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IMPROBABLE TALES

**DARING
9TH
ISSUE**

ICONS
SUPERPOWERED ROLEPLAYING
COMPATIBLE

**RETURN
TO THE
CRIMSON
FRONTIER**



A REUNION BECOMES A REVOLUTION

FAINTING GOAT GAMES

PRESENTS

RETURN TO THE CRIMSON FRONTIER

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INTRODUCTION

Welcome to another issue of Improbable Tales, the source for ICONS tales of fun, action, and really wild things! In this issue, you can taste the flavor of old pulp sci-fi and space fantasy novels about the Red Planet. Send your heroes to Mars alongside an older hero from the pulps, and thrill as they interact with the current Martian world and its society ... and try to help their aging ally, who has been brought back to Mars to answer to the current reigning monarch for crimes against the throne!

411 For the GM: Here's What's Going Down

Plot Points

2 1) Decades ago, the pulp-style spacefaring hero Vance Champion returned to Earth after many years on Mars. At the time Champion left Mars, his Martian lover Shara Thiris was carrying his unborn son. That son, Karka Thune, grew up to become the most brutal ruler the world of Mars has ever seen. Thune's granddaughter, Princess Helo Thiris, currently rules Mars. She blames Thune's tyranny in part on Champion's abandonment, and wants to bring the Earthling to book for his role in devastating the Martian people. Thiris desperately wants to undo the damage her grandfather inflicted on Mars, and believes that executing Champion would serve as a powerful symbolic gesture of putting Mars's tragic past to rest.

2) On Earth, the PCs are attending Vance Champion's 100th birthday party held aboard his luxury yacht *Superiority* at the very moment that Thiris activates her transport field to bring Champion to Mars. However, due to Thune's anti-science purge, Thiris's scientists are using synthetic tau crystals to power the transport field generators. Therefore, the wildly inaccurate targeting system transports to Mars not only Vance Champion, but

also the *Superiority* and everyone aboard the yacht at the time! The yacht crashes in a part of the Martian wilderness inhabited by savage, sentient white apes.

3) Once Champion is on Mars, Princess Thiris will send her agents to collect him. You should hand out Determination liberally to ensure that her agents succeed.

4) Meanwhile, Helo Thiris's cousin Hunter Rhoov — who idolizes their grandfather Karka Thune and great-grandfather Vance Champion — seeks to overthrow Thiris and return Mars to the old ways of despotic barbarism. Rhoov will offer to help the PCs rescue Champion, but this puts the heroes in the difficult position of teaming up with a brutal would-be dictator.

5) Presumably, the various interested parties will eventually converge on Princess Thiris's palace for a climactic battle between the princess's troops, Hunter Rhoov and his rebels, and the PCs, with Vance Champion caught in the middle.

Enemies

Princess Helo Thiris
Thling Elite Commandos (Human/Red Martian hybrids)
Red Martian Soldiers
Green Brigadiers (Green Martians)
Martian White Apes
A tendactylon

Important NPCs

Vance Champion
Hunter Rhoov
Red Martian rebels
Mister Ix (a.k.a. Mister Nine)

Powered by Mars!

The weaker Martian gravity makes human beings stronger and more agile on Mars than on Earth. This effect adds 4 any Earthling's Strength, and 3 to their Prowess, up to a maximum of 8. This effect will be more noticeable, and therefore perhaps more fun, if your players are running low-powered, street-level heroes along the lines of Batman, the Question, or Daredevil

Action Scenes

Set-Up: Party Aboard the Superiority

Scene 1: Crashdown on Cydonia

Scene 2: Enter: The Tendactylon

Scene 3: A Champion Abducted

Scene 4: The Battle for Auralon

Hey! This Reminds Me of That One Movie ...

The 2012 film *John Carter* is a fun superheroic romp through a strange world, based on the Barsoom series of novels by Edgar Rice Burroughs. This adventure is, in turn, heavily influenced by the Burroughs books and the cinematic action of John Carter. It's also a pastiche of the Barsoom setting and the pulp space heroes adventures from the 1930s, 1940s, and 1950s. The creatures in this module should definitely seem familiar to anyone who's seen *John Carter* in theaters or read the books, and will thrill those who haven't. As for Vance Champion himself, if you portray him as a blend of John Carter, Flash Gordon, Adam Strange, and Buck Rogers, you won't go wrong.

Set-Up:

Party Aboard the Superiority

The PCs have been invited to the 100th birthday of the famous hero Vance Champion. The man is definitely spry for a centennial! Ask the players why their PCs have been invited, or suggest one of the following explanations for each PC's presence on the guest list:

- The PC has a Connections aspect related to space exploration or pulp-style heroes from the mid-twentieth century.
- The PC is connected to space explorers or pulp-style heroes through the Birthright origin.
- The PC is a local or national celebrity whom Vance Champion would like to meet.
- The PC attends as another guest's "plus one."
- The PC received an invitation by mistake.
- The PC did not receive an invitation, but learned about the party and decided to show up uninvited

for a chance to meet the famous explorer.

Champion is throwing his own party aboard his luxury yacht *Superiority*, named for the famous experimental spaceplane that took Champion to Mars in the first place so long ago. As the PCs arrive, read or paraphrase the following for the players:

The Superiority sits at the docks, tethered with ropes adorned with decorative lanterns. It looks like it's decked out for a massive gathering. The night sky is clear, a spray of stars reaching across the horizon. The moon shining down on the gently lapping waves gives the ship a festive air. Upbeat big-band music flows from a nearby loudspeaker, and the yacht's exterior light fixtures shine with festive multicolored bulbs.

The gangplank extends to the dock, and aboard the ship, you see the man himself, Vance Champion! He's wearing a tuxedo and standing beside a small bar. A gleaming silver robot with multiple arms is mixing drinks and serving him.

"Welcome, my friends!" Champion calls out. "You're the first to arrive! Mister Nine here will be happy to serve you whatever libations take your fancy, and I've got a heck of a spread on the buffet table. I'm so happy you could make it!"

The party is just beginning, it seems. As you approach the bar, you hear the silver robot mutters in a low tone, "The name is Mister Ix, Earthling."

Allow the PCs to spend a page or two checking out the yacht and visiting with their host. In that time, they can get a feel for Champion and Mister Ix. Both are friendly, and Champion is very happy to have the heroes there, seeming to miss his old adventuring days. While reminiscing with the heroes, he should mention his time on Mars, and reveal that he's actually over 100 years old. In truth, he first visited Mars in the late 1800s. Nobody he knows these days believes he's really that old, so he's celebrating his second hundredth birthday now as if it were his first hundredth birthday.

Action Scene 1: Crashdown on Cydonia

While Vance is in mid-sentence, the PCs, the yacht, and everything around them suddenly lurches upward in the throes of a teleportation effect. The *Superiority* reappears in midair above the dry wastes of the Cydonia area of Mars! The yacht drops about fifty feet and shatters against the ground. Thanks to Mars's weaker gravity, the yacht falls more slowly than it would on Earth, giving the PCs about three seconds to react before it makes impact. The difference in gravity also means that characters still on the ship when it lands sustain only a minor damage, perhaps 2 points of Stamina for characters on the deck and 3 points of Stamina for any inside the yacht (because they will also get pelted with debris). Alternately, instead of inflicting Stamina damage, give injured a temporary challenge, Naggng Injury, to tag at opportune moments later in the adventure.

4 PCs with Flight, Leaping, Teleportation, or other applicable powers can easily get off the ship before it hits ground. Allow PCs with Acrobatics to test their Coordination plus Acrobatics against their own Coordination level to roll with the fall, reducing Stamina damage by 1 with a moderate success or by 2 with a major success. PCs with Invulnerability, Force Field, Armor, and similar defensive powers can probably just shrug off any damage sustained. Quick-thinking players might realize that Vance Champion's yacht must be filled with gadgets from his adventuring days — parachutes, jetpacks, and the like — which they could use to escape the falling ship. Charge a PC a point of Determination to use this "out" (they only have three seconds, after all), but don't require them to tag one of their own aspects for it; instead, treat the *Superiority* as a place with its own epithet of Floating Trophy Room.

In addition to getting themselves off the *Superiority*, the PCs will need to consider Champion and Mister Ix. Mister Ix cannot fly and has no damage-reducing armor. He's a sentient robot, so the PCs should be motivated by mere heroism to help him; if they need more motivation, remind them that Mister Ix has both a great deal of knowledge regarding Mars and an internal communications system that could allow the PCs to call for help. A flying or leaping hero

with a Strength of 4 or higher can carry Mister Ix to safety. A teleporting hero might be able to carry Mister Ix along as a power stunt. A character who somehow beats Mister Ix to the Martian surface might be able to catch the robot (ICONS, p. 58) or simply use himself or herself as a kind of cushion for the falling valet. If the PCs simply allow Mister Ix to fall to Mars, he's badly damaged in the fall; he could be repaired with the proper components, but Champion has no such replacement parts aboard the *Superiority*.

The same strategies the PCs can use to help Mister Ix work for Champion, too. If Champion falls to Mars without any intervening actions by the PCs, will be hurt, but too badly. He will look noticeably younger and less frail, as if he were a man in his sixties rather than one about to celebrate his second hundredth birthday. His body is also stronger than it was, due to the weaker Martian gravity. If you want to make things a bit more difficult for the PCs, declare that Vance's leg was broken when the *Superiority* crashed to Mars.

If you think the heroes need still more complications, explain that there were civilian partygoers aboard the *Superiority*, and give the team a temporary Innocent Bystanders challenge — assuming that some of them survive the crash.

The *Superiority* teeters on the edge of a crevasse that drops down into the maze of canyons called the Cydonia Labyrinth. If the yacht falls into the crevasse, the PCs will lose their only real source of food, drink, and shelter for the coming night. The heroes can move the yacht to a more stable location by succeeding at a difficulty 7 test of Strength limited by Coordination.

When the *Superiority* has been secured or has slipped down the crevasse, read or paraphrase the following to the players, adjusting it as appropriate to the injuries sustained by Vance and Mister Ix:

Vance is looking around, confused but smiling as he hoists a boulder up over his head with a single hand and tosses it with ease into the abyssal canyon.

"Mars! I cannot believe I am back on Mars! This is astounding, friends!" Vance looks at his hands and

winces as he drops to a knee. Apparently, he was hurt in the crash more than it appeared. Mister Ix wheels over to Champion, and uses his many arms to steady him.

“No need, Mister Nine, I — I’m fine. It is apparent that I’m needed here on Mars once more! Thank God you were here as well, friends! This should be a walk in the park, with our combined might!”

Vance Champion and Mister Ix can answer questions regarding Mars. Champion can answer general questions about the Martian environment, but his knowledge of Martian culture and society is several decades out of date. During their conversations with the PCs, Champion and Ix let the PCs know about the three primary races on Mars: the Green Martians, the White Apes, and the Red Martians. Neither of them knows about the Thlings, the Human/Red Martian hybrid race.

Once his radio relays begin working properly, Ix can answer more specific questions about current states of affairs on Mars. By monitoring radio broadcasts, he can identify the closest bastion of civilization: Arthaxia, a medium-sized settlement approximately 200 miles away from the *Superiority’s* crash site, populated primarily by Red Martians.

Aftermath: The PCs have two hours before sundown. The temperature can drop to -10° F in this part of the desert overnight, so the PCs will need to find a way to survive the dangerous environment. Each PC who passes the night out in the open without an external source of heat risks taking damage from the cold, but can potentially resist this damage by accumulating a massive success on a pyramid test (*Villainomicon*, p. 17). Test the PC’s Willpower, limited by Strength, against a difficulty equal to the PC’s own Strength. Each PC has four chances to achieve the required massive success. Two moderate successes add up to a major success, and two major successes add up to a massive success. Once a character has achieved a massive success, whether by actually rolling a massive success or by building one up through moderate successes, he or she can stop making checks and suffers no ill effects from the cold. If a character still has not achieved a massive success at the end of all four checks, he or she suffers 1 point

of Stamina damage for each moderate success he or she still needs to reach the massive success at the top of the pyramid.

If the PCs managed to move the *Superiority* to a safe location as described above, they and the NPCs present can use the yacht for shelter. However, the damage it sustained in the crash left it without power. Require the same tests for characters passing the night inside the yacht as for those spending the night outside, as described above, but lower the difficulty level by 2 for each test. If a gadgeteer-type PC repairs or jury-rigs a power source to run the *Superiority’s* onboard heaters, characters aboard the ship can forego the tests altogether.

Obviously, since these tests are based on the effects of cold, characters with Life Support (Cold) don’t need to make these checks. Additionally, characters with Weather Control or heat-generating powers could counteract the cold, dropping the difficulty level for the tests or eliminating the need for tests altogether, at your discretion.

Action Scene 2: Enter: The Tendactylon

During the night, a number of White Apes equal to double the number of heroes arrive at the PCs’ campsite and attack, intending to knocking the PCs out and drag them off to their settlement at the base of a canyon some fifty miles away. It’s simplest to simply award each PC a point of Determination and declare the White Apes’ assault successful. Alternately, you can have the PCs wake up and play out the fight; if you do, award as much Determination as required in order to assure the Apes’ success. Note that the White Apes have no interest in Mister Ix, and they leave him behind in the desert.

Upon reaching their settlement, the White Apes toss their captives into a massive arena carved out of the rock. The heroes awaken to the sound of a massive tentacled, armored dragon roaring at them, and the sound of the Martian White Apes roaring their approval at the sport.

Enemies:

Martian White Apes
A tendactylon
Red Martian soldiers
Thling Elite Commandos

Situation: The White Apes have brought the PCs to their arena to be ritually killed by the tendactylon. Their only goal is to enjoy watching the massive beast kill the outsiders.

Enemy Tactics: The Apes will try to make sure that the heroes don't escape from the arena. They will only attack the heroes if they attempt to flee, and will only subdue them and toss them back to the creature in the pit.

The tendactylon can burrow and attack from below. It will select one hero at a time as its food target, trying to swallow that hero whole, and will use its tentacles to hold off other attackers while it eats. A hero unfortunate enough to be taken into the tendactylon's mouth has only two pages before he or she is locked into the creature's gullet. A character engulfed by the tendactylon can pull himself or herself out by accumulating a massive success on a pyramid test of the PC's Strength against the tendactylon's Strength.

Aftermath: Just after the PCs defeat the tendactylon, several sky-skiffs bearing Red Martian and Thling soldiers scream down from the clouds. The soldiers initially fire at the White Apes, who scatter in fear. As soon as the sky-skiffs are close enough, the soldiers leap from the skiff and converge on Champion. They abduct the famous hero with shouts of **"Death to Vance Champion!"** The Red Martians are here to take Champion, and nothing will stop them — although the heroes are likely to try. Use the Soldier stock character (p. 177 of ICONS) for the Red Martians, giving each one a Blast 5 (Shooting) Device — Martian Rifle. Vary the number of each to fit the number of PCs involved. Feel free to toss out Determination if the heroes come too close to preventing Champion's abduction, or do what worked during playtesting: have the tendactylon come back for a surprise attack on one of the vulnerable PCs to divide their attention while the abduction takes place.

The White Apes flee, and the heroes are intercepted by Mister Ix, who has found them with his tracking equipment. He mentions that a modified skiff has been following him. The skiff is a long dragonfly-shaped craft with iridescent wings made of glittering energy. Numerous modifications and repairs have made the skiff look like a strange amalgamation of beast and machine. When the skiff arrives very shortly thereafter, a red-skinned Martian man dressed in complex armor and bearing two massive golden blades and a long rifle steps out.

"Earthlings, I know where they have taken the hero Vance Champion," he tells the PCs. "My name is Hunter Rhoov. I can track the soldiers who have abducted him, and we can rescue your friend."

Action Scene 3: A Champion Abducted

If the PCs accept Hunter Rhoov's help, he guides them to Arthaxia, where they have a chance to rest and refresh themselves before trying to rescue Vance Champion. Hunter also warns the PCs that they will surely face reprisals from Champion's abductors for helping Champion and for visiting Arthaxia. The citizens of Arthaxia are mostly rebels who follow Rhoov, so the PCs should be safe enough until Vance's kidnappers deliver him to Auralon, the capital seat of the Red Martians, and then return to deal with Champion's allies.

While Rhoov and the PCs are en route to Arthaxia, or during the PCs' time in the settlement, Rhoov will regale the heroes with tales of Vance Champion's exploits during his time on Mars three generations ago. He will also explain about Champion's relationship with Shara Thiris, and will tell the PCs that the current monarch, Hunter's own cousin Helo Thiris, wants to kill Champion in revenge for Vance's abandonment of the pregnant Shara. He'll speak glowingly, however, of Vance's half-Martian son Karka Thune, first of the Thlings (Human/Red Martian hybrids). According to Rhoov, life on Mars was nasty and brutish prior to Thune's rise to power, tinged with the ever-present threat of the White Apes. Thune ruled with a strong hand, to be sure, but this was necessary in order to free civilized Mars

from the threat of the White Apes. Hunter wants to convince the heroes that a Thune-ruled Mars was truly a paradise.

Meanwhile, Princess Thiris's military, the Green Brigade, is on the offensive. With the PCs heading to Arthaxia with her enemy Hunter Rhoov, there is no question that they are allied with the Karka Thune loyalist rebels, and must be destroyed. Exactly how that confrontation goes down depends on how much time the PCs spend in Arthaxia.

If the PCs are willing to spend several hours in Arthaxia, they can have Mister Ix upgraded to a current servant robot's specifications. The sidebar describes the changes, and both Mister Ix's standard and upgraded versions are detailed in the NPC section of this module. Under these conditions, the Green Brigade will land at Arthaxia's skiff-port and begin destroying target buildings (see the map below) as they look for the Earthling invaders and the rebels. Rhoov's rebels will join the battle (use the Soldier stock character from ICONS, p. 117 if you need stats for them, giving each one a Blast 5 (Shooting) Device – Martian Rifle), so the Green Brigade encounters will be tempered by the rebels taking on many of them to ensure that the PCs are challenged but not overwhelmed.

If the PCs insist on leaving Arthaxia as soon as possible, without waiting around for Mister Ix to be

upgraded or for Rhoov to make additional preparations, the Green Brigade will intercept them during their flight to Auralon. This will erupt into a mid-air ship-to-ship battle pitting two Green Brigade sky-skiffs against Hunter's modified sky-skiff.

Enemies:

Green Brigadiers

Notable NPCs:

Hunter Rhoov

Mister Ix (possibly upgraded)

Martian rebels

Enemy Tactics: If the Green Brigade launches a ground attack in Arthaxia, they will first take out the power generator building, followed by the rebels' armory, then the rebels' barracks, and finally Hunter Rhoov's hideout. If Mister Ix has been upgraded, they will blitz the power generator and the hideout, ignoring the armory and the barracks to take out the PCs.

If the battle takes place in the air, the two Green Brigade skiffs will launch harpoons into Hunter Rhoov's skiff, run across the broad ropes to leap onto Rhoov's ship, and attack the PCs. The Green Brigade soldiers are under orders to "bring 'em back alive."

The Helpful Mister Ix

Mister Ix — or Mister Nine, as Vance Champion keeps mistakenly calling him — is an ancient Martian valet robot. He's very old, well out of date by current Martian standards. An upgrade could make Mister Ix far more effective in aiding the PCs. The upgrade takes about four hours. After the upgrade, Mister Ix will have access to the Martian Worldwide Communication Network. He'll also have basic defense and martial capabilities, including the ability to use handheld weapons such as blades and firearms.

However, once he's upgraded, he can be tracked, and the contents of his data cores are public record — making him an unwitting accomplice to Princess Helo Thiris. Also, Karka Thune instituted a law giving the monarch of Mars control over all robotic entities, able to deactivate or control them with a command. That law, hard-coded into all robots manufactured or upgraded since Thune's day, has never been repealed. This means that an upgraded Mister Ix unintentionally functions as Thiris's spy and agent. This law was a closely guarded secret, however, and Hunter Rhoov knows nothing about it.

What Happens If the PCs Lose This Fight?

If the Green Brigadiers manage to capture the PCs, they will take them to Auralon to face the princess for crimes against the throne. Helo Thiris has come to realize that the PCs aren't necessarily aiding Vance Champion, and may be ignorant of his crimes against Mars. So, being an enlightened ruler, she will only imprison the PCs until after the criminal Vance Champion is executed. Then she will send them back to Earth via the transport field. But, of course, the PCs may attempt to escape the prison and prevent the execution of Vance Champion.

Action Scene Four: The Battle for Auralon

If the PCs wish to rescue Vance Champion, they must get to Auralon somehow—either on their own, in the company of Hunter Rhoov, or as the Green Brigade's prisoners. If the PCs try to travel to Auralon independently of Hunter Rhoov, he will attempt to follow pretty closely behind them. In the latter event, Rhoov will be along as another prisoner. In either case, the PCs will be able to see the city of Auralon from the air as they approach (whether under their own power or aboard a sky-skiff).

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Read or paraphrase the following to your players:

The city of Auralon stands atop a massive plateau, surrounded by vast canyons of darkness. The city's base material looks like glass or white silica. Faint beams of energy hold up the superstructure of the palace at key locations. A tremendous wall encrusted with multicolored jewels surrounds the palace, and massive banners bearing the symbol of Princess Helo Thiris flutter from the top of many of the city's spires.

The landing area is choked with the insect-shaped craft, and the strange smells of acrid smoke and ozone fill the air as you step down from the sky-skiff.

"We've arrived, Earthlings," Hunter Rhoov says, with a hungry look on his face. **"Soon the battle will be joined, and Mars will once more be free to seek its own destiny."**

If the PCs arrive in Auralon as prisoners: From the landing area, the PCs will be loaded into a transport and taken to a dungeon below the palace. Presumably, the PCs will try to escape so that they

can prevent Champion's execution. If so, they'll have to fight their way from the dungeon (or wherever else they decide to make a break for it) to the throne room, with Hunter Rhoov in tow. Keep in mind that the palace is massive, so you can stretch out or compress the battles in the palace as much as you wish. While working their way through the palace, the PCs will face opposition from both Red Martian soldiers (use the Soldier stock character from ICONS, p. 117, giving each one a Blast 5 (Shooting) Device – Martian Rifle) and a few Thling Elite Commandos.

If the PCs arrive unconstrained in Auralon: If the PCs arrived with Hunter Rhoov, he will invite them to a hidden rebel gathering place within the city. If Hunter had to follow the PCs, he will do the same as soon as he catches up to them, warning them that Princess Thiris's government considers them to be Champion's allies and, therefore, enemies of the state. Once they're securely off the streets, Rhoov will recommend that his rebels and the PCs coordinate an attack on the palace, timing the attack to begin just after the princess has announced Champion's impending execution. If the PCs agree with Rhoov's approach, they'll face resistance from the Green Brigade on their way to the palace, and from Red Martian Soldiers and Thling Elite Commandos once they're inside. If the PCs opt for a different approach, Rhoov will likely still go ahead with his plans ... unless the PCs take advance steps to prevent him from doing so. (If the PCs find themselves fighting against Rhoov's rebels and you need statistics for them, use the Soldier stock character from ICONS, p. 117, giving each one a Blast 5 (Shooting) Device – Martian Rifle.)

Enemies: Any or all of the following, depending on the circumstances —

Princess Helo Thiris
Red Martian Soldiers
Thling Elite Commandos
Green Brigadiers
Hunter Rhoov
Red Martian Rebels

Situation: Unless the PCs have opted to abandon Champion, the events in Auralon should eventually lead the PCs to confront Helo Thiris in her throne room, where she plans to execute Vance Champion. Rhoov will use this opportunity to launch an attack against Princess Thiris. The repentant Champion, for his part, will do his best to make amends for his long-past misdeed.

Enemy Tactics: If the PCs have managed to approach Thiris diplomatically, she's open to reason. Thiris won't initiate violence against anyone other than Champion, but her troops will leap to her defense if she's threatened in any way. For his part, Vance will plead with the PCs not to harm the princess. If he's freed from his restraints, Champion will do his best to protect her, as will Mister Ix. All the while, Champion will try to explain what's going on — and to take responsibility for the damage he's done. After all, despite Vance's egregious misdeed decades ago, he's still a hero at heart. If Princess Thiris dies, her troops will quickly surrender to Hunter Rhoov.

Rhoov won't be as restrained as either Thiris or Champion. He'll hold back only until Thiris has formally ordered Champion's execution, and then he'll spring into action. Whether the PCs have agreed to aid them or not, Rhoov and his rebels will attack, trying to free Champion and kill the princess. Rhoov will try to cause as much chaos as possible to give himself room to maneuver. Once he realizes that Champion is attempting to protect Thiris, Rhoov will roar in anger at this "betrayal." Then, as soon as he gets the chance, Rhoov will extricate himself from the battle and head for the transport field generators, intending to destroy them. If Rhoov's plan is exposed, or if he's prevented from destroying the transport field generators but can still reach the transport field's control panel, he'll play his final card: using the transport field to bring another

tendactylon into the palace's throne room! This particular tendactylon is being driven mad by a strange device, so it's only trying to crush, kill, maim, and destroy — not eat. Other than Rhoov himself, none of the Martians will stick around once this beast arrives.

Aftermath: If Hunter Rhoov and his rebels manage to kill the princess and stop the PCs somehow, you have the makings for an exciting sequel. Seeing the advantage of having super-powered allies, Rhoov will imprison the PCs, hoping eventually to bend them to his cause. How that works out is beyond the scope of this adventure, and could even be the beginning of a full-fledged Mars-based campaign.

If the PCs save the princess and defeat Rhoov (and the second tendactylon, if Rhoov managed to summon it), the princess must decide Vance Champion's fate. To add to the drama, role-play her indecision, and give the PCs a chance to affect the outcome through diplomacy. In the end, Thiris should decide to commute his death sentence. In return, Champion will take responsibility for the damage he did by leaving. What's more, he offers to stay help the current Martian government recover from the fractured state his descendants have caused. The PCs could head back to Earth immediately for a basic happy ending, or could stick around for a formal ceremony if you want a "pulpier" feel. Thiris and Champion will bid the PCs goodbye, using the transport field to send the PCs back to the docks where Champion's yacht once floated on the waves. For a comical touch, remember that the transport field's targeting system is imprecise due to Thiris's reliance on synthesized tau crystals, and have the PCs return in midair above the bay instead of on the docks. No matter how much time they seem to have spent on Mars, they've really been gone a very short time. They return just as the police arrive to find out what happened to the boat, which many reported as exploding in the harbor. In the sky, the red planet glitters, and the PCs know that a new chapter has begun in the adventures of Vance Champion.

Heroic Sacrifice of Major NPCs — An Alternate Ending

Whenever possible, the PCs' actions should determine the outcome of the scenario. However, you can also use Vance Champion and Mister Ix in dramatic ways to help the PCs if needed. In one playtest, Champion threw himself in front of the princess and sacrificed himself to protect her. This gave the PCs a chance to defeat the tendactylon and Hunter Rhoov, although it also added a poignant tone to the end of the adventure. In another playtest, Mister Ix sacrificed himself to protect both Princess Thiris and Vance Champion, exploding in the tendactylon's tentacles and thereby defeating the beast.

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NPC SECTION

Vance Champion

Transformed

Prowess 5
Coordination 8
Strength 6
Intellect 3
Awareness 6
Willpower 5

Stamina 11
Determination *

Specialties
Acrobatics

Powers
Blast Device 7 (Shooting) – Martian Annihilator
Pistol

Qualities
Catchphrase : “Great Scott!”
Epithet: The Warlord of Mars
Motivation: Protect the innocent
Connections : United States military and
Aeronautics Division

Challenges
Social : Old-fashioned
Social : Oblivious to change
Enemy : Princess Helo Thiris (unbeknownst to him)

Point Total 41

Vance Champion is a household name among people who follow superheroics and metahuman activities. Many see him as one of the world’s first super-science adventurers, but few know his true history. Champion was born in 1870 to a French trapper plying his trade in Alberta, Canada. In the fall of 1888, while on a trapping expedition himself, Champion was taken via a beam of multicolored light to Mars.

Champion’s exploits across Mars — how he



impressed the Green Martian tribes, drove back the Martian White Ape hordes, and wooed the princess of the Red Martians — were chronicled in a series of books published after he returned to Earth in the 1920s. Time passed so slowly for Champion on Mars that he spent lifetimes there, having adventures and then returning to earth. During one of his returns to Earth, he fell in love with Glinda Drake, daughter of the Space Administration’s chief of operations. He returned to Mars for one last adventure, then decided to return permanently to Earth, ignoring any further calls from Mars.

Little did he know that had left a family behind, giving rise to a bloodline that would prove more warlike than even the fiercest Green Martian.

Mister Ix

Artificial

Prowess 2
Coordination 2
Strength 4
Intellect 4
Awareness 2
Willpower 2

Stamina 6
Determination *

Specialties

Area (Mars, c. 1950)

Qualities

Epithet : Martian Valet Robot
Motivation : Assist Vance Champion

Challenges

Social : Irritated When Humans Mispronounce His Name

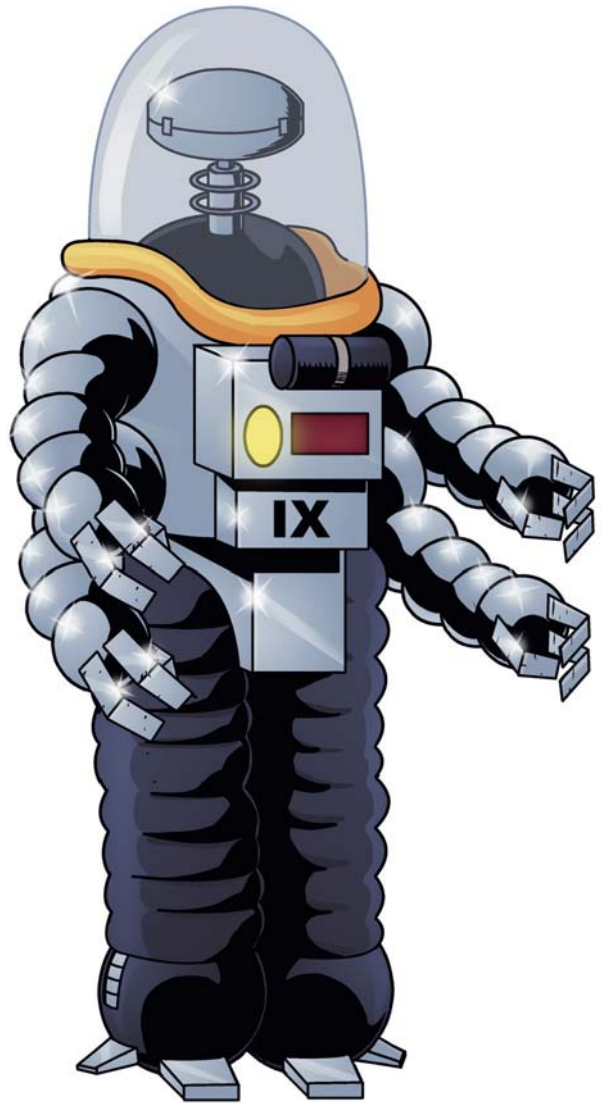
Mister Ix is a vintage Martian Valet Robot who served Vance Champion on Mars decades ago, and returned with him to Earth after Champion's last intentional visit to the Red Planet. In his base configuration, Mister Ix has no combat capabilities, and his knowledge of Mars is several decades out of date.

Mister Ix (Upgraded)

Artificial

Prowess 3
Coordination 3
Strength 4
Intellect 4
Awareness 3
Willpower 3

Stamina 7
Determination *



Specialties

Area (Mars, Up-to-Date)

Powers

Interface 4

Qualities

Epithet : Martian Valet Robot
Motivation : Assist Vance Champion

Challenges

Social : Irritable when humans get his name wrong
Limit : Interface is bidirectional

If upgraded, Mister Ix gains the ability to make simple unarmed attacks using his appendages or ranged attacks using guns, if their triggering mechanisms are appropriately modified for his

appendages. He also gains the ability to access the worldwide Martian communications network, but conversely, the Martian government gains the ability to tap into Mister Ix's knowledge base and track him wherever he goes. See the sidebar "The Helpful Mister Ix" for more information about this "feature."

Princess Helo Thiris

Birthright

Prowess 2

Coordination 4

Strength 3

Intellect 5

Awareness 5

Willpower 3

Stamina 6

Determination *

Specialties

Area Master (Mars)

Leadership Expert

Powers

Blast 4 (Blasting) Device — Martian Stun Blaster

Qualities

Epithet : Princess of Mars

Connections : Martian government and military

Motivation : Build a better Mars

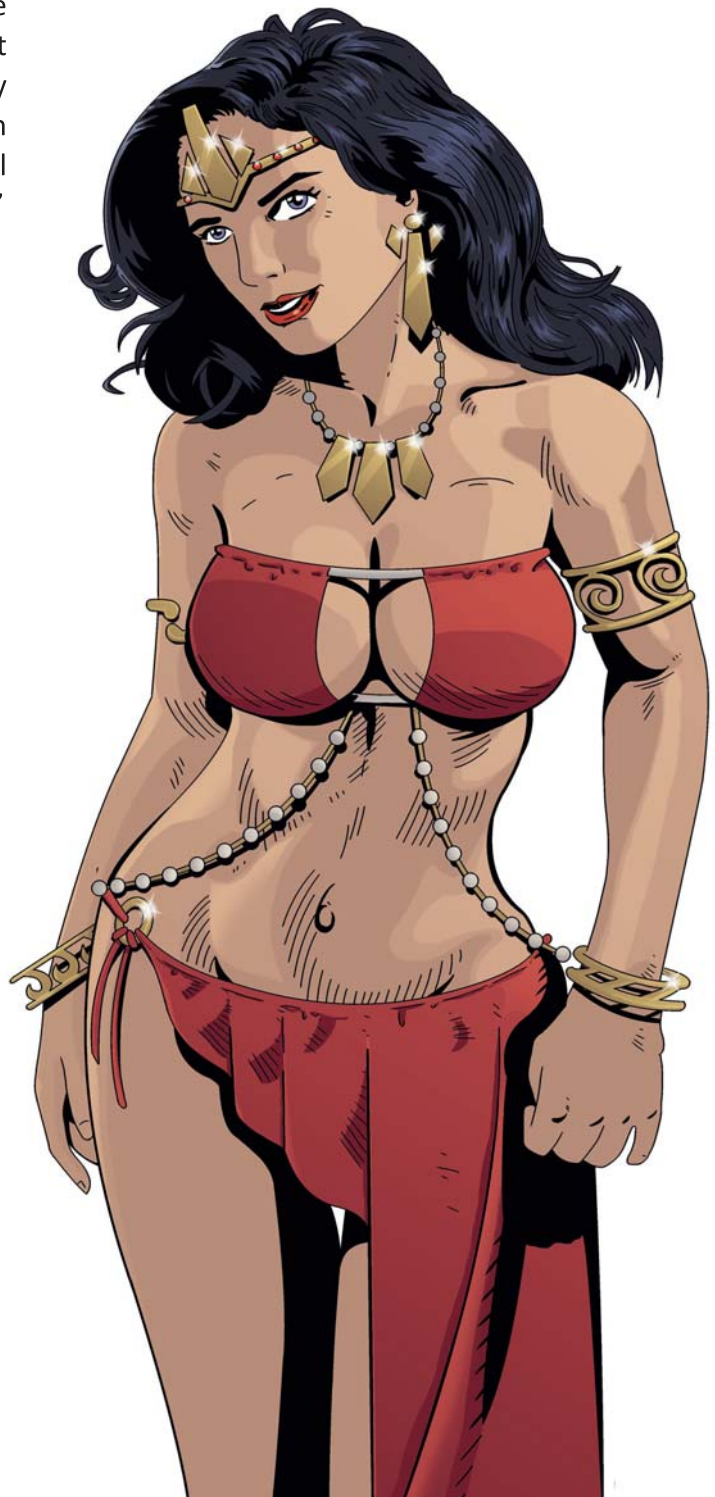
Challenges

Personal : Irrational hatred of Vance Champion

Enemy : Hunter Rhoov and his Red Martian rebels

Point Total 30

Princess Helo Thiris is the current monarch of Mars. She's the granddaughter of the brutal ruler Karka Thune, and therefore she's also Vance Champion's great-granddaughter. Thiris blames at least a large part of Thune's brutality on the fact that his father, Champion, abandoned Thune's pregnant mother to go back to Earth with his Earthling girlfriend, Glinda Drake. Therefore, Thiris wants to publicly execute Champion as a way to let Mars symbolically cut ties with its past. Aside from this obsession, Thiris is an



enlightened ruler who genuinely wants to move Mars past Karka Thune's heritage of brutal oppression.

Hunter Rhoov

Birthright

Prowess 6

Coordination 6

Strength 5

Intellect 6

Awareness 3

Willpower 3

Stamina 8

Determination *

Specialties

Aerial Combat (Sky-Skiff Maneuvers)

Weapons (Martian Blades)

Powers

Super-Speed 3

Binding Device 6

Qualities

Catchphrase : "For Free Mars!"

Connections : Red Martian underground

Epithet : Scion of Karka Thune

Motivation : Destroying the Martian monarchy

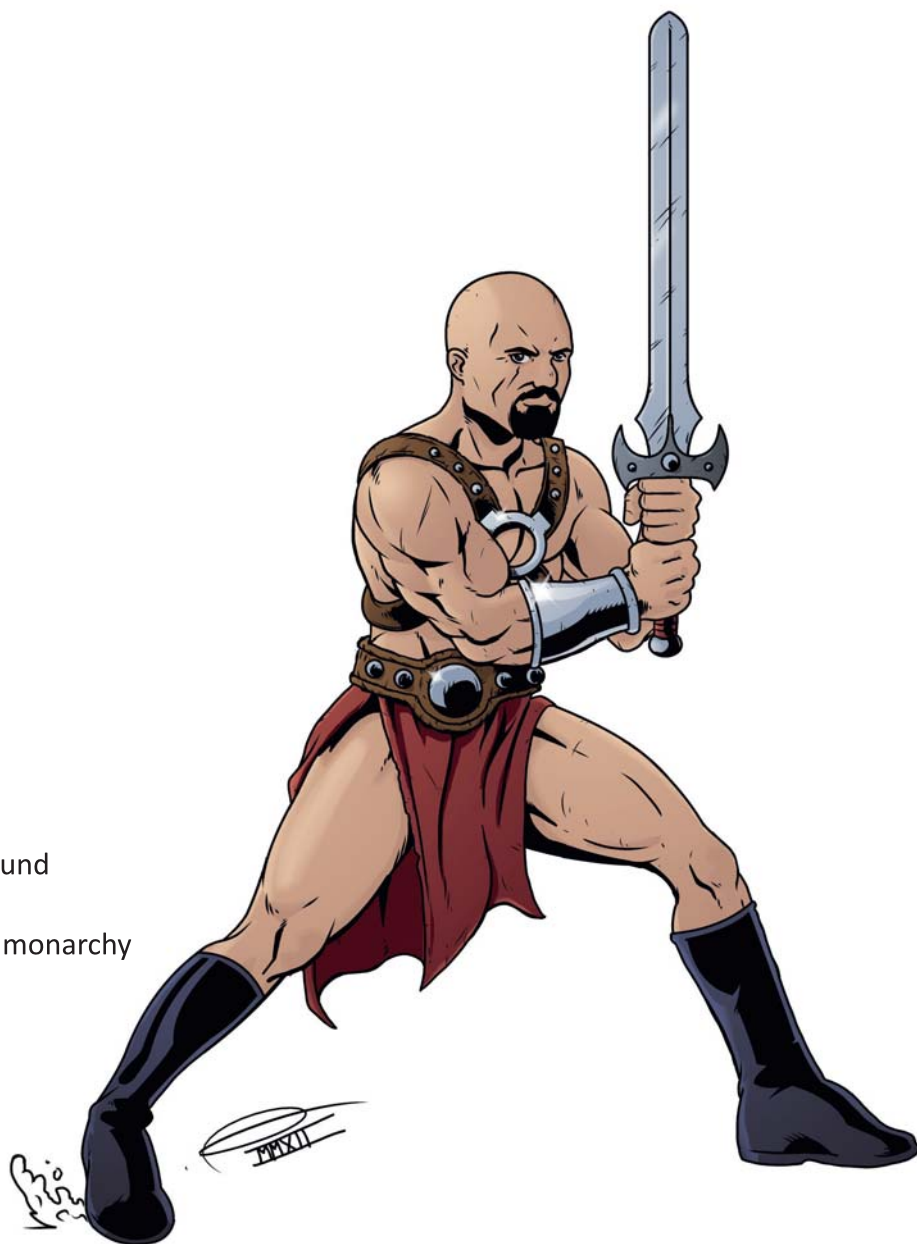
Challenges

Enemy : Martian monarchy

Social : Outcast and rebel

Weakness : Gets rattled if betrayed

Point Total 40



Hunter Rhoov is the grandson of Mars's most brutal warlord, Karka Thune — which also makes him cousin to the current reigning monarch, Princess Helo Thiris. Rhoov wants to dethrone Thiris by killing her, assume her position as monarch of Mars, and bring Mars back to a time when Red Martians ruled with brutal application of power. Rhoov knows his history, and if the old Martians were able to conquer with the help of just one Earthling, imagine what he can do with multiple, super-powered Earthlings!

Green Brigadier

Unearthly

Prowess 8

Coordination 7

Strength 8

Intellect 4

Awareness 4

Willpower 3

Stamina 11

Determination *

Specialties

Military

Weapons Expert (Blades)

Weapons (Guns)

Powers

Danger Sense 4

Leaping 5

Extra Body Parts 4 (Extra Arms (Fast Attack))

Invulnerability 5 – Tough Skin

Qualities

Epithet : Loyal soldiers

Motivation : Protect the princess

Challenges

Social : Single-minded

Point Total 58

The green-skinned Martians are four-armed creatures with enhanced strength and durability as well as the ability to leap long distances. Tribal by nature, they are now integrated into the society of Red Martians, and are loyal to the current monarch. Green Martians have four arms, and long tusks jut from their aquiline faces.



Thling Elite Commando

Birthright

Prowess 6
Coordination 5
Strength 5
Intellect 4
Awareness 4
Willpower 4

Stamina 9
Determination *

Specialties

Military Master
Martial Arts Master
Stealth Expert
Weapons (Guns)

Powers

Blast Device 5 (Shooting) – Martian Rifle

Qualities

Epithet : Thling Elite
Motivation : Loyalty to the Martian monarch

Challenges

Social : Aloof

The Thlings are the hybrid Human/Red Martian race, descended from the warlord Karka Thune (and, by extension, from Vance Champion). While they are combative at heart, they also bear the stigma of being related to the most violent and brutal warlord Mars has ever known.

Martian White Ape

Unearthly

Prowess 5
Coordination 5
Strength 6
Intellect 2
Awareness 4
Willpower 3

Stamina 9



Determination *

Specialties
Wrestling

Powers

Extra Body Parts 4 (Extra Arms (Fast Attack))
Invulnerability 2
Strike 4 (Slashing) - Bite

Qualities

Motivation : Survive

Challenges

Social : Shunned and feared by civilized Martians

Point Total 36

The so-called “white apes” of Mars resemble four-armed albino gorillas. They are as savage and brutal as the harsh Martian landscape that they inhabit.

Tendactylon

Unearthly

Prowess 6
Coordination 4
Strength 9
Intellect 1
Awareness 5
Willpower 3

Stamina 12
Determination *

Specialties

Powers

Binding 9 - Mouth/Throat
Extra Body Parts 8 (Tentacles)
Fast Attack 8
Invulnerability 9
Burrowing 9
Supersenses 1 - Tremor Sense

Qualities

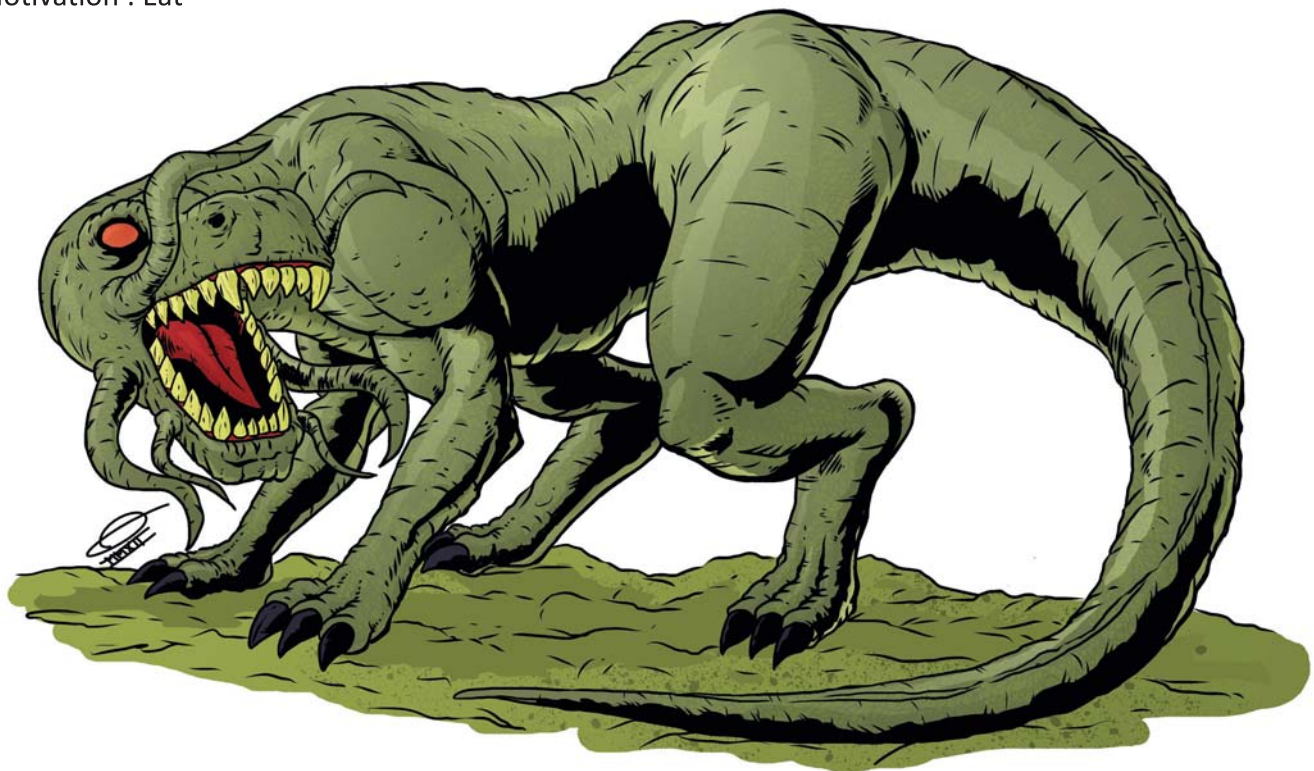
Power Stunt : Binding is Prowess-based, limited to close range
Motivation : Eat

Challenges

Personal : Large target (-3 to defense)
Personal : Mindless brute

Point Total 72

A tendactylon resembles a quadrupedal tyrannosaurus, about sixty or seventy feet long, its mouth surrounded by long tentacles. Only a few tendactylons exist. Although exotic, they're just animals, driven by their survival instincts. Tendactylons often swallow their prey whole. Once a tendactylon stuffs a human-sized creature into its mouth, that creature is effectively held by a Binding 9 attack. After two pages in the creature's mouth and throat, the prey is pulled into the creature's gullet, and takes 3 Stamina damage per page from the tendactylon's digestive muscles and acids while so engulfed. A creature inside the tendactylon's gullet can pull itself out by accumulating a massive success on a pyramid test of the creature's Strength against the tendactylon's Strength.



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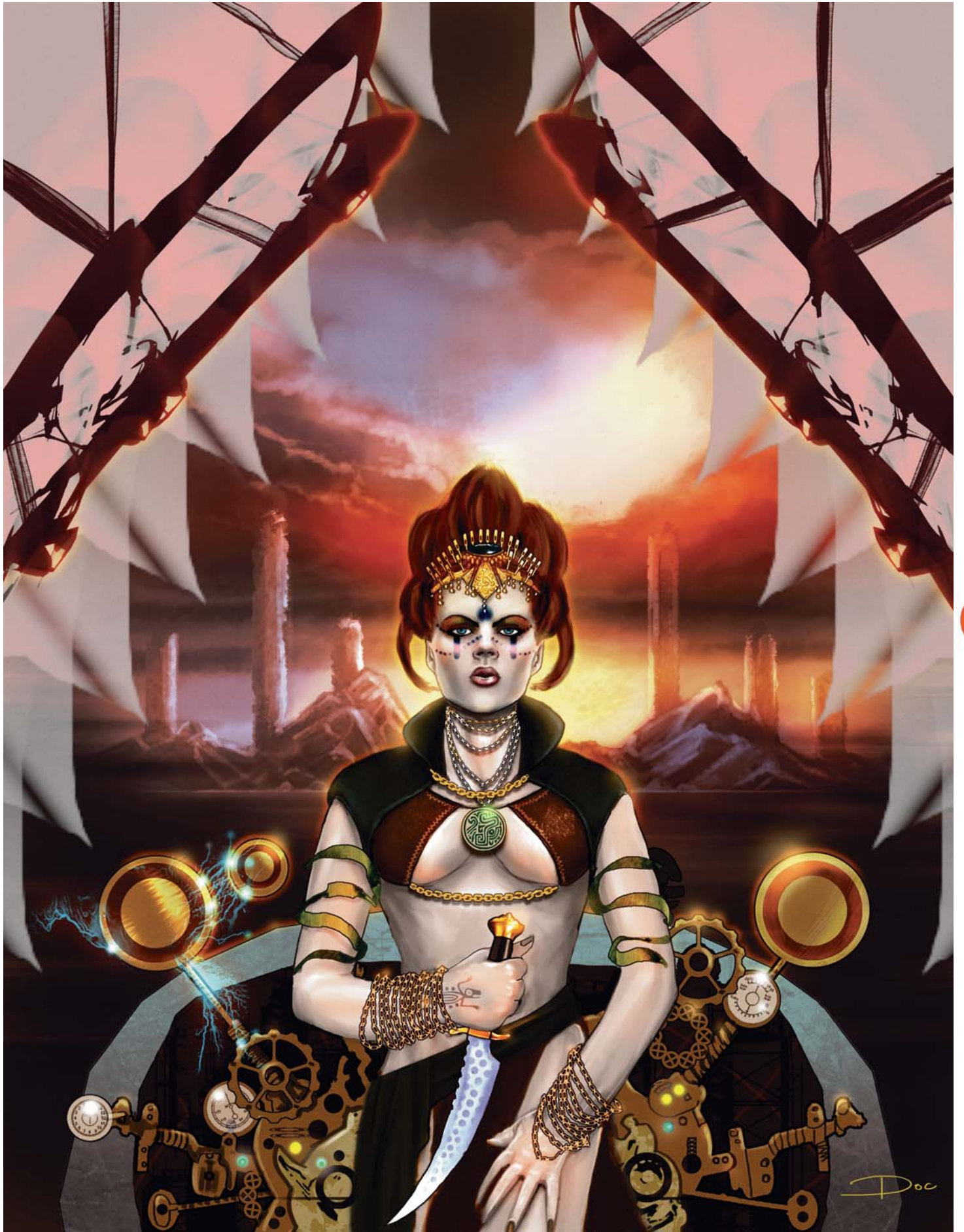
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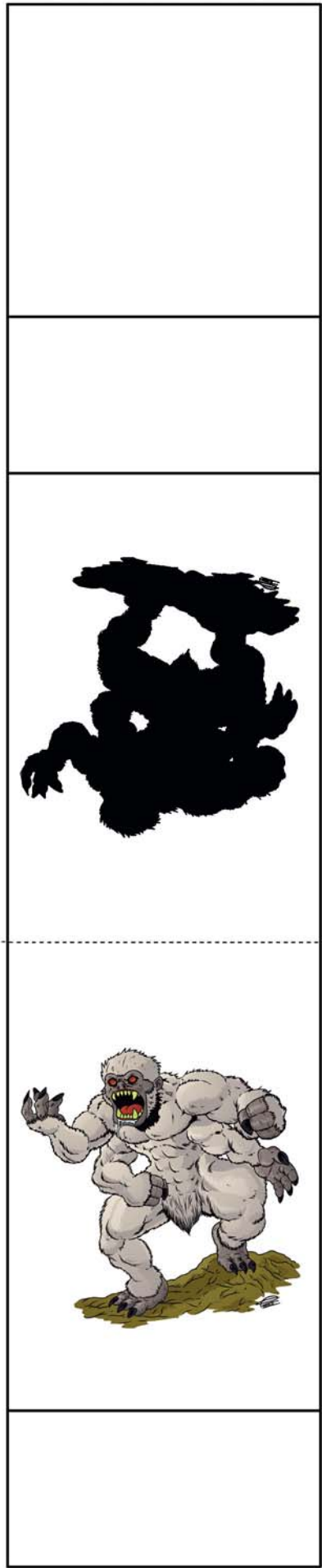
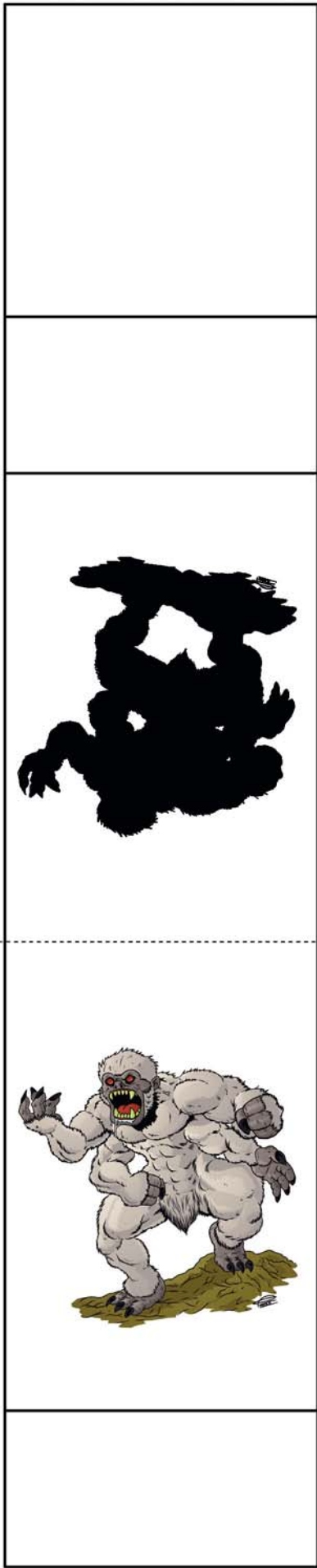
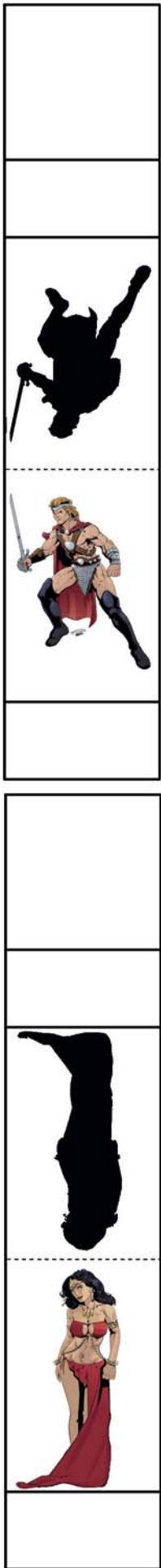
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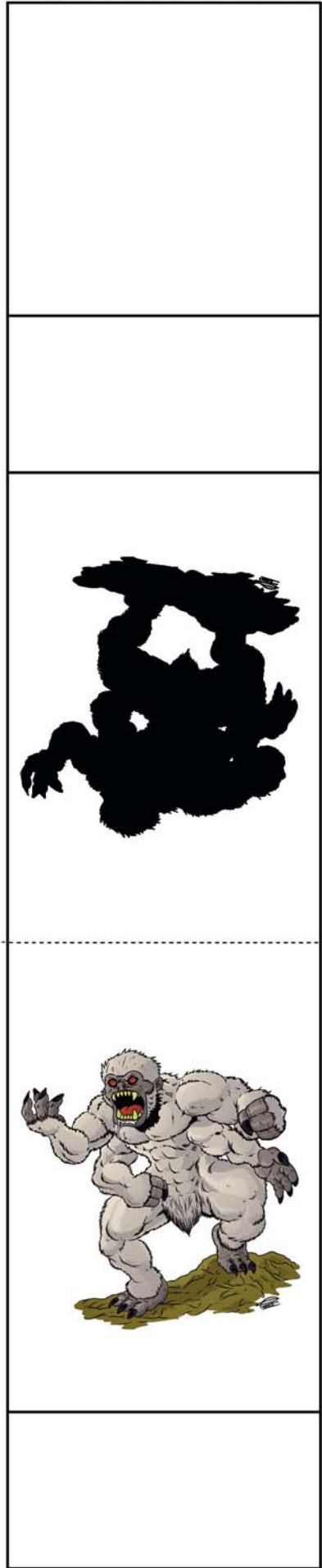
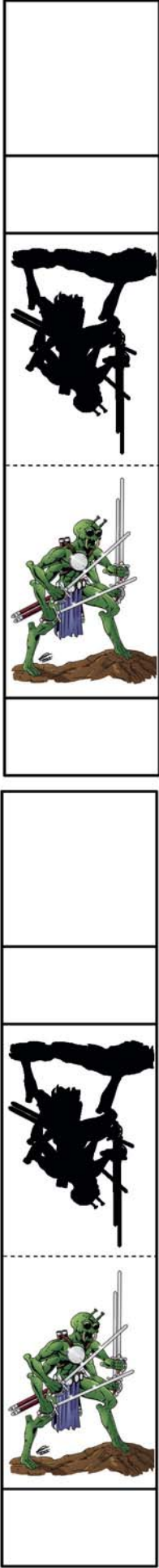
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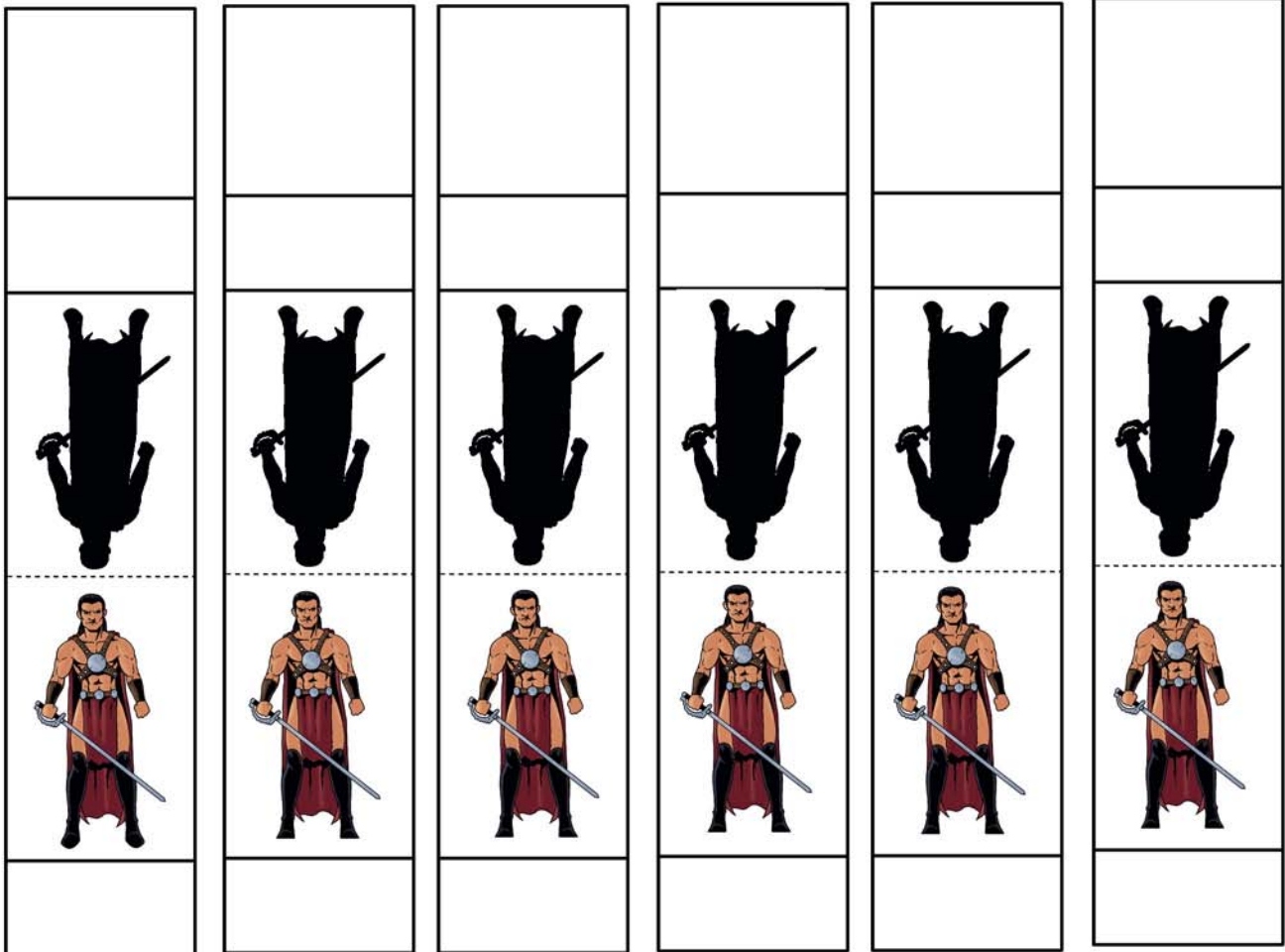
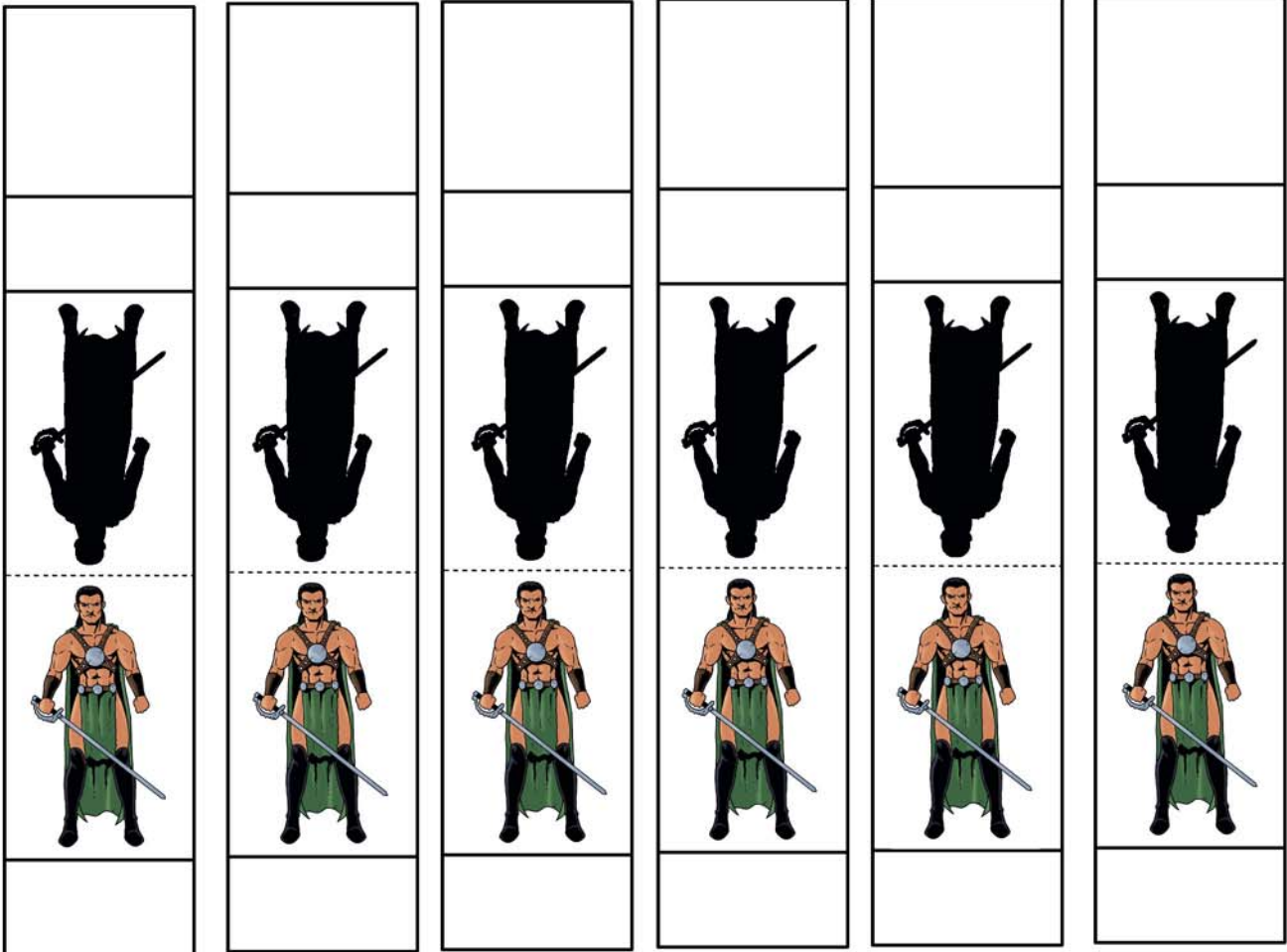
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