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Signs & Portents

7

SOLO CONAN

Rules For Small Parties In Hyboria

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*Custom Weapons And Ammo For
OGL CyberNet*

power beyond cognition

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Rules For Leyser Weapons In Slaine!*

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To celebrate the release of Conan the Roleplaying Game, it only seems right to put the man himself on the cover.

Editor:

Ian Barstow

Managing Editor:

Matthew Sprange

Production Manager:

Alexander Fennell

Mongoose Staff: *Paul Tucker, Rich Neale, Mark Humphries, Ian Belcher and Ted Chang*

Artists: *Chris Quilliams, Alejandro Villen, Phil Renne, Anne Stokes, Chad Sergesketter, Eric Bergeron, Martin Hamford, Leo Winstead, Jon Netherland, Brent Chumley, Peter Schlough, Ralph Horsley, Anthea Dilly*

Contributors: *Fey Boss, Joanne FitzRoy, Ian Sturrock, Matt Sharp, Jonny Nexus, Johnathan M. Richards, August Hahn, Joseph Miller and Stratos*

Statistical Analyst:

Steve Mulhern

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Editorial

Hi all,

Some months it is really easy to come up with an editorial. For others, I just scratch my head about what to say. A lot depends upon what issues have come up at the office, and what we are currently working on.

As I write this in mid-December we have something close to a mini controversy on our Internet forum. What basically happened was that with the release of the Babylon 5 Earth Alliance Fact Book the old subject of cultural stereotypes came up, and it got me to thinking. Do I always play cultural stereotypes when I game? My gnomes are always jolly, japing, nosy types, while my half-orcs are akin to football hooligans. My dwarf characters all sound like pseudo-Celtic types now for some reason and my oriental bard, Chang, has recently taken on the traits of the grumpy guy at my local takeaway.

Am I alone in falling into this trap, or are we all prone to such things? Is it actually possible to play a punchy gnome or a thoughtful half-orc? Sure, you can start of that way, but how long can you keep it up?

Depth of character is perhaps the hardest thing to sustain, especially if the character you have selected to play is significantly different to your own. Take Chang, for instance. I envisaged a cultured, if aloof, tambourine-playing manservant designed to complement Rich Neale's elfen noble. During the first session this was no problem; I followed Rich's elf around, serving up tea and cucumber sandwiches and drilling the occasional hobgoblin with my crossbow. Then the elf died – hardly a revelatory experience for Rich, but something of a spanner in Chang's works. He no longer had a master, which meant either finding a new employer or making his way in the world as a freeman. I considered what Chang would do and in the end he offered his services to Bulwei, Alex's psychotic barbarian.

All went well until Bulwei got a cohort – a female elf who clearly lacked any personality. Almost at once a vicious rivalry developed as to who was the better companion for Bulwei. Chang started getting more ornery. His action started getting more pronounced. He stopped playing the tambourine and began muttering under his breath. Bit by bit, he degenerated away from the direction designed for him. Some of this was down to circumstance, but if I am being self critical, then once things went off the straight and narrow I was more than happy to fall back on what I perceived to be stereotypical behaviour (in this case, influenced heavily by Benny Hill).

So the question is, can you sustain a character or after a few sessions do you fall back on familiar stereotypes? Take a look at your current batch of characters and see how many are still following the original brief. It can be quite a revealing experience.

See you next month,

Ian



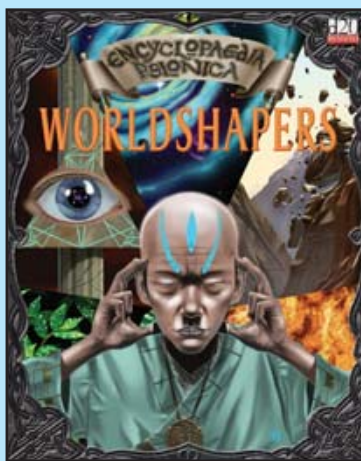
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EYE ON MONGOOSE

New Releases This Month



Encyclopaedia Psionica: Worldshapers is the first in new series focusing on psionic powers, following the familiar style of the previous *Encyclopaedia Arcane* series. This 64 page book opens up a new world for you to explore - your own psyche...

In the minds of all sentient creatures lies the potential to change the world. Every thought, every action resonates throughout reality. Actions and thoughts intersect, collide, contradict, and merge together to form the fabric of cause and effect that make up 'reality' as people understand it.

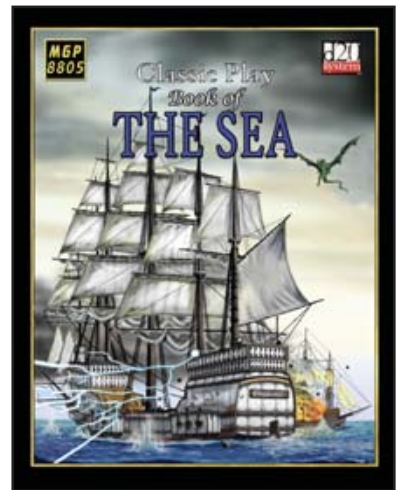
Most people express their power to change the world through their bodies. They take up swords to fight or tools to make. They craft words to convince others about the rightness of their cause. Others possess the gift of expressing primal emotions in paint or sound or stone or clay, creating what others call art. A handful finds they wield incredible arcane or divine powers, changing all of creation by moving forces they barely understand about.

A rare cursed few do not suffer the limits that constrain mortal men. They alter the shape of the universe by will alone. They move mountains, light fires, transport themselves through time and space without drawing on anything but themselves. They have what many would consider the ultimate gift: to transform thought into definite action unbound by the constraints of the physical world.

That ultimate gift brings with it a terrible curse. Each world shaper must maintain constant focus, constant control over the power within. A stray thought could become a bird. A flare of anger may ignite an inferno that destroys a town. Unbridled by the buffer of physical action these gifted individuals must struggle constantly to establish boundaries on their own desires. Even a moment's failure can bring ruin to everyone they hold dear.

They are the world shapers, world breakers, dreamers, and destroyers. Where they walk reality itself bows down.

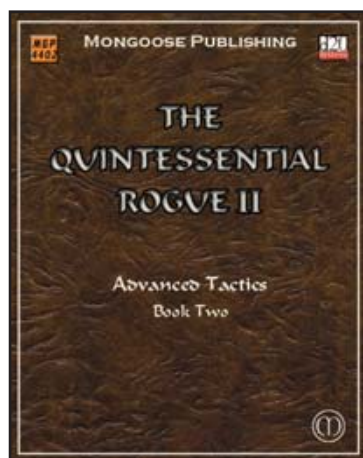
Do you dare to face them?



Detailing the perils and pitfalls of the last great wilderness, *Classic Play - Book of the Sea* takes you on a voyage into the unknown. Detailing everything an ocean-goer could wish to know, from arranging passage aboard an elven swanship to running a seagoing vessel of your very own. Featuring brand new core and prestige character classes, new and revised rules for nautical travel, combat and ship construction, the latest 256-page hardback in the *Classic Play* series provides an invaluable guide to adventuring, both on, and beneath the waves.

The sea can be a harsh and unforgiving mistress, but if you know how to treat her well, she will be your friend in fair times and foul.

It's time to turn the capstan, weigh the anchor and splice every mainbrace in sight. Just look out for the weevils...



For rogues at the bottom end of the pecking order, the greatest reward is to survive another hand-to-mouth day with a pocket full of pilfered silvers and a bottle of sour wine. Life on the streets is nasty, brutish and short-lived, with many fish and not enough pond to go round. Few of these ragamuffins and tatterdemalions give much thought to achievement as rogues. For them, the issue is survival, rather than what they could eventually attain. They live on the edge, taking ever-greater risks until one day the net closes in and they are left wriggling on the end of a hemp rope.

There are those who disdain this kind of short-sighted thinking. For some, the path of the rogue is not just a way to make easy money by taking what is not yours, or a path to the respect of your peers, who learn not to turn their back on you for fear of what you might do. Those who take a pride in their work, who determine to make more of themselves than just another corpse in cheap leather armour who overlooked just one trap, can achieve heights of prestige to which no other class can reach.

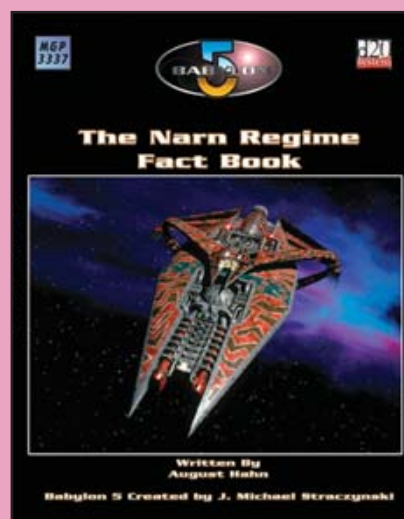
For rogues have their legends, too.

These are not necessarily those who have advanced in experience until they have achieved epic heights, though their names are indeed remembered and commemorated in whispers. No, the true master rogue can be low in level and poor in his pocket; what matters is that he has the imagination, the determination and the information to succeed. Choosing his fields of study carefully and practices meticulously carefully, making sure that his abilities complement one another, he is far from being just another jack-of-all-trades with a nasty sneak attack.

With the help of this 128-page sourcebook, any character choosing the rogue class will find many alternatives and options expanding his range of abilities. With career paths, rogues can customise their advancement and gain special benefits from their chosen branch of training; legendary classes offer a subset and expansion of their skills and character features that may take them to epic levels and beyond. Multiclassing offers a rogue a complement to his abilities, giving advice as to how best to integrate two classes, while superior tools and accessories ensure that his performance is enhanced to the optimum degree. Tricks of the Trade provides a collection of useful information relating to the rogue's craft, while sections on locks and the means of bypassing them bring additional challenge and complexity to this aspect of roguery.

A chapter dedicated to the use of magic gives insights into the use of easily overlooked low-level spells and provides additional magical items for the rogue's use, while the Gizmo is introduced in a later chapter as the last word in rogue equipment. Rackets and confidence tricks are explained and a whole chapter is given over to detailing the role of the bank in a fantasy game world, in case a group of rogues feels up to the ultimate challenge of robbing one.

Ironically for a character class that includes so much versatility, rogues are all too often pigeonholed into very narrow set roles. This book opens up the field, giving a multitude of different ways to pursue the rogue's path, each one enriched by new class combinations and character concepts.



The Narn Regime Fact Book is the latest in the series of releases focusing on one of the specific and central races in the Babylon 5 universe.

This 200 page, full colour hardback provides everything players and Games Masters need to know about setting scenarios or characters within the Narn Regime's sphere of influence.

Faced with unparalleled aggression from the Centauri Republic, the Narn are in a perilous position, with the difference between survival and annihilation being little more than one wrong decision.

Babylon 5 aficionados will find a complete history of the Narn, from their militaristic tendencies to the book of G'Quan. Players will also gain access to new prestige classes, feats and equipment specifically designed for Narn characters.

Do you have what it takes to protect the homeworld against the hated Centauri? If you don't, it may mean the end of your race. Nothing like a bit of responsibility...

Why ogres? Why do players want to create ogre characters? Why do Games Masters want to use ogres as villains, minions, or setting elements? What about them attracts attention? What about them makes them the laughable buffoons encountered in song and story?

The basic image of ogres, of monstrous stupid men who can sweep cattle up in their arms, reoccurs in the folklore of hundreds of cultures. Every single time the ogre appears; a clever human or god appears right behind him, tricking the mighty creature to his death. Despite his strength and cannibalistic ways the ogre stands no chance against the tricky mind of an alert human being.

It is commonly agreed that ogres are large, vicious and extremely lazy. They do not work well together, nor do they believe in bathing. Although they use some basic tactics most ogre encounters involve running away from foes. What's more, the common ogre stands 9-to-10 feet tall, smells like a dung heap and avoid direct confrontations. Charming.

Rather than stating a single 'truth' about these creatures, the *Slayer's Guide to Ogres* outlines a variety of possible connections along common themes. These connections and origins are all mutually interchangeable; although some represent rather extreme versions of the ideas presented they all work together. These elements are backed up with rules designed to assist players and Games Masters in portraying ogres in a specific light.

There is so much more to the humble ogre than simply a stinky, brainless thug. The *Slayer's Guide to Ogres* tells you all you need to know.



WINNER Caption Competition #4



Congratulations to David Michaels of Tampa Bay, Florida who has won a copy of CyberNet with this gem: 'Quick nurse...I've just dropped my torch!'

Also an honourable mention for Jurgen Haessler of Dusseldorf for the nearly as good: 'Dammit, doctor! I said I wanted the sun to shine out of my a@\$e!'

This is the sort of standard we like to see!

EYE ON MONGOOSE

New Releases This Month

FEATURE RELEASE:

OGL ANCIENTS

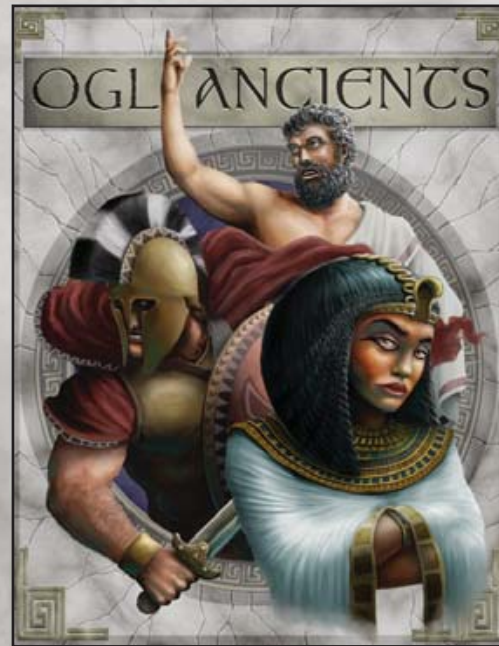
256-page, full colour hardback

Players in OGL Ancients take the role of heroes, characters who stand head and shoulders above ordinary men and women. Each player's character, even at the lowest level of experience, is an exemplar in his field. Heroes are tougher than other people and can do things that ordinary folk cannot. They are the warriors, sages and artificers whose deeds will eventually enter the storybooks and be commemorated in epic poems.

There are two styles of play available in OGL Ancients. If you wish to recreate the atmosphere of heroic legends in which the Gods occasionally walked the earth and terrible monsters lurked in forsaken places, then you can play in the Mythic Age. This kind of game is essentially fantasy on a Graeco-Egyptian theme. The Gods are real, there is such a thing as witchcraft and magic and the powers of heroes and their ilk are supernatural. When the strength of Heracles is spoken of, people mean that he genuinely *can* tear a tree up by the roots, or hurl a boulder for a mile. Monsters such as Ladon the Serpent or the sea-beast Lacedon are very real. This is the recommended option for players who want magic, adventure and the broadest range of powers. Films such as *Jason and the Argonauts* or *Clash of the Titans* typify this style of play.

Alternatively, you may play in the Classical Age. This is a recreation of ancient Greece and Egypt as they were, with a measure of poetic licence to allow for easy game play. In this version of the game, miracles do not occur and the myths are only stories. Those creatures that the legends record as 'monsters' are exaggerations of the truth; the Cyclops was only a brutish human with one eye and the Minotaur was the deformed son of King Minos, kept in a labyrinth to hide him away. You may prefer to play in the Classical Age if you like a more realistic campaign, or if you want to tie events in world history into the adventures. If you hunger to stand amongst the *300 Spartans* or ride with Alexander then this option is for you.

Either way, a glorious world of adventure, a rich tapestry of ancient history and mythology, awaits you. Search for the fleece, outwit the gorgon, save the two Kingdoms from the Hittites or sail amongst the 1,000 ships. It has been said that the greatest fiction is that rooted in fact. Now you have the opportunity to find out!



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.

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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.

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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.

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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

At the end of the last instalment we left our heroes assaulting the hobgoblin fortress, with Casper having just thrown a bit of a wobbly having decided to assault the place single-handedly in search of Guy, his pet pseudodragon...

Casper's Diary

comfortably on Slurp, who had waddled over to the wall to give me some support – although not of the kind that actually occurred.

So, this is the current situation: Slurp and Casper are prone in a confused mass of arms, legs, weaponry and deep-fried dog. Bulwei and Raygar are attempting to butcher the entire hobgoblin encampment on their own, while Eresindo and everybody's favourite wrestler, Sabah Karambunai, are potting anything that moves from an uncomfortably safe distance. Thus, with yet another concerted plan running smoothly, we proceed.

Things in the camp brighten up (literally) when Raygar inadvertently sets fire to himself while attempting to burn out a family of hobgoblins from their tent. He runs about a

Ian Barstow



The Hobgoblin Warchief... a worthy opponent for Bulwei

bit, takes minimal damage and gets put out by a thoughtful Bulwei who throws him into a well.

Back in safety, Sabah and Eresindo are playing the ever-popular game of Death Count, as propagated in the *Lord of the Rings* movies. To be fair, they are doing rather well, although it seems a trifle unsporting

to be standing in such safety while others (me) are putting their feeble collection of hit points on the line.

Which brings things neatly back to Casper, who is, after all, your favourite character and the

Seeing you second favourite pet barbecued at your feet is not exactly the best treatment when you are a halfling on the edge. To be fair, it's not tremendously great news for the pet either. Rex is now definitely an ex-dog and Casper, looking down from his precarious perch on the wall, finally snaps completely.

OK, I admit it. I got fed up playing the pacifist and wanted some hardcore action. Can you blame me? No, of course you can't. When it comes down to it we are all shallow creatures, intent on personal gratification – although there are some at Mongoose Hall who are more regularly gratified than others (<<cough>>Alex<<cough>>) in this department. Anyway, enough of my feeble justifications. Suffice to say I felt the need to roll some crits.

The effect of unbridled fury can be somewhat diluted when you fall off the wall on your next Climb check. I just couldn't resist that fast climb routine again, and the 5-point difference in the DC I needed to do it twice was too much for Casper's unhinged mind. Fortunately I didn't hurt myself as I landed rather

Ian's Roleplaying Tips #681

The Call of the Crit

It doesn't matter what character you play. There will come a point when you will cast envious eyes at the party's Fighter/Barbarian/Assassin, or whatever, and see the simple pleasures to be had from killing everything you meet. None of this 'What Diplomacy roll do I need?' nonsense. The Call of the Crit reaches out to you, and when it does, you must answer its call.

Unless you are a big softy, of course.

one you really want to read about. This is the bit where you should be nodding sagely, appreciating the intense quality of my roleplaying and sharing my angst and pain at not having rolled a crit for nearly three sessions. I'm getting well narked by my abject lack of mountaineering skills and manage to blag Slurp into giving me a leg-up the wall.

Ian's Roleplaying Tips #118

Englander Lingo

It's an unavoidable fact that we English have a selection of slang which means nothing to the rest of the literate and English-speaking world. Hey, it's *our* language! There have to be some perks, you know. Anyway, from time to time you will bump into terms I use that you are unfamiliar with. The most recent one probably being 'blag'. Blag can mean a number of things: firstly, it is slang for doing a burglary; secondly, it can mean getting somebody to do something for you that they might not actually be that keen to do; finally, it can mean simply joking at someone's expense.

Helpful, aren't I?

Slurp takes my request very seriously and decides (without bothering to actually mention it to me) to provide me with the lizardfolk equivalent of rocket-assistance. Suffice to say I get up the wall rather quickly. The fact that I end up in the arms of the hobgoblin that had just fried Rex came as much of a surprise to me as it did to him. The ensuing momentary impasse allowed the action to cut

back to Bulwei rescuing Raygar from the well that he had just been thrown into. Luckily, the grumpy fighter had latched onto the bucket rope and hauling him out of the drink was no big deal for the mighty-thewed barbarian – although the actual concept of the well itself might have caused him a bit more trouble – who was back in action almost instantly.

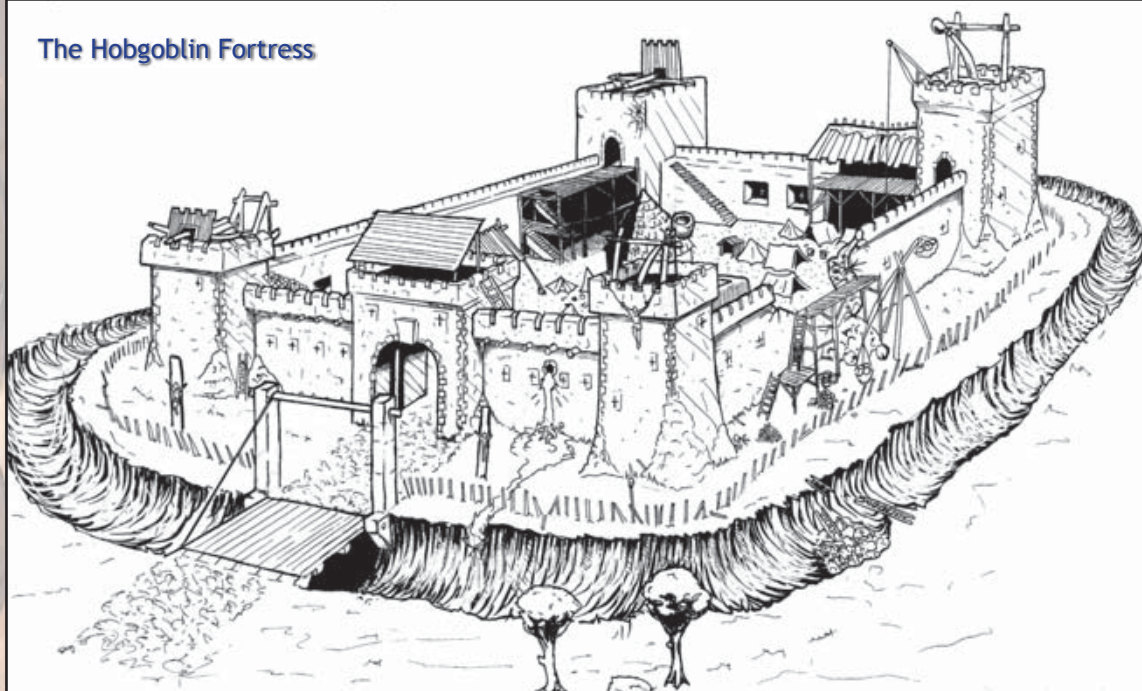
This was just as well, as a huge hobgoblin warchief was at that precise moment leading a group of hobgoblins through the wreckage of the encampment to seek retribution on the perpetrators of the Forgotten Realms' version of the Towering Inferno. The warchief's attention was strangely drawn to Bulwei, who was taking time out from dunking his comrades to strangle a passing shaman, muttering vagaries about knowing the

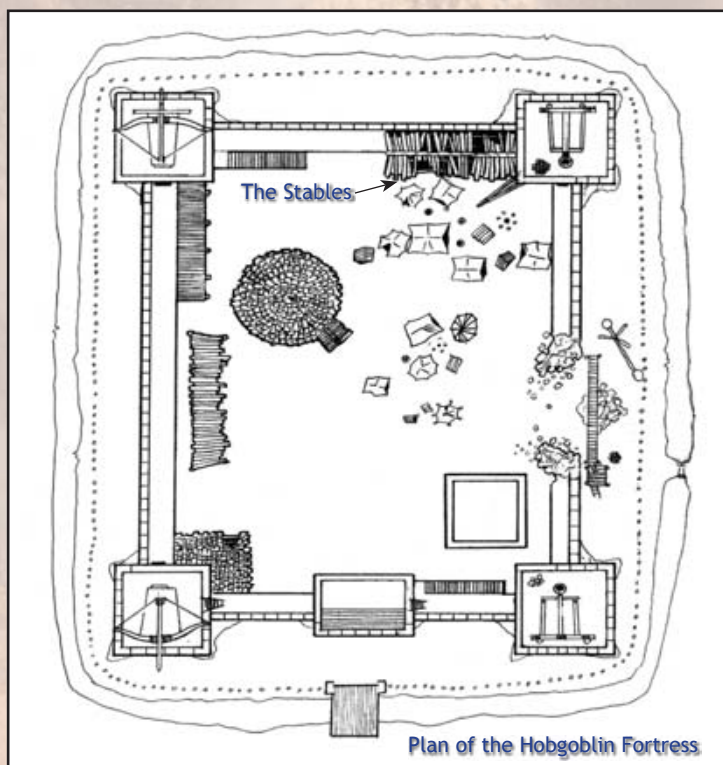
location of the Snow Vitsch (regular readers will know that hunting this witch is Bulwei's sole motivation in life – if you take mass murder out of the equation, of course).

Seeing a far more impressive foe, Bulwei dropped the weedy shaman (who was luckily now dead) and strode forth to do battle. This actually turned out to be a pretty good fight, with both of them knocking great chunks out of each other, although it seemed that Bulwei was getting the upper hand until the warchief rolled back to back 20's to inflict a particularly nasty wound which put Bulwei into single figures (hit points, of course), necessitating a time out for Bulwei to knock back a hefty bottle of dark yellow liquid. Those of you familiar with the ways of Mongoose hall will remember that our crew invariably considers anything yellow in a bottle a potion of *cure light wounds*. One day, of course, some smart aleck villain will knock out a batch of yellow-coloured poison...

Clearly the average hobgoblin isn't keen on just hanging around while his opponent tops up on hit points, and the warchief might well have taken action had he not suddenly been feathered by some opportunist sniping by Sabah and Eresindo whilst at the same time getting a crack on

The Hobgoblin Fortress





Plan of the Hobgoblin Fortress

the back of the head from a soggy Raygar (who has clearly dropped his standards when it comes to interfering in a fair fight). Bulwei looks up from his imbibing to see a decidedly deceased hobgoblin at his feet, and a pack of furious hobgoblins looking at Raygar unpleasantly.

It turns out that the death of the warchief has seriously annoyed the whole tribe, who begin taking countermeasures. In one of the fort's turrets, a catapult is targeted on Eresindo and Sabah, obliging them to actually move a bit to avoid getting squished. Whilst this rather one-sided firefight kicks off the more in-your-face action around the body of the warchief gets underway, although with a rejuvenated Bulwei back in action, things look bad for the hobgoblins.

Meanwhile on the wall, I'm looking meaningfully into the eyes of the main hobgoblin shaman, wondering what to do next. The sound of grunting from below suggests that Slurp is making his way up the wall, so I decide to take the initiative and go for a Pressure Point attack to the throat (courtesy of the *Quintessential*

Monk) which successfully stops the shaman from casting any spells involving somatic components. Unfortunately this doesn't prevent the shaman from smacking me on the head with his magic wand, instantly reducing me to zero hit points and putting me out for the count.

Had I been conscious, I would have seen myself dumped in a sack and hauled away as Slurp got pulled over the wall and filled in by a gang of irate warriors. Some time later I come round to discover that I am now tied to a post, alongside a similarly bound Slurp. So, that went well.

On the outside, the attack is somewhat petering out. Eresindo and Sabah have retreated to a safe distance to avoid the catapult, whilst Bulwei and Raygar have driven off the remaining hobgoblins back into the fortress, leaving the ruined encampment empty of enemies. The words 'Stand-off' and 'Mexican' come to mind.

That means, of course, that we can concentrate on the really interesting

stuff going on inside, where Slurp and I begin planning our daring escape. Next to our posts is a partially enclosed stable, complete with some mangy-looking horses. The effect of this much food on the hoof is beginning to upset Slurp, who has missed lunch, and he uproots his post in order to get to the buffet.

This rather surprisingly does not go unnoticed by our hobgoblin guard, who looks around in stunned silence as he gets an uprooted pole in the mouth for his trouble, rendering him unexpectedly extinct. Slurp accomplished this by the rather imaginative approach of simply bending over and allowing the pole attached to his back to work as an inverted ram. This also rather helpfully dislodged the remains of his bindings, freeing up his hands.

Seconds later, we are both free and heading for the horses. Slurp is all for eating one but I come up with the revolutionary idea to use them as a means of escape instead. After a difficult moment in thought, the lizardfolk admitted my plan was almost as good as his was and he lobbed me up onto a startled mount before displaying a surprisingly large amount of dexterity in swinging into the saddle himself.

Ian's Roleplaying Tips #367

Unsaddling Animals

Have you ever noticed that, like in the movies, nobody ever takes a saddle off a horse or pulls up the stirrups when they dismount? What's worse though, is that when somebody else climbs into the saddle, the stirrups are amazingly the correct length. This is indeed a strange thing.

Thus, mounted on two beat up and decidedly unwilling nags, we erupt out of the stables and into the open...

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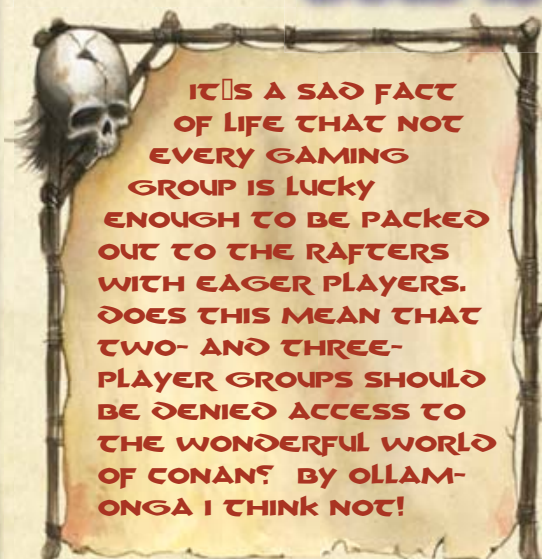
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CONAN

Roleplaying in the Hyborian Age

Ian Sturrock

Solo and Duo Play



The swords-and-sorcery genre in which the Conan stories so firmly fall does not usually have quite such large numbers of player characters as most fantasy roleplaying games. Rather than associating with the usual 'party' of perhaps four or five adventurers, Conan usually works alone, or with the assistance of one other main character (along with great armies of henchmen on occasion).

For *Conan the RPG* groups of small size, with only a Games Master and one or two players, it is probably a good deal more rewarding to run games with only one or two characters rather than having each player run several characters, or using Non-Player Characters to make up the numbers.



CHARACTERS

The Games Master and player or players should work very carefully together when creating characters for solo or duo play. It is recommended that characters be designed as a group effort, rather than generated in the normal manner. If all parties involved can reach a consensus as to each character's statistics, that is probably the ideal.

One important difference between play when there is a balanced party, and when there are only one or two player characters, is that the party of several adventurers will usually be sufficiently versatile to cope with almost any situation in which they find themselves. This is down to the better balance of classes, and as a result, of skills, in the larger party.

There are two main ways to circumvent this in a 'party' of only one or two characters.

The first is careful choice of classes and multiclassing. *Conan the RPG* is designed to be very forgiving of multiclass characters, so combining combat-capable classes with skills-heavy classes works quite well. It is not usually necessary to have a scholar, even in a larger party; in a smaller party of only one or two, it is perhaps more heroic not to have a scholar, though a few Counterspells are useful so the Dabbler feat might be a worthwhile investment.

The second way is the alternate skills system presented over the next few pages. With this system, not only do most characters advance in their specialist skills every level, but all characters also advance in most other skills at least every couple of levels.

If you do use the alternate skills system, you may also wish to give solo characters more feats than usual, again with the aim of ensuring they are well rounded. Rather than the usual feats at 1st level, 3rd level and every three levels thereafter (6th, 9th, etc.) it is suggested that you allow feats at 1st level, 3rd level, and every two levels thereafter (5th, 7th, etc.).

Note that Conan, like the other characters presented in Chapter 10: Adventurers and Notables of the Hyborian Age, has not been created using the system here. This allows him to be reasonably balanced against player characters in most cases (other than his truly heroic ability scores). However, if you are running a solo campaign, you may wish to boost his skills and feats somewhat according to the guidelines given here.

Skills

This is done by simply allotting characters two ranks at first level, then half a rank per level thereafter, in each of a wide variety of skills, including all their class skills and several others. These half ranks are allotted before the character spends

the skill points each character class gains each level. See Table 1.1: Skills by Class, along with the example below, for precisely how this works.

Note that under this system, the characters do not gain any background skills for race. This system replaces the usual background skills system.

This system may seem complex at first, as it adds an extra stage to the process of determining how many ranks in each skill a character has. However it has several advantages for gaming in the Conan genre and should prove easy enough for experienced d20 players to grasp. If not, see the sidebar 'Half a What?' for a way to achieve the same effect with less maths.



Half a What?

For easier generation and advancement of single-classed characters without having to bother with adding up half skill points, follow these steps:

1. Work out how many skill points you gain at each level beyond first.
2. Choose twice that many class skills to specialise in.
3. You have (your level +3) ranks in each of these skills.
4. Note down all the skills which you did not choose from Table 1.1: Skills by Class, but which have either a 'C' or a '½' in the appropriate column.
5. You have (your level +3)/2 ranks in each of these skills, rounded down.

TABLE I. I: SKILLS BY CLASS FOR SOLO AND DUO PLAY

Skill	Barbarian	Commoner	Borderer	Noble	Nomad	Pirate	Soldier	Scholar	Thief	Key Ability
Appraise	½	½	½	C	½	C	½	C	C	Int
Balance	½	½	½	½	½	C	½	½	C	Dex*
Bluff	½	½	½	C	C	C	½	C	C	Cha
Climb	C	C	C	½	C	C	C	½	C	Str*
Concentration	½	½	½	½	½	½	½	C	½	Con
Craft (alchemy)	cc	cc	cc	cc	cc	cc	cc	C*	cc	Int
Craft (herbalism)	C*	cc	C*	cc	C*	cc	cc	C*	C*	Int
Craft (any mundane)	C*	C*	C*	cc	C*	C*	C*	C*	C*	Int
Decipher Script	½	cc	½	½	½	½	½	C	C	Int
Diplomacy	cc	cc	cc	C	cc	cc	cc	cc	C	Cha
Disable Device	cc	cc	cc	cc	cc	cc	cc	cc	C	Int
Disguise	½	cc	½	½	½	C	½	½	C	Cha
Escape Artist	½	cc	½	½	½	C	½	½	C	Dex*
Forgery	cc	cc	cc	cc	cc	cc	cc	C	C	Int
Gather Information	½	½	C	C	C	C	½	C	C	Cha
Handle Animal	C	C	C	C	C	½	½	½	½	Cha
Heal	½	cc	½	½	C	½	½	C	½	Wis
Hide	C	½	C	½	C	½	½	½	C	Dex*
Intimidate	C	½	½	C	½	C	C	C	C	Cha
Jump	C	C	C	½	½	C	½	½	C	Str*
Knowledge (arcana)	½	cc	½	½	½	½	½	C	C	Int
Knowledge (geography)	½	cc	C	½	½	C	C	C	½	Int
Knowledge (history)	½	cc	½	C	½	½	½	C	½	Int
Knowledge (local)	½	½	C	C	C	½	C	C	C	Int
Knowledge (nobility)	½	cc	½	C	½	½	½	C	C	Int
Knowledge (religion)	½	½	½	C	½	½	½	C	½	Int
Listen	C	C	C	½	C	½	½	½	C	Wis
Move Silently	C	½	C	½	C	C	½	½	C	Dex*
Open Lock	cc	cc	cc	cc	cc	cc	cc	cc	C	Dex
Perform	½*	½*	½*	C*	½*	C*	C*	C*	C*	Cha
Profession	C*	C	C*	cc	cc	C*	C*	C*	C*	Wis
Ride	C	C	C	C	C	½	C	½	½	Dex
Search	½	½	C	½	C	C	C	C	C	Int
Sense Motive	½	½	½	C	½	½	½	C	C	Wis
Sleight of Hand	½	cc	½	½	½	½	½	C	C	Dex*
Spot	C	½	C	C	C	C	½	½	C	Wis
Survival	C	½	C	C	C	C	½	½	½	Wis
Swim	C	C	C	½	½	C	½	½	½	Str
Tumble	½	cc	½	½	½	C	½	½	C	Dex*
Use Rope	½	C	C	½	½	C	½	½	C	Dex

(Ability)*	This skill is affected by the Armour Check Penalty of any armour worn.
C	Class skill, and you gain 2 ranks in this skill at 1 st level, then ½ a rank in this skill each level thereafter, always before spending any of your own skill points.
C*	Class skill, and you gain 2 ranks in any one sub-skill of this skill at 1 st level, then ½ a rank in the sub-skill each level thereafter, always before spending any of your own skill points.
Cc	Cross-class skill.
½	Cross-class skill, but you gain 2 ranks in this skill at 1 st level, then ½ a rank in this skill each level thereafter, always before spending any of your own skill points.
½*	Cross-class skill, and you gain 2 ranks in any one sub-skill of this skill at 1 st level, then ½ a rank in the sub-skill each level thereafter, always before spending any of your own skill points.

SKILL POINT EXAMPLE:

Starting Character

Jackie decides to generate a character for a solo campaign. She will be Mabb, a 1st level barbarian. Her Intelligence is 13, probably more than that of most barbarians, but she hopes at some point to take some levels in the thief class and so wants to ensure she will gain a reasonable selection of skills when she does so.

Her skill points at 1st level are (4 + Int bonus) x4, or 4x5 = 20.

However, before spending these skill points, she determines her base skill points.

As a barbarian, she gains 2 ranks in each of the following skills, before spending any skill points:

Appraise, Balance, Bluff, Climb, Concentration, Craft (herbalism or any one mundane), Decipher Script, Disguise, Escape Artist, Gather Information, Heal, Hide, Intimidate, Jump, Knowledge (arcana), Knowledge (geography), Knowledge (history), Knowledge (local), Knowledge (nobility), Knowledge (religion), Listen, Move Silently, Perform (any one), Profession (any one), Ride, Search, Sense Motive, Sleight of Hand, Speak Language, Spot, Survival, Swim, Tumble, and Use Rope.

She decides that her sub-skills in Craft, Perform and Profession will be as follows: Craft (swordsmith), Perform (song), and Profession (sailor). She is the daughter of a swordsmith, and has spent some time

aboard the riverboats of her Vanaheim home – which was also where she picked up some shipboard work songs.

At this point she spends her 16 skill points as follows: 2 each on Craft (swordsmith), Spot, Jump, Intimidate, Profession (sailor), Perform (drum), Ride, Move Silently, Listen and Survival. Note that although Perform is a cross-class skill for barbarians, Mabb has sufficiently high Intelligence that she can simply spend her Int bonus skill points on Perform.

So, after spending all her skill points, Mabb has the following ranks in her skills:

Appraise +2, Balance +2, Bluff +2, Climb +2, Concentration +2, Craft (swordsmith) +4, Decipher Script +2, Disguise +2, Escape Artist +2, Gather Information +2, Heal +2, Hide +2, Intimidate +4, Jump +4, Knowledge (arcana) +2, Knowledge (geography) +2, Knowledge (history) +2, Knowledge (local) +2, Knowledge (nobility) +2, Knowledge (religion) +2, Listen +4, Move Silently +4, Perform (sing) +2, Perform (drum) +2, Profession (sailor) +4, Ride +4, Search +2, Sense Motive +2, Sleight of Hand +2, Spot +4, Survival +4, Swim +2, Tumble +2, and Use Rope +2.

SKILL POINT EXAMPLE:

Level Advancement

When Mabb reaches 2nd level, it turns out that she has spent much of her time fighting as a mercenary in the army of Koth, rather than thieving as Jackie had planned. It seems more appropriate to give her a level of Soldier than anything else.

As a soldier she gains ½ a rank in each of the following skills:

Appraise, Balance, Bluff, Climb, Concentration, Craft (swordsmith), Decipher Script, Disguise, Escape Artist, Gather Information, Heal, Hide, Intimidate, Jump, Knowledge (arcana), Knowledge (geography), Knowledge (history), Knowledge (local), Knowledge (nobility), Knowledge (religion), Listen, Move Silently, Perform (any one), Profession (sailor), Ride, Search, Sense Motive, Sleight of Hand, Speak Language, Spot, Survival, Swim, Tumble, and Use Rope.

She also gains 2 + 1 = 3 skill points. She spends these as follows: ½ a point on each of the following: Climb, Craft, Intimidate, Knowledge (geography), Profession (sailor) and Ride.

Her skill ranks are now as follows:

Appraise +2.5, Balance +2.5, Bluff +2.5, Climb +3, Concentration +2.5, Craft (swordsmith) +5, Decipher Script +2.5, Disguise +2.5, Escape Artist +2.5, Gather Information +2.5, Heal +2.5, Hide +2.5, Intimidate +5, Jump +4.5, Knowledge (arcana) +2.5, Knowledge (geography) +3, Knowledge (history) +2.5, Knowledge (local) +2.5, Knowledge (nobility) +2.5, Knowledge (religion) +2.5, Listen +4.5, Move Silently +4.5, Perform (sing) +2.5, Perform (drum) +2.5, Profession (sailor) +5, Ride +5, Search +2.5, Sense Motive +2.5, Sleight of Hand +2.5, Spot +4.5, Survival +4.5, Swim +2.5, Tumble +2.5, and Use Rope +2.5.



Inside The Chainmail Bra

Do Women Gamers Exist?

asks **Fey Boss**

The question of whether women gamers actually exist keeps coming up: the recurring 'bad penny', as though while most people have conceded that they do exist, they aren't so sure it's going to last. That one day, everyone will turn up to the games, cons, supply shops and so on, and there simply won't be any women around. 'Cheryl? Oh, she joined a devout religious order; she's outside, picketing.' 'Marie? She went into mourning over her elf ranger's death.' 'Elizabeth? Well, we don't know, but there's this mysterious crop circle on her front lawn...'

This is probably not going to happen.

While some female gamers are 'fly by night' players, the vast majority of women who play aren't in it because of someone else; they're involved because of a genuine interest, even love of the game. What's not to like? It's often girls, not boys, who wander around in school with a notebook of dreams, ideas and bad poetry. In games, we get to pretend we're prom queens - women who laugh in the face of flab, cackle at the idea of cellulite, who dance the mazurka in chain mail bikinis and not feel ridiculous. This is, of course, the newbie idea of a character - like a male player making a STR 18/00 barbarian with a really big sword. Some of us grow past it. Others never do.

So clearly, women are involved in roleplaying; the question isn't 'are they', nor should it be 'why'. Some people think it's good. Very few

think it's the end of the world (or even the game world). Instead, it becomes a question of: 'Why aren't there more women gamers? Preferably scantily-clad, with an insatiable lust for geek guys' or 'Why don't they stick around?' These two questions have more to do with each other than you might think.

Most guys do have better manners than to openly leer at a woman's cleavage, but a first-time woman player coming into a game doesn't know that. All she knows is what she's been told by whoever invited her, plus whatever she's heard in general about RPGs and the people who play them (*next, on Springer*). This sets the basis for what can be a wonderful, or terrifying, experience. And, as with so many other blind dates, the experience can lead to a warm and fulfilling relationship - or leaves one or both sides swearing, 'I'll never do that again!'



Every male gamer pictures something like this when it's announced that a female gamer is joining their group. Sad, but true.

To a woman walking into a dungeon crawl with no gaming experience, it's similar to walking into a World Cup viewing. The setting may be familiar, someone's living room or basement; the men are violent, enthusiastic, making a lot of noise, and there's plenty of talk about killing the other team. As with sports, if the woman doesn't follow, it's confusing and a little bit alarming when she realises that this is a non-contact sport played on paper and in the mind. Not only doesn't she know most of the people present, now she's re-evaluating the sanity of whoever invited her.

Even if this isn't the scenario, there are plenty of other things that can turn a woman off gaming, or even off giving it a chance. Most games focus on combat, killing one's way through dungeons, cities, forests, temples, archipelagos...you name it, players have hacked through it. While many women enjoy a good hack and slash, eventually this

begins to pall. Her fighter wants to sit down with her INT 16 Neutral longsword and contemplate the new bauble in the hilt. Her ranger wants a hot bath followed by a discussion on environmental problems with the local druidess. Her mage wants some tea and a spot of conversation about feelings and relationships and how they've been affecting her spellcasting lately - possibly with the female cleric, who's only too eager by then to counsel someone on something other than how to keep wounds clean. All of them want to know where the best place to go shopping for something that chafes less than leather and chain mail bikinis. And as in real relationships, not every male is prepared for this. Some - players and Games Masters alike - may even feel betrayed. *She was different! She seemed to like killing those orcs. Now she's too good for that? For us? Well!*

This lack of preparedness to offer a campaign which appeals to social instincts and competitiveness as well as blood lust can lose women gamers faster than you can say, 'where's the intrigue?' The pity of it is, there are many campaigns out there which easily support such diplomatic negotiations and dare we say it, manipulations, without losing any capacity for 'Cap'n, blast the space pirates, quick!'

Even if this isn't a problem, and your political machinations would be the envy of Byzantine Italy, there are still problems that can arise. Insecure players, for example - some male players aren't comfortable around women players, or only if the woman always follows their lead. This can put strain not only on the players and on the Games Master, but also on the entire social dynamic of the game. When one player wants dominance, it rarely ends well. It can kill a game, despite the efforts of the Games Master and other players to run interference.

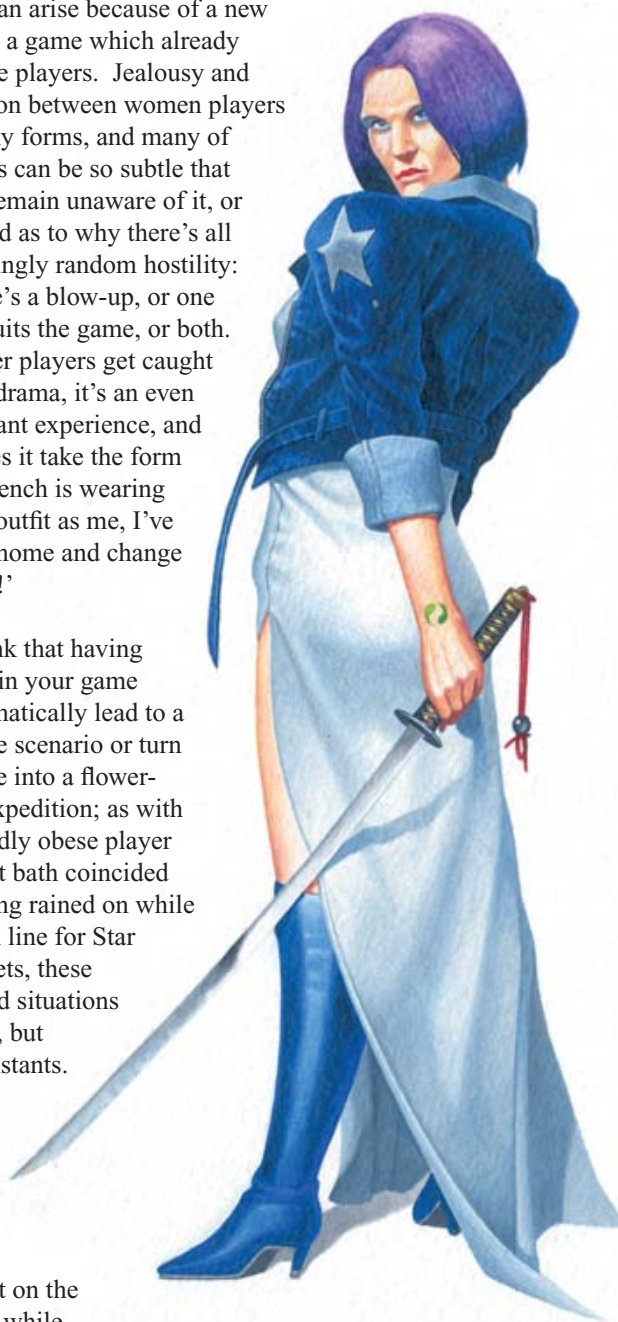
That's not to say that the man is always wrong - some of the ugliest

schisms can arise because of a new woman in a game which already has female players. Jealousy and competition between women players takes many forms, and many of the signals can be so subtle that the men remain unaware of it, or bewildered as to why there's all this seemingly random hostility: until there's a blow-up, or one woman quits the game, or both. If the other players get caught up in the drama, it's an even less pleasant experience, and rarely does it take the form of 'that wench is wearing the same outfit as me, I've got to go home and change right now!'

Don't think that having a woman in your game will automatically lead to a worst-case scenario or turn your game into a flower-picking expedition; as with the morbidly obese player whose last bath coincided with getting rained on while waiting in line for Star Wars tickets, these people and situations may exist, but aren't constants.

Women gamers not only exist, but have their own effect on the industry - while there remain tons of games geared to getting a bigger sword, the market has expanded to include more than military strategy and hardware. If you want to be able to negotiate with orcs or aliens, the games increasingly expand upon skills which allow for it. There are settings which allow for all the courtly intrigue that even Eleanor of Aquitaine or Lucrezia Borgia could wish for.

All that said, we women might occasionally fantasise about a really big sword - but you fellows can keep your swords. We can be queens



It's very likely that the ladies will prefer to picture themselves in this sort of form.

and femme fatales. Then we get to have our cake and eat it, too... while running the kingdom from behind the scenes, or leading our army against yours in an epic saga of loss, love and betrayal. Oh, and our stats just might get to be bigger than yours. Roll for crit!



More Most Wanted

WHITEY

The
JUDGE DREDD
Roleplaying Game



Justice Department Sector 190

197-9532

Internal Memo - Eyes Only
Subject - Whitey

Listen up, people. There is nothing worse than a judge killer - not in my book. This piece of trash even has the nerve to call himself 'Judge' Whitey and he's got Alvin's badge. This is not acceptable.

Get out there and bring this perp in. I don't want any more of you ending up as trophies, not even Judge Montgomery.

Deputy Sector Chief B. Cooksey

Real Name: Randolph Whitely
Also Known As: William Logan
Class/Level: Citizen 7
Hit Points: 52
Initiative: +6 (+2 Dex, +4 Improved Initiative)
Speed: 30 ft.
Defence Value: 14 (+4 Reflex)
Damage Reduction: 0
Attacks: +9 melee, +7 ranged
Damage: By weapon
Special Qualities: Prior life - goon
Saves: Fort +5, Ref +4, Will +2
Abilities: Str 18, Dex 14, Con 15, Int 9, Wis 10, Cha 12
Skills: Balance +7, Bluff +6, Climb +11, Computer Use +4, Concentration +11, Drive +10, Intimidate +11, Jump +9, Search +4, Spot +5, Streetwise +8, Swim +9, Technical +4
Feats: Improved Initiative, Point Blank Shot, Sure Grip, Toughness, Weapon Proficiency (rifle), Weapon Proficiency (heavy)
Possessions: Heavy Laser (4d10/18), Walther Mitsubishi PPK II Hand Gun (3d6/4)

History File:

A minor gangster and hold-up man, Whitey was little more than a thug noted for his vicious brutality and extreme methods. Exceptionally tall and very heavily built, Whitey made an intimidating and overpowering figure, his prematurely white hair, piercing eyes and permanent sneer making his appearance even more fearsome. Late in 2098, Whitey and his gang embarked on a string of robberies, armoured truck hold-ups and brutal murders. The 'Whitey Gang' soon became notorious for their use of sophisticated equipment (at the time, Whitey's trademark heavy laser was the most technologically advanced hand-held weapon system available in Mega-City One), although their methods were most definitely unsophisticated. By February 2099, Whitey enjoyed the dubious honour of heading the Justice Department's official 'Most Wanted' list. He was overjoyed to be named 'Public Enemy Number

One' on vid-casts, but this notoriety had a price – he was recognised wherever he went and after a series of vicious gun battles with the judges he was forced to go to ground. He and the remaining two members of his gang holed up in the derelict Empire State Building in Sector 44, a once-majestic structure that had been transferred from New York before the entire city had been concreted over a generation before, but now nothing more than a crumbling, forgotten ruin lost in the shadows of the surrounding city blocks.

Judge Alvin was a 20-year man who had graduated in the infamous class of 2079, a 'golden year' for the Academy that had produced a string of distinguished and notorious judges – Judge Steele, who later in the year was hypnotised by his vid phone and driven to kill several judges, Judge Gibson, apparently a 'perfect judge' who secretly spent his spare time robbing and murdering citizens disguised as Mutie the Pig, exceptional judges like Wagner, Hunt and Raider as well as the Dredd brothers, Joe and Rico. Unfortunately, his regular Lawmaster patrol route took him past the Empire State Building. Spotting the approaching judge, Whitey was convinced that Alvin had found his hideout and was coming to arrest him. He wasted no time blasting Alvin off his bike with his powerful laser, killing the judge instantly. Emboldened by this easy victory, Whitey took Alvin's helmet as a trophy and dubbed himself 'Judge Whitey'. He cuffed Alvin's corpse to his Lawmaster and sent it back to the Grand Hall of Justice on automatic.

Chief Judge Goodman was furious when Alvin's dead body rode into the Grand Hall, especially after he found a mocking note from Whitey. He was on the verge of ordering an airstrike to wipe the ancient building and everyone in it off the face of the Earth when Judge Dredd suggested a more subtle approach. Using his own Lawmaster set on automatic as

a distraction he was able to sneak up on the gang unawares. Whitey and his gang made no match for a fully prepared judge and Dredd was able to wipe out the gang in less than a minute. Only Whitey was taken alive. Dredd sentenced him to life imprisonment on the notoriously harsh Devil's Island.

Devil's Island

One of the bleakest prison facilities to be found, Devil's Island is a massive traffic island surrounded by one of the most complex road networks in Mega-City One. To avoid congestion, any vehicle that comes within range must automatically switch over to computer control and maintain a speed of no less than 200 miles per hour. The traffic density is so great that the island seems to be totally surrounded by a solid wall of speeding metal and noise – attempting to cross the road is certain death. The prison itself occupies the centre of the island – primitive in comparison to the Iso Cubes; it consists of little more than a rockcrete blockhouse composed of hundreds of two-man cells and a few basic recreational facilities. Only lawbreakers who commit the most odious crimes are sentenced to Devil's Island, transferred via a converted H-Wagon known as the 'One Way Special'. Until 2099, the Island was run by a civilian corporation and consistently failed to live up to its 'escape proof' reputation, but following a series of high profile break-outs the Justice Department took over the facility and dramatically tightened up security. The bleakness of the environment combined with the constant deafening noise and choking pollution means that Devil's Island has the highest rate of suicide in any prison in the world.

Whitey had only been imprisoned for a few weeks before he was free again. His brother, Welch Logan, was a particle physicist who had developed a powerful disintegrator technology – mounting these 'disrupters' on hovering, globe-shaped robots he was able to demolish a city block in seconds. Following a demonstration of his power on another ancient relic of New York, he blackmailed the Justice Department into releasing Whitey and handing Judge Dredd over to him. Dredd played along, but only to find Welch's headquarters. He was able to turn the renegade scientist's own weapons against him and before long Whitey was back on Devil's Island.

Because of his brief escape, the Devil's Island authorities forced Whitey to wear old-fashioned manacles at all times and moved him to the high security wing. Furious and even more determined to break out, Whitey intimidated his new cellmate, a renegade scientist nicknamed 'Einstein' because of his resemblance to the famous 20th Century figure. Einstein constructed a device that could override the Weather Control computer system. Whitey ordered some weather that had not been seen in the strict climate-controlled Mega-City for decades – snow. In the sudden, dense blizzard the traffic that isolated the Island ground to a halt. Dozens of vehicles crashed and hundreds were killed. Delighted, Whitey repaid Einstein by strangling him before making his getaway over the suddenly paralysed road, pausing only to batter a guard to death in order to steal his pistol. As the judges arrived to deal with the breakout, Whitey encountered a young couple stranded on the frozen megaway, who begged him for assistance. Whitey gunned down the young man and took the girl as a hostage, leaving a scrawled threat that he would kill her if he saw any sign of the judges in pursuit. However, Judge Dredd was already

in pursuit and before long had tracked down Whitey. The brute was just about to go through with his murderous threat, but Dredd offered his own life in exchange for the woman. Whitey found the offer too good to resist but only succeeded in wounding Dredd. As Whitey closed in for the kill, Dredd blinded him with a skilfully thrown snowball, which distracted him long enough to follow up with a knockout punch. Dredd switched off the Weather Control jamming device and Whitey was returned to his cell as the sun again began to shine.

Security at Devil's Island was tightened dramatically after this incident and it was many years before Whitey was heard from again. In February 2109, a decade to the day since his original arrest at the Empire State Building, there was a massive pile-up on the road network and many dangerous prisoners took the opportunity to make their escape.

Among them was Whitey, but he made no effort to get away. He wanted only one thing now – revenge on the judge who had condemned him to the hell of Devil's Island. It was only his single-minded hatred of the famous lawman that had prevented him from taking the 'suicide run' onto the megaway – he knew that one day he would get his chance to get his own back. He made his way to a munce-processing plant and took the workers hostage. He demanded to see Judge Dredd or he would kill one hostage every five minutes.

Even though Dredd could barely remember Whitey (he was just one of hundreds of similar criminals that Dredd had sentenced in his thirty years on the streets) he arrived at the munce plant and co-operated with the thug's demands to remove all his weapons and hang above the munce processing vats. Whitey had decided what form his revenge

would take – he could not give Dredd ten years in hell, but he could grind him up into munceburgers! He waited patiently for Dredd's grip to slip. Even though stripped of all his conventional weapons, Dredd was far from helpless. Just as he was about to drop, Dredd remembered that Whitey had been a judge killer and offered him his badge to add to his collection. Ripping the plastisteel shield from his chest, he hurled it like a shuriken. It embedded itself in Whitey's skull, and he collapsed into the munce grinders just as Dredd's strength failed him and he too dropped. Fortunately, the grinders jammed on Whitey's corpse and the vat ground to a halt before Dredd was killed. Reflecting on Whitey's undignified demise, Dredd observed that he had never learnt the lesson that he had tried to teach him a decade before – crime does not pay!



Soundbite

Dredd: I'm here, Whitey! What do you want?


Whitey: I want you, Dredd! In here, now! Unarmed!

Judge Edison: You're not going to do it, Dredd? A judge's life is worth more than some crummy hostages!

Dredd: We start thinking that way and we're not worth a damn thing, Edison. Our prime duty is to protect the citizens. If anyone shoots them, it's going to be me.

(Excerpt from 'Crime as it Happens!'; MCTV Network's official coverage of the Munce Plant Siege of 2109. An instant poll held by the channel found that 88% of those who responded would prefer to be shot by Judge Dredd than a criminal.)

H O R R O R



Terror. Death. Madness.
Chainsaws.

Don't Play This Alone.

power beyond cognition

leyser weapons and cythrons in the SLÁINE RPG

Ian Sturrock

if you thought that everything in SLÁINE was of a rudimentary and primitive style, then think again. meet the devastating menace of leyser weapons, but remember - handle with care.

Sláine occasionally wields weapons of supernatural power, rather than his trademark double-handed axe. These ley line-powered weapons are scarce in the extreme, and only seem to be available when he is on some special mission or other – usually at the behest of Myrddin or another powerful scholar of Dinas Emrys.

The leyser weapons of the *Sláine* setting are almost always used against the Cythrons, an utterly corrupted elder race whose forces are constantly working towards the complete subjugation of humanity in a dreadful programme of carefully planned breeding and destruction, where every human is born only to spend a grim lifetime of torment before being put to death for the greater benefit of his Cythron masters. This article looks at Sláine's most powerful and dreaded enemies, the Cythrons, as well as the weapons that can be used to fight them.

introducing leyser weapons and cythrons

Leyser weapons will unbalance an ordinary campaign of the *Sláine RPG* if introduced carelessly. In a setting where the slingstone or hurled spear is the state of the art ranged weapon, a sword that shoots bolts of leyser energy, or a cannon that blasts out

leyser beams, could make its wielder a king or even a god.

It is essential that the Games Master keep a tight rein on his player characters' access to leyser weapons. The *Sláine RPG* is not a game in which power is measured by how many magic items one has, and leyser weapons cannot be allowed to turn it into such a game. If need be, these weapons can be loaned, rather than given, to the characters, and the Games Master should not be afraid to have them be broken, destroyed, stolen or retrieved by their rightful owners, if the players seem desperate to hold onto them for their own purposes.

For players who are not familiar with the *Time Killer* and *Tomb of Terror* Sláine stories, it may be better not to introduce leyser weapons at all. Discuss the situation with the players first. If they are interested in exploring a new dimension of the world of Tir Nan Og and its attendant El realms, it may be worth using the leyser weapons and Cythrons in a one-off, high-powered game session or two. So long as the players realise they are not going to get to keep their new toys, but are off to some El world for a one-off special adventure, it should be possible to do this without permanently unbalancing your game.

Although costs for leyser weapons are included in this article, these costs are nominal only, and are really intended for purposes of determining the cost and time to construct the weapons for a character with the appropriate skills and feats. These items are never offered for sale, and anyone who attempted to sell or even give one to anyone other than a major player in



the wars between the Cythrons and the Ever-Living Ones of Dinas Emrys is likely to get hunted down by one or even both sides.

training with ley weapons

The tribes of the Earth Goddess regard these items as the Forbidden Weapons, usable only by the tribal elites and forbidden even to them save in times of direst need. It seems likely that the tribes do not have their own supply of leyser weapons – the tribal elites are probably trained in small groups at one of the military academies of Alba, or at the Eternal Fortress itself.

Any character can learn how to use a single type of leyser weapon, with a standard Exotic Weapon Proficiency feat. Those who have been trained in their tribal elites may learn how to use all types of leyser weapon with a single new feat, Forbidden Weapons Training. The druid seminary at Durrington also trains many of its students with the forbidden weapons, if they prove apt with such combative skills.

leyser weapons

Leyser Weapons Table

Exotic Weapons - Melee									
Weapon	Size	Cost	Damage	Critical	Area of Effect	Range Inc.	EP Cost to Use/Fire	Weight	Type
Leyser Shield*	1-handed	7,500 s�ts	1d4	x2	–	20 ft.*	–	5 lb.	Bludgeoning*
Leyser Sword*	1-handed	10,000 s�ts	–	–	–	–	–	4 lb.	–
– <i>melee</i>	–	–	1d10	19-20/x2	–	–	–	–	Slashing
– <i>enhanced melee</i>	–	–	1d10 + 1d6 + EP	19-20/x2	–	–	1	–	Slashing + Fire
– <i>leyser bolt</i>	–	–	1d6 + EP	19-20/x2	–	20 ft.	1	–	Fire
Exotic Weapons - Ranged									
Weapon	Size	Cost	Damage	Critical	Area of Effect	Range Inc.		Weight	Type
Leyser Cannon*	2-handed	15,000 s�ts	1d4/EP	19-20/x2	–	80 ft.	10	80 lb.	Fire
Leyser Cannon, Multi-Barrel*	2-handed*	25,000 s�ts	1d4/EP	x3	10 ft. wide stream out to 150 feet	–	25	120 lb.	Fire
Leyser Gun*	Light	5,000 s�ts	1d8 + EP	19-20/x2	–	40 ft.	1	3 lb.	Fire
Leyser Scatter-Gun*	Light	8,000 s�ts	1d4 + EP	x3	45� cone out to 50 feet	–	2	5 lb.	Fire
Pulsed Leyser Gun*	Light	6,000 s�ts	1d8 + EP	x2	–	30 ft.	1	5 lb.	Fire

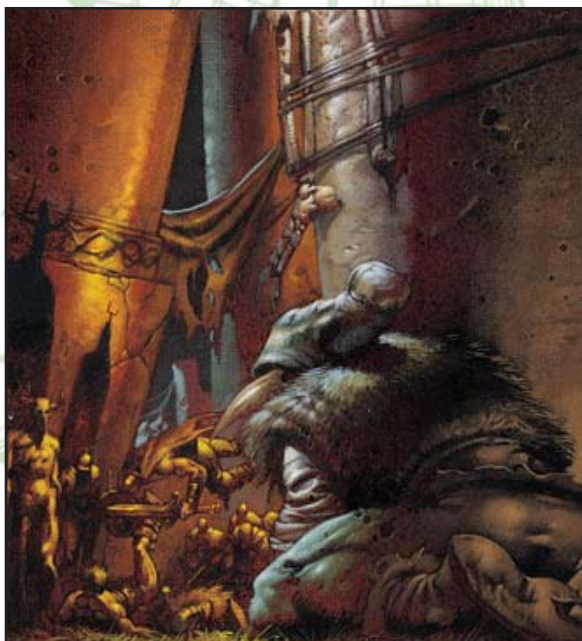
* See the weapon description for special rules.

Extras and Other Items			
Item	Cost	Weight	Notes
Cythron Power Suit	–	20 lb.	*
Ley Line Amplifier*	+2,500 s�ts	+1 lb.	*
Lodestone, Light*	50 s�ts	+1 lb.	Stores 3 EP
Lodestone, Medium*	350 s�ts	+5 lb.	Stores 18 EP
Lodestone, Heavy*	2,000 s�ts	+25 lb.	Stores 120 EP

leyser weapon descriptions

The following leyser weapons and items of equipment are known to the scholars of Dinas Emrys and elsewhere. Generally, the leyser guns and cannon are used in the defence of the Eternal Fortress itself. The forces of evil, including Cythrons and Els, tend to prefer the versatility of leyser swords.

As well as the usual weapon game statistics, leyser weapon descriptions have the following two entries:



Area of Effect: Much like a spell's area of effect, this indicates the area within which all creatures must make a Reflex saving throw or be dealt an appropriate level of damage for the weapon in question. The Reflex save DC is defined by the wielder's magic attack roll. Creatures who successfully save are dealt half damage.

EP Cost to Use/Fire: Each time a leyser weapon is fired, this Earth Power cost must be paid. It may be paid either directly from the wielder's personal Earth Power, or from a lodestone being used to power the weapon. Note that the EP cost is always the same for a given weapon, no matter how much damage it can inflict with a particular shot.

Cytron Power Suit: This armour is made from a supernaturally tough but flexible material capable of shrugging off most leyser weapon attacks. It is leyser powered itself, and features dual-mode optical leyser beams in the eyes, triggered by the wearer's thought command – this can be used exactly like a leyser scatter-gun or a leyser gun, at the wearer's option. The suit incorporates a medium lodestone and ley line amplifier into a chest-mounted power pack to supply all its, and its wearer's, energy needs. The wearer can fly at a speed of up to 150 feet (good manoeuvrability), at a cost of 1 EP per hour. He may also teleport for short distances as though by a *dimension door* spell (see *Core Rulebook I*) cast by a 10th level sorcerer, at a cost of 3 EP. Finally, the power suit provides resistance to fire 20, reducing all leyser attacks against the wearer by 20 points of damage. Even more so than leyser weapons, the Cytron power suit is never available to buy on the open market, and cannot even be manufactured by leyser weapon makers. The Power Suit Proficiency feat is needed to operate a Cytron power suit – without the feat, the wearer only gains the resistance to fire benefit.

Ley Line Amplifier: This small device can be fitted to any leyser weapon. It allows the wielder to tap

directly into the local ley energy, providing a considerable boost to any leyser weapon's power. So long as the wielder is standing on a ley line or confluence of ley lines he may draw double the usual amount of available Earth Power directly from the leys for purposes of firing his leyser weapon only. The amount of EP available is at the discretion of the Games Master.

Leyser Shield: A leyser shield is similar to any other large round shield, but with a faceted, highly reflective metal surface. It can be used like a large wooden shield (see the *Sláine RPG*), but in addition it also adds its AC bonus to the wielder's touch AC when being attacked with leyser weapons (only). It also adds a bonus equal to its AC bonus to the wielder's Reflex save when attempting to reduce the damage from an area effect leyser weapon, and if the Reflex save is successful causes the wielder to avoid all damage from the attack, rather than taking only half damage. Any additional bonuses from feats such as Door of Battle can also be added to the wielder's touch AC or Reflex save in these circumstances. Furthermore, a leyser shield can be used to reflect a leyser attack at a different target. To do this, the wielder must ready an action. If he is shot at with any leyser weapon other than an area effect leyser weapon, and the attack misses him, he may use this readied action to make an attack against any target or targets he chooses. This attack is resolved exactly as though he had fired the weapon himself, except that the original firer's EP is used to determine the damage.

Leyser Sword: This weapon resembles a sword of longer than the usual length, forged of a blue-green Atlantean metal of astonishing strength and sharpness. A leyser sword can be used in three modes, either much like an ordinary sword, or in an enhanced manner where the wielder channels earth power through the blade as he strikes, or rather like a leyser gun, with the blade shooting out blasts of earth power. Its long hilt holds a small but powerful lodestone (Light Lodestone) sufficient for

around three shots or enhanced sword-blows. The leyser sword can also be used to melt through an opponent's weapon, greatly enhancing the power of a sunder attempt. When used to attack any inanimate object in this way, it does a bonus of +1d10 + EP fire damage, rather than the usual +1d6 + EP as against living targets.

Leyser Cannon: This huge, shoulder-carried leyser gun fires an astonishingly powerful blast capable of slaying most foes with a single shot.

Leyser Cannon, Multi-Barrel: The multi-barrel leyser cannon resembles an ordinary leyser cannon, but is even larger and has around six to eight different outlet rods capable of together launching a wide stream of destructive energy. It is usually mounted in some form of turret, but a strong character (Str 13+) could wield it as a two-handed weapon.

Leyser Gun: This basic leyser weapon resembles a snarling-faced dragon in the form of a large, chunky pistol.

Leyser Scatter-Gun: Unlike the standard leyser gun, the scatter-gun affects a large number of opponents at once.

Lodestone, Light: The standard form of 'ammunition' for leyser guns, leyser scatter-guns and pulsed leyser guns, the light lodestone is a small sphere of enchanted iron ore which fits into a compartment in a leyser gun and provides it with earth power. All lodestones can be used for any leyser weapon or Cytron power suit, though attempting to use a lodestone of the wrong size for a particular application may prove troublesome logistically, at the Games Master's discretion – for example, a leyser scatter-gun does not have a compartment large enough for a medium or heavy lodestone, so such a power source would need to be held against it manually.

Lodestone, Medium: This large lodestone resembles the light lodestone, but is intended to provide earth power for Cytron power suits or for larger leyser weapons.

Lodestone, Heavy: The largest lodestone of all is used to power leyser cannons of all kinds. This type of lodestone can be found being rolled to leyser cannon posts by various support staff during sieges of Dinas Emrys.

Pulsed Leyser Gun: Unlike the other hand-held leysers, the pulsed leyser gun can be shot as often as the wielder has attacks, so long as he has sufficient Earth Power.

Leyser weapon ATTACKS

Most leyser weapons attack like any other weapon, except that only a touch attack (ranged or melee, depending on the weapon) need be made to hit the target. Armour provides no protection against leyser weapons, which can melt right through any mundane substance. The only exception to this is that a Cythron power suit reduces damage dealt by leyser weapons.

Attacking with a leyser weapon is a standard action, just as for any other attack. However, the smaller leyser weapons cannot warp sufficient energy to make more than one attack per round, even if the wielder could usually do so with another weapon. The only exceptions are the leyser

cannons and the pulsed leyser gun, both of which can be shot as often as the wielder can make attacks (so long as he has sufficient Earth Power to power them).

Leyser Weapon Damage

Damage for all leyser weapons is dependent on the current EP (Earth Power) of the wielder. These weapons will always deal more damage when used by a more powerful (or more maniacal) warrior, one who is strongly capable of warping Earth Power through his body.

For this reason, all leyser weapons deal damage depending on the firer's current Earth Power. This does not necessarily expend all his Earth Power in one shot, as might occur when casting a spell or having a warp-spasm; rather, the Earth Power here is used as a measure of the maximum possible damage the weapon can inflict, as the firer warps mystical energies through his body.

For example: Sláine has a Base EP of 16, and his current EP is also 16. This means that he can deal 1d4+16 damage with each shot he fires from a leyser scatter-gun, or a mammoth 16d4 damage with each shot from a leyser cannon. Each time he fires his

leyser scatter-gun, he expends 2 EP to do so. The gun's light lodestone holds just 3 EP, so will rapidly be exhausted – on his second shot, he must expend one of his one EPs, and on his third and subsequent shots, 2 EPs of his own. Thus his third shot will do only 1d4+15 damage (since he has 15 EP when he fires), his fourth shot 1d4+13 damage, and so on.

A character with a current EP of 0 is not able to operate the fire-type attacks of his leyser weapons, though he may still use (for example) a leyser sword in its mundane attack mode as a sword.

Hero-Harnesses Revisited

Hero-harnesses allow the wearer to better control earth power that is warping through them. In addition to a hero-harness's use to control a full-on warp-spasm, it may also be used to enhance a leyser weapon attack.

Any character wearing a hero-harness gains a +2 enhancement bonus to his Earth Power, solely for purposes of determining the damage he deals with leyser weapons.



Ley Lines AND power nexuses

Certain areas are capable of providing far more Earth Power, far more quickly, than even major temples or battles can. These are ley lines.

Most of the time, ley lines offer only an ordinary, background level of Earth Power – nothing special, unless one builds a shrine or temple there. However, given the right circumstances – usually a combination of time of year, a battle on the ley site itself, and a confluence of leys joining in a particular place – it is possible for a character to gain far more EP than usual, in a very short amount of time.

Situation or Area	EP gained every round
Major ley line during a battle or festival	1d2
Major ley line during a huge battle or festival (over 2000 participants)	1d4
Ley line nexus during a battle or festival	1d6
Ley line nexus during a huge battle or festival (over 2000 participants)	2d6
Highly magical time of year (Samhain, winter solstice, etc.)	+1

The Cythrons

An ancient evil, imprisoned millions of years ago on the dread planet Cythrawl, the Cythrons escaped by tunnelling through time into the planet's future. In that future, life evolved on the dead planet – the life of Earth, later to give rise to the Celtic civilisations of Tir Nan Og. The Cythrons were able to draw on the magical energy raised by human pain and suffering for their own evil ends, with a view to some day breaking out of their prison.

Although it is rare for a Cythron to voluntarily breed with a human and rarer still for a human to willingly mate with a Cythron, occasionally crossbreeds do arise. One such is Myrddin, the greatest scholar and sorcerer alive at the time of Sláine. Like Myrddin, half-Cythrons will have some very difficult choices to make with regard to good and evil.

Cythron characters are not intended for player character use, other than

perhaps in an extremely unusual one-off all-Cythron campaign. However, half-Cythrons can make an intriguing addition to your version of Tir Nan Og, so long as they are introduced carefully and players are aware of the consequences that will ensue if they play such a character inappropriately.

CYTHRON CHARACTERS

Cythrons appear to have absolutely no redeeming features. Even a Cythron that somehow befriends a human is almost certainly destined to betray him, sooner or later.

- +2 to Wisdom, +2 to Strength, –4 to Charisma. Cythrons are strong and perceptive, but tend to lack empathy and be poor at dealing with others.
- **Base Earth Power:** 15.
- **Magic Attack Rolls:** +4 racial bonus to all magic attack rolls. Though



Cythrons are not very socially skilled, they do have powerful personalities that can be used to force others to comply with their whims.

No Geas: Half-Cythrons do not begin the game with a geas.

Prana Requirement: Any Cythron who does not have the Drain Aura feat must feed on prana, distilled essence of human life force, at least once a day. This can be obtained almost anywhere Cythrons can be found, but without it a Cythron will begin to suffer the exact ill effects a starving human would.

HALF-CYTHRON CHARACTERS

Half-Cythrons are in a very tricky position, rarely trusted by either full Cythrons or humans. Yet upon their shoulders rests the fate of the world, for they must decide every day of their lives whether to simply go along with the Cythron plans for the enslavement and destruction of humanity, or attempt to save their weak and flawed human counterparts.

- +2 to Wisdom OR +2 to Strength (player's choice), –2 to Charisma. Half-Cythrons tend to be either

almost as powerfully built as full Cythrons, or almost as wise, but not both.

- **Base Earth Power:** 10.
- **Magic Attack Rolls:** +2 racial bonus to all magic attack rolls. Half-Cythrons are very nearly as commanding personalities as are full Cythrons.
- **Vulnerable to Cythron Command:** All half-Cythrons suffer a -2 racial penalty to saving throws against spells and spell-like abilities cast or wielded by Cythrons. They are easily manipulated by their full-blooded counterparts.
- **No Geas:** Half-Cythrons do not begin the game with a geas.

New Spell: Bloodfire

Curse

EP Cost: 8 points

Components: V, S, M

Casting Time: 1 round

Range: Evil Eye

Target: Up to one Cythron/rank of Sorcery skill

Duration: Instantaneous

Saving Throw: Fortitude halves

Spell Resistance: Yes

Prerequisites: Magic attack bonus +5 or higher, must be Cythron

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

This spell damages all Cythrons within range, up to a maximum of one per rank of Sorcery skill the caster has. Using the ancient magical law of Sympathy, it causes their blood to burst into flames, dealing horrendous damage. Each affected Cythron is dealt 1d6 fire damage per caster level.

The targets may make Fortitude saving throws for half damage.

Material Component: Hot coals which must be inserted into cuts made into the caster's hands. This deals the caster 2d6 damage during the spellcasting process.

Leyser weapon and cythron feats

The following new feats relate to the various pieces of equipment and new character races in this article. Even more so than any other feats for the *Sláine RPG*, any or all of these may be restricted by the Games Master for game balance reasons.



New Feats Table

General Feats	Prerequisite
Craft Leyser Weapon	Craft Masterwork (weaponsmith), Forbidden Weapon Training, must be a druid of 12 th level or higher
Forbidden Weapons Training	Must have at least one level in one of the tribal elite prestige classes, either Red Branch warrior, blackshield, Fianna or dancer of the sword, <i>or</i> one level in the druid class; base Earth Power 6+
Power Suit Acid Aura	Power Suit Damage Reduction, base attack bonus +10 or higher
Power Suit Damage Reduction**	Power Suit Proficiency, base attack bonus +7 or higher
Power Suit Disintegration	Power Suit Proficiency, base attack bonus +12 or higher
Power Suit Proficiency	Wis 13+, base attack bonus +5 or higher
Special Feats	Prerequisite
Cythron Evil	Must be half-Cythron, Wis 13+
Cythron Malevolence**	Must be Cythron, Wis 15+, magic attack bonus +12 or higher
Drain Aura	Must be Cythron, magic attack bonus +3 or higher
Human Innocence**	Human Kindness, Wis 15+, magic attack bonus +12 or higher
Human Kindness	Cythron Evil, Cha 13+, Bless skill, magic attack bonus +6 or higher
Tentacles of Crom-Cruach**	Must be Cythron, Drain Aura, Con 13+, base attack bonus +4 or higher, must be a worshipper of Crom-Cruach
Vampiric Revenant	Must be Cythron, Tentacles of Crom-Cruach, Con 15+, base attack bonus +7 or higher

* A character may gain this feat multiple times. Its effects do not stack and instead apply to a new weapon or skill.

** A character may gain this feat multiple times and stack its effect.

Cythron Evil (Special)

Certain half-Cythrons take after their more sinister parent. . .

Prerequisites: Must be half-Cythron, Wis 13+.

Benefit: You can acquire spells or feats which have the prerequisite 'Must be Cythron'.

Special: Every time you use a spell or feat which has the prerequisite 'Must be Cythron' your racial penalty to saving throws against spells or spell-like abilities cast or wielded by Cythrons cumulatively increases by -1. This increased penalty is lost at a rate of one point per year, at Samhain.

For example, Nimue is a half-Cythron witch. Most of the time she prefers to avoid using Cythron magic, knowing its dangers and having no great love for her Cythron heritage, but she is also well aware of the powers of this dark sorcery. Fighting for her life one winter against a fomorian raiding party, she calls on the power of her bloodfire spell to defeat her enemies. Desperately short of Earth Power and badly injured, she uses her Drain Aura feat on the last barely breathing fomorian before ritually sacrificing him, allowing her to regain sufficient Earth Power to cure all her wounds. Her racial penalty to saving throws against Cythron magic is now at -4 (-2 base, -1 for the bloodfire spell, -1 for the Drain Aura feat), and remains so until the following Samhain, when it drops down to -3 once more. The Samhain after that it returns to its original -2, so long as Nimue has not used any more Cythron magic herself in the meantime.

Craft Leyser Weapon (General)

After years as an apprentice to the great sages and forbidden weapons experts of Dinas Emrys, you have learned to create leyser weapons to rival those brought out of Atlantis centuries ago.

Prerequisites: Craft Masterwork (weaponsmith), Forbidden Weapon

Training, must be a druid of 15th level or higher.

Benefit: You may craft leyser weapons, according to the usual *Sláine RPG* craft rules.

Cythron Malevolence (Special)

By giving in completely to the evil ways of the Cythrons, you can draw directly on the dark powers of the Guledig and the High Cythrons.

Prerequisites: Must be Cythron, Wis 15+, magic attack bonus +12 or higher.

Benefit: You gain a +5 racial bonus to Earth Power.

Special: You may select this feat more than once. Its effects stack. Each time you gain it, your racial penalty against Cythron spells and spell-like abilities increases permanently by -2.

Drain Aura (Special)

You can drain Earth Power directly from a living human or other food source, without needing to have it processed into the form of Prana beforehand.

Prerequisites: Must be Cythron, magic attack bonus +3 or higher.

Benefit: As a standard action, you can make a magic attack roll (DC determines the target's saving throw) to attempt to drain the aura of one creature within 10 ft. If it fails its saving throw, you immediately drain 1d6 Earth Power from it, which is added to your own Current Earth Power. This is a spell-like ability.

Forbidden Weapons Training (General)

For most people, learning how to wield the fabled leyser weapons of legend is a long and difficult process, requiring a great deal of training and practice for each individual weapon to be learnt. You have a natural gift for leyser weapon use, and after a certain degree of initial training you have learnt to pick up and wield any leyser device as though it were any other of your weapons.

Prerequisites: Must have at least one level in one of the tribal elite prestige classes, either Red Branch warrior, blackshield, Fianna or dancer of the sword, *or* one level in the druid class; base Earth Power 6+.

Benefit: You may use any and all leyser weapons (all the new weapons presented in this article) as though you had the appropriate Exotic Weapon Proficiency for the weapon. This applies even to druids, who cannot usually meet the prerequisites for the Exotic Weapon Proficiency feat.

Human Innocence (Special)

By tempering the sheer power of your Cythron heritage with an appreciation of and even love for humanity, you can draw on immense hidden resources of Earth Power.

Prerequisites: Human Kindness, magic attack bonus +12 or higher.

Benefit: You gain a +5 racial bonus to Earth Power.

Special: The first time you select this feat you also automatically acquire a Major Geas which requires you to dedicate your life to protecting humanity from Cythron interference and attack. This supersedes the Minor Geas gained when you selected the Human Kindness feat. You may select this feat more than once. Its effects stack.

Human Kindness (Special)

Although you can access all the evil magic of your Cythron parent, your human parent's empathy and strength of character give you a great deal of resistance to the corrupting effects of the Cythrons.

Prerequisites: Cythron Malevolence, Cha 13+, Bless skill, magic attack bonus +6 or higher.

Benefit: You no longer have a racial penalty to saving throws against spells or spell-like abilities cast or wielded by Cythrons. Instead, you gain a +6 racial bonus to saving

throws against spells or spell-like abilities cast or wielded by Cythrons.

Special: If you select this feat you also automatically acquire a Minor Geas which requires you to give assistance to any humans you encounter who are being attacked or interfered with by Cythrons. You may no longer select the Cythron Malevolence feat in future, though you still gain the benefits of previous selections of the feat.

Power Suit Acid Aura (Special)

The more powerful Cythron warriors learn to use the magical energies of their power suits to generate a cloud of acidic vapour in the immediate vicinity of the suits.

Prerequisites: Power Suit Damage Reduction, base attack bonus +10 or higher.

Benefit: Any weapon striking your power suit takes 3d10 acid damage. Unlike normal acid damage, this does full damage to objects made of iron, though it does only half damage to other objects as usual. A creature striking your power suit with a natural weapon will take the full 3d10 damage to hit points, unless it succeeds at a Fortitude saving throw (DC 20) in which case it takes only half damage.

Power Suit Damage Reduction (Special)

Though power suits are largely intended to protect against energy-based attacks such as leyser weapons, they can also protect against physical attacks if the wearer is sufficiently strong-willed.

Prerequisites: Power Suit Proficiency, base attack bonus +7 or higher.

Benefit: Any power suit you wear now gives you Damage Reduction 2/enchanted weapons.

Special: You can select this feat multiple times. Each time you select this feat, your power suit's Damage Reduction is increased by +2.

Power Suit Disintegration (Special)

You have learned to materialise your power suit inside one of your enemies.

Prerequisites: Power Suit Proficiency, base attack bonus +12 or higher.

Benefit: Whenever you perform a charge action while wearing a power suit, you may forfeit the usual single melee attack to instead make a special disintegration attack. The disintegration attack may be made against a single opponent, who must immediately make a Reflex save (DC = your magic attack roll) or be disintegrated.

Special: You still suffer the usual -2 penalty to AC for charging.

Power Suit Proficiency (Special)

You have learned how to use one of the Cythrons' most deadly weapons, the dreaded power suit.

Prerequisites: Wis 13+, base attack bonus +5 or higher.

Benefit: You can operate and wear power suits.

Tentacles of Crom-Cruach (Special)

You have become so corrupted by the Maggot God that you can grow a pair of tentacles from your abdomen at will. Each tentacle resembles a young Time Worm, complete with mouth, and can be used to attack your opponents and drain their auras.

Prerequisites: Must be Cythron, Drain Aura, Con 13+, base attack bonus +4 or higher, must be a worshipper of Crom-Cruach.

Benefit: As a standard action, you may grow two tentacles from your abdomen. You immediately gain two extra attacks per melee round, though both attacks will be at -5 (the Multiattack feat will reduce this penalty to -2 as usual). Each tentacle attack can be used for either a bite attack doing 1d6 + Strength

bonus piercing damage, or to make a grapple attack. An opponent struck by the tentacle attack must also make a Will saving throw (DC = your magic attack roll) or you will drain them of 1d3 Earth Power, just as if you had used the Drain Aura feat. You can shrink the tentacles back into your stomach as a standard action, just as you grew them out.

Special: You may select this feat more than once. Its effects stack – each time you acquire it, you gain the ability to grow another pair of tentacles, so if you have selected this feat three times you will be able to grow six tentacles, and make six extra attacks. It is possible for an opponent to attack one of the tentacles specifically – each has an Armour Class of 16 + your Dexterity bonus, and 20 hit points. A tentacle reduced to 0 hp is severed permanently. Tentacles which are damaged but not severed regenerate at a rate of 1 hp per round.

Vampiric Revenant (Special)

Your evil and corruption are such that you can continue the dark work of Crom-Cruach even after your own death.

Prerequisites: Must be Cythron, Tentacles of Crom-Cruach, Con 15+, base attack bonus +7 or higher.

Benefit: If you are killed by an opponent in combat, your corpse reanimates after 1d6 melee rounds as a half-dead (see the *Sláine RPG*) dedicated to slaying your killer.

We warned you that these weapons were dangerous. In the hands of a hero, a leyser blade can destabilise small countries. As for the Cythrons; well, they aren't very nice, are they? Remember, handle them with care.



The Making of a Soundtrack

by S t r a t o s



To highlight the forthcoming CyberNet Soundtrack we thought it would be a nice idea to get the artist responsible, Stratos, to tell you a bit about it, himself and how exactly stuff like this comes together. As someone who thought *garage music* really was made in a garage this has been quite revealing. Now you can bluff your pals with your knowledge of modern music. *Bo Selecta!* (I think).

When I got word that I had secured the licensing agreement for the official CyberNet Soundtrack I was ecstatic! Having been a gamer most of my life, and being a huge fan of science fiction and cyberpunk, the opportunity to combine my music with CyberNet gaming was a dream come true. Leaning fully on my influences and past experiences, I immediately began to tackle the CyberNet Soundtrack. From the first recorded note, I knew I wanted this album to not only be my best work, but also the most experimental in writing and instrumentation. From feedback of the first rough demo I sent to Mongoose, to talks in the forums and hanging out at a local game shop, I started to get an early public response regarding the expectations and musical styles people thought best defined the cyberpunk subculture. Suggestions were as broad as 'please no rap music' to specifics like 'I'm hearing '80s glam rock and heavy metal guitars'. At the end of the day, I came to the realisation that a project such as this already has so many preconceived notions of what can and cannot work that it would be impossible to please everyone with every song I record. However, I knew I needed to compose music that not only appealed to the broadest audience possible but was true to who I am as an electronic musician as well.

I got my start as the electronic musician, Stratos, several years ago when a friend approached my company, Bailey Records, to compile a soundtrack for his first full-length motion picture called *The Screen* (Steward Entertainment / Wonderboy Productions). The movie, a student film about broken relationships and alternate realities, called for a wide range of musical styles. In particular, the screenplay required club and dance music for a college party scene, as well as some darker, ambient score pieces. Up to this point, finding independent recording artists to flesh out the film's soundtrack was easy – easy that is until I couldn't locate a DJ or electronic musician to write a song for the party scenes. After months of looking online and calling in favours, I turned up nothing so I decided to take matters into my own hands.

In October 2000, I set up my first digital recording studio. I bought Sonic Foundry's ACID Pro, hooked up a cheap keyboard and my bass guitar, and soon found myself writing and recording my first dance and techno songs. On December 8, 2000, *The Screen, Original Motion Picture Soundtrack* was released at the movie's premiere party. It featured my first two songs as Stratos, 'Sonik Dissonance', my first dance radio single, and 'Revelation [In the Woods]'.



Following the soundtrack to *The Screen*, I was smitten with writing electronic music and quickly began working on new projects. For Christmas 2000, I recorded ten dance versions of popular holiday tunes for my first full-length album, *Cosmic Christmas*. That CD was released on demand, exclusively through mp3.com.

The following year, I released two EPs (*Invasion – The Galactic EP* and *JesusRave*), a double-disc set (*Peregrine's Shadow: The Battle For Bengarii*), and my first full-length dance and techno album, *Solar Flare*, all through mp3.com. Also in 2001, I began remixing songs for various authorised contests. The first pop artist I remixed for was Madonna.

In 2002, I wrote and recorded a song called 'sydney.bristow' which appeared on the *Praise God Muzik* compilation alongside my label-mate, Jennifer Greenawalt. I also recorded authorised remixes for Lenny Kravitz, Alex Gordon, sonicAnimation, Tommy Lee and others. Later in 2002, I recorded a remix of one of my own songs called 'Disco Beat'. The original version appears on *Solar Flare*. The remix, 'Disco Beat [enhanced mix]', appears on the PlastiQ Musiq album *Unheard Artist's Compilation, Volume 3*.

In late 2002, I began recording my next project. On April 1, 2003, I released my national debut album titled *Autumnal Slumber*. *Slumber* proved to be a defining moment in my electronic music career. Not only does the album feature 16 of my best tracks to date, but also a good friend, Jim Prostovich of Impalpable Design, created all of the artwork. *Autumnal Slumber* features most of my radio singles including 'Sonik Dissolutions' and 'Conversations in Eschatology'. It also launched a small, summer tour with the Stereoflowers this past July.

In addition to *Autumnal Slumber*, in 2003 I released an exclusive song, 'For Avion', on the *Music For Martha* benefit CD and remixed a great track by Micah of the Stereoflowers called 'Sunlight' for *Unheard Artist's Compilation, Volume 4*. 'For Avion' reached the number one spot on select radio station Rhythmic Charts, quickly overcoming the likes of Andy Hunter, The Echoing Green, John Reuben, and many other dance/urban recording artists.

In October 2003, three years after first assuming the identity of Stratos, I entered into negotiations with Mongoose Publishing. By the end of the month, the paperwork was signed and I had begun writing and recording my ideas of what cyberpunk should sound like. Through my experiences with film scores, remixing songs by some of today's hottest pop stars, and writing original material, I feel ready to release the official soundtrack for CyberNet.

Inspiration for this soundtrack has come from all the logical places one might expect. For starters, the OGL CyberNet core rulebook. In addition to CyberNet, I've scoured the literary works and screen adaptations of the Fathers of Cyberpunk - William Gibson and Philip K. Dick. I also sought inspiration while I watched and studied popular genre films by Lucas, the Wachowski brothers and Spielberg.



Bailey Records

From within the literary and film works that primarily define the cyberpunk subculture, I've managed to find several key factors and recurring themes within the genre. Some of those themes include questions of Man vs. Machine, Man vs. God, and Man vs. Society. It is a goal of mine to develop these aspects of cyberpunk into key elements of the music I'm recording for the CyberNet Soundtrack. For example, I want to incorporate organic sounds and rhythms with hard-hitting techno, trance, and jungle beats to represent a Man vs. Machine mentality. Diversity of sounds is the key to any good soundtrack. To best translate the themes of cyberpunk into music, some songs are purely atmospheric strings and sustained keys, while others are heart pounding and adrenaline-rushing breakbeats and action.

While writing each of the twenty-plus songs for the CyberNet Soundtrack, I decided to use several underlying melodies throughout the album. This idea is similar to how film scores use heroic and villainous theme songs throughout a movie to notify the viewers that something exciting is about to happen on the big screen. To me, the soundtrack is one big piece consisting of a beginning, several climactic themes and a resolution - best listened to as a whole but hopefully one or two songs will have a breakaway appeal that could possibly get some radio airplay. The soundtrack will be over 70-minutes in length. From day one I wanted to push the production envelope and give the buyers the biggest bang for their buck.

As with my past projects, the CyberNet Soundtrack will be written, recorded, and produced in my home studio. In May 2003, my wife and I moved into our new house and soon thereafter I built what I now refer to as 'The Lair'. It is my own professional recording studio full of recording gear and instruments, plus my CD, toy, and book collection. The Lair is where the magic happens. I estimate that I will spend approximately 240 hours from start to finish in the studio on this project as I write, record and produce each and every track from scratch. Like *Autumnal Slumber*, the CyberNet Soundtrack will also be co-produced by my good friend and talented bass player, Bill Cory, and my business partner, Adam Greenawalt.

Much of the recording will feature royalty-free loops and samples that will lay the foundation for the melodies and instrumentation I have written. Currently in the studio we



The Darkrider

are using an early version of Sonar for tracking, digital mixing and most of the production work. I use several Korg synthesizers and drum machines for writing and creating original sounds along with my various electric and acoustic bass guitars and amp processors. Unlike most of my previous works, the CyberNet Soundtrack will also feature several guest instrumentalists on guitars and percussion, as well as guest vocalists. In fact, this project is the first where I've actually written lyrics for several songs on the album. In the past most of my work has been purely instrumental.

As for the album's packaging, it will actually act as a small game supplement to the OGL CyberNet Roleplaying Game. The album jacket will include new artwork by very talented individuals and correlating game stats for new Non-Player Characters that can be used to enhance your CyberNet adventures. One character, The Darkrider, was based on an illustration done by Jim Prostovich. On *Autumnal Slumber*, I released a song called 'Enter Darkrider' that was inspired by Jim's drawing. A new song called 'Darkrider Returneth' has been written for the CyberNet Soundtrack and acts as a continuing theme for the evil character. Game statistics for The Darkrider will be made available to those who purchase the soundtrack. Other stats are being created for a mid-level NPC of Stratos. It is my plan to create at least a half-dozen unique Non-Player Characters for the CyberNet RPG that will be available either through the album artwork or on my website – www.lifeofstratos.com.

My future plans, coinciding with the release of the CyberNet Soundtrack, are to keep busy with new projects, concerts, and convention appearances. While in the studio recording new material for CyberNet, I was simultaneously working on a few songs for an indie horror flick written and directed by a talented young filmmaker named Ted Mowery. *The Charnel Gospel* is

scheduled for an April 2004 shooting date and will eventually be released directly to video via the Internet. As a special bonus to my fans and supporters, anyone who purchases the CyberNet Soundtrack directly from me through the Bailey Records website (www.baileyrecords.com) will receive an exclusive white-label CD-R album of all my songs written for *The Charnel Gospel*. The mini-soundtrack will feature both the original songs, in addition to, club and trance remixes of each track. I expect the soundtrack to the horror movie to be an 11-song album in and of itself.

Besides soundtrack material, I will be recording a new exclusive song for another benefit compilation album that Bailey Records is releasing in September 2004. The album, *Arms of Love*, will aide in raising awareness and funds for Arms of Love International – an organisation building children's homes in third world countries throughout the world. In addition to new material, I have several authorised remixes lingering on the back burner and studio production work with several artists like Micah and a very talented up-and-coming band called Less Than Perfect. I also plan to write and record some 'generic' sci-fi and horror-themed songs for general licensing. I've spoken with several aspiring game programmers and filmmakers and this seems to be a viable area to pursue.

In addition to studio work, I have recently begun performing my music live at small venues and conventions. I plan to attend many of the gaming and comic book conventions scheduled for 2004, either as a performer or as a vendor selling the CyberNet Soundtrack (hopefully both). Check my website for dates and locations of all my upcoming concerts and appearances.

When I began recording electronic music, it was partially out of necessity. Little did I know that after just four years I'd have created over 50 original songs and a dozen remixes, and that I'd find myself working on a soundtrack for CyberNet. God willing, I will not be slowing down any time soon! I'd love the opportunity to work on yet another roleplaying game soundtrack or music for specific movies, video games, television, or product advertisements. Working on the *CyberNet Official Roleplaying Soundtrack* has been a truly rewarding and enjoyable experience.

When Bryan K. Borgman is not busy recording new material or performing as Stratos, he likes to spend his time serving as Owner and Executive Producer of Bailey Records, taking care of his beautiful baby girl Trinity Alexis, and hanging out with his lovely wife Missy. Bryan is also the GM of his local gaming group – CORSPHEL, and is a member of the Ohio Star Wars Collector's Club.



Stratos in action...

The background of the entire image is a dark, atmospheric cyberpunk cityscape at night, with tall, jagged buildings and glowing windows. In the center, a large, imposing figure with a bald head covered in orange and red tribal-like tattoos and wearing a blue jacket stands prominently. To the left and right of this central figure are two smaller characters, a man and a woman, both wearing futuristic, high-tech armor and holding large, detailed firearms. The overall color palette is dominated by dark blues, greys, and the vibrant orange and red of the central character's tattoos.

OGI **YBERNET**

CYBERPUNK ADVENTURES

Time To Play The Game

POWER CLASS: AVENGER

Joseph Miller

Avengers are the armour of the innocent and the swords of justice, whirlwinds of righteous wrath born of a desire to right wrongs and free others from the chains of oppression. The mantle of an avenger is laden with responsibilities and is heavy to bear, but those few who accept the calling are transformed into crusaders against cruelty and bastions of freedom from fear. The avenger is a catalyst of change wherever he goes, ridding the lands of his sworn enemies and giving hope to those who have none.

Adventurers: The avenger adventures in order to bring punishment to wrongdoers and salvation to the innocent. He has little desire for loot beyond seeking objects and items, which can help him in his quest against the minions of evil. Every day is a constant trial of the avenger's principles as he walks the fine line between righteous anger and revenge. From righting a wrong to freeing others from oppression, or just helping those in need, the avenger quests, not for personal gain, but for the cause of freedom and justice. The avenger's life is a constant search for perfection through the living of his ideals and he is most effective when adventuring to punish the guilty and guard the guiltless.

Characteristics: The avenger's divine wrath is legendary amongst both friends and foes alike and his tenacity in pursuing his sworn enemies is renowned. Avengers, unlike most divine agents, are not granted healing powers, instead they are dealers of divine retribution and as such their powers revolve around bringing about the final judgement

Continuing with our very popular Power Class series, we present the Avenger, a man (or dwarf, elf, etc.) on a mission. Be advised, this class is very focused and is quite powerful if power-played, so Games Masters might want to enforce harsh penalties for straying from the true path.



of their foes. As they grow in experience avengers gain the power to turn undead, cast divine spells, and acquire abilities that guard them from those impeding their goals. So too does the intensity of their wrath increase as they become adept at bringing retribution to their sworn enemies. To aid the avenger in his quest for righteous revenge his powers can draw forth an intelligent weapon sworn to strike down the avenger's enemies.

Alignment: Avengers must be chaotic good and lose their powers if they ever change their alignment. Avengers also have a code of conduct they must follow, which embodies the principles by which they live.

Religion: The avengers are a faith unto themselves, answering only to their deity, if they have one. Avengers need not worship specific deities, instead committing themselves to the path of retribution and righteous anger. If an avenger does belong to a church it has some influence over him and his actions,

but he is under no formal obligation to abide by the church's requests. In fact, an avenger might at times find himself at odds with his religious superiors, though such cases are rare.

Background: Avengers are called, not trained. Usually they experience some sort of grave injustice or cruelty in their youth, which galvanises their soul and sets their feet upon the path of righteous anger. Of course, not all who experience such pain in their adolescence become avengers, but there are a chosen few who experience the spark of divine wrath and who nurture it into a flame that consumes their very being. Some are called to the path of divine retribution later in life through an experience of great sorrow in their lives caused by evil deeds. No matter how they come to accept the call they all become avengers of the innocent and punishers of evil.

Few avengers are fortunate enough to train under the tutelage of another avenger as they rarely stay in one

place for long. Many young avengers perish before their time as they are much more daring in their deeds facing foes who wield more power than they can possibly hope to overcome. Still those avengers who survive their impetuous youth become adept at bringing their sworn enemies to judgement and freeing others from tyranny. Few things strike fear in evil more than knowing an experienced avenger is walking their lands.

Races: Humans, half-elves, half-orcs and elves make excellent avengers due to their inborn diligence once they pour their spirits into a purpose. Dwarves and halflings who become avengers rarely remain with their clan as they find it difficult to serve both their code and their kith and kin. Gnomes rarely take up the mantle of the avenger. Good-aligned humanoid races are known to have avengers among them, but among evil-aligned humanoids there are virtually none.

Other Classes: Avengers work well with each other and have been known to form bands against common sworn enemies. They have relatively good relations with good clerics and paladins, though they often differ in their approach and can sometimes find themselves at odds with each other's methods. They prefer working with daring, passionate and freedom loving individuals, though honour and honesty are important as well. They enjoy the company of good bards, rangers and rogues and recognise them as kindred spirits in their ardour for life and recognition that sometimes one must bend the rules in order to protect others. Avengers also feel a common bond with good barbarians, as they understand their inner rage and preference for intuition rather than reasoned logic.

Game Rule Information

Abilities: Charisma is the most important ability an avenger has. It

determines how long an avenger's divine wrath lasts, it influences the divine grace that guards the avenger from harm, enhances the avenger's ability to turn undead, and affects many of the avenger's skills. Strength and Constitution are also important due to the avenger's central function in combat. A Wisdom score of 14 or higher is required to gain access to the most powerful avenger spells, and a score of 11 or higher is required to cast any avenger spells at all.

Alignment: Chaotic Good.

Hit Die: d10.

Class Skills

The avenger's class skills (and the key ability for each skill) are Bluff (Cha), Concentration (Con), Craft (Int), Diplomacy (Cha), Gather Information (Cha), Handle Animal (Cha), Intimidate (Cha), Knowledge (religion) (Int), Profession (Wis), Ride (Dex), and Sense Motive (Wis).

Table 1–1: The Avenger

Level	Base Attack Bonus	Fort Save	Ref Save	Will Save	Special
1	+1	+2	+0	+0	Aura of chaos and good, <i>detect evil</i> , divine wrath 1/day, 1st sworn enemy
2	+2	+3	+0	+0	Divine grace
3	+3	+3	+1	+1	Aura of courage
4	+4	+4	+1	+1	Turn undead
5	+5	+4	+1	+1	Sworn weapon
6	+6/+1	+5	+2	+2	Divine freedom
7	+7/+2	+5	+2	+2	Divine wrath 2/day
8	+8/+3	+6	+2	+2	2nd sworn enemy
9	+9/+4	+6	+3	+3	
10	+10/+5	+7	+3	+3	<i>Break enchantment</i> 1/week
11	+11/+6/+1	+7	+3	+3	Improved divine freedom
12	+12/+7/+2	+8	+4	+4	Greater divine wrath
13	+13/+8/+3	+8	+4	+4	Divine wrath 3/day
14	+14/+9/+4	+9	+4	+4	<i>Break enchantment</i> 2/week
15	+15/+10/+5	+9	+5	+5	3rd sworn enemy
16	+16/+11/+6/+1	+10	+5	+5	
17	+17/+12/+7/+2	+10	+5	+5	Tireless wrath
18	+18/+13/+8/+3	+11	+6	+6	<i>Break enchantment</i> 3/week
19	+19/+14/+9/+4	+11	+6	+6	Divine wrath 4/day
20	+20/+15/+10/+5	+12	+6	+6	Mighty divine wrath

Skill Points at 1st Level: (2 + Int modifier) x 4.

Skill Points at each additional level: 2 + Int modifier.

Table 1–2: Spells per Day

Level	1	2	3	4
1	—	—	—	—
2	—	—	—	—
3	—	—	—	—
4	0	—	—	—
5	0	—	—	—
6	1	—	—	—
7	1	—	—	—
8	1	0	—	—
9	1	0	—	—
10	1	1	—	—
11	1	1	0	—
12	1	1	1	—
13	1	1	1	—
14	2	1	1	0
15	2	1	1	1
16	2	2	1	1
17	2	2	2	1
18	3	2	2	1
19	3	3	3	2
20	3	3	3	3

Class Features

All of the following are class features of the avenger:

Weapon and Armour Proficiency:

Avengers are proficient with all simple and martial weapons, with all types of armour (heavy, medium and light), and with shields (except tower shields).

Aura of Chaos and Good (Ex): The power of an avenger's Aura of Chaos and Good (see the *detect chaos* and *detect good* spells) is equal to his avenger level.

Detect Evil (Sp): At will, an avenger can use *detect evil*, as the spell.

Divine Wrath (Su): An avenger can fly into a Divine Wrath a certain number of times per day when within 60 feet of a sworn enemy. While in Divine Wrath, the avenger temporarily gains a +4 bonus to Strength, a +4 bonus to Charisma

to the exclusion of all others. Divine Wrath lasts for a number of rounds equal to 3 + the character's (newly improved) Charisma modifier or until all sworn enemies in line of sight are slain or have fled from view (invisible enemies are still considered



and a +2 morale bonus on Will saves, but he takes a –2 penalty to Armour Class. While in wrath, an avenger cannot use any Charisma-, Dexterity-, or Intelligence-based skills (except for Balance, Escape Artist, Intimidate and Ride), the Concentration skill, or any abilities that require patience or concentration, such as turning undead, nor can he cast spells or activate magic items that require a command word, a spell trigger (such as a wand), or spell completion (such as a scroll) to function. He can use any feat he has except Combat Expertise, item creation feats, and metamagic feats. While within divine wrath, an avenger must attack his sworn enemies and those immediately protecting them

in line of sight until they have fled), whichever comes first. An avenger may not prematurely end his Divine Wrath. At the end of the Divine Wrath, the avenger loses the Divine Wrath modifiers and restrictions and becomes fatigued (–2 penalty to Strength, –2 penalty to Dexterity, cannot charge or run) for the duration of the current encounter (unless he is a 17th-level avenger, at which point this limitation no longer applies; see below).

An avenger can fly into a divine wrath only once per encounter. At 1st level he can use his divine wrath ability once per day. At 7th level and every six levels thereafter, he can use it one additional time per day (to a

maximum of four times per day at 19th level).

Sworn Enemy (Su): An avenger may swear vengeance against anyone he has witnessed committing an evil act (the *detect evil* ability does not count for this purpose), oppressing others, or harming or threatening innocents. He may only have one sworn enemy at a time. The avenger swears vengeance in regards to a specific evil deed he has witnessed. The individual or group most culpable for the evil act becomes the sworn enemy of the avenger, this is not necessarily the person who the avenger witnessed committing the crime as they may not have performed the act willingly. In such a case the avenger's sworn enemy becomes the individual or group that coerced the person. If the avenger swears vengeance for an act that was, in fact, an unfortunate accident or misunderstanding the avenger loses his powers for one day because of his hasty rush to judgement.

Avengers know when they pass within 60 feet of a sworn enemy and are considered to know their sworn enemy even if they have not met them before (such as when an avenger casts the *locate creature* spell). If the avenger has slain or destroyed the individual or group that was his sworn enemy, he may name a new sworn enemy to take its place as a free action.

Should the avenger ever discover that his sworn enemy is innocent of his crimes, then he may freely renounce him and seek a new sworn enemy.

An avenger knows when a sworn enemy atones for his evil deeds (i.e. through the use of the *atonement* spell) and immediately gains the ability to swear vengeance for another evil deed.

No matter whether an avenger slays or renounces a sworn enemy, or his sworn enemy atones, he must replace the 'lost' sworn enemy within one week with a new one or lose his

avenger powers until he chooses a new sworn enemy. It is encouraged that both player and Games Master work together to make sure an avenger's starting sworn enemy plays some role in any campaign the avenger participates in.

At 8th and 15th levels, an avenger may have an additional sworn enemy. The avenger does not have to swear vengeance and gain a new sworn enemy immediately upon acquiring these levels, but must do so within one month. Failing to do so does not cause the avenger to lose his avenger powers (unless he has had no sworn enemy for over a week), but does cause the avenger to suffer a -1 penalty on attack and weapon damage rolls for each sworn enemy not declared for over a month.

Divine Grace (Su): At 2nd level, an avenger gains a bonus equal to his Charisma bonus (if any) on all saving throws.

Aura of Courage (Su): Beginning at 3rd level, an avenger is immune to fear (magical or otherwise). Each ally within 10 feet of his gains a +4 morale bonus on saving throws against fear effects. This ability functions while the avenger is conscious, but not if he is unconscious or dead.

Turn Undead (Su): When an avenger reaches 4th level, he gains the supernatural ability to turn undead. He may use this ability a number of times per day equal to 3 + his Charisma modifier. He turns undead as a cleric of three levels lower would.

Spells: Beginning at 4th level, an avenger gains the ability to cast a small number of divine spells, which are drawn from the avenger spell list. An avenger must choose and prepare his spells in advance.

To prepare or cast a spell, an avenger must have a Wisdom score equal to at least 10 + the spell level. The Difficulty Class for a saving throw

against an avenger's spell is 10 + the spell level + the avenger's Wisdom modifier.

Like other spellcasters, an avenger can cast only a certain number of spells of each spell level per day. His base daily spell allotment is given on Table 1-2: Spells per Day. In addition, he receives bonus spells per day if he has a high Wisdom score. When Table 1-2: Spells per Day indicates that the avenger gets 0 spells per day of a given spell level, he gains only the bonus spells he would be entitled to based on his Wisdom score for that spell level. The avenger does not have access to any domain spells or granted powers, as a cleric does.

An avenger prepares and casts spells the way a cleric does, though he cannot lose a prepared spell to spontaneously cast a *cure* spell in its place. An avenger may prepare and cast any spell on the avenger spell list, provided that he can cast spells of that level, but he must choose which spells to prepare during his daily meditation.

Up to 3rd level, an avenger has no caster level. At 4th level and higher, his caster level is one-half his avenger level.

Sworn Weapon (Sp): Upon reaching 5th level, an avenger gains the service of an unusually intelligent melee weapon to serve him in his crusade against evil (see below). This weapon can be any simple or martial melee weapon.

Once per day, as a full-round action, an avenger may magically call his weapon from the celestial realms in which it resides. The weapon immediately appears within the hands of the avenger and remains for 2 hours per avenger level; it may be dismissed at any time as a free action. Only the avenger may wield the weapon and if it is disarmed or taken away from the avenger by another it returns to the celestial realms where it will await the call of its master. The weapon is the same weapon each time

it is summoned, though the avenger may release a particular weapon from service.

Each time the weapon is called, it appears undamaged, regardless of any damage it may have taken previously. Calling a weapon is a conjuration (calling) effect. Should the avenger's weapon be destroyed, it immediately disappears. The avenger may not summon another weapon for thirty days or until he gains an avenger level, whichever comes first. During this thirty-day period, the avenger takes a -1 penalty on attack and weapon damage rolls.

Divine Freedom (Su): At 6th level, an avenger gains immunity to all charm, compulsion, or impeding spells or effects, such as paralysis, *charm person*, *dominate person*, *hold person*, *slow*, and *web* while within divine wrath.

Break Enchantment (Sp): At 10th level, an avenger can produce a *break enchantment* effect, as the spell, once per week. He can use this ability one additional time per week for every four levels after 10th (twice per week at 14th, and three times at 18th).

Improved Divine Freedom (Su):

At 11th level, an avenger's divine freedom improves beyond his divine wrath. Whenever he comes under the effects of a charm, compulsion, or impeding spell or effect and fails his saving throw he can attempt a new saving throw 1 round later at the same DC. He only gets this one extra chance to succeed at his saving throw.

Greater Divine Wrath (Su):

At 12th level, an avenger's bonuses to Strength and Charisma during his Divine Wrath each increase to +6, and his morale bonus on Will saves increases to +3. The penalty to AC remains at -2.

Tireless Wrath (Ex): At 17th level, an avenger no longer becomes fatigued at the end of his Divine Wrath.

Mighty Divine Wrath (Su):

At 20th level, an avenger's bonuses to Strength and Charisma during his Divine Wrath each increase to +8, and his morale bonus on Will saves increases to +4. The penalty to AC remains at -2.

Code of Conduct: An avenger must be of chaotic good alignment and loses all class abilities if he ever willingly commits an evil act.

Additionally, an avenger's code requires that he help those in need (provided they do not use the help for evil ends), protect people from oppression (especially slavery), and punish those who harm or threaten innocents. Unlike paladins, they can and oft times do act outside of the laws of the land and do not have to act honourably (except in the regards to the use of poison, which is forbidden) towards those they know are evil, oppressive, or harming or threatening innocents. They must act with honour (not lying, not cheating, not using poison, and so forth), in regards to all others whom they meet, until it is known that they are evil.

Associates: While he may adventure with characters of any good or neutral alignment, an avenger will never knowingly associate with evil characters, nor will he continue an association with someone who consistently offends his moral code. An avenger may accept only henchmen, followers or cohorts who are chaotic good.

Ex-Avengers

An avenger who ceases to be chaotic good, who wilfully commits an evil act, or who grossly violates the code of conduct loses all avenger spells and abilities (including the avenger's weapon, but not weapon, armour, and shield proficiencies). He may not progress any further in levels as an avenger. He regains his abilities and advancement potential if he atones for his violations (see the *atonement* spell description), as appropriate.

Like a member of any other class, an avenger may be a multiclass character, but multiclass avengers face a special restriction. An avenger who gains a level in any class other than avenger may never again raise his avenger level, though he retains all his avenger abilities.



The Avenger's Weapon

Avenger Level	Bonus Hit Points	Hardness Adj.	Int	Sense Enemy	Special
5–7	+5	+5	6	70 ft.	Empathic link, magic, uncanny dodge, unwavering grip
8–10	+10	+10	7	80 ft.	Automatic critical vs. evil and sworn enemies
11–15	+15	+15	8	90 ft.	Good, improved uncanny dodge
16–20	+20	+20	9	100 ft.	Adamantine, spell resistance

Bonus Hit Points: Add these bonus hit points to the normal hit points a weapon of the chosen type would have.

Hardness Adj.: Add this adjustment to the normal hardness a weapon of the chosen type would have.

Int: The weapon's Intelligence score.

Sense Enemy: The weapon senses its master's sworn enemies when they come within the indicated radius and informs its master of their number and direction. The weapon also ignores concealment when used against a sworn enemy as it guides its master's hand in striking such creatures.

Empathic Link (Su): The avenger has an empathic link with his weapon and can communicate empathically with it, while wielding it.

Uncanny Dodge (Ex): As long as the avenger is wielding this weapon, he retains his Dexterity bonus to AC (if any) even if he is caught flat-footed or struck by an invisible attacker. However, he still loses his Dexterity bonus to AC if immobilised.

Magic: The weapon is treated as a magic weapon for purposes of dealing damage to evil creatures and sworn enemies with damage reduction.

Unwavering Grip: The weapon provides a bonus equal to the avenger's class level on any roll made to keep it from being disarmed in combat.

Automatic Critical vs. Evil and Sworn Enemies: All critical hit rolls against evil foes and sworn enemies are automatically successful, so every threat is a critical hit.

Good: The weapon is treated as a good weapon for purposes of dealing damage to evil creatures and sworn enemies with damage reduction.

Improved Uncanny Dodge (Ex): As long as the avenger is wielding this weapon, he can no longer be flanked. This defence denies a rogue the ability to sneak attack the avenger by flanking him, unless the attacker has at least four more rogue levels than the target has avenger levels.

Adamantine: The weapon is treated as an adamantine weapon for purposes of dealing damage to evil creatures and sworn enemies with damage reduction and bypassing hardness.

Spell Resistance (Ex): A weapon's spell resistance equals its master's avenger level + 5. To affect the weapon with a spell, a spellcaster must get a result on a caster level check (1d20 + caster level) that equals or exceeds the weapon's spell resistance.

Circle against Evil, Magic Vestment, Magic Weapon, Greater Prayer, Remove Blindness/Deafness, and Remove Curse.

4th-LEVEL AVENGER SPELLS

Break Enchantment, Death Ward, Dispel Evil, Divine Power, Holy Sword, Freedom of Movement, Locate Creature, Mark of Justice, and Righteous Might.



AVENGER SPELL LIST

1st-LEVEL AVENGER SPELLS

Bless, Bless Water, Bless Weapon, Create Water, Cure Light Wounds, Detect Undead, Divine Favour, Endure Elements, Entropic Shield, Magic Weapon, Protection from Evil, Read Magic, Resistance, Shield of Faith, and Virtue.

2nd-LEVEL AVENGER SPELLS

Align Weapon, Bull's Strength, Eagle's Splendour, Owl's Wisdom, Remove Paralysis, Resist Energy, Shield Other, Undetectable Alignment, and Zone of Truth.

3rd-LEVEL AVENGER SPELLS

Cure Moderate Wounds, Daylight, Discern Lies, Dispel Magic, Magic

This is a tricky character to play. On the surface, it seems a licence to beat the tar out of anything in sight, but to play the character well a player needs to stay focused on his motivations. We don't need to tell you that the object of Power Classes is to provide new and interesting class variants, often based on the sort of characters many of you regularly create out of the existing classes. You can certainly max out the Avenger if you really want to, but that isn't the point, is it?



Lock and Load

August Hahn

'God made man, but Sam Colt made them equal.'



Bullets and the guns that fire them are as much a part of the CyberNet game as the characters who shoot them. A gun is not just a weapon on the dark streets of the game setting. They are protection, reassurance, tools of the trade and fashion accessories all rolled into one chromed-out, fully automatic package. While soldiers are the most prevalent character type to pack serious heat, other professions and character classes either have guns or need to find them as soon as they can. There is a word for characters in CyberNet who do not use guns – victims.

The *OGL CyberNet Main Rulebook* talks about the psychology of guns and ammunition in the game, going into enough detail to make the solid point that in a society where 'might makes right' has ascended past truth, honour, or fair law, a handgun can be the only thing a person can carry to feel any sense of freedom any longer. Pistols, rifles, shotguns and heavier ordnance are the tools of choice for both the huddled masses and their jack-booted oppressors.

Games Masters should take this concept to heart when running CyberNet games. While not every person the player characters meet

on the street will have a tricked-out machine pistol with armour-piercing rounds in the clip, even vagrants and homeless people carry antique guns or whatever they can find. A lot of agents and freelancers end up dead in the gutter, and those who shot them do not always have time to gather up fallen pieces. All of those guns go somewhere, and only rarely do they lay on the ground long enough to cool, much less end up in an evidence bag.

Among the setting's elite, a gun is assumed. Just *what* gun a character carries can be as big a statement about him as what he says and does. Does the private investigator the player characters have to visit for answers about a potential client have a mini-gun in a rack behind his desk? Does the woman they meet coming out of a low-rent hotel have a brand new high-calibre pistol strapped to her thigh? Do the corporate-funded police in their neighbourhood carry assault rifles? What about the local kids playing hide and seek with zip guns? These questions can lend a lot of flavour and depth to a campaign, since for every gun, there is a shooter and a body bag just waiting to happen.

Custom Guns and Ammunition

The Main Rulebook carries a selection of useful firearms to flesh out a campaign and characters should be able to find anything they need to get the job done from those pages. The guns listed in CyberNet are representative of the hundreds of weapons of each calibre and design available on the open market and behind the closed doors of a very violent tomorrow. If a given person cannot find a gun in the book big enough to take care of his problems, he probably should not be shooting it in the first place.

That said, there are times where a character needs something that is not straight off the rack. The idea of customising guns goes all the way back to their origins. When firearms were first created, each one was a work of art and fitted to the hands of their intended recipient personally. Carved stocks of precious wood, long barrels sized to the height of the shooter, and custom actions keyed for the strength and drawing power of the gun's owner were the only way such things were built. Even in the Industrial era when guns were mass produced, there were artisans

of the trade with the skills to take a machine-pressed long rifle and make it a special piece worthy of a master marksman.

These custom jobs were not just icons of vanity; a gun fitted to its owner performs better in the field and on the range than some average banger picked up at a pawnshop. The more comfortable a person is with their gun, the better they will be able to shoot with it, and what could be more comfortable than shouldering a weapon built just for you?

This article presents a basic system for custom building new guns and retrofitting existing ones to fit the needs of a customer. Such work is very exacting and requires the skills of a master craftsman, though easier work can be attempted by apprentice gunsmiths with some degree of success. A custom gun carries an additional cost, of course, and a single firearm with extensive custom work can easily be several times more expensive than the base weapon itself. For well-funded professionals, there is no question; a custom gun is worth an arsenal of inferior ones.

Performing custom work on a weapon requires three things – tools, a minimum level of skill, and the resources to do the work in the first place. Pre-existing designs are not entirely necessary, as custom work can be completely original and improvised, but there is a price in time and money to be paid for inventing customisations on the fly. This is rarely a problem for the craftsman, but the sort of people who would even want a five barrelled mini-cannon with a doubled rate of fire and cyberlinked targeting control are probably not known for their boundless patience.

The basic system for generating a custom weapon is this:

- Every customisation done to a weapon is a separate job.
- The length of time a custom job takes is one day for every point of Resource

cost increase as per the Customisation Master Table, to a maximum of 3 days. An additional day is added for every three base days of time if the gunsmith has never before examined a weapon with the modifications to the level the customer (which may be himself) desires or does not have an exacting technical layout of the work to be done.

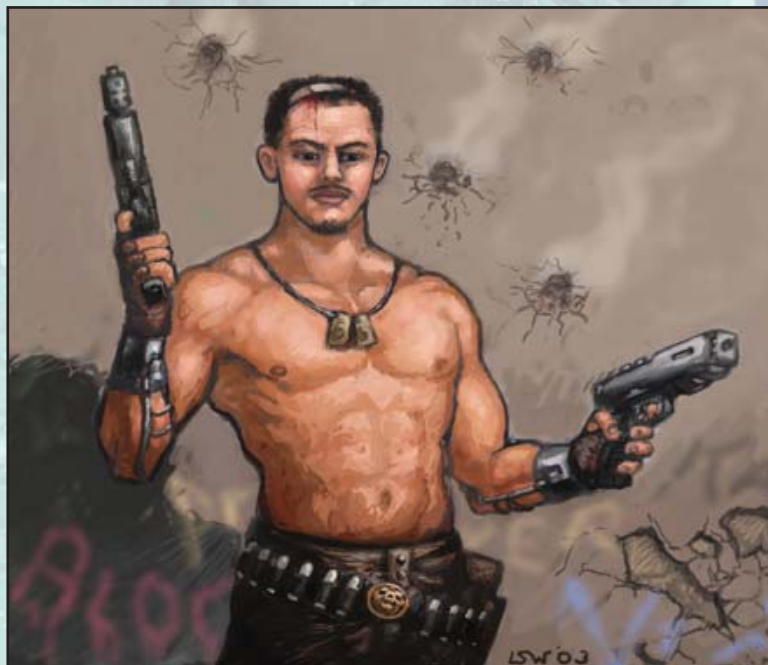
- One custom work skill check is made per day. The Difficulty Class (DC) for this check is the modified Technical (mechanical) skill check calculated using the modifiers generated below. The DC is increased by +5 if the gunsmith has never before examined a weapon with the modifications to the level the customer (which may be himself) desires or does not have an exacting technical layout of the work to be done.
- Every failed skill check must be successfully made after an additional day's work or the entire job is ruined. Rerolled skill checks do not penalise the craftsman with anything but lost time.

- A natural 1 on a custom work skill check ruins the weapon completely. Sorry, s\$%t happens...

Tools

At a minimum, a weapon craftsman needs a full set of cutting, crimping, fastening and smoothing gear. These are subsumed into the Cybergear concept of a mechanical tool kit. To provide the best quality of workmanship possible, a masterwork tool set is required, but a gunsmith can suffice with lesser tools if he is willing to shoulder the difficulty of working with them and the greater effort they will require to turn out decent work.

The need for tools also entails a place to do the work itself. This can be any relatively flat surface with enough light for the craftsman to see by, but the better the conditions, the better the chance of success at any given custom job. If a gunsmith has to worry about his best rifling lathe rolling around every time the van he is working in the back of turns a corner, he will have a harder time putting together a quality weapon. While every custom job does not require a massive, track-lit laboratory with arc-welding equipment and UberCraft brand tools on every tungsten steel table, the better the setting, the better the end product.



Tool Quality

Tools are:	Technical (mechanical) Modifier
Brand new (have never been used for any work before)	+1
Well-used (have been successfully used for at least 20 custom jobs by the craftsman currently using them)	+1
Mastercraft tools	+1 to +3 (depending on quality)
Every extra set of tools on hand (up to three)	+1 per set
Partial or low quality set of tools	-1 to -3 (depending on condition)
Completely improvised tools (tools from other sets or household items pressed into service)	-5

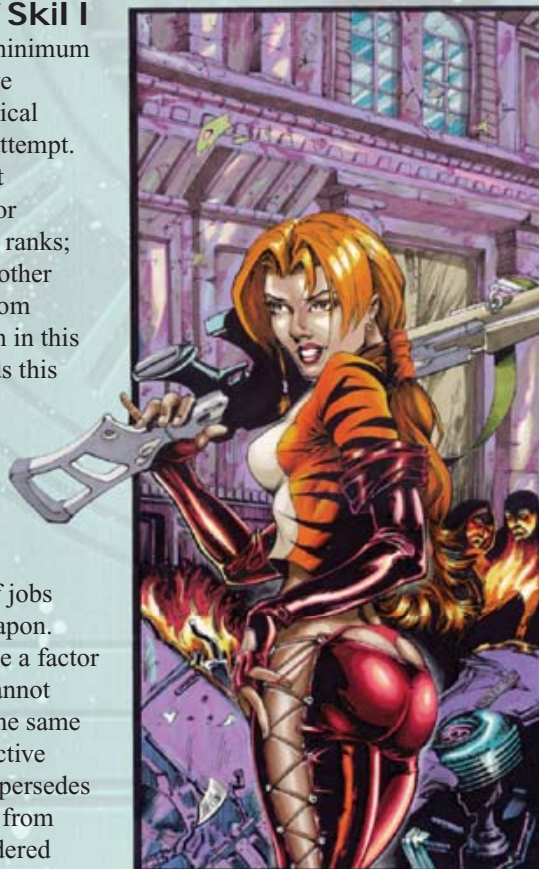
Workshop Quality

Workshop is:	Technical (mechanical) Modifier
Clean, spacious, and well-lit	+1
Quiet or remote enough to reduce possible distractions	+1
Custom designed for gunsmithing work	+1 to +3 (depending on quality)
Poorly ventilated or suffers from bad or undependable lighting conditions	+1 for each condition that applies
Without a power source of its own (craftsman must depend on his own generator)	-1
Barely large enough to contain all of the current job's parts and tools	-5

Minimum Level of Skill

Each job has its own skill minimum that the craftsman must have (or more) in ranks of Technical (mechanical) skill to even attempt. Meeting the minimum must be accomplished with true or cybernetically-granted skill ranks; ability score modifiers and other bonuses (including those from working conditions as given in this article) do not count towards this requirement.

There are a number of customisations a gunsmith can add to a weapon. Each one is its own job, but any number of jobs can be added to a given weapon. Customisations that increase a factor of a weapon sequentially cannot stack with jobs that affect the same statistic; only the most effective modification counts as it supersedes others of its type. Bonuses from this kind of work are considered



custom bonuses and do stack with masterwork bonuses. Custom ammunition will stack with a custom gun, even if the bonuses affect the same statistic (typically damage).

Resources

Customising a weapon improves its sale value, but doing this is hardly free.

In addition to needing a good set of tools for any real chance of success, there are a number of small, disposable parts that have to be used and several custom constructed pieces that are added to the weapon itself. These have to be paid for at the time of the custom work or the gunsmith simply does not have what he needs on hand to complete the work.

The basic resources needed for a custom job are measured as a Purchase DC based on the cost of the weapon after its base value is modified by the increase of the

Customisation Master Table

Custom Work	Game Effect	Cost Increase	Minimum Skill	Custom Check DC
Accuracy (+1 to +5)	Gun receives a +1 to +5 bonus to attack rolls. This bonus does not apply when the weapon is used for burst or automatic fire.	+1 per point of attack bonus	7 + 4 per point of bonus beyond +1	Base 18, +2 per point of Accuracy
Impact (+1 to +5)	Gun receives a +1 to +5 bonus to damage rolls. This bonus applies when the weapon is used for burst fire, but not for automatic fire.	+1 per point of damage bonus	7 + 4 per point of bonus beyond +1	Base 18, +3 per point of Impact
Rifling (2 to 5) [Rifles only]	A rifled firearm can achieve greater range; the rating of the customisation is the number of range increments the gun can fire before range penalties are applied to the shot. This modification does not work when the weapon is burst or automatic fired.	+2 regardless of increment bonus	6 for two increments, + 3 per additional increment	Base 18, +3 per increment bonus (DC 24 at 5 increments)
Piercing (+1 to +3)	The critical range of the weapon is improved; the Piercing bonus is added to its threat range after all other factors (feats, ammunition, etc.) are calculated.	+2 per point of Piercing bonus	10 + 5 per point of Piercing beyond +1	Base 20 +5 per point of Piercing
Ballistics (+1d4, 1d6, 1d8, or 1d10)	Extra power behind each shot enhances the gun's base damage. The die selected is added to each round fired, regardless of firing mode. Only one extra die can be added, but the size can improved all the way up to 1d10.	1 + 1 per die code increment (up to 5 for a +1d10)	9 (1d4), 12 (1d6), 15 (1d8), 19 (1d10)	Base 30 + 2 per dice code increment after the first (DC 36 for a d10 bonus die)
Additional Fire Type	This adds burst fire capacity to a weapon or automatic fire to a weapon capable of bursts. This customisation can be done twice to make a single fire weapon capable of burst and automatic fire.	+2 (burst), +3 (automatic fire), +5 (both)	8 (burst), 12 (automatic fire)	Base 15 (burst), Base 25 (automatic)
Improved Capacity	This modification improves the ammunition capacity of a weapon with a box feed only (maximum of twice the weapon's previous capacity). Weight increases by .2 lb. for every 4 rounds added to the magazine.	+1 per 4 additional rounds added	6 + 1 per additional 4 rounds added	Base 5 + 1 per additional round
New Feed Type	This allows a single shot weapon to accept a box with 6 rounds or a box fed weapon to take a belt feed with effectively unlimited capacity. This can be done twice to make a single shot weapon belt fed.	+3 to convert from single to box. +2 for box to belt	5 for single to box. 9 to convert from box to belt feed	Base 15 for single to box, Base 25 for box to belt
Size Reduction	This can take an unmodified weapon and reduce it by one size category. Modified weapons cannot be reduced and reduced base weapons cannot be modified. This can be combined with Weight Reduction.	+1	5 for shotguns and rifles, 12 for handguns, 19 for heavy weapons	Base 10 + 5 for each size category of the original size of the gun below Large
Weight Reduction	This can take an unmodified weapon and reduce its weight by 1 lb. Modified weapons cannot have their weight reduced and reduced base weapons cannot be modified. Maximum reduction is 50% of weight. This can be combined with Size Reduction.	+1 per lb. reduced	5 + 1 per additional lb. reduced from original weight	Base 10 + 5 for each size category of the original size of the gun below Large
Silhouette Improvement	A modification for heavy weapons, this reduces the skill penalty for carrying one to -6 or -4 instead of -8.	+2 (-6) or +4 (-4)	9 (-6) or 14 (-4)	Base 15 (-6), Base 25 (-4)
Custom Grips/Action	This customisation improves the feel and performance of a gun for a specific user. That owner adds +1 to the bonus added for Weapon Focus with that gun only.	+2	7 (handguns), 12 (rifles), 16 (heavy)	Base 20 +4 for rifles and +8 for heavy

customisation in question. Previous increases due to other customisations or other factors do not apply; only the weapon's original cost is considered. The formula for the Purchase DC to supply the gunsmith with the needed resources is this value divided by 2. For example, a Colt SuperThunder has a Purchase DC of 16. Improving its critical range by adding +2 Piercing increases the final DC of the weapon to 20. Half of this is 10, which must be paid before the work can proceed.

Additional resources beyond the base amount can be added to the Purchase DC to improve the chances of the modification's success up to a +5 on a +1 Purchase DC per +1 skill check bonus. This is all done at once before work begins. A character cannot have a customisation job in progress and then during the procedure try to add more resources by making a second Wealth check. Once work begins, its current funding remains static until the skill checks involved either succeed or fail.

At the Games Master's option, each skill check after the first one can be enhanced with increased resources. This is a level of complication the Games Master may not wish to add to the process, but if augmenting the skill checks is desired, it requires an additional Wealth check equal to the original Purchase DC of the skill plus twice the desired bonus (up to +10 for +5 as above). The increased cost reflects the fact that making up for missing funding is always more expensive than having the funds available at the start of a project.

Players and Games Masters should note that these are just the resources being paid for. None of this cost actually pays the gunsmith for his time and service. If the craftsman wants to make any money off the transaction, this is handled entirely separately between him and the customer. A 'standard' fee should be based on the Purchase DC of the final product after all planned modifications are complete (even

if the cost is paid before the work) divided in half. The SuperThunder handgun from the above example should net the gunsmith the same benefit as a Wealth check (DC 10).



Full Metal Frame – A Ballistic Work of Art

Let us say that Rip has lost one of his TEC-10s in his group's latest 'altercation' and he needs to get it back. He had that weapon heavily modified and he does not want a new one unless it can match the gun he lost. He locates Master Chen, the gunsmith he does all of his business with, and commissions a new TEC-10 with the same customisations as the one he still has. To make things easier for Chen, he lets the old craftsman hang on to his existing gun as a template for the work.

His new gun is going to have +1 Piercing, a 16 round increase in the magazine, extra damage per shot (+2 Impact), and have a much smoother aim (+3 Accuracy). Rip has to pay for all of this, but he trusts Chen's skill and does not figure he needs to lay out money for any improvements to the old man's chance to succeed. His Purchase DC to fund the resources for the job is (14 for the TEC-10, +2 for the Piercing ($16/2=8$), +4 for the extra 16 rounds ($18/2=9$), +2 for the Impact ($16/2=8$), +3 for the Accuracy ($17/2=8.5$, rounded to 9)), all of which he easily handles. The job cost him his left-hand shooter, but it was lucrative enough to make up for the hassle.

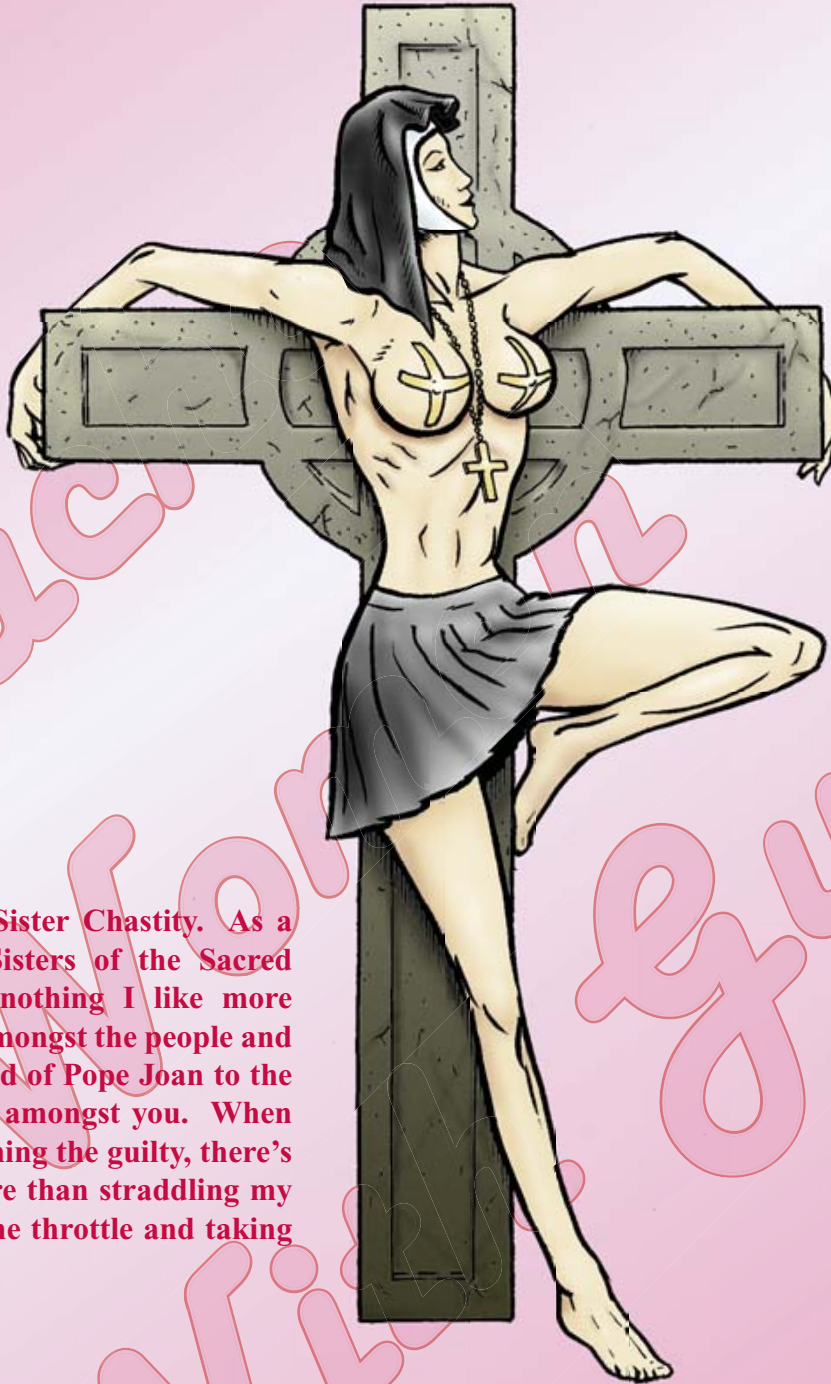
After they negotiate their payment (which ends up being a Purchase DC of 12, the total increases of the gun cost plus all the modifications divided by 2), Rip leaves Chen to do his magic. Each augmentation is its own job, so the wizened oriental master craftsman handles them one at a time. He has a gun to base the work on, so his times and DCs for the jobs are:

- Piercing Modification (DC 25, Two Days work time)
- Additional Capacity (DC 21, Three Days work time (Four, reduced to the maximum time per job of Three))
- Impact Modification (DC 24, Two Days work time)
- Accuracy Modification (DC 24, Three Days work time)

This means that, assuming Chen does not fail any Technical (mechanical) checks, when Rip shows up in ten days his shiny new gun should be ready. The resulting weapon will have a Purchase DC of 25, making it a very expensive commodity and a weapon to be feared on the street. Guns like this are valuable prizes when pried from the cold, dead hands of those whose survival instincts were not nearly as well developed as their credit accounts.

Macho Women With Guns

Page 45 Nun



'Hi, my name is Sister Chastity. As a member of the Sisters of the Sacred Chopper there's nothing I like more than getting out amongst the people and delivering the word of Pope Joan to the many evil sinners amongst you. When I'm not out punishing the guilty, there's nothing I like more than straddling my Harley, opening the throttle and taking off into the sunset.'

'Macho Women With Guns. Good, clean, gaming fun!' - J. Edgar Hoover

Jonny Nexus

You Want To Play A What?

Life in our Thursday night campaign had been progressing in it's own easygoing way. A few sessions previously an old man we'd met in a forest had cursed my character, Noorl. Noorl – who upon being cursed had acquired an ethereal sword hanging Damocles-style above his head – had only seven days to assassinate a local Duke. If the seven days elapsed with the Duke still breathing, the sword would drop down and that would be the end of Noorl. But other than this little awkwardness, life was sweet. Sessions would start in an atmosphere of easy banter as our characters debated what actions to perform, and which paths to follow.

Of course, the other players were merely waiting for the moment – usually about five minutes in – when a look of panic would suddenly appear on my face, immediately followed by a cry of: 'Hang on a minute! I'm gonna get killed in five days unless I kill some geezer!'

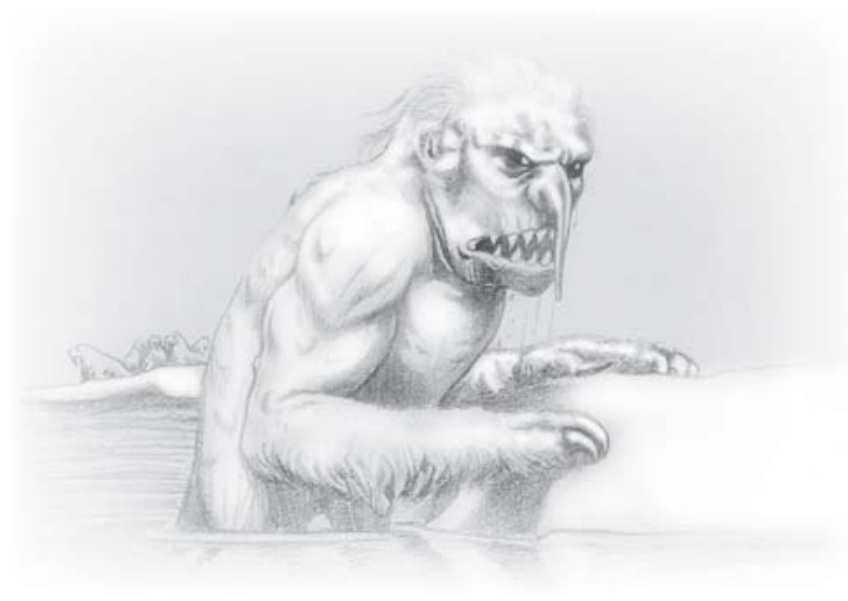
(As I confessed in S&P 4, I am something of a session amnesiac).

They particularly enjoyed it when – usually a few seconds later – I

realised that I couldn't remember who it was I was supposed to be killing.

And then last Thursday, I died, after taking thirty points from a single blow¹. (It wasn't the thirty points that was the problem so much as the fact that I was only on nineteen hit points when it happened). Now I (well Noorl) did get better a little while later, via a conveniently² found potion of resurrection. But in between Noorl's untimely death, and subsequent Lazarus-like (-ish³) return, I not only had to cope with passing through the standard stages of denial, anger, bargaining, depression and, finally, acceptance – all in a little under twenty minutes – but also had to suffer a conversation about the merits of resurrection versus reincarnation.

The guys were all teasing me by saying that they'd have me reincarnated rather than resurrected, coming up with a variety of beasties that I could come back as, most of them either unpleasant, or ineffective, or both. Somewhere along the way I pointed out that I'd rather be reincarnated as an orang-utan than any of the choices they were offering.



The real Jonny Nexus?

But in the end, they gave up teasing me, and resurrection it was.

It wasn't until afterwards that I realised something slightly startling: - I was actually disappointed that I'd been resurrected as Noorl, rather than reincarnated as an orang-utan. You see, when it comes to roleplaying an orang-utan I think I've got a pretty good handle on where to start. But when it comes to roleplaying a human member of a Dalelands' tribe from a region of the Forgotten Realms – I'm lost. I guess that because while I've never read a Forgotten Realms novel, I've watched 'Every Which Way But Loose' several times.

I've always been like that, never attracted to whatever 'normal' character creation options are on offer, and always wanting to play something offbeat instead. Someone once gave me a Rifts book, opened to the first page of the character classes/races section, and told me to keep reading until I found something I wanted to play. Unfortunately, by the time I did I'd unwittingly read through to the end of that chapter, and into the next – monsters. It turned out that the thing I was desperate to play was actually a non-sentient plant.

But I can't finish this article without confessing to one final 'fantasy' I have regarding offbeat character types. I always thought that if I had a roleplaying girlfriend, it would be really cool for her to play a female halfling and me to play her riding dog.

It would be roleplaying.

I'm just not quite sure what kind.

¹In the *Slayers Guide to Game Masters* there is a section stating that Games Master screens are evil and that Games Masters should roll 'to hit' and 'damage' dice in the open, allowing player characters to take whatever hits are generated. Mark (the Games Master) had read that section, and so – starting with this session – had discarded his screen and was making his rolls (including the monster 30 point blow that killed me) in the open. The rest of the guys thought that the fact that this had led to my death was absolutely hilarious, given that I am the author of the said *Slayers Guide to Game Masters*. I would probably also have found it hilarious, were it not for the fact that my character of several months had just died and I was having to try quite hard to maintain the old stiff upper lip.

²Mark pulled the old 'remember those three unmarked potions that you haven't yet got around to identifying?' trick.

³I say '-ish' because I suspect that people were quite glad to have Lazarus back, whilst Noorl is universally regarded as a pillock of the highest order – which is not surprising given that I based his character concept (low-Wisdom, overblown buffoon) on a bloke who used to be part of our gaming group (the legendary 'Bill'⁴). Let's just say that if Noorl hadn't been a player character, there's no way they'd have wasted the potion on him. Hell, if he'd survived the blow, they'd probably have finished him off themselves.

⁴A pseudonym – to protect the guilty, but possibly lawyer-equipped.

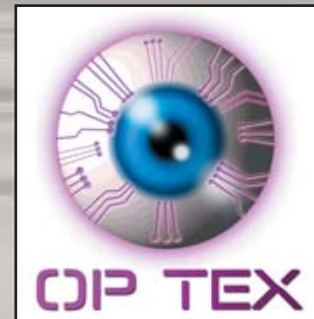
...Or perhaps this is?



Armageddon 2089 ICQA Field Test #5507

Union Fire Control

Those of you familiar with August's ICQA Field Tests may, by now, be seeing an uncomfortable pattern evolving. He provides a jolly nice piece of kit ready to fit into your Mek, but then there's the catch. Oh, yes. There's always a catch...



It never fails. You are tooling out your new Mek with all the best equipment and someone comes along with better hardware and blows you to scrap. Much as the antique dealers out there would like you to believe that tried and true designs win the war, battles usually go to the guy with the newest toys. So keep your off-the-shelf guns; I'll be running past you with the latest speed-enhancing servos and rocket assisted mobilisers. Just don't get in the way. I may not be able to stop.

Field Test: The Union Target Acquisition/ Fire Control System

Fire Control is usually an add-on system to the main computer of a WarMek. Most of the processing power of the machines slaved to military vehicles such as Meks and Main Battle Tanks goes toward maintaining power levels, running the hundreds of small motors and subsystems, and keeping all the information of whatever sensor equipment the vehicle is running with in a useful format with as little spooling time as possible between queries.

This means that unless a military operations system is designed from the ground up with fire control in mind, the only such animal a WarMek or tank has at its disposal is a small sidebox mounted somewhere near the processor and linked to the vehicle's main system through a software patch typically written by a third party.

Some of these systems are so glitchy, they operate like experimental equipment and many militaries would rather do without them than risk their wartime performance to the vagaries of using them.

OpTek's Technical Division is looking to change all of that. While some fire control is built into a WarMek's operation system or slaved to certain forms of weaponry, an overall solution for target acquisition and tracking has never been available before. The new computer solution OpTek is researching would provide a single computer to handle all of the combat applications a given WarMek or military vehicle could require in a single program. This system is codenamed Union by the Corporate Oversight Committee in charge of the project but its programmers and designers have another name for it in Research and Development – 'Havoc'.

The system is a complete central processor unit with enhanced memory and reaction speed as part of its combat-heavy focus. The device completely replaces the computer resources of the WarMek or vehicle it is installed in, making it the 'brain' of that tactical asset. With limited funding because of cost overruns during the first six months of development, OpTek is turning to private contractors to handle the next wave of tests the unit requires. That's where mercenaries come in.

God help them.

The Setup

The designers at OpTek know what a nightmare program they have developed; that is why they call it the Havoc. It is a resource glutton, eating up every cycle of computer power its housing system can offer and slaving it all to the purpose of fire control and target tracking. It does its job very well under most controlled conditions, but the researchers need to see how Havoc/Union will react to the chaotic conditions of actual combat before they can green light further implementation. That is the role of volunteer field testers, and OpTek usually has no lack of applicants.

Getting the job is not very difficult, which might be the Player Characters' first clue that all is not right with this test. The normal OpTek application process has several steps and advancing from one pre-testing stage to the next is not always assured. There are background checks, credit applications and affidavits from former employers that have to be cleared before a mercenary team can even think about talking to a field test representative at OpTek. In game terms, the minimum Diplomacy DC for *any* test is a 30 and each attempt takes 5 (– the attempting Player Character's Intelligence modifier) days.

This normal procedure is completely discarded for the Union test, as the designers are nervous and their administrators are desperate. They cannot afford to slag any more

company vehicles with the Union's 'quirks', so moving the project to private individuals is the only option they have left. Anyone who expresses an interest in this field test is taken on board with the assurance that 'we can worry about paperwork while you conduct the test'.

The only requirement the Player Characters must meet is that none of them work for or are known to consort with reporters or rival technology companies. OpTek has been cracking down on information espionage and even though they need warm bodies and Mekes they do not have to pay for, the executives in command of the Union project cannot go against the hiring mandates of Head Office.

By the time the Player Characters apply for and receive approval to test the Union TA/FC computer, their fates are sealed. The installation of the box is not a difficult job, as retrofitting was one of the key design points of the Union from very early on. Player Characters need only remove their vehicle's current central computer (a Technical task with a DC of 18), interface it with the new computer (a Computer Use task with a DC of 15), and then install the new Union where the old system went (Technical task, DC 18). The Union's extremely flexible operation system takes it from there, incorporating all of the old computer's programs and learning the driver information of every subsystem, sensor and weapon on the test-bed WarMek or vehicle.

At first, the Union seems like a computer technician's dream come true. Some of the cleanest, most efficient code on the market went into the system's legacy compatibility routines. There is no product currently on the market it cannot interface with automatically and no marketed program it cannot write into its own processes. Even custom work can be efficiently analysed and sublimated, which makes the usefulness of the Union to those who

like to do their own programming that much more appealing.

In simulations, the Union is a smooth, capable computer operating system with the ability to run all of a vehicle's subroutines, equipment and weapons with pinpoint, effortless ease. Everything from howitzers and rocket salvos to railguns and electrothermal cannons are handled by the Union's sophisticated subprograms, with magnetic fields, rocket ignition, and other technical concerns given virtual processors of their own for simultaneous resolution during real-time situations. In many ways, the Union seems like a dream come true.

effect, the Union performs well in tests because it gets to define the tests itself.

In reality, the Union is a considerably different machine. It installs well and integrates flawlessly, but once it has to start operating on a constant basis under conditions that it cannot also control, subtle performance issues begin to develop. At first, these are minor enough to be overlooked or missed completely, but they quickly become glaring errors in the way the vehicle operates or some of its systems function.

The Union overwrites a given system or weapon every 1d4 days after installation. Once a system or

The Union TA/FC Central Computer

The Union is the brainchild of OpTek, one of the world's largest manufacturers of tracking/optical systems and a major innovator in sensor technology. Now branching out to construct the basic computer systems that control their other products, Union introduces the Union primary computing core. Designed with combat and multiple systems integration in mind, the Union is a quantum jump forward in how a military machine's central processing should operate.*

The Union TA/FC Central Computer

System	Power Points	Hardpoints*	Mass	Cost
Union Computer - Tiny	2	0	0	\$50,000
Union Computer - Small	4	0	0	\$125,000
Union Computer - Medium	5	0	0	\$245,000
Union Computer - Large	6	0	0	\$365,000
Union Computer - Huge	8	0	0	\$485,000
Union Computer - Gargantuan	10	0	0	\$525,000

* Complexities in the systems from other manufacturers may cause instability in the Union's seamless operation and lead to loss of technical performance.

The Catch

Dreams have a nasty tendency to become nightmares when you least expect it. The Union performs well in simulations because all simulations have the same fundamental flaw - they are artificial representations of reality controlled by computer interfaces. The Union links to computers it comes into contact with, making it capable of rewriting simulations for better efficiency. In

weapon has been overwritten, it has a 10% chance of failing to work when needed. This chance increases by 2% every time the weapon is used in combat (this is per round, regardless of the number of shots fired or rockets launched) or the system is called upon. In addition, if a 01 is rolled on the percentage chance for system failure, the weapon has a catastrophic discharge and destroys itself or the system in question locks up and becomes ruined.

If the 'system' in question is the vehicle's power system, it must pass the 10% check every round it is used in combat thereafter. On a failed result, the vehicle cannot use any system requiring Power Points due to a massive power loss. Unlike the above system for increasing the failure chance with each successful use of a system, the power system failure chance increases by 2% every day thereafter automatically.

If the overwritten system is the 'cockpit', the pilot must roll the failure chance whenever he wishes to power up the vehicle, power it down, or eject. The failure chance for the 'cockpit' never increases beyond 10%, but it counts as a system at 50% for the possibility of critical system failure and Union shutdown as listed below. All Mekes are considered to have a Cockpit for the purposes of the Union being able to overwrite it, even if it is not listed among the systems on the WarMek's write-up.

Once six or more systems have a 50% chance or greater of failing, the Union's errors become so compounded that it shuts down permanently. This will also happen automatically if the power system of the vehicle is affected and its failure chance reaches 50%. If either of these conditions occur, there is a chance of the WarMek or vehicle's power system failing spectacularly. Tokamak reactors have a 10% chance of going critical after 1d4+1 rounds of blaring alarms and emergency venting. Gas Turbines have a 15% chance of cross-mixing and exploding, completely ruining everything mounted in the same area with them and doing 1d100 points of damage to the pilot if he fails his roll to eject. Fuel Cells can also detonate in this way, but they only have a 5% chance of actually doing so because of their more stable construction.

Nothing can prevent a Union system from trying to take control of everything attached to a given WarMek or vehicle. Any shielded systems cause a feedback error in the

Union during initial installation and prevent it from ever being used at all. Before long, a vehicle with the Union computer has so many technical glitches that no given system can be completely relied upon. It has to be removed before it causes full system failure or a catastrophic accident.

That is when the catch occurs in the field test. The lab technicians at OpTek made a great integration routine for the Union, but the uninstallation software is considerably less effective. The physical computer itself can be pulled with a Technical check at a DC of 18, but this cannot occur until the computer is forced to release its program hold on every subsystem in the WarMek or vehicle. This cascades into a massive amount of work, as a skilled computer user must prompt each of these releases manually and then double-check to see if they actually occurred.

This takes 1d20 minutes and a Computer Use check (DC 20) for each piece of software and each system (including weapons) that draw Power Points from the vehicle's fuel reserves. This can be very time consuming when dealing with a highly technical WarMek, but it is the only way to avoid having to purchase new memory modules for the systems in question, as pulling the Union without releasing each system will cause them to be overwritten with junk data and effectively ruined.

The memory and control hardware of any given system is 10% of its cost; this amount must be spent to replace those parts if the Union is removed without a technician making the required Computer Use check first. Failed checks can be retried, but a natural one on this skill check at any point results in the memory and control hardware of the system in question being ruined.

The Complications

Why then would anyone install this tyrant of a computer in their Mek? The Union earns its nickname

very well, but it also performs with incredible efficiency until it inevitably breaks down. The Union automatically acts as a Targeting Processor as part of its base functions. In addition, WarMeks and vehicles with the Union computer system receive the following bonuses:

- +1 equipment bonus to all attack and damage rolls with direct fire weapons of any kind.
- Tokamak reactors generate +1d6 additional Power Points due to more efficient energy management (this bonus is rolled once when the Union is installed and the result applied for the duration of the field test).
- All systems require one less power point to use to a minimum of 1 Power Point.
- All scanning systems gain a range bonus of 10% or 25m, whichever is greater.
- All improved artillery software bonuses are increased by +2 because of the Union's boosted processing abilities.
- Any WarMek or vehicle with a basic Targeting Processor already installed has its efficiency increased to that of an Advanced Targeting Processor (+4 bonus). Units with an Advanced Targeting Processor already installed have this bonus increased to +5 instead.

Until the Union breaks down, and it *will* eventually break down, it can greatly increase the effectiveness and accuracy of any tactical asset installed with it. For some mercenary groups and smaller militaries, the possibility of its causing disastrous failure of its machines might make the benefits of using the Union outweigh its risks. The system's unofficial name is likely to become the one more commonly associated with the device, however.

The Union is a great idea with horrible implementation, but it

Using the 'Havoc'; An Example of Play

Two days (2 on 1d4) after installing the Union computer into a front line Double Barrel assault WarMek, the system overwrites the firing systems of the 110mm Rockets in the head (determined randomly). After this, the first time the pilot of the Double Barrel wants to fire those rockets, there is a 10% chance of them not working. This failure rate goes up every round they do work by 2%, so after three successful rounds of firing them, the 100mm Rockets in the Double Barrel's head have a 16% chance of failing. If a '01' is rolled, the launcher shorts out and is completely ruined.

Three days after this occurs (a 3 on 1d4), the Union overwrites the Mek's cockpit. This makes the cockpit systems quite unreliable, and now every time the pilot wants to power up or shut down the Double Barrel, there is a 10% chance of it simply failing to respond. This chance extends to the Double Barrel's ejection system, so the pilot had better hope the Union does not ruin so many systems that his Tokamak L reactor goes critical.

does have some possibilities. It makes for a short term but powerful boost to a WarMek's effectiveness, albeit at the cost of long-term use. The long technical effort involved in removing a Union system from a WarMek makes it impossible to just hot-swap one for the unit's regular computer during every battle, but keeping one around for major battles where survival is more important than bringing every Mek home afterward might be a potential use for the 'Havoc'.



'Alas, poor Yorrick, you did a field test.'

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

Date: May 28, 2089

Keywords: Computer Technology, Fire Control, Havoc, OpTek, Targeting Systems, Union



The world of military technology may be getting a paradigm shift soon from the same innovators that brought efficient real-time optical tracking together with WarMek technology to make the entire humanoid war machine concept viable – OpTek. That company is preparing their new Union computer system for a late 4th quarter release this year.

Critics of OpTek say that the technology is far from ready for implementation into military service, but OpTek's Media Relations department has released a number of simulated performance runs that show flawless operation in several different application environments. These evaluations have convinced several world militaries to pre-order more than a thousand of the new Union computers for use in their WarMek divisions. Sales in the private sector have not been as brisk, mostly due to the unsubstantiated rumour circulating among Net user groups of the Union's nickname among its own designers being the 'Havok' because of certain dangerous design flaws.

IWN: The Best and Worst of Tomorrow presented Today

Q&A

Bob Roberts is back with his own brand of acerbic helpfulness! Always eager to assist, this month Bob tackles the *Encyclopaedia* and *Quintessentials* series with his usual quick wit and repartee.

Encyclopaedia Arcane: Chaos Mage

Q At level 7 I can take the feat Immutable Will, but the only ability it has an effect on is level 12: Purge Chaos. Does this mean: 1) I get Purge Chaos also at level 7, or: 2) does this mean I can take the feat before I get the ability?

A The answer is number two, you may take the feat before you gain the ability, this helps with planning your character's advancement.

Q Are the Familiar's saves based on its stats (most giving a penalty) plus 2, as seems to be implied?

A The Familiar's saves are calculated as normal, so part will be from the Familiar's stats and the plus 2 as stated. The +2 is likely to make most saves 0 after adjustment. With the adjustments for size when you reach 9th level some of the stats may increase then and so will the saves. On the web enhancement is the Feat Enhanced Familiar. This may help with your familiar's stats.

Q What use is Resistance if saves are so low?

A As the familiar has a positive number this can be very useful; I would expect the Will saves to be the most used here though.

Q Can the Familiar speak? If so, what language(s)?

A As their Intelligence is the same as their creator's I would say yes they could speak and they can speak any language their creator can.

Q Is a familiar sized differently for a Small caster?

A No, it is still Tiny,

Q Does the Familiar have evasion, or any other ability to make it anything but a moving target?

A It only has the abilities shown within *Chaos Magic*.

Q As it stands, the familiar's attacks and AC are surprisingly bad unless you take the feat in the online supplement, and even then they're likely not good, given that Charisma and Constitution are probably the master's highest scores. Despite this, the feats allowed seem to imply making it a combat monkey.

A I would disagree, there are only two feats/abilities that are combat-orientated. The remainder are mainly to help with spellcasting or the familiar itself. It is not a thing to use in combat.

Encyclopaedia Arcane: Crossbreeding

Q With the *Dagger of Essence Transferral*, it appears a Fortitude save could be required, but there isn't a DC given.

A The Fortitude save is only needed when the victim is awake and conscious. While drugged and helpless they do not get their save and their essence is stolen. However, while awake and fighting back they need to make a Fortitude check against a DC of 15.

Q Is the *Dagger of Essence Transferral* a +1 dagger also in the case of use against the race it was created for?

A If the dagger is currently holding the essence of the race it was created for then it would be a +1 dagger against that race. If no essence is currently in the dagger it does not get the +1 bonus but may suck the essence of that creature instead.

Q The *Cauldron of Essences* mentions that the base cost could be higher, but there is no guideline given. Can you give one?

A Not really as we have no idea what the cauldron would be used for. To hold larger sized creatures would be one reason but you would need to design it specifically for that creature, with runes etc depending upon the creature to be captured. Also, as a Games Master you may want to have specific protection or holding spells to keep different types of creatures captured. For example, an Intellect Devourer

will be hampered by *hold monster* but not stopped. Other spells will need to be used to counter an Intellect Devourer's abilities.

Encyclopaedia Arcane: Familiars

Q On Page 7, the summoning ritual mentions that the improved familiar feat will enhance the CR of the summoned familiar. The Improved Familiar is not in that section.

A The Improved Familiar feat is in the Forgotten Realms Campaign Setting book and will give a bonus of +2 to the CR of the familiar you are summoning using the table on page 7.

Q How would one of my players acquire a brownie familiar?

A Take a look at the *Encyclopaedia Arcane: Familiars* book. It gives the summoning ritual for Fey creatures and recommends different advancement and bonuses for all familiars.

Encyclopaedia Divine: Fey

Q On page 23 of *Encyclopaedia Divine: Fey Magic*, it states that with each 3 levels of Fey Essences stored, a druid is treated as 1 level higher for purposes of special abilities granted by the class. Which abilities are increased, as I can't see any that are based upon level (apart from Wild Empathy in 3.5 Ed) as caster level is dealt with separately?

A It means that if you are 1st level with 6 levels of Fey Essence you would have all the abilities of a 3rd level Druid. Do not forget your animal companion gains abilities as you increase in levels.

Q Also, on page 24, it states that you can spend levels of Fey Essence to gain abilities normally unavailable. Is this just class abilities (such as next stage of Wild Shape, etc.), or do your spellcasting abilities increase as well? If so, do you just gain extra spells for 10 rounds, as you wouldn't have the time to memorise additional ones?

A Yes, to all of your options.

Q On page 22, it states that any Bond Ability may be made permanent except for Mimic Attribute. There isn't an ability called Mimic Attribute, only Mimic Ability or Mimic Ability Score - which is the one not allowed?

A It is the Mimic Ability score that is not allowed.

Encyclopaedia Divine: Shamans

Q There seems to be an error in the Memory Domain. It lists Legend Lore at 4th and 7th level. Was that intentional?

A It should be Vision at 7th level, not the second Legend Lore.

Q What happens at level 10 for the Shaman Warrior prestige class?

A See table below:

Level	Base Attack Bonus	Fort Save	Ref Save	Will Save	Special	Max Spirit Allies	Spells per Day					
							0	1	2	3	4	5
10	+10/+5	+7	+3	+3		+4	6	4	4	3	3	2



A Journey into Lovecraft Country

At some point, whatever your hobby, you will take it to the next level - which can often include a pilgrimage to some site of significance. In terms of roleplaying, fans of HP Lovecraft look to Providence, Rhode Island in the USA. *Joanne FitzRoy* was drawn like may before her...

Joanne FitzRoy

It's one thing to be a roleplayer in the traditional sense. You get together with a group of like-minded individuals maybe once a week or so, sit around your rec room or living room, roll dice and try not to throw anything at the Storyteller too often. Roleplaying gives us a release for creativity and imagination, and provides a great social setting for these activities.

Sometimes tabletop (or pencil-paper-dice) roleplayers take their gaming to the next level and join a Live Action Roleplay group. These groups exist for gamers of all genres from fantasy to historical to horror. These groups create an imaginary game setting at a location in which gamers move around and physically interact with each other.

By far, the ultimate experience a gamer can have is to be in the setting which, in his mind, most accurately recreates the world in which his games take place. A Dungeons & Dragons player may dream of touring the medieval castles and abbeys of Europe. Fans of the undead drool over Romania and Egypt. And for Call of Cthulhu aficionados, the ultimate vacation is a trip to the New England region of the United States.

My spouse and I had the unexpected opportunity to travel to Lovecraft Country in late September. A



friend's vehicle had broken down near the Pennsylvania border a month before, and now that the repairs had been done, he needed a ride to pick it up and bring it home. We had initially toyed with the idea of making the 4-½ hour trip down, taking a break at the destination and coming back that night. Then we checked a road atlas and discovered that if we left the drop-off point by 2 PM, we could make it to Providence, Rhode Island, by that evening. We had the time and even a little bit of cash to spare, and we had been

talking about making the trip for the past 10 years. You don't get a chance like this every day, so we packed our clothes, cameras and Cuddly Cthulhu plush doll, and away we went.

Since it was pretty much spur of the moment, the trip was as much an adventure as it was a vacation. Seeing the countryside and community where HP Lovecraft spent his life brought so much more understanding to his writings. It also provided my husband, our CoC Game Keeper, with more adventure hooks than we'll ever use for the next 10 years. Driving along the Connecticut, Rhode Island and Massachusetts seacoast, we could see the thick forests kept lush by humid sea air. In gaming terms – lots of undergrowth to slow adventurers down and hide clues and creatures. The fog rolling in from the sea really does obscure the night, and it also makes everything unbearably damp and chilly.

The most incredible part of our travels was the city of Providence. Wandering around the old city near Brown University, we could not help but feel we had been transported into Lovecraft's world of the 1920's. There were so many visual reminders of what inspired his work. It was easy to imagine yourself on the

grounds of Miskatonic University standing in front of the main gate of Brown's. Down the street, a huge old brick residence had been turned into some sort of fraternal organisation, complete with two huge stone lions guarding the front door—Hermetic Order of the Silver Twilight?

We wandered slack-jawed for a time, until we decided to try our investigative skills in a local library. We deduced someplace like that would have information on Providence's famous author. We didn't find any brochures, but what we did find was truly incredible. The Athanaeum is a historic site near Brown University. When you walk in the front door, you step back 100 years in time. The place is lined with tall, narrow shelves. Ladders on rollers are situated here and there for you to climb up and access the higher places. The librarian has a modern computer system at her desk, but the old wooden-drawer card catalogue is still used as well. Downstairs is a reading room with stacking bookshelves, antique lounge chairs and tables, and even a rare book room (access for library members only). This place screams 'Miskatonic University Library'. We did discover that the library was frequented by both HP Lovecraft and Edgar Allen Poe, the latter of whom has a portrait hanging in the building.

We discovered the *pièce de résistance* of our journey the next morning. The night before we uncovered some information in a book in our hotel room on Lovecraft. The book included a list of historically significant sites in Providence and area for tourists to visit. Included in the list was Swan Point Cemetery, where HP Lovecraft is interred.

This cemetery is over 150 years old and not only a wonder of architecture and sculpture, but a botanical gem as well. A walking tour guide can be picked up at the main building near the entrance, which describes many of the unique tree species in the cemetery. Nestled among

this beautiful parkland are some truly spectacular (and very spooky) examples of cemetery architecture. We shamelessly peeked into the doorways of mausoleums, some very tiny, others bigger than many houses I've been in. We discovered hidden pathways and cracked sarcophagi. It didn't take too much imagination to envision a troupe of ghouls sneaking through the shadows, on their way to who-knows-where to commit God-knows-what.

In fact, I was so engrossed with the atmosphere of this place that it took me a while, wandering with my camera, to realise that my stalwart husband had been following me in the car with the engine running for the first half hour—and he's our Cthulhu Games Keeper.

Lovecraft's grave was not a huge spectacular monument. Rather, admirers of his work did not set the headstone in place until the 1960's. His parents and aunt's names are also on a taller memorial at the site. On his stone are little tokens of fans' appreciation: coins and trinkets left *in memoriam*. If you walk through the branches behind the gravesite, there's a massive specimen beech. Several Lovecraft fans have carved messages into the bark of the tree. It's kind of a double-edged sword. It's moving to see the tributes, but disappointing to see the damage to the stately tree.

After a couple of rolls of film and many digital snapshots (of course we took photos of ourselves at HPL's grave), we bade Swan Point Cemetery goodbye. We do plan to go back soon, though. On the anniversary of Lovecraft's birth (August 20), readings are conducted at the gravesite, and a walking tour of HP Lovecraft's Providence is held that day, and also on Halloween.

A few practical words to the wise if you're planning a similar trip: Parking in

Providence is absolute hell [*seems appropriate* – Ed]. There's very little of it, and when you do find a parking spot, it's likely to be short-term. In theory, there are many free places to park, but the duration varied between 1 and 10 hours. Lodgings can be a problem too. In the city itself, hotels are expensive, and rooms are in demand. We found it a little less costly (but admittedly not too much less) to room a half-hour or so outside of Providence proper. Also, plan your itinerary ahead of time. We wasted almost a whole day not knowing where to go or what to look for. The best information we've found is on the website www.hplovecraft.com. It's well worth checking out. They have downloadable maps of significant sites in Providence and area, and if you're able to travel further, some points of interest in neighbouring states such as Massachusetts and Connecticut.

Overall, we were thrilled with our journey into Lovecraft Country. The only downside of travelling with hard-core Cthulhu lovers and gamers was, that my husband now has an overwhelming urge to run Call of Cthulhu and use all the new ideas he envisioned while in Rhode Island. May the Elder Gods have mercy on our souls.



Rimbule the Metamorph

Some villains have instantly recognisable names. Think of *Darth Vader*, *Sauron*, *Voltan*, *Zorba the Greek* (OK, perhaps not him then). You get the idea.

Then along comes Rimbule...

'Rimbule the Metamorph' is a d20 fantasy adventure for four 8th-level Player Characters. Set in a dark forest believed to be haunted, the adventure can be placed in nearly any game world containing a temperate forest.

Adventure Background

The forest has long been a place of mystery, rumoured to hold the hidden keep of Mermilack the lich, who for centuries drank the souls of the living to prolong his own evil existence. The ghosts of his victims supposedly haunt the forest to this day.

Many pass such legends off as old wives' tales. However, there is no denying that strange things have occurred in the forest of late. There has been a rash of recent disappearances – people entering the merchant's trail that winds through the forest, never to be seen again. In recent months there have been at least six such incidents. While some attribute these disappearances to the forest-ghosts, a pragmatic few insist it is probably the work of bandits.

Recently, a merchant named Gilfred staggered out of the forest with the truth of the matter. He was the sole survivor of his small caravan, which was attacked by a wererat band. Gilfred and his two guards were overwhelmed by the lycanthropes; it was only because the wererats were busy dragging the rest of his caravan off through the forest that Gilfred managed to escape with his life.

The Merchants Guild will pay to rid the forest of the wererat band. Gilfred's was not the first caravan to disappear in the forest and the Guild does not want to lose any more merchants or their valuable cargo.

For the Games Master

The creatures responsible for the attack on Gilfred's caravan and the recent disappearances are not wererats but magical human/dire rat hybrids, the result of arcane crossbreeding experiments by the wizard Rimbule, who has set up shop in the abandoned keep of Mermilack the lich.

Rimbule has long been intrigued by the concept of magical crossbreeding, merging the bodies of two disparate creatures into a new life form. He studied such pursuits for years, mastering his craft and creating many hybrids, beginning with the humble slithertoad and progressing to more difficult beasts like the owlbear and megachiroptequine.

These successes only kindled Rimbule's ambition and he began

Johnathan M. Richards



delving into areas where few wizards dare venture: crossbreeding various animal forms with humanoids. After all, he reasoned, what is a centaur but a synthesis of horse and man? What is a satyr if not part elf, part goat? The regeneses of these races through magical means became Rimbule's burning passion.

His early experiments proved frustrating. Undaunted by his many failures, the wizard learned a little more with each attempt and finally managed to merge a human woman and a giant tortoise. While by no means anything near the creature he had envisioned, Rimbule took heart in his misshapen creature's survival and continued his attempts.

A trio of doppelgangers soon stumbled across Rimbule's experiments and became intrigued for several reasons. First, they could not read his thoughts, which puzzled them greatly. (Rimbule wears a *ring of mind shielding*.) Second, his attempts at magical hybridisation fascinated the trio, as he was delving

into new types of polymorphing magic unknown to them. Rather than attacking him they joined forces with the wizard, serving as his assistants.

Rimbule, for his part, saw the doppelgangers as excellent material with which to eventually work his experiments. He theorised if he could magically merge a doppelganger and a mimic he could produce a creature capable of assuming both living and non-living forms. Once he perfected that hybrid, Rimbule would then merge himself with the new creature, gaining such shapeshifting powers for himself. Of course, these plans are for the future, and Rimbule has not perfected his abilities to the extent he is ready to try them on himself just yet.

Rimbule found it increasingly difficult to find victims in the deep forest, so he perfected a simple hybrid, the ratman, and created a small band of such creatures as servitors. The ratman, patterned after the wererat's hybrid form, seemed ideal for Rimbule's tasks. After creating a dozen such creatures from hardened criminals, Rimbule informed them he would restore their human forms only after each had captured ten humanoid prisoners suitable for experimentation. They also receive 'half-credit' for suitable forest animals they bring to the wizard, for he needs beasts as well as men for his experiments.

The ratmen attack wayfarers travelling through the forest. While arguing over who gets credit for each capture, they recognise the advantage of working together and overwhelming their victims. Such tactics have worked well for the ratmen; already they have seen Rimbule restore and free three of their original number.

Unfortunately, this is just a ruse. Whenever a ratman 'earns his freedom' by attaining his victim-quota, he is brought into the keep, ostensibly to be returned to human form. Instead, one of the

doppelgangers slays him and assumes his human form. Now apparently 'restored,' the 'former ratman' waves farewell to his companions and takes off into the forest, never to be seen again. Once out of view, the doppelganger returns to the keep in its own female human form with none the wiser.

Players' Introduction

The party can be brought into the story by various means:

- The Merchants Guild hires them to take out the band of wererats plaguing travellers in the forest. They offer 1,000 gp for the death or capture of the wererat band and can supply each Player Character with a silver weapon (the cost of which is taken from the reward).
- The party encounters Gilfred staggering down the forest road, shortly after regaining consciousness following the attack. This way they get the story about the 'wererat attack' but have no time for any special preparations.
- The ratmen ambush the Player Characters as they travel through the forest on other business. In this instance, Gilfred is not necessary to the plot; assume he died in the ambush.

The Ratmen Attack!

Whichever method is used, the action begins with an attack by the ratmen band. The following description assumes the party is travelling down the forest path; otherwise, modify it accordingly.

A small, dark figure suddenly steps out onto the forest path, blocking your way. He holds a small, glowing crystal in one hand. As if on cue, several dark shapes break through the underbrush on either side of you and attack!

Creatures (EL 4): There are nine ratmen at present. Most were rogues before their transformation and still possess the majority of their thieving skills. The leader is a former human wizard with Thieves Guild connections.

Tactics: The ratmen spread out on both sides of the forest path and attack en masse at a signal from the leader, who steps into the trail and casts *hypnotic pattern*, hoping to take at least one opponent out of action. The others concentrate their initial attacks on those unaffected by the wizard's spell. Since Rimbule needs live victims for his experiments, the ratmen attack to subdue, hoping to knock their victims unconscious, as a dead victim does not help them earn their humanity back. The ratman rogues employ sneak attacks whenever possible, doubling the subdual damage they inflict with their saps and many may pile on to grapple a single opponent. However, the ratmen are not against using lethal force if the fight goes against them or fleeing if the opposition is too fierce. Fleeing ratmen head straight for Rimbule's lair.

Ratman Wiz 5: CR 3; Medium Monstrous Humanoid; HD 1d8+5d4+3; hp 20; Init +3; Spd 30; AC 14 (+3 Dex, +1 natural), touch 13, flat-footed 11; Base Atk/Grapple +3/+0; Atk: Bite +6 melee (1d4 plus disease); Full Atk Bite +6 melee (1d4 plus disease) or dagger +3 melee (1d4); Space/Reach 5 ft./5 ft.; SA disease, spells; SV Fort +1, Ref +6, Will +5; Str 10, Dex 17, Con 10, Int 13, Wis 9, Cha 7; AL NE; Climb +10, Hide +7, Listen +5, Move Silently +7, Spot +6, Spellcraft +5; Alertness, Brew Potion, Toughness, Weapon Finesse (bite)^B. Spell: *hypnotic pattern* (×3).

The ratman wizard has a spellbook with several 1st- and 2nd-level spells but *hypnotic pattern* is the only one he can currently cast, as it does not require verbal components. He carries a crystal rod filled with phosphorescent material (the material

component for the spell) and stores his spellbook in a hollow tree nearby. (You can decide what other spells it contains.)

Ratmen Rog 3 (7): CR 8; Medium Monstrous Humanoids; HD 1d8+3d6; hp 15 each; Init +3; Spd 30; AC 12 (+3 Dex, +1 natural), touch 13, flat-footed 11; Base Atk/Grapple +3/+0; Atk Bite +6 melee (1d4 plus disease); Full Atk Bite +6 melee (1d4 plus disease) or sap +3 melee (1d6 subdual); Space/Reach 5 ft./5 ft.; SA disease, sneak attack +2d6; SQ trapfinding, evasion, trap sense +1; SV Fort +0, Ref +7, Will +1; Str 11, Dex 17, Con 11, Int 6, Wis 9, Cha 6; AL NE; Climb +11, Hide +10, Listen +6, Move Silently +10, Open Locks +7, Sleight of Hand +7, Spot +6; Blind-fight, Weapon Finesse (bite)^B.

The ratmen rogues swarm over their opponents in a great wave, striking for subdual damage with their saps. They bind unconscious victims' limbs with rope and drag them off to Rimbule to get credit for their capture. If the Player Characters have other animals present with them, the ratmen try capturing them as well.

Development: The Player Characters cannot question captured ratmen easily, for while the hybrids still understand Common they can no longer speak, lacking vocal apparatus in their new forms. The ratman wizard can read and write but does not let his opponents know this unless it is in his own best interests.

The ninth ratman is also a Rog 1 but is on guard duty in the keep (area 10).

Screaming Turtle

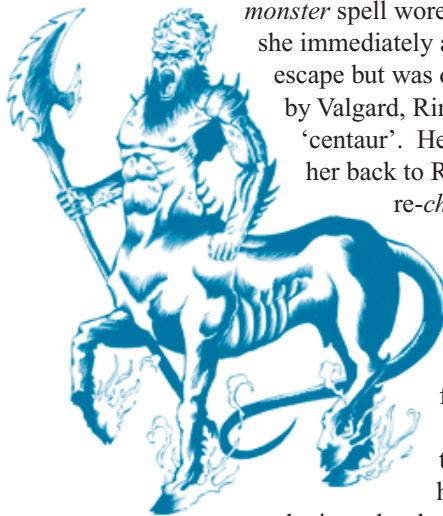
If the Player Characters kill all the ratmen in the ambush and cannot subsequently interrogate them

(perhaps using *speak with dead*) or lack the tracking skills needed to trace the ratmen back to Rimbule's lair (Track, DC 15), the following encounter can provide them a way to find the keep.

You hear a scream of frustration and the sounds of a struggle ahead. The thickets shake as a bulky figure bursts through the undergrowth and onto the forest path. It is a centaur, dragging a strange creature behind him at the end of a rope.

The creature is a large tortoise with a woman's head and forearm emerging from the shell. Her hair is thick and matted; tears carve channels through the grime and dirt on her face and her human fingers dig small furrows into the ground as she desperately tries to keep from being dragged away. 'Leave me alone, Valgard!' she cries. 'I won't go back!'

The **Creature** is the hybrid known only as Turtle, Rimbule's first 'success'. Turtle is a joyless soul. She has the form of a giant tortoise, save for her head and left arm, which remain human. Turtle wants nothing more than to regain her humanity or, failing that, a quick and painless death. When Rimbule's *charm monster* spell wore off her she immediately attempted escape but was discovered by Valgard, Rimbule's 'centaur'. He is dragging her back to Rimbule to be re-charmed.



Turtle begs the Player Characters for help, also pleading for them not to harm Valgard

as he is under the effects of a *charm monster* spell and is not responsible for his actions. If the Player Characters attempt to prevent Valgard from leaving with Turtle he attacks, striking with a longsword and his powerful hooves.

Creatures: Valgard was an 8th-

level human fighter before his transformation. One indicator he is not a 'natural' centaur is his ears are those of a horse.

Valgard, 'centaur' Ftr 8: CR 9; Large Monstrous Humanoid; HD 4d8+8d10+27; hp 89; Init +6; Spd 50; AC 14 (-1 size, +2 Dex, +3 natural), touch 11, flat-footed 12; Base Atk/Grapple +12/+12; Atk Longsword +16 melee (1d8+6); Full Atk Longsword +16 melee (1d8+4), 2 hooves +11 melee (1d6+2); Space/Reach 10 ft./5 ft.; SV Fort +9, Ref +7, Will +8; Str 18, Dex 12, Con 15, Int 10, Wis 11, Cha 7; AL N; Jump +8, Listen +6, Ride +5 (currently useless as a centaur), Spot +6; Alertness, Cleave, Dodge, Great Cleave, Improved Initiative, Improved Sunder, Iron Will, Mobility, Power Attack, Toughness.

Turtle, Wiz 2: CR —; Medium Monstrous Humanoid; HD 1d8+2d4+6; hp 19; Init -2; Spd 5, swim 10; AC 14 (-2 Dex, +6 natural), touch 8, flat-footed 14; Base Atk/Grapple +2/+1; Atk Grapple +1 melee; Full Atk Grapple +1 melee; Space/Reach 5 ft./5 ft.; SQ pull head and limbs into shell; SV Fort +4, Ref +0, Will +4; Str 8, Dex 6, Con 15, Int 14, Wis 9, Cha 9; AL CG; Concentration +6, Knowledge (arcana) +6, Listen +3, Move Silently +2, Spellcraft +6; Great Fortitude, Scribe Scroll. Spells: none.

Development: If the party subdues Valgard, Turtle informs them of their predicament and asks for help freeing the other crossbreeds. A *dispel magic* cast upon Valgard removes the *charm*, at which time he will aid the Player Characters as well.

Turtle refuses to disclose details of her previous life. She was a 2nd-level wizard who had heard of Rimbule's animal crossbreeding experiments and sought him out as a mentor. However, Rimbule decided he needed another human victim more than an apprentice and thus reshaped Turtle into her current form. If restored to human form, she flees far away to somewhere she is unknown. She is humiliated by her present form and her own foolishness.

Wilderness Encounters

If you wish to have a wilderness encounter on the way to Rimbule's lair, roll 1d12:

(1-2) Slithertoads (1d4): CR 1/10; Tiny Magical Beast; HD 1/4d10; hp 2; Init +3; Spd 15, climb 15 ft., swim 15 ft.; AC 16 (+2 size, +3 Dex, +1 natural), touch 15, flat-footed 13; Grapple -8; Space/Reach 2½ ft./0 ft.; SV Fort +2, Ref +5, Will +1; Str 3, Dex 16, Con 11, Int 1, Wis 12, Cha 2; AL N; Balance +11, Climb +5, Hide +14, Listen +5, Spot +5, Swim +8; Athletic

Rimbule's earliest experiments were creating these odd creatures. He set his first batch free and over the years they have bred. Slithertoads flee from combat.

(3) Giant Soldier Ant (1d6+4): hp 9 each; (see *Core Rulebook III*)

(4-5) Dire Rat (1d10+4): hp 5 each; (see *Core Rulebook III*)

While ratmen cannot command dire rats like wererats do, the two species often co-operate.

(6-7) Gandelbain, 'satyr' Rgr 3: CR 3; Medium Monstrous Humanoid; HD 2d8+3d8+5; hp 27; Init +1; Spd 30; AC 15 (+1 Dex, +4 natural), touch 11, flat-footed 14; Base Atk/Grapple +5/+0; Atk Club +5 melee (1d6); Full Atk Head butt +5 melee (2d4) or club +5 melee (1d6); Space/Reach 5 ft./5 ft.; SA Favoured enemy (goblinoids); SQ Track, wild empathy, elf traits; SV Fort +4, Ref +7, Will +5; Str 10, Dex 13, Con 12, Int 10, Wis 12, Cha 7; AL N; Climb +6, Hide +7, Listen +10, Move Silently +6, Search +2, Spot +9, Survival +9; Dodge, Endurance, Mobility, Two-Weapon Fighting.

Gandelbain was a 3rd-level elf ranger but was ambushed by the ratmen and magically merged with a goat to attain his current form. Gandelbain lacks a true satyr's musical abilities. Like most of the other hybrids, he has been *charmed* by Rimbule to report the approach of any intruders. A *dispel magic* cast upon Gandelbain gains the party another ally.

(8-12) Aerik, Rimbule's familiar (rat/bee hybrid): CR 1; Tiny Magical Beast; hp 19; Init +3; Spd 15, fly 40 (average), swim 15 ft.; AC 20 (+2 size, +3 Dex, +5 natural), touch 15, flat-footed 17; Base Atk/Grapple +4/-8; Atk Bite +7 melee (1d3-4); Full Atk Bite +7 melee (1d3-4); Space/Reach 2½ ft./0 ft.; SQ familiar traits, scent; SV Fort +3, Ref +6, Will +7; Str 2, Dex 16, Con 10, Int 10, Wis 12, Cha 5; AL NE; Balance +10, Climb +14, Concentration +13, Handle Animal +7, Hide +14, Knowledge (arcana) +15, Knowledge (nature) +15, Move Silently +10, Ride +8, Spellcraft +15, Spot +5, Survival +4, Swim +12; Athletic, Dodge, Improved Evasion, Mobility, Weapon Finesse.

Aerik is Rimbule's modified familiar. Originally a rat, Rimbule magically merged him with a Tiny bee, providing him with insectile wings and multifaceted eyes. Rimbule uses his familiar as a roving spy, keeping a wary eye on his creations. The hybrid can speak with his master; if Aerik spots intruders in the area he immediately reports back to Rimbule. (Thus, this 'encounter' might go completely unnoticed by the party and when they approach Rimbule's keep he may already know of their trespass.)

Note Aerik can go into the keep via the chimney, entering either the kitchen (area 13), the study (area 23), or Rimbule's bedroom (area 25).

The Clearing

Player Characters tracking the ratmen or following Turtle's directions come upon a clearing in the midst of the forest, the site of Rimbule's lair.

Passing through a heavy grove of twisted trees, you encounter a grassy clearing. A stone structure protected by both moat and palisade stands in the centre of the clearing, overlooking a nearby pond.

The land around Rimbule's keep is flanked by a ring of Mermilack's permanent images depicting thick groves of trees. At ground level, the keep is not visible from outside this perimeter. The view from above, however, clearly shows a large pond and the keep hidden inside the 'ring' of illusory trees. Most of Rimbule's crossbreeds keep to this central area

1. Dardonella's Perch.

A large bird sits perched upon a low branch, its back toward you.

Creature: Dardonella is a human/eagle hybrid Rimbule patterned somewhat after a harpy. She possesses the build of a feathered harpy without any of its magical abilities. Dardonella was a merchant; in her new form, she spends most of her time talking with Tukio the 'mermaid' or perched on her branch. She fears heights and only flies low to the ground. She longs to be returned to human form and return to her merchant's life. However, she is currently *charmed* to obey Rimbule and the doppelgangers.

Dardonella, 'harpy': CR 1; Medium Monstrous Humanoid; HD 2d8; hp 11; Init +1; Spd 20, fly 40 (average); AC 12 (+1 Dex, +1 natural), touch 11, flat-footed 11; Base Atk/Grapple +2/+0; Atk talon +2 melee (1d4); Full Atk 2 talons +2 melee (1d4); Space/Reach 5 ft./5 ft.; SV Fort +0, Ref +4, Will +4; Str 10, Dex 13, Con 11, Int 10, Wis 12, Cha 10; AL N; Appraise +2, Handle Animal +6, Ride +6 (useless in her current form); Animal Affinity.

2. Pond.

The stillness of the pond is broken only by the incessant darting of dragonflies and the occasional splash of a fish. Suddenly, a young woman surfaces from the centre of the pond and brushes her wet hair out of her face. She seems shocked upon sighting you, then breaks into a wide smile and starts swimming your way.

This freshwater pond is stocked with minnows, trout and a large number of slithertoads. Also inhabiting the pond is Tukio, Rimbule's 'mermaid', created by merging a young woman with a magically enlarged trout.

Creature: Tukio was a merchant before becoming a hybrid. As a merfolk, Tukio is unable to stray far from the pond on her own. Rimbule has seen no need to *charm* her.

Tukio's life is a dull one. The pond, after all, is only so big. She recently discovered a hidden passageway in the middle of the pond leading to a well (room 31) inside the keep. (Rimbule is unaware of this feature, as it was designed by Mermilack.) Due to her merfolk form, Tukio cannot climb out of the well herself. The 60-foot passageway is completely submerged; Player Characters can swim or simply hold their breath and crawl along the passageway. Tukio gladly shares this information with the party, hoping they will defeat the wizard and find a way to restore her to human form.

If the Player Characters enter the pond and traverse the passageway into the keep, read the following to the players:



Submerging, Tukio leads you to a narrow tunnel partially hidden by water plants. You feel the cold touch of smooth stone as you make your way through the tunnel, the light disappearing the further along you go. Finally, the tunnel veers upward and you break the water's surface to breathe stale air in a room of complete blackness.

At this point, they are in the hidden well inside Rimbule's keep (area 31).

Tukio, 'mermaid': CR ½; Medium Monstrous Humanoid; HD 1d8+1; hp 5; Init +0; Spd 5, swim 40; AC 11 (+1 Dex), touch 11, flat-footed 10; Base Atk/Grapple +1/+0; Atk Weapon +1 melee (by weapon type); Full Atk Weapon +1 melee (by weapon type); Space/Reach 5 ft./5 ft; SV Fort +1, Ref +5, Will +2; Str 10, Dex 12, Con 12, Int 10, Wis 11, Cha 9; AL N; Appraise +4, Handle Animal +3; Lightning Reflexes.

Rimbule's Keep

Rising up from the centre of the clearing is a 20-foot-tall circular structure of windowless grey stone. It is flanked by a stone wall broken by a single entrance facing the south.

Rimbule currently resides in the abandoned keep of the lich

Mermilack. As for the lich's whereabouts, some claim he was destroyed by adventurers while others insist he departed for other planes of existence but will be back one day to reclaim that which was his.

Rimbule doubts the lich will ever return, for the place was cleared of all wizardly spellbooks and magical apparatus when he discovered it. Mermilack apparently had the keep built while still alive and modified it once attaining lichdom. For one thing, he sealed up all of the windows, no longer needing the light they provided. Illumination is provided by ample castings of the *continual flame* spell on the keep's interior rooms.

The only remaining evidence of Mermilack's previous habitation is the shrine to an evil death god in

the lower level (area 32). Rimbule made an initial cursory inspection of the room but it disturbed him considerably and he has never returned.

3. Owlbear trench.

The stench of some great beast assaults your senses as you approach the dry moat surrounding the stone building. Scattered bones lying at the bottom of the trench give silent testimony that not all who passed this way survived.

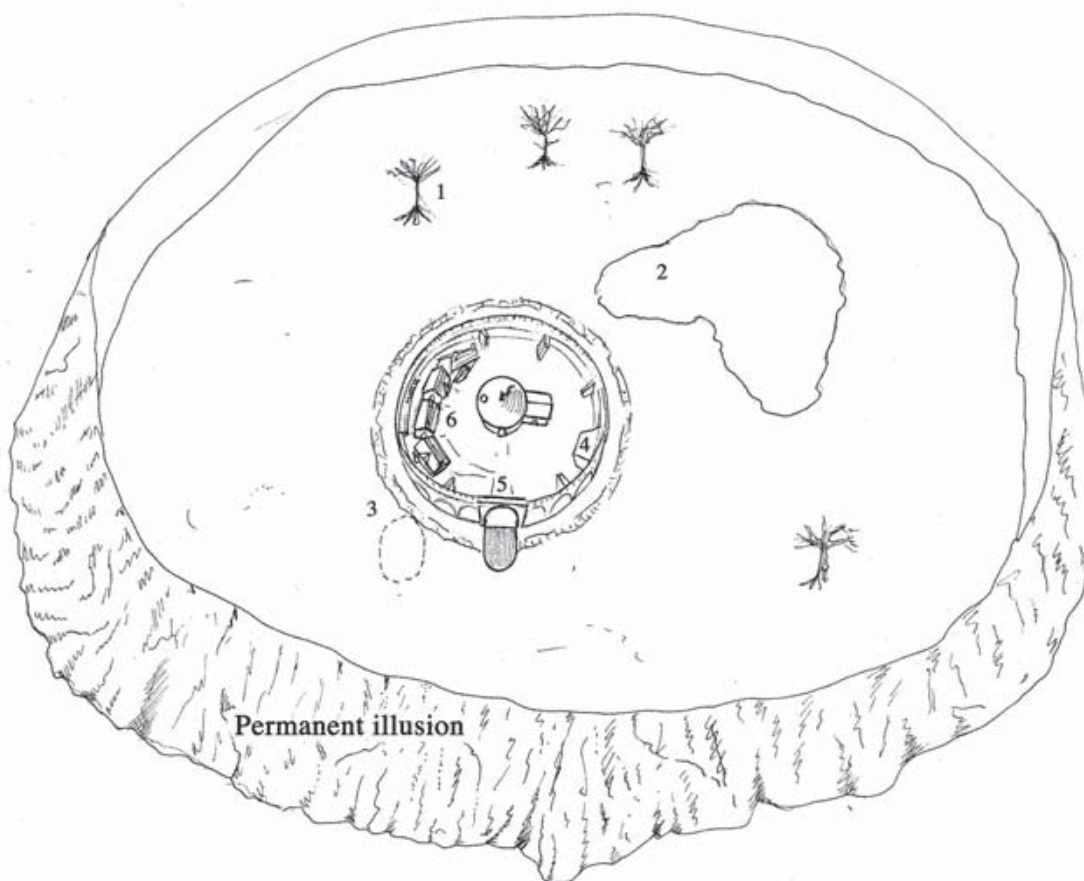
Creature: Rimbule keeps his owlbear here as a guardian. It has its own cave dug into the far side of the trench, providing the creature with a place to eat, sleep, and get out of the rain. The trench is 10 feet wide and 15 feet deep with nearly vertical walls preventing the creature's escape. One of the doppelgangers throws

scraps into the trench every few days. Unbeknownst to the ratmen, some of these scraps are the remains of their former comrades.

Anyone falling into the trench suffers 1d6 points of damage. The owlbear attacks all intruders, growling and screeching while fighting. These vocalisations alert everyone in the keep and vicinity that there are intruders about.

Owlbear: hp 58 (see *Core Rulebook III*).

Development: Bones litter the owlbear's cave. Some remains are still identifiable as portions of ratman corpses; this information would prove quite devastating to the ratmen currently working for Rimbule. Clever players might use this evidence to turn the ratmen against their master.



4. Palisade.

The outer wall along the inside of the trench ringing the keep is made of solid stone, 5 feet thick and 10 feet tall. There is only about a 2-foot clearance between the wall and the trench.

5. Drawbridge.

A stout, oaken drawbridge appears the only way through the palisade. The drawbridge is shut with no one around to open it; the situation seems designed to inform passers-by they are not welcome within.

A single individual can open or shut the drawbridge by cranking a lever on the inside of the palisade. Raising or lowering the drawbridge requires 5 rounds and makes a great clanking sound as the chains wind around the lever. This sound can be heard from the ground floor and second level of the keep but not the dungeon level.

6. Animal Cages.

Four large cages sit in a semicircle along the curve of the palisade wall. A musty smell and a chittering sound indicate at least one currently houses an occupant.

Rimbule keeps animals for his crossbreeding experiments here. Two cages are currently empty; one holds two dire rats (in reserve for more ratmen); the fourth holds a wounded hawk. The hawk's wing was broken during its capture and Rimbule has not bothered setting it.

Dire rats (2): hp 5 each (see *Core Rulebook III*).

Wounded hawk: hp 2 (see *Core Rulebook III*).

Development: Anyone tending to the hawk's wing (Heal check, DC 15 and Handle Animal check, DC 20) gains a devoted animal companion.

7. Barn.

A wooden structure juts from the side of the stone keep. Two barn-sized doors face the south and a clanking of chains emanates from within.

Rimbule added this wooden structure. The barn serves as the stable for a **Creature** of his, and he also uses it for crossbreeding experiments involving larger animals that cannot be performed inside. A thin layer of straw covers the stone floor; sweeping it away reveals several arcane symbols carved into the stone and filled with molten silver.

Creature: Rimbule's megachiroptequine, a horse/dire bat hybrid, lives here. The creature wears a saddle and harness with two locked saddlebags containing **Treasures #1** and **#2**. The megachiroptequine is secured to the stone wall of the keep by a lengthy chain preventing it from flying away. Rimbule uses his steed as a means of flying transport. If at any time during the adventure Rimbule needs to escape, he heads here.

Megachiroptequine: CR 2; Large Magical Beast; HD 3d10+9; hp 25; Init +6; Spd 60 ft., fly 30 ft. (good); AC 19 (-1 size, +6 Dex, +4 natural), touch 15, flat-footed 13; Base Atk/Grapple +3/+8; Atk Bite +6 melee (1d8+4); Full Atk Bite +6 melee (1d8+3), 2 hooves +1 melee (1d4+1); Space/Reach 10 ft./5 ft; SQ Blindsight 40 ft.; SV Fort +6, Ref +9, Will +2; Str 17, Dex 22, Con 16, Int 2, Wis 13, Cha 6; AL N; Listen +11, Move Silently +6, Spot +9; Alertness, Run

Treasure #1: The right saddlebag secures Rimbule's travelling spellbook.

Treasure #2: The left saddlebag holds a small sack containing 50 gp and three purple amethysts worth 100 gp each. The locks can be opened with a successful Open Locks check (DC 22); the keys are worn on a chain around Rimbule's neck.

Rimbule's Keep - First Floor

8. Front Door.

This door appears to be the only way into the keep. Footprints are visible before the doorway, some made by ratmen, some apparently by humans.

The outer door to the keep is solid oak, 2 inches thick and reinforced with iron bands. The door is usually unlocked but if the keep inhabitants are alerted to the party's presence they bar this door from the inside. (Hardness 5, 20 hp, Break DC 25.)

9. Entry Hall.

This narrow hallway is lit only by the sunlight streaming in from behind you. There is another door across the way, similar to the one behind you. Several narrow niches, cloaked in shadows, appear carved along both side walls.

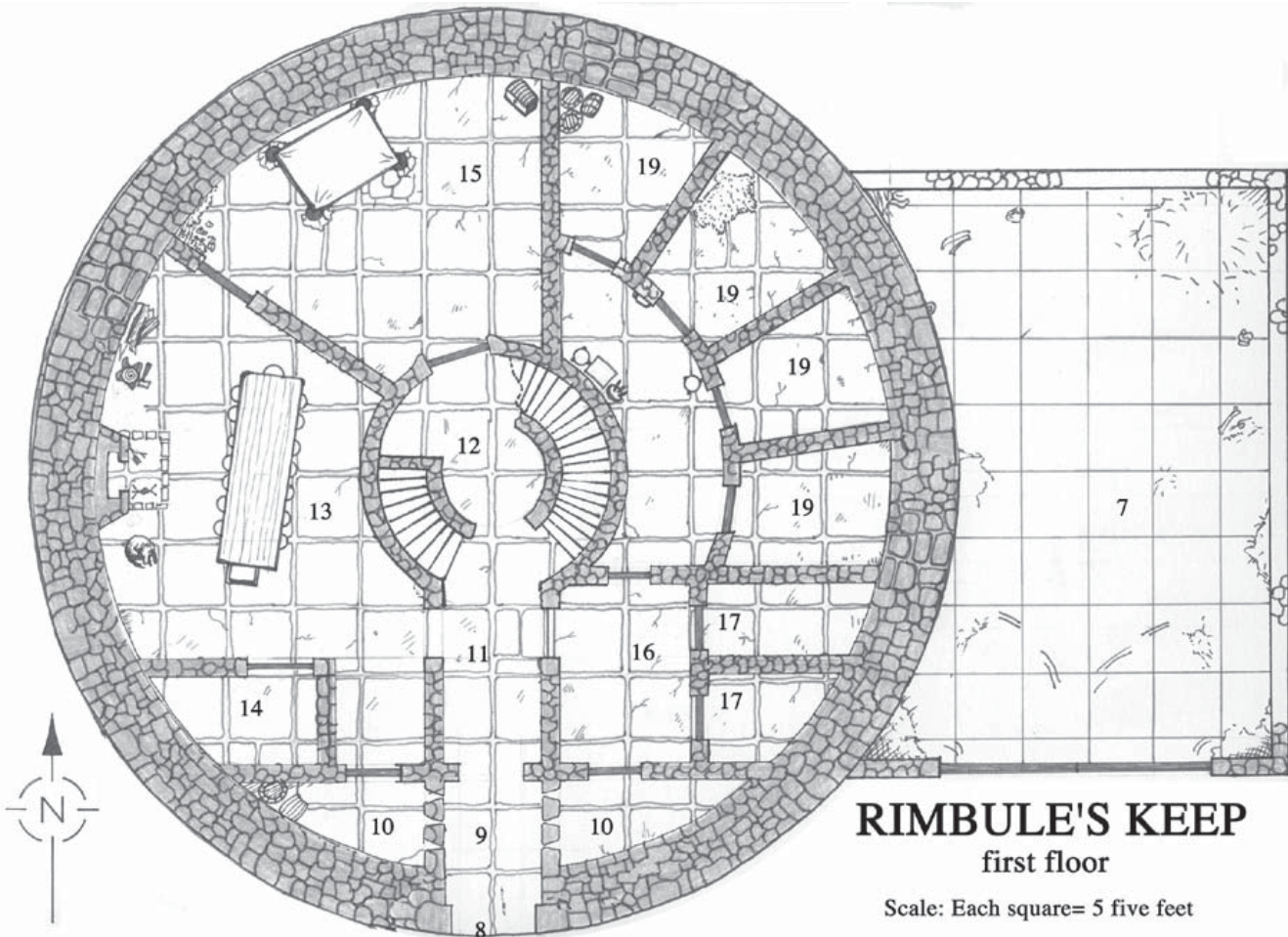
In the event hostile intruders force their way through the front door, the keep's guards can attack them through the arrow slits in the walls of the guard rooms (area 10) before the intruders can smash their way through the door to the north. The northern door is identical to the front door but Rimbule has cast *arcane lock* on it (Break DC 35); only he and the three doppelgangers can enter and exit at will.

10. Guard Rooms.

There are two of these rooms, possibly manned by ratmen. The description below assumes an empty room; adjust appropriately if necessary.

This narrow room is unlit, holding little more than a small table, two stools, three crossbows hanging on metal hooks from the wall, and a small barrel.

Each of these rooms has three arrow slits in the wall adjoining the entry



RIMBULE'S KEEP first floor

Scale: Each square= 5 five feet

hall (area 9). Rimbule seldom has more than one ratman guard on duty, usually stationed in the eastern guard room. Each room contains three crossbows and a barrel of 50 quarrels.

Tactics: If Rimbule becomes aware of an attack on the keep, two doppelgangers supplement the ratman guards, one in each room. When on guard duty, the doppelgangers usually assume the forms of ratmen so as not to alert the intruders to the presence of any but these hybrids.

Doppelganger: See 'Keep Inhabitants' sidebar for statistics.

Ratman Rog1: See 'The Ratmen Attack!' for statistics.

11. Central Hallway.

This narrow hallway provides access to other areas of the keep.

12. Stairwell.

Stairwells curve up to the second level on the right and down to a lower level on the left. The far side of the room holds a thick wooden door.

13. Kitchen.

The kitchen is large and spacious, with a functional fireplace on the western wall. A large, well-used table holding numerous cooking utensils stands in the middle of the room. Various spices in glass containers sit

on the numerous shelves along the walls. In the corner, a deer carcass hangs upside-down by a rope from the ceiling.

14. Pantry.

A myriad of pleasant smells assails your nostrils upon opening the door to this room. This large, walk-in pantry holds various foodstuffs: dried and fresh vegetables, wheels of cheese, barrels of water and wine, bags of fruit and small tuns of nuts and mushrooms.

15. Dining Room.

This green-carpeted room sports an enormous wooden table with twelve chairs.

Rimbule permits only the doppelgangers and himself to dine in here.

16. Foyer.

An open doorway and four doors provide access to various parts of the keep.

17. Bathrooms.

Two separate bathroom facilities exist side-by-side here.

This room sports a washing bowl, a mirror and two simple chamberpots. A stick of incense burns in each room to keep the air smelling fresh.

A pile of incense blocks is stored on a shelf below the mirror; three blocks in the northernmost room are actually **Treasure**.

Treasure: Three blocks of *incense of meditation*. Rimbule is unaware of their nature and could not use them in any case.

18. Servants' Hall.

This small, curving hall has four wooden doors spaced equidistant along its eastern wall.

19. Servants' Quarters.

There are four small bedchambers in this section of the keep.

This room contains a bed, a dresser and a small desk. The room is immaculately clean; it is difficult to say whether it has been recently occupied.

The three northernmost rooms are used by the doppelgangers Callipygia, Mamilla and Vulnavia, respectively; the fourth room is not currently in use. The doppelgangers each keep their **Treasure** hidden in their rooms.

Treasure #1: Callipygia keeps the following in a *portable hole* folded and stashed under her mattress: 314 gp, an ivory comb (20 gp), and a

thick notebook detailing various important people living in several nearby towns. The doppelgangers have been taking notes, ready to assassinate and replace people of power and prestige and gain those roles for themselves. Callipygia also keeps a pair of polished human skulls as candleholders. The desk contains writing utensils (quills and ink) and a small drawstring bag of 20 tindertwigs.

Treasure #2: Mamilla keeps three potions stuffed into a boot under her bed: *cure moderate wounds*, *gaseous form* and *water breathing*. She keeps a drawstring pouch of 20 gp in the top drawer of her dresser.

Treasure #3: Vulnavia keeps the following tucked away in her pillow: a *figurine of wondrous power (ebony fly)*, a map detailing a cave network in the nearby hills, a small leather sack holding two tiny gems (50 gp each), and several field mice carcasses with their heads bitten off.

Development: If attacked by an overwhelming force, the doppelgangers may cut their losses and run. If they can make it to their bedrooms, Mamilla uses her potion of *gaseous form* to escape, while Callipygia and Vulnavia ride the *ebony fly* to safety. Note that while Mamilla can consume her potion from here, the other two must sneak outside before making good their escape. If the front door is blocked, they try shapechanging into kobolds and scuttling up the chimney, gaining access to the roof and fleeing from there.

If one doppelganger gets cut off from the others with no other means of escape, she might sneak down to the dungeon level and lock herself in one of the cells in area 29, hoping to pass herself off as one of Rimbule's captives. If this plan is put into action, the doppelganger assumes the form of another young human woman and awaits 'rescue' by the party.

Rimbule's Keep- Second Floor

20. Stairwell.

This stairwell holds a set of stairs leading up, another set leading down, and a series of four doors: three to the north and one to the south.

The stairs along the eastern wall lead to a trapdoor (barred from the inside), and beyond that, the roof of the keep (not shown on map). The roof holds three large barrels, used to catch and store rainwater. A chimney rises up along the western side of the roof.

21. Laboratory.

This room is cluttered with a haphazard collection of furniture and equipment: a desk, a small bookcase and several small animal cages. There are arcane symbols carved onto the stone floor and manacles imbedded into the floor at four points around a magic circle. Several sheets of loose paper lie scattered around the room.

This is where Rimbule performs his experiments on Medium and smaller creatures. It seems part of the transmutation process involves the humanoid victim chained spread-eagled to the floor in the circle's centre.

The bookcase contains records on the crossbreeding attempts so far, with notes on each type of hybrid creature stored in a separate tome. The animal cages are all empty. The loose papers are discarded notes on hybrid forms Rimbule rejected as infeasible at his present knowledge level.

22. Library

Both doors leading into this room are *arcane locked* (Break DC 26).

The curved northern wall of this semicircular room holds several bookcases. A comfortable chair rests

between the two doors along the southern wall and a wooden chair and table stand against the eastern corner.

This room is Rimbule's extensive library, where he keeps his spellbooks, manifold notes on magical crossbreeding, and anatomical texts on humanoids and various animals. Also stored here is Turtle's spellbook.

23. Study.

A simple, wooden table and chair stand in the centre of this room. Scattered across the tabletop are anatomical diagrams of humans and birds, along with several drawings of harpies, angels and vorks. There is a fireplace in the southwest corner.

The fireplace shares a chimney with the one in the kitchen (area 13) below.

24. Gallery.

This irregularly shaped chamber holds four doors. Colourful paintings hang on the north and south walls.

The framed paintings are **Treasure**, spoils of the caravans the ratmen have ambushed over the past several months.

Treasure: Four framed landscape paintings, collectively valued at 450 gp.

25. Master Bedroom.

This opulent room is filled with much finery. A huge four-poster bed stands against the curved wall and colourful tapestries of frolicking forest nymphs and dryads hang from the walls on either side. A thick, green carpet covers the floor. Along the northern wall stands a wooden wardrobe. A fireplace in the northwest corner provides warmth.

Rimbule keeps the door *arcane locked* (Break DC 26) to prevent anyone else from entering. The wardrobe holds Rimbule's robes

and cloaks, as well as a false bottom containing both **Trap** and **Treasure**. Hanging on a hook on the inside of the wardrobe door is a large key ring with seven metal keys; these open the cells in area 29 and the door to area 32.

The fireplace shares a chimney with the kitchen fireplace below (in area 13) but the dual-chimney construction makes it impossible to climb from this fireplace to the one in the study (or vice-versa) without first crawling down the shaft to the kitchen and then switching chimneys on the way back up.

Baleful Polymorph Trap: CR 6; magic device; touch trigger; no reset; spell effect (*baleful polymorph*, 9th-level wizard); Search DC 30; Disable Device DC 30. Opening the false bottom of the wardrobe without first disabling the trap triggers a *baleful polymorph* spell. If the victim fails a Fortitude save (DC 18), he polymorphs into a Tiny garter snake (use non-poisonous viper statistics).

Treasure: One of Rimbule's cloaks is a *cloak of the bat*. Stored in the secret compartment are 900 gp, 2 fire opals (1,000 gp each), a small ceramic jar containing two doses of *stone salve*, and a small, framed portrait of a dark-haired woman.

26. Guest Bedroom.

This room contains a bed, dresser, small standing closet, and a wide mirror. A small blue throw rug lies on the floor in front of the bed.

27. Bathroom.

This room is divided into two sections. The southernmost part holds a washing bowl, a mirror, and two simple chamberpots. The northernmost holds a clawed-foot tub. A stick of incense burns to keep the air smelling fresh.

Treasure: The tub is magical, filling with warm water upon command ('aqueata' to fill, 'vacanti' to drain).

Rimbule's Keep- Dungeon Level

28. Stairwell.

Stone stairs lead to a circular room below the earth. A narrow passageway leads north, ending in a wooden door. Two other doors appear on the left and the right of the passageway.

29. Cells.

Past the door a curved hallway bends in an arc, displaying six metal doors. Each holds a small, barred window. There is the strong scent of something dead nearby.

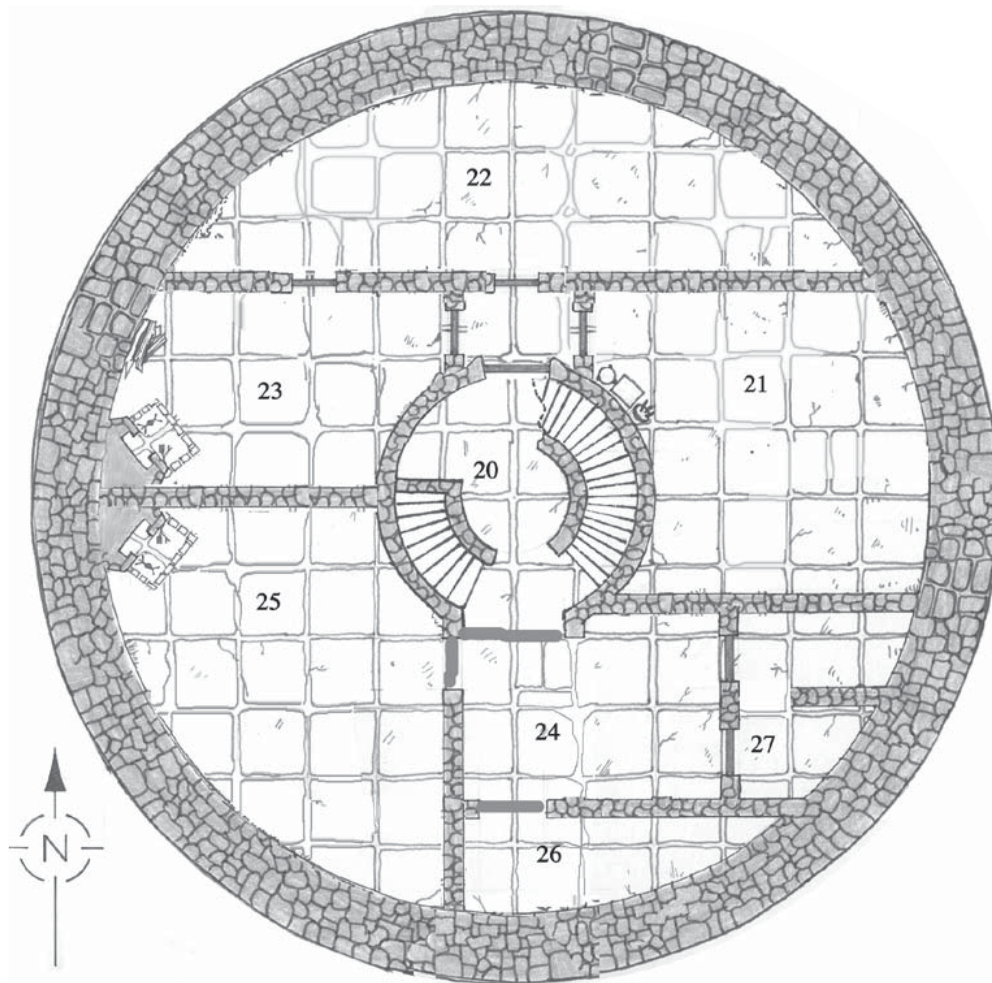
The doors lead to six cells, some holding subjects for Rimbule's experiments. The hallway is lit with *continual flame* but the cells are not.

The cells are carved from solid stone and the doors are thick metal with small (4 inches by 6 inches) barred windows. The cell doors open into the hallway, preventing captives from tampering with the hinges. Each cell locks with a different key; the keys to each cell (and the key for area 32) are kept on a large key ring hanging from the wardrobe in Rimbule's room (area 25). Opening a lock without a key requires a successful Open Locks check (DC 25).

Currently, only four cells are occupied. The second and third cells from the north each contain a human captured from Gilfred's caravan.

Creatures: Roger and Walther are fledgling fighters who recently hired on as caravan guards.

Roger and Walther, male human Ftr 1: CR 1; Medium Humanoids; HD 1d10+3; hp 13 each; Init +5; Spd 30; AC 11 (+1 Dex), touch 11, flat-footed 10; Base Atk/Grapple +1/+1; Atk Weapon +1 melee (by weapon type); Full Atk Weapon +1 melee (by weapon type); Space/Reach 5 ft./5



RIMBULE'S KEEP Second floor

ft; SV Fort +4, Ref +1, Will +0; Str 13, Dex 12, Con 11, Int 10, Wis 10, Cha 11; AL CN; Handle Animal +4, Ride +5; Great Fortitude, Improved Initiative, Toughness

Development: If released from their cells, Roger and Walther aid the Player Characters in the fight against Rimbule and his minions. They are currently unarmed and must be supplied with weapons (either their own from area 30 or 'loaners' from the party). They can inform the party that Rimbule has several human women in his employ.

Creature: The southernmost cell contains a captured mimic which Rimbule eventually hopes to merge with one of the doppelgangers and then with himself. In the meantime,

the mimic stays here under lock and key. In an effort to escape, the mimic assumes the form of a tempting item (perhaps a treasure chest, suit of shining plate mail or even a wishing well), hoping to entice someone to open the door.

Mimic: hp 53(see *Core Rulebook III*).

Development: The cell immediately to the north of the mimic's is used to store the corpse of the last ratman to 'earn his freedom'. It lacks both an arm and a leg, which were fed to the mimic. Any ratman currently working for Rimbule readily identifies the corpse and becomes furious at their master's treachery. (This is why they are barred from the dungeon level.)

30. Storage Room.

This room lies in total darkness. Your first impression is of a disorganised clutter of boxes, crates and piles of a wide variety of objects. Numerous cobwebs indicate this room does not see much traffic.

Treasure: Stashed here haphazardly are three cots, a chest stuffed with blankets, a crate containing 24 bottles of elven wine (total value 720 gp), Roger and Walther's chainmail, Gandelbain's elven chainmail, several longswords, short swords, daggers and maces, several sets of clothing, a crate of dyed silk (350 gp), three small tuns of dwarven mead (20 gp each), a druid's herbal pouch, a crate of broken pottery, a bundle of unused torches, several dozen leather belts,

and an assortment of tiny gargoyles carved from stone. The gargoyles are garden statuary enchanted to ward off insects and other pests. Add any other items as desired; most of the items stored here constitute goods captured from various caravans.

Unknown to Rimbule, there is a secret door on the eastern wall leading to a hidden well. Anyone attempting to enter this room via the secret passageway must make a Strength check (DC 15) to push open the door.

31. Hidden Well.

If this room is entered via the storage room, read or paraphrase the following to the players:

After passing a second secret door, you enter an unlit room, 10 feet square. Incongruously, centred in the room is what appears to be a well, like one would find in the middle of a town square.

This room is unknown to the current inhabitants of the keep. The well is 20 feet deep and at the bottom is an underwater tunnel leading to the pond (area 2) 60 feet to the northeast. Climbing out of the well requires a Climb check (DC 30) due to slipperiness. Those failing their Climb check fall back into the water; anyone below them must make a Reflex saving throw (DC 15) to avoid being landed upon. If this save is failed, everyone involved takes 1d4 points of damage.

32. Evil Shrine.

This unlit room is almost as large as the storage room (area 30). Rimbule keeps the door locked (Open Locks DC 25 or Break DC 18).

From each upper corner of this room leers a grinning skull. Bas-relief skeletons stand out from each wall. At the far end of the room stands a stone statue of an emaciated figure wearing brocaded robes and elaborate headgear. Its right hand

clutches an enormous scythe and its left hand holds an amulet in its skeletal fingers.

The statue is a carving of an evil death god. Closer inspection (Search, DC 10) shows the amulet is carved from bone and rests upon the statue's hand. The amulet is part of a necklace made of human finger bones, with the word 'rosablanca' etched on one side and a white rose on the other. The amulet is a magical **Trap**.

Skeletal Spikes Amulet Trap: (CL 8); magic device; command word trigger; automatic reset; spell effect (*skeletal spikes*, 15th-level wizard, spikes burst forth from wearer's skin, living wearers drop to 0 hp, no save); Search (DC 30); Disable (DC 30). Mermilack left this item behind to be found by trespassers; it was Rimbule's overall fear of the room that kept him from discovering the amulet.

Assaulting Rimbule's Keep

There are many ways to assault Rimbule's keep. Player Characters might try to storm the place, magically flying over the palisade and gaining entrance to the keep's interior. They might try the stealthy approach, using *invisibility* magic or the underwater tunnel from the pond. They might even try the direct approach, walking up to Rimbule's keep and announcing themselves.

Whatever they do, Rimbule's actions are based on those of the party. Rimbule's familiar reports to his master if he spots them, in which case the wizard and doppelgangers prepare for an attack. If the Player Characters interview the crossbreeds while avoiding the familiar they might gain enough information to take the wizard by surprise.

If the Player Characters recruit the crossbreeds to aid in the assault

(overcoming Rimbule's *charm monster* spells), Valgard, Gandelbain and Dardonella take up arms against the wizard. Tukio is limited to the pond. Turtle helps in any way she can but her slow movement rate and inability to stand upright make her of little combat use. However, she can provide the party with a rough map of the above-ground floors of the keep, although she has never been in the library (area 22), study (area 23), or master bedroom (area 25) and has no idea of the dimensions of the rooms beyond the doors. She has likewise never been down to the dungeon level.

Player Characters capable of flight might make it to the roof and enter via the trapdoor there, using a *knock* spell to deal with the bar on the inside. Dardonella can carry one Small person in her arms as high as the roof of the keep but must be persuaded by the party to do so (Diplomacy, DC 12), as she fears heights.

If Rimbule is unaware of the party's approach, he is in his study working out the details of a hawk/human hybrid. Callipygia is assisting him; Vulnavia is preparing a meal in the kitchen; Mamilla is feeding the mimic.

If Rimbule is aware of the party's approach, he instructs Mamilla and Vulnavia to stand watch in the guard rooms, each with a ratman guard. Callipygia positions herself at the stairway in area 20 with a crossbow from the guard rooms, ready in case anyone descends through the trapdoor on the roof. Rimbule stands by the stairway at area 12, ready to cast spells at anyone getting through the doorway of area 9 or race upstairs to aid Callipygia if needed. Aerik remains outside and spies on the party, reporting their movements to Rimbule via empathic link. Since Rimbule is unaware of the secret underwater tunnel leading from the pond to the well room, he makes no plans against an attack from the dungeon level of the keep.

Concluding the Adventure

If the party defeats Rimbule, his doppelganger assistants and the ratmen, there remains the question of what to do with the wizard's previous victims. The rituals Rimbule used to create his hybrids are permanent. A *polymorph any object* restores the victims at least to human form, if not their own exact human form.

This adventure gives you the opportunity to add a centaur or satyr Non-Player Character to the party (at

least until Gandelbain or Valgard can be returned to their original forms); such unusual characters might add a little spice to the game.

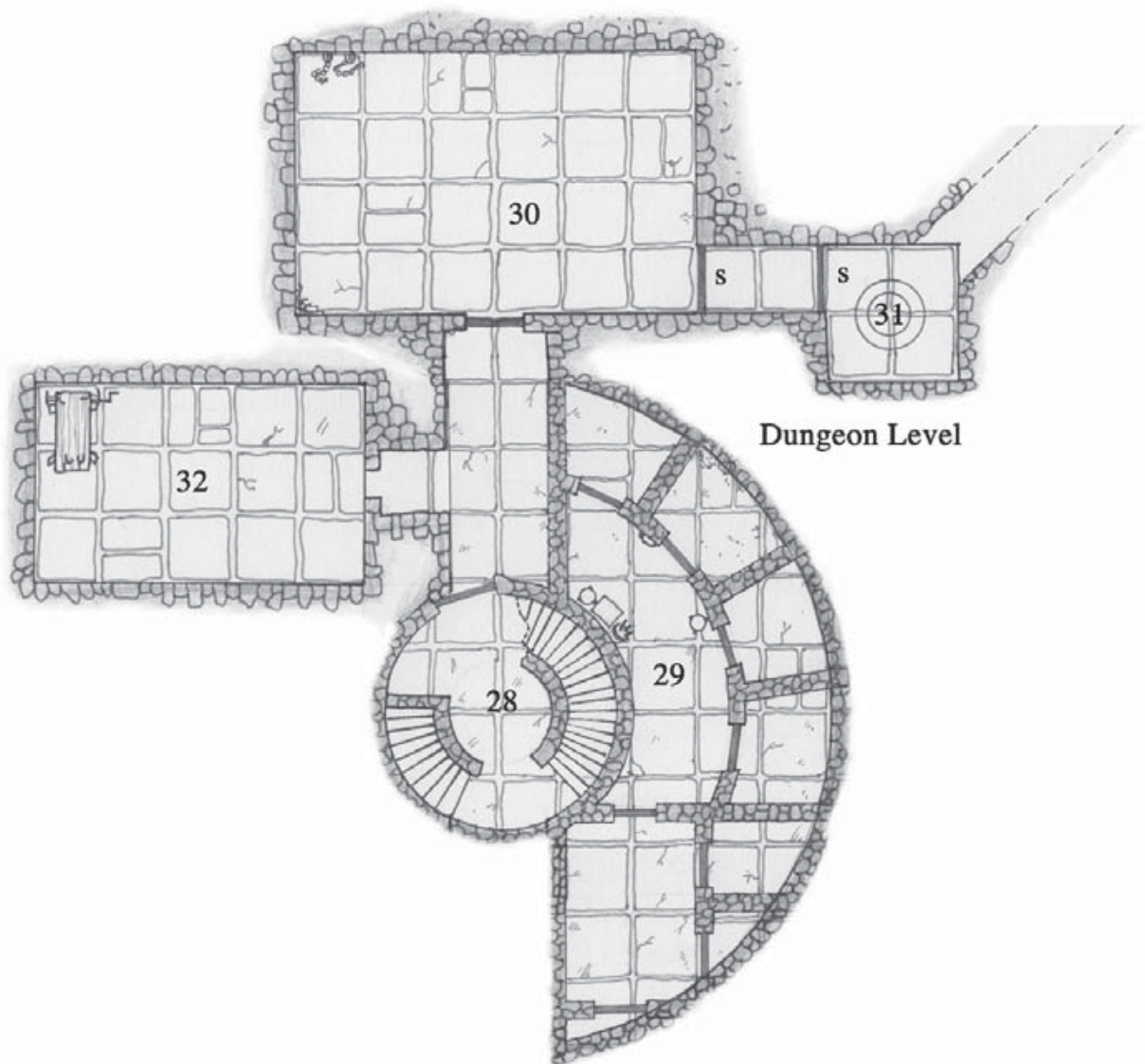
Keep Inhabitants

Rimbule, male human Wiz9: CR 9; Medium Humanoid; HD 9d4+9; hp 38; Init +6; Spd 30; AC 14 (+2 Dex, +2 *ring of protection*), touch 14, flat-footed 12; Base Atk/Grapple +4/+0; Atk Dagger +6 melee (1d4+1); Full Atk Dagger +6 melee (1d4+1); Space/Reach 5 ft. by 5 ft.; SA spells; SV Fort +4, Ref +5, Will +8; Str 10, Dex 15, Con 12, Int 17, Wis

11, Cha 13; AL NE; Concentration +13, Handle Animal +7, Knowledge (arcana) +15, Knowledge (nature) +15, Ride +8, Spellcraft +15; Brew Potion, Improved Initiative, Iron Will, Scribe Scroll, Spell Focus (transmutation), Spell Mastery (*alter self*, *baleful polymorph*, *polymorph*), Weapon Focus (dagger).

Possessions: *Dagger* +1, *ring of mind shielding*, *ring of protection* +2.

Spells (4/5/5/4/2/1): 0—*detect magic*, *detect poison*, *light*, *read magic*; 1st—*burning hands*, *charm person*, *comprehend languages*, *expeditious retreat**, *mage armour*;



2nd—*alter self**, *darkvision**, *mirror image*, *see invisibility*, *spider climb**; 3rd—*dispel magic* (×2), *fireball*, *hold person*; 4th—*charm monster*, *polymorph**; 5th—*baleful polymorph**. Spell save DC = 13 + spell level, 14 + spell level for transmutation spells (*).

Rimbule's spellbook also holds the following: 0—*arcane mark*, *dancing lights*, *ghost sound*, *mending**, *prestidigitation*; 1st—*enlarge person**, *reduce person**; 2nd—*arcane lock*, *blindness/deafness*, *continual flame*; 3rd—*fly**, *gaseous form**, *tongues*, *water breathing**; 4th—*locate creature*; 5th—*animal growth**, *hold monster*.

Rimbule is a tall, lanky man with an unkempt beard and dishevelled hair. At 42, his light brown hair has yet to show its first signs of grey. He typically wears robes stained with chemicals, blood, or worse.

In combat, Rimbule strikes with his *charm person*, *charm monster*, *hold person* and *baleful polymorph* spells first, incapacitating several opponents if possible. He uses *mirror image* and *mage armour* to protect himself, relying upon *expeditious retreat* if needed to escape to the barn (area 7), where he frees his megachiroptequine and flies to safety.

Doppelgangers (3): hp 27, 25, 24 (see *Core Rulebook III*).

The doppelgangers assisting Rimbule cannot read his mind because of his *ring of mind shielding*. Unable to cloak themselves in the forms of trusted individuals (as per their habit), they have instead adopted the pleasing forms of three beautiful young women. All three wear scanty outfits around the keep; the wizard has yet to complain.

Callipygia appears as a long-lashed, light-skinned blonde with

ice-blue eyes. She wears a *dagger* +2 strapped to her left thigh. The other two doppelgangers follow Callipygia's lead. She realises the potential to be had by adding a mimic's shapeshifting abilities to her own and remains devoted to Rimbule until such time as he has provided her with such power – then he becomes expendable.

Mamilla appears as a redhead with thick, sensuous lips and sparkling, emerald eyes. She wears a *short sword* +1 at her hip and thigh-high, high-heeled black leather *boots of speed*. She fancies herself a mistress of seduction and is amazed (and not a little miffed) Rimbule has held out against her wiles for so long.

In human form, Vulnavia has raven-dark hair and almond-shaped brown eyes projecting an aura of mystique. Her preferred weapon is the spiked chain looped around her waist. She wears a necklace of fishhooks

around her neck, on which she impales field mice she catches. Vulnavia enjoys the sensation of the struggling mice squirming on her 'necklace of misery'. She gets along very well with Aerik, to whom she often feeds her field mouse 'leftovers'.

If the doppelgangers encounter intruders in the keep, they keep up the guise of beautiful assistants (if the party spots them first) or may attempt to infiltrate the party by silently attacking and replacing a member (if they spot the party first). Note while referred to as 'female' in this adventure, doppelgangers can appear as members of either sex at will.





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