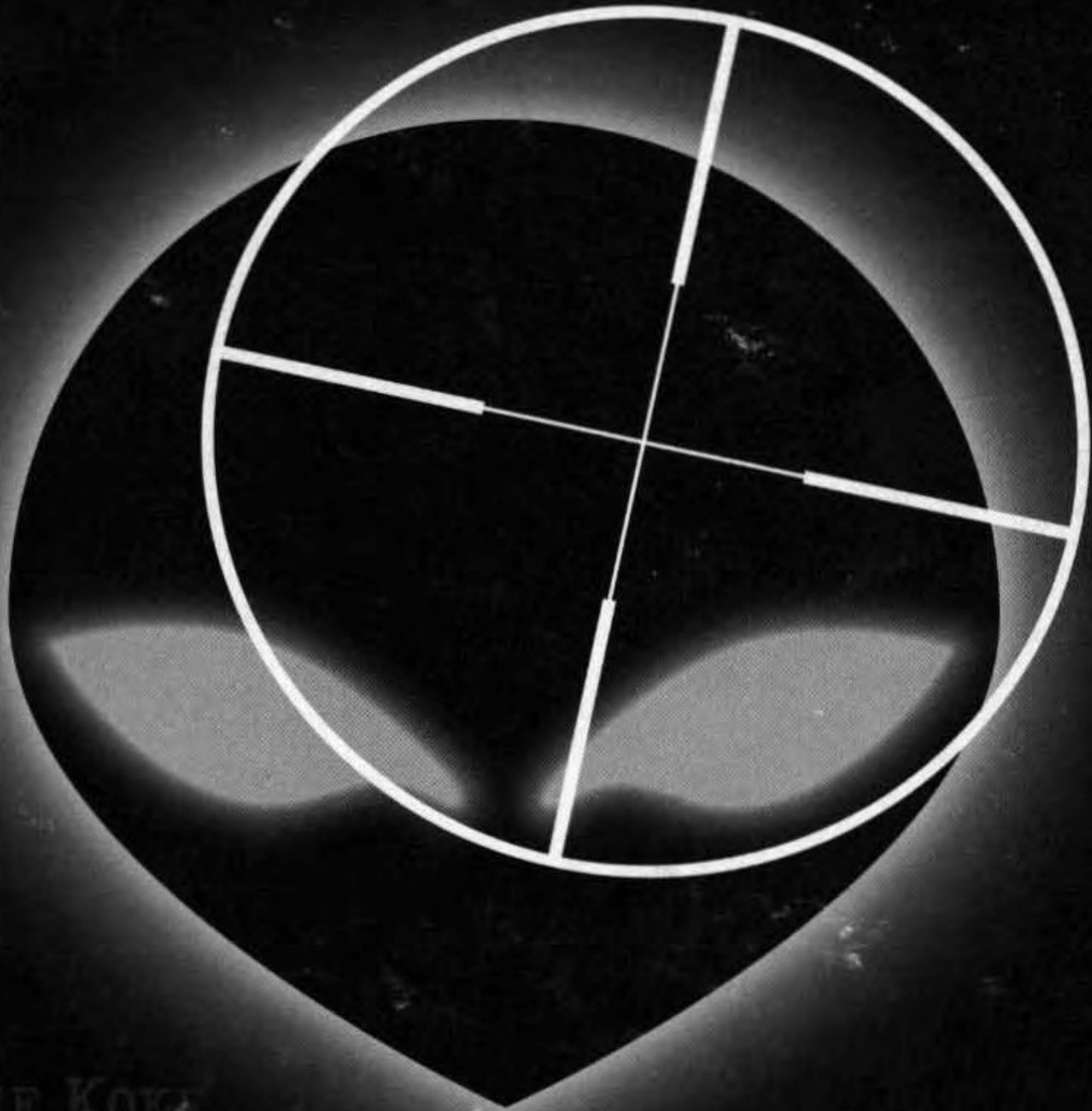


G U R P S

BLACK OPS™

FIND THE TRUTH — AND KILL IT



BY JEFF KOKE
AND S. JOHN ROSS

STEVE JACKSON GAMES

G U R P S

BLACK OPS

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thanks to Sandra Earles, Shawn Fisher, Marty Franklin,
Dan Jasman and Bob Likins.

Jeff Koke dedicates this book to the twin joys of his life – Angela, who loves him more than he could possibly deserve, and Alexandra, who simply loves. S. John Ross would like to dedicate his work on this book to Tim Driscoll and Clint Gaige, both of whom have inspired and fed his interest in the action-movie genres.

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STEVE JACKSON GAMES

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INTRODUCTION

About GURPS

Steve Jackson Games is committed to full support of the GURPS system. Our address is SJ Games, Box 18957, Austin, TX 78760. Please include a self-addressed, stamped envelope (SASE) any time you write us! Resources now available include:

Pyramid. Our bimonthly magazine includes new rules and articles for GURPS, as well as information on *In Nomine*, *Illuminati: New World Order*, *Car Wars*, *Toon*, *Ogre Miniatures* and more. It also covers top releases from other companies – *Castle Falkenstein*, *Traveller*, *Call of Cthulhu*, *Shadowrun* and many more.

New supplements and adventures. GURPS continues to grow, and we'll be happy to let you know what's new. A current catalog is available for an SASE. Or check out our Web site (below).

Errata. Everyone makes mistakes, including us – but we do our best to fix our errors. Up-to-date errata sheets for all GURPS releases, including this book, are always available from SJ Games; be sure to include an SASE with your request. Or download them from the Web – see below.

Q&A. We do our best to answer any game question accompanied by an SASE.

Gamer input. We value your comments. We will consider them, not only for new products, but also when we update this book in later printings!

Internet. Visit us on the World Wide Web at www.sjgames.com for an online catalog, errata and hundreds of pages of information. *Illuminati Online* supports SJ Games with discussion areas for many games, including GURPS. Here's where we do a lot of our playtesting! Dial 512-485-7440 at up to 33.6K baud – or telnet to io.com. We also have conferences on CompuServe and America Online. GURPS has its own Usenet group, too.rec.games.frp.gurps.

GURPSnet. Much of the online discussion of GURPS happens on this e-mail list. To join, send an e-mail to majordomo@io.com with "subscribe GURPSnet-L" in the body, or point your World Wide Web browser to www.io.com/~ftp/GURPSnet/www/.

A Note From the Authors

The first part of this book (up through Chapter 3) and the vignettes beginning the chapters are adapted from a mysterious, partially burned document found in a Dumpster behind a Seattle tractor plant. It was edited for clarity and to remove repetitions; other than that, it's presented in its entirety. The supposed author of this document, one Ivan Decker, could not be located to verify its authenticity.

The remainder of this book provides GURPS rules and campaign suggestions for playing in a world that seems ominously like our own.



Important Players' Note

A conspiracy wouldn't be much of a conspiracy if everyone knew everything that was going on. *Black Ops* contains important yet secret information meant for Game Masters to read and convey as warranted. This material is in sidebars with titles beginning *Argus' Eyes Only* and the entirety of Chapter 6, *Things to Hunt and Kill*. Black ops displaying knowledge of such matters may draw unwanted Security-department attention, at the GM's discretion.

So It Begins . . .

"Oh God oh God oh God oh God oh God . . ."

She just won't shut up. I realize that having the greater part of your arm removed is painful, but she's really starting to give me the willies.

"Oh God oh my God oh Jesus oh God oh God oh merciful Christ . . ."

She's not that light, either. Big girl, thick, like a damn side of beef. A very loud, freaked-out side of beef. I'm dragging her down the sewer tunnel which, by the way, seems to be slowly filling with sewage, flashlight's running low and she's squealing like a stuck pig about her friggin' arm.

So I say, "Shut up, lily, or I'm putting you in the bag."

"Okay, okay," she says. "Okay." This is only marginally more comforting than "oh God," but at least it sounds somewhat positive and I know she doesn't want to get frozen. The thing that got her arm is somewhere back in the tunnel, probably bleeding to death courtesy of my last shotgun shell. Nastiest wiggler I've ever seen. Big as an alligator and segmented like a centipede, with short stubby legs protruding in all directions and a mouth full of teeth that come out of nowhere.

I push Illiana up onto a ledge and look at the arm. It's bad – huge gashes run vertically from shoulder to elbow, and both bones are snapped and protruding from the skin below the joint. Her hand is a bloody mess, barely there. I pull off my bandanna and tie a tourniquet just below the shoulder. She winces as I knot it and starts mumbling her litany again to herself, "oh God oh God oh God oh Jesus . . ."

"Listen. We're copacetic here. The squad is just up the way. The doc's gonna do wonders with your arm. Trust me, you're fine." It's total b.s. and I think she knows it. She's just staring in a daze, refusing to look in my face.

I snap my fingers a couple of times. "Please, Illiana, stay with me, here. You've got to keep it under control or we're going to bite it for sure."

"Oh God! Oh God! Oh God!" she starts screaming. She kicks me backward with one foot and with her good hand draws the blood-soaked .45 from her shoulder holster and points it straight at my head. "Jesus, Illy, put that away. I'll get us out of here, I promise."

Crack! Crack! Crack! Crack! She unloads the entire clip. My eyes are closed and burning with red light. But there's no pain, no blackness – just the sick collapse of the thing behind me and its fetid final groan. Then all I can hear is the soft gurgling of sewage and the faint rumble of the subway.

The sewage reaches my waist now. I stare at Illiana.

"Reload that, and let's get the hell out of here."

Listen Close

Welcome to a messed-up world.

Of course, you already know that. You live here, too. But you haven't seen the half of it. Everything I'm going to tell you is true. If someone tells you different, they're lying to you. Or, like you, they have no idea what's really going on.

Right now, you could have an electronic chip implanted behind your ear. Can you feel it? It feels like a little pimple or lump on the bone. If you are one of the ten million already chipped, the Grey aliens who are harvesting us can monitor you and everything you hear. Removal is simple; unfortunately, only about 20 doctors on the planet even know the chip exists. Not all of them work for us.

Right now, your closest friend may have, instead of his brain, a parasitic creature buried in his cerebral cortex and controlling his body. Of course, the body only lasts about a year after infestation, but by then the creature has lured five or six victims to the undercity, new hosts for its children. Is someone you know looking a little ill and acting strange? Maybe he's been brainsucked.

Or maybe he's a vampire. No, if he were a vampire, you'd be dead. Vampires don't have friends. They even hate each other. All they want to do is feed. If you're normal, the only time you'd see one is right before it killed you, drank your blood and ate your internal organs, leaving you to steam like roadkill in the moonlight until you died . . . or worse, became one of them.

Sounds like a load of crap, doesn't it? I must be pulling your leg. I wish. See, it's my job to kill all of these creatures. I'm a black op. I work for an organization so secret that even the U.S. government has no idea that we exist. The Company pays me to keep the world safe from all the bizarre terrors that the powermongers are too afraid to let society know about. Aliens, bigfoot, Walt's frozen body – it's all true, and worse. Things they couldn't possibly print in the tabloids. Things that look like they came from some lunatic's sketchbook. You pray that you're hallucinating. You beg for the sweet release of death.

So come on. Join in the fun. There's only two kinds of people in the world: hunters and prey. If you don't start hunting then you will be prey. Pick the right side. Don't worry; it's not as bad as I make it sound.

You'll get to kill a lot of things before they finally get you.

— Ivan Decker, August 1997

Page References

Rules and statistics in this book are specifically for the *GURPS Basic Set, Third Edition*. Any page reference that begins with a B refers to the *GURPS Basic Set* – e.g., p. B102 means p. 102 of the *GURPS Basic Set, Third Edition*.

Page references that begin with C1 indicate *GURPS Compendium I*. Other references are BE to *Bestiary, Second Edition*, CII to *Compendium II, HT to High-Tech, Second Edition*, P to *Psionics, UT to Ultra-Tech, Second Edition Revised* and VE to *Vehicles, Second Edition*. See *GURPS Compendium I*, p. 181, for a full list of abbreviations for *GURPS* titles.

About the Authors

Jeff Koke is a graphic designer, writer and musician living in the Austin, Texas, area with his lovely wife, Angela, and their endearing cherub of a daughter, Alexandra (recently certified the smartest baby on Earth). He has two strapping golden retrievers and a harried half-Siamese cat. His previous writing credits include *GURPS Vampire: The Masquerade* and an adventure in each of *GURPS Supers Adventures* and *GURPS Time Travel Adventures*. He plays bass and writes songs for a local rock 'n' roll band, called *Love Blender*. He honestly believes everything in this book is true and is finally relieved that someone will read his ravings.

S. John Ross lives in what was once a Colonial-era tobacco town that grew up to serve important roles in the Revolutionary War, the Civil War and now the War For Earth. He's the author of *GURPS Warehouse 23*, and the co-author (with Daniel Thibault) of *GURPS Grimoire*, but his most obscure achievement is his role as a playtester for *GURPS Terradyne*, for which he received no credit in print. Justice is now served. He has no cats, and his neighbors seem to have fewer each year, as the diabolical experiments continue. He is not sane, and must be stopped.

CHAPTER ONE

THE SECRET ELITE

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'Men in Black' Destroy House, Neighbor Says

SYLMAR, Calif. - Fire investigators have no leads in a strange Nov. 5 blaze, but a neighbor does. She claims "men in black" set the fire, which consumed a house in just 30 minutes.

Authorities can find no evidence of arson after a fire at the home of Daniel Smith, who has not been seen since. The house burned down far more rapidly than usual, thwarting firefighters' efforts.

But neighbor Jennifer Gales, of Sylmar, said she witnessed arsonists at work. "It was those men in the black suits," she said. "They took him away and burned his house."

Gales said she saw five or six people in black clothes exit a nondescript recreational vehicle and enter Smith's home at about 3:30 a.m. Nov. 5. After the sounds of a struggle, and what she described as a high-pitched animal shriek, these "men in black" allegedly left through the front door with a large, wriggling sack. Moments later, the house was ablaze.

When asked about Gales' account, Sylmar police spokesman Norm Finster said, "The fire, and incidents surrounding it, are under investigation."

Fire officials also refused comment on Gales' story, for lack of evidence. "There's really not much left to investigate," said Fire Chief Geoffrey Hammond. "That fire was so hot and burned so fast, everything was destroyed. There's just ash now."

Smith is a research engineer for the Dynatronics Corporation, 20 miles northeast of Sylmar. Co-workers say he is a quiet man, with no close family and few friends. Neighbors describe him as friendly but shy, keeping mostly to himself.

Finster said another neighbor was working in his garage at the time of the fire and reported seeing nothing.

Gales also said she heard helicopters while the "men in black" were at Smith's. Finster pointed out that a municipal airport is two miles from the neighborhood, but refused further comment on her account.

If You Only Knew the Half of It

The vast majority of people go about their daily business laboring under the pleasant illusion that everything is pretty much okay.

Sure, crime is on the upswing, especially things like inexplicably brutal slayings, but the politicians are promising more police and more prisons, and it has to turn around sooner or later. Yeah, people disappear mysteriously - especially children - but the authorities are on top of the situation, and there's always a logical explanation waiting at the end of the investigation. So what if it doesn't exactly fit the facts?

Of course, people report all manner of strange occurrences - strange beasts roaming the wilderness, devils abducting their babies, aliens performing sexual experiments on several generations of a single family - but those people are crackpots. Surely there are rational explanations for all of these things.

Thankfully, the respectable media ignores most of these reports and relays to us the important news of the day: the state of the stock market, the latest celebrity murder, sinking cruise ships in the Atlantic. If any of those strange

Argus' Eyes Only

This is only a test. Black ops without the proper Game Master level of security clearance should not read any material with a title beginning *Argus' Eyes Only*. Report any such material to a GM-cleared operative immediately.

About the Narrator

I have many names. You can call me Ivan Decker. That is the identity I am most fond of, the one furthest from the blood that I've shed as a black op.

I've been a Combat department op for 15 years, and survived 53 missions. This is practically unheard of, and I only know of three ops who've survived more. As far as I know, they're all retired, teaching at the Academy or working admin for their departments. I'm the oldest active op, and I risk my career and my life by writing this.

I risk my sanity if I don't.

Unlike most ops, I am married, with two children. My family is blissfully unaware of my true profession, and it would drive them mad if I were to reveal it. I wouldn't. I spend much of my time as a farm-equipment salesman. I don't do much selling, but do make my rounds in rural areas with recent reports of UFOs or mysterious abductions. My clients tell me things they wouldn't tell a stranger.

Jan's a good wife who understands that a salesman has to get on the very next flight when someone across the country wants to buy a \$100,000 combine. I'm sure she knows there's a part of me I don't let her see, but she doesn't pry, and I love her for it.

For my part, I keep them unchipped and clean. If any Grey came near my house, he'd be a stain on the front lawn. I've put enough of those bad boys down to do it gagged, blindfolded and hopping on one foot.

I don't know how long I'm going to keep doing this. I know I should retire, but there's some part of me that won't give it up. I hate the thought of leaving Jan a widow with no idea what really happened to her husband, but I fear that's how it's going to end up. I want to get this all down before I feel that soft hum in my neck. The call I can't refuse. Omicron, Argus and the Company... calling me home.



Interview with General Davis Steele, Academy Director, November 1994

Good evening, sir. Thanks for taking the time to answer these questions. I'm sure my trainees will learn a great deal from your wisdom.

It's my pleasure.

You've said you don't care for the term "black op." Can you explain why?

I prefer to call the troops "protection agents." That's what me and Harry came up with in the beginning. I don't know where "black ops" came from, but I'm sure it's one of the younger crowd that started it.

You see, our job is to protect Mr. and Mrs. Normal from all the bizarre crap that they don't want to know about. We are the agents of their protection. We are invisible by necessity, but I am confident that they would want us there if they knew the entire truth.

How do you reconcile that with the civilians that you "dispose of?"

Listen here: Nowadays, any killing that we do is necessary. Nobody wants to take care of a busybody, but on rare occasions it's the only way to be sure we aren't discovered. The conspiracy is sacred. Besides, we're moving away from the "kill first" mentality that was a fixture in the early days. Lately, we've been perfecting nonviolent means of dealing with the nosy and innocents who happen to get in our way. That's the direction we're going, and I'm proud of that.

Continued on next page . . .

things were true, obviously we'd hear about it somewhere other than the tabloids.

Guess again, bucko.

The sad fact is that the Earth is under siege. Two races of alien creatures already have invaded our planet. One, the infamous Greys, is devilishly intelligent and coldly amoral. They just don't care. They've been around since the turn of the century, stealing humans for their clinical reproductive research.

The other race, what those who know like to call "brainsuckers," is voraciously brutal and slippery as hell. They've infiltrated the sewer and subway systems of every major city on the planet. At least when the Greys steal a human, they return him relatively unharmed with just a few scars or scooped flesh, memories of the unpleasant event mostly erased. The brainsuckers, after subjecting their hosts to a year or so of a half-aware, zombie-like existence, leave a corpse. An ugly corpse. They erase memories the old-fashioned way – they eat them.

It gets worse. Untold numbers of mundane creatures lurk in the shadows, things that zoology has yet to classify, things that live in active volcanoes, burrow under Antarctic ice, venture out from the depths of the Aleutian Trench, roam the steamy Amazon. Sometimes they've been hidden for millennia until some poor sap explores the wrong cave. We call 'em wigglers. Most of them are nasty, fast and enjoy the taste of flesh. Most of them go down hard.

Then there are the big ones. The beasts. You've heard of them: sasquatch, yeti, werewolf, vampire, demon. Who knows where they came from, but they've been around a long time, maybe even longer than we have. Sure, they've been pushed back by our insatiable need for development. Sure, there aren't as many as there used to be. But there are still plenty left, and they're no longer afraid of us. Now they're just . . . irritated.

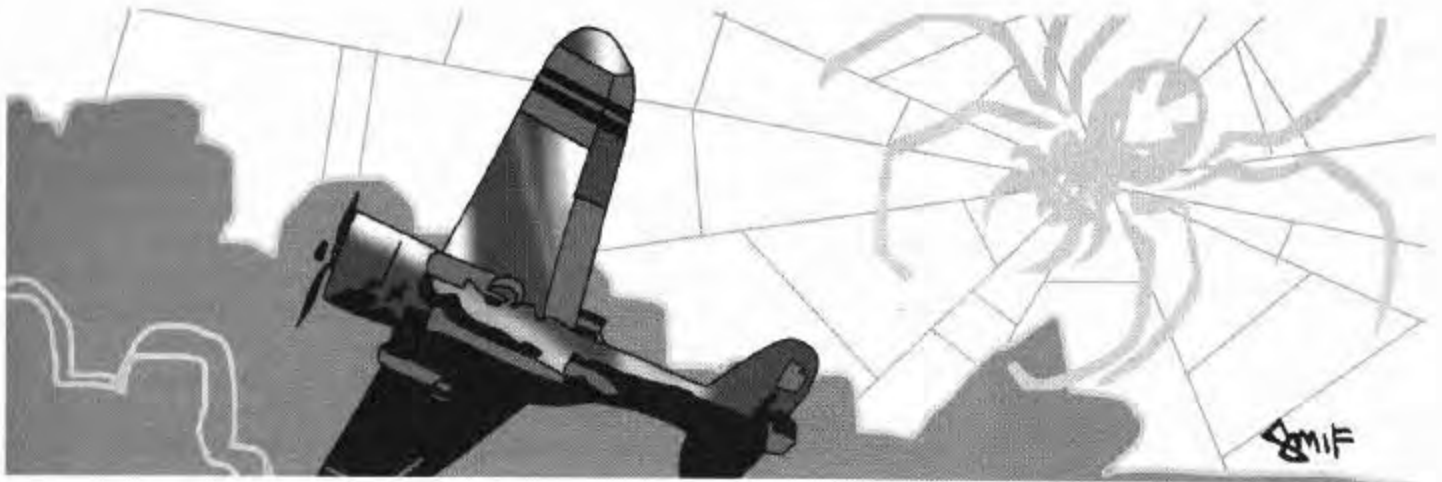
I'm not even finished. The worst part is that some of our own have turned against us. You see, a lot of people have powers – call it what you want: brain waves, psychic power, magic. Most of us don't even know about it. Sometimes good things happen; sometimes they don't. We just wander through thinking it's all fate.

But there are groups of people out there who *know* about their abilities, who actively recruit and train others. Some – sadly, too few – use their power to help, to make things right. But power corrupts, and psychic power corrupts at flank speed. Most of them go bad. These people – "rogues," we call them – work to change society to their advantage. They are immensely wealthy, desperately secret and far too powerful for anyone's good. There are a few ways to defend against this type of psychic meddling. A couple of bullets in the brain is a good start.



Which is where we come in. Helpless as it is, humanity is not completely unarmed. Someone long ago saw to it that when things started creeping out of the night, someone would be there to turn the lights on – and their lights out. That someone thought up Argus, and Argus thought up the Company.

I work for the Company, as do all of the black ops. Maybe – if you're good enough – you can, too.



Backtracking

A little history is in order. In 1943, an American pilot named Johnny Franklin was shot down over Hamburg, Germany. He was flying escort for a B-17 and everything was going smoothly when he broke away to check out a bogey in the distance. That bogey, he reported later, looked for all the world like a hovering, spinning black spider, with shiny legs and a glass dome for a head.

As he approached, it flashed two lights at him in quick succession ("like a car flashing its headlights to warn you of something"). Then his engine was on fire and he was going down. He never heard any gunshots or saw anything come from the UFO.

After a harrowing escape from behind enemy lines, Franklin reported his experience to his CO. The major was doubtful of the boy's story, having heard many tales of these enigmatic "foo fighters," but he took it up with his own CO, Colonel Davis Steele.

Colonel Steele recognized certain similarities between Franklin's story and a story he had heard from a general in the States at a cocktail party two years earlier, something about a "floating spider." He wanted to interview the young pilot himself. The major was told never to discuss this with anyone. He didn't.

After hearing Franklin's testimony and instructing the young pilot also to keep silent about the affair, Steele flew to Washington to meet with General Samuel Carrington, who, in the previous two years, had set up a covert task force to investigate reports of unusual occurrences on the battlefield or in the air. Franklin's case was one of about a hundred similar reports, though several pilots reported the foo fighters shooting down *enemy* planes.

There were also reports of deranged "half-men" roaming the battlefields and devouring the blood and organs of the newly killed. These creatures didn't die when shot; they just ran off. The only sure way to kill one was to burn it (which, unfortunately, destroyed any evidence). The words "vampire," "ghoul" and "demon" were used often and interchangeably. Carrington also had uncovered a slew of similar reports, in secret military files, through every major conflict since the Civil War. He took to drinking a little too much and developed a nasty cigarette habit.

The Birth of Argus

On the evening of February 17, 1944, Carrington met with Senator Harry Truman, who at the time was chairman of a special investigating committee created to root out corruption in the national defense infrastructure. Truman turned out to be a moral, trustworthy confidant. Over cigars and brandy, Carrington

Interview with General Davis Steele (Continued)

What is your overriding philosophy guiding Academy training?

That's easy. I believe every man and woman I train must be prepared to meet the very thing destined to end their life, and then survive the encounter.

How do you prepare them for that?

I try to kill them. On one level, that's what the Academy's all about. This job requires endurance and abilities beyond those possessed by even the most exceptional people. We try hard to weed out the unfit before recruitment, but it doesn't always work out that way. The only way to ensure our agents will be up to the challenges they meet in their missions is to exceed those in training.

You lose a lot of trainees, don't you?

Almost half. That seems like a lot. It seems like a whole mess of innocents dead for no good reason. I don't like it, either. But when you look at it from all angles, it's got to be this way, or the world would be a blackened wasteland overrun by demons and aliens.

How do you think your graduates are doing?

Splendidly, considering what we face. It seems strange, given how talented these operatives are, to think that we're barely holding on, but what we're up against is immense, and we don't have the luxury of going public.

Continued on next page...

Interview with General Davis Steele (Continued)

Why is secrecy so important?

It is the backbone of everything we do. It would be wonderful if we could announce our existence to the world and unite everyone against the common threat, but it doesn't work that way.

Unfortunately, the legitimate government is notoriously slow and incompetent, and the armed forces are made up of rabble. I know; I'm a general.

Some folks would, out of misguided compassion, try to save the very things that threaten us. No, it has always been this way, and must always be. Evil will always threaten the world, and people of vision and character will always protect it.

Do you ever worry about being exposed?

At first I did. I lost a lot of sleep over that one. But now I see that the thing is too big to be exposed. No one would believe it. We have so many resources and so much power that even if someone went public, they'd be dead within the day, and their story would be so full of holes, it would be laughed off.

There are risks, of course. We still maintain standards of absolute secrecy, but I don't sit up nights worrying about it like I used to.

Tell me about Argus.

Well, I can't give you too many specifics, but it was started in '44. I was brought in by my general, and you already know that Harry Truman was involved. There have always been 12 of us. We came up with the idea for the Company and its departments, and it has served us well. We had no idea back then how big an enemy we faced, but we planned for the worst.

We still guide things, though the departments do most of the decision-making, now. And they leave a lot of it up to the individual ops.

Where are the black ops headed?

Well, the campaign against the Greys is still going strong. We have some promising technology that may give us an edge in that war. As far as the other enemies, it will always be a struggle. We know that. We've prepared for it. It defines our lives.

convinced Truman that all manner of paranormal activity was taking place all around them, all over the world, perhaps stirred into action by the fighting in Europe, maybe awakened by the negative psychic energy from the worst war the world had ever known. Whatever the reason, the nation's well-being was at stake. Something had to be done.

Truman agreed that there was a problem, and decided that they would gather 12 trustworthy people of power – scientists, money-men, perhaps a mystic or two – to meet in secret and decide the best course of action. The government was not to be officially involved. With an election year approaching, and Truman on the fast track for the vice presidency, it wouldn't do for him to be tied to anything controversial, especially nonsense like alien spaceships and vampires.

So nine months later, Carrington arranged for 12 people to meet quietly on a luxury yacht off the coast of Massachusetts. Among those present were General Carrington, Colonel Steele, Vice President Truman, Albert Einstein, Robert Oppenheimer, Howard Hughes, two biologists, two astronomers, a psychologist and a psychic who called herself Madame Z.

Carrington dumped out onto a table a box of manila folders, filled with typed reports, blurry photographs, handwritten testimonies and innumerable sketches. The group spent the next four days sifting through the evidence, at first stunned by the weight of it, then resolved to do something about it. Carrington, well-versed in classical Greek mythology, named the makeshift crew "Argus." Truman dubbed the effort "a conspiracy of protection."

The Company

With little argument, the members of Argus decided to create an organization, separate from them but under their influence, untraceably connected. In their discussions of the developing organization, they called it "The Company," always thinking that some new, more interesting name would come along. But as time wore on, the name stuck.

The Company's goal, from the beginning, was to kill aliens without public knowledge. This is an oversimplification, but it gets the idea across.

There are things out there that are dangerous and unpredictable. Their existence threatens a tested, established way of life. The *public knowledge* of the existence of all manner of paranormal beasts would irrevocably alter the state of human society. Once that knowledge became public and believed by any significant number of people, there would be no going back.

This factor frightened many of the learned minds in Argus more than the aliens themselves. Some foresaw huge, negative social consequences to public knowledge of the aliens. Others reasoned that no one could predict the outcome of that knowledge, so it would be best to prevent the change altogether. The Company's primary objective became to protect the status quo, by whatever means necessary. After four days of deliberation, a case of brandy and a couple of dozen cigars, these 12 people created what was to become the largest and most intricate conspiracy the world has ever known.

Maybe I make it sound like this decision was entered into lightly – deceiving the lion's share of humanity on a whim. Well, think what you like. It was a hard choice then, and it's still a hard choice. As other paranormal foes appeared – some of them of a relatively minor nature when compared to the Greys – the same reasoning applied to the need for secrecy in dealing with them. Once the public learned of *any* creature that didn't fit its neat and tidy vision of the world,

that would make people all the more likely to believe in the next thing that didn't fit. People who *know* giant spiders exist will find it that much easier to believe in Greys.

Given what I know now, maybe they should have done it differently, but we're in too deep. We chased a demon into the woods, found out we didn't know jack about the woods, realized we were lost and had no clue how to make it back, and learned that the demon had lots of friends. We are up the proverbial creek.

But I digress. Argus selected five people to run the Company, as heads of five separate but equally powerful departments: Combat, Intelligence, Science, Security and Technology. Each received equal funds, equal recruitment powers . . . and separate goals. Of course, the Company as a whole pursues the overarching goal of protecting society from the unknown, but each department has a separate agenda. The true motives of a department are its most closely held secrets.

Of course, the departments work together. Combat needs the research expertise of Science to tell us what we're up against, and Technology needs Combat to test their latest weapons. Security needs Technology to supply them with the latest satellite equipment, and Intelligence needs Security to protect them from their numerous, often ruthless, enemies. The list goes on.

Furthermore, long-standing rivalries and camaraderie have grown among the departments. The Science department's loathing of Combat is well-known, as is the overt friendliness between Technology and Intelligence. And everyone seems to dislike Security. The Company was designed so that no department could stand on its own, but neither would any department be completely reliant on any other. A perfect balance of support vs. independence, battle-hardened trust tempered by secrecy and deception.

We'd die for each other, of course. Have done it often. But ultimately, the only thing that can keep a black op sharp and honest is another black op.

Combat

See p. 45

The goal of the Combat department is to determine the most effective way to make something dead, get the weapons and kill it. We're not the only ones in the field, but we're the ones with the biggest guns and nastiest attitudes. Although other ops often regard us as bloodthirsty killing machines, that impression is a huge exaggeration. Many of the most competent grunts have refined pastimes, such as poetry or impressionist art, and can hold their own in a literature discussion with a Harvard dean.

Intelligence

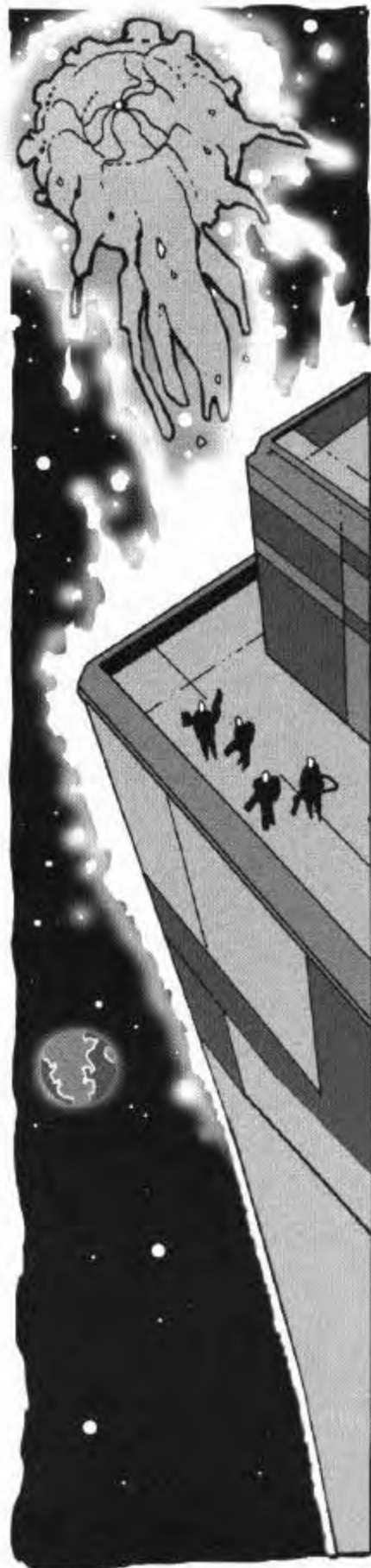
See p. 47

Intelligence agents are the spies of the Company. The department handles all of the clandestine snooping required in all aspects of the Company's operation. This can be anything from breaking into a senator's office to destroy a damning report, to infiltrating the space-shuttle crew to attach a monitor to a satellite, to disturbing wet-work in a South African shanty town. Whatever the Company needs done that requires a little subtlety, they leave to Intelligence. Although the agents of this department are seen as shadows and spooks, they are as quick on the draw and aggressive as any but the baddest Combat grunt.

Science

See p. 49

To the scientist in the Company, the world is a collection of data to be analyzed. The best way to defeat an enemy is to understand it completely. Every mission represents a chance to learn more about what we are fighting. Science ops perform high-tech autopsies on paranormal creatures, develop emergent





A Combat Op Speaks

"Damn secops are everywhere. Squealers. I call 'em. I hate 'em. Always poking into my business, asking me how much ammo I have, whether I've had my latest physical, telling me I can't crawl into this tunnel or through that window. I'm sick of it. Most missions I've been on would have gone just fine without the security op.

"What do they know about it, anyway? It seems to me that when there's a real firefight, the squealer's never around; he's curled up in a dark place somewhere, jawin' on his headset — calling for backup, or some other nonsense. They've got guns — puny little things, but they fire real bullets — and they need to be up with us, mowing down the bad guys.

"At least the techies get something done. Half the time, I don't have a clue what they're doing, but the next thing you know, half a block is vaporized and two dozen beasts with it. All I know is you give a techie your gun, and in an hour it fires twice as fast as it used to.

"Half the departments are worthless, and I don't care much for the whole system. Not that I have any say in the matter, but I'd do away with the squealers and the geeks. Combat can handle all the security any squad needs, and frankly I think the techies understand the enemy more than the science boys. At least, they understand how to kill them, and that's good enough for me.

"The spooks are okay, if you go in for that sort of thing, spying and all. It seems like a waste of time to me. I can kick three doors down in the time it takes one of them to pick a single lock. Oh well, at least they know how to fire their guns, and that's what really matters in the end."

medical technologies (cryogenics, performance-enhancing drugs, etc.) to better protect the black ops and attempt to implement complex programs of destruction (such as lethal viruses) against the enemy. We grunts like to call them geeks, but the Science ops can be extraordinarily brave in the heart of danger, leaping flaming wreckage to deliver a life-saving antivenin to a downed op, or holding off a swarm of breederbugs to allow squad members to get to higher ground.

Security

See p. 51

The job of the Security department is to safeguard the lives of all the black ops. Every mission must have at least one Security agent, and that agent has the authority to abort the mission at any time. They are stoic guardians of the conspiracy. Security ops are trained equally in every aspect of the Company — they are competent soldiers, scientists and spies, and know just enough about the latest technology to be dangerous. In addition, they are trained extensively in a broad range of safety techniques, from how to detect poisons to how to put out electrical fires. They tend to be a little paranoid about precautions, getting on the other ops' nerves from time to time. Even though agents from other departments occasionally whine about the necessity of the secops, they are grudgingly tolerated — their intervention has saved plenty of lives.

Technology

See p. 55

The "techie" are the most unorthodox of the black ops. While their baseline skills are above the minimum required to be a black op (which is to say, they survived the training), most eschew the highly organized structure of the other departments, opting for a more laid-back approach. In a word, they are hackers. Immersed in the latest technology, and responsible for most of it, they live in a world of computers, psychic amplifiers and applied physics. Much of the technology they turn loose on their fellow black ops is still very much experimental and insufficiently tested: teleportation, the telepathy chip, cybernetic limb replacements and others. They stay in constant communication with one another through a specially made, hand-held computer known as a *Cistron* (p. 118), which is part cellular phone, part television and part palmtop. Each unit includes a global positioning system and can access the Internet and Blacknet (see p. 17) from anywhere on the planet. Because they share information freely, having one techie on your squad is essentially like having them all.

The Government Denies Knowledge

It's easy to think of the Company as a big government conspiracy, with collaborators in high political and military offices. Most people are pretty sure that this type of conspiracy exists, but the simple fact is that the U.S. government is too large and unwieldy to pull off something so clandestine and far-reaching.

The vast majority of government officials know nothing about the activities and purposes of the Company. If they happen to uncover something damning, the lucky wake up one morning with a week's memories erased, or with their sanity discredited and out on the street. The uncommonly nosy who make the wrong ethical call wake up in a casket.

Besides, our reach extends well past the borders of the U.S. The conspiracy went global decades ago.

At first glance we may appear all-American — after all, U.S. officials created the Company and it remains based in the States — but that's yet another false

front on our part. We've even taken to ignoring national borders in recruiting as well as missions. Some of our operatives who were formerly foreign nationals have advanced to high posts. Really, no black op has any nationality once he enlists with the Company.

When we first started operating in other countries, some black ops wondered if we might encounter versions of the Company based elsewhere. We haven't – so far. And of course, no foreign government claims to know of such an organization, either . . .

The Shadow Brokers

I'm told the transition from a national to an international sphere of influence took far less effort than one might think. Turns out, there's not much difference between ignoring U.S. law and authorities and ignoring anyone else's law and authorities. We black ops are our own law.

At this point you may scoff. How could we carry out our often large and noisy operations without the consent of the government? How can our massive supply and research infrastructures exist in its back yard without someone noticing. It's impossible, you're thinking.

Good. We want you to be skeptical; we depend on it. The conspiracy would have the lifespan of a gremlin at a Cadre beer bash if you and so many others didn't pride yourselves on your common sense.

Here's how it works.

First, you have to have money. Lots of it. The Company is privately funded through front companies, lucrative investment strategies, contributions from the extravagantly wealthy and theft from high-volume drug deals. (Who do you think

really put those Columbian cartels out of business?) The Company's assets have mounted into the billions.

Once you have the money, you have to hide it. You hide yourselves in the process, but the Company discovered long ago that no one tracks people with any fervor. It's the classic money trail that we have to



worry about. So early on, Argus established scores of front companies, big and small, interlocked and independent, public and private sector. Those same drug lords that we regard as a revenue source are gross amateurs at this game compared to us. You won't see the Company involved in offshore banking (well, okay, precisely three Swiss operations meet our standards). Doing business with the Caribbean institutions would be like popping a flare under the noses of the FBI and Interpol.

Argus funnels funds from the outside world into the Company through these front companies. It funnels equipment and influence-peddling back out through



An Intelligence Op Speaks

"I like darkness and I like quiet. I like taking time to listen, to think and to check my equipment. Some of these grunts just like to run straight in, weapons blazing, bodies falling left and right. They hardly care who goes down in the end.

"I can't count how many times a combat op has ruined hours of planning and quiet perfection, seconds before the whole plan clicked into place. I'm as much a fan of killing wigglers as anyone, but I have to say, I'm not a fan of ricocheting bullets and skull lacerations. There's too much of that with a trigger-happy grunt around.

"Not that the secops are much better. Busybodies. They're never satisfied with just letting you do your job. I like to work by myself – planning, preparation and execution. But it's almost impossible with a secop breathing down your neck, trying to deconstruct your plan before it's even finished. The whole department should be removed. The Intelligence department is plenty capable of handling security.

"Now the techies are helpful. I love walking down into their basement vaults, marveling at all the cool stuff piled along the walls and wired into their computers. I almost never leave empty-handed. Sure, I've had my share of backfires, but in the end, there's nothing cooler than being able to project a life-sized hologram from your watch or wearing a headset that lets you hear everyone's emotions. Those are useful tools, when used correctly."



A Science Op Speaks

"It's fascinating. I never dreamed I'd have so many opportunities to study so many different organisms. The facilities here are top-notch, and the field work is very stimulating. Oh, I know it's dangerous, but there are precautions that anyone can take to minimize the risk. It's all a matter of knowing your enemy.

"The combat ops wear blinders. They think extreme violence is the best way to defeat all enemies. Sometimes a subtle approach works better. The sewer fluke, for example, is astoundingly resilient (perhaps even regenerative); gunfire only makes it mad. But it can sometimes be incapacitated by high-intensity subsonics. You think a grunt would wait around while I set up my sound equipment? Not likely. They're all a bunch of psycho jarheads with a death fetish.

"The techies are almost as bad. Technology is not a toy. It is a tool, to be tested, refined and perfected before bringing it into the field. I don't know how many times a snot-nosed tech freak has shoved some wired-up gizmo in my face and said, 'Here, put this on. It'll ratchet your brain waves up a notch so the Greys can't read your thoughts.' I don't think so, MacGyver. I like my brain waves at their current notch, thank you very much.

"Now, the guys I don't mind are the secops. They remain so in control. Everybody resents them, but they do their jobs anyway, with no complaints. I know my butt's been saved a couple times by a secop holding back a grunt and saying, 'No. It's not going to happen.' That takes a lot of nerve, and frankly it warms my heart to see a grunt steaming and impotent."

the same channels. Our own people can barely keep track of what's coming from where, and they're on the *inside*.

Finally, you put the money to work. For starters, we black ops enjoy almost unlimited resources, and create our own technology far more advanced than anything in civilian or military hands. We laugh at the most advanced American sensors in the same way the Pentagon used to laugh at the Soviet gear. That's a crucial edge in getting in and out without leaving a trace.

Even more money goes into making certain crucial people look the other way. While we don't directly work with any governments, the Company likes to ensure that a few key officials are friendly. This is rarely handled with the crudity of a bribe – bribes just lead to questions and more bribes. Usually, once the Company has singled out someone who could do it harm, one of our front companies makes a hefty investment in their career via campaign contributions, financial support of a pet project or something else that's just as quasi-legitimate. Any favors asked in return come from the same front, and have an ironclad, mundane rationale behind them. No one ever deals directly with the Company. One way or another, we make sure of that.

Argus: the Top of the Pyramid

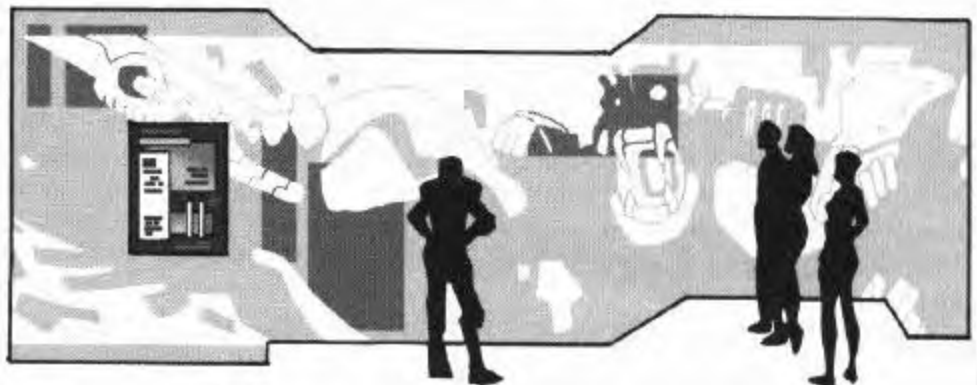
The select few individuals at the pinnacle of this huge mountain of deception are the 12 members of Argus. Through the years, Argus has included top government and military officials, the extravagantly wealthy, geniuses and psychics. Membership is for life.

Only two of the original members are still alive: General Davis Steele, 79, who also runs the Academy (see Chapter 2, *The Academy*), and Andrew Farstein, 83, a geneticist who exerts pressure to study the enemy rather than destroy it, and heavily influences the direction of the Science department.

The Argus members meet once a month in a different location, in the utmost secrecy, under the protection of an elite cadre of the Security department known as "the Wall." In their meetings, which often last for several days, they decide the direction that the Company will take in the coming month. General strategies are outlined, but the specific mission objectives are left to the discretion of the Company department heads.

Argus has no contact with individual black ops. The department heads receive their orders through e-mail, with a backup version sent via the regular mail in blank manila envelopes from an unknown source, coded with multiple-level cyphers that were set up decades ago. The department heads couldn't expose the members of Argus, even if they knew who they were. The individual black ops are so far removed from Argus that many don't believe it even exists. This system is precariously balanced on a framework of trust and fear.

Argus gathers its intelligence in two ways. First, the members receive monthly reports from each of the department heads. Since each department prepares its



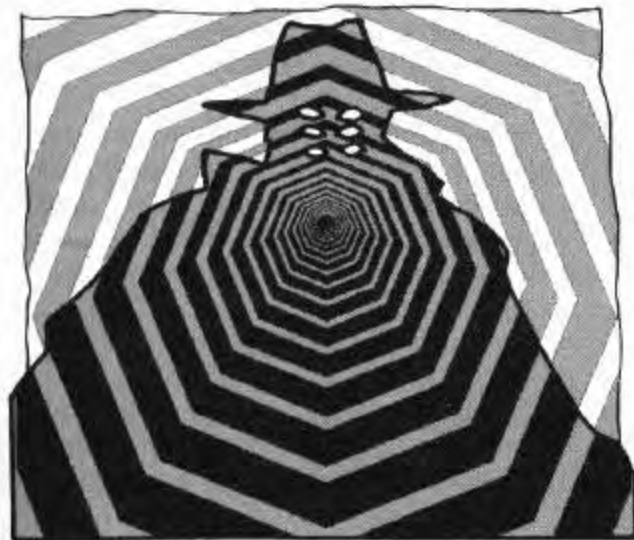
report privately, none of the departments has a clear picture of the Company's direction. Argus is the only group with a true view of the larger picture, and they purposefully keep the Company in the dark. To them, the Company is a tool, to be given only enough information to do its job. The reports detail each department's progress and failures, the status of individual missions (from that department's perspective), and any significant discoveries that have been made since the last report. Argus gleans additional information by studying the differences in separate departments' recounting of the same mission.

The second avenue of information for Argus is Blacknet (see sidebar, p. 17). This network of computer servers contains everything known about paranormal aliens, beasts and wigglers, as well as dossiers on the world's leading rogue psychics and their organizations. Every black op or recruit also has a Blacknet file.

The Technology department maintains Blacknet, but the Wall maintains the supercomputer called

Black Hole that serves as a dead drop for all Argus communications with Blacknet and department heads.

Black Hole keeps tech ops from discovering Argus members' identities; its programming and secop administrators even run sting operations to lure Tech ops who should know better. Any black op foolish enough to try to ferret out Argus through



Black Hole would first run into one kind of wall – and then another kind that carries guns and no-nonsense attitudes.

Argus cannot modify Blacknet's content and rarely tries to influence its administration. As Argus' reference library, Blacknet keeps them wonderfully free of paper trails. Blacknet's digital trail is covered by multiple levels of security, firewalls and encryption, also maintained by Technology department black ops.

Argus has been extremely careful to keep the identity of its members secret from the department heads. This has the added effect of preventing micromanagement. They can't get too involved in the Company's methods, or they risk the chance of being revealed. Whether this is a blessing or a curse is the topic of heated debate among Argus members. Nevertheless, the flow of information is kept strictly one way: from the Company to Argus. The only thing that flows the other way is Argus' orders.

The Company: Middle Management

The only thing the members of the Company know about Argus is that whoever they are, they pay well and are not to be crossed. That's the surest way to wind up six feet under. A few Company administrators hold onto the irrational belief that Argus is somehow part of the legitimate government. They use this as a rationalization for the deception and violence that make up their day-to-day jobs.

Given its world-spanning reach, the Company isn't all that big. Each department employs fewer than 600 support personnel, of whom most are retired ops.



A Security Op Speaks

"It's hard being a glorified baby-sitter. Not that I'm complaining. My work is the most satisfying in the Company; I'm sure of it. It is satisfying because of the challenges, not despite them. I know they all hate me. I know they all want to buck me off. But I break them anyway.

"All the grunts think they're Mr. and Mrs. Badass, struttin' around like coked-up gunslingers. Well, in my book a .45 auto doesn't make you a hero. It just makes you dangerous.

"Now, the spooks are all right, if you don't mind condescending braggarts. They're always cooking up some type of 'master plan' that's going to do away with the enemy and cook everyone's lunch in the bargain. Usually it involves them putting on a disguise and going off alone for three days to reconnoiter. If I weren't the one blamed when they come home in a paper bag, I'd let them go.

"The geeks are the easiest to keep tabs on. They just want to see the bodies and get their samples. Sometimes, it's hard to get them to move on. I'm sure the innards of a dead brainsucker are fascinating, but when the place is crawling with live ones, it's time to go. And don't get me started about the bagging missions. Tranquilizers or no, a freaked-out vampire is not going to climb into a crate without a major struggle.

"Last, but not least, are the techies. They're not so bad. They're all pretty laid back and funny, but you gotta watch them close. When the squad stumbles into a nest of ice weasels, you don't want to turn around to see the crew's only transmitter in about 20 pieces. 'I'm just trying to boost the range,' she says. But I just ignore the sheepish smile and tell her to fix it. 'Now.'"



A Technology Op Speaks

"Check this out. It's so cool. Take a standard military-issue 12x scope, add IR filtering and wire it for sound and movement sensitivity. Then add parabolic X-ray tracking and a supersonic imaging chip with the latest AI software. Plug in a satellite uplink and a microradar suite. And voila. You can see through walls, baby.

"Drop that puppy on an X-17 Tank Killer, give it to a grunt and let him go crazy. Of course, you'll likely get static from any nearby power lines, and there's a good chance the AI will see ghost images; I wouldn't take it anywhere near a microwave oven, either... but it's *gotta* be at least 40%-50% reliable! I could work the bugs out in, say, two or three missions. Hell, the grunt doesn't mind. He's just happy to blast holes in things.

"Now, you can bet a squealer would let me have this thing for about two seconds, then 'It's too unpredictable,' he'd say. 'It needs to be tested in the lab before field work.' Come on, this is better than the lab. There aren't any wigglers in the lab (well, there are, but they don't let us blow them up).

"And then the Science op would chime in, 'Why does everything have to be designed to help kill these creatures? Can't you build something more productive?' he'd say. Yeah, you geek. How about a digital lobotomy helmet for ya?"

"Only the spooks truly understand the joy of technology. They love this stuff. Give 'em a pen that squirts acid, or a pack of cigs that can dial the Kremlin, and they're happy. Sometimes it's good to take a break from weapons tech and work on other stuff, like smart latex disguises and superthin parachutes. Oh, hey, check this out. It's so cool."

Except for some old-timers hired in the early days, the civilian workers don't know the true nature of their employer.

At times, some Argus members have called for eliminating employees who aren't in on the conspiracy. It has proven impractical. While you can ask a retired field operative to handle accounting or programming, no Company administrator has dared asked one to clean restrooms.

The ignorant civilians hired for menial jobs have been fed one of several corporate cover identities, depending on which department employs them. A few civilian workers who stumble onto the truth are indoctrinated – most get a dose of the Cocktail (see sidebar, p. 18).

The day-to-day operations of the Company are divided among the departments. There isn't one central location where missions are researched and planned. Department heads rarely meet in person, relying instead on encrypted teleconferencing (via a secret satellite), couriers and Blacknet discussion groups. An objective comes down from Argus, the departments each research possible courses of action, and one department is given authority to develop a mission plan, with the other departments' recommendations.

Once the department heads have met, cajoled, manipulated and influenced each other, specific mission objectives are approved through a majority vote. A squad (usually four to eight black ops) is chosen, the objectives drawn up (often with a few secret ones for each department), and the team is alerted and given a location to receive their mission briefing.

The Black Ops: Meat and Potatoes

The Company maintains roughly 800 active black ops for its global operations. We would train more – always need more – but can't find enough potential recruits that have what it takes.

Sometimes, when missions are flying in at all hours and personnel are in really short supply, administrators are tempted to make dumb calls. I once had one – faced with yet another dragon in Peru – ask me if I thought it would be all right just to railgun it from offshore. (I reminded him that, at minimum, a forward observer might be prudent.)

If an op isn't active, then he's on light duty, retired or dead. That last category holds the most names, by far.





No black op ever leaves the Company. Only the dead ones aren't fully employed – and even they fill an essential function on the Spire. I'll get to that later.

Active ops are the sword arm of the Company. They undertake the missions and field work that get the job done. All black ops start out as active ops, and hope to stay that way for as long as possible.

Light duty is a temporary status for injured active ops. They help administrate the Company or teach at the Academy while their wounds heal.

Retired ops make up the largest living category. The Company retires any active op with permanent injuries that make him unfit for the field. Black ops used to joke that the retirement application consisted of showing the severed appendage or its stump. They also knew that if circumstances leading to the injury were the slightest bit suspect (no witnesses saw the combat, the wound came from your own weapon, etc.), then they would be assigned one of several dreaded support jobs. *Someone* has to clean the giant-cockroach enclosures at the Lab.

The average black op survives only 22.5 missions without a permanent injury or death. Even though most of those killed are in their first three years of active duty, and veteran ops last longer than that, this still meant that, in the old days, there were scores of ops "retiring" each year. For a while in the '60s, work actually had to be made for them. There wasn't a major library or museum in the world without a tough-looking one-eyed, one-armed or wheelchair-bound character poking around.

Nowadays, a lot of permanent injuries can be circumvented by the Company's medical technology (see *Bionics*, p. 118). The technology keeps us in the field longer – some tech ops even insist on "upgrading" themselves in mid-mission! – and has allowed the number of active ops to swell to its present level. In fact, some foresee a shortage of retired ops for support work in the near future, and a point where one can actually volunteer to leave active duty.

Retired ops are so crucial because they work for their department in an administrative, support or research capacity. Many teach at the Academy, as do active ops from time to time. The retired agents perform most of the Company's support functions, with a constant rotation of light-duty ops bolstering their ranks.

As for ops who reach a traditional age of retirement, they enjoy cushy desk jobs at which they set their own agendas. The Company considers them rich veins of experience and expertise.

The majority of black ops don't start families. The Academy and departmental bases include housing with all the creature comforts. Any op who wants a long-term relationship is expected to do his courting among his (or her) fellow

Blacknet

Blacknet is like an underground vault on the Internet. Its networked servers contain the entire amassed knowledge of the Company: black-op personnel files; Science-department technical journals, zoological and xenobiological reports; technical specifications on emergent technologies; Security-department mission logs, and Intelligence dossiers. Pretty much any information that relates to the Company, or would be useful to black ops in the field, can be found on Blacknet.

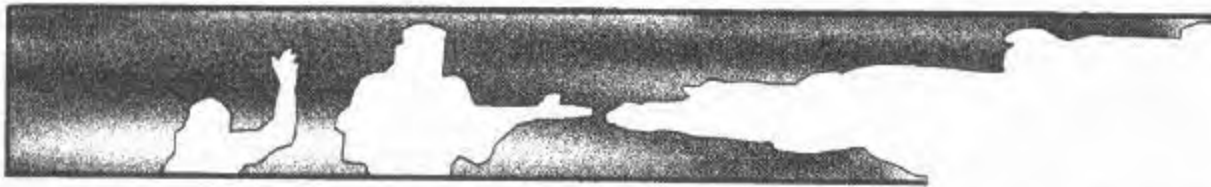
The network is given the ".xxx" domain, but isn't accessible through normal Internet channels. Each server has a false front, usually a high-traffic chat service or something equally innocuous. Access requires the proper multi-level passwords and a custom decryption chip on your computer.

Every black op, certain Company administrators and each Argus member has an account and access to the Blacknet information. Only high-level Technology department members, who administrate Blacknet, have the ability to change the content (with the exception of each user's personal folder).

While Blacknet is highly secure, it still represents the biggest potential information leak for the Company. Users must change their passwords monthly. These must be at least 15 characters long, include numbers and capital letters, and cannot contain any recognizable words. In addition, the techie sysadmins have set up a worm virus that would, within five minutes, destroy all the data in Blacknet . . . just in case. Backups are made daily and kept in a special vault, protected by Security.

Certain types of information in Blacknet are disguised to look like part of a roleplaying game. Personnel records, dossiers, science reports and technical specs are all written as though they were the fake specs and rules of an elaborate game. This is to aid the deniability of the information, should it be discovered or should printed copies fall into the wrong hands. Several sections of data from Blacknet appear later in this book.





Taking Care of the Nosy

It inevitably happens from time to time that some innocent, or not-so-innocent, civilian pokes his nose into Company business. A janitor stumbles onto some Grey ship schematics, or a CIA sting exposes a demon-hunting squad. Company policy for these incidents is unwavering – the conspiracy must be maintained at all costs.

Killing the perpetrator outright is frowned upon. While it solves one problem, it opens up several others.

The preferred method of dealing with prying eyes is what black ops call "The Cocktail" (or sometimes "The Mickey"). A Science department innovation, the Cocktail is a potent mixture of barbiturates, amino-acid chains, neurotransmitters and the extract from a rare African lily. The solution can be given orally (I understand it tastes like dog crap) or injected. The recipient sleeps for about 30 hours, then wakes up with a week's memories wiped from his brain. He then enjoys another 30 hours of barely functioning consciousness, allowing the rudimentary elements of living, like drinking and using the bathroom. This is usually mistaken for a severe flu. About 1 in 20 victims has a bad reaction to the Cocktail and loses a month to several years of memories. A rare few suffer permanent amnesia.

Some die-hard Security ops oppose the Cocktail because the memories have been shown to be reachable through deep hypnosis, and sometimes show up in dreams and nightmares. Plus, administering the drug before the snooper can reveal the information to someone can often be tricky. Given the moral and practical problems with outright killing, however, it seems a reasonable compromise. Still . . . sometimes time constraints or situational circumstances make a knife across the throat the only way to keep the Company secret.



ops – and use birth control. Most recruits learn real quickly that the Company isn't just a job – it's a full-time life till death do us part.

Sometimes, Argus decides it needs ops entrenched in a crucial position out in the real world – that it would be more efficient for a black op to *be* an important senator's right-hand man than to tail him. Only then are ops such as myself sent out to recreate the sort of real identity we left behind. A few of us even use the identity we started life with; it's the best cover as long as a foolproof excuse for the years we've spent training can be created. We're firmly told that our wives and children will *not* be regarded as potential hostages for the Company's foes. Of all the nasty orders I've received, that one I found hardest to swallow.

Despite controlling every aspect of our lives, the Company always has ops scattered across all seven continents, often in out-of-the-way locales. It monitors and contacts us through the Omicron Device (see p. 21), a chip implanted in the back of the neck that acts as a global position transmitter and pager. When a black op gets out of pocket but is needed, the device vibrates softly every few minutes until the operative checks in. That senator's aide better find a real good excuse to duck out of that round of golf and go hunt vampires.

Black ops aren't paid. What good is money when the Company provides anything you could possibly want in what little down time you have? Those few of us with outside identities provide for our families with our identity's paychecks. If something else is needed, a rich uncle dies or a "forgotten investment" pays off. No problem.

Every black op belongs to a department (see pp. 11-12). Squads usually contain ops from at least three departments. They always include at least one Security agent, except for when those whacked-out Cadre (p. 25) boys sneak off without one. The sanctioned exception to the rule is mop squads, whole teams of Security agents who are set up for special clean-up missions that require the utmost subtlety and secrecy. A black op's loyalty is first to his squad, then to his department and finally to the Company.

Most missions are set up in general terms: investigate the mysterious deaths of silver miners in South Dakota, confirm or refute the FBI's report of an undersea behemoth eating the supports of offshore oil rigs, find and destroy the brainsuckers infesting the Paris subway system. Though the Company provides specific mission objectives and hand-picks the operatives to be involved, it is up to the individual squad to determine the best course of action to accomplish the mission.

Squads are given a generous budget with which to purchase equipment from the various departments. The budget is largely a formality – very rarely will the Company withhold needed supplies from a squad – but the prejudices of individual departments will affect the availability of certain equipment (a Science op is going to have to do some convincing to get a prototype teleporter from Technology, while an Intelligence agent could get it with no questions asked).

To complicate things, each department might also provide private objectives to their members on a squad. These objectives are usually tangential to the mission objective, but occasionally they conflict. Black ops with such orders have to balance squad and departmental loyalty.

Black ops tend to live short, exciting lives. There's no getting around the fact that what we do is extremely harrowing and hazardous. It is truly the heroic

operative who can tell of surviving 40 missions with body and mind intact, and these agents are spoken of with a reverence approaching worship.

Maintaining the Conspiracy

On the Street

While Argus established an excellent framework for maintaining the conspiracy on a strategic level, it falls to us black ops to preserve it on the tactical level of our day-to-day operations. Regardless of how enormous a mission objective might be, every op knows that his first priority is to keep the world in the dark about the Company and its foes. Every op misses a target from time to time, but we can't afford to let the world in on the conspiracy even once.

Fortunately, we have the tools to make preserving the conspiracy no more than a routine chore. Usually.

Getting In and Out

The first black ops discovered that transportation deserved top priority in their missions. Often, black ops can filter into missions – particularly in urban areas – under the cover of mundane identities, and use the same cover to get back out. I've personally ridden the Boston subway with a trenchcoat concealing a gaping chest wound, courtesy of one of the four fragged gargoyles I'd left behind. I left a pool of blood on the floor, but no subway rider's going to pay much attention to that.

At other times – when heavy gear is called for or speed proves crucial – we rely on our own quick and stealthy transportation.

Our primary transport is the fleet of helicopters we keep stationed around the world. Yes, they're black – but only when we want them to be.

We use the black coloration as a trademark during action, then fly off with a nice canary-yellow, white or pink paint job, thanks to some advanced liquid-crystal features dreamed up by the techies. The transformation only takes a few seconds. Most people have black helicopters locked into their cultural consciousness, right? That works for us, not for them.

The copters also feature the most advanced emission cloaking, armor and psi shielding. Their ceramic engines outpower and outrange anything else with a rotor. Usually, these get the job done.

Sometimes missions call for road transport. We maintain everything from motorcycles to semi tractor-trailer rigs at depots where the ops can get to them. Most of these are simply conventional vehicles of their type; some only appear so. My favorite had to have been the beat-up pickup truck I once drove in a failed capture mission intended to bring a werewolf back intact. Around the bed



The Life of a Black Op

Black ops don't have lives; recruits learn that quickly on entering the Academy. At least, not lives of their own.

Normally, black ops don't even mingle with the outside world except on missions. The Company houses almost every black op at the Academy or one of the departmental bases. If an op wants something for personal use, the Company provides it, within reason. Reason has a liberal definition here. A recently graduated op who requested a yacht to play around with would be laughed at. An old wardog such as myself could make it happen . . .

Several factors prompt this silken straitjacket of a policy. First, recruits have already seen the last of any family or friends prior to entering the Academy. Second, operatives may not start families of their own, except for those picked by the Company to establish a real-world identity to serve its needs. Third, ops tend to stand out in a crowd: 800 of us raising Cain on our own time among the ignorant masses would do the conspiracy no good.

Fourth and foremost, the Company always needs more ops than it has available. Many potential missions go unfilled because the personnel can't be scraped up. The Company can afford to dole out so little down time to its billion-dollar investments that maintaining non-essential outside identities would be impossible.

This doesn't mean an active ops' average year is one long string of missions. Argus can only wish it were that simple.

Training fills a great deal of time, especially for newer black ops. A recent Academy graduate can expect to spend two months of the average year keeping his skills sharpened and knowledge up to date.

Continued on next page . . .



The Life of a Black Op (Continued)

Veterans train, too, but not as much. They also rotate into teaching assignments at the Academy, especially if they've just got done dismantling some previously unknown Grey technology that the cadets need to know about. Retired ops handle most of the training, though.

Active ops also spend a large amount of time on light duty due to injuries. Thanks to the cryobag, the Company can ship injured ops – or large chunks of them – to the Infirmary at the Academy or the hospitals hidden at the departmental bases. There, retired science-op doctors sew them up with eye-popping technology.

Once the op can walk or manage a wheelchair, he'll leave the hospital and help the retired ops with support functions until fully healed. For obvious reasons, the Company loathes sending ops into the field in less than tip-top shape.

Missions do take up the lion's share of an active op's time, though. These can range in duration from 10 minutes to several decades. An average mission – should such a thing exist – might take several months. It might involve a surveillance stage, some clandestine work to research the objective, scientific analysis of what's uncovered and then a combat strike.

Often, the departments assign their operatives "background" missions to be handled when nothing more urgent appears on their platter. The Intelligence department in particular sometimes sends its people out with a dozen cover identities, a dozen objectives and years to achieve them. The line between the lives of these Intelligence ops and a Company-sanctioned "family man" such as myself can get fuzzy.

Regardless of his other functions, any black op has to be able to instantly drop what he's doing and respond to the Omicron Device (see p. 21). The implant vibrates softly, and the black op must call in within 12 hours, or be considered AWOL. Given our missions' potential duration, operatives who maintain cover identities must be ready with a good story or excuse for their absences.

The Company has the ability to monitor the location of any black op, but only does so when the agent is summoned (to determine approximate travel time), or when an agent goes AWOL. At least, so I'm led to believe.



and underneath what appeared to be one of those cheap, vinyl bed covers was a half-inch of hardened steel armor. It made the thing into a rolling vault. Trouble was, the techies miscalculated how much oxygen an enraged werewolf requires to stay alive . . .

A problem related to road transport is the amount of traffic going in and out of the Academy and our departmental bases. In particular the Academy, with its secluded location and low-key cover identity, presented a challenge to the conspiracy till someone got the bright idea of *tunneling* to the nearest major highway.

Now, we have a concealed entrance set up at a rest stop 15 miles from the Academy grounds. The Academy surveillance crew keeps track of all traffic on the road, hikers, satellite flyovers and such, so that no one's ever seen using this feature. The operation is foolproof: you pull up to the Pepsi machine standing in front of the small restroom building. If the vending machine's digital display reads "65 cents," you wait. If it says "75 cents," you keep on driving; the entire wall and machine swivel back to reveal the tunnel. A semi truck can just barely squeeze in.

For those missions presenting special needs, even bigger gear can be acquired. We maintain submarines (p. 46), warplanes and similar hardware. Some even say we have a space shuttle, though the last time I looked the U.S. could account for all of its fleet. I'm not sure I want to try riding an old Soviet job, even if they do have the better track record.

Cleaning Up Loose Ends

The most important phase of every mission takes place after it's completed, when our support staff looks things over and decides what needs a little cosmetics applied. This, more than anything, has preserved the conspiracy through several foul-ups.

The retired ops who perform this duty know more tricks than a Las Vegas magician and the most high-powered public-relations consultant combined. If a squad used fuel-air explosives in Colombia, they'd



plant evidence of a cocaine-processing lab at the site; if in Des Moines, they'd scrounge up debris from a bargeload of fertilizer. They can make a mundane, ordinary explanation for any Company activity *plausible* – to the point where no rational person could believe anything else.

This is not to say that they like cleaning up after sloppy agents. Nothing will get a black op in hot water quicker than doing less than his best to preserve the conspiracy on his own. These support boys do a hard job, and you'll pay if you make it any harder than it has to be.

Usually, planting a few simple explanations for any strange goings-on will take care of things once and for all. At other times, though, more long-term repercussions are felt. Even these deskbound Houdinis can't get black ops out of some kinds of trouble, or nip major threats to the conspiracy in the bud.

Black Ops and the Law

Unlike the Company administrators and support staff, who hide comfortably behind multiple layers of front companies and shadow corporations, black ops on a mission are out in the real world, often forced to perpetrate extreme violence in public places. This puts them in real danger of run-ins with the legitimate authorities. When a squad corners a wiggler on the twelfth floor of an office complex and riddles the building with automatic gunfire, it's a little hard to explain to the local police.

If this risk is foreseen, the Company can provide any sort of cover identities, some of which will have the legal right to fill things with lead. Also, ops are expected to use their escape and evasion training. Usually, the best police in the world can't catch a Company man; any black op who gets "flatfooted" can expect to take a savage ribbing once he gets out.

Along with their political agendas, the Company's front operations also further the careers of the most influential law-enforcement officials around the world. It can call in these favors when needed.

No favor, at least in the U.S., will make something like multiple murder charges disappear, so legal trouble is the area where blatant bribery is used most often. And let's face it, the only police departments who want to really pry into what's going on usually are unredeemably corrupt; everyday messes keep the honest cops too busy to pry into our business too much. If a few thousand dollars in the right pocket doesn't do the trick, then a quick, smooth escape from under the real cops' noses is implemented with the Company's trademark precision. Sometimes, a few embarrassing details about certain officers' private lives come to light and resolve the matter.

Regardless of the technique or timing, the ops always disappear quietly. We shed blood to preserve the conspiracy – exactly how much no one person really knows – but not in these circumstances. At worst, an op's arrest jacket and case file go happily into outstanding warrants and the unsolved files. A few months later, they disappear from there as well, leaving little trace and no hard evidence. Sometimes we get tricky and frame someone who deserves the grief with the crime. There's nothing like a win-win scenario to brighten a harried black op's day.

Any black op who doesn't find a way to avoid violence against honest law-enforcement agents will be lucky to end up simply disavowed. More likely, a



The Omicron Device

As soon as a recruit enters the Academy, he is fitted with the Omicron Device. This small transceiver is tuned to a specific, scrambled frequency. It vibrates softly when activated, and can transmit messages through skull conduction. The Company uses the device to track the worldwide location of operatives, and to page them.

It is about the size of a quarter, implanted in the back of the neck, just above the last cervical vertebra. The state-of-the-art batteries have an average service life of five years.

The device's locator system uses global positioning satellites to provide the agent's location, accurate to within 10 feet.

After activation, the device provides the phone number the operative is to call for his orders. It can also transmit short vocal messages, called "the Voice of God" by black ops. The phone number – or any message being sent – cycles every 10 minutes until the op checks in. Lengthier messages can be sent, but run down the batteries much more rapidly than normal operation. Given the complexity of the operation to replace them, policy is to avoid long communique except in emergencies.

The device can be removed by a competent surgeon, but any tampering sends an immediate alarm to the Technology department's monitoring station. The device self-destructs within two minutes of removal, and the previous owner becomes a renegade (see p. 23), with a very short life expectancy unless he has swapped Omicron for a good explanation.

Though the devices' small batteries are replaced religiously, sometimes one malfunctions and the Company loses track of an operative. A hunter squad is sent to the agent's last known position to track him down. If the agent is there, the needed repairs are made. If the agent cannot be found, he is tracked down. If he has gone renegade, he is killed.

Rumor has it that the Company can listen in on an operative's surroundings without his knowledge, and some more cynical souls have taken to calling Omicron "the other Chip."

The Company can remotely destroy a functioning Omicron Device should the need arise. More importantly – at least from my perspective – it can use Omicron to remotely destroy the host black op (see *Disavowal*, p. 22). I suspect this is one reason that renegades are rare (see *Renegades*, p. 23).



Disavowal

When an operative does something to jeopardize the secrecy of the Company, such as telling too much to someone outside the conspiracy or killing a police officer, he is quietly killed and his body incinerated or dropped in a Louisiana swamp. Rarely do ops get this stupid, but it happens.

Even if the operative is outside normal communication channels – and they almost always are when they foul up – the Company can fatally reach out to them through the Omicron Device. Prior to entering the Academy, every recruit has three saes of a traceless toxin implanted in his body. One is placed deep between the lobes of the brain, making surgical removal nearly impossible. Omicron can signal these saes to burst on the Company's command. Death takes seconds and resembles coronary failure.

More often, if the Company decides it needs the operative for future missions, or the op has proven loyal in the past, he might only be disavowed. For example, an op caught destroying a building, or burning files in a "secure" White House vault, might receive this lesser punishment.

An operative learns about disavowal the old-fashioned way – in a room full of hard-edged secops, sitting under a stark overhead light after being summoned by Omicron. This is a very painful interview, but even for ops who know they're in trouble it beats ignoring the summons and going renegade.

Disavowal is not permanent. If things cool down enough, often after years of confinement to a departmental base or worse, the Company may attempt to return the op to active duty. Often this involves a highly hazardous mission directly related to the op's original error. The maintenance of the conspiracy is paramount, however, and such a mission will not be risked unless those in the chain of command think the lesson's been learned.

Reinstated agents are viewed with some suspicion by other ops they work with. No black op entirely trusts another op who's even shown a hint that he might let them down.

mop squad full of volunteers will kill him messily. Even the Company holds some small core of standard ethics.

The Media

The press is harder to control and manipulate than law enforcement. Then again, we don't much mind wasting reporters.

Luckily for them, journalists can be discredited fairly easily, and as I mentioned before, covering up Company activities is a relatively mundane task. The Security department is largely responsible for organizing cover-up missions, which can range from feeding false information to rival media organizations, to dosing nosy reporters with memory-erasing drugs, to the last resort of an unfortunate "accident."

If the situation calls for it, the Company can arrange for a startling media event – a celebrity murder trial, for example – to distract the attention of the media until the other, more unbelievable story about aliens or some such nonsense is forgotten. We ops find this tactic particularly amusing.

It does occasionally happen, however, that a particularly hardy reporter survives long enough to get his story of global conspiracy to his editor. Such stories rarely see print, regardless of the volumes of documentation and evidence the sleuths may have to back them up. Even if a story about vampires or sewer beasts *were* to make it into a newspaper or onto TV, causing the beginnings of a nationwide panic, the whole thing would suddenly be "revealed" as an elaborate hoax a few days later, with little harm done. The original reporter is in bed with a bad case of the flu, but the perpetrator of the hoax is more than willing to talk. The Company has people everywhere.

The Legitimate Government

The most dangerous threat to the Company's clandestine operations is investigation by legitimate federal and international agencies, which have considerable resources at their disposal. The CIA and MI6 suspect the Company's existence – the KGB might if the files didn't disappear in its upheavals – and the FBI especially has come close to uncovering the truth several times.

The FBI in particular has its own agents in the field investigating paranormal activity, and they know that some other agency is involved; they just can't put their finger on who it is. The Company plays a dangerous game of cat and mouse with these agents, letting them believe that the black ops are part of the legitimate government, from a department that the FBI agents are not aware of. The Company tries to use the agents as pawns to uncover just enough truth to give the black ops something to work with, at which time the government agents are swept aside, denied access to the whole truth, while we take care of things in our own style.

Other times, the FBI agents uncover a dangerous entity and inadvertently let it loose upon the world. Then the black ops have to step in and fix things, all without letting the authorities know who cleaned up their mess. Some black ops look upon government agents as inept, meddling children. Others of us pity them for being placed in a situation where they are never told the whole story, with insufficient resources and information to do any good.

Nevertheless, black ops occasionally develop tenuous working relationships with government agents. Black ops have access to an abundance of information, and use it to barter for whatever unknown intelligence the government boys might be able to provide. In all cases, the information given is less than that received, and the government op is never given enough ammunition to hinder a black op mission. The black op always controls the relationship, and if the agent gets out of line, he might find himself exposed in explicit photos with his chief subordinate on his boss' desk, or in a videotape bartering top secrets on the 10 o'clock news.

On rare occasions, an unusually competent government agent, or one who learns too much and deals with it well, will be recruited for the Academy. The most common type is the natural hacker who joins the FBI or NSA to feed a techno-urge. The Committee (see p. 48) keeps its eyes open around the globe for those precious few men and women who might have what it takes – but it's always watching for recent enrollees in national security agencies with the right qualities and requisite lack of family ties.

Ultimately, very little threatens the secrecy of the Company's operations. Covert activity is our stock in trade, and we've been doing it successfully for more than half a century. It is unlikely that someone is going to show up and reveal the whole conspiracy to the world.

It's even less likely that the world would believe him.

Worst-Case Scenarios

As omnipotent and capable as the Company is, its leaders and the members of Argus can foresee the small potential that the conspiracy could become unveiled, either partially or in whole. Every black op is educated in what to do should these emergency circumstances ever arise.

Unveiling of the First Degree

The least-disturbing unveiling of the conspiracy by outside parties would involve an outside law-enforcement or military agency such as the FBI becoming convinced of the Company's existence (anything on a lesser scale could easily become a non-crisis through the mysterious "disappearances" of those in the know). This is also the most likely unveiling scenario.

Full-scale countermeasures of a passive nature would be undertaken for as long as the outside agency attempted no direct action as a result of its knowledge. These could conceivably conclude anything up to starting a war, though something so callous would only be used as a last measure. Most likely, the black ops would be given missions to discredit key leaders of the outside agency, and create a score of diversions to keep it and any interested parties pre-occupied.

Renegades

We don't like to talk about it, but agents do go renegade.

No black op, as far as I know, has ever sold the Company out for cash. A few have turned due to conflicts over national loyalty. Several, over the years, have suffered a "religious crisis." This can be hard to distinguish from the most common reason for going renegade . . . the op just snaps. To my mind, some of these folks are as much martyrs as the ops who fall to a critter or a Grey. This business is hard on the soul.

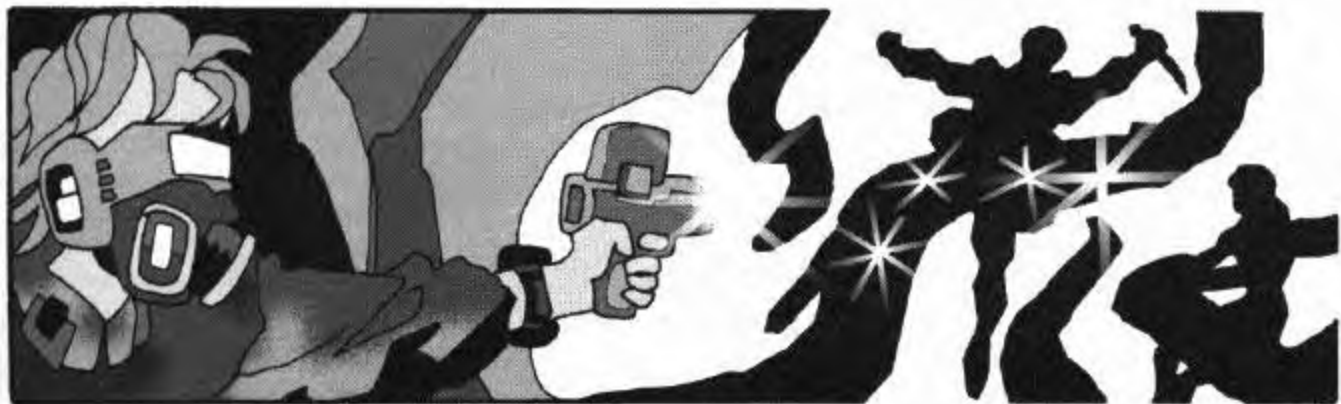
The most heartbreaking kind of renegade is the op whose cover is penetrated by some foe, and whose loved ones are held hostage. The Greys do that; so did the Singapore clan (p. 25) until we closed them down.

Renegades are hunted like animals, but I've only had to do it once, and I have more experience than most. That's because renegades are rare; most ops are too loyal, and too realistic, to try.

A renegade would have to get rid of his Omicron Device. It would be hard to explain to a surgeon; most renegades dig it out themselves. With the proper tools, anesthetic and mirrors, it's not too hard. Of course, you need to get lost in a hurry as soon as it's out, and hide your bandaged neck.

Then there are the poison sacs. Omicron going dead won't activate them – otherwise battery failures would kill too many ops – but some suspect the sacs must receive a signal from Omicron every so often. I don't know if this is true, but removing the sacs would be very difficult, requiring a skilled brain surgeon with some idea of the insertion process!

I've also heard of a cabal of successful renegades who look for the right candidates to "free" from the Company, but this may just be a rumor.



Argus' Eyes Only: Renegades

Though the black ops as a whole have a high morale, renegades are more common than the Company lets on: the total immersion into the Company agenda can test the strongest resolve.

The Company can conceal the defection of any renegade who doesn't bug out in very public fashion, and it certainly chooses to do so.

In these cases, it sends out a few, hand-picked senior secops who are in on the secret. They track down and dispose of the former operative. Then, the Company invents a fictitious account of the renegade ops' death in the line of duty. His name goes on the Spire as one of our fallen heroes. The secret remains limited to Argus members, top Company administrators and the secops themselves – unless some longtime Combat op knows the mental state of a string of "heroes" prior to their deaths and does some snooping.

Though I have been an active op for 15 years, I only recently learned of this disturbing policy. It's one of the reasons I'm risking my life writing all this down. I've been taught to believe in the names on that Spire – by the very people who are tainting it.



Tactics would change were the outside agency to attempt to take action against the Company, particularly raids on Company bases. Should this happen, the Company would abandon all of its existing facilities – even the safe-houses normally used in missions – and signal all black ops in the field to do the same. No matter how one-sided the conflict might be – and we Combat ops know we'd give anyone a real drubbing on our home turf – it would only serve the outside agency's purposes to get into a shooting match.

The Company has established several ultrasecret reserve bases for just such a contingency, and would transmit their location to the black ops via the Omicron Device. Our job would be to make it to these bases undetected, to receive further orders there.

Though I haven't been filled in to this level of detail, I have reason to believe Argus and Company officials think they could win a secret war with the Army or FBI acting solo, and emerge afterward with the conspiracy intact.

Unveiling of the Second Degree

Far more problematic would be an outside agency that didn't keep its findings to itself, but rather convinced the U.S. government or another nation of its discovery. Should the U.S. government realize the Company's existence (I'm excepting those officials who already belong to Argus, of course), then the Company would immediately abandon its bases as in the above scenario.

At that point, I suspect Argus would have to think hard about going public, despite its many deeply held fears of that eventuality. I do know that some of the retired Science ops specializing in psychology and sociology have been employed for many years in modeling just what impact that knowledge of the Greys and other paranormal creatures out there would have. I also know the results haven't pleased Argus.

Still, I could see a public presence for the Company – but only if the unveiling coincided with an emergency situation in the war against the Greys. Otherwise, all of us – from Argus to the most recent Academy graduate – would likely end up imprisoned. Not only would our trespasses against U.S. and global law merit it, but some would unreasonably fear us more than our foes.

I can also see the Company taking on the government's credibility, in an effort to preserve our secrecy. Depending on the administration, it *could* be easier to discredit the president than the CIA, for instance.

Unveiling of the Third Degree

This is hard to imagine – given our expertise – but in theory the public could discover and be convinced of our existence. In that case, the Company would have to go public, of course – it already *would be* public.

The real question here is if a paranormal state of emergency doesn't exist, what would become of us black ops? We're all criminals from a public perspective. Would the Company go about setting up a legal defense . . . or would simpler solutions be found?

Unveiling by Our Opposition

Although our primary opponents – the Greys – are already well-aware of the Company, others aren't. Should one of the other groups we oppose learn we exist, the Company likely would simply step up its efforts to squash that organization.

Most of them have their own good reasons for sharing secrecy with us. Should one prove insane enough to try to reveal our existence, they would get squashed that much more quickly. The only winner in that scenario would be the Greys, who probably would thrive while our attention was diverted.

Takeover

More fearsome than any prospect of the conspiracy being dismantled is the possibility of some outside power gaining control of some or all of the Company.

I know of at least two attempts at this in the past. A few years ago, three brothers based in Hong Kong and Singapore – any one of whom quietly dwarfs Bill Gates in wealth – caught wind of who we were. They attempted to satisfy their curiosity by purchasing every one of our front companies that they could find!

Some of us field operatives found it amusing to watch the administrators nearly panic in the face of this unexpected flank attack, but none of us found the idea of a buyout funny in any way. Ultimately, the two elder brothers were persuaded to mind their own business, with the assistance of the severed – but still living – head of their sibling.

Prior to that, in 1972, the Greys attempted to gain control of a majority of Argus and cause the Company's self-destruction. Though telepathically powerful, the attack had been foreseen years earlier and was quickly countered. The aliens took a licking in that one, and haven't tried anything similar since.

As for the possibility of a successful takeover of one sort or another, it's common knowledge that the Omicron-based destruction of black ops can be handled *en masse*, broken down by departments or however. The circumstances under which this drastic measure might be enacted aren't known to even the most veteran black ops, though.

Enemies Everywhere

A detailed bestiary containing the statistics for all of the creatures in this section can be found in Chapter 6, but only Game Masters should read it.

The members of Argus view themselves as the unseen protectors of society. They have quite a task, given the number and variety of mysterious and unexplained enemies that threaten the well-being of our world. If the truth were fully known about the depth of this war, no one would be able to sleep at night.

Aliens – Greys and Brainsuckers

First and worst, there are two races of alien beings living among us on Earth, gnawing at the edges of our society, eating away at us from the inside like a mutant tapeworm: the *Greys* (p. 84) and the *brainsuckers* (p. 88). They are not friendly visitors, and only the black ops keep them from getting out of control.

The Greys are the aliens you read about in the supermarket tabloids. Most of the rumors about them are lies, spread by the Company to keep society looking the other way. The Greys do not come in peace; they are malicious and cold-hearted, and think of humans as cattle. The Greys were trapped on Earth by a

The Cadre

The Cadre calls itself elite. The rest of us call them, at best, eccentric.

This subgroup of Combat ops specializes in hunting beasts, especially vampires, werewolves, gargoyles and demons. To join, ops must possess combat abilities and endurance beyond those already required by the Company. They also have to hand-deliver a beast's head to their leader, Alexandra Morgan.

The Cadre currently numbers 15 men and women, and they are the scariest mothers you'd ever not want to meet. They bury themselves in vampire and demon lore, and live for the hunt. They tattoo and scar themselves, and tend to enjoy the fashion appeal of black leather and iron. They carry a lot of weapons, and prefer big knives, crowbars, pickaxes, shotguns and other messy implements. As Nietzsche predicted, the abyss is staring back at them.

The Cadre meet once every other month to plan the next few hunts. They locate the lair of a particularly nasty beast (or a nest of them), then send a squad out to reduce it to hamburger. They usually try to sneak off without a Security op, but the secops have learned most of their tricks.

Not all hunts go as planned, and every once in a while they lose a couple of members. But they never lack for membership. There are plenty of Combat ops who want in.

Cadre members are assigned to other missions, of course. If you're up against a beast, there's no one you'd rather have with you – if you can stomach ritual scarring, speed-metal and late-night chanting and candle-burning. The Company, as a whole, thinks they need psychological evaluations. It only allows them their foibles because they *do* represent some of the best of the best of the best.

More importantly, they kill a lot more critters than the average op.





Psi-Ops

About 70% of humanity has some level of psychic power, though only about 0.05% know it. Even they usually do no more than perform simple precognition or end up as side-show freaks. Even rarer still are those with "the gift," a level of psychic potential high enough to be useful.

Those black ops with the gift are given some special training. Most of the time, the psychic ability is pretty trivial – a sense of empathy, slight precog or danger sense. Only about half of those with the power can use it for more astonishing feats, like telekinesis and telepathy. Every department has a few of these exceptional agents, which we call psi-ops.

Psi-ops are valued by any squad. It's useful when your team's psi-op can tell you that three demons are lurking on the other side of a closed door, though some get a little jumpy, raising false alarms and getting things plain wrong. Psychic ability is still pretty raw, and not all of them have the best control.

Some psi-ops are trained specifically to deal with the Greys, trying to interrupt and decode their thought transmissions. This is very demanding work, requiring overdeveloped telepathy skills. These ops tend to burn out quick. Sometimes this is simply emotional; at other times it involves actually losing part or all of their psychic powers.

To stave off this burnout, the Company will send these folks out on non-Grey missions to give them a break. Squads tend to hate it when a Grey-reader is put on their team, because the op has usually developed his telepathy to such a state that he routinely reads others' thoughts without trying. This can be annoying.

When burnout does occur, the former psi-op is given regular active-op status. He must re-enter the Academy if his abilities don't meet the standards for non-psychic agents (p. 70). The threat of more time in the cadets' regime ensures few psi-ops reach that level of emotional bankruptcy.

crash in 1908, which also killed all of their females. They want nothing more than to breed and to leave, but they would gladly enslave all of humanity if they had the forces.

The Greys are physically and mentally superior to humans. They also possess telepathic powers and vastly superior technology. Luckily, there aren't many of them on Earth, so instead of just taking over through outright force, they have to manipulate human society to meet their goals. To this end, they've been kidnapping and impregnating women, tinkering with the progress of human technology, and making inhuman deals with the more unethical among us.

As far as we know, the Greys cannot disguise themselves as humans well enough to withstand more than a cursory examination. At night, with a long coat and large hat, a Grey could wander an empty sidewalk, but the Greys hate to wear human clothing. Still, they are a sinister presence in our cities, from the gutters and alleys to the gleaming boardroom tables at the peaks of our skyscrapers.

The war with the Greys is a guerrilla conflict, raging in the streets and alleyways of the world's major cities. They have the advantages of technology and guile, and we have the overpowering advantage of simply being able to appear in public without being noticed. The fact is, they're sneaky as hell, and simply stronger, but we still manage to hold our own against them. Lately, though, they seem to be everywhere.

Our other alien visitors are worms we call "brainsuckers." It's pretty obvious how they earned that nickname: when a brainsucker leaves its host, there isn't much gray matter left. It burrows into the brain of a helpless or sleeping human. Usually, the victim has no idea what's happened until it's too late.

The brainsucker takes over the body and turns the human into a zombie. You'd be surprised, though, at how long a zombie can live among normal humans and not be pegged. Generally, the guy looks a little sick, and stops showing up at work and chatting with friends. Some of these aliens get pretty good at mimicking human behavior and manage to fool the host's close acquaintances for months. They stubbornly resist all requests to "get some help" or "see a doctor." After about a year, the victim will die, but not before the brainsucker releases about a half-dozen babies out of his ears and nose.

The brainsuckers were brought to this world by yet a third race of aliens, who are no longer among us. The Prima, as we call them, inhabited Earth from about 7,000 B.C. until 30 A.D. They were very influential in the development of the Incan, Mesopotamian, Phoenician, Egyptian, Celtic and Greek cultures. Some Company historians believe the Prima actually spurred the hunter-gatherer tribes of the world into forming agrarian colonies, setting what we call "civilization" into motion.

The Prima used the brainsuckers as domesticated animals, allowing them to use humans as slaves and making it possible to set themselves up as gods,

The Greys are as of yet unaware of the brainsucker threat, and the Company wants to keep it that way. We don't want them figuring out some way to use the little buggers against us.

Monsters – Wigglers and Beasts

Next, there are creatures from right here on Earth that fall outside the precise, logical classification system of modern science. Some things don't want to be stumbled upon, and some things defy classification. Some creatures are utterly unbelievable, and some haven't even been discovered yet. The Company keeps careful records of such creatures, but rarely is their existence made public.

Most people would call these things monsters. Black ops are more refined: they call the small, quick ones that are hard to hit "wigglers," and the larger, more intelligent ones that are hard to damage "beasts."

Some black ops argue about whether such and such creature is a wiggler or a beast – it usually depends on who you talk to – but everyone agrees that they're *dangerous*. Even so, you'll encounter the occasional Science op who wants to capture one.

Some of the wigglers we know about include *big bugs* (p. 91), especially roaches and sewer flukes; the *brainsquid* (p. 93), which eats nerve tissue and brains; *breederbugs* (p. 94), which scoop out and animate corpses as nests; the *ice weasel* (p. 95), a voracious arctic predator, and the *rockworm* (p. 96), with its deadly, crushing maw.

Known beasts include the gigantic *gullet* (p. 101), capable of eating an entire squad for breakfast; the mind-eating, body-smashing *soul dog* (p. 102); psychotic *vampires* (p. 104), which devour human flesh and blood; *werewolves* (p. 105) and other beast-men; the bloodthirsty *gargoyles* (p. 99); *demons* (p. 97), creatures of pure evil; powerful psychic *ghosts* (p. 100), and an assortment of *dinosaurs* (p. 98) and *sea monsters* (p. 98).

Rogues – The Lodge, Mind and Ramblers

I've saved the worst for last: humans who turn against their own kind. The Company uses the term *rogue* to refer to any human who possesses psychic powers and uses them in a selfish or dangerous manner. Most black ops use much coarser language among themselves.

There are three main varieties of rogue: the *Lodge* (p. 106) is a close-knit cabal of self-styled "mages" who would like to be "the conspiracy that runs everything." They dress their powers up in strange rituals, and use them to manipulate events and pull the strings of society.

Mind (p. 107) is an informal network of powerful psychic hedonists who are mostly interested in wealth and power without the associated responsibility. If the Lodge manipulates events, Mind manipulates people. Mind members occasionally turn up behind cult activity. Mind is also dangerously close to uncovering the Company, contacting the Greys, or both.

Ramblers (p. 106) is the collective term used to describe psychic "joy riders" who are out to raise hell and have fun. These perpetual teenagers cruise around the world, partying and abusing their powers. As far as the Company knows, they aren't organized.



Argus' Eyes Only: Psis

The Company may actively recruit potential psi-ops, but it even more actively distrusts them.

In an organization built on secrecy, psi-ops can represent a danger even greater than the Greys. Despite the Psi-Ops' Code (p. 54), I know of at least two active programs designed to ferret out psychic black ops who are telepathically listening in on too much. So far, I haven't heard of any disciplinary actions resulting from these programs. But I suspect that day won't be long in coming. Personally, I wonder how those in charge will keep the guilty psi-op from warning the others – and what will happen if they don't.

SMIF RAMBLERS

970401 - FILE X>\\AC144322 archives.blacknet.xxx
Academy Welcome Speech, Rookie class, 1997
Speaker: Gen. Davis Steele (SN:00-2214-0004)
Class Roster under separate cover: FILE X>\\AC144523
\\begin-transcript

Okay. You're good. That's a given. You're good at a lot of things or you wouldn't be here. You're killers and healers, hunters and hiders, builders and destroyers. Some of you seek knowledge and some of you seek to conceal it. You are good because there is no alternative. For the next five years, you will live in a place where there is nothing and no one who is not, at the very least, good.

You're good or you would have been dead a long time ago. You're good or you would right now be fish food in the bottom of the Canadian with a bullet in the back of your head, put there by my operatives, on my orders, because I wanted it to happen. Lots of others who would have liked to be here aren't because they weren't good enough. And they're dead now.

So let's just get past that. Let's forget that you're good, because it doesn't matter. You might as well just say you're breathing, because it has the same amount of importance. Being good only gets you here. You are going to have to get much better than good. It doesn't matter how "good" a firefighter you are, once you've been sent to hell.

I see some of you out there. Cocky. Rolling your eyes like you've heard it all before. You're all such badasses, aren't you? There's nothing you can't handle. Well, cherish that confidence, troops. Hold on to it like the gunwale of the ferryman's boat. You will need it. Starting tomorrow, everything you've learned will be wrong.

I'm not going to sugar-coat it. There's no way to pretty it up. This is hell. You're going to be taught and trained, humiliated and beaten to a broken, bloody mess. You will feast and you will starve. We will test the limits of your body, exceed your endurance, teach you the purest pleasures and the severest pain. We will put unbearable strain on your mind and force you to question your motives, your faith and your own will to live. You will face death, and some of you will die.

And if you survive, you will wake up late on certain nights, sweating and cold, wondering whether it was worth it.

But it is.

When you leave here, you will be among the 800 most competent, all-around bad mother[censored] on the planet. You will be better than six billion other people, the whole remainder of humanity. No one you meet, for the rest of your life, will be able to outdo you in anything, unless it's another one of your own. You will kick ass and take names. In effect, you will have complete freedom and unlimited resources to do whatever it takes to get your job done. You will be gods among men.

Which isn't to say we won't own you. We will. Forever. But with that ownership comes a great boon. You will exist outside of society. You'll walk between the raindrops. Nothing will touch you except for us. And even that won't matter to you. By then you will have been incorporated. *You will be us.*

So you live in hell for five years; you do your time, and when you get out, you'll be handed a life that's richer and more exciting than anything you can imagine. You will do things that everyone knows are impossible. You'll experience things that live only in the minds of lunatics and visionaries, things you thought were made up to scare children. Trust me; it's a whole 'nother level. It's the bargain of a lifetime.

And if you don't like the bargain, you can have what's behind Door No. 2. A bullet.

Dismissed.

\\end-transcript
:dfs

The Commander

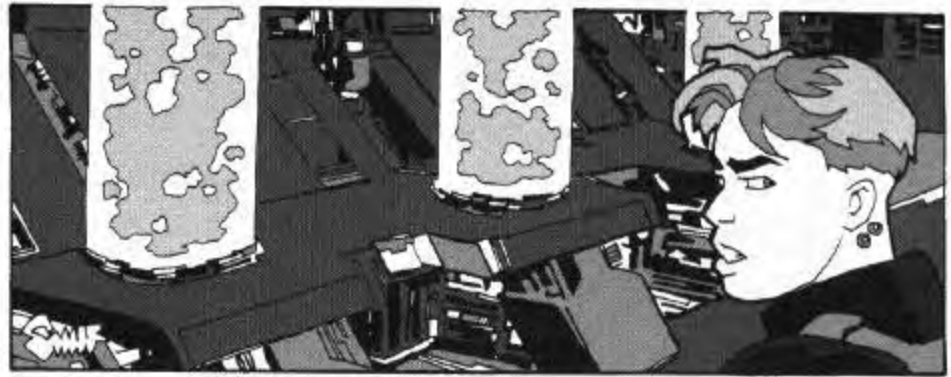
General Davis Francis Steele is approaching his 80th birthday. A big bear of a man, the general is immediately and immensely likable, yet terrifying at the same time. He reminds me of an aging football coach, respected and feared, openly loved and secretly cursed, a legend in his own time.

Born in December of 1917 to a father who was a hero in the first World War, Steele became a hero in the second. Already a captain when the war began, Steele was a bombardier over Germany. His plane was shot down behind enemy lines, and he rescued four of his crewmates, killing an entire troop of Nazis with only a knife and carrying a wounded soldier 12 miles to safety.

He was soon promoted to colonel and given command of an entire air wing in the European theater. It was there that he heard the story of Johnny Franklin (see p. 9) and discovered the first of the many threats to humanity he would soon learn about. He has a passionate love for human society and a hatred of the creatures that threaten it.

Once Argus had designed the Company and started to put it together, Steele asked to be in charge of the agents' training. The other members of Argus couldn't think of anyone more qualified, and he was given carte blanche to create the toughest training institution in the world. He designed the Academy to rectify everything that he felt was wrong with the American armed forces. Not bound by laws and regulations, he designed the drills that so casually take the lives of so many cadets. He quickly points out to any complaining recruit that he's personally completed every drill he designed. If they're good enough for him, they're good enough for some whiny grunt.

The commander continued his military career until he became a general at age 53. He then retired to run the Academy full time. He has gradually let the administration slip into his assistants' hands, and is rumored to be grooming a veteran Intelligence op to take over. His main functions lately are ceremonial, giving welcome speeches and pep talks to cadets.



Welcome to Hell

A lot of black ops look back on their years at the Academy as the worst experience of their lives, as though it were five years of the most bizarre, intense fraternity hazing that the Devil himself could have thought up. Armed-forces basic training times a million. And, to be honest, in many ways I'd have to agree. It is truly an excruciating time, both mentally and physically. It sits like a black stain on the wall in the dungeon of my memory. I wish I could block it out, but I never will.

The other side of that same truth is that not a single black op isn't proud of having graduated from it, as proud of it as he is of anything he's ever accomplished. We know that the time in hell is necessary. We'd all be dead meat out there in the field if we hadn't been put through the Academy's brutality. The fact that I can come upon a demon gnawing the limbs off a little girl and not throw up, wet myself or break down crying is testimony to the success of my training. When we see the little glimpses of hell that punctuate our missions, we can always say, "This isn't so bad. I've been through worse."

Only the elite make it into the Academy, and those who make it out . . . we are something else, something beyond that, something almost godlike. Just as importantly, we are literally Company men. Inside and out, we belong to Argus.

The Spire

The first place recruits are assembled is in the Academy's central square, under an imposing monument called the Spire. The Spire is a four-story needle of the flattest black – what it's made of isn't common knowledge. All too often, a special crew has to inscribe a new name on it. They break out state-of-the-art laser cutting tools to do it.

Under a sweltering sun, the new cadets are told that those names – and there are nearly 2,000 of them by now – are the real names of every cadet and black op who's died honorably in training or duty. "The last time you were that person was when you stepped onto this campus," shouts a drill sergeant. "The next time you become that person is when that name is inscribed on the Spire." Then he stares ominously. "Some of you will be up there soon."

Cadets soon find out that the Company takes the Spire very seriously. It's as public as a black op gets – and that's only in death. Pretty soon, many cadets start taking solace in the loss of their friends in training, because at least they've entered the Company's most exclusive circle – the names on the Spire. Pretty soon, the cadets start taking the Spire just as seriously as the old-timers.



The First Few Days

Starting with the Spire speech, the instructors and administrators try to be up-front about what's going to happen. They tell you from day one that you're in for a hell of a ride. But most of the recruits don't listen. These are men and women from all over the world, hand-picked because of their skills and natural abilities. Most of them are overconfident, puffed up and cocky. They're already used to adversity and think they've seen it all. Nothing scares them.

When they walk in, the recruits are excited, just taking in the place with its wooded, campus-like feel. They hardly notice how the upperclassmen look at them – the pitying looks they get as they receive their uniforms and are shown to their barracks. They talk and exchange stories with each other; everyone is easy and confident, all smiles and back-slapping. The first few days are a cakewalk, just looking around, scouting it out. Everything seems about like they expected.

If I could say one thing to new recruits as they come in, I'd tell them to savor those days, to etch them into their minds as a comfort to be returned to again and again. On the morning of the fourth day, it all changes. That's when they pass out the schedules.

The Curriculum

Academy training is divided into two equally important areas: education and drills. Education, or "book learning" as we used to call it, is the most intense scholastic training a person could receive. The material is not all that difficult (at first), but the sheer volume of information that they expect you to learn is astounding – chemistry, physics, geology, technology, languages, philosophy, sociology. . . . The list goes on. They expect you to read and know the material from two to three textbooks a week. If you fail a test, you get incredibly thorough and abusive tutoring from an instructor with the personality of a Rottweiler.

If you fail it again . . . well, no one really knows. There is no flunking out of the Academy, though the term is used to describe a cadet who snaps under the strain and foolishly runs for it. You can't drop a class, or withdraw from study; the only way to end the schooling is looking up at a headstone.

At the same time you're receiving this force-feeding of knowledge, the drill sergeants run you through an unbelievably physically and mentally challenging battery of drills, most of which are extremely dangerous. Serious injury and "placing out" (no one is said to have simply "died" in Academy training) become commonplace, and friendships become a luxury. When ops talk about training being hell, they are referring to the drills, which are run every day except for Sunday – even the Academy retains some facade of piety.

Each day is equally divided. One month you'll do book learning in the morning, followed by a hearty lunch and drills in the afternoon. The next month it's the other way around. Either one might be bearable by itself, but the combination amplifies the stress enough to strain the most hardened cadet.

After six months, when you've finally had all you can take, they send you on furlough to some out-of-the-way island, perhaps in the Bahamas or the Azores. Everything is paid for – many cadets realize for the first time that they'll never worry about money again – and you get a week in paradise.

But it never seems like long enough. Just when you think your mind and body are back to normal, just when you've finally managed to let go of the sick vigilance that's been rammed down your throat, they drag you back in.

Recruiting

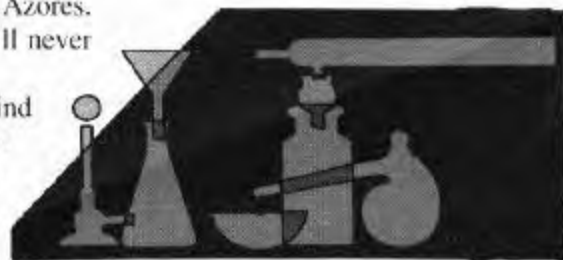
Those selected for training at the Academy already are some of the most competent people in the world (see p. 67 for details). An elite section of the Intelligence department, called "the Committee," observes potential recruits, whittling thousands of names down to just a few hundred each year before the real selection begins.

Potential trainees must be under 30 and have little or nothing in the way of close ties. When a person becomes a black op, the Company doesn't want some snooping brother trying to find out where he disappeared to. Experience has shown the Committee that an existing family is the greatest temptation for a cadet or black op to go AWOL (another reason it permits so few ops to have outside lives). It's rumored that on rare occasions, the Company will authorize the "disappearance" of one or two family members to aid in the enrollment of a particularly appealing candidate. No one is really sure if this is true, but I wouldn't be too surprised to learn it.

When an appropriately skilled and unconnected candidate is discovered, Committee members watch his every move for at least a year, sometimes longer. Often, a black op will befriend the candidate at his job or pose as a neighbor and ask leading questions – never enough to reveal any information about the Company, but enough to gauge the recruit's potential reaction. Then the first real contact is made.

The candidate secretly is drugged with a low dose of sodium amobarbital and the Company's mission is generally outlined, with the candidate's potential role in the conspiracy explained in detail. If the recruit freaks out and tries to escape or threatens to go to the authorities, he is fed the Cocktail (see p. 18). The candidate remembers nothing and never encounters a black op again.

If he finds the prospect appealing, even exciting, the Committee members arrange for his disappearance from normal society. Usually, an "unexplained accident" or "mysterious tragedy" will occur, and the new recruit is whisked off to the Academy to begin training.



A Recruit Speaks

"I have to admit, I freaked out a little when they first told me. They had given me something, you know, to relax me, but it didn't do much good. It was just too much for me to handle. I started tossing them around. They almost had to take me out. You have to admit, though, it's pretty bizarre – aliens, the Company and all that.

"But now that I'm here, I like it. Don't get me wrong. It's a living hell. Ten times worse than anything in the Army. But these people know what they're doing. We are going to be so badass when we get out of here.

"I wasn't much before they recruited me, a carpenter with a Gulf War medal and a knack for bar fights, but I'm big and smart; I guess that counts for a lot. Some of the older cadets call me a long shot. That just makes me try harder.

"I've only been here a few months though, and everyone tells me it's going to get worse. Our class has only lost one cadet so far, if you don't count that guy who freaked and ran screaming into the mountains. They say we'll lose 30 by the year's end. I won't be one of them."

A Drill Sergeant Speaks

"Fear is the important part. You have to scare the crap out of them in almost every drill. If you can handle the fear, you can handle the drill. When you're staring into the maw of a rockworm, fear becomes a luxury you can't afford.

"We have to teach these people that it takes more than confidence to conquer anxiety. Confidence helps, but there is something beyond that. When confidence gives out – and it eventually does – you need a base of sheer determination and ability to keep you going.

"They think we're trying to kill them; that's not really true. If we could have 100% survival, we'd be happy; that would mean the Committee was doing a great job. There are no quotas. We don't expect people to die, but not everyone has the right stuff.

"It may seem strange, but I love my cadets. When they're wetting themselves in the face of their first real pain, they need someone who cares. I hate to lose one. Sometimes it gets to me, late at night when I can't sleep. I get up, light a cigarette, pour myself a scotch and I sit and think and listen. I swear sometimes I can hear the ones I lost. Sometimes, I swear I can."



Book Learning

To illustrate the breadth of knowledge that the Academy requires black ops to master, I'll run through a brief summary of the subjects every recruit must learn. Basically, you're required to know everything about a few subjects, and a few things about everything.

Now, I've made it sound like every recruit has to sit through every minute of every class to survive. That's not true. Most potential black ops already have achieved expertise in one or two fields, and high competence in several others. The Academy

doesn't want to waste resources preaching to the converted. Trainees may take placement tests during the first week (after hours) to "test out" of subjects that they feel they already know. In fact, the administrators have designed the curriculum with the expectation that each recruit will test out of at least two subjects. Those who don't had better be phenomenal students, or they're pretty much dead meat.

This list only covers the first two years of schooling. Once a recruit is enlisted in a department (see *The Draft*, p. 35), his education becomes much more specialized. I've listed the basic year-three to year-five curricula for each department in the sidebars.

Basic Science

Ops must take courses in basic chemistry, physics, biology, zoology, botany, anatomy, medicine, ecology, geology and astronomy. This is equivalent to college-level course work, but proceeds much faster.

Special emphasis is placed on the anatomy and habits of beasts and wigglers. Academy instructors surf Blacknet and read squad reports carefully for any new information that they could add to their classes.

In addition, the specific details of our alien enemies are covered in xenology, xenobiology and xenopsychology.

Parascience

All recruits are tested for psychic ability upon entering the Academy. Those with the gift are given added course work in parascience, learning to develop and master their psychic powers. The added work exempts them from certain classes and drills, at their sergeant's discretion. Cadets with the gift generally are held in high esteem, and while I wouldn't go so far as to say they're coddled, they certainly have it easier than the rest of us.

Parascience training has no set curriculum, because each psychic's abilities are unique. Each is assigned to a faculty psi-op sponsor, trained individually and given assignments and lessons based on his or her particular talents. Recruits with telepathic ability are given special training in Grey telepathic communication, which requires a great deal of patience, intelligence and raw psychic power to master. Those cadets who do, however, are prized agents, always drafted early by their chosen department and specifically requested by mission sponsors.

Technology

The Technology department built a special complex at the Academy in the late '60s that has become the model for other departments. It is constantly kept state of the art, and the instructors who teach there are considered the best –

even, grudgingly, by instructors in other departments. The required course work is extensive, and must be broken down into subsections:

Computers: All black ops must be familiar with computer systems, from fabricating microchips to programming AIs. Ops must learn to repair any type of circuit board and understand the myriad formats of connections and cabling that make up the computer world. In addition, each recruit must choose at least three distinct computer languages to learn.

Vehicles: The ability to repair, maintain and operate a number of vehicles, from jeeps to helicopters, is required.

Weaponry: Much of what is done in later drills involves a plethora of weapons. In weaponry classes, potential black ops learn how to use, dismantle, clean, repair and build a number of weapons, from knives to artillery.

Engineering and Mathematics: The Technology department also takes care of teaching engineering and math courses. Agents are required to have a basic working knowledge of algebra, trigonometry, calculus, drafting, electrical engineering and mechanical engineering.



Philosophy and Logic

Philosophy isn't ignored at the Academy; ops joke that "Why am I here?" takes on more relevance there than anywhere. Principles of logic are covered in depth and turn out to be very useful in other disciplines, including computer programming, mathematics and science. Ethics courses tend to be weighted toward justifying the Company's activities, but nonetheless are taught expertly.

Social Sciences

Black ops receive intense training in sociology and psychology. They also are given a special course on Grey psychology, examining what we know about the actions and motivations of the Greys.

History

The Academy history department teaches history a little bit differently from your standard liberal arts college. You see, Company historians have pieced together the *real* history of the world. The fact is, much of what traditional history teaches us has glaring holes in it.

Academy course work reflects this by adding facts about the Prima, the Greys, the first discovery of many of the wigglers, the history of vampires and demons, the various types of werewolf that have been encountered and so on. I learned much of what I imparted in the first chapter of this book in my history classes.

Languages

Recruits are required to learn two languages other than their native tongue. The most common are English, French, Japanese, Portuguese, Russian and Spanish.

Literature and the Arts

As if all that weren't enough, the Academy provides full course work in art history, literature, poetry and both creative and technical writing.

The Lay of the Land

The Academy is nestled comfortably into the foothills of the Sangre de Cristo mountains at the tail end of the Rockies in northern New Mexico. It has the bearing and appearance of an old-world military academy, with the scenery of the mountainous American Southwest.

Sprawling across a 2,000-acre plot of land, the Academy is registered with the state of New Mexico as a private hunting club, and in its yearly inspections it always receives an unexceptional report, even though the inspector never actually sets foot on the campus.

With easy access to 15,000-foot mountains, thick forests, narrow canyons and white-water rapids, the Academy has the rustic charm of a wilderness resort. But it also sports high-tech laboratories, state-of-the-art lecture halls and luxurious dormitories with private rooms.

The centerpiece of the Academy is the campus, a cluster of dormitories and classroom buildings set along narrow cobblestone streets. The buildings are classical in style, made of red brick and trimmed with limestone slabs. The floors are all natural wood or tile, and the place has a musty, nostalgic smell (although the custodial staff keeps the place immaculate). The only notable exception to the classical feel is the technology center, a stark, blue-black building crouching on the southern end of the campus, ominous and darkly exciting.

A large portion of the property, near the main campus area, has been set up like a movie-studio back lot, where fake sections of inner city streets, tenement buildings, subway and sewer junctions and much more have been built and filled with mechanical traps, robot snipers and Animatronic beasts and wigglers. The recruits call this place "Satan's Playroom."

Finally, the Commander's mansion is a majestic log house, posed dramatically on the shores of the Canadian River. Once or twice a year, General Steele throws a huge party, inviting the faculty and drill sergeants – as well as the top 10 or so recruits, who simply stare in awe at the magnificent surroundings.

ATTENTION:
UNAUTHORIZED CADETS
FORBIDDEN IN THIS AREA



The Infirmary

While death seems commonplace at the Academy, wounding and injury are even more frequent. It is very rare for a recruit to last a year without making at least one trip to the Infirmary. The instructors have built in a certain amount of "padding" into the drill schedules, and most stays in the Infirmary are a few days to a few weeks at most. Being injured does not exempt a cadet from any drills, it only postpones them (unless he chooses to use some of his excuses – see main text).

The Infirmary facilities are top-notch, and the docs there have access to the Science department's vast stores of advanced medical knowledge and the latest and most expensive medical technology. Healing time in the Infirmary is remarkably brief – one time, I was down with three gunshot wounds and was back in the fray in under two weeks, serviceable if a little worse for wear.

Of course, given the level of violence during the Academy's rougher years, many recruits suffer far more serious injuries – wounds that, even given the Infirmary's advanced facilities, take months or years to heal. Some never heal. The Academy takes care of its own, and severely injured cadets can attempt to finish their training once they've recovered, or take on supporting jobs at the Academy. The worst cases, coma patients and brain-dead vegetables, are mercifully killed and given heroes' funerals.

Combat Department Curriculum

Cadets who are drafted into the Combat department hold illusions of never having to crack open another textbook. After the mental bludgeoning they've received in their first two years of schooling, this is an understandable desire, but it doesn't work that way.

True, combat ops spend the majority of their time in actual training, learning through brutal experience, but they also spend at least two hours of every day until graduation studying (in no particular order) tactics, diplomacy, strategy, martial-arts history, military history, anatomy (alien, beast and wiggler), armory, ballistics and demolition.

In addition, Combat's drill sergeants insist that the cadets learn combat psychology and zen meditative techniques.

How They Make You Want to Die

Someone spent some serious time and effort thinking up the various drills that make up the Academy's "extracurricular activities." Half of every day (save Sunday) is spent knee-deep in mud, bathed in blood, hacking up vomit or swimming through filth. When we come into the Academy, we feel like the biggest, baddest homeboys on the planet. After the first drill, we're bawling like babies.

Drills start out on a precise schedule. Trainees are given a whole year's schedule, with brief descriptions of the drills, so they have ample time to prepare (mentally and physically) for the upcoming exercises. The sergeants know that the drills are hard and want to give the recruits a fair shot at surviving them. If anyone fails to complete a drill, they receive more intense and nasty personal attention until they do . . . or they place out of the exercise.

In addition to hospitalization time, every potential black op receives 10 excuses a year. These exempt them from any drill for any reason. No questions are asked; the sergeant simply marks the recruit absent and marks off an excuse. Cadets are told that no one has remained at the Academy for a single day after an eleventh absence. Since by then everyone knows the only way out is placing out, no one I know of has tested the system.

Year One: Endurance

The first year is spent conditioning the body to withstand the pressures of the coming years' drills and the rigors of fieldwork. Without the endurance drills, the rest would be pointless. These drills also serve to weed out the unfit very quickly, especially the so-called "weeding drills" (see sidebar, p. 37), which tend to have a higher body count.

Stamina

Stamina drills start with 10-mile runs. If you can't run 10 miles when you come into training, you'd better learn – *fast*. Within a month, trainees are running marathons. By the end of the first year, recruits must finish a triathlon. Stamina drills focus mainly on strengthening the body with long-term aerobic activity. Swimming, cross-country running, bicycling and mountain climbing are the primary activities.

The second, less-emphasized, part of stamina training involves maintaining certain stances for extremely long periods of time. In one drill, a recruit must hold a pencil against the wall with his nose for three hours. If he varies from the stance and the pencil falls, he has to start over . . . and keep starting over till he gets it done. This is motivation enough.

Severe Exposure

After a nice, 20-mile run, there's nothing like a couple of days in the wilderness without food or water. Nicknamed "Summer Camp," the exposure drill is a weeding drill (see sidebar, p. 37). Each recruit must undergo the drill three times in the first year, and the drill always is unannounced. Trainees who are absent on the day that Summer Camp is supposed to start are not exempted from it; they just have to do it later. Only about 85% of freshmen survive all three trips.

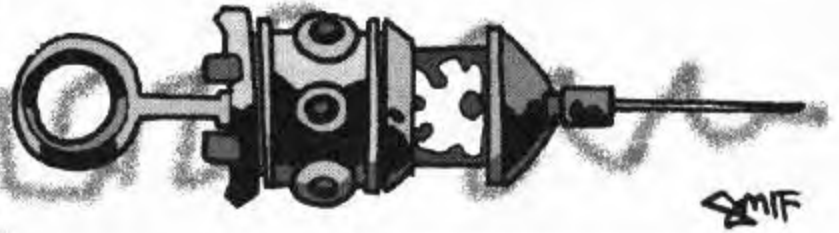
Mental Strain

Some of the more creative drills fall into this category. In one example, a recruit is strapped to a chair where he is forced to solve logic puzzles on a computer. With every wrong answer or excessive delay, a hypodermic needle filled with an unknown substance inches closer to his neck. The trainee has no idea how many questions he must answer, or what's in the needle (a strong tranquilizer).

Speaking of drugs, the recreational variety can't be obtained at the Academy,

as much as some cadets might crave the escape they bring – but they're often used in the mental-strain drills. By the time a cadet's seen his last drill of this sort, he'll never be tempted to use drugs recreationally again.

An example of another drill in this category secludes trainees in isolation tanks for 10-hour stretches, the only stimulation being a man's voice mumbling incoherent poetry.



Year Two: Competition

In the first year, the recruits are only trying to survive. The only competition is against the Academy's training schedule and against their own inner demons. After the second furlough, in the late summer after the first year, the trainees return to the Academy to find that they've been ranked.

At first, the ranks are arbitrary and highly fluid, but after a few weeks, they become more serious. With the rankings comes an intense spirit of competition, which the trainees hungrily adopt – the ranking system brings a sense of control over one's life at the Academy, something that is sadly lacking during the first year. Recruits are ranked in two categories, mental and physical, and the drills are set up as contests – a year-long tournament – to determine the seeding going into the Draft (below).

Although year two is not lethal (at least not intentionally), it is very stressful. The recruits are never sure what the rankings are for, except that they are somehow important in the coming years. Everyone becomes an enemy, and maintaining and improving one's rank becomes an obsession for most cadets.

Mental Contests

Mental prowess is proven almost entirely through the game of chess. General Steele, who started the Academy, is an avid chess devotee, and believes that ability at chess is the purest measure of a person's mental acuity. Many department heads and Argus members have tried to argue otherwise; Steele ignores them. Therefore, whether it makes sense or not, chess is the litmus test that determines about 80% of a recruit's mental rank.

The remaining mental contests include other strategy games, like go and backgammon, quiz challenges and debates. Competitors are given preliminary ranks based on practice games played throughout the year; these are finalized in a big tournament at the end of the second year.

Physical Contests

Physical rankings are based exclusively on sports – two sports to be specific: swimming and rugby. Both of these sports emphasize total body conditioning and a certain amount of mindless energy. Recruits must choose one sport to specialize in, and this division creates additional competition. The swimmers think of the rugby players as graceless thugs, while the rugby players regard the swimmers as effete wimps. Physical rank is determined through a series of tournaments held throughout the year, and (like the first year's drills), half of each day is taken up by conditioning and practice. As with the mental contests, a final tournament in each sport is held at the end of the year, determining the cadets' final ranking.

The Draft

By the end of year two, all the recruits are fully aware of the purpose of the rankings. They aid in the Draft. The Draft is the selection of trainees by Company departments; each recruit is hand-picked by the department heads

Intelligence Department Curriculum

Years three through five take the spooks in the Academy into the realms of social maneuvering and international intrigue. Intelligence cadets are the lucky first recruits to experience training outside of the Academy's borders.

They are sent on month-long trips to some of the world's international hot spots, immersed in the culture and language, and develop skill in surveillance, social engineering, infiltration and general subterfuge. By graduation, Intelligence ops are fluent in at least four languages other than their native tongue, and can get by in two or three others. They also can blend seamlessly into the background in a half-dozen cultures, in nearly any social setting. Intelligence ops reverently are referred to as the "invisible ops."

When not on these field trips, the cadets' classroom instruction continues at its usual breakneck pace. They study diplomacy, intelligence gathering and analysis, technology, advanced psychology, history and world culture.

Security Department Curriculum

The secops' training is varied and intense. From firefighting and paramedic training, to poison detection and remedies, to fairly advanced medical training, their schooling runs the gamut. The focus is on safety and crisis management, but secops also learn a great deal about psychology and behavioral modification. When things go bad on a mission, the secops are the ones who have to keep things under control and get everyone to safety.

As well, Security cadets face a battery of miscellaneous classes, including ballistics and demolition, languages and diplomacy, technology and science, history and a smattering of art and literature. They are truly jacks of all trades.

Science Department Curriculum

In their last three years, cadets who are drafted into the Science department crank the intensity of their education up yet another notch. The most scholarly of the five departments, Science believes that its ops must have the equivalent of three doctorates in the sciences!

Called "geeks" by their peers, Science cadets are the most erudite of all graduates when the day comes to leave the Academy. They study cutting-edge biology, botany, ecology and zoology, and delve deeply into extensive Company studies of wiggler and beast zoology and ecology. They also research medicine, genetics, cell biology, physics, astronomy, seismology, vulcanology, aerodynamics, pyrotechnics, electronics, pharmacology and chemistry.

The last year of study for potential Science ops involves an intense, hands-on examination of the two alien races that threaten humanity. Grey physiology and anatomy, as well as psychology and behavior, is studied in mind-numbing detail, as is the physiology and behavior of the brainsuckers. Geek trainees are the only cadets allowed to view the small collection of alien specimens that are carefully guarded and preserved by Company scientists.

Technology Department Curriculum

With the possible exception of Combat department trainees, no one goes into their third-year schooling with as much enthusiasm as freshly drafted techies. The promise of a warehouse full of experimental technology is enough to make the most reserved techie drool with anticipation.

The Technology Annex is packed with state-of-the-art R&D facilities. The basement lab contains the most powerful supercomputer on the planet, equivalent to a dozen commercial versions running in parallel and home to what may be the first artificial sentience (or a well-programmed simulation – even the top programmers aren't sure).

In these exciting surroundings, tech cadets study robotics, engineering, imaging and sound technology, applied physics, network protocols and a vast array of programming languages and operating systems.

(with the assistance of close aides). By that time, about 150 cadets remain of a class that started with roughly 200 bodies, and the Draft takes about a week to complete.

It starts at the beginning of the second-year tournaments, where the department heads and their aides watch the top-ranked cadets compete for their respective titles. Each trainee selects three departments of choice, and the departments have "draft picks" which they trade, barter and wheedle out of each other. The selection process strongly resembles that of professional sports. Every cadet gets selected eventually, although the lower-ranked ones may not get into one of their preferred departments.

Once the Draft is over, the rankings are meaningless except as social badges for those who competed well during the year (kind of like graduating first in your high-school class). Early draft picks will, however, be more likely to be chosen as squad leaders in the coming years, and generally rise higher in the departmental infrastructure. The "old boys' club" of aging department administrators tends to promote this attitude. Although cadets in general do not have a great deal of influence within their departments, lower-ranking cadets have to work much harder than their peers to advance and gain respect.

The most important part of the draft is that afterward, all cadets notice a subtle shift in how they're treated. Previously, they were meat – well-instructed and obscenely motivated meat – but meat nevertheless. After the draft, drill sergeants start treating them with just a little respect. It's as if the instructors have seen the beginnings of a black op in the cadet.

No black op that I've ever asked has failed to admit this made a huge impact on his perception of the Academy. Previously, we all gutted it through for ourselves. After the draft, we started gutting it through for the Company.

Year Three: Combat

Many recruits think that combat is what the Academy is all about. This is what they wanted from the day they walked through the iron gates. Well, the combat drills they go through are nothing like what they dreamed of – unless they dreamed of a 300-pound bull-sergeant thrashing them day after day.

A lot of cadets come into the Academy knowing how to fight, and tend to breeze through the early days . . . but their time comes. They are quickly sorted out and placed in "advanced" classes, where they face opponents of comparable ability. They soon wish they hadn't been so full of spit and bravado.

All cadets go through a heavy battery of combat drills, but those who have been recruited into the Combat department train twice as long as their counterparts. While the Tech department hackers are spending half their days breaking into their first real corporate mainframe, the Combat grunts are snapping each others' limbs and learning to recognize a gun model from the sound of someone cocking the weapon.

The year of combat drills, like most of the other years, starts out hard and intense, weeding out the unfit in a hurry. Later drills tend to be more about refining and building on the knowledge so harshly gained. In addition to the rigorous training schedule, cadets must maintain the physical conditioning that they achieved during the previous year.

Manhandling and Skullcracking

The martial arts are taught with very little reference to their ancestral names. Karate, kung fu, jujitsu, judo – all are mashed together into a bastardization that the instructors separate into the categories "manhandling" and "skullcracking."

Manhandling includes judo-like moves, in which the opponent's strength and weight are used against him. The techniques taught include locks, holds, throws and pins. The idea is to incapacitate and disarm the opponent with a minimum of broken bones and internal bleeding.

Skullcracking feeds the other urge. The opponent is to be reduced to a quivering mass of snapped limbs and bleeding organs. The goal is the death or permanent maiming of the enemy, and all methods, honorable or not, are taught. The body is dissected and mapped out, laying bare the most vulnerable spots — the eyes, solar plexus, groin, kneecaps, chin and elbows.

Most of the time, cadets fight each other. The instructor will pair off trainees of comparable skill, and fights are stopped at unconsciousness. On occasion, a particularly cocky recruit will find himself paired off with the drill sergeant, forced to fight for what he fears will be his life. Those who manage to knock out the sergeant are respected and revered, telling about the feat for years to come (I was one such cadet). Every so often, those who fail are actually buried.



Stabbing and Shooting

Once recruits have mastered unarmed combat, they graduate to weapons. They don't get to stab and maim each other with real knives and swords, but the rattan ones they train with can inflict bruises, broken bones or more serious damage, and thus are fine for their purposes.

Cadets also are trained in the quick and accurate use of every type of gun, from derringer to Gatling gun. The Academy's gun obstacle courses are some of the best and most lethal ever created. Fashioned like movie-studio back lots, they are designed to be unerringly realistic. Mechanical beasts and wigglers jump out at recruits from dark warehouse windows and faux fire escapes. Gun-toting mannequins fire real bullets from within dark alleyways and behind false storefronts. Although cadets are allowed to wear Kevlar vests during these drills, many an unlucky trainee ends up in the Infirmary (p. 34) or the morgue.

The better part of the year is spent in gun training. For most ops, the gun becomes a symbol of survival, a reassurance in the face of overwhelming odds. Even the most studious Science op carries two or three pistols on a mission.

Although all cadets are expert marksmen, there are always the elite few who think of the gun as a "wimp's weapon" and opt to do their dirty work with fists, feet and hand weapons. They quickly learn to heed the wisdom of Dalton Rogers, the legendary founder of the Combat department, "If you don't carry a gun, you'd better have a helluva lot of knives."

Blowing Things Up

The final part of combat training is in demolitions. From hand grenades to plastique, all operatives have to be well-versed in the art of turning things into pieces of things. Cadets learn about fuses, timers, detonators, radio-controlled bombs, mortars and artillery. Combat department agents also learn how to construct and operate larger bombs, from tactical nuclear warheads to strategic thermonuclear weapons (which everyone hopes we'll never have to use). In addition, all cadets are taught how to recognize specific types of explosives and how to defuse many types of bombs.

Year Four: Society

The fourth year at the Academy is a welcome break from the rigorous physical training that has tasked cadets to this point. As with the previous year,

Weeding Drills

Weeding drills are the most agonizing of the Academy's many agonizing drills, all the more so because they're unannounced. They often test cadets' endurance and serve as benchmarks in a recruit's training, but their primary purpose is to gauge a future black op's physical and mental ability to withstand surprise adversities.

Their exact nature varies — perhaps a 10-mile hike under live fire after a long day of other drills — but is usually as surprising as their timing.

Since all other drills are explained and scheduled, these earn a special place in cadets' hearts. They also tend to be more lethal.

Thoughts of Escape

The Academy is not a fun place. There's no way around that unpleasant fact. Many cadets, although they believe themselves to be the most competent people on the planet, just aren't prepared for that harsh reality. Sometimes, despite the administration's strong warning against it, they try to leave.

There just isn't any leaving.

In the institution's 50-year history, no one has managed to make it longer than a week AWOL; they've always been tracked down and executed. Only about 60 cadets have tried to run, or "flunked out" in Academy parlance. The Academy keeps this number down by playing up the fact that no one has successfully escaped (though instructors try not to emphasize that the Academy is a place people wish to escape from).

Hardly a year goes by that a cadet doesn't try to run, and most recruits have thought about it from time to time — usually right after a particularly harrowing drill or a close friend's funeral. But it remains a huge and — so far — unrewarding risk.

First, there's the physical remoteness of the campus. The Sangre de Cristo mountains provide harsh, inhospitable terrain in all directions. The Canadian River is treacherous, punctuated by rough rapids and jagged canyons. It would be hard to make it down the river in a good raft, much less without one.

When a cadet tries to escape, the Academy calls on the unlimited resources of the Company to track him down, including the Omicron Device, satellites, helicopters and active ops.

Continued on next page . . .

Thoughts of Escape (Continued)

Contributing to the low frequency of escape attempts is the simple fact that recruits have no time to plot a run. Sleep is a precious commodity, while each waking hour is filled with exhausting drills and mind-numbing study. Every spare moment is filled.

If a cadet tries to leave during a field trip, perhaps by trying to slip unnoticed into a crowd in Mexico or stow away on a Russian freighter, he sometimes stands a better chance . . . but the unbelievable determination of the Company when it comes to tracking down escapees has made it thus far a losing proposition.

Escape attempts are almost exclusively made during the first year, and usually in the first half of the first year. After that, cadets' budding sense of *esprit de corps* takes over.

Argus' Eyes Only: the Academy

The Academy presents an image of actively trying to kill cadets. That's a Company line: Argus has to expect training casualties, and uses them to build motivated black ops.

In reality, instructors do their best to preserve cadets, but only behind the scenes. The Company goes one further and often sends undercover secops into the cadet corps to keep an eye on the instructors' performance. The quality and safeguards of the Academy program are regarded as hugely important.

Eventually, cadets see through this sadistic posturing for themselves; that's part of the morale-building process.

trainees must keep up their physical conditioning (passing a strenuous physical exam every three months), and most don't need to be told to spend their spare time on the firing range, but other than those things, year four is relatively calm.

This year begins the black ops' training in dealing with people and situations outside of the conspiracy. During real field missions, agents have to be prepared to take on any identity from a senator to a bag lady. Ops have to be convincing and comfortable in any situation, from a late-night fire in a hotel lobby to a black-tie charity ball at a billionaire's mansion. As such, this is the first year that cadets are taken out into the field. Cadets are selected on a rotating schedule for weekly field trips, while the others stay at the Academy, learning different social customs, how to recognize breeding and rank, how to gamble, which fork to use for salad, the difference between "shaken" and "stirred," etc.

Elaborate scenarios are developed by the instructors, and cadets are dropped in with specific goals but no foreknowledge of where the scenario will take them. A single day's drill might take them from the lair of a sleazy, big-city drug dealer to the penthouse suite at the Ascot. While this all sounds exciting and fun (and it is, to a certain extent), the penalties for failure are extreme. The instructors work hard to make these scenarios realistic, and when a cadet makes a social faux pas, or otherwise gives his squad away, the scene is played out. If that means the recruit is taken out back and beaten . . . well, that's what happens.

By the end of the fourth year, each class is down to about 130 cadets, and the year's end is celebrated by a huge formal ball, called the General's Ball, which doubles as the year's final exam. Set up as a quagmire of political intrigue, renegade agents, basement-dwelling aliens, double-crossing rogue psychics and their mind-controlled lackeys, the General's Ball is both nerve-wracking and fun.

Year Five: Teamwork

By the fifth year, surviving cadets feel like they're ready for anything. They've been beaten and brutalized, wined, dined and refined. They've learned how to serve tea to a congressman . . . or break his neck with one hand. But they soon find out that the hardest drills are yet to come.

The cadets are divided into squads and run through some of the most harrowing adventures that they'll see outside of field work. Each month, they are assigned to a new squad and sent on a new selection of drills, each harder than the last. Here is a small sampling of the types of drills that fill the fifth and final year.

The Six-Day Maze

The six-day maze isn't really a maze, and you'd better finish it in less than six days or you probably won't. A squad of four to eight cadets is dropped in one end of a long, narrow canyon with no food or water, one knife and one handgun with six bullets. The canyon is filled with traps, crocodiles, mountain lions, robot snipers and a couple of hidden caches of weapons.

Cadets must make their way 10 miles to the other end of the canyon, retrieve a poorly sealed box full of poisonous spiders, and bring it back intact to their starting point. The secret weapon stashes include a few more bullets for their pistol, an extra pistol or two, and some more knives. Sometimes there's even a shotgun with some shells.

The squad also can retrieve rifles and bullets from the robot snipers that populate the walls of the canyon – if they can get to them without being shot.

Squads who don't make it back within six days are left for dead by the instructors waiting at the launch point. They are given another three days to make it back to the Academy (another 20 miles away). If they don't show up, they are tracked down through the Omicron Device. If not already dead, they'll soon wish they were: they have to do it again.



The Sacrifice

The sacrifice drill is something every squad goes through at least once, and it can take the form of any type of drill, from a trek through a fake sewage-treatment plant to a desert hike. At some point in the drill, it appears things have broken down in potentially deadly fashion. It becomes "clear" that most of the squad is going to be destroyed unless one cadet does something obviously life-threatening to save the entire group. Maybe he has to hold two wires together to keep a bomb from going off while the room fills with water and the squad escapes, or he might need to stay behind in a collapsing tunnel, lifting the other squad members to safety. The instructors will not let the heroic trainee actually die, but will stage it in such a way as to make the remaining squad members think so. They will not intervene if no one steps up to make the sacrifice, and a few squads have come back from a sacrifice drill mentally scarred for life.

The Log

In the log drill, a squad is run through one of the more difficult gun courses. It's set up in a fake, run-down tenement building, where mechanical demons and robot snipers bust down doors and shoot from window ledges. All the cadets in the squad have survived and conquered this particular course during year three, but this time there's a difference – the group members are attached to a six-foot log which they have to carry with them through the course of the six-hour drill.

Each member is attached to the log via a 5' length of steel chain that's clamped to a different body location on each cadet (leg, arm, wrist, ankle, waist or neck). By the end of the drill, trainees have learned to maneuver the log around hallway corners, through doorways, and up and down stairwells. The log also can be used as a shield from gunfire, a battering ram or makeshift weapon.

Hell's Kitchen

In this drill, a squad is armed to the teeth and sent to hunt a mechanical wiggler in a warehouse filled with wooden crates. The main doors are welded shut, but a few cramped access tunnels allow access. They know the wiggler is in there somewhere, and they are told not to return without its powerless, mechanical body. What they don't know is that the crates are filled with benzine and newspaper, and any stray gunfire is likely to set the whole building ablaze. The wiggler is remote-controlled and pretty tough to take down. Getting out with the body without becoming barbecue is quite a challenge.

Graduation

The Academy has no final exam. The 125 or so remaining cadets finish a drill, then are marched to the Academy's central square. To their immense surprise, there they find every available active and retired op assembled in portable grandstands. As the cadets form ranks around the Spire, General Steele steps up to a podium and utters the sweetest two words they'll ever hear: "Congratulations, graduates." The audience applauds thunderously. No cadet ever forgets it.

An afternoon of speeches and pomp follow, but most graduates stand through it in a happy daze. Finally, they're led one at a time to the podium for a small but formal individual ceremony and personal congratulations from General Steele. The General also takes the time to pen a hand-written letter to each graduating black op, commenting on their performance throughout the training, commending them on their particular abilities and expressing his confidence in their ability to perform in the tough times ahead.

The new black ops receive a final furlough to another unnamed tropical isle, this time for a month. It's probably the last time they'll string 30 days of leave together. After that, the gentle buzz of Omicron will be a constant companion.



CHAPTER THREE

THE COMPANY

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There's a quiet poetry to the sound of a squad preparing for a mission. It's a symphony of shuffles, clicks and soft muttering as the ops pack their bags and check their pieces.

Ramírez tapes his hands with black electrician's tape and slips 13 silver-tipped shells into the ammo belt that he straps high on his waist. Above it, directly over his heart, is a tattoo – a bull's-eye target. Thick black type reads, "HOME RUN." Tinny funk-metal can be heard bleeding from his headphones.

Blane pops the clip of his .45 auto in and out, in and out. It's a nervous habit of his, but it's more comforting than annoying. He smokes a fat stub of a cigar. The thick blue smoke curls around the solitary bulb that lights the room.

Illiana stacks her gear methodically into a thin, gray duffel, her face grim and purposeful. Medkit. Laptop. Headset. Shoulder cam. Ammo belt. Semi-auto. Grenade launcher. While she packs, she whispers to herself, "Hail Mary, full of grace..."

Denver is curled in the corner tapping on his Cistron. Occasionally, he wrinkles his forehead, grabs the pressure pen and scribbles a few notes to himself. He sips espresso and rubs his temple with the barrel of his silver .38 Special.

I smile and pop 20-gauge shells into twin double-barreled, sawed-off Winchesters. The thick, meaty clack as I snap each shut is an authoritative "ready!" and the noise of the room builds for a moment then falls away to a reverent silence. They wait for me to speak.

"Let's dance."

My first impression of the Company was one of shocking ordinariness. I was expecting long, dimly lit corridors, lined with row after row of filing cabinets and populated by dark-suited agents whispering secrets among themselves. Or warehouses brimming with alien spacecraft and ancient, forgotten technology. Don't get me wrong; those things exist, just not with the comic-book exaggeration that my mind had constructed.

No, walking into Steelhead, the Combat department headquarters in San Diego, I was struck by how much the place looked like a high-class health club. A cheerful receptionist met me and directed me to my meeting with Samuel Harting, who was then the head of new-agent integration. He wore a business suit, shook my hand warmly and said, "Welcome to the Company."

The long, dark corridors came later, when I visited the basement tech labs of Dynatronics, or the Intelligence department's salt-mine storage facility, Area 12. The secops' training headquarters, buried under massive Stone Mountain, Georgia, is pretty spooky too, with its antiseptic, labyrinthine hallways, echoing with the muffled sounds of gunfire. And the weirdest place by far is the Science department's specimen lab, submerged beneath the surf off the southern coast of Texas.

The Company is the origin of all black op activity. Although it is spoken of as a centralized entity, in actuality, the Company is a collection of disparate departments, with their own facilities and headquarters. They work together to fight a common enemy, but they also pursue and promote their own secret agendas. To belong to a department is to swear allegiance to a certain way of thinking and, more importantly, a specific method of achieving the Company's goals.

The power struggle among the department heads is what keeps each department sharp. The leaders want to prove that their operatives are the best-trained and most competent. The department with the best operatives is likely to be present in more missions, and thus have more influence on the direction of the

The Grey Alliance

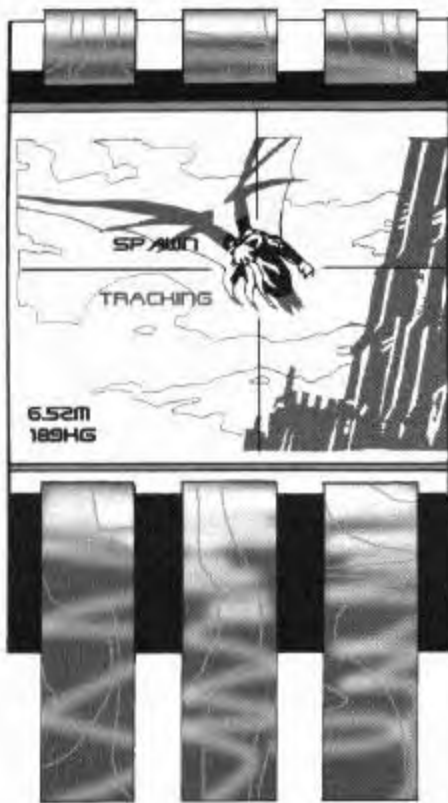
In the mid '50s, Argus made a hard decision. Numerous encounters with the Greys had shown that the Company was completely outmatched in technology by the inscrutable aliens. Argus knew that if something drastic wasn't done, the Company that they'd so carefully crafted would be powerless within a year.

Then, a remarkable Science op named Dana Franek revealed during a recon mission that she could "hear" the Greys thinking and that she had a basic understanding of their mental language. Using Franek, Argus contacted the aliens and proposed an alliance. After learning of the Greys' imprisonment, they realized that the arrangement was eminently logical: they would help the aliens leave the planet in exchange for the keys to advanced technology. A further stipulation was that the Greys would no longer abduct humans, provided the black ops stopped assaulting the Greys and hindering their actions on Earth.

The alliance was doomed from the start. First, communication was difficult, and misinterpretations were common. It took four years of translation and experimentation to work out the sole technological advance the Greys gave us, which was the secret to compact electromagnetic weaponry. Argus made even less progress in the fight to get the aliens off the planet. Faster-than-light travel was a pipe dream, and it was a miracle that the Greys didn't figure that out sooner. Or maybe they did. Company historians recently have uncovered evidence that the Greys barely slowed down their abduction and experimentation, and may have made secret alliances with other organizations, including select corporations and the U.S. government. These alliances may continue to this day.

Nevertheless, in 1959, Argus member Robert Oppenheimer destroyed the alliance in a secret Pentagon meeting with the Joint Chiefs of Staff. He didn't betray the existence of the Company, but he doled out specific information about known Grey bases in the American Southwest, which led to the destruction of two Grey fliers by the Air Force. It didn't take long for the Greys to declare war on the black ops.

The Company achieved one of its greatest cover-up missions ever by privately discrediting Oppenheimer. As a result, neither the U.S. government nor the Company ever trusted him again. He died a lonely, bitter man.



campaigns. More influence means more support from Argus. While it may seem petty and political, the struggles actually serve Argus' purpose by keeping the black ops as competent and efficient as possible. The machine doesn't run unless the gears press against each other.

Only the Security department stays relatively clear of Company politics. A quiet, solid presence in every mission and at every important meeting, Security never has to worry about losing influence. Their place has remained constant, and their role rarely questioned (except perhaps by a cocky operative or two).

History

It is perhaps appropriate that the first department head chosen when the Company was formed back in 1947 was the Combat department's legendary leader, Dalton Rogers. Rogers set the tone for the infighting and squabbling that would come to typify Company procedure. As Rogers said at the first Company conference, "Nothing worthwhile gets done without a struggle."

The members of Argus spent nearly a year choosing the remaining department heads. They chose people who were, first and foremost, competent and trustworthy. They selected Karen Stonelightner, a reclusive but brilliant Cambridge zoologist, to run the Science department. From the U.S. Treasury's staff of crime-fighting G-men, they picked the massive Brian "the Giant" Peterson to run the Security department. Einstein himself picked Gustav Schneckler – a man who invented the transistor 20 years before it won Bardeen, Brattain and Shockley the Nobel Prize in 1956 – to head up the Technology department. Finally, the Intelligence department was put into the hands of a shadowy woman known by the name Julia Xavier.



The Directives

After choosing the department heads and letting them in on the conspiracy, Argus set up the departments' priorities in clearly written documents called the Directives (see sidebars, pp. 43-51). The departmental Directives are the final and ultimate authority on any issue that is not addressed directly by an order from Argus.

The Directives are written broadly in an attempt to guide the philosophy of the departments, not to address specific events. Thus, they are open to interpretation. Argus decides whether a department has violated its Directives. If Argus determines a violation has occurred, the department head is removed from power, and sometimes suffers a worse fate.

The Directives ensure that one department can never gain more power or control over Company direction than another, and that procedures and priorities remain constant. Although the scenery changes from decade to decade, the Company and its departments run things pretty much the same way they always have, and that, in the face of the chaos we're fighting, is mighty comforting.

Early Missions

The first 10 years or so were spent gathering information. The Technology department holed up in the basement of Harvard's science building and began to



work on long-range radios, advanced radar, computers and other technological wonders. They've always stayed ahead of the game. When ENIAC, with its million vacuum tubes, was unveiled to the public in the early '50s, the tech boys already had perfected the transistor and had a computer the size of a desk that was 10 times more powerful than ENIAC.

Intelligence set up Area 12 under the Utah wastelands, implementing the massive, archaic filing system that is still maintained today. Their operatives spent day and night sifting through the accumulated evidence, and examined mounds of "borrowed" government files hoping to find more. Security made sure no one outside the Company figured out what was going on.

Combat and Science went out to find some enemies to fight, researching report after report of strange encounters and late-night abductions. Most of them were false leads, and I can only imagine how frustrating it must have been during the *five years* before those early black ops had their first real contact with an alien life form.

It happened in 1952. A squad of ops was staking out a suburban house in Lincoln, Nebraska, where a housewife was complaining about strange dreams of being taken into the sky by white creatures.

It was the fifth night of the stakeout, and the team was about to declare the mission another wild goose chase, when one of the Greys' fliers plopped right down on the back lawn and four aliens emerged. Right away, the agents could tell that they were up against a serious enemy. The Greys moved in precise, almost military, formations, cat-like and exact. They each performed a specific job, and before the ops had time to plan a response, they had the family unconscious and the woman bundled up and on the way to the ship.

The two Combat ops could not wait any longer – they went in blazing. Despite the effectiveness of the aliens' bullet-repelling jumpsuits, one Grey was killed. The others managed to drop their abductee and get to the safety of their ship. The squad got the woman back into her house and into bed without disturbing the rest of the family (who had been rendered immobile and unable to awaken).

The Company's mission had just become reality, and I bet the adrenaline was flowing overtime in the dark hallways of the department headquarters. Combat had bagged its first Grey, and Science had a real alien body to analyze. The other departments had no trophies to display, but they were equally excited about the missions to come.

The Salad Days

Over the next 30 years, the Company was fine-tuned into a smooth-running machine. The Intelligence department proved invaluable when it managed to infiltrate many high-level government agencies and route funds, supplies and technology into the hands of black ops in the field. The spooks also used their abilities to gain access to hotbeds of paranormal activity around the world, whether it was an unknown parasite terrorizing Gorky Park in Moscow or a vampire problem in downtown Hong Kong.

What's more, Intelligence made it possible for each of the departments to set up untraceable front companies, like Tech's Dynatronics (see p. 55). This made the analysis of recent finds possible without having to set up in some university's basement. Thanks to creative accounting, tax-law massaging and lucrative investment strategies, these shadow corporations actually began to turn a profit, and became essential in funding Company activities. With the fronts in place, we were able to crank up the frequency and boldness of our missions.

Technology and Science were both making enormous strides in their respective areas, outfitting ops in the field with the most advanced equipment and the latest information about the enemy. The geeks were classifying dozens of

The Directives

These documents were drafted by the first incarnation of Argus in an attempt to clarify each department's mission in the context of the Company's goal. Each fits neatly on a single, type-written sheet of paper, and each Academy cadet is required to memorize his department's Directives verbatim before graduating. Although the language is precise, the Directives themselves are general, intended to apply to any conceivable situation.

In several places, the Directives of different departments contradict one another, and this is the root of much of the conflict that occurs between various departments. In such cases, the Security Directives usually take precedence, followed by those of Combat, Intelligence, Technology and Science, in that order. The last three rarely contradict each other.

The Directives serve as basic guidelines, but to be honest, a lot of this gets forgotten out in the field. It's more important to consult the Directives when planning a mission than when you're knee-deep in wiggler guts. Usually, a department's Directives are only brought up by some anal secop when there's a conflict brewing. Most of the time, though, the conflict is resolved. The Directives are pretty straightforward.

Note that the last Directive of all the departments is the same, and was pretty much taken care of when the Academy was founded in 1951.



Combat Directives

The Combat department is responsible for the eradication of certain secret entities whose existence, due to their supernatural, alien or horrific origin, cannot be revealed to the general public, as that knowledge would threaten the emotional and physical well-being of the world's population.

Pursuant to that aim, the Combat department is directed to:

1. Acquire the tools and weaponry necessary and sufficient to destroy any being, known or unknown.
2. Acquire and maintain the expertise needed to operate the aforementioned tools and weaponry.
3. Employ any force necessary to eradicate enemies of the Company, as directed by the members of Argus, except when such eradication would result in an unacceptable loss of civilian life or the betrayal of the conspiracy.
4. Capture or contain any entity that cannot reasonably be destroyed.
5. Maintain exceedingly high physical, intellectual and emotional standards for the recruitment and training of department personnel.

Continued on next page...

unknown creatures, and learning a great deal about the Greys' anatomy and weaknesses. The techies developed the prototype for Blacknet 10 years before the Internet was a twinkle in the eye of some Defense Department lackey.

But don't think that Combat and Security were taking it easy! Every few months, some new beast or wiggler was discovered, usually in some unpleasant way – like the squad investigating gargoyle sightings in Paris that was set upon and mutilated by a band of demons. They were finding new dangers and new things to kill all the time. The threat posed by the Greys was fully uncovered and the war against them initiated in earnest. The Combat department began to really focus campaigns on specific enemies: immersing some grunts too far and creating the Cadre (p. 25).

Present Day

Today, it's an all-out free-for-all. The Company and number of black ops grew steadily until about five years ago, when it appeared to level off. I think we're as big as we can be without revealing the conspiracy. There are about 800 active black ops, and 2,500 support personnel. Most of those are retired operatives.

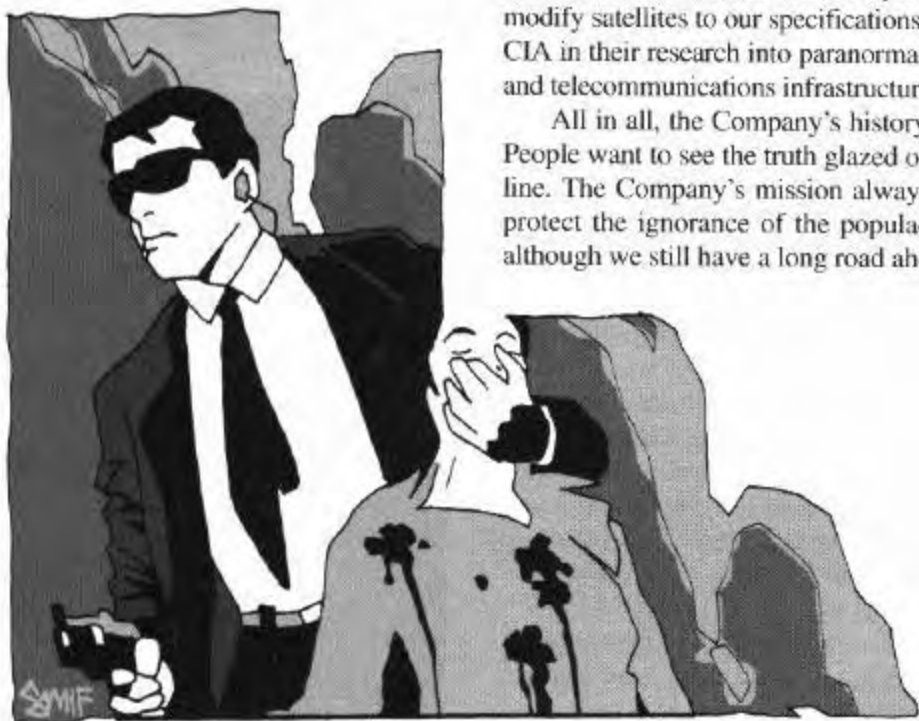
The number of enemies we've discovered has leveled off, as well. That is, I believe we've categorized pretty much everything we're up against, and we're just starting to realize how extensive that list is and how little we've reduced it.

The machinery runs fairly smoothly, but we're up against a lot. I don't think anyone realized how difficult it would be to fight an enemy in total secrecy. All the firepower, technology and guile in the world doesn't go very far when you can't expose your tactics or your enemy.

The major campaigns today are focused on the Grey menace, brainsucker infestations (definitely a losing battle), vampire and demon hunting, and exposing and disempowering the rogue psychics of the world. A smaller amount of energy is aimed toward research – discovery and capture missions, spearheaded by the Science department and pushed by Argus member Andrew Farstein.

A great deal of energy is expended just keeping the whole thing afloat, too. An organization this size begins to become unwieldy, and black op resources must be spent keeping things running smoothly. Squads are now used to track down disavowed ops and AWOL Academy cadets, infiltrate the space program to place and modify satellites to our specifications, guide and reverse the direction of the FBI and CIA in their research into paranormal activity, and manipulate the world's computer and telecommunications infrastructure to better suit the Company's future needs.

All in all, the Company's history has proven that society wants to be ignorant. People want to see the truth glazed over with the garish absurdity of a tabloid headline. The Company's mission always has been to provide that easy deniability, to protect the ignorance of the populace. In that mission, I think we've succeeded, although we still have a long road ahead of us.



The Departments

The departments are the gears in the Company machine. In this case, the whole is no more than the sum of its parts. There is no Company outside of the departments, no ominous central headquarters where decisions are made. The only controlling authority is Argus, and they're off-limits; even the top echelon of each department can't get to them.

What keeps the Company whole is the departments' interdependency. No one department can achieve very much without the cooperation and support of the other four. And while each department holds certain prejudices about the others, they all recognize the synergy that drives the Company machine. If any department were removed, the others would be weakened, and the Company as a whole would be less than it needs to be. Sometimes, the politics get a little rough and the big picture gets lost in the struggle, but when something big goes down, when the president's daughter gets kidnapped by a group of Ramblers and taken for a joy ride, you forget all the petty arguments and you go kick their worthless behinds. You take them down hard and bring the little girl back home.

Combat

Combat has the prestige of being the first department created by Argus. Headed by the legendary Dalton Rogers, a mercenary who was fighting a secret war in Cambodia before anyone had a clue what a hot spot that area would become, the Combat department set the tone for the Company's purpose: these things we are fighting are evil and dangerous, and our ultimate objective is to destroy them. The Company was largely formed by military men, and though it has since evolved beyond that mindset, the focus on secretly ridding the world of our paranormal enemies remains foremost.

Dalton was the perfect leader for the fledgling department: physically intimidating, tactically brilliant and as wild as a New Orleans brothel. He was a walking contradiction. He was sweet yet fierce; he loved to kill, but he revered life; he was earnestly compassionate, as strict as a nun and as kind as a grandfather. I had the profound pleasure of meeting him during his last years, after his retirement in '82. He was an intense, gracious man, and I was awed in his presence.

The department has changed very little since its inception. The ops are still as tough as nails and twice as sharp. A lot more women have entered the ranks recently, a fact that at first rankled the good old boys at the top, but has become accepted since. Everyone who's been through the Academy knows that if you survive, you have the right to be on the front lines, female or not. Frankly, if you're stupid enough to question the competence of a female Combat op, you deserve the pain that she unhesitatingly would deal out.

Goals and Methods

As I've said before, Combat's overarching goal is to kick ass and take names. Destroy the enemy. All else is secondary. It's not that we don't realize the need for analysis and study. Capture and containment missions are fine, but only when the option to destroy is unrealistic or so risky as to be foolish. Combat ops may appear to the other departments as lunatics with no regard for their own safety, but that impression emanates from our confidence in our own abilities, not from foolhardiness. When a combat op says, "We'd better just take them out," you should trust him – you'd better.

As a department founded on the concept of extreme violence, Combat relies heavily on weaponry, and a great deal of energy outside of missions is expended researching and testing new methods of destruction. Grunts love their guns, and I can honestly say that a defining moment in any Combat op's life is that first stroll



Combat Directives (Continued) Commentary

The third Directive is interesting in that it specifies that the only time eradication is the lesser option is when there would be an unacceptable loss of *civilian* life. Many Combat ops have used this Directive as a justification for suicide missions. The Cadre, in particular, feel that the squad's safety is always secondary to destruction of the enemy.

The term "unacceptable" also raises some interesting questions. Unacceptable to whom? The most widely held interpretation is the mission's secop, but again, some Combat agents feel that the loss of life must be unacceptable to the senior grunt on a mission to warrant stopping short of full destruction of the enemy. Since the Security Directives unequivocally put the safety of the squad in the secops' hands, they are adamant and usually successful in preventing both suicide missions and missions that endanger civilians.

Another question arises when dealing with "civilian" human foes such as Rogues. Some more liberal minds have suggested that they cannot be casually killed by Combat operatives. Combat's argument against such an interpretation is that since the loss of civilian life is qualified (by the term "unacceptable"), Rogues and the like can be killed when an operative determines that the killing is acceptable.

Intelligence Directives

The Intelligence department is responsible for the gathering of information related to the operations, habits, numbers, location and weaknesses of any beings that have been determined by Argus, due to their paranormal or otherworldly nature, to threaten the existing state of society. Furthermore, the department is responsible for the safeguarding of the Company's accumulated information about said enemies, to be achieved in such a way that the information remains useful to other Company personnel.

Pursuant to that aim, the Intelligence department is directed to:

1. Acquire the tools necessary to retrieve, analyze and store information from any conceivable source.
2. Acquire and maintain the expertise necessary to utilize said tools, and acquire and maintain the ability and knowledge to interpret the data resulting from the utilization of said tools.
3. Assist members of other Company departments in the gathering and utilization of information from any source.
4. Assist members of other Company departments, through the analysis of gathered information, or through any other means, in the fulfillment of their Directives, except when such assistance would result in an unacceptable loss of civilian life or the betrayal of the conspiracy.
5. Maintain exceedingly high physical, intellectual and emotional standards for the recruitment and training of department personnel.

Continued on next page . . .

through the arsenal at Steelhead, with its shelves piled upon shelves of carefully racked, sparkling-clean guns, knives, bombs, rockets and missiles. I've seen a menacing, 300-pound agent fall to his knees weeping at the sight.

Combat Missions

Combat ops love to go on missions, and most squads want at least one grunt on the team. When the department sponsors a mission, there's usually two or three grunts on the squad. Those missions have a definite flavor. Combat sponsors mostly clean-up missions, where an obvious threat has been identified and needs to be destroyed. Such missions tend to be short – a few days to a week – and decisive. If the enemy survives, it's because the squad did not. You just don't see a Combat-sponsored squad come back empty-handed unless the secop pulls the plug, and even then, most grunts would rather jump into a den of rock-worms than return to Steelhead in failure.

Of course, partial success is better than nothing. No one expects the entire demon nation to be destroyed on one mission. There are limits even to the combat ops' abilities, but when there are beasts and wigglers to be eradicated, there's no one better suited to the task.

Facilities

The department only has one facility, Steelhead in San Diego, California, but it's an impressive place. Sleek, stylish and comfortable, it completely flies in the face of any expectations about a secret department's headquarters. The atmosphere is upbeat and confident, and the staff is friendly and helpful.

The building is a four-story structure that looks like any other warehouse on the docks, painted with a huge fish emblem and the words "STEELHEAD DISTRIBUTION." The front company (which actually does most of its business from other locations) is generally ignored by the industry and the community.

Inside the building, beneath an unremarkable warehouse facade, is a Combat op's mecca – fighting arenas, shooting ranges, gun courses and even a huge, underground explosives-testing lab. The place has 12 stories beneath the surface, and includes a submarine-docking station for the Company's pair of stolen Soviet nuclear subs. Operatives are welcome to visit at any time, day or night, and any agent who retires will be gladly given a job in the facilities.

The few auxiliary staff who aren't in on the conspiracy have been told that they work for a clandestine military-training facility, under the Department of Defense. Of course, every once in a while someone gets snoopy, and has to swallow a Cocktail or vanish in an unpleasant way.

The department also makes use of some private land in the Nevada desert to do outdoor munitions testing and to hide the destruction of certain sensitive bodies, both paranormal and mundane, but this land does not qualify as much of a facility.

Subgroups

The only Combat department subgroup is the Cadre (see p. 25). Devoted to the eradication of paranormal beasts from the face of the earth, the Cadre has an accurate reputation as the dark side of the Combat department. Most of the stereotypes that the other agents hold about grunts originated from a member of the Cadre. Cadre ops are nasty, bloodthirsty killing machines. More than a few have had to be disavowed due to their obsession with their group's agenda. One crew killed its own secop when she aborted a vampire-hunting mission. Cadre grunts like speed metal and tongue piercings. They tattoo "Death Fetish" on their chests. They are bad news.



Relations With Other Departments

Combat ops are universally called "grunts" by members of the other departments and by other grunts as well. A more derisive term, popularized by the Science department, is "jarhead," which has lately become unpleasantly common throughout the Company.

While Combat agents endure a stereotype of being trigger-happy lunatics, most black ops realize that grunts are as intelligent and refined as the rest of the Academy's graduates, and that the rep is undeserved. Grunts read Bartok and Kipling, write poetry and play the violin – not all of them worship their weapons, although many have a healthy (and necessary) obsession with armaments. In general, it is Science's extreme dislike of Combat's tactics that has spread and maintained the unfair characterization.

Intelligence

In the early days, the Intelligence department was designed simply for fact-gathering. Its Directives outlined its goal as a repository of information about the enemy, its methods and ways to destroy it. As originally conceived, the department's sole purpose was to research, investigate and analyze the enemy, and make its findings readily available to the other departments.

The department still retains that purpose, but a creative reading of the Directives by department head Julia Xavier in the mid '50s greatly expanded the department's function. The Directives basically gave Intelligence great leeway in the methods used to garner and safeguard information, as well as laying out a general initiative to improve the other departments' ability to follow their Directives.

By reinterpreting its Directives, the Intelligence department came into its own. In addition to observing and analyzing various enemies, spooks get involved in all sorts of clandestine activity – infiltration of high government offices and agencies, industrial espionage and sabotage, and more and more wet-work in the world's hot spots (Bosnia, Iraq, Israel and Central America). Their Directives allow them incredible flexibility in pursuing and promoting the Company's interests, and they take advantage of that.

Goals and Methods

The department's spies are expert planners. They covet information, and try to learn everything they possibly can about a mission before they begin. They quietly listen to mission objectives, take voluminous notes and try to spend at least a week on research before heading out.

Spooks prefer missions with subtlety, and earnestly believe most missions fall into this category. Even a straight-up bug-hunt can be done without waking up the neighbors, or so they would have you believe. They tend to think that the Combat department is glorified and overt violence overemphasized in the Company.

An Intelligence op is more likely than other agents to attempt solo work, and they'll take any opportunity to escape the confines of a tight squad. Give a spook the chance and he'll don a disguise, flip out a fake I.D., and infiltrate any building or organization you could imagine. They love that kind of challenge, and thrive on the adrenaline rush that covert activity generates.

Like their Combat counterparts, spooks love weaponry. They adore their guns and keep themselves highly proficient in their use. They tend to prefer smaller, concealable weapons – compact handguns, garrotes and knives. They are all competent fighters, and make it a point of pride to keep themselves in tip-top shape.

Spooks also love to employ special, secret devices – pens that shoot fire, gadget-filled vehicles, radar-enhanced binoculars. They entreat and challenge the

Intelligence Directives (Continued)

Commentary

In the mid '50s, Intelligence department head Julia Xavier decided her ops were being stifled and underutilized, forced to waste their talents digging up files in Area 12. She reinterpreted the Directives, emphasizing the phrase "through any other means" in Directive 4. Using this phrase as a mantra, she placed her operatives on many missions that they normally would not be a part of. She stepped up their combat training, and established the Committee (see p. 48), giving the department significant control over the recruitment of potential operatives. She argued that since Intelligence Directives required them to assist other departments in following their Directives, and since every department is required to maintain "exceedingly high standards" for recruitment, the Committee was a natural extension of the Intelligence department's duties.





Science Directives

The Science department is responsible for the scientific analysis of the physiology, ecology and psychology of those creatures, supernatural or otherwise, that the Company has determined to be enemies of society. Furthermore, the department's expertise shall be used to advise the other departments in methods and procedures to be used in the destruction of said enemies.

Pursuant to that aim, the Science department is directed to:

1. Acquire the tools necessary to analyze the physical, biological, social and psychological properties of any conceivable creature, from any conceivable origin.
2. Acquire and maintain the expertise necessary to utilize said tools, and acquire and maintain the ability and knowledge to interpret the data resulting from the utilization of said tools.
3. Procure and analyze any specimens necessary for the fulfillment of Directives 1 and 2.
4. Assist the other departments in the fulfillment of their Directives by providing pertinent scientific data and advice on the habits and/or weaknesses of the enemies of the Company, and by any other utilization of scientific knowledge or accumulated data.
5. Maintain exceedingly high physical, intellectual and emotional standards for the recruitment and training of department personnel.

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Technology department to create new and more amazing devices. They also try to keep their arsenal of gadgetry hidden from fellow squad members, pulling out some day-saving device at the last moment, to the astonishment of their comrades.

Intelligence Missions

When Intelligence sponsors a mission, you can bet it's going to involve sneaking of some type. No spy mission ever goes down without at least two backup plans and some type of double-cross built in. It's just not in their nature to deal with things head on.

Reconnaissance and discovery missions are favorites of the Intelligence department, and they tend to be elaborate and convoluted. Missions tend to stretch on for months as agents go deep under cover to infiltrate the relevant underground society, build contacts and lay the groundwork for achieving the final mission objective. Intelligence takes secrecy issues very seriously, and would never send a squad into a populated area without air-tight cover stories, multiple identities and backup extraction plans. While this sounds like a lot of time and effort (compared to combat missions), the spooks have a very high success rate. They take it personally if anything goes wrong, and get very irate if another op doesn't perform up to expectations. Intelligence missions are mentally demanding in the same way that Combat missions tax agents physically.

Facilities

The Intelligence department has two main facilities. The spooks sharpen their skills at a simple training facility called "the Workshop." The Workshop is disguised as a meat-packing plant in Springfield, Missouri. While it does not approach the sophistication of Steelhead, it has its share of gun courses and weapons ranges. It also has a state-of-the-art testing facility for refining all of the experimental gadgets that are supplied to them by the Tech department.

The other facility is a massive, abandoned salt mine under the Utah desert, called Area 12. The Intelligence department keeps impeccable records, and this facility is nothing more than a gargantuan storage area for all of the files and records that the department has collected over the last 50 years. Area 12 consists of frigid, arena-sized rooms filled with row upon row of dimly lit filing shelves; flat files, cabinets and ancient microfilm machines punctuate the spooky halls. Some of the more important data has been transferred to Blacknet, but for some reason, the spooks don't trust the reliability of the Company's network. More often than not, when they want a piece of vital information, they make a trip down to Area 12. Frankly, I think they just enjoy walking amongst the cold, echoing stacks and deciphering the archaic filing system more than typing their request into a laptop.

Subgroups

Deep Cover is a group of about 25 spooks who have been around long enough and survived enough missions to be given special freedom in the field. Deep Cover agents answer directly to a special lieutenant of their department head. They are not sent on their own missions, but rather lend support to the most important ongoing missions, usually without those ops' knowledge. If they do have to make their presence known, they always seem to just pop out of the woodwork. Usually, it's right at the time when circumstances are worst and a mission's going sour. They show up, hand you exactly the information you need and then disappear like the wind. They work very hard at preserving this omnipotent, shadowy image among the other ops. They are so good at infiltration and impersonation that it's rumored that they can take on any identity, from a janitor at the local middle school to the president himself.

The Committee is a collection of about 20 Intelligence ops whose main job is to locate potential recruits for the Academy. They employ advanced surveillance

techniques, and follow candidates for at least a year before approaching them. Membership on the Committee is generally reserved for Intelligence agents who have survived at least ten missions, and is considered an honor for active ops – who make up at least half of the membership (the other half are retired agents). Competition for vacant Committee spots is fierce.

Relations With Other Departments

Intelligence agents are known primarily as “spooks” and sometimes as “shadows” or “spies” by the other operatives. Also called “invisible ops,” Company spooks are generally held in high esteem by the other departments, with the notable exception of Combat, who occasionally characterize them as overly methodical. Spooks can sometimes seem too detail-oriented, and the action-loving grunts have been known to get impatient with their planning. Also, the shadows’ well-known love of undercover work often gets them on the bad side of a mission’s secop.

Science

Although they get a bad rap from the other departments, the scientists of the Company are some of the most all-around useful members of the organization. Not only are they up to all of the physical challenges of being a black op, they also have the most intense education and intelligence of all the ops. They know *everything*.

Curiosity is the overwhelming motivation behind Science department politics – the desire to know every possible bit of information about the enemy. Typically, Science ops are driven by an addictive need to gather specimens – live ones are preferred, but dead ones often have to do. Another, less acknowledged side of the Science department is its work with parapsysics and psychic powers. Parascience is just now coming into its own, and the scientists are at the forefront.

While there is some overlap of responsibility with the Technology department (and some fierce arguments about who gets to study which bit of alien machinery), the Science department concentrates on the physical and mental aspects of the enemy – biology, culture and psychology are the primary fields of interest.

Retired Science department ops also provide the Company with its doctors and medical specialists. Stationed in the Company’s hospitals, these medical specialists are state of the art at everything from setting broken limbs to counteracting strange infections never before suffered by human beings. Ailing ops who make it into their hands while still breathing almost always recover.

Goals and Methods

The goals of the Science department are four-fold: observe the enemy, gather specimens, analyze them and share the results. Pure research is a luxury, due to time constraints and pressure from Argus and the other departments. The Science department Directives are fairly straightforward – examine the enemy and determine the most effective way to destroy it.

This creates a paradox which defines each Company scientist’s life. If the primary focus of the black ops is to destroy the enemy, how can we ever learn enough about it? This creates the biggest conflict among departments, the long-standing rivalry between the Science and Combat departments. While Combat ops have little more than thinly veiled disrespect for the scientists, the geeks truly despise the Combat department and all that it stands for. The intensity of this hatred varies from agent to agent – some simply avoid combat-heavy missions, while others walk the edge of jeopardizing missions with their constant hindering of Combat ops’ efforts.



Science Directives (Continued) Commentary

The main conflict here is between Science’s and Combat’s directives 3. Combat believes its Directive is clear and that Science can “procure” its specimens once dead. This usually happens. Live specimens are rare and capture missions hard to get approved. While Science officials have good arguments for needing live specimens, Science ops can do very little to prevent Combat ops from fragging an enemy at the slightest provocation. Very rarely will such be in violation of Combat’s Directives. (Note that Combat has no Directive requiring it to assist the other departments!)

Argus member Andrew Farstein has argued well that the inability to analyze live specimens unduly threatens civilian lives and the security of the conspiracy; thus, preventing live collections violates the Combat Directives. A hard argument to refute, it’s the reason the Company allows a limited number of capture missions each year – but the secret objective of grunts on those squads is usually to frag the creatures should the slightest thing go wrong.

Security Directives

The Security department is responsible for the safety and well-being of the Company's operatives in the field as well as within Company facilities. Furthermore, the department is responsible for maintaining the absolute secrecy of the Company's operations.

Pursuant to that aim, the Security department is directed to:

1. Acquire the tools and weaponry necessary to ensure the safety and security of any conceivable person in any conceivable situation.
2. Acquire and maintain the expertise necessary to utilize said tools and weaponry.
3. Maintain standards of absolute secrecy and assist other departments in the maintenance of such standards in the field and within Company facilities.
4. Ensure the safety and security of Company operatives in all situations, and accompany company operatives on any fieldwork that the department deems hazardous.
5. Ensure the safety and security of the members of Argus while engaged in Company business.
6. Maintain exceedingly high physical, intellectual and emotional standards for the recruitment and training of department personnel.

Commentary

The first thing that the original Security department head did was to make it clear that the department considered all fieldwork hazardous and that there would be a secop on every squad for every mission, forever, and let's get that out in the open up front so we can all just move on. The only response was minor grumbling from Dalton Rogers and his aides about their desire to create all-Combat squads, but Argus put that to rest quickly – the Directive is clear.

The department expressed concern that Directive 5 was not aggressive enough, and that Argus members should be protected around the clock. Argus said no. It would be too much of a threat to the conspiracy to have agents following Argus members around, especially when most of them are in high political, military or social positions (and already have bodyguards or Secret Service protection).

Many Science ops prefer to stay back at the Lab, working on emergent medical technology. The department is responsible for two very useful recent advances, the cryobag and "the juice."

The cryobag (p. 118) – called simply "the bag" by ops – is a large body-bag made of a thick, black plastic. When a severely injured person is put in the bag, it activates, "superfreezing" him with experimental heat extractors until he can get back to a safe hospital, where Company doctors can attempt to revive him.

The juice (p. 119) is a drug that temporarily boosts an agent's agility and strength. The down side is that it's mildly addictive, and the crash that comes after using it lasts about twice as long as the effects. There is a dichotomy between agents who use the juice and those who don't.

In the field, Science agents carry compact kits containing every conceivable testing instrument they can think of that will fit inside a backpack. I am always awed when I see a scientist, in the middle of a firefight in a Lisbon ghetto, pull a centrifuge and spectrometer out of his bag and start analyzing wiggler parts. It's even more amazing when two minutes later, she yells for us to douse 'em with ammonia . . . which shrivels and kills them instantly. Science ops definitely have their strong points.



Science Missions

Contrary to the prevailing opinion, Company scientists love to go on just about any mission that involves contact with the enemy. They generally contain their fear better than a lot of other ops, performing their duties with a kind of bemused calm. Of course, the calm disappears as soon as there are specimens to gather. I've seen a Science op scale a 40-foot refinery wall over a burning vat of chemical goo just to get a better look at a fragged critter.

The stereotypical Science mission is the capture. Geeks stand in line to be chosen for capture missions, and the Science department sponsors all that Argus will send their way. Chemists in the department have perfected several types of heavy-duty tranquilizers, and have worked with the techies to manufacture advanced tranquilizer guns to deliver these concoctions. Capture missions tend to be the most dangerous, and most Combat ops would rather pull out their own toenails than try to bag one of the bad boys. So many Science ops beg to go, however, that there is never a problem filling up a squad.

Another type of mission that Science likes is discovery. Tracking down rumors of some undiscovered creature gets their analytical juices flowing overtime.

This type of mission has a high failure rate. Many times, the squad will find the creature it's looking for, only to get sucked into a morass of infighting and squabbling as the Science and Combat agents go around and around about whether to bring the creature home or frag its sorry ass. The rivalry never ends.

Facilities

The main Science facility is simply called the Lab. It's an awe-inspiring place. Submerged about three miles off the coast of Texas in the Gulf of Mexico, the Lab is as beautiful as it is functional. The most advanced technical equipment fills pristine laboratories, and the frozen bodies of three dozen Greys and about 50 assorted beasts line the cold-rooms. It's a surreal sight to see a



crew of white-coated scientists wheeling a dead alien through a glass tube, illuminated by the green-filtered light from the ocean's sky.

An entire sector of the Lab is a huge zoo, filled with cage after cage of live wigglers and beasts – including two demons. Ten Security agents are stationed full time at the Lab, overseeing the zoo's precautions and ready to go down shooting should anything break out. So far, nothing ever has.

Subgroups

Although not formally organized into a group, the Science department's doctors are generally lumped into a single category by the other ops. Any Company doctor is called "the doc" by other agents (including other Science ops). An injured op usually will hear one of his squad mates tell him not to worry, that the doc's going to fix him up.

Relations With Other Departments

The nickname *du jour* for Science ops is "geek." While this sounds derisive, it's actually used with a measure of respect by all black ops save for a few cranky grunts. That segment of the black op population has taken to calling Science agents "Poindexter," which is definitely intended as an insult.

Lately, the department's concerted effort to wield more influence in Company missions has begun to bear fruit, and most ops I've talked to don't seem to mind. Geeks are becoming ubiquitous on missions, and those missions are achieving high success rates. The typical view of a Science geek is changing for the better, and I'm glad to see it happening.

Security

The Security department is the least-appreciated department . . . and the hardest-working. Charged with protecting the lives of the black ops while maintaining the conspiracy, Security agents are generally held in low esteem by the other agents. Most of us think of them as overprotective busybodies. They hold the reins on a mission, and when they pull, the other ops don't like it.

Security agents tend to have the broadest training. They have to know enough about each department's area of expertise to reliably and fairly judge the safety of any mission at any point in the operation. Secops have the authority to restrict the conduct of any operative on a squad, regardless of which department sponsored the mission. Their Directives also give them the authority to abort any mission, at any time, for any reason (or for no reason). Rarely is this authority used, and if it is, it's almost never questioned by the directors of the departments (though it is often questioned by other squad members).

Security also provides the Company with a broad range of protective services. Their Directives allow them to be used almost at will by other departments in any activity where there are risks involved. Thus, secops guard the Lab's zoo, keep round-the-clock surveillance at Area 12, protect the Steelhead arsenal and so on. Any department engaged in extremely sensitive or dangerous activities can call upon Security to protect them. This is rarely abused, and the stoic secops would never let on if it were.

Technology Department Directives

The Technology department is responsible for developing and maintaining an advanced level of technology for Company operatives in all aspects of the conspiracy.

Pursuant to that aim the department is directed to:

1. Acquire and maintain the tools necessary to research, build and test any conceivable mechanical, electronic or otherwise technological device.
2. Acquire and maintain the skills and knowledge necessary to utilize said tools in a productive manner.
3. Procure the raw materials necessary to build the aforementioned technological devices.
4. Assist the other departments in the fulfillment of their Directives by making advanced technological devices readily available, free of defect and scientifically sound.
5. Maintain exceedingly high mental, physical and emotional standards for the recruitment and training of department personnel.

Commentary

Mention Directive 4 to a techie and you're likely to be met with shrugged shoulders and a sheepish grin. Although they don't like to talk about it, the line "free of defect" is one of the most laughed at phrases in Company literature. It's well-known that much of what comes out of Dynatronics' basement labs is glitchy and dangerous. If it weren't 20 years beyond the military's most advanced devices, the level of reliability would never be tolerated.

The flip-side of the coin is that other departments usually demand that techies participate in missions which involve their experimental tech. If the mission is going to serve as an alpha test for some new, laser-guided killer missile, then the techie who designed it is sure as hell going to be there to see exactly what goes wrong.





Sponsoring Missions

The department heads generally meet to discuss the possible missions needed to achieve their objectives and which departments will sponsor those missions. All missions are sponsored by a specific department. Sometimes this sponsorship is ordered by Argus, sometimes it's generally agreed upon by the department heads, and sometimes it comes down to a vote (having five departments means there's never a tie).

The department heads very rarely meet in person, at least not for these conferences. Instead, they communicate using encrypted teleconferencing stations in their headquarters, with direct links to the other leaders' stations. The conferences go on for hours before specific mission objectives are agreed upon. Once missions are outlined, the department heads wait a week before the mission's sponsorship is decided. This happens in another teleconference. During that week, the wheeling and dealing is fierce as the leaders barter for support in the upcoming sponsorship bid. If a sponsor is not chosen after an hour, a vote is taken.

The lucky sponsoring department is responsible for laying out the specifics of the mission: setting objectives, choosing an existing squad or building a squad tailor-made for the mission, deciding on an equipment budget, and assigning false identities and other resources. The sponsor also chooses the squad leader, once the team is chosen.

Continued on next page...

Goals and Methods

The goal of the Security department is simple: protect the Company and its agents. They are quietly competent, never angry or emotional. They are the true Men in Black, walking calmly into the most dangerous situations, performing their job with inhuman efficiency and then getting out, leaving no trace that they were ever there. They are always right, and arguing with one is like yelling at a steel wall.

On a mission, secops fade into the background, doing their jobs with little flair and only making their presence known if things start to go wrong (which they do with alarming regularity). When decisions that involve squad security come up, like whether to chase a rockworm into a sulphuric chasm, the secop's word is law. They are, in most cases, fair and rational. They understand the Company's mission, but must temper the need to learn or destroy with the need to keep the agents alive. They are diplomatic and good negotiators, reviewing every agent's opinion before handing down a decision. But once that decision is made, it is to be obeyed, or the rebellious op is considered renegade. The secop will order the traitor restrained . . . or kill him himself, if necessary.

The Security department is the only segment of the Company that has no secret agenda. They are always straightforward and brutally honest. Part of their job is to root out conflicting department agendas on a mission.

If they discover that a particular agent could jeopardize the mission through his secret objective, that op could be removed, or at the very least sternly warned that the objective is secondary to the mission's success and the safety of the squad.

Security Missions

Security is a part of every mission, from the tamest reconnaissance mission to the most dangerous clean-up. Every squad must have at least one secop. If, for some reason, the squad's secop is killed, the mission goes on as planned and a new secop will join the squad at the nearest convenient point (if there is one). It is considered *very bad form* to let your secop get fragged.

Certain extremely sensitive missions will be taken on by entire teams of security agents, called "mop squads." These squads are called in when a highly sensitive task needs to be accomplished swiftly, efficiently and quietly – kidnapping a mob boss or government agent, destroying the evidence of a mission gone wrong, taking out a renegade black op. The mop squads work through surprise and brute force, usually finishing their job before anyone knows what happened.

Facilities

The main Security facility is called Whitehall. It is an underground complex, buried beneath Stone Mountain in Georgia. It gets its name from the long, anti-septic corridor, lit by thousands of humming fluorescents, that stretches from the checkpoints at the entrance to the bowels of the facility. From the corridor at Whitehall, unmarked, hospital-sized doors lead off into a maze of training rooms, labs and storage areas. Security agents are required to memorize the entire layout of the complex, and no maps exist. Deep within the corridors of Whitehall is a "mission control" of sorts, where the Omicron Device (p. 21) is monitored. From there, secops can, if they choose, find the location of any black op or Academy recruit and send them the signal that they have been chosen for a mission.

Unlike the other departments' headquarters, Whitehall employs only Company staff. Every person admitted into the facility is a Company operative, active or not, and everyone who works there is a Security op (secops have a complicated schedule of rotation so that no op gets stuck on any particular duty for very long). Visitors have to go through three separate security checks, and

must always be escorted by a secop once inside. They take their security very seriously, and more than one cocky agent has awakened in a well-guarded hospital bed after joking about being a double-agent or infiltrator.

Secops also have thousands of safe houses all over the world. The majority of them, especially in the U.S., are set up in small, innocuous offices under the name "Universal Underwriters." In every major city, agents can find a Universal near them where they can rest, regroup, request more equipment or additional instructions and enlist the aid of at least one additional secop. Every Security op has a master key to the Universal offices, and every office is well-stocked with a selection of weapons and ammunition, first-aid supplies and various scientific equipment. It's always a crap shoot, though, because we never know exactly what Universal will have in stock, or how recently a squad might have raided that particular safe-house. The Security department prefers that squads visit after hours, so as not to alarm the other occupants of the building in which they reside.

Subgroups

The only distinct subgroup of the Security department is the Wall. The Wall is a cadre of 10 secops assigned to protect the members of Argus during their monthly meetings. The members of the Wall are hand-picked by the head of the Security department, and are always the most competent in the department. Generally, the Wall is charged with selecting the location of the meeting, assuring its safety and security, and escorting Argus members in and out. The membership of the Wall remains fairly constant, though the head of the department may substitute agents from month to month if an op requests it.

The agents of the Wall are the only ones in the Company who are aware to any degree of the identities of Argus members, and they don't talk. They would never reveal the names of Argus members, even under extreme torture (except, perhaps, in special circumstances – after a bottle of 12-year-old single malt scotch, to one very experienced Combat operative who swore never to reveal the information).

Relations With Other Departments

Universally called "secops," Security operatives also are more negatively referred to as "squealers," but rarely where they can hear it. Generally, the other departments regard them as a necessary pain, something that they know is integral to the Company's success but which often bogs down missions with overprotective delays. This is dangerous work, and it rankles some of the cockier agents to be told when they can and cannot sow their oats.

Technology

The Technology department was created to develop, refine and implement improvements in the general technology level of the entire Company. They create advanced testing apparatus for the geeks, high-powered and ultra-accurate weaponry for the grunts, whiz-bang gadgetry for the spooks and triple-encrypted transmitters for the Security department.

A large percentage of the technology that the techies create is experimental and insufficiently tested. Like most hackers, Tech ops feel that getting something functional is paramount. Perfecting it is an afterthought. By the time a device or program gets out of beta test, some other techie has invented something more advanced to replace it. This earns the Tech agents a reputation for sloppiness, as ops have to constantly deal with malfunctions and incomprehensible or incomplete instructions. At one time or another, every op has heard a techie say, "It works, but you just have to make sure these wires stay together," or, "Just don't turn the gain past

Sponsoring Missions (Continued)

If things go wrong, the squad contacts the sponsoring department. They can deliver more equipment, assign more ops or send in another squad if things are really intense. They write the mission report for Argus and the Blacknet archives. They take the rap if a mission is aborted or a Directive violated.

Sponsorship is an intensely coveted role, and it's certainly not evenly distributed. Combat sponsors the largest number of missions, probably 40% or so. This is a holdover from the salad days, when the focus of the Company was the unequivocal eradication of the enemy.

Another 30% are sponsored by Intelligence, indicating their rising role in the Company's current direction.

The remaining 30% is apportioned fairly evenly between the Science department's capture and discovery jobs, the techies' attempts to grab some alien technology and the secops' cover-ups. Recently, the Science boys have begun a push to increase the frequency of geek-sponsored missions, and they have had a little success. I expect to see more Science missions in the near future.



The Agendas

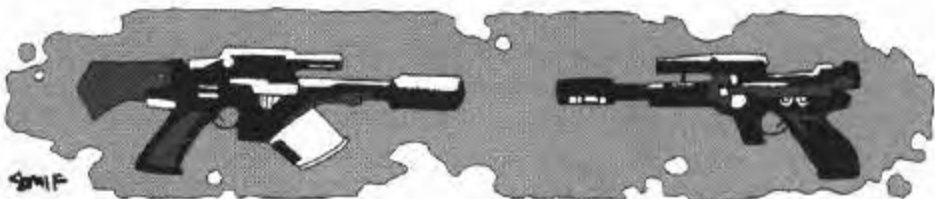
We must never forget that each department is a unique entity, tied by necessity and habit to the others. While the Directives give broad guidelines for policy, they do not attempt to structure the way a department is run, nor do they address the growth, organization or tone of a department.

Consequently, each department has a secret agenda. Some items on these agendas are fairly transparent, like Science's recent attempts to garner more influence in mission planning and execution, and Combat's standing order to frag an enemy at the least provocation. Others are known only to the top echelon of each department's power structure. For example, it has long been suspected, but never proven, that the techies hold back certain technological developments that they feel will give the other departments too much power. Another rumor is that the spooks have forged a shaky alliance with the legitimate government. Each department's agenda is its most closely guarded secret, and the intrigue and power struggles that go on to protect these agendas are nearly as exciting as fieldwork.

Speaking of fieldwork, each op on a mission may have been given specific, secret objectives by his department. These objectives are part of the department's agenda and are considered sacrosanct. They are to be achieved without betraying their existence to ops from other departments. Secops, in particular, are well-trained in rooting out these secret objectives when they conflict with the mission objective.

Psi-Ops and Secret Agendas

There are risks inherent to having secret objectives in the presence of telepathic agents. To prevent unwanted mind-reading, psi-ops are constrained by the "Psi-ops Code," which prohibits them from using their powers on Company members. This is strictly enforced, and the penalty for violating the Code is disavowal or death. Psi-ops monitor each other, and it's well-known that turning in a violator of the Code is worth points in Company politics. Due to the steep penalties and the chance that another op is monitoring a squad's psychic traffic, the Code is rarely violated. Still, rumors about secret objectives circulate, and it's probable that many of them have some basis in the occasional illicit mind probe.



three and you'll be fine." Nevertheless, the devices that come out of Dynatronics are unbelievably cool, and despite the routine backfires, most agents love to get their hands on them.

In addition to developing experimental high-tech gadgets, the Technology department runs the massive computer network known as Blacknet – dozens of interconnected servers spread throughout the country that serve as repositories of information about individual black ops and current operations in the field, and the amassed knowledge about the enemies that we are fighting. Surprisingly, Blacknet is one of the more reliable devices that Technology has created, and it is further enhanced by multiple redundancy and routine backups. Tied into Blacknet are the techies' Cistrons – hand-held computer assistants that allow all Tech ops to remain in constant communication with each other and Blacknet. No techie goes anywhere, even to the bathroom, without his or her Cistron.

The latest advancements in the department relate to the emerging field of psychic energy. A few hackers have developed a prototype helmet that boosts latent psychic power, and another group of techies has created a field generator that can solidify psychic beings, like ghosts and poltergeists, for a few moments – sometimes long enough to frag them.

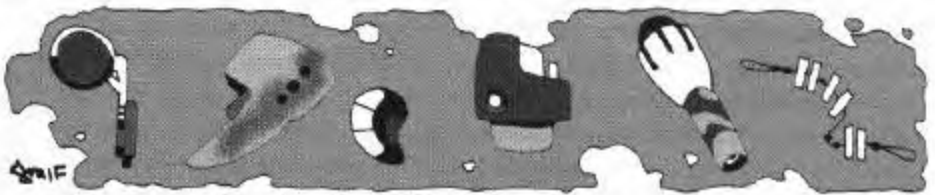
Goals and Methods

Tech agents are typically the most laid-back of Company operatives. They are also the hardest to get out into the field. They look upon their rigorous Academy training as the price of admission to the tech labs of Dynatronics, and once inside, they rarely want to leave. Nonetheless, it is possible to lure them out with the promise of the discovery of new alien technology, or the field-testing of one of their new inventions.

Out in the field, techies constantly are working on the squad's equipment. The radar never has quite enough range, or the subvocal microphones need a boost in the low frequencies. Or wouldn't it be cool if we could all communicate by sending brain waves over our microwave transmitters? Generally, their fiddling does lead to an improvement in the equipment's functionality, but quite often a needed bit of equipment is in pieces while the techie works on it, or what was a functioning air-ram is now a very expensive paperweight. It's a running joke in the Company that the way to defeat the Greys is to send all our techies over and have them "improve" the aliens' equipment.

Technology Missions

The Technology department does not sponsor many missions. The ones it is most interested in are those involving alien technology, especially the recovery of Grey ships or weaponry. Although they have yet to unlock the secret of operating the alien machinery, the techies know that the more items they can get their hands on, the better their chances of figuring it out.



Techies try their best to get out of capture and clean-up missions due to the extreme violence and high risk that these missions tend to involve. The notable exception is when the squad requests a bit of experimental technology, like one of the new alpha-stage teleporters that Dynatronics has been bragging about. Without fail, Technology sends one of its hackers along to make sure the item doesn't get misused (and the department blamed for a messy accident). Both Combat and Intelligence ops have a special love for Technology ops, and they often specifically request one or two for a mission squad. If the mission is dangerous, or starts to go badly, you can bet the techie will never stop whining about the sorry piece of trash who made him come along.

Facilities

In addition to the Technology Annex at the Academy, which serves to indoctrinate future techies into the worship of experimental tech, the department maintains four complexes across the country, under the front company Dynatronics. Dynatronics is a well-known computer-research facility and Defense Department contractor. What the public doesn't know is that what Dynatronics releases to the world is about 10 years behind its current developments. The recent developments in RISC processing, smart weaponry and artificial intelligence are throwaway projects that the Technology department developed for black op use in the mid '80s. The department heads just recently approved their release into the mainstream technology market.

Usually, the techies wait until someone else discovers these technological "breakthroughs" before releasing their own versions, but they pump out enough pseudo-revolutionary tech to stay in business. In many ways, Dynatronics controls the flow of technology development in the U.S. and around the world.

Dynatronics offices are located in San Jose, California; Washington, D.C.; Seattle, Washington, and Austin, Texas.

Subgroups

A small group of talented but asocial techies broke away from the departmental mainstream to form their own special group. They call themselves the Phreaks. The department tolerates them for two reasons: they are extremely good at what they do, and nobody wants to be around them very much.

Whenever there is a mission that involves breaking into a large corporation or government computer system, or defeating a high-tech security set-up, the department sends in a Phreak. These ultimate hackers pride themselves on being able to defeat any security measures, and have a reputation as rude and reckless. Their abrasive personalities only add to their mystique.

So far they boast a perfect record: 22 missions without a failed attempt. Some of their accomplishments include the "loss" of the NASA Mars probe and the '89 stock-market drop. Many Phreaks are retired ops, unsuited for active duty. This limits them not one bit.

Relations With Other Departments

Technology ops are almost always called "techies," and more rarely, "hackers." Their reputation as genius screw-offs is largely undeserved, and has its origins in a few, well-remembered fiascos where a mission went bad due to an alpha-stage device malfunction or a techie's tampering with vital equipment. There are plenty of precise, careful Technology ops who pride themselves on turning out reliable, consistent devices. Unfortunately, these agents are often overshadowed by their more ambitious comrades, whose cool, flashy gadgets, while risky to use, are a hell of a lot more fun.



CHAPTER FOUR CAMPAIGNS

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The focus of a *GURPS Black Ops* campaign can range from the tense subtlety of international espionage to the overt drama of jungle combat. Players who enjoy intricate espionage – such as investing weeks in seducing a CEO – will enjoy *Black Ops*. Players who prefer fragging a pack of Tyrannosaurs with fuel-air explosives will, too. A successful campaign requires mixing subtlety and mayhem to the tastes of the participants.

When planning a *Black Ops* campaign (or any other *GURPS* campaign), the GM and players should talk about the style and approach they want to take before the characters are created or the first adventure is penned. There's nothing wrong with a campaign that focuses on the blood and guts of tactical alien-busting . . . unless the GM has a group of players who are in the mood for something more subtle. Talk about it! A few minutes before the campaign begins can prevent a lot of wasted time later on, and can help ensure that everybody has fun.

Campaign Types

While *Black Ops* is firmly in the "cinematic action" category, that covers a lot of ground. The kinds of missions appropriate to the campaign will depend on the ops the players create. That, in turn, will depend heavily on campaign type. A few of the principal options:

The Everything-Squad Campaign

The most basic *Black Ops* campaign revolves around the tried-and-true "well-balanced party." The ops are fresh from the Academy and have the widest possible cross-section of abilities. Each member of the team performs a vital function. The Company calls this an "omni-squad," a multi-purpose unit formed in order to maximize teamwork and group identity. Omni-squads are given the widest range of missions, and are expected to perform a wider variety of tasks than any other type of squad.

Advantages: The GM can quickly learn the group's strengths and weaknesses, and can custom-tailor storylines to offer the maximum degree of challenge and entertainment. Nearly any sort of mission type can be used.

Drawbacks: Missions that are clearly the province of more specialized squads are inappropriate. Storylines that don't give each type of character something to do must be carefully avoided.

The Modular-Squad Campaign

The GM may wish to vary the Everything-Squad Campaign in the following manner:

Each player creates *two* characters, preferably very different from one another. A geek and a member of the Cadre, for instance, or a secop and a suave Intelligence op. Only one will be played at a time, but they'll both be available for missions. The GM may allow experienced players to create more than two ops – perhaps even one from each department!

At the start of each mission, the GM should select the squad leader from the available pool of manpower. The leader then (in character) selects the rest of the team by "reviewing their dossiers" and deciding which ops he wants on his squad, based on the needs of the mission. The GM may wish to reserve the selection of the party secop for himself.



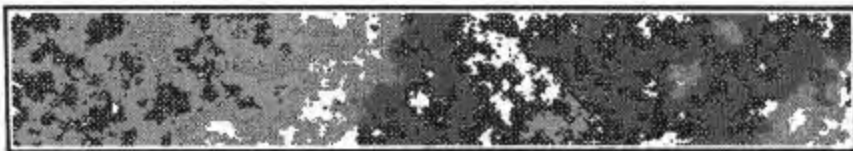
Character-Oriented Adventures

In general, most *Black Ops* adventures will focus on the mission – either the execution of a task important to the Company, or what it takes to deal with a mission that isn't executed properly. In short, the game is about the job.

But black ops have lives beyond the mission, and conflicts beyond those they seek deliberately. Ops can gain the personal enmity of individual aliens, rogues, demons . . . or corporate executives that wanted to deal with the Greys. Or the wife of a man killed in the course of duty. Or entire small *nations*.

The life of a black op is that of a spy, soldier and conspirator. Conflicts can come from surprising directions – even allies. There are times when the stress of the war overwhelms, and friends fight. There are times when inter-departmental rivalries exceed their role as a stimulant and create problems. There are times when a black op questions his role in the scheme of things.

The GM should shake up the pattern of any long-running *Black Ops* campaign with occasional adventures that aren't "missions," or adventures that use a mission as a springboard, but which are really about something completely different. Not only is this more realistic, it's more dramatic, and it provides a roleplaying opportunity that can lead to greater character depth.



The Historical Campaign

Any type of *Black Ops* campaign can be run as a *historical* campaign, following the careers of black ops through the early years of the Company (just after World War II) up to the present. For instance, by setting adventures 15 years ago, the GM can convincingly describe Company technology, since the Company had today's technology in the early 1980s! The players can also take part in some famous – such as they are – moments in the conspiracy. What really happened at Roswell? You'll know because you were there.

This "retro" approach also allows the GM to slowly introduce some of the more recent elements in the *Black Ops* timeline.

Advantages: This type of campaign allows the widest possible variety of missions, with little chance of straining credibility when it comes to squad composition. If the GM is in the mood to run a mop-squad game, he can just say, "Everybody bring your secops tonight," and run with it. On a complex clean-up mission, it allows the players to try whatever mix they feel can manage the job. Many players enjoy exploring multiple styles of play in a single campaign.

Drawbacks: Less continuity on the *individual* level will be a problem for some. Character development will be slowed; this kind of campaign is more mission-oriented than character-oriented.

The Cadet Campaign

Academy life is a five-year, self-contained adventure – with a higher mortality rate than most other *GURPS* campaigns! From their first days in the cool corridors of the Academy to the final days of the teamwork trials, every op has his share of life-threatening adventure long before he ever sees real fieldwork. Sessions focusing on the lives of cadets in the Academy could constitute an entire campaign or serve as an interesting prologue to one, depending on the level of detail the GM selects.

Characters entering the Academy are, on average, worth 150-250 points, with a lot of variation. Beginning cadets should be created on 200 points, with minimum attributes of 12 and a few areas of real expertise. The Academy does the rest.

Advantages: If used as a prologue to an extended *Black Ops* campaign, the Cadet Campaign provides a solid foundation for character development. Even as a stand-alone campaign, it provides an exciting, ready-made framework that offers diverse challenges and plenty of room for expansion on the part of the GM. And who *doesn't* want to play out the log drill (p. 39)?

Drawbacks: This works best for players who've never done *Black Ops* before, since it's a campaign of discovery as much as anything else. If the party is destined to be drafted by different departments, then the "split-screening" in later years can be a headache; this is a good part to gloss over if the Cadet Campaign is being run as a prologue.

The Single-Department Campaign

In this campaign, everyone plays a member of the same department: Combat, Intelligence, Science, Security or Technology. If the department is something other than Security, then either one player can be permitted to play the party secop, or the secop can be an NPC. This campaign focuses on the goals and mission styles of the department in question.

Advantages: Continuity and consistency become easy, and the ops' roles in any mission are likely to feel credible. Scenarios will rarely seem "forced." Exploration of a single style of play allows for strong genre flavor, particularly for Combat and Intelligence games.

Drawbacks: Everybody in the group has to enjoy the same kind of adventure if they are all to be satisfied. Individual ops can seem too similar in terms of what they offer the group.

The Flip-Side

The protagonists are Greys, rogue psychics, vampires . . . or renegade ops! This can be run in several ways. One option is to have a group of ops find out an ugly truth about the Company and decide to form an organization to counter it; maybe the Greys are willing to help. In a game like this, one thing is certain: the PCs will be facing the deadliest foes on earth – the black ops themselves!



Advantages: It's fun to play the bad guys now and then. If nothing else, it'll give the players a chance to enjoy the thrill of ripping as many secops limb from limb as they can manage. Difficult prey, though . . .

Drawbacks: Probably more viable as a one-shot or micro-campaign (2-5 sessions) than as an ongoing story. The principle reason for this is the black ops themselves, who could become monotonous as foes.

The Shared World

This is a variation on any of the above campaigns, but it works best of all with the Modular-Squad set-up.

Every player has a character (or two), and every player takes a turn Game Mastering, usually on a regular schedule of rotation. This means there will always be an op missing from the group (the one normally run by the player who's GMing), which conveniently simulates the way most units work in the setting.

Each mission is a self-contained episode, designed to be completed in a single sitting (with the occasional two-part "mini-movie," not unlike a syndicated drama program). Any running plot threads are agreed upon by mutual consent, and everybody gets to play *and* run.

Advantages: Multiple GMs means multiple styles – the greatest possible variety of challenges. Taking turns also means that individual GMs are more likely to be regularly inspired and much less likely to "burn out."

Drawbacks: If you want a long-running subplot, you must either coordinate well with the other GMs, or just run it in your own sessions. If you're running a weekly game with five players, that means your subplot can easily be forgotten in the intervening month! Finishing a story in a single session requires tight adventure design and punctual players. Even coordinating the schedule can be tricky. Make sure that every session has a back-up GM to take up the slack if the principle GM isn't prepared or able to run.

Mission Types

This section is provided to help the *Black Ops* GM organize his thoughts when preparing a scenario, and to provide adventure ideas. Every *Black Ops* mission should be unique, intense and fun. After all, the fate of humanity is on the line, and glory waits on the other side of the flames.

The Capture Mission

The purpose of a capture mission is to safely return a person, animal or device to the Science department for study. More than 85% of all capture missions are sponsored and planned by Science, with the remainder being the province of Intelligence or Technology.

The most common type of capture missions are those devoted to the safe capture of beasts and wigglers. These are frequently assembled on dangerously short notice, while the trail is still hot. The ops must locate the creature(s), pacify them without unnecessary injury and bag them.

Mission Seed: The Lab contains specimens of a number of nasty beasts, but no squad has ever come close to bagging a gargoyle. Since the creatures decompose within hours of death, their biology has never been analyzed adequately. Argus has decided it's time to bring one home.

A Science-sponsored squad must travel to the Vatican, infiltrate the holy city without being discovered and track down one of the beasts that has been



Protect and Serve

When a hostile creature is already in the process of harming innocent civilians, a capture mission becomes a "protect and serve" mission. These missions seriously gall the grunts, who are anxious to punish as well as defend.

Less than a year ago, for example, four separate vampire killing sprees occurred within 60 miles of one another near Nisab, Al-Yaman (Yemen) . . . in the same week. Convinced that some central vampire was busy creating dangerous offspring, Science insisted that all four vamps be captured to gather clues about the parent vampire. Combat disagreed, pointing out that captures could cost more lives and create more vampires in the bargain, but the mission went through as Science planned when the other departments threw in their votes for the captures. During the mission, all of the vampires were destroyed in action anyway by the grunts, who insisted that the vampires had forced their hand. The Company is still shaking a little from that one.

Complications in these missions can include creatures that can't be killed without destroying innocent hosts, and victims that don't *want* to be rescued.

Machines of War

The Technology department sponsors its own brand of capture mission, focused on the capture of *technologies*. We're still pretty fuzzy on most of the stuff that the Greys are throwing at us, and a few missions have been mounted into Grey hot-spots with the specific goal of acquiring alien weapons, devices and power supplies.

Theft: The B&E Mission

Every now and then, somebody gets there first. The United States government is notorious for this, as are the scouts for a few major industrialists. Grey fliers (or parts from them), entire live animal specimens and even demons are sometimes found, pacified and captured by somebody other than black ops. Sometimes, the thing they capture is too hot for them to handle, and the Company has to get it and try to save some lives (except for those lives that have to be taken to maintain secrecy). Other times, the thing captured is well and truly *captured*, and a B&E results, where ops have to steal specimens for study from those who've already done part of the work.

These missions rely heavily on assistance from Intelligence. Complications include captured entities (or machines!) alerting their captors that new captors are on the way in . . .

Keeping Fresh

The Company is well aware that black ops risk becoming specialists and letting many of their skill levels wither – skills that aren't used tend to atrophy fairly quickly (see p. CH17).

To combat this, the type of missions conducted by each black op are carefully tracked by his department. If these start showing similarity, the black op is specifically redirected to missions of a much different nature. For instance, black ops who've seen a lot of deep-jungle combat with dinosaurs are cycled out to more social and urban missions.

An exception often is made when a particular op is deemed essential to the success of a long-term operation. If this is the case (and it sometimes is, for entire teams), then the op may have to take Academy refresher courses.

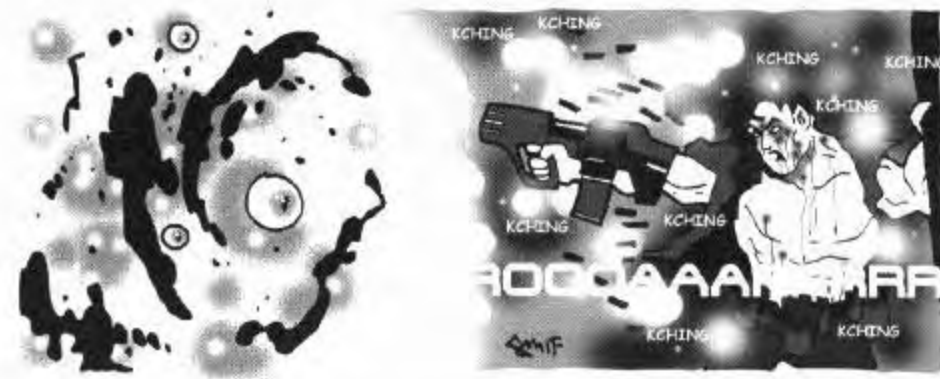
terrorizing priests and palace workers. They've been equipped with an experimental tranquilizer that's strong enough to knock out a blue whale, but will it work on these supernatural beasts?

The Clean-Up Mission

The purpose of a clean-up mission is to *eradicate* a problem. The squad goes to a known trouble spot, destroys the threat, spirits away the evidence and comes back home. Clean-up missions are almost entirely the province of the Combat department, although assassinations (typically performed by Intelligence) also fall into this category.

All clean-up missions share the same structure, though flavors differ. The target already is identified, either by previous recon missions or by reliable field reports. Sometimes, "reliable field reports" include footage on the six o'clock news. All that is left is the hunt. These missions tend to be short and decisive.

Mission Seed: Someone is mailing ritually scarred human body parts to random recipients around the country from a post office in Des Moines, Iowa. Company psi-ops have examined the remains and determined that it is the work of a particularly nasty demon. The Company wants the bastard dead, now. There's no time for reconnaissance, but no civilians in the post office are to be harmed, and absolute secrecy must of course be maintained. Will the Combat-sponsored squad be able to single out the demon and dispatch him without a bloodbath? Or will they put a new spin on the phrase "going postal"?



The Containment Mission

The purpose of a containment mission is to prevent a threat from spreading, bottling it up for convenient destruction or study. It includes elements of both clean-up and cover-up missions, since an established threat must be dealt with and an established threat to secrecy must be squashed as well. This is most often the province of the Combat department.

Containment missions have occasionally led to the (highly regrettable) destruction of entire isolated towns, all to keep an alien invader (and the knowledge of it) from spreading into the world.

Mission Seed: A cruise ship returning from Alaska is infested by an unknown parasite that's turning the passengers into bloodthirsty maniacs. Not only does the mission squad need to contain the parasite while saving as many lives as possible, they've got to do it all before the ship reaches its next port. If things go bad, the ship could turn into a floating morgue.

The Cover-Up Mission

The purpose of a cover-up mission is to keep a secret by erasing the evidence. This often involves altering records and silencing key witnesses.

Intelligence plays the leading role in virtually every cover-up, although the secops are more aggressive here than anywhere else, owing to their chartered role as protectors of the conspiracy.

This is a spy mission, and can be spread over many months of careful planning, infiltration and execution (although some cover-ups don't allow that kind of luxurious timetable).

Mission Seed: A renegade secop has stolen a mess of documents from Whitehall. These could reveal the conspiracy once and for all, if seen by the right people. She is being escorted by 12 elite FBI men on a train from Atlanta, Georgia, to Washington, D.C., where the documents are to be analyzed by bureau specialists. The squad can board the train without a problem, but their quarry is well-armed, has the home field advantage . . . and is expecting them! Can the squad take out the traitor and retrieve the documents before the train makes it to its destination?

The Discovery Mission

The purpose of a discovery mission is to investigate a rumor, usually by tracking down sightings of supernatural or alien threats to their source. A discovery squad's goal is to find the source of the rumor, make sure it isn't a hoax, and determine what kind of mission will be required to deal with it. This is primarily the job of the Science department, although Intelligence sponsors discovery missions when rumors of new secret societies, major crime figures and so on arise.

Discovery missions are, potentially, the most exciting and lethal operations the Company undertakes. When you're dealing with the unknown, it's all too easy to prove the old soldier's axiom: no battle plan ever survived contact with the enemy.

Mission Seed: Rumors of an unknown creature roaming the Vietnamese jungle have begun to make their way through Intelligence channels. The reports describe it as a giant, burrowing mass that devours the roots of large trees, causing them to topple. There have been no deaths or injuries reported to date, and the description doesn't match any current wiggler or beast classifications. To make matters worse, the locals seem to have a secret mythology about the creature which demands that it never be disturbed. They'll stop at nothing to keep the meddling ops away from the mysterious beast! Is it a harmless creature, as yet undiscovered by the scientific community? Or is it something much more sinister – something prehistoric, or even alien?

The Reconnaissance Mission

The purpose of a recon mission is to quietly gather information on a known trouble spot – enemy position, beast or wiggler lair, etc. – in order to deal with it more effectively. Recon missions are sponsored by either Combat or Intelligence, more often the latter than the former.

Recon missions generally take a number of weeks, even when sponsored by the Combat department. Typical short-term missions include routine scouting of laboratories known to be manipulated by the Greys. At the long-term end, they include two-year long infiltrations of government hierarchies to find out who knows what, and who is dealing with whom.

Mission Seed: High-definition satellite photography has revealed what could be a Grey base on a tiny island in the center of the Bermuda Triangle. An Intelligence-sponsored omni-squad is sent to investigate. What they find is beyond imagination – a human zoo populated by mutated and partially cyborged civilians. The place also is crawling with Greys. Does the squad try to save the humans, or pull back and nuke the whole thing from orbit?



Quick-and-Dirty Autofire

A mission can require a lot of automatic-weapons fire, but using the table on p. B120 can bog down play. The following optional rules replace that table, with only a tiny loss in realism, and allow a full burst of autofire to be handled with a single die roll. To use this option, two new numbers must be recorded for all guns capable of automatic fire. Once these are written down, autofire becomes as easy to handle as a knife thrust or karate kick.

Autofire Accuracy (AAcc): This is equal to the weapon's normal Accuracy, minus 5. It can never exceed the firer's skill-5. This can be a negative number.

Autofire Recoil (ARel): Multiply the weapon's normal recoil penalty (Rel) by its rate of fire (RoF), then divide the result by 7. Round to the highest negative number (e.g., -1.14 becomes -2). Compare this result to the weapon's normal Rel. The least favorable number (i.e., the largest penalty) is the ARel.

Some examples:

AK-47: AAcc/ARel: +2/-2

AUG: AAcc/ARel +5/-2

FN-FAL: AAcc/ARel +6/-4

H&K G3: AAcc/ARel +5/-3

H&K MP5: AAcc/ARel +3/-2

M16: AAcc/ARel +6/-2

Uzi: AAcc/ARel +2/-2

Determining Hits

Determine the effective skill of the gunman normally. *Exception:* taking an Aim maneuver on a previous turn doesn't give a bonus to skill – it simply eliminates the possibility of a snap shot.

Once you've determined what the gunman needs to hit, add AAcc and subtract ARel. This can result in a snap shot if the final, modified skill is below the weapon's SS number, unless the gunman took an Aim last turn.

The gunman then rolls to hit:

If the roll is a success, every bullet hits.

If the roll is a failure, a number of bullets hit equal to the gun's RoF minus the margin of failure. E.g., if your gun has RoF 8 and you miss by 3, then five bullets hit.

Sustained Fire: On each subsequent turn of sustained fire, subtract the weapon's ARel figure from the roll needed on the previous turn. Snap-shot from the first turn (if applicable) automatically is eliminated.

Continued on next page . . .

Concepts and Reminders

The following sections touch on issues important both to running a *Black Ops* campaign and to designing good adventures for the genre.

Keep the Squad Informed

Every adventure should include a briefing where the squad is given its mission by the mission sponsor. Remember, the Company isn't omniscient – if it were, it wouldn't need the ops half the time – but any information that would reasonably be available to a modern police department, military force or intelligence agency is available to the squad upon request. This requires more preparation by the GM, but the results are worth it.

Keep in mind that Company operations are sponsored by a single department, with inter-departmental cooperation providing the necessary mix of operatives. Each department has its own unique style of presenting the mission briefing, but any briefing has the following universal goals:

Establish the Objective

The Company insists on a clearly defined objective for any mission; e.g., shut down the New York City subway system for a week, rescue the president of Costa Rica from the Greys, cover up or destroy all evidence of the recent gargoyle epidemic in Lisbon. Typically, a time limit is also included. Some missions will include specified methods of achieving the goal, others will be more open to planning by the squad. Any pre-arranged avenues of escape will also be established at the mission briefing.

Establish the Team Leader

Squad leadership is not permanent; it is established on a per-mission basis. Even teams that tend to retain the same membership and composition from mission to mission tend to rotate leadership as the needs of the mission dictate.

Assign Department-Specific Goals

Before, during or after the actual briefing, each department will assign specific goals to its members. Science may insist on the capture of the mission's target, for instance, while Combat will insist on its absolute destruction.

Assign Equipment

Most ops have gathered a nice assortment of personal gear over their careers; even rookies tend to be well-armed and well-equipped. Mission-specific needs are covered by the mission budget, typically a generous sum ranging from a few thousand dollars for a short cover-up to millions for extended Grey-hunting campaigns. Generally, if an agent can come up with a good excuse for needing a specific bit of standard-issue gear, it will be worked into the budget.

Experimental tech is a bit harder to acquire, and requires some roleplaying. A squad techie may need to talk his superior into letting them alpha-test a gadget, while a squad without a techie may need to pull in some favors to get access to choice widgets. Be sure to remember how members of different departments view each other; interdepartmental politics play a big role in this type of request.

Keep the Departments Squabbling

Each of the five departments pulls – and pulls hard – in its own direction. This is by design; Argus wants it that way. The job of the Company is to fight a war against the enemies the mundane world doesn't want to know about – to pit

life, force and knowledge against armies and spies in a shadow war for the future of mankind. The Company's founders might have made their share of mistakes, but they were wise enough to know that this kind of war doesn't belong to any one form of conflict, "conventional" or otherwise. The departmental rivalries form a dramatic backdrop against which entire adventures can be cast.

Keep the Background Busy

A *Black Ops* campaign should include a lot of flavor; both modern, "real-world" flavor and an atmosphere appropriate to a world of secrets, paranoia, unnatural beasts and deadly invaders. One way to ensure that every session is appropriately "seasoned" is to make lists when putting the scenario together; e.g., three amusing NPCs, three dark hints that imply something sinister, three monsters appropriate to the area, three villains, three conflicts, three vital revelations, etc. You're not likely to use it all, but it can shake ideas loose and help you keep all aspects of the world in mind. Besides, anything you don't use for this adventure can be recycled for the next one . . .

Keep the Competition Hot

An important part of the *Black Ops* world is competition. The desire to compete is one of the qualities sought in Academy recruits, and contests are a vital part of Academy life before teamwork is even touched on! This reflects the larger truth of the Company itself, where each department is its own conspiracy to defend the earth, with rivalries and private agendas fueling half of what gets done.

This principle can be used to good dramatic effect in the campaign, keeping in mind that black ops, one and all, are the kind of people who keep score.

In day-to-day active duty, the competitive urge manifests most clearly on the squad and personal level. Squads with any lifespan or identity whatsoever are constantly comparing performance and success ratios, while truly badass Combat ops are comparing notches on their gun barrels. The GM should always make the players aware of NPC ops who are currently on the "A-list," with juicy details to be jealous of and surpass. In the Modular-Squad Campaign, the ops can compete against *themselves!*

Keep the Cameras Rolling

Black ops aren't realistic and shouldn't be encumbered by realism in the game – especially if realism starts to bog the game down or make the ops look less godlike than they should. Black ops are the shapes emerging from the burning wreck, the high-kicking martial arts masters, suave agents and cunning detectives of the world. The



Academy only picks from the best of the best, and only a few of them survive to become ops.

The GM should read the discussions of cinematic and high-powered gaming on pp. C11176-180; both sections certainly apply. Layering on as many cinematic rules options as your players enjoy is also an important part of the genre; customize the level of cinema to the tastes of the group. In addition to the cinematic options found in the *Basic Set*, *Compendium I & II* and elsewhere, the following are offered as being especially appropriate to *Black Ops*:

Quick-and-Dirty Autofire (Continued)

Special Rules for Success Rolls: For these rules only, the firer may roll even if his effective skill is less than 3 (even if it's negative)! Critical success occurs on a 3 or 4, and critical failure on a 17 or 18, regardless of modified skill.

Added Detail (Optional): On a successful attack roll, every bullet hits except one. To hit with all bullets, the attack must succeed by 5+. This more accurately simulates the results of the normal autofire rules, but may not be worth the trouble, at the GM's option.

Obscene Rates of Fire

Normally, the margin of failure determines how many bullets miss, on a 1-for-1 basis. For weapons with high RoF, multiply this by the *Miss Multiple*, equal to (RoF/9), rounded to the nearest whole number. Most small-arms have a MM of 1, so it isn't necessary to record this stat often.

Hose Jobs: Area Effect

Spraying multiple targets uses the same rules as firing at a single target, with the following additions:

Penalties: Use the *worst* speed/range modifier that applies to any of the targets in the group.

Divide Evenly: The bullets that hit the group are divided evenly among the targets. Any remainder is assessed one bullet at a time to each target in succession, beginning with the first target in the group – either the one on the far left or far right – and moving in the direction of the sweeping burst.

Don't forget that each empty hex between targets will "take" one bullet (two if RoF is 16 or more); these are counted against those successfully "hitting" the group. The width of the affected area is still limited as per p. B121.

Dodge Rolls

Autofire may be dodged, just like any other ranged attack. On a successful Dodge roll, the target dodges a number of bullets equal to twice his margin of success.

Continued on next page . . .

Quick-and-Dirty Autofire (Continued)

E.g., if a character with Dodge 7 is hit by 6 bullets in a burst of autofire and rolls a 5 on his Dodge roll (success by 2), then he dodges four of the bullets. The other two still hit him.

Depleted Ammo and Counting Shots

When less than the full RoF must be used, for whatever reason, reduce the ARel penalty for that turn proportionately. Accumulated penalties from previous turns remain in full force.

Damage

No dice are rolled. The bullets do their *average* damage: 3.5 points per die, plus any adds. Thus, a gun doing 7d+1 damage does 26 points of damage per slug. Average damage can be recorded on the character sheet for easy reference, if desired.

Optionally, roll damage *once per attack*, with all the bullets doing the rolled damage (or twice per attack, with each roll applying to half the bullets).

The Scrub

A "scrub" is an unworthy foe, usually nameless and always lacking in motives that extend beyond a single scene in the adventure. Scrubs include generic thugs, hordes of rappelling ninja, faceless congressmen, executives, fast-food clerks and so on. They serve only two functions: to wander through the background, impressed by the black ops, or to wander into the foreground, in order to make the black ops look good.

In a high-action, cinematic universe, 99% of the population is scrubs. Only heroes, villains and those who live on the edge of becoming one or the other (e.g., an important NPC cop with real motives and a role in the story) are worth any more than a few seconds of "screen time." Scrubs may attack normally, but do not get defense rolls and are always taken out of the fight by a single hit. You never need to roll damage when you hit a scrub. The attacker can decide whether the scrub was humiliated, knocked out, maimed or brutally slain.

In non-combat conflicts (debates, games of chess, etc.), a black op need only succeed at his skill roll to win, even if the conflict would normally be resolved by a Contest of Skills. This applies especially to the Intimidation skill—even when used against entire crowds. Only important NPCs are immune to this; ordinary security guards and secretaries are not.

Tools and Trappings

Black ops can identify an Austin-Healy by the sound of its engine and a Glock 26 by the sound of its slide being released. If an op has a skill, it automatically includes an incredible degree of familiarity with all makes and models, every tradition and superstition, and any conceivable accessory. Ignore the limitations on p. B43—those are for scrubs! This extends beyond technical skills to "softer" skills... an op skilled in Savoir-Faire knows an Armani suit on sight, beluga caviar by scent and a bottle of *Dom* by the sparkle in the glass. The GM may opt to require an IQ or skill roll for this, but never at any kind of penalty (except possibly those for long range).

Ghostly Movement

Action heroes (such as black ops) like to lure unsuspecting foes into ambushes, sometimes just to toy with them. The opening scenes of *The Professional* and the "library scene" in *The Substitute* are just two of many examples on film. To represent this in *GURPS*, use the following cinematic rule:

A PC can get quietly and instantly to any place within Move yards, provided no one is looking (save other PCs), and provided he could get there "the hard way," given time. This requires a Move maneuver in combat. Thus, in a single second, an op can move from the floor of an office into the heating vent above his head (with the grate closed behind him). No die-roll is needed.

Immunity to the Common Cold

... and any other truly mundane problem. An op's motorcycle can explode, but it never just breaks down. His gun can run out of ammo, but it doesn't just jam. His laptop can be fragged by an antitank weapon fired through the window, but his system doesn't crash because his spreadsheet doesn't like his word processor. Black ops never get their zippers stuck in their fly.

The Spirit of the Rules

Note that while rules like these are great for setting tone, creating atmosphere and speeding play, they should enhance roleplaying, not sidestep it. Saying "I kill the scrub pointing the Beretta at





me.” isn’t enough – the player must always describe his “badass” exploits for the amusement of those at the table! “I flip the Beretta’s muzzle back into his gaping mouth and squeeze his hand on the trigger!” is much more amusing.

Let 'Em Show Off (The Spotlight Principle)

Some GMs get nervous when they have a party of 700-point characters to entertain for the evening. Some even let themselves panic into finding new ways to stifle the adventurers’ abilities, and include so much “game balance” that the party might as well be playing ordinary 100-point heroes. This approach can frustrate the players. Relax. High-powered gaming operates on the “spotlight principle,” which is to say *let them show off!*

Part of the GM’s job is to entertain the players through the medium of the game. When preparing an adventure, be sure to include a “spotlight” for each hero: a beast for the Cadre member to decapitate with his teeth, a stack of fuel cans for the pyrokinetic to blow up, a regulation to be bent so the secop can get hot under the collar, a broken Grey toy for the techie to drool over and push buttons on . . . and if there’s a suave Romeo in the group, there should be *some* opportunity for him to smooth-talk his way to vital information. The players have probably put a lot of care and thought into their characters; it’s only fitting that you allow each of them to shine.

Scare Them

The flip-side of the “spotlight principle” is that the fun of showing off is balanced by the other kind of fun – pure, pants-wetting terror. The ops’ extreme confidence and ability should just barely overcome their challenges: The Cadre member who so capably decapitates beasts with his teeth soon learns real fear when *they just keep on coming*. The scrubs are falling left and right when one of them decides to shut the warehouse power off. That’s when the gargoyles strike, filling the darkness with an inhuman shrieking. The rockworms scatter in fear . . . but only because the crevasse rapidly is filling with lava!

One of the keys to a successful *Black Ops* campaign is the sense that even though the ops are truly badass, they still barely manage to survive their missions. This is achieved both by occasionally handicapping the players and by beefing up their challenges. As GM, you always should be thinking of the one extra enemy or circumstance that will push the action over the top. Every now and then, put the squad in a spot where they run out of ammo and have to use knives and ingenuity. Drop them into low-tech cultures where they have to pass as natives . . . which means no suit of heavy combat armor. Have them fight in hip-deep mud against wigglers who think mud is great to swim in.

Like any great action flick, the initial climactic moment always is surpassed by the true climax, as the real enemy rises from beneath the steaming corpses of his feeble flunkies. Don’t worry too much about going too far. Extreme circumstances often bring the best out of the players, as they rack their brains for the solution to a desperate situation. And if they don’t find a solution, well, heroic death is part of *Black Ops*, too.

Torso Blow-Through: an Optional Rule

In the normal *GURPS* rules, any bullet penetrating the torso has a blow-through limit equal to the target’s hit points (pp. B109, CII57). This works well enough for small-arms, but black ops face (and use) heavy firepower – a .50-caliber slug through the torso can rip part of the body away! Big bullets do big damage. To reflect this, use the following optional rule:

The torso blow-through limit is equal to the target’s hit points or the average basic damage of the bullet striking him, whichever is *higher*. Thus, a 7d+1 rifle round (average basic damage 26) striking a HT 10 man could do up to 26 points of damage before the excess “blows through,” while a 2d pistol bullet (average basic damage 7) hitting a HT 10 man could do up to 10 points.

Blow-through for the vitals is equal to triple this figure. Blow-through for the extremities use the normal rules. Average basic damage is equal to 3.5 points per die, plus adds.

Using These Cinematic Rules in Other Genres

Even outside of *Black Ops*, there are times when it’s frustrating to have great scenes bog down in a morass of die rolls. The cinematic rules in this chapter can be used to avoid this in *any* genre – for instance, to let adventurers back through hordes of ores in a high-fantasy game. If some characters can use these rules but not others (such as the fighters in a high-fantasy game), the GM may wish to charge those characters an Unusual Background cost. Something in the neighborhood of 75 points seems fair for the abilities listed under *Keep the Cameras Rolling*.

CHAPTER FIVE

CHARACTERS

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The raw recruits who enter the Academy are talented men and women from many fields – soldiers and policemen, engineers and programmers, teachers and athletes. The graduates who leave the Academy are *black ops*, the most effective spies, detectives and soldiers ever forged in the fires of evolution and shaped by the hands of man.

Cadets are selected less for their skills than for their drive and potential – physical, intellectual and *emotional*. The combination of real passion and emotional stability is one of the rarest combinations the species can produce. These criteria alone make the physical requirements seem almost reasonable . . . not that some black ops don't seem crazy – some are, but it's a special kind of crazy. As for the skills, those will be taught on-site in New Mexico.

When a student enters training, his value in *GURPS* might be as low as 150 points – merely heroic. A trained op, however, is *truly badass*, and mere heroes part for his passage like prairie grass before a hurricane.

Point Level and Disadvantage Limit: Full-fledged black ops should be built on 700 points, with a limit of -5 points in quirks and -40 points in disadvantages. Black ops are extreme, and exceptional concepts might justify more disadvantages, but too many crippling problems would keep them out of the Academy in the first place. Of course, many disadvantages are forbidden to begin with (see p. 74). As always, disadvantages *required* by the campaign never count against the limit.

Background Story

There are two steps that every player should finish before writing anything down on a character sheet: *Pre-Academy Life* and *Academy Experiences*.

Pre-Academy Life

Regardless of what your character will eventually become, keep in mind that he was pretty impressive before he ever became an op. Some thought should be given to his life before the Academy. In this spirit, answer the following questions *in character*:

1. *What was your upbringing?* Determine what kind of people your parents were, what kind of education you had, and where you grew up. Were you a military brat, moving from base to base, never planting roots, and becoming comfortable with many types of people early on? Or did you grow up in an isolated village in Vermont, where smoking grass and exploring the woods were the limits of available entertainment? Did you get along with your parents?

2. *What were your morals, and their source?* Were you religious? Did you believe in a supreme being? More than one? Did you believe humanity was inherently good or evil? Neither? Was your basic philosophy/faith home-

spun, given to you by your family, or learned later in life, perhaps at school or from an early romantic partner? What qualities did you admire most in others?

3. *What was your opinion on violence and weaponry?* Not all black ops were soldiers and cops. Did you believe that killing was sometimes necessary? Did you hunt? Did you own and use firearms? Blades? Did you protest war, either quietly or publicly?

4. *Did you believe in life on other planets?* Had you ever seen a UFO? Did you know anybody who claimed to be an abductee? Did you think we were alone in the universe? Did you think the government was hiding the truth about aliens?

5. *How did you feel about your native country?* Were you a proud patriot, antipatriotic or just indifferent to the concept? Did you think your government was honest, just and well-run? Did you think your government's agencies and staff were competent and worthy of respect?

6. *What was your career and what were your motives?* What did you do for a living? Did you enjoy it, or just do it to pay the rent? Did you have a career, or drift from job to job? What *really* motivated you? Money? Power? Comfort? Friends? Love? Sex? Travel? Justice? Learning? The thrill of adventure? What were your hobbies and pursuits, other than your work?

7. *What were the most important moments of your life?* Who was your first love? Who was your first close friend to die? When were you happiest and most satisfied? What is your most painful memory?

You don't need to write down all the answers in the form of a character story (p. B78), but if you have the time, please consider it! If you don't have the time, just a quick read-through can improve your character concept dramatically.

Academy Experiences

Once you have a general impression – at least mental answers to the questions above – put the whole thing through the hell of the Academy (see Chapter 2; specific page references are also provided below):

Year One: What were you doing when the Company approached you (p. 31)? Why did you decide to accept? How did you respond to what they told you about aliens, monsters and the other threats alive in the world? Did you make any friends in the first couple of days (p. 31)? Did they live? If not, did you see them die? How did you feel when their names went up on the Spire (p. 30)? Which book-learning subjects did you “test out” of (p. 32)? Which drills (p. 34) were the most difficult? How did you use your ten “excuses” (p. 34)? Did any of your friends make an escape attempt (p. 37), or discuss one with you?

Year Two: Were you already good at chess (p. 35), or did you have to learn the game from scratch? Do you play aggressively or defensively? How did you do in the final

tournament? Were you a swimmer or a rugby player (p. 36)? What was your opinion of those who chose differently? How successful were you at your sport? When the Draft (p. 35) began, what were your three departments of choice (p. 36)? Who actually drafted you – and how did you feel about that?

Year Three: Were you already combat-trained and placed in an advanced class (p. 36), or were you new to combat training? How well did you take to manhandling and skullcracking (p. 36)? Did you fight your drill sergeant? How did you take to firearm drills (p. 37) and demolitions training (p. 37)? Were you seriously injured? Did you discover a favorite weapon that you still prefer today?

Year Four: Did you prefer the social training (p. 37) to combat, finding it challenging and creative, or did you find it tedious? Did you ever fail? What were the consequences (p. 38) if you did? What was your most triumphant moment? What was the most interesting challenge for you at the General's Ball (p. 38)?

Year Five: When you experienced your sacrifice drill (p. 39), were you the one who made the sacrifice? If not, why? Were any of your teammates shot or maimed during drills with the log (p. 39)? Did you cut their bodies free or try to drag them to safety with the log? Did they live? How did you spend your last month in the Caribbean (p. 39)? Do you live on a Company base or do you have a cover identity?

Finally, go back to the questions posed in *Pre-Academy Life*. How many of your answers – your morals, feelings about violence, belief in aliens, and so on – have changed? What events changed them?

By the time you're done, you'll know what makes your black op tick, and have a few anecdotes to share around the campfire when you're grilling ice weasels on a stick.



Basic and Departmental Requirements

Attribute Minima

Surviving the Company's education requires superior stamina, strength, speed and intelligence; therefore, a black op may have no attribute below 14. A *cadet's* attributes can be much less impressive than this, but the Academy regimen will dramatically improve all of his attributes by pushing him to the peak of his potential. Black ops can and often do have attributes that exceed 20!



Basic Advantages and Disadvantages

Advantages: By graduation, every black op has the advantages Alertness +3 [15 points], Combat Reflexes [15 points], High Pain Threshold [10 points], Strong Will +5 [20 points], Toughness DR 1 [10 points], Very Fit [15 points] and Zeroed [10 points] (p. CI32). Black ops also have the Company as a Patron. The Company is powerful, provides valuable equipment and has access to knowledge and technology beyond that of the normal world. It appears on a roll of 15 or less, making it worth 105 points.

Ops may *exceed* any of these advantages, of course, if they wish. For instance, many ops will have the second level of Toughness.

Disadvantages: On the down side, an op's association with the Company is a Secret [-30 points], and the life of every op revolves around an Extremely Hazardous Duty [-20 points].

The total value of this "basic package" is 150 points.

Basic Cadet Skills

To graduate, every cadet must have the following skills at the listed level or higher *and* must have at least one full character point in each:

Acting-14, Animal Handling-13, Anthropology-13, Area Knowledge (Earth)-16, Boxing-15, Climbing-14, Driving (Automobile)-15, Driving (Tracked)-15, Electronics (Computers)-13, Gunner (Machine Gun)-18, Guns (Pistol)-18, Guns (Rifle)-18, Judo-15, Karate-15, Mind Block-15, Naturalist-13, Piloting (Helicopter)-15, Piloting (Light Airplane)-15, Psychology-13, Wrestling-15 and any two foreign languages at 13. Black ops must also be fluent in English, if that is not their native tongue.

Furthermore, every graduating cadet must have the following skills at level 12 or higher *and* must have at least half a point in each (which will often give a level much higher than 12):

Armory (Hand Weapons), Armory (Rifles and Handguns), Artificial Intelligence, Astronomy, Bard, Bicycling, Boating, Botany, Bow, Chemistry, Chess, Computer Operation, Computer Programming, Crossbow, Dancing, Demolition, Ecology, Electronics Operation (Communications), Engineer (Electrical), Engineer (Mechanical), Fencing, Gambling, Geology, Guns

(Flamethrower), History, Knife, Leadership, Literature, Mathematics, Mechanic (Automobile), Mechanic (Helicopter), Motorcycle (Medium and Heavy), Orienteering, Parachuting, Philosophy, Physician, Physics, Physiology, Physiology (Grey), Poetry, Powerboat, Psychology (Grey), Running, Savoir-Faire, Scuba, Shortsword, Sign Language (AMESLAN), Skating, Skiing, Spear, Stealth, Streetwise, Swimming, Tactics, Telegraphy, Throwing, Writing, Xenology and Zoology.

Black ops who were rugby players must also have *at least* half a point in Rugby (a P/A Sports skill defaulting to ST-5 or DX-5; see p. B49).

Departmental Curricula

The "basic cadet skills" are what every op has at his command. In addition, cadets are given specialized training by the departments that draft them. The minimum requirement for each department is described below. Note that defaults *may* be used to meet these requirements! Where applicable, the levels and specializations specified below take precedence over those listed above.

Combat Department

A Combat op must take optional specializations (see p. B43) in History (two specialties: Military History *and* Martial-Arts History), Physics (Ballistics) and Psychology (Combat Psychology), rather than take the unspecialized versions of those skills. Furthermore, his Physics skill must have an effective level of 15 for general use, requiring Physics-16 to counter the -1 penalty for specializing in Ballistics.

Next, a Combat op's Boxing, Judo, Karate and Wrestling skills must all be at level 17+, his Guns (Pistol) and Guns (Rifle) skills must be at level 20+, his Mathematics skill must be at level 15+, and his First Aid and Tactics skills must be at level 16+.

Finally, a Combat op must have the following skills at level 12 or higher:

Armory (two *additional* specialties chosen by the op), Beam Weapons (Lasers), Camouflage, Diplomacy, Engineer (Bombs and Traps), Engineer (Combat Engineering), Engineer (Nuclear Weapons), Explosive Ordnance Disposal, Fast-Draw (Pistol), Forward Observer, Garrote, Hiking, Meditation (the M/VH version), NBC Warfare, Nuclear Physics, Professional Skill (Machinist), Speed-Load (Clip-loading), Strategy and Traps.

Intelligence Department

An Intelligence op's Anthropology, Gambling, History, Psychology, Savoir-Faire, Stealth and Streetwise skills must all be at level 20+.

In addition, an Intelligence op must have the following skills at level 12 or higher:

Criminology, Cryptanalysis, Detect Lies, Diplomacy, Electronics Operation (Security Systems), Electronics Operation (Sensors), Escape, Fast-Talk, Holdout, Intelligence Analysis, Lockpicking, Sex Appeal, Shadowing and two *more* foreign languages (for a total of four).

Science Department

A Science op's Computer Operation, Physiology (Grey), Psychology (Grey), Writing and Xenology skills must all be at level 17+.

As well, a Science op must have the skills Diplomacy-12, Physiology (Brainsucker)-17, Research-17, Teaching-14 and three *additional* Electronics Operation specialties at level 12 each.

Lastly, a Science op must have level 20+ in three of the following skills, and level 14+ in another five:

Astronomy, Biochemistry, Botany, Chemistry, Ecology, Genetics, Geology, Hydrology, Metallurgy, Paraphysics, Physician, Physics, Physiology, Psionics, Psychology and Zoology.

Security Department

Security ops have more leeway in their curriculum than other ops, and often have the broadest range of skills overall. In the Academy, potential secops take many of the "elective" courses offered by other departments; they are expected to know a little bit about *everything*.

A secop's Judo and Physician skills must be at level 20+. He must also have Diplomacy-16, Electronics Operation (Security Systems)-15, Forensics-16, NBC Warfare-16, Professional Skill (Firefighter)-12 and Traps-16.

Beyond that, a Security op must select two skills from the unique requirements listed for *each* of the other four departments, and put at least a full point into each of those skills. The skills chosen must be specific to the department in question and not simply improved levels of the basic cadet skills or Security department requirements. For instance, Metallurgy and Research are valid choices from the Science list; Computer Operation and Writing are not.

Technology Department

All Technology ops must purchase the Gadgeteer advantage at the 50-point "Quick Gadgeteering" level (see pp. CI25, CI123); any techie can turn the contents of a suburban kitchen into a remote-controlled, walking bomb, provided the toaster was made after 1967 and he can scrounge up a Japanese robot toy . . .

A Technology op's Artificial Intelligence, Mathematics and Physics skills must all be at level 17+. He must also



have at least one *extra* Armory specialty at 14, Computer Hacking-20, Computer Programming-20, Electronics (four *more* specialties)-15, Electronics Operation (four *more* specialties)-15, Engineer (Bombs & Traps)-15, Engineer (Robotics)-15, Mechanic (Robotics)-15, Mechanic (two *more* specialties)-15, Paraphysics-16 and Scrounging-17.

Psi-Ops

Psi-ops frequently receive leeway in the required regimen, both general and departmental. This is especially true of those with psychokinesis. A psi-op may ignore the required *levels* for skills on the *Basic Cadet Skills* list, but must still have at least half a point in each. Psi-ops can also get away with only a 10 or higher (defaults count) in any departmental requirement that is normally needed at level 12+.

Psi-ops with PK Power 5+ can *entirely* ignore up to three normally required skills, in addition to the breaks mentioned above. The GM should note that these skills are missing when giving the psi-op mission assignments.

Finally, all psi-ops must take the Unusual Background (Psionic) advantage [50 points] (see p. 73) and must follow the Psi-ops' Code (see p. 54). The Code is considered to be a Vow worth -5 points; although the consequences of breaking the Code are severe, there is a great deal of overlap with the ops' Extremely Hazardous Duty.



Advantages: Eidetic Memory, Lightning Calculator, Mathematical Ability, Single-Minded, Unfazeable.

Disadvantages: Compulsive Behavior, No Sense of Humor, Obsession, Odious Personal Habit (One-track mind, -5 points).

Skills: One or two Scientific skills, with obscene amounts of points piled into them.

Bruce Lee

The Company *likes* to recruit martial artists. Dedication to the martial arts requires an ideal balance of passion and stability, and provides a useful combative edge. Most casual

friends will think of a "Bruce Lee" as a martial artist first and a person second – he is focused on his art, and enjoys the rush of hand-to-hand conflict. Some Bruce Lees are showoffs, while others are sober and grim, moving like cats, striking like cobras, and meditative when at peace.

Advantages: Ambidexterity, Enhanced Dodge, Enhanced Parry, Increased Speed, Strong Will (beyond the five levels required of all ops!), Trained By A Master, Weapon Master.

Disadvantages: Code of Honor, Disciplines of Faith.

Skills: Terrifying levels Acrobatics, Boxing, Judo, Karate and Wrestling are a must, along with plenty of maneuvers (pp. C1162ff). If *GURPS Martial Arts* is being used, a Bruce Lee will be proficient in one or more styles from his pre-Academy days. Academy training focuses entirely on the twin styles of Manhandling and Skulldracking (see p. 36).

Character Types

In terms of skills and mission roles, character types are largely pre-defined by the various departments. But within each department exists a variety that belies stereotypes. Some soldiers fight because they like to kill things; some fight because they know it's necessary. By the same token, not all hackers are socially-inept technophiles – some are cheerful, pleasant young women who would rather talk about NASCAR than C++.

Brainiac

Every black op maintains a high standard of physical excellence, but some are also very *cerebral*. They think before they act . . . and while they act, and after they act. Brainiacs analyze things while engaging in casual dialogue. They quote their sources when they argue. They read a lot. Technical and scientific brainiacs are the classics, obsessed with their fields of knowledge, while martial brainiacs tend to go on about the minutiae of formal tactics, or picky medical details about types of nerve damage. Brainiacs tend to cluster together to engage in deep, incomprehensible conversation about their obsessions.

Bruiser

Less elegant but frequently more intimidating than a Bruce Lee, the bruiser likes to beat things up – or at least carries himself as though he does. Some bruisers are "gentle giants," massive collections of muscle who never move to violence unless it's necessary. Others see every combat as a bar-room brawl, an excuse to cut loose and have some fun smashing heads. Rarely fond of leadership positions, bruisers are happiest when their fists and guns are being put to good use.

Advantages: Bruisers are beefy, often with phenomenal ST (remember to use the costs on p. C18) and a few Extra Hit Points. Unfazeable isn't uncommon – some are absolutely stolid.

Disadvantages: Ugly is probably the most common disadvantage, with "gentle giants" adding Chummy, Compulsive Generosity or Humble. Gigantism is always appropriate!

Skills: Any close-combat skill, with a less complex list of maneuvers than a typical Bruce Lee – a few points in Choke Hold and Neck Snap is all a Bruiser really needs . . . High levels of Intimidation are ubiquitous.



Career Soldier

Career soldiers are those who thrive on the military lifestyle. They enjoy the simple pleasures of mess halls, marching drills and drab offices filled with old photos of boot camp and Army-Navy football games. The career soldier's ideal breakfast is S-O-S (if you don't know, don't ask), bitter coffee and scrambled eggs that have been rehydrated in a plastic tub. The order, camaraderie and sense of function and place that the military provides are what career soldiers value most. They fall easily into leadership positions, and tend to be likeable and easy-going when the situation allows for it, snapping into ordered discipline when the situation demands it.

Advantages: Charisma, Common Sense.

Disadvantages: Code of Honor, Sense of Duty (Those under my command).

Skills: Higher-than-average levels of Military skills and Social skills common to soldiers, such as Carousing and Leadership.

Company Man

Life as a black op is a new beginning for *any* cadet; the Academy places you in a special elite and gives you a special purpose. For some, this inspires a level of loyalty and dedication that overwhelms all other aspects of character. A Company man defines his position in the universe in terms of his position in his department and his role in the Company's work. Company men are happiest when they receive the call to duty, and patiently await the buzz of Omicron. Some Company men are irritating, smug and by-the-book (many secops are like this), but others simply thrive happily on the sense of belonging that the Company provides.

Advantages, Disadvantages and Skills: Whatever best suits their role, along with a Sense of Duty to the Company or even Fanaticism to the Company's cause.

Hacker

The hackers know how important they are to the cause and really get off on knowing it. Corporations, small towns, entire *nations* are dealing with the Greys, whether or not they realize it; the hackers break in and expose the trails in the electronic ether. Hackers are motivated by the challenge, riding the high of overcoming the best defenses the enemy has to offer. When they aren't hacking, they're

talking about their victories and itching to "try something new with the system." They aren't braniacs; braniacs are thinkers. Hackers don't contemplate, analyze or look before they leap – they just *do*, and brag about it afterward.

Advantages: Mathematical Ability or even Intuitive Mathematician.

Disadvantages: Impulsiveness, Odious Personal Habit (Abusive, stuck-up little creep), Overconfidence, Trickster (applied to hacking instead of physical trickery).

Skills: Computer Hacking, Computer Operation and Computer Programming at abusive levels. Related Electronics and Electronics Operation skills.

Mouse

A mouse is an op whose specialty is getting *into* places unseen and unheard. The classic mouse can squeeze through air ducts, slip across rooftops and navigate a maze of sewers by sound alone. Physically, mice tend to be short, compact and muscular – some of them look like kids when they stand next to a bruiser. The physical equivalent of the hacker, they love to be where they aren't wanted! The average mouse lacks the abusive personality of a hacker, however, which is fortunate for those who have to work with them. In fact, most mice exhibit the happy sense of comfort associated with career soldiers.

Advantages: Absolute Direction, Alertness (beyond the three levels required of all ops), Double-Jointed, Intuition, Night Vision, Perfect Balance.

Disadvantages: Trickster.

Skills: Camouflage, Climbing, Electronics Operation (Security Systems), Escape, Lockpicking, Stealth, Traps.

Mr. Cool

Sure, he's full of himself – but it's infectious. You *want* to like Mr. Cool . . . and you do.

Ops of this type prefer the black-tie-and-evening-gown side of Company work, the suave play of cloak and dagger. This includes everything from a private party at the Greek embassy, to a secret meeting of CEOs in Tokyo, to the family funeral of a Mafia don. Mr. Cool fits in best where sharp shoes, a ready smile and expensive tastes carry the day.

Advantages: Alcohol Tolerance, Charisma, Cultural Adaptability, Daredevil, Empathy, Fashion Sense, Imperturbable, Sanctity, Voice.

Disadvantages: Gregarious, Lecherousness, Trademark.



Skills: Acting, Appreciate Beauty, Area Knowledge (many and varied), Dancing, Diplomacy, Erotic Art, Savoir-Faire (including specialized versions such as Corporate and Military), Sex Appeal and the entire Thief/Spy list.

Psycho

Some psychos actually *are* crazy, while others just like to be underestimated or left alone – and some of them just get off on scaring their buddies. Happy, clowning psychos are great to have along on a mission, provided they don't get on your nerves; their tendency to enjoy anything that happens is good for morale. Brooding, angst-ridden psychos aren't very good company, but they're often fiercely intimidating in combat.

Advantages: Daredevil, any form of Luck. The more positive variety of psycho often has genuine Charisma as well.

Disadvantages: Bloodlust, Impulsiveness, Odious Personal Habit, On the Edge, Overconfidence, Trademark, Trickster.

Skills: Acting and Intimidation are common for psychos who aren't *really* nuts. For real psychos, dangerous skills like Demolition and Poisons can be fun!

Romeo

While a Mr. Cool is smooth on a social level, a Romeo is smooth on a very personal one. This kind of operative – male or female – has an uncanny knack for persuading anyone to do anything, and for extracting sensitive information from the tightest sources through natural charisma and raw attractiveness. Romeos generally get what they want, via sweet-talking seduction or silver-tongued promises, and can greatly simplify many kinds of missions. Romeos generally come out of the Intelligence, Combat and (less often) Security departments.

Advantages: Appearance, Charisma, Empathy, Voice.

Disadvantages: Compulsive Lying, Lecherousness.

Skills: Acting, Erotic Art, Fast-Talk, Savoir-Faire, Sex Appeal.

Shadow

Shadows *watch*. They are quiet, observant and frustratingly smug. Since they see themselves as the eyes of higher authority (and they're frequently right), they are often resented by their companions. But when the chips are down, the shadows are there, with a well-placed knife in the forehead of your foe and a sharp command to take cover. They take pleasure in their work – possibly more pleasure than



any other kind of op. They are the eyes of the Company and the hands of stability. They lurk most often in Security and Intelligence, but there are shadows everywhere.

Advantages: Alertness (beyond the three levels required of all ops), Danger Sense, Unfazeable.

Disadvantages: Callous, Edgy.

Skills: Any appropriate to their role in the Company, with emphasis on things like Gesture, Lip Reading, Shadowing and Stealth.

Tinker

These are mostly found in the Technology department, but the grunts have a few tinkers among them as well, never satisfied with the way a gun is manufactured. Unlike braniacs and hackers, tinkers are almost always fun people . . . if you don't mind explosive, chemical and radiation hazards. They love to take things apart, find out what makes them tick and rebuild them *better*. The collective efforts of the Company's tinkers have moved its technology decades past that of the mundane world. Tinkers are passionate and focused, often to the point of ignoring the rest of the world.

Advantages: Gadgeteer, Single-Minded, Versatile.

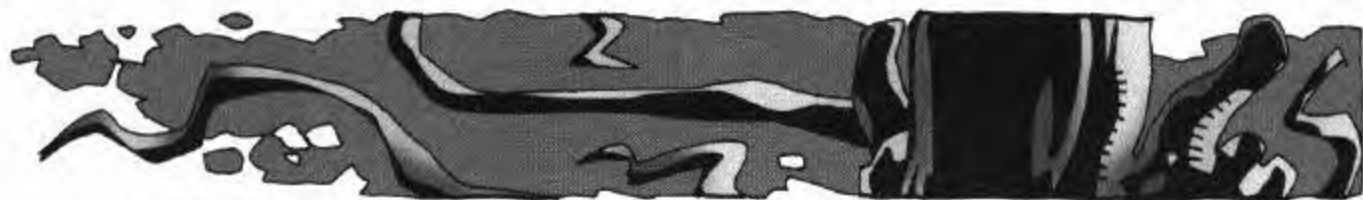
Disadvantages: Absent-Mindedness, Compulsive Behavior (Taking things apart), Curious, Impulsiveness.

Skills: Armory, Electronics, Electronics Operation, Engineer and Mechanic, in as much variety and depth as possible. Scrounging is a must!

Warrior

To a warrior, combat is a spiritual experience – blood, honor, iron and fire, bound into a focus. Pain and injury are baptisms, the death of each foe an ascension to heaven. Other people see warriors as dangerous, deluded psychotics. That's because they don't understand the power of blood, the lunatic beauty of honorable combat.

While members of the Cadre (p. 25) exemplify the warrior concept, the Combat department is riddled with the strain. Warriors *love war*. They withdraw into solemn combat drills in moments of peace, or into meditative states where they almost seem to venerate their fallen foes.





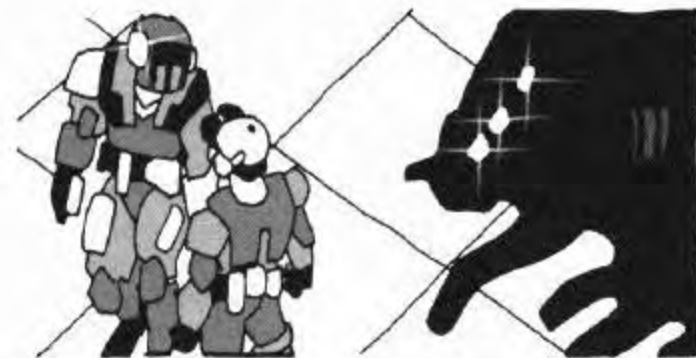
Advantages: Alertness (beyond the three levels required of all ops), Rapid Healing, Sharpshooter, Strong Will (beyond the normal five levels), Weapon Master. Cadre members have a Higher Purpose (the destruction of all beasts in combat).

Disadvantages: Low Appearance (from tattoos and ritual scarring), Bloodlust, Obsession, Odious Personal Habit (Dangerous lunatic), Vow. Warriors are more likely than most to have slipped Berserk past Company screening. At the GM's option, the Company may turn a blind eye to such infractions, acknowledging that, in some cases, berserkers are useful.

Skills: Everything at required minima except combat skills, which are pumped to the max and enshrined in their souls. In particular, true warriors *really* enjoy killing with blades and bare hands, as well as with their guns.

with it should at least have the decency to come up with a good story for it!

Some notes on specific advantages:



Advantages, Disadvantages & Skills

Advantages

The world of *GURPS Black Ops* is custom-tailored to cinematic, high-powered action roleplaying. Any cinematic advantage – such as Hard to Kill, Sharpshooter or Weapon Master – is available to black ops and their foes, unless the GM specifically forbids it.

The GM may even allow players to go beyond the merely cinematic, choosing the occasional racial or super advantage. This is a matter of taste, but (for instance) advantages such as Hyper-Reflexes and Hyper-Strength are appropriate for many Combat ops, and could represent a cinematic degree of physical training.

Advantages that are actually *supernatural* are inappropriate, unless the GM approves them on the grounds that they are somehow psionic in nature. This can only be stretched so far, though, and the player trying to get away

Gadgeteer

p. CI25

Only Technology ops may purchase the 50-point version of this advantage. Other ops may be gadgeteers, but must use the 25-point version. Gizmos (p. CI124) are the exclusive province of Technology and Intelligence. At the GM's discretion, Intelligence ops who *aren't* gadgeteers may purchase Gizmos, on the theory that they are given a constant supply of strange gadgets by the Technology department.

Iron Hand

p. CI26

While a cinematic approach to the martial arts is recommended in a *Black Ops* campaign, this advantage would not be permitted to ops, as it can hinder the operation of specialized equipment. It should be reserved for their foes.

Military Rank

p. B22

While the Company in general (and the Combat department in particular) is certainly *military*, black ops do not hold traditional rank or formal organizational status. There are active ops, light-duty ops, retired ops and dead ops. Beyond that, no distinctions are made beyond the level of squad or mission leader, which is assigned on a per-mission basis.

This is not to say that certain ops aren't more likely to be chosen for leadership positions than others – there is a definite "pecking order" in each department. However, the pecking order is based on actual skill, real leadership and past performance, not on arbitrary ranks.

Unusual Background

p. B23

Knowledge of any psionic skill except Mind Block requires the Unusual Background (Psionic) advantage, worth 50 points. Latent (untrained) psis do not require this advantage, but they *do* require an explanation as to why they haven't been further trained at the Academy!

Disadvantages

Certain disadvantages (from *GURPS Basic Set* and *Compendium I*) are prohibited to ops due to Academy screening . . . and the Academy has an excellent track record when it comes to weeding out flaws it doesn't want to see in an op! Some "forbidden" disadvantages might easily slip through the cracks, however – for instance, a cadet could *conceivably* go the entire five years without

revealing his Kleptomania, and there are certainly undetectable terminal illnesses to be had. If the player can explain how a prohibited disadvantage escaped unnoticed, then the GM may opt to permit it.

Forbidden List:

Addiction, Age, Albinism, Alcoholism, Amnesia.

Bad Back, Berserk, Blindness.

Cannot Learn, Chronic Depression, Clueless, Color Blindness, Combat Paralysis, Compulsive Behaviors worth more than -15 points in total, Confused, Cowardice, Cursed.

Deafness, Delicate Metabolism, Delusions, Dependency, Dyslexia.

Epilepsy.

Fat.

Glory Hound, Gullibility.

Hard of Hearing, Hemophilia, Honesty, Hunchback.

Ignorance, Illiteracy, Incompetence, Indecisive, Innumerate, Intolerance.

Jinxed.

Kleptomania, Klutz.

Lame, Laziness, Low Empathy, Low Pain Threshold, Low Self-Image.

Manic-Depressive, Migraine, Missing Digit (Thumb), Motion Sickness, Mute.

Night Blindness, No Depth Perception, No Physical Body, No Sense of Smell/Taste, Non-Iconographic.

Oblivious, One Arm, One Eye, One Hand, Overweight.

Pacifism (any), Paranoia, Phobia (any), Prefrontal Lobotomy, Primitive.

Quadriplegic.

Reclusive, Reduced Move.

Sadism, Selfish, Selfless, Semi-Literacy, Short Attention Span, Shyness, Slave Mentality, Sleepwalker, Split Personality, Stuttering.

Terminally Ill, Tourette's Syndrome.

Uneducated, Unfit.

Very Unfit.

Weak Immune System, Weak Will.

A couple of "classic nasty fighter" disadvantages, such as Berserk, are prohibited. Many recruits have these, but they are soon beaten down to quirk level if that cadet is to survive training. The Company appreciates a little lusty zeal and artistry in combat, but it must remain under the soldier's control or the mission is jeopardized. Strong-willed cadets sometimes succeed in faking control of such afflictions for long enough to get themselves and their team killed in the field.

There are other disadvantages (such as correctable Bad Sight, or Easy to Read) which the Company doesn't like to see, but which won't keep a recruit out provided the qualifications of training are met after any penalties are applied

(for instance, a Solipsist would need sufficiently high Social skills to overcome his -3 penalty). There are still others (such as Flashbacks or Nightmares) that can be *caused* by life as a black op, or even by Academy training!

The GM may opt to veto any combination of "legal" disadvantages which he feels creates an unacceptable operative. Furthermore, crippling disadvantages or combinations *gained in play* result in a "honorable discharge" from active Company work – with a move to a desk or training job as a retired op.

Any combination of *behavioral* (i.e., mental) disadvantages that give a general reaction penalty exceeding -2 is prohibited. The Company tolerates the occasional eccentricity – everyone rubs *somebody* the wrong way, after all – but it will not tolerate the morale hazard of a total ass. Physical appearance has no bearing on recruitment in general, although certain specialties in the Intelligence department are reserved for attractive ops.

Some notes on specific disadvantages:

Fanaticism

p. B33

This is a tricky issue for the Company. Fanatic devotion to the Company and its war against humanity's foes is acceptable, encouraged to a large degree, but fanatic devotion to a *nation*, or any other entity besides the Company, is forbidden – there is too great a chance it will give rise to a conflict of interest on pivotal missions in the war for human survival.

This is one of many reasons why fewer than 5% of Combat ops have experience in special-forces units, contrary to what one might assume. Special-forces training includes manipulation of soldiers' emotions to create not only highly specialized troops, but highly motivated troops. To most armed forces, "motivated" includes unreasoning pride and patriotism, drummed into them day and night by assertions that they are *the best*, and that they are *the best* because they are [insert unit type] and trained by the best country in the world.

The Company's own regimen includes this kind of conditioning, of course, but turning a truly dedicated SEAL into a black op requires both deprogramming and reprogramming the soldier. Sometimes, it's worth it.



New Disadvantage

Grey Attunement -10 points

This is a double-edged sword. For whatever reason, your mind is particularly attuned to the telepathy used by the Greys. Any Grey targeting you with a telepathic skill gets +10 to skill and +2 to Power! Furthermore, Grey telepaths can *read beyond your surface thoughts* (see p. 85). Finally, you may not use the Mind Block skill to defend yourself against Greys.



The upside is that you can *sense* the Greys, passively and automatically. Anytime a Grey uses Telepathy within 100 yards of you, the GM will secretly roll against your IQ, applying normal range modifiers (p. B201). On a success, you know there is a Grey nearby; on success by 6+, you know the exact direction and approximate (+/-50%) distance as well! On a failure, you notice nothing. A critical failure burns the sense out for 1d hours, during which time you are no more telepathically susceptible to the Greys than anyone else.

Any character except an Antipsi can take this advantage; it requires no Unusual Background, although it *is* an indication of some kind of psionic latency. Company scientists estimate that 15% of the population have this disadvantage.

Note that humans "thinking" in Grey Code don't trip the attunement's "radar," and receive no bonus against attuned characters.

Skills

Due to the specialized, high-pressure training offered by the Academy, beginning black ops may have any number of character points in skills; they are not limited by their age in any way. As with advantages, cinematic skills and maneuvers are perfectly acceptable in a *Black Ops* campaign, unless the GM specifically forbids them. Supernatural skills are not appropriate, however.



New Skill

Grey Code (Mental/Very Hard)

No Default

Prerequisite: Telereceive at 20

This is a psionic language, the skill of interpreting and creating the telepathic imagery that the Greys use for communication.

Telepaths with this skill may use the normal rules for Telereceive and Telesend when dealing with the Greys, but at the *lower* of the appropriate telepathic skill or *half* Grey Code skill (round down). E.g., a telepath with Telereceive-25, Telesend-18 and Grey Code-14 would have Telereceive-7 and Telesend-7 when dealing with the Greys.

Separate rolls against this skill are required when the GM determines that a particularly *alien* concept has been picked up by the psi.

Use of this skill is both physically and emotionally taxing. Every time a human uses Grey Code, he must make a Will roll at the outset, at a cumulative -1 penalty per Will roll after the first. On a failed roll, the character loses one level of Telepathy Power *permanently* (this can be regained normally with earned character points) and must make a Fright Check at -10.

A full day of abstinence from Grey Code use will "erase" -1 from the cumulative penalty to the Will roll. Failing a Will roll starts the slate clean, erasing *all* accumulated penalties.

Martial Arts

While many cadets have martial-arts experience before entering the Academy, the martial-arts regimen offered there requires them to *unlearn* much of it. The restrictions of traditional styles are cast aside, in a manner that would make even a Jeet Kune Do master blink in confusion! The training focuses on the basic Boxing, Judo, Karate and Wrestling skills, teaching all maneuvers with equal attention. Individual students are encouraged to develop their favorite moves as they progress, customizing their style to suit their own strengths and preferences.

In order to reflect this approach, *any* of the realistic maneuvers from *GURPS Compendium 1* and *Martial Arts* may be learned by any black op who can meet the prerequisites, with no other restrictions whatsoever.

An op who is Trained By A Master (representing the elective advanced courses offered at the Academy) may likewise purchase *any* cinematic maneuver. The style rules simply do not apply to Academy training, although the Style Familiarity advantage does, when dealing with opponents from outside the Company, and ops retain familiarity with any styles they learned before entering the Academy.

Academy instructors refer to any "hard" fighting (punches, kicks and other offensive strikes) as *skullcracking*, and any "soft" fighting (throws, grapples and locks) as *manhandling*. They use a simple belt-rating system, derived from the op's lowest bare-handed fighting skill (Boxing, Judo, Karate or Wrestling):



White Belt: A beginner; skills at 15 or less. Most cadets have this rating in their first year of training at the Academy; some geeks and hackers graduate with it.

Red Belt: Lowest skill is 16-17. This is the minimum rating for any Combat department graduate.

Blue Belt: Lowest skill is 18-19.

Black Belt: Lowest skill is 20 for a *First Dan* black belt in the Academy system. A First Dan is indicated by a black belt with no adornment. Each additional *Dan* earns the student a vertical red stripe on his belt. Second Dan is skill 21-22, Third Dan is 23-24, Fourth Dan is 25-26, Fifth Dan is 27-28 and Sixth Dan is 29-31. Each additional Dan is represented by three further levels of skill.

Thus, a Combat op with Boxing-20, Judo-17, Karate-20 and Wrestling-18 would wear a black *gi* (the standard uniform) with a red belt. This scale differs from *GURPS Martial Arts* because it accounts for the ops' level of natural talent and the Academy's high expectations!

Psychic Powers

Psionic advantages and skills from *GURPS Basic Set* and *Psionics* are available to black ops, with the following special rules and restrictions:

Psi is rare: While a large chunk of the population has some form of psionic potential (see p. 26), most of it manifests in the form of passive, low-level abilities like Danger Sense and Empathy. Any training requires a 50-point Unusual Background advantage (p. 73).

Powerful psi is fickle and even rarer: Of course, the Committee is always looking for candidates who seem to have psi powers *and* look as though they could survive the Academy. Beginning psi-ops may spend no more than 20 character points (total) on psionic power, based on the *final* power cost, after applying any enhancements or limitations.

E.g., a character with 20 levels of one-skill Telekinesis Power [80 points] and -75% worth of limitations (net cost 20 points) is an acceptable – if extreme – starting psi. Interesting exceptions to this rule may be allowed, with the GM's permission! In play, power levels can be increased normally with earned points.

Psionic NPCs who have not received the benefit of Academy training and power development rarely have more than 10 points' worth of psi power, with rare and nasty exceptions among the Rogues.

Departmental Templates

For those who wish to create an op *quickly*, we've provided five templates, one for each department. These include only *required* skills, advantages and disadvantages. The player is free to choose additional attributes, advantages, disadvantages, quirks and skills.

Each template has 650 points spent already. By spending the remaining 50 points and taking up to -40 points in disadvantages and -5 points in quirks (for a further 45 points), there's plenty of room for customization! There is no psi-op template; any of the five templates below can easily be made into one.

Skill Listings: Skills are listed in the format *Skill Name-Actual Level [Point Cost] (Type) Relative Level*; for instance "Skating-12 [1] (P/H) DX-2." For the sake of simplicity, the "/TL" has been omitted on technological skills.



Attributes: ST 19 [100], DX 18 [125], IQ 14 [45], HT 16 [80].

Advantages: Alertness +3 [15], Combat Reflexes [15], High Pain Threshold [10], Patron (The Company; 15 or less) [105], Strong Will +5 [20], Toughness DR I [10], Very Fit [15 points], Zeroed [10].

Disadvantages: Extremely Hazardous Duty [-20], Secret (Black op) [-30].

Skills

Acting-14	[2]	(M/A)	IQ
Animal Handling-13	[2]	(M/H)	IQ-1
Anthropology-13	[2]	(M/H)	IQ-1
Area Knowledge (Earth)-16	[4]	(M/E)	IQ+2
Armory (Beam Handguns)-12	[1/2]	(M/A)	IQ-2
Armory (Hand Weapons)-12	[1/2]	(M/A)	IQ-2
Armory (Rifles & Handguns)-12	[1/2]	(M/A)	IQ-2
Armory (Vehicular Weaponry)-12	[1/2]	(M/A)	IQ-2
Artificial Intelligence-12	[1]	(M/H)	IQ-2
Astronomy-12	[1]	(M/H)	IQ-2
Bard-12	[1/2]	(M/A)	IQ-2
Beam Weapons (Lasers)-20	[1]	(P/E)	DX+2*
Bicycling-17	[1/2]	(P/E)	DX-1
Boating-16	[1/2]	(P/A)	DX-2
Botany-12	[1]	(M/H)	IQ-2
Bow-16	[1]	(P/H)	DX-2
Boxing-17	[1]	(P/A)	DX-1
Camouflage-13	[1/2]	(M/E)	IQ-1
Chemistry-12	[1]	(M/H)	IQ-2
Chess-13	[1/2]	(M/E)	IQ-1
Climbing-18	[2]	(P/A)	DX
Computer Operation-13	[1/2]	(M/E)	IQ-1
Computer Programming-12	[1]	(M/H)	IQ-2
Crossbow-17	[1/2]	(P/E)	DX-1
Dancing-16	[1/2]	(P/A)	DX-2
Demolition-12	[1/2]	(M/A)	IQ-2
Diplomacy-12	[1]	(M/H)	IQ-2
Driving (Automobile)-19	[4]	(P/A)	DX+1
Driving (Tracked)-19	[4]	(P/A)	DX+1
Ecology-12	[1]	(M/H)	IQ-2
Electronics (Computers)-13	[2]	(M/H)	IQ-1
Electronics Operation (Communications)-12	[1/2]	(M/A)	IQ-2
Engineer (Bombs and Traps)-12	[1]	(M/H)	IQ-2
Engineer (Combat Engineering)-12	[1]	(M/H)	IQ-2
Engineer (Electrical)-12	[1]	(M/H)	IQ-2
Engineer (Mechanical)-12	[1]	(M/H)	IQ-2
Engineer (Nuclear Weapons)-12	[1]	(M/H)	IQ-2
Explosive Ordnance Disposal-12	[1]	(M/H)	IQ-2
Fast Draw (Pistol)-18	[1/2]	(P/E)	DX†
Fencing-16	[1/2]	(P/A)	DX-2
First Aid-16	[4]	(M/E)	IQ+2
Forward Observer-12	[1/2]	(M/A)	IQ-2
Gambling-12	[1/2]	(M/A)	IQ-2
Garrote-18	[1]	(P/E)	DX
Geology-12	[1]	(M/H)	IQ-2
Gunner (Machine Gun)-22	[8]	(P/A)	DX+4*

Guns (Flamethrower)-19	[1/2]	(P/E)	DX+1*
Guns (Pistol)-22	[4]	(P/E)	DX+4*
Guns (Rifle)-22	[4]	(P/E)	DX+4*
Hiking-14	[1/2]	(P/A)	HT-2
History (specialized: Military & Martial Arts)-12	[1]	(M/H)	IQ-2
Judo-17	[2]	(P/H)	DX-1
Karate-17	[2]	(P/H)	DX-1
Knife-18	[1]	(P/E)	DX
Language (op's choice)-13	[1]	(M/A)	IQ-1
Language (op's choice)-13	[1]	(M/A)	IQ-1
Leadership-14	[2]	(M/A)	IQ
Literature-12	[1]	(M/H)	IQ-2
Mathematics-15	[6]	(M/H)	IQ+1
Mechanic (Automobile)-12	[1/2]	(M/A)	IQ-2
Mechanic (Helicopter)-12	[1/2]	(M/A)	IQ-2
Meditation-12	[2]	(M/VH)	IQ-2
Mind Block-15	[4]	(M/A)	IQ+1
Motorcycle (Medium and Heavy)-17	[1/2]	(P/E)	DX-1
Naturalist-13	[2]	(M/H)	IQ-1
NBC Warfare-12	[1/2]	(M/A)	IQ-2
No-Landing Extraction-12	[1/2]	(M/A)	IQ-2
Nuclear Physics-12	[2]	(M/VH)	IQ-2
Orienteering-12	[1/2]	(M/A)	IQ-2
Parachuting-17	[1/2]	(P/E)	DX-1
Philosophy-12	[1]	(M/H)	IQ-2
Physician-12	[1]	(M/H)	IQ-2
Physics (specialized: Ballistics)-16	[8]	(M/H)	IQ+2
Physiology-12	[2]	(M/VH)	IQ-2
Physiology (Grey)-12	[2]	(M/VH)	IQ-2
Piloting (Helicopter)-19	[4]	(P/A)	DX+1
Piloting (Light Airplane)-19	[4]	(P/A)	DX+1
Poetry-12	[1/2]	(M/A)	IQ-2
Powerboat-16	[1/2]	(P/A)	DX-2
Professional Skill (Machinist)-12	[1/2]	(M/A)	IQ-2
Psychology (specialized: Combat Psychology)-13	[2]	(M/H)	IQ-1
Psychology (Grey)-12	[1]	(M/H)	IQ-2
Running-14	[1]	(P/H)	HT-2
Savoir-Faire-13	[1/2]	(M/E)	IQ-1
Scuba-12	[1/2]	(M/A)	IQ-2
Shortsword-16	[1/2]	(P/A)	DX-2
Sign Language (AMESLAN)-12	[1/2]	(M/A)	IQ-2
Skating-16	[1]	(P/H)	DX-2
Skiing-16	[1]	(P/H)	DX-2
Spear-16	[1/2]	(P/A)	DX-2
Speed Load (Clip-loading)-17	[1/2]	(P/E)	DX-1
Stealth-16	[1/2]	(P/A)	DX-2
Strategy-12	[1]	(M/H)	IQ-2
Streetwise-12	[1/2]	(M/A)	IQ-2



Swimming-17	[1/2]	(P/E)	DX-1
Tactics-16	[8]	(M/H)	IQ+2
Telegraphy-13	[1/2]	(M/E)	IQ-1
Throwing-16	[1]	(P/H)	DX-2
Traps-12	[1/2]	(M/A)	IQ-2
Wrestling-18	[2]	(P/A)	DX
Writing-12	[1/2]	(M/A)	IQ-2
Xenology-12	[1]	(M/H)	IQ-2
Zoology-12	[1]	(M/H)	IQ-2

* Includes +2 for IQ.
† Includes +1 for Combat Reflexes.

Attributes: ST 14 [45], DX 17 [100], IQ 18 [125], HT 15 [60].

Advantages: Alertness +3 [15], Combat Reflexes [15], High Pain Threshold [10], Patron (The Company; 15 or less) [105], Strong Will +5 [20], Toughness DR 1 [10], Very Fit [15 points], Zeroed [10].

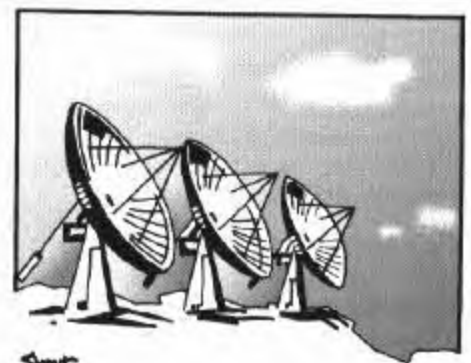
Disadvantages: Extremely Hazardous Duty [-20], Secret (Black op) [-30].

Skills

Acting-18	[2] (M/A)	IQ
Animal Handling-16	[1] (M/H)	IQ-2
Anthropology-20	[8] (M/H)	IQ+2
Area Knowledge (Earth)-20		
	[4] (M/E)	IQ+2
Armory (Hand Weapons)-16		
	[1/2] (M/A)	IQ-2
Armory (Rifles & Handguns)-16		
	[1/2] (M/A)	IQ-2
Artificial Intelligence-16	[1] (M/H)	IQ-2



Astronomy-16	[1] (M/H)	IQ-2
Bard-16	[1/2] (M/A)	IQ-2
Bicycling-16	[1/2] (P/E)	DX-1
Boating-15	[1/2] (P/A)	DX-2
Botany-16	[1] (M/H)	IQ-2
Bow-15	[1] (P/H)	DX-2
Boxing-16	[1] (P/A)	DX-1
Chemistry-16	[1] (M/H)	IQ-2
Chess-18	[1] (M/E)	IQ
Climbing-17	[2] (P/A)	DX
Computer Operation-17	[1/2] (M/E)	IQ-1
Computer Programming-16	[1] (M/H)	IQ-2
Criminology-16	[1/2] (M/A)	IQ-2
Crossbow-16	[1/2] (P/E)	DX-1
Cryptanalysis-16	[1] (M/H)	IQ-2
Dancing-15	[1/2] (P/A)	DX-2
Demolition-16	[1/2] (M/A)	IQ-2
Detect Lies-16	[1] (M/H)	IQ-2
Diplomacy-15	[1/2] (M/H)	IQ-3
Driving (Automobile)-18	[4] (P/A)	DX+1
Driving (Tracked)-18	[4] (P/A)	DX+1
Ecology-16	[1] (M/H)	IQ-2
Electronics (Computers)-16	[1] (M/H)	IQ-2
Electronics Operation (Communications)-16	[1/2] (M/A)	IQ-2
Electronics Operation (Security Systems)-16	[1/2] (M/A)	IQ-2
Electronics Operation (Sensors)-16	[1/2] (M/A)	IQ-2
Engineer (Electrical)-16	[1] (M/H)	IQ-2
Engineer (Mechanical)-16	[1] (M/H)	IQ-2
Escape-14	[1/2] (P/H)	DX-3
Fast-Talk-17	[1] (M/A)	IQ-1
Fencing-15	[1/2] (P/A)	DX-2
Gambling-20	[6] (M/A)	IQ+2
Geology-16	[1] (M/H)	IQ-2
Gunner (Machine Gun)-21	[8] (P/A)	DX+4*
Guns (Flamethrower)-18		
	[1/2] (P/E)	DX+1*
Guns (Pistol)-21	[4] (P/E)	DX+4*
Guns (Rifle)-21	[4] (P/E)	DX+4*
History-20	[8] (M/H)	IQ+2
Holdout-16	[1/2] (M/A)	IQ-2
Intelligence Analysis-16	[1] (M/H)	IQ-2
Judo-15	[1] (P/H)	DX-2
Karate-15	[1] (P/H)	DX-2
Knife-16	[1/2] (P/E)	DX-1
Language (op's choice)-17	[1] (M/A)	IQ-1
Language (op's choice)-17	[1] (M/A)	IQ-1
Language (op's choice)-17	[1] (M/A)	IQ-1
Language (op's choice)-17	[1] (M/A)	IQ-1
Leadership-16	[1/2] (M/A)	IQ-2
Literature-16	[1] (M/H)	IQ-2
Lockpicking-16	[1/2] (M/A)	IQ-2
Mathematics-17	[2] (M/H)	IQ-1
Mechanic (Automobile)-16	[1/2] (M/A)	IQ-2



Mechanic (Helicopter)-16	[1/2] (M/A)	IQ-2
Mind Block-19	[4] (M/A)	IQ+1
Motorcycle (Medium and Heavy)-16	[1/2] (P/E)	DX-1
Naturalist-17	[2] (M/H)	IQ-1
Orienteering-16	[1/2] (M/A)	IQ-2
Parachuting-16	[1/2] (P/E)	DX-1
Philosophy-16	[1] (M/H)	IQ-2
Physician-16	[1] (M/H)	IQ-2
Physics-16	[1] (M/H)	IQ-2
Physiology-16	[2] (M/VH)	IQ-2
Physiology (Grey)-16	[2] (M/VH)	IQ-2
Piloting (Helicopter)-18	[4] (P/A)	DX+1
Piloting (Light Airplane)-18	[4] (P/A)	DX+1
Poetry-16	[1/2] (M/A)	IQ-2
Powerboat-15	[1/2] (P/A)	DX-2
Psychology-20	[8] (M/H)	IQ+2
Psychology (Grey)-16	[1] (M/H)	IQ-2
Running-13	[1] (P/H)	HT-2
Savoir-Faire-20	[4] (M/E)	IQ+2
Scuba-16	[1/2] (M/A)	IQ-2
Sex Appeal-17	[6] (M/A)	HT+2
Shadowing-16	[1/2] (M/A)	IQ-2
Shortsword-15	[1/2] (P/A)	DX-2
Sign Language (AMESLAN)-16	[1/2] (M/A)	IQ-2
Skating-15	[1] (P/H)	DX-2
Skiing-15	[1] (P/H)	DX-2
Spear-15	[1/2] (P/A)	DX-2
Stealth-20	[16] (P/A)	DX+3
Streetwise-20	[6] (M/A)	IQ+2
Swimming-16	[1/2] (P/E)	DX-1
Tactics-16	[1] (M/H)	IQ-2
Telegraphy-17	[1/2] (M/E)	IQ-1
Throwing-15	[1] (P/H)	DX-2
Wrestling-17	[2] (P/A)	DX
Writing-16	[1/2] (M/A)	IQ-2
Xenology-16	[1] (M/H)	IQ-2
Zoology-16	[1] (M/H)	IQ-2

* Includes +2 for IQ.

Attributes: ST 14 [45], DX 14 [45], IQ 20 [175], HT 16 [80].

Advantages: Alertness +3 [15], Combat Reflexes [15], High Pain Threshold [10], Patron (The Company; 15 or less) [105], Strong Will +5 [20], Toughness DR 1 [10], Very Fit [15 points], Zeroed [10].

Disadvantages: Extremely Hazardous Duty [-20], Secret (Black op) [-30].

Skills

Acting-20	[2] (M/A)	IQ
Animal Handling-18	[1] (M/H)	IQ-2
Anthropology-19	[2] (M/H)	IQ-1
Area Knowledge (Earth)-22	[4] (M/E)	IQ+2
Armory (Hand Weapons)-18	[1/2] (M/A)	IQ-2
Armory (Rifles & Handguns)-18	[1/2] (M/A)	IQ-2
Artificial Intelligence-18	[1] (M/H)	IQ-2
Astronomy-18	[1] (M/H)	IQ-2
Bard-18	[1/2] (M/A)	IQ-2
Bicycling-14	[1] (P/E)	DX
Biochemistry-20	[8] (M/VH)	IQ
Boating-12	[1/2] (P/A)	DX-2
Botany-18	[1] (M/H)	IQ-2
Bow-12	[1] (P/H)	DX-2
Boxing-15	[4] (P/A)	DX+1
Chemistry-19	[2] (M/H)	IQ-1
Chess-20	[1] (M/E)	IQ-1
Climbing-14	[2] (P/A)	DX
Computer Operation-19	[1/2] (M/E)	IQ-1
Computer Programming-19	[2] (M/H)	IQ-1
Crossbow-13	[1/2] (P/E)	DX-1
Dancing-12	[1/2] (P/A)	DX-2
Demolition-18	[1/2] (M/A)	IQ-2
Diplomacy-17	[1/2] (M/H)	IQ-3
Driving (Automobile)-15	[4] (P/A)	DX+1
Driving (Tracked)-15	[4] (P/A)	DX+1
Ecology-19	[2] (M/H)	IQ-1
Electronics (Computers)-18	[1] (M/H)	IQ-2
Electronics Operation (Communication)-18	[1/2] (M/A)	IQ-2
Electronics Operation (Medical)-18	[1/2] (M/A)	IQ-2
Electronics Operation (Security Systems)-18	[1/2] (M/A)	IQ-2
Electronics Operation (Sensors)-18	[1/2] (M/A)	IQ-2

Engineer (Electrical)-18	[1] (M/H)	IQ-2
Engineer (Mechanical)-18	[1] (M/H)	IQ-2
Fencing-12	[1/2] (P/A)	DX-2
Gambling-18	[1/2] (M/A)	IQ-2
Geology-20	[4] (M/H)	IQ
Gunner (Machine Gun)-18	[8] (P/A)	DX+4*
Guns (Flamethrower)-15	[1/2] (P/E)	DX+1*
Guns (Pistol)-18	[4] (P/E)	DX+4*
Guns (Rifle)-18	[4] (P/E)	DX+4*
History-18	[1] (M/H)	IQ-2
Judo-15	[8] (P/H)	DX+1
Karate-15	[8] (P/H)	DX+1
Knife-13	[1/2] (P/E)	DX-1
Language (op's choice)-19	[1] (M/A)	IQ-1
Language (op's choice)-19	[1] (M/A)	IQ-1
Leadership-18	[1/2] (M/A)	IQ-2
Literature-18	[1] (M/H)	IQ-2
Mathematics-19	[2] (M/H)	IQ-1
Mechanic (Automobile)-18	[1/2] (M/A)	IQ-2
Mechanic (Helicopter)-18	[1/2] (M/A)	IQ-2
Metallurgy-17	[1/2] (M/H)	IQ-3
Mind Block-21	[4] (M/A)	IQ+1
Motorcycle (Medium and Heavy)-14	[1] (P/E)	DX
Naturalist-19	[2] (M/H)	IQ-1
Orienteering-18	[1/2] (M/A)	IQ-2
Parachuting-13	[1/2] (P/E)	DX-1
Paraphysics-20	[8] (M/VH)	IQ
Philosophy-18	[1] (M/H)	IQ-2
Physician-18	[1] (M/H)	IQ-2
Physics-20	[4] (M/H)	IQ
Physiology-18	[2] (M/VH)	IQ-2
Physiology (Brainsucker)-17	[1] (M/VH)	IQ-3
Physiology (Grey)-18	[2] (M/VH)	IQ-2
Piloting (Helicopter)-15	[4] (P/A)	DX+1
Piloting (Light Airplane)-15	[4] (P/A)	DX+1
Poetry-18	[1/2] (M/A)	IQ-2
Powerboat-12	[1/2] (P/A)	DX-2
Psychology-19	[2] (M/H)	IQ-1
Psychology (Grey)-18	[1] (M/H)	IQ-2
Research-19	[1] (M/A)	IQ-1
Running-14	[1] (P/H)	HT-2
Savoir-Faire-19	[1/2] (M/E)	IQ-1
Scuba-18	[1/2] (M/A)	IQ-2
Shortsword-12	[1/2] (P/A)	DX-2
Sign Language (AMESLAN)-18	[1/2] (M/A)	IQ-2
Skating-12	[1] (P/H)	DX-2
Skiing-12	[1] (P/H)	DX-2
Spear-12	[1/2] (P/A)	DX-2
Stealth-12	[1/2] (P/A)	DX-2
Streetwise-18	[1/2] (M/A)	IQ-2
Swimming-13	[1/2] (P/E)	DX-1

Tactics-18	[1] (M/H)	IQ-2
Teaching-18	[1/2] (M/A)	IQ-2
Telegraphy-19	[1/2] (M/E)	IQ-1
Throwing-12	[1] (P/H)	DX-2
Wrestling-15	[4] (P/A)	DX+1
Writing-18	[1/2] (M/A)	IQ-2
Xenology-18	[1] (M/H)	IQ-2
Zoology-18	[1] (M/H)	IQ-2

* Includes +2 for IQ.



Attributes: ST 16 [70], DX 16 [80], IQ 17 [100], HT 16 [80].

Advantages: Alertness +3 [15], Combat Reflexes [15], High Pain Threshold [10], Patron (The Company; 15 or less) [105], Strong Will +5 [20], Toughness DR 1 [10], Very Fit [15 points], Zeroed [10].

Disadvantages: Extremely Hazardous Duty [-20], Secret (Black op) [-30].

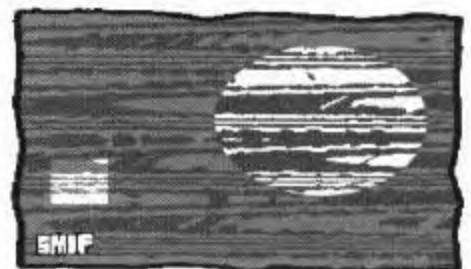
Skills

Acting-17 [2] (M/A) IQ
 Animal Handling-15 [1] (M/H) IQ-2
 Anthropology-16 [2] (M/H) IQ-1
 Area Knowledge (Earth)-19 [4] (M/E) IQ+2
 Armory (Hand Weapons)-15 [1/2] (M/A) IQ-2

Armory (Rifles & Handguns)-15 [1/2] (M/A) IQ-2
 Artificial Intelligence-15 [1] (M/H) IQ-2
 Astronomy-15 [1] (M/H) IQ-2
 Bard-15 [1/2] (M/A) IQ-2
 Bicycling-15 [1/2] (P/E) DX-1
 Boating-14 [1/2] (P/A) DX-2
 Botany-15 [1] (M/H) IQ-2
 Bow-14 [1] (P/H) DX-2
 Boxing-15 [1] (P/A) DX-1
 Chemistry-15 [1] (M/H) IQ-2
 Chess-16 [1/2] (M/E) IQ-1
 Climbing-16 [2] (P/A) DX
 Computer Operation-16 [1/2] (M/E) IQ-1
 Computer Programming-15 [1] (M/H) IQ-2
 Criminology-16 [1] (M/A) IQ-1
 Crossbow-15 [1/2] (P/E) DX-1
 Dancing-14 [1/2] (P/A) DX-2
 Demolition-15 [1/2] (M/A) IQ-2
 Detect Lies-16 [2] (M/H) IQ-1
 Diplomacy-17 [4] (M/H) IQ
 Driving (Automobile)-17 [4] (P/A) DX+1
 Driving (Tracked)-17 [4] (P/A) DX+1
 Ecology-15 [1] (M/H) IQ-2
 Electronics (Computers)-15 [1] (M/H) IQ-2
 Electronics Operation (Communications)-15 [1/2] (M/A) IQ-2
 Electronics Operation (Medical)-16 [1] (M/A) IQ-1
 Electronics Operation (Security Systems)-16 [1] (M/A) IQ-1
 Electronics Operation (Weapons)-16 [1] (M/A) IQ-1
 Engineer (Bombs and Traps)-15 [1] (M/H) IQ-2
 Engineer (Electrical)-15 [1] (M/H) IQ-2
 Engineer (Mechanical)-15 [1] (M/H) IQ-2
 Explosive Ordnance Disposal-16 [2] (M/H) IQ-1
 Fencing-14 [1/2] (P/A) DX-2
 Forensics-16 [2] (M/H) IQ-1
 Gambling-15 [1/2] (M/A) IQ-2
 Geology-15 [1] (M/H) IQ-2
 Gunner (Machine Gun)-20 [8] (P/A) DX+4*
 Guns (Flamethrower)-17 [1/2] (P/E)DX+1*
 Guns (Pistol)-20 [4] (P/E)DX+4*
 Guns (Rifle)-20 [4] (P/E)DX+4*
 History-15 [1] (M/H) IQ-2
 Judo-20 [32] (P/H) DX+4
 Karate-15 [2] (P/H) DX-1
 Knife-15 [1/2] (P/E) DX-1
 Language (op's choice)-16 [1] (M/A) IQ-1
 Language (op's choice)-16 [1] (M/A) IQ-1
 Leadership-16 [1] (M/A) IQ-1
 Literature-15 [1] (M/H) IQ-2
 Mathematics-16 [2] (M/H) IQ-1

Mechanic (Automobile)-15 [1/2] (M/A) IQ-2
 Mechanic (Helicopter)-15 [1/2] (M/A) IQ-2
 Mind Block-18 [4] (M/A) IQ+1
 Motorcycle (Medium and Heavy)-15 [1/2] (P/E) DX-1
 Naturalist-16 [2] (M/H) IQ-1
 NBC Warfare-16 [1] (M/A) IQ-1
 No-Landing Extraction-16 [1] (M/A) IQ-1
 Orienteering-15 [1/2] (M/A) IQ-2
 Parachuting-15 [1/2] (P/E) DX-1
 Philosophy-15 [1] (M/H) IQ-2
 Physician-20 [10] (M/H) IQ+3
 Physics-15 [1] (M/H) IQ-2
 Physiology-15 [2] (M/VH) IQ-2
 Physiology (Grey)-15 [2] (M/VH) IQ-2
 Piloting (Helicopter)-17 [4] (P/A) DX+1
 Piloting (Light Airplane)-17 [4] (P/A) DX+1
 Poetry-15 [1/2] (M/A) IQ-2
 Powerboat-14 [1/2] (P/A) DX-2
 Professional Skill (Firefighter)-16 [1] (M/A) IQ-1
 Psychology-17 [4] (M/H) IQ
 Psychology (Grey)-15 [1] (M/H) IQ-2
 Running-14 [1] (P/H) HT-2
 Savoir-Faire-16 [1/2] (M/E) IQ-1
 Scrounging-17 [1] (M/E) IQ
 Scuba-15 [1/2] (M/A) IQ-2
 Shortsword-14 [1/2] (P/A) DX-2
 Sign Language (AMESLAN)-15 [1/2] (M/A) IQ-2
 Skiing-14 [1] (P/H) DX-2
 Skiing-13 [1/2] (P/H) DX-3
 Spear-14 [1/2] (P/A) DX-2
 Stealth-14 [1/2] (P/A) DX-2
 Streetwise-15 [1/2] (M/A) IQ-2
 Swimming-17 [2] (P/E) DX+1
 Tactics-15 [1] (M/H) IQ-2
 Telegraphy-16 [1/2] (M/E) IQ-1
 Throwing-14 [1] (P/H) DX-2
 Traps-17 [2] (M/A) IQ
 Wrestling-16 [2] (P/A) DX
 Writing-15 [1/2] (M/A) IQ-2
 Xenology-15 [1] (M/H) IQ-2
 Zoology-15 [1] (M/H) IQ-2

* Includes +2 for IQ.



Attributes: ST 15 [60], DX 14 [45], IQ 18 [125], HT 15 [60].

Advantages: Alertness +3 [15], Combat Reflexes [15], Gadgeteer [50], High Pain Threshold [10], Patron (The Company; 15 or less) [105], Strong Will +5 [20], Toughness DR 1 [10], Very Fit [15 points], Zeroed [10].

Disadvantages: Extremely Hazardous Duty [-20], Secret (Black op) [-30].

Skills

Acting-18	[2] (M/A)	IQ	Gambling-16	[1/2] (M/A)	IQ-2	Telegraphy-17	[1/2] (M/E)	IQ-1
Animal Handling-16	[1] (M/H)	IQ-2	Geology-16	[1] (M/H)	IQ-2	Throwing-12	[1] (P/H)	DX-2
Anthropology-17	[2] (M/H)	IQ-1	Gunner (Machine Gun)-18			Traps-16	[1/2] (M/A)	IQ-2
Area Knowledge (Earth)-20			Guns (Flamethrower)-15	[8] (P/A)	DX+4*	Wrestling-15	[4] (P/A)	DX+1
Armory (Beam Handguns)-16	[4] (M/E)	IQ+2	Guns (Pistol)-18	[1/2] (P/E)	DX+1*	Writing-16	[1/2] (M/A)	IQ-2
Armory (Hand Weapons)-16	[1/2] (M/A)	IQ-2	Guns (Rifle)-18	[4] (P/E)	DX+4*	Xenology-16	[1] (M/H)	IQ-2
Armory (Rifles & Handguns)-16	[1/2] (M/A)	IQ-2	History-16	[1] (M/H)	IQ-2	Zoology-16	[1] (M/H)	IQ-2
Artificial Intelligence-17	[1/2] (M/A)	IQ-2	Judo-15	[8] (P/H)	DX+1			
Astronomy-16	[2] (M/H)	IQ-1	Karate-15	[8] (P/H)	DX+1			
Bard-16	[1/2] (M/A)	IQ-2	Knife-13	[1/2] (P/E)	DX-1			
Bicycling-13	[1/2] (P/E)	DX-1	Language (op's choice)-17	[1] (M/A)	IQ-1			
Boating-12	[1/2] (P/A)	DX-2	Language (op's choice)-17	[1] (M/A)	IQ-1			
Botany-16	[1] (M/H)	IQ-2	Leadership-16	[1/2] (M/A)	IQ-2			
Bow-12	[1] (P/H)	DX-2	Literature-16	[1] (M/H)	IQ-2			
Boxing-15	[4] (P/A)	DX+1	Mathematics-17	[2] (M/H)	IQ-1			
Chemistry-16	[1] (M/H)	IQ-2	Mechanic (Automobile)-16					
Chess-17	[1/2] (M/E)	IQ-1	Mechanic (Fuel Cells/Electric Motors)-16	[1/2] (M/A)	IQ-2			
Climbing-14	[2] (P/A)	DX	Mechanic (Helicopter)-16	[1/2] (M/A)	IQ-2			
Computer Hacking-20	[16] (M/VH)	IQ+2	Mechanic (Jet Plane Engine)-16					
Computer Operation-17	[1/2] (M/E)	IQ-1	Mechanic (Robotics)-16	[1/2] (M/A)	IQ-2			
Computer Programming-20			Mind Block-19	[4] (M/A)	IQ+1			
Crossbow-13	[8] (M/H)	IQ+2	Motorcycle (Medium and Heavy)-13					
Dancing-12	[1/2] (P/E)	DX-1	Naturalist-17	[1/2] (P/E)	DX-1			
Demolition-16	[1/2] (P/A)	DX-2	Orienteering-16	[2] (M/H)	IQ-1			
Driving (Automobile)-15	[1/2] (M/A)	IQ-2	Parachuting-13	[1/2] (M/A)	IQ-2			
Driving (Tracked)-15	[4] (P/A)	DX+1	Paraphysics-16	[1/2] (P/E)	DX-1			
Ecology-16	[4] (P/A)	DX+1	Philosophy-16	[2] (M/VH)	IQ-2			
Electronics (Computers)-16	[1] (M/H)	IQ-2	Physician-16	[1] (M/H)	IQ-2			
Electronics (Holographics)-15			Physics-17	[1] (M/H)	IQ-2			
Electronics (Security Systems)-15	[11] (M/H)	IQ-2	Physiology-16	[2] (M/H)	IQ-1			
Electronics (Sensors)-15	[1/2] (M/H)	IQ-3	Physiology (Grey)-16	[2] (M/VH)	IQ-2			
Electronics (Weapons)-15	[1/2] (M/H)	IQ-3	Piloting (Helicopter)-15	[2] (M/VH)	IQ-2			
Electronics Operation (Communications)-16	[1/2] (M/H)	IQ-3	Piloting (Light Airplane)-15	[4] (P/A)	DX+1			
Electronics Operation (Computers)-16	[1/2] (M/A)	IQ-2	Poetry-16	[1/2] (M/A)	IQ-2			
Electronics Operation (Holographics)-16	[1/2] (M/A)	IQ-2	Powerboat-12	[1/2] (P/A)	DX-2			
Electronics Operation (Security Systems)-16	[1/2] (M/A)	IQ-2	Psychology-17	[2] (M/H)	IQ-1			
Electronics Operation (Weapons)-16	[1/2] (M/A)	IQ-2	Psychology (Grey)-16	[1] (M/H)	IQ-2			
Engineer (Bombs and Traps)-15	[1/2] (M/A)	IQ-2	Running-13	[1] (P/H)	HT-2			
Engineer (Electrical)-16	[1/2] (M/H)	IQ-3	Savoir-Faire-17	[1/2] (M/E)	IQ-1			
Engineer (Mechanical)-16	[1] (M/H)	IQ-2	Scrounging-19	[2] (M/E)	IQ+1			
Engineer (Robotics)-15	[1] (M/H)	IQ-2	Scuba-16	[1/2] (M/A)	IQ-2			
Fencing-12	[1/2] (P/A)	DX-2	Shortsword-12	[1/2] (P/A)	DX-2			
			Sign Language (AMESLAN)-16					
			Skating-12	[1/2] (M/A)	IQ-2			
			Skiing-12	[1] (P/H)	DX-2			
			Spear-12	[1] (P/H)	DX-2			
			Stealth-12	[1/2] (P/A)	DX-2			
			Streetwise-16	[1/2] (P/A)	DX-2			
			Swimming-13	[1/2] (M/A)	IQ-2			
			Tactics-16	[1/2] (P/E)	DX-1			
				[1] (M/H)	IQ-2			

* Includes +2 for IQ.



CHAPTER SIX

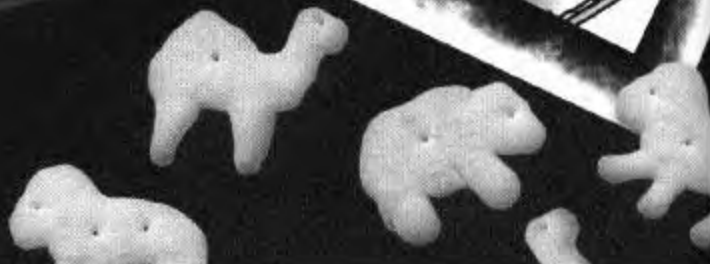
THINGS TO HUNT & KILL

Loren ipsum dolor sit amet, consectetur adipiscing elit, sed diam nonummy nibh euismod tincidunt ut laoreet dolore magna aliquam erat volutpat. Ut wisi enim ad minim veniam, quis nostrud elit ut hendrerit in vulputate blandit praesent luptatum zzril delenit augue dui faucibus nunc tincidunt.

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Damn, that sucker's fast!

Wormy little thing, darting like a mongoose back and forth along the tracks – can't hardly see him in this lousy subway light.

Machine gun's no good. Can't get a good shot running after him like this. Illy's acting like an idiot, zigzagging behind me, cracking shots over my shoulder. We've been chasing this one for half an hour now, and I'm getting tired, but I can't slow down. Sucker bit me on the shoulder. It's payback time.

He slips into a crack in the wall. A crevice of wet, crumbling concrete. From within I can hear the hiss of steam. Moist heat mists my face.

"Stay behind me," I say as I squeeze in. It's tight, but I can stand. I flick on my shoulder light. "Keep close."

I keep seeing the wiggler a few feet ahead. Coming out of the shadow for a second, slipping over rebar and broken concrete. A few more shots spray deadly ricochets around, so I shoulder the machine gun. I'm getting tired.

"Hold still, you bastard!"

But he wiggles around a corner, and there it is. A water junction, bigger than my living room. And it's filled. Moving. Squirming. A thick writhing carpet of wet, gray skin.

Thousands of 'em. Crawling on the walls. Dripping like syrup from the ceiling. Then they start on this godawful noise. A hum like a million cicadas.

And all I can think of is that they're hungry. They are so hungry.

I switch to the flamethrower. The sweet stinging smell of gasoline. Without turning, I yell to Illiana, barely audible above the noise, "Run."

"Run!"

"RUN!"

The world of *GURPS Black Ops* is a target-rich environment. An abandoned tire factory in Maryland is teeming with roaches the size of dogs. Brainsuckers are breeding like maggots in the tunnels beneath the Tokyo Ginza. The Greys have an entire network of villages in Turkey and Kazakhstan. Your next-door neighbor drinks human blood and uses his psi talents to torture local children.

A lot of people believe that creatures like this are out there. But the black ops are among the select few who know. It's their job to pry up the rocks these things hide under and kill them. This chapter details a few of the many things an op gets to drill with lead.

Note to GMs: This chapter is written from Decker's perspective as a veteran of 15 years. The GM should decide how much of this information is known to new Academy graduates and save the juicy details for mission briefings. In any event, it is suggested that the actual statistics never be revealed to the players.

Key to Descriptions

ST, DX, IQ, HT. Have their usual meaning. HT will often have two numbers, separated by a slash (e.g., 15/25). The first number is the "health" you roll against, the second number is "hit points."

Move/Dodge. Some creatures will have more than one Move (e.g., flying and on the ground). The listed Move is for the most common situation (e.g., swimming for sea monsters). Move for other situations is given in the text. For beasts, Dodge is the better of DX/2 or Move/2, to a maximum of 10. For humanoid monsters, Dodge is calculated from Basic Speed.

PD/DR. PD and DR of the creature's hide or armor.

Damage. Damage listed is for the creature's most common form of attack; damage for other forms of attack is given in the text. Listed damage is for an average member of the species. "By weapon" means that the creature is normally armed; see the text for details.

Reach. The creature's reach, in hexes. "C" means "close combat only." "By weapon" means that the creature is normally armed; see the text for details.

Size. The creature's size, in hexes. Small creatures (size < 1) take up less than a hex; several fit in one hex.

Weight. The creature's weight in pounds or tons.

Habitat. Where the creature is commonly found. Primary habitat is listed first. Abbreviated as follows:

A: Arctic/Antarctic

F: Forest (temperate)

J: Jungle or tropical forest

M: Mountain

P: Plains, including grasslands, steppe, etc.

S: Swamp

Sub: Subterranean

SW: Salt-water aquatic

Other Abbreviations: A "*" means a special ability or attack; see text. A "-" means the statistic in question is negligible or not applicable. A "#" indicates exceptions to the given entry; see text. A "+" indicates that exceptional specimens may have an even higher score.

Aliens

There are probably many different alien species. We don't know for sure. Scraps of information stolen from the Greys indicate that they had an enemy; maybe more than one. A few shaky deductions based on ancient documents, cave-paintings and hieroglyphs (many of them hidden from the public eye) indicate that the Prima weren't exactly alone, either. The galaxy is a big place. Someone out there might even be friendly. Maybe. It's hard to say with confidence that *humanity* is a "friendly species."

Speculation aside, we have concrete evidence of visitation by three types of aliens. Unfortunately, two are still hanging around, raping women and eating brains.

The Greys

ST: 25 **Move/Dodge:** 7/7 **Size:** 1
DX: 16 **PD/DR:** 0/0 **Weight:** 130 lbs.
IQ: 16 **Damage:** * **Habitat:** Any (alien)
HT: 12 **Reach:** C, 1

The stats given above are for an average adult, male Grey.

Almond-eyed and silent, the Greys are chilling even to contemplate, much less wage a war against. The irony is, we have images of them everywhere: on the covers of books, on bumper stickers, in movies. Literature has been devoted to them. They even have fan clubs.

It's all a Company lie, except for the wide eyes and quiet disposition. They have those, but they aren't our "space brothers." We're animals to them, little more than lab rats.



History

The Greys' mother ship crashed into the Siberian wilderness in 1908, leaving only 1,500 of them alive in their escape ships (the infamous "foo fighters" reported in both world wars). They are now trapped on Earth. They want nothing more than to get off this primitive world and head back to their home planet, but Earth's technology is sadly lacking. They have been subtly advancing human technology in an effort to spur the development of FTL space travel before they all die out.

The Greys are fully aware of the Company's campaign against them, and have been since the 1950s, when an uneasy alliance was developed by Argus and implemented by the Company: the Greys' technology and wisdom in exchange for our help with their goal of escape from our world. This lasted until 1959, when Robert Oppenheimer, in a fit of misguided conscience, betrayed the existence of the aliens to the military.

Two alien fliers were shot down by Air Force fighters in an ambush over Bryce Canyon. Luckily, black ops had a few hours' warning of the betrayal and were able to remove the alien corpses (as well as any usable technology) and produce three sheepish aviation experts who claimed they had privately developed these aircraft in an attempt to perpetrate an elaborate hoax; the "hoax" never

made it to the public because the military destroyed the only fliers they had. The Air Force believed them.

The wreckage and the "experts" were snatched up by the Air Force, but the hapless aviators could not duplicate their amazing fliers, though they tried for years. The public was never told of this, and any records related to it have long been shredded. (Illustrating the irony of life, the famous Roswell, New Mexico, crash of 1947 was an elaborate hoax designed by the Company to distract the Air Force from a highly sensitive operation. It worked.)

After the downing, the Greys cut off all relations with Argus and doubled their efforts in abduction and experimentation. Argus had no choice but to go to war. Oppenheimer, by the way, was privately discredited and lost his security clearance.

Biology

Greys are clearly superior to humans, both physically and mentally. Physically, they are tall and lean, with compact, muscular frames and surprising agility. They look somewhat lanky, but are unbelievably strong. Mentally, their intellect reaches far beyond human levels of genius.

They are closest to us in terms of physical hardiness. All things considered, they don't live *much* longer than we do, and black ops are doing their best to make the average Grey lifespan even shorter. A few slugs from a .45 will put one down as easily as they would a healthy man.

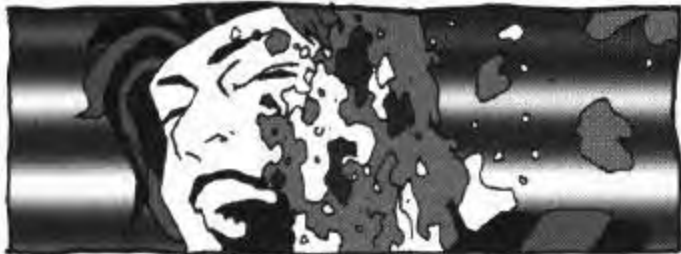
Greys are warm-blooded, bipedal vertebrates. They have two sexes (male and female), and the females bear young in the womb. They have lungs and a heart, after a fashion. They see in the same visual spectrum as us. Then we start to run out of similarities with our "space brothers."

A Grey's face is dominated by two large, oval eyes with slitted black pupils that form an "X" shape. When he is angry, these flare open to make an almost square shape. A Grey has no discernable mouth, but his "chin" ends in a large flap of grey skin. His "ears" are two long, thin, slightly indented membranes where our nose would be.

The Greys communicate in two ways: telepathically and via a kind of pheromonal "note-pad" system. While Science is researching the latter, it isn't yet understood at a level that ops in the field find useful. The Company's guess is that the Greys are evolved from predators. The human sense of smell is focused in the nose, and adequate for a species that used to gather fruit to survive; the Greys smell with their entire skin, and can know hours later if you've been in a room just by the smell of it. On operations where Company telepaths have successfully "jammed" Grey telepathy, the Greys *still* acted as though they knew what their companions were thinking, which baffled and frustrated the ops. The reason was pheromones (see p. 85).

The Greys lack the teeth or claws of a predator – in fact, they lack teeth and fingernails entirely – but the skin flap on their "chin" folds open to reveal four concentric

rings of acid-producing pustules. They use these to devour their food, but they can also spit *very* nasty acid. (Treat this as an attack made at DX, with reach C, 1. The acid does 1d damage per turn for 1d+1 turns to anything it lands on. Damage is cumulative against DR.) They have a predator's ruthlessness, cunning and disregard for any life that isn't *them*.



With a little tinkering (and without consent), they've proven themselves capable of impregnating human women. As far as we know, these women haven't survived, and no viable offspring have been produced. Yet.

Telepathy

The Greys are naturally telepathic, and it seems probable that their pre-sentient ancestors were, too – perhaps some kind of vicious pack predator, coordinating attacks through telepathy. Of course, that's just speculation.

In *GURPS* terms, Greys have 4-12 levels of Telepathy Power, with a mean Power of 7. They use the standard rules for Telepathy (see pp. B167-171), and can use any telepathic skill, with the following racial modifications:

⊙ The Greys have a complex, image-based telepathic *language* that humanity can't generally fathom. Psi-ops (p. 26) are sometimes more powerful than the Greys, but prying into their skulls is useless when all you can see is pretty colors and incomprehensible bands of texture and abstraction. Thus, while human telepathy can find and recognize Grey minds, only a few, specially trained telepaths, the Grey-readers (p. 26), can read them.

⊙ The Greys cannot force their way into each other's minds. This is the principal clue that Grey telepathy is a long-standing feature of the species. If a Grey doesn't want to reveal a thought to another Grey, the other Grey can't force the issue; their "defenses" against their own style of telepathy are so instinctive and complete that they aren't really defenses any more – just the ability to shut up. This doesn't prevent human telepaths from looking in (they have to work to do that), but getting in has been pretty useless so far.

⊙ The Greys *can* force their way into our minds, but the differences in our thoughts work against them almost as

much as they work against us. Use the normal rules, but Telereceive rolls that succeed by more than 2 still don't give up anything but surface thoughts and emotions. Greys who want to communicate with a human will let him know that he's being scanned so that he can use his surface thoughts to talk back. Only basic ideas can be transmitted; even then, communication takes effort. There is a 50% chance (1-3 on 1d) that any thought exchanged by human and Grey will be gibberish, regardless of consent. These telepathic "conversations" never exceed the speed of halting, uncertain speech, and the Greys (who see us as cattle, anyway) are always *exceedingly* condescending.

Pheromone Communication

The Company does not understand Grey pheromone communication nearly as well as Grey telepathy. That information was not shared during the brief alliance with Argus, possibly because the Greys consider pheromone communication to be a crude reminder of their primitive past, and don't like to talk about it.

In addition to sensing differences in smells with an acuity that rivals a bloodhound (see *Discriminatory Smell*, p. CI52), the Greys can selectively *emit* odors which have crude symbolism to other Greys. These are persistent, lingering on surfaces and in still air for days, and lasting hours even in areas with good air circulation.

A Grey pheromonal "note" can convey any non-specific concept that can be summed up in a single English word. For instance, it could say "food" but it couldn't say "fruit," much less "tangerine." A note could say "human" or "enemy" but it couldn't say "black op" or "soldier." It could say "Flee!" but it couldn't say "run to the south." The GM is left to determine what, exactly, can be communicated. These notes are almost always undetectable by human senses. Those that are detectable carry a faint smell of cinnamon, a detail that has crept into the public lore regarding the Greys.

Company scientists have learned that the Greys smell with their skin, and have even developed odors that are harmful to the Greys, but deciphering the pheromone language could be a key turning point in the war. Electronic "noses" could spy on Grey pheromone communication, and false pheromones could be used to mislead them. If pheromone communication is somehow the primitive precursor to the symbolism in the Grey telepathic language, then understanding the simple code of pheromones could be the Rosetta stone Company telepaths have been waiting for. All of these possibilities are on the Science department's table, but none have yet borne fruit.



Culture

The Company knows the Greys have bases all over the globe (the American Southwest, the Antarctic ice fields and the red canyons of Madagascar, to name a few suspected locales), and some rumors even have them making forays from the dark side of the moon. In those bases, presumably, are the keys to unraveling the mystery of Grey culture. So far, they have been impossible to root out.

Only a little is known. The Greys are analytical, systematic, thorough and inquisitive, but have very little of what we call human emotion. Their ruthlessness and single-mindedness, combined with their incredible intellect (made even more incredible by their collective, telepathic genius), have created a society that is best described as antiseptic, impersonal, clinical and uncaring.

There is a pecking order among the Greys, apparently based on strict ratings of intellectual capacity and reward for good performance. Those in the lower ranks toil. Those in the higher ranks think, live well and have stimulating work and mating privileges. Competition is fierce and deadly, but entirely *dispassionate*. Greys compete because failure means death or a poor quality of life, not because competition inspires them with passion.

In 1974, a squad operating in Brazil witnessed the Greys feeding. The food was a blue, pearly substance formed into spheres, apparently created from available animal life by an alien device. The Greys ate *in order*, with the higher-ranking aliens eating their fill, then the lower ranks sharing the scraps. At first, the Company believed that there might be resentment between the ranks that could be exploited, but every attempt along those lines has failed. Of course, it might help if we could really communicate with them.

What they do for *fun* (assuming they even understand the concept) is a total mystery, but they do seem to enjoy their work. No examples of Grey art have ever been seen, although telepaths who have directly touched Grey minds insist that a great potential for subtle complexity exists in their mental language. It is possible that all of their art is ephemeral and telepathic. Perhaps the Greys on Earth are simply too busy with their mission to have time for art, but the Grey home world is an aesthetic paradise.

Of course, all of this applies only to Grey males here on Earth. When the Grey ship crashed in 1908, all of the females were killed. As a result, we don't know if the females are the Greys' natural rulers, second-class citizens used only for mating, or something in between.

Motives and Methods

The Greys have two primary motives:

First, they want to breed. The Greys on Earth *can't* breed. For reasons related to their breeding cycle, all the females on board the mother ship were in stasis, and were killed when it crashed. The Greys who survived in the escape ships were all male. As a result, they are kidnapping and *changing* humans by the hundreds every year, and have been experimenting with human females as incubators for the past 90 years in an attempt to create viable offspring. Their attempts have so far been futile, although in recent years, they have managed to successfully inseminate several human women with pure Grey genetics. None of the impregnations were carried to term, and all of the women died from "... complications due to miscarriage."

Second, they want to build a working hyperdrive and leave Earth. To achieve this, they are feeding humanity technology in order to help us build what they lack the resources to make themselves. Despite the Company's best efforts to stop it, there seem to be plenty of people willing to "deal with the devil." Company operatives have, on rare missions, observed humans interacting with and helping the aliens. It is not yet known if the humans are there voluntarily or if they're being controlled telepathically. It is depressingly likely that some corporate or governmental organizations are exchanging human slaves for technological secrets, the idea of which is profoundly disturbing to Argus. Lately, the Company has become very interested in learning the truth. It is wary of Grey lackeys infiltrating its ranks.

Peripheral to all of this, certain Greys are simply *curious*, in a very clinical fashion. Many of the experiments on humans seem to have nothing to do with either of their known goals. This might point to a third, undetected motive. It might also be their idea of a good time.

There's one thing we know for sure: the average Grey lifespan is 140 years. Their home planet is 110 light-years away, and was sent a radio message from the doomed mother ship in 1908. In 2018, the Grey home planet will receive the message and most likely dispatch a FTL rescue ship, which will arrive a few weeks later. This means that even if the Greys are unsuccessful in their breeding attempts, some will probably still survive to greet the rescue ship. We don't know all the implications of this, but we're fairly confident that the alien ship is a lot more likely to just move on if there aren't any Greys around. This is one more reason why we want to kill them all.



Technology

The Greys are an old (but not ancient) interstellar race. All of their devices are considered to be TL12; see *GURPS Ultra-Tech* and *Ultra-Tech 2* for a wide selection of TL12 gadgetry.

First, they have an impressive mastery of psi-tech and a baffling array of weapons. Their sensors include grav-scanners, multiscanners and ultrascanners. They also have force screens and deflectors, but these are not compact: Use the rules for TL12 force screens and deflectors in *GURPS Space, Ultra-Tech* or *Vehicles*, but any field generator that weighs less than 25 tons is unavailable; only the big starships have them.

Next, the Greys have the biotechnology to make clones, store living things cryogenically and make "braintapes" (computerized records of sentient minds to be read into clones or used as the basis for AI programming). However, very little of this is available to the Greys on Earth. It seems that all working examples of these delicate technologies were reduced to scrap when the Greys smacked into the planet nine decades ago.

The simplest of these technologies is cryo-storage, which requires not only hardware but also drugs that the Greys either haven't been able to synthesize or haven't bothered expending their resources on. Certainly, if the Greys have any working freeze tubes, they hold key Greys, ensuring their survival until the rescue ship arrives in 2018. Most Grey medical resources are used in the ongoing experiments on mankind.

Finally, the Greys are capable of FTL travel. Grey hyperdrives achieve an average FTL speed of 1 parsec per day, but this varies somewhat; some parts of the galaxy are frequented by hyperspace storms, or contain "slow" or "fast" patches of hyperspace. Grey sub-light drives are reactionless, requiring power but not fuel or reaction mass. Greys do not have FTL "radio" or "radar" of any kind.

Hyperspace travel, as far as the Company knows, has no dangerous physical or psychological side effects, and sidesteps the issue of time dilation. Grey females might be susceptible to some sort of hyperspace malady, which may be why they were frozen on a journey only a few weeks away from the home world. Of course, the Greys may have been in the midst of a much longer journey.

Two Grey technologies are described below; for Grey personal technology and weaponry, see Chapter 7.

Grey Ships

The term "flying saucer" originated in a misquote. In the 1940s, an Air Force pilot who was being interviewed by a magazine about his encounter with an UFO explained that it moved "like a saucer being skipped across a lake." He was quoted as saying he saw a "flying saucer."

In fact, Grey ships *do* move like something being skipped across water, but they don't look much like

saucers. They are more oval than flat, and they have six "legs" spaced evenly about their body that act as landers, pincers and airfoils for steering. People who have seen Grey ships up close often describe them as "spider-like," though after the legs retract into the body (when they leave Earth, for example), they look like squashed spheres.

The ships fly using what the techies call a "gravity damper." The damper is a large device that hums loudly when active, and it negates most of the effects of gravity within a specific area while it's on. It works in a cyclic pattern, so when a Grey ship is moving through the air in a straight line, it seems to skip in a shallow wave pattern as the damper kicks in and out. Using high-pressure air jets and their airfoil legs, the ships maneuver extremely well.

The Greys have two types of weapons on their ships. The first (the flashing lights that airman Johnny Franklin reported to his major) is called a "scorcher" by the techies, and uses a concentrated beam of microwaves to superheat objects. Metal objects and living tissue are extremely susceptible. The second weapon is an antiparticle beam that can blow through ten feet of solid iron. Fortunately, this only works in a vacuum; it is useless in an atmosphere.

The Grey ships communicate by amplifying psychic energy and transmitting telepathy using radio waves. They also possess stealth and sensors that would (and do) make human military men weep. All of the ship's equipment and weaponry is controlled mentally by the aliens.

The Company has managed to acquire two Grey ships. One is heavily damaged (one of the two shot down by the Air Force in 1959); the other seems to be in working order. The techies can't seem to get the thing to actually fly, but with their experimental psychic amplifiers and their knowledge of the Grey psychic language, they may make headway soon. Since most of it relies on alien telepathy to function, our existing stash of Grey technology is useless to us.

The Chip

The chip is a small implant that the Greys place in abducted humans to monitor them. It's about the size of a push-pin and rests just behind the left ear. It is attached to the bone of the upper jaw and can listen in on anything the subject hears (and believe me, just because we don't understand their complex thought language doesn't mean they haven't deciphered our simple, vocal one).

The chip is also a tracking device with a range of about 500 miles, accurate to within 10'. We don't know how carefully the Greys monitor humans, but they certainly pay more attention to people of power, especially military officers and political officials. We run routine chip checks on the president and the more important members of Congress, but we can't get to everyone. When we find a chip, we have to manufacture some sort of innocuous affliction, like a nose polyp or tonsillitis, to get the politico into the operating room.

The chip is fairly easy to remove once it's discovered, and the Greys cannot tell from their monitoring the difference between a chip's removal and the victim dying, so they usually don't investigate right away. All black ops are checked at least twice a year for chips, and we're all taught what one feels like. Due to its proximity to major arteries feeding the brain, it is not recommended that a black op attempt to remove the chip himself.

The Company has done some random sampling and estimated that about ten million humans have been chipped, mostly in developed countries and most commonly in the U.S., Japan and Russia. About 70% of chipped humans are fertile women, and we suspect that the Greys are looking for specific signs that certain women are more likely to be able to carry viable Grey offspring. We don't yet know what these signs are.

In the past few months, three of the chips removed by Company docs have been slightly *different*. They are a bit bigger and have more connections to the surrounding nerve tissue. The rumor around the Science and Tech departments is that these chips give the Greys some type of limited control over the victim, allowing for remote hypnotic suggestion. If this is true, then things are a lot worse than we could have imagined.

Throughout the years, a few members of Argus have argued that the chip represents the only real reason for the Company to go public. Their arguments have not yet persuaded anyone to take action, but the chip remains one of the Company's primary concerns.



Brainsuckers

ST: –	Move/Dodge: 1/5	Size: < 1
DX: 10	PD/DR: 6/6#	Weight: Negligible
IQ: 8	Damage: 1d-2 cut*	Habitat: Sewers
HT: 10/1	Reach: C	

Unlike the Greys, who came here in a starship of their own devising and who see us as cattle, the brainsuckers are stupid, single-minded little scraps of flesh who care about nothing but procreating. They were brought here by the Prima (p. 90), and are best viewed as errant *devices*, wasteful litter left behind by cosmic tourists, mindlessly carrying out their long-absent creators' programming.

Black ops never have to *fight* brainsuckers, just kill them. Their *zombies*, on the other hand, can be trouble.

History

The Prima used the brainsuckers as domesticated animals, allowing them to use humans as slaves and making it possible to set themselves up as gods. They used special vocal commands to make brainsucker-infested humans do their bidding. These commands have long been lost, but a few Company historians are certain that they are hidden in ancient manuscripts, just waiting to be discovered.



Biology

The creature starts life as a greenish worm about the size of a paperclip. Its skin looks and feels smooth, but is actually made up of millions of flat, interlocking, scalpel-sharp scales. When in pain or startled, the brainsucker flares its scales into a porcupine-like posture and flops about like it's having a seizure. When calm, it moves like a tadpole and is impossible to grab. The stats given above are for the worm itself; the cutting damage listed is inflicted on anyone touching it in its agitated state.

The worm never attacks *per se*; leave it alone and it won't cut you. Instead, it will simply burrow into your brain while you sleep, entering through your nose or mouth, or piercing the softer portions of your head or neck. Then it will cut its way into your cortex as though it had lived there all its life. The pain is intense, but the brainsucker knows its way around the cerebral cortex and quickly deadens the nerves above the neck (giving the victim a perpetual "duh" expression).

Brainsuckers are *stupid*, but they are well-suited to their function. Their entry into the brain causes no real injury to the victim. If the victim is awake when entry occurs, an IQ roll is necessary to even notice it (+4 for Low Pain Threshold, -4 for High Pain Threshold). There is a brief, intense pain, but if the IQ roll is failed, it will be mistaken for something more natural, such as a migraine.

Once a brainsucker enters the body, it takes 3d+30 seconds to scoop out its home between the two hemispheres of the brain, extend its tendrils and take over nearly all of the brain's voluntary functions. From that point on, the brainsucker and its host are completely integrated. The brainsucker can see, hear and smell everything its host does, and the victim is essentially a zombie.

Separation, other than by careful surgery or "liquid lobotomy" (see p. 89) will kill both worm and host instantly. What was once a living human is now a living *vehicle* for the alien. In a year, both vehicle and pilot will die naturally and 2d-1 brainsucker babies will emerge. In that year, however, the brainsucker can do a lot of damage.

Brainsucker Zombies

The host of a brainsucker retains his original ST and HT, but has -2 DX for the first 2-3 weeks of "occupation," until the young worm becomes adept at controlling the voluntary functions of an entire human.

The question of IQ is an ugly one. At first, it was believed that the moment of control was, for all intents and purposes, the moment the victim died – at least in the mental sense. Unfortunately, psi-ops have recently discovered that the original personality remains in there, quietly imprisoned but still aware. In game terms, IQ is reduced permanently by 2; not only are some vital connections severed and stolen by the brainsucker, but a lot of vital nutrients are diverted to the worm as well. This IQ can be ignored for nearly every purpose.

The victim *can* be contacted telepathically, but cannot use his own psi powers. Fortunately, brainsuckers can't handle psi either. Perhaps they weren't programmed for it, or perhaps their pea-sized brains just overload if they try.

Aside from reduced intelligence, the mind of the victim tends to go insane after a while. It takes about three months for the typical victim to become not only an imprisoned mind, but also a delusional, irrational mind. Some go a lot quicker. At any rate, the mind most likely retreats into a fantasy it can handle. Killing a brainsucker zombie is more than necessary; it's a mercy killing.

Brainsuckers don't have access to many of the memories of their victims, only a few scraps here and there, including enough language, gestures and general mannerisms to get by and get fed. To supplement those, they have a stunning amount of sheer cunning when it comes to quickly learning enough to fake their way through the day.

Brainsucker zombies have slack facial expressions that the worm has only limited control over. If a brainsucker zombie smiles, it's a slack smile; if he scowls, it's a slack scowl. Beyond that, they can seem completely human, even down to simple idiosyncrasies of speech. However, the worms prefer not to speak too much. They *know* they aren't especially scintillating, and work to cover that weakness. It's a lot easier for the zombie of a drug-addict high-school dropout to pass for the original than it is for the zombie of a high-end defense attorney. Worms that survive as attorneys do so by making excuses about burnout and taking long vacations from the firm.



The worms absorb their victims' skills, but incompletely. Divide any points the victim has in a skill by 4 and use that to determine the effective skill of the zombie. If this works out to less than half a point, the skill is lost.

Example 1: The worm's victim has Driving at DX+2 [8 points]. The zombie has Driving at DX [2 points], since $8/4 = 2$.

Example 2: The worm's victim has Brawling at DX [1 point]. The zombie has *no* Brawling skill, since $1/4$ is less than half a point.

Round effective point expenditures down to the nearest meaningful level. A victim with 3 points in a skill will be a zombie with $1/2$ point in the skill, not $3/4$ point. The mental skills of a zombie are relative to the *worm's* IQ (typically IQ 8) rather than the victim's IQ.

Brainsucker Nests

Brainsuckers prefer dank, dark places, and have set up nests in the sewer systems of every major city in the world. The brainsuckers' sole purpose is to use their hosts to lure new hosts to these nests. Their victims tend to be drifters and sanitation workers. Brainsuckers *know* about each other, and can unerringly recognize one another in zombie form. However, the nest is the closest thing they have to a "culture." This is the private life of the brainsucker: worms gathering together in their fleshy vehicles in order to nurture the young left behind by their dead, waiting to take them out into the world when they are mature enough to take a host.

All brainsuckers return to their nest as soon as possible, to inform the rest of the pack of their new role and to be among their own kind whenever possible. When there is a large stock of hatchlings to be given bodies, brainsuckers work to lure humans deep into their sewers and subways, using any means at their disposal.

The larger the city, the greater the *number* of nests; sometimes, these nests are gigantic. The #3 Water Tunnel in New York City hosted a nest of some 40 worms, all of whom had taken "sand hogs" (the diggers who work on the water tunnel) as victims. All of them continued their jobs, making more space for brainsucker colonies. When the Company finally got wind of this, it was a costly bloodbath and a complicated cover-up.

When it finally comes time to die, the brainsucker knows it several hours beforehand and returns to the nest to die peacefully, where its young can be cared for.

Expulsion of Brainsuckers

Surgically removing brainsuckers always damages the brain permanently. The few attempts that left a living host have also left them a vegetable for life.

There is a way to expunge the alien without surgery. It must be attempted within the first two months of infestation, and is still only about 10% effective. Company scientists have developed an elixir that will make the victim's cerebrospinal fluids inhospitable to the creature.

Dosing is very tricky, and about 20% of the time the victim simply keels over and dies (which also kills the brainsucker, so it's not a total loss). About 70% of the time, the brainsucker leaves, but not before shredding about 30% of the victim's gray matter, leaving the victim alive, but not really able to function in society. (This is

why black op scientists secretly refer to the mixture as the "liquid lobotomy.")

The 10% who survive without much damage can return to fairly normal lives. This procedure is reserved for Company agents and powerful people whom the Company wishes to keep alive. The victims will not remember much that occurred during infestation, so they can be fed whatever story their rescuers feel appropriate.

The Prima

It seems that the gods of old were aliens – the Prima. Powerful shapeshifters, they could become anything: giant humans, two-headed hounds, half-beasts and monsters. Their influence on history has become our legend.

The Inca carved their visages into their temple walls. The Egyptians built monuments to their exacting specifications. The Greeks defined their entire lives around their petty struggles. They also influenced the development of Mesopotamian, Phoenician and Celtic cultures, and some Company historians believe that they actually spurred the hunter-gatherer tribes of the world into forming agrarian colonies, setting what we call civilization into motion.

Frankly, I'm glad they're no longer around.

Little is known about the Prima. We know that they died out or left around 30 A.D., but there is no evidence pointing to why they vanished. We don't know when they arrived, but estimates range from 7,000 B.C. (the earliest, positively identified archaeological evidence) back to the edges of the last ice age, perhaps as early as 11,000 B.C. Carvings that *might* be artistic renderings of the Prima, found in northern Europe, date to this period.

The Prima were humanoid, but not necessarily mammals. No remains have ever been uncovered, but carvings of their likeness indicate that they may have had a more bestial appearance than mankind and were capable of appearing as men. They may even have been beast-men of some sort; many images seem to cast them as reptilian.

While their faces were those of beasts, their minds were clearly advanced beyond those of humanity *and* the Greys. If the interpretation of Company researchers is correct, they were capable of advanced teleportation, "force" technology that surpasses the capabilities of the most powerful known telekinetics, and possibly even the fundamental manipulation of energy and matter.

Their principal legacies on Earth are their genetic manipulations and animal creations. Many of the fabled beasts of antiquity (unicorns, for instance) are now seriously believed to have been here during the time of the Prima, kept in their stables and serving their purposes. We aren't sure how many present-day animals are really descendants of Prima biotechnology, but we know that *some* are. Fireflies have all the earmarks, as do many other flying insects.

The most dangerous survivor is the brainsucker. The Prima either bioengineered brainsuckers or brought them from whatever planet they came from. In any case, the Prima exposed certain humans to brainsuckers, and could use vocal commands to cause their lackeys to do their bid-

ding (see below). It's theorized by Company historians that certain herbal concoctions sustained the brainsucker hosts for much longer than the year that they live today, and possibly gave them superhuman powers, enhancing their strength, endurance and psychic ability.

Our historians have gathered a lot of data on the Prima, but they are always looking for more, especially that elusive material pertaining to the brainsuckers and control of them. It could turn up at any time.

We also live in fear that a rogue organization, like the Lodge (p. 106), will discover the existence of the Prima and figure out how to use the brainsuckers. That would be very, very bad.

The Prima are among the greatest mysteries ever encountered by mankind, and are one of the greatest secrets that Argus has decided humanity needn't be clued in on just yet.

Zombie Control

In 1978, archaeologists working in Asia Minor uncovered Hittite scrolls, dating back to 1,500 B.C., that described the use of the brainsuckers in some detail. Fortunately, the Company was there to intercept and hide the scrolls, so minimal damage control was necessary. The scrolls were penned as a fable, obscured by euphemism and arcane symbolism, but to those who knew what to look for, they were crystal clear.

The scrolls revealed that brainsucker zombies have a function beyond self-preservation and the acquisition of new hosts. The slack-jawed former humans were the docile *slaves* of the Prima, who ordered them about using what the scrolls call "phrases," "verses" or "songs," depending on how the scalpel of translation is turned.

The scrolls' authors were apparently part of a kind of rebellion, a faction among the Hittites who resented the influence of the bizarre Prima. The "songs" themselves were not described in any translatable form, but the uses the zombies were put to were made clear. Also made clear was the secrecy of the matter, and the danger in recording such things, even in coded form.

The Prima's slaves weren't just workers and servants, they were *human leaders*: chiefs, priests, thinkers and prophets. Recently uncovered accounts by other cultures tell similar stories, and it gets easier to spot them every time. The slack-jawed zombie was more likely to be prince than pauper, and the strings of these brain-dead animal puppets could always be followed back to the fingers of the Prima.

Like the Greys, the Prima seemed to view humanity as little more than lab rats, but unlike the Greys, they seemed interested in what they could make of *us*, rather than what we could be made into for *them*. It seems plain that the Prima were never trapped here, nor did they arrive by accident. In many ways, our societies are their very deliberate creation.

The brainsquid (p. 93) may well be another Prima device, especially considering recent discoveries regarding their role in evolution of intelligence.

Wigglers

The following creatures are only a sample of the dangers slithering under the rocks of the *Black Ops* world. Many other *GURPS* books, especially *Creatures of the Night* and *Space Bestiary*, are packed with wigglers (and beasts) that can make an op's life a living hell.

Big Bugs

In the late 1960s and early '70s, while Vietnam was still in the headlines, the U.S. Department of Defense was experimenting with ways of enhancing the common infantryman into something less common. One of those experiments – a cocktail of drugs, growth hormones and radiation treatments – was designed to make soldiers super-strong and super-resilient. Instead, it made them super-stupid and, frequently, very dead.

Meanwhile, a handful of roaches were under the table, eating the scraps accidentally tossed to them by careless researchers. The progeny of those roaches grew twice as large. The progeny of *those* roaches grew twice as large. And so on. Roaches breed quickly; before long, there were roaches walking around that a child could put a saddle on and ride. For every one the horrified Defense scientists saw, a hundred more were scuttling around underground. That's when the ops were sent in. Nowadays, the big bugs live in the undercity, breeding like crazy. They tend to keep hidden – unless they get hungry.

That's the roaches' story. It's a good bet that humanity has no one but itself to blame for most of the big bugs, although a very few species may have *always* been here.

Ant

ST: 6-12	Move/Dodge: 6/6	Size: 2
DX: 12	PD/DR: 2/2	Weight: 25-50 lbs.
IQ: 2	Damage: 1d-2 cr#	Habitat: P, F, J
HT: 10-15	Reach: C	

Big ants live in large, underground nests containing hundreds or thousands of individuals. They are the ultimate communists: everything is done for the nest; the individual means nothing. Most ants are divided into "soldier" and "worker" castes. For every soldier in the colony, there will be 20-50 workers. Soldiers' stats are at the high end of the ranges given above; workers' stats are at the low end. With most species, the workers don't attack at all – they just mill around and get in the way. The workers of some species *will* defend the nest, though. In any species,

workers will "attack" someone if they see him as food. Soldiers will ignore people unless the nest is invaded.

Big ants are usually encountered while foraging. Foraging parties will be made up of about 2d ants. While foraging, the ants leave chemical trails behind them. If an ant finds food (humans qualify) and returns to the nest, many ants will follow the trail back to the food source. Ants can carry many times their own weight. A single, 25-lb. worker ant could drag a human body back to the nest.

The possessions of ant victims will be scattered around the hill or (in some species) stacked in "burial chambers" along with dead ants and other trash.

Big ants attack with their mandibles, doing 1d-2 crushing damage. Many species also secrete formic acid, doing an extra 2 points of damage if the initial bite penetrates DR. A few species can *squirt* formic acid, doing 1d of damage (SS 10, Acc 0, 1/2D ST, Max ST×1.5).

Big *fire* ants have a venomous sting. Anyone stung takes normal damage and must roll against HT-6. Failure means 1d damage instantly and -4 DX for three days. Success means half damage and -2 DX for the same period. In this species, even the workers are aggressive and have venom. Giant *army* ants are really bad news – they're all food-gatherers with a soldier's bite, and they all attack.

Other Notes: Black ops have attacked ants in their own nests. Many species dig tunnels that allow humans to walk in a low crouch, but the twists and drops require decent spelunking skills and a lot of climbing. This is only necessary when the nest is too near civilization to do the obvious thing: pour gasoline on the nest and light it. On the scale of a big ant nest, that's a *very* visible blaze.

During an extended operation against army ants in Uganda in 1979, Company scientists perfected a synthetic version of the chemical trail that foraging ants leave behind. Any operations where big ants are expected will include a healthy supply of this in spray applicators. Each applicator weighs 2 lbs. and is good for 1,000 yards of trail. This can be used to play with the ants' feeding patterns and to draw them into ambush or capture.

Cockroach

ST: 9	Move/Dodge: 18/9	Size: 1
DX: 12	PD/DR: 3/3	Weight: 70-100 lbs.
IQ: 2	Damage: 1d-2 cut	Habitat: Nearly any
HT: 16/8	Reach: C	

It is said that the cockroaches will inherit the Earth (presumably by killing off the meek, which shouldn't take



long). Any op who's faced a tunnel that's crawling walls, floor and ceiling with big roaches knows this to be true. Roaches are fast and numerous. They hang on, chittering loudly, long after they should be dead. Like their smaller cousins, they prefer to scavenge for food, but the big ones are quick to turn aggressive, particularly if they smell something sweet or greasy.



While the swarm rules (p. B143) are normally reserved for much smaller creatures (big roaches are dog-sized), a version of these rules can be used for scenarios in which every available surface is covered in roaches, crawling over one another to get to the ops, who are up to their waists in them already. A hex represents an average of 3 roaches (the exact number will change every turn) and has a Move of 7. Moving into a roach hex costs 3 points of movement, and requires a roll against DX+3 to avoid falling. Each hex does 1d cutting damage per turn (DR protects normally) and can be dispersed by 21 hits of damage. Flame weapons and explosives do their full damage to a roach hex; bullets and other attacks do one point each (making autofire exceptionally useful).

Straightforward combat against hundreds of roaches would be tiresome; the GM should use the "swarm" approach when a squad is trying to move *through* a roach-infested tunnel to some greater goal. Then they can drop a brick of C4 down the tunnel to bury the rest.

Other Notes: Big roaches can appear in truly terrifying numbers. A rotting mansion near Macon, Georgia, contained over 700 of them. Ultimately, the house had to be torched from a distance. A lot of the roaches just walked right out of the flames, pouring into the open air and making screeching noises of complaint as they headed for shade. There were ops chasing the roaches across the countryside for three days after.

Sewer Fluke

ST: 20-30 Move/Dodge: 7/6 Size: 5-6
 DX: 12 PD/DR: 3/5 Weight: 900-1,700 lbs.
 IQ: 3 Damage: 1d+2 cut Habitat: Sewers
 HT: 15/25-40 Reach: C

A gigantic, white centipede about the size of an alligator, the sewer fluke dwells in the murkiest depths of city sewer systems, living on human waste and anyone who happens to disturb it. It was fluke sightings that created the urban myth of "albino alligators" in the sewers. Black

ops often run into sewer flukes when they venture into the undercity to locate and destroy a brainsucker lair.

Sewer flukes are straightforward in combat. They move by half-running, half-swimming in sewage and water, and attack with their mandibles for the damage listed above. Long but highly flexible, they can double over and twist about to maximum advantage in combat.

The fluke is extremely tough and hardy. Its skin is leathery and segmented, like a carapace. Furthermore, it heals very quickly, shrugging off bullet wounds within hours. A sewer fluke regenerates wounds at the rate of 1 hit per 10 minutes, and can even regrow missing body parts, given a few days.

Certain sewer flukes are vulnerable to sonic attack in the 5-10 Hz range. "White noise" broadcast at these frequencies will completely stun the fluke, and it takes a while for it to adjust to the jangling of its nervous system. A fluke stunned in this way must make a HT roll to recover from stun, at -12 initially, -11 on the second turn, -10 on the third and so on. Eventually, the fluke will adjust and snap back to readiness, angrier than ever. If it critically fails any of these HT rolls, the fluke is automatically stunned for a full minute before getting a roll to recover. Some flukes are entirely immune to this effect. The GM should secretly roll 3d for each fluke; on an 8 or less, the fluke is unaffected.

Sewer flukes may cluster in small pockets of a dozen or so to huge nests of a hundred or more. They are sometimes encountered individually, but as there is no real competition for their normal food source, they are social and laid-back, as deadly mutant monsters go. They are only found in places where discovery is unlikely.

Sewer flukes take full advantage of their environment. When fighting in sewer tunnels, remember the rules for fighting in water (p. B91). Especially clever flukes will try to draw foes into deeper tunnels, attacking from below, grappling with mandibles to suck victims into the sewage and so on. Sewer flukes move on dry surfaces as easily as they do in water, and can crawl up walls and onto ceilings at full speed. Some have been known to drop to ambush.

Sewer-fluke encounters can often lead to disease. Use the contagion rules on pp. B133-134.

Spider

ST: 12-40 Move/Dodge: 4-12/7 Size: 1-7
 DX: 15 PD/DR: 2/2 Weight: 250-700 lbs.
 IQ: 2 Damage: * Habitat: Sub, F, J, S
 HT: 14/10-35 Reach: C

Black ops have encountered over 20 species of big spiders in the course of their duties, and Science suspects that many hundreds might exist. The varieties so far encountered represent a broad cross-section of types.

Most big spiders are poisonous. The strength and type of the venom depends on the species, and ranges from



ineffectual to deadly; types A, C, E and F are recommended (see pp. CII147-149). Spiders with weak venom generally have strong jaws that do impaling damage for their ST (see p. B140). Spiders with strong venom have weaker jaws, doing damage based on half their ST (still impaling).

Webs: A strand of webbing has DR 3, HT 6 for the purposes of cutting. Touching the strand will have the effect of grappling the body part in question. Breaking free requires a Quick Contest of ST, which is usually no problem for one strand. Treat a single strand as ST 2 for this purpose, although some strands are extremely sticky and should be given a higher ST. Each additional strand gives +2 ST, and a spider can generate one strand every other turn. For purposes of lifting, a single strand will have ST equal to (spider's weight in lbs./25).

Anyone who stumbles into a big spider's web will be grappled and suffer an immediate -2 to DX. Give the web a ST of 10-16 for grappling purposes. A Quick Contest of ST is required to break free; each *failed* attempt will cause the victim to become further entangled and cost 1 point of fatigue. If ST reaches 0, the victim is totally immobilized and can't even struggle. If the web's creator is handy, it will be adding more webbing (one strand every other turn), with each new strand adding 2 to the ST of the web for grappling purposes. Every strand cut reduces the web's ST by 2; when the web's ST is reduced to 0, it is assumed the victim has been cut free (other parts of the web retain full ST, however).

Big spiders use their webs in many ways, from large web traps to single-strand "tripwires." *Hunting* spiders string a web behind them, securing it frequently as they actively seek prey. Any tremor in the web up to 20 yards behind the spider will bring it scuttling back for the kill.

See pp. BE34-35 for other types of giant spiders.

Brainsquid

ST: -	Move/Dodge: -	Size: < 1
DX: 8	PD/DR: 0/0	Weight: Negligible
IQ: 3	Damage: *	Habitat: Any damp & warm
HT: 10/1	Reach: C	

Company scientists have yet to determine whether brainsquid and brainsuckers are related; both are tiny, both bore into the human brain and live there. The difference is that brainsquid are about as smart as the average pigeon and don't control the host - they just eat brain. Until very recently, the Company didn't know how they reproduced at all. Now that their reproduction is understood (see below), the key to their purpose may be at hand. They may be a

failed project of the Prima or a brainsucker mutation. In any case, they're lethal. Fortunately, they're also rare.

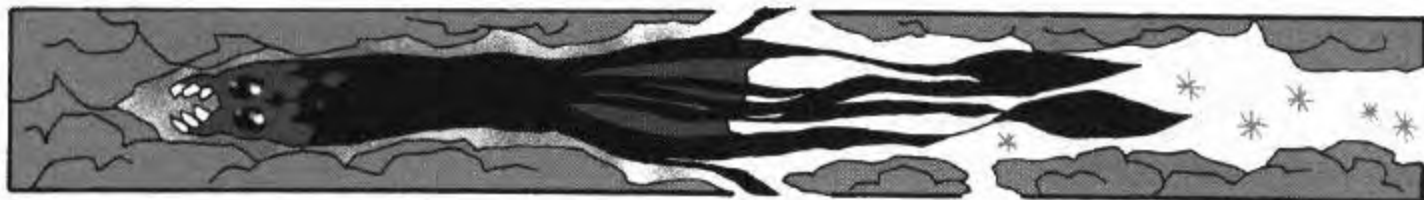
Brainsquid can be found in warm waters or marshes, on damp ground, or even in foliage above ground. An immature brainsquid is the size of a mosquito. When any mammal (humans included) brushes against one, it latches on and begins to burrow. It chews a hole in the victim's flesh and can slither under the skin anywhere on the body, secreting a powerful local anesthetic as it crawls toward the nearest major nerve. Unless the pinhole-sized wound (or the squid's slithering tail) is spotted *visually*, it won't be noticed at all.

Inside the body, the squid moves an inch or two a day, slowly eating its way through the nervous system to first the spinal cord and then the brain. It eventually grows large enough to nearly fill the passage occupied by the nerve. The first symptom, a feeling of numbness, occurs within a few hours of entry. If the squid entered at your ankle, you might just think your foot was falling asleep. If it entered at your chest, you might think you were suffering from heart trouble.

If a brainsquid enters at the bottom of your foot, it will take about 40 days to reach your brain. If it enters at your neck, you have maybe half a week. As time passes, you will experience more frequent numbness and (as the squid crawls up your spine) dizzy spells and short blackouts. Before the squid enters the spine, a tiny hard lump will be visible under the flesh. Once it begins to burrow for home, there isn't even that. If the squid has not been discovered by then, the victim is as good as dead.

When the brainsquid reaches the brain, it gorges, eating to its heart's content and becoming a little larger than a golf ball as it burrows through gray matter and into the sinuses. While this is happening, the victim is dizzy and disoriented. Then the squid begins to fragment. Visually, it seems to liquify and die. One time in fifty, the victim, its nasal membranes irritated by the presence of the squid, will give a final sneeze, spraying this liquid invisibly into the air. The victim will then slip into a coma and die shortly thereafter. The other 49 times, the victim slips into a coma and dies without sneezing at all. When the sneeze happens, the brainsquid has reproduced, spreading up to 15,000 microscopic creatures that aren't *exactly* brainsquid (see p. 94).

Squid Removal: The removal of a brainsquid requires a well-equipped surgical theater and skilled surgery. The squid must be isolated within living nerve tissue and removed as a bundle without disturbing it, harming it or exposing it to open air. This means that a part of the



patient's nervous system must be removed to save his life, which can cause paralysis or worse, even in the best cases.

The procedure requires four consecutive rolls against Surgery skill (with all the usual modifiers). Each roll represents 10-15 minutes of time, depending on the success of the roll. If *any* of the rolls fail, the brainsquid is accidentally killed (either by rupture or exposure). The surgeon must make an immediate Surgery-6 roll to detect the danger in time and forcibly remove the squid (doing 2d damage to the patient in the process). If this succeeds, the patient suffers the damage directly to his nervous system, but lives (exact long-term effects of the nerve damage are left to the GM). If it fails, the squid liquifies into a powerful toxin that does 1d damage/minute to the patient for 5d minutes. There is currently no known antitoxin.

A mature brainsquid can't live for long outside the human body. If one is expunged from its host, it must find a new host within 10 minutes or it will die.

Other Notes: Brainsquid offspring aren't brainsquids. They're *different*. The "brainchildren" (a nickname applied by Science op Paul Pageant in 1995) are microscopic and encoded with human brain waves. These brainchildren infest living creatures the same way brainsquid do, but in groups, remaining very tiny and living comfortably in the brain without harming the host.

In fact, brainchildren *enhance* their victims (usually lower mammals), raising their intelligence and permanently altering their genetic code. Company research suggests animal intelligence on Earth is evolving at *triple* the rate it would be without the brainsquid, and probably has been for millennia. Very, very slowly, the brainchildren are raising the mental capacity of nearly every mammalian species on the planet. Maybe even *us*. Examination of rogue corpses indicates that the most powerful human psychics are "infested" with brainchildren.

When a brainchild host dies, the brainchildren living in its brain bond, forming an egg-like mass from their own bodies. A small cluster of brainsquid then hatch from this and crawl into the world.

Breederbugs

ST: 13 **Move/Dodge:** 6/6 **Size:** 1
DX: 8 **PD/DR:** 2/1 **Weight:** 130-170 lbs.
IQ: 7-12 **Damage:** By ST or weapon **Habitat:** Any
HT: 20 **Reach:** C, 1

These are tiny, black, centipede-like "bugs" that scoop out nests in the corpses of humans and domesticated ani-

mals, which they then animate! They are also called "taxidermites" by some of the grunts, a joke dating from when a Science op died trying to discover more about them became the Company's first breederbug victim.

Breeders enter a corpse's mouth or open wounds, reproducing rapidly as they feed on internal organs. Leaving only a husk of outer flesh, they continue to multiply until they form a tightly packed mass. They then secrete a fluid that preserves their host and binds them together in a sticky semblance of musculature, allowing the colony to move in concert and animate the dead body.

A corpse animated by breeders cannot speak, and its eyes and mouth are full of glittering bugs, but a clever breeder colony can live among humans for years. Although it can't talk, eat or drink, it is undetectable if it wears sunglasses and doesn't open its mouth.

Often, the bugs will attempt to imitate the movements of the animal or human which they occupy. Their actions will appear jerky and uncoordinated, but will improve with practice. Left to their own devices, breederbug colonies are solitary, quiet "citizens": the silent elderly, the half-seen vagrants and the mentally ill. They are always there, but never heard; they fall into roles where ubiquitous presence and lack of speech won't alert others to their nature. They shamble through life, the occasional bug falling from a mouth or ear drying to black ash when separated from its colony.



The stats above describe a complete humanoid *colony*, a human corpse inhabited by thousands of bugs. ST and hit points will change proportionately for a colony in an animal body, but HT and DX won't vary much. The collection of bugs forms a hive mind, with basic instincts and motives, and IQ increases with the size of the colony; a horse-sized breeder corpse will be *smarter* than a human-sized one. For every halving or doubling of the weight given above, change IQ by 1. This means that a horse-sized colony might have an IQ of 12-13, and a colony inhabiting a *T. rex* corpse could have an IQ of 15-16! Minimum colony IQ is 3; individual bugs are IQ 2.

Breeder colonies are very vulnerable to extreme heat; their binding secretions break down rapidly at temperatures much above the human comfort level. Open flame (burning clothing, flamethrowers, napalm) applied directly to a colony will cause it to vacate, creating an image akin

to rats fleeing a sinking ship as the bugs pour by the hundreds from the mouth of the collapsing corpse.

Any breederbug free from the cosy confines of a colony will attempt to invade a fresh body, even a living one. Individual breeders are too stupid to tell the difference between a corpse and a living body, and will wriggle into any available orifice. This is not

really dangerous (the bugs die harmlessly in minutes), but it

is disconcerting and causes a Fright Check at -5.

This is a regular hazard in the presence of heat or in combat, as breeders are shaken from the corpse's mouth and spill out of open wounds. If a scattered colony is near many dead bodies, the GM should roll 3d to determine how many corpses become infested.



Otherwise, a scattered colony is essentially doomed.

In combat, breeders typically *leave*. Their own agenda includes nothing other than haunting the dying and waiting for fresh corpses to inhabit. They aren't hunters, they're scavengers, lurking around those soon to depart.

A breeder colony can be riled into combat by cornering or attacking it; a provoked colony will defend itself if there is no other option. A colony has a collective Bad Temper disadvantage, and a mild fear of flame (see pp. B35-36). Serious injury (or failed, flame-related Fright Checks) can cause a state similar to the Berserk disadvantage (p. B31). This includes "injury" that accrues from lack of exposure to static.

Radio and television static – "white noise" or "snow" – stimulates breeder colonies to produce the fluid that binds them together and keeps them alive. Breeders are often seen wearing a portable radio tuned off the channel, or hanging around the television displays at department stores, tuning each set to static. After a day without static, a breeder colony takes a point of damage every two hours.

Other Notes: Many ops who've encountered the breeders believe that they're another creation of the Prima, perhaps an efficient method of using brainsucker zombies for cheap labor after they've died. That seems unlikely, unless *something* has been providing the breederbugs with static for the two millennia since the Prima vanished. The breederbugs need white noise to live and, Prima creation or not, they're now the pawns of many other dark forces. Anyone with Telepathy and skill at controlling minds can control breederbug colonies as easily as humans. They are known to Mind (p. 107) and the Greys (p. 84), both of whom have employed them in numbers.

Ice Weasel

ST: 20-25 **Move/Dodge:** 7/8 **Size:** 2
DX: 16 **PD/DR:** 3/6 **Weight:** 160-270 lbs.
IQ: 3# **Damage:** 1d+1 imp# **Habitat:** A
HT: 13/18-35 **Reach:** C

Ice weasels are dangerous arctic predators that have been encountered by black ops in isolated regions of Canada, Alaska and Russia. When venturing into the sub-arctic woodlands, they are most commonly found seeking prey in frozen marshes. Certain ice shelves in the Antarctic are also home to small pockets of ice weasels.

Company scientists have arrived at few useful conclusions about the weasels' unique physiology. First, they aren't "weasels" at all (the name refers to an Eskimo legend). Rather, they physically resemble *lizards*, both inside and out, with striking silvery-white scales. Unlike lizards, which are slowed to uselessness in cold weather and invigorated by heat, ice weasels thrive in freezing temperatures and can be seriously damaged by sudden warmth. While reptiles are cold-blooded, ice weasels have an internal body temperature of nearly 300°F.

A weasel's underbelly is a dark blue-black, and it rolls on its back to absorb solar energy through some as-yet unexplained mechanism. This heat is "stored" as chemical potential in large glands that run from above the mouth (near the teeth) to the back of the neck. When an ice weasel needs a burst of heat, these glands release chemicals that create it – instantly! The heat created can be *intense*, and serves two functions. The first is movement: ice weasels can swim through solid ice and hard-packed snow as if it were liquid water. Their "swimming" speed is Move 5 (the Move score above is for land movement), but they can push the envelope to Move 6 at a cost of 4 fatigue per turn, allowing them to make short, under-ice sprints. The weasel achieves this by superheating its razor-sharp teeth, melting the ice as it burrows at incredible speeds.



The second function of the heat glands is combat. While ice weasels rarely need to (they have terrifying teeth and claws), they can superheat their teeth while biting, and will do this if they feel particularly threatened. In game terms, an ice weasel may opt to do this *after* scoring a successful hit, but before damage is rolled. For every

point of fatigue the weasel elects to spend, it increases its biting damage by 1 point. The additional damage doesn't receive the impaling bonus; it is burning damage.

Ice weasels are susceptible to damage from any heat other than that which they generate themselves. Flamethrowers and burning phosphorus do triple damage; incendiary bullets do +2 damage per die. Even boiling water splashed on an ice weasel (at least a gallon) will do 2d damage. If a weasel is stunned (see p. B127) by a heat-based attack, it rolls to recover at -6! Immersion in boiling water would be instantly fatal to them. All such "heat attacks" ignore the weasel's DR.

Ice weasels live and hunt in small packs, going after wolves, caribou, elk, penguin and anything else. They use pack tactics in combat. A weasel pack is rarely larger than 10 creatures, but that's enough to give a team of ops serious trouble, especially if they are taken by surprise – and the terrain *always* works in the weasels' favor. If there isn't deep snow or treacherous footing, the weasels won't attack unless they are starving. Alpha weasels (which aren't always male) have IQ 4 (sometimes 5!), and are fiercely cunning when it comes to ambushes that inconvenience the prey. Ice weasels have Stealth at DX, with +5 to the roll when traveling under ice and snow.

Other Notes: Graham Lee, a secop operating near Juno, Alaska, discovered a useful property of ice weasels while on a cleanup mission in 1995. An ice weasel's head, carefully severed without damaging the heat glands (requires a roll against Knife skill for anyone who's learned Survival (Arctic) at the Academy), can be squeezed from under the jaw in such a way as to heat the teeth as it did in life. The weasel's head will be good for 3d+16 seconds of white-hot heat before the juice runs out. The glands stay fresh for about 7 hours. The teeth can be used to carve ice miraculously, start fires (even with wet wood) and cauterize wounds (does 1d-1 burning damage, but stops bleeding on a First Aid roll).

If using the *Flammables* rules (p. HT24), an ice weasel head can ignite class A, B and C flammables in a single turn, class D flammables in 2d seconds, and class E flammables in 4d seconds. The use of weasel heads as improvised weapons has yet to be necessary, but may be possible (GM's option).

Any critical failure rolled while handling a hot weasel head can result in horrible burns.

Rockworm

ST: 150-200 **Move/Dodge:** 3/4# **Size:** 2 or 3
DX: 9 **PD/DR:** 2/10 **Weight:** 0.5-1.5 tons
IQ: 4 **Damage:** 9d-1(2) cr **Habitat:** M (Volcanic)
HT: 10/100+ **Reach:** C

Found in rocky terrain (canyons, ridges, mountains), especially near volcanic or seismic activity, rockworms are earthworm-like creatures the size of cattle. They have short, thick bodies; rough, stubby skin that can turn small-arms fire, and a maw that can rip a man to shreds.

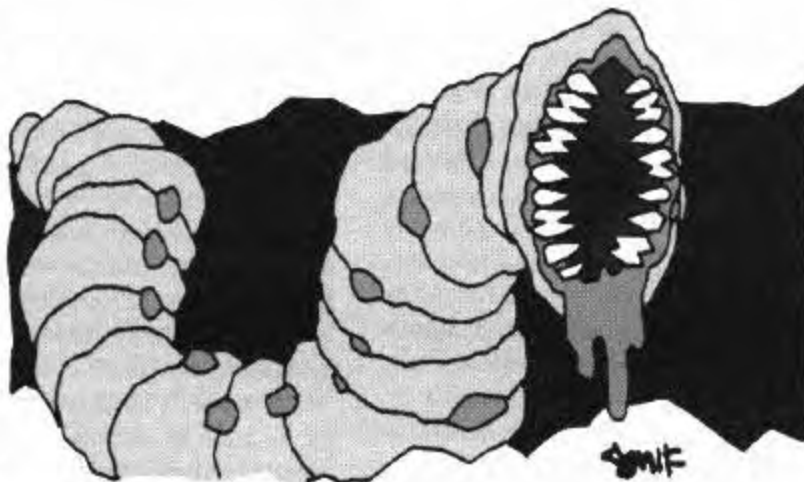
Rockworms do not typically engage in combat; they are timid, busy creatures, their single-minded brains concerned with little else but tunneling through miles of tasty rock. They use their super-hard teeth to burrow at a shocking rate of 1

yard per second, leaving behind a trail of pulverized gravel streaked with what looks like wet sand, the entire mass leached of vital mineral nutrients.

Their usual tendency to avoid other living things dangerously reverses when seismic or volcanic activity occurs nearby. At first (often due to a mild tremor, undetectable to unaided humans), they just get edgy, and begin to cluster together and move to the surface. When the activity reaches the level a human can detect, the rockworms are there, ready to madly kill anything that isn't a rockworm.

In combat, a rockworm has the stats given above (rockworms can "sprint" at Move 3 for short periods, but rarely bother except when crazed by tremors). All rockworm attacks are *bites to grapple* (p. BE55), treated as both an attack and a grapple. Once a victim is successfully bitten, he is held fast, even if DR is not penetrated (and DR is *halved* vs. rockworm bites). Effective grappling ST for contests is 1/3 that of the beast itself; multiple humans can add their ST together to pull out a friend. A human-sized victim who isn't pulled free will be sucked inside in 1d+1 turns. Once inside, damage is doubled.

When a swallowed victim has taken HT×6 total damage, he is expelled in a messy spray from the opposite end of the rockworm. Some rockworms have been known to deliberately aim this spray at foes to blind them (treat this as an attack with reach 4 and no penalty to hit the face, due to the width of the jet). Being sprayed by a comrade's churned remains tends to demoralize (although this rarely fazes a black op): make a Fright Check at -5.



Rockworms are numerous; fortunately, their tactics are terrible. The nearly blind (Vision rolls succeed only on an unmodified 3 or 4) worms sense vibrations at up to 20 yards. They then move to what they sensed and eat it.

Other Notes: Rockworms were discovered when a group of geologists went missing a few years ago. Only one made it back to base, and she was in bad shape. A black op squad intercepted her radioed call for help. When they showed up, she was dead from massive trauma to all major organs. Subsequent investigation led to an epic battle with a den of rockworms.

The largest rockworm nest uncovered to date was, curiously, far from normal volcanic or seismic activity, in the rocky hills near the Khyber Pass (Pakistan end), with no less than 117 rockworm bodies accounted for when the carnage was done. The clean-up and cover-up mission was among the most inconvenient and unsettling in Company history, requiring not only considerable favor-taking with the Pakistani military, but over 3,000 lbs. of curry. The beasts were driven into combat frenzy not by natural vibrations, but by sonic devices planted by the Greys.

Company scientists theorize that the actual limit to rockworm size is much greater than the encounters to date would suggest, possibly ranging up to 6 tons. If such rockworms exist, they probably never approach the surface world. They would do 6d×10(2) cutting damage, but burrow at lower speeds (perhaps 16 yards per hour).

Beasts

Most creatures in this section are representative examples, not absolute templates. Beasts vary in size, shape and power at least as much as wigglers, if not more so.

Demon

The term "demon" is applied by the Company to a group of creatures that are human in many respects. The *typical* demon is the size of a strong man, with two legs, two arms and a head. Dress a demon in an overcoat and a floppy hat, and he'll look perfectly human. But there's really no such thing as a typical demon. Most demons have one or more inhuman features: slit pupils, a tail, small horns, talons or even the wrong number of limbs. Some of these unnatural features are useful in a fight; some are just ugly. No two demons look quite alike.



Individual demons should be created by the GM. Physically, they aren't too superior to humanity, but they are *smart* (typical IQ 12-14). All four basic attributes tend to stay in the human range, but there are unpleasant exceptions. In 1985, operatives in Toronto bagged one that would have had ST 30+ in *GURPS* terms. (It had been running a bizarre murder scheme involving cola taste tests and ripping off limbs. Thirteen human bodies were found, many of them children, along with seven cases each of New and Classic Coke.)

Hard enough to pin down alone, demons have been known to band together, forming cabals with six or more members. These nefarious "tribes" can cause unbelievable damage to a community over long periods of time. It is suspected that areas with large numbers of missing children owe more to demon cabals than to an increase in the number of runaways.

Demons stick to darkness, but don't have a *physical* weakness to light. They just don't like it, and darkness helps them stay disguised. Beyond that, the only generalization that really sticks is that demons are *evil*, or as close to evil as you can get without getting metaphysical. They enjoy cruelty, violence and suffering, and see all three as games to be played. They have no conscience, and appear to live for the unequivocal pleasure of causing pain and destruction. They will often perpetrate elaborate plans to humiliate and degrade their victims.

A typical demon is presented below:



The Cedarville Shadow

ST: 13	Move/Dodge: 7/7	Size: 1
DX: 15	PD/DR: 1/3	Weight: 180 lbs.
IQ: 14	Damage: By weapon *	Habitat: Ohio
HT: 15	Reach: Varies	

This demon terrorized a community near Dayton, Ohio, for a year before the Company caught up to it and shot it to hell. The Shadow had dark skin and slitted yellow eyes, but was otherwise physically human. It wore a battered leather flight jacket, spray-painted black (the PD and DR above include the jacket), black shorts and nothing else. It killed people by shooting them in each hand and foot, and then the forehead, which got it dubbed "The Crucifixion Killer" by a Dayton newspaper. Its skin had a unique chameleon property: it blended into darkness *very* well. (Attacks against the Cedarville Shadow take *double*

the normal darkness penalty, and if the total Vision penalty on the Shadow is ever -10 – the maximum – the creature is considered invisible for all purposes.)

The Shadow favored small handguns (especially the Ruger .22), apparently because they were less likely to put the victim into shock before the killing blow and because a .22 slug isn't likely to leave an exit wound on a head shot. On the two known occasions where the Shadow left a corpse with the skull broken open, he desecrated the corpses further, marking them as "failures." The ops that took him down didn't have time for question-and-answer sessions, or this behavior might have been explained.

Dinosaurs

The Company met its first *T. rex* in Madagascar, back in '59. The ops didn't realize it, but they were lucky: most encountered since hunt in packs – family picnic outings. We now know that the Amazon and Congo rainforests host several dinosaur species, and Science would love to capture samples of all of them. Combat isn't likely to go for that any time soon.

Company scientists aren't sure why there are still living examples of prehistoric wildlife. They may be the result of recent Grey experiments. Given the Greys' cold curiosity, it wouldn't be beyond them to clone a few dinosaurs just to see what noises they make when feeding.

Dinosaurs are mostly found in isolated jungles and rainforests, but some are cropping up near cities in China. Clean-ups are getting trickier; fortunately, the Chinese press rarely separates sensationalism from the truth.

For stats on hundreds of prehistoric species (and when they were supposed to have lived and died), see *GURPS Dinosaurs*. The two perennial favorites are provided here.

Tyrannosaurus

ST: 100-150	Move/Dodge: 11/7	Size: 13+
DX: 14	PD/DR: 2/3	Weight: 4-6 tons
IQ: 3	Damage: 5d+2 imp	Habitat: P, F
HT: 15/50-80	Reach: C, 1, 2	

Tyrannosaurus rex grows up to 40' long and stands 20' high. Its massive skull (DR 4) is over 4' long, with 6" saw-edged teeth, and its jaw is well-muscled, allowing it to rip off 500 lbs. of meat in a bite (most black ops weigh considerably less). Its arms are less than 3' long, ending in two claws (not used in combat), and have ST 14-15. It uses its powerful legs to pin down small or weak prey (Contest of ST to pin; does 3d cutting damage).



T. rex has good stereoscopic vision and hearing, and a sharp sense of smell. It makes all sense rolls at 14.

The listed Move is its normal speed limit. On open ground, *T. rex* has been clocked at 40.9 mph (Move 20), but problems with decelerating and (worse) falling keep *T. rex* at a more conservative Move 11 in combat. Speeds up to 50 mph (Move 24) might be possible in an open chase.

Triceratops

ST: 200+	Move/Dodge: 10/6	Size: 15+
DX: 12	PD/DR: 2/2#	Weight: 6-7 tons
IQ: 3	Damage: 5d imp#	Habitat: P
HT: 17/50-75	Reach: C	

An adult *Triceratops* grows from 25' to 30' in length, with brow horns more than 3' long. In close combat, its head butt does 3d+2 impaling damage with either. Its head, neck and shoulders are protected by a solid, bony frill, up to 7' wide, providing PD 4, DR 6, and giving it a Block defense of 6 as well as a Dodge.

A *Triceratops* can charge at up to 25 mph (Move 12), doing 7d impaling, but is at -3 to hit a human-sized target with this type of attack. Its trample does 3d crushing damage, with no penalty to hit. Finally, it has blade-like teeth, doing 5d cutting at -4 to hit.

Dragons and Sea Serpents

Ops have encountered beasts that might be called *dragons*: large, saurian creatures with wings and dangerously hot breath (the chemical process seems similar to that of the ice weasel; see p. 95). Statistics for several dragons can be found in *GURPS Fantasy Bestiary*.

As for "sea serpents," most are left-over prehistoric creatures, but one found in the Caribbean was a salt-water electric eel large enough to wrap around a nuclear sub, and giant octopoids are becoming increasingly common.

Electric Eel, Giant Aquatic

ST: 150	Speed/Dodge: 7/4	Size: 60
DX: 9	PD/DR: 1/2	Weight: 800 tons
IQ: 5	Damage: *	Habitat: SW
HT: 12/175	Reach: C, 1	

Even the mundane electric eel (see p. BE14) reeks of alien genetic tampering. While all animal life is to some extent electrical, few creatures have nervous systems adapted to deliver massive electrical discharges. The electric eel (actually a fish) uses its electric field for defense, navigation and to stun small prey, such as frogs. The giant version can disrupt the electrical functions of a sea vessel!

The stats above describe the largest example on record: a monster nearly 200' long, capable of delivering a continuous 2,700 volts at 25 amperes, or nearly 70 *kilo-watts*! Its individual discharges last up to 1/30 of a second (much longer than those of a normal electric eel). A normal electric eel generates about 500 watts, which would

be sufficient to light several light bulbs if the discharges weren't so brief. However, the electricity of the giant eel *can* be put to useful applications. It's possible that under-sea facilities of the Prima were entirely eel-powered! The fish can discharge more-or-less continuously for days on end, with minimal loss in output.

These eels hunt in schools of up to seven. If one eel discharges, the others will rapidly converge on the spot, seeking food. This can be deadly: the discharge of a *single* eel can do up to 5d×20 electrical damage to an unprotected human swimmer within 5 yards! The haunting light produced by such a discharge can be seen for dozens of yards in the murkiest waters. The great fish require much food, but easily slaughter entire schools of smaller fish.

If a vehicle comes within shocking range of an eel, roll damage as above. Apply this damage as if it were a weapon hit, but metallic armor has only 1/10 its normal DR! This damages electronic equipment, but has no effect on other components. (This can still cripple a submarine.) Anyone operating electrical gear that takes damage takes half as much damage himself, and must make a HT roll to avoid instant heart failure (see pp. C1138-139). **GURPS Vehicles** contains detailed rules governing vehicle component damage; GMs without **Vehicles** should be able to judge discharge effects using the guidelines above.

Giant Octopoid

ST: 50-80 **Speed/Dodge:** 10/7 **Size:** 25-30
DX: 13 **PD/DR:** 2/4 **Weight:** 10+ tons
IQ: 3 **Damage:** 3d+1 cut# **Habitat:** SW
HT: 12/120 **Reach:** C, 1-8

The term "giant octopoid" is about as precise as "wiggler" or "beast." It includes creatures apparently related to both octopi and squid, as well as alien variants of both. The octopoid can use its tentacles to grapple other creatures – or vehicles! – and *constrict*. This takes a number of turns equal to the Size Modifier of large prey (such as a ship), but once in its grip, the unfortunate victim will take damage equal to the tentacle's ST *every turn*. Each tentacle has the ST listed above, and multiple tentacles can be brought to bear on large targets.

Only a single tentacle can grapple a man, but it can do significant damage. Roll a Quick Contest of ST each turn. If the 'poid wins, it inflicts damage equal to its margin of victory. Damage equal to 25% of the total hit points can sever a tentacle (impaling attacks receive no damage bonus). Such damage in no way affects *body* hit points. Damage listed above is for the beak on the body (reach C), to which any tasty morsels will be drawn in combat,



Gargoyle

ST: 20+ **Move/Dodge:** 8/8# **Size:** I (usually)
DX: 16-18 **PD/DR:** 4/8 **Weight:** 200-300 lbs.
IQ: 7-10 **Damage:** 3d+2 cut# **Habitat:** Any
HT: 14-16 **Reach:** C or by weapon

Gargoyles are a *species* (or multiple, related species) of some kind, something above an "animal" – barely. Some ops think that gargoyles are related to demons (p. 97). The stats above are for a typical humanoid gargoyle; adjust appropriately for more bestial gargoyles (many of those encountered in Germany last year were *very* bestial winged quadrupeds). Move and Dodge are based on (DX+HT)/4; the values above are averages, to be used if a quick reference is required. Gargoyles with wings (about 80% of them) have a flying Move equal to four times their ground Move (typically Move 32 in the air).

Gargoyles possess several abilities that are useful when hunting intelligent prey just for the fun of it. They are stealthy (Stealth skill equal to DX) and capable of almost perfectly silent flight and movement. They can stand stock-still for hours on end. They can also blend into a natural stone background, shifting their skin color and mottling to match the rocks (+10 to Stealth when standing still, or +5 when moving against the background, when trying to avoid being seen). Gargoyles in urban areas stay near old churches and Gothic cathedrals, because the large, cut stones allow them to blend in, while brick, glass and brushed concrete do not.

A gargoyle can use its talons to do swing/cutting or thrust/impaling damage in close combat. An ordinary (ST 20) gargoyle does 3d+2 cut and 2d-1 imp. For stronger beasts, use the table on p. B248 or p. C110. The average



gargoyle *loves* to rip at the carotid artery (-7 to hit; see p. C1153) and watch the spray. Some enjoy weapons, especially blades. It is unusual for a gargoyle to be fond of firearms (the Mal of any gun drops by two steps in a gargoyle's claws), but such gargoyles are almost always winged and make *really irritating* snipers. Gargoyles do not eat their victims, and kill only for the sheer pleasure of it (the Bloodlust disadvantage).

A single gargoyle can be a terrifying foe, sufficient challenge for an entire squad of ops. Winged gargoyles use their flying abilities to their advantage. They prefer to keep to the open, and *really* enjoy foes dangling from window ledges, the tops of tall buildings and so on. Sometimes they enjoy this enough to grab an earthbound foe and carry him there! Unfortunately, single gargoyles are rarely the problem. They tend to roam in gangs of misshapen grey hatred, with up to a dozen members.

Other Notes: Gargoyles aren't made of stone, but they look and feel like it, and living gargoyle skin can turn small-arms fire about half the time. Dead gargoyles *soften*, becoming pasty and puffy within a day of death.

Gargoyles come in many shapes and sizes; GMs should be inventive. Perhaps 25% of all gargoyles are not humanoid in scale or shape. These range from humanoid gargoyles the size of house pets (excessively irritating "gremlins," in the parlance of ops), to winged lions with curling horns and other misshapen animals, often sporting claws, wings and barbed tails.

strength that even a non-psi can perceive them. Sometimes, these "recordings" carry with them an emotional effect that can be genuinely dangerous (a depressive gloom, an urge for violence), but more often than not, they're simply a disturbing psionic echo of the past. For more on this type of ghost, see p. P49.

The second type of ghost is an actual *entity*, the mind of a human being no longer among the living. Somehow, certain people – unusually strong-willed or emotional people, or powerful telepaths – manage to keep their consciousness beyond death, existing in a kind of "etheric" form, a living field of psychokinetic energy.

Most ghosts of the second variety are also harmless, if startling, creatures. They are trapped in the repetition of their last deeds, attempting to complete a task left unfinished (e.g., rescue a loved one, escape from a locked vault). Some simply drift across moors at night, howling mournful cries. They often frighten but rarely bother to interact with the humans around them, if they are noticed at all. Some ghosts can only be seen by psychics, some by anyone and some can only be seen intermittently.

Dangerous Ghosts

Most ghosts are harmless, but some are big, *big* trouble. "Unfinished tasks" of the dying include the habits of serial killers and the agendas of tyrants. The world includes many ghosts that must be hunted down and destroyed, and more of these are appearing every day.

The stats above are mostly physical and therefore mostly ignored when ghosts are encountered by the living. They apply when ghosts are encountered astrally (see *GURPS Psionics*) or when ghosts are *solidified* (see below). Generally, a ghost is a spectral image that cannot be touched by physical attacks. It can pass through walls, fly at its Move and generally make a nuisance of itself.

All ghosts have some form of psi power, and a good number have *many* forms of psi power: electrokinesis for disrupting electrical devices, psychokinesis for throwing things around and adjusting the ambient temperature, telepathy for erasing memories and causing hallucinations, etc. Any psionic skill or power in *GURPS Basic Set* or *Psionics* may be given to a ghost. Tactically, such ghosts are a free-floating set of malicious psi powers that can't be shot at.

Black ops have found three ways to defeat ghosts. The most direct (favored by Combat ops) is the use of the solidifier (p. 119) to force the psychokinetic energy that the ghost is made of to take on a physical aspect. This allows the grunts to just *shoot* it, which makes them very



Ghost

ST: 8-12 Move/Dodge: 6/6 Size: 1
 DX: 10 PD/DR: * Weight: 110-180 lbs.*
 IQ: 9-15 Damage: Variable Habitat: Any
 HT: 14 Reach: Variable

The term "ghost" includes all manner of spirits, shades and poltergeists. Call them what you will, they fall into two general categories.

The most common type is almost entirely harmless, a psychic "footprint" saturating an area. When something very traumatic and emotional occurs (such as a violent death or suicide), the psychic emanations are often powerful enough to linger for years or *centuries*, with enough

happy. Unfortunately, the small solidifying field and device's dangerous nature limits its usefulness; see Chapter 7.

The second method is direct telepathic attack, possibly assisted by a psychic enhancer (p. 119). The *mind* of a ghost is affected normally by human and Grey telepathy, but the GM should keep in mind that ghosts are strong-willed almost by definition, and usually can fight back.

The third method is *trickery*. Many ghosts owe their continued existence on this plane to an unfinished task or obsession. If the ghost can be convinced that its task is complete (or if it can be completed both demonstrably and harmlessly), the ghost often simply vanishes, moving on to the next level of existence, or dissipating entirely – the Company isn't sure which.

Gullet

ST: 600	Move/Dodge: 5/7	Size: 7
DX: 14	PD/DR: 0/10	Weight: 5 tons
IQ: 6	Damage: 3d×10 cut#	Habitat: Sub (wet)
HT: 14/300	Reach: C, 1-200	

The gullet is a creature unlike any on the planet; it may not even *be* from this planet. Found in damp, warm underground environments, it is a 20'-long, 5'-thick tube of gooey, leathery muscle, terminating in a mouth 5' across that is filled with three rows of serrated teeth. The mouth conceals a long, black tongue, which can shoot out at 60 mph and grab an op in less than a second.

The worst aspect of the creature is the dozens of tendrils, up to 200 yards long, that snake out from its hiding place along walls and ceilings, or underwater. These are slick and hard, and take on the appearance of their surroundings. Using its tendrils, the gullet grows "into" its chosen network of caves, tunnels or basements and gathers food. The tongue is used only when prey gets close enough to eat. A gullet *hates* living things coming near its body unless they're food dragged there by a tendril.



When traveling, the gullet extends no tendrils and keeps its tongue folded over into its body. It can snake along as quickly as a running man, and can twist and flatten itself to fit into some very tight spots. In a very open area, the gullet will try to intimidate its foes by drawing in its tendrils and rearing up on them like legs, lashing out with its tongue. It takes 25 tendrils to support the creature; any remaining tendrils may still attack.

The stats above are for the gullet's tube-like body. The damage listed is for its mouth. The creature's DR isn't due so much to resistance to damage as to the *lack* of resistance – physical attacks tend to slosh through the sticky muscles as if through mud – but they do have a certain tough, elastic quality as well. Due to its shape, a gullet's body has a "blow-through" threshold of 30 hit points rather than 300.



Gullets enjoy heat, and are immune to flames cooler than 4,500°F or so (much hotter than Company-issue flamethrowers). They have an effective DR of 40 against flame weaponry and other heat-based attacks. Extreme cold slows them slightly; it doesn't harm them.

Getting Touched: Gullets settle into remote corners, shafts and holes, deep underground. Once they are at rest in a new location, they quickly *grow* tendrils, one at a time. These grow to a length of approximately 600' in about two days. Then the next tendril begins to grow. The tendrils adapt their coloration (and to a limited degree, their texture) to their environment, blending in as much as possible. In a cave, they look like smooth flows of stone, while in a sewer, they resemble hard, gray pipes.

The gullet can sense heat and movement through *any* part of its body, with an acuity that in some ways surpasses human sight. When food draws near a tendril, it moves, crushing the prey and dragging it back to the gullet's maw.

The tendrils are narrow enough to wrap around a man-sized creature several times. Each one has ST 16, and can move and dodge as quickly as the body itself. They can also constrict (see p. C152). The tendrils have PD 3, DR 5. It takes 8 points of damage to sever one.

Damage done to a tendril has no effect on the body or other tendrils. A gullet can have more than 30 tendrils; the limit is unknown. The record to date is 37.

Getting Licked: The gullet is a partially hollow tube of sinuous muscle, and a large part of it is *tongue*. The tongue is extended only when food is being drawn toward the gullet's open maw, or as a last-ditch (and devastating) form of attack. The creature's tongue is twice as strong as its body proper (ST 1,200!), much longer and lightning-quick. In game terms, it is \times much more powerful tendril.

Any target within 15 yards of the creature's maw (in direct line-of-sight) can be snapped up and pulled into the maw as a single combat action. This requires a Quick Contest of DX between the gullet and the victim. If the victim loses, he is instantly grappled in the gullet's mouth (ST 600), and the gullet can start chewing him up on its next turn.

When the tongue is "deployed," any target within 30 yards of any part of it can be grappled. Again, roll a Quick Contest of DX. The gullet may elect to move the target the remainder of the 30 yards. For instance, a target 20 yards from the tongue when it attacks can be grappled and dragged 10 yards in a single turn. The gullet's tongue may constrict on the turn that it grapples. Death is typically instantaneous.

The tongue has PD 0, DR 5. It takes 24 hits of damage to "cripple" it, and cutting damage can sever it. However, any part of the tongue between the wound and the creature can still move and attack normally, dragging the crippled flesh along with it, if necessary. If the gullet's tongue is crippled, it will begin its retreat (see below).

Gullet Encounters: All five gullets encountered to date have been solitary creatures. Three of these were destroyed by Cadre squads (p. 25) after several previous squads had gone missing. The other two got away. Tactically, they are a nightmare: a conflict with a gullet is a conflict with the shadows in its lair and with its tendrils.

A GM running a gullet encounter should build to it slowly, then start it abruptly. Out of nowhere, one or more tendrils will strike at each black op: some from the ceiling, some from the floor, some from behind pillars, crates, stalagmites . . . The gullet will choose its point of attack carefully, trying to keep dangerous prey at a good distance from its soft body. While small-arms fire rarely bothers it, a burst or two from a machine gun can kill it in seconds; and while it's too stupid to tell a gun from a six-pack of 7-Up (unless it has encountered one before), the gullet knows that humans are dangerous prey.

Eventually, a group of tough and clever ops will trace the tendrils to their source. Then they'd better be ready, because the gullet won't hesitate to bring its tongue to bear. This can mean a dead op every turn if they're foolish enough to get into the open in front of its maw. On the other hand, the only way to disable the tongue is to give the gullet an excuse to extend it. Risky hunting. Explosives may sound like the obvious answer, but they are generally a bad idea in an underground environment, especially beneath the populated areas that gullets enjoy feeding from.

If the gullet sustains a crippling injury to its tongue, loses more than half of its tendrils or takes any kind of real injury to its body, it will engineer its retreat. By taking a single turn and doing nothing else, the gullet can "jettison" its tendrils. Free of its "entanglements," the central

body can make good its escape, fleeing into large heating ducts, watery pits or any other tight squeeze it can find. The discarded tendrils tend to harden and dry over time, becoming just another odd tree root or length of lead pipe to the casual observer.

Other Notes: The mating and everyday eating habits of the gullet are still a mystery. They seem to prefer the tunnels and catacombs beneath inhabited areas (one was found hiding in the steam tunnels beneath the Pentagon), so stray humans are a possibility, perhaps combined with long dormant periods when food is scarce. However, the gullet under the Forbidden City in Beijing had the remains of small, greyish creatures still being digested inside it. Science still hasn't identified them; it could be a secret food source that keeps the gullets active and fed without any dormancy at all. Smaller, infant versions of gullets have not been encountered, but it's assumed they exist.

Soul Dog

Stage I Body

ST: 70-90	Move/Dodge: 12/6	Size: 2
DX: 12	PD/DR: 2/10	Weight: 400-1,000 lbs.
IQ: 13+	Damage: 4d cut	Habitat: Any
HT: 15/40-60	Reach: C	

Stage II Body

ST: 150-170	Move/Dodge: 12/7	Size: 10
DX: 14	PD/DR: 3/15	Weight: 2-4 tons
IQ: 13+	Damage: 8d cut	Habitat: Any
HT: 15/100	Reach: C, 1	

Stage III Body

ST: 300+	Move/Dodge: 12/8	Size: 10+
DX: 16	PD/DR: 4/25+	Weight: 15-30 tons
IQ: 13+	Damage: 3d×5 imp	Habitat: Any
HT: 15/200+	Reach: C, 1, 2	



A soul dog is a violent beast born from an evil soul, fed by the spirits of the unjustly murdered, and given form by the debris of its dark lair. Generalizations

about soul dogs are difficult; this is more of an overview.

Physical Manifestation: An "infant" soul dog consists of dust and debris no bigger than coins or bits of broken glass. Until a few human souls are absorbed, it stays this small (use the stats for lions on p. B143, but with DX 11 and IQ appropriate to the core mind). It is physically no match for even a single black op. In combat, a soul dog moves quickly, attacking with teeth and claws formed from appropriately shaped debris. It regenerates 10% of its hit points each turn, drawing scattered debris back into it.

A soul dog's HT score is used for shaking off stun from large injuries and the like, but not for consciousness or "death" checks. When a soul dog of any size is reduced to 0 hit points, it is dispersed, and will stay that way for 1d+1 hours. During this time, the core mind is also dissipated and cannot be isolated for psychic combat.



When an infant soul dog absorbs a soul, it advances to Stage I. The size is about the same, but the body is denser, and made of larger pieces of debris. A half-dozen souls will bring a soul dog to Stage II, and 30 or 40 will bring it to Stage III. After that, things get weird, and the beast just keeps getting bigger and harder to slow down. The largest ones can trample a human flat under feet of iron, torn cable or old books.

Breaking Up is Hard: The soul dog's rapid regeneration can be a problem. Each hit point represents an equal fraction of the dog's mass, giving about 14 lbs./point at Stage I, 60 lbs./point at Stage II and over 200 lbs./point at Stage III! The dog regenerates by replacing missing mass with debris. This wouldn't matter much, except that this "debris" may include nearby weapons and gear (e.g., items being held by black ops) and nearby people (e.g., the black ops who are holding those items).

The "danger zone" is 2 yards at Stage I, 4 yards at Stage II and 6 yards at Stage III. On any turn when a soul dog regenerates, anything within that distance will be drawn toward the body of the soul dog, where it will be crunched and churned back into its mass. Thus, an op holding a machine gun 4 yards away from a Stage II dog is in danger of losing it (the op himself is too heavy). If he's within 6 yards of a Stage III dog, he himself will be picked up and assimilated!

An item or person drawn into a soul dog will take damage equal to the dog's bite each turn. To break free or keep hold of an object being drawn into a soul dog, the victim must win a Quick Contest of ST vs. the soul dog's ST/10. The "absorption" side effect of a soul dog's regen-

eration is not discriminatory in any way. If you put a 20-lb. brick of C4 next to it, the dog will absorb it just as readily as 20 lbs. of trash (and an explosion inside a soul dog does 5x normal damage).

A soul dog absorbs the soul of any victim it manages to draw in and kill. A soul dog that gains enough new souls in combat *can* advance to the next stage right before the ops' eyes! It will start "regenerating" to reach its *new* full hit points, absorbing suitably more massive objects as it does so.

The Core Mind: Soul dogs have the souls and minds of twisted, angry madmen. They are the result of those killed unjustly, but it's difficult for ops to retain sympathy as a soul dog racks up its revenge one human death at a time. This soul is called the "core mind" by psi-ops.

The core mind's integrity is proportional to the state of its physical manifestation. If the dog is whole, the core mind is whole. If the dog is damaged, the core mind becomes more vulnerable. If the dog is entirely dispersed, however, the core mind *dissipates*, going from vulnerable to impossible to hunt.

Battle with the core mind of a soul dog is a unique form of psychic combat. The core mind has the power to cripple the human mind and *directly damage psionic powers*. Likewise, it is vulnerable to such attacks. While the dog's physical manifestation depends on a special form of telekinesis, the core mind is entirely telepathic. Only the Mental Blow and Mind Shield skills matter in psychic combat with a soul dog, which uses special rules.

The Telepathy Power of a typical soul dog is equal to half the dog's maximum hit points. Thus, a Stage III soul dog has Power 100! Soul dogs have the Telesend, Telereceive and Mental Blow skills at a level equal to double their IQ. They may have other skills at the discretion of the GM, but remember that they are not human psis but a special type of ghost.

A soul dog's psychic attack is a brute-force lash into the human telepath's mind (those without at least latent telepathy are immune, and must simply be chewed up). This is represented by the Mental Blow skill, but instead of inflicting fatigue, the soul dog's Mental Blow directly damages the victim's psionic power – and then his IQ. Every point of damage done erases one *character point* worth of Telepathy power and then, when that's gone, IQ. This damage is permanent unless the core mind is destroyed (in which case the points will heal the same as hit points, rolling against IQ instead of HT to recover).

A Mind Shield at skill 12+ will provide one point of "Damage Resistance" per level of Telepathy Power against these attacks. Furthermore, a roll against Mind Shield will "parry" a soul dog's attack *completely*. This

roll is made at a penalty equal to the margin of the soul dog's success: if it makes its Mental Blow roll by 8, you "parry" at -8! A Mind Shield serves *no* other purpose against the soul dog's attacks (but can still interfere with the defending psi's own skills, if his skill is too low).

The soul dog has -1 to its Mental Blow skill per 10% of its physical hit points that are currently carved away from its body. If the body is ever *destroyed*, the mind lingers, in a stunned and vulnerable state, for 1d+1 turns. During this time, it cannot attack. After that, it dissipates and cannot be attacked again until the dog is reformed (at which point the core mind will be completely healed).

Attacks against the soul dog's mind are similar. A Mental Blow is required, and every 5 points of damage lowers the soul dog's Power level by 1. When the core mind is reduced to Power 9 or less, it will attempt to flee. When it is reduced to Power zero, it is well and truly dead.

Other Notes: Until recently, the Company had no idea what these evil creatures were and where they came from. Then, two years ago, a Science department psi-op was engaged in an epic battle with the Alcatraz Soul Dog. The boiler-room beast was destroyed and the operative retired the next day, but during her struggle, she learned a lifetime of knowledge about the enigmatic spirit-monsters.

A soul dog is created when an evil, single-minded person dies before his obsessive plot comes to fruition. His soul becomes an invisible spectre, full of unfocused rage, and gravitates toward some out-of-the-way location where it roams in bitter isolation. Usually, the location is related to the spirit's former evil purpose. After years in its dark lair, the creature begins to gather form, collecting the loose debris of its surroundings into a vague animal shape. The beast is small at first, but vicious. Any unfortunate who happens upon the beast is murdered with uncommon cruelty, his soul pulled free of his corpse and enslaved.

After 5 or 6 souls are added to the creature's spirit, it can begin to give its form even more definition, prying free the more stable parts of its lair and growing more physically imposing. A jungle-dwelling soul dog might begin to uproot small trees, while a soul dog who roams an abandoned factory would attach pieces of machinery to its growing form. The largest soul dogs are dino-sized leviathans filled with hundreds of tormented souls.

Vampire

ST: 9-13* **Move/Dodge:** 7/7 **Size:** 1
DX: 14 **PD/DR:** 0/2 **Weight:** 120-180 lbs.
IQ: 8-12 **Damage:** 2d-1 cut# **Habitat:** Any
HT: 16 **Reach:** C or by weapon

The legends about these creatures are all wrong. They are not stylish aristocrats or punkish goths. They are evil, hungry monsters, the once-human victims of a mysterious virus who require the blood and raw organ tissue of human beings to survive. A typical vampire in the middle

stages of the disease requires 3-4 victims a week; this increases with time, and vampires tend to go psycho at the drop of a hat when the hunger hits.

Vampires' craving for human blood and organs is intense: crack or heroin addiction is mild by comparison. Vampires under the pain of hunger are immune to shock, stunning and knockdown from physical injury, and have *triple* their normal ST. They attack with fury and bloodlust, but aren't truly "berserk." They are not required to make All-Out-Attacks (although they often do) and are capable of trick tactics. For instance, a vampire that sustains serious injury will often pretend to be dead to trick a foe. This also buys some time for force-healing (see below), which is risky in the midst of combat, since a successful attack can break concentration.

A vampire's teeth and fingernails grow hard and sharp, letting it do cutting damage in close combat (use rules in the sidebar on p. B140). A typical vamp "juiced" on the hunger does 2d-1 cutting damage. When the rage gets too blind, teeth and claws are all a vampire will attack with. While they're still semi-reasonable, most of them like good honest hardware and plenty of ammo.

Vampires don't give a damn about holy water, crucifixes, garlic or running water. They avoid sunlight, and all other light, because the virus causes their skin to become extremely sensitive to ultraviolet rays (see below).

Vampire Healing: Vampires roll for natural healing every 5 hours, not just once per day. They can also *force-heal* themselves. This requires the vampire to concentrate for a full turn and make a roll against HT, at a penalty equal to its current level of injury (e.g., a vampire with 7 points of damage rolls against HT-7). If the roll succeeds, the vampire instantly heals 1d points of damage for every point by which the roll is made, minimum 1d! This will even "uncripple" a crippling wound, if applicable.

Vampires may take fatigue to counteract the penalty to their HT roll. For every point of fatigue they take, they get a +1 to the HT roll. Fatigue is counted against their *tripled* ST when in the clutches of hunger.

Vampires and Light: Light can kill vampires; even short exposures harm. Bright daylight does 1d-3 damage per turn to a vampire in the heavy clothing the bloodsuckers favor. Double damage for ordinary clothing; double it *again* for a bathing suit. Lesser sources of light do less damage:



Light Level / Penalty **Damage**

Clear, Open Daylight		
None		1d-5 per turn
Overcast Day, Bright Artificial Light		
None		1d-5 per 10 seconds
Ordinary Indoor Lighting		
None		1d-3 per 10 minutes
Dim Indoor Lighting, Bright Firelight		
-1		1d-3 per 100 minutes
Ordinary Firelight, Torchlight		
-3		1d-2 per day
Ordinary Candlelight, Moonlight (Clear)		
-5	None	
Starlight (Clear), Moonlight (Overcast)		
-7	None	
Starlight (Overcast)		
-9	None	
Total Darkness		
-10	None	

The vision and combat penalty for each level of light is noted for the GM's reference. Each line on the table represents an order of magnitude of illumination. Clear, open daylight is 10,000 foot-candles. Ordinary indoor light is 100. Searchlights of the kind found on many military vehicles will do damage equivalent to many times that of ordinary daylight.

Vampires, for obvious reasons, prefer to fight in total or near-total darkness. They have a limited ability to see into the infrared spectrum, and take no darkness penalties when attacking a warm target.

Vampire Contagion: For an op, the worst part about vampire attacks is the contagion. Any human (and possibly any mammal) who has taken damage from the teeth and claws of a vampire must make a HT roll at the end of the combat, at a penalty equal to *triple* the damage taken. If this roll fails, the victim contracts the virus and will regress into vampirism after an "incubation period" of 2d days (occasionally much longer).

Company scientists have yet to find a cure for vampirism. This is the cause of considerable stress between Combat and Science. Combat has standing orders to destroy vampires, to keep the disease from spreading, while Science has standing orders to capture them, to study the virus. An infected *op* is retired; even if he were cured, the Company would never trust him again. Usually, this means a quick execution, courtesy of Combat. Science would prefer to offer comfortable life imprisonment for study. So far, Combat has usually won in the field.

GMs should note that humans with the vampire virus don't forget their skills and (as discovered by an *op* squad hunting a vampire in Tulsa, Oklahoma, last winter) don't lose any psi powers they might have, either.

Other Notes: Vampires are, in the experience of the black ops, solitary, despite popular literature to the contrary. Gangs of them probably exist somewhere, but competition for food would keep such a group very small, and probably very short-lived. They are barely able to keep their natures hidden, and they do this by wearing sunglasses, hats and thick baggy clothes, and by avoiding contact with humans as much as possible. They usually go out only to kill.

Werewolf

ST: 10-40+ **Move/Dodge:** 6+/6+ **Size:** 1
DX: 12-18 **PD/DR:** 0-3/0-4 **Weight:** 90-400 lbs.
IQ: 7-13 **Damage:** Variable **Habitat:** Any
HT: 12+/12+ **Reach:** C or by weapon

In *op* parlance, "werewolf" refers to any humanoid creature with a strong streak of the bestial. This includes not only actual shapeshifters, but also creatures that might be called "yeti," "sasquatch" or "bigfoot" in the popular press, goat-men and cat-men, and even anachronistic Neandertals. Some werewolves might be regional varieties of the same species, but not all of them are.

The shapeshifters are the ones that give Science ops the most serious fits of hair-tugging. Theories on the mechanics of a man who turns himself into a grizzly have ranged from a highly specialized and probably painful telekinetic discipline to some kind of cross-dimensional rift that allows bodies or minds to switch places in time or space. The shapeshifters can even teach ghosts a few things when it comes to boldly spitting in the face of traditional physics. They presumably have a lot to teach humanity, too, if we can figure out how to listen.

The stats above are for humanoid and quasi-humanoid beast-men. Beyond this, not a lot of generalizations stick. Werewolves are typically fast, hardy and ruthlessly violent. They are *not* especially vulnerable to silver. They avoid populated areas for the most part, which is a small blessing. Some (particularly the "yeti" of the Himalayas) have supernatural



speed and frightening agility. Some seem immune to pain. Many have some form of claw or bite attack, even in humanoid form. Some are capable of blending in socially with humans, while others are too bestial to understand the concept of a door. They're wild cards, and the GM should use that to keep the ops on their toes.

Use the stats in Chapter 18 of *GURPS Basic Set* (pp. B140-145) for animal forms. For more exotic animals (and a thorough treatment of shapeshifters), see *GURPS Bestiary*.

Rogues

Note on Rogues: All of the rogues in this section use psionic powers and skills found in *GURPS Basic Set*. For a wider menu of psychic powers, see *GURPS Psionics*.

The Lodge

The Lodge is a conspiracy of "mages." These highly psychic humans call their powers "magic" and use elaborate rituals to concentrate their powers and warp society. Stock market crashes, earthquakes, riots and full-scale wars have all been perpetrated by Lodge members.

The Lodge is ancient and highly secret. Very little is known about their exact methods, and access to their cabals is very strictly regulated. They rely on layer upon layer of deception to keep the true nature of their organization hidden from all but the highest initiates. Lower-level members are helped to develop their abilities while being slowly and carefully indoctrinated into the Lodge.

A few black ops have managed to infiltrate the Lodge, but none to the highest levels. One of our greatest fears is a renegade joining the Lodge; they could reveal many of our secrets before the Company could react.

The Company's campaign against the Lodge is designed to hinder them without revealing the conspiracy. Killing Lodge members is therefore discouraged, except in self defense. Squads dealing with Lodge usually need weeks to discover its true motives before *secretly* stopping the plan. This has been a somewhat losing battle so far.

Most Lodge members are perfectly capable of just cutting loose to defend themselves. A single, clever Lodge wizard can keep a party of ops busy. A coordinated *group* of Lodge members can utterly destroy a squad, if the ops aren't careful. When large concentrations of Lodge activity are suspected, the Company likes to send in groups of high-powered Antipsi "screamers" with plenty of ammunition, but it usually takes several light-stepping reconnaissance missions to ferret out their meeting places.

Sample Lodge Initiate

Ordinary, middle-aged man, 5'8", 160 lbs. Possibly an antique dealer, doctor or university professor. Dresses in tasteful but bland clothing. Frequently, there is something about his appearance that would tip off another member of the Lodge to his rank within the cabal, but that won't be apparent to the casual observer.

ST 10, DX 12, IQ 17, HT 14.

Basic Speed 6.5, Move 6.

Dodge 6.

Advantages: Certain advantages are more common than others among psychics. Typical initiates (and rogues in general) will have one or more of Alertness, Animal

Empathy, Charisma, Danger Sense, Empathy, Intuition, Luck (any level) or Sanctity (p. C129). The non-psychic advantage of Longevity is also common.

Disadvantages and Quirks: Most are at least eccentric; some have multiple Delusions and other dangerous mental disadvantages. In particular, those in the Lodge's "outer circles" often believe that they *are* sorcerers, carrying on ancient traditions.

Psionic Powers: These tend toward variety rather than sheer power. A mid-level initiate might have ESP, Psychokinesis, Telepathy and Teleportation, all at Power 10.

Psionic Skills: A wide range, appropriate to their powers. Again, the focus is on breadth, not depth. The sample power list above complements Autoteleport, Cryokinesis, Emotion Sense, Exoteleport, Levitation, Mental Blow, Mind Shield, Mindwipe, Precognition, Psi Sense, Psychometry, Pyrokinesis, Sleep, Telecontrol, Telekinesis, Telereceive and Telesend, all at levels 15-18 (IQ-2 to IQ+1).

Skills: Mundane skills vary widely, but most Lodge members involve themselves in intellectual pursuits.



Mind

The members of Mind are the strongest psychics in the world. They can simply will psychic energy to do their bidding. Their main goal seems to be to generate wealth and power for their members, little else. They don't try to overthrow the government, nor do they meddle much with the overall economy. They prefer elaborate, untraceable schemes that funnel funds from all over the world into their shadow corporations and offshore bank accounts.

Some members are more troublesome. Psychic power is a tremendous temptation, and few can resist using it for more than financial gain. Often, Mind members begin to think of themselves as demigods and "normal" humans as their minions. Some set themselves up as cult leaders, garnering large followings of mind-controlled lackeys. When this happens, the Company generally has to step in.

Evidence is just now beginning to surface concerning a new faction of Mind, a group of high-powered corporate CEOs who are using their considerable resources to investigate paranormal activities around the world. If true, these agents could seriously hinder Company efforts, especially if they discover and make contact with the Greys.

Sample Mind Member

Healthy, confident-looking man, "youthful" but middle-aged, 5'11", 175 lbs. Expensive suit, tie, shoes, car and wife. Carries an air of power and respectability. Mind members are people *in charge*.

ST 10, DX 11, IQ 20, HT 12.
Basic Speed 5.75, Move 5.
Dodge 5.

Advantages: All of the psi-related advantages listed for Lodge initiates (p. 107) are applicable. Many members of Mind have *all* of them. The most ubiquitous advantages, however, are Wealth and Status. Most of them have used their powers to achieve considerable worldly influence. They are university deans, senators, bank presidents, media moguls and more. Good Reputation within their community is probable, and some are known worldwide.

Disadvantages and Quirks: Any appropriate to the jaded, wealthy and hedonistic. Some Mind members are full-fledged villains, with Fanaticism, Megalomania, Sadism and so on. Others have depraved sexual tastes (the kinds that require "victims" rather than "partners"). Greed is almost a prerequisite for Mind members.

Psionic Powers: A typical Mind member has only one or two powers at very high levels, with few or no limitations; e.g., Teleportation Power 6 and Telepathy Power 30!

Psionic Skills: With the powers above, Autoteleport, Emotion Sense, Exoteleport, Mental Blow, Mind Shield, Mindwipe, Sleep, Telecontrol, Telereceive and Telesend, all at levels 18-23 (IQ-2 to IQ+3).

Skills: Mundane skills for a character like this depend on his social role. Aside from high levels in Politics (nearly ubiquitous), anything goes. Most of the non-psi skills possessed by a Mind member are those necessary to organize large amounts of underlings and large amounts of money, and put both to work.

A character like this, in a world without rival telepaths or black ops, could probably rule the planet inside of a few years. The Company is finding out, slowly, that a small number of Mind members do rule large parts of it.

Ramblers

Ramblers are young punk psis, often encountered in groups. These psychic joy riders are motivated by a desire to have a good time, sometimes at a cost in human life. They live mostly by stealing, hitting towns at random. They appear to have no motives other than to cause trouble and have fun. They drink, smoke, take drugs and let their demons loose upon the unsuspecting public.

Recently, Intelligence department analysts have put forth a theory that the rambblers' activities are not random at all, but maddeningly precise, based on some fractal mathematical framework that we have yet to decode. If so, then there is some controlling force behind the rambblers' joy rides. Several missions are planned to attempt to root out whether this theory is true.

Ramblers are the hardest rogues to pin down, because the Company can never predict when or where they'll strike. Ops will hear about a Rambler spree in San Francisco and get there to find that ghost sightings and astral-projection reports have skyrocketed overnight, but there are no rambblers to be found. After a few days of investigating bleeding walls and animated dog corpses, another report will come in from Dallas. It never seems to end. The rambblers always seem to end up in New Orleans for Mardi Gras, but it's understandably hard to pick them out during the festival.

One disturbing thing about rambblers is that they're usually just *kids*, so ops try to avoid killing them when capture is possible. They can't be given anything like a normal life, but Science can study them. On the other hand, some groups of rambblers have been recruited by the Greys, and others just like to kill. These get bullets. In any case, rambblers are eventually dealt with by the Company, the Greys, the Lodge or Mind; there are no *old* rambblers.

Sample Ramblers

Irreverent punks, ages 15 to 20. Usually of average height and build, and dressed in ordinary street clothes.

ST 9, DX 11, IQ 13, HT 13.
Basic Speed 6, Move 6.
Dodge 6.

Advantages: Any. Ramblers tend to have 10-50 points distributed among the psi-influenced advantages listed for Lodge initiates (p. 106).

Psionics: Psychic powers are highly variable. The following three sample packages are worth 35 points each, a typical power level for a run-of-the-mill Rambler:

"Poltergeist" – *Psionic Powers:* Telekinesis-only Psychokinesis, Power 15, Only on living things (-20%), Uncontrollable (-30%) [30 points]. *Psionic Skills:* Telekinesis-13 [4 points], Mind Block-12 (p. CI155) [1 point].

"Jumper" – *Psionic Powers:* Teleportation, Power 6 [30 points]. *Psionic Skills:* Autoteleport-13 [4 points], Exoteleport-11 [1 point].

"Peeper" – *Psionic Powers:* Telepathy, Power 12, Useless on other psis (-50%) [30 points]. *Psionic Skills:* Mindwipe-10 [1/2 point], Sleep-10 [1/2 point], Telereceive-12 [2 points], Telesend-12 [2 points].

Skills: Ramblers have mundane skills appropriate to their ages and (if applicable) vocations. Most can drive a car, handle a stolen pistol and so on. A few can jimmy locks or hotwire cars. Most of them have Streetwise-12.

Most rambblers aren't especially skilled, but they *are* clever, and have an instinct for staying out of sight (and a sense of cruelty) that is attributable as much to their youth as to their gift. The GM should keep this in mind, and remember that they work as a group, covering for each other. There is typically one leader type if a group exists. Give the leader double or triple Power, and double the number of points he has in psionic skills.

CHAPTER SEVEN

DANGEROUS TOYS

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A *Black Ops* campaign should feature a lot of bizarre tech and heavy weaponry, both human and alien. Since most of the really *serious* technology will be tied to the plot of the adventure, it would be pointless to put forth generalizations here. Instead, this chapter offers a selection of commonly-used “standard” equipment available to black ops and the Greys. Keep in mind that even on the level of personal equipment, untested toys from the Technology department are an important part of the setting!

GMs with tech-happy groups should assemble supplementary sources for gear: everything from survivalist catalogues to electronics buying guides will come in handy. Much of the equipment the ops use is real, or at least feasible. When introducing futuristic items, remember that the more “impossible” a device is, the buggier it tends to be when the box shows up from Dynatronics.

Many other *GURPS* books contain rules for equipment appropriate to a *Black Ops* campaign. *GURPS High-Tech*, *Ultra-Tech* and *Ultra-Tech 2* are entirely devoted to gear, while *Vehicles* is recommended for GMs (or Tech ops!) who like to build new tech – from experimental miniplanes to hand-held plasma projectors. *GURPS Espionage* contains a great deal of “spy-tech,” while *Warehouse 23* includes toys for GMs who want to play *weird*, including TL8 “black helicopters” and discussions of mind control techniques.



Tech Level

The world of *Black Ops* is 1990s Earth, late TL7. The Company, however, is more advanced – the Science and Technology departments have been stumbling into TL8 for a decade or so. As of now, they’re stumbling less and beginning to manufacture the guns, computers, sensors and power cells that the civilian world will think is state-of-the-art in another 10 to 15 years. Every year sees new breakthroughs, and unpacking the latest “toy box” is one of the real joys of beginning a mission.

Some technologies are not yet fully TL8. Any “bio-tech,” from genetic engineering to cloning, is only four or five years ahead of the publicly-known cutting edge – and every now and then, a civilian laboratory makes a breakthrough that surprises the Company. Some weapons tech-

nologies are still a little buggy, too (see appropriate sections, below).

Occasionally, the madly brilliant minds in the Science and Technology departments create something that’s TL9+ (often based on technology salvaged from encounters with the Greys). These are *always* flawed and unpredictable, and usually very hazardous. But sometimes, they’re just what’s needed to get the job done. GMs should use the *Experimental Bug Table* (below) with malicious abandon on these items.

Reading the Price Tag

Prices are provided for all of the items in this chapter. Usually, these won’t be important – the Company assigns a budget that should cover all the gear necessary to do the job, and any reasonable requisition will be successful. However, some training missions are tightly budgeted; and if a group of ops develops a reputation for wasting lots of valuable equipment, they’ll start to feel a budget crunch. In general, the Company prefers not to spend more than \$100,000 per squad per mission! Exceptions are made when the need is clear, but never cheerfully (and note that this figure doesn’t include standard equipment that the ops keep between missions, such as a Tech op’s Cistron). The Company’s resources are vast, but they aren’t bottomless.

TL9+ devices, when available at all, are usually unique prototypes or very limited production runs. They’re essentially priceless (if necessary, use the gadgeteering rules on pp. CH21-127 to determine production costs), and the Company always wants them *back* after a mission.

The Black Market: Company technology that slips into the black market tends to sell for up to 5 times the listed price, but “whatever the market will bear” is the only real rule. More importantly, such items become the focus of clean-up missions; those outside the Company who get their hands on secret Company tech usually assume room temperature within a few days of getting it.

Special Weapons: The GM should consider disallowing *Very Fine*-quality TL8 equipment for ops fresh from the Academy. Such items, particularly guns, are custom-made for the user (e.g., sniper rifles carefully re-tooled to the exact finger strength, hand dimensions and firing peculiarities of the firer), and should be issued for special missions or for outstanding service in the field. This is in keeping with both the pro-competition philosophy that ops learn in the Academy *and* the budget limitations of the Company; it gives ops something to shoot for.

Experimental Bug Table

The GM should use this table whenever a glitch or “bug” for an experimental device is needed. Either roll a random result (2d), or just use the table for inspiration. Note that some random results will make no sense with some equipment; just reroll until you get something suitable.

Also useful for this purpose is the *Guaranteed Play-Balance Table* (p. C110), which can produce comparable (but sometimes sillier) results.

2 – When in use, the device triggers severe headaches (treat as the Migraine disadvantage, p. C182) in any telepath who is within his usual telepathy range of the gadget. This *does* affect the Greys!

3 – Every time the device is used, it delivers a mild electric shock to the user. This causes the equivalent of 1d points of shock from injury (see p. B126), but no actual damage. High Pain Threshold does *not* protect. Insulated gloves must be worn to avoid the effect.

4 – The device (if a weapon) has a Malf number four steps below the ordinary Malf for the item. Non-weapons simply fail to function on a 1 on 1d (the GM rolls secretly each time the device is used).

5 – The device is power-hungry, draining its entire power cell with a single normal use. If the device *already* sucks its cells down that quickly, then it requires a heavy-duty feed from a major power grid.

6 – The device emits dangerous radiation, either 3d rads per use (for things like beam weapons), or 10 rads/hour (for things that operate continuously, like sensors). The dosage listed is for anyone in the same hex as the object; divide this by the square of the distance in yards. *Quadruple* dosage for characters touching the thing!

7 – The device has a *hidden* glitch (roll again on this table to determine the glitch). It operates normally, but the GM should roll 1d in secret whenever it is used. On a 6, the glitch finally shows itself.

8 – The device is slow, taking 2d+3 *times* as long to perform its usual function. For weapons, divide RoF by the rolled figure (this would represent, for instance, a blaster with a weak internal power supply attached to a capacitor strong enough to produce single shots).

9, 10 – The device is unsafe in subtle ways. Any skill roll involving the item is at -5, but *the user doesn't know it!* The GM should carefully note the margin of success when it is used; if it is less than five, the roll actually fails. If the roll fails *without* considering the -5, then it is automatically a critical failure!

11 – The device takes several minutes (roll 1d×10, once, to determine how long) to “warm up” before it can be used.

12 – If the device fires or projects something, it does so in the *wrong direction* on a 6 on 1d (rolled secretly by the GM). Usually, this means right into the user's face.

Weapons and Armor

Melee Weapons

Black ops are trained killers, versed in the use of every device that man has dreamed up for wounding his neighbors. Unlike modern military units and police forces, the Company has no “standard issue” weapon; ops select their tools of choice as they train at the Academy. Sometimes, affectations grow peculiar; one infamous member of the Cadre (killed in 1993 by a Lebanese gargoyle) insisted on using nothing more than an ordinary cattle prod and a vibro-survival knife.

Any of the swords, knives or daggers in *GURPS Basic Set* or *Compendium II* are available, using TL8 rules. *Superfine* blades (often vibroblades) are very popular! The vibroblades manufactured by Dynatronics – called “hummers” – are power-hungry; their B cell power supply lasts only (100 seconds/weapon's weight in pounds).

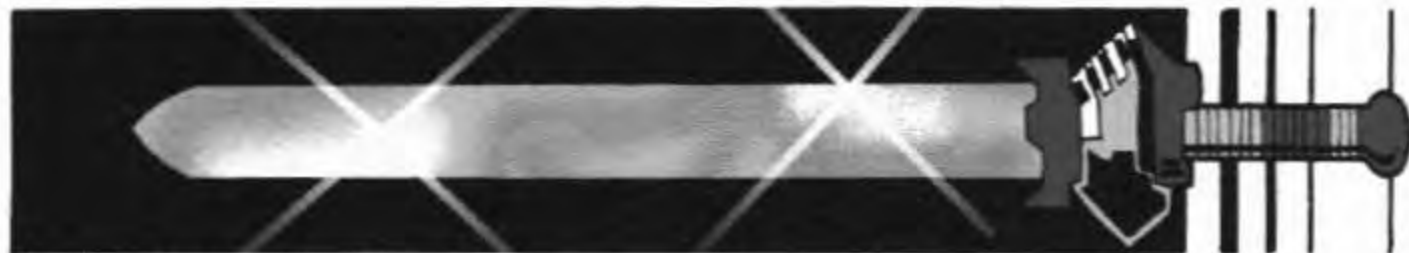
Nervecrackers (TL8)

Also called shock clubs or stun wands, these are batons which use very low-powered electric currents to disorganize nerve function. Some are *jointed*, to prevent a victim from taking damage even when struck by an adrenaline-charged Combat op; others inflict damage as a baton. In addition to any damage due to being struck by the baton, the victim must make a HT-3 roll to avoid being stunned (at +1 per 10 points of DR); if the roll fails, the victim takes 1d fatigue and remains stunned for as long as the weapon is in contact, and for (20-HT) seconds after it is removed, before any recovery rolls are permitted.

Nervecrackers are wielded using Shortsword skill. They use a B cell and strike 20 times before losing power. They weigh one pound and cost \$100 each.

Grey Melee Weapons

The Greys have the technology to produce a wide variety of exotic close-combat weaponry, from monowire blades to neurolashes and force swords (see *GURPS Ultra-Tech*), but have never been seen to use them. If such items exist at all on Earth, they are in hidden Grey armories. The GM should reserve such technology as spoils of war; the Greys prefer to keep their distance in combat, using ranged weaponry and telepathic attack.



Ranged Weapons

Most combat in a *Black Ops* adventure occurs at range – at least, if the mission goes well! In the Academy, every op is ordained into the Priesthood of the Gun, and tends to select a favorite firearm. Recent technological breakthroughs have added more advanced weapons to the ops' repertoire, including rocket guns, electromagnetic ("Gauss") weaponry, tangler weapons (favored for Science department capture missions), and even energy weapons like lasers and masers. Many ops also make use of compound bows and crossbows (see p. CII30).

Statistics for the weapons below can be found on the *Ranged Weapons Table*, p. 124.



Guns

The most fundamental weapon of the black op is the gun. Every black op possesses the ability to impose his will on the world through a trigger.

Any standard-quality, 20th-century firearm is readily available to ops; see *GURPS Basic Set* and *High-Tech* for examples. Many ops also have sidearms custom-made for them (see *Firearm Quality*, p. CII39). Furthermore, the Technology department engineers and manufactures a variety of advanced (TL8) firearms that take full advantage of the superior strength and special needs of black ops. The most popular of these are:

10.1mm Sniper Rifle – This rifle, which fires an extra-long, caseless "magnum" round from a 24-inch barrel, is officially known as Firearms Project 1996-EH40. It has been nicknamed the "pinata stick" by the ops, due to the effect it has on a human head. It is the favorite sniper rifle of the Intelligence department. The stats on the table are for the basic production model, which includes an integral folding bipod, mounted on a sliding track under the barrel, which can slide and lock into a variety of positions. The action is recoil-powered and fairly simple, made cleaner by the caseless design. It accepts any standard telescopic sight. Extra magazines weigh 1/2 lb. empty, 2 lbs. loaded. Ammo is \$15 and 7.5 lbs per 100 rounds.

Model 4 Electrothermal Sniper Cannon – The M4 "E-T" is affectionately known as the "varmint gun" by grunts, but it is definitely intended for big game. Designed for long-range sniping, light anti-vehicle fire and blow-

ing the brains out of Tyrannosaurs, the M4 was developed in the late 1980s when Combat ops complained that their .50 BMG rifles lacked the punch needed for some of the beasts they were firing at. Built in a manner similar to the 10.1mm sniper rifle (but bulkier), the M4 is an entirely different story on the inside, and is only usable by stronger ops.

Instead of caseless rounds, the M4 fires "dry" slugs by electrically superheating propellant and driving the bullet down the barrel on a cloud of plasma. The gun's ammo cassette (\$110 and 6 lbs. each) is a self-contained unit consisting of a power cell, a reservoir of propellant and bullets. The power cell is exhausted when the bullets and propellant are used up, so the entire cassette is disposable. The gun has an integral bipod, and can be fitted with any type of scope.

Recently, Technology has developed a "banana clip" version of the cassette with identical ammo capacity – but the remainder of the clip is a *grenade*, so an op who's out of ammo can strip the clip and throw it at the enemy. This is not yet standard issue, and is taken by many to be a sign the Tech boys should get out into the fresh air more often.

Castor '94 Caseless Assault Carbine – A light automatic weapon for use against human beings and wigglers, not beasts. Intelligence ops prefer them for the rare occasions when their missions call for full-auto weapons. One feature is its twin, 30-round magazines, both feeding into the same firing chamber. Each magazine can be loaded with a different type of ammo, usually APS and hollow point. The firer can select between magazines; this must be announced before firing, and does not require an action on a successful Guns roll. Ammo is 1 lb. and \$30 per 30-round cassette.

Castor '97 Caseless MG – Normally mounted on a 30-pound tripod (or in a vehicle), the '97 is the caseless (and musclebound) cousin of the M60 and countless similar guns. With an articulated weapon harness (see p. 112), any op can fire it from the hip. Many Combat ops don't need the harness. The '97 fires from a 130-round disintegrating ammo belt (\$20, 9.75 lbs) loaded with the same 10.1mm Long rounds used in the pinata stick. The stats on the table include a single belt of ammo, but not the tripod. The gun is fitted with an integral folding bipod as well. If fired on the tripod, ignore the minimum ST requirement and increase Acc by 2.



Hammer Man-Portable Railgun (MPR) – The term "man-portable" is something of a stretch when referring to what the ops call "a shotgun for Superman." The Hammer is a 55.4mm electromagnetic gun with a barrel just 22 inches long; the weapon's overall length (including the graphite shoulder stock) is similar to that of an ordinary shotgun, but



the bore is gigantic. The weapon is a muzzle-loading Gauss cannon designed to frag impossible-to-kill beasts and armored vehicles. It uses the Guns (Grenade Launcher) skill, but unfamiliarity penalties (see p. B43) are doubled to -4. The weapon is powered by an integral rC cell, good for 22 shots before the weapon needs recharging.

The stats on the table are for a solid round (1.3 lbs, \$10), but grunts typically load it with either an armor-piercing explosive (APEX) round or an APFSDSDU round. The former is for huge beasts, the latter for armored vehicles. The APEX round (\$50) does the listed damage, but DR is halved. It explodes for 7d×3 explosive damage when it strikes, multiplied by 5 if the round penetrates into flesh! The APFSDSDU round (\$120) does 5d×10 (3) instead of the listed damage. Acc is increased by 1 and ranges are increased by 50%. Damage that penetrates DR is divided by 2.

The "shotgun" hasn't yet been used to fire a multiple-projectile round, but some especially perverse op is bound to ask Dynatronics for one.

Special Ammunition Types

Small-arms (20mm or smaller) can be loaded with a variety of special ammunition. In addition to ordinary solid, hollow point (×1.5 cost) and armor-piercing (×3 cost) rounds (see p. CII55), the following types are available:

Armor-Piercing Saboted (APS): These rounds use a high-density depleted uranium or tungsten carbide penetrator encased in a much larger plastic sheath – the "sabot" – which is designed to fall away as the round leaves the barrel. This gives a flatter trajectory and much higher velocity to the smaller, sub-caliber bullet. Increase ranges by 50% and add +1 to damage per die. APS rounds are treated as standard armor-piercing rounds for the purposes of penetrating and wounding. Price is 5× that of a normal round.

Plastic-Cased Ammo: Any non-caseless gun can fire *plastic-cased* ammunition, which increases magazine capacity by 50% (round down) and doubles the price of the ammo. This is cumulative with other modifiers; e.g., plastic-cased, hollow point rounds would cost 3 times as much as ordinary solid ammo (1 × 1.5 × 2). Most of the TL7 guns issued by the Company have been converted to fire plastic-cased rounds.

Articulated Weapon Harness

Necessary for most ops to use guns such as the Castor '97 or an old-fashioned M-60 from the hip, this straps on like a backpack and has a chest plate in front, with a supporting arm and three articulated hydraulic joints positioned to allow universal motion and easy suspension. The harness reduces ST requirements for the weapon it was designed for by 3; a harness designed for the Hammer MPR would allow the gun to be fired from the hip by someone with ST 17. Weight is five pounds and cost is \$600.

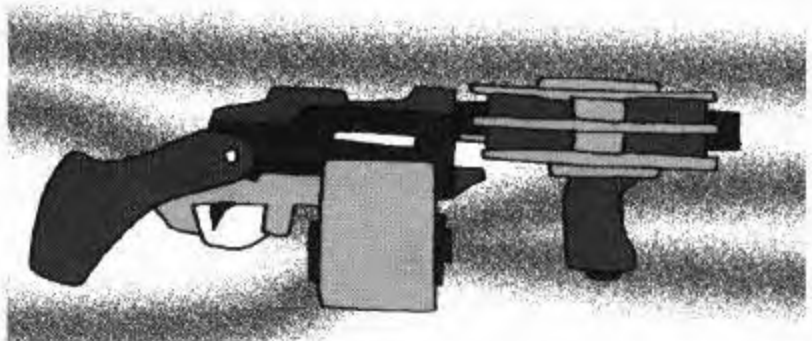
Grenade Launchers

Black ops have two basic GL systems available to them, the standard 40mm workhorse of the world's militaries, and the experimental *electromag* GL produced by the Technology department through its cover arms companies.

M79 40mm GL – The "Colt .45 of grenade launchers," the model the Company uses is custom-built along the same lines as the classic M79, a simple breech-loading gun using the full range of M79 ammunition as well as special munitions developed by the Technology department. The standard PLASTEX explosive round does 4d×2 concussion damage (the "mundane" military round does 2d+2, and is filled with Composition B), and 3d cutting from fragments. Signal-flare rounds are available, as well as a sabot shot-gun round that effectively turns the GL into a 12-gauge for close-in defense. In addition, tear gas, smoke, stun and various chemical loads are available (see *Grenades*, p. I15).

M203 Under-Barrel GL – Another GL custom-built along the lines of a classic, the M203 mounts under any rifle. By using two hands, the firer can operate the rifle and the GL simultaneously. The M203 is more popular than the M79, since it limits the options of the firer a good deal less.

Electromag GL (TL8) – An EMGL is a short, stubby, shotgun-like weapon, outwardly similar to the M79, with a magazine of five grenades. Essentially a small mass-driver, it uses a magnetic impulse to propel grenades. It is recoilless, and except for the crack as the grenade breaks the sound barrier, silent (the weapon can be switched to



subsonic mode, which reduces range to 25% normal but totally silences the weapon).

Electromag grenade launchers can fire one round per turn. Grenades may also be loaded and fired one at a time, but it takes one second to load each grenade and one second to fire.

A magazine weighs five pounds (ammo is not interchangeable with M79/M203 ammo); cost depends on the load. The launcher will fire 10 grenades on a C cell.

Under-barrel versions of the EMGL are still in development. *Full-auto* versions are available, however – they cost and weigh three times as much as the EMGL, and fire from a 20-pound, 20-shot magazine. RoF is 4, but otherwise stats are identical to the EMGL.

Flamethrowers and Incendiaries

Flamethrower – The Company makes flamethrowers especially for the black ops. These are commonly issued when dealing with large numbers of giant insects, or any other wigglers that travel in swarms.

Flamethrowers fire three one-second bursts, each of which is treated as four “shots.” Determine the number of hits as for a 4-round group (see p. B120); the damage from all shots that hit is added together for the purpose of penetrating DR. Unsealed armor protects at 1/5 DR. The fuel continues to burn for 10d seconds, doing 1d damage per second (armor protecting as above).

Flamethrowers take two seconds to ready; they are awkward to handle. Like concussion damage from an explosion, damage is to the entire body, not to one location. It is not limited by the “blow-through” rule.

Flamethrowers have two triggers; one controlling the flow of fuel and another for ignition. By using only the fuel trigger, the user can fire “cold” shots in order to soak the target with fuel.

On a critical failure with a flamethrower, roll 3 dice. 5 or less means a simple non-ignition; the target is sprayed with cold fuel. 6-17 means no fuel is sprayed at all. 18 is a backfire; the weapon explodes and does 3d burn damage to the firer’s hex and all adjacent hexes.

On any malfunction result except the last, Immediate Action can be attempted. This requires 10 seconds. A success returns the weapon to action; a failure lets the firer try again. A critical failure results in an explosion, as above.

The fuel tanks, worn on the user’s back, have DR 5, HP 12. If penetrated, they explode on a roll of 6 on 1d (5-6 for a flame attack), doing explosive concussion damage equal to 3d times the number of shots left.

HAFLA – The HAFLA DM34 (HAFLA-35L) isn’t really a flamethrower, but the original German manufacturers called it one, and the name stuck. It is a pocket incendiary, a simple aluminum tube (packed three to the waterproof pack) containing red phosphorus and a propel-

lant. It has a folding handle and trigger. When fired, the incendiary is propelled about 80 yards, then bursts, covering a 10 by 15 yard area with burning phosphorus. Any normally flammable material will be ignited; any exposed person is hit on a 9 or less on 3d (roll randomly for hit location) and takes 1d of burn damage. Damage continues at 1 point per second for 120 seconds (or until the phosphorus is cut from the skin, doing 1d-2 of surgical damage). Armor or even a heavy coat will keep the phosphorus from the skin long enough to be removed. The phosphorus cannot be extinguished with water.

The HAFLA is a disposable, one-shot weapon, popular with black ops, who’ve managed to find some *very* creative uses for it. Firing it requires the Guns (Grenade Launcher) skill.



Lasers

Lasers are energy weapons that fire coherent beams of light. They are fired with the Beam Weapons (Laser) skill.

A laser has no recoil, either for successive shots in the same turn or for successive groups in a burst. It is thus so accurate that the dispersion of shots is less than the diameter of the beam. Because of this, lasers on full-auto use special rules (p. B120) that allow multiple shots in a burst to add their damage and count as a single attack versus DR. Lasers do impaling damage, so damage that gets through DR is doubled. In rain, fog or smoke, lasers do half damage (or less). Smoke bombs and blackout grenades block lasers entirely.

In a vacuum, lasers are silent and invisible, but not in any kind of an atmosphere – while the beam itself is invisible, a laser weapon is powerful enough to ionize the air, leaving a trail of sparks and producing a sharp crack as air rushes into the vacuum left in its wake.

On any laser hit to the eye (see p. B203) that does *not* penetrate the DR of the victim’s visor or goggles, roll vs. HT, at +5 if wearing anti-glare or tinted goggles. A failed roll indicates the victim is blinded; however, he may recover later – use the rules for crippling injuries (p. B129). On a laser hit to the eye that *does* penetrate DR, all damage is doubled, and permanent blindness will almost certainly result. A laser hit to the eye does double damage to the eye *instead* of scoring an automatic brain hit for quadruple damage. In this case, roll versus (HT-damage) to see if the eye is blinded permanently.

minutes, and at -2 to DX for an additional (20-HT) minutes.

"Kill" does the full listed amount of damage. If any damage penetrates armor, the target must also roll immediately against HT minus half the damage taken. If the roll is failed, his heart stops. He passes out, and will die in HT/3 minutes unless someone performs CPR to save him. This takes one minute per attempt, and requires a successful First Aid-4 or Physician roll.

Note that the Grey electrolasers are TL12 versions of a TL9 weapon, and are therefore superior to the TL9 gun.

Force Rods – These small (+1 to Holdout) weapons project a solid, gravitic force field, delivering a powerful physical blow, which can break bones or knock an

eral uses – fuse trains, mine clearing, girder or tree cutting and many ingenious possibilities for ambush. Det cord does 6d×2 explosive damage per pound; one pound is 10 yards long and costs \$100. It burns at 4,000 yards *per second*, effectively instantaneous, doing 1d concussion damage in each hex it passes through and releasing a flash of fire and an ear-splitting *crack*. Very effective at cutting things it has been looped around!

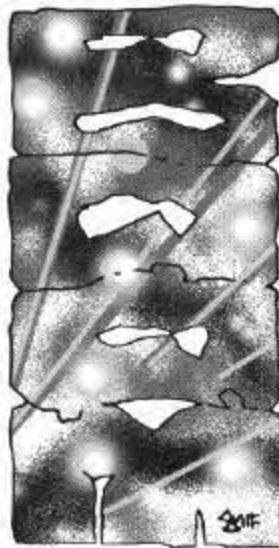


PLASTEX (TL8): This is a powerful, moldable plastic explosive. It is very stable, and can only be detonated with an explosive detonator. A quarter-pound does 6d×2 damage – it is roughly four times as powerful as TNT. PLASTEX costs \$20 per 0.25 lb. block. A detonator (remotely-triggered or timed) is \$20, weight negligible.

Grenades

While most of the world still uses Composition B and other RDX/TNT blends as grenade filler, the Company uses PLASTEX (see p. 114), making the grenades used by ops very powerful for their weight. Nearly every grenade the Company issues is manufactured especially for it, and employs advanced technology. In general, all Company grenades can be assumed to be TL8, even those designed for compatibility with M79-type launchers.

Hand grenades and grenades for the EMGL weigh 1 lb. each. Rounds for the 40mm GL weigh half that much.



Chemical Grenades – These are treated exactly like bursting smoke grenades (see below), but the “smoke” is replaced by a chemical cloud:

Blackout grenades are \$30 each, and fill the area with utterly dense, black smoke (-10 to Vision for even one hex, reduced to -5 with infrared sighting). Anyone without breathing gear must make a HT roll each turn or take 1 point of damage.

Prism grenades are \$50 each, and fill the area with a slightly opaque (-1 to Vision) cloud of prismatic crystals which block laser fire and radar. Prism is harmful if inhaled; use the rules for blackout grenades.

Sleep Gas grenades are \$50 each, and creates a lingering cloud of knockout gas. If the gas is inhaled, roll vs. HT-4 each turn to avoid dropping to ST 0 and falling asleep; success costs only 1 point of ST.

See **GURPS Ultra-Tech** for other chemical weapons.

Concussion Grenades – Similar to fragmentation grenades (below), these inflict 6d×2 concussion damage, but fragmentation is limited to that picked up from the ground at the site of the explosion – see pp. B121-122. The 40mm version does only 4d×2 damage. Concussion grenades cost \$20.

Fragmentation Grenades – Frag (“defensive”) grenades do 6d×2 concussion damage and 2d cutting damage. The 40mm version does 4d×2 concussion but 3d cutting. See p. B121 for concussion rules. They cost \$20.

Shaped-Charge Grenades – Anti-tank grenades that use a Monroe-effect warhead to defeat heavy armor (either

personal or vehicular), these are only available for grenade launchers. The explosion does 4d×2 (10) damage for the EMGL version and 5d+1 (10) for the 40mm version. The Monroe effect bores through the armor with a jet of hot gas and molten metal. This only works against hard targets; roll 3d vs. DR+3 of a target with rigid armor, or vs. DR/2 of a target with nonrigid armor, to see if the jet forms at the proper angle and distance. If not, the grenade simply does 4d crushing damage to the target. The jet extends for three yards beyond the penetrated armor, ripping holes in equipment and people.

Smoke Grenades – Smoke grenades come in two types: bursting and burning. Bursting types are the most popular, as the cloud appears immediately. The smoke lasts (300 seconds/wind speed in mph), maximum 300 seconds. Assume a radius of 6 hexes. Burning types (“hot smoke”) are measured in total hexes of smoke. The shape that the cloud takes will depend on the way the wind is blowing. Assume that a typical burning type will fill 270 hexes at a rate of 3 hexes per second. Burning grenades get hot (up to 800° F!) while burning. Hot smoke lasts 150 seconds.

Both types of grenade can be loaded with tear gas instead of ordinary smoke. Tear gas and smoke are covered on p. B132. Targeting through smoke is at -1 per hex, but keep in mind that total visibility penalties can never exceed -10 (total darkness). Smoke and gas clouds move at about 1/5 the actual wind speed (round down). Smoke grenades cost \$2, or \$5 for tear gas.

Nukes

These are rarely used, but may become a *lot* more common as the Greys get bolder and the need to wipe them out reaches the “utter panic” level. Any Combat op can, if the materials are available, construct a nuclear explosive device.

Nuclear weapon yield is normally measured in kilotons (kt., explosive force equal to a thousand tons of TNT) or megatons (Mt., explosive force equal to a *million* tons of TNT). In general, tactical nuclear weapons have yields under 10 kt., and are intended for smashing armies and supply sites. Strategic nukes have yields above 10 kt., and are used to destroy cities and “hard” targets, like underground missile silos and command posts.

Some representative nukes:

1 kiloton: Concussion damage is 12d×2,000,000. For every 128 yards from the impact site, quarter concussion



damage. Adds \$36,000 to the price of the warhead-bearing weapon or bomb.

10 kiloton: A small strategic or large tactical weapon, similar in yield to the bomb dropped on Hiroshima. Concussion damage is 12d×20,000,000. For every 256 yards from the impact site, quarter concussion damage. Adds \$42,000 to the price of the warhead-bearing weapon or bomb.

100 kiloton: A strategic weapon, able to destroy a city. Concussion damage is 12d×200,000,000. For every 512 yards from the impact site, quarter concussion damage. Adds \$48,000 to the price of the warhead-bearing weapon or bomb.

1 megaton: A large strategic weapon, capable of wrecking everything within a five-mile radius, and causing serious damage out to about 9 miles. Concussion damage is 12d×2,000,000,000. For every 1,024 yards from the impact site, quarter concussion damage. Adds \$64,000 to the price of the warhead-bearing weapon or bomb.

For rules on radiation, fallout and EMP (electromagnetic pulse) see pp. CII145-148.

Body Armor and Protective Clothing

The most advanced armor available to black ops is *combat infantry dress* (p. B211). It is issued whenever Combat ops are expecting heavy enemy resistance in an operation that isn't likely to come under civilian scrutiny. "Civilian," in the parlance of the Company, includes anyone who isn't in on the conspiracy – including the world's military and police forces.

Other forms of protective clothing available include:

Disposable Respirator: A gray-white, paper-thin "particle mask" that fits over the wearer's nose and mouth, preventing him from inhaling dangerous dust and mist (such as hot foundry dust, sprayed chemicals and nuclear fallout). No protection from gases and vapors. \$30 for a pack of 10, weight negligible.

Face Shield: Used to protect from sparks and flying debris, the hard top and clear, broad shield provide PD 2, DR 2 to the skull and (from the front and sides) the entire face and neck. \$40, 5 oz. The colorless face shield can be replaced with a "shade 5" tinted one (\$30) when doing low-intensity (gas) welding.

Haz-Mat Suit: A floppy, laminated suit with a clear Mylar or PVC face shield, laminated boots and gloves. Covers the entire body. For use in areas contaminated with

hazardous chemicals. Includes space in the back of the suit for an internal air supply. The huge hood allows plenty of room for a respirator mask. \$125, 10 lbs. Provides PD 0, DR 1 (PD 2, DR 2 to hands and feet). Reflective, *vapor-protection* models (\$2,000) provide DR 10 versus flames and chemical flash.

Monocrys (TL8): Monocrys is woven from a two-phase, single-crystal metallic fiber. It provides full protection against crushing and cutting attacks, but is less effective against impaling attacks (like knife thrusts and lasers), which penetrate the weave. Protection against impaling attacks is always PD 1, DR 2. Against crushing and cutting attacks, DR depends on thickness:

Light: PD 2, DR 8. \$400, 3 lbs. for a vest; \$1,000, 7 lbs. for a full suit.

Medium: PD 2, DR 16. \$600, 5 lbs. for a vest; \$1,500, 12 lbs. for a full suit.

Heavy: PD 2, DR 24. \$800, 7 lbs. for a vest; \$2,000, 16 lbs. for a full suit.

However, because monocrys is flexible, any 6 rolled for damage indicates one point of damage that affects the wearer through the armor. Vests take 10 seconds to put on, 5 to take off. Full suits require 20 seconds to put on, 10 to take off.



Lower-tech *Kevlar* is also available; see p. B211. Note that Kevlar is bulkier and more visible, and lets "blunt trauma" damage through on a 5 or 6, but is sometimes necessary when moving among observant civilians.

Protective Eyewear: These are clear or tinted polycarbonate safety glasses or goggles. They give PD 2, DR 2 to the eyes only, and are fog-free and resistant to mild corrosive chemicals. Safety glasses weigh 2 oz. Goggles weigh twice as much, but provide indirect venting to protect from splashes, and fit comfortably over prescription glasses. Either costs \$10.

Respirator Mask: Worn over the entire face, with a clear shield covering the eyes (PD 2, DR 2 to face). Air is drawn in through two cylindrical filters mounted on the side of the mask. Flip-down "shade 10" shield allows it to be used when arc welding. Fully sealed, and usable as a positive-pressure airline respirator. Different filter cartridges are needed to filter out different gases and vapors. \$500, 1 lb. Inexpensive "half-mask" respirators cover the mouth and nose only, but hold the same filters. \$25, 5 oz.

SCUBA Gear: Sporting SCUBA equipment makes a great deal of noise and emits a telltale stream of bubbles. Emerson, or closed-circuit, gear eliminates the bubbles but shortens the diving time. Ops tend to favor a semi-closed apparatus, which strikes a compromise between stealth and duration.

Ordinary scuba gear allows a maximum depth of 130' and carries enough air for three hours underwater. This system automatically triggers hydrophones within 10 yards. Surface observers may spot bubbles on a Vision roll. \$500, 90 lbs.

Emerson gear allows a maximum depth of 20' and has enough oxygen for two hours. The diver will only trigger hydrophones within one hex and surface observers have nothing to see. Those unfamiliar with Emerson gear must make a Scuba skill roll just to use it, and an additional Scuba-3 roll every hour or be forced to surface. \$2,000, 35 lbs.

Semi-closed gear allows a maximum depth of 180' and carries enough air for three hours. Hydrophones are alerted within 5 yards, and bubbles are visible on a Vision-4 roll. Users unfamiliar with this gear suffer a -2 penalty on all Scuba rolls. \$1,000, 70 lbs.

Divers in frigid water wear a "dry suit," to avoid contact with water. Intelligence ops sometimes use these suits to avoid looking wet once they walk ashore. Of course, unless they remove and hide the dry suit, they will be fairly conspicuous anyway. \$500, 12 lbs.

Sound-Block Earmuffs: Made of hard plastic with foam dampeners, these reduce noise levels by 29 decibels, providing ear protection from explosives and other noise hazards. They give a -3 Hearing penalty when worn, but +3 to resist the effects of temporary deafness and attacks such as stun grenades. \$20, 10 oz. \$200 for a set which includes an FM stereo radio!

Grey Armor

The Greys don't wear armor per se, but their standard-issue jump suits provide impressive protection! They are woven from a single-crystal ballistic fiber similar to monocrys (p. 116), but far stronger. The fabric incorporates thermal-superconducting material that allows it to soak up lasers as well as bullets. The Technology ops who have examined it call it "energy cloth," but have not been able to reproduce it. It provides PD 4, DR 50 vs. all attacks, and laser damage is halved *before* the suit's DR is considered. The highly flexible material has the same weakness as monocrys versus "blunt trauma," however.



Tools and Gadgets

Communications & Information Tech

Communicator (TL8): This is a hand-held radio communicator the size of a man's palm. It has an effective range of 100 miles, which can be increased to a maximum of 200 miles with a successful Electronics Operation (Communications) roll, at -1 per 10 miles extra. One B cell operates the unit for a year. \$200, 1 lb. An optional booster unit doubles cost and weight, and allows it to reach any satellite equipped to pick up its signals. A communicator with a video display is twice as expensive.

Short-Range communicators are smaller (the size of a cigarette lighter) and have 1/10 the range. \$50, 2 oz.

TL7 radios are comparably priced for civilians, and weigh the same, but have 30% the range.

Com Scrambler (TL8): Attached to a communicator, this unit scrambles the message according to a preset pattern; only another com scrambler using the same settings can translate it. Given several minutes of conversation, a computer *might* be able to crack the pattern - roll against the Electronics Operation (Communications) skill of the user, +1 per level of Complexity of the computer, minus the TL of the scrambler. This can be avoided by sending a short message using prearranged alternative settings, or by compressing a message into an ultra-fast "burst" transmission (which precludes conversation). It uses the communicator's power. \$500, 0.25 lb.

Implant Communicator (TL8): This is implanted in the user's skull and powered by an AA cell, which lasts ten years. It has an effective range of 10 miles. With practice, users can subvocalize, communicating without moving their lips (IQ-4 to notice someone in the same room doing this). Unit costs \$10,000, plus another \$10,000 for surgery.



Computers

For game purposes, the Company's computers are fully TL8, with no price hike or bugs, and fully compatible with the ordinary, late-TL7 computers used by the rest of the world. As of 1997, Dynatronics can routinely produce a palm-top computer that can run the even the hottest computer games with the graphics, speed and sound totally maxed-out! Use the standard *GURPS* computer rules (pp. C112-19) for TL8.

The Cistron

One notable article of Company computer hardware is the *Cistron*, the hot-rod palm-top issued to every Tech op. The *Cistron* is a small computer with the "compact," "genius" and "high-capacity" options, giving it Complexity 3 and the ability to run three Complexity 3 programs simultaneously. Its miniature terminal includes a small, full-color LCD screen, a fold-out keyboard and a pressure pen that writes directly to the screen.

The *Cistron* includes a TL8 radio, with a 10-mile range and a scrambler system, capable of using local cellular-phone networks (Technology picks up the bill), and a top-speed cellular modem, allowing it to access Blacknet (and through that, the Internet). It can also pick up local TV signals and (when the weather is good) patch into satellite TV signals as well.

Finally, it can communicate with the Company's private global positioning system, allowing the user to pinpoint his location anywhere on the planet. Full-color maps, with detail down to the neighborhood-and-alley level, can be downloaded from Blacknet at any time.

The TL8 price tag for a *Cistron* would be \$62,000, but a stray *Cistron* would be priceless on the world market – civilian electronics corporations would pay millions for one, no questions asked. The *Cistron* is slightly larger than a paperback book (8" × 5" × 2"), and weighs 2.5 lbs.



Medical Tech

Company scientists have worked hard to move medical knowledge almost entirely into the 21st century; most techniques taught are entirely TL8. The only exception is cloning, which the Company hasn't perfected yet, though it's trying hard given the success of bionics in "de-retiring" ops. Some common medical gear (all of it TL8):

Bionics: Company surgeons can replace any limbs lost in action with experimental bionics. This research has long held the highest priority, since bionics are often used to keep a black op on active duty, despite injuries that should retire him. Most bionic limbs simply replace the original limb (or eye!) without any enhancements (improvements in ST and DX, etc.) . . . but recently, the Company has begun to venture into *improving* broken bodies with bionics. For advanced bionic tech, see *GURPS Cyberpunk*, *Space, Ultra-Tech* or *Ultra-Tech 2*.

Cryobag: Resembling a police-issue body bag, a cryobag is constructed of thick, black, tear-resistant plastic, lined with a heavy, quilted silver insulation. A small mechanism near the terminus of the zipper activates a supercharged capacitor that sends a spike of electricity through the coils of "molecular heat eliminators." The bag will not activate unless zipped up completely. A severely-wounded op can be placed in the bag and flash-frozen within 5 seconds.

If the victim is returned to a Company hospital or the Lab within 8 hours, there is a good chance of reviving the victim *to his state of injury before freezing*. Roll 2d; anything less than a 12 indicates successful revival. Subtract 1 from the target number for every additional hour of delay (i.e., after 12 hours, you'd need to roll under 8 to revive the wounded op). A cryobag will "superfreeze" any creature that is man-sized or smaller. When rolled up, a cryobag is 3' long and a foot in diameter, about the size of a stowed sleeping bag. \$1,000, 12 lbs. (empty).

Emergency Medkit: A belt pouch with 5 revive capsules, 5 plastiskin patches, a pneumospray hypo and 2 doses of hypercoagulin. Gives +1 to First Aid skill. Has room for another 10 doses of any medication. \$2,200, 1 lb.

Hypercoagulin: When injected into a patient with a bleeding wound, this drug causes instant coagulation and a cessation of bleeding within 1d+4 seconds. It restores 1 point of HT, and prevents further damage from blood loss. Overdoses can kill; a HT roll minus (number of doses taken) is required if more than one dose is taken within 24 hours. A failed roll means that the patient's blood becomes so thick that his heart stops. Full medical facilities will be required to save the patient. This is a popular assassination method among Intelligence ops, since it leaves no chemical trace

detectable by ordinary TL7 medicine, and death is nearly identical to an ordinary heart attack. \$500/dose.

The Juice: This injectable drug is a breakthrough, even at TL 8 – a stable cocktail of adders (see p. UT97) with no (known . . .) side-effects. It increases the user's ST, DX and Move by *two* points each. To determine effect and duration, roll vs. HT-6. If the roll succeeds, the effect lasts for a number of hours equal to the margin of success. If the roll fails, the bonus is only +1, and lasts for an hour. On a *critical* failure, the user's ST, DX and Move are *reduced* by one for an hour. After a successful (or partially successful) dosage wears off, the user suffers a -2 to ST, DX and Move for twice the number of hours the drug was in effect.

While the drug is in effect, the user suffers from Overconfidence. During the "down time" after the drug wears off, mild depression is common. The drug is \$6,000 per injectable dose. A pill form is being developed (\$3,000 per pill), but it requires half an hour to take effect, and has *triple* the normal down-time slump.

Medical Pouch: A doctor's bag, with room for twice the contents of an emergency medkit (see p. 118), plus standard bandages, sedatives, stimulants and so on (all drugs and plastiskin must be purchased separately). Has room for whatever other drugs the physician would want to add. This kit includes a full set of physician's and surgeon's tools, and is the minimum necessary to use Surgery, Diagnosis or Physician skills without penalty. Give +2 to First Aid skill. \$1,500, 15 lbs.

Plastiskin: The ultimate bandage, this is a skin-like plastic patch that holds wounded flesh together, taking the place of normal skin (even taking on the color of the patient's skin, so that it is only evident on close examination). When the flesh beneath it heals, the patch falls off. Can also be used to cover tattoos, etc., for disguises. \$200 per 6-inch square patch.

Pneumospray Hypo: A penlight-sized pneumatic hypodermic that injects drugs with compressed air. \$125, negligible weight.

Revive Capsules: Small, easily-crushed capsules which, when broken, release fumes that can instantly revive (wake up, "unstun," etc.) anyone who breathes them. The patient rolls at HT+5 to become fully alert. No HT is regained, but the patient is awake. \$100/dose. Less effective ammonia inhalants are \$5/dose, and grant an unmodified HT roll.

Psychotronics

Psychic Enhancer (TL7): A small mesh "helmet" resembling a chainmail coil made of copper, the enhancer attaches to a compact (2 lbs.) power supply worn on the belt. The power supply takes 24 hours to recharge from a normal household wall socket, or 2 hours back at Dynatronics. It's good for an hour of continuous operation. The entire unit weighs 2.5 lbs., including the helmet and power leads.

Anyone wearing an activated psychic enhancer has all of his psi power levels doubled or increased by 4 whichever is *less*. The drawbacks, unfortunately, are many.

The enhancer works by generating what amounts to a "psi-conductive field" around the user's brain, which grants the same increased power (and a +3 to skill!) to any *hostile* psi attempting any sort of telepathic activity against the wearer's own mind. Secondly, the device causes a kind of soothing high that reduces the wearer's DX and sense rolls by 2 when the helmet is worn. When it comes off, the wearer comes down from that high. Switching the helmet off eliminates all of the aforementioned effects, but drops the wearer into a kind of funk (treat as a mildly depressive version of the Laziness disadvantage, p. B34), and gives him mild brontophobia (see p. B36). These effects last for 1d hours after the helmet is removed.

Finally, any critical failure on a psi skill roll made while wearing an active enhancer is extremely dangerous to the wearer's mind, as the conductive field opens his consciousness to things within himself that are best left unexamined, the capricious whims of his own imagination. The result is that – in addition to any other effects of the critical failure – the wearer must make 1d Fright Checks at a basic penalty of -10 each!

Due to its highly experimental nature, this device is difficult to requisition for most missions.



Solidifier (TL8): This is a red metal box, 15" square and about 3" thick, weighing 15 lbs. Each is attuned to an identical twin. Together, the two boxes can set up a resonant psychic field which *solidifies* concentrated psychokinetic energy (PKE). In this field, the PKE that a psi might use to manipulate objects resembles smoky tendrils of

soupy mist, visible to the naked eye. When a psychokinetic *entity* enters the field, it becomes almost as solid as flesh (resembling a dense gelatin in texture), and – to the delight of the grunts – can be shot. A “solidified” ghost is treated as a physical thing for all purposes. It can take damage, bleed and die (becoming incorporeal as it does).

Solidifiers are easy to use: switch them both on and go. The internal power supply of each lasts 2 hours before needing a recharge. However, the field is *very* narrow – a thin strip of space between the two boxes. When using a hex grid for combat, draw an imaginary line between the centers of the two hexes containing the units. Every hex that the line passes through (even just a little) is considered part of the field, as is every adjacent hex. This means that getting a ghost to *stay* in the field can be tricky, involving a pair of ops running around, trying to keep the ghost exactly between them while their teammates blow holes in it.

Solidifiers only work in pairs, but any number of pairs can operate near one another without field interference. The maximum distance between two solidifier boxes is seven yards; beyond that, the field is too dispersed to do anything.

Solidifiers are new technology, and buggy. The GM should secretly roll 3d for every turn of continuous operation. On a 17 or 18, one of the devices burns out, emitting a nasty squealing noise and acrid smoke. Anyone with Teleceive who is within his normal telepathy range of the devices takes 1d damage *directly to the brain* from the surge (do not multiply this damage by 4), and must make a HT roll or be knocked out. Characters with Mind Shield may make a skill roll. If successful, they subtract their Power level from the damage. Those who take no damage need not make the HT roll, but they are mentally stunned. On the up side, this effect damages ghosts (and Greys!), as well.



Sensors & Measuring Devices

Chemical Test Strips: Thin strips that can be inserted into liquids to test for chemicals by color change. Each strip tests for a specific compound, metal or ion (e.g., ammonium, arsenic, chlorine, chromate, copper, cyanide, formaldehyde, iron, lead, manganese, nitrite, peracetic acid, silver, sulfite, zinc). A pack of 50, all of one type or two each of 25 common varieties, is \$50, negligible weight.

Seismic Sensor (TL8): This is a detector sensitive to vibrations carried through the ground. It requires 20 seconds to set up. Sensor information is displayed on a fold-out monitor screen. On a successful Electronics Operation (Sensors) roll, it can detect explosions, heavy vehicles and giant animals (such as dinosaurs) at up to 1 mile. Lighter vehicles, and animals such as horses, may be detected at up to 700 yards; people on foot within 100 yards. A dedicated computer distinguishes between different types of vibrations. Add bonuses for large numbers of vehicles or individuals, and subtract penalties when trying to detect things beyond normal range. A detection roll is allowed for every 10 seconds of operation.

Seismic detectors can map subterranean caverns by analyzing reflected shockwaves from explosions. Several sensors (for triangulation) and a Geology roll are needed to create an accurate map. \$1,000, 3 lbs.

Wristwatch Rad Counter: This has a display to indicate the radiation level. The same unit may be built into a helmet visor. \$100, 0.25 lb.

Survival Gear

Concentrated Rations: Highly-nutritious concentrated food pastes in squeeze tubes. One tube supplies a human with all the nutrients required for one day. Tastes good, but not filling at all; ration users always complain of hunger. A full week's worth (7 tubes) is \$50, 2 lbs.

Depth Gauge: For diving. This gauge is wristwatch-sized. Runs off an AA cell for a year. \$40, 0.25 lb.

Filtration Canteen: A canteen with a built-in filtration unit designed to purify and hold up to a quart of water. Will remove *almost* all impurities, microbes and poisons; there is always the possibility of a contaminant for which the filter was not designed! It takes 30 minutes to purify a quart of water. Filters must be replaced every 100 quarts; a color change signals this. An “exhausted” filter still has a few quarts of capacity, but only the manufacturer and the GM know how many. \$175, 1 lb. empty (3 lbs. full). Replacement filters are \$25.

Inertial Compass (TL8): A hand or belt unit that indicates the direction and distance traveled from any preset point on the planet's surface. It can be set for the location at which the user is physically present, or for any other coordinates (requiring a Navigation or Orienteering roll if coordinates of the location aren't known). Uses an A cell. Distances measured are accurate within 1 yard per 1,000 miles. \$5,000, 1 lb.



Survival Knife: A Fine-quality large knife with a serrated back, allowing it to be used as a saw. In addition, the handle is hollow and contains a variety of miniaturized survival equipment: antiseptic, compass, fire starter, fishing line and hooks, knife sharpener, miniature tools and flashlight, stimulants, wire for animal snares, and up to three other very small items the owner specifies beforehand. \$100, 1.5 lbs. Custom versions are available with assorted built-in electronics such as radios, rad detectors, homing buttons and so on.

Thief/Spy Gear & Countermeasures

Acoustic Foam Sheets: Shaped, black "acoustic foam," used to prepare an area in order to eliminate echoes of footsteps, projection of speaking voices, screams and so on. Each sheet is 5' x 5'. \$50 per sheet (includes tube of adhesive).

Antenn-Eye: This resembles a standard car radio antenna. However, the knob on the top contains a pinhole lens for a TV camera, and the device can perform 360° video surveillance. Intelligence ops commonly attach it to vehicles or large portable radios for discreet spying. \$2,500, 4 lbs.

Bugs: Rapidly becoming obsolete in the face of newer and better "sniffers" and "stompers," these tiny microphones and transmitters come in a variety of shapes, all tiny. An internal power source lasts six weeks, relying upon voice activation to conserve power during quiet times. The bug can broadcast up to 400 yards to a waiting receiver. \$400, weight negligible.

Grapnel Launcher: An air gun that can shoot a grapnel and rope up to 75 yards. It is fired using Guns (Rifle)-1. All normal modifiers for size and speed of the target apply. \$500, 15 lbs.

Laser Microphone: Turns any window into a bug by reflecting an invisible beam off the glass and measuring vibrations

caused by speech. Loud music and running faucets can foul it up, but it is otherwise undetectable. Range 1,000 yards. Runs for 8 hours on a C cell. \$1,200, 12 lbs.

Long-Range Microphone: Uses a parabolic dish to focus sound. It must be aimed directly at the thing you want to listen to. Picks up speech at 1,500 yards, whispers at 100. Halve ranges if there's a lot of ambient noise. \$450, 2 lbs.

TEMPEST (Transient ElectroMagnetic Pulse Emission Standard) Gear: This device, the size of a large briefcase, picks up ambient radio emissions from standard computer monitors. It can display the current screen of any computer within 100 yards. The user must make an Electronics Operation (Computers) roll. Roll at -3 to distinguish one computer from many in a modern office building. \$50,000, 20 lbs.

Thermographic Film: Film that produces pictures in complete darkness, provided heat sources are present. A 24-exposure roll for a 35mm SLR camera costs \$25. Negligible weight.

Tracking Bug: This device, roughly 1" in diameter, broadcasts a continuous radio signal. With appropriate radio gear, an agent can follow the bug wherever it goes; the internal battery lasts for ten days. The signal can be followed at a distance of five miles in the city, 25 miles in rural areas. This requires an Electronics Operation (Communications) roll. \$100, negligible weight. The tracking gear is \$1,000, 20 lbs.

Tools and Personal Gear

Diving Light: A sturdy, pistol-grip floodlight designed for SCUBA and other uses. Waterproof to 600', it operates for 10 hours on four flashlight batteries. \$50, 2.25 lbs.

This light is very popular for vampire hunts; its 60,000 candlepower lamp can be focused to a narrow beam that damages exposed vampire flesh (provided the vampire is strapped down and isn't moving). Use defaults to Beam Weapons-4 or Guns (Pistol)-4. The light has SS 12, Acc 3, 1/2D 5 and Max 15. It has RoF 6 and does 1d-5 damage per shot to vampires, using the laser autofire rules.



No-Spark Tools: For 10x normal prices, any tool (or an entire tool kit) can be made from a beryllium-copper alloy that will not produce sparks. As an added bonus, they're non-magnetic and highly corrosion-resistant.

Personal Kit: Attaches to belt, etc.. Holds eating utensils, pen, lighter, small change, toothbrush, comb and so on. \$25, 0.5 lb.

Shoulder Light: A smaller version of the diving light (above), this bright light is used mainly on missions where darkness is common and the ops need both hands free. It can be mounted on the shoulder, forearm, barrel of a weapon or side of a riot helmet. Its beam is adjustable both in brightness and focus – at its maximum setting, it is half as bright as the diving light, but costs the same due to its compact size. \$50, 1 lb.

Six-in-One Axe: An all-metal firefighting and rescue tool forged from beryllium-copper alloy (see *No-Spark Tools*, above), the six-in-one axe is bored through the blade and chiseled below the handle to allow it to be used as a hatchet (sw+1 cutting), a pick (sw+2 impaling), a hydrant wrench, a spanner wrench, a pry bar and a gas-valve shut-off. Treated it as a Fine-quality weapon and tool for all purposes (damage bonuses are included above). Min ST is 12; turning the axe to switch from hatchet to pick grip takes a Ready maneuver. \$200, 4.5 lbs.

Tool Kits: For use with the Armory, Electronics, Engineer and Mechanic skills, allowing major and minor repairs to be made at no penalty on skill. A basic Mechanic or Engineer kit costs \$800 and weighs 300 lbs., and has a volume of 13.5 cubic feet as cargo. Basic Armory or Electronics kits cost \$1,200, weigh 100 lbs., and have a volume of 6.75 cf as cargo.

Portable tool kits (smaller versions of the basic kits above) are available, and will fit into a backpack. \$600, 20 lbs. for a Mechanic or Engineer kit; \$900, 10 lbs. for an Armory or Electronics kit. Major repairs are made at -2 with a portable kit, minor repairs at no penalty.

Mini tool kits are belt-mounted, and can be used for routine repairs at -2 to skill, major repairs at -4. \$400, 2 lbs.

Utility Belt: A web belt with pouches for money, equipment, ammo and other valuables, plus hooks and loops for tools, equipment, holsters and so on. \$25, 1/2 lb.

Transportation

The Company employs a wide variety of very specialized vehicles, from man-portable break-down helicopters to microsups. GMs are referred to *GURPS Vehicles* for the full range of vehicle possibilities and vehicle action; Technology op PCs might even wish to engineer their *own* special machines for getting around. . .

The Teleporter (TL?)

One important breakthrough in transportation technology that deserves mention is the recently-unveiled teleportation device. Still in the alpha stage, this is dangerously useful. On one occasion already, its usefulness has been paid for with the life of an op who materialized half inside a steel girder. Issued only to trusted, experienced ops on *desperate* missions, the teleporter is an astonishing achievement – if you survive the ride.

The device consists of three main parts: a metallic "blanket," an array of focusing antennae and a power supply, all attached to a dedicated computer. The power supply is the largest component – a 350-lb. bundle of capacitors, batteries and heavy cables. The central capacitor stores more than 300 kilowatt-hours of juice. The object to be teleported is wrapped in the blanket, then the computer and focusing antennae are used to direct the transmission of matter.

Using the teleporter requires an Electronics Operation (Computers) skill roll *and* one of the specially-trained techs who built it, to supervise and troubleshoot. One or more members of "Team Teleport" are always "issued" along with the teleporter, to oversee its use and safe transport. Without the tech present, an op could use the teleporter at -4 to skill, *provided he's operated it before*. An op not yet familiarized with the device operates it at a hazardous -8.

Any matter, living or unliving, can be teleported. The range is (theoretically) just under seven miles. Apply *half* normal range penalties (p. B201) to the Electronics Operation roll. Thus, attempting a maximum-range teleport (7 miles) would incur a penalty of -11 to the operator's skill. The longest successful jump to date has been 4,376 feet (-9 to skill).

Time is a factor. *Square* the range penalty to find the processing time, in minutes, required to aim the jump. Thus, a -9 jump would require $9 \times 9 = 81$ minutes to aim. *Anything* less than the full required time adds an additional -6 penalty to the skill roll! Doubling the required time gives a flat +1 bonus (no further bonus possible).



SMIF

Also required is a three-dimensional physical map of the target area (obtaining this can be a mission unto itself). Barring that, a precise direction and distance can be programmed – but this can be risky if sending something (or someone) into entirely unknown territory. Finally, the teleporter must not be moved during preparation and operation (-6 penalty if it is).

When all is set, the switch is flipped and the roll is made. If the roll is a success, the object appears exactly where it was intended to go. On a failure by 1, the teleportation deviates by 1d yards in a random direction along a random axis (see below). Multiply this by the margin of failure (e.g., failure by six deviates by 1d×6 yards). On a critical failure, the object to be teleported is sprayed into the universe as a stream of radiation, and the machine burns out and must be repaired. To determine the approximate direction of teleport scatter, roll 1d *twice* and combine the results; opposite results mean that teleportation does not occur at all:

- 1 – North.
- 2 – South.
- 3 – East.
- 4 – West.
- 5 – Toward the center of the planet (straight down).
- 6 – Away from the center of the planet (straight up).



A roll of 1 and 2, for instance, means the object goes nowhere (it stays in the metallic blanket) since “north” and “south” cancel one another. A roll of 1 and 5, on the other hand, means the scatter deviates both northward and downward. Any result is possible; the teleporter *can* send something in entirely the opposite direction from the one intended, and it can bury something in solid rock.

Living things arrive stunned and mildly nauseous; the Body Sense skill is needed to shrug this off. The Body Sense roll takes the same range penalty that the Electronics Operation roll took, reduced by the margin of success of the Electronics Operation roll. This means that on a -7 jump, you roll Body Sense-7, but if the operator makes his roll by 4, you roll at only -3. The nausea lingers

a good deal longer than the stun, but is rarely intense enough to cause a noticeable penalty in game terms.

Weapon Tables

Weapons are described in the following format:

Malf: The die roll on which the weapon malfunctions.

Crit. means that the weapon malfunctions only on a critical miss, when a roll on the critical miss table indicates a malfunction. **Ver.** means that the weapon requires a *verification roll*, another roll against skill. Any failure is the malfunction from the table; any success is simply a miss.

Type: The type of damage the weapon does: impaling (Imp.), crushing (Cr.) or an explosion (Exp.). **Spec.** is a special effect – see the description of the weapon.

Damage: The number of dice of damage the weapon does. A number in parentheses () means the weapon is very good at piercing armor; the target's DR is divided by that number before being subtracted from the weapon's damage. A number in brackets [] indicates additional fragmentation (cutting) damage.

SS: This is the snap-shot number, the final to-hit number necessary to avoid a penalty of -4 without at least one turn of aiming.

Acc: The weapon's accuracy modifier. See p. B115.

1/2D: The range at which Acc drops to zero and damage is halved. For weapons like grenade launchers, this range may be shown as a dash, indicating that damage is never halved; in this case, Acc drops to zero at half the maximum range.

Max: The maximum range of the weapon under Earth-normal conditions.

Wt.: The weight in pounds of a loaded weapon, including any magazines or power cells.

RoF: The rate of fire of the weapon – the number of shots it can fire each turn. If this number is greater than one, then the weapon is capable of automatic fire; i.e., that many shots will be fired if the trigger is held down for the entire turn. A ~ indicates a weapon that is not automatic, but can fire up to the indicated number of times per turn. A * indicates that it is capable of selective fire; it may fire either automatically or with RoF 3-. A fractional RoF (e.g., 1/3) means the weapon can fire once, but then requires a number of turns equal to the number after the slash to reload before it can be fired again.

Shots: This is the number of shots the weapon's magazine holds. Unless the weapon has a fractional RoF (see above), it takes three turns to replace a magazine.

ST: The minimum ST required to avoid an extra turn of readying the weapon after it is fired and extra recoil penalties. Minimum ST only applies when firing the weapon from the shoulder or hip.

Rel: The recoil penalty of the weapon (see p. B119).

Cost: The retail price of the weapon. See *Reading the Price Tag* (p. 109) for more information.

Ranged Weapon Table

Guns (Rifle)

Weapon	Malf	Type	Damage	SS	Acc	1/2D	Max	Wt.	RoF	Shots	ST	Rcl	Cost
10.1mm Piflata Stick	Ver.	Cr.	10d	12	11/14#	980	4,700	17	1	19+1	14/13#	-4	1,500
M4 E-T Sniper Cannon	Crit.	Cr.	6d×3	17	12/15#	1,200	6,500	34.5	3~	22	16/15#	-3	5,700

Guns (Light Automatic)

Weapon	Malf	Type	Damage	SS	Acc	1/2D	Max	Wt.	RoF	Shots	ST	Rcl	Cost
Castor '94 Assault Carbine	Crit.	Cr.	6d	12	11	1,000	4,500	7	10*	30/30	9	-1	1,000
Castor '97 Caseless MG	Ver.	Cr.	10d	17	11/14#	980	4,700	39.75	10*	130	15/14#	-2	3,000

Guns (Grenade Launcher)

Weapon	Malf	Type	Damage	SS	Acc	1/2D	Max	Wt.	RoF	Shots	ST	Rcl	Cost
Hammer MPR	Crit.	Cr.	5d×5	17	11	800	4,200	18.5	1/3	22/rC	20	-6	18,000
M79 Grenade Launcher	Crit.	Exp.	4d×2 [3d]	12	6	—	400	7	1/4	—	12	-2	750
M203 Grenade Launcher	Crit.	Exp.	4d×2 [3d]	14	6	—	400	4	1/4	—	11	-1	1,000
Electromag GL	Crit.	Spec.	Spec.	10	8	—	1,000	10	1	5	—	0	5,000
HAFLA	Crit.	Spec.	Spec.	14	3	—	80	0.5	1	1	7	-1	50

Guns (Flamethrower)

Weapon	Malf	Type	Damage	SS	Acc	1/2D	Max	Wt.	RoF	Shots	ST	Rcl	Cost
Flamethrower	Crit.	Spec.	3d	5	8	40	56	56	4	12	13	0	750

Grey Weapons (Beam Weapons (Electrolaser), Beam Weapons (Force Beam) or Heater)

Weapon	Malf	Type	Damage	SS	Acc	1/2D	Max	Wt.	RoF	Shots	ST	Rcl	Cost
Electrolaser	Crit.	Spec.	4d	8	4	78	156	1.5	1	25/C	—	0	N/A
Force Rod	Ver.	Spec.	4d+2	10	5	20	30	1	3~	30/C	—	0	N/A
Heater	Crit.	Acid	4d	N/A	N/A	N/A	10	0.5	1	N/A	—	0	N/A

Use the more favorable stats when firing the weapon from a prone position using its bipod.

Melee Weapon Table

Weapon	Type	Amt	Reach	Cost	Weight	ST	Notes
Nervecracker	Spec.	Spec.	C, 1	100	1	—	
Six-in-One Axe	Cut	sw+1	1	200	4.5	12	
	Imp	sw+2	1				May get stuck.
Survival Knife	Cut	sw-1	C, 1	100	1.5	—	Maximum damage 1d+2.
	Imp	thr+1	C				Throwable. Maximum damage 1d+2.
Vibroknife	Cut	+1d (5)	C, 1	240	1	—	Damage modifies large knife.
	Imp	+1d (5)	C				

GLOSSARY

Academy, The: The black ops' training school, where recruits go through five years of hell before becoming active agents.

Agendas: Secret, closely guarded goals determining the direction pursued by each department in the Company's various campaigns.

Area 12: The Intelligence department's large, underground storage and filing facility, located in a salt mine in the Utah desert.

Argus: The secret, 12-member controlling entity that created the Company and still manages its activities. Named after the thousand-eyed beast of Greek mythology.

Beast: A classification of creatures including vampires, werewolves, gargoyles, demons, dinosaurs, sea monsters and other man-sized or larger enemies.

Big Bugs: Larger-than-normal insects. A type of *wiggler*.

Blacknet: The Company's high-security computer network, in which is stored mission logs, agent dossiers, medical files and other useful information.

Brainsquid: A parasite that feeds on nerve tissue. A type of *wiggler*.

Brainsucker: An alien creature that takes over a human host and occupies it for a year before killing it. Brought to Earth or bioengineered by the *Prima*.

Breederbug: An insect that forms colonies inside animal corpses (including humans). A type of *wiggler*.

Cadre, The: A sub-section of the Combat department that specializes in hunting and destroying *beasts*.

Capture Mission: A mission focused on the live acquisition of a (usually) dangerous entity.

Chip, The: A cybernetic implant created by the *Greys*, which allows them to monitor and track humans.

Cistron: A hand-held computer, communicator and navigational device developed by and for the exclusive use of the Technology department.

Clean-Up Mission: A mission focusing on the eradication of a problem through whatever means necessary and as quickly as possible.

Committee, The: A sub-group of the Intelligence department responsible for choosing and inducting recruits into the *Academy*.

Company, The: The organization, composed of five disparate *departments*, that is dedicated to the protection of humanity from dangerous, publicly unknown elements.

Containment Mission: A mission designed to prevent the spread of either dangerous knowledge or a destructive entity.

Cover-Up Mission: A mission intended to prevent the spread of potentially harmful information about the Company and its activities.

Cryobag: An experimental, portable cryogenic device, that allows severely wounded operatives to be frozen safely for up to eight hours, so that they may be transported to friendly doctors who can revive them.

Deep Cover: A sub-group of Intelligence agents who hold a great deal of their own initiative in supporting other Company missions, often without the knowledge of those black ops involved.

Demon: A humanoid entity with some distinguishing diabolical characteristic and an evil, perverted mind. A type of *beast*.

Departments: The five subsections of the Company, of which all black ops are members: Combat, Intelligence, Science, Security and Technology.

Directives: The broadly written documents that outline the purposes and methods of each department.

Disavowal: A term used to indicate that the Company no longer recognizes a particular agent as a black op, but does not feel he or she must be killed. Not necessarily a permanent condition.

Discovery Mission: A mission aimed at uncovering the truth about a rumor or scientific lead.

Doc, The: Nickname for Science department medical staff made up of retired ops.

Draft, The: The process of selecting *Academy* recruits into their future departments. Occurs after the second year of training.

Drills: The various hellish exercises that make up half of a recruit's training at the *Academy*.

Dynatronics: The Technology department's front company. Four facilities around the country where secret research into technological advances takes place.

Gargoyle: A paranormal creature whose skin is rough and stone-like, and who loves to kill. A type of *beast*.

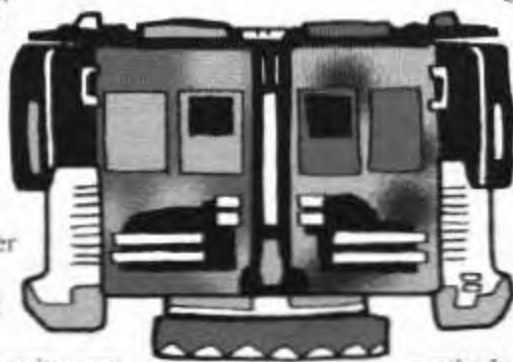
Geek: A nickname for a Science department member.

General's Ball: A social event/final exam marking the end of the fourth year of *Academy* training. Includes a morass of political intrigue and social maneuvering, as well as several plot lines involving aliens, departmental politics and betrayal.

Ghost: A supernatural entity made up of the "spirit" of a dead individual. Occasionally very dangerous. A type of *beast*.

Gremlin: A small, annoying, vicious *gargoyle*, usually in the form of a misshapen animal.

Grey: An alien species trapped on Earth since 1908. They are systematically abducting human women to perform



clinical reproductive experiments in an attempt to produce viable offspring.

Grey Code: The complex telepathic language used by the Greys.

Grunt: A nickname for a member of the Combat department.

Ice Weasel: An arctic reptile that uses special glands to superheat its front teeth, allowing it to travel quickly through solid ice and packed snow.

Juice, The: An experimental drug that can boost a human's strength and agility, but causes an extended crash after use.

Lab, The: The Science department's underwater research, testing and storage facility, off the coast of Texas.

Liquid Lobotomy: A dangerous concoction designed to expel a brainsucker from its zombie host. Only 10% effective without killing the host.

Lodge, The: An intricate, highly secret organization of *rogues* who categorize themselves as mages and fashion their psychic powers as spells and incantations.

Manhandling: The judo-like martial art taught at the *Academy*, designed to incapacitate opponents by using holds and throws.

Mind: An organization of *rogues* who use their psychic powers to gain power and influence over world society.

Mop Squad: A mission squad composed entirely of Security agents.

Omicron Device, The: An implant inserted into the back of the neck of every recruit and black op. It is used by the Company to alert agents of a mission, or to track them should they go AWOL.

Omni-Squad: A mission squad that includes at least one member from each of the five departments.

Phreaks: A sub-group of the Technology department. Obnoxious, anti-social hackers who specialize in breaking into complex, high-security computer systems.

Poindexter: An abusive nickname for a member of the Science department.

Prima: An ancient race of aliens who inhabited – and perhaps ruled – Earth from approximately 7,000 B.C. to 30 A.D. Responsible for creating the *brainsucker* menace.

Psi-op: A black op with a significant amount of psychic power and the training to use it.

Ramblers: An anarchic gangs of *rogues*, who use their powers to cause mayhem at unpredictable times and locations.

Reconnaissance Mission: A mission aimed at gathering information.

Renegade: A black op who has gone bad. Any operative who refuses to answer the call of the Omicron Device, or who otherwise sabotages or betrays the Company's efforts.



Rockworm: A large, dangerous, wormlike creature that has the ability to tunnel through solid rock. A type of *wiggler*.

Rogue: A human with strong psychic powers who uses them illegally or immorally.

Satan's Playroom: A large section of *Academy* property, constructed to look like many different urban environments. The area is populated with dangerous animatronic *beasts*, *wigglers* and aliens.

Scorcher: A weapon used by the *Grey* fliers that causes intense burns by concentrating microwave radiation at a specific location.

Secop: Another name for a member of the Security department.

Sewer Fluke: A large, white, segmented sewer creature, with lots of teeth and a healthy appetite.

Skullcracking: A martial art taught at the *Academy* that concentrates on dealing out severe injury and death.

Solidifier: An experimental device created by the Technology department that can briefly give corporeal form to psychic energy.

Spook: A nickname given to a member of the Intelligence department.

Squealer: A derisive nickname given to a member of the Security department.

Steelhead: The main headquarters and training facility of the Combat department. Located in San Diego, California.

Summer Camp: A nickname for one of the *Academy's* severe exposure *drills*.

Techie: Another name for a member of the Technology department.

Universal Underwriters: Cover name for a string of Security department safe houses around the country.

Vampire: A former human who has been mutated by a terrible virus, causing him to require human blood and organ tissue to survive. A type of *beast*.

Wall, The: A special group of Security agents who are assigned to protect the members of *Argus*.

Weeding Drill: An *Academy* drill that is likely to kill recruits who are not up to the challenges of being a black op.

Werewolf: Any of a number of dangerous, paranormal creatures with characteristics of animals and humans. Sometimes called *beast-men*, *yeti*, *susquatch*, etc. A type of *beast*.

Whitehall: The large, heavily guarded underground complex beneath Stone Mountain, Georgia, that houses the headquarters of the Security department.

Wiggler: Any of a number of small, dangerous entities which the Company has pledged to eradicate.

Workshop, The: The Intelligence department's training center and headquarters. Located in Springfield, Missouri.

Zombie: A human who has been infested by a *brainsucker*.

Zoo, The: A collection of living paranormal and alien creatures, stored and studied at the Science department's *Lab*.

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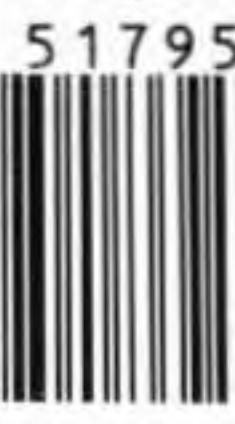
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