life Support
Orbital Life Support Pod
Manipulator Arms

MOVEMENT

Ground Speed: 30 mph (74/18 ypt)
Air Speed: 120 mph (296/72 ypt)
Orbital Speed: 900 mph (2220/540 ypt)
Acceleration Code: B [2/1]
Jumping Distance: 10/5 yards
A-Pods
Micro Gravity Maneuver Systems

STRUCTURE

Integrity 20
Armor 3/3
Damage Control Systems 1/turn

WEAPONS SYSTEMS

Vacuum-Tuned Laser Cannon (Medium)
Vacuum-Tuned Charge Beam (Medium)
2 Hyperedge Blades (Medium)



PULSAR (KAVARI)

Type: 0-G Artillery Support Mech (10 AP)

Size: Medium (25' tall)

When the powers-that-be within the Independent Solar Colonies had to limit the number of mecha models that they could keep in circulation, they had some tough choices to make. In the end, they came down on the side of the Nazzadi design for their artillery mecha. The Pulsar is a 0-G analog of the Maelstrom, combining devastating support with lightning speed. Unlike its terrestrial counterpart, the Kavari sacrifices one of its rocket pods for a charge beam, in order to extend its useful lifespan in the firefights of the vacuum of space.

ATTRIBUTES

Control Response (*Agility*) +2
Sensors (*Perception*) +1
Frame (*Strength*) 4
Multi-Task System (*Actions*) +1
Warning Systems (*Reflex*) +1

SENSORY SYSTEMS

Broadband Audio
LADAR
Radar/IFF
Targeting (+2)

SUPPORT SYSTEMS

0-G Systems
Auto-Sealant System
Cold Resistance
Extended Endurance Environmentals
Life Support
Orbital Life Support Pod

MOVEMENT

Ground Speed: 30 mph (74/18 ypt)
Air Speed: 180 mph (444/108 ypt)
Orbital Speed: 1000 mph (2467/600 ypt)
Acceleration Code: B [2/1]
Jumping Distance: 10/5 yards
A-Pods
Micro Gravity Maneuvering Systems

STRUCTURE

Integrity 15
Armor 2/2
Damage Control Systems 3/turn

WEAPONS SYSTEMS

Chaff Dispenser (Medium)
Vacuum-Tuned Charge Beam (Medium)
Hyperedge Claws (Medium)
Rocket Pod (Medium)



COMET (TAZIDI)

Type: Tactical 0-G Reconnaissance Mech (6 AP)

Size: Small (14' tall)

As with the Pulsar, the powers within the Independent Solar Colonies chose the Nazzadi design to maintain as the recon mecha for their fleet. It is nearly identical to its terrestrial counterpart, though properly modified for space operations. However, it sacrifices the Hurricane's grab bomb in favor of a chaff dispenser – more likely useful in its intended conditions. The Tazidi is also faster than the Kameni, for increased speeds are necessary in the void or in light atmospheres. It also keeps careful watch for any stealth units that might sneak up on the fleet, something that is fortunately rare.

ATTRIBUTES

Control Response (*Agility*) 0
Sensors (*Perception*) 0
Frame (*Strength*) 2 (-1 damage)
Multi-Task Systems (*Actions*) 0
Warning Systems (*Reflex*) 0

SENSORY SYSTEMS

Broadband Audio
LADAR
Long Range
Nightvision
Radar/IFF
Scan
Targeting (+1)
Thermal
X-Ray

SUPPORT SYSTEMS

0-G Systems
Auto-Sealant System
Cold Resistance
ECM
Extended Endurance Environmentals

Life Support
Orbital Life Support Pod
Manipulator Arms

MOVEMENT

Ground Speed: 30 mph (74/18 ypt)
Air Speed: 180 mph (444/108 ypt)
Orbital Speed: 1000 mph (2467/600 ypt)
Acceleration Code: C [2/2]
Jumping Distance: 5/2 yards
A-Pods
Enhanced A-Pod Speed (Sextuple)
Micro Gravity Maneuvering Systems

STRUCTURE

Integrity 5
Armor 1/1
Damage Control Systems 2/turn

WEAPONS SYSTEMS

Chaff Dispenser (Small)
Hyperedge Claws (Small)
Vacuum-Tuned Laser Cannon (Small)



MV-163 VULPECULA

Type: Tactical 0-G Stealth Combat Mech (6 AP)

Size: Small (18' tall)

Despite the origins of the stealth system in Nazzadi engineering, the Vulpecula, the analog of the Rapier, has become the standard stealth combat mech for the Independent Solar Colonies' fleet. Unfortunately, this normally nimble little unit sacrifices its agility to accommodate the additional systems required to operate in 0-G. It still, however, maintains the angles of black stealth armor. Like its terrestrial counterpart, the Vulpecula is used to infiltrate into enemy space, complete disabling surgical actions, and gather intelligence.

ATTRIBUTES

Control Response (*Agility*) 0
Sensors (*Perception*) 0
Frame (*Strength*) 2 (-1 damage)
Multi-Task Systems (*Actions*) 0
Warning Systems (*Reflex*) 0

SENSORY SYSTEMS

Broadband Audio
LADAR
Nightvision
Radar/IFF
Targeting (+1)
X-Ray

SUPPORT SYSTEMS

0-G Systems
Auto-Sealant System
Cold Resistance
ECM
Extended Endurance Environmentals
Life Support

Orbital Life Support Pod
Stealth System

MOVEMENT

Ground Speed: 30 mph (74/18 ypt)
Air Speed: 120 mph (296/72 ypt)
Orbital Speed: 900 mph (2220/540 ypt)
Acceleration Code: C [2/2]
Jumping Distance: 5/2 yards
A-Pods
Enhanced A-Pod Speed (Quadruple)
Micro Gravity Maneuvering Systems

STRUCTURE

Integrity 10
Armor 1/1
Damage Control Systems 1/turn

WEAPONS SYSTEMS

Vacuum-Tuned Laser Cannon (Small)
2 x Hyperedge Spur (Small)



ISC VESSELS

FO-706 FER-DE-LANCE FIGHTER

The FO-706 is one of the first orbital military fighters to be deployed by the New Earth Government. It saw large-scale deployment in the First Arcanotech War and was designed to hold its own in both air-to-air and orbital engagements. A product of the Deutche-Benz-Messerschmitt (DBM) Aerospace Corporation, it was built to last – as evidenced by its place as a primary fighter in the Independent Solar Colony fleet. ISC technicians have kept their Fer-de-Lances in pristine repair and regard them as a revered workhorse. Fortunately, they've seen little deployment until the recent attack on Pluto. *Pictured on p. 64.*

Type: 0-G Fighter (16 AP)
Manufacturer: DBM Aerospace
Size: Large (32 ft.)
Passengers: 2
Cargo: 3.5 cubic feet/71 lbs.

ATTRIBUTES

Control Response (*Agility*) +1
Sensors (*Perception*) 0
Frame (*Strength*) 3
Multi-Task Systems (*Actions*) 0
Warning Systems (*Reflex*) +1

SENSOR SYSTEMS

Long Range
LADAR
Radar/IFF
Targeting (+2)

SUPPORT SYSTEMS

0-G Systems
Auto-Sealant System
Cold Resistance
Life Support
Orbital Life Support Pod

MOVEMENT

Air Speed: 1200 mph (2960/720 ypt)
Orbital Speed: 1800 mph (4440/1080 ypt)
Acceleration Code: A (1/1)
A-Pods
Inertial Dampener
Micro Gravity Maneuvering Systems

STRUCTURE

Integrity 10
Armor 1/1

WEAPONS SYSTEMS

Vacuum-Tuned Laser Cannon (Large)
2 Rocket Pods (Large)
2 Missile Racks (Large)

M-105 MAMBA FAV

M-105 Mamba FAV (Fast Attack Vehicle) appears to be bulky for a fighter of its size. While the Mamba can be used as a fighter, it is best used for its intended purpose of breaching enemy vessels or compounds and inserting marines. Its ability to remain undetected allows it to sneak up on enemies, while using its charge beam, rockets, or missiles to make a hole and its rail gun turret to provide cover fire. The vessel is large enough to transport a full squad of marines, with an airlock for 0-G deployment. The Mamba puts the alien technology of the ISC to good use, accelerating to and decelerating from blazing speeds in seconds. *Pictured on p. 71.*

Type: 0-G Fast Attack Vehicle (16 AP)
Manufacturer: Eurodine Systems
Size: Large (58 ft.)
Passengers: 2 crew, plus 12 marines & support equipment
Cargo: 490 cubic feet/10,000 lbs.

ATTRIBUTES

Control Response (*Agility*) 0
Sensors (*Perception*) 0
Frame (*Strength*) 5
Multi-Task Systems (*Actions*) 0
Warning Systems (*Reflex*) 0

SENSOR SYSTEMS

Long Range
LADAR
Radar/IFF
Targeting (+1)
X-ray

SUPPORT SYSTEMS

0-G Systems
Auto-Sealant System
Cold Resistance
ECM
Life Support
Orbital Life Support Pod
Stealth System

MOVEMENT

Air Speed: 750 mph (222/54 ypt)
Orbital Speed: 2400 mph (5920/1440 ypt)
Acceleration Code: A (1/1)
A-Pods
Inertial Dampener
Micro Gravity Maneuvering Systems

STRUCTURE

Integrity 10
Armor 2/2

WEAPONS SYSTEMS

RMG-10M Rail Gun (1500 rounds capacity)
Vacuum-Tuned Charge Beam (Large)
Vacuum-Tuned Laser Cannon (Large)
Rocket Pod (Large) or Missile Rack (Large)

ROVER CLASS CONSTRUCTION VESSEL

Every fleet needs those ships that are dedicated to nothing other than its maintenance. The versatile Rover class construction vessels are just that, the remoras hovering around the sharks of the larger Independent Solar Colony ships. Complete with on-board work and machine shops, each with robust nanofactories, Rovers are capable of both construction and repairs. When not in use, they are kept carefully protected in the bellies of the ISC fleet's dreadnoughts.

Type: 0-G Construction Vehicle (20 AP)
Manufacturer: Eurodine Systems
Size: 400 ft.
Cargo: 340,000 cubic feet/6,900,000 lbs.

ATTRIBUTES

Control Response (*Agility*) 0
Sensors (*Perception*) +1
Frame (*Strength*) 6
Multi-Task Systems (*Actions*) 0
Warning Systems (*Reflex*) -1

SENSOR SYSTEMS

LADAR
Radar/IFF

SUPPORT SYSTEMS

0-G Systems
Auto-Sealant System
Cold Resistance
Life Support
Orbital Life Support Pods

MOVEMENT

Orbital Speed: 1200 mph (2960/720 ypt)
Acceleration Code: A (1/1)
Inertial Dampener
Micro Gravity Maneuvering Systems

STRUCTURE

Hull 5
Armor 0/1

WEAPONS SYSTEMS

RMG-10M Rail Gun (1500 rounds capacity)

SHRIKE CLASS DESTROYER

The Shrike class destroyer was one of the later units employed by the New Earth Government before the start of the Second Arcanotech War. At the time, it was cutting edge with a reputation for both power and reliability. It is a space-going vessel only, but it is a small and agile ship designed to both fend off enemy fighters as well as maneuver in to cause trouble for much larger ships. Of any non-fighter warship in the Independent Solar Colony fleet, it's the Shrikes that are best represented.

Type: 0-G Destroyer (35 AP)
Manufacturer: DBM Aerospace
Size: 400 ft.
Cargo: 340,000 cubic feet/6,900,000 lbs.

ATTRIBUTES

Control Response (*Agility*) +1
Sensors (*Perception*) 0
Frame (*Strength*) 5
Multi-Task Systems (*Actions*) +1
Warning Systems (*Reflex*) +1

SENSOR SYSTEMS

Long Range
LADAR
Radar/IFF
Targeting (+2)
X-ray

SUPPORT SYSTEMS

0-G Systems
Auto-Sealant System
Cold Resistance
ECM
Life Support
Orbital Life Support Pods

MOVEMENT

Orbital Speed: 1800 mph (4440/1080 ypt)
Acceleration Code: A (1/1)
Inertial Dampener
Micro Gravity Maneuvering Systems

STRUCTURE

Hull 10
Armor 2/2

WEAPONS SYSTEMS

Vacuum-Tuned Charge Beam (Large/Hull)
2 Vacuum-Tuned Linked Laser Cannons (Large/Integrity)
2 Vacuum-Tuned Linked Plasma Cannons (Large/Integrity)
2 Rocket Pods (Large/Integrity)
2 Missile Racks (Large/Integrity)

NEBULA CLASS TRANSPORT

The Nebula class Transport is the workhorse of the Independent Solar Colonies. Originally designed to ferry goods, materials, and passengers, they have been converted into the primary living quarters for most of the ISC. Cargo holds have been segmented into apartments for most civilians, and Nebula class transports have functionally become the floating cities of the Independent Solar Colonies. Most have been significantly modified from their original designs.

Type: 0-G Transport (20 AP)

Manufacturer: Eurodine Systems

Size: 1000 ft.

Cargo: 1,189,900 cubic feet/24,180,000 lbs.

ATTRIBUTES

Control Response (*Agility*) -1

Sensors (*Perception*) 0

Frame (*Strength*) 8

Multi-Task Systems (*Actions*) 0

Warning Systems (*Reflex*) -1

SENSOR SYSTEMS

Long Range

LADAR

Radar/IFF

SUPPORT SYSTEMS

0-G Systems

Auto-Sealant System

Cold Resistance

Life Support

Orbital Life Support Pods

MOVEMENT

Orbital Speed: 2400 mph (5920/1440 ypt)

Acceleration Code: E (3/3)

Inertial Dampener

Micro Gravity Maneuvering Systems

STRUCTURE

Hull 10

Armor 0/1

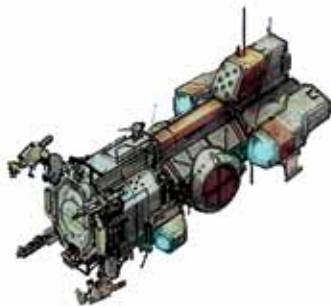
WEAPONS SYSTEMS

None

87



SHRIKE CLASS
DESTROYER



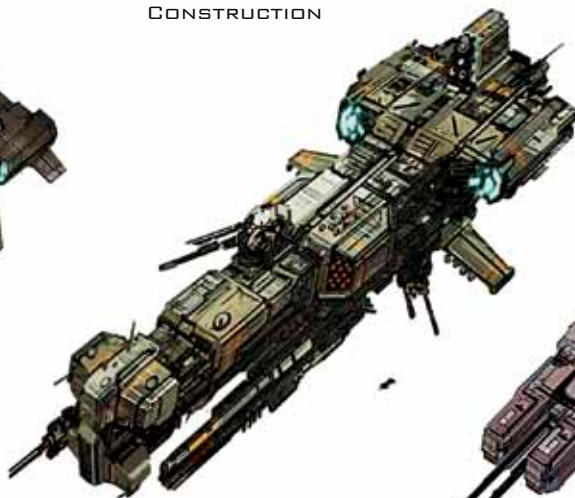
ROVER CLASS
CONSTRUCTION



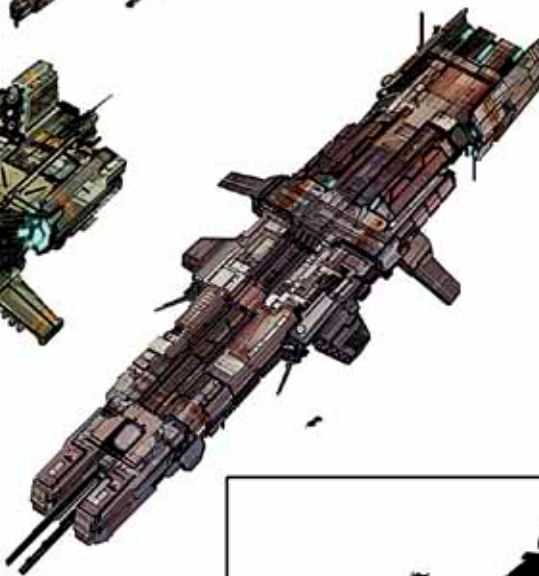
QUASAR CLASS
FRIGATE



NEBULA CLASS
TRANSPORT



METEOR CLASS
DREADNOUGHT



NOVA CLASS
DREADNOUGHT



QUASAR CLASS FRIGATE

As Quasar class frigates were the most common force used by planetary and solar security and police forces, they became the base heavy combat vessel within the Independent Solar Colony navy. They are well-armed and well-armored, designed to be the mid-range between destroyers and the much larger dreadnoughts. The Quasar class can carry between 30 and 60 fighters, depending on size, as well as up to 30 0-G mecha, in addition to its own complement of weapons. The ship's company consists of roughly 2200 crew, in addition to the fighter wing and mecha crews. Their amazing transit drives also allow them to keep pace with the much larger dreadnoughts when crossing solar distances.

Type: 0-G Frigate (100 AP)

Manufacturer: Lake Michigan Ship Building Co.

Size: 2000 ft.

Cargo: 1,700,000 cubic feet/34,500,000 lbs.

ATTRIBUTES

Control Response (*Agility*) 0

Sensors (*Perception*) 0

Frame (*Strength*) 7

Multi-Task Systems (*Actions*) +1

Warning Systems (*Reflex*) 0

SENSOR SYSTEMS

Broadband Audio

Long Range

LADAR

Radar/IFF

Targeting (+2)

SUPPORT SYSTEMS

0-G Systems

Auto-Sealant System

Cold Resistance

Life Support

Orbital Life Support Pods

MOVEMENT

Orbital Speed: 1800 mph (4440/1080 ypt)

Acceleration Code: A (1/1)

Inertial Dampener

Micro Gravity Maneuvering Systems

STRUCTURE

Hull 20

Armor 2/2

WEAPONS SYSTEMS

4 x 2 Linked Charge Beams (Large/Hull)

8 x 2 Linked Laser Cannons (Large/Integrity)

2 Missile Racks (Large/Hull)

Plasma Cannon (Large/Hull)

4 x 4 Linked Rocket Pods (Large/Integrity)

METEOR CLASS DREADNOUGHT

The Meteor class dreadnought is one of the largest ships ever put into commission by the New Earth Government. They were the mainstay warship that fought against the invading Nazzadi fleet during the First Arcanotech War. They were designed solely for combat among the stars and were worthless in atmosphere – that is the role of the battlecruiser. However, they have done very well in their role. Like all battlecruisers and dreadnoughts, they are part battleship and part aircraft carrier, bringing firepower, versatility, and durability to the solar battlefield. Given the ravages of both the First and Second Arcanotech Wars, there are only precious few Meteor class dreadnoughts remaining in service of the Independent Solar Colonies, though they are the most visible deterrent to any enemy they might have. Floating with an overall length of more than 3000 feet, it is more than one and a half Quasar frigates all told.

The dreadnoughts maneuvering drives propel the vessel at more than 1000 mph, but it carries transit drives that, combined with the inertial dampeners, allow the ship to cross solar distances at more than half a million miles an hour. Like its larger counterpart, the Nova class, the Meteor class is capable of taking smaller ships aboard to help ferry them across great distances.

Type: Dreadnought (212 AP)

Manufacturer: Lake Michigan Ship Building Co.

Size: 3200 ft.

Cargo: 2,720,000 cubic feet/55,270,000 lbs.

ATTRIBUTES

Control Response (*Agility*) -1

Sensors (*Perception*) 0

Frame (*Strength*) 9

Multi-Task Systems (*Actions*) +1

Warning Systems (*Reflex*) 0

SENSOR SYSTEMS

Broadband Audio

Long Range

LADAR

Radar/IFF

Targeting +2

Thermal

SUPPORT SYSTEMS

0-G Systems

Auto-Sealant System

Cold Resistance

Heat Resistance

Life Support

Orbital Life Support Pods

MOVEMENT

Orbital Speed: 1200 mph (2960/720 ypt)

Acceleration Code: B (2/1)

Inertial Dampener

Micro Gravity Maneuvering Systems

STRUCTURE

Hull 25
Armor 2/3

WEAPONS SYSTEMS

4 x 2 Linked Charge Beams (Large/Hull)
8 x 4 Linked Laser Cannons (Large/Integrity)
4 Missile Racks (Large/Integrity)
4 Missile Racks (Large/Hull)
2 x 2 Linked Plasma Cannons (Large/Hull)
8 x 4 Linked Rocket Pods (Large/Integrity)

NOVA CLASS DREADNOUGHT

There can be no doubt that it is the gigantic Nova class dreadnoughts that have brought the greatest feelings of security to the citizens of the Independent Solar Colonies. These warships are the largest ever made, combining the might of a battleship and the power of an aircraft carrier with incredible armor and durability. There were only four Nova class dreadnoughts ever made, brought into service just before the end of the First Arcanotech War. One was destroyed in the final days of that war, another met its end at the hands of the Migou, and the other two are what remain the flagships of the ISC to this day. Enormous, they have an overall length of 4000 feet – nearly three Victory class battlecruisers end to end. The vessel is armed to the teeth and nearly anything in the solar system so far, even the Migou, have had pause when attacking this dreadnought.

When standard maneuvering is required, the Nova class can move at more than 1000 mph. However, it's special transit drives, combined with the alien inertial dampeners, can propel the ship at more than half a million miles an hour, making the Earth to Pluto run in less than a year. It's mammoth bays are capable of taking other ships aboard for long-range transport, even destroyers and frigates – it's the way the Independent Solar Colony fleet gets around.

The two Nova class dreadnoughts still proudly in service are the *ISC Lusitania* and the *ISC Titanic*. Once named the *NES Polaris* and *NES Sirius*, respectively, their names were changed when it was clear that the former colonists were on their own.

Type: Dreadnought (260 AP)
Manufacturer: Lake Michigan Ship Building Co.
Size: 4000 ft.
Cargo: 1,189,900 cubic feet/24,180,000 lbs.

ATTRIBUTES

Control Response (*Agility*) -1
Sensors (*Perception*) 0
Frame (*Strength*) 11
Multi-Task Systems (*Actions*) +1
Warning Systems (*Reflex*) 0

SENSOR SYSTEMS

Broadband Audio
Long Range

LADAR
Radar/IFF
Targeting +2
Thermal

SUPPORT SYSTEMS

0-G Systems
Auto-Sealant System
Cold Resistance
Heat Resistance
Life Support
Orbital Life Support Pods

MOVEMENT

Orbital Speed: 1200 mph (2960/720 ypt)
Acceleration Code: B (2/1)
Inertial Dampener
Micro Gravity Maneuvering Systems

STRUCTURE

Hull 30
Armor 3/3

WEAPONS SYSTEMS

4 x 2 Linked Charge Beams (Large/Hull)
4 x 4 Linked Charge Beams (Large/Integrity)
8 x 4 Linked Laser Cannons (Large/Integrity)
4 Missile Racks (Large/Integrity)
4 Missile Racks (Large/Hull)
2 x 2 Linked Plasma Cannons (Large/Hull)
8 x 4 Linked Rocket Pods (Large/Integrity)

It wasn't the flu.

Salvatore just thought it was a relapse. He'd had the flu something fierce not long ago and he was miserable. He couldn't keep anything down and he was so fatigued he couldn't get out of bed for days. But then it went away, like any flu should.

However, like most men, he didn't take it easy afterwards. Sal got right back on his feet and went out to celebrate. Mia tried to get him to settle down, but he said he felt invincible after his bout with violent illness.

Of course, he didn't really know what violent illness meant. Until now. Yesterday, Sal woke up thinking the flu had come back. He was achy and feverish. Mia put him straight to bed and fixed him a pot of her famous chicken soup. For once, Sal let her take care of him. She had high hopes that he would pull through with flying colors and be back on his feet in no time.

Then the bleeding started.

At first, Mia thought it was just a dry nose from all the decongestants he'd been taking, added to all the nose blowing. It wasn't uncommon for someone in his condition to get a nosebleed. But this one didn't stop. It just kept going and going. Sal had to plug his nose with tissue, just to get it under some kind of control.

Then, Sal started coughing blood. Sometimes, when someone's been coughing and they've worn their throat raw, they can cough a few streaks of blood. That's how it started and Mia thought it was from the nosebleed draining down the back of Sal's throat. A few hours later, he was coughing up so much blood there was no way it was from a few ruptured capillaries. Mia got worried.

Not half as worried as she got when the blood started coming out of his ears and backside. That's when she called the ambulance.

The emergency vehicle that showed up was different from the ambulance she expected, as were the paramedics that came with it. The ambulance looked more like one of those clean rooms, but mobile. The medics wore full suits with breathers, like they were dealing with some kind of biological warfare. Worse yet, one of them was armed with an assault rifle and he carried it like he was expecting trouble.

They rushed Sal into the back of the ambulance and asked Mia a couple questions about how sick he'd been. They also asked her questions about how she'd been taking care of him and if she had any symptoms. Mia answered honestly, more worried about her husband than anything else. The medics nodded silently to each other and ushered her into the back of the ambulance as well. Then, they took off as fast as the arcology streets would allow them to go.

Mia got very worried when they didn't pull up to a hospital. Instead, they pulled up next to something that resembled a warehouse of some kind. The ambulance backed up to a loading dock, where they were greeted by more people in fully sealed suits. Sal was rushed off in one direction, as medics exam-

ined him and talked quietly to each other. Mia tried to follow, but other people took her some other direction, telling her that the doctors needed to be alone with her husband right now.

They then took her to another area, which looked like where the warehouse offices should have been. They put her on a cot and told her to wait. Then, she was alone, scared for her husband – and frankly scared for herself.

After more than an hour, someone came and talked to her. He was wearing a full suit with a breather, just like everyone else she'd seen.

"Mrs. Antonelli?" he said.

"Where's my husband," replied Mia. "Is he going to be okay?"

"Mrs. Antonelli, my name is Dr. Chan. We need to talk."

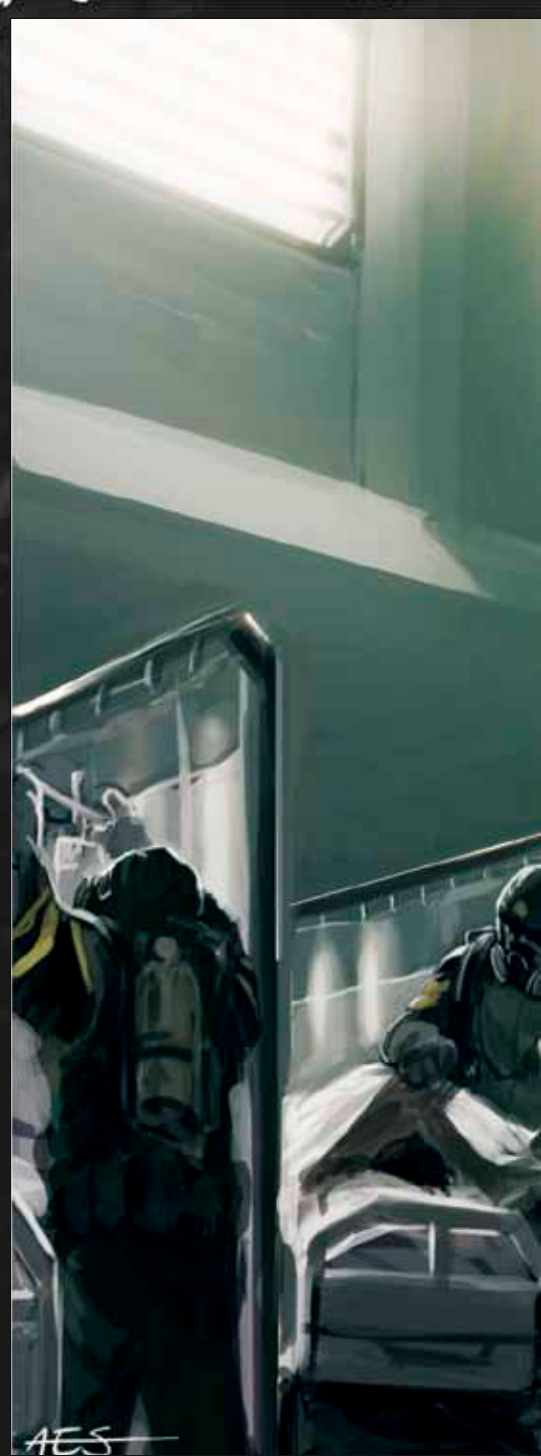
There was something in his tone that made Mia understand that the situation was far more serious than she thought. Strangely, it was as if the entire experience up until now hadn't set in.

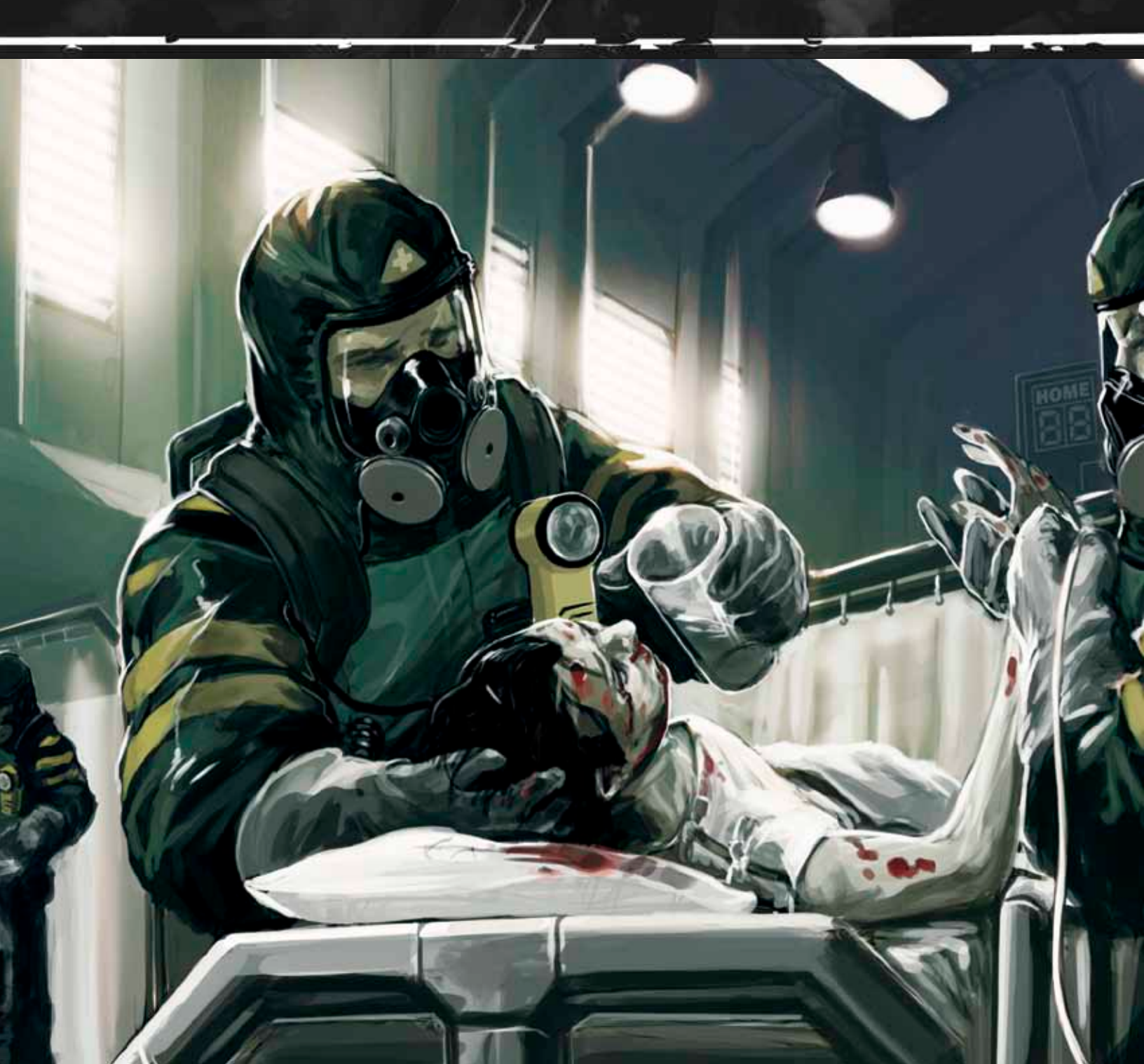
"Your husband came down with the flu recently, correct?" asked Dr. Chan.

"Yes. He was pretty sick, but he got over it. He wasn't very good about taking care of himself afterwards, though. I told him he needed to take it easy or he was just going to get sick again. But he's not that kind of guy."

Dr. Chan nodded. "And he fell ill again when?"

"Just yesterday," Mia replied. "It looked like the flu again, but then he started bleeding. Is he going to be okay?"





She could hear Dr. Chan sigh inside his mask. "Mrs. Antonelli..."

"Please, just call me Mia," she interrupted.

"Fine then. Mia, I'm sure you've noticed that this isn't a hospital and we're not normal physicians."

Mia nodded that she understood, too afraid of what came next to answer.

Dr. Chan continued. "Your husband is not the only person to display these symptoms. Recently, we've seen many people display these symptoms, which is one of the reasons we need a large facility such as this. Are you following me?"

Mia nodded again.

"Good. This is where many people go into shock. The other reason we need a facility such as this is because the disease in question is, at this stage, highly contagious."

Mia's face, if it was even possible, went more pale.

"Have you been exposed to your husband's blood through his illness? If so, have you observed proper disinfecting measures?"

Mia didn't even know how to respond.

Dr. Chan leaned towards her. "Mrs. Antonelli... Mia... this is very important, because the disease is invariably fatal."

At this point, Mia stopped worrying so much about Sal and suddenly started to worry very much about herself.

chapter five

the plague

Many have asked the question, if the Migou have such a thorough knowledge of Human anatomy and genetic structure, why haven't they just engineered a disease to wipe us out? Those who ask this question fail to understand the fundamental motivation behind the Migou's invasion. They don't want to kill us, they want to enslave us. We are the barely sentient monkeys that have always been their playthings on their planet and they want to put us back in our place. After all, where else in this part of the galaxy are they going to find such wonderful subjects?

However, things have changed and they feel they now need to teach us a lesson. Fighting the war is to be expected, but the New Earth Government has actually deigned to launch an assault on the Hive Ship. That in and of itself was not insult enough. However, the activities of the recently emerged Independent Solar Colonies is another story. They have violated the sanctity of Pluto and stolen what was the Migou's. They have forced the second Hive Ship, the reinforcements that would have guaranteed Migou victory on Earth, to turn around and go home. There are now threats they must protect their home against.

It is time to send a message. It is time to unleash the plague.

THE MIGOU HEMORRHAGIC VIRUS

Since the Migou entered the Aeon War, they have held back on unleashing the full force of their power. Their driving goal has been to subjugate humanity and keep the Elder Ones from returning to Earth. Destroying humanity was a last resort.

The New Earth Government attacks against the Hive ship were to be expected eventually, though the need to divert the second Hive ship proved to the Migou that the semi-sentient monkeys on Earth could pose a threat if allowed to continue. With humanity upping the stakes, the Migou decided to take the first step towards culling humanity to a manageable level and began the release of a viral weapon which they believed would devastate NEG population and morale.

The Migou have previously not engaged in biological warfare due to the knowledge that such weapons are often as deadly to their creator as they are to the victim. The Migou have studied all of the ways that human bodies are destroyed and the weaknesses of a body to its own immune systems – something Migou physiology doesn't have. Experiments on blanks from different regions have assured the Migou that the virus is deadly, without being capable of utterly destroying both the Human and Nazzadi species. Through reading human epidemiological history, it is believed that the psychological impact on survivors can be used to control the population as needed.

The Migou Hemorrhagic Virus (MHV) is built to act in two stages. Stage I of MHV resembles a virulent strain of influenza, with symptoms including nausea, malaise, and dehydration. While this can be deadly to the elderly, infirm, or children, most Humans and Nazzadi are able to recover within a week. Stage I spreads through physical contact and fluids. The disease is capable of surviving up to twelve hours outside of a host, allowing

for contamination through community pools, public utilities, and tables at restaurants which aren't disinfected. Roughly eighteen percent of those who contract MHV will enter Stage II of the virus after appearing to fully recover.

During Stage II, the virus begins replicating within the immune system of Stage I survivors. Now the same T-cells which Human physiology uses to fight the virus become a weapon for it. Large amounts of cytotoxic cells are replicated and begin to target the capillary walls, causing bruises to swell along the victim's body and massive bleeding through the eyes, nose, mouth, and anus. Stage II infection is terminal within forty-eight hours. Because the virus is blood-borne and the victim bleeds constantly, the victim becomes highly contagious during Stage II. Any fluid contact with the victim can spread the disease. New victims suffer complete organ failure when the virus enters their bloodstream and triggers a super-antigen response from an immune system which hasn't been prepared by Stage I exposure. Complete organ failure generally happens within seventy-two hours of exposure to the Stage II virus. During Stage II the viral mutation is only capable of surviving outside of the host for a few minutes, so secondary infections are rare except through direct contact.

The disease is specifically designed to maximize the psychological impact it has on survivors. Watching a loved one die suddenly isn't easy for most people to handle. Add into that mix the fact that, in a matter of hours, the loved one went from healthy to bleeding from every orifice, large bruises sprouting without a single touch, and pustules filled with the smell of decay, blood, and death – now, you have a disease which causes panic. Because the disease is especially fast-moving, arcanotherapy is a difficult option to utilize. The Migou research into other hemorrhagic viruses such as Ebola and the Hanta virus have shown that introduction into the population will cause widespread panic and fear.

The Migou have improved the virus to adapt to diverse conditions and to be harder to kill. Additionally, because the virus grows decidedly more virulent in the second stage, it becomes harder for people to interact with their loved ones during the final hours, without catching the virus themselves. This is meant to alienate communities and force seclusion. While individuals go through the grief process for their lost loved ones, they shut themselves off from the rest of the community in fear that someone else may be spreading the disease. The Migou projections suggest complete isolation and fracturing of social infrastructure, once the plague culled thirty to fifty percent of the population.

MHV MUTATIONS

The Migou have designed MHV to be highly virulent and capable of overcoming a wide variety of hosts. To this end, the Migou used sections of their fungoid DNA, which adapt to environmental stimuli. The virus actively mutates to different pathogenic vectors and adapts different Stage I symptoms to the host. The virus breaks down too quickly in Stage II outside of the host to be spread indirectly. Redundant structures were also built into

the virus to keep it from mutating into a form which is capable of damaging the Migou. Certain mutations self-terminate to avoid the plague from becoming overly lethal.

The virulence of the virus appears to be limited to vertebrates; however it can be carried by parasites such as mosquitoes and fleas. The virus is also destroyed by exceptionally high PH environments, such as those found within the Migou diet. MHV is capable of infecting Humans and Nazzadi, though the symbiotic relationship with the Ta'ge and other otherworldly beings protects the Tagers and Dhohanoids from infection. Acolytes who have not undergone the transformation can still be infected.

SPREADING THE INFECTION

With the virus ready, the Migou needed to decide on how it would be spread. It was agreed upon that a silent plague appearing in the population would be the best answer. After the initial wave of panic had struck the NEG, the Migou would close the trap by spreading the infection across the front lines.

The first reported outbreak of MHV is in the rural town of Hesch, Germany. While most of the population had moved to the Hanover arcology ten years previously, a small contingent of farmers and automated equipment was left behind to produce crops which were unable to be grown within the arcologies. When Office of Internal Security representatives debrief the initial doctors on the scene, DNA samples from several victims are collected for further study. Many of the patients speak of indistinct sounds in the night – scratching on windows, splashing in water, or glass breaking – but there is never any source of the noise in the morning. The OIS never release the identities of the victims, or the fact that one of the victims is an infantryman believed to be killed in action near Juneau.

Initially, blanks are infected with the Migou Hemorrhagic Virus (MHV) and sent into lightly populated regions to spread the disease. The blanks are sent to small towns surrounding arcologies, and begin infecting the watershed, as well as the people, to transition the plague slowly into the population and to allow the Migou to study the mutations that the virus makes as it travels through a broader genetic sampling from which the researchers had to work. As Stage I takes hold in these regions, the Automated Personal Diagnostic Machines (APDMs) begin to report heightened flu symptoms. The APDMs are themselves responsible for spreading the disease as otherwise healthy individuals come into contact with MHV through the devices due to patients sweating or coughing on the machinery. Responding to the possible outbreak of an influenza pandemic, the New Earth Government begins fabrication of flu vaccines and prepare to cycle the population through injections. Amidst their preparation, several small towns are simply annihilated by the plague before the NEG can respond. Faced with a rising flu pandemic and then the sudden arrival of a hemorrhagic fever that kills faster than the automated systems could track, the NEG mobilizes.

As the New Earth Government mobilizes to deal with a flu epidemic amidst the populations outside the arcologies, the citi-

THE MIGOU HEMORRHAGIC VIRUS

Below are suggested effects for baseline MHV. Because the plague rapidly mutates and changes, feel free to adjust the Difficulty of Tests or the effects within Stage I. Stage II should stay 100% lethal if contracted, though the speed of onset and damage can be changed to be dramatically appropriate.

If a Character is exposed to Stage I MHV, they must succeed at a Hard Tenacity Feat Test or lose one Action per turn until they recover. Additional exposures to the same strain – such as visiting a hospital wing without taking the proper precautions – should increase the Difficulty of the Tenacity Feat Test, rather than requiring separate Tests.

Every 24 hours after exposure, the character will make another Tenacity Feat Test at the same Difficulty as the initial Test to see if they have recovered. If the Character has rested, the Storyguide should lower the Difficulty of the Test by 2 each day until the Character succeeds. Once the Character succeeds at the Tenacity Feat Test, they have overcome the effects of Stage I MHV and regain the lost Action.

After surviving Stage I MHV, the Characters should not progress to Stage II unless the Storyguide wants them to die. Upon entering Stage II, the Character takes one Wound Level every (Tenacity Score) hours. This damage cannot be healed, but can be slowed through arcanotherapy, if the Character survives long enough to get treatment. If the Character is exposed to someone infected with Stage II MHV, he must succeed at a Legendary Tenacity Feat Test or they will contract Stage II as well. Before the Migou Immunogenic Inoculation is discovered (p. 100), the only known cure for Stage II MHV is the Purify Form ritual.

Note that Tagers and Dhohanoids are normally immune to the effects of MHV and cannot contract the virus. If the Storyguide decides to create a mutation which can infect them, it should be highly unstable and difficult to spread beyond the initial host.

zens inside believe that they are safe. This is when the Migou begin spreading the virus even faster. Blanks inside the arcologies begin the same series of infectious behaviors, spreading it to water supplies by infecting fountains, public squares, and, when possible, introducing the disease directly into water treatment plants. The Migou agents release an airborne version of the virus into subway and metro systems, infecting tens of thousands of people on their way to and from work. Due to the slow onset of the disease, it becomes impossible to track the spread of the virus and contain it before it spirals out of control.

Within the arcologies, thousands begin to show symptoms of Stage I MHV. Even more than this are actually symptomatic, but believe that it is only a common flu and do not go to the hospitals or seek treatment. Two weeks after the initial reports of a hemorrhagic fever outbreak, the NEG begins full quarantine procedures and limits travel between arcologies. By this point it is too late and nearly every arcology has been infected. When the Berne arcology is shown to be untouched by the plague spreading across the rest of the globe, rumors begin to spread that the virus is actually a weapon released by the NEG.

Once the plague has taken root in New Earth Government news, the Migou begin widespread infection, overwhelming NEG medical and arcanotherapy staff. The Migou detonate missiles containing a weaponized version of the virus in the upper atmosphere, allowing for widespread contamination. As the disease falls to Earth, the MHV droplets mix with rain and enter water sources. This mutation of the virus is airborne, to allow for micro drops to be inhaled and spread the infection. It is also capable of surviving outside the host indefinitely as a fungus which releases spores laden with the plague.

The New Earth Government identifies the hemorrhagic virus of Stage II contamination as the most virulent and begins isolating all symptomatic patients. Beyond that citizens are urged to stay in their homes and sections within the arcologies are sealed off, except with security clearance. As full quarantine goes into effect in some areas, martial law is declared for brief periods to quell uprisings.

HUMANITY BECOMES ITS OWN WORST ENEMY

As news of an unknown plague spreading across the New Earth Government is released to the people, the Ministry of Information begins full spin control to limit the impact and maintain public order. With the true source of the virus initially unknown

and then kept secret, the Ministry of Information “experts” identified the plague as the European Hemorrhagic Virus. Within the neighborhoods though, word of mouth misinformation and rumors quickly spread. The plague is called everything from “God’s punishment” to a “Nazzadi attempt to cleanse the world of humans.” There is a short-lived uptick in violent crimes against the Nazzadi, before the NEG steps in and publicly demonstrates support for the Nazzadi community leaders through the swift trial and execution of several vigilantes. As fear spreads, and human communities begin to fracture, smaller groups become much more insular – unknowingly spreading the plague faster amongst each other.

As quarantines begin to be erected throughout the arcologies for anyone going through the hemorrhagic stage of the disease, epidemiologists begin back-tracking patients. Once it is discovered that a high percentage of patients have recovered from the flu a week beforehand, ideas of containment transition from quarantining the sick to a general segregation of the populace. All security forces are issued gas masks when on-duty and are forced to submit basic vitals – temperature, blood pressure, and blood samples – to automated systems before reporting to duty. Screening of the general populace begins through the use of APDMs. The APDMs are monitored by medical personnel to



ensure that there is no cross-contamination between users. The machines are programmed to check for heightened temperature or symptoms matching the flu. Any citizen exhibiting symptoms has their ID flagged and is instructed to report to one of the processing facilities. Reports are also generated to cross-check that each citizen actually reports in, and the symptomatic are placed on "No Travel" restrictions. Individuals that failed to report are arrested and detained.

With the need to segregate the population, individuals who demonstrate a clean bill of health are ordered to stay within their homes. Gymnasiums, schools, and arenas are converted to emergency hospitals and holding areas for anyone who becomes symptomatic. Individuals are held until a week after their symptoms clear. If they do not progress to Stage II, they are free to go. Those who progress to Stage II, along with everyone within the immediate vicinity, are transferred to the quarantine zone. Quarantines use forced air reclamation and water purification to keep the disease from spreading back to the arcology air and water supplies. The forced air cycling has the adverse effect of reinforcing the virus and everyone exposed to quarantine conditions, even those initially not in Stage II, die quickly.

News reports from the Ministry of Information reinforce the need for segregation, showing images of families dying within their homes because they allowed a friend to come in without being tested first. Anyone who has the possibility of infection is slowly stigmatized, and families become increasingly nuclear, denying neighbors and extended family any access.

STOPPING THE SPREAD

Along with the quarantines, government officials within the arcologies near major military installations secretly begin dividing the air supply and reclamation facilities within some of the arcologies. With individuals ordered to stay within their homes, the arcology defenses are activated in the middle of the night and blast doors seal off different sections. Security forces are placed in each section to maintain order, and passages through maintenance access tunnels are sealed to prevent smugglers from trying to sneak through. Once the arcologies are sealed, citizens are once again allowed to leave their homes, though their options are very limited. Each section is a nine block square, three blocks wide on a side. Entertainment services are limited by what was included in their section. Areas which do not have medical services or food supplies located in the sealed area are provided with weekly drops managed by security forces and rationed out to the population.

These divisions are not publicized outside of the arcology, and the Ministry of Information runs media feeds within the sealed sections constantly citing that these actions were for the protection of the citizens. To combat the groundswell of negative emotion, the New Earth Government subsidizes entertainment services, with theaters and amusement parks free to use for anyone in the cordoned area. At the same time, NEG researchers administer experimental vaccines to different sections to determine the response of the virus amidst the population. In sections

where MHV has spread to a large percentage of the population, it is decided to utilize humane methods of stopping the disease. The NEG administers treatments of benzodiazepine laced with cyanide. This is the most painless measure of euthanasia that could be taken, causing citizens to fall asleep and never wake up. The Ministry of Information is tasked with making sure that news of these events would not spread.

Other arcologies have leadership which is not as militaristic. These arcologies use enforced screenings on any personnel required to report to work, such as emergency support personnel, maintenance technicians, etc. All transit access is screened with thermographic sensors, and a fever of more than half a degree was sufficient for the system to bar access. Personnel who are non-critical to the maintenance of the arcology are told to stay in their homes, and curfews are set up to limit possible spread of the virus between groups. Travel between levels of the arcology is restricted, but individuals are allowed to move within their own level.

Less restrictive measures are placed on the wealthy and elite, many of whom travel on chartered aircraft and do not mix with the general populace. This includes government officials, as well as corporate partners such as Chrysalis Corporation executives and managers. Those traveling outside of the arcologies are initially screened for symptoms of MHV, but otherwise unrestricted. Once the Migou begin broad scale distribution of the virus across the countryside surrounding the arcologies, and the virus has spread across the upper atmosphere, travel is only allowed within environmentally sealed aircraft and transports.

Many politicians travel to the Berne arcology, using political visas to bypass the quarantine restrictions. They bring trusted advisers and personnel with them (unknowingly including many recruiters for the Disciples of Death's Shadow). While these individuals are screened for symptoms, and required to submit blood samples for more extensive testing, they are allowed into the arcology. The government officials sequester themselves in separate levels from the normal population. The office of the Global President announces that they will not be accepting visitors for the duration of the crisis. All communications with the President are routed through secure servers and scrambled. Secretly, the President is moved out of Berne to a secret underground bunker beneath Chicago. Though it doesn't yet look like the end is nigh, the Global President chooses to be as close to the Ark as possible.

Within the military, all bases, vessels, and outposts are placed on quarantine status, with transfer of troops between duty stations suspended until exposure can be determined. During a skirmish in China between Migou and New Earth Government forces, the Migou release a weaponized version of the virus against an armored infantry squad. The squad is forced into quarantine with their gear to monitor the spread of the virus. Later engagements show that many of the Migou forces, including their powered armor units, were modified to release MHV during combat operations. While NEG mecha and Engel units

are environmentally sealed, combat damage is capable of breaking the seal and infecting the pilots. Pilots are issued secondary support equipment in case of damage. Additionally, all units are forced to undergo decontamination protocols before returning to the hangar.

While initial research delves into curing the hemorrhagic fever, epidemiologists discover the connection to Stage I infection with the flu symptoms. This leads researchers to the understanding of the immune system response killing the host. Immunosuppressant treatments, which stop the advance of T-Cells in the bloodstream, show signs of promise. The problem is that in order to stop MHV from being 100% lethal, the dosage requirements will shutdown the individual's immune system entirely. Once this happens, without any antigens to protect them, the patient can simply die from a separate infection or cold. This method of stopping the disease is ruled out for the military, but is offered by some doctors within the civilian population as an experimental cure.

In addition to the quarantine procedures, the New Earth Government begins trying to isolate how the virus is introduced into the arcologies and watersheds. Brain scans are ordered on all workers with access to the water reclamation facilities and transit system infrastructure. While this identifies only a few blanks within the system, the Ministry of Information touts this as a major victory for the NEG and a huge amount of hype is put forth to convince the people that the government is doing everything it can to keep them safe. What isn't put forth is that the blanks who actually spread the virus were all most likely dead before the NEG even began looking for them.

MIGOU STRATEGY

While the New Earth Government is focused on containing the spreading virus, the Migou redouble their military efforts. The initial plan is to strengthen their forces along key lines, and then begin a slow offensive to hinder the NEG's ability to make war. Each of the steps taken by the Migou is calculated with contingencies and backup plans designed to obfuscate their actual goal. The truth is that these military actions are the prelude to a full-scale invasion of South America.

Across the front lines in China, the Migou began to reinforce their divisions with additional mecha that are modified to release the Migou Hemorrhagic Virus. Systems similar to those used by crop-dusters are added to the air units operating in the Asian theater. These systems are designed to tax the limited resources of New Earth Government forces for decontamination. These crop dusters also poison NEG infantry forces, as well as forces of the Rapine Storm, which aren't operating in environmentally sealed suits. Throughout Asia, the Migou assume a defensive posture focusing on containment and area denial tactics. Facing the NEG and the Rapine Storm, the Migou do not want to exert the necessary force to begin to gain lost ground.

Europe and North America see a similar build-up of Migou forces, though the Migou bolster their forces with an increased

number of blanks. The Migou begin to fire long-range missiles towards military targets, but detonate them in air or allow New Earth Government forces to utilize anti-missile defense systems to destroy them. The actual purpose of these strikes is to release the hemorrhagic virus in atmosphere and allow the virus to mix with the water cycle. High atmospheric winds blow the clouds great distances, allowing the virus to spread well outside of the strike zone. The transition into the water cycle spreads MHV across communities and cities outside of the protection of arcologies. When the virus settles onto the earth, it spreads like a fungus across the ground. This kills livestock and wild animals throughout both continents.

While building forces across the northern hemisphere, small elite squadrons are sent to destroy NEG weapon emplacements capable of targeting orbital units. Following the destruction of orbital platforms when the Migou first arrived, the NEG turned the satellites which had not yet been launched into ground based weapon emplacements. The Migou begin to target these emplacements to allow them to better position the Hive ship and release support satellites for orbital targeting and bombardment, if necessary. Though the Migou are unable to destroy the entire defense system, they are capable of creating blind spots in the network over Asia and South America large enough for satellites. The NEG maintains enough of the orbital emplacements to still target the Hive ship if it dropped into a closer orbit.

The second phase of the Migou offensive is to target training and manufacturing facilities. Due to brain scans before attending boot camp, the Migou are unable to introduce blanks into the training sites. Instead, the Migou uses blanks and Loyalist Nazzadi to wage terrorist-style attacks against recruiting and training grounds. These attacks include suicide bombings, homemade explosives, and attempted infection of base personnel with the hemorrhagic virus. The Migou use traditional methods for targeting manufacturing facilities, destroying several factories that make parts to go into military equipment and armor. The military presence surrounding top-secret projects keeps the Engel project unharmed by the Migou attacks, but the resupply of gaskets, armor plating, and parts to repair the mecha divisions is hindered. These interruptions are not severe enough to slow the manufacture of new power armor suits, but cause supply line shortages to the fronts.

In addition to their war machine, the Migou begin slowly obtaining information from their moles in the Office of Internal Security (OIS). They began to collect information about the Cults and known strongholds for the Esoteric Order of Dagon. Knowing that the Cults are just as susceptible to the hemorrhagic virus as the New Earth Government, the Migou begin plans for targeted infection. By limiting the mortal cultists' ability to call on the Old Ones, the Migou believe that they will be able to create a large enough window to finish the Aeon War victoriously before anything else like the avatar of Hastur come into this world. The process for gathering this information is very slow and careful, to prevent the Migou agents from drawing attention to themselves and the possibility of undergoing evaluation.

The last step before the Migou are ready to launch their offensive is to move a mechanized division out from the Migou northern bases due north of Chicago. The New Earth Government dependency on a centralized command structure makes Chicago the lynchpin for the military conquest of North America. When NEG scouts report the buildup of forces, the New Earth Government believes that the Migou are about to launch a strong offensive against North America, starting with Chicago. Troops are moved quickly to attack the Migou before their plan can be put into action. The New Earth Government launches a devastating attack and the Migou forces fall back against the raging horde of humanity – exactly as the bugs had planned.

TIME LINE OF MILITARY ACTIONS

Here is a general timeline of the Migou's military plans.

- T - 0 – Case Zero
- T + 30-60 days – Military build up in Northern Hemisphere. Initial reports of active use of biological weapons in military actions by the Migou against NEG forces.
- T + 45-60 days – Strike teams are sent to eliminate anti-satellite platforms.
- T + 60 days – Attacks are launched against training and manufacturing facilities. All attacks by blanks and Nazzadi forces utilize civilian weapons and improvised explosive devices. Military attacks against manufacturing facilities.
- T + 75 days – Migou build up north of Chicago.
- T + 90 days – Launch of South America campaign.

MIGOU ADVANCES DURING THE PLAGUE

After the Migou reinforce their lines and start the probing attacks against the New Earth Government, their true offensive begins. The Migou have quietly built-up forces in Antarctica using blinds and are in constant communication with their North American counterparts. Once the word is passed down that NEG forces have begun the march against the Migou feint, they unleash hell from the south. The Migou presence in South America has previously been a slow and steady push. When the full offensive comes and several armored divisions are sent into the area, the Migou quickly overwhelm the NEG forces stationed in Southern Argentina and Chile. The New Earth Government base in Buenos Aires scrambles to respond as the Migou swarm past the front lines. As the Migou launch their offensive, they take advantage of the holes in the anti-satellite systems and launch satellites from the Hive Ship to settle into a medium Earth orbit (MEO). These satellites begin orbital kinetic bombardment of Buenos Aires and Rio de Janeiro. The strikes against Buenos Aires target NEG military assets, though the Rio de Janeiro attacks target sites immediately along the coast and the shock waves from the blasts are believed to penetrate the ocean floor.

With the sudden attack by the Migou forces in South America and use of kinetic bombardment, the New Earth Government scrambles to rebuild weapon emplacements in order to again protect South America. The Migou turn away from heavily occupied areas, spreading over the jungles and mountains, building a military line stretching from a hundred miles south of Buenos Ai-

res to Lima. Radar shows the Migou dropping huge numbers of blanks into the Chilean Andes with digging equipment and prefabricated shelters. Behind the line, the Migou begin the process of collecting and Assimilating all of the Humans – and executing the Nazzadi – now in their controlled area.

Engel units are scrambled and air dropped into position to slow the locust-swarm of Migou forces. With the shortage of supplies in Buenos Aires for conventional mecha, the Engel units see more combat time than normal. During these engagements, several pilots report that their Engels are exposed to the Migou virus. Pilots whose Engels have their environmental protection systems pierced report an increase in headaches and that the Engels exhibit seepage of a clear, musky-scented fluid, but no other side-effects from exposure. It is determined that the fluid seepage is non-threatening. Samples of the fluid are sent back to research facilities for further testing.

Once the Migou draw the new border, it's up to their forces in South America to hold it. With regular reinforcements from Antarctica and the Hive ship, the Migou forces do not give ground easily. Instead the line becomes fluid as the Migou fall back in one area and push forward in another. The New Earth Government military is forced to re-assess what areas they want to maintain control of and what they are willing to sacrifice. The advance of Migou forces slowly crawl to a halt, controlling a broad swath of the inhospitable regions and the Andes, with the NEG maintaining control of their major cities and drawing the front to a halt nearly a hundred miles from the closest settlement.

In the mountains, Migou forces dig in quite literally. Within the high peaks, the Migou begin to drill into the cavernous reaches of the Andes. The underground exploration extends as far north as the tunnel systems connected to the Cave of Toquepala. Rumors begin to circulate amongst NEG forces in South America that the Migou are excavating the ruins of a city that belonged to the Great Race, or unearthing the corporeal form of an Old One from when it last walked on Earth.

While it is unclear what exactly the Migou are searching for, the Andes become the most defended parts of the Migou encampments in South America. From these mountain outposts, the Migou run sorties into NEG-controlled territory, but the Engel reinforced lines are able to hold their ground.

While their primary drive is in South America, the Migou also take advantage of the lack of anti-satellite weapon emplacements covering parts of Asia. The Migou launch several satellites into a MEO above western China, Tibet, and India. These satellites unleash kinetic bombardment attacks, focusing on the Plateau of Leng. These attacks devastate the ground, leaving huge craters and killing thousands of the gibbering hordes within the Rapine Storm. The true target of their attacks is the stronghold of the Dead King. The avatar of Hastur's defenses are able to diminish the force of the attacks, sending the hurtling space debris across the plain instead of into his place of power.



The Migou satellites are relatively short-lived, as the New Earth Government sees the devastating power that can be unleashed. Anti-satellite emplacements are reconstructed to close the gaps created by the Migou attacks and once again ensure the standoff of orbital control. The New Earth Government also commissions additional mobile emplacements capable of targeting satellites in low Earth orbit, as the Migou had proven capable of deploying satellites with little warning. There is discussion within the NEG command about targeting, but not destroying, the Migou satellite over Asia which is currently raining death upon Rapine Storm forces. However, the possible casualties if the satellite was reassigned to an NEG military target outweigh the possible benefit of eliminating Rapine Storm forces.

HOW THE PLAGUE AFFECTS THE CULTS

Nearly as important to the Migou as culling the population down to a manageable number is the annihilation of the Cults which are spreading the Old Ones' influence. Using information gained from agents inside the Office of Internal Security and the Federal Security Bureau, the Migou target Cult strongholds as they release the Hemorrhagic Virus. These attacks range in efficacy but include everything from the Children of Chaos down to small cults just coming onto the FSB watch lists. Because these attacks are also hitting civilian targets, the OIS and FSB do not register that the cults are the ones being targeted.

Within the arcologies, the enforced quarantine by the New Earth Government thrusts many cults into prolonged proximity between members. This has the benefit of ensuring cross-infection and several small sects, such as groups of the Blood Brigade, are simply wiped out. Larger groups are more diverse and they lose a few members, but the sect continues on. When blanks begin targeting the Dionysus Clubs, the contagion spreads into the wealthy and elite. Many of these people have the power and influence to see an arcanotherapist immediately, and they are purged of the hemorrhagic virus before spreading it. These experiences shake the faith of a few of the lower circle members who have not been fully initiated yet.

Outside the arcologies, the virus runs rampant. The already weakened Church of the Earth Mother suffers losses not only in their mortal cultists, but also in many of the animals with which they are attuned. As the virus enters the water system and mutates, it kills the local fauna and begins crossing species. Deer and other prey animals begin dying, and many of the normal scavengers die from eating the diseased flesh.

The Disciples of Death's Shadow are hit the hardest of the major Cults. With exposure to the virus on all levels, from their front line positions working with the Rapine Storm, to their influence and vice peddling within the arcologies, the Cult sees casualties of nearly forty percent. While they are widespread and able to avoid the cross-infection which faces many of the smaller sects getting aide from the Death Shadows, they are found primarily in the large population centers where the Migou strike hardest with the virus. The high-ranking Death Shadows who have infiltrated the NEG government's highest levels are able to get travel

and diplomatic visas allowing them to travel between quarantine zones. Some of these passes are issued by politicians under duress, as the politicians hear that rumors of recordings of their dark deeds may come to the light.

The Migou Hemorrhagic Virus also provides recruitment potential for the Death Shadows. As news of the virus spreads, and the cheery reports from the Ministry of Information are undermined by first-hand experiences of terror, many NEG citizens start pushing the boundaries of vice. The quarantines create a very dull life after the first few weeks, with cabin fever setting in from never leaving the house. Once the zones are sealed and citizens are allowed to move around within their zones, Death Shadow recruiters begin to slowly introduce harder-edged recreational drugs, and whisper dark secrets into the drug-addled minds of a scared populace. Soon, many of those who had previously been on the edge, having kinky fetishes or desires, are acting out those desires while in a drug induced haze. While some of these people believe that the acts are just hallucinations and dreams, others come out of the haze in full awareness of what they had done. Though many of these people do not join the Disciples of Death's Shadow directly, their actions continue the mission of degrading humanity's will and preparing the world for the return of the Old Ones.

The Children of Chaos are impacted through their integration throughout the Chrysalis Corporation. As employees within the arcologies come to work and spread the virus amongst them, the hemorrhagic virus climbs up the corporate ladder. This leads to infections within many of the para-psychics and sorcerers, as well as acolytes preparing to undergo the Rite. Several of the Genesis Pits become the final resting places for ritual groups which attempt the Rite of Transfiguration with either the sorcerers or the recruit infected by the virus. Though the Rite, if successful, will purge the infection from a nascent Dhohanoid, there are several accidents where the ritual is disrupted by a sorcerer fainting part way through and unleashing the cosmic forces improperly, or the merging being corrupted and a madness-struck Dhohanoid killing several people before the fire team can put it down.

Beyond the direct effects of the virus on the Children of Chaos, the quarantine is a double-edged sword for the Chrysalis Corporation. It means that their agents at distant outposts are able to act more freely against incursions by the Eldritch Society, as the Office of Internal Security and Special Services face limitations on crackdowns. It also means that moving resources becomes much more difficult and the lock-downs within arcologies create difficulties for containing the more monstrous tendencies of the Dhohanoids when they are under stress. Covering up the Dhohanoid population within a single arcology becomes a huge source of stress for the upper management of the Corporation. The Chrysalis Corporation Info-Sec teams have their hands full, breaking into NEG medical databases and inserting names of victims in the plague files. In truth, many of these are hapless mortals who pushed a bored Dhohanoid into a murderous rage. Luckily, the ashes of a plague victim look very similar to the ashes of someone who has been rended and half-devoured.

The Rapine Storm takes heavy casualties when the Migou begin releasing the virus in atmosphere and allow it to fall like a poisonous rain across Australia and Asia. Tens of thousands of mortal cultists die in the months following the attacks, though the Disciples of the Rapine Storm barely notice. In the beginning they simply feed on their own, but as others grow sick and die from the same plague, huge pyres are formed and hundreds of bodies are burned each night. Because the Migou built the virus to affect Humans and Nazzadi, the host of otherworldly creatures within the Rapine Storm are unharmed.

With the deaths of a large portion of the mortals within the Rapine Storm, the ravenous horde is forced to slow its expansion. The virus curtails the number of pilots for their dilapidated mecha and weaken the survivors who are thrown into combat often while still fighting the effects of the virus in their bodies. Additionally, many of the ritual circles which work without stopping to bring more creatures from across the void are shattered and their replacements lay dying all around them. Other creatures come across mutated and diseased as the magic shifts with the poor health of many in the circle. These ancient horrors ooze with bile and puss from open sores, creating a new set of nightmares for NEG soldiers along the front lines.

In the seas, the Esoteric Order of Dagon is protected from many of the ravages of the virus. The ocean saltwater diffuses and destroys the majority of the virus which has been mixed with the water cycle. The Deep Ones and their Hybrid offspring are all immune to the hemorrhagic virus, though the mortal worshipers within their cities still occasionally succumb to the disease. Along the coastline, intermixed with mortal society is where the Esoteric Order faces its heaviest casualties. Among the Church of All, huge swaths of the uninitiated members fall to MHV, the same as the rest of the population. Within the initiates, many bargain on the service they have given to the Deep Ones in order to be allowed to enter the hidden cities. Elsewhere, initiates in the throes of Stage II infection overdose on Harmony, riding out their last minutes completely in touch with the ocean and their deep masters.

The kinetic bombardment off the coast of Rio de Janeiro results in the destruction of an Esoteric Order of Dagon city, killing thousands of Deep Ones, hybrids, and their mortal worshipers in one of the most decisive strikes against them yet. The devastation spreads across the coastline as tidal waves surge up from explosions. Shockwaves are felt up to fifty miles away, but there are no geological events such as earthquakes.





Life for the Eldritch Society is very similar to that of the cults which are hiding from the New Earth Government amidst normal society. While many of them can blend in better than the psychotic and delusional cultists, the threat of contamination is much greater. As the lorekeepers and other researchers look at the medical data for the Migou Hemorrhagic Virus, it becomes clear that if someone is infected and got into one of the training areas, the loss of a training group could be devastating to the small organization. Unlike the Children of Chaos, who can lose several Genesis Pits with only mild regret, the loss of a dozen Tagers could be a setback of months of work. The training grounds undergo a self-enforced quarantine, even before the New Earth Government starts their enforcement of them.

Amongst the non-Tagers in the Society, caution is suggested for all face-to-face meetings. Communication through the Lorekeeper Network becomes the standard operating procedure for everyone within the arcologies. Packs of Tagers trapped within the arcology quarantine zones find themselves coming toe-to-toe with groups of Dhohanoids sealed in with them. Despite the caution taken, reports of monsters fighting one another quickly makes the news and OIS agents are sent in to investigate.

THE CURE AND HOW IT WORKS

Six months after Patient Zero is discovered, New Earth Government researchers still search for an effective cure, one that would not kill a patient from a sympathetic infection. The NEG's Army Medical Research Institute for Infectious Diseases has been working around the clock since the initial discovery of the virus. AMRIID's teams are the first to identify the precursor infection and confirm the link between Stage I and Stage II infection.

Traditional inoculation methods, utilizing inert strains of the virus – such as those used for immunizing against influenza – do not work with the Migou Hemorrhagic Virus. Patients register similar side effects to the influenza vaccine, as expected since Stage I MHV shows common symptoms. The problem is that one in six patients then progress to Stage II as if they had been infected by a virulent strain.

Priia Oleynick is the lead researcher on the team that discovers the cure. Her team takes blood samples from infected Nazzadi and introduce it to samples of healthy Migou tissue. As expected, the Migou tissue proves immune to the virus. What is unexpected is that the Migou fungal metabolism begins to produce protein structures which bond to infected Nazzadi T-cells. When these T-cells are introduced into infected tissue samples, they purge the virus without further damaging the tissue.

Identical testing using Human T-cells is tried, but the Migou proteins overwhelm the Human tissue and begin to feed on it. It is postulated that Nazzadi DNA, which was engineered by the Migou to be an improvement on the basic systems which nature had granted humanity, had genetic markers which Migou DNA recognized. Through the same method that the Migou genetic memories were passed between generations, the Migou were able to recognize their own creations at a cellular level.

Oleynick's team begin synthesizing the proteins for wider testing. They successfully introduce the modified Nazzadi DNA into Human patients. Because the Migou Hemorrhagic Virus is capable of rapidly mutating, strains from around the world are collected and introduced to patients before an announcement is made. Oleynick's team ultimately creates the Migou Immunogenic Inoculation (MII). The MII has an additional effect of preventing nearly all virally-induced infections by encapsulating the virus and rapidly developing new antigens.

As the inoculation is synthesized in large enough doses to begin treating the global population, the New Earth Government begins mandatory immunization of all military personnel. Buried within the enlistment agreement is sufficient legal text for the NEG to effectively shove a needle full of anything they want in the arm of each soldier, provided it is to prevent a clear and present danger to the military. Thousands of soldiers are inoculated before the information leaks out that Migou and Nazzadi DNA are being forcibly introduced to the Human genome. The Ministry of Information tries to keep the news from spreading, though rumors of conspiracy and treachery abound. Soon enlisted men and officers begin to refuse the injection, demanding that further testing be done to determine what the lasting effects of MII might be.

Publicly, the New Earth Government is divided over the issue. Millions clamor for immediate inoculation, begging for a cure from the Migou Hemorrhagic Virus. Others fear that the cure is simply a means for the NEG to slowly change humanity into Nazzadi, or worse, something like the Migou. There are also whispers that say introducing Migou DNA into Humans and Nazzadi was exactly what the Migou planned when they released the Hemorrhagic Virus, and that they actually plan to exert psychic control over all of us.

The Chrysalis Corporation sides with many of these public outcries, calling for more testing before immunization is made mandatory for all of society. They suggest allowing individuals who want the inoculation to be allowed to volunteer for clinical trials, and thus provide the government with a broader test pool to determine any long-term side effects. The Chrysalis Corporation partners with AMRIID in the clinical trials. Secretly, the Children of Chaos have discovered that something in the inoculation prevents the Rite of Transfiguration. It was believed that further research is necessary to find out what parts of the Migou/Nazzadi blending are causing the ritual to fail.

Along with the Children of Chaos, the Eldritch Society has concerns over the inoculation. When MII begins to be spread through the military, the Eldritch Society obtains samples and administers them to a few recruits who have undergone the Union. The result is the Tagers become deathly ill for several days, incapable of shifting back to mortal form. A similar process happens to any Dhohanoids which receive an injection. The introduction of Migou DNA makes them violently ill, and both the Tagers and Dhohanoids begin to exude a fetid smelling, clear fluid from their skin. After two to three days of illness and in-

ability to eat solid food, the creatures seem to regain their health and are again capable of returning to a mortal form. Scholars within the Eldritch Society believe that the Ta'ge symbiont is incompatible with the Migou form and the illness was caused by the regenerative properties of the creature fighting against the rapidly adapting proteins in the Migou DNA. While the inoculations do no lasting harm to the Tagers or Dhohanoids, both groups are highly anxious about what it might mean for the rest of humanity and their secret agendas if the injection is introduced to the general populace.

The New Earth Government does bow to public pressure, and sides with the Chrysalis Corporation that further clinical testing needs to be done before mandating the inoculation. Those who wish to volunteer for the injection are given it on the caveat that their medical records are to be used for research. All quarantined individuals are told that they must either accept the inoculation or remain in quarantine until they have proven to not be symptomatic. The ability to treat Stage II victims is a major coup for AMRIID and the Ministry of Information begins to spin coverage of these lucky survivors brought from the brink of death back to perfect health.

WHAT HAPPENS NEXT

With a cure spread on the news, and support from the Chrysalis Corporation, the New Earth Government generates the vaccine for widespread inoculation as needed. Slowly, the quarantines begin to be lifted around the world. The Ministry of Information begins to spin full media coverage to preemptively combat survivor's guilt from setting in. Monuments are erected in parks and the Office of the Global President calls for a day of mourning and remembrance. During the speeches, a common thread of Human resilience and the commitment to overcome the Migou is heard. In combination with the news that the outer colonies are still alive and strong, the NEG rallies humanity and raises hope that they would one day be victorious.

Further coverage of the Migou Immunogenic Inoculation makes the positive side effects common knowledge. MII grants complete immunity to all viral infections, so public support begins to build behind it. While the NEG still cannot make inoculation mandatory until clinical tests are completed, they authorize any willing citizen to receive the injection. Talk shows are filled with people who have received the injection, without any adverse side effects. Many use their five minutes of fame to call out those refusing to get the injection – labeling them as the fundamentalists of the previous century who refused polio vaccines.

The Blood Brigade uses the inoculation as a rallying cry for Human purists. Anti-inoculation rallies begin and quickly grow violent as members of the Blood Brigade spread through the crowd. Once the violence starts, many of the other rally attendees jump into the fray, causing riot squads to be deployed across the globe at different events. In other cities, Brigade members attack and kill humans who receive the inoculation, labeling them race traitors. Hate crimes against Nazzadi rise as information about how the cure was discovered come to light. While

the Federal Security Bureau launches investigations into these attacks, it becomes clear that not all of them are from cultists, but include several garden variety vigilantes and psychopaths who have found a common cause.

The Migou soon capture soldiers from the front lines who have received the inoculation and begin their own research. Their scientists all reach the same conclusion. Any newly engineered virus would need to be capable of harming the Migou, in order to pose a danger to any Human or Nazzadi that has received the inoculation. Other researchers discover that the presence of Migou DNA may create new opportunities for them and unlock some of the limitations the Migou have been facing in their research and development on their version of the Engel project. While some viruses are no longer a viable solution, the Migou command structure confirmed that their final solution in case the mortals managed to awaken the Old Ones is still viable.

Within the shadows of the New Earth Government and across the globe, the worshipers of the Old Ones realize that the Migou are a direct threat to their plans. The mindless hordes of the Rapine Storm do not have the discipline to structure an organized attack, but they focus their efforts and attacks on the Migou forces, only attacking NEG forces when there are no Migou around to kill. This break from fighting gives the New Earth Government time to rebuild their supply levels and begin to push for air superiority in Asia. While it isn't a definitive victory for the NEG, they make substantial strides in gaining an even footing with the Migou in the skies.

The Children of Chaos aid the Rapine Storm by rebuilding the shattered summoning circles and providing sorcerers and parapsychics. As they have done before when bringing the Ruined King across, some of the most powerful sorcerers within the Children gather and enact a ritual which they believe will hide them from the sight of the Migou. Reports soon come from the Federal Security Bureau of packs of monsters, Dhohanoids of all types, heading into the Arctic regions. Publicly, the Chrysalis Corporation pushes their full support behind the NEG in developing new methods of tracking Migou agents which have been Assimilated and released back into society. Behind closed doors, they begin experimenting on blanks with rituals to find a way to use one as a ritual focus for others, like a living voodoo doll.

NEW ASSET: MIGOU IMMUNOGENIC INOCULATION (1)

Your character has received the Migou Immunogenic Inoculation and is now immune to the effects of the Migou Hemorrhagic Virus. In addition, your character is immune to all viral infections, such as HIV, influenza, and the rhinovirus. This protection does not extend to diseases caused by outsider creatures such as those within the Rapine Storm, Dhohanoids or Tagers.

Characters with the Dhohanoid or Tager Asset or Outsider Tainted Drawback may not choose this Asset.

Deep under the sea, the Esoteric Order of Dagon acknowledges the destruction of their city as a temporary setback. The elder Deep Ones meet with several Spawn in the Atlantic Ocean and begin to lay out a plan. Far under the current Migou settlement in Antarctica is the remains of an ancient city from before the first Migou trip to Earth. Some of the Spawn have been to the city before the Migou returned and they believed that it would be possible to drill in from beneath the ice and stone to enter the landing station of the Migou. If they can succeed, it may cripple the Migou and give the Dagonites a reprieve to finish their search for R'lyeh.

EVENTS TO PLAY

THE BEGINNING OF THE END

While Case Zero was the first sign of the Migou Hemorrhagic Virus discovered by the New Earth Government, the Migou were experimenting all around the globe on small settlements. In these remote towns and villages, the Migou sent in blanks infected with MHV, but they also stayed nearby and watched. Using wards to keep them from sight, their researchers moved from house to house in the evening, taking biometric readings of the population and recording the exact pattern of contagion. Ex-

periments like this are run in Russia, eastern Europe, the Pacific Northwest, and South America.

NEG Military Games

For most military Characters, these events will be something that they hear about on news reports or field intelligence. While the Migou are focusing on small outposts, it is possible for a group of scouts or forward recon to come across the Migou researchers on their way to or from a settlement. This could play out as a traditional battle between Migou and NEG forces, but the characters should notice that there are non-military Migou units attempting to flee while their military escort deals with the NEG.

NEG Government Agent Games

This style of play is one of the best suited for these events. The OIS and FSB are being called in to investigate and provide support to AMRIID. The first cases discovered are actually covered up by OIS officials, as AMRIID collects the disease for possible use as a biological weapon. When it becomes clear that the virus isn't natural and has possible Migou roots, the OIS begins to lock down all information about the virus. Characters can be the ones who first discover the virus and deliver the samples to AMRIID or get involved in the politics of euthanizing a settlement



with healthy citizens amidst the plague victims as higher-ups stress the need for containment. OIS para-psychics may even stumble across the traces of Migou wards and lead their team face-to-face with the enemy.

Arcane Underground Games

During the initial flow of events, there is not much to interact with for Characters operating within the arcane underground. It is possible that some of the Characters may have family in remote areas that is caught in the initial experiments. Shortly after the experiments begin though, and plague victims start dying, there is a plethora of ritual components that can be collected from the dead and dying.

Eldritch Society Games

As these events don't fall directly into the Shadow War, most Eldritch Society Characters will have their hands full with other problems. Depending on what parts of the world they are active in, packs could be sent to investigate the unnatural destruction of an entire town, just to ensure that Dhohanoids weren't involved.

Cult Games

Like the arcane underground, many cults will come into these events on the back end. Gathering components or performing dark rites in a plague-stricken area is possible, depending on the type of cult. Many of the less powerful cults will not know anything about the plague until the first cases of MHV break on the news.

TRAPPED!

As the Migou Hemorrhagic Virus begins to spread through the arcologies and military bases, emergency services start doing the best they can to contain it. Gymnasiums and schools transform to portable decontamination zones, with plastic tarps, airlocks and tunnels traveling between containment rooms. Many citizens are overcome by shock as their quiet lives are turned into a horror movie of biological warfare. Curfews set in and people are ordered to stay in their homes, an order which most are very willing to follow. Then, one day they wake up and everything is gone. The government has removed all of the portable quarantines and sealed the arcology. They are trapped inside.

NEG Military Games

Military personnel operating on the front lines need to adapt to decontamination procedures. As they return from engagements, or any time in the field, they go through hours of chemical sprays, scrubs, starting at the out layer of their armor or mecha, all the way down to skin scrubs leaving them raw – all to know that it will happen over again, each time they go out. Characters may receive letters from home, where family members are in the sealed arcology sections. Support personnel operating in the arcologies, or troops on leave, may find themselves locked in with the citizens who normally live there. This can be a change of pace for many mecha pilots who are used to having forty tons of armor between them and the world.

NEG Government Agent Games

While many of the government agencies pull their people out of the arcologies just before lock down, some agents are in the middle of investigations and need to be left inside. Others face possible infection and their superiors are ordered to not give them the call. Characters may receive tips from fellow agents and work against the clock to get out of the arcology before everything gets locked down. Alternatively, they could be sent into sealed sections to investigate reports of supernatural phenomena or monsters in the streets.

Characters in this level of game may also come face-to-face with the orders to terminate an arcology level which has been overrun by infection. They could be the ones who make the call on when a block is too far gone to recover.

Arcane Underground Games

When the order to seal the arcologies is given, the black market begins to swell with demands from different people mostly wanting a shortcut out, but some wanting in. The arcane underground has connections with smugglers who may assist in transporting people in and out of the arcology zones, or Characters may find themselves pulled into performing rituals for people. Many within the underground learn that a connection to the forces from beyond can save you from the virus, and promises of transformations or the actual rites can be made. Characters wishing to be more philanthropic, so as to have bargaining chips for later, may perform purification rites to save those who became infected.

Eldritch Society Games

Within the Eldritch Society, Tagers trapped inside the arcologies will need to either control their impulses or find themselves drawing attention from the New Earth Government while inside a confined space. Luckily, NEG resources are being taxed maintaining the quarantine and ferreting out the other horrible monsters trapped inside with them. Packs may also find themselves in conflict with Dhohanoids, or needing to protect the civilians trapped with them from murderous psychopaths.

Other members of the Eldritch Society will be just as busy, like the Administrative network providing support for packs that are in the area, or Operators who are being called on to gather information from the virtual world to aid remote teams. In a world full of plague victims, the Chrysalis Corporation is actively increasing their recruiting for experimentation. This can create plenty of adventure for Society members as they try to keep humanity safe.

Cult Games

The quarantine will bring out the best qualities of sociopaths forced into tight quarters with one another. Depending on the nature of the cult, the Characters may be forced to work together as the machinations of other cult members are driven onward by psychosis and turn against one another. Like the arcane underground, many cultist Characters may find themselves

performing rites for others to use as bargaining chips, or recruit new followers who have indulged in the sin and vice offered by the Disciples of Death's Shadow.

O QUE NÃO MATA ENGORDA

"That which doesn't kill us, makes us stronger." Buenos Aires needs all the help they can get to survive the onslaught of Migou forces pouring out of Antarctica. With the hemorrhagic fever in full swing, and military intelligence pointing to the threat northward, the New Earth Government is initially caught unprepared for the attacks. Humanity must pull together or fall under the storm.

NEG Military Games

For military Characters, now is the time to lock and load. Characters may have been sent to South America from the active front lines in an effort by Command to keep troops fresh and unburdened by excessive combat fatigue, or they could be from South America and used to the small skirmishes that happen from time to time with Migou forces near Punta Arenas and the Falklands. With the full weight of the Migou war machine pushing in, Characters will be scrambled into position for the long fight. Their victories will help drive back the front lines and their losses bring the bugs ever closer.

Light infantry, scouts, and forward recon may be sent into the Andes to investigate the Migou encampments. Sneaking through the tunnels, they will be all alone in the dark. Deep under the mountains may lay ruins of cities from the Great Race, shoggoths which had slept through the ages, or other horrors. Bringing back intelligence for the NEG could spell the difference between victory or defeat in the Aeon War.

NEG Government Agent Games

Intelligence operatives, para-psychics, and sorcerers can be sent into the southern most parts of South America, near the front lines before the invasion. Their mission is to ascertain whether the Migou plan to take advantage of the chaos throughout the rest of the world and attack. Talking with natives and inhabitants of the southern towns won't reveal much immediately. When the team stumbles across a Migou blind being moved into position, they have to evade pursuit and get a message back to the NEG SOACOM before everything is lost.

Arcane Underground Games

South America's jungles offer a wide variety of rare plants and animal specimens to be used in rituals, and the over-teeming population makes it nearly impossible for the NEG to crack-down on smugglers. One of their largest black markets is in Rio de Janeiro, where they have access to an ocean port and millions of people to hide behind in their dealings. When the kinetic bombardment begins off the coast, there are tidal waves and flooding of the ocean front property, including the house of a prominent member of the underground. Characters may want to collect some of the lost relics before he can recover them, or be hired to track down thieves who beat them to the idea.

Many of the mystical ruins which dot the landscape of South America are now also very close to the active war zone. Characters which have been sent out to find relics lost within the ruins may find themselves having to skirt past a military engagement.

Eldritch Society Games

The press of people in South America has made it a perfect recruiting spot for the Children of Chaos for years. Many Eldritch Society members have been fighting there to protect humanity from the depredations of the Cult. With the destruction of the coastline and cities, the Chrysalis Corporation sends in Humanitarian Aid Workers to help in the reconstruction. For every person that these workers save, two or three more are shuffled off to cargo containers to be used in experimentation. Characters will need to stop the Cult from preying on the disaster victims, while they stay off the radar themselves to avoid being targeted by sweeps from officials or trigger-happy military personnel.

Cult Games

Depending on the cult the Characters are in, the invasion could be a direct conflict (Esoteric Order of Dagon) or another distraction from their work. If the Characters are in South America collecting ritual components or unwilling recruits to be slaughtered, they may find themselves caught behind enemy lines as the Migou swarm forward or in an active military zone when the NEG mobilizes. The Characters will find the military focused on the obvious threat of the Migou, and may be able to take more liberties than normal in town. They may also have associates in Buenos Aires or Rio de Janeiro who are trapped in the kinetic bombardment.

The Children of Chaos have a large presence in both cities. With the heavy losses by the Esoteric Order of Dagon in Rio, the Children will be extending their aid to the cult of the fish god in rebuilding. The active fighting by the NEG will also further distract them from Buenos Aires, for Dhohanoid strike teams to range out through the city and abroad.

CAST OF CHARACTERS

AGENT YA-MEI CHIU

FSB Agent-in-Charge

An FSB veteran in the Critical Incident Response Division, Agent Chiu has seen her share of entrails strewn across pavement. She has a solid jaw-line and wears straight cut, black-on-black suits. An attractive woman, no one would ever use the term beautiful to describe her. Ya-Mei prefers to work in silence for the first few minutes when arriving on a scene, and then will speak of what she sees. She can be acerbic to anyone foolish enough to interrupt her initial impressions.

Agent Chiu is the Agent-in-Charge of the initial investigations into Case Zero. She has a gift for investigation and determining the root cause of any circumstance, though Chiu has difficulty letting go of cases. When presented with a new problem, she jumps in and scours every detail before preparing her reports.

After preparing her reports, she won't give up the matter and continues to push and prod much to the dismay of everyone around her. Chiu never knows when to "drop" a subject, either in her professional or personal relationships.

Virtue/Flaw: Inquisitive/Brooding

Experience: Veteran

Noteworthy Attributes: Intellect 9, Perception 9

Noteworthy Skills: Bureaucracy: Master, Education: Expert, Law Enforcement: Master, Science, Life: Expert

Noteworthy Qualities: Authority (3), Driven, Duty (2)

ADRIAN HAEHN

Arcology Governor, Seattle

Dr. Adrian Haehn, PhD is an immaculately dressed older gentleman, who wears tailored suits that are timeless rather than cutting-edge fashion. A Seattle native, he served in the New Earth Government Armed Forces during the First Arcanotech War as an Intelligence officer. After the war, he parlayed the connections he had made into local politics. Appointed to the position of arcology governor, in 2084, Haehn has seen the arcology through several difficult moments with a calm, grandfatherly charm. What only those closest to him know is that the "good, old boy" act conceals a razor thin patience. He has used his personal security force and connections with the NEG military to eliminate individuals who have caused him political difficulties.

Virtue/Flaw: Reserved/Vindictive

Experience: Veteran

Noteworthy Attributes: Intellect 8, Presence 9

Noteworthy Skills: Bureaucracy: Expert, Business: Master, Savoir-Faire: Master

Noteworthy Qualities: Authority (3), Elite, Shrewd

JAKAYA

Chrysalis Corporation PR Executive

Jakaya draws attention immediately to himself whenever he walks into a room. It was little surprise to any of his employers when the Nazzadi came through the transformation as a Vas-siamon Dhohanoid. Now, the Public Relations specialist spends his time weaving elaborate stories and simple lies, that cover up all manner of indiscretions made by other Dhohanoids. He has a creativity to his stories that is unmatched, and all of the lies fall into place around him. There have unfortunately also been times when his own hungers have necessitated stories themselves to cover up the sudden disappearance of attractive political aides.

Virtue/Flaw: Imaginative/Greedy

Experience: Veteran

Noteworthy Attributes: Presence 13, Perception 9

Noteworthy Skills: Misdirect: Expert, Persuade: Expert, Savoir-Faire: Master, Seduction: Master

Noteworthy Qualities: Dhohanoid, Elite, Wealth (3)

LT. LEONORE SWANEPOLE

Engel Pilot, Squad Leader

The daughter of former Field Marshal Aura Swanepole, Leonore was born shortly after the end of the First Arcanotech War. Leonore never met her father, only knowing that he had died in the last days of the war. Growing up in her mother's shadow, it was always expected that she would serve in the New Earth Government military. The young Swanepole never wanted to be given special treatment for being her mother's daughter and volunteered for the nascent Engel training program. Since she was paired with her Engel, Leonore has proven to everyone around her that she is a strong and capable woman.

Athletically built and well-tanned, Leonore's greatest moment was when her mother was forced to resign her command. The lieutenant is estranged from the former Field Marshal, and has never known how to fit in except through over-confidence and bravado.

Virtue/Flaw: Driven/Insecure

Experience: Experienced

Noteworthy Attributes: Agility 8, Perception 8

Noteworthy Skills: Armed Fighting: Adept, Dodge: Expert, Fighting: Expert (Focused in Engel Fighting), Marksman: Expert (Focused in Engel Marksman), Observation: Adept, Stealth: Expert, Surveillance: Adept

Noteworthy Qualities: Code (2), Damaged, Duty, Engel Synthesis Interface



The Widow skittered to a stop on the rooftop, quieter than a giant humanoid spider-thing should be. Black chitin melted back into flesh, mandibles retreated back into teeth, and Roy Romer immediately unholstered his 15mm CS-44 Enforcer. With him, if it wasn't one weapon, it was another.

He crouched down next to his friends. "Looks like it's contained to the building. Intel seems solid."

Next to him, a young man who one would lose in a snowstorm nodded. "If my source is right, they should be setting their explosives as we speak," added Mesta.

"Man, this is ridiculous." Sorena looked like a movie star going for a jog hoping the paparazzi were waiting. "Why would the Corporation want to stir up this kind of hornet's nest?"

"This sort of thing is only what we get to see. Imagine what other strings they're pulling," responded the White.

The Nazzadi took a sip of his energy drink - Turkey-Berry Blast. "But the Office of Infernal Spite? That's playing with fire. We don't even play with that kind of fire."

"Yes, but we're not a multinational corporation with money and influence up the yang." Roy habitually checked his clip. "I don't know how you can drink that stuff."

"What? It's like Thanksgiving in a can." Sorena, whose blood red eyes had never left the streets below, smirked. "And just in case anyone was wondering, they're all fair game. If it ain't a D-bag, it's mystically capable and 100% Child of Chaos."



Roy stood up and holstered his pistol. "Good news. We'd better get down there and take them out before those explosives get too set." Once again the black chitin came and Romer was the thing they called Thresh, crouched to jump across to the neighboring rooftop.

"Hey man, remember to save me one of the squishy guys." Sorena's smile suddenly turned terribly cruel. "I'll have questions for the lucky winner afterwards." The giant bat-like wings had already begun to sprout from his back. Soon, the tall bloodthirsty monstrosity they called Incubus leaped into the air.

Mesta simply stepped out over thin air and walked across. "Show-offs."

.

Like all of their surprise attacks, it was only surprise until Incubus got overzealous and needed to kill things.

Fortunately, the Children of Chaos hadn't sent a kill-team to wire a building to explode. There were a few Dhohanoid specialists, along with some hitters to keep everyone safe. Fortunately, a few Ramachese, a Namarok, and

an Elib weren't going to be enough to dissuade this crew. Mesta dropped a gravity well the minute the fighting broke out for real and it went downhill from there.

Unfortunately, Sorena didn't get the still-living captive he wanted. But, truth be told, it was his own fault. He was so in the moment, he never even noticed that he'd ripped both the arms off the para-psychic and beaten the sorcerer to death with them.

C'est la vie.

.

Roy came in from dragging another body out back. Sorena, still the Vampire, loaded the parts of one of three bodies

that were left into a plain black trash bag. Mesta refused to touch the bodies physically, so he used his telekinesis instead, making a 'yuck' face as he did.

Roy moved to deal with the last corpse, one that was handily already in a cocoon of his own making. "Okay, we've got another three minutes before the guys they were meeting show up and about a minute past that before that tip that went in brings the OIS down around all our necks."

Sorena shifted back to his Nazzadi form and tied off the bag. "Dude, that's a lot of blood. Don't think they'll notice and freak?"

Mesta chortled out loud. "Maybe you should have thought of that before you boiled it all out of their veins and all over the floor. And the windows. And the walls."

"Don't forget the ceiling," added Sorena. "That'll keep 'em guessing."

The three began to drag their grim cargo out of the building and into the back alley. Fortunately, they'd already shot out all of the lights over the last few days, so it was under the cover of darkness.

Roy dropped the cocooned cadaver from his shoulder. "The point was to save the federal agents that were walking into a death trap, not to give them a cushy arrest with everything spelled out for them. They're going to live, so we've done our job."

A nearby access cover wiggled its way out of the ground, sliding across the concrete. An inhuman head with a monstrous mouth exited first. The rest of the Echo Tager followed, along with another.

Roy walked over. "Sorry to make you crawl through the sewers, guys. Take 'em away, but make it fast. Trouble's on the way."

The trio made their way out of the alley while the Echoes dragged the bodies below ground, ostensibly to dump them in the bay.

"We have some interesting friends," said Mesta, wiping off his hands. "And why are we cleaning this up anyways?"

"We don't want the Corporation to know we're helping out. This way, it could be any number of nasty characters in the arcane underground. It'll be a question instead of a sure-thing. If they figure out we're helping, it'll only get worse," answered Roy.

Hitting the sidewalk and walking at a brisk pace in the opposite direction from the bloody building, Sorena chuckled. "After all this time running from the Office of Internal Security, here we are."

"Seems natural," said Mesta. "We're all on the same team, right?"

Roy got that grim stare he so often got. "Why don't you shift and try telling them that."

chapter six

hamstrung

Starting in 2087, the Children of Chaos begin covert operations against the Office of Internal Security in order to hamper its investigations, long a thorn in the Cult's side. Spurred by an edict from the Director and the Blind Lady themselves, the cult prepares an assault to hamstringing the organization. The Eldritch Society, drawn in by the conflict, becomes a silent ally to the OIS in their fight against the Cult.

IMPETUS

Last year, the Congregation of the Earth Mother attempted to bring the end of the world a little closer by summoning their goddess, the Black Mother, to this planet. This plan, strongly backed by the Children of Chaos and the Director himself, was foiled when operatives of the Eldritch Society managed to get word to the New Earth Government's Office of Internal Security, the agency tasked with policing arcane law and protecting the inhabitants of the NEG from the horrors waiting beyond the walls of reality. The cavalry was called in, with everything from soldiers up to and including mecha, coming in force to stop the ritual that would bring the Old One into our plane of existence.

The Director was, inwardly, incensed at this failure, going so far as to "retire" a member of the Chrysalis Corporation Board of Directors. This group, comprised of some of the most powerful beings on the planet under his control, issued a memorandum to those working under them. In part, this document read, "the long-term plans of the Director and his Board are too important to be hampered by short-term hindrances like law enforcement and government." It further went on to make it clear that OIS was **not** to be allowed to interfere in such a way again.

The Circle, under the direction of the Blind Lady, issued a similar edict. Their cat-and-mouse games with the OIS had long been a source of amusement for Circle members, but this past action had cut too deep and derailed plans too long in the making. The time for play was over.

By the beginning of 2087, groundwork is being laid that would silently, subtly, and insidiously bring the machinery of the Office of Internal Security to a halt, one gear at a time.

OPENING SHOTS

The Children of Chaos develops a three-pronged plan of attack against the OIS. First, the cult will stall the momentum of Office of Internal Security operations through misdirection and red herring operations; second, a campaign to discredit and cast doubt on agents and employees of the OIS will reduce the organization's overall effectiveness; and finally, the normal day-to-day operations of the OIS will be hampered, lowering morale and generally gumming up the works. Infiltration, bribery, and outright coercion at all levels hasten the agency's decline.

Hamper

The first phase of the attack serves to check the advances the Office of Internal Security has been making against the Cult by forcing the agency to expend resources on useless investigations. Immediately upon implementation of this strategy, operations

believed to be under investigation by the OIS are suspended, allowing resources to be reallocated while teams investigating them take days or weeks to realize the game is already over. Other operations where the Children of Chaos have inside information on the agency's plans are allowed to continue, right up to the point where the OIS is to make a move against the Cult. At that point, all activities cease, anyone involved is reassigned to other tasks, and all evidence of the operation from the planning to its execution disappears.

Plans are also laid to confuse the agency. Complex schemes involving shell corporations, money laundering, influence peddling, and other markers of organized criminal activity are used to hide completely inconsequential activities. By the time the last layer of one such plot is peeled away, revealing nothing but a legitimate distribution network for low-end PCPUs and not the illegal tomes for which they are being investigated, the final accounting showed that the Office of Internal Security has wasted hundreds of thousands of Terranotes and thousands of hours in a huge joint operation with the Federal Security Bureau, with nothing to show for it. Setting the agency against itself is another core component of this strategy; a months-long undercover operation against a suspected cabal of illegal sorcerers is completely blown when a different OIS team receives orders to investigate and ultimately apprehend the undercover agents.

Hobble

The second prong of the campaign deals with the people of the OIS, as opposed to its activities. Initially, high priority targets, such as lead investigators and undercover agents the Children had uncovered, find themselves staring at the business end of internal affairs probes. Even when these probes result in no action against the agents at all, the atmosphere of distrust alone is enough to begin driving a wedge into the intense loyalty that was once an agency hallmark.

For targets deemed less vulnerable to this sort of smear job, psychological attacks are used to call the target's fitness or sanity into question. Disrupting an agent's sleep patterns, as simple as installing noisy neighbors or sabotaging the environmental controls, is a popular opening shot. While supernatural attacks on the targets themselves is not always an option, their friends and families are usually easy targets. While none of these things individually cause a target to crack, the combined damage of a thousand little cuts is usually enough to get an agent pulled off an assignment for evaluation and treatment.

The outbreak of the Migou Hemorrhagic Virus is a major boon to the Children in this endeavor – already a weapon designed to incapacitate the New Earth Government, its targeted use against the OIS is a natural. The fact that Dhohanoids are immune to MHV just makes it that much easier for them to spread it in its early stages, dripping a bit of infected material into a drink or incorporating it into something like lipstick or aftershave. Once MHV goes airborne, it is as simple as tranquilizing infected victims, dumping them into the ventilation systems of Office of Internal Security buildings, and deactivating the filtration systems.

Due to these efforts, the OIS has the highest casualties of any governmental agency due to the Migou Hemorrhagic Virus.

Harass

Similarly, targeting entire swaths of OIS employees is the third prong of the Children of Chaos attack. Disrupting the everyday operations of the agency doesn't have the immediate impact that derailing an investigation does, but over time the effects are titanic as morale plummets, tempers flare, and the workplace slowly becomes unbearable. A group of three or four cultists, nicknamed "gremlin teams" by their superiors, work their way into the service and support staff of Office of Internal Security buildings. Once established, they make life difficult in the building. Always careful to do a good job at whatever they've been hired to do in order to avoid suspicion, their diverse skill sets allow them to commit a wide range of minor sabotage.

It's always little things. One day, an entire floor is just a few degrees too warm, the next day a few too cool. The coffee is bitter and nigh undrinkable, or the decaf is swapped with regular. Lighting modules are too dim or too bright, and intermittently emit a high-pitched buzzing at times. Chairs break without warning; it happens so many times in one office that people start suspecting each other of sabotage. The gremlin team in question halts its activities as soon as they get word that vandalism is suspected, but their fear of an investigation never materializes - colleagues turn on each other as opposed to searching for a saboteur. As frustrations mount and tensions wear thin in OIS offices around the world, professional cohesion deteriorates.

HOW COULD THIS HAPPEN?

A number of higher-ups in the Office of Internal Security actually take notice of the pervasive disruption, and correctly divine that a concerted effort to undermine the agency is underway. Impaired intra-agency cooperation, brought about through the successes of the Children of Chaos, means that it is not until nearly the middle of the year that those with suspicions find others thinking similarly inside the organization. Meeting in secret, their first action is to figure out not how the saboteurs are getting into the OIS, but how they could have been operating so long with apparent impunity. No one doubts that the infiltrators, whoever they are, are smart and have vast resources at their disposal. However, that had always been the case back in their day. That's when they hit upon their massive institutional blind spot - counterintelligence.

Almost without exception, those suspicious are agents of the old school, men and women who had served in the clandestine services of their countries - back when there were countries to belong to. When the New United Nations morphed into the New Earth Government in 2059 as a response to the First Arcanotech War, the political and economic walls between nation-states dissolved much more quickly than the walls built over centuries by the paranoia of those working to keep secrets secret. In short, since the OIS had no peer globally that posed a threat to the organization *as a whole*, there was no reason to employ the scrupulous habits that made agencies like the GIA or the long-defunct

CIA of the United States such bastions of internal purity. Their internal defenses are designed to detect arcane influence, taint from Outsiders and the like, not the deep rooted and slow burning fuse set by the Children of Chaos.

Viewing their agency from this angle, the chilling logic of the Children's incursion isn't just an opportunistic strike, it's an inevitability. Institutional arrogance had left a key weakness to an assault on the establishment itself. It could have been anyone, they concluded, from a coalition of players in the arcane underground to an army of Esoteric Order of Dagon Hybrids trained specifically for the task.

They had dropped the ball, and no one was going to help them pick it back up. At least, that's what they thought.

THE SOCIETY TAKES NOTICE

As the Children of Chaos begin their operations, relations between the Eldritch Society and the Office of Internal Security are far from friendly. Their help in foiling the manifestation of the Black Mother last year was obtained anonymously, and for a very good reason. Still, the OIS is a useful ally and Society members genuinely respect the people of the agency.

The machinations against the OIS are discovered fairly early on, when an information source inside the agency goes quiet (see *Drawn In*). Evidence recovered during the investigation of the source's disappearance, along with recent reports of bungled raids and odd breakdowns in agency cooperation lead the Eldritch Society to the inescapable conclusion that the OIS itself is now a target of the Children of Chaos.

The decision to act on the agency's behalf is made swiftly. Garrett Paulson, a metamorphosed Tager who had arranged for the OIS' involvement in the confrontation with the Congregation the year previous, personally meets with the Society's most senior Tagers to ask for their permission and is given their full support. The OIS will now be another front in the Shadow War.

Eldritch Society assistance is wide-ranging, though by necessity covert. Investigations of importance to the Society are monitored and aid is given whenever possible, from pre-empting Cult interference to taking on the investigation itself if abandoned. Tagers, as usual, do the majority of the field work, but so much of the action happens behind the scenes that a concerted effort involving Society members of all types is needed. Society sorcerers and para-psychics secretly ward targets for arcane influence while tracking the attackers down. The Operator Network, an indispensable information source for operatives in the field, turns their attentions to supplementing OIS intelligence gathering and analysis; on more than one occasion, OIS agents receive anonymous messages with timely information while in the middle of an investigation.

Some effort is also made to protect the OIS internally. The Eldritch Society has few members inside the agency, but those that are there do their best to hire and promote Society opera-

tives trying to safeguard against sabotage. Members working on this front jokingly refer to their struggle as “the Janitor Wars,” as fighting the gremlin teams is sometimes as simple as fixing a light bulb or unclogging a toilet. Other times the term is far more literal, as gremlin teams engage in lethal combat against Eldritch Society members when discovered.

DRAWN IN

The Eldritch Society involves itself in what almost certainly will have eventually been the end of the agency when an unwitting source of theirs inside the Office of Internal Security, an insular and somewhat petty bureaucrat named Victor Harshaw, goes silent. During their investigation of his disappearance, Society operatives discover the depth and nature of the plot against the agency, and the danger posed to it by the Children of Chaos.

The Linchpin

Victor Harshaw was a bureaucrat in the OIS requisitions department. He wasn't a personable man, and certainly would never have progressed in his career if not for the fact that his system for resources manipulation was: a) the most efficient the logistics officers had ever seen, and b) utterly incomprehensible to anyone but Harshaw himself. As the agency gave him more and

more responsibility, things went more and more smoothly, but less and less able to carry on without him. By the time he'd been promoted to a position of leadership, he'd made himself indispensable to OIS logistics as a whole.

Tight-lipped even with his work colleagues, he had a habit of venting his frustrations to a woman he practiced the violin with, an older Nazzadi named Seruly. Seruly was an Eldritch Society operative, who passed on the information she gleaned while she and Victor chatted over coffee and homemade Cuban pastries they shared in her tiny Chicago apartment. The information he'd leak was hardly of earth-shattering importance on its own, but it allowed the Society to form a complete picture of OIS activities.

One day, Harshaw didn't show up at Seruly's. This was entirely out of character for a man like him, not to mention that Seruly had promised to make *pan suave* that day, a sweet bread that was his favorite. Unable to get in touch with him, she convinced a friend of hers in the Operator network to help her take a peek into his apartment. It looked as though he'd grabbed some essentials, some personal effects, and left without putting anything back in its proper place. Concerned, Seruly informed her superiors that she suspected foul play.



The team that begins investigating Harshaw's disappearance quickly discovers he was indispensable to the internal operation of the OIS. His logistical planning is as obscure as it was streamlined; many of his notes are written in a kind of shorthand, referring to people and transfer schemes that he must have known the meaning of and would translate into actual directives later. Within a day or two things begin rapidly slowing down at the OIS, exactly as the Children of Chaos had planned.

On the Run

A surveillance video from outside Harshaw's building shows him, nervous and furtive, heading to the garage to retrieve his rarely used car. He looks off screen, sees something that makes him panic, and jumps in the car. Records show that he left the Chicago arcology a few minutes later. Certainly the man was on the run, but he looked like a man actively pursued.

The Eldritch Society team tracks Harshaw to a hotel outside the arcology, about halfway between the city and Springfield. They find him in a Cuban restaurant, having lunch, and observe him from outside. As they watch, a pair of people in high-fashion business attire enter the restaurant, taking a booth right behind him. The team is able to identify them as Dhohanoids, two fairly inexperienced Ramachese. Their conversation is obviously making Harshaw uncomfortable, leaving half of his sandwich behind as he hastily pays his bill. He bolts out of the restaurant, followed quickly by the Dhohanoids, who shift into their monstrous forms once they are out of sight of the diner's inhabitants. They pursue him for a half a block before stopping, just standing and laughing as he runs off.

It is an odd sight, Dhohanoids actively terrorizing a civilian in their shifted forms and then just letting him go. They are toying with Harshaw, scaring him just enough to get him to keep running. With the discovery of Dhohanoid involvement and the overall peculiarity of the situation, the Eldritch Society leadership declares the effort important enough to be an official Society operation, assigning a troubleshooting team along with the requisite support personnel to find and protect Victor Harshaw until he can be convinced to return to the OIS.

Escort Mission

The team assigned to escort Harshaw back to the city meets with Seruly to get a profile of the man. She is entirely forthcoming, giving as much detailed information as she can. Before the team leaves, she gives them a small plastic box, with instructions to give it to Harshaw so he will know the team could be trusted. Opening the lid, the team finds the box was an airtight food container, with a piece of *pan suave* inside.

Harshaw hasn't gone too far since the run-in at the restaurant. The team catches up with him that night outside Kansas City, trying to catch some sleep in an old parking garage. The only other vehicle in the parking garage, a van parked some thirty feet away from Harshaw's car, houses a team of cultists there to make sure he doesn't get much rest. They have a para-psychic skilled in Empathic Projection ramping up the fear and paranoia

he already feels, and a couple of Ramachese ready to startle him out of his sleep and get him back on the run.

The team engages the operatives, and Harshaw, woken by the sounds of the fighting, flees his car on foot. Once the operatives have been dispatched, the team easily catches up to Harshaw once again and manages to convince him that they are on his side, using Seruly's gift. He gratefully munches sweet bread and explains that a few days ago, he found a note at his desk threatening him with harm unless he left town, and death if he told anyone. Every time he'd stopped, someone or something had been there to jump him, scaring him into running again.

The operatives don't have a great deal on them to give the team much of an idea of why they are picking on the poor guy. They carry badges identifying them as employees of Adamant Inc., a security company controlled by a Chrysalis Corporation subsidiary. Curiously, each dossier carries the explicit directive that Harshaw is not to be killed, interrogated, captured, or even detained. The team passes this information on to the Operators Network, hoping for some insight.

The return trip is considerably faster with Harshaw as a passenger rather than a driver. On the way, an Operator contacts the team to let them know that they'd found a lead linking the security company and Chrysalis to the Office of Internal Security. A psychologist working for the agency, Dr. Julia Pasquil, is married to Arnel Pasquil, one of Adamant's executive staff. It isn't much of a lead as to why the Children have targeted Harshaw, but it's the best they'd had so far.

Cracking the Shell

The Pasquils are, outwardly, a normal couple. Arnel is a tall, strongly-built Filipino man of European descent, with long black hair and a salt-and-pepper beard, whose tastes and grooming give him the appearance of a proper gentleman. His wife Julia is shorter, lithe with elegant proportions and straight brown hair, who works at the OIS as a psychologist tasked with preparing psychological evaluations for employees.

The facts, however, are quite different. The Pasquils had been inducted into the Children of Chaos many years earlier. Arnel has risen through the ranks while impressing enough of his superiors that he was chosen to undergo the Rite of Transfiguration, becoming a Zabuth Dhohanoid. His wife, a bit of a psychopath in her own right, hopes to follow him one day.

Julia is using her position of trust and authority to find appropriate targets for early strikes against the agency, anyone with that perfect balance of authority and neuroses, vulnerable enough to be taken care of relatively easily and important enough to put a cramp in OIS operations. Victor Harshaw fit the bill perfectly. Julia passed this information on to Arnel, who made all the arrangements. Now that the team following Harshaw has gone silent, the Pasquils are getting nervous for information. He must have help – the man could barely fire a gun, much less take care of a team guarded by two Dhohanoids. They fear the OIS has

somehow figured out what was going on, and may have already begun planning some kind of counterattack.

Surveillance of the couple's house shows quite a bit of activity. Julia and Arnel have set up the dining room as a command center, the two of them furiously working at impromptu workstations while three or four Dhohanoid assistants come and go, carrying out various errands. A curious neighbor inquires about the goings on and is told that the couple are helping to plan a relative's wedding on short notice, which seems reasonable. However, the Pasquils are panicking and getting sloppy. On into the evening and night, the work continues, Dhohanoids continuing to come and go with such regularity that the house is essentially an open target. Doors are unlocked and alarms are off. There would never be a better time to attack.

The plan is to execute a simple smash-and-grab raid. With luck, it all takes fewer than thirty seconds and no one will get hurt. Of course, no plan survives contact with the enemy. With only one Dhohanoid, apart from Arnel, left in the house, the team members entering through the back are given away by a neighbor's barking dog. As Arnel goes to investigate, the distraction team decides to go for broke and bust in anyway. Arnel is ready for them, severely wounding the first team member with his ocular blast. The Dhohanoid in the dining room immediately shifts into its natural form as a Gelgore, and Julia hoists a previously unseen Benelli M-87 shotgun. The team out back is doing a heroic job keeping Arnel busy, now shifted into his Zabuth form, but not well enough to draw the other two away from the dining room.

The other half of the team decides to throw caution to the wind and go for it, blowing the window and charging in. The team in back is able to nearly cripple Arnel as he's distracted by the blast, and begins a fighting retreat while the Zabuth follows. The team in the dining room gets a lucky break as Julia is wounded by flying glass, giving one team member an opening to take a computer while the others keep the Gelgore busy. Distant sirens mean the violence has, predictably, upset the neighbors. Putting their last bit of reserve into the fight, the team manages to do enough damage to the two Dhohanoids to disengage combat and get away, battered but with their prize in hand.

Aftermath

The computer, apparently Julia's, houses a wealth of information on Office of Internal Security employees at all levels. The team finds documents on the computer detailing the best ways to get into the minds of these people, the best ways to undermine them, frighten them, or just break their spirits. Messages exchanged between Julia and Arnel indicate that she'd been tasked to do this as part of a larger strategy aimed at the heart of the OIS, an attempt to retard the organization's effectiveness.

This was the final piece of a puzzle the Eldritch Society has been trying to understand. The OIS, while not an open ally of the Society, was an unwitting one in their war against the Children of Chaos, so recent failures in the agency have caused concern in the Society's leadership. There have been far more failed opera-

tions than usual lately, and leaks to the agency haven't been getting to the right people. When viewed with the other evidence, it is now clear that the agency is under attack.

THE INNOCENT MAN

When the Children of Chaos target Office of Internal Security agents for character assassination, they choose carefully. Acting with care and discretion, the Cult makes sure those known for annoying them eventually find themselves in a facility not marked on any civilian maps.

One such agent is William Hopper. In charge of an investigation between departments of the OIS, Hopper was earnest but cavalier. He cut corners when he felt he had to and was known for consorting with the bad in order to apprehend the worse. When evidence arose that he was involved with illegal magical activity, his peers were stunned, but his superiors kicked themselves for not seeing it sooner. His record had all the hallmarks of a man willing to go too far for a cause, and he must have gotten himself in so far that he couldn't find his way back.

The facts didn't square with the Eldritch Society, however. They'd taken an interest in Agent Hopper, and decided to trust him. They'd fed him information anonymously, and it had always been used to great effect. Furthermore, the investigation he was heading was aimed at shutting down a major source in the flow of dangerous arcane materials to the arcane underground, fed by the Circle. Every inch of this shouted frame job to the Society leadership, so they assigned a team to take a closer look and, if possible, clear Hopper's name.

Damning Evidence

The team assembled to investigate the evidence against Hopper has a daunting task in front of them. They are presented with all available information, including copies of the para-psychic reports, transcripts of Hopper's testimony, his personnel file and evaluations from Ashcroft-certified psychiatrists, every piece of information available to anyone inside the OIS or out.

Hopper is accused of being the chief participant in an illegal magical ritual involving human sacrifice intended to contact an extra-dimensional entity of great power and knowledge. A knife found at the scene had Hopper's DNA – and only his DNA – on it, and a probe of Hopper's mind reveals memories of the ritual, and of him plunging the knife into a 12 year-old girl. Hopper protests his innocence, but with wide-eyed, crazed rantings that only serve to undermine any credibility he once had. He calms down once he is in an OIS prison, but it is far too late by then. Even if the tests being performed to determine whether or not he is still human came up clear, he'll never see the light of day again regardless. The very fact of his incarceration is evidence that he was compromised.

Leads

Sifting through the data at hand for leads is a tedious process. There simply isn't a whole lot there to raise an eyebrow. Hopper's service record isn't impeccable, but for every reprimand or poor

evaluation there are two commendations or glowing progress reports. The only negative thread running through these records is that Hopper had a tendency to take his cases personally. He was uncompromising in his approach to collecting information, and wasn't above roughing up belligerent sources. Paradoxically, his attitude towards protecting informants bordered on vigilantism.

His personal life is a little more informative, but not much. He is a man with very few friends. He apparently has a girlfriend, or at least a woman he saw several times a month, though his psych evaluations indicate that he doesn't have terribly strong feelings about her. She has been interviewed by the OIS team sent to dig into his personal life, but the questions asked of her have been perfunctory and her answers are uninteresting.

The Eldritch Society team comes away with two leads to follow up on. First, significant or not, the girlfriend mentioned might have some insights into the affair that OIS agents might have overlooked. Second, Hopper had a source by the name of Nlarika that had snitched on a group called the Coiled Band, which is known by the Eldritch Society to have dealings with the Circle.

The Girlfriend

Hopper's lady friend is a Human named Amanda Lee. Beautiful, blonde, intelligent, with striking yet approachable features, Lee works in the city as a PR officer for an advertising firm. Her background doesn't bring up any red flags; the company she works for isn't even in the control of the Chrysalis Corporation.

When the Eldritch Society team asks to meet with her, she is reluctant at first but eventually agrees to meet in a public place over her lunch break. She warms up a little and starts answering their questions with more detail once the team convinces her that they are interested in clearing Hopper's name. Most of her information is already in the OIS report. She has been in love with Hopper, even though she was certain he isn't in love with her. When pressed, she gives details about their sexual relationship, saying that it was "pretty normal," but that he is distant, as though he is always thinking about something else. When they ask about Nlarika, she said she'd never heard the name.

One thing she does reveal to the team is that for the last few weeks, she suspects Hopper was cheating on her. She hadn't told the OIS agents because she didn't want to tarnish his reputation. She confides that when she first suspected Hopper of seeing someone else, she'd rifled through his clothes while he was sleeping and found a slip of paper with an address on it. It was a flower shop in a seedy part of town, which she'd visited looking for this "Tori" woman. She didn't work there, but Lee still had the address in her PCPU, which she gives to the team.

The Snitch

The Nazzadi magician Nlarika has a small amount of arcane talent, though not enough to do more than a few rudimentary spells and certainly not to the point where his status as an unregistered spell caster even registered on the OIS' radar. What he is though is a fairly decent information broker.

Hopper ran into Nlarika during a probe into the use of illegal magic to alter the personalities of some movers and shakers in the arcane underground through their dreams. Nlarika was one of the few people in town who knew where one might get the specific harmonic crystals necessary for the ritual. He ultimately gave up a cabal of five sorcerers known as the Coiled Band as the buyers. Word of Nlarika's loose lips got back to the members of the Band, who'd retaliated by sending a bruiser to scare Nlarika into leaving town while he was in Hopper's company. After he threatened Nlarika, Hopper wordlessly pulled out his sidearm and put a total of four bullets through the thug's arms and legs. Hopper's investigation broke up the Coiled Band, and a grateful Nlarika continued passing him information. When he hears about Hopper being put away, he goes into hiding, assuming that his enemies will come looking for him once they hear that Hopper isn't around anymore to protect him. The OIS doesn't consider Nlarika an important person in Hopper's life, and as such hasn't gone looking for him.

After a series of inquiries and some help from the Operator Network, the Eldritch Society team finds him outside a corner grocery store, quickly and furtively hurrying home with a bag of groceries. Noticing the team, he drops the groceries and flees, only to be cornered after a few blocks.

After they convince Nlarika that they are there to help Hopper, they head to a local pub. Nlarika tells the team he saw Hopper a week or so before he'd been arrested. He'd been investigating the sale of harmonic crystals with an impurity that drove those using them insane, and the OIS was afraid that they would eventually make their way into the legal market. Nlarika was able to point Hopper in the direction of a woman he thought might have them, a xenomix named Tory Connolly. She sold magical components that were just barely on the other side of legal from the back room of a flower shop. He hasn't seen either Connolly or Hopper since passing this on, and really doesn't have any more information the team hasn't found out on their own.

Nlarika thanks the team for picking up the tab, gets up from the table, and walks out the door straight into a bullet to the head. The team rushes out the door, just in time to see a tall man's form rounding a corner down the alley past the bar. After a chase and running gunfight, they manage to capture the assassin. Before they can ask questions, the man bites on a poisoned tooth, screams an oath to Nyarlathotep, and dies. Though he hadn't shared such information, the team gets all the answers they need: Nlarika has been killed by the Children of Chaos.

Tory Connolly

With the information they've gotten from Lee and Nlarika, the Eldritch Society team heads to a flower shop named The Eternal Bloom in the Red Light District. Asking for Tory after bribing the matronly woman at the register, they are led through a door to a large room full of flowers. There, they find a tall, voluptuous woman oozing the exotic sensuality for which half-Nazzadi are often known. She cuts daffodils for an arrangement with a wickedly sharp knife with which she looks distressingly comfortable.

The team manages to gain her trust after telling her of Nlarika's murder at the hands of cultists – she liked Nlarika well enough, and he'd sent a good deal of business her way. When asked if she is having an affair with Hopper, she gives a bitter, cynical laugh. She says that the man had the libido of a tortoise and she couldn't have seduced him even if she'd wanted to.

The conversation eventually turns to why Hopper had sought her out. He'd come to her asking about tainted crystals for ritual magic, and she'd helped him out because she'd unknowingly sold some of those crystals to a few of her customers. Frankly, it had pissed her off; the only thing she had in this business was her reputation and someone's interference had damaged that. Between her irritation at being sold tainted goods and a promise from Hopper that she'd be allowed to continue her business, she was going to lead him to her supplier. In fact, she was supposed to lead him there that night.

Acting on a hunch, one of the team contacts the Operator Network and asks about tainted harmonic crystals. The team's operator confirms that the Eldritch Society had teams investigating the Circle's involvement in distributing magical materials corrupted to drive those using them insane, possibly to gain a stranglehold on illegal spell casting. In the same way that the Chrysalis Corporation is involved in almost all legal business in the New Earth Government, this would involve them in almost all of the illegal magical business as well. This, then, must have been why the Children decided to target Hopper. He'd shown both the inclination and ability to interfere with the Cult's plans in the past and was close to shutting down the Cult's distribution channels in the city.

The decision is made to go after the supplier – every step closer to the source of the crystals is a step closer to clearing Hopper. Tory thinks they're crazy, explaining that her supplier is rumored to be a para-psychic, possibly a Mindworm. Still, she agrees to lead them to where she was going to take Hopper, after they agree not to start anything as long as she's around. After all, she doesn't want to be known for collaborating with anyone crazy enough to take on a cult.

The Supplier

The team follows Tory to a dingy alley behind a series of warehouses in an unsavory part of town, the place where she'd picked up her previous shipment of crystals. Climbing up an old fire escape, she explains that Hopper's plan has been to wait for the sale to take place and ID the supplier.

After an hour or so, sounds from the street bring attention to a van moving through the alley. A group of eight thugs emerge from the back, unload five large crates, and stand waiting. Each is armed. While menacing, they don't look terribly smart. A keen-eyed member of the team sees an earpiece on one of the bruisers; whoever is in charge must be taking care of things remotely.

In short order a second van drives up, dislodging an assortment of men and women of all races, followed by a large man in a

white suit. The sight of him makes Tory catch her breath; she explains that the man is Hans Corso. A businessman in the most dangerous sense of the word, Corso is known as a major black marketeer in the local arcane underground. His methods are ruthless and direct, with a lethal sense of patience and an eye towards the future.

Corso is cool as he expresses his displeasure, as he is expecting to speak with the supplier. The "head" thug takes a second to respond, pulling a PCPU out of his jacket. Switching it on, the face of Amanda Lee flickers to life on the screen. She apologizes for not being there in person, but thanks Corso for his purchase, and that she hopes to do business with him in the future. He, in turn, thanks her, but expresses disappointment that the conversation isn't face to face – after all, he'd gone to great pains acquiring some Inhibex just in case his personal para-psychic sensed any "uncivil activity" from her. The smile on Lee's face doesn't so much as twitch at the implied threat. She thanks Corso again and the two groups of criminals pile back into their respective vans and drive off.

Stunned at this turn of events, the team asks Tory if the blonde woman is her supplier – she is. They suggest contacting Corso, perhaps convincing him to help, but Tory disagrees. A single-minded businessman, Corso won't care who the crystals hurt, assuming he gets paid for them. Furthermore, he'll kill anyone who gets in his way. Tory has decided she's had enough.

Bitch of an Ex

Things start happening pretty fast after leaving the site. Tory, now freaked out about Corso, wants nothing more to do with the group's investigation and immediately sets off for her flower shop. The Eldritch Society team stops her before she can get too far. Why would Lee point the team in Tory's direction? She must have known Tory would have information that would help them discover the tainted crystals, and that would have led them closer to finding the truth about Hopper.

The answer comes as spotlights start flooding the area with light. Two Guardian X50 skycars have moved in silently, turrets trained on the area as a personnel carrier loaded with Office of Internal Security response teams head towards Corso's van. One of the skycars spots the team, pursuing as they run. Gunshots and laser fire can be heard in the distance as the OIS soldiers clash with the criminals. They lose the skycar by doubling back through an abandoned building, and pursuit is called off.

Lee is tying up loose ends – putting Tory and the Eldritch Society team at the site of an illegal deal should ensure that their nosing around would come to an end. Hitting the flower shop will deprive them of a base of operations. She must have ordered the hit on Nlarika as well. It would all be neatly sewn up.

Along with Tory, they head to an Eldritch Society safe house, reporting their findings to their superiors. The mission is now clear: eliminate Lee. As the key to the supply of the tainted harmonic crystals, stopping her will stop the Cult's plans in the city.

If her body, or at least the head, could be preserved, OIS examination of her brain will also give proof that she was a powerful para-psychic. Along with testimony from Tory, it might be enough to clear Hopper's name.

An Eldritch Society source is able to confirm to the team that Lee has entered the building her PR firm was in earlier that night, and hasn't left. They leave Tory at the safe house and head downtown. Infiltrating the building requires slipping past a few guards and security cameras – not terribly difficult – before heading up to Lee's office on the 16th floor. Getting in to the floor itself is considerably more difficult, as the entrances are locked with industrial-grade security systems, but these are bypassed all the same. Once on the floor, more care is taken to avoid the cameras that dot the ceiling. Standing outside Lee's office are two of the thugs they saw earlier. Again, they are wielding assault rifles and have a vigilant look about them. The team dispatches them before they can fire a shot.

Lee, ever resourceful, has been in constant telepathic communication with her guards and knows they've been killed the instant it happens. Hitting a panic button locks her reinforced door and sets off the floor's alarms. Breaking through the door in short order, the team finds themselves staring down the barrel of an FN-MAGiC machine gun, which opens up on full auto, nearly killing one of the team members. Abandoning the door, another member of the team simply goes straight through the wall at Lee. A white flash blinds everyone in sight as Lee pulls a grenade. One of the unblinded team members is able to quickly incapacitate her before she can pull the pin and drop it at her feet. The team is out of the building with security on their heels.

Aftermath

Though the mission is a success, it is far from ideal. As hoped, the delivery of Lee's head to the Office of Internal Security along with Tory's testimony gets Hopper released, but not reinstated as an OIS agent. The evidence of an attempt to frame Hopper is compelling but not absolute, so the agency decides to drop the official investigation against him pending further review. Of course, there's no such thing as a truly "dropped" investigation – they'll be keeping close tabs on Hopper for quite a while.

Tory is ruined. She'd spent her life on the flower shop and doesn't have the resources to start over again. The Eldritch Society team members do what they can for her, which isn't much; they do, however, keep an eye on her as a possible recruit to the Society. Rumors spread around the arcane underground that Corso managed to escape the raid and is reconsolidating his power base in the underworld.

It is a bittersweet victory. An innocent man has been freed and the Circle's plans had been foiled, but the OIS had lost one of its best agents – which was what the Children of Chaos wanted.

THE BEAST UNLEASHED

Within a few months, the Eldritch Society's efforts begin to stem the tide of damage done to the Office of Internal Security by the

Children of Chaos, and even turn it around in some cases. Their efforts have not gone unnoticed. Annoyed that the bastard children of the T99 Division are once again hampering their progress, the Board decides to task Grant Walker with dissuading the Eldritch Society from any further involvement.

Walker, for his part, relishes the idea. He and his team have been itching for a large operation like this, something that might give them a chance to deal a massive blow to the Eldritch Society. He quickly sets about taking over a Dhohanoid hive in Chicago, and is given broad authority to recruit from its denizens. Wasting no time, he finds an Eldritch Society member who has recently gotten a maintenance job at the OIS within a week, and picks through the doomed man's mind with his uncanny mental powers. Once he has retrieved the identities of all the Society members the man knows, he is killed and the Dhohanoids under his command go to fetch these new information sources. This process repeats for three days before a team of Taggers catches on to what is happening, alerting their superiors. All Society members involved with the agency, in any way, are to be on high alert from that point forward.

By that point it is a bit too late. Within a week Walker has constructed a fairly large web of who from the Eldritch Society is working inside the OIS, who is working outside, and what they are doing. It is far from a complete picture, but with the help of a few Ciraquen he is able to divine a rough idea of the local command structure and strategy of the Eldritch Society members engaged against the Children. Again, Walker moves decisively, personally overseeing operations that kill over a dozen Society operatives in a single night, all involved with the planning or execution of imminent activities designed to strengthen the OIS.

Walker's blitzkrieg against the Society's counterattack is just the beginning of a complete reversal of the momentum it has built up countering the Children of Chaos. The Board of Directors, impressed with Walker and his team, put more and more authority in their hands, until the hive becomes the nerve center of the entire operation against the Office of Internal Security. As fall closes into winter, the agency is as crippled as it had been before the Eldritch Society got involved.

Hunting the Hunter

With the gauntlet thrown down, the Eldritch Society leadership senses the hand of Grant Walker behind the mayhem. Accordingly, the Walker Initiative is dispatched to counter the move. More than keeping Walker and his team from interfering with the aid provided to the OIS, the Walker Initiative is interested in stopping Walker for good. It is a unique opportunity, because Walker is in one place, set on one task – all previous efforts to deal with him have failed as he disappeared, only to appear somewhere

See *Damnation View*, pp. 43-47 for more on Grant Walker, his abilities, and the Walker Initiative.

else to cause more carnage. Over the next several days, Walker Initiative Tagers manage, along with an herculean effort from the Operator Network and support sorcerers and para-psychics, to track Walker and his minions back to their hive.

The structure is a fifteen-story reinforced blast-proof building designed to look like a simple condominium structure, with armed guards at every entrance and almost three hundred Dhohanooids of most manifestations inside. Tagers have taken down hives before, but never on this scale, and certainly never with Grant Walker leading them. Still, an assault on the compound seems the Walker Initiative's best shot at finally stopping Walker.

A call goes out to all Tager packs in the region not immediately occupied to come to Chicago for a massive raid on Walker's hive at the end of that month. The message is delivered in person, Tager to Tager, using the form of telepathy peculiar to their kind to reduce the chances of the message being intercepted and somehow getting back to Walker. Dozens of Tagers heed the call, including many powerful metamorphosed Tagers, but they are still outnumbered four to one. Undaunted, the assault goes on as scheduled.

The plan is for groups of four to eight Tagers to attack alternating floors *en masse*, while independent Spectres will quickly search for Walker's command center. As the building itself is shielded against their insubstantiality ability, the distraction caused by the attack will both allow them more freedom to poke around and also give them a way in. Simultaneously, the attacking Tagers will withdraw, leading as many Dhohanooids away as they can. At this point, the more senior Tagers and members of the Walker Initiative will make a beeline for Walker, hoping to end his career permanently.

Walker and his team have suspected the Eldritch Society would move against them eventually, but not this soon and not with this much ferocity. The attack begins with Nightmares firing their Limit Weapons into the building's roof and alley-facing side walls, creating entry points for the attacking teams. Many encountered overwhelming resistance, while a few unlucky teams take heavy losses when they find themselves facing Grokells and Zabuths. The Spectres' mission also proves slightly more difficult than expected, encountering a number of areas further warded against their intrusion. Teams that have an easier entry converge on the Spectres, with the more combat-savvy Tagers holding off attackers while the others breach these sensitive areas.

Far fewer teams are able to pull Dhohanooids away from the Hive than had been planned, meaning the second wave of attackers are as busy with holding off the flood of Dhohanooids as they are with looking for Walker. Breaking in to the warded areas is slowing down progress as well. One by one, the warded areas are opened, laying bare data centers and ritual spaces used by Walker's team to coordinate their strikes on the OIS; while the members of the Walker Initiative manage to wipe out the Dhohanooids, sorcerers, para-psychics, and other cultists they contained, Grant Walker is not among them.

A frantic call for help goes telepathically through the minds of the Tagers as a team breaches one of the last warded rooms. Zabuth ocular blasts pierce them as the air fills with Gelgore needles, with Namaroks pouring through the door followed by a pair of Jjia-sin-dumash. Master para-psychics wielding telekinetic tentacles throw smaller Tagers around like rag dolls. Suddenly, a group of four Grokells explode through the door. Two engage the already outnumbered Tagers, with the other two making a beeline for one of the holes carved in the building's wall, their terrifying screeches filling the cold night air.

Those Tagers that can give chase, but frankly they have their hands full. Though the few minutes of fighting seem like hours, their time to act is closing. The senior Tagers give orders to the teams in the warded areas to grab anything that looks important, destroy the rest, and retreat. Walker has eluded them again.

Hindsight

With the raid on Walker's hive, the assault on the Office of Internal Security is diminished. Much critical information is lost, along with so many Dhohanooids that the Director himself issues Grant Walker a reprimand. Bowed but far from broken, Walker rebuilds his team as he has before, with a new respect for the power of the Eldritch Society. The experience tempers his zeal and arrogance – he will not be ambushed so easily again.

For their part, the Eldritch Society gain a new respect for their adversary as well. Fragments of a spell book recovered from the Hive hints at a spell that will allow the beneficiary to take any form desired, including any abilities associated with it. The after-action reports mention two Grokells fleeing the scene of the raid – one of them must have been Walker, using the spell's effects to mask his form. Though Walker Initiative sorcerers work tirelessly to recreate the missing parts, it is finally concluded that they will never be able to recreate the intricate ritual details necessary to the spell's function, but at least they now know their quarry has access to far more potent magics than they had initially believed.

As for the OIS, things continue much as they have before, but much less smoothly. Shake-ups in leadership bring better operating efficiencies, and fewer operations go south than have in the previous year. A number of agents refer to it as "Jinx Year," the year where nothing would go right. They commiserate over drinks, and sometimes stronger drugs, about bizarre failures in logistics, frequent annoyances, friends lost to violence, madness, or worse. A few believe it was sabotage; a few others know it was, but don't know who to trust. The few senior staff who have divined that the agency was under attack from external malignant forces put new safeguards in place, stepping up counter-intelligence activities and making sure their subordinates are aware of the subtleties of spy craft, that they might teach their subordinates, and so on.

The senior Tagers of the Eldritch Society have much to think on, going forward. Their work on behalf of the Office of Internal Security will continue certainly, until the Children of Chaos decide it is simply too costly to continue their actions against the

agency. It is a potent ally in the Society's work against their cult adversaries, and some OIS agents have earned the trust of its operatives. Perhaps in time the agency will work together with the Eldritch Society – but not quite yet.

KEY EVENTS

This section is intended to give Storytellers some guidance on how to incorporate the events of *Hamstrung* into their games.

THE LINCHPIN

In *Drawn In*, Victor Harshaw, a nebbishy OIS bureaucrat, is targeted by the Children of Chaos as a linchpin in the agency's operations. An Eldritch Society team finds Harshaw, protects him on his way back to Chicago, and in doing so discovers the plot against the OIS, drawing the Society into the fray.

Overview

This story is a fairly straightforward one, set in the Chicago arcology, and is appropriate for just about any type of Eldritch Society game. A fairly diverse skill set is needed for this story, so the Characters should feel free to use the Operator Network for plot-critical pieces of information (e.g., figuring out that Adamant, Inc is controlled by Chrysalis).

This story is presented slightly differently in the *Drawn In* section; specifically, it's indicated there that one team discovers Harshaw's location, and a second team goes in to escort him. This gives Storytellers the option of skipping some of the leg work, starting off in Act II.

Act I: On the Run

Goals: To get relevant information from Seruly. To find out more about Harshaw. To track Harshaw down while he's on the road. To witness him being threatened by Dhohanoids.

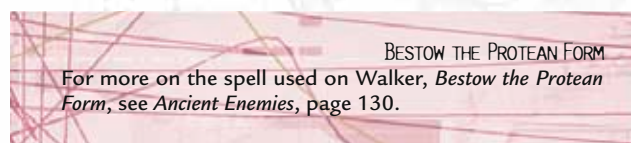
Setting: Seruly's apartment; Harshaw's apartment; the Wet Whistle Café.

Cast: *Seruly* – Experienced, Nazzadi female, early forties, world-weary with a kind smile. Seruly has been an Eldritch Society operative for many years, using her warm demeanor and empathic nature to milk long-term intelligence assets who need a soft touch. She genuinely likes Harshaw, and wants him found safely.

Victor Harshaw – Inexperienced, Human male, late forties, jumpy, cowardly. A career bureaucrat insulated from violence and intimidation, Harshaw ran like a rabbit when the Children of Chaos threatened him. At this point, he's in no real danger, as the Children just want to keep him on the run.

Jerome and Kaitlin – Inexperienced, Human male and female Ramchese Dhohanoids, malicious and overconfident. Jerome and Kaitlin are newly minted Dhohanoids, formerly executives of the Chrysalis Corporation. They derive great pleasure from tormenting Harshaw, but aren't terribly subtle about it.

Act I begins with the Characters meeting with Seruly to discuss the Harshaw situation. If they're a normal Eldritch Society group,



someone above them in the chain of command will simply tell them to be at Seruly's apartment at a certain time, that she'll be waiting for them, and that they're to consider themselves at her disposal for the time being. She fills the group in on all relevant information, lets the Characters know that she suspects foul play, and wants them to look into who might want Harshaw out of the picture and why.

Gathering some basic information on Harshaw isn't terribly difficult. If a Characters has contacts in the OIS, a successful Average Persuade Test will get one of those contacts to reveal that things are difficult at the OIS without Harshaw around. A Challenging Test using similar skills directed at any OIS bureaucrat in the mood to talk, perhaps to an empathetic bartender or pretty face, will reveal the same. Success at a Hard Computer Test to hack into Harshaw's work computer would show a deluge of panicked messages, asking where things are and when they'll get to where they need to be. It would also show Harshaw's entirely opaque logistics planning.

At this point, the group should be able to start forming some hypotheses regarding Harshaw's disappearance. Reporting back to Seruly, she'll insist that the group go after him. She's been able to track his route by tracking some of his purchases, showing him heading towards Springfield from Chicago. He's a mad-deniably slow driver, so it shouldn't be too hard to catch up to him. If any group member doesn't have a pass to get out of the Arcology, Seruly can furnish them. She can also provide a car, if they don't have access.

Seruly knows Harshaw's fondness for Cuban food, so she suggests the group check those types of places at about the halfway point between Chicago and Springfield. Once on the road, some poking around will reveal that The Wet Whistle Café has a great pressed *cubano* sandwich, and some further poking will reveal that Harshaw has taken a room at a nearby hotel. The group will find him at that café, and witness him being terrorized by the Dhohanoids. If the group is combat-minded, fighting the Dhohanoids won't be terribly difficult. In the mean time, Harshaw will double-back to his car and take off again.

Reporting their findings to Seruly, the group will be ordered to escort Harshaw back to Chicago.

Act II: Escort Mission

Goals: To get a profile of Harshaw as a briefing, if you chose to skip Act I entirely. To find Harshaw in the parking garage. To engage the Chrysalis Corporation operatives that are tormenting Harshaw. To convince Harshaw to head back to Chicago. To discover the link between Adamant, Inc and the Chrysalis Corporation.

Setting: A mostly abandoned parking garage; the open road; a rest stop outside the Chicago arcology; an Eldritch Society safe house.

Cast: *Seruly* – from Act I.

Victor Harshaw – from Act I.

Chrysalis Corporation Operatives – the Gremlin Team in the section entitled *Important Characters* will work here.

Dhohanoids – Two Ramachese (perhaps Jerome and Kaitlin if not killed in Act I).

If Act I was entirely skipped, *Seruly* will fill in the Characters on all relevant information they need to know, as well as providing them with a slice of *pan suave* to convince *Harshaw* that the team can be trusted. If not, *Seruly* will let the group know that she packed a slice of the sweet bread for them in the car, just in case they needed it.

The group will catch up with *Harshaw* in a parking garage, trying to sleep in his car. A successful Challenging Parapsychology Test from someone observing *Harshaw* will reveal that he's definitely under the influence of some kind of para-psychic power. The manipulation is coming from the van full of *Chrysalis* operatives nearby. The combat abilities of the team are fairly low since *Harshaw's* not much of a threat. Any combat will be done mostly by the two *Ramachese*, with the operatives themselves taking pot shots from under cover, or attempting to flee.

Unless the Characters are absolute ninjas at taking out the *Chrysalis* operatives without alerting a soul, *Harshaw* will wake up and run, so they'll have to track him down. He'll be paralyzed with fear and do little more than beg for his life without a successful Challenging Persuade, Intimidate, or similar Test, but he'll calm down immediately when presented with *Seruly's* sweet bread. He'll tell his story, and allow himself to be escorted back to Chicago. If the group came in their own car, *Harshaw* is willing to ride back with them (if there's room), or allow someone else to drive his car.

The evidence on the operatives will identify them as employees of *Adamant, Inc.*, which is known to the *Eldritch Society* to be controlled by *Chrysalis* (the Operator Network can provide this information if no characters have the relevant skills to know this). The link between *Adamant* and the OIS, i.e., *Arnel* and *Julia Pasquil*, can be found with a Hard Research Test during the ride back to Chicago, or can again be provided by the Operator Network.

Breaking the encryption on the operatives' PCPUs requires a Hard Computer Test, and reveals information on *Harshaw*, and the *Pasquils* as their contact. Much of this investigatory work can be done at the *Eldritch Society* safe house to which the Characters will take *Harshaw*. *Seruly* will calm *Harshaw*, and explain that he's become the target of one of those big, nasty cults he's heard about on the news. At this point, *Harshaw* can be considered safe, calms down some, and is no longer the group's concern.

Act III: Cracking the Shell

Goals: To investigate the *Pasquils*. To find evidence that multiple OIS agents are being targeted by the Children of Chaos. To successfully deliver this information to the *Eldritch Society*.

Setting: The *Pasquils'* home. The streets of Chicago.

Cast: *Arnel Pasquil* – Experienced, Human male *Zabuth Dhohanoïd*, early to mid-thirties, muscular, vicious, and arrogant. He is currently heading up the fledgling operations against the OIS. He's supremely confident in his combat skills, and will gladly enter combat at the drop of a hat.

Dr. Julia Pasquil – Experienced, Human female, early thirties, calculating and emotionally sadistic. *Julia* is a Children of Chaos cultist who has spent five years infiltrating the OIS to get to her current position there. She uses her position to find the most mentally vulnerable people of status in the agency to target.

Dhohanoids – Two *Gelgore* and one *Vrykol*, running errands for the *Pasquils*.

The raid on the *Pasquils'* house should be fairly straightforward; the smash-and-grab plan is an especially good one for inexperienced groups, or groups without a combat focus. Sneaking around the outside of the house requires a successful Challenging Stealth Test. Any reasonably powerful explosive will shatter the windows of the house, while gunfire or brute force might not be enough (Vitality 4, armor 1/1). As for the computers, they're light enough to pick up and not physically secured in any way.

The group won't be able to talk their way in. The *Pasquils* are a bit panicky, and aren't making the best decisions, but they're not stupid, and can't be fast-talked; they'll put a bullet through someone's head before letting them into the house. The *Dhohanoids* under their command aren't terribly bright, but they'll carry out whatever orders the *Pasquils* give them.

Endings

If Harshaw doesn't make it back to the OIS...

The logistical hurdles faced by the OIS become insurmountable, and all operations relying on *Harshaw's* planning are scrapped. A new team is quickly brought in to pick up the pieces, but they're understaffed and overworked. The agency scales back its activities for the time being, giving the Children of Chaos more operating room while continuing to erode the organization. With an even bigger head start, the Cult is in an excellent position to counter the *Eldritch Society's* aid to the OIS.

If the plot is discovered...

Events will progress as detailed in the rest of the chapter, with minor alterations based on how the Characters handled things.

DAMNING EVIDENCE

The Innocent Man describes the efforts of the *Eldritch Society* to clear the name of an Office of Internal Security agent falsely accused of arcane malfeasance. Guilty of nothing but being a thorn in the side of the Children of Chaos, enough evidence was

brought against him that the OIS had no choice but to jail him in one of their secret detention centers. Investigation reveals more than the agent's innocence – it reveals a plot by the Circle to poison the magical workings of an entire city.

Overview

This scenario is intended for Experienced Eldritch Society Dramatic Characters, and is written generically enough that it can be set in any major New Earth Government city. It's heavily investigation-based, so groups more interested in combat may not find it entirely appropriate. The investigation leans heavily towards the world of the magical and para-psychic, so having a few Characters who live on that side of the supernatural will help.

Storytellers running arcane underground games might also look towards adapting the scenario for their groups. Characters with ties to the underground might not need to rely as heavily on Tory to move through that criminal underworld, so her role can be reduced proportionately.

Act I: Leads

Goals: To learn about William Hopper, and the evidence against him. To find some leads, and follow them up – specifically, to interview Amanda Lee and Nlarika.

Setting: Around the city; The Hilltop Pub; Lee's house.

Cast: *Amanda Lee* – (seemingly) Inexperienced, Human female, late twenties, stunning ex-“lady friend” of William Hopper. Even though he didn't fully return her feelings for him, she's forthcoming and wants to see his name cleared.

Nlarika – Experienced, Nazzadi male, early forties, small-time operator in the Arcane Underground. He helped Hopper in a previous case, and received some protection in return. Wants to help, but wants to keep his head down too.

Instructed by their superiors to investigate the Hopper affair, the story begins with the Characters doing some nose-to-the-grindstone gumshoe work, gathering leads and fact finding. Depending on how interested they are in this, Storytellers may decide to present little more than Hopper's name and OIS personnel records, or an entire pre-compiled dossier on the man. Either way, the group will be given some information to start off their investigation, with the ultimate mission of clearing Hopper's name.

The two best leads emerging from the facts at hand will be a Lee and Nlarika. Lee is much easier to find than Nlarika, and the Characters should be able to get a hold of the background of both leads and Hopper's connection to them.

A cursory investigation into Lee's life and background will confirm that she's a normal, boring person (a series of Incredibly Hard Test results for various investigation skills may reveal her actual motives; see Act III for more). She'll be somewhat cagey when contacted, requiring some reassurance that the group is acting in Hopper's best interests (an Average Difficulty Persua-

sion Test, for example). She'll insist on meeting in a public place during the day, preferably over her lunch break. She'll answer the Characters' questions to the best of her ability, sharing all of the information in *The Girlfriend* if prompted, although she doesn't know anything about Nlarika. Since she doesn't know that Tory is a xenomix who has been given a Nazzadi name, she assumes that her name is spelled “Tori.”

Lee isn't lying about everything, but she is lying about quite a bit. Furthermore, she's an extremely gifted liar, playing a role she's been rehearsing for years. She is like a deep-cover spy, and nothing less than a Legendary Test result to catch her in a lie about her background, life, or anything of that sort will reveal her deception.

Finding Nlarika is a bit more of a challenge, especially if the Characters don't have any connections in the arcane underground, but some help from the Operator Network will give them a neighborhood to start poking around in. Once found, he'll bolt if he can before talking, and once the group catches him, it'll take a Hard Persuasion, Intimidate, or Fast-Talk Test (or, failing that, perhaps a sizable bribe) to get him to calm down. Further Persuasion or Seduction Tests will get him to a nearby pub, The Hilltop, where he'll talk. If his tab is covered, he'll drink and spill the proverbial beans, revealing the information covered in *The Snitch*. Of particular importance is the appearance of these new tainted harmonic crystals. Nlarika suspects that the crystals affect those using them by subtly putting a magical practitioner's consciousness out of phase with this reality, causing the mind to buckle under the strain. He's fairly sure that Tory isn't the one doing the tainting, as she's got a reputation to uphold. That being said, he has no idea who supplies her.

Once he's out of info or the Characters are tired of paying for his drinks, he'll get up to leave. He'll insist on leaving first, as he doesn't want anyone following him where he's going. He's shot as soon as he leaves the bar and the wound will be lethal. The shooter will immediately flee, so if the group isn't quick on their feet he'll get away cleanly. He's not superhuman, so a group of Tagers should quickly subdue him, but he's in fairly decent shape so unaided “normal” humans will have a bit of a chase on their hands. He will absolutely not be taken alive, committing suicide with a poisoned tooth before being captured.

Act II: Tory Connolly & Friends

Goals: To meet Tory. To gain her trust and find out what she knows. To stake out the crystal sale that evening. To convince Hans Corso to arrange a meeting with the supplier.

Setting: The Eternal Bloom flower shop; an alley in the bad part of town; Corso's warehouse.

Cast: *Tory Connolly* – Experienced, xenomixed female, late twenties, world-weary and proud, “grey” marketeer of the arcane underground. Hopper sought her out as a source of information due to her involvement with the tainted harmonic crystals. She's interested in helping less because of some sense of moral obligation than to restore her reputation.

The Circle – Experienced minions, no actual sorcerers or parapsychics, male, burly, and good with a gun. They're serving as muscle and protection for the delivery of the crystals, and will lay down their lives to protect them.

Hans Corso – Veteran, Human male, fifties, bald, rotund, powerful arcane underground black marketeer. He is the consummate criminal businessman, whose only interests are in making money and continuing to make money.

Corso's Mooks – Experienced, mixed race and gender, thugs hired by Corso to keep himself and his stuff safe. They'll take a bullet for Corso, but won't stick around if stuff gets hairy.

Convincing (successful Challenging Fast-Talk, Intimidation, Persuasion, or Seduction Tests) or bribing the older woman at the flower shop will give access to Tory. Once she learns the group isn't there to shop, she'll be standoffish, and she'll get downright defensive when they start talking about Hopper. Mentioning Nlarika's murder will gain her trust, as will convincing her that they're honestly trying to help Hopper. She won't even attempt to hide her anger at being sold tainted harmonic crystals, and is willing to help out in any way that she can as long as she isn't in danger. She suggests heading to the spot where Hopper was going to observe the sale of crystals that night, in hopes of catching the supplier.

Note: Making the logical jump connecting the crystals to the Circle is one that some groups may not make, which is not a big problem; events won't hinge on this knowledge. This can be revealed as part of Act III.

The sale should go smoothly; as long as no one tries to cause trouble, it'll happen exactly as described in *The Supplier*. If violence is applied to the situation, both sides will open fire on any and everything in sight while piling into their respective vans to get away. A more important problem is that Lee won't be revealed as the central villain, having used her Mindworm power to implant the false memories in Hopper's memory. If this happens, Tory can arrange a meeting with Corso to try to trade for his supplier's name. The group will have to come up with something very valuable to get Corso to give up this information.

Act III: Bitch of an Ex

Goals: To escape the OIS raid. To confront and eliminate Lee.

Setting: The city streets; Lee's office building

Cast: *The OIS* – Experienced Response Team, nearly a dozen soldiers in all, backed up by two Guardian X50 skycars. The Characters should turn tail when presented with this level of force.

Amanda Lee – as in Act I, but now known to be an Elite member of the Circle.

Lee's Guards – Experienced, young Human men, early twenties, stocky and vigilant. They will fight and die to protect Lee.

Evading the OIS raid will take an extended Challenging Stealth Test, requiring six successful Tests before the OIS agents will

break pursuit. The stealthiest Character in the group can make the Tests, as it's assumed that this Character would be telling the rest of the group where to go to evade capture. The skycar will not open fire until fired upon, but if fired upon they will not hesitate to shoot anything that moves.

At some point, the Characters should begin putting together the pieces of Lee's deception. If they don't, feel free to drop some hints as the Storyteller, such as pointing out that Lee sent them to Tory in the first place, knowing that she'd likely lead them to Corso. It's an intricate double-cross, so be patient if they don't get it right away – it's much more fun to figure it out.

Once they've evaded the OIS, Tory will insist on heading to her flower shop, but will turn back as soon as there's even a hint that it's being raided as well. At this point she'll follow the Characters' lead. For Eldritch Society games, things should proceed as in *Bitch of an Ex*. Arcane underground groups might have to get a bit more creative in figuring out where to go and how to find Lee's location, but the group does know her work address, which is a decent place to start.

Bypassing the building's lobby guards and security system requires a successful Challenging Stealth or Average Security Test. Getting in to the 16th floor requires success at an Incredibly Hard Security Test, if the group doesn't have some other means of bypassing the alarms. Getting to Lee's office will require an extended Hard Stealth Test if the security system wasn't bypassed at the entrance to the 16th floor.

Treat Lee's guards as per the Scrub rules in *Vade Mecum*, since they're there as meat shields as opposed to real threats. They're more there to serve as an early warning system for Lee to hit her panic button and set up her machine gun. The door to her office has Vitality 5, Armor 1/1. As soon as it's broken down, Lee fires out the door on full auto. Whoever's standing behind it will take the first shot from surprise – unless they were expecting to be shot at for some reason. The door is the only entrance to Lee's office, with no windows of which to take advantage. Four security guards (also scrubs) will show up after six rounds of combat, and more will show up five minutes after that. Lee will fight to the death, as will the guards. If it looks like she's going to be taken prisoner, Lee will attempt to commit suicide with a grenade (L7A2) sitting next to the machine gun on her desk.

Endings

If Lee isn't stopped...

Failure to stop Lee will result in tainted crystals, and eventually tainted ritual gear of all types, proliferating throughout the city, in both legal and illegal markets. Magical practitioners of all types begin to go mad, first a few and then by the dozen. The Circle begins to silently take over the arcane underground in the city, entrenching itself as the gatekeeper of illicit spellcasting in the city. The OIS, still reeling from the Children of Chaos' onslaught, dispatches a team to investigate, but nothing conclusive can be found. The city descends a little farther into chaos.

If Hopper's name isn't cleared...

As long as Lee is stopped, the Eldritch Society calls the mission a success, but the Characters might feel differently. Perhaps there wasn't a head to deliver to the OIS, perhaps Tory was killed or refuses to work with the agency; for whatever reason, there's insufficient evidence to release Hopper and he becomes a victim of the system he worked so long to uphold. The good guys may have won the battle, but the bad guys continue to win the war.

If Hopper is cleared...

It's a hollow victory for William Hopper – while he's a free man, he can no longer serve the OIS or do the job he loves, and he knows he'll be followed for years. Hopper will likely never meet the people who helped free him, but then again, his skills would be quite an asset to the Eldritch Society. Perhaps he, along with Tory, would fit well in the Society.

Nerve Center

In *The Beast Unleashed*, the actions of the Eldritch Society in aiding the OIS draws the ire of the Children of Chaos, who task Grant Walker with putting the Society back in its place and the assault against the agency back on schedule. Seizing this as a chance to stop the cult's Tager hunter, a massive raid against

Walker's compound is planned and executed by some of the most powerful Taggers on the planet.

Overview

The massive undertaking that is the Eldritch Society attack on the hive would be almost impossible to re-create as a whole in any game, given the sheer numbers, multiple experience levels, and interplay of different plot elements. Therefore, rather than presenting a single storyline to follow for these events, here are some hooks and individual scenes that will allow Storytellers to involve their groups in facets of the attack.

Scent of the Beast

Bringing a less experienced Eldritch Society team into the happenings of Grant Walker's tenure leading the Children of Chaos against the OIS, this scenario involve discovering and investigating the deaths of Society members that were part of the defense of the agency. As they trace threads linking the murdered operatives, they find that all they have in common is other Society members that have recently gone missing. Suspecting foul play, but fearing a leak, the team digs until they find that the greatest existential threat to their existence, Grant Walker, is behind the mayhem. Between snooping around the city, finding and follow-

121



ing Dhohanoids, and getting lucky, the Hive will be discovered, and planning for the raid can begin.

Assault

Characters of all stripes can take part in the raid on the Hive. Experienced Tagers can be part of the primary frontal assault, while Veteran and Elite Tagers might be part of the second wave. Operators will have their hands full coordinating the strikes, while keeping cultists and law enforcement alike from responding. Society sorcerers and para-psychics that are well-trusted by the Tager leadership will spend days preparing for the raid, while anyone whose loyalty is not iron-clad will likely be cut out of the loop for security reasons.

The raid itself is a solid slugfest, with as much combat as anyone could possibly want. Groups interested in assisting with breaching the warded areas of the building will have their work cut out for them; the double doors and walls around these areas are Vitality 15 with 3/3 armor. Furthermore, treat them as warded with a modified *Ward Against the Unbidden*, with an exception for Dhohanoids. Getting through their locks will require a successful Incredibly Hard Security Test.

Capturing Grant Walker

This battle is likely to outright kill most Characters, regardless of experience level, but some people really love a challenge. Grant Walker, under the effects of *Bestow the Protean Form*, intends to escape the Hive by taking the form of a Grokell and fleeing while his retinue engages the attacking Tagers. While the Characters have no way of knowing this, or even that the spell he's using exists in the first place, the fact that two Dhohanoids of the fastest known type are trying to escape might be a tip-off that one of them is important somehow. As described in *Hunting the Hunter*, Grant Walker has the following Dhohanoids with him: 4 Gelgore, 3 Grokell, 2 Jjia-sin-dumash, 6 Namarok, and 3 Zabuth.

They're not stupid, fighting with good tactical sense (soften them up at range, tie up stronger combatants with multiple attackers, hit the weaker ones with Gelgore needles, etc.), but they'll fight to the death and do anything to protect Walker. Once all the attacking Tagers are engaged, the three Grokells and the shape-shifted Walker will emerge, with two of the Grokells engaging the most powerful Tagers they can find and the other two flying as quickly as possible towards the most convenient exit – even if that's straight through a partially weakened wall. Walker won't reveal himself unless he has no choice, sacrificing anyone and anything to get away.

Endings

If the Hive is not found...

Failure to locate the Hive serving as Walker's base of operations means that his new campaign will increase. Walker grows increasingly brash with each new success, working not only to destroy the OIS and the Eldritch Society. Walker instructs those under his command to bend the attention of the agency towards

the Eldritch Society, with surveillance footage of Tagers in their monstrous forms and mutilated bodies (actually dead Dhohanoids) in their wake. Convinced that this threat is now their most pressing, the OIS leadership begins to allocate resources to fighting the Eldritch Society. Former allies become adversaries as the Society defends itself, with no clear idea of how to preserve its own existence while simultaneously keeping the Cult at bay.

If the raid is unsuccessful...

Repelling the Tager attack, the Children of Chaos continue to harass the OIS. Grant Walker dislikes having his nose bloodied in such a fashion, relinquishing control of the operation and redoubling his efforts against the Eldritch Society. The leadership of the Children of Chaos support this decision, as the Society has proven itself to be much more of a nuisance than anticipated. The T-99 Division at the Chrysalis Corporation is given a fresh influx of funding and talent to further expand on the research that created Walker and his two siblings, with hopes of producing more and more powerful Dhohanoids to begin what will become a full-fledged war against the Tagers and their ilk.

If Walker is killed...

The Walker Initiative's triumph is short-lived, as the leadership of the Children of Chaos furiously turn their gaze to the would-be do-gooders. Grant Walker was a favored son of the Director, the result of years and millions in research, lost to battle like some common soldier. A massive portion of the cult's resources is now trained on the Eldritch Society, determined to wipe it out quickly and decisively, that it may never interfere again. Once they realize the threat, the leadership of the Eldritch Society may have no choice but to go against the wishes of its founders and partner with those in the New Earth Government, risking annihilation at the hands of possible allies to avoid extinction at the hands of their mortal enemies.

If Walker gets away...

Things proceed pretty much as described in *Hindsight*, with minor alterations based on the actions of the individuals involved in these events. Though the stage is set for cooperation between the Eldritch Society and the OIS, the time isn't right; still, there may be some on both sides willing to compromise what they're "supposed" to do in the name of the greater good.

WEAVING CHARACTERS

NEG Military Games

Military Characters, as a whole, do not have much of a reason to get involved in the events of this plot. Unless they're involved in a branch of military intelligence called in to support a mole hunt or other investigation, between the assault on the Hive Ship, the outbreak of MHV, and the day-to-day fight for survival, the military has plenty on its plate.

NEG Government Agent or Police Games

This is one of the groups clearly intended to take part in the events of this chapter. Dramatic Characters inside the OIS may take part in operations to discover or capture interlopers, be

falsely accused or swept up in those operations, or even used as pawns by either side to further their own goals. The Children of Chaos seek nothing less than the total incapacitation of the OIS, a goal which has far-reaching consequences at all levels of law enforcement and intelligence in the New Earth Government. High-ranking members of the OIS, aware that something is up, might have to call in favors from other agencies if they want to root out the infestation on their own. Conducting a mole hunt with help from local law enforcement and an organization like the FSB would help to reduce the likelihood of the mole being tipped off. Another agency likely to get involved at some level is the GIA. As the problems in the OIS are caused, primarily, by a breakdown in defensive counterintelligence, it may ultimately fall to the NEG's espionage agency to conduct some sort of independent purge of compromised agents, and help bulwark OIS defenses against future infiltration.

Eldritch Society Games

This is the another group that's clearly intended to have a hand in these events. Tager Characters can get involved in counterintelligence operations against the cultists, help the agency root out infiltrators, even take part in the Walker Initiative's raid. The scenarios presented in this chapter are definitely opportunities for Taggers to shine.

Of course, Taggers aren't the only members of the Eldritch Society risking their lives to combat the Children of Chaos. Society sorcerers and para-psychics are uniquely positioned to investigate infiltrators and ersatz operations, as they tend to be unregistered. The Operator Network's contributions are always critical, but never more so than when intense levels of secrecy are required; keeping agents in the field one step ahead of the Children of Chaos is difficult enough without having to worry about discovery by the Office of Internal Security. While Lorekeepers tend to shy away from the front lines, the analysis and insight they bring to researching matters of the occult are invaluable when unraveling the intrigues of the Children. When the Cultists decide to push back against the Eldritch Society's activities, it's certain that they won't restrict themselves to the Taggers – everyone will have to be ready to fight.

Arcane Underground Games

The arcane underground is one of the primary foes of the OIS, and its members have everything to gain with the agency's decreased effectiveness. Characters operating in the underground will have more opportunity to act, and with less scrutiny. It's the perfect time for up-and-comers to consolidate power and make a name – what better way to do that than to make some OIS agents look like fools by participating in one of the ruses set up by the Children of Chaos, or to harry a targeted agent?

Members of the arcane underground in contact with the Eldritch Society, on the other hand, may feel an obligation to help the Office of Internal Security, even if only peripherally. Fact-finding missions and intelligence will be particularly useful, as will any actions taken against Children of Chaos operatives working against the agency. Anonymously exposing a phony scheme de-

signed to waste OIS resources, or clearing the name of a falsely accused agent are steps in restoring the OIS to full force.

Cult Games

Obviously, Characters involved in the Children of Chaos have a number of ways to enter the events in this chapter, as those responsible for discrediting OIS agents, sabotaging the agency directly, or even as members of Grant Walker's hit squads. Most cults have a reason to dislike the OIS as they, along with the FSB, are primarily responsible for the resistance to their machinations, and may feel like getting in on the fun if they hear of the agency's difficulties. Perhaps the Children of Chaos have been negotiating with other cults to make extra trouble, or to give their actions a decentralized appearance – if the OIS investigation gets too close to learning the truth, the Children don't want it known that a single organization was behind the operation.

ALTERNATE RESOLUTIONS

The Children Triumphant

It is possible that the Eldritch Society has utterly failed to check the assault from the Children of Chaos. Reeling from failure, internal conflict, brain drain, and sabotage, the OIS as it once was is no more. Stunted, paralyzed, and ineffectual, it's becoming a shadow of its former self. Enforcement of occult law is gradually diminishing, with only the flagrant or stupid routinely finding themselves in trouble. The agency's leadership is now a mix of sycophants, desk jockeys, and a few staunch idealists trying to bring the agency back from the brink.

The fact of the matter, though, is that the idealists are not going to succeed. The word is out on the agency, and the best and brightest are jumping ship to the GIA, FSB, or just leaving government service altogether. The police forces of the New Earth Government are trying to pick up the slack from the OIS' apparent desertion, but they have neither the expertise nor the manpower to keep the citizens of the NEG safe.

The ramifications are staggering. Without effective investigation and enforcement of arcane law, the use of dangerous magic is unchecked. Unwitting amateurs invite insanity, corruption, and worse as extra-dimensional entities dominate the weak while tempting the ambitious and cajoling the arrogant. The arcane underground operates with near impunity, and threatens to gain the type of criminal influence not seen since the time of Prohibition in the United States. Politicians in Chicago promise investigations and leadership shake-ups, scapegoats tender their resignations, but behind the scenes not much is really happening.

The Director is pleased with the work of his Children. The Board is making plans to again call one of the Old Ones to Earth, and this time they will succeed. The darkest period of human history just got a little darker.

This shouldn't be happening.

The Rapine Storm had turned south, their eye on Australia. New Earth Government forces had amassed near Darwin, determined to turn back the monstrous hordes. After what happened in China, they could ill afford to lose more territory to the Dead God's minions. So many had already died and it just seemed like the Storm was an unstoppable force in this part of the world.

The soldiers waited for the Rapine Storm the way they always did – scared out of their minds. It's one thing to have an army that wants to kill you. It's entirely another to have one that wants to, at the very least, eat you. At the very least, and that's only if there was a god and he was feeling nice.

As the horde crossed the water, carried on stolen conveyance and scavenged mecha, something even more unexpected happened. For some reason, the Esoteric Order of Dagon decided that now would be a good time to make things worse. They came from deep under the ocean, in their alien mecha, backed up by horrific creatures with tentacles and gigantic sharks that made the great whites of the Great Barrier Reef look like infants.

The New Earth Government forces were ill-prepared to adjust their tactics to such a surprise. Instead of fighting against an enemy that had superiority of numbers, but a technological disadvantage, they were fighting against a foe with equal technology and a vast terrain advantage. What started out to be a bad situation suddenly became disastrous.

Then, as quickly as they'd come, the Esoteric Order went back to their underwater cities, leaving the ravenous hordes to find their way to land.

Sergeant Denison held his position as ordered, his soldiers around him barely restraining the urge to run. There was something in his armor's climate control that was failing and sweat was starting to pour down his scalp from the hot Australian sun – and his own fear. Though he knew it was a bad idea, he reached up and hit the release for his helmet, throwing it down on the ground in front of him. He wiped his face to get the sweat out of his eyes and saw the scene in front of him with unaided optics for the first time. He immediately wished he hadn't. The helmet optics had given him one step of removal from the situation. Now it seemed all the more real.

Sgt. Denison knew he had to say something. The Storm had found purchase and was beginning to advance inland. It was like watching a mutating virus beginning to consume its host.

"The worst is over," he said, trying to sound convincing. "The fish-heads are gone and that just leaves one rag-tag group of critters who don't know how to fire guns. Just keep your heads on straight and we'll show 'em who Oz belongs to."

That did enough to calm the jitters of his squad for a moment. It did precious little to calm his.

The first wave of the Storm was off the boats and making their way into the mainland. Even without his helmet optics, Sgt. Denison could see that he was wrong about the guns. The Rapine Storm had brought with them an unprecedented number

of what were once Human or Nazzadi, now turned horrific cultist. While they may not be military trained, they seemed to know which way to point, how to pull the trigger and basically control the weapon, and how to reload. That was more than enough.

That didn't include the ghosts, which hopped across the landscape like Australia's own native kangaroos – except these were horrific kangaroos with assault rifles.

Sgt. Denison could finally see, first hand, why the Rapine Storm was such a powerful force on this planet. They had scavenged war machines, a host of well-armed foot soldiers, and a diverse group of hideous beasts. However, the weapon they had in their disposal, which was beyond anything the New Earth Government had in their arsenal, was the raw ability to inspire fear.

The lines were breaking before him. He suddenly wondered how the lines of China had held for so long, as battle-hardened soldiers began to flee one by one. Some stood their ground, especially those in mecha or the Engels, but they were quickly overwhelmed by the madness that was this invading horde.

The Storm advanced on his position and his lieutenant screamed into the helmet Sgt. Denison was no longer wearing. It was all a blur from there. There were monsters, then there was gun-fire, then there was death, and then they were on him.

The first thing upon him was no beast, although it should have been. It was a Human being, or at least it once might have been described as such. It lumbered towards him, a grotesque thing with filed teeth, shaved head, and speed that nothing as morbidly obese as it should be able to move. It carried





what appeared to be a sharpened mech part in one hand and a severed head in the other. It's mid-section was ringed with Human ears. The dusty trainers it wore on its feet were almost comical. Almost.

Sgt. Denison found himself falling over onto his backside, his weapon out of ammunition. He backpedaled across the dirt, realizing in an almost detached way how futile an effort this was. The obese thing bearing down on him was only one of a hundred other ugly deaths advancing on him. Then, he froze.

The thing looked down on him with its beady, blood-shot eyes, raising its blade. Then, it stopped. It regarded him for a moment, cocking its head the way a dog might. The rest of the Storm carried on, shrieking its way past them in a moment that might have lasted an eternity. The thing lifted the head it held in its left hand and bit off a chunk of hanging gristle from the severed neck, never taking its eyes off him.

Then, without warning, it lowered its weapon and moved on.

As the Rapine Storm raged around him, somehow Sgt. Denison was the calm eye. Creatures flowed around him, regarding him with a careful eye, but ultimately leaving him sitting, bewildered.

As if the entire scene were not yet fully surreal, a man walked amidst the horde. He appeared to be Asian of some sort, but a Buddhist monk for certain. Calm and collected, serene even, the monk approached Sgt. Denison.

"Can you not see its perfection?" he asked. "I know you can. Otherwise, the Dead God's disciples would not have left you alive. You have been chosen. Look around. See it now."

Look around he did, with eyes that seemed new. Though he hated to admit it, it did look something like perfection.

chapter seven

the storm down under

Sichuan Province in western China lies in a natural basin formed by the presence of the Yangtze River flowing eastward, meandering through several mountain ranges on its way towards the more populous areas of the country. In better times, the region might have been considered idyllic or at the very least serene. Agricultural land is abundant and Sichuan contains some of the greatest concentrations of natural resources in all of Asia. Those who once lived there were prosperous and, for the most part, happy.

That was before the coming of the Rapine Storm.

In the beginning, the monsters were merely rumors or the stuff of nightmares. Sightings were scarce and they were little more than tales to frighten children. Then the dark things began to come more often and the New Earth Government fought back against their invasion. Armed forces moved into the area and martial law was declared. Eventually, full-scale military bases began to appear. The Rapine Storm massed to the north and west, so a “Kill Zone” was set up to halt their advance. Meandering south through Sichuan, flowing like a river across the basin, the Zone was a line of death. Anything on the opposite side of the line was the enemy, to be shot on sight. Those on the east side were protected and safe... or so they thought.

For a while, the New Earth Government seemed to be holding firm. As far as the residents of Sichuan knew, life went on as normal. But one day, a day that seemed as ordinary as any other, something changed. The lines simply collapsed, and the Storm rushed into Sichuan, destroying everything in its path. NEG forces broke like matchsticks against the overwhelming assault. In the blink of an eye, Western China had fallen.

Within the space of just a few weeks, the Rapine Storm overran all of China, driving New Earth Government forces back into Mongolia, Vietnam, Japan, and other bases throughout the southeast. The only thing that prevented a complete collapse by the NEG was stubborn resistance by Migou forces still present in the area. The Migou refused to give ground and continued battling the Rapine Storm’s hordes, which by then had seriously overextended themselves in their rapid blitzkrieg across China. The bloodthirsty nature of the creatures making up the Storm’s army worked against them, as time and again they would turn aside to strike juicy (but strategically unimportant) targets, giving their enemies time to regroup and escape. Only a few among the New Earth Government leadership realized just how close the exodus from China came to utter disaster.

THE OCEANIC EGGSHELL

One of these leaders was Marshal Hirini Kaihautu. Born to Maori parents in New Zealand, Kaihautu emigrated to Melbourne, Australia at a young age, where he distinguished himself in school and became well known for his outspoken views on Aboriginal rights. Though Maori, and thus not technically an Aborigine, he was nonetheless a descendant of the indigenous native Oceanic peoples. As a result, he felt a strong kinship with them – Aussie and Kiwi alike.

The young Hirini seemed destined for a career in politics as a champion of Aboriginal rights, but after the Migou invasion of New Zealand, he instead joined the military, intent on defending his adopted homeland. He saw several tours in New Zealand and was active in keeping the Migou from gaining a stronger foothold there, but he quickly advanced through the field grade ranks and was soon moved to the Chinese theater.

The newly promoted Marshal Kaihautu saw firsthand the depredations of the Rapine Storm as he found himself in charge of defending the province of Yunnan, on the border of Laos, Burma, and Vietnam. Here, with mountains and deep canyons as natural staging areas, the Storm was preparing a devastating onslaught that could easily have broken through into the more populated areas of central China. Hirini pleaded for more troops, but none were available. Lacking what he considered to be essential support, he concocted a last-ditch plan that involved the use of low-yield nuclear weapons against the advancing Storm. Faced with no other choice, the New Earth Government authorized the use of nukes against the Storm’s spearheads – one of the few times such weapons have been allowed in the Aeon War – destroying them and saving China, but leaving the entire area a devastated wasteland. What had once been a natural zoological garden rich with life was now a radioactive slag pit that would be uninhabitable for hundreds, if not thousands, of years.

Kaihautu considered the destruction of Yunnan to be a decisive victory against the Rapine Storm. With one stroke, the NEG had drawn out the enemy, then destroyed a significant chunk of their army with very little in the way of military losses. The operation was, however, a public relations nightmare. The Chinese people felt that their homeland had been devastated for no good reason – and by a non-native, no less. Many former residents of the region called for Hirini’s head. The New Earth Government, however, publicly shouldered the blame, calling the decision not one to be made by a single individual. Nonetheless, yielding to political pressure, they sent Marshal Kaihautu back to Australia for six months, taking him out of the loop on further decision-making in China.

Hirini felt betrayed yet refused to tender his resignation, because he suspected the time would come again when the use of nuclear force in China would be required. He may well have been right. As the Storm breached the Kill Zone and swarmed into the inner provinces, he returned to the theater, armed with a plan tailor-made to shatter the invasion in one fell swoop. Nuclear arms had won the day once before, in Yunnan and elsewhere, and with a single-minded intensity he presented his plan to his fellow marshals – drop nukes in several strategic positions and the advancing Storm spearheads would be shattered. The war could be won right then and there, if only they would see things his way.

Perhaps the assembled commanders could indeed sense the inhuman brilliance of Kaihautu’s plan, but there was never any chance of its acceptance. The resulting devastation would have left much of China uninhabitable and what was left would be in ruins. Worse yet, the cloud of fallout would spread across all

of Southeast Asia, into Japan, and perhaps eventually reaching North America and beyond. The first throes of nuclear winter might even be felt across the globe, should the radioactive dust reach too high into the atmosphere. The cost was simply too high.

Kaihautu was incensed at what he felt was a complete failure by the other marshals to carry out their sworn duty to save China. He might have escaped the meeting unscathed had he simply departed in silent anger, but instead he made the mistake of directly insulting the honor of Vice Marshal Zhang Yu, who had himself sworn to yield no ground to the Rapine Storm. Still screaming epithets, Hirini Kaihautu was dragged from the headquarters building and to the stockade, where he was to await court-martial. Only the complete collapse of the Chinese front, and Zhang Yu's pointless death during his desperate attempt to save Beijing, preserved what was left of Kaihautu's career.

Some of the marshals who escaped the Chinese debacle came to believe that Kaihautu may in fact have been correct in his initial analysis. The court-martial proceedings have been tabled for "later discussion" and Hirini has been assigned to a base in southern Indonesia. Banished there, he quietly watched as China fell and has begun to wonder what is next on the Rapine Storm's list. The New Earth Government still holds Taiwan and Japan, as well as city strongholds scattered throughout Southeast Asia, but there seems to be little in the way of strong strategic defenses. Embarking on a tour of Indonesia and Malaysia, the marshal has realized the awful truth – there is little to stop the Storm should they turn their eyes southward. Friends in Australia and elsewhere have reported similar findings there as well. All of Oceania is little more than a fragile eggshell that can be cracked open easily with a single army, exposing the soft interior to utter destruction. Marshal Kaihautu concludes that unless something was done, and soon, all Oceania will be wide open before the Storm.

Armed with a carefully considered plan to defend the region, with a particular focus on Australia, Marshal Kaihautu leaves his post in Indonesia and heads forthwith to the headquarters of the Oceanic Combined Forces (OCFCOM), located in Melbourne. There, he demands an audience with Field Marshal Ariel Lundstrom, commander of the NEG's Oceanic theater. Until this point, OCFCOM has been fully occupied battling the Migou in New Zealand, and holding off attempts to establish beachheads in southern Tasmania, which lies perilously close to the bugs' stronghold in Antarctica. So far, except for occasional unconfirmed sightings in the Outback, the Rapine Storm has left Australia alone.

Marshal Lundstrom can see no reason to believe the Storm will move on Australia, especially with the Migou still fighting them in China and New Earth Government fleets commanding the seas nearby. Still, she agrees to listen to Kaihautu, permitting him to express his plan in its full detail. The plan, such as it is, involves a complete pullout of all NEG forces from Southeast Asia, abandoning all remaining inland population centers and bases,

so that the Migou and Rapine Storm can fight each other to their heart's content. Meanwhile, NEG fleets blockade all Asian ports, build up fortifications along the coastlines, and adopt a policy of containment. Finally, as the capstone to his plan, Kaihautu advises the use of tactical nukes at any location the Storm concentrates their forces large enough to attempt a breakout. Only this, he argues, will be sufficient to hold the Storm back and keep them from weaving a path of devastation through Southeast Asia and all the way into Australia.

Lundstrom listens patiently to Kaihautu's plan and then picks it apart, piece by piece. Hirini is at first dismayed, then angered, and finally insulted by her refusal to accept his "perfectly valid" points. When Kaihautu makes a move as if to physically force Lundstrom to listen to reason, her aide, a Nazzadi named Colonel Kwilanna, intercepts him. Only the quick action of Kaihautu's own staff gets him out of the office before blows are exchanged.

Later that evening, while waiting for his flight back to Indonesia, the distraught Hirini becomes inebriated at the officer's club and begins to argue his plan to anyone who will listen. In the midst of his tirade, Colonel Kwilanna enters the club and becomes involved in the "discussion." Later reports differ on who actually throws the first punch, but a brawl ensues; afterward, both officers demand the other's court-martial. In response, Marshal Lundstrom holds a private conference with Kaihautu, the details of which are never revealed to the public. In the end, all charges against both combatants are dropped, and Hirini is left with his rank and dignity intact. He returns to Indonesia, but less than a week later finds himself reassigned to the city of Darwin, on the northern coast of Australia. From here, he is to quietly oversee the defense of the continent, which he still believes is under imminent threat of invasion by the Rapine Storm. He's right.

BUDDHISM IN THE STRANGE AEON

Buddhism is a very old religion that is generally not fully understood by Western society. In Buddhism, all sentient beings are seen as essentially a part of the universe as a whole. There is no eternal soul as such. Instead, death merely leads to rebirth in a constant cycle of resurrection throughout eternity. During life, a creature's karma measures its positive and negative thoughts and deeds, and determines the path it takes during its next incarnation – an endless cycle of cause and effect that defines all existence.

In Buddhism, all life is suffering in some form or another. This suffering is caused by some sort of craving, either for things one cannot have or to change the things one cannot change. Buddhism considers such cravings to be delusional in nature. One must accept the universe as it is, in order to achieve true enlightenment.

To eliminate suffering, one must first rid oneself of these unnatural cravings. Needless to say, this isn't easy. Human beings all have wants, needs and desires, no matter how devout the individual might be. Only through true enlightenment can one achieve liberation, and to do this one must follow the teach-

ings of the Buddha. This is the point where most subdivisions of Buddhism diverge, as each believes the path must be followed in a different way, but in the end all believe a truly enlightened individual will achieve a state of calm oneness called Nirvana. This basically means the person in question has eradicated all cravings and delusions from his mind and body, giving up all hatred, greed, and similar vices, and thereby escaping the karma-driven cycle of death and rebirth.

The coming of the Strange Aeon introduced new factors into the nature of existence: sorcery, dark gods, monsters, and the like. The appearance of such things was not kind to many established religions, especially Western ones that had no place for such anomalies. Buddhism, however, was only strengthened by these new aspects of reality. Alien creatures and dead gods were merely another kind of sentient being, another possible step on the ladder of existence. The universe could hold infinite numbers of such monstrosities, each better or worse than the last depending on the karmic measuring-stick inherent in all forms of life.

Despite its calm stability, Buddhism did evolve somewhat. Many followers saw magic as a way of altering or erasing one's karma, or its mastery as a stepping-stone towards achieving enlighten-

ment. Some Buddhists took to the practice of sorcery in the hopes of gaining new insight on the nature of the universe, and thus uncovering an alternate path to the perfection of Nirvana. Some became corrupted by power, choosing to believe that in the end they could employ magic to cleanse themselves of negative karma, entering the next life with a clean slate despite any misdeeds done in their current incarnation. Reviled by Buddhist purists, they fell into evil, convinced they could get away with anything as long as they achieved perfection through magic. Many of these deluded would-be sorcerers joined dark cults or sunk into madness, and no small number turned to the worship of Hastur.

The existence of new creatures in the world provided new forms into which one could be born after death. In general, most monstrous beings were seen as repositories for those with negative karma, though this was not always the case. Some of the stronger forms might in fact be a step or two above humanity, and some subsets of Buddhism began to see all monsters as improvements. Many of these eventually degenerated into cults and were swept up into the Disciples of the Unnamable, especially those who came to believe that Nirvana was simply a way to communicate directly with ancient beings best left alone.



Not all Buddhists succumbed to such things, however. Most simply embraced the new ways of the Strange Aeon and continued to seek the lofty goal of Nirvana, or perhaps even something more. Buddhism as a whole remains a powerful force in the world. Its number of followers grows daily, and with so many chasing after enlightenment who knows what new states of existence they might attain...

THE COMING OF FU-LI FENG

The Chinese town of Surling was located along the edge of the Sichuan province, perilously close to the New Earth Government's Kill Zone. With a population of just over one thousand, Surling seemed like an unimportant backwater village. Surling's people were primarily farmers, though a few managed to eke out a living making a daily trek into the foothills of the mountains to the south, working in the mines there. Life in Surling was simple, for its people depended very little on technology, choosing to live in much the same way as their ancestors did. Even the influx of refugees from the west, before the Kill Zone was fully formed, did little to change their ways.

Unfortunately for the town, its nearness to the Kill Zone made it strategically valuable as a supply point, so the New Earth Government set up a military post there. This drew the attention of Rapine Storm spies looking for targets to destroy once their invasion was in full swing. One dark night, a N'athm agent made its way into the town under a moonless sky, intending to sow chaos and nightmares while quietly gathering information about the area. Instead, the creature encountered Fu-li Feng.

Feng was a Buddhist monk who spent his days in Surling teaching schoolchildren, and anyone else who would listen, about the coming changes to the world. Feng believed that the arrival of the Strange Aeon heralded one of the great transitions that lay deep within the foundations of Buddhism. Instead of battling the dark forces that seemed intent on destroying their way of life, Feng advocated quiet acceptance. In another place and time his views may have seemed sacrilegious, but with dark sorcery abundant and monsters knocking on their doorstep, he made more than a few converts among the villagers.

This in and of itself was relatively unimportant, however. What nobody knew, not even Fu-li Feng, was that he was one of a select few chosen by Hastur for something greater. The power of the Dead God touched Feng's mind while he slept, and sometimes during his frequent meditations. At these times, Hastur filled his dreams and thoughts with terrible visions. In some of his more terrifying nightmares, Feng was swept away by a tide of horrible monsters, to an unspeakable doom that made him wake in a cold sweat. However, in other dreams, he reached forth his hands and took command of the monstrous hordes, making them dance like puppets on strings. Then, at the break of dawn each morning, Feng would at last see himself standing at the head of an army of horrible creatures, his own body changed to the form of one of them. Only then would he fully awaken, refreshed and content, as though everything would soon be in its proper place.

Until the arrival of the N'athm spy, Feng dismissed his nightmares as the subconscious products of a worried mind. The Rapine Storm, after all, was gathering to the west, threatening Surling and everything he held dear. Where the influence of a N'athm would normally drive mortal minds towards madness, Feng instead found his thoughts achieving new clarity. Unbeknownst to him, as he mastered his new focus, he began to take control of the N'athm. His dreams no longer seemed fractured and random – instead, they were more like training. He began to learn about the monsters in the Storm's army – their types, abilities, and mindsets. He also began to uncover, at least in part, exactly what they were and what they represented. They were no longer mindless beasts driven to chaos, but the instruments of vital change, an inherent part of the universe come to cleanse the world. These concepts may or may not have been the truth, but he believed them, and that was all that mattered.

On the night before the Storm's invasion, Feng seemed to sense a change was coming. He made his way from his home in Surling to the Buddhist temple in the nearby mountains, arriving with his N'athm shadow in tow, dimly sensing its presence but no longer caring. He found himself at the great stone Buddha's feet, where he meditated until dawn, when at last he made his final breakthrough – the realization that humanity itself was the great barrier to true and everlasting enlightenment. The N'athm, little more than a wasted shell, dissolved into dust as Feng absorbed its essence, achieving a perfect clarity he knew in his heart was Nirvana.

Feng was ready now for what was to come. His life as a Human was over. He would stand and die to the invading Storm, which he somehow knew was swarming over the border that very morning. They would take his life and he would be reborn, in the Buddhist way, as something greater.

He stood in place there, waiting, as refugees from the town tried to find succor in the temple. The monsters came, devouring all in their path, and still Feng waited, kneeling, arms raised to Heaven. The monsters came, but they passed him by.

Surprised but not concerned, Feng realized that death was not yet to be the instrument of change, at least not for him. He made his way down from the mountains, driven to seek a new purpose for himself. He knew nothing of the being known as Hastur or the Dead God's dark desires, but Feng understood one thing – the Rapine Storm was the wave of the future. In the purest extension of Buddhism, all people were to die, and the worthy would be reborn anew as part of the Storm. Along the path, Fu-li Feng would lead them.

As he has sought a new direction, Fu-li Feng has found his dreams are not a lie. He can indeed command the monsters of the Storm as though they are puppets on strings. Sensing his power, the Storm's leaders sent him east, towards a meeting with the Consort. By the time he reaches her, on the outskirts of Beijing, Feng's transformation into a Desolate One is complete, and he is ready to take his place at her side.



The Consort recognizes his power immediately. Feng's connection to the Dead God is palpable, almost visible in its intensity. Hastur clearly has plans for this most special of his followers, yet the Consort has no idea what those plans are. This is the first she hears of Fu-li Feng and, while her own origins are just as inexplicable, her coming was at least anticipated. To have a creature like this emerge from nowhere comes as something of a shock. The Consort fears him and rightly so. Is he her replacement? Has she disappointed her dark master in some way? She cannot – and will not – believe this! Nonetheless, something has to be done with Feng. But what?

Feng's power seemingly grows with every minute. The Consort knows she can't allow him to operate unchecked. He has to be sent away, to succeed and prove himself worthy of her favored position with Hastur, or to fail and be destroyed. So, she decides on a radical solution. Victory in China is now assured, and many of her bloodthirsty armies rage unchecked across the land. She will test Feng's power by allowing him to gather up what forces he can and drive them before him. He will be the Dead God's Pied Piper, leading the vermin out of her sight, shoving them down the throats of her enemies. In the end, whether he succeeds or fails, it will be by Hastur's will. Smiling at her own deviousness, the Consort sends Feng to his destiny.

FENG MARCHES SOUTH

Fu-li Feng has no idea at this point that the Consort's orders are in any way deceptive, and even if he did, he probably wouldn't care. What matters to him is that he has achieved Nirvana, undergone a deathless rebirth, and has transcended humanity. He no longer has any connection to his former life. His old memories are just a dream, a barely remembered nightmare from which he has now awakened. New truths are clear to him, as clear as day, and among those is that existence as a Human (or, by extension, a Nazzadi) is a cruel, torturous thing that no longer has any place in the universe. There are better fates, such as the "monsters" that surround him, creatures that are – as far as he is concerned – a higher form of existence. The death of the races of humanity will only be doing those beings a favor, and usher them into rebirth as a servant of the Rapine Storm.

With no fanfare or hesitation, Feng begins to march. He moves into southern China, where swarms of monstrosities rampage across the battered countryside, calling them to him with the merest whisper. They form around him in even ranks, moving in ordered formation from village to burning village, gathering into a warband, then an army, and finally a horde. When he is done, Feng has over one hundred thousand creatures following him, the most orderly and disciplined force the Rapine Storm has ever seen.

Feng marches south, into Laos and Thailand, avoiding the nuclear hot spots in northern Vietnam. From the shelter of the mountains, the Consort watches him go, glad to be rid of him. His target is Bangkok, a huge city surrounded by hefty fortifications built for emergency use should the New Earth Government not avert disaster in China. Undisciplined swarms of monsters have

already taken control of the surrounding region, rampaging unchecked across the countryside, and they flock to Feng's banner. Eager for conquest, they strike at Bangkok again and again, and each time are repulsed.

For all his control over his monsters, Feng is completely inept when it comes to waging war. A product of a peaceful religion, he has never studied combat. There is a certain stereotype of the stoic monk who also happens to be a martial arts master, but this is not Fu-li Feng. He knows nothing of warfare, and because he can control the Storm's creatures so directly, he has brought with him no aides or assistants to give him advice or lend their expertise. Not that any would have followed him in any case, for the Consort did not assign any to his side. This war is his to win or lose entirely on his own.

Thus, Feng spends many days outside Bangkok, using the city and its defenders as a sort of training tool. He sends units this way and that, probing, studying, learning whatever he can, and slowly understands what it means to carry out a large-scale tactical battle. Yet, even though victory through sheer force of numbers seems assured, his slowness gives the New Earth Government time to react to his presence. Numerous reinforcements are sent from other bases, desperate to counter this new threat. With much of the rest of the Storm occupied battling the Migou in China, the NEG is free to send a tremendous force to Bangkok, which they do.

Feng may be inexperienced in the ways of war, but he knows when he sees the New Earth Government's arriving army that his forces will suffer tremendous losses attacking the city. He realizes at once that he could win, but the resulting fight would render his army incapable of further advancement. The Consort has ordered him to ravage Southeast Asia and hitting a single city before returning for reinforcements seems entirely too much like failure. So, instead of attacking, he leaves enough forces behind to pin down the defenders while once again marching southward. In the meantime, he calls for reinforcements to be sent to Malaysia, and sends word to the Consort that Bangkok is ripe for the plucking. Though she ultimately declines to attack, her waves of reconnaissance-in-force attacks keep NEG units tied up in the city for weeks.

Pressing south, Feng meets little resistance, except in the largest cities, where most of the local population has gathered. Any town or village he encounters is destroyed utterly, as is most of the countryside. He adopts a policy of allowing his troops to spread out in a great sprawling mass, in part to avoid making concentrated targets for themselves in the event of air strikes, but also to root out any and all refugees and survivors hiding out in the area. When he comes upon cities, such as the unfortunate Pulau Pinang and Ipoh, he simply surrounds them, then crushes them like grapes. Anyone attempting to take refuge in such places finds no avenue of escape available, except by air.

When he reaches Kuala Lumpur, Feng finds another fortress similar to Bangkok. He destroys the city, but the attack causes

more losses than he'd have liked. He is forced to wait for more reinforcements, calling back the last of the Bangkok harassment details he'd left behind. While waiting, he spends some time contemplating an assault on Singapore, but eventually determines this is foolhardy. By now the residents have seen him coming for weeks, and New Earth Government forces are arriving by the shipload. This is one nut that is too difficult to crack.

The two armies wait in stalemate, probing and testing each other amidst the forests along the length of the peninsula, until finally the Esoteric Order of Dagon takes notice of the NEG's fleet build-up in the South China Sea. They attack in force, starting a small battle off the coast near Singapore and, during the confusion, Feng's horde crosses unchecked into Indonesia, onto the island of Sumatra. Here he releases his army, which is growing restless after days of waiting, allowing it to rampage across the entire island, destroying everything it can find. New Earth Government forces attempt to intervene in many small battles, but find no major targets, no central control to strike. Feng, the head of the snake, walks calmly amidst his minions, never drawing attention to himself, and thus remains unnoticed by NEG reconnaissance.

In this Feng proves himself to be quite an anomaly. The New Earth Government has until this point found the Rapine Storm relatively predictable. Their leaders usually surround themselves with large contingents of defensive formations, arraying lesser commanders about them in a loose formation designed to keep some measure of control over their undisciplined monsters. Feng's horde work in a completely different manner that defies all conventional intelligence. There never seems to be any sort of command element, and the usual leadership targets prove invisible or nonexistent. NEG analysts know there has to be someone or something in charge of the strangely disciplined monsters, but who or what that might be, they have no idea.

Furthermore, Feng's army doesn't follow any intelligent strategy the New Earth Government can discern. Faced with an easy and obvious target like Bangkok, the horde simply mills around, as if uninterested in destroying the city. Yet they have no compunctions about hitting Ipoh or Kuala Lumpur, and then once again mysteriously avoid the obvious choice at Singapore, instead crossing into Sumatra and dispersing at random. The NEG theorizes at this point that perhaps the mysterious, charismatic "Eye of the Storm" (as they now refer to Feng) has quite possibly been killed before he could strike.

With this in mind they send the Navy back to its bases, so as to not provoke further attention from the Dagonites in the South China Sea. Only then does Feng resurface, gathering his army seemingly overnight into its original, disciplined form and crossing quickly into Java. The horde rampages eastward, leaving the island a shattered wasteland, then hopping from isle to isle until it finally arrives in Timor.

That is when Fu-li Feng finally crosses swords, so to speak, with Marshal Hirini Kaihau.

THE DARWIN IMPERATIVE

The arrival of Feng's forces outside Bangkok is all the proof Hirini Kaihau needs that his worrisome theories were correct. He has postulated an invasion of Southeast Asia, and eventually Australia, and now the army is on its way.

From his post in Darwin, Kaihau gathers information and collected reconnaissance, devouring it all like a hungry man confronted with a feast. When the invading horde leaves Bangkok and heads south, he immediately deduces that Australia, not Singapore, is the primary target. Kaihau's detractors claim that this is simply paranoia about his homeland's safety showing through – and certainly his actions to date seem to suggest this is the case, seeing as the invading force is still hundreds of miles away with plenty of other targets in its path. Yet the Marshal's dire predictions come to pass again and again. He correctly deduces that Singapore will be left alone, and once Feng's horde cross into Sumatra and seemingly disband, Hirini argues vehemently that the threat isn't over. Only when the army coalesces and moves on Java does the New Earth Government finally grudgingly admit he has a point. The next and most obvious target, and the ideal location for an invasion, is the isolated city of Darwin.

Darwin, the northernmost arcology in Australia, is nonetheless relatively small as cities go. Though it sports over half a million inhabitants and is one of the most modern cities in the New Earth Government, Darwin until recently has had no military presence and little in the way of fortifications. Kaihau's presence there has begun a slow process of change, but there is only so much that can be done in the few months he has available. Darwin is ripe for the plucking and Kaihau knows it. The only possible chance he has is the slim hope that perhaps Feng doesn't.

Feng has, in fact, already set his eyes on Darwin. Invading Australia itself will be relatively easy. There are any number of places along the endless miles of northern coastline where his army can land virtually unopposed. The problem is one of control. He possesses great power in his new form, and can command the obedience of any monster in the Rapine Storm's vast collection of monsters, but that command doesn't necessarily translate into complete control. He faces a constant battle against the rapacious nature of his army and their bloodthirsty need to rend and destroy. Every time he has to wait, delay, or plan, he soon finds himself exhausted by the constant need to keep his army intact. Furthermore, there is another issue, one that has confronted military leaders since the beginning of time – food. An army travels on its stomach, or so the saying goes, and the monsters in the Rapine Storm need food just like any other creature. There is only so much they can eat by living off the land, and only so many supplies they can pillage. Once those are gone, they will either starve or fall upon each other, and all Feng's power will be as nothing compared to that mindless hunger.

Australia, though seemingly huge and inviting, is also mostly desert. Feng knows there will be little to feed his army unless he can pillage a large New Earth Government city, and quickly.

Timor serves as little more than a light snack for his vast horde. He will have to sack Darwin, or else retreat and end his campaign at the fortress that is Singapore.

Kaihautu is unaware of this and focuses his energies on confusing Feng's reconnaissance efforts. He paints a picture of a supremely defended citadel with at least the same amount of defenses as Singapore. He squanders ammunition as if it grows on trees, forces his men to work double and triple patrol shifts, and keeps recon going round the clock, all to convince his opposite number that he has far more troops than he really does. The Marshal adopts sneak tactics such as moving units out under cover of darkness or storms, bringing them back in full view of Feng's spotters so they look like new reinforcements arriving to join the militia. Kaihautu has a glimmer of hope that perhaps he's delayed the invasion when Feng sends a force across to New Guinea, but this is merely a probing move, accomplishing little. The Rapine Storm's forces gather, waiting for transports and reinforcements from the north, while Kaihautu scrapes up every New Earth Government unit he can find, calling in every favor and all but begging for support from every OCFCOM base in the region.

As the NEG fleet begins to assemble near Darwin, once again the Esoteric Order of Dagon rears its ugly head. As the skies begin to cloud over and winds pick up, the Dagonites launch an attack on the New Earth Government ships and coastal forces. They seem to attack without any rhyme or reason, leading many to suggest that perhaps the Rapine Storm is now in league with the EOD. This is not the first time the Esoteric Order has acted seemingly on Feng's behalf. Yet, the truth is simply that such a large concentration of surface vessels cannot go unnoticed by the Order. They have found a juicy target of opportunity and don't waste their chance, striking just as a natural typhoon begins to form over the region.

The storm benefits no one, except perhaps the EOD. Fighting both the seas and the Dagonites is impossible, so the New Earth Government retreats their ships and lands their ground forces outside of Darwin. Meanwhile, the Rapine Storm horde tries using the weather cover to cross unopposed, only to meet with NEG air strikes and a few limited attacks from the EOD, who declare victory and retreat beneath the waves. Feng's remaining forces complete their landing at Gunn Point, on the peninsula north of Darwin, without much resistance from the New Earth



Government, but as the storm began to wane, the NEG army moves into position to push the invaders back into the sea.

At first it seems as though Feng's army is doomed. The beach-head leaves no room for retreat and his army is nearly insane with hunger. Yet Feng seizes upon this as an advantage, not a limitation, sending his forces out in a mad, overwhelming rush. They die in droves, but in the end their numbers are too great to resist. The New Earth Government's lines are shattered and Feng's monsters fall upon them, devouring everything in their path. Follow-up strikes by the defenders devastate the Storm's front lines, which have paused to consume their victims, but the invaders keep coming in seemingly endless waves.

What's more, they don't waste any time stopping to recover. Driven by insane hunger, the hordes rush down the peninsula towards Darwin. Kaihautu, expecting a more disciplined and cautious advance – which until now has been Feng's hallmark – is caught by surprise by this mad blitzkrieg. His army is cut off, with only air forces and flight-capable mecha able to move back to Darwin to take up a defensive position. By the time they reach the fortifications, the outskirts of the city are already under attack.

Worse still, the Esoteric Order of Dagon has by now returned in force, engaging the New Earth Government navy off the coast. Unable to lend any sort of support to the ground war, the fleet retreats, drawing the EOD away from the city in the hopes of letting at least some civilian ships escape with refugees. The exodus is disorganized and chaotic, as ships sail every which way, some out to sea and others along the coast, many unfit for travel on the still-stormy ocean. The number lost to the weather or to EOD raiders will never be known, but only a few escaping ships ever reach a safe harbor.

Meanwhile, Marshal Kaihautu makes a last-ditch effort to break through to Darwin, but it quickly becomes clear he has no chance of success. His retreating army is still too disorganized. Furthermore, the Storm's horde seem uninterested in chasing him, unless he tries to attack. Any attempt to hit them brings an immediate and lethal response, but as long as they don't fire, Kaihautu's men can retreat unopposed. This is because the creatures in Feng's army are so hungry they wanted only to sack the city and stuff their bellies – but the bodies of dead NEG soldiers will feed them just as well, if necessary.

So, it is with a heavy heart that Marshal Kaihautu orders Darwin abandoned. Once more he begs the New Earth Government for the use of nuclear weapons – a bomb dropped on Darwin now would end the threat of Feng's army once and for all. Once again he is refused. There will be no more nukes unless there is absolutely no other choice. Only if Hirini cannot destroy the army on the ground will nukes be contemplated, and that day has not yet come.

From her safe haven in Melbourne, Ariel Lundstrom now tasks Kaihautu with the most important order he's ever received – de-

fend the interior of Australia at all costs. In this he is determined to succeed, or die trying.

FENCING IN NORTHERN AUSTRALIA

The fall of Darwin sends shock waves through all of Oceania. Rumors fly that the Rapine Storm is rampaging unchecked across the continent. Panic is rampant, and the fall of the continent seems almost a foregone conclusion. Yet the news is not all dire. Marshal Kaihautu, once reviled, now seems like a genius – the one man with the foresight to see this coming, and the only one with a plan even remotely capable of saving Australia.

From OCFCOM headquarters in Melbourne, Marshal Lundstrom waits for word that Kaihautu's forces have escaped annihilation. Slowly the reports trickle in, and the situation gradually improves. Hirini is regrouping in the tiny town of Pine Creek, where he is taking up positions to prevent the Storm army from pressing on deeper into the continent. He requests reinforcements at once, and Lundstrom holds nothing back. Everything that can be spared is sent northward to meet the Rapine Storm.

Feng, convinced that he has already faced and defeated everything the New Earth Government has in Australia, sees no reason to hurry his advance. His reconnaissance units report nothing but a scattered, disorganized force to the south, with no walls to hide behind. He can destroy them at his leisure. He takes his time and allows his hungry army to feast upon the remains of Darwin and the settlements nearby. Once sated, his monsters move south, intending to gradually encircle Pine Creek as has been done to the various towns in Indonesia, cutting the defenders off from reinforcements before crushing them under his army's weight.

Marshal Kaihautu doesn't wait for that. He takes the offensive, striking at Storm units as they move, surgically eliminating any creatures that stray too far away from the main body of the horde. His aggressive stance forces Feng to slow his advance, but not stop it. Each time he moves further south, there is an air strike or a unit of mecha pops up to inflict terrible casualties before disappearing behind the Australian's lines. Kaihautu, who has had months to plan his defense of the continent, knows full well that Feng's army is overextended. Thousands of miles from the Consort's support, with little chance of reinforcements any time soon, the Rapine Storm force can be whittled down through attrition.

Feng's army continues to spread out, barely held together by his will. The monsters need to kill and eat, and northern Australia is only sparsely populated. Ranging ever farther from the Feng's influence, some lose contact with him and break loose, scattering into the wilderness. Others, driven by hunger, make mindless attacks on the NEG, and are cut down in droves.

Feng begins to realize his mistake. He knows very little about Australia and simply assumed there would be sufficient supplies to feed his hordes, as there had been in Malaysia and Indonesia. Worse yet, the New Earth Government navy has now moved into

position along the north coast, where they can easily block any retreat. What supply line there was has now been cut, and a small cadre of reinforcements on its way through Indonesia is spotted and destroyed. There will be no help from Asia – Feng is on his own.

The obvious target is Katherine, a small city south of Pine Creek and a virtual gateway to the Australian interior. This is the only town with any sort of fortifications and it's the center of a flood of refugees from all across the Northern Territory. If Feng can capture Katherine, he can swiftly move south without much fear of reprisal. Heading east or west is also an option, but towns in those directions are already being evacuated and the opportunity for resupply is limited. He makes a few raids, meeting with enough success to keep his monsters fed, and then begins to focus on the goal of destroying his opponent.

Kaihautu's sniping attacks inflict damage on the Rapine Storm army, but they have the side effect of showing the Marshal's hand. Observing the results, Feng reasons that if his opposite number had the capability of making a concerted strike, he would have already done so. Correctly guessing that Kaihautu doesn't have the strength to oppose him directly, Feng begins an elaborate fencing match. He seems to be in no hurry. Each small engagement improves the morale of his forces and teaches him a little bit more about the nature of war in Australia. Furthermore, while it is possible a much larger force might arrive at any moment, he doubts any such presence is likely. If the New Earth Government had more military in Australia, it would have already arrived. Even if it did come, that meant it had been pulled from somewhere else in the Far East, and the Rapine Storm would be able to push farther as a result.

By this point, Feng understands his purpose in being sent here. He no longer has illusions that he's been sent to Australia for any reason other than to be rid of him. The lack of any further reinforcements, or even contact with the Consort, tells him all he needs to know in that regard. Yet he is not angry or bitter by any means – he has left such petty emotions behind with his fallen humanity. When he achieved Nirvana, he had expected to die. The universe had other plans for him, and so he became something more than human. He will do what he needs to do in his new form, and when the universe is ready, he will depart his mortal shell, to be reborn again into something even more powerful. All that matters now is to do what he needs to do before that day comes.

Over the course of many days of fencing with his enemy, Feng takes Marshal Kaihautu's measure and finds him wanting. The Maori's entire strategy is plain to see. He intends to harass and delay the Rapine Storm as much as he can, steadily whittling down his forces without getting involved in a decisive engagement. The last thing Kaihautu can afford is the loss of his army. As long as it remains intact, he still has a chance.

Realizing this, Feng decides to press the issue. After refusing the opportunity to make a direct assault for almost two weeks, he

suddenly changes tactics. His monstrous horde, still spread out over hundreds of square miles, literally stops in its tracks and turns as one on Pine Creek. Feng hopes the sudden move, preceded by absolutely no preparatory action, will catch Kaihautu by surprise. He almost succeeds.

Marshal Kaihautu has been planning for a while now to abandon his barely defensible position at Pine Creek. The town is little more than a crossroads at the junction of two old highways, near a small lake known for quaint scenery more than anything else. It is ill-suited for a military base of any size or quality. More importantly, all civilians have long since been evacuated. There is nothing there to protect. Thus, when it becomes clear that Feng is through fooling around, Kaihautu issues the retreat order he'd prepared days before. Under the cover of suppressing fire from multiple emplacements in the nearby hills, the New Earth Government army slips away, avoiding the obvious path along the road to the southeast and instead going overland. In this they manage to escape encirclement and get away almost entirely scot-free. Only the loss of a few tenacious defenders, who refuse to leave their post lest it be obvious the town is abandoned, mar an otherwise perfectly executed strategic withdrawal.

If this isn't bad enough news for Feng, he also finds almost no supplies left behind in the evacuated town. His horde of monsters grow restless and difficult to control, thirsting for blood where none is available. Feng wants very much to pursue the retreating New Earth Government forces at once, perhaps falling upon and devouring their rear guard, but fears a counter-ambush en route. He needs a victory and there seem to be no targets in the area.

Feng needs to advance quickly on Katherine, but needs to do so with the sort of discipline his power commands. There is no way to do that without mollifying his troops, so with great reluctance he looses them on the countryside. The region is sparsely populated, as far as people go, but contains plenty of other sorts of resources as well as native fauna. The Rapine Storm spends several days hunting and pillaging with wild abandon. Feng is not worried about the campaign, though, for he knows without a doubt he can defeat the New Earth Government. By this point he has decided to take his time and do things right. Hurrying will only lead to failure.

Marshal Kaihautu seems to sense this as well. He has by now called in every marker, conscripted every civilian, and taken every measure possible to secure the town of Katherine. Originally a rustic town of barely fifty thousand residents, Katherine has become an armed camp surrounded by hastily built walls and gun towers. Situated along a river flanked by high ridges and deep gorges, it is a natural chokepoint in the local terrain, a strategic gateway to southern Australia. It is a stronghold Feng simply cannot allow the NEG to keep. He could simply bypass it, of course, as there are plenty of ways to go around, but to do so would leave a strong army entrenched at his rear. Even such a relative newcomer to strategic warfare as Feng cannot fail to grasp the folly of such a plan.

Thus it is that the success or failure of the entire Australian campaign hinges upon the little town of Katherine.

DESPERATE MEASURES

Fu-li Feng already understands that he can't allow the New Earth Government army to escape again, as it did in Pine Creek. To this end, he breaks off two large segments of his army and marches them around the gorges that flank Katherine, all the way around to the tiny towns of Manbulloo and Venn. This cuts off any possibility of retreat along the roads leading southwest and southeast, respectively. He then places spotting forces in the wilderness surrounding the towns, which by then have been completely abandoned. In the event the NEG attempts to flee Katherine, they will run into these spotting teams, and the mobile garrisons at Manbulloo and Venn can quickly move to pin down the escaping forces. While these garrisons will almost certainly be destroyed, their sacrifice will buy the rest of Feng's army time to descend upon the NEG army and grind it to pieces.

This plan is certainly solid, but Feng needn't have bothered. Marshal Kaihautu has no intention of leaving Katherine. In fact, the encirclement plays directly into his hands. Hirini makes no attempt to engage the enemy at Manbulloo or Venn, concentrating on striking the main body of the horde, which is massing near Edith to the northwest. Focused fire inflicts heavy casualties and sends Feng's forces scattering for cover, yet they continue to advance. It seems likely that the army might make a final drive at Katherine that very day, but the timely arrival of a fresh mech company out of Perth opens up Feng's western flank. He is forced to go to ground by nightfall and an uneasy peace settles over the cratered landscape.

At this point, Feng does not press the attack. He has plenty of time, after all. Morale is high, as the enemy is surrounded and has nowhere to go. They will soon fall and there will be nothing to stop the Rapine Storm from ravaging an entire continent. Feng's monsters spend the night under cover or in burrows, dreaming dark dreams of the blood they will spill in the coming days.

The next morning seems like the perfect opportunity to press on into Katherine. Feng opens by making several probing attacks at the various approaches to the town, hunting for weaknesses. Kaihautu counters swiftly, battering the approaching monsters with direct and indirect fire until they retreat. Sometimes he lets them move a little closer before laying down a searing cross-fire. Furthermore, the Marshal has by now correctly divined the purpose of the garrisons south of town, and sent several small squads to put on a "colourful lightshow" over Venn. Feng, fearing his enemy might be prepping an escape in that direction, sends more forces to reinforce the garrison rather than press home a direct assault.

Feng does catch Kaihautu by surprise at one point by sending a team of aquatic capable monsters through the gorge to the northeast, approaching Katherine from under the river there. Unfortunately, this squad has the misfortune of emerging just

as a company of armor is crossing the bridge. Both units are decimated in the resulting fight, but the battle is over so quickly that Feng never receives any reports of success or failure. The loss of this unit convinces him that further approaches from that direction are doomed.

Kaihautu, for his part, enjoys almost complete control of the skies from sunrise to sunset. Feng's forces contain few air units – only a few Quetzalcouatl have survived to this point – and those he does have quickly learned to stay hidden unless absolutely needed. The Marshal has long ago discerned that there had to be a commanding officer of some type somewhere in the invading horde, but its nature eluded him – Feng has become expert at hiding from all reconnaissance. Since he used no advisers and didn't travel with any sort of large entourage, it has been virtually impossible to pick him out from amidst the swarms of creatures roaming to and fro. Several times, Kaihautu has heard rumors of a lone Desolate One spotted amidst the monsters, and he knows that Desolate Ones are the Storm's equivalent of officers, but he has yet to actually get this solo individual in his crosshairs. He has high hopes that his air recon units will pick out Feng at some point but, despite numerous close calls, he has been unsuccessful.

As the second day of the Battle of Katherine grinds on, Feng has a decision to make. His probing moves suggest a two-pronged assault on the northeast and western sides of the town will be ideal. Morale is still high, and his beasts are slaving at the thought of finally getting to rip into the soft underbelly of their enemies. Yet he still remains cautious. His enemy is crafty and may be concealing some new trick. Unwilling to risk his army with a rash attack late in the day, he instead orders his forces to spread out and dig in for the night. As a result, some of his more aggressive creatures come close to outright rebellion, going so far as to attempt to escape his control, forcing Feng to move along the front lines, reining them in.

THE CONSORT SENDS REINFORCEMENTS

Feng also knows from his tenuous communications with Rapine Storm elements left behind in Southeast Asia that two additional companies of monsters are making their way through Indonesia on their way to reinforce him in Australia. These companies are led by Desolate Ones who disagree with the Consort's decision to leave Feng to his own devices. The rebellious Disciples; a former Russian sorcerer named Sergei Katov and an albino cultist known only as the Hooded One, have come to throw in their lot with Fu-li Feng.

Katov, whose own entry into the Rapine Storm was brought about by his selfish desire for power, was a sycophant who initially attached himself to the Consort in an attempt to ride her coattails into Hastur's favor. The Consort loathes him, but needs his expertise in China, an area with which the Russian is familiar. He at one time had spent a great deal of time studying ancient ruins in Tibet and the surrounding regions, exploring old Buddhist ruins looking for anything that might connect the religion to dark magic. While he found very little, the teachings of Bud-

dhism started him on the ultimate path to becoming a Desolate One. Reasoning that a metamorphosis might be another form of karmic rebirth, and that Nirvana might itself be a way to tap into the power of the dark gods, he purposely induced a transformation and this brought him to the attention of the Rapine Storm.

Thus, when he heard of Fu-li Feng's similar transformation, Katov felt a kinship with the former monk. When it became clear, after the Storm's conquest of China, that his unique knowledge of the landscape and geography was no longer needed, Katov found himself demoted and shunted away. The Consort is done with him, he realizes now, so his only hope for further advancement is to take up a position at Feng's side.

In this he is joined by the Hooded One, a pale-skinned Desolate One who speaks little and is something of enigma within the Rapine Storm. He is in fact an Australian aborigine, but his albinism makes his true nature almost impossible to detect. The Consort knows of his origins among the mystics of central Australia, and once Feng made his way onto that continent, an aborigine seemed the perfect choice to send to assist in his mission there. She thus recruited him specifically to spy on Feng, sending him with a gift of several hundred troops in the hopes of gaining further information on her rival, should he survive. Though the Hooded One agreed at once, with barely a word and a nod, the Consort has her doubts. She doesn't question the man's loyalty to the Rapine Storm, for he has proven himself time and again during the Chinese campaign, but he does share a connection to Australia with Feng and there is always the chance the Hooded One would shift his allegiance to her rival. This is something of a risk, of course, but the counter-argument is that should he remain loyal to her, Feng will never expect such a man would spy upon him. A dangerous choice, but then the Consort is no stranger to such things.

Sergei Katov and the Hooded One make their way hastily down through Malaysia and Indonesia, skirting the surviving cities of Bangkok (now itself under siege by the Consort) and Singapore. In this they hope to pass unnoticed through the desolation, but fail. Air recon spots them on Sumatra and, when they cross to Java, their destination is obvious. The New Earth Government navy, patrolling off the coast near the burnt-out shell of Darwin, moves to intercept. The two Desolate Ones don't make the mistake of trying to land at Darwin, but cross far to the west across a much wider expanse of ocean than they would have liked. Even so, they can't avoid an engagement with NEG forces, which hit them as they commence their landing on Quoin Island. The Storm forces have no choice but to cross to the mainland by night, where they suffer withering fire from ships and then have to face even more defenders already in place at the obvious beachhead location. There is no intervention from the Esoteric Order of Dagon this time, and most of the Rapine Storm reinforcements are wiped out in the resulting fighting.

Katov and the Hooded One manage to escape the disaster, hurriedly making their way at night through the wilderness to the southeast. They move quickly, despite their unfamiliarity with

the land, for Feng has dispatched one of his surviving Quetzal-couatls to meet them and guide them in. When he learns there will be no reinforcements, however, Feng is greatly disappointed. The arrival of two more companies of monsters would've made the assault on Katherine a foregone conclusion.

Feng appreciates the attempt to reinforce his position, but has little use for Katov and the Hooded One. Sergei's overwrought professions of loyalty seem a bit transparent, while the Hooded One is as silent and enigmatic as he has been in the service of the Consort. Feng neither desires nor accepts any counsel on the matter of the invasion of Katherine. Instead, he sends the two Desolate Ones off to command the Venn and Mannbulloo garrisons, hoping the creatures will stay out of his way. He doesn't even bother attempting to hide the reasons for their assignment there, for Feng is a man who has transcended beyond petty deceptions. The Hooded One accepts this duty stoically, but Katov is quietly outraged and begins to plot ways to steal glory for himself should the opportunity arise.

The one advantage the Desolate Ones provide is that Feng is now free to focus all his attention and power on commanding his troops to the north and west of Katherine. He no longer needs to divert precious willpower to keeping control of the smaller task forces in Mannbulloo and Venn. Though he doubts his two new subordinates will be completely loyal to him, he feels certain they will stay true to the goals of the Rapine Storm. They may not obey him, at least not completely, but neither will they betray him to the enemy, and that is all Feng really needs. What he can't know is that he has already been betrayed, though not intentionally.

With his southern encampments thus secured, as much as possible given the circumstances, Feng decides the time has come to end the conflict one way or another. With the coming of morning, he begins to form his troops into two spearheads that will soon drive their way into Katherine in a massive, monstrous pincer maneuver. He has no way of knowing that his enemies now know of his presence and are prepared to cut off the proverbial head of the snake.

OFF WITH ITS HEAD

The previous night, Marshal Kaihau receives several urgent communiques from the naval fleet offshore indicating that reinforcements inbound to the Rapine Storm horde have been intercepted and destroyed. Amidst this happy news comes the firm warning that at least some of the despicable creatures have managed to escape into the darkness.

Hirini sees this not as a danger, but an opportunity. He immediately deploys night-specialized special forces units to pinpoint the escapees and report their locations to him at once. He could easily order the destruction of these bedraggled survivors, which are now making their way swiftly and without stealth down the deserted western road, but instead he chooses to keep his forces out of sight. The New Earth Government has been trying for weeks to figure out who the mysterious leader of the Rapine

Storm horde is and where he might be hiding. Kaihautu rightly senses this is his opportunity to find out.

Sure enough, the arriving Desolate Ones are ushered directly to Feng's presence. Hidden in the hills nearby, watching through telescopic night and infrared scopes, elite spy teams finally pick out the distinct shape and heat signature of Fu-li Feng. Once so identified, and his image passed around to other scouts, Feng can move around but can't stay hidden for long. He has to constantly stay in motion to keep in command range of his troops and to deliver crucial orders. Kaihautu finally has his target, and now he just has to take out the enigmatic figure and deliver the knockout blow to the Storm in Australia.

The problem lies in getting to him. Air strikes, while the logical choice, are dismissed as unacceptable. Even precision bombing is too inaccurate to ensure a clean kill, especially against a creature as powerful as a Desolate One. Furthermore, an air strike will be quickly detected and Feng can easily be protected or spirited away by any fast-moving creature that happens to be close by. Should an air attack fail, the jig will be up – Feng will know he's been identified and will thereafter take greater care to protect himself. Kaihautu's advantage now is that Feng has no idea he's been spotted, and thus will continue to act as he's always done. The Marshal knows he will have only one shot and he has to make it count.

As the skies dawn clear over Katherine, Kaihautu can see the enemy armies forming up into their twin spearheads. Feng is located behind the front lines, close enough to see the city, but too far for artillery to effectively strike. If he wants to strike at his target, Hirini has to take the offensive, and that is exactly what he does.

The Marshal's plan is threefold. First, he allows the western spearhead to penetrate almost to the river and then pins it down with massive bombardment. Simultaneously, he strikes at the eastern half of the pincer with every piece of military hardware at his command. At the same moment, the special forces teams he's already deployed into the surrounding hills sweep down upon the rear, attempting to pierce the lightly guarded flanks to get a clean shot at Feng. Killing him is paramount, as it could very well end the war with a single stroke. In Kaihautu's mind, nothing matters but this. To assure his strike's success, he secretly prepares a contingency plan known to no one but himself and his direct commander, Field Marshal Lundstrom, nervously keeping track of the proceedings back in Melbourne.

As he leads his troops into battle, Kaihautu has a smile on his face. The battle is already won, as far as he's concerned. No matter his fate, or the fate of his army, Australia will live to see another day.

VICTORY AND DEFEAT

The two armies clash just before noon. Fighting is brutal and no quarter is shown or given. Kaihautu is ever-present on the battlefield, riding in his souped-up Claymore, personally directing his troops to make surgical strikes on exposed monsters, and

rapidly stitching together holes in his own lines. He truly believes he can win this fight and his enthusiastic defense spurs on his soldiers to greater and greater heights – even though they stand little chance of winning on their own. Everything depends on the success of the special forces teams even then striking at Feng's rear.

As the elite squads begin their assault, Feng recognizes the danger almost at once. The New Earth Government attack teams hit his escorts with supreme precision, hemming him in, forcing his guards to sacrifice themselves time and again to protect his comparatively fragile body. He weaves them about him like shields as he pulls back towards his own front lines. In the end, a final desperate push by the last remaining elite troops succeeds in wounding him with shrapnel, but Feng does not fall. He rises, undaunted and, with a fist of victory to the sky, directs his remaining monsters to raze the town of Katherine to the ground.

It is over. Amidst the swirl of battle, Marshal Kaihautu can see that he's severely damaged Feng's forces, but he can't destroy them all. In his final act as commander of the Australian defense forces, he toggles the signal that informs Field Marshal Lundstrom of his inevitable failure. From her office in Melbourne, she gives the final order and, hundreds of miles from Katherine, a flight of cruise missiles takes to the skies.

Hirini's fallback plan is a simple one and relies on the same weapon he's argued time and again to use earlier in the campaign – the nuclear weapon. A single large-yield nuke, dropped at precisely the spot where his Claymore is standing, would destroy Feng, his army, and Katherine itself, annihilating any supplies the surviving Storm units might use to carry out further operations in Australia. The war would end just like that, with but a single bomb.

Ariel Lundstrom has already agreed that this was the case – in fact, the truth of it has never been in doubt. She and Kaihautu have discussed this very possibility on numerous occasions. Yet in this last moment of the war, when decisive and surgical use of nukes is called for, she wavers. The use of nukes on her homeland is anathema to her. In addition to the morality of such a move, as well as the nightmarish destruction involved, she knows it will mean the end of her career. She isn't willing to sacrifice so much when the possibility exists, however slight, that another means might be available.

So, instead of nukes, she launches cruise missiles filled with napalm, firebombs, and fuel-air explosives. With virtually no air power to speak of, Feng's forces can do nothing to interdict the incoming munitions. They burst like suns over the battlefield. In an instant, everything for miles is caught in a massive explosion. The resulting firestorm sweeps up what is left of Katherine, the surrounding countryside, and hundreds of square miles of national forest. Everything at ground zero is annihilated, friend and foe alike.

The invasion is effectively over, but there has been no winner.

AFTERMATH

No one knows for sure whether Fu-li Feng is killed when his army is destroyed. More than likely he is, but the extreme heat at ground zero eradicates any trace of what might have been his body. The surviving monsters in his horde show no sign of further control by any sort of central authority so, at the very least, his influence dies along with Katherine. Who knows, though – he may have seen the incoming missiles at the last minute, and been spirited away by one of his escort creatures, possibly even one of his last remaining Quetzalcoatl. If so, why has he not rejoined the Rapine Storm and what is he planning?

The two Desolate Ones stationed at the southern garrisons observe the gigantic fireball rising over the town and to them it looks like a nuclear blast. Horrified, they immediately gather up their remaining forces and run for the hills, hoping to escape the fallout. In this they narrowly avoid a flaming death from the approaching firestorm. Neither Katov nor the Hooded One possess Feng's ability to command their troops, so they are only able to rally a small number of creatures to them during their flight. The rest disperse into the countryside, forming hunting packs that spread through the Outback. Leaderless, these mobs still hunt and kill anything they can find, obeying only their basest natures, with nothing to guide them.

After the Hooded One flees southeast, he makes no attempt to link up with Sergei Katov. The aborigine knows the land well, for the Outback is his ancestral home. He disappears into the desert along with a significant military force and is seen only briefly, surfacing and vanishing like a ghost. It is said he is sometimes seen alone in towns and settlements just before an attack, a white specter that can only mean destruction is imminent. He seems to prefer his small company of elite creatures, for he makes no attempt to re-integrate into the rest of the Rapine Storm.

Sergei Katov, on the other hand, wanders Australia in search of glory. He takes over any contingent of monsters he comes across, making attacks on seemingly random targets wherever the fortunes of war take him. He may be trying to once again earn the favor of the Consort, or he may simply be insane for all anyone knows. He does have the distinction of discovering a hidden Migou base deep within the Outback, drawing it to the attention of the New Earth Government, as described on p. 38. Unfortunately, he manages to survive this incident and continues to sow chaos wherever he can.

Back in Thailand, the Consort is glad to hear of the campaign's end. A full scale invasion of Australia at the present time seemed to her a colossal waste of resources. Bangkok was proving to be extremely difficult to siege and Singapore promised to be much worse. Departing China in any kind of numbers would be tantamount to abandoning it to the Migou. She clearly intends to remain and consolidate her position in Southeast Asia before advancing on another continent in full strength.

She does, however, decide it was wise to continue to tie up New Earth Government forces in the Australian theater, where they

will be out of the way of her plans in Asia. To this end she sends a number of Desolate Ones, along with their troops, to make landings on the Australian shores. These groups meet with some opposition here and there, but most of the time they make their landings safely and disappear into the Outback. Here they join up with each other or with Sergei Katov, or busy themselves gathering up the loose remnants of Feng's once-proud army.

The presence of these forces has forced many Australian civilians to move to the cities for their own safety, where they live with the constant worry that the Rapine Storm units will once again coalesce into an army and move to strike one or another of the arcologies. Melbourne and Sydney seem safe, but the more exposed cities, such as Perth and Adelaide, must live with the constant threat of Rapine Storm attack.

To prevent this, the New Earth Government keeps significant garrisons at each arcology, as well as a mobile response force ready to move to any city that comes under direct assault. Additionally, civilian transports are always on call to assist in an evacuation, should one become necessary. Rumors abound that firebombs and even nukes have been secretly hidden in the cities in order to destroy any Rapine Storm army that attempts to pillage the place, but whether these are true or not are simply a matter of conjecture.

Meanwhile, NEG patrols roam the skies over central and southern Australia and ground troops and mecha engage Storm monsters in the desert whenever they rear their ugly heads. No one is certain of the true strength of the Rapine Storm in Australia, and that alone is cause for significant concern. Some believe that if all the Storm's forces were to gather together into a cohesive force, they could indeed threaten any of the southern cities and the New Earth Government makes every effort to ensure this never takes place.

Marshal Hirini Kaihautu, for his part, is revered as the hero who saved Australia. Plans for a statue of him have already been put in motion in Melbourne and the tale of his valiant defense of his homeland is already bouncing around Hollywood in screenplay form. In a world in desperate need of heroes, the valiant Kaihautu has certainly earned his place on the honor roll.

WEAVING THE CHARACTERS

Australia, the Land Down Under, is certainly an intriguing place. Awash in its own rich history, the continent is filled with remote and scenic locales, modern cities, mystic secrets, and hidden dangers. The opportunities for adventure and excitement are as vast as the great Outback itself.

The Outback is more than just a wide expanse of desert. While it's true that much of central Australia is quite arid, the Outback encompasses all sorts of terrain, from windswept plateaus to thick forests and deep canyons cut by rushing rivers. Even the coming of the Rapine Storm has done little to mar the beauty of this incredible continent, though it has brought it out from under mortal "rule."

Except for a few civilized areas, mostly along the coasts, most of Australia is wild and untamed. It's whispered in certain circles that the rugged landscape hides secret places where ancient beings once dwelled. The Migou certainly believe this, for they have sent at least one expedition secretly into the Outback to hunt for long-lost relics. Other travelers speak of strange ruins, odd symbols in the ground, ghostly encounters with shadowy beings, and the like, none of which can be verified or repeated. What truly lies beneath the deserts, mountains and plateaus of central Australia seem likely to remain a mystery.

So what might bring the players to Australia, or the surrounding area? Here are some possibilities.

DEFENDING SOUTHEAST ASIA

China has fallen and the New Earth Government is in disarray. What remains of NEG military power in Southeast Asia is scattered, scrambling to hold onto whatever they can since the fall of Beijing and the collapse of the theater's central command. Only continued Migou aggression against the Rapine Storm keeps them in check for the moment. Yet amidst all this chaos a new threat arises. A great host of the Disciples of the Rapine Storm breaks free from China and begins to march south, through the

jungles towards Bangkok. The largest surviving city in the region, its defense is vital if the New Earth Government is to have any chance at all of restoring order in Asia.

The Dramatic Characters, having just survived the evacuation of China, are hastily ordered to Thailand to join the defense of Bangkok. Here they learn that for the first time, the normally disorganized Rapine Storm army seems to act logically, with intelligent forethought and a clearly defined plan. Is this the result of some fundamental change to their nature, or are they being directed by some as yet unknown force? Learning the truth of this can be a story unto itself.

In the meantime, the Dramatic Characters engage in numerous military engagements in a desperate attempt to keep Bangkok safe from invasion. Ultimately, their actions will help decide if the Rapine Storm is able to break through the walls and ravage the city, or if instead they pull back and continue their march deeper into Southeast Asia.

CUT OFF AT DARWIN

Bangkok seems safe for now, but the Rapine Storm horde is on the move again, heading south through Malaysia and on into



Indonesia. Many analysts feel they are heading straight for the city-fortress of Singapore, but some think their goal is further still. The Dramatic Characters' skill in combat has come to the attention of Marshal Hirini Kaihautu, recently promoted to command the defense of Australia. They have been reassigned to Darwin, which he seems certain the Rapine Storm will soon attack.

Sure enough, the Storm avoids Singapore and moves into Timor, an island just north of Darwin. The Characters are sent to observe and report on the Storm's efforts to cross the Van Diemen Gulf and hit the Australian beaches. The intervention of a typhoon and the Esoteric Order of Dagon complicates matters, enabling the Storm to form their beachhead at Gunn Point. The Characters attempt to disrupt the landing as best they can, but are cut off behind enemy lines and must flee deeper into Australia. Pursued by snarling monstrosities, can they escape pursuit and link up again with New Earth Government forces in time to make a difference?

THE DARWIN EXODUS

In a potential extension of the above scenario, the Dramatic Characters reach the coast and try to make their way back to Darwin, battling the weather and harassment by Esoteric Order of Dagon forces as they go. When they arrive, they find the city in ruins, with civilian ships scattering every which way trying to escape the conflagration. They must save as many as they can, escorting the wide variety of barges, pleasure craft, and fishing boats as they flee the burning city. With EOD attacks mounting and no safe port for hundreds of miles, how long will they last before help arrives?

COMBAT OPERATIONS

The Rapine Storm pins down Marshal Kaihautu's army – and with it the Characters – in the town of Katherine, then settles in for what might well be a long siege. The opportunities for military action here are endless. Characters might be sent out to eradicate snipers, save a local village from being overrun, eliminate spy units, shoot down annoying Quetzalcoatl, make precision strikes on specific targets, or hunt for the elusive Storm leader himself (the name of whom is still not yet known). There are plenty of other possibilities as well, limited only by the imagination.

As the military campaign draws nearer to a close, word arrives that Storm reinforcements are landing to the northwest. The Characters are dispatched, under cover of darkness, to help destroy the enemy before they can reach the front lines. After a pitched battle, they manage to locate the surviving Storm leaders as they try to make their way to join the siege. Yet before the Characters can take up ambush positions, they are ordered not to engage. What possible reason could they have for not killing these obvious leadership targets?

The answer comes quickly enough. The Desolate Ones will lead the Dramatic Characters, and their elite special forces team, to the mysterious Rapine Storm commander. Killing him now will

end the war with a single shot. If the Characters can take Feng out, the result of the invasion might turn out differently. Certainly the loss of their commander will send the army scattering leaderless in a hundred different directions. Will this be such a good thing, though? Would it have been better to collect the entire army in one place, then destroy it with a single vicious fire-bombing, despite the inevitable loss of NEG life? The Characters may think they're doing a good thing by killing Fu-li Feng, but they might wind up making things worse in the end.

POSTWAR OPS

The Rapine Storm's invasion, or at least its primary thrust, is over and the remnants of the monstrous army have dispersed to the four winds. At least two leaders, Sergei Katov and the mysterious Hooded One, are loose somewhere in the Outback. Worse yet, more Storm forces have landed on the coast and are now rampaging across the continent. Plenty of story ideas suggest themselves here, such as the obvious attacks on Storm forces as they move, rooting out monsters in their burrows, and rescuing refugees trying to reach the safety of the cities. Here are a few more possibilities.

Residents of a small town to the west refuse to leave their homes, intent on defending themselves against the monsters. Dispatched to evacuate the reticent population, the Characters discover a pile of dead Storm creatures killed in the last onslaught. What secret does this unremarkable little town hold that allows it to destroy such beasts with no loss of life?

New Earth Government scouts pick up the flashes of combat on their instruments, but who could be fighting in the middle of the Outback? The Characters are dispatched to the scene and find Rapine Storm monsters battling, of all things, the Migou. What are the bugs doing here, so far away from their nearest outpost? What did they find in the Outback that could possibly draw their attention?

A mining town in the deep desert finds itself surrounded by the Rapine Storm, but to their surprise, their lives are spared. The mysterious figure known only as the Hooded One delivers a message – he wishes to parley with representatives of the New Earth Government. Curious, OCFCOM dispatches a diplomat, escorted by the Characters, to the scene to find out what's going on. What might a Desolate One need that involves the cooperation of the New Earth Government? And will the NEG agree when they learn the truth?

AND WHAT NEXT?

Where will this all lead? Will the Rapine Storm gather itself to strike at the rest of Australia, intent on turning the entire continent into the next China? Will the Migou make another attempt to find whatever it is they're looking for in the Great Desert? Will the New Earth Government rally to push the Disciples of the Rapine Storm out of Oceania and back to Southeast Asia, and perhaps even one day free China itself? And what part will the Characters play in bringing these things to pass?

INDEX

Acceleration	82	Environmental Suit Specialization	73
Adrian Haehn	105	Esoteric Order of Dagon	131
Advanced Neural Interface	31	Esoteric Order of Dagon	34
Agent Ya-Mei Chiu	104	Extended Endurance Environmentals	58
Alaska	16	Eye of the Storm	131
Alien Technology Specializations	73	Fashion	20
Alternative Music	25	Fer-De-Lance	85
Amanda Lee	113	Firebug	48, 61
Antarctica	47	First Arcanotech War	66
Anton Tilden	69	Fu-Li Feng	129
Arcanowave Powered Armor	46	Fuzion	25
Arcanowave Technology	31	Gaius McCreavy	20, 21
Arcanowave Weapon	58	Grant Walker	17, 115
Ariel Leighton	38	Gravity	79
Arnel Pasquil	111	Great Race	38
ARt System	23	Gremlin Teams	109
Astrogation	73	Gunnery Specialization	73
Atmospheres	79	Hakari	60
Australia	38, 126	Hakury	21
Auto-Sealant System	58	Hans Corso	114
Battlecruisers	45	Hastur	129
Big Band	25	Helasi	26
Big Talent	24	Hive Ship	48
Big Tours	25	Hive Ship Entry Points	49
Black Noise	25	Hooded One	135
Blanks	93	Hull Scale	80
Blind Lady	108	I.C.C.	30
Blinds	44	I'chask	35, 37
Blockbuster Studio Films	24	Independent Films	24
Bloodrose	25	Independent Solar Colonies	69
Bonegrinder Foundation	25	Inertial Dampeners	68
Brain Tubes	78	Integrating Characters	13
Buddhism	127	IPeek	23
Caliente	25	Iravy	20
Captain Trada	29	ISC Characters	72
Cars	22	ISC Games	78
Children of Chaos	24, 108	ISC Marine Profession	74
China	16, 126	ISC Mecha Pilot Profession	75
Chrysalis Corporation	24, 108	ISC Pilot Profession	76
Coalition	69	ISC Professions	72
Colonies	66	ISC Race	72
Comet	84	ISC Tager-in-Hiding Profession	77
Congregation of the Earth Mother	108	ISC Timeline	78
Consort	130	ISC Vessel Nomenclature	79
Cover Modifiers	81	Jakaya	106
Crafty G	25	Jameson Cain	24
Damage Levels	81	Jaraely	24
Damocles Class Assault Ships	32	Jian	62
Dance Music	25	Jinx Year	116
Daria Tokugawa	20, 21	Julia Pasquil	111
Darkside Music	25	Julie Rain	25
Darwin, Australia	131	Juneau, Alaska	44, 47
Defensive Systems Advances	30	Katara	63
Director	108	Katherine, Australia	135
Disciples of the Rapine Storm	38, 126	Kris	47, 61
Distant Stare	25	Kyaza	28
Dr. Aina Eeze	34	LADAR	58
Dr. Priia Oleynick	100	Laruny	29
Dua-Sanaras	35	Lian Xiao	69
Eldritch Society	108	Limited Autodrive	22

Loyalists	26	Quasar	88
Lt. Leonore Swanepole	105	R'lyeh	16
M. Noman	24	Ramming	81
M'yas Stones	34	Rapid Discharge D-Cell	33
Major Serials	24	Razor Wire	25
Mamba	85	Retro	25
Manta	47, 60	Revenant	38
Marshal Hirini Kaihautu	126	Rite of Transfiguration	34
Marshal Lundstrom	127	Rover	86
Medical Advances	30	Scatter Missile Pods	59
Metaplot	12	Scatter-Pods	31
Meteor	88	Seattle, Washington	16
MHV & the Cults	98	Second Arcanotech War	66
MHV Countermeasures	95	Sergei Katov	38, 135
MHV Mutations	92	Serials	24
MHV Rules	93	Seruly	110
MHV Spread	93	Shadow War	51
MHV Stage I	92	Shadowbeat Music	25
MHV Stage II	92	Ship Size Modifiers	80
Micro-Gravity Maneuvering Systems	58	Ship Special Situations	81
Migou	126	Shrike	86
Migou	38	Sorena	25
Migou	44	Southeast Asia	130
Migou	66	Spacefaring Types Specialization	73
Migou Attack Timeline	97	Spacer Asset	73
Migou Attacks	96	Spaceship Combat	80
Migou Hemorrhagic Virus	27, 92	Spaceship Combat Turn	80
Migou Hive Ship	45	Speeding Targets	81
Migou Immunogenic Inoculation	30, 101	Spirit Soundsystem	25
Minika Omotoso	24	Spot Damage	81
Movement	82	State of the World	16
Movies	24	Story-Based Battles	52
Music	25	Street Crime	17
N-Dimensional Computer Core	32	Swarm Ships	45
Nebula	87	Switchblade	62
New Earth Government	44	T99 Division	34
New Zealand	126	Technology	23, 30
Nlarika	113	Terrain	82
Noisemaker EW Platform	58	Th'aranoids	35
Nova	89	Timeline	18
Offensive Systems	31	Tirala	25
Office of Internal Security	108	Top 40 Music	25
Ool'sha	35, 37	Tory	113
Operation Final Strike	47	Ty Roosevelt and his Big Badass Band	25
Orbital Insertion Rockets	58	Underground Music	25
Orbital Insertion Vehicle	46	Urban Smack Music	25
Orbital Life Support Pod	58	Vacuum-Tuned Laser Cannon	59
Orbital Speed	59	Victor Harshaw	110
Orion	83	Void Stealth Suite	58
Patul	35	Vulpecula	84
Perrin & Ozala	25	Walker Initiative	115
Piloting	82	Warren White	25
Pine Creek, Australia	135	William Hopper	112
Plan Jericho	45	X, Y, & Z Axis	82
Pluto	68	Xenophobe Drawback	73
Pop Culture	19	Yellowjacket	48, 63
Portable Nanite Triage Units	30	Zero-G Specialization	73
Powered Armor Stealth Systems	31		
Prevana	20,21		
Pulsar	83		



WILDFIRE

Igniting Imagination

2011 PRODUCT CATALOG



WDF23000

CthulhuTech Core Book

288 pages [Color, Hardcover]
MSRP: \$49.95
AVAILABLE NOW!



WDF232000

CthulhuTech: Dark Passions

63 Pages [Color, Softcover]
MSRP: \$19.99
AVAILABLE NOW!



WDF23001

CthulhuTech: Vade Mecum

159 Pages [Color, Hardcover]
MSRP: \$39.99
AVAILABLE NOW!



WDF23300

CthulhuTech: Damnation View

143 Pages [Color, Hardcover]
MSRP: \$39.99
AVAILABLE NOW!



WDF23002

CthulhuTech: Mortal Remains

142 Pages [Color, Hardcover]
MSRP: \$39.99
AVAILABLE NOW!



WDF23003

CthulhuTech: Ancient Enemies

144 Pages [Color, Hardcover]
MSRP: \$39.99
AVAILABLE NOW!



WDF236000

CthulhuTech: Unveiled Threats

126 Pages [Color, Hardcover]
MSRP: \$39.99
AVAILABLE NOW!



WDF23301

CthulhuTech: Burning Horizons

144 Pages [Color, Hardcover]
MSRP: \$39.99
AVAILABLE NOW!

WDF23004

CthulhuTech: Dead Gods

144 Pages [Color, Hardcover]
MSRP: \$39.99
COMING 3RD QUARTER 2011

WDF23100

CthulhuTech: Reference Screen

6 Double Sided Full-color cardstock reference sheets
One 8.5" x 44" four-fold reference screen.
\$24.99



the void

Something approaches, a thing on an orbit from far away. This object is known in obscure prophecy as the Cthonian Star. It is awakening things long thought lost or dead, things that have slumbered awaiting its return. The Unified World Council sends out special teams of sanctioned Wardens, whose job it is to ascertain the new threats to human life, to learn everything they can about them, and fight them wherever they are found.

From the award-winning team that brought you CthulhuTech comes a new detailed Lovecraftian horror RPG setting a few hundred years in the future.



THE VOID CORE BOOK:
HORRORS OF THE VOID:

MSRP: \$29.99
MSRP: \$24.99

PAGES: 416 (Color, Softcover 6X9 format) Catalog#: WDF33000
PAGES: 224 (Color, Softcover 6X9 format) Catalog#: WDF37100



MORE DETAILS AVAILABLE AT <http://sandstormllc.com/pageRetailers>
CUSTOMER SERVICE 1.800.289.5290

WildFire LLC, the WildFire logo and The Void are registered trademarks of WildFire LLC, and the Void Roleplaying Game is a trademark of WildFire LLC. © WILDFIRE LLC 2011

Sandstorm
ILLUSTRATION: JAMES