

RANGER

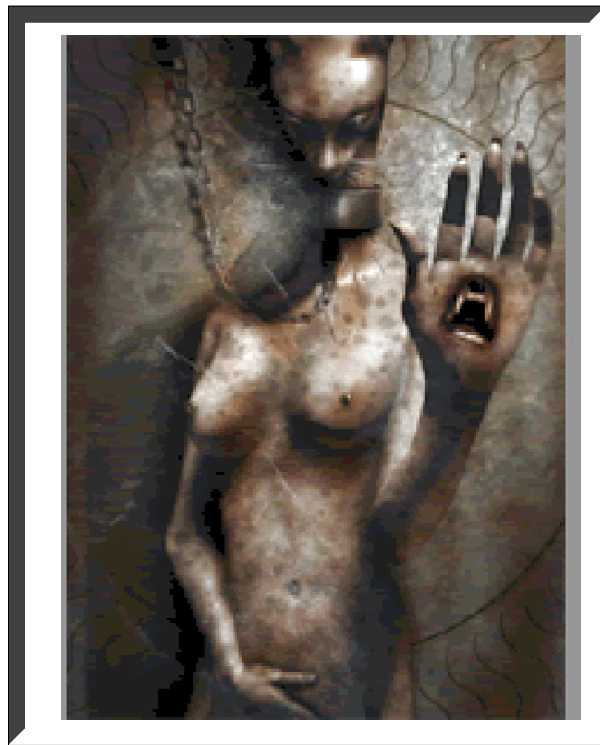
David Nilsen



GDW

Texan Adventure On The Eber Homeworld

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Hunger...

RANGER

Texan Adventure On The Eber Homeworld

David Nilsen

2300AD

Since 1973



Ranger is an adventure module for the **2300 AD** science-fiction role-playing game, dealing with a plot against the Texas enclave on 82 Eridani IV, the Eber homeworld.

For Devon

Special thanks to Wanda Baggs, Texas Department of Public Safety, and Chester Arrington, retired Texas Ranger, for their assistance in the preparation of this book. *Soli Deo Gloria.*

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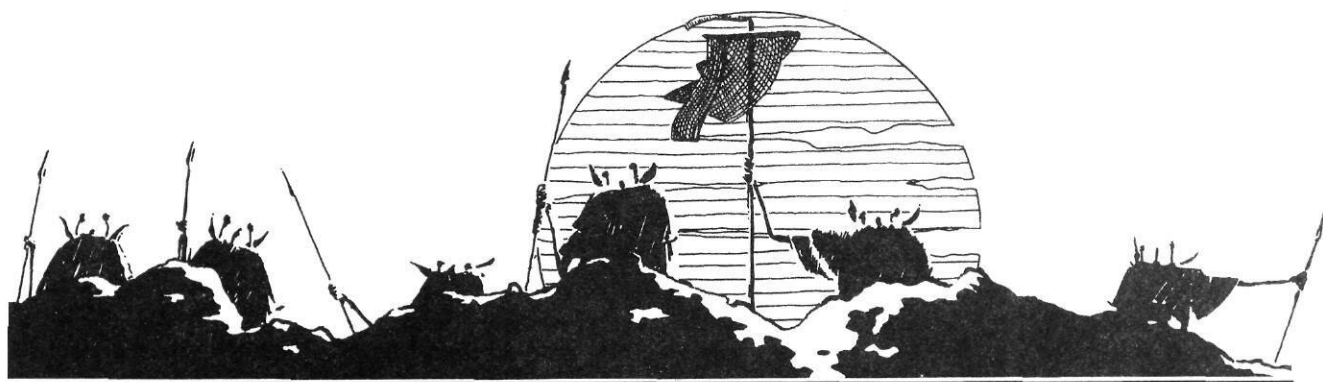
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Introduction



**IN ORDER TO
PRESERVE SUSPENSE,
PLAYERS SHOULD
READ NO FURTHER
THAN THIS PAGE.
WHAT FOLLOWS IS
FOR REFEREES ONLY.**

Ranger is an adventure and supplement for use with GDW's science-fiction role-playing game, **2300 AD**. It deals with Kormoran, the fourth planet of 82 Eridani, and its indigenous, intelligent life form, the Ebers.

The first signs of the Ebers, the fourth alien intelligence encountered by humanity, were discovered on Beta Hydri II (Daikoku) in 2249, when Arabian colonists on that planet happened upon the buried ruins left by a technologically advanced race. Excavations began the next year, amid great technological interest. Only three years later, in 2253, Texans exploring Rho Eridani II (Heidelsheimat) announced that they had found more ruins resembling those uncovered on Daikoku. No sooner had attention shifted to the Texan find than a United Arab Republic survey team succeeded in finding living members of the race in 2256. The aliens were discovered on 82 Eridani IV (the planet soon to be named Kormoran). A UAR contact team quickly returned to the world, and by 2261 the republic had set up a full-scale research enclave on the outskirts of an Eber city.

The passage of seven years brought Texans to meet the Ebers, but this time in Kormoran's High Desert, which the Ebers called "The Roof of the World." The Texans found that they were not welcome guests—not to the Ebers, not to the Arabs, and not even to the planet itself.

It is now 33 years later, and things have not become any easier for the determined Texans, but their hearts have not grown any smaller either. They are going to build a place for themselves on this world, and if something has to give, it is certainly not going to be them.

The events in this adventure module represent Texas' last fight to hold its place on Kormoran. Forces within the jealous UAR enclave have engineered a constellation of events that seem sure to bring an end to the tenuous Texan presence. New Austin is on the verge of a breakthrough agreement with a Civilized Eber nation, but the UAR is determined not to let it come to pass. Through calculated use of Eber neuro-chemistry and tribal politics, the UAR has arranged for the tribes of the High Desert to unite in war against the Texan enclave that rests in their midst. All that stands between New Austin and disaster is one company of Texas Rangers and a few auxiliary forces. The player characters appear on Kormoran just as the situation prepares to explode into war.

REFEREE'S SYNOPSIS

As the adventure begins, the player characters are sent into the desert to search for a missing Ranger. While on that search, they receive orders by radio to go to the aid of an experimental joint community of Ebers and humans—they arrive there just in time to witness the first massacre of the coming war. The PCs then discover a trail of an Eber war party—a trail that leads back to the Texans' main settlement—and they rush back to ambush the Eber raiders.

The Mission

In an attempt to discover the cause of this violence, a reconnaissance team is assembled and sent into the desert, taking the PCs along. They subsequently discover a series of clues not only to the cause of the impending war, but also to the mysteries of Eber psychology itself. After several days of encountering signs that the Eber desert tribes are uniting, the PCs happen upon a previously friendly tribe, whose chief is an old friend of the Ranger captain. But this meeting does not go as would be hoped—the captain returns from it somewhat upset, with a look of foreboding. When he next meets his Eber friend, the chief murders him, and the meeting turns into an attack on the humans. The Rangers manage to fall back and regroup. After evading any pursuers, they head on into the desert, still seeking answers.

The next thing they encounter is a village full of maternal Ebers attempting to defend themselves (following the sudden departure of their warriors to a war council). They show the humans the body of the Ranger that the player characters were originally sent to find, and the PCs learn that his body was planted here as evidence of a supposed Ranger assault on the village. Just after this, a call comes through from New Austin reporting a war party attempting to overrun the colony's airfield, a strange target for the primitive Eber tribes.

Evidence of a plot against the Texas Enclave accumulates as the humans begin discovering the remains of a type of narcotic plant near the abandoned villages—a plant that only grows in the temperate eastern area of the continent, far from the desert that holds New Austin. Also, the party of Rangers are attacked repeatedly by Eber war parties that should not even know of the Ranger's presence, let alone their exact location. Eventually it becomes obvious that they are being pinpointed by their radio transmissions—a frightening discovery, considering the Ebers have no radio-finding equipment.

The humans eventually find their way to an assembly of all the desert tribes. Stealing around its edges, they learn that the tribes are uniting to declare war on the Texans. To prepare for this, the Ebers must first perform an ancient ceremony, a ritual that holds encrypted in itself the priceless secret of Eber star travel. The humans record the proceedings on a visual imager, hopeful that they can get it back to human scientists who can figure out the code, breaking the 7.7 light-year limit on star drive.

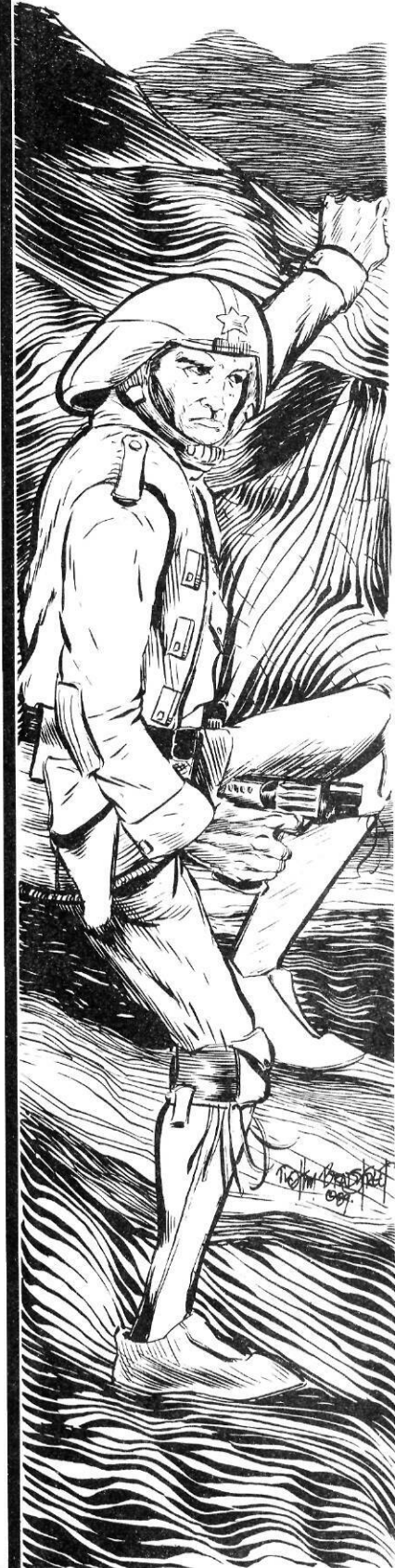
While watching this ritual, the Rangers spot a set of radio antennae sprouting from an Eber tent. When someone is sent to sneak in and investigate, they discover that the tent holds a UAR command post from which the UAR has been directing the hostilities toward the Texas enclave. A sharp firefight follows, in which the Rangers capture documents that prove the UAR's culpability.

But to get that proof to Manchurian authorities, the Rangers must first escape from the alerted Eber camp, by fleeing down a dark canyon full of horrors, in the darkness of the night. Even after making their escape, the Rangers must race to reach New Austin ahead of the hordes of Eber warriors headed for the enclave. Following the line of a railroad that was being constructed as the war broke out, the recon team arrives at the settlement in time to man a rear guard, delaying the Ebers while help is sought.

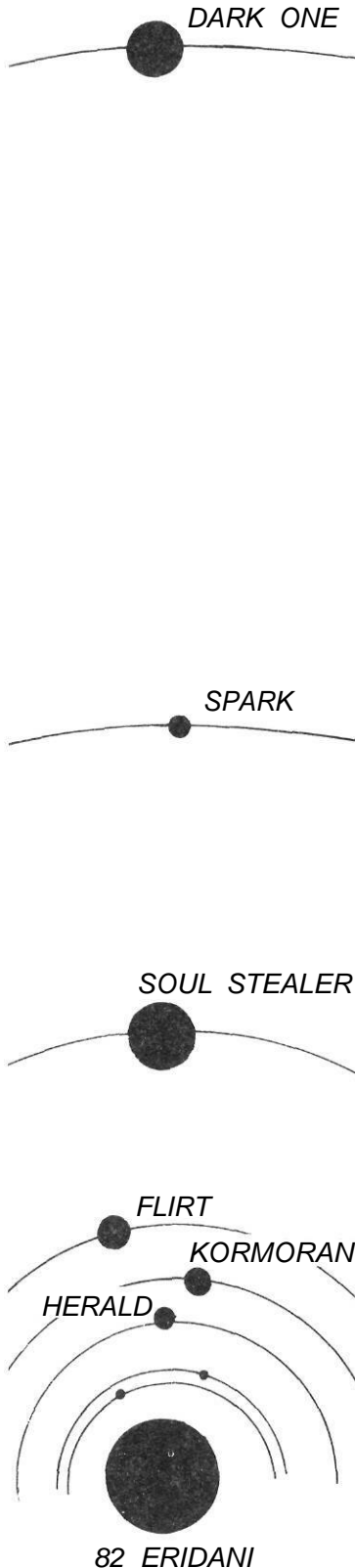
The Resolution

Eventually, the Civilized Eber nations cordon off the enclave and bring their nomad cousins back to their senses. New Austin is saved, but the Eber outrage at the senseless slaughter caused is profound. The captured UAR papers clearly point out that the UAR enclave has misused its power on Kormoran, enslaving the Nomadic Ebers to do their bidding. With this revelation, the power of the UAR enclave is broken.

Through their mutual suffering, a new friendship has been forged between the Texans and the Ebers, ensuring that Texas' power on Kormoran will grow, while the UAR's influence wanes. Once again, the Texas Rangers have proven to be an invaluable asset for their native country.



THE 82 ERIDANI SYSTEM



Some Basic Facts

In this chapter, a general background of the Ebers and their home system is drawn.

THE 82 ERIDANI SYSTEM

82 Eridani is a G5 main sequence dwarf, very similar to, though slightly smaller and cooler than, Sol. It masses 1.9116×10^{33} grams, or 0.96 solar, and it has a radius of just under 670,000 kilometers. Its absolute visual magnitude is 5.29, yielding a stellar luminosity of 0.685 solar: 2.622×10^{33} ergs per second. 82 Eridani's average surface temperature is 5620 degrees Kelvin.

The star has a retinue of eight planets, but only Kormoran, the fourth planet out, resides in the life zone.

The first two planets, both moonless and without formal names, are small rocks orbiting at 0.2 and 0.36 au respectively. The third, with a name that translates roughly as "Herald," is a twin-mooned Hot House, very similar to Sol's Venus, orbiting at 0.61 au. It is often speculated that this world might hold ruined Eber installations, but this has not yet been proven.

Kormoran itself, a Garden world, orbits at 0.86 au, just four percent beyond the optimum distance. It is rather large for a garden world, but its proximity to the star allowed the planet's lighter gases to be burnt off during its formation, leaving an Earth-like atmosphere. All of the planet's land mass is accumulated in one large continent. Kormoran has three moons, one a respectably sized body and the other two mere chunks of captured rock.

The fifth planet orbits the star at 1.29 au. Its name is translated as "Flirt," presumably from the fact that its orbit takes it continually to and from opposition with Kormoran. Flirt is also suspected of holding Eber artifacts.

Planets six and eight, both gas giants, orbit at 2.57 and 9.72 au respectively. Number six, known as "Soul Stealer," has thirteen moons and a faint ring. Number eight is named "Dark One," and has eight moons. The seventh planet orbits at 4.63 au and is a moonless Ice Ball. The Ebers call this planet "Spark" since high albedo makes it very noticeable in the night sky at certain times of the year.

Eberese Planetary Names

Today's Ebers do not have firsthand experience with the difference between stars and planets, but they do retain something of this distinction from their starfaring forebearers. To modern Ebers, the distinction is simply "moving star" versus "stationary star."

In the original human survey of the 82 Eridani system, the planets were given Terran names, but since that time these have all been abandoned in favor of Eber terms. The Eber names for the planets vary in age, some of them apparently being holdovers from predecimation culture, and others being more recent names that describe the behavior of the objects in the sky. The planet called Herald is thought to provide an example of the former type—Herald is the name of a mythic figure with two children, and the planet has two small moons. What marks this name as predecimation is that Eber instruments are not sufficiently advanced to detect either of those moons. The planet called Flirt provides an example of a more recently given name.

The first two planets are variably called "Daughter of the Morning/Evening" and "Son of the Morning/Evening," depending on whether they are seen as morning or evening stars. The sources for some of the other names are difficult to establish, as Eberese "C-D-F," the name for the sixth planet, has many different referents—translators eventually decided upon the prime referent being another mythic figure. In fact, each planet has several possible names among the Ebers, the following being some that are common use among Wild Ebers, for example: Life (3rd), Warrior (5th), Hand (6th), and Seeker (8th).

THE EBERS

Of the alien races thus far encountered by humanity, the Ebers are arguably the most similar to humans in gross biological characteristics. However, to the majority of the human population they are also one of the least well known races. The Sung and Xiang have been the subject

of much publicity as a result of the Slaver War, the Pentapods are familiar because of the market for their bio-engineered products, and the Kafers have drawn humanity into the most extensive war in its history; but, the Eber race is well known to fewer than 9000 humans. These 9000 are the people living with the Ebers on 82 Eridani IV, a world virtually closed to human travel by Manchurian restrictions.

The Ebers are huge, heavy-bodied, furred bipeds, standing two meters at the top of their head/shoulders, with a trunk, extensible eyestalks, and two arms that are an astounding three meters in length. They are heterosexual beings, but males and females are functionally equivalent in all matters not specifically related to reproduction—the females adopt a ritual maternal behavior only during the first year of an offspring's life. Eber births are always single; multiple births are unknown.

Ebers are given to wearing multiple layers of loose-fitting, heavily embroidered clothing, and they extensively ornament themselves with heavy metal jewelry.

The Eber language is not so much spoken as whistled through their mobile trunks, and it has yet to be fully understood by human linguists. Eber language has an unusually high proportion of idiomatic terms—words that can only be translated in the context of the culture which brought them into being.

Perhaps most interesting of all, the Ebers are the remnant of a starfaring race that almost destroyed itself in an interstellar war more than 4000 years ago—a war that annihilated their colonies and left survivors only on the Eber homeworld.

In terms of society, Ebers can be divided into two major groups: the Civilized Ebers of the coastal and temperate inland regions, and the Nomadic Ebers of the central desert.

The Civilized Ebers inhabit the remains of the proud race's millennia-old cities, building their masonry structures in the eerie shadows of the ancient, rusting shells of skyscrapers. They are both proud of the technologically advanced society their race once attained and embarrassed by the destruction it brought upon itself. Neither of these attitudes interfere with their eagerness to take advantage of the human technology that has come to Kormoran. Preserving what they could of their ancient civilization, these Ebers have managed to retain many of that society's cultural components, including its system of writing, its trade practices, and especially a mind-boggling knack for bureaucracy—a holdover from highly technological times. This almost hereditary tendency for the generation of red tape creates highly ritualized business practices with negotiations that last for days or even weeks (severely taxing the endurance of any humans involved).

[T]he Ebers of the high desert live a harsh life.

The Nomadic Ebers have lost their cities and returned to a primitive hunting-gathering lifestyle in kinship/tribal groups in the high desert. Although their nomadic lifestyle prevents them from accumulating possessions as their civilized cousins do, they too demonstrate a love for long-winded oration and involved ceremony, but they dispense with much of the extravagant paperwork and gift-exchanges of their civilized neighbors. The Nomadic Ebers have traditionally made their living as hunter/gatherers, supplementing desert food sources by raids on the farms of civilized Ebers, and more recently on those of the Texas settlers. Fighting the elements, their civilized neighbors, and often even other nomad tribes, the Ebers of the high desert live a harsh life.

For both Civilized and Nomadic Ebers, ritual is the center of life, encompassing all social interactions. Their behavior is sometimes marked by a seemingly erratic, schizophrenic component, and ritual becomes a foundation stone for all activities. Ebers are segmentally monogamous; they "marry" in order to reproduce, and they remain bonded as consorts until the offspring's rite of passage to adulthood, at 23 years. Once the offspring of a marriage has officially become an adult, the parents' "marriage" formally expires, and the individuals are free to pick new partners for further marriages. In practice, however, more than two-thirds of all Ebers renew their vows with the same consort throughout their three-century life spans.

EBER PERSONAL NAMES

Until the rite of passage to adulthood, young Ebers are known by "Child of" names, living as social extensions of their parents. Upon reaching 23 years and adulthood, the young Ebers then choose the name they wish to carry for the rest of their lives. There are few restrictions on what names can be chosen, and most are usually reminders of some significant event of a new adult's childhood, or of the circumstances of his passage to adult status.

Adult Ebers may attain new or additional names later in life, given to them by members of their social group. This is especially common on achievement of leadership positions, which include such titles as "Supervisor" among the Civilized Ebers and "Chief" or "Subchief" among the Nomadic Ebers. Nomadic Ebers tend to award additional names even more often than do Civilized Ebers, and many of these names recall an event of bravery in battle or an unusual occurrence, often humorous, that is remembered by the tribe. Even if the name and remembered event, such as "Wild Javelin" or "Broken Foot," seem somewhat less than complimentary, the awarding of a new name is always a mark of honor, showing that the tribe remembers and values the individual as a unique and irreplaceable figure.

Kormoran

THE NAMING OF KORMORAN

The naming of Kormoran is one of those odd, confused, and embarrassing historical footnotes that few people know and even fewer care about. It is not an Eber word, nor a human word: it does not even have the meaning its namers intended.

After the Ebers were discovered in 2256, it was soon decided that the human names for the system and its worlds would be changed to conform to those of its inhabitants. Naturally, this had to wait until the language barrier could be breached, which took a little longer than anticipated.

Impatient chart-makers wanted to know the name of the world, so a linguist was pressed to ask the leaders of one of the Ebers' seaside communities what the name of their world was. The Eber being questioned pointed to the water, indicating that the Eber word for the planet was "Ocean." However, at the moment of the gesture, one of the native seabird analogues, known as cormorants to the scientists because of their resemblance to the Terran bird, made an impressive plummeting dive into the sea to come up with a fish. Seeing the human's confusion at this odd reference, the Eber sought to clarify the situation by waving his hands to simulate the motion of waves, as if to say, "Get it? Ocean."

Kormoran is a garden world occupying the fourth orbit of 82 Eridani, at an average distance of 0.8568 au. It masses 1.0505×10^{25} grams, roughly 1.76 times the Earth's mass, and it has a diameter that ranges from 13,997 kilometers over the poles to 14,043 kilometers around the equator. This gives the world a density of roughly 1.3 times that of the Earth, and a surface gravity of 1.46 G. Its high density promises that the world is a tremendous source of geological raw materials, but its status as Eber homeworld has thus far prevented any serious mineral exploitation.

Kormoran rotates at an unusually high speed, its day being only 17.8 hours long. This high spin rate and a molten core provide the planet with a magnetic field that is almost one-and-a-half times the size of Earth's, and this keeps external radiation on the surface at low levels. However, Kormoran's high density is often manifested in heavy radioactive materials lying in exposed veins on the planetary surface. Therefore, while stellar radiation is low, the human traveller must beware of dangerous local radiation sources.

Kormoran's year is 423.236 local days long, and the planet has a 29 degree axial tilt, providing distinct seasons. The world has three natural companions: the primary moon, known to humans as "Dancer" (an inadequate translation of the Eber term); and two irregular rocky moons. Dancer has a diameter of some 3400 kilometers, a mass that is roughly one-80th of Kormoran's, and a density of 0.6. Its density makes it obvious that Dancer is a captured body, but its origin is not known. The other two moons are also captured bodies, orbiting very rapidly, with major axes of 98 and 172 kilometers. Dancer is primarily responsible for oceanic tides on Kormoran, while its small companions create slight perturbations in the larger patterns.

The Continent

Kormoran's surface is roughly 70 percent water, but most of the land is concentrated in the single continent, known by the same name as the world itself. For this reason it is generally referred to as "the continent." This continent takes up some 60 percent of the northern hemisphere and is located primarily within the middle latitudes wind cell, providing prevailing westerly winds across the bulk of its mass. The prevailing winds, coupled with a large mid-continental mountain range, have created the Great Desert in the continental interior, defined almost precisely by the mid-continental tectonic plate.

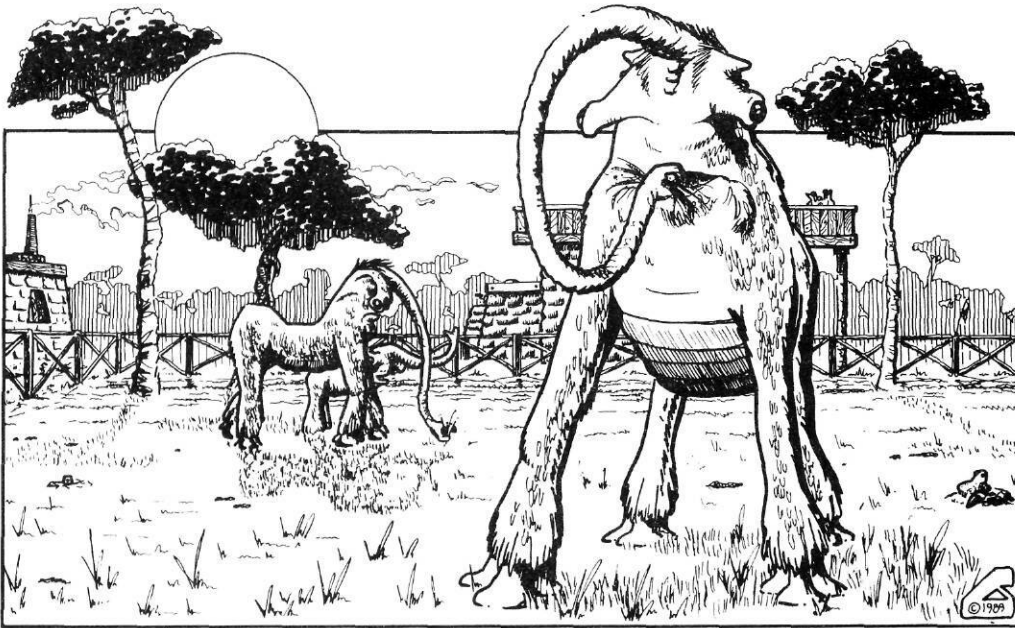
The direction of movement for this central plate is toward the north, and the plate is slowly riding up over the arctic ocean plate. The arctic plate's subduction beneath the mid-continental is the cause of the volcanic mountain ranges that mark the northern coast of the mid-continent, as well as seismic activity in this region. The line where the plates meet is marked by a deep oceanic trench just a dozen kilometers off the northern coast of the continent.

Two more plates form the rest of the continent. The eastern and western continental plates move toward each other and lift the mid-continental plate between them. The borders between these plates are marked by the "Skyscraper Mountains" between the western and mid-continental plates, and the older, more weathered "Eastern Massif Mountains" between the mid-continental and eastern plates. These mountains and all other Kormorese physical features are not nearly as steep as those on Earth, due to the leveling force of the planet's higher gravity. Hydraulic erosion also works more rapidly, for the same reason.

The eastern plate is not pushing as vigorously westward as it was in the past but is still holding the mid-continental plate firm against the pressure of the western, which is doing most of the work of raising the mid-continental plate and the desert that rides atop it.

The eastern and western thirds of the continent are temperate, well watered, and quite amenable to habitation. The Civilized Eber communities are located in these areas, as well as on the southern coast, which enjoys a mild climate.

The weather of this southern coast is agreeable in both summer and winter, and the moisture-laden easterly trade winds allow a year-round growing season. The southern coast is also blessed with plentiful fishing; the prevailing westerlies drive an Ekman current that creates deep water



upwellings in two large zones south of the continent. These nutrient-rich areas support plentiful sea life in a chain that ranges all the way from thick layers of plankton to the predacious Kormoran seadragons, and, of course, fleets of Eber fishing boats.

The east coast also is the site of a more stationary upwelling. Unlike the southern zones that drift east and west along the coast, the eastern upwelling is a large stable phenomenon.

One of the more outstanding features of the continent is the Mid-Continental, or Great Desert, situated almost precisely in the center of the continent between the mountain ranges. Surveyors placed the prime meridian down the center of the desert, thus allowing the date line to run through open ocean between the ends of the continent. The continental westerly winds lose almost all of their moisture in climbing the Skyscraper Mountains, and winds blowing north from the Tropic of Capricorn shed their moisture long before reaching this desert as well. The desert's primary source of moisture comes from northern polar storms in winter, but as these have to cross the volcanic range on the northern rim of the continent, little moisture remains by the time they reach the desert. As a result of these factors, the Great Desert has an average annual precipitation of less than 1 1.5 centimeters.

Habitation on Kormoran is primarily confined to the temperate eastern and western portions of the continent, especially along the coasts and near rivers that allow boat access to the continental interior. Both the east and west ends of the continent have many rivers. In general, those flowing toward the southern, eastern, or western coasts are navigable along most of their lengths, but those emptying along the northern coast have pronounced fall lines within one hundred kilometers of that coast.

Islands

Besides its single continent, Kormoran also boasts several islands in its equatorial and southern seas, but these have yet to be extensively explored by humans. One of these islands is marked by a large expanse of silica, suggestive of a thermonuclear ground burst, but no other signs of prior civilization have yet been found on these pieces of land.

Humans on Kormoran

Humans inhabit only two small enclaves on Kormoran, the UAR enclave on the east coast and the Texas enclave in the Great Desert. Although it takes some time for most humans to adjust to the high gravity, the short planetary day is helpful in this regard. Since the days are one-fourth shorter than Earth's, humans are able to rest more frequently, allowing them to acclimate themselves to the harsher gravity more quickly.

The linguist thought the Eber was flapping his arms like a bird, confirming the cormorant reference. Just to be sure, he pantomimed the dive of the bird into the water, flapping his wings in return. Coincidentally, a bird in flight is the Eber metaphor for the soul. The Eber was suddenly taken by the impression that he had been mistaken and that the human was actually referring to spiritual matters, and not asking about the name of the planet.

After a few more minutes of garbled attempts to communicate, the two broke off the conversation unwittingly sharing a mixed sense of confusion and relief. The pressured linguist changed "cormorant" to "Kormoran" to make it sound more alien, and the happy chart-makers departed.

It was two years before the errors in the conversation were revealed, but even afterward, no attempt was made to correct the mistaken name, the consensus being that the public likes to believe that the experts know what they're doing. Although the experts know better, they would rather the word did not get out.

Flora and Fauna

In this chapter, the Kormorese ecology is described.

FLORA OF 82 ERIDANI IV

Kormoran is a green world, well deserving its "Garden" classification. It has plants equivalent to Terran trees, shrubs, vines, grasses, mosses, algae, and plankton. However, there seem to be no gymnosperm analogues here; all of the complex plants, bushes, and trees discovered so far are angiospermoids. Even the upland evergreens are flowering, so that while Kormoran is no greener than the green Earth, it is naturally more colorful. This abundance of flowering plants has a marked impact on the Kormorese fauna, as there are more niches for nectar gatherers and fruit eaters.

Deciduous forests cover much of the temperate regions of Kormoran's single continent, while the colder areas and highlands are home to evergreen species. There are two major shapes of the deciduous trees: a rounded-ball shape similar to that of most of Earth's deciduous trees, and an umbrella shape, reminiscent of Earth's palm trees, in which the trunk is bare of horizontal boughs up to a height of approximately four meters, after which limbs branch out widely. There seems to be no climatic factor at work in the distribution of these two forms of deciduous trees, although the umbrella-shaped types are most closely concentrated around inhabited areas.

The following plant species are found on Kormoran.

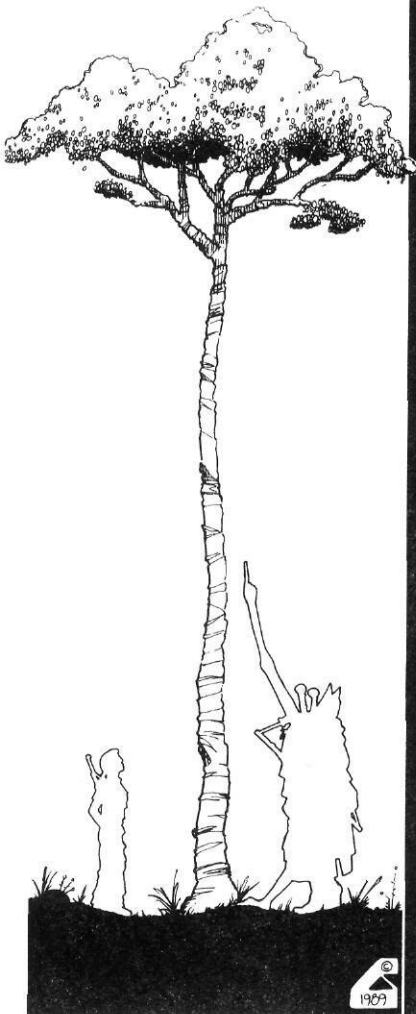
Napalm Plants: A desert-dwelling succulent, this plant stores moisture as a sticky, poisonous pitch in large, oblong, thick-skinned fruiting bodies. These "Napalm Gourds," as humans call them, are sometimes used by the Nomadic Ebers as lethal grenade weapons. The sticky, inedible pitch is highly flammable; consequently, the fruit is useful in the Eber style of warfare, which relies heavily on indirect missile attacks. These plants, which were most likely spread by Nomadic Ebers over the centuries, are widely distributed throughout the Great Desert.

Stink-Gourd Plants: Like napalm plants, stink-gourd plants are found throughout the Great Desert. While napalm plants are used by the Ebers for serious warfare, stink-gourds are used for a more ritualized form of conflict. The Ebers are very long-lived in comparison to humans, and this longevity has made them loath to engage in deadly warfare. However, they are very fond of competing in warlike ways. Stink-gourds allow them to have warlike competition without the danger of the loss of life. Stink-gourd plants produce one or two seed-filled gourds at a time year-round. The plants' flesh and juices are considered extremely foul-smelling by the Ebers; consequently, use of these gourds as grenades allows tribes to "count coup" on each other by making their opponents unacceptable company until the odor wears off (typically taking about a week to do so).

Although stink-gourds have an odor that is disagreeable to Ebers, several other Kormorese creatures find them very desirable as food. It is likely that much of the plants' proliferation has been by means of seeds carried in these animals' digestive tracts, but there is evidence that the Ebers themselves have also transplanted the stink-gourd through the ages.

D-F: Thanks to the Ebers, D-F is perhaps the most common plant on Kormoran. In civilized communities, it appears in fields, backyard gardens, window boxes, and indoor pots. In the desert it grows in profusion at all oases and in clumps around the Ebers' semi-permanent settlements. It is dried and ground to form the flour used to make D-F cakes (or "Sugar Cookies," as the Texans call them) that are consumed at all Eber rituals. The plant contains some chemical that appears to give Ebers a mild burst of energy and euphoria, similar to the effects of sugar in humans. D-F is an extremely hardy organism and can grow in many conditions of temperature and moisture, although most successfully in temperate, watered areas.

C-D-F: Common only to regions occupied by the Civilized Eber nations, the C-D-F plant is very sensitive to dryness and will not grow in the Great Desert. C-D-F is used by Ebers to make a fermented drink that Texans call "Eber Beer" (or, sometimes, "Ebeer"), which has a mildly intoxicating effect on Ebers. In large, concentrated doses the juices of the C-D-F plant can produce monomaniacal behavior. C-D-F is fairly expensive and is generally only consumed



by the middle- and upper-class Ebers with any regularity.

Bulb-Pole Plant: Another desert plant, the bulb-pole plant is usually found only near oases, along wadis, or near other locations that have some intermittent water passage. This plant consists of a thin, straight wood-like trunk surrounding a pulpy succulent core, surmounted by a cluster of leaves and fruit or flowers (depending upon moisture conditions) at the top. Below ground the plant has a large bulb fed by a number of deep tap-roots, supplemented by surface roots. By storing water in its bulb, the bulb-pole plant can survive even on the sparse semi-annual rain received in many portions of the desert. The thick, hard wood which protects the plant's trunk and bulb from animals also makes it highly prized by the Nomadic Ebers. The bulb-pole plant is their source of materials for javelins, lances, and hook spears.

The hook spear illustration gives an idea of the appearance of the plant with its bulb still attached. The Nomadic Ebers dig up these plants and carry them as canteens until they are empty of moisture. Thereafter, they lay them in the sun to dry, turning them periodically to prevent any warping that could be caused by drying unevenly. When the plant is cured in this way, its pulpy interior becomes virtually weightless inside its extremely hard wooden shell. As a result, the bulb-pole becomes a very strong, straight, and lightweight object imminently suitable for fashioning into weapons. Because of its value, the bulb-pole plant is actively cultivated by the Nomadic Ebers.

FAUNA OF 82 ERIDANI IV

Like Earth, Kormoran is home to a large and diverse animal population. There are analogues of Terran birds, fish, and mammals. While not strictly definable by familiar Earth characteristics, most Kormorese fauna above the level of fish is warm-blooded. There does not exist the dramatic break between primitive cold-blooded land dwellers and modern warm-blooded land dwellers that is typical of Earth's ecology. It is possible that warm blood developed in the Kormorese oceans and only after that came ashore to populate the land.

Animal products are common trade items between Nomadic and Civilized Eber nations. This is particularly true of gruntbuggly ivory, which often serves as a sort of currency. Other animal products that are valuable to the Nomadic Ebers are identified below in terms of their equivalent value in grams of ivory.

Hulk: The hulk is a six-legged, heavy-bodied omnivorous hunter. A furred mammal analog, its fur ranges from a lightly striped pattern to a uniform brown-black. This creature is common in forests and highlands where it uses its impressive array of teeth to prey upon other forest creatures. It is not much of a climber, but it can rear up on its back four legs to reach food on the lower branches of trees or to fight with its front paws. There is also a sandy-colored desert variety of hulk, with a reduced body size but larger ears and paws.

Hunter *Number Appearing:* 1 *Initiative:* 4 *Hit:* Routine *Size:* 300-500 kg *Speed:* 55 m *Armor:* 0.2 *DPV:* 1.2 *jaws:* 0.8 *paws:* 0.8 *Value:* 1000 gm ivory, pelt

Tall Fox: The tall fox is six-legged like the hulk, but it is slimmer and able to hold its forebody erect more easily. Its coloration is similar to the Terran gray fox, including a luxuriant banner-like tail. There is also a desert variety of the tall fox, tan to sand in color, and smaller-bodied with larger extremities.

Hunter *Number Appearing:* 1 *D6 Initiative:* 4 *Hit:* Routine *Size:* 20-60 kg *Speed:* 110 m *Armor:* 0.2 *DPV:* 0.2 *jaws:* 0.2 *Value:* 1500 gm ivory, pelt

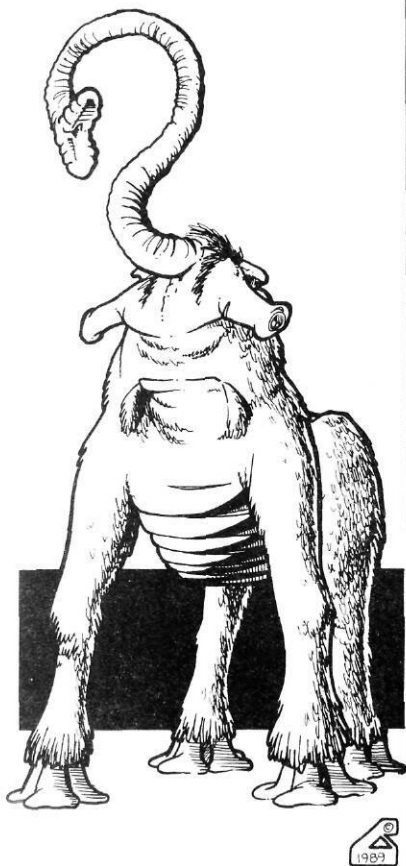
Centaur: This six-legged browsing herbivore is common in both wild and domesticated forms on Kormoran. Centaurs are routinely able to raise their forebodies up into a posture that gives rise to their name, and their forepaws are adapted to form claws, allowing them to grasp tree trunks and raise themselves to feed on higher branches.

Grazer *Number Appearing:* 1 *D6x1D10 Initiative:* 2 *Hit:* Difficult *Size:* 500-1000 kg *Speed:* 55 m *Armor:* 0.3 *DPV:* 2 *trampling:* 2 *Value:* 300 gm ivory, pelt

Cotta Bird: Like most Kormorese bird analogs, the cotta bird has six limbs; the forward pair are adapted as grasping claws, the middle pair as wings, and the rear pair as taloned feet. Cottas are scavengers similar to Terran vultures. Their primary importance to the Ebers is that a group of cotta birds circling on the horizon is generally an indication of the presence of an Eber desert settlement.

Hijacker *Number Appearing:* 2 *D6 Initiative:* 4 *Hit:* Difficult *Size:* 35-50 kg *Speed:* 110 m flying, 40 m grounded *Armor:* 0 *DPV:* 0.4 *beak:* 0 *Value:* 0 gm ivory





E-Horse: The E-horse is a grazing herbivore domesticated by the Ebers for use as a riding animal. It has four limbs; the forward pair are longer than the rear, which helps the animal to reach the foliage of low trees with its long, slim trunk. This trunk is located near the top of the E-horse's rudimentary head, and it allows the animal to carry food to its underslung jaws. Of course, the trunk can also be used to pluck grasses and shrubs at ground level as well.

Most E-horses on Kormoran are domesticated, but there are some mavericks that roam the fringes of the Great Desert where they are hunted by the Nomadic Ebers. Domesticated E-horses are bred for various sizes and uses, the largest being capable of carrying their own plate armor and a fully armed and armored Eber.

Grazer *Number Appearing:* 1D6 x 1D6 *Initiative:* 2 *Hit:* Difficult *Size:* 500-1000 kg *Speed:* 65-70 m *Armor:* 0.2 *DPV:* 1 trampling, 0.3 biting *Value:* 10,000 gm ivory

E-Dog: The E-dog is a small, four-limbed creature with a flexible pig-like snout, well adapted to tracking by scent and to hunting. Wild E-dogs can be encountered in packs, but most of the animals are of the domestic variety. Like the E-horse, the E-dog has longer forelegs than back legs, but its head is slightly more pronounced than the E-horse's. The combination of long forelegs and very little neck force the animal to kneel when feeding, however.

Chaser *Number Appearing:* 2D6 *Initiative:* 6 *Hit:* Routine *Size:* 20-40 kg *Speed:* 1 1 0 m *Armor:* 0 *DPV:* 0.1 jaws *Value:* variable

Sea Dragon: Sea dragons are giant 20-meter sea creatures that travel alone, but swarm in packs when food is discovered. Each sea dragon has six paddle-shaped limbs and a three-meter sinuous neck surmounted by a meter-long, tooth-filled head. Sea dragons feed on shoals of fish, on other sea dragons, on curtain dragons, or on nearly anything else that moves. They are hunted by the Civilized Ebers with harpoons, an occupation that is as dangerous to the Ebers as to the sea dragons. One curious custom sometimes practiced by Eber fishermen is to catch and butcher a sea dragon, then throw its carcass back into the sea. The Ebers claim that this results in a large catch of macroplankton, pelagic crustaceans, and the like. Eberologists are fascinated by this tale, citing it as a modern derivative of ancient myths of an Eber sea-god.

Killer (aquatic) *Number Appearing:* 2D6 *Initiative:* 10 *Hit:* Easy *Size:* 50,000 kg *Speed:* 1 50 m *Armor:* 0.6 *Wound:* +2 *Cone/Life:* 25/37 *DPV:* 20 *Signature:* + 1 4

Curtain Dragon: Although somewhat shorter (18 meters) and fatter than sea dragons, curtain dragons are otherwise very similar in appearance to them. However, this similarity in appearance is hidden by the great masses of sea plants that affix themselves to these slow-moving creatures and dangle their ropy tendrils deep into the sea. It is from these veritable sheets of plant tendrils that curtain dragons get their name.

The sea dragons serve as mobile supports for the plant growth on their backs, lifting these plants into the light and carrying them into nutrient-rich waters. In return, the plants grow long tendrils that act as seines, sweeping up large numbers of macroplankton as the sea dragons swim slowly along. It is upon these macroplankton that the curtain dragons feed, sucking their accumulated numbers from the plant tendrils.

Although they are usually peaceful creatures, sea dragons can be unpredictable. In 2279, the 10,000-ton UAR hydrofoil *Allah Akbar* ("God is Great"), the largest sea vessel on Kormoran, was attacked and sunk by two curtain dragons. The result was a loss of 216 human and Eber lives.

Gatherer *Number Appearing:* 1D6-2 *Initiative:* 3 *Hit:* Difficult *Size:* 50,000 kg *Speed:* 35 m *Armor:* 0.7 *Wound:* +2 *Cone/Life:* 23/37 *DPV:* 20 (ramming) *Signature:* +14

Gruntbugglies

Among its various life forms, Kormoran is host to a particularly strange type of creature that Texans call "gruntbugglies." There are many species of gruntbuggly, but all have developed a subterranean lifestyle for survival in the desert. Additionally, gruntbugglies have evolved a means of expelling their bodily wastes dozens of meters away from their burrows in order to avoid revealing the location of their burrows to predators. These fecal pellets, dried of all moisture, are very hard, and the gruntbugglies propel them by means of bladder-stored digestive gases. However, only one such pellet can be fired at a time, several hours being required to create another.

All gruntbugglies, so named by the Texans because of the distinctive sound they make when discharging a pellet, are supremely adapted to burrowing, with the first pair of their six limbs developed into the equivalent of huge clawed shovels.

During the early days of the Texas enclave on Kormoran, gruntbuggies proved to be a serious problem. Many individuals were injured by the creatures, and young livestock, and even children, were killed by the larger varieties, sometimes from a well placed shot, sometimes from a particularly vicious bite, and at other times from subsequent infection.

Because of this danger, all species of gruntbuggies within the boundaries of New Austin were systematically destroyed by filling their holes with flammable fuel or lethal gas. Since that time the small communal varieties have begun to re-populate somewhat in the enclave. Although these species are sometimes criticized as pests, many argue that they help to aerate the soil. A few Texans have even begun to keep small, herbivorous gruntbuggies as pets.

On a related note, gruntbuggly ivory, from the creature's teeth or tusks, is highly prized by the Ebers. It is strong yet easily worked, and once polished it maintains a high luster. In the descriptions that follow, the yield of ivory from each type of gruntbuggly is noted.

All gruntbuggies have an additional -2 to their signature when in their burrows.

Communal Gruntbuggies: Communal gruntbuggies are small creatures that live in shared burrows containing whole colonies of the animals. They feed on the roots of plants that they reach by burrowing, and they project their fecal pellets into the ceilings of their tunnels, fertilizing the ground above.

This subterranean lifestyle means that they almost never have to leave their tunnel complexes, and as a consequence, they are rarely seen by humans, although their burrows are very common. Communal gruntbuggies have rodent-like front teeth to gnaw on roots and to help in burrowing through obstacles.

Intermittent (subterranean) *Number Appearing:* 1D10x1D6 *Initiative:* 2 *Hit:* Difficult *Size:* 5 kg *Speed:* 120 m *Armor:* 0 *Wound:* -5 *Cone/Life:* 1/2 *DPV:* 0.1 *Signature:* None *Value:* 1 00 gm ivory

Sharpshooter: This type of gruntbuggly is a fruit eater that has adapted its behavior to allow it to feed on succulent fruits that grow high above the ground. The sharpshooter gruntbuggly propels a fecal pellet to knock such fruit loose from high branches, then the gruntbuggly scurries forth to retrieve it.

Sharpshooters live singly in burrows, though several such burrows may be located near to one another.

Intermittent *Number Appearing:* 1D6-4 *Initiative:* 3 *Hit:* Difficult *Size:* 20 kg *Speed:* 100 m *Armor:* 0 *Wound:* -3 *Cone/Life:* 1/4 *DPV:* 0.5 projectile, 0.1 bite *Signature:* -6 *Value:* 400 gm ivory

Omnivorous Sharpshooter: The omnivorous sharpshooter, a larger version of the sharpshooter described above, supplements its fruit diet with insects and small animals that it knocks from plants. This creature aims at these mobile targets by looking back between its legs, which have spines that seem to serve as sighting aids.

Intermittent *Number Appearing:* 1D6-3 *Initiative:* 4 *Hit:* Routine *Size:* 40 kg *Speed:* 95 m *Armor:* 0 *Wound:* -2 *Cone/Life:* 1/5 *DPV:* 0.5 projectile, 0.1 bite *Signature:* -3 *Value:* 800 gm ivory

Sniper: The sniper is a larger gruntbuggly that has left its herbivorous ancestry behind and developed an entirely carnivorous diet. Its pellets are of such size and propelled with such force as to be able to stun animals as large as Ebers. The sniper's inner leg spines are much heavier than those of the sharpshooters, serving as an aid in carrying its incapacitated prey back into the burrow. The sniper's rodent-like front teeth have evolved into tusks, useful both for digging and for killing prey.

Pouncer *Number Appearing:* 1D6-4 *Initiative:* 5 *Hit:* Routine *Size:* 80 kg *Speed:* 85 m *Armor:* 0 *Wound:* — *Cone/Life:* 3/8 *DPV:* 1 projectile, 0.2 bite or daw *Signature:* 0 *Value:* 1 600 gm ivory

Great Sniper: The largest of the gruntbuggly species, the great sniper, feeds exclusively on predators that it lures to its burrow. It leaves rotting food outside the entrance, then makes scuffling noises to lure the unfortunate victim inside. There it either fires point-blank into its prey or goes the creature with its three-kilogram tusk. The great sniper hardly ever needs to move from its burrow, as its meals deliver themselves.

Large Pouncer *Number Appearing:* 1 *Initiative:* 8 *Hit:* Routine *Size:* 150 kg *Speed:* 75 m *Armor:* 0.1 *Wound:* — *Cone/Life:* 5/12 *DPV:* 2 projectile, 0.4 bite or claw *Signature:* 0 *Value:* 3000 gm ivory

NIGHTMARES

One other interesting type of creature is sometimes reported in the Great Desert, the creature commonly called a nightmare. Although there have been many reports of encounters with nightmares, it is not certain that these creatures actually exist. Reports from the desert and early Texas settlers speak of hordes of terrifying creatures coming out of the ground in dark, isolated places. Unfortunately, these reports generally do not agree on the appearance of the creatures. Some witnesses claim to have seen glowing eyes, others remember large pincers, and yet others mainly recall multiple legs or bat-like wings. Most authorities theorize that nightmares are simply exaggerated reports of gruntbuggies.



The Eber Nations

EBER TRADE ITEMS

Some commonly traded items, and their equivalent value in gruntbuggly ivory, are as follow:

Civilized Eber Items

Head for metal javelin or lance: 500 gm ivory.

Hollow metal javelin (normal weight, but nearly unbreakable): 3000 gm ivory.

Steel knife or dagger: 3000 gm ivory.

Steel sword: 9000 gm ivory.

Bolt of cloth (sufficient for three garments): 1000 gm ivory.

Nomadic Eber Items

Handworked wooden javelin: 2000 gm ivory.

Decorated garment: 1000 gm ivory.

Desert-bred E-horse: 15,000 gm ivory.

In this chapter, a brief, informative overview of both the Civilized and Nomadic Eber nations is given.

THE CIVILIZED EBERS

In 2301 the Civilized Ebers are estimated to have a population of 320 million scattered across the temperate areas of the Kormoran continent.

Split among almost two dozen nation-states, the long-lived Ebers, although highly territorial, are reluctant to enter into wars. Their preferred form of competition is economic warfare. Eberologists have proposed that this and their elaborate rituals are psychological responses to the war that almost destroyed them as a species, that these activities serve as emotional buffers and allow them to sublimate violent tendencies.

Few Eber settlements remain on ancient sites. Many were destroyed in the Decimation, and most of those remaining are poorly located for modern Eber needs. An interstellar culture with high-technology transportation does not locate its settlements in the same way as a less advanced people. Most new cities are located along rivers or on the continent's coasts, at transportation nexuses.

Although their technology approximates Earth's early Renaissance, this can be misleading since their knowledge is actually more advanced than this. Some ancient concepts are not forgotten, such as the world being round, the value of sanitation, and the heliocentric solar system—no Copernican Revolution is needed here. Eber map technology is excellent, based on ancient records, and they never lost sextant-based navigation, although they did have to reinvent the skill of sailing.

The Ebers' main form of long-distance transport is by sea. Many cities occupy the continent's lower coasts, with access to the great fishing grounds and southern trade routes. Eber sailing ships cannot sail close to the wind, and they are, therefore, limited to certain paths. Ships cannot sail into the teeth of the easterly trades to pass east around the southern capes; therefore, almost all sailing is in a westward direction, circumnavigating the globe to arrive at a point only somewhat east of the departure. The only direct eastern routes are those linking the extreme east and west ends of the continent. Here the prevailing westerlies allow seagoing vessels to travel by the most direct route.

All of the southern nations rely heavily on fishing, and some of them have major companies that hunt the sea dragons. The nation of Plunger Coast, named for a fish that forms a staple for its people, contains the UAR enclave of Nasser, and it profits from that association—many of its ships carry precise UAR navigation and meteorological systems that are linked to human satellites.

The two southernmost Eber nations, Ripper (named for a seasonal wind) and The Capes, are coveted farming areas. The climate in these regions allows a year-round growing season and makes it possible to raise many crops that could not survive elsewhere.

Black Sky and Headwaters (two more northern nations), conversely, have little in the way of agriculture, but their plentiful mineral resources make trade with the agricultural nations possible. Headwaters maintains this trade nearly year round, but Black Sky is iced-in all winter and must rely on overland caravans, "The Sun Trail" through the broken badlands to the east of the Great Desert, to supply its wealthy with choice fruit during the winter. In this way Black Sky is able to maintain trade with the Nomadic Ebers, the only Civilized nation to do so, as the southern nations have enough trouble just keeping the nomads out of their fields. Black Sky trades metal goods, javelin and lance tips, or sometimes knives and swords for gruntbuggly ivory, exquisite Nomadic handiwork done in leather and wood, and desert-bred E-horses for use on the Sun Trail itself.

Civilized Eber military technology is still iron; weaponry remains at the level of chain and plate mail versus swords. Bows compete with hand-thrown javelins only in rare circumstances, and metallurgy is the limiting factor for the few inefficient powder weapons.

THE NOMADIC EBERS

The Nomadic Ebers have a culture that is almost completely different from that of their Civilized relatives. The most obvious difference is that their lives are harsher and shorter because of the environment of the Great Desert in which they live. While the average Civilized Eber lives approximately 350 Terran years (more than 400 local years), a Nomadic Eber is lucky to make it to 300 Terran years (350 local), and even then he will have far more infirmities and disabilities than will a Civilized Eber. Nonetheless, the Nomadic Ebers love their harsh lifestyle. They are experts at survival, and they bear a great deal of scorn for the "soft ones," their Civilized neighbors.

This disdain does not prevent the Nomadic Ebers from taking advantage of some of their soft brethren's accomplishments. On the contrary, the southern tribes are quite fond of food grown on the Ripper and Capes farms, and they have freely enjoyed it for many years. The Nomadic Ebers also keep mercantile relations with the Civilized Nation of Black Sky, trading skins and gruntbody ivory for valuable metal implements. Access to this ivory is one of the most valuable commodities that the Nomadic Eber tribes possess, allowing them to purchase items that they cannot produce themselves. Gruntbody ivory also serves as a type of coinage when Nomadic Tribes trade among themselves.

Most items crafted by a Nomadic Eber tribe are needed for their own use, however. Chief among these items is the javelin. Every Nomadic Eber's javelin collection is carefully carved with personal designs and patterns, depicting the individual's adventures, and usually each javelin has its own exploits carved on it. The Nomadic Ebers believe that with each exploit the javelin becomes luckier, more useful in combat. All Nomadic Ebers have one prized javelin, their oldest and most precious, to be used in extremities when all other weapons have failed them. It is indeed a cause for mourning when one of these wooden warriors is broken in battle.

Tribal Organization

Nomadic Ebers live in tribes made up of small family groups. These tribes in turn have parent and sibling tribes; each tribe splits into two when it attains a size of more than 90 individuals with four subchiefs and a Chief. Subchiefs are merely less senior chiefs who lead raiding and hunting parties of roughly 20 individuals.

Each tribe ranges over a wide area of desert that is traditionally its individual territory, and it will defend this territory against encroachment by other tribes. Settlements shift within these territories, moving from oasis to oasis, planting bulb-pole, napalm, stink gourd, and D-F plants at each spot. Many of these settlements become semipermanent villages with heavy tents built on huge wooden frames. These villages are generally established on high ground near oases, such as the top of mesas, if accessible. Nomadic Ebers like high places for their defensive advantages, their improved visibility, and their height above the worst effects of the desert's periodic sandstorms.

E-Horses

E-horses are rare commodities among Nomadic Ebers—one for each 10 of the Ebers. The Nomadic Ebers rarely use E-horses for riding, but they are primarily used for moving a tribe's settlement, towing the tribe's possessions on a device similar to the Amerindian travois, but with wooden wheels, another artifact of the Ebers' technological past.

THE ROOF OF THE WORLD

The Nomadic Ebers' name for the Great Desert, "F-E-G A-D-D-F," or "Roof of the World," is an apt one. Resting atop a tectonic plate that is being pushed skyward by the converging Eastern and Western plates, the Great Desert sits at a rather high elevation which is still rising. But it is probably the clarity of the desert sky more than any other factor that has given rise to the name. The dry air above the desert is crystal clear 380 nights a year. The northern desert settlements are advantageously placed to allow the Nomadic Ebers to witness the northern aurora on many occasions, particularly during the star 82 Eridani's active periods, which occur approximately every 28 days (the star's rotational period).

While most UAR citizens and off-planet observers refer to the desert as the Great or Mid-Continental Desert, the Texans have adapted the Nomadic Ebers' name and call their home the "High Desert."



Evolution and Neurology

EBER CLOTHING

All Ebers dress similarly, in elaborate layers of loose garments. Civilized Ebers are prone to bright colors, while the Nomadic Ebers primarily wear white as a means of combatting the hot desert sun. However, even Nomadic Eber dress betrays its owners' love for color manifested in intricately patterned hems and cuffs.

While the dress of Civilized Ebers consists of varying colors, each individual garment is usually of one single hue, and a multi-colored look is obtained by combining many different items of clothing. Desert garments, although primarily white, are many times more intricately decorated than those of the Civilized Ebers. Colored thread is used to embroider pictures or writing on the Nomadic Ebers' garments, telling stories and/or identifying an individual by tribe and social role.

The writing incorporated into Eber clothing is of an ancient type retained only by Nomadic Eber handicrafters. This knowledge is jealously guarded from generation to generation, protected from changes over the ages by the most rigorous of ceremonies and pledges.

EBER EVOLUTION

Some 500,000 years ago, the Ebers were simple browsing creatures, using their long arms to gather fruit from high in the branches of trees. They were opportunistic eaters; their arms also allowed plucking eggs from nests, or reaching into burrows for small animals.

Rudimentary intelligence went hand-in-hand with these expanded dietary sources, as the improved diet improved chances of survival for those proto-Ebers bright enough to obtain it. This cerebral expansion, however, was not easy to accomplish biologically. Eber arms were their means of feeding, defending themselves, and interacting with their environment, and they were thus one of the Ebers' most important organs. The most crucial portion of the arm structure was the shoulder, allowing the marvelous arms to pivot and move dexterously; the shoulder was heavily muscled to handle the loads carried at the end of these immense levers. The early Eber brain was carried between and beneath these shoulders, protected by a small, dense, hemispherical brain case. This case was the skeletal foundation for the shoulder girdle, providing the solid fulcrum upon which the crane-like arms pivoted. Early Eber physiology struggled fitfully with the problem of accommodating increased brain size without a great deal of success. Increasing the brain case to hold the larger brain only displaced the shoulder sockets and interfered with the complicated arm movement. Since the benefits gained by a larger brain would not compensate for a drastic drop in the arms' function, these experiments soon faded out of the gene pool. Nevertheless, the stimulus to intelligence was still present, and attempts to increase brain size persistently recurred in Eber evolution, only to repeatedly run into the obstacle of the shoulder girdle.

Over the several thousand years of this genetic struggle, climatic changes opened up new areas to proto-Eber habitation and brought them into contact with the huge swamp plains of their homeworld. Located along one side of a colliding tectonic plate that was generating new highlands, large, poorly drained basins collected runoff from surrounding hills and concentrated nutrients in a deep, soft, treacherously wet peat. The plant life that thrived in these moist areas drew many animals to graze, and all were incorporated into the peat when they died. The result was one of the most concentrated sources of nutrients on the planet, and one which the stocky, pillar-legged proto-Ebers were woefully ill-equipped to benefit from. Mats of ground-hugging shrubs were heavy with berries protected by long thorns. Fruit in large stands of trees was hanging on high branches reserved for the local bird analogues. These would have been accessible to the long Eber arms, but with their great bulk balanced on thick, stumpy legs, the Ebers were unequal to the dangerous footing. Those that didn't sink into hidden shafts of black water often found themselves prey to swamp predators lurking in the thick brush or dropping from trees.

Again evolution struggled to give birth to Eber intelligence. One day an Eber was born with increased brain size, but not bought at the expense of his priceless shoulder girdle. He was a little nimbler on his feet in the mucky ground than his fellows, a little quicker to spot an approaching predator, and a little more inventive in reaching through high branches and heavy thorns. After a few generations there were more like him, better able to fend for themselves.

The secret to these Ebers' larger brain capacity was that their brains were expanding *outside* the cover of the braincase, growing new lobes through openings in the skull that had originally passed only sensory nerve bundles. Given the tremendous benefits of opening the swamp environment to Ebers, the lobe brain was a quantum leap in Eber evolution, and within a short period of time the adaptation was fixed in the population.

However, the connections of the discrete lobes to the central brain were rather tenuous, limited by the braincase openings. Weakening the braincase with further or larger perforations did not prove adaptive, as a thick skull was useful in their new, often violent environment. As previously mentioned, the skull was the foundation of the shoulder structure. Any weakening of this foundation would only reduce arm strength, strength that was becoming increasingly valuable to the proto-Ebers for lifting themselves into the trees to plunder "bird" nests and escape predators.



Analogous to the human *corpus callosum* that integrates the two hemispheres of the human brain, the nerve bundles linking the Eber central brain and lobes were simply not large enough to enable integrated functioning. This led to the lobes' developing into specialized mental organs, dividing the Eber mentation into discrete regions, and resulting in a much more compartmentalized pattern of thought and behavior than is the case with humans.

The unprotected location of the lobes was something of a problem, as they could be damaged more easily than the central brain. However, it was unusual for more than one or two lobes to be injured at a time, and since the damage was limited to discrete areas, remaining portions of the brain were able to "cross-circuit" and pick up some of the burden. In this way the rise of Eber society became a Siamese twin of increasing encephalization. Not only did increased intelligence allow the elaboration of social ties, but the importance of intelligence made the proto-Ebers even more dependent upon group support, both to raise and educate the young and to provide aid in an environment where many adults suffered some kind of debilitating brain damage during their lives. Thus, while an individual Eber might not be at full capacity in all areas—predator avoidance, swamp locomotion, food gathering, etc.—the development of social groups allowed Ebers to concentrate their individual strengths to conceal their individual weaknesses.

But as is often the case in sentient behavior, a positive orientation to one area is accompanied by a negative orientation to another. This growing Eber commitment to its local group was also manifested in greater hostility to outside groups and eventually led to the extreme, violent, and even disastrous territoriality of modern, particularly pre-Decimation, Ebers.

Thus the crucial divergence that led from the basic proto-Eber to the forerunners of modern Eber was the development and elaboration of the lobe or multipartite brain. This is not to say that the precise working of the brain has not changed. During the period discussed above, brain lobes typically shared the new behaviors: swamp locomotion, predator vigilance, new food gathering, and other behaviors adaptive to their new environment. A modern Eber has the division of labor of his brain rearranged, as the size of the lobes has not only increased, but the sophistication and density of his neural "wiring" has improved in his central brain as well as in his distal lobes. The modern Eber keeps all of his basic survival programming in his central brain: balance, autonomic reflexes, all of the tasks handled by the cerebellum and medulla in the human brain, as well as certain (by human standards) cerebral functions such as basic feeding behavior.

Most importantly, the central brain serves as a sort of clearing house for the specialized behavioral data handled by the lobes. The basic personality of the Eber resides in the central brain. In this way each Eber retains the same character even though different information is filtering from the lobes through this personality.

Clothing performs a key ritual function for all Ebers—much ritual activity involves changing dress numerous times and acting out different roles. While Civilized Ebers give each other gifts of clothing for these rituals, Nomadic Ebers not only have individual wardrobes, but each tribe also owns vast collections of costumes communally. It is these jointly owned vestments that are typically used in their rituals.

Garments are also worn as uniforms of a sort. Civilized Ebers wear blue or green when at home, white or brown when at work, and black when farming. Nomadic Ebers bear these distinctive colors only on their stoles. An Eber food gathering or hunting party wears black stoles, a war party wears red, and so on. Other colors present in small amounts on the white Nomadic Eber clothing are personal symbols or tribe colors; these are worn on the alb, surplice, and amice. Tribe colors are also carried in pennants on the tips of javelins and lances. Subchiefs and chiefs additionally have a blue band on the fly end of their tribal pennants.

CLOTHING AND PSYCHOLOGY

The reason for the importance of costume to Ebers is that Eber dress affects their psychology, as will be explained in the next few chapters. Each color represents a different function, helping an Eber to take on the necessary mind set, and to recognize the dominant mind set of other Ebers.

The colors and their meanings are as follow: Aesthetic, White; Competitive, Red; Professional, Brown; Reproductive, Green; Social, Blue; Survival, Black.

Ebers carry full sets of clothing with them at all times to allow ritual use and mind change. An Eber will not ever wear an inaccurate color. And the absence of a properly colored garment prevents an Eber from entering that lobe; the psychological power of the color itself plus its symbolism to the ritually entranced Eber permits mind change to occur and mind change cannot happen without it. Special garments exist for mind unification over a certain lobe's function. The most important is the elaborate Blood Stole, worn by Nomadic Ebers in place of the basic red stole for wars to the death.

EBER LOBE FUNCTION

Ebers have six lobes in addition to the central core. These lobes are specialized in their basic neural paths, and thus all Ebers have essentially the same division of mental labor among their six lobes, as certain lobes are formatted more suitably for some suites of behavior than others. These six lobes are typically identified as Survival, Competitive, Social, Reproductive, Professional, and Aesthetic lobes.

The Survival lobe carries data on how to locate and acquire food and other basic needs. This includes hunting, and, for the technologically more advanced Civilized Ebers, agriculture.

The Competitive lobe handles high-stress situations in which the Eber is pitted against opposing intelligent forces. Most typically this involves combat and competitive sports.

The Social lobe is where an Eber stores detailed information on how to exist in his society, and his own role in it. It is this lobe that allows more generalized group interactions than hunting, warfare, and the like. This lobe handles new learned behaviors that result as culture and society become more complicated. Commerce and trade, being essentially elaborations on individuals' relationships with each other, are handled here, as are group-oriented elaborations on other skills sets, such as military tactics and general leadership.

The Reproductive lobe is also referred to as the domestic or paternal/maternal lobe, to indicate that it is not simply concerned with the physical basics of reproduction. This lobe is the operative lobe for pair-bonded Ebers, "consorts," containing their affection and tenderness for each other, as well as concern and protectiveness for each other and their offspring. Any task devoted to the raising of young and maintenance of family bonds is stored here.

The Professional and Aesthetic lobes are together the most variable of the lobes, able to be manifested in numerous different ways in different Ebers. Clearly the most flexible in terms of storage and format of information, the difference between them is that the Professional lobe is more closely linked to survival-related work with the hands than the Aesthetic which is more conceptual, philosophic, and artistic. While it is the Professional lobe that would be involved in painstakingly fashioning a beautifully functional spear, the aesthetic lobe would be the one most likely to notice the delicate way the sun glints off it in flight.

However, the limitations of the inter-wiring between the six lobes via the central brain mean that these lobes cannot all be used at once. The average Eber can only use one lobe at a time; therefore, an Eber might not always be using the best possible lobe for a given situation and will want to change to another. Unfortunately, a certain level of mental agility is required for this lobe change, a level that most Ebers do not possess. It is the initiation of the change that is difficult: activating the different portions of the brain preparatory to re-prioritizing them constitutes a neural threshold that must be reached. Once this threshold has been reached, the rest is simple for any Eber. The most intelligent Ebers can cross this threshold on their own and can lead other Ebers in so doing. Eber society has developed a way of allowing the most intelligent to guide others through such a change—by ritualizing the mental state that needs to be achieved to reach this threshold, one intelligent Eber, known as the Initiator (C-G-G-B) can lead another Eber or group of Ebers to a point where they can finish the change on their own.

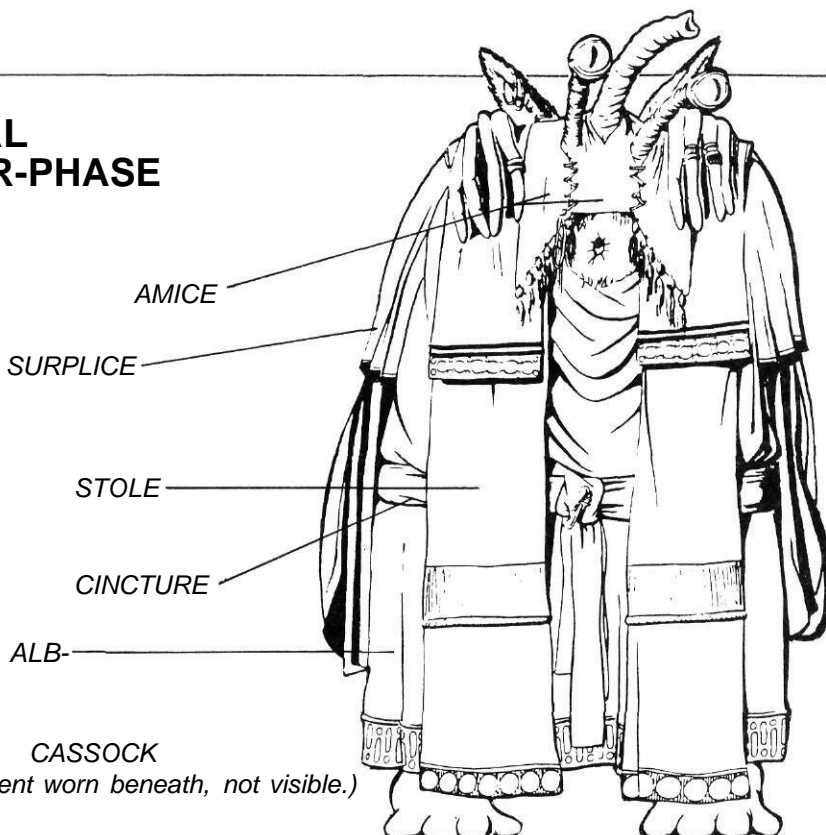
The Initiator, therefore, has the responsibility of being aware of developing situations in order to lead the others to make a lobe change. Initiators are the Eber leaders, whether tribal chiefs, subchiefs, or civilized supervisors. The Ebers have evolved a need for leaders, those with sufficient intelligence to assist the group in attaining its potential. Members of an Eber group without leaders become stuck in their current lobes, lose their ability to function, and are destroyed.

From this fact arises the tradition that when a group's leaders are killed in war, survivors of the losing group are adopted into the winning group. They do not join in order to become prisoners or spoils of war (although that is often in fact just what they become), but simply because they cannot live without Initiators.

Eber Lobe Names

Several different terms are used to refer to Eber lobes. The Reproductive lobe is often referred to as the Domestic, Parental, Husband/Wife/Consort or Maternal/Paternal lobe, and the Professional lobe is sometimes called the Economic or Business lobe by UAR Eberologists, since many Civilized Ebers use this lobe for that purpose. However, perhaps most important are the names the Ebers themselves give to these lobes.

TYPICAL NEUTER-PHASE EBER



AMICE

SURPLICE

STOLE

CINCTURE

ALB-

CASSOCK

(Undergarment worn beneath, not visible.)

MATERNAL EBER SHOWING WEAR OF COTTA



COTTA

AMICE

SURPLICE

ALB

In normal conversation Ebers frequently announce which lobe they are in, generally by phrases like, "I am speaking to you as a Warrior," or, "Hello, I am Bright Dawn, the Mother." Humans typically assume the former statement to be metaphorical, and the latter statement to be simply something announced out of pride.

Ebers might also point out the color stole they are wearing, to emphasize the mind they occupy. They might say, for example, "We are wearing black today," but to humans this merely seems odd and redundant. While Ebers also use names like "Mother," "Father," "Husband," or "Wife," they often do so because they have learned them from humans and are trying to make themselves better understood. They are especially fond of the "Husband/Wife" pair of terms since their term, "Consort," is neutral in gender.

Nomadic Ebers still use the ancient names for the lobes, terms such as Dancer (Social), Hands (Professional), Life (Reproduction), Seeker (Survival), Spark (Aesthetic), and Warrior (Competitive). These names survive from Eber antiquity, and although they are not understood by humans, they are the Nomadic Ebers' way of identifying who they are.

EBER GARMENTS

The following articles are typical of Eber dress.

Cassock: A slip-type undergarment, never publicly seen.

Alb: The primary garment, colored in Civilized dress, white with decoration in Nomadic dress. Decoration indicates tribe as well as exploits and distinctions of the owner.

Surplice: A flowing overgarment covering the arms and shoulders. Colored like the alb, this is the garment most often changed during ritual activities. Accomplished individuals will often wear a primary color here, blue for chiefs, red for a warrior, brown or white for a skilled artisan.

Amice: Not worn by Civilized Ebers, it is used by nomads to keep desert sun off the "head."

It is usually white, with a colored fringe. A garment of modesty amongst nomads, the amice is only removed inside tents among close friends or family.

Cincture: A functional belt. If an Eber is a consort, the cincture is green. The fashioning of the knot shows the number of children born with the current consort.

Stole: An article worn only by Nomadic Ebers. It is an ornamental scarf-like garment, colored according to the present activity of the individual or group, and is often changed in ritual when beginning a new activity.

Cotta: A green cloak worn during the year-long maternal period of child-bearing females.

Chasuble: A rarely seen poncho-like overgarment used only during the highest of rituals.

Eber Psychology

HUMAN/EBER INTERACTIONS

Statement by a human diplomat on Kormoran:

The Ebers are the most infuriatingly slow, plodding, anal retentive, detail-obsessed dolts I've ever had to deal with.

A statement by a Texas Ranger Captain commanding the New Austin Ranger Company:

Ebers are simply the most challenging military opponents you could ever have. Their tactical inventiveness and insight is lightning-swift. I graduated at the top of my class at West Point, and I thought I was cool, collected, and analytical under fire. But you'd think these guys take sand tables into the field with them. It's uncanny the grasp they have of a developing tactical situation. The Ebers have obviously never heard of the "fog of war."

Ebers have been described in a number of ways by humans who have dealt with them—several examples are given in the sidebars. The first problem with these accounts is that they seem mutually exclusive. The second is that they are all true. What none of these people are aware of is that they are all seeing different aspects of the Eber lobed, or multipartite, brain in action.

The easiest explanation of how the Eber mind works is to use a common human analogy. An individual can hold more than one position or role at one time and see a problem differently depending upon which role he views it from. In an extreme example, Gilbert and Sullivan's Poobah from "The Mikado" gives the Lord High Executioner varying advice depending upon his position as Private Secretary, Chancellor of the Exchequer, 1st Lord of the Treasury, Leader of the Opposition, Paymaster General, Archbishop of Titipu, and so on. Humans typically describe this as "wearing different hats." Any police officer who has had to arrest a friend has dealt with this problem; despite personal loyalty, the officer deals with the friend in his capacity as a law-enforcement officer—he is "wearing his policeman's hat." Whereas among Terrans this description is merely a metaphor for the agility of the human mind, for Ebers it describes a biological reality.

Humans...describe this as "wearing different hats."

While a human mind is able to look at a situation from several points of view in quick succession, the compartmentalized Eber mind restricts an Eber to looking at things in terms dictated by the lobe that his consciousness occupies at that time. This is an artifact of Eber evolution and the construction of the Eber brain. The six distal lobes are connected to the central brain by nerve bundles less than a centimeter in diameter. The small size, hence small capacity, of the connectors prevents the segments of the brain from all working together at once. Eber psychology is based on different social roles being divided among the separate lobes, only one of which is in active use at any particular time. Thus while the lobes are responsible for the Eber's roles as Warrior, Tribal Leader, Parent, Economic Occupation, and the like, the Eber can only serve in one of these capacities at a time.

The transfer of consciousness from lobe to lobe, depending upon which lobe is called for by the present social situation, explains the Eber ceremonial life. It takes time for an Eber to make the necessary psychological and neurochemical realignments to move the active functioning of his brain from one segment to another. Eber ceremonies are designed with three things in mind: (1) to provide time for the Eber to make these changes, (2) to assist the changes by ritualizing the physiological acts necessary to allow them, and (3) to serve as fair warning to others what an Eber's dominant mental state is becoming. If there were no way to recognize when a particular Eber is in his warrior mind, another Eber could easily be killed while trying to deal with him in a merchant mindset, for example. The ritualized passing from one mind to another helps to prevent misunderstandings and enables each party to choose the mental mode best suited to deal with other Ebers.

THE FUNCTION OF EBER INTELLIGENCE

Differences in intelligence among Ebers are manifested in several ways. The first is the swiftness with which a particular Eber can shift lobes. Highly intelligent Ebers can switch very quickly, giving them an advantage in reacting to developing situations. But ritualized shifting generally allows ample time for Ebers of average intelligence to react, especially since Eber society moves at such a typically slow pace.



A second way in which differences in intelligence are manifested involves the functioning of an Eber's inactive lobes. While a given lobe is active, the others are generally "idling," chewing away on some thought at a reduced rate of speed. High-intelligence Ebers profitably use this "down time" to solve problems in much the same way as some humans "sleep on a problem" and wake to find that their sleeping mind has solved it. An Eber can return to his Economic mind to find that it has reached a solution to some vexing business problem while he was off in another mode. One of the most famous of Eber poets had a very well developed idling mode for his Domestic lobe—during one long war his idling husband lobe worked at writing literally dozens of love poems for the consort that awaited him at home.

Another manner in which intelligence affects Eber mentation is in the utilization of idling lobes to feed information to the dominant mode. One way of describing this is in terms of the rate at which thoughts can filter down to idling levels, or percolate up from the "subconscious" to the active level. Some Ebers find that lobes brought on-line after long periods of idleness are not up-to-date on recent developments, and perhaps do not even recognize someone with whom another lobe has been dealing recently. Eber lobes can update each other as they trade places in consciousness, but this requires time to be spent in ritual, and under certain circumstances this time is simply not available.

In the most intelligent Ebers, developments from the conscious mind filter down to their idling lobes very effectively, allowing these lobes to update problems they might be working on. An idling lobe that is constantly fed new information will come "on-line" during a lobe transfer without the gaps in recent knowledge that are common to less intelligent Ebers; therefore, much less time is needed for ceremonial updating. The most intelligent Ebers sometimes seem as if they have two lobes working at the same time, so smoothly is information passed to an "idling" lobe which, after it has reached a subconscious decision about the information, just as smoothly sends that solution up to the dominant lobe.

It is in this way that military geniuses occur among the Ebers. Since each Eber can have a different division of labor among its lobes, the Professional and Aesthetic "discretionary lobes" that in another Eber might be used for artistic excellence or additional proficiency in parenting could be devoted to military concerns. A military genius would have this strategic lobe idling away, feeding him cool, analytic data even in the heat of battle. As human officers learn coolness under fire only after training and combat experience, and even then find that making decisions under the acute stress of combat is much less than ideal, this ability of certain rare Ebers to have an analytical voice in their heads insulated from the stress of combat can be devastatingly effective.

Statement by a Texan settler on Kormoran:

They're schizophrenic. Absolutely two-faced. Living where we do, we deal with the whistlers quite a bit, negotiate with them for land use, like that. You think you get to know one of them, and then bang, it's like he doesn't recognize you, doesn't remember the little things you did for him. Then next time you see him, he's back to being your friend again. You simply can't trust them.

Statement by a Texas Ranger trooper:

The injuns have got honor like humans don't even know. The human notion of honor is only a pale copy of Eber honesty. It's like they've got it genetically coded into them. If you make an agreement with one of them, he'll do this little ceremony, he'll change his clothes, he'll make you change your clothes, you stand around in the hot sun for a while, you both change your clothes again, and it's done. You'll end up doubting your own word before you'll doubt his. It's a natural law: He'll stand by you, he'll back you up.

MENTAL ILLNESS AMONG EBERS

Eber mental illness takes a number of forms. The most common is the loss of communication with certain brain lobes that occurs in Ebers of advanced age. (Incidentally, this is relatively unknown to the Nomadic Ebers, as their harsh lifestyle results in very few of them reaching such an age.) To humans this is known as Eber senility, but unlike human senility, Eber senility causes the Eber in question to lose huge chunks of behavioral responses at one swoop. The Eber could entirely forget how to interact with his family, or even who they are. What makes the problem worse is that at this stage in life, the brain has lost the flexibility of transferring mental burdens to other lobes when one has been damaged.

A less well known variation on this phenomenon is the loss of the ability to manufacture the chemicals to allow the brain to switch lobes. The brain is thus stuck—permanently—in the current lobe, with no way out. This was unknown to ancient Ebers except in freak cases, but it has become something of a problem to the modern Ebers of the Endport city-state on the eastern end of the continent. It is attributed to the native C-D-F plant, whose sap can be brewed into an intoxicating drink. Even small amounts of the drink bring about this side-effect in approximately one percent of the Eber population. Deliberate overdoses, however, produce this effect in all Ebers.

THE SIGNIFICANCE OF EBER RITUAL

As part of their ritual, Ebers wear clothing that indicates which lobe they are currently occupying. Communication between Ebers would be almost impossible if it were not for this. The most important garment for these purposes is the stole, the scarf-like garment that is the topmost component of the Eber wardrobe. These stoles are color-coded to provide clear warning at a distance which mode an Eber is in. When undergoing mind-changing rituals, stoles are removed and changed to indicate the departing mental state, the state of transition, and the new mental state. These rituals also involve chants, physical movements, and other concrete components that assist the Ebers in achieving the proper mental state.

A particularly important, though uncommon, Eber ritual is the ritual to "unify the minds." When Ebers make alliances among themselves, go to war with each other, become "married," or make other momentous decisions, they perform a ritual in which they correlate their minds to reach a common perspective on the certain issue. This unifying might range from a single Eber who is making a momentous personal decision, to a limited group in the case of a "marriage," all the way up to entire tribes or nations making an alliance or a declaration of war. While a typical Eber in his Professional mind might not remember that his Domestic mind is angry with you, when an Eber group embarks on a war, they undergo a group ritual that brings all of their lobes into concurrence on the war. The stole worn when in this state is particularly colorful and unmistakable, as Ebers in this condition are not to be trifled with. Conversely, when making an alliance the same means are used, to stamp the reality of that alliance onto every aspect of each Eber's life. While humans very often compartmentalize and rationalize their compliance to an ideal in different aspects of their lives, an Eber who has unified his minds is unable to do this. From this standpoint, the Ebers truly are deserving of the accolade, "the most honorable beings in known space."

Ritual is the means by which Ebers manage their compartmentalized minds: changing active lobes, transferring information between them, and joining members of a group into the same outlook on an issue. They are time-consuming due to the length of the actual mental processes, but they also allow most Ebers (Intelligence 4+) to participate in the procedure. Rituals are basically of two types: mind change and mind unification. These can each be further subdivided, mind change into simple mind change or mind change plus mind update, and mind unification into individual mind unification or corporate mind unification.

Rituals can also be divided into two occasions: standardized and led. Standardized occasion rituals can be performed by any Eber when certain social circumstances occur, while led rituals are those initiated by Eber leaders at a time of their own choosing.

Standardized Ritual

Standardized rituals function as default mind changes, allowing average intelligence Ebers to change minds when Initiators are not present. Standardized rituals occur at the following times:

Homecoming: When any Eber returns to his consort, tribe, or social group after an absence, the Ebers involved perform a ritual to recognize his return.

Meeting: When any Eber meets another Eber outside of its tribe or social group for the first time, or after a long period of no contact, the two Ebers share a ritual of meeting. This type of ritual does *not* occur under war conditions.

Periodic: Once every 10 Kormoran days (178 hours), at sunset, Ebers hold a small ceremony to mutually recognize the passage of another "week."

Led Ritual

When Initiators are present, led rituals become possible. Initiators, by virtue of their greater number of intercommunicating lobes, are able to be more fully aware of the requirements of changing situations, and they can then initiate a ritual to allow their social group to change its collective mind to meet a new need or threat.

The fact that led rituals exist does not mean that an Eber with sufficient intelligence and ritual skill cannot change his dominant lobe without outside assistance. Indeed, most Ebers are quite capable of performing such change, or initiating it in family and friends, as often as they see fit. The role of leaders and led ritual is merely to assist in mind change when other means are inadequate, or when a corporate agreement must be ensured.

First Mind Change

Each Eber also has one unique ritual in his life, his first mind change, which takes place with fanfare and celebration when he is 25 years old. This marks the approximate age when chemical changes take place in the brain and its function settles down into the adult mode. Before this time the juvenile's consciousness operates on a generalized level, inefficiently slipping from mode to mode and spreading memories into them all without really settling into any one of them. This first mind change also involves a special mind update, which allows the youth to sort the scrambled experiences of his childhood into his permanent lobes.

These ritual movements are not random, nor are they always the same. The Ebers Involved act out certain routines related to the ritual: Ebers changing to their Warrior lobe will act out combat activities, or Ebers unifying their minds on a business agreement may act out the enterprise they are embarking on.

The D-F Cake

All rituals begin with the participants eating a D-F cake, called a "Sugar Cookie" by the Texans. These cakes are baked from the ground leaves of a plant bearing the same name, which is cultivated around the semipermanent Eber settlements and planted at all oases. These plants contain a chemical substance that stimulates neurochemical activity in the Eber brain. This has the effect of bringing all the lobes up to higher levels of activity and preparing the brain for lobe changes. The effect has been compared to the "rush" caused to the human brain by a quick dose of sugar.

(The D-F leaf is also used in larger doses by Eber mystics to achieve higher spiritual awareness. The extremely high levels of lobe activity that these dosages give rise to can only be maintained for moments, but they represent the highest level of interlobe communications attainable. Mystics claim to gain tremendous spiritual insights during these sessions, but they are always followed by unconsciousness, and sometimes even by coma or death.)

Once the D-F cakes have been eaten, they bring the brain up to an active and plastic level, and the ritual begins. Hypnotic dancing, swaying bodies and limbs, and vocalizations help maintain the trance-like state that is necessary for changing, updating, or unifying lobes. These ritual movements are not random, nor are they always the same. The Ebers involved act out certain routines related to the ritual: Ebers changing to their Warrior lobe will act out combat activities, or Ebers unifying their minds on a business agreement may act out the enterprise they are embarking on. If an attempt is made to communicate with Ebers in this state, no one but the leaders will respond. The average Ebers in the ritual are in a state of tension, suspended between all of their lobes, not in any of them fully, but able to hear whispers of all aspects of their personality; they are in no position to respond to outside stimuli. The leaders, having greater mental control, are in a modified trance. They keep most of their consciousness in their Social lobe, so they can control the long development of the ritual, and lead the specialized chants and dances.

The dances differ between Nomadic and Civilized Ebers. Nomadic Eber rituals seem to retell old folk tales, while Civilized Ebers have adapted rituals for greater social utility. Instead of retelling old stories, they act out their contemporary social relationships, including the exchange and signing of contracts and forms, the making of acceptance speeches and so on, thus making their ritual relevant to their more advanced society. While Nomadic Eber rituals reinforce social ties, the Civilized rituals incorporate the utilitarian needs of their more complex community and additionally promote the development of new social relationships. Thus, they advance their cultural and technological development and do not remain rooted in the past.

LOW GROSS INTELLIGENCE

Another mental handicap, though not strictly a mental illness, is Low Gross Intelligence (3-). This is a severe handicap in Eber society, where the structure and timing of ritual is targeted for Ebers of average intelligence. From a social standpoint, therefore, Low-Gross-Intelligence Ebers are considered mentally retarded. On a lobe-by-lobe basis they might actually be geniuses, but shifting must be initiated one-on-one with the retarded Eber, and even then it might be almost impossible.

Mentally retarded Ebers are handled differently by different social groups. Some of these Ebers receive close attention to their unique needs, allowing them to participate in society as fully as possible. In other societies they are simply left in a socially useful lobe (typically either Domestic or Warrior) for long periods of time.

Eber Language

THE GROWLER

The growler is a device that makes low-frequency buzzing sounds that allow humans to simulate the deeper end of the Eber vocal range. The device is about the size of the human thumb, and it fits against the roof of the mouth, supported by a soft frame that is clenched between the teeth. The pitch of the growler's buzz can be raised or lowered by increasing or decreasing the pressure of the teeth on the frame.

A growler gives its user a +2 die roll modifier when attempting to speak comprehensible Eberese. Unfortunately, there is a side effect to growler use—most humans develop headaches from the vibrations after only a few minutes. The referee should determine how many minutes pass in such a conversation, and for each minute, a character using a growler must roll for the following task.

Task: To avoid headache: Difficult. Endurance. Instant.

Referee: Failure at this task means that the character acquires a -1 modifier to all task rolls due to headache. Modifiers are cumulative, so if a character fails at the task three times, for instance, he has a -3 to all task rolls. For every 30 minutes that a character spends resting, one -7 modifier is negated. Of course, medical treatment can help a character to ignore these modifiers, to a maximum of -5 modifiers.

The main Eber language, generally called Eberese, is not easily picked up by humans. This is mainly because the language is not actually pronounced, but is rather whistled like a bird song. The Eber language is voiced by modulations in respired air expelled through the Eber's trunk. Since the respiratory system is not connected to the alimentary canal, the mouth has no effect on the sounds formed with this expelled air. The tip of the boneless trunk, however, is muscular and can make fine movements to regulate air flow, thus interrupting and altering the pitch of sound as the Eber exhales. The resulting sounds can range from a high-pitched, reedy tone surprising from such a large creature, to a rumbling blast that uses the Eber's vast bulk as a resonating body. Sound can be emitted in short notes or in long modulating phrases, depending upon what the Eber is saying.

A second, emotional emphasis can be added to an utterance by the position and movement of an Eber's ears, eyestalks, and trunk as it speaks. Fear, for example, is indicated by eyestalks and ears stiffly erect and the trunk low and pushed forward in the direction of speech. Courtship communication, on the other hand, is accompanied by a slow, sinuous swaying of the five sensory projections.

HUMANS AND EBERESE

Humans experience a number of problems when attempting to duplicate Eber speech. The actual duplication of the sounds is not so difficult, many Eber words can be "spoken" simply by whistling. The lower and more powerful sounds can be made with the mechanical assistance of a battery operated "growler." Unfortunately, use of the growler is accompanied by headaches in most humans. Many humans use a growler to increase their eloquence when speaking for very short periods, making headaches less likely; but they give longer speeches, when necessary, without the aid of the device.

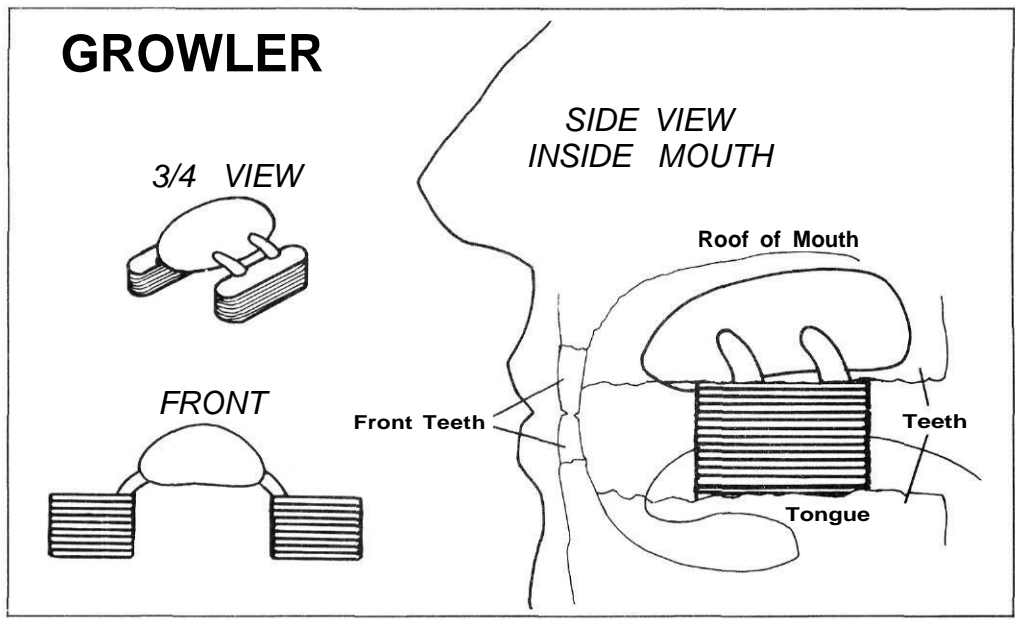
Humans also must use hand movements to simulate the Eber's emotional cues, which is difficult if a human is using his hands for something else at the time. In practice, humans only use their hands to establish the initial emotional state, then periodically reinforce that mood or demonstrate any changes in emotion as they occur.

It is extremely difficult for humans to relate Eber written language to Eber vocal language, as the only means humans have to record pitches is with notes on a musical staff.

WRITTEN EBERESE

It is extremely difficult for humans to relate Eber written language to Eber vocal language, as the only means humans have to record pitches is with notes on a musical staff. But these notes are instructions to a human reader on how to perform a vocal or instrumental task, not symbols for complicated and precise ideas. Reading musical notation for Eberese meaning would be much the same as trying to read a human speech from a voiceprint. And while reading Eber written language is not difficult, the characters provide no cues for the human to know how to "sing" the words aloud. In effect, a human needs to learn Eberese twice, once for the written language and once for the vocal. Linguists have not yet succeeded in creating a system for humans to write Eber speech in a way that captures the sound of the words as well as their meanings. Humans simply tend to think of music and language as two separate concepts, and Eber language

GROWLER



EBER HUMOR

Eber grammar consists primarily of what sounds good "musically." (But bear in mind that Ebers use the same word, 'C-F.' for both music and language—the human separation of the two concepts confuses Ebers as much as the Ebers' joining of the two confuses humans). Indeed, based on the beginning of an Eber sentence, an Eber listener can often anticipate where the sense of the sentence, the "tune," is going. Interestingly, Eber humor depends heavily on twisting or confounding these expectations. Even non-Eberese speakers can sometimes tell when an Eber joke has been told because they hear "badmusic," as if an involved, complicated tune suddenly became trite or ended abruptly on a sour note.

confounds this dichotomy. The result of this is that written accounts of Eber speech almost always appear as a human language translation.

Not surprisingly, humans with a facility for music make the best Eber speakers and linguists. This is especially evident in terms of Eber grammar. Since an Eber word is a series of notes, a well turned phrase to an Eber is one that is aesthetically pleasing from an aural standpoint. There can be many different words for the same noun in Eberese, allowing the speaker to choose one that fits in with the rest of the tune, generally defined by the verb being used.

Human handling of Eberese generally consists of standard translations of Eber words into French, English, or some other dominant human language. Insofar as is possible, the attempt is made for the English words to be close in sense, meaning, and connotation to the Eberese concept. However, some caricatures of actual Eber meaning are unavoidable. Names for basic concepts can be only rough approximations at best. For example, the deep ceremony and meaning accompanying Eber dress has reminded humans of human ecclesiastical vestments, and thus articles of Eber clothing are named cassock, alb, stole, and the like. While these "translations" (actually characterizations, given the difficulties of transferring meaning between alien minds) successfully capture the sense of meaning and symbolism inherent in Eber garments, the religious parallels they conjure in human minds are inaccurate.

For words that share common roots in Eberese, English attempts to capture the connection that makes the words similar in Eberese. A Kormoran flying creature shares the same Eberese name as shoulder cloaks worn by maternal Ebers. This cloak in English is known as a cotta. The bird analogue is so named in Eberese because of the flowing, fluttering quality of its wings, similar to the behavior of the cotta when the wearer's arms are extended. Thus, in English the creature becomes the cotta bird.

The names of Ebers is another area that gets close attention from linguists. When translating Eberese into human languages, the common denominator is meaning. The meaning of an Eber name might be "Fast Runner," "Mighty Javelin Carrier," "Bright Dawn," or the like. The difficulty is that names like these are synonymous in human minds with primitive cultures. But in actuality, over time and with repetition a name becomes simply a name, losing the connection with its original meaning. Few humans would assume that a man surnamed "Smith," works with iron or that another named "Archer" makes his living with a bow and arrows. When studying other languages, however, these ancient meanings are very evident to the student. In order to avoid patronizing human reactions to Eber names, the names are transliterated to respectable human counterparts when possible. Thus, the Eber names listed above become "Remus," "Garrett," and "Roxanne," respectively.

Task: To speak comprehensible Eberese: Eberese or one-half Linguistics. Instant.

Referee: This task should be rolled once for each concept that a non-Eber character is trying to convey. Mishaps are all variations on saying the wrong thing. They can range from humorous mistakes to serious offenses. Unintentional mild insults are common. Nomadic Ebers are fond of playfully swatting each other in response to humorous insults, and often they attempt to make humans feel less uncomfortable by treating them in the same way when they misspeak. This can be very disturbing to humans.

EBER "MUSIC": THE HUMAN PERSPECTIVE

An understandably popular sensation occurred on Earth when it was learned that there was a race that apparently communicated via a cappella vocal performances. Many human musicians and composers have made visits to Kormoran in order to receive musical inspiration. Several internationally known composers made their reputations on music inspired by their visits to the Eber.

The first and most well known of these was the American. Bradley Torgan, whose pieces inspired much imitation. Like most of these musicians, Torgan chose merely to absorb the musical qualities of Eber speech without sullying the aesthetic experience by actually learning the language. His most well known piece is called the "Dirt Symphony," so named because it was apparently inspired by a group of Ebers discussing planting conditions. The main repeated theme turns out to have been the Eber word for topsoil. Other more successful composers, including the French Antoine Naviere, British Henry Golf, and Trude Rom of Austria, are more circumspect: all are careful to have linguists review their Eber-inspired work before its release.

EBER POETRY

Eber poetry is an example of a behavior that tends to confuse human characterizations. Although the poetry is written down in order to be preserved, it cannot be experienced through silent reading, but must be read and heard aloud. Where human poetry relies on meter and rhyme, Eber poetry relies on the tonal qualities of Eber speech to make it an aesthetic experience. However, humans listening to Eberese find it hard not to think of it as singing. This is not the case, however, as Ebers use the same word, "C-E-F-E," for linguistic and melodic qualities.

The Ebers do have an analogue to music that involves instruments, but it is rhythmic rather than melodic, and the Ebers themselves do not seem to view a poetry reading any differently from the way a human would regard an exciting or moving speech. In fact, a powerful Eber orator will sound something like a bombastic Wagnerian overture, and this "eloquence" is, to Eber ears, what makes him a successful speaker. That his eloquence and grammar sound to a human ear like musical virtuosity is simply a cultural obstacle that must be overcome.

A related difficulty is the tendency to interchange the various human verbs for "speak" and "sing" when referring to vocalized Eberese. In general, either verb is acceptable, given the clumsiness of saying, "he vocalized to me." However, this can give rise to phrases like "she sang a story," which sounds odd to humans, since they make a mental distinction between singing and speaking. While it is somewhat easy for humans to think of an Eber having *spoken* something to them, any human embarking on an Eberese conversation is unable to think of what he is doing in any manner other than as whistling or singing.

HUMAN TRANSLATIONS OF EBERESE

Very few humans speak Eberese at any level approaching fluency. However, most Kormorese colonists can whistle a few useful Eberese phrases, the equivalent of "I would like something to eat," or, "Where is the latrine?" Most humans find it awkward to use Eberese words for things. An Eberese word is actually a short tune, and the human mind persists in disassociating something sounding like music from spoken language that carries a precise message. Therefore, most humans use some sort of substitute for the actual whistled sound.

Analogous Eberese

The first and most common substitute is to translate the Eberese concept into an analogous concept in the human's native tongue. This is known as *Analogous Eberese*, or AE. There are as many different AE languages as there are human languages: English AE, Arabic AE, Spanish AE, Welsh AE, and so on. In practice, however, the nationalities of the Kormorese enclaves dictate that English and Arabic AE are the only versions of any consequence. This creates some problems for study of the language, since only Arabic and English speakers can gain full advantage from research that has been done. If a Russian-speaking researcher wishes to pass on Eberese information to an Indian colleague, he must make an Indian translation of the Russian translation of the English or Arabic AE translation of the Eberese. Each step of translation reduces the accuracy a little further.

Musical Eberese

International study, therefore, is developing an alternate system. As mentioned above, the most serious study of Eberese is now being conducted against a musical background, using modified versions of the five-line musical staff to symbolize Eber words. This translation, called *Musical Eberese* or ME, is international, as anyone with musical training can read it. Unfortunately, it is useless to those without musical training; it cannot be efficiently written down in media designed for standard lines of type, and it cannot be spoken without simply speaking the original language, which defeats the original purpose of translation.

Musical Eberese has given birth to another, unofficial form of Eberese translation, *Scale Eberese*, or SE. As the Ebers pitch most of their words in the diatonic scale, a simple rendering of most words can be made using the letters A-B-C-D-E-F-G of the notes of an octave. This is just a form of shorthand, as the system does not show sharps and flats when present, nor indicate which octave the notes are in. However, it allows humans to speak an untranslatable Eber term as "F-E-F" without attempting to whistle or to translate into the cumbersome phrase "to retract one's eyestalks into their sockets."



HUMAN MUSIC: THE EBER PERSPECTIVE

Just as there were many human composers who travelled to Kormoran in order to absorb musical inspiration from the Ebers, there was an equal rush to "bridge the gap between worlds" by those who felt that the Eber's musical language and lack of musical instruments would make them receptive audiences for Earth's music.

Rarely in human history has an idea had such an unambiguous result. In every case, the concerts were unmitigated disasters. The most favorable response was from Ebers registering glaze-eyed boredom who walked out early. "These Earth people have no minds. They speak gibberish like babbling infants," was the gist of translated remarks. Rioting, however, broke out at the majority of the concerts, most recently at New Austin in 2285. On certain occasions the audiences detected insults or inflammatory language in the tunes, but more often the cause of the rioting was disagreement within the audience.

In the same way that humans insist on hearing words like "whip poor will" in a simple bird call, Ebers strain to catch meaning in musical tunes. Depending upon whether an Eber was concentrating on various melody or harmony lines, different words were detected in the human concerts. What the humans at first delightedly interpreted as Eber attempts to sing along was actually their arguing over what the humans were trying to say.

Experiments are underway in which humans use electronic synthesizer keyboards to "speak" with Ebers, although purists rightly feel that communicating with an Eber should involve as few artificial enhancements as possible. The insertion of technical means to assist in speaking with Ebers places psychological obstacles between the speakers, insulating them emotionally from each other and making real conversation difficult. Both sides, as there is a machine acting as intermediary, might sometimes feel that they are interacting with the machine rather than with a person.

Another difficulty for human Eberese speakers is that even with the growler, human sounds cannot match the depth and timbre of a huge, adult Eber. Human sounds are more like the voices of young Ebers, a point not lost on the Ebers themselves. A colloquial Eberese term for humans is "little ones," referring not to their small physical size, but to their similarity to immature Ebers. This cannot be an advantage for humans attempting to negotiate from a position of strength, although friendly relations might possibly prove simpler if Ebers think humans are "cute."

Eber Combat

EBER COMBAT TASKS

The following tasks apply to Ebers involved in combat.

Task: To hit a target with an Eber javelin at close range: Routine. Thrown Weapon. Absolute (1 action).

Referee: This task becomes Difficult at effective range, Formidable at long range, and Impossible at extreme range. At close and effective ranges, no fumble is possible. At long and extreme ranges, the task is hazardous—a Mishap means that the throwing arm is seriously damaged (1D6 months to heal); a Serious Mishap means that the arm is permanently damaged and unusable.

Task: To hit a target with a napalm gourd or stink gourd at close range: Routine. Thrown Weapon. Absolute (1 action).

Referee: This task is Difficult at effective range and is not possible at ranges greater than effective. No fumble is possible, but failure results in deviation.

Task: To convince a group of Ebers to make a long- or extreme-range javelin throw. Difficult. Leader or Eloquence. 75 seconds.

Referee: Mishap indicates that the Eber troops lose confidence in leader.

The following modifications to the **2300 AD** combat rules are necessary when Ebers are involved. Most of these modifications apply only to Eber characters.

MOVEMENT

Ebers, being larger and bulkier than humans, have different combat movement speeds than human figures do. Eber speeds (in meters per combat turn) are: *Crawling:* 2 *Walking:* 10 *Trotting:* 20 *Running:* 40

Due to Kormoran's high gravity, human movement is reduced as well, as follows: *Crawling:* 3 *Walking:* 12 *Trotting:* 24 *Running:* 50

THROWN WEAPONS

Effective Throw Range for an Eber is 24 times his Strength, in meters. 1 he Eber Javelin does normal damage with a DPV of strength divided by 20, rounding fractions down to the nearest tenth.

Thrown Gourds

Napalm gourds and stink gourds are thrown using the normal grenade rules, but they do not have a safety feature and will, therefore, do their work on their user if they happen to deviate on top of him. Ebers use these grenades to hit targets that are behind cover. Therefore, they are thrown at the last position from which eye-stalks were seen. If the throw is a hit and the target is still there, damage is done normally. If the target has changed positions, a hit is irrelevant.

MELEE COMBAT

Ebers can melee if within four meters of an opponent, twice the human melee range. When combatting other Ebers, an Eber can be at long melee range or short melee range, depending upon his weapon length. When combatting humans, an Eber may be at melee range while his human opponents are still limited to fire or thrown weapon combat. If the human opponents are within their own melee range (two meters), an Eber is always considered to conduct strikes against them at long melee range, even if he is unarmed or using a short melee range weapon.

THE EFFECTS OF DAMAGE

Ebers are so much more massive than humans that they can take more physical damage than can most humans. Therefore, Eber NPCs should be treated as taking two shock points before becoming unconscious, rather than the one shock point that renders a human NPC unconscious.

WOUNDS AND RECOVERY

Blunt or Normal damage to an Eber's head (area 1 on the hit location diagram) can cause damage to brain lobes even if it does not kill the Eber. This damage is in addition to that already defined by the rules.

If the hit only results in a shock point, one of the Eber's brain lobes is also damaged. Roll 1 D6 on the following list to determine which lobe it is: (1) Aesthetic, (2) Competitive, (3) Professional, (4) Reproductive, (5) Social, (6) Survival. Next, roll 1D10 on the Wounding chart again—a kill result on this roll means that the lobe is destroyed; a shock point result means that the lobe is heavily traumatized. A heavily traumatized lobe may resume normal functioning at a later time—to determine if it regains function or not, roll for the task in the sidebar.

EBER WEAPONS AND ARMOR

The following arms and armor are commonly used by Ebers.

Napalm Gourds: Napalm gourds are used by Nomadic Ebers and do damage as an explosion, with fragmentation but no concussion. Both contact damage (if a direct hit is scored) and fragments represent globs of burning pitch that stick to their targets, doing damage every combat turn until the fire is put out. *Weight:* 1 kg *DP:* As explosion (EP= 1) but no concussion

Stink Gourds: Fruit of a desert plant, this gourd is used by Nomadic Ebers as a grenade for "counting coup." The fur of any Eber hit by one of these is impregnated with a terrible odor, thus humiliating him while doing no damage. *Weight:* 1 kg *DP:* As explosion (EP= 1) but no concussion

Dagger: A weapon common to both Civilized and Nomadic Ebers, this dagger has the same statistics as a human knife.

Sword: 1 his long, steel-bladed weapon is common to Civilized Ebers but almost never found among Nomadic Ebers. *Length:* 100 cm (Bulk = 3) *Weight:* 10 kg *Melee Range:* Long *Melee Skill Modifier:* - 1 *DP:* 0.3

Long Sword: A longer, heavier version of the sword, this weapon is also common only to Civilized Ebers. *Length:* 150 cm (Bulk = 5) *Weight:* 15 kg *Melee Range:* Long *Melee Skill Modifier:* -2 *DP:* 0.4

Edged Pole Arm: This weapon consists of a long wooden pole surmounted by a heavy steel blade. It is common only to Civilized Eber nations. *Length:* 300 cm (Bulk = 9) *Weight:* 12 kg *Melee Range:* Long *Melee Skill Modifier:* -3 *DP:* 0.5

Javelin: This weapon is typical to Nomadic Ebers. It is constructed of wood and sometimes has a metal-clad tip, either fashioned from soft metal by the Nomadic Ebers themselves, or a harder tip purchased from Civilized Ebers. The javelin can either be used in melee combat or as a thrown weapon. *Length:* 290 cm (Bulk = 7) *Weight:* 0.9 kg *Melee Range:* Long *Melee Skill Modifier:* 0 *DP:* Strength/20 thrown, 0.2 melee

Eber Lance: This long wooden weapon is intended for use from a charging E-horse. Like the javelin, it has a metal-clad tip. It can be used in melee as a clumsy thrusting weapon. *Length:* 500 cm (Bulk = 12) *Weight:* 6 kg *Melee Range:* Long *Melee Skill Modifier:* -4 *DP:* 3 from charging E-horse, 0.3 otherwise

Eber Grapnel or Hook Spear: A common weapon among Nomadic Ebers, the hook spear is fashioned from the bulb-pole plant and is specially designed to pull gruntbuggies from their holes. The sharp point wounds them, then the hook can pull them out. The other end, based on the water storing bulb of the plant, is used filled with rocks for blunt club attacks. *Length:* 400 cm (Bulk = 10) *Weight:* 3 kg *Melee Range:* Long *Melee Skill Modifier:* - 1 *DP:* 0.3 normal or 0.4 blunt

Eber Arquebus: This primitive firearm is used only by the Civilized Ebers. *Length:* 200 cm (Bulk = 6) *Weight:* 20 kg *Action:* Muzzle loading black powder *Ammunition:* 15mm ball *Muzzle Velocity:* 300 mps *Magazine:* none *ROF:* one per 10 turns *Aimed Fire Range:* 50 m *DP Value:* 0.3

Eber Catapult: The Eber catapult finds some limited use among the Civilized Ebers. *Length:* 500 cm *Weight:* 1000 kg *Action:* Spring action or counterweight *Ammunition:* 50cm solid shot or equivalent weight *Muzzle Velocity:* 100 mps *ROF:* 1 per 40 turns *Siege Fire Range:* 700 m

Eber Bombard: Like the catapult, the Eber bombard is sometimes used by the Civilized Ebers. *Length:* 100-300 cm *Weight:* 500-1500 kg *Action:* Muzzle loading black powder *Ammunition:* 20-60cm solid or heated solid shot *Muzzle Velocity:* 300 mps *ROF:* 1 per 20-60 minutes *Siege Fire Range:* 3000 m *DP Value:* 25

Civilized Eber Armor

There are two types of armor typical of the Civilized Eber nations: chain armor, by far the more common of the two; and plate armor, generally reserved for the most powerful Eber war leaders. Nomadic Ebers do not usually use armor in battle. Notice that because of the size of an Eber torso, all of the armor listed here weighs approximately twice as much as its human counterpart.

Chainmail Vest: *Weight:* 16 kg *Area Protected:* Torso *Armor Value:* 0.1 (non-rigid) *Initiative Penalty:* - 1

Chainmail Suit: *Weight:* 30 kg *Area Protected:* Torso and limbs *Armor Value:* 0.1 (non-rigid) *Initiative Penalty:* - 2

Platemail Carapace: *Weight:* 24 kg *Area Protected:* Torso *Armor Value:* 0.2 (rigid) *Initiative Penalty:* -2

Platemail Suit: *Weight:* 45 kg *Area Protected:* Torso and limbs *Armor Value:* 0.2 (rigid) *Initiative Penalty:* - 3

Task: To hit a man-sized target with a lance from a charging E-horse: *Difficult. Riding and Melee. Absolute (1 action).*

Referee: This task assumes that the man-sized target is attempting to evade: to hit a stationary object is *Routine.*

Task: To extinguish a napalm gourd fire (*Unskilled*): *Difficult. 2 seconds.*

Referee: This task becomes one level more difficult for each napalm gourd fire hit after the first. It becomes one level less difficult for each assisting character. The difficulty can also be modified by the referee (if water or other fire-damping materials are near at hand).

Task: To regain the use of a damaged brain lobe: *Routine. Endurance. One month.*

Referee: If the task is failed, roll for time normally, but brain lobe function returns with all of its skill levels reduced by 2.

Task: To hit a building at siege ranges with a bombard or catapult: *Formidable. Projectile Weapon or Military Engineer. Absolute (1 action).*

The UAR Enclave

UAR POLITICAL CULTURE

To say that the Texans of New Austin have a hard time with the UAR is to state the obvious. The UAR's Kormoran presence evinces the single-minded determination of a people who believe that they are having a rendezvous with destiny, even if they must create it themselves.

The Terran states that constitute the UAR have a history of pragmatism that is the antithesis of the Islamic fundamentalism of Arabia, the other major Arab power. The UAR contains many practicing Moslem citizens, but almost all are of the Sunn; sect, generally less imperialistic about their faith than their Shiite counterparts. The character of UAR political culture is a strong, secular, Pan-Arabism dating back hundreds of years, and it is manifested in the best self-interested traditions of a Nasser or Sadat. Pained at suggestions that their neighbor's fundamentalism was more successful than their pragmatism, the UAR found the success of the Arabian space program particularly painful.

However, with careful, hard work, and not a little luck, the UAR managed to bring to light the existence of an alien race that was only hinted at by Arabia's discovery of ruins on Daikoku in 2249.

The UAR was only one of many latecomers to the stars, and it had little hope of breaking the virtual lock that a few major powers held on interstellar commerce. With limited resources to devote to interstellar expansion, UAR leaders knew they could ill afford an unsuccessful colonial effort. While larger powers attempted colonies in unfavorable locations, the UAR spent years conducting painstaking studies to discover a site that ensured the greatest probability of success. The year 2249 was a bitter one for the UAR: Arabia, their traditional rival, with a 10-year-old colony on Daikoku, hit pay dirt when they discovered alien ruins near that site. With this discovery, Arabia suddenly found its colony becoming a center of interest, and the funds that flowed into it as a result helped to ensure the colony's viability.

The UAR, stiff-necked and prideful, had always hidden its bitterness at Arabia's colony behind the disdainful argument that its colony had only been possible because of early Japanese sponsorship. But this facade crumbled when it appeared that Arabia had suddenly been propelled into the limelight via the 23rd century's almost faddish interest in alien cultures, living or dead. By 2251, however, interest in the ruins on Daikoku began to wane, much to the UAR's relief. When the following year saw a Texan discovery of similar ruins on Heildelshimat completely eclipse the Daikoku findings, the UAR realized that the lead the Arabians had on them was not unrecoverable. Two ruined settlements from one race meant that more were likely, and the UAR was determined that it should find such evidence of the aliens that fame could not desert it as it had the Arabian finds. Plans for planting a colony were laid aside, and the entire UAR space effort was bent toward discovering the homeworld of the aliens. In 2256 that gamble paid off. UAR contact teams discovered more than they could have hoped for when they found the alien homeworld and discovered that the race still lived among the ruined buildings of their millennia-old cities!

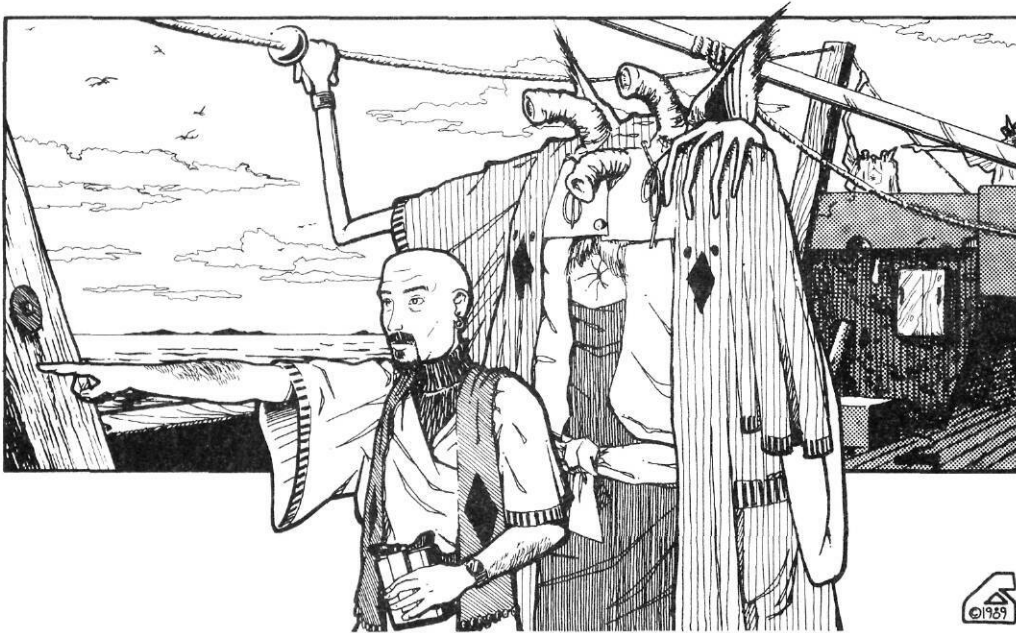
Having worked hard to gain this advantageous position, the UAR moved quickly to preserve its dominance on Kormoran. Two factors were crucial to consolidating UAR control, and the UAR used them both shrewdly. The first factor was a Manchurian resolve to prevent a recurrence of events similar to the Slaver War. The Manchurians felt that in that situation, what should have been an opportunity for them to develop a well run contact program with the Sung, turned into a circus of international interference based upon uninformed Terran public opinion. Trade with the ascendant Akcheektoon nation should have been quite profitable, but Manchuria's hand was forced by public opinion, leaving her with no alternative but to effectively destroy that most stable and effective of Sung governments.

Thereafter, Manchuria sought ascendancy over her Arm, hoping to keep the attention of other major Terran nations out of what it increasingly regarded as its internal affairs. The UAR pointed out that if access to the Ebers were restricted, this kind of attention could be avoided. However, the Melbourne Accords were clear on the equal access issue, and Texas took advantage of them to establish an enclave on Kormoran, thereby becoming the only nation with settlers on two "Eber" worlds.

It was the resurgence of Provolution on the Chinese Arm that gave the UAR a powerful case for shutting off further access to Kormoran. The fear of letting the violent terrorists gain a foothold on the Eber world led Manchuria to agree to a moratorium against further human access to 82 Eridani. Having thus gained for themselves a virtual preserve, the UAR had only to prevent the Texans from achieving anything more than a backwater desert settlement.

UAR Facilities

The UAR facilities begin in orbit around Kormoran with a belt of communication, navigation, and survey satellites providing global coverage. Expensive surveillance satellites are not yet in place. The UAR satellites are usually shared with the Texans, but Texan use is often intervened while UAR accusations against the Texans are being processed. Several UAR fighters are also stationed in orbit at the planet's interface terminal, but interstellar contact is provided by Manchurian ships.



The Nasser settlement itself encompasses almost 5000 persons, about 500 of these are transients, primarily researchers visiting from Earth. Nasser is situated right next to the Eber city of Endport, home to one of the largest fishing fleets on the eastern end of the continent. Relations between the Arabs and the Ebers of this region are very close, and the Arabs provide the Ebers with a wide range of technical and developmental assistance, including navigational assistance to the Eber fishing fleet. Because of the profit made possible by these benefits, Endport is becoming the envy of other Eber cities and nations. Over the years, Nasser and Endport have become quite intertwined socially; members of both species pass freely through either community, Arabs going to Endport for research and developmental purposes, and Ebers going to Nasser for the many employment positions offered by the Arabs. The wealthy Arabs employ many Eber servants, eager to be paid in currency that allows them to purchase technologically advanced human goods.

Ground facilities at Nasser include a scramjet take-off ramp and landing field, a seaside fusion plant, Nasser University (the center of Eberology research), a farming program in which Eber laborers are taught human techniques, and a pilot mining facility—the planet's tremendous mineral bounty allowing even minimal exploitation to pay for itself.

Secret Research

The primary reason for the existence of this enclave is scientific, although not for cultural study. The UAR hopes to rectify its status as a third-rate power by gleaning "the secrets of the Ebers." Although discounted by most scientists, the fact that the Ebers achieved starflight four millennia ago has led to a popular notion that they have some ancient secret, perhaps tied to the way they made themselves extinct on all but their homeworld. The UAR is determined to uncover this secret. The enclave's cultural observations are a cover for and an adjunct to this program, and their "tattle-tale" tendency is intended to keep the Texans from achieving a similarly productive relationship with any Eber group. The status of the Texan's Desert Railroad project is extremely distressing to the UAR, and the Arabs currently are working on plans to sabotage its development.

The UAR has discovered much about the Ebers, including the facts about their multi-lobed brains, which is not generally known by the Texans. Humans outside of the UAR research community assume that Eber ritual and recurring incidences of seeming split personalities are cultural phenomena, rather than biological. The UAR treats its knowledge as highly secret, and it is jealous of any other group which gains access to the knowledge about the Ebers that the UAR has obtained.

Knowing that Eber contact was their one chance at international fame, the UAR held on to it with a doggedness that it has maintained to this day. Ironically, the discovery of living Ebers at 82 Eridani in 2256 created a modern Islamic fundamentalist movement in the nation that is troublesome to the Republic's traditional policies. Maintaining that discovery of the Ebers was proof of Allah's beneficence to the UAR, this still-small group demands that the Republic be restructured as an Islamic state in response to Allah's faithfulness. The same group also sought to name the Kormoran enclave Allah Akbar, "God is Great." The UAR leaders responded by choosing a name that sent a dual message, a message of reassurance to their supporters and of warning to their opponents—they named the new enclave "Nasser."

Following this, the UAR worked to convince Manchuria of the importance of defending Kormoran's Ebers from the dangers of excessive human contact. With its fleets controlling the Arm's traffic, Manchuria could guarantee this isolation. The only non-UAR presence on Kormoran (other than the Ebers, of course) was the Texas enclave, and UAR officials set about making the Texans feel unwelcome. Even now, off-world supplies to New Austin are periodically interrupted while Manchurian inquiry boards evaluate UAR claims of Texan misbehavior. Pressing their advantage as the older settlement, the UAR enclave seems determined to make further Texan development as difficult as possible.

The Texas Enclave

The following extract, "New Austin, Then and Now," from Andrew Plunkett's book, *The Prairie Rose*, will serve to illustrate the New Austin settlers' fierce pride in their settlement.

NEW AUSTIN, THEN AND NOW

First-time visitors to the Texas settlement at 82 Eridani are warned to never refer to the community as an "enclave." Small though it is, the population is passionately proud of the home it has wrested from the midst of an undesirable wasteland. "It's a colony," the citizens insist, their voices giving notice that any other title will be considered an insult. The parcel of land granted to the first Texans was nothing more than deep desert, desiccated and deadly. It was a slap in the face from the Civilized Ebers, and the Texans knew it. The intransigent aliens would not refuse human colonization requests outright, but they believed that the desert would give the Texans all the discouragement they would need.

But no one had warned the Ebers that there were typical humans, and then there were Texans. With egos as big as their boasts, and with a determination that matched both, the Texans smiled politely and set about subduing the desert they had been "gifted" with. For over a year orbital surveys sought a way to alter the local weather patterns enough to bring water to the site, but to no avail. For another seven months fusion drills bored into the hardpan desert floor, but they brought no more than a trickle of moisture to the surface. In the face of this continued failure, planetary geologists became embarrassed and then furious.

... 12 May is celebrated as "Water Day," the birth of New Austin.

Finally on 12 May 2269, the impasse was broken. A quiet-spoken young colonist named Edwin D. Estes stepped forward with a suggestion that the Nomadic Ebers who had congregated over the months to watch the humans work, be asked if there were a likely spot to drill for water. With no other prospects to resort to, the directors of the Texas enclave approached the gathered Ebers and presented their question. One of the Eber elders replied that he could suggest such a location, and he led the human engineers to an unremarkable spot at the bottom of a dry basin. The engineers began to drill, and at 19:32 hours local time, the first spurt of water soon arose from the new well. The Texans whooped with delight, loaded the Eber elder with gifts, and carried Edwin Estes on their shoulders back to the main encampment.

"Easy Dog" Estes became the first governor of the colony and then served as its Director of Industrial Development until his death in 2283. Each year 12 May is celebrated as "Water Day," the birth of New Austin.

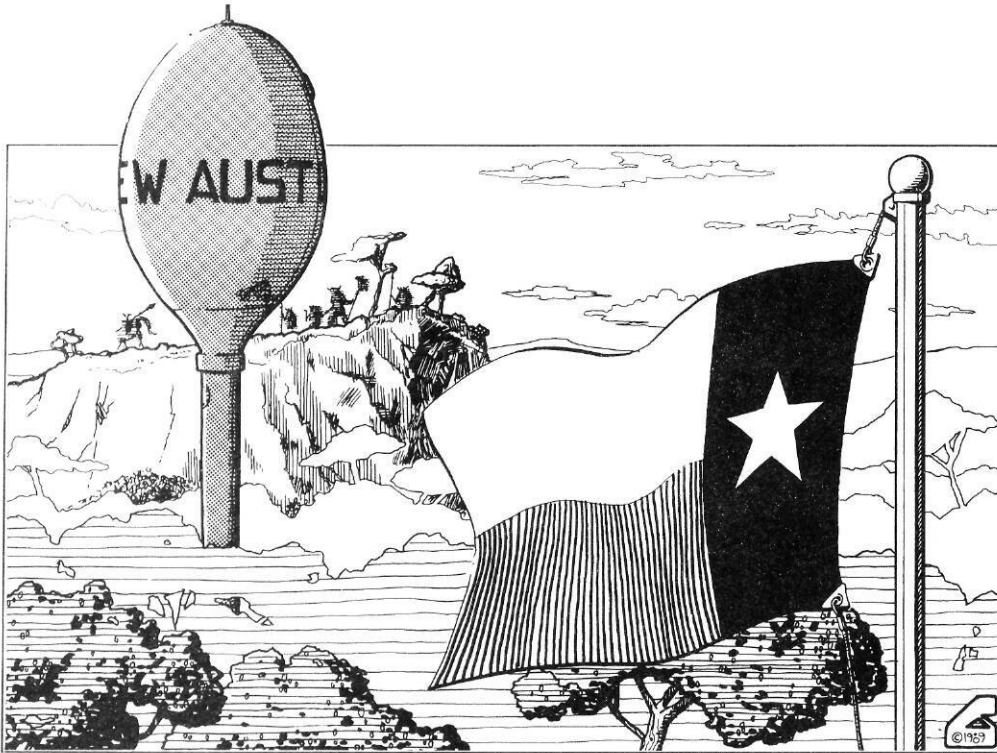
However, in the 19 months preceding the strike, the number of Texan homesteaders dropped from the original 584 to 116, some being lost to the harsh environment, some to nomad raiders, some to native animals. Those who were left honed their skills and redoubled their resolve. These hard-baked survivors formed the core and set the attitude of the developing New Austin settlement by their dogged example. But in their struggle, they found an unexpected ally from home, a symbol that they could cling to as an image of their determination and adaptability. The initial colonists had brought with them stocks of "mutationally activated" Terran seed. The harsh, parched desert destroyed almost every species that was represented, all except one unassuming wildflower that graced roadside ditches back in Texas. The Prairie Rose, *Rosa suffulta*, now evolved to a new strain known as *Rosa suffulta+* (Sol III/82 Eridani IV).

These hardy bushes sprawled a bit under the 1.46 G, and they produced smaller, drier fruit, but the prickly stems and deep pink and yellow flowers clung to the gravel by the walls of the human shelters with a fierceness that mimicked the determination of the Texans themselves.

INTERSTELLAR TAXONOMY

The vast number of alien species discovered by humans in the interstellar age has unleashed a storm of taxonomic controversy. The first part of this dispute concerns the issue of how to classify species native to other planets. Early explorers insisted on naming creatures things like *Canis Barnardis* ("Barnard's (Star) Dog"), implying that they are hereditarily related to members of the Terran genus *canis*. Unfortunately, the principle of priority made it difficult to stamp out this bad nomenclature right away; conflicting claims for classification had to be reviewed by the scientific community. While not all disagreements have been ironed out, it has at least been agreed that: (1) No phylum, class, order, family, or genus name can be duplicated, and (2) All binomial names must note parenthetically the planet on which the organism evolved.

The second bit of difficulty involves classifying Terran Stock that has adapted to life on other worlds. The *Kormoran-adapted Prairie Rose*, often designated *Rosa suffulta+* (Sol III/82 Eridani IV) is one example. Under this modified system, the *Rosa suffulta* denotes Terran stock, the "+" indicates the artificial genetic augmentation, and the parenthesized designation names both the original biosphere and that in which the strain developed.



In later years, extensive irrigation allowed virtually any plant to grow. But when in 2274 the community of New Austin chose a symbol to embody the dogged qualities that had allowed it to survive to its fifth anniversary, it chose the Prairie Rose, the only Terran organism that had clung to life alongside its human hosts.

Modern New Austin

The past 27 years have seen the New Austin enclave swell in population to almost 3700 Texans. There are now six high-capacity water pumps supplying the communities needs; in fact, Texas well-drilling expertise is now so reliable that one Civilized Eber government is depending on them to sink wells that will support the construction of a rail line across the Great Desert. The Wild Ebers near New Austin have come to accept the Texans' presence, and while some tribes have formed treaties with the Texans, many individual Ebers have come to live alongside the humans and learn their strange ways.

Recent reports of growing unrest among the Ebers in the southern desert are unsettling to the Texans, but few Texans doubt that they will see their way through this challenge as they have every other.

Looking at a photograph of the Texas flag snapping in the breeze above New Austin, there is little to betray the fact that the former desert is not a Terran prairie. The higher gravity is the primary difference in the environment, and as it is not directly visible, the eye is drawn to the mutationally activated Terran grasses and shrubs that have taken quite well to the irrigated soil. The higher gravity results in different slopes and ridge configurations than exist in one G, but only a trained eye notices these. The overall feel, once acclimated to the gravity, is that of a place very similar to the colonists' Texan home. That suits the colonists fine, for although they live 20 light years from Terra, they view themselves as Texans nonetheless. Sometimes even after years of acclimation, Terran bones can still awake in a 1.46 G field and feel abused, a Terran tongue can taste wheat grown in alien soil and feel lost, Terran eyes can glance at a sun some few hundred degrees cooler than Sol and feel chilled. But these settlers have one thing that no Terran Texan has had in over 400 years—a love for the land that one only gets by shaping it with one's own will and labor.

Some 80 members of the original settlement group still survive in 2301, but they are not the sole custodians of the pride that burns in those who made a garden of a wasteland with their own hands. Every New Austin Texan shares fully in this legacy, for they are still aliens in this new home, Terran-born aliens who must depend on their joint Terran-ness to maintain this purgatory as a paradise.

MUTATIONALLY ACTIVATED SEED

Colonists need to be able to grow food that they can metabolize. The easiest way to achieve this is to raise Terran crops, but Terran organisms cannot always thrive in alien environments. In an effort to provide a solution for this problem, the University of Nebraska at Omaha developed Mutationally Activated Seed (MAS) for use by ESA colonists during the mid-22nd century. This seed had been slightly irradiated to increase the number of mutations in the DNA. This gives the seed a greater statistical chance of possessing advantageous characteristics for a new environment even before being planted in that new environment. It was theorized that natural selection in the new environment could proceed more rapidly with the diverse genetic material. While surviving strains must be tested to see if they are still edible, the process has improved plant adaptivity. MAS is still in use on many worlds, even though it is rapidly being replaced by seeds enhanced with Pentapod-designed symbiotic bacteria.

THE COMMUNION OF SENTIENTS CHURCH

The Communion of Sentients Church (typically called the CommSent Church) is a body devoted to the idea that all sentient beings are reflections of the Holy, and that all sentient races must come together in peace as a single community to discover the secrets they each hold of the Divine Truth. While virtually everyone agrees that this is a marvelous idea in an abstract sense, in practice it has proven less than efficacious. Attempts have been made to join humans with the Pentapods, Kafers, and Ebers, and the interactions thus far have typically ranged from embarrassed indifference to outright violence. Critics of the CommSentients movement maintain that it actually exacerbates differences between the races by bringing them into such close contact that they cannot help but be offended by each other. Others point to the maiming of the CommSent delegation by the Kafers as proof that some races might not reflect anything divine.

Whatever the final verdict will be concerning the CommSent Church, it is currently alive and well on Kormoran in a settlement 30 kilometers north of New Austin. Led by Father Dinardo, it boasts a population of over 100 humans and Ebers. Dinardo labors under much criticism, notably that his group offers sanctuary to a number of undesirable, even criminal, members of both human and Eber communities.

NEW AUSTIN AND THE UAR

New Austin is home to 3700 hardy Texas colonists. Although the settlement is already 32 years old, its physical facilities are much less developed than one would expect for that age. This is due to the control that Nasser, the UAR colony, has over human involvement on Kormoran. With Manchurian agreement, Nasser has enacted a virtual moratorium on Kormorese development, ostensibly in the interest of protecting the re-developing Eber nations as well as preventing Provolution access to the planet. While these purposes have admittedly been served, there is a widespread awareness that UAR regulations are as much for the self-serving purposes of UAR aggrandizement as for any other reason. It is undeniable that despite the UAR's claim to be protector of the Ebers, its own growing power often has adverse effects on the aliens.

The strong position of the UAR means that the Texas enclave must depend upon the UAR for satellite time, orbital facilities, and even, in a way, for supplies, since Terran shipments are often delayed while Manchuria investigates UAR accusations of improper Texan activity. Being dependent upon the UAR orbital terminal means that Texas' six *Shillelagh*-class fighters have to share these facilities. Naturally, being dependent on the UAR results in losing access to spare parts, maintenance, and fuel at all of the worst possible times.

The UAR satellite net is also available for use by Texan ground stations, but generally only when it suits the Arabs. For orbital interface, the Texans have nothing but a dry lake bed a few clicks away that serves as a rough scramjet field, but as local facilities consist of only a temporary control tower and some fuel trucks, no such craft can be permanently based there. Most visitors and new arrivals to New Austin are forced to take the scramjet down to Nasser Aerospace Port and hop a VTOL Propfan out to the Texas enclave.

New Austin, then, has remained arrested in the farming mode of colonial development. The numerous prospectors that live there are reduced to a lot of hand-and-pick work, as the obtaining of more technological mining equipment seems very far away. Despite this primitivity, the Texans are able to mine sufficient raw minerals for their own modest manufacturing base, but not enough to allow exports. Unable to export either manufactured goods or raw materials, the Texans are basically left with only agricultural exports to pay for the technical and electronic equipment that they desire from Earth. Because of its emphasis on agriculture, the enclave's layout is basically sprawling fields interrupted by occasional clusters of buildings.

NEW AUSTIN AND THE NOMADIC EBERS

The Texans' great expertise is in the drilling of wells. New Austin is currently supplied by six wells, and it will soon be sinking more to support Black Sky's new desert railroad. This well-drilling talent has also served as a bargaining tool of sorts with the Nomadic Ebers—there are several new artificial oases in the desert, drilled by Texans to cement treaties with previously hostile tribes.

The Texans' great expertise is in the drilling of wells.

However, the Texans still have some difficulty with the Nomadic Ebers; many tribes frequently send raiding parties to plunder a few groceries from the bountiful Texan fields. While this is an irritant to the Texans, harsh experience has taught them that firing on the Ebers invites UAR retribution, and that is much worse than allowing the raiders to run off with an armload. Some fatalistic farmers even load up a wagon-full of fresh produce and place it at the edge of their fields, reasoning that this way the raiders will not trample their crops. Most Eber tribes, for their part, no longer threaten the lives or non-produce property of the Texans, although exuberant parties of warriors sometimes send hundreds of stink gourds raining down onto the farmers. A call to the Texas Rangers quickly brings a trooper with a grenade launcher full of Mk II stink grenades, and the Ebers disperse, beaten at their own game.

This practice of almost paying tribute to the Nomadic Ebers, provided that they do not damage other crops or harass the farmers, is a compromise situation that works pretty well. However, there are still tribes from the deep desert, north or south of New Austin, who have not been

acquainted with the compromise. Every two months or so a tribe fallen on hard times will send a desperate party of emaciated warriors to raid the Texan's fields. Aggressive Ranger patrols seek to prevent these occurrences, but nonetheless, half a dozen Texans a year fall to Eber javelins.

NEW AUSTIN AND THE GREAT DESERT

Aside from the limited availability of water, the Great Mid-Continental Desert is an unusually fertile place. The site of New Austin is actually the center of a great run-off plain, or playa, thousands of square kilometers in area. While it is strange to see in a desert, New Austin is ringed by flood-control levees and criss-crossed by drainage channels to prevent flooding during the severe rains that occur once every year or two. These floods wash eroded minerals down into the basin, and they collect at the surface as the water evaporates. Previously deposited minerals are even drawn back to the surface by capillary action as water is drawn up by evaporation. The result for New Austin is some of the most fertile soil in existence, heavily laden with soluble phosphates and nitrates, just waiting for irrigation to help it explode into life.

Elsewhere in the Great Desert, however, harsher conditions prevail. The erg, or constantly shifting dune seas, wash back and forth, sometimes exposing serir, the hardpan desert pavement. Rising above these features are strange wind-blasted shapes, formations of harder minerals left when softer rock eroded away.

Dust storms can tower up to several thousand feet, obscuring vision and confounding weather-proof seals....

Besides marauding Eber bands and sharpshooting gruntbuggies, the Great Desert also has storms to throw at patrolling Rangers. Dust storms can tower up to several thousand feet, obscuring vision and confounding weather-proof seals, filling everything with a fine dust that quickly destroys machinery. All Rangers are issued compact Navpacks, tuned to a grid of transmitters in New Austin that can triangulate the Ranger's position no matter how disorienting the storm. But other machinery can still be defeated by the dust, requiring a tow back to the Ranger garage.

Getting caught in a sandstorm can be incredibly dangerous. Although the long-term erosive effects of wind-blown sand in Kormoran's desert is insignificant much more than 30 centimeters above the ground, local gusts can blow it much higher than that for short periods of time. Unprotected delicate equipment, including such things as perimeter sensors and alarms, is quickly destroyed by these storms. Vehicles and other heavy machinery are somewhat more resistant but will succumb eventually to repeated sandstorms. To combat the effects of seasonally shifting sands, New Austin has erected several concrete barriers to block the drifting, wind-driven dunes. In severe winters these barriers are often overcome by sand drifting up and over them, so the colony has a small force of bulldozers to clear away the bases of the walls each day to prevent accumulation.

DESERT WEATHER TABLE

For each four-hour period that a group spends travelling through the Great Desert, roll 1D10 and consult the table in the sidebar. Whenever a modified 7 or better is rolled, further weather checks should be conducted every 30 minutes until a clear result is reached again.

The Effects of Storms

If a character is caught without filter mask and goggles in a dust storm, he receives one stun point every five minutes until he reaches cover or the storm subsides. A character caught without shelter in a violent storm suffers one stun point every two minutes that he is so exposed. If character loses consciousness in a sand or dust storm additional stun points become shock points, reflecting respiratory damage.

DESERT WEATHER

1D10	Result
1	Clear
2	Clear
3	Clear
4	Clear
5	Clear
6	Clear
7	High dust storm
8	High dust storm
9	Violent sandstorm
10	Low sandstorm

Clear: The desert sky is clear and there is virtually no wind.

High Dust Storm: An approaching sand storm creates winds that carry dust from ground level to nearly 100 feet in altitude, blocking out the sun and making breathing difficult. Filter masks are required to avoid stun damage. Add 2 to the next weather roll.

Violent Sand Storm: A sand storm has developed, blocking out the sun, making breathing difficult, and even causing stun damage to exposed figures. Shelter is required to avoid stun damage. Add 3 to the next weather die roll.

Surface Sand Storm: Subsiding winds blow sand and dust to a height of about one meter. Goggles and filter masks are desired for comfort. Add 1 to the next weather die roll.

The Texas Rangers

THE RANGER BADGE

The Texas Rangers wear no particular uniform: they have never had one. Instead, they dress comfortably for whatever role they are currently filling: a business suit if assigned to a large city or blue jeans, a loose shirt, and a leather vest if patrolling a country frontier. One unwritten law, however, is that all Rangers wear leather boots and a western-style "Cowboy" hat with all outfits.

The Rangers' one and only sign of office is their badge. Once made of solid silver, stamped from old Mexican pesos, the Ranger badge is now cast with identity-coded microchips incorporated to prevent counterfeiting. The three Ranger ranks, Private, Sergeant, and Captain, are also identified by the badges. Privates wear a basic silver badge, while sergeants wear the same badge with "SERGEANT" inscribed across the open area. Captains wear gold badges with "CAPTAIN" inscribed in the open area. All Rangers display their badges prominently on the front of whatever they are wearing.

Some organizational customization of badges is allowed, such as the addition of a unit's company designation across the open area. On Kormoran only Private William Gabresi has done this, wearing the legend "CO 3A" on his badge. Colonial Rangers wear their own distinctive badge, as seen on page 13 of the **2300 AD** Director's Guide.

The Texas Rangers had their genesis in the 1820s as Stephen Austin's "Ranging Companies" of Indian fighters, but they were not organized into their present single force until the Texas Revolution of 1835. Seldom numbering over 500 at any one time, and spread very thinly over Texas' borders with Mexico and the Indian nations, the Rangers very early earned the hallmark that would follow them throughout the future—they were always out-numbered. As time passed and the reputation of the Rangers spread, this mystique became a source of strength.

A frequently repeated story featuring the revered Ranger Captain W.J. McDonald goes a long way toward describing this Ranger mystique. During the late 1800s, a Texas town was threatened by a rioting mob. The mayor called the Texas Rangers for help. Shortly thereafter, the mayor was met at the local train station by a single Ranger. "What? Where are the others? We need a whole Company!" the mayor exclaimed. To which the Ranger replied, "You've only got one mob, and I'm one Ranger. Let's go."

Fighting only a handful at a time against foes that numbered in the scores or hundreds, Rangers adopted a policy that would hold them in good stead for a century of frontier fighting: Always attack; audacity nearly always pays off. Each time a small band of Rangers vanquished a larger opponent, the legend of the Rangers grew, making it that much easier the next time for the Rangers to gain a crucial morale edge over their enemies.

The legends of Ranger Captains Jack Hays, Samuel Walker, Ben McCulloch, "Rip" Ford, Bigfoot Walker, and Leander McNelly set continually higher standards that both raised the *esprit de corps* of the Rangers and elevated the fear with which their enemies regarded them. The Rangers were known for a ruthlessness that bordered on racism against their Indian and Mexican enemies. An outnumbered force like the Rangers could not sit defensively; it had to pursue, dominate, subdue, and set examples. Among the Mexicans the Rangers became known as *los diablos sangrientos*, "the bloody devils." But this fearsome reputation often allowed the Ranger to accomplish his task with force of will alone, with few men and without recourse to bloodshed.

Following the Civil War this tradition was carried on as well against their fellow Texans—the Rangers closed down the wild frontier. Their assignment was to first restore order, and then restore the law. This period saw the Rangers using the *ley de fuga*: Many criminals in this chaotic period were recorded as "killed trying to escape" or "shot while resisting arrest."

Entering the 20th century, the Rangers were moving more and more into the status of state police rather than their former role as state army, cavalry, police, and peace keepers. However, the term "State Police" conjured images of carpetbaggers and the excesses of Reconstruction in the minds of all Texans. After 1874, the term would never again be heard in Texas, as the Rangers took over these duties while retaining certain of their traditions. They were non-uniformed, and each supplied his own clothing, weapons, and transportation. And even after coming under the aegis of the Texas Department of Public Safety (DPS) in 1935, their numbers always remained small: They had earned their status as an elite force, and as such they remain. Drawing their recruits from the cream of the DPS Troopers, the Rangers filled their small ranks with only the most competent, accomplished, and experienced officers available.

Even by the end of the 23rd century, the Rangers still retained much of this organization: Ranger Companies were defined by geographical regions, each commanded by a Captain with the assistance of a Sergeant, with a total of perhaps 20 privates. A colony might have more than one company depending upon its area, with the senior Ranger officer for a planet holding the rank of Major.

Currently, the Texas Rangers are administered by the Texas Department of Public Safety headquartered in Austin, Texas. All Ranger operations are commanded by a single Ranger Colonel.

The force on 82 Eridani consists of a small company of Captain, Sergeant, and seven Rangers. However, this force can be augmented under various DPS provisions enacted to allow planetary Ranger forces to swell or reduce their ranks in response to local situations without resorting to the cumbersome and administratively expensive transfer of personnel. This system allows colonial companies to do local recruiting for varying periods of renewable enlistment, and it is roughly



RANGER JURISDICTION

As part of DPS regulations, the Rangers are not allowed to initiate their own investigations but must be called in by local sheriff's departments, or by the DPS's own Criminal Law Enforcement or Traffic Law Enforcement Divisions. On Kormoran, however, the local frontier conditions call for a combined roll of standard law enforcement and armed international peace-keeping, replicating the traditional Texas Ranger commission from centuries before.

The essential flexibility of the Rangers led to the establishment of a new Ranger Company, 3A (3 for the third Texas colony. A for the first jurisdictional region on that world) to be the primary DPS organ on Kormoran. While other DPS personnel can be assigned to support 3A on an as-needed basis, they report through Captain Lawson rather than through their normal chains of command.

The company receives its orders and appropriations ultimately from the Republic of Texas government, but for realistic purposes they respond to New Austin's governor as an on-the-scene representative of the Texas government.

The blue, white, and red Ranger Pennant flies over the Ranger's New Austin headquarters alongside the flags of Texas and New Austin, as well as from the whip antennae of all Ranger vehicles.

equivalent to deputizing troops into the planetary Ranger Company, although not, strictly speaking, into the Texas Rangers proper.

Deputized troops are designated as Colonial Texas Rangers, which most citizens do not realize are any different from official Texas Rangers. Colonial Rangers actually form the bulk of Ranger forces on any given planet, allowing the Texas Rangers to retain their coveted small size and elite status while still maintaining the capacity to field large forces when needed. While not officially considered Texas Rangers, the Colonial Rangers are trained by the Ranger Sergeant of each Company, and so are indoctrinated into the proud traditions of this almost 500-year-old force.

By now, the Rangers on Kormoran have returned full circle to the role played by the original Rangers of the 19th century—serving as internal law enforcement within their area of jurisdiction, plus the role of border patrol and paramilitary force, holding off the forces of a wild frontier through aggressive and creative patrolling. For the Texas Rangers of the 24th century, Captain McDonald's maxim is as true as it was 400 years before: "No man in the wrong can stand up against a fellow that's in the right and keeps on a-comin'."

Ranger Company 3A

RAWLING REDBIRD

Some say that only Texans remember how to make a real pistol. Although benefiting from modern metallurgy, the Rawling Redbird is a piece of iron in the old Texas style, with a "9-inch" barrel, and chambered for ".44 magnum." Somewhat cumbersome for most civilians, the long barrel is valuable in the hands of those who know what they are doing, and the powerful cartridge is handy for law-enforcement types who do not want to be out-gunned. In response to questions about the disadvantage of the Redbird's small magazine size and the difficulties of reloading, Rangers respond, "Boy, if you know your job, you don't need your gun to do it for you." Type: 11.2mm magnum revolver Country: Texas Weight (empty): 7.6 kg Length: 38 cm (Bulk = 0) Action: Single shot Ammunition: 11.2x38 mm fixed cartridge ball Muzzle Velocity: 600 mps Magazine: 6-round cylinder Weight of 6 rounds in reloader: 0.2 kg ROF: / Aimed Fire Range: 700 meters Area Fire Burst: 3 rounds (AFV=0.25) Area Fire Range: 50 meters DP value: 0.9 Price: Lv400 (Lv 5 for box of 100 rounds)

In 2301, Texas Ranger Company 3A is a small unit consisting of seven Privates, one Sergeant, and a Captain, reinforced by 12 members of DPS's Traffic Law Enforcement Division. The latter reinforcements have only been on Kormoran for a few weeks, having been sent in response to forebodingly increased levels of violence among Eber tribes south of New Austin. The Texas Rangers, a lean organization, could not transfer any actual Rangers as they are already spread out in essential positions elsewhere, but Company 3A is additionally reinforced by a growing body of volunteer Colonial Rangers, recruited from New Austin's farmers.

THE RANGER OFFICERS

Company 3A is led by Captain Dwight Lawson and Sergeant Julian Ramirez, two individuals who have repeatedly demonstrated their expertise in leading Rangers.

Captain Lawson

In command of Ranger Company 3A is Captain Dwight Evan Lawson. Born in 2264 on Austin's World, Lawson emigrated to Earth at 18 in order to enlist as a DPS trooper, seeking selection for the Rangers as soon as possible. The driven young man's rise was rapid, and he was early recognized as future Captain material.

Following his initial tour on Kormoran, Lawson requested extension and then permanent assignment to Region 3, becoming the DPS authority concerning the Ebers. He gained his knowledge through close personal contact with the Red Rocks, a tribe of Nomadic Ebers, and especially through a friendship with one of their young sub-chiefs, an Eber named Lynn. Lawson and Lynn became Arm partners, and this bond became the basis for an alliance between the Red Rocks and New Austin, the first of its kind. This alliance was instrumental in preserving New Austin through the violent period of its development and led to further Eber treaties and agreements.

Although accused by some in the DPS as having lost his perspective and "gone native," when it came time to replace the departing Captain Gabriel in 2294, Lawson's extensive expertise made him the only real choice. While this meant jumping young Lawson over the heads of some other officers, Gabriel's lack of success in difficult Eber relations led the selection board to the conclusion that in this case it needed to modify its selection criteria. Lawson's deft handling of the 2295 New Austin concert riot the following year silenced most of his critics. Although some would consider it a failing, Lawson is proud that he has never had to kill a Nomadic Eber.

Lawson is quiet, and something of a loner, tending to stand apart from those around him. His Rangers are nonetheless devoted to him in spite of his reserve, and they trust his judgement implicitly. Lawson is not fond of his first name, but none refer to him as anything but "Captain."

Captain Lawson is an Elite NPC in Law Enforcement. He is Mentally Oriented.

NPC Motivation Results: *Spade Ace:* Lawson is a charismatic natural leader who draws others to him and inspires extreme loyalty. *Heart King:* He is scrupulously honest and his word of honor is his absolute bond. He has contempt for liars and anyone who breaks his word.

Sergeant Ramirez

Captain Lawson's second-in-command and administrative and training officer is Sergeant Julian "Ram" Ramirez. On Kormoran since 2287 and Company Sergeant since 2292, Ramirez is the prototypically competent NCO. It is Ramirez who actually does the nuts-and-bolts running of the company, but he gladly gives the credit to Lawson. Where Lawson's expertise is a keen grasp of local and Eber affairs, Ramirez knows all the bureaucratic ins and outs of modern law-enforcement, and the two have made a crack team since Lawson's appointment in 2294. Originally in the Republic of Texas Army, Ramirez joined the DPS at 20.

Ramirez is a Veteran NPC in Ground Military and Law Enforcement. He is Physically Oriented.

NPC Motivation Results: *Heart Queen:* Ramirez is devoted to the safety and well being of his troops, and he would willingly sacrifice himself for them, but only if he is not of more use to them alive. *Club 7:* He is aggressive and accepts violence as a means of solving problems.



30MM PROPELLED CHEMICAL STINK GRENADE

The 30mm propelled chemical stink grenade is a high-rate aerosol dispenser that creates a cloud of persistent, noxious (to Eber senses) gas 10m in diameter. Any Eber in this zone becomes a social outcast for 2D6 days. DP: As explosion (EP=1) but no fragmentation Price: Lv6, manufactured locally

THE RANGER PRIVATES

The other Kormoran Rangers are all Veteran Law Enforcement NPCs, with a Physical Orientation and additional Primary Skills of Combat Rifle and Recon, as well as Related Skills of Leader and Tactics. The Texas Rangers' high standards (of 12.5 million Texans, 174 are Rangers) are reflected in the expertise of these troopers. The names of the Ranger Privates are Private Robert Kitchens, Private Wanda Krafft, Private Sean Luongo, Private Willie Hobert Mitchell III, Private Chuck Riley, and Private Stafford Taylor. One additional Ranger, Private William Gabresi, is on independent assignment and not available for use in the adventure.

THE HIGHWAY PATROL

The 12 State Troopers recently arrived on Kormoran were selected for tolerance to High gravity, and for firearms expertise. Leading the detachment are Sergeant J.W. Riggs and Corporal Robin Bond. Riggs and Bond are both Mentally Oriented, Veteran Law Enforcement NPCs. The other 10 State Troopers are Physically Oriented, Experienced Law Enforcement NPCs.

RANGER EQUIPMENT

(Note: Equipment listed in this section is drawn from the **2300 AD Adventurer's Guide**, the **Equipment Guide**, and the sidebars in this book. If the referee does not have the **Equipment Guide**, some of the items listed will be unfamiliar and can be replaced with other items.)

Each Ranger traditionally equips himself as he best sees fit, from clothing to weapons. However, in the interest of smooth functioning on a planet far from Earth, most of Company 3A's equipment is standardized. Under normal peacetime conditions, each Ranger has the following equipment at his disposal: Respirator, sun goggles, light intensifying viewer, infrared viewer, FarSeer, criminology kit, spinner, a Quinn Optronics Restraint Carbine, GW-9 40mm Grenade Launcher with Mk II Stink Grenades, and a pistol. The pistol can be any of three types: the Hancock 923, the Traylor 57 "Chip Traylor Special," or the Rawlings Redbird. Not all of this equipment is carried at the same time, but each Ranger has it all at his disposal.

In addition, the Ranger headquarters building has the following equipment available as needed: fuel station, burrowvarg trackers, Terran German Shepherd guard dogs, handprint analyzers, voice analyzers, Foraline gas (which does not work on Ebers), "J" electronic surveillance bugs, laser ears, EFR imagers, and two Skyhopper jetpacks.

Additional equipment is available in case of war, as detailed in the Lock and Load chapter, including the Wu-Beijing Type-79 Assault Rifle, the standard rifle of Company 3A.

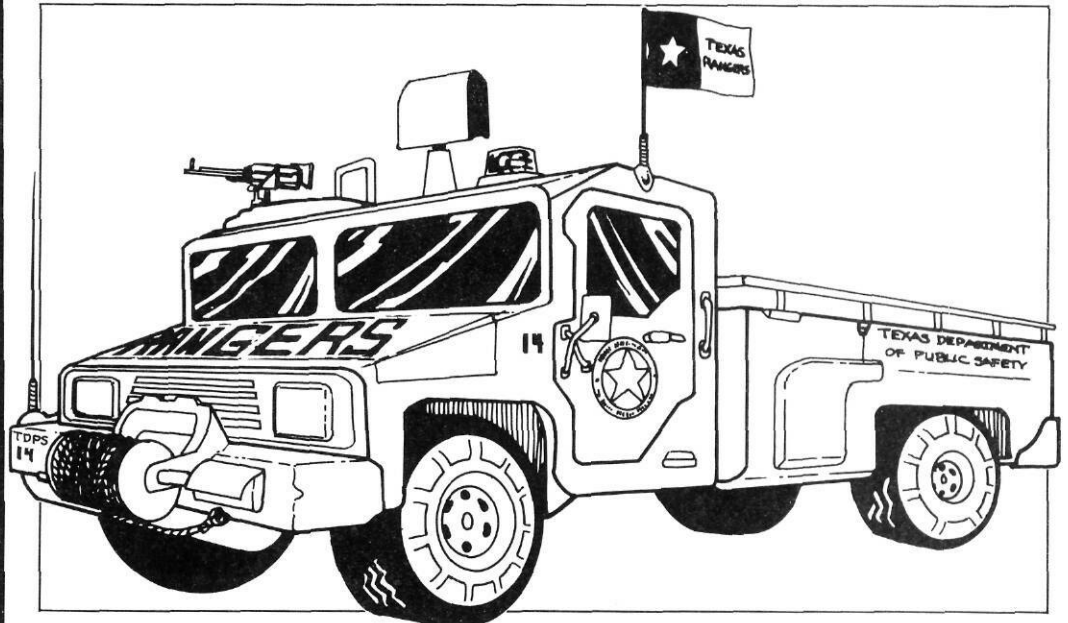
ALL-PURPOSE FIRE EXTINGUISHER

An all-purpose fire extinguisher can be used on chemical, electrical, or normal fires. Each extinguisher has three separate CO₂-propelled packets of fire retardant powder. Weight: 5 kg Price: Lv35 for disposable, Lv50 for rechargeable, Lv10 per 3-charge refill

Task: To extinguish a fire with a fire extinguisher (Unskilled). Routine. 3 seconds.

STANDARD EQUIPMENT

All trucks contain a vehicle communicator, 12 flares, two fire extinguishers, 30 man-days of compact rations, vehicle maintenance tools, a Medkit with four refills, a PortaComp, a radiation detector, and a water purifier. All but the ambulance also carry excavation tools, a climbing kit, an auto-grapple, an inertial map, an electronic repair kit, and battle radar. The command version carries a computer station, a tight beam uplink, and two EFR Imagers as well. The Utility and APC versions also carry a shotgun mike, and a tent, in addition to racks for six rifles and up to 1632 rounds of Type-79 ammo and 90 grenades. The ambulance carries two light automeds which run off the engine, and two extra Medkits with 8 refills. A utility truck may also be fitted with a 700 kg fuel bladder with refueling hoses in lieu of passengers.



RANGER VEHICLES

Following a request in 2282, DPS began looking for a new type of vehicle for use by Company 3A on Kormoran. After testing numerous possibilities, several vehicles were sent to New Austin for final evaluation. The Houston Motors Rangestar 8 emerged as the winner, but the Rangers demanded modifications, notably the addition of armor and a larger engine to compensate for Kormoran's high gravity.

Rather than being built from the mild alloy of the Rangestar 8, the new vehicle's body was constructed from armor plating, saving the weight of bolt-on plating, and retaining the same basic shape as commercial bodies. Ballistic cloth curtains were installed in the cab, as was bullet-proof glass.

The new engine was designed to provide the equivalent mobility of the Rangestar 8, even considering the vehicle's armored body and Kormoran's higher gravity.

Additional modifications included larger, rigid-wall, run-flat tires, the adding of numerous grab-rails around the bed and cab, a blue rotating light atop the cab, a siren and public address system, and a ring mount suitable for attaching a light machine gun or auto grenade launcher above the passenger's side of the cab. The rear bed of the vehicle was designed to accept modular pallets—the Rangers currently use ambulance and command vehicle modules. The final vehicle design was dubbed the "Ranger Rider" and was delivered in 2283. Since then 36 more have been produced.

In 2293, the Rangers requested an armored personnel carrier model for operations against Eber raiding parties. A new rear body was specified, being constructed of thicker sloped armor to resist the Eber javelins, which can penetrate thin armor at close range. This model also features a shield for the ring-mount weapon (although that weapon can also be fired remotely from within the cab by a servo connection), eight vision blocks and firing ports in the rear compartment, and a roof hatch in the rear compartment for indirect fire from under armor. The cab windows have armored shutters, and the driver's seat has a set of periscopes that run through the roof of the cab.

At present, Company 3A has 14 Ranger Riders divided into four APCs, two ambulances, two command vehicles, and six open-bed, light utility versions equipped with an automatic grenade launcher and ground surveillance radar. *Type:* Cross-country light truck *Crew:* Driver and gunner *Weight:* 1100 kg *Armor:* *Suspension:* 0.3 *All Faces:* 1.5 (3 on APC) *Signature:* 2 *Evasion:* 2 *Cargo:* 4 passengers and 300 kg cargo *Max Speed:* 120 kph *Cruising Speed:* 90 kph *Combat Movement:* 250 m *Off-Road Mobility:* Halved *Power Plant:* 0.17MW hydrogen fuel cell *Fuel Capacity:* 100 kg H₂ *Fuel Consumption:* 5 kg/hr *Endurance:* 20 hr *Price:* Lv6500

The Black Sky Rail Line

Although sea travel is more efficient and economical for long-distance trade among the Eber nations, winter ice on the Kormorese continent's northern coast and terrible summer storms in the planet's equatorial sea often make such travel unreliable. In addition, inland city-states must resort to over-land travel just to reach the ports, and thus have an impetus to develop improved forms of land travel.

One Eber city-state with a particular incentive in this area is Black Sky. Black Sky is located at the west end of the Civilized Eber nations, on the eastern half of the continent, and is cut off by the Great Desert from other cities of Civilized Ebers on the west coast. Compared to its sisters to the east, Black Sky it is a relative backwater of Civilized Eber society, its importance in raw material production notwithstanding. If it were able to gain greater access to other nations, Black Sky could trade its mineral abundance for improvements in quality of life for its citizens.

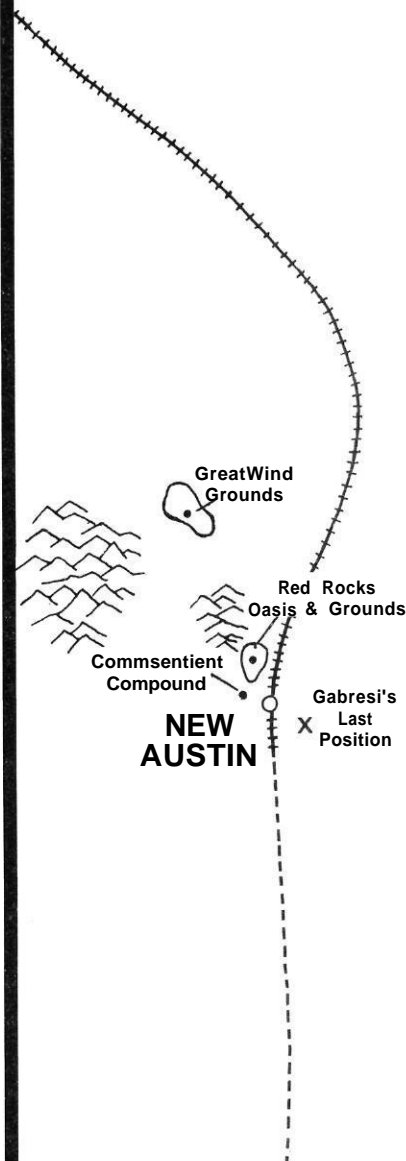
[T]he rediscovery of steam power has resulted in Eber production of a UAR-designed steam locomotive.

The UAR has established one program intended to assist Civilized Eber nations in developing new applications for their indigenous technology, and the rediscovery of steam power has resulted in Eber production of a UAR-designed steam locomotive. This is the most basic and simple incarnation of steam engine technology, intended to function within the Eber's limited mechanical and technical expertise. Sustained speed is only 55 kph along iron rails, and even then only on very limited inclines.

Black Sky hopes to replace its "Sun Trail" caravan route to the Southern Capes with such a system, but the roughness of the Sun Trail route prevents the limited locomotives from operating on this path. The only option left open to the northern nation was to lay the proposed railroad across the Great Desert itself. While trailing cars can carry a supply of wood for the firebox, the locomotive's inefficient boiler requires refilling approximately every 500 km—a difficult problem to overcome in the desert. Having learned of the Texans' developing expertise in drilling wells, officials of Black Sky approached the Texans to negotiate the drilling of a series of wells every 500 km along the path of the proposed railroad. The New Austin government, seeing in this a wonderful chance to break the UAR monopoly on relations with the Civilized Ebers, agreed immediately. In order to guarantee the deal, New Austin even offered to provide security for the railroad against possibly hostile Nomadic Eber tribes. (It was decided that with the addition of a set of retractable steel wheels, Ranger Riders could patrol the rail line itself if periodic side tracks were laid to allow the trucks to pass or be passed by Eber trains.)

Construction on the Black Sky rail line has recently commenced, and it is proceeding from three points. The northern end of the line was begun at Black Sky and is steadily stretching toward the southwest. The southern end of the line is progressing northward from its point of origin on the southern Capes. Work is also progressing toward the northeast from New Austin. Black Sky has plentiful iron resources for the project and is making good progress, but with Texan technical assistance the segment extending from New Austin is growing most quickly, having reached a length of 1 800 kilometers to date.

Unfortunately, as some of the planners feared might happen, the Nomadic Ebers of the Great Desert are becoming restive, particularly in the deep desert south of the Texan enclave, presumably because of this impending intrusion on their territory. While hostilities have not occurred against the humans yet, there have been uncharacteristic attacks in the Capes and even wars among the Nomadic tribes themselves. The Rangers are on watchful alert, well aware that the situation could quickly turn dire.



Starting the Adventure

Task: To find Gabresi's truck tracks: Routine. Tracking or Reconnaissance. 1 minute.

Task: To find Gabresi's spent shell casings: Difficult. Tracking or Reconnaissance. 2 minutes.

THE RED ROCK WEDDING

The Nomadic Eber wedding that the PCs are invited to involves all members of the Red Rocks, with chieftain Lynn serving as the master of ceremonies. First the marrying couple approaches Lynn, who gives them several articles of clothing, which they then pass to each other. Lynn then gives each a small biscuit (a D-F cake), which they eat from each other's hands. Each then goes to a separate tent where they change into their new clothes. While they are changing, the rest of the tribe consumes some of the biscuits, then they also go to their tents and change clothes.

There are two primary paths for players to enter the adventure in this book. One is through the transfer of pre-existing player characters from other campaign areas; the second is by creating new player characters already living in the Texan enclave colony on Kormoran, or serving with the Texan Department of Public Safety elsewhere. Each path holds several options.

A SLEEPY BILLET

Many players already have well established characters who have, perhaps, spent time fighting Kafers on the French Arm. The word is being spread throughout human space that things are heating up at New Austin, and the Texas DPS is seeking reinforcements for the Ranger Company there. Experienced Kafer fighters are especially desired. If such player characters are private citizens or mercenary troops, the DPS will recruit them as Colonial Rangers, provided that they are successful characters of good standing, perhaps even renowned heroes. It is possible, of course, that the PCs do not have such a glowing reputation. If, for example, they "screwed up" their last job, or spent some time in jail for a particularly drastic blunder, they would hardly be prime candidates for service with the Rangers. However, the serious circumstances developing on Kormoran require the DPS to obtain new forces with some haste, so such players characters might be hired without a careful background check.

If the characters are active-duty members of other national armed forces, Texas will take them for temporary exchange duty on Kormoran. This allows Texas the added bonus of sending its best officers to gain Kafer-fighting experience on the French Arm. Whatever the details of the agreement, the *referee* should describe the Kormoran assignment as a soft job after the PCs' Kafer War experience. The primitive, shaggy Ebers cannot be much trouble compared to the well equipped, savage Kafers, can they?

PC Rank

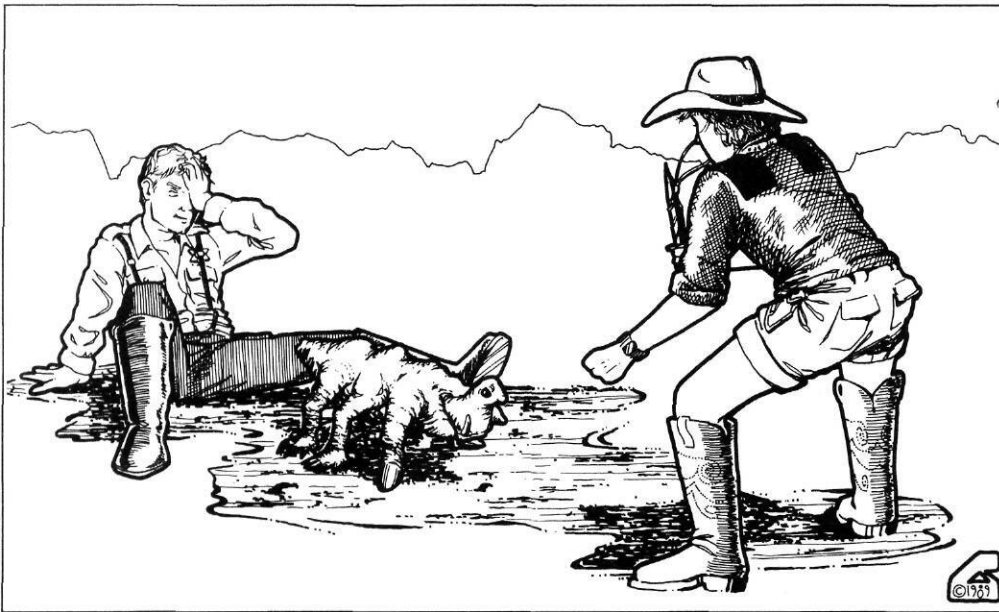
Player characters who are not in an official armed service, but who have particularly valuable talents or experience, can parlay their expertise into a Lieutenancy with the desperate DPS, allowing them to be higher in the Ranger chain of command. Alternatively, the PCs can bargain with the DPS as a group and designate one or two of their members as leaders who must receive Lieutenancies as part of the contract package. Exchange-duty PCs will automatically be given courtesy rank as Lieutenants in the Colonial Rangers, placing them beneath only Captain Lawson, as befits their position as representatives of a foreign government.

DEFENDING HOME AND HEARTH

If the players desire, they can play through this adventure with new characters who are part of the New Austin settlement. Such PCs can be one of two types: (1) farmers, prospectors, or other citizens who sign up to be Colonial Rangers, or (2) members of the Texas DPS Highway Troopers who have been sent to Kormoran to fill out Ranger Company 3A's ranks. In either of these cases, such PCs will become troopers under the command of Captain Lawson and Sergeant Ramirez, in the standard Ranger organization. If this option is taken, the *referee* must see to it that at least one member of the players' group receives a Lieutenant's position, so that the group has control over its own destiny and is not under the command of Sergeant Ramirez.

INITIAL DUTIES

The first portion of the adventure is a relaxed, business-as-usual period, intended to familiarize the players with their characters' surroundings before the balloon goes up. If the PCs are new to Kormoran, these activities can be presented as guided tours to familiarize the characters with their new duty station. If they are newly deputized Colonial Rangers, they will be taken by Sergeant Ramirez on some dry-run training missions to give them a taste of their jobs. (If the players play pregenerated Rangers, these activities will soon be their actual duties. The referee will need to familiarize such players with Kormoran so that they can effectively portray long-time residents.)



Setting the Stage

The dry-run missions should include a few particular episodes, as described below.

One of the missions should be a trip to see the work being done on the Desert Railroad to the northeast of New Austin. Under the guise of learning how to protect these new facilities, the players will be shown the rudiments of operating the very basic steam locomotives, including refilling the boilers at the Texan-built wells that are the foundation of the enterprise. After this, all players will be considered to have a skill level of zero in Primitive Rail Vehicles.

On a second mission, the PCs should have to answer a complaint from a farmer that a large gruntbody has taken up residence in his fields. The players will need to root the gruntbody out and kill it, thereby learning first-hand how to deal with the creatures.

A third mission involves a visit to the Red Rocks Nomadic Eber tribe as part of a perimeter patrol and good-will visit. During this visit, the PCs or their Ranger guide will exchange pleasantries with Lynn, the Red Rocks Chief, and discuss reports of inter-tribal conflict deeper in the desert. The chief has heard rumors of this trouble, but he has no hard information. Lynn invites the Rangers to stay for a "C-B-A-G-D-D-C" taking place that afternoon. After some discussion, the players learn that he is referring to an Eber wedding. This will allow the PCs to see an intricate Eber ritual as well as realize the special relationship that the Rangers share with the Red Rocks. They are also invited to stay for the celebration which follows the ceremony, a time of feasting and contests of skill and strength, including, among other things, javelin throwing and E-horse riding contests.

The final introductory mission is simply an orientation visit to the Communion of Sentients Church compound north of New Austin. In preparing for this trip, the PCs will first be given a rather cynical briefing of the difficulties caused by the existence of the compound and its stubborn leader, Father Dinardo. (See the next chapter for precise details of the visit.)

The Kicker

Just after visiting the CommSent Church compound, but before arriving back at New Austin, the PCs are ordered by radio to investigate the disappearance of a missing Ranger, Private William Gabresi. Private Gabresi was out scouting alone, and he has missed his last two position reports. The players are directed to proceed to his last position (Point 1 on the New Austin map), where they find his truck's tracks (they must roll for the task in the sidebar). Following those tracks, the PCs come to a spot where the tracks are churned up, and they find several pistol-sized spent sabots (they must roll for the second task in the sidebar). The tracks continue beyond this point, but the PCs cannot follow, because they receive a radio call to return to the compound.

When everyone returns, they gather together and perform complicated dancing maneuvers, with chieftain Lynn and the marrying couple as the center of attention. Tribe members occasionally retire to a tent to change clothes again and return, bringing new sets of clothes for others to wear. The dancing is accompanied by the ethereal whistling and trumpeting of Eber speech.

The entire procedure takes about three hours, and to humans it is rather boring. Each hour the PCs must attempt the task below to keep from falling asleep during the ceremony. Eventually the ceremony ends, the Ebers all wave their arms and whistle in their form of applause, and the humans are invited to join in the celebratory feast.

Task: *To maintain attention at an Eber wedding: Difficult. Determination. Instant.*

Referee: PCs who succeed at this task each hour will notice that the Ebers often seem to be pantomiming familiar tasks, like hunting, fighting, waving imaginary javelins, or riding invisible E-horses.

The CommSent Compound

FATHER AMERIGUE DINARDO

Born on Earth in 2253, Father Amerigue Dinardo initially pursued a career in the field of astronomy, which led to an interest in xenobiology. During his study, Dinardo was struck by the ways in which life evolving on very different worlds had so many of the same concerns and interests. This realization led him to the new Communion of Sentients Church. Dinardo entered seminary and studied for years before being selected to head up the new CommSent mission on Kormoran. His preparations for the post included a jack-of-all-trades education designed to ready him for colonial life.

Although misunderstood and disdained by many members of the Texas settlement, Dinardo is admired by nearly all who actually meet him, and he is an inspiring leader to his followers. His values are simple: All life is sacred, unique, and precious; and it is important to concentrate on what unites all life rather than on what divides it.

Dinardo is an Experienced Academic NPC with an emphasis on Anthropology and a Mental Orientation.

NPC Motivation Results: Spade Ace: *Dinardo is so impressive in person that even previous enemies are often won over when they actually meet the man.* Heart Queen: *He loves all life so deeply that he unquestioningly would give up his own to save another's.*

In this chapter, the PCs visit the Communion of Sentients Church compound on Kormoran. Their first visit is a chance to get to know the compound's charismatic director. Their second is an emergency call.

THE FIRST VISIT

When the PCs are taken to the CommSent Church compound (see New Austin Map), they meet Father Amerigue Dinardo, a thoroughly unforgettable individual. The Rangers have some problems involving wanted criminals who suddenly adopt a convenient piety and join the CommSent community, so the PCs have been assigned to talk with the Father concerning one such individual. During this conversation, they will have the opportunity to discuss his philosophies with him.

The PCs will find that Dinardo is not the naive Pollyanna they might have assumed him to be. On the contrary, he is a magnetic and powerful leader, who fairly explodes with the force of his convictions. His argument is persuasive: The intelligent races will not find unity in cautious half-measures, but only in bold, courageous acts of commitment to the reality of Universal Truth. He is painfully aware that he is often a patsy for cynical criminals, but answers "They are not mine to treat as I like. They are God's, and only God can know their worth. It is not my place to turn away any of His children." Perhaps most telling to the players is Dinardo's acceptance of his probable fate. Dinardo admits that his pacifistic beliefs may well require him to die, but he responds that, "We all have to die. But at least I'll die believing in something."

While they are at the CommSent compound, Dinardo takes the PCs on a tour. He shows them classrooms where human and Eber instructors are teaching English and Eberese to children of both races, and he leads them through fields where humans are teaching agriculture to Ebers and they both are growing crops for the joint community. During this tour, the PCs will also note several of the human criminals they came in search of. These individuals cast furtive glances at the Rangers and seem relieved when they are not apprehended.

One of these criminals is wanted for the recent murder of an Eber as part of an unsuccessful E-horse swindle. When the PCs leave the compound they will notice a few Ebers, relatives of the murdered individual, keeping careful watch while encamped on a ridge overlooking the compound.

After the tour, the PCs should leave the compound with mixed feelings. They should be impressed with the successes of Dinardo's program, but equally apprehensive about the compound's future.

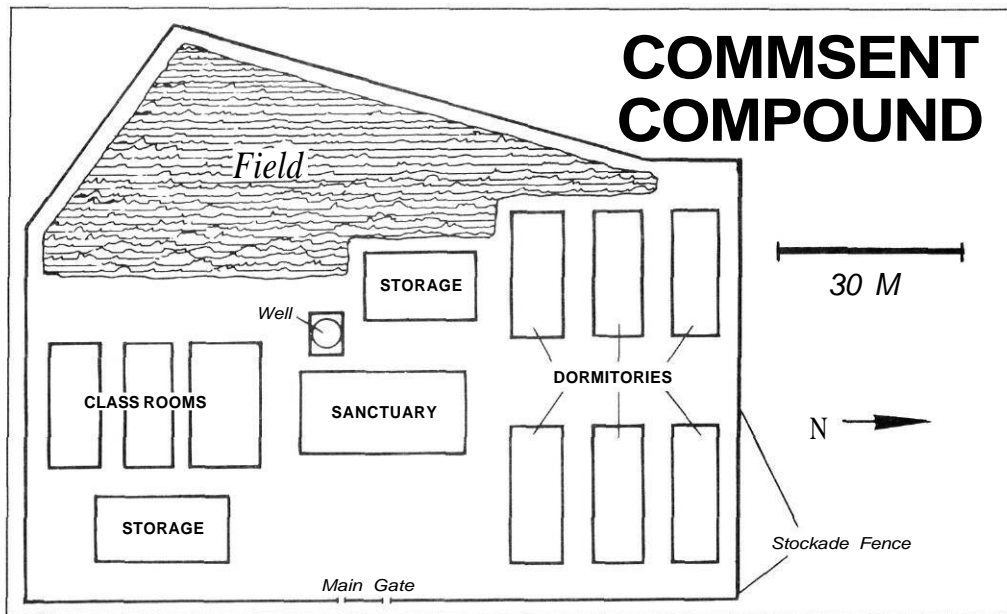
A RETURN TO THE COMPOUND

Several days later, the PCs, along with Sergeant Ramirez and a few others, receive a call that there is trouble at the CommSent compound. This marks the beginning of the adventure campaign proper, and takes place after the preliminary episodes have all been completed.

When they approach the site, a smudge of smoke on the horizon is the first indication that something is amiss, and closer approach shows a few scattered fires among the compound's wooden buildings. There is no sign of life within the area.

Outside the open front gate the PCs discover the first bodies. Most are holding makeshift weapons: wooden clubs, a shovel, and a hoe. All of these bodies are human, and they each show signs of disfigurement. Each body has been stripped above the waist, and their upper chest and shoulders are deeply cut and torn open. Inside the gate, the group discovers even more horror. The ground is littered with odd shapes that are revealed to be pieces of bodies. If the referee desires, the PCs may have to make a Determination check to enter the compound.

A search of the compound reveals nothing but more dead and dismembered bodies and a few smoldering fires, the result of napalm gours. There are also numerous holes straight through the heavy stockade fence and building walls. Examination will reveal a few damaged javelins lying inside the compound, evidence that it was these weapons that made the holes.



Task: To find the Eber trails: Routine. Reconnaissance or Tracking. 3 minutes.

Referee: Success at this roll will reveal two trails, the first of a very large party headed deeper into the desert, and the second of a raiding party, about 20 Ebers strong, headed for New Austin.

PCs who make a Routine roll against intelligence will notice that only the humans who had been fighting (identifiable by the fact that the bodies have weapons nearby) have the strange shoulder mutilations first seen outside the gate. Sergeant Ramirez can inform the players that this is a ritual mutilation called, in SE, "D-A-D-A," performed on dead Eber warriors. None of the dead Ebers, all CommSent Ebers (no tribal bodies are found), have these marks, although they are mutilated in other ways. The same is true for human bodies that have no weapons nearby. Apparently only those who did not fight back were dismembered. Strangely, the clothing from those stripped above the waist is nowhere to be found.

Finally a sound is heard over the crackling fires, a sound of incoherent grief. It is Father Dinar-do, walking numbly through the carnage, somehow unwounded. He recognizes no one and cannot speak, except to groan inconsolably, but he can be led unresistingly away.

After they've absorbed the shock of the carnage, PCs with any tracking skills may notice two sets of obvious Eber and E-horse tracks leading away from the compound (roll for the task in the sidebar). One set heads back into the desert where there is a cloud of dust just over the horizon. The other leads toward New Austin.

If the PCs immediately head after the second group in their Ranger Rider, they will fall upon the rear of an Eber raiding party just as it is about to attack a Texan farm house (see New Austin map). If, instead, they delay at the compound to discuss the matter, or if they attempt to pursue the group heading deeper into the desert, they will receive a call ordering them back to New Austin to fight the raiding party, but the six Texans in the farm house will already be dead when the party passes it.

The Eber Raiding Party

There are 18 Ebers in the raiding party, and when the PCs catch up to them, the Ebers will be taken by surprise. Three of the Ebers are mounted on E-horses, the rest are on foot. All are armed with four javelins, six napalm gourds, and a hook spear; the mounted members additionally each have a lance. The mounted leaders are Experienced NPCs; the others are Green. Upon being attacked, the Ebers will turn to face the Rangers, and the leaders will charge with lances, preferring the Ranger Rider as a target.

The PCs are armed only with their Stink Grenade Launchers and pistols. After about five minutes, 10 Colonial Rangers (Green NPC's, armed with SS-7's, FC-70's, and Traylor Model 10's) will arrive from the south.

After the battle, a search of the Eber bodies will reveal them to be wearing unusually dark red stoles. These are very heavily ornamented, unlike the usual red stoles Nomadic Ebers use.

D-A-D-A MUTILATION

The Nomadic Ebers' ritual D-A-D-A mutilation is intended to free the mind of a warrior from the constraints of its lobes in death. The mutilation is performed on those who died fighting in their warrior mind: it involves the cracking of the skull and the stirring of the brains together, thus uniting them for eternity. This performs the dual service of allowing the dead to carry their full skills into the afterlife for their own benefit, and also keeps the afterlife from filling up with single-minded warriors who will torment the other dead souls. Ebers assume that humans have the same needs and provide the same service to them on their deaths.

Lock and Load

A PEP TALK FROM THE SERGEANT

This is what it's like to go to war. And I know what you're thinking. If you think this is going to be fun, you're wrong. It's going to be lousy. And if you think it's not going to be any fun, you're still wrong. It's going to be worse than that. Take a look around. Some of the people you're looking at are going to be dead in a few days. Appreciate them while you can. If they're going to live, it's up to you to see that they do.

Always remember, you're a Ranger, and that's the best there is. There ain't no one can stop you but another Ranger. When possible, avoid killing, but remember that us and ours is always more important than them and theirs. Make Texas proud.

The armory is open now, so form a line to the right and pick up your weapons.

After the conclusion of the fight at the farmhouse on the northern outskirts of New Austin, it will be too late for the PCs to pursue the north-bound group of Ebers into the desert. Also, now that a serious threat to New Austin has been established, it is imperative that the Rangers prepare for war and set out to bring it to a speedy conclusion.

REARMING

The first order of business is to bring the company up to a war footing by breaking out the lethal equipment from storage. In addition to the equipment the Rangers already had, the following items will be issued to each Ranger: one helmet with heads-up display, one rigid breastplate armor, one medkit, five doses of Herc drug, and an M-2 assault rifle with 10 magazines.

In addition to equipment issued on an individual level, other lethal weapons will be released on the unit level from stocks stored at the headquarters. This equipment includes two Type-81 Storm Guns with 100 clips, three Rockwell 12-81s with 100 clips, 600 rounds of lethal 30mm ammunition, eight Type-381 LMGs with 160 clips, four autogrenade launchers (treat as a GW-9 with ROF 10 and a 30-round box of belted grenades), and 50 antipersonnel mines (see the sidebar for details on these mines).

For simplicity's sake, the *referee* can assume that each Ranger Rider carries six rifles with eight clips of appropriate ammunition plus the cab-mounted weapon, an LMG with 1500 rounds or an autogrenade launcher with 60 rounds, at no loss to cargo capacity.

DIPLOMATIC DIFFICULTIES

For the civil authorities, the first order of business is to get word back to Texas of the developments on Kormoran so that emergency measures can be taken. However, the UAR enclave, which controls all orbital systems and off-planet access, has already cut New Austin off from the satellite net, as is usual during these situations. Instead of allowing the Texan enclave to get its own messages out, the UAR has issued the following communique: "It appears that a state of open warfare now exists between the Texas enclave of New Austin and the tribal Ebers. Further cooperation with the settlement is being withheld pending inquiries into the Texas intemperance which surely precipitated this tragedy. The reinforcements requested by the New Austin government will not be permitted to land on Kormoran, in order to prevent a barbaric final solution to this latest Texan outrage."

The next Manchurian warship is scheduled to pay a call at Kormoran in 20 Kormorese days, on 20 June, Terran Calendar. The matter is to be submitted to Manchurian arbitration at that time. In the meantime, the governor of New Austin has ordered the Rangers into the field to prevent, and if possible and necessary, to preempt any thrusts at the enclave itself. The Rangers' secondary mission is to gather information and attempt to discover what has caused the war.

THE RECONNAISSANCE FORCE

The player characters, of course, are chosen as part of a reconnaissance force to determine what has precipitated this sudden war with the Nomadic Ebers. The composition of the force will vary, based upon the talents of the PCs. The referee should round out the reconnaissance force to about a dozen individuals, with the player characters being chosen first, then adding full-fledged Rangers, and finally supplementing the group with DPS troops or experienced Colonial Rangers with their private weapons replaced by M-2s. Of the headquarters equipment stocks listed above, no more than one-third of this total may be taken, as the remainder is needed for defense of the enclave itself. Role playing between the players and Sergeant Ramirez may allow the PCs to take an additional Rockwell or Storm Gun if the *referee* judges that they present a persuasive argument.

The reconnaissance force will be riding in five Ranger Riders: one command, one APC, one ambulance, and two utility types. All are outfitted with their basic equipment, plus whatever other equipment the players can get and fit aboard.

The group will be commanded by both Captain Lawson and Sergeant Ramirez. Orders from the governor are that the group is not to include any of the several dozen settled Ebers who have volunteered for Colonial Ranger duty, as they may be unreliable or traitorous under the circumstances. Lawson disagrees with this belief, but he has been overruled. Father Dinardo, who, though silent, has been present with the group since his rescue, requests to go along in the ambulance, and Captain Lawson agrees to allow it.

The force is given a chart of ID codes listed for each day to be used in transmissions to and from Ranger Headquarters. Any message not using these codes will not be authenticated.

INITIAL SWEEPS

Captain Lawson is disturbed by the Eber bodies that were examined after the abortive raid on New Austin. They were obviously not members of a nearby tribe—the cut of their clothing identifies them as being from the "Great Wind" tribe, located some 200 km to the northeast of New Austin. Another surprise is that despite the distance they had to cover to reach the area of New Austin, most of them were on foot. But most disturbing is the fact that they were wearing dark red stoles.

If the PCs ask about these stoles, Lawson explains, "Those are their Blood Stoles. Those aren't like the red ones. The Ebers have to exercise their brains every once in a while, so they go out and throw some melons at each other. But the blood stole isn't worn very often. It means all-out war, and when the Ebers put their heads together on something, they're hard to stop."

As he leads the reconnaissance group out, Lawson insists on no contact with Eber groups during the search. The group's mission is to establish where the tribes are at and where they are going. As an aiming point, Lawson leads the group along a generally northeastern path toward the Great Wind home grounds. Each vehicle's crew is to watch carefully by ground surveillance radar and FarSeer, looking for signs of Ebers on the move so that the humans can inspect them from a great enough distance to avoid being attacked. In order to reduce their own dust cloud signature, the humans are to travel at 20 kph, instead of their vehicles' maximum cross-country speed of 45 kph.

If the PCs ask about these stoles, Lawson explains, "Those are their Blood Stoles. Those aren't like the red ones. The Ebers have to exercise their brains every once in a while, so they go out and throw some melons at each other. But the blood stole isn't worn very often. It means all-out war, and when the Ebers put their heads together on something, they're hard to stop."

Each hour of travel, the referee should roll 1D10 to determine if the reconnaissance team encounters any Ebers. A roll of 7 or 8 indicates that tracks are discovered. A roll of 9 means that Ebers are encountered. A roll of 10 means that the PCs encounter an Eber settlement.

If the reconnaissance team discovers tracks (a roll of 7 or 8), a successful roll for the task in the sidebar will reveal that the group leaving the tracks consisted of 60-80 adult Ebers, some on E-horses but none with travois, and none apparently heavily laden. All are heading basically northward.

If Ebers are encountered (a roll of 9), they will be in groups of 60-80 adults, travelling light, carrying only weapons and warpath supplies.

If a settlement is discovered (a roll of 10), none but juvenile and maternal Ebers are present in it, with no protecting warriors, a situation hitherto unheard-of.

Lawson reports each discovery back to Ranger HQ by radio. Ramirez keeps remarking to Lawson about how eager he is to get to Great Wind, and he reminisces about the time that he and Lawson fought alongside the Great Wind Ebers against another tribe.

ANTIPERSONNEL MINE

This type of mine is a directional, antipersonnel, defensive weapon. It is emplaced to face a particular direction and will fire a formidable blast of antipersonnel fragments in a 30 degree conical "killing ground." The mine is small and easily camouflaged, and it can be detonated by a 30m tripwire (60 percent chance of detonation if a target walks across it) or by remote control. Explosive and concussion damage is resolved normally; fragmentation effects are only felt by those in the blast cone. The width of the cone at any distance along the firing axis is half the linear distance from the mine. (Example: The cone is two meters wide at a point four meters in front of the mine.)
Type: Antipersonnel defensive mine
Country: Generic
Weight: 2 kg
DP: As explosion (EP=6)
Price: Lv50

Task: To gauge the composition of an Eber party from its tracks: Routine. Reconnaissance or Tracking. 7 minute.

Referee: Before this task is rolled for, throw 1D10 to determine how many hours old the tracks are, and increase the difficulty of the task by one level per four hours passed. An intervening dust storm or sandstorm will make the task Impossible.

A Falling Star

Travelling at 20 kph, it will take the reconnaissance team 10 hours to reach the Great Wind settlement, but each time that the group stops to inspect an Eber movement or changes course to pass around one, the referee should add an hour or two to the journey. There are 11.5 hours of daylight at the desert latitudes at this time of year, so it should not be until after dark that the PCs arrive at the settlement.

The referee should use the trip as an opportunity to role play exchanges between Captain Lawson and the PCs, during which Lawson will give hints to them about the multi-lobed nature of the Eber brain. The referee should use his own knowledge of Eber psychology when role playing the part of Lawson and give these clues in the form of ambiguous statements which the players could take as simple figures of speech or metaphors, but which actually have literal truth hidden in them.

For example, Lawson's statement about the blood stole in the last chapter hints at the true functioning of the Eber mind, as does his final remark to Ramirez in this chapter. However, rather than give important secrets away prematurely, the referee should only reveal hints at this time. If the PCs begin to press Lawson on a point, they should be interrupted by a cloud of dust or a radar image to be examined. If this is not enough to defer their curiosity, Lawson can explain that he is oath-bound not to reveal the secrets that he knows.

AN ATTACK ON THE LANDING FIELD

At some point during the trip, the reconnaissance group is interrupted by a radio call from Ranger headquarters, informing the group that New Austin is under attack from a large Eber raiding force from the south. A few minutes later this message is amended to say that only a few Ebers plundered the outer fields, and most of the Eber force is swinging west toward the dry lake bed that serves New Austin as a scramjet field. While no personnel are stationed at that location, there is valuable refueling and communications equipment there in a portable control tower which should be protected. The radio call states that a small force of State Troopers and Colonial Rangers is being sent to defend the site, or at least rescue the equipment that is located there.

When he hears this news, Lawson seems disturbed. "That doesn't make sense," he muses. "The Ebers shouldn't know enough to try to take out our orbital field. Besides, the UAR isn't letting anybody down from off-planet anyway."

MEETING THE RED ROCKS

About an hour before dusk, the humans sight an Eber band which Lawson recognizes from their pennants as the Red Rocks. Lawson moves the reconnaissance team to intercept them, and the two groups come to a stop behind two ridges on either side of a small basin. The Rangers are to the east, with the setting sun in their eyes. On the west side, behind the ridge, 60 Red Rocks warriors form a single line, conspicuously holding their lances erect.

"I've got to be able to stop this," the PCs hear Lawson tell Ramirez, "I'm his Arm Brother." The captain changes into an elaborate Eber outfit with a blue stole, then hurries out to meet Chieftain Lynn, who is already waiting at the center of the neutral ground. Despite the sun's glare, the PCs can see that Lynn is wearing the Blood Stole. There is much arm waving and involved movement from Lawson, but Lynn does not respond except to speak briefly. Finally Lynn produces a knife from his cincture and hands it to Lawson.

Lawson returns shaken and disappointed. "He's going to try to make me kill him, but I won't do it. Somebody got to him and gave him a bigger ritual than he and I had." He produces the knife from his cincture, and hands it to Ramirez, saying, "Here, he gave me my knife back, hang onto it for him."

The captain then calls Ramirez, Dinardo, and the senior PCs aside and produces a bag of D-F cakes. "Don't lose these," he warns, "If you run across an Eber that you know, but he acts as if he doesn't remember you, give him one of these and start acting out what you were





ARM PARTNERING

Among the many No-madic Eber rituals there is one which allows the formalization of ties between previously unrelated comrades. It is called "B-C-A-F-A," literally "Arm Partners," and it is similar to the Amerindian concept of "blood brothers." The honor of this ceremony has only been extended to humans on a very few occasions, one of the most famous being the arm partnering of Ranger Captain Lawson and the Red Rocks tribe chieftain Lynn.

For the Eber involved, the ritual is a mind unification, making the partner an official blood relative. For a human, it is a private look inside Eber psychology which gives him knowledge of how to initiate and participate in Eber ritual.

To perform the ritual, the two participants are each given a ceremonial knife with which they make an incision along each other's forearm. The two incisions are then placed together and the participants' arms are bound. Tied together like this, which is very awkward for a human and an Eber, they go into the desert armed only with their knives, to survive for three days without food or water. Upon their return there is a huge mind unification celebration at which they exchange their knives and are declared siblings. They become lifelong comrades and members of each other's tribes at each partner's social level. A human participant gains knowledge of the Eber multilobed brain and ritual skill equivalent to Eber Ritual-1.

both doing the last time you were together. I know that it sounds silly, but just do it. If that doesn't work, give him a few more of these and try it all over again, maybe that'll finally shake his head loose."

Lawson looks around at the faces of everyone in the group. "And remember this one thing," he insists, "they don't really want to kill us, they just act like they do."

"Now, I'm going back to talk with Lynn. If anything happens out there, try not to hold it against him. It's not his fault really, he's just not in his right mind." Lawson smiles ironically to himself as if he's just told a small joke, then turns around to head back out onto the floor of the basin.

As he descends into the depression, the sun has nearly disappeared behind the far ridge, silhouetting the dozens of Eber warriors and their javelins, held at the ready. Lawson stops about three meters from Lynn and begins to talk. Lynn responds animatedly, then, before anyone can react, the chieftain throws his javelin right through Captain Lawson's chest. Lawson falls facing the Rangers and as his dying act gives Ramirez the signal to fall back.

the humans once again. Amber Rose immediately embraces Ramirez, calling him "C-C A-D-A-E-F," which translates as "Charging E-horse," and she reminds him of an exploit from the battle they once shared.

Now that the Ebers are "back in their right minds," as Ramirez puts it, the humans are able to make some progress in learning of recent events among the Ebers. Amber Rose and the other maternals-turned-warriors will initially need some prompting to explain what happened to the rest of their tribe, but after a few more moments they will begin to recall. As they do, their attitude toward the humans begins to turn cold, as if the Ebers were remembering some wrong done by the Rangers. Because of her respect for Ramirez, however, Amber Rose will fill him in on what has happened, and he will translate for the rest of the group.

The Maternals' Story

For many days, neighboring tribes had been trying to convince Aurora, the Great Winds' chief, to make "A-C-A-C" against the Texans. They tried to convince her through rituals, but to no avail. Then four days ago the tribe was attacked by someone using human firearms. Three young Ebers and one adult were killed before the tribe killed the intruder.

"He was wearing a star like yours," Amber Rose says, and she offers to take the humans to see him. The body she shows the Rangers has been dead for almost a week, and the only way to identify it is by the distinctive badge on its clothing. Ramirez turns a bit pale as he looks at the star, then he informs the PCs that the body is that of Gabresi, the missing Ranger private, as evidenced by the fact that Gabresi customized his badge with a "CO 3A" marking. A further inspection of the body reveals evidence of a gunshot wound in the chest.

With this revelation, the Ebers' hostility is easy to understand. The PCs can try to convince them that Gabresi would never have done such a thing (the gunshot wound he bears gives evidence of another human hand in this), or they can argue that the Rangers do not condone Gabresi's actions. Either way, Ramirez' past ties with the tribe makes the Ebers willing to believe the humans.

Amber Rose goes on to explain that after this attack Chieftain Aurora entertained the A-C-A-C ritual and was invited to share a drink with the visiting tribe, something the Great Winds found unusual. After the drink the visitors initiated a G-B-B ritual. The Great Winds expected Aurora to stop this, but she surprised them by going along enthusiastically. It was impossible to talk the chief out of this new plan of action; indeed, she danced G-B-B for the entire tribe, save the maternals and young, and the next day she took all of the Great Winds warriors away, leaving no one behind to guard the camp. Amber Rose insists that such irresponsibility, leaving the weak behind with no protection, is unheard of among the Ebers.

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All of the Ebers remark on the strangeness of the drink Aurora was offered and the change in her following it. This made them suspicious of the visitors, but in their maternal roles there was little they could do. Now, especially if the players can convince them that Gabresi was dead days before the attack by human firearms, the Ebers are determined to follow their tribe and stop them from being deceived.

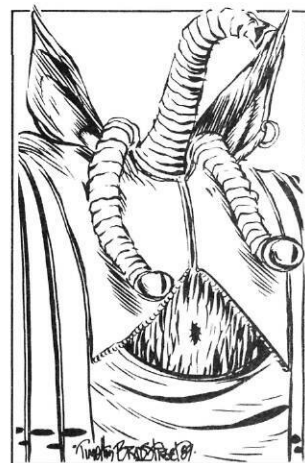
Amber Rose and one other maternal-turned-warrior, Straight Twig, are convinced that they can at least convince their consorts to listen to them, and their consorts might sway Aurora in turn. These two will accompany the Rangers and leave the other newly turned warriors to protect the remaining maternals and young.

The trail of the Great Winds' warriors is now three days old, but even without attempting to trace it, the humans should have a pretty good idea that it will lead north.



AMBER ROSE

Named for the blossom of the bulb-pole plant from which Eberjavelins are made, Amber Rose is a former battle companion of Sergeant Ramirez. When the PCs meet her, she is in maternal mode tending her eight-month-old juvenile. As a warrior, Amber Rose is a Veteran NPC.



STRAIGHT TWIG

Also named for the bulb-pole, Straight Twig is another maternal at Great Winds. She has an 11-month-old son. Her dominant lobe is the Aesthetic one, tending in her toward poetry. As a warrior, Straight Twig is an Experienced NPC, but her Aesthetic lobe is so developed that it remains accessible during fighting.

Cross-Country

COMPETITIVE RITUAL

Eber lobe change ritual is a fairly straight-forward event that can help those involved to bring their best talents forward to approach a problem. Eber mind unification is a much more far-reaching ritual that not only brings Ebers all into a like lobe, but actually imprints a joint understanding in the Ebers involved. The fact that Eber chieftains are given the authority to lead mind unification rituals is a measure of the power that they wield.

Sometimes mind unification rituals can become competitive. This simulates two initiators fighting to gain control over the ritual, since the controlling Eber can lead the participants to a mind set that they would not choose on their own. In some ways, competition in a ritual is similar to a human debate, except that it is not merely a swaying of opinion, but a complete change of perspective.

Eber ritual works because of the influence of the ritualized movements on the plastic Eber mind. The controller chooses or creates the dance, determining the story that will be imprinted onto the minds of the participants and ordaining the way they will view the issue.

If two initiators vie to dominate a mind unification ritual, their Intelligence and Ritual skill is the deciding factor. Thus, a powerful chief can convert other tribes to his views. For this reason, tribes rarely engage in mind unification with other tribes.

This phase of the adventure is episodic, as the Ranger reconnaissance group runs across various clues and groups of Ebers on their way north.

GENERAL COURSE OF THE ADVENTURE

As the Rangers travel northward with their two Eber maternals-turned-warriors, evidence continues to reveal lightly burdened war parties moving north, travelling on either side of a spine of high ground. As each new group is spotted, the Rangers can track them by using equipment keyed to pick up the radiation from their jewelry. The Rangers' Command Vehicle has a computer terminal that is able to use this information to generate position updates on each Nomadic Eber group.

Since the Ebers avoid high ground when travelling in order to move faster, the Rangers find the spine to be an ideal path for their vehicles. While the ridge allows the reconnaissance group to observe the lower ground on either side, it reduces the chance of actually running into Eber warparties, and the harder ground reduces the vehicles' dust signatures as well.

RADIO TROUBLE

Despite the fact that Ebers do not travel the high ground, the Rangers are ambushed by Ebers exactly once each day. If the players are very perceptive, they may notice that these attacks always occur about 12 to 15 hours after the Rangers make their daily radio report to headquarters. (As the referee is aware, a group of UAR operatives is tracking the Rangers by radio and sending the Eber ambushes.) These ambushes consist of 3D10 Experienced Ebers led by a subchief (Veteran NPC), and they are sprung from covering positions along the recon team's line of travel. If the Rangers are careful to remain sharp-eyed as they move, they can thwart many of these attacks, but they inexplicably continue each day.

The referee must be careful to keep track of equipment damaged and destroyed as each attack takes place. When a vehicle is destroyed, the players must carefully state what equipment they are salvaging, as several items, especially the imagers and PortaComps, will be needed for successful completion of the mission.

Even when they are not destroyed, the Rangers' trucks will be prone to superficial damage. The first things to go will be their ground radars and radio antennas, which are discovered after battle to be neatly clipped off by javelins and irreparable. In fact, by the time the command vehicle is finally destroyed (as explained below), it will have the group's only remaining functioning radios.

DESTRUCTION OF THE COMMAND VEHICLE

The Ranger command vehicle is identical in appearance to the ambulance, except for the lack of red cross and the presence of numerous aeriels and antennae. Both share the same slab-sided, easily penetrated shell. In the likely event that the players do not make the connection between their radio reports and the Eber ambushes, the command vehicle containing the group's last operating radio will be destroyed several days before their arrival in Eber Valley, thereby allowing them to slip in without being detected by the UAR.

The destruction of the last radio will take place during one of the ambushes, and the truck will be massively damaged, suffering javelin hits in the engine, drive train, and even through the command center itself. The PCs will have an opportunity to salvage the all-important imagers and PortaComps from the wreckage, however, and they could store them in the APC, whose rear armored box is impervious to javelins (but not to charging lances).

ENCOUNTERS

During this portion of the adventure, the referee should roll 1D10 once every four hours of travel to determine if the Rangers encounter anything new. The table on which he should roll is located in the next sidebar. Explanations of the encounters are given here.

New Group Sighted

The PCs spot a group of 2D10 youthful and 6D10 mature warriors, plus 3D10 porters, 1D6 subchiefs, and one chieftain. New war parties are merely noted for intelligence purposes; they will not be actually encountered unless the players seek to do so.

One of these parties *will* turn out to be the Great Wind tribe on its way north. Amber Rose and Straight Twig will request the chance to go out and meet their consorts. When they do so (whether the players agree to it or not), it will be during an evening encampment. They will succeed in getting their consorts into their social lobes and convincing them that something is not right about the G-B-B.

Their consorts, Garrett and Rusty Pierre, a subchief, will agree to try to initiate a mind-change ritual with Aurora. When they attempt the ritual, they are so unsuccessful that Aurora flies into a rage and attempts to kill the two males. Garrett, Rusty Pierre, Amber Rose, and Straight Twig flee the camp, pursued by Great Wind warriors, and the Rangers must help them escape. They explain to the PCs that Aurora's response is unfathomable, as if she is physiologically incapable of changing her mind.

Settlement Sighted

If the Rangers sight a settlement, the situation will be very similar to that in the Great Wind chapter, with inexplicably abandoned and confused maternals and young needing help to mind change and defend themselves. All tell similar stories of visiting tribes trying to convince their chiefs to make A-C-A-C, offering strange drinks, and then dancing G-B-B and taking the warriors away with no regular courtesy or precautions.

Some tell of more extreme measures being used, as in the "Mind Unification" result, below.

As each of these settlements is encountered, Straight Twig will try to convince them to join the Rangers' group and come north to stop their tribes. These Ebers will join the group on a 1D10 roll of 8+. Otherwise they will insist on staying to defend their oasis settlements. Regardless of whether they join or not, they will invite the Ranger group to eat and rest.

Mind Unification Sighted

If the PCs sight a mind unification ritual, it is taking place at a settlement and is being conducted between the settlement's inhabitants and a north-bound group of warriors. An exchange, as discussed in "Settlement Sighted," above, will first take place, but on a 1D10 roll of 5+ , the settlement tribe will not agree to ritual and the Rangers will witness the northbound group attacking the resisting settlement and slaughtering large numbers of the inhabitants.

The survivors will be rounded up and mind changed into their survival lobes preparatory to being used as porters by the victorious war party. The Ebers with the Rangers explain that these are prisoner-of-war forced laborers, carefully controlled by their captors so they cannot regain their wits. They are forced to carry heavy loads of supplies, plundered from their own settlements, northward with the war party.

CLUES TO BE GAINED

If the PCs carefully inspect any of these former settlements or the debris dropped by the war parties, they will notice that a strange plant material is frequently found. They have never seen it before, and the Ebers with them will know nothing of it except that the plant was used to make the drinks that their chiefs were offered. Kormoran-native PCs who make a Difficult roll versus their Education will recognize it as C-D-F, which only grows several hundred kilometers to the east, past the Great Massif. If the PCs do not pick up on the significance of its presence, Sergeant Ramirez or Father Dinardo will.

CHARACTER DEVELOPMENT

As the Rangers travel, Father Dinardo is active in encouraging help for abandoned maternals and young and for settlements that are being attacked and enslaved. During ambushes and combat encounters, he never uses a weapon, but he, nevertheless, displays tremendous physical courage, going to assist wounded humans or Ebers under fire and giving vital and valuable first aid. These many acts of courage should be effective in assisting his attempts to exercise the group's conscience.

TRAVEL ENCOUNTERS

As the Rangers travel during this portion of the adventure, there are several possible encounters they may have. Once each four hours, the referee should roll 1D10 and consult the table below. Descriptions of the individual encounters are included in the text of this chapter.

ENCOUNTERS

Roll	Result
7	No new contact
2	No new contact
3	No new contact
4	No new contact
5	No new contact
6	New group sighted
7	New group sighted
8	Settlement sighted
9	Settlement sighted
10	Mind unification sighted

Dance of the Quarks

After 10 to 15 days of travelling northward, the Rangers will see a line of mountains stretching east to west on the northern horizon. A rugged ridge line extends southward toward the group from the main line of mountains, but there is a pass between the rough backbone they have been travelling and the northern ridge line (please see the Desert Map). Through this pass stream hundreds of Ebers; those that had been marching along the eastern side of the Rangers' ridge are passing through the gap to join the western group's Ebers in a massive river that continues up the westward side of the ridgeline toward the distant mountains. A massive flock of circling Cotta birds gives the Rangers some idea of the number of Ebers who have already passed to the north.

There is no chance for the Rangers to slip in on the west side of the ridge with the mass of Ebers, but they can travel along the eastern side and hook west across the ridgeline to spy on the gathering Ebers when they finally reach their destination. The recon team can easily do this without being detected if its members wait until dark to slip across the pass that gaps between their present high ground and the rocky ridge that continues toward the north. By night the Ranger party can spot the glow of countless camp fires scattered across the desert at the mountains' feet.

THE VALLEY OF MEETING

Continuing to travel northward, the Rangers, guided by the atmospheric glow caused by multitudes of bonfires, finally turn west to cross the mountains' southern spur. The recon team approaches the crest of the ridge, and its members take a surprised breath when they discover the panorama laid out before them. In a huge basin six kilometers across, tucked up against the foot of the northern mountains, 10,000 Nomadic Ebers are massed together, their tent city lining the basin's perimeter.

The Ebers there are so intent on their rituals in this, their desert fastness, that they have not set guards, and they will not notice the Rangers, who are free to observe.

One of the first things that the PCs will notice is the strange rock formations that line the bottom of the basin. After a few moments, it will become obvious that these strange shapes are the ruins of some ancient, pre-Decimation city. To the right of the Rangers' position, on their side of a dry wash, is rubble from collapsed masonry structures, but low walls and a few intact peaked doorways and windows are still visible. More incredibly, the very faces of the mountains seem to be the fronts of crumbling buildings, but it is not clear whether these were cut into the mountains or if the mountains are some form of debris sloughed onto the old city, burying it and fossilizing it in the intervening 4000 years.

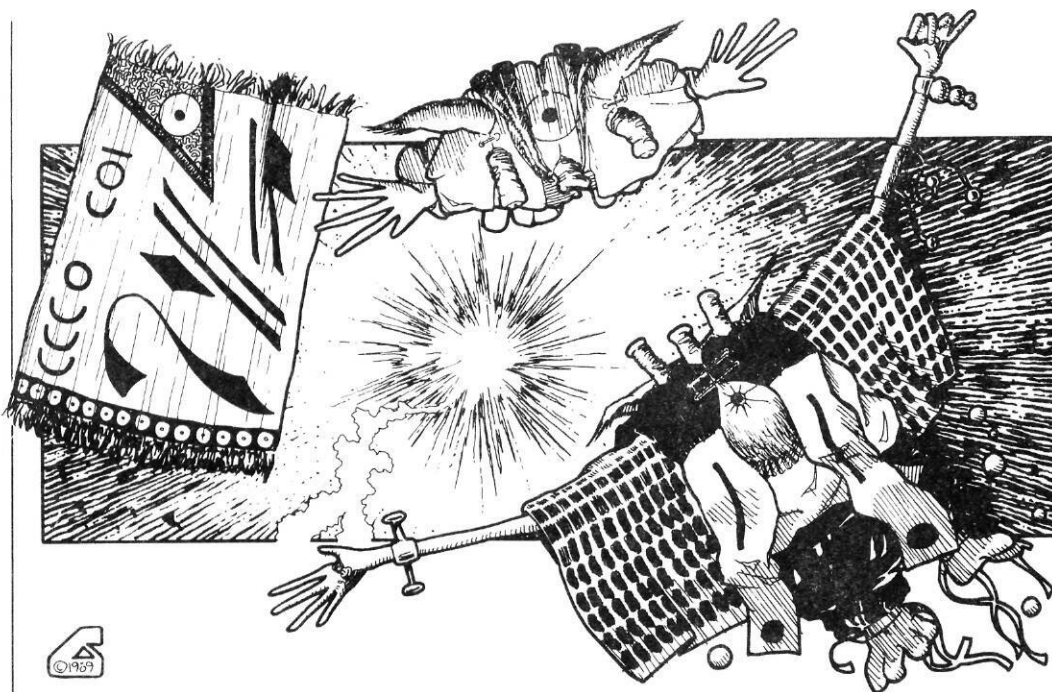
THE DANCE

Shortly after the Rangers arrive, a grand ritual of mind unification is begun. The ritual lasts a day and a half without pause. Unlike the Eber marriage they viewed earlier in the adventure, however, this ritual does not tax the humans' ability to maintain interest in the proceedings. The savage environment, the fires flickering against the ancient buildings on the mountainsides, the incredible numbers of Nomadic Ebers with banners and pennants fluttering, all are enough to hold the humans spellbound.

Through the night and into the next day, rituals are performed, sometimes involving members of a dozen different tribes. In these rituals the finest of costumes are used, and according to the four Ebers accompanying the Rangers, some of these costumes are only made and used once every century or so, on the most momentous occasions.

As they watch the rituals, the humans cannot help but realize that the Ebers are acting out events from their history, including some set-piece battles, but the meaning of certain other dances are less clear. Late in the afternoon, a number of Ebers wearing colorfully embroidered chasubles, a rare garment seen only in the highest of rituals, move out onto the large, open area and form a pattern. Other Ebers begin walking in circles around certain stationary Ebers, suggesting four





solar systems. Father Dinardo, the four Ebers accompanying the Rangers, or any PC who is a native of Kormoran will recognize in the Nomadic Ebers' dance a pattern of constellations visible from Kormoran.

As twilight falls the performance is lit by hundreds of torches as an Eber acts out an attempted departure from the 3rd planet of what the humans are *certain* is Zeta2 Reticuli. However, after reaching a point a short distance away from his origin, he produces a small firework and then drops as if dead. This same Eber performs the action multiple times, each ending exactly in the same way.

A few questions are sure to rise in the players' minds. Could this be a representation of failed interstellar missions? Does the firework represent stutterwarp discharge? The Ebers in the group will point out that the dancing Eber's intended destination seems to be a large tapestry on the ground, embroidered with the Eberese word for "world." After further observation, the other two stars with solar systems represented appear to be Rho Eridani and Beta Hydri, two other systems that have yielded Eber ruins.

The Ebers representing stars and planets now clear the field, and a new set of players arranges itself. Each figure wears a garment embroidered with large symbols. Father Dinardo says that the symbols look somehow familiar to him. If a FarSeer is handed to Straight Twig, her artist training enables her to report that some of the symbols are for special kinds of rocks that are sometimes found in the desert. At this, Father Dinardo cries, "Of course! They're atomic symbols! I've seen them in a UAR report concerning ancient Eber writings."

A check with the Rangers' Portacomp authenticates his statement, and if the PCs think to record the scene with their imagers, the records could be priceless. It seems that the Ebers are acting out a kind of physics formula. Dinardo whispers, "This is astounding. They can't know the meaning of what they're doing, yet they're acting out some kind of atomic interactions."

Sergeant Ramirez grins, "C'mon, baby, dance with me. We'll do the Quark."

After this arcane and very confusing display of chemical data concludes several hours later, the Ebers playing stars return to the field and resume their dance. This time, however, the Eber launching out from the "Zeta2 Reticuli system" dances all the way to the tapestry, whereupon the valley rings with the victorious fluting of the massed Ebers. From there, he dances to Rho Eridani and then to Beta Hydri. The trips all seem to be no more than two legs each, which computes to an equivalent stutterwarp range of 9.4 light-years. Considering the 7.7 light-year theoretical limit to stutterwarp travel, the players should be stunned. According to this ritual, performed by primitive Nomadic Ebers, the ancient, pre-Decimation Ebers held the secrets to a 9.4 light-year stutterwarp drive.

It seems that the Ebers are acting out a kind of physics formula. Dinardo whispers, "This is astounding. They can't know the meaning of what they're doing, yet they're acting out some kind of atomic interactions."

Assault

While watching the long ceremony in the valley full of Ebers, one or more recon team members might observe that occasionally an Eber is led somewhat resistingly through the tent city to a collection of tents near a dry wash behind the rubble. But the tents there do not look quite like the rest. If none of the Rangers notices, however, one of their Eber companions will eventually ask, "What's that metal tree over there?" Sprouting from the center of one of the tents by the dry wash is a spindly metal construction, all branches and right angles, but it is no tree; it is a radio direction finder.

The players should realize with a sense of outrage that they have found the cause for all of the ambushes their characters suffered on the way north to the valley. With a little thought, they should also realize that this proves the direction of a human mind behind the machinations of war against New Austin. Now their tormentors lie just an easy few hundred meters away in a spot that will be relatively simple for men on foot to approach with the distraction of the grand ritual in the valley. Shielded from view by the rubble, the Rangers can work their way down the wadi, or drywash, to within 75 meters of the antenna site without being seen.

UAR HEADQUARTERS

Included in the grouping near the radio direction finder there are three tents, the center of which houses the direction finder itself. There are two Skyhopper Jetpacks parked outside the left-hand tent, one to either side of a canister of fuel. If the players watch for a moment, they will be able to count five Arabs in the area, all wearing Eber dress with pistol holsters on their cinctures. These Arabs pass freely between the three tents, mostly using the center tent, but occasionally going to the left for supplies.

After a few minutes, three Eber chiefs will approach, two escorting a resisting third. Two of the Arabs will meet them, and with the help of the first two Ebers will force the resistant one to drink what is presumably a potent C-D-F mixture. Then the two Arabs and Ebers dance a mind unification for the benefit of the drugged Eber, who eventually acquiesces and returns with his escorts to the basin.

RANGER RETRIBUTION

When the players attack, the Arabs will fight to the death (unless they are rendered unconscious first). None will flee the station, and the referee may wish to ignore the normal rules for NPCs ducking when exposed to area fire. Each Arab wears an Arno Five-fifteen on his waist, although Gabresi's Redbird (identifiable by his Ranger service number etched on the grip) is on the desk in the electronics tent. Once attacked they will try to get to the electronics tent where a wall rack holds five loaded SG-77 assault rifles.

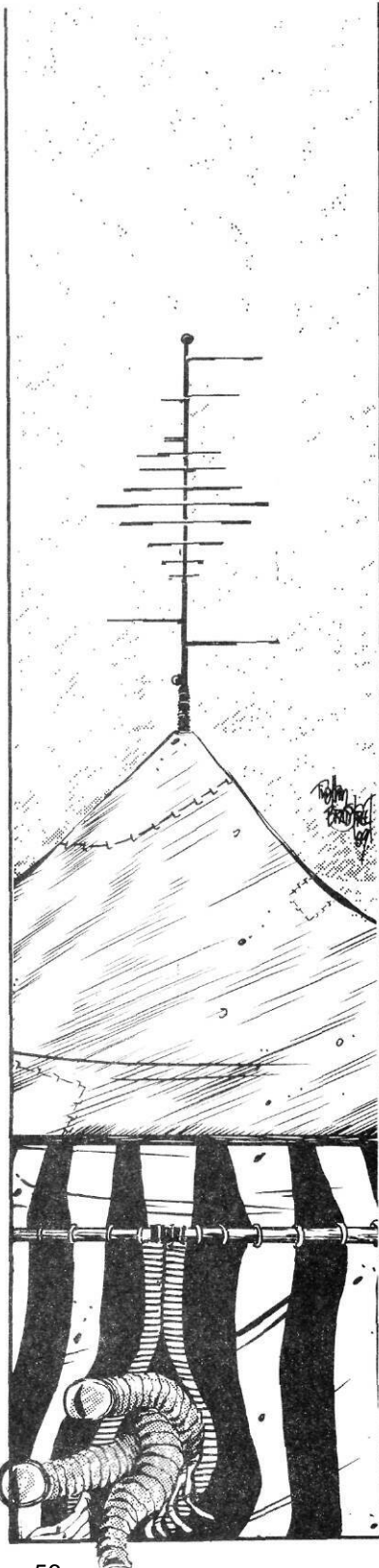
The operatives are Veteran Ground Military NPCs with a Physical Orientation.

Sounds of a firefight will attract some Eber attention (at the referee's discretion), but most Ebers are thoroughly involved in the ritual trance, and will not respond.

When the five Arabs are incapacitated, some of the Rangers can quickly search the tents while their companions hold off any Eber attacks. The left hand tent is full of supplies: food, flares, desert survival gear, several cases of 5 X 40mm ammo, and a Blindicide-9 launcher with three rounds. The right hand tent is merely sleeping quarters containing personal effects and multiple changes of Eber garments.

The center tent is the headquarters and communications post. Here are a small generator powering the radio direction finder, a tight beam up-link communicator, a computer terminal, and a refrigerator. There are also two back-up, battery-powered, vehicle communicators and two PortaComps sitting on the large desk in the center of the room. The refrigerator contains fresh C-D-F and bottles of potent C-D-F drinks, which later chemical analysis will reveal to be brewed to the overdose level.

Most important of all is a lockable portable single-drawer file cabinet, currently open (several sets of keys are carried by the operatives). It contains numerous maps, charts, and supply manifests,





Task: To decipher the UAR files: Routine. Bureaucracy or Information Gathering. 1 minute.

Referee: Performance of this task assumes knowledge of Arabic or a translation program of some sort.

as well as signed papers giving instructions and authorization for the UAR mission to cause a Nomadic Eber uprising against the Texas enclave. All are in Arabic and require a character to roll for the task in the sidebar to decipher them.

THE UAR MISSION

As long as Texan relations were limited to the seemingly unimportant Nomadic Ebers, the UAR enclave was not overly concerned, but New Austin's blossoming relations with the Civilized Eber nation of Black Sky threatened to break the UAR enclave's stranglehold on Eber research and information gathering. By demonstrating New Austin's inability to provide security from the "marauding" Nomadic Ebers, the UAR enclave hoped to take over the Texans' role in developing Black Sky's railroad and further cement its hold on Kormoran, thus jealously crowding Texas out.

By faking Texan aggression on the small scale and controlling Eber groups with C-D-F drugged chiefs on the large scale, UAR enclave forces were able to unite the Nomadic Ebers against Texas and the intrusive Black Sky railroad.

ESCAPE

Players should be aware of the importance of their characters taking as much physical evidence with them as possible as they escape the area and begin their trip back to New Austin. Of particular importance are the filing cabinet, a PortaComp, and the C-D-F. Imager footage of the Arabs' presence would also be valuable. However, once the Arabs have been overcome, the Rangers only have about five minutes to ransack the tents before angry flutings will announce that the entire Eber population in the valley has been mobilized against them. Thereafter, 1D10 attacking Ebers will appear each turn.

As the Rangers make good their escape, their captured UAR radios will chatter with confused Arabic for a while, presumably the UAR enclave's headquarters trying to sort out the situation. After a few hours, a new message will be heard: "This is Ranger Headquarters calling Ranger recon force, come in. Ranger Headquarters calling Ranger recon force, please respond. We have an emergency, we need to contact you. Our authentication codes have been destroyed, please respond."

The players will have to puzzle this one out, but it is actually the UAR enclave trying to get a directional fix on the group from their radio. If the Rangers give a response, the UAR will be able to get a fix on them and will send a ground-assault aircraft to seek them out (if the referee desires).

Nightmare Canyon

ORIGIN OF THE NIGHTMARES

The nightmares are horrific creatures similar to overlarge Terran social insects—all are the offspring of a single queen who is mother to all of her brood. But these creatures are not naturally sprung from Kormoran. Instead, they represent a last surviving example of ancient Eber genetic engineering, being one of the leftover weapons of the decimation war: an artificial biological weapon.

Unlike traditional human biological warfare which concentrates on bacteria, the ancient Ebers built ruthless monsters to do some of their civilian assaults. The Nomadic Ebers remember this, calling the nightmares F-E-D-E, or "Night Children."

Preparing to leave the Nomadic Eber gathering, the Rangers find that their escape to the south is cut off by hordes of angry Ebers. While some of the players might like to take their chances by heading straight south and cutting through the Ebers, Sergeant Ramirez and Father Dinardo will point out that not only is this impossible, but it is also not honorable since the recon team has invaluable recordings of the Eber dance and the hard evidence against the UAR enclave, material that they are duty bound to return to New Austin without taking chances on losing it.

The Rangers' inertial map shows that they are only about 75 kilometers northwest of the completed section of the Black Sky railroad, separated from it by a narrow line of mountains. If they can make it there with their vehicles, they can remove the tires and ride the rails the rest of the way in to New Austin. The only argument raised against this plan is a protest by the Ebers in the group, who warn of the F-E-D-E (see the sidebar). But since they cannot describe just what this threat is, their protests are discounted.

INTO THE CANYON

It is fully dark by the time the Rangers find a pass through the mountains, but the terrain is so rough that the Ranger Riders can only make about walking speed through the boulder-strewn canyon. In fact, some of the Rangers must proceed on foot ahead of the trucks in order to pick out a route the vehicles can follow. It promises to be a long night as the group works its way through the 25-kilometer canyon, and the Rangers are soon to discover for themselves some of the truth behind the legends of Kormoran's "Nightmares."

THE NIGHTMARES

There are several basic types of these creatures, and in the darkness and close quarters of the canyon the Rangers are not likely to get a really good look at any of them. Their later recollections will be of spines, pincers and slick, gleaming carapaces. The creatures will suddenly appear out of shadows all around the recon team, clacking and scuttling. It should strike the PCs that the nightmares attack with an uncanny cooperation, as if they were following the plan of some intelligent force. All have multiple legs and dark bodies carried close to the ground. Their eyes seem to function on some infrared or light amplification system, as they are quite at home in the blackness, and if the Rangers use flares, the creatures will be dazzled and disoriented for a moment but will quickly regroup to violently attack the source of light and smother it with their bodies.

Except where indicated in the individual descriptions below, all nightmares have similar statistics.

Chaser *Number Appearing:* Variable *Initiative:* 6 *Hit:* Routine *Size:* 80 kg *Speed:* 75 m *Armor:* 0.2 *DPV:* Variable *Consciousness/Life:* 3/6 *Signature:* 0

Sparkler: Sparklers have bulbous heads with no visible jaws, but they spray a fine ionized aerosol that drifts downwind in a cloud onto their target. Then electrical organs charge the cloud, doing electrical stun damage. *Number Appearing:* 1 D6 *Range:* 10 m *ROF:* One attack per turn *DPV:* 0.7 *stun*

Cutter: Cutters carry large scythe-like jaws on their flat, dish-shaped heads. Their job is to slice up creatures stunned by the sparklers so that the grabbers can carry them away. They can also attack unstunned targets, however. *Number Appearing:* 1D6 *DPV:* 0.3

Grabbers: Grabbers have large tong-shaped jaws to carry prey to their subterranean burrows where it is fed to their queen and her larvae. Grabbers can also attack living targets; several of them will combine to carry away a struggling victim. *Number Appearing:* 2D6 *Hit:* Difficult *DPV:* 0.2 *blunt*

Queen: The nightmares only have one queen per valley colony, as her brood can scavenge an area clean of most competition. The queen spends her entire life several hundred meters deep in a burrow. Each brood numbers in the hundreds of mature hunters, plus several dozen larvae and nurse castes. *Size:* 2000 kg *Initiative:* 1 *Hit:* Formidable *DPV:* 0.1 *Movement:* 0 *Armor:* 0 *Consciousness/Life:* 1 4/24 *Signature:* + 4

Resolution

After battling their way through the nightmares, the Rangers exit the canyon at about dawn the next morning. A relatively quick dash across the desert brings them to the northernmost end of the rail being built by New Austin. Mounting the remaining Ranger Riders on the rails, the recon team can travel at full speed back to the Texan settlement, arriving there days ahead of the pursuing Nomadic Ebers.

THE TIDE TURNS

With the information that the recon team brings back to New Austin, the UAR stranglehold on Kormoran is effectively ruined. All that remains is to prevent the Texans from being slaughtered by the approaching Nomadic Eber tribes. In this, the nation of Black Sky proves an invaluable ally. Lending Eber troops to help defend New Austin, Black Sky also sends diplomats to other Civilized Eber nations, revealing the atrocities that the UAR enclave has committed in its bid to control Kormoran. As one, these other nations send troops to aid the by now beleaguered Texans. Of course, the transportation and communication equipment that the Texans have helps to spread the news more quickly.

In the meantime, word also spreads through the massed Nomadic Eber tribes that they are being led to war by drug-damaged chieftains who have fallen under the power of the Arabs. Rather rapidly the drugged chieftains are taken from power as new chieftains arise to perform a mind unification ritual on their tribes and return them to a mindset of peace.

The Texas enclave is saved, and the Texans are suddenly thrust into the limelight of attention by Civilized and Nomadic Ebers alike, preparing the way for a new age on Kormoran.

FUTURE EVENTS

Given the public outcry to follow successful publication of the UAR plot, Manchuria will seriously review its policy toward the UAR's Kormoran enclave. It is probable that the relationship between Nasser and New Austin will completely reverse and allow the Texas enclave to finally come into its own.

On Earth, this will come as a huge shot in the arm to Texas' controversial, expensive, troublesome, and not universally supported colonial program. The bravery and accomplishments of the Kormorese citizens will doubtless revitalize and legitimize this effort, at least for the next decade or so.

On Kormoran, relations between the Nomadic Ebers and New Austin should be improved by their shared tragedy: Two groups forced by conspiracy to go to war have a great incentive to cement and formalize good relations for the future. The revelation of the multilobed nature of the Eber brain will also simplify relations and open up understanding between the two intelligent races.

Father Dinardo, now well respected by his Ranger colleagues, will raise another CommSent settlement from the ashes of the old, and in spite of the horrible war he has witnessed, he might feel that perhaps his dream is finally just a little bit closer to completion.

The Black Sky railroad will be finished in another two years, and its passage through New Austin will herald a new relationship between the Texans, the Civilized Ebers, and the Nomadic Ebers. A large, rapidly growing Civilized Eber population will be established on the outskirts of New Austin.

Private Gabresi's body will be buried near where he fell in the Great Wind country, and his grave will be carefully maintained by the Great Wind tribe as a reminder of the importance of their relationship with the Texan colony.

Lynn will remain chief of the Red Rocks tribe, and although its numbers have been drastically reduced, this will be remedied by inter-"marriage" with other tribes. He will take as his consort Amber Rose, formerly of the Great Wind tribe, whose consort was killed in intertribal power struggles over the G-B-B. The two will have a son after another year, and they will name him "Law's Son."

THE PCS' FUTURE

It is possible that, following the debacle of the UAR enclave's attempt to destroy New Austin, elements of the UAR government might want revenge on the PCs. Assassins might dog their footsteps on Kormoran or even follow them throughout human space. Whether this is true or not, the acts of the PCs in this adventure will create something of a new world in which there will be plenty of action for them to participate in, in whichever capacity they desire.

Discoveries

TWO ECOLOGIES, TWO WORLDS

There is ample evidence that Kormoran is not the Ebers homeworld. Not only do the Nomadic Ebers themselves demonstrate this in their highest rituals, but the flora and fauna of Kormoran demonstrate it as well.

There are two basic groups of trees: round-shaped and umbrella-shaped. This is also true of animals—there are numerous types of six-limbed creatures with distinct heads, and then there are a few types of four-limbed creatures with rudimentary heads, much like the Ebers. In both cases, plant and animal, the differences are due to the fact that one group is native to Kormoran and the other was transplanted to Kormoran by the Ebers from their real homeworld at Zeta2 Reticuli.

Even the most basic study of comparative karyotypes—blood and genetic proteins, chromosome shape and numbers—demonstrates the groups to be completely distinct with absolutely no joint genetic heritage at any point in their development. The Ebers simply brought their favorite plants and animals with them when they came to Kormoran, and most of them adapted and thrived, like the Ebers themselves.

In this chapter, several topics are discussed that have in some way been brought to light by the PC's actions in this adventure. The referee may wish to share them with his players as after-action reports, or he may prefer to reveal them slowly over the course of future adventures.

COMPARATIVE RITUAL AND THE BARREN CIVILIZED CULTURES

Many Eberologists have noted that the various Eber dance rituals, although appearing to fill much the same social roles, are not identical in form. In fact, they are almost all different, even those used in the same type of event, such as Eber marriage. For this reason the terms "dance" and "grand dance" are typically used because relative length of the rituals seems to be the single greatest means to classify them.

Using this system, there are basically two types of ritual: the fairly common short dances, which are followed by the participating Ebers behaving in a different way (presumably due to some exchange of information between them); and long dances, generally involving a larger number of Ebers, following which there is often observed a distinct unity of purpose of the Ebers involved. There is a third intermediate type which seems basically to be a longer form of the short dance, but has the same observable results.

It has also been observed that Nomadic Ebers' dances are longer and more varied than those of the Civilized Ebers. This has usually been attributed to the more primitive needs of the Nomadic society in reaffirming kinship ties in a hostile environment. Civilized Ebers, having developed a more complicated society with more varied and technical interactions, have left behind the need and ability to ritualize this multitude of relationships and now effect their transactions in more concrete and businesslike terms.

What researchers have observed are the Eber mind change (short dance), mind unification (long dance), and mind change plus mind update (intermediate dance). The variability of dances within each group is a manifestation of Eber "oral history," to use a related human concept, or active cultural memory. In their dances, in addition to making the neurochemical modifications necessary to change, update, or unify their minds, Ebers act out parables, fables, aphorisms, events of their history, and certain crucial scientific principles. In acting out these stories when their brains are in a "plastic," or transitional, state between lobes, the Ebers imprint this cultural knowledge onto their subconscious. Thus, this knowledge is preserved in the group, even in the most stupid of Ebers. One Eber ritual that has never been observed is similar to a data dump, in which an Eber enters a trance-like state and allows his subconscious to play out these stories and dance them for the edification of his comrades.

The Eberologists' explanation of the difference in complication of ritual between the Nomadic and Civilized Ebers is basically correct in concept, although completely wrong in conclusion. As Eber culture became more technical and scientifically advanced, it did prove more and more difficult to codify these things into ritual dance. And as written documents and information retrieval systems became available to store this knowledge, ritual memorization and its tremendous demands on time seemed less and less important. Just like humans under these same circumstances, individuals' knowledge became more and more specialized and compartmentalized, and the race as a whole experienced the equivalent of a cultural lobotomy. When the memory is not exercised, it atrophies. As Eber society plunged into darkness following the Decimation war, the brains of the Civilized Ebers were not filled with their cultural memories, and their atrophied ritual was unable to replace the lost knowledge.

The assumption of Eberologists that the Civilized Ebers have the secrets of Eber technology because their society more nearly replicates the previous Eber civilization is utterly unfounded. Some lost and forgotten documents somewhere might reveal an interesting tidbit or two, but the Civilized Ebers are effectively an empty shell.

It is the Wild Ebers who keep the ancient secrets. What appears to human researchers as a preservation of specialized behavior of use only in their harsh, nontechnical environment, actually represents the largest extant repository of living memory of the Eber race's great past.

The Nomadic Ebers, or New Ebers, as they call themselves, are actually a sort of "back to nature" experiment dating back to the period just before the Decimation War. This group was dissatisfied with the direction that their increasingly technological society was heading, objecting to the loss of cultural memory resulting from the diminishing of ritual and the storage of data by technical means.

Having conducted extensive studies of Eber psychology and the importance of these rituals, these Ebers resolved to preserve, revive, and recreate this active cultural memory and revert to a more primitive lifestyle. They moved to a wilderness area on the first Eber colony of 82 Eridani, where they established their society in seclusion from other Ebers. The very social forces that inspired their reforms were building up in the rest of Eber society, and in only another generation boiled over into the Decimation War. This group has, to this day, maintained their commitment to ritual and cultural memory, although this is not even understood by the civilized Ebers, much less by humans.

[T]hey established their society in seclusion from other Ebers.

Even though the Nomadic Ebers cannot understand the meaning or significance of the information they carry, pass on, and preserve, each of them carries within him or her the seeds for a rebirth of Eber technical society. As they have lost their technology, it is impossible for them to understand some of the electrical and chemical equations that they act out. Nonetheless, much of this information is still there, with very little garbling.

This is the reason for the longer, more involved rituals, and the intricate designs woven into their ritual garments. One garment might carry the Eber chemical symbol for plutonium or a neutron. What has evolved in the Civilized Eber into the ritual exchange of gifts is actually a remnant of the ritualized issuing of different costumes to each Eber taking part in a ritual dance, in effect saying, "Okay, you play the plutonium nucleus and I'll play the neutron this time in the nuclear fission dance."

Bearing in mind that as the total Eber brain size, including all lobes, is approximately 2.5 times that of a human's, while the amount of that brain that is active at any given time is only about 0.7 human, the total brain is used for subconscious cultural memory storage, and the Ebers have a 350-year life span to imprint this material onto that massive brain. The result is a tremendous amount of stored knowledge.

In effect, the UAR researchers, hoping to gain access to ancient writings and equipment, bet on the wrong horse when they chose to court the Civilized Ebers.

EBER RADIATION RESISTANCE

The Ebers have an immunity to radiation levels that humans would find unbearable. Their use of radioactive metals in their jewelry is one example of this, and the radiation level just does not seem to particularly affect them. Uranium from surface veins and even trace amounts of plutonium, these cultural reminders of the importance of fission technology, cause no long-term effects in the Ebers. As related earlier, the radiation can be powerful enough to allow tracking of Eber groups with radiation detectors. These discoveries foreshadow the following point.

EBER STAR DRIVE

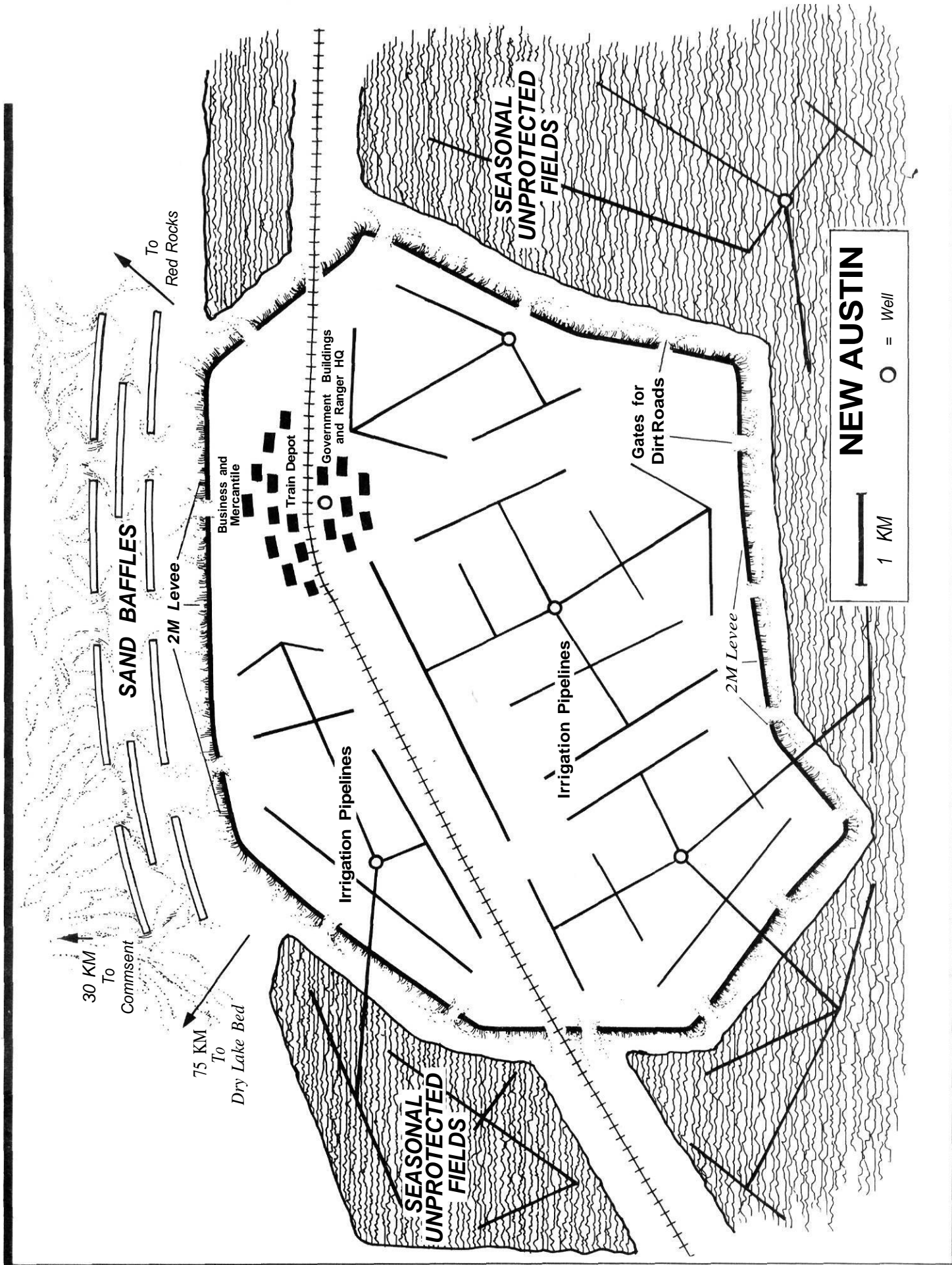
The Dance of the Quarks not only shows that ancient Eber stutterwarps had a 9.4 light-year range, necessary to allow passage from their home at Zeta2 Reticuli to Beta Hydri and Rho Eridani, but it also gives clues to human researchers as to how to recreate these drives. When this work is done, following years of research and testing, humans will undoubtedly be able to build such drives. Unfortunately, it was the Eber resistance to high levels of radiation that made those drives possible. It is likely that humans may eventually be able to build robot ships that can carry radiation-resistant cargoes further than the 7.7 light-years now possible, but transporting human crews, or any living Terran creatures for that matter, will be impossible until some marked advances are made in the technology of radiation shielding.

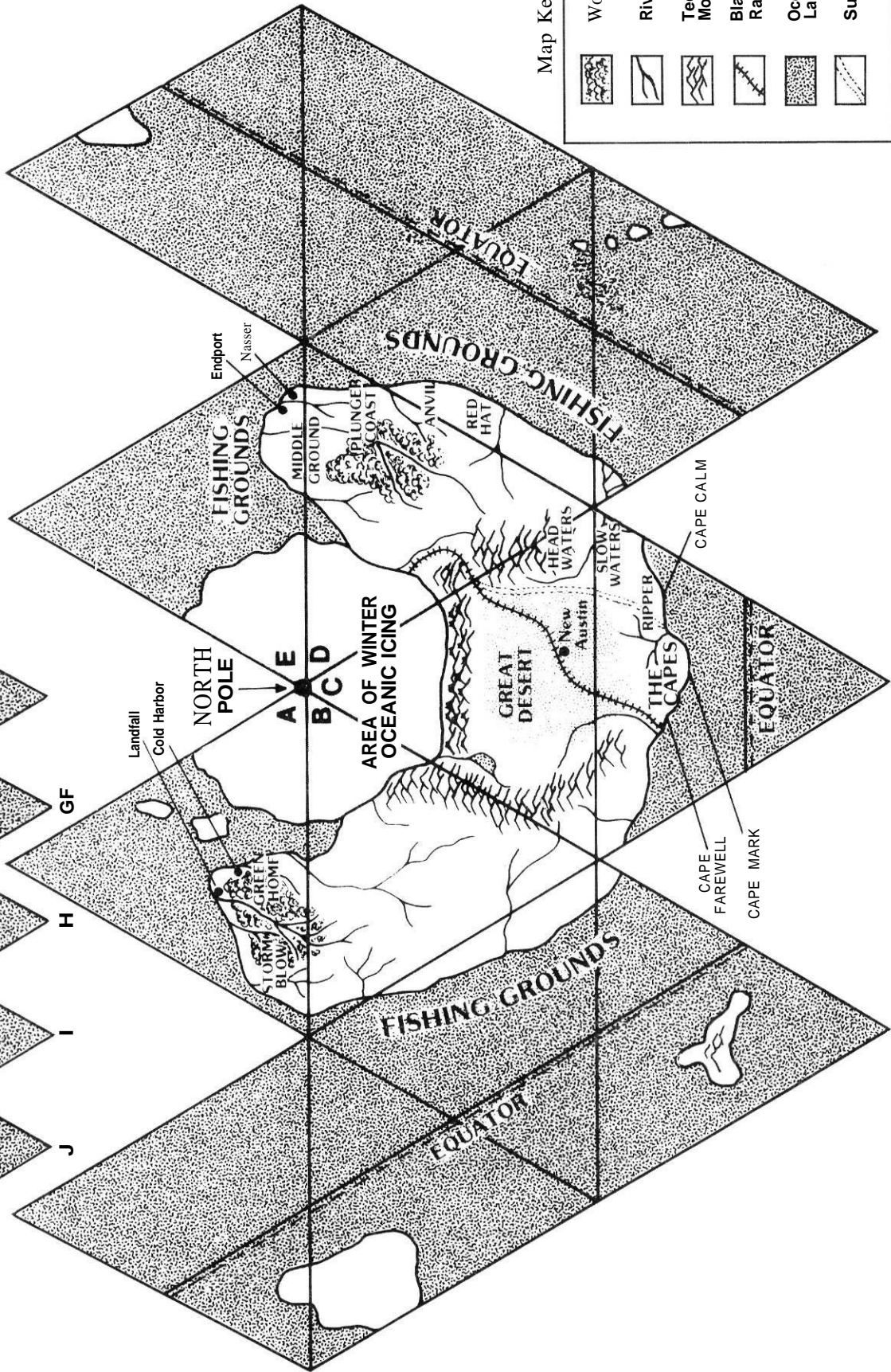
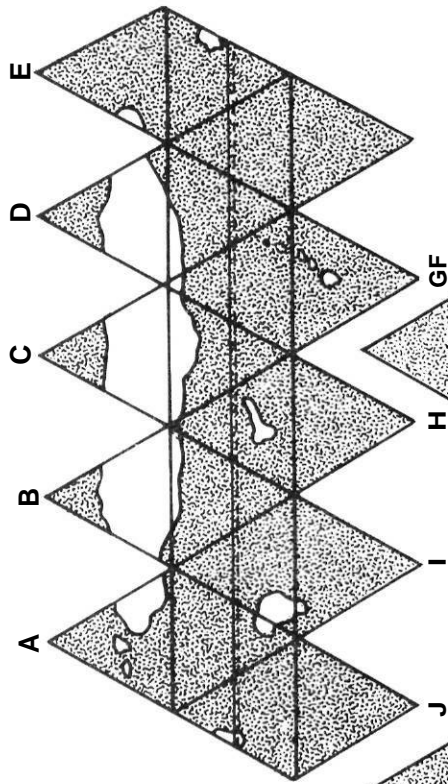
CURTAIN DRAGONS

Curtain dragons, not the transplanted Ebers, are Kormoran's true gift to the stars: an indigenous sapient life form. Although the intelligence of these creatures became fixed in the population as a result of the environmental dislocations of the Decimation War, they are truly intelligent creatures, who have been attempting contact with other races.

The curtain dragons' two most notable attempts have been ignored or misunderstood by humans. One encounter, which resulted in the loss of the Allah Akbar in 2279, involved two curtain dragons attempting to communicate with what they believed was a huge metal creature. The hydrofoil's captain, in a fit of panic and poor piloting, managed to ram and kill both dragons and sink his ship, then he claimed to have been attacked by the gentle beasts.

The other communication effort has been somewhat more successful. Curtain dragons have trained Eber fishermen to recognize that if they catch and slaughter sea dragons—which prey upon curtain dragons—the curtain dragons will return the favor by herding huge schools of macroplankton into the Ebers' nets. This interspecies cooperation has been ridiculed by human science as superstition.





Map Key

	Woods
	River
	Tectonic Mountains
	Black Sky Railroad
	Ocean & Lake
	Sun Trail

NORTH POLE
A E
B C D

FISHING GROUNDS
MIDDLE GROUND
NASSER
ENDPOINT

AREA OF WINTER OCEANIC ICING

GREAT DESERT
New Austin

FISHING GROUNDS

EQUATOR

FISHING GROUNDS
PLUNGER COAST
ANVIL
RED HAT

HEAD WATERS
SLOW WATERS
THE RIPPER
CAPE CALM

EQUATOR

CAPE FAREWELL
CAPE MARK

Landfall
Cold Harbor

STORM BLOWN GREEN THOMI

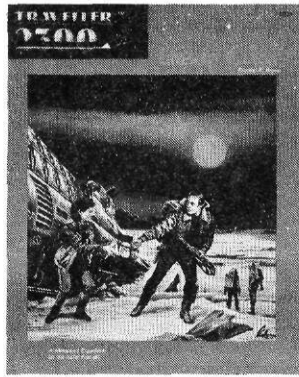


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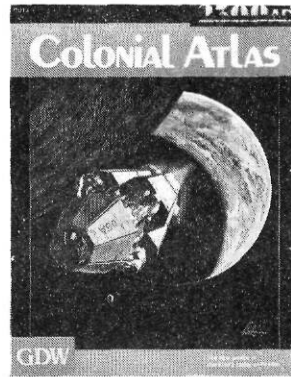


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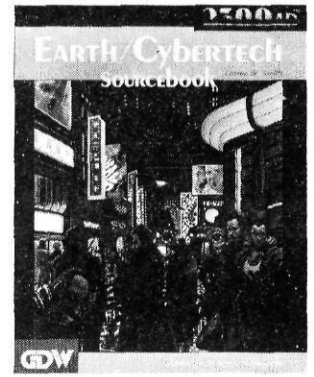


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Of course, if you're a bit more reactionary, your views might be different. Life is cheap on Earth. While the majority is comfortable, life is tedious and boring. Terrible poverty (though kept out of sight) remains; the gulf between rich and poor is broader than ever before. Illegal bionics, drugs, and dangerous brain/computer symbioses are commonplace, drawing the wretched masses under their spell, their technology inexpensive enough to appeal to the lowest classes.

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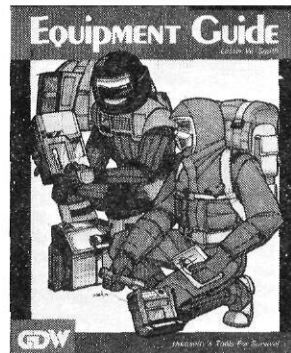
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82 ERIDANI IV

At the extreme end of a side branching of the Chinese Arm lies a yellow star much like Sol. This star is circled by eight glittering planets, the fourth of which bears life.

Humans call 82 Eridani IV "Kormoran," and it is home to the enigmatic Ebers—members of a race that once possessed star drives but destroyed its culture by interstellar war.

THE EBERS

Of the races thus far encountered by man, the Ebers are the most like men in gross biological characteristics, but they are also the least understood. Ebers are known first-hand by fewer than 9000 humans, the inhabitants of two enclaves: the UAR and Texas.

Once possessing knowledge beyond that of humanity, the Eber race nearly obliterated itself thousands of years ago in an interstellar war. Even now, they are just beginning a new industrial age. Most Eber nations continue to conduct travel by animal, and war by sword and spear.

The Ebers are extremely ritualistic creatures. They hoard the decaying knowledge of their ancient forebearers and protect it with semi-religious tradition against the day that their race will use it once again.

THE ARABS

The UAR has a major enclave on Kormoran, the first extra-terrestrial project ever created by that nation. Enjoying good relations with the Civilized Eber nations and with Manchuria (which holds the reins of pow-

er on the Chinese Arm), the enclave may someday divine the deep secrets of the Civilized Ebers.

And the Arabs are not hesitant to use their influence with Ebers and Manchurians to make life difficult for the recently arrived Texans, in a jealous effort to protect their hold on Kormoran.

THE TEXANS

The Texas enclave was established eight years after the UAR enclave. In that eight years, the Arabs had wormed their way into the councils of the Civilized Ebers. Therefore, while by Terran treaty the UAR could not prevent Texas from planting an outpost on Kormoran, it could ensure that the Texan enclave had little chance of surviving. The Arabs convinced the Civilized Ebers to cede a parcel from the Great Desert to the Texans, believing that if the harsh environment did not destroy them, the savage Nomadic Eber tribes would.

But Texans are stubborn, and in the three decades that followed, the Texan enclave of New Austin held tenaciously to its site.

Now, with the dawning of the 24th century, Texas has signed a landmark agreement with the Civilized Eber nation of Black Sky to build an Eber steam train line through the Great Desert. With this gain, the Texans have become a real threat to the UAR enclave.

THE MISSION

In the wake of the historic agreement between Black Sky and the Texas enclave, the Nomadic Ebers of the Great Desert have assembled for

war. Attacks on New Austin's outlying areas are increasingly frequent, and a Texas Ranger is missing.

The player characters have been recruited to serve as auxiliaries alongside the Rangers. Now the Rangers have been ordered out into the desert to determine what is precipitating the war. Having come to Kormoran for a peaceful break from Kaffer fighting, the player characters find themselves cast into the thick of a mounting conflict with hordes of aliens who can throw spears through plate armor.

What was advertised as a relaxing stint of duty is quickly becoming a nightmare.

Design.....David Nilsen



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