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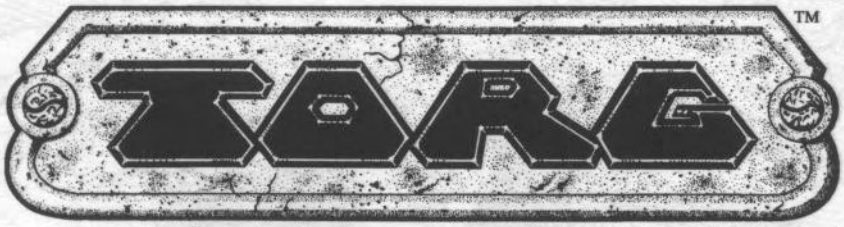
INFINIVERSE™

CAMPAIGN GAME UPDATE

VOLUME III



Roleplaying the Possibility Wars™

INFINIVERSE™

CAMPAIGN GAME UPDATE

VOLUME III

By John Terra

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Introduction

A storm of great intensity flashed and roared around Illmound Keep as, within the edifice's walls, a most unique meeting dragged into its fourth hour.

"... and, furthermore, I know not why I have deigned to meet with this most unholy congregation!" Cyberpope Jean Malraux thundered, his cybernetic enhancements flashing as if with rage.

The thin, skeletal figure of the Gaunt Man sat at the head of the table, that worthy nodding his head quietly at the Cyberpope's tirade. His crimson eyes cast a sweeping glance at the rest of the assembly.

Seated to the Gaunt Man's left was the dark figure of Dr. Mobius, features obscured by his hood. Next to the Pharaoh was Jezrael, the beautiful cybernetically-enhanced woman who ruled Tharkold. Beside her was the Warrior of the Dark, she who ruled Aysle, ebon armor gleaming in the candlelight. Malraux sat next to her, followed by Ryuchi Kanawa, otherwise known as 3327, High Lord of NipponTech.

The vine-covered chair of Baruk Kaah, located to the Gaunt Man's right, was conspicuously empty.

"And does anyone else have any objections to this meeting?" the Gaunt Man asked softly, a hint of menace underlying his words. "After all, we have never all gathered in one place at the same time. Perhaps it was necessary to do so."

"Well, if we are going to end, let us end soon," the voice of Dr. Mobius rose up from the folds of his hood. "I am due to battle Major Havoc atop the Great Pyramid of Cheops at midnight, Cairo time."

Jezrael looked at the Nile High Lord with a mixture of amazement and contempt. "Madness," she declared in a cold voice. "To let your enemies live to fight another day."

"You're just upset about Berlin," Mobius scoffed.

"Indeed, the heathen High Lord has begun expanding where he has no right to be," Malraux said through clenched teeth.

"Look, your Unholiness, if you can't take the land, someone else will," Mobius replied smugly.

"I am surrounded by enemies!" Malraux shouted, casting hateful glances at Mobius, Jezrael, and the Warrior of the Dark. "I thought that we were supposed to be allies in a great cause!"

Kanawa, his face impassive, nodded and looked over at the Gaunt Man, who was clearly enjoying the heated exchange. "Indeed, Salisbury. You recruited us several years ago to help you take this world. What *has* happened to our alliance?"

The Gaunt Man twirled his cane absently. "What has happened?" he echoed, sarcastically. "Truly, Kanawa, you do not know? No sooner do I undergo a minor ... inconvenience with that eternity shard, necessitating my absence, when the rest of you fall upon each other like ravenous dogs, fighting for the best cuts of meat this world has to offer."

The Gaunt Man rose to his full height, his countenance reminding the others why he was the lord of terror. "Look at all that has occurred. Uthorion: gone. Baruk Kaah: gone. Reversals, infighting. Why, the one High Lord who can claim any great measure of success is Dr. Mobius, one who many of you call mad, his ways incomprehensible to you!"

Mobius inclined his head modestly, but couldn't resist adding, "Brilliant tactics yield brilliant results."

"Where is Uthorion now?" the Warrior of the Dark asked, frowning.

The Gaunt Man merely smiled.

"And where is Baruk Kaah?" Jezrael added.

The Gaunt Man smiled again.

"Why are we here, Salisbury?" Kanawa repeated. "Is there a reason? Or did you just bring us here to see us argue amongst ourselves?"

The Gaunt Man spoke sharply. "If you do not know why I summoned you here, then you are dimmer than I feared, all of you."

"This is a waste of time," Jezrael snapped as she stood up and summoned a dimthread. "I have a cosm to conquer."

"As do I," Malraux added, conjuring up his own dimthread. "I grow weary of consorting with such heathen."

Each High Lord conjured up his or her respective dimthread and prepared to leave. The Gaunt Man shook his head in mock sadness. "Then I suppose all that that remains to be said is farewell to you all. I regret we could not repair the damage to our alliance."

"What do you mean, 'farewell'?" the Warrior of the Dark asked, eyes narrowed in suspicion.

The Gaunt Man yawned and shrugged. "Leave me, all of you. This meeting is adjourned." He flashed each of them the wide, toothy grin of a predator.

Looks of uncertainty flickered across all the High Lords' faces save Mobius', whose features were still obscured by his hood. One by one, the High Lords disappeared, until only the Gaunt Man remained in the council chamber.

"What do you think?" the Gaunt Man asked aloud.

They are afraid, the voice of Heketon, the Orrorshan Darkness Device, replied. *Your use of the word farewell was a nice touch; it added just the right element of uncertainty.*

"Those fools. With the possible exception of Mobius, they have allowed circumstances to overwhelm them. They have lost all semblance of strategy and cooperation."

But that is better for you, is it not?

"You and I have our roles to play, Heketon," the Gaunt Man replied. "The divisiveness of the other High Lords will make our individual tasks that much easier."

In that case, we had best begin. There are preparations to be made, maelstrom bridges to be repaired, and stormers to manipulate.

The Gaunt Man nodded, striding from the council room, his mind whirling with the plans he had for the other High Lords ... and the Nameless One, as well, before all was said and done.

It's The State Of The World As We Know It

Welcome to *Infiniverse Update Volume III*, which gives the latest information on the state of the realms, including events that came about as a result of responses received from *Infiniverse* subscribers.

Included in this volume are updates on the original six realms (Aysle, Cyberpapacy, Living Land, Nile Empire, Nippon Tech, and Orrorsh), as well as Core Earth, the realm of Tharkold, and the areas of the Space Gods and the Land Below/Above. Also included are two new mini-adventures.

Finally, all realm chapters include updated maps of stelae boundaries and Akashan reality trees.

The *Infiniverse* Newsletter

Infiniverse is a 16 page interactive newsletter published bi-monthly by West End Games. An exciting new concept in gaming, the *Infiniverse* allows *Torg* players throughout the world to affect the outcome of the official campaign through the results of their adventures, dispatch results, and rumors.

Every issue of *Infiniverse* (and most published adventures) comes with a response form, which allows subscribers to send in the results of dispatches (short adventures) they have played, as well as to confirm or deny rumors published in the newsletter. These results are then tabulated at West End and used to plan the future of the Possibility Wars. Subscribers who reply to the dispatches within two months of their publication receive a personalized response form detailing what happened as a result of their adventure.

Infiniverse results have prompted new realms to come to Earth, old ones to suffer serious setbacks, and stelae to be planted or uprooted. In essence, you, the players, help decide the direction of the war. Consider this work to be the fruits of your labor, the events herein to be the results of your actions. Now, turn the page, and see what you and your fellow Storm Knights everywhere have wrought!

How To Subscribe

Just because we're on our third update doesn't mean it's too late to join in the fun. There's still a lot going on, and the more results we get, the better! Besides, nothing beats the satisfaction of seeing an event happen in the cosmverse that takes place because you and your group of Storm Knights made it happen.

If you would like to start receiving the *Infiniverse* and having a real impact on the cosmverse of *Torg*, send a check or money order for $25 (12 issues, one every other month) to:

Infiniverse Subscription
West End Games
RR 3, Box 2345
Honesdale, PA 18431

This Volume

In this book, you will find updates on all the *Torg* realms, along with new source material to delight, distract, and destroy your campaign's Storm Knights. This book is a companion to *Torg: Roleplaying the Possibility Wars*, and you will need the boxed set to play the mini-adventures contained herein.

CHAPTER ONE

Aysle™

Toagr, chief of the tribe of the Grey Wolf, sat in his lodge and pondered the future. His sharp ears heard a stirring, a cry, and then the young men charged with guarding his door came tumbling through it. Then they lay still, unconscious. They were followed a moment later by another body, that of one of the perimeter sentries, also unconscious.

As Toagr rose and unsheathed his sword, a beautiful woman in leather armor, adorned with symbols of the Grey Wolf clan, strode proudly into the lodge, hands on her hips.

The chief relaxed, though his face was creased in a frown of disapproval. "Kayla, my daughter."

The barbarian woman pointed to the sleeping sentry. "This one challenged me at our tribe's borders and forbade me entrance. The other two were outside your door, trying to prevent a daughter from seeing her father. They were fortunate I was feeling merciful, else I might not have been content to use the flat of my blade on their worthless hides."

"You were a fool to come here," Toagr declared flatly, making no move to embrace his daughter. "You should have stayed with those stormers you run with."

"They are my friends, father," Kayla snarled. "And we fight the Warrior of the Dark."

Toagr gave a short, bitter laugh. "And a fine job you have done, too! She has only conquered all of this Brit-Ton, save Lon-Doon and the Ford of the Ox, where the Armies of the Light still hold sway. Most of the realm lies in Darkness. Dragons now guard the borders, making it impossible for any to enter or leave this conquered island."

"*Almost* impossible," Kayla corrected. "But what of our tribe? Who do they fight for?"

The chief shook his head. "Though we fight for the Warrior, for the last few moons, we have stayed in our settlement, building our village, reinforcing our gains. Besides a few skirmishes, we have seen little of the war. But the Warrior has called us to arms again; she is expanding into the great wintry land of Ra-Sha, and there is word that Tolwyn Tancred has won in Aysle, and now comes here to liberate this land. There is even talk of Brit-Ton's long dead king coming to life again to fight. Our tribe sharpens its swords once again for war."

Kayla frowned. "So, we fight on opposite sides, father? So be it. I will bring this news to my comrades."

As Kayla turned to leave, Toagr made a move to stop her. Kayla scowled. "Do not try it, father. I do not want to be known as a kinslayer. My blade is as sharp as ever it was, and I have acquired something else besides."

Toag stepped back, amazed. He had not noticed it before, but he did now: his daughter radiated honor, an aura of nobility shone about her.

Kayla nodded. "Aye, father, I am a servant of the Light in every way. Only that has stopped me from slaying my tribe-kin ... and you."

Toag stood rooted to the spot, speechless. Before Kayla departed, she bored into him with her steel-blue eyes. "Father, the war for the hearts and minds of the Ayslish is about to begin in earnest. We shall rid this land of the Dark, even if we have to rip it out of each denizen, one at a time. Bring our people to the Light, father, or be prepared to see them all die."

Kayla was gone before the echo of her last word had died. Somewhere in the distance, thunder heralded a coming storm. And for the first time in his life, a very shaken barbarian chief feared the future.

State Of the Realm

Currently, all of the United Kingdom that is in the realm of Aysle is under the sway of the Dark, with the exception of the area where Oxford lies. The darkness even extends across the North Sea and into Scandinavia. For all intents and purposes, the Warrior of the Dark has unquestioned control of the entire realm.

Aysle's eastern borders now extend into northwestern Russia, including the city of Smolensk. Only one more stelae need be planted for Moscow itself to come under Ayslish sway. Since this new invasion commenced, rumors have been springing up of creatures resembling those in Russian folklore coming into being.

The raiding Corsairs in the Mediterranean have found a sympathetic port: the island of Malta. This rocky isle, dotted with ancient fortresses and rich with the history of its own Order of Knighthood, is naturally sympathetic to this reality of knights, swords, dragons, and the like. Considering the Maltese dislike of the Nile Empire to the south and the Cyberpapacy to the north, there is even speculation that the citizens would be willing to see an Ayslish reality tree planted here in the not too distant future.

With the departure of Ardinay (see below) from the political scene, the British Parliament has granted full civil rights to the half-folk. As a result of this shrewd move, the ranks of the Armies of the Light have swelled with new half-folk recruits, and this has helped to check the Dark's siege of Oxford.

Bonds of Evil

Emissaries from the Warrior of the Dark have been reported in the realm of Tharkold, apparently trying to further cement the alliance between Jezrael and their mistress. Already, the Warrior has allowed Tharkoldu to encode Ayslish spells on SpellChips. The shape of a further deal would be that the Tharkoldu would provide aid against the Cyberpapacy in exchange for more magical knowledge.

In the meantime, the Warrior continues to put pressure on Malraux. Cyberpapal witches being persecuted by Malraux are finding a sympathetic friend in the Warrior. She has been sending powerful lieutenants into the Cyberpapacy to meet with covens and educate them further in the ways of magic.

The Warrior is growing increasingly concerned with the Gaunt Man's behavior, particularly his audacity in kidnapping Ardinay. His interference in Ayslish affairs has her convinced that he intends to make use of Ayslish Corruption for his own ends, possibly to give it more of an Orrorshan flavor. She expects him to make a more aggressive foray into Aysle soon — little does she know that a transformed Ardinay was originally intended to be that foray!

Double, Double ...

The Warrior of the Dark's origins have long been a mystery, and the subject of much speculation among both her allies and her enemies. It has often been whispered among her lieutenants that she bears a striking resemblance to Ardinay's right hand, Tolwyn of Tancred. (Whispered, because to speak this aloud is to invite death at the hands of the Warrior.)

As is so often the case, the truth is stranger than the myths that have grown up around her. Early in the war, Storm Knights in the company of Tolwyn challenged an Orrorshan doppelganger who had been masquerading as the Lady of House Tancred (see "The Fall of a Storm Knight," *Queenswrath*). The creature was defeated, but in the chaos that followed the battle, some of its flesh was stolen away by servants of a Dark sorcerer, Salbane. He used the skin as a component in a spell to create a double of Tolwyn, now of Ayslish reality, and trained her in the ways of the Dark.

It is possible that Salbane hoped to succeed where the Orrorshans failed, and substitute his own creature for Tolwyn. What he did not realize was that he had made her better than he knew and she harbored her own ambitions. Contacted by Drakacanus, the Warrior readily accepted the condition that she slay Salbane to prove herself worthy of being High Lord.

Now free of the only person who knew her origin, the Warrior looks forward to the day she will meet Tolwyn in a final battle.

A Queen Corrupted

Recently, a wave of kidnappings occurred in various realms, all masterminded by the Gaunt Man himself. Among the targets were Ellen Connors, former director of the now defunct Delphi Council; Sarila, Akashan biotechnician; Natatiri, Nile overgovernor; and Pella Ardinay, Lady of the Houses of Aysle.

As always, there was method in the Gaunt Man's madness. He had learned that one of these four women harbored a dark power that linked her to the Nameless One. The Gaunt Man was convinced that if he could unleash this power, he would have a powerful servant well-versed in the ways of destruction at his command.

Storm Knight intervention saved some of his victims, but an occult ritual ensured that Ardinay fell into his skeletal hands. The Gaunt Man chained her in his laboratory and began a ritual to free her dark side. Midway through the spell, however, the Gaunt Man suddenly lost control of it. Some outside force had seized mastery of the ritual!

Ardinay writhed in the grip of occult energies more powerful than any ever unleashed on this plane. Before the horrified eyes of the Gaunt Man and a party of Storm Knights, she began to transform as the foundations of Illmound Keep shook from the strain.

Before anyone could act, Ardinay, newfound power blazing in her eyes, shattered her chains and rose into the air.

"You have been manipulated from the start, High Lord," Ardinay shouted at the Gaunt Man. "The Nameless One required you to pour some of your occult power into this vessel to prime it for transcendence. Once that had been done, his own energies completed the transformation. I am everything you were and far, far more!"

With that, she lifted her slim, white arms to the heavens and bolts of lightning flew from her fingers, blasting a hole in the roof of Illmound. Then she rose through the gap and vanished into the night sky.

The Implications

The Nameless One's intervention in this affair crystallized what many *Torg* fans have long suspected — that entity is far more involved in the Possibility Wars than any of the High Lords suspected, and he is growing impatient ... and hungry.

The revelations about Ardinay allow us to take a look back at some previously inexplicable events and see the Nameless One's hand at work. Specifically:

• The Gaunt Man's choice of Uthorion to become a High Lord, despite his obvious unsuitability for the position;

• Uthorion's decision to possess Ardinay during his initial invasion rather than simply slay her outright.

Put simply, the Nameless One desired a servant on Earth who understood both good and evil, something the Gaunt Man could not truly claim to be able to do. By tainting Ardinay's body with Uthorion's evil, the Nameless One banked on the possibility that eventually her spirit would return to its shell and she would find herself divided between good and evil. A perfect tool ...

Once this happened, it remained only for the Gaunt Man to be prodded into believing that the "bride of Darkness" would be at roughly his power level or slightly below and a potential ally in his quest to become Torg. By seeking her out and unleashing her latent evil through an occult ritual, the Gaunt Man allowed Ardinay to ascend to her new role as demi-goddess of Darkness.

Ardinay Today

Ardinay is now something beyond human. Her mortal soul now shares her body with a portion of the Nameless One's essence. The woman who led the Houses of Aysle is no more — in her place is an entity of pure destruction, one that much more deadly because she truly understands how followers of the Light think and act.

Gamemasters can use Ardinay to keep their player characters from having too easy a time of it in adventures and from wandering off the map. As an avatar of the Nameless One, she will appear where her deity's interests are most threatened.

Ardinay
(Avatar of the Nameless One)
Reality: Aysle
DEXTERITY 16
Beast riding 21, dodge 22, flight 19, maneuver 21, melee weapons 20, missile weapons 21, prestidigitation 28, unarmed combat 20
STRENGTH 15
Climbing 18, lifting 18
TOUGHNESS 15
PERCEPTION 33
Alteration magic 48, divination magic 40, evidence analysis 43, find 44, first aid 47, language 45, scholar

(Ayslish lore) 42, scholar (the Nameless One), 36, trick 42

MIND 39

Apportation magic 55, artist (painter) 44, conjuration magic 53, medicine 41, survival 43, test 52, willpower 52

CHARISMA 32

Charm 45, persuasion 43, taunt 36

SPIRIT 50

Faith (the Nameless One) 51, corruption 60, intimidation 51, reality 65

Possibilities: 500

Arcane Knowledges: Pella Ardinay has all arcane knowledges at 10 adds, and knowledge of all Aylish spells.

Equipment: elfmail, armor value TOU+6/21; elf longsword, damage value STR+8/23

The Warrior of the Dark fully expects Ardinay's transformation to completely dispirit the Light's defenders in the realm. Still, the presence of so powerful an entity who can appear anywhere at any time has the High Lord nervous enough to demand wards be placed upon her fortress to warn her of Ardinay's approach.

The Triumph of Tolwyn

After many hard-fought battles and much bloodshed, Tolwyn of Tancred has led the Army of Light to victory in the cosm's civil war, and dispatched her treacherous brother, Gareth the Usurper.

As it should have been, it was Tolwyn's own blade that slew her brother. With his death and the subsequent defeat of his main army, the Dark fell apart as swiftly as the news could spread.

But Tolwyn could not take the time to enjoy her victory. Knowing from her agents that the realm was imperiled, she left control of House Tancred in the hands of her cousin, Rhean, and journeyed to Earth. (Rhean, a paladin of Dunad, has made it clear that she will step down upon Tolwyn's return to the cosm.)

Dark influence now rests within House Daleron, once the most powerful ally of Gareth Tancred. Frederick Daleron, current head of the House in the cosm, has thrown his complete support behind the Warrior of the Dark in return for her aid in harassing Houses Tancred and Gerrik. The Warrior, however, is prepared to offer only nominal support, as her focus is the war on Earth.

When Tolwyn returned to Oxford, she found it a shambles. In her absence, the Army of the Light had crumbled and the Home Guard become an ineffectual joke. Most of the realm had gone Dark, and the news of Ardinay's corruption hit the sword maiden particularly hard.

Tolwyn's first orders of business are:

1. Issue a summons for Storm Knights to come to Aysle to aid in breaking the siege of Oxford;

2. Once #1 has been achieved, the Knights will be sent out to disrupt supply lines and commit other acts of sabotage against the Dark armies;

3. Reorganize and retrain the Home Guard and the Army of the Light, and prepare for a counteroffensive into northern England.

Tolwyn has now become the *de facto* head of the Aysle realm, in the eyes of those defending the planet from the Possibility Raiders. Though she chafes under this burden, as she would much rather be swinging a sword in the front lines, Tolwyn recognizes what is expected of her and is ready to serve until the war is won.

By itself, Tolwyn's return has served to restore hope in the people of Aysle. Many are praying for a repeat of her glorious victory in the cosm, and already you can see the Light's defenders are fighting with renewed vigor.

England's Darkest Hour

With every part of Great Britain in the Ayslish realm firmly entrenched in the Darkness (with the exception of the Oxford zone), it can be argued that England is in the worst situation in its long, turbulent history. Many Arthurian scholars believe that the conditions are right for the reappearance of the "Once and Future King," King Arthur, who, it is said by some, will return at the time of England's greatest need.

Groups of disenchanted Britons are congregating at places like Glastonbury Tor, Stonehenge and Winchester, all sites tied to Arthurian legend.

As yet, there has been no word of Arthur, and there may never be. Ardinay has used her newfound powers to seal off the pocket dimension of Avalon from the realm of Aysle. This means a returning Arthur will have to find another passage to Earth, and may emerge in a realm other than Aysle.

In a related note, word of an eternity shard that bears some importance in Arthurian legend has surfaced. Apparently, something very important lies in an old monastery in Scotland.

The Barbarian Wars

Many of the Ayslish barbarian tribes which came down the maelstrom bridges and fought for Uthorion have now settled in Britain and built villages. The existence of these communities has proven crucial to the continued existence of the tribes, especially as the spreading Darkness had caused food to become scarce in the realm.

A good number of the tribes have opted to drop out of the war, no longer certain that the Dark is worth fighting for and unwilling to follow a woman into battle. The Warrior of the Dark, of course, does not tolerate such behavior, and has sent hordes of Vikings to "make them change their minds." This has resulted in great clashes between the Vikings and certain barbarian tribes. Such battles are becoming commonplace and diverting resources from the Dark's war effort.

Helsinki Holdout

The Warrior of the Dark desperately desires the conquest of the city of Helsinki in Finland. She wants to use the city as a fortress/staging area for forays across the Baltic into Lithuania, Latvia, and Estonia, as well as into Poland.

In an effort to "soften up" the Finnish capital, the Warrior has sent Vikings, dwarves, and giants into the city to wreak havoc. What she is finding out the hard way, however, is that the Finnish are an extraordinarily tough people with a long history of spirited resistance against overwhelming odds.

Helsinki, however, is not populated by fools. They realize that they can only hold on for so long, so calls are being sent out to Storm Knights to come and help the beleaguered city. The Finns have also asked for military aid from Germany, Poland, Austria and the United States. (The Finns, having long memories, have not extended this invitation to the Russians, however.)

The Institute Arcana

In an effort to aid in the defense of Core Earth, a group of scholarly Ayslish have set up a mage academy in Berlin. Called the Institute Arcana, the college teaches the four magic skills and spell use to promising Core Earthers and those of other realms as well.

The entire "campus" is within the area of an Ayslish hardpoint. The college contains one of the most extensive collections of grimoires to be found in the world. There are even rumors that alchemy is being perfected there. Talk of universal solvents, lead being turned to gold, and elixirs which restore life, have been echoing from the Institute. Security is provided by Ayslish paladins and elven warriors.

The Institute is in for some rough times ahead, however. Kanawa has learned about the alchemical work and is not pleased with the idea of homemade gold flooding the commodities markets, especially since the High Lord of Marketplace has invested so heavily in the ownership of gold mines. Kanawa will send spies, preferably ninja, to disrupt the research, kill the budding alchemists, and bring back the notes in order for Kanawan scientists to ascertain exactly how far along the scientists have come in their attempts at elemental transmutation.

The Ensorcelled Curtain

It is no secret that the Warrior of the Dark intends to expand as far into the former Soviet Union as possible, focusing primarily on Russia and the Ukraine, then attempting a move westward into Poland and the Balkans.

The Ukraine and Russian states have allied themselves against this bizarre foe, and the governments are offering incentives of cash and weaponry to Storm Knights who are willing to come to the area to fight the forces of Aysle.

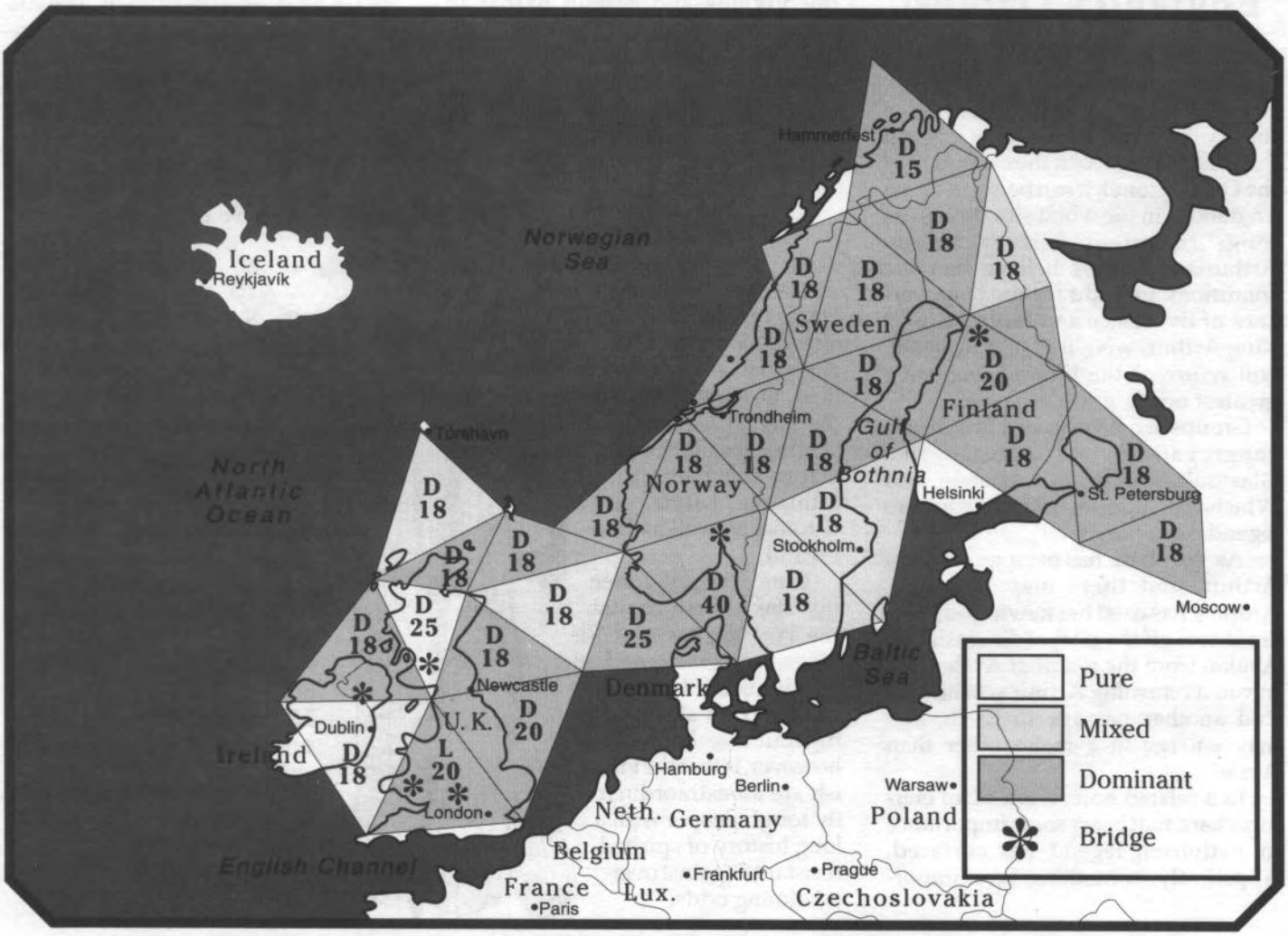
As a result of the axiom wash in Russia, bits of history and folklore are coming alive again. Reports of Cossacks and even witches are filtering in from dazed survivors of Ayslish encounters.

Cossacks

Reality: Aysle
DEXTERITY 9
Beast riding (horse) 12, dodge 11, melee combat 13, unarmed combat 12
STRENGTH 10
TOUGHNESS 11
PERCEPTION 9
Find 11, tracking 12, trick 11
MIND 9
Survival 12, test 11, willpower 12
CHARISMA 8
Taunt 12
SPIRIT 10
Intimidation 14
Additional Skills: three at +1 adds
Possibility Potential: some (25)
Equipment: sabre (STR+5/15), horse
Description: Expert horsemen and fierce warriors, there are said to be Cossacks on both sides of the war in Russia.

Gorynich

Reality: Aysle
DEXTERITY 16
Dodge 19, maneuver 17, unarmed combat 18
STRENGTH 17
TOUGHNESS 15 (22 with scales)
PERCEPTION 14
Alteration magic 17, find 16, tracking 15, trick 18
MIND 13
Conjuration 17, willpower 15
CHARISMA 9
Taunt 12
SPIRIT 14
Intimidation 19, reality 15
Possibilities: 20
Arcane Knowledges: *Darkness 5, entity 5, fire 3, folk 2, living forces 1, metal 1*
Natural Tools: Fire breath, damage value 25, range 50/100/250 (each head can breathe fire once every three rounds); claws, damage value STR+7/



24 (**Note**: Gorynich has seven clawed limbs, and can attack seven different opponents with no penalty); teeth, damage value STR+8/25 (Note: Gorynich has three heads, and can attack three different opponents with no penalty); scales, armor value TOU+7/22

Description: Gorynich is a huge lizard 13 meters long, with a snake-like body, seven clawed limbs, and three heads. Despite his huge bulk and great potential of causing damage, the lizard enjoys employing cunning and trickery on his victims. Gorynich enjoys feasting on human, elf, and dwarf flesh.

***The Pestle of Baba Yaga* (Eternity Shard)**

Cosm: Core Earth
Possibilities: 100
Tapping Difficulty: 15
Purpose: To facilitate spellcasters in casting magic spells in defense of Mother Russia.
Powers: Wielder gains +3 adds in the *entity* arcane knowledge while holding the shard. Reduces the backlash of all spells cast by -2.
Group Power: *Insight*
Restrictions: The wielder must either be within the borders of the old Soviet Union, or be of Russian descent. In either case, the wielder must be able to cast magic spells, even if only one.
Description: The pestle is an unremarkable battered wooden stick that has a wide blunt head at one end, and a tapered handle. It is one meter long. Close examination shows thin veins of red and blue running down the length of the wood. The pestle was used by Baba Yaga, the famous witch of Russian folklore, who would fly around in a huge mortar, using the pestle like a rower would use an oar.

Things to Come

The Warrior of the Dark is anxious to confront Tolwyn and destroy her once and for all. The Dark forces laying siege to Oxford will pull back for a while, still keeping the Oxford zone cut off from the rest of Britain, but ceasing any attacks … for now. The Warrior wants to reinforce her siege army. Expect a resumption of battle within the next few months.

Expansion will be aimed at Moscow, Kiev, and then into Poland and the Balkan nations. Some reality scholars believe that Moscow itself will probably wind up retaining Core Earth reality due to the preponderance of locations and items that symbolize Mother Russia.

CHAPTER TWO

Core Earth

Lorraine Snyder, press secretary to President Leland Nicklaus , walked across the courtyard and took the podium, looking out over the sea of media people. Her own nervousness had brought a sheen to sweat to her brow, and the hot Miami sun wasn't helping matters. Taking a deep breath, she steadied herself and decided that she couldn't delay the inevitable. It was time to dive right in.

"Okay, ladies and gentlemen, it's time we got this press conference off the ground. Things are kind of disorganized right now, which is why we're having this get-together outdoors. I only ask that you bear with me, and try to ask your questions in an orderly fashion." She gave them her best winning smile.

"Is the government planning on continuing operations in Miami for the foreseeable future?" one of the network reporters asked, holding his mike aloft.

"No, we're considering a number of alternatives," Snyder replied.

"How does the President feel about the loss of central Texas to the Nile Empire?"

Lorraine frowned impatiently, but kept her temper in check. "The President is naturally very disturbed and concerned about this invasion of US soil. The Secretary of Defense is currently consulting with President Nicklaus regarding possible responses to this criminal action.

"I can tell you that all Nile Empire assets in America have been frozen and their embassies have been shut down."

A striking woman in the front row raised her hand. "Ms. Snyder, Corey Jones, International Cable News. Is it true that the Delphi Council has been officially disbanded, and that former director Ellen Connors will be tried for war crimes?"

"I'm afraid I can't comment on any ongoing investigations," Snyder replied. "But the Delphi Council is in the process of being reorganized."

"Does that mean legislation pushed through by the Delphi Council will be repealed in the near future?"

"All I can say is that President Nicklaus hopes to work with Storm Knight groups in the future, rather than against them."

"What about the Spartans? What's going to happen to them?"

"The Spartans were hastily deputized individuals, many of whom we now know to have had criminal records. Their activities are currently under investigation by the Justice Department."

The next question was drowned by the roar of a four-by-four's engine as it careened into the courtyard, Secret Service bullets bouncing off the armored trailer. A speaker mounted on the cab screamed, "Long live the Spartans! Long live the Delphi Council! God bless America!"

The vehicle gunned straight the press conference crowd, and the media types screamed and parted like the Red Sea. All, that is, except for Corey Jones, who put her camera down, pulled out a .38, and squeezed off three rapid shots.

The slugs slammed into the windshield and the truck swerved wildly, smashing into a concrete barrier and overturning. The Secret Service swarmed over the truck, hauling the bloodied would-be assassins out of the cab.

Corey put the gun back in her bag and picked up her camera. Snyder was slowly emerging from behind her podium.

"So, Ms. Snyder," Corey said. "Care to add anything about just how successful the break-up of the Spartans has been?"

The State of the Union

(Excerpts from the State of the Union Address by President Leland Nicklaus from the Miami White House):

"Mr. Speaker, members of Congress, honored guests, my fellow Americans:

"Over the past four years, we have lived the stuff of nightmares. I do not need to tell you about the invasions of our soil by the Living Land, the Nile Empire, Nippon Tech, Tharkold and the Land Above. Nor do I need to relate the horrors, the hardships and the heartbreak suffered by countless Americans since this ordeal began.

"Much has changed since those chaotic opening days of what the media calls the 'Possibility Wars.' Tonight, I will not look back at where we have been, but rather forward, to where we are going.

"When I assumed this office one year ago, I — and this nation — were forced to confront some brutal truths. The trust of the American people had been abused, and invaders in the guise of trusted friends were allowed claim to Sacramento and the surrounding area. We have since learned that the true rulers of Japan are not Japanese at all, but are from some distant dimension.

"Fifty years ago, during a very different war, we made some serious errors of judgment regarding the treatment of Japanese-Americans. It is my hope, my plea, that history does not repeat itself. We cannot look at the color of any citizen's skin and declare him or her an enemy.

"In recent months, we have begun to see some return on the toil and sacrifice we have endured. I am proud to report that US troops are now routing the edeinos warriors from their defensive positions in what remains of the Living Land. In addition, I have authorized strikes against the so-called Land Above, which are commencing even as we speak.

"But not all the news can bring us hope. The Tharkoldu remain entrenched in Los Angeles, and our best intelligence places them in the Las Vegas area as well. The American people can rest assured that we are doing everything we can to counter this threat.

"Most disturbing of all, of course, is the assault upon Texas by the forces of Dr. Mobius. This is not the first time America has been challenged by a foreign dictator. We have never bowed our heads before a conqueror and we never will.

"One thing that has been proven true in recent years is that, without the contribution of the freedom fighting Storm Knights, circumstances would be very grave indeed. With this in mind, I have asked Congress to repeal any and all legislation restricting Storm Knight activities in the US. We will ask these brave individuals, of their own accord, to come forward and make themselves known to us, but we will not penalize them should they choose to remain anonymous.

"In addition, I have ordered the dissolution of the Delphi Council. Directives with their seal are to be ignored. Finally, I have stripped the paramilitary units known as Spartans of all authority.

"We have braved a fierce trial, my fellow Americans, and I fear much worse still lies ahead. But we a proud people and a strong people. We will endure, and, with God's help, we will reclaim our land, our world and our futures.

"Thank you, and God bless America."

The Taking of Texas

In a move calculated to shock, Dr. Mobius ordered a maelstrom bridge dropped on to Houston, TX, headquarters of the US government. The invasion caught America completely by surprise, with the forces of Super Battlegroup Mobius rapidly conquering Houston, Waco and Austin.

Ironically, Mobius was able to launch the attack so successfully thanks to intelligence gained by Wu Han during the time he was under Good inclination and working for the Delphi Council in Texas. It's believed that Wu Han used this information to buy his way back into Mobius' good graces.

Reaction from across the state has been swift and angry. Not since the Alamo have Texans been so roused to action, and hordes of volunteers are pouring in, forming militia groups in the name of the Texas Volunteer Army. Elements of the United States armed forces are trying their best to coordinate with these ragtag units.

The blow virtually destroyed the Delphi Council and severely crippled the US government as a whole. President Leland Nicklaus and other top officials were airlifted out of the state and rushed to Florida. Tragically, four Supreme Court justices were slain when the pilot of the helicopter in which they were flying disconnected. The craft went down like a stone and exploded on impact.

At present, Mobius continues to hold several Delphi Council members and Congressmen as hostages, but Nicklaus has stated emphatically that America will not make deals with a terrorist. Mobius' response was, "Fools! It's the Gaunt Man who spreads terror. I spread the living truth of the Pharaoh!"

Mobius himself traveled across the bridge to Texas for a brief visit. Once certain that all was in order, he turned his attention back to his efforts in Greece and the pull-out in Bosnia. It's possible that the attack on the US was no more than a feint to distract the other High Lords from some loftier goal.

The old battleship *Texas*, a veteran of both World Wars and now docked in the Houston Ship Channel, is a Core Earth hardpoint. As yet, the Nile troops seem unaware of this.

Super Battlegroup Mobius is currently under the command of Field Marshal Abu Ashwahn, who is now residing in the Houston White House. In addition to the battlegroup, a RoboSphinx Mark III and six zeppelins are stationed in the area.

Plans are currently being laid to relocate the US government from its temporary home in Miami, FL to Atlanta, GA.

The Fall of the Delphi Council

The Delphi Council, the governmental body charged by former President Jonathan Wells with the running of the war, had been under investigation since the election of Leland

L+H

Nicklaus. But the death blow came, both literally and figuratively, when Mobius invaded Houston. In the first few days, virtually all of Delphi's leaders and bureaucracy were killed or captured by Nile troops.

Of the top brass, only Council Director Ellen Connors survived, owing to the fact that she was outside of Houston at the time of the invasion. Shortly after the Nile assault, Connors was the target of a kidnapping attempt by creatures in the employ of the Gaunt Man. Though rescued by Storm Knights, she was badly injured and is still recovering.

When she is well enough to stand trial, she is expected to be indicted for, among other things, accessory to the murder of President Jonathan Wells; accessory to murders and assaults committed by Spartans in countless resistance communities; obstruction of justice and conspiracy regarding the attempt to frame former Congressman Andrew Decker for Wells' murder; and numerous civil rights violations.

There is, of course, some dissenting voices that claim that Connors is being made the scapegoat for decisions made by former President Quartermain. It's believed that the government feels a trial of Quartermain would be too painful for the country to bear at this point.

(Things have not been helped by the fact that Quartermain mysteriously disappeared before the startled eyes of his Secret Service contingent several weeks ago.)

Spartan units across the nation are being forcibly disbanded. Those Spartans that were originally part of Special Forces, FBI, CIA, NSA, or other military or espionage units are being sent back to their respective branches and reindoctrinated. Spartans recruited from the general public are being reviewed for their fitness to serve in other capacities. Those Spartans suspected of committing criminal acts against the populace are being investigated by the FBI and Justice Department prosecutors.

Unfortunately, not all of the Spartans have taken kindly to this. Some have taken their arms and ammo and taken to the hills. They believe the current Administration is too soft on the Possibility Raiders and is indirectly responsible for the invasion of Texas.

Team Omega

President Nicklaus, realizing that some sort of special force is needed in place of the Spartans, has authorized the formation of an elite force of men and women who were well-versed in the ways of reality.

Enter Jason Wellfleet, a young politician who was a Delphi Council mole within the State Department. Wellfleet stepped into the vacuum left by the destruction of the Delphi Council and proposed the formation of Team Omega. (Omega, being the last letter of the Greek alphabet, indicates that this force is "the last word in cross-reality fighting.")

The average Team Omegan is a former Special Forces, Green Beret, Navy SEAL, or CIA operative. Unlike the Spartans, which eventually started accepting anyone with a rifle, a Team Omegan has an air of complete professionalism. Only the best, the brightest, and the most stable people are allowed into the ranks. All Team Omegans are possibility-rated, and enhancements like psionics, cybernetics, and magic are allowed and even encouraged.

Team Omegans are well-equipped and organized in cells of five. They are charged with the mission of defending American interests at home and abroad, as a sort of Rapid Deployment Force.

Of course, Wellfleet has his own agenda. He wants to see the current Administration removed from office, the rebuilding of the Delphi Council, and his own fortunes increase. However, Wellfleet is willing to bide his time and instead project the image of a fresh-faced, idealistic young bureaucrat who loves his country and wants to serve it.

Standard Team Omega Agent

DEXTERITY 11

Beast riding 12, dodge 13, fire combat 15, lockpicking 14, maneuver 12, melee weapons 14, missile weapons 13, running 13, stealth 15, swimming 13, unarmed combat 14

STRENGTH 11

TOUGHNESS 10 (17 with armor)

PERCEPTION 10

Air vehicles 12, evidence analysis 12, find 13, first aid 14, land vehicles 13, language 11, tracking 14, trick 13, water vehicles 11

MIND 10

Computer science 12, survival 11, test 12, willpower 12

CHARISMA 9

Persuasion 11, taunt 11

SPIRIT 10

Intimidation 14, reality (Core Earth) 12

Additional Skills: three at +2

Possibility Potential: all

Equipment: Kevlar/Ceramic, armor value TOU+7/17, M16 rifle, damage value 20, ammo 10, range 3-40/250/400; .357 Desert Eagle, damage value 16, ammo 6, range 3-10/25/50; knife damage value STR+3/14; radio headset and microphone; IR goggles; first aid kit

Description: Team Omegans are professionals, not like the sometimes psychopathic Spartans. While it is true that some Omegans may be more zealous that others, they are more disciplined and organized. They are usually sent on missions such as rescue, search and destroy, sabotage, and covert operations.

Snake in the Grass

Nothing is more dangerous than a fanatic whose organization has collapsed around him. Such is the case with Randolph Chapman. Up until a few months ago, he was a Spartan who had dedicated his life to serving the Delphi Council. The death of his family at the hands of edeinos sparked in him a hatred for all non-Core Earthers, regardless of their declared loyalties.

When the Delphi Council collapsed, Chapman was convinced that it was betrayed by the Nicklaus administration. Now counting the government as an enemy, Chapman has embarked on a personal crusade to hunt down Storm Knights.

Randolph Chapman

DEXTERITY 12

Beast riding 14, dodge 15, energy weapons 16, fire combat 16, heavy weapons 13, lockpicking 14, maneuver 14, martial arts 14, melee weapons 15, missile weapons 13, running 13, stealth 14, swimming 14, unarmed combat 14

STRENGTH 11 (15 with right arm)
Climbing 12
TOUGHNESS 11 (18 with armor)
PERCEPTION 9
Air vehicles 11, cyberdeck operation 12, disguise 11, evidence analysis 12, find 14, first aid 10, land vehicles 11, language 10, scholar (realms lore — Living Land) 12, scholar (realms lore — NipponTech) 12, tracking 15, trick 14, water vehicles 10
MIND 9
Computer science 11, survival 14, test 14, willpower 14
CHARISMA 8
Persuasion 10, taunt 11
SPIRIT 11
Intimidation 15, reality (Core Earth) 14
Possibilities: 26
Cybernetics: NeuraCal, J-Jack, BelleScan eye, MB Blocker, Trigon Hercule Arm (right); CyberValue: 15
Equipment: Kevlar/Ceramic Armor, armor value TOU+7/18; Res-14 laser pistol, damage value 25, ammo 50, range 3-50/100/200; Uzi, damage value 17, ammo 11, range 3-15/40/100; .45 Colt Auto, damage value 16, ammo 7, range 3-10/15/40; MAS Grenade Launcher; bandolier with 12 Frag grenades, damage value 21, burst radius 0-3/8/15; modern compound bow, damage value STR+7/22; hunting knife, damage value STR+3/18; nylon rope; backpack; C-rations; first aid kit
Special: Randolph wields an eternity shard called the Sword of Vlad the Impaler. See the stats below:

Sword of Vlad the Impaler
Cosm: Core Earth
Possibilities: 40
Tapping Difficulty: 18
Purpose: To find and dispatch the most threatening enemies quickly
Powers: The sword adds a +12 damage bonus to the wielder's STR — thus in the hands of Randolph, the sword's base damage is 30 if he's using his cybernetic arm. In addition, the sword can detect possibility-rated beings in a 10 meter radius, automatically, at will.
Group Power: *Judgment*
Restrictions: The sword can detect possibility-rated beings six times a day.
Description: This is a jeweled scimitar with bloodstains that cannot be removed from the blade. It was used by Vlad the Impaler (the Count Dracula of legend), and drank the blood of many foes.

The War "Culture"

If there is one thing Americans are known for, it's their love of leisure time activities. America's entertainment industries have prospered during the war, as people need diversion now more than ever. Here are but a few examples of entertainment fads arising out of the war:

• In the wake of the popularity of the *Five Realms* game, a consortium of corporations have launched a line of Storm

Knight Action Figures, fully poseable 6" dolls of well-known Storm Knights and their adversaries. Figures include Tolwyn, Angus Cage, Major Havoc, Kayla the Barbarian, Daremo the Ninja (with realistic ninja action!), Dr. Zap (with switchable heads, to make him either a hero or a villain), Skippy the Edeinos, and Fred the Galactic Guardsman. One half of the proceeds from the sale of the figures goes to the Possibility War Survivors' Fund, created to help refugees and other victims rebuild their lives.

• Ranbee, the Friendly Edeinos. Actually a man dressed up in a hot pink edeinos suit, Ranbee is a kid's program aimed at preschoolers. Ranbee teaches tolerance towards all creatures who are fighting for Earth. Many critics find the show to be aggravatingly simplistic, and are offended at the mass merchandising that is gearing up around the show. To make matters worse, Ranbee has an annoying sidekick, Little Gorp, a man dressed up like a baby stalenger.

• Rap, Hip Hop, and Guns. Before the war, some rappers came under fire for their violent lyrics and imagery. Now, in the midst of war, rappers who sing about getting a gun and blowing away a Tharkoldu are hailed as heroes by everybody from the kids in the playground to the President of the United States. The most popular CD titles today are: *Do the Suits* (advocating the elimination of Nippon Tech corporate stooges), *Ice Kold* (rapping about killing off the Tharkoldu, nicknamed the "Kold"), and *Lizard Killer*.

Around the World

A quick look at conditions in some Core Earth hotspots:

Western US

The US Armed Forces are routing the forces of Baruk Kaah in the Western United States. With Baruk Kaah missing and presumed dead, the Living Land forces are becoming increasingly ineffective. However, the loss of San Diego to the Tharkoldu has hampered US troop movements.

Meanwhile, Kanawa's forces are racing north, in the mistaken belief that Dr. Mobius is targeting Alaska.

Quebec

Quebec, under the influence of the Cyberpapacy, has officially split from the rest of Canada. The Canadian government, now located in Regina, is alarmed at this development and is attempting to gather substantive proof that this decision was made as a result of pressure from an invader.

Mexico

The Mexican government is turning a nervous eye northwards, watching as Texas is attacked by the Nile Empire, and wondering if they will be next. In anticipation of Nile troops heading south, the Mexican armed forces have mobilized all units, establishing a defensive line on the Mexican side of the Rio Grande. The Mexi-

can government has gone to great lengths to assure the American government that the forces on the river are not meant to enter Texas, but are there strictly as a buffer against possible Nile incursion.

In overcrowded Mexico City, a new group has sprung up and is making itself loudly known. Calling themselves the Children of the Legacy, they have been telling people that all Mexicans were cheated when the Aztec Empire failed to manifest itself in Mexico and Central America. Citing the grandeur of the Aztecs, Mayans, and Incas, the Children have been urging the people to cast off the chains of their mundane existence and embrace a new order (though its beliefs and intent are poorly defined). Their activities have already sparked riots in some Mexican Indian communities.

Not surprisingly, this is a front organization put in place by Mobius in preparation for a southward push. The Childrens' function is not to make people accept the Nile Empire, but simply to undermine their faith in Core Earth, making the masses pliable for the day when the Nile axiom wash hits. Children of the Legacy activities are coordinated through the Nile Embassy in Mexico City.

Akashan representatives have been working with Mexican government officials to help stem the spread of the Comaghaz virus in southern Mexico. Unfortunately, the presence of Akashans so close to California has drawn Tharkoldu scouts to Mexico City.

In truth, this has proven to be beneficial for beleaguered Texas. Reported sightings of Tharkoldu, and lingering doubts about the Akashans' intent, have prompted refugees from Texas to turn around and take their chances in their home state.

South America

Thus far, South America has still been spared an invasion, (though many regard the coming of the Space Gods as an invasion of sorts.) The government of Peru remains a puppet of Kanawa, and this shows no signs of changing. There are also many Cyberpapal churches and cathedrals in place in Brazil, recruiting people by playing upon their fears of Akashans, techno-demons, and other horrors. In addition, the reality tree-bounded refuge of the edeinos in the Amazon rain forest continues to provoke controversy. There are no stelae currently planted in South America.

Brazil is currently the hotbed of Possibility Wars-related activity. Angered by the Akashans' presumptuousness in relocating edeinos on to their territory, the Brazilian government has entered into secret negotiations with the Cyberpapists. In exchange for Cyberpapal pledges of support in the event of an edeinos invasion, the government is looking the other way as cyberpriests prosletyze all over the nation. In addition, Malraux has promised not to plant stelae within Brazil's boundaries.

Interestingly enough, it is not fear of objections by other Core Earth nations that has prompted Brazil to keep this arrangement quiet, but the risk of damaging their relationship with the Vatican. A concerted effort by Rome to paint the Brazilian government as collaborators could well lead to its fall.

Europe

One of the most significant developments in Europe of late has been the resurgence of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) as the first line of defense against the invaders. NATO currently numbers among its members the US, Canada Iceland, Ireland, Great Britain, Spain, Portugal, the Free French, Germany, Denmark, free Norway, Belgium, the Netherlands, Luxembourg, Italy, Greece, Turkey, and Austria, and Poland, Czechoslovakia and Hungary have been awarded associate membership. NATO headquarters remains in Brussels, Belgium, commanded by Brigadier Sir Arthur Charles Pevensey. The Brigadier's no-nonsense style of command, coupled with the traditional British stiff upper lip, has made him a popular and respected leader. Despite his traditional views (particularly concerning the role of women in the armed forces), Pevensey has surprisingly enlightened opinions on the part Storm Knights can and should play in repelling the invaders.

NATO command council meetings now include delegates from the Ayslish Home Guard and representatives of the Rauru Block. Akashan applications to attend as well are still under consideration.

In other developments, plans to permanently relocate newly reunified Germany's capital to Berlin have been put on hold due to the Nile/Tharkold incursion there. The German government remains based in Bonn.

In Eastern Europe, Nile troops have begun pulling out of embattled Bosnia, leaving the field to the Cyberpapists. Analysts believe that Mobius simply decided the territory wasn't worth the price in men and material the war was exacting.

Turkey, in particular the cities of Ankara and Istanbul, have become centers of political skullduggery involving the Nile Empire. It seems that Mobius, aware of the enmity between Greece and Turkey, is trying to destabilize relations between the two rivals and ensure that there will be no aid for the besieged Greeks from that quarter.

Russia, Ukraine, Azherbaijan, and Armenia have banded together in order to fight the forces of the Warrior of the Dark. There is talk of the Russian/Ukrainian elements of the Black Sea Fleet sortieing into the Mediterranean in order to sweep the sea clear of Mobius, Malraux, and the Ayslish Corsairs.

Africa

The famine and resulting chaos in Somalia continues to stymie the United Nations, and now several of the more influential warlords have been consorting with Mobius. This may open the gates for more Nile expansion on the Horn of Africa.

Kenya, Tanzania, Zaire, Burundi, and Rwanda have united together to establish a line of defense against the encroaching Nile Empire. Unfortunately, Uganda is still a thorn in their side, what with Nile-sympathetic warlords in control of that nation.

The civil war in Angola and the internal strife in Mozambique rages on, heedless of the Possibility Wars. The only hint of the war's influence is

the port city of Beira in Mozambique, which is still firmly in the Kanawan sphere of influence. Whatever else Kanawa is slashing and burning, it does not include this city, being his only foothold on this continent.

South Africa is in turmoil, as the Willetston government continues its campaign to destabilize the opposition. As an added wrinkle, the Gaean Victorians have opened up talks with the administration, but the precise nature of these negotiations has yet to be revealed.

The Middle East

The Sword of Saladin's (see the *Delphi Council Worldbook*) effectiveness in the Middle East has been debatable. While there have been no advances into the Middle East by the High Lords, neither has any territory been regained.

Mobius has been portraying himself as a champion of oppressed groups, such as the Kurds in Iraq. This, plus his call for a Palestinian homeland has gained him a great deal of sympathy and support from tribesmen in the Arab nations.

Meanwhile, the nation of Kuwait, uncertain of America's continued ability to defend it, has struck a separate peace with the Nile Empire. In exchange for allowing the Nile to place an embassy in Kuwait City and according the Nile Empire "most favored nation" trading status," Mobius has agreed to sign a non-agression pact with the Emir.

Jordan and Syria have taken a bold step and allied themselves with Israel in the event of another attack from Mobius, but the alliance is a fragile one. The longer Mobius delays taking action against Jerusalem, the more convinced the nations are that perhaps the alliance is not necessary after all.

Asia

India and Pakistan thus far remain untouched by the effects of the war. Curiously, there is a growing presence of Gaean Victorians on the Indian subcontinent.

Southeast Asia has been temporarily spared further Orrorshan incursion due to the destruction of the Gaunt Man's maelstrom bridges. Bangkok, however, continues to be a place of mystery and danger, touched as it is by Orrorshan reality.

China has thus far not committed much in the way of men and/or material to the war. Chinese leaders are keeping a close eye on the strength (or weakness) of the Commonwealth of Independent States' alliance, and Nippon's stalled efforts to invade the mainland have convinced the Chinese they are safe from attack. The government is already looking beyond the war, to a time when a weakened Core Earth will recognize China as the dominant military, political and economic force.

Australia

Australia, New Zealand, and the United States have revived the old ANZUS alliance and welcomed the Philippines to the fold. The four nations are now coordinating defense plans for the entire Pacific Rim, as well as means to force Orrorshan invaders off Australian soil.

The city of Darwin had been the major Storm Knight staging area, offering supplies, ammunition, hospital facilities, transportation, and contacts with ANZUS. However, its proximity to the Orrorshan zones has prompted a relocation to Port Hedland.

Cityscape

London

London continues to function despite being surrounded by Ayslish reality. Smuggling supplies into the city has become easier in recent months, particularly by water, as more and more of the Dark forces are shifted to Oxford.

Victorians are known to have made overtures to the British government regarding a possible alliance, but Parliament has yet to consider them.

Brussels

Headquarters of NATO, the streets of Brussels are choked with militaryunits, refugees, and Storm Knights. The city is loaded with weapons shops, cyberleggers (who have fled France), magic shops, and other places that a Storm Knight would find useful. Its strategic position makes it an ideal jumping-off point for Storm Knights on missions. Of course, Brussels is also crawling with agents from the Cyberpope, Tharkold, Nippon Tech, and the Nile Empire. Going out at night can be a very dangerous thing.

Casablanca

With war once again raging across the globe, Casablanca has now taken on an air similar to that of its cinematic namesake. Cyberpapists try their best to convert the population by sermons, and Nile representatives walk about unmolested (Morocco has diplomatic relations with the Nile Empire, and Casablanca has a Nile embassy). This city has become home to dingy little bars, twisted alleys, secret rendezvouses on foggy nights, all in all a place of mystery.

Casablanca, being an Atlantic port on Africa's northwestern coast, is a place of vital strategic importance. Both the Nile Empire and the Cyberpapacy want it. In fact, the latter may declare a Crusade into Northwest Africa, if it chooses not to try for Jerusalem.

Jerusalem

Jerusalem has big problems these days. Despite Core Earth forces repelling the Nile Empire, this holiest of cities is still in grave danger.

The streets of Jerusalem swarm with Israeli defense force personnel, as well as agents from Mossad and Sin Bet who keep track of foreign Storm Knights. In addition, PLO units patrol East Jerusalem, and many Christian volunteers have poured into the city to help defend it.

Jerusalem is the spiritual center of three of the world's major religions. Its capture by any of the Raiders would be a major blow to Core Earth morale.

• **The Nile Empire:** Mobius once held Jersualem and lost it. And Mobius hates to lose ...

Although he has long postponed plans to recapture it, he has not forgotten the one city to successfully resist him. And even sweeter than taking it

himself will be keeping it out of the Cyberpope's grasp.

• **The Cyberpapacy:** With Malraux's realm suffering setbacks, he is considering declaring a Holy Crusade in order to take people's minds off of internal problems. Malraux claims that the reason things are going so badly in the realm is that "the holy city of Jerusalem is in the hands of infidels and blasphemers, and the Lord is displeased." Look for a possible military expedition to Jerusalem once New England is consolidated and pacified.

• **The Victorians:** High-placed Sacellum priests have wrestled with the theological question about the importance of Core Earth's Jerusalem as opposed to the Gaean Jerusalem. At last, a consensus has been reached, and the Victorians feel that "even on this misbegotten, stumbling world, Jerusalem must be in the hands of the True Believers." The destruction of the Orrorshan maelstrom bridges means no reinforcements for a while. But it should come as no surprise when troop ships and old ironclad battleships begin steaming westward toward the Red Sea and the Suez Canal.

One can find clandestine agents from the Nile Empire and the Cyberpapacy in the city, as well as visiting Victorian dignitaries (there is a Victorian embassy in Jerusalem nowadays). Despite the fact that Christians, Jews, and Moslems are banded together against a common foe, all is not sweetness and light between them. There are still deep-seated resentments and unresolved conflicts between some members of those three factions.

All in all, Jerusalem is at a crossroads. On one hand, Mobius, Malraux, and the Victorians all want the city for their own. On the other hand, Jerusalem is filled with people from three factions who have had problems with each other in the past … and they all have guns.

Nairobi

Nairobi, Kenya, is the choice spot for Core Earth operations into the Nile Empire. The British have a strong military presence there and it has become a gathering place for Storm Knights. Nairobi was the site of the first Storm Guild branch office.

Hong Kong

A massive black market plus numerous economic clashes in the Hong Kong Stock Exchange make the city an exciting place that attracts many Storm Knights. Ninja slipping through the shadows, corporate break-ins, hackers cracking databases, executives making secret deals and hostile takeovers, all of this combined with the city's strategic location (between Orrorsh and NipponTech) make it an ideal place for adventure and resupply.

The biggest point of controversy, however, is that Great Britain has suspended the timetable for turning Hong Kong over to the Chinese "for an indefinite period, pending the outcome of the war."

Djakarta

Located in Indonesia, and surrounded by Orrorsh, Djakarta has become a meeting place for Storm Knights who make forays into Orrorsh. The city is crawling with Storm Knights, Orrorshan Horrors, cyberpriests, and Nippon businessmen, and is becoming a true neutral city of intrigue, danger, and resupply.

The Guildmaster

This year saw West End Games hold its "Guess the Guildmaster" contest. Players and gamemasters were asked the guess the true identity of the woman behind the Storm Guild, the Stormer recruitment and training organization. The contest was won by Jim Ogle of Socorro, NM, who correctly guessed that the Guildmaster was none other than Ayroa, the former mate of Kurst, High Lord of Kantovia.

When the Gaunt Man conquered Kantovia and defeated Kurst, he betrayed his sometime ally, Ayroa, leaving her for a time to the tender mercies of Uthorion. When the brute was done with her, the Gaunt Man exiled the shapeshifter and her remaining followers to a pocket dimension attached to Kantovia. (For the full story, see *Interview With Evil*.)

Time passed slowly in this dimension, and Ayroa spent it planning her revenge on the Gaunt Man. When the Kantovian Darkness Device was tricked into returning home after failing to establish the Aztec Empire (see *High Lord of Earth*), it fell into Ayroa's hands once again.

Infused with its power, Ayroa coaxed from the Device its knowledge of the Possibility Wars. Suspecting that the Gaunt Man would eventually return to the fray, Ayroa shifted to her human form and dimthreaded to Earth.

Setting herself up in the Storm Guild using gems taken from the pocket dimension, Ayroa began to get her bearings on this strange world. Right away, she saw that Nippon Tech posed the greatest threat to Orrorsh, something she could not abide. No one but her would be allowed to destroy the Gaunt Man. Thus, she turned the Guild's resources against 3327, much to his consternation. Meanwhile, she continued to gauge the strengths and weaknesses of the stormers and the various High Lords on Earth.

Eventually, however, her facade slipped and her identity was discovered by two ninja in the employ of 3327. Learning the details of her story, 3327 realized that they had a common goal. In addition, "Kanawa" felt certain this bestial primitive could be easily dealt with if it became necessary, and in the meantime, she might serve as a useful pawn against Orrorsh. He therefore called off all current plans for eliminating her and the Guild and has begun feeding her information on the Wars and the Gaunt Man's activities.

For more information on Ayroa and Kantovia, see Chapter Nine, "Pocket Dimensions."

CHAPTER THREE

The Cyberpapacy™

The line of robed, cowled mmonks swayed and sang the Requiem as they made their way through the drizzle-soaked courtyard. Before them lay their destination, the relative warmth of the monastery of Our Lady of Many Wounds.

One monk in particular chafed in his robes, and not simply because of the coarseness of the material. The discomfort came because the wearer was in truth no monk, but Marcel Berge, former Hospitaller and now devoted Storm Knight. Berge was a man of action, better suited to smiting his enemies with a GodMeeter than skulking around and spying.

There had been many contradictory rumors about what was going on in the GodNet, in the College of Cardinals, and even in Malraux's own court. Berge's regular sources — the hackers, cyberjockeys, chippers, and speed metal kids — were simply not good enough to get the information he needed. It required someone who was once on the inside, on the side of the frocks, who knew the Gospel truth about the Anti-Pope's inner workings.

As the monks entered the main sanctuary, they broke off into clusters, each group heading toward its appointed tasks. Berge fell in with the NetMonitors, and made his way to the chamber of decks.

Berge knew well the risks inherent in what he was doing. He had to enter the GodNet, get by the very defenses he was in the midst of, and find the right exchanges with the right information. All the while, his body would sit, surrounded by his enemies, vulnerable to any attack.

But it had to be done.

At last, he sat down before an old wooden desk, which looked all the more incongruous due to the presence of an ultramodern Penitence IV smart terminal/cyberdeck sitting atop it. When no one was looking, he pulled out a minidisk that contained the netrunning programs that he would need to accomplish his mission. Picking up the wire plug, Berge inserted it into his Neural Jack, and everything went dark.

When he "saw" light again, it was coming from an enormous glowing cross that he seemed to be falling towards. All around him thudded the bass booms of an organ playing a ponderous old hymn. As Marcel got closer to the cross, he could see that it was in fact made up of millions of glowing pathways, and he was falling towards one in particular.

His "feet" touched the path, and he felt himself drawn along the data path, though he could stop and survey his surroundings. His VX image was that of a Crusader in silver plate armor with a red cross on his breastplate. He held a fiery sword in one hand (which was his attack program on standby), and a great helm that covered his face and protected his identity (this was his Shroud program on line). A pair of angel wings sprouted from his back, a customized concession to his own vanity.

He could only go in one direction, so he let the pull take him. In an instant, he was in a vast chamber where all manner of odd creatures, most of them covered with eyes, watched all the traffic go by. Berge guessed correctly that he was in the VX equivalent of the room his physical body was in. Using his wings as a cover, he tried to

let his VX image merge with the background music. It worked, and none saw him as he "walked" out the door and into the monastery's VX sanctuary, where some of the monks' VX identities created hymn programs. Acting like he knew what he was doing, he simply left the building and stepped onto the highways of virtual France proper.

Sometime later — was it minutes or hours — he found himself in the main data vaults of an Avignon cathedral. Where a Core Earther at a terminal would pull up a menu of file directories, the VX Marcel thumbed through a great VX tome that listed all the volumes in the library. Finding what he wanted, he pulled a particular book off the shelf. He frowned as he saw that the heavy book had a clasp lock, the VX symbol for an inaccessible directory.

As Berge's smart terminal began running a codebreaker program, the VX Marcel showed this by using a knife on the lock. He was rewarded by the lock mechanism springing open. Eagerly, he began thumbing through the pages.

Never had Berge read Cyberpapal files that so filled him with hope. Although the Cyberpapacy was making some modest gains in America's New England, Malraux was on the run in Europe. Mobius and the Warrior of the Dark were openly hostile to the blasphemous pope, and even some of his own cardinals were restless and dissatisfied.

While the VX Berge produced parchment and began to write down the information at inhuman speed, his terminal began copying the file information onto a datchip. The more Berge read and copied, the more pleased he became, as the volumes of reports painted a picture of an increasingly desperate Malraux.

His joy was cut short as an Angel entered the room and pointed at his VX image. Knowing he was caught, Berge ceased his file copying, and swung his fiery sword at the guardian. Though the Angel went down, it screamed in pain, indicating that an alarm had just been activated. Cursing, Berge used his wings to fly out of the chamber and Avignon itself with all possible haste.

Thanks to judicious use of his Evasion program, symbolized by silently flying by guards, Berge's eyes snapped open in the real world. He was sweating and his body felt stiff, but he sighed with relief as he ejected the program chip and the datchip and pocketed them.

Suddenly, four white-robed men burst in on the monitoring monks, their evident leader shouting, "Halt, brothers! We have a blasphemer in our midst!"

Berge frowned. It was the Inquisition. Though he knew that there would be some resistance to his foray, he hadn't thought it would be Inquisitors. But in a perverse way, he felt a sense of relief — he really hated undercover work.

With a shout, he tossed off his robe and stood revealed in his Armor of God. Now it was *his* turn to surprise the Inquisition. As the monks scrambled for cover, Berge's GodMeeter lived up to its name, dispatching the four to meet their Maker in quick order.

Berge took a running jump and smashed through the monitor room's stained glass window, stumbling out into the misty dusk. His power sword found the chests of two Church Policemen, and he relieved them of a high speed motorcycle. Not sparing even a glance behind, the Storm Knight roared off into the countryside of a France that might soon be free ...

A Realm Unravelling

It has been an exceedingly rough year for Jean Malraux and the forces of the Cyberpope. His few small gains (the seizure of Boston and a Pyrrhic victory in Bosnia) have been overshadowed by a stunning setback in Spain.

It started simply enough. Storm Knights had been trickling through the port of Marseilles for some time, prompting the Church Police to shut it down. But this maneuver backfired — stymied at getting to southern France, Storm Knights shifted their attention to Algiers, where Cyberpapal infilitrators have been clashing with Sunni Muslims for sometime. Knights stoked the fires until the Cyberpapal forces were routed from the country.

This was the opportunity the Knights needed. As CyberFrench troops poured through Cartagena in chaos, Storm Knights went with them. From there, using information supplied by Spanish resistance forces, the Knights moved northwest until they reached a spot roughly midway between Madrid and Valencia. There, they uprooted a key Cyberpapal stelae, causing three stelae triangles to collapse and freeing almost all of Spain from Malraux's domination.

The operation was surprisingly well-planned. Story seeds planted in the area over the past few months by Knights working with the resistance kept civilian casualties low, and the ensuing confusion allowed the Knights to escape pursuit in Madrid. NATO forces have since been dispatched from Florida to aid in driving the Cyberpapists back into France.

This has been a shattering defeat for the Cyberpope, made even worse by the Sunni Muslim uprising and the uprooting of the now-useless stelae on the border of Algeria and Morocco. With Spain free and extending an invitation to NATO, the Cyberpapacy is now menaced by Aysle to the north and west, Spain to the south, and Germany (and its Tharkoldu/Nile contingents) to the east.

Malraux's only gain in the past year has been the dropping of an additional stelae in the northeastern United States (near Hartford, Connecticut), bringing the cities of Boston and Providence under his control. The Cyberpope's incursion here has been far less subtle than his initial invasion of Quebec, made possible by the current confused state of the US government (see Chapter Two).

The Cyberpope also successfully brought the long-planned separation of Quebec from the rest of Canada. It is now an independent nation, ruled (unwittingly) from CyberFrance.

Finally, Malraux enjoyed a victory (of sorts) in Bosnia, where Nile troops have begun to pull out. Unfortunately, the field left in Cyberpapal hands is littered with the dead and the drastically reduced population has made it far less a motherlode of possibility

energy than once it was. Essentially, the former Yugoslavia is good for a large gospog field, and that's about it.

Cyberpapal vessels in the Mediterranean are still locked in running battles against Nile ships and submarines, as well as against Ayslish Corsairs. The Cyberpapal navy, which is based in Marseilles, sorties against these enemies, but does not always succeed. The Cyberpapists know that the island of Malta is helping out one or both of their enemies, but they are unable to act against the island for now.

This inability of Malraux to hold his own or expand significantly has caused him to come under harsh scrutiny by the Gaunt Man. The Orrorshan High Lord has evidently decided to simply let Malraux founder, neither helping nor hindering him. Seeing as how Mobius is now the Gaunt Man's favorite (a mixed blessing, that), it should come as no surprise that the Gaunt Man may actually be throwing malraux to the good Doctor to do with him as he will.

Finally, there was the disgraceful episode earlier this year when Storm Knights actually attacked Malraux's person on live television during an excommunication ceremony. Malraux disposed of them, of course, but the damage had been done. Ichi Entertainment managed to get hold of copies of the video and give it global distribution, further embarassing the Cyberpope.

A Cyberpope Gone Mad

All of the above have served to increase Malraux's already prodigious paranoia. He now sees enemies under every rug, behind every curtain. He takes irrationally elaborate security measures, and is rarely seen in public anymore.

Hushed whispers in the halls of the Cyberpope's palace in Avignon talk of the High Lord succumbing to fits of anger, depression, and even hallucinations. Some say that Malraux is rationalizing his failures by saying that all of his once-trusted advisers are in truth unfaithful, sin-soaked hypocrites, and the CyberTrinity is punishing him for the sins of his people. At such times, purges seem inevitable.

This gives way to flashes of a Messiah complex, where the High Lord sees himself as a Savior, taking the punishment for his flock of believers. Add a dash of occasional paranoia, and the picture painted of Malraux is one of a High Lord in the throes of a nervous breakdown.

But at other times, Malraux seems calm, thoughtful and in complete possession of his faculties. He makes plans, writes papal bulls, expounds on doctrine, all with great competence and sometimes even moments of brilliance.

The most popular explanations of Malraux's condition are:

- Occasional onsets of cyberpsychosis, possibly even compounded by systems damage;
- Malraux was never fully acclimated to cybernetics, and the experience is slowly eating away at his medieval mind;
- Even on Magna Verita, Malraux was never a model of mental stability, and the pressure of running a war (and losing) has simply caused him to snap;
- God really *is* punishing Malraux.

Whatever the reason, Malraux has tripled the number of guards at his palace, and is sending the Inquisition out to deal harshly with any member of the Church, from humble parishioners to members of the College of Cardinals, who he feels have been saying, acting, or thinking a heretical thought.

Mutterings in Magna Verita

The world of Magna Verita, still living quite comfortably at its medieval technological level (despite being under a *Tech* 26 axiom), is wondering if Malraux perhaps is pursuing a course of action not in accordance with God's will.

The original five cardinals on Magna Verita, who fled when the Grand Inquisitor Marcel-Anton came back to Magna Verita, found refuge with the Eastern Europe Administrative Area's Patriarch. Working with slow, patient secrecy, the Patriarchs of all the Administrative areas have met and discussed matters.

The dissension has quietly spread through the College of Cardinals, and of the 21 cardinals who were judged capable of continuing their duties without need of Faith Chips and like, 14 of them are now quietly working against the Cyberpope and his Papal Legate. Cardinal-Bishop Gerrard-Pierre, who was appointed Papal Legate and is acting in place of Malraux, is losing influence on Magna Verita, though he is unaware of it, as the erosion is very subtle.

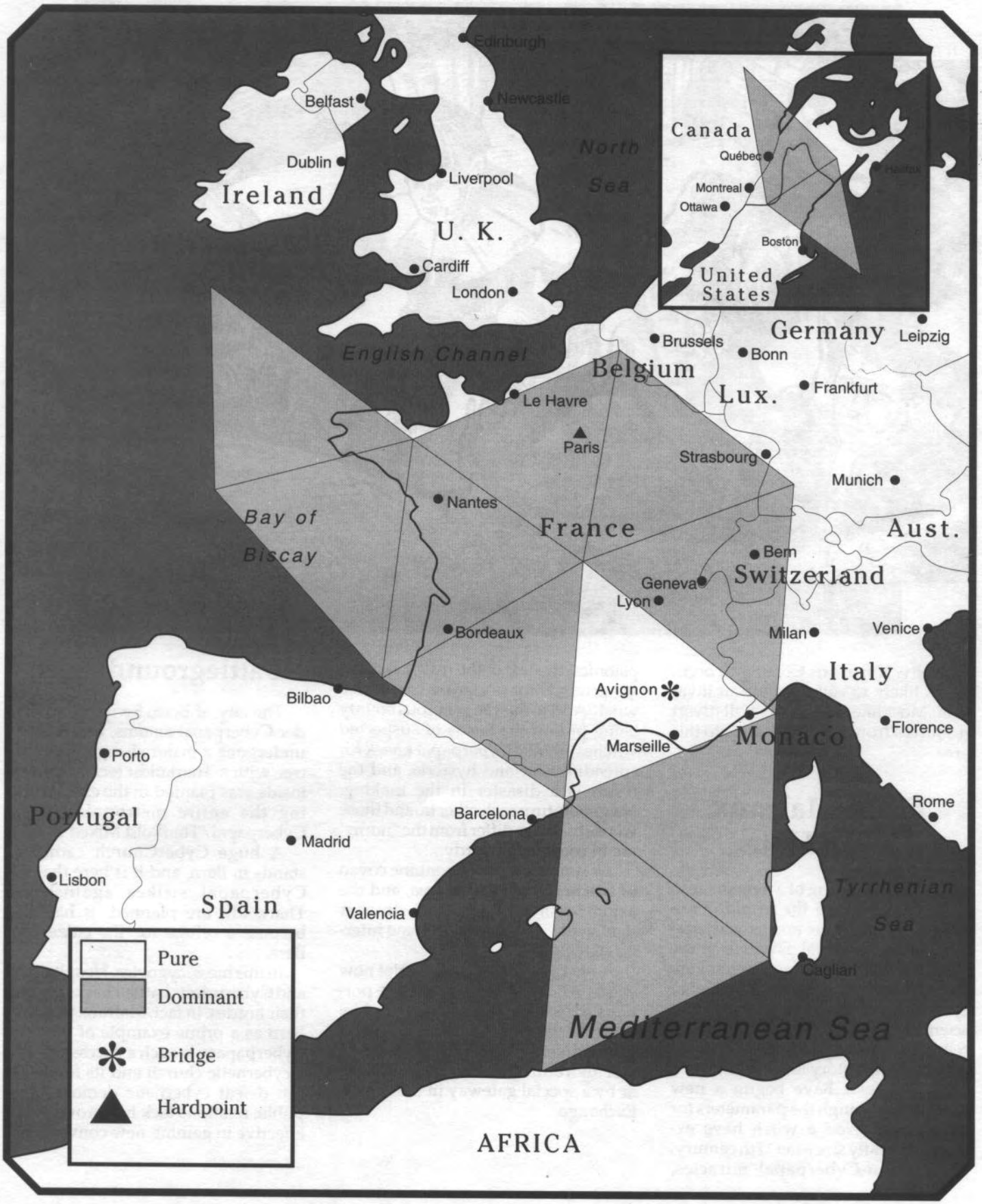
Dangerous ideas from Core Earth have been trickling back up the bridge, and rumor has it that there are actually several copies of the Core Earth Holy Bible circulating around. With the Trinity represented in that book appearing a lot more merciful and benevolent than the hideous blasphemy that Malraux penned in his Cybernetic Bible, many who read the Core Earth Scriptures are undergoing a dramatic change in their faith. To some of these, this Bible reminds them of the Magna Verita Bible the way it was centuries ago. (Naturally, being caught with the King James Version in one's possession is a capital offense in this cosm.)

All in all, Magna Verita may be poised on the brink of a spiritual and political revolution, and several thousand high-tech Cyberpapal faithful may not be able to stop it. Perhaps the only thing that could halt its progress now would be the return of Malraux.

The New Crusades

In the wake of the loss of Spain, Malraux has reaffirmed his Crusade against North Africa, his stated rationale being that the nations of Morroco, Tunisia and Algeria are doing a poor job of resisting Mobius.

Malraux is also making noises about launching a Crusade in earnest against Jerusalem, emphasizing that the Holy City belongs to the Holy Church, and he is the head of that church. Here, he faces two problems: lack of resources and the fact that both Mobius and the Victorians have an interest in that his-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Boston
United States
Germany
Leipzig
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Bonn
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Avignon
Florence
Marseille
Monaco
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Portugal
Barcelona
Madrid
Lisbon
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Tyrrhenian Sea
Valencia
Cagliari
Mediterranean Sea
AFRICA
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Dominant
Bridge
Hardpoint

toric city. Nor are its Core Earth occupants likely to roll over for an invasion. Most likely, Malraux will divert resources from Eastern Europe to this area.

From Malraux, With Hate

With the planting of a new stelae in New England, and the resulting seizure of territory, the area is undergoing serious upheaval. Students at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology have actually embraced the arrival of cybernetics with the enthusiasm of scientists, while trying to ignore the religious trappings.

In Salem, history is repeating itself as cyberpriests have begun a new witch hunt, though the parameters for being considered a witch have expanded greatly since the 17th century. Magic, non-Cyberpapal miracles, psionics, the use of the *reality* skill, all are grounds for declaring someone a witch. Add to this the generous bounty being put on the heads of suspected witches and the Cyberpapal knack for spreading fear and hysteria, and the result is a disaster in the making. Neighbors turn each other in, and those whose lifestyles differ from the "norm" are in constant jeopardy.

Of course, there is a genuine coven of witches in the Salem area, and the axiom wash has made them stronger than ever. This has led to some interesting clashes.

A new portion of the GodNet now exists, which encompasses those portions of North America controlled by the Cyberpapacy. Access to the rest of the GodNet (in Europe) is gained either by routing through Firmament, or by a special gateway in the Boston Exchange.

Battleground: Bern

The city of Bern, Switzerland, under Cyberpapal axioms, has recently undergone a major change. A reality tree with a Tharkoldu techno-demon inside was planted in the city, changing the entire metropolis into a Cyberpapal/Tharkold Mixed Zone.

A huge CyberChurch cathedral stands in Bern, and it is here that the Cyberpapal strikes against the Tharkoldu are planned. It has also become a refuge for the citizens of Bern.

In this mess, cygoyles, Hospitallers, and Cyberpriests battle Tharkoldu and their hordes. In fact, Malraux points to Bern as a prime example of why the Cyberpapacy is such a necessity: only a cybernetic church and its followers can defeat cybernetic demons. This public relations tack has proven very effective in gaining new converts.

Bern contains elements of both the GodNet and the Grid, allowing passage between the two VX systems. Bern is, in essence, the checkpoint, the gateway.

Of course, in any clash between two major enemies, the ones who truly suffer are the neutrals, the innocent, the helpless. A plea has gone out for Storm Knights to come to Bern to help ease the suffering of the people.

Firmament

The Cyberpapal space station known as Firmament is now being used to monitor not only Earth broadcasts, but also the comings and goings of the Akashans.

Four large lasers (damage value 38, range 10-500/5K/20K) have been secretly installed on Firmament as an offensive/defensive measure.

Unfortunately, like much of his other high-tech equipment, Malraux does not know how to make full use of his space station. Most of the people who could help him with this technology were killed in the early days of the first axiom wash, the Magna Verita reality, when knowledge of such celestial sciences was considered a heresy.

The Templars and the Hospitallers

A number of Malraux's Hospitallers have turned renegade and, following their consciences, fight on the side of the Storm Knights against their former leader. Into this mix is added the Templars, a revival of the old Core Earth order. The Templars fight the Cyberpope with a verve and enthusiasm that is hard to match.

Unfortunately, the Templars and the Hospitallers have a long and bloody history between them. This has resulted in numerous skirmishes over the past year between warriors who are supposed to be fighting on the same side.

The Hospitallers who defected from Malraux's forces chose from their number a leader, Phillipe Auguste D'Or, to help set policy and to represent the Hospitallers as a cohesive group to the world at large. Phillipe met with the man who calls himself Jacques De Molay, the leader of the Templars. After several weeks of discussions, protocols have been established to govern behavior between the two groups. Despite some isolated incidents in recent weeks, it now appears that Templar-Hospitaller relations have been stabilized.

Hammer and Anvil

In the early days of the invasion, much of France's armed forces were decimated or ceased to exist. But one vital portion of her military, the navy, managed to flee to Gibraltar, where elements of Britain's Royal Navy earlier succeeded in reaching and reactivating the base on behalf of England.

For the last few years, the Anglo-French force on Gibraltar has been preparing, training, and refitting. They have held maneuvers in the North Atlantic with some elements of the US Navy, and now they are ready to act.

Within the next few months, Operation: Hammer and Anvil will begin. Units of the US, Royal, and French Navies will sortie from Gibraltar and head east across the Mediterranean, while elements of the Ukrainian and Russian Black Sea fleets will depart from Sevastopol and Odessa, enter the eastern Mediterranean, and make their way west.

The fleets, protected by fighter-bomber cover based in Italy, will make a sweep across the Mediterranean, wiping out any CyberFrench, Nile or Aysle ships they find, then linking up at Malta. The combined fleet will then sail to Naples, to resupply and regroup, and remain stationed there in order to intercept any further non-Core Earth vessels.

NetWar

The Angel-Demon War in the GodNet is experiencing a temporary lull, much like the calm before the storm. Though the Demons are currently in a stronger position, they are not pressing their advantage. In fact, the datapaths all over France are now safe again, with netrunners and cyberpriests alike returning to business as usual. This abrupt pullback is seen by some as an alarming development, for it makes no sense.

What few realize is that there is a High Lord dwelling in a cosm to which the GodNet has somehow become linked and he is directing operations. For details on this High Lord, see Chapter Nine.

The Almighty Dollar

Many of the corporations in Cyberfrance, envious of the corporate gains made by Nippon companies, have long sought to gain the same sort of economic freedom, apart from the CyberChurch. With Malraux having his difficulties of late, Gods Word Industries, Clear Sight Industries, Manufacture d'Armes de Saint-Etienne (MAS), and MindBody Technologies have all made efforts to "go public," issue stock, have independent boards of directors, and join the stock exchanges in London, Tokyo, and Atlanta.

Many of these corporations are hiring Storm Knights to undertake missions against the CyberChurch in exchange for top-notch products and hefty monetary rewards. Many of these missions are espionage, sabotage, or netrunning assignments.

The corporations are even assembling their own security forces, many of them assembled from disgruntled veterans of France's armed forces and the Surete. Stormers and defecting Cyberpapists make up the remainder of the ranks of these private armies.

The corporations are slowly leaking out word that they wish to see a separation of Church and State, while still keeping the technological benefits that the Cyberpapal reality has brought. The idea is beginning to catch on, which could mean yet another problem for Malraux.

Oh, To Be in Paris, Now That Liberté is There

Paris still holds out against the Cyberpapacy's encroachments, to the point that Malraux is no longer expending resources trying to take it. Relative peace has descended on the streets of the "City of Light," with HOGs and other Cyberpapal influences being rounded up or killed. Supplies are being airlifted in from Belgium and the US.

Cygoyles, CyberKnight punks, and other undercover Cyberpapists still make runs into the city in order to carry out clandestine missions or just wreak random havoc, especially in the case of the cygoyles.

The edges of the dominant zone, which extend into Paris, are becoming havens for young rebels to crash, eat, socialize and do some serious netrunning.

Vive La Resistance!

Resistance groups continue to flourish in CyberFrance, and though many of them are still fragmented and acting independently, there has been some effort made to coordinate actions between groups. For the last few months, cryptic messages sent by very roundabout routes have been passed between Resistance leaders, in an effort to exchange intelligence information and try to make organized strikes against the Cyberpapacy.

The first true test of whether or not these efforts have been worth the time and trouble will happen during Operation Hammer and Anvil. When the fleets engage the CyberFrench Navy, Resistance cells all over France will strike at pre-selected infrastructural targets such as bridges, power plants, factories, cathedrals, etc.

Of course, if everything works, it will be a blatant tip-off to the Inquisition that the Resistance cells are beginning to unite. But this seems to be a risk the Resistance is willing to take.

The biggest obstacle to a united front is that so many of the groups are only opposed to the Cyberpope because he infringes on *their* freedoms. They care little about liberating France, only ensuring that they can do as they please. Needless to say, their willingness to sacrifice on behalf of a greater good is minimal.

The Cyber-Reformation

In another eerie parallel to Earth history, a young Cyberpapal monk, alarmed at the abuses of the CyberChurch, has downloaded a series of ninety-five theses at all Cathedral, Church, and Monastery exchanges, as well as posting these theses on the front door of the Cathedral at Avignon.

This young monk, whose VX address is Luthor Martine, believes that the church, in order to survive, must reform its practices, dispose of corrupt officials, and elect a new Cyberpope and College of Cardinals.

Naturally, all of this has enraged Malraux even more, and he has declared that Martine is now anathema to the church. He has excommunicated Martine in absentia and the rebel is now under a summary death sentence.

Many of the more sincere, less violent cyberpriests, however, see wisdom in Martine's words, especially when they glance over their shoulder and see the rise of corporate secularism.

Martine is in hiding. Rumors place him in Paris Liberte, where he is treated like a celebrity despite his past affiliation with Malraux's church.

The Days Ahead

The Land Above continues to pique Malraux's curiosity. Now that he has New England as a staging area, he may launch more expeditions into that realm, with an eye at possibly planting a stelae in New York City.

Punishments against heretics and Storm Knights will be more severe than ever, reflecting Malraux's increasing frustration over the way the war is progressing (hey, he has to take it out on somebody). Look for increased persecution against the enemies of the CyberChurch (defined as anyone not a loyal member of the CyberChurch who the authorities manage to get their hands on).

With his Darkness Device growing increasingly restive , look for the possibility that Malraux may make a bold move, perhaps a strike on Rome, in an attempt to both assimilate the city into his flock and to sever the head of the legitimate Catholic Church.

CHAPTER FOUR

The Living Land™/Land Above™/Land Below™, and Space Gods™

The battered Chevy four-by-four pulled up to the small tourist stop in Montana. A dozen other vehicles, all of them rugged machines that could handle rough terrain, were already parked here. Groups of mostly men in camo fatigues stood around in small knots, drinking coffee and exchanging stories.

A group of a dozen young people walked slowly around the tourist stop, bearing signs that read "Stop the Slaughter," "Edeinos Have Feelings Too," "These Edeinos Didn't Ruin New York — It Was Already Ruined When They Found It!" An International Cable News film crew was recording the proceedings.

"Aw, jeez, what is this?" the first man out of the four-by-four said, as he laid his weapons out on the hood of the truck. "Lizard lovers?"

"This is barbaric!" one of the protesters shouted. "Don't you have any feelings?"

The man took a few steps forward, gun in hand, his friends behind him. The ICN crew moved beside them, the reporter shoving a mike into the hunter's face.

"Theo Storch, ICN. Can we ask you a few questions, Mister — ?"

"Walker. Guy Walker," the man said, still moving toward the protesters. "Go ahead."

"What's brought you out here today?"

"Lizard hunt. It's long past payback time, know what I mean?"

"There are some who charge that these hunts are unnecessary, and that many of the edeinos killed are not in arms against the nation. Any comment?"

"They invaded, didn't they?" Walker barked. "They don't want to get shot, let 'em go back where they came from!"

"What about reports of high casualties among the hunters?"

"Hey, I don't know about these guys, but I'm a pro. I can even make my truck work in the Mist," Walker said proudly.

"Have you ever spoken with an edeinos, Mr. Walker?"

"Spoken with —?" Walker began, incredulously. "Son, those damn lizards killed my family. They came down their bridge and they turned this country upside down. Well, now that the Army's got 'em on the run, I figure it's time to get my licks in."

Storch turned back to the camera. "Peter, Guy Walker's words reflect the opinions of many Americans. With the reported death of their leader, Baruk Kaah, and the collapse of their army, it appears it's now open season on edeinos. Theo Storch, Harris, Montana."

Suddenly, a commotion began among the protesters. First one, then two, then a small group of edeinos stumbled out of the forest. The protesters moved to greet them while the hunters dropped behind their trucks and readied their weapons.

Afterward, no one was certain who fired the first shot. But someone did, and the hail of bullets that followed killed the eight edeinos and 17 of the protesters, wounding nine others. The whole thing took maybe 10 seconds.

When it was over, Guy Walker knelt among the corpses. He knew the police would be coming soon, but he would be long gone by then. But before he left, he searched for the answer to a question.

Why? Why did they come out of the Mist? What could have scared them bad enough to make them leave their territory?

The answer came on metallic wings, cybernetic claws reflecting the sunlight, edeinos skulls dangling on their belts. The techno-demons' first pass scattered the hunters, their second saw three men die.

Walker opened fire with his rifle, watched in horror as the bullets glanced off the hide of one of the Tharkoldu. Annoyed, the demon aimed its laser and neatly incinerated Walker's head. His body hit the ground like a puppet whose strings had been cut.

And all was still ...

A Realm In Retreat

The Living Land has been steadily losing ground for years, but the death of Baruk Kaah, Saar of the edeinos, has turned the edeinos' retreat into a full-scale rout. Despite the grumbles about his leadership and depth of devotion to Lanala, Kaah's will was the unifying factor in the edeinos' conquest of much of North America. Without him, a sense of inevitable doom pervades edeinos camps throughout the Americans Northwest.

The Living Land has come under attack by the forces of Nippon Tech and Tharkold, as well as the US and Canadian militaries. Thus far, Nippon has been most successful, pulling up Living Land stelae in California and Oregon and replacing them with those of 3327's realm. The result has been additional Living Land/Nippon Tech mixed zones.

The Death of Baruk Kaah

From the beginning, Baruk Kaah has had it harder than many of the other High Lords. Of all the High Lords, his immediate conquests were the most ambitious: a large portion of Canada, as well as much of the eastern and western portions of the United States. He faced a huge population determined to resist his incursion and arguably the most powerful standing army in the world.

His foolish attempt to gain information through captured singer Eddie Paragon led indirectly to the destruction of a maelstrom bridge. His mighty army was stopped dead at the Core Earth hardpoint Silicon Valley, prompting the first mutterings among the tribes that perhaps Lanala no longer favored Kaah. To make matters worse, Nippon Tech, Tharkold and the Cyberpapacy would all seize territory adjoining his own and begin harassing his troops.

The final insult came last year, when earthquakes and volcanos erupted all over the Eastern Land. Panicked, tribes there foreswore their allegiance to Kaah in return for an Akashan airlift to safety in Brazil. Shortly after they abandoned the area, the Land Below erupted from beneath the surface, causing new mountain ranges to appear, burning out the Living Land stelae and creating what's now known as the "Land Above."

Driven to madness by this sudden loss of the Eastern Land, the slow erosion of the Western Land, and rebellion with his own army, Kaah hit upon a twisted plan. His scouts had reported discovering a multi-faceted jewel in a pocket dimension off the Land Below, one whose faces displayed scenes from the various realms. Kaah knew enough of reality mechanics by now to recognize this as the nexus of Core Earth's reality.

Determined that, if he could not have this cosm, no one would, Kaah planned to hurl his Darkness Device into the nexus. The resulting explosion he believed would shatter the nexus and destroy the cosm for all time.

Kaah tricked Rec Pakken into accompanying him on an expedition to the Land Below. Once they had reached the nexus (dogged, of course, by Storm Knights), Kaah threw his Darkness Device at the gem.

But things didn't work out quite the way he had planned. The nexus absorbed the Darkness Device and then drew Kaah himself within, tearing the High Lord to pieces in the process. It then spat Rec Pakken out, and the Device promptly disappeared.

Through his own machinations, the Saar of the edeinos was dead.

Who Mourns for Kaah?

In the wake of Baruk Kaah's death, the edeinos tribes in the Western Land collapsed into chaos. Without the inspiration of their tribal leader, and harried on all sides by enemies, the edeinos lacked the will to fight on.

Meanwhile, Rec Pakken rematerialized in the center of the Western Land, now without a High Lord. It's expected that the Device has already begun a hunt for a new master/pawn.

The death of Kaah also had the effect of shattering the already fragile alliance between Tharkold and Nippon Tech. With no High Lord to oppose them, there was no further need for a non-aggression pact that both sides viewed with distaste to begin with.

Currently, the Living Land is under the nominal control of a gotak named Taal, but it's anyone's guess how long he will be able to retain command.

Taal

DEXTERITY 11
Dodge 14, maneuver 12, melee weapons 13, missile weapons 13, stealth 14, unarmed combat 14
STRENGTH 9
TOUGHNESS 10
PERCEPTION 10
Find 12, trick 14
MIND 10
Test 15, willpower 15
CHARISMA 12
Persuasion 15, taunt 15
SPIRIT 13
Faith (Keta Kalles) 17, focus 17, reality (Living Land) 17
Possibilities: 20

Natural Tools: Claws, damage value STR+3/13; teeth, damage value STR+2/11

Weather Is Here, Wish You Were Beautiful

The edeinos colonies in the jungles of Brazil, created by the Akashans, are continuing to thrive. These colonies, Living Land/Core Earth mixed zones created by reality trees, are havens of peace and unity with nature. With the news of the death of Baruk Kaah, the edeinos have adapted to a new life of self-rule, under the benevolent gaze of the Akashans.

The mutual love of nature and all

living things has helped forge a strong bond between edeinos and Akashans. In fact, some edeinos are proving to be rather adept at learning the principles of biotechnology.

The South American colonies have been a propaganda gold mine for both Nippon Tech and the Cyberpapacy, who point to the Akashans as "giving aid and comfort to the enemy." Both realms have dispatched squads to attack the colonies, hoping to provoke the edeinos into a rampage. The Cyberpapacy has been a bit more circumspect, since Malraux cannot afford to anger the Akashans at the moment.

NipponTech's attacks, which are usually launched from neighboring Kanawa-controlled Peru, are more slash and burn operations. It is almost as if Kanawa and Malraux decided to swap tactics, growing evidence that nothing is certain these days anymore.

The Akashans have made some effort to defend the edeinos, but growing hostilities with the Tharkoldu have forced them to divert resources.

Skippy, We Hardly Knew Ye ...

Those who dreamt of a negotiated peace between humans and edeinos — perhaps even an alliance — were dealt a severe blow this year with the death of famed Storm Knight, Skippy the edeinos. Skippy's exploits were many and varied (see *The Character Collection*), and he had come to be seen as a goodwill ambassador from the Living Land to Core Earth. His gentle demeanor and willingness to turn on his own species in the interests of justice had gone far toward proving that not all edeinos were bloodthirsty killers.

In the end, Skippy was slain, not in combat with the minions of High Lords, but in the middle of a private war. Ensign Egypt, the Keefee Haroo sidekick of Nile Mystery Man Colonel Cairo, had shifted inclination to Evil and begun plotting his mentor's death. One of his attempts involved planting a time bomb in a building and then luring the Colonel there. Egypt's work was interrupted by Skippy, who helpfully pointed out that the Keefee's clock was set to the wrong time. Skippy corrected the "error" and perished in the ensuing explosion.

Later, there were rumors that Nile "weird scientists" had stolen Skippy's remains and created four Skippys: a teenaged Skippy, a cyborg Skippy, an Ayslish edeinos in a suit of plate armor ("the Skippy of Steel") and a brutal Skippy ("the Last Son of Lanala"). These rumors turned out to be just that: rumors. Skippy sightings occasionally still pop up in supermarket tabloids, but the fad seems to be slowly dying out.

An Uncertain Future

It seems that all the future holds for the Living Land is inevitable defeat. With no bridge extant to bring in reinforcements or provide an avenue of escape, more and more edeinos are surrendering or being slaughtered. As more edeinos die and more US troops move in, the strength of the reality weakens. Rec Pakken will need to pull a High Lord out of its nonexistent hat pretty quickly if it wants to salvage the realm.

Space Gods

The Akashans, for all their advanced technology, are beset on all sides with problems. War with the Tharkoldu, problems with control of the Comaghaz, and assaults from Orrorsh have combined to make their sojourn on Earth a nightmare. They may be powerful, psionically gifted beings from another star, but they face the same frustrations as Core Earth's other "visitors," and have been no more successful in overcoming them.

Perhaps the most shocking revelation of the past year occurred on the first day of November, when every Akashan with even the most minimal psionic abilities awoke with one thought burning in their brains: "He knew we were coming."

Through some judicious use of the occult, the Gaunt Man had evidently decided to take the Akashans down a few pegs. The realization that the most powerful High Lord of all had taken a hand in their decision to journey to Earth has shaken the Space Gods badly.

In the frightening vision he planted in each sleeping mind, the Gaunt Man revealed that he alone, of all the Possibility Raiders, had been aware of the Akashans and their previous visit to Earth millennia before. Since he could not fathom the location of the Akashans' home cosm, the Star Sphere, and was intrigued at the Akashans' ability to cross cosms without the aid of a Darkness Device, he decided to "allow" the Space Gods to come to Earth and provide him with the answers he sought.

When the vampire Victor Manwaring was sent to the Forever City (see *The Forever City*), it was not in fact to prevent the Storm Knights from lighting the Signal Fire with the Possibility Chalice. Rather, it was to ensure that they did so. (Was Manwaring aware of this? The vision is unclear, but odds are he wasn't. The Gaunt Man is not known for sharing his plans with underlings, and even had he wanted to, he had been trapped in the maelstrom for three months when this took place. But he had faith that Manwaring would be incapable of stopping the Knights, and his efforts would be sufficient to convince them that the High Lords dreaded the lighting of the Signal Fire.)

Rotan Ulka is extremely concerned about this, particularly the possibility that the Gaunt Man might discover the location of the Star Sphere and invade.

In an effort to discern more about the Akashans, the Gaunt Man has launched a series of strikes against them, most of them consisting of incursions of Horrors into the Akashan-held areas of South America.

The results of the conflicts have thus far been inconclusive, and have created an unwelcome side effect: more biotech Horrors roaming South America.

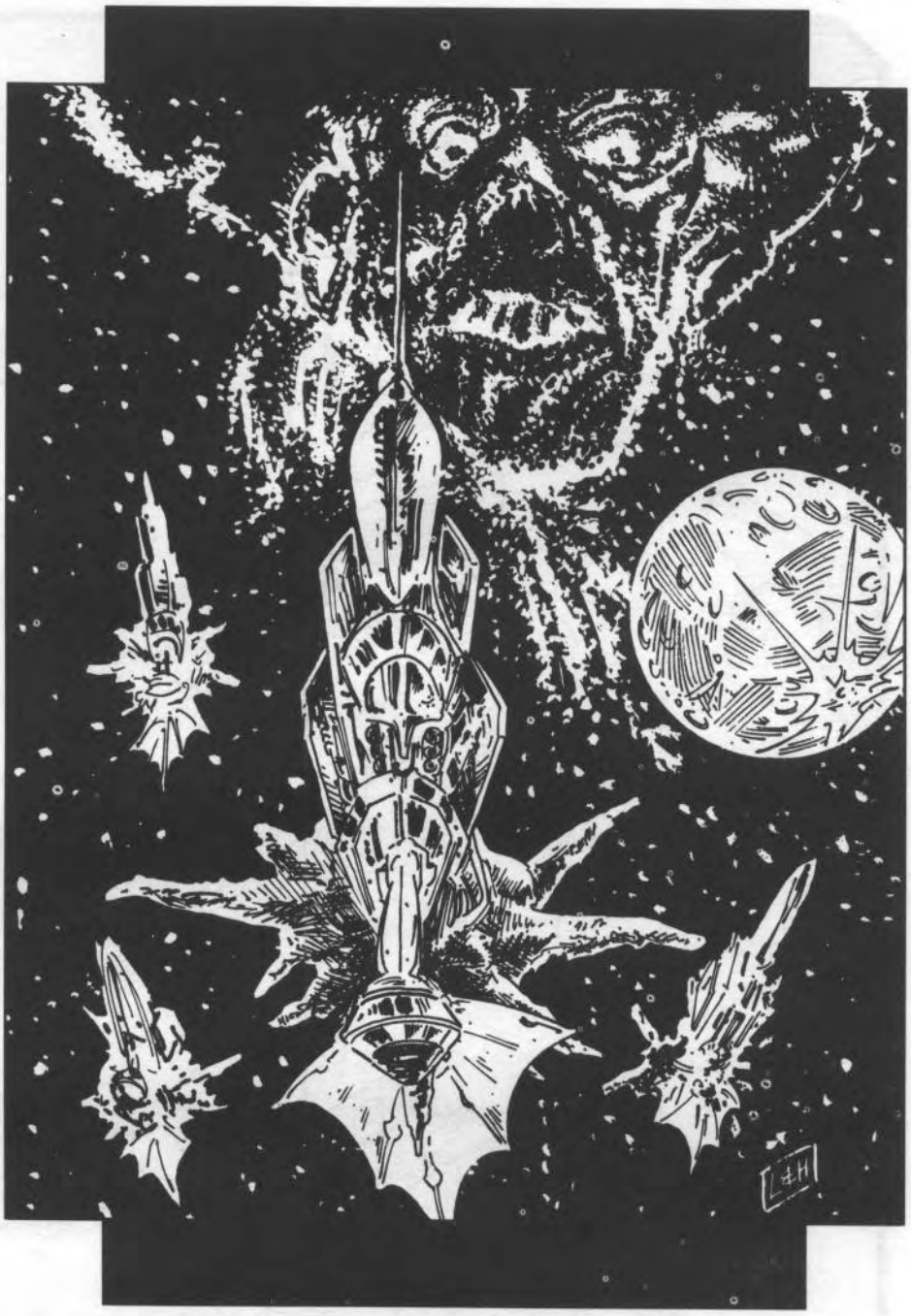
Bloodplant

Reality: Orrorsh
DEXTERITY 13
Dodge 15, unarmed combat 15
STRENGTH 16
TOUGHNESS 18

PERCEPTION 10
Tracking 14, trick 14
MIND 7
Psionic resistance 10
CHARISMA 10
Persuasion (15)
SPIRIT 10
Faith (Orrorshan evil) 14, intimidation 16
Additional Skills: Two at +1 adds
Possibilities: Some (20)
Natural Tools: Prehensile ridged tongue, damage value STR+6/22; thorn claws, damage value STR+4/20
Powers: ***paralyzing touch, attack form resistance (melee weapons)***
Corruption Value: 15
Fear Rating: 1/2
Perseverance DN: 14
Weakness: Darkness
True Death: Destruction by a biotech weapon
Description: The bloodplant is a two-meter-tall, one-meter-wide bush with an obvious network of red and blue arteries and veins intertwining all through it. It has vague, arm-like appendages with thorny claws, and a head that resembles a human skull. The prehensile ridged tongue is the source of the ***paralyzing touch*** power.

In other developments, the Akashans are currently fighting Tharkoldu in Mexico, South America, and the American West. The Tharkoldu discovered that the Akashans were providing weapons and material to Storm Knights for use against the techno-demons and responded by declaring full-scale war against the Space Gods.

At present, the Monitors are doing most of the fighting. Species like the Lorbaat are not as interested in fighting the Tharkoldu, though the other races have lined up behind the Akashans.



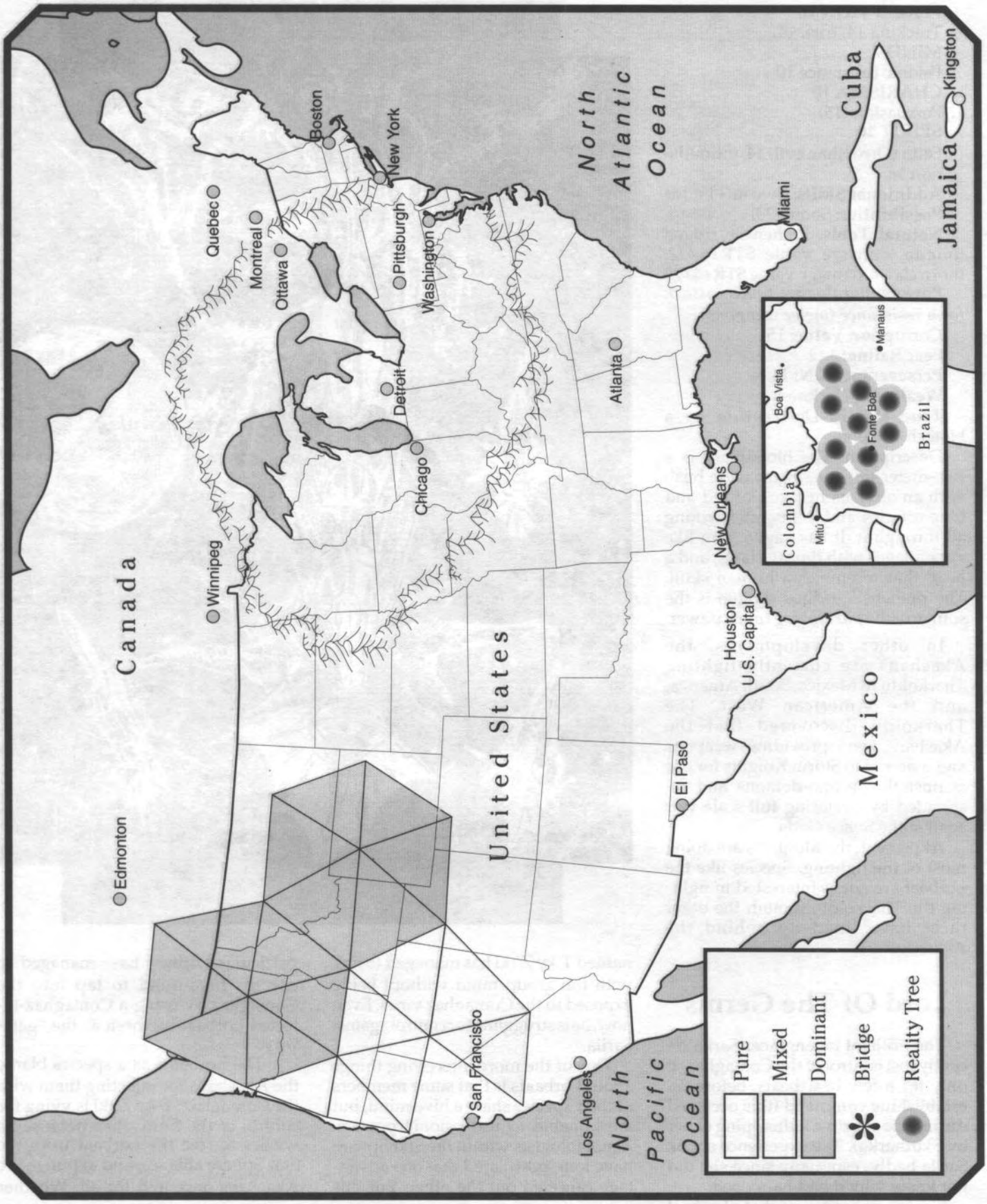
Lord Of The Germs

The brilliant bioengineer Sarila recently lost control of the Comaghaz, if only for a few heartbeats, before re-establishing command (this occurred during the abortive kidnapping of her by Skutharka). The experience shook Sarila badly, especially since she did not know why it had happened.

She has since learned that a Lorbaat named T'ky Z'tkl has managed to link with the group mind without being exposed to the Comaghaz virus. Even now, he is struggling for control against Sarila.

One of the more interesting things about Lorbaats is that some members of their species share a hive mind, but are unable to use psionic powers. Xenobiologists within the Star Sphere have long postulated that one advantage canceled out the other. But this particular Lorbaat has managed to use his hive-mind to tap into the Comaghaz by using a Comaghaz-infected Lorbaat brethren as the "gateway."

The Lorbaats as a species blame the Akashans for infecting them with the Comaghaz. T'ky Z'tkl is vying for control of the Comaghaz because he wishes to free the Lorbaat from the Star Sphere alliance, and expunge the Akashans once and for all. Whether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Mexico
North Atlantic Ocean
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Washington
Detroit
Chicago
Atlanta
New Orleans
Houston
U.S. Capital
El Paso
Los Angeles
San Francisco
Winnipeg
Edmonton
Colombia
Brazil
Boa Vista
Manaus
Fonte Boa
Mitú
Pure
Mixed
Dominant
Bridge
Reality Tree

Sarila realizes it or not, she is fighting for the survival of all Akashans, and perhaps the Star Sphere itself.

Not being as strong mentally as Sarila, the Lorbaat cannot attempt to wrest control of the group mind more than once every five days. Sarila is aware that it is a Lorbaat she is contesting with, but does not know his identity or location. Nor can she plead for help from the High Council without revealing her role as originator of the virus.

T'ky Z'tkl

DEXTERITY 10

Biotech weapons 13, dodge 11, maneuver 12, stealth 11, unarmed combat 13

STRENGTH 10

Climbing 12, lifting 12

TOUGHNESS 10 (13 with shell)

PERCEPTION 11

Evidence analysis 15, find 12, language 14, trick 14

MIND 13

Medicine 16, science (biotech) 17, test 18, willpower 20

CHARISMA 7

Taunt 10

SPIRIT 7

Intimidation 12, reality (Star Sphere) 14

Possibilities: 24

Alignment: Coar

Natural Tools: mandibles, damage value STR+4/14; claws, damage value STR+3/13; shell, armor value TOU+3/13; baatase, value STR 16, TOU 13; trioacid damage value 14

Equipment: Smash gun, damage value 21, ammo 30, range 3-20/150/300; biotech repair kit; MedKit; transtech (biotech)

Description: T'ky is a Lorbaat biotechnician who wants his people to be free of the Akashans. He is so singleminded in his goal that he is even willing to use something as dangerous to all as the Comaghaz.

T'ky's hive-brother and mental link, K'lty, is kept in a suspended state in an isolation chamber, with a neural interface that T'ky can access. T'ky's lab is located underground in the northernmost zone of Akashan reality in Brazil.

Cure Or Kill?

Although the Tharkoldu are intent on defeating the Akashans, they are unwilling to import the Comaghaz virus into their domain in the process. Thus they set the best minds in the realm, including a number of Race slave scientists, to the task of coming up with a cure for the Comaghaz.

The good news is that they've succeeded. The bad new is that it's a cure only a Tharkoldu could love.

Called the Beta-14 FLM (Frontal Lobe MedModule), this heinous little gadget is attached to a diseased being's forehead (precise center is best) by means of tiny, sharp clamps. Once in place, micro-razor thin needles enter the being's head, drilling a microscopic hole in the skull. The needles act as probes and have amazing prehensile abilities. Once the infected parts of the brain are found, the probes spray the areas with Vyadin-C, a powerful antiviral chemical that is rumored to be caustic.

If the probes sense the continued presence of the virus, a second spray is made. After this, if there are still some pockets of the plague, the probes become razor sharp and actually slice out the unhealthy brain tissue and suck it into the Beta-14 FLM.

In game terms, the Beta-14 FLM is attached to the character's head, who then takes two points of shock damage. The victim's base *Toughness* is then "attacked" by the FLM's damage value of 16. If the victim is still alive, the machine's value of 16 attempts to achieve the difficulty number of the disease, based on its stage (16 for First Stage, 23 for Second Stage, and 25 for Third Stage). All 10's and 20's are rolled again. If the difficulty number is met or exceeded, the victim is cured.

If the first attempt fails, the FLM repeats the process, this time using a damage value of 20 (the victim gets attacked first again, then the virus).

Should the second attempt fail, the FLM begins hacking away at the brain (damage value now 25). Whether or not the FLM succeeds the third time, the machine self-destructs in three minutes (make sure to remove it from the victim's head, or he and everyone in a two meter radius is attacked by an explosion of damage value 20).

This cure unit costs $25,000 US dollars, and is available on black markets in Berlin, Las Vegas, and Los Angeles.

If the victim is cured, he must spend one week in bed per attempt made by the FLM.

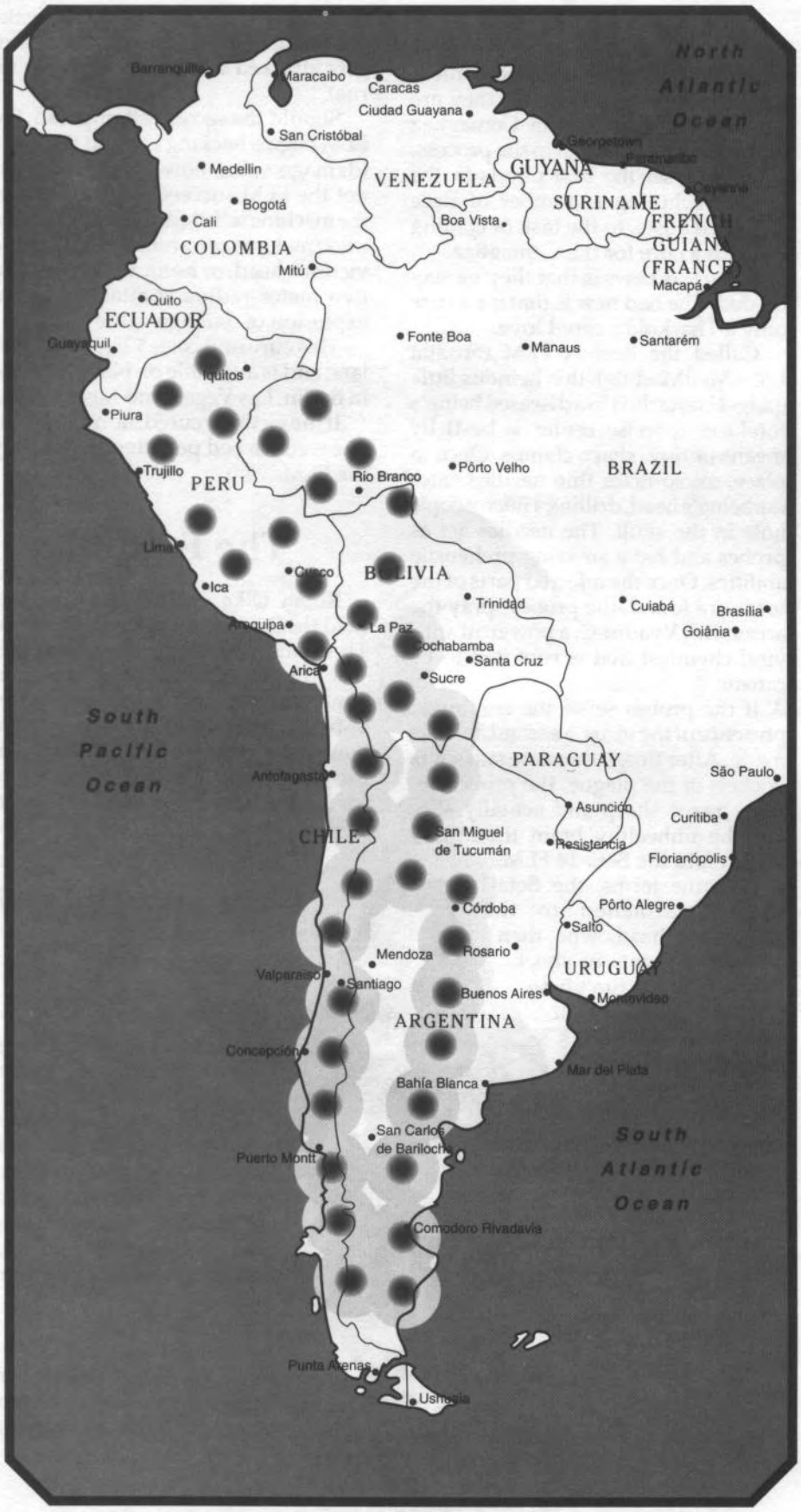
The Future?

Rotan Ulka continues to try and hold the Star Sphere alliance together. There may come a point, however, when the Akashans simply throw their hands up and decide that getting involved in Earth's affairs is simply not worth the grief it's caused, and that the people of Earth are just not ready for contact with a species as advanced as they are.

Land Below/ Land Above

The Land Above, which rose in the Eastern United States replacing the Eastern Living Land, has stabilized for now. The surrounding areas of Core Earth America and Canada are recovering from the shock of the rise, and life is returning to "normal."

There have been relatively few incidents of Land Above creatures going beyond its borders, as the mountain ranges prove an effective barrier.



There have, however, been numerous travelers going into the Land Above, among them agents of Nippon Tech, the Cyberpapacy and the Nile Empire. Those who have survived are believed to still be in there, gathering information.

They are the lucky ones. Several Cyberpapists were discovered near Ottawa, hacked to pieces and Serpentors are said to have skinned alive a group of Nippon MarSec agents in Indiana.

There are several entrances to the Land Below that have been marked in recent months by brave (or foolish) explorers. The entrances are a form of dimthread, taking an average expedition about 18 hours on foot to reach the pocket dimension.

The points of entry are:

- A tunnel that branches off and downwards, found in the New York City subway system. It enters Merretika near the Ohibi village;
- A large cave in the hills outside Lynchburg, Virginia. It enters near Smoke Canyon;
- A tunnel half-buried in the remains of an underground parking garage in Chicago. It leads to Misty Gorge.

None of these entryways into the Land Below are guarded, at least not on the surface. There are certainly other points of entry, but estimates are that there probably aren't more than a half dozen unaccounted for.

As Below, So Above

Bands of Keefee that have come to the Land Above are understandably very curious about what lies beyond the mountains. What possible stories could there be out there? What wonders await?

Groups of braver Keefee are doing more than wondering: they are making contact with visitors "from beyond the mountains" and bargaining for passage out into Core Earth America.

Meanwhile, the Manhattan Protectorate has entered into negotiations with the Leopard Men and other tribes in the area, in an attempt to hammer out a mutual defense pact against Darooni Wasp Riders.

Threatening this is the Cyberpapacy, which would love to plunder the remaining museums and cathedrals/churches in the city of their treasures, a number of which might be eternity shards. There is nothing Malraux would like more than to plant a stelae in New York City and bring the axioms back to a "more acceptable" level.

Unfortunately, there are some Core Earthers in New York City who think that having the Cyberpapacy come in wouldn't be such a bad thing. They claim that having heat, light, television, and refrigeration is far better than running around in torn clothing and cooking on open fires. Many gangs share those feelings, and have actually sought out Cyberpapal representatives in order to be "fitted" as CyberKnights.

This apparent schism could threaten the Manhattan Protectorate's ability to negotiate a deal with the denizens of the Land Above.

Fires of Ambition

Lord Hadian Fel Ar, the leader of the Pyrian Fire Tamers, has not come up to the surface for any length of time, but his dreams have been haunted by the image of a black stone that wields great power. It lies in the center of a jungle, one most unlike anything found in the Land Below. And it calls to him ...

As a result, Lord Hadian has begun to send expeditions outside of the Land Above to see if they can find this thing. War bands of Pyrian Fire Tamers have been seen working their way west toward Montana, searching for someone who might know of this wondrous thing.

Kord the jungle lord, however, has traveled to the Land Above. Kord knows about Lord Hadian's dreams, and instinctively knows that whatever the leader of the Pyrians has in mind, it's not good. Kord may attempt to contact Storm Knights in order to alert them to this development.

What the Future Holds

If Lord Hadian winds up getting his hands on Rec Pakken, it could spell disaster for not only Core Earth Americans, but also for the Land Above/Below. Who knows how the lands would react to suddenly having to conform to a High Lord's rules of reality? Such a shift might cause further destablization, tectonic shifts, volcanic eruptions, and certainly increased reality storms.

Expect Cyberpapal encroachments into the Land Above to far outpace those of the Nile Empire and Nippon Tech in the months to come, as expansion of Malraux's American territory will inevitably require an invasion of that cosm.

CHAPTER FIVE

The Nile Empire™

Wu Han smiled with wicked satisfaction as the burly shocktroopers dragged their unwilling captive into his presence.

"So. At last I have you, Major Havoc," Wu Han purred as the Mystery Man, relieved of his .45s, was thrown at the Overgovernor's feet. Despite having taken a beating from the shocktroopers, Havoc still sported his hat and face mask, and his black double-breasted suit and cloak seemed none the worse for wear.

Havoc hated to admit it, but a little part of him was relieved to see that Wu Han was back to normal, and in as finely villainous form as ever.

"I know what comes next, you madman," Havoc hissed. "Torture, right?"

Wu Han nodded, smiling, so Havoc continued. "Well? What's it gonna be, you sadist? The Pit of a Thousand Stings? Hugo, the Blind Surgeon? The Vat of Slow-Acting Acid? The beautiful Lotus twins, whose skillful ministrations blur the line between pleasure and pain?"

Wu Han smiled again as Havoc was led up to a set of double doors.

"None of those, dear Major. You are too strong for them. But not even you can resist this!"

With that, the doors flew open to reveal a grand royal chamber, lit by a pair of skylights in the ceiling. The sunlight shone down upon a vast banquet table, set for two. The food and wines were sumptuous, each dish a culinary masterpiece. At the head of the table sat none other than Dr. Mobius himself, his features hidden as usual under his dark cowl.

"Ah, my old enemy, Major Havoc! Sit, sit!" The High Lord motioned at one of the chairs. The shocktroopers dragged the Storm Knight to the seat and sat him down.

"So, what happens now?" Havoc asked through gritted teeth.

"Lunch!" exclaimed Mobius, hefting a wine goblet. "Enjoy!"

Major Havoc gave a snort of contempt. "Right. Eat poisoned food? I'm no babe in the sands, Doc."

"That's 'Pharaoh,' to you," Mobius replied. "And the food and drink are safe. Believe me, Havoc, if I wanted you dead, you *would* be dead. Eat. In fact, why not see what lies under that covered dish?"

Curious, Havoc lifted the cover and found his guns. He shot a confused glance at Mobius. The High Lord chuckled and spread his arms wide.

"Dear Major Havoc, do you still not realize it? I've won. Look at my realm. It grows bigger each day, expanding into Europe, Africa, and now even America. My most trusted aide, Wu Han, is back in charge of Cairo. My greatest foe, Dr. Alexus Frest, is missing. All around me, my would-be rivals fall: Malraux, Kanawa! I am winning, Major. I am winning!"

"So that's what this little fete is about, eh, Doc?" Major Havoc hissed as he fetched his guns. A quick glance showed that they were not loaded. "Gloating."

"Yes," nodded Mobius. "My realm will continue to crawl up into Europe, even as I press westward across North Africa for a harbor in the Atlantic ... perhaps Casablanca. And don't think that Jerusalem is safe, either. Things are going my way.

"Of course," the High Lord added, "I can tell you all this because you will never leave this palace again."

Now it was Havoc's turn to smile. "That's what you think, Mobius. I came prepared." Flipping open his wristwatch face to reveal a secret radio transmitter, the masked avenger lifted it to his mouth and shouted, "Now!"

Nothing happened.

Slightly alarmed, Havoc tried again. "Now!"

Nothing.

Mobius began giggling like a maniac as Havoc tried a third time. "NOW!!!!!"

"Oh, Havoc, I am *so* glad you still have your sense of —"

Mobius' words were abruptly cut off by the sound of glass shattering overhead, as a man clad in fire-engine red crashed through one of the skylights.

"It's always darkest before the dawn! Destructo Don!!!!" the newcomer shouted as he swooped down, grabbed Havoc by the collar, and roared skyward again.

"What!?!?! Guards!!" Mobius roared as a half dozen shocktroopers burst in, looking for the source of the disturbance.

"Shoot them, you fools!" the High Lord raged as the two figures raced towards the ceiling.

As bursts of machinegun fire erupted around them, Havoc noticed that Destructo was heading towards the other intact skylight rather than the one already knocked out.

"No, Don! Go for the open one! Go for the —"

More glass shattered as the flying hero rammed the skylight with his warheadpiece, and the two heroes sailed over Thebes toward safety.

"Thanks. Now I'll be picking glass out of my hair for days," Havoc murmured. "And what's more ... you were late."

"Sorry, Major," Destructo replied, keeping a strong grip on his friend. "Headwinds were terrible. So, where to now?"

"On to Nairboi," Havoc announced as he tried not to look earthward. "Let's see how fast this warheadpiece can get us there."

"Found out some bad news, eh?" asked Don as he turned southward towards Kenya.

"The worst," Havoc replied grimly. "If there's one thing worse than a madman ... it's a madman who's winning."

Showdown at Giza

A full moon shone down on two groups of people, squaring off against the backdrop of the pyramids of Giza. On one side stood the Hood, backed up by his horde of gangsters, strongarm men, and Nippon Tech ninja.

On the other side stood Overgovernor Wu Han, with his own toughs, mobsters, mysterious Oriental alchemists, and a horde of the Nile's version of ninja. The latter made lots of anxious exaggerated moves, whipping their swords through the air, and shouting "Hiya!" far too often.

"This war ends now," the Hood announced, the villain's features hidden under the very famous hood. "For too long we have both smashed our heads against the wall, neither gain-

ing nor losing ground. It must be finished."

Wu Han smiled. "Oh? Could it be it is because I am winning that you have called this meeting?

"Think what you will, old man, but after tonight there will be but *one* master of Cairo," the Hood warned.

"I refuse to speak to a mask. Remove it and face me, if you dare," Wu Han ordered.

"If you insist," the Hood replied, removing his namesake. A gasp rippled through the assembly as the face of Wu Han, fifteen years younger, stared back at Overgovernor Wu Han. The Hood smiled.

"What trickery is this?" Wu Han demanded.

The Hood smiled even more. "No trick, old man. Before this planet was invaded, I was Wu Han, a Chinese intelligence agent from Manchuria. When Kanawa invaded, I became a loyal worker for the High Lord. And when he sent me here, I was delighted to at last work against my Terran counterpart. I challenge you, my brother. To the death!"

The Hood produced a glove, and slapped Wu Han in the face.

The Overgovernor nodded, still quite amazed at seeing "himself." But eventually, he produced a glove of his own and slapped his younger self so hard that the man's face actually tingled. "I accept," he declared.

"Do not be so surprised," the Hood said. "After all, Earth had its own Roosevelt, Hitler, and others. Why not another Wu Han?"

"Yes, yes, whatever," Wu Han replied irritably. "Now, what of this fight? What are the conditions?"

The Hood pointed at the Great Pyramid. "Years ago, Arab men would fight atop that pyramid. It is only fitting that we two do so now. Fist fight, martial arts, wrestling, whatever it takes to win. But no weapons, special powers, or poisons. The winner gets Cairo."

Wu Han nodded his acceptance of the terms. "Very well, let us climb the pyramid. But before that ..."

Wu Han produced an ornate flask and drank deeply from it, then held it out to his Core Earth namesake. "Drink?"

The Hood laughed in contempt and batted the bottle out of Wu Han's hand. The liquid spilled out, only to be absorbed by the thirsty sand. "What kind of fool do you take me for, o master of poisons? Enough of your pathetic tricks. To the top of the pyramid!"

In silence, the two men scaled the Great Pyramid of Cheops and took their positions on the flattened apex. The Hood began stripping down to the waist. "Do likewise, Wu Han. There will be no surprises, no cheating."

Wu Han shrugged and stripped down to the waist, then assumed an exotic martial arts stance. The Hood did likewise, and then the two men hurled themselves at each other, murder in their eyes.

For a while, it appeared that the fight would go to the younger, stronger Hood. However, as the men struggled, it became obvious to all that the elder Wu Han was gaining the upper hand.

"What's wrong, Hood? Getting tired already?" Wu Han purred smugly.

The younger man's face was now deathly pale, and he was shaking all over. Sweat dripped off of him as he disengaged from the elder Wu Han and staggered back to a neutral corner. "You! You did something to me!"

"Quite so," Wu Han chuckled. "I poisoned you."

"You son of a jackal!" the Hood hissed. "You broke the rules! I said no poisons!"

"I poisoned you before the rules were announced," Wu Han yawned, then made a pantomime motion of slapping the Hood with a glove. The Hood stared at him, open-mouthed, in outrage. "Oh, do stop that," Wu Han snapped. "It was a new poison. To tell you the truth, I didn't even know if it would work. I didn't even get a chance to build up an immunity to it myself."

"But that means you've been poisoned as well," the Hood pressed.

"Yes. Which is why I took the antidote," Wu Han grinned, then gestured toward the spilled bottle way down at the base of the pyramid. "I even offered some to you, but you swatted it away. That's gratitude for you."

"The antidote ..." the Hood muttered as he staggered down the pyramid, eventually tripping and falling the last dozen feet. He scrambled across the sand like a drunken scorpion and tried in vain to get a few drops from the now-dry flask.

Following behind him, Wu Han hefted the pathetic Hood and, holding him up so that everyone could see what was happening, twisted the man's neck until an audible snap heralded the end of his Core Earth counterpart.

As the victor let the body slide to the sand, he turned to the Hood's men. "Any who now wish to follow me, stand forward and be recognized."

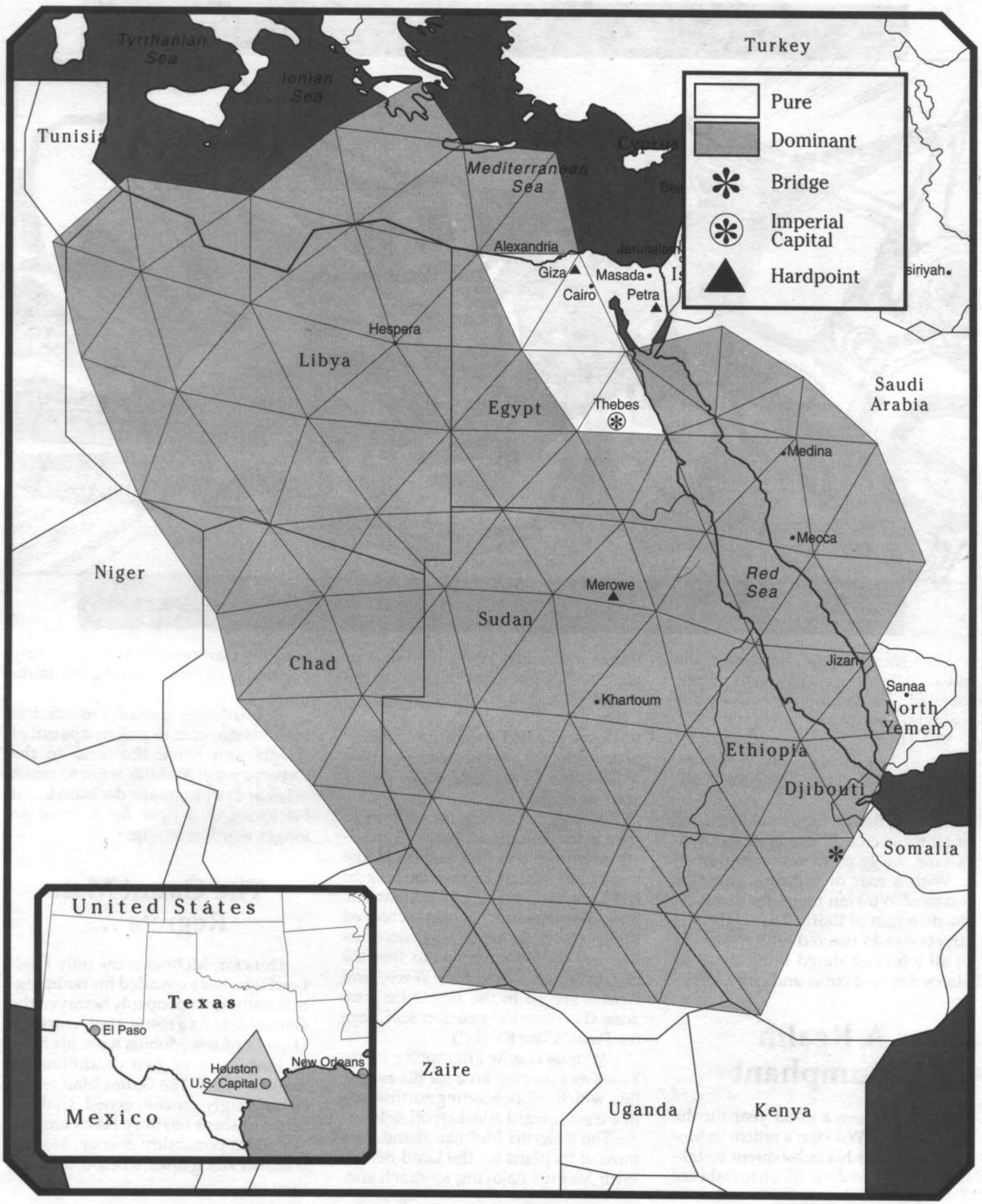
Only a quarter of the Hood's followers stepped forward. Wu Han noted with interest that none of these were Nippon ninja. Wu Han turned to his own followers and pointed toward his new recruits.

"Kill them," he ordered.

One pug-ugly gangster in Wu Han's employ looked about uncertainly. "Uh ... don't ya mean, kill da ones who ain't joinin' up?"

Wu Han glared at the man. "No. Kill the ones who stepped forward. Any man who would change sides so easily, without even knowing what risks, rewards, and duties are to be his, is not to be trusted. If they left the Hood so easily, they would do the same to me. Kill them."

A split second after the bodies hit the ground, Wu Han turned toward the survivors. "Your leader is dead, and you have nowhere to go. I offer you my protection, and an opportunity to make yourselves rich and powerful by being the masters of Cairo and her environs. We will face down the Storm Knights, and humiliate them. And we will do so in the service of Dr. Mobius!"


Tyrrhanian Sea
Ionian Sea
Turkey
Tunisia
Mediterranean Sea
Pure
Dominant
Bridge
Imperial Capital
Hardpoint
Alexandria
Giza
Cairo
Masada
Petra
Hespera
Libya
Egypt
Thebes
Saudi Arabia
Medina
Mecca
Red Sea
Niger
Merowe
Sudan
Chad
Jizan
Sanaa
North Yemen
Khartoum
Ethiopia
Djibouti
Somalia
United States
Texas
El Paso
Houston
U.S. Capital
New Orleans
Mexico
Zaire
Uganda
Kenya

He turned to stare pointedly at the ninja. "All who wish to join me, come forward. The rest of you — leave this realm by sunrise and never return."

The Hood's henchmen flocked *en masse* to Wu Han's side, while the Nippon ninja vanished into the shadows.

"Cairo, Berlin, Houston! I am lord of all three cities!" Wu Han shouted. "Come, we go on to new conquests!"

With a roar of triumph, the new forces of Wu Han made their way in the direction of Cairo. That night, the streets would run red with the blood of all who had dared think that Wu Han's day had come and gone.

A Realm Triumphant

This has been a good year for the Nile Empire. Wu Han's return to Mobius' fold and his subsequent re-taking of Cairo has done much to stabilize things internally. With the defeat of the Hood, Nippon has lost any chance it had ever had to seize control of Cairo.

Despite heated opposition from the Tharkoldu, the Nile has also been able to maintain its foothold in the mixed zone of Berlin.

The biggest victory for Mobius to date is the landing in Texas. A maelstrom bridge was dropped on Houston, appropriately enough landing on the Delphi Council's headquarters. SuperBattlegroup Mobius achieved the necessary element of surprise, causing the US Government to flee the Houston area. Houston, Waco, and Austin are all in the new Nile pure zone. (For more information, see Chapter Two, "Core Earth.")

Mobius is now attempting to use Texas as a staging area for his zeppelins, which will be heading northwards in a feint toward Alaskan oil fields.

The Kefertiri Idol has abandoned most of its plans for the Land Below. With Mobius enjoying so much success, the Darkness Device has wisely decided to continue serving him faithfully.

Mobius' only recent setback has been his decision to pull troops out of Bosnia and leave the field to the Cyberpapacy. And this is not so much a defeat as a pragmatic decision to cut his losses in a fight for a prize no longer worth winning.

The Gaunt Man Regrets ...

Thus far, Mobius is the only High Lord who has expanded his realm significantly and not openly betrayed the Gaunt Man. As a result, the Orrorshan High Lord lets Mobius have his head as long as those two conditions remain in effect. The Gaunt Man seems surprisingly unconcerned that, in terms of sheer territory taken and the attendant possibility energy, Mobius is farther along toward becoming Torg than he.

Mobius, of course, knows full well that eventually the Gaunt Man will unveil some master plan to suck Earth dry of its possibilities (after all, that's what Mobius would do). But he feels that as long as the Gaunt Man points him toward another cosm to invade, he cares very little what happens to Core Earth or the other High Lords.

Of course, Mobius may be overestimating the amount of regard the Gaunt Man has for him. And he is certainly forgetting that if the Gaunt Man becomes Torg, all of the cosmverse will fall, leaving no more worlds to conquer.

The Coming of the Sphinxes

Recently, shocktroopers on station at the Sphinx in Giza were found slain, torn to pieces. Witnesses reported seeing winged creatures emerge from nowhere and do the bloody deed, prompting fears that the Tharkoldu may be invading the Nile Empire.

The truth came out some time later, with multiple sightings of winged beings, half human/half lion. Identified by Bedouin tribesmen as "true sphinxes," these creatures have great wisdom and terrible power. They wander the sandy wastes, posing riddles to travelers. Those who answer correctly are given a reward (jewels, gold, or information). Those who answer incorrectly are set upon and devoured.

It appears that some of the sphinxes favor Mobius, while others are of Good inclination. Why they have appeared and what they truly want remains a mystery.

True Sphinxes

DEXTERITY 14
Dodge 17, flight 18, maneuver 15, melee weapons 17, stealth 16, unarmed combat 19
STRENGTH 16
TOUGHNESS 16
PERCEPTION 14
Divination magic 16, Egyptian religion 17, evidence analysis 16, find 17, hieroglyphics 17, language 18, scholar (riddles) 19, tracking 15, trick 18
MIND 14
Survival 17, test of will 18, willpower 19
CHARISMA 11
Charm 14, persuasion 15, taunt 17
SPIRIT 14
Intimidation 19, reality (Nile Empire) 19
Additional Skills: four at +2 adds
Possibilities: 20
Inclination: Variable
Arcane Knowledges: *Magic 5, entity 6, folk 6, living forces 5, inanimate forces 5, death 4, life 4, time 5, true knowledge 6*
Natural Tools: Claws, damage value STR+4/20; teeth, damage value STR+4/20; wings, speed value 18
Equipment: Sword, damage value STR+9/25
Note: Not all sphinxes carry swords.
Description: Sphinxes are a combination of the head, upper torso, and arms of a human male or female, wings of a giant eagle, and the flanks and hind-quarters of a lion.

The sphinxes prize knowledge and riddles, and adhere to a very strict set of rules as far as riddle games go. They will stop passersby and ask them riddles. Those who guess correctly may gain an add in an arcane knowledge, some secret information, a Possibility, or perhaps even the answer to a question that has been vexing the person. Those who fail are set upon by the sphinx and killed.

Around the World With Dr. Mobius

Mobius' territory now encompasses portions of Africa, Europe and North America. And everywhere he goes, his axiom wash goes with him, sometimes with alarming effects …

The Greek Gods Return

When Mobius invaded Greece, he unknowingly set into motion a chain of events that have worked to his disadvantage. When the Nile axioms washed over parts of Greece, the parts of the reality that represented ancient Egypt did a sort of "reality jump start" to certain hardpoints in Greece, such as the Parthenon. These hardpoints, however, are not of present day Core Earth reality, rather, they are ancient Greek reality.

The only noticeable result of this odd occurrence is the awakening of a few of the Greek gods from their slumber in their pocket dimension. The gods awakened are: Zeus, chieftain of the gods; Hera: wife of Zeus, goddess of home and hearth; Pluto, god of the underworld; Athena, goddess of wisdom; Ares, god of war; Hermes, messenger of the gods.

For whatever reasons, the rest of the gods have not yet appeared, and there is no hint of whether they ever will. Pluto has actually allied himself with Mobius, and Ares, always interested in a war, refuses to act against the High Lord as long as Mobius continues to stay aggressive. The remaining four deities are opposing Mobius, usually acting through Storm Knights who have become priests of the respective gods and have been granted miracles by them.

The gods will not take a direct hand in the conflict, as this would pit god against god, something which even opposing deities are loathe to do in front of "mere mortals."

The entire pantheon dwells on Greece's Mount Olympus, and are inaccessible to mortals unless they will it otherwise.

As a result of the intervention of the Olympians, Mobius' campaign in Greece is stalled.

Praying to Olympus

Any Storm Knight who wishes to be a cleric of the Greek gods must have the *focus* skill, and at least one add in *faith (Greek)*.

For more details on the Greek gods and the miracles associated with them, see *The Clerics' Sourcebook*.

The Wonders of Arabia

There have been scattered reports, nothing verified, of the Nile axiom wash doing odd things to the zones in Saudi Arabia. There are tales of people finding splendid cities in the desert, lush oases, and powerful elemental spirits, also known as *djinn*, roaming about. Speculation is that the same force which restored the ancient Greek figures may be doing the same to the old Arabian tales.

Some scholars guess that the Arabian myths are taking longer to manifest themselves because there are fewer ruins and such to act as hardpoints. If these stories have any truth, however, there soon may be a run on old lamps and low-flying carpets.

The Great State of Texas

Invading Texas has given Mobius a brilliant propaganda victory. Naturally, this has not endeared him to some of the other High Lords. Mobius froze all Nippon assets in Houston and took over all Kanawa holdings, inviting the wrath of 3327. Nor is Jezrael pleased to have yet another High Lord on the North American continent, especially since Texas is close to her own zones.

As a result of the invasion, a host of new pulp heroes, all of them transformed Core Earthers, have arisen to battle the forces of the Nile. Calling themselves the New Texas Rangers, this group of heroes has become a rallying point for all loyal Texans. The group consists of Lone Star, Yellow Rose, Rio Grande (who harbors an unrequited love for Dr Zap), Texas Longhorn, and Kid Alamo. Their major foe is the Rustler.

Lone Star

DEXTERITY 9

Dodge 12, long jumping 13, maneuver 12, missile weapons 12, running 14, unarmed combat 15

STRENGTH 11/14

Lifting 14/17

TOUGHNESS 11

PERCEPTION 8

Find 10, tracking 9

MIND 8

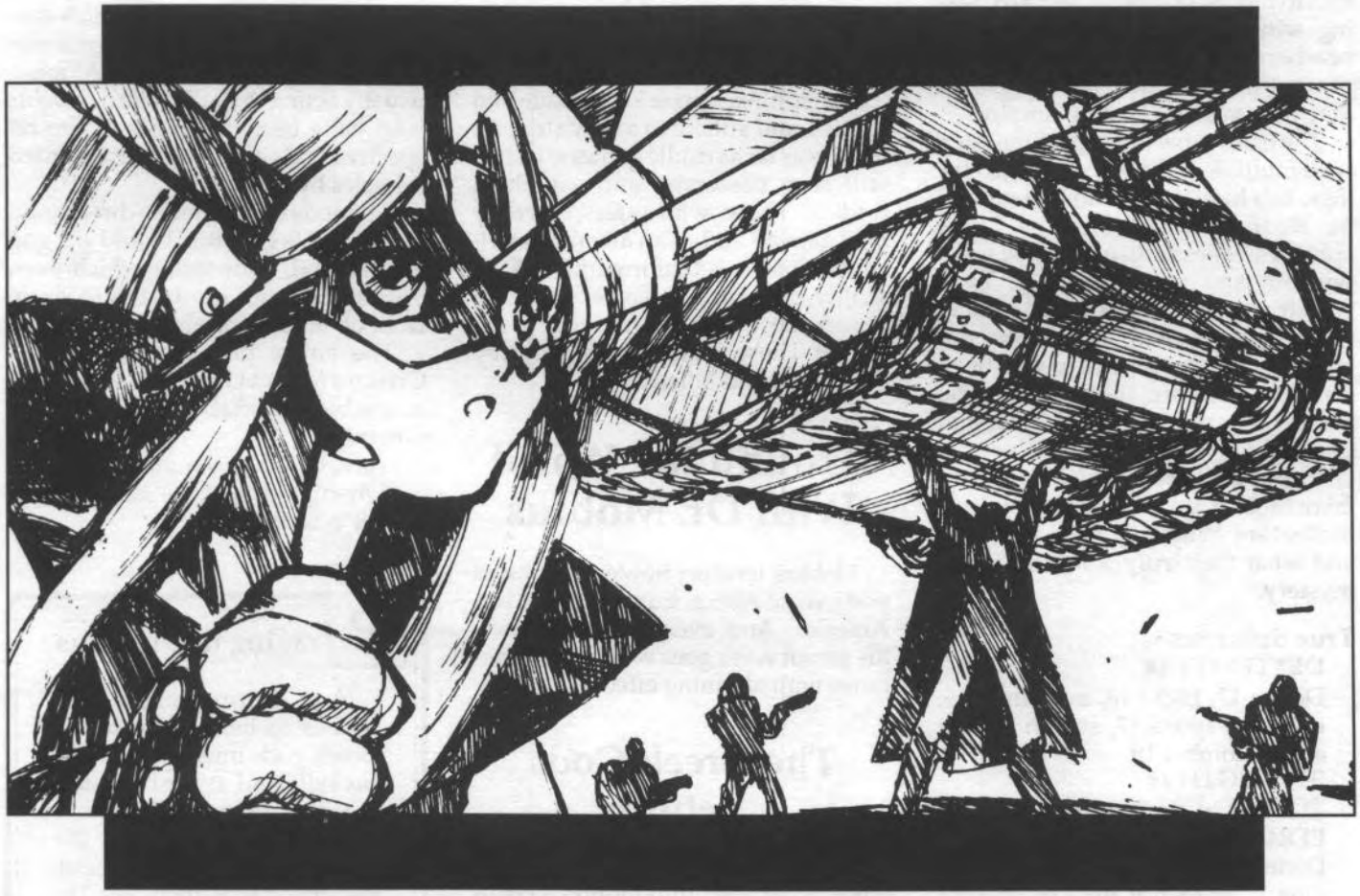
Test 12, weird science 9, willpower 13

CHARISMA 10

Charm 13, taunt 13

SPIRIT 12

Intimidation 15, reality (Nile Em-



pire) 14
Possibilities: 12
Inclination: Good
Equipment: Throwing lone star, damage value STR+3/20, range 10/25/50
Pulp Powers: *Super Attribute* (STR+3)
Power Flaws: Lone Star loses his *Strength* if he is attacked by a female (six point power flaw).
Description: Lone Star is secretly Jack Valdez, who was caught in the Nile axiom wash and reborn as a defender of Texas. He speaks with a drawl, and is very courteous to women, so much so that he cannot bring himself to attack one.

Valdez wears a white star on his chest, which he can throw like a shield. The star always returns to him.

Lone Star's costume is a skin-tight bodysuit that resembles the Texas flag.

Yellow Rose

DEXTERITY 12
Acrobatics 16, dodge 16, fire combat 14, long jumping 14, maneuver 15, running 14, swimming 14
STRENGTH 8
TOUGHNESS 9
PERCEPTION 10
Trick 13
MIND 9
Artist (dancer) 12, weird science 11
CHARISMA 13
Charm 17, persuasion 16
SPIRIT 10
Reality (Nile Empire) 13
Possibilities: 15
Inclination: Good
Equipment: Rose thorn gun, damage value 14, range 5/15/25
Description: Jennie Rose McClintock was an intensely patriotic Texas civil servant before the axiom wash hit. She was inspired to act in defense of her home and designed a bright yellow outfit and mask.

Her rose thorn gun shoots darts that resemble thorns. The thorns can also be modified to deliver a potent knockout potion (stun damage value 20) that produces unconsciousness.

Rio Grande

DEXTERITY 7
Melee weapons 8, missile weapons 8, unarmed combat 9
STRENGTH 11
Lifting 13
TOUGHNESS 12
PERCEPTION 10
Evidence analysis 13, find 12, trick 14, land vehicles 12
MIND 10
Test 12
CHARISMA 8
Charm 11, persuasion 11
SPIRIT 12
Intimidation 16, reality (Nile Empire) 16
Possibilities: 16
Inclination: Good
Pulp Powers: *Water blast*, damage value STR+10/21, range 3-10/25/40; *water breathing*

Water blast is similar to the *ice blast* power (*Infiniverse Update Volume I*, page 49), except that Rio cannot create a wall of water. The water fires from the palms of her hands.

Power Flaw: Rio Grande loses her *water blast* power when subjected to very hot air (greater than 120 degrees Fahrenheit). This does not mean a flame attack will cause her to lose her power, but if she were to be in a room where the heat had been turned up or out in the middle of the desert, her power would desert her.

Description: Rio Del Floria is a rotund woman and a long-time admirer of the Nile hero Dr Zap. Ever since the news of Zap's apparent conversion to Evil, Rio has been hoping she could somehow do something to reform him.

Then came the Nile axiom wash. Now endowed with amazing water powers, she donned a hideous blue spandex outfit and dedicated her life to fighting Mobius and saving Zap.

Texas Longhorn

DEXTERITY 13
Long jumping 16, running 16, unarmed combat 17
STRENGTH 13
TOUGHNESS 13
PERCEPTION 7
Tracking 9
MIND 7
Willpower 12
CHARISMA 7
SPIRIT 12
Intimidation 15, reality (Nile Empire) 14
Possibilities: 17
Inclination: Good
Equipment: Longhorns (STR+7/20) At maximum size, the horns have a damage value of 27.
Pulp Powers: *Grow*, value STR+7/20
Power Flaw: Texas Longhorn returns to normal size and/or is incapable of using the longhorns if attacked with electricity/lightning (six point flaw).
Description: Big Jim Londell was a cattleman who got caught in the axiom wash and wound up as strong as a Texas Longhorn. Unfortunately, he wound up about as smart as one as well. He can grow up to seven meters tall.

Texas Longhorn is one of the most powerful members of the New Texas Rangers, but is kind of slow on the uptake. Lone Star usually winds up explaining things to him.

Texas Longhorn is dressed in a stretchable brown one-piece costume, with a cowl shaped like a bull's head. The longhorns are mounted atop his head.

Kid Alamo

DEXTERITY 10
Acrobatics 14, beast riding 12, dodge 12, maneuver 11, missile weapons 12, stealth 14, unarmed combat 12
STRENGTH 9
TOUGHNESS 10
PERCEPTION 10
Evidence analysis 12, find 12, land vehicles 11, scholar (Nile realm lore) 13, scholar (Texas history) 14, trick 12
MIND 11
CHARISMA 9
Taunt 13
SPIRIT 10
Reality 12
Possibilities: 11
Inclination: Good
Pulp Power: Kid Alamo can cause Storm Knight players on his side to enjoy the effects of a *Rally* card, once per scene.
Power Flaw: Kid Alamo takes a shock point every time he uses the *Rally* power. This shock point cannot be healed; it goes away after 24 hours (three point flaw).
Equipment: Slingshot, damage value STR+2/11, range 3-5/10/15 and special sling stones (4 each): fireburst,

damage value 18; knockout gas (2), stun damage value 20; dazzle, value 18; motorcycle, speed value 15

Description: Richie Carpenter is a high school student who found that his knowledge of Texas history serves to rally people who fight alongside him. He wears a buckskin jacket, faded jeans, and a black mask. Kid Alamo is an impulsive, cocky teenager whose heart is nonetheless in the right place.

The Vanguard

The Mystery Men are not the only Nile heroes to have come over from Terra. Other, smaller groups of heroes have also emigrated to Core Earth is recent months.

One such group is the Vanguard, made up of Mystery Men "wannabes," as well as transformed Core Earthers. The group consists of Destructo Don, the Sparrow and Lady Rahab. The Vanguard also considers Major Havoc a member, though he has thus far refused to affiliate with any group.

The Vanguard has recently been sent to Berlin in the hope of putting the Scarlet Asp and her allies out of commission.

Destructo Don

DEXTERITY 8
Acrobatics 9, dodge 9, flight 12, heavy weapons 9, melee weapons 11, unarmed combat 11
STRENGTH 15
Climbing 17, lifting 18
TOUGHNESS 10 (13 with suit)
PERCEPTION 9
Air vehicles 12, find 10, trick 11
MIND 8
Weird science 10, willpower 10
CHARISMA 9
Charm 11, persuasion 12, taunt 14
SPIRIT 10
Intimidation 12, reality (Nile Empire) 14
Possibilities: 22
Inclination: Good
Equipment: DD suit, armor value TOU+3/13; Warheadpiece TOU 12, damage value 14; 50' rope, flashlight

The Warheadpiece is shaped like the nosecone of a missile and is roughly .75 meters high. The only way the Warheadpiece can be used is by ramming the target courtesy of the *flight* power. Every successful attack on an opponent inflicts one shock point of damage on Don. A complete miss means that Don has crashed into a wall, ceiling, floor, whatever (or the surface simply did not break or buckle), and Don suffers three shock points of damage

Power Flaw: The *flight* power is neutralized in any form of darkness, which is defined as: darkness spells, darkness pulp powers, smokescreens, and interior areas with absolutely no light sources or open doors/windows. Even the tiniest bit of light is enough for Don to be repowered (six point flaw).

Description: Destructo Don is actually Dan Monning, a wealthy playboy socialite from Terra. He gained his amazing powers through a chain of freak accidents, then donned the fire enginered mantle of Destructo Don.

However, the Mystery Men did not take Destructo Don seriously — far from it. They refused to allow him to join. Not to be deterred, Don tagged along and helped them on their cases, whether they wanted him to or not. Don actually did some good, although his actions did result in the hospitalization of several Mystery Men.

At last, the Mystery Men decided to elect him as a sort of mascot, but he resigned when the Vanguard was seeking to fill its ranks.

Destructo wears a metallic, fire engine-red bodysuit and a red helmet. A pair of red goggles rounds out his outfit.

The Sparrow

DEXTERITY 9/11
Dodge 12/14, fire combat 11/13, flight 13/15, lockpicking 10/12, maneuver 10/12, unarmed combat 12/14
STRENGTH 9
TOUGHNESS 9/10
PERCEPTION 10
Evidence analysis 12, first aid 11, trick 12
MIND 10
Hypnosis 11
CHARISMA 9
SPIRIT 10
Intimidate 11, reality (Nile Empire) 12
Possibilities: 30
Equipment: K08 pistol, damage value 15, ammo 8, range 3-10/25/6
Pulp Powers: *Super Attributes*, DEX+2, TOU+1; *flight*
Power Flaws: *Stymie flaw* in the presence of birds of prey (hawks, falcons, eagles), or people or things that take on that aspect (three point flaw); loss of added DEX when in below freezing temperatures (six point flaw)

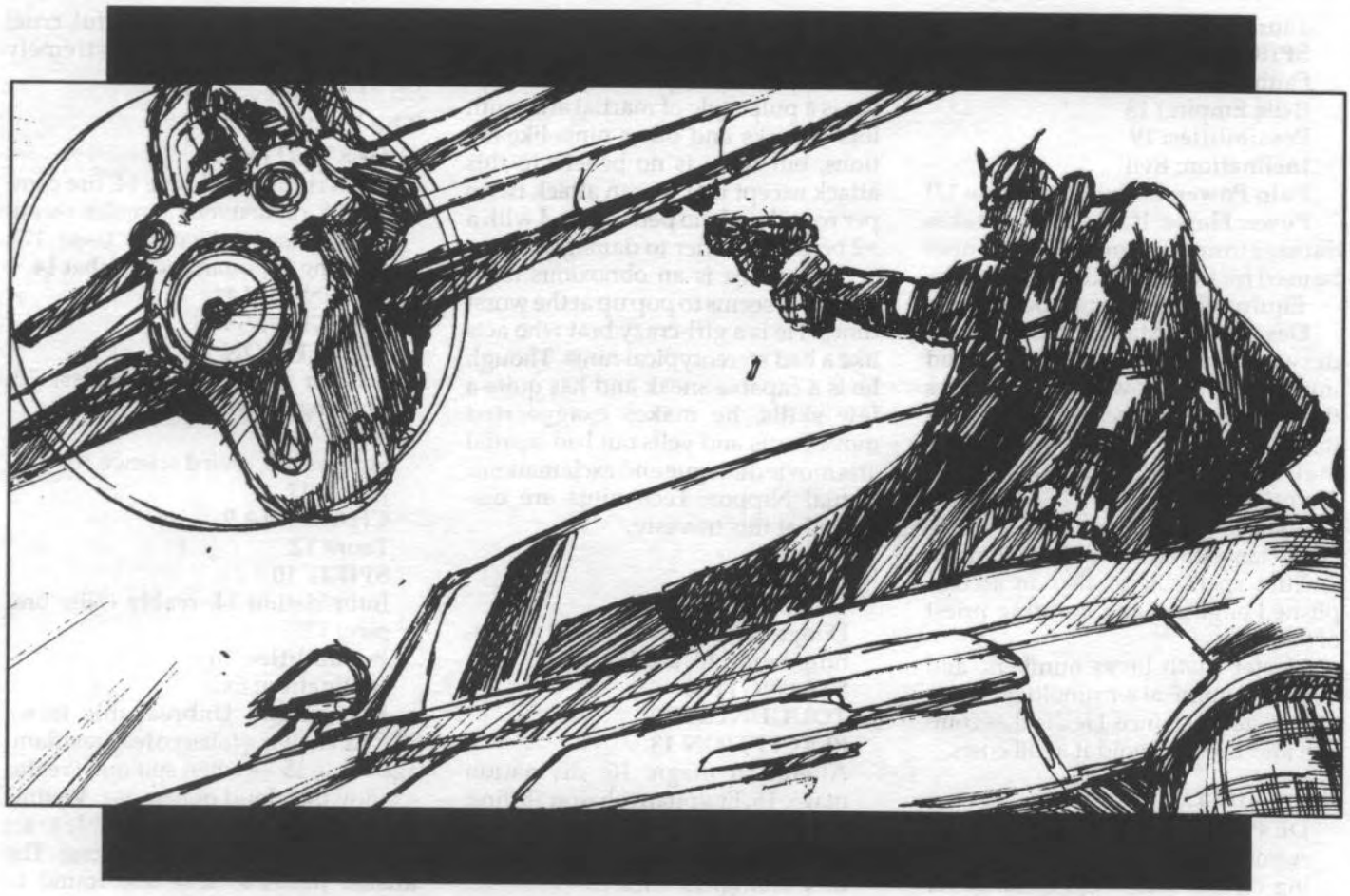
Description: The Sparrow is Kathleen Winters, a young Core Earth woman who was transformed into a Nile pulp hero. She met Major Havoc, and since then has longed to be his crimefighting sidekick, and perhaps even more than that. Others who know Havoc have warned him that the Sparrow seems to have a crush on him.

The Sparrow has brown hair, cut short and feathered, and a bodysuit with a white front and a golden brown back, legs, and arms. She wears a small black mask with a white stripe, and a brown half-cape.

Lady Rahab

DEXTERITY 11
Acrobatics 13, dodge 16, fire combat 12, maneuver 13, melee combat 12, missile combat 15, prestidigitation 13, unarmed combat 12
STRENGTH 9
TOUGHNESS 10 (13 with leather)
PERCEPTION 12
Air vehicles 13, evidence analysis 15, find 16, land vehicles 15, language 14, scholar (intelligence procedures) 17, scholar (Nile realm lore) 15, tracking 15, trick 18, water vehicles 13
MIND 11
Artist (singer) 14, weird science 12, willpower 13
CHARISMA 12
Charm 15, persuasion 15, taunt 14
SPIRIT 10
Intimidation 14, reality (Nile Empire) 14
Possibilities: 20
Equipment: Leather clothing, armor value TOU+3/13 wrist-mounted crossbow , damage value 19, range 3-10/150/300; lockpick set, smoke bombs, smoke goggles, 20 meters of silk line and grapple gun

Description: Lady Rahab is Lorraine D'Artemis, an Allied double-agent in the Great War (though there were some who wondered exactly how



devoted she really was to the Allies). After the war, she searched in vain for something to occupy her time and satisfy her need for adventure. She finally decided to become a masked heroine, fighting crime and the machinations of Doctor Mobius.

Rahab's grapple gun shoots a retractable silk line and a hook, and she uses it to swing from rooftop to rooftop. Her smoke bombs add +10 to the difficulty of all sight-based actions. Her goggles enable her to act unhindered.

There still exists some question about Rahab's inclination. Even though she's one of the "good guys," she often flirts with Evil actions.

Rahab wears a black leather costume.

Rogues' Gallery

This list of villains includes Scarlet Asp's retinue and the most prominent Texas-based villain.

Dr. Dementia

DEXTERITY 9
Dodge 12, melee weapons 13, prestidigitation 12, stealth 10
STRENGTH 10
TOUGHNESS 10
PERCEPTION 12
Evidence analysis 14, find 13, first aid 16, scholar (master criminal) 15, trick 14
MIND 12
Medicine 17, psychology 15, science (chemistry) 16, weird science 15
CHARISMA 7
Taunt 10
SPIRIT 10
Intimidation 13, reality (Nile Empire) 14
Possibilities: 20
Inclination: Evil
Equipment: Scalpel of doom (*fear* value 17, damage value STR+3/13); face mask; surgical gown; doctor's bag filled with truth serum (+10 to attempts to interrogate affected character, duration half hour), poisons, and needles.

Description: Dr. Dementia is a longtime ally of the Scarlet Asp and is delighted to be working with her in Berlin. Dementia created the Scalpel of Doom and endowed it with the *fear* power, since he believes that all people fear "going under the knife." Dementia enjoys playing mind games with his victims.

Master Math

DEXTERITY 8
Dodge 12, fire combat 9, prestidigitation 10, stealth 10, unarmed combat 9
STRENGTH 8
TOUGHNESS 9
PERCEPTION 12
Egyptian religion 14, evidence analysis 15, find 15, mathematics 17, scholar (master criminal) 14, trick 13
MIND 12
Engineering 14, weird science 15
CHARISMA 7

Taunt 8
SPIRIT 10
Faith (Sebek) 12, focus 12, reality (Nile Empire) 13
Possibilities: 19
Inclination: Evil
Pulp Power: *Brainbuster* (value 17)
Power Flaws: If Master Math takes damage from his own power, it cannot be used for the remainder of the scene.
Equipment: Slide rule, pens, ankh.
Description: Master Math is an underworld accountant who gained mysterious pulp powers, and now uses those powers to spread evil. His costume is a curious cross between a normal accountant's and an ancient Egyptian's.

Not only is Master Math a mathematician with access to all of the mathematics spells, he is also an accomplished engineer and budding priest of Sebek.

Master Math loves numbers, and he uses numerical terminology whenever he gets a chance. He dislikes combat, and tries to avoid it at all costs.

Teen Ninja

DEXTERITY 13
Acrobatics 17, dodge 16, lock picking 17, long jumping 14, maneuver 18, melee weapons 17, missile weapons 16, running 17, stealth 18, unarmed combat 18
STRENGTH 9
TOUGHNESS 10
PERCEPTION 10
Find 12, scholar (secrets of the Orient) 12, tracking 14, trick 15
MIND 8
Willpower 10
CHARISMA 8
Taunt 13
SPIRIT 9
Reality (Nile Empire) 12
Possibilities: 15
Inclination: Evil
Pulp Power: *Darkness* (value 14)
Power Flaws: If Teen Ninja is caught in a bright light before he gets a chance to use his *darkness* power, he will be unable to activate the power for the rest of the scene (six point power flaw).
Equipment: Black ninja suit; katana damage value STR+7/16; throwing stars (four), damage value STR+3/12, range 3-5/10/15; nunchakas, damage value STR+5/14; smoke bombs; smokescreen lenses; silk cord and grapple hook.
Note: Teen Ninja's unarmed combat is a pulp style of martial arts, with lots of kicks and other ninja-like actions, but there is no benefit to this attack except that he can attack twice per round with no penalty, and with a +2 bonus modifier to damage.

Teen Ninja is an obnoxious teenager who seems to pop up at the worst times. He is a girl-crazy brat who acts like a bad stereotypical ninja. Though he is a capable sneak and has quite a few skills, he makes exaggerated movements and yells out bad martial arts movie dialogue and exclamations. Actual Nippon Tech ninja are disgusted at this travesty.

Madame Mage

DEXTERITY 9
Dodge 12, melee weapons 11, prestidigitation 13, stealth 11
STRENGTH 8
TOUGHNESS 10
PERCEPTION 13
Alteration magic 16, divination magic 15, Egyptian religion 15, find 14, hieroglyphics 15, language 15, scholar (magic arts) 18, scholar (fortune telling) 15, trick 15
MIND 13
Apportation magic 16, conjuration magic 17, hypnotism 15, occult 15, weird science 16
CHARISMA 12
Charm 15, persuasion 16, taunt 15
SPIRIT 11
Faith (Isis) 14, intimidation 17, reality (Nile Empire) 16
Possibilities: 22
Inclination: Evil
Arcane Knowledges: *Earth, air, fire, water, folk, metal, magic, plant*
Equipment: Dagger, damage value STR+3/11; magic components; Tarot cards.
Description: Madame Mage is an arch-villainess who came from Terra, but became fascinated with all the aspects of magic floating around the Possibility Wars. She went to Aysle and learned much about magic, then to Orrorsh and learned the occult. Now, confident in her power, she has returned to circulation in the Nile realm. She volunteered to accompany the Scarlet Asp to Berlin because she wants to learn Tharkoldu magic.

Madame Mage is a beautiful, cruel woman who wears an extremely skimpy costume and a cloak.

The Rustler

DEXTERITY 12
Beast riding 14, dodge 14, fire combat 16, maneuver 13, melee weapons 13 (specialization: lasso 17), running 15, unarmed combat 14
STRENGTH 11
TOUGHNESS 11
PERCEPTION 10
Scholar (Wild West stories) 13, tracking 14, trick 12
MIND 8
Survival 10, weird science 10, willpower 11
CHARISMA 9
Taunt 12
SPIRIT 10
Intimidation 14, reality (Nile Empire) 12
Possibilities: 16
Inclination: Evil
Equipment: Unbreakable lasso, STR 13; chewing tobacco tear gas, damage value 15 — when spit out, creates a billowing cloud of tear gas. Victims are blinded and helpless, unable to act for one round per level of success. The Rustler needs to take one round to chew the tobacco and may spit it in any subsequent round; twin Colt Peacemakers, damage value 15, ammo 6, range 3-5/15/40, cowboy hat, bandanna- face mask, horse
Description: Steve Cassiday was a small-time crook and Wild West enthusiast who got caught in the Nile axiom wash and became a cowboy villain. He talks and acts just like a movie or pulp novel cowboy.

In general, the Rustler is more interested in getting the loot and getting away than engaging in gun battles with heroes. But when challenged, he's a dead shot.

The Taking of Dr. Zap

The situation was desperate. A ravagon had appeared before the Storm Knights to tell them that the Gaunt Man would soon emerge from the maelstrom in which he'd been prisoner. Only the Knights, armed with an eternity shard, had a prayer of stopping them.

But this particular group of Knights wasn't ready to advance blindly into danger — at least, not without help. They flew off to the Nile Empire to recruit some Mystery Men, and one of their number, Dr. Zap, conceived a cunning plan.

Zap's theory was that Mobius didn't want the Gaunt Man back anymore than the Knights did, and might be willing to help. Zap decided to risk going to Thebes and asking Mobius for a reality bomb to use on Illmound Keep.

Of course, it was foolish. But Zap's heart was in the right place, if nothing else. When he arrived at Thebes and demanded an audience with the High Lord, Mobius' response was simple: "That fool has nothing I want. To the Omegratron with him."

Trapped in Mobius' fiendish torture machine, Zap broke and shifted inclination to Evil. When he was finally released, he had become Captain Carnage, dedicated foe of the Mystery Men.

With a gang of hired guns, Carnage managed to defeat some second-string pulp heroes. Then he chanced upon his old ally, Colonel Cairo, still reeling from the betrayal of his sidekick, Ensign Egypt (see Chapter Four). The two came to blows and both were apparently destroyed in a warehouse explosion. But there have since been scattered reports from Khartoum indicating Carnage is still alive and active.

Which leaves one question: where is Colonel Cairo?

Berlin Rezoned

In the year since the Nile/Tharkold mixed zone was established in Berlin, much has changed in that city. Now it is a place of pain and horror intermingled with pulp heroes, dramatic chases, and villains who insist on explaining the mechanics of their torture devices before employing them.

Some of Berlin's architecture has changed as well. Many buildings that were present in the 1920s and 30s have been restored to their former beauty and grandeur by the axiom wash, giving the Berlin skyline a nightmarish art deco/dark future/high tech look.

Overgovernor Wu Han is directly responsible for Berlin until Mobius settles on a replacement (after all, Wu Han is stretched rather thin at the moment). Some of Wu Han's gangland cohorts are taking advantage of this by moving in on Berlin and trying to establish various gangland rackets. This has resulted in gang wars between Nile mobsters, Tharkoldu-backed street gangs, and various Core Earth German right wing groups. Some of Wu Han's mobsters have managed to get a foothold in Berlin, and have even been able to take control over several nightclubs and black market operations.

The Disappearing Doctor

Mystery Men and Storm Knights alike were stunned this past month by the sudden disappearance of their mentor, Dr. Alexus Frest.

According to his closest friends, the "weird scientist's" burdens had been weighing heavily on his shoulders. His failure to construct a device that could get the Mystery Men home; the twin defections of Ensign Egypt and Dr. Zap; and Mobius' awe-inspiring success, all conspired to deaden Frest's spirit.

Of late, it was finding a way to bring more heroes over from Terra that had obsessed Frest. When his assistants came into his lab some weeks ago to find him gone, speculation immediately began that he had succeeded in opening a gate.

But when no word came from Terra about Frest, rumors spread that he had been captured by Mobius or Malraux. Some even say he's been snatched by the Tharkoldu and taken to Berlin.

Things to Come

With the exception of the slowdown in Greece and the Balkans, it appears that Mobius is currently unstoppable. In the months to come, expect a westward push across the rest of North Africa in an attempt to prevent the Cyberpapists from returning to Algeria. The realm will probably also expand southward toward Kenya, Tanzania, and southwest toward Zaire.

Expect Nile spies to increase activity in Jerusalem in an attempt to soften the area up before trying another invasion. One possible tack will be to try and pit the city's Jewish, Christian, and Moslem defenders against each other.

Look for a possible push northward in the Eastern Mediterranean, planting a stelae in southwestern Turkey. Mobius wants Istanbul (and wants to rename it Constantinople), and control of the Bosporus and Dardenelles Straits, effectively sealing off the Black Sea. Look for more spies and other disruptive elements in Istanbul.

In Berlin, the Scarlet Asp and her ilk will continue to subtly (and sometimes not so subtly) undermine the Tharkoldu. The transplanted Cairo mobs will press the gang wars in an attempt to control all of Berlin's underworld activity. The Asp may be picked to attempt another stelae planting, close to Leipzig, southwest of Berlin. However, in order to do so, the Nile forces will have to dominate the zone, a tough task considering their Tharkoldu competition.

In America, expect more stelae planting in northwestern Texas, heading for the American West, to eventually abut the Tharkold/NipponTech zones. There exists a possibility of Mobius expanding southward towards the Rio Grande and Mexico. Mobius will not expand eastward towards Louisiana, seeing as the Gaunt Man has some influence there at present, and Mobius does not want to challenge the Orrorshan High Lord at present.

CHAPTER SIX

Nippon Tech™

Ryuchi Kanawa, otherwise known as 3327, sat at the head of the table in the sterile, air-conditioned meeting room of the Kanawa Corporation building in Tokyo. His eyes, concealed by his dark glasses, swept up and down the conference table as he took stock of the participants.

Around the table sat Isei Sagato, Yakuza leader and Kanawa pawn; 7710, 3327's right-hand man, sat beside him; and then there was Saito Horyu, vice-chairman of the board of directors. Horyu looked nervous — a Core Earther, his sole purpose as a board member had been to signal that there was no invasion of Japan. With a Storm Knight guidebook to Tokyo effectively destroying 3327's cover, Horyu knew he was now expendable.

The remaining chairs were filled by the five top executives of Kanawa's biggest subsidiaries, the Bank of Japan, Mitsuyana Motors, Omi Electronics, Ichi Entertainment, and Komco, and one other man. Yoshitomo Fujita was the supervisor of "Miscellaneous Resources," a euphemism for stormers. Cold, ruthless, and efficient, Fujita had been directly and/or indirectly responsible for the deaths of many Storm Knights who dared to cross Kanawa.

"Report," Kanawa said softly.

7710 cleared his throat and tapped a keypad on the table. A holographic screen began displaying charts and graphs as the man talked.

"As we all can see here, our profits have declined, while our operating expenses, which include losses due to Miscellaneous Resources, have skyrocketed. Our companies are losing money, but liquidation of some of the holdings is slowing down this loss rate."

"And what about land acquisition?" Kanawa, his face still expressionless, pressed.

"Ah ... our efforts at further acquisitions since the San Francisco purchase have been largely unsuccessful. We are pursuing the Alaska transaction with all due speed, but Miscellaneous Resources and our distinguished competitors are causing ... delays."

Kanawa nodded at the term "distinguished competitors," a polite way of saying "other High Lords."

"And in regards to Miscellaneous Resources," Fujita cut in, committing a breach of etiquette that only someone favored by 3327 could get away with. "Representatives from our primary competitor to the south are increasingly encroaching on our territory."

Kanawa slammed his hand on the table, the most emotion any of them had ever seen him display. "Is there no good news to report?"

Sagato, trepidation evident in his features, spoke up. "The Vegas operation is going well. We are expecting a substantial profit this quarter."

Kanawa smiled thinly.

The CEO of Komco cleared his throat. "Ah ... I wish to ask, what of these reports regarding the assassination of your esteemed personage?"

Kanawa gave the slightest shake of his head. "A double of mine, deployed in anticipation of precisely that sort of unfortunate incident. I can assure you that all is well."

"And there shall be no other such incidents," Fujita announced coolly. "Stronger measures, devised in cooperation with Security Director Nakajima, will assure that —"

The door to the boardroom opened, and a secretary in a sky-blue kimono wheeled in a tea cart. A few of the CEOs were startled by the woman's sudden appearance.

Fujita nodded to Nakajima, who checked the woman and the cart for concealed weapons. Finding none, he placed a small instrument in the pot of tea, and read the flashing readouts.

"The tea is safe," he announced, then checked the teacups and napkins and found them safe as well.

The woman bowed and, still facing the men, began backing out of the room, half-suppressing a little cough as she bowed again and closed the doors. Kanawa gave the slightest nod of approval to Nakajima and Fujita. The former nodded his grateful thanks, but Fujita remained cool and unmoved.

Horyu at last spoke up. "Well, the boardroom security measures are obviously satisfactory, but then again this is the heart of our corporation. I hope that things are equally as well covered in our farflung holdings, eh, Fujita?"

Fujita did not reply.

"I have every confidence in Fujita-*san's* abilities," Kanawa declared flatly, in an effort to end this thread of conversation. "He has done well, and will continue to do so, I trust. What is your next project, Fujita?"

Fujita did not reply.

A look of disapproval flickered across 3327's features. "I asked you a question, Fujita. What is your next project?"

Fujita said nothing.

Horyu, who sat next to Fujita, gave him a sharp nudge. "The man is asking you a question!" he hissed in a whisper.

Fujita did not move.

In a flash, Osamu Nakajima was beside him. He looked up at 3327 stunned, "Fujita-*san* is dead."

"How?" 3327 asked, rising from his seat as the Yakuza boss began idly fingering his shoulder holster. Nakajima pulled out a pair of tweezers and retrieved a dart from the back of Fujita's neck.

"Poison dart. And, judging by the point of impact, it came from the door."

"The secretary!" Sagato snapped.

When the doors were flung open, the secretary's desk was unmanned. A search revealed the real secretary, bound and gagged in a closet.

"Kanawa need fear nobody. Nobody will kill him."

To the uninitiated, the note might sound like a promise or assurance. However, the note was written in Japanese, and the word for "nobody" is ...

"Daremo," 3327 hissed.

Mention of the renegade ninja's name sent a thrill of fear through the assembled executives. After a moment, 3327 walked to the phone and punched a button.

"Notify Personnel that we will be requiring a replacement for Fujita," he said quietly. "And Nakajima as well."

The Security Chief started.

"The former has met with an ... accident," 3327 continued. "The latter is about to."

In the Red

The realm of Nippon Tech has undergone a series of stunning reversals that are causing many experts to doubt the continued solvency of Kanawa Corporation. Territorial gains have been minimal over the past year, and all of them have been in the form of mixed zones, from which the High Lord derives no possibility energy.

The grand plan of 3327 in dominating Asia has not come to fruition. Resistance from Storm Knights as well as a crippling competition with Orrorsh has stalled the advance into mainland China, even as that nation begins to flirt with the idea of a free market economy.

And the difficulties do not end there. The collapse of the Delphi Council has cost Kanawa a key ally in the United States; the assassination of one of his clones has revealed just how close his enemies are coming; the death of The Hood has cost Nippon its chance at Cairo; and there is at least a perceived threat that Mobius will succeed in grabbing all the world's oil supplies and force Nippon industry to come to a grinding halt, at least until fusion can be introduced on a wide scale.

And things are even worse than 3327 knows ...

Is it any wonder, then, that the High Lord has begun to seriously think about cutting his losses on Earth and returning to Marketplace, in defeat if not disgrace?

Assassination #1

People who tuned in to the live broadcast of Ursan Industries CEO Ryuchi Kanawa dedicating a new office building in Kyoto were shocked to see the CEO gunned down by a well-armed assassin. The assassin in turn was perforated by MarSec agents, but the damage had apparently been done.

Ryuchi Kanawa was dead.

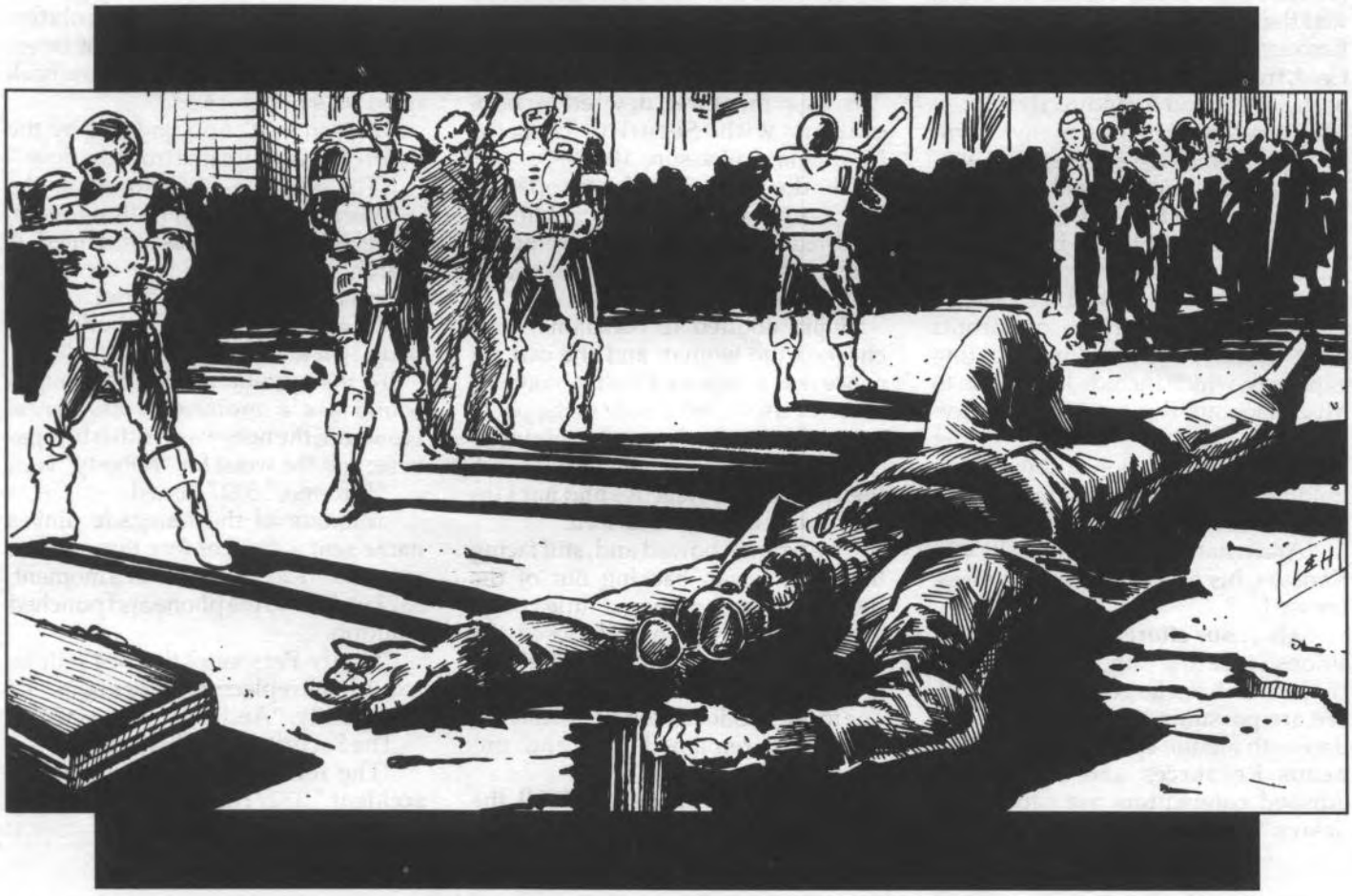
Or was he?

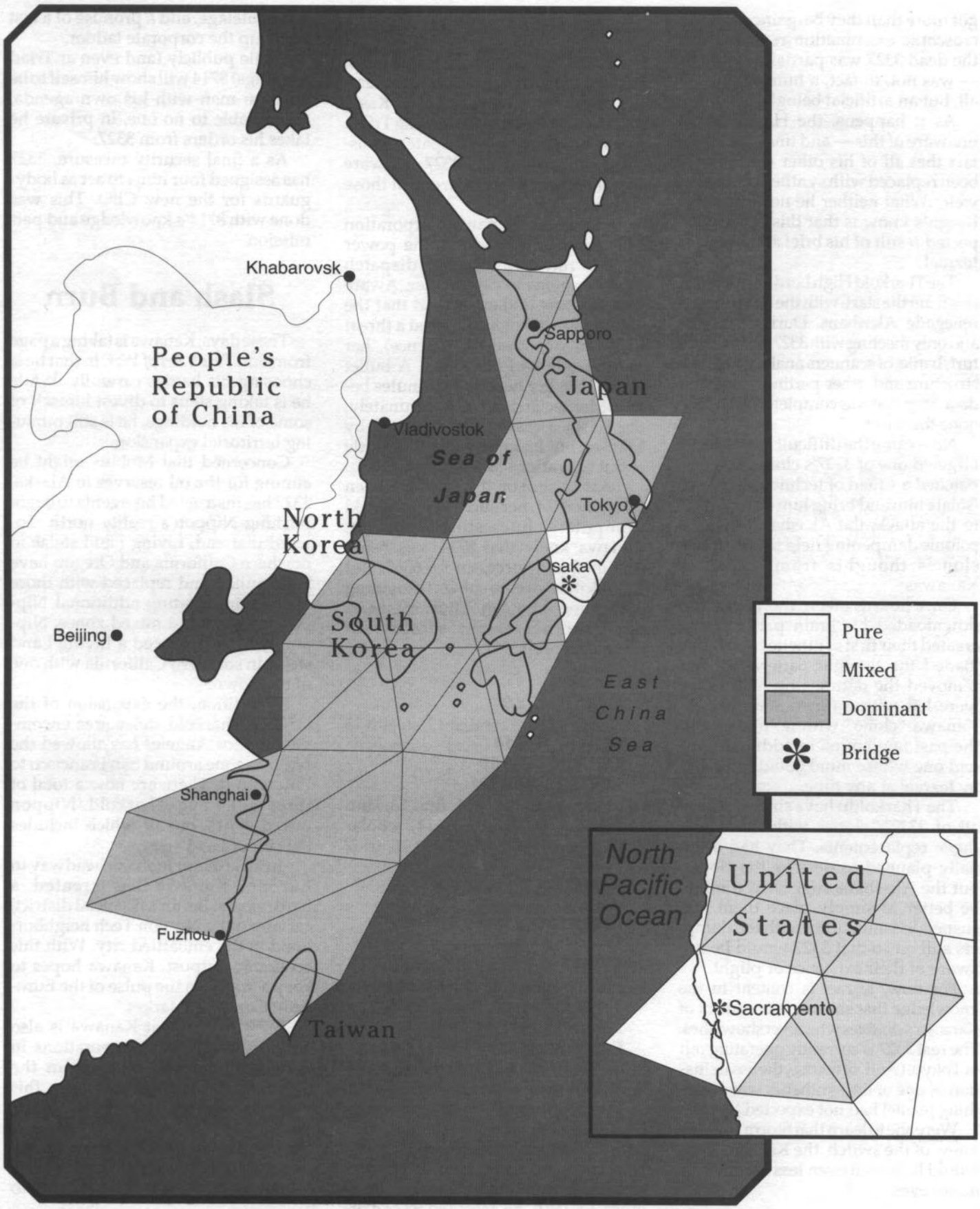
Later, the Kanawa Corporation would release footage of a very healthy CEO and an explanation that the dead man was a double hired to act as a decoy. Included with this release was yet another denial that Kanawa was a High Lord.

Meanwhile, wheels were turning within the Kanawa Building to identify the assassin. He was revealed to be a freelance hitman currently in the employ of Misaki Computers. The attack had been engineered by Kanawa's fellow Marketplace executive, 6365. MarSec agents were dispatched to retrieve her for questioning, but things did not go quite as planned (see below).

Storm Knights, of course, understood that the dead 3327 had to be one of his legendary clones. And they set out to prove it, breaking into the Kyoto morgue and stealing the body to prove that its DNA matched Kanawa's exactly.

It did, of course, but in the process of discovering this, the Knights also




Khabarovsk
People's Republic of China
Sapporo
Japan
Vladivostok
Sea of Japan
Tokyo
North Korea
Osaka
South Korea
Beijing
East China Sea
Shanghai
Fuzhou
Taiwan
Pure
Mixed
Dominant
Bridge
North Pacific Ocean
United States
Sacramento

got more than they bargained for. Microscopic examination revealed that the dead 3327 was partially synthetic — was not, in fact, a human clone at all, but an artificial being!

As it happens, the High Lord is unaware of this — and unaware of the fact that all of his other clones have been replaced with synthetic beings as well. What neither he nor the Storm Knights know is that this is an unexpected result of his brief alliance with Jezrael.

The Tharkold High Lord had planned this from the start, with the help of some renegade Akashans. During her first and only meeting with 3327 on her home turf, banks of scanners analyzed his cell structure and other pertinent physical data. Step one was completed with 3327 none the wiser.

Now came the difficult part. Jezrael targeted one of 3327's clones and dispatched a squad of techno-demons to isolate him and bring him down. Prior to the attack, the Akashans set up a psionic dampening field to cut off this clone's thoughts from the other Kanawas.

Once he was taken, the Tharkoldu downloaded his brain patterns and created their first synthetic copy. They loaded the thought patterns in and removed the dampening field. They were left with a functioning Ryuchi Kanawa "clone" with no memory of the past few hours. In addition, they had one whose mind could be seized by Jezrael at any time.

The Tharkoldu have since replaced all of 3327's clones with these synthetic replacements. They had originally planned to destroy the clones, but the Akashans suggested it might be better to simply place them into suspended animation with the dampers still on so that 3327 would be unaware of their existence or plight.

For now, Jezrael is content in the knowledge that she can take control of Kanawa's doubles whenever she wishes. The real 3327 is currently operating out of Tokyo. (And, of course, the assassination of one of the synthetics was something Jezrael had not expected.)

Were she to learn that Storm Knights know of the switch, the Knights' lives would be worth even less than 3327's in her eyes.

Assassination #2

6365, CEO of Misaki Computers, had long lived a double life as a member of the revolutionary group Kashi and part of Marketplace's ruling Triad. It was her decision to dispatch an assassin to Earth to slay 3327, unaware that there was more than one of those worthies.

It took the Kanawa Corporation little time to trace down the power behind the assassin and dispatch MarSec agents to capture her. Aware that she was in danger (and that the knowledge in her head posed a threat to Kashi's continued existence), her own people had her killed. A bullet was put in her head only minutes before MarSec arrived. (Unfortunately, the Kashi assassin was captured by MarSec, but he knows relatively little about operations as a whole.)

6365's spot on the Triad has been taken by 8714, her successor at Misaki Computers. Interestingly enough, Kanawa knew that 8714 was being groomed as a successor for 6365, and he took measures to subvert the young man some time ago. Thus, Misaki is now another secret satellite in Kanawa's orbit.

8714

DEXTERITY 9

Dodge 11, fire combat 12, stealth 13

STRENGTH 10

TOUGHNESS 10

PERCEPTION 12

Evidence analysis 14, find 16, land vehicles 14, language 14, scholar (Nippon Tech realm lore) 16, trick 14

MIND 12

Business 15, test 14

CHARISMA 10

Charm 14, persuasion 13

SPIRIT 11

Intimidation 14, reality (Nippon Tech) 13

Possibilities: 15

Equipment: LOV 9mm, damage value 15, ammo 12, range 3-20/30/50; Sony Talkman; security briefcase

Description: 8714 is a bright young man (only 31) an eager student of finance. Though he admired 6365 and learned all he could from her, it became apparent that 3327 offered him more. Quietly, he accepted 3327's offer of tutelage, and a promise of a fast climb up the corporate ladder.

While publicly (and even at Triad meetings) 8714 will show himself to be his own man with his own agenda, accountable to no one, in private he takes his orders from 3327.

As a final security measure, 3327 has assigned four ninja to act as bodyguards for the new CEO. This was done with 8714's knowledge and permission.

Slash and Burn

These days, Kanawa is taking a page from Sun Tzu's *Art of War*, in that he is choosing his battles carefully. While he is taking steps to divest himself of some of his holdings, he is still pursuing territorial expansion.

Concerned that Mobius might be aiming for the oil reserves in Alaska, 3327 has instructed his agents to begin pushing Nippon's reality north. Toward that end, Living Land stelae in northern California and Oregon have been pulled and replaced with those of Nippon, creating additional Nippon/Living Land mixed zones. Nippon has also replaced a Living Land stelae in southern California with one of their own.

In addition, the expansion of the original Tharkold stelae area encompassing Los Angeles has allowed the Nippon zone around San Francisco to link with it. There are now a total of three adjoining Tharkold/Nippon mixed zones, one of which includes the city of Las Vegas.

In an attempt to make headway in Europe, Kanawa has created a hardpoint in Berlin's financial district, carving out a Nippon Tech neighborhood in the embattled city. With this economic outpost, Kanawa hopes to keep a finger on the pulse of the European Common Market.

There is talk that Kanawa is also aiding CyberFrench corporations in their bid to break away from the CyberChurh. In Kanawa's eyes, this move is eminently logical: if the corporations break away, it will weaken the Cyberpapacy, and if the corporations also succeed in going public and issuing stock, Kanawa will attempt to

purchase controlling shares and initiate hostile takeovers.

Operations in South America are currently limited to observation of the Akashans in their war against Tharkold and collecting data on the techno-demons. Kanawa is pulling for the Akashans to win and then be exhausted by the effort. Kanawa has even supplied the Akashans with information on the Tharkoldu, and hopes to eventually call in those favors at a later time.

Meanwhile, the following subsidiaries have been shut down and/or gutted as a result of Kanawa's downsizing:

Masters and Field Corporation and its subsidiary, Kakuro Paper Products; Konici, Inc and its subsidiaries, Pony Audio/Video, Spotlight Sporting Goods, Borubokan Textiles; Magnolia Station Research Park (subsidiary of Kanawa Enterprises); Brookgreen Publishing (subsidiary of Omi Electronics); Ichi Publishing (subsidiary of Ichi Entertainment).

Unemployment and recession have hit NipponTech as a result of these closings, fostering even greater resentment toward the megacorps among the suddenly poor and disadvantaged.

This whole "scorched earth policy" of Kanawa's has sent shockwaves through the stock and commodities exchanges of the world. Coupled with the revelation that 3327 is a High Lord (something many other corps have been slow to accept), this has caused various Kanawa stocks to drop sharply in price as investors, sensing a collapse, divest in a hurry. A complete disaster has been prevented only by the suspicions of some stock market analysts that Kanawa Corp. still has a few tricks up his sleeve.

The Claws of Corruption

Reports of ninja vampires in Nippon Tech are old news, but now accounts of ninja werewolves have begun trickling in. All of this points to Orrorsh's continuing campaign to introduce horror into Kanawa's sterile world.

The tactic is pure genius on the part of the Gaunt Man. NipponTech is a realm where things of the spirit have been cast aside for material pusuits. Magic is something out of children's fairy tales (even well-established Nippon Storm Knights who have fought alongside magic-using companions for months, continue to stubbornly believe that "it's all done with holograms and special effects").

Thus, Nippon agents try to challenge Horrors with physical weapons, with decidedly mixed success. Magic and faith, two of the most potent weapons in any arsenal, have been cast aside.

When Kanawa abandoned the Indonesian offshore oil platforms after trying to run them despite Orrorshan influence, the crews and employees returned to Japan. Unknown to many, including Kanawa and his lackeys, some of these returning people brought small bits of Orrorsh back with them. Perhaps it was a cursed artifact, or an employee who was bitten in his sleep by a vampire and is now infected. Whatever the case, the seeds of terror are being planted in Japan.

In fact, several Storm Knights report that the Gaunt Man is trying to learn all he can about Japanese legends and folklore, hoping to bring some of the darker things to life.

Standard Ninja Werewolf

DEXTERITY 13
Acrobatics 14, fire combat 14, maneuver 14, martial arts (ninjutsu) 16, melee weapons 14, missile weapons 14, stealth 15, unarmed combat 14
STRENGTH 9/13
TOUGHNESS 9/12
PERCEPTION 9/8
Tracking 10
MIND 9/6
CHARISMA 8/5
SPIRIT 9
Reality (Orrorsh) 10, shapeshifting 11
Additional Skills: Three at +1 adds
Possibility Potential: All

Equipment: Varies
Natural Tools: Claws, damage value STR+2/15; teeth, damage value STR+10/23
Powers: Shape change, plus three more power points
Corruption Value: 19
Fear Rating: 2
Perseverance DN: 14
Weakness: None
True Death: Pierced through the heart with a silver katana

In Other News ...

These other developments have also been reported in Nippon Tech in the past year:

• 3327 has expanded his cyberware research facilities and increased their budget. Working off of developments made while he had plants within the Cyberpapacy, the High Lord is hoping for a localized *Tech* axiom boost.

• Storm Knights have discovered a new Core Earth hardpoint in Japan, the battleship *Mikasa*. The *Mikasa* was the flagship of Admiral Togo's fleet in the Russo-Japanese war at the turn of the century. Togo defeated the Russian fleet at Tsushima, establishing Japan as a powerful Pacific nation. The *Mikasa* represents the Japan of the 20th century, strong and victorious, taking its rightful place among the leading nations of the world.

The *Mikasa* was preserved as a memorial and it is berthed in a drydock in Osaka.

• The Possibility Wars Survivors' Fund is an American non-profit organization dedicated to helping those poor unfortunates who are homeless and/or bereft of family, job, and money as a result of the war. The organization helps relocate survivors and even attempts to trace missing family members. The Fund also finances the construction of new buildings in reclaimed areas, as well as sponsoring soup kitchens and emergency health centers.

The Fund is underwritten by the generosity of individuals lucky enough to have had their fortunes spared, as well as by proceeds from Storm Knight merchandise (action figures, movies, books). Even the *Five Realms* game donates 20% of its proceeds to the Fund.

Corporate sponsors have also begun to come out of the woodwork, staging massive rock concerts to raise funds. The latest, Reality Aid, was held in Atlanta.

Unfortunately, there is a serpent in the garden. Some of the Rauru Block executives on the administrative board of the Fund are secretly working for 3327 and funneling information back to him. Thus far, none of these infiltrators have been identified or captured.

• The Rauru Block is offering its aid to CyberFrench corporations who wish to throw off the yoke of Malraux. They are unaware that Kanawa is doing the same, for very different reasons, and the corps are in no hurry to tell them.

Swords of the Samurai

The Swords of the Samurai is yet another group within the realm of Nippon Tech that wishes to see the end of Kanawa and the damage his influence has caused to Japan. However, their anger is directed at others as well.

The goal of the Swords is to restore Japan to greatness, but not that of the 20th century. Rather, they hunger for Japan's medieval period of greatness, with daimyos, a powerful emperor, samurais, and the like. To them, the fact that Nippon Tech could invade Japan and the rest of the world hardly notice it speaks ill of pre-Possibility War Japan.

In their view, Japan's woes began in the 19th century, when the American Admiral Perry forcibly opened the nation up to the rest of the world. The Swords of the Samurai cite the Russo-Japanese War, the Great War, the Washington Naval Treaty Conferences, the Asian campaigns in the 1930's, World War II, and the adoption of many Western ways (and the Possibility Wars as well) as merely symptoms of a greater malady.

The Swords of the Samurai work for the expulsion of Kanawa, then the removal of all foreign influence from Japanese soil. This even extends to the Japanese language, removing such terms as *sarariman*, a corruption of the English words "salary man," indicating a white-collar worker. The Swords of the Samurai favor the abrogation of all mutual defense treaties and all pacts of cooperation.

After all this is done, the Swords of the Samurai want to re-introduce the Japanese to their traditional dress, manners, customs, and religion. No more would young people dress in jeans like Westerners and have rock concerts featuring Western pop stars. Things of beauty and culture such as poetry, music, dance, kabuki, such things would be the people's entertainment.

The Swords' ranks are currently filled by many ronin and ninja, as well as Shinto, Buddhist, and Zen priests. The movement is also gaining some support among the underclasses.

The Swords concede that help is needed in their fight, and that the Storm Knights are the lesser of many evils. Still, their attitude towards Storm Knights is that they are just that: a necessary evil. Though they follow traditional Japanese rules of etiquette, they treat foreigners with the minimum amount of courtesy necessary.

The Swords do use firearms, but will not make use of any device made after 1900 (including computers, cars, radios, etc.) Weapons like assault rifles and machineguns are allowed, as they are seen as merely variations of standard pistols and rifles.

Standard Sword of the Samurai

Reality: Core Earth
DEXTERITY 10
Beast riding 12, dodge 12, fire combat 14, long jumping 14, maneuver 13, martial arts 14 (select a style), running 12, stealth 14, swimming 11
STRENGTH 10
TOUGHNESS 10
PERCEPTION 11
Evidence analysis 12, find 13, first aid 14, scholar (Japanese culture and history) 16, trick 12
MIND 10
Artist (select one) 12, meditation 14, survival 12
CHARISMA 9
Persuasion 12, taunt 11
SPIRIT 12
Faith (select one) 13, intimidation 15
Additional Skills: Three at +1 adds
Possibility Potential: Some (25)
Equipment: Varies

Description: Swords of the Samurai are usually dressed in traditional feudal Japanese garb. When it becomes necessary, they conceal their colorful clothing under grey robes. They are more than willing to welcome other Japanese (and even those from Marketplace) to their cause if they are sincere.

Victory in Vegas

The Yakuza has a firm hold on Las Vegas, the city they share with the Tharkoldu. They now control virtually all of the hotels and casinos and are generating enormous profits.

In addition, they have a protection racket in place, but not the standard one where the merchant pays for protection from the mob. Instead, they are paying for protection from the Tharkoldu. In a manner of speaking, the Yakuza is running a quasi-legit business of defending establishments against techno-demons and other Tharkold-inspired horrors.

The Forecast

Look for Kanawa to proceed very carefully from this point on. He wants to make sure that his resources are easily able to be liquidated in the event a retreat is called for, yet is not ready to completely concede the war.

His plans currently call for increased attempts to plant stelae on the Chinese mainland, especially around Hong Kong. He is also believed to be eyeing Vladivostok in the former Soviet Union.

In North America, Kanawa is looking toward the cities of Seattle and Vancouver and, of course, Alaska.

Kanawa is also considering setting up special squads of assassins to deal specifically with Marketplace natives fighting on the side of Core Earth.

CHAPTER SEVEN

Orrorsh™

The stranger walked into the Silver Whistle Pub, an establishment located at a small whistle stop on the Majestic Rail Line. The stop, called Blackheathe, was located halfway between Sibolga and New London, and was home to only a few shops and some houses. Even though the island of Majestic was located in Earth's tropical zone, the night air was foggy, cold and clammy: perfect for the Horrors that stalked the darkness.

The stranger removed his overcoat and ambled over to the fire to warm himself. The patrons eyed him discreetly, then went back to their food, drinks, gossip, and dart games.

"What'll it be, guv?" the tavern owner, a genial man with a walrus moustache asked.

"Pint of bitters, and a plate of whatever's hot and good," the man smiled. "I'm very hungry."

As soon as the man talked, the patrons could tell that he was not from Orrorsh, but rather from the place called England. But he was no Ayslish — from London, then, they surmised. And that meant he might have news for them, news from the outside.

In less time than it takes to tell it, the stranger had his meal and the rapt attention of the occupants of the common room.

"The Victorians are looking toward Jerusalem," the stranger explained in between forkfulls of food. "But with the bridges down for so long, there are no more reinforcements coming in. They're going to have to recruit."

The patrons nodded soberly at this news.

"I hear tell that Horror fights Horror," he continued. "Two wicked women who consort with demons are at war with one another."

"You seem to know much about what goes on," a burly laborer pointed out. "How do you manage this, sir?"

The stranger gave a sad smile. "My work takes me all over the realm. I hear things."

"And what might your profession be?" a miner asked.

The stranger hesitated for a moment before saying, "I am a vampyre hunter. In fact, I am just returning from a particularly nasty encounter."

This news piqued everyone's interest, and they begged him to tell the tale. The stranger shook his head and waved off their requests. "I do not think you'd want to hear about it, friends," he explained. "It has an unhappy ending."

"Couldn't be too unhappy, guv," the innkeeper observed. "After all, you're here, alive and moving about."

"Moving about, perhaps," the stranger said, smiling to reveal incisors that had grown into fangs. "But alive? Alas, no ...

And then it was all over but the screaming.

State of the Realm

The Gaunt Man has conquered many a cosm in his time. But never before has he encountered so strong a challenge to his wits and skills as Earth. From the moment Hachi Mara-Two forced him into the maelstrom until today, Storm Knights have shown the ability to surprise the master of fear.

They accomplished that this year by toppling both Orrorshan maelstrom bridges, in a coordinated attack between two groups of Storm Knights. Coupled with yet another death for the Carredon, this was an extremely frustrating turn of events, even if the battle did claim the lives of a number of Knights (see below).

The borders of Orrorsh have remained static this year, largely because of the loss of the bridges. Much of the Gaunt Man's attention has been focused on finding the "bride of Darkness" (see Chapter One) rather than on realm expansion. Indeed, it seems as if he is quite content to remain motionless, like a spider in the center of a web, and let events unfold around him.

Maelstrom Bridge is Falling Down

Prompted by his mirror, Wicked, the Gaunt Man resolved to destroy two groups of Storm Knights. To accomplish this, he unleashed the Nightmare Aranae, a twisted offspring of Basjas, and the resurrected Carredon. Aranae's plot to destroy one group failed when the second intervened and rescued them from the sorcerous spider-webs in which they were imprisoned.

While one group ventured to Illmound Keep, the other traveled toward Palembang to bring down the Majestic bridge. After a battle with a blood cult, the Knights encountered and defeated Hellion Court member Lord Stanton Cheltenham and pulled the necessary stelae.

Meanwhile, the second group encountered the Gaunt Man himself and his servant, the Carredon. After a bloody battle, they succeeded in destroying the last link to the cosm of Gaea, but at great cost. Storm Knights Ti-Dara Jarnel, Captain Verdigris, Kevin Middleton, Andre Duchard, and Vito Tattaglia were slain by the Carredon and a memorial to them stands at the Hawaiian headquarters of the Storm Guild.

The destruction of the bridges stopped the flow of Possibilities from Gaea and reduced the number of Horrors who could be brought into the realm (he was forced to rely solely on dimthreads).

In addition, the Victorians lost their sole means of getting fresh troops and supplies from Gaea. There are rumors that some occult societies are dabbling with dimensional gates in the hope of finding an easy way to breach the gulf that separates Gaea from Earth. Unfortunately, all attempts have thus far failed, and some of the failures have been spectacularly gruesome.

The Gaunt Man has succeeded in replacing the stelae that were pulled and has restored the Illmound Keep bridge. The Majestic bridge has not yet been reconstructed.

The Basjas-Sabathina War

In what has to be one of the strangest developments in Orrorsh is some time, the Hellion Court member known as Basjas and the Nightmare Sabathina have gone to war with each other. The Gaunt Man has thus far chosen not to interfere in this blood feud.

The conflict began when Sabathina regained possession of the *Nocturna*, a vile tome crammed with occult rituals. By means of one particularly difficult ritual found between its blood-red covers, Sabathina was able to have her youth restored.

Though this boded well for the vampyre, it also came at a price. Her body was now young, true, but alas her mind changed ever so slightly as well. Youthful passions and impulsiveness raced through her head, and she began entertaining some rather strange, unfounded ideas.

One of these regarded Basjas, the spider-woman and longtime Hellion Court member. Sabathina became convinced that Basjas had seduced the Gaunt Man and was gaining power and privileges in return for her favors.

Angered by this, Sabathina marshalled the Horrors under her control and set them to attacking Basjas and her followers. The first clash was bloody, but inconclusive, and both retreated to their respective lairs.

Since then, there have been a number of skirmishes between the two. Sabathina does not covet Basjas' place on the Court, but feels the spider-woman does not deserve her high station. And Basjas sees Sabathina as a threat, both to her power and to her dark dreams of becoming the Gaunt Man's mistress.

The High Lord himself has chosen not to step in and stop matters, seeing this as a way of winnowing out weakness. If Basjas cannot defeat Sabathina — even a restored Sabathina — then she is not worthy of her place on the Hellion Court and should be cast out.

Most of the battles are taking place in Sabathina's province on the northeastern edge of Majestic, as well as in the city of Samarinda on Borneo, a favored haunt of Basjas and her brood.

The other members of the Hellion Court couldn't care less about the fight. As long as the two combatants keep their conflict within their own boundaries, none of them feel it necessary to choose sides. The Nightmares feel largely the same.

It is also doubtful that agents of the other realms will take steps to help one side or the other, in hopes of exploiting the situation for their own benefit. This is not a feud between corporations within Kanawa's corporate structure, or a split in the Cyberpapal church — this is a bloody, soul-damning conflict using powers best left untouched.

The two women are making use of crack troops — Basjas, her spider-kin, Sabathina, her blood-thirsts — in this war.

Spider-Kin

DEXTERITY 11

Dodge 14, long jumping 15, maneuver 14, stealth 16, unarmed combat 16

STRENGTH 15

TOUGHNESS 15

PERCEPTION 14

Find 17, tracking 18, trick 16

MIND 10

CHARISMA 5

Charm (14), persuasion (14), taunt 10
SPIRIT 12
Faith (Orrorshan evil) 15, intimidation 16, reality (Orrorsh) 13
Possibilities: 6
Natural Tools: Mandibles, damage value STR+5/20; poison, damage value 16; webs, *Strength* total of 20 required to snap
Powers: ***Resistance to normal weapons, magical resistance***
Corruption Value: 16
Fear Rating: 1
Perseverance DN: 16
Weakness: Bones of birds (severe weakness)
True Death: Impaled with a branch from a tree, removed from the tree no more than an hour before.
Description: The spider-kin are Horrors made by Basjas herself. They resemble huge spiders, two meters long, 1.5 meters high. The head of the spider-kin is a human skull with glowing green eyes and black mandibles coming out of the sides of its mouth.

The spider-kin have an aversion to birds. When a spider-kin is in the area, any birds in the surrounding trees and brush begin a loud cacophony.

Blood-Thirsts
DEXTERITY 10
Dodge 13, flight 14, maneuver 12, stealth 15, unarmed combat 15
STRENGTH 14
TOUGHNESS 15
PERCEPTION 12
Find 14, trick 15
MIND 12
Willpower 15
CHARISMA 4
Charm (16), persuasion (15), taunt 11
SPIRIT 13
Faith (Orrorshan Evil) 16, intimidation 17, reality (Orrorsh) 15
Possibilities: 6
Natural Tools: Fangs, damage value STR+5/20; wing-like appendages, speed value 14
Powers: ***Cold aura, resistance to normal weapons, life drain, infection***
Corruption Value: 18
Fear Rating: 2
Perseverance DN: 18
Weakness: Salt (severe)
True Death: Wrapped in thorny vines of the Gaean Peace Rose.
Description: Blood-thirsts are creations of the vampyress Sabathina, and are based on a similar creature in her old cosm, Lereholm. These flying Horrors are a sickly gray colored blob of opaque protoplasm, covered with red, unblinking eyes. Flaps of its skin appear to serve as wings, allowing these abominations full flight.

Their mouths are located on their underside, a round sphincter with teeth all around its edges, much like a lamprey. It has one special tooth, a long, fang, which it uses to drain blood from its victims.

People who are bitten by blood-thirsts and become infected turn into vampyres. However, unlike normal vampyres, the victim's skin turns a putrescent, slimy grey. Next, dozens of tiny red eyes begin growing on the victim's back. This is followed by the shrivelling up/sloughing off of the victim's limbs, and the eruption of a toothed sphincter on their chest. At last, the head of the victim falls off, and the transformation is complete. Note that the victim is not dead until the head falls off. The entire process takes two weeks.

The Peace Rose

The Gaean Peace Rose was first heard of in the affair of Major Avery Wellington, a Hellion Court member who tried to betray the Gaunt Man (see *The Gaunt Man Returns*).

Gaean Peace Roses resemble normal roses, except that their petals are red and blue and they tend to have very long stems. Some botanists claim a link between Gaean Peace Roses and the Ayslish Chrys Flower.

There are only two places on Core Earth where the Peace Roses grow. The roses grow in the inner courtyard of the Fortress of the Dead on the eastern coast of Majestic, and in the garden of Angus Stormfield, leader of the Sign of the Six, New London. On Gaea, the rose grows in the Royal Gardens of the Queen, the garden of Archbishop Matthew John, and wild in the Carpathian Mountains in Rumostria.

The Peace Rose, besides being a weakness and true death method for some Horrors, is also a valuable component in certain occult rituals whose desired results are well-intentioned.

By far, though, the true value of the Peace Rose lies in the benefits it provides Storm Knights. Each rose, when picked, can give the wielder up to four Possibilities within 72 hours. The tapping difficulty of the rose is 14. Each level of success gives the Storm Knight one Possibility, up to a maximum of four. When the rose is drained of Possibilities (or three days have gone by without the rose being tapped), it still stays fresh for a fortnight.

The Man Who Would Be Torg

The Gaunt Man sits back and watches as the other High Lords scramble for territory. He observes as alliances are made and broken within the same season of the year. He regards Storm Knights and their role in this war; it seems that if stormers aren't turning up at the most inconvenient times to foil the Possibility Raiders' plans, they are being used by one High Lord against another. Even the Gaunt Man himself used stormers to ferret out a traitor in his Court.

All the careful plans he had laid prior to the invasion are so much dust now, as the High Lords pursue their own selfish gains. But perhaps this is all for the best — while they have busied themselves with their petty intrigues, he has devoted more time to studying the Nameless One and the nature of Darkness Devices (particularly in light of the outcome of the "Bride of Darkness" experiment).

Working with the established fact that the Darkness Devices are merely bits of the Nameless One, the Gaunt Man has changed his tactics. His goal, to become Torg, remains the same; but his method of arriving at it has changed.

His plan is cunning in the extreme. Although the various Darkness Devices have an adversarial relationship now, due to the attitudes of their High Lords, they all serve the Nameless One in the end. Thus, to attain the possibility energy he needs to become Torg, all the Gaunt Man need do is use

Heketon to convince the other Devices to merge once again. In one strike, he will be absorbing the energy of *all* the realms — and long before the other High Lords can rip up their own stelae, he will have ascended to power.

Of course, these would-be rivals will be stripped of their power as High Lords with the loss of their Devices. This is of little concern to the Gaunt Man — as far as he is concerned, they have earned their fate by their incompetence.

That leaves only one ingredient to be acquired for the mantle of Torg to be his: physical energy. And interestingly enough, the answer to that problem lies in the realm of Tharkold ...

When Thratchen departed Orrorsh, he did so hastily, fearing what the Gaunt Man would do to him when the High Lord escaped the maelstrom. When the techno-demon left, however, he never took into account the fact that the Gaunt Man had access to bits of Thratchen; a talon here, some scales there. In the language of the occult, the Gaunt Man had contagions of Thratchen, which would enable the High Lord to affect the demon via a ritual.

First, the Gaunt Man invoked a *watching*, which enabled him to see what Thratchen saw, hear what Thratchen heard. In this way, the Gaunt Man has been able to keep very close tabs on Thratchen's progress. The High Lord even got an unexpected but welcome bonus; Jezrael does not fully trust Thratchen, so she keeps him close by in order to keep an eye on him. This makes the Gaunt Man privy to what goes on in Jezrael's compound.

One of the more intriguing things that the Gaunt Man learned of was the existence of a collection of seismological data gathered by Race scientists in Jezrael's employ. It seems the Tharkold High Lord is investigating the stability of the San Andreas fault and the smaller faults around it — the recent Los Angeles earthquake was, in fact, Jezrael's first test of her data.

This revelation set the Gaunt Man to thinking. A truly massive earthquake, one sparked by his occult power, would provide sufficient physical energy to meet his needs. Getting a hold of this seismic data has moved to the top of the Gaunt Man's list of things to do. Who knows, maybe he'll even find a way to have Thratchen do the job for him ...?

The Big Easy

The city of New Orleans is now a Core Earth/Orrorsh mixed zone, due to the presence of an Akashan reality tree with an Orrorshan in it in the area. As a result, the exotic city has become even more mysterious, not to mention downright deadly.

Local Cajun legends and superstitions have now taken on a life of their own. The local swamps and bayous, besides having the normal hazards such as crocodiles and snakes, now have all manner of grotesque Horrors wandering about. Moldering old graveyards from the 18th and 19th centuries now vomit forth their dead, who seek warm blood.

Of passing note is a Cyberpapal church which has been trying to make inroads among the French Catholic population. Ironically, the coming of Orrorsh to New Orleans has made this church a lot more popular. There is nothing like a good, nasty enemy to drive people over to your side if you have a way of protecting them.

In addition, one of Nippon Tech's holdings that has thus far survived the slash and burn downsizing going on in the Kanawa Corp. has oil platforms in the Gulf of Mexico, and consequently has a small office building in New Orleans proper.

Voodoo, Santeria, and organized Christianity have experienced major upswings in membership. Under the Orrorshan axioms, miracles and magic come easier.

The citizens of New Orleans have taken these changes in stride (there are no plans for canceling or postponing Mardi Gras, for instance). In fact, since the Orrorshan axiom wash has physically altered parts of the city, restoring many buildings from the 1800's, there is a minor fad of dressing in 19th century clothing, using 19th century mannerisms, even in some cases using 19th century technology. It is not surprising to see a Core Earth man, a vampyre hunter, dressed in top hat and ruffled shirt, wielding an Uzi and an oil lamp, having arrived at his destination in a horse-drawn hansom cab.

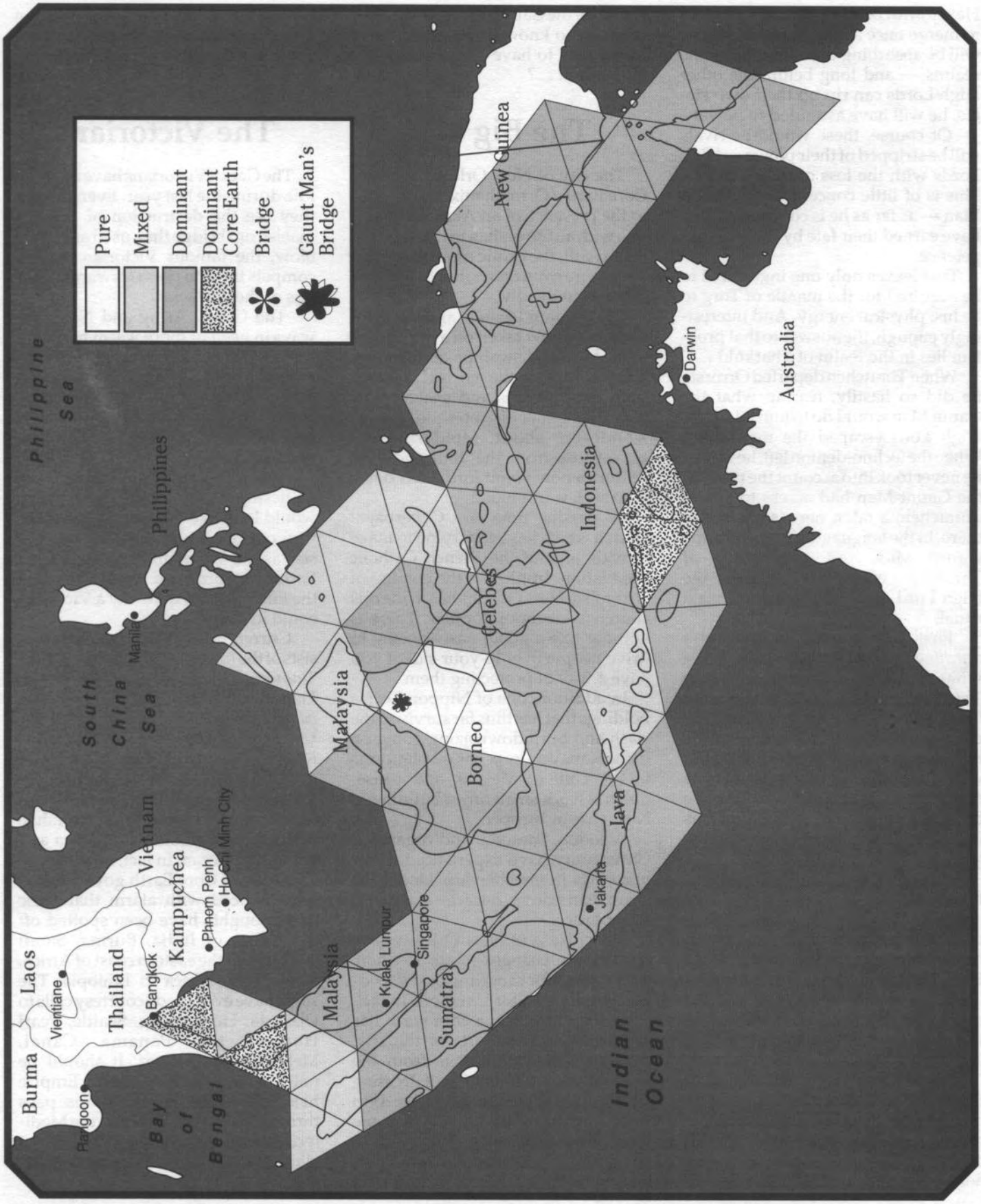
The Victorians

The Gaean Victorians have not been idle during the last year. Even though they see the destruction of the one maelstrom bridge they used as a great blow, the famous Victorian resolve compels them to press forward, heedless of the obstacles.

The Gaean Army and Navy, always in need of more warm bodies to replace combat casualties, have taken to recruiting Core Earth men who are down on their luck. In some cases, shanghaiing men for naval crews exists, especially in cities like Bangkok and Djakarta.

The Victorian Navy, a series of battleships that to a Core Earth native would look like they sailed out of the turn of the century, has increased in size as the Victorians took over Core Earth shipyards and started building the kind of ships that only a Victorian could love.

Currently, the Victorian fleet consists of the following ships: the *Victoria, Thunderer, Majestic, Royal Sovereign, Empress of India, Princess Royal, Revenge, Valiant, Invincible, Inflexible, Unstoppable, Glorious,* and the *Dread Nought*. These battleships steam as far south as Australia, and as far north as Taiwan. They regularly patrol all bodies of water included in the Orrorshan realm, plus the South China Sea and the Indian Ocean. In fact, many Asian and African Core Earth governments have noticed with alarm that these dreadnoughts have been spotted off the coasts of India, Burma, Saudi Arabia, and the eastern coast of Africa, from South Africa to Ethiopia. The ships have even made courtesy calls to Djakarta, Hong Kong, Seattle, Pearl Harbor, the Panama Canal, Melbourne, and Suez. It should be noted, however, that the Nile Empire has refused to let the ships pass through the Suez Canal into the Mediterranean. Similarly, the ships are not allowed through the Panama Canal.


Pure
Mixed
Dominant
Dominant Core Earth
Bridge
Gaunt Man's Bridge
Philippine Sea
Philippines
Manila
South China Sea
Vietnam
Kampuchea
Phnom Penh
Ho Chi Minh City
Laos
Vientiane
Thailand
Bangkok
Burma
Rangoon
Bay of Bengal
Malaysia
Kuala Lumpur
Singapore
Sumatra
Borneo
Celebes
Indonesia
Jakarta
Java
Indian Ocean
New Guinea
Darwin
Australia

Each Victorian battleship has a crew of 452 sailors, a captain, 4 officers, 2 regimental chaplains, 16 staff personnel, and a battalion of Royal Marines.

Many defense experts wonder why the Gaeans require such an extensive fleet. The Victorian authorities refuse to discuss the matter. On the face of it, it seems like it should not be a matter of great concern — after all, a single guided missile destroyer could more than likely handle their entire navy. Then again, even a modern navy can't be everywhere at once.

It should be noted that the Victorians have also built dozens of freighters and gunboats. There is even talk of building a cruise vessel under construction to allow the Victorian upper crust to visit exotic ports on Earth. The vessel, called the *Titan*, is being constructed at the New London dockyards. It is rumored that the ship will be a luxury liner of great size, and unsinkable as well.

The Victorian mercantile machine continues to churn forward as well. Numerous Victorian companies are springing up and issuing stock. Many such companies are even making transactions on some of the world's stock exchanges. The most prominent Victorian companies are: the Victorian West India Company (a major import/export firm), the Trans-Majestic Railway, Cross Munitions and the Armstrong-Whitworth Shipyards.

Hand in hand with these companies comes a new development from Majestic: the mercantile colonies. With the world economy hurting because of the war, the Victorians have approached some heads of state and offered them a deal: in exchange for allowing the Victorians to settle in a portion of their city, the Victorian companies would pump in revenue. In addition, the Victorians would help fight any other-cosm threats that materialized.

Thus far, the cities of Port Elizabeth, South Africa, Dar-Es-Salaam, Tanzania, Mombasa, Kenya, Rangoon, Burma, Bombay, India, Karachi, Pakistan, and Townsville, Australia have allowed the establishment of mercantile colonies, though the host nations prefer to call them "financial cooperatives."

The average mercantile colony consists of several shops and branch offices (from the respective Victorian companies), a branch of the Bank of New London (the foremost Victorian bank on Core Earth; they even have cross-cosm currency exchange), a Sacellum Church, a regiment of the Victorian Army, ship facilities (drydock, repairs, coaling station), not to mention appropriate residences for the various classes of Victorians who move in. Each mercantile colony has an Orrorshan hardpoint, created by bands of exceptionally gifted stormers who are members of either the military or the Sacellum clergy.

There is one city in which the Victorians would truly love to establish a colony: London. There are talks underway between the British government and high-ranking Victorians about the possibility of such a colony in the city. With the Warrior of the Dark's string of successes, the British government is understandably worried about the continued survival of London as they know it. Some members of Parliament feel that if London has to shift realities, far better for it to become something very close to England's golden era rather than the brutal pseudo-medieval/magical reality of Aysle.

Some Victorians, especially those belonging tosecret societies, have a hunger for knowledge. These scholarly Victorians have filed for permission from several nations to conduct archaeological digs. Thus far, only two areas have been opened to the Victorians: the Yucatan peninsula in Central America, and the area in the Nile Empire where the Red Sea and the borders of Egypt and Sudan meet.

In the case of the Egyptian digs, Dr. Mobius himself has given permission for the digs for two reasons: first, as a favor to the Gaunt Man (the more Victorians who are not in Orrorsh fighting off the Horrors the better), and second, if the Victorians find any eternity shards, Mobius can arrange to have the items stolen, since all the digs are either under surveillance or have been infiltrated by Mobius' agents.

There are four digs in the Yucatan and six in the Nile Empire. Each dig has a small hardpoint.

The Jerusalem Question

The Sacellum has recently adjourned from a religious conclave, where the main question addressed was: "Does the Holy City of Jerusalem on this planet carry as much importance as our own, especially in light of the fact that this is a wretched, misguided world that is blind to the spiritual truth?" After a week of discussion, the answer was a resounding "Yes."

This confirmed the notion that Jerusalem would have to be seized, in order to restore it to "the hands of those who alone know the truth."

Various plans for taking Jerusalem are being discussed. The Gaunt Man is deliriously happy about this development, for not only does it keep the Victorians occupied on external matters rather than things going on in the realm, it also, if successful, would deny Jerusalem to the Cyberpapacy and to the Nile Empire.

The Fate of Uthorion

Before he became the High Lord of Aysle, Uthorion was a protege of the Gaunt Man. When he conquered Aysle, he possessed Ardinay's body, a state that continued for five centuries. When Ardinay returned and reclaimed her form, Uthorion possessed a Viking chieftain, Thorfinn Bjanni. Eventually, Bjanni was slain by Storm Knights and Uthorion fled into a Draconis Teutonica.

By that time, the Warrior of the Dark was now in place as the High Lord of Aysle, and Uthorion had nowhere to go but back to the Gaunt Man. Rather than intervene on Uthorion's behalf, the Gaunt Man sent his defeated minion back to Kantovia to learn the fate of the Darkness Device, Huitzilopochtli, that had fled there (see *High Lord of Earth*).

Once he arrived at the site of the Gaunt Man's first conquest, the dragon-form Uthorion discovered that the cosm was pretty much the way he and the Gaunt Man had left it: a lifeless

planet of ash. But further exploration revealed the gate to the pocket dimension into which the Gaunt Man had exiled Ayroa and her surviving followers.

Within the pocket, there was green grass, woods, even fresh water. In the heart of this dimension, Uthorion found the wayward Darkness Device. His joy was short-lived, however, when he also came upon hundreds of Kantovian shapeshifters, descendants of the shapeshifters that had fled Kantovia with Ayroa. The lady herself, of course, was not present, having gone to Earth in order to become the Guildmaster and put her plan of vengeance against the Gaunt Man in motion.

Uthorion made two mistakes when he encountered the shapeshifters. His first was to announce who he was, for stories had been passed down about the Gaunt Man and Uthorion, the one who betrayed his cosm. The shapeshifters immediately set upon the dragon before them.

That was when Uthorion made his second mistake: he stuck around to fight. Even though his draconian form made him a lethal killing machine, he could not overcome hundreds of Dire Wolves, many of them possibility-rated.

Uthorion died a slow, painful death that day, as the Gaunt Man expected. Though he remains unaware that Ayroa is the Guildmaster, he certainly knew that Huitzilopochtli would find its way back to her. When Uthorion did not return, it merely confirmed his suspicions about the nature of things in Kantovia.

Horrors to Come

With many of the Victorians looking the other way, and most of the High Lords squabbling amongst themselves, the Gaunt Man is free to pursue his own dreams. His first order of business is to restore the second maelstrom bridge and/or drop a new one.

After that, he will instruct his Horrors to lay some more stelae, most likely in Australia, if only to convince the other High Lords that he is still pursuing the standard course toward becoming Torg.

CHAPTER EIGHT

Tharkold™

The young man walked down the rain-slicked streets of Los Angeles as a digital clock on a billboard flashed 12:10. A look of irritation flashed across his face. His contacts were late, and it wasn't a very smart thing to be just standing around in old "Lost Angeles" in the dark, not with the 'Kolds about.

A noise jangled behind him, and he spun about, his jet black Res-14 laser pistol drawn. Crouched in a firing position, the young man let his Dangerscan eye survey the scene.

He let out a sigh of relief when he saw the orange tomcat poke its head out of a now spilled trash can. "Mrowr?" it said, irritated at being disturbed.

The man shook his head and put the laser away, turning around once again to survey the streets, awaiting his now very late contacts.

To his right, the man saw his own image in the reflection of a shop's window. Once, he was Jeff Lambert, premed student at UCLA. Then the "wash" hit, and the 'Kolds came down, and everything changed. When Jeff decided to rescue someone from a techno-demon instead of running away, something changed inside him. In fact, as a med student he watched with a certain clinical detachment as parts of his body changed into something else, cybernetics which until that point Jeff had only read about in stories.

The person he had rescued was a ganger, and since Jeff realized that he could never go back to his studies, he joined the gang. The other members nicknamed him "Doc," because of his aborted vocation.

Doc heard the cat cry again, but this time it sounded odd for some reason. Unable to figure it out, Doc spun about again, ready to give the annoyingly persistent animal a good scare.

Doc got the scare instead.

The head of the cat was at Doc's eye level. A telescoping cybernetic neck enabled the animal — if animal it was — to accomplish this.

The cat's eyes glowed a bright violet.

"Meow ... ...<<clik>> ... meow <<clik>> ... I said, meow, sucker!" the animal spat in a metallic voice as its tongue snaked out an impossible length and wrapped itself around Doc's neck. Suddenly, it was squeezing tight and he couldn't breathe.

The sudden attack took Doc by surprise, and he dropped his Res-14 onto the wet, grimy sidewalk. Not a soul was on the street, and even if there were, it would be more than likely that no one would help.

With a mental command, a set of slashers slid from the back of Doc's right hand. A sudden sharp pain in his leg made him look down, where the front claws of the "cat" had lengthened to several centimeters, and were beginning to whittle away at the skin on his shins.

The alloy tongue contracted tighter, and Doc's world began to blur. Of all the things that he had fought and beaten, to be done in by a cybernetically amplified cat was a humiliation.

Phut. Phut. Phut.

Three silenced shots slammed into the psychocyber feline, the first two shots ripping the body apart, and the third dusting the head.

With his slashers still extended, Doc turned in the direction of his rescuer, and saw a cocky young man with an orange mohawk swagger towards him, wrist gun deployed and still smoking.

"Thought you could use some 'elp," the stranger said in a Cockney accent. "You Doc?"

Doc nodded. "And you? You're —"

"Jape," the youth replied, then looked at Doc's extended slashers. Jape held up his hand and let his own slide free.

"Mine's bigger," he smiled.

A third figure, a young woman in tight black leather, stepped out of the fog. "And Tyrana makes three," she grinned as she holstered her smoking 13/Zan Magnum.

Doc looked at Jape and frowned at his cybernetics. "That's frockware," he frowned.

Jape shrugged. "I'm from Britain, and spent most of the war in France, whaddya expect? Stuff's just as good as 'Koldware. Least it's holding up in the Bern rumble."

The mention of Bern snapped Doc back to the purpose of this meeting. "Yes, the two of you are supposed to be giving me reports on how resistance goes, so I can relay it to the LA crowd. Ever since that damned Apocularum was fixed, the zone's gotten bigger."

Jape nodded and retracted his slashers. "Yeah, Berlin's now a 'Kold/Raghead mixer, and some 'Kold shacked up inside an r-tree has made Bern a Frockker/'Kold mixer."

Doc nodded. There were rumors about Berlin going Tharkold/Nile and Bern going Cyberpapal/Tharkold, but it was good to get confirmation.

"Both burgs are hell right now," Jape continued. "The Frocks point to the 'Kold and say that the technos justify the existence of the Cyberchurch. Lotta sheep joinin' that flock because of that."

"Nah, the Frocks won't be around long," Tyrana shook her head. "Mal's going chip-fried, you'll see."

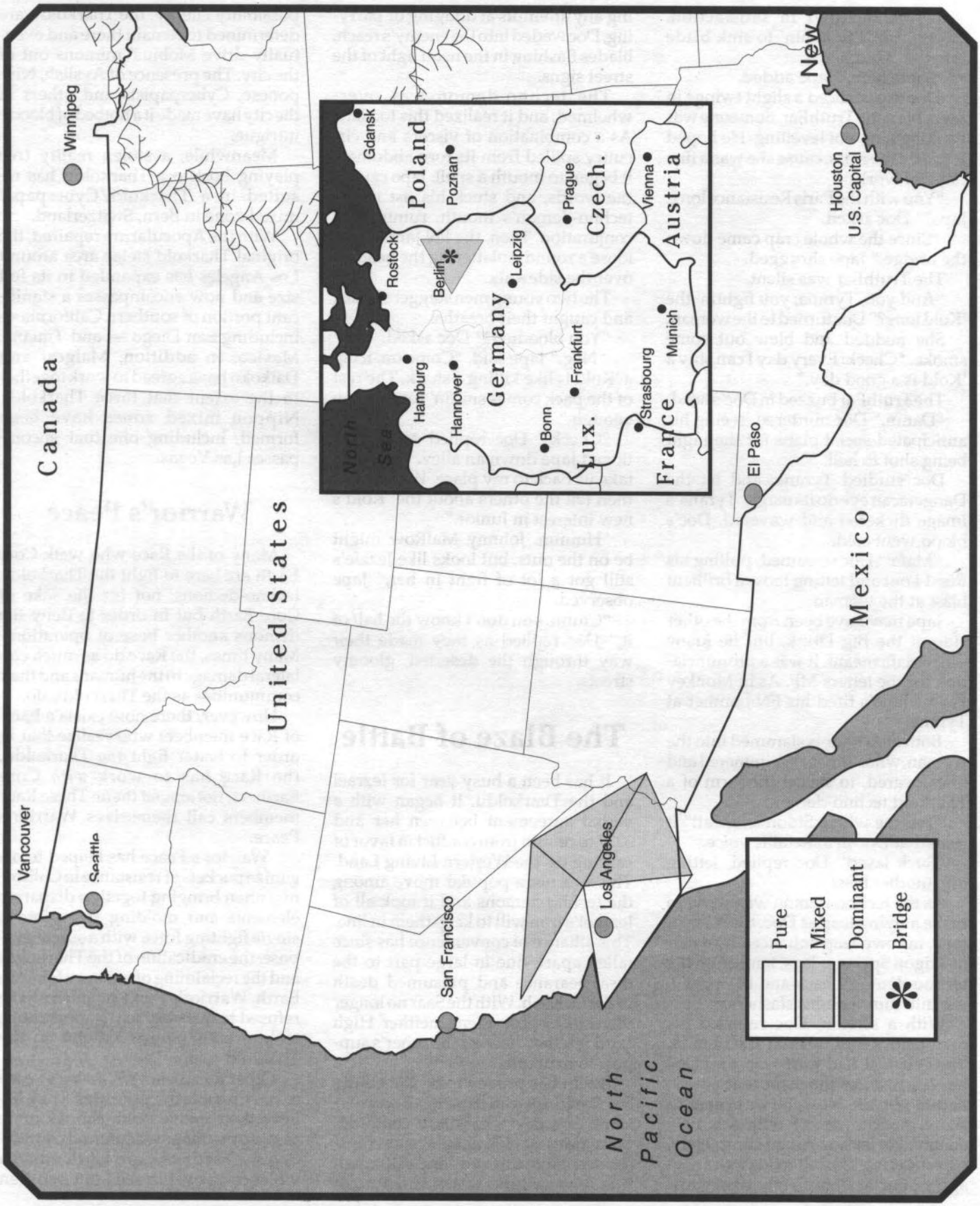
Doc turned to the young woman. "And what's the talk from the Other Side?"

Tyrana shrugged. "Race still doing the snatchgrab to unhip stormers, bringing 'em over to Other Side to fight the 'Kold there. They tell us they're here to help us fight the 'Kold, but they're scamming us, taking our best blades over there." Tyrana paused and regarded Doc. "What about Junior?"

"Junior grew fast," Doc replied. "He's ready to shiv Mommy."

"Where is he?" Tyrana asked, taking out a cigarette and lighting it.

"Here in El Ay. Junior strikes, we strike with him. Mommy lost her taste for Japanese food, and no longer sleeps on his futon, check?" Doc replied. "Mommy alone, time for Junior to do her up. Junior's round here. Trust me."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Rostock
Berlin
Leipzig
Czech.
Prague
Vienna
Austria
Germany
Hamburg
Hannover
Bonn
Frankfurt
Munich
Strasbourg
Lux.
France
North Sea
Pure
Mixed
Dominant
Bridge

Tyrana nodded in satisfaction. "Good. Me, I'm itchin' to sink blade into the 'Kold."

"Same here," Jape added.

Doc experienced a slight twinge in his cybernetic TruthEar. Someone was yanking him, not levelling. He hoped it wasn't the Miss, cause she was a fine piece of work.

"You with the Paris Resistance long, Jape?" Doc asked.

"Since the whole crap came down the bridge," Jape shrugged.

The TruthEar was silent.

"And you, Tyrana; you fightin' the 'Kold long?" Doc turned to the woman.

She nodded and blew out some smoke. "Check. Every day I can shiv a 'Kold is a good day."

The TruthEar buzzed in Doc's head.

"Damn," Doc muttered, seeing his anticipated social plans for the night being shot to hell.

Doc studied Tyrana, and let the Dangerscan eye do its magic. Tyrana's image flickered and wavered. Doc's blood went cold.

"Mafa!" Doc screamed, pulling his Res-14 out and letting loose a brilliant blast at the woman.

Jape may have been from the other side of the Big Drink, but he knew what Mafa meant. It was a pronunciation for the letters MF. As in Monkey Form. Jape's fired his FN Jammer at Tyrana.

Both men's shots slammed into the woman, whose images shimmered and disappeared, to reveal the form of a Tharkold techno-demon.

"Tell me where Sidon is, meat!" it roared at Doc in a metallic voice.

"Suck laser!" Doc replied, letting out another blast.

As the techno-demon was about to make a flying leap at Doc, the form of Jape, his own leap enhanced by a pair of Trigon Springer legs, landed on the techno-demon's back and began slicing into him with his slashers.

With a scream, Doc released his own blades and went at the demon. The cybercat had hurt Doc, and Doc had learned that much more about the nature of pain. Now, he was eager to share the knowledge with this new enemy. He let himself go completely, surrendering himself to his more savage instincts. Completely disregarding any attempts at dodging or parrying, Doc waded into the enemy's reach, blades flashing in the neon light of the street signs.

The techno-demon was overwhelmed, and it realized this too late. As a combination of viscera and circuitry spilled from its torn abdomen, it began to mouth a spell. Jape caught the words, and stuck his fist in the techno-demon's mouth, ruining the conjuration. Then, the FN Jammer let loose a round, splattering the head all over the sidewalk.

The two young men staggered back and caught their breaths.

"You bloodied?" Doc asked.

"Neg," Jape said. "Come on, icing a 'Kold is like killing a shark. The rest of the pack comes sniffin' round soon enough."

"Check," Doc replied as he motioned Jape down an alley. "This will take us back to my place. We'll crash, then tell the others about the 'Kold's new interest in Junior."

"Hmmm. Johnny MalRow might be on the outs, but looks like Jezzie's still got a lot of fight in her," Jape observed.

"Chum, you don't know the half of it," Doc replied as they made their way through the deserted, gloomy streets.

The Blaze of Battle

It has been a busy year for Jezrael and the Tharkoldu. It began with a verbal agreement between her and 3327 to refrain from conflict in favor of carving up the Western Living Land. This was not a popular move among the techno-demons and it took all of Jezrael's iron will to keep them in line. This alliance of convenience has since fallen apart, due in large part to the disappearance and presumed death of Baruk Kaah. With the Saar no longer there to oppose them, neither High Lord felt they needed the other's support to triumph.

Berlin has proven to be something of a fiasco. Instead of being the cornerstone of a new Tharkoldu conquest, the actions of Nile agents have transformed it into a mixed zone. Although it is now of little worth in terms of possibility energy, the Tharkoldu are determined to remain there and eventually drive Mobius' minions out of the city. The presence of Ayslish, Nipponese, Cyberpapists and others in the city have made it a hotbed of bloody intrigue.

Meanwhile, a stolen reality tree playing host to a Tharkoldu has resulted in a Tharkold/Cyberpapal mixed zone in Bern, Switzerland.

With the Apocularum repaired, the original Tharkold stelae area around Los Angeles has expanded to its full size and now encompasses a significant portion of southern California — including San Diego — and Tijuana, Mexico. In addition, Malgest and Daikoku have agreed to work together to the extent that three Tharkold/Nippon mixed zones have been formed, including one that encompasses Las Vegas.

Warrior's Peace

Many of the Race who walk Core Earth are here to fight the Tharkoldu techno-demons, not for the sake of Core Earth but in order to deny the demons another base of operations. Many times, the Race do as much collateral damage to the humans and their communities as the Tharkoldu do.

However, there now exists a band of Race members who realize that in order to better fight the Tharkoldu, the Race has to work *with* Core Earthers, not *around* them. These Race members call themselves Warrior's Peace.

Warrior's Peace has helped to organize pockets of resistance in California, often bringing together disparate elements and molding them into a single fighting force with a single purpose: the eradication of the Tharkoldu and the reclaiming of territory for Core Earth. Warrior's Peace members have refused to take any part in operations to lure other Storm Knights to the Tharkold cosm.

Other Race believe Warrior's Peace to have misplaced priorities. They believe their native cosm should come first, no matter how acute and compelling the needs of Core Earth are. No violence has yet broken out between

the Race and Warrior's Peace; the ties of blood are still too strong to allow an ideological disagreement to divide them.

The other problem Warrior's Peace is experiencing is that many Storm Knights are slow to trust a Race member. The Race has demonstrated a disregard for human safety and been slow in helping the cause on Earth, not to mention the practice of tricking Storm Knights into coming to Tharkold to fight.

(The most recent incident involved bogus "time bands" sold to Storm Knights, which served to transport them to the Tharkold cosm and worked only one-way.)

Son of Jezrael

One of the most interesting events in Tharkold has been the one most rarely talked about — the birth of Jezrael's child. Readers may remember that, shortly after she became High Lord, Jezrael used the power of the Darkness Device and a Cult of the Dominant miracle to impregnate Demon Prince Krezlakh. Slightly over 18 months ago, Krezlakh gave birth, perishing in the effort. The child was immediately whisked away by servants and kept hidden from the techno-demons.

The child was a boy and he was given the name Sidon. A Tharkoldu/Race mix, he was left in the care of nurses who were ordered to give Jezrael reports on his progress.

His "progress" was astounding, indeed. The child grew at an alarmingly rapid rate and reached adulthood in a matter of weeks. Unfortunately, he was soon heard to mutter treason, saying things that could only be interpreted as sympathetic to the plight of the Race.

Before anyone could decide exactly how to handle this increasingly intractable offspring, Sidon did everyone a favor by making the decision for them: he escaped. Jezrael responded by having Sidon's nurses and guards executed. The High Lord mistakenly believes that she alone knows Sidon is her son.

Sidon made his way down the maelstrom bridge to Los Angeles and found the Race-backed resistance formed by Warrior's Peace. After demonstrating his loyalty, Sidon has risen in prominence in the group; many think of him now as the leader of the LA Resistance, though he has some jealous detractors (many of whom point to his mixed blood as a evidence that he cannot be trusted).

Sidon's mixed blood, however, is an advantage. He can see both sides of the coin, think like either a human or a techno-demon. Sidon is proving to be a brilliant tactician, able to anticipate many Tharkoldu moves.

The success that Sidon has brought to the Resistance has made him the number one enemy in Jezrael's eyes. In battle situations, Sidon has loudly announced to the techno-demons that

he is Jezrael's offspring, but very few have survived to spread the tale.

Lately, Sidon has gone into a series of trances in which he makes cryptic prophecies. The one prophecy that keeps coming up is as follows:

As the architect of the miseries comes to us,
And darkness is locked up in his heart,
The mighty will be cast down,
For the sake of resisting a nameless foe,
And his first victim will return for retribution,
Then shall flesh face flesh,
Until only one stands,
And all kingdoms fall.

Sidon feels that a confrontation with his mother is inevitable. His companions are worried about him, but Sidon shows no signs of physical or mental impairment, other than an obsession with the coming battle.

Sidon

DEXTERITY 14

Acrobatics 16, dodge 19, energy weapons 20, fire combat 18, flight 17, heavy weapons 18, maneuver 19, melee weapons 18, unarmed combat 20

STRENGTH 18 (21 in left arm)

Climbing 23, lifting 22

TOUGHNESS 17 (22) (27 with armor)

PERCEPTION 20

Air vehicles 25, camouflage 22, cyberdeck ops 24, demolitions 24, find 26, first aid 24, land vehicles 27, scholar (Tharkold realm lore) 25, scholar (tactics) 26, tracking 25, trick 26

MIND 20

Cybertech 24, psychology 23, science: computers 25, streetwise 27, survival 27, test 28, willpower 28

CHARISMA 18

Charm 20, persuasion 22, taunt 25

SPIRIT 20

Faith (the Way) 26, focus 26, intimidation 25, reality (Tharkold) 29

Possibilities: 40

Natural Tools: teeth, damage value STR+2/20; wings, speed value 14.

Equipment: Pe-Ain Chaingun, damage value 24, ammo 12, range 3-40/200/800; Res-14 Laser, damage value 25, ammo 50. range 3-50/100/200; monofilament dagger, damage value STR+4/22; Chod 5/Skirmisher, armor value TOU+5/27; cyberdeck. Cyberware: Nanocord, nervejack, eye package (right eye) —Dangerscan, Darksight, Sharpsight; ear package (left ear) — Bugsweeper, Soundcatcher, Truthear Poisonsnooper, Nanodoc, Interdermal Armor, armor value TOU+5, Tendon Augmenter, Cyberarm 3, Slashers, damage value STR+4/25, 3 slot Chipholder. Cyber value: 18 (reduced by *psychology*).

Description: Sidon is an intense man in his mid-20s, with long dark hair in a ponytail. He has a swarthy complexion, with phosphorescent green eyes and slightly pointed ears (the latter are usually covered by his hair). A pair of leathery wings lie between his shoulder blades, but they can be actually drawn into his body if he wishes it. He has a set of small fangs that actually retract, almost like a vampire.

Sidon feels great sympathy for the Race as well as for Core Earth humans. He approves of Warrior's Peace (perhaps another reason why the rest of the Race doesn't pursue physical conflict with them).

Sidon has access to Way of the Race miracles.

A Shift In Horror

Jezrael has been tinkering with how horror is used in the Tharkold realm. Now that she has been expanding her realm on Core Earth, she cannot have the luxury of expending hundreds, even thousands, of techno-demons in massive head-to-head battles.

Thus, Jezrael has hit upon something close to the Gaunt Man's Power of Fear as result of doing some research into Kranod's computer records. (The Gaunt Man had met with Kranod centuries ago, when the High Lord of Orrorsh first started combing the infiniverse for likely allies. The Gaunt Man had given Kranod some ideas and theories that would be useful in spreading fear to the masses, and how to get energy from that. Unfortunately, Kranod did not take many of those ideas to heart, and even allowed the Fear Database to degrade to the point where the records were incomplete, much to Jezrael's disappointment.)

Still, enough has survived that she can use more subtle tactics in demoralizing the human population, and for spreading her reality beyond her borders, making stelae planting that much easier. While there are still some bla-

tant frontal assaults, Jezrael has given orders to strike from the shadows, creating fear in victims. If a techno-demon finds a group of six people out nightclubbing, the demon will kill four or five and leave a few alive to spread the tale of terror.

Besides this new method of restraint, Jezrael has also decided that adding more elements of horror in the commonplace will go a long way toward breaking the will of the people. Using her control of technology, she has come up with insidious ways of making Core Earth technological items come to a semblance of life on their own. These items then attack people, in some cases killing them. Among some of the most noteworthy manifestations of late, in the Los Angeles area:

• An Inglewood man was found dead, his flesh shaved off completely by his berserk electric razor;

• A Santa Barbara woman jogger was found dead, apparently when the earphones of her walkman contracted on her head and blasted music into her ears at screechingly high decibels, while the cord wrapped itself around her throat and strangled her;

• A Hollywood teenager was sucked into his computer via modem. His VX form was trampled by thousands of people trying to reach a popular online bulletin board.

"Lost Angeles"

Many changes in the Possibility Wars have been directly affecting the City of Angels, some for the better, some for the worse. The effects of Jezrael's directive calling for less blatant attacks has actually encouraged some people to come back to the Los Angeles area, in the mistaken belief that the Tharkoldu had turned their attention to some other enemy (or would remain quiescent as long as they weren't provoked).

The destruction of the Delphi Council has also been a benefit to the city, as Raymond Bates, Delphi field officer, was relieved of duty. Some Storm Knights may remember that Bates actually transformed to Nippon reality and was working to betray the Council and America. Some evidence of his duplicity was beginning to come to light, so he was let go. Bates fled to Japan, where he was promptly shot by corporate ninja for failing his mission.

In place of the Delphi Council, the Nicklaus Administration has reactivated the FBI, NSA, and CIA and restored those organizations powers. In addition, two detachments of Team Omega have been assigned to the LA area. They operate out of Camp Pendleton (see below).

Disgruntled Delphi Council agents have gone over to the Pure, the white supremacist group in Los Angeles.

Hostilities between Tharkold and the Cyberpapacy have erupted in earnest thanks to the Bern situation. As a result, Cyberpapal forces in the Los Angeles area have stepped up assaults on the techno-demons, coupling them with a massive public relations campaign, "It Takes a Techno-Church to Fight Techno-Demons," to win converts. The campaign has met with some success.

The Aysle embassy is in turmoil over events in Aysle, where the Warrior of the Dark's forces are inflicting terrible punishment on the forces of the Light. The embassy is still willing to help Storm Knights, but is now much more careful about who they help and how much.

The Black Diamond gang has been giving the embassy trouble lately, probably heartened by the fact that the Dark forces are winning in the Aysle realm.

Most of the Living Land factions have disbanded, been slaughtered or driven off. Some have accepted the Akashan offer of relocation to South America.

The Red Hand continues to control Forever Films and provide aid to the Legion of Doom. There are rumors that the Legion wants to move their operations to Texas, where there's less chance of their blood being shed. This change of heart may be tied to recent Tharkoldu attacks on Forever Films.

By far, the hardest hit realm forces in Los Angeles are those from Nippon Tech. Kanawa's slash and burn policies, and the corporate cutbacks, have shrunk the budgets of the businesses in Los Angeles. Their allies, the Delphi Council, are gone. The alliance with the Tharkoldu, which for a while kept attacks against Nippon holdings down to a minimum, is now over, and they are vulnerable again. Any Kanawan support of gangs and such in Los Angeles has stopped; the gangs are on their own, to live or die on their own merits.

Ichi Entertainment is leaving Los Angeles, scrapping all of their plans for the city, selling off some assets, mysteriously destroying or cannibalizing others.

Kanawa Enterprises remains solid, and it's from here that any remaining Nippon activities are being coordinated. All Kanawa employees are now expected to either find their own places to live or live in new apartments slapped together adjacent to the Kanawa Building. All executives now live in suites in the building.

The Resistance, the newest group to spring up in Los Angeles, is actually formed from elements of existing groups that have put aside their differences for now in favor of cooperation. This should not be viewed as some mutual love-fest; the groups have come to the conclusion that if they work together, their chances of individual survival increases.

The groups that participate in this newly organized Resistance are: City Hall, the Rauru Block, Warriors' Peace, the Posse, the Lawmen, and the Video Vigilantes.

The Resistance is also coordinating attacks on the Tharkoldu in the rest of the zone.

Berlin

The city of Berlin is now a mixed

Tharkoldu/Nile zone, thanks to the Scarlet Asp and her fellow villains, who uprooted a Tharkoldu stelae and replaced it with a Nile stelae.

Besides the usual effects, such as changes in architecture and clothing, there are now Nile heroes and villains running around the city with a vicious streak that not even the Nile's Evil inclinations could duplicate. Angst, moral ambiguity, and other dark elements now abound.

Vutark, the Tharkoldu Demon Prince who runs Berlin for Jezrael, is now prone to fits of having to explain his evil plans to his captives, making dramatic monologues, and coming up with truly grandiose and dramatic plans to conquer the world.

A brilliant techno-demon pain sculptor, Vutark seeks the secrets of weird science, in order to employ it in his craft and perhaps even unseat Jezrael. The Demon Prince runs Berlin only because he is not ready to take on the High Lord, whom he despises.

However, Vutark does agree with one tactic implemented by Jezrael: refraining from blatant attacks in favor of more dramatic, fear-building strikes. This approach is in keeping with Vutark's artistic soul, as well as his being affected by Nile axioms, where the dramatic is seen as always better than simply inflicting pain and death. In fact, Vutark has taken to viewing old German horror movies (such as *Nosferatu*, *The Golem*, and *The Cabinet of Dr. Caligari*) for inspiration.

Some techno-demons do not like the fact that Vutark is in charge of Berlin; many techno-demons consider artists (such as pain sculptors) to be too liberal, too soft, on their enemies. These critics point to Vutark's propensity to wax dramatic as a sign that the task is too much for him.

An interesting side effect of the axiom wash is that the *Social* axiom of the Nile now holds sway, turning the demons into a better organized force. Concepts such as cooperation, coordinated attacks, and chains of command are now accepted and implemented.

Most of Berlin is actually under the sway of Tharkold. The Nile Empire is their biggest obstacle, and they attempt frequent attacks on the Nile Embassy and other Nile areas.

Berlin also has gangs, but not to the extent of Los Angeles. The Tharkoldu have not been actively supporting any of the gangs, though ironically the gangers now have access to cyberware, thanks to the axioms that the techno-demons brought with them. Many back alleys boast cyberleggers willing to perform surgery for a price.

The Race is active in Berlin as well. The idea of Warriors' Peace and the Resistance are not as strong here. Berlin is becoming a haven for Race spies seeking to bring more Storm Knights into the Tharkold cosm. The Race does fight the Tharkoldu in Berlin, but with the same attitude that they have everywhere else on Core Earth: the deaths of innocents do not matter. Only killing Tharkoldu matters.

There are rumors that a Draconis Teutonica fled Aysle and was trans-

formed to Tharkoldu axioms. This dragon allegedly submitted to Vutark.

Berlin's night life has become a mixture of 1930's style decadent cabaret shows, gothic punk clubs, and the usual sampling of bars and discos. Only the very foolish, the very brave, the very strong, or the very drunk venture out to sample the night life. Judging by the size of the crowds, the axiom washes of Nile and Tharkold have created a lot of foolish, brave, strong, drunk Berliners.

Las Vegas

Since the dissolution of the Nippon/Tharkold alliance, questions have arisen over who will handle Vegas and how they'll go about doing it. Nippon wants the city intact because it is a major profit center. The Tharkoldu have no such aspirations, and instead see Las Vegas as a nice big hunting ground, where the techno-demons can feast and enslave at their leisure.

Still, with Jezrael's new ideas of more subtle contact, open slaughter on the streets of Las Vegas would be impractical. Besides, the Core Earth cities make fine hunting grounds, and if the cities are emptied out, the hunting will be less than productive.

Thus, both the Kanawans and the Tharkoldu have agreed that Las Vegas is not to be a site of open warfare. Clandestine attacks from the shadows are allowed. In fact, any act of violence which does not draw public attention is permissible.

Currently, a Great Alpha techno-demon named Ataz is overseeing all Tharkoldu operations in the Las Vegas area. As the Nile axioms did in Berlin, the Nippon *Social* axiom has increased the level of cooperation between demons, to the point of creating a strong, identifiable hierarchy.

Ataz makes his lair in an abandoned underground complex that was formerly used for atomic testing in the '50s, about 40 miles north of Las Vegas.

There are no organized street gangs in Las Vegas. Core Earth's organized crime elements and the Yakuza have been most efficient in keeping away the riffraff. There are scattered cyberpunkers, but nothing that comes close to being called a gang.

Tell It To the Marines

Storm Knights have discovered that Camp Pendelton in California is a Core Earth hardpoint that encompasses the entire base. This is a stroke of luck, seeing as how San Diego and its bases are now under Tharkoldu control.

Camp Pendelton has become an important site for Knight planning and the jumping-off point for a number of expeditions into Tharkold territory. In fact, Camp Pendelton probably has the greatest proportionate concentration of American Core Earth Storm Knights in the United States.

Sergeant Ted "Boomer" Nakamura continues to effectively lead a Marine squad which has scored impressive kills against the Tharkoldu.

The Akashan War

Thus far, the Akashans have proven to be the most formidable opponents of the Tharkoldu. The Akashans' psionics and biotech are proving to be a match for occultech and demon savagery.

Things started off slowly, when Coar Akashans began supplying weapons to Storm Knights for use against the techno-demons. When the Tharkoldu first ran into gravitic rays and the like, they swiftly realized that a new player had entered the game. Akashans found in Los Angeles became special targets of techno-demon vengeance.

As Tharkold has been expanding into the American West and spilling into Mexico, the techno-demons began running afoul of Monitor scouting parties moving north. To say that the meetings were not cordial would be an understatement.

The skirmishes have erupted into full-scale war. The Tharkoldu see the Akashans as an extremely powerful wild card that seems to favor the inhabitants of Earth. The Akashans see the Tharkoldu as a powerful, advanced race of killers that threaten the balance of the planet.

Monitors and techno-demon prides are slugging it out in the Tharkold/Nippon zones of the American West. Monitor Storm Knight teams continue to be sent into Los Angeles and Berlin to help the Resistance, but not in any greater numbers than their initial deployments.

The Tharkoldu have also made forays into South America, spreading terror in Peru, Chile, and western Bolivia. These attacks, called "raptor runs," are deliberately set up to be high-profile assaults on the citizenry, in order to undermine their confidence in the Akashans. The Tharkoldu are trying to make the people think that the presence of the Akashans in their nations is what attracts the attacks. Peru gets hit most often because not only are the Akashans there, but so is Nippon Tech.

The atrocities of the Tharkoldu have had a detrimental effect on the techno-demons themselves. The Akashans and their client species on Earth have spent much of the last few years at odds with one another about their goals here and how best to achieve them. With the techno-demons' assaults, the "Space Gods" and the other Star Sphere natives have been united as never before. While it is true that this unity exists only when dealing with the subject of the Tharkoldu, that is little consolation to the techno-demons.

Jezrael is growing increasingly annoyed at the Akashan interference in Tharkoldu affairs. She has ordered the dissection of captured Akashan technology in an effort to come up with a way of fusing biotech with occultech. Thus far, her efforts have led nowhere.

Jezrael is weighing the idea of a raptor run, using her best, strongest Alphas, against the Akashan leaders themselves, including Sarila.

Lizard Hunt

What do techno-demons do for sport these days? After a long day of dominating, enslaving, and instilling fear in others, many techno-demons are finding a new way to relax: hunting the scattered edeinos in the remaining Living Land zones.

The techno-demons hunt in groups of three, and many times, six. Groups compete to see which can come back with the most edeinos' skulls. Some techno-demons even have taken to wearing edeinos skulls as ornamentation.

Core Earth cameramen have brought back spectacular footage of techno-demons hunting down packs of edeinos and slaughtering them very slowly. As it turns out, many Americans and Canadians who have suffered from the Living Land forces are delighted to see the edeinos getting disembowelled on videotape. What many of these people conveniently turn a blind eye to is the fact that, given the chance, those same lizard-ripping Tharkoldu would do the same to *them*.

America's Common Ground Association (which for some reason no longer suffers headquarters vandalism since the dissolution of the Delphi Council), has called for intervention on behalf of these edeinos tribes. The response from all corners of America and Canada can be filtered down to this: "If you care so much about those things, you go out there and save them yourselves!"

The Akashans, however, are trying to save the edeinos, which brings yet another bone of contention into the Akashan-Tharkold war.

The Future Revealed

Jezrael plans to actively seek out Sidon and put a stop to him. She wants the true story behind her son to remain secret, and the best way to do it is to kill him if he will not submit to her

Look for expansion from the Berlin zone, most likely towards the Cyberpapacy. Jezrael is also intrigued to find out how the Tharkold axiom wash will affect Germany's legendary Black Forest, and if it will revive some old folktales with a new cyberslash twist.

Jezrael will continue pressing the war in the American West, in order to get as many of the Living Land's zones as possible. Look also for expansion into Mexico, where Jezrael is certain to run into the Nile Empire's forces.

CHAPTER NINE

Pocket Dimensions

Kantovia

The last anyone knew of the cosm of Kantovia, it had been drained of possibility energy by the Gaunt Man. He left it a dead husk and moved on to other conquests.

But Ayroa, the wife of the cosm's former High Lord, Kurst, and some of her followers had been exiled by the Gaunt Man into a pocket dimension. The Great Horn, the Kantovian Darkness Device, fled to Earth and eventually returned as Huitzilopochtli, would-be Device of the Aztec Empire (see *High Lord of Earth*).

When Malcolm Kane was defeated, the Device fled back to Kantovia. Its link with Ayroa allowed it to eventually find the pocket dimension where Ayroa and the descendants of the original shapeshifters dwelled. (Before the Device had fled Kantovia, it had given Ayroa a fraction of its energy, which allowed her to retain her youth while in the pocket dimension.)

With the Device back, Ayroa first used it to remake the pocket dimension into a replica of Kantovia. She then willed the Device to dimthread her to Earth.

Ayroa left Waheen, her younger cousin, in charge of the cosm's affairs. Waheen, a female Dire Wolf who shared Ayroa's vision, took the position with the knowledge that she is only occupying it until Ayroa returns to lead her people to new glory.

Once on Earth, Ayroa spent a while learning all about the planet. As a proto-High Lord, she was easily able to retain her reality, but swiftly saw that an invasion would avail her nothing. There were already too many other High Lords too well entrenched. She would need to find another way to revenge herself on the Gaunt Man ...

And so the Guildmaster was born (see Chapter Two, "Core Earth.")

Back in the pocket dimension, the Darkness Device has restored the world laws and axioms of the original cosm. The population of shapeshifters is growing in number, strength and desire to avenge the blood of their ancestors, spilled by the Gaunt Man.

The Dires have already slain Uthorion, sent in dragon form by the Gaunt Man to ascertain the fate of the escaped Kantovian Darkness Device. But it is the High Lord of Orrorsh's ichor they wish to see on their claws.

Axioms and World Laws

The *Technological* Axiom: 4

The Kantovians have very little need for technology, certainly none for refined metals. The Kantovians are hunters, not farmers. They are a wild folk, who wear only hides and live in dwellings that are little better than caves.

Though fire building is possible, the Kantovians avoid it whenever possible. Their animalistic instincts cause them to shy away from flames.

The *Social* Axiom: 6

In Kantovia, the pack is the key social mechanism. There are mated pairs who have their litters, and they are part of a clan, which in turn belongs to a pack. There used to be several packs in Kantovia, but that was before the Gaunt Man came along. Now there is but one.

The family unit is strong and Dires mate for life. Things like writing, reading, table manners, and etiquette do not exist here, for the Dires have no use for them. They do maintain a strong oral tradition, which is manifested through story telling.

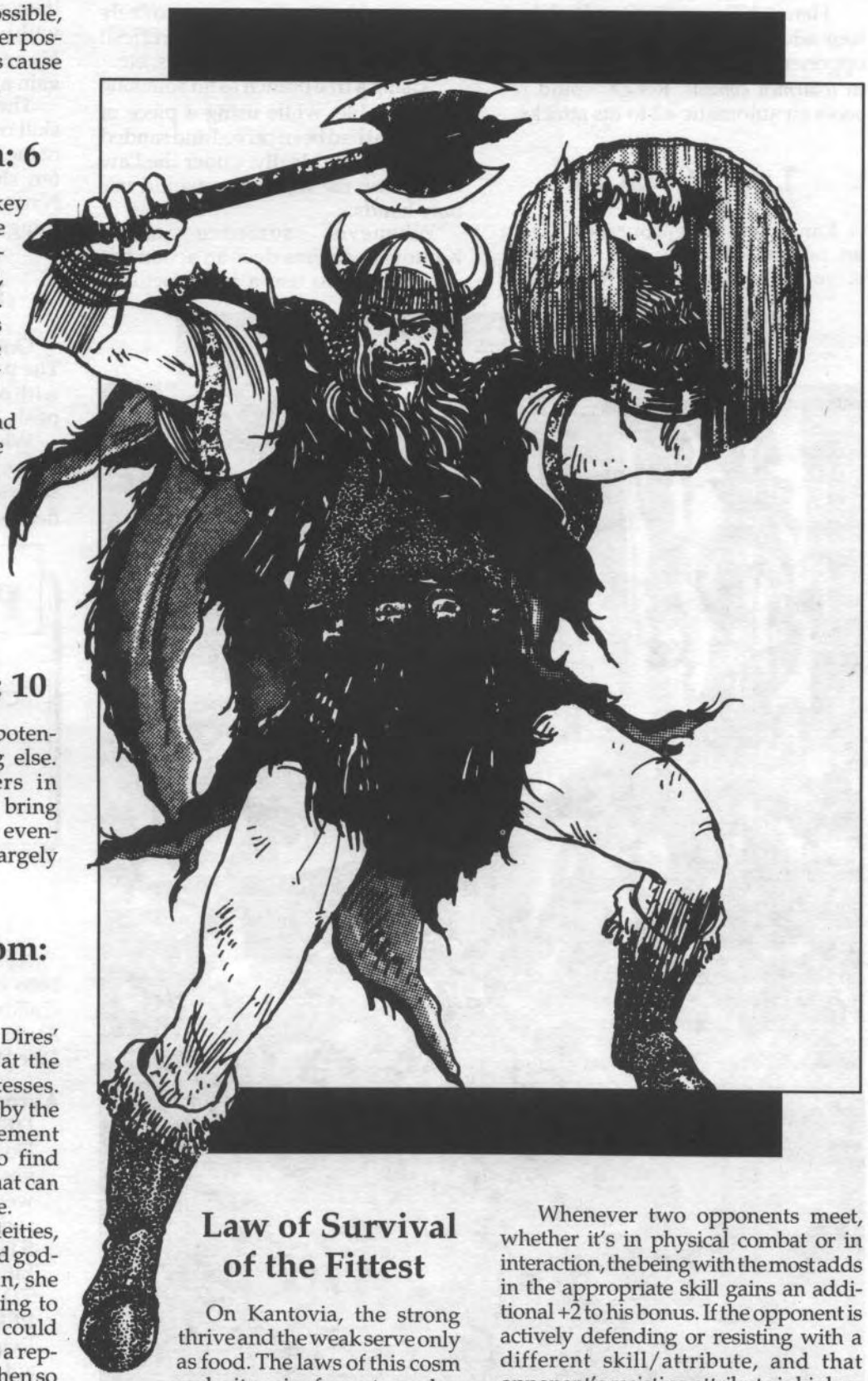
The *Magic* Axiom: 10

This is more of an untapped potential axiom level than anything else. There are no magic-wielders in Kantovia ... so far. Ayroa may bring such knowledge back with her eventually, but until then, magic is largely unheard of.

The *Spiritual* Axiom: 18

At one time in Kantovia, the Dires' goddess walked among them at the humble request of the priestesses. Though the goddess was killed by the Gaunt Man, there is a movement within the Dire Wolf ranks to find another deity to worship, one that can restore the full power of Nature.

While Ayroa does not trust deities, considering how effective the old goddess was against the Gaunt Man, she sees no harm in her people trying to "adopt" one. If such a being could help remake this dimension into a replica of Kantovia all the quicker, then so much the better.



Law of Survival of the Fittest

On Kantovia, the strong thrive and the weak serve only as food. The laws of this cosm make it easier for a strong being to overcome a weaker one.

Whenever two opponents meet, whether it's in physical combat or in interaction, the being with the most adds in the appropriate skill gains an additional +2 to his bonus. If the opponent is actively defending or resisting with a different skill/attribute, and that opponent's resisting attribute is higher, the opponent would receive a +2 increase in the respective attribute or skill.

Hence, if Renge the Dire Wolf had four adds in *unarmed combat*, and his opponent, a werewolf, had two adds in *unarmed combat*, Renge would receive an automatic +2 to his attacks.

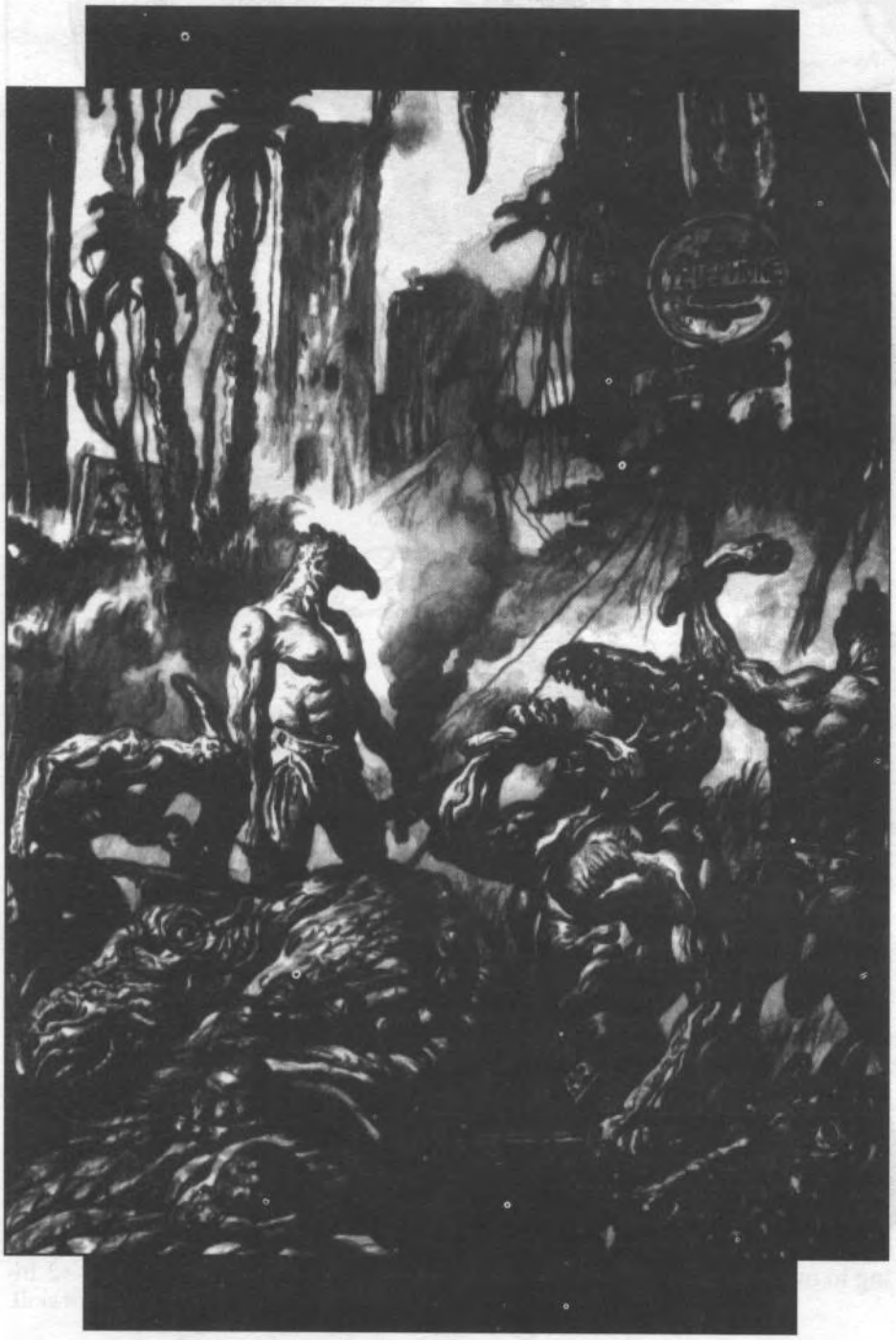
Law of Nature

Kantovians are encouraged to rely on nature's bounty, not on things wrought by hands. The world laws make it easier for Kantovians to "rely on their natures" instead of artificial conventions like time, manners, etc.

Using a tree branch to hit someone is acceptable, while using a piece of wood that had been carved and sanded would not be. Ideally, under the Law of Nature, the Kantovian would use bare hands.

Whenever someone under Kantovian axioms does an action but chooses not to use a manufactured item and instead either improvises with what nature provides, or just uses his own natural-born abilities, they gain a +2 to their bonus number.

The bonus also applies if using a skill or attribute in the pursuit of one of the basic needs (defense, food, shelter, sleep, procreation). The Law of Nature makes it easier to seek these things out and obtain them.



Law of the Pack

One never walks alone in Kantovia. The pack is everything. Actions done with others are much easier to accomplish.

When four or more beings attempt a Many on One action, the chart which shows how many succeeded is modified as follows

Pack Success Table

No. of Characters	DN Modifier
4	DN
5-7	DN +1
8-11	DN +2
12-15	DN +3

Ayroa

Ayroa, High Lord of Kantovia, has been on Earth for some time as the Guildmaster. The stats below cover Ayroa as the Guildmaster and in her Dire Wolf form:

Ayroa (as Guildmaster)

DEXTERITY 16

Dodge 19, lockpicking 17, maneuver 18, melee weapons 18, missile weapons 18, running 20, stealth 20, swimming 20, unarmed combat 21

STRENGTH 16

Lifting 19

TOUGHNESS 18

PERCEPTION 16

Evidence analysis 18, find 17, first aid 18, language 19, scholar (Core Earth realm lore) 20, scholar (Kantovian realm lore) 22, scholar (Orrorsh realm lore) 20, tracking

22, trick 20
MIND 15
Business 18, computer science 18, survival 22, test 20, willpower 22
CHARISMA 14
Charm 19, persuasion 20, taunt 19
SPIRIT 15
Intimidation 20, reality (Kantovia) 22, shapeshifting 22
Possibilities: 50

Equipment: 13mm Chunyokai, damage value 18, ammo 9, range 3-10/40/50; Sony Talkman with Scramble

Description: Ayroa has integrated herself well into Core Earth society, a necessity if she was to gather the information she needed.

Ayroa is a calculating, insidious, power-hungry Dire Wolf who has proven herself willing to betray anyone and everyone in her way.

When doing Guild business, Ayroa does not let herself be seen; she conducts all business from behind a privacy screen.

Ayroa (Dire Wolf)
DEXTERITY 18
Dodge 20, maneuver 22, running 24, stealth 23, swimming 20, unarmed combat 25
STRENGTH 18
Lifting 21
TOUGHNESS 20
PERCEPTION 12
Tracking 18
MIND 10
Survival 17, willpower 17
CHARISMA 9
Persuasion (14), taunt 14
SPIRIT 14
Intimidation 20, reality (Kantovia) 22, shapeshifting 22
Possibilities: 50

Natural Tools: Claws, damage value STR+3/21; teeth, damage value STR+5/23

The Net Entity

When the GodNet came into being, the Cyberpope was not the only High Lord with access to it. Instead, the cyberspace linked to another cosm as well, and the High Lord of that realm laid claim to the Net. Only recently has Malraux learned of this, but the Kadandrans have known about it for some time.

This mysterious High Lord is named Pulse, or at least that's the name that the few Kadandrans who know of its existence have taken to calling it. Pulse is apparently pure information personified, with little or no emotion. It acts out of a sense of logic, as well as an instinct for self-preservation and a desire to expand its knowledge (and, by extension, power).

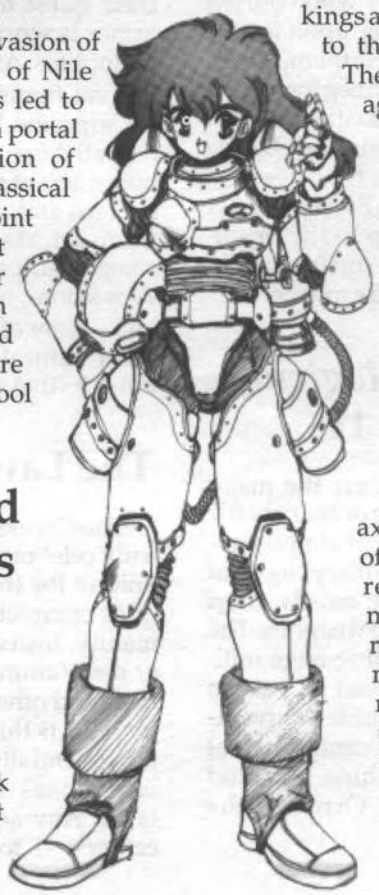
The axioms, as can be measured, are:

Technological Axiom: 32
Social Axiom: 28
Magical Axiom: 0
Spiritual Axiom: 0

Little more is known about Pulse, save that it feels that its domain has been invaded. For now, Pulse is content to send out scouts and warn netrunners away from its borders. Once adequate data has been collected and processed, Pulse will most certainly take more aggressive action.

Olympus

With Dr. Mobius' invasion of Greece, the imposition of Nile axioms on the land has led to the opening once more a portal to the pocket dimension of Olympus, the cosm of classical mythology. The main point of access is Mount Olympus itself, but other points may be found on the islands of Hespera and Crete in the Nile Empire and (possibly) a whirlpool in Atlantis.



Axioms and World Laws

The *Magic* Axiom: 15

A look at the Greek legends will show that highly sophisticated magics, such as alteration spells to permanently turn living beings into another form, are possible here. However, only a relative handful of the cosm's inhabitants have the ability to work spells. Indeed, in the myths, the witches Circe and Medea are almost unique. Such spellcasters as there are will either be court sorcerers for a powerful ruler, or they will be recluses living in the wilderness somewhere, enjoying their privacy as they experiment with their powers.

Thus, magic will be almost as legendary to the majority of the realm's inhabitants as it is to the people of Core Earth. There is little or no cooperation among spellcasters, and certainly no compilation spells such as can be found in *Pixaud's Practical Grimoire* in Aysle.

The *Social* Axiom: 10

This axiom is high enough (barely) so that democracy is possible, and some city states, such as Athens, even practice it. The majority of the city states, however, are ruled by petty kings and tyrants, though few to the extremes of Sparta. There is a standard coinage to encourage trade between the cities, but "brushfire" wars can break out at any time to cut it off. No one even dreams of uniting the entire realm under one ruler.

The *Spiritual* Axiom: 14

Olympus' *Spiritual* axiom is identical to that of the Cyberpapacy, with religious miracles far more common in the realm than conventional magic. However, even miracles are rare and tend to take place only at shrines and other holy places. Virtually no priests or priestesses are feared be-

cause of their connection with the gods. (In one of the last tales to come from this dimension, the *Odyssey*, the hero slaughtered the suitors who courted his wife, finally coming upon a poet and a priest who served them. When they fell on their knees to beg for mercy, Odysseus said he was loathe to slay a man who was taught his craft by the gods. That said, he slew the priest and let the poet go.) Any Storm Knight who thinks cozying up to the priesthood will give him influence in Olympus is in for a rude awakening.

The *Technological* Axiom: 11

In Olympus, spears are the major weapon of war, with the primary battle tactic the conventional phalanx. Cavalry and archers are auxiliary troops at best, while swords are mostly short and are used as back-up weapons. The catapult would be cutting-edge military technology here, but as yet, no one has gone to the trouble of inventing it. In a relationship similar to that of the automatic machine gun and Gaea's Victorians in Orrorsh, the realm's military men are so satisfied with what they have that they are not pushing the *Tech* axiom to the limit in their quest for new weaponry. Iron armor is worn by the heavy infantry, or hoplites. At sea, oared galleys fighting via ramming tactics or boarding are supreme. In civilian technical matters, all the city states are slowly developing decent road systems, while stone bridges and aqueducts have been introduced. Medical care is as good here as one can possibly get at this low a *Tech* axiom, with physicians having a wide array of herbal concoctions and other natural drugs available. Crude but effective surgery is also available.

The Law of Humanity

The Greeks were the first people to truly celebrate the human form, being unique for the time by making their gods completely in the image of humanity, instead of having beast gods or man/animal hybrids, as the Egyptians and others did. The realm's reality reflects this in the Law of Humanity. Essentially, it makes things easier on humans who try to accomplish tasks. Any action a human takes receives a -1 to the difficulty number. Thus, a human character attempting a *stealth* check while under closer scrutiny would have a difficulty modifer of 0, rather than +1. While this may not sit well with edeinos, stalengers, Gudasko, elves, dwarves, et al, it is a fact of life in Olympus.

The Law of Beauty

The Grecian appreciation of humanity was shared by an intense appreciation of beauty, as demonstrated by their art. Their gods were not only of human form, but their bodies were those of the finest athletes. Even the witches Circe and Medea were young and beautiful, unlike the hideous old crones common elsewhere in the world. Thus, in a law that may be more to those interested in interaction rather than combat, anyone with a *Charisma* of 11 or higher gains a +1 bonus to all *Charisma*-related skill checks. And yes, Olympus' two world laws are cumulative, so a human Storm Knight with a high enough *Charisma* will find that *Charisma*-based skills (and only them) will be significantly easier for him or her.

Example: A siren attempts to bewitch Hank Marlowe, a Nile detective who is searching for a missing man. Hank has a *willpower* of 12. She generates a total of only 11 — rolling very badly — but because she has a *Charisma* of 13, she gains a +1 bonus. In addition, her humanity knocks down the difficulty number of her skill attempt by -1, meaning the DN she now has to beat is only 11. With her Law of Beauty bonus, she has a total of 12 — a success!

The Cosm

Preliminary exploration seems to indicate that the area of the pocket dimension corresponds to the world known by the ancient Greeks: Greece, a portion of the Balkans north of Greece, Asia Minor, Scythia (the southern part of the former USSR), Italy, Egypt and the rest of North Africa, and the Middle East as far as Iran (not including the Arabian peninsula). The

familiar city-states of Athens, Sparta, Thebes, Corinth, etc. are all there, and the setup is roughly that of the Trojan War circa 1176 BC. Troy, however, is no more, though "dungeon crawler" characters would have fun poking through its ruins.

All the monsters of Classical mythology are present: hydras, sirens, satyrs, etc., including some species also found in Aysle. The nonmonstrous wildlife is dangerous, too, and those Storm Knights who are only familiar with present day Greece will be surprised to learn that in past centuries, the country hosted wolves, wild boars, bears, leopard, lions and the now-extinct auroch (a massive wild ox with a short, goat-like beard). Tigers are also found from Asia Minor eastward, while the Egyptian Nile has as many crocodiles as it does in Mobius' realm. Deer, elk, and other game are plentiful, so Storm Knights who are skilled hunters need not starve in the wilderness.

The realmwide love of beauty has its advantages for Storm Knight Jakatts from the Living Land. When the first party of Knights entered, a satyr bewitched a female Knight and was leading her away when an edeinos comrade hit him with *sensory explosion*. Once the satyr came to, he proved to be so grateful for the experience that he became a trustworthy guide for the party. Other Jakatt successes with that miracle, as well as lesser ones such as *heightened sight*, *heightened hearing*, etc. led analysts to conclude that many of the realm's denizens could be readily converted to the worship of Lanala, and that it is just as well that the Living Land is undergoing a period of decline.

As can be readily understood, the Nile Empire has more agents in Olympus than in any other pocket dimension, save perhaps the Land Above/Land Below. The Living Land has none, while Nippon agents are, of course, everywhere. Teams from Aysle and the Cyberpapacy have entered to investigate the new cosm, but the Tharkoldu in Berlin are apparently too absorbed in their struggle to conquer that city to pay much attention to a mere pocket dimension. A band of Horrors have captured an echidna (a monster that can change its shape from that of a beautiful woman to that of an emaciated centaur with sharp teeth and claws) and are taking it back to Orrorsh in an attempt to curry favor with the Gaunt Man. Core Earth efforts to investigate Olympus are sporadic at best, due to the recent intensification of the war.

The Gods

As far as can be determined, the ancient gods of Greek mythology do exist in Olympus, and are taking a hand in the war. However, their aid is uneven, being as capricious as these strange beings themselves. Moreover, some gods and goddesses who opposed Mobius' initial invasion may be ready to switch sides, or at least remain neutral.

The gods' lack of a united front goes back to the Trojan war, when the divine beings split down the middle over the Greek-Trojan conflict. Many still harbor resentments toward Zeus for not openly supporting the Greeks' cause sooner than he did.

Mobius' invasion threw all factions into confusion. Pluto openly supported the High Lord, sees him as a being of ultimate destruction who should naturally be favored by a god who rules the dead. His most significant contribution to date has been modifying the flames fired by Mobius' RoboTroops to affect the target's very soul.

After numerous skirmishes, the other gods supported the Greek defenders in a big way, creating a massive storm front that deprived the Nile troops of their air support. The resulting darkness also aided the Greek resistance by limiting visibility, as the only Nile foes who could see in the dark were a handful of properly powered pulp villains or those with the appropriate weird science gizmos. Confusion reigned among the battlegroups, and the Greeks, taking the initiative, began to force them back.

Alas, the Nile withdrawal never turned into a rout thanks to some last-ditch weird science weapons Mobius had rushed to the front. These strengthened the resolve of his troops and allowed them to retake what territory they had lost. Ares, Greek god of war, was so impressed with the Nile troops' performance that he has allied himself with Mobius and persuaded Aphrodite to do the same.

There are unconfirmed reports that Mobius sent appropriately powerful pulp villains to Olympus as informal ambassadors to meet privately with Queen Hera. The royal household is not a happy one, as Zeus' numerous love affairs are literally the stuff of legend. Zeus himself is simultaneously receiving a "private audience" with the Scarlet Asp (on loan from her duties in Berlin). Mobius is obviously attempting to create more rifts in the ranks of the gods, and whether or not he succeeds may have dire consequences for the remainder of the Possibility Wars.

Lereholm

As Orrorsh fans know, the vampyress Sabathina is one of the Gaunt Man's most trusted servants. As a reward for services rendered, the High Lord has allowed her to reshape a pocket dimension into a virtual duplicate of Lereholm, as a "home away from home" between campaigns. Although this Lereholm is but a pale shadow of its predecessor's glory, it is still a fair representation of what that world was like.

Axioms and World Laws

The *Magic* Axiom: 11

Lereholm's *Magic* axiom is high enough to permit the existence of undead and other beings that require magic to survive. Enchanted weapons and other tools are possible, but the spells cast on them will wear off over time. Still, the existence of the above-named creatures ensures that tribal spellcasters spend most of their time creating magical weaponry and protective charms. Of the four types of magic, only conjuration is rarely attempted. Alteration magic is extremely popular, particularly spells that involve transforming enemies into creatures.

The *Social* Axiom: 6

Lereholm social structure is tribal in nature. Due to the harsh living conditions on this world, discipline is harsher than is usual at this low a *Social* axiom. Each tribe is ruled by a matriarch. Every member of every tribe knows his or her place; they also know that they *have* a place, even if it is only as a transformed guard beast. Due to the tribes' all-meat diet, tightly-organized hunting bands are the closest thing they have to military discipline.

The *Spiritual* Axiom: 12

Lereholm's *Spiritual* axiom is slightly higher than its *Magic* axiom, so holy weapons are slightly more common than their magical counterparts. The latter, incidentally, are invariably in the form of a bone version of the tribal holy symbol, the Vassen (a circle with a triangle inside it). Fairly potent miracles are common, due to the fact that each matriarch is also priestess for her tribe. (Sabathina relinquished this power in exchange for the Gaunt Man's "gifts.") Lereholm's religion is of a shamanistic nature.

The *Technological* Axiom: 4

Lereholm's Tech axiom is the lowest recorded thus far, even lower than that of the Living Land. The tribes are still in the Stone Age, as well as the Ice Age, on this frozen world. Stone-tipped spears, stone knives and daggers, and stone-headed maces and axes share prominence with clubs as the cosm's predominant weaponry. Armor consists of hides and furs, and is worn as much for protection from the weather as from enemies.

Several factors conspire to keep the axiom low. First, agriculture is all but impossible on Lereholm: there are no plants extant which are edible for humans. Some of the smaller game animals have been herded into caverns and sealed in until needed, but true domestication is unknown. Any guard beast encountered will be a transformed human, not a true animal. Finally, the fierce winds that constantly blow discourage research into missile weapons such as bows and slings; spears in Lereholm are only for thrusting.

Although trees are present on Lereholm, harvesting them is so time-consuming and difficult that woodworking is almost unknown, with bone and stone taking its place.

The Law of Community

Due to the fact that tribes must work together to accomplish anything, the Law of Community has evolved so that every action has a better chance of succeeding if other members of one's tribe are present. When a character is part of a group of 10 or more, any action he takes will receive an automatic +1 to succeed. This effect is unconscious; the other members of the group improve the odds by their very presence. Due to the small size of most Storm Knight bands, this is an excellent reason for adventurers to make an effort to recruit locals (and for the players to engage in roleplaying).

The Law of Matriarchy

As Lereholm's power is concentrated in female hands, the Law of Matriarchy provides an automatic +1 to any action by a female of an intelligent species. If the woman is part of a group of 10 or more, she may boost the modifer to +2 by taking advantage of the Law of Community. (She gains no additional bonus by being in a group of 10 or more women.)

Example: Rhailina is a female warrior who has been separated from her band by a stampeding herd of branch-tusked mammoths, and she is now being stalked by a hungry hill bear. The beast catches up to her, forcing her to lash out with her spear in self-defense. She needs a 15 to hit the beast, but generates a 13. Her +1 modifier brings it up to a 14 — she fails! Fortunately, the bear misses its first attack as well.

Suddenly, she hears the shouts of her tribesmen as the reformed hunting band finds her. Soon she is surrounded by a knot of over a dozen hunters. She lashes out again, generating a 13 — her +1 modifier makes it a 14, and the Law of Community adds another +1. She hits! The bear is wounded and the other hunters move in for the kill.

The Cosm

Lereholm is a land of icy wastes, vast tundras, snow-covered mountains and dark forests of twisted trees. This world is very much in the grip of an Ice Age, one that has existed for tens of millions of years.

The wind always blows here in powerful gusts, so much so that missile weapons are unreliable. Unless one is firing with the wind directly at one's back, all *missile weapons* checks will have +4 added to their difficulty. Rounds from chemically-propelled weapons suffer a +7 to their difficulty of hitting. These restrictions do not apply when firing at point-blank range.

Save for inside the caverns, ranged weapon attacks can only be reliably made with energy weapons, magic and miracles.

Many of the mountains are made of limestone and tend to be full of caverns. The folk of Lereholm have expanded and connected all of these caverns and laboriously dug out new ones as shelter from both weather and beasts. Unfortunately, they must often leave their fortresslike homes in order to go hunting, so the monsters of Lereholm have a good chance of getting them almost every day.

Due to the gradual pace at which the Ice Age approached, most of the cosm's animal life was able to evolve and adapt with it. All reptiles have had their scales modified into a form of feathers, providing both insulation and armor. Thus, Storm Knights crossing a river are vulnerable to crocodile attack everywhere; the thing just has a layer of feathers like those of a penguin, with a roll of blubber underneath.

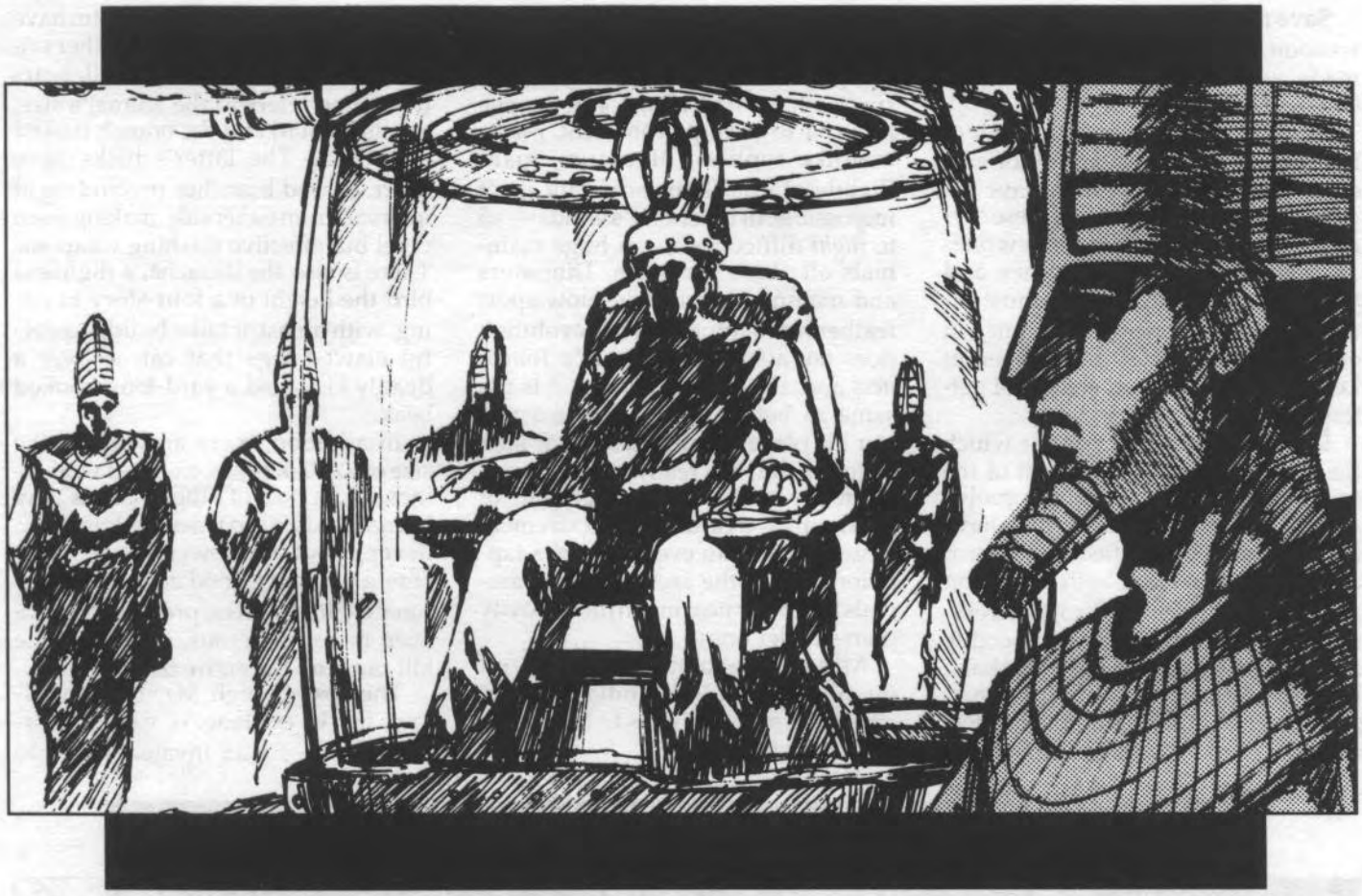
There have been no complete extinctions of animal life in the history of this pocket dimension, though many species have had their former range reduced to a single continent. Mammal-like reptiles, dinosaurs, giant flightless birds (flight is difficult, if not impossible, in Lereholm's winds — +5 to *flight* difficulties), and huge mammals all share the cosm. Dinosaurs and mammal-like reptiles now sport feathers or fur (note that this evolution does not affect the creature's *Toughness* and armor adds. This stat is the same as before. Thus, gamemasters can hit players with beasts that look different, but are really as dangerous as in the past.) Interestingly, all of Lereholm's creatures are extremely large — this is an evolutionary adaptation due to the fact that large animals lose body heat much more slowly than smaller ones.

Most of Lereholm's humans live on the continent of Volklandia, the only one of the six continents to have been named by the people.

Many carnivores on Lereholm have subspecies with sabreteeth. Other unusual inhabitants include hill bears (the name refers to the animal's size, not its habitat) and the branch-tusked mammoth. The latter's tusks have short, curved branches protruding at intervals from either side, making them cruel but effective slashing weapons. There is also the ditracha, a flightless bird the height of a four-story building, with an ostrichlike build, powerful clawed legs that can deliver a deadly kick, and a yard-long hooked beak.

In addition, there are wolves the size of Kodiak bears, ox-sized wolverines, and a host of other reasons why human hunting parties on Lereholm never go out with fewer than10 members, and often a good deal more. Fortunately for hunters, prey animals are even more numerous, and often one kill can feed the entire tribe.

The cosm's high *Magic* axiom allows for the existence of various Horrors, who were an invaluable aid to



the Gaunt Man when he invaded the original. Lereholm's undead are almost always of human form, though occasionally an animal also joins the ranks of the reanimated. Air elementals are the most common type of true elementals encountered here. In addition, hybrid elementals of snow and ice have also been encountered here.

Gehenna

Gehenna is a domed world of eerie horror, whose entrance is found (naturally) beneath the realm of Orrorsh. Unlike most domed worlds, it has no sun, only a moon, Nafaria. Thus, Gehenna is eternally lit by a full moon. Life (such as it is) is maintained by a natural form of occult magic.

Axioms and World Laws

This domed world has the same axioms as the Land Below in general, including Merretika (*Magic* 12, *Social* 8, *Spiritual* 17, *Technological* 10). However, these are modified by the nature of the pocket dimension, which includes some of the world laws of Orrorsh, much as Merretika has some of the Nile Empire's laws.

For the most notable example, Gehenna's magic is occult magic, just like that of Orrorsh. Thus, all non-native spells cast, save for the complicated magic of Orrorsh and the Nile, will create a one-case contradiction. Not that native spells will be cast all that frequently, either; save for a handful of undead who knew magic in life, there are virtually no spellcasters in Gehenna. Rather, magic is mainly employed in its other role, to allow the existence of creatures that cannot survive without a magical environment. There are no grimoires or easy-to-find compilations of magic in this dimension.

The other axioms are similarly not used to their potential. Undead with spiritual power are even rarer than undead mages, and there are not holy sites here. Rude clubs are the only weapons used; the majority of this world's inhabitants need no weapons beyond those they are "naturally" gifted with. The largest groupings of undead and other creatures are tribes, not even reaching the level of organization found among the Pyrians in Merretika.

By now, you're probably wondering what there is to Gehenna. "No magic, no miracles, no society, no gear — doesn't it have anything?" Yes, Gehenna does have one thing in abundance: horror.

The Law of Fear (Modified)

Gehenna possesses a modified version of one of Orrorsh's world laws, the Law of Fear. Unlike the original version, there is no Perseverance to deal with here, due mainly to the fact that there are no helpless victims to be slaughtered to stiffen the party's resolve. There are also no places or people they can visit to research the True Death of a monster — Storm Knights in Gehenna are essentially on their own.

Instead, Storm Knights must make a *willpower* roll of 13 whenever they meet one of Gehenna's monsters or they will be unable to fight it, hiding, fainting or running away as circumstances warrant. The gamemaster may wish to make the difficulty number higher when the characters confront stronger, possibility-rated opponents.

As in Orrorsh, characters operating under the Power of Fear will be unable to invoke reality storms or play for the critical moment when using their cards. In the former case, the offending Storm Knight disconnects and transforms to Gehenna's reality; in the latter, the players watch the gamemaster take all their cards and get nothing but a cold smile in return.

The Law of Despair

Gehenna's bleak, lonely moors, stark, craggy cliffs, fetid swamps and bubbling magma pits have a devastating effect on the psyches of those who adventure there. Anyone who stays in Gehenna for more than a day must, starting on the second day of his stay, make a daily *willpower* check with a difficulty number of 12. If she succeeds, great; if she fails, her *willpower* value drops by -1. If she does not have *willpower*, decrease her *Mind* value.

When *willpower* reaches 0, the character's mind is broken and she will be unable to face up the monsters of Gehenna. Then begin subtracting points from *Mind* on unsuccessful *willpower* rolls — when *Mind* reaches 0, she dies.

Points can be restored, but as can be imagined, it's tedious process. The Storm Knight gains back one lost point for every two consecutive days of successful *willpower* checks. Note that this only works within Gehenna — if she leaves the pocket dimension with a reduced *willpower* or *Mind*, it will stay at that level until she returns and faces up to her fears.

The Law of Targeting Threats

As in Orrorsh, the monsters in Gehenna have very specific powers which vary from one individual to another, including weaknesses and True Deaths. However, finding these Achilles heels is more difficult in Gehenna, and the world has a way of making things rough on those characters who can inflict True Death on a major opponent.

When the party is preparing to face the primary opponent in an adventure, the Storm Knight best able to inflict True Death upon the monster will find himself the primary target of all the creature's attacks. Even if other characters are wounded, unconscious, or staked out as sacrifices, the monster and its minions will still target that one character.

The definition of what makes one most dangerous to a particular monster depends on that creature's True Death.

The Cosm

Gehenna is a gloomy place, one whose terrain seems taken out of every horror tale ever written. Stark, windswept moors, swamps filled with evil stenches and swirling mist, massive, barren mountains and collections of lava pits that seem to be part of Hell itself — this is the terrain of Gehenna, all illuminated by the full moon. The air is always in motion here; it may be the slightest of breezes or a gale-force windstorm. And as it moves, it brings with it a chill clamminess and the faint scent of death.

The creatures of Gehenna are much the same as those of Orrorsh: Others, amphids, skarths, zombies, zuvembies, wights, ghosts, ghouls, animated skeletons, and vampyres. There are also creatures unique to this horror world, from things like literal demons and devils to vast, shapeless monstrosities of the kind seen only in the dreams of Ahjebax. Marine life is similarly horrid, from demonic sea serpents and fishlike monsters to beautiful mermaids who retain their lovely forms only long enough to lure the uwary into their clutches.

True Deaths are far less complex here, usually involving being slain with a particular type of weapon (firearm, energy weapon, etc.) to a combat spells from a particular school of conventional magic (inanimate forces, metal, etc.) to a particular religion's combat miracles or some pulp power. There is no Waiting Village — instead, the soul of a temporarily slain creature roams the world in disembodied form for a week or so, before entering the body of a newly created monster.

Gehennan monsters do not have Corruption Values, Fear Ratings of Perseverance DNs. They have one weakness and True Death apiece. They are also eligible for the full range of special powers enjoyed by Orrorshan Horrors. Intelligent monsters are relatively scarce here.

Mini-Adventure

E Pluribus Unum

This adventure brings the Storm Knights to beautiful Las Vegas, home of casinos, Wayne Newton, Tharkold, and Nippon Tech. It is set completely within the Tharkold/Nippon mixed zone of Tharkold/Nippon. This means that the axioms are as follows:

Magic 12
Social 22
Spirit 17
Tech 26

The applicable world laws in effect for this adventure are:

Nippon

Law of Intrigue: +3 to *stealth* and to *perception* checks vs *stealth*; +3 to *charm* and *persuasion* attempts based on lies/deception and bribes; reduce *perception* success by one level against *disguise*.

Law of Vengeance: Receive six Possibilities at the end of an act where vengeance is exacted.

Tharkold

Law of Ferocity: All-out attack ignores K,O,KO results; +3 to *taunt* and *intimidation* bonuses; +3 to *willpower* or *Mind* against *charm* or *persuasion* (exception: see Nippon Law of Intrigue); no normal surprise, complete surprise equals normal surprise.

Law of Pain: Roll again if a K, wound or better is inflicted on a victim, though attacker cannot use the extra roll on that original victim; character suffering pain can roll again 24 hours later against the one who caused him the pain.

Gamemaster Note

This adventure is designed for experienced Storm Knights. Beginning parties may not last long, and gamemasters should be aware of this. The adventure is structured so as to be as non-linear as possible.

The Perseverance DN for this adventure is 18.

The Major Beat

The Storm Knights have been sent on a fact-finding mission by the Nicklaus Administration. President Leland Nicklaus, in an effort to assess America's current status with regard to the various invading cosms, authorized the dispatching of scout teams to potential "hot spots" to determine the extent of enemy infiltration. With the collapse of the Delphi Council, such missions are rapidly becoming a growing necessity.

The Storm Knights, staying at the Las Vegas Hilton in between assignments, are asked by the management to investigate the murder of a guest, who turns out to be an Akashan. The Akashan had some information on other non-Core Earthers in Vegas, and this gives the Knights some leads to follow up.

Among the more interesting places for the Storm Knights to visit include a Cyberpapal cathedral and an Ayslish magician who has a nightclub act. There has been a murder at the cathedral, and an attempt is made on the Ayslish magician.

The Storm Knights are eventually "invited" to a Yakuza meeting. It seems that whatever is out there in Vegas, it has killed a Nippon Tech citizen under the Yakuza's protection, but the nature of the killer makes it tough to kill, so the Knights are "asked" to help. The Yakuza furnish the Storm Knights with the location of a secret Nile weird science lab out in the desert, as well as a known nest of Tharkoldu technodemons.

The Nile lab and the Tharkoldu nest have also been attacked by the mystery assailant. Clues lead to the Las Vegas Cemetery, where a run-in with an Orrorshan vampyre helps provide more answers.

The final showdown takes place in the desert, at the makeshift lair of the killer. The Knights are in for the shock of their life and a battle they may not survive ...

Note that there are also little "extras" to give the adventure a creepier Tharkold feel. Gamemasters are encouraged to toss them in, especially if the player characters are getting bogged down, or they think things are going too easily.

Adventure Background

Baruk Kaah, the High Lord of the Living Land, was last seen being consumed by Core Earth's reality nexus in a pocket dimension off the Land Below. Kaah, maddened by recent reversals, had tricked his Darkness Device into accompanying him there, intending to use Rec Pakken to destroy the nexus and the cosm with it.

Despite the intervention of Storm Knights, Kaah tossed his Device into the nexus. In the ensuing explosion, surviving Storm Knights told of seeing the deposed High Lord being torn to pieces in the nexus.

Flushed with victory, heartened Core Earth forces have begun the task of neutralizing the remaining pockets of Living Land reality and its denizens, the latter thrown into a state of confusion by the death of their Saar.

But Baruk Kaah isn't dead.

Then again, he's not the Baruk Kaah you remember, either.

When the High Lord was drawn into the nexus and torn apart, the nexus proceeded to remake him in its own image. And the nexus has been infected by the presence of so many different realities rooted in the cosm. Kaah emerged physically transformed into a native of all the realities, immune to disconnection.

But there's one hitch: although his intelligence is greater than once it was, Kaah is not certain how to use his new powers. He wandered through the Land Below and up to the Land Above, then instinctively began making his way toward the Western Land.

He eventually staggered into Las Vegas and began hunting down people from different cosms, demanding that they teach him how to use his various powers.

SCENE ONE: Murder, She Bled

The Situation

Standard. The Storm Knights are at the Las Vegas Hilton, resting up while on a fact-finding recon mission through the American Southwest. The mission is "to evaluate the impact of Tharkold/Nippon intervention in US Armed Forces area operations versus the surviving edeinos."

Read aloud or paraphrase:

Ah, Las Vegas! Your senses are assailed by the din of gambling, the glare of neon, and the smell of cigarette smoke and cheap perfume. Even though the edeinos have been driven away from here, and life has returned to what the locals like to call "normal," the air is ... different. Lying just under the veneer of happy vacationers and eager gamblers is a sense of impending horror lurking in the shadows, mingled with an air of intrigue and deception. You see it in the faces of the showgirls, the bartenders, the blackjack dealers, and the tourists. Yeah, welcome to Vegas: Tharkold/Nippon style.

You are on a mission for the US government, conducting a tour of the American Southwest to evaluate the impact the Nipponese and Tharkoldu have had on the area. Thus far, the only thing to report is that there is nothing to report. The command post advised you to take 48 hours of rest at the nearest city, and as luck would have it, it turned out to be Las Vegas.

You are staying at the Las Vegas Hilton, and for the last 12 hours you have managed to catch up on sleep, eat your fill of expensive food, shower, and even sample some of the entertainments that Vegas has to offer.

The time is 8:00 pm, and the group of you are gathered in your private suite, when there is a knock at your door.

The Action

A Japanese man in his mid-40s stands at the door. He identifies himself as Jack Shinano, manager of the Hilton. He is a Core Earth Ord, and has no ties with Nippon Tech.

Jack will ask to be admitted, citing "business of a personal, yet for you, potentially profitable nature." A *Perception* or *evidence analysis* total of 10 or more tells the Knights that Shinano is most distressed about something, but is trying to keep calm.

Once he is seated, he tells his story:

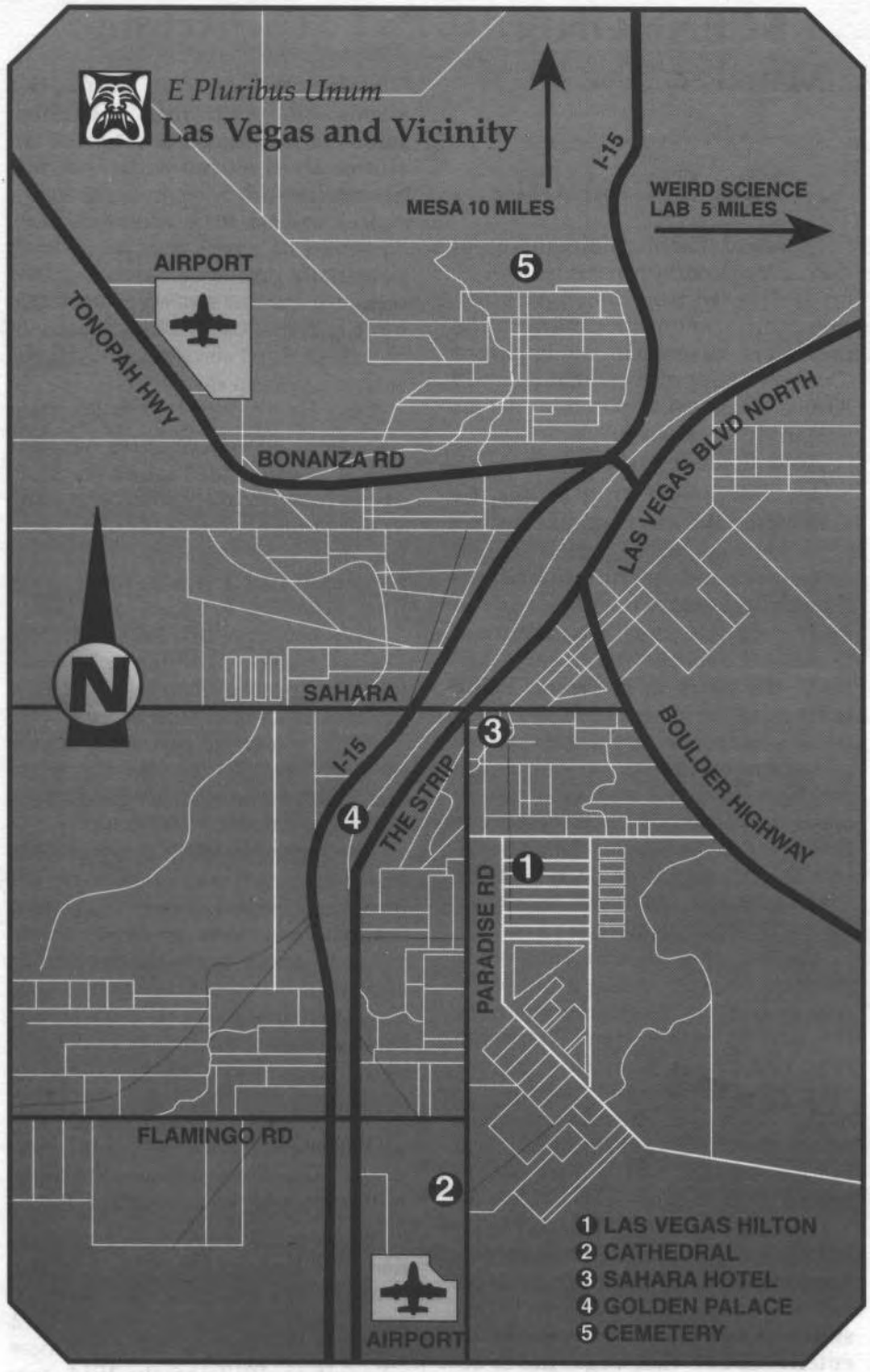
"About fifteen minutes ago, the guests in room 1010 called the front desk to complain about a commotion in the room next door, 1012. A security man was dispatched, and as it happened that I was around at the time, I decided to accompany him.

"We arrived at 1012 to find that the alleged noises had stopped. When knocking produced no answer, I used my master keys to gain entry.

"The guest in question was a woman from South America, registered as Amanda Flores from Lima, Peru. She's dead. Murdered."

The manager leans closer to you, his eyes pleading. "Look here, the normal name didn't fool me. I knew that she was one of those Space Whatsis, and I know that you folks are certainly from out of town as well. I'm going to have to call the police on this, of course, but before they come in, I'd like to have you look the place over ... informally. If you could find the killer before I have to invite in all that publicity ... I've been authorized to offer you $2000. We would also be willing to waive your hotel bill."

There is no room for negotiation here. The Knights can either take it or leave it. If they agree, Shinano will smile and give them the key to 1012. He will mention that the other room adjacent to 1012,namely 1014, was vacant at the time. He will also stress that the investigation must be discreet. After saying this, he takes his leave, telling the Knights they can have two hours before he has to call in the police.



A Corpse is a Corpse, Of Course, Of Course

Room 1012 is occupied by a dead female Akashan. She was here at the request of the Akashan High Council to check for the presence of any stray edeinos in the area that might wish to emigrate to join their brethren, and to catalogue any manifestations of other realities in the city of Las Vegas.

When the player characters enter the room, read the following:

Everything in Room 1012 is as the security guard and the manager left it. Lying on the only bed in the room is a beautiful woman with golden skin. Her chest has been torn open and her heart pulled out — it is nowhere to be seen.

A huge window looking out over the city has been shattered, and the rug is covered with shards of glass. It looks as if a cyclone whirled through the room, with furniture overturned and luggage torn to shreds. The television screen has been shot out. Both the closet door and the door leading to the bathroom are open.

Subtract -1 from the characters' Perseverance and call for a Perserverance check. Then add +2 to their Perseverance.

Here are the various things in the room, each broken down into separate areas for ease of investigation and information gathering:

Corpse: The body is that of a woman, probably in her early 30s. A *Perception* or *find* total of 10 reveals a biotech artifact in her hair, more ornamental than functional. A *medicine* total of 12 shows that the woman was actually strangled. A *Superior* or *Spectacular* success reveals that the mutilations were done after death, using very sharp slashing weapons, perhaps metal claws. A second *medicine* total of 20 reveals that the killer's hands were huge and clawed.

Floor: An *evidence analysis* total of 10 reveals that the window was broken from the outside — a neat trick, considering the room is on the 10th floor.

A *tracking* total of 12 shows that there was only one intruder. A *Spectacular* success reveals that the intruder had clawed feet and was at least 2.5 meters tall.

A *find* of 8 uncovers a Misaki XE laptop, slightly damaged, and a blaster. A *find* of 12 uncovers some iron filings. A *find* of 20 reveals a few reptilian scales.

Reptilian scales: A *Perception* or *evidence analysis* total of 12 tells the Knights that the scales could have come from a cygoyle, a Tharkoldu technodemon, a ravagon, a dragon, an edeinos, or a Serpentor.

Blaster: A *Perception* or *evidence analysis* total of 10 shows that this is a blaster of the type used in the Space Gods' domain, though not usually by Akashans. It has been twisted into a hunk of useless metal.

Iron Filings: A scholar *(Aysle realms lore)* of 8 reveals that iron filings are the material component for a *steel shower* spell.

Misaki XE Laptop: A *science: computers, science: electronics* or *Mind* total of 12 shows that the system suffered some minor damage from rough handling. Repairing it (using any of the three abovementioned skills/ attributes) has a difficulty of 16, and takes 30 minutes (minus 5 minutes per success level beyond *Average*).

The files on the system are locked with passwords, and require a *science: computers* total of 14 to break in. The information contained within yields the following leads:

- Pere Andre Voisin, Church of Our Lady of the Electronic Salvation;
- Fantasto, next show at 9 PM, Sahara Hotel's club;
- 36 15 00, 115 00 00

A Core Earth Storm Knight seeing those numbers and making a *Perception* total of 10 recognizes them as latitude and longitude. Checking a map will show that this a spot five miles due east of Vegas.

Television Screen: A *find* of 12 uncovers two spent cartridge casings. A *Perception* or *evidence analysis* total of 8 shows them to be .45 caliber. A *find* of 14 inside the television gets the Knights the bullets themselves, .45 caliber.

Closet: Contains a sky blue cloak and hood (Akashan design), an Alan Torch, a Biotech Repair Kit, and a MedKit.

Bathroom: Personal toiletries of an Akashan woman, plus four Vitamin Packs.

What Really Happened

Baruk Kaah, who had been tailing the Akashan, smashed in through the window. He roughed the Akashan up, and demanded to be taught how to use psionic powers. When the Akashan did not provide satisfactory answers fast enough, Kaah went berserk, strangling her and then ripping out her heart. He then ransacked the place, pumped two shots into the television, and flew back out.

If the party decides to question the people next door in 1010, read aloud the following:

The door opens to reveal a huge fat man with frizzy black hair, moustache and goatee. He is dressed in a loud Hawaiian shirt, plaid Bermuda shorts, dark socks, and sandals. He reeks of cole slaw.

Behind him, an equally overweight woman with long black hair and a garish sundress watches cable TV. She asks, in a grating voice "Who is it, Harry?"

The only other person in the room is a young woman dressed in tight black shorts and halter. Her hair is also black, and barely touches her shoulders. Her arms are folded across her ample chest, and she has a scowl as she paces back and forth like a caged animal.

The man at the door looks at you and says "Yeah? WhatkinIdoferya?"

The man is Harry Deal, his wife is Blanche, and his rebellious daughter is Sasha. They are originally from New Jersey, and are here in Vegas for a vacation. They are the stereotypical ugly American tourists. Sasha is 17, and will turn 18 tomorrow, but her parents are adhering to their law, and not allowing Sasha to wander Las Vegas at night. Sasha is naturally very upset about this.

If the Knights ask Deal about the noises next door, Harry will invite them in, offer them something to eat (probably cole slaw), and say:

"Oh, yeah, the noises. Yeah, it happened around eight. I heard what sounded like breaking glass, then a lot of thumping and crashing. Someone screamed, I think. I also heard someone, not the screamer though, say something like "Peach me," or "Reach me," or "Teach me." I dunno. I called the front desk, then I kept listening. I heard crashes followed by the sound of a couple of bottles of champagne opening up. Then, all was quiet. Hey, are you guys Hotel Security, or somethin'?"

The Deals know nothing else. They didn't even know who was staying in that adjacent room.

Last Call!

The Hilton has a large bar, and if a Knight mingles there and makes a *streetwise* or *Mind* roll of 12, he can find out one local rumor. One attempt can be made every 15 minutes, and requires a new roll.

• "It seems like the Japanese own everything in Vegas these days!"

• "Speaking of the Japanese, I hear that their underworld is selling protection against some of the strange stuff going on in the city."

• "There's been some real strange stuff going on in the streets at night, especially the dimly lit ones. Things have been known to swoop out of the sky and make off with some poor gambler. Some say it's giant mutant bats."

• "I heard some nutty story about some guy's electric razor coming to life. The thing supposedly chased his girlfriend around the apartment, and actually killed her."

• "Elvis is now playing at the Sahara."

• "There's some magician who shares a bill with Elvis at the Sahara, but he's no stage magician; this guy does REAL magic."

• "There are some biker gangs that have been riding around Las Vegas, but they're ... odd. There's something wrong with them, but I can't put my finger on it. Maybe it's that they hang out at the cemetery so much ... "

• "I hear that Wayne Newton is now cybernetically enhanced."

• "The Sands has some Dead Rock Star floor show, with impersonators of Hendrix, Joplin, Lennon, and Eddie Paragon."

• "I coulda swore I saw a guy and a broad dressed up like playing cards or something! They flew off into the desert, heading east."

• "A new casino opened up, something called the Emperor's Palace. Lotta Japanese there. But it seems to be the safest place in Vegas. I mean, NOTHING bad ever happens there!"

• "There's something called a cyberchurch or something like that here in Vegas. They're supposedly here to save us from the things that are stalking the streets at night, but I think they're here to close down the casinos. What do they intend to replace it with? CyberBingo?"

Variables

If the Knights decide not to take up the hotel manager's offer, then as they leave the hotel that night, they are showered with tiny bits of glass from overhead. It's coming from the hotel, the 10th floor. If the Knights look up, they can barely make out some winged shape entering through the window. This is Kaah, returning to the scene in order to fetch the body for some possible future use. He will be gone once the Knights arrive there.

Note that the return of Kaah to the murder scene will happen only if this variable needs to be used to get the Knights involved.

Flags

A *Romance* card means that Sasha will follow a male Storm Knight around, with a mad crush on him. Naturally, this will put her in danger, and when the Knight rescues her, she will be even more enamored with him.

A *Personal Stake* card means that the dead Akashan was a friend of one of the characters.

An *Alertness* card will reveal any one of these missed things: the computer in the rubble, the scales, the footprints.

An *Idea* card can give the Knight a good reconstruction of what took place in the room, or it can solve the mystery of the Misaki's third file. The numbers are latitude and longitude coordinates, and point to a place just east of Las Vegas.

Cut To ...

If the Knights decide to go to the Ayslish magician show, cut to Scene Three, "Elvis Has Left the Building." If the Knights decide to visit the CyberChurch, cut to Scene Two, "101 Damnations." If the Knights decide to follow up on the coordinates, cut to Scene Five, "Are You Pondering What I'm Pondering?"

SCENE TWO: 101 Damnations

The Situation

Standard. The Storm Knights visit the Cyberpapal cathedral in order to meet with the name supplied in the computer. They are unfairly blamed when the man is found dead.

When the Knights arrive at the cathedral, read aloud:

You arrive at the Church of Our Lady of the Electronic Salvation. Like they have done in so many other American cities, the Cyberpapacy has taken an old, abandoned Catholic church, added their own unique touches to the exterior, and filled its

interior with lies and hateful words. You've seen this all before.

Though it would not be noticed by an Ord, you pick up the sound of whirring security cameras, which maintain a constant surveillance of the surrounding grounds.

The complex itself consists of a stone cathedral, and an adjacent parish house, living quarters for the priests. A signboard attached next to the ponderous oak front doors says "Church of Our Lady of the Electronic Salvation, Pere Andre Voisin, Presiding Priest. Mass at 8 AM, Noon, and 6 PM everyday. Confession available 24 hours a day. Next week's sermon: 'The Cyberchurch: Your Only Defense Against the Demons.'

Atop the cathedral, you see numerous gargoyles perched. You hope and pray that they are merely decorations.

When the group enters, continue the description:

Inside, the sanctuary is cavernous. The church has been meticulously restored to its former grandeur. The interior is lit by numerous candles, though there are many areas in shadow. To your left is the confessional, while straight ahead is the altar and the pulpit, with a single cyberpriest in attendance. He looks at you and nods, gesturing for you to enter.

The Action

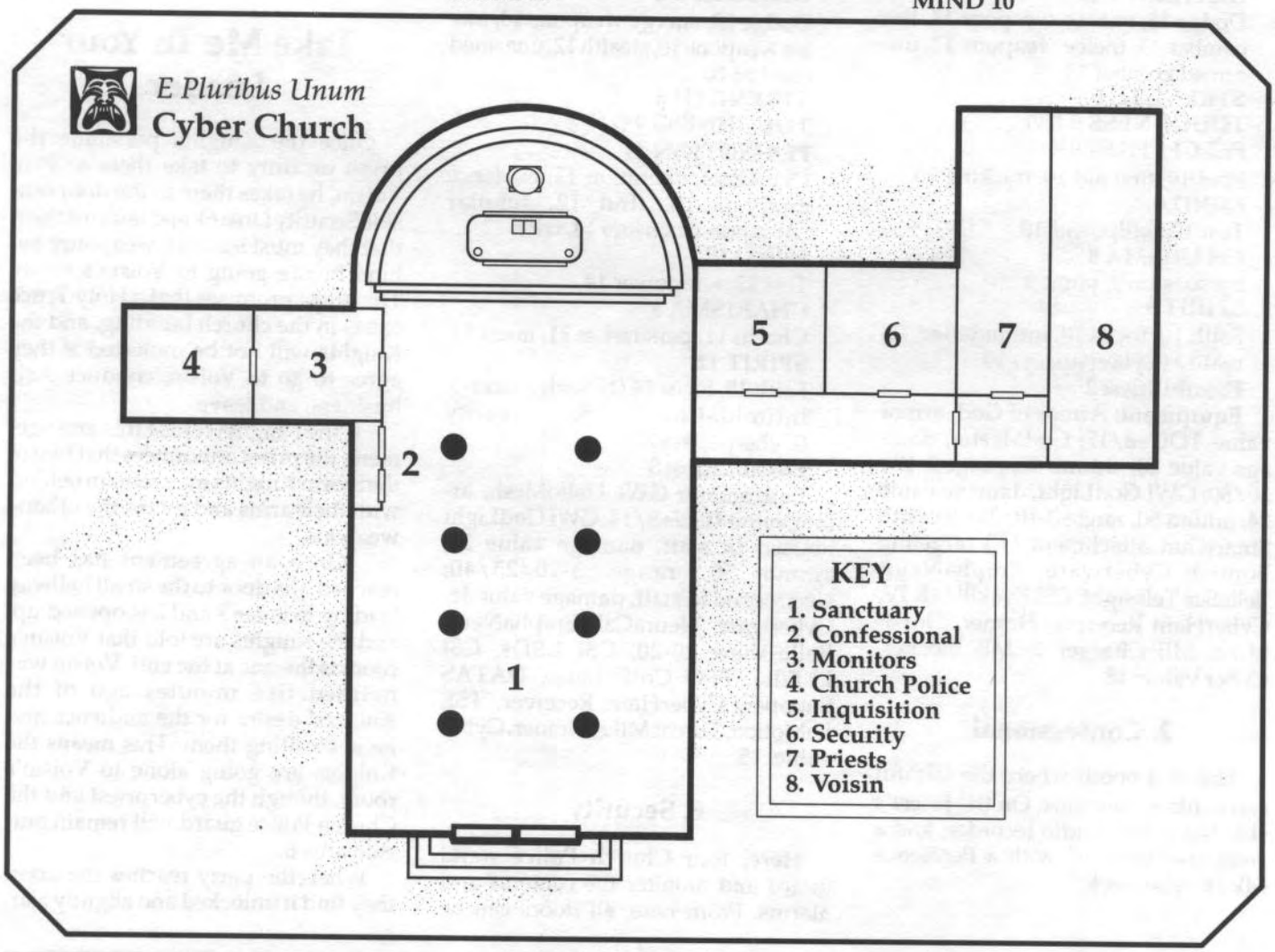
Note that all the doors are considered locked unless otherwise stated. *Lockpicking* difficulty is 16. Every door is also alarmed, and it requires a *find* or *Perception* total of 14 to discover this, and a *science (electronics)* total of 16 to disable it.

1. Main Sanctuary

The cyberpriest is Fra Alain St-Pierre, the priest on duty. Though he welcomes all to confession, he is suspicious of too many questions. He must be persuaded to allow the Knights to talk to Pere Voisin.

Hidden in the shadows are a pair of Church Police, whose job is to act as subtle, unseen sentries, making their presence known only if trouble arrives.

Fra St-Pierre
DEXTERITY 8
Dodge 10, fire combat 10, melee weapons 10
STRENGTH 8
TOUGHNESS 9 (14)
PERCEPTION 11
Cyberdeck operations 14, find 12, scholar (Avignon Doctrine) 11, trick 12
MIND 10



Science (computers) 12, test 11, willpower 13
CHARISMA 8
Charm 11, persuasion 11, taunt 11
SPIRIT 12
Faith 15, focus 14 (16 with crucifix), intimidation 14, reality (Cyberpapacy) 15
Possibilities: 3 per Storm Knight
Equipment: HalloMesh, armor value TOU+5/14; GodMeeter, damage value 20, ammo 30, range 3-12/30/50; power dagger, damage value STR+5/13; crucifix (+2 to *focus*). Cyberware: CyberHam Receiver, TSE LeMotion, Throat Mike, DATAS Boomer, Homer, MB Charger, EpiphaNeur. Cyber value: 21

For purposes of trying to *persuade* the priest to allow the party to see Pere Voisin, consider him *hostile*.

Church Police (2)
DEXTERITY 11
Dodge 13, energy weapons 14, fire combat 13, melee weapons 13, unarmed combat 13
STRENGTH 9
TOUGHNESS 9 (17)
PERCEPTION 9
Find 10, first aid 10, tracking 10
MIND 9
Test 10, willpower 10
CHARISMA 8
Persuasion 9, taunt 9
SPIRIT 9
Faith 10, focus 10, intimidation 12, reality (Cyberpapacy) 10
Possibilities: 2
Equipment: Armor of God, armor value TOU+8/17; GodMeeter, damage value 20, ammo 30, range 3-12/30/50; GWI GodLight, damage value 24, ammo 50, range 3-10/25/40, with SmartGun attachment (+3 targeting bonus); Cyberware: EpiphaNeur, BelleSee Telesight, CSI Eyekill MK IV, CyberHam Receiver, Homer, Throat Mike, MB Charger 1, MB Blocker. Cyber value: 18

2. Confessional

This is a booth where the faithful can confess their sins. On the priest's side is a video/audio recorder, and a computer terminal with a Penitence Mk IV cyberdeck.

3. Monitor Room

There are eight cyberpriests in here, seated at cyberdecks, monitoring the GodNet. Two Church Police guard the eight bodies, which appear to be unconscious.

4. Church Police Barracks

There are 24 bunks here, eight of which are occupied at any given time by eight sleeping Church Police. In addition, there are always four Church Police awake and "on call." Use the stats for Church Police found in Room 1.

5. The Inquisition

This room houses four Inquisitors. There is always one asleep, and one "on call."

Inquisitors (4)
DEXTERITY 8
Dodge 10, energy weapons 10, melee weapons 10, stealth 12, unarmed combat 10
STRENGTH 8
TOUGHNESS 9 (14)
PERCEPTION 11
Cyberdeck operation 12, evidence analysis 15, find 12, scholar (Avignon Doctrine) 14, trick 12
MIND 10
Test 12, willpower 14
CHARISMA 8
Charm 11, persuasion 11, taunt 11
SPIRIT 12
Faith 15, focus 14 (16 with crucifix), intimidation 15, reality (Cyberpapacy) 13
Possibilities: 8
Equipment: GWI HalloMesh, armor value TOU+5/14; GWI GodLight housed in staff, damage value 24, ammo 50, range 3-10/25/40; electroprod in staff, damage value 16; Cyberware: NeuraCal, EpiphaNeur, Belle-View 20-20, CSI LEDs, CSI Lt.Filta, FFO ColEnhanz, DATAS Snooper, CyberHam Receiver, TSE LeMotion, Throat Mike, Homer. Cyber value: 15

6. Security

Here, four Church Police stand guard and monitor the cameras and alarms. From here, all doors can be opened or locked, and alarms can be turned on/off. This room also contains chips which hold the films from the security cameras. A viewer enables the Church Police to look at any security tapes.

Right outside the security room's door is a Church Police sentry. He guards the Security entrance as well as the door which leads deeper into the parsonage, where Pere Voisin's room lies.

7. Cyberpriest Dormitory

There are 16 beds here. There are always four cyberpriests asleep here, and two awake.

8. Pere Voisin's Room

Voisin is the head priest of the Las Vegas cathedral. What goes on in his room is covered below.

Take Me To Your Leader

Once the Knights persuade the priest on duty to take them to Pere Voisin, he takes them to the door outside Security (area 6), and informs them that they must leave all weaponry behind before going to Voisin's room. The priest promises that a Holy Truce exists in the church building, and the Knights will not be molested if they agree to go to Voisin, conduct their business, and leave.

If the Knights refuse this arrangement, the priest announces that two of the Storm Knights may remain behind with their arms and guard the others' weapons.

Once an agreement has been reached, the door to the small hallway leading to areas 7 and 8 is opened up, and the Knights are told that Voisin's room is the one at the end. Voisin was notified five minutes ago of the Knights' desire for the audience and he is awaiting them. This means the Knights are going alone to Voisin's room, though the cyberpriest and the Church Police guard will remain outside area 6.

When the party reaches the door, they find it unlocked and slightly ajar.

When the party enters, read aloud the following:

The door is slightly open, and you feel fresh air on your faces. Looking inside, you see an opulent single bedroom. Unfortunately, you also see Pere Voisin ... quite dead, as evidenced by his head, which is mounted, wires trailing out of it and all, atop a small cybercross on the priest's dresser. The rest of the priest's body lies on the floor. The room is a shambles, especially since there is a three meter high, 1.5 meter wide hole in the northeast section of the room. You can see the outside grounds, and the churchyard, as the night's gloomy mist rolls in. There is a smashed cyberdeck and computer screen, as well as many numbered binder-bound volumes scattered all over the floor.

Subtract -1 from Perseverance and call for a Perseverance check. Then add +2 to Perseverance.

Here are the various things in the room, each broken down into several areas for ease of investigation and information gathering:

Head: A *find* of 12 shows that there are claw-like imprints on the head, as if it were clutched tight by two large clawed hands. The expression frozen on Pere Voisin's face is one of terror.

Body: An *evidence analysis* or *Perception* of 14 shows that the head was twisted right off the body. The rest of the body has blasts that an *evidence analysis* or *Perception* total of 16 shows to be laser fire. Anyone from Tharkold who makes a successful *evidence analysis* check knows that the blasts came from a Res-14 laser pistol.

Floor debris: A *find* total of 20 reveals a few reptilian scales.

Reptilian scales: A *Perception* or *evidence analysis* total of 12 tells the Knights that the scales could have come from a cygoyle, a Tharkoldu technodemon, a ravagon, a dragon, an edeinos, or a Serpentor

Volumes: These are technical manuals for computer and cyberdeck operations, as well as programming manuals. They are numbered 2-12.

Yes, #1 is missing, and a Cyberpapist character knows that these books are the Cyberpapal standard documentation. Book #1 covers the basics of computer and cyberdeck operations, and is meant for beginners.

Hole in the wall: An *evidence analysis* total of 12 shows that the wall was pushed in from the outside.

Tracks: A *tracking* total of 12 shows the same sort of footprints as in Scene One. The tracks lead to and from the churchyard, but then disappear abruptly (Kaah flew away).

This Isn't What It Looks Like

One of the Inquisitors, incensed that he was not allowed to be present during a meeting of heretics, barges in with plans to sit in on the conversation, and instead sees the sight. With a bellow of outrage, he says, "Guards! The heretics have murdered Pere Voisin!", using his ThroatMike to broadcast the message to all the Cyberpapists in the building. This will bring a dozen Church Police running, as well as the other three Inquisitors, and eight cyberpriests.

The Cyberpapists intend to capture the Knights and put them through the Ordeals in order to establish guilt. If the Knights decide not to react with gunfire and spells, and instead try to *persuade* their hosts of their innocence, treat the Cyberpapists as *enemy* +1. The Knights get a +3 to their bonus if they can point out the evidence and use it to corroborate their story.

If the Knights succeed in proving their story, the cyberpriests let them go, reluctantly. From this point on, however, one cyberpriest and two Church Police will follow the Storm Knights, keeping them under secret surveillance.

What Really Happened

Pere Voisin's internal receiver got Fra St.Pierre's message about the Storm Knights and instructed the duty priest to send the visitors on in. Several minutes transpired from that time to the time the Knights arrived at the door. During that time, Kaah crashed through the wall, demanded to know how to use cyberware, and was attacked by the cyberpriest. Kaah twisted the man's head off, ransacked the place, took the beginner's manual and flew out.

Variables

If the Knights decide to break into the cathedral instead, let them. They will still wind up finding the dead priest, but this time an Inquisitor walks in because he had a question for Voisin.

If the Knights think of it, the outside cameras should have picked up something. The records would be in Security. If accessed (which will require another *persuasion* roll on the *enemy* +1 level), it shows a blurry humanoid winged form punching in the wall, then leaving three minutes later.

Flags

An *Idea* card can reveal the missing documentation volume and what it would be, or the fact that the dead priest's body is still warm, or that the cameras should have picked up something.

An *Alertness* card shows where the nearest outside camera is, or the tracks.

A *Mistaken Identity* card means that Knight has been singled out as the perpetrator and will be taken into custody and shipped off to CyberFrance for his Ordeals.

A *Nemesis* card makes Fra St-Pierre that Knight's foe, and he will do his best to foul up that Knight's efforts in the investigation.

Cut To ...

If the Knights go to the Ayslish magic show, cut to Scene Three, "Elvis Has Left The Building."

SCENE THREE: Elvis Has Left The Building

The Situation

Standard. This time, the Knights arrive in time to prevent the murder, if they think and act quickly. When they arrive at the Sahara, read the following:

Ah, the Sahara Hotel, casino and club! Las Vegas at its finest! You are surrounded by the bright lights, the glitz, the fast pace of everything. The Marquis sign outside says, "Live Tonite: ELVIS! (The Edeinos), and Fantasto the Magician! REAL MAGIC!"

The place is crammed with average tourists, gamblers, and an awful lot of Nippon types, all with the same goals of getting entertained, drunk, rich, and lucky, though maybe not in that order.

As you walk to the Sahara's club area, Elvis the edeinos is finishing a set behind a huge American flag. He ends his final song, *You Ain't Nothing But A Gospog*, with a polite "Thankyewverramuch," and leaves the stage to thunderous applause.

A hostess shows your group to some tables halfway from the entry to the stage as the master of ceremonies introduces Fantasto the Magician. To a great round of applause, an Ayslish elf appears on the stage out of thin air. He is clad in a light blue sequined tuxedo. You don't know whether you should laugh or be disgusted.

As the elf is about to begin his set, the lights go out, and people start screaming and panicking. You hear the sounds of furniture being overturned and glassware breaking as people start stampeding.

The worst sound of them all is an inhuman shriek coming from the last spot the magician was seen at. It is so piercing a sound that glass breaks in the dark all around you.

The Action

Kaah is growing angrier and his visits are becoming more brazen and more violent. In Fantasto's case, Kaah approached the elf backstage and demanded to be taught how to better use magic. Fantasto gave Kaah a few offhanded instructions, but it was not enough. When Kaah said so, Fantasto foolishly ignored the edeinos, citing that he had a show to do.

Kaah has just used his *sonic scream* on Fantasto with devastating effect, and the latter is crumpled on the ground, unconscious. Fantasto's *Toughness* is 12, so consider him at 3 Wounds, KO, knocked down, and five shock points of damage. Fantasto has six Possibilities left.

In order for the party to get to the site of battle, they are going to have to wade through a panicked throng. This requires one round and a *maneuver* or *Dexterity* total of 16. Failure means the Knight has to try again. People who can fly must make a *flight* total of 8 to get there (try flying in the dark in a crowded room).

Only Knights with cyberlegs and/or the *long jumping* skill can make it there (with a total of 8), and still attack that round.

Kaah is using his cybershroud and his *blur* power. He will do his best to get initiative, finish off the elf, and escape, though he won't mind taking a few parting shots at the Knights in hopes of killing one or two. Whatever he does, however, UNDER NO CIRCUMSTANCES should the Knights get a clear look at Kaah. The last thing Kaah will do is a psionic *psychic assault* on Fantasto's *Mind* of 9. This will scramble the elf's brain and prevent him from recollecting much of the talk with Kaah.

The Running of the Tourists

The crowd will stampede and dozens will die unless they are calmed down. This requires an inspiring speech using *Charisma* or *persuasion* against a *Mind* of 16. A *Minimal* or *Average* result means the crowd is still upset and the evacuation is a bit rocky, with about a dozen injuries. A *Good* or *Superior* result means the crowd's panic subsides and the evacuation is orderly. A *Spectacular* result means the crowd is actually inspired by the Knight — consider a story seed to be planted here (even without a *Glory* card).

Fantasto, alias Altasryn, will die in seven rounds unless healed.

Backstage with Fantasto

Fantasto will be in a state of shock, even if healed. If questioned, he will mutter about some "great winged demon of many but one, a most ineffective student," who threatened him backstage.

Fantasto will then ask if Lady Tolwyn is well, and slump into a deep sleep as his mind tries to repair itself.

Backstage, there is a trail of four slaughtered stagehands. One was shot with a laser, another is burnt to a crisp, a third has no marks except for a little trickle of blood coming out of the nose, and the last was slashed to ribbons. Subtract -1 from Perseverance and call for a Perseverance check. Then add +3 to Perseverance.

A *find* total of 12 reveals a fifth stagehand, who hid during the carnage. She is in a state of sheer terror, and is practically numb. If calmed somehow (consider all her attributes to be 8s), she babbles about seeing some great winged reptile who shot fire from his eyes and grew metal claws.

Event

During this investigation, read or paraphrase the following:

As you wander around the area, trying to sort things out, the power comes back on. The place is a shambles. Four immaculately dressed Oriental men in expensive suits and Ray-bans watch you impassively as you conduct your investigation. Eventually, they approach.

The lead one bows just a fraction of an inch, and speaks. "Konichi-wa, stormers. I am Sato Mogami, and I represent a party who has taken an interest in this attack. Perhaps we can shed some light on your investigations. If you would accompany us, please?"

These men are Yakuza. A *Perception* or *find* total of of 12 shows the Knights a small portion of tattoo poking out from under the Satos' left sleeve. A *scholar (Nippon realms lore)* total of 8 reveals that this sort of tattooing is common among Yakuza.

Sato wants to take the Knights to see the *oyabun* (godfather) of Las Vegas. Apparently, a few Nippons have died under circumstances similar to this attack, and the Yakuza wants some answers.

Sato will not contradict the Knights if they accuse him of being Yakuza, but he will not acknowledge it. He will not tell them where they are going, but will swear that they will not be harmed provided that they make no overt attempts at violence toward their hosts.

If the Knights attack, the four will defend themselves, killing a third of the party, then repeating the offer. A further refusal will make the Yakuza withdraw, though if the Knights attack, the Yakuza will retaliate, and go for the total extermination of the party.

Yakuza Soldiers (4)

DEXTERITY 9
Dodge 11, fire combat 14, melee weapons 11, unarmed combat 12
STRENGTH 8
TOUGHNESS 9 (12)
PERCEPTION 8
Find 10, trick 10
MIND 7
Test 8
CHARISMA 8
Taunt 9
SPIRIT 7
Intimidation 10, reality 8
Possibilities: 2 per Storm Knight
Equipment: IriMesh jackets, armor value TOU+3/12; SC Kyogo 144, damage value 18, ammo 15, range 3-15/40/150; ZIP77z, damage value 16, ammo 12, range 3-10/25/40; knife, damage value STR+3/11; sunglasses; Sony Talkman

Variables

If the Knights have cybernetic eyes or other high-tech equipment that gives them night vision, remember that Kaah has the occult power of *blur*, and his form will be indistinct. He will look like a very strange Tharkoldu, or perhaps a ravagon that has somehow been transformed.

If the Knights kill the Yakuza, send two corporate ninja after the party, and repeat the invitation, this time with a warning that the Knights will never be able to leave Las Vegas alive if they do not comply.

Flags

A *Romance* card makes a female Storm Knight fall in love at first sight with Fantasto.

A *True Identity* card played by a Nippon Storm Knight means that the Yakuza know exactly who the character is, and if he's wanted by Kanawa. This could lead to some very interesting complications.

A *Nemesis* card makes Sato and the Knight into enemies, perhaps due to some past transgression.

Cut To ...

If the Storm Knights accept the Yakuza invitation, go to Scene Four, "Honored Enemies, Honored Guests."

SCENE FOUR: Honored Enemies, Honored Guests

The Situation

Standard. The Storm Knights are taken to a new casino, the *Emperor's Palace*, a place decorated in a Japanese motif. Once there, they meet with the Yakuza leaders and are given information.

When the Storm Knights arrive at the Golden Palace, read the following:

This brand new, glitzy casino is yet another tacky, neon-infested nightmare, and this time the theme is Japan. The outside resembles the Imperial Palace in Tokyo, but as if it were built using neon-lined materials. The interior walls look like they are made of rice paper screens, and the Japanese hostesses are dressed in short white kimonos with plunging necklines. The air is thick with cigarette smoke and the shouts of gamblers, who are a mixture of low to middle class Japanese, Americans, and Mexicans.

Besides the usual casino games, there are some Japanese games of chance as well. Off to the left, you see a club/bar. To the right lies the casino's restaurant, which serves Japanese and American fare. Against the far wall is a single door which says "No Admittance." It's flanked by two larger Nippon agents in tuxedos.

The Action

The Yakuza will escort the Storm Knights past the two Yakuza guards, who do not react. Continue the description:

You are in another casino room, but the clientele is all Japanese, and they look far wealthier than the people in the other room. The hostesses here are dressed in authentic Japanese kimonos, and the air is clear and filtered, providing maximum comfort. A bar serves drinks, and the prices are incredibly low.

There is a curtain to the east, flanked by a single Nippon agent in a tuxedo.

This is the Law of Profit in action. Wealthy Nippon Tech residents (no *gaijin* allowed) have this room as their personal playground. Purchasing drinks and gambling chips is cheaper here than in the first room.

There is a door on the west wall, which is a direct exit to the street. It is always guarded by two Yakuza enforcers. To the east lie the baths.

The Yakuza take the Knights to the east. Read aloud:

You are in an area which contains changing areas off to one side, and a huge hot bath in the center. Several men, including a few with very large tattoos on their backs, are soaking in the water, being attended to by unclothed female bath attendants. There is a door on the north wall.

This is the bath area, a favored place for Nippon executives and Yakuza powerbrokers. The Yakuza take the Storm Knights through the north door, then down a short hall to the northernmost room.

Read aloud the following:

At last, you are seated in a room devoid of decoration. There are metal folding chairs, enough for all of you, plus a desk. Seated at the desk is an important-looking Japanese man in his late 30s. A beautiful woman sits on the side of the desk, showing a great deal of leg courtesy of the long slit in her silk dress. Two other men in expensive suits sit in chairs flanking the desk, and four burly men wearing sunglasses are standing behind the man seated at the desk.

The man at the desk looks at you impassively. "I am Izumi Shinano, *oyabun* of Las Vegas. I am pleased that you have accepted my invitation."

The man nods, and the door opens. A woman in a kimono pours tea for all of you, then bows deeply to Shinano, and leaves.

"I have called you here, because your investigations have come to my attention," he continues. "Oh, do not be surprised; there is very little that happens in this city that we do not know. In any event, we have recently experienced some ... disturbances similar to the ones you are investigating. We wish to extend to you the opportunity to examine the bodies of a few of our associates who fell victim to these mysterious attacks. Perhaps you can find another piece of the puzzle you labor on. Our only condition is that when you discover the cause of these deaths, you inform us."

The man leans back in his chair, awaiting your answer.

Izumi is worried. Three Nippon citizens have been killed in the same mysterious way, and since the people pay the Yakuza for protection, the group is rapidly losing face. They have tried to figure out who is responsible for all this, but they have thus far been unsuccessful. That is why the Storm Knights have been called in; Izumi is no fool, and he knows that Storm Knights are uniquely equipped to handle the bizarre.

If the characters agree, Izumi will snap his fingers, and technicians will wheel in three corpses on gurneys. See "The Evidence," below.

Izumi Shinano

DEXTERITY 12
Dodge 14, fire combat 14, maneuver 13, martial arts (Atemi-Waza, all maneuvers) 15
STRENGTH 10
TOUGHNESS 10
PERCEPTION 11
Find 13, land vehicles 14, language 12, scholar (Yakuza) 16, scholar (Nippon realm lore) 14, trick 16
MIND 9
Business 12, meditation 12, willpower 10
CHARISMA 9
Charm 12, persuasion 11, taunt 13
SPIRIT 10
Intimidation 13, reality (Nippon Tech) 14

Possibilities: 12

Equipment: ZIP77z, damage value 16, ammo 12, range 3-10/25/40; Armani suit; Sony Talkman

Description: Izumi is the *oyabun* of the Las Vegas area. He is rather young for the position, but believes in the old Yakuza traditions.

He is not necessarily a cruel man, and if not crossed, he can "play fair." He keeps company with a woman called Blue Lotus (use standard Yakuza stats for her), who acts as a companion, errand girl, and sometimes even assassin.

The other two men flanking Izumi are mid-level Yakuza bosses, of no real consequence.

The Evidence

Subtract -1 from Perseverance and call for a Perseverance check. Then add +2 to Perseverance. The corpses have not undergone autopsies yet. They are handled below, individually:

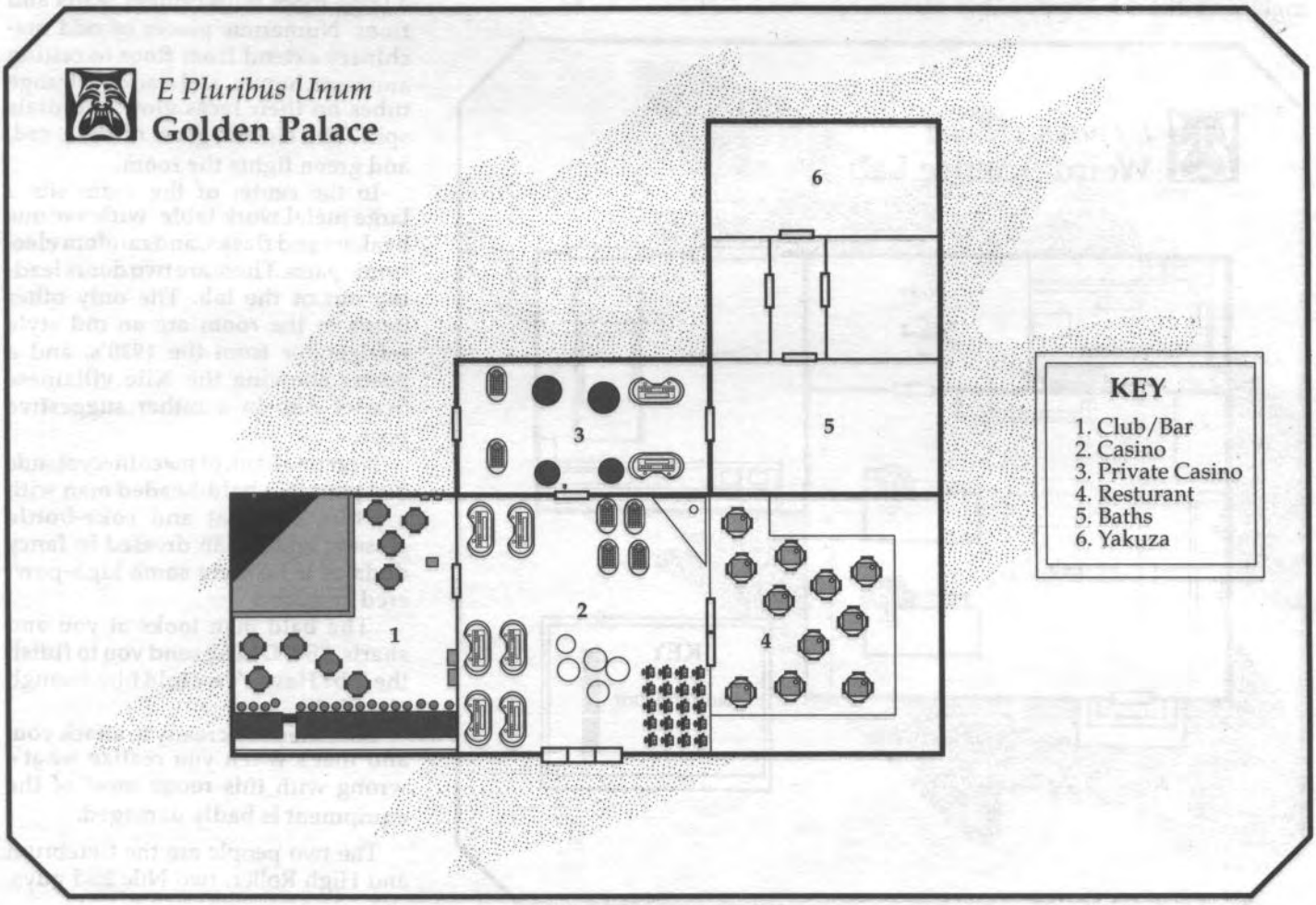
Corpse #1: A *Perception* or *find* total of 12 reveals that body #1 is covered with small bites. A *medicine* total of 14 reveals that the victim died of poisoning; a *Spectacular* success further reveals that there seem to be several different poisons in the bloodstream, as evidenced by varied mottling of the skin. A *survival (desert)* of 16 identifies the poisons as coming from snakes and lizards indigenous to the Nevada deserts.

Corpse #2: There is a thin cactus plant wrapped around the victim's neck, and he is also torn open from neck to bowels. A *medicine* total of 10 reveals that he was not strangled. A *Perception, scholar (Aysle realm lore)* or *alteration magic* of total of 14 points out that the plant may have been part of a spell called *plant shackles*. A *find* total of 18 on the massive wound turns up minute traces of metal. A *Perception* or *evidence analysis* total of 16 shows that they are from an alloy not of this Earth; a Tharkold character who makes a *Perception* or *evidence analysis* total of 14 can identify it as the type of metal used in slashers.

Corpse #3: This body was sliced up badly, and a tag reads "Katana slashes." However, parts of the body are also badly burnt, and other parts have shrapnel of an unusual configuration embedded within. A *medicine* total of 16 indicates that the fire was not caused by chemical means (such as napalm). A *Perception, scholar (Aysle realm lore)* or *apportation magic* total of 12 points out that the iron shards are from a *steel shower* spell.

See You Soon

Once the Knights have finished the investigation, they are blindfolded as a precaution. They are then led out of the room and through a side door to an alley. Then the blindfolds are removed.



Variables

If the characters are stupid enough to start shooting, numerous Yakuza soldiers will open up on them. For all Yakuza except Izumi, use the stats found in Scene Three.

If the characters wish to negotiate, Izumi can also provide the characters with the coordinates of "some odd lab in the desert, east of Las Vegas." Gamemasters amy wish to toss this to the player characters if they do not have the Akashan computer file with the latitude and longitude coordinates.

As a last concession, Izumi will pay each of the Knights the equivalent of $2,000 American.

Flags

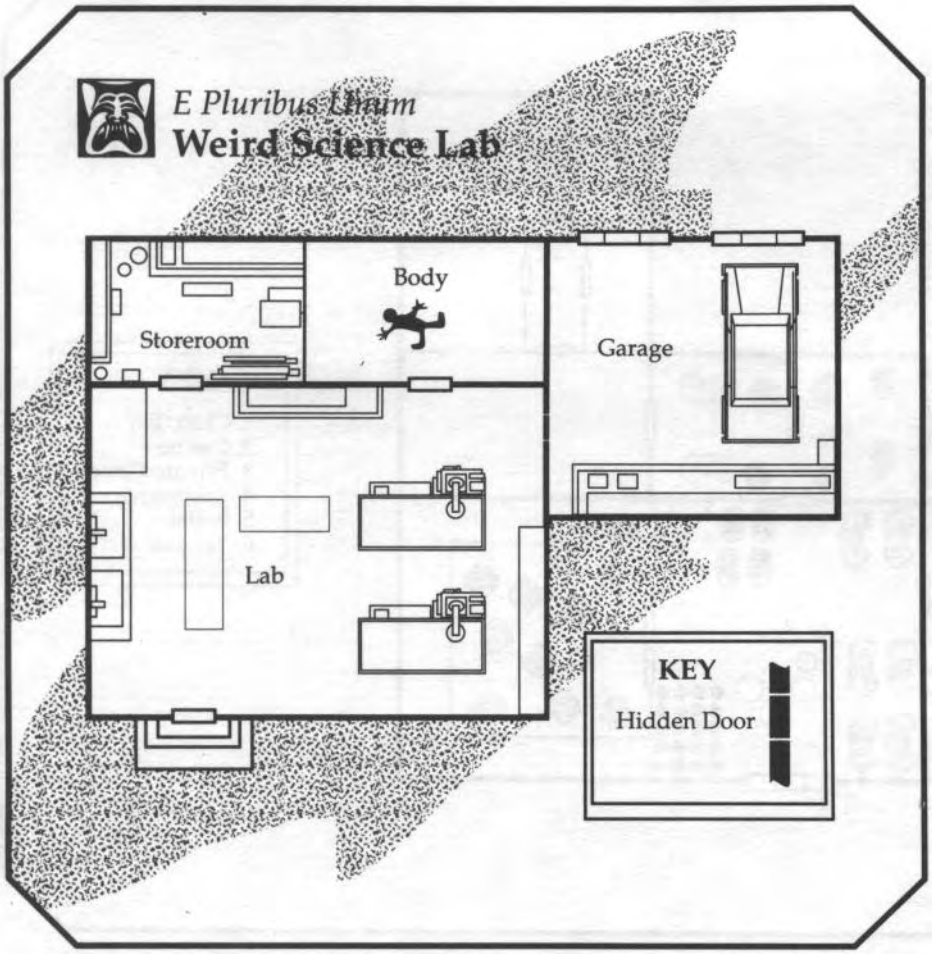
A *Connection* card played by a Japanese/Nippon Storm Knight means he or she knows Izumi. Izumi will be very friendly, and will not only willingly give the lab location, but also will invite the Knights to the baths and the private casino area. If the Knights need any firearms (no heavy weapons), Izumi will provide them with some from their arsenal.

A *Nemesis* card makes the character an enemy of Izumi, and consequently of all the Yakuza in Las Vegas. Watch out.

Cut To ...

If the Knights decide to follow up on the strange lab to the east, cut to Scene Five, "Are You Pondering What I'm Pondering?" If the Storm Knights go to the Las Vegas Cemetery, turn to Scene Six, "Fear and Pain."

SCENE FIVE: Are You Pondering What I'm Pondering?



The Situation

Standard. A Nile weird science lab lies five miles due east of Las Vegas, located in what was one a nuclear test site bunker. When the party arrives there, read the following:

If this was supposed to be a secret location, it isn't anymore. A large metal door has been torn off its hinges and thrown aside, revealing a set of stairs descending into the Earth. All is quiet, save for a mournful wind that whistles through the dark desert.

The Action

When the party descends the stairway, read the following aloud:

As you descend the stairs, an odd feeling washes over you, like you just stepped from an air-conditioned room into the muggy outdoors.

At the bottom of the stairs, you see a large room with cement walls and floor. Numerous pieces of odd machinery extend from floor to ceiling and buzz, humm, and crackle. Strange tubes on their faces glow and dials spin. The electric glow of blue, red, and green lights the room.

In the center of the room sits a large metal work table, with various beakers and flasks, and random electronic parts. There are two doors leading out of the lab. The only other items in the room are an old style refrigerator from the 1930's, and a poster showing the Nile villainess Scarlet Asp in a rather suggestive pose.

Near one bank of machinery stands two people; a bald-headed man with a white lab coat and coke-bottle glasses, and a man dressed in fancy duds as if he were some high-powered gambler.

The bald man looks at you and snarls. "So! Did he send you to finish the job? Haven't we told him enough already?"

Both men look ready to attack you, and that's when you realize what's wrong with this room: most of the equipment is badly damaged.

The two people are the Cerebrum and High Roller, two Nile bad guys.

For interaction purposes, consider them *hostile* to the Knights. The metal work table has a compartment underneath, which houses a small Nile hardpoint. The table and a circle two meters in radius is a Nile pure zone, while the rest of the complex is a Nile dominant zone.

If the party talks instead of fighting, this is their story, as told by the Cerebrum:

"We were laboring here in our lab, working as usual on our latest plan to take over the world. We suddenly heard this wrenching noise, and down the stairs comes the biggest humanoid reptilian I ever cast optical organs upon.

"The intruder studied the two of us, as well as my erstwhile assistant Pinkerton. Then in a croaking hiss, he said 'What is weird science!? You must teach me! It's in my head but I cannot use it! It hurts! Teach me weird science!'

"Needless to say, the thing was rather disturbed, and we were understandably hesitant to comply. As my companion here began some clandestine preparation for initiating hostilities, the intruder shot flames from his optical orifices and caused Pinkerton to combust, then proceeded to pull out a laser pistol and began firing at our equipment.

"We took the offensive, of course. Angered, the intruder turned to my polyhedral-rolling companion and announced that he was 'marked for death,' which caused him to inexplicably blanch with terror.

"However, before the creature could continue, he grabbed at his head and shouted ' ... the cemetery! The key to corruption! The source of pain! Must go!.'

"And thus, he left, abruptly terminating hostilities. Pinkerton's body is in the adjacent room. I intend to study it in the interests of science."

The Cerebrum

DEXTERITY 7
Fire combat 9, running 8
STRENGTH 7
TOUGHNESS 8
PERCEPTION 13
Evidence analysis 17, find 16, first aid 15, language 16, scholar (Nile realm lore) 17, scholar (master criminal) 17, trick 15
MIND 13
Science 17, weird science 18, willpower 16
CHARISMA 8
Taunt 13
SPIRIT 12
Reality (Nile Empire) 16
Possibilities: 12
Equipment: Weird science Pocket Calculator of Power: (TOU 15, *force field* 18, *electro-ray* 17, *teleportation* 12); weird science toolkit.
Description: The Cerebrum is a criminal genius from Terra, here at Mobius' request to research the construction of an atomic bomb.

High Roller

DEXTERITY 12
Dodge 16, fire combat 15, lockpicking 15, maneuver 15, missile weapons 17, prestidigitation 14, running 14, stealth 16
STRENGTH 9
TOUGHNESS 9
PERCEPTION 9
Find 12, land vehicles 13, scholar (games of chance) 16, trick 16
MIND 9
Weird science 12, willpower 12
CHARISMA 13
Charm 18, persuasion 17, taunt 18
SPIRIT 11
Reality (Nile Empire) 12
Possibilities: 8
Equipment: Numerous sets of Amazing Dice (range: 1-2/5/20 types: *dazzle* 12, *fog screen* 21, *fire blast* 19); .38 revolver, damage value 14, ammo 6, range 3-10/25/50; 1955 Ford Thunderbird, TOU 15, speed value 13
Description: High Roller is a gambler and a rogue from Terra. He uses weird science gadgets disguised as dice. Handsome, suave, sophisticated, High Roller dresses in a snappy suit and drives a cherry red T-bird.

The Evidence

Subtract -1 from Perseverance and call for a Perseverance check. Then add +2 to Perseverance. A *medicine* total of 16 indicates that the fire on the corpse was not caused by chemical means (such as napalm). Other than that, there are no clues on on the body.

Resolution

The pulp villains will make good their escape, if necessary, High Roller ducking into a secret entrance to the underground garage and roaring off in his T-bird, and Cerebrum teleporting away.

Flags

A *Romance* card means that High Roller finds himself strongly attracted to a female Storm Knight.

A *Nemesis* card makes one of the two villains an arch-enemy.

Cut To ...

If the party goes to the Las Vegas Cemetery, cut to Scene Six, "Fear and Pain."

SCENE SIX: Fear and Pain

The Situation

Standard. When the Knights start out for the cemetery, read the following:

As you begin making your way toward the cemetery at the edge of the city, the air is shattered by the sound of numerous motorcycles roaring closer and closer.

Looking down the main boulevard, you see a gang of ten bikers, whooping and hollering on their "Hogs," shooting guns into the air. Four of the bikers' machines are in some sort of square configuration, and a large object is hefted over them. Passersby on "the Strip" scatter.

As quickly as the bikers arrived, they're gone, traveling in the same direction as you.

The Action

A *Perception* or *evidence analysis* total of 12 reveals that the object between the bikes is a coffin. A second total of 14 reveals that the bikers have extensive cyberware. A *direction sense* total of 10 informs the Knights that the bikers seem to be heading for the cemetery.

The Boneyard

When the party reaches the cemetery, read aloud:

Even a party town like Vegas needs a graveyard, and these days it needs one more than ever. Still, why let the tourists be casually exposed to it? Thus, the main cemetery is located on the outskirts of the city, away from the partygoers, who would not appreciate such a reminder of their mortality.

As you enter through the wrought-iron gates, you see the glow of several torches in the distance. Numerous motorcycles and human figures are framed in the yellow-orange light of the fires. They are apparently performing some ceremony.

Before you can move, a voice comes from behind you, saying, "Pretty pathetic, aren't they? Surely you mortals are not part of their funeral procession?"

When the party spins around, read aloud:

The source of the voice is a gorgeous woman with pale skin, long raven hair that reaches her waist, and a long black dress that is low-cut in the front, with has a long slit up the side. In her arms she carries the body of a man, his skin shrivelled tightly over his bones.

Though she is breathtakingly beautiful, you notice that her eyes glow red and vestigial fangs poke out from her mouth. She regards you all appraisingly, and asks "Have you an answer?"

Interview With A Vampyress

This is Gemyni, a vampyress from Orrorsh. She carries the body of her mate, Tellurion, another vampyre. For purposes of interaction, she is *neutral*. If she can be *persuaded* to talk, she will motion the party away from the bikers' ceremony, towards an open grave that she herself has dug.

Gemyni explains that she and Tellurion were sent to interfere with Nippon operations in Las Vegas. They "set up shop" in this cemetery. Soon, they found out that a Tharkoldu techno-demon called Skerge also resided here, and that Skerge had dominated the biker gang. Still, Skerge left them alone, and the vampyres did likewise.

Earlier this evening, a winged horror confronted both vampyres and demanded to know about the nature of Corruption and the Ecology of Fear. The creature seemed to be an odd amalgam of various bits and pieces of various realms, and the vampyres reacted with violence.

The stranger responded by causing some plants to come to life, including a thorn bush, which wrapped itself around Tellurion's neck. Unfortunately, that was Tellurion's True Death, and the vampyre is now dead. As Gemyni braced herself for the thing's attack, it suddenly screamed and flew off to the north.

What the creature did not know was that Gemyni was a gypsy in life. Using *spirit medium*, she found out that the creature went back to its lair, a small mesa 20 miles north of Las Vegas. She will tell this to the party if they vow to kill the beast.

Subtract -1 from Perseverance and call for a check. Then add +3 to the characters' Perseverance.

Gemyni, the Vampyress

DEXTERITY 12
Acrobatics 20, dodge 19, maneuver 17, running 17, stealth 20, unarmed combat 20
STRENGTH 16
Climbing 19
TOUGHNESS 18
PERCEPTION 11
Find 14, language 15, scholar (Orrorsh realm lore) 16, trick 16
MIND 14
Test 23, willpower 23
CHARISMA 14
Charm 26, persuasion 21
SPIRIT 12
Intimidation 18, reality (Orrorsh) 19, spirit medium 17
Possibilities: 15
Natural Tools: Fangs, damage value STR+2/18
Powers: ***Life drain***, value 29 (drains TOU with a kiss on the lips; ***infection***, value 17; ***regeneration; shape change (black cat)***
Corruption Value: 24
Fear Rating: 6
Perseverance DN: 18
Weakness: Gaean Peace Rose (severe), garlic
True Death: Remove her heart and burn it
Description: Though Gemyni is evil, her quarrel is not with the Storm Knights, at least not directly. However, she will defend herself if they attack her.

The Biker Ceremony

Sneaking up on the scene requires a *stealth* total of 12 from each Storm Knight. Once there, read the following:

A group of 10 leather and jeans clad bikers, six men and four women, are gathered in a circle, most of them holding blazing torches. You can see that many of them have cybernetic enhancements. There is an eleventh man, but he has no legs. Instead, his torso is attached to a cybernetic motorcycle. There is also a twelfth figure, a techno-demon. A coffin lies ready to be interred.

The motorcycle-man is addressing the crowd: "Brothers and sisters, we commit the body of our sister to the ground, and vow that we'll hunt down the scuzz who sliced her. Great Master Skerge has divined the location of the scum, and soon we'll give it some payback!"

The mancycle stops talking, as if he just heard something. He snaps his head around and sees you. "'Lopers!" he cries. "Do 'em, but save two for Skerge!"

"The crowd turns to you, and begins to advance. The techno-demon unfurls its mighty wings and takes to the air, anticipating a fast chase, followed by a slow kill.

This is a fight for survival. Unlike some of the other encounters, this is not one where the party can hope to talk. The bikers are angry at one of their number being killed, and the techno-demon is outraged that one of his slaves is dead.

Cybernetic Biker Gang (10)

DEXTERITY 10
Dodge 12, energy weapons 12, melee weapons 12, unarmed combat
STRENGTH 10
TOUGHNESS 10 (15)
PERCEPTION 8
Find 10, land vehicles (motorbikes) 14, trick 10
MIND 8
Survival 10
CHARISMA 8
Taunt 12
SPIRIT 9
Intimidation 12, pain weapon 11, reality (Tharkold) 12
Possibilities: 1 per Storm Knight
Equipment: Kap/5 syntheleather, armor value TOU+5/15; Pain weapon: painchains, damage value STR+5/15; 13/Zan Magnums, damage value 18, ammo 21, range 3-10/40/60; Kokoru Avenger motorcycles, TOU 13, speed value 13. Cyberware: Nanocord, Darksight, Killseeker, Radiotalker, Talons, damage value STR+2/12. Cyber value: 9
Description: The gangers are loyal to their leader and to the techno-demon who has dominated them.

Mancycle ("Harley")

DEXTERITY 17
Dodge 20, energy weapons 19, fire combat 19, maneuver 21, unarmed combat 18
STRENGTH 14
Lifting 16
TOUGHNESS 12 (17)
PERCEPTION 10
Land vehicles (motorcycle) 19, trick 15
MIND 9
Streetwise 12, survival 13, test 11, willpower 12
CHARISMA 8
Taunt 14
SPIRIT 11
Intimidation 15, pain weapon 14, reality (Tharkold) 13
Possibilities: 10
Equipment: Res-14 laser, damage value 25, ammo 50, range 3-50/100/200; Pain weapon: whip, damage value STR+3/17. Cyberware: Nanocord, Dangerscan, Darksight, Soundcatcher, Cybercestus, damage value STR+2/16, motorcycle, TOU 15, speed value 14. Cyber value: 16
Description: Harley lost everything below the waist in battle against a techno-demon that was opposed to Skerge. In order to save his life, Skerge fused a motorcycle to the man's body, making him a Tharkoldu version of a centaur.

Harley has gotten used to this arrangement somewhat. He has excellent control over the bike, able to maneuver at the speed of thought. However, Harley is slightly unhinged, since he feels like a little "less than a man." As a result, Harley is prone to take foolish risks, and is also not known for giving mercy to defeated opponents.

Skerge told Harley the location of Kaah's hideout.

Skerge (Tharkoldu Alpha)

DEXTERITY 12
Dodge 15, energy weapons 15, fire combat 15, flight 16(19), melee weapons 16 (19 defense), missile weapons 15, stealth 15, unarmed combat 16 (19)
STRENGTH 17
Lifting 20
TOUGHNESS 17 (23)
PERCEPTION 12
Alteration magic 16, divination magic 16, find 15, first aid 13, land vehicles 14, tracking 16, trick 14
MIND 13
Apportation magic 17, conjuration magic 17, test 17, willpower 18
CHARISMA 11
Persuasion 14, taunt 15
SPIRIT 13
Faith (Cult of the Dominant) 18, pain weapon 17, intimidation 18, reality (Tharkold) 18
Possibilities: 20
Arcane Knowledges: *folk 4, entity 4, inanimate forces 4, living forces 4*
Spells: *Alpha stech, attack dominant, captive send, dominant vision, foeblaster*
Natural Tools: Teeth, damage value STR+2/19; talons, damage value STR+3/20; alpha sense (a *Perception* total), wings, speed value 10, can do a wing strike for STR+7/24
Equipment: Pain baton, damage value STR+3/20; a Datchip with the precise location of Kaah's small mesa 20 miles north of Vegas. Cyberware: Nanocord, balance wires, interdermal plate, armor value TOU+6/23; talons, damage value STR+5/22; cyberwings 3, backlash buffer 2, LifeCyber, 3 slot chipholder Cyber value: 16
Description: Skerge is an important Alpha in this particular zone of Tharkold/Nippon reality. It is a cruel creature that enjoys hanging around biker gangs. Skerge takes great pleasure in either spreading subtle terror or senseless violence.

Skerge does not know what Kaah is, or that it is even Kaah in the first place. It knows that the beast looked like an edeinos, a ravagon, or a cygoyle.

Variables

If the party has been all the way through the adventure and have no intention of visiting the cemetery, bring in the gang on its bikes, in effect pushing the characters into this scene.

If clever Storm Knights decide early on to visit the cemetery (thinking that perhaps gruesome things MUST come from a graveyard), they will not find any of the above folks, neither the bikers nor Gemyni. A *find* total of 14 will reveal lots of footprints in the cemetery, including the footprints of the techno-demon Skerge.

Should the party manage to kill Gemyni before she explains her story, arrange for a parchment to be found on her body which shows the location of the mesa.

Flags

A *Romance* card makes a Storm Knight and Gemyni fall in love at first sight with each other, providing a whole host of complications for the poor Knight.

A *Mistaken Identity* card played by a Nippon character means that Gemyni

considers him a spy, and will attack him.

The *Nemesis* card can make an enemy out of Gemyni, Skerge, or Harley.

Cut To ...

Once the group is resolved to go to the mesa, turn to Scene Seven, "The Best of All Possible Worlds."

SCENE SEVEN: The Best of All Possible Worlds

The Situation

Dramatic. The Knights arrive at the mesa, and must confront their mysterious enemy, who stands revealed as Kaah reborn.

When the group reaches the mesa, read the following:

At last, you reach a huge column of rock, 30 meters high and about 10 meters wide. It looks of fairly recent vintage, perhaps an upheaval that occurred when the Living Land reality held sway here a few years ago. The sides of the mesa are rough enough for climbing.

The entire area is desolate. At your back, you can still barely make out the hazy glow of the distant city of Las Vegas. A chill wind blows around you.

The Action

Climbing the mesa requires three *climbing* or *Strength* totals of 12. Failing the roll causes the Knight to fall to the ground (see the falling rules under "Climbing" on pages 52 and 53 of the *Torg Rulebook*).

Once at the top of the mesa, read the following aloud:

At last, you have made it to the top. The wind blows even stronger here than it did on the ground. The night sky is a brilliant panoply of stars, but the scene does not comfort you. Rather, you feel a sense of dread.

At the center of the mesa is a pile of rocks that looks like it could be a burial mound.

The pile is merely a heap of rocks, stacked up for a reason known only to Kaah. A *tracking* total of 10 reveals plenty of reptilian footprints.

How Do You Like My New Look?

After the party goes over to investigate the mound, read aloud:

Checking the rocks revealed nothing. As you stand in the center of the mesa, you hear the flapping of great wings, and a massive humanoid reptilian figure lands a ways from you and watches you. The creature ap-

pears to be a massive edeinos, except that this particular specimen carries an automatic pistol, a laser, and a katana. His metal wings gleam and one cybernetic eye glows red.

A discernible aura of evil rolls from the figure and washes over you, as you feel your mind probed by a psionic presence. The whiff of magic covers the creature as well. It unfurls its wings in an obvious gesture of defiance and addresses you in a grating voice:

"Greetings, stormers. Did you think me dead all this time? Fools — I, Kaah, have been reborn. I am of all realities, but belong to none. And from this blend of realities comes one being of great power.

"No longer do I need a maelstrom bridge, stelae, or a capricious Darkness Device. Now I know all, and that information screams in my head for release: possibility capacitors, decking, ki power, corruption, true death, psionic probes, true patterns, hostile takeovers, Avignon doctrine, all these things fight and scramble for my attention. I must sort them out ... I must ..."

Kaah clutches his head, and shakes it vigorously, then recovers, takes a deep breath, and looks at you.

"Behold the future, stormers. To paraphrase one of your dead poets, 'Look upon me, ye mighty, and despair ...'"

With that, Kaah charges, a ferocious snarl of hatred on his lips. Cybernetic slashers emerge from his left knuckles, while he draws his .45 with his right hand. His eyes glow red, as if fire were building up in them.

Subtract -1 from Perseverance and call for a Perseverance check.

Kaah

DEXTERITY 21

Beast riding 28, biotech weapons 25, dodge 24, energy weapons 25, fire combat 25, flight 22, lock picking 22, long jumping 23, maneuver 28, martial arts 22, melee weapons 29, missile weapons 29, running 23, stealth 27, swimming 23, unarmed combat 28

STRENGTH 24

Climbing 26, lifting 27

TOUGHNESS 23

PERCEPTION 18

Alteration magic 19, cyberdeck operation 19, divination magic 19, evidence analysis 20, find 28, first aid 19, land vehicles 19, language 19, psionic manipulation 19, scholar (Living Land realm lore) 27, tracking 22, trick 20

MIND 18

Apportation magic 19, business 19, conjuration magic 19, cybertech 19, hypnotism 19, meditation 19, occult 20, psionic resistance 19 , psychology 19, science (biotech) 19, science (computers) 19, streetwise 19, survival 23, test 27, weird science 19, willpower 24

CHARISMA 19

Persuasion 22, taunt 25

SPIRIT 25

Corruption 27, faith (Keta Kalles) 33, focus 31, intimidation 33, reality (all) 41

Possibilities: 100

Corruption Value: 25

Fear Rating: 4

Powers: ***Fire attack***, value 34 (comes from his eyes); ***animal control*** (snakes and lizards), ***blur form***

Perseverance DN: 18

Weakness: Touched by an eternity shard (severe weakness)

True Death: Slain by a sword with a metal handle and pommel, wooden blade, and enchanted by magic.

Pulp Power: *Sonic scream* (value 24)

Equipment: .45 automatic, damage value 16, ammo 7, range 3-10/15/40; katana, damage value STR+7/21; Res-14 laser, damage value 25, ammo 50, range 3-50/100/200; binoculars; I/R goggles; lockpick tools; backpack; Marseilles Hermes cyberdeck; medkit. Cyberware: NeuraCal, J-jack, optical package: (CSI LED, Belle-View Low Light, BelleSee TeleSight), cybercorder ear, cybershroud, cyberwings +2, nanodoc, slashers, damage value STR+4/23. Cyber value: 23

Inclination: Evil

Arcane Knowledges: *Metal 1, living forces 4, plant 4*

Spells: *Steel shower, charm person, heal, sixth sense, plant shackles*

Miracles: Any miracle from any cosm

Alignment: Coar

Psionic Powers: Psychic screen, awareness, life sense, psi detection, beacon, domination, psychic assault

Natural Tools: Claws, damage value STR+3/22; teeth, damage value STR+2/21; tail, damage value STR+1/20

Additional Notes: Kaah can use a Possibility to remove only two packets of damage rather than three. His CSI LED gives him data readouts, his Belle-View Low Light amplifies existing light, his TeleSight gives him a +3 to his *find* at range. He can record sounds with his cyber ear. Kaah's cybershroud shields his cyberware from a Modspotter. +5 vs electronic detection, +2 defense vs smart weapons. His Nanodoc makes self-repairs with a *medicine* skill value of 20.

All factors and bonuses have already been applied to Kaah's skills (e.g. Coar skill benefits).

Kaah and Reality Storms: Given that he now embodies elements of Living Land, Core Earth, Orrorsh, Nippon, the Cyberpapacy, the Land Below, Aysle and Tharkold, Kaah cannot invoke reality storms on natives of those realms, nor can they invoke a storm on him. He can invoke storms on natives of realms whose reality he does not possess, and vice versa.

Should Kaah win such a reality storm, the opponent will be drained of possibilities and *reality* adds, but will not transform. Instead, Kaah will gain that person's reality and one skill add in a skill associated with it. Should Kaah lose a reality storm, he will lose all possibilities and *reality* adds, but will not transform, as the nexus maintains his stability (such as it is).

Kaah cannot disconnect when using anything associated with any of the realities that now make him up.

Description: Kaah is now a living amalgam of all realities, a part of all of them, but belonging to none. The touch of an eternity shard to his skin causes him great pain.

Unfortunately for the ex-High Lord, though he has the knowledge of all sorts of new, exotic skills, spells, and psionics, he lacks the wisdom to use them. Gamemasters may wish to subtract -2 from all of Kaah's skill attempts with those skills to reflect his

L&H

disorientation from his very recent "rebirth."

Kaah is an angry, frustrated, borderline psychotic individual who wants to learn how to use all of his new additions, right away. Unfortunately, he has proven to be a most impatient pupil, who takes out his frustrations by killing those who could help him.

Kaah has a special hatred in his heart for Storm Knights, whom he sees as the instruments of his fall.

Notes

If the Storm Knights can slay Kaah, more power to them. But don't make it easy — Kaah will make use of the Power of Fear and every other advantage he has. If the Knights are getting pounded (or Kaah is), an escape attempt is permissible. If none of the Knights have the ability to fly, Kaah should be able to get away fairly easily, providing his wings still function.

Flags

The only card worth playing here is a *Nemesis*. In this case, Baruk Kaah becomes the sworn enemy of the Storm Knight, but that hatred does not vanish at the end of the adventure. Treat the *Nemesis* card as if it were piggybacked with a *Campaign* card.

Aftermath

If the Knights manage to drive off Kaah, but don't kill him, read the following:

Once you are back in your hotel room, surrounded by civilization (such as it is), you try to comprehend what has happened. A High Lord, and not a very competent one at that, has managed to rise above the laws of reality. If Kaah can do it, could other, more powerful ones do so?

Perhaps it's just the effect of being in a Tharkold/Nippon mixed zone that makes you feel less than enthusiastic about this victory. For, if it can be even called a victory, it's a hollow one at best: Kaah has gotten away, and you feel that the worst that the Possibility Wars has to offer is still to come.

If the Knights do kill Kaah (but not with his True Death), he does not go to the Waiting Village — instead, his body will vanish, drawn back into the nexus. He might be gone for good — or he might be recreated again, worse than before ...

Adventure Awards

If Kaah is killed, award each Knight 10 Possibilities.

If Kaah is driven away, award each Storm Knight six Possibilities.

Award an extra Possibility to each Knight for each of the following things that they succeeded in doing:

- Saved Fantasto from dying;
- Evacuated the Sahara without any deaths;
- Captured the Cerebrum and High Roller;
- Killed Skerge.

Mini-Adventure

Their Darkest Hour

Adventure Background

According to the various Arthurian legends, King Arthur went off to the island of Avalon, but would return when England needed him most and rule again.

Currently, all of Britain except for the Oxford area (where the forces of Light still hold sway) is under the Warrior of the Dark's control. England has been sealed off from the rest of the world: no one gets in or gets out (or at least they don't do so easily).

If ever there was a need for Arthur, that time is now.

But ...

Arthur is not returning. Who knows what the real circumstances of his return will be, but it hasn't come to pass as of now. However, the Cyberpapacy, seeking to destabilize the Aysle realm that's a mere swim across the English Channel from them, have launched a plan.

The Cyberpapacy kidnapped a British national, Arthur Figgis, an amateur Arthurian scholar, and have wired him up and made certain other alterations, so that Arthur Figgis is convinced that he is in fact King Arthur. The Cyberpapacy then took Arthur, put him into a coma, placed him in a coffin, and placed him in one of the sites in Britain that is rumored to have been Camelot, in the vicinity of the town of Winchester.

To the Cyberpapacy's way of thinking, the surest way of having Arthur be accepted by the English population is to have him "found" by some heroic Storm Knights. This is where the player characters come in.

Rumors were planted through underground channels, and the characters are being sent by the British government to check out one of the most likely sites. Other groups of Storm Knights are supposedly checking out other sites as well.

In order to make resistance look convincing, the Cyberpapacy also kidnapped a Paris Liberte Militia Storm Knight named Morgana D'Arcy, and gave her the same treatment as Arthur Figgis. Morgana now thinks that she is Morgana Le Fey, Arthur's enemy, and now wanders the area near Winchester seeking to destroy him.

Adventure Summary

Their Darkest Hour begins in Aysle, specifically southwest Britain, and winds up in Normandy, France. The characters make landfall on British soil in Scene One, where they reach the coastal village of Romsey and get a chance to mix with the locals and learn some things about their surroundings. Romsey is under the brutal occupation of a lieutenant of the Warrior of the Dark.

In Scene Two, the characters get the chance to liberate Romsey from its captivity. Depending on how successful they are, they gain some added information, including the precise location of the supposed ruins of Camelot.

The counterfeit Morgana Le Fey meets the group in Scene Three, as they cross the forest.

Scene Four covers the ruins of Camelot, including a few cryptic clues about what's going on.

The alleged body of King Arthur is found in Scene Five, after the warriors overcome some heavy resistance. They are also charged with recovering Excalibur, which is in a mystical lake guarded by a ferocious entity.

Scene Six deals with the lake, and the guardian. If the characters do everything right, they gain Excalibur.

After Scene Six, there is a sort of break in the action, and the Channel Crossing is quickly played through.

In the final Scene, Scene Seven, the characters (now in CyberFrance) find the monastery where Sir Launcelot is buried. In this climactic scene, the characters battle with the Cyberpapists that cooked up this whole scheme.

Potion of Healing

When this draught is consumed, it is as if the character had just spent a Possibility to remove the typical three packets of damage.

Introduction

The struggle in Aysle goes badly for the forces of Light. The vile hosts of the Warrior of the Dark have managed to overrun all of Britain save the Oxford zone, which now stands alone, a single island of Light surrounded by the Darkness. Truly, this is England's darkest hour. The island nation needs heroes now more than ever before.

And hushed whispers say that the greatest hero of all has returned, in this time of England's greatest need: King Arthur Pendragon, the Once and Future King.

Read aloud of paraphrase:

Your team has been given some electrifying news from the British government: King Arthur, according to underground sources, has returned to England! The government has decided to send out a team of Storm Knights to find him and begin coordinating efforts toward the goal of freeing England from Aysle's grip.

Here are the facts as you understand them:

• King Arthur has returned in some form, but there are no details. Underground cells say that the King has not been directly sighted, but there are odd happenings in several parts of Britain that have a distinctly Arthurian flavor to them;

• Several teams, including yours, are being sent out to try and make contact, each team going to one of the sites that legends might have been Camelot (there are at least three);

• You will dock at the seacoast village of Romsey, and try to organize a secret meeting with an agent codenamed Tristram. He or she will have any extra info you need. The government isn't certain what conditions are like in Romsey. The town may be occupied by the Army of the Dark.

• The site you will be checking is near Winchester, about 10 miles northeast of Romsey.

• If you find Arthur, you are to make contact with him and give him whatever aid he needs. Try to bring him back to your boat, and sail to Amsterdam.

If you do not find Arthur, but find clues to his whereabouts, return to your boat and sail to Amsterdam with the information.

SCENE ONE: The Landing

The Situation

Standard. The Knights make a nighttime landing at Romsey. Here, they are supposed to meet with a contact codenamed "Tristram."

Read aloud or paraphrase:

You were given a large sailboat and weathered the storms on your way to Romsey. Now your boat glides quietly through the cold, dark waters of the bay, as the lights of the village of Romsey twinkle invitingly. The twilight sky is filled with dark clouds, casting a grim pall over everything.

At last, your boat arrives at the docks of Romsey. Several battered fishing vessels are tied up here, but there is plenty of room to dock. From your vantage point, you can see that there is one street that leads from the docks to the village proper.

The buildings here are made of wood, stone, and thatch. Many have their windows shuttered, but occupation is evident by the smoke curling from the chimneys.

There appear to be the dark ruins of a church close by, and a tall tower, well lit, at the far end of town.

Occasionally, you see bands of human shapes with lanterns, walking the streets of the town. The whole town is deathly quiet, and the hairs on the backs of your necks rise up. Something just feels wrong here ...

The Action

That's cause something is wrong. The town is occupied by the Army of the Dark. Each patrol walks up and down the street, taking just five minutes to make a one-way pass on their circuit. The following are the stats for each patrol:

Dark Patrol

Minotaurs (2)

Reality: Aysle
DEXTERITY 8
Melee weapons 10, unarmed combat 11
STRENGTH 12
TOUGHNESS 7 (14)
PERCEPTION 7
Find 9, tracking 9, trick 8
MIND 8
Test 9
CHARISMA 7
Taunt 9
SPIRIT 9
Intimidation 12
Possibilities: None
Natural Tools: Teeth, damage value STR+3/15; horns, damage value STR+4/16; hide, armor value TOU+7/1

Equipment: Battleaxe, damage value STR+5/17; pouch with five Ayslish trades

Veteran Warriors (2)

Reality: Aysle
DEXTERITY 9
Beast riding 10, maneuver 10, melee weapons 11, missile weapons 12, unarmed combat 10
STRENGTH 10
TOUGHNESS 10 (14)
PERCEPTION 8
Find 10, track 10, trick 10
MIND 7
Survival 9, test 8
CHARISMA 7
SPIRIT 8
Possibilities: None

Equipment: Chainmail, armor value TOU+4/14; broadswords, damage value STR+6/16; clubs, damage value STR+3/13; short bows, damage vaalue STR+5/15, range 3-10/40/100; daggers, damage value STR+3/13; lantern on a pole (one soldier only); pouch with five Ayslish trades; distress horn

(blow it, and it alerts the other guard patrols, always bringing one patrol within three combat rounds.

There are four patrols of four beings each, two composed of humans and two minotaurs. These patrols of four keep vigilant watch on the town. If anyone is found violating the laws (breaking curfew, carrying a weapon, etc) they are either beaten, jailed, or killed. These patrols are part of an occupying army, and are easily suspicious and quite sadistic.

The Laws of Romsey

1. Curfew is in effect from 8:00 p.m. to sunrise
2. Magic shall not be practiced by anyone save the armies and representatives of the Warrior of the Dark
3. Weapons shall not be owned by anyone save the armies and representatives of the Warrior of the Dark.
4. No one can leave Romsey save by permission of the head of the Romsey Occupation Force.
5. Evidence of Storm Knight activity must be reported to the Dark Armies
6. Harboring a Storm Knight is punishable by death.

The Average Citizen of Romsey

What we have here is a cowed population, bereft of hope and weary of occupation. The average citizen has stats of 8. People usually travel in pairs, for safety.

Asking villagers questions is fruitless. They are all terrified. In order to get them to speak, they must be *charmed* or *persuaded*, and for game purposes, should be considered *enemy* on the Interaction Results Table.

Any success yields some meager information: this is Romsey, and it's being occupied by the armies of the Warrior of the Dark. They are based in the tower on the east end of town.

Village of Romsey

The following are scenes that the characters may witness as they walk the streets of Romsey. Keep in mind the curfew. The gamemaster should feel free to insert as many as needed. As a rule of thumb, the more the characters walk the streets, the more of the incidents they encounter.

• A veteran soldier takes a fresh-baked roll from a bakery, and does not pay for it.

• A patrol pair extorts two Ayslish trades from a merchant.

• Four veteran soldiers beat up a farmer in front of his wife and children.

•Three minotaur and three veteran soldiers loot the home of a widow, as she stands helplessly by and wails, and a crowd of sullen villagers do nothing but watch.

• Two veteran soldiers attack a beautiful young woman.

• Four minotaurs drag away three children from two hysterical families, saying something about "putting them to work in the slave pits."

1. Ruined Church.

This is an Anglican Church that has been sacked by the forces of Darkness. There is nothing left of value here, though there is a secret door in the eastern arm of the church, which can be found with a *Perception* or *find* of 12.

Opening the trap door leads to a winding set of stairs that lead to the underground crypt. If the characters go down here (and have a light source), read the following:

As you descend the old stone stairs, the air turns chilly and damp. Your footsteps echo on the old stonework. At the bottom of the stairs, you see, in the flickering light, rows of stone sarcophagi, many with the images of long-dead knights carved on to their heavy lids.

The place is deathly quiet, save for the occasional skittering of a rat.

If the characters persist in exploring the crypt, read the following:

Suddenly, men and women emerge from behind the tombs, many armed with swords and clubs. They advance towards you, suspicion etched on their faces.

This is Romsey's underground, made up of brave men and women who are trying to fight the Army of Darkness. There are a dozen here, including "Tristram," who, it turns out, is a woman.

Romsey Underground (11)

Reality: Core Earth (6), Aysle (5)
DEXTERITY 8
Beast riding 10, maneuver 10, melee weapons 10, stealth 11, unarmed combat 10
STRENGTH 9
TOUGHNESS 9
PERCEPTION 8
Find 10, track 10, trick 10
MIND 8
Willpower 10
CHARISMA 9
SPIRIT 8
Intimidation 11, reality 10
Possibilities: 4 each
Equipment: Broadswords, damage value STR+6/15; clubs, damage value STR+3/12; torches. For the Core Earthers, as above but also add: .45 automatics, damage value 18, ammo 7, range 3-10/15/40

"Tristram"

DEX TERITY 11
Beast riding 12, maneuver 14, melee weapons 15, missile weapons 12, stealth 14, unarmed combat 12
STRENGTH 10
TOUGHNESS 11
PERCEPTION 12
Find 14, language 14, scholar (Aysle realm lore) 14, track 15, trick 13
MIND 10
Test 14, willpower 15
CHARISMA 12
Charm 14, persuasion 15, taunt 13
SPIRIT 10
Intimidation 14, reality (Aysle) 14
Possibilities: 12
Equipment: Broadsword, damage value STR+6/16; wheelock dag, damage value 13, ammo 1, 3-5/10/25

Description: "Tristram" is a beautiful, fiery redhead with a temper to match. She is a fierce freedom fighter, and the leader of this group. Though she does not trust easily, once she is convinced, she is a loyal ally.

What She Knows About Arthur: "Tristram" knows that there is some sorceress running around, called Morgan, Morgaine, Morgana, something like that. She roams the Forest Perilous, northeast of Romsey, between here and Winchester. She doesn't know

what's in Winchester, but she has heard rumors of a sarcophagus hidden in some ruins, a sarcophagus that was not there before. The ruins of and near Winchester are infested with foul creatures of corruption.

What She Knows About the Occupation Force: The stone tower on the eastern outskirts of town is the barracks/dungeon/constabulary/ torture chamber of the occupation force. The force is made up of human and minotaur warriors, and led by an arrogant swordsman of great skill. But even this swordsman is subordinate to the mysterious lieutenant of the Warrior of the Dark. No one has ever seen this lieutenant, but he/she/it lives southeast of Romsey.

Once the characters convince "Tristram" and her band that they are allies, she will offer any help she can muster. She can get the party horses, but only if they need them, as well as food, backpacks, and other mundane weapons, but no weapons. Weapons (and money) are in short supply.

When it gets down to it, "Tristram" is more concerned about the welfare of the people of Romsey, and trying to free them, than she is about some legendary king returning. Romsey's plight is more immediate, more tangible.

2. The Sign of the Beacon

This is a two-story inn, with a signboard depicting a lighthouse lit up on a rocky coast. It is owned by Smargby, a dwarf. For a trade, a traveller can get a hot meal, ale, and a private room upstairs. For an extra trade, a traveller's horse is put up in the barn attached to the inn.

At any given time, there is at least one resistance member in the common room, keeping an eye on things. Any inquiries about "Tristram" will be heard by the resistance member, who will leave the place and head to the ruined church to notify her that someone is looking for her (see "Variables").

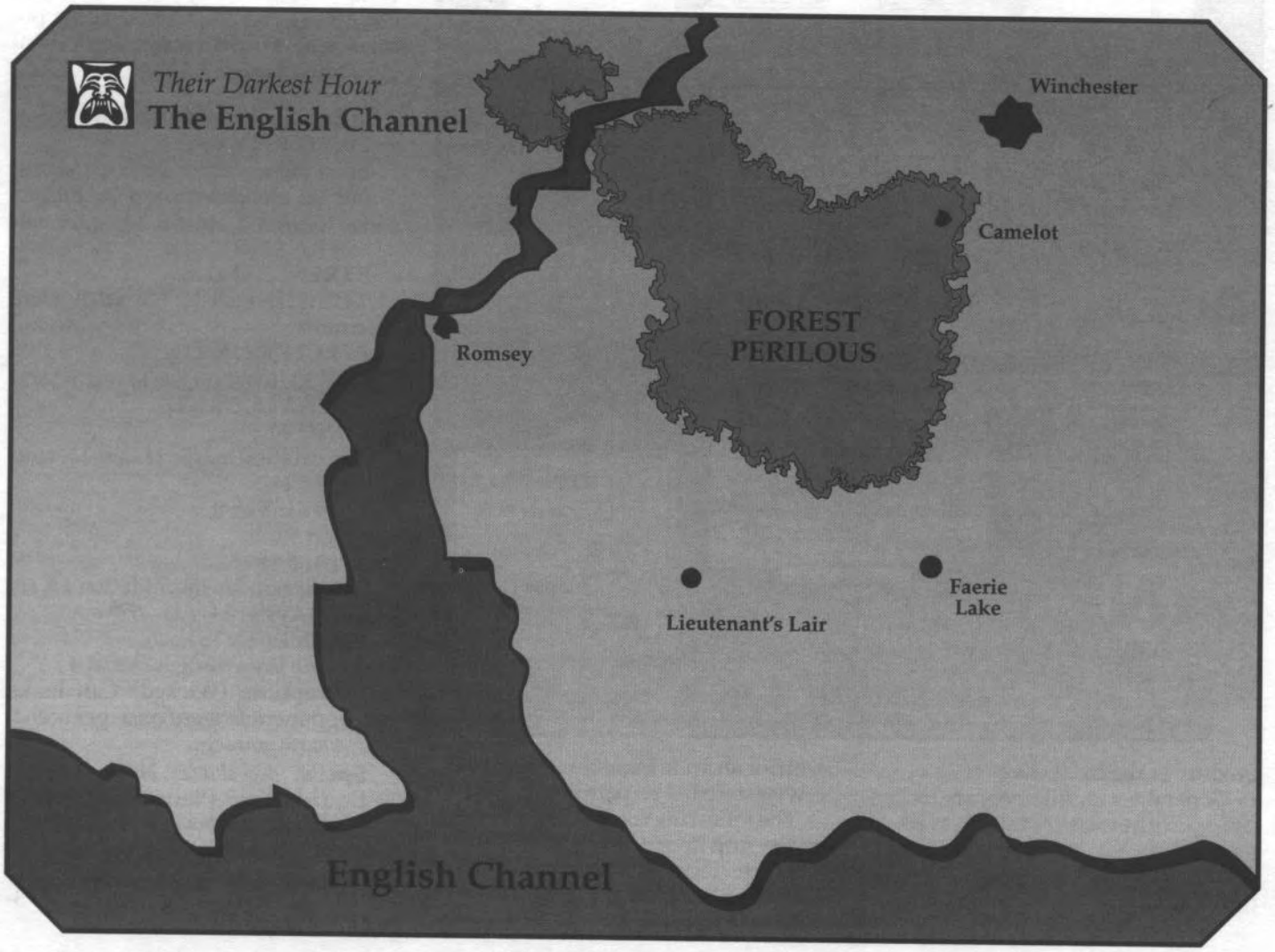
An off-duty guard patrol can be seen here, relaxing with a drink. The place usually has about 24 villagers in it, who stay and drink until the curfew.

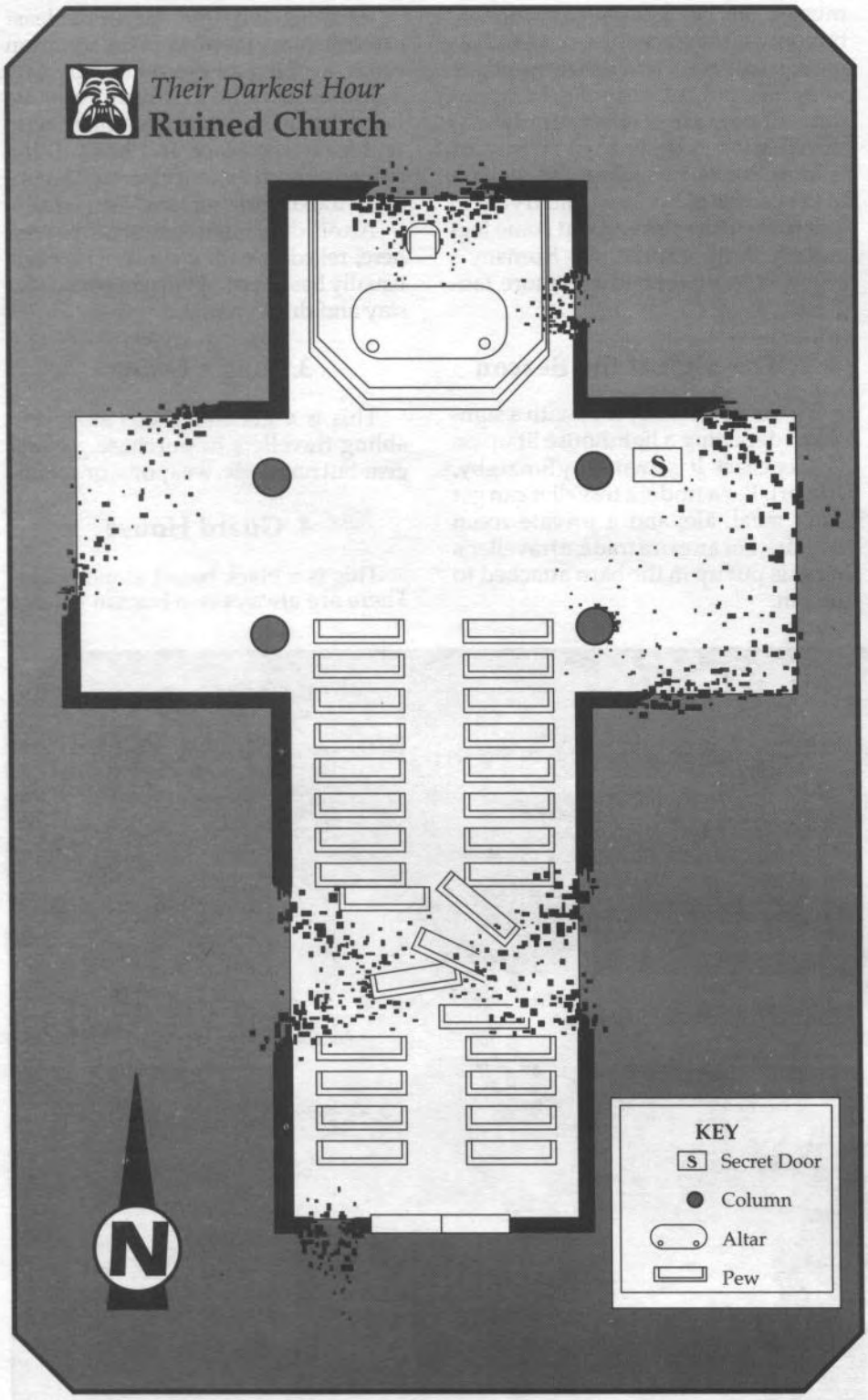
3. Krag's Goods

This is a general goods store, enabling travellers to purchase general gear but no magic, weapons, or armor.

4. Guard House

This is a black basalt stone tower. There are always two human guards





on duty at the front door.

General notes: All doors are locked unless otherwise stated, with a *lockpicking* total of 15 needed to open. All "G's" on the map are guard positions, each one manned by one human warrior and one minotaur, unless otherwise stated. (Use patrol stats above.)

The following rooms can be located on the first floor:

Entry: There is a large desk here, with a set of stairs going up. A large desk with one warrior behind it dominates this area. This warrior has the keys to this level's barracks and arsenal. A copy of the laws of Romsey are posted here.

Barracks: A dozen minotaurs are quartered here, but there's room for another dozen.

Arsenal: Contains 12 battleaxes, 24 broadswords, 24 clubs, 12 short bows, 240 arrows, 12 suits of chainmail armor.

Leader's Office: Contains a desk, chair, and a map of Romsey. Inside the desk are a set of keys to open every door and shackle in the tower. There is also a document in the desk that gives precise directions to the lieutenant's house. Another document says, "Be warned ... a foul sorceress lurks in the Forest Perilous."

Leader's Bedroom: A luxurious room with a bed, comfy chair, chest, wardrobe. The chest is locked (*lockpicking* difficulty 20), and contains 400 Ayslish trades, three healing potions, and an elfish longsword, damage value STR+8.

The Leader (Sir Mordryd)

DEXTERITY 10

Beast riding 12, dodge 12, maneuver 13, melee weapons 15, missile weapons 13, stealth 15, unarmed combat 14

STRENGTH 12

TOUGHNESS 13 (18 with plate armor)

PERCEPTION 11

Find 13, scholar (Aysle realm lore) 14, track 16, trick 17

MIND 11

Apportation magic 14, test 13, willpower 14

CHARISMA 8

Taunt 12

SPIRIT 11

Corruption 16, intimidation 15, reality (Aysle) 14

Possibilities: 16

Arcane knowledges: *Metal 4*

Corruption: (Wicked) Can make one opponent *fatigued* once per scene. Gains *harm* miracle.

Spells: *Steel shower, bullet*

Equipment: Plate mail, armor TOU+5/18; infernas sword, damage value STR+6/18; healing potion; dagger, damage value STR+3/15; light crossbow, damage value 21, range 3-10/100/200

Description: Mordryd is the leader of the occupation force. He's an excellent swordsman, but a very cruel man without a shred of honor. Mordryd can be found either in his office or bedroom.

What Mordryd Knows: The lieutenant of the Warrior of the Dark dwells southeast of Romsey. All audiences that Mordryd has had with this mysterious figure have been conducted from behind a curtain. The lieutenant's voice comes across as distorted. The lieutenant lives in a large cave set into the hills.

Mordryd knows that something odd is happening up in the ruins near Winchester, but is unsure of what it is.

The following rooms can be found on the second floor:

Prison: A large, filthy room with straw on the floor, manacles on the walls, and 12 townsfolk, here for petty misdemeanors.

Cells: These individual cells are for the more dangerous prisoners. Each lock has a *lockpicking* difficulty of 22. The guard pair that patrols the cell compound has the keys to the cells and to the prison.

Cell A: Sgt Major Oliver Abercrombe, Her Majesty's 17th Lancers. A Victorian soldier whose unit was wiped out during a reconnaissance mission in southwestern England.

Cell B: Michael DesRoches, a Core Earth grad student who is fascinated by Arthurian legend. He claims that the area northeast of Romsey was indeed Camelot. He also claims that Sir Launcelot became a monk after Arthur died. Launcelot died and was supposedly buried in a French monastery in Normandy.

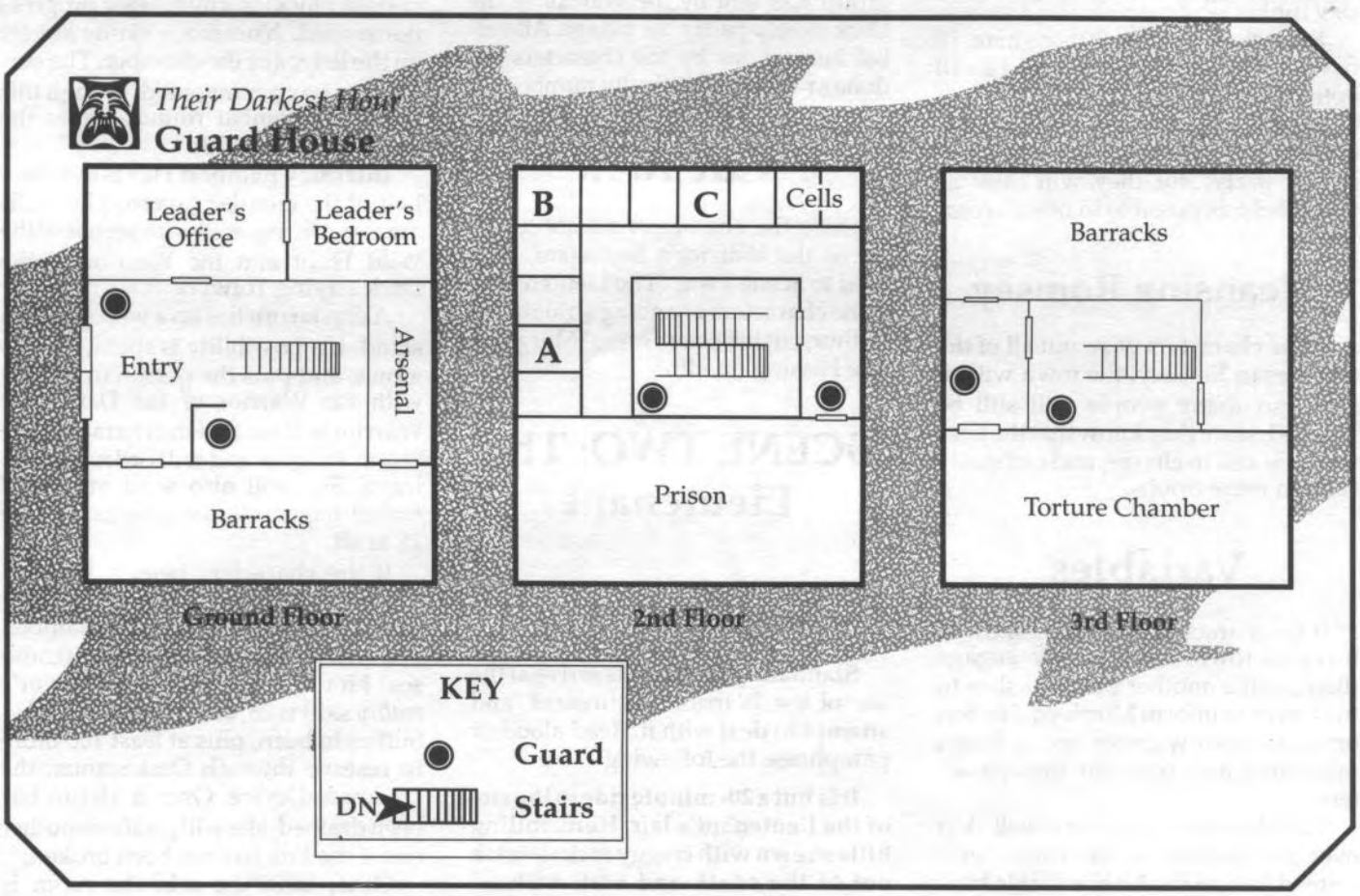
Cell C: Oisine (pronounced "oosheena"). A recently captured water spirit, held in this cell by magical wards, which break once the door is opened. As a reward, Oisine gives the party a silver chain with a medallion of solid water. If the medallion is tossed into the water, it will enlist the aid of any water spirits there to come and help the bearer. It can only be used once. Oisine knows the location of the Lady of the Lake, and the Lake itself, where Excalibur lies.

The following rooms can be found on the third floor:

Torture Chamber: This chamber contains the usual trappings of a torture chamber, a rack, iron maiden, etc. A troll tortures a prisoner in here. The prisoner is a cyberpriest.

Troll

DEX TERITY 8
Dodge 10, melee weapons 11, unarmed combat 10
STRENGTH 12
TOUGHNESS 12
PERCEPTION 7
Trick 8
MIND 7
Test 9, willpower 10
CHARISMA 6
Taunt 10
SPIRIT 5
Intimidation 9, reality (Aysle) 8



Possibilities: 12

Natural Tools: Claws, damage value STR+3/1

Equipment: Whip, damage value STR+2/14,; keys to third level rooms

Cyberpriest: Due to his injuries, the cyberpriest is practically incomprehensible. This fellow was part of the expedition that planted the fake Morgana Le Fey in the Forest Perilous. If any level of success is gained from interrogation, he says: "Morgana ... sorceress ... King Arthur ... Excalibur ... stop ... Storm Knights."

If a *cybertech repair* total of 18 is made prior to the interrogation, he says, "Morgana the sorceress wander the Forest Perilous. King Arthur lies buried near Winchester. We know not where Excalibur is. We must stop the Warrior of the Dark, for the glory of Jean Malraux, and we shall use Storm Knights for our ends."

Whatever the result, this priest is too far gone for more help from the characters. Unusually kind characters may put him up in the local inn, and pay for his tab.

Barracks: There are 30 beds here, 10 of which are presently occupied by 10 veteran warriors.

Note: None of the prisoners rescued from the tower will join the characters' party, but they will offer as much help as possible in other areas.

Cleansing Romsey

If the characters wipe out all of the enemies in Romsey, the town will be free. But many people will still be worried, since they know that the lieutenant is still in charge, and can easily send in more troops.

Variables

If the characters make a big show of being in town, three patrols engage them, while another patrol rushes to the tower to inform Mordryd. He will bring a dozen warriors and a dozen minotaurs and confront the characters.

The characters may very well skip over the liberation of the village, and instead just go for Arthur. If this happens, any army losses will be replaced within 24 hours.

Flags

A *Connection* card played means that the character knows "Tristram," and the meeting will be very easy to arrange. Still, the player must roleplay the encounter.

A *Suspicion* card played mean that the Underground in Romsey is actively suspicious of the character, and this will make negotiations difficult—not to mention that the Underground will assign three people to follow the character.

A *Romance* card played by a male Storm Knight means that he falls in love with "Tristram." If a female Knight plays it, Sir Mordryd is smitten by the woman, and will do whatever he must to in order to capture her and win her over.

A *Mistaken Identity* card means the Underground believes that the entire group was sent by the Warrior of the Dark to help pacify the village. All verbal interactions by the characters are done at +4 to the difficulty number.

Cut To ...

Once the characters decide to get rid of the Warrior's lieutenant, proceed to Scene Two, "The Lieutenant." If the characters are going straight for Arthur, cut to Scene Three, "Morgana, The Hissing Bandit."

SCENE TWO: The Lieutenant

The Situation

Standard. The Knights arrive at the lair of the Warrior's lieutenant, and attempt to deal with it. Read aloud or paraphrase the following:

It is but a 20-minute ride to the site of the lieutenant's lair. Here, rolling hills strewn with craggy rocks stretch out to the south and east, with an occasional tree to break up the monotony.

Unfortunately, the bare tree branches have bodies strung up on them like grim mobiles. There are no wildlife sounds around you, and the air is more oppressive than you have ever felt outside Orrorsh.

The bodies are of Storm Knights who tried to engage the lieutenant in the hopes of bringing him down. There are 14 bodies, including four Ayslish knights, two dwarves, an edeinos, three elves, and four Victorian soldiers. The bodies have nothing on them of any value.

A *tracking* total of 15 reveals a single, one meter wide trail of some sort, leading from the trees to the lair.

The Lair

The lair of the Warrior's lieutenant is a chill cave that reeks of death.

Audience Chamber: This is half of a circular cavern, with a heavy black curtain blocking any further progress northward. Numerous skulls are set on the ledges of the chamber. The curtain can be circumvented, though this takes one combat round due to the thickness of its folds.

Interior Chamber: This is the other half of the circular cavern. The walls are expertly painted with scenes of the Wild Hunt and the Warrior of the Dark slaying Tolwyn.

A crystal orb lies on a wrought iron stand. If a possibility is spent, the orb glows, and puts the person in contact with the Warrior of the Dark. The Warrior will see that the characters are Storm Knights and will order them to leave. She will also send an *altered fireball (improved)*, doing damage value 18 to all.

If the characters persist, she will invoke a reality storm and make it roar through the orb and into the chamber. She will choose one victim for it, and seal him in the storm. The Warrior's *reality* skill is 28, and she has 70 Possibilities to burn, plus at least 100 more in reserve through Drakacanus, the Darkness Device. Once a victim has been drained, she will go after another one if the link has not been broken.

Other than the orb, the room is empty. A *Perception* total of 15 reveals

the soft sounds of sobbing coming from the eastern passageway.

Lair Proper: This room is stacked with at least 11 dead bodies, including four cyberpriests and two Hospitallers (the rest of the party of which the cyberpriest being tortured in Romsey tower belonged to). A *find* total of 20 among those bodies discovers a note in French saying, "A and M in place, E's location uncertain."

If the characters are tracing the source of the cries, a *Perception* or *find* total of 8 reveals an eight year old boy with tattered clothing and a bruised face, hiding among the dead and crying.

If questioned, he says his name is Gareth, and his parents are among the dead. The monster who lives here, a "horrible snake-man," was saving him for dessert. Gareth says he was too afraid to leave. He also says he wants to go home to his aunt and uncle, who live in Romsey. Gareth also claims that the snake-thing left an hour ago to go do something.

Gareth is actually the Warrior's lieutenant, an Ayslish monster using a *disguise self* spell. Anyone who disbelieves the illusion (and makes a *Mind* or *willpower* total of 15) sees the boy shimmer and abruptly change into a large serpent before changing back to a boy again.

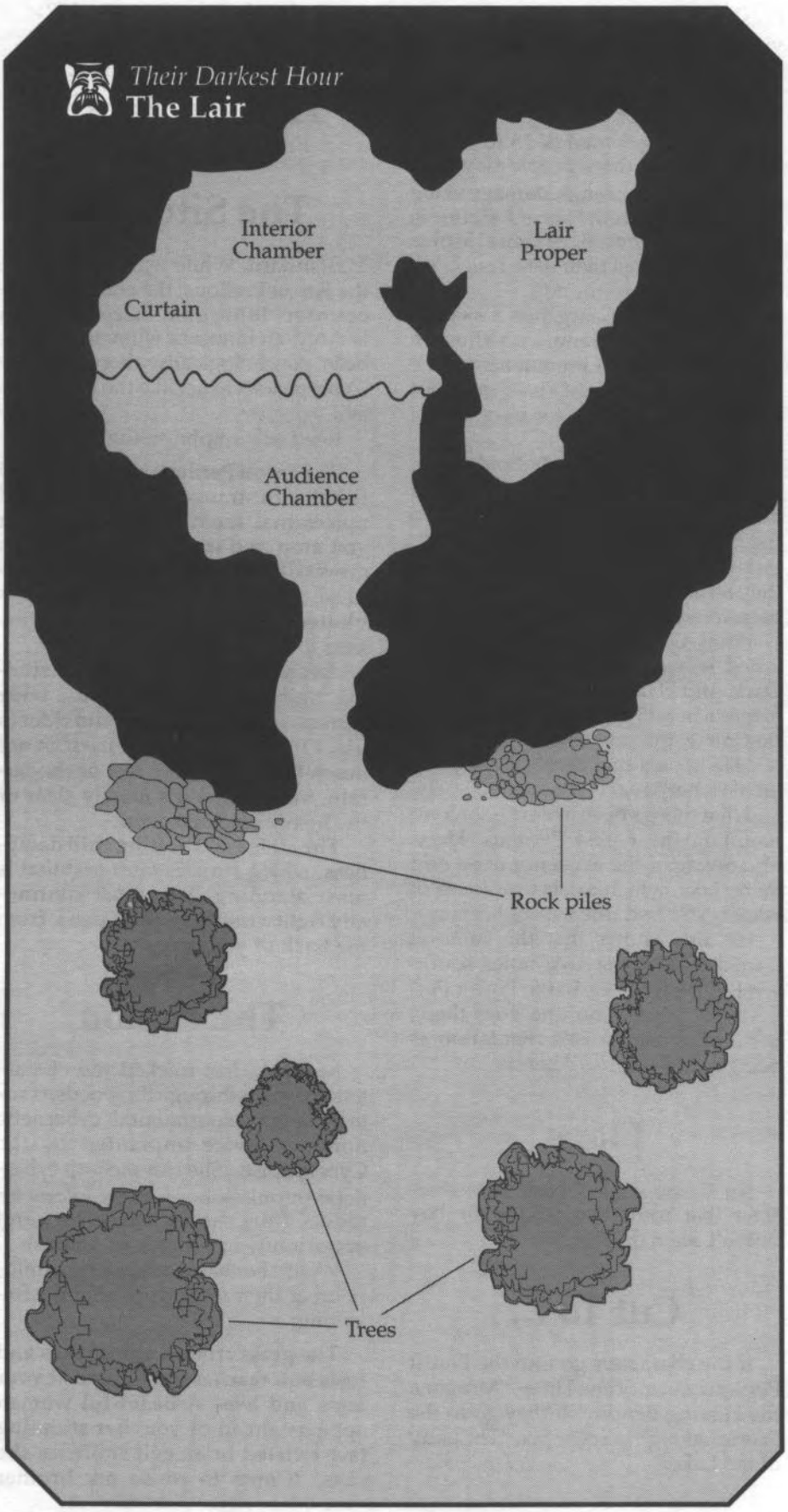
Lieutenant Gaarg

DEXTERITY 13
Dodge 15, maneuver 16, stealth 18, unarmed combat 17
STRENGTH 15
TOUGHNESS 15 (20 with scales)
PERCEPTION 10
Alteration magic 14, find 13, language 14, scholar (Aysle realm lore) 16, tracking 12, trick 13
MIND 11
Test 14, willpower 14
CHARISMA 8
Taunt 15
SPIRIT 12
Intimidation 17, reality (Aysle) 14
Possibilities: 20

Arcane Knowledges: *Darkness 7, folk 8*

Spells: *Abrasion, dark cloud, shadow bats, disguise self*

Natural Tools: Scales, armor value TOU+10/20; constriction (Gaarg can make an *unarmed combat* roll against a victim and, if successful, the victim is



crushed in the coils. Each round, the victim is automatically attacked by the Gaarg's *Strength* as he continues to constrict. The victim is helpless to do anything except try to get out, and needs a *Strength* total of 15 to escape the coils. Up to three people may be in the coils at once); fangs, damage value STR+5/20; venom, (once a victim is bitten, they take damage value 15 (plus bonuses), against their base *Toughness* for the next three rounds.

Description: Gaarg has a snake's body, eight meters long, with a human head and a pair of human arms. The head resembles that of a bald man, but it has slit-like pupils for eyes, and a pair of snake-like fangs.

Gaarg will most likely hold off on attacking if the characters believe that he is a boy. He will attack them when they least expect it, getting a free attack on them. He will do this before they return to Romsey, if the latter has been freed.

What Gaarg Knows: He is a devoted servant of the Warrior of the Dark, and is in charge of an area that extends in a 33 kilometer radius, with this lair as the central point.

He knows that there have been a lot of Cyberpapal types around lately, and that there's been a female sorcerer haunting the Forest Perilous. He is also aware of the existence of an odd faerie lake, which exists due south of Winchester and due east of his lair.

He also knows that the ruins of Camelot exist just two miles southwest of Winchester, in the Forest Perilous. Of course, no one goes there, because of the forest's reputation as being a haven for evil beasts.

Flags

An *Alertness* card reveals to the character that something about the boy doesn't seem quite right.

Cut To ...

If the characters go into the Forest Perilous, cut to Scene Three, "Morgana the Hissing Bandit." If they go to the Faerie Lake, go to Scene Six, "The Lady of the Lake."

SCENE THREE: Morgana the Hissing Bandit

The Situation

Standard. While walking through the Forest Perilous, the characters encounter Morgana, *nee* Morgana D'Arcy, an innocent woman who has been psychologically altered by the Cyberpapists to act like the legendary evil sorceress.

Read or paraphrase the following:

The Forest Perilous is a dense wood filled with strange shadows and odd noises that seem to fade whenever you stop and investigate. The trees grow tall, and even in winter the overhead cover is so thick that the sun is blotted out, yielding only a dim greyness to travellers below.

Even so, there is a narrow, winding trail through the woods, wide enough for a single horse and rider to use. Of course, the trail itself is not much better than the rest of the terrain, but at least it's mostly clear of the heavy undergrowth.

The air is a suffocating chill dampness, with a sinister taint to it that is most alarming. You must continually fight a rising sense of panic from the back of your mind.

The Action

Morgana has tracked the characters' progress through the woods, courtesy of an experimental cybernetic homing device implanted by the Cyberpapists. She can pick up cybernetic impulses in an eight kilometer radius. Thus, she has had the time and opportunity to prepare an ambush.

When the characters reach the midpoint of their forest trip, read the following:

The grass around you snakes and coils and reaches out to grab at your arms and legs. A beautiful woman appears ahead of you, her stunning face twisted in an evil smile, as she says, "Come to rouse my brother Arthur from his troubled sleep? I think not!"

The grass is animated by a *plant shackles* spell. Each character will be attacked by Morgana's total for that spell, which is 17. If the spell total beats the character's *Dexterity* or *dodge*, he is held fast by vines with a *Strength* of 20. A *Strength* total of 20 or better is required to break free.

Those that are not held by the plants will be the targets for Morgana's other spells. Her initial plan is to disable the characters and find out what they know. She is not supposed to kill them (after all, the Cyberpapists want the characters to "discover" Arthur), but her programming is not perfect. If *wounded*, she will lash out with the most potent spells she can manage.

Morgana (aka, Morgana D'Arcy)

DEXTERITY 11
Dodge 14, melee combat 13, stealth 17, unarmed combat 13
STRENGTH 10
TOUGHNESS 12 (16 with charm)
PERCEPTION 14
Alteration magic 18, divination magic 16, find 17, language 16, scholar (Cyberpapal realm lore) 16, trick 19
MIND 13
Apportation magic 15, conjuration magic 16, test 16, willpower 15
CHARISMA 12
Charm 14, taunt 15
SPIRIT 10
Intimidation 15, reality (Cyberpapacy) 15
Possibilities: 20

Arcane Knowledges: *Darkness 7, olant 3, earth 2, folk 6, earthly 2, living forces 3*

Spells: *Plant shackles, thorn staff, earth shield, pathfinder, *change to falcon, paralyzation, suggestion, lightning*

(All spells with an asterisk are a one-case contradiction for Morgana.)

Equipment: Magical amulet, armor value TOU+4/16; dagger, damage value STR+3/13; staff, damage value STR+3/13; grimoire of spells; components for all spells,; horse. Cyberware: ChipHolder 3 (with FaithChip), NeuraCal, EpiphaNeur, CyberFind (cybernetic detection device). Cyber value: 11

Variables

If the characters are inflicting too much damage on her (more than two *wounds* total), Morgana will change into a falcon and leave, hoping to return later. She will tail the party and pick another time to strike.

If the characters manage to subdue and examine her, they will find the J-Jack and the ChipHolder 3 on a *find* of 8. The ChipHolder has a FaithChip that makes her believe that she is Morgana, a DataChip which contains the entire legend of King Arthur for her mind to access, and a SpellChip with the spells listed above.

In order to snap her out of her trauma, a successful *cybertech* total of 20 must be made. This takes 30 minutes. This attempt will get her brains unscrambled. Success means she falls asleep for an hour.

When Morgana awakens, she will remember little. Her name is Morgana D'Arcy, a member of the Paris Liberté Militia, and she was set upon a group of cybernuns one month ago, by her reckoning. They overwhelmed her, and that's all she knows.

Flags

An *Alertness* card reveals a certain gleam in Morgana's eyes, as if she were wired.

Cut To ...

If the characters are continuing on to Camelot, go to Scene Four, "A More Congenial Spot."

SCENE FOUR: A More Congenial Spot

The Situation

Standard. The Storm Knights find Camelot, located near the border of Winchester and the Forest Perilous. When the party is in range, read aloud the following:

At last, the Forest Perilous is beginning to thin a bit. Rays of sunshine actually begin to cut through the overhead growth.

Ahead of you, a clearing with a series of stone ruins catches your attention. The ruins look beautiful, in a sad way, shining in the sun. Beyond the clearing, the forest resumes, but just beyond those trees you can see the spires of Winchester.

The Action

This is Camelot, or what's left of the earthly manifestation of it. It is little more now than a series of crumbling towers, jumbled stones, columns, and arches.

A successful *Perception* or *find* of 18 shows an elaborate cross lying in the grass. A successful *tracking* total of 18 shows six sets of footprints leading to "A" on the map.

However, something lurks at "B." A pack of ghouls, rummaging through the ruins, are debating whether or not to go underground, where they saw the cyberpriests go earlier. When they see the characters, they will attack them instead.

Ghouls (10)
DEXTERITY 7
Dodge 9, lock-pick 8, stealth 9, unarmed combat 10
STRENGTH 12
Lifting 14
TOUGHNESS 12
PERCEPTION 7
Find 9, tracking 8, trick (9)
MIND 6
Test 9, willpower 20
CHARISMA 6
Charm (8), persuasion (11), taunt (9)
SPIRIT 7
Intimidation 9, reality (Aysle) 8
Possibilities: 3 each
Natural Tools: Fangs, damage value STR+2/14
Note: Immune to KOs. If a *Setback* card comes up, characters flee in fear if intimidated.

If interrogated, they reveal that a few days ago, some priests with glowing eyes brought a coffin down underground. One ghoul witnessed it and told his fellows, and they have been trying to decide what to do. The priests have long since left, but there are guardians down there.

The Way Down

Section A represents a crumbled bit of Castle Camelot. Hidden behind some rubble is a wooden door. Beyond the door is a set of stairs going down.

Flags

An *Alertness* card can find either the cross or the tracks. An *Idea* card will bring to light the fact that the ghouls seemed kind of indecisive about something, or the fact that the rubble in front of the door in Section A seems out of place, as if it were put there on purpose.

Cut To ...

Once the characters enter A, cut to Scene Five, "The Once and Future King?"

SCENE FIVE: The Once and Future King?

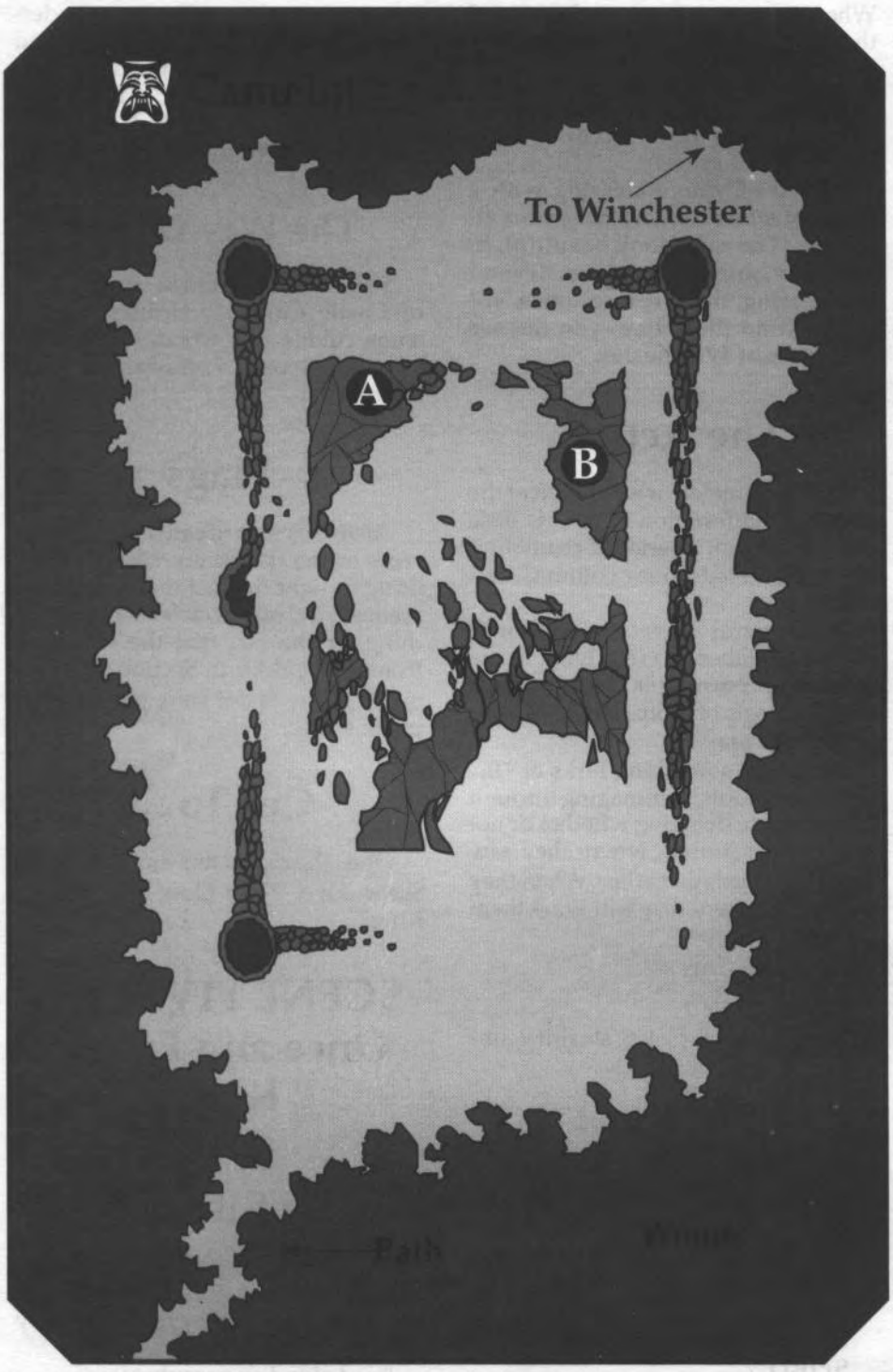
The Situation

Standard. The Knights have gone through the door, and descended into the depths, where they find the phony King Arthur.

Read aloud or paraphrase:

Beyond the door, a set of ancient stone steps spiral down into the earth. Though the darkness is enveloping, you do not feel fear.

As you reach the bottom of the stairs, you realize that you are in a vaulted, cathedral-like area. Faded murals on the wall show: 1) a boy



extracting a sword from a stone in a churchyard; 2) the boy, now a man, being crowned King; 3) the King marrying a beautiful woman; 4) a handsome knight wooing the Queen as the King rides off on a quest; 5) a sorceress battling the King; 6) a knight holding aloft a golden cup; 7) a large battle; 8) the King being buried in a coffin; and at last, 9) Excalibur thrown into a lake, where a hand covered in shimmering cloth stretches upward to catch it. This last picture is unusually detailed, showing the surrounding terrain quite clearly. Way off to the north, the spires of Camelot can be seen.

The room is vast, with many shadowy areas, most likely exits to other underground chambers. However, situated in the center of the room is a marble slab, with a stone sarcophagus of extreme age. A headstone rests at the head.

The Action

The stone has writing:

Hic jacet Arthurus, Rex quondam, Rexque futurus.

It requires a *language* total of 8 to read. It says:

Here Arthur lies, King once and King to be.

Moving the lid requires a *Strength* total of 22. All six characters may attempt it together, using the Many on One chart.

As they are doing so, however, read the following:

As the stone lid begins to scrape across the sarcophagus, a second scraping noise echoes to meet it. Through the shadows, youcan make out a dim red pinpoint of light, and the odd sound of whirring servomotors. A smell of death and decay washes over you, as a voice as cold as the grave says:

"Those who wish to free the King from Death's grip must first defend themselves from Death's blade."

A cowled individual steps out of the shadows, a scythe in his hand. Servomotors whir as cybernetic limbs flex menacingly, and LEDs flash from under the cowl.

This is a Cyberpapal gospog of the Fifth Planting, placed here by the priests in order to provide a convincing level of resistance.

Gospog of the Fifth Planting (Cyberpapal)

DEXTERITY 13
Dodge 15, flight 18, melee weapons 20, unarmed combat 20
STRENGTH 14
TOUGHNESS 30
PERCEPTION 14
Find 19, materialization 20, tracking 25, trick 16
MIND 13

Test 16
CHARISMA 12
Persuasion 16
SPIRIT 20
Faith 25, focus 21, intimidation 25
Possibilities: None
Miracles: May use all the miracles of the Cyberpapacy except *excommunication*.
Natural Tools: Wings, speed value 15
Equipment: Death scythe, damage value 25; Cybernetics: NeuraCal, BelleSee Tele-sight (+3 to *find* for distant objects), CSI LEDs, FFO NightView (+3 to *find*, plus *tracking* up to 50 meters away), True Spirit Toner, TSE Sifter (homes in on specific sounds), slashers, damage value STR+8/22. Cyber value: 15
Note: This Fifth-Planting gospog is not acting in the normal capacity of a Fifth-Planting. In essence, the characters are descending into a realm of Death, so to speak, thus the Cyberpapacy has posted a fitting guardian.

Arthur Unveiled

Once the gospog has been disposed of, and the characters get the lid off the sarcophagus, read the following:

The lid is finally gone. Inside the sarcophagus is a wooden coffin of polished English oak. The crest on the coffin is of a golden dragon, with the word 'Pendragon' emblazoned under the beast.

When the characters open the lid, read aloud the following:

The lid swings easily open, to reveal a man of regal stature. His shoulder-length hair and neatly-trimmed beard are shot with gray, and a golden circlet lies on his brow. He is clad in chain mail, with a tabard showing a charging golden dragon. His arms are crossed at his chest, and he holds a gem-encrusted longsword.

This is Arthur Figgis, now called King Arthur. The Cyberpapacy planted him here for the characters to "discover."

A legend written within the casket states that Arthur cannot be revived without the presence of Excalibur.

Examination of Arthur shows that he is breathing, but appears to be in a trance of some sort. Investigation of the sword reveals that it is *not* Excalibur. A look at the mural shows that it does not resemble the sword that was pulled from the stone.

If the characters seek to find a ChipHolder or J-Jack on Arthur, they must make a *find* total of 20. It's on the back of his neck (ChipHolder 3), under his long hair. The chips are: a FaithChip and a DataChip (about the entire Arthur legend). Yanking the chips out will do no good.

There is no way the party can make Arthur Figgis snap out of his coma. Only the stimuli of having Excalibur in his hands will do it. That is a strong post-hypnotic suggestion placed in his head by the Cyberpapists.

Transporting Arthur

Arthur can stand, and he can walk if led by the hand. He is like a robot. He will not talk, or react in any way unless Excalibur is placed in his hands.

Variables

If the gospog survives, it will tail the characters, marking each one for death by uttering the specific character's name. That character will begin to see visions of his or her past, flashed by the gospog, as the thing attacks its victim.

Flags

An *Alertness* card lets the characters know that the Fifth-Planting gospog is lurking in the shadows.

A possible *Setback* can be the untimely intervention of Morgana, if she's still alive and well.

Cut To ...

Once the characters realize that they must go to the lake, which is due south, cut to Scene Six, "The Lady of the Lake."

SCENE SIX: The Lady of the Lake

The Situation

Standard. The Knights go to the Faerie Lake, where an aquatic dragon holds the place in its terrible thrall.

Read aloud or paraphrase:

After riding south for several hours, the terrain slowly changes. Though there are still trees and grasslands, the plants have a more wholesome aspect. In fact, flowers and other beautiful plants grow in abundance, and the sense of evil over the land is lightened even further.

At last, you emerge into a glade, where a medium-sized lake of great beauty and tranquility welcomes you. The grass goes right up to the edge of the lake. The scene is picture perfect, with only a few odd looking scars on the earth to mar the beauty.

The Action

Investigating the scars and making a *Perception* or *evidence analysis* total of 12 shows that the scars were made by blasts of superheated steam.

If the characters do anything to the lake (throw rocks, scream, whatever), read the following:

Your efforts have certainly yielded results. The waters begin to boil and surge, and you sense that something grand is about to happen. A chill runs up your spines, as you realize that are witnessing some great event.

Suddenly, a great column of water shoots up, and a draconian head and sinewy neck break the surface. The dragon laughs at you, and then charges to the attack.

Draconis Aquatica
DEXTERITY 12
Swimming 14, unarmed combat 14
STRENGTH 24
TOUGHNESS 21 (31 with scales)
PERCEPTION 14
Find 15, trick 16
MIND 19
Conjuration magic 22, test of wills 20, willpower 21
CHARISMA 8
Charm 9, persuasion 11, taunt (10)
SPIRIT 8
Intimidation 14, reality (Aysle) 10
Possibilities: 24
Arcane Knowledges: *Water 5, living forces 2*
Natural Tools: Scales, armor value TOU+10/31; tail, damage value STR+3/27; steam breath, damage value 26, range 50/100/250

This dragon must be defeated before the Lady of the Lake will rise.

The Lady of the Lake

After the dragon is defeated, it sinks beneath the waves. Then, all is still. The next move is the characters'. They have to get the Lady's attention.

This can be done in several ways: The characters can drop the amulet from Oisine into the water, or they can drop King Arthur's golden circlet into the water. If the characters do either one, read the following:

The water boils again, and the very air is tingling with electricity. A column of water erupts again, but this time it's an arm, holding high a sword of great beauty and obvious power.

"Behold, Excalibur!" a woman's voice cries from everywhere and nowhere at once.

The sword is easily obtainable by anyone. If the characters threw Arthur's crown into the lake, it too, is returned.

Excalibur
Cosm: Core Earth
Possibilities: 100
Tapping Difficulty: 19
Purpose: To defend the people of Great Britain from their enemies.
Powers: When wielded in combat, a Possibility may be drawn from the shard once every six rounds without first generating a *reality* skill total. Or, the character can simply tap it in the normal way
Group Power: *Life Thread*
Restrictions: Possibilities tapped from Excalibur can only be used in battle against those who would threaten Britain, or when trying to lead those loyal to Britain.

Reunion

When Excalibur is placed in King Arthur's hands, read the following aloud:

As you slip the sword into Arthur's hands, a miraculous transformation occurs. Arthur's color returns, his breathing becomes regular, and he grips the sword tighter.

Suddenly, his eyes snap open, and he shouts: "Launcelot! We must get Launcelot! To France, now! Follow me, for it is God's will. I shall not fight nor lead without Launcelot — he who once betrayed me now seeks a chance to redeem himself! Away! To France's Normandy coast, to the monastery of Saint Michael!"

Arthur begins walking away, in the direction you came from.

What has happened is that the eternity shard Excalibur has jarred something loose in Arthur Figgis' head. Now, Arthur instinctively wants to go back to France, to the place where the Cyberpapists cast off from in their trip to Aysle.

Arthur still is in a trance, but he seems a lot more alive and animated. He still will not talk, except to repeat what he just said.

Flags

An *Idea* card will remind the characters that they have a boat docked in Romsey.

A possible *Setback* can be the appearance of Morgana, if she's still at large.

Cut To ...

When the characters head to France, cut to "Crossing the Channel" and then to Scene Seven.

SCENE SEVEN: Back to the Drawing Board

The Situation

Dramatic. Having followed Arthur back to the Cyberpapacy, the characters find the monastery of Saint Michael, where the Cyberpapists who hatched this whole scheme are headquartered.

Read aloud or paraphrase:

After surviving the harrowing sail across the channel, you are relieved to finally be on dry land again. It is the coast of France.

An old monastery lies on a rocky bluff, and King Arthur becomes very agitated, clambering up the cliffs, yelling "Launcelot! Launcelot, old friend!"

The Action

The cyberpriests are not expecting Arthur to return. Even though Arthur has a Homing device and a CyberHam radio receiver implanted inside him, they get shorted out when Arthur grips Excalibur. Back at the monastery, however, the cyberpriests simply think that Arthur's cybernetics were somehow damaged in Aysle.

When Arthur goes charging up the hill, however, he runs afoul of a group of Church Police, and eventually the cyberpriests themselves.

Church Police (13)

Reality: Cyberpapacy
DEXTERITY 10
Dodge 12, energy weapons 12, fire combat 13, melee weapons 12, unarmed combat 12
STRENGTH 9
TOUGHNESS 9 (17 with armor)
PERCEPTION 9
Find 10, first aid 10, tracking 10
MIND 9
Test of wills 10, willpower 10
CHARISMA 8
Persuasion 9, taunt 9
SPIRIT 9
Faith (Cyberpapacy) 10, intimidation 11
Additional Skills: Three at +1 adds
Possibility Potential: Some (65)
Equipment: Armor of God, armor value TOU+8/17; God Meeter, damage value 20, ammo 30, range 3-12/30/50; GodLight, damage value 24, ammo 50, range 3-10/25/40; (Both weapons are SmartGunned). Cybernetics: NeuraCal, EpiphaNeur, BelleSee Telesight (+3 to *find* at range), CSI EyekillMkIV (+3 bonus to hit with SmartGun-linked weapon), CyberHam receiver, Homer, Throat Mike, MB Charger 1 (+1 to DEX for three minutes), MB Blocker (ignore K results, three less shock points per hit). Cyber value: 18

Cyberpriests (8)

Reality: Cyberpapacy
DEXTERITY 8
Dodge 10, fire combat 10, melee weapons 10
STRENGTH 8
TOUGHNESS 9 (14 with armor)
PERCEPTION 11
Cyberdeck ops 14, find 12, scholar (Avignon Doctrine) 11, trick 12
MIND 10
Cybertech 12, science (computers) 12, test 12, willpower 13
CHARISMA 8
Charm 11, persuasion 11, taunt 11
SPIRIT 12
Faith 15, focus 14 (16 with crucifix), intimidation 15
Additional Skills: Three at +1 adds
Possibility Potential: Some (40)
Equipment: HallowMesh, armor value TOU+5/14; God Meeter damage value 20, ammo 30, range 3-12/30/50; power dagger, damage value STR+5/13; crucifix. Cyberware: NeuraCal, EpiphaNeur, BelleView 20-20 (+2 to PER skills based on sight), CSI LEDs, CyberHam Receiver, TSE LeMotion (+3 to *find* when detecting movement), Throat Mike, Homer, DATAS Boomer, MB Charger 1 (+1 DEX for three minutes), ChipHolder 3. Cyber value: 21

The compound is commanded by a Pere Georges, a high-ranking Jazuit who came up with the original plan.

Pere Georges

DEXTERITY 10
Dodge 12, fire combat 12, unarmed combat 13
STRENGTH 9
TOUGHNESS 10 (15 with armor)
PERCEPTION 12
Cyberdeck ops 14, find 14, scholar (religion) 15, scholar (Arthurian legend) 15, trick 14
MIND 12
Test 14, willpower 14
CHARISMA 10
Charm 13, persuasion 16, taunt 12
SPIRIT 13
Faith 15, focus 15 (17 with crucifix), intimidation 16, reality (Cyberpapacy) 15
Possibilities: 12

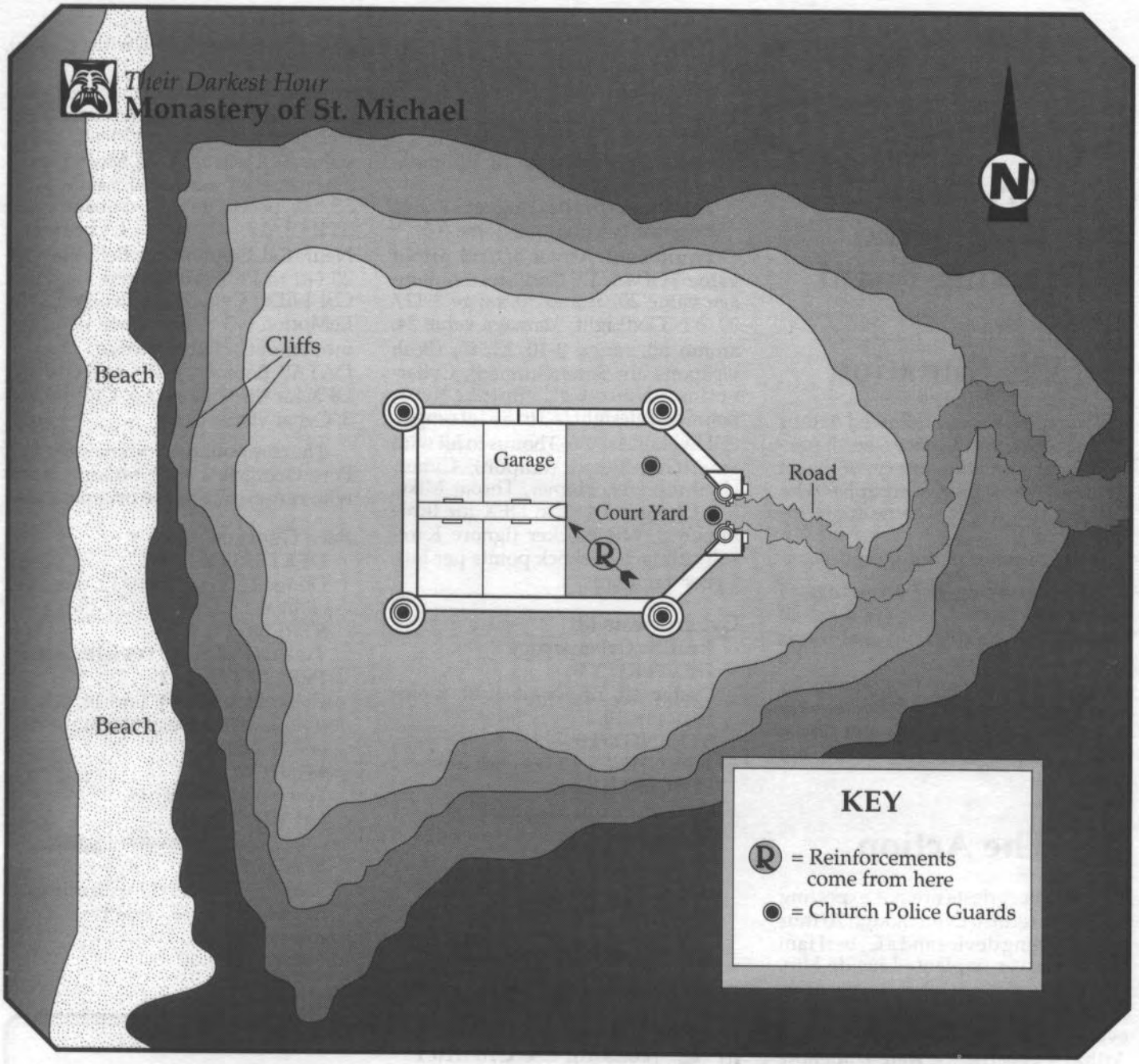
Crossing the Channel

The reality storm in the Channel has a *Strength* of 23, manifesting itself as a roiling black wall of clouds with red and blue bolts of lightning shot through it.

Everyone must roll using their *reality* skill. If the roll is passed, fine. If the roll is failed, consult the Storm Results Table and look up the number by which the character failed. Only the loss of Possibilities and the "Transform" result are important.

A character who is Transformed loses all Possibilities but gains a Neural Jack and cyberware on a roll of the die (rerolling 10s and 20s): 1-12=1 item; 13-19=2 items; 20+=3 items.

Once the rolls are done, cut to Scene Seven, "Back to the Drawing Board."



Equipment: HallowMesh, armor value TOU+5/15; God Meeter, damage value 20, ammo 30, range 3-12/30/50; Marseilles Hermes cyberdeck. Cyberware: NeuraCal, EpiphaNeur, BelleView 20-20 (+2 to PER skills based on sight), Slikslashers, damage value STR+6/15, Kreelar Tendons. Cyber value: 13

The Attack

There are seven Church Police patrolling the monastery grounds. When the Church Police sight Arthur, they will call out an alert at the monastery, bringing four cyberpriests to ascertain the nature of the threat and coordinate the defense. Once it is clear that Arthur has returned to the monastery, Pere George and the rest of the cyberpriests come out.

Read aloud or paraphrase:

You see Arthur, waving Excalibur and calling out, "Launcelot! Where are you, old friend?"

As if in answer, a high-ranking Cyberpapist official in black hassock, surrounded by four cyberpriests and six Church Police, emerges from the monastery. The black-robed official, his face contorted with anger, screams: *"Non! NON!* Idiot! Imbecile! Back! Go back to England, you fool!"

Clutching his head, Arthur collapses to the ground, dropping Excalibur in the process. The black-robed official eyes the eternity shard greedily, and it is clear he knows what it is. "Kill the intruders!" he screams to his staff. "Kill them all, and get me that shard!"

Note that the above narration means that it is quite possible for the characters to sneak up to the monastery, take on some of the Church Police, and then have Arthur revealed for who he is, especially since Arthur will not be fighting. Once he sets foot in the compound, he begins calling for Launcelot, thereby blowing any element of surprise.

Endgame

If Georges manages to get Excalibur, he will dash off with it. The monastery has a Peugeot 105 HoverCar. If he makes it to that, the characters have one round in which to let loose with gunfire, or whatever.

If Georges and the vehicle survive that round, he's out of there and has snagged an eternity shard.

When the battle is over, Arthur Figgis' sanity has returned, and he remembers who he is. His story is the same as Morgana's in that he was captured alive by cyberpriests, and cannot remember anything else.

If the characters regain Excalibur at the end, read the following aloud:

So it was all a hoax. Arthur has not returned after all. Sifting through the records at the monastery, you find that this was all a plot by the Cyberpapacy to divide Aysle and weaken the Warrior of the Dark. The cyberpriests actually created their own Arthur, using an innocent victim, and set him in a coffin in the ruins of Camelot.

Though the hoax was a nasty turn of events, at the very least, you managed to get Excalibur. As you ponder your futures, you cannot help but wonder what to do with this famed sword. Who among you, if any, should wield it?

Prompt the party for an answer. What do they do with the sword? The ideal answer is to give it back to the Lady of the Lake, in hopes that the real Arthur will someday be along to claim it.

If a character suggests the above course of action, he or she should get some special recognition for roleplaying that moment above and beyond the call of duty, even if the suggestion is not followed.

Awards

Each Storm Knight gets four Possibilities.

If Excalibur was found and not taken by the Jazuit, award each character an extra two Possibilities.

If the group returned Excalibur to the Lady of the Lake, award them all an extra three Possibilities.

If the group did not return it, award three Possibilities to any of those who argued to give back the sword to the Lady.

If Pere Georges was neutralized, award each character one extra Possibility.

Gamemaster Corner

(Hints and tips for gamemastering *Torg*)

World Laws

If the axioms are the hard, cold facts of the realms of *Torg*, then the world laws are the flavor. They are the rules under which those who operate in the realm must work under, constructed by the Darkness Device to enforce its image of that reality.

Storm Knights who enter a realm carry their own world laws with them, and may make use of some of them (see "Active and Passive," below). They are also acted upon by the world laws of the realm they are in, unless they create a reality bubble. That means an Ayslish character going into the Nile Empire may feel a desire to keep things moving due to the Law of Drama.

Some world laws can be used like tools. A Nile character adventuring in Nippon can take advantage of the Law of Action and spend two Possibilities on actions. However, since only his reality supports this and not that of the land he is in, it is a one-case contradiction. (The exception to this rule is the SpaceGods' realm—one of their world laws allows characters to use their world laws within Akasha without fear of contradiction.)

There is no such thing as a four-case contradiction when using world laws. An Ayslish character in the Nile could shoot a Cyberpapal weapon — but he could not call upon a Cyberpapal world law.

Active and Passive World Laws

Active

AKASHA
The Way of Zinatt
AYSLE
The Law of Honor
The Law of Corruption
CORE EARTH
The Law of Glory
CYBERPAPACY
The Law of Heretical Magic
The Law of Suspicion
LAND BELOW/LAND ABOVE
The Law of Savagery
The Law of Action
LIVING LAND
None
NILE EMPIRE
The Law of Action
The Law of Morality
NIPPON TECH
The Law of Intrigue
ORRORSH
The Power of Fear (Horrors only)
THARKOLD
The Law of Ferocity
The Law of Pain
The Law of Domination
TZ'RAVOK
The Law of Transcendence

Passive

AKASHA
The Law of Religious Compatibility
The Law of Acceptance
AYSLE
The Law of Observation
The Law of Magic
CORE EARTH
The Law of Prodigy
The Law of Hope
CYBERPAPACY
The Law of the One True God
The Law of Ordeal
LAND BELOW/LAND ABOVE
The Law of Wonders
THE LIVING LAND
The Deep Mist
Lanala's Love of Life
The Law of Lost Valuables
NILE EMPIRE
The Law of Drama
NIPPON TECH
The Law of Profit
The Law of Vengeance
ORRORSH
The Power of Corruption
The Law of Eternal Corruption
THARKOLD
None
TZ'RAVOK
The Law of the Most Real
The Law of Survival of the Fittest

Active and Passive

World laws can be broken down into two broad categories: active and passive. Active world laws are those you act upon; passive world laws react to you. Active world laws are those that provide skill bonuses or other concrete results; passive world laws affect the environment more than the character himself.

A character can use the active world laws of his realm in other realms, risking disconnection. He cannot make use of the passive world laws of his realm. A Nile character cannot cause the action around him to move faster using the Law of Drama when in another realm. A Living Land character cannot cause the Deep Mist to materialize in Aysle by invoking this world law.

To sum up, a Storm Knight from the Cyberpapacy goes into Nippon Tech. This means he is subject to the active and passive world laws of Nippon, unless he puts up a reality bubble. He can make use of the active Nippon laws the same way he could use any other Nippon tool, with a one-case contradiction. He can also make use of the active world laws of the Cyberpapacy, also with a one-case contradiction.

For a comprehensive list of world laws and their effects, see *Infiniverse Update, Volume II* or the individual sourcebooks.

INFINIVERSE™
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