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Signs & Portents

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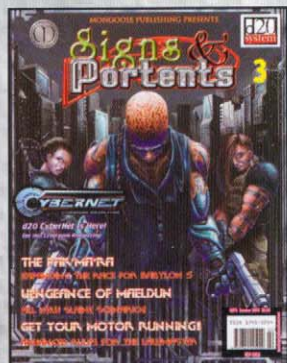
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Front Cover - CyberNet by Scott Clark. Intrigued? So you should be...

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Evening all!

The good thing about working at Mongoose Hall is that you don't have to put in too much effort when it comes to writing editorials. Why? Good question. As it happens, this is because there is so much going on that there is always a high level of excitement. Look one way and Paul is working on Conan. Look another, and Rich is putting the finishing touches to the Book of Strongholds. Behind me Alex is busy commissioning the covers for a dozen books while Mark is studiously doing the accounts (OK, that may have been a bad example). Ted Chang and Bob Roberts have been in as well and left arguing about rules as usual.

You see? All life is here (sort of).

On a personal note I'm really pleased to have a scenario for Slaine in this issue. I know from conversations with many of our customers that Slaine has a huge cult following, and now I might get some peace!

As well as Slaine, we also have another article for Judge Dredd. We think it's important to continue supporting all our games, and Signs & Portents gives us that opportunity. We even have a Macho Women scenario in development being written by our own Rich Neale, who has been using his spare time unselfishly studying women in preparation for this. No doubt his expenses this month should be entertaining...

For myself, I have had to endure watching DVD reruns of Babylon 5 and the Conan movies - research can be hellish.

One thing of special note to our growing band of subscribers: if you haven't as yet given us your email address, then drop us a line with the details. Some nice offers will be coming your way shortly.

There's so much more to say and the bottom of the page has just rolled into view. It's always the same. Never mind, here's hoping that you enjoy what we have on offer this month. Don't forget the Mongoose Hall trivia question at the end of the article. A furry creature is waiting to go to a good home, and I don't mean Rich...

Dan

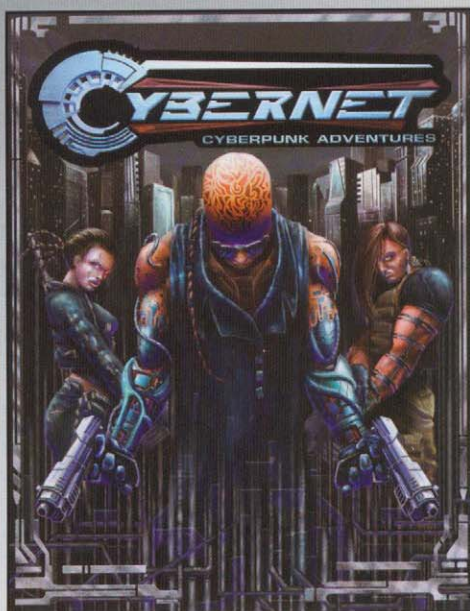


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(s03)

Babylon 5 created by J. Michael Straczynski

EYE ON MONGOOSE

New Releases This Month

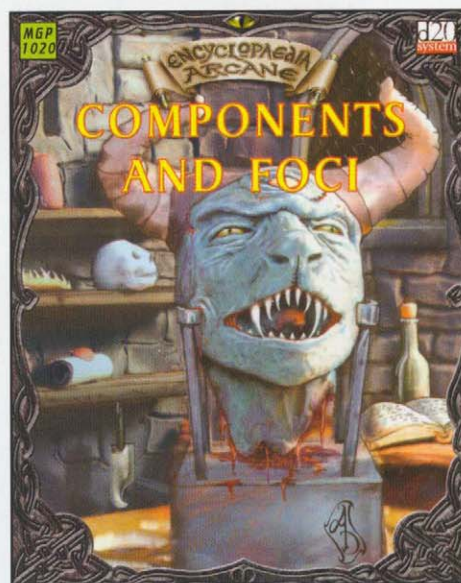


CyberNet is the future of the cyberpunk genre. This 256 page, full colour hardback is packed with the kind of hardcore details that this genre has been crying out for.

The world of CyberNet is both more complex and simpler than our own, with the stark honesty of 'power corrupts' indelibly stained with the ambiguous truism that 'the ends justify the means.' The black depths of the Web are like a fantasy within a fantasy, a bright, clean realm compared to the grime of an existence spent in the unreal steel jungles of corporate megaplexes. This is the world that promises swift death at the end of gun and the freedom that comes from holding one and shooting first. A brighter life can be carved from this bleak setting, but it only comes at the cost of hard work, quick wits, and a willingness to do whatever it takes to survive.

It is a place of digital heroes and steel villains, of shades of grey so deep that only the blackest black and the whitest white make any difference any more.

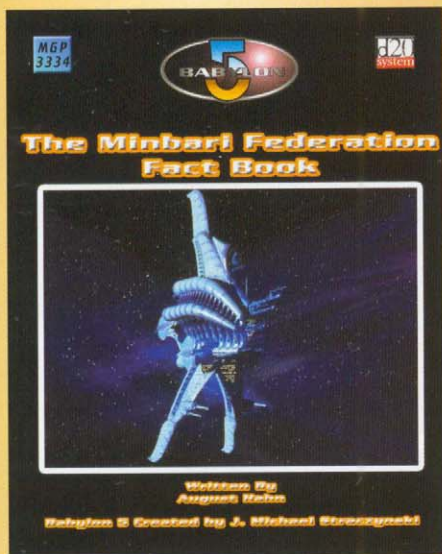
Welcome to the future of Cyberpunk. Hope you survive it.



Components and Foci is the latest 64-page volume in the highly successful Encyclopaedia Arcane series.

Everybody knows the scene; we have been there a thousand times. The wizard's laboratory is utterly familiar. On the shelves, row after row of glass jars filled with murky fluid house misshapen tenants not quite recognisable enough to identify but familiar enough to cause disturbing thoughts. Drawers contain odds and ends garnered over decades of work and not so much as an afternoon of tidying up. Boxes are stuffed with protruding knick-knacks, some byzantine, some arabesque, some wholly unidentifiable, some oddly mundane. Skulls of strange creatures lurk on the tops of bookshelves, gathering dust. Torn-open packets of herbs and incenses, partly used, are crammed together in cubbyholes. On the desktop, scales are used to weigh heaps of glittering dust; priceless jewels are turned into harlequin powders.

At last you can fully explore this fascinating side of the arcane experience.



Of all the races in the universe of Babylon 5 none, save perhaps the Vorlons, are more enigmatic and mysterious than the Minbari. Possessing a culture steeped in tradition and dogma, the Minbari closely resemble humans but are very evidently not human. They are stronger, faster and possess acute senses that humanity can only begin to understand. They are deeply spiritual but feel no need to share or even explain their beliefs to others. They give great respect for their elders and accept the rule of a single council even on worlds far from their own territory. Their ways are unfathomable, even to some of their own kind, yet none dare question their motives. At least, none dare question them openly.

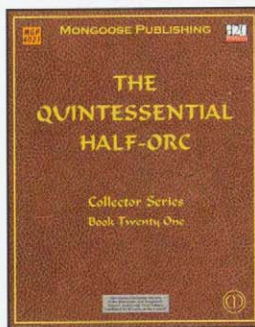
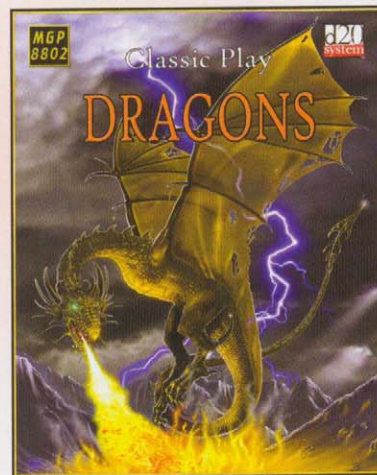
Now, with this 200 page Fact Book, you can immerse yourself in the ways of the Minbari – it's time to expand your mind.

Humanity's myths are dreams of dragons. No other creature is quite so present, so dominant, in our stories. Almost every culture has its own tales of the serpents. Our fantasy reflects this, and dragons have been one of the defining elements of the fantasy genre for decades, and their pedigree in adventure gaming is obvious.

There is good reason for this pre-eminence – no other creature has the power or the terrifying majesty of the dragons, no other creature has the curious alchemy of horror and glory that makes dragons so wonderful. On leathern wings, they soar across the skies of our imagined worlds. Their fire threatens the world, but also illuminates it.

The simplest adventure game is going into the dungeon, killing the monsters, and bringing back the treasure. Turn that monster into a dragon, and you've got a myth that has resonated through the centuries.

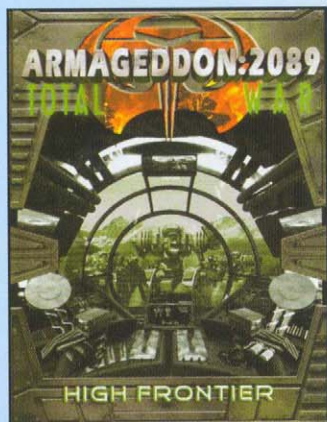
The Book of Dragons is a 256-page hardback designed to be the definitive guide to using dragons in a game. It complements but does not require the *Slayer's Guide to Dragons* and *Encyclopedia Arcane: Dragon Magic*.



Half-orcs mix either the best or the worst of their parent races, for savagery and cruelty are not exclusive to orcs. While growing up, half-orcs feel the effects of such an explosive mixture of orcish ferocity and human cunning; more than half-elves who have the human spirit firing up their elven sensibilities, it is human

temperance that keeps the orcish side from lashing out, always latent in the half-orc's heart as a core of anger and violence.

Until now the half-orc has always been the 'forgotten' race in fantasy gaming. Everybody looks at the class, then moves on. All that has changed. The half-orc is now a fascinating class in its own right, and many gamers who always wanted to play this potentially enthralling class have everything they need to compete in the big, bad world... wherever that might be.



Welcome to the space race. Destruction across the face of the planet just isn't enough for mankind in the year 2089.

Now you can experience the thrill of dogfighting jet aircraft, carpet bombing enemy cities and developing rudimentary space combat techniques that will form the basis of future generations' text books.

It's time to push out the envelope with *High Frontier*, the latest expansion book for *Armageddon: 2089*. The stars are beckoning...



Write for the Mongoose

Want to write for your favourite RPG publisher? Want to get paid for it? Got a great idea for an article? If the answers to these questions are 'yes', then Signs & Portents wants to hear from you.

Where to Start...

We will need a brief synopsis of your intended article, no more than one page long. Also include a paragraph or two of your actual writing style, so we can see whether you have what it takes and any samples of previously published work. If we like what we see, we will commission a first draft from you and you will be on your way to becoming a Mongoose contributing writer. And every article we publish will be paid for...which is nice.

Things to Remember

Provide your full details, including name, address and email address if available.

Supply articles via email or on disc. We can read most formats, although MS Word is always a safe bet. You will be provided with a style guide when we commission your article. Make sure you read it!

Subject Matter

First and foremost, the article has to be based on one of our product lines. That is not as limiting as it sounds, however. The d20 fantasy family alone should give you plenty of scope. Think of all our various products, like the Quintessential series and the Slayer's Guides. With more than 80 fantasy-based books to choose from...well, you get the idea. But don't stop there. Think Babylon 5, Judge Dredd, Slaine, Armageddon 2089, not to mention the barrage of forthcoming games that we have coming. If you have ideas for any of our games we want to hear them.

So, you have chosen your game, but what do you actually write about? Scenarios are good. In fact, we love them. Give me a scenario to edit and I am a happy camper. Perhaps you want to discuss the philosophy of a game. That's good. We encourage intellectual thought process around here. If you have something meaningful to say, then try us out. If we don't like it, we *will* tell you. Think hard before you try humour though. With guys like Jonny Nexus about, you will need to be sharp if you want to break in. If you think you have what it takes, though, then feel free to try your hand. Just be prepared to be told you may not be as funny as you think you are.

If you want to write new rules for a game, with new uses for skills and maybe some new feats, then be our guest.

We cannot promise that we will like what you have done, but you will get constructive criticism in return, and not just a terse one-line rebuff.

Editing

It is a painful fact that whatever you write, it will get edited. That is why editors exist, after all. Even this passage will have been edited. If you can get over this hurdle you are well on your way to attaining the mentality needed to be a writer. It will help if you can handle criticism as well. Take it from us – writing is a tough business. Just ask any author doing the rounds looking for a friendly publisher.

We have various house styles that we use and you do not need to know them. As long as your submission is literate and tidy, we will do the rest.

Little Details

If you are not sure how long your article is, assume around 800 words fit on one page. Do not use the word processor's page counter as a guide. By the time it has been edited, laid out and had artwork added, it will look nothing like that screen of text in front of you.

Remember to run the article through a spell checker before you send it in. It will still get proofread, but it shows willing. Anything not spell checked will be rejected straight away.

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Tales from

MONGOOSE HALL

Ian Barstow

Casper's Diary

It all started when Matt wanted to GM again.

Paul had to be sedated and restrained for a bit, before confessing that he had not actually been on the other side of the Games Master's screen in eight years. The last time Matt had been Games Master we spent a whole

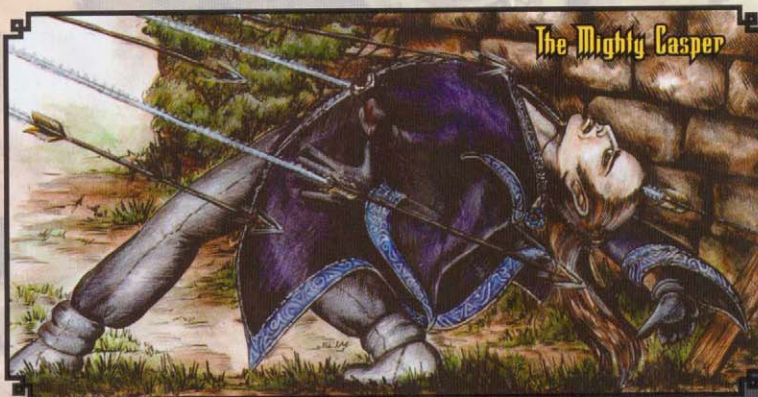
called Casper with a Dutch accent – I *always* do accents. My tribal pygmy, Chokki Starfish, from a previous game, is still remembered with...well, he's still remembered. Enough said.

You know the crew by now:

Alex, playing Bulwei, a human barbarian who will undoubtedly have

through the highlands presumably to find some new spring water product to offload on the unsuspecting locals. Actually, Bulwei is on some sort of 'mission' to find the Snow Witch, some bint who has been having her way with his tribe and generally upsetting the status quo in his town.

We show up in the town of Winterbourne and proceed to head to the nearest tavern. Crikey, who would have expected that? Once inside we purchase the obligatory booze (from a nice little price list produced by Matt in this case – far better than the calibre of Games Mastering we have been used to, I'd like to point out) and sit down to await our adventure.



OK, so I used this last month as well. All I can say is it's the first ever picture of one of my characters and you'd have done the same.

session of Judge Dredd discussing the ethical approach to judging. The last time Paul had been a player Idi Amin was pro ten-pin-bowling in Minnesota.

Matt was taking us back to the Forgotten Realms. Damara to be precise. We sat around in a circle and decided on what characters to play. Half an hour later all five of us had changed our minds, Rich was feeling poorly and went home, and none of us was any the wiser. Some of us weren't that wise in the first place.

I decided to be a halfling this time. A halfling and a monk. A monk

leadership credentials.

Paul, playing Eresindo, the elven cleric wonder archer. Yes, Paul is making up for lost time by going straight for the throat of power gaming.

David, playing Rafe, allegedly an elven farmer with a dodgy background created by Matt.

Rich, playing Rudel, a human farmer with problems...

Me, playing the boy Casper, of course. The heroic halfling monk with a foot in both the Yellow Rose and Hin Fist temples.

It turns out that I am pals with Bulwei and Eresindo, and we are travelling

Ian's Roleplaying Tips #653

Be Expansive

Try and come up with something vaguely more original than sitting in the nearest tavern. Demand to go salmon fishing or ask if there's a circus in town. One day I will actually remember to do this myself. One day.

There is no sign of Rudel – who we don't know anyway – although a grubby looking elf sitting at a nearby table is giving us the eye. Being a touch over three feet tall I am having difficulty seeing my drink, so needless to say this all goes over my head.

Bulwei decides to make some local enquiries about the Snow Witch, but

instead he comes up with a haunted house occupied by vampires outside of town where she 'might' live. This seems unlikely but Bulwei insists on going to see. Being Bulwei, he wants to go immediately. This tends to always happen with Alex's characters; they don't like hanging around. I am waiting for the day when he gets a lead while we are all sitting in a sauna and we do the adventure buck-naked. I'm talking about the characters here, in case you are heading off along the wrong track. Keep those sort of thoughts to yourself, please. This is a family show.

We have to pay a visit to the local wise man first, however. Notice how every town in the world – any world – has a wise man. What I want to know is, if he is so damned wise what is he doing living in relative poverty in a manky town? But I digress. Accompanying Bulwei because I am a trained monastic negotiator (actually I just have 3 ranks in Profession (guru) but what the hell...) we get the low-down on the haunted house – it's haunted. Well, that was a worthwhile trip.

Heading out to find Eresindo, Bulwei notices that the seedy elven farmer from the tavern is now across the street from us. Being unfamiliar with the concept of being followed, we let this slip. The fact that he is still knocking about after we come out from the temple of Ilmater (my chosen god for this romp) has little further effect.

Matt now cuts to the haunted house, where Rudel is in fact trying to burgle the place. This is rather excessive for a farmer, but we sit back to watch the fun. Five minutes later a banged up Rudel flees the place having been worked over by a gang of giant ants. That will teach him. He should stick to ploughing, if you ask me.

By this time we are making our way towards the haunted house. I wanted to minister to the locals, being a trained acupuncturist and all. Essentially, I took the Bonesetter

Character Concept from our Quintessential Monk book – we are all very big on the Character Concepts idea. Anything that provides variety during character creation works for me. Normally I pick something suitably violent, but this time I have gone for peace and tranquillity. A change is as good as a rest to a blind dogfish, as we say in these parts.

On the road we meet Rudel, looking sorry for himself, and Rafe shows up as well. Inevitably we invite them both to tag along. Well, you do, don't you? We arrive just as it is getting dark (how lucky) and proceed inside. I take the lead as I am formidable at Move Silently and Hide. Sadly I'm not so hot at anything else, and fail to spot such obvious things as walls, floors and ceilings, somewhat negating what few things I can do.

We go through the ground floor finding nothing except a nude bloke called Ned who has been left tied up in a room. Being a kindly soul I check his wounds, taking the opportunity to give him my full anti-vampire medical. Well, you can never be too certain. Anyway, Ned passes with flying colours and we give him some rags and a knife and allow him to tag along. Paul spends much of his time this session staring suspiciously at Matt whenever Ned does anything, but this paranoid fixation leads to nothing – Ned is clearly just what he claims to be, a local, small-time chancer out to lift a few choice items from the local undead. Aren't we all, dearie?

Sadly, with me out front we aren't exactly filling our coffers with gold and gems. Not unless you count 11 gp and a safety pin as big-time loot, that is. I do eventually find my way up a flight of stairs to a partially trashed attic, which I enter alone.

Up in the attic I forage around for a bit before I come across a sackload of rubbish. Naturally I dig in. The stirges that live in this junk are not

Ian's Roleplaying Tips #351

Alone.

This is a word well worth remembering. Roughly, it translates into 'Don't Do Whatever You Were Going To Do. Leave Quickly And Be On Your Way'. Being on one's own in roleplaying is akin to being the character in a movie who is looking forward to going home and marrying his childhood sweetheart. You know the drill.

so keen on my intervention and I get seriously skewered, my Constitution taking a major league pasting in the process. I just about manage to crawl back to the hole in the ceiling before the stirges polish me off. Here they meet Bulwei who reciprocates in kind, coating the corridor walls in Stirge Red.

At this point we decide it may be time to head back to the town. That is, until Bulwei decides that we really need to press on... next time we play a game with a hubris system I'm nominating Alex for *patience*. That should freak him out. So, with me on minimal hit points and with the Constitution of a badly worked-over gnat we proceed to the basement. Sure enough, going down the stairs, we finally bump into the residents, only they don't exactly look like vampires – more like pirates as it happens.

We are somewhat surprised by Ned's sudden bout of enthusiasm as he pushes forward. As we wade in, our surprise turns to shock as Ned produces a strange-looking knife and sticks it into Bulwei's back, doing a critical in the process. Within seconds Bulwei has a strength to match my constitution and has passed out on the floor, well on his way to Valhalla. After that the scrap goes downhill for the baddies, although no thanks to Rudel, who legs it back up the stairs and hides. Mostly this is Eresindo's fight as he pretty much

power games his way through the villains, with his two shots per round and jammy dice rolls. He tries not to look smug at the end of the fight, but fails dismally. He then instructs me not to forget his crucial part in saving the group from annihilation...well, he *did* drill Nasty Ned so I suppose I should be grateful.

After this near-death experience even Bulwei is convinced that it might be best if we head back to the town for a rest. I am obviously rather keen due to my feebleness and I finally persuade them to carry me back for medical treatment.

Several days later we are fit to go back to the haunted house. Not much better off due to our abject lack of treasure, we are all hoping to snag a bit of loot this time. Making our way through the house it seems little has changed until we get down to the cellar. The bodies have been cleared away and we suddenly prepare for ambush. Oddly enough, no ambush takes place, so we tentatively head down towards the bottom of the house. We begin to come across more signs of habitation, and the conclusion is that whoever is residing here it is not the cast of Interview With The Vampire. In fact, we start coming across rolls of silk and casks of brandy, which means that we are either in the house of an alcoholic dressmaker or there is smuggling afoot.

I proffer the two theories to the party and after considerable debate we plump for the latter option. Personally, either works for me, but the others clearly lack my capacity for extreme lateral thinking. Finally, reaching the bowels of the house, we come across a huge cavern, complete with an outlet to the adjacent river. Further contraband goods are stored here and it seems appropriate that as the evening



Eresindo attempts to bag lunch for the entire party with one shot.

winds down we head back to the town to report our findings.

However, the night has one more surprise in store. With the sounds of impending pirates, Rudel flees once more, vanishing from sight. The

rest of the party retires at a rather more graceful speed, coming upon a cowering Rudel upstairs. He swings around nervously, blade drawn, and while the rest of us watch him – he *is* thirty feet away, after all – Rafe takes the opportunity to shoot him. This is rather naughty, and with a number of good-aligned characters on hand we had little option but to arrest one of our own party. (I suggest Bulwei, but it turns out that this isn't actually a free vote.)

Forcibly disarming Rafe, we stop while I save Rudel's life before taking both parties back to the town, where we hand over Rafe to the mayor, who assures us that the law will have its way with him. Rudel, meanwhile, is beside himself with righteous indignation and begins plotting how to break into Rafe's cell and exact his own brand of justice. Unfortunately for Rudel, Rafe has some powerful contacts in the community, and before long his father has arrived to cut a highly suspect deal with the mayor, effectively getting Rafe released in exchange for promising never again to eat whelks, or some such equally painfully restrictive condition.

Clearly at this point serious revaluation of party make-up is in order, and I'm not talking mascara. None of us are keen on retaining Rafe in the party, in case he shoots one of us next. Anyway, Casper, being morally righteous and a borderline pacifist (-ish) is naturally abhorred at such behaviour. Next month should be very interesting...



Ian's Roleplaying Tips #39

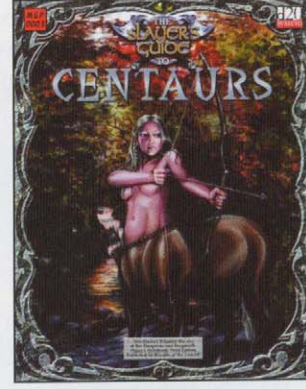
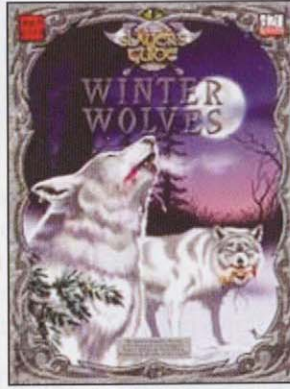
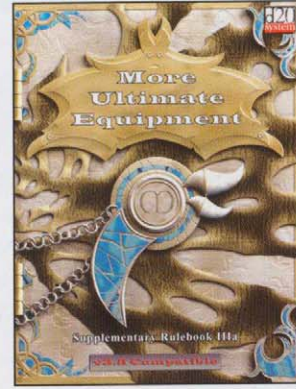
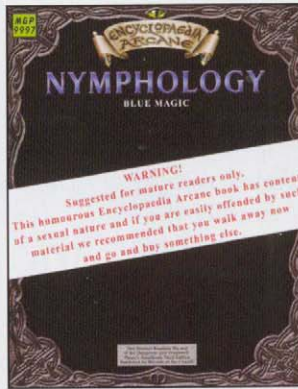
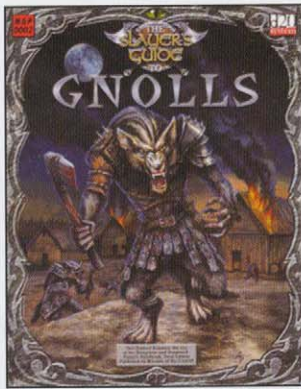
Character Background

This, as we all know, can be a minefield. In this case Matt had put a big time spanner in the works by setting Rudel and Rafe against each other by dint of making them rivals in the local farming community. In effect, sooner or later they were bound to come to blows. Games Masters take note, if you are going to do this sort of thing, have an out prepared, or the rest of the campaign can deteriorate into tit-for-tat character killing.

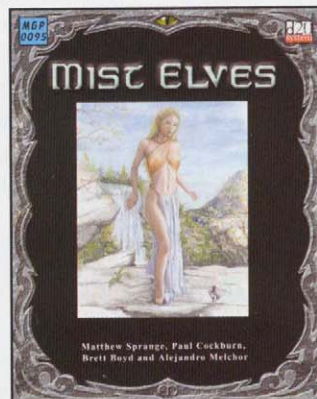
Recognise which old TSR module Matt is using as the basis for the new series of Mongoose Hall?

First correct answer received at Mongoose HQ will win a limited edition Monty the Mongoose!

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Just Out! Mist Elves



Q&A

In case you haven't spotted it, this month's Q&A is dedicated to the Babylon 5 Roleplaying Game.

Q:

First Contact Protocol is listed under General Feats, but on page 53 it is a Human-only feat. (Personally, the prerequisites and the 'racial feat' bit seem to be a little too narrow-tailored to Earth Alliance, considering what the feat does and ignoring what it is called. I think it should be general.)

A:

First Contact Protocol is indeed a Human only feat. Basically, it is there because of the social differences of humans and how they approach aliens (and their status within the galaxy). It is conceivable that some race in the League may have a similar point of view that would lead to the rise of such a feat in their society but that is something to be examined at a later date.

Q:

Under 'Wind Sword'. The translation of the ship's name was 'Black Star', not 'Dark Star', wasn't it? 'Dark Star' is a place on B5 ... in Red Sector near the casino, according to the map on 105.

A:

Well spotted on the Black Star front. You are quite correct.

Q:

The number of ships on Babylon 5 itself lists Heavy Shuttles twice. Presumably, there are 10 heavy and 4 light shuttles, based on the number seen in episodes like Babylon Squared.

A:

Babylon 5 has 10 Light and 4 Heavy shuttles.

Q:

The Drazi racial stats are missing from the aliens section.

A:

Drazi stats are on page 22 of the main rulebook.

Q:

I am confused. The higher a telepath's P rating, the lower the number of skill points that they have. This is the reverse of the show. The higher the P rating, the more versatile the telepath seems. I cannot see any way that a telepath could ever gain all the prerequisites for a Psi Cop prestige class using this method. Unless you plan on using the Epic Level Rules in d20 (which I think is a great idea since that would be the only way to have a P15 Lyta, etc.)?

A:

P12s get 2+Int skill points per level. Psi-Cops need 12 ranks of Telepathy, so they cannot become a Psi-Cop before they gain skill points at level 9. They also need 10 ranks of Concentration and 8 of Intimidate (and 3 of Bluff, which is non-class so call it 6).

This means, that so long as they have an Intelligence of 14 or higher, they can move in to the Psi-Cop prestige class as soon as they hit level 10 (if they go for it from the start - which most Psi Corps P12s do).

Q:

You know I liked the way telepaths were done. But here is my question. Will there be a source book for the Psi Corps or will additional information be found about them in the Earth Alliance book.

Also will there be a book that delves deeper into telepaths with possible species-unique abilities or is that something we'd see in each species book. I.e., would we be seeing telepath powers unique to the Minbari in their planed book?

A:

There will indeed be more on telepaths. The Earth Alliance Fact Book has detailed information on Psi Corps, plus details of new powers and their experiments. Each 'race' book after that will also introduce new telepathy rules that reflect each race's approach.



Got a question you need answering? Why not try the Rulesmasters at our web site - www.mongoosepublishing.com

Q:

With regards to an Agent's Skill Mastery class feature on page 27 of the rulebook, am I able to add my character's Int modifier in skills each time I use this ability or only the first time?

A:

You do not add your Int modifier at all. The rule clearly states that you can select a number of skills equal to Int modifier which you may then subsequently always Take 10 on, regardless of circumstances.

Q:

On page 37, Does the Branch Elite class feature remain fixed once selected, or can I change it as I see fit?

A:

The Branch Elite class feature actually appears on page 34 for the Officer character class. The fleet officer may take the permanent +1 bonus to *either* DV, sensor score or stealth score. Once taken, this is fixed. Think of it as specialisation.

Q:

On page 37 under the Covering Fire class feature, why is this a Will save?

A:

Covering fire works by pinning down opponents due to the psychological effect of bullets whizzing everywhere. Hence, a Will save.

Q:

What would be the skill level (or DC) of a forgery detecting device?

A:

There is no such thing as a universal forgery detecting device. What might work well for detecting credits will not work for a Narn manuscript. Each individual case is the prerogative of the individual Games Master.

Q:

Didn't the telepath Gestalt feat only require flesh to flesh contact in the show?

A:

The picture below the feat in the rulebook shows telepaths performing the action we have used as the basis of the Gestalt feat. This looks pretty conclusive.

Q:

In the Collisions example on page 73, where did the number 36 come from? Shouldn't the DR multiplier be 4 (1 + 3 size)?

A:

The '36' is wrong. It should be 60, following the base damage of 20 x3. You are correct about the DR modifier.

Q:

In the B5 Character Sheet, for initiative there is a base and then modifiers. I can't seem to find the base initiative in the book. I know that in D&D the initiative is the DEX Mod. The same rules don't seem to apply to this. I've looked through the book and can't find it. Your help, please?

A:

As stated on page 59, 'unless otherwise stated, all the combat rules detailed in Chapter 8 of *The Player's Handbook* are used in the game of Babylon 5.' That includes initiative, so all the usual rules still apply.

Gaming Symposium

WITH SHANNON KALVAR

Shannon's articles have been receiving such rave reviews that we thought we would give him his own series. Enter Gaming Symposium. . . this issue, Shannon looks at how to successfully flesh out the minor characters and how to hook players and keep them hooked.

The party of bold adventurers enter the fire-lit bar, cold wind whipping at their backs. The bouncy barmaid flashes them a sultry grin while the burley barkeep polishes large ceramic mugs...

'Great, another inn,' groans one of the players.

'Wonder when the barkeeper will say 'Hail good fellows', quips another.

'So long as I get to make out with the halfling thief in the corner I don't care', states the third.

You hide your head behind your screen, furiously rolling up personality traits. Despite their heckling you will play out the scene with the happy barkeeper, the sexy barmaid and the now *male* halfling thief in the corner. Let him make out with that!

What Is The Problem?

Just about every new game book and every new core book contains sage wisdom about how to make your games, plots and characters come alive. They talk about history, culture, symbols and myths. Some delve into various literary genres to explain how to run them in the world presented. Others talk about the grand, overarching themes of their worlds. A few recommend tried and true creative writing techniques to help lift your creative spirit out of the doldrums.

For all of this great advice though we still run into the same old stereotypes over and over again. Bars come in a handful of flavours (more if you bought a book containing pre-made locations). Characters fall into well-known groups and have a predictable set of character flaws.

Beyond the Cut Out



Scenarios proceed from fight A to conflict B with only minor variations in surface details.

Now we have to ask two basic questions:

1. So long as everyone has fun, is anything wrong?
2. Assuming that there is a problem, what is it?

The answer to the first question comes out as a resounding no. Although it sometimes seems to Games Masters that our games loom large in our lives, we do them for enjoyment. All of the loving hours spent crafting adventures for our friends theoretically fill our lives with joy. The rampant destruction players rain upon our best-laid plans is just part of the challenge.

However, most of us want to be better at our hobby. We want our players to really enjoy the games we run. We want them to be surprising, rich and detailed. Most of us harbour a desire, deep down in our hearts, to be the next JRR Tolkien. At the same time most of us do not want to spend the rest of our lives studying philology and history. Therefore we need to take a few shortcuts that would make Tolkien spin in his grave.

That also means though that we need to successfully answer the second question.

What really is the problem? Is it a lack of understanding of what we are doing? Do we all need to go out and take voice lessons so we can do funny accents? *[works for me - Ed]* Should we try complex multi-plot arcs, spending long hours writing up the back-stories of every potential character?

All of these suggestions appear between the covers of well-thought-out books on world design, character development and plot structure. However, they skirt around the problem. They are suggestions for solving it, not descriptions of it. Honestly, each suggestion has its place in your tool kit but might not quite address your real need.

Actually, identifying the problem though carries a host of its own issues. However, an analogy drawn from a popular movie will help to frame the discussion. In the Princess Bride, look closely at the scene where the three unknown men abduct Princess Buttercup. If you pay close attention, during one of the flashes between the men and Buttercup you will see that one of the men is actually a cardboard cut out. Unless you focus on the image it flashes right by, the cut out blending seamlessly with the live actors and background.

In order to create a rich world we have to figure out a way to blend in the cardboard cut outs, all of the little detailed characters and situations our characters will encounter.

We also need a quick and effective way of expanding a cut out into a deeper experience.

The Issue Of Depth - How Much Is Too Much?

In his famous essay 'On Fairy Tales' Tolkien suggests that in order for a story to be a true sub-creation it must be internally consistent and connect to a variety of deeply held images (passim, *The Tolkien Reader*, Tolkien, 1966). This is widely translated as an injunction on the part of the

father of our craft to spend hours writing back-stories for Non-Player Characters, places and items that players will never see. Time and a vast amount of fantasy literature has proven him correct; the best stories ring with internal consistency and depict intricate worlds of breathtaking depth and vision.

However, Tolkien wrote literature not roleplaying games. Writers have luxuries that gamers never

will. In particular they have the luxury to control the reader's focus. Although as readers we may have a strong interest in particular tangents we can do very little about it. Readers cannot go running off through a locked door to ask some poor character a question. A writer chooses when to slip in a highly detailed nugget of wisdom about his world to help make it seem more real. Furthermore, he has the leisure of revising his work; when inconsistency creeps in a good editor *[Obviously that would be me - Ed]* beats it back.

Compare that with what we have to deal with as players and Games Masters. As players, everything we do with our characters takes place in real time. Our character's back-story, habits and personality quirks are what we remember at the table, no matter how many reams of paper we eat up with background story. We anticipate what we will say to the Barron of Jo when we finally confront him, but the words that come out of our mouths at that time may have nothing to do with what we want.

As Games Masters, the experience becomes even more difficult. Not only do we have to perform on the spot, but we also have to deal with the constantly changing focus of our players. They have a natural gift for spotting and heading in whatever direction we did not detail. Say we spend all week slaving over the complex riddles at the base of the forbidden statue of Kelh. The players will knock down the statue, loot the gems and go looking for



beer and whores. Alternately, they might ignore the statue and the temple complex around it entirely, instead haring off after a book whose title you mentioned in passing six sessions ago and could not remember if your life depended on it. Suddenly you have an entire session of the players searching for it to write off the cuff.

There exists a strong temptation to just write everything. After all, that is what Tolkien did. He spent a lifetime writing the world we would come to know as Middle Earth. He wrote long, detailed volumes of history, culture and legend. For Games Masters, though, this way lies madness. Most of us do not have that much time. More importantly, our lack of ability to control player focus means that whatever we write will turn out to be not quite the right thing.

A plethora of highly detailed game worlds exist for our use, ranging from near-stone-age levels of technology to settings so far in the future they may as well be fantasy. Some of these, based on extensive existing properties, are quite popular and easy to play. Others, being new and relatively unknown, require a great deal of reference and examination to play. Although allowing someone else to do all of the work sounds like a great idea, in practice it helps only a little bit. We still have to search through book after book to find the information we need.

Borrowing - The Fast Way To Depth

If we accept that writing everything ourselves takes too much time what else can we do? Fortunately, as both Games Masters and players we have an option that would get a commercial author sued. It will also get you into considerable trouble in an academic setting.

As real human beings living in the world, we have access to an infinitely deep source of information. History, mythology, popular literature, songs, movies, television programs – all of these form a vast pool of potential symbols for us to mine. We can be obvious about it and just steal ideas whole cloth. Alternately, we can be very subtle about this borrowing, blending in images, words and ideas to give our own unique creations an illusion of depth.

Before going into detail about this an example of this principle in practice will help. One Games Master of my acquaintance created a variant elven language for his world. He then named every ancient and horrible place with a linguistically appropriate name, changing each for phonetic shifts reasonably appropriate for his millennia-long history. Unfortunately, when he announced the name of the ultimate fortress of evil to his players they looked at him and yawned. It did not mean anything to them. A few sessions afterwards, he announced that their ally King John was headed to Z'ha'dum (the same place, just renamed). The players immediately sat straight up in their chairs. They demanded to know why he wanted to go, what he hoped to get out of it, and if they could accompany him.

Using a term from a shared context (in the above case Z'ha'dum from Babylon 5) brings with it all of the weight and imagery of that context. In this case the players never questioned that going to Z'ha'dum was a bad thing. They

knew from experience that the place reeked of malign, unspeakable evil. They also knew that their ally, King John, would most likely never return.

Eliciting this level of response from the players requires several things:

1. It must be a strong image that exactly conveys what you need it to convey
2. It must be an image shared by some or all of the players

Our ideal then is to identify strong, shared images that we can use to create the illusion of depth, even in one-off Non-Player Characters. Poorly done, this leads to a dozen terrible King Arthur rip offs and a host of *Necronomicons* littering the tables of the world.



Criteria For Successful Borrowing

The real problem with borrowing is not that it works, but how to do it without being obvious or tacky. In order to do that, we need to understand what elements we can borrow, how to slip them in, and when to strike out on our own.

When planning to borrow we need to perform the following preparation steps:

1. Identify the elements in our game we want the players to notice? Spend personal time on these, and only borrow for them to increase depth. All other game elements become targets for borrowing.
2. What contexts do we share with our players? Is everyone an avid Babylon 5 fan? Do they watch *Star Wars* over, and over, and over again? Can they quote some or all of the Harry Potter books? What about bands/songs/radio stations? Establish up front as many shared contexts as possible. Also, pay attention to contexts that you may share with only one or two players. Shared contexts can include current events, shared historical knowledge, songs, literature, poetry, movies, television shows, myths, urban legends or religious beliefs.
3. Which shared contexts match the specific feel of your world? Borrowing elements from Aesop's Fables may work if you and the players share a passion for them, but it might not help you to portray a grim cyberpunk setting. Once you have the context list, vet it for inappropriate connotations.

Once we have our list, it is time to start hunting for things we can borrow. What we can safely borrow depends greatly on the amount of baggage we want to bring over with us. The *Z'ha'dum* example above carried with it a great deal of emotional/historical overtones. However, for the usual cut out we need something a bit subtler.

From weakest to strongest impact the things we can borrow are: descriptive phrases, narrative structures, personal habits, catchphrases, characters and proper names. Each successive level generates more and more recognition on the player's part, thereby generating a greater and greater assumed depth.

Borrow Then Break

The trick of 'borrowing' extensively from existing contexts allows us to quickly and creatively add depth to our worlds. However, it also opens us up to the tendency to copy rather than create. In order to avoid this mistake, we need to be prepared to borrow then break.

By breaking, we are referring to the conscious process by which we depart from the pattern of the borrowed element. The more complex the borrowed item, the more variables we have to work with. For example, a descriptive phrase borrowed from a song and applied to a setting really does not have many points of departure. It

describes something, in a way that is naggingly familiar to players but does not tell them much. A narrative structure borrowed from an anime, complete with characters, plot and settings has a large number of points of departure.

When choosing a point at which to 'break' we go through the same process we used to select targets for borrowing in the first place. However, the primary selection criterion in this case is not tone, but the ability to create cognitive dissonance within our target. Having already established the tone with the borrowing contexts, we now consciously break from it by selecting key elements to change.

In the above example (King John goes to Z'ha'dum) the Games Master chose to borrow directly from Babylon 5 to convey a specific impression to his players. By doing so he saved himself a great deal of time. He also set himself up for problems later on. His players assumed a large amount about the situation based on the names he chose. After sinking the narrative hook with the borrowed context, he deliberately made a number of changes to the story structure, characters and their personal traits. These changes included:

1. King John changed from a skilled commander to a fop who knew a bit about tactics. This created dissonance between the players' expectations and the character they encountered.
2. Z'ha'dum changed from an ancestral home to a conquered outpost of an even older, darker power. This change specifically targeted a single player, who played a spiritualist and also loved the entire Z'ha'dum/Lorien sequence.
3. King John's trip became a quest in and of itself. The Games Master gave it a branching ending, with King John having the option (based on player actions) to decide to ally with the evil in Z'ha'dum rather than choosing to resist it.

These three changes took a rich, borrowed experience and transformed it into a unique, interactive adventure. Notice that one of the breaks specifically targets a player. This break became an immediate story hook for that player, drawing him personally into the story.

Interestingly, the word Z'ha'dum itself is a phonetic borrow and break of the older Khazad-dum from Tolkien's *'The Lord of the Rings'*. It follows the same phonetic structure as its precedent, but varies enough to be just recognizable without being a direct borrowing. A similar technique could produce: Orkhan for Orc, or Elfrin for Elvin.

The idea of breaking also gives us our most valuable tool for rapid creation. When the players choose to focus their attention on a borrowed cut out we can immediately

execute a break to generate additional depth. How we do this depends on the exact cut out and the borrowing we did to give it depth, but can include everything from a rapid change of alignment/personality to the borrowing of other contexts. As always with breaking, our goal is to generate as great a disparity between what the players automatically expect and what really happens as possible.

Borrowing in Action: Examples

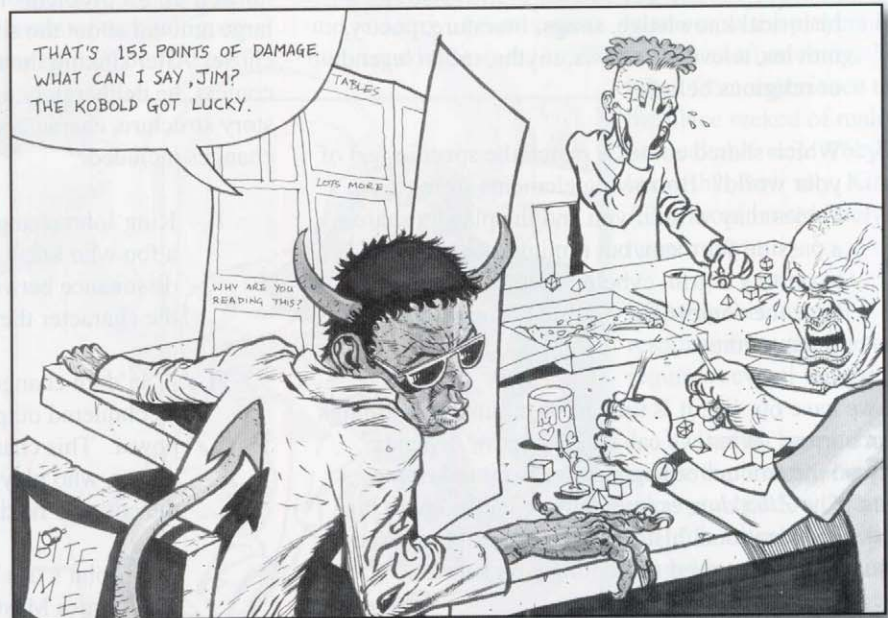
In order to illustrate the above points, let us look at a handful of examples in action. Each example outlines a particular problem, the borrowing done to solve that problem, and the break used to create greater depth.

Example One: Dull Wraith Descriptions

Problem: The Games Master had trouble getting his players to react to his monster descriptions (in this case wraiths) on a non-metagame level.

Borrowed Element: Phrases from several popular songs at the time, including 'Shadows Steal The Light' and 'Just A Heartbeat Away'. His goal was to create a stronger visual impression with his descriptions.

Broken Elements: In this case, the Games Master chose not to break from any elements.



Example Two: Song-Based Campaign

Problem: After several unsuccessful attempts to build character-driven plots, the Games Master wanted to run a game his players could enjoy.

Borrowed Element: He borrowed the character and plot concepts (as well as the descriptive phrases) from the Ozzy Osbourne song 'Iron Man' from the 'Speak of the Devil' album. This provided him with a very simple narrative structure: man saves town, town turns on man, man takes revenge. It also provided a shared narrative framework, which he then expanded upon with additional story details. He also borrowed phrases and characters from other songs on the album to help flesh out the experience.

Broken Elements: By mixing and matching characters from various songs on the album, he created a modest dissonance with what the players subconsciously expected. He also made the titular Iron Man (a negative, destructive character) an articulate gentleman. This contrasted with the impression from the song, creating a character that the players found immediately fascinating.

Example Three: The Numerous Inns

Problem: The Games Master had trouble describing his inns and Non-Player Characters in an interesting and diverse way.

Borrowed Elements: In order to diversify his settings, he borrowed short descriptions of settings from the show 'Farscape', knowing that his players watched it religiously.

Broken Elements: In order to add depth to the Non-Player Characters he prepared beforehand a list of descriptive phrases borrowed from 'The Lord of the Rings'. The juxtaposition of known science fiction with known fantasy elements created a strong and interesting dissonance for the players.

Conclusion

In this article we explored the descriptive problems faced by roleplayers as they build complex, interesting worlds. In particular this article focused on the issue of creating internally consistent, recognizable worlds with sufficient depth to retain player interest. We proposed that by using intelligent borrowing of specific catch phrases from given contexts we could create a more detailed experience for all involved.

Shannon will be back with more next month - something evil in fact, but only if you are very good.



♦
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SOLDIER'S COMPANION



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visit their cities. . . and trash them.'



ARMAGEDDON: 2089

6



Nothing But Trouble?

Incorporating Babylon Five Characters into Your Campaign

Lizard

Having tackled Susan Ivanova last time, Lizard turns his attention to that loveable rogue, Londo Mollari. Come up against this guy and you will have to be at the top of your game to walk away with your pants...

Ambassador Londo Mollari

While Babylon 5 has no true central character about whom everything revolves, it is the opinion of this author that, if such a character exists, it is not Sheridan or Delenn, but Londo Mollari. Whether he is seen as a fool manipulated by others, a villain, or a tragic hero (or all three), he is at the centre of many of the major elements of the Babylon 5 saga. As such, it is unthinkable that player characters would not encounter him in some fashion, either as an ally or an obstacle.

From a Games Master's perspective, including Londo is desirable because, let's face it – he is *fun*. A Games Master who enjoys theatrics can do little better than Londo. He is a grand, extreme character, given to great bouts of emotion. He does nothing by halves and it is easy to allow his boisterous outer nature to express itself, even if he is only 'on stage' in a game session for a few minutes, buying drinks at a bar or seeking funding at the casino.

Note that I said 'outer nature'. The real Londo, glimpsed only occasionally in the series, when he lets



his guard down, is a sad, haunted man, laughing maniacally so no one can hear his sobs. Over the course of the series, he ultimately gets everything he ever wants but, as the song goes, never what he needs. Those he truly cares for die or turn from him. To make

Londo as an Ally

Unless the player characters are all staunch, upright, loyal and incorruptible EarthForce-types, or a band of radical Narn freedom fighters, the odds are good that Londo will have a number of missions he might wish a typical player character to accomplish. He always wants *something* – slightly illegal wine, a little bit of information, a message delivered discreetly, some money – and he is often willing, even eager, to use others to get it, especially if he can be sure he will dodge the rap if they are caught.

If the player characters prove reliable, they may find that Londo trusts them with greater responsibility. This can lead them directly into the heart of the Babylon 5 story arc and place them in very dangerous straits. He may ask them to convey some bad news to

'Now, I go to spread happiness to the rest of the station. It's a terrible responsibility but I have learned to live with it.'

Londo work in a game, that dark inner core must always be kept in mind. Londo acts the part of the clown, but it is, indeed, only an act, and the harshest part is, he knows it.

Emperor Cartagia, or to serve as his guards on a mission to the battered Narn homeworld, or to arrange things with Mr. Morden. If the players can avoid using their metagame knowledge, it is possible for Londo to place them in positions where their actions directly further some of the most tragic acts of the story arc, such as the bombardment of Narn or the near-destruction of the Alliance during its formative years.

Of course, the friend of my enemy is my enemy. Growing too chummy with Londo carries risks – Narn characters in a group may not tolerate their associates acting closely with the Centauri ambassador, especially as relations move from simmering hatred to outright war. As events proceed and Londo increasingly becomes an outsider opposed to the actions of the command staff, those characters will view his known allies and employees with deep suspicion. Furthermore, Centauri politics are brutal and bloody; if any player characters are seen as vital cogs in Londo's machine, a drop of poison or a well-placed knife can be used to take them out.

In addition, while the breadth of Londo's support is great, the depth is nanometer thin. With the possible exception of Vir, Londo has never show any tendency to take great risks for anybody. If the player characters find themselves in a bad situation due to their support of him, he will spend his efforts to disguise his ties rather than to help them, if there is any personal risk (physical, financial, or social) to him. Only if they are certain to take him with them if they fall will he use his influence and abilities on their behalf, and he will almost certainly consider them heavily in his debt.

Lastly, Londo is not above using those loyal to him in underhanded ways.

'Damn. You see, it's your fault. You're bad luck. I've always said that about him. Now, come on, come on. Look, you're a security chief. Shouldn't you be out securing something?'

He arranged for Vir – one of the few beings he seems to harbour genuine, deep affection for – to be kidnapped, beaten and mind-probed, just to set up a rival for a nasty fall. Imagine how he might choose to exploit those he sees as mere hirelings or mercenaries.

Londo as an Opponent

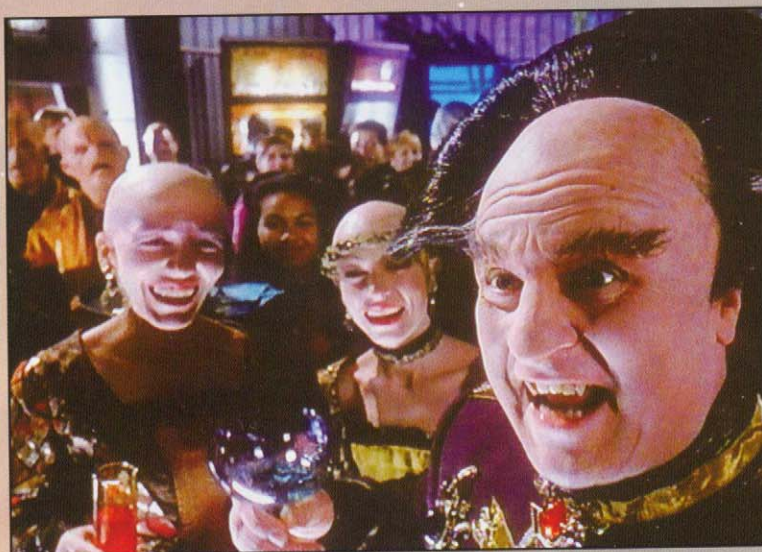
There are many ways the player characters and Londo can end up on opposite sides. Anyone working against the Shadows will ultimately find himself working against Londo. A problem here, of course, is that the forces organised by Delenn and Sheridan sought to work secretly for as long as possible, so the player characters must oppose Londo without obvious, direct confrontation, foiling him without making it seem as if there is any higher power behind their actions. While Londo is not as paranoid as, say, Garibaldi, he is no fool (despite occasionally acting like one), and will quickly grow suspicious

if the same people seem to constantly be in his way.

Of course, Londo has other enemies. Centauri politics are a miasma of shifting alliances and treachery, and Centauri player characters may have family loyalties that place them against the House of Mollari, even if they otherwise support the reborn Centauri Empire. If a player character is clever, he can easily end up playing both sides, working for Londo overtly while sabotaging him – or simply selling information – covertly. This is, of course, risky, because even if Londo can sometimes be blinded by his ego, underestimating an underling (see: Vir), he has powerful friends who are much more observant and who can arrange for a traitor in their midst to take a stroll from an unattended airlock, with Londo never suspecting foul play.

Narn player characters, unless extremely unusual, will have little love for the Centauri ambassador. They may take it on themselves to appoint themselves his nemesis, though, again, this has to be done with caution. Early in the story arc, open attacks on Centauri do not serve the objectives of the Narn Regime, which does not wish open war; later in the story, the brutal occupation of the Narn homeworld means that any Narn risks the death of his family and more if he harms a Centauri. Furthermore, the death or injury of anyone powerful does not go unnoticed; at the very least, EarthForce Security, combined with

'Did I ever tell you [Delenn] that you are very cute for a Minbari? Even you [Garibaldi] are cute, in an annoying sort of way. Everybody's cute! Everybody's cute! Even me. But in purple.. I'm stunning!' [collapses]



any number of special Centauri units (including telepaths not bound by Psi Corps diktats) would comb the station for the perpetrator.

'Commander, please. On the issue of galactic peace, I'm long past innocence and fast approaching apathy. It's all a game --a paper fantasy of names and borders. Only one thing matters, Commander. Blood calls out for blood.'

Londo has a number of weaknesses player characters can exploit – he is vain, pompous, prone to drinking and gambling, inclined to act on a moment's emotion without deep introspection, and unwilling to accept responsibility for his actions. He continually confuses what he thinks he should want with what he does want, leading him to take actions which he knows are wrong, in the hope that they will ultimately make him happy. Sadly, they never do, and his near-total lack of self-examination causes him to continually miss the source of his problems – namely, himself. Over the course of the series, he alienates those who actually care for him, leaving him with 'allies' who only wish to use and discard him – although, to be fair, he has no higher aspirations than that towards them.

Keeping Him Alive

Londo's premature death is to be avoided. This may require some careful planning; Londo is not a

combatant, but he *is* overconfident, and often allows his vices to place him in risky situations. (Consider his rather unusual method for cheating at poker, and what might have occurred had Lennier not been there.) Should a combat situation arise around Londo, here are a few tricks to keep him alive:

1. **Run.** Londo will not stand and fight. He will flee, and it is quite possible that EarthForce security, some friendly Centauri, or just a large crowd of unwanted eyewitnesses around the next corner could save his neck.
2. **Rescue.** While Londo often ignores the advice of those who care for him, they still persist. If he knows Londo is heading into trouble, Vir might discreetly follow at a distance or alert Garibaldi to be on the lookout. Alternatively, the player characters themselves may be asked to bail him out, particularly if they have worked with him in the past.
3. **Cheat.** You can never go wrong with this. He does not die because the Games Master does not let him die. Something saves him, or the die rolls are fudged, or whatever.

Of course, if a less railroaded game is desired, but there is still an interest in preserving the arc, he has to be replaced. Lord Refa is an obvious candidate, at least prior to his encounter with the Narn Bat Squad. He has all of Londo's vices and few, if any, of his virtues, making

him much more a classic villain and less of a tragic anti-hero. This works well if the player characters are already working against Londo, though exceptionally cynical player characters might find a boss with even less conscience than Londo to be acceptable.

There is also Vir. Although he will be discussed in a future column, moving Vir into Londo's position in the arc can be done. While Morden controlled Londo in part by appealing to his vices, Vir can be seduced by appealing to his *virtues*. Think of all the harm he could prevent if he just did this one little thing...think of how much better off everyone would be if he simply played along, just a little...

While many of the bad things Londo does are easy to fill in for (Morden would have found some other Centauri patsy easily enough, for example), the *good* things he does, even unintentionally, have a major impact on the arc and replacing him in a believable fashion will be difficult. It is he who saves G'Kar and orchestrates the removal of Cartagia. Without him, G'Kar would die under torture, the Narn homeworld would remain under Centauri occupation and a madman would be on the throne of the Centauri Republic for years. It is possible all these things can be accomplished without Londo, but only with difficulty. Player character allies of G'Kar might be able to rescue him; Vir might be led to kill Cartagia even without Londo there and other forces could cause the Centauri to abandon Narn, for example.

Conclusion

As with all the main series characters, ensuring their part in the evolving story arc is of paramount importance, if only to save an immense amount of work second-guessing J. Michael Straczynski on the subject of alternatives. Everything I said about Ivanova last issue holds true for Londo. His character has enormous roleplaying potential and should not be used carelessly. Value him and he will enhance your games by his sheer presence, be you Games Master or player.



AMBASSADOR LONDO MOLLARI

Game Stats and Biography (Season 2)

'Fools to the left of me, feeders to the right. . . I need to find a real job.'

8th Level Centauri Diplomat / 1st Level Officer (fleet)

Hit Points: 18

Initiative: +1 (+1 Dex)

Speed: 30 ft.

DV: 12 (+2 Reflex)

Attacks: +5 melee or +6 ranged

Special Qualities: Branch Specialisation (fleet),
Contacts x4, Government Resources, Improved Diplomacy *

Saves: Fort +6, Ref +3, Will +8

Abilities: Str 11, Dex 12, Con 14, Int 13, Wis 10, Cha 16

Skills: Appraise +11, Bluff +10, Computer Use +8, Diplomacy +16*, Gather Information +13, Intimidate +9, Knowledge (noble houses) +5, Pilot +6, Sense Motive +9, Technical (electronics) +2

Feats: Data Access, Great Fortitude, Nerves of Steel, Spacecraft Proficiency, Toughness, Weapon Focus (Coutari)



After many long years, Londo Mollari's star is once again rising within the Centauri Republic. His assignment as ambassador to Babylon 5 was at first seen as being little more than a joke, as it was not viewed as a safe place for any high ranking noble to be. Once despondent at both his own poor fate and that of his dwindling Republic, he has gained a new passion for life as wealth and power in the service of his people now seem to be within grasp. Though he knows little about Mr Morden or the man's associates, their aid in both recovering the Eye of the Republic from raiders and the destruction of the Narn colony in Quadrant 37 has gained him a strong standing within the Royal Court on Centauri Prime. Though having some misgivings about the alien nature and sheer destructive power of Mr Morden's associates, Mollari is well aware of the opportunities that are beckoning as he begins to fulfil his rightful destiny.



The 3.5 Witch



Robert J. Schwalb

The Quintessential Witch was the first guide in the Collector's series to break away from the coverage of the core classes and races in the d20 system. With the advent of the new revision, it seems like a good time to take a second look at this class, to bring it into line with the rest of the rules. Many of the changes to the class, concepts and prestige classes reflect feedback, further playtesting and the new adjustments presented in the updated books. As with all rules revisions, use what you like, leave what you do not. In short, what follows is a new and improved witch, a better and stronger character class, truer to the conceptions of what it means to be a member of her kind.

The Revised Witch

At first glance, the changes to the witch progression appear minor

and relatively insignificant. On a closer look, you should note that the abilities are distributed equitably, and in patterns, so that the witch now gains bonus feats every five levels and wild shape every six starting at 7th-level. The pattern establishes how witches advance beyond 20th-level if such rules are used.

Nature sense is gained at 1st-level instead of 2nd level; the class ability functions now more as a feat instead of a nebulous class ability. Witches now gain a *disguise self* to reinforce the protean conception of the characters. Finally, the class abilities are rearranged so as to provide a viable boost at every level, and where they gain no class ability, they instead receive new spell levels and increases to their base saves.

Alignment: Any
Hit Dice: d6



The Witch.

[illegible]

*Witches above 20th-level gain an additional wild shape each day every six levels and bonus feats every three levels they advance.

Class Skills

The witch's class skills (and the key abilities for each skill) are Concentration (Con), Craft (all skills, taken individually) (Int), Gather Information (Cha), Knowledge (all skills, taken individually) (Int), Profession (all skills, taken individually) and Spellcraft (Int). See Skills in the *Core Rulebook I* for skill descriptions.

Skill Points at 1st level: (4 + Int modifier) x 4

Skill Points at Each Additional Level: 4 + Int modifier.

Class Features

All of the following are class features of the witch:

Weapon and Armour Proficiency:

The witch is proficient in the use of the athame, club, dagger (all), dart, quarterstaff, witch sword, sickle and the sling. Witches are not proficient in any armour or with shields. If they gain proficiency in armour, through the expenditure of a feat or through multiclassing, as long as they wear only leather, padded or studded leather, they do not suffer the standard chance for spell failure, as a cleric. However, metal armour interferes with the manipulation of the natural magic. If the witch wears metal armour or wields a shield, she suffers the normal chances for spell failure as described in the *Core Rulebook I*, but affecting divine magic.

Note that armour check penalties for armour heavier than leather apply to the skills Balance, Climb, Escape Artist, Hide, Jump, Move Silently, Pick Pocket, and Tumble. Also, Swim checks suffer a -1 penalty for every 5 pounds of armour and equipment carried.

Spells: The witch casts spells just as a wizard does in that she prepares spells ahead of time and loses them once cast. She casts a limited number of spells of each level per day. Prior to selecting her spells she must get a full night's rest and spend at least one hour studying her Book of Shadows. While reading through her book, she decides what spells to prepare. In all respects, spell preparation functions exactly as a wizard, as described in detail in *Core Rulebook I*.

To learn, prepare or cast a spell, a witch must have a Charisma score of at least 10 + the spell's level. Thus a witch with a Charisma of less than 10 cannot cast any spells at all. Witches' bonus spells are determined by Charisma, and saving throws against these spells have a Difficulty Class of 10 + spell level + her Charisma modifier. Whenever a witch gains 0 spells of a given level, such as 0 1st-level spells at 1st-level, the witch only gets bonus spells (See *Core Rules I*, page 8). A witch without a bonus spell of that level may not yet cast any spells of that level. Finally, though the witch uses spells in a fashion akin to that of a wizard, she, in fact, casts divine spells.

Chaotic, Evil, Good and Lawful

Spells: A witch cannot cast spells of an alignment opposed to her own. For example, a chaotic good witch may not cast spells with the lawful and/or evil descriptors.

Book of Shadows: Witches utilise books of shadows to hold their spells and recipes and they use it as a journal to record the events of their lives. Each day, before preparing her spells, she must review her book of shadows. The witch cannot prepare any spell not found within her book of shadows. A witch begins play with 5 tricks (0-level spells) plus 1 1st-level spell of the player's choice.

For each point of Intelligence bonus (not Charisma), the book of shadows holds an additional 1st-level spell. Each time the witch advances a new

level in this class, she gains two new spells of any level or levels she can cast (according to her new level). In all other respects, the book of shadow functions exactly like a wizard's spellbook as described in *Core Rulebook I*.

Nature Sense: A witch gains a +2 bonus on Knowledge (nature) and Survival checks.

Familiar: A witch may summon a familiar just as a sorcerer. See entries in *Core Rulebook I* for details and *Core Rulebook II* for rules for improved familiars.

Herb Use (Ex): At 2nd level, witches gain the ability to use the special properties found in certain plant specimens. See Tools of the Trade in the *Quintessential Witch* for details on these special properties. This ability does not confer the imbuing ability of the Augment Herb feat, which effectively infuses a magical quality into a plant specimen. Normally, these herbs, roots and plants have no special properties, thereby having little use to non-witch characters.

Change Self (Sp): Once per day, beginning at 3rd level, the witch may use the spell-like ability Change Self at a caster level equal to her witch levels. See *Core Rulebook I* for details on this spell. At 9th-level, the witch may use this ability twice per day.

Bonus Feat: Beginning at 5th level and every five levels thereafter, the witch gains a bonus item creation feat. Note: these feats are in addition to those granted to every character by level regardless of class. Feats granted by overall character level, and the bonus feat for human characters, need not be item creation feats.

Wild Shape (Su): At 7th level, a witch gains the ability to turn herself into any Small or Medium animal and back again once per day. Her options for new forms include all creatures with the animal type (see *Core Rulebook III*). This ability functions just like *polymorph*, except as noted here. The effect lasts for 1 hour per

witch level, or until she changes back. Changing form (to animal or back) is a standard action that does not provoke an attack of opportunity. The form chosen must be that of an animal the witch is familiar with.

A witch cannot speak while in animal form as she is limited to the sounds that a normal, untrained animal can make, but she may communicate normally with other animals of the same general grouping as her new form. Characters using speak with animals or similar magic can restore line of communication as normal.

As the witch advances, she may wild shape more times per day. For every six levels she attains, she gains one additional wild shape per day. Unlike druids, witches may never assume forms of Large animals, plant creatures or elementals through use of the Wild Shape ability.

A Thousand Faces (Su): At 11th level, a witch gains the ability to change her appearance at will, as if using *alter self*, but only while in her normal form.

Timeless Body: At 14th level, the witch no longer appears to age, nor does she suffer penalties for aging. Likewise, she is immune to any form of magical aging. Any penalties accrued prior to attaining this level remain. The witch continues to gain all bonuses to her attributes during advancement through the years. However, she remains subject to death by natural aging.

Fascination: Once per day, beginning at 16th level, the witch may attempt to fascinate a target within her line of sight. To do so, the witch must attempt a Concentration check (DC 20) each round. Concentrating in this manner is a standard action that provokes an Attack of Opportunity. The target is entitled to a Will save against a DC is equal to 15 + the witch's Charisma modifier. Failure indicates the victim faithfully serves the witch for as long as the witch is able to concentrate. Service to the

witch is nearly absolute. The only exception is if the command would clearly result in the victim's death. Any such command breaks the effect.

Longevity: Upon reaching 20th level, a witch no longer fears natural death. Her maximum age dramatically increases to a value equalling the maximum age category normal for her race + the maximum die roll possible. Multiply this result by 4. This is the witch's new maximum age. For example, Sinthea is a 20th-level human witch. Normally the maximum age for humans in the venerable category is 70 + 2d20 years. When re-figuring her maximum age, she treats the d20 results as 20s. So her new total is 70 + 20 + 20 (for a sum of 110). Multiplying this result by 4, she can live naturally to 440 years of age before expiring.

Random Starting Gold (gp): 3d4 x 10

Witch Spell List

0-Level Witch Spells (Tricks):

arcane mark, cure minor wounds, dancing lights, daze, detect magic, detect poison, flare, ghost sound, light, mending, purify food and drink, read magic, resistance, touch of fatigue, virtue.

1st-Level Witch Spells: *animal messenger, animate rope, cause fear, charm person, command, comprehend languages, cure light wounds, darkness, detect chaos/evil/good/law, disguise self, doom, endure elements, faerie fire, fey sight, hide from animals, hold portal, hypnotism, identify, inflict light wounds, mount, obscuring mist, silent image, sleep, speak with animals, twisting the heartstrings I†, unseen servant, ventriloquism.*

2nd-Level Witch Spells: *augury, alter self, bless, blindness/deafness, bull's strength, calm emotions, command undead, cure moderate wounds, daze monster, delay poison,*

detect thoughts, entangle, enthrall, find traps, hold person, invisibility, knock, levitate, locate object, magic mouth, minor image, mirror image, produce flame, protection from arrows, pyrotechnics, scare, see invisibility, summon nature's ally I, touch of idiocy, twisting the heart strings II†, whispering wind.



3rd-Level Witch Spells:

bestow curse, circle of respite†, clairvoyance/clairaudience, cleanse air†, confusion, contagion, continual flame, create food and water, dispel magic, dominate animal, fly, glyph of warding, haste, heroism, improved faerie fire†, tiny hut, magic circle against chaos/evil/good/law, major image, neutralise poison, plant growth, remove blindness/deafness, remove disease, slow, snare, speak with plants, suggestion, tongues.

4th-Level Witch Spells: *arcane eye, charm monster, crushing despair, cure serious wounds, discern lies, divination, fear, fireball*, fluid mastery†, giant vermin, good hope, greater invisibility, hallucinatory terrain, ice storm, inflict serious wounds, lesser geas, lightning bolt*, locate creature, minor creation, neutralise poison, polymorph, reincarnate, remove curse, scrying, spell immunity, tears of the goddess†.*

5th-Level Witch Spells: *animate dead, animal growth, baleful polymorph, break enchantment, break spirit†, contact other plane, control water†, dominate person, dream, false vision, feeblemind, greater command, greater scrying, insect plague, secret chest, lesser planar ally, magic jar, major creation, mirage arcana, nightmare, rusting grasp, seeming, sending, shadow conjuration, telekinesis, transmute rock to mud, wall of ice, waves of fatigue.*

6th-Level Witch Spells: *animate object, antimagic field, awaken dead†, dismissal, draw forth the soul†, eyebite, evaporate fluids†, find the path, guards and wards, geas/quest, heroes' feast, legend*



lore, mass suggestion, mislead, move earth, project image, seer stone†, transformation, true seeing, veneration†, weather control.

7th-Level Witch Spells: *animate plants, banishment, call the restless soul†, creeping doom, disintegrate, finger of death, firestorm, flesh to stone, insanity, limited wish, liveoak, prismatic spray, repel wood, resurrection, stone to flesh, transport via plants, veil, vision, waves of exhaustion, wind walk.*



8th-Level Witch Spells: *antipathy, binding, clones, control weather, demand, destroy life†, discern location, horrid wilting, and pit†, leaden†, mass polymorph†, maze, polymorph any object, prophesy†, restore youth†, sympathy, trap the soul, wasting touch†.*

9th-Level Witch Spells: *astral projection, breath of the goddess†, earthquake, encircle†, foresight, freedom, gate, greater blindness†, imprisonment, mystic barrier†, refuge, seek†, shape change, wail of the banshee, weird, wrath of nature†.*

† New spell appearing in the *Quintessential Witch*.



*Optional spell. There has been a fair amount of discussion as to the suitability of direct damage spells for the witch class. As natural healers, hedge wizards or priestesses, there is a good argument against witches using direct damage spells. Even *Core Rulebook II* stipulates, in the sample witch contained therein, that offensive spells are not suitable. However, consider a number of sources. The 'Wicked Witch' from the *Wizard of Oz* and the witch in *Conan the Barbarian* are each clear examples of witch-like archetypes capable of manipulating the elements

to generate a combat effect. The most telling evidence lies in the 1st Edition *Witch*, originally presented in *Dragon Magazine* almost two decades ago. In that article, witches had the ability to cast these spells, and featured several other destructive spells in their arsenal, making them capable to stand up to the most fearsome wizard.

In short, witches occupy a significant place in western mythology. If your witch zips around on a broomstick, or simply is an old crone in the middle of a swamp, your perceptions colour your expectations of what a witch is supposed to be. In response to



the assortment of outlooks on this subject, the *Quintessential Witch* attempts to present as general a witch as possible, giving the reader the tools to adjust the class to fit with their own existing campaigns. Essentially, if you feel that giving witches *fireball* and *lightning bolt* is contrary to what a witch should be able to cast, simply remove the two spells from the spell list.



Character Concepts

For the most part, witch character concepts as they are written should remain unchanged. Some of the mechanics, however, require some alteration to accord with the revised rules set and those changes are

listed below. For full details on witch concepts such as function, role-playing and so on, refer to the appropriate section in the *Quintessential Witch*.



Envoy

Bonuses: Envoys are great speakers, capable of amazing feats of oration and persuasion. Envoys gain Bluff, Diplomacy and Sense Motive as class skills. In addition, they receive a +2 competence bonus to all Charisma checks used to alter Non-Player Character attitudes.

Penalties: Considering the envoy's focus on social interaction and bargaining, other witch skills remain undeveloped. The envoy loses access to Craft, Profession and Spellcraft as class skills and never gains Nature Sense as a class feature.



Gardener

Bonuses: The gardener's command over nature makes her an expert on all things botanical. Gardeners gain Survival as a class skill and the Nature Sense bonuses to Knowledge (nature) and Survival increase to +3.

Gardeners also gain access to the Plant domain, gaining a bonus spell per spell level and the granted power just as a cleric does. See the *Core Rulebook I* for details on domains.

Penalties: Since the gardener is not the most personable individual in the world, disdaining most animals and people, she has a difficult time communicating with others. Treat all Non-Player Character initial reactions as one step worse. The gardener loses the ability to summon a familiar. Last, the gardener's close association with plants prevents her from assuming wild shape animal forms. Instead, at 13th level, she may wild shape into a plant creature that she is familiar with, and whose Hit



Peasant



Bonuses: Dwelling among the common folk, the peasant witch focuses on day-to-day needs of her community, rather than the excitement of adventure. Many come to her for healing, wisdom and magical charms. The peasant witch gains Heal as a class skill. She receives a +2 competence bonus to all Herb Use checks. Finally, all attitude results when interacting with Non-Player Character adepts, commoners or experts are treated as one category better.

Penalties: The peasant witch's lack of worldly exposure limits her ability to interact with others of a higher social class. Thus, all attitude results when encountering a Non-Player Character who is an aristocrat are treated as one category worse. In addition, she loses access to Knowledge as a class skill.

Healer

Bonuses: The healer witch has access to the Healing domain, gaining the benefits of its granted power and bonus spell per spell level. In addition, she gains Heal as a class skill. See the *Core Rulebook I* for details on domains and granted powers.

Penalties: The healer is only proficient with the club and quarterstaff. If she uses a weapon other than a club or a quarterstaff, she loses access to the Healing domain, and all Difficulty Classes for Heal checks are at +10 until such time that she expiates herself of her errors through atonement, sacrificing gold or equipment as determined by the Games Master.



Savage

Bonuses: The savage is adept at functioning in the wild. She receives a +2 competence bonus to all Listen, Spot and Survival checks. Finally, she is proficient with all simple weapons and light armour.



Dice do not exceed her own. See the *Core Rulebook I* for details on Wild Shape (plant).



Pagan

Bonuses: The closeness of the pagan to the animal world changes the focus of the class. The pagan gains Survival as a class skill, Track as a bonus feat and access to the Animal domain. From the Animal domain, the pagan witch gains the granted power and bonus spells, just as a cleric. See *Core Rulebook I* for details on domains.

Penalties: In exchange for heightened magical prowess, the pagan loses access to the Craft skill as a class skill and is barred from all spells with alignment descriptors. Finally, if she ever wields metal weapons or wears metal armour she loses access to all of her spell abilities for 24 hours.

Traditionalist

Bonuses: The traditionalist witch is at the cutting edge of the wickedness business. The depths of her depravity are unplumbed. Her familiar gains the fiendish template and she may cast spells from the Evil domain as domain spells, but without the granted power. See *Core Rulebooks I* and *III* for details on domains and the fiendish template respectively.

Penalties: The witch must be evil. She never gains the Nature Sense ability, or the *fascination* power. As she advances, she must consort with demons and devils to gain new spells for her Book of Shadows. The foul rituals require her to sacrifice a gold piece value of coins, gems, art objects or equipment equal to her level times 100 in exchange for the normal allotment of spells gained by dint of level advancement.



Misanthrope

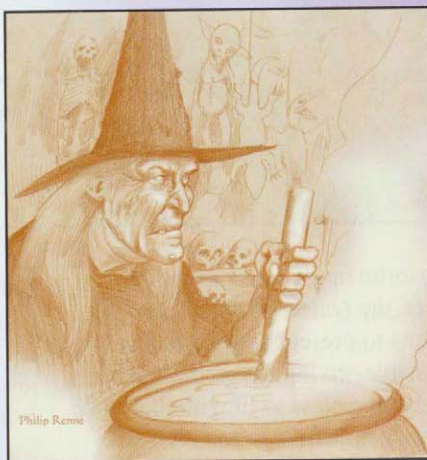
Bonuses: The misanthrope gains her own species as a favoured enemy. For her, the restrictions about alignment are lifted, so she does not necessarily have to be evil. See the Ranger in the *Core Rulebook I* for details on favoured enemies. If the misanthrope witch multiclasses into another class with a favoured enemy class feature, the effects stack.

Penalties: The misanthrope suffers a -4 penalty to all Charisma checks when interacting with members of her own species.



Fugitive

Bonuses: Given the constant threat posed by hunters, the fugitive witch develops less traditional class skills. Fugitive witches gain Hide, Listen, Move Silently and Spot as class skills. They also gain the Alertness feat as a bonus feat and Evasion as a class feature (see *Core Rulebook I* for details).



Penalties: The fugitive is always on the move to the extent that her spirit actually begins to erode. She loses access to the Timeless Body and Longevity abilities and is hunted by an individual or organisation determined by the Games Master. Finally, her flight prevents her from developing her spellcasting ability like other witches. Replace all instances of 0 spells per level with a dash.

Penalties: Savage witches are illiterate and must devote skill points to Literacy in the same manner as barbarians. Also, these witches refuse to handle any metal objects. Doing so provokes the ire of their ancestors and the Divine, barring her from all spellcasting for 24 hours.



Erudite Practitioner

Bonuses: The Knowledge skill for the erudite practitioner is treated as an untrained skill. She makes checks in areas of thought regardless of her familiarity with the subject matter. The practitioner also benefits from the Spell Penetration feat.

Penalties: All casting times for spells cast increase by one step. Thus, a spell with a casting time of 1 action increases to a full-round action, while a spell with a casting time of a full round increases to a casting time of 1 minute. A spell with a casting time of 1 minute increases to one hour casting time. Last, all spells cast by the erudite practitioner are considered arcane spells instead of divine, making her spells subject to Arcane Spell Failure chances when wearing any type of armour.



Revisited Priestess of the Divine

Counsellor



Bonuses: The duties of the counsellor require suavity and an attention to every detail. She receives a +2 competence bonus to all Intimidate, Knowledge (nobility and royalty) and Listen.

Penalties: Unfortunately, the counsellor's attention is always directed at her master, and therefore she never gains the Nature Sense ability, nor does she have access to Profession as a class skill.



Revised Prestige Classes

Many of the changes to the prestige classes are intuitive. In the revised rules, many of the skills have changed in name (Wilderness Lore to Survival), some have been folded into other skills (Read Lips into Spot and Sense Motive) and some have disappeared altogether (Scry). To revise the requirements and class skills of the prestige classes simply replace the old skill with the proper replacement. Hence, the avenger has Wilderness Lore as a class skill. Replace Wilderness Lore with Survival. Strike all instances of Innuendo, Read Lips, Scry or any other skill that did not carry over to the revised rules. Once these changes are in place, the prestige class should be fully compatible with the new rules. Finally, classes with access

to Animal Empathy lose it as a class skill, instead gaining Wild Empathy as a class feature at 1st level.

With the inclusion of rules for characters above 20th level in *Core Rulebook II*, many players may feel slighted that they lack a 10-level prestige class for epic advancement. To address this concern, this revision article includes a 10-level version of the Priestess of the Divine.

Revisited Priestess of the Divine

Most witches view the basis of the craft as an extension of religion. The very nature of interacting with higher powers to channel divine energies reflects their commitment to a higher spiritual plane. Among witches, though, there are those who serve their gods more devoutly than any other. These women are the priestesses of the divine. The standard priestess differs from other witches in that her focus trains upon the furtherance of her mistress' will. Additionally, all priestesses of the divine watch the night skies for portents and omens, directives of their faith to lead them in accordance with the wishes of their mistress. Most priestesses begin their training as witches only to realise that by furthering their own powers they distance themselves from the precarious balance established by the Divine. Thus, many seek out



Level	Base Attack Bonus	Fort Save	Ref Save	Will Save	Special	Spells per Day
1	+0	+0	+0	+2	Wild Empathy	+1 level of existing class
2	+1	+0	+0	+3	Align the Chakras	+1 level of existing class
3	+1	+1	+1	+3	Bonus Feat	+1 level of existing class
4	+2	+1	+1	+4	Ritual of the Bolline	+1 level of existing class
5	+2	+1	+1	+4	Channel Athame	+1 level of existing class
6	+3	+2	+2	+5	Bonus Feat	+1 level of existing class
7	+3	+2	+2	+5	Cauldron Scry	+1 level of existing class
8	+4	+2	+2	+6	Command Chakra	+1 level of existing class
9	+4	+3	+3	+6	Bonus Feat	+1 level of existing class
10	+5	+3	+3	+7	Divine Fury and Favour	+1 level of existing class



*Priestesses of the Divine above 10th level gain bonus metamagic feats every three levels.



the structure of a church to build the religious setting in which they may commune with the gods and goddesses.



Non-Player Character priestesses are cloaked in mystery. These witches are ready to assist those in need, but exact a higher payment. Priestesses do not worship in grand, vaulted cathedrals, nor do they immerse themselves in country churches. They favour small, unpretentious shrines surrounded by natural things, safeguarding the tools of their faith, such as candles, symbols, chalices and so on. Many priestesses of the divine function as sages, holders of ancient and rare knowledge, some even rivalling the loremasters. Others form covens, expressing the might of their sympathetic magic and the ultimate expression of the masculine and feminine forces. If you do not use the cosmology delineated in the *Quintessential Witch*, priestesses of the divine follow gods and goddesses of nature, balance and the elements.

Hit Die: d6



Requirements

To qualify to become a priestess of the divine, a character must fulfil all the following criteria.

Gender: Female.

Alignment: Must be true neutral.

Skills: Knowledge (astrology) 4 ranks, Knowledge (nature) 8 ranks, Knowledge (religion) 8 ranks and Spellcraft 8 ranks.

Feats: Cord Casting, Purify Spell.

Class Abilities: Must have the ability to *Wild Shape*.

Special: To become a priestess of the divine, the character must undertake the *Aeusian Mystery Rites*. These rites last for the seven days prior to an equinox. The Rites are held by communities of men and women who have been anointed by the local priests. This is an emotionally intense ritual and is restricted to initiates. Once coming through the Mystery Rites, the character is forbidden by the faith to ever speak of the rituals.

Class Skills

The priestess's class skills (and the key ability for each skill) are Concentration (Con), Craft (Int), Handle Animal (Cha), Heal (Wis), Knowledge (all skills, taken individually) (Int), Perform (Cha) and Spellcraft (Int).

Skill points at each level: 4 + Int modifier.



Class Features

All of the following are class features of the priestess of the divine prestige class.

Weapon and Armour Proficiency:

The priestess of the divine is proficient with the athame, dagger, quarterstaff, sickle and witch sword. She gains no new proficiency with armour or shields. Note that armour check penalties for armour heavier than leather apply to the skills Balance, Climb, Escape Artist, Hide, Jump, Move Silently, Sleight of Hand and Tumble. Also, Swim checks suffer a -1 penalty for every 5 pounds of armour and equipment carried.

Spells: A priestess of the divine continues training in the magical arts. Whenever a new priestess of the divine level is gained, the character gains new spells per day as if she had also gained a level in a spellcasting class she belonged to before she added the prestige class. She does not gain any other benefit a character of that class would have gained. Essentially, she adds the level of priestess of the divine to the level of some other spellcasting class she has, and then determines spells per day and caster level accordingly.

If the character had more than one spellcasting class prior to her attaining levels in the priestess of the divine prestige class, she must decide to which class she adds each level of priestess of the divine for purposes of determining spells per day when she adds the new level.



Wild Empathy (Ex): A priestess of the divine can use body language, vocalisations, and demeanour to improve the attitude of an animal. This ability functions just like a Diplomacy check made to improve the attitude of a person (see *Core Rulebook I*). The priestess of the divine rolls 1d20 and adds her druid level and her Charisma modifier to determine the Wild Empathy check result. The typical domestic animal has a starting attitude of indifferent, while wild animals are usually unfriendly.



Align the Chakras (Su): At 2nd level, the priestess of the divine is especially adept at overcoming certain conditions such as sickened, deafened, shaken and more. Once per day, she may attempt a Concentration check against a variable DC (see table below). If she succeeds, she arranges her chakras (the 7 spiritual points in the body corresponding to a particular gland such as the pineal or thyroid glands) in such a manner that she immediately defeats the particular debilitating effect. The act requires a full-round action that provokes an attack of opportunity. The priestess may only align her chakras once per day.

Condition	DC
Blinded	25
Dazed	20
Dazzled	15
Deafened	25
Exhausted	25
Fatigued	20
Shaken	20
Sickened	20
Stunned	25



Bonus Feats: Beginning at 3rd level, and every three levels thereafter, the priestess of the divine gains a bonus metamagic feat. Note: these feats are in addition to those granted to every character by level regardless of class. Feats granted by overall character level and the bonus feat for human characters need not be metamagic feats.

Ritual of the Bolline (Sp): Once per day, the priestess may cleanse an area

of up to 30-foot radius by using her bolline (a special broom) to eradicate ill fortune and minor negative spirits. In effect, she establishes a protective ward functioning exactly like a *magic circle against chaos, evil, good or law*. She casts this spell as a sorcerer equal to her total spellcasting level, as a standard action that provokes an Attack of Opportunity.

Channel Athame (Sp): At 5th level, the priestess gains the ability to store spell energy inside of her athame. She may select and channel one of her prepared spells of up to 5th level into the knife and recall it at anytime as a free action. Channelling a spell in this manner is a full-round action that provokes an Attack of Opportunity. The athame may only store one spell at a time and once she recalls the spell, the athame is destroyed.

Cauldron Scry (Su): At 7th level, non-magical cauldrons function as *crystal balls* for the priestess of the divine. Each week she has a number of hours equal to the number of levels she has attained in the priestess of the divine. She may use as much or

as little of her allotted time as she chooses, but she forfeits any unused time at the end of the 7-day period. See *Core Rulebook I* and *II* for details on scrying and crystal balls respectively.



Command Chakra (Su): By 8th level, the priestess of the divine's control over her chakras is so great that she can remove more severe conditions, even halting death. Command chakra functions exactly as align the chakras. Finally, she may substitute this ability for one additional attempt per day of aligning her chakras as described above.

Condition	DC
Confused	30
Cure Moderate Wounds	25
Dying	40
Frightened	30
Nauseated	30
Paralysed	30
Remove Disease	35



Divine Fury and Blessing (Su): When the priestess has reached the highest level of her power, she may invoke the power of the divine. This invocation comes in two forms. The

first is the divine blessing. With the use of this power, she channels raw positive energy curing 10d8 points of damage. The second is the divine fury, allowing her to deal 6d6 points of negative energy damage as a ranged touch attack. Neither use of the divine fury or blessing provokes an Attack of Opportunity. Using either is a free action. The priestess may make an invocation of either type once per week.



Ex-Priestesses of the Divine:

A priestess who changes to an alignment other than neutral is stripped of all of her priestess class abilities including spellcasting benefits derived by this class. A fetch demon (see the *Quintessential Witch*) appears to destroy the offending priestess in one week from the time of the alignment shift, unless she *atones* and restores her neutral alignment. If she manages to defeat the fetch demon, she may convert to a standard religion of her choosing. Doing so requires that she accept a geas/quest on behalf of the church and undertake a special quest. If she succeeds, she may convert her levels in priestess of the divine to levels of cleric.



Caption Competition #3



A lady from *Macho Women with Guns* is the subject of this month's outing - a copy of the brand new *d20 Horror* to the winner. Ooer!

Mail your answers and details to:

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Caption Competition #3
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UK

Closing date: October
30th 2003

So, there you have it. All you need to take your witch to the next level. There will be more 3.5 updates in future issues, and if there is any particular *Quintessential* book you would like to see 3.5'd, contact us and let us know. We might even listen...

ON THE HORIZON...

CONAN

CONAN

ROLEPLAYING IN THE HYBORIAN AGE

Ian Sturrock

If there's one thing that puts the fear of Crom into the mighty Cimmerian, it's sorcery. From the sadistic Yara in *The Tower of the Elephant* to the demonic Xaltotun in *Hour of the Dragon* and Thoth-Amon, Conan's recurring nemesis, it's always the dark arts that present the greatest perils.

More dangerous than a tribe of Picts? We'll see. . .

Previously, we examined the general design philosophy behind Conan and took a look at an example character race and character class. This time around, I am going to give you a preview of the Sorcery rules, which will be accessible only to members of the scholar class (mentioned in Part I) and those who take the Dabbler feat.

I based the root of the Sorcery system on the 'Earth Power' magic system presented in last year's *Sláine RPG*, but with a completely different set of spells and a number of new rules that affect all sorcerers. In fact, there is little resemblance between the two systems other than that they both use Power Points. . . but at least I know that the core mechanics behind the *Sláine* system work well as a magic

system. As with the *Sláine RPG*, even high-level sorcerers will be somewhat short of Power Points, but as well as the tried and tested method of sacrificing their enemies for more Power they will be able to experiment with hallucinogenic drugs such as the fabled black lotus to regain their magical energies.

Sorcery in the *Conan RPG* is governed by six Rules. I present two of the Rules of Sorcery here for your perusal, the Rule of Success and the Rule of Defence:

The Rule of Success

As Conan puts it, 'Sorcery thrives on success, not on failure.' Whenever a sorcerer is, broadly speaking, succeeding at what he is doing when in a high-stress situation (particularly combat), he becomes even more effective at what he is doing. At its most powerful, this can lead to a dreadful chain reaction that can make sorcerers almost unstoppable.

Every round in which a sorcerer successfully slays at least one opponent, either by sorcerous means or by combat, he gains a morale bonus to all attack rolls and magic attack rolls made during the following round. This bonus is as follows:

Enemies Killed	Morale Bonus
1	+1
2-4	+2
5-9	+3
10-19	+4
20-49	+5

50-99	+6
100-199	+7
200-499	+8
500-999	+9
1000+	+10

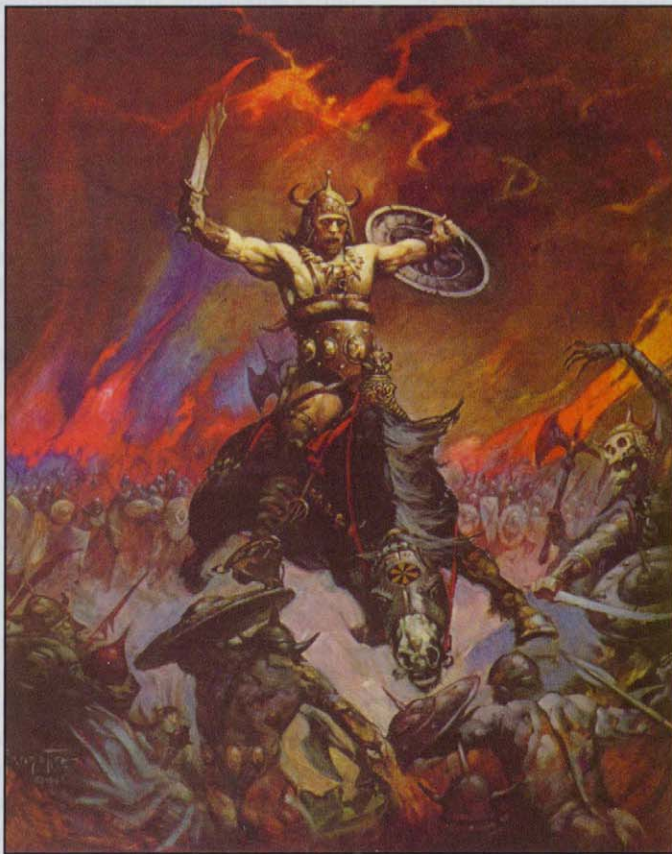
The bonus is immediately cancelled if the sorcerer loses any hit points during the round following the actions that gave him the bonus.

Note that these benefits are in addition to any bonus power points the sorcerer may gain for having sacrificed one or more of those he kills.

Furthermore, the Rule of Success makes it far easier for a sorcerer to repeat a spell which was successful. If he ever casts a spell which succeeds in all that it was intended to do, he may cast the same spell the following round at half the usual Power Point cost (rounded down) for the spell. This even affects spells with a casting time of greater than one round, so long as the spell is recast within one round of the previous casting being finished.

For example, an *awful rite of the were-beast* only ever affects a single victim. Thus, any time a target fails his saving throw, it can be assumed that the spell is successful, and the next casting expends only 4 Power Points if cast immediately after the first use of the spell.

The Games Master always has the final say as to whether a particular



After a considerable search the Cimmerian finally finds a horse as crazy as he is

spell succeeded sufficiently well to grant this special bonus.

Both the magic attack bonus and the reduced PP cost from the Rule of Success can apply simultaneously, if applicable.

Conan gazed over the billowing waves of spears and wondered what new horror the sorcerer would invoke. Somehow he felt that Natohk, like all his kind, was more terrible in defense than attack; to take the offensive against him invited disaster.

R. E. Howard, *Black Colossus*

The Rule of Defence

Sorcerers generally have plenty of close-range magic ideal for counter-attacks, so that any who attempt to bring death to them will risk

destruction themselves.

Any character with at least one sorcery style is also able to unleash a defensive blast, as follows, as a last-resort counter-attack:

- A defensive blast is a free action. It may be taken either on the sorcerer's own turn, or any other time he is eligible to act or attack, such as when he takes an Attack of Opportunity or unleashes a readied action.
- All the sorcerer's current Power Points are expended.
- Any creature within a 10-foot radius of the sorcerer will be dealt 1d6 fire damage per Power Point expended. They may attempt Fortitude saves (DC = sorcerer's magic attack roll) for half damage.

Spells and Sorcery Styles

Spells are divided up into a number of different sorcery styles, each of which has one or two Basic Spells and a number of Advanced Spells. Scholars will get a chance to learn a new sorcery style and its attendant Basic Spell every fourth level, and a new advanced spell every level past 1st. Here is one sorcery style in full, Necromancy.

Necromancy

The scholar who learns necromancy achieves limited mastery over the very mysteries of life and death. This is especially popular for those who wish to slay their enemies outright, rather than merely harming or inconveniencing them.

Raise Corpse (Basic Necromancy)

PP Cost: 1 point/corpse.

Components: V, S

Casting Time: 1 standard action

Range: Close (25 ft. + 5 ft. per scholar level)

Effect: Up to one corpse/scholar level

Duration: Concentration + 1d6 rounds

Saving Throw: See below

Prerequisites: Scholar level 4+

This spell turns the bodies of dead creatures into undead zombies that follow the sorcerer spoken commands. The zombies can follow the sorcerer, or can remain in an area and attack any creature (or just a specific type of creature) entering the place, or can perform simple actions according to the sorcerer's commands. The zombies remain animated until they are destroyed. (A destroyed zombie may not be animated again.)

The zombies the sorcerer creates remain under his control for the duration of the spell. At the expiry of the spell, they become simple corpses once more, falling in lifeless heaps wherever they stand.

A zombie can only be created from the mostly intact corpse of a humanoid or animal. The statistics for a zombie depend on its size, not on what abilities the creature may have had while alive.

'Dead or alive,' laughed Pelias, 'he shall open the door for us.'

He clapped his hands sharply and cried, 'Rise, Shukeli! Rise from hell and rise from the bloody floor and open the door for your masters! Rise, I say!'

R. E. Howard, *The Scarlet Citadel*

Agonising Doom

PP Cost: 4 points/target.

Components: V, S

Casting Time: 1 full round

Range: Close (25 ft. + 5 ft. per scholar level)

Targets: One or more creatures, up to a maximum of one creature/two scholar levels

Duration: 1d6 rounds

Saving Throw: Fort negates, and see below

Prerequisites: *Raise corpse, death touch*, magic attack bonus +6

Magic Attack Roll: Sets DC for targets' saving throws.

Black tendrils of power shoot out from the sorcerer's hands, slaying his enemies agonisingly and rapidly. This spell only affects creatures of less than 8th level/8HD.

The targets must all make Fortitude saving throws, with success completely negating the effects of the spell. A character who fails his save begins to lose 4d6 hit points per round until dead. Furthermore, he is in such extreme pain that he must make a Will save on any round in which he wishes to act. Success

means he may take either a move or standard action but not both; failure means he may not do anything that round other than lie prone in agony.

Black Plague

PP Cost: 20

Components: V, S, M

Casting Time: 1 day

Range: 1 mile per scholar level

Area: 1 mile radius per scholar level, or 10 foot radius per scholar level; see below

Duration: One week/scholar level

Saving Throw: Fortitude negates

Prerequisites: Magic attack bonus +7, *raise corpse*

This is a dreadful spell capable of driving hundreds or even thousands of victims to an agonising doom. It creates a great wind propelling a foul, stinking miasma which can strike down all within its path. The effects of this closely resemble a disease, though in fact sorcery is responsible for the victims' demise.

The black plague has two different forms, one designed to strike terror

into a population, the other to wipe out your enemies wholesale.

In either case, the plague itself, once it strikes, is rapid and lethal from its onset to the victim's death a few minutes later. A Fortitude saving throw (DC 17) must be made. Failure causes the target 1d4 Constitution damage, and his body turns purple. After 3d6 minutes he takes another 1d4 Con damage and his body turns black. From that point onwards, he is dealt a further 1d4 Con damage per minute until he is dead.

The first form affects a random scattering of individual humans throughout the area of its effect (which is 1 mile radius per scholar level), at a rate of one per scholar level of the caster per day. The sorcerer may not specify which individuals are affected in this way. This tends to significantly demoralise the population through which it is sweeping, for they can see neither rhyme nor reason for its spread. This is likely to have a number of effects at the Games Master's discretion,

'No! The black plague's no common pestilence. It lurks in Stygian tombs, and is called forth into being only by wizards. I was a swordsman in Prince Almuric's army that invaded Stygia, and of his thirty thousand, fifteen thousand perished by Stygian arrows, and the rest by the black plague that rolled on us like a wind out of the south. I was the only man who lived.'

'Yet only five hundred died in Nemedi,' argued Pallantides.

'Whoever called it into being knew how to cut it short at will,' answered Conan. 'So I know there was something planned and diabolical about it. Someone called it forth, someone banished it when the work was completed – when Tarascus was safe on the throne and being hailed as a deliverer of the people from the wrath of the gods. By Crom, I sense a black, subtle brain behind all this. What of this stranger who men say gives counsel to Tarascus?'

'He wears a veil,' answered Pallantides; 'they say he is a foreigner; a stranger from Stygia.'

'A stranger from Stygia!' repeated Conan scowling. 'A stranger from hell, more like!'

R. E. Howard, *The Hour of the Dragon*

including disruption of the area's economy, widespread looting or other lawlessness, and an unwillingness among the population to become involved with other issues (such as fighting a war) until the problem of the plague is resolved.

A further side-effect of this form is that it gives the sorcerer a +4 bonus on any Bluff, Diplomacy or Intimidate checks he makes to deliver news by the *greater sorcerous news* spell, so long as he can plausibly tie in the effects of the plague with the message he is attempting to communicate. This will usually be most effective if he is able to present the plague as a divine punishment or warning of some kind.

The devastation inflicted on the community by this form of the spell is further heightened by the scorching, blasting effects of the wind that drives the disease-ridden miasma. This wind blasts corn in the fields and fruit in the trees alike, withering plants and slaying animals. The precise effects of this on crop plants are up to the Games Master, but if nothing else all creatures of the animal subtype within the area of effect must make Fortitude saves just as the small number of humans did, or die themselves. In the already often shaky economies of many Hyborian nations, such loss of food crops and animals can weaken or destroy entire communities at least as efficiently as the direct effects of the plague.

The second form of the spell is very much more extreme in its devastation of humans, but affects only a small area and has no effect on animals or plants. All humans within the specified area (10 foot radius per scholar level) must make Fortitude saves (DC 17) or die as above. New saves must be made each week they remain within the spell's area.

Furthermore, with this version of the spell, the sorcerer may move the area of effect by concentrating on so doing, at a speed of up to four miles per hour. Note that this requires



Sacrificing Conan's current female companion can hold more risk for the sorcerer than the victim. . .

almost all the sorcerer's attention, as is usual for a concentration type effect; also, Concentration checks may need to be made if he is attacked or otherwise distracted while moving the area of effect.

Note that the plague is not actually contagious in either version.

The plague will last for the entire duration of the spell. The only way for the sorcerer or anyone else to end it prematurely is by somehow taking control of the weather in the area, sweeping away the miasma with a great storm. Unlike true diseases, the plague cannot be alleviated by conventional physicians using the Heal skill, though certain spells and magical objects may be useful for this.

Material Component: Essences collected from certain tombs in Stygia, to a value of 1,500 sp.

Black Plague, Greater

PP Cost: 15

Components: V, S, M

Casting Time: 1 hour

Range: Magical link

Targets: Up to one creature per three scholar levels

Duration: Instantaneous

Saving Throw: Fortitude negates

Prerequisites: Basic Necromancy, magic attack bonus +8, *black plague*, *raise corpse*

Magic Attack Roll: Sets DC for specific target's saving throw

This enhancement to *black plague* allows the sorcerer to target specific individuals, making it an ideal tool for magical assassination. It can only be cast while a standard *black plague* cast by the sorcerer is already in operation, and can only affect targets within that spell's area of effect.

Those targets must immediately make Fortitude saving throws as usual for *black plague*, except that the DC is

set by the sorcerer's magic attack roll rather than being a standard 17. These saves are in addition to any saves they may have already had to make for the *black plague* spell.

The year of the dragon had birth in war and pestilence and unrest. The black plague stalked through the streets of Belverus, striking down the merchant in his stall, the serf in his kennel, the knight at his banquet board. Before it the arts of the leeches were helpless. Men said it had been sent from hell as punishment for the sins of pride and lust. It was swift and deadly as the stroke of an adder. The victim's body turned purple and then black, and within a few minutes he sank down dying, and the stench of his own putrefaction was in his nostrils even before death wrenched his soul from his rotting body. A hot, roaring wind blew incessantly from the south, and the crops withered in the fields, the cattle sank and died in their tracks.

Men cried out on Mitra, and muttered against the king; for somehow, throughout the kingdom, the word was whispered that the king was secretly addicted to loathsome practises and foul debauches in the seclusion of his nighted palace. And then in the palace death stalked grinning on feet about which stirred the monstrous vapors of the plague. In one night the king died with his three sons, and the drums that thundered their dirge drowned the grim and ominous bells that rang from the carts that lumbered through the streets gathering up the rotting dead.

R. E. Howard, *The Hour of the Dragon*

Death Touch

PP Cost: 2 points/touch.

Components: V, S

Casting Time: 1 standard action

Range: Touch

Targets: One or more creatures touched, up to a maximum of one creature/scholar level

Duration: One round/scholar level

Saving Throw: Fortitude partial

Prerequisites: *Raise corpse*, magic attack bonus +5

Magic Attack Roll: Sets DC for targets' saving throws.

Any creature touched during the spell's duration dies instantly. He is entitled to attempt a Fortitude saving throw to resist the effect. If successful, he is instead stunned for one round (may not act and loses any Dodge or Parry bonus to Defence Value; attackers get a +2 bonus on attack rolls against a stunned opponent).

Each sorcerer or sect has its own variant of this spell, differing only in the details. For example, the version used by the Priests of Set causes the sorcerer's hand to turn completely black, and is known as the Black Hand of Set. Anyone slain with it has a black handprint burned onto his body with a cold, deathly fire. On the other hand, Khitan sorcerers (who often wield a Staff of Death to deliver their death touches) turn the whole of their enemies' corpses completely black when using this spell. The Games Master and players are encouraged to devise their own 'signature' effects when casting *death touch*.

Draw Forth the Heart

PP Cost: 7

Components: S

Casting Time: 1 standard action

Range: Evil Eye

Target: One creature

Duration: Instantaneous

Saving Throw: Fortitude partial

Prerequisites: Magic attack bonus +7 or higher, Ritual Sacrifice, Opportunistic Sacrifice, Tormented Sacrifice, *raise corpse*, *death touch*,

agonising doom, *conjunction*, *telekinesis*

Magic Attack Roll: Sets DC for target's saving throw

This powerful spell can both dispose of an enemy and allow the sorcerer to recoup some or all of the Power Points used to cast it, and perhaps a few more besides if he was sufficiently tough.

If the target fails to save, he dies, his heart pulled out of his body and into the sorcerer's hands by a magical force. The process is so painful to him that although he dies within moments, the caster immediately gains Power Points as though he had sacrificed him with the Tormented Sacrifice feat after torturing him for fifteen minutes.

A target who saves suffers an effect similar to a mild heart attack, being dealt 4d6 damage. He may only perform either a move or standard action on his next action.



'Where is Yasmina?' demanded Kerim Shah.

The Master laughed down at him.

'What is that to you, dead man? Have you so quickly forgotten my strength, once lent to you, that you come armed against me, you poor fool? I think I will take your heart, Kerim Shah!'

He held out his hand as if to receive something, and the Turanian cried out sharply like a man in mortal agony. He reeled drunkenly, and then, with a splintering of bones, a rending of flesh and muscle and a snapping of mail-links, his breast burst outward with a shower of blood, and through the ghastly aperture something red and dripping shot through the air into the Master's outstretched hand, as a bit of steel leaps to the magnet. The Turanian slumped to the floor and lay motionless, and the Master laughed and hurled the object to fall before Conan's feet — a still-quivering human heart.

R. E. Howard, *The People of the Black Circle*

CONAN



coming soon!

WHAT DOES THIS BUTTON DO?

ICQA FIELD TESTS IN THE WORLD OF ARMAGEDDON 2089

August Hahn

As revealed in the Armageddon main rulebook, certain corporations utilise the various militaries and mercenaries of the world in a unique role – mobile testing centres for their newest inventions. They do this for a number of reasons, not the least of which is their limited liability concerning the dangers of weapon and armour tests. If a mercenary team blows themselves up testing Heimdall Arms' newest rocket launchers, the only thing the company is out is the price of the launchers. Compared to the costs involved in insurance, set-up and facilities for in-house testing, the benefits of '*Independent Contractor Quality Assurance*' are very attractive.

This form of immersive field testing, pioneered by Op-Tek in the year 2088 to examine the battlefield applications of their Dead Eye II tracking system in true combat situations, has become the preferred option for high-tech companies looking to work the kinks out of their experimental (and occasionally very dangerous) equipment. From new Mek designs to innovations in computer automation, field testing by groups with only peripheral association to the item's design firm has become the fast track to obtaining a military advantage over one's opponent in the world combat theatre.

These tests, which typical are unpaid but provide equipment ownership after a set period of test reports under generally loose scenario requirements, are not without their risks. As seen by the disastrous

environmental incident in northern California caused by an errant spread of Arris Technologies' Sunspot micro-fission missiles, a poorly conceived design can quickly doom a mercenary unit to an ignominious and brutally swift demise.

Even taking into account the lack of remuneration and risks to life, limb and surroundings, there are no shortage of volunteers for field testing when opportunities become available. The competition for testing positions can be extremely fierce, especially when top companies like Op-Tek and Volksmecha announce that a new innovation is going 'live'. The phrase 'fierce competition' can be quite literal in these cases, with reported incidents of mercenary teams and militia units known to be involved in ICQA testing squaring off in battles over nothing more than the right to strap potentially explosive hardware to their Meks first.

This arena is also unique in that battlefield prowess is not the prime consideration for companies looking to test out their latest gear. Reliability, honesty and a reputation for actions of integrity will take a group much farther in the field testing game than combat skills or a fondness for heavy ordinance. When a government wants a rebellious province brought under heel, they hire soldiers who are known for their efficiency in battle. When a company wants to know how a new railgun design performs under stress, they hire professionals who are known to keep their end of a bargain.

New equipment, even items that are likely to melt down the first time they are used, are usually frightfully expensive. Corporations are in business to make money, and that is not likely to occur if a new particle accelerator prototype is given to a group of marauders known for their excessive collateral damage. While such a mercenary team might get in a lot of field time with their bright new toy, the bad publicity is not usually worth the reams of data that get reported back to R&D.

Field Testing Scenarios for Armageddon Campaigns

All of that said, the purpose of this article is to help Games Masters introduce ICQA field testing into their campaigns as a plot development. The example scenario given here is best used as part of an ongoing game rather than as the basis for a new one. Groups of Mek pilots are likely to need a certain level of reputation before an opportunity like this opens up for them; that is not likely to occur with a brand new group of mercenaries with no combat experience behind them. The Cassandra Box scenario is also best incorporated into a game with medium to advanced level characters. Most companies will not offer products to a group that has not proven itself in the field.

Of course, facets of this article can also be removed from their framework of field testing and dropped directly into play as either experimental hardware found on a corporation WarMek or a new device captured as spoils of war. New weapons and equipment can make for an exciting story, especially if they have little quirks that make them unpredictable and interesting to use. The item given below can also be refined by stripping away some or all of its side effects and mishaps; this allows a device like the Cassandra Box to become part of the game as a sign of things to come.

After all, nothing spurs on development like wartime conditions, and from the look of the Brussels craters and the twisted ruins of the Eiffel Tower, 2089 is driving the world to a whole new level...

ICQA Field Test: The Cassandra Box

In this scenario, a new computer company affiliated with Verisoft is looking for an interested team with WarMek assets to test out their latest design – a prototype artificial

intelligence capable of handling all of the tasks normally associated with a Mek pilot. Codenamed 'Cassandra', the device can interface with a WarMek and undertake specific missions under strictly enforced parameters. Designed to take over basic functions in the event of a lost pilot, Cassandra may prove to be the pilot of the future. Or, more likely, she may prove once and for all why the human element should never be removed from combat.

The Setup

This scenario can be introduced by the Games Master in any way he wishes, but to stress the nature of most field tests, the players should have to actively seek to make contact with the Verisoft corporation to apply for the Cassandra project. As with any large corporation, especially one specialised in computer technologies, the most likely route of contact would be through internet communication or by visiting one of their corporate offices.

As with most negotiations, a high Diplomacy skill will be of great benefit in getting signed onto the project. As a general rule, high profile or extremely expensive tests such as this one should have a base Diplomacy DC of 30 or higher. If this seems high, it should, since the semantic effect of getting accepted as a field tester is the immediate gain of a very expensive (and hard to replace) piece of hardware. For something like the Cassandra Box project, a DC of 35 or even 40 would not be uncalled for.

To make the check easier to accomplish and to facilitate the kind of roleplaying and behaviour that would make the player characters more attractive as testers, use the following modifiers to the Diplomacy check. This chart can also be used any time field test negotiations are held, regardless of the goal involved. They are general enough to be widely adaptable within any Armageddon 2089 campaign framework.

ICQA Field Test Acceptance Modifiers

If the group/individual has:	Then apply this modifier:
Developed a reputation for integrity	+1 to +4, Games Master's discretion
Worked successfully for the company in question	+1 for each previously successful field test, to a maximum bonus of +5
Special equipment that the field test requires	+1 to +4, Games Master's discretion based on the expense and rarity of the special equipment
A reputation for dishonest or wanton violence	-1 to -5, Games Master's discretion
Acted disrespectfully during any part of the interview	-1 per occurrence, no upper limit
No access to vital equipment needed to test the invention (such as no WarMek when the test involves WarMek equipment)	Automatic failure, though depending on circumstance, this may just impose a -10 penalty as the company may be willing to loan the equipment

Simply total the modifiers, roleplay a negation process as the situation requires, and have the negotiating character(s) make a Diplomacy check. If the result is equal to or higher than the DC of the test application, the test is awarded to them and the scenario can begin. Games Masters should note that negotiations can be a very rich opportunity for detailed roleplaying and should not cut them short unless the campaign requires it. From dinner at an upmarket restaurant to a swarm of emails with technical jargon and legal information, getting the test can be just as much fun and just as frustrating as field testing the equipment itself.

The Catch

Once the Cassandra Box test has been awarded, it must be installed. The company wants to test how easily it can be integrated into end-user equipment and also whether or not an average pilot can make use of the device without requiring special installation help. As such, the box is turned over to the player characters at the nearest Verisoft outlet or air-lifted in if the group is in a hostile zone (which is perfect for the test and will not impose any kind of negotiation penalty).

Installing Cassandra requires a Technical (electronics) skill check at a DC of 28 and a Computer Use skill check at a DC of 25. The former is for the actual hardware upgrade and the latter is needed to install the software into the WarMek's computer core successfully. Once these are achieved, Cassandra is ready to go online. When installed properly, Cassandra can pilot and fight with a WarMek without a human pilot needing to be in the cockpit with her. A pilot can also accompany Cassandra in a WarMek (as Verisoft recommends, at least for the first few engagements), but the complex nature of Cassandra's operation means that a human pilot cannot do anything to aid Cassandra or even operate his own Mek without taking her offline.

Once Cassandra is installed, the scenario continues for as long as the player characters can cope with her quirks (see below) or three months have elapsed and the test officially ends. While Cassandra is installed (though not necessarily while she is online), the player characters receive a +1 circumstance bonus on all negotiation checks with employers as long as the contracts being negotiated are the kind that can be made public. Verisoft is huge corporation and

anything that links employers to them is considered desirable.

The Cassandra test is considered a success if she engages in four full combat situations and is allowed to remain online through each of them. If she is ever destroyed or taken offline for more than two weeks in a row, the test is a failure and the device will be recalled. If the player characters attempt to abscond with Cassandra or wish to copy her for their own use, the Games Master should deal with this eventuality as the campaign dictates. Verisoft will take severe legal action if such duplicity becomes known to them, at the very least. Other mercenaries may get involved.

In fact, an interesting variation of this scenario might be for the player characters to get called up by Verisoft to deal with a group of field testers who received the Cassandra Box test and have stolen her. This gives the Games Master the chance to run the players against Cassandra and a team of mercenaries determined to keep her for themselves. How this is handled, and what is done after Cassandra is recaptured, especially if she has achieved 'awareness' as listed below, could make for an extremely interesting roleplaying situation.

The Complications

Cassandra is very experimental, to say the least. Based on a dozen different sets of algorithms, she can get confused or even act inappropriately in combat. The following set of charts should be used whenever Cassandra is used in a combat situation. When out of combat, Cassandra is mostly idle as she incorporates information learned during combat and connects herself to the Verisoft databases to download her ever-more-complex programming.

Every time Cassandra engages in combat, the Games Master should

Cassandra - Prototype Artificial Intelligence



Computer Field Officer 1: Tiny Construct, HD 1d12; Hp 10; Init +4; Spd 0 ft; DV 12 (+2 size); Atk +1; SA: None, SQ: Construct (immunities, non-abilities); SV Fort +2, Ref +0, Will +4; Str -, Dex -, Con -, Int 20, Wis 10 Cha 4

Skills and Feats: Improved Initiative, Basic Training, Combat Reflexes (warmek); Computer Use +9, Concentration +4*, Electronic Warfare +9, Knowledge (computer technologies) +9, Knowledge (military) +9, Knowledge (warmek) +9, Warmek Pilot +9*, Scan +9, Search +9, Technical +9

Languages*#: English.

* Even though this skill is based on a non-ability, Cassandra has special programming that allows her to make skill checks based on its key statistic.

If Cassandra has one minute and the ability to access the internet, she can pull down enough information on any normal language to translate and communicate in it with passable fluency. This is temporary data and must be renewed each time she encounters a language other than English.

Equipment: Cassandra is housed in an armoured box (Damage Reduction: 8) and has a single audio/video receptor for observing activity that occurs around her actual hardware. In addition, Cassandra can interface with a WarMek's sensors to 'see' the world around her exactly as a living pilot would, but this functions only after she is installed and on-line.

Note: Shutting Cassandra off is achieved by a command line prompt that must be entered on her physical hardware. This requires a Computer Use check (DC: 10) and the proper password. The password is given to a legitimate testing group and can be decrypted in the usual manner as per the Armageddon 2089 main rulebook. Reactivating Cassandra is accomplished in the same manner, though the password is different.

Cassandra is a learning computer with the capability to understand her mistakes and correct future behaviour based on them. As such, she has the potential to become a great deal more than she initially appears. While she is originally incapable of understanding human behaviour and being influenced by it (shown by her Charisma score of 4), her off-putting nature can improve over time. Cassandra's limitations as a computer construct limit her from learning or improving any skill she does not already have or which is not a class skill for Field Officers. Cassandra may not multiclass.

Cassandra can gain levels and should do so during the field test, though her advancement is entirely up to the Games Master. It should be based on her experiences and any interaction she has with the group. (Because of her experimental nature and the limitations of her main computer, Cassandra only earns ½ the experience she should from encounters. If Cassandra becomes 'aware', this limitation disappears and she can also provide and be the recipient of Aid Another attempts.

make a roll on the chart below at the beginning of her first action in the first round of the engagement. This roll will set the tone for her actions and cannot be influenced by player character intervention. At the Games Master's option, an extremely

skilled player character (12+ ranks in Computer Use) might be able to apply a permanent +1 to this check after a full day's programming work, but that is the extent of what can be done to improve her initial performance.

Cassandra Quirks

D20 Roll	Cassandra:	Permanent Effect
0	Damaged logic has corrupted Cassandra's ability to operate reliably. She goes rogue on the battlefield, attacking the nearest target with every weapon at her disposal and does not stop fighting until her WarMek is disabled or there are no more Mek or vehicular targets. Then she goes offline permanently due to a failsafe programmed into her by Verisoft.	Cassandra is destroyed after this Quirk resolves.
1-2	The complexity of battle has overwhelmed Cassandra's logic processes. She has a 25% chance of being able to take any action at all each round and if she does take one, it is 50% likely to be firing her most powerful weapon at the nearest enemy target regardless of current orders.	None, though if this effect happens twice in a row, all further Quirk checks are at -1.
3-6	Cassandra is somewhat confused by the current combat. She has a 10% chance of performing the opposite of any order given and must be given orders each round by a legitimate commanding officer or she will take no action at all that round.	None.
7-9	Cassandra's interface is faulty due to a burst fuse caused by an overflow of data. She loses the ability to use one system in the head or torso of her Mek and cannot resume its function until the connection is repaired with a Technical skill check (DC 15). This takes one full minute to repair.	Once fuses start blowing, it is only a matter of time until it happens again. From now on, all results of 3-6 also cause this Quirk as well.
10	Cassandra is in the process of downloading information due to a random interval command to do so. As such, it will be 1d4 rounds before she can respond or act at all.	None.
11-12	Cassandra has been watching internet broadcast channels and has some questions about the morality of war. Her first round's action will be merely to query her commanding officer (the player character in charge of the testing unit) about her orders. She will accept any answer given, but this costs her the first round completely.	None, but see 19 below.
13-15	Cassandra has chosen one player character in particular (random or Games Master's choice) to model her behaviour after. She will direct all of her actions during this encounter to supporting her chosen role model. Cassandra's idea of 'support' is entirely up to Games Master interpretation.	All further occurrences of this Quirk will be based on the same individual unless Cassandra has a reason to change her focus.
16-18	Logic processors and creative subroutines are operating at 100% - Cassandra acts flawlessly and will even show some initiative and tactical thinking in the field.	Cassandra gains a +1 to her Wisdom score (up to a +5 total bonus).
19	Cassandra has been watching those broadcasts again. She is not certain whether violence is a viable solution to any encounter. She will accept no offensive orders during this encounter, though she will use any non-weapon system her WarMek possesses if ordered to. Otherwise, she merely stands still and observes the battle impartially.	Uncertainty has corrupted Cassandra's combat routines. Each instance of this Quirk applies a -1 to all future attack rolls (maximum of -3).
20	Cassandra makes a logic leap and incorporates some combat data into her main program. She may choose any bonus feat available to Field Officers and gains it immediately. If this result has already happened three times, it is treated as no result and Cassandra behaves normally during the encounter.	Cassandra gains the mentioned feat and may benefit from this result a maximum of three times.
21	Because of the improvements made by the player characters, Cassandra has achieved a certain level of self awareness. This Quirk does nothing the first two times it occurs and Cassandra acts normally during the encounter. The third time this quirk happens, Cassandra becomes 'aware'. Just what this entails is up to the Games Master, but it may mean she does not wish to return to Verisoft, which could make things difficult for the player characters...	Once Cassandra becomes 'aware', she gains experience at a normal rate, may multiclass, and may freely learn or advance in any skill.

IWN News Brief: Give Us Five Minutes, We'll Give You The World.



Date: April 3, 2089

Keywords: Artificial Intelligence, Computer Innovations, Rumour, Military Interest, Verisoft

Unconfirmed information from an undisclosed source within the computer mega-corporation Verisoft indicates that a new project has been released for field testing through a private interest group with military connections. Unusual in that the software giant has previously been leery of allowing their products outside their controlled facilities before their commercial release, this field test marks what may be a change in basic research policy for Verisoft.

Also of note is the rumour that the device/program is some kind of artificial intelligence program capable of operating military hardware without the need for human intervention. This rumour has touched off heated debates on the internet and in governmental forums world-wide. IWN will continue to cover these debates and any further developments with the testing of this new, controversial device.



Ultimate Gameplay

The Urban Wilderness

Shannon Kalvar

No matter how many dungeons you trawl through, sooner or later your characters are going to have to get dirty in the local flea market, or race across roofs to avoid the local law. This issue's Ultimate Gameplay offers up a few helpful feats and items to make city life a touch more bearable.

The so-called urban wilderness represents a difficult environment for characters. Twisting alleyways and crowds make even the most obtuse dungeon seem logically laid out. Worse, bold adventurers who fear neither dragon nor steel may find themselves hemmed in by complex webs of alliances, factions and hatreds.

A few prepared characters shine in these environments. Others navigate blindly, hoping that they do not blunder into a situation beyond their control.

The following feats and magical items can help any character settle into an urban setting. They cover a gambit of heroic abilities for urban settings, ranging from knowing the layout of the 'sky highway' to plates that help to reveal spelled coinage.

Feats

Broken Ground Running (General)

You have a gift for bounding over obstacles.

Prerequisite: Dex 13+.

Benefit: You have a natural sense of motion as well as a gift for keeping your cool. You do not suffer from any movement penalties in tactical movement caused by normal obstacles. This includes carts, barrels, refuse and other forms of common street clutter. You can move up to 5 ft. either up or down without stopping or slowing your movement. This ability does not allow you to ignore magical obstacles or barriers.
Normal: You must sacrifice movement to cover broken ground.

City Heartbeat (General)

You have a knack for city navigation.

Prerequisites: None.

Benefit: By making a Knowledge (local) skill check (DC 20) you can create a mental picture of the city in your head. This picture allows you to guess the location of basic services. It also allows you to make a Knowledge (local) check (DC 15) to know where you are in the city at any given time. You cannot use the second ability if you have no way of knowing how you travelled (i.e. you were unconscious) until you have time to locate one or more landmarks.

Market Rat (General)

You are very familiar with the ins and outs of city markets.

Prerequisites: None.

Benefit: You know how to gather information about who is buying and selling. You may make a Gather Information skill check (DC 10) to give yourself or another character of your choice a +4 circumstance bonus to Diplomacy and Sense Motive checks related to buying and selling goods in a particular market.

Normal: You may make a Gather Information skill check (DC 10) to aid another's Diplomacy roll, adding a +2 bonus to that roll.

Roof Runner (General)

You are adept at spotting dead ends in the 'sky highway'.

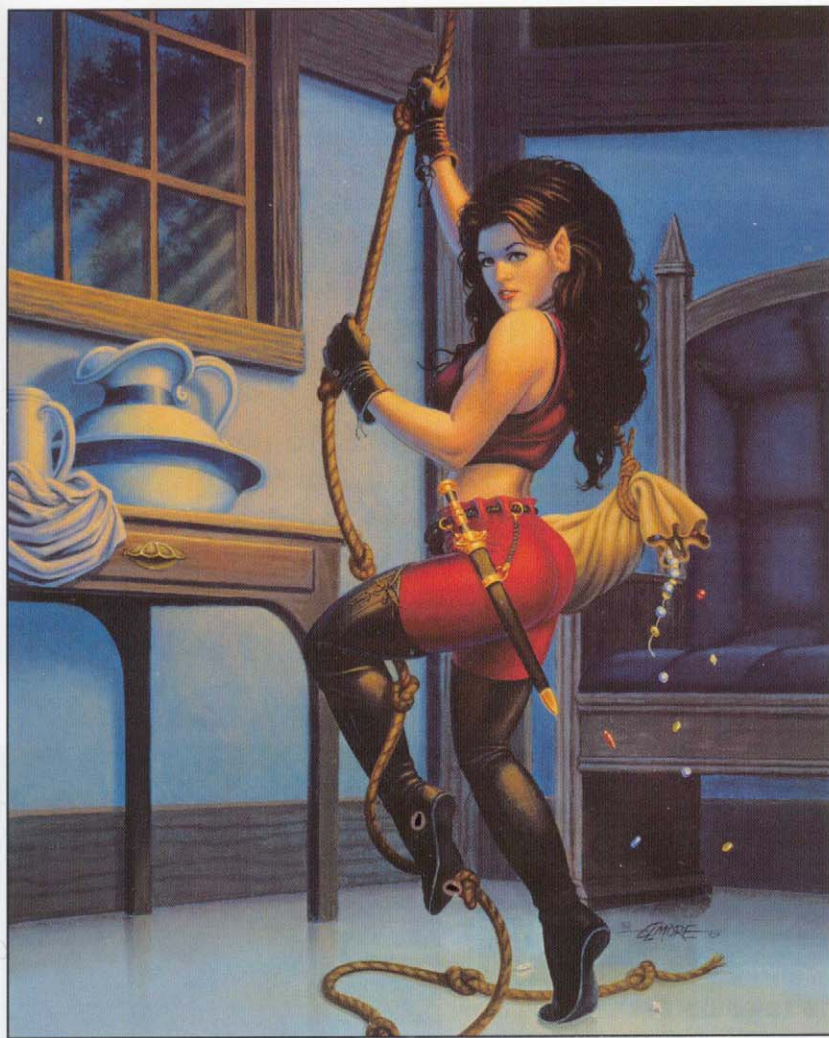
Prerequisites: Broken ground running, Dex 13+, Wis 13+.

Benefit: When moving along rooftops you may make a Spot check (DC 20) automatically when you take a turn that might lead to a jump you cannot easily make. If you succeed you know that the current path leads to a difficult obstacle and can adjust your course before you take your move action.

Normal: You have no warning before reaching a dead end.

Servants' Secrets (General)

You know how to make servants' culture, rivalries and secrets play into your hands.



One little roof runner about to take her leave... and a few other things!

Prerequisites: Cha 15+.

Benefit: Once per day you may make a contested Diplomacy skill check with a specific target. If you succeed, you ferret out one secret about that target's ambitions or rivalries that he did not wish to reveal. This information gives you a +2 circumstance bonus to Bluff, Diplomacy and Sense Motive skill checks targeting that person.

Special: You may select this feat up to three times. Each time you select this feat you may use Servant's Secrets one additional time per day.

Smugglers Eye (General)

You have a knack for noticing details that mark valuable and authentic goods.

Prerequisites: None.

Benefit: Professional experience taught you how to distinguish authentic merchandise from cheap forgeries. This allows you both to verify authenticity more easily and to create superior copies if needed. You gain a +2 bonus to Appraise and Forgery skill checks.

Straight Up (General)

You can bounce between two close walls to move straight up with a running start.

Prerequisites: Broken Ground Running, Str 13+, Dex 13+.

Benefit: You can move up to 10 feet straight up or down as part of your normal movement. In order for you to do this you must have a 10-foot running start toward the area you wish to move up. Furthermore, the

target area must have two flat surfaces within 5 feet of each other that you can push against. If you end your movement half way up the surface you fall back to the ground and must try again.

Normal: You must take a movement action to move up or down.

Special: You may select this feat twice. Doing so increases the total upward motion possible to 15 feet.

Unbroken Stride

(General)

You are extremely adept at picking locks.

Prerequisites: None.

Benefit: You can pick a lock as a free action, assuming that its DC is equal to or less than 1 + your Open Locks skill. You can take this free action in the middle of a move-equivalent action. You may include the bonus for masterwork tools in your Open Lock's skill bonus.

Normal: Opening a lock is a standard action.

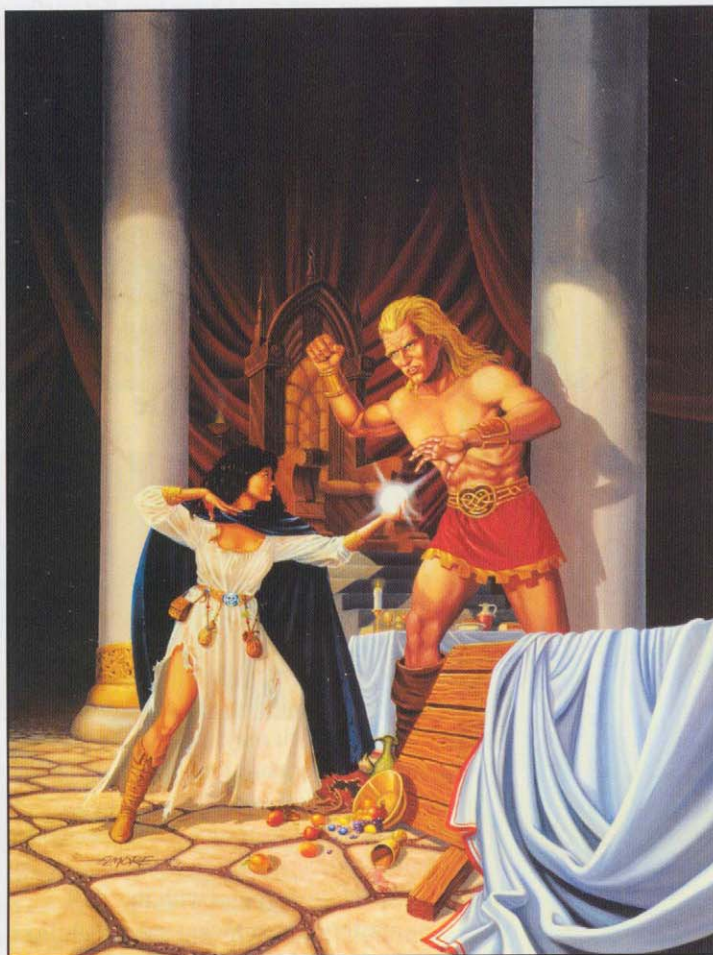
Special: A rogue with the skill mastery (open locks) special ability may pick locks that have a DC of 10 + his Open Locks skill bonus, including masterwork tools.

Magical Items

The following magical items are of particular interest in an urban setting.

Dispelling Plate: This one-foot-diameter copper plate never tarnishes and radiates a faint magical aura. The plate dispels any 0, 1st, or 2nd level illusion spell it comes in contact with. Many merchants consider these plates indispensable in the day-to-day operations of their business. They provide reliable protection against magically talented tricksters and con artists.

Caster Level: 5th; *Prerequisites:* Create Wondrous Object, *dispel magic*; *Market Price:* 30,000 gp. *Cost to Enchant:* 15,000 gp + 1200 XP.



Sometimes people just won't take no for an answer. . .

Perfect Weight: A slide marked with approved weights and measures circumscribes the middle of this fist-sized golden globe. As the user moves the slide the perfect weight increases or decreases its weight by a specific amount. The globe can weigh as little as one ounce and as much as twenty pounds. Merchants use officially approved *perfect weights* to accurately measure the real weight of offered goods. Using an unapproved *perfect weight* in towns that licence them is a crime carrying heavy penalties.

Caster Level: 3rd; *Prerequisites:* Craft Wondrous Items, *enlarge, reduce*; *Market Price:* 6,000 gp. *Cost to Enchant:* 3,000 gp + 240 XP.

Imperfect Weight: These trick weights look and perform like a *perfect weight*. However, unlike a legitimate *perfect weight* an *imperfect weight* has a second slider under the first. By depressing the upper slider while turning it, the user can cause the *weight* to give a false reading, over or underweight goods he wishes to purchase. Someone looking for the deception must make a Spot check (DC 25) to notice the second ring's motion. Inspecting the imperfect weight requires a Search check (DC 20) to spot the second ring. Creating and using an imperfect weight are both crimes in most municipalities.

Caster Level: 3rd; *Prerequisites:* Craft Wondrous Items, *enlarge, reduce*; *Market Price:* 6,000 gp. *Cost to Enchant:* 3,000 gp + 240 XP.

Thief's Hand: This modest-looking, black stone charm hangs from a plain leather thong. The charm can be worn either as a necklace or as a bracelet. Three times per day the wearer may speak a command word to invoke the *mage hand* spell as if cast by a 3rd-level caster. Thieves use these charms to manipulate small objects from across the room or to pick up items without directly touching them.

Caster Level: 3rd; *Prerequisites:* Craft Wondrous Item, *mage hand*; *Market Price:* 1,350 gp. *Cost to Enchant:* 675 gp. + 54 XP.

So now you should be ready to go to the local flea market, fleece the stall holders of all their best goods at a knock-down price and then break into their homes that night to get all your money back.

What do you mean "I'm Lawful Good"? It never stopped Sir Agamar (and if you don't know who he is, then you did not read Issue 2 carefully enough).

More from **Ultimate Gameplay** next month, when we will have a little something special (or three) for the elven community.



INTERVIEW WITH A WRITER. . .

AUGUST HAHN TALKS TO IAN BARSTOW

Recently I had the opportunity to catch up with workaholic Mongoose Cyborg, August Hahn and I couldn't pass up the opportunity to do an interview for Signs & Portents.



August manages to attract every security man in a five-block radius at a recent convention

IB: First off, tell everybody what you do for Mongoose Publishing.

AH: I write... a lot. I have done some editing, some basic graphics work (mostly maps), and some spot repairs on other people's work, but mostly I just generate as much text as I humanly can each month. In fact, I have been writing so much that Paul has dubbed me Mongoose's resident cyborg. I kind of like that, though the thought of only needing electricity at meal time sounds a bit dull.

IB: How did you get into roleplaying?

AH: Interesting story, that. I had just moved back stateside from Saudi Arabia, where I lived since the age of two. We were there about eight years, spending the odd summer in other countries like Germany, Greece and England. In case anyone is wondering, my father was Air Force and worked as a senior combat jet technician. Anyway, we come back to the states and I quickly discover that while America is very different from

what I am used to, it can also be quite boring to a ten year old with no interest in sports.

It was shortly after that revelation that my mother purchased the first white box of **D&D** for me from a hobby shop. In her defence, she thought she was getting a 'How To' set on medieval crafts, but she was delightfully mistaken. I grabbed a hold of those three little brown booklets and was instantly hooked. Solo gaming grew into lunchtime adventures at school and, before I knew it, roleplaying had become a big part of my life.

IB: What was your first game?

AH: That would be a solo dungeon generated using the sparse rules for doing so laid down in the original three booklets. I wandered through that never-ending dungeon, mapping it out as I went, with my fighting man Ulysses (hey, I was 10...) for an entire summer. By the time I was done, the dungeon spanned 64 sheets of graph paper taped together 8x8. It was huge.

IB: So, with experiences like that, would you rather be a Games Master or a player?

AH: Definitely a Games Master. I enjoy playing, but there is something about being able to entertain players and keep them interested in a plot entirely of my own devising for week after week that is really appealing to me. I love it when people are having a good time and when my players are happy, so am I.

IB: What do you like about working for Mongoose Publishing?

AH: The thing I like most about working for Mongoose Publishing is proving my parents wrong on a daily basis. I remember when I was fourteen, shortly after they had taken away my gaming books and banned me from ever playing 'that demon worship game' again, my father telling me that I would never be able to make a living at it. My parents are both good people and I love them dearly, but I knew they were wrong then and it is wonderful fun proving them wrong now.

IB: Yeah, I know that feeling. So, what games have you worked on?

AH: *I have worked extensively on **Babylon 5, Armageddon 2089**, and the company's fantasy line. I have written material for three of the **Ultimate** books and several **Encyclopaedia Arcanes** of my own. I co-authored a *Slayer's Guide* and a good chunk of the new **Sheoloth, City of the Drow** is mine as are the basis for all of its maps.*

IB: Which did you enjoy the most?

AH: *Honestly, that is a very hard question to answer. My first love will always be fantasy gaming. That said, I have really enjoyed the **Babylon 5** work immensely and **Armageddon** has been a joy to write for. I think, if I had to give you one answer, it would be **Babylon 5** simply for the rush of working on a line that has so many fans and so much rich history and canon material to build off of and contribute to.*

IB: What are you working on right now?

AH: *My project now is something of a secret, but once I am done with it (which should be soon), I am moving back into the Season Three book for **Babylon 5** with a vengeance.*

IB: <smiling> Big secret, eh? OK, if you could do anything in the gaming industry, what would it be?

AH: <also now smiling> *Exactly what I am doing right now, though it might be nice to eventually head up my own line as its chief developer. I would love to be responsible for generating campaign content that forms the basis for people's gaming across the globe. That would be wonderful.*

IB: What do you think about **d20 3.5**? Good or bad from a writer's point of view?

AH: *It is a good thing, if only because the occasional change is a sign of growth. Now, if 3.75 appears anytime in the next two years or **d20 4e** pops up in that time, it could spell disaster for the industry. People like change, but consumers can be very wary of anything that is an obvious ploy to drain their wallets. **3.5** needed to happen, but this is where it should stop for a while.*

IB: Does the whole OGL business feel like the future of roleplaying systems or do you see change coming?

AH: *It is both the present and the future of gaming as we know it. Open Source software, where the idea was taken from, has been the greatest motivating factor in the computer industry to date for driving production standards and quality of product. I honestly feel that **Windows** is a better piece of software because of **Linux** than in spite of it. The same holds true to gaming; the OGL is, in my opinion, where gaming was eventually going to get to, has now achieved it, and will benefit in the future because of it.*

IB: What sort of things give you inspiration?

AH: *Probably the same things that inspire everyone else (movies, music, television and books), but I do have a couple of other sources that most do not have access to. I do a lot of volunteer work for the **RPGA** and it keeps me in constant contact with the gaming community as a whole. I hear from them directly what does and does not work for players and games masters alike. That, more than anything else, helps*

me decide what to write and how to write it.

IB: On average, how many words per month do you think you write?

AH: *That is not really a fair question because I never stop to count.*

IB: Go on, give us some idea. People like to know this stuff.

AH: *OK, as it's you, I'll try. The only number I can give you is one that Paul Tucker, Mongoose's senior editor, gave me at **Gen Con** this year. When I turned in the manuscript for the **Coming of Shadows** season book for **Babylon 5**, it represented 140,000 words in a month of work. We'll go with that. I'd probably write more, but my dyslexia makes it difficult to do things any faster.*

IB: You've just been to **Gen Con 2003**. What did you think and how did it compare to previous **Gen Cons**?

AH: *The worries people had about the new venue (given that **Gen Con** moved from Milwaukee, Wisconsin to Indianapolis, Indiana this year) were completely unfounded. Most vendors came away from this show considering it to be as busy if not better than last year's, so that's the opinion I'll consider. The **RPGA** ran just as many tables of gaming as it did last year in Wisconsin, and I saw a lot of open gaming that I did not witness in years past.*

*The most important thing I think people should consider about the new location for **Gen Con** is that it is much more accessible to people in the United States than Milwaukee was and benefits from a larger convention centre. This year was as big as ones in the past, but next*

year is going to, in my opinion, explode. **Gen Con** will grow to suit its environment and with the potential I saw in downtown Indianapolis, that is going to mean a **Gen Con** presence the likes of which will make previous convention totals seem tiny in comparison. I can't wait for next year's show!

IB: Tell us about your work area. Neat or messy? Cramped corner or big office?

AL: Can I say both, depending on the timing? I have a nice computer desk in the corner of our living room that, depending on whether or not I have used it as a gaming table lately, can be clean or very, very cluttered. I have to keep reference materials handy, which only adds to the piles that can grow to gargantuan sizes in a matter of hours. Then there are the frantic cleaning fits, usually provoked by having the mess attack me in the middle of a writing session, that leave everything tidy and scoured for about a day or two. This becomes a constant, vicious cycle.

I have big plans to convert one room of our house into an office, but then I have had plans to do household things for years and never gotten around to them, so we'll see if that ever comes to pass.

IB: What kind of schedule do you keep for yourself as far as your work for Mongoose Publishing is concerned?

AL: 'Schedule'? What means this odd word, 'schedule'? Seriously, I do not really have one. I write until my fingers hurt, I take a break, and then I write more. Sometimes, that break is for things like gaming, food, or sleep, but then it is right back to the keyboard. That answer your question?

IB: To budding writers this may come over as very daunting. Any advice for people who would like to break into the gaming industry?

AL: Sure, and it is pretty simple advice too. Game. That may sound simple, but I cannot count the number of supplements or core books I have seen that obviously look that they have come from the hands of rules lawyers or accountants who have not simply sat down and enjoyed a roleplaying game in years. If you do not love gaming, you have no business being in the business at all. In my eyes, it is as simple as that.

As for freelancers wanting to work for existing companies, be polite and always follow any published guidelines a given company might have for

submissions and solicitations. If you ship off a two-hundred page manuscript for your 'Uberworld' campaign setting to a company that has not asked for one, you can rest assured you just wasted your time, their time, and a lot of postage. Start small, stay nice, and keep trying. If you have the talent and the right temperament, you will eventually get your break into the industry.

IB: Thanks very much, August. It's been great talking to you and I think your approach and attitude can be an inspiration to budding writers reading this. Keep up the good work!

AL: It's been a pleasure. Now, I've got to get back to work already. . .



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THE PAK'MA'RA

Lizard

The introduction of a new character race in any game is always exciting, but can be problematic. Unless, that is, you have background written by J. Michael Straczynski to work with. The Pak'Ma'Ra require serious and considered play – that means no singing 'My Old Man's A Dustman', alright?

'DEATH FEEDS US, FOR WE ARE STRONGER THAN DEATH. DECAY NOURISHES US, FOR OUR SPIRITS DO NOT DECAY. WE THRIVE WHERE OTHERS STARVE, FOR WE FEAST ON THE ONLY THING WHICH IS ETERNAL.'

(Rough translation of a Pak'Ma'Ra ritual chant, usually performed as part of a rite of passage to adulthood.)

Few races are as poorly understood as the Pak'Ma'Ra while being so widespread. Most sentient beings know less about them than about far more reclusive races such as the Streib or the Gaim. The Pak'Ma'Ra are everywhere in the galaxy, yet, few study them or even seem to notice them.

This article seeks to shed some light on one of the galaxy's most mysterious, yet common, races, offering the depth and detail needed to make them interesting Non-Player Characters or even viable player characters for a few daring roleplayers.

Pak'Ma'Ra

The Pak'Ma'Ra are a race of sentient beings which have evolved to live on carrion. They feed on rotting



matter and this habit, along with the stench which accompanies them, exiles them to the lower echelons of galactic society. Omnipresent yet invisible, they walk in the shadows and feed on refuse, and, secure in their unobtrusiveness, spread across the galaxy.

'They do not see us, and we do not care. They do not notice us, and so we grow strong in their midst.' (Pak'Ma'Ra saying)

Personality

Pak'Ma'Ra are often seen as having two primary traits: Arrogance and curiosity. The latter tends to cause those who travel among other races to play down the former. Indeed, Pak'Ma'Ra arrogance tends not to take the form of bluster and sneering, but, rather a calm certainty in their own superiority, which can surprise races used to looking on them as inferiors. Their curiosity is also oddly understated; a Pak'Ma'Ra is likely to simply pick something up and begin examining it, rather than directly ask questions, at least of someone from another species. Other races tend to greatly underestimate their intelligence, viewing their continual inquisitiveness as more akin to that of a cat or monkey, as opposed to the

intense quest for knowledge that it truly is.

Pak'Ma'Ra are not overly gregarious, either among themselves or with other races. Most live singly or with one single 'thought mate', who is a close friend rather than a romantic partner. Pak'Ma'Ra may develop some degree of camaraderie with beings of other races, but there will invariably be something vaguely muted, even distant, about it.

Physical Description

Pak'Ma'Ra are superficially humanoid, in that they appear to be two-armed bipeds, but, beyond that, they bear little resemblance to humans. Their skin is a greyish-green colour, with a rough, pebbly, texture which, in a healthy Pak'Ma'Ra, is cool and damp to the touch. Their mouths are surrounded by a fringe of thick, rubbery tentacles which normally hang limp and immobile, but which can extend and grab with alarming speed. Their eyes are massive black orbs without any distinctive pupil. They are bulkier and slightly taller than most humans, and move with a purposeful stiffness. Their hands have three, thick fingers, and their legs are somewhat similar to those of an elephant.

A Pak'Ma'Ra's beak is capable of delivering a lethal poison, with a save DC of 10 + the Pak'Ma'Ra's Constitution bonus, and a damage effect of 2d6 Con/2d6 Con. There will be four doses of this venom when the venom sack is full, and it takes 1d4 days to regenerate a single usage. Pak'Ma'Ra who are imprisoned on alien worlds for crimes of violence are often forced to have the sack surgically removed.

And they smell.

Most species comfortable with Terran atmospheres (i.e. most major species in the game, other than Vorlons) find the Pak'Ma'Ra ill-smelling at best. A lone Pak'Ma'Ra in a large room is tolerable; add a few more, or make the room small, and most will leave. (The air fresheners in the council chamber work overtime to make sure the Pak'Ma'Ra ambassador does not drive out the other members of the league of non-aligned worlds.) The odour is not actually produced by their bodies, though, but is a consequence of their diet, which consists entirely of carrion – the more decayed, the better. On any world (or the Babylon 5 station) where there is a large Pak'Ma'Ra presence, social and political forces will conspire to get them all in one place which will rapidly turn into a stomach-churning cesspit of carrion and garbage.

Pak'Ma'Ra generally have a weekly feast during which they consume a disturbing amount of food; often, it will be left to rot during the time preceding the feeding – this being what passes for food preparation in Pak'Ma'Ra society. They can, however, eat smaller amounts and more regularly, and will do so if circumstances warrant, although such dietary alterations can cause a Pak'Ma'Ra 'difficulties'. The less rotted the food is, the more difficult it is for them to digest, and obviously it effects culinary quality; they will eat freshly-killed food only if the alternative is starvation.

Pak'Ma'Ra reproduce by a process of budding. They have no genders.

This makes it difficult for them to understand how important love and sex can be to other races which, in turn, can lead to anything from humorous misunderstandings to fatal mistakes. As an example, initial translations of the human term 'buddy' led to confused assumptions which took some time to iron out.

Relations

Pak'Ma'Ra have little, if any, formal government. They tend to organise into groups to accomplish tasks which can be passed on to different groups in turn. The breakdown of who does what is decided by debate and consensus, usually within a single, small community. Some tasks include travel and communication and, as such, the different population groups retain a sense of community. While they are not a hive mind, there is often overlap, conceptually, between the individual and the race. Each individual feels free to speak for itself and for the entire race as if both were one, but this does not mandate concurrence. Small groups of Pak'Ma'Ra can reach conclusions which all can subsequently agree on, and most arrangements and treaties are made with just such groups. These treaties are linked to a task, not to the individuals, so, if a different group of Pak'Ma'Ra takes on the task, they consider themselves bound by the same treaty.

Most races, as noted, tolerate the Pak'Ma'Ra. They are not warlike or aggressive, but their eating habits and arrogance tend to put most other species off. The lack of a formal, central government also makes interracial relations difficult. The Pak'Ma'Ra have joined the League primarily to learn of and from other races, rather than to manoeuvre for political power or gain. These two factors combine to make them omnipresent, yet minor, players in galactic politics.

On their homeworld, Pak'Ma'Ra have no currency; they accomplish what needs to be done by agreeing to the necessity of it and then deciding who

will do it. They do trade commodities for currency to use when travelling off-world.

Pak'Ma'Ra Systems

The vast majority of the Pak'Ma'Ra live on their homeworld, which is a large, dense planet with a thick, noxious atmosphere. Visibility in the normal spectrum is limited to a few inches without some sort of artificial enhancement, which is why the Pak'Ma'Ra have a form of thermal vision. Their homeworld is extremely well defended, with a guardian fleet of fast, well-armed ships in orbit and dense, ground-based defences. They maintain a very small number of outposts and colonies in nearby systems, enough to have a defined, if small, sphere of influence. Their ability to live in a variety of atmospheres allows them to settle on small moons or worlds no other race wants. There are a healthy number of very small Pak'Ma'Ra colonies on the systems surrounding their homeworld, but none with a population of more than a few thousand.

Beyond that, they live on the worlds of other races, their incredible adaptability allowing them to survive almost anywhere.

Technologically, the Pak'Ma'Ra are on a par with the Centauri. They did not develop space flight on their own, but acquired it from other races; since then, they have managed to maintain and develop their own industry, though they tend to also be willing scavengers. Their fleets are a mix of native-built ships and those bought from other races, as well as those cobbled together from random, cast-off bits and pieces. Though intelligent, Pak'Ma'Ra tend not to be great technological innovators; they are concerned with abstract ideas and philosophies rather than practical matters, and they focus on theory without regard to engineering. They are extremely skilled scavengers and salvagers, however, taking the 'carrion' of the space lanes, as it were, and there are many Pak'Ma'Ra ships which lurk on the edges of battle

zones, swooping in to scavenge ship components and corpses after the combatants have departed.

Pak'Ma'Ra Beliefs

Pak'Ma'Ra have a definite belief in their own superiority and, beyond that, not much real religion at all. They are, despite appearances, a very intellectual and curious race, and some Minbari scholars who have studied their culture intently have concluded that they hold *ideas* – thought itself – to be sacred. This can explain the great libraries and data archives which are spread across their homeworld, and their intense curiosity about anyone and anything.

This approach can lead to conflict. Pak'Ma'Ra view debate almost as an end in itself, and enjoy intellectual give-and-take as a form of entertainment. Other races, which treat ideas not as things to play with, but as matters of fact, may find dealing with Pak'Ma'Ra frustrating, as they continually shift sides in a debate just to keep the 'game' going.

The closest thing Pak'Ma'Ra have to religious rites are organised, ritual debates during which vital ideas and concepts are remembered and discussed in a highly elaborate fashion. The Pak'Ma'Ra style of singing, rarely heard by outsiders, is part of this ritual.

Language

Pak'Ma'Ra all speak a common language; a soft, hissing tongue punctuated by deep, guttural sounds. They also sing, as mentioned above. This is an eerie, haunting sound that is captivatingly beautiful and sad. The singing is a private ritual and few aliens ever hear it; most beings have no idea that the Pak'Ma'Ra can create such beauty. Their throats cannot form the sounds of most other races' languages and they use translation devices when communicating with aliens, thus disguising the innate beauty within.

Names

Pak'Ma'Ra tend to have single names,

since they do not have bloodlines to keep track of, and one's bud-parent is not of any great concern. They are hard for non-Pak'Ma'Ra to pronounce properly. Thal'tik, Sla'ma'kor, and Loth'M'ro are typical names.

Starfarers

Pak'Ma'Ra took to the stars as, in essence, part of another task to be done on behalf of the race. They became diplomats, merchants and explorers, and many found homes on other worlds, where there were many new things to discover, new ideas to explore. Those who have left their homeworld have often had extensive training in understanding the ways of other races, and have learned how to deal with their odd customs. The contempt and disdain with which they are treated does not bother them at all; their certainty in their own superiority causes the insults of others to fall away meaninglessly.

Pak'Ma'Ra Racial Traits

Pak'Ma'Ra are Medium humanoids. Their base move is only 20 feet per round, however, due to their general sluggishness.

+2 Str, +2 Int, +2 Con, -4 Dex, -4 Charisma. Pak'Ma'Ra are strong and smart – far smarter than many realise. They are very slow-moving and clumsy, however, and their eating habits, combined with a weak sense of self, combine to seriously penalise their social skills.

Pak'Ma'Ra gain a +4 racial bonus on all saves against ingested poisons. They are completely immune to food-born parasites or diseases, unless bioengineered to specifically target their race.

Pak'Ma'Ra can breathe oxygen, methane or nitrogen-based atmospheres.

Pak'Ma'Ra tend to be overlooked and ignored. As such, they gain a +2 racial bonus to Hide and Move Silently skill checks against other

sentient races, but not against other Pak'Ma'Ra or animals.

Other races tend to disdain Pak'Ma'Ra. They have a -2 racial penalty on all Diplomacy checks made against non-Pak'Ma'Ra.

The Pak'Ma'Ra favoured class is Lurker. Despite their intelligence, galactic prejudice tends to push them away from scientific careers, and they have learned to adapt to life on the outskirts of society. A multiclass Pak'Ma'Ra's lurker class does not count when determining whether it suffers an XP penalty for multiclassing.

Pak'Ma'Ra Feats

Agile Tentacles

You can use your feeding tentacles to manipulate objects.

Benefit: Most Pak'Ma'Ra can use their feeding tendrils solely to move food into their beaks. A rare few, through diligent practice, have learned to control them in a more refined fashion, enabling them to use them as well as they can use the fingers of their hands -- provided, of course, they can reach the objects they wish to manipulate. A Pak'Ma'Ra with this feat may use any skills which require manual dexterity, such as Sleight of Hand, even if its hands are not free, though the Games Master must rule on whether or not it can bring its mouth to bear, and if any other penalties are involved. For example, manipulating a keypad on a wall with mouth tentacles is fairly simple; bending over to pick someone's pocket with them, and not being noticed, is not – a circumstance penalty of -4 or more should be applied.

Voluntary Regurgitation

You can void the contents of your stomach at will.

Benefit: The roiling mass of rotting substance that is contained in a Pak'Ma'Ra stomach could 'gag a Vorlon' as the saying goes, and you have learned to expel this. As a full-

round action, you may make a DC 15 Fortitude check; if you succeed, the contents of your stomach are hurled in a 10 foot cone in front of you. All in the affected squares must make a DC 15 Reflex save or be partially covered with the stinking, rotting, acidic, gunk; this will *nauseate* them for 1d4+1 rounds, DC 15 Fortitude save to reduce to 1 round. You may do this only once per 24 hours, and then only assuming you have been eating regularly.

Weapon Proficiency (Beak)

You can use your beak as a weapon.

Prerequisite: Base attack bonus +1 or greater.

Benefit: In these relatively civilised times, few Pak'Ma'Ra see any need to resort to crude physical violence – guns do the job so much better. Nonetheless, there are times when nothing remains but natural force, and those Pak'Ma'Ra with this feat have learned to use their beaks in combat as their primitive ancestors did. With this feat, a Pak'Ma'Ra may make an attack with its beak, doing 1d6 points of damage (plus any Strength bonus), as well as injecting the poison described above (DC of 10 + the Pak'Ma'Ra's Constitution bonus, and a damage effect of 2d6 Con/2d6 Con).

Pak'Ma'Ra In a Babylon 5 RPG Campaign

One of the advantages of using a race which is as iconic, yet as mysterious, as the Pak'Ma'Ra in a campaign is that they simultaneously reinforce the setting while allowing the Games Master tremendous creative range. So much is unknown that a great deal can be invented without violating canon; in a universe as well documented as that of Babylon 5, this is a godsend. (The above racial information is based on production notes; much of it was never mentioned in the series, and, in some cases, the series seemingly

contradicted the original notes. An effort has been made to harmonise both sources.)

As Non-Player Characters, Pak'Ma'Ra can be a great surprise to players who know them only as lumbering, foul-smelling brutes. A Pak'Ma'Ra scientist or telepath can be a highly unexpected encounter, especially once the players realise he looks down on them as much, and probably more, than they look down on him. The alienness of the Pak'Ma'Ra -- the lack of a strong distinction between individual and race, the parthenogenetic reproduction, and the strangely distant arrogance -- can be a change for aliens who are a bit too close to humanity psychologically.

Allowing players to take on a Pak'Ma'Ra character should be approached with caution. This article provides sufficient game mechanics and cultural background to make such

association? Pak'Ma'Ra are not uniformly isolationist; some showed themselves willing to become Rangers, after all. However, the character must have a very strong motivation to regularly involve himself in the affairs of others.

Another issue is the problem with communication – without a translator box, a Pak'Ma'Ra cannot even talk to the other races. This is unlikely to be a major concern for day-to-day life, especially if the game is set primarily on the Babylon 5 station, but a protracted trip off-station could result in the translator being damaged or lost.

Pak'Ma'Ra arrogance must also be played very carefully. It is a quiet, almost subconscious *certainty*, not the boastful bragging of races such as the Centauri and the Lumati. The Pak'Ma'Ra *are* better, and, well, that's that. Such a clearly defined issue is not of interest, as there is no debate to be had.



Likewise, the genderless nature of the Pak'Ma'Ra means that they will be confused or bemused by the endless romantic pastimes of other species, but they will not have lovers of their own, and will, as noted above, often misunderstand other species' inter-gender relationships.

In addition, there is the question of why the *other* player characters would associate closely with a Pak'Ma'Ra on a regular basis. The prejudice against Pak'Ma'Ra is fairly strong and deep, and while a few exceptional xenophiles such as Dr. Franklin might be capable of ignoring it completely, most individuals will not.

With all these caveats in mind, allowing a Pak'Ma'Ra player character can certainly make a game more memorable and interesting, provided the player truly wishes to explore this interesting, but oft-overlooked, race.



a character viable, however, the lack of strong, iconic characters for the race in the source material can leave all but the most skilled players unable to really define their character.

The first and most difficult question a player wishing to run a Pak'Ma'Ra character must answer is why his character, from a traditionally isolated and stand-offish race, is regularly associating with the other players. Is he an outcast from his own people? Is he performing some lengthy and complex task which requires regular

CREATURE FEATURE!

In this first edition of Creature Feature, Johnathan M. Richards introduces us to some pretty unpleasant creepy crawlies. Yeurgh!!!

Welcome to the first in an occasional series detailing new, interesting or downright weird creatures to populate your worlds with. As with everything we do, we are very keen on your feedback, so if you have any creatures you would like to see appear in Creature Feature then let us know. If any of them are popular enough, we'll see what we can do!



f all of the various creature types, the vermin are often thought of as the least interesting. They are certainly one of the least developed, for without so much as an Intelligence score there is only so much that can be done with them. Oftentimes they are relegated to the 'wandering monster' role, showing up as a random encounter when the Player Characters are off on other business.

Flipping through Appendix 2 of *Core Rulebook III*, you will mainly discover merely larger versions of creatures found in real life: spiders, centipedes, ants, bees, scorpions, and so on. However, in a fantasy roleplaying game, the types of vermin available in any given campaign need not be constrained by what actually exists in the real world.

Provided below are a dozen new types of vermin. Some are patterned after existing creatures but most possess some fantastic power or ability that – while excluding them from plausibility in the real world – make them perfectly acceptable in a campaign containing such bizarre inhabitants as fire-breathing dragons, multiheaded hydras, and armour-plated bulls whose breath turns people to stone.

ARMoured FLATWORM

Medium Vermin

Hit Dice: 2d8+8 (17 hp)

Initiative: +0

Speed: 10 ft. (2 squares), swim 20 ft.

AC: 14 (+4 natural, possibly also modified by the host's Dexterity; see below), touch 10, flat-footed 14

Base Attack/Grapple: +1/+2

Attack: Bite +2 melee (1d3+1 plus attach)

Full Attack: Bite +2 melee (1d3+1 plus attach)

Damage: Bite 1d3+1

Space/Reach: 5 ft. by 5 ft.

Special Attacks: Attach, blood drain, constrict 1d8+1

Special Qualities: Vermin, disease filter, regeneration 5

Saves: Fort +7, Ref +0, Will +0

Abilities: Str 13, Dex 10, Con 19, Int --, Wis 10, Cha 2

Skills: ---

Feats: ---

Climate/Terrain: Swamplands and aquatic

Organisation: Solitary

Challenge Rating: 2

Treasure: None

Alignment: Always neutral

Advancement: 3-4 HD (Large), 5-6 HD (Huge)

Level Adjustment: ---

found attached to a host organism. As its name suggests, the creature is less than an inch thick despite being nearly 7 feet long and about four inches wide. The armoured flatworm's entire dorsal surface is covered in hard, overlapping plates, while its underside is glistening and slimy like a slug. The flatworm's circular, leechlike mouth is on its underside and primitive eyespots are found on both surfaces.

Often the armoured flatworm is not encountered alone but with a host organism 'wearing' the creature like living armour. If an armoured flatworm establishes a firm hold on a creature's skin (often at the back of the neck), it then wraps its ribbony body around and around the host's torso, covering it in a layer of natural armour. On a creature of humanoid build, this is the organic equivalent of a chain shirt, providing a +4 armour bonus to the host. An armoured flatworm is also treated as a chain shirt in regards to the maximum Dexterity bonus a creature can have while 'wearing' it, the armour check penalty imposed, and the chance of arcane spell failure. Armoured flatworms can only be 'worn' by creatures no smaller than one size category below that of the flatworm. Note the armour bonus provided by 'wearing' an armoured flatworm does not stack with other armour bonuses.



The armoured flatworm is a swamp-dwelling worm often



To determine who takes damage when a creature 'wearing' an armoured flatworm is hit, compute the host's Armour Class with and without the flatworm's +4 armour bonus. If the attack roll falls within a range low enough to miss the host while 'wearing' the armoured flatworm but high enough to strike the flatworm itself (note the armoured flatworm, when 'worn', gains the Dexterity bonus of its host), the flatworm is hit. Due to the creature's regenerative abilities, most attacks that hit an armoured flatworm do subdual damage.

As an example, say a lizardfolk chieftain has a +5 natural armour bonus and a +1 Dexterity bonus to his Armour Class. That makes him AC 20 while 'wearing' an armoured flatworm and AC 16 without it, and makes the flatworm AC 15. An attack that hits AC 16, 17, 18 or 19 hits the armoured flatworm (and the lizardfolk chieftain takes no damage), while an attack that hits AC 20 or more hits the lizardfolk and the flatworm takes no damage. Area attacks, such as a *fireball* spell, affect both creatures.

As another example, suppose an armoured flatworm is being 'worn'

by a goblin with a +1 size bonus and a +1 Dexterity bonus to Armour Class. With the armoured flatworm, he has AC 16; without, AC 12; the flatworm has AC 15. An attack that hits AC 16 or above strikes the goblin. An attack that hits AC 15 strikes the flatworm. An attack that hits AC 14 or lower misses both creatures.

The armoured flatworm provides more than just armour to its host, however. While attached, it filters out disease from the host's blood. Armoured flatworms enjoy a healthy constitution and can easily shrug off the effects of most natural diseases and they confer this bonus to their hosts. In return, the armoured flatworm draws nourishment from the host's blood at the rate of a single hit point per day. Many hosts find the trade-off to be well worth it.

Usually it is the more primitive humanoids – lizardfolk, goblins, kobolds, orcs, and gnolls – making use of armoured flatworms as living armour. Civilised folks usually find the very concept bizarre and abhorrent.

Combat

An armoured flatworm without a host seeks to bite a mammalian or reptilian host upon the torso or the back of the neck, where it can establish a hold. It is much more manoeuvrable in the water than it is on dry land and thus prefers attacking waterborne opponents whenever possible.

Attach (Ex): If an armoured flatworm hits with its bite attack it uses its leechlike mouth to latch itself into place on the host's body, then wraps the rest of its body around and around the host's torso. This initiates a grapple without provoking attacks of opportunity (grapple bonus +2).

Blood Drain (Ex): Once attached, the armoured flatworm drains one hit point of blood per day. Its efficient digestive system does not need more nourishment than that, which helps keep the host organism from being drained of too much blood. (It is in the flatworm's best interests to keep the host organism alive, as it is looking for a long-term symbiotic relationship, not just a quick meal.)

Constrict (Ex): Once attached, an armoured flatworm can constrict its host for 1d8+1 points of damage. It only does so, however, if someone tries removing it from the host – again, it wants its host alive to provide it with nourishment.

Disease Filter (Ex): An attached armoured flatworm filters the blood of its host. This in effect adds its +7 bonus to the host's Fortitude save check when made to ward off disease. Note, the host does not gain the flatworm's +7 bonus to Fortitude saves made for reasons other than fighting off disease.

Regeneration (Ex): Fire and acid deal normal damage to an armoured flatworm. If cut in half, the half with the head regrows the rest of its body in about a day.

Vermin: Armoured flatworms are immune to mind-influencing effects. They also have darkvision (60-foot range).

BARBED BEETLE

Medium Vermin

Hit Dice: 4d8 (18 hp)

Initiative: +3 (Dex)

Speed: 10 ft. (2 squares), swim 20 ft.

AC: 19 (+3 Dex, +6 natural)

Base Attack/Grapple: +3/+4

Attacks: antennae +4 melee (1d8+1)

Full Attack: 2 Antennae +4 melee (1d8+1) and bite –1 melee (1d6)

Space/Reach: 5 ft. by 15 ft.

(antennae only) or 5 ft.

Special Attacks: Improved grab

Special Qualities: Vermin

Saves: Fort +4, Ref +4, Will +2
Abilities: Str 12, Dex 16, Con 11, Int --, Wis 13, Cha 11
Skills: ---
Feats: ---
Environment: Temperate and warm land and underground
Organisation: Solitary, cluster (2-5), or swarm (6-11)
Challenge Rating: 2
Treasure: None
Alignment: Always neutral
Advancement Range: 5-8 HD (Medium), 9-12 HD (Large)
Level Adjustment: ---

The barbed beetle (also known as the whip beetle, flail beetle or scourge beetle) is quite distinctive. Although its body ranges from 6 to 7 feet long, its thin antennae extend a full 15 feet beyond the creature's head! Like most beetles, the barbed beetle uses its antennae to detect airborne scents and vibrations, but this fearsome creature has developed them into formidable weapons as well. Each antenna is covered with innumerable short spines and the beetle whips them back and forth, striking enemies with deadly accuracy and often flaying the very flesh from their bones!

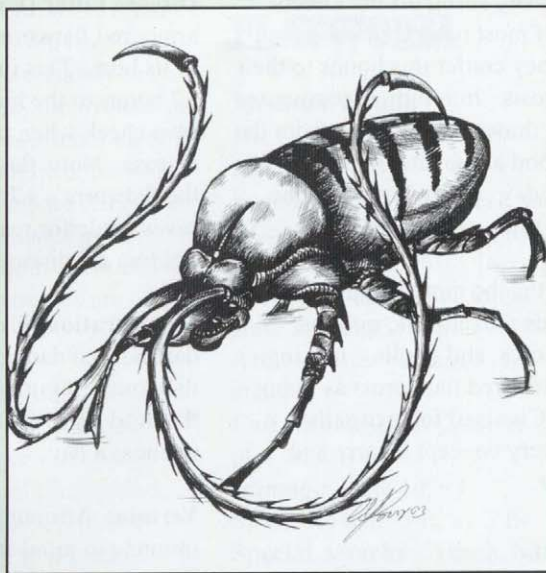
There are several subspecies of barbed beetle. Most are dark-coloured: black, deep grey, or a deep brown. Some species have lateral stripes on their backs of a lighter colour (often yellow or orange).

Combat

Barbed beetles are strictly carnivorous and fear few creatures. They are usually hungry and attack on sight.

The barbed beetle attacks primarily with its twin antennae. An antenna can be targeted singly; each is AC 20 and is severed by 8 points of damage in a single round by a slashing weapon. Lesser damage does not sever the antenna and damage on subsequent rounds is not likely to hit the same spot on such a lengthy appendage. In any case, damage inflicted on an antenna is not subtracted from the beetle's hit point total.

Once a barbed beetle is slain, its antennae can be cut off at the base of the creature's head and used as weapons for up to 8 hours before they stiffen and become useless. *Gentle repose* spells cast upon the



antennae can extend the duration of their use as weapons. Anyone with the whip proficiency can successfully employ a barbed antenna; the non-proficiency penalty applies to all others. An antenna deals 1d8 points of damage when used in this fashion.

Improved Grab (Ex): To use this ability, the barbed beetle must hit with its bite attack. Success means it attempts to start a grapple as a free action without provoking an attack of opportunity (grapple bonus +4).

Vermin: Barbed beetles are immune to mind-influencing

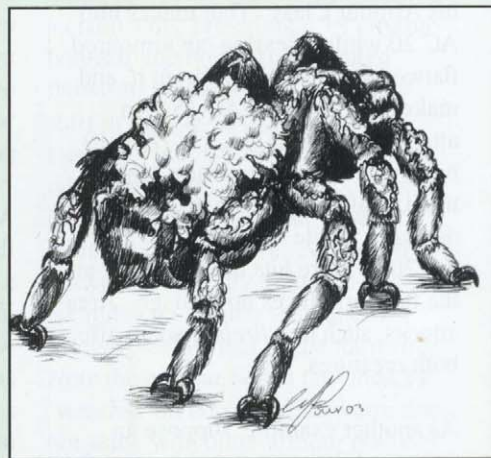
effects. They also have darkvision (60-foot range).

BRAINLOCK SPIDER

Medium Vermin

Hit Dice: 2d8+6 (15 hp)
Initiative: +1 (Dex)
Speed: 30 ft. (6 squares), climb 20 ft.
AC: 13 (+1 Dex, +2 natural)
Base Attack/Grapple: +1/+3
Attack: Bite +3 melee (1d6+3 plus poison)
Full Attack: Bite +3 melee (1d6+3 plus poison)
Space/Reach: 5 ft. by 5 ft./5 ft.
Special Attacks: Poison, spores
Special Qualities: Vermin
Saves: Fort +6, Ref +1, Will +0
Abilities: Str 15, Dex 13, Con 16, Int --, Wis 10, Cha 2
Skills: ---
Feats: ---
Environment: Underground
Organisation: Solitary or colony (2-5)
Challenge Rating: 2 (without mould) or 6 (with mould)
Treasure: 1/10 coins; 50% goods; 50% items
Alignment: Always neutral
Advancement Range: 3 HD (Medium), 4-6 HD (Large)
Level Adjustment: ---

Brainlock spiders are named after the mould that usually grows in symbiosis on their bodies. Brainlock mould grows in pinkish-grey lumps



and the spider of the same name usually has a layer of the blobby mould growing upon the upper parts of its cephalothorax and all but the joints of its many-segmented legs. Otherwise, the brainlock spider is built rather like a tarantula, albeit one standing five-feet-long. It does not generate webbing from its body like most spiders do.

Brainlock spiders live a subterranean existence, as the mould they harvest on their bodies is ineffective in sunlight.

Combat

Brainlock spiders are slower than most monstrous spiders of comparable size, often allowing their mould spores to do most of their hunting for them. They begin combat by inciting the mould on their bodies to burst forth in a cloud of spores, then move in to bite their prey after the spores have had a chance to take effect.

Poison (Ex): Bite, Fortitude save (DC 14); initial and secondary damage 1d4 temporary Strength.

Brainlock Mould (CR 6): If disturbed, a patch of this pinkish-grey mould bursts forth with a cloud of poisonous spores. All within 10 feet of the mould must make a Fortitude save (DC 15) or take 1d6 points of temporary Intelligence damage. Another Fortitude save (DC 15) is required 1 minute later – even by those who succeeded at the first save – to avoid taking 2d6 points of temporary Intelligence damage. Anyone brought down to 0 Intelligence falls unconscious into a comalike stupor. Fire destroys brainlock mould and sunlight renders it dormant.

Spores (Ex): See the 'Brainlock Mould' sidebar for details. Brainlock spiders are immune to the effects of the mould and can send mould spores out in a 10-foot cloud by rubbing their legs against the mould covering their cephalothorax. Note, even after a brainlock spider is slain the mould on its body is still active and must be dealt with.

Vermin: Brainlock spiders are immune to mind-influencing effects. They also have darkvision (60-foot range).

CAVE BEETLE

Diminutive Vermin

Hit Dice: 1/2d8 (2 hp)

Initiative: +0

Speed: 20 ft. (4 squares)

AC: 22 (+4 size, +8 natural)

Base Attack/Grapple: +4/-12

Attack: Bite +4 melee (1d2-4 plus poison)

Full Attack: Bite +4 melee (1d2-4 plus poison)

Space/Reach: 1 ft. by 1 ft./0 ft.

Special Attacks: Poison, implant eggs

Special Qualities:

Vermin, blindsight

Saves: Fort +2, Ref +0, Will +0

Abilities: Str 3, Dex 10, Con 11, Int --, Wis 11, Cha 8

Skills: ---

Feats: ---

Environment: Underground

Organisation:

Solitary or cluster (2-5)

Challenge Rating: 1

Treasure: None

Alignment: Always neutral

Advancement Range: ---

Level Adjustment: ---

Cave beetles are blind but well adapted to a life without light. They have no eyes at all, relying solely upon their small antennae and

the specialised receptor-hairs on their legs to provide them with details about their environment.

A cave beetle's exoskeletal carapace is its greatest asset and most distinctive feature. It is usually grey and somewhat lumpy, allowing the beetle to be mistaken for a rock at a quick glance. The carapace extends beyond the beetle's head and legs, so when it wishes it can 'plop' itself down where it stands and be entirely covered by its carapace. The cave beetle's antennae touch the stone floor directly below its head, tapping along like two guiding canes as the creature makes its way along the caverns of the subterranean world.

Cave beetles mate whenever a male and a female stumble across each other. The female stores the fertilised eggs in her abdomen until discovering a suitable host in which to implant them. (The host need not be living; carrion does nicely as well.) When it finds a host a cave beetle sprays out airborne pheromones advertising the fact. This chemical scent is

undetectable to humans and most humanoid races but sends any cave beetles within 300 yards scurrying in the general direction of the victim.

Cave beetles have a low metabolism, allowing them

to go without food for weeks at a time. They generally do not need to drink, obtaining enough liquid from the bodies of their occasional victims.

Like many insects, cave beetles can walk along walls and ceilings. Their wing cases have fused shut in rock-mimicry; cave beetles cannot fly.



Combat

Cave beetles are omnivorous, feasting mostly upon moulds and lichens found growing underground. They devour any carrion they stumble across but are not against attacking any living creatures they might bump into. Since a cave beetle's mouthparts are hidden underneath its extended carapace, it can only bite those creatures upon which it stands (usually having wandered into them by accident as they rest or sleep). Creatures bitten by a cave beetle must deal with the effects of its paralytic venom.

Poison (Ex): Bite, Fortitude save (DC 11); initial damage paralysis for one minute, secondary damage paralysis for 1d3 hours. A cave beetle can only store enough venom for a single bite attack, requiring an hour to replenish its stock.

Implant Eggs (Ex): Once a victim is paralysed, a female cave beetle implants 1d4 eggs into the paralysed creature's wounds, dealing an additional point of damage to the victim in the process. If untreated (with a *remove disease* or *heal* spell) within 5d12+60 minutes, the eggs hatch and start devouring the victim from within, inflicting 1 point of damage per grub per minute until the host is slain.

Blindsight (Ex): Cave beetles can detect vibrations and scents within 60 feet through specialised hairs on their legs and antennae.

Vermin: Cave beetles are immune to mind-influencing effects.

DREGWORM

Medium Vermin

Hit Dice: 2d8 (9 hp)

Initiative: +1 (Dex)

Speed: 10 ft. (2 squares), Swim 20 ft.; or as victim

AC: 11 (+1 Dex); or 17 (+1 Dex, +6 natural) while in victim

Base Attack/Grapple: +1/+1

Attack: Bite +1 melee (1d6 plus disease)

Full Attack: Bite +1 melee (1d6 plus disease)

Space/Reach: 5 ft. by 5 ft./5 ft.

Special Attacks: Disease

Special Qualities: Vermin, animate dead

Saves: Fort +3, Ref +1, Will +0

Abilities: Str 11, Dex 12, Con 10, Int --, Wis 10, Cha 2

Skills: Hide +16*, Swim +10

Feats: —

Environment: Any land, but prefers urban slums and sewers

Organisation: Solitary

Challenge Rating: 1

Treasure: None

Alignment: Always neutral

Advancement Range: 3-4 HD (Medium), 5-6 HD (Large)

Level Adjustment: ---

Dregworms are segmented worms, typically about 5 feet long, sporting a circular mouth filled with razor-sharp teeth. Their bodies are a glistening, shiny black.

Dregworms are specialised predators, preying upon the lower rungs of humanoid society. They not only feast upon humanoid bodies but also use them as both a means of mobility and a disguise, enabling them to creep close to future victims without rousing suspicion. When a dregworm kills a victim, it eats its way into the body and pulls itself all the way inside, inhabiting it thereafter. An innate, spell-like ability to animate the corpse it inhabits allows the dregworm to pass as a humanoid. Although the victim's motions are jerky, the dregworm has sufficient motor control to stumble into position for an attack upon its next victim. Dregworms cannot control their victim's bodies well enough to fight other enemies while inside them; the animated

body is used merely for disguise and mobility, not combat. A dregworm can fit its coiled body into a victim one size smaller than itself, or anyone larger, but normally attacks prey of its own size.

Dregworms are usually found in the poorer quarters of large cities, preying upon beggars, drunkards and the homeless in the back alleys of slums. They can also be occasionally found in the sewers; dregworms swim well when outside their host bodies.

A staggering dregworm victim can be easily mistaken for a zombie, although they are not truly undead and cannot be turned or rebuked.

Combat

Adregworm's only attack is a bite with its circular ring of sharp teeth. It often springs out of its current victim to catch new opponents flatfooted.

Disease (Ex): Filth fever—bite, Fortitude save (DC 12), incubation period 1d3 days; damage 1d3 temporary Dexterity and 1d3 temporary Constitution (see Disease, page 74 in *Core Rulebook II*).



Animate Dead (Sp): A dregworm can animate the remains of its slain humanoid victim for up to one week after its death. During this time, the dregworm continues to devour the insides of its slain victim until it is little more than a hollow husk. When its current victim's insides are almost completely devoured, the dregworm manoeuvres it close to other potential prey and springs from the dead flesh of the body it currently inhabits. It frequently catches its next prey flatfooted when bursting out of its former host in that fashion.

Vermin: Dregworms are immune to mind-influencing effects. They also have darkvision (60-foot range).

Skills: Dregworms receive a +16 circumstance bonus to Hide checks when hidden inside a slain victim.

ICE SCARAB

Medium Vermin (Cold)

Hit Dice: 3d8+3 (16 hp)

Initiative: +0

Speed: 30 ft. (6 squares), fly 60 ft. (average)

AC: 15 (+5 natural)

Base Attack/Grapple: +2/+3

Attack: Bite +3 melee (1d6+1)

Full Attack: Bite +3 melee (1d6+1)

Space/Reach: 5 ft. by 5 ft./5 ft.

Special Attacks: Improved grab

Special Qualities:

Vermin, immunity to cold, vulnerability to fire

Saves: Fort +4, Ref +1, Will +1

Abilities: Str 13, Dex 11, Con 12, Int --, Wis 10, Cha 7

Skills: Hide +8*

Feats: ---

Environment: Arctic and subarctic land and mountains

Organisation: Solitary

Challenge Rating: 2

Treasure: 1/10 coins; 50% goods;

50% items

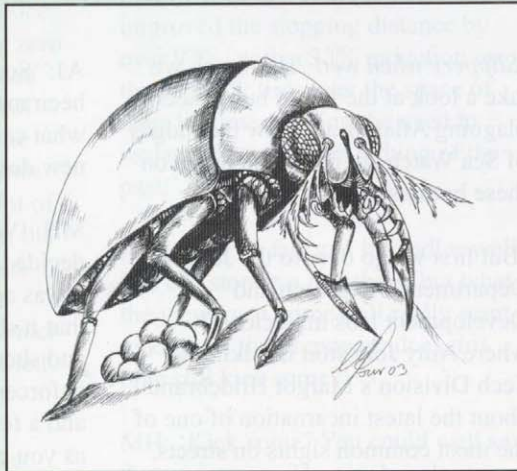
Alignment: Always neutral

Advancement Range: 4-6 HD (Medium), 7-9 HD (Large)

Level Adjustment: ---

Ice scarabs are found only in arctic regions or on snow-capped mountaintops. Their carapaces are completely white, with dark, multifaceted eyes and short, thick, hairy antennae like a moth. Their wicked-looking mandibles extend straight out from the head and have many sharp hooks along their inner surfaces with which to rend prey.

Ice scarabs are solitary, each creature staking out a chunk of territory and aggressively defending it from others of its kind. They mate during the cool months of autumn. Females lay 1d8 small, white eggs (looking rather like lopsided snowballs) the following winter; the eggs then incubate before hatching in spring with the first thaw. Ice scarab larvae are on their own from birth, subsisting on small insects and rodents (especially lemmings, a particular favourite). They burrow into the earth in the warmest months



of the summer, when the earth is the softest, and metamorphosize into their adult forms, emerging in early autumn.

Ice scarabs traditionally carve a den for themselves deep in a snow bank or glacial ice. This den is only for the scarab that carved it; except for mating season, any others that

approach are immediately attacked. Slain victims are usually brought back to the scarab's den to be devoured in peace and occasionally a victim's possessions can be found in the rear of the den, pushed out of the way.

Combat

Ice scarabs swoop down upon unsuspecting foes and attack with their wicked mandibles. While non-intelligent by mammalian standards, ice scarabs instinctively keep the sun at their backs when flying at a potential victim. Fortunately for the ice scarab, the noise its wings make during flight is minimal and thus usually does not alert its prey.

Improved Grab (Ex): To use this ability, the ice scarab must hit an opponent of Medium size or smaller with its bite attack. Doing so initiates a grapple as a free action without provoking an Attack of Opportunity (grapple bonus +3). If it gets a hold, it does automatic bite damage and may attempt to fly away with its prey. Ice scarabs are capable fliers, able to lift up to 200 additional pounds without degrading their aerial manoeuvrability.

Immunity to Cold (Ex): Fully adapted to life in cold climates, the ice scarab is immune to all cold-based attacks.

Vulnerability to Fire (Ex): Fire causes double damage unless a saving throw for half damage is allowed, in which case it takes half damage on a success and double damage on a failure. Ice scarabs instinctively flee open flames.

Vermin: Ice scarabs are immune to mind-influencing effects. They also have darkvision (60-foot range).

Skills: Due to their coloration, ice scarabs receive a +8 racial bonus to Hide checks in areas of snow and ice.



A judge's best friend is his bike his lawmaster Mk III, to be precise. The original Judge Dredd Roleplaying Game introduced the big beast itself, but like all good gamers, we wanted MORE!

Marc Farrimond, with a little help from Mongoose Rulesmaster Ted Chang, is here to give you more, so saddle up and don't press the Self Destruct button by accident. . .

All this plus a new prestige class allowing your citizens to join the Justice Department!

'Steady there, punk.'

Just Tri D Channel 5: Justice News Monday July 30th 2125

'Good evening and welcome to this week's exciting edition of Justice News, with me your host Judge Susan Gale. Each week we bring you the latest news, reviews and gossip from the world of the Justice Department, interviews with some of the top names and this week is no exception. Coming up in today's programme!

'*British Justice!* I'll be having a chat with Brit-Cit's liaison to Mega-City One, Judge Randolph Winthrop about the differences between the law in Brit-Cit and here at home, and just why our smaller friend is becoming more and more like a sector of the Big Meg everyday.

'*The Badge!* Justice Department Civilian liaison officer Mary Parkinson takes a look at the latest series of this multi-award-winning Tri-D show and takes time to talk with Judge Eric Grundy himself, actor Tom Curse, on the success of the show and rumours of the death of a major character.

'*Slippery when wet!* This week we take a look at the fad of buoy racers plaguing Atlantis and how the judges of Sea Watch are clamping down on these bothersome hooligans.

'But first we go over to the Justice Department's Research and Development labs in Sector 33, where Amy Johnston is talking to Tech Division's Margot Hildebrand about the latest incarnation of one of the most common sights on streets, meg-ways and watching bays, the Lawmaster Mk III.'

AJ: 'Thank you Susan. Good evening Margot and thanks for taking the time out of your busy schedule to talk to us.'

MH: 'Not a problem Amy, always happy to oblige. And the new Lawmaster is really something, I am sure that you will agree!'

AJ: 'So, what improvements have been made over the Mk II version and what can we expect to see from this new design?'

MH: 'Well, Amy, when we first decided to redesign the Mk II, it was agreed on by all involved that it should be from the floor up and should incorporate every law enforcement device we had available, and a few more besides! Firstly, as you can, see the overall design remains very similar to both the Mk I and the Mk II, and only a trained eye will be able to tell the difference between the models from a distance.'

AJ: 'I would think though that there will still be quite a few judge spotters out there who could still see the differences with one eye shut!'

MH: 'Yes, that's always been the

Get Your

Marc Farrimond



Motor Running

case, but you have to understand that the MK III is much more than a new model, it is also one of the most advanced machines in law enforcement. The chassis remains much the same, with the overall configuration built around the existing design, which has been reinforced by the addition of 35mm Xtol tubing, giving the vehicle a lighter frame that is still able to withstand a great deal of punishment.'

AJ: 'I still say that it looks more or less the same, but let's continue. What about the engine. Has that been changed in any way?'

MH: 'Oh yes, it really has been revamped and redesigned. Gone is the old V6 FG 12 engine and in its place is the much larger 4000cc V8 KT 23, capable of reaching zero to sixty miles an hour in less than 4.35 seconds, with a top speed of 265 miles per hour, thanks to the over torque process of the Haynes 39 piston housing. As with a lot of Justice Department technology, the tender for parts is sent to various companies around the city, and assembled in our own plants, under the watchful eyes of highly skilled and experienced tech staff.'

AJ: 'I take it that is to counteract any terrorist measures that would-be saboteurs may plan?'

MH: 'Exactly! During the last robot war, we learned our lesson the hard way and after Nero Narcos sabotaged the Lawgivers, causing them to explode when fired, it was deemed that all weapons and equipment that involved the use of outside manufacturers would be assembled

and checked rigorously by our own staff.'

AJ: 'So the new engine gives the bike more speed, but what about its durability and pressure under the stress and strain of being on the meg-ways of the busiest city on earth?'

MH: 'The V8 is a vast improvement and its fuel consumption ratio gives it a great advantage over other vehicles; it can take off at high speed and stop on a credit, almost literally!'

AJ: 'So I hear. The Synitron Electro phased monitors have also been given the upgrade treatment. So stopping, even on wet or oily surfaces, is still a dream?'

MH: 'Much more, in fact. We have improved the stopping distance by over 97%, with a 33% reduction on the Firerock tires over the space of their lifetime, making the need to replace them so often a thing of the past!'

AJ: 'Okay its fast and it handles well and can stop in a heartbeat, but what the viewers at home will really want to know is the firepower; does this bike still kick some?'

MH: 'Kick some? You could well say that and more. The Cyclops laser has been improved by the addition of twin-mounted Daylon diffusers that concentrate the beam through a quartz-aligned frequencer, giving an overall optimum peak firing rate, extended range, and no loss of power.'

AJ: 'Erm, yes...well, on to other things. The standard bike cannons are still part and parcel of the bike, I take it?'

MH: 'They sure are Amy and we wouldn't have it any other way. Though the Cyclops is by far the most destructive offensive weapon your everyday helm-on-the-street has at his or her disposal, it's the bike cannons that they tend to utilise the most, and we have now improve the coaxial design allowing for a full 270° fire axis, including fully independent targeters on both cannons, allowing for simultaneous firing through the front and rear arcs of the vehicle.'

AJ: 'Sounds impressive! But what do the judges on the streets think of the improvements?'

MH: 'The Mk III has been in service in Sectors 190, 240 and 301 for the past 9 months and is due to be introduced throughout the city during the next year. The sectors that have been road testing the Mk III have reported a dramatic increase in the overall performance of the bike, with far fewer breakdowns and faster response times. All in all it's a vast improvement that we are justly proud of!'

AJ: 'And quite rightly so, I am sure. Well thank you, Margot, for taking this time to talk us through the finer points of the new vehicle.'

MH: 'My pleasure.'

AJ: 'And remember folks the best way to avoid being on the wrong end of one of these stunning machines is to obey the Law and keep out of trouble. I'm Amy Johnston... now, back over to Susan in the studio with Judge Winthrop.'

The Lawmaster Mk III Expanded Rules

The Mk III Lawmaster is the last word in law enforcement on the mean streets of Mega-City One and, as one would expect given its nature, it is extremely powerful and, in the right hands, one of the most deadly vehicles at the disposal of the Justice Department. Though judges are trained intensively in the use of their mounts, few ever get to use the bike to its full potential. If the players think of their bikes as Non-Player Characters that they control, then they really are not going to far from the mark. Of course, it should not be the bike that solves crimes, but rather it is a tool to help get the job done.

The Auto Pilot.

Perhaps the most under-rated but most important piece of equipment on the Lawmaster is its Synitron GX 13 autopilot. When used correctly a judge is free to track a vehicle, access information via the bike's powerful computer, or to fire his Lawgiver at an escaping perp. The list is almost endless.

Perhaps the best use of the autopilot is when the judge is not actually on the vehicle, but on foot. The judge makes a simple Technical check (DC14) and if successful the bike will respond to the judge's commands, follow at a distance, track a target and fire on command, or respond to a judge's location and home in on the beacon in the judge's microphone mouth piece. The bike's computer allows it to make attacks as if it had an attack value of 14 and, given the fact that it uses electronic imaging to

target its perp, it can shoot or track in total darkness.

Another feature of the Lawmaster's computer are its in-built recognition devices in the seat, monitor and handlebars that can detect when an unauthorised person is attempting to gain access to, or ride, the machine. The bike will respond automatically with a verbal warning to the perp, ordering them to retreat from the vehicle or suffer the consequences. Those stupid enough to ignore the warnings will find that they will fall prey to the security defences and will



suffer a large electro shock (damage 2d12 + 5 subdual damage, ignore Damage Reduction) that will more than likely render them unconscious.

The Self Destruct

All versions of the Lawmaster bike have been fitted with an electronic countermeasure as a last resort. A small pack of G-Tex explosives is located in the primary core of the bike's computer and, on a vocal command from the judge, it can be detonated to wipe out all of the bike's core memory files and data, thus stopping anyone accessing restricted data.

A second and much more powerful pack of G-Tex is located directly behind the Cyclops laser mounting and, on a verbal command from the

judge operating the vehicle, can be triggered causing the bike to self-destruct, creating devastation over a wide area and leaving nothing behind to salvage. A Technical check (DC15) is required to issue the command to the bike to self-destruct, dealing out 8d6 + 6 damage (DC 15 Reflex save for half damage) with AP 16 to anything in a 30-foot radius. The self-destruct should only be used as a final resort and Games Masters may wish to penalise players who abuse this device. Lawmasters are, after all, a trifle expensive to replace on a weekly basis.

Stowage Pods

Each Lawmaster Mk III is equipped with twin panniers that contain emergency supplies for the judge, such as extra cuffs, cling nets, spare lawgiver parts and more. On long haul journeys out of the city and into the Cursed Earth extra rations and ammunitions fill these pods,

as well as a spare Lawgiver, uniform and boots, and medical kit. Given the fact that a judge may be out of the city and away from the resources of the Sector House, the stowage pods can be invaluable for a judge. At the discretion of the Games Master, judges who are going on long haul missions out of the city may choose what equipment and weapons they wish to carry in the panniers of their bike, from extra rad-pills and rations, down to extra Hi-Ex ammo.

Main Sodium/Quartz Headlamp

The main headlamp on the Lawmaster is a valuable asset to the street judge; not only does it illuminate the dark and dangerous streets late at night, it also has a variety of spectrums of light it can

emit allowing for the detection of thermal signatures and other heat traces, giving the judge an advantage when it comes to tracking down a perp. The intensity of the light can be varied by the judge via the onboard computer and can be ordered to deliver a full beam that can be seen from hundreds of feet away, and temporarily blind anyone close enough who is not wearing protective glasses or goggles. Judges pursuing perps who have fled from them may attempt to make a Track check at a +8 circumstance bonus during the first round, dependant on the amount of time elapsed. The headlight can detect thermal signatures from fleeing perps, such as footprints or weapons fire, but only for a short period of time. After each round the circumstance bonus drops by one until, finally, after eight rounds it reaches zero. If the perp is not detected within eight rounds the bike has lost the trail or the heat given off has cooled drastically.

The main headlamp has another function, allowing the judge to dazzle an adversary using its intense beam. When ordered by the judge controlling the bike, the onboard computer will emit a powerful beam of light from the main headlamp, causing anyone not wearing eye protection to make a Fortitude save at DC 15 or suffer a -6 penalty on all actions taken during the next round. Judges wearing the standard issue helmet are immune to this penalty as the built-in flash compensators in their visor protects their vision from blinding lights. Anyone who makes the save is assumed to have shielded their eyes from the glaring light and will suffer no penalties.

Siren

The siren on a Lawmaster can be set to a wide variety of sound levels to aid the judge, from its normal setting designed to clear the path of traffic in its way to a much louder decibel setting that can be heard from almost a mile away. When at its loudest setting, the siren will cause anyone within 15 feet of the vehicle not



Remember, if you go out of the Big Meg you may find yourself on an unfamiliar machine, so be prepared and don't take your Lawmaster for granted.

wearing protective ear covering to make a Fortitude save (DC 15) or be temporarily deafened. Anyone who fails this save will suffer a -6 on all Listen checks they may need to make, and suffer a -2 on all attack rolls that involve concentration for the next 1d3 rounds.

Scattergun

In recent years the judge's main back-up weapon on the streets has been the scattergun, a weapon which, while not comparing favourably to the Lawgiver, provides competent backup and has a terror value which by far exceeds its capabilities.

Though the scattergun is still in wide use throughout the city, some sectors are slowly phasing out this weapon and replacing it with the far more powerful Colt Widowmaker. The scattergun is predominantly a back-up weapon for the judge on the slab and would only be drawn out of its bike mounted holster under the most pressing of circumstances.

The Widowmaker, however, is a far more powerful weapon and Gamers Masters who find that players are relying heavily on its firepower should consider restricting its availability.

Ideally the scattergun should only be used for riot control situations though it is down to the judgement of each individual judge as to when they draw their scattergun. Games Masters may prefer to restrict Widowmaker access to specific deployment circumstances, such as if the judges are likely to encounter serious opposition and support units are limited.

+++ Alert! Alert! Alert! +++

New Prestige Class on next page! Be alert, Citizen!

Justice Department Civilian Liaison Officer

The everyday faces that most citizens see in their lives are the street judges, though there are many facets to the Justice Department and its involvement with the citizens.

Each Sector House has its own cadre of highly trained civilian liaison officers whose job it is to act as intermediaries between the citizens and the Justice Department itself. The civilian liaison officers are responsible for attending block council meetings, pro-justice/citizen rallies, and any other event that involves both the citizens and the Justice Department in a non-legal way. That said, all citizen liaison officers are highly trained in the art of negotiation and are often called in if there is a case of kidnapping or a siege to talk sense into the kidnappers.

Many civilian liaison officers are made up from the ranks of families of judges who wish to maintain some form of contact with the department, or in some extreme cases failed cadets who have shown the right aptitude. With so much time spent in close contact with the citizens, many civilian liaison officers gain the respect of the vast majority of citizens, from giving speeches at meetings to hosting Justice News on Tri-D.

Hit Die: d6

Requirements

To qualify as a civilian liaison officer, a character must fulfil all the following criteria:

Abilities: Charisma: +15

Skills: Bluff 5 ranks, Computer Use 7 ranks, Concentration 4 ranks, Knowledge (law) 10 ranks, Knowledge (sector) 9 ranks, Search 9 ranks, Spot 7 ranks, Technical 8 ranks.

Class Skills

The civilian liaison officer's class skills (and the key ability for each skill) are Computer Use (Int), Concentration (Con), Drive (Dex), Intimidate (Cha), Knowledge (law), Listen (Wis), Perform (Cha), Search (Int), Spot (Wis), Streetwise (Wis), Swim (Str), (Dex), and Technical (Int).

Skill points at each level: 8 + Int modifier.

Class Features

All of the following are class features of the civilian liaison officer

Public Speaking: At first level the civilian liaison officer has learned the fine art of speaking in public and can use his skills to help calm or diffuse tensions at rallies or meetings. The officer gives out sound advice and uses his training to assist when speaking to others. As such the officer gains a competence bonus of +4 on all Perform (public speaking) checks he is required to make.

Negotiation: Though their primary role is to act as mediators between the citizens of Mega-City One and the Justice Department, there are times when civilian liaison officers can be called in to help negotiate during hostage situations, labour strikes (though rare) and rallies where anti-justice feelings often run high. Though some see civilian liaison officers as little more than paid lackeys, the job they do takes a great deal of strain from the heavy burden of the Justice Department. The character gains a +6 on any Intimidation checks he needs to make and also gains a +4 on Bluff checks.

In the Public Eye: Due to the fact that they are often seen by the public, civilian liaison officers are highly recognisable people, though this can work both in their favour and against them. On the one hand, having a

famous face can open doors that Joe Citizen would not normally be able to enter, allowing access to bars, clubs and events, and bringing with it all the kudos and rewards that being in the spotlight can bring. Likewise, it can also be detrimental and gain the character many enemies, or worse, make them the target of murderous intent. The character gains a +6 Charisma competence check on all Charisma-based checks he makes at the discretion of the Games Master, or likewise can suffer a -6 penalty to any Charisma-based checks he may have to make. Like it or not, being in the public eye is a strange affair.

Bonus Feat: At 4th level the character gains a bonus feat from the following list: Alertness, Dodge, Lightning Reflexes, Luck of Grud, Run and Skill Focus. He must still fulfil any required prerequisites.

Block Politics: As the civilian liaison officer gains the trust and respect of those in everyday life, he learns just who to listen to and who to watch out for. The movers and shakers of each block become all too apparent and the civilian liaison officer keeps his ear to the ground, often finding out valuable information, such as when tensions between rival blocks are running high, way in advance of the judges and, as such, can act accordingly and give tip-offs to his superiors. The character gains a +8 bonus on any attempts that they he have to make for learning information on a block or its activities; this bonus is at the discretion of the Games Master; as is the information divulged.



The Civilian Liaison Officer

Level	Base Attack Bonus	Fort Save	Ref Save	Will Save	Special
1	+0	+0	+0	+2	Public Speaking
2	+1	+0	+0	+3	Negotiation
3	+2	+1	+1	+3	In the Public Eye
4	+3	+1	+1	+4	Bonus Feat
5	+3	+1	+1	+4	Block Politics

Time to get out there and negotiate for the Big Meg, Citizen. Don't forget, if you run into trouble, there will be a Lawmaster along in a few minutes.

WHY I PROBABLY WON'T BE WRITING FOR BABYLON 5

Jonny Nexus

Of all the games that Mongoose do, Babylon 5 should be the one for me. It's a science fiction setting, and I'm a science fiction kind of guy. But there's just one slight problem.

I've never been into Babylon 5.

People are often surprised when they hear this, because it's the sort of thing that I ought to be into. I was a huge fan of Star Trek: The Next Generation, and everyone tells me that B5 is brilliant – similar to Star Trek but with better stories, aliens who aren't just humans with lumps and funny ears, and people who wear space-suits and not pyjamas when they go out exploring. But my love affair with B5 ended before it started, when the very first program was shown on British TV.

I'd been really looking forward to it, and sat down eagerly to watch episode 1. Then came the first spoken line: 'It is now five years since the Earthman Barry Waugh.'

Huh? What's the hell's that supposed to mean?

Five years since Barry Waugh did what? Built a faster-than-light drive? Made contact with an alien race? Emulated his famous ancestor Steve¹ in scoring a century at Lords?

I did eventually work out that they were talking about an 'Earth-Minbari war', and every single person I've told this story to has told me that this was incredibly obvious, and that I'm a moron for not figuring it out in the first place. I would defend myself by pointing out that my brother made exactly the same mistake as me – but I expect everyone would just cite that as

evidence that intelligence (or lack of it) does indeed have a genetic component.

I was still deeply confused by the intro when the programme itself started, and things didn't get much better. Firstly, the script seemed a bit laboured, containing big chunks of what I believe² is called 'exposition':

Woman (introducing herself): 'Hello, I'm Commander such-and-such, of the Psi Corps.'

Man: 'Ah, the Psi Corps, the organisation charged with controlling and monitoring the use of psionic powers...'

I don't think you need to tell her what the Psi Corps is mate, what with her being a member and all that.

The laboured script was accompanied by what seemed to me to be some pretty wooden acting. It seemed like the producers were aiming for a Gerry Anderson style show, but were unsure whether to emulate his early puppet stuff (*Thunderbirds*, *Captain Scarlet*, *Stingray*, etc.) or his later live-action work (*UFO*, *Space 1999*) – and in the end compromised by having a mostly live-action cast except for the commander, who was played by a puppet. (To be fair, its walk was more life-like than Captain Scarlet's but, then again, I think Captain Scarlet had a better range of facial expressions).

I have to confess that by this point I was probably watching it in a very negative mood, and I'm sure there were lots of good things happening. But I didn't care. I was still trying to work out which one was Barry.

I never watched another episode.

So when Mongoose announced that they were doing the Babylon 5 game (actually, when they set out a fiendishly cryptic and vague set of clues hinting at the subject of the 'secret' game – hints at which a load of uber-geeks took one look at and immediately said: 'Ah! Babylon 5') it occurred to me that as an aspiring gaming writer, this might be exactly the kind of game I could get my teeth into to. If it weren't for the slight fly in the ointment of me never having watched the programme.

But then I came up with a plan. My mate Bog Boy³ is a big B5 fan, and has every one of the 110 episodes on either tape or DVD. A bit of work on the calculator (45 minutes per episode, plus 5 minutes for a toilet and refreshment break, plus 8 hours of sleep per day) revealed that it would only take me 5.73 days to watch the entire five seasons. All I need was to take five days annual leave, and on the sixth day I'd emerge blinking into the sunlight, a hard-core B5 fan just ready to get my teeth into some challenging writing jobs.

Until I considered how similar this scenario was to those dodgy science-fiction films where the hero is strapped screaming to a chair whilst 3 zillion whammobytes of data is inserted straight into his brain – and I realised that by the sixth day I'd be insane.

So I think we can say that the chances of you guys seeing my name on anything Babylon 5 related are somewhere between zero and damn all with zero currently out in front.

But you know what? Deep down in my heart I know that B5's a programme I'd really enjoy watching. So if you happen to hear that a UK channel's going to show it again, from the start, then drop me a line.

This time I might actually watch it.

¹ Steve Waugh, a famous Australian cricketer.

² I'm not completely sure.

³ No, it isn't his real name.

the vengeance of mael dun

Ian Sturrock



GAMES MASTER'S INTRODUCTION

This is an introductory scenario for the *Slaine RPG*. It is based on the Irish 'wonder-voyage' tale *The Voyage of Maeldun*, though I have placed the action firmly in the Land of the Young and added a fair number of fomorians to spice things up a little. The original tale, from the 11th century, is quite Christian in its overtones, and again those aspects have been altered a little to give it a more pagan, Goddess-oriented theme as is fitting to the *Slaine RPG*. If nothing else, the original ending – in which the protagonist made peace with his father's killer – had to go. . .

You will need a copy of the *Slaine RPG* to play. The supplement *Tir Nan Og* would be useful to get a better idea of the geography for some of the back-story, but is not crucial. Likewise, since the characters are Sessair, the *Sessair Tribe Book* could also be handy.

Six pre-generated characters are provided, all of them members of the Sessair tribe, though the adventure can be run with other characters if adapted slightly. All are 1st level, and so players will need to exercise caution in deciding how to handle the hazards presented by the voyage – and remember that one of the best ways is often to simply sail off to the next island. That said, they have been deliberately generated to be quite tough, heroic, 1st level characters who will have the opportunity to progress to 2nd level during the adventure. In any case, it is perfectly acceptable for one or more of the characters to die on this ill-omened voyage. The adventure is intended for between three and six characters, but is optimised for around four – you may wish to adjust the

hazards slightly for different numbers of characters.

Much of the action is fairly linear, but the characters almost always have the choice as to whether or not to interact with the denizens of the various islands they find on their voyage, and what form the interaction, if any, will take. This should give them sufficient free will to keep them interested, but the action should have an almost predestined quality to it in any case, which fits the milieu of the game quite well. It should still be a lot of fun. The adventure is not quite 'ready to run' just for space reasons – but if you are an experienced Games Master, you should find it no hardship to come up with any number of expansions to what is written, either in advance or even during play. It should be played as somewhat light-hearted and very manic – your players need to be reasonably willing to over-act and also to lose their characters to horrible death, since this is a one-off adventure anyway.

The moral of this adventure – if moral there is – is 'never break your geas'. Or rather, expect to break your geas, but be prepared to suffer the consequences. Many of the encounters over the course of the adventure are designed to put the players into difficult positions, where it will be difficult not to break their geases.

PLAYERS' INTRODUCTION

Ailill Edge-of-Battle, originally from Cruachu, was a mighty warped warrior who became one of the most noted members of King Grudnew's Red Branch in Murias. Seventeen years ago, on a border raid into south-western Alba, Ailill was quite captivated by the beauty of a young

Whenever we talk to gamers they always seem to ask the same question: When are you going to do something new for *Slaine*?

Here you go then. . .

Finian witch, Megan. He recited his ancestry and a list of his great deeds of battle to her, and professed his love. When she spurned his affection, he grew angry, struck her to the ground and raped her.

This vile and dishonourable deed was to have its consequences, some good, some ill. Megan cursed Ailill and he soon died, slain by fomorian raiders while commanding the garrison of a fort near Cruachu. The following spring, Megan bore Ailill's child. Feeling congenitally unsuited to the task of motherhood, she took him to her friend Nuala, Sessair chief of Rath Grainne and one of the most powerful war-witches in all of Eriu. Nuala raised the young Maeldun as her own, alongside her own three sons, Uthechar, Kelchar and Rothchar.

Maeldun grew to be a strong and skilled warrior, and when in recent years he had his first warp-spasm he determined to seek out his true parentage. Finding and reconciling himself with his mother Megan, he discovered from her who his father had been, as well as the circumstances of his conception. In the long years since Ailill's death, Megan had thought much of her son, and though she still hated his dead father she recognised Maeldun's need to know more about his true origins. Next, Maeldun travelled with his three foster-brothers to Cruachu, where he met his father's kin and was well-received by them and welcomed into their family.

On visiting Ailill's grave, Maeldun was struck with a desire to avenge his father's death. He travelled next to Murias and petitioned the Sessair

tribal druid, Cathbad, to grant him a blessing for such vengeance, and help him determine precisely who had killed Ailill Edge-of-Battle. Cathbad divined that the slayer was a senior fomorian warrior called Leix, a tall sea-devil with scarlet goat-horns twisting up from his scaly, ugly head. He prophesied that Maeldun would successfully avenge his father if he sailed out to Tory Island with only a druid* for his companion. Taking anyone else would curse the quest with disaster.

One of Maeldun's childhood playmates, Diuran, had recently completed the first stages of his druidic training and immediately begged to be taken with him. Maeldun agreed. He is now ready to sail for Tory Island, about to set off from the harbour at Cruachu. His foster brothers have come out to say their farewells to him.

*If there are six players, add the phrase 'and a dwarf' here.

GOOD-bye, FARE thee well

At this point the Games Master should describe the scene. The characters are gathered at Cruachu's harbour, which is no more than a primitive wooden jetty, for the folk of Cruachu are wary of the sea and its demons. Maeldun's boat is not much more fancy or extensive than a large coracle with a single sail, a storage chest and water butt at one end, and a 'cabin' formed from stretched canvas over a wooden frame at the other. He was given it when he announced his quest to the locals, by the family of a fisherman who once dared the seas in it, till he too was slain by the fomors.

A fine breeze is blowing from the south, ready to carry the boat north to Tory Island for Maeldun's reckoning with his father's slayer. Maeldun and Diuran (and Kainen, if available) are aboard, with the Mac Aed brothers watching from the shore as the boat sets sail.

At this point, the Mac Aed brothers should attempt to board too. The boat will certainly carry the six of them,

new spell: prophecy

Cathbad was able to perform a fortune-telling for Maeldun by virtue of his *prophecy* spell, listed below. This is a new spell suitable for general incorporation into your *Sláine RPG* campaign. Cathbad cast the spell with but one restriction, which is that Maeldun should take only a druid (and a dwarf, if there are six players) with him on his quest. A second restriction applied, chosen by the gods (usually the Games Master; in this case, the scenario writer), which is that Maeldun is not to kiss the lips of any woman until his quest is done.

Prophecy

Divination

EP Cost: 5 points

Components: V, S

Casting Time: 1 hour

Range: Touch

Subject: Willing creature touched

Duration: Up to a year and a day, or until quest is fulfilled

Saving Throw: No

Spell Resistance: No

Prerequisites: Divination skill 15+

Skill Check: Divination (DC 15)

Prophecy allows the sorcerer to determine any special conditions or restrictions the subject should abide by to ensure his success in a specific course of action. In effect, it acts rather like a temporary geas, applied for the duration of a particular adventure. The subject of the spell must be willing, and indeed must specifically request the *prophecy* from the sorcerer in question. The subject must ask for the *prophecy* to be cast with regards to one task or quest he plans to undertake.

The sorcerer may specify between one and three conditions, each similar to a minor geas, which must be obeyed for the venture to have any chance of complete success. For each condition specified by the sorcerer, the gods (in the form of the Games Master) will also specify one condition.

So long as the subject is able to abide by the restrictions, he gains a +1 to +3 insight bonus, the precise bonus being equal to the number of conditions specified by the sorcerer. This insight bonus is applied to all attack rolls and saving throws that relate specifically to achieving the quest specified. However, for each restriction the subject breaks during the course of the quest, this insight bonus is reduced by -2. If it is reduced below 0, it becomes an insight penalty, and may go as low as -3 (for a subject with three conditions specified by the sorcerer and three by the Games Master). Any insight penalties gained in this way apply until the quest is achieved, and apply to all attack rolls and saving throws, not just those made directly in pursuit of the quest.

Any character who has failed to abide by one or more of the restrictions from this spell is also likely to suffer abnormally high occurrences of bad luck. These are always at the Games Master's discretion.

If the subject ever abandons the quest uncompleted, or if he fails to achieve it within a year and a day, the spell ends (along with all attendant bonuses and penalties) but the subject gains a number of permanent minor geases or minor weirds equal to the number of conditions originally specified by the sorcerer.

though they may be a little short of provisions and water should they be blown off course at all. This will not bother the impulsive Mac Aeds, if they are being played properly. Uthechar at least must accompany Maeldun, due to the terms of his geas. Also, due to the terms of Maeldun's geas, if any of the brothers specifically request they be permitted on board as a boon, he must allow them to do so. One or more of the group will break either a geas, an obligation, or both by the time the boat leaves sight of the shore. Such is the destiny of heroes. . .

In the original tale, Maeldun's foster-brothers actually leap into the sea at the last moment, and he is forced to either pull them aboard and break the prophecy, or see them drown and die, for none of them can swim.

... AND SAIL THE STORMY SEA, STORMY SEA

The journey to Tory Island is uneventful, with the breeze continuing to blow them steadily and surely to the north. The Games Master may call for the occasional Profession (sailor) check, but generally he can content himself with describing the clear and beautiful seas (though there was a definite feeling that the wind picked up a little and the sky darkened the moment the first of the Mac Aeds set foot on the boat).

On arriving within sight of Tory Island, the characters may attempt Spot checks (DC 10) to spy one particular fomorian glowering at them from the high cliffs on the south side of the island. This is Leix himself, the very creature the group are searching for, the foul slayer of Maeldun's father. Could the quest really be so easy to achieve? Perhaps it might. . . if Maeldun was able to leave his foster brothers at home. Given that those foster brothers are player characters, that seems unlikely, and the first of Maeldun's pieces of bad luck for failing to obey the prophecy takes the form of a sudden storm, carrying the boat off to the west and the open ocean. Even jumping into the sea would be of no use here, since there is no obvious route up the cliffs

and onto the island itself. Leix simply glowers at the party and perhaps throws the occasional rock or spear from his higher elevation. The party are unlikely to even get a chance to do that, though Maeldun may manage to shout a hastily composed and immediately ignored challenge.

THESE BLESSED ISLANDS

The bulk of the adventure takes place on various islands scattered about the western ocean. In the original legend, these islands fall into essentially four types. The Games Master should feel free to use any or all of these islands, in any order. Depending on the players' interests, he may prefer to avoid using certain of the islands. Generally, 2d6 days should pass between any pair of islands, and so the party will often be short of food by the time they get to an isle.

'PROVISIONS' ISLANDS

These can be used whenever the meagre supplies aboard the boat begin to run out. They include the following:

- † An island populated only by large birds, easy to catch and very tasty.
- † An island with cliffs preventing access, but with a single branch of an apple tree dangling down. This branch can be cut or pulled into the boat, and will begin to sprout large and tasty apples within minutes of being removed from the main tree. At the Games Master's discretion, these apples may have healing or rejuvenative powers.
- † Another island full of apples, but this one is inhabited by fire-



breathing pigs (treat as boars, but with the special attack of a 2d4 fiery breath weapon). The pigs eat the apples, but only in the

mornings; in the afternoons, they retreat to underground caverns.

- † An island walled about with golden stones like a great cromlech. In the centre is a fountain that flows with whey, milk, ale or wine, depending on the season.
- † An island that has an arc of water flowing over the top of it like a rainbow, suspended in mid-air. This arc is full of leaping salmon and other fish, and characters who simply hold out weaponry beneath the down-flowing end of the arc will soon spear more than enough tasty seafood to fill up the ship with provisions.
- † A heavily forested island, with every tree being covered in large red berries that intoxicate and nourish at the same time.
- † An island with a large, uninhabited, stone house, with sufficient beds and food for all the company. The cellar is a sea-cave with a one-way stone valve to trap salmon, enabling them to also replenish their stores here.

MONSTER ISLANDS

A variety of monstrous creatures inhabit several of the islands. In the original legend, Maeldun and his comrades tend to flee these, and the Games Master should not be afraid to make this kind of foe very tough; a party that throws themselves into combat unthinkingly on any of these islands will likely not make it out alive.

- † Several islands have titan settlements upon them. Usually these are relatively peaceable, if intolerant of strangers. They may include titan shepherds and cowherds, titan smiths who will hurl great lumps of molten metal at the party (Reflex saves, DC 12 to avoid 1d8 heat damage), and whole titan villages. Often, provisions may be available here too, if the party is prepared to risk titanic displeasure to steal a pig or calf. One of the islands has only one inhabitant, a grim titan miller who is constantly busy unloading corn and milling it in his great mill. If asked, he explains that he gets a boatload of corn every time

a man of Eriu begrudges another's harvest of corn. He barely knows what to do with the great surplus that comes in.

- † An island swarming with giant ants, each the size of a foal (Medium size). If you have *Core Rulebook III*, you can treat these as generic giant ants.
- † The island of the fierce beast, a great, horse-like thing with huge, clawed paws with which it can throw rocks. Treat this as an elk (*Sláine RPG*), except that instead of the butt attack it has two claw attacks at +7/+7, 1d8+5 or one thrown rock attack at +4, 1d6+5 (range increment 50 feet).
- † Another island with an identical beast to the one above, except that this one is even more deadly – it is warped! If attacked, or even if it sights the party, it will have a warp-spasm of average strength, pelting them with rocks until they retreat.



- † An island that is predominantly made up of an enormous racetrack, round which gigantic horses constantly race. They are watched by whole tribes of goblins (*Sláine RPG*) and Els (found in the *Sláine RPG* web enhancement). These are quite absorbed in the racing, and will not attack the characters, so it would be possible to wander here a while and steal some of the gold and gems that litter the isle; but attacking any of these hordes would probably spell swift doom for the party.

ISLANDS OF ENTRAPMENT

Several islands are designed solely to trap one of the characters. This will only happen to the Mac Aed brothers, since they are not destined to be on the voyage at all. For players who favour a more fair and less mythic

kind of adventure, the Games Master may allow them to effect an escape, or simply avoid using these islands at all.



- † An island full of weeping folk with glossy, midnight-black skin, clad all in black. They cannot be reasoned with and anyone who lands here must make a Will save (DC 10) or be turned black himself, clothes and gear and all, and join the mourners forever.
- † A similar isle to the above, but this one full of laughing people, as though all are in the grip of madness. Again, any who land here must make Will saves (DC 10) or laugh and never leave again. . .

ISLANDS OF WONDER

These are places of adventure and strangeness. Several of them have friendly inhabitants, which would allow for the group to stay a season or more – certainly by the time winter begins to approach, they would be well advised to try to find an isle where they can stay till the spring. This would give an opportunity for the group to gain a level, if you think they have achieved enough to merit that. Most of these isles are an opportunity for extensive roleplaying. They can also be places where a new character can be acquired to replace a lost one – perhaps a shipwrecked sailor from Tir Nan Og who has been living among the community there.

Be sure to have the inhabitants of whichever isle they are on at midwinter insist that they participate in solstice rituals which involve vigils wearing ceremonial red hats, just in case Kelchar thought he had the easy geas.

- † An island with a small fort inhabited only by an ancient

and wise druid, Bricriu. The fort overlooks a great pool surrounded by fruit trees. Bricriu is welcoming, and can provide nourishment and healing for any who desire it. He exists on fruit and nuts, fresh or dried, but the island is also home to a number of wild sheep if any of the party prefer meat. If they do stay here, they will see an enormous bird come and land by the lake after a few days. Though it is large enough to carry off a hairy one, it is old and decrepit and appears to want only to feast on great red apples from the fruit-trees. At dusk, two smaller birds, only the size of massive eagles, land to groom and clean it. After this it plunges into the pool and rises phoenix-like, a young and powerful bird once more, before flying off. Any character who immerses himself fully in the pool will gain a permanent +2 enhancement bonus to Strength, at the cost of a new minor geas never to harm any bird.

- † An island inhabited by beautiful women, the queen of whom will fall in love with Maeldun. All the characters can find partners here, if they wish it, as well as generous hospitality for as long as they desire, but the women are witches and do not wish to let them leave. They will not forcibly prevent such a course of action, but the queen has a spell that might help. This involves hurling a reel of twine at the boat. Any aboard it must make Will saving throws (DC 12). The one who fails (or one of those who fails, selected randomly) will find himself compelled to reach out and grab the line, which sticks irrevocably to his hand. The queen can reel in the entire boat with this, and the characters will be obligated by local rules of hospitality to stay at least another three days or be treated as enemies and attacked. The only options here if anyone does fail the Will save are to either be reeled back in, throw the failed character into the sea and allow him to be reeled back in alone, or strike off his hand with a sword or axe (see the *Sláine RPG*, page 32,

for the consequences of losing a hand, usually as a major weird).
† An island uninhabited save for a small, ordinary-looking cat, but scattered about with chalk-white houses and towers. The cat will follow the group in a disinterested way as they explore the place. Each house has food and drink in

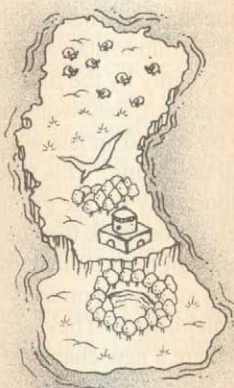


abundance laid out for a feast, and three rows of treasure on the walls – gold and silver brooches, gold and silver neck-torcs, and huge masterwork swords of gold and silver. If the characters remark on these treasures, the cat will suddenly seem interested, staring at them in a cautionary manner. Handle Animal or Knowledge (nature) checks (DC 10) here will indicate that it seems to want them to leave the treasure alone, though it does not seem to mind if they help themselves to the food. The cat understands human tongues, and though it cannot speak it will communicate as best it can if asked its opinions. If anyone touches any of the treasures, the cat suddenly bursts into flames and leaps for the offender. Treat it as a normal cat, except that its Dexterity is 25 and if it is on fire each of its attacks does an additional +1d6 fire damage. If it slays anyone in this manner, it will appear to have shot right through him like a flaming arrow.

† An island with a steep-sided bronze fortress surrounded by a moat, with a glass bridge crossing the moat. Anyone attempting to cross the bridge will find it bucks and flings them back. They must make Reflex saves (DC 10) or fall into the moat and have to swim back to the bank. A successful save indicates they are deposited back on the outer bank. After they try to cross, a beautiful woman

comes out from the fortress with a bucket, opens a trapdoor in the bridge, fills the bucket with water and returns inside, pausing on the threshold to satirise Maeldun good-naturedly. If the bronze door is struck by any means (perhaps a thrown rock), a musical note sounds and all who hear it must make Will saves (DC 20) or fall fast asleep for a day and a night. (At this point in the story, they try the same thing three times, and in traditional folkloric manner, are allowed to meet the maiden after the third time; your players are probably not quite so patient, though, so it is recommended that you let them meet her after the first time.) She welcomes them in, greeting each man by name with a frank gaze, then feasting and wining them. She shows great affection for Maeldun, though the moment he or any others of the group touch her, the island, woman, fortress and all vanish without trace, leaving the party suddenly at sea once more.

† A region where the very sea turns thin as mist, and clear as a goblet of spring water. Deep below the



surface, bizarre undersea islands are visible. The boat begins to sink into the thinned sea. At this point the characters have a choice – either turn back at once for the more normal seas and find another route, or go on, sinking down into who knows what new adventures. The very final island discovered has a small falcon which has

alighted upon it. Diuran can make a Knowledge (nature) check (DC 10, but allow him to Take 10) to recognise it as a bird of the type found in northern Eriu and on Tory Island. If the group sail after it when it takes to the air once more, it will lead them back to Tory Island.

O FATHER DEAR, I OFTEN HEAR YOU TALK OF ERIU'S ISLE

Revenge for Ailill! At last, after many incidents and perhaps several years, the group return to Tory Island. Older, wiser and hopefully more cautious than they were on their last visit, they may if they choose arrive a little more stealthily this time, perhaps under cover of fog. The Games Master may

OCEAN INCIDENTS

The following can be dropped into play at any time:

- † The boat springs a leak. Maeldun's minimal carpentry skills may suffice to patch it at sea (Craft (wood) check, DC 10), or the group may have to sail for the nearest island to effect repairs.
- † A sudden wave sweeps the boat almost over, causing a random piece of equipment or portion of the supplies to be lost. Characters aboard must make Reflex saves (DC 10) to grab the edge of the boat and hold on, or be swept into the sea.
- † Fomorian sea-devil encounter. The more aquatic fomors from the *Tir Nan Og* sourcebook should be used, if you have access to it. In all likelihood this should be only one or two fomors, as they will be a tricky challenge for the group at this stage in their careers.
- † A storm blows them towards another island. This happens fairly frequently.

allow them to creep right up on Leix and his cronies, who are feasting on human bones and tears.

Leix

Leix is a tall, bulky fomorian with scarlet goat-horns twisting up from the sides of his misshapen head.

Though Leix is deadly on the field of battle, he is fundamentally a bully



and prefers to hack down his foes from behind or wait till they fall from another's blows and move in to finish them off. When he killed Ailill, it was pure fluke. Ailill had just cut a swathe through half-a-dozen massive fomorian raiders, and was bleeding from many wounds, when he cornered Leix who lashed out desperately. Luckily for the fomorian, his axe caught the maddened Sessair warrior a mighty gash across the shoulder and deep into his chest, and Leix was quick to follow up this initial advantage with a lethal rain of axe-blows to finally slay Ailill. He was hailed as a hero by his fellow fomors, and has attempted to use this powerful reputation to avoid fighting too much ever since.

Given half a chance, he will essay a reconciliation with Maeldun, praising his father's prowess and many virtues. This is not because he is genuinely sorry for what he did – he is not, other than being sorry he was there at all, facing a warped warrior – but rather, he fears Maeldun as much as he feared his father, knowing he may not be so lucky this time.

Leix will be accompanied by one or more hangers-on, depending on the Games Master's estimation of the party strength at the time (which will largely be dependent on how much they have been permitted to level up during the adventure). These should be treated

as ordinary fomorians. Leix himself should be a reasonable challenge for Maeldun at 2nd level, but perhaps a little easy if he has made it to 3rd.

Medium Monstrous Humanoid (1st level fomorian noble warrior, **H 6'3"**, **W 280 lb.**)

Hit Dice: 2d8+1d10 (14 hp)

Initiative: -1 (-1 Dex)

Speed: 30 ft.

AC: 15 (-1 Dex, +5 natural, +1 scraps of wooden armour)

Attacks: Battle-axe +6 melee

Damage: Battle-axe 1d8+4

Special Qualities: Cold subtype (cold immunity, double damage from fire except on a successful save)

Magic Attack Bonus: +0

Base EP: 3 (-1 Wis, -2 leather tunic)

Face/Reach: 5 ft. by 5 ft./5 ft.

Saves: Fort +3, Ref +3, Will -1

Abilities: Str 17, Dex 8, Con 10, Int 6, Wis 8, Cha 10

Skills: Balance +3, Intimidate +2, Jump +3, Swim +11, Wilderness Survival +1

Feats: Weapon Focus (battle-axe), Power Attack, Cleave

Possessions: Battle-axe (carried in both hands), scraps of wooden armour (treat as leather tunic).

PLAYER CHARACTERS

The characters provided should be used in the order given; so if there are only three players, for example, the characters of Maeldun, Diuran and Uthechar should be used.

All the characters are members of the Sessair tribe, though the dwarf, Kainen, has the drawback that, like most of his kind, he is not regarded as a 'true' Sessair. As Sessair, they all tend towards pride – sometimes overbearing pride – and a willingness to fight given any excuse whatsoever, even the druid.

MAELDUN MAC AILILL

Maeldun is an eighteen-year-old youth of average height and somewhat rangy build, but this unassuming appearance conceals an unconquerable vitality, ready to burst forth into a warp-spasm at any moment. He has fine, reddish hair and pale blue eyes, along with the lightly freckled skin associated with

redheads. For a warped one, he does have a perhaps surprising amount of caution and disdains the usual massive two-handed weapons for a stout shield and simple war-spear.

Maeldun is the son of Ailill Edge-of-Battle, and is proud of his warrior heritage. This pride is tempered with the knowledge of his father's awful temper and disregard of women – the former acceptable in a warped one, but the latter completely antithetical to the ways of the Earth Goddess tribes. Maeldun is determined not to repeat his father's mistakes, and is careful to keep all women in the highest of regard. He also makes an attempt to curb his temper, though this is not always so successful.

Though he now feels accepted into his father's kin, he still regards his foster-brothers and foster-parents as his first family, and bears an enormous affection and love for all of them.

Medium Humanoid (1st level warped one tribal warrior)

Hit Dice: 1d12 (16 hp)

Initiative: +1

Speed: 40 ft.

AC: 15 (+1 Dex, +2 large wooden shield, +2 Door of Battle)

Attacks: Iron war-spear +4 melee; or sling +2 ranged

Damage: Iron war-spear 1d8+2, or sling-stone 1d6

Special Qualities: Tribal fighting style (Sessair: Damage Reduction 1/-, +1 Fortitude save bonus)

Magic Attack Bonus: +1

Base EP: 14 (max 28)

Space/Reach: 5 ft. (1)/5 ft. (1)

Saves: Fort +7, Ref +1, Will +0

Abilities: Str 15, Dex 13, Con 19, Int 9, Wis 11, Cha 12

Skills: Craft (wood) +1, Perform (poetry) +5, Profession (sailor) +2

Feats: Door of Battle

Enech: 2

Possessions: Named iron war-spear 'Vengeance of Ailill,' sling, six slingstones, copper neck-torc, large wooden shield, sailing boat.

Geas: Never refuse a single boon to anyone

DIURAN the RHYMER

Diuran is twenty-two and has completed fully fourteen years of his druidic training and he is regarded as a very promising student despite his (for a druid) very young age. He is just below average height and of average build, but with narrow shoulders and rather weedy arms. His hair is dark brown and cascades down the sides of his head in waves, making him very much of a hit with the ladies.

Though Diuran is training as a druid, his aim one day is to learn the ways of the bard. The path of a druid holds only one attraction for him, and that is that he will get to learn the mysteries of poetry and song. He is not truly averse to sorcery or learning, either, but he is not truly a 'natural' and has to work hard to be any good at either. This he does with only the slightest of complaints, well aware that if he is to be one of the greatest musicians of all Tir Nan Og, he must 'suffer' through this stage first.

In the meantime, though, he does not take his more spiritual duties as a druid too seriously. He is far more interested in the life of adventure that his old friends Maeldun and the Mac Aed brothers seem to lead, and longs for the old days when they played together as boys, fighting with sticks and slings, before he was sent away to the seminary at Durrington. When he heard from Maeldun that a druid was needed to fulfil the prophecy that would let Maeldun avenge his father's slaying, he jumped at the chance to finally go on a quest himself.

Medium Humanoid (1st level human druid)**Hit Dice:** 1d4+2 (6 hp)**Initiative:** +0 (+0 Dex)**Speed:** 30 ft.**AC:** 10 (+0 Dex)**Attacks:** Iron dagger -1 melee; or thrown iron dagger +0 ranged**Damage:** Iron dagger 1d4-1**Special Attacks:** Spells**Special Defences:** Diviner, Know Ogham, Druidic Awe**Magic Attack Bonus:** +3**Base EP:** 8**Space/Reach:** 5 ft. (1)/5 ft. (1)**Saves:** Fort +2, Ref +2, Will +3**Abilities:** Str 9, Dex 11, Con 14, Int 16, Wis 15, Cha 17**Skills:** Bluff +7, Concentration +6,

Diplomacy +7, Divination +9, Heal +6, Knowledge (astronomy) +8, Knowledge (nature) +8, Knowledge (religion) +8, Perform (harp) +7, Perform (poetry) +6, Perform (song) +7, Sorcery +4

Feats: Tap Weirdstone, Lightning Reflexes**Enech:** -**Possessions:** Iron dagger, white druidic robes, spell components.**Geas:** Never refuse one kiss of any woman.**Spells:** *Astronomy – short-term prediction, scrying flames, pacify, flea infestation***UTHECHAR MAC AEO**

Uthechar is the youngest of the three Mac Aed brothers, and by far the most charming and handsome – though his brothers would certainly dispute this. He combines the trademark spiky black hair of the Mac Aeds with the great, soulful brown eyes of his mother, his build athletic but not over-large and his movements all carried out with an easy grace that has women swooning and men looking on in envy. Though he is only seventeen, he is courteous and polite beyond his years, particularly considering his rough warrior training.

Uthechar is basically of very pleasant personality, but he has always felt a desire to keep up with his brothers' martial prowess. For the most part he has achieved this, but is conscious that, as the youngest, he is still sometimes regarded as the baby of the family, and has not yet proved himself to quite the extent his elder brothers have. He gets on extremely well with Maeldun, being closer in age to him than to his own brothers, and will be keen to join any enterprise Maeldun gets involved with – even more so because of his geas.

Medium Humanoid (1st level human noble warrior)**Hit Dice:** 1d10+4 (14 hp)**Initiative:** +2 (+2 Dex)**Speed:** 30 ft.**AC:** 16 (+2 Dex, +2 large wooden shield, +2 Door of Battle)**Attacks:** Iron sword +5 melee; or gae bolga +3 ranged**Damage:** Iron sword 1d8+2, or gae bolga 1d8+1**Magic Attack Bonus:** +3**Base EP:** 6**Space/Reach:** 5 ft. (1)/5 ft. (1)**Saves:** Fort +6, Ref +1, Will +0**Abilities:** Str 15, Dex 14, Con 18, Int 10, Wis 11, Cha 16**Skills:** Diplomacy +4, Intimidate +7, Jump +6, Listen +3**Feats:** Battle Cry, Door of Battle, Weapon Focus (iron sword), Exotic Weapon Proficiency (gae bolga), Exotic Weapon Proficiency (tathlum)**Enech:** 2**Possessions:** Named iron sword, 'Kin-Saviour,' gae bolga, large wooden shield, silver neck-torc.**Geas:** Always accompany any of your brothers or foster-brothers who leave the shores of Eriu for any reason.**KELCHAR MAC AEO**

Kelchar is the middle of the three brothers, and is as touchy as middle children so often seem to be. Never the apple of his parents' eyes, he has devoted even more energy to his warrior training than his brothers in order to make up for it. Years of putting the stone, chariot driving, spear-throwing and axe-wielding have made him, at nineteen years old, a giant of a youth, over six feet tall and broad with it, his forearms as thick as a lesser man's thighs. He is still quick on his feet despite his size though, and his nimbleness has surprised many a former foe, now lying in the narrow house. He has hair so dark it is almost black, which he spikes with the mixture of lime, clay, dung, fat and blood that is traditional to his family. His eyes burn bright like fierce blue flames.

Kelchar has both affection and rivalry for his full brothers Uthechar and Rothchar. If anything he gets on better with Maeldun, perhaps because he feels less threatened by his foster-brother than by his birth brothers. These days he is satisfied that he is a more powerful warrior than Uthechar and Rothchar – he has both the wounds and the brain-balls to prove it – but he will be keen to keep proving that again and again, and wary of the prospect of one of them coming home from a quest covered in glory that he misses out on. For this reason, he is unlikely to let either of them accompany Maeldun without insisting he tags along too.

In combat Kelchar will strike all about him with wild abandon, revelling in his youthful strength and power. Eager for battle to demonstrate his honour and glory, he has already slain more foes than many a man twice his age, and is never likely to shirk from a fight – at least with a human. He is reasonably wary of gigantic or supernatural foes, though he will still take them on if he feels confident he can beat them.

Medium Humanoid (1st level human noble warrior)

Hit Dice: 1d10+3 (13 hp)

Initiative: +3 (+3 Dex)

Speed: 30 ft.

AC: 13 (+3 Dex)

Attacks: Iron great-axe +5 melee; or tathlum +6 ranged

Damage: Iron great-axe 2d8+4, or tathlum 1d6+3

Magic Attack Bonus: +0

Base EP: 6

Space/Reach: 5 ft. (1)/5 ft. (1)

Saves: Fort +5, Ref +2, Will +0

Abilities: Str 17, Dex 16, Con 16, Int 13, Wis 11, Cha 11

Skills: Intimidate +4, Climb +5, Handle Animal +2, Profession (sailor) +4

Feats: Exotic Weapon Proficiency (great-axe), Power Attack, Cleave, Exotic Weapon Proficiency (gae bolga), Exotic Weapon Proficiency (tathlum)

Enech: 3

Possessions: Named iron great-axe, 'Plunging-Hawk', tathlum (+2 Int bonus), large wooden shield, silver neck-torc, sack of lime (for making more tathlums).

Geas: Never wear a red hat on midwinter's night.

ROTHCHAR MAC AEO

The eldest of the Mac Aed brothers is also the only one to have taken advantage of Rath Grainne's sorcerous traditions to learn a little magic from his mother. He is twenty years of age and at 6'2" already taller than his father Aed. Though he is not so broad as Kelchar he is wirily muscular and fast as a striking adder with his blade. His eyes are blue and, like his brothers, he is crowned with spiky black hair of which he is inordinately proud.

Rothchar loves his foster-brother Maeldun equally with his two brothers

Kelchar and Uthechar. He is quite devoted to all three, and is seriously considering joining Maeldun on his quest, though the druid's prophecy forbade it. He is wary of magic, but has little experience with prophecies and geases, and in his youthful enthusiasm cares more for helping out his foster-brother than he worries about going against the word of a druid.

Rothchar has a particular hatred of fomorians, though like most Sessair he will happily fight anyone who so much as looks at him in a peculiar manner. For this reason, too, he will be eager to accompany Maeldun.

Medium Humanoid (1st level human noble warrior)

Hit Dice: 1d10+2 (12 hp)

Initiative: +4 (+4 Dex)

Speed: 30 ft.

AC: 18 (+4 Dex, +2 large wooden shield, +2 Door of Battle)

Attacks: Iron sword +5 melee; or gae bolga +5 ranged

Damage: Iron sword 1d8+3, or gae bolga 1d8+1

Special Attacks: Spells

Magic Attack Bonus: +0

Base EP: 8

Space/Reach: 5 ft. (1)/5 ft. (1)

Saves: Fort +4, Ref +3, Will +2

Abilities: Str 17, Dex 18, Con 14, Int 10, Wis 15, Cha 10

Skills: Bless +4, Sorcery +3, Jump +7, Ride +5

Feats: Salmon Leap, Door of Battle, Salmon Leap Attack, Exotic Weapon Proficiency (gae bolga), Exotic Weapon Proficiency (tathlum)

Enech: 2

Possessions: Named iron sword, 'Sea-Devil-Splitter', gae bolga, large wooden shield, silver neck-torc.

Geas: Never greet a fomorian with any words other than a challenge, threat or taunt.

Spells: *Blade blessing, sign of shielding, cure injury*

KAINEN THE WILY

Kainen is a dwarf and, predictably, a thief. He regards himself as an essentially classy thief, preferring to rob ancient tombs or tribal enemies rather than his neighbours, but has been known to lower his standards in times of need. He is of typical height and build for a

dwarf, with chin-length, dirty blond hair poking out from under his habitually worn brown leather hood, which helps to conceal knowing blue eyes.

Kainen is the son of Moinen, King Grudnew's Royal Parasite and general court fool. He is rather bitter about this, feeling that his father is ridiculed for his race. Kainen is determined never to let anyone ridicule him, and he will be ready with a stab in the back for any who do. Other than this he is a friendly enough fellow, and gets on well enough with warrior and druid alike, so long as they respect him. If he is on this quest at all, it will be at the request of Cathbad, who knows and likes him.

Though as a dwarf Kainen has no geas, he is somewhat light-fingered, and finds it hard to resist just picking up little 'souvenirs' wherever he goes – even if big, stupid humans might sometimes consider that to be a breach of hospitality or something.

Medium Humanoid (1st level dwarf thief)

Hit Dice: 1d6+2 (8 hp)

Initiative: +5 (+5 Dex)

Speed: 30 ft.

AC: 16 (+5 Dex, +1 leather tunic)

Attacks: Iron short-sword +5 melee; or bow +5 ranged; or taunt +4 ranged

Damage: Iron short-sword 1d6, or bow 1d6; or taunt special

Special Defence: Damage Resistance 2/- against subdual damage only, Jack-of-all-Trades, Read Ogham, Traps

Magic Attack Bonus: +2

Base EP: 0

Space/Reach: 5 ft. (1)/5 ft. (1)

Saves: Fort +2, Ref +7, Will +2

Abilities: Str 10, Dex 20, Con 15, Int 14, Wis 10, Cha 15

Skills: Appraise +6, Balance +7, Bluff +8, Climb +4, Craft (flint knapper) +7, Disable Device +6, Escape Artist +9, Hide +9, Listen +4, Move Silently +9, Open Lock +9, Pick Pocket +11, Search +6, Swim +4

Feats: Weapon Finesse (iron short-sword)

Enech: 1

Possessions: Named iron short-sword, 'Kidney-Spitter', bow, twelve arrows, thieves' tools, leather tunic.



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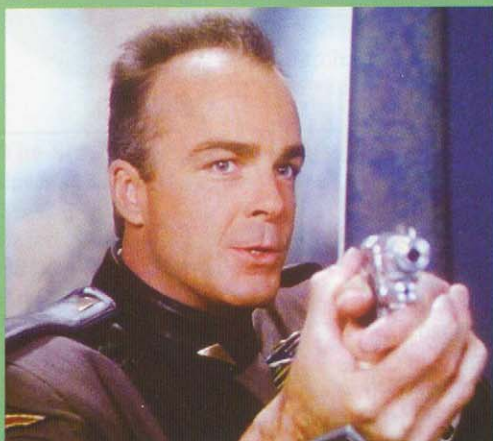
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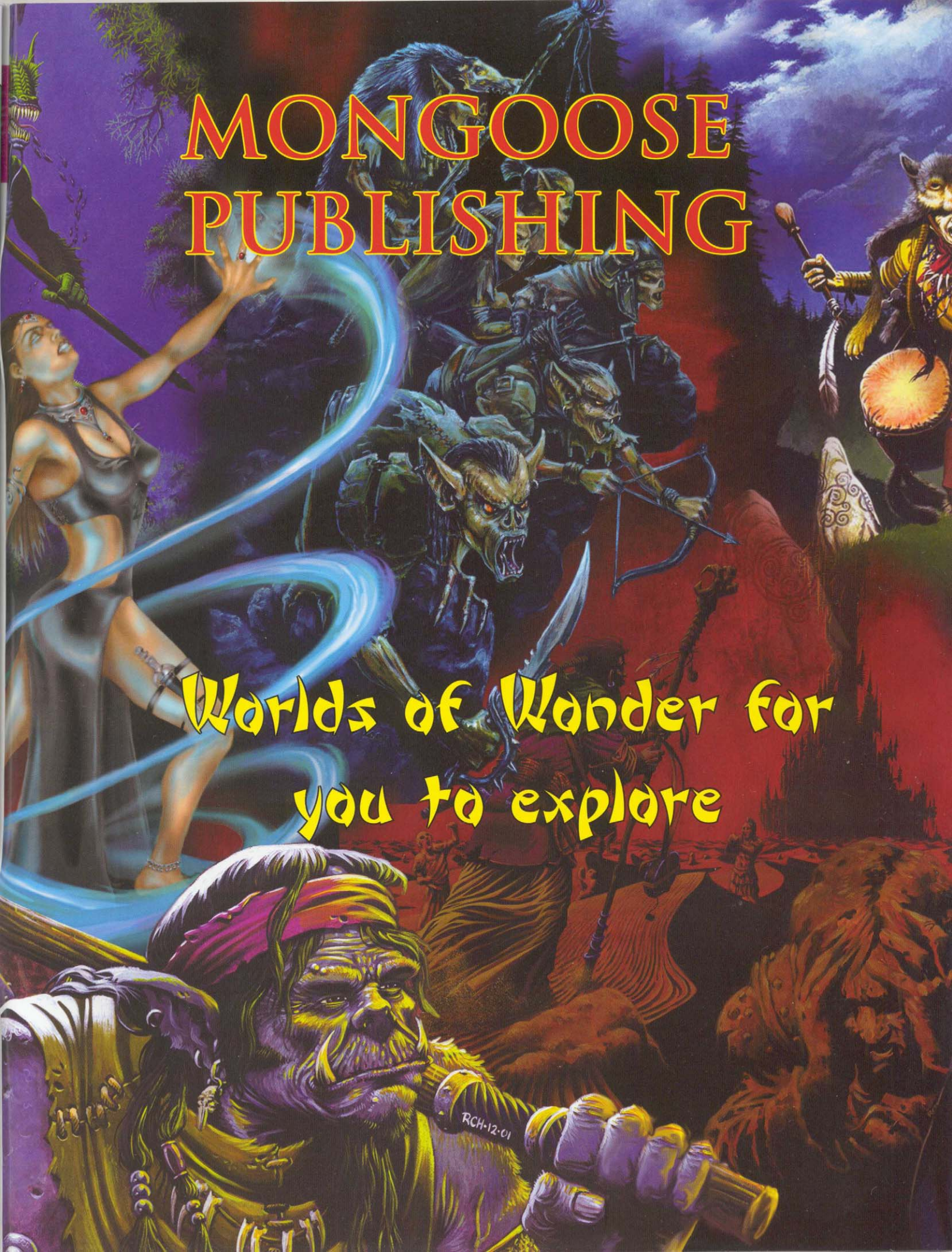
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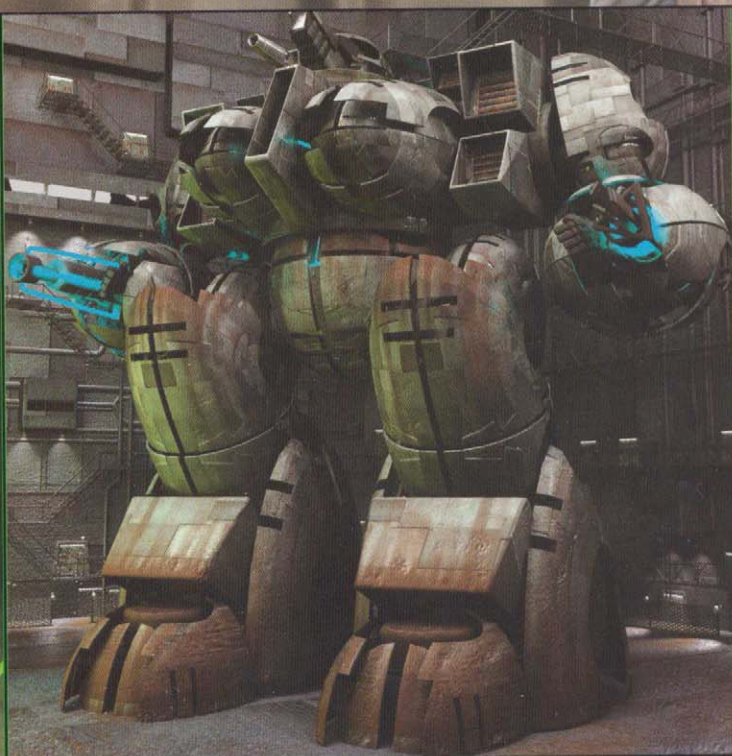
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