

MONGOOSE PUBLISHING PRESENTS



Signs & Portents

47

Roleplayer

ALIEN8!

Never-before-seen alien races for *Babylon 5*

PREVIEW8!

Blood of Orlanth and *RuneQuest Sláine*

ADVENTURE!

A *Conan* adventure for starting characters – perfect for Second Edition

Plus *The World According to Roleplaying*, more spaceships for *WARS*, unusual creatures for *RuneQuest*, the world's shortest (yet technically complete) *RuneQuest* adventure and more...

SGP Roleplayer 47

August 2007

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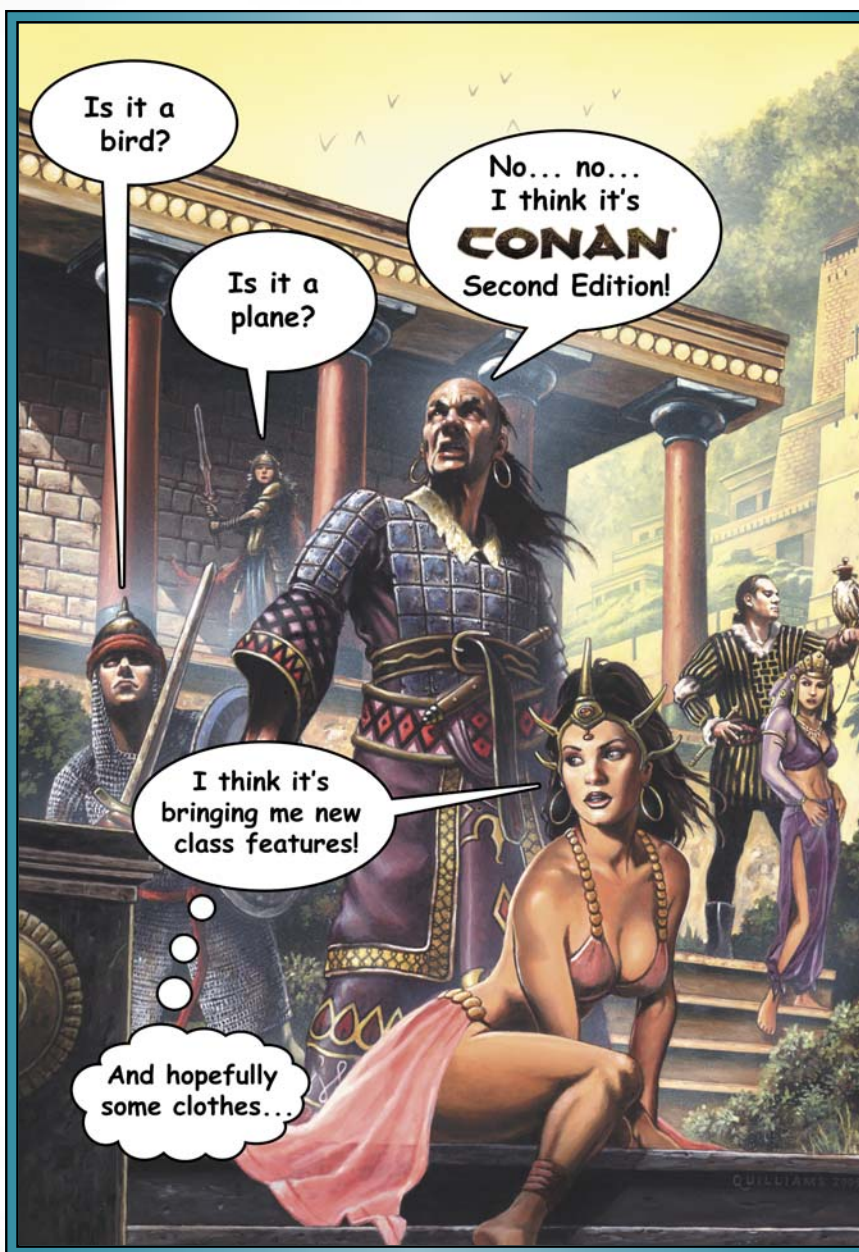
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CONTENTS

FOMORIAN LORDS



BLOOD OF ORLANTH



SHIPS, PART 2



AND... ACTION!



ALIENS

A quartet of alien races that were cut from the book *Heroes and Aliens* due to lack of space.



FOMORIAN LORDS

A sneak preview of one of the big nasties from the forthcoming RuneQuest Slaine.



BLOOD OF ORLANTH

A quick overview of the new Glorantha campaign by its author, Gareth Hanrahan.



THE WORLD ACCORDING TO ROLEPLAYING

The almost-true story of Dr. Crippen and his wacky getaway scheme.

SHIPS, PART 2

Last month we looked at the capital ships. This month, ships more suitable for Player Characters: freighters, scouts and fighters.



THE VAULT OF THEDIPIDES

To go with the release of Conan Second Edition, an adventure for a group of 1st-level characters. With map!



HUNTER'S SPOILS

Several unique creatures and the goodies that can be harvested from their bodies.



AND... ACTION!

Two of the creators of Spycraft 2.0 take a look at how to emulate big-screen blockbusters in your games.

EYE ON MONGOOSE

OFFER OF THE MONTH

WRITE FOR THE MONGOOSE

ROLEPLAYING GAMES PRODUCT LIST

MAIL ORDER FORM

EYE ON MONGOOSE

CthulhuTech

The Last War

2085. Humanity faces extinction. Alien insects from the edge of our solar system, long hidden behind the façade of reality, descend to enslave us. Hordes of unspeakable horrors roll out from Central Asia, laying waste to anything in their path. The church of the fish-god scours the world for lost occult secrets to unleash terrible forces. Dead gods awaken and turn their dreadful eyes toward the Earth. And within hides a cancer, eating away at the very heart of the New Earth Government.

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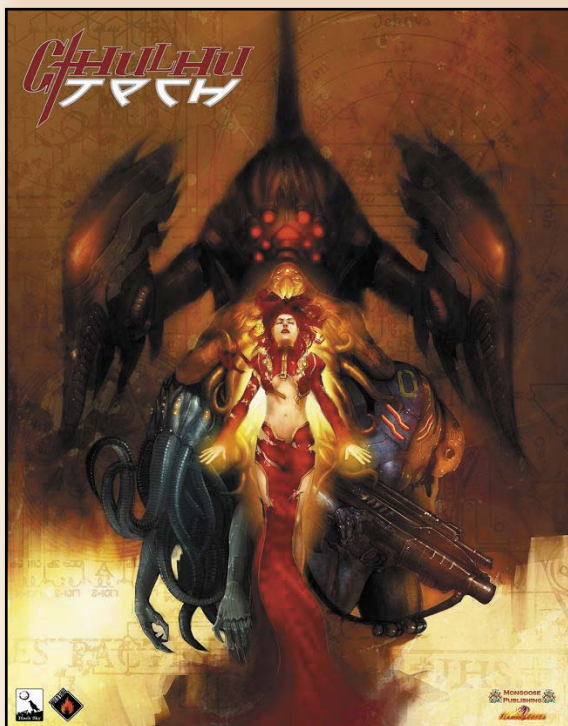
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- A unique ritual-based magic system, simulating dark and painstaking universe channeling power, including two dozen mind-wrenching spells.
- More than 30 unique machines of death, including the bug-like Migou mecha, the rough and tumble mecha of the New Earth Government, and the monstrous bio-organic Engels.
- More than 20 unspeakable horrors, including the terrible hordes of the Rapine Storm and the monstrous servants of the Chrysalis Corporation.
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- Story starters and hooks, to get you into a game now.

CthulhuTech is a complete, self-contained storytelling game. All you need besides this book are five to ten 10-sided dice.

Due to the fact that we now have our own printing facility, our web site now shows an indicated Shipping Date for each of our products. This is when new products are due to leave our warehouse - after that, it is up to the courier and shipping companies! They are normally good at what they do, but mistakes do happen from time to time, causing delays. And, of course, there is no accounting for Customs. Mail order customers and those waiting for books to appear in UK stores should expect to see them around three days after the Shipping Date. European stores will start to see them seven days after the Shipping Date, while US stores will see them around eight days after. Customers in other countries, such as Canada and Australia will usually see them a little after this, though it can vary. Please note that while we use fast track Customs services in many countries, packages can get pulled aside from time to time, putting perhaps a week on top of the delivery dates.



THE PACK-MAN

Those of you in the know will be aware that, with the massive upheavals at Mongoose Towers involving the installation of a complete print works, things have been a bit hectic to say the least! One of the areas that has unfortunately suffered has been Mail Order. Primarily this started when the 'new' mail order guy, Ed Russell, went and got himself promoted to managing the print shop - see, career opportunities in Mongoose really are exciting and rapid! This left a short-term hole which we filled using current staffers from the Studio, but that really was just a filler. What we needed was a new mail order guy, of course.

It just so happened that a friend of a friend already working in the gaming industry and with experience of just what we were looking for was looking to change jobs...enter Russell Veal! Having worked in the gaming industry already at Games Workshop, Russell knew just what was needed and on his arrival he blew through the mail order department like the mistral itself, suggesting all sorts of excellent ideas to make the whole thing more efficient.

Needless to say, we thought this was a good thing. Russell also understands as a gamer that every order is high priority and he is very keen to translate that feeling into how our mail order system works. We want you to feel like your order IS special, and it really is!

So, because mail order is by nature an anonymous business we decided you ought to take a good look at the man behind your orders...well, at least you know who to chase at open days now at any rate!

If you do have any queries about mail order you can always reach out to Russell at rveal@mongoosepublishing.com He'll be glad to help.



Russell hard at work. For the eagle-eyed that's new editor Charlie Law's head behind those boxes - Russell isn't above stealing help when he needs it!



Incredibly short or kneeling down...you decide.

SWORDS, SORCERY AND MOUNTAINS OF LOOT

AN OVERVIEW OF **CONAN, THE ROLEPLAYING GAME - SECOND EDITION**

Last year was the 100th anniversary of the birth of Robert E. Howard, the creator of one of the original fantasy icons, Conan the Cimmerian. This year, GenCon falls on Robert E. Howard day. Surely there cannot be a better time to reintroduce the world to **CONAN** - the Roleplaying Game?

A great many of the readers of this magazine will already be familiar with the exploits of the powerful barbarian - his feats of strength and combat prowess and his inexorable rise from a daring vagabond all the way to rulership of the greatest kingdom of the age - but a significant number of you may well be new to Conan or know him only from films. You are in for a treat.

As well as creating the character of Conan, Howard created a rich and vibrant world for him to prowl. Howard wrote an extended essay on the Hyborian Age and the the kingdoms thereof - an essay reproduced in full in the roleplaying game core book - in order to keep his stories straight in terms of what happened where. Drawing from this essay and other sources in his writings Conan the Roleplaying Game allows you to explore this detailed setting.

All kinds of adventure are possible in the Hyborian Age: you can play nobles, spies and agents in the multifarious cities of the Aquilonian kingdoms, scheming to increase your power at the expense of others; you can play hardened frontiersmen trying to force

civilisation into the Pictish Wilderness; barbarian raiders or the soldiers who oppose them; Hyrkanian horsemen, riding the endless steppes of their homeland; insane sorcerers calling up demons from the outer darkness or the rare few virtuous priests who try to curb their influence; or you can become the archetypal wandering adventurers in the mould of Conan himself, out to carve names for yourselves from the unforgiving and jealous world.

But what sort of a world is it? The Hyborian Age is not the magical paradise of your typical fantasy roleplaying game. It is not even the world of fading enchantment described in the *Lord of the Rings* trilogy. In Conan's world magic is a dark and dangerous force, unknown to the common folk except in legend and superstition. However, there are a great many ancient and haunted ruins waiting to ensnare curious wanderers and characters in Conan the Roleplaying Game will find themselves facing off against more than their share of supernatural terrors and creatures of the night - largely because they are often the only people capable of dealing with them.

In the Hyborian Age there are no magic swords or enchanted arrows of slaying to help you defeat your foes: warriors must face their enemies with nothing more than steel and skill; nobles and thieves must live or die by their own guile and the classic methods of diplomacy, poison or the subtle knife; when a sorcerer calls up a demon to serve him, he must coerce that fiend with his own naked willpower. It is the measure of a man which is important; not the gear he carries.

And so what of the roleplaying game? Based on the hugely successful d20 system, Conan adds a few new mechanics to better reflect the nature of combat in the Hyborian Age. You have the choice of parrying your opponents' blows or dodging them. Armour reduces damage but makes you no harder to hit. Magic has been completely reworked to better reflect Hyborian sorcery. Combat is faster and more deadly, but heroes have Fate Points which can save them from even certain death.

Even if you have never played d20 before, Conan the Roleplaying Game contains all the information you need to get started. Rules for character creation and doing things with your new character, an equipment list, rules for magic, combat, a bestiary of likely adversaries that covers people, animals and supernatural entities, three chapters on the Hyborian Age itself covering Robert E. Howard's original essay, religion in the Hyborian Age and an extended gazetteer of the Hyborian kingdoms and beyond, and a chapter of advice for Games Masters when it comes to running games set in Conan's world.

Unfortunately, there is far more to the Hyborian Age than can be crammed into a single book - even a single 420 page tome like the Conan core rulebook. On the positive side, the Conan game is well-supported with a complete line of products already available for the first edition (still compatible!) and a long list of planned future releases for second edition including the much called-for Asgard/Vanaheim sourcebook.

But what of players who are already familiar with the first edition of Conan? What is there for them in this new edition?

The answer? *More.*

If you liked the first edition of Conan you'll love the new edition. Twice as many combat manoeuvres to scatter your foes - and their body parts - far and wide across the battlefield. Half again as many spells for sorcerers both ally and enemy to rain down upon the heads of their enemies. The temptress from *Hyboria's Fallen* has been added to round out the core classes to nine. There are statistics in the bestiary for more animals, some dangerous (rhinceros), some less so (badger) and others harmless without sorcerous intervention (owl). There are sample creatures given for those who wish to use the *raise corpse* spell on bodies of non-human origin. The poison rules have been overhauled to add more drama without making them less dangerous.

In addition the rules have been clarified and tweaked throughout. Presenting an exhaustive list of all the changes would use more space than I have here, but the combat and sorcery chapters saw most of the revisions. Fear not! The game has not changed so much that you will not recognise it. It should now be easier to find what you are looking for in the book and the experience of play should flow more smoothly.

Want to find out what it's like? There will be two games of Conan running at Mongoose Hall '07 on August the 4th if you happen to live in the UK, and if you live elsewhere in the world keep an eye out for the Mongoose Infantry running a demo game at your local gaming store. On top of that, there will be previews available on the Mongoose web site if you want to see what the inside of the book looks like.



Aliens

A handful of alien races cut from previous products, here in print for the first time.

Alacans

The galaxy is full of the corpses of worlds. Despite the many thriving colonies and homeworlds, there are countless reminders of how thin the line between survival and extinction can be. Many species can be held accountable for their own destruction but many more are guilty of nothing more than being in the wrong place at the wrong time. Such was the case with the Alacans.

Alaca III is a slightly dry world, not a desert planet, but given more to plains and prairie than swamps and rainforests. Fresh water is still rare enough to be valuable and the early Alacans, a race of people best described as 'catlike,' warred over it constantly. Warfare led, as it often does, to technological advancement, and, over millennia, the Alacans moved from flint to bronze to iron to gunpowder to atoms... and then, unlike many other races, stopped. Given the prospect of global annihilation, they chose peace. Warring nations set down their arms and forged treaties. With difficulty, past sins and wrongs were forgiven, if never truly forgotten. The breakthroughs made in the pursuit of death were turned to exploration and the Alacans took their first steps into space, where they encountered the Abbai and began to trade with them peacefully, including purchasing some outdated weapons systems – not enough to threaten anyone, just enough to avoid seeming like an easy target to the many predatory species they now knew existed.

Unfortunately for them, the Dilgar were not dissuaded by ancient laser or missile weapons, nor by a fighting spirit rekindled from the ashes of

peace into a blazing, reborn fury. The Alacans threw everything they had against the Dilgar invasion and were slaughtered. As the Earth Alliance debated joining the Dilgar War, this image was brought up and compared to the Poles in World War II riding their horse cavalry against the German blitzkrieg, an image of doomed courage. This might not have swung the vote in itself but it certainly helped.

This did not save the Alacans. Their world was shredded, their race all but exterminated. Of the billions who once lived on Alaca, barely 10,000 remain alive, scattered among a half-dozen tiny outposts, mostly heavily shielded military bases. Even worse, the considerable gender dimorphism among the Alaca led to the military being overwhelmingly male; less than 10% of the survivors were females of breeding age. It is not certain if the species has enough genetic diversity to restore itself; nor is it certain the ravaged planet can sustain life for long. Almost forty years after the Dilgar War, the population is still in decline, with stillbirths and fatal birth defects very common, a legacy of radiation and biogenetic weapons. It is possible that the Interstellar Alliance may find a new, safe home world for the few survivors.

Personality: The ancient fighting spirit of the Alacans is reborn in the tiny remnant of the race that is still alive. Though a minority of Alacans have resigned themselves to the doom of their race, the majority are determined to rise again. They have paid a great price for their dedication to peace, and do not intend to fall back into that trap again. If the Alacans survive as a race and thrive, they will almost certainly never return to their old ways before the Dilgar came. Those Alacans dedicated to racial

survival, primarily military men, have begun to embrace draconian practices such as forced breeding programmes in an attempt to repopulate the species. The Alacans of 50 years ago would scarcely recognise their people today.

Physical Description: The Alacans are long-limbed and furry humanoids. Their ears are similar to those of a terrestrial cat, as indeed is their overall physical impression. They have a high degree of gender dimorphism in their species, with the males significantly larger and stronger than the females.

Relations: Now that the Alacans scarcely exist as a race any longer, they have no true relations with other species. Instead, they are forced to accept whatever scraps the Earth Alliance and other governments may offer – something they realise is necessary, but which still chafes.

Alacan Systems: The Alacans still hold their home world's system, the Alaca System, primarily because after its treatment at the hands of the Dilgar, no one else wants it. Alaca today is a blasted wasteland. The fertile veldt is burned away. The small seas are choked with ash, the same ash which blocks the sun and freezes what plant and animal life remains. The majority of surviving animal life falls into the 'rat and roach' categories; most food species, animal and plant alike, are extinct.

Alacan Beliefs: The Alacans have a deep, complex system of religious beliefs centring on the worship of a large pantheon of gods. However, the focus of their worship has narrowed since the time of the Dilgar war, and the Alacans now pray almost exclusively to their gods of fertility and vengeance. This situation is exacerbated by

the fact that virtually none of the clergy survived the Dilgar War, leaving the religious health of their race in the hands of the uninitiated.

Language: The Alacan language is a complex structure, one that takes full advantage of the entire range of an Alacan's vocal ability. This is slightly greater than that of most other races, such as centaurs and humans, and imposes a -2 penalty on any Linguistics skill check made to understand or speak it.

Starfarers: Now, virtually all Alacans are starfarers, as they no longer have a home of their own. They move from place to place in what remains of their fleet, never staying long in one place and careful to avoid any hostile powers.

Alacan Names: Alacan given names tend to be very short, containing no more than two syllables. The family name, on the other hand, is a much longer structure. Family names have two different versions, one for males and one for females, much like Russian surnames on Earth.

Alacan Racial Traits

- Males: +2 Strength, -2 Wisdom; Females: +2 Constitution, +2 Dexterity, -4 Strength, -2 Wisdom. Male Alacans are much stronger than the females, who in turn are slightly harder and nimbler than the males. Acting without thinking through all the consequences is endemic in Alacan culture, and not relegated to either gender.
- All Alacans are of Medium size.
- Alacans have a base speed of 30 feet.
- Fires of Old: Alacans were once a race of fierce warriors, and they can sometimes call upon their heritage in desperate circumstances. If an Alacan falls to zero Hit Points or below, he may make a Fortitude saving throw (DC 20) to remain on his feet and continue fighting normally. He will still lose Hit Points as normal, and will die when he reaches -10.
- Alacans receive a +2 racial bonus to all Acrobatics and Athletics skill checks.

- Automatic Language Feats: Fluency (Alacan) and Fluency (Human).
- Favoured Classes: Officer or Soldier. A multiclass Alacan's officer and soldier classes do not count when determining whether he suffers an XP penalty for multiclassing.

Descarans

Descara is a teeming jungle world, a 'deathworld' on par with Janos VII and Nakaleen, with one major distinction – this world gave rise to sentient life, life tough enough to survive and reach skyward on a world where survival is not a daily battle but an eternal war.

Little of Descara's surface is not covered in rich plant life; even the poles hold soaring pine-like forests, while the seas are covered in mats of kelp and algae so dense a Human can walk across them with little danger of falling in. Around, under and through the jungles, forests and swamps prowl countless predators. If there exists anything which can be eaten, something on Bestine II has evolved to eat it – and something has evolved to eat that, and so on.

The Descarans evolved in this environment and it shows. Where most sentient races lose their natural weapons, the Descarans retain theirs. They have mouths filled with sharp fangs and their hands terminate in vicious, raking claws. Descaran items are designed to account for this; non-Descarans using Descaran technology suffer a -1 racial modifier to all appropriate checks, and vice-versa.

Physically, the Descarans are 'ape like', with a hunched posture and a sloping brow. The size of the brain cavity seems inadequate to the task of holding a sentient mind but the Descaran brain has a dense cellular structure, with far more neural connections per cubic inch than most other sentient species. They have dense muscles, too – a Descaran can easily defeat a Narn in hand to hand combat, something the Narn have learned firsthand.

Descarans are a paradox – mighty but fearful. They are intensely xenophobic. They raised themselves from savagery to space, took a cautious look around and decided the universe was filled with dangers. True, so was their homeworld, but they had long since learned to deal with that

– no nasty surprises there. They retreated to their own planet, prepared themselves, waited and watched.

They did not wait overlong. The Narn, smarting from defeat at N'chak'fah, placed the world they named Bestine next on their agenda of conquest. Without planetary defences, they foresaw swift victory – only to find the paranoid Descarans had hidden fleets of defensive ships beneath the jungle canopies of their world. The Narn fleet, caught by surprise, was beaten and sent fleeing; those few Narn ships who managed to land troops were lucky to take off. The Descarans studied the remnants of the Narn vessels and improved their ships still further. They also deactivated (though they did not destroy) their jump gate, cutting off many of the rimward worlds from the League.

The Dilgar attacked Bestine and would have destroyed it, had the Earth Alliance not intervened in time. This led the Descarans to a slightly less xenophobic view of the universe. While they do not yet have full relations with any other species, they are at least making tentative stabs towards diplomacy and the Bestine jump gate is open for transit by other races, though the Descarans have advanced scanning systems located just inside and around the gate and will shut down access if it appears anything hostile is coming through.

A brief war with the Gaim, begun when the Descari shot down a Gaim probe ship, cost them temporary access to T'lad'tha and the neutral worlds of Sin'talith and Gamma VII. Access was later restored but the Descarans learned another painful lesson about shooting first and asking questions later. Indeed, the Descarans still do not understand how close the Gaim came to simply exterminating their species.

The Descarans are governed by a sort of 'Senate of Elders'. The oldest and most cunning Descarans are respected for their ability to survive and the oldest of them all form the planet's leading body. There is no form of senility known to affect the Descarans, so for them age truly does bring wisdom.

Personality: The Descarans are, surprisingly, a very cautious and frightened people. Though they have come far technologically, their ships and weapons are still no match for what the majority of the major spacefaring races can muster, a fact which was recently hammered home to them by the Dilgar and the Gaim. To the Descarans, the galaxy seems vast and threatening, and they are wary of involving themselves in it until they know they are strong enough to survive.

Physical Description: The Descarans have a distinctly ape-like appearance - though considerably more threatening and feral-seeming than the average terrestrial ape. Sporting fangs, claws and a coat of thick fur, the Descarans do not look like a race that has reached sentience. Indeed, they look like monsters. They are extremely strong and hardy, easily capable of defeating most other sentient races in close combat.

Relations: Relations with other races is a frightening prospect for Descarans, who would vastly prefer to simply lurk in their own system and have the rest of the galaxy leave them alone. Unfortunately for them, the galaxy will do no such thing. First the Narn came, and the Descarans repelled them. Then the Dilgar came in immense force, and only with the help of the Humans did the Descarans survive. This has forced the Senate of Elders to recognise that the Descarans cannot remain forever apart, and they have begun to take a few tentative steps into the wider galaxy. Still, though, most other races have never seen a Descaran, and will likely react poorly the first time they encounter one of the lumbering creatures.

Descaran Systems: The Descarans control the Bestine System, which is their birthplace, and have a single colony on an inhospitable planet in the T'lad'tha System.

Descaran Beliefs: The Descarans have an arcane and complex system of beliefs descended from ancient practices. Unfortunately, one of the central tenets of this belief, that the Descarans are divinely blessed and the pinnacle of life itself, having triumphed

over the hostile and violent world on which they evolved, has been rather shaken by their encounters with other races, and a high rate of apostasy is beginning to appear in the Descaran culture.

Language: The language of the Descarans is a particularly strange mixture of hoots, whistles and grunts which bears no resemblance whatsoever to any other known language. Those who use the Linguistics skill to attempt to decipher what a Descaran is saying suffer a -4 penalty, in addition to any other penalties that may be applicable.

Starfarers: There are few true starfarers among the descaran people. They are frightened and intimidated by the vastness of the galaxy and the variety of peoples who populate it, preferring the known threats of their own homeworld to the vast unknown that waits above. Those Descarans who do venture out among the stars are usually the most adventurous, either those whose curiosity overcomes their fear, or those who are willing to sell their great strength and fortitude as mercenaries.

Descaran Names: Descarans are given two names through the course of their lives - one name at birth and another upon reaching adolescence. Upon receiving the second name, the first is discarded, though it may still be used by family and those very close to the individual.

Descaran Racial Traits

- +4 Strength, +2 Constitution, -2 Intelligence, -4 Wisdom: The Descarans are exceptionally strong and hardy, but are not considered great thinkers and tend to act very rashly.
- All Descarans are of Medium size, though they certainly push the envelope toward Large.
- Descarans have a base speed of 30 feet.
- Descarans are exceptional climbers. They receive a +2 bonus to all Athletics skill checks for climbing. They are not considered flat-footed while climbing, so long as the surface has at least some handholds and footholds, and may climb at their normal speed without penalty.

- Natural Weapons: Descarans have vicious claws and fangs which make for very effective weapons when necessary. A Descaran's claws inflict 1d6 points of damage, plus any Damage Bonus, while its fangs inflict 1d4 points of damage.
- Automatic Language Feats: Fluency (Descaran), Fluency (Human).
- Favoured Classes: Soldier or Worker. A multiclass Descaran's soldier and worker classes do not count when determining whether he suffers an XP penalty for multiclassing.

Torta

Torat III was a pure water world with a thick atmosphere and no meaningful land surface, until an asteroid collision blasted water into space and changed the planet's orbit. In the global deep-freeze that followed, only the strong and the cunning survived... and the proto-Torta were the latter. They clung to oceanic rifts where the water was warmed, and as they waited out the ice age, they grew ever smarter in order to deal with predators. When the ice cracked and new islands were revealed, the proto-Torta adapted to the air and emerged onto land, their brains growing ever more complex until, millions of years after the planetary catastrophe, intelligence awoke on Torat.

With intelligence, of course, came aggression. The islands settled by the Torta could not contain their growing numbers, so war began and with war, technological progress. The Torta learned to shape flint and bronze and steel, learned to make gunpowder, learned to harness steam and electricity. Thousands of island domains became hundreds of small nations, then dozens of larger ones.

Ultimately, dozens became one - the Gorath. This ruthless and powerful nation seized control of the surface lands and also the subsurface regions, where many of the Torta still dwelled. This subsurface population, denied access to technology, soon became

slaves. The land-dwellers, with limited space, needed the underwater cities to grow food. These caste divisions persist to the present.

The Torta are a fishlike people, with stubby legs, similar to lobe-fins, which they use when on land and longer, much more agile fins which serve as hands. Despite their piscine appearance, they can survive out of water indefinitely, though a moist environment is necessary.

Government of the Torta is by a single elite ruling family, with the head of government being a Regent. The Regent rules for a period of several years and then nominates a successor.

The Torta developed orbital technology by themselves and then discovered a jump gate in their outer system. Given their history of war, it is not surprising their brief sojourn among the stars has been marked by constant violence, against the Earth Alliance, the ch'lon, the vree and the Kor-Lyan, not to mention the dilgar. While currently not in a state of active war, their system is 'off limits' to outsiders and ships entering it for any purpose other than to use the jump gate and be gone will be fired upon if they deviate from the specified spacelanes.

All Torta encountered by other races have been of the ruling, surface-dwelling caste. The existence of the subsurface slave caste, many times more numerous, is a racial secret. The fact that only the ruling class is permitted to serve in the military severely limits its size; the Torta are thus very constrained in how much pressure they can exert on other races and are hesitant to conduct more than swift attacks, fearing to leave their home systems undefended.

Personality: Torta are like nothing so much as walking, thinking sharks. They are predators in all ways, looking for and exploiting weakness, whether it be in warfare, in a trade agreement or even in the rare conversation a member of this race has with an outsider.

Physical Description: The Torta have a distinctly fish-like appearance, albeit pressed into a more or less humanoid shape. They are covered with scales and have a wide, gaping mouth and two thin black eyes. They have stubby legs, similar to lobe-fins, which they use when on land and longer, much more agile fins which serve as hands.

Relations: Though they are currently at peace with the rest of the galaxy, and indeed are members of the League of Non-Aligned Worlds (though not active members), no one who knows anything of the Torta expects this situation to endure forever. In the brief time since they emerged on the galactic scene, the Torta have gone to war nearly half a dozen times, each time stopping just long enough to catch their breath and rebuild before launching another attempt at seizing something that is not theirs. They have few relations with other races, though they do allow others to use the jump gate in their system.

Torta Systems: The Torta Regency controls the Torat System, where the Torta themselves evolved, as well as the Jodan System and the Trogoh System, where they maintain colony worlds.

Torta Beliefs: If the Torta have a faith, they have not made it known to the remainder of the galaxy.

Language: The Torta language is a complex structure which is difficult, but not impossible, for another race to learn. However, one of the most interesting aspects of the language is that it is perfectly intelligible to Torta who hear it either through the air or through the water, despite the wide disparity in the relative speeds of sound through either medium. However, this only holds true if the words are spoken by a Torta; an alien speaker will be unintelligible to a Torta underwater. This is presumed to be due to some manner of subvocalisation the Torta employ, probably one tied directly to their biology.

Starfarers: Most Torta starfarers are members of the race's military, serving aboard one of the great, wet ships that make up their fleet. However, there are a number of other

Torta at large in the galaxy, usually posing as traders but actually acting as agents and scouts to seek for signs of weakness in the other races.

Torta Names: Torta names are usually quite long and, like the language itself, full of difficult pronunciations. Examples include Yluth'relquab, Gaalthredrinuden and Burztreev'fruinle.

Torta Racial Traits

- +2 Strength, -2 Constitution, -2 Charisma. Torta are strong, but relatively frail and ill-tempered.
- Torta are of Medium size.
- Torta have a speed of 20 on dry land and a speed of 40 in the water.
- Water-Dependent. Torta need not be submerged, but they must remain in a moist environment. A Torta who spends 12 hours in a dry environment must make a Fortitude save (DC 15) or lose a point of Constitution. For every 12 hours afterward, the Torta must make another Fortitude save (with the DC increasing by one each time) or lose another point of Constitution.
- Aquatic. A Torta can hold his breath for a very long time, roughly 10 times as long as a true land-based creature. Thus, a Torta can easily hold his breath for a length of time equal to his Constitution score times 20. Thereafter, he must begin to make Constitution checks (DC 10) every 10 rounds.
- All Torta gain the Weapon Proficiency (close combat) feat for free.
- Automatic Language Feats: Fluency (Torta), Fluency (Human).
- Favoured Class: Soldier. A multiclass Torta's soldier class does not count when determining whether he suffers an XP penalty for multiclassing.

Yolu

Pa'rl is a harsh world, with most of the water tainted with poisons and ash. Only inland on the largest continent is there fresh water and the Yolu learned early, as a race, that life was difficult. Continual tribal fighting kept pushing the race to the verge of extinction, until, at roughly the Iron Age for the species, a philosopher known as Ilya'yol rose to offer a new way of life to her species. She preached iron discipline and strict self-control and these philosophies were embodied in the new form of conflict resolution she devised – the Mutai. Under the rules of the Mutai, issues were settled between tribes or nations by a contest of champions. This philosophy quickly took hold and the Yolu (naming themselves after their philosophical founder) united, developing rapidly and looking to space.

Space also came looking for them. It was the time of the Shadow War – not that of the 2260s but the one prior, the war of Valen. The Yolu saw no purpose in this battle and refused to become involved. The Shadows could not rouse them to fight but neither could Valen and his allies. This led to a great tragedy, where a race called the Tak'cha, allies of the Minbari, assaulted the Yolu for their failure to help, angering and saddening Valen, who had of course taught a philosophy directly opposed to this. The Yolu retreated to their worlds and refused to leave again for a thousand years. Empire rose, empires fell. Occasional trading ships did some dealings with the isolated Yolu and the tradition of the Mutai left the world, to become a popular blood sport among the League worlds. Yolu Mutai masters also left, to bring their knowledge to others, but the Yolu as a race stayed locked away, rebuking attackers and diplomats alike.

Then came the Dilgar. The Dilgar did not conquer the Yolu homeworld but kept them cowed and frightened. Only when the Earth Alliance and their allies pushed the Dilgar back did the Yolu become aware of how much the galaxy had changed and how much risk they faced by hiding themselves from it.

They joined the League and Yolu ambassadors now sit in council on Babylon 5.

The Yolu are governed by their religious leaders, a group of 15 men and women who have attained spiritual perfection. Once appointed, rulership is for life.

The Yolu as a species are not cowards but they do not fight unless they think they have a clear edge. They often have trouble understanding other species and can easily be bluffed by shows of apparent strength, a fact known to many casino regulars on Babylon 5, who enjoy seeing a Yolu sit down at a card table.

Personality: Introspective and even-tempered, but dangerous if roused, the Yolu could have become a major power in the galaxy had they cared to do so. However, they care little for such things – having risen above the tribal fighting that once threatened their race, they have no intention of indulging in it on a larger scale. Yolu see betterment of the self as a loftier goal than temporal power. Such betterment, of course, comes only with discipline and self-control.

Physical Description: The Yolu are humanoid creatures with thick, leathery skin that sags slightly. They have sparse hair sprouting from their bodies.

Relations: The Yolu have been in space longer than most races, and have established cordial relations with many of the space-going powers. They are on good terms with the Minbari, though this has not always been the case. They keep themselves slightly apart from most of the happenings in the galaxy, only speaking up on issues of great importance.

Yolu Systems: The Yolu Theocracy controls the Pa'rl System, where the Yolu evolved, as well as the Kitab System and the Trotaka System.

Yolu Beliefs: The Yolu believe in self-control and self-discipline, holding faith that if they can achieve a perfect state of such enlightenment, they will, upon dying, become part of the life-force generated by all living things. This desire for such perfection permeates their society and has a decidedly physical tone to it, as the Yolu believe

in physical perfection as well as spiritual. At all levels of society, the Mutai is used to settle disagreements.

Language: The Yolu language is soft and rolling. Its structure is decidedly different from that of other races' languages, however, causing most native Yolu speakers a great deal of trouble when they attempt to formulate their thoughts in another tongue. Rather than using macros like the Drazi, however, the Yolu suffer from having too many pronouns, and often choose the wrong one when speaking to a member of another race.

Starfarers: The Yolu have been in space for a long time, but space travel and all it entails is not an important aspect of their culture. Often, the Yolu leave their home worlds as Mutai masters or Mutai hopefuls, journeying out into the wider galaxy to teach and fight.

Yolu Names: Yolu names contain both the individual's given name and the family name in a single formulation separated by an apostrophe. Examples include Ilya'yol, Mrin'rah and Sleu'bash.

Yolu Racial Traits

- +2 Constitution, –2 Dexterity. The Yolu are hardy and able to take quite a pounding, but are not particularly nimble.
- All Yolu are of Medium size.
- All Yolu have a base speed of 30 feet.
- The Yolu are all trained in personal combat and begin play at 1st level with the Martial Arts feat.
- Because Yolu culture so prizes personal combat, training in advanced weapons is considered less honourable. Yolu have a –1 penalty on attack rolls with all personal ranged weapons.
- While tricking an opponent in the Mutai ring is perfectly acceptable, trickery outside the Mutai ring is considered wrong. Yolu have a –4 penalty on all Bluff skill checks in a non-combat situation.
- Automatic Language Feats: Fluency (Yolu), Fluency (Human).
- Favoured Class: Soldier or Worker. A multiclass Yolu's soldier and worker classes do not count when determining whether he suffers an XP penalty for multiclassing.



FOMORIAN LORDS

This month sees the release of the new Slaine roleplaying game, powered by the percentage-based RuneQuest system instead of the older d20 method and liberally decorated with the art of none other than Clint Langley. More than just the same old fluff stuck onto a new system, RuneQuest Slaine also incorporates game material from all four of the d20 tribe books and supplements this with a host of new spells, legendary abilities and foes drawn from all parts of the saga - such as the all-new Fomorian Lord, previewed here:

Fomorian Lord

The 'nobility' of the Fomorian peoples, these are especially dangerous and sadistic killers that lead the Fomorian armies against their enemies.

They are worshipped by their troops and consider themselves to be living gods, believing that gaining nourishment by 'harvesting' humans is the greatest honour a human can have. Unsurprisingly their human victims do not see things quite this way.

Each Fomorian Lord is a powerful warrior, with its own unique abilities. They are quite capable of cutting through swathes of normal warriors and will have multiple legendary abilities. Only the most powerful heroes will have a chance of defeating a Fomorian Lord.

In addition to their physical prowess and legendary abilities, Fomorian Lords will have one or more special

abilities generated or chosen from the table on the following page.

Characteristics

STR	3D6+6	(17)
CON	3D6+6	(17)
DEX	3D6+3	(14)
SIZ	2D6+6	(13)
INT	3D6+3	(14)
POW	4D6	(14)
CHA	4D6	(14)

Fomorian Lord Hit Locations

D20	Hit Location	AP/HP
1-3	Right Leg	2/6
4-6	Left Leg	2/6
7-9	Abdomen	2/7
10-12	Chest	2/8
13-15	Right Arm	2/5
16-18	Left Arm	2/5
19-20	Head	2/6

Weapons

Type	Weapon Skill	Damage / AP
Bastardsword	140%	1D8+1D2 / 4
Javelin	120%	1D6+1D2 / 1
Buckler	120%	1D4+1D2 / 5
Claw	200%	1D3+1D2



Special Rules

Combat Actions:	3
Strike Rank:	+14
Movement:	8m
Traits:	Excellent Swimmer
Skills:	Athletics 90%, Influence 120%, Persistence 100%, Resilience 110%
Typical Armour:	Hide (AP 2, no Skill Penalty)



Fomorian Lord Special Abilities

D100	Special Ability	Effect
01-05	Acidic Spit	The Fomorian Lord can make a single spit attack every Combat Round, this does not use up one of his Combat Actions. The attack will be with a skill of 95% and does 3D6 damage to a single location. Any armour protection is doubled (simple clothing will allow a single point of protection), but the armour will fall off, rendered useless if the acid managed to burn through and inflict any damage upon the target
06-10	Aura of Death	Every non-Fomorian within ten metres will take 1D3 damage every Combat Round to a random location due to this powerful aura of corruption
11-15	Extra Arms	Has an extra pair of arms that can both be used to wield weapons with no skill loss for any attacks. These will be additional attacks every Combat Round in addition to the number normally allowed due to the number of Combat Actions the Fomorian Lord has
16-20	Eye of Flame	The Fomorian Lord can use one of its eyes as a Serpent Staff. The eye's ability to do this is lost if it is removed from the Fomorian Lord or if he is killed
21-25	Great Stench	Any non-Fomorian within ten metres must make a Resilience test every Combat Round or fall unconscious for 1D4 Combat Rounds
26-30	Great Dexterity	Fomorian Lord gains an additional 3D6+3 DEX
31-35	Great Strength	Fomorian Lord gains an additional 3D6+6 STR
36-40	Great Toughness	Fomorian Lord gains an additional 3D6+6 CON
41-45	Howl of the Cyth	The Fomorian Lord can let out a great bellow that causing opponents, and even rock, to melt if they are within 30 metres. For every EP the Fomorian Lord expends one opponent will take 1D6 damage to a random hit location (no armour protects against this) if they fail a Resilience test. Up to 5 EP can be expended at one time attacking a single opponent, with a separate roll for Hit Location for each D6 of damage. 5 EP would be required if the Fomorian Lord wished to attack an inanimate structure (causing a cliff to collapse or wall to fall, for example).
46-50	Huge	Fomorian Lord gains an additional 2D6 STR, CON and SIZ
51-55	Hypnotic	As a bonus Combat Action every Combat Round the Fomorian Lord can attempt to beguile one other creature using an Evil Eye attack. The Fomorian's skill is considered to be at least 90%, and may be considerably higher at the Games Master's discretion
56-60	Lord of Slime	The Fomorian Lord excretes a noxious slime that hardens once removed from the Lord. Any successful attack upon a location (whether it caused damage or not) leaves behind this mucus which hardens to make the location hit unusable if a Resilience test is failed by the target. It can be washed off taking a full Combat Round if fully immersed in water, or a hard blow that deals damage to the effected location will also break the coating. The slime will cause suffocation on a hit to the head (see <i>RuneQuest</i> rulebook page 90)
61-65	Poisonous	Every wound the Fomorian Lord inflicts is poisonous with the equivalent of Manticore Venom, (see the <i>RuneQuest</i> rulebook, page 91, for more details)
66-70	Reflects Magic	Any magical spell or other magical attack is reflected back against the attacker with no harm being done to the Fomorian Lord, if the Lord makes a successful Persistence test
71-75	Regeneration	Regenerates up to three hit points to all hit locations every Combat Round until it is finally killed
76-80	Retaliatory Attacks	Every successful melee attack made against the Fomorian Lord is immediately countered with a retaliatory attack. This attack is in addition to any allowed due to the Fomorian Lord's Combat Actions, with no limit to the maximum number of retribution attacks in any single Combat Round
81-85	Sorcerer	Fomorian Lord has 90% skill in up to ten spells (Games Masters choice) and an extra 2D6 POW
86-90	Soul Eater	Using a single Combat Action the Fomorian can eat the soul of an individual that has died within the last Combat Round. By doing this the Fomorian Lord can completely heal any damage to a single Hit Location of his choice. If attacked after eating a soul in the same Combat Round the Fomorian Lord can not use a Combat Reaction to protect himself (this applies only to the first attack against the Fomorian Lord whether it is successful or not)
91-95	Tough Hide	Fomorian Lord has an extra 5 points of armour protection for each location, with no skill penalty
96-00	Winged	Gains Flying Movement at up to twice its normal Movement



This month should see the arrival in homes around the world of the first collector's edition copies of Lone Wolf 1: Flight From the Dark. Specially rewritten and extended by Joe Dever for Mongoose Publishing, the book features cover art by the celebrated Alberto Del Lago - you can see why he is celebrated to the right - and interior art by Rich Longmore. The publishing of these books signals the beginning of a production schedule that stretches well into 2010 and covers 32 Lone Wolf gamebooks, six novels (so far) and a new roleplaying game based very strongly on the system used in the books. The world of Magnamund is alive and well here at Mongoose.

Long-time fans of the Lone Wolf series will doubtless have noticed that I mentioned 32 gamebooks above. Yes, Joe Dever is finally getting to write the four final books in the Lone Wolf saga and we at Mongoose will be bringing them to you. And no, you won't have to wait for them to be released in numerical order; books 29 through 32 will be released as soon as they are ready.

The gamebooks and novels will be available in bookstores as well as through your local gaming store and from Mongoose directly, but the collector's editions will be available only from us. The collector's editions are hard-bound books released well before the paperback books are available in shops, perfect for the hardcore Lone Wolf fan who has to have his books as soon as possible.

If the collector's editions sound tempting, you will want to take a look at the Magnamund Mega-Deal: pay for everything up front and receive a collector's edition of every gamebook shipped - for free! - to your door as soon as it is released. On top of that, receive hard-bound copies of the Lencian and Agarashi trilogies for free!

LONE WOLF



BLOOD OF ORLANTH

Gareth Hanrahan writes a few words about the upcoming Gloranthan campaign supplement, *Blood of Orlanth*.

Blood of Orlanth wasn't my idea.

The project was originally conceived as a trio of thirty-two page scenarios by Aaron Dembski-Bowden, entitled *Revelation*, *Insurrection* and *Devastation*, centring around a God Learner plot to use Orlanth's blood to do... well, something suitably dire. When Aaron went off to write dialogue for the upcoming *Age of Conan* MMO, the project got bounced around a bit, combined into a single book, expanded to XX pages and landed on my to-do list.

Eep.

So, I wrote up an outline based on Aaron's original notes. I had what seemed like a good idea at the time, and added in a note that '*the adventure should be playable by God Learner, EWF or Orlanthi characters*' reasoning that most player characters are going to come from one of those three groups. Three weeks later, that note might as well have read '*the adventure will transcend space and time, and little pixies will dance before the reader's eyes, oh and it should contain winning lottery numbers too*'. The outline then got bounced around the office for comments and Lawrence Whitaker suggested something simple yet brilliant.

In the original concept, Orlanth had been mortally wounded fighting a Chaos god back during the Darkness and the God Learners were going to use that myth to get the god's blood. Loz suggested that instead of a Chaos god, the myth should be that of Orlanth's slaying of Sh'kaharzeel the Dragon. That put the HeroQuesting cat amid the God World pigeons, so to speak – suddenly, the EWF had a much better stake in the outcome of the whole campaign and it added a mythic slant to the whole clash. The whole campaign took shape, from the initial hook to the grand finale.

Along The Laughing River

The first section of *Blood of Orlanth* is all about drawing the battle lines and establishing the characters who will fight it out in the second two parts. I needed a place between the God Learners and the Empire of Wyrms' Friends with a strong Old Way Traditionalist element and eventually decided that the best approach would be to go back to the roots of Glorantha and set the campaign just south of Dragon Pass, on the border between Hendrikiland and the EWF. As the second section called for an Orlanthi revolt, I didn't want to involve King Androfin directly – wiping Hendrikiland from the map would make it harder for GMs to incorporate the events of *Blood of Orlanth* into their campaigns. Therefore, the campaign would focus on

a particular river valley and the clans living there (I originally picked the Syphon River but then I found out it flows backwards, so the campaign got moved over to the Solthi valley).

Each of the three groups would need a supporting cast of non-player characters. NPCs are tricky things – you want to have them cool and interesting enough to be memorable and fun but they have to take a back seat to the activities of the characters. Also, since the three groups are in opposition to each other, each major NPC had to be simultaneously a good ally for one faction and a horrible antagonist for another. One trick used extensively in *Blood of Orlanth* is keeping the most important NPCs 'off-screen' as much as possible yet having them discussed and their influence felt as much as possible. The players will only meet Telektios Ashbringer or Aeldred the Fat a handful of times in the course of the whole campaign but the big NPCs will be a presence in every game session.

There is one NPC in *Along The Laughing River* who is especially critical to the whole plot and whose identity is something of a mystery for most of the adventure. Mysteries in published RPG scenarios are always risky, as spoilers can ruin a player's enjoyment of the whole game. A good player can wall off out-of-character



information but that's a pain. The approach I took with the mystery of [Nope. No spoilers in *this* magazine. - Ed.] was to not have the revelation affect the ultimate outcome of this section of the adventure. The PCs will never be in a position to foil the NPC completely but if they work out what's going on ahead of time, they can affect the magnitude of the result.

The efforts of the characters throughout *Along The Laughing River* and the other sections are measured in Victory Points, which I lifted from Adrian Bott's *Drow War Trilogy*. As the PCs follow the Laughing River, they solve the problems of the various Orlanthi villages along the way. Each village gives a certain number of Victory Points, showing that they will support your faction when the inevitable clash between the Empire of Wyrms' Friends and the Old Way Traditionalists (backed by the God Learners).

Ashbringer's War

At the end of *Along The Laughing River*, a war starts between the EWF and the Orlanthi. Depending on how well the characters did in the first part, then the whole Solthi River Valley could be up in arms, or it could just be a few isolated Orlanthi hardliners who are rebelling against the Draconic Way.

Rather than turn this whole section into a wargame (though you could if you wanted to), *Ashbringer's War* is written as a large number of encounters, which the GM can drop into his game. There are several tables of encounters, tied to the current Victory Point totals. If the Orlanthi are doing very well, for example, they could be raiding the EWF military camps and freeing captured towns; if they are doing badly, then the suggested events are things like the EWF besieging Orlanthi ring-forts and dragonfire in the forests.

Not all of the events during the war are just combat, of course. Characters might get to sit in judgement over EWF sympathisers, try to win the friendship of a tribe of trolls, use sacred geometry to blast the enemy with the power of the Great Dragon Project or go dinosaur rustling. This is the most free-form of the three sections and was probably the trickiest to write. *Along The*

Laughing River set the stage and introduced the cast; *Ashbringer's War* sets the stage on fire and the flaming cast run around stabbing each other.

While the major characters like Telektios Ashbringer (a massively powerful but slightly deranged Wyrmfriender) or Rsadi the Wondrous (God Learner sorceress and ex-student of Delecti the Inquirer) are fully detailed, there's a large cast of minor characters who are given only a line or two of description. In my experience, it's hard to predict which NPCs will become important in a campaign. A particular inspired bit of impromptu roleplaying or a lucky roll can bring a minor NPC to the forefront, so I added in a large number of such minor characters in the hopes that lightning will strike a few times. Every village and town in *Along The Laughing River* has such characters and there's plenty of scope to bring them back in *Ashbringer's War*. If the players are invested in a character or a place, it's much more interesting when war and danger threatens them.

(In my games, it's people like Dhrek Billhook (hardcore axe-wielding duck mercenary), Thandor Manysons (Orlanthi playboy and poet) or Vastyr Brightshadow (I'm such a dragon my *shadow is on fire*) who I have the most fun playing.)

The most likely end of *Ashbringer's War* is that the Orlanthi rebellion holds the Empire of Wyrms' Friends back, buying the Old Ways another few years (it might also result in the Empire attacking Hendrikiland or even trigger a wholesale rebellion against the Wyrms' Friends' across Kethaela). That's really not what the war is about, though. The clash between the two cultures is reflected in the Hero Plane and it's there that the last section of the campaign takes place.

The HeroQuest

Orlanth battled the Dragon. He slew the monster but it mortally wounded him. He lay as one dead for three days, while his *fyrddmen* battled the spawn of the dragon. Then Chalana Arroy bled the poison from him and Orlanth rose again. That is the story the tribes of the Laughing River tell. In Glorantha, stories have power.

The Orlanthi use this story as part of their rituals.

The God Learners intend to manipulate this story, to gain power over the barbarian tribes – and over their enemy, the Wyrms' Friend Empire. The myths of dragons are

hard for the God Learners to grasp and twist, but the Orlanthi myth of the death of Sh'kaharzeel gives them a handle they can use to attack the EWF in the mythic realm.

And as for the EWF – will they let Sh'kaharzeel die again?

The HeroQuest is the climax of the *Blood of Orlanth* campaign. Agents from all three factions are in the HeroPlane, battling each other within the confines of the myth. Clues to the successful completion of the quest are scattered throughout the other two sections. If the players miss these clues, or lack the courage and skill to defeat the other factions in the Hero Plane, then they will fail the quest and find themselves back in the mortal world. Attentive and clever players can navigate the quest and win the prize – the Blood of Orlanth.

And that can change the world.



THE WORLD ACCORDING TO ROLEPLAYING

4. THE FALL OF DR. CRIPPEN

Dr Hawley Harvey Crippen – homeopathic doctor
Cora Crippen – his wife
Ethel le Neve – the ‘other woman’
Captain Oates – Captain Oates
Chief Inspector Walter Dew – Of the yard
Captain H G Kendall – Master of the SS Montrose
Sergeant Smith – Police Sergeant
Constable Jones – Police Constable
Constable Doppler – Police Constable
Sheptouhug – Demon lord and lapsed vegetarian
RCMP Constables – eh?

It is a dark night as the characters prepare to cast a summoning spell to question the dread deity Sheptouhug in an attempt to prevent a great evil occurring. In the basement of their London home Dr & Mrs Crippen, with the aid of Miss Ethel le Neve attempt the spell.

DR CRIPPEN: Right, everyone ready?

ETHEL: I have the candles, smelly tome and mouse blood.

CORA: I have the protective amulets.

DR CRIPPEN: Excellent. I shall begin to summon the demon lord himself. Ug Mugg grub Blibby Pop Bop Dowop.

ETHEL: *Sprinkles mouse blood, lights candles.*

CORA: *Waves some heather in the air.*

DR CRIPPEN: Heather? Heather is what you call a protective amulet?

CORA: I bought it off some gypsies. They said it had great power.

DR CRIPPEN: Good grief. It's the ponies all over again.

ETHEL: He is here – the dread lord is here!

DR CRIPPEN: Oh, no!

ETHEL: Look, those gypsies had to be genuine! They would not have made an appearance in the scenario otherwise. Back foul demon and tell us how to defeat the evil plans of the Order of the Shrubbery – the followers of Shrub Neverenough. Back I tell you, erk!

DR CRIPPEN: I can't look!

ETHEL: Ew, that has to hurt.

DISEMBODIED VOICE: Blast it! Now I have to roll up another character!

ANOTHER DISEMBODIED VOICE: It's your own fault! 'Protective Amulets' indeed.

DR CRIPPEN AND ETHEL: We're doomed!

SHEPTOUHUG: *(munching sounds)* Ngg Brink'k'kak. Bruggthith. *(advances on the characters).*

WHAT HISTORY MIGHT LOOK
LIKE IF IT WAS THE RESULT OF A
ROLEPLAYING GAME..

BY NICK ROBINSON
AND IAN BARSTOW

Captain Oates enters the cellar, sees the demon lord and pulls out his trusty rifle. BLAM. Sheptouhug dies.

CAPTAIN OATES: Huzzah! Just in time, I save the day. Again!

DISEMBODIED VOICE: I wish you would give me back that gun.

DR CRIPPEN: You were supposed to be here earlier.

CAPTAIN OATES: I was working out. Not everyone round here uses the physical stats as dump stats, you know!

DISEMBODIED VOICE: Proper roleplayers use game time to play out their characters lives, the nitty gritty. Sometimes I wonder if I'm the only genuine roleplayer here!

DR CRIPPEN: Poor Cora. At least there isn't much body left to dispose of. And the demon appears to have dissolved.

CAPTAIN OATES: Well I'm off. I have to work out again – I think with killing that there demonlord I've levelled up again. See you.

Oates leaves. Dr Crippen and Ethel start to clean up the mess. A little while later there is a knock on the door, they hurriedly throw a tartan blanket over the evidence and rush upstairs to meet the visitor. Ethel opens the door.

C.I. DEW: Evening All! Chief Inspector Dew of the yard, may I enter?

DR CRIPPEN: Actually it's morning by now.

C.I. DEW: It's traditional, no need to get smart with me, Mr Crippen.

DR CRIPPEN: Actually it's Dr Crippen...

C.I. DEW: Not here it isn't. I know you don't have a doctor's license and use homoerotic medicine.

DR CRIPPEN: Er, Homeopathic.

C.I. DEW: Don't correct me, Mr Crippen, or you will find yourself in trouble, me lad.

DR CRIPPEN: Whatever you say, Chief Inspector.

C.I. DEW: Now, I have had reports that there was a gunshot last night and a strange smell. Care to explain whilst I look around?

DR CRIPPEN: *(gulps)* Please feel free. We have nothing to hide. Not even in the cellar. Ha ha! It was probably a car backfiring!

C.I. DEW *(going down to the cellar)*: I see. And the smell?

ETHEL: It's driver backfiring?

C.I. DEW: Well that explains it. Nice tartan blanket by the way, although it seems something has stained it. Well I'll be off now.

DR CRIPPEN: *(stunned)* What? You're leaving?

C.I. DEW: Very kind of you to ask me to stay. Any chance for some biccies? You know, when I was a young constable I was the first police officer to the scene of Mary Jane Kelly's murder, grim business that Ripper malarkey. Now back in the day...

(A couple of hours pass, C.I. Dew lets himself out after putting the Dr Crippen and Ethel to sleep with his tales of the good old days...)

Later. The pantry. Crippen, Ethel and Oates are discussing their next move.

DR CRIPPEN: We have to leave immediately. The police are on to us, and it is only a matter of time before they come back and do a proper search.

ETHEL: I agree. But where should we go?

DR CRIPPEN: Well I'm American. We'll go to the continent and grab a ship to Canada, and then go from there back to my home country. No one would expect us to take such a route. How about you Oates?

OATES: Much too dangerous, those ocean-going liners. Never catch me on one. Anything could happen. I'll catch a ferry to Norway and walk to Canada across the Arctic.

DR CRIPPEN: What?

OATES: Look, I've done this sort of thing before you know. It'll be a wheeze.

ETHEL: *(Looks doubtful)* Riiight. Hawley and I will go via ship and you will meet us there, if you don't mind.

OATES: Suit yourself. Without me you're doomed anyway, so it will be your own fault.

(They all depart)

Several Days Later at the Crippen residence:

C.I. DEW: ...and then I saw her. Mary Kelly, the last of the Ripper victims. Horrible, it was, especially for a green behind the ears constable like myself. Not a lot of people know I was the first officer on the scene that day...

SGT SMITH: zzzzzzzz

CONSTABLE JONES: zzzzzzzz

C.I. DEW: Look lively lads, Doppler has finished looking in the cellar. Found anything Doppler?

CONSTABLE DOPPLER: Yes, Chief Inspector. There was a body hidden under a blanket. I don't understand how it could have been missed in the three earlier searches

C.I. DEW: Er, never mind. Excellent work! Did I tell you about the time I was the first officer on the scene of the last Ripper murder?

On the SS Montrose.

DR CRIPPEN: Lovely morning Captain. My son and I are most enjoying the morning air.

ETHEL: Yes we are Captain. We like it very much.

CAPTAIN KENDALL: Excellent, we like to keep our passengers happy. *(Strolls off to the bridge, having made spot check)*

DR CRIPPEN: See, that was easy, I wonder how Oates and his idiot plan to walk to Canada is getting on.

ETHEL: Yes, how simple it is to fool these NPCs.

DISEMBODIED VOICE: I told you the disguise skill wasn't worth putting points into. NPCs are useless at spotting anything worthwhile.

On the bridge:

CAPTAIN KENDALL: Is it me, number one, or does that boy with Mr Kruppen have a 36-GG bust? And does not Mr Kruppen look suspiciously like that Dr Crippen fellow the police are looking out for but with his moustache shaved off? Better use the wireless to let HQ know who we have on board.

Off the Canadian Coast, several days later:

C.I. DEW: Ah, Mr Crippen, we meet again!

DR CRIPPEN: That's Doctor Crippen! Oh, never mind. How did you find us?

C.I. DEW: The Captain here noticed your brilliant disguises.

CAPTAIN KENDALL: And then we used the wireless to inform the authorities.

DR CRIPPEN: Curse you and your ship!

C.I. DEW: Take them away, boys.

RCMP CONSTABLES: Eh?

C.I. DEW: Arrest them.

RCMP CONSTABLES: Right sir. Come along Dr Crippen, Miss le Neve, eh?

C.I. DEW: So, Captain, your help has been invaluable. Now these two villains will get the king's justice. Now not a lot of people know this, but when I was a young constable...

Some time later, a pub in London:

CAPTAIN OATES: So the 'it was a demon lord that did it and it was Cora's own fault it happened' defence didn't wash then?

ETHEL: No, they thought Hawley was faking being mad, so strung him up quick as you please. Let me off, though. That Dew fellow said there was insufficient evidence. I think the fact I stayed awake when he told us about Mary Kelly on the voyage back made him like me.

CAPTAIN OATES: Told you liners were dangerous. Fancy another pint? There's a performing circus strongwoman I would like you to meet, the latest member of our little group...

DISEMBODIED VOICE: This time I'm going to use Charisma as my dump stat. No more puny weaklings for me.





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cut here



WARS: Ships, part 2

Part 9 of the unreleased supplement, Soul and Steel. Written by Greg Lynch

Civilian and Freightier Ships

While the fighters and capital ships keep the war alive, it is the civilian and freighter ships that act as bloodstream of the Solar System, keeping the economy pumping despite the desolation of war.

There are literally hundreds of different models of ship operating in the Solar System, from the tiniest shuttle to the most massive gas tanker. The ships listed below represent only a small fraction of those that ply the shipping and smuggling lanes.

Accutrane Series 9 Corporate Transport

Accutrane Series 9 Corporate Transport: Gargantuan transport; **Defence:** 14 (-4 size, +2 armour, +6 manoeuvrability); **Speed:** 1,500; **Acc:** 40; **Dec:** 40; **Han:** +6; **GRAV:** GRAV 2.5; **Sensors:** +4; **Stealth:** +4; **Weapons:** 4 Grade-2 lasers (close, 8, +4); **Control Spaces:** 1; **Engine Spaces:** 2; **Structural Spaces:** 1 Crew; **Craft:** None; **Training:** +5; **Stress:** 15; **Features:** Energy screen (4); **Cost:** 290,000 creds

Considered the ultimate in corporate luxury, the Accutrane Series 9 transport craft has catapulted the Accutrane corporation to the top of the luxury transportation market, deposing the longtime favourite, LuxSystem's Oputravel RS. Primarily

used for travel back and forth from Earth to Luna by wealthy corporate executives, the Series 9 is fully capable of travelling anywhere within the Solar System, and features enough weaponry and shielding (nominally illegal on civilian vessels, but overlooked in this case, considering the clientele) to keep it safe from the random predations of pirates.

LuxSystems Sabre XII

Shuttle: Gargantuan fighter; **Defence:** 16 (-4 size, +2 armour, +8 manoeuvrability); **Speed:** 3,000; **Acc:** 60; **Dec:** 40; **Han:** +12; **GRAV:** GRAV 2.5; **Sensors:** +1; **Stealth:** +4; **Weapons:** Grade-2 laser (close, 8, +4); **Control Spaces:** 1; **Engine Spaces:** 2; **Structural Spaces:** 1 Crew; **Craft:** None; **Training:** +6; **Stress:** 12; **Features:** Ejection seat; **Cost:** 275,000 creds

LuxSystems, a division of FedGrav that specialises in building luxurious private vessels for the wealthy elite, debuted the Sabre XII two years ago to tremendous fanfare, and has had difficulty keeping up with demand ever since.

The Sabre XII is a very fast, very sleek civilian vessel, the kind of ship coveted by the young and wealthy for its speed and its ability to impress members of the opposite sex. It features a GRAV 2.5 drive, the fastest GRAV drive legally available to civilians of Earth, as well as a suite of oversized and overpowered thrusters that puts the ship on par with all but the finest fighter craft in the Solar System in terms of speed. It even

includes a set of laser cannons equal to those of the Commerce Authority Fighter. These are intended as much for show as anything else – the Sabre XII is far too expensive a vessel to risk in combat unless there is truly no other choice, and with the ship's speed and manoeuvrability, it is often possible to elude any would-be attackers rather than face them head-on.

Of course, the Sabre XII is as much status symbol as it is anything else. Anything it can do can be found easily enough on another, less expensive ship. It can carry a maximum of four people stuffed into its overdone cockpit, and can transport only a very small amount of cargo (the tiny hold is only one cubic metre), with the rest of the ship taken up by engines and thrusters. However, its look and styling is more than enough to overcome this in the minds of its owners, and LuxSystems continues to struggle to keep the supply equal to the demand. **Cost:** 275,000 creds.

Nibasha 44-A2 Heavy Freightier

Nibasha 44-A2 Heavy Freightier: Colossal Freightier; **Defence:** 17 (-8 size, +7 armour, +8 manoeuvrability); **Speed:** 1,250; **Acc:** 30; **Dec:** 15; **GRAV:** GRAV 1; **Sensors:** +8; **Stealth:** +2; **Weapons:** 3 Shocho Kaji Plasma turrets (close, 9, +5); **Control Spaces:** 2; **Engine Spaces:** 4; **Structural Spaces:** Crew 1, Cargo 5; **Training:** +7; **Stress:** 10; **Features:** Point Defence; **Cost:** 310,000 creds

Freighters

Ship	Size & Type	Faction	Malfunction Rating	Defence	Speed	Acc/Dec	GRAV	Price
Accutrane Series 9 Corporate Transport	Gargantuan Transport	Earther	B	14	1,500	40/40	GRAV 2.5	290,000 creds
FedGrav 77A4 Heavy Freighter *	Colossal Freighter	Earther	B	14	1,500	50/20	GRAV 1	225,000 creds
FedGrav NR-6 'Atlas' Tugboat	Huge Fighter	Earther	A	19	1,750	60/50	GRAV 1	65,000 creds
Hanson-Smythe Mark 9 Freighter *	Colossal Freighter	Earther	C	14	2,000	70/40	GRAV 1	180,000 creds
Nibasha 44-A2 Heavy Freighter	Colossal Freighter	Gongen	B	17	1,250	30/15	GRAV 1	310,000 creds
LuxSystems Sabre XII	Gargantuan Fighter	Earther	C	16	3,000	80/50	GRAV 2.5	275,000 creds
Starwake H3 Freighter	Gargantuan Freighter	Earther	E	9	500	10/10	GRAV 1	21,000 creds
Tilish Transport	Colossal Transport	Shi	A	12	1,000	40/40	GRAV 5	690,000 creds
TranSun Class 8 Heavy Freighter	Immense Freighter	Earther	B	15	1,000	20/15	GRAV 2.5	655,000 creds
Transystem A-12 Spaceliner	Immense Freighter	Earther	B	10	300	5/5	GRAV 1	275,000 creds
Universal Dynamics L2 Utility Shuttle	Gargantuan Fighter	Earther	C	14	1,000	30/25	GRAV 1	22,000 creds

* Complete statistics for this ship can be found in the *WARS Roleplaying Game* core rulebook.

A good all-purpose freighter, the Nibasha 44-A2 manages to combine manoeuvrability with impressive armour to create a ship able to take a pounding or avoid one. The primary shipping vessel in use on Gongen today, there are also a number of these ships operating in the Belt and the Outer Rim – either spoils of piracy or legitimately purchased from Gongen.

Starwake H3 Freighter

Starwake H3 Freighter: Gargantuan Freighter; **Defence:** 9 (-4 size, +1 armour, +2 manoeuvrability); **Speed:** 500; **Acc:** 10; **Dec:** 10; **Han:** +0; **GRAV:** GRAV 1; **Sensors:** +2; **Stealth:** +0; **Weapons:** 2 Grade-2 Lasers (Close, 8, +4); **Control Spaces:** 2; **Engine Spaces:** 2; **Structural Spaces:** Crew 1, Cargo 2; **Training:** +1; **Stress:** 2; **Features:** None; **Cost:** 21,000 creds

The Starwake H3 Freighter, a product of the Holly Buton Group, is infamous throughout the three human factions as the quintessential example of what can go wrong when someone tries to build a spaceship on the cheap. Ponderous and underpowered, the Starwake handles like a brick and has hull plating that has been unfavourably compared to wet paper. In fact, the Starwake is so prone to disaster that the stream of lawsuits brought by the bereaved relatives of those slain as a direct result of the ship's shoddy construction forced the Holly Buton Group out of business in 2385.

Still, the low cost and brief construction time of the Starwake H3 means that a large number of these craft were built and sold before the full extent of their inadequacies became known. Though anyone with a modicum of self respect or sense of self preservation stays as far away from these vessels as possible, they remain available for sale throughout

the Belt and the Outer Rim for those who have no other option.

A few Cogs, who call themselves collectively the Starwakers, have adopted this ship as a sort of pet project. Though they know as well as anyone else the various shortcomings of the Starwake, they actively collect and modify these old deathtraps, attempting to use the bare bones of the design as a foundation for something more worthwhile, a pastime they consider a sort of zen meditation.

FedGrav NR-6 'Atlas' Tugboat

FedGrav NR-6 'Atlas' Tugboat: Huge fighter; **Defence:** 19 (-2 size, +6 armour, +5 manoeuvrability); **Speed:** 1,750; **Acc:** 60; **Dec:** 50; **Han:** +4; **GRAV:** GRAV 1; **Sensors:** +4; **Stealth:** +0; **Weapons:** None; **Control Spaces:** 1; **Engine Spaces:** 2; **Structural Spaces:** 1 Crew; **Training:** +4; **Stress:** 22; **Features:** Tractor beam; **Cost:** 65,000 creds

The FedGrav NR-6 'Atlas' Tugboat is one of the most useful vessels in the Solar System today. Small enough to fit inside the cargo bay of almost any freighter, the Atlas is capable of pulling a ship many times its size with great ease, and are often kept on board a much larger ship just in case that ship breaks down, or if it happens upon a derelict ship that can be hauled back to civilisation for sale.

The tractor beam of the Atlas is an extremely powerful tool, though it is useless as a weapon – any ship with an acceleration rating greater than 10 can break free (in the case of a Gargantuan or smaller ship) or simply pull the tug along with it (in the case of a ship larger than Gargantuan). A single Atlas is capable of hauling a ship of Immense size or smaller. A Vast ship requires two tugboats, and a Tremendous ship requires three.

Tilish Transport

Tilish Transport: Colossal transport; **Defence:** 12 (-8 size, +4 armour, +6 manoeuvrability); **Speed:** 1,000; **Acc:** 40; **Dec:** 40; **Han:** +6; **GRAV:** GRAV 5; **Sensors:** +8; **Stealth:** +4; **Weapons:** 2 Plasma sparker (close, 10, +4); **Control Spaces:** 1; **Engine Spaces:** 2; **Structural Spaces:** 1 Crew; **Craft:** None; **Training:** +5; **Stress:** 15; **Features:** Energy screen (5), point defence; **Cost:** 690,000 creds

Once used as the primary mode of transportation for Crown Shis, the Tilish Transport fleet has been all but grounded since Seyal came through the Mumon Rift into the Solar System. Though the Tilish Transport mounts some weaponry and is hardly defenceless, the Shi deem it too lightly armed and armoured to risk traveling in such a craft, and prefer to use capital ships instead.

TranSun Class 8 Heavy Freighter

TranSun Class 8 Heavy Freighter: Immense Freighter; **Defence:** 15 (-12 size, +10 armour, +7 manoeuvrability); **Speed:** 1,000; **Acc:** 20; **Dec:** 15; **GRAV:** GRAV 2.5; **Sensors:** +6; **Stealth:** +2; **Weapons:** 4 Grade-3 lasers (close, 9, +4), 1 accelerator gun (close, 10, -1, P); **Control Spaces:** 2; **Engine Spaces:** 4; **Structural Spaces:** Crew 3, Cargo 8, Hangar 2; **Training:** +4; **Stress:** 15; **Features:** Energy screen (2), multi-use bays (2), point defence; **Cost:** 655,000 creds

Perhaps the finest freighter in service in the Solar System today, the TranSun Class 8 Heavy Freighter is armed and armoured to the point it can nearly double as a cruiser. The TranSun Corporation even builds them at an extremely well guarded facility on Ceres Station, simply to get around CGC restrictions on providing weaponry on civilian vessels.



One remarkable aspect of the TranSun Class 8 are its multi-use bays. These two cargo bays (also listed as hangars in the description above) have a series of retractable cranes and gurneys in them which allow the bays to function as either a cargo hold or a hangar with no additional modifications needed. The two bays (one port and one starboard amidships) can accommodate any craft of Gargantuan or smaller size.

Transystem A-12 Spaceliner

Transystem A-12 Spaceliner: Immense Freighter; **Defence:** 10 (-12 size, +10 armour, +2 manoeuvrability); **Speed:** 300; **Acc:** 5; **Dec:** 5; **GRAV:** GRAV 1; **Sensors:** +2; **Stealth:** +0; **Weapons:** None; **Control Spaces:** 2; **Engine Spaces:** 4; **Structural Spaces:** Crew 10, Cargo 8; **Training:** +2; **Stress:** 5; **Features:** None; **Cost:** 275,000 creds

The Transystem A-12 Spaceliner has not been produced in more than 50 years, and it is difficult to find one today that has not been torn apart and rebuilt a dozen or so times by ambitious Mavericks. The ship was originally built as a cargo and passenger vessel to provide transportation of goods and people throughout the Solar System, and in its day would have gone for a much higher price than the 275,000 creds listed above.

The A-12, the last major ship line produced by Transystem before that corporation was absorbed by Sun Systems to become TranSun, was a study in the Earther preoccupation with wealth. It offered its passengers every manner of accommodation imaginable, from the dingy, dark and cramped steerage quarters adjacent to the cargo hold and engine rooms to the opulent, lavish quarters rented by captains of industry for thousands of creds per night.

Lacking weapons of any kind, the A-12 nonetheless possessed an incredibly well-armoured hull for a civilian vessel of the period, a hull that acts as a perfect foundation for construction of a warship. The Naglfar Class Accord Destroyers are all built around the frame of an A-12.

Universal Dynamics L2 Utility Shuttle

Universal Dynamics L2 Utility Shuttle: Gargantuan fighter; **Defence:** 14 (-4 size, +2 armour, +6 manoeuvrability); **Speed:** 1,000; **Acc:** 30; **Dec:** 25; **Han:** +2; **GRAV:** GRAV 1; **Sensors:** +4; **Stealth:** +4; **Weapons:** None; **Control Spaces:** 1; **Engine Spaces:** 1; **Structural Spaces:** 1 Crew; **Craft:** None; **Training:** +6; **Stress:** 12; **Features:** None; **Cost:** 22,000 creds

This shuttle is the most common make of almost a dozen different utility shuttles in use throughout the Solar System. It can carry up to 20 passengers from the planetary surface into orbit, or from ship to ship. Cargo shuttles have a cargo component instead of a crew component. Extremely desperate Mavericks will add a weapon and soup up the engine to make a very cheap fighter, one that usually will not last longer than a single battle.

Fighter and Scout Ships

After cargo haulers, fighters are the most common form of ship in the Solar System. They fly patrolling screens around the Gongen shipyards at Pallas, they bring teams of Maverick thieves into the deepest reaches of hostile territory, they swarm like angry wasps around capital ships, bringing the great beasts to bay with a withering barrage of coordinated fire.

The most common fighters in the Solar System are of Earther manufacture, simply because the CGC and iCom have been building fighter craft for centuries, while Gongen has only been building military craft for about 30 years. The Quay and Shi, of course, came through the Mumon Rift with limited resources, and while both those extrasolar factions have been struggling to restore their military strength to what it was before the destruction of Seyal's sun, both still have a long way to go. The Mavericks, for their part, rarely mass produce anything (though the Razorjack and the Savage Bandit could be considered exceptions), preferring to scavenge or steal from the other factions and improve upon the basic design.

Gongen currently produces a wide variety of fighter craft, with different models created for each major

carrier capital ship. The fighter craft listed below comprise only a portion of the Gongen fleet, but represent a good cross section of abilities.

Comet Striker Scout Y4

Comet Striker Scout Y4: Huge fighter; **Defence:** 24 (-2 size, +4 armour, +12 manoeuvrability); **Speed:** 4,250; **Acc:** 90; **Dec:** 30; **Han:** +10; **GRAV:** GRAV 5; **Sensors:** +15; **Stealth:** +15; **Weapons:** 2 Grade-2 lasers (close, 8, +4); **Control Spaces:** 1; **Engine Spaces:** 2; **Structural Spaces:** None; **Craft:** None; **Training:** +6; **Stress:** 10; **Features:** Ejection seat, energy screen (2), light screen; **Cost:** 450,000 creds

Although the Comet Strike Scout Y4 is hardly the best vehicle for a fight, equipped with only a pair of Grade-2 lasers, it is one of the finest reconnaissance vessels in service anywhere in the Solar System. Its high-powered thrusters and immense GRAV drive (which takes up a little more than half the total space of the ship) allow it to zip in and out of enemy territory in the proverbial blink of an eye, while its high stealth rating and light shield serve to keep it practically invisible while it is there.

The Comet Striker is iCom's latest scouting vehicle, and has only recently come into service. Because of the comparatively small size of the ship itself, and the amount of space taken up by its advanced systems, the Comet Striker has a maximum crew complement of two adult humans.

FedGrav Type I Fighter

Type I Fighter: Gargantuan fighter; **Defence:** 15 (-4 size, +1 armour, +8 manoeuvrability); **Speed:** 1,000; **Acc:** 30; **Dec:** 20; **Han:** +1; **GRAV:** GRAV 1; **Sensors:** +6; **Stealth:** +4; **Weapons:** Grade-1 laser

Fighter and Scout Ships

Ship	Size & Type	Faction		Defence	Speed	Acc/Dec	GRAV	Price
Comet Striker Scout Y4	Huge Fighter	Earther	B	24	4,250	90/30	GRAV 5	450,000 creds
Commerce Authority Fighter *	Huge Fighter	Earther	B	21	2,000	50/40	GRAV 1	23,500 creds
FedGrav Type I Fighter	Gargantuan Fighter	Earther	D	15	1,000	30/20	GRAV 1	10,500 creds
FedGrav Type II Fighter	Gargantuan Fighter	Earther	C	18	1,500	40/40	GRAV 1	22,000 creds
FedGrav Type III Fighter	Gargantuan Fighter	Earther	B	20	1,750	55/45	GRAV 1	65,000 creds
FedGrav Type IV Fighter	Huge Fighter	Earther	B	24	2,500	60/45	GRAV 2.5	118,000 creds
Hastecurrent Pursuer	Huge Fighter	Shi	B	26	4,000	80/40	GRAV 5	450,000 + creds
iCom Advanced Fighter *	Gargantuan Fighter	Earther	C	24	3,500	60/50	GRAV 2.5	360,000 creds
Inca 1 Fighter	Gargantuan Fighter	Earther	B	24	3,000	70/40	GRAV 2.5	210,000 creds
Inca 2 Fighter	Gargantuan Fighter	Earther	C	28	3,500	75/30	GRAV 2.5	240,000 creds
Jikoku Fighter	Gargantuan Fighter	Gongen	B	26	2,500	60/50	GRAV 2.5	120,000 creds
Komoku Fighter	Gargantuan Fighter	Gongen	B	23	3,250	70/40	GRAV 2.5	130,000 creds
Komoku Interceptor	Gargantuan Fighter	Gongen	B	21	4,250	80/40	GRAV 2.5	145,000 creds
Quay Hekaton *	Gargantuan Fighter	Quay	C	20	4,500	80/20	GRAV 2.5	150,000 creds
Quay Hekaton B	Gargantuan Fighter	Quay	C	28	3,500	50/60	GRAV 2.5	325,000 creds
Razorjack	Gargantuan Fighter	Maverick	B	28	4,000	75/20	GRAV 2.5	242,000 creds
Savage Bandit	Gargantuan Fighter	Maverick	B	26	3,000	60/60	GRAV 2.5	215,000 creds
Shi Quarrel *	Gargantuan Fighter	Shi	A	22	3,000	70/40	GRAV 2.5	320,000 + creds
Swiftwave Attacker	Gargantuan Fighter	Shi	A	24	3,500	70/50	GRAV 2.5	650,000 creds
Tamon Fighter	Gargantuan Fighter	Gongen	B	23	3,000	60/40	GRAV 2.5	210,000 creds
Venus Garrison Fighter	Huge Fighter	Earther	B	26	3,500	60/55	GRAV 2.5	420,000 creds
XeRacer	Gargantuan Fighter	Earther	C	22	4,000	80/50	GRAV 5	320,000 creds
Zhang Fighter	Gargantuan Fighter	Gongen	C	22	3,000	50/35	GRAV 2.5	85,000 creds
Zoch Interceptor	Gargantuan Fighter	Gongen	B	22	4,000	70/45	GRAV 5	310,000 creds

* Complete statistics for this ship can be found in the *WARS Roleplaying Game* core rulebook.

(close, 6, +4); **Control Spaces:** 1; **Engine Spaces:** 1; **Structural Spaces:** None; **Craft:** None; **Training:** +7; **Stress:** 6; **Cost:** 10,500 creds

Virtually extinct now, this ponderous spacefaring dinosaur was once the cutting edge of fighter design in the Solar System – but that time was more than two centuries ago. Still, these decrepit antiques can occasionally be found here and there throughout the System, usually in the hands of inconsequential Maverick gangs or as the meagre security force of a failing Earther corporation.

The majority of a Type I fighter is taken up by its enormous, primitive GRAV drive. Some Mavericks have managed to turn an old Type I into a somewhat worthwhile fighter simply by replacing the original GRAV drive with a newer, refined model and utilising the newly available space for more armour and weapons. Still, perhaps the greatest weapon the pilot of a Type I Fighter has at his disposal is the hope his enemies will be stunned by the thought that someone is insane enough to bring such a relic into space

combat in 2391 – an act roughly analogous to bringing a World War I era Fokker triplane into combat with a 21st Century fighter jet.

FedGrav Type II Fighter

Type II Fighter: Gargantuan fighter; **Defence:** 18 (-4 size, +4 armour, +8 manoeuvrability); **Speed:** 1,500; **Acc:** 40; **Dec:** 40; **Han:** +3; **GRAV:** GRAV 1; **Sensors:** +6; **Stealth:** +4; **Weapons:** 3 Grade-1 laser (close, 6, +4); **Control Spaces:** 1; **Engine Spaces:** 1; **Structural Spaces:** None; **Craft:** None; **Training:** +7; **Stress:** 8; **Features:** Ejection seat; **Cost:** 20,000 creds

Representing a significant advancement over the Type I, but still quite obsolete by today's standards, the Type II fighter served as the primary fighter craft for Earth for more than three decades. Featuring upgraded armour, weapons, thrusters and handling capability (not to mention the very welcome ejection seat), the Type II is still a poor substitute for a modern fighter in the time of WARS. Nevertheless, these fighters are still bought and sold in a few locations throughout the Outer Rim, the last resort of people who cannot find or afford anything better.

FedGrav Type III Fighter

Type III Fighter: Gargantuan fighter; **Defence:** 20 (-4 size, +4 armour, +10 manoeuvrability); **Speed:** 1,750; **Acc:** 55; **Dec:** 45; **Han:** +7; **GRAV:** GRAV 1; **Sensors:** +8; **Stealth:** +4; **Weapons:** 4 Grade-2 laser (close, 8, +4); **Control Spaces:** 1; **Engine Spaces:** 1; **Structural Spaces:** None; **Craft:** None; **Training:** +7; **Stress:** 10; **Features:** Ejection seat; **Cost:** 65,000 creds

Until its replacement by the Type IV in 2372, the Type III fighter was the mainstay of the Earther fleet of fighter craft, and is still the subject of fond remembrances by the veterans that flew them. Sturdy, reliable and able to dish out impressive amounts of damage with its four linked laser cannons, the Type III has a long and proud history in iCom's service.

Though the model was decommissioned almost 20 years ago, large numbers of these fighters are still around, most of which have made their way (through one means or another) to the Outer Rim, where they have fallen into the hands of Mavericks. Nick 'Starhawk' Murrin's Hawk's Wing is a Type III fighter, though it has been greatly modified from its original specifications.

FedGrav Type IV Fighter

Type IV Fighter: Huge fighter; **Defence:** 24 (-2 size, +6 armour, +10 manoeuvrability); **Speed:** 2,500; **Acc:** 60; **Dec:** 45; **Han:** +8; **GRAV:** GRAV 2.5; **Sensors:** +8; **Stealth:** +5; **Weapons:** 2 Plasma M1 cannons (close, 9, +5); **Control Spaces:** 1; **Engine Spaces:** 1; **Structural Spaces:** None; **Craft:** None; **Training:** +7; **Stress:** 10; **Features:** Ejection seat, energy screen (4); **Cost:** 118,000 creds

Entering service in 2372, the FedGrav Type IV fighter was intended to carry the Earther military forward for the foreseeable future. Unfortunately, the foreseeable future did not include the Battle of Phobos or the opening of the Mumon Rift, two events that are sending the Type IV into an early retirement, while newer vessels like the iCom Advanced Fighter take up the slack. Still, the Type IV is a fast, tough and powerful ship. Smaller and stronger than its Type III predecessor, the Type IV is still in service throughout iCom's fleet, and is a particularly favourite of many Mavericks.



Hastecurrent Pursuer

Hastecurrent Pursuer: Huge fighter; **Defence:** 26 (-2 size, +6 armour, +10 manoeuvrability); **Speed:** 4,000; **Acc:** 80; **Dec:** 40; **Han:** +15 **GRAV:** GRAV 5; **Sensors:** +12; **Stealth:** +8; **Weapons:** Plasma sparker (close, 10, +4); **Control Spaces:** 1; **Engine Spaces:** 2; **Structural Spaces:** None; **Craft:** None; **Training:** +10; **Stress:** 9; **Features:** Energy screen (5); **Cost:** 350,000 creds

Sleeker and faster than even a Shi Quarrel, the Hastecurrent Pursuer has only just begun to make appearances in the Solar System, leading most humans to guess it is an entirely new model of ship. It represents the Shi's attempt to build a craft to match the Quay Hekaton, an attempt that comes up slightly short. Though its thrusters do not allow it the amazing speed a Hekaton can claim, it is equipped with a GRAV 5 drive, essentially making the Hastecurrent a cockpit bolted to the front of an engine. Far nimbler than most ships in service anywhere in the Solar System, the Hastecurrent is a terrifying foe.

Inca 1 Fighter

Inca 1 Fighter: Gargantuan fighter; **Defence:** 24 (-4 size, +10 armour, +8 manoeuvrability); **Speed:** 3,000; **Acc:** 70; **Dec:** 40; **Han:** +10; **GRAV:** GRAV 2.5; **Sensors:** +8; **Stealth:** +8; **Weapons:** 2 Plasma M1 cannons (close, 9, +5); **Control Spaces:** 1; **Engine Spaces:** 1; **Structural Spaces:** None; **Craft:** None; **Training:** +7; **Stress:** 10; **Features:** Ejection seat, energy screen (4), supercharger; **Cost:** 210,000 creds

The Inca 1 is one of the newest fighters born of the shipyards at Luna. Looking essentially like a larger version of the Type IV fighter, the Inca 1 was built to incorporate new design improvements, such as better armour and a supercharger, while at the same time concealing those new designs from Earth's enemies.

Inca 2 Fighter

Inca 2 Fighter: Gargantuan fighter; **Defence:** 28 (-4 size, +12 armour, +10 manoeuvrability); **Speed:** 3,500; **Acc:** 75; **Dec:** 30; **Han:** +9; **GRAV:** GRAV 2.5; **Sensors:** +10; **Stealth:** +8; **Weapons:** 2 Plasma M1 cannons (close, 9, +5), 1 GRAV torpedo launcher (medium, 8, +2, P); **Control Spaces:** 1; **Engine Spaces:** 2; **Structural Spaces:** None; **Craft:** None; **Training:** +6; **Stress:** 10; **Features:** Ejection seat, energy screen (4), supercharger; **Cost:** 240,000 creds

Almost indistinguishable in appearance from the Inca 1, the Inca 2 fighter is Earth's newest fighter craft, boasting a number of improvements over its immediate predecessor. Although it is a little more sluggish on the stick than the Inca 1, most Earther pilots who have flown one (and most Mavs that have stolen one) swear by the new design.

The Inca 2 is a formidable opponent for any fighter craft in the Solar System, but also features design elements rarely seen in a fighter – the ability to engage targets at greater than Close range. Concealed in the belly of the fighter is a GRAV torpedo launcher, which fires a smaller version of the GRAV missiles so common to human capital ships. The launcher carries a maximum payload of three missiles.

Jikoku Fighter

Jikoku Fighter: Gargantuan fighter; **Defence:** 26 (-4 size, +14 armour, +6 manoeuvrability); **Speed:** 2,500; **Acc:** 60; **Dec:** 50; **Han:** +9; **GRAV:** GRAV 2.5; **Sensors:** +8; **Stealth:** +4; **Weapons:** 2 Shocho Kaji Plasma turrets (close, 9, +5); **Control Spaces:** 1; **Engine Spaces:** 1; **Structural Spaces:** None; **Craft:** None; **Training:** +7; **Stress:** 10; **Features:** Communal jamming, ejection seat; **Cost:** 120,000 creds

This 10-year-old fighter design is one of the heavier models in service of the Gongen military today, designed to withstand tremendous punishment. This feature served the Jikoku well during the Battle of Phobos, enabling it to weather the furious Earth point defence fire to bring death to the invading forces.

Jikoku fighters are built to service the Gongen carrier *Jikoku*, but are just as capable of landing and taking off from the ground, or from a station's docking ports. The Jikoku fighter is one of the most common Gongen designs to fall into non-Gongen hands, indeed, the Hellcats have nearly a dozen of these craft which serve as the gang's backbone for heavy assaults.

Like all Gongen fighters, the Jikoku is most effective in groups because of its communal jamming ability. When at three Jikoku are flying in close proximity (within one kilometre of one another), they automatically set up a dampening field that disrupts the targeting sensors of other craft, inflicting a -1 penalty on the attack roll of anyone firing at any of the three fighters. For each additional Jikoku fighter after the first three, the penalty is increased by one to a maximum of -5 when a full wing of eight of these fighters is assembled.

Komoku Fighter

Komoku Fighter: Gargantuan fighter; **Defence:** 23 (-4 size, +6 armour, +11 manoeuvrability); **Speed:** 3,250; **Acc:** 70; **Dec:** 40; **Han:** +8; **GRAV:** GRAV 2.5; **Sensors:** +4; **Stealth:** +8; **Weapons:** 2 Raikou laser mounts (close, 9, +4); **Control Spaces:** 1; **Engine Spaces:** 2; **Structural Spaces:** None; **Craft:** None; **Training:** +7; **Stress:** 12; **Features:** Communal jamming, ejection seat; **Cost:** 130,000 creds

Lighter, faster and more fragile than the Jikoku, the Komoku fighter is the initial design created for service with the Gongen carrier *Komoku*. It is most commonly used for fast attack strikes, when the Gongen need to get in and get as swiftly as possible after inflicting as much damage as possible.

Like all Gongen fighters, the Komoku is most effective in groups because of its communal jamming ability. When at three Komoku are flying in close proximity (within one kilometre of one another), they automatically set up a dampening field that disrupts the targeting sensors of other craft, inflicting a -1 penalty on the attack roll of anyone firing at any of the three fighters. For each additional Komoku fighter after the first three, the penalty is increased by one to a maximum of -5 when a full wing of eight of these fighters is assembled.

Komoku Interceptor

Komoku Interceptor: Gargantuan fighter; **Defence:** 21 (-4 size, +4 armour, +11 manoeuvrability); **Speed:** 4,250; **Acc:** 80; **Dec:** 40; **Han:** +6; **GRAV:** GRAV 2.5; **Sensors:** +6; **Stealth:** +10; **Weapons:** 2 Raikou laser mounts (close, 9, +4); **Control Spaces:** 1; **Engine Spaces:** 2; **Structural Spaces:** None; **Craft:** None; **Training:** +7; **Stress:** 10; **Features:** Afterburner, communal jamming, ejection seat; **Cost:** 145,000 creds

Built on the same basic design as the Komoku fighter, the Komoku Interceptor is a specialised vessel designed to harry a fleeing enemy or quickly close a gap in Gongen lines. Fast and sleek, it is not the best fighter to bring into a frenzied dogfight, but it is one of the quickest ships in the Solar System. In addition to its already impressive engines, the Komoku Interceptor features an afterburner with an independent fuel tank, which allows the ship to reach speeds of as high as 6,500 for up to five minutes.

Like all Gongen fighters, the Komoku is most effective in groups because of its communal jamming ability. When at three Komoku are flying in close proximity (within one kilometre of one another), they automatically set up a dampening field that disrupts the targeting sensors of other craft, inflicting a -1 penalty on the attack roll of anyone firing at any of the three fighters. For each additional Komoku interceptor after the first three, the penalty is increased by one to a maximum of -5 when a full wing of eight of these interceptors is assembled.

Quay Hekaton B

Quay Hekaton B: Gargantuan fighter; **Defence:** 28 (-4 size, +16 armour, +6 manoeuvrability); **Speed:** 3,500; **Acc:** 50; **Dec:** 60; **Han:** +2; **GRAV:** GRAV 2.5; **Sensors:** +8; **Stealth:** +4; **Weapons:** 2 Plasma lance (close, 9, +5), 1 Cluster missile (medium, 10, +2, P); **Control Spaces:** 1; **Engine Spaces:** 2; **Structural Spaces:** None; **Craft:** None; **Training:** +8; **Stress:** 10; **Features:** Regeneration; **Cost:** 325,000 creds



The Quay Hekaton B is very similar in its lines to a regular Hekaton, but is about 20% larger. It is a much slower and even more unwieldy vessel, but the thick plates of armour protect it from most incoming damage. The Hekaton B is intended as a heavy assault fighter, able to withstand the pounding of Shi guns long enough to reach Medium range and release its load of cluster missiles – a single torpedo that breaks open to release 10 separate missiles, the combined damage of which is listed above.

Any turn in which a Hekaton B is not damaged, any damage done to its armour regenerates.

Razorjack

Razorjack: Gargantuan fighter; **Defence:** 28 (-4 size, +10 armour, +12 manoeuvrability); **Speed:** 4,000; **Acc:** 65; **Dec:** 20; **Han:** +10; **GRAV:** GRAV 2.5; **Sensors:** +8; **Stealth:** +5; **Weapons:** 4 Plasma M1 cannons (close, 9, +5); **Control Spaces:** 1; **Engine Spaces:** 3; **Structural Spaces:** None; **Craft:** None; **Training:** +2; **Stress:** 14; **Features:** Ejection seat, energy screen (4); **Cost:** 242,000 creds

The Razorjack is a rarity among Maverick ships – a design so exceptional that it has actually entered something approaching mass production.

The Razorjack burst onto public consciousness in 2389, when the first of its kind, piloted by Talia 'Vapor' O'Shea won the Vesta Singleship Rally. The ship itself is the creation of famed Cog inventor Hephaistos Hopper.

A Razorjack is faster than most ships in the sky, tough as nails and bristling with enough weaponry to give a battleship pause – the perfect ship as far as a Maverick is concerned. It is a testament to the efficiency and effectiveness of the design that a number of Mavericks

do not even bother to modify these ships, preferring to fly them just as they are. The Cog shipyards at Vesta Station work constantly to turn out more and more of these vessels, something the Shi controlling the asteroid have not yet bothered to stop.

Savage Bandit

Savage Bandit: Gargantuan fighter; **Defence:** 26 (-4 size, +6 armour, +14 manoeuvrability); **Speed:** 3,000; **Acc:** 60; **Dec:** 60; **Han:** +16; **GRAV:** GRAV 2.5; **Sensors:** +10; **Stealth:** +10; **Weapons:** 2 Plasma M1 cannons (close, 9, +5), mag grapple claw; **Control Spaces:** 1; **Engine Spaces:** 2; **Structural Spaces:** None; **Craft:** None; **Training:** +2; **Stress:** 14; **Features:** Ejection seat, energy screen (2); **Cost:** 215,000 creds

Another creation by Hephaistos Hopper, this is one of the latest models of ship born of his genius, and is so new that very few of them have even been modified yet. It is a near-perfect raiding vessel, able to out manoeuvre almost anything in space and equipped with a magnetic grapple claw that can latch on to an enemy ship's hull, allowing the crew of the savage bandit (which holds up to four humans) to cut through and gain access to the enemy ship. This tactic is best used with groups of savage bandits, enabling small teams of boarders to cut their way into an enemy ship at multiple locations.

Swiftwave Attacker

Swiftwave Attacker: Gargantuan fighter; **Defence:** 24 (-4 size, +8 armour, +10 manoeuvrability); **Speed:** 3,500; **Acc:** 70; **Dec:** 50; **Han:** +10; **GRAV:** GRAV 2.5; **Sensors:** +6; **Stealth:** +12; **Weapons:** 2 Plasma sparker (close, 10, +4); **Control Spaces:** 1; **Engine Spaces:** 2; **Structural Spaces:** None; **Craft:** None; **Training:** +10; **Stress:** 6; **Features:** Energy screen (5), screen disruption; **Cost:** 650,000



While the Quarrel is an excellent all-purpose vessel, able to carry out missions of every description, there are some areas where it pales in comparison to more specialised Shi ships, such as the Swiftwave Attacker.

The Swiftwave is designed for full-scale capital ship battles, where it is able to perform its two main functions to perfection. The Swiftwave is an exceptional defensive vessel, using its speed, dual plasma sparkers and manoeuvrability to keep enemy fighters away from the larger Shi vessels. However, it is in combat with a capital ship that the Swiftwave

truly shines. It features screen disruption technology, which degrades the efficacy of an enemy ship's energy screens. The mere presence of a Swiftwave within Close range of an enemy vessel decreases the effectiveness of the enemy's screens by two points. Thus, even the mighty Atlantis, the Earther flagship commanded by Horatio Hicks, would have its energy screen reduced to 4. The screen disruption has no effect on the energy screen of a Shi ship. This dangerous technology is highly sought by the other four factions of the Solar System, but thus far no Swiftwave has fallen into non-Shi hands.

Tamon Fighter

Tamon Fighter: Gargantuan fighter; **Defence:** 23 (-4 size, +8 armour, +9 manoeuvrability); **Speed:** 3,000; **Acc:** 60; **Dec:** 40; **Han:** +10; **GRAV:** GRAV 2.5; **Sensors:** +4; **Stealth:** +8; **Weapons:** 2 Raikou laser mounts (close, 9, +4), 1 Sougon grav missile (long, 10, +0, P); **Control Spaces:** 1; **Engine Spaces:** 2; **Structural Spaces:** None; **Craft:** None; **Training:** +7; **Stress:** 12; **Features:** communal jamming, computer assist, ejection seat, energy screen (3); **Cost:** 210,000 creds

The Tamon is an all-purpose fighter, unlike the more specialised Jikoku and Komoku fighters. Able to hold its own in a dogfight with other fighters, or pose a deadly threat to a capital ship with its single grav missile, the Tamon is used in a variety of Gongen military operations.

The Tamon also features an advanced computer system. While not truly an AI (which are reserved for capital ships) the Tamon fighter's computer system works hand in hand with the pilot, granting him a +2 bonus to all Pilot skill checks.

Like all Gongen fighters, the Tamon is most effective in groups because of its communal jamming ability. When at three Tamon are flying in close proximity (within one kilometre of one another), they automatically set up a dampening field that disrupts the targeting sensors of other craft, inflicting a -1 penalty on the attack roll of anyone firing at any of the three fighters. For each additional Tamon fighter after the first three, the penalty is increased by one to a maximum of -5 when a full wing of eight of these fighters is assembled.

Venus Garrison Fighter

Venus Garrison Fighter: Huge fighter; **Defence:** 26 (-2 size, +10 armour, +8 manoeuvrability); **Speed:** 3,500; **Acc:** 60; **Dec:** 55; **Han:** +10; **GRAV:** GRAV 2.5; **Sensors:** +12; **Stealth:** +12; **Weapons:** 2 Fusion microcannon laser (close, 11, +2); **Control Spaces:** 1; **Engine Spaces:** 1; **Structural Spaces:** None; **Craft:** None; **Training:** +8; **Stress:** 12; **Features:** Ejection seat, energy screen (4), light screen; **Cost:** 420,000 creds

Unwilling to trust the defence of its prized Venus facilities to the CGC and iCom, XeLabs created the Venus Garrison Fighter, a deceptively small craft

that packs as much firepower as almost any fighter in service today. Equipped with light screen technology and a pair of fusion microcannons, these fighters fly a constant, invisible picket around Venus, protecting the valuable assets of XeLabs.

More advanced than anything currently fielded by iCom, the Venus Garrison Fighter is very much sought after in the rest of the Solar System, despite the fact that the tiny craft holds only one person and has no cargo hold to speak of. Obviously, XeLabs will not divulge how many of these craft have been made, but most estimates put it at 200 to 300.



XeRacer

XeRacer: Gargantuan fighter; **Defence:** 22 (-4 size, +6 armour, +10 manoeuvrability); **Speed:** 4,000; **Acc:** 80; **Dec:** 50; **Han:** +8; **GRAV:** GRAV 5; **Sensors:** +8; **Stealth:** +6; **Weapons:** 2 Plasma M1 cannons (close, 9, +5); **Control Spaces:** 1; **Engine Spaces:** 2; **Structural Spaces:** None; **Craft:** None; **Training:** +4; **Stress:** 12; **Features:** Ejection seat, energy screen (2); **Cost:** 320,000 creds

A cross between a fighter craft and a scout craft, the XeRacer is XeLabs' contribution to the war effort for Earth. The phenomenal speed but unimpressive defensive abilities of this ship mean that it is often kept on station away from a battle, waiting to be called in at a moment's notice to deliver a quick pounding to the enemy before racing away again.

Zhang Fighter

Zhang Fighter: Gargantuan fighter; **Defence:** 22 (-4 size, +8 armour, +8 manoeuvrability); **Speed:** 3,000; **Acc:** 50; **Dec:** 35; **Han:** +0; **GRAV:** GRAV 2.5; **Sensors:** +4; **Stealth:** +8; **Weapons:** 2 Raikou laser mounts (close, 9, +4); **Control Spaces:** 1; **Engine Spaces:** 2; **Structural Spaces:** None; **Craft:** None; **Training:** +7; **Stress:** 6; **Features:** ejection seat, energy screen (1); **Cost:** 85,000 creds

One of the first fighter models to go into service for Gongen, shortly after the planetary government declared its independence from Earth, the Zhang fighter turned out to be something of a disappointment.

Not only was the Zhang quickly eclipsed by the somewhat slower but much sturdier FedGrav Type III, it was also plagued by a seemingly endless series

of software and construction glitches that made its already abominable handling that much worse. Within ten years, the entire fleet of Zhang fighters was decommissioned. Most were scrapped, but a large number were sold to Mavericks in various 'under the counter' deals by less scrupulous members of the Tenryu Party.

In game terms, every Zhang fighter has a quirk (see last issue) on some randomly determined system that cannot be solved even with a complete overhaul. Some Mavericks have managed to eliminate these quirks, mostly by modding the ship until it is unrecognisable as a Zhang fighter, but the vast majority of these craft still in service are still prone to mechanical and technological malfunctions without constant maintenance.

As for the *Zhang* itself, the ship these fighters were designed to service, it was destroyed in the Battle of Phobos, riddled with plasma holes by Captain Maximillian Paolo of the *Andalusia*.

Zocho Interceptor

Zocho Interceptor: Gargantuan fighter; **Defence:** 22 (-4 size, +8 armour, +8 manoeuvrability); **Speed:** 4,000; **Acc:** 70; **Dec:** 45; **Han:** +6; **GRAV:** GRAV 5; **Sensors:** +8; **Stealth:** +4; **Weapons:** 2 Raikou laser mounts (close, 9, +4), 1 Sougon grav missile (long, 10, +0, P); **Control Spaces:** 1; **Engine Spaces:** 2; **Structural Spaces:** None; **Craft:** None; **Training:** +7; **Stress:** 12; **Features:** communal jamming, ejection seat, energy screen (3); **Cost:** 310,000 creds

While the Zocho Interceptor is not quite equal to the Komoku Interceptor in terms of thruster capability, its massive GRAV 5 drive allows it to perform missions the Komoku simply cannot accomplish. The Zocho is used primarily to cut off a fleeing enemy force, or even to launch a long-range, lightning strike against an enemy.

The Zocho's low handling and stealth ratings have been a problem for the craft, as despite its speed, enemies often manage to detect and ambush a flight of these vessels, and there is speculation that the Tenryu Party and Shochō intend to take the Zocho Interceptor back to the drawing board until these kinks can be worked out. If they are successful, the Zocho will certainly become one of the deadliest long-range attack craft in the Solar System.

Like all Gongen fighters, the Zocho is most effective in groups because of its communal jamming ability. When at three Zocho are flying in close proximity (within one kilometre of one another), they automatically set up a dampening field that disrupts the targeting sensors of other craft, inflicting a -1 penalty on the attack roll of anyone firing at any of the three fighters. For each additional Zocho fighter after the first three, the penalty is increased by one to a maximum of -5 when a full wing of eight of these fighters is assembled.

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THE VAULT OF THE DIPIDES

AN ADVENTURE FOR CONAN, THE ROLEPLAYING GAME - SECOND EDITION, BY CHRIS LONGHURST

The Vault of Thedipides is a short site-based adventure designed to be completed in a single session's play. It is intended to be used to bring together a party of 1st level characters and give the Games Master ample opportunity to introduce his own hooks for future adventures. Having said that, this adventure is best suited to thieves and scholars, although it will accommodate any character willing to burgle another person's home in search of fabulous treasures. The trickiest characters to integrate are pirates, for Nemediā – where the adventure is set – is landlocked. Likewise, nomads are few and far between on the streets of Numalia, although those pirates and nomads who *are* somehow present will probably be quite happy to line their pockets with the baubles of the rich.

ADVENTURE SYNOPSIS

The city of Numalia, in Nemediā, is home to a great many prosperous merchants. Some flaunt their wealth at every opportunity, while others are content to simply amass a private collection of treasures behind closed doors. One merchant of this latter type is Thedipides, a trader in cloth. It is fairly well known that when the shop is closed he also deals in curios, collectables and rarities. There is a darker rumour that, on moonless nights, Thedipides also trades in black magic, buying and selling dark secrets and the souls of men for some inscrutable reason of his own.

As is often the case with rumours, this last contains a grain of truth. Thedipides has a large and growing collection of tomes of magical lore, which he adds to wherever he finds one for sale. Approximately once a month he sends his guards away and receives shadowy visitors at night

– men with dusky skin and strange accents who arrive with books and leave with chests of gold.

However, Thedipides is no black-hearted sorcerer. He is just a rich man with an obsession, and like any other rich man he enjoys the company of beautiful women. Shortly before the start of the adventure Thedipides loses interest in Catalina, his concubine, and ejects her in favour of a Brythunian girl named Rosa. This is an unfortunate turn of events for Catalina, as she believed herself very close to locating the vault where the merchant stores all of his most valuable treasures. It is also an unfortunate turn of events for Thedipides, as Catalina feels slighted by him and strongly desires to find and loot his vault as revenge.

Catalina knew of Thedipides reputation as a black magician, and Thedipides played on this, telling her that his manor was warded against unwanted visitors. He gave her a small charm – a rune stone on a leather thong that he picked up as a curio in Nordheim – and told her that it was a ward that would keep her safe from his magic. When she was ejected, Catalina took the 'ward' with her. She took it to a backstreet 'enchanter' that she knew and asked the man to make copies of it. Her plan was to recruit a band of adventurers who would be willing to do the breaking and entering for her – she sees no sense in endangering her life when the lives of several strangers will do just as well.

However, the enchanter that Catalina took the 'ward' to, an unsavoury character by the name of Petro, recognised straight away that it was useless. From careful talking to Catalina and questioning of his own underground

contacts, he has deduced her plan and wishes to beat her to it. He set about gathering his own cutthroats and ruffians, and will appear to provide competition to the Player Characters when they stage their break in.

In addition, Thedipides is expecting a visit from a Stygian priest named Kneft who wishes to consult his occult library. The Stygian has brought a great deal of gold to pay for the privilege and will not take kindly to a gang of savages trying to separate him from it.

Finally, the vault of Thedipides *is* warded, although not by the merchant himself. Many years before the events of this adventure, a sorcerer bound a guardian beast from beyond the stars to the vault and explained to Thedipides how to summon it should it be needed. Over the course of this adventure, it will almost certainly be needed.

INTRODUCTION

Catalina makes contact with her chosen catspaws by inviting them, in person, one at a time, to dine with her at a fine restaurant one evening. She will approach them in the manner that she deems most appropriate to secure their co-operation. At the restaurant, the Player Characters need only mention that they are part of Catalina's party and they will be escorted to a private room at the back. Following a fine dinner – at Catalina's expense – and any after-dinner drinks the characters wish to order, Catalina outlines her plan.

'How would you like to lay your hands on all the wealth of a very rich man?' the beautiful Zamorian asks.
'I have access to... privileged information
that will allow you to gain access to a

certain vault, right here in this city, that's just packed full of gold, and jewels, and silks, and-' she lowers her voice - 'artefacts of mystic power.'

Catalina won't divulge any details until everyone present has expressed an interest.

'There is a merchant, Thedipides, who lives across the city from here. He has a secret vault in his house where he keeps the greater share of his wealth – I do not know where it is, but I have seen him produce great quantities of gold and other valuables at such short notice that they cannot be concealed anywhere else, and I have seen similar quantities disappear in the blink of an eye.'

'However, Thedipides is a sorcerer of the worst sort. As well as paid guards, he has warded his house against the entrance of anyone not bearing the correct token. I do not know of anyone who has tried to enter the building without such a token, but you hear stories...'

'I can get you the tokens you need. I even know how to avoid the guards. I just don't know where exactly in the house that the vault is – I can help you get in, but finding and breaking into the vault is up to you. All I ask in exchange is half of the coins that you bring out of Thedipides' home. Everything else you steal, you can keep.'

Catalina will not venture the information that she is Thedipides' ex-lover, but will admit it without shame if asked where she got her information from. She does not trust the Player Characters at all, and will try to seduce a likely male character in order to increase his loyalty to her. Further, she plans to arrive shortly after the Player Characters do and shadow them to the vault. Once they are in the vault, she will reveal herself and remind them of the deal, trusting in her beauty and seductive nature to defuse any violent reactions. Once the deal is made, Catalina hands out the 'ward' tokens – one for each Player Character, plus one she keeps for herself – and explains:

'These wards will protect you from the sorcerous defences of the manor. Wear them around your neck. As for the guards... Thedipides is meeting one of his dark contacts from the south tomorrow night. He always dismisses the guards when he is dealing with other sorcerers in case they see the faces of his guests. The only people in the manor after sundown will be Thedipides himself and his guest. Spend tomorrow preparing yourselves, and tomorrow night will be your best chance.'

Catalina will answer whatever questions the characters have to the best of her ability – she has no reason to lie to them about anything. She will, however, try to charm and captivate as many as possible to better ensure their loyalty.

THE DAY

The Player Characters have several options open to them during the day. Most will wish to draw up a plan, equip themselves for the coming job, and get the ward tokens checked out. Some may also check the local rumour mill for information on Thedipides.

EQUIPMENT

As Numalia is an extremely civilised and prosperous city, any normal equipment the Player Characters want to purchase can be found there for the listed prices. More exotic items, such as alchemical preparations, are unavailable except at the Games Master's discretion. Conan, The Roleplaying Game is less about equipment than it is about the abilities of the characters themselves, anyway...

WARD

As there is no handy *detect magic* in Conan, assessing the effectiveness of the wards is not a simple proposition. A scholar may use his Knowledge is Power class ability and any character may make a Knowledge (arcana) check (both at DC 15) to tell that the symbol chiselled onto the stone is an Aesir rune that means 'luck' or 'good fortune'. There does not appear to be anything else special about them – as indeed there is not.

RUMOURS

By spending 1d4+1 hours and 2d6 silver pieces, a character may make a single Gather Information check on the following table. Characters are welcome to spend as much time and money making checks as they can spare.

Check DC	Rumour
10	Thedipides sells cloth during the day, and slightly more... 'esoteric' goods at night. (True)
12	Thedipides has an interest in old books and tomes of lore. (True)
18	Thedipides conducts black rituals and treats with demons. (False-ish)
22	Approximately once every month, Thedipides sends his guards away and receives strange visitors. Some say that those visitors aren't even human! (All true – some people do <i>say</i> the visitors aren't human. They are wrong.)

THE NIGHT

(On nights other than the night of the trade, add six 2nd level soldiers as guards.)

MANOR DETAILS

Unless otherwise specified, doorways in the manor are simply covered with heavy curtains rather than filled with actual doors. These curtains block line of sight and ranged attacks, but do not slow movement. A melee attack through a curtain is made as if the target has partial concealment (20% miss chance) and does –1 damage. Every curtained door has a hook on each side allowing the curtain to be 'propped open' or 'closed' again with a move-equivalent action.

Where doors *are* present, they are heavy wooden constructions with a hardness of 5, 15 hit points, and a break DC of 18. All doors

'WE CAN WAIT UNTIL HE LEAVES!'

It may occur to some players that they can wait for Thedipides' guest to leave before proceeding to break into the house to look for the vault. This will not work, since Petro and his thugs will simply arrive and attempt an entry while Kneft and Thedipides are still negotiating. If the Player Characters have staked out the manor, they have a good chance of noticing the band break in, or at least hearing the commotion from within once everything kicks off. If they leave it too late – until just before the guards return at dawn, for example, they may enter the manor to find the guardian creature keeping watch over a house of corpses. If they take too long dealing with it, the guards may well return in the middle of the fight.

The short of it is that no matter when the break-in is staged, the Player Characters will have something to do and something to fight.

are locked. The Open Lock DC is 25. Thedipides has a master key ring with keys for every door on it.

The ceilings are 10 feet high in most cases, rising to 15 feet in the gallery, the library and the atrium.

The manor is not lit at night. Most rooms get their light from their doorways into the atrium or the garden and the few that have no connection to either have sconces on the walls for torches.

The location descriptions assume that the Player Characters are entering at night, while the guards are absent. If they choose to follow a different plan, the Games Master will have to improvise somewhat.

1A-B. SHOPS

Thedipides maintains two smallish shops at the front of his residence. Each is split into two parts – a front area where bolts of

cloth are on display, including an area for measuring and cutting, and a back area where the bulk of the stock is stored. During the day, each shop contains one member of staff (a 2nd level commoner) and one guard (a 2nd level soldier) and the money (1d100 silver pieces) is kept in a locked box (Open Lock DC 25, the salesman has the key) in the back room. At night, both boxes are secured in the vault (location 16), the doors are locked and the staff and guards are not present.

2. ENTRANCE HALL

The heavy front door opens to reveal a wide entrance hall. The walls are plastered and whitewashed, and the floor is neatly paved with local stone. Set against the north wall is a pair of comfortable stools, and against the south wall is a bench for shoes. Above the bench is a row of hooks for cloaks and outer garments. Currently, one hook is occupied by a dark brown travelling cloak. Beneath it sit a pair of sandals.

The stools are for the guards on duty here during the day. This is where they relax and kill time between patrols. The cloak and sandals belong to Kneft, and can be identified as of Stygian make with a successful Appraise, Profession (tailor/seamstress) or similar skill check (DC 20).

3. ATRIUM

This is the atrium, the main living area of the house. Overhead, a large skylight is covered with a wooden barrier held in place with cunning locks. A firepit smoulders in the centre of the space, and various articles of expensive-looking furniture are placed in aesthetic positions around the room.

The skylight is hinged along the western edge, and locked into place using a simple bolt. Every morning, the servants (see area 4a) use a pair of specially designed poles to knock the bolt out, swing the shutter fully open, and lock it into place with a matching set of bolts mounted in the ceiling near the doorway from area 2. These poles are kept in the servants' room. This set up means that anyone seeking to break in through the skylight at night

cannot pick the locks but must instead break them open (break DC 18).

The ceiling in this room is 15 feet high.

4A-D. BEDROOMS

Each of these rooms holds a large bed, a cupboard, a storage chest and an assortment of personal belongings.

4a is the servants' room. The servants are a middle-aged couple who do domestic work for Thedipides (1st level commoners) in exchange for a roof over their heads and regular meals. A dull and obdurate pair, they are used to Thedipides' strange visitors. They will not come out of their room unless they hear sounds of violence or something clearly detrimental to their master, whereupon they will attempt to flee. They have been instructed not to raise any alarms, as Thedipides does not want the guard poking into his affairs, but the Player Characters may not know that. Also present in this room are the poles used to manipulate the skylight cover in area 3. Each is 10 feet long and can be used as an awkward staff if necessary (normal staff statistics but -1 to attack rolls).

4b is a guest room, and currently empty. A full search (DC 15 Search check) will turn up a single silver piece that has rolled under the bed.

4c is another guest room, but these days is used so much as a shortcut to the stables that no one would ever choose to stay in it. The bed has been lifted onto its side and pushed against the wall to make it easier to get through the room, and there is a pile of tack and harness in one corner. Characters in search of weapons can find a whip draped over a hook in the wall.

4d is where Thedipides sleeps when he is not entertaining guests late into the night. The cupboard in this room is very large and full of fine clothing, and a bedside table contains an assortment of rings and other jewellery (100 silver

pieces' worth in total). Hidden under Thedipides' pillow is a dagger, just in case. The clothing and jewellery contain items suitable for both sexes, as Thedipides shares this room with Rosa, his new live-in lover who is asleep in bed when the Player Characters arrive. She is a deep sleeper (-2 to Listen checks while she is sleeping) and not much of a combatant, but a scream from her will rouse the entire manor. Should trouble erupt elsewhere and wake her up, Rosa will spend a round wrapping herself in a cloak, another round grabbing the jewellery from the bedside table and the dagger from under Thedipides' pillow, and then attempt to quietly sneak away.

5A-B. DINING ROOMS

This room contains several low wooden tables and chaise longues upon which to recline while eating. The bare flagstones of the floor are covered by a rug in the eastern style and the walls are decorated with tapestries by local Numalian weavers.

These two rooms are used for everyday dining and meeting informal guests. The servants keep them meticulously clean. Unknown to everybody except Thedipides, one of the flagstones in room 5b is actually a wooden cover that conceals a secret ladder to his vault. The flagstone in question is concealed under a rug, which in turn has a chaise longue on top of it, making it almost impossible to detect without knowing what you're looking for (Search DC 30).

6A-B. OFFICES

A large desk and matching bureau dominate this comfortable room. Writing and counting implements are neatly arranged across the surface of the desk, clearly marking this space as an office.

Both offices are kept clean, tidy and ready for use at any time, but Thedipides' documents will only be in one of them. Which one depends on the time of year that your game is set. Thedipides uses office 6a during the spring and

summer months when the garden is in bloom, and office 6b during the autumn and winter. In the inactive office, the bureau and desk drawers are unlocked and empty. In the active office, the bureau and desk drawers are locked (Open Locks DC 25).

The desk can be hacked apart with time, but the noise will alert everyone in the house. The drawers contain assorted personal correspondence with legitimate merchants and with shadowy organisations both mundane and sorcerous. The Games Master should feel free to introduce whatever links to future adventures he desires here.

The bureau is sturdy wood and reinforced on the inside with fine steel (hardness 12, break DC 24). It contains all of the records for Thedipides' legitimate business. These are not worth very much by themselves, but a little time and a Forgery skill check could be very profitable for any character with a Numalian address. The DC should vary depending on just how much a character wants to pad his income by. Alternatively, destroying the records will deal Thedipides' business a fatal blow.

7. THE GARDEN

This open garden is neatly tended and elegantly styled. A covered walkway runs around the north, west and south sides, where shadowed doorways lead back into the manor. To the east, a high wall topped with spikes dissuades visitors.

Thedipides is very fond of his garden, and likes to relax in it on sunny days. The three doorways to the north lead into storage rooms for gardening tools, wine, and other bits and pieces that do not fit anywhere else. Anyone looking for an improvised weapon can easily find one here.

On normal nights, at least one guard is stationed in the garden at all times – enough thieves make it past the spiked wall to make it worth Thedipides' while to keep a watchful presence here. On the evening of the meeting with Kneft, though, the role of guard is filled by Apep,

Kneft's charmed serpent companion. The six foot cobra has been sunning himself all day and is still active when the Player Characters arrive, lurking in the west-most storage room (Hide check result 23). If a character is alone, Apep will slither quietly over and attack when he is in biting range. He will also rush to help Kneft should his master call for him, and will attack anyone who tries to search the room he is in.

8. THE GARDEN ROOM

This room is elaborately frescoed and kept in immaculate condition. Stools and chaise longues of the finest manufacture surround several low tables and lush potted plants.

The garden room is the formal dining room of the house, where Thedipides entertains his most honoured guests. On the night of the break-in, he and Kneft are here discussing terms. They recline on chaise longues on opposite sides of one of the tables, talking quietly. Kneft's coffer of gold sits between them, closed but unlocked. The coffer contains 200 pieces of gold, stamped with the mark of Stygia – a healthy fortune for low-level Player Characters!

9. KITCHEN

This room is clearly a kitchen. The remains of a fire lie banked in the fireplace, still glowing quietly. Along the western wall can be found solid tables for cooking on and along the southern wall are cupboards, cabinets and drawers for holding implements and utensils.

The Player Characters can find anything that could be commonly found in a kitchen with a full round of searching. If they think to gather up all the rare herbs and spices that Thedipides keeps in his kitchen, they can sell the collection for 50 silver pieces to any chef. Finally, if they pass a DC 15 Search check while searching the room they find the false drawer where Thedipides keeps his engraved silver cutlery. The set has 16 pieces (four forks, four knives, four tablespoons and four teaspoons)

and each piece will fetch two silver pieces if sold. If sold as a set they fetch a total of 40 silver pieces.

Enterprising characters may try climbing the chimney – either climbing down to break in, or climbing up to escape the guardian creature. This requires a DC 15 Escape Artist check and can only be attempted by characters wearing light or no armour. Failure indicates that the character has become stuck and must make either make a DC 20 Escape Artist check to free himself or be pulled free by allies with a DC 15 Strength check. Either way, each attempt takes one round and inflicts 1d2 damage on the poor character stuck in the chimney.

Finally, careless characters may discover that the fire in the grate, although banked, is still very hot. Anyone standing or landing in the fireplace takes 1d3 fire damage. This damage is repeated every round if they are unable or unwilling to move.

10. PANTRY

The pantry is dark and cool, stone shelves laden with cooked meat, grease, vegetables and other perishables that would suffer in the heat.

Apart from the food, the main point of interest in this chamber is the fact that the door is much thicker and heavier than the others in the building (hardness 8, 30 hp, Break DC 24). Although this design feature was intended to help keep the pantry cool, it also makes it a perfect place to hide from the guardian creature since the beast is unable to work the latch. Although the door does not have a lock, Player Characters may also be able to use the pantry as an impromptu prison if they can find a way of sealing the door shut.

11. MUSEUM

This L-shaped room is not lit, but has sconces for torches placed every ten feet along the walls. Seven pedestals line the east and south walls, each bearing a different object.

The door to this room is kept locked. In addition, the handle must be turned backwards in order to open the door safely – unless the player specifies otherwise, assume his character is opening the door in the usual manner, triggering the trap. The trap is a metal spike that shoots from the door handle. The painful wound causes all rolls with the door-opening hand to suffer a –2 penalty for 24 hours. Unless there is a good reason why not (such as holding a weapon in his main hand) you can assume that a Player Character opening the door will do so with his primary hand. The spike has a Search DC of 20, a Disable Device DC of 22, and if triggered allows a DC 20 Reflex save to avoid harm.

The seven pedestals each bear a treasure that Thedipides has traded for. Five are described here, leaving two pedestals free for any items that the Games Master wishes to include of his own design.

a) *The Incorruptible Hand* – this rather gruesome curiosity resembles the hand of a fresh corpse, cleanly severed at the wrist. By some unknown sorcery the flesh does not rot, nor will parasites or predators voluntarily feed on it. If fed a Power Point by someone touching it, the hand will animate and make strange arcane gestures, requiring a DC 11 Terror save the first time it is seen. Thedipides has never seen it do this, and would immediately trade it away – or, failing that, burn it – if he knew.

b) *Alien Seeds* – a small wooden box with a sliding lid holds about a dozen seeds the size of apple pips. Thedipides was sold these by an occultist he trusts, and believes that they are seeds that fell from the dark between the stars and will grow bizarre and unnatural fruit. Whether this is true or not is up to the Games Master.

c) *The Echoing Horn* – this appears to be a normal bull's horn hollowed out for blowing. The outside is graven with symbols that characters of the appropriate region may recognise as Pictish. When blown, the horn makes no immediate sound. However, 2d3 rounds later it will emit an impossibly loud whistling howl, like a gale force wind blowing through an echoing cave.

d) *Blood Bullet* – this rounded stone is the perfect size and shape to be used in a sling. If fed at least 1 hp of blood, it will soak up the vital fluid and turn a deep red for one minute. If used as a sling stone within this time period it will automatically hit its target for double damage. It will, however, be destroyed on impact and so can only be used once.

e) *The Dancing Serpent* – this is a straight piece of wood about one foot long, intricately carved to resemble a snake. If held by the tail it will begin to dance, coiling and writhing like a real snake for up to three rounds. If released, it immediately reverts to its wooden form. If held for three full rounds it lashes around and bites its holder on the wrist for 1d2 hp of damage.

12. LIBRARY

Heavy wooden bookshelves line the walls of this room and the centre is dominated by a single table and comfortable armchair. Unlike the preceding gallery, there are no wall sconces here. The only source of illumination seems to be an unlit silver candelabra on the table.

If a character needs to make any Knowledge check and has fifteen minutes to spend studying the books here he will gain a +1 bonus on the check (or +2 if it is Knowledge (arcana) or Knowledge is Power check). This is unlikely to be important unless the Player Characters somehow escape from Thedipides' manor with a literal ton of books.

Many of the books in the library cover occult topics and sorcerous theory. Three of the most notable are the *Book of the Heavens*, the *Infernal Bestiary* and *The Unquiet Dead*.

The *Book of the Heavens* is written in Kothic and forms something of a beginner's guide to astrology. A Scholar with this book may choose Divination as a new sorcery style whenever he is next eligible to gain one, regardless of his background. If he knows the Divination style – whether

he learned it from this book or from other sources – he may choose to learn the *sorcerous news* spell whenever he is eligible to gain a new advanced spell, regardless of his background.

The Unquiet Dead serves a similar function, except that it covers the style of Necromancy. As well as the style of Necromancy, this book contains the spells *the dead speak* and *chill of the grave*.

The Infernal Bestiary is slightly different. Although it purports to be a discussion of various demon lords (and adds +2 to any Knowledge checks relating to them if the character has time to read the book looking for references) it also contains the instructions for summoning one. With this book and an hour-long ritual *anyone* can summon a demon of medium power – Games Masters are encouraged to make this creature their own – and negotiate a one-off one task deal with it, like a limited version of the *demonic pact* spell. However, like the *demonic pact* spell, using this book to summon a demon forces a Corruption save to avoid gaining a point of Corruption, and the first time a character casts it the Corruption gain is automatic.

Unlike the other books, one cannot learn Summoning from the *Infernal Bestiary*. However, it does mention that demons can teach such spells themselves...

13. STABLES

A small paved courtyard fronts four covered stalls. Each is decked out with all the equipment needed for short-term care of a horse, although none are occupied.

Thedipides had a stable built on his property for the convenience of his guests and customers. There are no horses and nothing of value present when the Player Characters arrive, but the door into area 4c may be of interest to them. This door is kept locked at night but is otherwise not unusual.

14. CONVENIENT ALLEY

You can tell that Thedipides lives in a prosperous area – even the alley that runs behind his property is relatively clean.

This alley offers several alternative options for gaining entrance to Thedipides' manor. The wall is only 10 feet high and may be climbed with a DC 15 Climb check. The spikes atop the wall require a DC 15 Dexterity check to navigate – failure inflicts 1d3 damage. Climbing the wall grants access to either the garden or the roof, depending on where it was climbed. From the roof, possible avenues of ingress are the chimney (see area 9) or the skylight over the atrium (see area 3).

Another possibility involves the back door to the manor. This door is of standard construction but it has no lock. Instead, it is bolted shut on the inside. This means the lock cannot be picked from the outside, although the door can be smashed down. Unfortunately for potential burglars, the back door is also trapped. A cunning design of hinge allows it to be opened both ways – a DC 15 Knowledge (architecture and engineering) check will reveal this, but this check cannot be made untrained – and if the door is pushed open from inside it is perfectly safe. If, however, the door is pushed open from *outside*, as will certainly happen if it is broken down, the trap triggers a hail of poisoned darts from the doorjamb that will catch whoever smashed the door in. The poison darts make a single attack roll at +6 against the defender's flat-footed dodge defence. If they hit, they do 1d2 damage and inject their paralytic venom. This poison has a save DC of 14, requires 4 saving throws with a one minute interval and does a base of 1d3 Dexterity damage. The poison darts trap can be found with a DC 23 Search check (+2 synergy bonus if the searcher has any ranks in Knowledge (architecture and engineering)) but they cannot be disabled without dismantling most of the doorframe – a project beyond the scope of this adventure.

15. THE VAULT OF THE DIPIDES (NOT ON THE MAP)

When the flagstone in area 5b is discovered and moved, it reveals a ladder of iron rungs set into the wall of a tight shaft (no one in heavy armour can fit). The ladder descends some twenty feet and at the bottom of the shaft is a narrow door. The door is locked and trapped. The trap can be found with a DC 20 Search check – if the door is opened without some pressure exerted on the bottom rung of the ladder, a spear is fired from a concealed opening between rungs of the ladder to catch the unsuspecting door opener right in the small of the back. The spear makes an attack roll with a +10 bonus against the victim's flat-footed dodge defence, causing 1d8+2 damage if it hits. Even worse, whether it is dodged or not the impact of the spear will fully open the door to the vault and release the guardian creature. (If the creature has already been released, the door to the vault will be smashed open and the trap disabled.)

The guardian creature spends all of its time in an immaterial state, 'haunting' the vault. It leaves Thedipides alone if he enters, but if any other person should violate the sanctity of the vault it will coalesce out of the darkness and attack with the savage hunger of an immortal animal denied physical form for years. Since using all but light weapons is impossible in the cramped confines of the shaft, combat will almost certainly end badly but if the intruder is fast, he *may* have time to grab something and run.

The vault itself is only five feet square and lined with shelves. The shelves hold small coffers, and each coffer holds treasure – gems, coins, bars of precious metal, or jewellery – to the value of 2000 silver pieces. One coffer holds instead a ceramic flask with a single drink of the *golden wine of Xuthal* within. In total, there are seventeen coffers here, holding a total of 34,000 silver pieces in various valuables. There is virtually no chance of Player Characters escaping with all of this largesse, though – not with so many other people interested in the same thing and the guardian beast to deal with.

DRAMATIS PERSONAE

THE DIPIDES

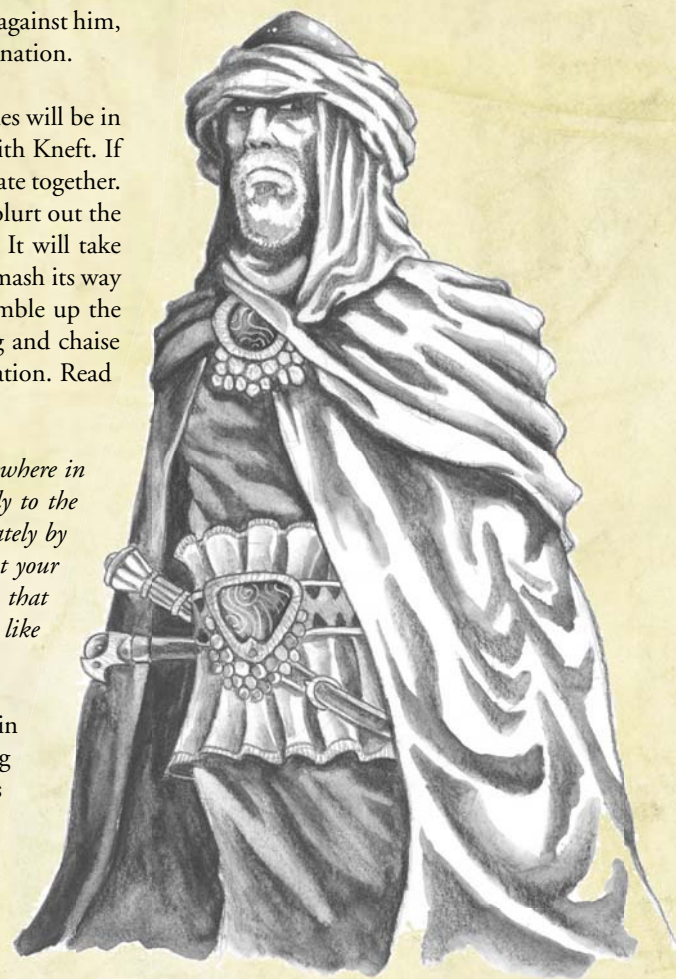
	2nd level Nemedian noble / 2nd level scholar
Hit Dice:	2d8+2d6 (16 hp)
Initiative:	+5 (+1 Dex, +4 Improved Initiative)
Speed:	30 ft
Dodge Defence:	11 (+1 Dex)
Parry Defence:	10 (-1 Str, +1 class)
DR:	-
Base Attack/ Grapple:	+2/+1
Attack:	Poniard +3 finesse (1d6-1, 19-20/x2)
Magic Attack:	+3
Power Points:	6
Space/Reach:	5 ft./5 ft.
Special Attacks:	-
Special Qualities:	Hyborian qualities, rank hath its privileges, regional features +1, background (independent), knowledge is power
Saves:	Fort +0, Ref +1, Will +7
Abilities:	Str 8, Dex 12, Con 10, Int 16, Wis 13, Cha 14
Skills:	Appraise +14, Bluff +9, Decipher Script +11, Diplomacy +9, Gather Information +8, Knowledge (arcana) +12, Knowledge (local) +7, Knowledge (nobility) +7, Profession (merchant) +7, Sense Motive +10
Feats:	Combat Expertise, Dabblers (counterspells), Diligent, Improved Initiative, Negotiator
Possessions:	Rich clothing, jewellery (worth 50 silver pieces), poniard, knife, two pouches of flame-powder

The dipides is not what he seems. He is certainly a cloth trader and he most assuredly deals in rare and forbidden tomes when he thinks he can get away with it, but he is no black magician. He has made some limited studies of warding magic in case one of his clients turns against him, but is no sorcerer by any stretch of the imagination.

When the Player Characters arrive, The dipides will be in the garden room (area 8) discussing terms with Kneft. If trouble breaks out, he and Kneft will investigate together. If the trouble turns serious, The dipides will blurt out the incantation that frees the guardian creature. It will take the creature one round to form a body and smash its way out of the vault, and another round to scramble up the shaft and into area 5b, casting flagstone, rug and chaise longue aside with a strength born of exhilaration. Read the following:

Suddenly you hear an almighty crash from elsewhere in the manor, as of a heavy stone falling violently to the ground. The sound is followed almost immediately by the thunderous roar of an enraged animal, but your blood flashes cold with the certain knowledge that no natural creature could give voice to a sound like that.

Of course, if the characters are actually in location 5b they will also get to see the thing burst from the shaft. Once the creature is summoned, The dipides will take the first opportunity to escape. His primary concern at all times is his own life and he will do whatever he thinks necessary to secure it. He is confident that the guardian creature can take care of his belongings.



kNEFT

	4th level Stygian scholar
Hit Dice:	4d6+4 (18 hp)
Initiative:	+1 (+0 Dex, +1 Reflex)
Speed:	30 ft
Dodge Defence:	11 (+0 Dex, +1 class)
Parry Defence:	10 (-1 Str, +1 class)
DR:	-
Base Attack/Grapple:	+3/+2
Attack:	Staff +2 (2d4-1 damage, AP 0)
Magic Attack:	+4
Power Points:	8
Space/Reach:	5 ft./5 ft.
Special Attacks:	Sorcery
Special Qualities:	Stygian qualities, background (lay priest), knowledge is power
Saves:	Fort +2, Ref +1, Will +7
Abilities:	Str 8, Dex 10, Con 12, Int 13, Wis 16, Cha 14
Skills:	Craft (alchemy) +10, Decipher Script +8, Handle Animal +4, Knowledge (arcana) +12, Knowledge (history) +10, Knowledge (local, i.e. Stygia) +3, Knowledge (religion) +10, Knowledge (nature) +9, Listen +10, Perform (ritual) +9, Sense Motive +10, Spot +10
Feats:	Exotic Weapon Proficiency (Stygian bow), Eyes of the Cat, Knowledgeable, Ritual Sacrifice
Spells:	Hypnotism – <i>entrance, hypnotic suggestion</i> ; Nature Magic – <i>summon beast, animal intercessor, animal ally, greater summon beast</i> ; Necromancy – <i>raise corpse</i> .
Possessions:	Plain robes, traveller's staff, knife

Kneft is a quiet, calculating sort. Despite this, he has a certain charm and a dry wit, and for this reason he spends a lot of time acting as an emissary, representing Stygia outside its borders. Of course, because he spends a lot of time outside Stygia, he is not advancing through the priesthood as quickly as he would like. While his first response to burglars in Thedipides' manor is to turn his magic (and Apep, his charmed serpent) against them, if they seem capable and not the sort to hold a grudge he may engage them in his schemes to advance his position within the priesthood.

APEP

Medium animal (cobra); HD 4d8; hp 18; Init +7; Spd 20 ft., climb 20 ft., swim 20 ft.; Dodge Defence 17; DR 4; Base Atk +3; Grp +0; Bite +7 finesse (1d6 and poison); SA poison; SQ scent; SV Fort +4, Ref +7, Will +2; Str 10, Dex 18, Con 11, Int 1, Wis 12, Cha 2.

Skills and Feats: Balance +12, Climb +11, Hide +13, Listen +10, Spot +10

Poison: Cobra poison acts directly on the central nervous system.

Damage: 1d2 temporary damage to Dexterity and 1d2 temporary damage to Constitution

Saves (9): Immediate/10 minutes/30 minutes/1 hour/1 hour/1 hour/1 hour/1 hour/1 hour

Because he is used to warmer climates, Apep is considered to be fatigued at all times (-2 to Strength and Dexterity, cannot run or charge).



CATALINA

	4th level Zamorian temptress
Hit Dice:	4d6 (14 hp)
Initiative:	+6 (+2 Dex, +4 Reflex)
Speed:	30 ft
Dodge Defence:	14 (+2 Dex, +2 class)
Parry Defence:	10 (-1 Str, +1 class)
DR:	-
Base Attack/Grapple:	+3/+2
Attack:	Stiletto +5 finesse (1d4-1, x4 critical)
Space/Reach:	5 ft./5 ft.
Special Attacks:	Sneak attack +1d6
Special Qualities:	Zamorian qualities, comeliness, savoir faire, seductive art +1, compelling performance 1/day, secret art (sneak attack +1d6), seductive savant (Bluff).
Saves:	Fort +1, Ref +6, Will +7
Abilities:	Str 8, Dex 15, Con 10, Int 14, Wis 12, Cha 16
Skills:	Bluff +10, Diplomacy +10, Forgery +7, Gather Information +10, Hide +9, Knowledge (local) +6, Knowledge (nobility) +6, Knowledge (rumours) +9, Move Silently +10, Open Lock +8, Perform (dance) +10, Disable Device +8, Sense Motive +8, Sleight of Hand +11
Feats:	Iron Will, Light-Footed, Nimble Fingers
Possessions:	Revealing outfit, concealing and voluminous cloak, stiletto.

Catalina is a beautiful, passionate woman with a manipulative bent and an iron will. Her goal is to secure herself a life of leisure, independent of anyone else, and every move she makes is calculated to bring about that end. Although she can mask it exceptionally well, her natural demeanour is intense and driven.

Catalina will keep an eye on the Player Characters when they break into Thedipides' manor and will follow them in at a safe distance. She intends to reveal herself to them when they are on the way out laden with treasure and demand her share, trusting to her looks and diplomatic skill to dissuade them from violence. When the guardian beast is released her plans will be shattered. She will panic and flee in terror, possibly running into the Player Characters, possibly becoming the guardian beast's first victim.



ROSA

	1st level Brythunian thief
Hit Dice:	1d8+1 (5 hp)
Initiative:	+4 (+2 Dex, +2 Reflex)
Speed:	40 ft
Dodge Defence:	14 (+2 Dex, +2 class)
Parry Defence:	10 (-1 Str, +1 class)
DR:	-
Base Attack/Grapple:	+3/+2
Attack:	Unarmed strike +2 finesse (1d3)
Space/Reach:	5 ft./5 ft.
Special Attacks:	Sneak attack +1d6/+1d8
Special Qualities:	Hyborian qualities, sneak attack style (knife), trap disarming
Saves:	Fort +1, Ref +4, Will -1
Abilities:	Str 10, Dex 15, Con 12, Int 13, Wis 8, Cha 14
Skills:	Balance +4, Bluff +4, Climb +2, Disable Device +4, Hide +8, Listen +5, Knowledge (local) +3, Knowledge (rumours) +3, Move Silently +8, Open Lock +6, Search +5, Sleight of Hand +6, Spot +5, Tumble +6
Feats:	Alertness, Fleet-Footed
Possessions:	A bedsheet

Rosa is exactly what she appears to be – a good-looking and opportunistic young woman who has lucked into a life of ease. If the Player Characters ruin or kill Thedipides and Rosa survives the adventure, she may return in future adventures looking for revenge on the people who ruined her good life.

PETRO

1st level Nemedian scholar / 2nd level thief

Hit Dice:	1d6+2d8+3 (15 hp)
Initiative:	+6 (+3 Dex, +3 Reflex)
Speed:	30 ft
Dodge Defence:	15 (+3 Dex, +1 class, +1 Dodge)
Parry Defence:	12 (+1 Str, +1 class)
DR:	4 (leather jerkin)
Base Attack/ Grapple:	+1/+2
Attack:	Dagger +4 finesse (1d4+1, 19-20/x2 critical) or dagger +4 ranged (1d4+1, 19-20/x2 critical, AP 2)
Magic Attack:	-1
Power Points:	4
Space/Reach:	5 ft./5 ft.
Special Attacks:	Sneak attack +1d6/+1d8
Special Qualities:	Hyborian qualities, background (independent), knowledge is power, trap disarming
Saves:	Fort +1, Ref +6, Will +5
Abilities:	Str 12, Dex 16, Con 13, Int 14, Wis 10, Cha 8
Skills:	Appraise +6, Bluff +8, Craft (knickknack) +6, Decipher Script +6, Disable Device +5, Forgery +6, Hide +5, Knowledge (arcana) +8, Knowledge (history) +2, Move Silently +5, Open Lock +5, Search +5, Sense Motive +5
Feats:	Dodge, Eyes of the Cat, No Honour, Point Blank Shot
Spells:	Divination – <i>astrological prediction</i> .
Possessions:	Leather jerkin, dubiously stained clothes, eight daggers, various ineffective charms and trinkets, a <i>survival charm</i> .

Petro is a conniving Nemedian with far greater aspirations than ability. He makes his living conducting a small-time protection racket in the downmarket neighbourhood where he lives and acting as a local wise man. His specialty is the crafting of charms and talismans – for good luck, for sexual potency, to prevent pregnancy, whatever the customer asks for. None of them work, since Petro has roughly as much sorcerous skill as a plank of wood, but a combination of superstition and fear keeps the customers coming back. His aim is to find the vault and loot it, and he is not above murder and torture to get what he wants. Once the guardian creature arrives, his priorities shift to keeping himself alive, but if he spots a chance to grab something valuable – Kneft's coffer, perhaps – and run, he will take it.



Petro and his boys will arrive at a dramatically appropriate point during the adventure, probably first fighting against the Player Characters and then maybe allying with them against the guardian beast. However it works out, the thugs make good 'red shirts' if you want to warn your players how dangerous the guardian beast can be.

Survival Charm

In his tinkering with various amulets and gewgaws, Petro has inadvertently created something extremely useful. A *survival charm* allows a character wearing it to be Left for Dead without spending a fate point. The charm works once, then falls to pieces.

PETRO'S THUGS

Use as many as needed to challenge the party, bearing in mind that there may be other dangers that they still have to deal with.

1st level Nemedian thieves; HD 1d8; hp 4; Init +3; Spd 30 ft.; Dodge Defence 11; Parry Defence 10; DR 4; Base Atk +0; Grp +0; Dagger +1 finesse (1d4, 19-20/x2 critical); SA sneak attack +1d6/+1d8; SQ sneak attack style (dagger), trap disarming; SV Fort +0, Ref +3, Will -1; Str 10, Dex 13, Con 10, Int 11, Wis 8, Cha 8.

Skills and Feats: Balance +5, Climb +4, Hide +7, Knowledge (local) +4, Knowledge (rumours) +4, Listen +1, Move Silently +7, Sleight of Hand +5, Spot +5; Alertness, Stealthy

Possessions: Dagger, leather jerkin, 1d10 silver pieces.

GUARDIAN CREATURE

An animal from the lightless voids between the stars, this creature is naturally bodiless. It pulls together a physical form out of darkness, creating a distinctly predatory silhouette with something of the hunting panther and something of the shark to it. Its exact appearance is impossible to determine as it travels in a constant cloud of shadow but six pupil-less, lambent green eyes can be seen burning from behind the swirling wreaths of shadow-stuff, vaguely illuminating something that looks like a muzzle.

Despite its indeterminate appearance, the guardian creature is fully present to other senses. It moves quietly, but its feline roar is instantly recognisable as unnatural even to a pampered noble who has never even seen the wilderness, let alone studied it. Although its body cannot be seen clearly, its teeth and claws are real enough and leave straightforward physical wounds. Upon adopting a physical form it also becomes vulnerable to physical weapons, although it resists injury with an alien vitality.

The guardian creature's motivations are simple: firstly, kill everyone in the manor except Thedipides; secondly, do not leave the manor. Left to its own devices it would leave the manor and begin hunting around the city, but the spell that bound it compels it to remain in the manor and not to harm Thedipides. It can understand all human languages, but not speak them.

Medium outsider (demon)

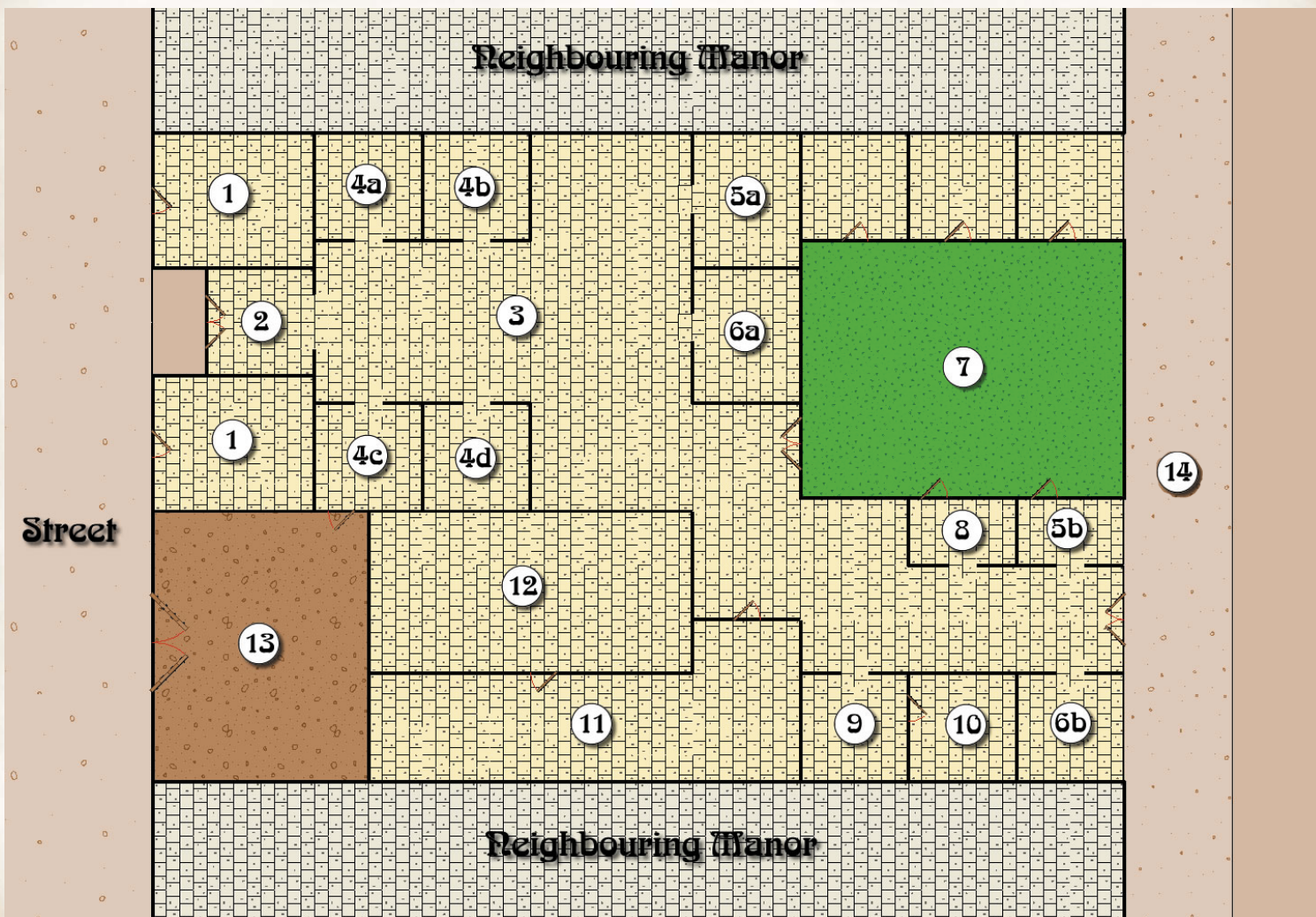
Hit Dice:	6d8+30 (57 hp)
Initiative:	+6 (+3 Dex, +3 Reflex)
Speed:	40 ft
Dodge Defence	17 (+3 Dex, +4 natural)
DR:	5
Base Attack/ Grapple:	+6/+9
Attack:	Claw +9 melee (1d6+3)
Full Attack:	2 claws +9 melee (1d6+3) and bite +4 melee (1d8+1)
Space/Reach:	5 ft./5 ft.
Special Attacks:	-
Special Qualities:	-
Saves:	Fort +10, Ref +8, Will +7
Abilities:	Str 16, Dex 16, Con 20, Int 6, Wis 14, Cha 8
Skills:	Hide +14, Intimidate +8, Move Silently +14, Survival +11
Feats:	Eyes of the Cat, Stealthy, Track

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HUNTER'S SPOILS

A plethora of strange beasts and the bounty that can be reaped from them, by Carl Walmsley.

Whether gathering ivory, furs or trophies for their wall, hunters will track and kill any creature that can provide saleable body parts. In magical lands such as Glorantha or the strangely populated worlds of the Eternal Champion multiverse, there are creatures whose bodies can provide a host of remarkable resources. Presented here is a selection of such creatures, each hunted for one or more valuable body part.

Having characters collect useful body parts after an encounter with a dangerous beast can provide a Games Master with a useful way to reward intrepid adventurers, without having to explain why a ferocious beast has a store of treasure. What is more, getting the best price for these rare body parts can provide an adventure in itself, as their value can vary considerably from place to place.

Hell Hornet

These ferocious insects build their nests around volcanic vents, harvesting sulphur-rich rock and hunting nearby animals. At fifteen centimetres in length, they are formidable creatures, and in swarms can be truly terrifying.

By the time a hell hornet has grown to adulthood, it has built up a residue of volcanic rock within its abdomen. This reacts with chemicals inside the hornet, ensuring that the ball of magma retains its heat indefinitely. It is these lava stones which are of interest to hunters, although – as one might imagine – hell hornets will not willingly surrender them.

A lava stone may be removed from a dead hell hornet with a very easy (+60%) Lore (Animal) test. A lava stone retains its heat for 7 days from the moment the hell hornet carrying it dies. After this time, the stone crumbles and its warmth dims in a surprisingly short space of time. However, a character may quadruple the lifespan of a lava stone with a successful Lore (Alchemy) test.

Lava stones have two main uses. Firstly, they can be used to cauterize fresh injuries, halting the flow of blood. A character making a First Aid test on an injured subject receives a +10% bonus if using a lava stone. However, attempts to revive a subject from unconsciousness or to remove an impaled weapon do not benefit from the use of a lava stone. A character making a Surgery (Healing) test receives a +5% bonus if using a lava stone.

The second use that can be made of a lava stone is as a weapon – specifically, a sling stone. The burning heat of the stone inflicts an additional point of damage when it strikes its target and has a 25% chance of igniting a flammable substance such as cloth or straw. A lava stone sling bullet will automatically ignite oil or other combustible liquids with which it comes into contact.

Handling a lava stone can be tricky – holding one in your hand inflicts 1 point of damage each round. The best way to store one is leave it inside the severed abdomen of the hell hornet until it is needed. It can then be popped out and used. Characters using a lava stone to help with a First Aid or Healing test can grasp them safely in a pair of wooden-handled metal tongs. Such a tool costs 1 SP

A character integrated with a Rune of Fire may freely handle lava stones without fear of being burned.

Typically, a lava stone that is still inside a hell hornet abdomen will fetch 20 SP.

Characteristics

STR	2	(2)
DEX	2D6+12	(19)
CON	1D6+3	(6)
SIZ	2	(2)
INT	2	(2)
POW	1D6+6	(9)
CHA	2	(2)

Hell Hornet Hit Locations

D20	Hit Location	AP/HP
1-7	Abdomen	2/2
8-17	Thorax	2/2
18-20	Head	2/1

Weapons

Type	Weapon Skill	Damage
Sting	35%	1 + poison

Hell hornets will try to find a way through or around a target's armour. When one of their attacks is blocked by an armoured location they will not attack that location again – reroll any further hits to that location (or locations) until the hell hornet strikes an area it has not touched before.

Special Rules

<i>Combat Actions:</i>	4
<i>Strike Rank:</i>	+10
<i>Movement:</i>	1m, 5m when flying
<i>Traits:</i>	Poison, Wall Walking
<i>Skills:</i>	Athletics 50%, Dodge 50%, Perception 40%
<i>Typical Armour:</i>	Chitin shell (AP 2, no Skill Penalty)

Hell Hornet Venom

Type: Sting
Delay: 1D10 Combat Rounds
Potency: 60
Full Effect: 1 hit point damage to all locations
Duration: 6D10 rounds

Slinker

These exceptionally shy felines possess chameleonic abilities, allowing them to change the colour of their fur to match their surroundings. However, only the woodland colours of a slinker's native environment may be mimicked – greens, browns, oranges and yellows.

A lone slinker will always flee from a larger predator – including most humanoids. However, if they are cornered – or if their young are threatened – they will fight to the death.

The biggest challenge when hunting slinkers is finding them. They live deep in the hearts of only the largest forests and have acute senses which warn them of approaching dangers. A hunter lacking the appropriate skills in Tracking and Stealth stands little chance of catching a slinker unawares.

Clothing made from slinker fur retains its colour-changing ability. A single pelt may be fashioned into a shirt or a pair of breeches. Two pelts may be combined to make a cloak.

A character wearing a shirt or breeches made from slinker fur receives a +10% bonus on Stealth tests whilst in wooded areas. A character wearing a cloak, or a shirt *and* breeches, receives a +20% bonus.

Note that covering up slinker-fur garments with armour prevents them from functioning properly and negates any bonus.

A single slinker pelt typically fetches 70 SP. Purchasing a shirt or a pair of breeches fashioned from this fur usually costs around 100 SP. A cloak costs at least twice this amount.

Characteristics

STR	2D6+3	(10)
DEX	3D6+6	(16)
CON	3D6	(10)
SIZ	2D6	(7)
INT	3	(3)
POW	3D6	(10)
CHA	3D6	(10)

Slinker Hit Locations

D20	Hit Location	AP/HP
1-2	Right Hind Leg	1/4
3-4	Left Hind Leg	1/4
5-7	Hindquarters	1/5
8-10	Forequarters	1/5
11-13	Right Front Leg	1/4
14-16	Left Front Leg	1/4
17-20	Head	1/4

Weapons

Type	Weapons Skill	Damage
Bite	40%	1D6
Claw	45%	1D4

Special Rules

Combat Actions: 3

Strike Rank: +9

Movement: 5m

Traits: Night Sight, Chameleonic Fur*

Skills: Athletics 75%, Dodge 60%,
Resilience 35%, Perception 80%,
Stealth 70%, Survival 55%

Typical Armour: Hide (AP 1, no Skill Penalty)

* Slinkers receive a +20% bonus on Stealth tests whilst in wooded areas.

Emperor Spider

These brightly coloured arachnids are the nobility of the bug world. With large, crested plates protruding from behind their heads and the ability to rear up on their hind legs, they are an imposing sight. It is said that all other arachnids and insects defer to them, and will never intrude upon their domain.

Emperor spiders are of interest to hunters because of their unique toxins. These are stored within two separate sacs, both located inside the spider's mouth. The first toxin numbs and paralyzes prey. The second is a coagulant that thickens the blood, leading to heart failure. To those who know how to extract and treat them, these poisons can prove extremely useful – either during medical procedures or as deadly venoms.

A character who succeeds with a simple (+20%) Lore (Animal) test may safely extract the poison sacs from a dead emperor spider. The toxin within retains its potency for two weeks and then breaks down into a harmless liquid. A character with Lore (Poison) may

take a skill test to quadruple this lifespan by treating the venom with preservatives. Failure destroys the poison.

The paralytic venom may be given to a patient who is about to undergo surgery. Administering the correct amount requires an Easy (+40%) Lore (Animal) *or* Healing skill test. If the test is successful, the patient will be spared any discomfort and the Healing (Surgery) test will receive a +20% bonus. If the test to administer the venom fails, then the Healing test is made without any modifier. However, if the test to administer the venom is a fumble, the patient has received an overdose and must succeed with a Resilience test or die from paralysis of the heart.

A weapon coated with paralytic venom replicates the effects of being bitten by the spider (see poison details in the creature characteristics).

The coagulant venom may be administered to a character who is bleeding in order to stop the flow of blood. An easy (+40%) First Aid or Healing test is required to administer the appropriate amount. A successful test stems any bleeding, including that from a Major Wound, and restores 1 HP to the injured location. A failure has no effect upon the target's condition. A fumble inflicts 1D3 damage to the target's Chest as the blood thickens and damages the heart.

A weapon coated with coagulant venom replicates the effects of being bitten by the spider (see creature characteristics).

A single emperor spider that is captured or killed, will provide 1D6 doses of each type of venom. A dose of paralytic venom is worth 30 SP. A dose of coagulant venom is worth 20 SP.

Characteristics

STR 1D6 (3)

DEX 3D6+6 (16)

CON 2D6 (7)

SIZ 1D6 (3)

INT 1D6 (3)

POW 3D6 (10)

CHA 2D6 (7)

Emperor Spider Hit Locations

D20	Hit Location	AP/HP
1	Right Fourth Leg	2/1
2	Left Fourth Leg	2/1
3	Right Third Leg	2/1
4	Left Third Leg	2/1
5-10	Abdomen	2/3
11	Right Second Leg	2/1
12	Left Second Leg	2/1
13	Right First Leg	2/1
14	Left Front Leg	2/1
15-20	Thorax	2/3

Weapons

Type	Weapon Skill	Damage
Bite	50%	1D3 + poison

An emperor spider injects both venoms with each bite.

Special Rules

Combat Actions: 3

Strike Rank: +9

Movement: 3m

Traits: Poison, Wall Walking

Skills: Athletics 80%, Perception 45%,
Stealth 60%

Typical Armour: Chitin (AP 2, no Skill Penalty)

Emperor Spider Paralytic Venom

Type: Ingested or smeared

Delay: Immediate

Potency: 45

Full Effect: Target is paralysed

Duration: 2D6 minutes

Emperor Spider Coagulant Venom

Type: Ingested or smeared

Delay: Immediate

Potency: 50

Full Effect: 1D4 damage to Chest

Duration: 1D10 minutes

Sparkfish

Sparkfish take their name from their dazzling bioluminescent tails. According to their mood – and the need to communicate with other sparkfish in the area – they emit either red, green or blue light. In this way, each school forms a co-operative colony that works together to gather food and ward off predators.

Residing within dark, underground rivers and lakes – or assuming a nocturnal lifestyle in pools above ground – sparkfish have inspired a number of legends over the years. The most popular suggests that they house the lost souls of those who have drowned.

The bioluminescent oil within each fish can be used make bright coloured lanterns. The colour emitted by these lamps changes over time, as the temperature at which the oil burns gradually increases. For the first ten minutes, a sparkfish lamp emits a blue light. This then changes to a green light and then, after a further half an hour, to red. Some miners and explorers use the regular change in the colour of these lamps to keep a record of the time that they have spent underground.

Sparkfish are too small to be caught using a rod and hook, and must be taken with a net or by a creature quick enough to snare them. Skilled hunters use a green light source as a lure to attract sparkfish: this is the colour they would normally use to summon others of their kind and to communicate safety. Using a green light in this way bestows a +20% bonus on appropriate Skill tests to capture sparkfish.

One sparkfish provides enough oil to fuel a lamp for 1 hour. Typically, this amount of oil will fetch 5 SP.

Characteristics

STR	1	(1)
DEX	2D6+6	(13)
CON	2D6	(7)
SIZ	1	(2)
INT	1	(1)
POW	3D6	(11)
CHA	3	(3)

Sparkfish Hit Locations

D20	Hit Location	AP/HP
1-6	Tail	-1
7-16	Body	-2
17-20	Head	-1

Weapons

Type	Weapon Skill	Damage
Bite	20%	1

Special Rules

<i>Combat Actions:</i>	2
<i>Strike Rank:</i>	+7
<i>Movement:</i>	3m (swimming only)
<i>Traits:</i>	Excellent Swimmer
<i>Skills:</i>	Athletics 60%, Perception 30%, Stealth 30%

White Leech

Although they are often mistaken for normal leeches, members of this sub-species have remarkable restorative abilities which make them valuable to hunters who know how to find them.

A white leech is in fact the same dark, muddy colour as other leeches. It also tends to live in the same sort of wet environments. It does, however, possess slighter longer antennae and a character who spends a moment examining one and passes a Lore (Animal) test may identify a member of this sub-species by checking for this.

Like all leeches, the white variety feeds on the blood of other living creatures. A white leech's blood drain has a number of peculiar – but extremely helpful – side effects. Firstly, the leech removes and neutralizes any poisons that are present in the creature it is feeding upon. It takes 1 minute for it to accomplish this.

In addition, a creature that has been fed upon for at least 1 minute by a white leech experiences accelerated healing. The creature immediately recovers 1 HP on all wounded locations and it will recover 1 HP more each hour until it is fully healed.

A white leech's regenerative properties do not stretch as far as healing Major wounds – these remain unaffected by the feeding process.

Keeping white leeches in captivity outside their natural environment is extremely difficult and requires a Lore (Animal) test each day. If this test is ever failed, the leech dies. The value of a single white leech is therefore only 10 SP.

It is far more practical to maintain leech farms in a swamp or marsh. Injured characters may visit these and pay for healing. Typically, a single visit cost 50 SP.

White leeches are too small to have characteristics and are considered to have only one hit location with one Hit Point. For all practical purposes, they die instantly when hit with any sort of attack.

Ironwood

Whilst not technically an animal, ironwood is nevertheless a prize that is highly sought after by hunters with the skill to acquire it. Securing ironwood is a difficult and dangerous business as the trees share a symbiotic relationship with creatures known as tree crabs. These small, shelled critters feed on ironwood sap and are extremely territorial, attacking any creatures that stray too close to their home.

Ironwood is an exceptionally dense type of wood, which is tougher and heavier than the flesh of other trees. Unless skilfully fashioned, it proves entirely unsuitable as a boat-making material. However, it can be used to construct very resilient fortifications or weapons and shields that are far more durable than normal.

Buildings made from ironwood have 50% more HP/ metre than normal. The structure's AP is also increased by 1. However, the Average Man Hours and Cost per Man Hour are both doubled. For more on buildings, see *RuneQuest Arms and Equipment*.

Shields and wooden weapons made from ironwood have 1 more AP and 2 more HP than normal. In addition, they inflict an extra point of damage when they hit. They cost twice as much as normal to make or buy, and take twice as long to construct.

All Skill tests involved with crafting a boat from Ironwood suffer a -30% penalty. However, a boat built from this wood is remarkably tough. The vessel's Seaworthiness is increased by 50%. The Hull is increased by 1, and the Structure points are 25% higher than normal. However, the vessel's Speed is reduced by 1m and its Draft is increased by 50%.

An Ironwood ship which is used to ram another craft automatically causes the maximum possible damage for a vessel of its type.

For example, an Ironwood trireme travelling at a speed of 5m (its maximum), will automatically inflict 20 damage to any vessel it rams (5 x maximized D4 = 20).

Boats made from Ironwood cost twice as much as normal to construct and take three times as long to build. For more on ships and boats, see *RuneQuest Companion*.

A fully grown ironwood tree provides 200 SP worth of wood, and typically houses 2D6 tree crabs. These are not crabs at all, but insects that are in fact capable of flight – something that can come as a shock to anyone not expecting it.

Tree Crab Characteristics

STR	1D6+3	(6)
DEX	3D6	(10)
CON	2D6	(7)
SIZ	1D3	(2)
INT	2	(2)
POW	2D6	(7)
CHA	3	(3)

Tree Crab Hit Locations

D20	Hit Location	AP/HP
1	Right Rear Leg	3/1
2	Left Rear Leg	3/1
3	Right Middle Leg	3/1
4	Left Middle Leg	3/1
5-10	Abdomen	3/3
11-15	Thorax	3/4
16-17	Right Pincer	3/2
18-19	Left Pincer	3/2
20	Head	3/2

Weapons

Type	Weapon Skill	Damage
Claws	40%	1D4*

*Tree crabs' sharp claws can snip through soft armour. Their pincer attacks ignore 2 points of non-metallic armour.

Special Rules

<i>Combat Actions:</i>	2
<i>Strike Rank:</i>	+6
<i>Movement:</i>	3m, 5m when flying
<i>Traits:</i>	Wall Walking
<i>Skills:</i>	Athletics 50%, Perception 40%, Resilience 40%
<i>Typical Armour:</i>	Tough Shell (3 AP; no Skill Penalty)

Horned Bear

There can be few more ferocious sights than an angry horned bear. Resembling a large grizzly with a sharp nose horn and a ridge of spikes running the length of its back, this fierce predator can shred plate armour as though it were nothing more than parchment.

Horned bears are solitary beasts, with strong territorial instincts. Only during mating – which occurs each winter – will they seek the company of others of their kind. At such times, they are especially short-tempered and will respond to any perceived threat with an unyielding attack.

Hunters covet the nose bones of horned bears, which are used to make weapon hilts, war horns and carvings. The fur of these beasts is also valued for the warmth it gives and the protection it offers against even the fiercest wind and rain.

Some especially skilled weapon-makers have found a way to craft daggers, knives, darts and arrowheads from horned bear claws. These weapons are unusually sharp, but have a tendency to shatter.

Weapons made from horned bear claws ignore 2 points of armour, but have 1 less AP and HP than normal. In addition, they break beyond repair as soon as the attacker rolls a fumble.

A single horned bear provides enough claws to fashion 8 small weapons. Craft skill tests to fashion weapons from this material receive a -10% penalty.

The fur of a horned bear typically fetches 80 SP. Survival skill tests related to staying warm receive a +10% bonus when a character is wearing clothing made from horned bear fur.

The horn of a fully grown male is worth 30 SP. Each paw – assuming it has four undamaged claws – is worth 20 SP.

Characteristics

STR	5D6+12	(29)
DEX	3d6	(10)
CON	5D6	(17)
SIZ	6D6+6	(27)
INT	4	(4)
POW	3D6	(10)
CHA	3	(3)

Horned Bear Hit Locations

D20	Hit Location	AP/HP
1-2	Right Rear Leg	3/9
3-4	Left Rear Leg	3/9
5-7	Hindquarters	3/10
8-10	Chest	3/11
11-13	Right Front Leg	3/8
14-16	Left Front Leg	3/8
17-20	Head	3/9

Weapons

Type	Weapon Skill	Damage
Claw	65%	1D8+1D12
Bite	50%	1D10+1D12

Special Rules

<i>Combat Actions:</i>	2
<i>Strike Rank:</i>	+7
<i>Movement:</i>	6m
<i>Skills:</i>	Athletics 35%, Perception 50%, Resilience 55%, Stealth 40%, Survival 60%, Tracking 45%
<i>Typical Armour:</i>	Tough Hide (AP 3, no Skill Penalty)

Rainbow Scarab

In the blazing desert sun, the shell of a rainbow scarab shimmers like a gemstone. To avoid being seen by predatory birds that would espy them from many miles away, these jewels of the desert have taken to living within the shaggy fur of shorrog – large herd beasts that wander the desert plains.

Rainbow scarabs will nest deep below the hot sands, building complex burrows where they lay their eggs. These mature very gradually over the course of several months, only bursting into life when the rains come. At this time, hundreds of tiny, glinting beetles emerge from the soil to feed on the newly blossoming plant life.

When not preparing to give birth, rainbow scarabs are nomadic, using shorrog as a way of moving across the desert in search of food. When a shorrog nears a water supply, any beetles it is carrying sense the moisture in the air and allow themselves to become unhitched and to fall onto the sand. They will then remain near any vegetation surrounding the water source until such time as it sickens or is eaten, at which point they will try to locate a shorrog and hitch a ride to a new location.

Many desert cultures prize rainbow scarab shells for their beauty, fashioning them into ornaments and jewellery. Some races even regard them as holy items, using them in their religious rituals. It is far away from the desert where they are most valuable in terms of hard cash however. The noblewomen of large cities often seek trinkets and clothing made with rainbow scarab shells.

Within desert locales, a rainbow scarab shell is typically worth 20 SP. In an area at least a week's journey from a desert, its value can rise as high as 50 SP.

Shorrogs are normally passive, rather dopey creatures that move slowly to keep their bodies from heating up. They do, however, possess both impressive camouflage skills and – if forced to defend themselves – a powerful tongue covered in razor sharp bristles. A lash of this tongue can tear through flesh. When forced to fight, a shorrog can move with deceptive speed, though it quickly tires. Typically, a shorrog hosts 1D6-1 rainbow scarabs.

Shorrog Characteristics

STR	3D6+3	(14)
DEX	2D6	(7)
CON	4D6	(14)
SIZ	3D6+3	(13)
INT	1D6	(3)
POW	2D6	(7)
CHA	2D6	(7)

Shorrog Hit Locations

D20	Hit Location	AP/HP
1-2	Right Rear Leg	2/6
3-4	Left Rear Leg	2/6
5-7	Hindquarters	2/7
8-10	Chest	2/8
11-13	Right Front Leg	2/6
14-16	Left Front Leg	2/6
17-20	Head	2/6

Weapons

Type	Weapon Skill	Damage
Tongue Lash	60%	1D6
Claw	30%	1D4+1D2

Special Rules

<i>Combat Actions:</i>	2
<i>Strike Rank:</i>	+5
<i>Movement:</i>	2m
<i>Traits:</i>	Adrenalin Boost (see below)
<i>Skills:</i>	Stealth 55%, Survival 60%
<i>Typical Armour:</i>	Thick Hide (AP 2, no Skill Penalty)

Adrenalin Boost: Shorrogs may temporarily boost their metabolism, giving them 3 Combat Actions, +10 Strike Rank and Movement of 5m. This may only be sustained for 1D4+3 Combat Rounds, after which time they acquire 1 level of Fatigue.

Note that individual rainbow scarabs are too small to have characteristics.

Nullworm

These weevilish creatures live inside the guts of other beasts, feeding on the waste products that pass through their intestines. Beyond causing occasional discomfort – they do wriggle around from time to time – they otherwise cause no harm.

Nullworms are most fond of creatures that provide them with a plentiful supply of flesh. This makes the innards of large predators particularly favourable places for them to take up residence. Lions, uz and horned bears often have a nullworm resting in their gut.

Nullworms would be of little interest to hunters were it not for a single, quite remarkable ability. In the same way that a sponge absorbs and retains water, nullworms soak up spells. How or why they developed this ability is unclear: the usual theories about magical experiments and chaotic mutations abound. Some scholars even suggest that nullworms come from another dimension, where magic is so common that even the simplest organisms have developed defences against it.

Any spell that either directly targets a nullworm (or the creature inside which it resides) or that is cast within 3 metres of it, might be absorbed. To determine whether this is the case, the nullworm and the spell caster should each make a Persistence test. If the nullworm succeeds the spell is absorbed. If the spell caster succeeds the nullworm is killed while trying to absorb the spell. If both succeed then the spell is absorbed and the nullworm dies.

An absorbed spell disappears entirely without generating any of the effects it was intended to.

A nullworm which has gorged itself on magic and died as a result will leave the host creature the next time the beast empties its bowels. The deceased nullworm can be used to power a spell - though collecting it can be an unpleasant experience. A nullworm that died because of absorbing a spell stores Magic Points equal to the number used to cast the spell that killed it. These may be used by a spell caster who is holding the deceased nullworm.

For example, Caylor retrieves a nullworm which died absorbing a Hand of Death spell. This means that its corpse contains 5 Magic Points, the number used, in this instance, to cast the spell. So long as he is holding the

corpse, Caylor may freely use any and all of these Magic Points to power a spell (or spells) that he casts.

A dead nullworm is worth 40 SP per Magic Point it contains.

Some hunters seek to capture nullworms alive. Doing so means extracting them from inside their host creature. This is not normally something that a ferocious predator is likely to co-operate with, and so usually dictates that the host be killed. Removing a live nullworm requires a Lore (Animal) test, a sharp knife and a strong stomach.

A live nullworm can fetch as much as 200 SP. A Character wishing to protect himself from spells can willingly swallow a specimen. The nullworm will safely remain inside his gut, ready to absorb the first spell with which he comes into contact.

Note that nullworms will absorb all spells that they come into contact with: they cannot differentiate between spells aimed at helping them or their hosts and those which might harm them.

Individual nullworms are not large enough to have characteristics. Their Persistence scores should be set by the Games Master based on the level of challenge he wishes to present.

The World's Shortest, Yet Technically Complete, RuneQuest Adventure

Adventure Background

The Player Characters' dinner is tainted by Chaos.

Adventure Synopsis

The Player Characters destroy their dinner, and not in the way they had originally intended.

Adventure Hook

Dinner grows tentacles and attacks.

Room 1: The PC's Dining Room

You are about to enjoy your dinner when it grows tentacles and attacks!

The room is three metres by three metres. Typical dining implements for the Player Characters' culture can be found here.

Creature: Dinner

Characteristics: STR 10, DEX 19, SIZ 10, INT 10, POW 10, DEX 10, CHA 10

CA: 4; **DM:** +0; **SR:** +10; **Move:** 4m; **MP:** 10

Traits: 1D4 Chaos Features

Skills: Athletics 50%, Dodge 50%, Persistence 40%, Resilience 40%

Atk: Tentacle 40%, 1D4 damage, 0 AP

Armour: None

Treasure

A chaos rune inside the main course.

Further Adventures

Why was dinner tainted by Chaos? Clearly foul play is afoot.

Dinner Hit Locations

D20	Hit Location	AP/HP
1-2	Tentacle 1	-1/2 x X
3-4	Tentacle 2	-1/2 x X
5-6	Tentacle 3	-1/2 x X
7-8	Tentacle 4	-1/2 x X
9-12	Main Course	-1/2 x X
13-16	Side Dish 1	-1/2 x X
17-20	Side Dish 2	-1/2 x X

X = the number of Player Characters

AND... ACTION!

CINEMATIC TRICKS FOR YOUR *SPYCRAFT 2.0* GAME.

BY ALEX FLAGG AND PATRICK KAPERA.

It's summer, and we all know what that means: warm weather, summer vacations, and most importantly, big-budget Hollywood blockbusters! You know, those movies starring larger-than-life heroes, high-tech gadgets, death defying stunts, faceless goons, and stuff that explodes at the drop of a hat. Incidentally, these same descriptors could be used to describe another blockbuster coming back at you this summer: *Spycraft 2.0*!

At its core, *Spycraft 2.0* is more than just an espionage RPG, or even a robust multi-genre system. It's your gateway to *cinematic roleplaying*, an RPG that thematically and mechanically rewards players and Game Controls alike for making cool, exciting decisions. It's a massive tome, of course, and offers an incredible wealth of rules for gritty, real-world play, but its heart is in the movies and the thrills they evoke.

WHAT'S WITH ALL THIS "CINEMATIC ROLEPLAYING"?

Put simply, it's gaming informed by the best parts of film and television. Oftentimes, this is translated as 'fast and loose' roleplaying, in the spirit of big budget action films, rife with gunfights, fistfights, and explosions, but such a game can just as easily be influenced by film noir, genre television like science fiction or horror, or episodic drama.

All good cinematic roleplaying games demonstrate a number of common traits:

They're exciting! Good cinematic storytelling is fun and effectively utilizes tension and drama to build towards climax. In classic action films, excitement might come from seemingly impossible stunt work, raw bravado, and snappy one liners, while in brooding noir stories, it could be rooted in the interplay between characters, the labyrinthine machinations of the plot, and a single deadly encounter between the protagonist and his nemesis. Regardless of genre, cinematic plots move quickly and keep players on edge of their seats, even at the expense of "realism."

They're engaging! Film is a powerful medium, speaking to the audience's emotions. By the same token, cinematic RPGs directly engage the players' emotions by weaving their characters intimately into the story. These characters' backgrounds become the backdrop of the story, and their actions determine not only the outcome of the game, but the way their world moves and evolves around them.

They're accessible. Film and TV are sometimes called the lowest common denominator of modern society, but in a game, that's not necessarily a bad thing. Cinematic RPGs are at their best when they're immediately relevant and easy to understand, allowing the heroes to act without hanging up on the details.

They're strongly themed and plotted. The best film is engrossing, complete in its vision and inspired in its plot. This can be the toughest part to emulate in cinematic RPGs, but when run with an open mind, strong characters and willingness to roll with whatever circumstances the dice throw you (for better or ill), you can capture the rollicking, well-realized plots of a serial drama – even when running off the beaten path of the campaign outline.

What all this boils down to is this: the best cinematic RPGs recognize the importance of a game's *play* over its *rules*. The stories we share at the table are very rarely about rules lawyering or the discovery of mechanical minutiae, but rather saving the day, surviving against overwhelming odds, and making the impossible possible. It's all about the experience; the man behind the curtain's always there, but in the best cinematic games, as in the best movies, you're never looking for him.

FROM THE DIRECTOR'S CHAIR

In every *Spycraft* season, the Game Control is both producer and director, the guy seeding the campaign with ideas, time, and knowledge, and setting the stage for the characters' actions. Like a director or producer, you can benefit from tried-and-true filmmaking conventions the next time you plan and run a game. As a start, try out some of the following strategies.

Do some research: Inspiration is everywhere for cinematic games: just watch some movies! Pop in a copy of a favorite film in your chosen genre and view it with a critical eye for how the director makes the movie so enjoyable for you. For instance, say you're watching *Raiders of the Lost Ark*. Ask yourself what makes it such a classic film. Is it Indy's iconic character? His mannerisms? The one-liners? His towering presence in the plot? The balls-to-the-wall stunts? What about the world Indy inhabits? Is it that it's filled with maniacal Nazi mystics and far-flung exotic sets that excites you, or are you more enamored with the action sequences, like the tank fight or Indy's less-than-graceful attempt to capture the truck carrying the Ark? Any or all these things might stick out in your mind, becoming excellent points of reference for satisfying cinematic sequences of your own creation.



Make the pitch: Every director "pitches" a script to the studio to get funding, and gets notes back on what can, should, or must change for the project to move forward. Game Controls face the same situation. Getting the players to invest in the story is one of the GC's greatest challenges, and games where he succeeds are vastly more satisfying than those where he doesn't. Before you dive into planning your season, sit down with your players and lay out your basic ideas about the game's overarching genre and themes. Gauge their interest as well as things the group might like to see in the game. Not only will this allow you to tune your campaign to the players' desires, it gives the players what they need to create truly fitting characters for your world. In turn, this will make it easier for you to tailor roleplaying challenges and opportunities for them.

Choose your tools:

Thousandsuponthousands of films have been made on every subject, each with its own visual and narrative style. Many tools are brought to bear in the process. Assuming the actors and sets are already in hand, the camera, film, wardrobe, props, and more must still be chosen. Storyboards set scene lengths, angles, lighting, and filters. Music is chosen or crafted to establish the right mood and evoke the right responses. There are literally millions of possibilities at the outset of any production. Roleplaying games don't

offer quite that many choices, but the selection can still be daunting, especially with a game as comprehensive as *Spycraft*.

Just like any great filmmaker needs to be mindful to choose only the most fitting tools and make only the most appropriate calls when developing his celluloid masterpiece, so should a Game Control hone in on only the character options, rules, and mission parts he needs to bring his vision to interactive life. Both creators also need to keep their productions simple enough that they can handle them, which means that the first-timers should focus even more than their experienced counterparts. It's just as important that they be comfortable with their tools as competent with them.

So this step's all about deciding what *not* to include. We never intended the *Spycraft* engine to be used in its entirety; no game requires that much detail. Instead, it's devised to encompass most basic situations and it's compartmentalized so that Game Controls can pick and choose what they need to get the job done and what they want to convey the flavor they desire. The only sections that apply in every game are the first 20 pages of the Skills chapter, the Combat chapter, and the mission and NPC design sections of the Game Control chapter. In a pinch, you could do with just the early sections of each, where the basic rolling mechanics, mission structure, and NPC blocks are detailed. Everything else is optional. *Everything*.

Sure, the players have to build characters, but that's mostly their onus, and you can limit their options to any combination of classes and feats, adding new options over time or not at all. To keep things simple, simply choose the classes and feats that *sound* the most relevant, check their prerequisites (if any), and make sure they're in your offering as well. That's it. Let the players keep track of their abilities – most will be more

than happy to – and have them point you to parts of the book as you need them. Everything has been carefully organized to keep each rule in only one place, hopefully right where it's needed. Even if that turns out not to be the case, don't panic! There's an exhaustive index, a detailed table of contents, and plenty of page pointers throughout.

How do you choose what to include? It's a great question, and the process is actually very similar to that of the filmmaker. Start by dissecting your story. Figure out what your adventure's about and what the characters and NPCs will be doing. If your game's going to revolve around a mercenary unit sent into a hostile country to find a kidnapped diplomat, for instance, you're probably going to need to know most of the combat chapter, and you should certainly allow the Soldier class, and maybe the Scout and Pointman as well. Perhaps one Faceman or Advocate for the talky part at the end, assuming you want one. Keep things low-level and the number of character options decrease. There won't be a need for expert or master classes and everyone's job is easier.

Your mission doesn't have to walk through every step in the book. Choose one location and three points of action for each scene. Assign one flat XP value for each scene, plus maybe one or two bonuses for important objectives, and you're done.

NPCs can be painfully easy to produce. Your first time out, it could be as easy as choosing whether the NPC is important (in which case he's "special;" otherwise he's "standard") and assigning each of seven ratings ranging from 1 to 10. That's it. The rest of the NPC system can wait. It'll be there when you need it.

The same approach works for rules. You want to keep combat simple? Ignore fluid initiative. Don't use minis

and keep the action abstract, only settling on hard distances and other details as they're needed. Ignore all the damage types and conditions. Ignore most of the actions and rely more on discretionary modifiers to reflect the battle narrative. Interpret the action as you go and keep things lively to occupy everyone so the rules aren't *needed* to keep the game flowing. You can introduce new parts of the system as you gain confidence with the basic mechanics, or just use the fundamentals forever. It's your license to improvise. Use it.

Frame the shot: Armed with ideas from your favorite films and a shared context with the players, it's time to get to the nitty-gritty of framing up your campaign. Just as every director must sets up his shots through "framing" – choosing what to use and what to cut out of the scenes – so too can you control the vertical and horizontal of your campaign using *Spycraft 2.0*.

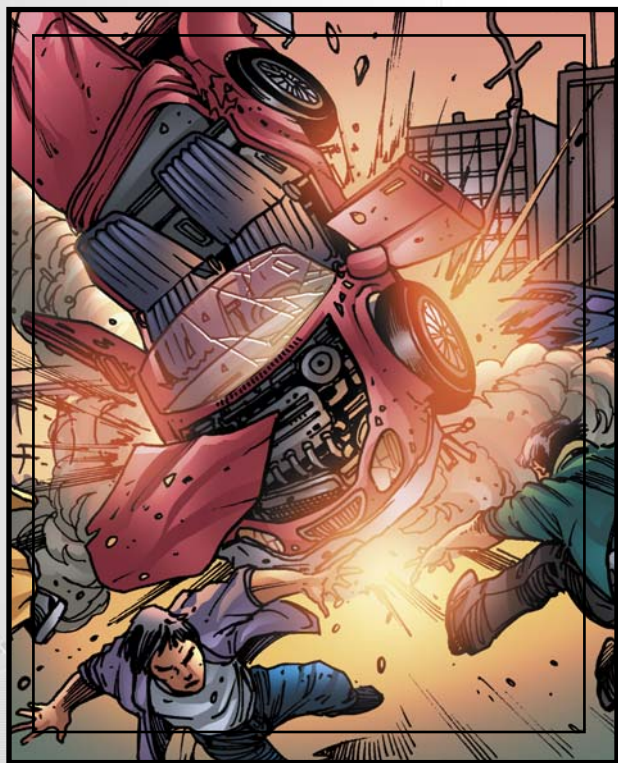
Campaign qualities are your foremost tool for customizing the feel and play of your game. These mechanical "plugins" can adjust anything from character progression speeds to combat lethality throughout your season, during a single mission, or even from scene to scene! *Spycraft 2.0*'s default flavor is that of a "standard action film." Characters have a good chance of surviving encounters and overcoming obstacles, but failure is a distinct, though uncommon possibility. Campaign qualities offer you a fast and easy way to adjust this, capturing the pace and underlying motif of your campaign, and furthering the sense of immersion. For example, "high octane" games emulating *Hard Boiled* and *The Killer* might use the *omnicompetent* and *spirited* qualities to represent the heroes' peerless status. On the other hand, the deadly gunplay of gangster movies might warrant using the *bloodbath* and *violent* qualities. These are just a few of the possibilities; for a complete quality list, check out page 405 of the *Spycraft 2.0 Rulebook*.

The other important bit about framing is controlling the players' perspectives. We never see James Bond in the office doing paperwork or sitting on his couch waiting for the next mission. Likewise, you should choose to *exclude* from your game anything that isn't important to the pace and cinematic experience you've chosen. Gloss over travel that isn't eventful. Tuck slow or cumbersome setting development into dossiers and character dialogue the characters encounter during otherwise exciting sequences. Build mission bundles for the characters rather than spending an entire session on plans and gear packs that may or may not ever see use. Plan ahead to keep table time focused on what's interesting and important to the story and everyone will enjoy the game a whole lot more.

Set the stage: More so than standard RPGs, setting is key to the success of a cinematic game. Whether it's the dizzying heights of Nakatomi Plaza in *Die Hard*, the tombs and deserts of *The Mummy*, or the exotic globe-spanning locales of a Bond flick, exciting locations and set pieces can become characters unto themselves, acting on and in concert with the heroes to heighten the drama and fun of the sequence.

The first consideration when staging is the use of *location*: where the adventure, scene, or sequence takes place. It's easy, for example, to drop your mastermind's headquarters into a tall office building in the center of Paris, but it's not very exciting. You can add cinematic "weight" to your game by choosing out of the ordinary locations or giving them unknown qualities. Move the aforementioned headquarters to a fourteenth century Norman castle, or a chalet in the French Alps, or a bunker nestled in the Parisian catacombs. Less realistic? Probably. More intriguing and challenging? You bet!

Another strategy for setting good cinematic scenes is planning scenes. Key sequences can and should provide excellent opportunities for classic “movie moments” where the characters take heroic chances. In turn, these scenes should also reward players who step up. This isn’t merely about saving the day; it’s about the details and enjoying the ride. Consider the mine cart chase from *Indiana Jones and the Temple of Doom* or the lightsaber duel in the carbon freezing chamber from *Empire Strikes Back*. In both cases the stakes were sky high, but more importantly the audiences of both scenes were riveted. With every tilt of the mine cart, Indy had the chance to dramatically change the course of the scene, just as Luke’s acrobatics led his fight from platform to platform (and even up cabling at one point).



The action was causal and easily grasped. The audiences were invested not only in the ultimate outcome but also in many smaller moments along the way. When Vader knocks Luke into the freezing chamber and the fight almost ends with the hero’s capture, there’s a moment of tension. When the young Jedi uses a severed cooling tube to distract his nemesis long enough to regain his weapon, people cheer. The action is just complicated enough to keep the viewers’ attention and draw them in, but not so overwhelming or esoteric that anyone gets lost in the shuffle.


In an RPG, the audience consists of everyone playing: the Game Control and every player. It’s important that RPG action sequences involve lots of lots of minor challenges and obstacles for the characters to overcome, but it’s just as important that the GC have fun building and introducing them. After all, a bored or uninspired storyteller can kill a cinematic game’s rhythm just as quickly as inattentive or uninvolved characters. This is where the information the GC gathered during the earlier phases of the process comes powerfully into play. Knowledge that everyone’s interested in lighthearted PG-13 shenanigans with a light glaze of humour tells the Game Control that a fanciful romp through 1920s London aboard an out-of-control double-decker bus is probably more appropriate than a grisly manhunt through the darkest Indian jungles. It also tells him that everyone’s going to have more fun fighting Dr. Zemo’s Puzzlemen and saving the bus’ passengers than constantly defending their dwindling numbers against bloodthirsty Thuggee invaders.

Once these first assumptions are made, the rest of the scene practically writes itself. The out-of-control bus careens across a bridge, requiring one of the characters to make a dash for the wheel before it launches over the side. The mesmeric goggles are a constant threat, keeping the characters’ eyes averted from the fight and

worse, hypnotizing the passengers so they can leap in front of the team’s attacks, or even off the bus. Oh, and did we mention that London’s blanketed by the worst storm in a hundred years just now? Or that Dr. Zemo’s brainwashed the local constabulary into believing the characters are foreign spies? Oh yes, things are shaping up nicely...

Clearly, scene planning is more about the journey than the destination, and it’s often about the subtext of the situation as much or more than the surface stuff. Let’s take another look at the carbon freezing room duel. Sure, it looks like combat, and it should probably be run like one – for a start. Fueling the physical battle, though, is Lord Vader’s attempt to sway Luke to the Dark Side. It’s this kind of character conflict that allows for the most critical component of successful scenes: drama. *Spycraft 2.0* has ready-made rules for just these occasions. They’re called Dramatic Conflicts and they let characters clash in a wide variety of non-combat ways. Chases, hacking, brainwashing sessions, interrogations, manhunts, and more: basically any activity that would keep the GC occupied with only one or two players for a good deal of time in any traditional RPG, or any lengthy or convoluted process that is best handled in broad strokes is ideal.

The system is simple. The action’s broken down into rounds that vary in length according to the activity (manhunts, for example, taking longer than hacking), and each side chooses a strategy during each round. These strategies are printed on cards in the main book, so the process is as easy as placing a card on the table at the start of each round. There’s a single opposed skill check that’s influenced by these strategies and the winner of the check gets to choose from a set of advantages that influence the rest of the conflict. The strategies and advantages all suggest flavor, but the details are left up to the GC and players to define. This



makes Dramatic Conflicts the perfect vehicle for all sorts of scenes. The Indiana Jones mine cart sequence, for instance, is a chase, with all the obstacles and little challenges influencing the proceedings and keeping Indy busy with what little time the conflict allows him during each round. The Jedi duel, though, that's an even better example. One of the Conflicts in the *Spycraft 2.0 Rulebook* is seduction, which can be used for more than just sexual pursuit. The GC could easily rule that Luke and Vader each choose a seduction strategy before each round of the physical combat, with the opposed skill check being resolved after the round's fighting. Suddenly the combat becomes an epic, multi-layered struggle that operates on as many levels mechanically as it does thematically. This is the essence of strong cinematic roleplaying, and exactly the kind of utility *Spycraft 2.0* is designed to bring to the table.

THE PLAY'S THE THING!

The most important thing about any game is using it, and all the planning in the world can't make a poorly run game fun. As a GC running a cinematic game, it's critical to be prepared for *anything*. After all, you're *asking* the players to challenge the expected, to come up with new and exciting ways to accomplish things, all in the name of fun. *Spycraft* in particular encourages this kind of mayhem and much of its crunch is angled toward giving the GC answers when he wants them. Not when he needs them, because he'll always need them, but when he wants them. The toolbox is there and one of the friendliest and most reliable communities in gaming is available on the Crafty Games website forums, but in the thick of things at the table, the GC needs to be ready to make calls on his own. Here's a few starter tips every cinematic Game Control should remember, with a healthy dose of *Spycraft* injected for good measure.

Promote your stars: Everybody in Hollywood wants to be a star, and the same goes for players. Nowhere is feeling like a star more important than in a cinematic game, because so much of the story's success relies upon the players' involvement and the excitement everyone brings to the table. Never mistake the players as cast – they do a lot more than read lines. Most stars in Hollywood would kill to have the players' power because your stars get to write their own parts!

Make sure every character gets "screen time" – moments where he has the chance to shine. If you're comfortable enough with the system, you can plan for these by tailoring them to each character's exclusive skills and abilities, but just making sure each character contributes to the story or the mission's success, or does something cool, or just gets his favorite one-liner off is plenty. Incidentally, these are also excellent chances for you to hand out action dice, rewarding the characters' efforts with a little mechanical perk and some XP, and replenishing your reserve at the same time.

Your pitch probably revealed a number of ways the players want to shine, so use that information. The player whose character is intentionally built to solve mysteries is looking to do just that. Devise some minor brainteasers for him to crack as part of the mission, or borrow some from your favorite movies and books (make sure he hasn't seen them, of course!). The vehicle specialist wants to show off his skills, so build a chase or vehicular combat into the mission. Fluid integration is key here; just including a random sequence to satisfy a lone player is likely to irk everyone and leave the player unsatisfied. These two characters could easily generate the 1920s London sequence we discussed earlier. The vehicle specialist is the best man to keep the bus on the road and give everyone else the chance to beat Zemo and his Puzzlemen. Meanwhile, the Game Control might

write up a half dozen clues to beating Zemo's hypnotic power that the villain arrogantly lords over the team as riddles.

Even shy and ill-equipped characters can shine. *Spycraft 2.0* encourages lots of team play, allowing these characters to move the story forward with various team-oriented actions, skill checks, and abilities. In these cases, again, describing the action is again paramount, and extra attention needs to be paid to the characters whose stardom is not already established. A wilderness-oriented Scout, for instance, could easily find himself out of sorts in the London scene – until the GC has three of the Puzzlemen abscond with a scientist's beautiful daughter (the reason Zemo attacked the bus) and leap into the passing park. Suddenly the Scout's on his native terrain, and those minions are in trouble.

Just in case none of this works and you still have a player or two out in the cold, *Spycraft* has one more trick up its sleeve: Subplots. These are personal missions and goals that quietly run in the background until you or the player decide it's time for them to intersect the main story. They give your players something all their own, explore aspects of the characters' backgrounds and the setting that might otherwise go unnoticed, and reward players who, again, step up. Subplots have a lot of range. The characters can find themselves in debt, obliged to someone, driven by their ideals, hunted by a nemesis, wanted by the authorities (or someone else), and more. Any of these plots is a stellar way to strengthen a character's star power, or just spice up a dragging game.

Reward flair: Action films demand men and women of action, characters who aren't afraid to perform brave and occasionally gonzo acts of heroism. These noble icons leap from roof to roof, infiltrate heavily guarded

compounds, face down Big Bads in Mexican standoffs, and risk life and limb with many other ballsy, death-defying maneuvers, partly to save the day, but again, partly because they're fun. Unfortunately, players often find "needless" actions too risky, and sacrifice exciting style for safe success. Right from the outset, every cinematic Game Control needs to challenge this notion. Happily, *Spycraft* offers a variety of ways to accomplish this, and there are a couple cinematic RPG fundamentals that you can apply as well.

First, action dice are an excellent way to encourage appropriate star quality play. They make PCs the heroes they are, allowing them to go to lengths and take chances NPCs and other non-heroic characters would be insane to try. Players can spend them to activate some of the most powerful abilities in the game and boost checks of most kinds. The GC is encouraged to reward "good play" with more dice and he's left to define this largely per the needs of his particular group. One of the strongest approaches is to use them as a reward for taking the very chances they help to make possible.

The GC can also offer discretionary modifiers to characters whose actions support the game's flavor, or simply allow the characters to succeed when their skill ranks equal or exceed the Threat Level. This latter option is also a great way to avoid losing momentum when the tempo's high.

Rewarding bravado sends a clear message to the players that it's not only cool to take chances, but worthwhile, and can profoundly alter the long-term flavor of any game. Of course, it's only half the equation; the GC also needs to scale back penalties for taking chances in the name of cinematic magic. This doesn't mean the character should run rampant every time they act crazy. Rather, it's best handled with a simple promise to the players that the game will ultimately be fair, and that

every allowance will be afforded the bold. Characters who fail will lose some ground, but rarely will they find themselves back at square one.

For example, let's assume the Scout who chased Zemo's minions into that London park failed his Will save against their goggle (gadget) ability. The GC could rule that the Scout's mesmerized, effectively helpless against three enemies who could then kill him and make off with the girl, but that's no fun. Perhaps instead the Scout manages to cover his eyes just in time, but in the process exposes a bystander behind him to the glare. The Puzzlemen order the bystander to attack, giving them time to flee. A short time later, after the Scout's managed to trick the bystander into a police box and

used a sash to tie off the door, he pursues the minions but fails his Speed Push check. Again, the GC could have the minions win, escaping into the night, but the Scout's acted like a hero and deserves better. Instead, the GC has the minions reach the opposite side of a busy intersection and use their goggles to seize control of a couple passing drivers. It's more for the Scout to worry about but he's still got a chance □ and being a hero and a star, that's all he needs.

Raise the stakes: Tension is a great tool for drawing an audience into a story, and one of the best tools for creating tension is drama. In cinema, what the heroes do *matters*, not only to the plot of the story but also to the world at large. Whether they're saving the planet from



mind-enslaving robots, recovering nuclear weapons from a rogue operative, or neutralizing a madman wielding a world-cleaving laser, it's important, and the GC should strive to convey that.

Like a well-plotted movie, a good cinematic game ensures the characters' actions are significant and valuable. More than knowing there's something at stake, the players should *feel* that there is. Once again, this can happen mechanically or thematically. Using the *Spycraft* system, you can introduce time limits, which may preclude many actions and abilities, forcing the players to think outside the box. You can upgrade scenes to "dramatic" status, hedging the odds in the villains' favor for a short time. You can introduce conflicting objectives and unexpected events like dangerous weather, widespread violence, and equipment failures. You can even spring new campaign qualities on the players for part of a mission, changing the rules for a scene or two. All of these options are covered in detail in the Game Control chapter, along with relevant rewards the characters gain for facing them.

Story-wise, there are even more ways to mount tension. Start a scene or even the mission *in media res*. This thrusts the players directly into the action and probably limits their gear options as well. Make the action personal, with the villains taking the characters' friends hostage, or make it global, with the fate of the whole world in the players' hands. This is another place where the system can support you – Subplots are the perfect way to personally invest the characters in the ongoing plot.

Employ your license to improvise: Action movies are rarely straightforward affairs. They keep the audience and often the characters guessing all the way to the bitter end. The masked villain's identity, the secret plot threatening the world, the heroes' out when all seems lost... It's all fodder for the strategically shifting and

unfolding plot. Emulating this with a cinematic game requires a little planning, or some strong improvisational skills. RPG plot twists can easily go awry if the Game Control isn't careful to keep them plausible and internally consistent. (In the latter case, the opposite isn't as important; indeed, keeping the players in the dark can be rewarding, so long as the answers come eventually.) Fortunately, *Spycraft* offers you plenty of ways fluidly shake things up using the basic system.

Action dice aren't just for the players. The GC has his own pool as well, and it's replenished every time he rewards the players' actions. These dice can be used for more than just boosting NPC check results and activating their critical successes. They can alter DCs, introduce surprise events, and even upgrade cool NPCs you'd like to keep around for a while.

Even better, action dice can activate dramatic scenes on the fly and to add campaign qualities to scale the game up or down to match the vibe at the table. Players getting crushed by that new nasty NPC you just built? Consider activating the *bulletproof* or *cakewalk* qualities to put the brakes on the opposition. The team casually blowing through your carefully planned challenges? Trigger the *thriller* or *gritty* qualities to keep things interesting.

Imagine a filmmaker having that extra bit of creative control over his production. Action dice give GCs just that. They're your way to change the pulse of the table, keep the PCs on their toes, and turn your group's routine on its ear. They can save a team in trouble or amp up a

slow session. They add that extra polish to your games and give you the chance to make them memorable for years to come.

CUT!

Cinematic games are tricky, but with the right game, the right players, and the right attitude, they can be among the most satisfying and enjoyable RPGs out there. They capture all the stuff we love about movies, letting us take charge of our big budget fantasies with dice and minis. Better yet, they let us improve on the model, bringing all the power of our collective imaginations to bear in a no-holds-barred minds' eye blockbuster. The keys, again, are flexibility and creativity, both of which are cornerstones of *Spycraft*'s multi-genre rules. So the next time you find yourself in the director's chair, or even a player in a fledgling production, consider the cinematic d20 alternative, and test out *your* license to improvise.



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