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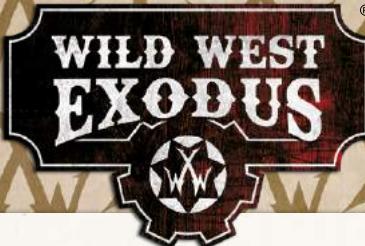
WILD WEST EXODUS



THE RULES

DYSTOPIAN AGE™

v3.02



Version Number 3.02

WELCOME TO THE DYSTOPIAN AGE!

Welcome to Warcradle Studio's Wild West Exodus (often referred to simply as WWX). An exciting and fast-paced tabletop miniatures game; Wild West Exodus will immerse you into the darkness of the weird west, a world far more sinister than the one in our history books. For thousands of years the progress of humanity has been influenced by clandestine forces who seek to reshape the world for their own purposes. Whether this interference has taken the form of corruption or influence it has plunged the world into a terrifying new age of arcane science and heroic gunfighting set against the backdrop of a conflict that has been waged for millennia!

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For more information on Wild West Exodus & Warcradle Studios visit:

www.wildwestexodus.com | www.warcradle.com



WARCRADLE[®]
STUDIOS

Third Edition Lead Chris Pond

Managing Director Richard Lawford

Art Direction Roberto Cirillo

Rules Development	Background & Setting	Art & Design	Miniatures & Terrain
Stuart Mackaness	Stuart Mackaness	Jon Cartwright	Brandon Beren
Jim Radford	Sarah Cawkwell	James Ginn	Curtis Scuffins
Daren Mcaninch	Craig Gallant	Michael Watson	Rebecca Holley
	Sam Bevan -Searing	Johnny Morrow	

Additional Contributions by Sascha Haag, Darren Hay, Matthew Parker, Mike Pierce, Brian Powell, David Shoulder, Nate Wigton and Fred Williams Jr.

Special Contributions by Eduard Reed, Molly Crouchman
and the team at Warcradle Manufacturing.

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GAME OVERVIEW

In WWX, two players take control of blazing gunfighters, supernatural warriors, mighty machines and devious commanders and pit them against each other in a thrilling encounter across the frontier and beyond. The player who destroys all of their opponent's Models or achieves their adventure objectives wins the game!

This book provides all the rules and background you need to start playing in the world of Wild West Exodus. Whatever your experience level, you'll quickly be leading your chosen Force onto the field of battle to dominate your foes. Exploring Wild West Exodus is a hugely rewarding experience where hobbyists collect and paint finely detailed Warcradle Studios miniatures representing the denizens of this epic dark fantasy world. You will require miniatures to represent each member of each Unit in your Force. Many people find collecting, building and painting the miniatures to be as important as actually playing the game.

These miniatures are available from all good retailers as well as from www.wildwestexodus.com.





GLOSSARY OF TERMS

ADVENTURE: In Wild West Exodus, an Adventure is the scenario which determines the specifics of the game you will play. The Adventure is randomly generated by players at the beginning of each game or by the tournament organiser in competitive play. This suggests how many Points the player gets to spend on Units for their Force. Once Forces have been selected, players then consult the Adventure to determine the size of the Play Area as well as other variables, including objectives for winning, such as conditions of victory, deployment and the terrain pieces that will be placed. Unless otherwise noted on the Adventure scenario, games last for five rounds and are played on a 48" x 48" Play Area.

FORCES, POSSES, DETACHMENTS AND UNITS: In Wild West Exodus a Force consists of one or more Posses or Detachments. For more details on how to build a Force refer to the Faction Handbooks found on the Wild West Exodus Website.

BASE CONTACT: This means that the Model in question must have their base physically touching something (usually a template or terrain piece). Not all of the base of the Model must be within that area, only the edge needs to be in contact.

BENEFITS & PENALTIES: Some Units have abilities that can grant other Units a bonus or penalty whilst it is within a certain range. Even if only part of a multiple Model Unit is within the specified range, the whole Unit will still gain the

benefit or penalty granted by the ability. Similarly, if the entire Unit is no longer within range of the ability, it immediately loses its effect (unless otherwise described in the ability's rules).

DICE - D10: Wild West Exodus uses ten-sided dice (abbreviated to d10). Each side on a d10 has an increasingly high value ranging from Ace (or One) to Ten. If a rule requires you to roll a d5, roll a d10 and round up to the nearest even number before halving the total (see *Rounding Up p.4*). If Dice are Cancelled it means they cannot be rolled or modified and instead are removed from the Action. If an Action has no Dice it automatically fails.

ENGAGED: Units that are within the Melee range of an enemy Model or have an enemy Model in their Melee range are considered to be Engaged. If your Unit contains Models that are Engaged, then the Unit itself is considered to be Engaged. If Models in either Engaged Unit make a Move Action away from the Melee range of an Engaged enemy Model, then that enemy Model may make a Backstab Reaction (see *Reactions p.30*). Any Model in an Engaged Unit that does not have an enemy Model in range of a Melee Weapon must move towards the closest enemy Model in step one of the Resolution Phase. (See *Resolution Phase p.18*)

FRIENDLY FIRE: Friendly Models cannot be nominated as the Initial Target of an attack. Should the target Scatter, be redirected, or use a template that touches friendly Models, the hits and Grit



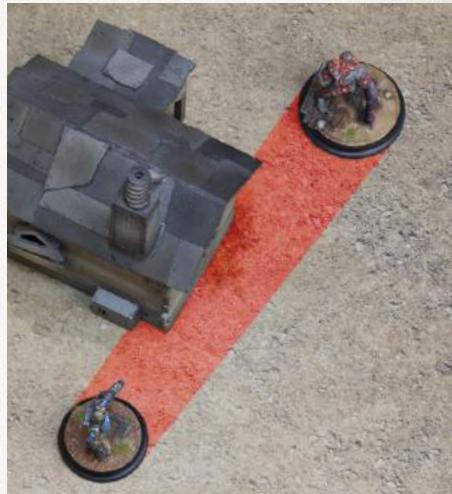
checks are resolved and cause Wounds in exactly the same way as though they were against an enemy Model. A player may not choose to fail a Combat Action once the roll to hit has been made and so cannot avoid hitting their own Models.

INITIAL TARGET: When a Model makes an attack against an enemy Unit, an Initial Target must be declared. The Initial Target is always the closest Model in the targeted Unit to the Model making the Action.

LINE OF SIGHT: Unless specified otherwise, all Models have a 360-degree Line of Sight. It can be imagined they can turn to face their enemy as required. For the purposes of determining Line of Sight, a Model can see through other Models in its Unit but not through any other Models or terrain that is larger than the Size of either the Attacker or the Initial Target.

Line of Sight can be drawn from/to a Model from any part of its base horizontally, to a point vertically up to its Base Size in height. This prevents modelling for advantage, or being restricted from adding height through basing or conversion and makes a Model's interaction with Terrain more straightforward. When measuring Line of Sight, trace an imaginary line from the two visible outermost points of the bases of the two Models that Line of Sight is being checked for. When drawing Line of Sight, the Initial Target is always the closest Model in the target Unit. Any Model or piece of Terrain that lies within this corridor should be considered providing an Obscured effect.

Remember if you cannot draw Line of Sight to any part of a Model's base, then that Model cannot be made the Initial Target of an attack.



MAJORITY: When determining the majority of something, if there is a tie when counting the number of applicable Models, the worst outcome for the player completing the Action is always applied.

MEASURING: In WWX measurements are made in inches ("). You are allowed to measure any distance in the Play Area at any time. Measuring is always between the closest points of the Models or Units you're measuring to and from. A Model's base is included when measuring distances, it's not just there to help the Model stand up! You may measure how far weapons can Shoot, how far your opponent's weapons can Shoot, the distance from Terrain pieces, Line of Sight, Charge distances and anything else you can think of. After all, people in the Exodus world have access to all



manner of maps, charts, range-finders, binoculars and other more esoteric measuring devices.

Weapons with a range of “-” have a range of base contact only. If a Model’s weapon uses a template then the template must be placed in contact with the base when being fired.

PATH OF LEAST RESISTANCE: Bases of Models cannot overlap, but on occasion it may be impossible to place a Model without doing just that. To resolve this, Models affected may be moved outside of their Activation but only by the minimum amount necessary to prevent bases from overlapping. You must ensure that the minimum number of Models are moved to accommodate this process.

PLACING AND REPLACING MODELS: Occasionally Models are replaced or placed in a new location as a result of a rule or other interaction. Placing or Replacing a Model is not considered movement and so does not trigger a Backstab Reaction or other effect. There must be room for the Model’s base in the location in the Play Area that the Model is placed. A Model cannot be placed in impassable terrain or with its base overlapping obstacles, buildings or another Model’s base. You must maintain Unit Coherency if possible when Placing. When replacing a Model, the centre of the new Model’s base must be in the same position as the centre of the Model it has replaced (using the Path of Least Resistance in cases where this is not normally possible).

PLAY AREA: Wild West Exodus can be played on any flat surface. Often players may want to use a gaming mat or play on a specially designed gaming table so that their battles can take place in an area that matches the look of their miniatures. Some Adventure scenarios may specify a Play Area. Experienced players should feel free to experiment with different Play Area sizes regardless of the scenario played. Models cannot leave the Play Area unless the Adventure you are playing has specific rules to cover it.

POINTS: Players use Points to assemble their Force for an Adventure. Refer to the Faction Handbook to determine how to build your Force.

RE-ROLLING DICE: Some rules give you the ability to re-roll one or more dice. This usually means you get to roll the die for a Check again. However, the same die cannot be re-rolled more than once.

ROUNDING UP: At times in the game you may be required to do something with half a given value, such as half of your Force, half of the elements in a Posse or Detachment or half the range of a weapon. When dealing with an even number this is a straightforward process. Where you have an odd number or value you should always round the number upwards to its nearest even value before halving. *Example, if you need half of seven, first round up to eight and halve it to get four.*

SCATTER: Rather than effects, weapons, and Units always arriving on target or as intended, occasionally the chaos and vagaries of conflict will cause things to



Scatter to an unintended position. When a rule calls for Scatter, the process for determining direction is as follows. Roll a d10 and the target point moves in the direction indicated by the upwards facing point of the die. The distance will be determined by the rule or quality requiring Scatter.

SIZE: Models are designed to be mounted on specific bases. Bases are usually round and the Size (**also called Base Size**) is indicated on the Unit Card as 1, 2, 3, 4 or 5. Size is important for working out intervening terrain (see *Shoot (Combat Action) p.25, Wounded, Destroyed and Removed from Play p.6 and Terrain p.34 sections for more details*).

A visual reference guide can be found online at wildwestexodus.com

STADIUM BASES: Some Models are mounted on Stadium Bases instead of the regular round bases. The width of these oval shaped bases is still the same as the round base Sizes but they are elongated along their length. They are referred to as Stadium bases and appear as 2S, 3S, or 4S. For rules purposes where reference is made to a round base it can be considered to apply to the Stadium equivalent. There are additional rules that specifically only apply to Model's on Stadium bases. These Units can either move in a straight line directly forwards as normal or they can make a turn using the Turning Template (see *Turning Template below*). A Unit on a Stadium Base can also move in a straight line backwards but it counts as being on Uneven Ground when it does so.

A Stadium Based Unit does not turn using the Turning Template when making a Free Run Action. Instead, it moves in the same manner as a regular round base.

TRAITS: Traits are a series of words that define every Unit in the game. Traits are expressed in special rules and Force building as a capitalised word. For example, a Unit for the Outlaws Faction with the Tainted Trait would be referred to as an OUTLAWS TAINTED Unit. In and of themselves a Trait has no effect on the game, however they are the trigger for certain special rules and Actions. Traits are also key for selecting Units for your Force and for identifying individual Units for scoring victory points. Example traits might include the Unit's Faction, their Unit type, their species, gender, rank and whether they are mounted or can fly.

TURNING TEMPLATE: Stadium based Models use the Turning Template whenever they want to turn during Move Actions. The small 'pips' around the edge of a Turning Template are called Travel Points and are spaced 1" apart.

The Turning Template is placed at the apex of the front of the Model, called the Turning Point, and then lined up with a Travel Point. The outside edge of the first segment of the Turning Template must be aligned to be parallel to the sides of the Model that wishes to turn. The Model is advanced 1" around the Turning Template so that the Turning Point is lined up with the next Navigation Point. The sides of the base must always be aligned to be parallel to the outside edge of the segment of template Each



advance reduces the remaining distance the Model may be moved by 1". A Model can always Turn less than the angle between two Travel Points but will still reduce its remaining distance by 1".



WITHIN: If a rule refers to a Model being 'Within' a certain distance to a point in the Play Area, then a part of that Model's base must be within the distance given.

Example: Within 3" means that part of that Model's base must be within 3" of the target.

WOUNDED, DESTROYED & REMOVED

FROM PLAY: If a Model suffers one or more Wounds the Model is Destroyed and Removed from Play. Certain rules and interactions applied to a Model may refer to removing a Model from play or that a Model is Destroyed. In these cases, the Model is not considered to have been Wounded, so any rules that might have applied to it, cannot do so. Once Wounded, a Model will always be immediately Destroyed and then Removed from Play unless an in-game effect or rule indicates otherwise. Models that are Removed from Play are literally removed from the Play Area and take no further part in the Adventure unless otherwise specified.





BUILDING A FORCE

The smallest grouping of Models on the Play Area is called a Unit. Units can be either a single Model or multiple Models, depending on what kind of Unit you have included in your Force. All Units must be deployed and finish any Action taken as a single group of Models.

Units of more than one Model behave as a group. When they are Activated, they all must take the same Actions. However, when attacking, they may declare those attacks against different target Models in the same targeted Units. If possible each Action must be attempted by every Model in the Unit before taking another Action.

BUILDING A FORCE

1. Agree a Point Limit.
2. Choose a Faction.
3. Choose a Posse or Detachment.
4. Add further Units and / or upgrades to a Posse or Detachment if desired.
5. Repeat 3 & 4 until you run out of Points.

POINT LIMIT: Both players agree on a maximum number of Points for the upcoming game. While both players will have the same Point Limit in the Common Adventures found in this rulebook, this does not always have to be the case with other kinds of Adventure.

FACTION CHOICE: Players must choose a Faction for their Force. Their Faction will be one of the eight Factions found in this book. Any Posse or Detachments included in your Force must have the Trait of the chosen Faction.



HANDBOOK: The Units available to a Force can be found in its Faction Handbook. Each Faction Handbook is available separately from the Wild West Exodus website, along with Unit Cards.

POSSES OR DETACHMENTS: Each Force must include one or more Posse or Detachments. A Posse or Detachment is a group of Units that are always led by a Boss or Commander. There are a number of Posse or Detachments available to every Faction and each will have a theme or other distinguishing characteristic. The most common Posse or Detachment will have the name of your Faction in its title such as a Lawmen Posse or Union Detachment. Other less common Posse or Detachments provide additional restrictions on what Units can or cannot be included, but reward such thematic Force building with bonuses and additional abilities.

UNIQUE: Each Unit that has the Unique trait may only be included once in your force.



ANATOMY OF A UNIT CARD

Every Unit in Wild West Exodus has a Unit Card like the one shown here. There are a number of elements to the Unit Card which need a little explanation.

In Wild West Exodus, each Model possesses the following Attributes, which represent in numerical terms its physical and mental strengths. **Important: An Attribute can never be reduced below 1.**

Q - QUICK: This Attribute indicates the distance, in inches, the Model may travel in a single Move Action. Quick Checks may be required to avoid being rammed by rampaging beasts or to leap a collapsing bridge over a ravine.

L - LIMIT: Each Unit in the game has a Limit Attribute. When Activated, a Unit may take a number of Actions up to their Limit rating. Free Actions are in addition to the number shown for the Limit Attribute.

F - FIGHT: This represents the Model's prowess in close quarter fighting and

reflects their natural reflexes as well as their skill with various weapons from axes, knives and swords all the way up to huge buzz saws, massive hammers or wickedly sharp teeth and claws.

M - MIND: This Attribute represents the Model's strength of will, determination and self-control. It is the means by which the malign influence of fell powers can be mastered or resisted.

A - AIM: This is used for shooting with Ranged Weapons or throwing objects. Aim represents the Model's accuracy and skill with hitting a target at distance with weapons such as pistols, crossbows, or acidic spit.

G - GRIT: Grit reflects the armour, constitution and any supernatural resistances that the Model may possess, enabling them to shrug off a successful hit against them. Should the Model suffer a hit from an attack, it must make a Grit Check. If the Check is failed, the Model is considered Wounded and removed from play as a casualty.

Special Rules that apply to this Unit.

Unit name.

Unit Traits.

Unit Attributes.

Fortune.

Weapon type.

This weapon has an additional quality if a Critical Success is rolled to hit.

This Unit is unique.



The Unit Base Size.

The number of Models in the Unit.

Additional Special Rules specific to this Unit.

These are the Factions this Unit is affiliated to.

Here it shows a Ranged Weapon.

The weapon's range.

The Rate of Attack for that weapon.

The Piercing Value of the weapon.



ATTRIBUTE CHECKS: TARGET OF TEN

In WWX all Checks are taken against a target number of TEN (10). Doubtless there are a range of modifiers that will come into play, but at its heart, whenever a Check is called for it will invariably require a d10 to be rolled and your relevant Attribute to be added to the result. If the total score is TEN or higher, the Check was successfully passed. Should the total be less than TEN, all manner of misfortune awaits the Unit in question...



CRITICAL SUCCESS! When making a Check, a roll of a 10 before modifiers is always considered a success regardless of any penalties. No Unit Common or Special Rule, Ability or Effect can force a Critical Success to be re-rolled. Furthermore, rolling a Critical

Success may trigger some additional effects on certain weapons or rules which will be clearly stated on the weapon profile on your Unit Card.



CRITICAL FAILURE! When making a Check, a natural roll of a 1 before modifiers is always considered a failure regardless of any bonuses. No Unit Common or Special Rule, Ability or Effect can force a Critical Failure to be re-rolled. *Rules that use general terms such as "This Unit may re-roll any failed Combat checks" for example, never allow that Unit to re-roll a Critical Fail.* Furthermore, rolling a Critical Failure may trigger some additional effects on certain weapons or rules which will be clearly stated on the weapon profile or under a Special Rule.





UNITS

BOSS UNITS: Bosses in the world of Wild West Exodus come in all shapes and sizes and are the heroic (or devious) leaders of a Force. From the bestial Ghost Wolf of the Warrior Nation to the innocent looking Nino de Oro from the Hex, you never know what you might find yourself up against.

A Boss usually has the following Special Rules; Largesse, Quick and the Dead, Target Priority and Mettle. See *Special Rules* (p.12)

COMMANDER UNITS: Commanders are the veteran combatants and leaders of a Detachment.

Commanders can lead from the front or retain a good view of the battlefield from a strategically significant vantage point. Either way they direct and inspire their troops to greatness and are usually the veteran combatants and leaders of a Force.

Commanders provide certain benefits or additional abilities to the Units under their command. A Commander usually has the following Special Rules; Command, Quick and the Dead, Target Priority and Mettle. See *Special Rules* (p.12)

FACE UNITS: These are friends or paid henchmen who support a Boss. Faces are individuals with their own stories and motivations. Face Units usually have the following Special Rules; Teamwork, Quick and the Dead, Target Priority and Mettle. See *Special Rules* (p.12)

SPECIALIST UNITS: These are officers, experienced combatants or soldiers with specific or unusual skill or equipment. Adding Specialists to your Force gives you access to some powerful rules and abilities.

If a Troops or Hands Unit ends its Activation within 3" of a Specialist Unit, the Specialist Unit may immediately Activate as a Triggered Activation. See *Triggered Activation* (p.19) Specialist Units usually have the Target Priority Special Rule. See *Special Rules* (p.12)

TROOPS, HANDS AND SUPPORT UNITS: These Units make up the bulk of a Posse or Detachment. Usually organised into Units of multiple Models, they are amongst the hardest working Units in a Force.

Troops, Hands & Support Units can spend Fortune though do not usually generate it. See *Fortune* (p.13)

UNIT COHERENCY: If a Unit consists of two or more Models then they must follow the rules of Unit Coherency. At the start of an Action, all Models within such a Unit should be within Unit Coherency of at least one other Model in the same Unit. Coherency is 3" unless otherwise specified by a Common or Special Rule.

If a Unit has one or more Models out of Unit Coherency at the start of its Activation, the Unit gains the Disordered Condition and must make a Run Action to regain Unit Coherency. If the Unit regains Coherency, it ceases to be Disordered at the end of their Activation. However, if after making a Run Action to



regain Coherency it has still been unable to do so, the Unit remains Disordered.

TRANSPORT UNITS: Units may make a Get In Action during the Adventure to go inside a friendly Unit with the TRANSPORT Trait. This is known as being Embarked on a Transport Unit. Units embarked within a vehicle cannot be targeted by attacks.

Units may be deployed inside the Transport Unit at the start of the Adventure. Both the Embarked Unit and Transport Unit vehicle are placed in the Play Area at the start of the Adventure as a single deployment.

A Transport Unit will have a value next to the TRANSPORT Trait where that value is the number of Size 1 Models it can transport. It is possible for Size 2 Models to be transported, but for Embarking purposes each Size 2 Model counts as two Size 1 Models. Units Size 3 or greater or on Stadium bases cannot Embark on a Transport Unit. Embarked Units as well as the Transport Unit itself are, of course, two separate Units and must be Activated separately. Units in a Transport may not take any Actions other than Get Out unless specified by the Transport Unit (such as having the Firing Platform rule).

If a Model with the TRANSPORT Trait is destroyed or moves off the Play Area while a Unit is Embarked inside it, all the Embarked Models in that Unit must make a Grit Check with Piercing of -2. Surviving Models are placed within 3" of the Transport Unit and must obey coherency rules before the Transport Unit is removed. Any Embarked Models

that cannot fit in the Play Area are removed from play.

TINTED UNITS: Units with the TAINTED Trait are referred to as Tainted. Should the last Model in a Tainted Unit be destroyed, before you remove the Model from the Play Area make a Tainted Check:

TAINTED CHECK =

D10 + MIND

**TARGET TEN
OR HIGHER**

If the Tainted Check is failed the Model is destroyed as normal.

If the Tainted Check is passed the Model is replaced with a single Model

Hex Beast. This Hex

Beast will not be able to take any further Actions this Round. The Hex Beast may act normally from the following round.

If a Hex Beast Model is not available or if the TAINTED Model is already a Hex Beast or has the Reanimated rule, the Model is instead removed from play.

On a Critical Success, the Model is not replaced with a Hex Beast and is not Destroyed or Removed from Play either. The Model is not Wounded and instead gains the Hunkered, Disordered and Stunned Conditions.

On a Critical Fail, the Model is replaced with a Hex Beast as outlined above, however the Hex Beast is under the control of the opposing player!





SPECIAL RULES

THE QUICK AND THE DEAD (REACTION): A Size 1 or 2 Model (not mounted on a Stadium base), may declare it will use this rule when it is nominated as the Initial Target of a Shoot Action. The Model must pass a Quick Check and may then immediately move up to its Quick value to be placed either out of range, line of sight or into base contact with a piece of Terrain. All dice in the Shoot Action declared against them are immediately cancelled and the Model gains the Hunkered Condition. If the Model cannot move out of range, line of sight or there is no Terrain within the Model's Quick value or the check is failed, the Unit the Shoot Action is resolved against the Model as normal. This Unit may not Engage an Enemy Unit while using this Reaction.

LARGESSE: While this Unit is in the Play Area other Units in the same Posse may spend Fortune belonging to this Unit as though it was their own. A Unit with Largesse cannot share their Fortune if they are Hunkered.

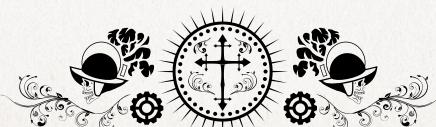
COMMAND: Units that are within 15" of a friendly Commander may spend Fortune belonging to this Unit as though it was their own. Furthermore, those Units can use their Commander's Mind value whilst making Morale Checks.

TARGET PRIORITY: Unless within 5" this Unit may not be the target of a Shoot Action unless it is the closest enemy Unit. This rule doesn't apply if the Model with this rule is Size 3 or greater or is on a Stadium base.

METTLE: When this Unit receives one or more Wounds from a Combat Action it is not Destroyed but instead, once all Grit checks have been made from the Action, the Unit receives the Disordered Condition (even if it may not usually be Disordered). Units that already have the Disordered condition or receive more Wounds from a Combat Action than their Limit Attribute, cannot benefit from this rule and are Destroyed as normal. Any Hazard Conditions the Unit is suffering from remain until the Unit passes its Grit Check as usual. If the Unit removes its Disordered Condition and would be wounded again in the same Round it can use Mettle each time.

Remember - If a Unit suffers three or more Wounds in a single Action, at the end of that Action it must make a Morale Check. See Morale Check (p.27)

TEAMWORK: Once a BOSS within 15" of this Unit or a COMMANDER anywhere in the Play Area, completes their Activation, you may immediately Activate a single Unit in the same Posse or Detachment with this rule that has not yet Activated this round. This is treated as a new Activation, so you must draw an Action card and apply any effects (see Action Cards section p.20 for more details).





FORTUNE

Bosses, Commanders, some Faces, Specialists and other influential Units have a Fortune rating. Each Unit with Fortune starts the Adventure with a number of points of Fortune equal in number to their Fortune rating. Each Unit's Fortune is replenished back to their Fortune rating at the end of their Activation, this Fortune is regained after any 'end of Activation' effects have happened. If the Model cannot Activate, it does not replenish its Fortune that round.

Fortune can be spent in several ways by a Unit. Each use of Fortune costs a single point Unless otherwise stated. Players should feel confident in using whatever points of Fortune they have available during the Unit's Activation

knowing they will be replenished to its initial Fortune rating at the end of its Activation.

Units that do not have a Fortune rating can still use points of Fortune. The Largesse and Command Special Rules allow a Unit to spend another Unit's Fortune as their own, with certain limitations. *See Special Rules (p.12)*

Designers Note: It should be remembered that a Unit with Fortune recovers its Fortune points back up to its initial Fortune rating at the end of its own Activation. Spending Fortune outside their Activation is likely to leave a Model with less Fortune to use in their Activation!

SPENDING FORTUNE

FOCUS: A Unit can spend a point of Fortune during their Activation Phase to force a Check to become Focused (*see Focused Actions p.21*). You cannot Focus a Special Action.

HIT THE DIRT (REACTION): A Unit can spend a point of Fortune to immediately gain the Hunkered Condition regardless of whether it is their Activation or not.

LUCKY SON OF A GUN: After failing a Check a Unit may spend a point of Fortune to re-roll the die regardless of whether it is their Activation or not. As mentioned before, you can never re-roll a die more than once or re-roll a Critical Failure or Critical Success.

PUSH IT: A Unit may spend a point of Fortune as an Action Point and may do so multiple times during an Activation. The first Action Point gained in this fashion for a Unit costs one point of Fortune per Activation, the second costs two points of Fortune per Activation, the third costs three per Activation and so on. *Example: A Unit using Push It to generate three Action Points would have to spend six points of Fortune to do so.*



**TAKING ONE FOR THE TEAM (REACTION):**

When a Model is nominated as the Initial Target of a Combat Action, as a Reaction, that Model may spend one point of Fortune and select another friendly Model within 3" of itself which is also within range and Line of Sight of the Combat Action. The selected Model immediately becomes the Initial Target of the Combat Action instead as they dive in front of the bullet, or push their comrade aside at the last minute, nobly sacrificing themselves in the process.

VETERAN INSTINCTS (REACTION): After this Model has been nominated as the Initial Target of an enemy Combat Action, at any point during that Action, but before any Strike or Shoot checks are made, it may spend 2 Fortune to immediately make a Free Strike or Free Shoot Action against the nominating Unit. Veteran Instincts may not be used by Units with the Disordered Condition.
See Disordered (p.31)

WALK IT OFF: A Unit can spend a point of Fortune during their Activation to immediately remove any Conditions applied to it that they wish.

Note: If the Unit is out of Coherency, it will immediately become Disordered again. See *Unit Coherency (p.10)* and *Disordered (p.31)*





THE PHASES OF THE GAME ROUND

INITIATIVE PHASE

1. Determine Initiative
2. Draw Adventure Cards
3. Reserve Checks

ACTIVATION PHASE

1. Draw from the Action Deck
2. Player with Initiative Activates a Unit
3. Opposing Player Activates a Unit
4. Repeat until all Units have Activated this round

RESOLUTION PHASE

1. Move Unengaged Models
2. Discard Unwanted Adventure Cards
3. Check Victory Conditions





INITIATIVE PHASE

1. DETERMINE INITIATIVE Both players shuffle their Action Deck and draw the top card. The player with the highest card number found in the top left-hand corner chooses who is Player A.

Unless the Adventure specifies otherwise, Player A has the Initiative for the first round.

If Player B was the first player to finish deploying their forces they may draw a new Action Card and see if the number in the top left corner is equal to or higher than the card Player A drew at the start of deployment. If it is equal or higher then Player B may choose to have the Initiative for the first round instead. Regardless of the outcome, both players must discard their Action Card face down to form (or add to) their discard pile for the Action Deck.

On subsequent rounds both players simply draw a new Action Card and the Initiative goes to the player with the highest number in the top left hand corner. In cases of a tie, Initiative goes to the player who did not have the Initiative in the previous round.

2. DRAW ADVENTURE CARDS Both players draw a number of Adventure Cards based on the agreed Point Limit for their Force. This number of cards is the maximum number of Adventure Cards you may hold at any time.

At the start of each round, players draw sufficient cards to bring their hand up to the card number determined by their Point Limit below.



POINT LIMIT	CARDS
99 Points or less	3
100 to 149 Points	4
150 to 199 Points	5
Each 50 Points thereafter	+1

3. RESERVE CHECKS From the beginning of the second round, players make checks to determine if any of their Units held in Reserve are able to join the battle. Starting with the player that has Initiative, each player must make a Reserve Check for one of their Units that are currently held in Reserve. Players should continue alternating Reserves Checks until all applicable Units have been checked.

To make a Reserves Check a player rolls a d10, adding to the result, the Adventure's Round number as well as half their Boss' or Commander's Mind Attribute (reflecting their leader's ability to coordinate their arrival).

RESERVES CHECK -
D10 + HALF BOSS' / COMMANDER'S MIND + ROUND NUMBER

TARGET TEN OR MORE

Should the Unit pass the Reserves Check it is immediately deployed within 5" of the rear table edge of their deployment zone or the specified reserves entry point for the Adventure. If the Unit passes its Reserves Check with a Critical Success, it may be deployed within 5" of any table edge. Models cannot be deployed within 5" of an enemy Model and if it fails the Reserves check it cannot be deployed this round. Any deployed Units can now Activate as normal during this round's Activation Phase.



ACTIVATION PHASE

1: DRAW FROM THE ACTION DECK The player with Initiative reveals the top card of their Action Deck. The card drawn has an Action Points Value on it. The Action Deck consists of 48 cards and the Action Points appear in the following frequency: there are four cards with 1 Action Point, fifteen cards with 2 Action Points, twenty two cards with 3 Action Points, six cards with 4 Action Points and finally one card with 5 Action Points.

The player declares which Unit they intend to make an Activation with. More detailed explanation of Activations and Actions can be found on the following pages. For now it is enough to know that Players Activate a Unit at a time, a Unit may only be Activated once per round and that during their Activation a Unit may make Move Actions, Special and Combat Actions.

2: PLAYER WITH INITIATIVE ACTIVATES A UNIT The Player with the Initiative must Activate a Unit that hasn't Activated this round. The Activated Unit may spend the Action Points indicated on the Action Card to make a number of Actions up to their Action Limit. Once the Unit has completed its Activation the Action Card is discarded to the Action Card discard pile face down. **Remember a Unit with Fortune recovers its Fortune points back up to its initial Fortune rating at the end of its own Activation.** See Fortune (p.13)



3: OPPOSING PLAYER ACTIVATES A UNIT Once the player with the Initiative finishes their Activation, the Opposing player now Activates a Unit following the two steps above.

Players continue to alternate Activations, each Activated Unit spending Action Points and taking Actions as described below. This continues until both players have Activated all their Units. Unless the players both have the same number of Units in their Forces, it is possible that several Activation Phases each round will consist of just one player Activating their remaining Units. Once all Units in play that are able to Activate have done so, the round moves to the Resolution Phase.

Once the last Action Card from the deck is drawn, shuffle the discard pile and create a new Action Card deck to draw from. Without looking, draw the top three cards and discard them face down, forming a new discard pile. This ensures that the player cannot be certain that the ratio of the cards they seek may still be available to them in the deck. The Wild West is an unpredictable place after all!





RESOLUTION PHASE

1: MOVE UNENGAGED MODELS Starting with the player who has the Initiative, both players take it in turns to select one of their Units that has one or more Models Engaged by the enemy. Any Unengaged Models in that Unit must be moved up to their Quick Value in inches towards a Model in the enemy Unit that has Engaged them. This move will trigger a Backstab Reaction as normal if a Model moves into and then out of an enemy Model's Melee Weapon range. See *Backstab* (p.30)

Once both players have completed this movement for each Unit, the Resolution Phase moves to the next stage.

2: DISCARD UNWANTED ADVENTURE CARDS Starting with the player who has the Initiative, both players take it in turn to discard any number of their unwanted Adventure Cards face down. On subsequent Initiative Phases, players redraw additional cards to bring their hand back up to the maximum number determined by their agreed Point Limit.

3: CHECK VICTORY CONDITIONS The Adventure's Victory Conditions should now be checked to see if either player has achieved them. If Victory has been achieved or a number of rounds specified in the Adventure have elapsed, the Adventure ends. Otherwise, a new round begins and Initiative is drawn for once again!

ADVENTURE CARDS

Adventure Cards have two uses in a game and should be kept secret until played. Adventure cards include effects for both Guts and Glory, either of which may be played but not both. These cards can be played whenever their criteria is met, even during your opponent's Activation!

Adventure cards may be played for Glory once a specific objective has been achieved. The player is immediately awarded the Victory Points indicated on the card. Though small in number, these Points will accumulate as more Glory is achieved. Though achieving the main objective for the Adventure will provide the lion's share of the Victory Points in an Adventure, it is possible that a player that seeks Glory above all other concerns might still win the battle.

The other end of the card from Glory is Guts. The bonus provided by Guts is immediate and is achieved at the expense of the Glory that might otherwise have been obtained by the card. You may apply as many Guts bonuses to a single Activation as you wish. Guts can often provide a bonus to an Attribute and last for the rest of the Unit's Activation, so must be played before the dice are rolled. Guts can also provide additional Action Points which can be added to the player's current Action Card to provide a greater number of Points to fuel a Unit's Actions. Additionally, there are several symbols on the Guts end of the card and if revealed provide certain benefits.





GUTS SYMBOLS

 **INTERRUPT:** An Adventure Card that has the Interrupt symbol on it can be played to cancel any Guts effect just played by your opponent. If your opponent holds an Interrupt card, they may play it to negate your card. However, you may attempt to Interrupt again if you have more cards with the Interrupt symbol in your hand!

 **RESTORE:** If your Adventure Card has this symbol on it you may reveal the card, at any time, to restore the number of Fortune points on a Unit of your choice back up to their Fortune Value.

 **TRIGGERED ACTIVATION:** If your Adventure Card has this symbol on it, after making an Activation

you may declare you will be making a Triggered Activation. You must reveal and discard the Adventure Card with this symbol that enables you to do so. You may then immediately Activate another Unit within 10" of the Unit you just Activated, that has not yet Activated this round. This is treated as a new Activation, and requires you to draw a new Action card. Further unactivated Units within 10" of the Activated Unit may make a Triggered Activation provided in each instance you can reveal and discard the required Adventure Card or have the relevant Unit Special Rule. Simply declare each Triggered Activation in sequence once the current Triggered Activation is completed.

ACTIVATIONS

Each Unit can only Activate once per round. When Activated, a Unit may take an Action. Actions fall into three categories: Move, Combat or Special. Each type of Action costs an Action Point. Once the Action is complete, the Unit may carry out another Action or even take the same Action again. However, a Unit carrying out the same category of Action (so two or more Move Actions, Special Actions or Combat Actions) costs two Points for each additional time rather than the usual one. Note, a Special Action can be taken only once per Activation, but a Unit may take more than one different Special Action if it has access to more than one.

A Unit can spend as many Action Points as they have available but may only make a number of Actions equal to their Limit rating. This does not include Free Actions.

Example: Belle Wilson makes a Run Move Action from behind some barrels. The Action costs her one Action Point. If Belle Wilson was then to make a Shoot Action, it would cost her a second Action point as a Shoot Action is a type of Combat Action. However, if instead she elected to Run again, then as this is a Move Action, it would cost her two Action Points to do either.

Remember every Unit with a Fortune rating receives Fortune back up to that level at the end of their Activation. See Fortune (p.13)



ACTION CARDS

When Activating a Unit, the controlling player must use the Action Card drawn in that Phase. Each Action Card has an Action Points Value on it ranging between 1 and 5.

A Unit has as many Action Points available as the card indicates. However, each Unit has a Limit Value, so spend your Action Card wisely! It is possible that you may wish to Activate a Unit with a Limit of 3. This would mean that you could make up to three Actions in an Activation. However, you may find that you only have drawn an Action Card with a Value of 2 meaning you may have to spend Fortune or play Adventure Cards to gain additional Action Points to maximise the effectiveness of the Unit. In this instance, you may want to either Activate a different Unit (such as a Unit that has a Limit of two) or else Activate the Limit 3 Unit, but accept that you only

have the Points to take (at most) two Actions rather than the potential three that they might have made otherwise.

Remember that the Limit of a Unit is the number of Actions each Model in that Unit can make each round, not the number of Action Points that they can spend.

Example: A Unit of Mexican Caballeros with a Limit of 2 can happily spend five Action Points on a Focused Shoot Action (costing a point for the Action and a point for making it Focused) followed by a second Focused Shoot Action (costing two Points for the second Combat Action and a point for making it Focused). A full list of the types of Actions and their Action Point cost can be found below.





ACTIONS

When Activated, a Unit may make a number of Actions equal to their Limit. Each Action normally costs one Action Point regardless of how many Models are in the Unit. All Models in a Unit must take the same Actions when declared. If a Unit declares the same category of Action (so two or more Move Actions, Special Actions or Combat Actions) costs two Points for each additional time rather than the usual one.

FOCUSED ACTIONS (COST: +1 ACTION POINT): Provided the Action is linked to an Attribute, a Unit may declare that the Action they are about to take in their Activation is Focused. Focusing an Action costs 1 Action Point in addition to the Action's cost and still only counts as a single Action. For the duration of that Action, the Unit gains a +2 bonus to that Action. This bonus can be added to the

distance moved or to a Check. A Special Action may never be Focused.

Example: The Countess Byron is having a great deal of fun electrifying some low-class Outlaw scum by starting her Activation with a Focused Shoot Action at a cost of 2 Action Points, giving her a +2 bonus to her Aim Check. She has drawn 4 Action Points this round so after spending one for the Shoot Action and one for having Focused it, she has two Action Points remaining. The Countess has a Limit of 3, meaning she could take a further two Actions. The Countess chooses to make a second Shoot Action, however this repeated Action costs her remaining two Action Points. The Countess has now run out of Action Points and cannot take any more Actions this round.

FREE ACTIONS

If an Action is described as a Free Action, it means that it does not cost any Action Points and does not count towards the Limit for a Unit's Actions in a round. Like all Actions, they usually must be taken

as part of a Model's Activation, however some weapon qualities or other in-game effects may cause a Model to take a Free Action outside of Activation.





MOVE ACTIONS

RUN (MOVE ACTION): Movement in Wild West Exodus is determined by a Model's Quick Attribute. Each Model in the Unit can move up to their Quick Value as inches of distance. *Example: A Quick of 5 means that the Model moves up to 5" in a single Run Action. Models can pivot around their centre as many times as they want during movement, but must move in straight lines. You may not move through an enemy Model's base. Measure the movement from the front of a Model's base. Any effect which causes a Model to be placed on the Play Area a particular distance from another Model or reference point should be measured exactly like a Run. You can Focus a Run Action and gain +2" to the distance you may move.*

As soon as the Run Action brings the Unit within Melee range of an enemy Unit then both Units are considered to be Engaged in combat.

Units on Stadium Bases can either move in a straight line directly forwards as normal or they can make a turn using the Turning Template (*see Turning Template p.5*). A Unit on a Stadium Base can also move in a straight line backwards but it counts as being on Difficult Ground when it does so. A Unit on a Stadium Base can also spend a Run Action to pivot on the spot to turn to face any direction, but it cannot move from its current position other than pivot.

Stadium based Models use the Turning Template whenever they want to turn during Move Actions. The small 'pips' around the edge of a Turning Template are called Travel Points and are spaced 1" apart. See *Turning Template (p.5)*

SPRINT! (MOVE ACTION): A Unit that is about to make a Run Action may spend an additional Action Point to gain a Sprint bonus to the distance they can move. A Unit that makes a Sprint, can move up to a distance equal to their Quick attribute Value +d5. This Run Action may be Focused as normal (which would give a total distance the Unit can move equal to their Quick Attribute +2, for being Focused, +d5 in inches).

GET IN (MOVE ACTION): To embark on an empty friendly Unit with the TRANSPORT Trait, a Unit must meet any Size requirements and all of the Unit's Models must be within 5" of the Transport Unit. A Unit is only able to perform a Get In Action if the intended Transport Unit has enough capacity for the entire Unit to fit inside. The capacity is indicated by the value next to the TRANSPORT Trait of the Transport Unit. Once a Unit is inside a Transport Unit, the Embarked Unit is temporarily removed from the Play Area and put aside, taking care to make it clear which Models are in the Transport Unit. Unless the Transport Unit has a Firing Platform Special Rule specifying otherwise, a Unit cannot take any further Actions in the same Activation it has made a Get In Action.

GET OUT (MOVE ACTION): To leave a friendly Transport Unit, an Embarked Unit must make a Get Out Action. When it does so, the entire Embarked Unit is placed in Coherency within 5" of the Transport Unit. You may not make a Get Out Action in the same Activation that you made a Get In Action, nor if the



Transport Unit is Engaged. A Unit making a Get Out Action from a transport may be the target of a Give 'Em Hell (Reaction).

CLIMB (MOVE ACTION): Units attempting to move across a Terrain piece as part of a Move Action that is higher than the Unit's base Size, must attempt to climb it. The Unit must make a Quick Check with a modifier of -1 per Base Size that the Terrain piece is higher than the Unit's Base Size. If the Unit fails this Quick Check, the Unit's Move Action ends (though they are free to make another climb attempt if the Unit has remaining Action Points and wishes to make a further Move Action). The result of the Quick Check applies to all Models within the Unit. The vertical movement still takes up inches from the Unit's Action as normal.

JUMP (MOVE ACTION): A Unit with one or more Models standing on a Building or Area Terrain with the Obstacle feature may attempt to make a jump at any point during its Move Action. This allows it to cross small gaps between buildings, jump off Area Terrain with the Obstacle feature or over a ravine etc. However, such heroics come with a risk of failure (especially if it is a long way down). A Unit can never jump further than the distance allowed by the Move Action

they are performing. Units crossing a gap between pieces of terrain that are greater than the Unit's Base Size must make a Quick Check, with a +1 bonus for each full inch between their starting position and the gap (essentially how much of a run up they get before jumping). So a Unit can, if they are very lucky, jump a gap that is up to their Quickness attribute in inches. However, this would mean they will not receive any 'run up' bonus to their Quick Check. If the Unit succeeds, it can continue to move normally. If it fails, any Models within the Unit that was attempting the jump will fall as described below.

FALLING: A falling Model must take a Grit Check with a piercing modifier equal to -1 if the drop is higher than the Model's Base Size. It is likely that falling will cause the Unit to go out of Coherency. Furthermore, a Model that falls automatically gains the Stunned Condition. In some extreme circumstances, you may rule that falling from a piece of terrain is immediately fatal as no amount of Fortune will save you if you fall off a five storey building or into a deep ravine from a cliff above. We suggest discussing any fatal drops with your opponent before the Adventure begins.





COMBAT ACTIONS

Any Unit with a Fight or Aim Attribute of 1 or higher is able to spend an Action point to make a Combat Action (which can be Focused as normal). Attacks from an Attacking Unit are made with a single weapon against a single target Unit.

Multiple Models in the same Unit that have the same weapon all participate in the Combat Action and these attacks must be directed at the same target Unit.

The most common Combat Actions are the Shoot Action (blasting someone at range with a shotgun or rifle, for example) and a Strike Action (slashing at someone with a cleaver or sword).

RATE OF ATTACK: All weapons have a Rate of Attack. The Rate of Attack for a weapon represents how many Aim or Fight checks the Model wielding it may make for each Shoot or Strike Action. You should roll all of these dice at the same time.

STRIKE (COMBAT ACTION): A Strike Action may be made by a Unit when it is Engaged in combat with an enemy Unit. A Unit is Engaged in combat when one or more Models in the Unit have an enemy Model within range of one or more of its Melee weapons, or if any Models in the Unit are within range of one or more enemy Models' melee weapons.

Once you have spent the relevant Action Points cost to make a Strike Action, you must declare which Unit your Initial Target is in and which weapon your Unit is making the Action with. If two or more Units are eligible to be the Initial Target, the attacking Unit may choose which it is.

Each Model in the attacking Unit that is within Range and Line of Sight of the Initial Target or another Model in the Initial Target's Unit adds their weapon's Rate of Attack to the attack. Any Model wielding the same weapon but is out of Range or Line of Sight cannot take part in this Strike Action.

The attacking Unit makes a Fight Check by rolling a d10 for each Rate of Attack and then adds its Fight Attribute and any modifiers. If the total of each Check is equal to or greater than TEN then it succeeds in hitting its target. If the total is less than TEN the blow goes wide of the mark and it misses. For each successful hit, the Initial Target must make a Grit Check or be Wounded. Additional Wounds carry over to other Models in the Unit as normal. (*See Grit Checks and Wounded p.27*)

After the Strike Action has been resolved, if the enemy Unit is still in play, any Model in the attacking Unit that was not in range of the Initial Target must make a Free Run Action. This movement must be up to their full Quick Value to bring them within their Melee range of an enemy Model in the Engaged Unit.

STRIKE = D10 + FIGHT +/- MODIFIERS

TARGET TEN OR HIGHER

COMMON STRIKE ACTION MODIFIERS:

FOCUSED: If the Strike Action has been Focused gain +2 to the attacking Unit's Fight Attribute for this Action.



HUNKERED: If the attacking Unit has the Hunkered Condition it receives a -1 penalty to its Fight Attribute during this Action.

SIZE: Gain +1 to the attacking Unit's Fight Attribute if the Initial Target of the Action is a Unit of Size 4 or 5.

MULTIPLE WEAPONS (STRIKE ACTION): A Model may only use a single weapon in a Strike Action (unless they have a Special Rule that specifically allows them to use more than one). If the Model is listed as carrying a second or third Melee Weapon then each Strike Action the Model must choose which weapon to use. Some Models may be sculpted to have multiple weapons of the same type that are not listed on their Unit Card. If it does not appear on the Unit Card then these additional weapons are present only for aesthetics purposes on the Model and play no further role in the Adventure.

SHOOT (COMBAT ACTION): To make a Shoot Action with your Attacking Unit, one or more Models in the Unit must determine an Initial Target (*see Initial Target p.3*). Spend the relevant Action Points cost, and declare which weapon is being used.

Each Model in the Unit that is within Range and Line of Sight of the Initial Target and is wielding the same weapon, adds its weapon's Rate of Attack to the Action. Models with the same weapon that are out of Range or Line of Sight cannot take part in the Shoot Action.

The Unit then makes an Aim Check for each Rate of Attack by rolling a d10, adding its Aim Attribute and any

modifiers. If the total is equal to or greater than TEN then it succeeds in hitting the target Unit. If the total is less than TEN the shot goes wide of the mark and misses. On a successful hit, the target Unit must make a Grit Check or it will be Wounded. See *Grit Checks and Wounded (p.27)*

Important: Models may not make or assist in Shoot Actions if they are Engaged in combat. Furthermore, unless the Model has a Special Rule that specifies otherwise, it may not make or assist in a Shoot Action if it has made a Charge Action in the same Activation.

SHOOT = D10 + AIM +/- MODIFIERS

TARGET TEN OR HIGHER

COMMON SHOOT ACTION MODIFIERS:

When determining Action modifiers you must consider every Model that is taking part in the Action. Although there may be several Models performing the same Action, some of them may have intervening terrain or be standing at a longer range from the Initial Target than the Model performing the Action.

FOCUSED: If the Shoot Action has been Focused gain +2 to the Unit's Aim Attributes for this Action.

OBSCURED: The attackers suffer -1 to their Aim Attributes for each Model or terrain feature directly between the attacking Unit and the Initial Target.

LONG RANGE: The attackers suffer -1 to their Aim Attributes if the majority of the attackers are more than 10" away from the closest Model in the Target Unit.



SIZE: Gain +1 to the Unit's Aim Attribute if the Initial Target of the Action is a Unit of Size 4 or 5.

Example: Venatici Helios has been trapped between two buildings by three Ranger Minutemen and they are attempting to finish her off with their Chace Rifles.

Two of the Rangers are only 8" away from Helios, but the 3rd is just over 10". However, because the majority of the Unit is not at Long Range, the Rangers do not suffer the -1 penalty to their Aim Attribute for this Action.

TARGET ENGAGED IN COMBAT: Unless using a weapon that uses a template, a Unit's Shoot Actions suffer a -4 to its Aim Attribute if the Target Unit is Engaged. This penalty does not include any additional Obscured penalty caused by any Models blocking Line of Sight to the target. Furthermore, if a Critical Failure is

rolled when making the shot, the hit is instead resolved against the closest Unit to the Initial Target within 3". If there is no other Unit within 3" the shot simply misses. Where there is a choice of Units, your opponent chooses which Unit is hit (Even your own Unit).

HIGHER GROUND: In many settlements and out on the frontier, hills are strategically important positions, overlooking the entire Play Area and giving support and Ranged Units an excellent opportunity to shoot at the enemy.

A Model is considered to have Higher Ground if its base is above the base Size (vertically) of the target.

While on Higher Ground a Model can Focus their Aim checks for Free and count as Obscured against any Unit except those who are also on Higher Ground.





GRIT CHECKS AND WOUNDED

There are often times that a Unit must make a Grit Check, such as when it has been allocated a hit from an enemy attack. A Grit Check is made against a target of TEN, as normal by rolling a d10, adding the Unit's Grit Attribute and then applying any other modifiers

Grit Checks are made, one at a time, starting with the closest Model to the attacking Unit that is in Range and Line of Sight, for each successful hit. Apply any effects (such as Conditions or qualities) after each Grit Check as they occur until all remaining hits have been resolved. If any Critical Successes have been gained, only those hits gain any additional qualities or bonuses associated with the critical effect, the Activated Unit decides the order in which those Critical Hits are resolved.

If the result is TEN or higher, the Grit Check is passed and the Unit is not considered Wounded.

If the total is less than TEN, the Grit Check is failed and the Unit suffers a Wound. When applying Wounds, only Models that are within range and Line of Sight of the damage source are affected.

If the Initial Target has been Wounded and removed from play, any remaining hits and associated Conditions are applied to the next closest Model in the Target Unit that is within Range and Line of Sight until the Unit is wiped out or each hit has been resolved by passing a Grit Check.

A failed Grit Check may be re-rolled by spending one point of Fortune. See *Fortune (p.13)*

GRIT CHECK :
D10 + GRIT +/- MODIFIERS

TARGET TEN OR HIGHER

COMMON GRIT CHECK MODIFIERS:

PIERCING: The Piercing Value of the weapon used in an attack is expressed as a penalty that is applied to the Unit's Grit Check should it be successfully hit by that weapon.

HUNKERED: Gain a +2 to the Unit's Grit check if it is affected by the Hunkered Condition.

MORALE CHECK: Should a Unit suffer three or more Wounds in a single Action, at the end of that Action it must make a Mind Check.

If they fail the Check they immediately make a Free Run Action at their full Quick directly away from the attacking Unit and gain the Disordered Condition. If it already has the Disordered Condition it becomes Stunned.

If they pass, nothing happens.

This includes Units with the CONSTRUCT Trait as even unfeeling amalgams of man and machine will lose their effectiveness when isolated during the chaos of battle.

Units that are within 15" of a friendly Commander can instead use their Commander's Mind value whilst making Morale Checks.



SPECIAL ACTIONS

Each of these Actions may only be made once per Unit per round, regardless of the number of Action Points available to the Unit. A Unit may make multiple Special Actions during its Activation but each specific Action can only be made once. Special Actions may not be Focused.

Example: Drum spends an Action Point to fire its Rotary Harpoon Gun at a Hex Beast, this weapon has the Special Trait and is therefore a Special Action. It then spends another Action Point to move to a second Hex Beast and spends another two Action Points to take a Strike Action with its Servo-Claw (another Special Action due to the Special Trait on the weapon), splitting the creature in two.

FLIGHT (SPECIAL ACTION): A Unit with the FLIGHT Trait may declare a Flight Action. Units making a Flight Action may be placed up to 15" from its position at the start of the Action. The Unit must not end their Flight Action in impassable terrain or Engaged in combat.

HUNKER DOWN (SPECIAL ACTION): A Unit not Engaged in combat may make a Hunker Down Special Action to gain the Hunkered Condition (see *Conditions* p.31). A Stunned Unit, or one with the IMMOBILE or MACHINE Trait cannot Hunker Down. You may not make any further Move Actions if you have made a Hunker Down Action this Activation.

RAM (SPECIAL ACTION): A Unit with the RAM Trait may declare a Ram Action. The Unit makes a Run Action as normal, but can only travel in a straight line. If

the Ram Action brings them into base contact with a friendly or enemy Unit at any point in that movement then the friendly or enemy Unit must pass a Quick Check or suffer an automatic hit. Models that are hit by a Ram Action are Wounded unless they pass a Grit Check with a Piercing of -1. Once the Ram Action is resolved, the Model (if it has survived the Ram) is moved the minimum distance necessary to allow the enemy Unit passage (see the *Path of Least Resistance* p.4). The vehicle making the Ram Action must continue its movement until it has travelled its full Quick rating, potentially hitting further Models it encounters. Ram Actions can trigger Backstab Reactions.

GO ON LOOKOUT (SPECIAL ACTION): A Unit not Engaged in combat may make a Go On Lookout Special Action to gain the On Lookout Condition. See *Conditions* (p.31)

CHARGE (SPECIAL ACTION): Units with a 1+ Fight Value that have not completed a Shoot Action during its current Activation are able to declare they are making a Charge Action. This Action allows the Unit to make a Free Run Action immediately followed by a Free Strike Action. Both of these Free Actions may be Focused separately for the usual costs.

First, designate an enemy Unit that is within Line of Sight to be the Initial Target. The active Unit then makes a standard Run Action, except that the whole Unit must end its movement closer to the Initial Target than it was at the beginning of it. Any Model passing





through Area Terrain during its Run Action must immediately pass a Quick Check or the Unit gains the Disordered Condition at the end of the Charge Action. Any Model failing its Quick Check cannot take part in the Charge's Free Strike Action.

After the Run Action, any Models in the Unit within Melee Weapon range

of the Initial Target are considered to be Engaged. The Unit may immediately make a Free Strike Action.

If no Model in the Unit ends its Run Action within Melee Weapon range of the Initial Target it has failed the Charge Action and must immediately pass a Quick Check or the Unit gains the Disordered Condition.





REACTIONS

Reactions are a type of Free Action that are triggered by another Action taking place. They are most commonly taken outside of an Activation and are always taken by the opposing player's Units in reaction to an Action made by one of your Units. You may only make one Reaction to any Action and you cannot Focus a Reaction or make one while Hunkered.

As soon as a Reaction is triggered, the initiating Action is paused and the Reaction is resolved fully before finally returning to and resolving the initial Action. There may only ever be a single Reaction per triggering Action and Reactions can never trigger Reactions themselves.

Any Model that is forced to perform an Action by another ability is unable to make Reactions for the duration of that Action.

Some abilities on Unit Cards are Reactions and they will be labelled as such. For Example, Even In Death (Reaction) or The Quick and the Dead (see p.12). Models can also spend Fortune (if applicable) to trigger some reactions. (See Fortune p.13)

BACKSTAB (REACTION): A Model is considered to be Engaged while it is within the Melee range of an enemy Model. If a Model moves out of the Melee range of an enemy Model, it risks being struck in the back.

A Model can make this Reaction against the first enemy Model that leaves its Melee range each Activation. Make a Free Strike Action against the enemy

Model. This Free Strike Action does not include the Free Move Action for Models that are not within weapon range.

Models that are Embarked in vehicles cannot make a Backstab Reaction.

GIVE 'EM HELL (REACTION): Should a Unit with the On Lookout Condition be declared as the Initial Target of a Combat Action by an enemy Unit, it may immediately make a Give 'Em Hell Reaction. At any point during the enemy Unit's Combat Action the Unit On Lookout may make a Free Strike Action or Free Shoot Action against them. This Action If the Free Strike Action or Free Shoot Action is out of range, it misses as usual. If a Unit On Lookout does not wish to make a Free Strike Action or Free Shoot Action and instead wishes to hold their nerve and not react (thereby retaining their On Lookout Condition for a future opportunity), it must pass a Mind Check. If it fails, it must make the Free Combat Action as normal (at any point during that enemy Unit's Combat Action). If it passes the Mind Check, it does not have to make the Give 'Em Hell Reaction.

HIT THE DIRT (REACTION):
See Fortune (p.13)

TAKING ONE FOR THE TEAM (REACTION):
See Fortune (p.14)

THE QUICK AND THE DEAD (REACTION):
See Special Rules (p.12)

VETERAN INSTINCTS (REACTION):
See Fortune (p.14)



CONDITIONS

A Model or Unit may be affected by one or more Conditions during the Adventure. Conditions are applied immediately, unless by a Weapon Quality in which case they are applied after all Grit Checks have been taken by the target Unit in the Action. Conditions remain in play until the Model or Unit's next Activation. A Unit receiving multiple instances of a particular Condition does not gain a cumulative penalty or bonus, so a Unit can be Stunned several times in the same round but will only suffer the penalties of the Stunned Condition once.

It is quite possible (and often quite likely) that a Model or Unit will be affected by several different Conditions at the same time. They should be resolved in the following order:

Remember that an Attribute can never be reduced below one (if it has a value).



DISORDERED: If any Model in a Unit receives the Disordered Condition, it applies to all Models in that Unit. The Unit loses the On Lookout Condition if it has it. Furthermore the Unit has its Limit reduced by 1. A Unit will lose the Disordered Condition at the end of their next Activation unless they are out of Coherency in which case the Disordered Condition remains. If a Unit should ever gain this Condition again whilst already Disordered, it instead immediately gains the Stunned Condition.



HUNKERED: A Unit that is Hunkered (usually from making a Hunker Down Action) gains +2 to their Grit Attribute and is considered to be Obscured if the attacker is further than 3" away. However, they suffer -1 to their Fight and Aim Attributes and -2 to their Quick Attribute. Furthermore, a Unit cannot make Reactions while Hunkered. The Hunkered Condition is removed at the start of a Unit's Activation unless they are in base contact with Terrain, in which case it continues without the Model needing to make another Hunker Down Action.



HAZARD: Until the end of their next Activation, a Model affected by Hazard cannot make Special or Free Actions (including Reactions). The Model loses the Hunkered Condition if it has it. The Model must take and pass a Grit Check at the end of its Activation, before regaining any Fortune or it is Wounded and the Hazard Condition remains. If it passes the Grit Check, remove the Hazard condition from them. SPIRIT Models are unaffected by Hazard Conditions.





STUNNED: A Model affected by the Stunned Condition suffers a -1 penalty to all Attributes (excluding Limit) to a minimum of 1. The Condition is removed at the start of the Unit's next Activation. A Unit with the MACHINE, STRUCTURE or ARTEFACT traits cannot normally be Stunned. If a Unit should ever gain this Condition again whilst already Stunned, it instead immediately gains the Disordered Condition.



ON LOOKOUT: A Unit that is On Lookout (usually from making a Go On Lookout Action) may make a Give 'Em Hell Reaction against an enemy Unit targeting them. The On Lookout Condition is removed at the start of a Unit's Activation or if they have made a Give 'Em Hell Reaction.





PLAY AREA

The Adventures in Wild West Exodus take place over varied scenery and environments. From the forested tribal lands of the Warrior Nation, to the dusty streets of the Lawmen protected frontier towns and the mesas and mountain paths rife with Outlaws and predatory aliens, the terrain will help and hinder your attempts to win the day.

The ground in a Play Area is divided into three forms to simulate this: Open Ground, Uneven Ground and Impassable Ground. As each player's collection of terrain is going to vary, players should discuss before the Adventure which terrain features will be Uneven Ground and which will be Impassable Ground. Everything else in the Play Area is assumed to be Open Ground.

OPEN: The open, flat spaces of the Play Area are considered Open Ground and do not impede movement at all. The vast majority of the Play Area will be Open Ground (except in particularly challenging Adventures).

UNEVEN: Here we see terrain such as sand dunes, scrub, crops and even hills (although particularly well-worn paths and roads might be considered Open Ground). Walkways between buildings and railway tracks should also be treated as Uneven Ground.

When moving through Uneven Ground Units halve their Quickness, so every half inch moved counts as 1". For example, a Unit has a Quick of 5. It can only travel 2.5" through the woods.

If Units move over Open Ground and Uneven Ground during the same Action, then their movement over Open Ground is normal and movement over Uneven Ground counts as double the actual distance travelled. Each Model in a Unit that spends a portion of their Move Action in Uneven Ground (even part of their base) counts that portion of Movement as the distance traversed (remembering again to round up). It is suggested that Models in a Unit in the Uneven Ground are moved first to make maintaining Unit Coherency easier.

Example: A Unit with a Quick of 5 makes a Run Action. Normally the Unit would be able to travel five inches in this Move Action. However, after the first three inches of the Unit's Run Action it reaches Uneven Ground (in this case, a clump of trees which are Area Terrain). Each Model in the Unit may only move a further inch into that Area Terrain (or may move two inches in open terrain).

IMPASSABLE: This terrain cannot be entered and usually represents locations in the Play Area that are to be avoided rather than traversed.





DESTROYING TERRAIN

Terrain cannot normally be destroyed in Wild West Exodus. Though the small arms fire (and even mortar shells and plasma blasts) can cause damage to the façade of a building or rip apart a tree we are more concerned in an Adventure with

the damage done to any Units seeking shelter. Should an Adventure require terrain to be destroyed to complete an objective, the Adventure will specify how this can be done.

TERRAIN

Terrain can be grouped into three main categories: Obstacles, Area and Buildings. All types of terrain should be given a Size for determining their height. This may seem counterintuitive as their actual width may vary wildly. What we are interested in is their height and more specifically whether their height makes it difficult to see enemy Models beyond

it. Terrain size is determined by turning a Base on its shortest edge and comparing it to the physical height of the terrain. A roughly agreed approximation is all that is needed. **Important: Terrain that is equal to or smaller than a Size 1 base is treated as Size 1. Terrain that is taller than a Size 5 base blocks Line of Sight to all Models.**

LINE OF SIGHT AND TERRAIN

Line of Sight can be drawn from/ to a target from its base, to a point vertically up to its Base Size. This makes a Model's interaction with Terrain more straightforward. When measuring Line of Sight, trace an imaginary line from the two outermost points of the bases of the two Models that Line of Sight is being checked for. Any terrain that lies within this corridor should mean that the target is considered Obscured when working out relevant modifiers to Aim checks etc.

Remember: If you cannot draw Line of Sight to any part of a Model's base, then that Model cannot be made the Initial Target of an attack.



OBSCURED: For each piece of terrain or Model that partially blocks the Line of Sight of a Shoot Action, the Unit making the Action receives a -1 Aim penalty. Models in the same Unit as the Active Unit do not count as blocking Line of Sight. However, while a Model making an Attack is in base contact with a piece of terrain that partially blocks their Line of Sight, the terrain does not penalise them with an Obscured penalty.





TERRAIN FEATURES

During an Adventure it will be obvious that certain terrain pieces will naturally confer certain advantages and drawbacks to any Models deployed in, on or near them. We call these advantages and drawbacks Features and most terrain will likely have one or more of them.

DANGEROUS: Models in base contact immediately gain the Hazard Condition.

IMPASSABLE: No Model can be deployed on or be placed on or in this piece of

terrain. Any Model that would be moved to this location involuntarily stops its movement as soon as it touches the Impassable piece of Terrain.

STEEP: Models must successfully make a Climb Action to cross the terrain upwards or horizontally. While crossing the terrain downwards, Models may focus their Move Action for free.

UNEVEN: Halves distance travelled for Move Actions that cross it.

OBSTACLES

These are barrels, crates, fences, wagons and any other terrain feature that is not area terrain or a building. Obstacles must be moved around or otherwise, a Model will need to make a Climb Action to move over the Obstacle. If the

base can reasonably fit/balance on the Obstacle (such as on top of a wagon or crate) then a Model may Climb on top of it. Depending on the height of the Obstacle, players may consider it Higher Ground (see p.26).

AREA TERRAIN

Area Terrain covers loose groups of individual pieces, such as forests, rocky ground, water features and so forth.

Before the Adventure begins, players should identify what Area Terrain is present. While any part of any Model's base is inside a piece of Area Terrain it is affected by the features of that Area Terrain.

Here are some common types of Area Terrain, however, players should agree on variations so as best to suit their own scenery collections. All area terrain gives the Obscured bonus unless specified otherwise.

TYPES OF AREA TERRAIN:

DEEP RIVER: Uneven, Dangerous.

FOREST: Uneven.

CLIFF FACE: Impassable.

SCREE SLOPE: Steep, Dangerous.

HILLS: Uneven.

HOT SPRINGS: Uneven, Dangerous.

JUNGLE: Uneven.

DILAPIDATED BRIDGE: Uneven.

MOUNTAININSIDE: Steep.

MESA: Uneven.

RAVINE: Impassable.

SHALLOW STREAM: Uneven.

TAR PIT: Uneven, Dangerous.



BUILDINGS

Before each Adventure, players should identify any scenery on the board that will be classed as a Building. This will usually be a man-made structure with (ideally) four walls, one or more floors and a roof. Every player will likely have their own unique collection of buildings and Terrain, so some common sense and communication with your opponent will be necessary while dealing with your own buildings. Small, unusually shaped or enclosed buildings with no internal structure or access to the interior should be considered Impassable and treated as Obstacles rather than true buildings.

Buildings are simply extensions of the Play Area. Walls are impassable terrain and buildings can only be entered by doors. Windows can be used to fire into and out of and stairs can be used to move up and down levels. Only Size 1 or Size 2 based Models may enter Buildings (regardless of actual size of doorways and windows).

DOORS: Buildings can be entered via a door and a door is always considered to be open for the purposes of movement and Line of Sight. Doors don't block line of sight.

WINDOWS: Windows are considered to be holes in the solid walls of the building and Models can fire out of them, be targeted through them and, if they are on the ground floor, Units can enter or exit buildings via them just like a door.

If a Model is within 1" of a window it can draw line of sight to a Target through the Window. A Model within 1" of a window can be targeted by a Unit that is outside the building by drawing Line of Sight to the Window. A target inside a building being targeted in this way is considered to be Obscured by the window.

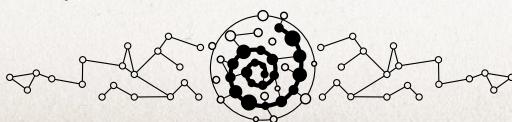
WALLS: Walls block movement and line of sight completely if no part of the target Model is visible. A Model whose base is partially blocked by part of a wall is considered to be Obscured as normal. A broken section of a wall should be treated like Window.

STAIRS: Stairs can be climbed by measuring the distance from the bottom of the stairs to the top. A Model can stop at any point on the stairs if it does not have sufficient movement to reach the top.

LINE OF SIGHT: Models draw line of sight to other Models in the same building in the normal way.

SPACE: Models can only pass through spaces that their base can fit through as per the movement rules.

ROOFTOPS: The roof of a building can often allow Units to be positioned on them. In all respects, Units on rooftops will likely have Higher Ground and are not considered to be inside the building or in base contact with it. See *Higher Ground* (p.26)



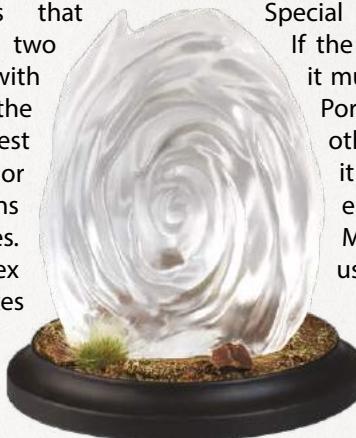


PORTALS

Portals are gateways that instantaneously connect two points in the local area with each other. Most of the factions in the Wild West use Portals in one form or another and their means of generating them varies. The arcanists of the Hex use their majiks and hexes to step through shadowy voids while the Order utilise their technology perfected over millennia on countless worlds. The Warrior Nation utilise spirit totems while the Enlightened and Union use Void Engines. In game terms all operate in very similar ways, but their means of generation and control will come from a specific source.

PORTAL MARKERS: Portals appear in the Play Area as Portal Markers. These are Size 2 tokens that can be represented using Warcradle Miniatures or any other suitable Size 2 marker. You may always choose a friendly Portal Marker as the Initial Target of an attack, if you wish.

To travel through Portals, any Portal Marker may be used (friendly or enemy) and should be imagined as being interconnected through some invisible web of tunnels between them all. That said, as the paths between Portals are complex at best, in order to make use of an enemy Portal as an exit the Unit must pass a Mind Check with a penalty of -1 for each enemy Portal Marker in play. Units with the Portal Mastery



Special Rule ignore this penalty. If the Unit fails its Mind Check it must exit through a friendly Portal Marker, if there is no other friendly Portal Marker it must leave by the Portal it entered from instead. Only Models of Size 3 or less may use Portals.

PORTAL MOVE (MOVE)

ACTION: To move through a Portal, a Unit must meet any Base Size requirements and all Models must be within 3" of the Portal Marker base. If only some Models in the Unit are close enough then the Unit cannot make a Portal Move Action. This keeps things manageable, and Units unable to Portal Move immediately should be able to do so easily in a subsequent Action or Activation assuming the Portal Marker is not destroyed or has collapsed. Once a Unit makes a Portal Move Action, the Unit is temporarily removed from the Play Area.

The entire Unit must then immediately be placed in Coherency within 3" of another Portal Marker on the table. If they cannot be placed in coherency they are Disordered as normal and the Portal collapses, removing the Portal Marker they exited from play.

MANIPULATE PORTAL (SPECIAL ACTION):

Manipulate Portal creates or removes Portal Markers. When a Unit attempts to place or remove a Portal Marker, it must make a Portal Check with a success target of TEN or higher. To do so the



Model must roll a d10 and add both their Mind and Aim Attributes. This combined score then suffers a penalty of -1 per inch of distance between the targeted Portal position and the closest Model in the Unit making the Portal Check. If the Check fails, then the Action ends with no further effect.



If the Check is passed, either remove the targeted Portal Marker or place a new Portal Marker at the targeted location. If a new Portal Marker is placed, a second Portal Marker may be placed within 10" of the first, scattering using the rules for Scatter (see p.4). Any Portal Marker placed within 1" of a Model, Impassable Terrain, a building, obstacle or outside of the Play Area is immediately Destroyed.



WEAPONS

There are a wide variety of weapons used in Wild West Exodus. They are broadly split into two types – Melee and Ranged. A Model may only use a single weapon in a Combat Action. Some Models have multiple weapons of the same type that are not listed on their Unit Card. If it does not appear on the Unit Card then these additional weapons are only present on the Model for aesthetic purposes and play no role in the Adventure. Regardless of the weapon type, weapon hits are always resolved sequentially and not simultaneously.



MELEE WEAPONS: The weapon may only be used in a Strike Action.



RANGED WEAPONS: Ranged Weapons are used primarily for Shoot Actions. You may only use one Ranged Weapon per Shoot Action. Except where specified otherwise, Ranged weapons cannot be used if the Unit has made a Charge Action in that Activation.



WEAPON QUALITIES

AMMO CLIP: When declaring a weapon with this quality will be used in a Combat Action, as well as its normal quality, you may choose one of the following additional qualities for it to gain for the duration of the Action: Brutal, Lethal, Shred, or Stun.

ATTUNED: When this Unit Focuses a Combat Action, any Attuned weapon it is using increases its Piercing value by -1.

BLAST: When determining successful hits from this weapon, centre the Blast template over the Initial Target, any Models touched by the template are automatically hit. When used in a Free Shoot Action, a Blast weapon does not use the template and instead causes d5 hits on the target (with a maximum of one hit per Model).

BRUTAL: Once per Combat Action, after resolving one or more successful wounds on a target with this weapon, the target receives a further single wound on the same Unit regardless of the weapon's Rate of Attack.

CLOSE WORK: This weapon may be used as a Melee Weapon in a Strike Action, it uses the Model's Fight Attribute rather than its Aim. When used as a Melee Weapon, for the remainder of the Round this weapon has a Melee range of 1" and when used in a Strike Action it suffers a -3 penalty to the Fight Check.

DISORDER: Weapons with this quality inflict the Disordered Condition on the Initial Target. If the Unit already has the Disordered Condition the weapon gains the Lethal quality instead.

FATAL: Successful hits from this weapon ignore the Mettle rule.

HAZARDOUS: Weapons with this quality inflict the Hazard Condition on the Initial Target. If the Unit already has the Hazard Condition the weapon gains the Lethal quality instead.

HEAVY: Unless this weapon is carried by a Model with the MACHINE Trait, the Unit may not perform any Move/Charge Action during its Activation to use this weapon. If the Unit has already made a Move/Charge Action it cannot use this weapon in a Combat Action during the same Activation. A Model may spend +1 Action Point to ignore this quality.

INDIRECT: This weapon ignores Line of Sight and Obscured penalties. When determining successful hits from this weapon, centre the Blast template over the Initial Target, it then scatters d5+1" in a random direction and then any Models covered by the template are automatically hit. Use the centre of the template for determining its direction when calculating Obscured bonus.

When using this weapon in a Shoot Action, if a Critical Success is rolled for the Aim check it does not scatter.





LETHAL: Successful Grit Checks against hits from this weapon must be re-rolled.

LINKED: Combat Actions using this weapon may re-roll failed Aim or Fight Checks.

REFINED: Actions made by weapons with this quality score a Critical Success on a natural roll of 9 or 10.

SHOCK: Weapons with this quality inflict the Disordered and Stunned Conditions on the Initial Target. If the Unit already has the Disordered or Stunned Condition the weapon gains the Lethal quality as well.

SHRED: Attacks made using this weapon ignore any Obscured modifiers to Aim conferred from any Terrain in its path. Intervening Models confer Obscured as normal.

SPECIAL: This weapon may only be used once by each Model in the Unit per Activation. They cannot be focused, used in Reactions or used outside of their Activation.

STUN: Weapons with this quality inflict the Stunned Condition on the Initial Target. If the Unit already has the Stunned Condition the weapon gains the Lethal quality instead.

TANGLE: Any Initial Target that is successfully hit by this weapon must also pass a Fight Check, as well as the standard Grit Check, or the Unit immediately gains both the Stunned and Disordered Conditions.

THROWN: Once per Activation, this weapon may be used as a Ranged Weapon that has an 5" range with the Rate of Attack indicated.

TORRENT: This weapon uses the tear-shaped Torrent template when determining which Models are hit by its Attack.

After successfully hitting an Initial Target, place the narrow end of the template in base contact with the Attacker with its centreline touching the Initial Target. All Models touched by the template, excluding the Attacker, are automatically hit. Models that have their Line of Sight completely blocked from the original attacker can still be affected, but cannot be the Initial Target.

When used in a Free Shoot Action, this weapon does not use the template and instead rolls one die to hit, with a success causing d5 hits on the Initial Target (with a maximum of one hit per Model).

UNWIELDY: A Model suffers a -2 penalty to any Aim or Fight Check when using this weapon.





ADVENTURE SCENARIO & DEPLOYMENT

DECIDE ON YOUR GAME SIZE: Both players should decide on what size Adventure they wish to play. In a tournament, the organiser will have set the game size beforehand. Common Adventures are designed for a 48"x 48" Play Area. For extremely large games, players may wish to proportionally increase the Play Area.

SELECT YOUR FORCE: Players should build their Force, using one or more Posse or Detachments, as per the Building a Force rules.

ROLL FOR ADVENTURE: Players decide on the Adventure Type to roll for. The Common Adventure Type is included below. Future expansions will give other Adventure Types to consider. Once a Type has been agreed on, roll a d10 and select the corresponding Adventure from the Type chosen. Alternatively, if players prefer, they can choose their own Adventure. In an organised event, it is likely the organiser will have pre-selected the Adventure being played.

COMMON ADVENTURE TYPE

- 1-2 = Supply Run
- 3-4 = Treasure Hunt
- 5-6 = Upper Hand
- 7-8 = Stake A Claim
- 9-10 = Send a Message

SET UP TABLE: The chosen Adventure will state what size board will be used for the game. A standard Adventure uses a 48" x 48" table. Players should then set up Terrain in a mutually agreeable manner, ensuring neither side of the board has an unfair advantage. In an organised

event, it is likely the organiser will have set up the tables beforehand.

RESERVES: When deploying your Force, you may choose to keep up to half the number of Units as Reserves. Units must be placed into Reserve or deployed in their entirety. For example, if you have a Posse with five Units and a second Posse with four Units within your Force, up to five total Units from the force may be placed in Reserve. This could be all of the first Posse or part of both. Support Units and those Units containing Models with a Quick of 2 or less may not be placed in reserve unless otherwise noted. Models in Reserve can then be brought into play during the Reserves Checks step of the Initiative Phase.

DEPLOYMENT: Both players shuffle their Action Deck and draw the top card. The player with the highest card number found in the top left hand corner chooses who is Player A and so deploys first. Player B discards their card face down to form a discard pile for the Action Deck. Player A must retain their card until after deployment.

The Adventure will describe player deployment zones. Usually they will be on opposite sides of the Play Area. Player A chooses which deployment zone they wish to deploy on, and deploys one Unit.

Player B then deploys one Unit in the other deployment zone. Continue to alternate until one player runs out of Units to deploy. Each player continues to take it in turns deploying one Unit into their chosen deployment zone.



A vehicle may be deployed with a Unit already embarked, treat this as a single deployment.

If one player finishes deploying all their Units first, the other player continues to deploy the rest of their Force until all Units are deployed.

Any Units with the Dispersed Deployment Special Rule are deployed, starting with Player B. Finally any Units with the Trailfinder rule take their moves. Players move their Units one at a time alternately, again starting with Player B.

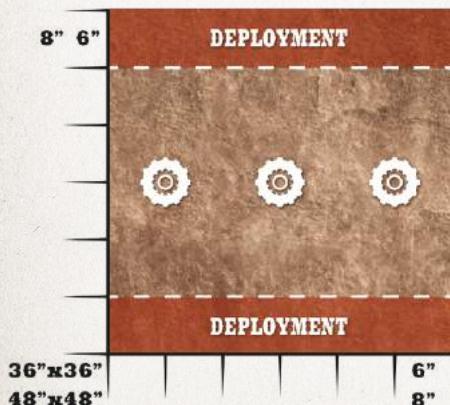
GAME BEGINS: Player A has the Initiative for the first round. However, if Player B was the first player to finish deploying their forces they may draw a new Action Card and see if the number in the top left corner is equal to or higher than the card Player A drew at the start of deployment.

If it is equal or higher then Player B may choose to have the Initiative for the first round instead. Regardless of the outcome, both players must discard their Action Card face down to form (or add to) their discard pile for the Action Deck. Players now begin round one of the Adventure, following the steps outlined in the Round Sequence section of the rulebook.

VICTORY: Usually after five rounds, the Adventure ends and the player with the most Victory Points wins the game. Some Adventures may specify a different game length. Should one player no longer have any Models in the Play Area at the end of step three of the Resolution Phase, their opponent scores an additional number of Victory Points equal to the current round number and the Adventure immediately ends.

COMMON ADVENTURES

SUPPLY RUN



Supply drops are always a risk on the frontier. Carriages laden with gold for the banks attract many a greedy eye, while

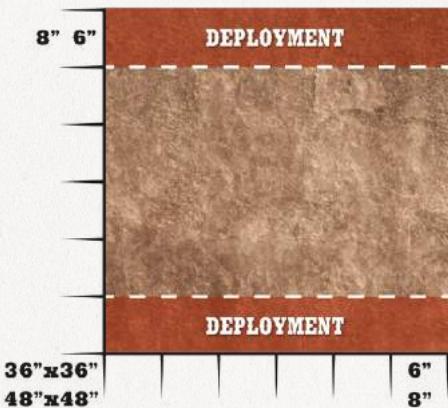
food, water and fuel drops are a target for the hungry and desperate. In Supply Run you must secure the supply drops while fending off the rival Force.

Place a Size 1 supply token on each of the three points marked on the map.

OBJECTIVE: At the end of each round a player scores a Victory Point for each of the supply tokens they control. In a Supply Run, a token is controlled if you have one or more Models within three inches of a token, with no enemy Models within three inches of the same token.



TREASURE HUNT



Rumours of an abandoned wagon train have circulated town. No one knows who, or what hit the travellers, but their remains have been left to bleach in the sun. No doubt there will be something of value in the debris.

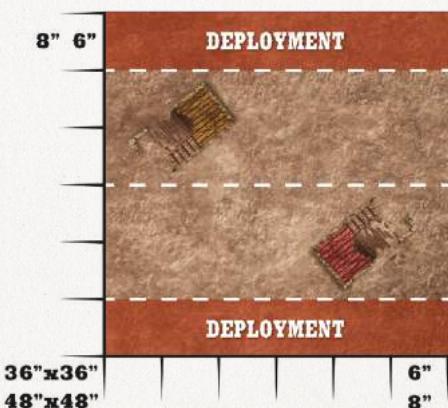
Each player takes 3 Size 1 loot markers. Taking turns, each player places one of the loot markers on the Play Area,

no closer than 5" to an edge, their deployment zone or another token.

OBJECTIVE: If a Model is in base contact with a token at the start of their Activation, they can make a Search (Special Action): Roll a d10. On an odd number, the token is nothing of value, remove it from the Play Area. On an even roll, the player finds a treasure token and gains 2 Victory Points. Once three treasure tokens are uncovered, remove all other loot tokens from the Play Area. If there are two loot tokens left uncovered and only one treasure token has been found, both remaining loot tokens are automatically treasure.

A player gains a Victory Point at the end of each round for each treasure token that has only one or more friendly Models in base contact with it and no enemy Models in contact.

UPPER HAND



The fortunes of war are ever shifting. Recent activity has seen previously inaccessible territory open up, with an

area of strategic importance suddenly there for the taking. Get in, dig in and wait for reinforcements.

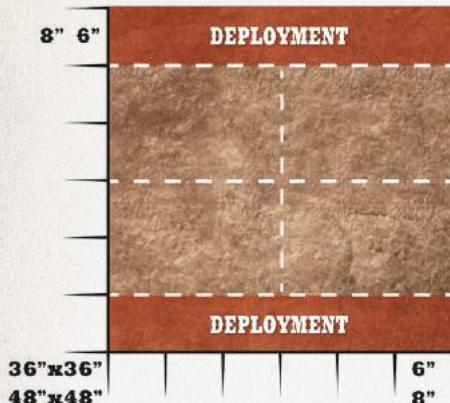
Place a small building (approximately 4"x4") on each of the points shown on the map.

OBJECTIVE: Each round, if you have a Unit completely within in the building on your side of the Play Area gain 2 Victory Points.

Each round, if you have a Unit completely within in the building on the enemy side of the Play Area, gain 4 Victory Points.



STAKE A CLAIM



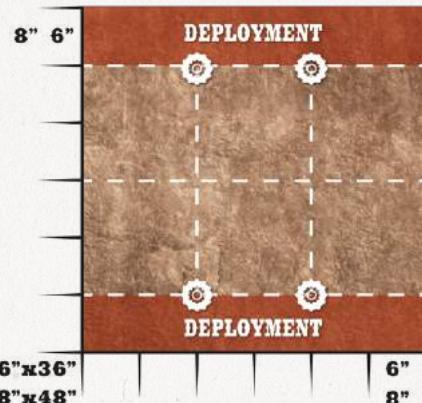
Gold, the fever dream of the old west. The rumour of it sends Forces on a mad scramble to secure ground and profit from the find. Whether to fuel their ambition, to further their political gains, or just to gamble and drink away, a chance to stake a claim of a rich seam can't be passed up.

Divide the Play Area into four quarters as shown on the deployment map.

OBJECTIVE: In the Resolution Phase of each round, each player scores two Victory Points for each quarter on the enemy side of the Play Area that has one or more of their Units completely within it, with no enemy Models completely within the same quarter.

Additionally, at the end of the Adventure, each player scores five Victory Points for each quarter where they have one or more of their Units in the quarter of the Play Area with no enemy Models in that quarter.

SEND A MESSAGE



A rival faction needs to be taken down a peg or two. The time has come to send a message. Maybe it's their colours that need burning - or maybe they do.. someone needs to get in, cause some mayhem and get out again.

Place two Size 1 objective markers per player as shown on the deployment map (the markers indicate the point that each of the parallel lines meets the front of the deployment zone).

OBJECTIVE: Each round, if a player has one or more Models in base contact with an objective marker touching their opponent's deployment zone they score 2 Victory Points.

If they have one or more Models in base contact with an objective marker touching their own deployment zone they score 1 Victory Point.





DYSTOPIAN AGE

From the Badlands of North America to the icy realm of Antarctica the world of the Dystopian Age is a wild and dangerous place. It is a generation since the end of the American Civil War and Queen Victoria has been on the throne for over forty years. While Louis-Napoleon builds an alliance in Europe, the nations of the Far East are roused to action against the growing threat from the West. Now the greatest scientific minds of the age have unlocked secrets that the human race was unprepared for as super science and alien technologies bring the world perilously close to annihilation.

THE DIE IS CAST

An ancient entity has been subtly influencing humanity for thousands of years for its own purposes. This interference has attracted others to take an interest in humanity and their knowledge has fallen into the hands of an alliance of scientists known as the *Covenant of the Enlightened*. Combining the newly discovered Element 270 with a limitless power source known as RJ-1027, the Enlightened have ushered in an age of phenomenal scientific advancement; bringing to reality projects and ideas that were the stuff of dreams only decades before. This unearned and disjointed scientific progression has, however, come with neither morals nor safeguards and the world has been plunged into a Dystopian Age.

Through manipulation, fear or conquest, many nations of the world have formed alliances with mutual economic and defensive benefits, often around common cultural or geographic ties. The remaining great industrialized nations of the world, while powerful in their own right, have found that they are overmatched and have been driven to join or form larger alliances until, as the end of the century draws near, seven distinct power blocs have emerged.

These seven great powers appear evenly matched in their war-making potential and this brings a grim prospect: If a total global war were to erupt there would likely be no clear victor. As the world teeters on the edge of such a catastrophic war, the great powers battle tirelessly to gain a decisive advantage and emerge triumphant with a mix of military might, subterfuge, diplomacy and economics.

FORTUNE FAVOURS THE BOLD

The Dystopian Age is an era where individuals can make their mark with opportunities for personal gain as well as the national interest to defend. Whole regions have been devastated by conflict, and yet others are relatively untouched, yet others remain untouched, transformed by the massive expansion of industry and technology into hives of activity that feed the fires of this terrible struggle. Worse yet, it appears that the world itself is changing as if the roiling conflict is enveloping the natural order as well as that of humankind. Bizarre weather events erupt with increasing regularity, mighty storms blow up and then suddenly vanish. At sea and in the air, ships and flying craft mysteriously vanish only to reappear miles off course, their crews having no recollection of the missing time.

There are key regions around the globe that offer the potential to grant a decisive to those who dare to claim them. Many of these involve the alien or otherworldly artefacts that are being discovered. These artefacts defy explanation, which makes them only more sought after. Most notably the Enlightened has uncovered a strange structure in the Sudanese desert. Undoubtedly this is the cause of their presence in the region and the reason for their fierce resistance to the Crown's eastern expedition. Yet further east in Africa, the streets of Lagos bear witness each night to extraordinary masquerade scenes where the phantasmagorical performances hide the battle between the agents of the Dark Council and the Outlaw guilds for control of the city.

THE WILD WEST

Perhaps most important of all, however, is the conflict unfolding on the American Frontier. The Union of Federated States has emerged traumatised and hardened from a bloody and protracted internal conflict known as the Ore War. It now tries to brutally enforce its rule across the sprawling and lawless land claimed by the proud Warrior Nation, all manner of Outlaws, wild creatures and elements of the Enlightened.

The cities of the East Coast of the Union are austere and distant places compared to the rapidly expanding and vibrant towns that have sprung up across the West. Towns like Red Oak, Tombstone, Deadwood and Retribution rival each other for attracting the most exotic and deadly of the inhabitants that call the frontier home.

There are factions at work in the West beyond the ken of the global power blocs. While these forces on the Frontier are not ignorant of the larger world around them, it has little immediate impact as the Union serves as both protector and oppressor; isolating the Frontier from the wider world except for those few agents that slip through the ever-tightening net. There is much more to be found in the West than just a plot of hard-earth and the scrabble for gold. With so many vying for power and influence; the Frontier is truly a place where a man or woman might not just make their fortune but become a legend. A legend to be remembered, a legend to be feared. Welcome to the Wild West.



THE UNION OF FEDERATED STATES



Tarnished by a recent Civil War and brutalised by the horrific technologies it unleashed to claim victory, the Union is a dark reflection of its former glory. The conquest and subjugation of the former Confederacy and the deeper south, as well as the new opportunities opening in the West stand as grim consolation for the Union's war-wearied soul. The Union cheer the formidable military might their country now wields to ensure that never again will anyone have to pay the brutal price that freedom demands. Nothing, however, can truly extinguish the fire of the American spirit. Scarred and brutalised by their own experiences, the Union's military industrial complex is well-aware of the depths to which man can fall – the only hope is to be found in having strength and resolution to stand tall in the face of great adversity, whatever the cost.

First draft of 'Rise of Our Nation' by the Committee on Public Information.

Manifest Destiny. Two words that define the Union of Federated States. A rejection of the old order of the world and the foundation of a new nation in the midst of a pristine land blessed with natural resources. The Union was founded as a beacon of freedom and equality in the world; a country where every man and woman would have a voice, where every person's rights would be sacrosanct. Emerging from a war for independence against the stagnant and oppressive Imperial British Crown, the Union of Federated States was born into a future that could not be denied.
[Editor's note: Starting strong! I like it.]

EYE OF THE BEHOLDER

Yet, at the heart of the endeavour, at the very core of that great nation-in-infancy, fissures were already forming. The corners of the Union hid a dark shadow, where the voices of the dispossessed, the disenfranchised and the excluded echoed in fear and anger, striving for their own hopes and dreams to be heard, to be acknowledged, and to be included in the great endeavour.

Those voices went unheard, their demands went unnoticed, and so, even as the Union began to take its first few steps on the world stage at the end of the Eighteenth Century. Suffused with its victory over the Crown, the Union was ready to accept its role as champion of liberty and freedom, to prove to all the

nations of the Earth that it was possible for a free people to work together to create perfection. But the fault lines of division and failure were already there.

ENEMIES WITHOUT

For decades, the Union flourished – at least externally. Each of the former colonies in America had become a Federated State, brimming with pride at their new standing and the part that they had each played in defeating one of the greatest powers of the world to earn their freedom. A feverish energy swept the land, and the newest nation on Earth began to press out in all directions, moving from the original Crown Colonies into the surrounding countryside.

But the Crown was not about to lose such a precious jewel so easily. There were constant skirmishes as the Crown pushed and prodded its wayward child in a thousand petty ways. The dissatisfied and dispossessed within certain States were nurtured and goaded into all manner of treacheries. To the North, the Crown Dominion of Canada was incited to cause all sorts of problems, while around the world the fledgling navy of the new nation was harried at every turn. The newly born French Republique, so quick to support the Union in their war for independence, elected to remain outside the conflict. The Union would stand or fall alone.

But whether it was driving back northern land grabs from the Dominion, the rising outlaw posses in the South and West of the country, or naval clashes with the Crown, the Union withstood it all. Even

when Crown forces swept down from staging points in the Dominion and ransacked the capital, the Union could not be brought low. The bones of the new nation were strong and united the will of the people were indomitable.

ENEMIES WITHIN

Despite this sense of invincibility, the fractures that grew deeper and deeper with each passing triumph could not be ignored forever. The Crown did all they could to give succour to the diverging ideology separating the northern states from the southern. The grievances were many and were deeply felt on both sides. But it was not the Crown who eventually set brothers and sisters against one another in the Union.

For nearly a decade the Union had tolerated the presence of a group from the Covenant of the Enlightened, a global coalition comprising of many of the pre-eminent brilliant minds of the age. This cabal of Enlightened had ensconced themselves deep in the western territories, hiding from the prying eyes of the world. While most of the Enlightened arrogantly declared themselves to be the sole custodians of the fruits of their brilliance, the Enlightened led by Burson Carpathian were of a different philosophy. Unlike their peers elsewhere in the world, these 'Egalitarian' members of the Covenant believed that the marvels that they developed should be made freely available to all who could afford them. Where money could not be readily given, perhaps some other currency might be offered such as land titles,

mineral access or information that might lead to further breakthroughs. Like their peers elsewhere in the world, these men and women could turn their genius to create the most destructive weaponry imaginable. All they needed were willing customers desperate enough to pay their price

It is impossible to know in hindsight if the War Between the States would have occurred without the offer of support from Carpathian and his Enlightened. It is possible that men of reason and peace living and ruling on either side of the great divide might have come to some accommodation. Many of the differences were fading even as the violence grew imminent. It was argued by several statesmen of the day that, if given enough time, peace would have been possible. *[Editor's note: This will play well to the South. I like it.]*

THE ORE WAR

The initial flashpoint in 1860 was a dispute over whether state or central government should have control over the extensive oil and mineral reserves of Mississippi and Texas – indeed, the Civil War was also known as the Ore War for just that reason.

Carpathian and the Enlightened Peers loyal to him, knew that the wealth and power they required for their greater work could only be had if these tensions and fears were stoked. Weapons of terrible efficacy and horrific power found their way to any faction who might conceivably triumph in the coming conflict. Money, credit, contingencies,

and future considerations were traded at a feverish rate for juiced rifles, automata, sonic cannons and RJ-1027, the wonderful that allowed all these infernal devices to be powered. The Ore War escalated into all-out Civil War, a conflict the likes of which had never been seen by man on Earth before.

Entire towns were turned to storms of ash, twisting on infernal breezes roaring up into blackening skies. Armies were swept from the field as streams of crimson power flashed beneath the rising clouds of smoke and dust. In the first year alone, over a million souls were lost, civilians and soldiers together, as the nation went mad, tearing at itself like a diseased animal without reason or sense.

And that was only the beginning...

CONFLICT ON A NEW SCALE

Brutal raids on towns and villages swept out from dark, foreboding forests, cutting down farmers, merchants, and craftsmen and their families. In acts of reprisal, the forests were set to the torch, the raiders screaming their last agonised breaths into the fury of the flames.

The war spilled beyond the borders of the Union and soon the Republic of Mexico became a battleground too. The Mexicans were drawn into the conflict to aid the Confederates in exchange for a promise of favourable terms after the conflict ended.

Armoured landships crawled across the churned, muddy ground, shrugging off blasts that would have shattered castles.

And then, as they fell upon fortified enemy positions, they were rendered in turn into pyres for their crews, as even more powerful weapons were brought to bear.

And all the while the factories of the Enlightened weighed and measured, making certain that the Confederacy and the Union were evenly matched so that neither would have the decisive advantage and equal currency and titles were pledged by both sides should they be victorious. That very balance, of course, only made the conflict much more terrible. *[Editor's note: Excellent, the more blame laid at the feet of the Enlightened the better this will play with the government. I like it.]*

SALVATION THROUGH BETRAYAL

In the end, as the bloody years trailed by, redemption came from the same quarter that had provided the tools of destruction. One of the most brilliant scientists in the Enlightened, a young Serbian by the name of Nikolai Tesla, was horrified by the bloodshed and the unending pain Carpathian and his peers had unleashed. Against the counsel of the other more conservative Enlightened and his patrons in the Prussian Imperium, Tesla travelled from Europe to the Union and offered his expertise and assistance in ending the war.

The government in Washington, headed by the beleaguered Abraham Lincoln, knew at once what they were being offered, and accepted graciously. The most senior General of the Armies of

the Union, Odysseus Grant, was quick to see the advantages as well. They were essentially being offered the chance to field advanced weaponry the Confederacy could not hope to match. They would launch an offensive that the rebels would have no means of countering.

Grant's family had been murdered and he had been hideously wounded by a raiding party armed with these new hellish weapons early in the war. As a result, he had developed a hatred of both the Enlightened and the Confederacy. This attitude had only hardened through the grinding, endless years of conflict. Knowing now that his opponents would be helpless before him, he would not wait for a moment more than necessary for Tesla to supply a small unit of soldiers with his lightning guns. They were dispatched on a raiding mission, deep behind enemy lines, to make a show of force and shock the rebels, it was hoped, into quick submission.

Just in case they proved recalcitrant, however, Tesla was given control of the Pipeworks, a massive manufacturing centre in Washington, to convert to his own compound of factories, laboratories, and staging areas. If the war were to continue past this moment, the Union would not lack for these new weapons.

THE FINAL CRESCENDO

The Union soldiers learned, all too soon, that possessing more deadly weaponry than the enemy does not necessarily, rob the enemy of their own lethality. The battles that ensued were perhaps even bloodier than any that had gone before,

but Tesla's new technologies were terrible to behold, capable of blasting the life from an enemy soldier no matter their protection. Men were fried alive while piloting the massive armoured vehicles or were seared into the hereafter as they slept in their fortress barracks. The skies of the South flared electric blue with the power of Tesla's inventions, and the Confederacy, no matter how brave their soldiers or savvy their generals, could not hope to stand against them. [Editor's note: *Beautiful imagery. I like it.*]

Just as Tesla's weaponry came into use, the Confederacy had dug in at Petersburg. Less than 150 miles south of Washington, this was the place from where they could defend Richmond, the capital of the embattled Confederate States. Between the two cities, virtually all the strength of the Confederate Army was deployed in a defensive posture, and all but one of the Union Generals agreed that it would be impossible to dislodge them, despite Tesla's magnificent weapons, without horrendous loss of life.

Odysseus Grant, however, felt differently. He did not question that there would be casualties. He only disagreed with his colleagues on one salient point; he believed the losses would be worth the victory they would secure. Pushing south from Washington with the Army of the Potomac, Grant meant first to crush Petersburg, thus eliminating the final military threat to his forces, and then push on to completely raze Richmond, the spiritual and political capital of his enemies.

Grant was brutal and merciless in these final attacks. As the Confederate

command tried to rally their forces in Richmond for the final battle, Jonathan 'Stonewall' Jackson, their most gifted field commander, did his best with the orderly retreat from Petersburg. Unfortunately, he was ambushed with his vanguard just ten miles from safety. His body was carried from the field, his ultimate fate lost amidst the chaos of the running battle. [Editor's note: *Not sure old scarface is going to like being called 'brutal and merciless'. I don't like it either.*]

Jackson's loss was the final straw for Confederate President Davis. As Grant began to rain down hellfire on Richmond and the entire city burned, Davis instructed General Lee to sue for peace, making certain their offers of surrender were carried to President Lincoln himself, as they felt Grant might be too inclined to ignore them in favour of his great, blazing victory. Lincoln accepted the conditions of surrender, immediately commanding Grant to cease his attack. Nearly three-quarters of the city of Richmond had been destroyed as the last fire went out and the Confederate Army was utterly shattered with less than a tenth of their fighting strength remaining.

THE ROAD BACK

By late 1865 the war was over, but the Union's wounds ran deep. Six million souls, almost a fifth of the total population, had died or would not survive their wounds while the South was largely devastated. In addition, there were even greater threats rising all around. The Crown, always eager for an easy opening, attacked the Union both financially and militarily,

weakening them abroad. In the West, the indigenous tribes threaten to halt westward expansion, if not unleash outright invasion. Coupled with this was the ever-present fear that while an all-out war was unlikely, a resumption of small skirmishes could erupt again South of the Mason-Dixon Line. It was clear that the Union Army could not be disbanded or reduced to pre-conflict levels. The war might have ended, but this was certainly not peacetime.

The Union continued to function as it had during the war, with conscription and recruitment continuing apace. Service in the Army was seen in many quarters as the greatest honour one might achieve. It became fashionable for the most wealthy and best families to send their second-born sons and daughters to officer training to serve.

SACRIFICE AND UNITY

As Union society shifted to acknowledge and accommodate the need for a well-trained, well-prepared standing army, most states saw more and more of their surplus resources going back into a military who had already won its war. A massive bureaucracy stretched out from Washington to oversee taxation and other support activities to ensure peace and the slow recovery of the brutalised country. Sacrifice was the watchword on the thin lips of these agents of the government, and sacrifice was the national virtue they embodied.

One remarkable aspect of the Union compared to other major powers is the relative unity of its populace. Since the

abolition of slavery in the country after the War of Independence, black citizens have become steadily more integrated into the country's population, and those of Latin descent are following suit after the acquisition of the bulk of the Spanish-speaking lands of North and Central America, so much so that Spanish is close to gaining recognition as an official language alongside English. The overall effect is that where many empires encompass many different peoples, societies and creeds, the people of the Union, whatever their origins, are slowly but surely coming to think of themselves primarily as one people united by a common cause - the survival of liberty.

The men and women of the Union were not alone in their sacrifices. It became painfully clear to President Lincoln that he could not rule effectively with such a diverse array of enemies and challenges rising up against him. The nation needed to be able to respond to these countless threats with a speed and versatility that the Founding Fathers had just not imagined. He was best suited, of all the men and women alive, to shepherd his beloved nation back to peace, but he could not do it from the White House.

THE DEATH OF A PRESIDENT

Using his ever-expanding web of agents to assist him, Lincoln plotted his own assassination in 1866. Enlisting an actor friend of his son's, a man who truly believed in the Union and what it stood for, plans were laid for a massive public attack that would seemingly result in the president's death. He would then be free to assume



GROWTH OF THE UNION

more direct control of the varied defences of the nation, while his vice-president, Andrew Johnson, a capable bureaucrat with little to no imagination or drive, would be left as a figurehead to rule in his place. [Editor's note: *What the hell is this??! You can't talk about this kind of stuff in public. Cut it all out. I hate it.*]

Knowing that for the ruse to succeed, he would have to die, John Wilkes Booth was not afraid to give his life for his nation. As planned there was a struggle, and a juiced blaster roared within the confines of a small private theatre box. When the smoke cleared the world reeled at the death of the President, even his own family believed he died that night. The sacrifice made that night was by two men. Booth was caught as planned and killed for his actions and Lincoln would never be allowed to return to his private or public life again

Abraham Lincoln was now relieved of the trappings of office. He was free to move out into the wide world in order to lead his extensive army of gifted killers through the shadows, conducting the infinite number of dark and dreadful deeds the times demanded of the nation should she expect to survive. Lincoln knew that there were things the Union Army could not be called upon to do, whether it was investigating dangers to the wounded country, to ferret out plots and schemes that threatened her, or eliminate potential problems before the public could even be aware of them. His Secret Service was essential to the health of the Union. [Editor's note: *Are you nuts? Do you want to go missing? Cut it all out. I hate it.*]

The Army places its faith in themselves and their arsenal. Grant remained the General of the Armies, and although his bitterest foe was no more, he began to view all threats to the Union as equally despicable. He had seen the horrors of war. He had seen his family destroyed before his very eyes with the terrible weapons unleashed by the covetous Enlightened. He had seen the savages of the Warrior Nation tear his beloved soldiers' limb from limb. There was only one way his nation was going to survive this terrible time, and that was through strength. [Editor's note: *Ease up on the slaughter of the Union, eh? I don't like it.*]

To the north, the Union's border stretches the length of the Dominion of Canada to the cold reaches of Russian Alaska; frontier territory of the most inhospitable kind. To the south, the war-ravaged and lawless hinterlands of Mexico still harboured rebels and dissidents contesting the Mexican Absorption into the Union in May 1868.

The Army knew such challenges could not go unanswered. Whilst the northern borders are reinforced against Crown incursions and further reinforcements funnelled into the West, the invasion of Gran Columbia in the Spring of 1869 ensured that not only were future attacks on the Union's southern border discouraged but that further resources and territory enriched the lives and coffers of all the member states. Such rapid expansion requires the deployment of large garrisons of Union troops to ensure these new territories remain loyal to the

manifest destiny that drives the Union ever onwards. Looking to repeat the gains made in Gran Columbia, the Union army mobilises itself once more with an eye southward on the newly emergent Socialist Unity of South America.

THE UNION ASCENDANT

Building on the designs purchased from the Enlightened during the Civil War, Union military technology is mostly an effective mix of the innovative and reliable. Though Carpathian and his Enlightened continues to supply the Union with RJ fuel cells, the nation has warmed towards other, less fickle sources of innovation. Union manufacturers, such as Orlington and Chace produce an array of functional, but beautifully engineered weapons and operating systems. Tesla continues to contribute automata designs and spark reactors for the military as well as to improve the lives of the citizens of the Union. As a result, the war machines of the Union are well equipped with labour-saving devices for weaponry and control systems, allowing them to devote more crew-space to their fighting compliments, especially the Marine Corps sharpshooters.

When it comes to offensive power, in all spheres the Union prefers relatively simple weapons: massed rocket batteries and big guns – lots of them! Land Ships and Rolling Thunder battle tanks bristle with heavy cannons, whose long barrels, superior ammunition and automatic loaders allow them to lay down heavy barrages at extreme range. Union warships are driven by huge paddle wheels, rather than propellers, allowing them to manoeuvre

far more efficiently than their great size would suggest. Reinforced with another Enlightened development, Sturginium, these massive structures are very resistant to damage. Union airships, the core of its aerial forces, are also highly resilient beasts. Filled with inert Helium gas – a by-product of the nation's oil industry – they can absorb immense amounts of punishment while dishing out huge quantities of their own.
[Editor's note: The official story here is that Brigadier General Samuel Sturgis discovered Sturginium while leading an expedition in the Dakota Territory. The Enlightened then stole it and took to south to the Antarctic to mass produce it. Are we clear?]

There is one thing that all of the men and women who have answered the Union's call can agree on: With weapons and technologies such as these, the Union of Federated States is still the greatest hope for instilling liberty and independence in the world.

AN UNCERTAIN AGE

The President says that there will be time to return to the values that once made the nation a beacon of hope. At some point in the future, there will be peace again and the time for relinquishing weapons will come. Until that time, there can be no peace. Better to curtail freedom today that the Union may live on to be an example to the rest of the world tomorrow.

For without the Union, how else will freedom in the wider world prevail?

[Editor's note: Great ending, but that stuff about Lincoln has to go. If the public knew the truth...]

THE WATCHERS HEGEMONY



A pan-galactic group that consists of dozens of species all working together to a common cause, the Watchers have been observing humanity for thousands of years. Their standing order is not to involve themselves in the affairs of a sentient species until they reach a level of technological and cultural sophistication. Once this level is reached, the Watchers reveal themselves and the world is honoured by joining the Watcher Hegemony.

On Earth, there is something wrong. Outside influences are interfering with humanity's development. Technologies are available that are decades, if not centuries, beyond their time. The Watchers came to the Earth to free humanity from the various unnatural influences that had taken hold, however recent events have caused their mission to change. One day the Watchers will be able to recontact their people and bring the full might of the Hegemony to this backwater ball of dirt. Until then, the Watchers rebuild their forces in secret, raiding settlements for raw materials and hunting down those who would threaten their own survival on this harsh and unforgiving alien world.

Diagnostic Event Recital Amber Alpha Jocasta

For over six thousand years the Watchers have maintained peace in the galaxy. Led by the noble Guardians, the Hegemony of Watcher Clades have worked in unity to observe the myriad worlds for those that might bear sentient life. Where such worlds show promise, closer scrutiny is conducted. Self-awareness in life is both a blessing and a burden on all other sentients. Over the watchful millennia, should that new species evolve to a maturity that enhances the galaxy, they

are welcomed into the Watchers and the species is re-engineered as a new Clade. Each Clade has a function in the Watchers, from the crystalline architects of the Indigo Clade to the personal protection services of the Vermillion Clade. However, should the emergent race prove to have no purpose save that of being selfish, warlike, aggressive or unreasoning then they are considered a threat to other sentients of the galaxy. In such circumstances, the Watchers act without compunction to eradicate the species and reset the primordial elements once more so that the world might give rise to a worthier race in the future.



THE ARKVULTS

Travel between the stars is a lengthy and complex process. Early in their history, thanks to technology gleaned from the relics of a dead world, the Guardians developed and seeded large portal gateways at key points across the galaxy traversing distances that would otherwise take centuries. Travelling from their idyllic Sphere-Worlds through this network of portals, the Watchers use large spacecraft known as Arkvults to extend their vigil to the hundreds of thousands of planets that harbour sentient life. These city-sized starships contain all the resources needed to carry out the Watchers' mandate. Species from all the Clades are held in stasis in these immense craft for while the journey between portals is near instantaneous, the journey within the star system itself can take several weeks or longer until the ship is in position above the target world.

Once in orbit, the Watchers' Observation Teams are able to make journeys to the surface in moments utilising shorter ranged portals. In this manner, the

Watchers can conduct a thorough analysis of each of the worlds in their care. As an Arkvault is responsible for routinely checking on hundreds of worlds and so once the observation is complete, the team transmits their findings and the Arkvault departs for the next sentient world. The return of an Arkvault to a world within a century is seen only in cases of urgency.

THE HUMAN CONUNDRUM

The emergent human race first drew the closer scrutiny of the Watchers around four thousand years ago. A team of Watchers (known as a myriad) from the Azure and Cerulean Clades discovered something surprising while making a routine observation. Infiltrating the primitive society on the island of Thera, the Cerulean were impressed to find a cultured and innovative people. Reference was made to an even more advanced civilisation on a distant island in the Sea of Atlantis. The Azure Clade traversed the waters using their Aetherwings, leaving the Cerulean to continue inveigling themselves into the higher echelons of Theran society.

Crossing the sea, the Azure Clade arrived on the island of Atlantea and found an unprecedented level of technological sophistication and organisation for a civilisation as primitive as the humans were believed to be. No species had made such a technological leap in isolation from the others of their kind. How could it be that the Atlanteans appeared to have mastered cold fusion while every other settlement on the planet was still struggling with glass making and erecting stone monoliths? Returning to



their Cerulean allies, the Azure agreed to portal back to the orbiting ArkVault and inform the Hegemony of this unexpected development.

A SURPRISING WELCOME

A larger team under the command of a Viridian Alpha arrived a few days later including myriad from the Grey, Azure, Icterine, Magenta and Viridian Clades. Charged with obtaining specimens of these advanced humans for further study, the Watchers emerged from the portal gateway on Thera to find the Cerulean waiting for them without the need of subterfuge. The natives seemed unconcerned by the arrival of the otherworldly visitors and the Cerulean quickly explained that the humans in Thera had discovered their mimicry not long after the Azure had left. Rather than being fearful, the Therans had welcomed them as brothers. The Viridian Alpha was suspicious of this ready acceptance. In her experience, such a fundamental shift in a culture's beliefs should not so easily be made. Focussing on the mission at hand Icterine Engineers and the Grey built a staging ground near the township of Akrotiri while a reconnaissance force of Azure and Magenta was despatched to Atlantea. Arriving in Atlantea the Magenta managed to abduct several of the humans before the armed militia, known as Spica, began to respond. Surprisingly disciplined and accurate, the rifles of the Spica cut down many of the Azure and Magenta before they could escape with their captives. Returning to Thera, the Atlantean prisoners were quickly transported back to the ArkVault

while the Viridian Alpha had the Greys tend to the wounded as she prepared her remaining forces for the next action decided upon by the Hegemony.

INTERFERENCE

Aboard the ArkVault, the analysis of the humans was fascinating. Though they had potential to be a superb addition to the Watchers with their creativity and determination, it was clear that some external agency had influenced the humans of Atlantea. Though the humans themselves had been conditioned by some pseudo-religious doctrine it was clear that a greater intelligence was at work feeding them technological and cultural directives through their subconscious. Identified only as The Order, this previously unknown species appeared to be extra-galactic or possibly even extra-dimensional. Both of these concepts had hitherto only been theorised by the Hegemony.

Interviewing the captive Atlanteans, the Watchers deduced that they were proxies in some kind of war between the Order and another party known as the Hex. According to the Atlanteans, the Hex were a dark corruptive stain on humanity and their purpose was to cleanse that stain from the Earth. Regardless of how apparently well-intentioned the Order might be, the interference in the natural development of a sentient species could not be tolerated even if the Order were restricting their influence to the island of Atlantea. Furthermore, no sign of a corrupting dark empire could be identified on the planet. As

the alien masters of the Order could not be communicated with, the Watchers had no alternative but to remove their agents from the Earth to prevent further interference.

BETRAYAL AT THERA

While the Watchers aboard the ArkVault made plans to excise the island of Atlantea, the reconnaissance force at Thera was instructed to cease work on the observation post and withdraw all assets from the planet. The Viridian Alpha passed on this news to the Clades under her command and was surprised when the Cerulean petitioned to be allowed to remain, in direct contradiction of the directive given by the Hegemony. Surprise turned to alarm when, after denying this request, the Cerulean withdrew from the other Clades and entered a discussion with the Therans. The reaction was swift and unexpected as the Icterine and Viridian were attacked by murderous humans and monstrous creatures emerging from subterranean lairs. As the Cerulean psionically battered her to the ground and the blades of the humans pierced her chest the Viridian Alpha realised too late that she had found the Hex.

JUDGEMENT OF THE WATCHERS

Unaware of the slaughter of their kin at Akrotiri, the ArkVault in orbit targeted the island city of Atlantea with a simple sequence of commands. The starship's large portal generators instantly dematerialised a twenty-kilometre wide sphere of matter that included the island

and the surrounding bedrock. After a split second, the waves rushed in to fill the void with a roar. As the sea settled there was no trace that the island had ever existed, save for the perfectly smooth kilometres wide gouge in the bedrock thousands of fathoms below the surface. As for Atlantea, rather than rematerializing in another location, the island remained as energy that was harmlessly vented into space. Atlantea and all its people were gone and with them the Order's connection to the Earth.

A DESPERATE ACT

As the only survivors remaining from the surprise attack by the Hex, two wounded Grey managed to fall back to the geothermal generator that had been installed to power the partially constructed Watcher base. As the Hex beasts and hordes of grimly determined humans approached, the Grey realised that there would be no escape for them. Not willing to allow the human's betrayal to go unpunished, the Grey overloaded the geothermal reactor beginning a chain reaction through the crust and into the magma vent below. Joining hands in a last moment of comfort, the pair were annihilated as a detonation ripped through the island causing a volcanic eruption so massive that the ArkVault in orbit could observe its effect. Thera was obliterated as were the Hex corrupted humans and all trace of the Watchers on Earth. The distant lands of Egypt and China would record storms of ash and fire in the sky that year and whole communities were washed away by the tsunami caused by the vanishing of Atlantea and the annihilation of Thera.



RENEWED OBSERVANCE

For several months the Watchers on the orbiting ArkVault scanned for any sign of the Order or the Hex. A heavily armed observation team consisting of myriad from the Viridian and Azure Clades made several inspections over the following weeks and even infiltrating myriad from the Cerulean and Magenta Clades could find no trace of the influence of either faction on the Earth. Satisfied, the ArkVault departed once more, with a follow-up mission scheduled for fifty years time. When that also found no sign of continued interference the centuries passed and the observations became less frequent. Humanity continued to develop and it was hoped that after several more millennia the species might prove worthy of fulfilling their potential and take their place amongst the Watchers. Elsewhere in the galaxy, the Watchers searched for evidence of the Hex or Order on any other world of sentients but found none. Disturbingly, however, in the ruins of two dead worlds, fragments of technology were discovered. Though millennia old, the technology bore the hallmarks of those weapons used by the Spica of Atlantaea and though there was no sign of life on either world perhaps there had been long ago.

RESURGENCE

It had been almost over a century since the last observation when the ArkVault arrived in orbit. At first, all appeared as unremarkable as before, but a survey team from the Indigo Clade detected anomalous portal activity in South America. After a Magenta Beta and myriad were dispatched to the jungles to investigate it was found

that an entire indigenous people had vanished. Suspecting the involvement of the Hex or the Order a reconnaissance force consisting of Cerulean, Azure, Icterine and Grey Clades was deployed to thoroughly chart every human population and identify any extra-planetary influence. Very quickly it became apparent that the dominant culture on the continent of Europe was being used by agents of the Order. It logically followed that the Hex would be present elsewhere on the globe.

According to the reckoning of the European humans, the year was 1518 and it was anticipated that before the next century was at an end, the Europeans would have spread to the lands they referred to as the New World. The Watchers concluded that this expansion would spread the agents of the Order and the Hex further across the planet and it might be impossible to remove them strategically. The Watchers were left with the unpleasant realisation that if they did not act soon they might need to exterminate a large proportion of humanity to prevent further corruption of their natural development. The Hegemony concluded that a decisive strike force must be deployed and remove the Hex and Order once and for all.

THE CLADES ASSEMBLE

Operational command of the battle group was given to the Alphas of the Clades involved. Consisting primarily of myriad from the Viridian, Magenta, Icterine, Indigo, Cerulean and Grey Clades, the battle group was charged principally with the salvation of humanity.

Translocating from the orbiting ArkVault, the host of some two thousand Watchers arrived ready for deployment. The Grey aboard the ArkVault had identified a suitable landing point to construct a base of operations. The Grey, Icterine and Indigo translocated to the surface on the islands of Bimini. Mindful of the attack on their forces by the natives all those years ago, the islands were cleared of its indigenous population and the Watchers began to assemble an armoured beachhead from which the campaign could be conducted.

FOOTHOLD

To ensure a ready supply of material and troops for the task at hand, a gateway was opened linking the base at Bimini with the orbiting ArkVault. Over the following months, the initial forces were expanded with the arrival of myriad from the Azure, Vermillion, Amber, Onyx, and Umber Clades. Their numbers now swelling to over four thousand the base was extended further below the surface. Geothermal generators and atomic batteries were installed to supply auxiliary power, though primary power was still supplied through the link with the orbiting ArkVault. Scouting myriad from the Magenta and Azure Clades were deployed to not only secure the surrounding territory but also search for traces of the Order or the Hex.

THE DELUSION OF MAN

While the Watchers were busy preparing to strike down the Order in Europe, the human explorer Juan Ponce de Leon

and his Conquistadores had arrived in the Bahamas looking for the fabled Fountain of Youth. The activity of the Watchers had convinced the natives that something supernatural was taking place and when rumours reached Ponce de Leon, he became convinced that the goal of his quest must lie there. Defeating an unsuspecting patrol of Grey, the Conquistadores managed to gain access to a service tunnel. Adventuring beneath the islands many of the Conquistadores were killed or lost in the labyrinthine network of corridors and vents. Fortune smiled on Ponce de Leon, as by chance he managed to avoid detection by the Watchers - until an encounter with a Magenta Lurker raised the alarm.

By this point the Conquistadores were deep in the alien complex and, though they viewed the place as an ancient temple of the gods, they understood enough of the architecture to know that the chamber ahead of them was a place of great importance. In actuality, the humans had found the temporal relay substation that supported the uplink to the orbiting ArkVault. This apparatus was an essential part of the portal technology and compensated for the natural drift in space-time when using a portal over hundreds of kilometres. The temporal regulator array was aboard the ArkVault but as the portal was required to be open to the planet for a prolonged period, the Icterine had incorporated a relay substation planetside to support the efforts of the ship. While his men ambushed the demons they found deeper in the cave (actually Icterine and Grey working in the chamber), Ponce de Leon stood transfixed by

the shimmering fountain of light at its centre. Light streamed from him as he crossed invisible protective shields and entered the hazardous heart of the chamber. He was bathed in temporal energy, feeling both rejuvenated and impossibly ancient at once.

As though on holy or sacred ground, Ponce De Leon took a golden goblet from his knapsack and placed it into the fountain as though it would be filled with life-giving waters. In a split second, his hand aged centuries and then was gone. The goblet fell from his grasp and tumbled into the volatile heart of the relay below. As he spun around, clutching the withered stump of his hand, the sound of klaxons wailed and the chamber shook. Monstrous Magenta scuttled across the ceiling and the entrance was barred by a myriad of Vermillion Sentinels. The Conquistadores numbered less than a dozen and each man knew that this must be their end. Then a pulse of white light filled the chamber and all was still.

THE LINK IS SEVERED

The gold from the goblet caused a spectacular and unanticipated chain reaction to ripple through the apparatus. The shockwave pulsed back through the collapsing portal vaporising all the Watchers within half a kilometre of the portal gate on the surface. Within the relay chamber and the surrounding complex, the Watchers and Conquistadores were frozen in an instant of time, protected from the terrible firestorm that raged above them. The energy that pulsed through the portal exploded inside the orbiting

ArkVault, causing crippling damage to the city-sized starship. With a flash that lit up the sky, the ArkVault broke open and its shattered hull plunged towards the planet. Even as its superstructure began to break apart as it slew through the atmosphere, the Watchers on the bridge of the ArkVault desperately tried to slow the craft and ensure that the impact did not cause apocalyptic devastation to the planet. Using what remained of their dying strength, the Watchers ploughed the ship into the uninhabited frozen southernmost continent. The impact was felt in many parts of the southern hemisphere and caused tsunamis and firestorms that killed thousands, but the impact was not the planet killer it could have been and the shattered city-ship was buried under the frozen sprawl of Antarctica.

A NEW WORLD

In the outpost chamber, after what seemed like mere seconds had passed, the light faded and the Watchers recovered their senses. The Conquistadores had vanished, presumably vaporised and the surviving Alphas quickly moved to assess their own situation. The lower levels of the facility were intact but everything from the first sub-level and higher was completely destroyed. As the Grey brought the geothermal generators online and the Icterine began to make sufficient repairs to power up the surviving systems, establishing contact with the ArkVault proved impossible. Once interference had been discounted a closer examination revealed that the starship was gone, presumably destroyed by the same cataclysm that had scourged

the base. The Indigo managed to smash their way to the surface and a myriad of Azure were dispatched to reconnoitre the immediate area. What they found was at first confusing. The Humans from Europe had settled the areas previously uninhabited or inhabited by the indigenous peoples. Furthermore, their technology seemed significantly in advance of where it had been only hours earlier. Cerulean infiltrators contacted the nearby human colony in the guise of travelling natives and confirmed the terrible truth that more than three centuries had passed on the Earth while the Watchers were frozen. The year according to human reckoning was 1868.

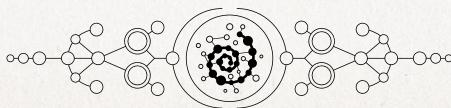
AN UNCERTAIN PRESENT

Looking to their strength, the Alphas could count on less than four hundred Watchers from the combined Clades. This was not only insufficient to carry out their primary mission but was also lacking the capability to immediately improve their current situation. The Watchers on Earth were left with a troubling matter, after three and a half centuries why had the Hegemony not sent another ship? Presumably, their own ArkVault had been destroyed but the lack of an update after a year or more would have been sufficient time for a response. Yet nothing had arrived. Why?

Riven by uncertainty, the Clades fell into quarrelling and disharmony. The Amber Alpha acted quickly and decisively to give them purpose once more. For the present, they would have two key

objectives with each Clade contributing to them as best they could. The first objective would be to construct a large portal here on the Earth to reconnect with the Sphere-Worlds. Though activating such a portal would cause devastation for hundreds of kilometres around, it would be a small price to pay to reconnect with their kin. Such a portal would require a significant quantity of materials, some of which would be difficult to source or replicate. The construction would likely take the best part of a decade to complete. In parallel to this first objective would be the second, to carry out the mission as given to them by the Hegemony. Seek out the Hex and Order influence on humanity and eradicate any trace of it. This eradication would include any allies of these forces as well as any trace of technology or other interference with the natural progression of humanity.

Already the Grey have begun construction of a new portal facility deep in Superstition Mountain in the Arizona Territory. Incubation chambers have been designed by the Grey Elite and Icterine that will enable a new generation of Grey to be cloned to reinforce the existing Clades. The Watchers are not sufficiently numerous to conduct a large-scale open conflict on the Earth and so, for now, must carry out their two-fold mission discretely lest their enemies move too quickly against them.



THE DARK COUNCIL OF THE HEX



The Hex just wants to be left alone. Hunted across the galaxy, the Hex has come to Earth to find a new home for itself. It calls out to those similarly abused and victimised so that it might find companionship and learn from their culture and endeavours.

The Hex has no sense of right and wrong, it only knows survival and the loneliness that eons of persecution have brought about. On Earth it has made new allies and bonded with many who are similarly persecuted, but the Hex's gift of power is misused by humanity. Those who were the victim now have the strength to strike back at those who made them suffer. Led by a Dark Council the Hex manipulate and inveigle themselves in the great nations of the world, for only through control can they truly be safe.

*From the pen of
Doctor Burson Carpathian,
27th October 1871*

My beloved Veronica.

It is our anniversary once more and you are still not by my side. As I look back on the unfairness of our separation I cannot help but feel compelled to write this narrative in the hope that you might understand the nature of the faustian pact I have been forced to make. I hope that, in reading it, you will understand what it has cost me, and what it may yet cost me still.

It is said that life always finds a way to survive. Whether that is at the bottom of the oceans, upon the highest mountain peaks, or lost in the most inhospitable, scorching deserts. I remember the Amis

speculating that even in the coldness of the aether, a flicker of life might be found. If they only knew the truth.

DRIVE INCHOATE

The entity known as the Hex has existed for billions of years. Where it came from, or how it first came into being, none can say. Certainly, the Hex itself offers no explanation on the subject. It is a being devoid of the concept of history, it keeps no record and lacks all but the simplest memories of its own past. The Hex is the maxim of survival made manifest. It is barely aware and yet driven with a single-minded focus to survive at all costs. It is the quintessential fighter, an awareness of existence without an awareness of self, driven to continue to survive against all odds, no matter what opposition might

rise up before it, no matter what the cost. Though that cost is great indeed.

MIND WITHOUT THOUGHT

Beyond its unending drive to exist, the Hex lacks awareness as most sentients would understand such things. It is a disembodied force, a creature of energy that wants nothing more than to belong somewhere, to be a part of something and to survive. It is driven by instincts shared by every other organism in creation to do whatever it takes to continue its existence and to widen its understanding.

Lacking any true sentience of its own, the Hex is driven to bond with existing minds. In doing so, it is able to utilise those minds and the accompanying body to provide form, function and purpose to its survival. Lacking a history, higher calling, or a culture of its own, it assumes these things from its partnered organisms in order to thrive and perceive the universe through different eyes.

Although the Hex is unaware of its past on any practical level, the experiences that drive it exist somewhere in its being. It recalls little of the Helmera, the first civilisation ever to host the Hex, save for their name and some detail of their world of Kerin. It remembers when it called out across that planet to draw several sympathetically minded Helmera to it. There is a vague recollection of bonding with them for the first time. It remembers well the flood of amazement and joy it felt upon first touching sentient minds, upon first looking at the universe with physical eyes.

The Hex also remembers what happened next.

THE BATTLE FOR SURVIVAL

The Helmera were destroyed utterly. Targeted by some force from beyond Kerin, far outside the Hex's own experience, the entire civilisation was destroyed with a hatred it had never encountered before. First to die were those most closely related to the Hex. The entity had gifted vast stores of its own power to several of the Helmera, and these were the first to be destroyed. Then the Tenebrae Seed, the crystalline geode matrix through which the Hex interacted with the Helmera was destroyed. The energy force at the core of the being was diminished and damaged, driven back out into deep space.

The Hex does not really remember the Helmera, but it does remember that it is hunted. The Hex does not remember the Cupash either, or the Sindar, or the Heelian nomads of the red planet. It has only the vaguest of recollections of the seventeen attempts it has made to find a refuge. The attempts to find a partner in the vastness of space only to be thwarted yet again by the hunters and forced to flee. Each time the Hex has been driven from its adoptive world by the hunters as they reduce to a charred husk the natives that had offered the Hex the one thing it craves: a home.

THE SEEDS OF SURVIVAL

The hunters, known as the Order, are indefatigable. Driven by the need to

survive against this ruthless threat, the Hex has developed all manner of defences. Upon arriving at a new planet, called there by some instinct it could never understand, it divides itself into six equal Tenebrae Seeds. Each Seed sinks through the crust of the planet, taking root far from prying eyes or population centres. In this way, it hides its power from those that might harm. At the site where each Seed sets hold, massive quantities of biological matter are converted into Hex Essence. This glowing, crimson ooze first forms a crystalline shell around the Tenebrae Seed, giving it physical form, and latterly creates a protective moat of viscous fluid hundreds of feet across. From this relative safety, each Seed calls out to sympathetic minds amongst the native population; the outcast, the pariahs, the castoffs of civilisation.

The Hex is a simple consciousness, yet eternal. It knows nothing of the temptations of mortal creatures, the lengths to which they might go to obtain power, and the depths to which they might sink to keep it. Once these kindred spirits link with the Seed they can draw on a portion of its power and strength which allows them to build a network of further allies and support. This way those who are linked to each Seed develop the influence in the world necessary to protect themselves and the Hex as a whole. For physical succour, the Essence can be used to reshape biological matter so that the desires of a being's mind are made manifest in their flesh.

In exchange for this incredible power, each Seed shares its need for inclusion

and understanding with those it brings into the fold, elevating them to positions of authority and, eventually, clandestine control over any other local factions. Through this eventual rise, the Hex consciousness develops, using each individual to multiply its own awareness, experiencing the physical realm through the culture and intellect of the host.

This process of influence and integration may take centuries if not millennia on a world to reach fruition. Once complete it is rare for the Hex to enjoy more than a few years of relative peace and security before the merciless Order return and wreak destruction on those carefully crafted societies, driving the Hex back out into the void once more.

Occasionally the Seed's call will go unanswered, its location is too remote for the natives to be aware or reach it. By dividing into six it ensures that even if one or two Seeds go unfound, enough of the other Seeds will make a connection to ensure its survival. The lost Seeds can then be rediscovered by agents of the Hex later in the process of connecting with the inhabitants. Each Seed is linked to the others and even if only one escapes the destruction of the world, the Hex will survive. On its long journey to a new home, the Hex will regenerate its missing substance until it is whole once again.

THE DRIVE TO EARTH

The seventeenth attempt to create a home, on the planet Chy, was a true disaster. The emotional and spiritual connection between the Hex and the

indigenous Chyne was particularly difficult. Perhaps due to their crystalline nature, true symbiosis with the Chyne remained elusive even up to the moment the dreaded Order arrived. This time, the Tenebrae Seeds had been unable to create a sufficiently influential group of followers, and those that had aided it were quickly discovered and destroyed. The Hex was driven out, vast portions of its Essence burned away as the planet was scoured in stellar flame.

The remaining awareness, insensate with agony and its usual unfocused, emotive existence, sought desperately for safety. Drifting near the solar system of the red planet it had once fled from aeons ago, for the first time the Hex found itself drawn back to a system it had visited before. Though the red planet had been lifeless for hundreds of millennia, its neighbour, a watery blue world was home to an emerging race of sentients known as humanity.

Not having recovered sufficiently, the Hex was only able to divide into four Seeds and fell to this new world in the hope that this might be its final home. The first landed in the northern hemisphere on an island known as Thera while the second landed near the frozen north of Europe. The third Seed fell far to the East in China, while the fourth landed far to the South in the steaming subtropical American swamplands that would in time become known as Florida.

Though some four thousand years before our present day, even then humanity was a diverse and complex a species as the

Hex had ever encountered. While the first Seed found a solid foothold amongst the people of Thera, the second found none amongst the warring tribes of Northern Europe to link with. That second Seed instead watched and waited until the emergence of the Roman Empire before it felt the humans were advanced enough to begin to establish itself amongst the civilisation there.

The third Seed was supposedly found by monks of a particularly selfless and introverted nature known as the Tian Shang who took it back to their monastery in the mountains. I know not what happened to this Seed, for it is as lost to me as it is lost to the Hex. Perhaps the Celestians know more, but it plays no part in this narrative so let us give it no further thought.

The swamp-bound final Seed, so far away from the others, was left to its own devices. It waited, dormant and uncontacted for centuries beneath the Floridian swamps, the natives being warned away by their so-called Great Spirit that nothing good would come from contact. Unable to draw any of the local tribesmen into its sphere of influence, the Seed instead settled deeper into the wetlands. Its power leached through the murky water, drawing what sentience it could from the swamp dwellers and creatures of the dank, moss-shrouded wastes. Unbeknownst to the Seed, its seeping power eventually reached a large, misshapen egg that had lain dormant, ossified for millions of years. The creature that had laid such an egg had passed from history so long ago there was no

fossil remaining to tell of its existence. But nurtured with the crimson Essence of the Hex, the egg quickened, eventually hatching forth a creature who drew on the link with the Seed to develop a wicked intelligence and claim all of the surrounding bayous as her domain.

THE ALIEN WITHOUT

After centuries on Thera, the first Seed developed its network among the sophisticated island culture. But then something extraordinary happened. Something that the Hex had not experienced on any of its previous host worlds. Its adoptive home was visited by aliens.

An alliance of different species, collectively known as Watchers, had arrived from off-planet. The Hex had never been present at a visit by extraterrestrials before. In all previous encounters with a new race of sentients, it had been the Hex who had been the alien presence arriving on their world. The Hex did not recognise any of the Watcher species and that was both a source of fascination as well as concern. As it would anywhere else, it immediately set about drawing several of these newcomers to itself, thinking to better understand their cultural ideologies if possible.

However, the Watchers had their own mandate on the Earth and having found agents of the Order already operating on the Earth they brought them to Thera, not understanding the consequences this would have for the Hex and its human allies. With no choices left to it,

the Hex attacked, frantic to salvage what it could of the situation. The response from these Watchers was equally decisive and the island of Thera was engulfed in a fiery cataclysm, burying the Seed deep beneath countless tons of lava, stone, and seawater. Lost beneath the waves of what came to be called Mare Nostrum, the Seed was beyond the reach of the planet's inhabitants, no matter the power that might be offered.

A SLOW RESTORATION

The other Tenebrae Seeds recoiled from the destruction of the Thera. Now the Hex was reduced to two active Seeds and its situation proved desperate indeed for the merciless Order were doubtless still out there in the world.

It took more than a thousand years for the second Seed to work its council of allies into positions of influence and authority in the emerging European powers. Deep beneath the more obvious surface trappings of mortal power and prestige, these companions manipulated the rise of great empires that spread the influence of the Hex anew.

MY BURDEN

On Earth, the humans who were drawn to the second Seed over time came to refer to themselves as the Dark Council. Each individual considered worthy enough to join with the Hex became a strong, driven leader despite their outcast status. The power gifted to them by the Hex made them formidable indeed. Linked as they were

through the Seed, each member of the council was connected together on a fundamental, spiritual level. By entering a trance-like state the councillors could communicate with each other over vast distances and through this telepathy came to know the minds of the others. Over the centuries it became a tenet for the Dark Council (insofar as the Hex had the need for such rules), that none brought into its fold was capable of betraying its fellows. But the Hex had never encountered a mortal such as I, Burson Carpathian.

I had accomplished my scientific successes in virtual anonymity in Romania, sharing them with a small circle of friends and advisors through metered correspondence. All of my grand schemes were tossed to the wind when you, my beloved wife Veronica, fell ill with a wasting sickness so virulent that nothing I could do could halt its progress. It was at this lowest ebb, broken-hearted and despondent, that I inadvertently attracted the awareness of the Hex, an entity all too familiar with isolation and fear. Tasting my dreams, this kindred spirit reached out to touch my mind and introduce itself.

KINDRED

As the alien sentience reached out and made itself known to me, it revealed its own desperate troubles and offered me a chance to bond with it. With a simplistic understanding of the physical universe, the Hex could not know how such an offer might be received by a man in my position. Nor could it know

that in me it had met a being whose indomitable will and all-consuming passion would reshape the gift it offered into something that would change the world forever.

In desperation, and half thinking it was a delusion of madness, I agreed and was drawn into the Dark Council of the Hex. I became immediately aware of other members in Europe, and elsewhere; the deeper and stronger pulses of energy and awareness flashing around the globe. I instinctively closed off his mind and fell to my knees, burdened with an intense, spiking pain which threatened to overwhelm me.

In that instant I not only gained the knowledge of all that had transpired for the Hex before this moment, but I discovered that not only was I blessed with a pre-eminent genius but that I am also blessed with a rare brain chemistry that enabled me to close off my mind to the others in the Dark Council. I would later learn that this was a talent never seen before in a human.

I had the ability to hear the thoughts of the others joined to the Hex Seed in Europe but could reveal nothing of my own mind to them, save that which I wished to. I was now part of a larger collective, something bigger than the man I had been and more far-reaching than even the Amis I corresponded with. I was part of the Dark Council of the Hex but on my own terms. A supremely advantageous situation, as I am sure you would agree, my dear.

THE ESSENCE

I spent the next year learning all I could from the Hex and from the other members of the Dark Council. There was an easy familiarity among the Council due to the mental bonds that tied them together. I sensed very quickly that none of the others could isolate themselves from the gestalt in the way I had nor did they realise that I had done so. I parcelled out the occasional thought, the occasional scheme or secret so that they would believe the link to be truly two-way, but I determined to keep the knowledge of the true situation to myself.

I travelled all over Europe, maintaining and strengthening the protective web the Hex had spun around itself, gaining the full confidence of the other members. I discovered the nature of the Hex Seed and, most interestingly of all to me, that the base of this alien geode was a huge subterranean reservoir of a crimson fluid. The fluid was referred to as the 'Essence of the Hex', but other than helping fuel arcane powers or being ingested to cause physical mutation or transformation, the potential of the fluid was largely untapped. The viscous, crimson liquid was often provided to me in small doses as snuff and seemed to invigorate my mind by its very presence. Tantalised by the properties of the Essence, I thought that it might hold the secret to returning you, my darling wife, to health. I spent my fiercely guarded free time studying the fluid, plumbing its mysteries and power, seeking to unlock the potential I saw in its vibrant ruby glow.

At the end of that first year, I felt the onset of crushing depression once again after coming to the conclusion that the Dark Council and their limited knowledge of the Essence could do nothing for you, my beloved Veronica. While the Dark Council continued to power play with the governments in Europe, I applied my scientific mind to the very nature of the Hex and its Essence. I quickly became convinced that the Hex itself did not comprehend the extent of its own power and how it truly interacted with the creatures of the Earth. The alien power was, in some ways, laughably naive to the darkness inherent in humanity and how that could spark human ingenuity. I came to see links and combinations between the powers of the Hex and my earlier experiments that hinted at far greater potential for this ruby Essence than even the Dark Council seemed to realise. The Hex could do nothing for you, but I was convinced there was something I could do to save you, given enough time. My goal was not a small one. Once I realised the full power of the Hex, I would settle for nothing short of mastery over death itself.

THE TAINTED AND THE HEX BEASTS

I have observed that the Essence of the Hex can cause physical warping of creatures with prolonged exposure to it. In its captive state when used as RJ-1027 power cells (I will explain about these later, I promise), the Essence is relatively harmless, however, should it be ingested, injected or otherwise absorbed into the body the effect is quite different. The

subject quickly exhibits the signs of Hex taint: their skin takes on an unhealthy pallor and their emotions are heightened to an intoxicating level. The eyes of a tainted individual may also occasionally display a crimson tint that flashes and fades under certain conditions. The experience is highly addictive, but is not a true connection with the Hex.

Should a tainted subject be mortally wounded there is a chance, particularly if their death is drawn out, that in their final desperate moments they will inadvertently make contact with the Hex. At the crossroads of death, the most likely response to a pitiful cry for mercy or salvation is the silence of the looming void. Rarely though, the taint within them makes a true connection to the Hex and they are infused with new life and energy. This is a crucial moment, only those with the strongest minds and sense of self can hold the energies in check. Should an individual have the strength of character a bond with the Hex requires, they return to full health and live to fight again. Those found wanting cannot control the energies unleashed through their being and their flesh immediately begins to warp, their organs liquefying into volatile Hex Essence and, wailing pitifully, the cage of flesh stands again as a mindless Hex Beast. Mercifully such creatures do not live long. The Essence in their bodies catalyses quickly and within a few hours or days reaches a critical mass and they explode violently. There are tales of Hex Beasts that have retained a link to their former lives or have fallen under the influence of a powerful agent of the Hex and continue to function for months

if not years after their transmutation. But such stories are rare and for most the path of a Hex Beast leads only to a volatile and violent death.

ENLIGHTENING OPPORTUNITY

My peers in the scientific community of the Amis had begun to band together into a new organisation - the Covenant of the Enlightened. Ever the opportunist, I applied my genius to the aims of that new collective on the chance that they might further my goals. Gaining the trust and favour of various members of the Dark Council over a further two years, I was finally granted knowledge of the location of the European Hex Seed, buried deep beneath the small city of Innsbruck, Austria, high in the Alps. As a member of the Enlightened, I now had the resources to act.

I had been busy using my fierce intellect and will to obfuscate my intentions. Trusting your brother, Vlad, to help me bring together a loyal coterie of fellow countrymen, I used my contacts in the Covenant of the Enlightened like Herman Haupt and Gustav Eiffel to supply the machinery and expertise needed to make my plan a reality. My first act against the Hex was to break through the walls of the Schloss Ambras using Haupt's giant drilling machines and mechanical excavators. Once inside, your brother and his men ruthlessly dispatched the Hex-warped creatures guarding the site while I focussed on drilling down into the reservoir of Essence beneath the Schloss and the massive Hex Seed that lay at its centre.

The roughly cylindrical geode was over twenty feet long, thick as four men standing cheek to jowl, and warm to the touch. The enormous opal-like mineral was placed into a sturginium-lined casket, before being loaded onto a purpose-built wagon. The moment the casket was sealed, the Dark Council realised something was terribly wrong. Although their gestalt ability to communicate as a collective remained, their arcane connection with the Hex itself had been severed. The servants of the Dark Council arrived to reinforce the site only to find my Enlightened and the Seed were already gone.

All this I did in secret, even from you, my beloved. You were so sick that I did not want to worry you with the risks I was willing to take. That journey as we absconded to the New World together was the beginning of my new nightmarish existence as no sooner did we arrive than you were taken from me. Though death claimed you for now, I swore there and then that I would dedicate all my genius to have you alive and at my side, no matter how long it took.

I placed the crystalline Seed at the centre of my burgeoning industrial empire spreading from a factory-fortress I built in the American Wild West. From this base, I was able to utilise the crimson Hex Essence to power a raft of new technologies. To hide its origins, I branded the power source RJ-1027 and claimed that I had invented it myself. On today of all days I hope you appreciate the meaning of those numbers, my love. Working from my stronghold, I spread

this technology, and the Essence of the Hex, over the entire continent.

A NEW DARK COUNCIL

Elsewhere in the New World, the final Seed had not been idle these past centuries. The nazombu witch Marie Laveau had claimed the artefact as her own power source to rule over the denizens of the bayous as their queen. This channelling of the Seed's energy was a beacon to those that had been touched by the Hex in the past.

Having been hidden amongst humanity for centuries, the enigmatic Shepherdess arrived at Laveau's court. With the ability to mimic the form of humanity, the Shepherdess claimed to have first bonded with the Hex on the long-forgotten island of Thera. Laveau sensed within the stranger something otherworldly yet also the touch of something familiar. While the Shepherdess was certainly not human, it was evident that she had been linked with the Hex and through that bond could share her ability to disguise her true form. With this gift, Laveau was able to move amongst humanity and spread her influence free of the revulsion that her true form evoked in mankind. In the Shepherdess, Laveau realised that she had perhaps found a true ally.

The Shepherdess was not alone, however, for the beast-lord Carcosa Rex had answered the call of the Hex and presented himself and his people as another ally to the nazombu. Rex told the story of his people, that they were the true inheritors of the Earth, the first

people created by the Great Spirit in ages past. But the Great Spirit was ashamed by the Carcosa's bestial nature and abandoned them in favour of creating humanity. Competing for resources in those early days, the human usurpers hunted the Carcosa almost to extinction. Now Rex and his kind numbered less than three dozen and had heard the call of the Hex. Perhaps, by joining with the others Rex could obtain the salvation for the Carcosa he so desperately sought and of course revenge on mankind.

In these three individuals, the Hex had found itself a new Dark Council.

CONTACT

With the abduction and repurposing of their Tenebrae Seed, the Dark Council in Europe had instantly lost their connection to the Hex. They remained politically inveigled and hugely influential despite the physical loss of power but their ability to trust each other and influence the Crown, Commonwealth, Imperium and Alliance was beginning to fade. They had to track me down and reconnect with the Hex.

Eventually, the Europeans learned that Laveau, Rex and the Shepherdess had formed their own Dark Council, a unique alliance that excluded mankind. That could not be allowed to continue. The enigmatic Third Man was dispatched as an envoy from Europe to this new Dark Council. After a meaningful display of his power which resulted in the death of the Shepherdess, the Third Man was accepted by Rex and Laveau and together the three of them

launched a clandestine war against my fellow members of the Covenant of the Enlightened in a bid to reach me and find the stolen Hex Seed.

This war did not come without terrible cost. Since the disaster at Thera, the Hex had avoided contact or conflict with the Order through maintaining a low profile, its supporters working from the shadows to establish and maintain the protection it needed. Now it is impossible for things to return to the way they were. With my distribution of RJ-1027 over an entire continent, and a growing conflict that might soon break out into the public consciousness, the Hex's drive to survive means that even if I can be found and dealt with, the status quo can never return.

The hunters of the Order have emerged, and it is surely now only a matter of time before all-out war breaks out once more and this world, like the seventeen that went before it, may burn in starfire.

The Hex clings to hope. Hope to forestall the seemingly inevitable by seizing back from me the technologies and the power I stole. Hope that then the Hex might be able to burrow deeper into the societies of Earth. Hope that this time, unlike all those times before, the Order will not burn the Hex's adopted home to ash in an attempt to destroy it.

This is the price I am willing to pay, for what do I care of the world if you are not in it?

*Yours forever,
Burson*



THE ORDER OF THE ALLSHARD

Existing in a formless realm of energy beyond mortal comprehension, the Order has been waging a ceaseless crusade against the malign influence of the Hex. On Earth, their followers believe in the righteousness of this cause but their true understanding of the powers they serve is shrouded in mystery and doctrine. For the men and women of the Order, they know that their crusade is just and that the very fate of humanity rests with them. With such a burden, the Order strive to put themselves above their human frailties and morality. The Order knows that should their crusade here on Earth fail; the world will burn.

From the confessional writings of High Sircan Horst Abner.

Let me tell you of the true saviours of mankind. Their original name or what planet they might have called home is now lost to time. But somewhere in this fathomless universe, there was a species who sloughed off their physical forms and ascended to a higher state of being. Having departed from the physical universe, they found themselves in a new reality; a dimensional plane they refer to as the Allshard. To those previously bound to the perceptions of matter and energy, this realm took the form of a river of blinding light. Amongst this infinite stream of energy sparkled the very essence, the souls as it were, of those who came to be known as the Order.

The Allshard is a timeless realm, unfettered by the physical laws of our own. Within the cocoon of the Allshard,

the Order's understanding continued to expand as they developed a thirst for knowledge that dwarfed the ambition that had first driven them into the light.

While contemplating the deepest workings of the universe the Order found they were briefly able to re-join the material plane should their studies and curiosity drive them to do so; but time spent in the realm of the flesh was anathema to them, its rigid, linear flow as uncomfortable as gravity or any of the other limitations of the physical universe.

A SHADOW ARISES

Within the Order's ever-widening understanding of the universe, they began to sense the encroachment of a familiar shadow from the universe they had left behind. This morass was known to them as the Hex, a relic of a life long forgotten. The Order, loath to allow the stain of this

creature to corrupt the physical galaxy, felt the first stirrings of compulsion in aeons. The Hex had to be eliminated.

Bending their will upon the physical universe, the Order was able to touch upon the sleeping consciousness of countless beings scattered among the stars. Refining this skill, they found that not only could the subjects of this process convey information into the Allshard, but images, beliefs, and messages could be subtly insinuated back into the sleeping minds thus contacted, in a process the Order referred to as Gnosis.

Through Gnosis the Order began to track the shadowy taint of the Hex across the galaxies. Travel in the material universe was the process of a mere thought for them, the entirety of creation in the aether could be spanned in an imperceptible moment. The consciousness of the Order found the still nascent Hex, studied it with horrified fascination, and then moved to destroy it utterly and erase its every trace from the backwater galaxy in which they found it. It is worth noting that this distant galaxy contained an obscure ball of dirt and water its inhabitants would come to call Earth...

THE FIRST CRUSADE

In one of the farthest corners of the firmament away from our Earth, the Hex had settled upon a small, hot planet whose inhabitants were millennia from discovering even the simplest machines. These four-armed natives, who called themselves the Sindar in their own language, lived in discrete, primitive communities hunting the wide veldt

and gathering fruits and berries from plants growing along the boundaries of the plains.

Even primitive societies have rules. With rules come outcasts and misfits; those deemed unworthy of inclusion, who had been relegated to the fringes, to eke out what pathetic lives they could, demeaned and disrespected. It was here, within these small, disenfranchised communities, that the Hex had taken hold, driving these outcasts further from the other Sindar, and then twisting and corrupting their flesh and their minds.

The Order, driven by disgust and overconfidence, struck at the Hex too soon, assuming their foe would be easily destroyed and thus the galaxy would be saved from their debasement. The Hex, unaware of the Order's existence, reacted instinctively and violently to the sudden attack. The Sindar who had been as hosts and helpers lashed out in all directions, arousing the ire of the nearby villages. The entire emerging civilisation was torn apart in violent upheaval and open war. In the resulting confusion, the Hex escaped into the wider galaxy with enough of its essence intact to begin anew.

BURNING OBSESSION

Several things became clear to the Order at that time. The Hex, although a creature of energy like themselves, was limited in its power and scope. In fleeing from the Order's attack, the Hex revealed its inability to exist beyond the material universe. The Hex seemed only able to touch upon a single world at a time, which should, theoretically, make it

much easier to eliminate it. The problem with theories, of course, is that they can be disproved.

An appreciable percentage of the Order's capacity was deployed and engaged in the task of locating the Hex once more and this time eliminating it for good. Through dogged persistence, the consciousness of the Order emerged from the bright river of the Allshard for brief forays into the material realm. Countless lesser sentient minds were sifted through the scrying power of Gnosis for any sign of the Hex.

The events on the Sindar homeworld repeated themselves again and again. But now, aware that they were being hunted, the Hex proved far more elusive. The Order perfected their ability to twist a society's innate xenophobia to their own ends, as the Hex always gravitated toward fringe elements of the societies they attempted to infiltrate.

In time, as the Hex continued to evade destruction, the hunt took on a formal structure. More and more of the Order were drawn into the effort, their higher contemplations and aspirations abandoned for the destruction of the Hex.

CEASELESS VIGILANCE

Through the millennia, the Order settled upon a fixed strategy in their efforts against the Hex. When the hated foe was once again discovered, a crusade would immediately be declared, following a rigid framework of events and techniques that would, it was hoped, bring about the destruction of the foe.

The initial phase of a Crusade begins when the first hint of the Hex's presence on a world is identified. An exhaustive study of the planet's societal structures is then conducted through the analysis of the dreams and subconsciousness of the sentient natives in the process of Gnosis. This scrutiny is intended to find both the root of the Hex incursion and suitable organisations and also to highlight individuals that the Order may use as agents in the coming conflict. With the strength of the Hex corruption ascertained the Order are careful to ensure that they have identified appropriate allies amongst the native inhabitants before declaring Phase One of the Crusade to be at an end.

As the Crusade moves into its second phase, the Order begins to shape the beliefs of those native groups who have a sympathetic outlook on the tenets of purity and discipline. The beliefs of their unwitting allies are gradually and subtly influenced towards a more close-minded, intolerant worldview conducive to the persecution of the disenfranchised Hex-touched populations. Throughout the first and second phases, the chosen native allies are unwitting proxies in the Order's conflict. Select individuals begin to have lucid dreams from a presence they believe to be their godhead. The goal of the Second Phase is to use the population to cull those fringe groups and societies where the Hex might be harboured, with the intention of eradicating the hated shadow before it is allowed to fully take hold. Should the direct action aspects of this phase of the Crusade fail, the groundwork will have already been laid for the declaration of the Third Phase.

With this escalation of the Crusade, the Order will have consolidated its hold over those organisations it has decided to use as proxies, imposing a more militaristic, disciplined structure upon them. In addition, through Gnosis, the Order will agitate general trends of prejudice and bigotry in the general population to create a hostile and deeply unwelcome environment for the Hex.

The vassals of the Order will be inspired to create advanced technologies and weapons for use against the Hex. These technologies are never imparted with the education of the underlying principles. Understanding of the technology is not required, only explication. Through many generations of parents and their offspring, entire bloodlines are focussed in the recreation of the weapons and technologies required to defeat the Hex. While one faithful family may perfect the replication of how to assemble a complex relay or layer the steel for a sword blade, another may strive to achieve an exact copy of a sword hilt that they were shown in their dreams. Others work on mining specifics ores, gem-working or learning how to inlay inscrutable yet sacred holy runes into the metal. Finally, a privileged family would be shown how these elements combine to form this relic, such as an energised blade or portal emitter. This family would now possess knowledge as to how the sub-assemblies are crafted or even become aware as to the identity of the other families who have worked over the centuries on those components. A thousand years might have been spent across multiple generations of devout families all to bring about the assembly

of that single relic. All they know for certain is that their gods will direct them and provide instruction so that they may play their small part in the greater plan.

During the final stages of Phase Three, a disciplined core of devout militia arises: the Spica. These Spica will have been formed, trained in the use of these advanced weapons and are prepared to hunt down the Hex-influenced natives. It is these holy warriors who are the physical extension of the will of the Order. Over the centuries the Spica conduct a sacred but hidden war against the Hex and the ruling Dark Council that serves to push the Hex's agenda of corruption and murder. Relics such as the Spear of Light and Tumbler enable the Spica to extend their campaign and reach even the most distant or elusive of a tainted populace. But there will come a point where even these fabulous devices are insufficient on their own to bring about the extermination of the Hex.

RISE OF THE COR CAROLUS

The replication of technologies is time-consuming and ultimately has its limits. The more complex a technology, the more families and generations must be dedicated to its creation. Something like a relic blade might take a century to enter the service of the Crusade. However, technology such as the portals that allow the Spica to instantly teleport between two points on the battlefield would take more than a thousand years to bring to fruition. The final relic that can be taught to a mortal mind is so complex that in many ways the initial components are amongst the first revealed to the native

servants. The completion of the first Apothic Arch at the heart of the Order's stronghold signals the end of that phase and the commencement of the next.

The Fourth Phase is marked by the activation of the Apothic Arch. These archways connect directly with the Allshard and provide a bridge between the best warrior servants of the Order and their patrons. Believing themselves marked for greater service, chosen Spica willingly enter the Apothic Arch expecting to receive some small measure of the blessings of their god. Instead, their bodies are invaded and possessed by one of the ascended beings in the Allshard. After several minutes of being wracked with agony, the now smouldering host steps free on the arch as a member of the warrior elite - The Cor Caroli. These holy warriors inform the assembled senior priests and commanders, the Sircan, of their true purpose and finally, the real nature of the Order is laid bare for those leaders. With the highest ranking mortal members of the Order having now been made fully aware of their role in the millennia-spanning conflict they are sworn to secrecy. Only the Sircan like myself are privileged to know the truth of the Cor Caroli, the god-like alien masters we must serve.

With the arrival of the Cor Caroli, the Order's Crusade is no longer relegated to the shadows, though a degree of secrecy and restraint must still be shown. The Cor Caroli will be too few and the Spica too mortal to escalate the conflict so quickly that the native governments and powers be alerted. The last thing

the Order wants in the Fourth Phase is to become embroiled in a conflict with the mortal governments of the planet as well as the Hex. A war on multiple fronts is unlikely to always be fought on the Order's terms. Better to restrict the Spica and Cor Caroli to precision strikes of overwhelming power so that the natives can be strategically weakened and the Hex confronted. By this time the Hex will have corrupted a small but significant portion of the planet's population. Should repeat strikes against their post-war bases and supporters prove insufficient and the Hex survives, Phase Four will reach a conclusion. Under the direction of the Cor Caroli, the construction of immense strongholds on each of the planet's major continents is completed. These Bastion Armatures are hidden in remote locations and are staging areas for the final war against the Hex. While the exterior fortifications may be completed relatively early in the Fourth Phase, it is the completion of the immense Revelation Gate at the centre of each citadel that signals the beginning of the Fifth Phase.

By the time the Order reluctantly commences with the next phase of the Crusade, direct, open warfare has begun on all fronts. The Cor Caroli have grown to sufficient numbers and are deployed to seize every strategic and tactical resource on the planet to deprive it from their enemies. Every enclave of the Hex is attacked simultaneously, instilling panic in the population and resulting in hasty, terrified reprisals from the native governments in response to such violence. The entire world will be engulfed in war as the Order attempts

to exterminate the Hex. The Cor Caroli are openly unleashed, and no quarter is asked – neither is it expected. This state of total warfare may continue for years until the Order determines that all indigenous survivors have either sided with the Order or have been infected by the Hex. When there is nothing to be saved the Order reluctantly moves to enact the final phase in the last effort to destroy the Hex before it can once again escape.

At the declaration of the Sixth and final Phase, each of the enormous Revelation Gates is activated. Their true nature is revealed in that moment. They form a portal, linking the gate room directly to the surface of the planet's star. These gates unleash a burning tide of superheated gas that washes across the planet. Everything is destroyed; every last vestige of the native populace, the

servants of the Order and those corrupted by the Hex alike, are gone. The Cor Caroli host bodies vaporise as the planet is cleansed. The eternal energy form of each Cor Carolus is welcomed back into the Allshard and a quiet vigil of several moments is offered up to the memory of the destroyed civilisation, another victim to the corruption of the Hex. Then the eternal watch of the dreamers in the physical realm begins anew, in the anticipation that the Hex will emerge once more on another planet.

Seventeen times the Hex has been discovered. Seventeen times the Order has come crashing down on them. And each time the Hex has forced the Order to burn a world. Each time the entity manages to escape and begins its cycle of foulness anew.



THE EIGHTEENTH

After the eradication of the planet Chy the Order believed that the Hex had been completely destroyed at last. The crystalline-based native Chyne had proven less susceptible to the touch of the Hex, and their rigid, structured minds had been more amenable to Gnosis. Despite this, it had still become necessary to carry out the Sixth Phase on the world and burn it to ensure that the Hex was no more.

For many years after the death of Chy, there was no sign of the Hex and a feeling of hope began to emerge within the gleaming river of the Allshard once again. Then the dreams of a soft, primitive people isolated within the far spiral arm of a galaxy grew dark. The unsophisticated inhabitants of the Earth were not advanced far beyond the ability to shape soft metals to their uses.

There was a darkness shading the dreams of some of the inhabitants of Thera, a small, protected peninsula jutting into a long, narrow, land-locked sea. Through more careful observation, the first two phases of the Crusade were implemented. A likely Hex infestation was identified on Thera along with the most suitable force capable of confronting them, the people of the neighbouring island nation of Atlantea.

The Crusade of Earth was well into the Third Phase, with Atlantean Spica working surreptitiously against the tainted folk of the island city of Thera. The first Apothic Arch was nearing completion on Atlantea and construction of a Bastion Armature was begun in the

heart of the island to support what the Order believed would be the final battle of their long war. Within a generation, the Cor Caroli would arrive to join their servants in preparation for a massive assault. The Order supposed with some confidence that their victory was at hand. But then Atlantea disappeared.

An immediate campaign of Gnosis was begun, but none of their followers appeared to have survived the utter eradication of the island. Even the subconscious of the tainted inhabitants of Thera was unavailable to the Order as it appeared that the Hex enclave on Thera had been completely destroyed by a volcanic eruption.

There was no sign that the Hex had survived the destruction of their island stronghold, but the Order was not quite ready to believe that victory had arrived from such an unexpected and unprecedented quarter. They were right to be suspicious.

FACTORS OF COMPLICATION

In all the time the Order had kept a watch across the galaxies for the taint of the Hex, they had spared no interest in the unrelated goings of the myriad of lifeforms flourishing across a thousand other worlds. So single-minded were the Order in their crusade that entire civilisations were born, evolved and died without the all-powerful Order even learning their name. Certainly, the Order had no concept that in the more recent moments of the material realm, say a mere few thousand years or so, that a close-knit federation of worlds had been

formed, an organisation of sentient races, unlike anything this galaxy had ever seen before: The Watchers.

It took decades of analysis and penetrative Gnosis of the Galaxy before the Order finally understood what had happened at Atlantea. At first, it was feared the Watchers were tools of the Hex's Dark Council, having clearly brought about the destruction of Atlantea. But it was revealed that in this case, appearances were deceptive. These Watchers were nothing more than younger races who had wandered unknowingly into the eternal war between the ancients. These galactic children would normally be of little consequence to the Order, but here on Earth they were a dangerous obstacle to the crusade.

RENEWAL

Keeping a wary eye out for any future visits from the Watchers, the Allshard maintained a vigil for many centuries over the developing nation-states of Earth. Eventually, after more than two thousand years, signs began to emerge once more of the Hex taint. The corruption was predictably more widespread in its resurgence.

As it was evident that the Hex was active once more, the Order were forced to restart the crusade at the first phase. This time a secretive religious sect, known as the Holy Path of Man, proved the most predisposed towards the Allshard's approach. Located in the densely populated continent of Europe, the newly daubed Holy Order of Man began to extend its power and influence throughout the region.

Confident with how they could impart their technology through Gnosis to the humans of this cult, the Allshard moved at an expedient pace and within two thousand years had progressed the Crusade to the third phase with the Holy Order of Man at its heart.

Since the resumption of the Crusade of Earth at an accelerated pace, the Holy Order of Man has developed quickly into a well-disciplined secret army. Now known simply as the Order, we are a fanatical force who mask our true beliefs beneath the cover of a fringe religion. In this way, carefully eschewing the established concepts of Godhead and the doctrines of the other orthodoxies we can move amongst the spreading colonial powers to found enclaves across the globe. From these multiple strongholds, we are able to strike out against Hex activity and agitate the local populations against the pawns of the Dark Council. Chapel-Fortresses have been built in remote areas as precursors to Bastion Armatures. Finally, in my lifetime, the Apothic Arches have been assembled. The Cor Caroli finally walk the Earth amongst the faithful - a glorious sight to behold indeed.

ALLIES AMONGST THE HERD

Yet for all of our recent successes there have been setbacks as well. Our situation has become infinitely more complex since the appearance of other advanced technologies. These have suddenly begun to appear across the continent as if being purposefully spread to confuse and confound our task. Perhaps these are of the Watchers or even might be

remnant Order equipment lost with the destruction of Atlantea. Whatever their source, they are to be expunged from the Earth with the same zeal and fervour as though they were infernal Hex-blighted weapons.

It is fortunate that in hunting down and destroying enemies of our orthodoxy we have found allies. After bandits using Hex-tainted weaponry were found to be raiding the city of Edirne on the border with Greece, I despatched Sircan Dylan Callus and his Spica lapetus to cleanse them from the region. During this action Callus saved the son of an Ottoman noble and within the year the Order had found sympathetic supporters within the Sultanate.

Sultan Suleiman Mustafa I has had his eyes opened to the truth of the Order of the Allshard. Once he was given a version of the true nature of the Order that he could comprehend, he spent a full day in counsel with his Grand Vizir, Mehmed Pasha. Calling Callus to his court, he proclaimed that the Order of the Allshard were thereafter a permitted religion in the Ottoman Sultanate and that he would consider whatever our requirements would be to establish a stronghold in the Sultanate. His conditions were simple, firstly that his royal personage would be guarded by a phalanx of Cor Caroli at all times as he moved about his realm. Furthermore, the Sultanate required the Order to deploy their forces alongside his own in the pursuit of mutually beneficial military objectives. These two points were readily accepted, and detachments of Spica are now routinely deployed alongside Sultanate forces.

THE ORDER MADE MANIFEST

The pinnacle of the relationship with our new Ottoman allies was the completion of the second Bastion Armature. Though construction of the first had begun in the Rocky Mountains many years previously, work had been slow as it was carried out in secret and with limited resources. No such guile or restraint was required in the Ottoman Sultanate and now a mighty Armature has finally been completed. This colossal fortress is known as *Izadkhast* and lies amongst the rugged vistas of Persia. The Bastion Armature located in the Rocky Mountains was finally completed in 1870 and we have titled it the *High City*. Alongside *Izadkhast* they have become the focal point for most of the Crusade's activity.

As the regional politics developed, both in the Sultanate, but more particularly here in the Union, we have been disturbed to find more and more signs of Hex taint emerging. The chaotic, rough-and-tumble nature of the western borderlands is proving to be a perfect environment for the Hex. The entity is driven to take advantage of the plight of the dispossessed and outcasts of the fevered expansion of this young nation. To combat this rising corruption my Sircans, under the guidance and with the advice of our Cor Caroli, direct the Spica in their training and preparation, as stockpiles of advanced weapons build beneath the Bastion Armatures for the coming war.

I pray I have the strength to temper the will of my masters in the Allshard. For if

the Order cannot destroy the Hex here in the American West or elsewhere in the world, then the burning of the Earth must follow.

THE ZEALOT AT MY HEELS

My calls for temperance are heeded by many, as is my right as High Sircan, but I am aware that there is a growing following building around that upstart Elita Nura. Within our number she was only recently raised to the rank of Sircan following years of service in the field as a Mimreg during the Third Phase. Nura's selection was initially something of a disappointment to her, as with the construction of the Apotheosis Gates she yearned for the chance to join the Cor Caroli. Unlike many of her rank within the Order, Nura was fully aware of what apotheosis to a Cor Coroli entails but this knowledge did nothing to dampen her zeal. Her fervent desire to serve the Order more fully was thus recognised by the Allshard and so Nura has been given command of the Portal Vanguard - the Spica Astraea.

Nura believes that the last battle against the Hex fast approaches so she pushes for Phase Five of the Crusade to be enacted. As such, Nura's voice is the most extreme within the Order as she seeks to provoke a suitably devastating encounter with the Hex that would justify the declaration of Phase Five and all-out war. Within the Council she is considered a fractious zealot and I know she is marked to succeed me as High

Sircan should I succumb to an assassin, approaching old age or an accident.

When in the field acting as the Allshard's instrument she is equally impatient to bring about the unveiling of the Order's true mission. This reveals itself as a disdain for the use of subterfuge and stealth, instead portal jumping into combat directly and taking her foe unawares with the precision application of overwhelming force against those tainted by the Hex through absorption of its essence or simply through being manipulated by the Dark Council. She finds that the seismic powers of her Luminant Staff more than capable of eliminating either type of foe.

For now her violent excesses and insistent urgings for progression of the Crusade have been forestalled by my patient testimony and sermonising but as open war looms ever closer it is only a matter of time before she gains enough support on the Council to convince the Allshard to begin the next phase of the Crusade. Nura's commitment to the Order is absolute and her greatest fear is that her faith in its mission should be found wanting in this most desperate hour, a fear whose voice she drowns out with strident calls for war. Should she learn of my true reasons for wanting to stall the furtherance of the Crusade she would decry me to the Allshard and perform a permanent excommunication by severing my head from my shoulders. I pray I have the strength to see through my plan before I am discovered...





THE COVENANT OF THE ENLIGHTENED



The architects of the Dystopian Age, the Covenant of the Enlightened wield their formidable intellects to sweep aside those who stand in the way of Science and Progress. These masters of technology covet knowledge above all things and believe that it is only they who can steer humanity on a path to enlightenment. Whether with monstrous fusions of man and machine or with their terrifying and wondrous war-engines, the Covenant of the Enlightened take every opportunity to demonstrate their technological supremacy. The discoveries that were intended to herald a new era for humanity are instead used to punish those who would misuse them. Only when the Covenant are lauded as the rightful leaders of the Earth this new Dystopian Age can the world be brought into a new dawn of achievement and prosperity.

Assessment by Service Agent Kingston - for the Director's eyes only.

Director Lincoln, it is human nature for like-minded individuals to seek each other out, to form deep and lasting bonds and to establish communities and societies in a world that often seems bent on keeping each person isolated and alone. As you may already be aware, one of the oldest such societies in Europe is La Societe des Amis du Nouveau Eclaircissement, founded in Vienna in the early sixteenth century. The Amis, as they called themselves, were scientists, philosophers and free thinkers who enjoyed an active, lively correspondence, sharing their desires, dreams, and scientific exploits through written letters and occasional symposia.

AHEAD OF THEIR TIME

Generally, to be invited into the Amis, a man or woman must have proven themselves through extraordinary accomplishments with extensive peer-reviewed research or intellectual treatises. As such, most members were relatively advanced in years and rather set in their ways. By the early-nineteenth century, most of humanity's greatest minds were clandestine members. The influence of the Amis was felt throughout the world, although of course, most people had never heard of them.

Records show that by 1845 the scientist-explorer Barnabas Draynes Sturgeon, a member of the Amis, had acquired extra-terrestrial artefacts from the crater at Bimini. [Agent's note: for more detail on

Bimini please refer to my report last week on Caribbean meteorite strikes.]

Sturgeon shared some of that extra-terrestrial material with his associates Eberhard Bunsen and Gustav Kirchhoff who had recently set up a facility at the University of Königsberg. At Sturgeon's encouragement, the pair studied the artefacts for almost a year before unlocking the principles of atomic energy. The potential of this breakthrough was clear to Sturgeon and the other members of the Amis. *[Agent's note: Regrettably, the Service was not established at this point in history for if it had been, I am certain that we would have monitored the activities of the Amis more closely. It is likely that enemy agents from the Alliance, Commonwealth and Imperium had intercepted vastly more of the Amis correspondence than our own limited network managed to.]*

Tipped off by their spies, the Prussian Imperium had Bunsen and Kirchhoff arrested and claimed the material for their Teutonic Knight-Luminaries to study. This acquisition triggered a series of similar seizures all over the world by agents from other governments. The Amis were plunged into crisis. Their apolitical nature was under threat but a solution would present itself from an unexpected source.

THE EXPEDITION SOUTH

In the midst of this intellectual upheaval, Barnabas Sturgeon was planning another extraordinary expedition. This time his destination was Antarctica, the vast ice-bound wilderness at the foot of the

world. Theirs was to be a genuine voyage of discovery rather than conquest. The expedition was intended to prove a theory shared by Sturgeon and few other radical scientific minds: that the wastes of Antarctica were not empty and desolate, instead they concealed treasures of incalculable value.

Sturgeon had kept back a particularly curious artefact previously recovered at the Bimini crater: a compass pointing south instead of north. After further tests, along with his closest friend the Greek physicist Leonidas Vasiliou, Sturgeon formed the belief that not only was the device pointing to a particular location in the south but that it was indicating something beneath the surface of the Antarctic itself.

Following the arrest of Bunsen and Kirchhoff, Sturgeon accelerated his plans, pulling together the resources needed to mount his expedition south. Despite great adversity, he still managed to secure patronage from certain valuable parties, notably Crown Prince Vladimir of the Russian Commonwealth. It was Vladimir who introduced Sturgeon to a scientific polymath of extraordinary talent: Helsinki Markov. At first, he was a priceless asset to Sturgeon's cause, but later he was to become a figure of infamy.

A CHANGING ENVIRONMENT

The expedition made landfall in Antarctica in 1849 after a long journey fraught with difficulties. However, to the surprise of everyone, not least Sturgeon and his friends, they soon made what appeared to be a finding of

great import. A series of reconnaissance flights were undertaken by Miranda Wells in her trusty modified Doncaster, the *Eye of Reason*. Her patrols inland revealed an extraordinary sight located deep inside the desolate Antarctic interior. A wide, chasm-like trench, many miles long and almost a mile wide was revealed. Shimmering, gnarled spires of impossibly polished metal and vast, glowing masses of blue-green crystalline rock spread out like a starfish across the ice. The landscape around the site was different from what had been originally expected. Though most of the landscape was, as anticipated, frozen tundra, there were valleys and mountains that held starkly differing climates, flora and fauna.

Though Sturgeon had paid handsomely for the services of Maximilian Schneider and his mercenaries to protect the expedition, it remained a journey of great hardship to navigate to this incredible site overland. Along the way, Sturgeon noted subtle changes to the landscape. These changes were imperceptible at first but the surrounding valleys to the chasm leading all the way back to their base camp were in a state of comparatively rapid climate change. The permafrost and snow had melted away for the most part forming lakes or billowing clouds of vapour. Strange megaflora were seen sprouting from these freshly revealed landscapes. Though there were the occasional attacks of large beasts and birds to contend with, the expedition most frequently saw ever more exotic and otherworldly jungle plants and vegetation.

Losing more than half of their original expedition along the way, it took over a year to finally reach the trench. When they arrived, what they found was more astonishing than the initial reconnaissance had suggested. Buried amongst the eerie crystalline agglomerations and twisted metal spires, sunken into the earth and rock was a strange doorway. Beyond it lay what would truly become a discovery of earth-shaking proportions – the mysterious Antarctic Vault.

THE VAULT

Once they stepped through the doorway, Sturgeon, Vasilou, and their retinue vanished beneath the Antarctic landscape for several days. A series of earth tremors heralded their return and they were changed profoundly by what they had seen. *[Agent's note: Despite several high ranking members of the Enlightened defecting to the Union, we still have no clear picture of what lies within the Vault. I would concur with General Grant's assertion that a military campaign to Antarctica is the most expeditious means of obtaining its secrets of the Vault for the Union.]*

More excited and animated than he had ever been, Sturgeon was still as shrewd as he was brilliant. He had observed what had happened to fellow members of the Amis who revealed their achievements to a greedy world without safeguarding them, so took steps to ensure the Vault was not stolen from him. In secret, Sturgeon sent his closest allies instructions to gather resources and material so that they might expand and

fortify their camp around the Vault. The facility was dubbed *Wells Chasm* after the daring aviator who had braved the howling gales above the Antarctic to be the first to spot the crystals and spires.

Sturgeon, Markov, Vasilou, and the others would embark upon several further journeys into the Vault. Inside the inhuman megastructure, virtually everything they found was beyond their ability to comprehend. The excursions were not without their own inherent dangers, as small parties could become lost in the Vault's labyrinthine corridors and alien architecture. Most painfully for Sturgeon, his closest and most intimate friend Leonidas, became lost in the Vault, never to be seen again. Putting aside his grief, Sturgeon gleaned enough from the artefacts they recovered to set new paths of scientific discovery. Markov estimated that it would take several lifetimes to fully explore and catalogue the contents of the Vault.

At the centre of these efforts was the strange super-conductive mineral surrounding the Vault, and which extended in great veins outwards from it. Codified as 'Element 270', and later named *sturginium*, in honour of Sturgeon himself, the properties of this material would ultimately allow for accelerated exploration of existing fields of scientific undertakings. The mineral would be harvested and shipments sent from *Wells Chasm* to their original landing site on the Antarctic coast. This harbour camp was itself expanded into a second base of operations for the expedition. Sturgeon named the new harbour facility *Leonidas Spire* in honour of his late friend.

A GIFT FROM THE STARS

By their seventh journey into the Vault, Sturgeon and Markov had enough research gathered to theorise that the Vault was the core of some massive alien object which had crashed on the Earth centuries ago. There were records from the time that spoke of "a ball of fire in the sky" and a "great earth tremor". Expanding on this hypothesis and reversing the trajectory from the impact site in Antarctica, Markov noticed an unusual number of meteorite strikes recorded along the flightpath. This suggested that the object had begun to break up before it landed. This then pointed to the possibility that any parts of the alien structure's mass that had fallen along the way could also contain Element 270. The nature of the impact, erratic trajectory, and calculated size of the object implied a controlled crash, guided by some intelligence or pilot. This suggested the object was some kind of colossal ship, perhaps akin to an ocean-liner to the stars themselves, only much larger; perhaps a kilometre or more in diameter. If such a craft had impacted with its full force it would likely have devastated the planet.

While it was agreed that the discoveries in the Vault were the birthright of humanity, such a wealth of knowledge needed to remain in the hands of a few. This custodianship was vital until the explorers had amassed sufficient allies to ensure that no one nation or interest group could pervert this profound discovery for their own petty agenda. The Amis was nothing more than a correspondence group and with

how helpless they had been to save Bunsen and Kirchhoff, something more was needed to safeguard the Vault and the new age of science it would unleash. Leaving Markov and several others behind to continue the work, Sturgeon returned to Europe to create the organisation he needed.

A COVENANT IS AGREED

1852 saw a conclave of the Amis held in the Palazzo del Borromeo on Lake Maggiore, Italy. This literal meeting of minds had one purpose: to secure a future for the great undertaking they had agreed on for the betterment of humanity. Freshly returned from his Antarctic expedition, Sturgeon called for a new beginning for the group. No longer would they be a loose collection of correspondents but instead Sturgeon declared that a more structured and independent movement was needed. This "Covenant of the Enlightened" as he termed it would be free from political or patriotic pressures from the nations of the world and would be founded as a technocratic oligarchy. The discoveries of the Enlightened, such as those he had seen in the Vault of Antarctica, would be ostensibly for the betterment of humanity, but only when wider humanity could prove itself worthy of those discoveries. Until such time, the Covenant would be custodians of the Vault and of the new age of scientific enlightenment that it would herald.

Other brilliant minds of the age stepped forward to join with Sturgeon including the warmaster Maximilian Schneider, President Louis-Napoleon

Bonaparte of the French Republique, the boyar magnate Oleg Tatumovich, the spymistress Julianna Drakenburg, the communications specialist Mahlon Loomis, the alternate energy prodigies Nikolai Tesla and Augusta Byron, and the engineering auteurs Herman Haupt and Gustave Eiffel. This was also the first time that the polymath Burson Carpathian found notice amongst this group as a peer and signatory on the Covenant charter.

The conclave became the First Symposium of the Enlightened and it was agreed that each Peer of the Enlightened would have an equal status within the Covenant. There were conditions to being granted a place in this new technocracy. To become a Lord or Lady of the Enlightened, an individual must have their scientific merits recognised by the Covenant. Beyond that, a prospective Peer must offer land or some significant holding or power base to serve as the location for their own secure place of learning. Sturgeon offered *Wells Chasm* as the model for the ultimate form of such a facility - what he called a Promethean Complex. Though many Peers could not afford to build such a facility they were content for now to ally themselves with the half a dozen Lords and Ladies who could. Over time, and with the right opportunities taken, each Peer would go on to found their own Promethean Complex and by this method, the Enlightened began to develop a decentralised structure and a web of strongholds across the globe - essential if their independence was to be assured.

THE DAWN OF A NEW AGE

Returning to *Wells Chasm* with many of the newly dubbed Enlightened, Sturgeon was gratified to see that in his year of absence, Markov had developed *Wells Chasm* and fortified it with new technologies to ensure that their position on the continent was relatively secure. It was regrettable that the new Eden that surrounded the Promethean Complex was already beginning to be despoiled by the industry required for the progress of humanity. A burden of the Covenant was the knowledge that for their destiny to be fulfilled, the world must be forever changed. What use are verdant flora and wondrous fauna if not harnessed for the enlightenment of mankind?

Markov, driven by a mixture of exploratory fervour and in part by the need to prove the value of their discoveries, had pressed on doggedly and codified a huge amount of the knowledge they found in their exploration of the Vault. He firmly believed the time was ripe for the fruits of these labours to be shared with the nations of the Earth for the betterment of humanity.

For several months there was heated discussion amongst the Enlightened as to the correct path. Thanks to Lord Lyon Playfair's cypher the Peers were able to discuss the matters in secret over their Loomis telegraphs. Markov's urging for the sharing of the Vault's secrets was mirrored by Carpathian, Eiffel, Tesla and the engineering genius Isambard Kingdom Brunel. There was a strong voice of caution, however, from Countess Byron and Lady Drakenburg. They countered that the

nations of the world were not yet ready for such power. For years the Countess had attended the courts, salons and assemblies of power in Europe and knew how fickle and self-interested governments could be. Drakenburg was aware of a shadowy network moving within similar corridors of power to her own agents who appeared to have loyalty beyond any single nation. The true nature of this Dark Council she had yet to fathom, but her instincts warned that it did not bode well. *[Agent's note: While our own research on the Dark Council is undoubtedly more comprehensive than the material gleaned by Drakenburg and her spies, there is surely no harm in sourcing a copy of her notes to cross-reference with our own? Our friend, Mr Morden, may be able to assist us in this matter.]*

Despite these warnings, the Enlightened agreed at a Second Symposium to dispatch envoys to the major scientific institutions around the world and share without bias their research, confident that as long as no single nation was given preferential treatment or privileged access they would be secure. Even the guarded Celestian Empire were receptive to the offer of mutual advancement.

In the first few years, this balance and equality stimulated the greatest surge of innovation and invention since the beginning of the Industrial Age. Regular and equal shipments of Element 270 were delivered to each nation's principle scientific institution in exchange for a copy of the research documentation and prototypes of whatever applications they made with the mineral.

The voltaic arc technology that the Prussian Imperium had been exploring for years was given a huge boost when Tesla introduced sturginium infused superconductor coils into the design. After seeing what Element 270 could do for their metallurgical research, the Ottoman Sultanate sent Princess Sherezad to study at *Wells Chasm* so that they might embrace this new age of technology fully. Brunel's transportation rotorcraft became a reality for the British Crown as a unique alloy of sturginium and copper created a revolutionary metal combining light weight and incredible strength. The Russian Commonwealth continued to explore sonic applications now using sturginium reinforced resonators for breaking apart ice-floes while the French Republique finally made the breakthrough in their attempts to miniaturise their thermal projectors so that the so-called heat lances could be mounted on excavating machines to enable the construction of a vast network of tunnels beneath France and her allies. The Celestian Empire made great strides in the fields of magnetic levitation and atomic energy though true nuclear power eluded them as it continued to confound the Enlightened themselves.

Their hubris, of course, meant that the Enlightened retained most of the gathered Element 270 for their own work. It was they who produced the most bleeding-edge applications as the half dozen newly founded Promethean Complexes around the world began work on a series of extraordinary generators, each only made possible by sturginium crystals at their core

acting as superconductors. Despite the protestations of Markov and Carpathian, the Enlightened saw caution in keeping the secrets of these most potent devices away from individual nations. For these were devices that could project thrumming shielding screens of energy to defeat projectiles, kinetic enhancers to augment engine efficiency and machines that could influence local weather patterns. Most incredible of all were bizarre temporal and distance distorters; engines of near-surreal complexity that could cause localised warps in time, or teleport men and material enormous distances in mere moments. The Enlightened arrogantly presumed that no nation should have these marvels as the applications for warfare were all too obvious and terrifying to them.

[Agent's note: Amongst all this ingenuity, no-one seemed to notice when Burson Carpathian combined it with molybdochalkos to create a casket suitable for his own grand scheme to come to fruition. This most unassuming of applications would set in motion events that would change the world far more profoundly than any generator would.]

RULE OF THE CUSTODIANS

For a while, the Enlightened basked in the glory of their accomplishments. The wave of new technology, for which they earned the plaudits they had desired for so long, spread out across the world. Sturgeon dared to believe that what he termed the Sturginium Age would herald a new era of peace for all.

Across the globe the development of rudimentary mechanical servants known as automata grew rapidly from the machines carrying out instructions on simple punch cards to millions of complex instructions being engraved on silver disks so that these mechanical beings could ape more complex reasoning. The eagerness with which other nations absorbed the Enlightened discoveries and the innovations accelerated by Element 270 was matched only by their drive to take these incalculably precious gifts and turn them to warlike ends. Technology designed for weather control, disaster relief and agricultural resilience became the basis for whole industries of war. The discovery of new metal alloys and chemicals went into the construction of Battleships and hulking Landships, cannons and bombs.

The benefits of the Vault revealed, once again, the true nature of humankind. Each nation was desperate for an advantage over the others and frustrated that their own developments would be shared impartially by the Enlightened. As the nations demanded more, the Enlightened felt compelled to impose rations on Element 270 shipments and demanded greater oversight as to its application. *[Agent's note: Predictably, the Enlightened would use any pretext to exert undue influence and control over the other global powers. It is a testament to our belief in the Union's manifest destiny that we did not capitulate to such demands.]*

Finally, in 1856 Sturgeon called for the Third Symposium of the Enlightened to propose a solution to the destabilising

nature Element 270 was having on the world. The arguments became heated and splinter factions began to form. Sturgeon used all of his influence and patronage to finally carry the motion on the day. The Enlightened would become true custodians of the knowledge from the Vault which was now unleashed elsewhere in the world. All the secrets and technologies would be developed exclusively by the Enlightened and withheld from the world at large until they had proven themselves capable of the responsibility for the great power it contained. There would doubtless be some anger and even some military repercussions from the other nations, but as the Enlightened had contained those most terrible of technologies, including the generators, for their own arsenal, it would be a brief conflict.

THE REBELLION OF MARKOV

While Sturgeon was away, Markov had built a political power-base as a cover for his true activities. His followers, including Princess Sherezad of the Ottoman Sultanate and Burson Carpathian of Romania, believed this Custodian ideology was caused through fear and jealousy, in contravention of the goals of the more egalitarian principles of the Enlightened. On this proclamation from the Symposium, the authority of Custodians was challenged by a coup instigated by Helsinki Markov. Secretly an agent of the Russian Commonwealth, Markov utilised his allies to set in motion an armed insurrection at *Wells Chasm* and *Leonidas Spire* and fled in the ensuing chaos taking with him generator

technology and a large shipment of Element 270 to his patron, Tsar Vladimir.

Fighting broke out between the Custodians and Egalitarians, resulting in chaos throughout Promethean Complexes around the world. Princess Sherezad and others took many of the prized secrets of the Covenant back to their homelands. Thanks to Markov's treachery the world now had access to the most potent weapons and technology the greatest minds on the planet could envisage. The world was set on a path that must surely lead to self-annihilation.

Even the powers of the Generators were twisted: weather control devices intended to green the world's deserts were instead used to invoke tempests that devastated towns and villages. Terrifying force projectors were created with the power to make both metals and, more horrifyingly, flesh run like wax. Interminable minor conflicts continued to flare up around the world, now enlivened by a desire for a rival power's technological and scientific secrets as well as whatever territory and resources it had to offer. For all the scintillating knowledge bestowed by the supposed Sturginium Age, basic human nature, with its greed, pride, hubris, desire for power and dominance remained unchanged.

But the efforts of the Enlightened could not prevent human ingenuity developing ever more dangerous devices from the knowledge they had already unleashed. Pandora's Box was well and truly open and, for the

Enlightened, even worse was soon to come. Although the revolt quickly subsided when its participants realised the truth it had already served its purpose for the traitor Markov. In the wake of the revolt and its consequences, the Enlightened left were shaken and shell-shocked. They had believed themselves and their new domain above the petty concerns of nationalistic fervour and factionalism. That conceit, that prideful self-assurance, now lay in ruins.

THE SCHISM

By 1857, although the Enlightened had managed to conceal news of the internal crisis from the rest of the world, Markov's treachery ensured that the Covenant was split into two distinct factions. Custodians believed that advanced technology should be guarded and hidden from the world until humanity reached the maturity to use it, while the Egalitarians believed that every man and woman had the right to self-determinism and that it was the obligation of the Enlightened to work with those nations to bring about a new age.

The Enlightened's most ardent scientist-patron, President Louis-Napoleon Bonaparte, had recently founded the Latin Alliance, a bold coalition of France, Spain and Italy. This emergent power promised to be a safe haven for the scientists and researchers, just as the French Republique had been these past five years. As a signatory of the Covenant Charter, Bonaparte was obligated to establish a Promethean Complex, which he did with the renovation and expansion of *Mont Saint-Michel*.

It was while meeting at *Mont Saint-Michel* that Julianna Drakenburg discovered that many of the secrets stolen by Markov had made their way onto the blackmarket. Louis-Napoleon had purchased as many of these designs outright as he could to keep them out of the hands of rival world powers. As a continued show of good faith with the Covenant, the Latin Alliance shared everything they had acquired and kept out of the public domain. [Agent's note: *Though as all such technologies had been stolen from the Covenant to begin with there was little material gain for the Enlightened by this gesture. I am sure Louis-Napoleon was not unaware of this fact.*]

In light of the destruction unleashed in the world and the origins of Markov's treachery, the Custodians easily assumed complete dominance over the shell shocked Covenant. The most influential Peers ensured that those few Egalitarians who remained were consigned to the fringes of the organisation, effectively exiling them from the Enlightened. Though they were entitled to attend future Symposia, any secrets from the Vault were denied to them. The hope was that denied of further inventions, these ostracised members would wither on the vine. Indeed they most likely would have, being subsumed into their own national interests over time. Everything would have gone according to the Custodians' plan had it not been for the actions of one Enlightened Peer and a sturginium lined casket.



THE HEX SEED

Desperately searching for a discovery that might save the life of his ailing wife, Veronica, Burson Carpathian had come into contact with the mysterious Dark Council; individuals who had become bonded with an ancient alien entity known as the Hex. [Agent's note: *What follows contains a significant degree of supposition based on anecdotal accounts. When supported by what the Service has witnessed in the field I cannot help but feel that we are close to the truth of the matter, even with a lack of hard evidence.*]

The Hex itself existed in a geode-like Seed that was hidden away from the prying eyes of the uninitiated. Carpathian discovered the location and nature of the Hex Seed and, most interestingly of all to him, that the base of this alien geode was a huge subterranean reservoir of a crimson fluid. The fluid was referred to as the 'Essence of the Hex' but, other than helping fuel arcane powers or being ingested to cause physical mutation or transformation, the potential of the fluid was largely untapped. The viscous, crimson liquid was provided to him in small doses and seemed to invigorate his mind when a single drop is imbibed. Tantalised by the invigorating properties of the Essence, Carpathian thought that it might hold the secret to returning his wife to health.

With the aid of allies in the Enlightened, Carpathian managed to steal the Seed. The Dark Council had agents throughout Europe and Carpathian reasoned that it would not be long before he was identified as the architect of the theft.

Nowhere in Europe would be safe for the experimentation he intended, but two of the Enlightened here in the Union of Federated States had offered him sanctuary. Gustave Eiffel and the brilliant geologist Petronella Gage had been forced into exile thanks to their support of Markov's insurrection. They had secured the town of Payson in the Arizona Territory as an ideal home for Carpathian and his work.

SHATTERED

Crossing the Atlantic on the steamer *Lady B*, Carpathian, his wife Veronica and their allies were aware that their prospective foster nation was wracked with tensions as the northern and southern states vied for control of the vast resources of the continent. They hoped to arrive unnoticed. They could not have been more wrong.

[Agent's note: Here we must again make an educated guess based on the available facts. As you know, the very existence of the Dark Council is difficult to verify, let alone to what extent, if any, it has influence here in Washington D.C. What follows in regard to General Grant is taken from information supplied in confidence by our friend Garrett Morden. Though his candour is appreciated, I feel it unlikely to be welcomed by General Grant should you share any of the following with him].

The Dark Council undoubtedly would have found itself severely weakened by Carpathian's actions. Clearly it was still more than capable of exerting its influence and exacting revenge -

Carpathian had been marked for death. Using what resources and connections it had, the Dark Council manipulated Odysseus Grant, who was at this time a promising army Captain now reputed to have fallen to drink and paranoia. Fuelled by rumours of a fresh European threat to the security of the Union, Grant was set on a course to destroy Carpathian and his newly arrived Enlightened entourage.

Taking the travellers completely by surprise, Grant's bombardment killed most of the Enlightened landing party and Carpathian was smashed like a rag doll against the Seed-carrying casket he had risked so much to bring to these shores. Twisted and broken, as consciousness left him Carpathian saw his wife, Veronica, dead at his side - her body pierced by a single bullet that had gone unnoticed in the cacophony of battle.

A NEW BEGINNING

Carpathian awoke days later atop the casket containing the Hex Seed. He had been carried many miles away from the carnage but he barely heard or cared. His wife was dead and he was delirious with pain. With consciousness came the realisation that both his arms and legs were shattered and he sensed the onset of infection. Death would surely claim him before long. The Enlightened made their careful way to Payson, where others of the Covenant were waiting for them. The eccentric Doctor Francis Tumblety immediately took charge of the barely-alive Carpathian and began to work on him.

As he recovered, Carpathian put aside the pain and despair of his wife's death and focused instead on the future. If Veronica could not be healed then perhaps she could be resurrected? He would need to make war against death itself to achieve this vision. Eiffel and another Peer in exile, Emily Roebling, had overseen the renovation and fortification of Payson. The town had become a Promethean Complex built on the example of *Wells Chasm*. Carpathian dubbed his new home '*The Warcradle*'.

The entire town had been completely rebuilt to their specifications, combining classic European architecture with the rough and ready materials of the American West. It contained extensive laboratory and meeting spaces, not to mention formidable defences that would make the town a veritable fortress should it come under attack. Most important of all were the catacombs excavated beneath *The Warcradle*, the deepest of which would serve as a vault to securely store the stolen Seed. Carpathian dismissed the workers who had helped him before collapsing the passageways that had led them down. An alternative route, known only to himself, led him back out into the hot dry air of Payson. As impressive as all this was, for the nigh impossible feat he aimed to achieve, Carpathian knew that he would need resources and a power-base in the Union many times larger than he could currently call on. Now his work truly began.

THE INVENTION OF RJ-1027

With the Hex Seed now shielded securely beneath *The Warcradle*, Carpathian

devoted all his time and resource to experimentation with the Essence. He exposed biological matter to the alien mineral and worked to create more of the volatile crimson fluid. Tantalisingly, he discovered that by mixing the fluid with gunpowder or other accelerants he could greatly increase the potency of weaponry and combustion engines - a process colloquially known as 'juicing' them. Once he had stockpiled a sufficient quantity and designed suitably armoured and durable sturginium-enhanced containers for it, he announced the Fourth Enlightened Symposium to be held in Payson at *The Warcradle*. The date of this Symposium, the 27th of October 1859, had special significance for Carpathian as it was also the date of his wedding anniversary. As he stared into the glowing crimson fluid he felt a connection to his wife, as well as the promise of her eventual resurrection.

In the wider world, their authority challenged by the announcement, the Custodian leaning Enlightened were in a difficult position. Fearing a further division, Sturgeon and his allies at *Wells Chasm* acknowledged this Fourth Symposium but claimed security concerns in the rapidly destabilising Union for a reason not to attend in person.

Many Enlightened did attend, however, including Princess Sherezad and distinguished guests such as Amantine Dupin, Giuseppe Garibaldi and Louis-Jules Trochu. To them Carpathian unveiled his greatest invention, a new wonder-fuel he called RJ-1027. [Agent's note: Presumably Carpathian believes that the pseudo-science of the name would

hopefully distance the liquid from its true origins to the general public as well as to his Peers. Though the Service is fully aware of the true nature of RJ-1027, I understand the need for such facts to remain within the Service at this time].

For the Enlightened, RJ-1027 represented a near-infinite power source limited in application only by their imaginations. That it had been developed and designed by Burson Carpathian, the self-proclaimed Father of the Enlightened was undisputed. Available for all the world to use, RJ-1027 rapidly became the means by which the designs of much of the new wave of technology unleashed by the Enlightened became possible.

Sturgeon reluctantly contacted Carpathian via Loomis telegraph to offer his congratulations and Carpathian graciously gifted *Wells Chasm* with the first shipment of RJ-1027 canisters so that their important work in the Vault might benefit. Although some of the Enlightened like Nikolai Tesla and Augusta Byron still favoured power sources they had independently developed, within five years the Enlightened were almost exclusively powering their advanced technologies with RJ.

The energy contained in an oil drum sized RJ cylinder could power a family home for six months before it would need to be switched for a new one. The spent RJ cylinders would be collected and taken back to *The Warcradle* where they would be recharged for a small fee. Within a decade, a million canisters of RJ-1027 of all different sizes could be found in transit back to *The Warcradle* at any

one time, a whole third of the immense factory city turned over to the safe storage and reprocessing of canisters.

CIVIL WAR

The sale and supply of RJ-1027 was only the first step in Carpathian's plan. The cost of processing and generating more of the Essence with the secrecy that required was relatively high. The vast majority of the world's fuel requirements were still driven by coal, oil, timber and gas. This was unlikely to change for the next few decades as the application of RJ-1027 tended to be for more advanced technologies rather than the day to day. Carpathian needed something to drive the purchase and distribution of the technologies. *[Agent's note: The Union did not disappoint in this matter].*

The initial flashpoint in 1861 was over the extensive oil and mineral reserves of Mississippi and Texas. Carpathian and the Enlightened loyal to him knew that the power they required for their greater work could only be acquired if these tensions and fears were stoked. Carpathian and his Enlightened needed to be in a position to demand autonomy and favour from whichever faction came out on top. To that end, they began to sell juiced rifles, automata, sonic cannons, and of course, the wonder-fuel that allowed all these infernal devices to be powered to both sides. Thus, when the Civil War erupted in earnest, it was fought with the most destructive weapons ever devised by man.

Armies were swept from the field as streams of crimson power flashed

beneath the rising clouds of smoke and dust. Armoured landships crawled across the churned, muddy ground, shrugging off blasts that would have shattered castles. Millions died and the nation was devastated as the war dragged on, the Confederacy and the Union equally matched through the availability of Enlightened technology. As year after bloody year passed with no sign of an eventual winner, Enlightened elsewhere in the world began to fear that it would never end. They predicted with certainty that the country would be reduced to a smouldering cinder before the war reached a conclusion.

Eventually, it was Nikolai Tesla who broke faith with the rest of the Enlightened and intervened, despite Sturgeon and the other Peers warning him not to. Taking his voltaic technologies with him, Tesla journeyed to the Union, providing them with what would turn out to be the upper hand. Supported by Tesla-Coil powered automata and devastating Rolling Thunder tanks, the war ended within months. The exhausted populace on both sides of the Mason-Dixon line finally brokered an uneasy peace. *[Agent's note: Director Lincoln, have you ever asked Nikolai why he chose the North over the South?]*

Carpathian was furious, watching all of the groundwork he had laid with the Confederacy rendered useless with their defeat. He immediately moved to consolidate his holdings through the connections and alliances he had built with northern interests. The foundation of several Promethean Complexes had been established during the war and

now these were greatly expanded and reinforced into massive industrial cities on the land ceded to them by the newly victorious Union.

ENLIGHTENMENT OF THE SELF

Knowing better than any other what the true purpose of the Enlightened was, Carpathian directed his servants and acolytes at *The Warcradle*, making it the most advanced source of weapons and research in the world. The aloof Sturgeon and his allies at *Wells Chasm* saw the emergence of Carpathian and those who followed him as a dangerous, unstable element within the Enlightened. The Union Civil War had been a flashpoint driving on scientific endeavours around the globe as well as the demand for RJ-1027 and the technologies that it could power. But the conflict had also breathed new life into the Egalitarian movement within the Covenant. Now the notions of Carpathian became a credible alternative to the principles espoused by Sturgeon.

Following the betrayal of Markov, the facilities in the Antarctic have been expanded, with a large shipyard and airfield producing all manner of advanced craft to help the Enlightened project their principles across the globe. While Carpathian and his allies have chosen to portion out advanced technologies equally and fan the flames of industry and conflict, so too have Sturgeon and the rest of the Enlightened taken whatever steps they deem necessary against those same nations to ensure that no power gains a decisive advantage. Sturgeon is Lord of

Wells Chasm, now a bustling metropolis built around the fabled Vault itself; and *Leonidas Spire*, the great port on the Antarctic Peninsula presided over by Maximilian Schneider. From these two Promethean Complexes spread a vast network of tunnels, cut and blasted by engineers with drills, ice-burners and the tireless TX 01 automata. Underground galleries contain workshops and farms illuminated by sun-like globes; made habitable by atmospheric controls; interconnected by railways and pneumatic pressure tubes.

Elsewhere in the world, though not quite to the scale of the Union Civil War, other opportunities have enabled Promethean Complexes to be established. Through such agreements, the Enlightened are usually left alone by their host governments, although their methods and attitudes often make for tense relationships with the local populace. The Promethean Complex known as *The Gateway*, was once the tiny south Atlantic island of South Georgia. This island-city is, quite literally, the entrance to the Antarctic approach, through which all visitors must pass. The Crown is resentful of being manipulated to sell the land to the Enlightened. [Agent's note: *The Crown may be resentful, but I think it fair to say that now that our dependence on the Enlightened has faded, we are in open aggression here in the Union - particularly against our 'guests' out in the Badlands. Even the general populace now see Carpathian and his Peers for what they truly are - opportunistic monsters making coats for themselves out of our widow's weeds. I understand that this mounting antagonism towards the Enlightened has*

caused Nikolai and his assistants go to great lengths to distinguish themselves from their Enlightened cousins. Having visited The Pipeworks myself, it is clear that beyond the publicly accessible lobby and conference room, the facility is still to all intents and purposes a Promethean Complex.]

AN ENLIGHTENED PRESENT

The Enlightened are vastly changed since their founding a quarter of a century ago. Now more self-focused and fractured than before, they are still collectively driven by the ultimate goal of elevating humanity through science. Hulking monstrosities guard the entrances to their labyrinthine promethean complexes that are dotted around the globe. Overhead, their bizarre and wondrous rotor craft ferry materials back and forth between these strongholds. It is folly to mistake their unusual appearance for weakness as they are bristling with concealed rockets and searing lasers ready to annihilate any who would threaten them. Similarly, their fleet is usually hidden from view beneath the waves, elegantly rising only when needed to loose weaponry that cleaves through enemy armour and shields. The Enlightened make prodigious use of their vaunted generator technology, confounding their foes or harry them from new and unexpected quarters.

Thanks to the actions of the traitor Markov, the clash of nations and the influence of the Hex, the Enlightened's plan to control the world through science and technology has come to nought and the various groups and factions

are left scrambling to follow the many counter agendas they have devised. Though the Covenant of the Enlightened still arrogantly places itself above the petty jingoism of the nations of the Earth, rivalries between the Enlightened members are fierce. Competing designs are often produced in different Promethean Complexes in an attempt to earn their inventor prestige amongst their fellow Peers or lucrative contracts should they feel that selling their creations will further their goal. An example of this conflict was seen when Zerah Colburn's Blackhoof Automata was replaced as the primary means of personal transport in the Union army by Erasmus Levett's Iron Horse. The sickness and death caused by the Automata's primitive atomic batteries resulted in such humiliation for Colburn that he flung himself from the cooling tower of his Promethean Complex, the *Iron Citadel*.

Within their Promethean Complex, each Peer rules as a technological autocrat and is responsible for maintaining a militia or retinue armed with the latest in Enlightened advancements. Some Peers make use of extensive mechanical augmentation to create a capable force out of the physically injured or idealistic volunteers. Others have explored the paths of automation to create marvellous machines capable of a semblance of independent thought processing. Able to carry out a variety of tasks with the world's most advanced fleet of naval ships, armoured machines and aircraft,

the Enlightened continue to push the envelope of human advancement, harnessing any technologies they can create or reverse engineer.

Beyond the predominant ideologies within the Enlightened of Egalitarianism and Custodianship, the reality is more nuanced and each Peer pursues the agenda of the Covenant in their own way. Isambard Kingdom Brunel spends his time at a vast workhouse complex known as *Bletchley* designing ever more impressive engineering feats for his patron, Queen Victoria. Brunel is convinced that the world was at peace when the Crown's rule was unchallenged and now puts his great intelligence to work considering how best to return the Crown to her former glory. For Barnabas Sturgeon at *Wells Chasm*, it is about developing the secrets of the Vault and dealing with those who would misuse them. For Lady Julianna Drakenburg at *The Gateway*, it is about keeping an eye on the scientific achievements of the seven great power blocs and eliminating or seizing emergent technologies that would prove a danger to the world.

Through these Peers and dozens more, the dream of the Sturginium Age has faded into the reality of the Dystopian Age. It is only a matter of time before the brilliant minds of the Covenant of the Enlightened are called upon to defend humanity in their darkest hour. Until then, they must each learn to find a place in this era of constant warfare and strife that they themselves have created.





LAWMEN OF THE MARSHAL SERVICE



The law is an elusive animal on the Union Frontier. After the brutal culmination of the Civil War, the western territories have entered the Dystopian Age, a time of such violence and upheaval that there is almost no hope for ordinary men and women to survive, let alone prosper. First amongst those who rise up to defend them are the Lawmen of the Federated States Marshal Service. These determined and resourceful men and women stand for the Law and act as judge, jury and, if necessary, executioner of those who would sow misery and mayhem.

To: Whitelaw Reid, Editor, New York Tribune.

Sir, please find enclosed the article for which you commissioned me. This piece explores the history and current status of the Lawmen of our nation. I have interviewed a number of Marshals and Sheriffs as well as their deputies as I laid out for the folks back East the nature of this vital service organisation. I look forward to receiving your feedback in due course.

Minerva Bly, Tombstone,
Arizona Territory, 1871

"Every citizen needs to know the limits of their freedoms, and the protections to which they are entitled as they go about their daily lives. It is also necessary for a structure of punishments and strictures to be established, to ensure that everyone can enjoy the protections and rights of the Law." – Abraham Lincoln

LAW AND ORDER

Our great nation has grown and flourished in the years since the Founding Fathers landed upon our shores. When Abraham Lincoln considered the state of the nation, he proclaimed that without laws, humanity could not flourish. He further stated that without men and women to uphold them, the laws are not worth the parchment on which they are written.

The men and women who enforce those rights and responsibilities are often the first, last, and only line of defence between the innocent and those who would abuse and victimise them. I have extensively researched these individuals and have been fortunate enough to obtain several exclusive interviews.



SHIELD OF THE INNOCENT

While the Union Army is paramount to the survival of the Union, they are a blunt instrument better suited to crushing insurrections and defending against foreign invaders than policing communities and guarding against individual lawbreakers. When the Army is deployed, countless innocents are often injured or killed in the process.

Government agents also move through our great country. And effective as these solitary individuals may be at flushing out enemies of the state and threats to the nation, they too, are ill-suited to the defence of the individual civilian when the more mundane laws of the land are being flouted. So when it comes to the protection of an innocent farmer, a blameless merchant and their families, it is to the Lawmen of the Federated States Marshal Service that these people must turn.

THE LETTER OF THE LAW

In order to understand what the Law has become, it is important to appreciate how it has evolved. I beg you to indulge me and allow me to share a little history.

A framework of professional law enforcement was established by the eastern states considerable years ago. It is known that the Federated States Marshal Service, based out of the Nottingham Building in New York City, has existed for over a hundred years, overseeing the establishment of local regulating forces and the peaceful implementation of the laws generated from Washington. I should point out

here that though the term Lawmen is used it is universally applied to both men and women who serve in the Marshal Service. Though some older Lawmen (and 'Law-women') have gone out of their way to make that distinction, for the vast majority that I interviewed, the inclusion of both genders was so natural that it warranted no comment.

At the heart of the Federated States Marshal Service is the concept that the Law is sacrosanct, that it protects and surrounds everything within the borders of the Union. No man or woman, regardless of social position or status, should consider their actions above the Law. The Law, the marshals believe, exists to protect everyone equally, and to ensure that all citizens of the Union are guaranteed a fair and impartial field upon which to strive for peace and happiness.

HIERARCHY OF THE SERVICE

So a little structure, then. At the top of the Federated States Marshal Service are the High Marshals, each responsible for a state or territory and all business conducted therein. The High Marshals answer only to the Nottingham Building and even then are granted wide interpretive powers within their own jurisdictions.

Below the High Marshals are the marshals, assigned to a major city or civic centre within the larger state or territory. Relationships between marshals and High Marshals vary wildly, from familial dynasties policing an entire state, to an outright rebellion led by a large city's marshal against the dictates of that territory's High Marshal. For the most part,

these men and women work together for the greater good of the societies under their care, but there are fault lines built into the structure of the system that may shake the foundations of the Law in time. This may be a cynical outlook, but it is a pragmatic and honest one.

Below the marshals serve the sheriffs, looking after small towns, boroughs, and other regions within the larger jurisdictions. The sheriffs serve at the pleasure of the marshals, focusing on those policies and priorities fixed at the higher levels through the use of deputies.

Deputies are civilians who have been granted special status by the High Marshal at the request of the local marshal or sheriff. Deputies are the law-enforcement equivalent of citizen-soldiers and come from all occupations and walks of life. In times of particular distress, deputies don uniforms that identify them as acting with the authority of the local marshal. Deputies provide their own weapons and equipment as well, forming more of a well-ordered militia than a standing constabulary. If confronted with a particularly difficult case, a local sheriff might deputise every able-bodied man and woman in a town to try to bring down a powerful criminal threatening the general peace of the region.

"In the soul of each law-abiding citizen is an outlaw just waiting for their chance." – Judge Kingsley Stern

A FLAW IN THE SYSTEM

The Law is the Law to any honest officer. It is codified, written in the ordinance

books, and available for all to see and read. The problem, however, comes from the interpretation of that law. Most statutes provide for a wide range of punishments, for instance, and it is up to individual Lawmen to decide what penalty is imposed. Further, each individual marshal and sheriff is given extensive interpretive powers within their own jurisdiction, to decide what constitutes an infraction and what might represent a simple misunderstanding or innocent confusion.

Each Lawman is given wide interpretive powers and this can result in considerable confusion when travelling from one jurisdiction to another. In one region something that might be seen as a minor transgression could command the highest corporal punishment the next town over. The High Marshals are constantly working to ensure that the Law is being applied equally across the land, but when so much power resides in the hands of each local Lawman, such a task is not easy.

Luckily, most established eastern jurisdictions have a long tradition of precedent and custom to resort to, and so implementation of the Law throughout the more structured regions of the Union is generally equitable. Many of the marshal's offices have been functioning, in one form or another, since this structure was first put in place and their relationship with the Nottingham Building is well-established.

The newer territories, however, have proven to be a much more difficult region to assimilate into the existing

structure and it is these that have provided me with so much fascinating insight into the real lives of these men and women.

FRONTIER JUSTICE

Wyatt Earp, High Marshal of the Arizona Territories is an imposing man. Well over six feet in height, with what could best be called an 'intimidating' presence, he is taciturn and hard to extract information from. When he gives up his words, he is startlingly eloquent and his belief in dispensing justice is without question.

"Unfortunately, what works in a region that has been civilised for over a hundred years might not be a perfect fit for territories still wet with the blood of those who carved them from the wilderness in the first place," he says to me as we sit beneath the burning Arizona Territory sun.

Wyatt Earp has made it his duty to serve and protect the people of the Union of Federated States from threats that might intrude upon their daily lives. Laudable though this goal may be, it has nonetheless earned Earp few friends and countless more enemies. His immediate family has suffered numerous personal tragedies at the hands of the lawless. Only his closest friends are able to permeate the iron-clad demeanour he maintains and so there are but few who can offer support and succour to the undoubtedly lonely man that must lie within the legend.

The enemies of peace and harmony on the frontier are everywhere and, Earp

claims, they will stop at nothing to force the Union settlers out of the territories and back to the safe havens of the eastern states.

But the Union claims those territories and demands that their laws be followed there just as anywhere else in their domain. And so the Nottingham Building has sent the High Marshals to impose the Law over the lawless, and to protect the innocent civilians from those who would victimise them.

"My fellow Lawmen and women, who have headed into the untamed frontier, are a special breed. We must be fiercely independent. Resourceful. And utterly dedicated to the Law." He emphasises each point with a slap of his hand on the table

Each Marshal dispatched to the western territories knows that he or she is going to be alone and entirely dependent upon the organisation they are able to establish themselves. Their marshals, sheriffs and deputies are each responsible for an island of order and safety amidst the chaos, with assistance often days or even weeks away.

Under such circumstances, the price of leniency with lawbreakers is often steep and bloody. Each Lawman is forced to deal with this unhappy situation in their own way. Some maintain law and order through the force of their own personalities, granting wider powers to the sheriffs and deputies beneath them. In so doing, they create a regional character that might keep those tempted to veer from the righteous path on the straight and narrow. Others understand that terror is a superlative

motivator, and so impose a rigid, brutal regime, where the slightest infraction is punished swiftly with the full weight of the Law.

Only one thing is certain in the Wild West: The Law is a harsh, fickle mistress, and she often bows to the strongest suitor. In the face of such challenges, many a lesser man would have given up a long time ago. But according to Earp's close friend Henry John "Doc" Holliday: "Mother Earp raised no shrinking violet." So Wyatt Earp continues to heft his shield and shotgun and strides out to the clink of spurs, ready to dispense justice. He is rightly feared by those he faces in the city of Tombstone or further afield, because he brings hell with him.

"The western territories are a violent, chaotic realm where the succour of the eastern states is a distant hope, and too far away to help the brave men and women trying to wrest a living from the unforgiving earth." – Wyatt Earp

GUARDIANS OF THE WEST

As has been true throughout time, those who dispense justice carry the greatest power in their fists. Back East, the marshals are kept in check by a rigid framework of tradition and precedent that holds them accountable to the politicians and bureaucrats above them. In the western territories, no such framework exists. Because of this, the men and women who rise to positions of authority within these lawless tracts tend to hold far more power over their fiefdoms than their eastern cousins. Holding the safety of every man, woman, and child in your

jurisdiction within your gloved hand can be a potently heady brew.

This has resulted in a wide range of behaviours among the marshals of the West. Although the vast majority of Lawmen came to their occupations honestly, through a genuine desire to protect the innocent and hold the chaos and violence at bay, a lifetime of such struggles, especially against the mounting odds currently piling up against the territories, cannot help but take their toll. Even the strongest will may break if the burden of blood and death becomes too heavy.

Among the High Marshals of the West are men and women who have come to very different methods for dealing with this pressure. Following my interview with him, I ascertained that Wyatt Earp has evidently retained a great deal of the humanity that drove him into his lofty position in the first place. The Law within the Arizona Territory is as fair as he can make it, and a man or woman crossing through that arid region can hope for equitable dealings with the marshals and sheriffs they find there if they keep their wits about them. Unfortunately, as a traveller passes beyond the lands ruled from the rough and tumble town of Tombstone, there is no telling what situation they might find themselves in next.

"They call it the town too tough to die," I am informed by one of Earp's deputies, a man well-known for gambling infringements in border towns across the nation. "I reckon it's the town too damn stubborn to die."

"The true character of mankind is dark, and must constantly be offered object lessons on the price of malfeasance, lest they wander from the bright path."

– Judge Kingsley Stern

FRONTIER JUDGEMENT

Every soul living in the frontier must navigate their way through life by utilising their personal moral compass, regardless of whether the needle points to light or shadow. Soldier or miner, outlaw or deputy, each has their own set of standards, a code by which they live. In the case of Judge Kingsley Stern versus the criminal fraternity, that compass points unshakeably to the creed that guilt in all cases is a given fact. Only the severity of the transgression matters.

Judge Kingsley Stern is an itinerant Lawman serving in the territories. Judge Stern is best described as a roving one-man lynch mob utterly convinced of his own righteousness. He believes that at the heart of each law-abiding man is an outlaw just waiting for his chance. In contrast to Earp, Stern is more than eager to give me his opinions.

Judge Stern's understanding of the law is so rigid that he has been known to hang his own deputies on more than one occasion when he thought they might have overextended their responsibilities. In one instance, a sworn deputy stopped a bank robbery in progress by shooting dead the perpetrators. But the man was not in uniform, and so his story came to a quick and painful conclusion at the end of Stern's hanging rope.

He began his career in Boston, a brilliant and much-respected attorney-at-law whose passion for ensuring justice was served brought him not only great respect from his fellow lawyers but also tremendous wealth. Focused on his career and with no intention of marriage or children, Stern demonstrated remarkable acts of philanthropy, providing for those who had none. The people of Boston loved him, but the criminal element rightly feared him. For those unfortunates who transgressed too far above the law, the name Judge Stern was associated with a long drop and short stop.

The lawlessness of the frontier of the Federated States attracted his attention, drawing him to the territories as a moth to a flame. He learned swiftly that the soft and privileged life he had led back in Massachusetts had not remotely prepared him for life out here. Subsequently, he set aside his law books, applying his determination to mastering the arts of self-defence. That early training has long since metamorphosed into an ability to dole out justice at the end of his beautifully crafted and masterfully balanced hammer.

What could be seen as a 'hang 'em high' approach to the law has drawn criticism from other Lawmen who feel that Stern's zeal occasionally blinds him to circumstance. Stern is not bothered by the opinion of his fellow Lawmen, but out of respect for their station, rarely deputizes among their ranks. Instead, he hires and deputizes people from many walks of life who are eager to prove their worth. More often, their lack

of experience and training means that Stern rarely gets to re-use their services.

Only one thing is certain in the territories: Law or no Law, a man or woman intending to live out their days so far from civilisation takes their life and livelihood in their own hands.

NO EASY PEACE

The end of the Ore War saw a massive influx of settlers flood throughout the western territories. They came from the defeated Confederacy, fleeing the brutal destruction of cities and towns; they came from all over the Union, looking to take advantage of the vast lands of opportunity opening up before them. Each of them came with all of the preconceived notions of their past lives firmly grasped in their whitened fists.

With this exodus of new flesh came those who would prey upon them. Confidence men, hucksters, and snake-oil salesmen flourished, willing to take the last penny from a desperate farmer new to the harsh conditions and isolated lands. Desperados sweeping up from the South, or wandering in from the broken Confederate armies, felt no qualms at earning a living off the backs of the hard-working farmers and ranchers trying to make new lives for themselves in the territories.

But in addition to these dangers, classic archetypes of violence and greed that have existed for thousands of years, new, more insidious dangers arose to threaten the men and women who would make the territories their homes.

There were dark things lurking in the canyons, arroyos, deep caves and pine forests of this unforgiving and inhospitable terrain. Twisted monsters from the darkest tales of the Old World stalked the night for prey. A Lawman freshly arrived from the East might look askance at these stories, unwilling to give the slightest credence to the numb babbling of an exhausted madman. But all too quickly, that veneer of genteel disapproval would be worn away, or that particular Lawman would be heading back East, all too often in a pine box.

"My mom always said she heard that Bass was so tough he could spit on a brick and bust it in two!"

-Willabelle Shultz

THE RESTLESS NATIVES

The Union rightly claims all the lands between the Dominion of Canada in the North and way down South past Gran Columbia to the Socialist Unity of South American, but the natives of the so-called Warrior Nation believe differently. These native tribes pose a wholly different kind of threat. Although the Lawmen in the East have been swift to dismiss the tribesmen as vicious beasts, those tasked with bringing Law to the territories believe differently.

The Warrior Nation might not accept the rule of the Union of Federated States, but they still have a code of lawfulness of their own and they impose it upon any who live on their ancestral land, no matter what Washington or the Nottingham Building might think. All too often, a naïve settler might transgress against

this native law, and feel the sudden and irrevocable punishment crush him into the dirt. It is the uneasy task of the Lawmen to untangle the intersection of the Law of the Union and the Tribal Law, and navigate a path forward that might not result in open warfare. Fortunately for us all, there is a man up to this difficult task of upholding the law in the region known as Indian Territory

No lawman has earned the respect of the Warrior Nation to the degree afforded Marshal Bass Reeves. His reputation for both fairness and determination, coupled with his skills at the fast draw has settled many of the disputes he dealt with during his long career in that troubled region. Grimly determined and fiercely loyal, Reeves commands the respect of those who follow him. With over three thousand outlaw arrests to his name, Reeves is valued by the Lawmen for his ability to deploy a cool head and rein in the sort of impetuosity that Marshal Earp is known for. Consequently, for newly appointed sheriffs, it is Reeves whose activities in the East are cited as the shining light to which all Lawmen should aspire.

Indian Territory encompasses not only grounds sacred to the Warrior Nation but also land around an Enlightened Promethean Complex. In addition, there are numerous outlaw camps and the hunting grounds of a fell creature known as Wicasasni. Bringing justice and security to the towns in such a place proved an impossible task, even for Mashal Reeves. However, after he saved the son of Chief Raven Spirit, the so-called Apache Kid, Reeves was set on

his current path. Still under-resourced and over stretched, Reeves now fights valiantly to stem the flow of attacks on civilians. With the Apache Kid at his side under oath of a life-debt and Chief Raven Spirit lending him braves to help protect the townsfolk under his care, Bass Reeves has become something more than that which he was. He has become legendary.

OTHER DANGERS

In addition to these other dangers and difficulties is the cabal of so-called genius scientists who have swept across the western territories since the ending of the Ore War. Most of the Covenant of the Enlightened's factory-fortresses established after the war are scattered throughout the West. These semi-autonomous enclaves tend to police themselves, not allowing Lawmen of any stripe near enough to impose the Law. As their influence grows, they often spread that dubious protection over surrounding towns and settlements, creating tension with the local marshals.

The Union Army, having received their orders from the more centrally-controlled high command in Washington, tend to leave the Enlightened's burgeoning forge-cities alone except in the instance of truly egregious offences, or if their name is Odysseus Grant. The Lawmen, however, often feel the diminution of their own authority more keenly, and refuse to be called off so easily. The marshals and sheriffs work within the letter of the Law, but to the settlers caught in the middle, this distinction carries little weight.

The tension between the Lawmen and the Union Army is perhaps the most frustrating aspect of enforcing peace and justice in the territories. The Army is often called upon to deal with uprisings, large-scale savage incursions, or massive outbreaks of lawlessness. And when the Army is unleashed upon the territories, they care very little for any civilians who make the mistake of standing inadvertently in their path. To the military mind, the destruction of an entire frontier shantytown might be considered a small price to pay if a threat to the Union can be contained. When an overzealous commander is dispatched into the territories, most Lawmen feel it is their duty to protect the population, even from their own defenders.

THE FRINGE OF THE FRONTIER

As dangerous and dark as the territories are, there are lands even stranger that lie beyond. The threats that menace the settlers of this region may be manifold, but in the grand scheme of things, most of those can be handily dealt with by the stalwart folk who have dedicated themselves to the Law in the West.

When times grow truly desperate, and the enemies of peace and order become too much even for the High Marshals to handle, the Lawmen know they must be able to call for aid, or the dream of a civilised West will be lost. Short of calling upon the Union Army to come and crush the delicate balance of power and freedom beneath their hobnailed feet, there are two organisations within the wider law enforcement community that can be summoned to help the local Lawmen when things get out of hand.

The Rangers are a force of roving Lawmen who trace their roots back through Texas and the fierce battles waged there against all manner of foe. Semi-autonomous units of sheriffs that operate in the grey space between jurisdictions, the Rangers go where they will, and are not afraid to follow the scent of wrongdoing no matter where it might lead. Although a band of Rangers riding into a marshal's town might cause some friction, most Rangers are savvy enough to finesse local politics in their favour, and seldom will such tensions be allowed to rise to a level that interferes with the work of either group.

"At last, after thinking a heap about it, I came to the conclusion that I always did: that the boldest plan is the best and safest." – Wild Bill Hickok

A LEGENDARY RANGER

Some men earn their legends. Others contribute to the legends of others. Some, like the Marshal known as 'Wild' Bill Hickok, simply make their own legends up and recount them for anybody who will spare the time to listen. Hickok is a charmer; a story-teller extraordinaire and a man well versed in what the renowned showman P T Barnum would call 'the noble art of humbug'. He knows well the magic a good yarn can bring to others, having spent some considerable time with a travelling show in his younger years. His marksmanship skills were as sharp then as they are now and many a contented visitor would leave the show that night swearing that they truly had seen the greatest gunman on Earth.

For all his dramatic tendencies and his overblown, often hugely exaggerated tales, Hickok is a canny, shrewd soul. Like so many of his ilk, he fell into the role of Lawman without intending to. When he first came out West, he did so with the intention of setting up a travelling show of his own, perhaps bringing entertainment to what he perceived as the poverty-stricken settlers of the frontier. Instead of the struggling little shanty towns he envisioned, he found flourishing settlements, rich with prospects, loaded with opportunity and marred by those who operated outside the law. Along with his friend and fellow former showman, Bill Cody, he excelled in the field of scouting and reconnaissance. As a young ranger, he discovered a love for this unexpected new career and when Cody headed back East, Hickok remained, eager to keep his skills as one of the newly-named Rangers sharp and focused. He grew strong and powerful, mastering the use of a rifle as well as his pistols.

As the years passed, Hickok took others under his wing, training them in the arts of wilderness living and tracking. One young woman in particular – Grace Myrtle – has grown to be every bit his equal in skill and is in possession of a personality as big as his own. They have become confidantes, even good friends and he values her opinion more than he'd ever openly admit.

The stories of his own greatness that he told in his youth have long been forgotten, replaced with stories that are every bit as true as he tells them... mostly, anyway. Hickok is still fond of

exaggerating and as long as he has a glass of whisky, a comfortable seat and a willing audience, he will still wheel out the showman of old and entertain a crowd with the wild tales of Wild Bill.

Despite the somewhat menacing air of many Rangers (what Ranger Myrtle suggested I do when asked if she was prepared to be interviewed cannot be reprinted, for example), men and women like Myrtle and Hickok are veterans, spending their lives on the bleeding edge between civilisation and chaos. If a marshal needs help but is loath to turn to the Union Army, the Rangers are always willing to answer the call.

"Is there any way I can get this stuff off my fingers without betraying my calm exterior?" – Investigator Helena Miller

INFERNAL INVESTIGATIONS

When the darkness truly falls, and the stuff of nightmares crawls out beneath the clearing skies, only one group can shine a light on the taint and corruption to enforce the Law. The Bureau of Infernal Investigative Affairs, an elite band of Lawmen working directly out of Washington, who specialise in investigating the very worst crimes and infractions. Although many of the greater mysteries of the Earth defy description or analysis, it is the men and women of Infernal Affairs who strive to keep the Frontier safe from the depredations of those malign menaces that stalk the long nights.

When some purportedly horrific creature begins to threaten the peace of a frontier

town, or a law-abiding citizen suddenly goes insane with rage and bloody-minded murder, it is the marshals of Infernal Affairs who are dispatched to deal with the threat.

It is Infernal Affairs who 'watch the watchmen'. Should a Marshal, Sheriff or Deputy overstep their remit and put themselves above and beyond the Law, it is Infernal Affairs who are mandated to be the judge, jury and, if necessary, executioner of their fellow Lawmen. This ominous duty, along with the necessity that Infernal Investigators have pre-eminence over their fellow Marshals and Sheriffs causes no end of grief and frustration among those who perceive themselves to be the 'real' Lawmen in the Frontier. But when desperation is the watchword of the day, most High Marshals will concede and accept help from any quarter.

"I believe it is your round."

- Doc Holliday

TINMEN

The western territories are haunted by all manner of dangers, but they are filled with opportunities as well. As long as settlers move westward seeking a new and better life, there will be those who follow close behind or wait up ahead in cowardly ambush, to take advantage of their innocence and naiveté. But there is Law, even in the West; and so long as a single marshal, sheriff, or deputy draws breath, that Law will be defended.

Their motivations are infinite, and their methods range from the terrible to the inspired, but the dedication and commitment of the Lawmen of the western territories cannot be denied. There are no riches to be had within the letter of the Law; she makes no guarantees of fame or fortune. Most of these men and women will struggle against the darkness all their lives for little more than a roof over their heads, warm meals, and maybe a timid smile or hushed greeting as they walk down the street. Many will gasp out their last breath into the dust of the desert, taking a bolt or blade meant for some innocent settler. But they answer the call nevertheless, willing to sacrifice their own peace and happiness for the Law.

Each Lawman, be they Marshal, Ranger, Infernal Investigator, Judge or Deputy, carries a thin tin shield or star on their person. This symbol, all but worthless in the wider world, represents lifetimes of commitment and obligation to an ideal without which they believe civilisation cannot survive. They are the first and only line of defence between the falling night and the true wealth of the Wild West: her people. They are the guarantee of a quiet night. They are the promise of peace in the face of viciousness and greed.

They are the Lawmen.





OUTLAWS OF THE AMERICAN FRONTIER

The Outlaws are a rag-tag mix of men and women. Each forging their own path in the world, each fiercely independent. To the Union and Lawmen, they are viewed as desperate and dangerous criminals. The term outlaw is as a slur among the men and women of the Union. In these troubled times, where war and wages thrive, cut-throats, bandits and mercenaries inevitably follow.

Separately, the Outlaws flock to charismatic men and women who offer them, fame, fortune or a glorious destiny. The Dystopian Age makes such individuals into outlaw nobility, their services for hire as displays of power to intimidate others. Outlaws can turn a rich man into a dangerous one. Of course, it goes without saying that this any relationship based on coin quickly turn predatory if an employer fails to keep his mercenaries well paid.

Though the Outlaws are a varied bunch, they largely fall under one of four Affiliations. The Mercenaries are those outlaws who fight only for money and power. Aided by biomechanical implants and experimental weaponry acquired on the black market, these Outlaws lead a reckless and fugitive lifestyle. They are less concerned with noble causes or lofty ideals and instead are driven by promises of fame and fortune.

The Confederate Rebellion continue to fight the Ore War on behalf of the southern states, even though that Civil war ended more than a decade ago. The Conquistadores are a band of supposedly immortal explorers who find themselves on a holy quest, fighting injustice as they go and answerable to no-one but their god. Finally, the Golden Army are the brave revolutionaries fighting to free their beloved Mexico from the oppressive Union.

Report from Judge Kingsley Stern to High Marshal Frederick Douglass, Washington

It is my duty to report to you the current state of affairs regarding the miscreants who consider themselves outside and above the great Law of our nation. It is

a sad truth of the times that there are those who have more and those who have less and despite this being one of society's natural laws, there will always be those who will take what they want without regard or care for those from whom they take it.

JESSE JAMES

I have come to consider myself something of a shepherd to the people of the untamed Western Territories but no matter how diligently a shepherd tends his flock, there is always a single rule that must be observed. The wolf will have his day. And those so-called Outlaws are imbued with predatory natures. In a difficult environment where hard-working men and woman barely scratch a living from the unforgiving terrain, these wolves thrive. Our world is changing and these Outlaws adapt swiftly. They are in possession of three key qualities: strength, charisma and cunning. By themselves, these traits are useful to those seeking success in our world. When all three are combined... that is where the real trouble begins.

When operating separately these Outlaw leaders are a danger, especially when they sell their services and ally themselves as mercenaries with our enemies. What is most difficult to counter, however, is when these outlaws band together in common cause. Usually it will be for a share of whatever spoils are to be plundered from criminality, but there have been cases where mutual hatred on the Union or the Law has been sufficient to make temporary bedfellows of the most unlikely of miscreants.

I have taken it upon myself to detail those most likely to become known across this great nation of ours. Each is dangerous beyond words and the Federated States Marshal Service should not rest until they are brought to justice and taken to the gallows to feel the righteous caress of the noose at their throat.

Above others, this name must be marked and noted. It is said that the mercenary man sees opportunity where others buckle in adversity. The recent Union Civil War and the perpetual border clashes around the world present many chances for personal gain. But in the lawless regions, the retribution for a failed gambit can be swift and it can be merciless. In these hardened Territories, it appears that Jesse James has gambled all that he has and all that he was in order to become a self-style 'King of the Thieves'.

His very name is synonymous with division. Most law-abiding folk see him as nothing more than a common criminal: a thief, a bandit, a con-man and, most crucially, a killer. But despite the blatant evidence of his crimes, there are still those who consider this rogue to be a hero, a paragon of the people whose goals are thought be worthy and awe-inspiring. The man is an enigma and plays his cards close to his chest – literally and figuratively.

He led a recent raid (and I am reluctant to acknowledge, a daring one at that) on the newly-established Heavy Rail line, which supplies the border forts and Marshal stations out here on the frontier. James and his posse successfully de-railed the RJ-locomotive, an act which scattered a year's worth of guns, vehicles and other equipment across the desert just west of Kansas City. Before the Union had even drawn up an inventory of the stolen goods, any number of outlaws under James' banner were armed to hilt with weapons just as powerful as those back east, given

that they originated at the Pipeworks. In this one, bold act, Jesse James has shifted the balance of power out here.

It is my understanding that the man should have been dead a long time ago, but whether it be luck or some greater power at work, the man cheats death repeatedly. A fight with a vicious beast known as a Weylyn (*see my report on the Warrior Nations*) did not stop him and by all rights it should have: both arms were ripped from his body.

Further investigation suggests that James forged an alliance with Burson Carpathian, the infamous scientist from the Covenant of the Enlightened. Carpathian's name will appear over and over again in my reports and I attribute much of the woes of the Frontier, as well as our great country, to that detestable technological autocrat. Whatever deal James struck meant that Carpathian gifted him with two extraordinarily crafted artificial limbs, said to be quite exquisite and intricate in design. Bandits I have questioned (shortly before hanging of course) believe that the price of this 'gift' means that Jesse James is now at Carpathian's beck and call. I can't imagine a man like James cares much for Carpathian, but nonetheless, he has been given another opportunity to take and steal from life what he so clearly believes he is entitled to.

BILLY BONNEY AND HIS REGULATORS

A man with a reputation as large as Jesse James will naturally cast a shadow in which other, lesser men will eternally skulk. William Bonney is one such man. Young,

headstrong and impetuous, Bonney rarely teams up with Jesse James. When he does, things allegedly flare up and the two egos clash. It is a simple case of Bonney perceiving James as a broken man who has served his purpose and who should make way for a faster, younger man. In return, James likely sees Bonney as not only a challenger to his ill-fitting crown, but as little more than an upstart. It is said that James coined the sobriquet 'The Kid', which Bonney allegedly despises.

Bonney champions the opportunistic Carpathian's RJ-1027 technology in its many forms and has been quick to switch to 'juice' as the fuel is known colloquially. He utilises modern weaponry in his various criminal activities, which include but are in no way limited to, bank and stage robberies, street brawls and on occasion, simply 'settling an argument'. He has been heard to bad-mouth Jesse James in public on more than one occasion and his jealousy of Carpathian's 'gift' apparently knows no bounds.

From reports – and from first hand observations – Bonney has no sense of guilt or remorse relating to the murders that he commits and I am forced to conclude that the man revels in the sheer, bloody joy it must bring to his repulsively tarnished spirit. William Bonney is man quick to anger, quick to revenge and, it appears, quick to round up like-minded individuals who share his goals.

He is the leader of a hopelessly loyal gang known as the Regulators, who tread a curious line between notoriety and legitimacy. This is down to the interfering of desperate Lawmen, men

and women who I am adding to my list of those who require justice to be served up to them in due course.

For all his anger and youthful belligerence, Bonney's nature, I suspect, belies a calm, calculating intelligence. He acts instinctively, but it cannot be disputed that at times he will plan meticulously before engaging in any sort of activity.

He is young and physically impressive, and it is this youth and vibrancy which lends him an edge that not even Jesse James can enjoy. To utilise the vernacular used by these outlaws, he is the quick – and those in his way will likely become the dead.

JOHNNY RINGO AND HIS COWBOYS

There are those in the frontier like the hard-working Lawmen who occasionally earn a degree of public repute through acts of selflessness and heroism. But there are more by far who become famous during their own lifetime for infinitely less salubrious acts. Those are the men and women for whom the taste of notoriety is a finer wine by far. Johnny Ringo is just one man among many mean-spirited, foul-mouthed and lawless villains, but he is also by far and away one of the most bloody-minded. Set apart from many other by dint of his inherent charm and good breeding, Ringo is supremely arrogant and self-absorbed; using his "superior" intellect to bamboozle his underlings and impress the gullible.

Ringo is a crack-shot, cold-blooded killer; a marksman without peer and he is justly feared for it. He is rumoured to have taken down more duel opponents than any

other man in the West and this may well be true. It is certainly not something our deputies contest – at least not to his face.

Despite his tendency to bear grudges and pursue personal revenge against any number of foes, Ringo is, in his own way, a superlative leader, commanding respect and fear from those who follow his command. He is equally at home planning a bank heist as he is at opening fire on a Lawmen posse just for the sheer and unbridled joy of it.

Ringo harbours a particular hatred of our own High Marshal Wyatt Earp and the other Lawmen attached to the city of Tombstone. It is surely a matter of time before that situation comes to a head. For now, Ringo and those who follow him stampede their way through the West, robbing, killing, gambling and drinking their way to their notion of glory.

PANCHO VILLA AND HIS GOLDEN ARMY

We move further south from the western frontier lands with this individual. Pancho Villa was born and raised in the hills of Northern Mexico. He is the eldest of five children and records suggest he grew up in comparative poverty. As is often the way with large families, an individual swiftly learns that the best way to be noticed was by making the most noise – and Pancho Villa makes plenty of noise.

As he grew from boy to man, what is certainly a hair-trigger temper clearly dictated his path. In common with his contemporaries, he is a bitter man, perpetually angry at what he sees as

the unfair hand that Fate has dealt him. These traits have produced a most dangerous individual indeed.

It seems that Pancho Villa has chosen to steer his own destiny. A desperate desire to improve his lot has driven him to acts of theft and banditry and, like so many others who walk this ill-fated path, he too has become a stone-cold murderer of his fellow man.

Despite his denouncement by the authorities, Villa discovered that his acts of murder had not cause revulsion among his peers. Indeed, despite some obvious cruelty, particularly towards women, this pauper-made-good had somehow become a local hero. On the subject of women, I am reminded of a particularly gruesome tale regarding Villa's second wife. Though no doubt embellished in parts, the story goes that in a fit of jealous rage Villa is said to have killed a man simply for massaging the foot of his wife. The woman, Maria, was then blinded in one eye and badly disfigured by Pancho's own blade. Maria was left for dead to serve as a warning to all others: This is what happens to those who disrespect Pancho Villa.

It is likely that Villa's path became clear when the Union swept in and occupied Mexico. This was his country and he was not prepared to be told what to do by – and I quote – 'some blue-jacketed soldier boy'. He fomented a revolution, slow to catch, but when it finally did, it burned as outright rebellion.

The next part of this report is pure hyperbole, information gathered over a number of interrogations of many of Villa's cronies and followers. It is believed

that he had a chance meeting with the Nazombu witch, Marie Laveau (*note: see my report 'Persons of Interest'*) and from her, he received a prophecy.

Allegedly, she told him of a boy from Durango who would rise up at the head of a 'golden army' and conquer the Americas. It seems that he has taken this prophecy and determined to shape it to his own ends. His rebellion grew, both in size and in reputation and expanded beyond Mexico's borders. The men and women who flocked to his banner became known as his Golden Army in accordance with the prophecy.

Villa led a revolution in the south, taking lands where he could and becoming rich and powerful in the process. He was driven back by the Union many times and yet his passionate Golden Army remained undeterred, engaging in ever-more bold and daring acts.

Eventually, Mexico was no longer enough for Villa. He masterminded a surprise attack on a Union garrison in Texas. In this single act, Villa made himself known as a force that the government could no longer ignore and had to take seriously. The riches of technology and resources he seized during his next raid on an Enlightened convoy were soon deployed in support of his army.

It seems that he wants a share of the riches offered by the wealthy Union. As far as I have been able to determine, where Pancho Villa is concerned, his share is 'all'.



JUAN PONCE DE LEON

On encountering the self-styled Conquistadores gang, I was struck by the spectacle as they came replete with appropriately gaudy golden armour to add verisimilitude to their ridiculous story and sobriquet. Of all the outlaws operating on the Union Frontier, the story of Juan Ponce de Leon and his Conquistadores is by far the most incredible. By incredible I of course mean that it is beyond credulity. Such an account cannot be taken as anything more than self-delusion and hearsay, however as we have so little to report on this particular band of miscreant we must retell the extraordinary tale here.

Juan Ponce de Leon emerged from the Florida coast with claims that he is the very same man who set out in search of the Fountain of Youth nearly three hundred years ago. Of course we cannot believe even a shred of his preposterous claims for even in a world of mechanised corpse-flesh, shapeshifters and our own Federally endorsed super-science, the fountain of youth is still considered little more than a fairy tale. To give the man some credit, whether one believes these claims about the outcome of de Leon's quest he cares not, for he is self-assured in the truth as he sees it. The reality may be stranger than the fantasy however. I have spoken to him directly and he seems to view the events that led him to this point through the eyes of one who is trying to reconcile what he believes with what he has experienced. Perhaps Investigator Miller may be a better person to interview him when he is apprehended?

He claims to have been guided to a sacred shrine some three centuries ago where he found his Fountain of Eternal Life. As foretold to him in a vision, de Leon took a golden goblet from his knapsack and placed it into the fountain so that it might be filled with life giving waters. In a split second his hand had aged centuries and then was gone. The goblet fell from his grasp and tumbled into the volatile waters at the heart of the fountain. They were beset on by all manner of strange creatures as the shrine shook violently at the transgression. As his men were cut down there was a blinding flash and de Leon and his men awoke to find that three centuries had passed.

Unable to comprehend what had happened to him or his Conquistadores, de Leon lives with the delusion that he has been granted eternal life and now explores this new world like a traveling lord. Several of our Lawmen have tried to challenge this delusion but he dismisses their prattling as temptation to lure him from his righteous path. The Conquistadores under his command remain loyal, though a few, like Tomasito Bernal, have shown less of the zeal and fervour his supposed sacred task requires and only infrequently accompany him.

Since his supposed "reawakening" Ponce de Leon has led his men from the jungles south of the Socialist Unity of South America up to the Union Frontier. Along the way he has broken countless laws and found himself righting wrongs where he finds them - upholding his view of justice where he can. Though popular with the people, he has rightly drawn the ire of the authorities. Juan Ponce de Leon is

a noble man with a delusional mind. We can neither tolerate his brand of vigilante justice nor the crimes he and his Conquistadores have committed when unsavoury characters have exploited their delusions to their own ends.

JONATHAN JACKSON'S REBELLION

I broach this group with caution, for despite their criminality, there are those who regard them as heroes and their leader, Jonathan 'Stonewall' Jackson, as nothing short of a military genius.

The capitulation to the Union's terms by the Confederate army in their surrender occurred more than a decade ago. Yet this decision is still bitterly regretted by many, not least of which are those who served under the command of General Jonathan 'Stonewall' Jackson.

It is unquestionable that Jackson is regarded by most who fought in that most brutal Civil War to be the most gifted tactician and commander ever to graduate from the Union Academy at West Point. He carved out a reputation during clashes along the Mexican front and during this time, commanding the Stonewall Brigade, he earned his epithet.

He won virtually every battle he waged and having been laid low following an ambush by Union skirmishers Jackson knew eternal shame as he was carried from that field of battle in a state close to death. None expected him to survive and without their most gifted commander – not to mention being beset on all sides by an enemy with a clear technological

advantage – the surrender of Jackson's beloved Confederacy followed less than a month after his incapacitation.

But Fate plays strange games and Jackson did not die. A young socialite, sympathetic to the Confederate cause, brought a man known as Kyle the Black to see the dying General. In this moment, Jackson experienced the skills of the Enlightened at first hand and was saved from certain death.

Like all who make deals with such devils, Jackson was aware that the price for his resurrection would likely be steep – but it is a price that perhaps he must pay some other day. For now, he has gathered his still-loyal forces to him, taken to the mountains to make a camp of sorts and begun developing his strategies once more.

For over a decade, he and his men have waged guerrilla warfare against the 'accursed and arrogant' Union. His tactics, over the years, have changed and evolved as new technologies are brought forth (including those which allow his loyal followers to avoid detection), but Jackson understands well that the fundamentals of war will never change. He makes alliances and undertakes missions for his various Enlightened patrons, often under the guise of legitimacy, but I deeply suspect that he nurtures his dream of restoring the Confederacy to its former greatness.

The old warhorse, I would dare to suggest, has more than a few battles left in him.



THE RAIDERS OF WILLIAM QUANTRILL

Tragedy is a strange form of romance, particularly when it is attached to an individual. Much like his former commander, Quantrill is perceived as a romantic hero in the eyes of Confederate sympathisers rather than the war criminal he truly is.

During the Ore War, Quantrill's Raiders were a band of irregular Confederate cavalry who specialised in guerrilla tactics - sweeping relentlessly through unprotected townships, leaving untold devastation in their wake. Such actions bring a reputation and such a reputation brings a price. For William Quantrill, that price was exacted when the Union detained female relatives of the Raiders in a Missouri jail. Regrettably, when that jail collapsed, killing and maiming the women and children within its walls, the Raiders were compelled to exact a swift and bloody revenge with Quantrill very much at the fore.

The resulting massacres perpetrated by Quantrill's Raiders have left hundreds dead. Despite the toll living life on the run has taken, for Quantrill the war will never end. He rallies the most violent and the most extreme elements of the old Confederacy and its sympathisers and attacks military and civilian targets alike.

Over time, many of the original Raiders have gone, either to meet their makers, or others, like Frank and Jesse James chose to leave and have since found their own causes. Quantrill remains a constant, however, and will often be found at the head of such attack. The Union rightly sees him as a criminal, but in his eyes, it is he who

is the wronged party and his fervent belief in this sustains him. A man with nothing to lose is a dangerous man indeed.

MARCUS WAYWARD AND HIS EIGHT

Captain Marcus Wayward had everything going for him and nothing against. As a charismatic young soldier whose heroism ensured he rose through the ranks, he was generally considered the pinnacle to which all young Confederates should climb. He was admired, respected and could generally do no wrong in the eyes of his superiors. That all changed the day he held up his hands in surrender.

For Marcus Wayward, there was no understanding or sympathy. Nobody cared that he had taken the decision to save the lives of his squad who were hemmed into an impossible-to-escape corner during a battle that claimed countless lives in the now long-destroyed Tranquility river valley. In his unexpected act of surrender, they saw only a coward, a man who had turned his back on all that Confederate army stood for and he was duly stripped of his rank, his uniform, his weapons and his pride. Ejected from the Confederacy under a dark cloud, his squad startled everyone by refusing to allow him to suffer alone. They insisted on continuing to call him Captain and no matter how hard he tried to shake them off – and admittedly, he didn't really try at all – he couldn't seem to ditch them.

Collectively, they have become known as the Wayward Eight and they pick

up mercenary jobs for whoever has the readiest cash. One of Marcus' first decisions was to accept a Warcradle Ironhide as down payment for a dirty job Carpathian needed doing. The crew trust Wayward to choose their jobs for them, but his decisions aren't always good ones. A particularly ill-fated excursion was undertaken last year on behalf of Burson Carpathian. How many times does that man's name crop up in relation to the Outlaws of the American Frontier I wonder? That excursion has left the Wayward Eight somewhat more of a broken and angry force of late. But I suspect it will take more than the loss of a limb and a few poor choices to keep down the irrepressible spirits of Marcus' crew.

THE ONLY LAW

It grieves me to pen details of these criminals, these Most Wanted. But the mercenary heart of every outlaw, whether surrounded by their brothers and sisters, or whether sitting along at a corner table glaring at the world, calls them to prove their worth – and to enjoy the fruits of this age of plenty on their own terms. Nobody is going to tell them what they cannot do, where they cannot go, or who they can or cannot kill.

Each of these individuals and others like them, are kings and queens in their own mind. They obey the only laws they truly understand: survival of the fittest and to the victor goes the spoils.

Rest assured that my fellow Marshals and I will strive for as long as it takes to bring these felons to the justice they so richly deserve. No one person is above the great laws of our country. You may trust in me that these 'Outlaws' will not prosper.

I remain, your most faithful servant,

Kingsley





THE WARRIOR NATION OF NORTH AMERICA



Preferring to live out their lives alongside nature, the Warrior Nation dwell in concord with the rhythms of the Earth, attuned to the seasons and the weave of life and death that binds all living things together. Able to wield a form of spirit energy, they are the defenders of the natural world, guardians of all things spiritual. Recent years have seen mounting aggression against the Warrior Nation in North America by the Union and their settlers. With growing threats and omens of darker times to come, the Warrior Nation understand that this must be the greatest cause in which they fight, for no land endures long if it cannot take up arms against those that wish it harm. Standing unified against their enemies the Warrior Nation are humanity's greatest hope, whether the rest of the world realises it or not...

From the Journal of Teutonic Knight-Luminary Kapitan Endris Tapfer.

DAY 95

After three months of relative comfort in my first posting, it is the damnedest worst luck that has seen me join the Imperial forces as they push through the African tribelands. It has been decided that, given the feral nature of the Nguni Clans, none of the Teutonic Knights heavier combat units would be required. There have been strange reports coming into high command for months, and the venerable Oberst Scherer, commander of the Knights Luminary on the African Front, has dispatched me to investigate. Perhaps I have offended him in some manner to be given this honour?

DAY 96

Most of my fellow knights are all too happy to stride into battle at the helm of a Hochmeister Automata Dreadnought, their physical frailness shielded behind plates of thick armour. I have always believed the true weapon of a Knight-Luminary is his or her mind, and conviction serves as our armour. I have never sought to hide this conviction, and so my superiors have often seen fit to appoint me to such investigative tasks, even unto the front lines themselves, to better advance the Imperium's understand of our foes, our own strengths and weaknesses.

All of that changed, however, last night. Having arrived in the valley the day before, we disembarked in good order

from the *Graf Nostitz* our Gewitterwolke airship. The grenadiers had gone into the village first, clearing the outbuildings with bursts of electricity and flame. A small section of Knight Armsmen went in next, walking straight through the burning thatch and kindling walls. Still, no resistance was met. Finally, roaring overhead with the grace of eagles, a squadron of Luftlancers fell amongst the drifting motes of ash and fire, their charged pikes sparking in the night air.

It was a brave show, no less valiant for the apparent lack of opposition. I will carry with me to my dying day the image of those brave men and women, stalking through the burning remnants of that village, of that death trap, their clear eyes peering into the swirling smoke, backs straight, weapons held at the ready, willing to stand before any foe that might dare challenge the primacy of the Imperium.

Until hell opened up and swallowed us all. The leading elements were felled by hammer blows of blue power the likes of which I had never seen before. At first, I thought we had been ambushed by the bizarrely arrayed forces of the Covenant rather than the expected native beasts. How that thoughtless word would come back to haunt me as the battle unfolded before my eyes.

Beasts, I had thought; African animals, caring nothing for the niceties of civilized warfare. But the shapes that emerged from the surrounding trees were nothing human. Twisted forms that seemed to writhe and shudder with the guttering flames; light glinting from

protruding fangs and long, distended claws. Most walked on two legs like men, but their faces were corrupted visions of a nightmare, with the features of any number of animals stirred into their bestial mix.

The bolts of blue fire continued to rain down upon the brave men and women of the Imperium, who fought back with all the tenacity and bravery any officer could hope to expect from them. The Luftlancers took to the skies once more, aiming their electro-lances down into the swirling maelstrom of the melee below, only to be struck from the air by enormous shadows falling upon them from above. Their screams were cut off abruptly as each warrior hit the hard-packed earth.

The Grenadiers fell back in good order, dragging their wounded as they made for the oberst's position. Our final hope, a mighty Faust battle-walker, charged into the fray, tossing shadowy forms in all directions. For a moment it appeared as if the tide had turned. The armsmen rallied around the Faust's towering form while the grenadiers, following standard doctrine, established a firing line at the edge of the village.

But the nightmare had only just begun. Darker things still would emerge from those shadows. At first glance, I took the bellowing form to be fantastically armoured rhinoceros. As strange as that would have been, I cannot now swear that to be the case at all. The vengeful gleam of blue in the creature's eyes was a perfect match for the shots slashing into our position. An aura of azure flame



seemed to cling to its flanks. It became apparent, as it charged into the Faust, that it was much larger and far more dangerous than any rhino I had ever seen.

With a single convulsive lurch of its massive horned head the charging beast tore the leg from the Faust and caused the reeling warmachine to topple to the ground. At this sight, and with the rest of my Teutonic brothers and sisters either dead or down, the battle descended into a horrific rout. The regular infantry threw aside their arms and fled into the darkness. There were no heroes of the Imperium there that night – at least none, it seemed, who had not already been killed. I remember only the burning of my chest, the pumping of my legs, and the desperate, soul-crushing certitude of death looming up behind me as the screams of my companions faded into the distance all around.

DAY 100

The oberst's forces had been scattered. As far as I know, I alone survived, and it took me three days to re-establish contact with headquarters. By then, the generalleutnant had ordered a detachment of Lucifyre walkers down upon the savannah, supported by the *Graf Nostitz*. The entire region was devastated, not a single creature was left alive. Not a shred of evidence remained of the terrible ambush that had destroyed my unit.

I have been removed from my normal duties and sent back first to Graz, and then on to Berlin.

DAY 121

I have learned that the phenomenon I had witnessed has not been an isolated incident. No hard evidence of what enemy might have caused such destruction had yet been found, and although a multi-pronged attack seems to have been their plan that night, each of the points of contact had been utterly eradicated by high command. No further encounters had been witnessed across the entire area of operation. It was as if either we had destroyed every last remnant of the mysterious foe, or some decision had been reached by our enemies to forego any further use of their strange new weapons.

The general consensus at the front was that the Nguni people had received assistance from the Covenant of the Enlightened. My report countervailed that, of course, which was one reason I had been summoned to Berlin. Many of my peers believed that my mind had broken under the strain of that strange battle. No known phenomenon could explain what I had reported, and some of my closest associates among the Knights-Luminary agitated for my removal to a home for the mentally deranged.

The annals of Graz contained occasional mentions of similar phenomena from locales as scattered and distant as Australia, India, and South America. None of these reports were more than footnotes in the general record, and none of them included enough detail to clarify my confusion – or my concerns – any further. Never had a member of the Knights-Luminary or anyone else been

present who could be counted on for a clinical, scientific observation. For every mention of such occurrences, a tidal wave of rationalisation and clarification would follow, sweeping away any possibility of further study. It was clear that no one had given such incidences much credence, but then, neither did it appear that an attack the likes of which I experienced in the tribelands had ever been reported.

The fact that each and every mention, from around the globe, ended in silence and dismissal was incredibly disheartening to me. I began to doubt my own memory; a terrifying prospect for a man of science and the mental disciplines.

Luckily, however, recent reports out of the newly-reconstituted Union of Federated States spoke of episodes very similar to those I had collected in my researches. The noble savages of their western territories seemed to have manifested similar marvels in their contests against the government forces and the more esoteric hosts of the Enlightened. Flares of azure flame, genetic anomalies charging the battlefields, and other, even stranger sights had been reported. They echoed the rumours that had circulated through our own ranks in the African campaign before Generalleutnant Didschus had completely destroyed the tribal villages.

But those reports had been made by Americans, agents of the British Crown, or other, equally less reputable sources. No Teutonic scholar had infiltrated into the new world, and so no truly scientific observation had yet been assayed of

these strange accounts. None had been deemed necessary, until the momentary ascension of the Nguni.

DAY 197

I am now several days into my journey West and one thing remains abundantly clear. I have never enjoyed travelling by airship.

In the midst of a deployment, I find the incessant rumbling of the engines, the hiss and whine of the machinery tries my patience. Even with the most advanced craft of the Imperium bearing me aloft, such as my time aboard the *Graf Nostitz*, the ever-present reality of thousands upon thousands of feet of emptiness beneath me wears my patience – and my mind – further still.

Unfortunately, the *Prinz Wilhelm* is far from the most advanced craft of the Imperium.

These civilian aircraft have always seemed even more ephemeral to me than the military craft, their structures seeming less solid than their counterparts. My sleep is plagued with dreams of falling while my days are near-endless stretches of cold, shuddering hell. The ceaseless knowledge that the endless miles of the frozen Atlantic stretch beneath me is hardly conducive to calming my fears.

But deeper still than these close-held terrors are the thoughts that have driven me for these past months. As has been the case ever since that night on the savannahs of the Dark Continent, that which compels me relentlessly forward threatens the very Imperium itself.

Once again this night, I have been cast from my sleep in a cold sweat that has nothing to do with the *Prinz Wilhelm's* juddering progress over the frozen waves. Once again, my slumber has been haunted by the screams of my comrades as they were torn limb from limb, the wet, twisting crunch of their deaths at the hands of ... heaven knows what. Images of cold, glowing blue eyes hunted me up out of sleep, their manic howls echoing off the low ceiling of my stateroom even as I clawed my way free of the tangled, sweat-damp bedclothes.

It was a familiar awakening. It has been my curse, night after night, for more nights than I care to count.

And so here I sit, on the edge of the small bed in my stateroom aboard the *Prinz Wilhelm*, making my slow, terrifying progress across the Atlantic Ocean towards a chaotic, backward world that might hold the secrets of the greatest threat to the Imperium or the proof of my utter and complete ruin.

As the growling engines fill the air around me with vibration and unease, I cannot help but fear I march headlong toward the latter.

DAY 203

I will admit that some of my trepidation concerning flight was swept away as the metropolis of New York City came slowly crawling over the horizon. The lights were bright, glittering on the waters of the bay as the *Prinz Wilhelm* dropped out of the clouds, approaching the tall docking towers along the eastern waterfront.

The two principal towers, each much smaller than the docks of Berlin, were empty when we arrived. The Union, I knew, is much more enamoured of fixed-wing, heavier-than-air craft, as was evinced by the massive airfield located just across the western river bordering the great city. With Tesla's defection to the barbarian nation, travel between the New World and the Imperium has been curtailed sharply. Our consulate in New York, which is reluctantly providing my cover story, was severely understaffed. Making my way out of the city and into the west without arousing suspicion would prove to be my first major challenge.

Or so I had thought. In practice, once my papers had been scrutinized by the young Union officer at the base of the tower, I was released out into the city and had not noticed anyone else taking undue interest in my arrival. I found myself somewhat annoyed by what I consider their cavalier manner. It was clear, from their reception, that the Union of Federated States did not find me particularly threatening. By extension, they therefore do not find the Imperium to be a threat.

I know it is irrational, but I find myself hoping for a future conflict in which this error can be corrected.

The Consul, a man named Graf Kushner (allegedly a distant cousin of the Kaiser) was far from helpful. It was clear from the moment of my arrival that he cared nothing for my mission, or for me, and wanted only that I vacate the consulate at my earliest convenience. I was grudgingly offered a small office in

the basement from which to conduct my initial investigations, but at no time was the camaraderie of Graz, or even the basic decency of Berlin, in evidence. For the first time in my adult life, I found myself missing home.

There were few reliable resources concerning my primary area of interest in New York, as I knew there would be. Every beerhaus and tavern seemed full to bursting with self-styled 'experts' on matters concerning the western natives and their barbaric habits, but there was sadly little in the way of cold, reasoned observation. Everything I heard sounded even more implausible than the whispered rumours that had plagued our own ranks prior to the Nguni incident. I was heartened, however, at a few details that seemed consistent across the various tales I collected. Twisted, monstrous animals, shape-changing warriors, and the ubiquitous sapphire glow filled the stories of those who seemed to have at least crossed their Hudson River, to the west, at one time.

DAY 205

Though I have only been a couple days in this filthy, stinking city, I have realized that I needed to head into the great unknown of these contested territories if I am to find the truth, the hard science, behind the stories.

Kushner was not sorry to see me go, and given the quality of his hospitality, I was not sorry to leave. I am eager to taste the vaunted frontier spirit of the American West we hear so much about. And even more so, as the rest of my journey would

be made mercifully sweeter with both feet firmly planted on the earth.

DAY 210

I must admit, as dismissive as I still feel toward these barbarian Americans, their Heavy Rail system is certainly to be applauded. With well over twice the width of the standard gauges of the railroad used through the more civilized world, the Heavy Rail is able to carry an immense amount of cargo, a throng of passengers, and an intimidating array of advanced weaponry, all wrapped in a sheath of thick armour.

I was impressed until it dawned on me the threats they must be guarded against in their interior in order to validate such expenditure.

I travelled by motorcoach south to Washington D.C., where I made certain to avoid attracting the attention of any agents of the Union's Secret Service, their Bureau of Infernal Affairs, or the myriad other investigative bodies the 'free and open' society has created recently. I desperately wanted to take a walk past Tesla's vaunted Pipeworks. Unfortunately, the region surrounding the vast, sprawling complex was a rowdy, lawless moat, with law-abiding Washington on one side, and the blank-faced automata of Tesla's guards on the other. I thought it best to stay true to my primary mission and catch the first Heavy Rail moving west toward the territories.

Not until I had seen how enormous these behemoths were did I understand why no Heavy Rail tracks were allowed

to enter Washington. I was forced to pull my collar up and my hat down and board a crowded ferry down the Potomac River, to a massive stone temple to Union hubris located five miles south of the capital.

It seemed hubris, at first sight, but when I finally caught my first glimpse of the Heavy Rail, as I said, I began to question my initial response.

I avoided undue attention by securing a small and non-ostentatious economy class berth on the westbound train and wandered the length of the beast during the long day of my journey. When we pulled into the big station in Kansas City, I truly felt as if I had entered another world.

DAY 224

This is such an amazing land. Kansas City is a dizzying mix of metropolitan chaos, frontier grit, and uniquely American contrasts. It appears as if these western territories call to all manner of folk from around the world. I could distinguish French, Italian, and even Prussian-flavoured German in the babbling rush of speech that greeted me upon walking out of the cool granite of the enormous station and into the dusty world of that city on the edge of nowhere.

I have spent almost two weeks trying to pick up leads that might take me deeper into the mysteries of the indigenous peoples of this land, but it transpired that the jumble of cultures and languages hid beneath its churning waters a more insidious division. It seemed that although a man of the Prussian Imperium

could walk the packed-earth streets of Kansas City without fear of judgement or approbation, the natives were not afforded nearly the same latitude, and were seen as national enemies.

This is not to say there were not members of the various Warrior Nation tribes present in Kansas City. Outcasts, exiles, and renegades could be found in many of the lower dives along the outskirts of town. But these were men and women with suspicious minds, living closed, isolated non-lives apart from both the society in which they lived and the societies which they had left behind.

A not-inconsiderable portion of my remaining stipend was spent trying to warm various informants to my cause. I was offered tantalising bits and pieces, hints and whispers, but nothing that might provide a concrete clue as to my next course of action.

I collected notes on an entity known to the natives as the Great Spirit, which I took to mean some concept of divine power or guidance. The wildest tales I have yet gathered present this Great Spirit as the source of the mysterious power that has guided me across half the world. Between the Great Spirit and the worship of ancestors long dead, the native tribes would appear to attribute most of their strange abilities to beings above or beyond them, rather than from some font of power within themselves.

While I know these tales are nonsense, and that some rational, scientific explanation must be behind what I witnessed in deepest Africa and the tales these frontier hooligans whisper into

their cups, I cannot help but reflect back upon the legends of our own ancestors. Is not fable and folklore replete with similar stories? Powerful beings flinging the power of the sky about on a whim? Fantastical creatures twisted beyond recognition? Might this phenomenon I am investigating somehow connect with our own most ancient tales?

And, rational thought aside, would it not be grand if one day a Prussian Imperium might march forward, heads proud and high, with the power of the ancients at our fingertips? I imagine Luftlancers soaring not on the pounding roar of rockets but the silent pinions of angels' wings. I imagine electro-pikes powered by the very minds of our brave armsmen. There is literally no power in the world that could stop us.

But I have learned all I can learn on the dusty streets of this frontier metropolis. I must continue now to venture west, into the savage lands of the contested territories. I must find these Warrior Nation sorcerers in their own environment and see for myself the power that they command. I hear that the Marshal of the Indian Territory is a man of some basic integrity. I am cautious of approaching local law enforcement as I understand them to be all corrupt and drunken. Perhaps he will be sober enough to help me

DAY 231

The surprisingly intelligent and charming Marshall Bart Reeves has introduced me to a native in his employ who claims to be the son of a great chief in the Warrior

Nation. This native has given me the first insights into their beliefs, though these revelations have cost me greatly in both local currency and other valuables about my person that this self-styled 'Apache Kid' has taken a liking to.

The way he tells it, there is a fundamental disagreement over the origins of the world and how it relates to their venerated deity - the Great Spirit. A shaman known as Irontooth believes that the Great Spirit is truly infinite and caused this world's perfection as part of some infinitely complex plan of which humanity is but a small part.

My guide's father, a chieftain known as Raven Spirit believes differently and apparently he is of such standing amongst the natives that his view by extension is held by the chiefs of the Hundred Tribes. His father believes that the Great Spirit was uniquely formed at the birth of the planet and that the destiny of the two are inextricably tied.

Whatever the nuance on this matter, all Warrior Nation believe that the Earth has a guardian spirit, a consciousness that can be communicated with and provides humanity with the ability to unlock a potential energy within them. This Great Spirit is believed to have shepherded the planet's development, husbanding the rise of life, and watch over the development of all of mankind.

The Warrior Nation story of creation says that the Great Spirit filled the seas, and then watched as the vital energy spilled out onto the land and into the air. Occasionally a great tragedy might befall the grand work, setting back the growth;

the Great Spirit (or Keeper as my guide occasionally calls him) is not an infallible deity. The Great Spirit made a mistake when, under his careful guidance, a race of small bipedal mammals, the unlikeliest of heirs, achieved the first glimmerings of awareness and forethought. These creatures are known as the Carcosa by the Warrior Nation and no sooner had their spirits, once dim and flickering, flared into life than the Great Spirit realised his mistake. Though he struck down most of them, some of the Carcosa are alleged to still roam the frontier even to this day and seem to be both feared and reviled in equal measure by the Warrior Nation.

DAY 232

I cannot fathom how the Warrior Nation in the American Frontier even know of the details of the tribes of Africa, Australia and elsewhere around the world, let alone claim an affinity. Yet this evening I have been presented with artefacts and pictograms crafted a century or more ago that clearly resemble the Nguni tribal artefacts I have brought with me from the Luminary archives in Graz.

DAY 233

After this evenings interview, my currency is now all gone, I have contacted the consulate for more funds though I suspect these will be some time in coming to me. It has been a fascinating day and my guide has become quite animated in regaling me with the stories of his people.

The way my new friend views it, once humanity had taken its rightful place as the inheritors of the Earth, the Great Spirit began to connect the disparate human tribes to the criss-crossing ley lines that encircled the globe. At points where these lines converged, the Great Spirit placed the most powerful cultures. It was apparent that, even though most humans could not sense the flowing rivers of energy that surrounded them, its presence nonetheless imbued them with a sense of strength and purpose that made them far more formidable than others of their kind.

Like moving pieces of a puzzle, the Great Spirit shifted the cultures around, maximising the potential of the strongest so that centres of defence would exist all around the planet, ready to be called upon to protect it should the need ever arise. This is a sound strategy that again belies the primitive appearance of the Warrior Nation. This interview is invaluable!

DAY 234

It was only natural, I suppose, for my guide's bitterness and jealousy at the advances of Western culture would bubble to the surface. It is a credit to his breeding that it has taken as long as it has for the resentment to begin to show. The narrative now turns to talk of the misguided folly of Europe. The temerity of the man!

My guide observes that, occasionally, a culture founded upon a spiritual nexus would wander from the intentions of the Great Spirit. Sometimes, the lines of

force moved away, abandoning them to a slow decline, and so they struck out in confused anger, disrupting the careful defences of that part of the net.

As time inexorably marched on this happened more and more often. A civilisation might arise upon the intersecting lines of energy and grow too powerful too quickly. As the tides of the planet's soul shifted, rather than follow or decline gracefully, more and more cultures developed a false narrative, justifying their continued ascendancy with a newly-developed belief structure that denied the nurturing, vaguely parental presence of the Great Spirit. These cultures studied the world around them, discovering the laws that even the Great Spirit must obey, and put their faith in these things rather than the primeval concepts of gods that their ancient ancestors had found sufficient.

These cultures still worshiped gods, but fractured them into many smaller, more manageable entities. They were given human traits and human motivations, the better to understand them and manipulate their place in the greater human story.

As this rise of science and creed gained momentum among some of the greatest cultures, the Great Spirit lost touch with them. Its ability to guide them faded as they grew immune to the influence of the spirit lines, and they began to forge their own destinies.

DAY 235

We depart this evening for the Warrior Nation's tribal lands. My guide seemed as exhausted with the storytelling as I am. I instead beseeched him to take me to visit his father. Though at first, he was more than a little reluctant, after we shared the last bottle of my schnapps, he has agreed!

DAY 268

I have witnessed miracles. I have seen sights the likes of which none since the ancients might claim. And yet, my faith in science, rather than being broken, has never been stronger.

I have been privileged to have met with Chief Raven Spirit and shared a meal with him. He is undoubtedly one of the greatest leaders of humanity on the face of the world. Worthy to sit almost as an equal with the Kaiser himself. By the time of the American Civil War, Raven Spirit was already ancient, although his vitality had never waned. He was sustained by the Great Spirit, and in battle was surrounded by the majestic energies of the spirit world.

There is no doubt in my mind that the incredible abilities wielded by these primitive tribesmen are real. I have seen wonders that would make the most dedicated sceptic fall to their knees over the past months. There is also no doubt in my mind, sadly, that this is not a power that will ever be replicated by the Imperium.

It has long been theorized that every living thing incorporates within it a field



of force, electrical, magnetic, possibly a combination of powers we do not entirely understand. Simple laboratory experiments can sense this field, and even children may witness it in action through shuffling their feet across a wool carpet and then reaching out to touch another child.

Raven Spirit has explained that there has always been those among the tribal nations who were capable of channelling the power of the spirit world. The spirit of each human, as dim as reflected fireflies upon a dark lake in most instances when compared to the Great Spirit, occasionally flared to brilliance in some, granting them great gifts ranging from enhanced battle-prowess to the ability to peer into the misty reaches of the future.

With Raven Spirit's guidance, more and more of the Nation's people became attuned to the world of the spirits, navigating the winding paths to their spirit guides and the powers they provided. Some were able to call forth weapons of pure energy from the spirit world, while others were able to imbue their very bodies with the power of their spirit guides, altering their forms to better confront the array of foes rising up on all sides. Oh, truly I have stared into the eyes of legend, and I believe!

DAY 273

A patrol of Union soldiers was killed yesterday. This has agitated some of the tribe and my belongings have been searched. Photographs I have taken and samples of the Nguni tribal artefacts I have brought with me were

discovered and they have ruled that I have committed a grave transgression. I will be brought before the chieftains tomorrow morning and their judgement will be enacted upon me.

DAY 278

Fearing death, I have fled north to Montana. I now write this as I huddle in this tiny, ramshackle cabin in the woods, my breath puffing in white clouds, the small fire doing little to dispel the oppressive cold outside.

I reflect on the past month in the company of Raven Spirit and his people. His claims at being over a century in age seemed so credible then, but now I begin to wonder. It is true that I have seen warrior braves conjure electrical power from nowhere, infuse their weapons with this energy, and lash at their foes with the might of the ancient gods. I have even seen their flesh twist and writhe into new, grotesque shapes, the likes of which would blanch the face of the most stalwart romantic poet. An enormous elk, its body swollen with power, destroyed an armoured vehicle, not ten paces from where I stood. I was helpless to move, standing there locked in place, my mouth agape, as its feral, demonic blue eyes searched for another target. My mind goes back to the Faust that was felled by such a creature in Africa. We never stood a chance!

But, as what little warmth I have left in me leaches slowly away, I am faced with the hardest question of all... what is it that I believe?

There are no gods. There is no mystical salvation for my people. Were these savages ever to gain control of a region of this Earth, there is little that could stop them. They have tapped into some power, some force within the human mind that we have locked ourselves away from for a thousand years.

My conclusion, now that I am safe from them, now that I am no longer breathing the stink of their twisted creatures' breath, no longer the victim of the abject fear they instil in all civilized men, is this: Science, as I have always wanted to believe, reigns supreme.

Much like a child conjuring a shock from the carpet, although vastly more powerful, these savages have somehow learned to pull energy from their surroundings, channelling it into more offensive pursuits. Many of their warriors cannot even do this much, calling up little more than azure gleams in the darkness as they shot their arrows at the foe. But enough can channel this electrical aura to lend their attacks a power and savagery that makes them, in the right circumstances, the equal of modern weaponry.

There are some further few among their number, the greatest and most powerful leaders and wise men, who can do more. These are the paragons that are capable of twisting their flesh into horrible, potent forms for battle. But even here, I believe I have broken the secret of their power.

It is something I think we lost long ago. An ability that has been weakened over time and advancement, enervated through centuries of rational thought. They believe. It is as simple as that. The

immense power of the human mind, capable of such amazing feats as has been recorded throughout history, is channelled in these primitive peoples. It is combined with the living field inherent in every plant, animal, and human on the planet, to create wonders the likes of which, truly, have not been seen by civilized man in over a thousand years.

The more impressive the works demonstrated by these tribal warriors, the more of them seem to gather around, chanting and singing to the sky, focusing their intent upon the workings of their elders. In the end, the force of their resolve, the power of their will be brought to bear upon the object of their fixation, focused by their leaders and their wise ones, is enough to bring marvels back into the world, if only for a brief period of time.

I have observed that none of these changes last for long. The energy required to maintain them even for the length of a single engagement seems to devastate their most powerful warriors. Animals subjected to their mutating attention often die when their tasks are accomplished, collapsing into exhausted slumber from which many never awaken.

I believe this is due to a combination of the inherent weakness of the flesh and the faltering of the savages' concentration once the task at hand is passed. The intensity of the moment, the crushing single-mindedness of battle felt by all soldiers throughout history, allows them to transcend, for a brief time, the limitations of body and mind.

When did we, the civilized men and women of the world, lose this ability? I couldn't say, but I have a theory.

As we learn more about the world around us, as we are more and more capable of bending it to our will in mundane ways, not dependent upon the initial terror that compelled our ancestors to build walls, and fires, and weapons, we drift further and further from that part of ourselves capable of channelling these forces that yet linger. Our rational minds, focusing on the everyday wonders we take for granted, are no longer capable of touching these more primitive, and yet far more powerful forces that glorified our species' younger days.

Through our greatest achievements, we have lost our most powerful inheritance.

Is it possible a culture can advance and yet still maintain this ability to channel these primordial powers of the mind? I don't know. I think if that were possible, we would have known about that culture by now. In fact, I suspect if that were possible, we would even now feel the boot heel of that culture upon our collective necks. But still, one wonders...

DAY 279

Every now and then outside, I hear a startling snap. Out there, in the cold, still darkness, something stirs. I have been hiding from the savages for weeks now, hoping that they would abandon their search and allow me to find my way back east, to the towns and villages that border the frontier, and thence, to Kansas City and home to Graz.

Is that snap a branch popping in the cold? Is it a savage warrior's incautious footstep, heralding my last, violent moments on this Earth?

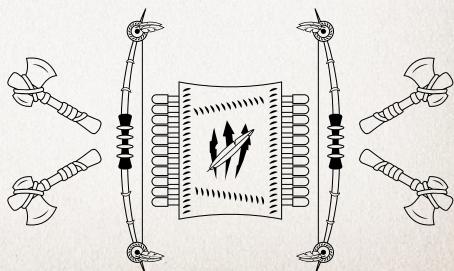
I carried an electro-pistol with me all the way from my chambers in the chapterhouse in Graz. Even now, as I write by the guttering light of my dying fire, it is beside me, its charge light blue and clear. If they attack me here, they will know the power of the Imperium. The first brave through that crooked door will face my own lightning, as will the warrior behind him, and the one behind him as well. My charge will fail eventually, and I will die here, so far from home, but they will remember me when I am gone.

Or perhaps it is nothing more than a branch, snapping in the cold.

DAY 280

I have managed to staunch the blood from my wounds, but I fear my leg has become infected.

Perhaps a good night's sleep will set me right. The wolves howling no longer scares me. I have my belief. I have science. I am content... Though it is so very, very cold.





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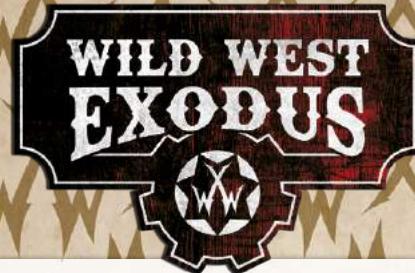
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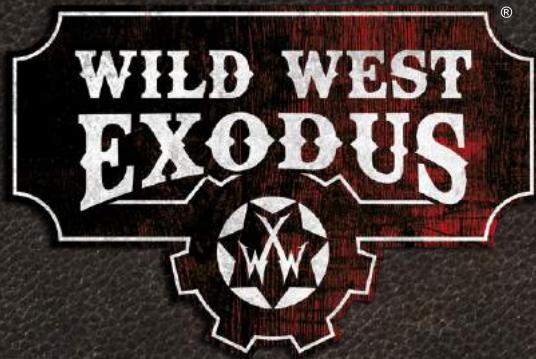
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