

HYDRA™



A WASTE WORLD SOURCEBOOK

DESIGNER: BILL KING

HYDRATM

A SOURCEBOOK FOR WASTE WORLD

BILL KING

CREDITS

CONCEPT

bill king.

CODE

bill king, colin chapman.

CONTROL

paul du temple.

COVER IMAGE

martina pilcerova, Ondrej Zahradnicek,
greg kucera.

MONOCHROME IMAGES

zoran perdic, jakub pozar, Ondrej Zahradnicek,
marcel turic, tomas kucera, andrej kostic,
zdenka bouskova.

INTERFACE DESIGN

greg kucera.

EDITORIAL INPUT

rachel carpenter, paul du temple.

LAYOUT

greg kucera, bill king.

PRODUCTION

Manticore Unit Two, Prague.

TRANSLATORS

sallie lynch.

DEBUGGING

"oscar, nick., brian, brad, and johnie." benn
"arkangel" williams, colin "psygob" chapman,
andrew ross, peter bogdasarian, paul franklin,
ian hunter, aric wieder.

SPECIAL THANKS TO

nick pendrell, benn "arkangel" williams,
colin "psygob" chapman, andrew ross,
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in the wastelands.

WASTE WORLD CREATED BY

bill king.

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DATA CORE I.I



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HYDRA

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Oleg Krane stood poised on the prow of his junkboat, keen eyes scanning the waters ahead. The great hydrojets pulsed beneath the deck, huge organic machines driving the Drakon through the waves. Glowing foam broke around the ship prow, matching the luminescent wake she left behind her. He was not one of those captains who relaxed as soon as he was within sight of home. Too much could still go wrong, even here in the great South Harbor of Hydra. Too many good men had died in these last fatal kilometers. There could be hidden obstructions beneath the waves, ravenous monsters escaped from the accursed genclan biolabs, canal pirates, even Sea Devil raiders lying in wait below the slimy surface of the polluted waters.

All manner of strangeness was possible here: freak storms could capsize his ship, poisonous chemical clouds could spring out of nowhere, water wizards could run amok, the madness of the Power spreading through their brains like poison. And all of this was in addition to the usual navigational hazards of entering the Waste World's busiest harbor.

No, he would stay alert. He would not relax until the Scowling Drakon was safely tied up along Madman's Pier, and he was stretched out in the taproom of the Saucy Lady with a hookah of devilweed in one hand and a pint of sharksblood ale in the other. He could not relax while that accursed cargo was in his ship's hold, and those Pancreator-forsaken mercenaries strode the deck of his craft.

He wondered why he had ever agreed to this trip. From the word go it had smelled wrong. Take these heavily armed mercenaries to the coast of the Slime Jungle. Wait three days. Pick them, and whatever they were carrying, up and return to port. A simple contract that paid good money. Too good in fact, for such a simple mission.

The whole trip has the stink of intrigue, of inter-genclan politics, of dark deeds done in shadow, of quiet deaths in far-off places. It was somehow part of the constant struggle for supremacy among the Posthumans. Of course, he had done this sort of thing before, that was why they had come to him. But he had never done anything quite so bad as this. If word got out concerning the cargo in the Drakon's hold then...

He pushed those dark thoughts aside and clamped his old lips tight around the stem of the bone ivory pipe he had picked up on Helstrom's island. He took another lung-full of rushweed smoke. The stimulant made his face tingle and filled him with false energy and alertness.

For a moment, he felt the weight of his years fall from him, and he was almost young again. For an instant he could fool himself into believing that he was master of his own fate. He almost considered telling his crew to get their weapons, holding the mercenaries at gunpoint and tossing the cargo overboard.

Almost.

Instead he gave his attention back to his glowing pipe and its contents. The smell of chemicals and pollution and the raw, harsh odor of the Slime Sea itself overmastered the drug in his pipe. It was a heady mix. For a moment, caught up in the rush of the drug and the familiar scent, he felt almost like laughing.

Ahead of him the Towers of Hydra rose like monstrous plants. They loomed above the harbor, piercing the chemical clouds. No matter how many times he looked upon the city, it was a sight that never failed to fill him with wonder. By the faint light of the dying sun he could see the squat menacing bulk of the Fortress of Valka, and the sky-thrusting spire of the Tower of Pleasure. The rusting duralloy hulks of ancient ships lay partially submerged where they had run aground, squalid homes to thousands of the Indigent with no other place to go. Junkboats crowded the harbor so closely that a man could run for kilometers, jumping from deck to deck without ever taking the risk of falling into the dark polluted waters. More of them crowded the mouths of the canals that emptied into the harbor.

Zekt riders crowded the sky, chitin-armored knights mounted on huge flying insects. They escorted the mighty bat-winged ornithopters that droned along in the wake of the monstrous airclippers - those living juggernauts of the sky.

As Oleg watched, one of the airclippers slipped its anchorage against the Tower of War. Huge sails of translucent skin fanned out from its side and it gained altitude swiftly. Hawzers of muscle twitched, pulling the dorsal fin around, and the whole craft swung to race northward, bound for some fabulous destination on the far side of the Slime Jungles.



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THE GENCLANS RULE

TO BE BETTER

TO BE THE BEST

INTRODUCTION





Not for the first time, Oleg felt the corrosive droplets of old familiar envy drip through his veins. He wondered what it must be like to sit in the command throne of that clipper, bound to the nervous system of the huge, living vessel by ganglionic links, and guide its thousand-ton bulk through the skies. What must it be like to have that massive creature be an extension of your own body, of your own will? To feel its suspensor-supported weight drift free from gravity's tenacious pull, to swim through the sky with great lateral and dorsal sails catching the breeze, to ride the wind and the storms of night like a mortal god?

He resigned himself to the fact that he would never know. For him, as for so many other humans of the Commonwealth of Hydra, heredity was destiny. He had not been born into one of the mighty genclans who ruled the city and controlled over eighty-nine percent of her wealth. He was not one of the genetically engineered aristocracy, born with strange gifts, destined for great things. His ancestors had lost that long ago war, retained their humanity and ceded their place in history to their Posthuman successors.

He was not one of the privileged few, who kept for themselves all the rewards of rank, wealth and position. The best he could hope for was to catch some of the crumbs that occasionally fell from his betters' tables, and pray to the Pancreator that he was not crushed like a gnat in their struggles.

He tried to tell himself that he had not done badly for himself in his eighty-seven years. The Drakon, which was his vessel, his livelihood and his home, was almost paid for. He had gone through three hearts and two livers, all replaced with the best House Meleus prosthetics. The living muscles pulsing beneath the chitin of the carapace armor grafted to his flesh granted him the strength of two normal men half his age. He had enough money for the best medical care. He could afford to replace the hand he had lost to those accursed wako pirates with a new grasping claw.

He had done better than his father, a tired wraith of a man who had died slumped over his biomachine in the factories of House Meleus, most likely from exhaustion.

While still young he had broken the labor contract into which he had been indentured at birth and run away from the barracks. Barely sixteen, he had swum the canal that surrounded Meleus Island like a moat, somehow avoided being eaten by the rippy fish and the devil sharks, eluded the Bond Hunters, and made his way to the great Freeport of South Harbor. He had started work as a contract sailor, risen to captain, and eventually earned enough to put a down payment on the *Drakon*.

It was funny, he told himself, how after all these years he still found himself working for the Fleshlords of Meleus. From the scraps of the mercenaries' conversation he had overheard, he was certain that that was who the warriors were working for.

He heard the footsteps of one of the mercenaries behind him. The weight of the footfalls on the deck of hardened chitin told him it was the big one, the war-golem. He cast a glance back over his shoulder. The giant stood motionless, its heavy gun held in its hand, its red eyes blinking as it surveyed the swiftly darkening scene before it. Oleg felt a surge of unease.

Like most human Hydrans he feared the war-golems, products of the genclan's darkest science. He feared what might be going on behind that expressionless face. He had grown up with tales of what those inhuman giants had done to his ancestors, how they had put down countless human rebellions. He had every right to feel afraid of it now.

Another of the mercenaries appeared at his shoulder. Oleg was shocked. He had not even heard the man approach and Oleg knew his hearing was good, attuned to every subtle change in the sound on his ship. The mercenary was a tall, lean man with the elongated features and pointed ears that marked certain kinds of Posthuman. Oleg could not begin to guess to what genclan he belonged and that in itself was worrying. Each genclan's physical appearance was as distinctive as that of a Xenogen race. Oleg could identify members of at least a hundred genclans by sight. Perhaps this man was some sort of Broken Tower mongrel or perhaps he belonged to one of those genclans who specialized in disguise and deception, the assassins of House Spydra, for instance.

"The mist is drawing in," the mercenary said. His voice was pleasant and well modulated. Oleg remembered his name was Kripte. "I don't like that at all. We're too close to the Island of the Damned."

"Why does that bother you, Goodman Kripte?"

Kripte flashed him a cold smile, and Oleg was suddenly glad of the cutlass on his belt, and the blaster in his boot. "Because of the cargo we're carrying."

Oleg kept his face bland. He had seen the thing they had brought on board before they had cocooned it. One of the Swarm worker castes, for sure, though what any sane man would want with one of those deadly aliens, he could not guess. Bringing one of them alive into the city had been a capital crime since the days of the Swarm Wars. Just having it on board would be enough to get them all killed, if the port authorities ever found out about it.

"That is your business," Oleg said.

The thin man nodded. His long thin fingers played with the butt of his blaster. He stared off into the mid-distance and seemed to consider something. At long last, he spoke: "This is just a job to me. Like you, I'm getting well paid for this. I just deliver our package and vanish."

Oleg heard the footfalls of the golem behind him. It occurred to him that the organic robot was moving into a position where it could blast him from behind. Cold fingers of unease tickled his spine. Was there some treachery about to happen here? He followed the line of Kripte's gaze. He could see that a small ship was approaching out of the mist. It had no running lights, and it was heading directly towards them.

Oleg had wondered how they were going to get their cargo of the ship unnoticed. The docks were full of prying eyes. It now seemed obvious that they had never intended to land at the docks, that the cargo was going to be transshipped out here in the harbor. But if that was the case, why had no one told him?

One look at Kripte's face gave him the answer. He and his crew were not going to be in a position to tell anybody anything. They were going to be too busy being food for the fishes. Kripte's hand suddenly flashed forward, a killing strike aimed at Oleg's windpipe. It would have got most men, but Oleg Krane was a veteran of too many dockside brawls to be taken like that. He raised his arm and blocked the blow, then lashed out with a thunderous counter. Kripte ducked and twisted. He knew about close-in fighting, — a punch from Oleg's muscle-augmented armor would be quite capable of taking off his head.

Too late, Oleg remembered the golem behind him. Steel-strong fingers grasped him. He felt himself immobilized by a strength that not even his armor could resist. Kripte extended his fingers that suddenly ended in poison dripping claws. Oleg did not doubt that he would die if a single drop entered his veins. The pressure on his spine increased inexorably as the giant tightened its grip. Suddenly, almost incredulously, Oleg knew he was going to die.

He let himself relax, slumping forward in the robot's grip, then as Kripte approached, his grin widening, Oleg lashed out with his foot. It caught the thin man between the legs. He let out a high-pitched squeal of pain, then fell forward. Oleg allowed himself a brief terrible grin of satisfaction then the awful pain burst through his brain, and he fell forward into darkness.

HYDRA

Of all the strange places on the surface of Waste World, Hydra is perhaps the strangest. It lies on an eroded promontory in the Sea of Slime, a peninsula that has slowly sunk into the sea to become a chain of thousands of small islands. To the North, through treacherous and near-impassable swamps, lies the Great Slime Jungle; all other sides are bounded by the polluted seas of Waste World.

Huge bridges link the Hydran islands. Great gondolas pass along the canals and out into Hydra's mighty harbors. Enormous mushroom-like skyscrapers hang over the waters, blocking out the sun from the streets and canals below, reaching skyward out of the gloom as if stretching for light and freedom.

Above these lesser structures loom the Towers, monstrous and unique arcologies, dwarfing all other buildings, the way trees dwarf the fungi of the forest floor. These Towers differ from all other starscrapers of Waste World. They do not look like man-made structures. They look as if they have grown from the foundations of the islands like antediluvian plants, not by human hand.

The organic appearance of the Towers is no accident. They actually were grown rather than built. Each enormous building may have a skeleton of plascrete and duralloy, but its walls are grown from chitin, a living substance stronger than steel, and the engines which make life possible within it are living things shaped by the biomancers of Hydra.

On every level, bridges link the buildings, forming an intricate spider web of commerce and communication. Every day tens of millions of people surge through the streets and canals, a tide of flesh as predictable and relentless as the tides of the sea.

THE TOWERS

Each Tower is unique in both appearance and internal structure, and each Tower reflects the nature of its inhabitants with unerring precision. The Tower of War is a squat and forbidding fortress. The Tower of Pleasure is a place of almost ethereal beauty.

Each Tower is the home to a genclan, one of the genetically-altered noble houses that rule Hydra. It is at once a fortress and a factory and a shelter against the elements. Towers are as self-sufficient as starships, with their own recycling and air-purification systems, and their own sealed environments. To enter a Tower you must pass through airlocks and decontamination areas so that you do not pollute that environment.

Because of their enormous size, each Tower is a small self-contained city, with its own laws and taboos. The culture of a Tower can be as different from its neighbor as if they were separated by thousands of kilometers of ocean rather than hundreds of meters of canal. Many people can, and do, live their entire lives within the security of their Tower, never leaving it even to visit the skyscrapers that share the same island. It is little wonder then that the folk of the Towers have a reputation for being inbred and introverted.

For the people of the genclans, a Tower is more than a simple physical location. It is a state of mind, a culture in which they have been immersed all their lives and that shapes even their smallest ideas and prejudices. In such environments people can become very strange indeed.

Scattered here and there throughout the city are the Broken Towers. These ruined structures belonged to genclans that were wiped out in one of the Tower Wars or simply dwindled away to nothing. The Broken Towers are often abandoned or occupied by commoners. The ruins that surround them usually have a very bad reputation. Because a genclan has to be spectacularly evil and threatening to force enough of the other Towers to band together and wipe it out, this is hardly a surprise. Within these huge, bleak and brooding structures, the adventurous seek their fortune, looking for hidden treasure or ancient secrets. These islands sometimes become battlegrounds for the troops of other Towers.

Some genclans of the Broken Towers survive as renegades within the city. Such genclans usually enjoy an evil reputation. Many are roundly despised and hated by the others. Most Broken Tower clans end up on the Bridges or on the Island of the Damned.

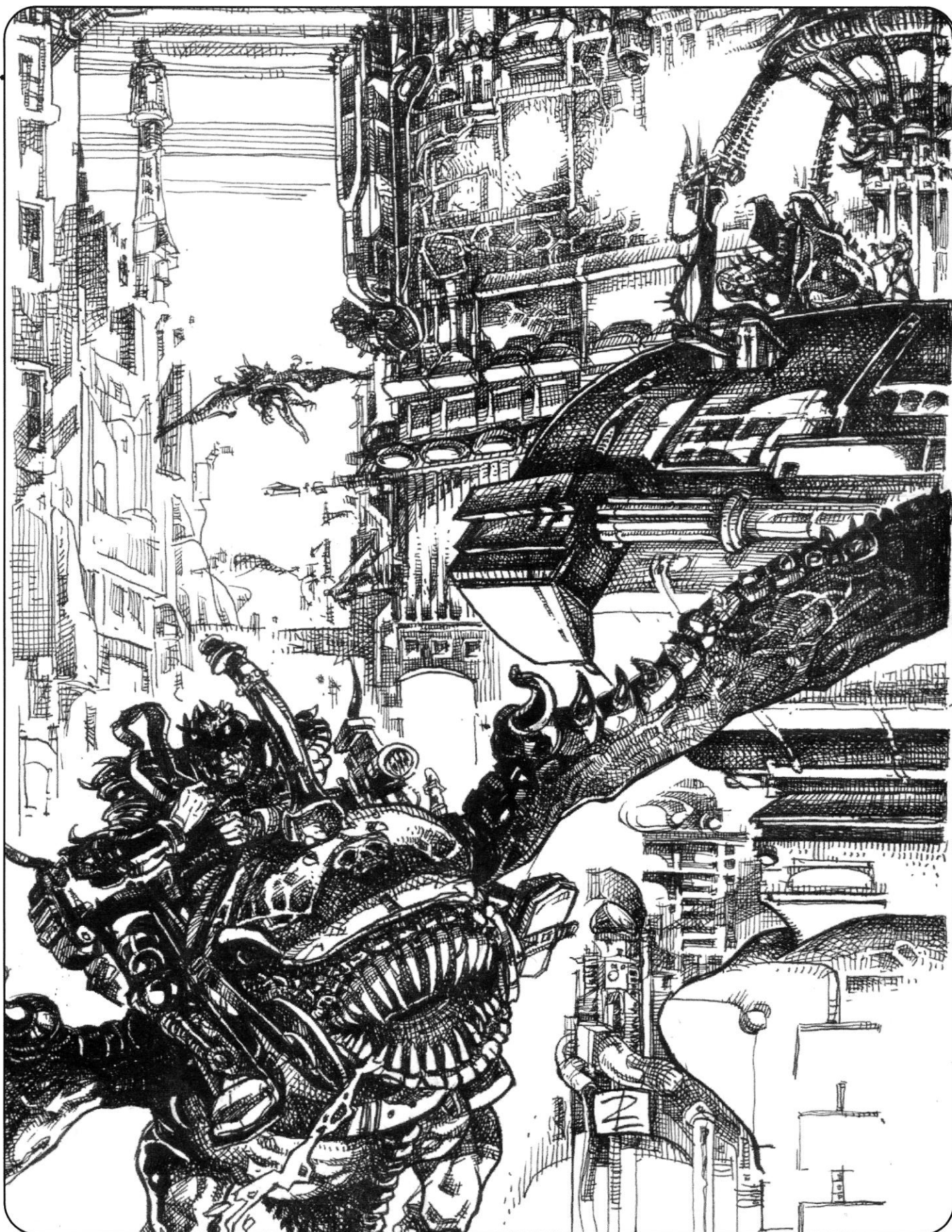
THE ISLANDS

Each Tower generally occupies its own island, known as an *insula*, and is surrounded by the lesser skyscrapers owned by its genclan. These mushroom-like buildings are home to the genclan's workers and servants and factories. Many are also barracks for mercenary troops. The power of the ruling genclan encompasses their entire *insula*. Their laws are enforced by Tower troops. Once you set foot on an island you are most assuredly under the jurisdiction of its Tower, unless you come under a flag of truce and are protected by another genclan.

THE BRIDGES

Some of Hydra's larger bridges are nearly a kilometer long. There is a saying in Hydra that the law stretches only as far as the Bridges. This contains an element of truth. In general a genclan controls all of the island on which it dwells and enforces its own laws and customs on the folk who live there. The Bridges are something else. They are a no-man's-land between the jurisdictions of rival genclans, and crossing over them can sometimes have all the formality of crossing the borders of rival states.

Down through the centuries the Bridges have become freezones where the poor and those unaligned with any clan can live. They have been transformed from broad thoroughfares into warrens and mazes of narrow streets, with every inch of the structure covered, barnacle-like, by the hovels and shanties of the occupants. Sometimes they become so worn out and so overloaded that they collapse into the canals, killing thousands. Most people simply accept this as a fact of everyday life in Hydra. The nobility of the genclans use the Bridges as combination red-light areas and cheap flea markets. They are also neutral ground on which members of different clans can meet while being bound by the laws of neither.





THE CANALS

The Canals divide all the islands of Hydra. In some places they are little more than narrow open sewers. In others they are as wide as rivers and flushed clean by powerful currents. By ancient custom, passage through the canals is free to all. Some clans try to restrict trade and travel through the canals around their island, but this is frowned upon and can lead to war as others fight for right of passage.

The canals too are crammed with life. Tens of thousands dwell on barges in the canals. Some are eccentric and wealthy merchants and sorcerers whose houseboats are as luxurious as the interior of any Tower. Most are floating shanties, consisting of barely seaworthy junkboats lashed together to create floating towns. These are home to some of the poorest of Hydrans and a breeding ground for beggars, thieves and cut-throats.

The floating markets where merchants trade from their small sampans and junkboats are popular. There is also a thriving class of Canal Pirate who commit their criminal acts mostly under the cover of darkness.

THE HARBORS

Hydra has three great harbors, the South, East and West Harbors. These enormous bays look out onto the Sea of Slime. Each is a mighty seaport in which thousands of ships can shelter from the turbulent oceans, and the tremendous typhoons that lash the coasts. Around each harbor are many markets and merchant colonies. These come under freezone law, and are areas where, by ancient tradition, no Tower has jurisdiction. Since sea trade is so important to the prosperity of the city, most Towers maintain colonies in the islands abutting the harbor and the great wharves are overseen by mercenary guards paid for by a customs levy. By long tradition, the Harbormasters are all drawn from the Guild of Merchants and possess no allegiance to any genclan. The harbors are one of the few areas of the city where a commoner has more power than the folk of the genclans. The areas around the harbors are becoming hotbeds of mercantile activity, where every commoner dreams of making his fortune.

THE ISLAND OF THE DAMNED

This monstrous island lies just beyond the South Harbor. It is a freezone but a strange one. Since it is technically beyond Hydra it is a place of exile where many of the genclans of the Broken Towers have ended up. As such it has become a ferment of political intrigue as these clans scheme to regain some of their ancient power, or crossbreed with other Broken Tower clans in an attempt to create newer and more successful evolutionary strains. The genclans of Hydra look down on the folk of the Island as mongrels and practitioners of evil sorcery. The folk of the Island return this contempt with hatred.

On the other hand, the Island is a useful place to find mercenaries, assassins and people with many strange talents, and its folk are too hardy to be cleared out except at great cost. The one thing that can unite the folk of the Island is the threat of invasion by the Towers, and since the island is a monstrous warren of fortified buildings, and its people are fanatical in its defense, no one is likely to shift them. In theory no one is allowed on or off this island, but this law is not strictly enforced and many people come and go on strange errands under cover of darkness.

THE NORTH WALL

To the North of Hydra is the Great Slime Jungle, one of the deadliest places on the surface of Waste World, a breeding ground for monsters and home to the Hives of the dreaded Swarm. As a barrier against incursions from this area, there is the North Wall, a huge tangled hedge of poisoned thorns. This hedge has grown so thick that not even a small bird can pass through its branches. Its spines are strong enough and sharp enough to tear through ceramic armor. There are no gates, and there is no way through the North Wall. You must fly over it.

THE SLUDGE SWAMPS

Beyond the North Wall are the Sludge Swamps, a precursor to the Jungle proper. This is a maze of foul, stagnant fens, quicksand and poisoned marshes. The Swamps are supposed to be a buffer zone between Hydra and the Jungle. The area is constantly saturated with deadly toxins to prevent anything growing there, but over the centuries many of the plants have become immune to even the deadliest poisons the Hydrans can devise. And it is said that small Swarm Hives are starting to spring up even there.

THE SLIME JUNGLES

The Slime Jungles have their origins in alien plantlife brought to Waste World before the Interdict. In those days, the plants were maintained in hothouse conservatories, but when the Armageddon Wars came and smashed the greenhouses, spores escaped and mutated rapidly, thriving in the newly altered world. Whatever their origins, the Slime Jungles are a showcase for the worst side-effects of Entropic fallout. The plants and animals of this hyper-competitive environment adapt and mutate in a matter of days, and in many ways the plants are more dangerous than the animals.

The Slime Jungles take their name from the great Denebian Slime Trees that are their most noticeable component. Each of these monster trees is covered in a deadly poisonous slime designed to keep it safe from the depredations of its competitors. This slime drips everywhere and covers everything with a patina of deadly mucous. Virtually every living thing in the Slime Jungles is a danger in some way or another. Each species must adapt to the threat posed by its mutating neighbors, and each mutates in turn. Thus there have developed some of the deadliest and most competitive species on Avernus, creatures that are little more than walking appetites, laced with symbiotes that help them survive.

Some of the Towers maintain colonies and outposts in the Slime Jungles to harvest their genetic material and capture specimens of plants and animals. These colonies are most often punishment details, for life in them tends to be short and nasty. The diseases of the Slime Jungles are as deadly as the inhabitants. Of course, some of the Houses have found ways of surviving and even thriving within the Jungles. The warriors of House Valka and the Scouts of House Stalker are trained to live and fight in the Jungles. Within these environments they are all but invincible guerrilla warriors.

THE SEA OF SCUM

No one knows whether the Sea of Scum takes its name from the poison mucous that drips into it from the Slime Jungles, or from the toxic effluents from Hydra's biofacs. Everyone knows that it is one of the most polluted stretches of water on Waste World. A thin film of pollutant scum covers every wave, only occasionally broken by the motion of the water.

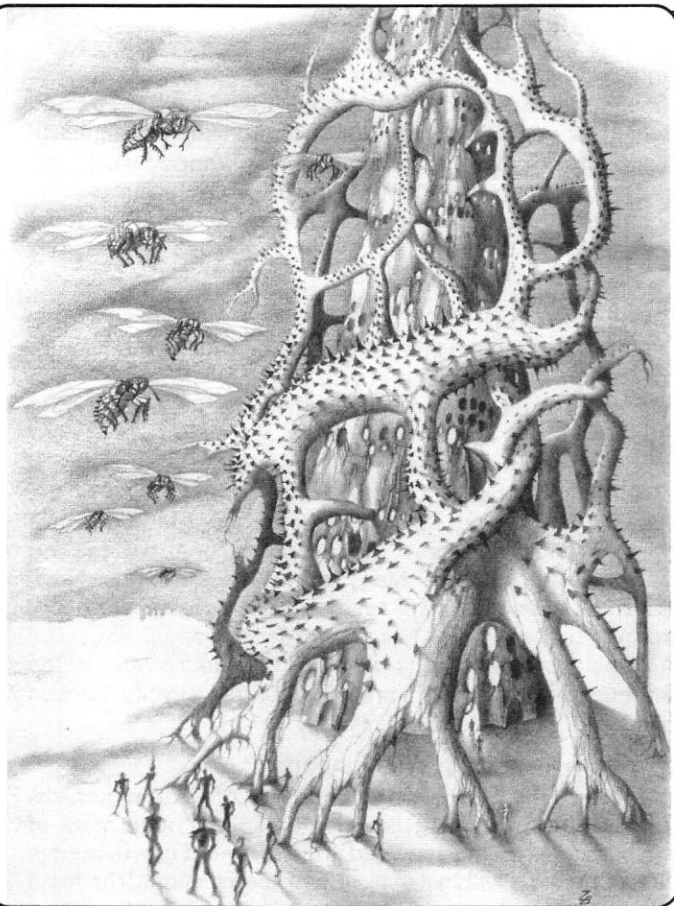
The sea itself is tinged a hideous luminescent green and by night it glows with a sickly phosphorescence. Indeed, some slum dwellers capture the water in jars and light their hovels with its dim glow. The running lights of junkboats are glass spheres containing trapped water and certain dyes, so that they will stand out from the general shimmer of the water. The further you go from the coast the more the glow fades till eventually the sea returns to its normal chemical-tainted colors.

THE ARCHIPELAGO

The Archipelago stretches for over a thousand kilometers south of Hydra. It is a chain of many small volcanic islands covered in Slime Jungle. These islands form part of Hydra's natural sphere of influence and are home to hundreds of Hydran colonies that harvest the genetic material of the slime jungles and mine the mineral cores of the islands. The Towers fight for possession of the richest of these islands and they are a source of great tension between the Houses. Many of these islands are also havens for Broken Tower refugees and occasional rumors spring up of new Towers growing on them. The Archipelago is constantly raided by the wako pirates of the Shogunate and by the Ikareans when the skycity sweeps overhead.

THE FLOATING ISLANDS

One of the most unusual products of Hydran biotechnology are the floating islands. These are huge mats of interwoven kelp and seaweed. This seaweed grows bubble like air pockets within its strands to keep it afloat. The mats are so tightly interwoven that a man can walk on them, but so flexible that they ripple with the motion of the waves. Various forms of parasitic tree grow on the seaweed and provide food and building material for the islanders. The islands have their own tightly knit ecologies and are home to various species of bird and small animal; the areas beneath them are home to many species of fish. Each floating island is the home to a village of Hydrans who make their living from the sea. These villages are all part of the Hydran Diaspora, designed to preserve some of Hydra's technology and culture if the city is attacked and destroyed. Many of the floating islands are carried by the ocean currents to the furthest reaches of Waste World. Some are never heard of again. Many are destroyed by storms and tidal waves and the Leviathans of the deep. But many survive and even prosper. Over generations their people fall back into barbarism but their culture and their sea-borne way of life lives on.



THE WASTELANDERS

Hydran colonies are to be found everywhere amid the great deserts and toxic wastes of Avernus. These are part of the Diaspora, the enormous dispersal of people and resources that the Hydrans hope will enable their civilization to survive the coming wars. Some of these colonies are way-stations for the Hydran sandfleets. Others are hidden bases far from major trade routes. Still others are secret laboratories maintained by the genclans in which they can conduct forbidden experiments far from population centers, and thus contain the damage if anything goes wrong. A few are trade centers along the main convoy routes. In almost every case the basic architecture of the colonies remain the same.

The Hydrans use organic buildings, grown from seeds. These send down questing roots to draw water from deep artesian wells. They use solar power and trace minerals drawn from the soil or from nutrients provided by their owners. They blossom outwards like huge bubbletents, using their surface area to collect solar power. As they grow, the organic buildings subdivide until they contain many internal chambers. Within these tent-like chambers are fountains of water drawn up from the plant's roots, and nutrient slime grown within the plant's walls. How they grow from here depends on their purpose.

Thornkeeps grow thick armored bark and shoot forth thousands of poison-tipped spines. They send out spores which will grow into great fence like barriers surrounding them. Hab-bubbles blossom into multiple domes, each able to shelter a family. From the middle of these clusters of bubbles rise great windmill trees that harness the energy of the breeze to augment the power of the sun. Pump-plants become freestanding wells. Oasis banyans grow to provide shelter for entire communities among their roots, and whole eco-systems sprout in their branches.

Colony seeds grow quickly. A Hab-bubble can become fully formed in a week, a Thornkeep can grow to enormous size in a month. Despite this, many of the seeds are scarcely larger than eggs and contain all the nutrients they need to see them through the first few days. Another Hydran tactic is to release colony spores. Millions of these tiny seeds are unleashed by their creators along the great wind-rivers that flow across the deserts or carried to every part of the Wastelands by storms. Most of the spores fall where nothing grows and die, but a tiny percentage find hospitable surroundings and begin to grow. They provide shelter for weary travelers. Many are found by Hydran wanderers, as they were intended to be, and form the nuclei of new colonies. Still others become the homes of Skavengers or other more sinister creatures. No one knows the real reason why the builders of House Karnak release these spores. Some suspect it is part of a master plan to make the deserts bloom once more. Others think it is some sort of religious ceremony of atonement. The Lords Of Karnak give their reasons to no one.

House Meleus and House Fera, the two Towers which engage most actively in Drakonium harvesting, also maintain huge colonies at the border zones where the Wastelands meet the Slime Jungles. These are enormous biofac complexes, guarded by hundreds of kilometers of Thornkeeps and barrier hedges. Within these Habzones are the gigantic biological machines in which the greatest of all the Hydran land vehicles, the gigantic sandwalkers, grow in huge life-pods. These life-pods are fed through enormous nutrient pipes. Eventually they split as they give birth to the monstrous machines within them. The gigantic walkers shake themselves down, preen themselves and then stand waiting for the pilots who will guide them on their never-ending quest for Drakonium.

THE CULTURE

Like most of the other metrozones, Hydran culture is shaped by its unique approach to technology. Hydrans are supreme masters of biomancy and its related arts, genesculpting and symbionics. Broadly speaking, biomancy is the ultimate extension of bio-technology. This arcane science is used to turn living things into industrial artifacts. The Hydrans have shown no scruples in perfecting biomancy. Everything, even their own genetic codes, have become raw material for their use.

Biomancy can be divided into two major branches: genesculpting and symbionics. Genesculpting works by recoding the genetic matrixes of living things to create new variant species of human, plant and animal. In ancient times, it was used to produce the Posthuman races from which the Hydran genclans are descended.

Symbionics takes living things and turns them into technological artifacts. It is used to create prosthetic limbs and weapons and carapace armor. There are areas where the two branches blur into each other but the commonly accepted definition of the two terms is that genesculpting works at the genetic level to change a whole organism, while symbionics creates artifacts that can be grafted onto any organism without changing its genetic makeup.

THE GENCLANS

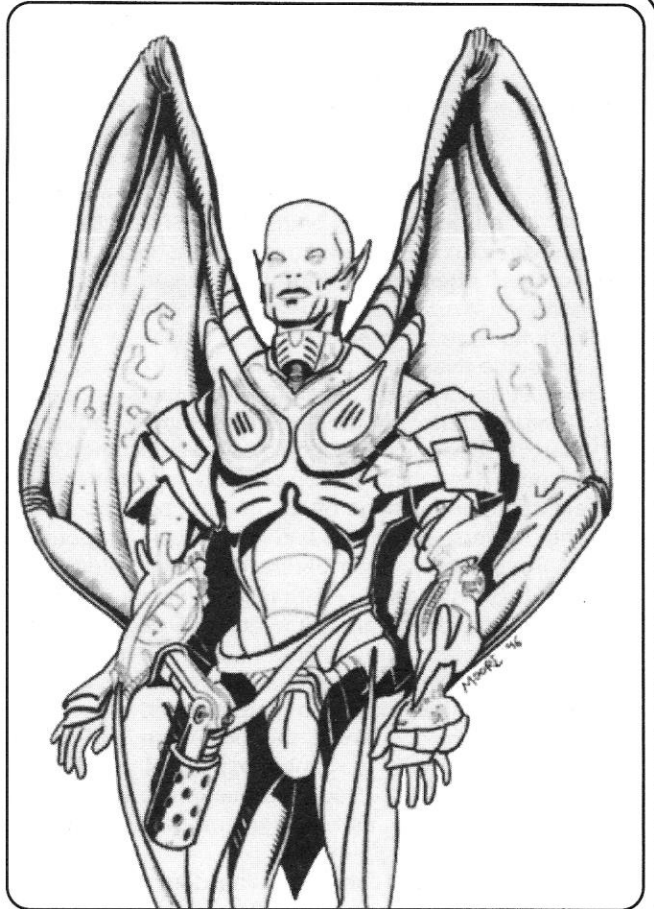
Long ago the Ancients learned that it was impossible for one person, corporation or nation to master all of the knowledge, science and technologies they had spawned. So began the process of specialization that eventually resulted in the genclans.

Taking the economic theory of comparative advantage to its logical conclusion, the ancestors of the genclans specialized in certain areas of knowledge, throwing all their resources into that one area, hoping to create their own niche in the galactic economy. They used genesculpting to tailor themselves and their children to their chosen goals. Many thousands of unique groups of Posthumans sprang into being. Some chose to specialize in psychic powers, others pushed at the boundaries of intelligence and creativity, still others became warriors, or laborers or bodyguards. Some even chose to become spies and thieves and assassins.

Of course, not every nation or metrozone agreed with the genclan's goals or methods. Some found their reworking of their own genetic material abhorrent and banned them from entering their territory. The relatively poor and unimportant Commonwealth of Hydra took the opposite point of view and welcomed the genclans with open arms. The city-state's laws were changed to positively encourage what the genclans were doing. Its charter forbade any interference with the genclans' work, just so long as they did nothing to threaten the well-being of the Commonwealth. Soon Hydra became a hub of biotechnological experimentation, home to most of the genclans of Waste World.

As the power and wealth of the genclans grew so did that of Hydra. Soon it was one of the dominant powers in the world. Giant Towers sprang up above the city, huge arcologies within which the genclans could live and perform their experiments in secrecy and seclusion. Each of the genclans vied to build bigger and more striking structures as symbols of their wealth and power.

The genclans targeted any area where they could seize an advantage. House Karkosa became specialists in alien and exotic diseases. House Valka became mercenaries and security specialists. House Karnak specialized in the creation of large scale bio-technological artifacts. House Bakkus concentrated on producing the finest and most expensive wines that any connoisseur could desire.



Many of these strategies failed, but that was expected. This was, after all, how evolution worked, and evolution was the model the genclans used to guide them. Success would lead to success. Failure would lead to extinction. Existence was a struggle. Survival was the goal.

The best of the genclans did more than survive. They prospered and succeeded in dominating the niches they aimed for. Jealousy of their success and fear of their ruthless business methods was one of the root causes of the Armageddon Wars. Even within Hydra, the non-modified population of the city started to look askance at the behavior of the Posthumans.

THE COLLAPSE

When the Armageddon Wars erupted Hydra was hit hard. Airburst Entropic weapons devastated the city, and sunk huge areas of the promontory on which Hydra stood into the sea. The Apocalypse Virus ravaged the datacores, and rogue Panzers ran amok through the ruined streets. The genclans responded with characteristic, ruthless thoroughness.

They destroyed the city's datacores and cut the metrozone off from the Ultramunda. They eradicated all robots within the city that could conceivably cause harm. When the common people tried to stop them, fearing that the city would be reduced to barbarism, the genclans killed them.

The genclan's actions resulted in exactly what the human population of Hydra feared. The city was plunged into darkness as the power generators went down. Financial systems collapsed. Millions of people went bankrupt overnight. Hundreds of thousands starved in the streets.

And yet, the genclans' swift action may have saved the city from total destruction. Without power and datacores, the city was perceived as harmless by its rivals, and they shifted their attention to more immediate threats. The Armageddon Wars swept by Hydra, and while many cities and nations were destroyed utterly, it at least survived.

Of course this still left the genclans with a very unhappy population to pacify. Anarchy and chaos gripped the city. There were riots in the streets as hungry people took up whatever weapons they could seize and turned on the Posthumans they blamed for causing the disaster. The Towers came under siege by the general populace.

The Towers, however, had long been prepared for such an eventuality. Even before the Armageddon Wars, they had been islands of wealth rising from a sea of poverty. They were fortified and secure and guarded well by their Posthuman owners. The pitiful attacks of the humans were driven back. The masters of the Towers consulted with each other and then moved to restore order.

Tower troops dispersed the besiegers and brought order to the streets by the simple expedient of killing anyone who resisted them. Soon the rule of law was restored in the burned-out city, and the Hegemony of the Hundred Towers began.

The genclans had long been the dominant economic power in the city. Now they saw that it was necessary for them to become the dominant military power as well. They had long worked behind the scenes to influence the law-makers; now they took on the mantle of the law itself.

They moved swiftly to create new homes for the common people and to feed the hungry. House Meleus created the first of its huge agridomes and began growing crops of mutated synthirice. The Builders of House Karnak designed the fast-growing insula-towers that would house the commoners. These were equipped with recycling systems that turned human waste into food. They were not necessarily pleasant places to live but no one went homeless or hungry.

Of course, the genclans did not do this out of mere altruism. They did it to restore civil order and secure their own positions. No more than anybody else did the Posthumans want to live amid ruins and unsafe streets. But their efforts had another long-term effect. The genclans now directly fed and housed the majority of the common people of the city. The commoners were indebted to them.

To begin with, the commoners had no money or anything else the Houses needed to bargain with. So they signed away hours of labor to pay for the rent on their new homes, and for the food that they ate.

The genclans soon realized that they could set rents and prices at such a level that the debt would never be repaid. By the time a commoner had paid off his initial debt he had run up a still larger one to pay for his shelter, food and clothing. If he did not like that he could face eviction and starvation in the streets. So began the infamous practice of payment in labor that has kept the common people in virtual slavery to the genclans.

There were other deeper psychological and sociological effects of the troubles. The Posthumans began to see their Towers as safe havens in a world that was often threatening. More and more of them retreated into these sanctuaries, never to emerge again. It is during this period that the insular mentality that was to characterize the genclans first began to take hold.

The Collapse did much to shape the structure of Hydran society. In importance, only two other events begin to compare with it: the First Tower War, and the Swarm Wars.

THE FIRST TOWER WAR

In the early days after the Collapse, the situation was fluid and unstable. More than a thousand Towers had survived the Armageddon Wars but only the wealthiest and strongest, the so-called First Hundred, wielded power. Even among themselves they could not agree on what should be done and there was no way of resolving disputes over who controlled territory or owned property. This led to tension and dissension as various factions within the First Hundred sought to get their way, and those Towers presumed weaker were ignored.

Alliances were made. Factions formed. Favors were promised. The division of spoils was planned long in advance. One alliance, spearheaded by the powerful, militaristic House Typhon, threatened to dominate the city. It incorporated many of the wealthiest and most powerful Houses. Typhon's rivals, and those it simply excluded from the its faction, made common cause against it, calling themselves the Defenders of the Commonwealth. Tensions grew and eventually led to war. Everybody expected it would last ten weeks. It lasted many years, and ended in a way that no one could have foreseen.

At first the Typhonians and their allies surged forth and conquered everything within reach. They showed no mercy and gave no quarter. Those who opposed them were destroyed, assimilated or exiled. This had the effect of making their enemies more desperate and stiffening the spines of those who resisted them. As the war raged on it became increasingly obvious that not everybody would prove easy prey for the armies of the Typhonian Alliance.



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INTRODUCTION



The Valkans had turned their island into a fortress that for three years withstood the assaults of their enemies. Enraged by the resistance of their ancient rivals, the Typhonians threw more and more troops into headlong assaults on the island. Monstrous organic siege machines circled the island. Hundreds of thousands of troops came ashore from living landing craft. Swarms of ornithopters dropped chemicals and incendiaries onto the island of the Valkans. The wily Valkans gave just enough ground to keep their enemies coming, to lure them into ambushes and traps, and then destroy them utterly. At the same time, their agents spread rumors that with one more push, the Valkans would break and victory would belong to Typhon.

Shadragon, the Lord of Typhon, was a vain and brutal man, and wanted to believe this, and so spent much of the overwhelming power of his army besieging the Tower of War when it might have been better employed subduing the rest of the city. This gave the Typhonians' enemies the chance to build their own strength until their power rivaled the Typhonians. Then, when the time was right, they came to the aid of the Valkans.

Soon the Typhonians found themselves encircled, caught between enemies on both sides. The wrecks of ships sunk in the bitter naval battles clogged the canals. The skies were darkened by hosts of warring ornithopters. Both sides threw more and more troops and resources into the battle. Eventually, the Valkans and their allies gained the upper hand, breaking the siege and forcing the Typhonians to flee by ship and ornithopter to the safety of their own Towers. Huge amounts of material and corpses were left on the beaches of the Isle of Valka. It was from the bleached bones of soldiers and bio-machines that the Wall of the Skulls, the great fence of human head-bone that surrounds the Tower of War, was built on the order of Haradrek, Lord-Commander of House Valka.

The tide of war had turned against the Typhonians. Now they found themselves under attack. Many of the Typhonian allies, seeing the way things were going, defected or sued for peace. Haradrek let them surrender on easy terms. He had learned a lesson from the Typhonians' harsh treatment of others. Some of his enemies kept their property. Those responsible for the worst atrocities were exiled. There was none of the genocidal killing that the Typhonians had perpetrated.

Eventually the war came to the Tower of Typhon. Before launching his final assault Haradrek offered Shadragon a chance to surrender. The Lord of Typhon was too proud to consider it. Even deserted by his allies, and vastly outnumbered, he thought he could seize victory from the jaws of defeat. Those who counseled surrender, or even negotiation, were executed as defeatists. Shadragon declared that he would rather see his Tower cast down into darkness than endure the disgrace of surrender.

By this declaration he consigned his Tower to destruction and his people to exile, for his arrogance merely hardened the resolve of his enemies to overthrow him. The Defenders of the Commonwealth threw themselves into the final, long hard battle of the war. Great siege bridges were thrown across the canals. Commando troops infiltrated the Tower and poisoned the food supplies. Assassins and agents of death spread terror and despondency among the besieged. Chemical and biological agents created by House Karkosa were introduced into the water supplies. Many of the Typhonians went mad and started killing each other. Slowly supplies of uncontaminated food dwindled. Corridor by corridor, chamber by chamber, the Tower fell, and still Shadragon sat in his throne room and refused to surrender.

A cabal of his generals tried to assassinate him, but he was too strong and managed to kill all of his attackers while suffering only light wounds in return. His own son begged him to sue for peace, to end the suffering of his people. He had the boy's right hand severed and he himself threw his son's corpse down from the battlements of the Tower.

Soon, however, his own people took matters into their own hands and began to surrender of their accord, throwing away their weapons and casting themselves on the mercies of their captors. The Commonwealth armies treated them as honorable foes, fed them and sent them into exile. By the third month of the siege only a hard core of fanatics loyal to Shadragon still held the core of the Tower. Rather than surrender, the Lord Of Typhon bade them join him in one final, glorious battle and together they sallied forth to face their enemies.

Shadragon led his warriors to certain death, but fatalism had overcome the Typhonians and they did not care. They merely wished to drag down as many of their enemies as they could, before they themselves were killed. They charged forth and were slaughtered. Shadragon himself was killed by Haradrek after an epic duel on the heights of the Bridge of Tears. After the battle Haradrek ordered the Tower of Typhon cast down and all its people sent into exile. Thus ended the First Tower War. House Typhon became the first Broken Tower.

In the aftermath of the First Tower War, all the combatants were exhausted. The First Hundred had spent hundreds of thousands of lives and a significant part of their wealth to perpetrate the war, and had emerged from the conflict with very little to show for it. They had become weaker and the remaining Towers had become stronger. They had entered the War in its final stages and had been able to extort many concessions from its victors in return for their support. The first and most important was that they were to have a say in the government of Hydra.

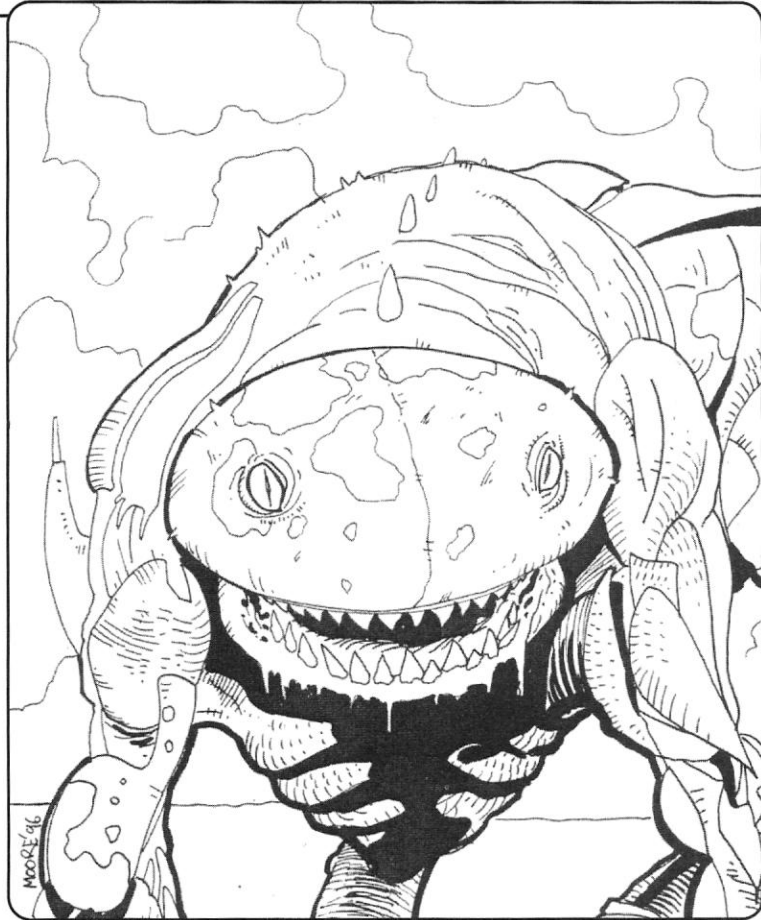
It was obvious to all that there had to be some means of resolving disputes between the genclans without resorting to war or economic sanctions. The metrozone's economy and ecology were too fragile to support such conflicts for long. With numerous external threats starting to rise from the rubble left from the Armageddon Wars, such battles would prove suicidal anyway.

So victors acquiesced to the demands of their supporters and set up the first parliament of the Commonwealth of Hydra: the Tower of Lords. Land was set aside in the center of the city for this mighty structure, the tallest starscraper in the city. Each Tower, regardless of size or wealth or power, was allowed to send one representative to the Tower of Lords. Each representative was allowed to vote in the passing of laws. Laws could be passed with the support of a simple majority of all the Tower representatives. After the Tower War the majority required was 481. The Tower of Lords was to represent all the genclans. The Leaders of every Tower swore mighty oaths, binding on them and all their descendants, to obey the laws passed within the Tower or face exile or destruction. In addition to its representative, each Tower had to appoint a Herald, an individual who would carry the Tower of Lords's decrees back to his people, as well as carry out the Tower of Lords's other instructions.

All the representatives at the Tower were granted immunity from harm. Their persons were sacred. Within the confines of the Tower they were allowed to speak as they wished without fear of retribution. The same immunity was granted to each of the Heralds of the Tower. In times of external threat the Tower of Lords has the power to appoint a Supreme Commander to lead the joint military forces of the genclans.

Of course, the Tower of Lords was an imperfect instrument. It had no money or armies of its own. It had no power to raise taxes. Its laws could only be enforced if the most powerful of its members chose to enforce them with their own troops. There were factions, each with their own secret agendas. The least powerful genclans would vote the way their more powerful allies told them. The poorest of the Towers would often sell their votes to the highest bidder. And, of course, the vast majority of the population, the Commonality, were simply not represented at all. The Tower of Lords spoke only for the genclans.

Still, the Tower of Lords provided some way of resolving disputes and containing the strains that often threatened to tear the city apart. And often, particularly in the early days laws, that were quite genuinely aimed at promoting the common good were passed and enforced. The canals were declared open to all. The harbors were made free trade areas to prevent them from falling under the domination of any one powerful clan. The city was declared a freeport open to all who wished to dwell there and abide by its laws. Tower of Lords-appointed Prosecutors were empowered to investigate serious crimes in any Tower. Over the years, the Tower of Lords has failed in its stated goals on many occasions. New Tower wars have erupted. Many laws it has passed have been ignored. For centuries the Tower of Lords was practically impotent, as the most powerful genclans refused to pay any heed to its instructions. Still, somehow the institution has survived and proven to be the closest thing to a central governing body that exists in Hydra.



THE SWARM WARS

In Hydra's long history there have been many wars, internal and external. Tower has fought Tower and metrozone, has fought metrozone but none have been so desperate as the first coming of the Swarm.

During the whole time of the Collapse, the Slime Jungles sprouted, taking over thousands of kilometers of land, killing or absorbing native plant life. Entropic fallout and Entropic storms caused ever fiercer mutation within their confines, whole metrozones were swallowed up by the spread of the jungles. Most of the folk of Waste World were too busy fighting each other or merely struggling for survival to do anything about the spread of the Slime Jungles.

By the time anybody was in a position to do something, it was already too late. The vast alien forests had become entrenched, too deeply rooted to be exterminated by anything less than an all-out Entropic strike. There are some savants who have speculated that the forests have mutated to a point where they might even survive that. To this day the jungles still spread. They have been stopped at Hydra by the North Wall and constant biochemical bombardment, but on every other front they are advancing, even managing to reclaim some of the hellish deserts.



The jungles themselves are deadly. Everything in them seems to have evolved merely to kill or be killed, but the mindless plants and creatures they contain are not the only threat they present. Within their towering, slime-coated vaults are things far worse. A species alien, sentient and completely inimical to all other intelligent life: the Swarm.

No one is sure of their origins. Some claim they are alien warriors brought back to fight in the Armageddon Wars. Others claim that they are living bioweapons brought back by the genclans from beyond the stars. A few claim that they are zoological specimens that escaped during the chaos of the Armageddon Wars. Still others fear that they are genocidal weapons of the Galactic Compact, deployed on Waste World to eradicate all the troublesome inhabitants.

The Swarm resemble huge insects. They are covered in horned and spiked armored carapaces. They dwell in huge fortified Hives. They can wield enormous psychic powers. They are fast, fierce and strong. They are immune to all poisons. They are controlled by powerful Hiveminds that can guide their breeding and their actions. Within the cores of the Hives are hundreds of thousands of genetic templates that can be used to fertilize clutches of eggs and develop them into the appropriate sort of living tool for the needs of the Hivemind. These range from enormous worker drones as large as airships to tiny mosquito-like living darts that can swarm all over an intruder and paralyze it with poison stings. In addition to being able to hatch their own brood, the Hiveminds can use many sorts of sophisticated genetic engineering to infect captives with their genetic templates and create new forms of Swarmer. These captives share many of the traits of the Swarm and their parent race, but are totally loyal to the Swarm Mind that rules the Hive.

Swarm Minds are based deep within the Hive itself. They can control all their progeny within about a ten kilometer range. Beyond this control radius many of the Swarm become mindless organic robots capable of responding only to their programmed instincts to gather food and return to the Hive. Of course, many of the more sophisticated Swarmers are intelligent, Hivelords both intelligent and capable of assuming command of their out-of-control brethren.

Every decade or so, or whenever the Hive is threatened, a Swarm Mind will fertilize an egg containing the codes of a new Swarm Mind and dispatch that egg with a guard of warriors and workers to found a new Hive. New Hives are founded just at the edge of the control range of the original Swarm Mind so that contact can be established and the newborn Mind will be loyal to its parent. In this way a network of Hives spread across the Slime Jungles and beyond.

Of course, in the entropically contaminated zones of Waste World, things go wrong even with the Swarms' incredibly resilient metabolisms. They mutate. Swarm Minds go mad or become independent from their parents and begin to war with them. Some savants have speculated that this is the origin of the four great Hives of Waste World.

During the period just after the First Tower War, the Black Swarm developed a terrifying new power. Using retro-viral infection, it developed the ability to assimilate humans and other species without leaving any obvious traces. The victim became part of the Swarm but no outward manifestation of this condition was detectable. They retained all their previous memories and powers but their thoughts and loyalties lay with the Swarm that had assimilated them, at least for so long as they were within the range of its mental control, or that of one of its Hivelords. Once out of range, some strong-willed individuals could cast off the control of the Swarm, but most choose to remain loyal to the alien entity that had possessed them.

It is to the few who managed to cast off the yolk of inhuman mental domination that we owe our knowledge of what it was like to be assimilated. Most describe the experience in remarkably similar terms. A warmth and a light filled their minds, and they felt like they had become part of something larger than themselves, something that would protect them and grant them power, and that they themselves would die to preserve if need be. Most of the descriptions were phrased in terms of religious awe or even love. When under the Swarm's control this feeling over-rode all other loyalties and allegiances. All parts of the Swarm, even the most monstrous-seeming, were their kin. Sometimes they would have flashes of insight into the thoughts and race memories of the Swarm Mind itself. This was like being vouchsafed an insight into the mind of a god.

When out of the control range of the Swarm to which they belonged, the assimilated could return to their normal way of life and their former allegiances. However, as soon as they came within the Swarm's sphere of influence they were assimilated once again. Indeed, many of those assimilated became addicted to the experience, and if taken outside the Swarm's sphere of control would do their best to return to it as swiftly as they could. Perhaps most frighteningly, the Swarm could make these people forget they had ever been assimilated, and leave them in place as sleeper agents against the day when it would require their services. Unaware that they possessed loyalties to something alien and inhuman, these people would remain dormant, often respected members of their communities until the day when they were reactivated.

Human psychers were the most terrifying tools of the Swarm, for they would become Prophets, living links in the Swarm's command chain, able to pass among normal people and at the same time relay the mental instructions of the Swarm Mind to the Assimilated who surrounded them. To such individuals the Swarm Mind would impart some part of its own immense psionic powers, making them formidable psychers in their own right.

It was a Black Swarm Mind that launched the first attack on Hydra. It took the Hydrans completely off guard and many of the people were carried off into the jungle to be assimilated by the Swarm. At first the Hydrans did not know what was happening. All through the Northern sectors, along the boundaries of the Slime Jungle, people simply disappeared. Rumors of strange new monsters began to abound. At first people suspected House Stein and House Fera. They feared that dangerous experimental subjects had gotten loose and started to prey on the local populace. Feran Beasthunters were dispatched to investigate and many of them vanished as well. The few survivors reported encounters with a new sort of insectoid monster, but when killed some sort of fast-acting enzyme dissolved the creature's corpse into pools of poisonous slime, preventing all analysis. The genclans along the border strengthened their defenses and hired mercenaries to patrol the streets. No one imagined that this was more than a minor threat. They were wrong, but it took a long time for them to discover this, for almost as quickly as they had begun, the disappearances stopped. The Swarm Mind had acquired enough humans for its purposes. They were assimilated and became part of the Swarm, and then were returned to the city to begin the next stage of the Swarm Mind's plan.

During this period a fertilized Swarm Mind egg was smuggled into the city by assimilated cultists who could still pass for human. It was infiltrated into the Tower of Woe, the home of the then relatively minor genclan of Jonah. Once within, the Swarm Mind bonded itself to the bio-organic systems of the Tower, and swiftly assimilated all the members of House Jonah. House Jonah then began the most meteoric rise in power in the history of Hydra. A minor clan member, Jedidiah, rose to prominence as the Prophet of a new cult, the Church of Brotherhood. The word of the cult was spread in secret among the people of the city.

Its basic tenets were that all men were created equal, and that the divisions among the Towers were artificial and would be healed by acceptance of the god of the cult. It also declared that membership of the Cult would grant power and immortality to those who underwent its ritual of acceptance. The word of the cult obviously appealed to the commoners of Hydra. Strangely enough, it attracted many of the genclan's younger members as well, for they were weary of war, and exhausted by the long period of civil strife. Anything that promised peace was at least considered. Of course, those who attended the rituals of acceptance were assimilated. They became part of the Swarm, and the new Hive that was arising within the Tower of Woe.

No one is entirely sure how long this state of affairs lasted. A period of several months seems most likely. Over this period House Jonah acquired a great deal of money, power and influence, and a large number of supporters in the Tower Of Lords. Jedidiah himself became his genclan's representative there and was both popular and respected. He used his ambassadorial position to throw great balls at which many high-ranking and influential people became interested in, and inducted into, his cult. It seems likely that this process could have gone on indefinitely, until the whole of Hydra was assimilated, except for several events, all of which happened in fairly short order.

Firstly, all of the Oracles of House Kazandra began to predict a great disaster descending upon the city. They took to the streets and began to call their warnings from every corner. Since the women of that genclan had the recognized gift of prophesy, the people of Hydra were brought to a state of preparedness.

Secondly, one of the assimilated who had managed to break free of the Swarm Mind's control while in the city on a mission, managed to talk to a Feran Beasthunter and give the man warning. Both the Beasthunter and the assimilated disappeared shortly thereafter, but the Beasthunter's log was found and his notes were brought to the attention of the Evolutionaries of House Fera.

The Evolutionaries dispatched a force of Beasthunters to the northern sectors with instructions to seize some of the cult members and bring them back to the Tower of Beasts for testing. There they were held in isolation, under the strictest security, while tests were run on them. Traces of Swarm genetic material were indeed detected in their cell-structure. The Ferans swiftly developed speedy tests for this. Compulsory testing was introduced for every member of their genclan, and the Evolutionaries were terrified to discover that not even their Tower was secure. All of those who tested positive for assimilation were quietly disposed of.

The Ferans then paused, afraid. With Jedidiah so influential in the Tower of Lords, and unsure of who to trust, what could they do? They had no idea how many influential citizens had come under the Swarm's control, and no idea how far the corruption had spread. Perhaps the whole city could be turned against them. Then began a delicate time of secret meetings in which the Feran leaders sought out high-ranking members of other genclans, tested them and then told them what was happening. They made their testing techniques available to all. Some were suspicious, thinking perhaps the tests were some new sort of Feran bioweapon. Some were assimilated and met with accidents. Some believed and began to apply the tests to their own members. Among those who took the Ferans on trust were the Valkans and the Karkosans. The Karkosans took the basic Feran research and began to twist it to their own purposes, as they raced to create a plague that would wipe out those who contained the tell-tale genetic traces of Swarm assimilation. It was a dark and fear-filled period, for no one was sure whom they could trust, even among their own people.

It was the Swarm Mind itself, however, that gave itself away. It had become aware of the Ferans' attempts to root out its pawns, and fearing that all it had worked for was about to be undone, it attempted to strike first. From out of the Slime Jungles a horde of Swarm Warriors erupted, joining those who had massed within the corrupt houses of the Northern sectors. Simultaneously, the assimilated rose up across the metrozone and struck down the enemies of the Swarm. Traitors in high places spread chaos and confusion. The streets and bridges were filled with battle. This was worse than the Tower War, for brother fought brother, as assimilated fought human.

The ferocity and power of the Swarm surprised the Hydrans, as did the sheer numbers and the massive psychic powers some of them wielded. Specialized swarm troops raged across the city slaughtering all in their path. Huge Lokusts sprang between buildings. Bugs filled the skies. Hivelords and Swarm Warriors were everywhere, covering the Towers like ants swarming over a stone. As more humans were captured and assimilated the Swarm forces grew. For a while all seemed lost, and it looked like Hydra would join all the other cities that had been overrun and colonized by these ferocious aliens. Even the Fortress of Valka was penetrated. Then, in what seemed like the hour of the Swarm's greatest triumph, a dark miracle occurred. The hordes of Assimilated assaulting the tower of Plague began to sicken and die. Their skins turned black, their eyes bulged and popped, and death took them. In agony, Swarm Warriors began to tear each other to pieces and then turned their claws upon themselves. A terrible plague killed most of the attackers within hours, but it was not without cost. Many had been unknowingly infected with the Swarm retro-virus although they had not yet become assimilated. They too sickened and died. It seemed to many that as always the Karkosans had done their work too well; the disease they had unleashed had mutated and begun to infect humans. Hundreds of thousands died and angry hordes swirled around the Tower of Plague and threatened its inhabitants. They only dispersed when the enigmatic inhabitants opened their doors and threatened to break the seals on the Black Vault, unleashing all the diseases they had ever created at once, if the attacks did not cease.. Only once the crowds dispersed did the doors slide shut and the Karkosans return to their secretive and unnatural researches.

The cost of the Swarm War was high, but in the long run it strengthened Hydra. Every Tower introduced its own checks against assimilation, the North Wall was strengthened and all gates in it were sealed forever. All members of the Tower of Lords were from that day subjected to the closest genetic scrutiny. In the long run, the Hydrans benefited in many ways. Many of the most powerful houses raided the Hives and acquired their own stock of Swarm eggs. Study of Swarm biochemistry opened up a whole new field of biomancy. The eggs were to provide the basis for the creation of sandwalkers, spidertanks, and a whole range of organic machines based on the Swarm's worker castes but subservient to genclan control.

THE CURRENT SITUATION

Hydra is a city of thousands of factions, all of which are part of many alliances. The political situation is very dynamic but there are certain basic power blocs that wield influence more or less constantly, and certain rival camps that are always at odds.

First of all there are the big three, House Meleus, House Fera and House Anthor. These are the oldest and richest genclans from which many others are descended. Between them they account for almost 60% of Hydra's wealth and productive capacity. Each of these mighty houses is a hub around which hundreds of lesser clans rotate, and their policies and rivalries dominate the Tower of Lords.

House Meleus is the wealthiest of all the Houses. It is very conservative. Like the Ferans, they claim that a new Armageddon War is coming, but unlike the Ferans they do not believe that Hydra can survive it in its present form. They know that at best Hydra is the third most powerful metrozone and that while their city has powerful troops and huge armies, it cannot match the mechanized legions or powerful airfleets of either the Prometheans or the Shogunate. They know this because they have done their best to create biomachines to match the Drakonium-powered Panzers, airships and tanks of their foes, and without success. Its massive commercial trading empire gives it many opportunities to spy on the other metrozones, and its assessment of the situation is a realistic one.

In most other things House Meleus is the guardian of the status quo, and does its best to maintain peace and stability within the city. It is also the most outward-looking of the genclans since its trading empire stretches far beyond the city, and its sandfleets pursue Drakonium to the four corners of Avernus. House Meleus and its followers can always be counted on to resist the Ferans' calls to close the city to outsiders and to back those who would keep the canals and harbors free for all to use. In terms of their foreign policy the Meleans are more pacifist than most Towers. They want peace and are prepared to conciliate the other metrozones as long as their sandfleets are left alone. The Meleans are great supporters of the Diaspora. They see it as the last, best hope of preserving Hydra's people and culture against the coming Doomsday.

House Fera rivals House Meleus in power, but has a radically different agenda. The Ferans want to close the city and bar outsiders from it. They do not use much human genetic material themselves these days and the anthromophs provide them with all the labor they need. They claim that the waves of immigrants and refugees are placing a strain on the city's resources and that population pressure will eventually lead to rebellion and civil war. House Fera wants all foreign-owned businesses kicked out of the city. The Ferans want to turn the city into a giant fortress, for they fear that a new wave of cataclysmic war is about to break as Drakonium becomes exhausted. The Ferans point out that, like House Meleus, they operate sandfleets, and they know Drakonium is becoming harder and harder to find.



House Anthon is ambitious, expansionist and opposed to House Fera and House Meleus, whom it sees as its great rivals. It is almost as wealthy as House Meleus, but even more than House Fera its power and wealth are mostly centered in Hydra. House Anthon wants to keep the city open to immigrants because it wants a steady stream of new genetic material available to its biomancers. On the other hand it wants the genclans to exert stricter control over the general population, who are becoming unruly and fractious. It wants to divide up the great harbors between itself and House Fera and House Meleus, each of them getting one.

This, in particular, is opposed by the Defenders of the Commonwealth, which is a coalition of mid-ranking Towers that have banded together to oppose the influence of the big three. They have taken their name from the ancient alliance that defeated the Typhonians. The principle members are House Karnak, House Radost, House Numera and House Triton. House Numera and House Radost are known for their political acumen and Houses Karnak and Triton are wealthy enough to spread bribes and favors liberally through the Tower of Lords. The Defenders enjoy considerable support among the Guilds of the Commonality and often fight for them in the ongoing political struggles in Hydra.

The Dark Towers represent another powerful faction. These pariah Towers are shunned by the others of the city but they all have ways of making their influence felt when decisions are made. The Karkosans have the threat of their plagues, the Luxorians have enormous wealth and powerful armies, the Spydrans can hold the threat of assassination over their foes. While they rarely intervene in the city's affairs, they can do so effectively when they need to.

The final factor that needs to be taken into account in Hydran politics is the Commonality. While it has no representatives in the Tower of Lords, and theoretically no power, the human population is still in the majority in the city. The Guilds are very rich and do not hesitate to use their money to buy favors and preference from the poorer genclans, as well as to support those who support them. Lastly, while the genclans have proven they can deal with rioting ruthlessly, riots always cause chaos and destroy lots of property so the Tower of Lords will, when it needs to, pay attention to the voice of the mob in order to avoid civil unrest.



THE DIASPORA

For the past twenty years, the idea of the Diaspora has ruled Hydran politics. There have always been Hydran colonies scattered throughout the Wastes. These were trading posts, way stations, and scientific research installations. Amid the islands of the Archipelago there have always been habtowns founded by the Hydrans. Beneath the waves of Oceanus there have been Tritonian towns. Since the discovery that Drakonium is running out quickly has become common knowledge, the founding of these colonies has taken on new urgency.

Numeran analysts believe that there is a significant probability that Prometheus and the Shogunate will be drawn into a war over control of the Shogunate's Drakonium fields within the next ten to thirty years. They also believe that the conflict will escalate into a general war involving all the other metrozones, and that Entropic, atomic, biological and chemical weapons will be deployed in such numbers that all of the major megastates will be destroyed. In all likelihood this is a war in which Hydra will be destroyed. That being the case, steps should be taken to ensure that Hydran culture and indeed humanity in general can survive this catastrophe.

The Diaspora began shortly thereafter. All the major gencians, even those who did not take the predictions too seriously, have scattered colonies in hidden locations throughout the Wastelands, just in case. Some of the gencians have gone even further. These colonies replicate the culture within their Towers in miniature.

House Meleus has taken to equipping new splinter-clans with symbionts and dispatching them into the Wastes with instructions never to return. There have always been nomad tribes in the Wastes who have used symbionts to survive, but recently their numbers have been swollen by these newcomers, and a whole new tribal culture is now emerging in the deserts.

House Anthor has been experimenting with human/symbiont hybrids who can survive in the most hostile conditions. House Karnak has been scattering habdomes and the seeds of living cities to the four winds.

It has been estimated that at least 10% of the gencian population now lives outside Hydra, and that number is growing as the clouds of global war gather on the horizon.

HYDRAN TECHNOLOGY

As with so many of the great civilizations of Waste World, technology underpins the social structure of Hydra, affecting everything from the buildings in which the people live to the genetic structure of the inhabitants themselves. Indeed, the basic political units of Hydra, the gencians, are as much products of technology as they are of social and economic forces. Over the long millennia, genetic manipulation has changed the people of the gencians into something other than human.

Hydra is the way it is because necessity made it so. Most of the city's industrial capacity was lost during the Armageddon Wars. The people of the city suffer from the common prejudice against thinking engines left by the Apocalypse Virus. This meant that when civilization was rebuilt, the folk of Hydra had to find organic substitutes for the machines and autotacs of the Ancients. A freak side-effect of Entropic contamination made the operation of the datanets within the city extremely unreliable. The presence of the Apocalypse Virus within the system made it extremely unwise to even try.

Fortunately for the Hydrans, biomancy, a whole body of biotechnological techniques, was a long established force in the city, and the process of finding substitutes for the Ancient's machines, while often painfully slow, was fruitful.

Huge biofacs were created. These vast organisms, part living creature, part factory, became the center of new industries. Within their massive chitinous walls, new bio-machines were, quite literally, born. Huge mutated animals, part insect, part Xenogen replaced vehicles. Living symbionts shielded the citizens from the worst Waste World had to throw at them. Organic robots took over much of the menial labor.

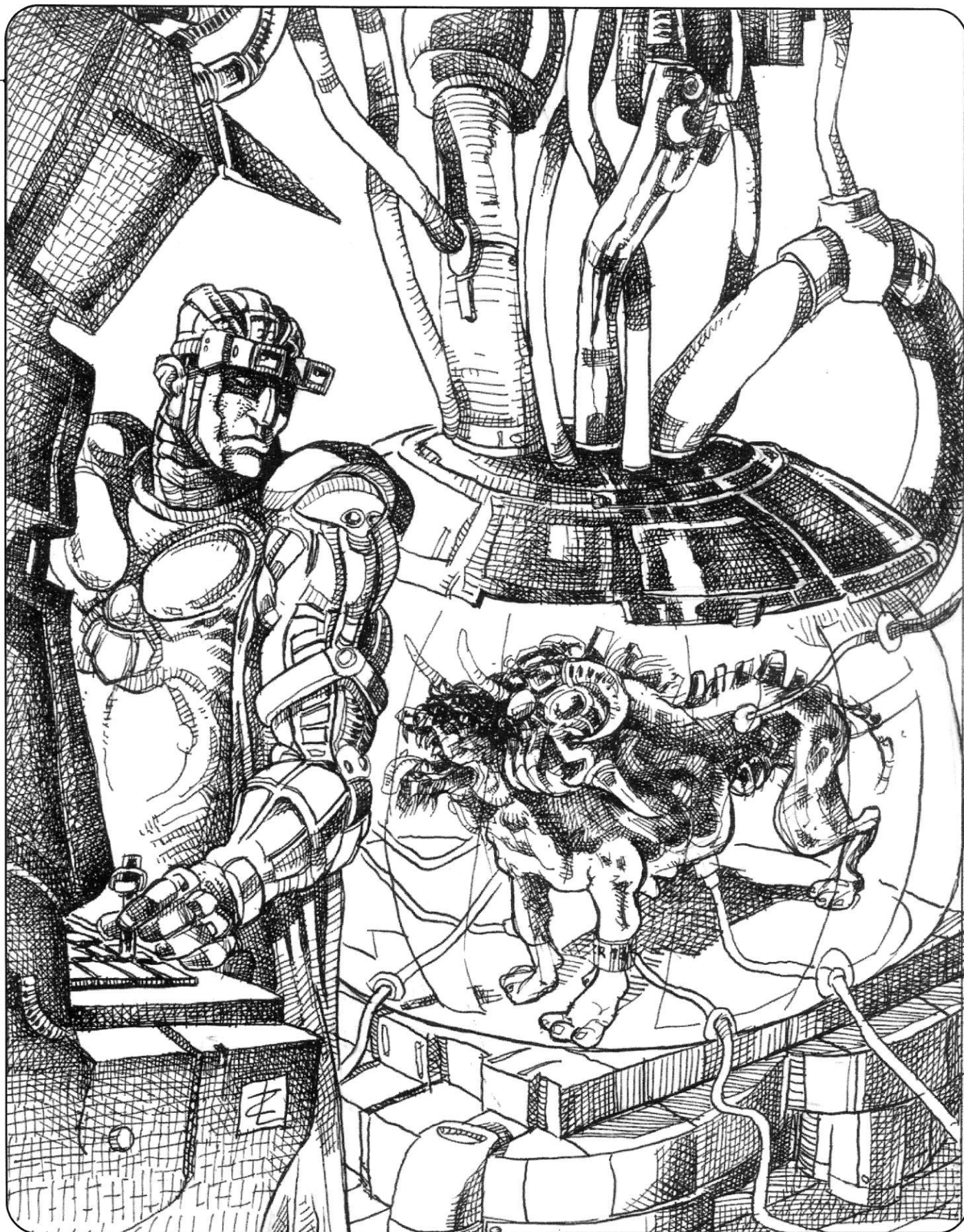
Of course some of the old factories still survived, with assembly lines manned by humans and Posthumans rather than robots. These still create guns and simple machines more quickly than the biofacs can.

GENESCULPTING

The gencians were created by genesculpting. This strange art allows the Hydrans to tamper with the genetic matrixes of living things, altering and improving them in various subtle and not-so-subtle ways. Genesculpting has even been used on humanity itself, creating the new breeds of folk known as Posthumans. Using genesculpting, hereditary diseases were eliminated and children were born faster, stronger, smarter and more beautiful than their parents. This was the origin of the gencians.

On a more sinister level, the traits and characteristics of different species have been mingled to produce entirely new species known as Hybrids or Subraces.

In their early days the various gencians used genesculpting to alter their own people to enhance what they saw as their strengths, and to eliminate their weaknesses. Each gencian placed a different emphasis on this genetic manipulation and followed a slightly different path. This ensured that the warriors of House Valka were born swift, strong and hardy; the children of House Numera were born with increased brain capacity; the assassins of House Spydra were stealthy and flexible, with blood that was poisonous to all others.





SPLINTER-CLANS

Of course, there have always been rebels who want to continue exploring certain paths of radical evolutionary development, often in opposition to their elders and superiors in the genclans. In such cases the ruling class have two choices: they can either eliminate the rebels, which in many cases means civil war within the House, or they can choose to follow one of Hydra's most ancient traditions and allow a splinter-clan to be formed.

Splinter-clans are usually created with the blessing of their parent genclan. The analogy most often used is that genclans are like amoebae; they reproduce by fission. The rebel groups are given their own small tower and a portion of the resources of the parent-clan to continue their researches. Since the members of the splinter-clan are related by birth to the members of the parent-clan, a web of blood ties usually ensures an amicable relationship. The new genclan enjoys the protection and patronage of its parent clan. The parent clan usually shares in the fruits of the splinter-clan's discoveries. As the splinter-clan grows in power, it normally provides a potent ally to the parent. Sometimes splinter-clans survive the destruction of their parents, or even grow in power to eclipse their former patrons.

When a splinter-clan reaches a sufficient size and level of wealth it petitions the Tower of Lords for acceptance. To do this it needs a sponsor- usually, but not always, its parent clan. If it is recognized as sufficiently different from an existing clan, and of sufficient merit to warrant inclusion, it is accepted into the Tower of Lords and allowed representatives there. If not, it remains a splinter-clan, not a true genclan.

Many splinter-clans have remained in this status for millennia, for the parent genclan's enemies will often do everything within their power to prevent the splinter-clan being recognized and their foe's gaining a new ally in the Tower of Lords. Such conflicts are often the flashpoints of new Tower Wars.

Now and then, rebels will be cast out from their genclans for refusing to toe the line, and will try to found their own splinter-clans without the blessing of their former genclans. Most of these rebel factions end up on the Island of the Damned but a few manage to make a go of it, and actually become stable entities. Sometimes they align themselves with their parent-clan's hereditary enemies, sometimes they are absorbed by them. In many cases, the enemy genclan will become the splinter-clan's sponsor when it comes to join the Tower of Lords. Thus have many of the secrets of biomancy been passed from one genclan to another, thus ancient feuds are caused, and thus does the relentless march of knowledge proceed.

In the early days of wild experimentation that followed the Armageddon Wars, the genclans tried many bizarre strategies that led to the creation of people who were unstable and often insane by the standards the world then applied. In the altered world left in the aftermath of the Armageddon Wars such people often thrived. The Hydrans are ultimately pragmatists. Survival is the only test of fitness and morality they recognize. The new breeds of humanity were allowed to continue for as long as they were successful. Some became very successful indeed.

In those early days there were a number of failures, and many genclans faltered and fell, or were absorbed into other more successful Houses. Many Houses discovered that their experiments in genesculpting were proving less and less fruitful and meeting with more failure than success. They were leaving their people increasingly vulnerable to the stigmata of mutation. Having achieved a reasonably successful genetic pattern, the genclans usually abandoned further genesculpting on themselves and concentrated their resources in other areas.

Eventually, out of this wild ferment of experimentation, the genclans emerged in roughly the forms they have today. Over the years, interbreeding and mild genetic manipulation have refined their genotypes, but for the most part the basic genetic matrices of the major genclans have been fixed for thousands of years.



NEW PATHWAYS

Just because most genclans have had their basic genetic matrixes fixed for centuries does not mean they stopped their experiments. It merely means they found other subjects. Indeed, it is misleading to suggest that it was only when they stopped experimenting on themselves that they began experimenting in other areas. The whole time they were using themselves as guinea pigs the genclans still explored other avenues that biomancy had opened up.

The Evolutionaries of House Fera used animals as their subjects and manipulated them in many different ways. They mixed the genetic patterns of everyday beasts with Xenogens and the Swarm to create new types of animals, such as the ferocious attack beasts, like bio-hounds and deathspiders. They mingled human and animal to create the new Subraces known as Anthromorphs.

The Thinkers of House Anthon worked almost exclusively with human gene-runes, and created entire new Subraces of humanity such as the Brutes, the Flyers and the Lurks. They also were the first to create golems, altered and often intellectually impaired neutered people who were little better than living robots programmed to perform certain functions.

The Fleshlords of House Meleus turned living things into industrial artifacts, mass-producing organic vehicles such as ornithopters, dragonflyers, stiltwalkers and spider-tanks, as well as hosts of everyday devices such as organic glowglobes, living weapons and symbiots. They created what was the first and largest biofac in Hydra. This monstrous creature, part building, part living machine, churns out products to this very day. In the process they turned their genclan into an industrial powerhouse.

The Builders of House Karnak undertook the creation of the largest scale industrial artifacts ever conceived and created the first living buildings that grew like plants. There are many more examples of the Hydran genius with biomancy, but the point is made. Lacking access to the normal building materials and autofacs of the Ancients, the Hydrans developed their own versions and thrived. Genesculpting enabled them to transform not only themselves but the world around them.

Over the years many of the genclans' discoveries were sold, shared, stolen, pirated or duplicated by other genclans. Many techniques that had once been specific to one genclan became the common heritage of all. This knowledge would underpin the phenomenal growth of Hydran civilization.

COCOONING

One form of genesculpting that is worth looking at more closely is cocooning. This process is used for many purposes, of which the strangest is probably adopting outsiders into the genclans. This was developed independently by the Ferans and Anthonians in the time following the Swarm Wars. Doubtless it owes much to techniques adapted from those used by the Swarm itself.

During the process of cocooning an individual human or animal is suspended in a tank of transparent chitin, and various nutrient fluids are introduced along with mutagenic enzymes, biomorphic hormones and nanoviral agents. The subject is kept alive with intravenous drips. As the process continues a hard shell begins to form around the subject that hardens into a cocoon. This horny integument protects the subject and helps keep it alive as various changes are worked on its genetic matrixes.

As the process continues, the subject begins to mutate according to the programming contained in the nanoviral agents. Changes are written into the subject's genetic codes, cells are killed and replaced, and the subject alters, gaining the powers and abilities the supervising biomancer chooses. At the end of the process, assuming the subject survives, the cocoon splits asunder and the dramatically altered subject emerges complete with any new powers and abilities that have been implanted in them. Of course, natural creatures were not meant to be subjected to such strains, and many who undergo it emerge crippled, insane or simply dead.

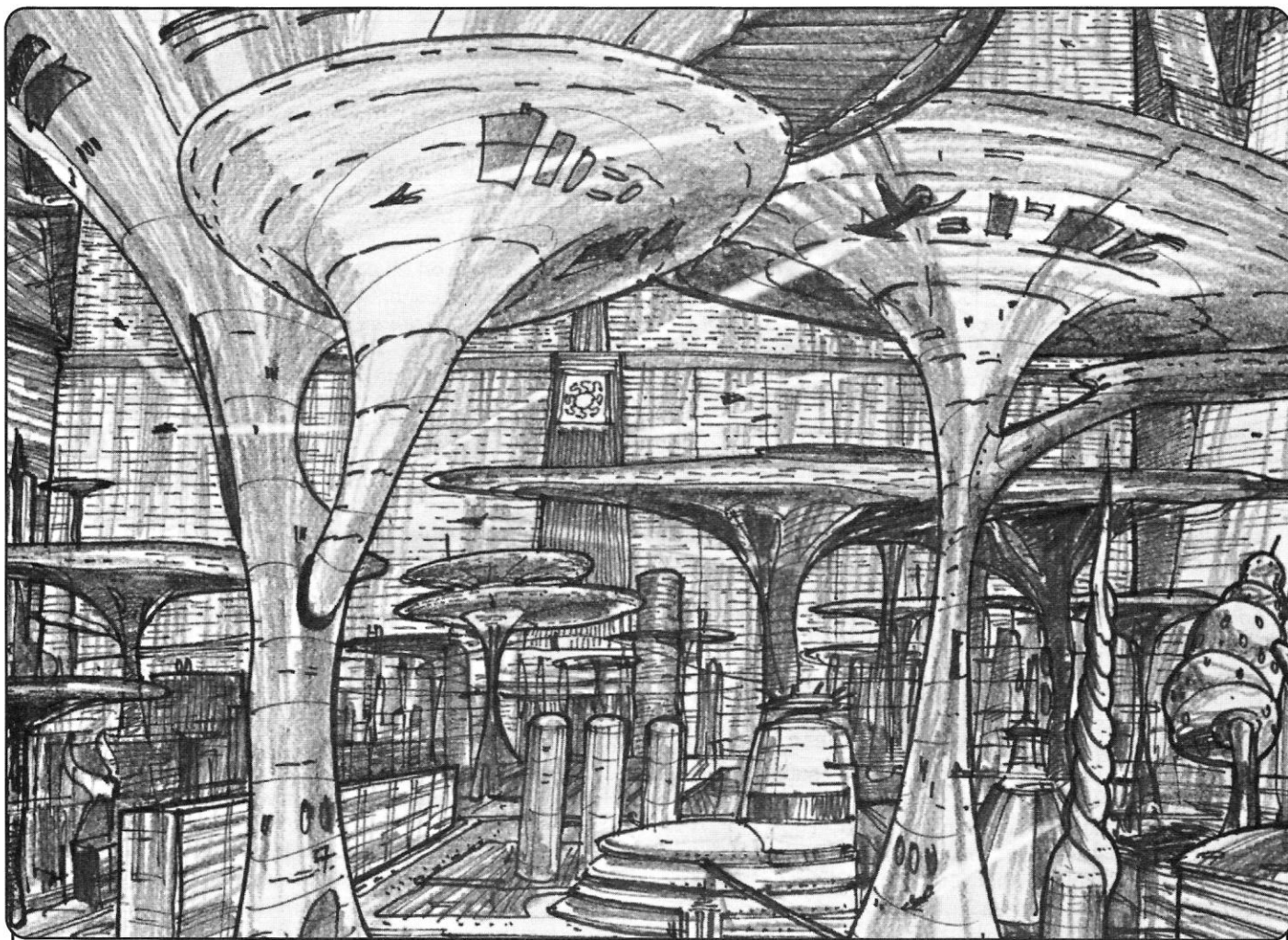
Since the subject's basic genetic codes have been altered, they can breed and pass on their new abilities to children born of suitable partners, providing their partners possess the same genetic coding. Cocooning is used by the Hydrans in many different ways. One of the most common is to adopt commoners into the genclans.

The process of adoption is a long and difficult one for most commoners, but it provides a way out of their lives of drudgery and into the wealth of genclan membership. Children who dwell on the same insula as a genclan and who possess gifts that the genclans can make use of are often adopted into the genclan and cocooned. Those that survive are trained as genclan members and become part of the ruling class. Over the years this has kept a constant flow of fresh blood and genetic material coming into the clans.

The other use of cocooning is to breed new races of creatures and monsters adapted to Hydran purposes. This is the particular specialty of House Stein and House Fera. Many adventurers try cocooning, believing the chance of gaining great powers makes the risk worthwhile. Most are proven fatally wrong.

HYDRAN ARCHITECTURE

Hydran buildings are often grown using the techniques perfected by House Karnak. They mostly consist of layers of chitin that sets rock hard over a skeleton of duralloy or bone. Some savants claim that this technique is an adaptation of the methods by which Swarm Hives are built. Others claim that the Karnakians had already developed this technique for themselves long before the Swarm Wars, and that access to Swarm genetic material merely allowed them to perfect it.



In any case, chitin is used by all Hydrans in a number of different ways. It is used to manufacture the hard outer layers of carapace armor, and to create lances and swords and other close combat weapons. It is a general all-purpose building material. Depending on the hormones added to it before it hardens, the texture, color and translucency can be altered. Chitin can be made smooth as marble or rough and horny as the skin of a shark. It can be made porous and light as bone but considerably harder. It can be made almost any color or a mixture of colors. It can be opaque, partially opaque or clear as glass. Indeed, in many buildings windows are created by simply leaving translucent areas. Chitin has many advantages over normal glass. For one thing it is much stronger and tougher. For another, a new covering of chitin can be patched into any area that is broken.

While it is alive, chitin can be programmed to grow in many different ways. This gives Hydran architecture its unparalleled flexibility in look and style. Some buildings and vehicles seem to have been grown from flesh and bone. Others are smooth and hard as seashells. Still others can hardly be told from the plascrete and duralloy monstrosities found in other cities.

Hydran buildings are like living things in many other ways. Their internal communication systems really are nervous systems into which genclan members can patch themselves using ganglionic links or masks. They can grow until they reach the required size and shape and then be frozen. Many of the lifts, automatic doors and other devices are controlled by huge muscles and tendons. Many of the buildings possess a rudimentary intelligence, and will respond to circumstances. This allows them expel air when poisons are introduced, seal themselves when damaged, or open landing decks in their side when given the appropriate signals by approaching vehicles.

The most sophisticated Hydran buildings draw some of their power from the sun, and continue to grow through their centuries-long lives, adding new chambers and walls according to the perceived needs of the inhabitants. Tragically, some such buildings go mad or start to mutate and must be abandoned. In the most extreme cases, disasters have ensued when structures have gone insane and turned on their inhabitants.



VEHICLES

Many different types of vehicle are created in Hydra, ranging from the most exotic to the most prosaic. The various genclans never tire of experimenting with new technologies or combinations of technology, and are always pushing the limits of what can be built. This has led to many different genclans creating similar vehicles that operate in different ways.

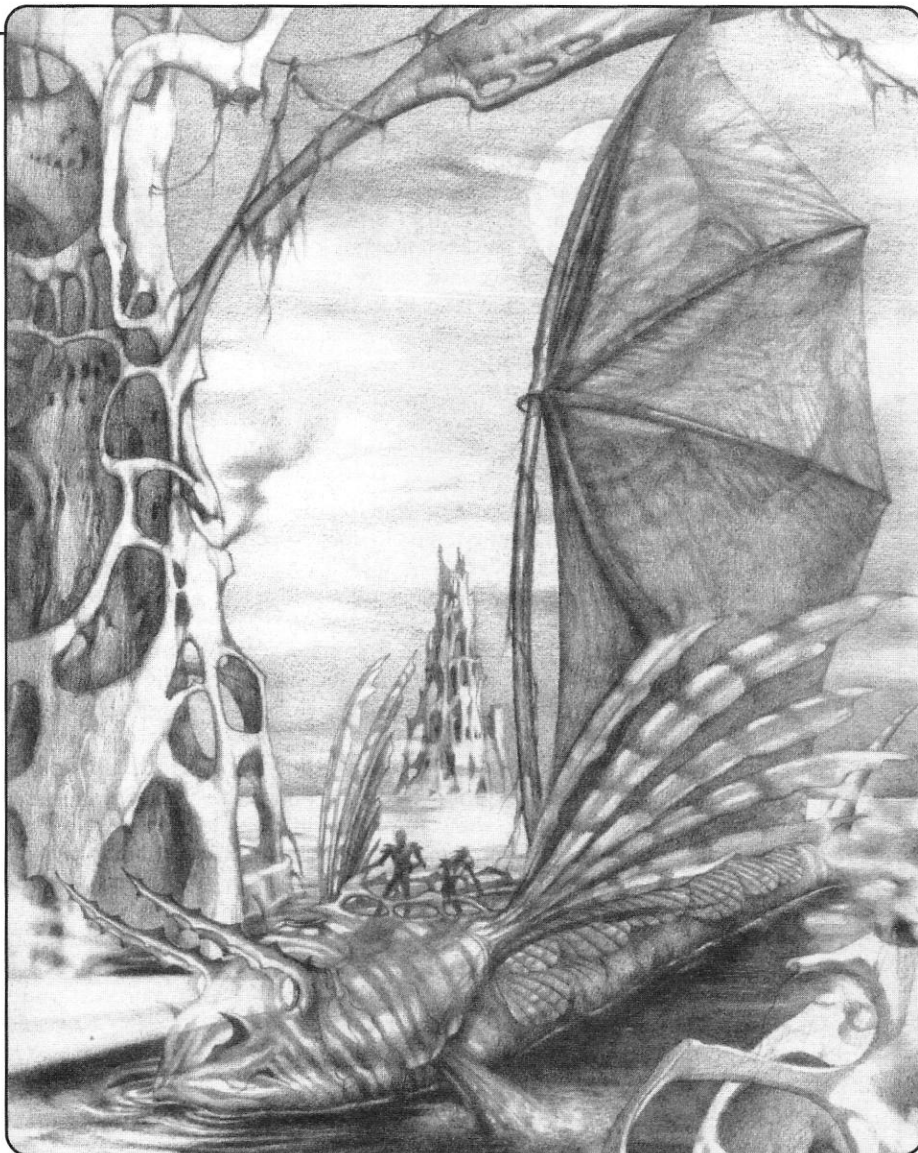
The Ferans have created ornithopters that are really huge insects with suspensor systems implanted within their flesh. The suspensors hold the giant insects aloft, the insect's wings provide the motive power. They have also created huge bat-like beasts that can fly using their own unaided muscular power, as well as flyers who use psionic levitation after the manner of the Swarm.

The Meleans have created aircars and airships that cannot be distinguished from the products of Janus, Prometheus and the Shogunate from a distance. On close inspection the discerning observer will notice that their hulls are made of chitin, the cushioned seats that mold themselves to the individual passenger are living creatures. The only products of external technology are the suspensor drives themselves.

Some genclans have even experimented with using cloned and altered psyker brains with the power of levitation to drive their craft, but in many cases these have proven unreliable.

For surface vehicles the Hydrans favor walkers. This is obviously because many of the genclans base their craft on living creatures. Huge eight-legged spidertanks are a common sight among the military forces of the city. Gigantic stiltwalkers are used to patrol the swamps and Slime Jungles that surround the city. Of course many of the clans use riding animals of various sorts, ranging from suspensor augmented flying insects to saddle reptars modified so that, over short distances at least, they are capable of matching skimmerbikes for speed.

As you would expect in a city of canals surrounded by the sea, there are many forms of water transport. These range from the submersibles of House Triton, which resemble streamlined seashells propelled by organic thrusters like those of a squid, to enormous clipper ships.



Of course, many modified sea-creatures are used as beasts of burden as well. All of these means of transport have their advantages and disadvantages, but the Hydran philosophy of allowing competition means that all of them either find a useful niche or fade from common use. The genclans are nothing if not practical.

The same technology used when building houses is applied by the Hydrans to their sailing vessels. These sleek clippers are among the strangest and most beautiful ships ever to set sail, with hulls like smooth seashells, sails of flesh and cables of tendon. Some Hydran airships combine this technology with imported suspensor technology to ride the wind rivers between the metrozones.

Of course many of these vehicles have weapon systems grafted onto them. The Hydrans are not slow to integrate products of more conventional technologies with their own, and long ago mastered ways of doing so. Many of these living vehicles have conventional weapon systems attached that can be controlled through ganglionic links.



GOLEMS

Of all the many forms of biomachines in Hydra, golems are the most common. These organic robots can be seen everywhere in the streets, performing menial tasks, involving hard physical labor or dirty and dangerous jobs. Many golems look human and can only be told apart from the commoners by their gray skins, their hairlessness and the identification codes tattooed in pigment on their skins. By ancient law, golems are sterile and unable to breed. They are grown in lifevats using accelerated cell division techniques. Many have all the knowledge they require for their tasks burned into their neural pathways using a variation of the same technology used by nekrochips.

Other golems are of radically different appearance and function. Wargolems can be giants of enormous strength with armored, bullet-proof hides and a central nervous system totally impervious to pain. Many have claws instead of hands and altered sensory systems that let them see in the dark. A few are given extra limbs to increase their fighting prowess.

All golems suffer from shortened lives. This cannot be helped. The same process of accelerated cell division that speeds their growth continues throughout their lives. They age about ten years for every one year that passes. There is no known way to retard this process once it starts. Most golems are designed so that their bodies contain nekrotic enzymes. These ensure that when they die they swiftly dissolve into a puddle of bio-degradable material. It is probable that other forms of accelerated growth could be devised by the Hydrans but the current process has two great advantages. The first is that it is very cheap. The second is that it ensures that the customer must buy a new golem on a fairly regular basis.

Of course there are terrible prejudices against golems among the commoners. Many claim, with considerable justification, that they are slaves in all but name, and that they are taking jobs away from commoners. The fact that golems are programmed to enjoy their slavery does not make it any more acceptable to some people. For these reasons golems are banned on many insula.

WEAPONS AND ARMOR

The Hydrans use a variety of weapons, some created by biotechnology, some created in more conventional factories, others imported from outside.

Many Hydran close combat weapons such as boneblades, deathlances and shockspears are products of biotechnology. At the simplest, they are the same as ordinary weapons, only grown from razor edged chitin. More sophisticated weapons will have symbiotes grafted into them, or will be functioning living organisms. Shockspears, for example, are alive and generate a powerful electric charge in a manner similar to an electric eel.

In the human ghettos of Hydra, some Ancient armaments factories survived the Armageddon Wars, and to this day churn out conventional assault rifles and handguns of a type that have been in use for millions of years. Even though the factories are manned by humans, drudges, golems and slaves, they can still churn out guns and bullets far more efficiently than a biofac. So the assault rifle, the machine gun and automatic pistol are still in common use among the Hydrans alongside the stranger weapons produced by biomancy. The know-how to create sophisticated energy weapons was lost long ago, so blasters and forceblades are imported from Janus, Prometheus or the Shogunate. As a consequence they tend to be rarer among the Hydrans than elsewhere, and usually are found only in the possession of adventurers, wealthy aristocrats and elite military units.

Biomancy has resulted in the creation of some unique weapons. These can be very potent, if somewhat unreliable. Dragon gloves generate bolts of pyrokinetic power. Deathguns use psionic energy to disrupt the cellular structure of living things. Enzyme grenades eat through flesh and bone. Spore grenades choke the lungs of those who breathe in their foul vapors. And of course, the evil and insane beings who dwell within House Karkosa are infamous for their use of plague weapons.

While biomantic weapons are unreliable and not much favored even by the Hydrans themselves, Hydran carapace armor is renowned and feared throughout the world. At its most basic level it is simply chitinous armor that molds to the body of its wearer for comfort and support. At its more sophisticated and expensive level it can have all manner of symbiotes grafted to it, until it rivals Promethean powered armor in strength and surpasses it in flexibility.

For example, wings can grant carapace armor flight, muscle augmentors can amplify the wearer's strength, reflex enhancers can increase dexterity and speed. Implanted symbiotes can protect the user from poison and allow him to recycle his body's waste products to survive for long periods without food and water. And, of course, weapons such as deathguns can be grafted directly onto the armor itself.

SYMBIONICS

Symbionics are artificial organs created using living things that are grafted onto their user's body or onto the flesh or chitin of various biomachines. Symbiotic systems are used for all sorts of purposes: to replace limbs and other body parts lost in combat; to graft wings, claws and other devices onto their owner and thus grant them powers they did not previously possess; and for many sorts of cosmetic purposes.

Symbionics are usually grown in lifevats, in the biofacs of the great genclans. At their most basic they are living organisms that have been turned into machines by the power of biomancy. They are grafted onto the flesh of their owners using various surgical procedures.



Once in place they fuse with their owner's central nervous system and become functional. All sorts of symbiotic systems are popular in Hydra, ranging from great lobster-like claws favored by the more deranged sorts of warrior, to second hearts that can greatly increase endurance, and increase the chance of surviving a chest wound.

Some genclans use symbionics to increase their member's lifespans, replacing old organs as they wear out with new symbiotic ones fresh from the vat. In this way many Hydrans stretch their lives out for centuries. Of course, Hydra was contaminated with Entropic fallout during the Armageddon Wars. This means that many symbiotic systems are prone to mutation, and there is a certain inevitability about the fact that the more symbiotic systems you use, the more prone you become to mutation or carcinoma.

FOOD

Perhaps unsurprisingly Hydra is the world's largest producer and exporter of food and drink. In the lifevats of Hydra, succulent foodstuffs can be grown in a fraction of the normal time using accelerated growth techniques. Meat is cloned in great vats. Plants can be made to grow to gigantic size. All of these foodstuffs are designed for taste. Genetic engineering ensures that these foods keep fresh longer. Some of the more expensive viands contain stimulant or relaxant drugs which make them addictive and pleasurable to consume. Such stuff is favored by the Ikareans, among others.

Hydran wines are equally famous. They have been specially created by House Bakkus, and come in a number of strengths and flavors. Even the most jaded pallet will find something to tempt it among the cellars of Hydra.

Of course, Hydran foods are regarded with some suspicion by the inhabitants of other metrozones. They are suspected of being laced with mutagens and mind-control drugs. They are banned completely in Prometheus. But such is their flavor that most people who taste them are hooked, and there is a thriving black market in them, even in Prometheus. All Hydran packaged foodstuffs can be recognized easily. They are packed in distinctive containers made from translucent chitin. In the Wastes these packages are valued more highly than bullets and credits when it comes to trading.

PHARMACEUTICALS

While they do not have quite the reputation or expertise with pharmaceuticals that the Ikareans do, the Hydrans are nonetheless major producers of medicines and combat and recreational drugs. In particular they are famed for the creation of self-stimulant healing drugs and fleshgraft slap-patches.



The healing drugs can revitalize an injured warrior in seconds. Slap-patches graft themselves to wounds instantly, stopping bleeding and preventing infection. More sophisticated still are the surgical symbiotes that burrow their way through a patient's body and graft themselves to injured internal organs, and prevent internal bleeding.

As with foodstuffs, these are regarded with suspicion by many outsiders. There are those who are greatly prejudiced about having Hydran implants within their bodies, or Hydran chemicals in their bloodstream. On the other hand, in the agony brought on by traumatic wounds, few people are going to stop and argue with their healer over the methods used to save them. Many adventurers favor Hydran medical symbiotes because they are so effective.

VIRUS DETECTION PROGRAM: ON	INITIATE SEQUENCE	GUNSTBERG OVERDRIVE	CORTICO QUASI-DEGRADATION
FLOW LINK QUASI PROTOCOL: INITIATED	NON-BIOLOGICAL RAW MATERIAL:	MICRO-OPTICAL MODULATOR: ON	GANGLIAL ELECTRO-IMPLANT
FILE SUB-PROTOL: GENCLAN	INTERNAL DATA CORRUPTION:	SILICONE SYNAPTIC SIMULATOR	SMART CHIP INSTALLED
NANOMECHANICAL INTERFACE:	LINGUISTIC MARKUP DIRECTORY	DYSFUNCTION	METHANE IMPULSE CATHETER
VALIDATE SIMULATION	MOLECULAR BINARY:	MEGAPULSE CHANNEL ON	OCCIPITAL FLOW MODULATION: SINE

GENCLANS

LOGIN:	SUB system COORDINATES	SEROTONERGIC OVERLOAD	BIOFEEDBACK MATRIX: XO
PASSWORD:	X1:477.27.8 X2:566.57.2	AMYGDALPTIC OVERWRITE	BINARY NANOBOT PRESENT
ACCESS GRANTED	Y1:642.42.4 Y2:388.01.2	SMART CHIP INSTALLED	GENIMATRIX SCANNER ENABLED
SECURITY CLEARANCE LEVEL:	Z2: 90.09.9 Z1: 31.47.3	BIOMECH AUGMENTATION:	PATTERN RECOGNIZER NULL:
EXCESS GENETIC VARIATION:	ABBERANT CHROMA LEVELS:	NANOCCIPITAL DRIVER	INFODUMP INITIATING

Maraya grasped her lance tighter and leaned low in the saddle of her zekt. The chitinous beast's insect-like wings buzzed loudly in her ears, drowning out the drone of the suspensor harness that kept the creature airborne. Below her, the city spread out like a great jungle. Huge mushroom towers leaned over the canals, huddling like conspirators at the water's edge. Over them loomed the great Towers, vanishing into the polluted multi-colored sky. Junkboats filled the canals. Crowds of people covered the land, looking for all the world like insects swarming over a vast termite mound.

Maraya pulled on the reins and the zekt altered the angle of its wings so that she rose higher. Clouds surrounded her for a moment, and she was blind. Droplets of moisture ran down her goggles like crystal tears. The cold bit her face, but her living armor kept the rest of her body warm. She kept climbing, praying to the First Ancestor of House Fera that no other zekt rider was close enough for a collision. She had heard of such things happening but never quite believed they could happen to her, until moments like this.

Then with a sudden flash of exhilaration, she was free of the clouds, rising into the brilliant light of the dying sun. She tugged on the reins again and the zekt leveled out. She smiled in spite of herself. It was a different world up here. Most of the city was invisible beneath the clouds. Only the tops of the tallest Towers rose out of the roiling mass, islands rising from a sea of white, fairy castles above the world. As the sun sank lower, glowglobes flickered to life in the windows, turning the Towers into pillars of light.

Up here things were different. Wind and speed whipped her ponytail back from her head. The murmur of the zekt's wings was all but inaudible.

Bat-winged ornithopters swooped to land on the ledges jutting from the Tower's sides. Huge whale-like air-clippers turned to catch the breeze with their sails of flesh and then lumbered off into the distance. Flyers flitted on angel wings, bearing messages from starscraper to starscraper. At this hour, on such evenings as this, she loved this city with an indescribable passion.

Down below it was polluted, crowded, filthy and corrupt. Up here, though, was evidence of what mankind was still capable of, even in these final days. Just for this moment she felt a sense of peace beyond all understanding. Joyous laughter bubbled from her lips then, remembering her mission, and the important messages she carried in the pouch within her, she decided she had better return to her duties. Josiah, High Beastmaster of Fera, was not a man to disappoint, particularly when you were carrying his messages to his counterpart in the Tower of Flesh.

She leaned back in her saddle, stretched her left leg to its fullest extent, pulling the stirrup tight. Responding to the signal, the zekt peeled off, rolling to the left, dropping altitude and gaining speed. It saved her life. Something large and dark flashed past her. She caught sight of a pennon fluttering on the end of a lance, as the other zekt rider dropped beneath her. Obviously her last-second change of direction had confused his aim. Maraya was a trained warrior. That instant was all she needed to realize that she was under attack.

She cast a quick glance around her, moving her head in a sweeping circle from left to right. Above her, another two zekt riders dropped like stooping hawks. Their riders were taking no chances. Each held an unholstered blaster pistol in their fist. They aimed them directly at her. She tugged her reins and stretched both legs, leaning far back in the saddle. Her zekt responded instantly, reversing the direction of its wingbeat. There was a heart stopping sense of deceleration, then she was moving backwards. Pulses of fire ripped the sky in front of her.

In the instant's grace, she considered her position. She faced three armed foes. They had attacked her by surprise. They had been waiting for her above the clouds. They obviously knew about her habit of high altitude joy-riding when she was abroad at this time of evening, but that still did not explain how they had found her. No one had followed her from the Tower of the Beasts. No one had been behind her before she had lifted off into the clouds. No one could have seen her from above the clouds.



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THE GENCLANS RULE

TO BE BETTER

TO BE THE BEST

GENCLANS



Her mind raced. Maybe they had been lucky. Maybe they had watched her from a distance and climbed through the clouds at the same time as she did. But if they were after her for some specific purpose then they had taken an awful risk. What if she had dropped back below cloud level? Maybe they had confederates waiting below too. Perhaps they were just bandits chancing their luck with a lone rider, but somehow she doubted it. In the great, ongoing game of inter-genclan politics, it was better not to believe in coincidence.

The question was how was she going to get away. The answer came to her swiftly. She reached forward and deactivated the suspensor harness. She gave the signal for the zekt to fold its wings. It dropped like a stone. Lines of fire passed through the air where she had just been.

Blasters! By the genes of her First Ancestor. These people were too well-armed to be bandits. Usually only the elite troops of the great genclans carried those expensive foreign-manufactured weapons. Or outlander mercenaries and adventurers, she corrected herself.

The clouds enfolded her once more, and she reactivated the suspensor harness, letting the zekt hover while she caught her breath. For a moment she felt safe. They could not see her here in the cloud murk. The feeling lasted only a moment as a shape emerged from the mist in front of her, and a bonelance hissed towards her breast. She had just time to kick the zekt to life, and roll it to one side, and the lance still grazed her. She felt the bite of bonelance poison, a moment before the symbiotes in her armor moved to neutralize it.

Filled with anger, she twisted in the saddle, looking for her attacker, but he had vanished into the mist. How had he found her? Maybe he had just been lucky. She sensed rather than saw the approach of another rider and threw herself flat, as the great hooked barb of a zekt sting passed over her head. She booted her own zekt into life, sending it moving into a random evasion pattern. The creature let out a scream as a blaster bolt came out of the gloom and took it in the side. Maraya's heart almost stopped as the zekt lurched to one side. Had they hit the suspensor harness? Was she going for a long plummet into the canals?

The beast pulled up. She inspected the side where the blaster bolt had hit. The zekt's carapace had melted and ran at the point of impact, and for a moment, she thought she smelled scorched flesh. Fortunately her steed did not seem badly hurt. She leaned forward in the saddle, couching her lance and pulling the reins forward. The zekt responded with a burst of speed, and a loss of altitude, and then they were out of the clouds with the city beneath them once more.

Maraya thought quickly. Hiding had done her no good. Her attackers had found her too easily in the clouds. Perhaps they were psychers, or perhaps they had been genesculpted with some special gift that let them track her.

Or perhaps... She leaned forward, running the fingers of her right hand under the straps of the suspensor harness. They found what she was looking for. She pulled the small locator symbiote out from where it had been attached to the harness. She knew now for a certainty that there was a traitor within the Tower of the Beasts, one who had set this homing device on her mount to let her attackers find her. She swore that if ever she found the man, she would kill him. Of course, first she would have to stay alive. Fortunately, she now had an idea of how to do that.

She threw the locator out and away from her and watched it drop. And the same time she pulled her zekt round in a dizzyingly tight circle. The world wheeled drunkenly around her. She saw the city as a flowing stream of light, the glow of the Towers reflected in the oily black waters.

Her attackers dropped out of the clouds, pursuing the locator. In an instant they were below her, dropping out of sight, dark shapes silhouetted against the lights of the city. Even so, she was glad that her genclan had seen fit to grant her nightsight. It made what she was about to do so much easier.

She nudged her mount into a sharp descent. The wind whipped her hair. The chill bit her face. She could taste blood inside her mouth where she had bitten the inside of her cheek. Her pursuers had reined up for a moment and halted, hovering in confusion. She couched her lance, and pulled her zekt up. She centered on the chest of one of her attackers, and swept past him. There was a moment of shock as the bonelance passed right through his chest and pinned him to his zekt. She let go of the shaft and swiftly drew her own pistol.

Pulling her zekt up and around, she banked to attack once more. The pistol kicked in her hand. Warm spent cartridges hurtled past her face. A line of tracer bullets hurtled towards her prey, stitching his chest with lines of fire.

She swept backwards once more, and this time was not so lucky. A hail of blaster bolts hit her zekt. Its wings caught fire. It squealed in agony as its eyes exploded. She felt a sudden sickening lurch as all power went from the suspensor harness. For one heart-stopping instant Maraya knew she was dead, destined for the long fall to hard earth. Then she saw her only chance. Her trajectory carried her directly towards her attacker. He had momentarily stopped firing. She swung her leg out of the saddle and kicked off, leaping out into space towards him.

Almost at once, she knew she was not going to make it. She was going to fall short but she twisted and reached, stretching to the utmost. Her fingers caught on the man's stirrup, with a jolt that threatened to pull her arm out of her socket. Indeed, she felt that if it had not been for the support her living armor gave her, it would have.

She dangled for a moment, as her attacker's zekt lurched, bobbing like a ship on a high sea under the force of the impact. The world wheeled past below her, and she forced herself to look up. She knew there was no chance of getting into the saddle if the man resisted her, so she swung her weapon around and opened fire. The bullets turned the top of his head to fine red mist. He fell backwards in the saddle.

Feeling the unfamiliar tug on the stirrups from its left side, and weight of its dead rider going backwards, the zekt was confused. It tried to roll backwards and leftwards. With the sudden movement Maraya almost lost her grip. Swinging frantically, she dropped her weapon and pulled herself up with the stirrups. The zekt became ever more confused and erratic, and she held on desperately, as it soared towards a nearby Tower.

Maraya watched the Tower approach. There was nothing she could do about it. She was about to be smashed to pulp against its chitinous walls.

No, she was not going to die here. Not after all this. Suddenly she saw her chance. She reached over and unbuckled the suspensor harness. It slipped from the zekt's back, and the former rider fell free. Unable to keep itself airborne using only its wings, the zekt began to the long fall to the ground. Without the propulsion of the zekt's wings, Maraya found herself drifting slowly towards the walls of the Tower. She reached up again and adjusted the intensity of the suspensor. Slowly, with lessened power, she began to drop towards the ledge beneath her. The guards looked up, and she saw that they were biowarriors of House Meleus. By some strange chance, her flight had ended directly above her destination.

She let go of the harness and rolled to a halt on the ledge. The guards pointed their weapons towards her, but she came to her feet with her hands held high.

"Greetings," she said. "I bring a message for your Lord from the High Beastmaster of House Fera."

The guards looked at her in astonishment.

THE GENCLANS

There are thousands of genclans and splinter-clans in Hydra, and more spring into being all the time. Each is a distinctive entity with its own culture. They range in size from tiny splinter-clans of less than a hundred people to industrial and economic giants like House Fera and House Anthor. All are engaged in the struggle for survival and dominance that characterizes Hydran society.

In a book this size there is not enough space to cover more than a handful of the major genclans in any detail. In future sourcebooks we will cover more.

HOUSE FERA

House Fera dwells within the Tower of the Beasts. They are one of the most ancient and wealthy of all the genclans, and were one of the greatest of the First Hundred. House Fera specializes in the biomantic discipline of Feramorphics, the shaping of all manner of beasts. Indeed, it is upon this that most of Tower's prodigious wealth lies.



House Fera uses basic animal genetic matrixes to create everything from enormous bio-machines, such as Sandwalkers and Ornithopters, to the highly evolved humanoid animals known as Anthromorphs. The house has also grafted animal genetic matrixes to its own members to create the mighty Beastwarriors. Over the long ages, its psychers have come to specialize in the handling of the House's creations. The nobility of the genclan are known as the Beastmasters. The ruler of the Tower is called the High Beastmaster.

ORIGINS

House Fera was one of the original genclans founded in the lost golden age before the Armageddon Wars. Initially its members differed from many of the other genclans in that they did not to alter their own genetic matrixes, but chose instead to concentrate on manipulating those of animals. In those days there was a staggering influx of genetic material from the stars, and Fera Beasthunters roamed the galaxy seeking new animals for Fera scientists to experiment on. The Biomancers of Fera called themselves Evolutionaries.

At first the Ferans chose simply to improve the strains of various cattle and poultry, making them hardier and more resistant to disease, able to subsist on the cheapest possible fodder and produce the leanest and tenderest of meats. From there it was a simple step towards creating animals that were living incubators for drugs and medicines, such as cattle that created human insulin in their milk.

Slowly but surely the Ferans advanced down the path to more radical genetic engineering. They made house pets smarter and more loyal to their owners. They found a huge market for exotic pets such as docile albino tigers and dogs so intelligent they were able to understand human speech. They even used ancient genepatterns to create small simulacra of the terrible lizards that ruled the world at the dawn of time.

From there it was another short step to creating sentient animals that could speak and understand human speech. The final stage of their work, and the one that finally caused protest against the Evolutionaries, was the creation of the Anthromorphs. These were animals evolved to human or greater intelligence, who possessed humanoid forms and who take on many tasks normally performed by ordinary people.

With the coming of the Armageddon Wars, life became much harsher for the Ferans. The markets for their custom-made pets dried up. Most of the domesticated beasts they had created could not survive in the new and deadly world. At first the Ferans themselves seemed almost too ethical to survive. They refused to use their expertise to create bio-weapons. They sheltered the Anthromorphs who remained loyal to them within their own Tower when the commoners tried to destroy them. However, as the Collapse raged about them, a cabal of younger Ferans seized control from the High Beastmaster and made one of their own, Shadrax, Lord of the Tower.

Shadrax's rule as High Beastmaster saw many sharp changes in Feran policy. He knew that in order to survive, the genclan was going to have to do many things its people found distasteful. He immediately ordered the creation of a new range of killer animals. Albino tigers now emerged from the clonevats as snarling killers ferociously loyal to their masters. King Rats were created to act as spies across the ravaged city.

Teams of Evolutionaries were dispatched to collect Entropic matter and study its mutagenic effects. Changes were made to the genetic matrixes of the Anthromorphs, reviving their killer instincts and bringing their bestial nature to the fore. They became the soldiers of the Tower and brutal enforcers of Shadrax's will. The Lion Guard and the Wolf Warriors became roundly feared and hated by the commoners during the Hegemony of the Hundred Towers. Those within the Tower who disagreed with what they saw as this perversion of the genclan's skills were brutally suppressed or exiled by those loyal to Shadrax.

During the First Tower War, the Ferans at first remained neutral. Fearing the terrible powers of the Typhonians and their allies, Shadrax drove his Evolutionaries to redouble their experiments in new bio-weapons. Entropic material was used to create fearsome new creatures. First were the warbeasts, normal animals capable of transforming into gigantic ravening monsters when their handlers spoke a command word; then came the awesome Beastwarriors, men and women who could transform themselves into towering humanoid creatures, half-human, half-beast, and fight with superhuman ferocity.

When he was sure his people possessed the means to fight and survive, Shadrax entered the fray on the side of the Valkans and the Defenders of Commonwealth, and his forces took part in the final siege of the Tower of Destruction when the Typhonians were finally broken. The Ferans were one of the strongest supporters of the founding of the Tower of Lords and are one of the few genclans who have always cooperated with it.

Shortly after the foundation of the Tower of Lords, Shadrax was assassinated by a cabal of Evolutionaries who had proven loyal to the old ideal. The evolutionary revolt was put down by Shadrax's former right-hand man, and chief general, Gaius. Gaius became High Beastmaster in turn and ruled the clan with an iron fist. His strong leadership was needed, for the threat of the Swarm had arisen on Hydra's boundaries.

While many viewed the Swarm Wars as a time of unmitigated disaster, it was to prove a time of triumph for the Ferans. Their troops distinguished themselves in the fighting and destroyed several Swarm Hives.

By the end of the Swarm Wars and the creation of the Northwall, Gaius had become ever more paranoid and oppressive. There had been several attempts on his life by Evolutionaries and Beastmasters still loyal to the old ideals of the clan. Gaius came to see assassins in every shadow, and plotters around every corner. Anyone he suspected died or vanished under mysterious circumstances, and it became something of a bitter joke that the Spydrans were just as at home within the Tower of the Beasts as they were in their own Tower.

When the end came for Gaius it came from a completely unexpected quarter. It was Blackfang, the leader of the Wolf Warriors, who killed Gaius and sparked off the period known as the Anthromorph Rebellions. The roots of this bitter internal struggle can be found in the dark days of the First Tower War, when the Anthromorphs had borne the brunt of the fighting for House Fera, aided by the Beastwarriors. Tens of thousands of them had died in the fighting. They had become the strong right arm of the genclan and patrolled the streets and kept the commoners under control. They had become increasingly unpopular with the folk of the Feran Insula and had shared none of the spoils of victory. They worked long hours and risked their short lives for little or no reward.

As Gaius grew ever more paranoid, the Wolf Warriors were put under greater surveillance, and awarded fewer rations. During the purges they saw Beastmasters they loved and revered murdered. In the end it proved too much even for their in-bred loyalty. Legions of Wolf Warriors rose up after the assassination of Gaius and civil war wracked the Tower of the Beasts. A cabal of Evolutionaries loyal to the old ways tried to seize power. Hekate, the leader of Gaius' secret police, made a bid for power. Most of the Anthromorphs supported the Evolutionaries. A few, such as the Warhogs and the Lion Guard, remained loyal to Hekate. Battle raged across the island, and for a brief period it looked like the Anthromorphs might win.

However, using the genclan's vast wealth, Hekate hired several Legions of Valkans. The Anthromorphs were put down quickly and efficiently. Many of the War Wolves fled to the Island of the Damned. Many more Anthromorphs were slain in the purges that followed.

To everyone's surprise Hekate Na Fera proved to be a wise and, for the most part, conciliatory leader. She rewarded those Anthromorphs who had remained loyal, improved the conditions for everyone on the island, and ruled justly and well. During her long reign the foundations of the genclan's long prosperity and stability were laid.

Captured Swarm eggs provided the Ferans with new genetic material of incredible potential. Studying the mysteries of how the Swarms create their various castes from essentially the same eggs gave the Evolutionaries new insights into their chosen field of study, and opened up a new and incredibly lucrative field for Ferans: the creation of biomachines.

Since the time of the Armageddon Wars, Hydra had suffered from the destruction of its autofacs and Overminds. Vehicles had to be imported, as did many technological weapons. Now the Ferans were able to use Swarm Worker castes as the basis for a whole new class of vehicles and machines. They swiftly created Ornithopters and spider-like stiltwalkers that could carry people through the Swamps and canals of Hydra.

Eventually they created the enormous Sandwalkers that could travel across the Wastes and process Drakonium within their bodies. It was these mighty machines that were eventually to rebuild House Fera's fortunes to heights greater than they had ever been before the Armageddon Wars. The Sandwalkers enabled them to gather enough Drakonium not only to power their own homes and technological imports, but to resell it to other genclans and even have a surplus left over to sell on the great Drakonium Exchanges of Janus and the Shogunate. This flow of wealth kept the genclan in luxury and funded a whole new spate of research into Feramorphics. Early on they lost their market leadership in the creation of biomachines to the mass-production techniques used by House Meleus, but to this day they remain the undisputed masters at creating custom biomachines. Indeed, through licensing agreements, they often design new vehicles for House Meleus and share in the profits from their sale.

THE ISLAND OF THE BEASTS

The Isle of Fera is one of the largest of the Hydran islands. It is roughly triangular in shape and about five kilometers per side. In its center lies the Tower of the Beasts. The Tower of the Beasts is ovular. It resembles a gigantic egg placed upright in a ring of smaller egg-shaped structures and surrounded by many domes.

The whole island is actually one huge building consisting of thousands of domes, all connected by tunnels and covered walkways. Within the domes are housed the barrack-like rows of apartments where the Commoners dwell and the lairs of many Anthromorphs.



A wall surrounds the island and is manned by Lion Guard and Beastwarriors. The streets are patrolled by Warhogs. Three bridges, one at each corner of the island, connect it with the surrounding islands. To the north lies the Bridge of the Lions. To the Southeast is the Gate of Glory and to the Southwest is the Bridge of Dragons. By each bridge is a huge dome that houses an enormous bio-fac.

The genclan folk dwell within the confines of the Tower and rarely go outside except on clan business. Within the Tower of the Beasts are enormous laboratories, clone-vats and genetic libraries.

FERAN SOCIETY

Feran society has a number of layers. At the top are the Beastmasters, the core of the genclan's ruling class from whom the High Beastmaster is always selected. Each Beastmaster has been blessed with psychic power and from an early age is taught the mysteries of Feramorphics.

Next in status are the Beastwarriors. They are actually a sub-set of the Beastmasters who were long ago granted the power to transform themselves into monstrous living engines of destruction. They are, in fact, a splinter-clan of House Fera, but they have chosen to remain with their progenitors, and dwell within the Tower itself.

They are the Ferans' trusted bodyguards and allies and form the officer class of the Feran armies. Their intelligence is somewhat lower than that of the Beastmasters and in general they lack their ruler's psionic powers. They are, however, deadly warriors, utterly loyal to their progenitors.

Below the Beastwarriors are the Commoners and Anthromorphs. Technically they are of roughly equal status, but the Anthromorphs are more feared and deferred to by the human population. The highest status of Anthromorphs are the Lion Guard who make up most of the elite units of the Feran army. Next in status are the Warhogs, who are the brutal police force of the island. They also provide the vast majority of infantry, known as grunts, to the Feran Legions. There are numerous other Anthromorphs on the Island who are employed in various capacities.

The humans of the island perform a variety of tasks. They look on the genclan as god-like beings, and fear their Anthromorph lackeys. Some are merchants. Some work in the biofacs as manual laborers. Most hope that their children will test favorably with the Beastmasters and be elevated to Beastmaster or Beastwarrior status. Many savants suspect that the only reason the Feran allow commoners on their island is to provide a pool of genetic material from which new Ferans may emerge.

THE BEASTMASTERS

In general the Beastmasters look somewhat like ordinary humans. They tend to be slightly taller and from an early age shave their heads. Many have pointed ears. The mark of their genclan, a winged lion, is tattooed in the middle of their foreheads. What separates them from the rest of humanity is that many of them are psychers with the Beast Master power, and that they are very well-schooled in the symbiotic discipline of Feramorphics. The Beastmasters will adopt anyone from among their commoners who shows unusual intelligence or an aptitude for their discipline. They will also adopt any child found among the commonality who shows signs of psionic ability. It is very unusual for them to adopt anyone not born on their island or in their colonies.

Most Beastmasters seem quiet and scholarly to those who do not know them. They are very knowledgeable about their chosen subject and about animals in general. While they are not actively evil or unkind the way many Posthumans can be, they show little regard for any living thing, and tend to view most of the world as potential experimental subjects. They also project an air of quiet confidence in themselves and their traditions. They are quite aware of how wealthy and powerful their clan is.

At an early age they are taken away from their parents and taught by a ferociously efficient school system, that gives them a lot of hands-on experience with their subject.

From the very start they are made aware that their future rank and status depends entirely on their intelligence and ability. They are tested by competitive examination and streamed to study the areas to which they are most suited.

Some become mere technicians. Others become administrators. The very best become Evolutionaries and are allowed to create new life forms and develop new biomachines. Those who have psi powers become Beastlords.

Titles within this class are a strange mix of the military and the academic. A Beastmaster might be known as Captain-Doctor. His superior might be Colonel-Professor. The highest rank, short of Supreme Evolutionary, is General-Beastmaster. On the death of the Supreme Evolutionary, the highest-ranking Evolutionary General succeeds.

Commoners adopted into the clan obviously start at a disadvantage. They are not steeped in the culture of the Evolutionaries and must work doubly hard simply to keep abreast of those born into the genclan. It is very rare, but not impossible, for an adopted commoner to reach the upper echelons of power within the clan.

The Beastmasters rarely leave their Tower except on unusually important business, or when exiled. They prefer to send Beastwarriors on errands beyond their Tower.

THE BEASTWARRIORS

The Beastwarriors are the elite soldiers of House Fera. They all possess the power to transform themselves into a *beastform*. This ability causes their entire appearance to shift. They can grow in an eyeblink, gaining height and muscle mass, usually becoming half again as tall, and four times as heavy as they are in human form. They acquire horns, claws and rending jaws when the change comes over them. In beastform they are incredibly swift and strong and far more ferocious and animalistic than their human counterparts. There are many different types of beastform. Lions develop cat-like features, huge mains of hair and tawny fur. Hogs sprout bristles and small tusks from their lower jaws and their heads become porcine and brutal. Wolves sprout fur and their heads become lupine with well-developed canine teeth.

Beastwarriors come in many different shapes and sizes, all of which suggest the creatures they transform into. A Lion-warrior might be tall and blonde with tawny, cat-like eyes. A Hog might be short and broad and muscular with a short-sighted, peering gaze. A Wolf might be lean and quick, with a gaunt face and piercing eyes that reflect the light.

Beastwarriors are brought up to be fighters. From an early age, they learn loyalty to their pack and the skills of combat. They are taught how to restrain their baser urges and how to focus their instinctive aggression for the good of the group. They tend to be very emotional and to react quickly and according to their instincts. They are not cerebral. They are warriors, not thinkers.

Beastwarrior society is very hierarchical and stratified, but the structure is imposed from outside by the Beastmasters. If left to themselves, the Beastwarriors would tend to have a pack leader and a group hierarchy based on strength and power. While this would make for great close combat fighters, it runs contrary to the desire of the Beastmaster Evolutionaries, who require tactical ability and cunning as well as raw ferocity.



The Evolutionaries test their Beastwarriors and make promotions on the basis of many different criteria. Perhaps because of their genetic engineering, the command structure they put in place holds good; except under times of extreme stress, when more primal instincts take over. For this reason, most Beastwarriors are separated from each other and put in charge of squads of Anthromorph troops.

ANTHROMORPHS

Anthromorphs come in many shapes and forms, all of them based on a hybrid of human and animal genetic matrixes. In some ways they look much like Beastwarriors, although they are usually less powerful, graceful and charismatic.

Lion-men have golden skin and eyes, feline features and great golden manes of hair. They have padded feet and retractable claws in their fingers. Light tawny fur covers their entire body. Most Lion-men are warriors and become part of the Lion Guard, the elite Anthromorph legions that are the shocktroops of the Feran army.

Tuskers are based on warhog genetic material, and are singularly ugly creatures with sloping foreheads, snout-like noses, grunting speech and small tusks that jut from their lower jaws.

They are short and broad and very strong. Bristly hair covers their bodies. They are short-sighted and bad-tempered but are also fanatically loyal to their Feran masters. They form the police force and the backbone of the Feran army's infantry units.

The War Wolves rebelled long ago, and survive mostly on the Island of the Damned. They have wolf-heads, and gray fur covers their bodies. They are fast runners and fierce fighters who are welcomed in many mercenary units. By ancient edict, they are banned from ever setting foot on the Feran Insula.

WEALTH

The colossal wealth of this genclan comes from several different areas. Firstly, and these days most important, is Drakonium harvesting. As the shortages of Drakonium increase, and the market value of Drakonium rises, the clan is getting richer. Secondly, there is the creation of high-spec custom biomachines, as well as revenue from licensing agreements entered into with House Meleus. Thirdly, House Fera is the largest producer of meat and meat by-products in the world. In its monstrously huge factory farms, cloned animals are grown at accelerated rates, slaughtered, butchered and processed with incredible speed, then brought to market. Meat is an expensive luxury item in most places, and House Fera produces the best in the world. They charge a huge mark-up on it.

HOUSE MELEUS

The enigmatic folk of House Meleus are best known as the owners of the largest and oldest biofac complex in Hydra, and for pioneering many of the basic techniques of symbionics. They are equally famous for being the wealthiest of all the genclans, and one of the most influential.

It is hard to overestimate the Melean influence on the development of Hydran civilization. In the days before the Interdict they were the first to use symbiotic grafts, altering the genetic matrixes of living organisms to turn them into living machines. They made the breakthrough in genetic grafting that allowed samples of a person's genetic material to be taken and used in the process of growing symbionics, thus reducing the chances of tissue rejection. After the Armageddon Wars, they set up the first large-scale biofac to mass-produce symbiotic devices and bring them to market.

This biofac still exists today and has grown to cover several insulae. Within its walls virtually every device known to biomancy has at some time been created, and their genetic codes remain on file so that they can swiftly be produced again if the need arises.

The Meleans were the first to set up colonies on the archipelago and in the Slime Jungles, and reproduced their biofacs wherever the necessary raw materials were available. They swiftly adapted Swarm genetic material to their needs, and developed carapace armor to its highest level.

They adapted the techniques used in the creation of biomachines pioneered by House Fera, beginning to mass produce vehicles while the Ferans were still custom-building theirs. Since those days they have developed all manner of organic vehicles and weapons. Their scouts scour the Slime Jungles looking for new genetic material to adapt to their purposes. Their scientists travel as far afield as Kimera to study the gene-patterns of mutants. Their biomantic research labs are the largest in the world.

House Meleus is an industrial titan, representing almost twenty-five percent of Hydra's productive capacity. Along with House Fera and House Anthon it forms the backbone of the Hydran economy and directly and indirectly shelters, houses and employs millions of people.

House Meleus produces almost fifty percent of all symbiotic systems sold in Hydra, either for itself, or through sub-contracted production for other genclans. It produces a similar percentage of all vehicles and biomachines. House Fera leads in the production of new types of machine and in custom-building them. House Meleus is the master of mass production. It is always willing to fund the development and mass production of new and interesting biomachines developed by splinter-clans, and it will often simply buy off or absorb useful splinter-clans into its own structure. The Fleshlords, the ruling bureaucrats of the genclan, like to see themselves as the nervous system of a huge symbiotic selection of organisms.

Of course, where there is so much wealth and knowledge, other people covet it, and over the millennia the Meleans have developed many methods of hanging on to what is their own and of adding to it. House Meleus is not just an industrial powerhouse, it is a military one. They are the largest producer of combat biomachines in Hydra. They can field as many spidertanks as most Houses can field soldiers. They have been instrumental in the creation of sentient biomachines, and at least half of their spider-tanks are self-aware and capable of independent action without human intervention. They have produced bio-walkers, huge humanoid biomachines, in great numbers to defend their installations. And of course they have their own warrior cadres. The house also owns more than half of all military ornithopters in the city of Hydra.

Indeed so huge and powerful has House Meleus become that it has within it many separate organizations that elsewhere would be entirely new genclans. It is a tribute to the organization skills of the Fleshlords that all the Houses different components manage to enjoy a fruitful symbiosis.

During their youth all members of the genclan are tested to see where their aptitudes lie, and assigned a career according to them. The Meleans are also enthusiastic testers of their human bondsmen, and will adopt anyone who shows the necessary talents and aptitudes. There are over a hundred castes of Meleans, of which the four most important are:

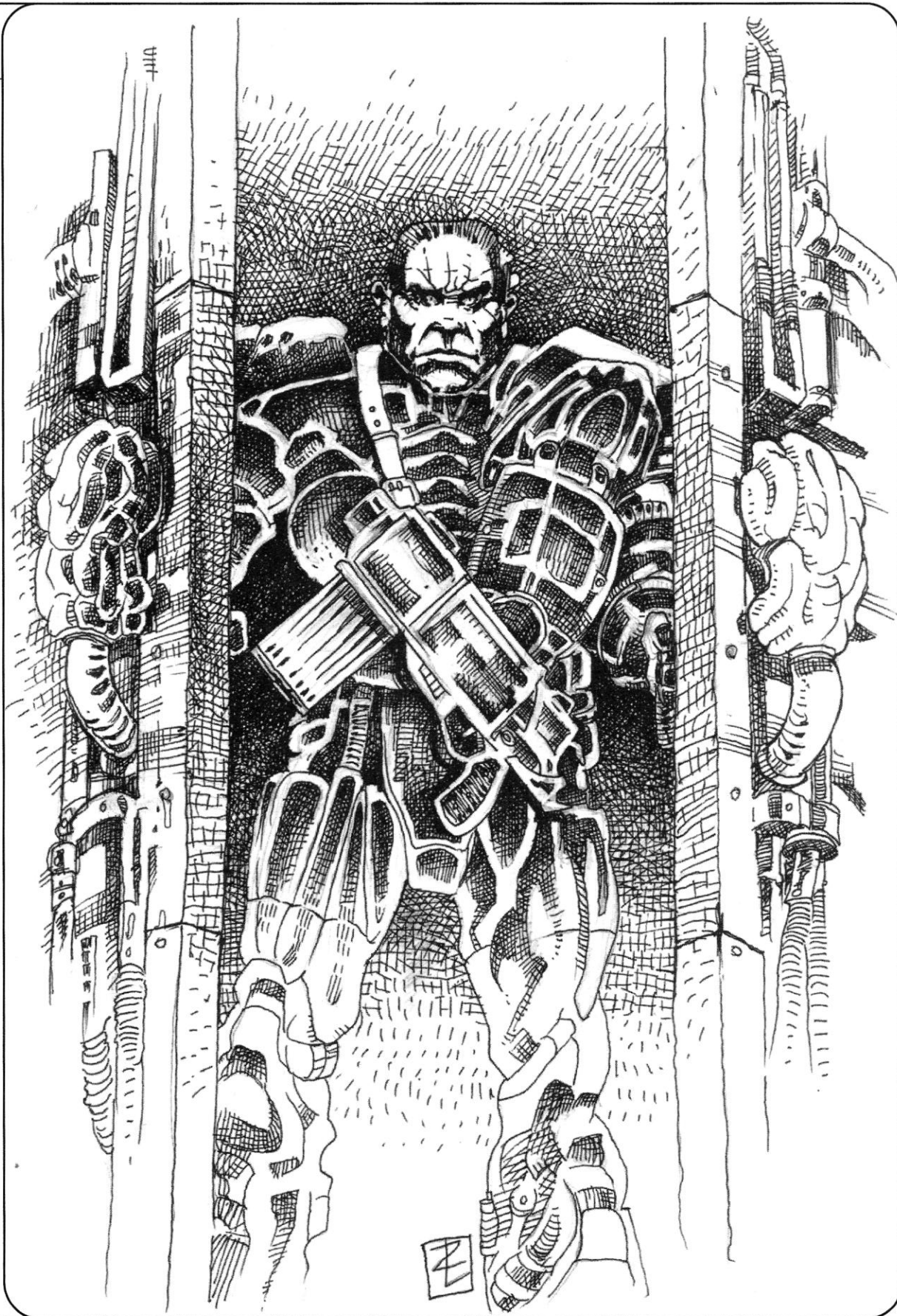
BIOWARRIORS

House Meleus employs several hundred thousand biowarriors. These are trained from the age of testing in the arts of war. As well as their own officer corps, they are instructed by Valkans, Typhonians and the best mercenaries money can hire. Their physical performance is hugely enhanced by genesculpting and constant training. They are further strengthened by the use of symbiotic grafts, and are equipped with the best carapace armor that can be mass produced.

The elite units of the Melean army are equipped with energy weapons such as blasters and force swords. Officers and special units are given custom armor designed for their specific tasks. Airborne units are given winged armor, aquatic units are given sybmsuits with fins and webbed leg-gear. Supported by the huge mass of biomechanical armored units, House Meleus legions are among the most potent fighting units on the planet. They need to be to protect the genclan's far-flung holdings and to police the streets of its insulae.

BIOMANCERS

Like the biowarriors, biomancers are trained from early youth. As children they attend the best scientific and technical schools. Their brains are augmented with implanted biocomputers. They are encouraged to specialize in areas that interest them and the best and brightest are put in charge of research divisions. The others will spend their careers supervising biofacs and the creation of House Meleus's products.



OVERSEERS

The Overseers are the managers and administrators of the genclan, and it is from their ranks that the Fleshlords, the genclan's ultimate rulers, are normally drawn. The Overseers are skilled merchants and negotiators trained to manage all aspects of the House's business. They have received a very broad-based education, and are constantly being rotated in and out of the various divisions and biofacs to give them experience and contacts. They are responsible for the smooth running of the genclan's day-to-day business, and for heading the small special project teams that develop new products and liaise with the many splinter-clans and Houses allied with House Meleus.

PSYCHER LEGION

House Meleus is one of the few genclans to recruit and train its own corps of Psychers, - it employs over two thousand of them. They are extensively psycho-conditioned to remain loyal to the clan, and to further its interests in any way necessary. Any young Psyker who is not a wanted criminal can usually find a home with House Meleus if he is prepared to undergo extensive indoctrination. House Meleus rewards well those who are, and finds them lots of interesting and important work. It is also completely ruthless in hunting down renegade psychers who betray its trust.

THE RESURRECTORS

This caste oversees the genclan's Lazarus pools and makes sure that those who possess nekrochips are brought back to life quickly and efficiently. This is a highly profitable business, for the Meleans are known to be among the most diligent and secure brokers of resurrection contracts.

THE FLESHLORDS

The Fleshlords are the ruling council of the genclan. There are always one hundred of them, chosen by merit from those who have proven adept in managing the clan and solving its problems. One Fleshlord is responsible for each of the great castes above mentioned, the last is the Supreme Fleshlord who casts the deciding vote in all decisions where the others are tied. Each Fleshlord is guarded by a cadre of fanatic warriors and enjoys the best health-care money can buy. All of them have lived for centuries, their lives extended by anti-agathic drugs and symbiotic replacement organs. Their instructions are carried out by the genclan's hordes of employees.

THE TOWER OF FLESH

The Tower of Flesh is an enormous collection of Insulae. Over the years, the Melean's gigantic biofac has grown and spread over neighboring insula. It now covers an area twenty kilometers square.

The biofac has a huge central spire and many habtowers dot its surface. Within its huge chitin walls are the cells and apartments where the commoners live. Masses of veinous organic piping cover the walls and obscure the building's outline. Huge pipes flow through the living walls, carrying nutrient chemicals to the vast lifevats and cocoons. Enormous insect-like machines constantly crawl over the surface of the building, repairing and enlarging it. Equally titanic biomachines drag cocoons and freshly spawned products through the building to the holding bays and storage nests. In this way people are hooked to the machines by ganglionic links, controlling their actions and supervising the production of new artifacts. Many more are employed in shops and showrooms selling these wares.

COMMONERS

The bondsmen of House Meleus are well-treated and well-paid, but their lives are somewhat regimented. Everyday they must rise with the dawn, perform their exercises and sing the *Song Of The Worthy Laborer* before setting off to work. They are usually well contented with their lot, however. The habs in which they live are safe and fortified, and their Posthuman masters see to it that they have the best health-care available for as long as their lives are productive. As soon as they fall terminally ill or reach the age of non-production, they are humanely retired by lethal injection and their body's bone, muscle and tissue is recycled for use in the biofacs. Even in death, they are proud to serve House Meleus.

AGRIDOMES

House Meleus owns many other insula scattered throughout Hydra. In these huge agridomes, synthi-rice is grown in controlled womb-temperature environments, and leg-less meat animals are grown in enormous lifevats before being processed, dispensed into chitin containers, and dispatched to feed the masses.

COLONIES

House Meleus has many colonies scattered across the surface of Waste World. The largest are in the Slime Jungles bordering on the Wastelands. These are the center of House Meleus's Drakonium harvesting operations. The people of these colonies also maintain contact with the desert nomads of the Diaspora who act as their scouts. House Meleus also maintains a huge biofac complex in Janus where it produces carapace armor and replacement body parts as well as symbiotic limbs and nekrochips. This huge installation is guarded by elite squads of biowarriors.



HOUSE ANTHOR

House Anthor calls itself the Tower of Knowledge. From the most ancient times the Thinkers have always been the most advanced of the genclans, always pushing the technical and moral boundaries of biotechnology. It was the first of the genclans, and in truth all the others are in some way its descendants, for House Anthor developed most of the basic techniques of genesculpting, and to this day holds the lead in that field. Genesculpting, the basic art of mixing and splicing two separate genetic matrixes to create a viable new organism, is the very bedrock on which biomancy rests.

Perhaps because they were the first to use these new techniques to improve their own genetic matrixes, the Anthorians have always had a sinister reputation. They were long suspected of having the darkest of motives in all their dealings, and in the end these suspicions were proven true. And yet House Anthor has spun off the greatest number of splinter-clans of any Hydran genclan, and has even given rise to whole new subraces of humanity, although whether this is a positive thing is still open to debate.

Over the entrance to the Tower of Knowledge is inscribed the motto: The proper study of man is man. The Anthorians have certainly taken these words to heart, for no other genclan has studied the genetic matrixes of humanity so closely or used that knowledge so ruthlessly. There is truth in the philosopher-poet Kraylo's remark, It was the sin of House Fera that they turned beasts into men, it was the sin of House Anthor that they turned men into beasts. Many of the subraces to be found in Hydra today, the Brutes, the Flyers, the Lurks and Drudges are its creations. Entire peoples came into being as a result of Anthorian experiments with the human genotype.

In their way, all of these subraces are flawed: the Brutes gained great strength and hardiness at the cost of intelligence and perceptiveness. The Flyers achieved the ancient human dream of unassisted flight but at the cost of shortened lives and brittle bones. The Lurks, said to be the result of an effort to create the perfect spy, are now an amoral race of thieves that plague the city.

No one is quite sure as to the Anthorians' motives for creating these subraces. The Anthorians claim it was pure research. Others are not so sure. What is known is that having created them, the Anthorians gave the subraces homes on their insula and even allowed them freedom to come and go as they pleased, and to settle where they would.

This has led to the subraces spreading throughout many of the islands of Hydra. The Anthorians do not seem to be too troubled by this. They gave up creating subraces millennia ago. They say they have learned all they need to know, and have moved on to more productive fields of endeavor.

Some genclans, having seen the Anthorians' use of hormones to transform peaceful Brutes into terrifying Berserker warriors, now suspect the Anthorian's motives.



Could it be that they will at some future date introduce a chemical into the water supply that will cause the other races to transform also? They would then have powerful and deadly infiltrators in many other insula. Certainly, close inspection of the subraces by the biomancers of other Towers has led to no evidence of it, but this may mean nothing. If any genclan is capable of concealing the evidence of such tinkering it is the Anthorians. As a result of this, the subraces are barred from many insula, mostly notably those of the Ferans and the Valkans.

It may be that these suspicions are unworthy, for the Anthorians seem genuinely proud of their creations, and of the fact that they granted them freedom and free will. Such pride seems strange to others, for Anthor is also the largest producer of industrial Golems in the world. These neutered slave workers have been adapted to almost every task and perform much of the drudge labor in the Tower of Knowledge.

The Tower's War Golems are feared wherever they are deployed, for they are completely loyal to their Tower and fight with no regard for their lives or the lives of others. They are warriors without scruple and killers without mercy, stronger and faster than a normal man. Some of the Golems have other adaptations that make them seem all the more terrifying. Some have huge shark-like jaws, others are centauroids, quadrupedal cavalry that act as shocktroopers in the Tower wars.



House Anthor maintains many research colonies on the Archipelago, and in the Wastes, where strange experiments take place in isolation. The Anthorians say that this is for reasons of security. If anything goes wrong these remote locations can be isolated and contained. Anthor's many enemies claim that it is because what goes on in these places is so horrifying that even the other genclans would clamor for it to be stopped if they knew the details.

THE TOWER OF KNOWLEDGE

The exterior of the Tower of Knowledge is shaped like a human brain. It is over three hundred meters high and encased in a carapace of super-hardened chitin that preserves every wrinkle and fold of the brain's surface. The interior of the structure is a maze of corridors and chambers in which all manner of bizarre research is performed. The tissues of the entire structure are saturated with nerve ganglions and the whole tower is a vast living computer into which the Anthorians can hook themselves by ganglionic link.

At the very center of the Tower lies an armored vault in which is held the largest library of books in creation on the subject of biomancy. Around the library are Avernus's most advanced genesculpting laboratories where endless experiments are performed at all hours of the day and night.

The Tower of Knowledge is unusual in that the Thinkers do not live there, they only work there. Scattered through their insula are many smaller Towers in all shapes and sizes where communities of Anthorians live and work. Each of these smaller towers is a separate fortress with its own laboratories and research facilities. Enormous ganglionic links run over the roofs of the insula, connecting each lesser Tower to the Tower of Knowledge by a vast web of living cables. These allow the Anthorians to always be in communication with their central brain computer.

Also scattered throughout the island are many biofacs and industrial scale genesculpting tanks in which the Anthorians create their Golems. These too are linked to the brain-cable network. Amid all these seemingly randomly placed buildings are the huge hab-blocks where the Anthorian subraces and bondsmen dwell. There are huge concentrations of Brutes, Drudges and Flyers on the island, as well as hundreds of thousands of commoners who serve in various menial ways.

The whole island is enclosed by a ring of fortifications patrolled by war-Golems and Anthorian warriors. The walls are grown from bone and chitin, and can release various toxic chemicals at need. Rumor has it that the central reservoir on the island can be flooded with mutational hormones that can turn all the Flyers, Brutes and Drudges into ferocious warriors. The reality of this claim has never been tested.

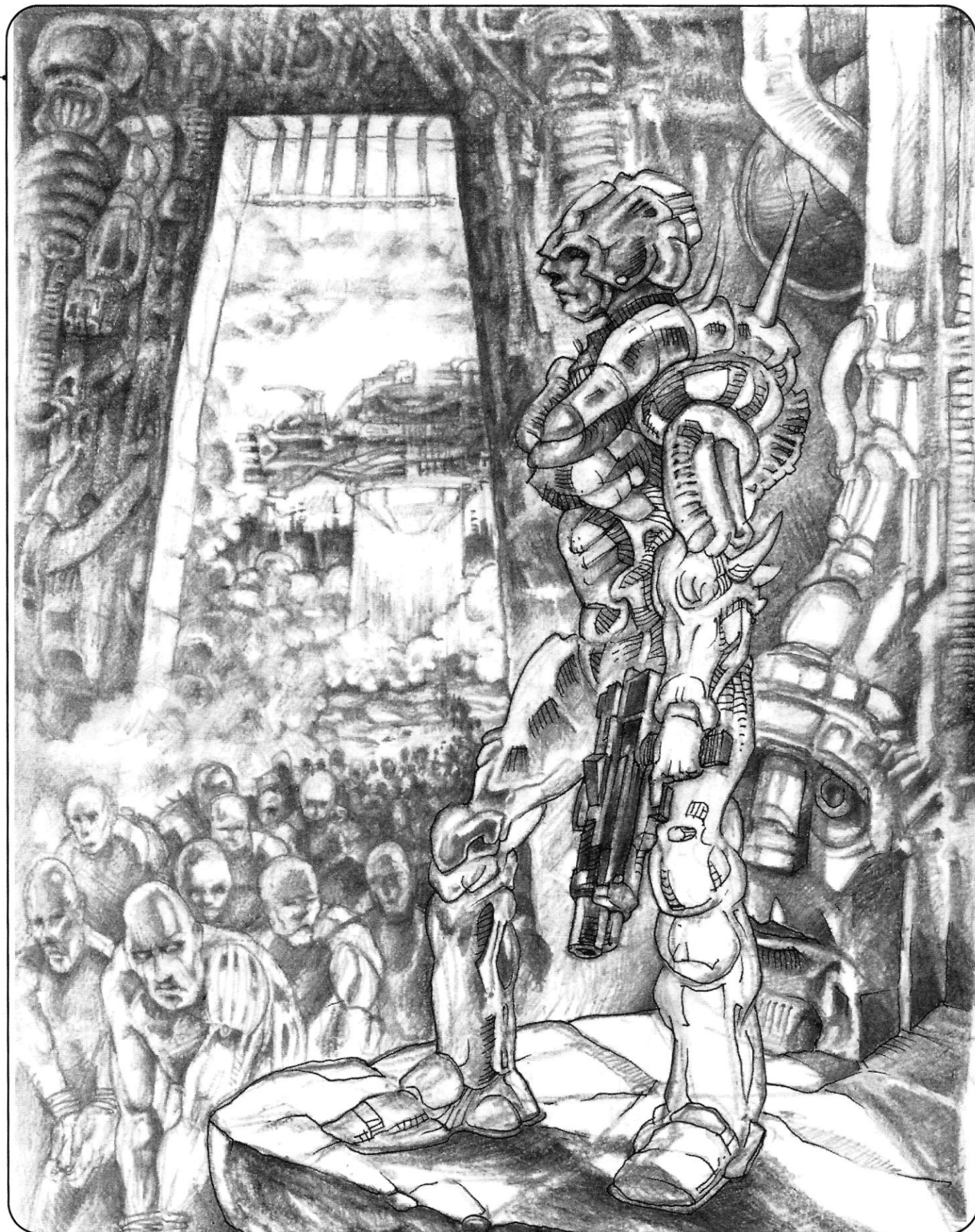
Perhaps most sinister are the new, huge hab-blocks where human populations live in the lap of luxury, their every whim catered to by a legion of Golems. Places in them are open to anyone from anywhere who submits to a genetic examination and proves to have traits the Anthorians deem worth studying. Many people mysteriously vanish from these blocks to become the subject of Anthorian experiments. Those left behind do not care, for their lives are wonderful by the standards of most people on Waste World. No one knows what the Anthorians are up to this time, but most people are betting that when the truth comes out it will be horrible.

THE ANTHORIANS

The Thinkers of House Anthor have a reputation for madness and cryptic motives. It is said that their brains have been reworked for intelligence and creativity to such an extent that they are not now sane as most people measure sanity. Most people consider them sinister. Certainly they have single-handedly been the cause of Hydra's reputation for scientific immorality and insane experimentation. The renegade Anthorian genius is a popular figure in plays and other entertainment throughout the known world.

Unmodified Anthorians tend to be tall and cadaverous in appearance. They have high foreheads, their ears are pointed and their eyes are wild and staring. Their fingers are long and dexterous, their movements are quick and nervous. When young they are prone to fidgeting but as they age they acquire an impressive self-control. Many have subjected themselves to cocooning and have acquired many strange powers and abilities. This can affect their appearance in numerous ways. Muscle enhancement can make them look larger and stronger. Gills may pulse on their necks or beneath their armpits. Long claws may extrude from their fingertips.

As a people, Anthorians tend to be ruthless, amoral and nasty. They view the rest of humanity as experimental subjects or cattle to be preyed upon. Intelligence and ruthlessness are the only qualities that are respected among them. They are cold and calculating and see most relationships purely in terms of advantages and disadvantages. Many are extremely unstable and some are quite mad. This madness and instability seems to be directly linked to their genius, giving them insights into their chosen subjects that few could match even if they cared to.





GOLEMS

House Anthor's fortunes lie in the creation of Golems. These are organic robots created to perform various functions in the same way as the Swarm's various castes. They are sterile, short-lived and obedient, and just self-aware and intelligent enough to perform the various tasks for which they have been programmed. They are all more or less humanoid, although their size can vary between that of a five-year-old child and that of a giant. They have many functions. For example, some are workers, some are bodyguards, some are soldiers, some are sex-toys. Some are programmed for combinations of all these roles and more. Many are designed to the specifications of their future owner. Golems are programmed to obey the person deemed to be their master. They are perfect slaves designed to enjoy their slavery. By making machines in the image of man, the creation of Golems makes a mockery of the tenets of many of Waste World's religions. This is another reason why Hydrans in general, and Anthorians in particular, are hated in many areas of Waste World.

The brains of Golems are seeded with knowledge in much the same way as memories are implanted into clone-minds from Nekrochips. Many Golems are given just the skills they need to perform their assigned tasks and no more. Still others are given memories and interests and personalities that make them indistinguishable from human beings.

Warrior Golems are particularly frightening creatures. They have armored skins and inbuilt weaponry. They are fearless, disciplined and highly skilled. They will fight with no regard for their lives in defense of their masters. They come in many shapes and forms. Some resemble huge sentient suits of carapace armor. Others are more human, distinguishable only by their hairlessness and the clone number bar-codes implanted on their foreheads. Most Anthorians who travel abroad are accompanied by a bodyguard of these lethal, living, fighting machines.

Although many people are repulsed by the very thought of Golems, many more find the convenience of cheap, abundant and obedient labor hard to ignore. Golems are banned in many of the freezones of Hydra. The Guilds do not like the competition they pose to human workers.

HOUSE VALKA

House Valka is one of the most famous warrior genclans of Hydra. It distinguished itself during the First Tower War and the Swarm Wars and has played a major role in all the great conflicts ever since.

The Valkans are mercenaries of a most unusual sort. They will hire their services out to any genclan they deem worthy of them. While serving, they will obey their oaths of allegiance to the letter and fight for their employers as loyally as any kinsman, even if it means going to war against another Valkan force.

Valkans always fulfill their contracts, and behave with the strictest honor. This is one reason why they have survived so long when other military genclans have failed. No other major genclan sees them as a threat, and they are rarely suspected of having their own political agenda. This is just as well, for the Valkans are a fearsome fighting force, and if they sought power, others would feel the need to destroy them before they could grow too powerful.

From birth the Valkans are brought up in the expectation that they will fight and die in defense of their city and their honor. They begin study of the martial arts almost as soon as they can walk, and begin studying strategy and tactics as soon as they are old enough to read. Early in life they are separated from their parents and other kin, and sent to the Academy of War.

Here they live in barracks-like dorms. Their days are endless rounds of physical exercise, weapons training and tactical exercises. They memorize the history of their clan, with particular attention given to the use of tactics during particular conflicts. They are taught the stern honor code by which their forefathers lived and died. It is said that by the time they are eleven years old, most Valkans are as tough as seasoned veterans from many other houses.

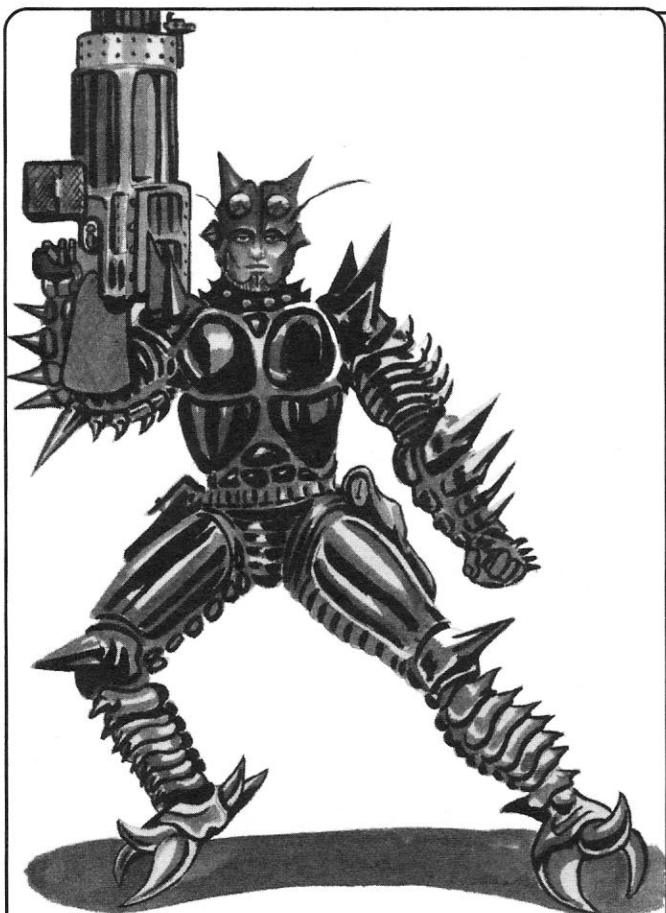
Within the Academy each dormitory is called a unit and named for a famous hero of the Valkan past. The inmates of that dormitory stay together throughout their basic training, learning together, fighting together and competing with the members of the other units. Between the members of a unit, bonds are formed that are as deep as family bonds. The unit learns to act together almost without thinking. Throughout their lives, even when they go their separate ways, these ties bind the members of a unit so that they will often come to each other's aid.

During the basic training of a Valkan, failure is not an option. Many die or are seriously maimed during the exercises. The dead go to a pauper's grave, the maimed are sent into the city as beggars. Those who fail to make the grade at any stage are sent out of the Tower to make their way in the world as best they can. They become nameless, and are never afterwards referred to by their friends and former comrades.

At the age of eleven the young warrior comes of age. They are measured and equipped with their first symsuit and issued with their own weapons, which they are expected to keep in good working order for the rest of their lives. They are allowed beyond the grounds of the Tower of War and journey all over the city on errands.

Each year, during the great exercises designed to hone their skills, units are sent off to the islands in the Skum Sea, or to the forts along the edges of the great Wastes, on survival courses. There they learn the skills needed to keep themselves alive in the most hostile environments known to man. They are supervised by retired warriors considered too old for active duty but still fit enough to lead the youngsters and impart wisdom to them. During this time, they will often become involved in skirmishes with the Swarm, the Sea Devils and the Skavengers of the Wastelands. Those who die are not mourned. They are regarded as failures.





At the age of fifteen, a Valkan begins his true apprenticeship as a warrior. He is attached to one of the many Valkan Legions, where he performs menial tasks, and watches the everyday running of the unit. His training is continued by the warriors of his Legion as, and when, they see fit. Many of the Legions see active service in the Slime Jungles and the Wastes, so the soldiers of House Valka see war early, and learn its ways while young. If they survive, they will progress within the ranks, perhaps one day rising to a position of power and prominence within the genclan, perhaps even becoming a hero after whom a unit is named.

Promotion is strictly according to merit. Candidates are judged not only on their tactical skill and efficiency but on how well they have measured up to their warrior codes. It is possible for a Valkan to begin life as a common soldier and end up commanding a Legion.

In appearance all Valkans are tall, fit and muscular. The weak and sickly were long ago weeded out from their bloodline. They are graceful and dexterous, having for long ages been bred and genesculpted for reflex speed and quickness of reaction. They have cat-like eyes that enable them to see and fight in the darkness, and they have a habitual air of alertness. Even when seeming to be relaxed they are always ready for trouble.

Most famously, they are gifted with an instinctive understanding of how weapons work, and simply by handling a gun or a blade for a few moments, can work out how to use it with competence.

Valkans have an air of unbending moral rectitude and military discipline. They are honorable to a fault. They are honest, courageous, and fair. In particular, they are loyal to anyone whose salt they have eaten. (This is the traditional Valkan method of sealing a deal.) On the other hand, they are often thought to be humorless, snobbish and contemptuous of those who do not meet their own particular code. They are not merciful and can be very bloodthirsty when roused. With some truth, they tend to see themselves as physically superior to most of humanity.

While not blind to the superior abilities of other genclans (being so would, after all, be a tactical weakness) they tend to believe that their own abilities represent the best humanity has to offer. This has its upside. They tend to set themselves very high standards and live up to them. Very few Valkans who survive basic training and join a Legion ever go rogue. Those that do are fearsome foes indeed.

In war, the Valkans are not bound by any considerations of honor towards a foe who has not surrendered. They see it as their task to defeat the enemies of their employers as quickly as possible, with a minimum loss of life to their own side. They regard assassination, ambushes, sabotage and spying as legitimate tools of their trade. Once a foe has surrendered, they will be treated well until they prove they deserve to be treated differently; but before surrender anything goes.

THE TOWER OF WAR

The Tower of War is a monstrous fortress. For ten thousand years, it has slowly grown until it completely fills the insula upon which it sits. There are three concentric rings of defensive walls, all of which are decorated with the skulls of defeated enemies. All of these walls are constantly patrolled and guarded. Flights of Zekt Riders, cavalry mounted on monstrous winged insects, overfly the Tower at all times. Terrifying ancient weapons of unique design are maintained within special towers by the Armorers of Valka.

Within the first circle of walls are the hab-blocks and armaments factories of the genclan. Here dwell the Helots, the Valkan bondsmen. These humans are almost as tough and grim as their employers. They too live in great barracks, and spend their lives training with weapons, when not working the great armaments factories.

They are treated fairly and well by their employers, and if they want to leave the insula, are free to do so. Most bondsmen are born into the service of the Valkans and have a long, proud family tradition of service to them and would not dream of leaving. By allowing them to go armed at all times, the Valkans place a great deal of trust in them. This trust is not misplaced; many helots have given their lives defending the Tower of War.



Within the second ring of walls dwell the Valkans themselves. This immense area is given over entirely to training areas, parade grounds and the halls within which the Valkans dwell in austere splendor. This area seethes with constant activity as units come and go.

Within the third wall lies the Keep of Valka, a fortress of enormous strength, a place where no enemy has ever set foot. From here the Valkan general staff keep track of all their outposts, and supervise the running of their far-flung Legions.

All of the Tower of War is filled with splendid statues, monuments to the heroes who have inspired the Valkans through the ages. These massive effigies look down on their successors as if in judgment, challenging them to live up to their proud legacy.

COLONIES

The Valkans need many colonies outside the walls of Hydra. These range from the hidden bases of the Diaspora, to training camps in the Slime Jungles and Wastes, to Rest Stations where troops can enjoy well-deserved R&R after active service. Wherever they are situated, all Valkan colonies are fortified and easily defended. Each of these colonies has a complement of Helots to ensure their smooth running.

WEAPON MASTERS

Perhaps the most feared of all Valkan warriors are the Weapon Masters. These powerful psychers have been trained to use their gift to enhance their prowess in combat. They use psychic powers to improve their accuracy and aim when using their armaments. This, combined with the Valkan's already high level of training, makes them perhaps the most formidable warriors on the planet.

Any Valkan who tests positive for psionic ability is immediately dispatched to the House of the Weaponmasters. There he lives a life of monastic self-discipline under the careful supervision of older and more experienced psychers. Over the years, he is taught the secrets of their art. This does not mean his basic training is neglected. Indeed no. His induction into the mysteries of the psyker's art is in addition to the rigorous training any Valkan warrior must undergo. Any signs of rebellion are instantly and painfully quashed by the powerful Magisters of the House.

Surprisingly, the ruthless discipline shown by the Valkans seems to work well, and relatively few Weapon Masters go insane in the manner psionic adepts are prone to. Most of them claim they were simply too busy and too exhausted to do so.

Weaponmasters are bound by a code even more strict than that of the normal Valkan. They may use their powers only when their lives are threatened or in the service of their employers. Some Weapon Masters are, if anything, even stiffer and more self-controlled than the average Valkan. Surprisingly, many claim that this discipline does them good, and prevents them from going off the rails as often as their non-Valkan counterparts.



On the other hand, Weapon Masters are famed for their eccentricity, so perhaps the madness common to psychers merely comes out in other less dangerous ways. While on the field of battle they are as disciplined as their brethren. However, in everyday life these psychers can behave very oddly. Jan the Silent, for example, was famous for never speaking unless to give a command or utter a threat. Jayne Bluesky always wore clothing in the color blue that she claimed matched her eyes. Given Weapon Master's power and utility on the field of battle, Valkan commanders have resigned themselves to putting up with these little foibles. They see them as a small price to pay for the service of such awesome fighters.



HOUSE RADOST

The Tower of Pleasure is probably the most famous structure in Hydra. It is certainly the one most discussed by strangers, and the one most often used by foreigners as an example of Hydra's decadence and moral corruption. It is said that within its walls all the pleasures of the flesh and mind are to be found. What is more rarely pointed out is that among those pleasures is the appreciation of beauty in all its forms, - aesthetic as well as physical. The Radostians are artists of uncommon skill, as well as courtesans of unequaled imagination.

The genclan's home stands in the center of the Great Urban Lake, close to the residence of the Valkans. It is one of the tallest structures in the city, an enormous tower thrusting skyward to pierce the clouds. Within its walls the daughters of Radost, adopted as well as natural, are trained to give and receive pleasure in accordance with their ancient discipline.

From the earliest age they are taught to move gracefully and seductively. To speak skillfully and well. To soothe and lull potential clients with words and actions. They learn the ten thousand pleasure dances of the Veil.

They are taught to play instruments and to sing and recite poems. The rhythms of the songs and poems, and the tones of the music, were developed to touch their listeners on a primal atavistic level and to manipulate their moods and emotions to achieve the courtesan's desired effect.

Indeed, one of the dangers of dealing with the Radostians is that they are masters of manipulation, skilled in using pleasure and pain to mold their clients to their own ends. They are masters of psycho-conditioning. As they should be, for they practice it even among themselves. From their very earliest days the Radostians themselves are shaped by the disciplines of their Tower and molded to conform to its ideal.

The Radostians will adopt anyone into their clan. The younger the potential member is the better, for the younger they are the more they can be shaped to the clan's wishes. If adopted by the clan in her teens even the greatest beauty may only be fit to be a pleasure slave of the humblest sort.

If found as a child, she will have all the educational resources of the clan lavished upon her, until she is a mistress of neuro-enticement, courtly speech, and every form of refined art.

The Radostians are one of the principle users of cocooning in the metrozone. In their cocoons, adopted genclan members will be given all the characteristics that mark those born within the Tower. They will acquire pheromone and drug synthesis glands, and the pleasure zones of their brains will be enhanced. Their reflexes and motor control will be increased. Genetic surgery will sharpen the beauty they already possess and raise it to super-human heights. There are rumors, never confirmed or denied by the Tower, that some experimental subjects are granted poison glands and retractable claws and are trained to become assassins.

The Tower also creates golems, organic robots, to cater to the fantasies of its clients. Often designing them to match the client's wishes exactly. Such pleasure golems are often purchased as gifts. Many become the companions of their owners and accompany them wherever they go.

The Radostians are among the greatest synthesizers of narcotics on the planet. Their knowledge of mood-altering drugs rivals that of the Ikareans. They are one of Waste World's largest brewers and purveyors of narcotic wines. Radostian chefs are famed among epicures everywhere. As has been said before, the Radostians pride themselves on the fact that there is no human appetite they cannot satisfy. All the pleasure the world has to offer can be found within their Tower, or one of the miniature replicas of it that are to be found in Janus, the Gaijin Quarter of the Shogunate, or in various pleasure domes scattered throughout the Wastes. Of course, these pleasures come at a price. On this fact, the fortunes of this wealthy genclan rest.



Radostians tend to be physically beautiful. Their movements have a dancer's grace. Their voices are soft and soothing and make whatever they say sound appealing. Their bodies generate mind-clouding pheromones that make them alluring to members of the opposite sex. Their saliva and other bodily fluids are laced with pleasure-enhancing narcotics. Tiny glands at the base of their nails allow them to inject these into their client's bloodstream during lovemaking. There are as many variations in Radostian appearance as there are variations in personal taste. They are all designed to be attractive to someone.

As people, Radostians are proverbially difficult to read. They are all skilled actors, schooled to conceal their real feelings and make their clients feel at ease with them. They mask their emotions well and give away only those things they wish to. They can counterfeit shyness, arrogance, mildness or any other manner of behavior, but few people ever find out what they are really like.

This is probably just as well, for the Radostian mask usually conceals a skilled and predatory manipulator, incredibly adept at getting others to do what they want by the exertion of subtle pressures and praise. They are not necessarily evil people. They have simply been brought up in a society where such behavior is encouraged, indeed is necessary, to get ahead. Their power and the power of their House lies in their skill at diplomacy, information gathering and social manipulation. Of all the genclans, House Radost uses its vast wealth to the greatest effect.

Rogue Radostians are not uncommon and come in many forms. Some sufficiently wealthy courtesans buy out their contracts and leave the Tower to freelance. Others are sold as slaves and either manage to manipulate their masters into giving them freedom or become free by force of circumstances when their masters die. Some flee from the Tower and elude those agents sent to recapture them. Still others are roving agents of the Tower; their apparent freedom is simply a cover story that lets them go to out-of-the-way places while avoiding the suspicion that might otherwise fall on them as representatives of the Tower.

THE TOWER OF PLEASURE

All who can afford entrance are welcome at the Tower of Pleasure. They are greeted by poised and charming servitors and ushered discreetly into a world of beauty and pleasure. All the chambers of House Radost are beautiful in their way, even those given over to pain. Beautiful paintings grace the walls, the air is filled with subtly narcotic perfumes, all those present have an aura of poise, grace and refinement.

In sumptuously appointed waiting rooms, older and more dignified courtesans engage the visitor in conversation and find out discreetly and tactfully what their requirements are. After these have been ascertained, the visitor is led to a chamber prepared for his or her pleasure. The visitor can linger if they wish or be shown to the exit, where their bill is discreetly presented to them, and then paid. Few who do not have the means to pay for their visit ever get past the doors of Tower.



Within the Tower are restaurants and bars and gambling rooms where the wealthy stake fortunes on the turn of a card or the roll of a die.

Naturally, security is a consideration within the Tower of Pleasure. Everyone who enters must surrender their weapons. Samurai, or others like them, who cannot honorably part with their armaments, will have them neutralized, either by having the powercells removed or by having an electro-lock placed on them. Those who do not agree to these terms are not allowed beyond the entranceway. Once inside, House Radost guarantees the safety of its clients, and disarming the potentially quarrelsome is one of the primary ways of doing so.

Of course, scattered among the crowds of the beautiful and the wealthy are other security personnel. These are Radostians chosen at an early age for their proficiency in combat. They have had their reflexes and muscles augmented to superhuman levels and are very proficient, both with weapons and unarmed combat. They are trained to circulate among the guests and intervene at any sign of impending trouble. Like all Radostians they are skilled at diplomacy and will do their best to smooth over disputes, but if trouble does arise they are more than capable of dealing with it.



Additionally, and more visibly, the Tower is guarded by Valkan mercenaries, and it is well known that there is always a company of them on hand to deal with any attempts at robbery and outright violence. The close proximity of the Tower of War, and an ancient agreement between the two houses, means that reinforcements are easily summoned if things become really nasty. Furthermore, it is a well-known fact that House Radost pays a retainer to the Spydrans to deal painfully with anyone who escapes the vigilance of the Valkans and their own people.

THE ISLAND OF TEN THOUSAND PLEASURES

The island on which the Tower of Pleasure stands is a small one, but over the long millennia, it has been shaped into a place of extreme beauty. There are many beautiful domed gardens filled with exotic plants whose winding paths are protected from the elements by roofs of transparent chitin. The streets are lined with genetically engineered trees. The hubs of the bondsmen are small and designed to blend in with their surroundings. The people you encounter on the streets appear to have been chosen for their beauty and grace.

This is not an illusion. Many of the most beautiful and handsome commoners are drawn to the island, lured by the promise of a life of ease amid beauty. They land amid the crowds that throng the island's single harbor and present themselves at the Tower, where they are greeted by the Valkans who provide security. Those who are sufficiently beautiful and charming are allowed to enter and be tested for adoption. The others are turned away.

Many of these beautiful people choose to stay on, and make a living selling their bodies or their services as muscle or middlemen on the streets of the island. Some of the more ruthless will succeed and acquire great wealth before they die. Most will either burn out or succumb to many of the unspeakable diseases that plague the area. Their lives will be hard, for the Guild of Pimps and the Guild of Whores hold invisible dominion over the streets and are merciless to those who do not pay their dues or show respect to their representatives. Naturally these guilds too pay a tithe to the Radostians, and act as their unofficial spies on the streets of the island.

By night the whole island is a huge red-light district, a sprawling area where the lusts of all who cannot afford the delights of the Tower are accommodated in bars and sin-houses. The Isle of Ten Thousand Pleasures is famed throughout the known world. All of the property is rented to the owners by House Radost who receives a tithe on every credit spent within them. Beneath the island's surface is a huge warren of tunnels lined with still more bars and sin-houses where naked courtesans pose in windows, and pushers of every imaginable drug are to be found on every street corner. The lower you go, the darker and more dangerous things become, and the more outrageous and exotic the services you are offered.

Valkan warriors and Zekt Riders patrol the island ensuring that things do not get too out of hand among the armed, and usually drunken, customers. Fights are common as the night wears on. Killings and robbery are an all-to-present risk on the lower levels. Still this does not appear to stop people from coming, or prevent parties of wealthy visitors slumming there. Sometimes, when factions from rival genclans or metrozones meet, huge brawls break out and the streets run red with blood. At times like this, Valkans come swarming in from the Tower of War and swiftly subdue all participants.

HOUSE NUMERA

House Numera is a small but wealthy genclan whose fortunes rest on their ability to process data and manipulate numbers, symbols and people. House Numera specializes in the creation of human thinking machines. Its people have been bred for countless generations to be more than clever. Their brains have been augmented to the point where they can perform countless calculations in milliseconds, in a way that rivals the thinking engines of the Ancients.

Throughout their lives members of the genclan hone their abilities through the Discipline of Calculation. This teaches them how to process countless pieces of information, extrapolate and draw conclusions. It is a Discipline with numerous applications, from theoretical science to political prediction. While not invariably accurate, the Numerans are right often enough for many to seek their advice when contemplating new courses of action. Many rulers throughout the Waste World rely on Numeran advisors.

Numerans are very astute politicians who can often predict their opponent's actions and take steps to neutralize them almost before their foes have formulated their plans. This has led to many clans, and even foreigners, employing Numerans to advise them.

Of course, their discipline involves more than abstruse, high-level prediction. The Numeran's instinctive ability to handle numbers, combined with their completely flawless memories, mean that they are superlative advisors to merchants and traders. Many Hydran trading Houses employ a Numeran accountant to keep track of their finances and to balance their books. Of course, these Numerans are sworn to the utmost secrecy in these matters. They will never reveal details of their employer's affairs unless instructed to by the employer. To do so would bring disrepute on their whole genclan, and any Numeran who has gone beyond the first faltering steps in his Discipline is perfectly capable of predicting the consequences of that.

It is quite common for a Numeran to control his employer's finances and to act as political advisor. Such individuals are known as Factors. The Factor's position often leads to a huge concentration of power in his hands. This has led to many, quite unfair, accusations of a conspiracy of Numerans who control the affairs of the city. This is far from the case. Factors are totally loyal to their employers once they have been hired. No one has found any way to subvert a Numeran's loyalty to his employer without killing them or driving them insane.

In appearance Numerans are tall, lean humanoids. They are completely hairless and sometimes their skin takes on a scaly quality. Their most distinctive feature is their bulging domed forehead that houses their hugely enlarged brains. Their eyes are cold and unblinking. Their fingers are long and slender.

In temperament Numerans are cold and calculating. They rarely form close personal friendships even within their genclan, and they strive to keep always their emotions in check, for their Discipline teaches them that emotions cloud lucid thinking and hamper the processing of data. They try always to avoid the input of a personal bias that might affect their calculations, and cause them to draw erroneous conclusions. Almost all Numerans are insatiably curious. There are good reasons for this. The more information a Calculator has to draw upon, the more accurate his conclusions are likely to be.

All Numerans are formidably intelligent. Most have an obsessive interest in one or two specialist areas. They normally try to master all available information concerning their areas of interest.



Most Numerans are passionate devotees of Qua, the game of nine thousand rules which, it is said, can only be understood by followers of their Discipline. Qua is part military and economic simulation, and part three-dimensional chess. It is played without a board. Players must visualize the playing area in their mind and remember all the moves and calculations involved. Sometimes as many as twenty Numerans will be involved in a game of Qua at one time.

Qua is regarded as the ultimate test of Calculation, and it serves more than a recreational purpose within the genclan. A Numeran's rank within the genclan is based on his proficiency at Qua. The leader of the House is invariably the best Qua player. This goes a long way to explaining the ritual seriousness with which Numerans treat Qua. It is not so much a game as a way of life. Numerans regard it as the ultimate test of willpower, spirit and intelligence. There are no records of anyone from beyond the genclan ever mastering the rules of the game.

In battle, Numerans are formidable opponents. Their ability to calculate their opponents moves make them deadly in close combat. Their ability to project the exact mathematical trajectory for the best shot makes them crackshots.

All Numerans are psychically inert. There is something about the structure of their enlarged brains that makes them incapable of wielding psychic power.



HOUSE TRITON

Although many of the seas of Waste World are dead, through pollution, military toxins and Entropic radiation, there are still pockets here and there that are inhabitable. These areas are home to one of the most unusual Hydran genclans.

The Aquatics of House Triton are among the most distinctive of all the folk of Hydra. They have been adapted to dwell underwater in the chemically polluted seas of Waste World. They can descend into the darkest depths and breathe the most foul and toxic water. They can swim as fast as a normal man can run, and their athletic lifestyle and adaptation to pressure makes them immensely strong and hardy.

Most Tritons possess the gift of mindspeech that enables them to communicate when completely immersed. They travel secretly beneath the waters of the canals and often bear messages and illicit goods between the Towers, for the Tritonians are great smugglers.

The Tritons originally adapted themselves to the sea in order to cultivate its riches. They farmed fish in great undersea corrals. They prospected the ocean floor for minerals and other natural resources. They sought ancient treasures among the sunken cities of the ancients.

During the Armageddon Wars the depths of the sea provided them with a refuge from the worst of the fighting. For a time Tritonian colonies spread across the ocean floor and the Tower of the Tritons was merely one outpost of their underwater Empire albeit an important one. Their ancient home provided them with many new technologies and a rich source of trade.

Also, within its partially sunken walls, Triton bi-mancers work their weird scientific magic on captured Kraken and young Leviathan, adapting them into gigantic living machines suited to the Triton's purposes. This is in addition to their work creating new forms of plant and fish life that can survive in the poisoned waters.

Although the Tritonians are among the most successful of all the Hydran genclans, they are not without enemies. During the Armageddon Wars many monsters found their way into the waters, natural creatures mutated, and strange bio-weapons were unleashed. Huge Devil Sharks, big enough to swallow submarines, move through the depths battling with enormous Kraken. And then there are the serpentine Leviathans, large enough to take in Kraken and Devil Shark in one mouthful.

As well as these and many more natural monsters there are the *Scyllans* or Sea Devils, vicious predatory Xenogens whose undersea empire dwarfs that of the Tritons, and who even now are engaged in a vicious war for dominance of the lands beneath the waves. This is a war that the Tritons are slowly losing. Many of their colonies have been destroyed and Tritonian refugees have flooded back into Hydra.

The Nameran genclan gains considerable revenue from indenture contracts. Members of the House are rented out, either on short term contracts or on lifetime contracts, to various employers. The services of a Nameran Factor command huge fees. However the clan makes most of its money in trading and speculation, an occupation that their Discipline makes them ideally suited to.

Some Nameran choose to go rogue and leave their genclan. From them the genclan withdraws all protection but it takes no other action, and publicly disowns the individual. The Rogue Calculators are allowed to earn their living as best they can. Since contracts for accredited factors and calculators can only be struck with the Tower of Thinkers, anyone hiring a freelance Nameran knows they are hiring a rogue.

Most honest people will not hire such flawed individuals for positions of trust, since the Tower only guarantees the loyalty and discretion of its own members. Of course, if a Rogue calculator takes any action reflects poorly on his former genclan, corrective measures will be taken. These range from physical chastisement to death. Most Nameran adventurers tend to be rogue Nameran, since only Nameran who are flawed in some way will willingly seek out such erratic and dangerous lives.



In recent years, Scyllan submersibles and armies have assaulted Hydra itself and have been driven off with great losses to both sides. One reason the Tritons still ally themselves with their fellow Hydrans is to gain access to the metrozone's enormous biotechnological resources, which are so useful in this war.

Most Tritonians resemble blue-skinned humans with webbed fingers and feet and a great fin of flesh rising from their scalps. However, there are other forms of Tritonians who have chosen to turn their back upon the land and become true creatures of the depths. In time they may splinter off from the Tritonians and become a new genclan, but for the moment they are known as the Sea Tritons.

They have mutated, becoming mer-creatures with fish-like tails replacing their lower bodies. On land they are nearly helpless, as they flop about like floundered fish, but beneath the waves they are creatures of amazing grace and speed.

One of the strangest things about the Tritons is that many of them continue to grow throughout their lives, becoming larger and larger until their bodies are incapable of movement without the support of the water. Many of these Tritonians, called Primal Ancestors, are ancient and near immortal and have existed for centuries. They dwell in the great lagoons that surround Hydra and in the surrounding oceans where they battle with Leviathans and other sea monsters, and rise from the depths to protect their people from seaborne menaces.

Tritonians are a very proud and clannish people even by Hydran standards. They need to be. Their whole culture has been adapted to surviving in an environment that is very hostile to humans and that often requires great teamwork simply to survive. Their long war with the Sea Devils has made them very disciplined and efficient fighters. Their gift of mindspeech often makes them seem taciturn and standoffish to outsiders for they rarely use spoken language when a thought or a gesture might do. Yet there is another side to the Tritonian character. They are often seen sporting in the water, leaping from the waves and performing dazzling acrobatics just for the joy of it. They enjoy each other's company and can be, in their rare moments of relaxation, as fun-filled and joyous as children.

The Tritons are often the butt of jokes made by other Hydrans, since they are thought to be naive and a little simple. Their favored foods, raw fish, seaweeds and jellyfish disgust many people but are an acquired taste of many more. Even in decline their undersea empire and far-flung network of colonies brings them great wealth, and the strength of their armies make them a power to be reckoned with in Hydran politics. Few people joke about the Tritonians within their hearing. In a city of canals, the Tritonian's ability to move troops swiftly and secretly is a great resource. In a city that is basically one vast seaport, their command of the seas ensures that they are taken seriously when they want to be.



Rogue Tritons are among the most feared of the canal pirates, coming upon junkboats in the night, attacking them and vanishing into the concealing waters. Sometimes they will bore holes in the hull of watercraft and loot them after they have sunk.

OTHER GENCLANS

HOUSE KARNAK

The Builders of House Karnak are one of the wealthiest and most conservative of all genclans. They pioneered the techniques of organic building that are the bedrock of Hydran architecture. Their great days of experimentation are in the past though.

These days most of their money comes from owning slums and other properties in the freezones, and lending money to merchants and splinter-clans at high interest rates. In military terms, they are still unsurpassed in the art of building fortresses but their legions, while huge, are considered distinctly second rate, except for their Siege Engineers.

In appearance, the Builders are squat and powerful humanoids with broad hands and stubby fingers. They are almost entirely hairless.



The Builders are often characterized by the other genclans as greedy and grasping, as well as proud and aloof. They resent what they see as a slur on their ancient lineage by their social inferiors. They use their wealth as patrons of the arts and their Tower is furnished sumptuously, almost to the point of decadence. They also spend a lot of money releasing building spores into the wastelands, and founding new colonies for the Diaspora.

The main gift of the Builders is that they have an almost instinctive understanding of the way structures are built and can tell at a glance how sound a building is.

HOUSE VENTURAE

The Navigators of the Venturae are one of the great merchant genclans. They are potent psychers who specialize in creating gateways. These are holes in the fabric of time and space that can link two distant points instantaneously. Although this power has a limited range, the Navigators have compensated this by building a network of waystations across Avernus. These are fortified colonies linked by a network of gateways. Each colony is overseen by a Master Navigator and protected by Valkan mercenaries.

Most waystations are about 100 km apart, spaced so that the whole network can be kept open at all times. By jumping through gateways people can travel great distances at amazing speed. In this way the journey between Hydra and Janus can be made in hours instead of days. Sometimes a waystation is knocked out by a Skavenger raid, or one of the many hazards of the desert, and the whole network can go down or be blocked by bottlenecks until the colony is restored. And of course, psychers are only human and sometimes mistakes are made and people and goods vanish never to be heard from again.

Of course, few people willingly entrust themselves to something so unreliable as psionic transportation unless their need is great. Only the Ventureans themselves regularly travel these routes. They do however make a fortune trading for themselves, purchasing perishable, highly portable goods and transporting them to the outlying points of their transport network where they sell them at premium prices. They also act as couriers shifting messages and packages for others when there is a need for speed.

All of the gateways in the colonies are opened within sealed domes, and any outsider is kept blindfolded and thought-screened when they pass through them. This is thought to prevent them memorizing the layout and whereabouts of the colonies and using psi powers such as teleport and gateway to infiltrate and rob them. It is said the Ventureans themselves navigate between the gateways by means of certain runecodes inscribed over the entrances to the domes, but only members of the genclan themselves are in any position to confirm or deny this rumor.

The Ventureans themselves are rarely seen in public and when they are, they wear huge cowed robes over their symbionts, which has given rise to the rumor that they are monstrously distorted mutants. All Navigators carry a winged staff as their badge of office.

They are a very enigmatic and secretive people who keep themselves to themselves. They are surrounded by an air of mystery, and are one of the most talked about and least understood of the genclans.

HOUSE ATILUS

The Tower of Giants is a warrior House. It is a massive stone keep built in the ancient style from rock and mortar and the rubble of more ancient buildings. It could be the home of a tribe of stone age ogres for there is no sign of any more modern Hydran building techniques anywhere in its construction. The folk of this genclan are brought up to be fighters from a very early age. They are huge, brutal people of enormous muscular strength. The most famous of them are the Giants. These potent psychers possess the power of *growth* that enables them to vastly increase their size, weight and strength. Some can grow to be the size of a house. All are terrifying foes in close combat.

House Attilus is not a mercenary house. They have colonies scattered throughout the Wastes that they rule as feudal enclaves. Their insula in Hydra is run exactly the same way. It is regarded as a poor, backward place shunned by all sensible travelers. The people are oppressed by their brutal masters who rule with an iron fist. They perform all the menial labor for their rulers.

The Giants are a fierce, bullying, stupid people. They lack subtlety, grace or any pretension to good manners. They are proud of their ignorance and their lack of culture, which they see as a sign of weakness in others. They take what they like from those they think will let them get away with it. They fight and brawl without the slightest provocation, certain that their superior strength and ferocity will grant them victory. The genclan is ruled by the largest, strongest and fiercest of the warriors, who rules like some ancient chieftain, once he has overcome his predecessor in a fight to the death.

Most people claim that the Attilians would have died out long ago were it not for their alliance with the Anthorians. The Thinkers guide the Attilians, keeping them from picking fights with genclans who would wipe them out if all out war came. They pay them a stipend to buy their alliance and maintain their holdings. In return, the Giants act as shocktroopers for the Anthorians in times of war, and allow the Anthorians access to their genetic matrixes in times of peace. It is said that the Anthorians used Attilian gene codes to create the Brutes. The Attilians deny this. They hate the Brutes and go out of their way to make life miserable for them whenever they get the chance.



VIRUS DETECTION PROGRAM: ON	INITIATE SEQUENCE	GUNSTBERG OVERDRIVE	CORTICO QUASI-DEGRADATION
FLOW LINK QUASI PROTOCOL: INITIATED	NON-BIOLOGICAL RAW MATERIAL:	MICRO-OPTICAL MODULATOR: ON	GANGLIAL ELECTRO-IMPLANT
FILE SUB-PROTOL: GENCLAN	INTERNAL DATA CORRUPTION:	SILICONE SYNAPTIC SIMULATOR	SMART CHIP INSTALLED
NANOMECHANICAL INTERFACE:	LINGUISTIC MARKUP DIRECTORY	DYSFUNCTION	METHANE IMPULSE CATHETER
VALIDATE SIMULATION	MOLECULAR BINARY:	MEGAPULSE CHANNEL ON	OCCIPITAL FLOW MODULATION: SINE

DARIK TOWERS

LOGIN:	SUB system COORDINATES	SEROTONERGIC OVERLOAD	BIOFEEDBACK MATRIX: XO
PASSWORD:	X1:477.27.8 X2:566.57.2	AMYGDALPTIC OVERWRITE	BINARY NANOBOT PRESENT
ACCESS GRANTED	Y1:642.42.4 Y2:388.01.2	SMART CHIP INSTALLED	GENMATRIX SCANNER ENABLED
SECURITY CLEARANCE LEVEL:	Z2: 90.09.9 Z1: 31.47.3	BIOMECH AUGMENTATION:	PATTERN RECOGNIZER NULL:
EXCESS GENETIC VARIATION:	ABBERANT CHROMA LEVELS:	NANOCCIPITAL DRIVER	INFODUMP INITIATING

Melmothe, assassin of the Tower of the Spider, slipped in through the high window of the old fortress. He froze for a moment to give his darksight a chance to adjust to the dim interior, and to let the camoderm exterior of his armor blend in with the gray chitin walls of his surroundings.

Outside the storm still raged. The nerve ganglions of the tower swayed in the wind. Lightning flared behind him, causing a flicker of white to slash across the walls. Thunder spoke like the voice of an angry god. He forced himself to stand immobile, not to gaze behind him and look out into the storm.

It never did any harm to be cautious, he told himself. The Thinkers of Anthor were too damn clever by half with their protective eyes. He knew that most likely there was one set in the ceiling of this chamber somewhere, and at the far end of that nerve ganglion was a sentry receiving the eye's optic feed. It was a long shot that, of all the chambers the sentry could be surveying, he would be looking at this one, but you never knew. Men had died because they had made such careless assumptions. Melmothe had made too many mistakes just recently to want to make another quite so soon.

He knew he wasn't too visible. His blaster pistol had been blackened to kill any reflection from the duralloy. His armor made him near invisible anyway. As slowly as a snail emerging from its shell, he slid along the wall of the room till he reached the door. His keen ears detected no sound from the other side, which was just as well.

He smiled and used the gift his genclan had given him, feeling the muscles below the surface pulling the skin of his face into a new configuration. His hairline receded. The smooth flesh of his cheeks tightened, his eyes were pulled deeper into their sockets, the pigment of his skin changed to near corpse white. He jutted his jaw forward. He knew he now had the distinctive high forward and narrow fox-like face of the typical member of the Anthorian genclan. Even with more than a cursory glance, he would pass for a member of their insanely brilliant folk.

He slid his blaster back into its holster, and touched the command node of the door. It dilated and he stepped out into the corridor.

He made himself assume the straight-backed walk and abstracted air of a Thinker. He placed his hands behind his back and clasped the wrist of his left hand with the fingers of his right. He had spent hours studying the clan's mannerisms till he could duplicate them at will. He made his pupils dilate as if he were on powdered red lotus, a drug the Thinkers took because they felt it enhanced their creativity and gave them new insights into the working of the world.

He made himself believe that he was a Thinker, a genesculptor privy to all the secrets and mysteries of biomanancy. He threw his head back and let out a high-pitched titter such as he has heard Thinkers high on lotus emit. He knew the best way to play a part was to become the person you were impersonating. At least such was what his genclan had taught him in his youth. He struggled to find something he wanted to think about.

At least, his fitness had returned, he told himself. The long climb up the side of the building had not even left him winded. The suction pads on the gauntlets and boots of the armor let him climb even the sheerest surface with ease but it still took considerable physical strength to do so. It had taken him weeks to recover from the hooked dagger Prince Skali had slipped between his ribs, and for a while it had looked like he wouldn't pull through. Served him right, he supposed, for letting his target get within a dagger's reach anyway. The thought of how he had broken Skali's neck at least gave him some compensation for the weeks of pain he had endured.

The memories of his lurching flight from the merchant's mansion were just a blur of pain and fear now. He had been lucky, as well as fast. He had managed to throw himself out a window and into a canal, then swim to safety. In the chill depths, he had caught a case of fug that almost ended him. He was lucky that his clan cared enough to pay for his healing. It meant that his services were still valuable to them, and the Word of Death would not be whispered in his ear.

That thought gave Melmothe a sick feeling in the pit of his stomach. He was not a young man anymore. His loyalty conditioning to the genclan still held, but he no longer had the bright clarity of purpose that he had possessed as a youth. Recently he had found himself questioning the purpose of his work, of doubting his genclan's motives and methods, even of feeling a twinge of pity for his victims.



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THE GENGLANS RULE

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DARK TOWERS



He knew he was getting weak. Such doubts had no place in the heart of an assassin. They slowed you down. They caused your hand to hesitate at the crucial moment, just as his had done with Skali. The man had looked so vulnerable in sleep. Almost child like. Melmothe fought to keep his lips from assuming a cynical grin. Yes, and in the moment you stood there thinking that, he had woken and drove a poisoned dagger into you. If your genclan had not had the foresight to make you immune to poison then, you would have died there.

He forced these dark thoughts to the back of his mind, and made himself concentrate on his mission. Even if he no longer believed in his genclan it still had its ways of ensuring he obeyed them. There was the Word of Death, for example. He had spent a week hooked to a psychomachina as a child, and the word had been drummed into his brain day and night. If someone spoke the code phrase in his hearing, he would die. If he spoke the phrase himself he would die. As a youth he had believed the tale that it was a device of last resort, to be used if he ever fell into the hands of his enemies. Now he knew it was also a means of control. The genclan had agents everywhere. He could die in the street if someone whispered the wrong phrase. Sometimes, in his more cynical moments, he wondered what other time bombs ticked away in his brain. He hoped that he would never find out.

He emerged onto a high, narrow walkway. Crowds of people filled the street below. The shark-eyed golem guards of the Thinkers filled the corridors. Their tall lean masters walked among them, heads held in high gazes fixed on the middle distance.

Huge muscular Brutes carried palanquins through the crowd. Lean labor drudges swept the streets. All manner of exotically beautiful men and women strutted and posed. No, not men and women, Melmothe realized, golems, toys and slaves of the Thinkers. He pushed on across the bridge and under an archway framed by chitin bio-sculptures grown to resemble a fantastically changed man and woman.

Beyond the archway it was dark. The corridor stretched off into the distance, curving slowly out of sight. He gave his eyes a moment to adjust and then pushed on. Every ten meters or so a dim glow-globe set in the ceiling gave off a faint greenish light. Ahead of him, he could see brighter lights around the curve of the corridor. He emerged on another high walkway. This one set into the walls of the room. Below him, stretching off into the distance, were many translucent chitin containers.

They resembled huge bottles, each linked to some obscenely gurgling life-support apparatus which was in turn connected by plumbing to some central reservoir.

The lines of bodies were separated by canals of some foul and viscous fluid. Within each bottle was a body. The bodies were not fully formed. They were in various stages of growth. Here a spine emerged from a headless torso covered in flesh and muscle. There he could see a pair of pulsing lungs imprisoned within a perfectly formed ribcage.

There seemed to be neither rhyme nor reason to the growth. It was as if the half-formed bodies were designed according to some madman's whim. Perhaps the organs were being grown for harvesting. Perhaps they were an experiment to see what it was possible to grow in a nutrient vat. Perhaps the bodies were intended to be combined, mixed and matched later. Or perhaps this was simply a new and experimental process that had not yet had all the bugs worked out of it. He pushed the thought from his mind. He could hear voices below him. It seemed his target was exactly where the Spydran's informants said he would be. Or so he hoped.

Nearby was a ladder. It was set in an aperture in the floor of the walkway and it dropped down to the level of the body-filled bottles. He lowered himself carefully down the ladder and turned to face the voices. There were two figures. One was standing with his back to Morgothe. He was garbed in carapace armor. He had obviously undergone some form of genetic surgery, for the whole back of his head appeared to be an exposed brain. This he knew was his target, Doctor Ulik. There could not be another person with this particularly grotesque modification making the rounds of this biofac at this hour of the morning.

Ulik was engaged in conversation with a heavily built man in a long flowing coat. The man's eyes were obscured by goggles which had thick lenses of translucent chitin. His arms were folded as he listened to his instructions. He seemed to be some sort of technician.

"...Keep the temperature at a steady 249, Henrik," said the man in carapace armor, gesturing towards the nearest nutrient flask. In it floated an obscene shape that looked like the top half of a bisected body from which the skin had been flayed. The neck was connected to some sort of umbilical, a spine floated free in the fluid.

Ulik's voice was penetrating. The technician nodded brusquely, like a man having something he already knew laboriously explained to him. He was the random factor here. Melmothe had known that there would be others present in the biofac, he had even anticipated witnesses, but he had not expected to find the good doctor in conversation. Perhaps he should wait for the two to go their separate ways, follow the doctor and kill him later. Then he realized that it was too late. Henrik had noticed him and was gazing over the doctor's shoulder at him.

"Can I help you, sir?" he asked.

Melmothe cursed. Ulik had turned to look at him as well. He could see the man's coldly crazy eyes, gazing out from his squat brutal features. He forced himself to look absent-minded at the two as he walked closer.

"Er-um," he murmured as he got within striking distance and extruded his claws from the fingers of his gauntlets. "Yes. Perhaps you can...perhaps you would be so kind as to...die!"



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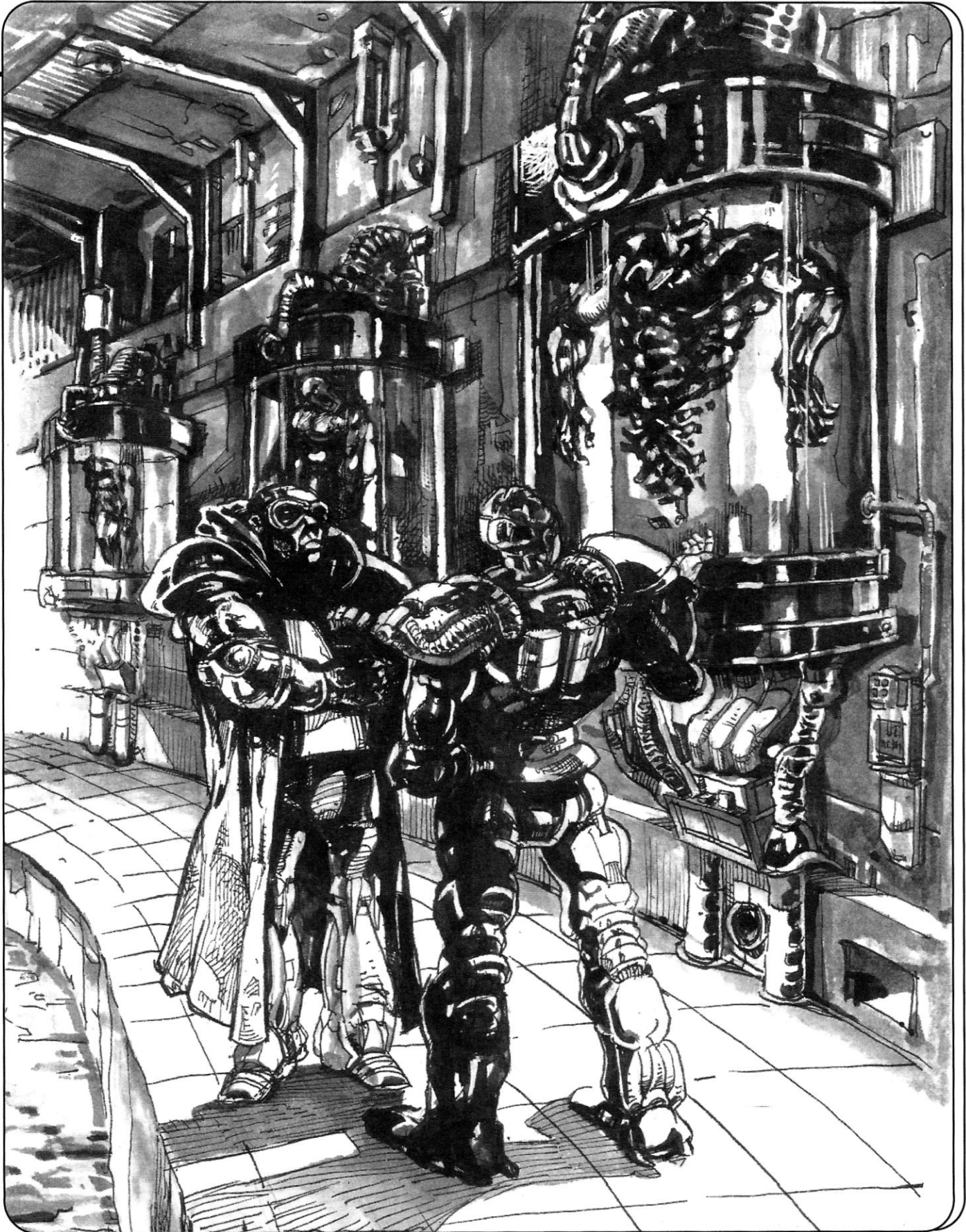
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THE GENCLANS RULE

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DARK TOWERS



He lashed out with both hands, his left aimed for Henrik. His right aimed at Ulik. The one aimed at Henrik connected and the man went down instantly as the venom entered his wounds. To his surprise, he failed to connect with Ulik. The Anthorian simply wasn't there when his blow landed. With astonishing speed he writhed to one side, letting Melmothe's claw pass over his head.

Damn, thought Melmothe. He had not been able to hit Ulik even with the advantage of surprise on his side. The man must have his reflexes wired up higher than those of an adrenalized cat. In the split second Melmothe had given him, he had recognized the threat and responded. Now his balled fist was racing towards the Spydran. Backed by the enhanced muscles of that carapace armor it would hit like a pile driver.

Melmothe let himself roll with the impact as he had been taught. He did it as well as he could have hoped and the force of the blow still almost took his head off. He rolled backwards along the ledge, drawing his blaster from its holster. He rolled upright and then opened fire, sending a hail of blaster bolts blazing through the air towards where thought his prey should be.

The nutrient tank exploded. Greenish liquid bubbled out, carrying the skinless torso flopping into the water. The hardened chitin of the walls bubbled. None of the bolts connected with Ulik. He was already diving forward towards the assassin, the angle of his leap carrying him below the line of fire. His bulk connected with Melmothe's and they fell entangled towards the floor.

Melmothe knew that he could not afford to grapple with the Anthorian. The strength in that carapace armor would enable Ulik to tear him limb from limb. Instead, he allowed himself once again to roll with the flow, getting his feet under the Doctor's belly, then thrusting out with them like an uncoiling spring. Ulik went flying through the air and landed in the fluid canal, vanishing with a splash beneath its surface.

Melmothe cursed savagely. Alarms had begun to sound. Perhaps they were security alarms. Perhaps they were some sort of fail-safe system warning about the broken nutrient vat. It didn't matter. Surely sometime soon people would arrive to investigate. And he still hadn't managed to kill Ulik. Old conditioned responses made him coldly angry at the very thought. Artificial determination to finish his mission flooded his mind.

He stood poised, blaster held ready, waiting for the doctor to break the surface. Nothing was visible in the inky depths. He counted to twenty and still nothing appeared. He cursed again. If the doctor's carapace armor was a symbsuit he could remain submerged for hours. Cautiously Melmothe moved to the edge of the fluid, hoping for a better view.

Suddenly an arm shot out of the water and gripped his ankle. It tugged with irresistible strength and he lost his balance, falling backward. Sickeningly he felt himself sliding along the chitin-tiled floor and into the water. He had time for one deep breath and then the thick sludge closed over his head.

Bubbles clouded around him as Ulik moved into a new position, grabbing for his throat and trying to pull him deeper below the surface. Melmothe could see that the cowl of a symbsuit now enclosed the Anthorian's head and armored his whole body. His worst fears were fulfilled. The Doctor was wearing a symbsuit. He was not. All Ulik had to do was keep him submerged. He would drown. Ulik would not.

Desperately, he twisted his arm around put the muzzle of his weapon to Ulik's belly and pulled the trigger. The doctor writhed in agony as the blaster bolt hit home. With a sudden reflexive movement, he pushed Melmothe violently away. The assassin felt his head crack against the chitin wall of the canal and briefly lost consciousness. His mouth opened. Fluid filled it. Desperately fighting to overcome the blackness that filled his mind, he pulled clear of Ulik, stretched out with an arm and dragged himself out of the water.

He flopped onto his belly, pulled his feet underneath him and rose smoothly to his feet. A quick glance showed him Ulik floating face down in the water. Red blood colored the fluid on which he floated. Taking no chances, Melmothe fired a stream of shots into his head. Even if the man had a Nekrochip he would not be coming back.

Footsteps came rushing closer. Melmothe raced for the ladder, knowing he was too late. Already, the shark-eyed soldiers were arriving, filling the ledges with their armored forms, the black muzzles of their autorifles swinging backwards and forwards to cover the room. On the ledge overhead he heard more booted feet. No escape that way, either. He considered leaping into the pool and hoping to find some hidden vent, then shook his head. Hurt as he was, he would not be able to hold his breath long.

"Halt, intruder!" He was covered now. At least ten autorifles pointed at him. There was no way out. He would be captured and tortured. A sudden hideous fear blossomed in his mind. He could face anything except that. Part of him knew the fear was not really his. It was artificial, the product of his conditioning long ago, but that knowledge did not make the terror any less real. His mouth felt dry, his hands shook. He knew his masters had implanted the fear to make it easier for him to do what he had to do next. To make it impossible for him not to do it.

He paused for a moment, seeking calmness, trying to fight down the unreasonable fear. In many ways it had been a good life and he was sorry to be leaving it. He wanted to see one more sunrise, lie beside one more courtesan, drink one more cup of sweet-scented chai. He knew now it was too late for that. A phrase raced from his brain to his tongue. It bubbled out through his lips.

"The sinister stars swirl in the lilac sky," he said. He had just time to see the look of incomprehension on the faces of the shark-eyed guards before a bomb went off in his head and everything vanished in a blaze of white.



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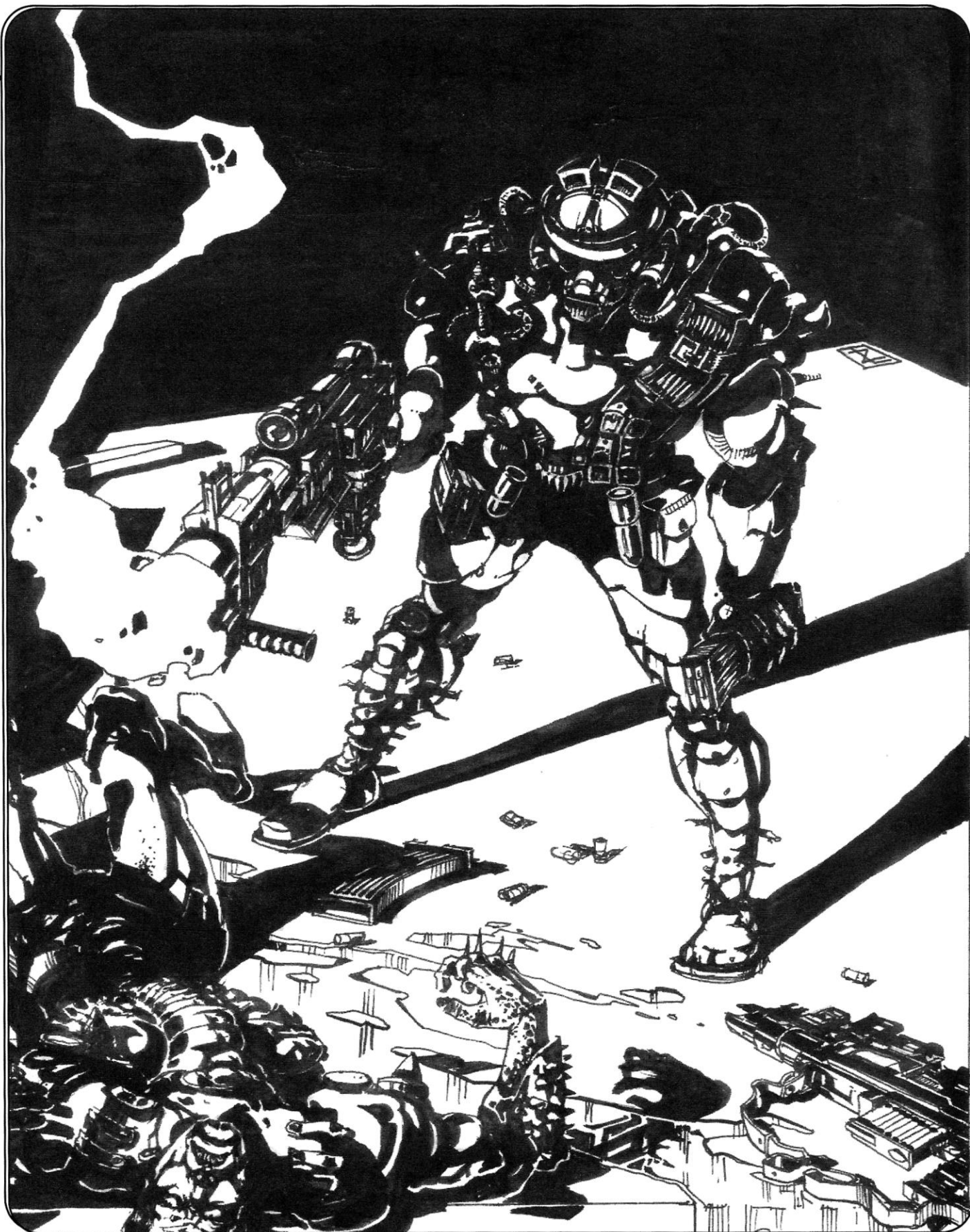
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THE GENCLANS RULE

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DARK TOWERS





THE DARK TOWERS

Among the many gencans of Hydra are ones so powerful and so feared that they are shunned by normal Hydran society. Despite this they are too powerful and wealthy to be ignored or destroyed, and many fulfill useful if disturbing functions within Hydran society. Most of these Towers have an often well-deserved reputation for evil, and are known to the metrozone's population as Dark Towers. The best known Dark Towers are House Spydra, House Karkosa, House Luxor and House Stein. For all the fact that it is a Broken Tower, House Typhon's name is often added to this list since it's people still exist and the Tower's name is steeped in ancient evil.

HOUSE SPYDRA

House Spydra is a name that is infamous throughout the continent of Avernus. Not even the dreaded ninja of the Shogunate have such a reputation for relentlessly pursuing their victims - as the inmates of the Tower of Assassins.

Once a death price is put on someone's head, the Spydrans will pursue that person until such a time as they are dead beyond any possibility of rebirth or until the price of seven deaths has been paid. This means until seven Spydran assassins have failed in their attempts to kill the target. At this point the Spydrans will declare the contract void. Since the only way a Spydran will ever stop trying to get his victim is to die in the attempt. This means that the Tower will have paid a very high price for its failure. By long tradition a killing is usually given to the most junior assassin qualified to perform it. If he fails then a superior one will step in. If this one fails another even more proficient killer will be dispatched, until either the seven deaths have occurred, or the Master of the Tower himself sets out to kill the chosen victim.

Another reason for the Tower's infamy is that they will never refuse a contract on anybody once the price is paid. There is no one who is too young, too old, too weak, too revered to be beyond the reach of the assassin's arm. Babies, brides, holy men, princes and politicians have all fallen to the Spydrans. In return for their diligence and dedication to their task, the Spydrans demand a high price. The price on someone's head will vary depending on how well protected they are. It can range from a thousand credits for a common merchant, to millions for the head of a gencan ruler. Indeed, the cost on certain people's heads are said to be so astronomical that they are beyond the reach of all but the wealthiest gencans. The Spydrans are the cream of their profession. They are rarely involved in mere street corner murder. Their fees reflect this.

The Spydrans are experts in every manner of dealing death. They use whatever tools are needed to get the job done. Individual gencan members are adroit at all manner of combat and stealthy killing. They are given whatever genetic modifications are deemed necessary for their task, and equipped with all the equipment they need. In return, they are expected to give their lives if necessary to ensure their appointed task is completed. Since few have the willpower to do this, the Spydrans are extremely adept at psycho-conditioning. Once set a task few Spydrans can abandon it, even if they try.

Of course, Spydrans fail in their task from time to time, a few are even captured. This state of affairs rarely lasts long. All Spydrans are granted the gift of the Will-death when they join the ranks of the assassins. This means they can at any time of their choosing simply die. No one knows how this psycho-conditioning is achieved. The few who have seen it work do not doubt its effectiveness. In case a Spydran turns renegade, or fails to kill himself when captured without possibility of escape, death command conditioning can be activated by the speaking of a code phrase. If the Spydran hears this, he will inevitably die. No Spydran ever knows what his code phrase is until he hears it spoken. The Spydrans are masters of disguise and stealthy infiltration. Given time they can get agents into even the most secure places, and thus ensure the deaths of captured assassins.

The Spydrans have many other techniques to ensure that they are not discovered when attempting to slay their victims. All members of the gencan are psychically inert. Those who are adopted into the gencan are made so by biomorphic surgery. The bodies of all Spydrans are laced with mortuary enzymes that ensures that their bodies dissolve into a puddle of poisonous acid when they are killed. The acid eats away at their clothing to remove any clues. Spydran custom carapace armor is designed to dissolve when touched by this acid, preventing it falling into the hands of outsiders.

Of course, there are many types of Spydran assassin. There are the Spytes simple beggars or commoners kidnapped from the street. These are injected with psychoactive drugs, psycho-conditioned and then given a brief course in basic killing techniques. They are fed up on a diet of muscle-building food, injected with growth hormones, nervous system stimulants and other things that will eventually prove fatal. They are brainwashed into believing that their target is their worst enemy, has done all sorts of terrible things to them and is responsible for all the misery in their lives. They are filled with hate until all they can think about is killing their chosen victim and then they are unleashed to find their target. As soon as he dies, the Spyte dies the will-death.



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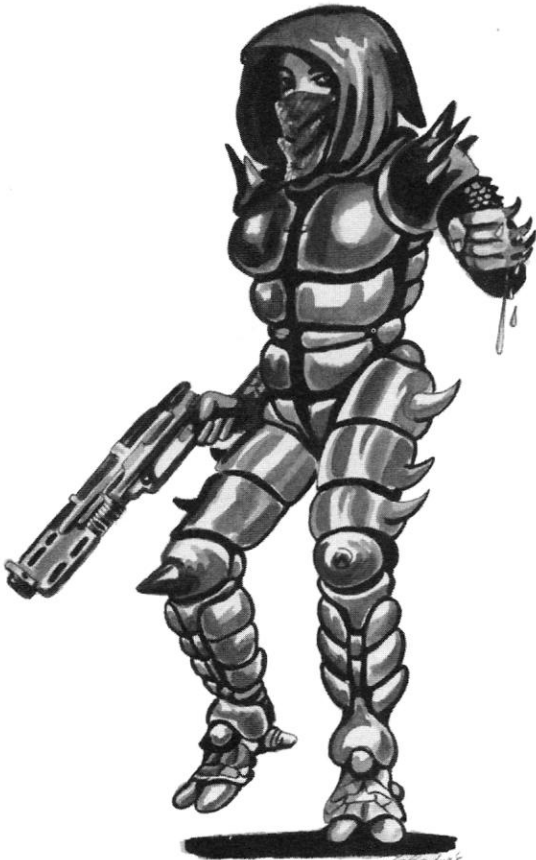
THE GENCLANS RULE

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DARK TOWERS





Above the Spytes are the Spydrans themselves. They possess all the gifts their genclan can lavish on them. They are double-jointed, dexterous, flexible, strong and hardy. From their earliest days they are taught how to use numerous weapons, and schooled in unarmed combat. While children they learn about disguise, stealth, how to bypass security systems. They learn courtly manners so that they can pass themselves off in any company, they learn the secrets of seduction - for this is often the easiest way of getting close to their prey. They are psycho-conditioned to superhuman levels of loyalty and dedication, and endure many ordeals designed to harden them and shape them into perfect living weapons. During their times of testing, many die for that is the inevitable punishment for failure. Only the superior few survive to perform the tasks set them by the Master Assassin of the Tower of the Spider. There are nine ranks of assassin, progressing from ninth rising to the first. Beyond the first is the Master of the Tower. All assassins when not employed on a contract are responsible for training those of the rank below them.

The Tower also employs many biomancers, and for particularly tough jobs, death golems will be created. These living robots are designed to perform the task of killing their victim. It is all they live for, and they are given every enhancement the Spydrans believe necessary for the job at hand. Some will be beautiful and seductive, some will be incredibly tough and strong. All will be relentless in pursuing their chosen prey until either he or it are dead.

The Tower of the Spider is located on the Island of the Damned. It is a warren within an old partially ruined building. There are hundreds of tunnels and secret passages leading in and out. Some emerge in dark alleys, others emerge in the sewers. All are guarded by sentries, traps and all manner of sensors, set there by people who know their jobs as well as it is humanly possible to do so. Scattered throughout Hydra, Janus, and the Foreigners Quarter of the Shogunate are many secret Spydran lairs, safe houses from which assassins can be sent about their tasks.

In appearance, most Hydrans are tall and slender. They are usually far stronger than they look. When they want to be, they are very graceful in their movements. They are usually non-descript looking, but a few are beautiful because sometimes their job requires that.

By temperament most Spydrans are taciturn, grim and unemotional. Since they are skilled actors, they can seem charming and outgoing if the situation demands it, but normally long years of hard training and mind-numbing psycho-conditioning set them apart from the run of humanity.

There are many ways of getting in touch with the Spydrans. Most local crimebosses know how to do it, and many shady businessmen will act as intermediaries. Those in the know will be aware that certain traders act as agents and intermediaries. If desperate, you can always go to the Tower itself. Many do, carefully disguised when the death of a rival is important to them.

The Spydrans are an ancient institution in Hydra, and a useful tool of statecraft for the genclans. In the past there have been many efforts to eradicate them, some of which apparently succeeded. But in the end it always turned out that the Spydrans had merely gone to ground and shortly thereafter those who had hunted them would, in their turn, start to die mysteriously. Now they are left alone to go about their dark business, and few dare interfere.

HOUSE KARKOSA

The ancient genclan of Karkosa once specialized in curing diseases. Its people were experts revered across the Galaxy for their skill in finding cures for the lethal ailments that plagued humanity as it spread across the stars. The folk of the genclan were brought up to be compassionate, curious and passionately interested in finding cures for human ailments. Their bodies were designed to withstand exposure to almost any disease and to swiftly produce antibodies.

Their Tower was one of the wonders of the world. It was a huge organic structure of pristine whiteness that lived and continued to grow throughout its life. Within its walls it could synthesize cures to diseases and send the serums, vaccines and miracle cures it created gurgling through its veinous piping to flow out into pools in its hermetically sealed interior.

As the genclans expertise grew, it set up medical research centers across the galaxy, and its presence on the homeworld shrank, until their Tower in Hydra contained only a tiny fraction of the genclan's people, working in truly arcane fields of research.

When the Armageddon Wars came, the Karkosans were cut off from their off-world kinsfolk by the Interdict and left with the impossible task of trying to contain all of the genetically engineered plagues and bio-weapons unleashed during those devastating conflicts. Watching millions die of new variant diseases, and able to do nothing but stand by and catalog their symptoms, was more than the caring minds of the Karkosans could deal with. The stranded Karkosans lost faith in their ability to deal with the diseases, and in the genclans culture of research and compassion. Worse still, as many of the Karkosans succumbed to madness and despair, their carefully created bodies started to fail them as well.

Viruses and bacteria mutated swiftly on exposure to Entropic fallout. New diseases sprang into existence almost hourly. Not even the Karkosans highly developed immune systems could cope with this savage onslaught and many died before they could adapt. A few Karkosans survived. Looking at the pusulating corpses of their kinsfolk strewn across the clinically clean floors of their once sterile Tower, they laughed insanely, their minds having cracked under the terrible pressure, and then went out into the city to see what they could see.

Now they bore terrible stigmata of the ordeal they had survived. The symptoms of every disease they had endured were visible upon them. Running sores marred their flesh, boils and pustules of every color sprang erupting from their skin.

Corrupt humors filled their lungs and made them wheeze and cough. Their eyes were reddened, their noses ran. Strains of para-leprosy ate away at their extremities. Every movement caused them terrible pain. Here they discovered something even more fearful. Their bodies had survived the worst that the plagues could throw at them, but they had not survived unchanged. Instead of manufacturing antibodies, they had become miniature biofactories in which all the plagues they had survived bred and combined. Now their very presence among humanity spread these new and incredibly deadly diseases. If they passed among a crowd, the crowd would die. Many of the Karkosans were stoned and shot, the survivors retired once more to their Tower to seek a cure for their condition.

Working slowly, maddened by pain, they cataloged all the diseases they had suffered in the Library of Pestilence within their Tower. They concocted new drugs that cooled their fevers and eased their agony but they could find no cure for their condition. Their Tower slowly came to reflect its inhabitants. Huge carcinoma blotched its exterior. Festering sores marred its sides. A moat of mucous flowed around it. Diseased and luminous fungi blotched its walls. Its clean lines became twisted as the Tower itself seemed to writhe in long slow agony. Its occupants became known first as the Plague Lords.

Fearing infection, crowds prepared to lay siege to the Tower. It was targeted with potent weapons.



The Karkosans dispersed the crowds and disarmed the weapons by the simple expedient of emerging from their Tower and announcing that within was contained thousands of plague spores of incalculable virulence, and if the Tower was destroyed, those spores would be unleashed to spread through the city.

By attacking the Tower the crowds would succeed in causing that which they most feared. The crowds withdrew. All the insula around the newly named Tower of Plague were abandoned. The Karkosans were left to their own devices once more. So began an uneasy balance of terror that has held to the present day. The folk of Hydra hate the Karkosans but leave them unmolested for fear of the consequence. The Karkosans withdrew into the Tower and emerged to intervene in the metrozone's affairs whenever it suited their own unguessable purposes.

As the centuries passed the Plague Lords continued their research and bred with each other. Their children possessed their own curse but slowly it was refined and brought under control, so that the descendants of the original Plague-bringers could control the release of the diseases stored within their body, and walk among humanity without being harbingers of pestilence. They wrapped themselves in bandages to conceal their stigmata and wore huge cowed cloaks to conceal their features.

Slowly, the Karkosans reclaimed their original gift and learned once more to cure diseases as well as cause them. With a single touch they could break a fever or bring succor to the sickest person. Sometimes when pestilence stalked the city, they would wander the streets in their cowed cloaks and bring relief to the sick and the dying.

The Karkosans had not quite forgotten the original code of their ancestors, but they themselves had changed. Where once they had known nothing but praise and adulation, they had been shunned and scorned. Where once they had possessed an unconquerable belief in their own ability to conquer any disease, now they knew the limits of their ability. They had been scourged by doubt and madness, and cynicism had corroded many of their old values. Even when they helped people, those they saved withdrew from the sight of their diseased features. In their madness they had learned to hate their patients even as they cured them. As a people they became ever more withdrawn.

While the Karkosans continued to work on cures for diseases, they also developed a new expertise. In the ancient times, when humanity still bridged the gap between the stars they had been peaceful and sworn to protect life however they could. In those days of peace and harmony, they had no need for weapons. Just laws enforced by powerful police agencies had protected them. In the new world, created by war and Interdict, they knew they would have to protect themselves. So they set about using their knowledge to create new weapons, and succeeded beyond the wildest nightmares of their detractors.

Their claim that the destruction of their Tower would unleash the mightiest collection of plague spores ever created was no idle one. Down the long centuries the Plague Lords had created new diseases and new bio-weapons so virulent that they might well be able to end all life on the face of the planet. The threat of their release became a shield for Hydra as well as House Karkosa, for no external enemy wished to take the chance of unleashing the contents of the Library of Pestilence.

Over the years House Karkosa has regained much of its former wealth. Through various fronts and agencies it releases many new drugs, vaccines and anti-viral agents onto the market that are in common use throughout Waste World. Through another chain of intermediaries it sells a range of potent but short-lived biological weapons to any who can afford the asking price. This money is plowed back into research and development in the genclan's chosen fields.

Karkosans have a very distinctive appearance. They constantly seem to be suffering from the effects of some illness or another. They sniffle, they cough and wheeze. Their eyes water. Their noses run. Spots and pustules of many different colors erupt from their flesh as new diseases breed within their bodies and are dealt with by their hyper-fast immune systems. Their movements are slow and rheumatic. Lines of pain and fatigue crease their faces. Their skins are blasted by pockmarks and scars. Many have lost noses or lips or fingers or limbs to para-leprosy, and these parts will never grow back. They seem to be heirs to all the ills of the flesh, and yet somehow they have a terrible vitality that lets them keep going.

As a people they are bitter, ironic and cynical. They are given to mad laughter, and bouts of gloom and depression. All of their lives they live with constant low-level pain that sometimes becomes agony, as a particularly virulent new disease is created within their body and then dealt with. They are suspicious and defensive for they have seen people they have saved turn against them. They are given to bouts of megalomania, seeing themselves as people who hold the power of life in their right hand, and the power of death in their left hand. They appear weak and yet they have a peculiar confidence, which is based on the normally correct belief that they can destroy any non-Karkosan who threatens them, even if it costs them their own life.

HOUSE LUXOR

House Luxor is one of the most ancient of the genclans, and was once one of the most revered. Now it is one of the most feared. The Tower of the Dead and the insula around it is shunned by all sensible citizens of Hydra, for it is a place where corpses stalk the streets.

House Luxor was once one of the greatest of all Hydran trading houses. In the days before the Interdict, its people scoured the stars looking for the best and finest goods to bring back to Hydra. Like House Karkosa, it specialized in the production of medicines, particularly anti-agathics and other substances for prolonging life. For the folk of Luxor were obsessed with personal immortality. They did not believe in the illusion of it granted by nekrochips. Often their corpses lay in cryonic vaults deep within their huge pyramid Tower, preserved against the day when a cure for what killed them would be found, and perhaps they would be reanimated. It came to pass that soon the dead within the Tower outnumbered the living.

In the days before the Interdict, House Luxor was one of the richest of the genclans, and one of the most respected. Then the Armageddon Wars came, and with them, came the plagues. Worst of all was the Nekroth Plague, the terrible disease that killed folk with a wasting disease and then reanimated their mindless corpses to feast upon the living. By a strange irony, it struck fast and hardest in House Luxor.

Scenes of terrible carnage and madness were enacted within the huge pyramid. The living fought with their dead kin. Somehow the great cryogenic vaults became contaminated and the frozen corpses emerged and they were hungry. One can only imagine the horror of those dark days, as the opulent chambers of the living were ravaged by the armies of the walking dead. And yet, something strange had happened to a few of the corpses that had emerged from the vault. Their minds were still intact, they did not lust for human flesh, and they found within themselves deep wells of psionic power that enabled them to control their ravenous kin, and render them docile. In all ways they looked like zombies, but they were not. They were something new.



DATA CORE ACCESS

TO BE HUMAN

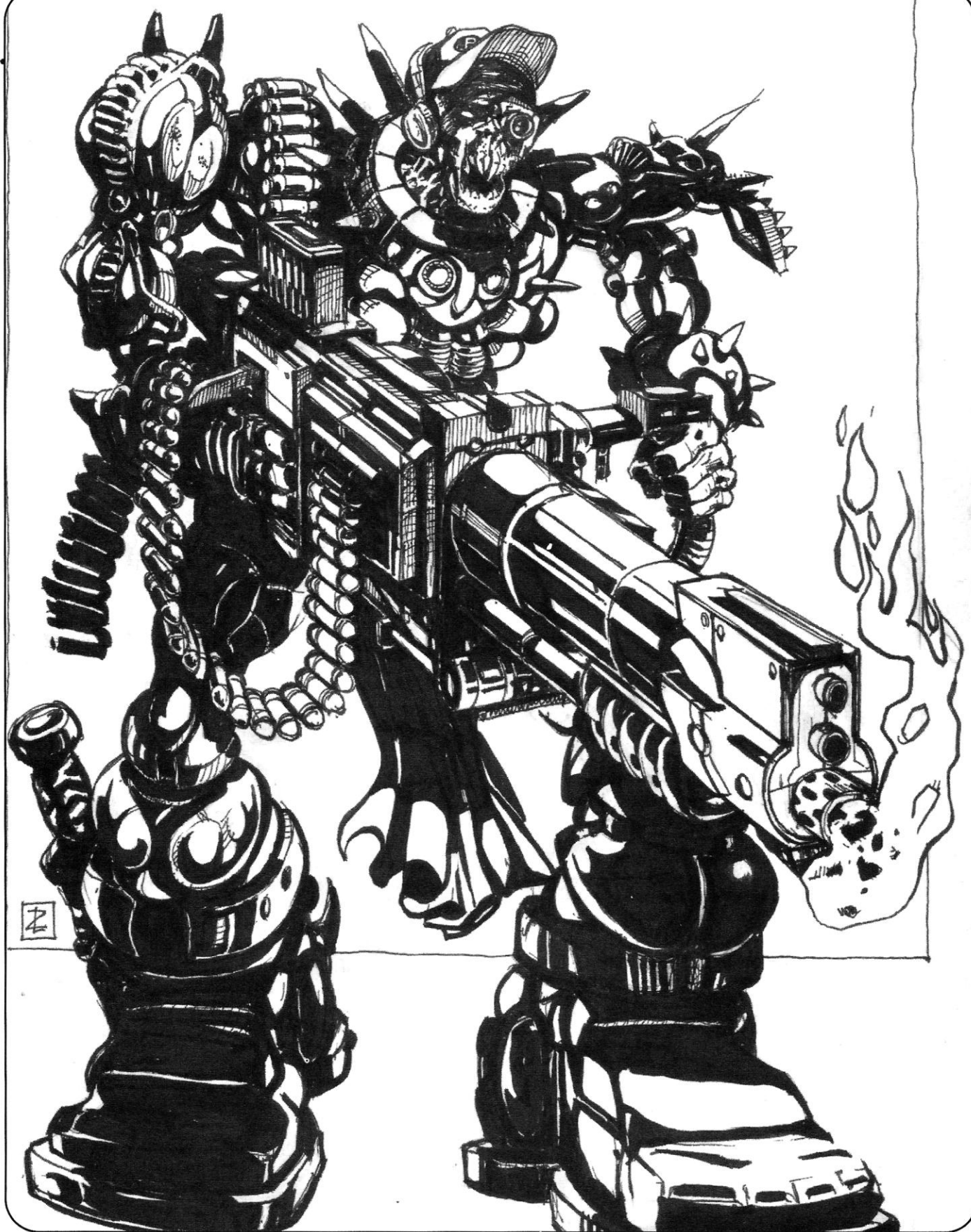
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THE GENCLANS RULE

TO BE BETTER

TO BE THE BEST

DARK TOWERS





At first, there were many misunderstandings. The living members of House Luxor feared a trap and many of the sentient zombies were destroyed by their living relatives. Eventually, however, an uneasy truce was laid and with the help of the sentient ones, the plague of zombies was put down. Within the Pyramid of Luxor an astonishing discovery was made.

The sentient zombies did not eat or breath or sleep but they did not seem to age either. Their cells were in a weird state of stasis neither living nor dead, but undead. The sentient zombies concealed themselves for they feared that the outside world would fear them and destroy them. The insula was sealed, the streets were cleared and emissaries from other Towers were turned away.

Within the Pyramid were some of the finest bi-mancers and genesculptors in Hydra. Eagerly they began their research, trying to find out what had enabled some of the zombies to survive with their minds intact while others had died. Eventually, they isolated the factor and created a new variant of the Nekroth Plague that would enable those infected to become undead and yet retain their sanity-or so it appeared. One by one, as old age snuck up on the researchers, they injected themselves with the plague until soon all but a few inhabitants of the Pyramid were walking corpses.

Other research was carried out at the same time as all this was happening. A form of antidote to the Nekroth Plague was created. This did not stop a corpse infected with the original plague from being animated, but it did render it docile and obedient to orders, and took away the hunger to devour human flesh. Emissaries of House Luxor visited the other islands where the plague still raged and used their antidote. The docile zombies were marched off to what became known as the Isle of the Dead, for destruction or experimentation. No one questioned why at the time, they were simply grateful to see the threat of the flesh eating zombies disposed off.

So it came to pass that the people of House Luxor found themselves in possession of a huge army of docile, obedient slave zombies. They set these to work rebuilding their shattered insula, and guarding their treasure houses. The leaders of the gencian gained a new name among the outside world, the Corpse Lords. They took on this mantle with pride.

So over the centuries life dragged on the Isle of the Dead. Few children were born to the living, and they died out leaving only the Corpse Lords and their undead servitors to their own devices. These brilliant minds continued their experiments, isolating new strains of the Nekroth virus and modifying it to suit their needs. Soon they could create different types of zombie, clever quick ones to fight and perform tasks that required brain-power.

Slow and stupid ones to perform menial tasks. They discovered that their own decomposition was not ended, just immeasurably slowed. They also discovered that although their life-spans had been increased a hundred fold they were becoming prone to madness and forgetfulness and a strange kind of senile dementia. They also discovered that their bodies would reject the products of Hydran biotechnology so they discovered a way of transplanting limbs from their zombie servitors to their own bodies to replace parts damaged by injury and accident. Then they discovered ways of attaching bionic limbs and other cybernetic systems to their bodies.

They also discovered that just because they had chosen to withdraw from the world, the world had not chosen to ignore them. Some gencians, and marauders from the Dark Towers coveted their wealth, and launched raids on their insula. Since they were no longer represented in the Tower of Lords, no one was allied with them or came to their aid. So the Corpse Lords armed their zombie legions and learned to fight once more. They were invariably successful and the corpses of their attackers swelled their own armies. House Luxor became a military power again, and learning its lesson, it once more tried to involve itself in the politics of the city.

They found themselves shunned and isolated, for even the cosmopolitan Hydrans were suspicious of the walking corpses equipped with Promethean bionics. They found they had, over the long centuries of their isolation, gained an evil reputation and were lumped in with the Dark Towers. Slowly and surely, as they descended into madness, they began to deserve that reputation.



Even their undead lives were not limitless. Slowly, the Corpse Lords began to die off, till only the most powerful and the most hardy survived, and with every decade that passed they became crazier. Gaps started to appear in their memories, knowledge began to be lost, and yet a strange, mad pride and a determination to preserve their culture kept them going.

Even within Hydra, they were not entirely shunned. Every so often people afflicted by incurable diseases, mad people and people who simply craved immortality petitioned to join the ranks of House Luxor. All were accepted. Some became servitors, some became warriors, and the best and the brightest were given the so-called Royal Virus and became Corpse Lords. So the House preserved itself.

Of course all of this did not happen without some friction. Rifts grew within their ranks, old quarrels festered. Rather than split their Tower with civil wars, some of the Corpse Lords gathered their legions of zombies and disappeared into the Jungles and Wastes to set up mansions and colonies among the dead cities of the world.

So House Luxor has continued to the present day. Shielded by their undead legions, the Corpse Lords sit amid the incredible wealth their ancestors collected and drive off all who would take what is their own.

CORPSE LORDS

Corpse Lords are the ruling class of House Luxor. They are invariably ancient beings, their bodies covered in a mass of stitching where old wounds have been sewn together. Many are equipped with powerful bionic systems imported from Janus and Prometheus. All of them are potent psychers with the animate dead power and usually several others. Some Corpse Lords choose to wrap themselves in cerement-like bandages to conceal the rips in their flesh, others proudly flaunt their disfigurement for all to see. Many Corpse Lords wear billowing cloaks and cowls that conceal their features when they travel abroad incognito. Anyone looking on their faces will know at once what they are, their parchment-thin gray skins, glowing eyes and lipless mouths filled with yellowing teeth give them away at once.

Most Corpse Lords are patient, cunning and filled with ancient wisdom. All have their eccentricities and many have huge gaps in their memories because of their slowly decomposing brains. As they grow older, Corpse Lords become more twisted and evil. They turn in on themselves and begin to hate the living and each other. When this starts to happen, they are usually banished beyond the city before they can start real trouble on the Island of the Dead. Occasionally, a truly ancient Corpse Lord will become cannibalistic and violent as the old strain of plague takes over. In this case, they must flee from the Isle of the Dead, or they will be destroyed by their fellows. Such evil ancients wandering abroad are one of the major reasons House Luxor has such a dreadful reputation.

CYBERZOMBIES

Cyberzombies form the military caste of House Luxor. They are powerful, deadly warriors usually equipped with one or more bits of bionic equipment to replace their lost limbs and organs. They are usually recruited from the most aggressive and militaristic of those who petition the Corpse Lords. They are fearsome foes for the Gift of Luxor makes them hard to kill, and they have long centuries in which to hone their skills. A few adventurous sorts desert from the service of the Corpse Lords and wander the world in search of ways to ease their boredom. Many are slain far from the Isle of the Dead. Some join the Legion of the Skull in Janus. Most eventually tire of their wanderings and return to the only place they truly fit in, the Isle of the Dead. The Corpse Lords usually welcome them back, no questions asked, unless they did something particularly heinous when they deserted.

LACKEYS

Lackeys are the lowest caste on the Isle of the Dead, they are the drudge laborers. Many were left over from the ancient wars, others were drawn from the ranks of those the Corpse Lords disliked or judged to be useless. They are mostly docile, tireless laborers who perform whatever task they are set to by their masters. A few Overseers are allowed free will. Sometimes gangs of zombie laborers are hired by the less scrupulous builders and merchants in the city because their services can be hired cheaply from the Corpse Lords.

Most of the time they must work at night and on concealed projects, for their presence very swiftly draws complaints from the normal citizenry. In times of war, the laborers are injected with a strain of the original Nekroth virus that turns them again into ravening, flesh-eating monsters. After the danger has passed, they are once more rendered docile by administering a new strain of the virus. The Corpse Lords are usually loath to transform their subjects, except in times of grave danger, for once they have become carnivores, they are forever afterwards prone to relapses, usually at very inconvenient moments.

CORPSE BEASTS

It is not just humans the Corpse Lords choose to re-animate. Sometimes they infect animals with their strange disease as well, creating undead monsters with the combined advantages of an animal and a zombie. Of course, these creatures are not very bright, and many of them are slow, but the difficulty of destroying them makes them terrible opponents. Since they need neither food nor sleep, they are often set to guarding secure sites on the Island of the Dead or in the Luxorian colonies. They will attack anybody not authorized to enter the area. Usually this consists of anyone who does not possess the Gift of Luxor.



HOUSE STEIN

House Stein is a splinter-clan of House Meleus. Long ago its people were exiled from the Tower of Flesh because of their pursuit of the darker byways of symbionics. The folk of House Stein found a powerful patron in House Anthor who protected it when it was weak and vulnerable.

The Monster Makers of House Stein have never forgotten their early sense of vulnerability though, and their Tower is a vast and brooding fortress on the edge of the Black Lagoon. It is built on the site of an earlier fortress from the days before the Interdict, a place that was long abandoned because it was thought to be haunted. Beneath the ancient ruins were a warren of caves and cells that the fortresse's new masters swiftly put to their own uses. These days the Tower of Monsters is a strange mixture of ancient castle and modern Hydran organic building. New towers and wings are constantly added as the genclan population increases.

The insula around the island is mostly ruins, dating back to the time of the Armageddon Wars. These burned out buildings are mostly abandoned save for a small colony of mutants and poor lowly beggars. For none but the most crazed or desperate would choose to dwell in the shadow of that brooding, evil pile.

On dark nights strange lights often flicker in the highest tower, as chain lightning flickers between the strange machines of its owners, and creations of monstrous evil are brought to life by the darkest powers of biomancy. Sometimes the lights on the towers are answered by eerie witchlights flickering in the depths of the lagoon. On such nights, even the beggars and the mutants lock themselves in the cellars and bunkers below the ruins and pray they do not see those who emerge from the dark, forbidding waters.

The folk of House Stein are quite insane, but this does not prevent them from being master symbionicists. Indeed, in many ways it helps them, for they will consider uses of their craft that would be cast aside with a shudder by folks with less brilliance and more scruples. The Monster Makers are completely ruthless in the pursuit of forbidden lore. There is nothing they will not stoop to in their search for the secrets of life and death. They see all of humanity as their experimental subjects, and all of the creatures in creation as mere tools that lie close to their hands.

The folk of House Stein are amongst the most gifted of all biomancers. In certain fields of symbionics their understanding far exceeds that of the Fleshlords of Meleus. In limited areas of genesculpting they long ago surpassed their former patrons of the Tower of Humanity. Their understanding of their field is as vast as their minds are cool and unsympathetic.

The monster makers call the particular area of research they are obsessed with "human augmentation". They are determined to push the human form to its uttermost limits, to create beings who far exceed normal humans in strength, toughness and survivability. They believe that as the Drakonium runs out a great war will come, and in those desperate times only the very strongest will survive. The folk of House Stein claim to be creating humanity's successors.

People who are not part of the genclan claim this is only an excuse, and that allows the Monster Makers to justify their insane cruelty to the experimental subjects and their mad researches into things that were better left undisturbed. Whatever their reasons, there can be little doubt that the Steinians get results. Some of their creations rank among the greatest living weapons ever created. Even their failures are invariably deadly things.

The Steinians take kidnapped Indigents, mutants, and sometimes even their own kin, and use biomorphic surgery and symbiotic grafts to transform them into hulking monsters. They use strange but effective psycho-conditioning techniques involving sensory deprivation, hallucinogenic drugs and sense-bypass playback to brainwash their creations to obey their will. Mostly this conditioning is successful, but sometimes it fails and their monsters run amok with disastrous consequences.

Many claim that what keeps the Steinians from becoming a major power is also their greatest source of strength. Every Monster Maker is an individualist. Each chooses to follow his own vision of the perfect creature regardless of what others believe. Every one of them is crazed but brilliant. Many times the genclan has threatened to pull itself apart under the strain of dealing with so many brilliant egomaniacs. What keeps it together is the wealth the clan pours into funding research and the enormous amount of information contained in the Tower of Monster's Black Library. Also, for all their rivalry, the Steinians despise all others. At the end of the day they prefer to meet with their equals and argue out their theories. Nowhere else can they find such a concentration of fertile and brilliant minds. The cross-pollination of ideas within the Tower has led to many significant breakthroughs. So although most of the Steinians keep to their own chambers and follow their own researches aided by their monstrous and invariably hunch-backed assistants, equally often they can be found in the Great Hall dining and debating about their theories or intriguing to gain the favor of the Patriarch, the supreme ruler of the genclan.

The clan makes its money marketing the breakthroughs its researchers make, and creating monstrous bodyguards and assassins to meet the specifications of its clients. In reality these are only sidelines. Each Steinian is obsessed with creating the perfect monster for the great games held every seven years in the mighty arena beneath the Tower.





In these brutal gladiatorial contests each Steinian can enter one monster that will fight to the death in pursuit of ultimate victory. The creator of the final victor in the seven day games becomes the next Patriarch and gets to allocate the resources of the genclan to his pet project. Of course this gives the Patriarch an advantage when it comes to holding on to power, for he can far outspend his rivals. On the other hand, he cannot cut off all funding, for this would lead to a general uprising against his rule, and turmoil within the Tower. The Steinians do not seem to mind this imbalance as long as it does not prove too great. They seem to think that it forces the Patriarch's competitors to greater ingenuity in their search for victory. To overcome such an inbuilt advantage they have to come up with significant innovations in their field. Thus the whole field of the genclan's knowledge is driven forward, and the quest for the perfect fighting machine takes one step further towards its goal.

The folk of House Stein tend to be short and squat and short-sighted. Most have thinning hair and wear thick glasses through which they peer. Many are hunchbacked or deformed in other ways. They care nothing for appearance and often go months without washing or changing their clothes. Most carry themselves with an air of abstraction as if their minds were far away, dwelling on other things.

Occasionally they pause to emit an insane cackle, or shriek with joy as they gain a particular crazed insight. At such moments they hastily scribble notes on their sleeve or rush off to the laboratories to put their new theory into practice.

Most are accompanied by a bodyguard of one or two of their monstrous creations. These accompany them everywhere beyond their own apartments, and are often dispatched to capture new experimental victims. The Monster Makers have no qualms about kidnapping anybody. If their latest theory calls for the use of courtesan of House Radost or a Valkan warrior, they will dispatch monsters or agents to ensure that they get the subject they require. Such actions have often sparked off diplomatic incidents with the other genclans.

Most Steinians begin their working lives apprenticed to an older and more experienced Monster Maker. They perform menial tasks such as washing the test tubes and cleaning the beakers while studying the methods and working patterns of their masters. Once they have acquired sufficient knowledge they will be allowed to help their master when he is creating his next foul creature. Eventually they will graduate to creating their own small, and usually unoriginal monsters and watch proudly as it breaks through its imperfect psycho-conditioning and runs amok through the labs before being brought down by the master's monsters. Eventually, when he has learned enough, and when his master is sick of his endless questions and back-chat, the Steinian will petition the Patriarch for his own laboratory, submitting a proposal for the sort of creature he intends to create. If his ideas are worth stealing, the Patriarch will do so and grant his request. More often than not, the request will be denied and the would-be monster maker must return to his previous master or find a new one. Sometimes, unable to take the rejection, the Monster Maker will set off from the Tower, turn, shake his fist, and swear that all those who laughed at him will pay. Then he will trudge away and go adventuring, seeking to find funds to set up his own laboratory and pursue his research, until the day when he can return to the Tower with his invincible monster and rest power and privilege away from the witless dullards who mocked him.

HOUSE TYPHON

House Typhon is one of the most ancient Towers. Long ago, after the First Tower War, its people lost their home and went into exile on the Isle of the Damned. Although they have kept their pride in their lineage and Discipline, they have been reduced in status to mere wandering mercenaries who serve the other genclans for pay and profit.

It was not always so. House Typhon is one of the oldest of the genclans. It was a Tower with roots in the time before the Armageddon Wars. The building resembled a great outstretched claw clutching an orb. Its people were proud and noble warriors with a thirst for victory in battle. Even in those ancient days sages think there was some flaw in the Typhon genetic matrix. There was a dark side to their character that made them overproud and they had a hunger for destruction as well as a thirst for victory.



During the Collapse this served them well, for as they evolved they became ever more brutal and ruthless. They experimented with ever more ingenious ways of bringing about destruction. Always the masters of close combat, they thrived in the bitter house-to-house fighting of the civil war. They honed their discipline in thousands of combats and their sorcerers and sages refined the genetic matrix until they manifested their ultimate ability, the Claw Of Typhon. Masters of this power could destroy stone with a touch, and then they learned to transfer this destructive energy into the weapons they carried.

In an age of warfare, their power grew, and they were one of the most influential genclans during the Hegemony of the Hundred Towers. They had a long tradition of unbroken victory and their pride matched their power. Down the centuries they became rivals with the other warrior Towers, particularly House Valka. The Towers probed each other for signs of weakness and many skirmishes were fought between partisans of either side.

Filled with overweening pride, the Lords of Typhon plotted the downfall of their enemies. They wished to be the supreme military power within the metrozone. Indeed their ambitions were greater. Its Lord, Shadragon, felt that if he could become the prime military force within the city, rulership would soon follow. However, even the insane Lord of Typhon knew that the other genclans would not permit this and would come to the aid of House Valka. For this reason, before the Tower War began, he gathered a host of other genclans to his faction and promised them a share of the spoils of victory. Many believed this charismatic ruler, and came over to his side.

All know the outcome of that ill-fated attempt to seize control of the city. In the bitter civil war that ensued, the Tower of Destruction was cast down and destroyed and its people thrown into exile. Lord Typhon was slain in single combat by the Warmaster of Valka. His people were banished beyond the boundaries of the city and took residence on the Isle of the Damned. Their numbers savagely reduced by casualties taken in the Tower War, it would have been easy for the Typhonians to vanish, their gene-line absorbed into that of the Isle of the Damned.

However, the genclan showed some traces of its ancient discipline and kept themselves apart, preserving their heritage. With their military skills and ferocious presence they soon carved themselves a niche on the Island. They earned their living as mercenaries, bounty hunters and bodyguards but always the ancient customs of testing and inter-marriage were observed so that the Typhon gene-line is preserved to the present day.

A new Tower was created on the Island of the Damned. Smaller and less impressive than their previous home, and unrecognized by the Tower of Lords, it still provided the genclan with a base of operations, and a fortress from which they could preserve their bloodline. Members of House Typhon can be found in service everywhere across the surface of Waste World but they always return to their city to marry within their circles of chosen, and to pass on their proud and diminished heritage to their offspring. House Typhon's people dream that one day they will return to their island and rebuild their broken Tower and then they will be able to take vengeance on those they think have wronged them. Most of them are realistic enough to know that this is a forlorn hope. They will never be permitted to do so by the Tower of Lords, and they do not have the strength to defy the rulers of the city. Still it is a powerful dream and one that binds House Typhon together still. While they have a Lord to follow, and have breath in their bodies, they will follow their dream still.

THE DISCIPLINE OF DESTRUCTION

The Discipline of House Typhon is known as Destruction. They live to fight, preferably to destroy their foes in hand to hand combat. They are masters of unarmed combat and close combat weapons. They are taught to fight in small, disciplined units. They are masters of urban warfare and in this area perhaps even surpass House Valka. They are excellent commando troops. They lack the almost spiritual devotion to their Discipline that the Valkans possess. Their discipline allows them to get drunk and roister and cause unrestricted destruction when need be. It is perhaps this lack of total control that has made many people perceive them to be inferior warriors to the Valkans.

Naturally House Typhon do not see things this way. They see House Valka's victory as an unfortunate twist of fate. Had luck smiled on them, they know that the positions of the two Houses would be reversed.

They possess the powerful Gift known as the Claw of Typhon. These powers enable them to destroy things with a touch, and to imbue whatever close combat weapon they carry with their power.

The folk of House Typhon are cold and aloof. They despise weakness and see it as the right of the strong to exploit the weak. And of course they are brought up to see themselves as the strong. They can be bullies and they are brutal. At the same time they are still bound by their ancient codes of honor. They do not break their word. They honor their contracts to the letter, or die trying. They obey the orders of their superiors without question. While they are not liked they are respected, and even in some cases admired. They are highly paid for their services and many people throughout the city employ Typhonian bodyguards.



DATA CORE ACCESS

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THE GENCLANS RULE

TO BE BETTER

TO BE THE BEST

DARK TOWERS



VIRUS DETECTION PROGRAM: ON
FLOW LINK QUASI-PROTOCOL: INITIATED
FILE SUB-PROTOL: GENCLAN
NANOMECHANICAL INTERFACE:
VALIDATE SIMULATION

INITIATE SEQUENCE
NON-BIOLOGICAL RAW MATERIAL:
INTERNAL DATA CORRUPTION:
LINGUISTIC MARKUP DIRECTORY
MOLECULAR BINARY:

GUNSTBERG OVERDRIVE
MICRO-OPTICAL MODULATOR: ON
SILICONE SYNAPTIC SIMULATOR
DYSFUNCTION
MEGAPULSE CHANNEL ON

CORTICO QUASI-DEGRADATION
GANGLIAL ELECTRO-IMPLANT
SMART CHIP INSTALLED
METHANE IMPULSE CATHETER
OCCIPITAL FLOW MODULATION: SINE

commonALiTY

LOGIN:
PASSWORD:
ACCESS GRANTED
SECURITY CLEARANCE LEVEL:
EXCESS GENETIC VARIATION:

SUB system COORDINATES
X1:477.27.8 X2:566.57.2
Y1:642.42.4 Y2:388.01.2
Z2: 90.09.9 Z1: 31.47.3
ABBERANT CHROMA LEVELS:

SEROTONERGIC OVERLOAD
AMYGDALPTIC OVERWRITE
SMART CHIP INSTALLED
BIOMECH AUGMENTATION:
NANOCCIPITAL DRIVER

BIOFEEDBACK MATRIX: XO
BINARY NANOBOT PRESENT
GENMATRIX SCANNER ENABLED
PATTERN RECOGNIZER NULL:
INFODUMP INITIATING

Griblet the Lurk raced through the night, his new pretty clutched firmly in one hand, the sounds of pursuit filling his keen ears. He bounded over a steaming midden, landed cat like on the far side. He grinned as he heard the curses of the big folk crashing into the foul dungheap. That would teach them to try and catch bold Griblet, he thought.

It was dark here in the back alleys and the going was rough. There were no streetlights. Heaps of rubbish, scavenged by the local colony of Drudges, filled the pedway.

Griblet didn't care. Not for nothing was he known as Griblet the Keen-Eyed, Prince of Thieves, Bravest of Lurks. His keen eyes pierced the shadows. His long arms allowed him to move just as easily on all fours as upright. The obstacles barely slowed him down. It was only when they started to collapse beneath him, and he heard the panicked squeals that he realized that these were not junkheaps but shanties, home to the local colony of Drudges.

Griblet giggled. That would teach the stupid creatures to build their houses in his way. There was a series of loud bangs. Something whizzed past the Lurk's head. He felt a sudden stinging pain in his ear and reached up with a foot to feel his own blood flow. Griblet almost fainted.

This wasn't fair. They were trying to kill Griblet, to rob the world of his brilliance. He considered the options available to a bold lurk under these circumstances, and decided that surrender just might be the safest option. He thrust his hands skyward and bravely turned to face his pursuers.

One look convinced him that this was not a good idea. The big folk looked mean. They were garbed in the hard chitinous armor that soldiers always wore, and they carried big black durallloy guns, all of which were starting to swing in Griblet's direction.

"There's the little rat!" one of them shouted. "Kill the sniveling, verminous rodent!"

Griblet cocked his head to one side. He looked around to see if anyone fitting the description was nearby but there wasn't. It was hard to believe, but it seemed that they were talking about him.

For a moment, outrage overcame fear. He shrugged. The big folk were always jealous of his good looks and intelligence. They resented his shiny bald head, the sharpness of his teeth and his compact, lean and muscular form.

For a moment, he was angry. Then looking down the muzzle of a large gun, he felt his bowels turn to water and his outrage splutter and die like a torch doused in scummy water.

"No hurt Griblet, handsome master!" he said diplomatically. "Griblet mean no harm!"

The man with the gun smiled and his finger started to tighten on the trigger. Griblet threw himself to one side, diving behind a corrugated iron shack as a hail of lead tore through the air where he had been.

"Damn! That little cockroach is fast!" he heard the man curse. Griblet decided that the big folk hadn't seen anything yet. Fear lent his feet wings as he bounded through the drudge camp, leaping over the shrieking occupants, diving between their pitiful homes, which were being torn apart by bullets. The Drudges scattered in all directions as the big soldiers pursued Griblet.

Griblet found himself face to face with a panicky Drudge. It was gray-skinned, small and thin, with stringy muscles. Its mouth was open, showing row on row of ugly grinding teeth. Fear filled its saucer like eyes. It held a length of lead pipe in its hands which it swung at Griblet. Once more a sense of outrage filled the Lurk. What had he ever done to harm this creature?

He ducked the blow and bounded to one side, scrambling into the shelter of a lean-to where a huge fat female Drudge lay with a litter of children clutched to her breasts. She opened a mouth full of those scary teeth and made as if to bite the Lurk. Griblet dived past her, crashing through the flimsy cardboard wall, and rolled to his feet in the street.

"I can't tell these vermin apart!" he heard one of the big soldiers shout.

"Kill them all then!" Another voice shouted. "The Fleshlord will have our guts for garters if we don't get back his favorite amulet. His shield is in it an' that cost a pretty penny."

So that was what the pretty he had snatched was. Griblet whistled. It had looked so nice and bright and shiny against the fat man's chest that he had been simply compelled to reach in and snatch it.



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THE GENCLANS RULE

TO BE BETTER

TO BE THE BEST

THE COMMONALITY





He gazed down at his prize lovingly. It was really bright and really shiny and it had this big jeweled button right in the middle of it. All the other lurks would be really jealous when they saw it. If they saw it, he corrected himself. He would hide it with the rest of his treasure trove, far from prying eyes. You couldn't be too careful with pretties. After all, the world was full of thieves.

That was assuming he got away at all. The big soldiers seemed uncommonly persistent, not to say cruel and ruthless. Their bullets mowed down the shrieking drudges. Oh well, thought Griblet, better them than me.

Ahead of him a huge mound of garbage rose above the shanty town. The pungent smell of decomposing trash filled the Lurk's nostrils. It was not unpleasant to one who had grown up in the sewers below the city. In fact, it reminded him of home. A small tear trickled down his face when he remembered the cruelty with which he had been exiled from the lair just because he had been accused of stealing Chief Ug's treasure chest. It had been such an unjust accusation. He had only borrowed the treasure. He really had meant to give it back.

The sound of bullets broke into his reverie. His pursuers were closing in and there was only one way to go. Up! He scrambled forward, climbing over the rotting mound, his fingers and toes probing for footholds. As he crossed the ridge at the top of the mound, he noticed that there was another smell, now cutting beneath the smell of decay. This was more sinister. It smelled like rotting meat, like death, and it was mingled with a strange musty odor.

At this point, he noticed that nearby was a mound of white objects. Closer inspection revealed that these were the skulls of humans and drudges. Horror filled Griblet. It was even possible that one or two of them belonged to lurks. What was the world coming to, when innocent lurks couldn't walk the streets without being decapitated.

Terror made Griblet's heart pound against the walls of his chest. He realized that he knew that smell. He had last encountered it as a child, when he had been pursued through the tunnels by a band of marauding ghouls. The cannibal creatures had eaten poor slow stupid Guk. He remembered with horror coming upon one gorging on the remains of the young Lurk. Blood had dribbled down its chin as it stuffed Guk's severed arm into its mouth. Guk lay shrieking on the floor, pinned beneath the huge creature's weight.

Things were not looking good, Griblet told himself. Ghouls in front of him, blood-mad soldiers behind him. Maybe he should just burrow into the rubbish and wait. The bellowing of one of the humans filled the air.

"I tell you, Sarge, I saw the little runt head up there. He went up that trash heap like a rat up a drainpipe."

"Suppose we'd better get him then. Off you go lads!"

"Sarge, it stinks up there!"

"Maybe you want to go back and explain that to the Fleshlord."

"No, Sarge!" The sounds of heavy feet crunching up the side of the mound reached Griblet's ears. He could see lights gleaming over its brow. The big soldiers had broken out torches. Best not wait then. Just as he came to his decision, the first soldier came over the top of the mound, a flashlight held in front of him. He paused to look down. Without realizing it he had come to rest on top of a heap of skulls.

A stealthy slithering noise came from nearby. Griblet froze, as a monstrous, misshapen form slid by him. The soldier looked up.

"I think I can hear him, Sarge! Yeah, I think I can see the little tosspot! Yeah, come just a little bit closer, you little rascal, I'll give you....urk!"

There was a brief stutter of an autorifle, then all hell broke loose. From beneath the garbage, the twisted forms of a pack of ghouls erupted. He heard screams and the sound of gunfire on the far side of the mound, as the ghouls and the soldiers ran into each other.

Griblet tittered. Let them fight. Clever Griblet would make his escape. He looked back over his shoulder to make sure the way was clear, even as he bounded down-slope. Filled with glee at his luck and ingenuity, he laughed aloud. Who but Griblet the Bold, Griblet the Brave, Griblet the Supremely Intelligent could have engineered this struggle between his powerful pursuers? His laughter was cut short when he hit something massive and solid and bounced.

He looked up to see that he was looking into the face of the largest ghoule he had ever seen. It was tall as a big man with long spidery arms and legs. Its mouth was open to reveal row upon row of sharp grinding teeth covered in glistening saliva. It licked its blubbery lips with a tongue like a moist gray worm. Griblet leapt back but it was just as fast as he was, and he was almost penned in by its outstretched arms.

He knew he was dead if he didn't do something clever. He thrust out his arms and held the amulet in front of him. "Take pretty. Present for handsome ghoul!"

The ghoul licked its lips again and reached for him. Griblet's fingers fumbled on the amulet and pressed the jewel. Suddenly ruby light sprang from the amulet and surrounded his body. The ghoul's teeth snapped shut on his arm. Griblet prepared himself for the surge of pain. He was ready to whine and wail but the pain never came. He felt a muffled pressure on his arm, nothing more. The baffled ghoul backed away from him. Griblet noticed that he seemed to be looking out at the world through a ruddy glow. It encased all of his limbs. He clicked the jewel on the amulet again and the glow vanished. The ghoul bounded forward. Griblet pushed the gem once more and the glow returned. The ghoul's jaws slid from him, baffled by the forcefield of light that enclosed him. In a moment it bounded away in search of easier prey.

Griblet kept the light around him till the sounds of screaming, gunfire and horrible munching faded behind him, then he set switched the amulet off, and headed back to his lair. Once more Griblet the Bold triumphs over his enemies, he thought.

THE COMMONALITY

Although the genclans rule Hydra with an iron fist, they actually represent, at most, twenty percent of the population. The genclans started with fewer members than the general population, and their process of selective breeding has meant that their numbers have not expanded as fast as they might have.

The rest of Hydra's inhabitants, the Commonality, have bred faster, and their numbers have been swelled by immigration, so that even after war, pestilence, famine and the slow adoption of their best and brightest into the genclans has been taken into account, their numbers continue to swell.

The Commonality is made up of a mixture of normal humans, mutants, and the subraces the genclans themselves have created. Immigrants swell their number every day, for Hydra is an open city, where work, cheap housing and nutritious food is freely available. Compared to the hantowns of the Wastes, it is a paradise. Thousands of families sell everything they own to buy passage there. Even the fact that many are betrayed or sold into slavery or spend long hours of drudgery once they get there does not deter them. For many, life in the Wastes is so hard that any alternative seems preferable.

The people of Hydra can be divided into roughly six major categories: Humans, Flyers, Brutes, Drudges, Lurks and Mutants. The last two occupy a twilight world on the fringes of normal society, the first four provide the bedrock on which Hydran society rests.

HUMANS

Humans still make up the majority of the population of Hydra, forming about fifty percent of the population. Though proud to call themselves the descendants of the city founders, who first welcomed the genclans all those ages ago, in truth many are descendants of the immigrants who have made their way to Hydra over the years.

By ancient tradition, Humans enjoy certain rights within the city. They are free to come and go as they please, and to assemble and organize as they wish. They can own property and elect their own leaders. The humans can point to the ancient statutes and claim that these rights are laid down by law. They are correct. Long ago, however, the genclans proved that the real laws are made by those with the power to enforce them, and only the genclans have that power. Since these rights help keep the human population relatively docile and tractable, the genclans respect them for as long as it suits their purposes.

The human population can be divided into three categories: freemen, bondsmen and indigents. Freemen normally dwell within the great freezones around the harbors, on the bridges, and on those insula not under genclan rule.

They elect their own Alcaldes, pay for their own police forces out of taxes, and vote on their own laws within the freezones. They can own property and organize as they please.



In times of war, they raise regiments from the local population, and equip them from the public purse. Life in the freezones is rather like that in a large and very well-organized haptown. Indeed it is much better in many ways. Being located within a major metrozone means they are safe from Skavengers and other marauders. These freezones also provide areas where outsiders such as Janusian Kombines or the samurai clans of the Shogunate can set up bases and homes. Naturally these are carefully monitored by agents of the genclans, but they are not forbidden.

The genclans allow the freezones to exist for many reasons. They provide large trading zones where the representatives of the various Houses can meet on neutral ground and exchange goods and services. They usually are home to humans with skills the genclans do not possess themselves, and whom the genclans occasionally require.

They provide useful buffer zones between hostile Houses when the area in which they are located on is strategically too important for either House to allow the other to control it. In this case the safety and neutrality of the freezone is usually guaranteed by both parties and their allies.

They are a convenient way of ensuring the neutrality of the great harbor ports that are too important for any genclan to exercise solitary control over. Lastly, since many have well-organized and equipped local defense forces, it would take a major military effort for the genclans to crush them. So the freezones are allowed to continue.

Within these huge districts are markets, factories, guildhalls and residential areas. Many of the largest freezones produce things that the genclans cannot produce themselves. For instance, in Steelhaven, there is a colony of Promethean renegades who manufacture bionic systems that are sold to House Luxor and anybody else who desires them. There is also a huge duralloy smelting plant and many, many armaments factories that churn out pistols, assault rifles and machine guns. In Bluesky there is a massive industrial plant where a Janusian Combine manufactures suspensor drives. Having someone else provide these things frees the genclans to do what they do best.

The freezones are also strongholds of Guild Power. These powerful labor organizations oversee all labor in the freezones, setting wage rates and ensuring their members are paid. Guilds look after their members when times are hard. Unemployed guild members and their families can always, at least, get a meal and a roof over their heads in their Guildhall. The Guilds exert pressure on the Alcalde and his council to see that their member's interests are looked after. They also employ teams of strong arms to see that their edicts are obeyed.

Of course, the freezones have their problems. Overcrowding leads to pressure on the sanitation systems, and on the people who live there. Street crime is endemic. Corruption and patronage are common, and many of the great criminal gangs have their tentacles firmly wrapped round the political structure.

Some Alcaldes are little more than gangsters. Some guilds are nothing more than fronts for organized crime. Sometimes there are riots and terrible block wars between the inhabitants of the Tower Blocks.

BONDSMEN

Bondsmen are also known as wage slaves. They dwell on the insulae controlled by the genclans. They live in housing provided by their genclan. They work for their genclans. They buy their food in shops controlled by their genclans. They subscribe to the ideals promulgated by the genclan's propaganda corps. They drink in genclan-controlled taverns. They give their corpses to be rendered down in the genclans' recycling tanks. They are expected to belong, body and soul, to their genclan, and many do. They are bound to their genclans by contracts sealed with their blood, - this provides a convenient genetic marker to identify them. These contracts are known as debt bonds, or simply bonds.

Within some genclans these bonds are actually used as a form of currency. One genclan member can pay another with debt-bonds he holds on his bondsmen. It is less common for bondsmen to be passed between genclans this way, but it does happen.

It is easy to spot a bondsman, they have their genclan's emblem bio-tattooed on their arms or forehead, and their own identification number tattooed somewhere below it. These bio-tattoos are often implanted at the cellular level. If removed with a laser scalpel they will simply grow back. The only way to get rid of them is to either overlay them with another bio-tattoo or to have biomorphic surgery performed on them.

The system began in ancient times when the genclans moved to restore order in the wake of the collapse. They offered housing and food to any refugees who would work for them, and soon discovered that they could set the rents and food prices so high that their employees were obliged to work for them forever. They were never out of debt, so the genclan always had a legal claim on them, and eventually their children.

Many people were so indebted to the genclan that they were forced to indenture their children into the genclan's service to cover part of their debt. By the time the children were old enough to have fulfilled the terms of their indenture contract, they too were indebted to the genclan. Thus began a system of hereditary servitude that continues to the present day. Since the genclan make the laws on their insula, most have ruled that the debts of a bondsman can be passed on to their surviving relatives. Indeed it is a bitter joke among some wage slaves that they are still paying off the debt incurred by their ancestors at the time of the Collapse.

Of course, there are advantages to being a bondsman. You may have less freedom but you have more security. You always have a roof over your head, you will never starve, and the streets are more or less safe unless there is a war on between the Towers.



DATA CORE ACCESS

TO BE HUMAN

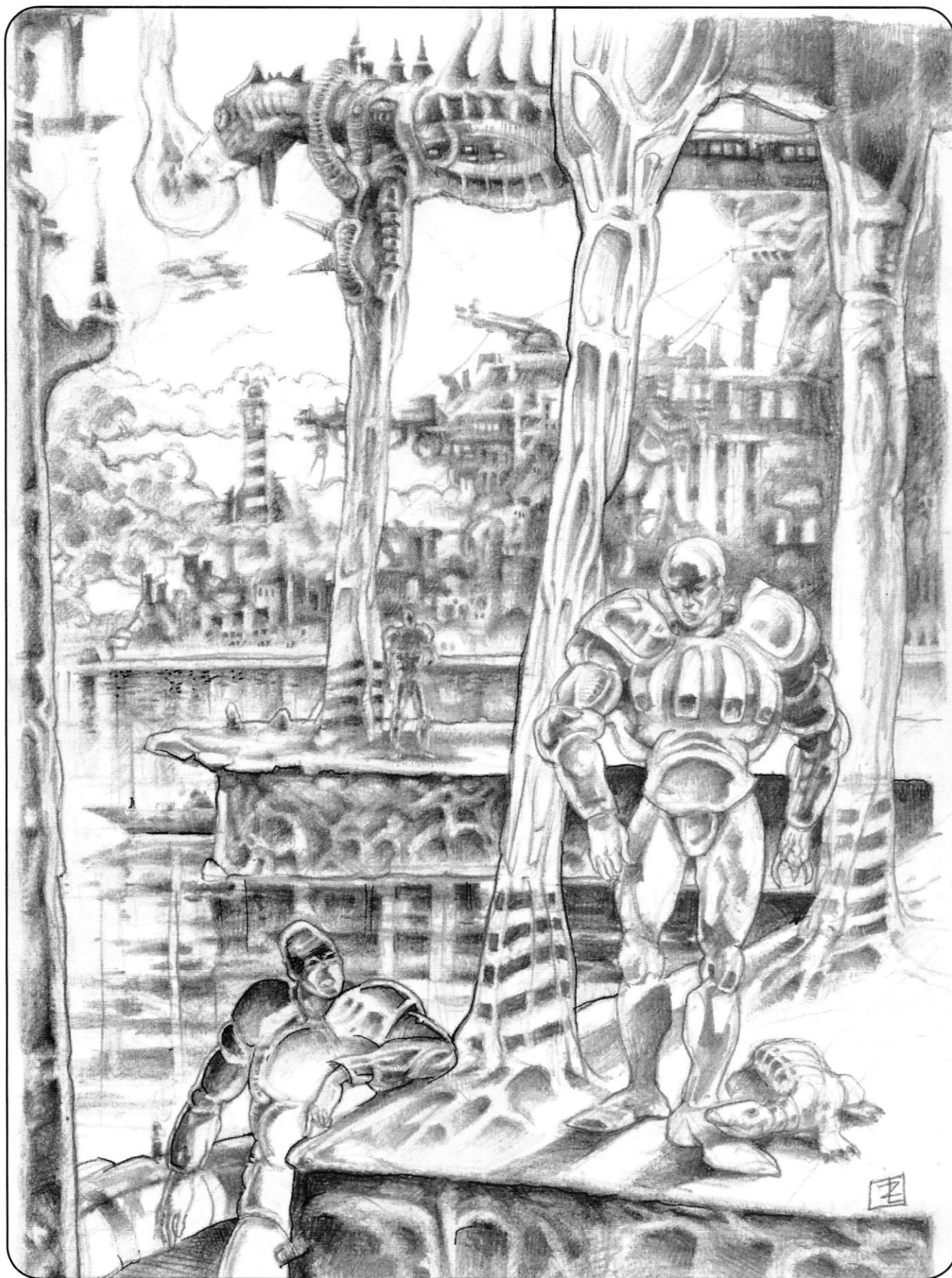
<http://www.manticore.com>

THE GENCLANS RULE

TO BE BETTER

TO BE THE BEST

THE COMMONALITY



Your children may be indentured laborers but they also have a chance of being adopted into a genclan, if they are lucky and meet the requirements. You will not be set upon by ruffians and you can practice your trade without being part of a guild.

Life in the insulae can be strange. Most bondsmen ape their masters in dress and manners. They subscribe to the genclan's aims often with more fervor than the Posthumans themselves. The majority are proud to be part of something greater than themselves, and have a sort of patriotic fervor about it. This makes them very suspicious of outsiders and other bondsmen who do not profess similar loyalty. There is enormous social pressure to conform, and most people either give in or get out.

There are ways out of debt slavery. The hardest is to find the money to pay off your debt bond. Some people get lucky gambling and do. Taking a dive is more common. Those who wish to escape jump into the canals and swim to passing vessels, or try to swim to the nearest freezone. This is not without risks. Many drown. Many more are thrown off the vessel or returned to their insula so that their captors can claim the reward for returning escaped bondsmen. (Naturally, the cost of this reward is added to your debt to the genclan.) Going to the insula of another genclan is usually useless, for they will simply return you to your former masters or press you into service themselves. Many people do not even try to escape because they know if they do, their debt will be transferred to their families. Usually only the young, the desperate and the ruthless try to escape.

There are also the bondhunters to consider. These hard and ruthless souls make their living returning escaped bondsmen to their owners. They have many tricks. Some simply cruise the canals around the insulae waiting for bondsmen to escape. They drag them from the water and then take them back at gun point. Some are more subtle and pretend to be part of a network helping bondsmen to escape. They find bondsmen passage in sealed vehicles, and when the vehicles are opened, and behold, they are back where they started. Other bondhunters simply use violence to overcome their prey and then drag them back in chains.

Once escaped bondsmen make it to a freezone they are safe can join all the other immigrants seeking work. Most freezones have laws against bondhunters. Of course, this does not stop them, it just makes their lives a little bit harder, and the escapees' lives a little bit easier. Anyone who lives in an freezone can claim residence there, and by law is no longer a bondsman.

THE INDIGENT

The indigent are a huge part of Hydra's population. These are the beggars and the canal dwellers and the poor who have no fixed abode. They work as casual laborers and are constantly on the move, always seeking a place to settle. They cannot claim residence in an freezone and no genclan will have them, so they roam the city scratching a living as best as they are able. This can be a dangerous life. The areas in which they dwell, the canals and the lawless shanties on the edges of the freezones, are places where life is nasty, brutish and short. Many are kidnapped by body-snatchers, slavers and Spydran recruitment teams. Others have their property stolen by their stronger and more ruthless neighbors. Many simply cannot take the strain of their lives and cast themselves into the canals to drown.

Sometimes the Indigent are roused by a Prophet or a demagogue and take to the streets wielding crude improvised weapons, in an orgy of looting and violence that usually ends up being brutally suppressed by Tower troops. Needless to say these poor, desperate people are looked upon with suspicion by their fellow citizens.

IMMIGRANTS

Hydra is an open city. It welcomes anybody. There are numerous reasons for this. One is tradition. Before the Interdict, Hydra was a freeport that traded with the stars. All were welcome and free to come and go as they pleased. Economics, too, plays its part. The unrelenting tide of immigrants provide a source of cheap labor and helps keep wages down for the rest. Then there is biomanacy. The immigrants provide a pool of new genetic material for the genclans to play with. Finally there is disorganization. The genclans are so fragmented and fractious that they have never bothered with an immigration policy except with regard to their own insulae. The rest of the city is open to any. The harbors are freeports. The authorities care only that the excise duties are collected, and a steady stream of new arrivals helps ensure this.

Once they arrive in the city, the newcomers discover a vast warren of slums and shanties where they can find a place, and a whole structure of work gangs and bosses who will find them employment, albeit for a hefty percentage of their pay. Those who work hard and save money, or those who steal enough, find that they can move up into the nicer apartments in the habtowers built by House Luxor, or, if they have useful skills, they find their way to the insulae of the genclans, and get work there. Otherwise it is not easy for a skilled newcomer to ply his trade, for if he does not have the protection of a genclan, he must join a guild. This can be difficult, for the newcomer must first find a sponsor within the Guild, pass the entrance tests, and raise the membership fee. Some who have relations within the Guild do this quickly. Others may spend a lifetime without ever being licensed to practice their trade.





OUTLANDERS

Many foreigners come to Hydra to trade, to work, to seek medical treatment or recreation in the pleasure palaces of House Radost. Not all want to live there or claim residence. Many have homes elsewhere. Many are foot-loose adventurers simply wandering the world in search of excitement and riches. Their aims do not matter. Hydra accepts them all. They are welcome as long as they have money to spend, business to contract, or skills that are needed. They are tolerated even if they fall into none of these three categories. There are only two classes of sentient being that the Hydrans have any prejudice against: robots and mutants.

Robots are suspect beings. Sometimes they are attacked in the street by fear-filled mobs. They are still regarded as potential bearers of the Apocalypse Virus. Most Hydrans expect a robot to turn on them at any second. No law forbids the employment of robots; it simply is not done. There have been a few attempts to build automated factories in the city, but these have all been sabotaged by the genclans. Only the shadiest of Hydrans will employ them. Gangsters sometimes employ Panzers because of the additional fear they generate among the general public.

Mutants have a more ambivalent place in Hydran society. They too are feared and despised, and most normal people cannot stand their twisted features. Since the genclans are even more prone to mutation than humans, many are refugees who have fled from the Towers. Mutants make up a high proportion of the indigent, and some have their own ghettos on the edges of the freezones. For all that, they are still welcomed by the genclans, albeit for a very sinister reason.

The genclans regard the mutants as potentially excellent sources of genetic material, and many mutants are abducted by genclan agents to be experimented on. The genclans will stop at nothing to unlock the secrets of their genetic matrixes, and many an unfortunate mutant has been dissected in the biolabs of the Towers. All of this has given Hydra an unfortunate reputation among mutants in the know, and most prefer to pass the city by and make their way to Kimera. Those who remain behind are either ignorant of their danger or too poor or weak to leave the city. Many genclan members who begin to mutate flee the city as soon as the stigmata of mutation begin to show.

THE SUBRACES

The subraces were created long ago by House Anthor, who modified human genetic matrixes to create entirely new breeds of humanity. The Anthorians gave them their freedom ages ago, no one is quite sure why, and now their descendants form a significant percentage of the occupants of the city. Each subrace is basically humanoid, with its own strengths and weaknesses. They normally form very close-knit communities within the freezones, with their own Guilds and ghettos. Many have found their way to other insulas where they have become bondsmen in the normal fashion.

BRUTES

Brutes are massive, hairless humanoids 2.5 to 3 meters high. They weigh over two hundred kilos, all of it muscle. They are enormously strong and hardy and were bred for physical labor. They have deep resonant voices and speak slowly with the maximum consideration of their words. They are very docile creatures and surprisingly gentle, given their power. This was almost certainly a deliberate trait given to them by their creators since, after all, no one would care to work or dwell alongside a Brute if it were bad-tempered, sullen or prone to outbursts of rage. Brutes are to be found working in foundries, factories and on the docks - wherever their enormous strength is required. They think nothing of working from dawn till dark without pause. Brutes are the favored employees of many because they are patient, diligent and hard-working.





Brutes are proverbially slow-witted, with huge appetites for food and drink. They can consume enormous quantities of both and only become more patient and reasonable. Wherever they dwell, they are ruled by a council of the eldest, and most experienced, who can pass judgment on any member of the community and make decisions that bind all. The greatest punishment they can inflict is a period of ostracism. This means none of the punished Brute's fellows, friends and family will talk to it. For such social creatures as Brutes, this can be a terrible experience. Normally, when they are allowed to rejoin society, they have learned their lesson and rarely repeat their crime.

For all their niceness there is a dark side to Brute nature. They were designed so that in times of war, they could be transformed into deadly soldiers. By injecting a Brute with certain hormones, you can begin a terrifying and irrevocable transformation. Their skin thickens and hardens into a carapace of armor. Spikes protrude from their arms and knuckles. Their eyes grow red, and their lips draw back from their mouths, revealing their long sharp teeth. They also become sterile and have no possibility of breeding. This physical transformation is matched by a mental one. The Brute becomes angry, short-tempered and prone to berserk rages. When in such black moods, they are terrifying foes, immune to pain, strong enough to bend durralloy; brave beyond all reason.

Once made, this transformation is irrevocable. The Brute cannot go back to being what it once was. It is stuck in this form, with all its concomitant mental disadvantages. Such Brutes are shunned by their own community, and often they drift into the lonely life of the freelance mercenary. Many drink to dull the pain of losing the peace and sense of harmony they once knew. This does nothing to improve their tempers.

Because of this, few Brutes willingly volunteer to become soldiers. Only in times of direst threat will a mass of Brutes willingly allow themselves to be transformed. Normally only those already ostracized by their community would even consider it.

Of course, freelance mercenary recruiters hang around the Brute communities looking for just such isolated individuals. They are only too willing to stand the lonely Brute a drink and outline the glamorous life of a warrior. Many young Brutes are led astray in just this manner.

FLYERS

Flyers have long ago realized man's ancient dream, to fly under their own power. They are a beautiful people with distinct hawk-like features, lithe bodies and an eerie grace. Huge bird-like wings sprout from their backs carrying them through the clouds like eagles. Their eyesight is phenomenal and their reflexes amazing.

In some ways Flyers have paid a terrible price for their gifts. Their metabolisms operate much faster than normal humans, and their lives are consequently shorter. On average most don't live much past thirty, and a Flyer of fifty is considered an ancient by his people. Their bones are hollow, to decrease the weight they must lift, and this leaves them much more vulnerable than normal people to injury, as well as somewhat weaker.

By nature, Flyers are a proud and solitary folk. They stand aloof in company and rarely speak unless spoken to. They are rarely happy on the ground but love to soar above the rooftops. When on the wing, they will often perform dazzling aerobatics for the pure joy of it. Only in the sky are they truly alive. A Flyer who loses his wings soon pines away and dies. For all their solitary nature, Flyers work very well in teams and can show considerable discipline when they need to. It is part of their heritage.

In ancient times, Flyers were used as couriers and scouts by the Legions of House Anthor. They carried messages to the furthest reaches of the city and beyond. In times of war they would spy out military targets and then, if ordered, drop bombs and grenades on them. In times of war, they still perform this function for those who will hire them.

These days most Flyers can be found around the harbors where they dwell in great towers looking out on the city. They make their living carrying messages to and from arriving ships, and bearing urgent packages between ship and shore. Many are employed by merchants to spy out arriving clippers and find out about their cargo. There are times when even a few minutes' warning can give a merchant the advantage over his fellows, allowing him to communicate with the shipping agent and purchase all of an incoming vessel's cargo. When needed, flyers act as couriers between the Towers. Groups of flyers act as bearers for aerial palanquins, carrying leather chairs suspended from the ends of ropes about the city. From these chairs those wealthy enough to afford this service enjoy spectacular views of the area below them.

There are many Flyer mercenary companies who serve the genclans. They will serve outlanders too, but their first loyalty is always to the city of their birth.

DRUDGES

Drudges are among the lowest of the low in Hydra. They were bred to work and perform menial labor, and to enjoy it. They are never happier than when sweeping up the streets, mucking out stables or performing any humble task. Every freezone in the city has a community of Drudges who earn their living scouring the streets off garbage and selling what they can find. They were bred to be able to eat any biological waste products and to thrive on them. They are an uncommonly energetic folk, and will work for a pittance and perform any task set to them with energy. They are brought up to feel grateful to their betters, and the habit of deference appears to have been bred into them. They are always respectful to outsiders who show an interest in them. Drudge females usually give birth to large litters; this combined with the Drudge ability to eat almost anything, means the population is always growing. However, in times of great hardship, when the population grows too great, the females become sterile. The males go mad, running amok, killing and eating the young. Afterwards they can remember nothing and feel no guilt. This was apparently a fail-safe built in by the Anthorians to prevent the city becoming overrun with Drudges.

Drudges are small, thin and hairless. They have thin faces dominated by large eyes and powerful jaws. They have multiple rows of broad teeth capable of grinding down almost anything they chew. They have a dismal world-weary aspect and never look happy, even when playing as children. They are usually garbed in dirty clothes and carry buckets or sacks in which to store the leavings they find.

Drudges normally live in small shanties at the edge of town. Next to the shanties there is usually a huge garbage heap where Drudges can work through the trash they have collected at their leisure, sorting out the stuff that can be cleaned up and resold from the stuff that will need to be taken to a recycler and broken down. A Drudge community is anarchic but surprisingly peaceful. There are no leaders but there is little crime since Drudges are very law-abiding.

Drudges are despised by most of the community, who see them as filthy, spineless weaklings willing to undercut anyone for a job. Humans in particular hate them but they are protected by an Edict of the gencians, who obviously enjoy having a source of cheap labor close at hand. And it does humans little good to try violence on Drudges because although normally docile, when attacked they fight with the fury of a cornered rat. And lastly they are tolerated simply because they will perform those menial tasks that no one else will do.

Sometimes Drudges go bad and become ghouls. There appears to be no reason for this. It may be that the accumulated toxins and mutagens they have picked up from their environment or from their food triggers the change. It seems to be a flaw in their genetic makeup that taps into the same primal instinct that makes the males run amok. Or it may be that the ancient Anthorians planned to be able to transform Drudges into terror troopers in the same way that Brutes can be transformed into berserkers. The reasons do not matter, the results do.

Ghouls undergo a horrifying transformation. Their eyes glitter with malice, and they are overcome by a constant and terrible hunger. They become violent and cunning. They gather in packs and will eat anything that crosses their path in a cannibalistic frenzy. Their favorite food is meat, preferably human meat. Gorged on this high protein diet, ghouls become much bigger and stronger than Drudges. Though they are of course hunted down relentlessly by the communities on which they prey, bands of them still terrorize the more run-down areas of the city.

LURKS

Lurks are outsiders and renegades. They seem to be an experiment that went wrong. They are related to Drudges, to whom they bear a superficial resemblance, but are much faster, sharper and more cunning. They have long arms and can lope along on all four limbs with considerable speed and agility.

They have an excellent sense of smell, and their huge eyes allow them to see in the dark. Their feet are as dexterous as their hands. They can climb like spiders, finding hand and foot-holds where few would believe any could exist. They are insatiably curious, insatiably larcenous and amazingly cowardly and lazy. They prefer stealing to working, and stealthy theft to violent confrontation.

Lurks dwell in abandoned buildings, in the sewers, or in any other place where they can live unmolested and far from prying eyes. They spend most of their day asleep and emerge from their hiding places by night to steal food and "pretties". They like to make off with bright and shiny objects, regardless of worth. They are insatiably curious and constantly explore the world around them, particularly the dark places beneath the city. They usually have an incredible knowledge of the maze of sewers and tunnels beneath the part of the city in which they live.

Since they are not violent, they are regarded as a nuisance by most folk in the city, but not hated in the way ghouls are, though they are still hunted down like vermin whenever they are found. Few people like the thought of a Lurk creeping through their home by night, sniffing at their stuff.

Lurks themselves have a society based on strength and fear, in which the bigger and more violent Lurks bully the others into obeying their orders and carrying out their thefts.

A few Lurks leave the city and put their larcenous skills to work as adventurers. In their later years, they usually return to their home communities, armed to the teeth, and rule the roost by intimidation, threatening to get their "big pals" to pay their followers a visit.

Some Lurks have been captured by the Spydrans and reprogrammed to be assassins. They have been uncommonly successful; their small size allows them to get into airvents and other places too narrow for humans, and thus to infiltrate some very secure places. Strangely though, not even Spydran psycho-conditioning seems able to overcome the Lurks' thieving instincts and many have given themselves away by pausing to grab some shining "pretty, pretty".

VIRUS DETECTION PROGRAM: ON	INITIATE SEQUENCE	GUNSTBERG OVERDRIVE	CORTICO QUASI-DEGRADATION
FLOW LINK QUASI PROTOCOL: INITIATED	NON-BIOLOGICAL RAW MATERIAL:	MICRO-OPTICAL MODULATOR: ON	GANGLIAL ELECTRO-IMPLANT
FILE SUB-PROTOL: GENCLAN	INTERNAL DATA CORRUPTION:	SILICONE SYNAPTIC SIMULATOR	SMART CHIP INSTALLED
NANOMECHANICAL INTERFACE:	LINGUISTIC MARKUP DIRECTORY	DYSFUNCTION	METHANE IMPULSE CATHETER
VALIDATE SIMULATION	MOLECULAR BINARY:	MEGAPULSE CHANNEL ON	OCCIPITAL FLOW MODULATION: SINE

CHARACTERS

LOGIN:	SUB system COORDINATES	SEROTONERGIC OVERLOAD	BIOFEEDBACK MATRIX: XO
PASSWORD:	X1:477.27.8 X2:566.57.2	AMYGDALPTIC OVERWRITE	BINARY NANOBOT PRESENT
ACCESS GRANTED	Y1:642.42.4 Y2:388.01.2	SMART CHIP INSTALLED	GENMATRIX SCANNER ENABLED
SECURITY CLEARANCE LEVEL:	Z2:90.09.9 Z1:31.47.3	BIOMECH AUGMENTATION:	PATTERN RECOGNIZER NULL:
EXCESS GENETIC VARIATION:	ABBERANT CHROMA LEVELS:	NANOOCCIPITAL DRIVER	INFODUMP INITIATING

As soon as Roz opened his eyes, he wished he hadn't. His head ached, and he had the worst hangover he had ever experienced. This was quite a feat, given the number and quality of hangovers Roz had endured in his thirty-five years on the planet. This hangover was so bad that he couldn't even move his limbs. They felt like they were strapped into place.

Looking up at the ceiling Roz realized that he did not know this place. This was hardly an unusual experience either. Roz had just arrived back in Hydra last night, after a long sea voyage from Port Stellaris. Before that he had spent two months on Konvoy Guard duty, riding in a spidertank, escorting House Meleus goods to market in Janus. His credits had been burning a hole in his pocket and he had dived into the first bar he saw near Madman's Dock.

He had very vague memories of the spree that followed, of heading deeper and deeper into the dark and depraved areas of the freeport in search of wine, women and rootweed. He could only just remember getting separated from the rest of the lads and ending up in a dingy bar near the White Water Cross. The weasel-faced inhabitants had made him more than a little uneasy, and his last drink had tasted kind of funny...

He looked around him, expecting to see the familiar knickknacks of some bar girl's room. They were not there. Instead there was all manner of strange organic machinery, gurgling in a most unusual fashion. In translucent chitin jars around the room, he could see huge vaguely humanoid shapes encased in horny cocoons. He tried to rise to get a better view and realized that he was actually strapped down. There was no way at the moment that he could move his limbs.

He turned his head to the right and saw something that looked strangely like the handpiece of his carapace armor on a nearby table. He twisted his wrist and rubbed his right hand against his leg. He felt normal skin scrape against the roughness of chitin. No doubt about it. That was part of his armor.

What was going on here? Was someone trying to flay him a bit at a time, starting with his armor? He had heard of stranger things happening in the nastier parts of Hydra. He cursed himself for his folly in letting himself get separated from his squad mates. Just for something to do, he tried an experimental shout for help.

He heard a door dilate. The faint gust of displaced air carried all sorts of ominous chemical odors to his nostrils. Suddenly a stranger's face was looking down at him. The man's features were oddly distorted as if his face hid many subdermal implants. His nose had been broken and badly set. Carapace armor covered the top of his head. He smiled showing a mouth full of huge, tombstone-like teeth.

"Good," he said in a pleasant baritone. "You're awake. I like to have someone to talk to when I'm performing my experiments. Of course, it can get a little odd when you're talking to the experiment."

"Where am I?" Roz asked.

"You know, if I were a betting man, and I could find someone silly enough to take the bet, I could make a lot of money. Nine out of ten subjects who wake up here ask that question first. Personally I find it rather alarming that people are so predictable."

"Where am I, you son of a ..."

"No need to be abusive. It won't do you any good. If you must know you're in House Stein. I am Frederik Stein and you are about to be the subject of my next experiment."

Roz felt suddenly afraid. House Stein was a name which his mother had used to frighten him when he was a child. Its owners were among the most warped of all the genclan people, and the genclans were not known for their sanity.

"House Stein?"

"Mmm, I can see you've heard of us. Don't worry, I won't hurt you...much. No, don't squirm, that was just my little joke. I like to see how people respond to it. You probably won't feel a thing."

"Probably?"

"I can't promise you anything, of course, but don't worry, you most likely won't die"

"Most likely?"

"Well, it wouldn't do me any good if you did, would it? You see all I want to do is make a few improvements to your genetic matrix. You'll be bigger, stronger, more savage. You should have a nice large claw on your right hand as well. That's why I took off your glove. I needed to inject the preparatory hormones. Of course, all your armor will have to come off eventually. To give you room to grow."

"You're not going to turn me into one of your monsters, you stunted little maniac!"





"I don't see how you're going to stop me," said Frederik Stein. "And by the way, I rather resent being called a maniac by someone who will soon be calling me master."

"In your dreams," Roz shouted, activating his fury glands. A sudden surge of berserk strength swept through his body, he flexed and snapped the restraining straps. Red madness crashed into his brain. Froth bubbled from his mouth as he rose upright, foaming at the mouth.

"Oh dear," murmured Frederik, "I knew I should have run you through the analysis jar."

It was the last thing he said in this life. Roz bounded upright, reached out and snapped his neck. Then filled with insane rage and self-confidence he headed for the door. He found himself in a darkened corridor; unable to think clearly, he took a right and ran, hoping and praying to his first ancestor that he would meet something living so he could kill it. He ran down the corridor for long minutes, till the fury drugs started to wear off and he felt his energy levels subside.

He paused to gather his breath. He felt much better now. One thing he would always say in favor of fury glands. They were great for clearing away hangovers. He noticed how dark it was so he slipped his nightsight goggles down over his eyes and studied his surroundings. The corridor stretched off as far as the eye could see. It was joined by many more corridors at intersections and crossroads. No one seemed to be about and there was no obvious exit. The air was filled with the roaring of what sounded like huge animals. From overhead came a strange gurgling, crashing noise, as the sea rolled above the ceiling.

In horror, he realized that he must be beneath the Tower of Monsters, in their fabled holding catacombs. It was quite possible that it was the sea he heard overhead. By all accounts the catacombs stretched out under the floor of the bay on which the Tower sat.

The folk in that dingy tavern must have kidnapped him and sold him to the Monster Makers as an experimental subject. He spat on the floor. Well, if ever he made it out of here alive, he would find the place and burn it to the ground. Of course, first he would have to find his way out.

Just then he noticed that several huge misshapen figures were emerging from a nearby chamber. One of them seemed to catch his unfamiliar scent, and turned and roared at him. Roz was shaken. The creature was half again as tall as a man, with a head like a wastehound, and arms that ended in bony spikes. He had once seen a transformed Feran Beastwarrior and this creature bore a slight resemblance to it, except that no Beastwarrior ever looked so mangy, or had such a look of twisted madness in its eyes. Madness, and something else he couldn't quite identify.

Roz shuddered. If he had woken up ten minutes later, he might have ended up like this thing. Thank the ancestors, he had thought to spend some of the wages from his last trip getting those fury glands implanted. They had really saved his life. So at least, he thought, not liking the way the creatures were looking at him.

He turned and ran. Without weapons he did not fancy his chances against the creatures, even with the fury glands activated. There were just too many of them. Maybe if he could not escape, he would turn at bay and activate them again but right now, he needed his wits about him.

The monsters bellowed once more, he twisted his head and turned to see that they were in hot pursuit. More and more monsters poured out of other doorways, looking round and joining the hunt. Things were definitely not looking good.

Roz raced along as fast as his legs could carry him, hoping that the monster's awkward shambling gaits and huge size would slow them some. There were places where the roof became so low that they would have to stoop. That might compensate for the fact that their legs were much longer than his.

He rushed along, heart racing, turned another corridor, raced up a flight of stairs, then stopped baffled, and filled with dread. The corridor ended in a huge duralloy hatch. There was a warning sign, a stern admonishing against opening this door. A large metal wheel protruded from the door. It looked rusty and impossible to turn. The hatch looked as if it were rusted shut. He looked around desperately. There was no other way out. The bellowing of the monsters and the clumping of their heavy feet was coming closer.

There was nothing else for it. He was just going to have to open the hatch. He tried twisting the wheel but it refused to move. He pulled his goggles up from his forehead to mop his brow. He exerted more strength, to no avail. He thought he could hear heavy footfalls on the stair. He thought he could feel the gurgle of liquid through the door.

He braced a foot against the nearest wall and began to twist and pull with all his strength. The door moved. A small puddle formed around his feet. He realized that he had no idea what was behind the door. Perhaps it was the black, polluted waters of the bay. If he opened the door, perhaps he would drown.

The bellowing was close now. The monsters were on the stairs; there definitely was no other way out. Roz remembered the mad tormented eyes of the monsters. They had looked like those of beasts, like the eyes of creatures who could remember that they were once more than monsters, who knew they had lost their humanity and could do nothing about it. There had been infinite sorrow in those eyes along with the madness. He came to a decision. He knew he would rather die than end up like that.

He braced himself once more and threw all his strength into his efforts to open the door. The wheel moved, water spurted around him, then began to rush in. As the ancient lock gave way, the rush of the water helped him, pushing the hatch open from the outside. Grimly, he hung on to the door as the water raced past him, flooding the corridor. He heard the bellow of the monsters as they were pushed headlong down the stairs. It went dark.



He had no idea how long he held on as the water rushed past. It might have been seconds. It might have been minutes. Somebody somewhere must have shut a bulkhead door, sealing the corridor, for the water around him started to rise. He let himself float in the darkness. He took great lungfuls of air, as the rush of water slackened off and the corridor filled.

He knew that he would have to do something soon. If he stayed here much longer he would drown. Yet still he waited. Something kept him in place. It was the knowledge that he had no idea what lay beyond the door, how deep the water was above him. A short time ago, he had decided that he would rather drown than be a monster. Now that the prospect of drowning outweighed the alternative, he wasn't so sure.

He wondered what had happened to the monsters. Had they escaped from the sealed corridor, had they drowned or were they still somewhere near? The thought of one of those huge shapes coming at him out of the watery blackness filled him with fear. It was fear that decided him. He squeezed in one last lungfull of air, wished hopelessly that he had thought to buy symborg armor that would let him survive underwater, then kicked off.

He swam upwards through the black waters, certain that his lungs were about to collapse, that he was destined to die here. His swim seemed endless. He needed air so badly that he almost opened his mouth and took in water. It was all hopeless.

Then his head broke surface, and he found himself looking up at the night sky. Over the black waters of the bay loomed the twisted shape of the Tower of Monsters. He trod water for a moment, waiting to see if there were any signs of pursuit, but nothing about the Tower changed. There was no hue and cry, so he turned and swam away towards the distant shore, trying frantically to remember where that last tavern had been. He wanted to go in there and slaughter the whole lot of them. He wanted revenge more than he wanted a drink.

He considered this for a moment and came to a quick decision. Maybe he would stop for just one, first.

CHARACTER GENERATION

PLAYING A HYDRAN

Hydran culture is dominated by a single idea. The Hydrans see themselves as the cutting edge of evolution. Their city is a place in which the gene pool of humanity is purified and improved by a constant struggle for survival and control. The Hydrans do not see the world as a battlefield: they see it as a jungle in which there are predators and prey. The strong will survive. The weak will go to the wall.

To most Hydrans the whole world is a proving ground where people, genclans, nations and even whole races are constantly tested for their fitness to survive. On Waste World where resources are scarce, conditions are harsh and enemies are many, their point of view is easy to justify.

Hydrans are savage competitors, with each other and with the world. They constantly seek improvement, not just in themselves but in their families, their clans and those about them. They see it as the only way to ensure survival as resources become scarcer.

Anything can be a tool or a weapon. Physical exercise toughens the body. Symbionics and genetic surgery increase your personal effectiveness and so are to be embraced. Education improves the mind and makes it sharper for the coming battles. As the saying goes: the mind is the deadliest weapon.

This belief in constant improvement was embedded in Hydran society by the hyper-competitive ideologies of the original genclans and by the need to reconstruct their society after the Collapse. It helps to explain why Hydra is one of the few places where there have been definite advances in science since the Armageddon Wars. Where most of the people of Waste World see themselves as enfeebled dwarfs living in the shadow of their god-like ancestors, the Hydrans see themselves as the torchbearers of progress, and despise outsiders for their superstition and lack of faith in humanity.

There is some truth in Hydran prejudices. Most of the population of Waste World have been content to sit amid the ruins of ancient society, and live using the products of those autofacs that remain functioning. Most are superstitious. They dread progress and the spirit of scientific research. All around them is evidence of the destruction to which it leads. *Our ancestors were far wiser and far more powerful than we, and look at what they did*, sums up the most common attitude. Most people shun scientific research of any sort, and look on the Hydrans with suspicion because they do not.

Hydrans still have a few of the common prejudices against mutations and psionics, but they express them in peculiar ways. Mutants are seen as interesting sources of genetic material or flukes that may point the way towards new paths of development. Hydrans will dissect mutants in their experiments, but they will rarely attack them in the streets; as happens in other places. Psychers are revered as the beginning of a whole new strain of humanity. Many believe they represent the last, best hope of the human race. Most genclans are doing their best to create or recruit as many psychers as they can.

The only thing the Hydrans truly hate and fear is machine intelligence. They hate it because they see it as unnatural. They fear it because they suspect they may have encountered a more efficient competitor than themselves.

This hatred and fear expresses itself in odd ways. Hydrans are suspicious of any machine that possesses a positronic brain, or artificial intelligence. Their justification for their prejudice is that machines proved unreliable in the past and may do so again. They try to rely only on themselves and the organic technologies that they have developed and that have proven so successful in their city's growth. There may also be an element of sour grapes in their attitude, since this is a technology they do not understand and could not recreate if they wanted to.



In many ways Hydra is the most open civilization on Waste World. Anyone is welcome there, even robots. They may find themselves assaulted by mobs in the streets but they are not barred at the gates or harbors. The Hydrans believe that only by exposing themselves to new people and new ideas will they continue to adapt themselves. Paradoxically this has come about because Hydra is one of the most introverted societies on Waste World. Rather than go out and meet the world, most Hydrans prefer to let it come to them.

Of course, there are exceptions to this rule. Many young Hydrans travel widely, challenging themselves in new arenas and testing their beliefs against new points of view. Some gain a taste for adventure and never return to the bosom of their genclan. Others settle down in the Hydran colonies or other out-of-way places.

Hydrans prefer to deal with the open-minded and trade oriented Janusians rather than with the relatively closed and closed-minded folk of the Shogunate and Prometheus. Since the Prometheans refuse to deal directly with the Hydrans, the Janusians are necessary intermediaries anyway. The Hydrans and the Ikareans usually get along fairly well when they meet, although neither trusts the other at all. The genclans and the raider aristocrats understand each other all too well.

These, then, are all common factors about Hydrans that should be born in mind when trying to role-play them. They are progressive, open-minded and flexible but they are also used to the suspicion of others. They are intensely competitive and quite convinced of their own superiority. These are the basic assumptions that shape Hydran culture, but more important even than that, is the influence of your character's genclan. You should study the section of this sourcebook dealing with your genclan for more information.

HYDRAN CHARACTER TYPES

These character types represent a tiny fraction of all the Hydran characters you can chose to role-play. The information given below is intended only as guidelines. These sample characters are intended to give you some idea of what is possible. All the skills, powers etc. are merely suggestions and you should alter them as you see fit - to give you a character you like.

ASSASSIN

You are one of the feared and deadly assassins of House Spydra. You live to kill and are supremely well adapted for it. You are cold, calculating, amoral and merciless. Nothing will stand in your way to reach your target. You are utterly loyal to your clan, for that is the way you have been conditioned. Your superiors have but to speak a word and you will die. You would never dream of rebelling, would you?

Skills: Unarmed Combat, Martial Arts, Blade, Pistol, Rifle, Climbing, Dodge, Disguise, Escape Artist, Fast Talk, Savoire Faire, Stealth, Security Systems, Shadowing, Poison Lore, Torture.

Advantages: Immunity to Poison, Double-Jointed, Unique Background: Spydran.

Powers: Gift of Spydra, Mask of Spydra.

Equipment: Light Carapace Armor, selection of weapons.

Disadvantages: Obligation to House Spydra, Death-Command Conditioning.

BEASTHUNTER

You are one of those charged with hunting down Feran creations that have gone rogue. You receive a bounty on every beast you slay or bring back. You were not necessarily born into the genclan but you have shown that you have the nerve and the skill it takes to face the nastiest of monsters. Your prey has included everything from Beastwarriors, to Anthromophs, to strange monsters that have escaped from the biolabs. You have spent time in the Slime Jungles seeking out new genetic material. You have a great deal of autonomy and report directly to the Beastmasters themselves. Your scent and manner have been genesculpted to make you seem non-threatening to animals. You have been made immune to poisons.



You are a hard-bitten, cynical individual - self-reliant and tough. You have fought in more places than you care to remember and have brought back prey that many would have considered uncatchable. You live by your wits and your weapons. You wear the best armor you can afford, and carry a railgun for taking out your prey.

Skills: Armory, Spear (Shockspear), Thrown weapons, Rifle (Railgun), Heavy Weapons, Shadowing, Stealth, Streetwise, Tracking, Survival, Animal Lore, Lore (Slime Jungle).

Advantages: Animal Friendship, Hardy, Immunity To Poison.

Powers:

Equipment: Carapace Armor, Shockspear, Railgun.

Disadvantages: Personal Code of Honor.

BEASTMASTER

You are a psyker, and proud of it. You are one of the elite of your genclan, one of the true aristocracy of Hydra. You use your mental powers to control your genclan's lethal creations. You also possess considerable expertise in genesculpting and creating useful beasts. You were brought up around animals and like them, and they in turn like you. If truth be told you prefer animals to people. They are more predictable, pliant and a lot less trouble. Most Beastmasters have a reputation for being aloof, arrogant and distant. Let people think the same about you. You have no need of their good opinion.

Skills: Animal Lore, Courtier, Genesculpting, Pistol.

Advantages: Animal Friendship, Beast Speech, Unique Background: Fera.

Powers: Psyker, Beastmaster.

Equipment: Carapace Armor, Blaster Pistol.

Disadvantages: Personal Code of Honor.

BEASTWARRIOR

You are one of House Fera's mighty Beastwarriors. You have been gifted with the power to transform yourself into a towering animal-headed monster of enormous physical power and speed. You have been brought up from birth to lead House Fera's anthromorph troops into battle. Your great physical strength enables you to carry heavy weapons. Your formidable natural weapons serve you well in close combat. You are brave, ferocious and insanely loyal to your genclan. You are also proud, short-tempered and impulsive.

Skills: Unarmed Combat, Stealth, Climbing, Dodge, Survival, Heavy Weapon.

Advantages: Hardy, Unique Background (Beast Warrior).

Powers: Beastform.

Equipment: Carapace Armor, Heavy Weapon.

Disadvantages: Personal Code of Honor, Obligation (House Fera).



BIOWARRIOR

You have been rebuilt from the ground up to be a superior fighter. Symbiotic Grafts have been lavished on you by your genclan. You are a walking showcase of your genclan's technology. You have been trained to fight, and fight well, but your real superiority lies in your implants. You fight - confident in the knowledge that not even death is the end. If you lose limbs, you will get them back, and better. If you die in battle, you will be resurrected in a Lazarus Pod.

Skills: Unarmed Combat, Martial Arts, Dodge, Pistol, Rifle, Heavy Weapon, Survival.

Advantages: Unique Background: Meleus.

Powers: Gift of Meleus.

Equipment: At least 50% of points spent on symbiotic grafts, Carapace Armor, Boneblade, Blaster.

Disadvantages: Obligation to House Meleus.



BRUTE

You are huge and strong and gentle. Most people think you are slow-witted just because you like to take a long time to think things over. You enjoy heavy lifting and hard work. It gives you great pleasure to do things with your hands. You do what you're told by your employers because if you did not - it would reflect badly on all Brutes. You live for the respect of your friends and family, and will do almost anything to avoid losing it. You are very slow to anger, but when you do, you have a fierce and terrible temper.

Skills: Bludgeon.

Advantages: Fasthealing, Hardy.

Powers: Giant.

Equipment: -

Disadvantages: Obedience.

CALCULATOR

You belong to House Numera and have been proud of that fact since you were old enough to count. All your life you have been trained to think clearly, rigorously and logically, to analyze a situation like a living computer. In many ways your brain is as efficient as one of the Ancient's thinking machines, and you are sure that it is far more loyal to the cause of humanity. You are grateful to the genclan that trained you, and would do nothing to bring it into disrepute. You are equally loyal to those who employ your services.

Skills: Lore (your choice), Dodge, Courtier, Trade, Resistance, Scholar, Interrogate, Blade, Pistol.

Advantages: Eidetic Memory, Psychically Inert, Unique Background: Numera.

Powers: Gift of Numera, Sense Weakness.

Equipment: Carapace Armor, Sword, Autopistol.

Disadvantages: Obligation to House Numera.

COURTESAN

All your life you have been trained to give pleasure and to manipulate people while doing so. You are beautiful, amiable, and suave. You are used to being the center of attention wherever you are, and to getting your own way, subtly, without others ever realizing how you did it.

Skills: Unarmed Combat, Martial Arts, Dodge, Pain-Pleasure Conditioning, Play Instrument, Courtier, Disguise, Fast Talk, Savoir Faire, Trade.

Advantages: Beautiful/Handsome, Unique Background: Radostian.

Powers: Allure of Radost, Subjugation.

Equipment: Ecstasy Glands.

Disadvantages: Obligation to House Radost.

CYBERZOMBIE

You are one of the walking dead; virtually immortal unless killed by violence. You are one of the smarter zombies who serve the Corpse Lords as soldiers and bodyguards. As such you lead a privileged life and have access to the latest bionic systems. Many people find your rotting flesh, hideous stench and awful appearance repulsive, but you do not care. You have seen mortals come and go and you are still here, and may well be here forever, unless your brain rots and madness takes you. You find that you are coming to despise the living with their silly prejudices and their short and meaningless lives.

Skills: Rifle, Heavy Weapon.



Advantages: Unique Background: Luxor.

Powers: Gift of Luxor, Hideous Stench.

Equipment: Bionics, Rifle or Heavy Weapon.

Disadvantages: Obligation to House Luxor. Negative Appearance, Prejudiced Against.

DESTROYER

You are a Typhonian, one of the remaining descendants of the first Broken Tower. You are proud of your warrior heritage and are glad that your people have preserved it to the present day. This knowledge gives you strength to endure the sneers of those who are of less high and ancient lineage. Let them call you mongrel or renegade. You know this is not true. Sometimes your genclan's evil reputation works in your favor, giving pause to your enemies, and intimidating the weak. You despise the weak. They are there to be ruled by the strong, and you know that you are strong.

There are times when you feel bitterness against this ancient, evil city and its decadent inhabitants. There are times when it sours your mood and eats like a canker at your mind. Those are the times when a black rage descends upon you, and you feel the urge to kill.

Skills: Unarmed Combat, Martial Arts, Dodge, Blade, Pistol, Rifle, Survival, Intimidate, Leadership.

Advantages: Ambidextrous, Hardy, Unique Background: Typhon.

Powers: Gift of Typhon.

Equipment: Carapace Armor, Chainsword, Rifle.

Disadvantages: Obligation to House Typhon, Prejudiced Against.

FLYER

Your people were created by House Anthor, and you still look to them for leadership. You are grateful that they gave you the greatest of all gifts, the gift of flight. Those who have never soared on the winds cannot understand the joy it brings, and you feel pity for them.

You live to fly and have a morbid fear of being imprisoned or enclosed. You think you would rather die. You are very highly strung and sensitive.

Skills: Aerobatics, Dodge, Thrown Weapons.

Advantages: Catfall, Keen Eyes, Handsome/Beautiful, hyper Metabolism.

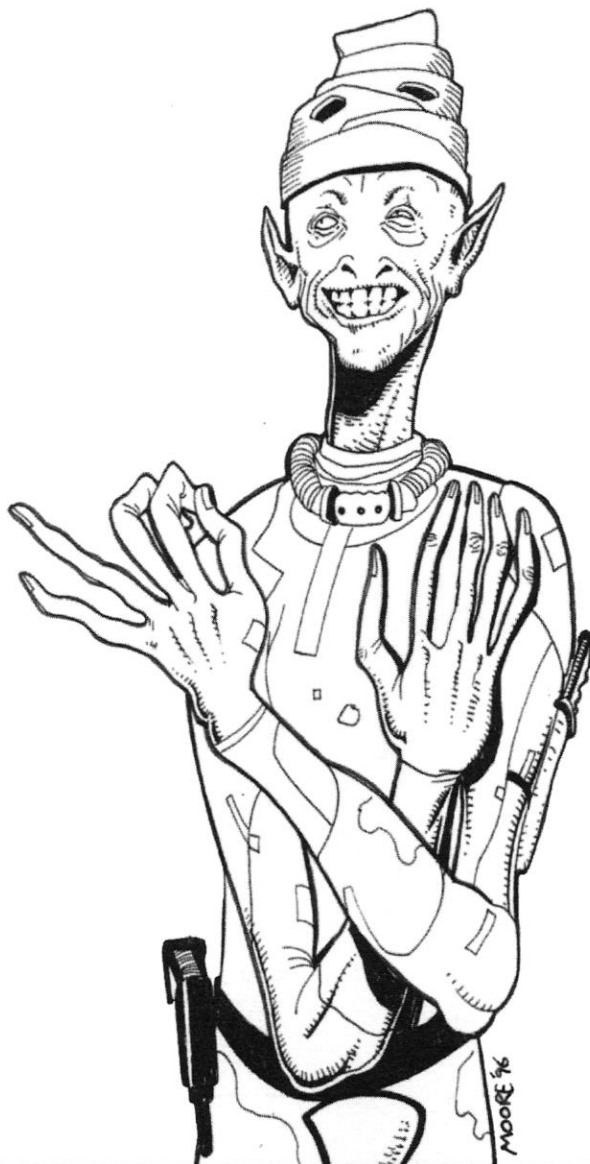
Powers: Evasion, Wings.

Equipment:-

Disadvantages: Brittle Bones, Phobia (being trapped or imprisoned).

LURK

You are small and fast and stealthy and you like pretty-pretties. Unlike most people with the *midget* disadvantage, you have long limbs and prehensile feet. You are fascinated by anything that glitters. You don't like to go hungry and see nothing wrong with helping yourself to food from those who have it when you don't. Unfortunately the big folk call this stealing, a concept you haven't quite got your head round yet. You also cannot understand this strange prejudice the bigger folk have against you, but you've learned to keep out of sight in case they kick you.



Skills: Climbing, Stealth, Pickpocket, Security Systems.

Advantages: Catfall, Double-jointed, Keen Hearing, Midget, Prehensile Feet.

Powers:-

Equipment:-

Disadvantages: Obsession (Stealing Things), Prejudiced Against.

MIND WITCH

You are a psyker born and bred into House Radost. You have all the skills of a courtesan coupled with your own psionic powers. As you have aged, your powers have grown, as has your status within the genclan. You are entrusted with many secret missions on behalf of House Radost.

Skills: Unarmed Combat, Martial Arts, Dodge, Pain-Pleasure Conditioning, Play Instrument, Courtier, Disguise, Fast Talk, Savoir Faire, Trade.



Advantages: Beautiful/Handsome, Unique Background: Radostian.

Powers: Allure of Radost, Subjugation, Psyche, Emotion Control, Domination, Illusion, Healing.

Equipment: Ecstasy Glands.

Disadvantages: Obligation to House Radost.

PLAGUE BRINGER

You were born in House Karkosa, the Tower of Plague. You have spent your life studying plagues and less virulent diseases. They are a morbid interest of yours for you often show their external symptoms and its nice to know exactly what it is you are carrying in your body. You know that people hate and fear you, and you think that this is foolish. Many times your Tower has saved this city. Many times you have saved individuals from horrible diseases only to see them recoil afterwards at the sight of your pustulent flesh. Now you don't expect gratitude, you expect to be paid handsomely for your services. If you're not, you can always give the client their disease back.

Skills: Unarmed Combat, Healing, Disease Lore.

Advantages: Unique Background: Karkosa.

Powers: Gift of Karkosa.

Equipment: First Aid Kit.

Disadvantages: Obligation to House Karkosa, Prejudiced Against, Negative Appearance.

THINKER

You are one of the ruling elite of House Anthor. Your whole life has been dedicated to the study of genesculpting, and you yourself have undergone many modifications to enable you to achieve your maximum potential. Many folk think you are unstable and insane, but fools always think that about genius. You know that you have been evolved over countless generations to have brilliant insights into the nature of life itself.

You are self-confident; assured that your great intelligence makes you the superior of all you encounter. You have your little foibles and eccentricities, but what great genius does not.

Skills: Courtier, Genesculpting, Scholar.

Advantages: Unique Background: Anthor.

Powers: Gift of Anthor.

Equipment: Carapace Armor.

Disadvantages: At least one mental disadvantage.

TRITON

You are an aquatic, one of the merfolk of House Triton. You are at home both above and below the surface of the waves and you are familiar with many secrets of the Deep. You are physically strong, and enormously resilient. You are loyal to your comrades. You have a deep appreciation of the wonders and terrors of your undersea world, and stand somewhat apart from those who can never share in it.

Skills: Spear, Dodge, Swimming, Lore (Undersea),

Advantages: Hardy, Innate Sense of Direction.

Powers: Gills, Mindspeech, Webbed Feet and Hands.

Equipment:

Disadvantages: Obligation to House Triton.

VALKAN WARRIOR

You are one of the elite mercenary warriors of House Valka. You were bred for battle and have spent your whole life training for combat. You live to fight and would willingly die in the service of your clan or in the execution of a contract. You are tough, honest, and fair in your everyday dealings, but will do whatever it takes to win in battle. You do not engage in senseless brawling. You are paid to fight.

Skills: Unarmed Combat, Martial Arts, Dodge, Blade, Rifle, Heavy Weapon, Survival, Stealth, Climbing, Leadership, Tactics.

Advantages: Hardy, Fasthealing, Unique Background: Valkan.

Powers: Gift of Valka, Evasion, Combat Reflexes.

Equipment: Carapace Armor, Sword, Autorifle, Fury Glands.

Disadvantages: Code of Honor.

VALKAN WEAPONMASTER

You are one of the best of the best, a warrior-wizard well schooled in the arts of battle. You use your psionic powers to augment your combat skills and heal your comrades after the fighting is through. In most ways you resemble other Valkan Warriors but, like all psychers, you can be somewhat eccentric. Your genclan tolerates this for it knows your true worth.

Skills: Unarmed Combat, Martial Arts, Dodge, Blade, Rifle, Survival, Stealth, Climbing, Leadership, Tactics.

Advantages: Hardy, Fasthealing, Unique Background: Valkan.

Powers: Gift of Valka, Evasion, Psyker, Weapon Master, Psi Blade, Healing.

Equipment: Carapace Armor, Sword, Autorifle.

Disadvantages: Code of Honor and one other mental disadvantage.

WASTELANDER SCOUT

You are part of the Diaspora, and have spent many years living in the wilderness far from the center of Hydran civilization. You were bred to resist the worst that this hideous environment has to throw at you. You have honed your skills in combat with the monsters and Scavengers of the Wastes, and are adroit at survival in that inhospitable land. Now you have returned to the cradle of your ancestors, to look upon the place where it all began. Other Hydrans regard you as an uncouth country bumpkin. Your manners are raw, but you speak the truth as you see it. You have no time for the sneering subtlety of these city dwellers.

Skills: Unarmed Combat, Martial Arts, Dodge, Survival, Navigation, Rifle, Blade, Lore (Toxic Wastes)

Advantages: Immunity to Mutation, Immunity to Poison, Immunity to Disease.

Powers: -

Equipment: Rifle, Sword, Carapace Armor with Symbisuit Attachment.

Disadvantages: Personal Code of Honor.

ZEKT RIDER

You are one of the airborne cavalry. You own your own zekt and fight for whoever will pay you. You live for the sensation of speed and the thrill of battle. There is nothing like looking down on a battlefield from the sky, and then sweeping down on your foes from a great height. You have been known to drop grenades but you prefer to charge into combat with your great bonelance. You are a proud warrior and you live by your own mercenary code.

Skills: Aerobatics, Ride (Zekt), Spear (Lance), Thrown weapons, Rifle.

Advantages: Hardy.

Powers: -

Equipment: Zekt, Light Carapace Armor, Deathlance, Autorifle.

Disadvantages: Personal Code of Honor.



UNIQUE BACKGROUNDS

Many of the special powers in this sourcebook have the *prerequisite* that you possess a unique background of belonging to a certain genclan. This implies that you possess the unique genetic matrixes of that genclan. Where this is the case, you simply cannot possess such an ability without the prerequisite. Normally the only way to have it is to be born into that particular genclan.

By the way, simply possessing the unique background of belonging to a genclan gives you no special claim on its resources. Your genclan will not ransom you or give you material aid the way, for example, a Shogunate Clan might do. Your genclan will help you, if you are engaged upon its business and possess the *obligation* disadvantage concerning it, but otherwise you are very much on your own. Your kin reckon that providing you with their gene codes and an education was help enough. It is now up to you to stand on your own two feet. If you leave your Tower or insula then best be wary.

All Hydran unique backgrounds cost five points.

ADOPTION

Usually your character cannot belong to more than one genclan. The only way round this is to have your character adopted by another genclan. During character creation, you can choose the advantage *adoption*. This means that you were born into one genclan and then adopted by another. This also means your character underwent cocooning and had the genetic matrixes of his new clan grafted on to his own.

It is up to you and your narrator to decide how this happened and where your true loyalties lie. The most normal case of adoption is for someone to belong to House Luxor and to another genclan as well. Of course, it is perfectly possible that you are a turncoat and your previous genclan has a grudge against you. This is good grounds for the *hunted* disadvantage.

Adoption costs an additional 5 points on top of the cost of the new unique background. It is extremely unlikely that you would be adopted by more than one genclan. If your Narrator allows this, he should make the cost of all your adoptions cumulative. (5 points for the first, 10 points for the second, 15 points for the third etc. This would mean that if you were adopted three times, the total cost of all your adoptions would be 30 points.) You should come up with a truly exceptional story to justify such a thing, and even then your Narrator is well within his rights to disallow it.

In play, adoption means undergoing genesculpting, see cocooning in the equipment section (pp xxx). When doing this you need to pay XP to get the unique background you wish and have the genetic codes spliced to your own. You also need to pay the XP cost for the adoption. This represents the additional difficulty of splicing the genclan's codes to your own.

Of course, first of all, you must convince your chosen genclan to adopt you. Genclans do NOT simply adopt strangers in return for money. They usually require that you perform long and difficult service to the genclan, and prove your loyalty to them many times over. After that, you usually must pass some form of entrance test. Then you need to survive the genesculpting.

NEW SKILLS**DEXTERITY SKILLS****DANCING****Type:** Normal

This is your talent for performing intricate and graceful dances that are impressive and pleasing to watch. While a rare skill on Avernus, some performers and Kitsune are highly adept at this art.

ESCAPE ARTIST**Type:** Hard

This indicates your ability to escape from bonds, slip ropes, and twist out of handcuffs.

PILOT, DIRIGIBLE**Type:** Normal**Slots:** Personal, Cruiser

This skill allows you to operate lighter-than-air vessels, including balloons, dirigibles and zeppelins.

PILOT, ORNITHOPTER**Type:** Normal**Slots:** per vehicle type

This skill allows you to operate suspensor air-going vessels, steered and maneuvered with wing-like or rotary systems, including the bio-suspensor vessels of Hydra. Since Hydran ornithopters are created in many and various ways, each has its own slot with this skill.

SAILOR**Type:** Normal**Slots:** per vehicle type

This skill tells you how good you are at performing all the tasks needed to pilot and maintain a vessel at sea. For example, on sailing ships you will not only know how to steer but how to operate sails.

INTELLIGENCE SKILLS**ANIMAL HANDLING****Type:** Normal**Slots:** per beast

This is your ability to train, rear and care for beasts.

ARTISTRY**Type:** Normal**Slots:** per art form

This is your skill in producing imaginative and/or attractive pieces of artwork in your chosen medium. Fine pieces are often salable.

COOKING**Type:** Easy

The ability to create an appetizing meal out of the resources you have on hand. This is a rare skill in Waste-World, but is highly valued by the aristocrats and leaders of the metrozones.

CRAFTSMANSHIP**Type:** Normal**Slots:** per craft

Your skill in creating useful and ornamental pieces associated with your craft, including blacksmithing, carpentry, glasswork, pottery or any number of other skills. Such pieces can be useful and are good avenues of income.

DEMOLITIONS**Type:** Hard

The knowledge and technique of effective explosive use, including demolition, minimizing or maximizing damage potential to an area, possibly while leaving the surroundings relatively unscathed, and the ability to defuse explosive devices.

DISEASE LORE**Type:** Normal.

You have studied many diseases and possess general knowledge about them. You are also skilled at identifying diseases from their symptoms and prescribing the appropriate treatment.





GENESCULPTING

Type: Hard.

You are skilled in the art of genetic manipulation of living subjects with biomorphic cocoons. Using this skill you can modify and augment their basic genetic patterns to give them new powers, abilities and disadvantages.

LORE (SCIENCE)

Type: Hard

Slots: per science

Each slot is an individual skill and shows your knowledge of a science, such as biology, physics, or chemistry.

PAIN-PLEASURE CONDITIONING

Type: Hard

Prerequisite: Unique Background: Radost. Gift of Subjugation.

Through a system similar to tantric lovemaking, you are skilled in the secret art of manipulating nerve clusters during and after sex to make your victim amenable to psycho-conditioning. Once they are asleep after the act, you use mantras and tantric nerve manipulations to implant various mental commands into their minds as they dream. This skill can also be used in conjunction with a *psychomachina* to condition people. For more on this subject see the section on **Psychoconditioning** (pp xxx).

SINGING

Type: Easy

Your ability to carry a pleasing tune, and please listeners with your vocal qualities.

TACTICS

Type: Normal

This military skill allows you to predict possible military actions, and identify the best plans and locations to attack or defend, including sites of potential ambush.

TORTURE

Type: Hard

Your talent for causing maximum pain with minimum damage, while also reducing the risk of accidental death. This skill is a favorite of many Stygians.

TRAPPING

Type: Normal

This skill allows you to create and set up traps (including booby-traps, snares and animal traps) - choosing which places are best to set them, and concealing them from view with effective camouflage.

NEW ADVANTAGES

EIDETIC MEMORY

You have a photographic memory and remember nearly everything you see with absolute clarity and recall. Of course, it doesn't help you notice or remember things you didn't see the first time around. **Cost: 10**

IRON GUT

You can quite literally eat, digest and derive nutrition from any organic material you eat, no matter how disgusting, rotted, mutated, diseased or irradiated it is, without harm. Poisoned foods still affect you however. **Cost: 10**

LUCK

You are amazingly lucky. For each level of luck you possess, you may re-roll one of your own die rolls once per session of play. If your group normally plays for three hours in the evening this is the period your luck covers. Re-rolls cannot be saved between sessions. If you do not use them during one play session, they are not carried over into another. However, you do start every session of play with your luck at its normal level. **Cost: 5 points per re-roll.**

EXPANDED AND REVISED COSTS FOR THE PET ADVANTAGE

The previous costs didn't accurately reflect the differences between the animals, or their sheer usefulness (especially of such beasts as the Dragon Tiger). To better reflect their abilities, create them using the same process as characters, divide the total point cost by 8, and round to the nearest 5. Here are some updated point costs for pets.

King Rat	5
Guard Dog	5
Deathbird	10
Saddle Reptar	10
Wastehound	10
Reptar Bat	15
Biohound	20
Robohound	20
Dragon Tiger	25

This cost does NOT include the Special Powers or Cybernetics. Special Powers, Cybernetics, Neurolinks and Ganglionic links that aren't common to ALL examples of that animal must be purchased using points at full price from your characters allocation of points.

NEW POWERS

CUMULATIVE LEVEL COSTS

Some of the new powers given below come with cumulative levels. This means the power costs the basic cost - at level zero. Any levels have their cost increased cumulatively just like psi powers. So, for example, if a power is x2 per level cumulative, and you want to buy 3 levels with it, then this will cost you 12 points in total, in addition to the basic cost of the power. Where a power, for example *quick reflexes*, has no basic costs given for level zero, you simply pay for the levels.

ACID SPRAY

This power enables you to emit a stream of acid that will corrode anything it comes into contact with. Acid spray does d6 damage to anything it hits. It will continue to eat away at its target round after round. Each round it does d6 damage. If you roll a 6 you can roll again and add. If you roll a 1, the acid dissipates its potency and stops working.



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This acid will eat away at armor. When you hit someone in armor, roll the d6. On a roll of 6, you eat away 2 AR of their armor, reducing it permanently. On a roll of 1, you inflict no damage and the acid dissipates. On any other result your target loses 1 AR permanently. Multiple hits with *acid spray* are cumulative, if you hit a target twice then he will take 2d6 per turn.

Your range with this power is STx5 meters. If your foe successfully dodges your attack and reduces your successes to zero, then you miss and the acid spray has no affect. Forcefields and psionic shields and walls stop this power completely. It has no affect on them.

You can use this power until you fumble when aiming it. When this happens you have run out of acid and must make a ST roll every hour. When you succeed in doing this, your body has regenerated enough acid to start using the power again. **Cost: 20.**

ALLURE

Prerequisite: Unique Background: House Radost

Your body produces a cloud of pheromones that cause mood alteration in any humans or Posthumans surrounding you. This clouds their judgment and makes them more malleable to your wishes. You can choose to modulate your emissions to cause anything from mild attraction to outright lust. Each level you possess of this power allows you to add +1 to reaction rolls by those made under the affect of this power. You can also use any levels of this power as a negative modifier to their resistance roll to mind-affecting psionic powers such as emotion control, domination or telepathy. Targets wearing rebreather masks, who are immune to poison or who have robotic bodies, are immune to the affects of this power. Toxin neutralizers will swiftly analyze this power and provide an antidote. The area of effect is normally within a 3 meter radius. This can be extended by +1 meter per level. **Cost: 10 points for the power at level zero, x2 points per level cumulative.**

BEASTFORM

Prerequisite: Unique Background: Feran Beastwarrior.

You can transform yourself into a towering human/animal hybrid almost three meters tall and weighing four or more times your normal weight. You will have a head like that of a hound, dragon tiger, bear, serpent or some other creature depending on your Beastform. You may well be covered in fur or scales if the creature your Beastform mimics has them. You will have claws and may have horns, fangs or other modifications. Your Beastform is immensely strong and resilient to damage. You may well have keen senses like darksight, or bloodhound scent.

This power, granted to the mighty Feran Beastwarriors, is related to *Mutarch Transformation*. Indeed, the Ferans devised the power by combining the genetic matrixes of animals and Mutarchs. Beastforms are more stable but less powerful than those of Mutarchs.



The exact powers and disadvantages possessed by a Beastwarrior are based on the form that you choose. You substitute the ST and DX characteristics and disadvantages of the Beastform for any you normally have. (Note: the effects of Giant are already figured in.) Reduce your character's IN by 1 while in Beastform. Your PW remains the same.

Your LF and MR are based on your Beastform's ST. If your ST is normally less than your Beastform's, you can increase your LF by twice the difference i.e., if your ST is normally +1, and your Beastform has ST +4 then you gain 6 LF in Beastform. Your MR would go up by 3.

The various Beastforms are:

Dragon Tiger: ST +4, DX +3, Claws, Fangs, Darksight, Giant, Negative Appearance: Ugly, Mute. **Cost: 80.**

White Bear: ST +5, DX +1, Berserk, Darksight, Giant, Negative Appearance: Ugly, Mute, Impaired Vision: Mild. **Cost: 75.**

Wastehound: ST +4, DX +2, Claws, Fangs, Darksight, Bloodhound Scent, Giant, Negative Appearance: Ugly, Mute. **Cost: 65.**

Serpent: ST +4, DX +1, Fangs, Darksight, Slither, Filtermouth and Eye Membranes, Giant, Negative Appearance: Ugly, Mute. **Cost: 50.**

You can add additional powers, that only work in your Beastform, for half the normal point cost rounded up. Any powers you possess in your normal form will also work in your Beastform.

In the case of Beastform, the mute disadvantage means that you are incapable of normal speech, only growling.



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To activate this power takes a full action during which you can do nothing else, not even dodge or parry. You must spend 1 LF to transform. Once activated it costs 1 LF per hour to remain in Beastform. While in Beastform your entire metabolism is working at incredible speed to power your new form, so you cannot recover LF in the normal way; only through drugs or psionic healing.

Once you transform back from Beastform, you are extremely drained, and cannot transform again, or regain LF, until you've had a good six hours rest. You cannot sleep and maintain Beastform so you will have to transform back to rest.

There is another possible penalty as well. Because of their strange bestial nature, people with this power are prone to regression. When this happens their animal nature overwhelms their human intellect, and they become like wild beasts.

For every 6 consecutive hours after the first spent in Beastform, you must make an IN roll, with a -3 penalty per additional 6 hour period spent in Beastform. If you fail this roll, then your animal nature comes to the fore; for the next six hours you will possess the *animal intelligence* disadvantage and be under the Narrator's control.

At the end of this period, you must make an IN roll. If you fail this roll, the beast is completely in control your character is now permanently an NC under the Narrator's control. The Narrator may give you a +3 positive modifier to this second IN roll, if you have friends present who are trying to talk you back to humanity or you are presented with a good reason for coming back. If you do return to normal you will automatically revert to human form. You will also **permanently** lose one point of IN due to the brain damage you have suffered. You will not be able to transform into beast form again for d6 days, or you will regress automatically.

BURROWING

You have large spade-like hands, and highly adapted arms and shoulders, allowing you to burrow through sand and loose soil at your full MR, literally swimming through the ground. **Cost: 10**

CENTAUROID

Your lower body has a 'body' of its own and four or six legs (not necessarily mammalian or horse like). Multiply your CC by 4, and you can act as a mount for other characters if desired. Add 6 to your BLF and double your BMR. Unfortunately your appearance is very distinctive, many pieces of equipment (especially armor) have to be tailored to your unique form; you'll find it very difficult to pilot any craft without special modifications, you can't climb ladders or ropes, and suffer a -3 penalty on all your Stealth rolls. **Cost: 15**

CLAW OF TYPHON

Prerequisite: Unique Background: Typhon.

You can cause an eerie black glow of destructive energy to appear around your right hand.

Simply by reaching out and touching someone with your naked right hand, you can cause a d10 of damage per point of ST. Using this power is a slot of the unarmed combat skill. When the Claw of Typhon is activated, you can parry weapons - even energy weapons like forceblades with your right hand without any of the usual penalties.

The dark aura of power emerges from your right hand and envelops any close combat weapon you are holding in it. You can add the extra damage created by the Claw of Typhon to any close combat damage caused by a weapon held in this hand. It also enables you to parry energy weapons, like forceblades, normally. You can only use the Claw of Typhon with physical weapons such as swords, axes and chainswords. It does not increase the damage of energy weapons such as forceblades or powerblades. If you fumble with the weapon you are holding in your right hand, then the Claw of Typhon will be deactivated.

Activating this power costs one LF. It lasts until you choose to deactivate, until you fumble when using it in combat, or after one minute, whichever comes first. Once the power becomes deactivated, you must spend another LF to reactivate it. **Cost: 15.**

CONCEALED NATURAL WEAPONS

In order to have this power you must first possess natural weapons such as horns, claws, large claws, spiked tail, fangs etc. When buying concealed natural weapons simply add 5 points to the cost of the power. This ensures that they retract in a way that cannot be noticed, except on very close examination. Of course, when they are in use, they are no longer concealed. **Cost: +5 points to the cost of your natural weapons.**

DAMAGE RESISTANCE

You have the ability to absorb huge amounts of damage and still keep coming. Each time you take damage from weapons or from falling, you can roll a d20 and add your levels with this power. Each success will let you ignore one LF of damage. **Cost: 10 points for the power at level zero, x2 point per level cumulative.**

ENHANCED NATURAL WEAPONS

This power is an augmentation of the fangs, horns, large claws and spiked tail powers. It gives you particularly potent examples of the power type. You can buy this power for each of the above. You must buy enhanced natural weapons separately for each power. Each level of enhanced natural weapons you purchase increases your damage multiplier with that specific power by +1.

You must buy this power separately for each power you wish to enhance. So for example, if you wished to possess horns and a spiked tail, and wished to enhance them both, you would have to buy it twice.

With Large Claws you have to buy this separately for each large claw you possess. You can buy different levels of this power with each natural weapon you possess. For example, you could have two levels of enhanced fangs, one large claw without enhancement, and one with. Any combination is possible as long as you pay the points. **Cost: x10 per level cumulative (this is the same as for characteristics).**



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EVASION

You possess a strange sixth sense about incoming attacks. You have an extraordinary facility for avoiding attacks. You can even avoid attacks that you weren't aware of, or when taken by surprise. This power also enables you to dodge superlatively well. The DX+3 limit that normally applies to the *dodge* skill does not apply to you. You can purchase the skill all the way up to +9 levels. **Cost: 10.**

GIFT OF ANTHOR

Prerequisite: Unique Background: Anthor

Your genetic code has been altered in such a way as to make easy - genesculpting performed on you. Whenever you undergo genesculpting, the person operating on you gets a +4 modifier on all their genesculpting rolls. This power does not count towards the number of powers you possess when it comes to making mutation rolls. **Cost: 5.**

GIFT OF FERA

Prerequisite: Unique Background: Fera

Your brain has been modified in such a way that you have an instinctive understanding of the way genesculpting works when applied to animals. You get +4 to any genesculpting rolls you make when your subject has the *animal intelligence* disadvantage. This power does not count towards the number of powers you possess when it comes to making mutation rolls. **Cost: 5.**

GIFT OF KARKOSA

Prerequisite: Unique Background: Karkosa, Negative Appearance.

Your body is a natural reservoir of germs and viruses, antibodies and plague cures. You suffer from constant symptoms of the diseases that churn within in you and which mar your skin with boils and pustules. You sweat constantly and are prone to sneezing and runny noses. People find your general appearance both frightening and repulsive and you get a -2 penalty to reaction rolls in addition to those you gain from negative appearance.

You do however have many advantages. You are totally immune to all diseases. You can cure diseases in others simply by laying your hands on them, and making a success roll using your level of this gift as a positive modifier. If you are successful then the person you touch will begin to recover from the disease within d6 hours. If you fail then the disease will run its course, and you cannot attempt to cure it again for another 24 hours.

Once you have been exposed to a disease, you can assimilate it into your body providing its *disease level* is not greater than your level with this gift. The disease costs its virulence level in XP to assimilate. If you do not have the XP to pay for this, then you can still assimilate the disease if you wish, and all your future XP must go to paying for it. You cannot assimilate another disease until this disease has been paid for.

If you choose, you can inflict any diseases you have assimilated by your simple presence, regardless of that disease's normal vector. Anyone within your level with this gift in meters will have to make a resistance roll to the disease of your choice. You can also inflict any disease you have assimilated on one target - simply by touching them. Once you have exposed a person to a disease, it will run through the normal incubation period and can be recovered from in the normal way. (See the section on diseases for more about this.) **Cost: 15** points for position of the gift at level zero, x3 per level cumulative. You must also pay points equal to the disease level of any diseases you have assimilated.

GIFT OF LUXOR

Prerequisite: Unique Background: Luxor, Negative Appearance.

The Corpse Lords of House Luxor are famed for granting a terrifying and loathsome form of immortality to their chosen people. You are one of the chosen. Your bloodstream has been infected with a modified form of the Nekroth virus that animates and preserves you. Your heart has ceased to beat, your lungs no longer draw breath, your internal organs have decomposed and changed into something else. You no longer age. You no longer need to eat or breath or sleep. You are immune to poison and mutation. You do not feel pain, save as a mild discomfort. Your limbs can be blasted away and it will not slow you down.

You need never check for shock or stunning or sudden death. Critical hits will still have some physical effect. If a limb is blown off, you will lose the limb, but nothing except a type 19+ critical hit to the head can kill you.

Of course there are some disadvantages. You cannot gain new powers through mutation. Any normal symbionics implanted into your body, after you gain this gift, will die. New limbs can be grafted to your body, but they must be taken from the animated zombies who serve the Corpse Lords or they will simply be useless, wither and die. The Corpse Lords will replace this free of charge, but you will still need to pay XP to buy off any *unusable limb* disadvantages you have gained.

You can add new mechanical bionic systems, and can suffer rejection syndrome in the normal way.

You must take the Negative Appearance disadvantage, the level is up to you. You could just look like a gray-skinned pallid individual who bleeds green when cut, or you could look like a shambling, rotting, animated corpse. Every time you take a critical hit, the marks of the wound will show. Ripped skin will reveal decomposing muscle. White bone will gleam through gouged flesh. Eventually your appearance will grow worse. Each time you take such a critical hit you must roll a d20. If the result is greater than the critical hit you took, nothing happens. If you fail, your level of negative appearance increases by one. Once you reach the third level nothing more will happen, although you should keep track off your wounds for your own sick pleasure. **Cost: 15.**

GIFT OF MELEUS

Prerequisite: Unique Background: Meleus

Over hundreds of generations your genclan has become uniquely adapted to the use of symbionics. Your genetic codes have been altered to enable you to acquire far more symbiotic grafts than the average human and to make the acquisition easier. Your symbionist gets a +4 modifier on all rolls when implanting symbiotic grafts, and there is no chance of warping. You get a +4 modifier to your rejection roll after the graft has been implanted. This power does not count towards the number of powers you possess when it comes to making mutation rolls. **Cost: 5.**

GIFT OF NUMERA

Prerequisite: Unique Background: House Numera

You are a living computer. Your brain works at astonishing speed and with incredible insight. Once per combat round, when you are about to make any d20 roll, you can choose to invoke this special power. Make a success roll using your levels with this power as a positive modifier. For every three successes you get a +1 modifier to the d20 roll you are about to make. Since you cannot use this power more than once during a combat round you could use it to augment your *initiative* roll or one attack roll, but not both.

Cost: 10 points for the power at level zero, x5 points per level cumulative.

GIFT OF SPYDRA

Prerequisite: Unique Background: Spydra

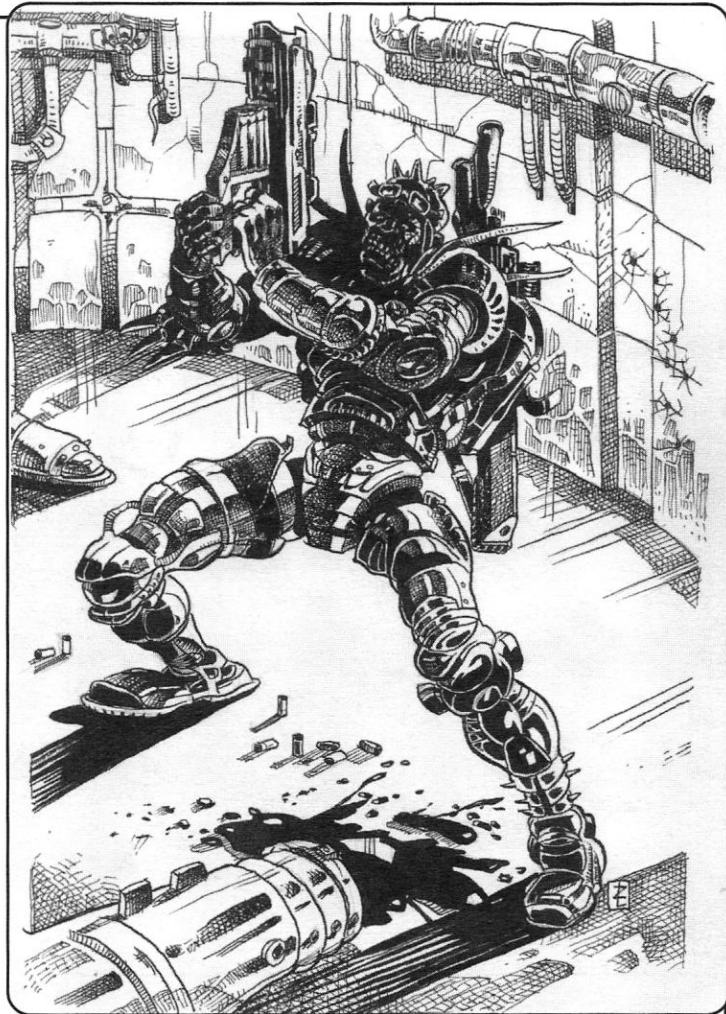
The folk of House Spydra have been warped to be ultimately stealthy - even to psionic powers. Their genetic code makes them invisible to, and untraceable by, psychic powers.

With this gift you cannot be spotted by *clairvoyance*, *precognition*, *psi sense* or *scanning* or any similar power. You leave no trace to *psychometry*. You are not immune to psi powers in general. You still take damage from psi powers and are still vulnerable to powers such as domination and illusion, as long as their wielders have line of sight to you. **Cost 5.**

GIFT OF SUBJUGATION

Prerequisite: Allure

Your body has glands that generate certain psychoactive chemicals. These are released in your bodily fluids and enhance the pleasure of love-making. They also have another more sinister purpose; they enable your body to act as a Psychomachina for the purposes of psycho-conditioning your victim - using pain-pleasure conditioning. The drugs you introduce into their system make them malleable and open to suggestions that can be implanted using pain-pleasure conditioning. **Cost: 10 for the power at level zero, x5 points per level, cumulative.**



GIFT OF VALKA

Prerequisite: Unique Background: Valkan.

With this gift you can understand any man-portable weapon, given time. If you pick up a weapon, handle it for a round and use this power, you can make an IN roll; if you are successful you gain the slot with the skill, or the skill itself needed to use the weapon. As soon as you receive some XP, these must be spent on purchasing the skill or slot. This power only works with weapons you can pick up, handle and inspect - not with vehicles, battlesuits etc. You cannot use the Gift again until you have paid off the XP for the latest skill you have gained. **Cost: 5.**

HOOVES

Your feet are hard, sharp hooves. Add 2 to your damage when you kick in unarmed combat. To use hooves properly you need the Hooves slot in the Unarmed Combat skill, but this is free with this power. Unfortunately hooves make it more difficult to walk with Stealth (-1 to all Stealth rolls on foot). When you possess hooves you cannot wear normal footwear. **Cost: 5**



HYPER METABOLISM

Your metabolism burns like a furnace, making you swift, but hyperactive. You also burn up your calories at an astronomic rate and need to spend at least 4 times as much on food (especially high protein foods like meat) just to keep going. You suffer four times the LF penalty for *starvation*.

However, you receive a +2 bonus to your Initiative, and increase your BMR by 1. **Cost: 10**

INCREASED CARRYING CAPACITY

This power simply increases your carrying capacity. For each level of the power you possess you can double your CC. It has no other affect. **Cost: x3 points per level cumulative.**

INVULNERABILITY

Your peculiar metabolism makes you partially immune to certain forms of damage. The categories: impact, energy, chemicals and psi. Impact weapons are things like bullets or maces that rely on the force of their impact to do damage. Energy weapons cover lasers, blasters and force-blades as well as flame-throwers. Chemicals include poisons, gases, napalm, acid etc. Psi powers cover the effect of psionic powers.

When attacked with these weapons you can still lose LF and you still suffer from shock or stunning. It is simply that you will not suffer the affect of any critical hit from them. You will not be killed or maimed or mutilated by them, although you can still be harmed in this way by weapons to which you are not immune.

It is up to you and your Narrator to decide how this power works. It might be that you simply ignore the affects of the weapon, or that it passes through you, or that it cuts you but your flesh knits again behind it, or an energy field flares around you and absorbs the damage.

Finally, you should note that there is no such thing as complete immunity to damage. Within each category that you are immune to, you should select some form of the attack to which you are vulnerable. For example, if you posses invulnerability to impact, you could choose to still be vulnerable to impact weapons made of silver. If you are invulnerable to energy weapons you might still take damage from fire. The thing to which you are vulnerable must be something that is quite commonly available to anybody who makes the effort to find it. Anyone with the Sense Weakness power or who manages to scan you with *medi sensor* will be able to find out what your weaknesses are. **Cost: 40 points per Immunity.**



LARGE CLAW

You have a particularly large and powerful claw. This does 1M+ST damage in close combat. You must buy this power once for each large claw you wish to possess, up to a maximum of one per limb. If you also have claws, the +2 damage bonus you get applies to each large claw you possess. **Cost: 10 per claw.**

MASK OF SPYDRA

Prerequisite: Unique Background: *Spydra*

Your features are incredibly malleable. The flesh of your face is putty-like. The muscles beneath the skin of your face are designed to pull it into new shapes. Your iris has special polychromic pigments enabling you to change your eye color at will. By using one action phase, and making a successful disguise roll, you can change your features to resemble those of anyone you have seen, or radically alter your features to make yourself unrecognizable when making a getaway.

When impersonating someone, if you fail the disguise roll your imposture will be obvious. Your successes with the disguise are applied as a negative modifier to anyone trying to see through it's perception roll. Of course, your height, build and voice will remain unchanged so you will have to find your own means of altering these. **Cost: 5.**

NATURAL DRIVER

Put you behind the wheel of any vehicle and you will instinctively know how to drive it. If you can make an IN roll, you acquire the skill or slot necessary to drive the vehicle. As soon as you receive some XP, these must be spent on purchasing the skill or slot you have just received. You cannot use this power again until you have paid off the XP for the latest skill you have gained. **Cost: 5.**

PATAGIA

You have large loose flaps of skin stretching up your sides from ankle to wrist. Jumping from a sufficient height, or at a sufficient speed, allows you to glide with some control. You can travel at up to 10 times your MR per round when gliding. You must lose at least one meter in altitude for every ten meters traveled. **Cost: 10**

PSI DISRUPTOR

Prerequisite: Psychically Inert.

There is something about your peculiar brain-pattern that causes great distress to any psyker who targets you with his powers. Any psyker who targets you with a power that affects your mind directly (domination, illusion, telepathy etc.) will not only fail in the attempt, automatically, but will immediately suffer d6 per level of the gift you possess. This power has no affect on those psi powers that do damage directly such as pyrokinesis, psionic blast, etc. **Cost: 10 per level.**

QUICK REFLEXES

You have swift reflexes that allow you to react swiftly to any threat of danger, and which often give you an advantage of your less quick-thinking brethren in combat. Each level of *quick reflexes* you possess adds 1 to your initiative roll. It also will let you add your level to a die roll in situations where a response action is called for, and when the Narrator deems appropriate. For example, you might be allowed to add your *quick reflexes* to a DX roll when a huge stone unexpectedly drops on you from the ceiling above. This ability does not add anything to your DX in combat or when dodging. **Cost: x3 points per level, cumulative.**

RANCID BREATH

This power operates exactly like Hideous Stench (*Waste World* pp 136) but takes the form of a cloud of stench that can be belched forth at will. This means the stench isn't always present, and therefore there isn't a -2 reaction roll penalty. **Cost: 20**

ROAR

You can bellow forth a powerful, deafening roar that can be heard up to a kilometer away. It affects all those within 10 meters of you, causing temporary deafness in the next combat round and startling them so much that they get a -d6 penalty on all their actions during their next action phase. You can combine use of this power with any other action. It costs 1 LF each time you use this power. Earplugs will prevent this power from having an affect. The penalties from this power are not cumulative. If someone is affected twice in the same round by roar (from two separate individuals say) then apply only the largest penalty. **Cost: 10**

SENSE WEAKNESS

This power gives you an uncanny ability to detect flaws within your opponents defenses. By taking an action phase to use this power you can make a *sense weakness* roll using your levels with this power as a positive modifier. Each success you get will reduce your target's AR by 1 for the rest of the combat.

There are limits on *sense weakness*. You may only make one attempt to *sense weakness* on any particular foe during any particular combat. If you fail you may not try again on the same foe for the rest of this combat. Only you will get the armor reduction bonus generated by *sense weakness*. Your *sense weakness* bonus does not carry over to new foes even if they are of the same type as someone whom you have successfully used the power on. Every target is unique in this respect. Every Swarm Warrior will have a slightly different weakness. The bonus does not carry over from combat to combat, so every time you enter a fight with a foe you will need to make a new *sense weakness* roll.

A success with this power will also tell you any flaws a foe may have in their invulnerability. **Cost: 10 points for the power at level zero, x2 points per level cumulative.**

SHOCK GENERATION

Within your body you can generate powerful electrical charges. In close combat, whenever you hit someone with your fist or feet, or a conductive metal weapon, the charge becomes part of your blow, and is delivered along with any normal damage the weapon does. On a successful hit you do an extra d6 electrical damage per level of the power. The damage caused by the charge (but not by any normal damage done by the fist or weapon) ignores any uninsulated metallic armor. You also gain an additional d6 bonus damage if your target is wet.

They are also very useful against Panzers and opponents with bionic systems. If you score a critical hit on a Panzer when using this power, it is automatically put into shock, unless it possesses *systemic autorepair*. If it possesses *systemic autorepair* the power has no special effect.

If you score a critical hit on a bionic limb when using this power, then the limb automatically shorts out and becomes useless until repaired.

Whenever you are grappled in close combat, you can electrocute your opponent, doing d6 per level damage each round until he lets go. To electrify the whole surface of your skin like this takes an enormous amount of your power and costs you 1 LF per d6 damage inflicted, each time you do it.

It costs 1 LF per level to activate this power. The effects last for one minute, until you fumble when attacking with the power, or until you deactivate the power, whichever comes sooner. Once deactivated you must spend the LF to activate the power again.

Despite your power, you can still take electrical damage yourself, if attacked with a shock spear, electrokinesis or by somebody else with this power.

In water this power acts like an explosive power with a radius of 3 meters +1 meter per level. Your body is the center of the explosive effect, but you take no damage. Anyone within the radius, and in contact with the water, takes d6 damage per level. Using the power this way is exhausting. You can use the power this way as your only attack in your action phase, and it costs 1 LF per use. **Cost: 10 points for the power at level zero, x5 points per level cumulative.**

SPIT POISON

You can spit forth a stream of contact poison up to 4 meters, affecting one target. If you fumble a use of this power - your poison sacks are empty and you must wait 24hrs before they are ready again. **Cost: 15 plus a cumulative cost of 1 per level of poison plus the following cost multiplier based on the type of poison: Blind: x2, Kill: x3, Phaze: x1, Snooze: x2, Staze: x2**

STARWINGS

These beautiful, insect-like, semi-translucent wings are normally kept folded in sheaths on their owner's back. By night, they can be unfurled to their full size, and used to fly. Perhaps since the power is partially psionic, and their owners believe that they will work only at night, they only work at night or in the dark. Under such conditions they work in all ways like normal wings. Of course, you could always pay the extra 10 points at some future date, and turn them into full fledged wings. **Cost: 10.**

SYMBORG

Your body exists in symbiosis with an alien entity that recycles its waste products and passes them on to you as food, water and air. You can continue to survive as long as you can find a liter of water and a mouthful of fresh food each month. The symborg spreads over your body like a second skin protecting you from radiation and poison. This power is more common among Wasteland animals than it is among humans. **Cost: 20.**

TENTACLE TONGUE

You have a long, thick, writhing prehensile tongue that can grasp things up to 1 meter away with your own ST. Unfortunately it looks disgusting and makes speech more difficult. You suffer a -2 penalty on all reaction rolls. If you have the Poison power, the saliva on your tongue can be poisonous as well. **Cost: 5**

WEBSPINNING

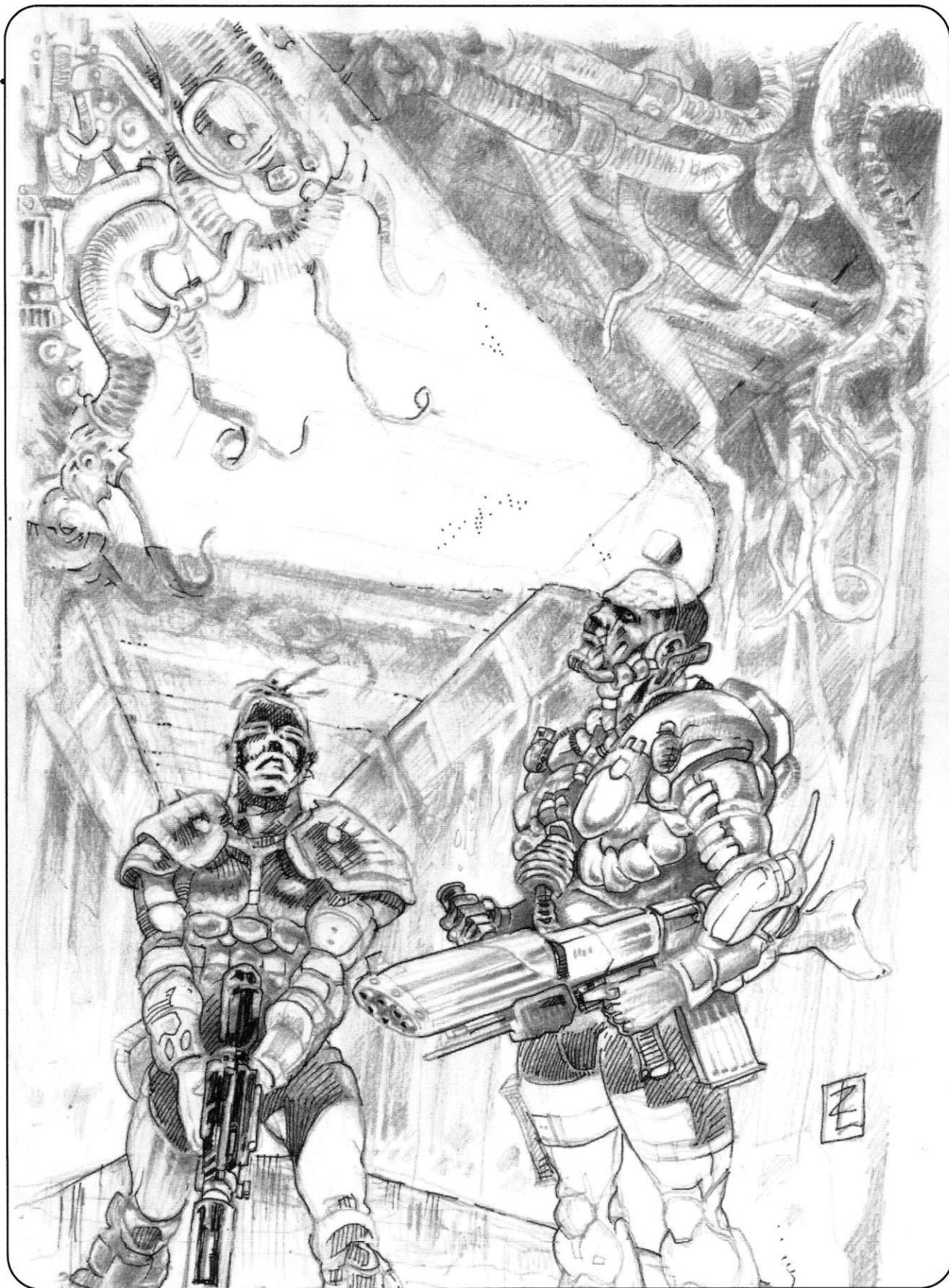
You can create light, ultra-strong webbing within your body - capable of entangling your foe within its sticky coils. The web spinning glands can be within your hands or even within your jaws. When you create a web it has a range and ST determined by your level with the power. You can throw your web for 10 meters per level.

In order to entangle someone, you must first make a to hit roll using your thrown weapons skill. If this is successful they are entangled in a net of sticky strands. It is as if they were grappled by someone with a ST equal to your level with the power. You can then choose to sever the web, leaving them entangled and you free to select another target with your web spinning, or you can choose to drag your entangled foe towards you. This will take a successful contest of strength between you and your foe. They will be drawn towards you 1 meter for every point greater than their roll you get. If you sever the web leaving a target entangled they will break free by making a ST roll using your levels with this power as a negative modifier. The web can be cut automatically by any unentangled person nearby with a sharp blade. This takes an action phase to do so.

Web spinning can be used to create handy ropes and snares. You can dissolve your own webs with your saliva.

Webs can be dodged or parried with forceblades or edged weapons. A successful dodge or parry will stop your foe from being entangled by your web when first thrown. By successful we mean if your foe's parry cancels out your successes entirely.

Cost: 10 points at level zero, x4 points per level cumulative.



NEW PSIONIC POWERS

ADAPTION (X3)

With this power you can instantly adapt yourself to hostile environments. Adaption means your body automatically reconfigures itself in such a manner that the prevailing environmental conditions will not harm you. When invoked, adaption will allow you to survive in airless space or deep below the sea. It will keep pressure or vacuum from harming you. Background radiation and Entropic fallout will have no affect. Ambient poisons will not affect you.

Whenever you are exposed to a hostile environment, make a success roll using your PL as a positive modifier. If you succeed then you suffer no ill affect from the environment. This power comes on automatically if you are conscious. It does not require an action. If you fail to adapt in this combat round you can try again next turn. If you already have other powers activated so that you are at the limited end of your PW, your Narrator will give you the option of canceling one of the powers so that you can activate adaption. Once adaption has taken affect, your body has adapted and the power need no longer be activated. As soon as the surrounding conditions return to normal, your body will return to normal also.

Adaption does not prevent damage from normal impact and energy weapons or from impact damage such as falling or crashing or from the use of psionic powers. These take effect too quickly for your body to adapt. It will protect you from poisons, and the pressures of the ocean depths or the vacuum of space. While active it will allow you to survive with food or water or air. Prolonged stays in an adapted form are to be avoided if possible since they place a great strain on the metabolism. Every day spent in an adapted form drains 1 LF. This cannot be recovered until the threat is passed and your body spends one day in its natural form.

At higher levels you can adapt other people to the environment, protecting them from its ill affects. In this case, they pay the LF for spending time in an adapted form for themselves. You only pay it for yourself.

Acolyte: No additional benefits.

Initiate: You can give any living organism you are touching with your hands the benefit of adaption, as well as yourself. The benefits last for as long as you are touching the person/s. The chain can be extended if a person you are touching is touching someone else. The chain can be extended up to a maximum of PL-3 people at one time.

Magister: You can give the benefit of adaption to any willing person you choose, within (PL-6)x5 meters. The benefits will last for as long as you keep the power activated, providing they do not stray out of the range of your power.

BEAST MASTER (X5)

First perfected by the Beast Masters of House Fera to control the creations of their genclan's symbiotic research, the use of this power has spread throughout Waste World. Certain primitive wanderers in the Wastes and Slime Jungles are among the greatest masters of this ability.

Description: You have the ability to not only communicate with animals but to force them to obey your will. This power enables you to communicate with any creature with the *animal intelligence* disadvantage and make it do what you want. It is essentially a combination of *mind-speech* and *domination* that works only on animals. Of course, virtually by definition, any creature that suffers from the *animal intelligence* disadvantage is not going to be able to understand complex concepts and commands, so you will be limited in what you can achieve using this power. Normally you will be limited to simple commands of one sentence - not exceeding ten words. (For example, come here or kill him! or find Killa and bring her to me. This last assumes that the creature knows who Killa is.) When using this power you forge a partial mindlink with the creature. This allows you to describe people or machines with mental pictures. You can visualize the instruction you are giving to your creature and communicate that message to it.

To dominate a beast, you must roll a d20 using your PL+PW as positive modifiers. The creature gets to resist using its PW as a positive modifier. If you are successful in your use of *beast master* then the creature will obey you as long as the power is active. You get a +2 modifier to your attempts at *beast master* if you possess the *animal friendship* advantage.

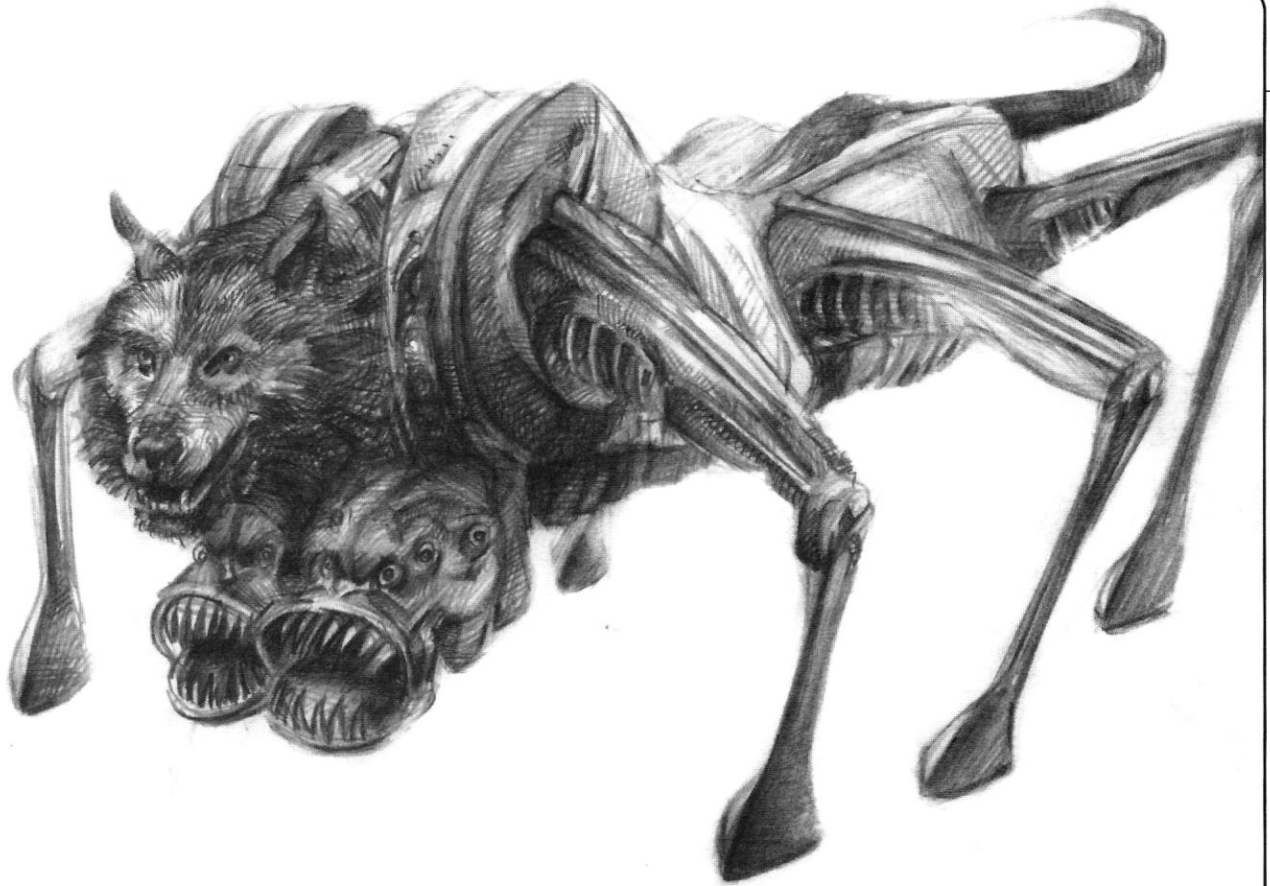
An important concept when using *beast master* is the LF limit. Most levels of ability allow you to control up to a limit in LF of creatures. If you wish to control a new creature that would bring this LF total up to exceed your limit, then you must drop control over one of the creatures you already dominate to allow you to do this.

Control is automatically lost when a creature passes within an area protected by a *psi-screen* or *psi-shield* or anything else that blocks psionic powers.

Acolyte: You can communicate and control any single creature or group of creatures with a combined LF of PLx10 or less within a range of PLx10 meters. This would enable you to control packs of creatures as long as the combined LF of the creatures you are trying to control does not exceed your limit. The creature gets a +1 modifier to its resistance roll for every 10 LF it possesses or every 10 LF worth of creatures you already control.

Any time you order a creature to do something that goes contrary to its instincts, or would result in its destruction, it automatically breaks free of your influence. If the creature goes beyond the range of your power it automatically breaks free of your influence and must be mastered again.





Initiate: You can communicate and control any single creature or group of creatures with a combined LF of PLx20 or less within a range of PLx20 meters. This would enable you to control packs of creatures as long as the combined LF of the creatures you are trying to control does not exceed your limit. Any time you order a creature to do something contrary to its natural instincts, or that would result in its destruction, the creature gets a chance to break free from your power. You must make a contest roll using your PW and PL as modifiers to your d20 roll. The creature uses its PW and gets a further +1 modifier for every 20 LF worth of creatures you have under control.

Once your domination is established it remains in effect even if the creature goes beyond the original range of the power. You can still communicate mentally over your link with the creature, even when it is beyond the range of your PW.

Magister: You can communicate and control any single creature or group of creatures with a combined LF of PLx30 or less within a range of PLx30 meters. This would enable you to control packs of creatures as long as the combined LF of the creatures you are trying to control does not exceed your limit. Even if you order a creature to do something contrary to its natural instincts, or that would result in its destruction, the creature must obey.

Once your domination is established it remains in effect even if the creature goes beyond the original range of the power. You can still communicate over your link with the creature, even when it is beyond the range of your PW. You can even use its senses to see what it is seeing and hear what it is hearing.

BINDING (X5)

When you use this power you cause glowing bonds to materialize out of thin air, and enwrap your chosen target preventing them from moving. To do this, you roll a d20 and add your PW and PL with binding. Your foe rolls a d20 and adds his DX plus the levels of any psi-shield or psi-screen he has plus his dodge skill. If your total is greater, then your chosen target is held entrapped by the bands of psionic energy. This is exactly like being grappled by someone with a ST equal to your PW+PL. While bound, your target cannot make gestures, use any weapons or perform any action requiring movement of any sort. The bonds must be dispelled or broken by main strength (i.e. making a ST roll). The bonds can be parted automatically by a single blow from a forceblade, or they can take a certain amount of damage from an external source before breaking. Range is 100 meters per PL of the power you possess.

Once you have used the power, you do not need to keep it active to maintain the bonds. You can attack another target with the power.

Acolyte: Bonds can take PLx2 damage before breaking. They have AR equal to your PL.

Initiate: Bonds can take PLx3 damage before breaking. They have AR equal to your PL.

Magister: Bonds can take PLx4 damage before breaking. They have AR equal to your PL.

CURSE (X4)

You can place a terrible curse upon anybody within line of sight. To do so you must roll a d20 and add your PL and PW. Your victim gets to roll a d20 and add his PW and the level of any psionic screen or psi shield that he has activated. If your roll is higher, then the curse takes effect. Once under the affect of your curse, they are blighted with bad luck and must subtract your PL with the power from any d20 roll they make, for as long as the curse takes affect. The effects of more than one curse are not cumulative, in such cases use the highest PL of the affecting curse.

Acolyte: The effects of the curse last one week or until dispelled.

Initiate: The effects of the curse last one month or until dispelled.

Magister: The effects of the curse last one year or until dispelled.

DEATHGAZE (X5)

From your eyes you can unleash beams of crackling black energy that disrupt the cellular structure of any single living thing you hit. Armor has no effect on these terrible beams although psi shields, psi screens and psionic shields will reduce the PL of your attack by one PL per level they have. If this reduces your PL to zero or less then you will do no damage.

For example, you use your PL 3 Deathgaze on a soldier doing 3d6 damage. If his buddy however has a level 2 psi screen and you attack him, you do only 1d6 damage. If the psi screen had been level 3 or more you would have done no damage.

You roll to hit using your PL as a positive modifier. The beams can be dodged, or parried using *bladeshield*, blocked or dispelled. If the defensive action reduces your successes to zero - you miss. Otherwise you hit and do damage. Your range is 100 meters per PL you possess and there is no modifier for firing at long range. You do d6 per PL damage.

GATEWAY (X5)

The most famous users of this power are the Wayfarers of House Venturæ in Hydra. They maintain a network of small waystations across the Wastes to facilitate the fast transportation of goods and people. These waystations are hidden colonies. Any non-Venturæ passing through them must be blindfolded to prevent them from seeing the inside - perhaps enabling them to open a gateway to them for raiders and marauders.

Description: You can open a hyper-spatial gateway between two points that will remain open for a short space of time. This resembles a brightly glowing archway with a shimmering surface. The final destination of the gateway is not visible through the arch so anyone using the gateway needs to trust you. Once the gate is open anyone can pass through it. Of course there are some limits to the creation of gateways. You cannot open a gateway through a psi-screen or psi-shield, or into any location protected by psi-screens or psi-shields. Certain substances, such as *adamant*, completely block gateways and no gateway can enter or leave a structure created from them. Certain natural phenomena can interfere with gateways disrupting their flow and even ensuring that you are taken to the wrong place altogether.

In addition to this, you need a very clear picture of your destination in your mind. In order to do this you must either be able to see your final destination with the naked eye or with clairvoyance or some other psi power, or you must be very familiar with it.

To *familiarize* yourself with a location, you must have physically visited it and memorized it. To do this you must make a successful IN roll using your PL as a positive modifier and you must spend one XP. This will fix the spot in your memory. If in future you need to *familiarize* yourself with another location and you don't have a spare XP, you can always *forget* a location you have already memorized. This will free up the XP you used to *familiarize* yourself with the location. It does mean however that in future, if you want to open a gateway to a location you have *forgotten* then you will need to refamiliarize yourself with it. This ability to memorize and forget locations represents a floating pool of locations with which your character is reasonably well acquainted.

When you first acquire the power, you can familiarize yourself with one permanent location. This does not cost you any XP and you cannot forget it. This represents your home base or some other location with which you are totally familiar.

To open a gate you need to activate the power and tell the Narrator your intended destination. If the Narrator deems it is possible to reach this place, he will make a success roll for you using your PW and PL as positive modifiers and applying any negative modifiers as he sees fit. If the roll succeeds, the gateway is created and may be used normally. If the roll is failed, you have strained yourself and may not attempt to create a gateway for another 24 hours. If the roll is fumbled then the gateway will lead to someplace completely random, which need not be within the range of your power and might be halfway across the world. If this happens you will have strained yourself, as described above, and will not be able to use the power again for another 24 hours. There is no way you can tell where a gate leads to until you pass through it.

Opening a gateway costs one point of PW to use at acolyte level, two points of PW to use at initiate level, and three points of PW to be used at magister level. This PW can be recovered as normal.

Acolyte: You can open a gateway between two points up to 1 kilometer x your PL apart. There is a -1 negative modifier to your gateway creation roll per kilometer after the first. Once open the gateway will stay open for a combat round per PL.

Initiate: You can open a gateway between two points up to 10 kilometers per PL apart. There is a -1 modifier to your gateway creation roll per 10 kilometers after the first. Once open the gateway will stay open for ten combat rounds per PL.

Magister: You can open a gateway between two points up to 100 kilometers per PL apart. There is a -1 modifier to your gateway creation roll per 100 kilometers after the first. Once open the gateway will stay open for one minute per PL.

GROWTH (X4)

The most famous users of this power are the folk of House Attilus; the Tower of Giants in Hydra. Over the years, however, it has become more common among the mutants of the Wastelands.

Description: You have the power to alter your size and mass. It enables you to grow to enormous sizes and to greatly increase your ST and hardihood. You can add 1 meter to your height for every level of growth you possess. Each additional meter will double your body weight. It will also add 1 to your ST. While the power is in effect all special characteristics are affected, adding 2 to your LF, 1 to your MR and one to your BLF for purposes of determining whether you are stunned or not.

Of course, this power has some disadvantages. When it is in use you may have some difficulty fitting inside rooms with low ceilings etc. You also become a far easier target. Your opponents get +1 to hit with ranged attacks for every level of this power that is in effect.

Using this power while wearing normal armor creates some problems, it can crush you as you grow. Hydran carapace armor will grow with you although there are some limits. Normal carapace armor can accommodate growth at up to *acolyte* level. To grow beyond this, the armor has to be specially created to expand beyond normal limits. This doubles the cost of armor that will grow up to *initiate* level and triples the cost of armor that will grow up to *magister* level.

Acolyte: In order to activate this power you must concentrate. You do a base damage of 1M with your bare hands or claws. You can also add 1M to the base damage you do with any close combat weapon or with natural weapons such as horns, tail or jaws.

Initiate: You no longer need to concentrate to activate the power. When using PL 4-6 you do a base damage of 2M with your bare hands or claws. When using PL 4-6 you can add 2M to the base damage of any close combat weapon although these have to be specially scaled and built for your use, or with any natural weapon. Specially scaled weapons cost five times as much, and weigh four times as much, as normal weapons.

Magister: You can activate this power without taking a *use psi* power action. This means you can perform any other action while activating this power. When using PL 7+ you do a base damage of 3M with your bare hands. When using PL 7+ you can add 3M to the base damage of any close combat weapon, although these have to be specially scaled and built for your use, or with any natural weapon. Specially scaled weapons cost ten times as much and weigh fifteen times as much as normal weapons. Naturally they can be a pain to carry around before you change.

HYDROMANCY (X4)

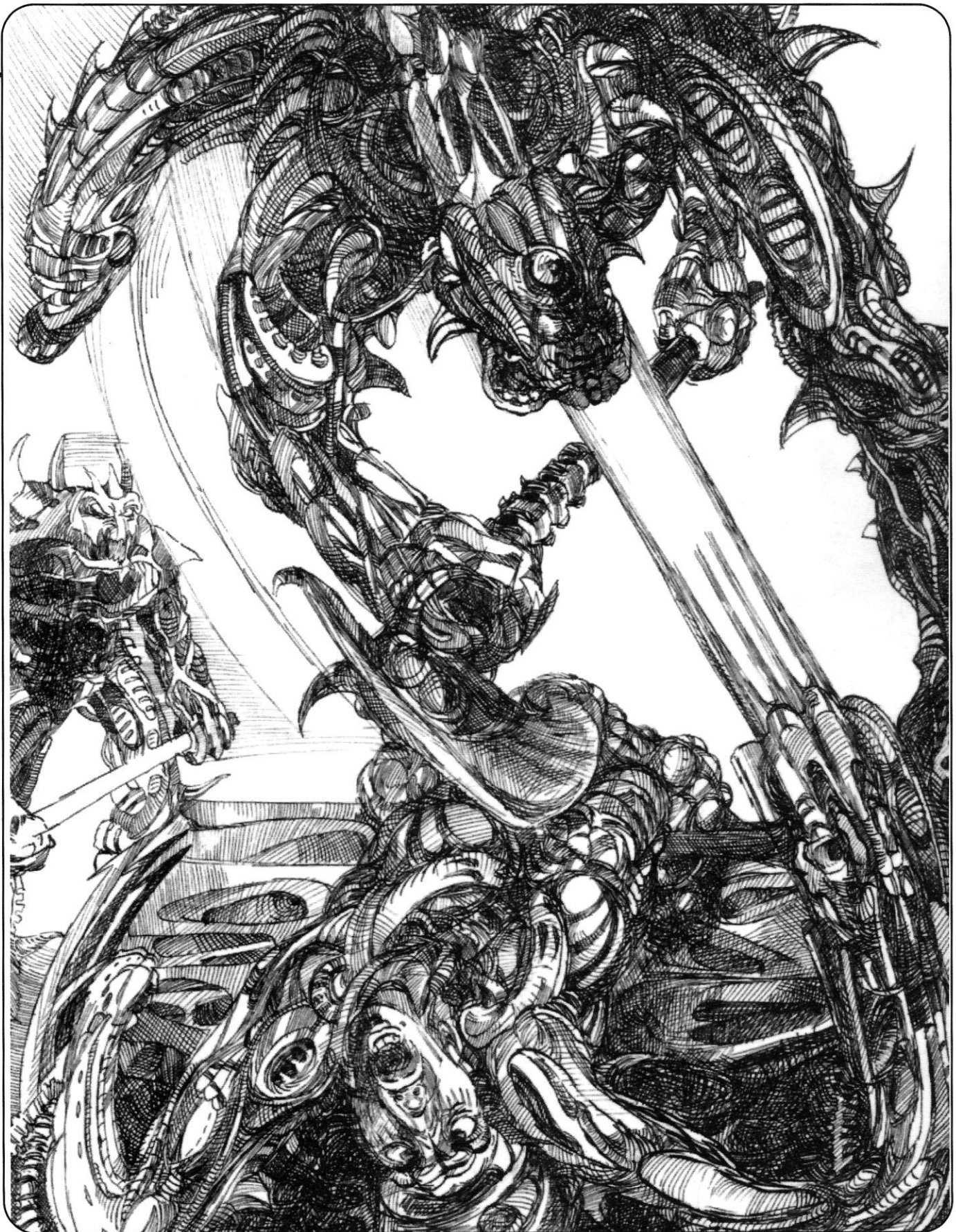
Hydromancy is the ability to manipulate large amounts of water or other liquids or semi-liquids like sludge or sewage, shaping it by the use of energies akin to telekinesis and animating it to your will. This power was originally developed by the Hydromancers of House Triton and is quite rare in the arid wastes beyond the Slime Jungles. In order for this power to be used, large quantities of standing water need to be present. (At least the size of a small swimming pool.)

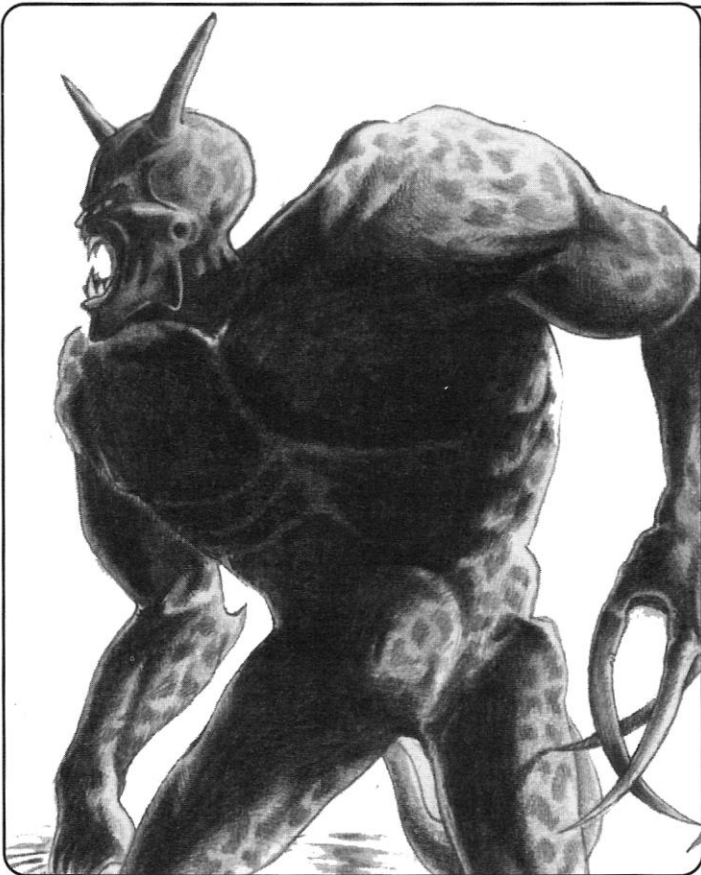
Hydromancy can be used in many different ways. It can be used to set up a current that will propel you through the water at astonishing speeds or drive large vessels at greater than normal speeds. It can be used to shape water into jets and spouts for attack purposes. You can lift and manipulate anything in, or on, the water as if you possessed the same level of telekinesis that you have hydrokinesis. You can cause water jets to rise from the water and spray a target doing d6 damage per PL. To hit, you use your PL as a positive modifier. Your target can dodge normally.

You can also use it to purify contaminated water. You can purify 10 liters of water per level per combat round when using the power in this way.

Acolyte: You can set up a current that will carry you and others through the liquid. This will add your PLx1 to your swimming MR. If used to hinder someone pursuing you, it will drive them back at a similar speed. You can add your PLx3 KPH to the movement speed of ships up to the size of a junkboat. Anything larger will be too heavy to be affected. You can fire waterjets from any pool or body of standing water within PLx10 meters to a range of PLx10 away from the pool.

Initiate: You can set up a current that will carry you, and others around you, through the liquid adding your PLx2 to your swimming speed. You can add your PLx5 KPH to the speeds of junkboats or smaller type vehicles. You can add your PLx1 KPH to the speed of larger vessels. You can fire waterjets from any pool or body of standing water within PLx30 meters to a range of PLx30 away from the pool.





Magister: You can set up a current that will carry you and others around you through the liquid adding your PLx3 to your swimming speed. You can add your PLx10 KPH to the speeds of junkboats or smaller type vehicles. You can add your PLx3 KPH to the speed of larger vessels. You can fire waterjets from any pool, or body of standing water, within PLx50 meters to a range of PLx50 away from the pool.

PSIBLADE (X2)

By concentrating your psionic energy you can conjure into being a blade of pure psionic force, that can be used in every way like a normal sword. This blade is an energy weapon, capable of parrying forceblades, and affecting Demons. The blade does not need to resemble a sword. It can be an ax, a spear or any other close combat weapon you wish. When you first purchase the weapon you should define what it looks like, forever afterwards it will have this shape for you. Whatever it looks like it will always have the same properties.

The psiblade operates in all ways like a forceblade. It cannot be parried by normal weapons, only other energy weapons. It ignores armor but not forcefields. If you have the martial arts bugei *bladeshield* then you can use it with a psiblade. To use a psiblade in combat you need the Blade skill with the psiblade slot, otherwise you will suffer from a non proficiency penalty.

Acolyte: The psiblade does 1M+PL damage when you hit.

Initiate: The psiblade does 2M+(PL-3) damage. For example, if you have PL 5, you would do 2M+2 damage.

Magister: The psiblade does 3M+(PL-6) damage. For example, if you have PL 9, you would do 3M+3 damage.

WEAPON MASTER (X5)

This power is favored by the Weaponmasters of House Valka, the elite corps of psychics who guard the innermost sanctum of the Tower. With this power you focus your psionic energies into enhancing your skill with any weapon you possess, driving your performance to near superhuman levels. When active, your PL is added to any attempt to hit or parry with any weapon you know how to use. (You cannot use this power if you are not proficient with the weapon). This is in addition to any skill levels you may have with the weapon.

Acolyte: No additional benefits.

Initiate: You can add +1M to the damage multiplier of any close combat weapon you are using.

Magister: You can add +1M to the damage multiplier of any ranged weapon you are using.

NEW DISADVANTAGES PHYSICAL DISADVANTAGES

ALBINO

Prerequisite: Exotic Appearance

You were born without pigmentation, giving you white skin and pink eyes. Unfortunately, this makes you sensitive to light and you suffer a -2 action penalty in brightly-lit situations if you're not wearing eye protection. **Cost: -5**

ALLERGY

You are allergic to one substance, and must make a ST roll with a penalty of -1, -3, or -6 depending on the level of this disadvantage, or will be incapacitated with respiration problems and sneezing until the substance is removed. The reaction continues each round, with a new ST test and with a cumulative -1 penalty. You can decide with your Narrator what the particular substance is. It should be something you have a fair chance of encountering. **Mild: Cost: -5, Strong: Cost: -15, Total: Cost: -30**

BRITTLE BONES

You have very light, hollow bones like those of a bird. While these help reduce your body weight considerably (by at least 25%) compared to another human of the same size, they make you vulnerable to damage from impact weapons such as swords, chainswords and bullets. You take double the normal damage from them (after armor is applied). This disadvantage has no effect on energy weapons. You cannot take this disadvantage as well as the *immunity* to impact weapons power. **Cost: -20 points.**

INCANDESCENT

Prerequisite: Exotic Appearance

Your skin glows with a pale luminescent color. This makes you an easy target in darkness, and makes stealth in dark surroundings, or at night, more difficult. Opponents suffer no darkness or dim light penalties attacking you, and receive a +4 bonus to spot you in such conditions. **Cost: -10**

PARTIAL BIPED

Your arms are longer than normal, and your legs are shorter, much like a gorilla. You naturally walk and run on all fours and cannot perform any other actions requiring the use of your hands while doing so. You can stand erect and act normally while stationary though. You are still classed as a biped in all matters related to BMR and MR.

Cost: -5

REDUCED LF

During character creation, you can choose to sell off your LF if you wish, gaining 1 point per LF you lose. For example, if you have LF 12, you could reduce it to 8 and gain 4 points. **Cost: -1 per LF lost.**

REDUCED MOVEMENT

During character creation, you can choose to reduce your movement rate if you wish. You gain 3 points per MR you lose, but can never reduce your MR below 1. **Cost: -3 per point of MR lost.**

SNAKE TAIL

Your lower torso and legs have merged into a single long and sinuous tail like that of a snake. You can use your tail to grapple an opponent while leaving your hands and arms free, but your movement is slow (half your MR) and equipment costs to fit your unusual body (especially armor) are doubled. A variant of this is Fish Tail, this lets you double your swimming speed but you cannot grapple an opponent using it. **Cost: -5.**

SPECIALIZED SUBSISTENCE

Your digestive system is highly specialized to the point where you can only subsist on a single given substance such as raw meat, vegetable matter, or blood. Other foods make you vomit and provide no nourishment. You cannot take this disadvantage and *unnatural hunger/thirst*. **Cost: -5**

UNNATURAL HUNGER

You suffer from a craving for human flesh (the flesh of Posthumans counts in this case). You must eat at least 0.5 kilos of it per day or suffer d6 LF loss per level of the disadvantage you suffer from. The LF will not return until you have consumed at least a kilo of flesh. Naturally most people will be repulsed by your appetite and you will most likely be reported to the authorities, and hunted down if discovered. You cannot take this disadvantage as well as *specialized subsistence*. **Cost: -10 points per level to a maximum of three levels.**

UNNATURAL THIRST

You suffer from a craving for human blood (the blood of Posthumans counts in this case). You must drink at least 0.5 liters of it per day or suffer d6 LF loss per level of the disadvantage you suffer from. The LF will not return until you have consumed at least a liter of blood. Naturally most people will be repulsed by your appetite and you will most likely be reported to the authorities, and hunted down if discovered. You cannot take this disadvantage as well as *specialized subsistence*. **Cost: -10 points per level to a maximum of three levels.**



WEAK IMMUNE SYSTEM

You suffer from a weak immune system that makes you particularly susceptible to diseases and poisons. Each level of this disadvantage acts as a -1 modifier to any resistance rolls to disease, or poison saving throws, you must make. Additionally each level adds +1 damage to the damage done by *kill* poisons. So, for example, if you had 3 levels of weak immune system, then *kill 4* poison would do you 4d6+3 damage instead of the normal 4d6 damage. **Cost: -5 points per level to a maximum of three levels.**

MENTAL DISADVANTAGES

ASSIMILATED

At some point, you have been assimilated into the Swarm. If you are ever within 10 kilometers of the Hive where you were assimilated you will be absorbed into its Swarm Mind. There is no possibility of resistance.

Any psionic member of your Swarm such as a Hivelord, Hivequeen or other caste, will sense your presence automatically if you are within one kilometer and can form a mental link with you.

If this happens, you must obey its mental commands. You have one chance to avoid being absorbed when you receive the first command. If you can make an IN roll with a -3 modifier per level of this disadvantage you possess, you can hold out against the Swarm's influence for one hour.



At the end of this period, the Swarm creature may try again. The levels of any active psi-screens and other psi-shields act as positive modifiers to this roll. Even if you do resist, your vulnerability to mental attack powers such as dominate or illusion, used by any member of your Swarm, are greatly increased. Your resistance rolls to them are at -3 per level of this disadvantage that you possess.

Your troubles don't end there. Because you have been genetically modified, the fact that you have been assimilated will show up on bio-sensors and mutant detectors, and to anyone with the *Sense Swarm* form of the *Sense Enemy* advantage. You are not only vulnerable to normal human diseases but to those diseases developed specifically to affect the Swarm.

In addition to this, your modified brain makes it easy for members of other Swarms to dominate you if you are not under the control of your own Swarm Mind or one of its psionic representatives. If you are not currently absorbed by a Swarm Mind, any Swarm Mind or its representatives can take you over; just as if it were the one that first assimilated you. You cannot possess this disadvantage and be *psychically inert*. Mild: **Cost: -5**, Strong: **Cost: -15**, Total: **Cost: -30**

AVARICE

You cannot resist the prospect of personal gain. It colors your thinking and clouds your thoughts. The possibility of profit will affect your decision making even if you are normally clear-sighted and realistic in other areas. Whenever the possibility of personal gain arises you must make an IN roll to resist taking advantage of it, even if it threatens your life or the lives of those you care about. This is at -3 per level of the disadvantage you possess. Mild: **Cost: -5**, Strong: **Cost: -15**, Total: **Cost: -30**

DEATH-COMMAND CONDITIONING

Your brain has been implanted with a key hypnotic command that will, if you speak it aloud or someone else speaks it aloud, cause you to die instantly. Obviously this is only a disadvantage, and you only get points for it if someone else knows the command phrase or there is a chance of it being accidentally spoken. Most of these commands are nonsense words or phrases to remove the possibility of accidental activation. It is possible that even you do not know what the phrase is, but your enemies might, and they might use that knowledge to threaten or control you. **Cost: -20**.

HALLUCINATIONS

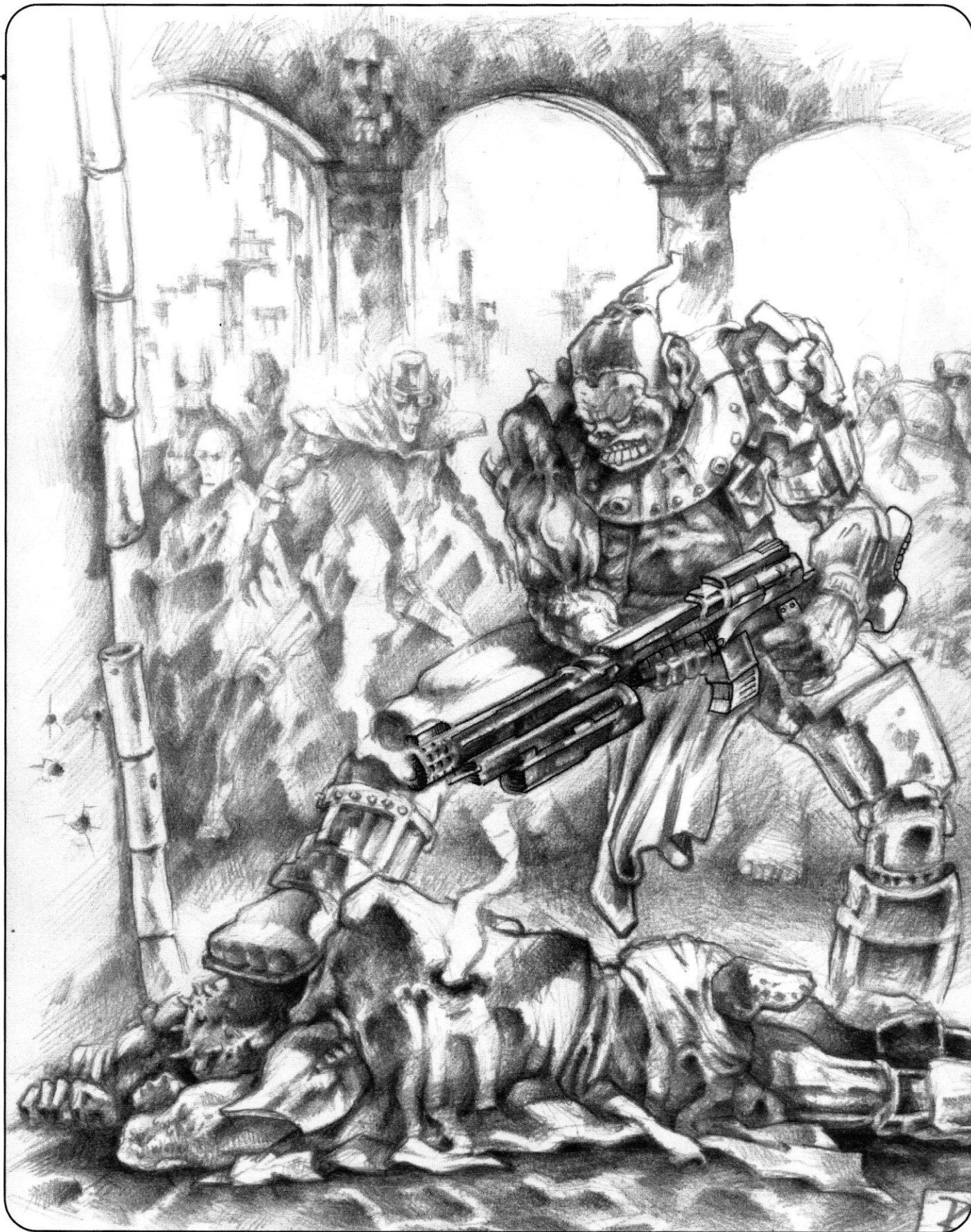
You are prone to random hallucinations under stress that mix fantasy and reality and often seem very real indeed. They confuse and distract you, and you must make a IN roll (-1, -3 or -6 depending on the level of this disadvantage) or suffer a -2 penalty on all actions until the stress ends. A fumble on the roll immerses you in whatever illusory reality the fiendish imagination of the Narrator devises, and you react to it all as if it were real. Mild: **Cost: -5**, Strong: **Cost: -15**, Total: **Cost: -30**.

LUST

You suffer from a compulsion to have sex with people of your chosen sexual preference. Whenever you come into contact with such a person for more than a few minutes, you must make an IN roll to stop yourself from making advances towards that person. There is a -3 penalty per level of this disadvantage you possess. How you make these advances, whether they are subtle or ham fisted, will be determined by your style. In social situations you sometimes let your gonads do your thinking for you. If propositioned by an attractive potential partner you must make an IN roll with a -3 penalty, per level of the disadvantage, to avoid giving in to them, even if you suspect something disadvantageous may occur because of your actions. Mild: **Cost: -5**, Strong: **Cost: -15**, Total: **Cost: -30**

OBEDIENCE

You habitually obey the person designated as your master. This may be one person, it may be the person who speaks a certain codeword or possesses a certain document or device. The exact conditions were set down when you were created if you are a robot or golem, or when you were psycho-conditioned if you are a normal person. You will normally obey all orders given by your master unquestioningly. If these orders would lead to self-destruction or to harm to someone you care about, you may make an IN roll with a penalty of -3 per level of obedience to see whether you obey those orders. Mild: **Cost: -5**, Strong: **Cost: -15**, Total: **Cost: -30**



VIRUS DETECTION PROGRAM : ON	INITIATE SEQUENCE	GUNSTBERG OVERDRIVE	CORTICO QUASI-DEGRADATION
FLOW LINK QUASI-PROTOCOL: INITIATED	NON-BIOLOGICAL RAW MATERIAL:	MICRO-OPTICAL MODULATOR: ON	GANGLIAL ELECTRO-IMPLANT
FILE SUB-PROTOL: GENCLAN	INTERNAL DATA CORRUPTION:	SILICONE SYNAPTIC SIMULATOR	SMART CHIP INSTALLED
NANOMECHANICAL INTERFACE:	LINGUISTIC MARKUP DIRECTORY	DYSFUNCTION	METHANE IMPULSE CATHETER
VALIDATE SIMULATION	MOLECULAR BINARY:	MEGAPULSE CHANNEL ON	OCCIPITAL FLOW MODULATION: SINE

EQUIPMENT

LOGIN:	SUB system COORDINATES	SEROTONERGIC OVERLOAD	BIOFEEDBACK MATRIX: XO
PASSWORD:	X1:477.27.8 X2:566.57.2	AMYGDALPTIC OVERWRITE	BINARY NANOBOT PRESENT
ACCESS GRANTED	Y1:642.42.4 Y2:388.01.2	SMART CHIP INSTALLED	GENMATRIX SCANNER ENABLED
SECURITY CLEARANCE LEVEL:	Z2:90.09.9 Z1:31.47.3	BIOMECH AUGMENTATION:	PATTERN RECOGNIZER NULL:
EXCESS GENETIC VARIATION:	ABBERANT CHROMA LEVELS:	NANOOCIPITAL DRIVER	INFODUMP INITIATING

Lomax didn't like it. All day the Ikarean skylace had been following them, its great silver disk obscuring part of the sky behind them. It kept pace with them easily, as menacing as the first clouds of a storm.

Lomax willed the cowl of his carapace armor to rise. It slithered across his face, obscuring his vision for a moment, then the photoreceptors saturating its skin took over and his sight came back to him, improved immeasurably. It wasn't just that the details were clearer, sharper, more distinct. His whole field of vision seemed to have stretched so that he was aware of peripheral areas that could not be seen with his forward-focusing human eyes.

There was a moment of jarring, like the first puff taken from a dreamweed hookah, then his brain made the adjustment, and everything seemed normal once more. The symbionist who had grafted his new armor onto him had done good work. It was the smoothest and easiest transition he had ever experienced.

His moment of satisfaction was brief. The huge Ikarean structure still glided along behind them, like a vulture drifting on thermals, waiting for its prey to drop. Lomax wondered what they were waiting for. The great ship on which he served was not going to become any easier prey. It was a fully-rigged and armed clipper with a crew of hundreds of battle-hardened warriors. They were bio-armored and had darksight. A night raid would not be any easier than a daytime one.

Of course, you could never tell with Ikareans. They were a strange bunch. This might just be their idea of a joke, to follow along menacingly in the ship's wake, making the Hydran crew nervous. It was possible that they had no intention of attacking, though Lomax wasn't counting on it. Any nation whose people lived on floating platforms above the clouds and hunted other races for sport was capable of anything. The tales he had heard made them sound worse than anything that had ever emerged from the Dark Towers.

Still, it would be madness to attack this fleet, he thought, running his gaze from the high platform on which he stood, taking in the dozens of clippers sailing line abreast. Each ship bristled with weapons, ranging from huge deathguns to the latest Promethean-manufactured sea-air missiles.

All of the vessels were floating weapons platforms. They had to be. Any ship that made the regular trading run between Hydra and the Shogunate needed to be fast, tough and supremely well-armed. The seas were full of monsters and pirates.

He upped the magnification of his armor's vision and studied the skylace. To his mind, it was both beautiful and alien, a glittering structure of streamlined duralloy, quite different from the curved organic chitinous buildings he had grown up with. Its sleek lines spoke of a culture at once exotic and powerful. It was menacing as a predatory bird in flight, and quite as lovely.

By Ikarean standards, it was not a large structure, barely larger than the ship. It was probably home to some small, noble family and their retainers. Lomax had heard that was the way the Ikareans lived. In their way, they were just like the genclans, living apart from each other, while still belonging to a common people and culture.

Actually, if anything, the Ikareans took things one stage further than their Hydran counterparts. The Towers were fixed in place, eternal as the hills. The homes of the Ikareans were free to wander over the surface of the Waste World and rob and plunder as they pleased.

Suddenly he saw why the Ikareans had been waiting. Another skylace descended from the clouds to join the first. They flew side by side for a moment, then began to descend till they were mere hundreds of meters above water. Here indeed was madness.

Huge airhorns sounded, the bellow of living ships crying warnings to their fellows. Lomax raced for his position, swinging himself up into his weapon mount, and relaxing back into the command chair. The muscles of the mount contracted, swinging his gun into position around him. Ganglionic links writhed over him like snakes, seeking the conduits in his armor, binding him to his post. The great claw that held his turret in its grasp swung him out from the ship's hull and into attack position.

He heard the thoughts of others as they raced through the ship's nervous system. He recognized the master gunner's calm distinct thoughts.

<<Get ready to fire!>>



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THE GENCLANS RULE

TO BE BETTER

TO BE THE BEST

EQUIPMENT





He relaxed and felt his gun become part of him, linked to his own nervous system by the ganglionic cables. He could see through its eyes. Distances suddenly became precise. He knew without being told that the leading skypalace was at a range of exactly 3.761 kilometers, and closing at a rate of 74 meters per second. A crosshair on his vision indicated the optimal point to aim for if it continued along its current path at the current speed. He smiled beneath his masked features, knowing that as long as the ship suffered no damage, he would not need the emergency reserve target system that hung above his head, ready to drop into place when required.

Suddenly the ship shuddered, and a wave of sea-air missiles rose from the decks. Battle was joined in earnest.

Ikarean warriors dropped from the skypalaces. The razor-edged wings of their battlesuits were fully extended, making them look like human birds of prey. Over the ganglionic net, Lomax heard the captain give the order to the marines: <<Prepare to repel boarders!>>

Turrets on the bottom of the skypalaces swiveled as point-defense blasters targeted the Hydran missiles and blew them from the sky. One missile dropped from the sky and exploded in the sea, sending a massive waterspout leaping 50 meters into the air. Still more raced towards their targets.

Lomax knew their best hope was to launch a flurry of missiles, overwhelming the Ikareans defense systems. He snarled and willed his own missile to launch, feeling a spasm of something like ecstasy as it roared from its mount and swung upwards towards the leading sky palace.

Even as he watched, one of the Hydran missiles impacted. There was a brief glow and then a burst of light brighter than the sun as the missile's enriched Drakonium warhead overwhelmed the skypalace's layered forcesshields. Savage triumph filled him as the huge airship lurched then righted itself. His heart sank when it did not fall straight from the sky.

The Ikareans responded with a missile salvo of their own. They shrieked downwards and plowed into a nearby clipper, the *Pride of Meleus*. Huge explosions wracked the ship. The mighty living vessel gave a shriek that was almost human, only a hundred times louder, as it wailed its death agony. The huge sails of translucent skin blazed and shriveled. The ropes of muscle-cable that reefed the sails and swung the masts were burning. A stench of scorched flesh filled the air. There was no time for the crew to save themselves; the broken backed ship keeled over, its carapace hull broke in two, and both halves wheeled skywards and sunk swiftly beneath the waves.

Lomax felt fury fill him, and unleashed another missile. Adrenaline and death-fear threatened to overwhelm him, as a wave of missiles raced from the sky towards his own ship. He put the sights over the leading rocket and willed his super-heavy blaster to activate. The blaster bolts hit the missile head on. It exploded. Fraternal detonation took out two of the nearby missiles in chain reaction. Lomax kept firing, knowing that his life depended on it.

There were only two ways for this fight to end, in victory or in death.

EQUIPMENT

HYDRAN WEAPONS

DEATHLANCE

The deathlance is a simple but deadly weapon favored by Zekt Riders and destrier-mounted cavalry. It grows in clumps as part of the lancebush, a strange plant created in the lifevats of House Meleus and which now grow everywhere in the Wastes and Slime Jungles. A deathlance resembles a spear almost three meters in length, made from a substance similar to porous bone. When it pierces an opponents body, the tip breaks off and embeds itself in the wound. The shard of broken lance reacts with the fluids within the victims body and begins to dissolve into poisonous fluid. The poison on a deathlance is of variable strength. A successful hit injects a *kill d6* poison. After one successful hit the lance is broken and can be used only as an improvised weapon.

When used from a mount the deathlance user can, if he chooses, use his mount's damage bonus instead of his own.

Deathlances can be picked from lancebushes when they blossom, or can be purchased freely in Hydra and the settlements in the deserts. Availability: 9.

D	T	W	MS	C
1M+Spec	C	1	0	50

Deathlance is a slot in the *spear* skill.

BONEBLADE

Boneblades are serrated-edged swords of chitin. Within the hilt resides a poison generating symbiote. During combat the poison created by this symbiote is dispatched down channels within the blade until it coats the point and teeth of the blade. If the user hits a target and does damage, the victim is injected with the poison and must make a poison saving throw against the *kill* poison generated by the blade. The cost of the blade is 50, +100 credits per level of poison generated cumulative. Each time the blade successfully injects poison, the owner must roll a d20. On a roll of 10 or less the symbiote has exhausted its poison and must spend the next 24 hours regenerating it. It can still be used as a normal blade but will not be able to inflict poison damage until 24 hours have passed. Availability: 9.

D	T	W	MS	C
1M+Spec	C	1.5	0	50+

Boneblade is a slot of the *blade* skill.

SHOCKSPEAR

Shockspears resemble ordinary spears of chitin, but in a pod just beneath their tip is a symbiote capable of generating an electrical charge. This burst of energy is passed through the conductive blade at the end of the spear and into the victim's body. The damage caused by the charge (but not by any normal damage done by the spear) ignores any uninsulated metallic armor. On a successful hit, shockspears do an extra d6 electrical damage.

They are also very useful against Panzers and opponents with bionic systems. If a shockspear scores a critical hit on a Panzer, it is automatically put into shock, unless it possesses *systemic autorepair*. If it possesses *systemic autorepair* the spear has no special effect.

If a shockspear scores a critical hit on a bionic limb, then the limb automatically shorts out and becomes useless until repaired. Shockspears are used one handed. They can be thrown as a normal spear. Availability: 6.

D	T	W	MS	C
1M+d6	C	1	0	1M

Shockspear is a slot of the *spear* skill.

DRAGONGLOVE

This strange and potent weapon is grown in the life-vats of Hydra. When activated the pyrokinetic organism implanted within the weapon draws upon its psychic energies, and creates a fireball.

The glove flickers and becomes incandescent, a halo of flame flickers around the user's hand. He can then throw the fireball at any target he chooses. The hand encased within the dragonglove is completely impervious to normal flame, and the user can pick up the hottest objects without taking damage.

The glove can also be used in close combat, where the flames surrounding the gauntlet cause additional damage to the target hit. Once the glove is ablaze it cannot hold another weapon in its grasp without the weapon taking fire damage.

The dragonglove consists of a fleshy gauntlet, ruddy red in appearance. A large nodule on the back of the gauntlet marks the location of the pyrokinetic organism. When used it grafts to the hand of the user, closing around his hand like a glove. Once in place it can be activated by closing the hand and making a squeezing motion. Alternatively, if attached to a symbiote or grafted directly onto flesh, it can be activated by mental impulse.

It costs one LF and a full action for the user to activate a dragonglove. A dragonglove stays active until the user chooses to deactivate it, or until the user fumbles when trying to hit with the dragonglove in close combat or with a fireball. Once deactivated it must be activated again in the normal way.



The dragonglove user can throw a fireball up to 100 meters plus 50 meters per point of ST. He must roll to hit using his thrown weapons skill. The fireball does d20 explosive damage to all within 3 meters of the point of impact. A fireball can also be dropped from the dragonglove at the spot where the user stands. In this case, there is no need to roll to hit. The user will take full damage however.

When a successful hit is made in close combat, the user can add a d6 flame damage to his punch. When used in close combat dragongloves use a slot of the *unarmed combat* skill. Availability: 5. **Cost: 1500.**

DEATHGUN

In some ways, the deathgun resembles an ordinary large pistol made from hardened chitin. It has no trigger - in the normal sense of the word. To activate it, the user squeezes the grip. This awakens a dormant psionic node within the weapon and causes it to create a beam of deadly psionic energy. The beam is a glittering black lightning bolt that disrupts the cells of living organisms, causing flesh to melt, ooze and run - wherever it hits.

Normal armor is of no use against the energy unleashed by a deathgun. Psi-shields, psi-screens and all the barriers created using psi-powers do work, however, against this energy.



The main weakness of the deathgun is its relatively short range and the fact that focusing such deadly energies very swiftly burns out the psionic organism within the weapon, rendering it useless. Also it does no harm whatsoever to vehicles, robots or any unliving creature such as Nekroth or Luxorians.

There are several forms of deathgun, designated by level. The more expensive sort do more damage. All deathguns have a range of 100 meters. There is no penalty for firing beyond close range. When you hit with a deathgun, you do a d6 random damage per level of the deathgun. Armor does not count against this damage, but psi-screens and psi-shields will stop one point of damage per level, as will psionic walls. You must roll to hit as normal, getting no bonuses to damage for your success. Your foe can dodge the blast or deflect it with the martial arts bugei bladeshield (see **The Shogunate** sourcebook for more details). If the defense roll cancels out all your successes, you do no damage. If you have any successes left after the defense roll, roll your damage dice.

Deathguns can be attached to custom carapace armor. Each attached deathgun counts as an implant. The wearer can get an additional attack per action phase for each gun attached to the armor.

If you fumble while using a deathgun, the psionic organism overloads and dies. You take d6 damage equal to the level of the deathgun and this ignores armor as above. The deathgun becomes useless and you must buy a new one. If attached to carapace armor it must be replaced. Deathguns use a slot of the *pistol* skill. Availability: 5-(level). **Cost:** 300 credits per level up to a maximum of three levels.

CR	R	D	W	MS	C
100-	Spec	Spec	3	-	*

ENZYME GRENADES

Enzyme grenades resemble large dried fruits about the size of an apple. When thrown against something, they burst unleashing a pool filled with corrosive enzymes. These enzymes splash everywhere within three meters, doing intense damage to anything they hit.

When you throw an enzyme grenade - all the targets in the area must make a DX roll. If they succeed, they take no damage. If they fail, they will be splashed with enzymes. If they are hit you should roll a d6. If the result is a 1 or a 6, this is the amount of damage you do. If the result is 2-5, you do this amount of damage, roll again and add. You keep rolling until either a 1 or a 6 comes up, then you add the 1 or 6 to the total and stop.

For example, you hit with an enzyme grenade and roll d6 for damage. The result is four so you roll again and get three, you roll again and this time get 6. This is added to your total and you stop. The enzyme grenade has done 13 points of damage.

Enzyme grenades can be very effective, but they have many flaws. Among these are the fact that the enzymes are delicate and prone to losing their potency. Since the enzymes are sealed with their protective casing, there is no way to tell whether this happened or not - without using the grenade. Just after you throw an enzyme grenade you should roll a d6. If the result is 1 the grenade is a dud and has no effect.

Enzyme grenades are also fairly delicate and prone to breakage. If you fumble when throwing an enzyme grenade, it breaks in your hand, spraying you in d6/2 locations and doing damage as above. (Check to see if it was a dud first!)

If you fall from a height of more than 3 meters, you should roll a d6 for every enzyme grenade. If the result is 1 the grenade breaks open and splatters you with results as described above. Again you should check for each broken grenade to see whether it was a dud. Availability: 5. **Cost: 50 credits per grenade.**

SPORE GRENADES

Spore grenades somewhat resemble enzyme grenades except that they are packed with quick growing fungal spores that fill the lungs of their victims and swiftly choke them to death. These spores take root in the soft living tissue of the lungs and sprout with incredible speed, eventually spurting out of their victims nose and throats like a yellow tide. If they do not find a home within one second they die and become ineffective.



When thrown, a spore grenade explodes and affects everyone within 3 meters. Those who were aware of the attack get to make a DX roll to hold their breath, and cover their mouths and nostrils. If they succeed, the spore grenade has no effect on them. If they fail, the spore grenade fills their lungs in a choking cloud. Roll a d6. The result is the number of d6 damage the victim takes, ignoring armor.

Like enzyme grenades, spore grenades are prone to lose potency. Once the grenade has been thrown, roll a d6. If the result is one, then the grenade was a dud and has no effect. If you fumble with a spore grenade it goes off where you are standing, affecting everyone within 3 meters.

Spore grenades are completely ineffective against robots, people wearing rebreather masks, and people in symbiots or other sealed suits. Availability: 5. **Cost: 25.**

ELIXIR OF LIFE

Sometimes when someone is badly wounded they fall into a coma and appear to be dead, even though they are not. The Elixir of Life is useful on such occasions. The Elixir of Life contains a cocktail of stimulants and healing drugs. It can be administered orally or injected into a patient with a successful healing roll. Used normally it heals 3d6 LF.

It has another use. When someone dies of a failed sudden death roll, if the Elixir of Life is injected within five minutes they can make a ST roll. If this succeeds, they are not dead. They can be given medical attention as per normal and will heal in the normal way. They come out of the shock but they don't get back any LF. They do not work on anybody with the *robotic body* disadvantage. The Elixir can be used only once per day. If used more often it has no effect. Weight: Negligible. Availability: 4. **Cost: 1,000.**

NEKROZOTE

This strange symbiote was created from the genetic patterns of some Xenogen beast. It resembles a cross between a crab and a spider and when activated it does something rather horrible. It burrows through the skull of a dead man and extrudes ganglionic tendrils that it uses to map the dead man's brain in the same way as nekrochip. Within one hour it will have duplicated the man's brain patterns. During the digging it will devour and store a sample of the corpse's genetic matrix. The nekrozote can then be taken back to a Lazarus Pod. It contains all the information necessary to grow a clone body and download the memories into it.

Of course there are some limitations on this. Firstly there must still be an intact brain for the nekrozote to work on. (A type 19 or 20 head critical hit means the brain has been too damaged for the procedure to work.) The nekrozote can only be used if the brain has not degenerated too much and brain damage has not set in. This means it must be attached to the corpse within five minutes of death. The mapping process may not succeed. The nekrozote's owner must roll a d20. On a result of 11 or more the nekrozote has succeeded, otherwise the corpse's brain has not been properly recorded and the playback will fail. In any case, only one use of a nekrozote is permitted. If it fails the brain will be too damaged for another attempt.

Weight: Negligible. Availability: 6. **Cost: 2,500.**

SLAP PATCHES

These bands of artificial flesh automatically adhere to wounds, sealing them, sterilizing them and stopping the flow of blood. When attached to amputated limbs, there is no need for the patient to make a sudden death roll to avoid death through bleeding. They work on type 16-19 arm critical hits, type 17-19 leg critical hits and type 16 and 18 torso critical hits. This works on type 17 head critical hits to prevent sudden death, although it does nothing about the concussion.

Weight: Negligible. Availability: 6. **Cost: 25.**

SURGICAL SYMBIOTES

Surgical symbiotes are tiny creatures that are injected into a patient suffering internal damage. They flow through his innards seeking the cause of the damage, bind themselves to it and begin to the process of repair. They automatically heal any internal injury once injected. Surgical symbiotes can be used only once and then they are gone.

Weight: Negligible. Availability: 3. **Cost: 250.**

SYMBIONIC IMPLANTS

The following are symbiotic devices that can be implanted within your body by a trained symbioncist.

SECOND HEART

A second heart has been grafted onto your cardiovascular system. This increases your endurance and hardihood and makes you more resilient to damage. With this implant you gain +4 to any ST rolls for shock, stun and sudden death. You also gain +4 to any roll involving feats of endurance, such as a ST roll to see if you can continue after running for eight hours.

If you take a type 19 Torso critical hit, you do not die instantly. One of your hearts has been destroyed. You must still roll for shock as normal, but you will not die. The destroyed heart can be replaced with a new symbiotic graft. You cannot have more than one second heart implanted. **Cost: 1,000.**

ECSTASY GLANDS

Your body contains glands for synthesizing pleasure inducing drugs. These drugs are mixed with your bodily emissions and secretions, such as saliva or sweat. They are a contact poison of sorts that can be used to induce extreme pleasure in their targets. They will be stunned by pure ecstatic joy.

On a successful strike with natural weapons such as fangs, claws or after a successful close-combat hit, your opponent must make a ST roll or be stunned. For d6 hours afterwards they will be in a happy daze and will respond to all suggestions at +4 on the reaction table. For this period they are extremely susceptible to pain-pleasure conditioning. (+4 to any attempt to do so). You can also use these glands outside of combat. You can scratch, nip or bite your chosen target.



A side effect of possessing these glands is that you can use the drugs on yourself. As well as the obvious recreational use of the drugs they can be used to dampen and control pain. You can add +4 to any attempts to resist shock or stunning *after* the die roll has been made. However if you then choose to use this power to resist the pain, you will be unable to do anything except stand around in an ecstatic trance for your next action phase. **Cost: 2,000.**

FURY GLANDS

You possess certain chemical glands that in times of extreme stress flood your body with the potent combat drug known as *Fury*. This enhances reflex speed, aggression and ability to endure pain. You get to add +4 to your initiative rolls, to all your attacks in hand-to-hand combat, and to your ST when resisting shock or stunning and when making ST rolls. It costs 1 LF to activate these glands. This can be done instantaneously in combination with any other action. The affects last for the duration of one combat or until you fumble any die roll, whichever comes first. Once the affects of the Fury has worn off the power cannot be reactivated for another hour. **Cost: 4,000.**

BIO-BLASTERS

Bio-blasters are parasitic symbiotic grafts that bind to the outside of carapace armor or the body of their wearer. Most bio-blasters take the form of small pods that bind on to their wearer's hands, shoulders or head. Since they are usually attached by thin stalks, they are quite easy to peel off. They can also be built into a symbiotic limb or eye, in which case they can only be removed by the appropriate critical hit or by being dug out when their wearer is unconscious or immobilized. Built-in bio-blasters cost twice as much as normal.

Bio-blasters drain their wearer's LF to power their psionically generated energy blasts. They cost one LF to activate. Once activated, they act as a standard ranged energy weapon doing 1M+2 damage up to a range of 1,000 meters. Close range is 100 meters. They are capable of semi-automatic fire. Once activated they will function until you run out of ammo in the normal way. They can then be reactivated by spending another LF. Activating a bio-blaster is instantaneous and does not cost an action. If you possess multiple bio-blasters you can activate them all simultaneously providing you pay 1 LF for each bio-blaster activated.

Super Bio-Blasters are simply supercharged versions of the bio-blaster. They have the same range and activation cost but are Full Autofire Weapons. All bio-blasters are *availability 6*. **Cost: 1,250 for normal bio-blaster, 2,500 for super bio-blaster.**

CUSTOMIZED CARAPACE ARMOR

Hydra is the best place on the surface of Waste World to buy mass-produced carapace armor. It is far cheaper here than anywhere else and can be bought and tailored to your needs by the numerous genclans who sell it. You can have a suit of custom armor designed to your exact specifications - then grown in a lifemat. This suit will be guaranteed to meet your requirements but you must pay the full price in advance.

To buy a suit of custom carapace armor, simply choose which type of carapace armor your suit will be based on: light, medium or heavy. Then decide which special powers you want the suit to have. The cost of these powers will be 50 credits times the points cost of the special powers. Symbionists long ago developed biomatrixes for all the most common powers, so it is a fairly simple matter for them to mix and match according to your wishes.

Even the armor special power can be added to carapace armor, but there are some restrictions. The level of armor added cannot exceed the AR of the suit itself. You can add up to two levels of armor to light carapace, four levels of armor to medium carapace and six levels of armor to heavy carapace.

In all cases, where a power has levels, it can have any number of levels. It still only counts as one power when calculating the number of powers the armor has.

Custom armor can be used to augment virtually any characteristic. You can buy characteristics for your custom suit in exactly the same way as you buy powers. The cost is 50 credits per point. It is important to note that suit characteristics are not added to your own characteristics. When a suit's characteristics are higher than your own, you can use them in place of your own characteristics. When they are less, you can use your own.

Of course you need to find someone capable of creating your suit for you. This takes a great deal of skill. In addition to the raw materials and matrixes, the creator needs to be qualified to supervise the procedure. You will need someone with one level of symbionics for every power you wish to add. In addition, a symbionist is limited in the level of characteristics he can add to a suit. He can add characteristics up to his level with symbionics. So at level 1 he could build suits with characteristics of +1; at level 5, he could build suits with characteristics of +5 or less.

If you are adding a power with levels, such as enhanced natural weapons, then the symbionist can only grant up to his own level with symbionics in levels. So for example, you would need someone with symbionics +3 to add 3 levels of enhanced natural weapons to your suit's claws.

You must pay the Symbionist 10 credits per skill level per hour of time spent creating your custom armor. He will spend one hour per point spent on powers and characteristics supervising the growth of your armor. A Symbionist can supervise the creation of up to one creation per skill level at a time.



DATA CORE ACCESS

TO BE HUMAN

<http://www.manticore.com>

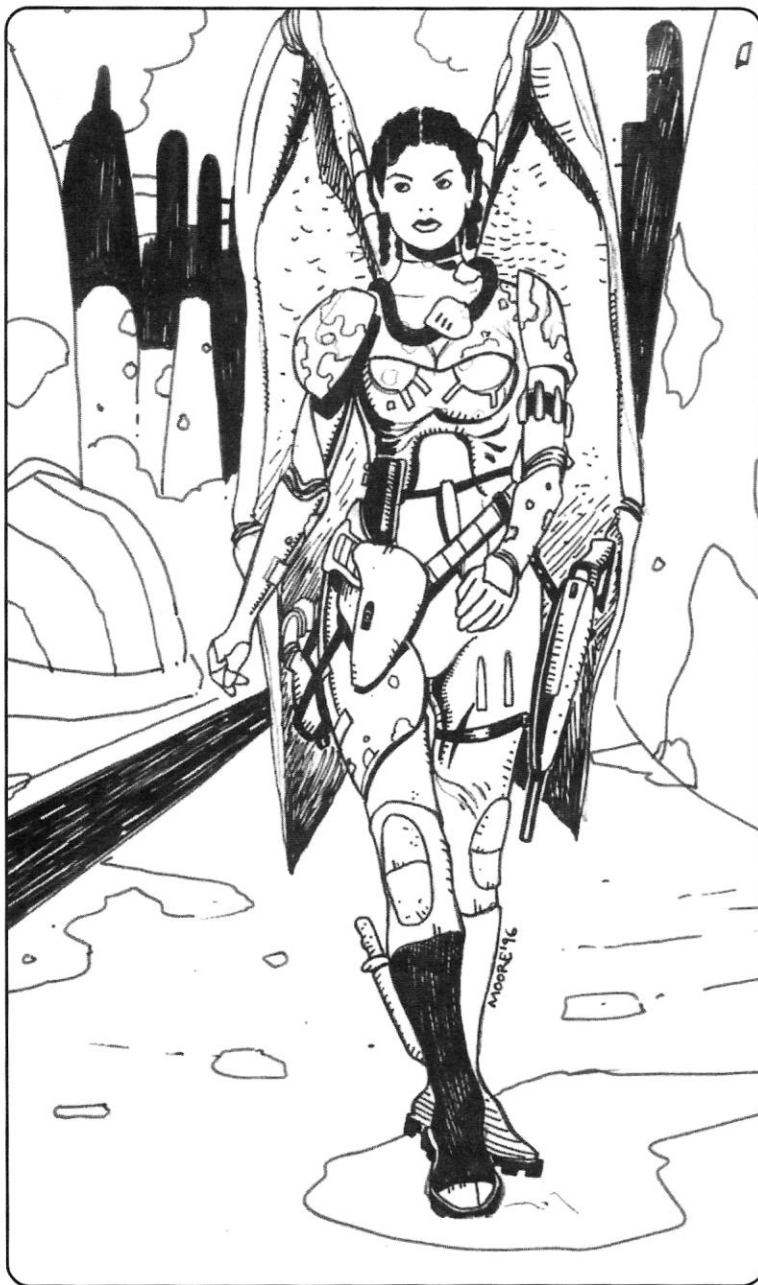
THE GENCLANS RULE

TO BE BETTER

TO BE THE BEST

EQUIPMENT





For example, you wish to create a winged battlesuit that increases your ST and DX to +3 and gives you poisoned claws. This is based on heavy carapace armor. You want, however, to enhance its protective value to the maximum so you add six levels of the armor power. The cost for this will be 2M for the heavy carapace. Now let's add up the points for all those enhancements.

The characteristics cost 60 points each to improve. The wings cost 20 points, the claws cost 10 points, the poison is level 2 kill and costs 19. The total point cost is 169 which translates into 16,900 credits/ divided by 2, for a cost of 8,450. This is added to the 2M cost of the carapace armor itself to give a final basic cost of 10,450 credits.

That's already a lot of money, and then you've got to pay for the symbionist as well. You're adding 4 powers, which is the real killer, so you'll need a Symbionist of at least level 4. This means you're going to end up paying 4 credits per hour for 169 hours of his time. This adds 6,760 credits to the cost. The final cost of your suit is now 17,210 credits.

The suit will be created exactly to your specifications and it will work. There is no possibility of warping or rejection during its creation. However, the internal balance of such suits are complex and delicate things to maintain. If you want to add a new power to your armor, or increase a characteristic, you need to check for rejection with a -1 modifier for each power or level of characteristic you have added.

For all its expense, Hydran armor is still a great deal in terms of the points you would spend if you bought it during character creation. Surely there are some disadvantages? Well, yes. The greatest is simply that it can be taken away from you. Armor can be removed from your body when you are unconscious or captured. All those points spent are going to do you no good whatsoever if someone else is wearing your armor.

Once created, Hydran armor grafts itself to your body. It becomes like a second skin, and its grafts become almost extensions of your body. You can remove it by an act of will. There are various chemical agents known to symbionists that will cause armor to separate from its wearer, but only if the wearer is unconscious. These agents cost d6x10 credits per dose and are availability 9. They must be administered by someone with the symbionics skill, and they must make a symbionics skill roll to succeed.

Custom carapace armor can be ripped off its wearer. This inflicts a special critical hit with a level equal to the number of powers the suit has, or to its highest characteristic, whichever number is the greatest. The more powerful the suit, the greater the number of links between the wearer and the suit, and consequently the greater potential for damage to the wearer.

And there's another disadvantage: Hydran armor can take damage when you take damage. If you take a critical hit to a location, the armor will be damaged there as well. Any critical hit of type 14 or greater will damage the armor in that location.

You won't be able to use any special power that is embedded in that location of the armor. For example, if you have claws and your arm is damaged, you will not be able to use those claws again until the armor is healed.

Hydran armor will heal providing it is bathed in nutrient fluid at least once a day. It takes d6 days for a location to heal properly. Nutrient fluid costs 10 credits per daily dosage. Each day, after the first, that part of your armor is left wounded and untreated you must make a rejection roll with the normal modifiers for your armor. If this is failed your armor will die and become useless.

If a hit location is amputated, the armor will be amputated there too and will not regrow. You will need to get a graft for the armor as well as for your lost limb. These cost half as much as for replacement organs. There is a chance of warping and rejection when the graft is attached.

MAGUS ARMOR

These suits are among the most potent weapons in the Hydran arsenal. They are favored by the warrior elites of the city. They enable their owners to wield potent psychic abilities even if they possess no trace of the Powers themselves. They are rarities since they can only be created by a person who is a combination of Psychic and Symbionicist.

Magus suits are built according to the normal rules for custom armor. They must have a PW of at least +1 and you must give them the Psychic special power. They can then be given psionic powers. In order to imprint the suit with a psi power, the symbionicist must consult the ancient grimoires of his craft and supervise the creation of the suit most carefully, using his own psychic gifts to bring the armor's gifts to life. The suits can be granted any psi-power with a PL not exceeding the Symbionics level of its creator. The cost for creating the suit is calculated as per normal, but the care and attention to detail needed to create the suit means the Symbionicist must give it his undivided attention. This increases the cost to 20 credits per level per hour. Each psi-power granted counts as one special power granted to the suit.

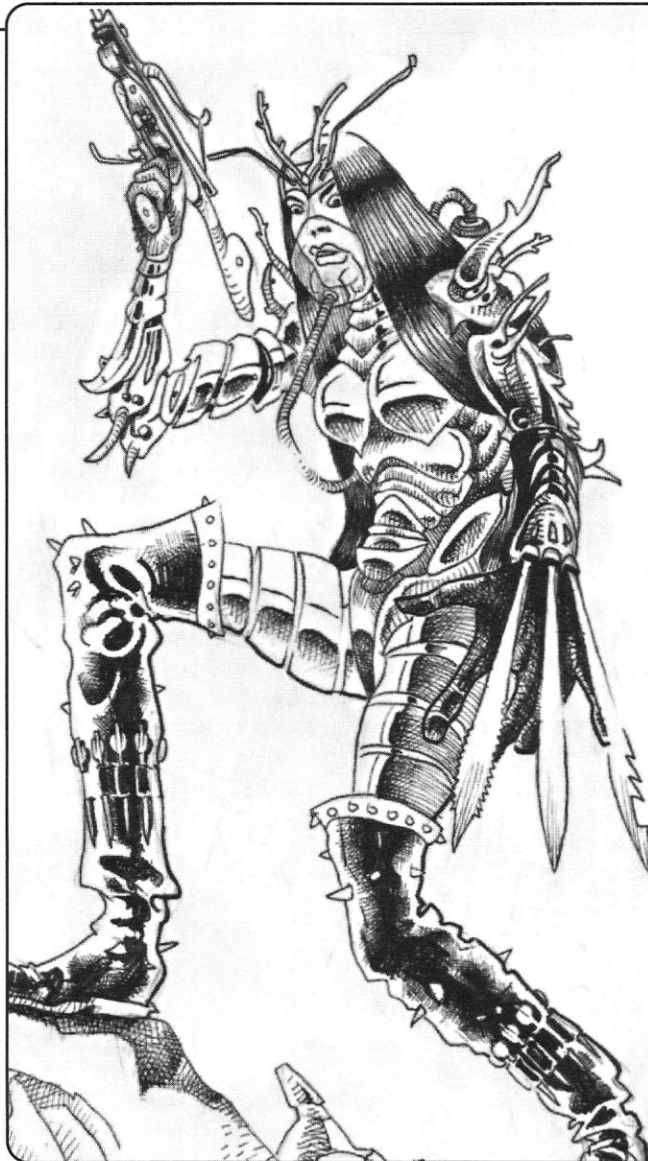
CREATING SYMBIONIC DEVICES

You can also create symbiotic devices such as prosthetic limbs and other organs. To do this you must first find out the basic point cost of the limb. A symbiotic organ costs one point per point of disadvantage it will buy off or as much as an *extra limb* if it is to be grafted on in addition to a normal limb. To this you add the point cost of any powers it will have. You add these together and multiply by 5 to get the base cost of the organ in credits.

You need also pay a symbionicist to supervise the construction of the limb. This takes the same time and has the same limits as custom carapace armor. The symbionicist must have one level per power added to the limb. He must supervise its growth for the number of hours equal to the point cost of the limb or organ. His time costs 10 credits per hour per level.

A limb can have its own ST characteristic. These are created in the same way as characteristics are added to a suit of custom carapace armor. Divide the point cost of any ST you purchase by 5. The actual cost is 50 credits per point. Once again, a symbionicist can only grant a maximum of his skill level with symbionics in ST.

The ST of an arm is added to your damage when using it. It will also affect ST rolls made when using that hand, such as when you are gripping things. This ST does not affect your LF, BLF or CC.



The ST of legs affects your damage when kicking. It has no affect on your LF, BLF or CC. It will only affect your MR, if both legs have been replaced with prosthetics. (You just can't hop that fast no matter how strong one of your legs is.)

For example, you want to buy an arm with ST+3, the large claw power, and two levels of enhanced natural weapon with that claw. The base cost for a full arm is 15 points. The cost of the ST is 12 points. The large claw power costs 10 points. Two levels of enhanced natural weaponry costs 30 points. This gives a total cost of 67 points. Multiplying this by 50 credits we can see that the limb costs 3,350 credits. You will now need a symbionicist of skill +3. (Because of the ST) to supervise the growth. This will cost you 30 credits for 67 hours or 2,010 credits, giving you a total cost of 5,360 credits. Not bad for an arm that will do 3M+3 damage.



MAKING YOUR OWN CUSTOM ARMOR

If you possess the symbionics skill, you may want to make your own armor. To do this you need access to a fully equipped Biomancy Lab (see below). You can either build one yourself, or hire one if you don't have the time or funds to do this. You need a lab with at least one lifevat of human size.

You can buy all the components from House Meleus or one of the numerous symbionics houses. Basically these cost half of the final cost of the custom armor, minus the cost of labor. Of course, you don't have to pay yourself for labor. Since you're basically using prefabricated components, simply roll your symbionics skill at the end of the usual time period it takes to create the armor. If you succeed, all is well. If you fumble, the suit is dead, and any money you spent is wasted.

If you fail, the armor will still work but there may be some minor flaws. Its up to your Narrator what these are. They will become evident the first time you fumble while trying something in your new armor- maybe all die rolls will be reduced by the amount you failed your symbionics roll by. If your Narrator can think of more appropriate flaws, then he can apply them.

In any case, these flaws will be easily correctable, once you get the suit back to the lab. To correct the flaws, you must take a day at the lab and make another symbionics roll. The negative modifier is equal to the amount you initially failed your symbionics roll by. If you fail this roll, you can try again next day and keep trying until you succeed. If you fumble this roll, you have killed the suit and must build a new one. Any money you have spent is wasted. This is the risk you take building your own equipment. The big gencians can afford to insure against these things and do them right. Maybe you should just buy off the shelf.

The procedure for creating your own symbiotic organs is basically the same as that as for creating carapace armor, except that once you have created your organ you then need to graft it to the person who will soon (hopefully) be using it.

SYMBIONIC GRAFTING

(Important Note. This section replaces the one on Symbiotic Grafts, Warping And Rejection in Waste World p 197-198.)

To implant symbiotic grafts you need both the *healing* skill and the *symbionics* skill. Whichever is lowest of these two acts as a limiter on the other. You also need a place to perform the operation. This can be done in a standard biomancy lab. All the required tools will be available there.

To apply the graft, you must make a healing roll. If you succeed then the graft has been attached successfully. If you fumble, then the graft has died and a new one must be grown before the operation can proceed. If you fail; the graft has been attached, but there are problems, and the graft may warp.

Roll a d20, adding your skill with symbionics and subtracting the number of implants the patient already has. If the result is 10 or less, warping has set in and the graft will start to mutate. The exact nature of these mutations is dependent on the powers within the graft. The claw may be huge and swollen with huge warts. An eye may be blood-shot with a strangely distended pupil. A second heart may cause the chest to swell. The beating of the enlarged heart might cause the patients chest to visibly pulse. These changes will become obvious in d6+1 days.

In any case the nature of the power will be obvious, and the sight of warped grafts will cause a -1 reaction penalty per warped graft that is visible. Your patient may choose to keep the graft or have it removed. If the graft is kept - it still works normally. If it is removed then the patient is back at square one and must have a new graft grown.

Once a graft is accepted, then the patient must check for rejection syndrome in the normal manner (see **Waste World p 192**).

A grafting operation costs 10 credits per hour per level of healing on the grafter's part and takes one hour under normal conditions. Grafts can be added to carapace armor using this procedure. The difference is that if the rejection roll is failed, both the graft and the armor will die.

BUILDING A BIOLAB

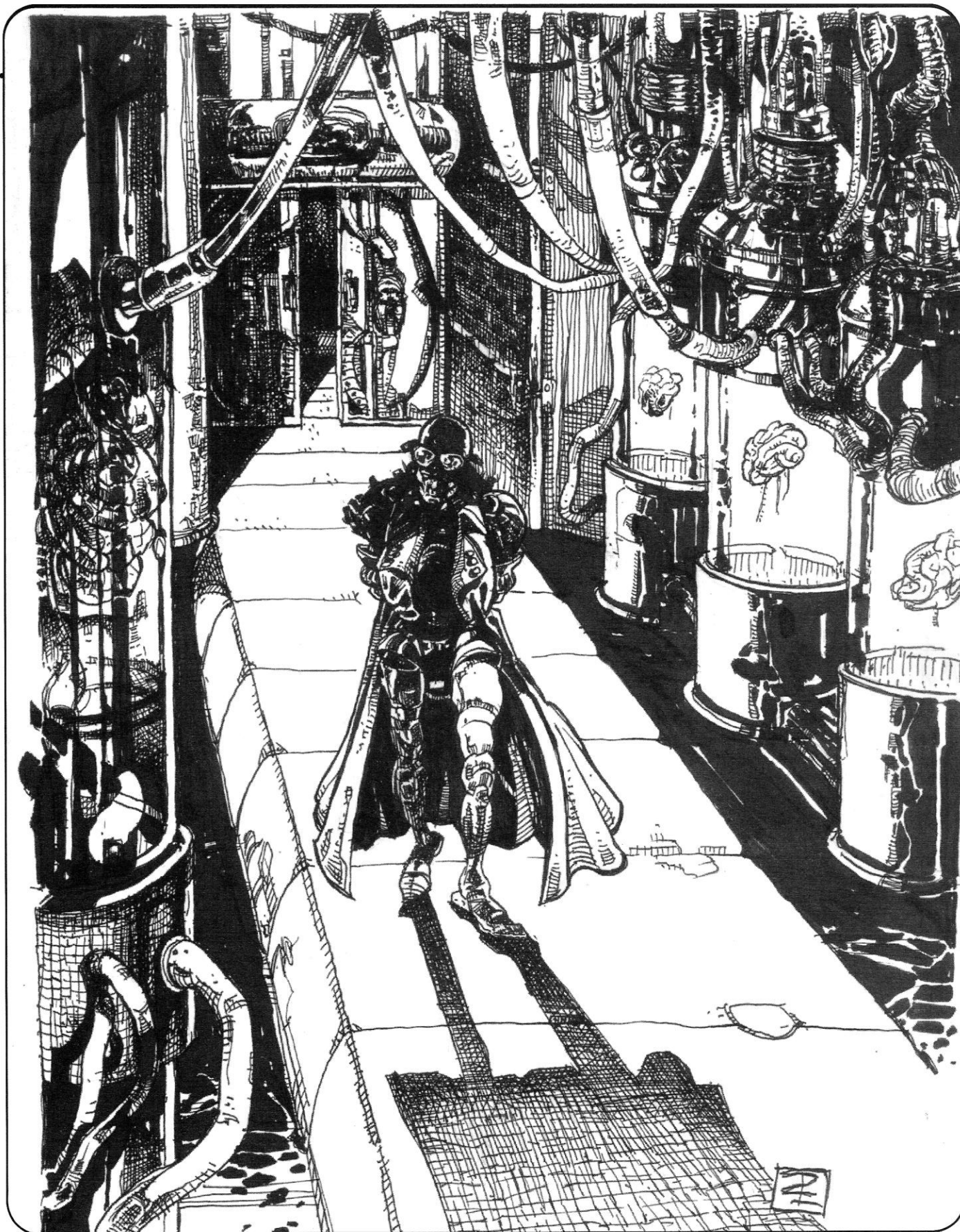
Biomancy Labs, or biolabs as they are more usually known, can be used for genesculpting and the creation of symbiotic artifacts such as custom carapace armor. In order to equip one you need to pay the following costs, and buy the following equipment.

You will require humanoid or larger cocooning tanks, assorted chemicals, alembics retorts, genetic mixers and all the other paraphernalia a skilled biomancer requires. The base cost of this is about 10,000 credits to outfit the lab plus 5,000 credits cumulative for every level of lab equipment you wish to buy. The equipment level of the lab reflects the quality, accuracy and reliability of the gear you have there, and acts as a limiter on the levels of symbionics and genesculpting you can perform within it.

LIFEVATS

Lifevats are the basic tool of a biomancer's trade. As their name would suggest they are large vats filled with a bubbling broth of warm nutrient fluids, mutational agents and tranquilizers to keep your experimental subjects comatose. They also contain umbilicals that can be used to feed subjects intravenously, let them breath and introduce new chemicals into their bloodstream. The fluids are usually kept at womb temperature.

The cost of a lifevat is proportionate to its size. A small lifevat that holds creatures of less than human size costs about 500 credits. A human size lifevat costs about 1,000 credits. The cost then increases proportionate to the size.



You use the square of the size variation to get the cost multiplier. Something twice human size would cost 4 times as much. Something three times human size would cost nine times as much. Something for holding a creature ten times human size would cost one hundred times as much. If you want more than one tank, you must pay the same cost over again.

ANALYSIS JAR

An analysis jar is usually about the same size as a lifevat. It resembles a great transparent chitin jar that encloses the experimental subject. Once inside, a battery of tests is deployed on the subject and his exact size, weight, and genetic composition are determined. An analysis jar will let you determine exactly what powers and characteristics a subject possesses as well as spot anomalies such as mutations and Swarm assimilation, providing you make a successful genesculpting roll.

Before any changes are made to a subject they should be measured within an analysis pod. If you do not have access to one, or you choose to wing it, all your genesculpting rolls will be at a -6 penalty. Analysis jars cost five times as much as a comparably sized lifevat.

A SAMPLE LAB

Let us say you want to build a lab with two tanks, one capable of holding human subjects and one capable of holding larger creatures of up to twice human size. You also want a human size analysis jar. Furthermore, you have genesculpting skill at +5 so you need a lab of at least +5 equipment level in order to use your skills to the fullest. This will cost you 85,000 in total. 75,000 for the laboratory equipment, 5,000 for the lifevats and 5,000 for the analysis jar.

RENTING BIOLABS

Fully functioning biolabs are hard to find and expensive to hire. After all, most biomancers don't want strangers doing weird and wonderful things in their expensive facility. Biolabs are only available for hire in Hydra or its colonies. Rented Biolabs are *availability 5* in Hydra and *availability 1* in the colonies. You can roll once per week of searching. Labs cost d6% of their total cost to build per day's rental. Yes, this is expensive, but you're paying premium prices because of the risk the owner is taking renting to you.

GENESCULPTING

There are several things you need to do before you can begin genesculpting. First, you must catch your experimental subject. This is not necessarily as easy as it sounds. You can use friends, family, derelicts kidnapped from the streets or anybody else you can lure into your lab. Your subject will probably need to be sedated and in good physical condition to survive the procedures. You may need holding cells near your lab to keep unwilling subjects, and you may need guards to provide security. These are all peripheral to the basic concerns of this article however, so we'll leave it to you to negotiate a decent fee for your lack-eyes.

Now you'll need to get your subject into the cocooning tank and introduce the right mix of genespores, mutagenic hormones and nutrient fluids. Mutagenic hormones cost approximately 10 credits per point of change you're trying to induce.

First of all you should run your subject through an analysis jar. This will let you know exactly what you've got and lower the chances of any unpleasant surprises being sprung later in the process.

Once the subject is firmly ensconced in the lifevat, they are automatically sedated. You can switch on your equipment and let the fun begin. Supervising changes in your subject will be your main task from now on but, except in periods of extreme crisis, this will not be a full time task. All you'll need to do is look in once a day and run some basic tests, and introduce the correct chemical compounds at the correct time.

This is the time to plan exactly what changes you want to induce in your subject. You may have decided to increase his strength or intelligence or give him wings or other improvements to his natural form. In any case, you'll need to work out the point cost of all the changes you're going to make. This will give you some idea of the length and complexity of the procedure your subject is about to undergo. It's normally best to go slowly and modify only one characteristic of the subject at a time. You can do more but it will result in unnecessary complications.

Anyway, let us say that you have decided to increase your subject's ST. Your subject has a ST of +1 already and you wish to increase this to +3. This costs 50 points for, as always, the costs of increasing a characteristic are cumulative. This lets you know that it will take about 50 hours for the change to take effect, once cocooning has been achieved. It also tells you that you'll require about 500 credits worth of mutagenic hormone.

Naturally there are some limits to the amount of changes you can master. Genesculpting is not a simple procedure, and it can take a lifetime to master. The dosages of chemicals involved are as much an art as a science, and even after a lifetime of experience it's still possible to get them wrong.

The larger the changes you are trying to induce, the greater the difficulty of the operation. If you are planning big changes in your experimental subject, and you have limited skill, you will have all the more reason to go slowly. It is easier for the unskilled to perform genesculpted transformations incrementally.

Within a few hours (1d6 to be precise), you'll notice some gratifying changes coming over your subject. At first a thin layer of mucous will build up around their flesh. Don't worry, this is normal. Over the next few hours (another d6) this mucous will harden into the horny integument of the cocoon. The subject's outline will become distorted and the real process of change will begin. From this point on, the whole process should take one hour per point of change you are trying to instill.



The first period of crisis is when the cocooning begins. You must make a genesculpting roll to make sure you have added the correct chemical mix to achieve your aims. It is quite normal for the Narrator to make this roll for you in secret, because sometimes your actions will have consequences of which you will not become aware for a long time. If you fail this roll, you can make a second roll to notice your mistake. If you do this you can make a third roll at -2 to correct your error. Once again the Narrator may make this roll for you. If you fail these rolls then your experiment has gone awry and must be abandoned. All the chemicals in the tank are wasted. You must begin the whole procedure again.

The next crisis period comes exactly halfway through the period of transformation, or in the case of the example - after 25 hours. At this point you make a roll at -1 per 10 points of change you are attempting to induce. If you succeed, the procedure is going well and you can relax. If you fail, then as above, you must make another roll to spot your error. If you succeed in this, you can make another roll at -2 to correct your error. If you fail this time, not only have you wasted your chemicals but you've blown it big time. Your unfortunate subject will suffer severe side effects, gaining disadvantages equal to the points value of changes you were trying to induce rounded up to the nearest 5 points. Normally, these will bear some relevance to the changes you were trying to induce. If you were attempting to increase the ST by 50 points, you may succeed in decreasing it by 50 points instead, or you may decrease it by -20 points and inflict the monstrous appearance disadvantage instead. The exact details can be negotiated between yourself and your Narrator.

You must repeat the whole procedure for a third time when the cocoon breaks. If you fail at this point, the transformation will be complete but your subject will be insane and uncontrollable and will immediately run amok, smashing up the laboratory and attacking anything in sight until it is destroyed.

If all goes well, your subject should be allowed to float in the cocoon for another d6 hours to gain strength. Removing the creature from the tank at this time will result in it taking d6 points of LF loss per 10 points of change induced. Indeed breaking the tank, removing the creature or destroying the equipment at any time will inflict this amount of damage on the subject. The only exception to this is if your subject runs amok, in which case it will have 3d6 temporarily added to its LF to simulate its insane and berserk rage.

Of course, there is a downside to the changes you have made. The universe follows the principle of equilibrium and nothing is gotten for free. Every point of change in your subject must be paid for with an equal number of disadvantage points. For every point of change, you have induced in your subject, you must now inflict an equal point value of physical disadvantages. Negative appearance is always a good one. Another possibility is reducing a second characteristic by the number of points you have increased a characteristic by. For example, if you increase ST - your subject might suffer a consequent decrease in IN.

If you have been working changes on your friends (i.e. other player characters), they can choose to ignore these disadvantages by spending the same number of XP. Or they can choose not to take the disadvantage and commit future XP to paying it off. (No one can commit more than 10 future XP in this way for any reason.) Or they can do some combination of both.

After this, you must roll for mutation in the normal way. (See *Buying New Special Powers Waste World* p 160). You can modify this roll positively by +1 per level of genesculpting you possess. If your subject fails this roll then all the usual consequences of mutation ensue. You only need to make this roll if you are adding powers. It is not necessary if you are altering characteristics.

FUMBLES

If at any time you fumble your genesculpting roll, the Narrator is at liberty to inflict any penalty he desires on your experimental subject. The subject may break out and run amok, or he may emerge from the tank with no appetite for life and slowly pine away and die. He may mutate horribly, or worse still; everything may appear normal and the process may continue as normal.

In this case, the Narrator should make a note to the effect that there is a hidden flaw in your creature that will only become evident at some future time. With time your creation may prove increasingly intractable, or it may be prone to berserk rages in certain situations or when it fumbles. You may expect trouble, but your character should be role-played as if unaware of this until problems arise.

Example. You have kidnapped a subject off the street, and are preparing to turn him into a winged warrior of greater than average ST. Your subject has zero in all characteristics. You have genesculpting +5. You want to give your subject ST +1 and wings. This costs 10 points for the ST and 20 points for the wings, or 30 points in total. You will pay for this by making your creation horribly ugly, giving it 30 points of negative appearance. So you stock up on mutagens costing 300 points and put your subject into the vat.

Immediately you must check to see if you've gotten your dosage and chemical composition right. This is a basic genesculpting roll. You roll 17 - making it easily. The project is under way!

Fifteen hours later, you check in on your subject for the first crisis period. You must make another genesculpting roll, this time at a -3 penalty. (-1 per 10 points of changes). You roll 5 and add 5 for your levels with genesculpting, then you subtract the -3 penalty. The result: 7. Oops, you've blown it. Time to make a roll to see whether you notice. Even worse - you get a total of 4 this time. The Narrator could say all sorts of awful things happen. Your subject might die, or might break out. Instead, he cackles evilly, makes a note in his records and lets you continue. You just know you're going to pay for this!



After thirty hours, at the final crisis period, you get 16 on your genesculpting roll, and fairly soon thereafter your subject crawls forth. Because of your failure he has 30 points of disadvantages but no powers. He is hideous to look at and has tiny vestigial wings that don't work, and horribly swollen limbs. Oh well, back to the drawing board. If you hadn't failed that roll he would be muscular and able to fly. Better luck next time.

PSYCHOMACHINA

Psychomachina are an investment that most genesculptors find worthwhile. These strange devices resemble a vast bloated human brain floating in a tank of nutrient solution. They are attached to the cocoon of your subject by means of ganglionic links. All psychomachina have a *ganglionic mask* attached to them through which they are programmed.

Once attached they graft themselves on to your subject's nervous system and begin to bombard it with images and stimuli designed to bend the subject to your will. The longer the process takes the more embedded the conditioning will become and the more the subject's mind will be warped.

At the end of the cocooning process, you should make a success roll using the level of your psychomachina as a positive modifier. If the roll is successful, you can use a number of points, equal to the number of points gained from your genesculpting, to inflict any mental disadvantage that you want on your subject, (for example, *obedience* to yourself). If your subject already has a disadvantage, you can increase its level if there are sufficient points available to do so. These mental disadvantages are gained instead of the physical ones you would normally have to take to pay for points gained. You can also choose to inflict a combination of mental and physical disadvantages.

For example, your subject already has level one obedience which is a -5 point disadvantage. Your latest bout of genesculpting has added 10 points worth of powers to your creature. This means that you need to find 10 disadvantage points from somewhere. Since you made your psychomachina roll, this can be the mental disadvantage of your choice. Ten points is the difference between mild obedience and strong, so you can increase the level of obedience to strong if your psychomachina roll was successful. If your creature already had strong obedience, and had only gained 10 points worth of powers, you would not have gained enough points to increase the disadvantage from strong to total, so you would have had to find another 10 point disadvantage.

If you fumble the psychomachina roll then your image, or the image of anybody you have chosen as the creature's master, will indeed be imprinted in your creation's consciousness. It will, however, hate you with such a venomous passion that it will do its level best to destroy you. This will be a 30 point obsession with your destruction, that will continue as long as the creature lives.

Psychomachina cost 10,000 credits plus 5,000 credits per level cumulative. They can also be attached directly to a subject's body during psycho-conditioning using the *ganglionic mask* attachment. The mask is attached to the victim's head to begin the psycho-conditioning.

PSYCHO-CONDITIONING

The Hydrans are masters of this arcane art, and have as many ways of using it as there are genclans. The most common method is the psychomachina. This is used during genesculpting to condition experimental subjects to accept their new masters, but it can also be used in other ways.

It can be hooked onto a subject's nervous system while that subject is undergoing extreme pain or pleasure (the Radostians are masters of this) and can be used to implant any sort of mental disadvantage you require. Specially trained Radostian courtesans have the *gift of subjugation*; their bodies can generate psychoactive chemicals that in many ways duplicate the effects of a psychomachina. During the course of lovemaking they can use pain-pleasure conditioning upon their partners.

Psychoconditioning takes at least one hour and the subject gets to make an IN roll adding any levels of resistance he may have. You get to roll adding the level of the psychomachina plus any levels you have with either torture or pain-pleasure conditioning. You subtract your subject's total from your own. If the result is positive then you should note the number of successes you have gained. This is the total number of points of the mental disadvantage you are giving the subject.

You need at least 5 successes to implant the disadvantage at mild, 15 successes to make it strong or 30 successes to make it total. It takes 10 successes to increase a disadvantage from mild to strong, and 15 successes to increase it from strong to total. The victim gets no points for having gained the disadvantage, merely the disadvantage itself.

If you fumble your roll, your victim has proven immune to your attempts at psycho-conditioning and will remain so until you gain another skill level with torture or pain-pleasure conditioning or a more powerful psychomachina.

Disadvantages gained in this way can be bought off with XP as normal, providing a justification can be found. These could include going through deprogramming from somebody with the psycho-conditioning skill, or if conditioned to obey someone - simply spending enough time away from the person you have been programmed to obey. This might take a week for mild conditioning, a month for strong conditioning and a year for total conditioning.

TEMPORARY AMNESIA

It is possible to psycho-condition someone and then make them forget it ever happened. You do this by implanting a 5 point selective *amnesia* disadvantage that applies only to the period of the conditioning. This can be very useful if you want to condition someone to *obedience* of a certain command word and keep them unaware of this until the command word is spoken.



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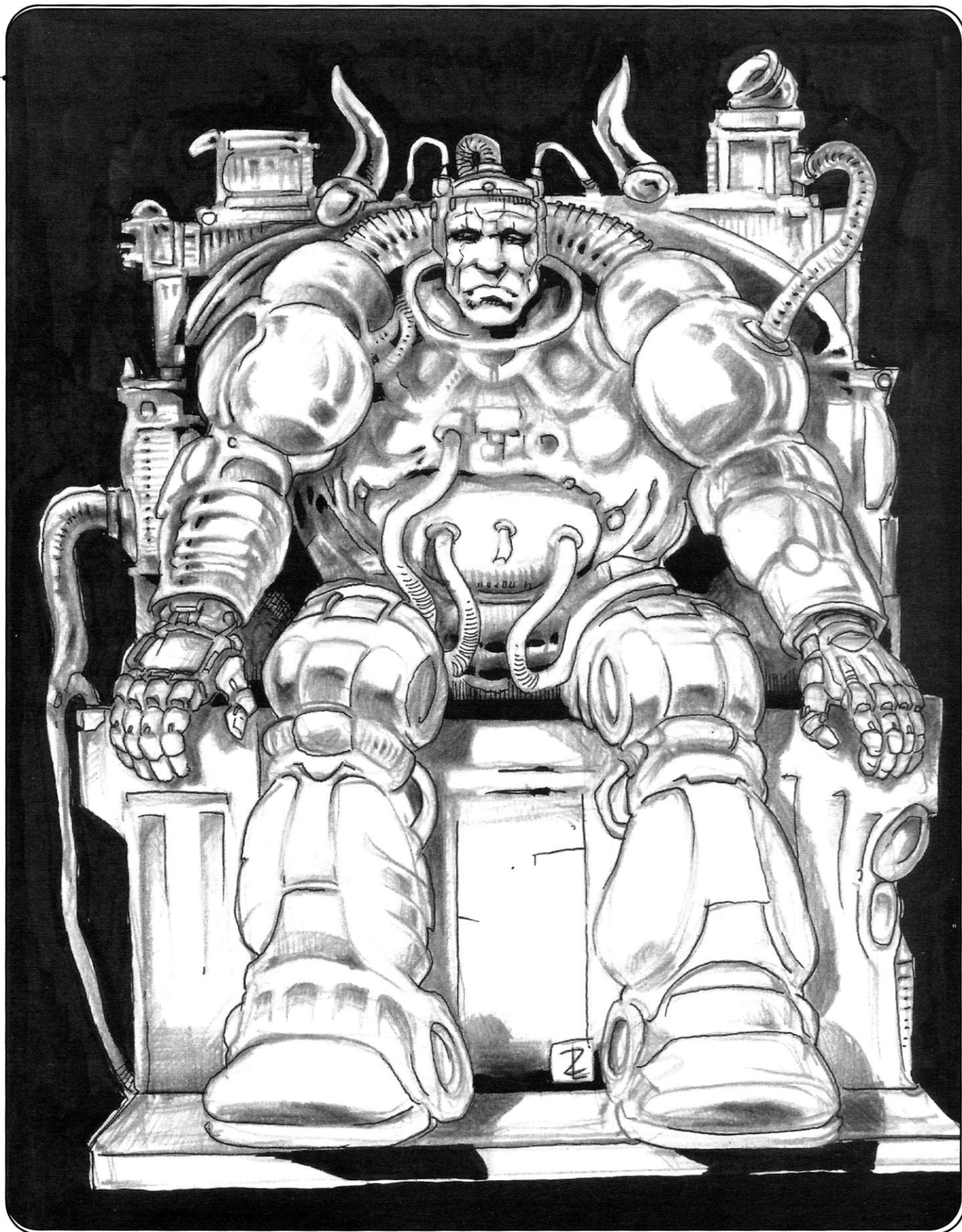
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EQUIPMENT



One advantage of the Radostian pain-pleasure method of psycho-conditioning is that the victim does not even know it has been done until the conditioning takes effect.

GOLEMS

Golems are basically robots, created using human or Xenogen genetic material. In Hydra they are mass produced in lifevats filled with accelerated growth solutions.

If your players want to design their own golems, you should let them. They should design a prototype golem as if it were a character. The player cannot give the golem characteristics greater than his own skill level with genesculpting, or more advantages, powers or skills than he has levels in genesculpting. For example at genesculpting +3, you could not give your golem characteristics greater than +3, and they would be limited to three advantages, three powers and three skills.

The basic design work must be completed before the golem can be grown. Then once the plans have been made and the genespores mixed, the mixture can be transferred into the tank. A golem prototype costs 1000 credits + 100 credits per point to build and takes hours equal to its point cost to grow. Any disadvantages will reduce the cost by 100 credits per point but will not reduce the growth time. You cannot give a golem more than 50% of its total point cost in disadvantages. All golems suffer from the accelerated aging disadvantage and get no points for it.

Once the golem emerges from the tank the player can judge the success of his work. The player (or the Narrator on his behalf) should make a genesculpting roll once for each power. There is a penalty equal to the number of powers the golem possesses. If the roll is made, all is well and the golem has the power. If it is failed then the power will not work. The player should then make a similar roll for each characteristic, using the level of the characteristic as a penalty. If the roll is made, the characteristic applies at the given level. If it is failed the characteristic is reduced by the amount the roll was failed by. The same is then applied to skills, using any skill levels the golem has as negative modifiers. If the roll is made the golem has that skill. If the roll is failed then reduce the skill levels by the amount the roll was failed by. If this takes the skill level below zero then the golem does not have that skill. Any fumbles on any of these rolls mean that the golem has a deeper flaw that may only become evident after months of operation.

Once a prototype has been created, then the basic design can be reused and will emerge from the tank exactly like the first - without having to go through the process of making rolls to see whether its characteristics, powers, advantages or skills will work as normal. Most golems grown in Hydra are created by the big gencians using designs that have been tried and tested over millennia. They are not prone to flaws - or where they have them the flaws are so well-known that no purchaser should be surprised by them.

A NOTE FOR NARRATORS

Biomancy is a huge subject and there is no way we could provide you with detailed rules on every single contingency that might arise. Instead, use these rules as guidelines and follow your own best instinct as to what works in your campaign.

In general, when players are trying to create things you should look at a number of areas. The first is whether you want to allow this creation into your campaign. Will it unbalance things totally? If the answer is yes, don't allow the creation. The second is, does it make sense in the context of the campaign? Do the disadvantages the player is proposing make sense and have the right feel to them?

As was pointed out before, increasing ST by lowering IN or giving an experimental subject a twisted monstrous appearance, just feels right. This is an area where you have to wing it and go with what works for you and fits in with your campaign.

Obviously, with these rules, we're putting a fair amount of power into the hands of the PCs. As Narrator, you are not obliged to let players use these rules if you don't want to. Even if you allow these rules to be used, the final say is always yours. If you decide that what a player is attempting is flat-out impossible, it is, no matter what the dice say.

The thing to bear in mind is that you should never allow something that will totally imbalance the game. Some players have a natural tendency to take any rule system and try and bend it out of shape, invariably to their advantage. If people start doing this, toast them, or worse yet, take their great idea and use it against them.

It is one thing to try and create a race of invincible warrior drones that will aid you in your plan of world conquest. It is another to succeed in doing so and discover that your invincible warrior drones have decided that they don't need you and are going to conquer the world for themselves. Where a player's mad schemes might make for a good scenario you should encourage them to go ahead, then twist them to the purposes of your game.

And in the end, never lose sight of the fact that a device won't work unless you let it. The point of these rules is to let people create interesting monsters and devices that enhance a campaign, not to place ultimate power in the hands of some megalomaniacal minimaxer. If people want to create reasonable weapons and devices that don't differ too much in power from those that already exist, you should let them. Otherwise, don't hesitate to torment rules abusers, that's what they're there for.

And remember, just because you allowed something to happen once, it doesn't mean it has to be possible again. Many strange factors can affect biomancy. Maybe the experiment that created the device was a fluke and some unreproducible element fell into the lifevat. If the thing turned out to unbalance your game greatly, it will be just as well to forbid it.

GENESCULPTING AND SYMBIONICS?

In rules terms, it's simple. Implanting anything in your body that requires a rejection roll uses the symbionics skill. Anything that alters your basic genetic structure and requires a mutation roll uses the genesculpting skill.



HYDRAN VEHICLES

Hydra produces many unique vehicles created using symbionics and genesculpting. These vehicles are really living organisms shaped by the power of biomancy. Most are grown in huge lifevats but a few of the more bizarre ones are actually capable of reproduction. Some can be made sentient and capable of performing actions without human intervention. This is one of the most fertile of all areas of biomancy.

Most of the larger vehicles contain lifepods that provide their owner with air, food and shelter. Many are like symborgs and recycle their driver's waste products turning it into food for themselves. Where this is not the case, there will be an asterisk (*) after the vehicle's PS characteristic.

Most of these vehicles are accessed through sphincter-like doors. Many Hydran vehicles can be controlled by ganglionic link, grafting the nervous system of their driver directly into that of the vehicle and making their craft a simple extension of their own body. There is not room to give the details of all the different types of vehicle here, so the following are only a tiny selection of what's available. All Hydran vehicles have the following in common:

FUEL

Hydran vehicles are powered by nectar, a thick golden syrup that is in fact an incredibly concentrated food source. They carry this nectar within their bodies in huge tanks, and can keep going for a month without refueling. Nectar costs 10 credits per LF of your vehicle. Most vehicles have inbuilt storage tanks for one month's supply of nectar. This capacity is already figured in and does not affect the vehicles CC.

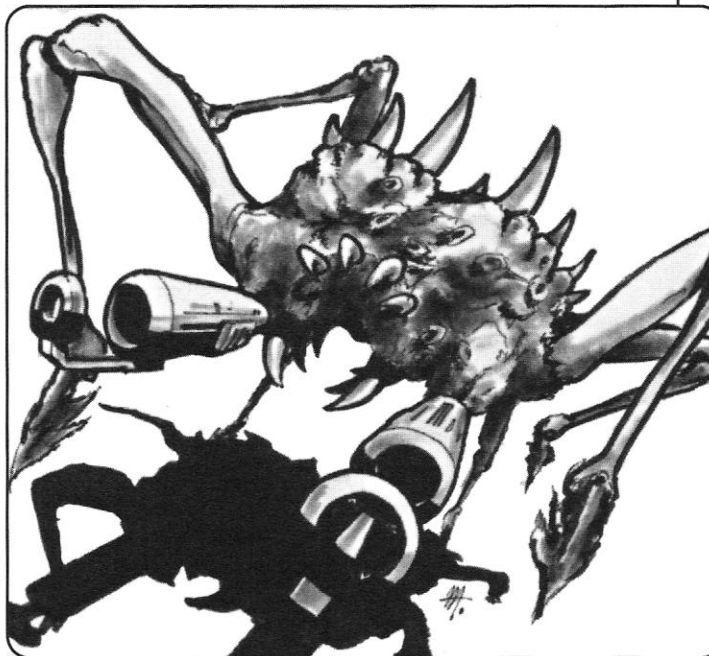
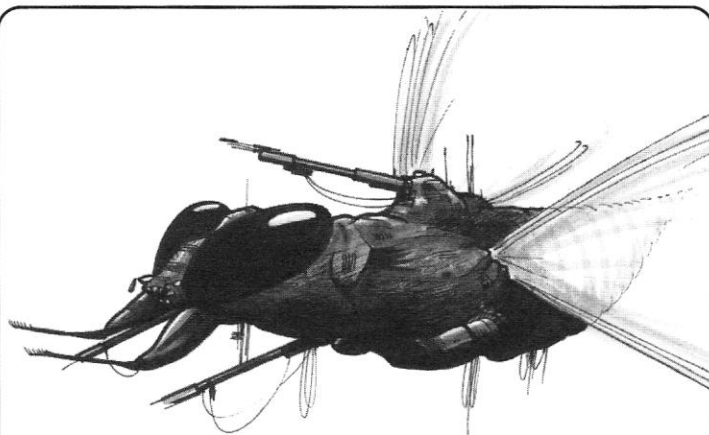
Additional nectar can be carried. It weighs 10 kg per LF's worth of energy. So for example, a vehicle that requires 80 LF's worth of nectar could carry an additional month's supply of 800 kg. Carrying additional nectar will reduce a vehicles CC, as space will have to be made in the cargo compartments to carry it.

SELF REPAIR

As long as they have nectar, Hydran vehicles are capable of self-repair. They cannot regrow anything lost to a critical hit but they will recover LF at the usual rate. Doing so burns up 10 kg of stored nectar and consequently reduces range. Usually, it's worth keeping track of LF recovered and only reducing range when you reach important markers such as half LF repaired. If you want to keep a more detailed record, simply divide the amount of fuel available by 30 to find out how many days of travel you have left.

LIMITED PERCEPTION

All Hydran vehicles possess a sense of touch, allowing them to feel their way forward and to stop if they hit an impassable obstacle.



SELF AWARE

Hydran vehicles are living things, and thus have a limited amount of self awareness. When they hunger they will toot their airhorns or give other signs. They need food and they need to rest occasionally (normally one day out of every thirty.) They can also perform certain functions automatically. Once given a direction by their driver, they will continue to follow it even if the driver is asleep. They will stop if they come to an impassable obstacle and let their driver know. They are capable of responding to threats in a very limited way. If they are attacked and in pain (i.e.. losing LF) and their driver is not in control for any reason (such as being dead or incapacitated through critical hits) they will flee from the attack.

WEAPONS

The cost of any attached weapons is in addition to the cost of the vehicle.

OPTIONAL SYSTEMS

GANGLIONIC LINKS

Ganglionic links can be used to directly control various Hydran biomachines, providing they too possess a ganglionic link. You can use them to patch yourself into the biomachine's nervous system and use it as an extension of your own body. While controlling a biomachine in this way, there is no non-proficiency penalty for not having the appropriate skill. If you do have the appropriate skill, you get a +1 bonus to all your rolls.

GANGLIONIC MASKS

Many Hydran vehicles are equipped with ganglionic masks. These strange face-hugging symbiotes graft themselves onto your head and use neural links to let you control the vehicle directly. The affect is as given for ganglionic links above. Ganglionic masks add 1,000 credits to the cost of a vehicle.

Most Hydrans have some experience of this technology, but it can be a weird and disturbing experience for any non-Hydran. They must make an IN roll to adapt to a ganglionic mask. If they fail, they tear the mask from their face, or are too disturbed by the sensation of it to actually gain any benefit. You can make one IN roll per day to acclimatize to a ganglionic mask. If you succeed once - you need never make such an IN roll again.

DEXTERITY

Hydran vehicles can be given their DX. This is used when the vehicle is not directly under the control of its driver and is maneuvering over difficult obstacles. It can also be used in place of the driver's DX when making driving skill rolls if it is higher than the driver's own DX. Dexterity costs 1,000 credits at level zero, and an additional 1,000 credits per level cumulative to a maximum of +3.

SENSES

Living Hydran vehicles can be given senses other than touch. To give a vehicle sight adds 3,000 credits to its cost. You can increase its perception rolls by +1 level at a cost of 100 credits per level cumulative to a maximum of +3. This vision can be turned into night vision or x100 telescopic vision for an additional 1,000 credits per type of vision added. These senses can be used by anyone who is ganglionically linked to the vehicle. Use the pilot's awareness skill if it is higher. This cost is - per pair of eyes. These are usually forward facing. You can add additional eyes that will look left, right or to the rear. They can also be turret mounted. Each additional pair of eyes costs half as much as the original.

BIO-LINKED WEAPONS

If your living vehicle can see, and has its own DX, then it can have its weapons bio-linked. This enables the weapons to be fired by the vehicle itself when it comes under attack or on the order of the vehicle's driver.

The weapons use the vehicle's DX when rolling to hit. To use turret mounted weapons and weapons that fire, other than directly forward, the vehicle needs eyes in the turret or focused in the direction the weapon fires. The cost for bio-linked weapons is an additional 500 credits per fixed mount, 1000 credits per turret.

CARNIVOROUS VEHICLES

Some Hydran Walkers have been developed to allow them to forage for prey. They can subsist on organic material. They have their own maws and feeding mandibles mounted on their chassis, and digestive systems lace their carapaces. They can transmute one LF of animal or human prey into the equivalent of 1 kg of nectar. This LF is calculated from the original LF their prey had before taking any wounds. They can only consume their prey after it is dead. Of course, some of these vehicles go rogue and roam the Wastelands in search of food. The modifications for this are expensive and cost 250 credits per LF of the carnivorous vehicle. This modification is illegal in many places because hungry vehicles have been known to run amok.

For example, a vehicle consumes a dead human. When unwounded, the man had 10 LF. The vehicle consumes this and transmutes it into the equivalent of 10 kg of nectar. It does not matter that the man had his LF reduced to zero in the fight in which he died, it is the original LF that counts.

BRAIN-LINKED

One terrifying and perverse habit of the Hydrans is to link human brains to their vehicles. This long, complex and delicate operation is takes a symbionist and costs 10,000 credits to perform and takes 10+d6 hours. If the symbionics roll is fumbled then the brain dies. If it is failed then the brain has its IN, and all its skills, reduced by 1 per 3 failures, or part thereof, that the roll was failed by. If the roll is successfully made, all goes according to plan.

The vehicle then has the skills and memories contained within the brain as well as the personality and mental disadvantages of its former owner. Of course, many humans go mad when they awake to find themselves trapped in the body of a walker. This option is normally only used as a last resort by the incurably ill or the very, very strange.

SPEECH

Brain-linked vehicles can be given speech for a cost of 1,000 credits.

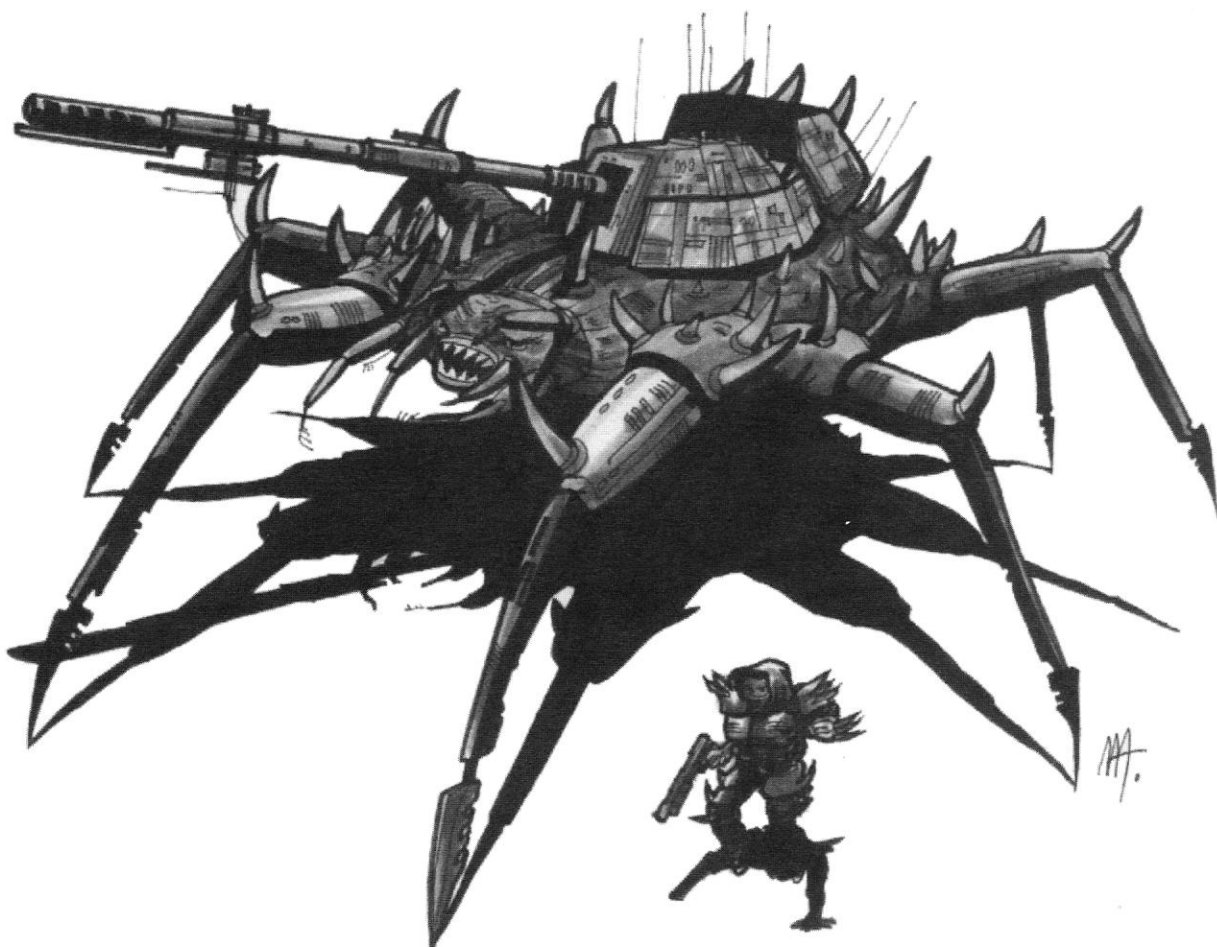
GROUND VEHICLES

The Hydrans favor walkers for their ground vehicles, simply because they are easier to create from living things. All walkers can pass over the roughest terrain without penalty. All of the following vehicles use their own slot in the *Driving (Walker)* skill.

STILTWALKER

MX	LF	AR	PS	CC	C
40	40	6	6*	2	2M

Stiltwalkers are huge insectoid creatures with very long segmented legs.



They are designed to operate in the treacherous swamps around Hydra and their bodies contain flotation tanks that will keep the vehicle afloat even in the deepest quicksand. They will allow a stiltwalker to swim at quarter speed through quicksand, bog or even water. Passengers ride in a howdah on the vehicle's back. There is usually space to mount a couple of heavy weapons. These can traverse on 180 degree arcs fore and rear.

SPIDERKAR

MX	LF	AR	PS	CC	C
80	50	4	4	0.5	5M

These eight-legged vehicles can scuttle across the roughest terrain with amazing speed. They can pass over broken ground without penalty. They are favored by Hydrans for crossing the Wastes but many others find their arachnid appearance repulsive and frightening. Spiderkars can have one forward firing heavy weapon mounted on their front, and a second on their roof capable of rotating through 360 degrees.

SPIDERTANK

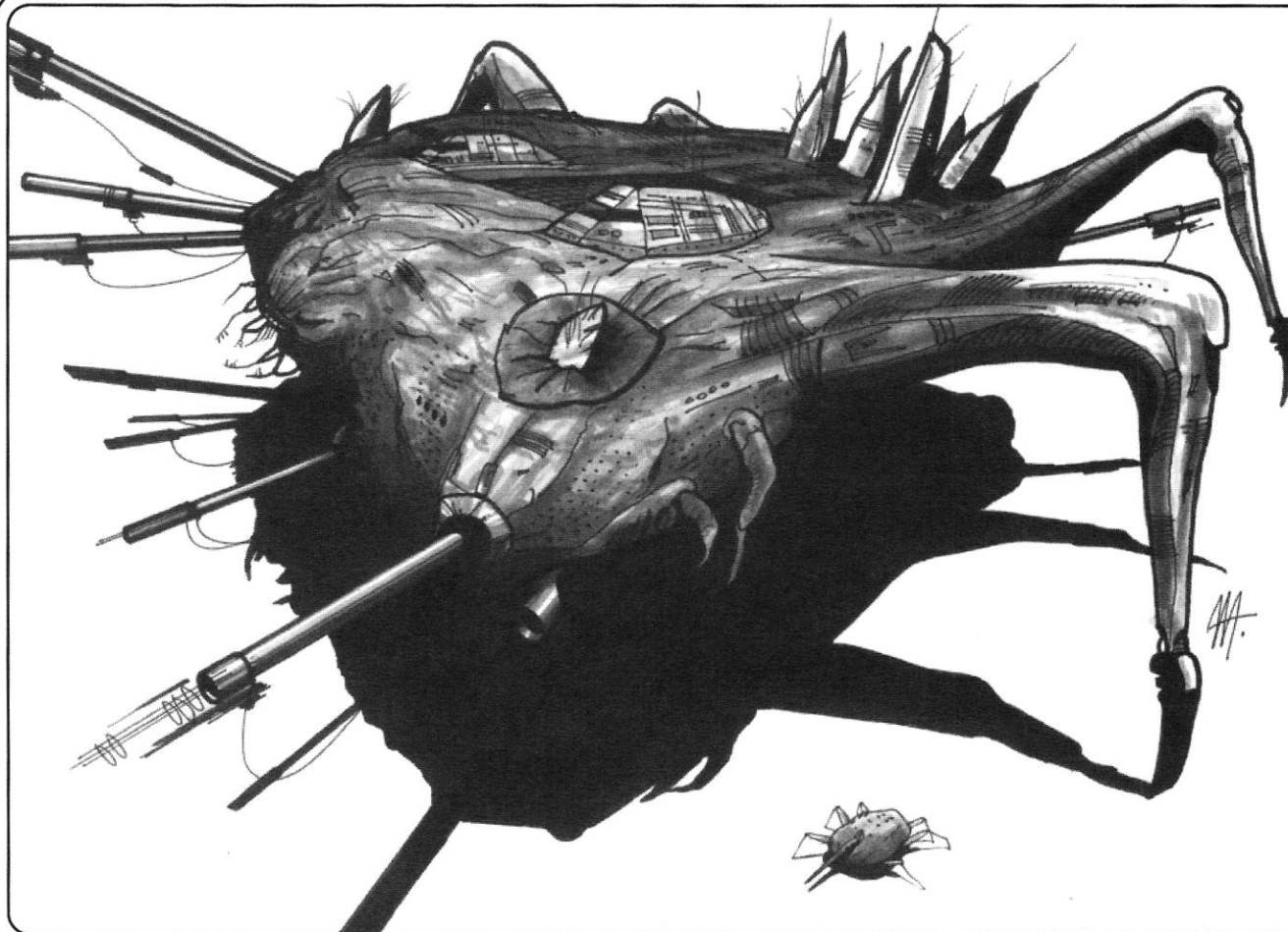
MX	LF	AR	PS	CC	C
60	80	12	3	5	10M

Spidertanks are enormous arachnid war-machines created in the biofacs of House Meleus. They are covered in hard spiked carapace armor, and where the jaws of the spider would be are mounted two forward firing heavy weapons. They can also have up to four linked heavy weapons turret-mounted on the top of their carapace. This can traverse through a 360 degree arc. They are very swift and maneuverable and can cross difficult terrain at full speed, just like quadrupedal walkers.

SPIDERKARRIER

MX	LF	R	PS	CC	C
60	80/100	6/20	6/50	30/10	10/25M

Spiderkarrriers are huge haulers designed to carry heavy loads across the deserts. They can cross the roughest terrain without penalty. Spiderkarrriers come in two versions; the civilian and the military version that is capable of carrying up to 50 troops in comfort.



In the vehicle statistics, the number before the slash applies to the civilian version, after the slash to the military one. Spiderkarriers can have up to four linked heavy weapons turret-mounted on top of their carapace. This is capable of traversing through 360 degrees.

SPIDERDRONE

MX	LF	AR	PS	CC	C
60	40	6	1	10	3M

These are very unusual creations. They somewhat resemble spiderkarriers but are much smaller. They do not require a pilot. They will automatically follow any other Hydran vehicle to which they have been assigned. Providing they do not stray more than 100 meters from their assigned leader, they will follow it as it moves and stop when it stops. In the Wastes, long lines of spiderdrones, stretched out behind a single spiderkarrier, are a common sight. They are used to carry additional cargo without the cost of paying a driver.

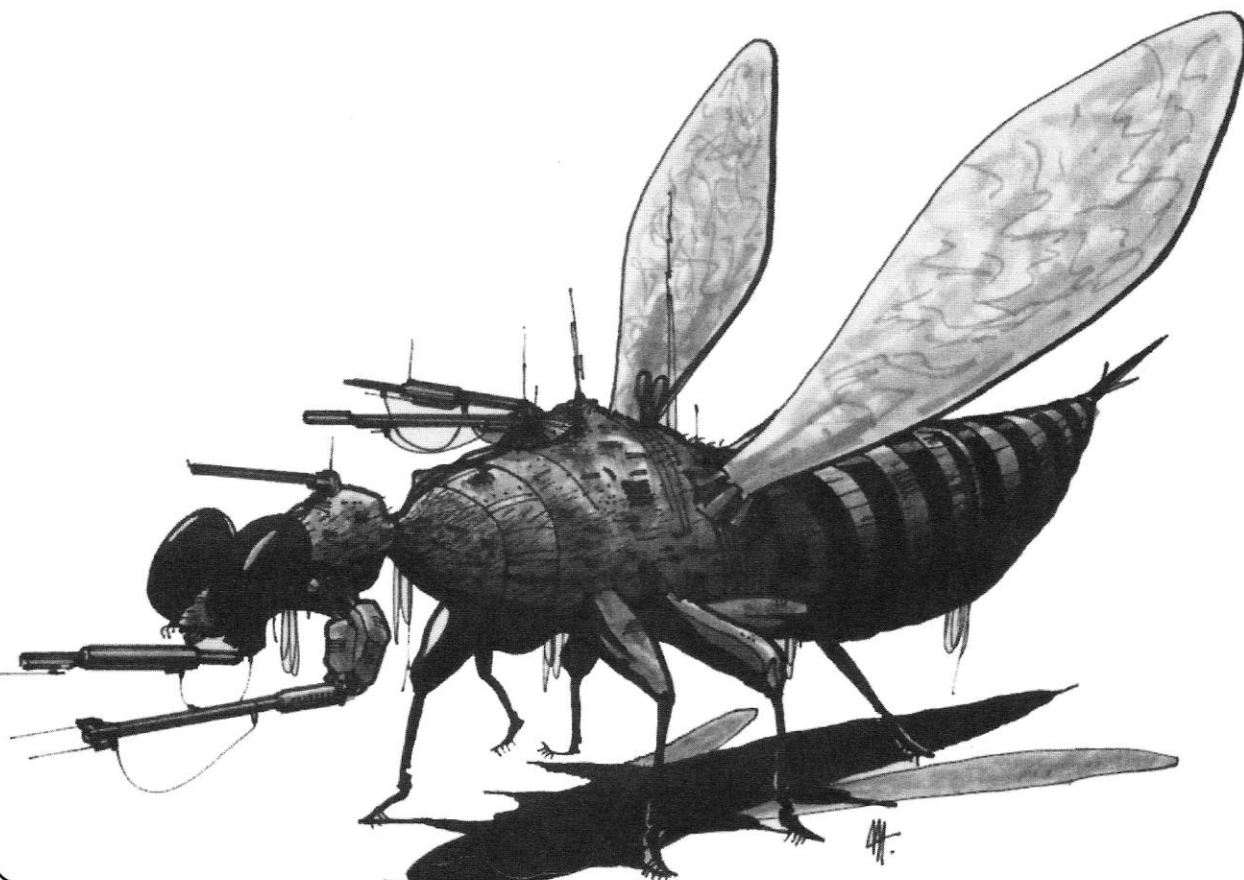
SANDWALKERS

MX	LF	AR	PS	CC	C
40	1,000	24	100	500	1G

These huge Drakonium harvesters are the largest mobile biomachines ever to stalk the land. They form the backbone of the Hydran Sandfleets and are normally accompanied by a swarm of support vehicles.

They are walking nightmares of hardened chitin and spiked armor capable of moving through all but the worst shatterstorms. The tread of their columnar legs causes the earth to shake. With their mighty snouts they devour Drakonium, storing it in huge holding sacs deep in their bowels. Once they reach their base they excrete the Drakonium into processing hoppers, before setting off to find more. Sandwalkers draw energy from a small portion of the Drakonium they have consumed and, as a result, have a virtually unlimited range.

Sandwalkers tower up to forty meters high and are almost one hundred meters in length. On their backs are landing platforms for ornithopters. Inside their bodies are lifepods for over one hundred people. More pods can be attached to their underbellies, each capable of holding 50 more troops at a cost of 5 tons of CC. Sandwalkers can be equipped with over one hundred heavy weapon turrets but in general are lightly armed. Every spare centimeter of space is used to store precious Drakonium.



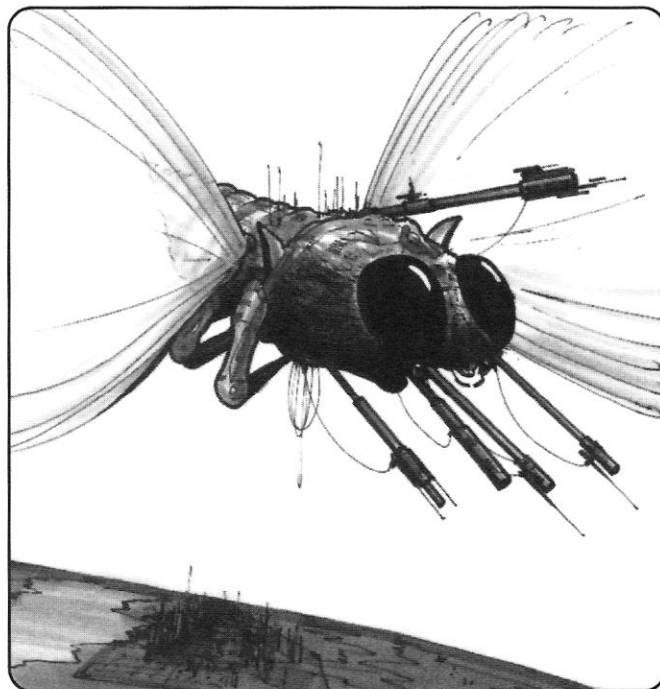
FLYERS

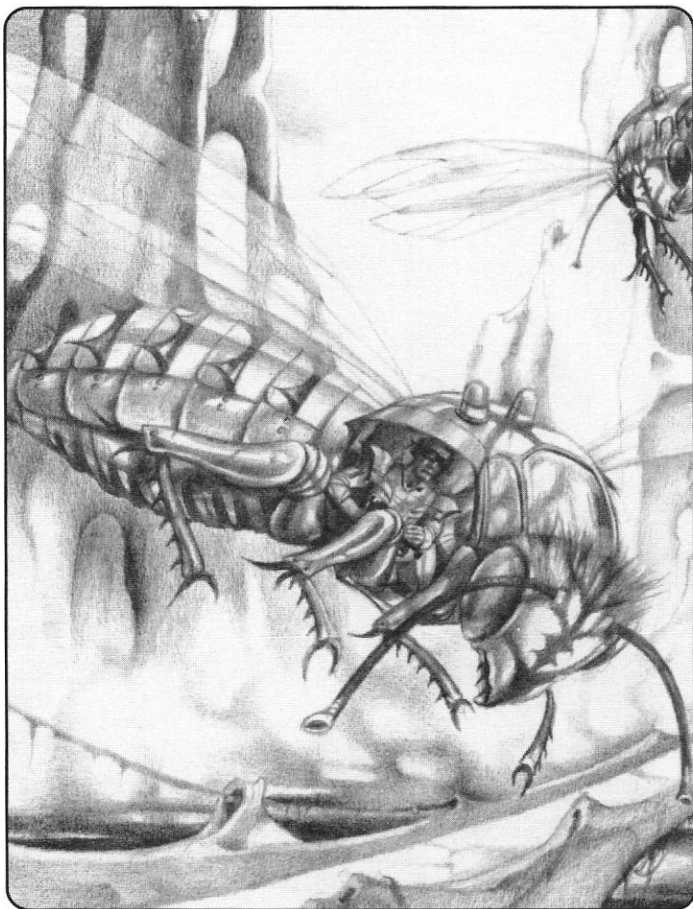
The Hydrans also possess many ornithopters and other flying machines. These use a wide variety of propulsion systems, but all have chitinous bodies and living central nervous systems. Each of the following vehicles uses its own slot in the *Ornithopter* skill.

DRAGONFLYERS

MX	LF	AR	PS	CC	C
200	40	2	2	0.2	10M

Dragonflyers resemble huge wasps with a cockpit of chitin emerging from their backs. Within this cramped space one person can sit in comfort or two people can sit at a push. Dragonflyers can take off, hover and fly backwards, forwards or sideways with the greatest maneuverability, using a combination of their wings for propulsion and guidance and suspensor globes to keep them aloft. They are often used as pleasure craft by wealthy young Hydrans who race them among the streets and towers. Since they are quite fragile this is a dangerous pursuit. Dragonflyers can have two forward firing weapons attached.





ORNITHOPTERS

MX	LF	AR	PS	CC	C
120	80	6	4	10	20M

There are various sorts of ornithopter. Some are held aloft by helicopter blades, others by suspensors, others by psionic power. All of them use some form of wing for propulsion and guidance. Some resemble great bats, others have insect-like wings that retract within their carapace when not in use. All of them are capable of vertical take-off and are very maneuverable.

All Ornithopters can have up to four forward firing heavy weapons attached. Many have turrets in their nose and under their belly as well.

AIRYAUGHT

MX	LF	AR	PS	CC	C
40	500	6	40	100	100M

These large skyships are built around chitin hulls. Many have sail-like wings emerging from their sides and tops, making them resemble huge stream-lined fish rather than more conventional aircraft. They are held aloft by suspensor and use these sails to catch the wind and augment their more conventional drives.

This arrangement allows them to be kept airborne and held aloft by far-fewer suspensors than a normal aircraft. This is a factor of great importance to their cost and energy conscious Hydran designers. The inside of these ships can vary in many ways. Some are luxurious liners, others are functioning cargo ships. Some of these craft have only skimmer drives, and thus must float along just above the planet's surface. These cost half of the given price above. They can be armed and equipped like haulers (see WW pp 199).

WATERCRAFT

As a great naval power, Hydra has many different types of ship. Each of the following vehicles has its own slot in the *Sailor* skill.

JUNKBOAT

MX	LF	AR	PS	CC	C
10	100	4	30	50	10M

Junkboats come in all different shapes and sizes. They are normally to be found in the canals of Hydra and sometimes out on the open sea. Most junkboats are powered by a combination of sails and conventional drive systems. Some use motors, some use hydrojets sucking in water from the front and spraying it out of the rear. Most junkboats are home to extended families and are designed more for comfort than speed. Many are hundreds of years old and barely in seaworthy condition. They are usually armed with whatever weapons their owners are carrying. Some mount heavy weapons on bows and stern if traveling over the open sea.

SQUIDSHIPS

MX	LF	AR	PS	CC	C
40	50	6	4	10	20M

Squidships are very unusual craft. They are submarines made from hardened chitin and powered by hydrojets. They all have air-recyclers and can carry passengers under water for 24 hours before the air supply runs out and they must surface. They resemble stream-lined seashells that open up like oysters to let their passengers board.

CLIPPERS

MX	LF	AR	PS	CC	C
20	500	6	40	100	25M

Clippers are ocean-going sailing ships. Their hulls are made of chitin. Their sails are made of flesh. Their ropes and hawsers are made of living tendon and sinew, and the ship's sails are controlled by its skipper through a ganglionic link. They ply the seas around Hydra carrying cargo to the Archipelago. They are designed to be usable after the Drakonium is exhausted and thus to be a valuable part of the Diaspora.



DATA CORE ACCESS

TO BE HUMAN

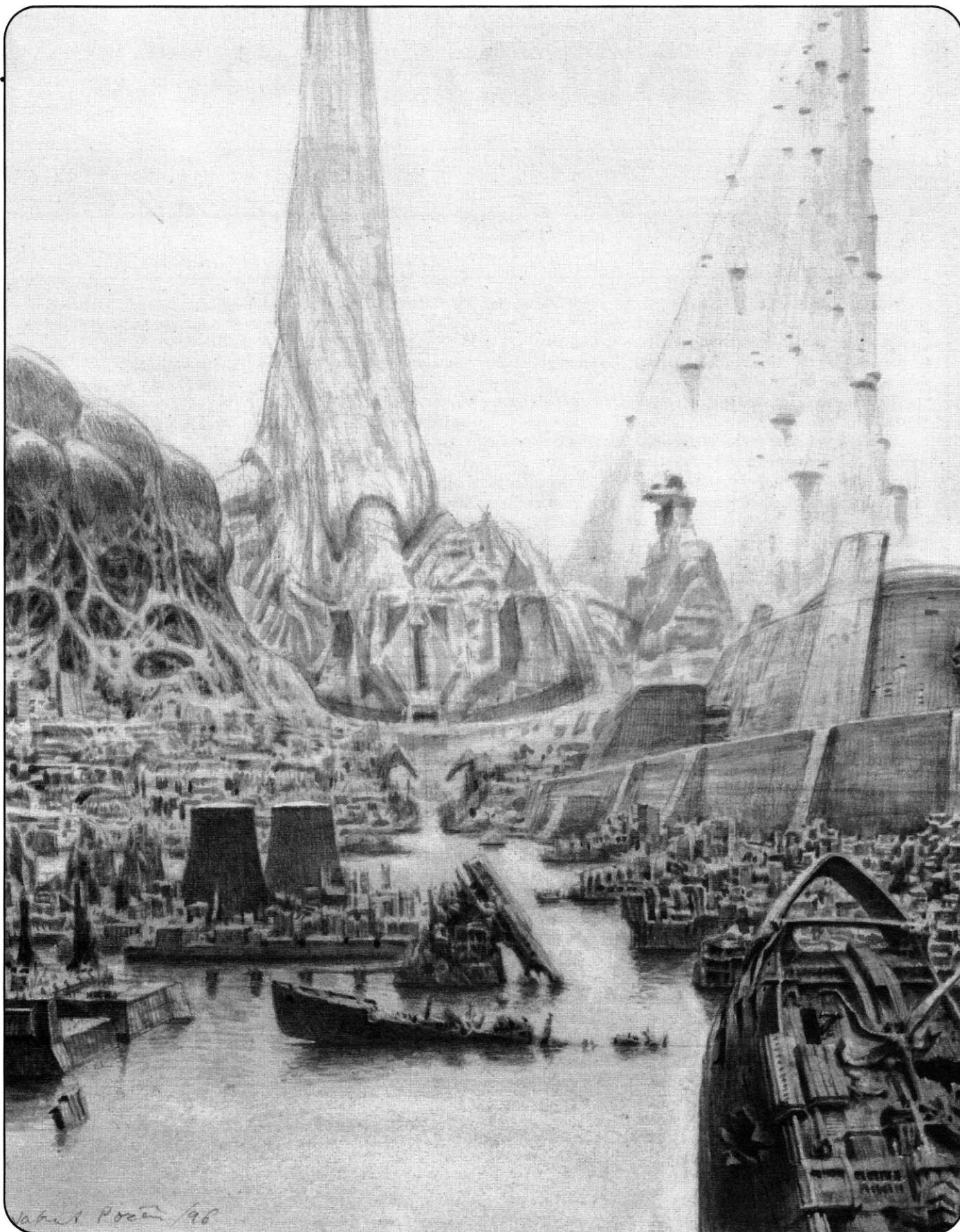
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VIRUS DETECTION PROGRAM: ON	INITIATE SEQUENCE	GUNSTBERG OVERDRIVE	CORTICO QUASI-DEGRADATION
FLOW LINK QUASI-PROTOCOL: INITIATED	NON-BIOLOGICAL RAW MATERIAL:	MICRO-OPTICAL MODULATOR: ON	GANGLIAL ELECTRO-IMPLANT
FILE SUB-PROTOL: GENCLAN	INTERNAL DATA CORRUPTION:	SILICONE SYNAPTIC SIMULATOR	SMART CHIP INSTALLED
NANOMECHANICAL INTERFACE:	LINGUISTIC MARKUP DIRECTORY	DYSFUNCTION	METHANE IMPULSE CATHETER
VALIDATE SIMULATION	MOLECULAR BINARY:	MEGAPULSE CHANNEL ON	OCCIPITAL FLOW MODULATION: SINE

NARRATOR

LOGIN:	SUB system COORDINATES	SEROTONERGIC OVERLOAD	BIOFEEDBACK MATRIX: XO
PASSWORD:	X1:477.27.8 X2:566.57.2	AMYGDALPTIC OVERWRITE	BINARY NANOBOT PRESENT
ACCESS GRANTED	Y1:642.42.4 Y2:388.01.2	SMART CHIP INSTALLED	GENMATRIX SCANNER ENABLED
SECURITY CLEARANCE LEVEL:	Z2: 90.09.9 Z1: 31.47.3	BIOMECH AUGMENTATION:	PATTERN RECOGNIZER NULL:
EXCESS GENETIC VARIATION:	ABBERANT CHROMA LEVELS:	NANOCCIPITAL DRIVER	INFODUMP INITIATING

Karl was uneasy. He had not felt right since the ornithopter dropped them in the clearing in the Slime Jungles. No, he corrected himself, since before that, since he had agreed to join this fool expedition. The whole thing just gave him a bad feeling. He wished he had never agreed to Malthus's mad request. He wished he had never come here.

Too late for that now, he thought, looking out of the ancient stone tower to the old stone streets that were already starting to bloom once more with strange fungi. By the Ancestors, this jungle was fertile. Less than an hour after the team had swept the area with flame-throwers, and saturated the stone in potent defoliant, the plants were back. It made him very uneasy, always had, even back in the days of his youth when he had done his jungle training with his unit.

Perhaps it was then that he had first noticed the flaw in his nature. He was not like the other Valkans in his unit, stern, upright, scared of nothing. The jungle had frightened him. Even though he had done his best not to show it to his comrades, they had sensed it, made him the butt of friendly and not-so-friendly jokes. Oh, he had done all right, pulled himself through the exercises, learned all he needed to know, but he had never been comfortable after that, either with the ideology of his genclan, or the company of his unit.

Looking back, if he had to say exactly when he had set his foot on a different path, one that would make him an outcast and a renegade from his own people, he would pick that first night in the Slime Jungle. His life had been changed then, by his simple unease at the sight of the endless alien foliage, and the hint of the things that lurked within it. He had always had a premonition that his life would end there.

He laughed softly and bitterly. So why did he keep coming back? Maybe because he wanted to prove to himself that he was not a coward, that his comrades had been wrong when they laughed at his sweaty-palmed fear. Or maybe because he had grown accustomed to danger, and liked the thrill of it. Or maybe because it was his destiny to die in the jungle, and there was nothing he could do about it anyway.

He had never been able to understand the strange compulsion that brought him back into this green hell. Since he left his genclan he had never been out of the jungle for more than a three-month stretch. Every time he came out, he swore never to return, but he always did. There was something about the Slime Jungle that got into a man's blood. There was a thrill to being a Bug Hunter that nothing else could match.

He forced himself to keep calm. He ran a hand over his shaven head, and lifted his heavy blaster to make sure that it was still working. In the Slime Jungles weapons had a way of malfunctioning if not checked hourly. Small fungi grew in the mechanisms. Strange life forms drained the Drakonium batteries. Heat and humidity took their toll.

Clicking the mechanism of the weapon, making sure that it was still functioning, calmed him. He knew the line of thought he had been pursuing was a dangerous one. He's seen it happen to others. They went jungle crazy. Started talking about the light, and the beauty and the lure of danger. Those were the ones who went for a walk one day and never came back.

What was that?

Had he heard a stone fall? These ancient buildings were crumbling. The plants broke the stone with their roots. Things grew in the cracks. Age wore them out. They were not like the buildings of his home city which would repair themselves when things went wrong. The Ancients might have been peerless architects but this was one area in which his home metrozone had surpassed them, he thought with justifiable pride.

He smiled grimly. He knew he was allowing his thoughts to wander because he did not want to think about what else might have made the stone fall. He picked himself up and unlimbered his weapon and walked slowly and softly towards the ancient doorway. Sweat ran down his forehead. He felt more than a twinge of fear.

What was that creaking sound?

He froze. His spine tingled. He fought down an urge to look behind him, to control the sure and certain knowledge that something terrible was stealthily approaching his unprotected back. He forced himself to look ahead, to where he had heard the noise.



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Suddenly it was there. Maybe it had been human once. It still had a vaguely humanoid shape, although its hands ended in poisonous needle like talons and shark like jaws dominated its face. Glistening carapace armor covered its whole body. It had swung itself around the doorway from the wall to which it must have been clinging like a lizard. It moved with incredible, eye-blurring speed.

Now that the moment of crisis had come, Karl was calm. He responded smoothly, as his training took hold. To him the Swarmer seemed to be moving in slow motion. He threw himself backwards out of its reach, and as he fell, triggered the blaster. White hot bolts of incandescent energy tore through the thing, burning it and shredding it simultaneously. It exploded into a shower of greenish blood and pinkish flesh.

Karl rolled onto his feet and risked a quick sideways glance over his shoulder. No one was there, but he knew that counted for nothing. Where there was one Swarmer there was always another. Malthus's information had been right. There was a nest of them here.

He ran back down the corridor. His keen ears picked out the sounds of swiftly moving feet from his right. He threw himself round the corner prepared for the worst, and he got it. Swarm Warriors filled the passageway, hideous features twisted in terrifying snarls that revealed their long rows of serrated needle like teeth.

Karl pulled the trigger once more and advanced firing. In the confined space, with the heavy blaster spitting death, nothing could survive. The leading Swarmers were chopped in two by his first burst. The others tried to advance into the rain of death. He mowed them down as well. In scant seconds he had cleared the corridor.

He could hear the sounds of firing from up ahead, from the main chamber, and he raced towards it. Their base camp was under attack. He lengthened his stride, carrying the heavy weapon as if it were weightless, and surged into the room. Hickman and Gregor stood at the far end of the room. Hickman had two SMG's, one in each hand. Gregor held an autorifle. Both were blazing away at something down the corridor that he could not see.

Malthus looked up as he entered, turning to cover him with his pistol. Just in case his comm-net locator wasn't working, Karl shouted: "Don't shoot - it's me!"

Malthus threw a grenade at him. No, not at him, over him. Knowing what was coming next Karl dived forward, throwing himself flat behind their supply crates. He heard the explosion, felt green blood splatter down round him. He glanced backwards. More Swarm Warriors were advancing. This was bad. The Hive was obviously bigger than Malthus's information had led him to believe. Maybe it was a trap. Well, too late to worry about it now.

He stood up and snapped off some shots. The Swarm advance stopped. A weird howling assailed his ears. Malthus had unleashed his pets. The biohounds went surging forward. Big deal, Karl thought. Malthus claimed his pets were special but so what? Biohounds were tough but he knew from experience that Swarm Warriors were tougher.

"Zarathustra!" Malthus shouted, and Karl wondered if he had gone mad, then he noticed something. A strange change was coming over the hounds. Their chitin armor was cracking, and they seemed to swell and gain muscle mass. Their jaws became so huge that they made those of a Swarm warrior look like the jaws of a kitten. Their jaws were wide enough now to swallow a man at a bite. They had ceased growing and stood as tall at the shoulder as Karl.

Amazing, he thought, warhounds. He had heard of such creatures but never seen them in action. He was going to get his chance now. The pack had rushed into the Swarm Warriors, and a ferocious ruck began. Howls and screams filled the air.

"Look out!" someone shouted. Something dropped from above, through what must have been a hidden panel. The Swarm Warrior landed easily and bounced to its feet, coming at Karl with claws outstretched. He cut it in two with a burst from his heavy blaster, then turned to look at Malthus.

Malthus nodded at him. A strange grin was on his face. Karl recognized it. A similar one was plastered onto his own features. They were locked in combat with the deadliest foes man had ever faced, fierce merciless creatures who would never stop until one side was defeated. He knew now why he kept coming back to the jungle.

This was really living.

RUNNING A HYDRAN CAMPAIGN

There are many ways of running a campaign set in Hydra. The PC's can be agents of a genclan, freelancers caught up in the fluid political situation there, or simply strangers passing through. The important thing is to get them involved in the action and bring home the strangeness of the setting to them.

Hydra is a unique place with bizarre architecture and even stranger vehicles and technologies. You should use these at every opportunity to give the players a feeling of the oddness that surrounds them. Describe the huge spider-like walkers stalking down the streets, the twisted mazes of alleys swarming with all manner of exotic beings, the massive insect-like flyers filling the skies overhead, the cool shadows of the enormous organic buildings chilling the streets on which they fall.

Hydra teems with life in a multitude of strange forms. It is anarchic place where almost anything goes and anything is for sale. It is a place of great contrasts. The genclans are amazingly wealthy and the Indigents are poor as mutants in the slums of Kimera. Places of great beauty exist cheek by jowl with areas that are twisted and horrible. Most outsiders find the organic nature of Hydra's buildings repellent. Most are repulsed by the Hydran's seeming lack of all scruples.



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Try and bring home to your players that this is a place where the normal standards of morality do not apply. Things that horrify us are the norm here. Slavery exists in many forms, and is not only condoned, it is the basis of much of the economy. Ethical standards of conduct in science and medicine do not apply. The Hydrans will try anything as long as it looks like it might work. The folk of the gencians are not sane according to the standards by which we measure sanity.

When role-playing Hydrans, remember how totally focused they are on themselves. They will talk endlessly of their specialist subjects. They have staring, unblinking eyes. They look obsessed all the time. Their warriors are casual killers. Their scientists will stop at nothing in the pursuit of knowledge. They are a ruthless people, and you should have them behave as such.

When they employ the characters they will not let little technicalities, such as legality or morality, get in their way. They will define their goals and expect the players to achieve them by whatever means are necessary. They have no sympathy for failure and no tolerance for weakness. They will not accept excuses.

More to the point, Hydra is a city where the interests of millions of these ruthless amoral people come into conflict every day, and the chances are that the players are going to end up caught in the middle. They are going to find themselves pawns or players in some very vicious games.

There is little law and order as we understand it in Hydra. On the insula of the gencians, martial law is enforced by the troops of the Tower and summary arrest and execution can happen all too easily. In the freezones, the law is sporadically enforced by Guild Hunters hired by the local councilors. For protection most people go armed. Ultra-violence is simply a fact of everyday life. There are many poor and desperate people with nothing to lose.

The gencians constantly dream up new schemes to get ahead of their rivals and will stop at nothing to discredit them. They do stop short of outright war, since such a conflict could lead to the destruction of the city and themselves. An uneasy balance of terror exists between all sides. This means there is plenty of opportunity for work of the roughest sort: assassination, industrial espionage, sabotage and all manner of skullduggery. There is also room for the players to try and stop these things. They will often be hired as bodyguards or security specialists.

The players can be paid in credits or in kind. This means that they will have access to all sorts of symbiotic and genesculpted goodies, for the gencians reward their favored agents well. For the successful, life in Hydra is good. For the unsuccessful, well- the slums are full of them, and their corpses are often found floating face down in the canals.

When running adventures in Hydra you should not hesitate to point out the disparity in wealth between the rich and poor, or the overwhelming air of desperation, disease and poverty that hangs over much of the place.

Robbery and street crime are common. They are often used as cover for assassination. Try and make every journey down the streets of the freezones tense and menacing. The insula of the gencians are not much better. There will be troops on every street corner and constant surveillance of all suspicious strangers.

The available wealth is another source of adventures. Strange artifacts from all corners of Waste World find their way into the freeports. The mansions and junkboats of the wealthy can provide tempting targets for PCs of a thievish bent. The canals and the constant jurisdictional boundaries make escape a matter of getting to the water and swimming for dear life.

Of course, the wealthy are not without means of defense. All manner of sentries, human and inhuman, will defend their homes, and all manner of deadly beings can be hired or created to find and return their precious possessions, usually leaving the thieves dead in the process. The salvage and recovery business is another potentially lucrative area for PC involvement.

ADVENTURE SEEDS

Here are a few ideas for running adventures in Hydra, or using the Hydrans as background. We're sure you can come up with many more of your own.

BEASTHUNTERS

Hydra is full of genesculptors. Many of these are tampering with Things Man Was Not Meant To Know. Under the circumstances it is almost inevitable that things will go wrong, and creatures that are both powerful and dangerous will escape into the city. The players can be hired to track these things down.

Beasthunting can be handled in any number of ways, from subtle investigations to straightforward hack and slash. Your PC's prey could be anything from a twisted serial killer with biomanipulated augmented powers, to a ravening horde of monsters. You could run anything from a detective story where the PC's piece together clues, to a trip into the labyrinth of tunnels beneath a Broken Tower to exterminate a new Swarm Hive.

BRING THEM BACK ALIVE

This is a variant on Beasthunting. In this variant, it's the players job to bring the monster they are hunting back alive; so its genetic matrixes can be extracted or so it can be used as a basis for the creation of some new and foul creature. House Stein are obvious employers in this version of the scenario, but bear in mind House Fera employs people for this purpose as well.

ASSASSINS

Someone has been targeted for termination by House Spydra. It's the players job to keep them alive until the victim can be gotten safely out of Hydra. Alternatively the victim may refuse to leave and the heroes may have to hope they can kill enough Spydrans to get the assassins to stop.

The reason why the victim is wanted is up to you. Maybe he is a spy, or wanted by criminals or simply has powerful enemies. Maybe he is a plant and the real target is one of the PCs.



A variant on this is to have the players be the assassins and dispatch them to slay a difficult target. In this case, you'll want to have them gather intelligence and come up with a plan, since the target will be well protected and a frontal assault is unlikely to succeed.

THE REBELS

There have been many rebel movements in Hydra. They seek to free the humans and the subraces from the bondage of the genclans, stamp out slavery, end the manufacture of golems or simply redistribute wealth more equitably. Some use peaceful protest, others are vicious terrorists. Many are pawns of the genclans, set up to lure in truly rebellious individuals and then betray them. Some are pawns of the genclans aimed at causing rebellion in rival insulae. As quickly as they spring up, they are stamped out by the genclans.

The players can be asked to join one of these rebel movements, or sent to infiltrate on behalf of the genclans. Maybe they'll discover the rebels have a point and join it in all sincerity. In any case, being part of a rebel movement can lead to a drastic shortening of life expectancy. The genclans are not merciful to those they perceive as their enemies. Once part of a rebel alliance, the PCs are likely to be sent on all sorts of missions from sabotage to contacting sympathetic foreign powers.

THE CURE

A new plague has broken out in the freezone where the players live, or in one specific insula or maybe it affects the whole city. A cure has been found but certain substances are needed to enable mass-production. Our heroes are dispatched into the Slime Jungles (or off to the Archipelago or anywhere else that seems useful) in order to find them. And it gets worse; the plague is the work of evil enemies and they will stop at nothing to make sure the players fail in their quest.

Additional complications are possible. Perhaps the freezone or insula where the players live is under quarantine by order of the Tower of Lords and our heroes need to find a way to slip out. If the plague is affecting the whole city then perhaps it is the work of foreign powers such as the Prometheans, and the PCs will find themselves in conflict with the servants of the Machine Gods. And perhaps the plague is the precursor to something worse like a full scale invasion or all-out war - once Hydra is sufficiently weakened. It all depends how much pressure you want to put on the players and how apocalyptic your mood is.

THE PLAGUE BRINGERS

An interesting possibility is to reverse The Cure scenario and have the players dispatched with a flask full of plague with which to contaminate a rival genclan insula or a foreign metrozone's colony.

This can be a tense scenario in itself - for who knows what will happen if the flask breaks while the PC's are carrying it. An even more vile possibility is to have the PC's carry the thing unwittingly, their employers have lied to them about its contents and told them to give it to someone at their destination.

COLONISTS

The PCs are part of the Diaspora. They are out in the wilds - helping found a new colony. They may have been hired as specialists or this may be a new start in life for them. In any case a site has to be located, and local threats have to be neutralized. Maybe there are monsters in the surrounding area, or Drakonium prospectors or Skavengers. In any case, our heroes will have to compete with the elements, bad guys and internal dissension within the ranks of the colonists.

This adventure seed is a good basis for a long term campaign set in the Wastelands, as the players explore their surroundings, and make life safe for those who are relying on them.

Alternatively, maybe the players are hired by the folk of a struggling colony to solve some problem for them. They can deal with those marauding bandits or cleanse that Swarm Hive. This is also a good way of bringing existing characters into a colonists campaign. In any case you'll need a good map of the area and you should mark potential adventure sites, rival colonies and places of interest on it before you begin.

HARDSHIP

The two most common forms of hardship your players can undergo during the course of their adventures are starvation and thirst. While not as dramatic a cause of death as a bullet through the head, they can still kill just the same.

STARVATION

Once you go more than 24 hours without eating you automatically begin to suffer from starvation. This has three main affects. You lose 1 LF per day until you eat a reasonable meal. While suffering the affects of starvation, you cannot recover LF normally. You also suffer a penalty to all your die rolls due to the affects of weakness and your inability to concentrate. All your characteristics are reduced by 1 for every 5 LF, or part thereof, you lose in this manner. You will recover the lost characteristics at the rate of +1 per day once your eating patterns return to normal.

Normally you must eat at least one normal size meal or a food tablet each day. For game purposes a normal size meal is at least 100 grams of food per day. This is actually a tiny meal but you can get by on it.

Narrators should feel free to vary this according to the type and nutritional value of the food available.

THIRST

Thirst is even worse than hunger and will kill you quicker. It operates in exactly the same way as starvation except that you will lose 1d6 LF per day after twenty four hours without water. While suffering the effects of thirst you cannot recover LF normally. This will be increased by a d6 if the prevailing conditions are extremely hot. You will lose one point of from all your characteristics for ever 5 points, or part thereof, of LF lost to thirst. If you are suffering the effects of hunger and thirst simultaneously then add the LF loss caused by them together before calculating the penalty.



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For example, Rex has been captured and undergone two days of captivity without food and water. On the second day starvation and thirst kick in. Rex suffers 1 LF loss from hunger and 3 LF loss from thirst. Adding these two together gives us 4 LF loss, so Rex suffers a penalty of -1 to his ST, DX and die rolls. Since Rex has ST and DX of +1 they now go down to zero. His IN and PW of zero become -1.

The next day his cruel captors turn the heating in the cell up to maximum and Rex really starts to suffer. He loses another 1 LF to hunger and 7 LF to thirst. He has lost a total of 12 LF now and his ST and DX are reduced by 3 down to -2 each. His IN and PW are now -3. Rex wonders how much more of this he can take.

LOSS OF MOBILITY

As your ST is reduced by the effects of hardship, your MR goes down as well. If it falls to zero, you will be so weak that you are unable to move and can only lie there groaning.

DYING FROM HARDSHIP

If your LF reaches zero through hardship and you are still suffering from hunger and/or thirst, you can die. At the end of each 24 hour period you will lose LF as normal and this will tell you the level of Special Wound critical hit you will receive. If you have the advantage *hardy* then you can subtract 3 from the special wound critical hit roll.

If the result of the critical hit leaves you still conscious you do not suffer from shock. Instead, roll a d20 and add your ST and any modifiers you may get from being hardy. If you fail this roll, you will start to hallucinate and be incapable of rational thought or action for d6 hours.

On day four poor old Rex has just about had it. His takes 5 more LF loss from hunger and thirst. His original LF of 15 is gone and he still has 2 more LF to lose. This means he takes a Special Wound Critical Hit at +2. He rolls 11 on the d20 and adds 2. The result is 13. He loses consciousness for d6 hours, and will be at -2 on all skill and characteristic rolls until he regains all his LF. Since he is unconscious he does not need to roll to see whether he hallucinates.

RECOVERING FROM HARDSHIP

Once you have been fed and drank your fill, you will still be weak. Lost characteristics come back at the rate of one day of complete rest. Once all your characteristics have returned to normal, you will be able to regain LF at the normal rate.

SYMBSUITS

Symb suits allow you to reprocess your own bodily wastes, sweat and even the carbon dioxide you breathe out. They actually live on human wastes, purifying them. Their own waste products are actually pure water, air and food that are fed directly back to their wearers.

Obviously, no system is completely closed and there is a limit to the amount of waste exchange that can go on, but symb suits greatly enhance your ability to resist hardship. When wearing a symb suit you can go for 30 days without eating and drinking without suffering the effects of hardship. After this period, you need to eat at least a kilo of food and drink a liter of water. Once you have done so, you can go for another 30 days without food and water, and so on.

DISEASES

There are thousands of diseases present on Waste World. As well as all the natural ills of the flesh to which humanity is prey there are hundreds more caused by the bio-weapons unleashed during the Armageddon Wars. There is not space to list all of them in a book this size so we have provided a selection for you and your players to use and to suffer through and to use as examples when creating your own diseases.

HOW DISEASES WORK

All diseases are explained in the same way, we classify them according to their vector, their virulence, their incubation period, their symptoms and their effects. The format we use to describe them is as follows:

Name. This gives the common name by which the disease is known on Waste World. The number in brackets after the name is the Disease Level. This is only used when calculating whether you can use the disease with the power *Gift Of Karkosa* or with certain psi powers.

Description. This tells you a little about the disease.

Vector. This tells you the manner in which the disease is spread and how it can be caught.

Virulence. This tells you how difficult the disease is to resist. To resist a disease you must make a ST roll using any modifiers you may get from being hardy and using the diseases virulence as a negative modifier.

Incubation. This tells you how long it will be from first exposure to the disease to the first symptoms manifesting themselves.

Duration. This is the period the disease normally takes to run its course. The first number given before the slash is the number of disease resistance rolls you will have to make while the disease runs its course. The number after the slash is the length of time between making these rolls.

Symptoms. This tells you how to detect the disease and any obvious markers of its presence.

Effects. This tells you the effect the disease will have on those who suffer from it.

D3

Where these rules refer to a d3, you should roll a d6 and half the result, rounding up. SO for example, if you roll a 5 when making a d3 roll, then you should treat the result as 3.



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DISEASES IN PLAY

In play almost all diseases work in the same way (exceptions will be dealt with in their description). First of all a patient has to catch the disease, then they suffer through its various stages. Then they will either recover or in the case of particularly nasty diseases they will die or suffer truly nasty long term effects.

CATCHING A DISEASE

In order to catch a disease you must first encounter it through its normal vectors. In the case of most diseases this means either visiting an area where the disease is present or coming into contact with a person who has the disease, or it means consuming food or water where the diseases spores are.

Once you have encountered the vector, you must make a disease resistance roll. This is a ST roll. Positive modifiers are advantages like hardy. Negative modifiers are the diseases virulence and any other debilitating factors such as exhaustion, wounds or bad surroundings such as damp quarters, insanitary conditions etc.

DISEASE ROLL MODIFIERS

All modifiers are cumulative. For example, if you are reduced to 20% of your normal life force, you suffer the penalty for being at less than 50% normal LF and the penalty for being at less than 25%, a cumulative modifier of -4.

- Innoculated: +4
- Less than 50% LF: -2
- Less than 25% LF: -2
- For each minor wound currently suffered: -2
- For each major wound currently suffered: -4
- No sleep in the last 24 hours: -2
- No food in the past 24 hours: -2
- Bad conditions: -2 or more

If you fail your disease resistance roll, you have caught the disease and will suffer its effects.

INCUBATION PERIOD

All diseases have an incubation period. This is the time it takes from which you catch the disease to when the first symptoms show. This can be minutes, hours, days, weeks even years. At the end of this period, you will begin to show symptoms and suffer the negative effects of the disease.

STAGES

All diseases have stages, which get progressively worse. Once the incubation period is over you enter stage one of the disease. As you suffer from a disease you must make a number of disease resistance rolls over the period given in its duration.

Each time you fail one of these rolls, you progress to the next stage of the disease. Once you have made the number of disease rolls given in duration, your disease is said to have run its course, and you will, in most cases, begin the process of recovery.

RALLYING

If you roll a natural 20 or get a result of over 20 when you make a disease roll, you rally, and reduce the stage of the disease you are at by one stage. If this reduces the disease below stage one then you have spontaneously recovered.

RECOVERY

Once your disease has run its course, you will begin to recover. In some cases this means that you begin to work through the stages of the disease in reverse order, over a period equal to the intervals in which you made disease rolls in the ailments duration. I.e, if you made disease rolls every 10 hours when suffering from the disease, you will reduce its stages in 10 hour increments when recovering.

LASTING EFFECTS

Sometimes a disease will leave you with a permanent disadvantage. This is known as a lasting effect and can be bought off in the usual way.

INNOCULATION

With the miraculous progress of medicine in Waste World it is possible to get inoculated against many diseases. Once you have been inoculated, you get a +4 modifier to resisting the disease when it is incubating or progressing. Inoculation costs: in most cases 5 credits per virulence of the disease you are being inoculated against. Availability for inoculations is 9.

If you survive having a disease, you count as inoculated against it in the future. During character creation, you can buy inoculations for the cost given above. You need not worry about availability.

MEDICAL TREATMENT

Once a disease is caught you can still get medical treatment for it. There are drugs available to treat most diseases. These must be administered once per duration period, and give you a +4 positive modifier to your disease roll. These drugs cost 1 credit per virulence level of the disease per dose. They are availability 6.

Of course, in order to decide which are the correct drugs to use, someone with the Disease Lore skill must be present, and must make a skill roll to recognise the symptoms correctly. A fumble on this roll will lead to an incorrect diagnosis and the prescription of the wrong drugs. In this case there will be -4 modifier to the next disease roll. Every disease roll made after this the Healer will get another Disease Lore Roll to realize that he has misdiagnosed the disease.

If you are in sterile conditions such as a hospital with medical aids such as intravenous drips, monitoring equipment and constant care on call you get a further +2 modifier. If you are being supervised by a physician or anybody else with the healing skill, you get +1 per three levels your doctor has with the healing skill. This sort of hospitalization costs 100 credits per day plus the cost of any drugs used to treat you.

COMMON DISEASES

FUG (1)

Description. This disease common in the habtowns of the Wastes and in the great Metrzones. It is spread through contaminated food and water supplies. It causes mild nausea, dizziness, diarrhea and irritability. It cannot be inoculated against.

Vector. Contaminated food and water supplies.

Virulence. -d3.

Incubation. d3 hours.

Duration. d20/4 hours.

Symptoms. Nausea, diarrhea.

Effects. Every time you fail a disease roll or eat something, you suffer an attack of sickness or incontinence that lasts for d20 minutes, and leaves you at -1 to all die rolls for one hour afterwards.

LURGY (2)

Description. This disease is endemic throughout Waste World. It is a form of flu caused by constantly mutating viruses. Whilst rarely fatal it makes life miserable for many people.

Vector. Contact with an infected person. The disease is spread through plague spores in the air so a person coughing or sneezing can spread it.

Virulence. -1.

Incubation. d6 days.

Duration. d20/1 day.

Symptoms. Coughing, sneezing, listlessness, lack of energy and appetite, headaches and muscular pains.

Effects. Each time you fail the disease roll, you gain a penalty of -1 to all your die rolls. If this penalty exceeds -3, your movement and carrying capacity are halved. If this penalty exceeds -6 you are unable to move or do anything except lie around and eat broths. If this penalty exceeds -9 you will die.

PARALEPROSY (4/9 FOR ACCELERATED PARALEPROSY)

Description. This horrible disease was developed as a bio-weapon during the armageddon wars. It eats away at the victims limbs and extremities causing them to rot and then fall off. Inoculation actually provides complete protection against this disease. You cannot catch it if you have been inoculated.

Vector. You can catch paraleprosy by physical contact with a sufferer or with things that he has handled within the last hour. (Some paralepers smear their blood on the blades of weapons before going into combat.) Also disease spores are often present in the sealed vaults of the ancients, and amid their ruins.

Virulence. -d6. The virulence varies seemingly at random.

Incubation. d6 weeks. During this period, you can still seek treatment. If received the diseases progress will be arrested.

Duration. Special/6 months. Once the disease starts it will run until treated.

Symptoms. Your skin becomes grey. Your extremities begin to rot and fall off.

Effects. As the disease progresses it has two stages. You must repeat stage two until the disease is treated.

1) Skin turns grey, flesh on extremities begins to rot and fall off. You gain the *mild negative appearance* disadvantage and the *prejudiced against* disadvantage.

2) Your *negative appearance* disadvantage increases by one level until it is total. You also must roll on the hit location table. Then roll on the appropriate critical hit tables using the virulence of the disease as a modifier. Apply the results of the critical hit only if they cause an unusable arm or leg or the loss of an eye or some fingers. This represents parts of your body simply rotting away.

This disease will be cured as soon as you get proper medical treatment. However nerve damage will forever afterwards prevent bionic or symbiotic systems being attachable to the body parts you may have lost. You will keep the *negative appearance* and *prejudiced against* disadvantages until you can get cosmetic surgery.

There is a much nastier version of this disease called accelerated paraleprosy which works in exactly the same way except that the incubation and duration periods are measured in hours instead of weeks and months.

GREEN SLIME FEVER (5)

Description. This disease is found naturally only in the Slime Jungles and is caught only by exposure to the infected mucous from certain slime trees. Unfortunately there is no way of telling which trees so you must simply avoid all contact with slime. Equally unfortunately, some nasty people collect infected slime and use it to create simple bio-weapons. Distilled this slime can be smeared over weapons or dropped into food and drink. This spreads the disease as well.

Vector. Contact with infected slime.

Virulence. -9.

Incubation. d6 x 10 minutes

Duration. d6/12 hours.

Symptoms. Vomiting, difficulty in breathing, weakness. To begin with it may look as if you've simply got food poisoning.

Effects. This disease has three stages.

1) Vomiting and inability to keep food down combined with sweating and headaches.

2) Physical Weakness. -1 to all die rolls for every disease roll made (whether failed or not) until disease runs its course. Movement rate is halved until you recover from the disease.

3) You start to vomit up blood. Lose d6 LF every disease roll you make irrespective of whether you fail it or not. till the disease runs its course. If LF becomes negative make a roll on the Special Wounds critical hit table. You will not be able to recover LF until the disease runs its course.

As soon as the disease runs its course you will begin to recover. The penalty to all die rolls will be reduced by one each hour. LF is recovered at the normal rate.

RED DEATH (6)

Description. This deadly fever is normally to be contracted in the Slime Jungles of Avernus but shows up with monotonous regularity in all the cities of Waste World. It is spread by plague spores which can be breathed in by the victim. Wearing a rebreather mask, and following effective decontamination procedures after coming into contact with the disease greatly reduces the risk of infection. (+6 to your disease roll when first exposed to disease). Although the symptoms of this disease are ludicrously easy to diagnose there are several hundred variants so a Disease Lore roll is still required to prescribe effective medical treatment. One inoculation effectively covers all variations, although new variant strains are mutating all the time.

Vector. Exposure to a person already infected. Contact with a place where the plague spores are to be found. There are many such areas within the Slime Jungles.

Virulence. -5.

Incubation Period. d6 hours.

Duration. 9/d6 hours.

Symptoms. Skin turns bright red. High Fever. Weakness and delirium.

Effects. The disease had 4 stages.

- 1) Feverish headaches and weakness, Movement rate halved, all future die rolls at -3.
- 2) Prostrate- unable to move or act. You only semi-conscious and experiences fever dreams. Will have moments of lucidity where you can speak normally for a sentence if you want to and make a ST roll.
- 3) Unconsciousness.
- 4) Death.

After recovery you will suffer from reduced ST for a period of one week. Reduce your ST by 1 till you are fully recovered.

PURPLE DEATH (9)

Description. Purple Death is one of the deadliest and most virulent plagues known to man. It affects can affect all the warm-blooded sentients of Waste World and is one of the quickest killers imaginable.

Once you are infected, your whole body bloats and swells. Huge pus filled blisters erupt from your flesh and when broken spurt forth a horrible purple fluid. You will be in constant pain until you die. Inoculations are available against all the known variants of Purple Death but it is a disease which constantly mutates into new strains against which there are no antidotes. This disease has been known to lay waste to entire habs towns before suffering dieback and burning itself out through lack of new hosts.

Vector. This disease is carried by airborne plague spores which can be breathed in and which are spread by the victims coughing and wheezing. The purple pus that flows from broken blisters contains a particularly concentrated and virulent form of this plague. Wearing a rebreather mask and following proper decontamination procedures can aid greatly when exposed to this plague. (+6 to your Disease Roll to avoid catching the disease.)

Virulence. -9

Incubation. d6 minutes

Duration. 3/d6x10 minutes

Symptoms. Flesh blisters, teeth chatter, agonising muscle aches and spasms, huge purple blisters on flesh.

Effects. This disease has two stages:

- 1) Wracking agony siezes you. You are incapable of speech or movement. Muscle spasms inflict 1 LF damage per minute.
- 2) Death.

If you survive a strain of Purple Death you will be immune to it in the future.

SOME RULE CLARIFICATIONS

Since the release of the original Waste World RPG we've had a few questions concerning the rules for powers. This seems like a good time to clarify these.

GIANT

When you take the *giant* power, you get a ST of +4. If you wish to increase this, you must pay the full cost for ST +5. Taking ST +1 and Giant does NOT give you ST +5. You cannot take Giant twice and get ST +8 either.

MUTARCH TRANSFORMATION

You can transform even if you have no LF left to pay for the transformation. To do so you must survive a +1 critical hit on the Special Table. Assuming you survive you can transform as normal.

Once you have run out of LF to pay for the transformation, you can still maintain your transformation. At the end of your action phase, take a +1 critical hit on the Special Table. If you survive this, you can fight on as normal next round.

GROWTH POWERS AND ARMOR

Certain powers allow you to increase your body size and mass, these include beastform, growth and mutarch transformation. Normally, if you are naked or wearing only everyday clothing when you activate these powers, you will have no problems. Your clothes will shred and rip as you grow. They will be ruined but you will suffer no ill affects. Armor on the other hand poses more difficulties, because it is designed for strength and will resist your attempts to grow out of it. The strain caused by your own flesh pressing against hard armor can do you a great deal of harm.

Only carapace armor can be worn while using growth powers, as it will stretch to fit. Trying to make a transformation in any other form of armor will result in either your being crushed as you attempt to expand within the armor or the armor being destroyed. If you attempt to do this. Make a ST roll using your normal ST (or your PL with *growth* if using this power) using your AR as a negative modifier. If you make the roll the armor splits. If you fail the roll you take 1d6 damage per AR you are wearing, and the transformation fails. You can try again next round if you wish.



BESTIARY

DESTRIER

DX	ST	IN	PW	LF
0	+4	-	0	30

MR: 10

AR: 3

Attacks: Bite: 1M, Horn: 1M, Tail: 1M,

Disadvantages: Animal Intelligence

Special Abilities: Symborg

Description

These powerful animals are used as cavalry mounts and beasts of burden throughout the Wastes. They were originally created by House Fera to provide a cheap, efficient means of transport in the deserts, and have been adapted for cavalry use. They have their own special symborgs that can keep them alive for a month without food and water.

In addition, the symborg can stretch itself to cover the rider, grafting itself to him with veins and tubes. It can then extend him the same benefits as it grants the destrier for as long as the rider stays mounted. They are very strong and swift with a fierce bite. They are favored by nomadic tribes of Skavengers, the desert nomads of the Diaspora and by Hydran colonists in the Wastes.

You need the skill Ride (Destrier) to be able to use one of the beasts. Destriers normally cost 1,500 credits to purchase. Trained battle destriers can be purchased that have skill levels with all their **Attacks**: +1 with all skills adds 150 to the cost, +2 with all skills 450 to the cost, +3 with all skills adds 900 to the cost. Destriers are availability: 6. Subtract 1 from the availability for each skill level they possess.

ZEKT

DX	ST	IN	PW	LF
+1	+1	-	0	10-20

MR: 6 (x50 when flying)

AR: 1

Attacks: Bite: 1M, (Sting: 1M+2+Poison)

Disadvantages: Animal Intelligence

Special Abilities: Wings, (Kill Poison)

Description

There are many forms of Zekt. All resemble winged insects grown to huge size. They are so large that a human can sit on their back and ride them.

Normally such insects would be unable to lift themselves under the power of their own wings, but zekts use suspensor harnesses to get them off the ground and guide and propel themselves with their wings.

They can be guided either by ganglionic link or by tugging on their sensitive antennae. They can also be trained to respond to certain signals such as:- a strike to the left of their head meaning go left, to the right meaning go right, a kick to their left side meaning go down, a kick to their right meaning go up. Most Zekts can carry up to two riders and stay airborne.

Many breeds of Zekt have been adapted for combat and have powerful rending jaws and poison stings in their tails. They are ridden by a form of aerial cavalryman known as the Zekt Riders. Zekts cost 1,000 credits +10 credits per point of LF over 10 (Maximum: 20) for a basic insect. Those with poison tails cost an additional 100 credits plus 50 credits per level of poison. They can use their stings once per day and then must grow them back. The cost includes the suspensor harness needed to keep the beast aloft. The harness normally costs 500 credits. If you already have a harness then subtract 500 from the cost of the zekt. Zekts are availability 9.

You need the skill Ride (Zekt) to be able to use one of the beasts.

DEVILWINGS

DX	ST	IN	PW	LF
+1	+4	-	0	25

MR: 4 (x50 when flying)

AR: 6

Attacks: Bite: 2M, Tail: 1M

Disadvantages: Animal Intelligence

Special Abilities: Wings

Description

These large beasts are part dragon, part shark and all appetite. They are part of the airforce of many Towers and a common sight in the skies above Hydra. They are ravening carnivores capable of biting through hardened carapace armor with one chomp of their mighty jaws. They are capable of taking down a bull Mastodon when they want to. They have short leathery wings that can only keep them aloft with the aid of suspensor harnesses. You need the skill Ride (Devil Wing) to be able to use one of the beasts. Devil Wings cost: 1,500 credits. Devilwings are availability 6.

DEVIL SHARK

DX	ST	IN	PW	LF
+3	+6	-	0	50

MR: 4 (Swimming: 10)

AR: 6

Attacks: Bite: 4M, Tail: 1M

Disadvantages: Animal Intelligence

Special Abilities: Gills

Description

These mighty beasts are the terror of the seas, hunting in packs, rending their victims into pieces. They are almost ten meters in length and weigh twenty tons. They can be drawn by the slightest trace of blood in the water from a distance of up to 5 kilometers away and once roused will attack until they are dead. There are tales of Devil Sharks over a hundred meters in length being sighted far out to sea. They are said to be capable of swamping a small boat with a slap of their tail. No one dismisses these as sailors stories as every one knows how many horrors have been created by Entropic mutation.

THE SWARM

MANTIS

DX	ST	IN	PW	LF
+3	+4	0	0	30

MR: 6

AR: 9

Attacks: Bite: 1M, Claw Strike: 2M

Special Abilities: As per Swarm (see WW p 279).

Disadvantages: -

Description

This is a warrior sub-caste that resembles the insect known as the Preying Mantis. They move upright and have massive claws and extendible jaws. Both of these are capable of biting through solid armor. Mantis warriors are incredibly patient and can stand immobile for weeks on end. In the Jungles of the South they are responsible for many casualties.

LOKUSTS

DX	ST	IN	PW	LF
+3	+4	0	0	25

MR: 8

AR: 3

Attacks: Bite: 1M, Kick: 3M

Special Abilities: As per Swarm (see WW pp 279)

Leap

Lokusts can leap up to 100 meters in a single turn, and still make a bite attack. Since this uses the same legs as they use to kick with, a Lokust may not use its kick attack on the same turn it leaps.

Disadvantages: -

Description

Lokusts belong to the Warrior Castes. They have enormously overdeveloped hind legs enabling them to spring hundreds of feet in mighty leaps. Their rear limbs have razor sharp spurs that can punch right through the toughest of armor. They are often used as shocktroops when the Swarm attacks.



SCOUTS

DX	ST	IN	PW	LF
+3	+3	0	0	15

MR: 6 (x50 when flying)

AR: 3

Attacks: Bite: 1M

Special Abilities: As per Swarm (see WW pp 279).

Disadvantages: -

Description

Scouts are winged and lightly armored members of the Warrior Castes. They are used to reconnoiter new areas in advance of the Swarm and to patrol the borders of the Hive. Sometimes they are used as mounts by smaller types of Swarm. They wrap the Warriors with their limbs and carry them through the air, dropping them into the fray.

WASPS

DX	ST	IN	PW	LF
+3	+4	0	0	25

MR: 6(x50 when flying)

AR: 3

Attacks: Bite: 1M

Special Abilities: See above.

Acid Jet

This powerful acid jet can lash out at a range of 50 meters. There is no range modifier. If it hits, the acid will do a d6 damage to any armor. This will permanently reduce the armor's armor rating. Once the armor's AR is reduced to 0, the target will take the damage himself. If he takes damage from the acid jet he must also make a Poison Saving Throw with -2 modifier, or be paralyzed.

Disadvantages: -

Description

Wasps are a much larger form of scout. They have huge acid sprays mounted in their rear segments that they use to attack enemy ground troops. This acid can eat through armor and flesh.

WORKERS

DX	ST	IN	PW	LF
+2	+4	0	0	40

MR: 8

AR: 6

Attacks: Bite: 1M

Special Abilities: As per Swarm (see WW pp 279).

Disadvantages: -

Description

These are huge living machines. When they emerge from their cocoons they are fed and fed by their fellow Swarm. As they eat they gain mass till they grow to be nearly the size of Queens. Workers can spin huge webs of swarmsilk, a substance that is tougher than steel, and can secrete a sort of organic concrete with which to build Hive structures. There are many sub-Castes of Worker each with their own specific role to play in Swarm society.

HIVELORDS

DX	ST	IN	PW	LF
+4	+6	+2	+3	60

MR: 8

AR: 9

Attacks: Bite: 2M, 2 Claws: 1M+2; Stinger Tail: 2M.

Special Abilities: As per Swarm (see WW pp 279); d6 Psionics Abilities of the Narrators choice. These are at PL d6.

Command

Hive Lords can command other Swarm Members psionically up to a range of 1 kilometer.

Disadvantages: -

Description

Hivelords are mighty creatures, perfectly adapted for warfare. They resemble giant Swarmers with far more pronounced jaws and claws. They manifest many potent and destructive psychic powers. Hivelords are the generals of Swarm attacks.

HIVEQUEENS

DX	ST	IN	PW	LF
-1	+9	+3	D6+3	200

MR: 6

AR: 9

Attacks: Bite: 5M, 2 Claws: 4M.

Special Abilities: As per Swarm (see WW pp 279); d6 Psionic Abilities (PL d6+3)

Ovipositor

Can inject enzymes and cocooning templates into the bodies of its victims. In a matter of d6 days they will emerge from their cocoons assimilated.

Disadvantages: Huge bulk cannot be moved down narrow corridors. +4 to hit with ranged weapons.

Description

Queens are only ever found in the great Hives. They are the most massive of all Swarm and possess truly terrifying psychic powers. Their huge bodies can grow to tens of meters long and the can weigh many tons.

WARPBEASTS

Prerequisite: Animal Intelligence

This option is only available to animals created using the genesculpting rules, or under GM control. It can only be used on animals with ST's of less than 4. When a keyword is spoken the animal's size increases and it may gain special powers. An animal with this power may take Mutarch transformation. This is costed in exactly the same way as Mutarch Transformation. The main difference is that the power is activated by the owner speaking a command word or phrase. It costs 100 credits per point of Mutarch Transformation added to the cost of the beast.



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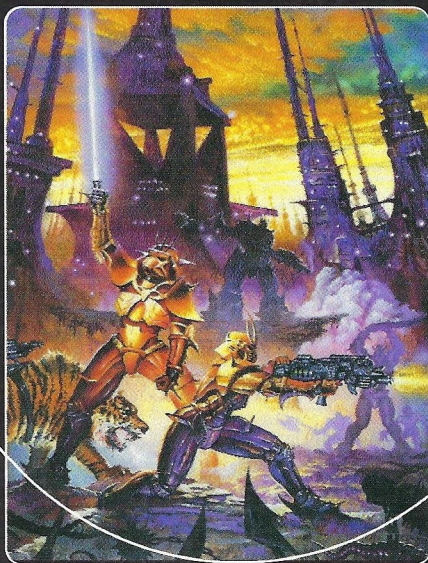
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