





PDF EDITION NOTES



The original edition of M-Force was published back in 2002, and had some layout issues even then, so trying to use those layout files to create a PDF in 2010 only made matters worse. The software we were using then isn't even designed to run on today's computers, so it's a miracle we able to get anything. We had to delete the page number bars in some chapters and delete some artwork because the graphics were showing up in places they weren't supposed to be (on the plus side, sometimes this resulted in blank pages at the end of chapters, and we filled up the blank space with some of Gary Bedell's original M-Force concept art). We also had to move some tables to the ends of chapters, and had a couple that wouldn't print at all. So this PDF is kind of a mess, but for the most part all the text is readable, if not especially pretty. Since we're working on the 2nd Edition and this one's mainly for people who want to try out the game before the new one comes out, "readable" will have to do. Enjoy!

We have no idea what's going on here, but thought you might enjoy this pic and still can't put it in the book with a straight face.

Keep Track of M-Force 2E Progress at:

www.kickmonsterbutt.com

**MONSTERS ARE
A PROBLEM.**



**BE A PART OF
THE SOLUTION.**

M



FORCE

MONSTER HUNTING IN THE 21st CENTURY

Created by Leighton Connor

HEX ENTERTAINMENT

Louisville, KY



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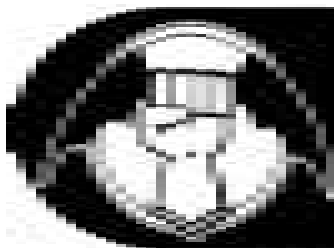
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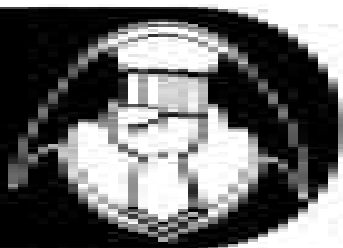


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INTRODUCTION



Imagine driving a Jeep at 110 mph across the desert, swerving to avoid toxic spore-bombs, leaning out the window to open fire on the 50' tall plant monster with tendrils bigger than you are. Imagine creeping into a dusty mausoleum, wooden stake gripped firmly in hand, your heart racing every time you see a rat skitter across the floor. Imagine standing alongside your closest friends, brandishing flamethrowers in a last-ditch effort to keep the army of giant ants from overrunning the city.

If you're even remotely sane, you wouldn't want to do these things in real life. But they're fun to imagine. Who doesn't daydream, from time to time, about being the hero in a movie? Don't you wish you could fight against the forces of darkness, at no risk to your person? That's what the M-Force role-playing game allows you to do.

BUT WHAT IS A ROLE-PLAYING GAME?

Role-playing games (RPGs for short) are a relatively new form of entertainment. An RPG combines elements of drama, strategy games, and storytelling, but it is not exactly like any of them. While a board game allows players to move pieces on a board, an RPG allows them to take part in an interactive fictional experience. Unlike typical fiction, though, there is no one person who determines the "plot" of the story. And unlike most dramatic productions, the players are not given scripts to memorize or any specific instructions on what to do with their characters. The activity most like an RPG is a child's game of make-believe.

When we are children, make-believe comes easily. Without a second thought, sticks become swords, houses become palaces, and ordinary summer days become grand, epic adventures. What children's games lack in complexity they more than make up for with unbridled imagination and their total immersive quality. As we become older, and as we learn more about the world around us, suspension of disbelief becomes more difficult. The stick stays a stick, no matter how much we squint. Worse than that is the realization that it is not socially acceptable to continue games of imagination after a certain age. We give them up, and find other hobbies to take their place.

But as adults we still, on some level, want to play. We want to let our imagination out, in a positive and entertaining way. In order to satisfy this urge, though, we need structure. We need help suspending our disbelief. We need rules to make the process run more smoothly, and rituals of play that will allow us to bypass our societal conditioning against make-believe. And, since we don't want any funny looks from the neighbors, we need to play inside, in the privacy of our homes. Thus most RPGs take place around tables. As we mentioned earlier, you won't need playing pieces or boards--the real game will exist in what you and your friends say to each other.



In the game each player will take on the role of a fictional character. This is called a *player character*, or PC. The player decides what actions the PC takes, and speaks for the PC when necessary. There is no script, and a player may attempt anything he wants with his PC--though he may not necessarily succeed.

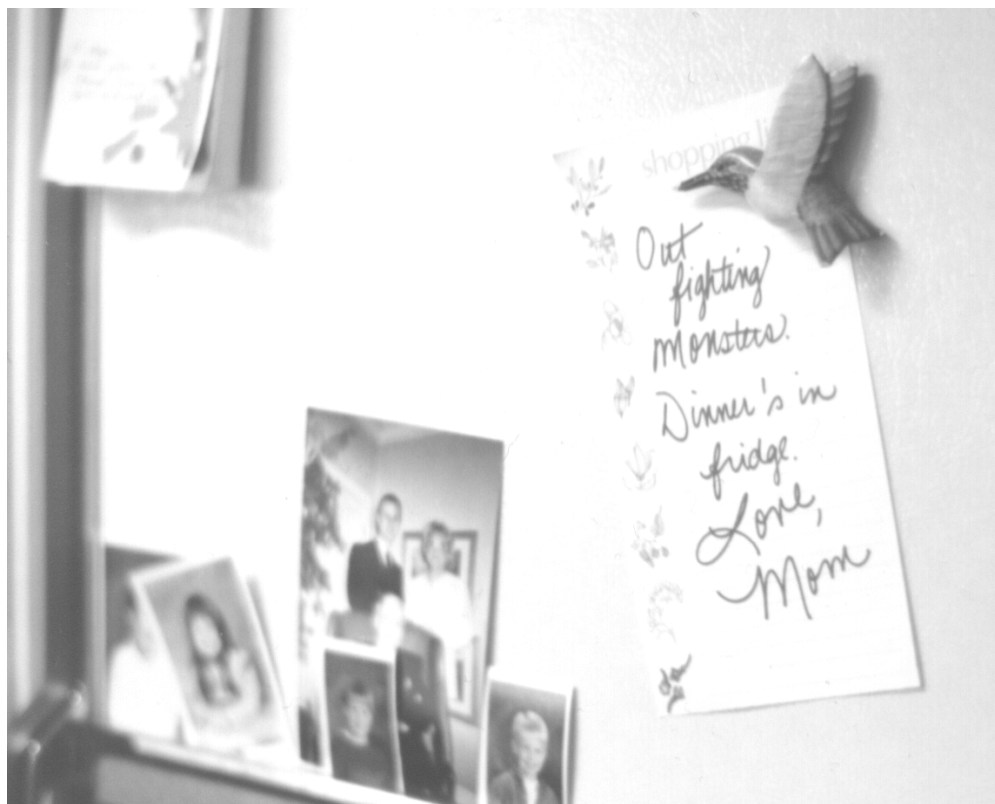
In addition to 3-6 players, each gaming session requires a *gamemaster* (or GM). The GM has the most work to do, and is responsible for every part of the game outside of the PCs. If you were to view the game as a film, the GM would be the director. She maintains the fictional environment of the game. She describes settings and introduces conflicts, scenarios, and other characters. These other characters--which may be supporting cast members, enemies, or monsters--are called *gamemaster characters*, or GMCs.

Through the course of the game, players guide their PCs through the imaginary setting that the GM maintains. When questions arise--as to whether a character can accomplish a specific action, or about which character will win a fight--the GM uses the game's rules to settle the question quickly and fairly. All the rules you will need are contained in this book. In addition to this book, you will need 20-sided dice, paper, writing utensils, and some candy.

As you read the rules, please keep in mind that they are guidelines to help players and GMs resolve conflicts, not an end in and of themselves. Don't worry about the details--this system is designed to be simple and easy-to-learn so you'll be able to focus on the story you are creating. The only person who needs a thorough understanding of the game mechanics is the GM. You will need to choose a GM well before playing, since the job requires quite a bit of preparation.

WHAT THIS GAME IS ABOUT

Long ago, people created myths to explain things they didn't understand. If Othan the hunter went out in search of food and never returned, well, perhaps a monster ate him. If ships sank, perhaps it was because of the terrible creatures that lived in the sea. Over time people developed more knowledge about their surroundings and most



monsters were revealed as natural phenomena. Yet even in the present day, belief in such things still exists. There are grainy photographs purporting to be pictures of sea monsters, tales of alien abductions, guidebooks to haunted houses, and urban legends about monsters that still exist in the wilds. Is it possible, people ask, that monsters really do exist? In our world, they probably don't—but in the world of M-Force, many of the things that we consider fictional are demonstrably real.

From the Medusa of ancient myth to the serial killer in the latest slasher movie, we as humans are fascinated by the horrible things that lurk in the darkness. Alongside this fictional tradition, though, is the equally proud tradition of the monster hunter. The oldest surviving stories we have are about brave warriors who hunted down and killed the creatures that preyed on their villages. Even though we know the stories to be mythical, they resonate with us. On some level monsters are metaphors for problems that have always plagued humankind, and heroes are symbols of courage and hope. In the 21st century, we're still obsessed with monsters, but from time to time we forget the monster hunters.

Players in this game take the role of members of M-Force, America's premier monster-hunting organization. The men and women of M-Force are part of the monster-hunting tradition, but they are also modern-day people with their own quirks, personalities, and problems.

Most of them have day jobs. From time to time they are called away from making sandwiches, organizing stock portfolios, cleaning windows, writing novels, selling cranes, driving cabs, or whatever else, to join in the age-old war against monsters. Their adventures can be funny, dramatic, suspenseful, or tragic, but above all else everyone involved should have a good time.

HOW TO USE THIS BOOK

This book is divided into three parts. The first part, *Setting*, is all about M-Force. It gives the background information you'll need to know to play the game. This starts with the big picture, the history of the world, and narrows its focus in each chapter, to the nationwide organization, specific branches, and finally to the individual M-Forcer. Part Two, *The Game*, tells you how to create characters and use the game mechanics to resolve action. Part Three, *Gamemastering*, provides advice on creating scenarios and campaigns, arbitrating the rules, and generally running the game. Prospective players should read the first two parts. Prospective GMs will need to read all three parts, plus the appendices at the end. A glossary of game and setting terms is provided at the back of the book, for the convenience of all players.



PART ONE: SETTING



CHAPTER 1

THE HISTORY OF THE WORLD



At first glance, the world of M-Force looks much like our own world—most place names are the same, and history follows basically the same course. Upon closer examination, however, the world of M-Force is a deeply strange place. This is not an alternate timeline where one key divergence brought about a different history. It's a world that has been strange from the beginning. Weirdness suffuses everything. In the world of M-Force, many of the things we look at as fiction are demonstrably provable facts. In addition to monsters, you can find magic, aliens, ancient conspiracies, super-science, and lost civilizations. As writer Kurt Busiek once said about his *Astro City*, "It's not a realistic world, but it's a fascinating one."

IN THE BEGINNING

No one knows how long monsters have existed, or whether they share any sort of common origin. Some say that monsters once ruled the earth. Others believe mon-



sters appeared much later, not arriving until after the dawn of human civilization. Still others claim that all monsters are the offspring of the primal god Leviathan. Whatever the case, it seems clear that non-human creatures have been preying on humankind for a long time.

Fortunately, monster hunters have been around for an equally long time. Ancient cave paintings show depictions of humans killing terrible beasts. Countless myths and legends tell tales about heroes who overcame great odds to defend their people from monsters. Though it's impossible to separate the facts from the fiction, it is likely that many of these legends were rooted in the truth.

Later periods of prehistory also remain shrouded in uncertainty, but modern cryptozoologists have put forward some theories. The fossil record suggests that Southeast Asia was once dominated by giant dragons. Many humans fled from the tyranny of the dragons, setting out across the sea in dugout canoes. Some settled in the islands of Polynesia, but others were driven on by the sea monsters which even today plague those islands. Some of those travelers eventually came to Australia. This must have seemed to them a paradise, as evidence suggests no monsters lived there until the days of Western colonization.

This exodus is not the only evidence of human civilization being driven by encounters with monsters. Professor Joseph Binford, in his *Rise of the Horse*, presents evidence suggesting that the tribes of the Asian steppe domesticated the horse to help them flee bands of monsters. Eventually, the tables turned and the horse peoples began hunting the monsters. This change was one of the first great accomplishments of human civilization.

THE RISE OF CIVILIZATION

In a great many early cultures, from Babylon to Egypt to Israel, the founding of the cosmic and social order is depicted in myth as the slaying of a monster by a central god or hero. That mythic explanation may not be far from the historical truth. In the earliest times, monsters were able to prey at their leisure on humans, who were dispersed and largely disorganized. Over the centuries, however, humans learned to gather together in larger and larger groups, whose members could watch out for each other



THE HEX FICTION

The word “fiction” was coined by science fiction writer Robert Heinlein in the novel *Number of the Beast*. The word simply means a fictional world. Heinlein gives Oz and Wonderland as examples, but some fictions look just like our world, such as those that house *Moby-Dick* and *The Maltese Falcon*. No matter what it looks like, a fiction is governed by natural laws that differ from our own. These laws generally owe more to drama than to physics.

M-Force exists in its own fiction, one inspired by popular fictions but still unique. The M-Force fiction is developed through the pages of this book, and will be expanded in future releases. Several previous products from Hex Games (such as the adventures *Mars and Venus at War* and *Galaxikhan Attacks!*) are set in this same fiction. They have characters, locations, and events in common. If you wish to incorporate any ideas from these other products into your M-Force game, these connections should make the job easier. If not, don't worry—you don't need to know anything about these other products to play M-Force.

and better insure their collective survival. When numbers alone proved to be insufficient protection, they built walled towns, abandoning the nomadic lifestyle for settled and agrarian safety. The settled life in turn led to a flowering of ideas. The knowledge of monsters' weaknesses was shared within and between allied communities. Technological advancements, specifically the development of bronze, provided edged weapons that allowed humans to effectively exploit those weaknesses.

As city-states evolved into great empires, the monsters were forced ever further into the shadows. Strong city walls and well-equipped troops protected the centers of civilization. Good roads permitted easy travel and communication across great distances. In most places, monsters could survive only at the fringes of human habitation, preying on lone individuals foolish enough to leave their safe havens. Even those monsters did not live unhindered, however. Every human culture produced heroes who fought to protect their peers.

In the Roman Empire, these heroes could be found in the legions. Legionnaires who specialized in fighting monsters formed a society called Herakles Kallinikos, the order of Hercules Triumphant. The Kallinikoi protected Roman society for centuries, until they were brought down by politics.

After centuries of prosperity, the Roman Empire grew weakened by its own successes. With no monsters or outside

threats, the Roman army was reduced in size and began to decay as a fighting force. People felt safe; cities and towns let their guards down. Complacency also led to political problems. Without external threats, the leaders of the Empire became more worried about their own power and wealth. The Imperial structure fell into disrepair.

The collapse of the Roman Empire came about as monsters learned to exploit the lessened defenses and weakened social structure. Though the death rates mounted, corrupt politicians failed to develop any effective countermeasures. Cities fell apart as people fled. The remaining legions tried to help, but they were undermanned and ill-equipped for the task. Soon the entire Empire was ripe for conquest. When Germanic tribes invaded, the legions were spread across the Empire and not massed to defend the frontier. The Empire could not withstand this threat in addition to the danger posed by the monsters.

THE DARK AGES

The fall of the Empire left the countryside swarming with monsters. The Roman roads were abandoned. Without established trade routes, villages became isolated communities, like islands in a sea of forest. Since no central government or army remained to keep the monsters at bay, villagers had to develop their own defenses. Some of these defenses, like using silver against werewolves, were effective. Others were groundless superstitions and provided no help.

Priests were able to use holy water, the Eucharist, and blessed artifacts to keep some monsters at bay. In this and many other ways, the church played a vital role in preserving civilization throughout the Dark Ages—or so the conventional wisdom goes. According to Prof. Chad Lumaye, in his *Servants of Mammon: The Monstrous Allegiances of the Catholic Church*, the truth may have been far darker. In 596, St. Augustine's mission to convert England was stopped by a werewolf attack while still on the European continent. In response, Lumaye claims, Pope Gregory I negotiated a treaty with Europe's dragons to guarantee protection for traveling Church officials. In return, the pope agreed to emasculate the church's successor to the Kallinikoi, the society of Christ Unconquered (Christus Invictus). Furthermore, the church would help prevent the formation of any central authority in Europe, allowing the dragons nearly free reign there.

Whether or not Lumaye is correct, it is known that dragons did appear in Europe in the sixth century. For centuries, dragons had ruled in China using human proxies (much as they may have done in South and Central American societies). Chinese historian Hiun Tsang wrote of malcontent dragons who were banished from the land for causing rebellion



THE KALLINIKOI

In the early days of Rome's expansion, the legions were often called upon to fight monsters. It was not a task well suited to the strict battle-drill and formations that made the legions so successful. The heroism of an individual soldier was often needed to best these unnatural foes, and soon an award was created to honor the intrepid legionnaire who stepped forward and slew the beast. This award was known as the Order of Herakles Kallinikos (Hercules the Triumphant) and was represented by a bronze medallion affixed to the breastplate of the legionnaire.

Within twenty years, the Order of Herakles Kallinikos had spawned an organization of legionnaires who wore the medallion. The order held meetings and rituals in Roman camps throughout the Empire. (The ritual elements, along with the order's Greek name, were taken from an older mystery cult to which several of the early members of the order had belonged.)

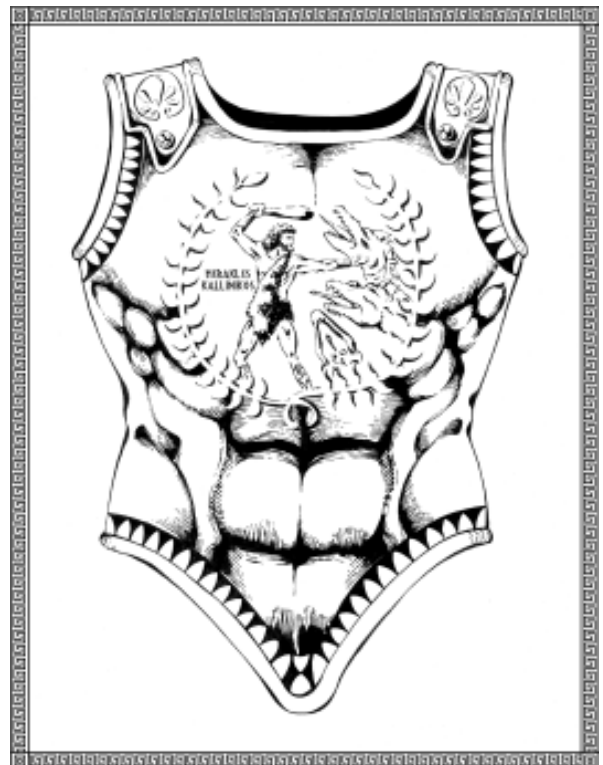
By 106 B.C., the order was seen as so important to the well-being of the Empire that Consul Gaius Marius declared the formation of the Legion of Hercules, which would be tasked with putting down the threat of monsters. Cohorts of the legion were stationed throughout Roman lands. In A.D. 196, Emperor Septimius Severus ordered the construction of a new headquarters for the legion in Byzantium, and granted its leaders considerable autonomy.

By the time the Emperor Constantine renamed the city Constantinople and made it the capital of the Empire, the Order of Herakles Kallinikos had become a powerful force. From its temple, the order controlled almost 12,000 legionnaires and auxilia. After Constantine's recognition of Christianity the order decided to change its public appearance, outwardly discarding all association with Herakles. The members became simply the Kallinikoi (or the Triumphant), though their secret rituals continued to invoke the Greek hero.

The Kallinikoi continued to flourish until the reign of Justinian. In A.D. 530, Justinian responded to claims that the Kallinikoi were a secret pagan cult of Hercules by stripping them of their authority and resources. These privileges he granted instead to a new, Christian order, Christus Invictus. The leaders of the Kallinikoi were arrested and put on trial for heresy. However, the citizens of Constantinople revolted in response to the mistreatment of their protectors, and in the chaos, the leaders of the Kallinikoi escaped. Thereafter, operating in secret, they recruited both surviving and new Kallinikoi to carry on their mission. This new, smaller, and more secretive order survived for another seven hundred years, continuing to protect civilization from monsters.

In 1204, Christian crusaders sacked Constantinople, and the Kallinikoi were forced to flee. The members scattered, and the order's library had to be left behind and was ultimately lost to history. Many former Kallinikoi continued to operate under new names, like the Order of the Dragon, but only a few remained who retained the original precepts, rituals, and name of the organization.

For centuries, the surviving Kallinikoi were without a home; they traveled constantly, performing their sacred mission while staying one step ahead of the Catholic Church. Finally, in 1562, England's Queen Elizabeth offered the order permanent shelter, granting them a castle that they named the Herakleion. For almost four hundred years, the Kallinikoi continued their work from this new headquarters. Though their membership had dwindled to only 48 by the time of World War II, the Kallinikoi still pursued their goal with great fervor.





and war during the time of the Sixteen Kingdoms. It seems likely that these dragons traveled across Asia and made Europe their home.

With the arrival of dragons, monsters grew more and more brazen. Only through the efforts of armored knights were they pushed back. Feudalism grew up as a way to support the overwhelming cost of the armor, weapons, horses, and training

necessary to defeat dragons and other creatures. The power of armored knights and the strength of stone castles slowly formed feudal islands of safety and order in the European wilderness.

Eventually, the success of the feudal lords resulted in a reduced threat of monster attack. Rather than change the system, the lords began to seek luxuries rather than weapons and armor. Trade brought spices, silks, and a need for safer travel for all. Armed caravans became the order of the day and regular trade fairs sprang up across the land. The monsters still ruled the wild woods, but it became possible for the feudal communities to communicate and trade. A major effect of this trade and communication was the gradual migration of freemen from the manors to towns and cities.

By the dawn of the new millennium, monsters were no longer a threat in Europe. Constant questing by knights had driven the creatures underground. Great lords held tournaments to maintain their knights' interest, but with Europe a virtual armed camp, something had to be done.

Pope Urban II found a solution in the Middle East. While Europe had been divided and monster-ridden, Muslim society had defeated its monster threat through the strength of the caliphates. Powerful armies, flourishing culture, and centralized government forged a society that the monsters could not withstand. Pope Urban saw the Muslim advance towards Constantinople as a threat and an opportunity. His declaration of the First Crusade channeled the armed might of feudalism safely out of Europe. Over the next three hundred years, the Crusades proved to be a military failure, but an economic success.

RENAISSANCE AND ENLIGHTENMENT

With the virtual disappearance of monsters and continued economic growth, Europe became a very different place. National rulers emerged in France and England. Cities became the center of society and the feudal lords began to lose power as their serfs demanded rights or ran away to become tradesmen.

As society changed, so did its goals. Wealth became as important as birth or military strength. Armor and weapons had been supplanted by knowledge and art. Greek and Roman culture were revived and studied. The logic of Aristotle was revered. Though there was ample evidence of monsters throughout history—most notably the troll on display in the Musaeum Tradescantianum—the emphasis on rationalism and science led many to conclude that monsters no longer existed, having been hunted to extinction. Through the next several centuries this attitude flourished. Monsters found in the mountains of Eastern Europe and on the high seas could be easily dismissed as fairy stories. Though Africans and Native Americans told of their very real encounters with terrible creatures, the Europeans denigrated such stories, and continued to advance their science and industry.

PROBING THE UNKNOWN

A small number of individuals attempted to use the power of reason to bring unknown horrors to light. The most notable of these was Professor Phillip Points. While a student at Cambridge, Points befriended the ghost of suicide Francis Dawes. This friendship sparked a lifelong interest in the supernatural. Points returned to Cambridge as a professor, but his growing obsession with the creatures of legend prevented him from receiving the acceptance of his peers in the scientific community. In 1845 Points left the university to conduct research. His stated goal was to move discussion of monsters out of the realm of folklore and into a rigorously scientific context. Over the next 17 years he traveled the world and, working alongside such brave men as Sir Francis Breckinridge and Dr. Hesselius, found startling evidence that monsters still existed and were still preying on humans. Points catalogued hundreds of monstrous menaces, including werewolves, vampires, succubi, and the slug-like species Points named *Vermis imitor*.

Realizing that monsters posed a greater threat to civilization than anyone suspected, Points returned to Cambridge and began to write. For five years he labored over a seven-volume set that painstakingly presented his findings. Points planned to send his manuscripts to a well-known publisher and warn the world. In the late hours of November 17, 1867, however, Professor Points' home



caught fire and burned to the ground. His body, his finished manuscripts, and all his notes were believed lost, though a number of his manuscripts would later resurface in occultist circles.

THE OCCULT UNDERGROUND

Even though rationalism had largely displaced superstition throughout Europe, pockets of mysticism continued to exist in every society. The old beliefs did not so much die off as move underground. In 19th century Britain, this underground took the form of secret societies primarily composed of the idle rich. Most of these groups were harmless, possessing no real occult knowledge. The exception to this rule was a group called the Acolytes of Leviathan. Wealthy nobleman Marcus Derth founded the Acolytes in 1849 to worship the primeval chaos-god Leviathan. This worship entailed a number of blasphemous rituals and bloody sacrifices. The Acolytes existed in secret, taking positions of power where they would have the necessary resources to track down the mystical artifacts they required. The Acolytes eagerly awaited the day when the stars would be in alignment, the correct rituals would be performed, and a gateway for Leviathan would be opened. The members of the cult knew that on the day Leviathan returned it would devour the universe, and so the organization generally attracted sociopaths and nihilists. Unfortunately, these were not in short supply.

FROM THE JOURNAL OF SADIE WITTERSTADT, 11/15/27

I remember after I'd seen the things and knew things weren't right but the doctor convinced me that I'd imagined it all or gotten confused or something. And I felt happier then but it was a fake happiness, stemming not from the fact that everything was right with the world but from the fact that I wanted so badly to believe that it was. And you can lie to yourself like that for the rest of your life but somewhere down inside yourself you'll never fully believe it, never forget that horrible sight you have seen. Now I know that the things I have seen are true. And this knowledge does not make me happy but I would not give it up. Because the way we feel does not affect the truth of a thing. We all want to pat each other on the back and tell each other that it's okay but what if it's not? What if there is something fundamentally wrong, something that pervades the whole world? Is it right to just go on like there's nothing wrong at all?

In 1927 the Acolytes believed that the stars were finally right and the great day had come. The culmination would take place in Caledonia, Massachusetts, a town noted for supernatural activity. A small band of innocent bystanders, in town for a mutual friend's funeral, were pulled into the occult conspiracy. This band, including police officer Sean O'Casey, pulp novelists A.J. Farmer and Jeff Wilscott, psychic Caleb Danforth, and socialite Sadie Witterstadt, ultimately thwarted the cult's ambitions. Earth was safe. This defeat seemingly spelled the end of the Acolytes. Sean, A.J., and the rest never widely discussed the matter with others—in those days it was considered unseemly to discuss ancient occult evils.

THE NAZIS

Many high-ranking members of the Nazi party were obsessed with the occult and the creation of monsters. Combining their blasphemous knowledge with cutting-edge science, the Nazis produced zombies, cybernetically-enhanced animals, and other horrors. Their most ambitious project, Plan Entscheidungskamps, nearly came to completion in September of 1944. Entscheidungskamps would have enslaved an ancient evil spirit to power the UberTeufelwaffe, an occult super-weapon 1,000 times more powerful than the atom bomb. Fortunately the Kallinikoi knew of the project, sneaked into the castle at Burg Veldenstein, and ruined the Nazis' efforts. Before they could escape, though, the Kallinikos members were surrounded by Nazi soldiers. By this point the ancient order had diminished to only 48 members. The Nazis killed them all, except for one survivor—a young man of 14 who had not yet completed his training. He fled the castle, leaving his comrades' bodies there amidst the smoldering wreckage of Plan Entscheidungskamps.

SPLITTING THE ATOM

In 1945 American scientists began nuclear testing in the desert. They were uncertain of the possible side effects. They soon discovered that radiation could, in a small number of cases, create rapid and horrifying mutations in organic life, including plants, animals, and people. In 1946, a number of giant ants attacked an Army unit outside Phoenix and mauled 17 soldiers. Heavy artillery was necessary to destroy them. In 1948, a carnivorous strain of ivy terrorized the town of Oak Ridge, Tennessee, before government scientists could put an end to it. Determined not to create a panic, the government quashed all reports of the mutated creatures. But a new age had dawned, and they would not be able to cover it up for much longer.



CHAPTER 2

THE HISTORY OF M-FORCE



DR. FIELDS

The history of M-Force begins with one man, Dr. Henry Fields. From his college days onward, Fields made a specialty of investigating the unusual and unexplained. He acquired a reputation as an amateur detective even before completing his doctorate. After serving in the O.S.S. in World War II, Fields traveled the world for a time, solving problems and explaining the unexplained. Eventually Fields accepted a job offer from Washington University in St. Louis and settled into a comfortable life as a professor of biology. This quiet time lasted only until October of 1948.

Two destroyers had disappeared without a trace near the Marianas Trench, and the Navy wanted to know why. They came to Fields. After an extensive investigation, Fields discovered that a monstrous sea creature had devoured the ships. Under Fields' direction, the Navy filled a small ship with explosives and sent it into the creature's hunting grounds. Once the creature attacked, they detonated the ship by remote control, destroying the undersea menace. The Navy praised Fields for his good work, but Fields felt somber. The sea creature did not fit any known scientific classification—who knew how many more of these monsters roamed the Earth?

Fields asked Naval Intelligence to fund a research project to determine the potential danger unknown monsters posed. They agreed, partially because of the alarming number of dangerous mutations that the A-bomb tests had produced. Dr. Fields amassed all the information he could find about monsters, and the sheer number of reports overwhelmed him. He couldn't possibly analyze all the available data by himself and still have time to teach. Luckily, Fields' students were happy to assist.

THE COLLEGE DAYS

For the next three years a variety of grad students contributed to the project, some of them even doing their thesis work on monsters. By far the most important of these was Myron Hunt's 1951 paper "The Occurrence of Cryptozoological Menaces Considered Over a Period of Time." This paper put forth what would become known as

the "Hunt Curve." Put simply, the Hunt Curve demonstrates that an overall progression can be seen in the number of monster attacks in a given year. When Hunt looked at the years between 1800 and 1900, he saw a steadily declining curve. But when he looked at the years from 1900 to the present, he saw a steady rise, one that became ever steeper by 1950, with no end in sight. In short, the monster problem had been getting worse for some time, but would get much worse yet.

Myron published his paper, Dr. Fields wrote letters to the newspapers, and still the public didn't seem interested in their discovery. Humanity had grown complacent—it seemed they would not recognize the threat until it was too late. The time had come to take the research out of the lab. In 1952 Fields and eight of his grad students formed a monster-hunting club. The faculty knew them as the Cryptid Studies Club, but the students preferred the nickname "M-Force."

On weekends and vacations, M-Force would pile into a van and drive to the site of any strange occurrences they had turned up in the newspapers. They investigated hauntings, reports of strange lights in the sky, and unusual murders. Some of these turned out to be perfectly normal occurrences. Most had more sinister explanations. The fledgling M-Force encountered restless spirits, mischievous pixies, animated corpses, and at least one authentic werewolf. More than that, though, they befriended the giant woolly mammoth dubbed Mammotho, and watched in sorrow as Mammotho died defending them; they narrowly escaped the underwater citadels of the Frog-Men off the Georgia coast; they met pulp novelist A.J. Farmer and aided her in thwarting the Cult of Typhonis.

As time went on, students graduated and new ones joined. The M-Force alumni stayed in touch, however, and kept an eye out for suspicious occurrences. They circulated a newsletter to keep each other updated on the club's activities. By this time the group had accumulated a good deal of information, and had saved numerous lives, but Fields grew worried. The students were neglecting their other classes to focus on finding monsters. Worse, some of them were getting reckless. Somewhere along the line, the club's focus had shifted from gathering information on mon-



sters to destroying monsters outright. Fields repeatedly forbade his students to take any risks. He was responsible for the students, after all, and did not want to see any of them hurt.

THE FIRST TO FALL

In 1956, M-Force experienced its first casualty. Six M-Force members, including Fields, traveled to Cairo, Illinois, to track down a creature that had been feeding on human flesh. Their search led them to the basement of an abandoned building. Bill Snyder, a relatively new club member, opened a door. Immediately an enormous tentacle sprung out through the doorway, impaled Bill, and dragged him into the room. The others turned and ran. After gathering their wits, they set the building on fire. When firefighters and the police arrived to investigate, they were dubious of M-Force's explanation—until a dig through the smoldering wreckage revealed the creature's remains.

The University severely chastised Fields for taking a student into such a dangerous situation. Fields agreed—the whole thing had been a mistake, and he would never do it again. Fields immediately disbanded the Cryptid Studies Club. He felt tremendous remorse over Bill's death. And anyway, he reasoned, the club had done enough. His initial goal had been to raise public awareness of monsters. Though his M-Force had never achieved widespread recognition, they had brought forth evidence of several types of monsters. There were newspaper articles, papers in scholarly journals, and embalmed corpses backing up his claims. Surely that information would inspire someone else to take action.

ABERNATHY QUINN

One man in particular had followed the exploits of M-Force with great interest. Abernathy Quinn had learned of M-Force when they spoiled the Cult of Typhonis' plans to raise their ancient god from the waves. Quinn, too, had been investigating the matter. Quinn knew more about monsters than anyone alive, with the possible exception of Fields. Over the years he had learned, however, that he could not battle them alone.

Three months after Bill Snyder's death, Quinn met with Dr. Fields. With monster attacks on the rise, Quinn explained, someone had to step up to defend humankind. Quinn wanted Fields to form a new M-Force, one that would seek out and destroy the horrors that so many others were content to ignore. Fields declined, explaining that even if he wanted to hunt monsters, he no longer received funding from the Navy or the University. Quinn assured Fields that

he would fund the organization. Eventually Fields gave in, and the two assembled a new team of monster hunters.

NEW BLOOD

Quinn and Fields agreed that monster hunting was too dangerous for untrained college students. They recruited detectives, mercenaries, police officers, and other men of action. Only those alumni who had proven themselves especially capable were allowed to join. Still, students at Washington University continued to assist with research. Quinn purchased weapons, kept the M-Force office running, and paid the field agents. He could not afford to pay them very high wages; most of those who joined had personal reasons for doing so.

Agents quit and others joined, keeping the membership in a state of flux. The only constants were Fields, Quinn, and Mike Mulligan. Mulligan was a hardened former detective from the East Coast. He claimed to have had a bad experience with aliens once, and attacked monsters with great relish. Quinn also seemed hell-bent on destroying monsters, though no one knew why. Similarly, no one knew where he had acquired his vast knowledge of monsters and monster hunting, or his monetary resources. Quinn refused to divulge any details of his past.

For two years, M-Force proved increasingly effective in battling the creatures of the night. They tracked down the first reported vampire in thirty years and, after sustaining regrettable losses, discovered that garlic and wooden stakes are genuinely effective. They saved hundreds of lives, protecting civilians across the country from dozens of unrelated horrors. They learned how to function as a team, and how to minimize the loss of life on missions. Unfortunately, they always found themselves strapped for cash and, more importantly, lacking public support. Newspapers, radio, and television seldom mentioned them; the government didn't take them seriously; and the public still refused to acknowledge the ever-growing monster menace. All that was about to change.

GALAXIKHAN'S ATTACK

In 1958, an alien creature crash-landed in the American West. This creature fed on energy; the more it consumed, the larger it grew. By draining power lines, the creature grew to enormous size and devastated everything in its wake. The military proved ineffectual. The press followed the creature, and dubbed it "Galaxikhan." People all across the country listened over the radio, and watched on television, wondering if Galaxikhan would make it to

San Francisco, and grow big enough to destroy the world. M-Force devised a brilliant plan and, with the help of Fields' old friend A. J. Farmer, defeated Galaxikhan.

Overnight, M-Force became national heroes. None of M-Force's previous victories had been quite so public. Hundreds volunteered to join. The President personally thanked M-Force, and requested their help in future monster emergencies. The future looked good, except for one crucial detail—Fields and Quinn had run out of money, and could not continue to fund the organization. A. J. Farmer knew about their troubles, and so introduced them to her old friend Sadie Witterstadt.

SADIE WITTERSTADT

By this time, Sadie Witterstadt was an aging eccentric who seldom left her mansion in Caledonia, Massachusetts. Upon meeting Dr. Fields, however, she demonstrated an abiding passion for the cause of monster hunting. She decided that supporting M-Force would be the best possible use for her vast family fortune, no matter what her family might think. She pledged to make sizeable yearly donations to the organization, and volunteered the use of her guest house as M-Force's new headquarters. M-Force moved out of St. Louis and into the Witterstadt guest house in 1959.

Over the next few years, the organization came into its own. For the first time, M-Force could afford a full-time support staff in addition to the paid field agents. Also for the first time, M-Force had the manpower to send out multiple teams at a time to investigate separate cases. In addition to the full-time agents, M-Force recruited hundreds of part-time agents to be "on-call" in case of emergency. Many of these new agents had been part of the old alumni network. From this point onward, there would always be more part-time M-Force agents than full-time ones.

Sadie Witterstadt's generosity also allowed M-Force to purchase more weapons, equipment, and vehicles, and to develop new monster-hunting technologies. Dr. Fields, Abernathy Quinn, and Sadie Witterstadt shepherded M-Force through these successful times. Each of them contributed to the team's success, and as the years passed they became close friends.

DARK DAYS

As M-Force increased the scope of their investigations, they discovered monsters living secretly among humans. These creatures—dubbed *Vermis imitor* by Professor P. A. Points, who first identified them in 1867—were

small, slug-like beings who would crawl inside a human being, devour his insides, expand to fill his flesh, and then take his place. M-Force agents discovered that these Slugs (as they dubbed them) had infiltrated human hosts throughout New England. The creatures seemed intent only on reproducing and, ultimately, controlling all humankind. M-Forcers worked diligently to track the Slugs down and eliminate them.

The Slugs did not appreciate this attention. Unlike most of the creatures M-Force had battled in the past, the Slugs were intelligent and highly organized. On April 3rd, 1965, the Slugs mounted a full-scale assault on the Witterstadt mansion. Most field agents were away on cases, leaving the grounds poorly defended. The Slugs overwhelmed the support staff, and swarmed toward the bedroom of the already-ailing Sadie Witterstadt. Abernathy Quinn, the only remaining field agent left at the headquarters, positioned himself at Sadie's doorway and did his best to fend off the attack.

FROM THE JOURNAL OF ABERNATHY QUINN, 6/20/63

I dined with Sadie and Henry again this evening. Once again they joked about finding a nice girl for me, and I laughed politely. Then Henry started discussing the hecklestimp situation in Amherst, and speculating about the possible origin of the creatures. I almost told him of the Ahtaji Codex but stopped myself, as always. I have fought alongside these Americans for seven years now, and despite their eccentricities I believe they are the finest monster hunters in the world, but still I worry about what my fallen comrades would think. I have let our old ways, our rituals and secret words and codes of behavior, fall by the wayside. Yet I have continued our primary business, that of defending mankind from the horrors of the night. And though I am almost embarrassed to admit it, our "M-Force" has become every bit the equal of the order, at least the order as I knew it in its last days. So why am I still hesitant to give up my secrets, to share the full knowledge of the order with my new friends? Can't I accept that the Kallinikoi are dead, survived only by one terribly flawed member who never completed his training? Can't I tell them the truth? Or do I fear the consequences of breaking the blood oath I took so long ago, fear that the spirits of the Kallinikoi will rise up to punish me?



By the time Fields and his team returned to rout the invaders, they were too late to save Quinn. They found his body outside Sadie's bedroom atop a pile of dead Slugs. To their surprise, Quinn wore an antique Roman breastplate and held a sword. Sadie had survived the attack, but not for long. Though the Slugs had not harmed her, the stress of the attack had caused her already weak heart to give out. Dr. Fields stood by her side and tried to console her. She impatiently dismissed him with the words, "Are you not my monster force? Go kill the monsters!" and died.

Overcome with grief, Dr. Fields led all of M-Force in a massive assault on the Slugs' staging ground. All the Slugs who had participated in the attack on the mansion were killed, but M-Force still reeled from the damage it had sustained.

INHERITANCES

While collecting Abernathy Quinn's possessions from his room, Dr. Fields discovered Quinn's secret journal. This journal revealed that Quinn had been the last surviving member of an ancient secret society called the Kallinikoi.

After his comrades died, Quinn had traveled for years, trying to decide how best to wage war against monsters, before finally joining M-Force. He felt that M-Force would be the logical successors to the Kallinikoi, but had kept his vow never to reveal the order's secrets. In the event of his death, Quinn's journal revealed, he wished to be buried at the Herakleion in England. He also hoped that M-Force might make use of anything they found there.

Fields, Mulligan, and a few others accompanied Quinn's body to England, and respectfully laid it to rest on the castle grounds. In the castle itself, Fields found the library of the Kallinikoi, thousands of volumes of secret lore about all manner of monsters. M-Force immediately began boxing up the books for transport back to the United States. Dr. Fields feared the effort would be a waste of time, since they were most likely about to lose their headquarters.

Sadie Witterstadt's family had never approved of her association with M-Force. With Sadie dead, her surviving family would certainly expel M-Force from the guest house and cut off the funding she had provided. Fields

feared the worst until the reading of Sadie's will. Much to her family's horror, Sadie willed the entire mansion to M-Force, requiring only that they "keep the place looking nice." In addition, she established a trust fund for M-Force, making sure they would always have enough money to operate.

M-Force's future now seemed secure. Dr. Fields deeply felt the absence of his friends Sadie and Abernathy, and decided that M-Force could get along fine without him. In August of 1965, Fields retired from M-Force and returned to Washington University. Fields selected Mike Mulligan to take over as M-Force's Director. Fields had fought alongside Mulligan for years, and knew he could trust him to run the organization.

THE WAR ON SLUGS

Mulligan's first priority was the annihilation of the Slug menace. Research revealed that the danger was greater than anyone had suspected—there were hundreds of Slugs masquerading as humans all across the country, and perhaps across the world. For a time, M-Force largely ignored other types of monsters to focus on hunting the Slugs. No matter how much power or influence a Slug wielded in its human guise, M-Forcers would hunt it down and blow it to pieces.

During this time, M-Force failed to consider its public image. A typical team would pinpoint a Slug, drive by in a van as the host went about its business, jump out, and open fire. They would then pull the writhing body back into the van for future dissection. They did this in the name of the public good. They forgot that, in the eyes of the average citizen, M-Force was randomly killing people on the streets. An attitude of fear and mistrust gathered around M-Force. The government started worrying—for years they had allowed these M-Forcers to brandish deadly weapons and conduct their war on monsters with little or no interference. It seemed the time had come for a closer look at M-Force activities.

Mulligan insisted, to the press and the authorities, that M-Force's actions were necessary for the safety of the public. He continually instituted new policies to deal with the ever-escalating struggle. He established six regional centers of operation, which worked with the Caledonia headquarters to coordinate dozens of teams in different areas. Thanks in part to this new structure, M-Force made great strides against the Slugs. In 1969, they infiltrated Slug high command and destroyed their ruling council. Now only a few undercover Slugs remained. M-Force stepped up its Slug hunt, dispatching teams to scour the streets at all hours,

and soon after made their greatest mistake. Two M-Forcers tracked down a Slug host and opened fire on it. . . only to discover that they had killed not a Slug, but an innocent human being. Nothing could hold back the firestorm of criticism that now descended on M-Force.

DARKER DAYS

"We hate monsters. We hate 'em dead." —Mike Mulligan

In 1970 the Senate began its official investigation into M-Force. Though M-Force immediately announced that its "War on Slugs" had ended, that concession was not enough. All M-Force activities were suspended by executive order. The mansion shut down. All staff members and full-time operatives were sent home. All registered M-Forcers were forbidden to take part in monster-hunting of any sort. The only thing left for M-Forcers to do was testify.

Michael Ray, an M-Force researcher, was among those who spoke before the Senate subcommittee. Ray had incorporated material from Kallinikoi manuscripts to extrapolate the Hunt Curve into past eras. The Hunt-Ray Curve, as it came to be known, demonstrated that the present upswing in monster activity was an even greater threat than previously imagined. Ray's figures showed that every great advance in human organization — the Roman Empire, medieval Christendom, modern high-tech industrialization — had been accompanied by an initial drop in monster predations. Each time, however, the monsters had eventually adapted, and the more subtle threat that resulted had contributed to the ultimate downfall of the civilizing force that had initially suppressed the monsters. If the pattern held true for the latest rise in the curve, human society would soon be plunged into darkness. Ray passionately orated about the necessity of allowing M-Force to combat this menace, but his pleas fell on deaf ears.

Congress began deliberating on the Federal Monster Hunter Act. The details had not been determined, but everyone knew what the Act's end result would be: the permanent dissolution of M-Force, and laws forbidding organized monster hunting of any sort.

GUNDERSEN'S TRIAL

In 1971, five M-Forcers broke the law and engaged in monster hunting. In Pasadena, Texas, something had been preying on civilians in a black neighborhood. The local law-enforcement agencies did little to halt these attacks. The five M-Forcers started their own investigation and tracked the monster into the sewers. The monster attacked,

M-Force retaliated, and the battle burst up onto the streets. There the monster killed all but one of the M-Forcers. The surviving agent, Samuel Gundersen, finally managed to kill the creature. Only seconds later, the police arrived to arrest Gundersen. By engaging in monster hunting, he had disobeyed an executive order, and would now stand trial.

Sam Gundersen's trial quickly became a media circus. Dozens of witnesses had seen him risk his life to kill the monster, and people across the nation considered him a hero. The actions of Gundersen and the four dead agents seemed to prove that the country needed an organization like M-Force. Still, the agents had broken the law, and Gundersen was convicted and sentenced to prison. A tremendous outcry followed. A shift in the public perception of M-Force had occurred, practically overnight. Congress could not ignore this shift.

In 1972, Congress passed the Federal Monster Hunter Act. Instead of outlawing monster hunting altogether, though, FMHA-72 merely provided regulations that would allow M-Force to continue operating. One such regulation stipulated that monster hunters must clearly identify them-

selves while in the field. M-Force responded by requiring all agents to wear ID badges. In addition to these guidelines, the act gave M-Force, and other licensed monster-hunting organizations, special privileges regarding the possession and employment of firearms.

REBIRTH

After years of struggle, M-Force underwent a glorious rebirth in 1973. M-Force regained the public's trust--but not until some changes were made. Director Mike Mulligan had become synonymous with M-Force's unpopular hard-hitting approach. To help the organization, Mike willingly resigned. Most high-ranking personnel followed suit. To usher in a new era, M-Force needed new blood.

G. Carlton Saunders had been one of Dr. Fields' grad students in the 50s, and had stayed a vital part of M-Force's alumni network over the years. During that time he had also risen through the ranks at a major American company. With backgrounds in both monster hunting and business management, Saunders seemed the perfect choice to take over as Director. Immediately after taking charge he began making changes, and over the next few months built M-Force into the organization we know today.

During the time of the suspension, M-Force's field agents had scattered across the country. They had found new jobs and resumed their lives. Rather than asking all these agents to move, Saunders asked them to set up M-Force offices wherever they were. Most agents would be based out of local offices, rather than out of the central headquarters in Caledonia. One of the charges leveled against M-Force was that they had given untrained civilians deadly weapons and sent them out into hostile situations. Saunders admitted that this had been a problem and quickly instituted a training program. The Witterstadt Trust purchased the abandoned estate next door to M-Force headquarters and began renovations. In 1973 the M-Force Academy opened its doors. Now all agents would receive training in the basics of monster hunting. Sam Gundersen, newly pardoned and released from prison, became the first Chief of Training and Dean of the Academy. By 1980, M-Force had grown into an effective, well-run, nationwide organization.

EXPANSION

Throughout the 80s, M-Force continued to expand and evolve. Local offices opened in every state save Alaska and Hawaii. In addition to fighting monsters, M-Force also led the way in studying them through its co-sponsorship of several academic and military research facilities, includ-



ing the Fields Institute at Washington University, the Hunt-Ray Paranormal Research Complex, and the Triangle Universities Joint Center for Cryptid Studies. The organization continued to add new methods and new technologies. Even their badges evolved—what had started as simple forms of identification grew increasingly complex, eventually housing high-tech communication features.

DEATH OF A HERO

M-FORCE SYMBOL



When M-Force functioned as a college club, they had little need for an official emblem. Still, in 1953, student Frank Dall drew a picture of a stylized bat that the group quickly adopted. The students painted the bat on

their van, used it on their letterhead, and featured it in ads, until it became the official symbol of M-Force.

M-Force used the bat symbol until 1966, when Director Mike Mulligan declared it “too silly.” Mulligan hired a graphic designer to create a new look for M-Force, which resulted in the stylized “M” that agents wore for years afterwards.

The Federal Monster Hunter Act of 1972 required every licensed monster hunter to wear an identifying insignia when on active duty. M-Force’s new administrators didn’t want to continue using the “M” symbol, which was associated with the Slug War years. They decided to revive the bat symbol. One problem presented itself—the bat stood for monsters, not monster hunting. M-Forcer and professional illustrator Mark



Kidwell solved this problem with his new design, an image of a gauntlet crushing a bat. The new symbol met with an enthusiastic response from M-Force agents, and has stayed in use to the present



day. It is most often worn in the form of the official M-Force badge, though it is possible for an agent to fulfill the FMHA-72 requirement by wearing the symbol on a T-shirt, baseball cap, or the like.

As the 21st century approached, Dr. Henry Fields took stock of all he had accomplished and felt proud. His organization had become more successful than he had ever imagined. Hundreds of monster hunters were on call day and night. The monster threat had been pushed back, at least for a little while. And science was coming ever closer to unlocking the monsters’ deepest secrets. As the years went by, Fields did less and less research himself, but plenty of groundbreaking work took place in the institute that bore his name.

In May of 1998, Dr. Fields had to be hospitalized due to heart congestion. M-Forcers from around the country gathered at the hospital, standing watch day and night. Dr. Fields had made many enemies over the years, and it seemed likely that some of them would come for him in his weakened state. G. Carlton Saunders swore that if Fields were to die, he would die peacefully. M-Force made good on that vow. Fields died in his sleep, in the presence of his wife and children. Dr. Fields had not been involved in M-Force’s day-to-day operations for decades, but all of M-Force mourned the loss.

THE NEW MILLENNIUM

M-Force moved boldly into the 21st century, confident that they could face whatever the future might hold. A sour note rang out in the year 2000, when field agent Barney Magnum discovered a Slug living undercover in Manhattan. No Slugs have been found since that time, but cryptozoologists are sure that there must be more out there. No one is sure how the modern M-Force would handle another War on Slugs, though many agents have quietly debated the matter among themselves.

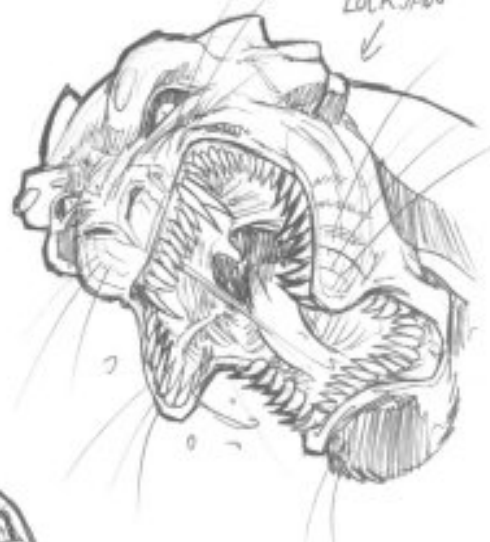
In 2002, M-Force celebrated its 50th anniversary. M-Forcers from around the country attended the festivities at the Caledonia mansion. Surprisingly, the weekend celebration went off without a single monster attack. An attitude of good cheer reigned. Despite countless alien behemoths, walking corpses, radioactive mutants, fairies, occult horrors from beyond, vampires, giant insects, apparitions, Frog-Men, cults of elder gods, Slugs, and protoplasmic horrors, human civilization was still intact, thanks to M-Force. Amid this celebration, G. Carlton Saunders reminded everyone that the Hunt-Ray Curve is still on the rise—meaning that there will inevitably be even more monsters to battle in the years to come. Despite this grim certainty, though, the men and women of M-Force are ready to meet whatever challenge tomorrow holds.



MISSOURI MUCK
MONSTER



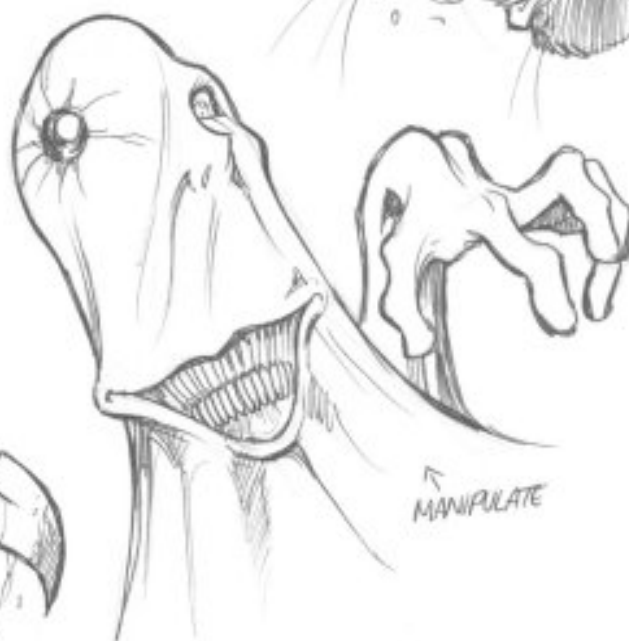
LOCKJAW



SCREAMER



MANIPULATE



GARY BEVELL © 2002

3

M-Force's world is one in which monsters are real, and everyone knows it. Still, the presence of such things changes life little for the vast majority of people. Monsters are rather like serial killers—sure, they're out there, and sometimes they show up on the news, and occasionally a friend of a friend will actually be involved in a monster-related incident, but most people never get any closer to the reality than that. Most of those who do have such an encounter spend the rest of their lives trying to forget it, like victims of any other terrible event. There are few who would deliberately seek out such an experience even once, and fewer still who would do so deliberately and repeatedly. It is these heroic men and women, this tiny minority of a minority, that makes up M-Force.

M-FORCE TODAY

In 2002, M-Force boasts thousands of personnel (including more than one thousand active field agents) and hundreds of offices throughout the United States. Within the year, the first formal M-Force offices in Great Britain and Europe are scheduled to become operational. The ranks of M-Force agents include everyone from military veterans and retired police officers to college students and homemakers, and those ranks have actually expanded slightly every year for the past decade, despite the organization's perpetually tight budget and the extremely dangerous nature of the work.

To the average American citizen, M-Force is about as familiar as other major do-gooder organizations like the Red Cross. Everyone has heard of them, and their larger exploits make the news, but few people know much about the organization's internal structure or the day-to-day activities of the local offices unless M-Force has touched their lives directly. Because monster encounters are rare, and those worthy of national attention even more so, M-Force's activities tend to fade into the background for most people. Much of the organization's PR efforts are directed at keeping itself in the public eye when there's not a seventy-foot



crustacean scuttling toward Santa Barbara. On the other hand, that same relative obscurity shields M-Force from serious animosity. There are the occasional protests outside M-Force offices, from groups that want to “stop the gun-toting weirdos” or prove that “monsters are people too.” However, most people who have enough contact with the organization to form a strong opinion have just had their lives saved by M-Force agents, which tends to bias them toward a positive reaction.

Naturally, the government pays a bit more attention to M-Force than does the average Joe. The Federal Monster Hunter Act of 1972 created a Bureau of Monster Affairs within the Department of the Interior. FMHA-72 simultaneously gave federal sanction to outfits like M-Force and provided a check on their activities. Under the Act, M-Force operatives are exempt from most federal, state, and local restrictions on the possession and use of firearms and destructive devices while in active pursuit of their duties. Furthermore, the BMA's Official Monster List classifies the most dangerous nonhuman menaces as “nuisance creatures,” exempting them from concerns about due process or species endangerment. In return for these privileges, the BMA keeps a close eye on M-Force's recruit-



ment, training, and evaluation procedures, and works with M-Force Oversight to bring down harsh justice on the heads of agents who abuse the trust placed in them. Fortunately, since the Slug War, incidents of irresponsibility have been rare, and BMA agents these days see themselves more as allies of M-Force than as its wardens.

M-Force is less known in other countries. Established in the U.S. in the Fifties, it retained a rather provincial outlook in its early years. More recently it has made efforts to bolster its presence in the rest of the world, but it remains primarily an American phenomenon. M-Forcers traveling abroad may not receive the courtesies and privileges to which they are accustomed in the States, and must be careful not to run afoul of the authorities. More than that, there are countries that actively discourage or even forbid M-Force visits. Some see M-Force as yet another example of cultural contamination by the United States. Others have their own national monster-hunting organizations, or just long-established local traditions for dealing with such things, and look down on M-Force's brash, big-guns approach.

CHAIN OF COMMAND

For a nationwide organization like M-Force to run effectively, there must be a clear chain of command. At the top of this chain is the National Director. The Director makes the big decisions about where the organization is heading, and oversees the Department Chiefs. The Director must meet every year with the Witterstadt Trust to gain their approval on major policy and funding decisions. As the Director also holds a position on the Witterstadt Trust, there is seldom much disagreement at these meetings. The Director can also rely on the Assistant Director, who does whatever is necessary to help the Director keep everything running smoothly. The Assistant is also the next in the line of succession, should anything unfortunate happen to the Director.

Beneath the Director and Assistant Director are the Department Chiefs. These

OTHER ORGANIZATIONS

Ampersand & Ampersand Celebrity Services

Hollywood private investigations agency known for absolute discretion and a taste for the strange. Sometimes ally with local M-Forcers, but their confidentiality policies can be a problem when it comes to sharing information.

Discordian Association for Monster Neutralization

Presumed to be a gigantic joke, this organization allegedly hunts monsters to eat them, and propagates the most ridiculous monster-hunting techniques in its publications. A nuisance, not recognized by the federal government.

Herrick Agency

Oldest and largest paranormal-investigation agency in the United States. Former M-Force Director Mike Mulligan worked for the Herrick Agency in the 1930s and 40s, and they remain an ally – though like A&A, their first loyalty is to their clients.

Lucky Seven

Team of independent monster hunters headquartered in the American West, supposedly founded by a nineteenth-century gunslinger. They always number exactly seven. The group has turned down offers of M-Force membership.

Office of Extraordinary Missions

Vatican office of outreach to intelligent non-humans, including some that M-Force classes as monsters. Not generally pleased when an M-Force team arrives to kill a creature they've targeted for evangelization.

Project Eightball

FBI task force that deals with unusual phenomena. As one of their primary duties is to cover up events that might cause "public panic," they are sometimes at odds with M-Force and its determination to educate the public about monsters.

Sons of Thunder

Scandinavia-based society of Thor-worshipping monster fighters. M-Force is soon to enter talks with them about its upcoming European expansion.

Strange Times

America's leading magazine of paranormal activity. *Strange Times* reporters are all too likely to be found investigating the same cases as M-Force agents.

The Wrath

Monster-hunting society funded by several far-right, white supremacist Christian groups. They enjoy drawing parallels between monsters and various minority groups, and there is no love lost between them and M-Force, which would dearly love to prove the Wrath guilty of illegal activities.

are the people who oversee the seven departments of M-Force: Administrative Services, Business, Logistics, Operations, Oversight, Research & Development, and Training. Field agents—which is to say, most M-Forcers—work in the Operations branch. Most of the Department Chiefs are field operatives who have worked their way through the ranks.

Below the Chief of Operations are the Regional Directors and Agents in Charge. Each Regional Director is responsible for one of six national regions (see map). Each works out of a major local office in the appropriate region. They foster communication between the national and local level. Each individual M-Force office has an Agent in Charge to handle day-to-day administration. The AIC is responsible for keeping track of field agents, and summoning them when monsters are sighted. AICs at larger offices are assisted by full-time staffs, while AICs of small offices must often work alone.

PROMINENT ADMINISTRATORS

Director G. Carlton Saunders

G. Carlton Saunders, known to all M-Forcers as “Carl,” has been with the organization for almost fifty years, and has been Director for thirty. He is a bald, pleasant man with a firm handshake and a friendly smile. He is also a natural leader, able to keep the organization running smoothly, and a dedicated foe to monsters everywhere. To many modern-day agents, Carl Saunders is M-Force. In the last few years, though, he has been delegating more and more of his duties to the Assistant Director, and those at the top speculate that it’s only a matter of time before Carl retires from duty.

Assistant Director Adam Sekowsky

If Carl Saunders were to retire, Adam Sekowsky would take over as M-Force Director, making him the youngest person ever to hold that office. Some grizzled veterans complain that Adam tends to be too “by-the-book.” True, Adam is able to quote all M-Force handbooks and regulations at great length, and has been known to focus too much on minor infractions, but that is only because he is wholly devoted to M-Force. He is a highly-skilled monster hunter and an administrative genius, and will most likely settle well into the role of Director.

Chief of Operations Mary Anne Mayes

Mary Anne is a soft-spoken woman who retains a trace of her West Virginia accent. At first glance, she doesn’t look like one of the most lethally inventive monster hunters



of all time, yet, as many monsters will testify, she is. She is warm-hearted, however, and many Agents in Charge have taken to calling her “Mom.”

Chief of Training/Dean of the Academy Chuck “Chainsaw” Findley

When he lost his eye, Chuck refused to retire from active duty. When he lost his right arm, however, he finally gave in and accepted an administrative position. Now, when he’s not terrorizing his new recruits, he’s regaling them with war stories—particularly the one about how he got his nickname.

Chief of R&D Arthur Cordlain

Former director of research and development at Witterstadt Defense Industries, Arthur Cordlain brings a passion for direct and forceful anti-monster solutions to an organization that is equally passionate about using them. His desire to advance the state of the art in monster elimination is tempered with an understanding that the failure of a new system will cost agents their lives. His primary focus is on the hard sciences, and his leadership is more uncertain with the Psych/Soc sections of M-Labs and their focus on the psychology and sociology of monsters.



Chief of Oversight David Evan Hossler

Directing M-Force's internal affairs department is an unenviable job. Oversight investigators almost never encounter their fellow agents under the best of circumstances, and it can be easy to become jaded. David Hossler combats this cynicism with twelve years of field experience and a fierce dedication to M-Force. His love of M-Force and its ideals means his tolerance for transgression against the "Big Three" is absolutely non-existent. Balancing this is his time in the field and the understanding that an agent has a split-second to make a decision that an inquiry board has all the time in the world to dissect.

RULES AND POLICIES

In the early days, M-Force operated under an informal code of conduct, promoted and enforced largely by the personal example of leading members like Dr. Fields. Even the various part-time "satellite" groups usually had direct links back to Fields' original team, and passed on the same values. That was sufficient while M-Force was a small group, tightly tied to its founders. However, with the death or departure of the original founders, the lack of formal rules proved a liability, culminating in the revenge-driven, reckless violence that marked the War on Slugs. For the new M-Force that formed in the wake of those troubles, codification of rules and policies was a key goal. In one of his first official acts, Director Saunders created two new departments of M-Force—Training and Oversight—to fulfill that purpose.

In addition to running the M-Force Academy (see page 42) and its other educational programs for agents, the Training department is responsible for establishing and promulgating new rules and policies for M-Force. Every new agent receives a copy of the most recent revision of the *M-Force Policy Manual* and is drilled in the most important rules during initial training. A Rules and Policies committee within the Training department devises new rules and amends old ones as necessary, most often in response to a situation in the field that reveals the need for new guidelines, but occasionally in response to orders from the Director or recommendations from the federal Bureau of Monster Affairs. New and amended rules are posted to the M-Force intranet and sent out in regular mailings to all M-Force offices and agents.

The Oversight department investigates possible violations of M-Force policy. Generally, field agents will encounter representatives of Oversight in one of four situations: when a fellow agent dies in action; when they are accused of a crime that also violates M-Force policy (gen-

erally meaning the deaths or endangerment of humans); when a monster encounter results in questions about the agents' performance (due to excessive bystander deaths or monster escape, for instance); or when one or more of the agents is suspected to have been co-opted or replaced by a monster. An agent under investigation will always be suspended from active duty for the duration. Everyone involved can expect detailed and repeated questioning,

M-FORCE DEPARTMENTS

Administrative Services

The behind-the-scenes folks. This department handles personnel management, public relations, legal services, and all the myriads of clerical work required by an organization the size and complexity of M-Force.

Business

Here are found the accountants and auditors who keep M-Force's books and handle the organization's finances.

Logistics

The staff of this department handles M-Force internal supply, producing and distributing specialized equipment, such as the M-Force ID badges, communications and analysis gear, and some of the heavier or more customized weapons needed in the monster-hunting business.

Operations

This largest and most important M-Force department includes the hundreds of part-time and full-time field agents, as well as the headquarters staff that supervises them.

Oversight

M-Force's "internal affairs" department, Oversight investigates claims of wrongdoing by M-Force agents.

Research & Development

These scholars and scientists study monsters and develop new monster-killing techniques in support of the agents in the field.

Training

This key department is responsible for teaching new agents the skills they'll need to survive in the field and making sure veteran agents stay on top of the latest knowledge.

and a thorough examination of evidence (in cooperation with a parallel police investigation, if any).

An agent found to be in violation of M-Force rules faces a range of penalties, depending on the magnitude of the offense. Minor negligence or inappropriate use of force that had no lasting consequences (but might have under other circumstances) will likely result in suspension from duty for several months; the agent may be required to complete appropriate counseling or training programs before being admitted back to active M-Force membership. An agent who has caused financial harm—excessive loss of M-Force equipment, or massive and unnecessary damage to civilian property -- may have his or her pay docked until compensation is paid. Repeated flouting of the rules, or a single more severe violation—especially any behavior that results in serious harm to an innocent bystander -- will be met with permanent expulsion from M-Force. In all cases, the Oversight department will cooperate fully with police at all levels, so an agent guilty of criminal acts will face more than just M-Force's displeasure.

THE BIG THREE

M-Force has its share of everyday rules and procedures that its employees are expected to follow, but the most important rules are those dealing with proper behavior on field assignments. These are grouped under three headings reflecting what M-Force sees as its most important tasks. Agents refer to these as the “Big Three,” and most could recite them in their sleep; in the post-Slug War era, they are drilled into every M-Force operative from earliest training.

1) Protect and preserve human life.

This takes priority over everything else, even stopping monsters. The *Policy Manual* and other Training-produced documents typically break this down into a number of specific rules:

- a) Don't take a human life if there is any alternative. In addition to the obvious prohibition of outright murder, this requires agents to be exceedingly careful when dealing with monsters that look like humans, or those -- like werewolves -- that are human part of the time. In the former case, identification must be ironclad before lethal force is employed. In the latter case, capture is preferred where possible. Dealing with humans who serve monsters is even more tricky. Normal self-defense laws may apply, of course, but M-Force prefers not to overuse even those. Non-lethal means are always preferred when dealing with fellow humans.

- b) Don't endanger bystanders in the course of an assignment. The obvious connotation here is, “Don't use civilians as monster bait.” In addition, this rule should be foremost on agents' minds when they unlimber their weapons. Indiscriminate fire, or use of incendiaries and explosives in populated areas, is not tolerated.
- c) Don't permit a monster to harm an innocent human if you can prevent it. By long-standing M-Force tradition inherited from the Kallinikoi, that means “even at the cost of your own life.” M-Force isn't going to come down hard on an agent who fails to take action if, realistically, all that the agent could have accomplished was to join the death toll without altering the fate of any civilians involved. However, many agents have so internalized the “monster-slaying hero” ethos that they would prefer to take even such an extreme risk rather than live with the question of whether the situation really was so hopeless.

2) Protect humanity from monsters.

Again the *Policy Manual* divides this general directive into more specific rules.

- a) Know your List. It is the responsibility of every M-Force agent to be aware of the current state of the government's Official Monster List (see page 18), and to treat non-human creatures accordingly -- showing restraint against those not classified as monsters and exterminating without qualm those that are.
- b) The lesser evil is still evil. Non-hostile interactions with monsters are inherently suspect, and are strongly discouraged by M-Force. Even on the rare occasions when M-Force agents find their interests aligned with one foe's while in pursuit of more dangerous quarry, the organization advises extreme caution. In particular, no agent is authorized to make promises on behalf of M-Force, or indeed to grant any concession to an officially-classified monster that would endanger human safety. Actually shielding a “friendly” monster from destruction by other agents is grounds for immediate and thorough investigation by Oversight; the threat of infiltration by monsters or their agents (witting or unwitting) is something M-Force never takes lightly.
- c) Share all monster-related knowledge with M-Force. The organization depends on its agents for the information that may save the lives of future teams. Reports of field missions are expected to be as complete and accurate as the agents can make them. Agents should also report any possible indications of monster activity they encoun-

ter, in addition to whatever personal follow-up investigations they may perform.

- d) Keep your skills and knowledge fresh. M-Force maintains rigorous training standards, with annual evaluations to make sure every agent stays in top monster-fighting trim. Besides keeping their combat and investigation skills up to par, every agent is expected to stay up-to-date on monster-related research, open M-Force investigations, refinements to standard equipment, and the like. Regular reading of *M-Forcer* magazine (see page 27) is meant to provide the basic grounding that is required, though outside reading is always encouraged.

3) Respect the law and uphold high ethical standards.

Though this is definitely third in priority among the Big Three, agents hold to it when they can, lest M-Force should again be forced to defend its own existence and reputation before the public when it ought to be out hunting monsters. Again, several more specific rules are usually given.

- a) Obey the law whenever possible. That is, whenever possible without endangering human safety or failing to bring down a monstrous threat. Lawbreaking that M-Force considers justified in pursuit of a monster does not violate this rule, and M-Force will do everything in its power to defend an agent against any charges arising from such an act. Of course, some laws are less flexible than others even in M-Force's eyes; an agent will have to have a much better justification for armed robbery than for a traffic violation or twelve.
- b) Avoid unnecessary damage to private or public property. Naturally, damage incurred in the course of a successful monster pursuit-and-elimination is considered necessary. M-Force and its agents may well still be sued by the property owners, but M-Force Legal will step in to handle the case -- and as long as there's

decent evidence that a real monster threat was eliminated, it's likely the matter will be dismissed by any judge assigned to hear it. On the other hand, massive and unnecessary damage to property is likely to land an agent in hot water with both M-Force and the proper authorities.

- c) Keep your nose clean. While M-Force does not police the private lives of its agents, the organization does have a public reputation to maintain, and reserves the right to suspend or expel agents who publicly fail to maintain certain minimal standards of ethical behavior. Note that this means refraining from activities like embezzlement or drug dealing, and explicitly does not refer to private, consensual sexual behavior of any kind, about which M-Force has a reputation for extreme open-mindedness. An agent brought low by crimes or vices outside the line of monster-hunting duty is a liability to M-Force both in PR terms and in the field, and at best will be asked to retire quietly.



DEALING WITH PUBLIC PERCEPTION

Like any organization that regularly deals with the general populace, M-Force must devote a certain portion of its resources to safeguarding its reputation and promoting its image in the public mind. This work is carried on by two divisions of the Administrative Services department, Public Relations and Legal. The former strives to keep M-Force in the public eye as a well-liked public service organization, while the latter steps in whenever M-Force's reputation is threatened, whether by agents overstepping their bounds or by the slanderous accusations of opposition groups.

Public Relations Division

M-Force Public Relations, headed by Janet McAllister, acts as the liaison between M-Force and interested parties in government, the mass media, and the general population. They strive to provide accurate information with a

positive spin, emphasizing M-Force's contributions to the public good and reminding civilians about the ever-present threat of monsters.

Advertising and Press Releases

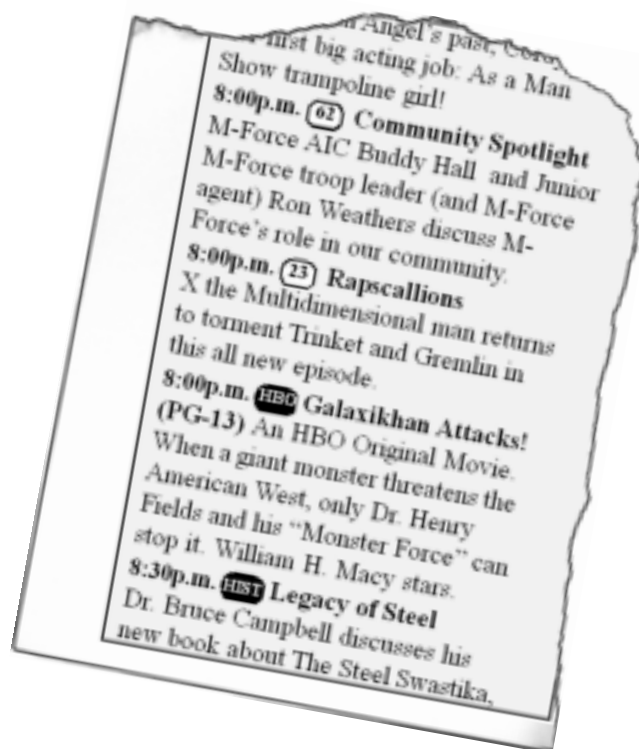
M-Force has a modest advertising budget, and premieres a few short radio and TV spots each year. These commercials are primarily meant to familiarize their audience with the M-Force toll-free hotline. Of the current spots, one traces the history of M-Force, with footage of notable triumphs from the Galaxikhan rampage to the present day, and reminds viewers that M-Force still stands ready to protect them today. Another features a dramatized monster attack that is foiled when the quick-thinking citizens summon M-Force to their aid. A third focuses on testimonials from real people who have been helped by M-Force. The fourth, similarly structured, features actual part-time M-Force agents, reminding the audience that people just like themselves give of their time and put their safety on the line to combat the monster threat.

M-Force also issues press releases to newspapers and online news services. Most of these concern notable field assignments. A few are "Monster Alerts," letting the public know about threats that have been identified but not yet neutralized. Others deal with more mundane matters, such as the establishment of new M-Force offices or the announcement of a major staff change at the national headquarters.

Damage Control

Monsters, by definition, do terrible things, and M-Force can't always work fast enough to stop them. If a creature takes another victim while an M-Force team is still trying to track it down, it's all too easy for citizens' horror and grief to turn into accusations against the agents. At other times, M-Force agents do questionable things in pursuit of their duties; even if it was necessary to demolish the deserted shopping mall to destroy the menace within, a great many people are probably less than happy.

In these situations, M-Force Public Relations comes to the fore. Its spokespeople hold press conferences and talk to local authorities. While they are careful not to deceive, they do strive to put forth M-Force's side of the story. If agents are accused of incompetence, they commiserate with victims, but remind them that M-Forcers are not infallible and are doing the best they can. If a rogue agent embarrasses M-Force, the spokespeople make sure to draw a careful line between the behavior of individuals and the organization as a whole. These staffers often work closely with Oversight and the Legal Division.



Speaking Engagements and Media Appearances

Whether it's a Boy Scout troop looking for a few real-life ghost stories, a biology professor in need of a guest lecturer on a subject more exciting than earthworm digestion, or a TV news editor wanting a supernatural angle on a still-unsolved crime, M-Force is periodically contacted by folks who want a few words from the monster experts. Public Relations keeps a couple of talented speakers on staff for such occasions, and also maintains a list of agents with the skills and interest to represent the organization publicly. Several field offices have their own arrangements with local media outlets and other interested groups. Fees charged for these services are reasonable, and are generally split between M-Force and the agent actually performing the speaking chores.

In addition to these public appearances, a few M-Force agents have found employment as the highly-touted "monster consultants" for various movies and television series with paranormal themes. Though these positions further reinforce M-Force's expert reputation, the agents involved complain that in reality, their recommendations are all too frequently ignored in favor of less accurate but more "cinematic" portrayals of monsters and monster hunting.



Training Partnerships

M-Force can't always be first on the scene following a monster encounter. In such cases, it is helpful if those who do arrive first -- usually local police and emergency medical personnel -- have some training in recognizing and properly dealing with the signs of monster involvement. M-Force offices foster good relations with local communities, make things easier on their agents when they are called in, and enhance their own people's skills by entering into training partnerships with those other organizations. A city police force might be taught to spot clues pointing to the presence of common monsters, so that they can preserve those clues intact and summon M-Force as early as possible. In return, the police provide the local M-Forcers with additional training in crime scene investigation and how best to avoid disturbing their work. EMS personnel are taught to identify and treat monster-related injuries, especially those with nasty after-effects, and provide supplementary field-medical instruction in return. Similar exchanges might be made with other local professionals, from forensic scientists to psychotherapists.

Website

As has become de rigeur in the Digital Age, M-Force maintains a public website, m-forcer.com. The site offers a number of features designed to familiarize the public with M-Force activities and to promote a positive image for the organization. These include the following:

- A basic guide to M-Force -- history, purpose, office locations, and so forth.
- The latest news on M-Force's own activities, as well as breaking news about monster attacks.
- Profiles of prominent M-Force agents, teams, and offices.
- Data on monster species, monster-hunting equipment, and the tricks of the monster-hunting trade.
- Selected M-Force case files (a fan favorite).
- An online store selling M-Force merchandise.

Junior M-Force

The Junior M-Force program is a fan club for young people, with members ranging in age from eight to seventeen. Membership offers a number of perks, from exclusive information about M-Force and its work to the chance to meet real M-Force agents. The cost is \$25 for the initial membership, and \$10 per year to renew it thereafter.

Each Junior M-Force member receives a certificate of membership signed by the director of M-Force; a pin re-



sembling the M-Force badge; a year's subscription to the Junior M-Force newsletter, which features kid-slanted articles about monsters and the monster-hunting business; and a password to access a special restricted section of the M-Force website, with members-only chat areas, monster-zapping games, and so forth.

Many Junior M-Force members organize themselves into local clubs. Local M-Force offices are expected to offer nearby Junior M-Force chapters special tours, "training" days, and so forth, though the degree of actual compliance depends on the kid-friendliness of the local office. In return, Junior M-Force clubs are called upon to perform fund-raising activities, act as "gofers" and occasionally babysitters, and otherwise help out the agents in their area.

Naturally, M-Force never deliberately puts its young fans in harm's way. Indeed, the Junior M-Force materials repeatedly warn against actually approaching anything that might conceivably be a monster, or getting in the way of M-Force agents on assignment. Nevertheless, M-Force

Legal receives regular threats of litigation based on the imitative monster-hunting behavior of some young enthusiast or other, and voices both inside and outside the organization have denounced the Junior M-Force program for encouraging such things.

Legal Division

M-Force Legal is another division of the Administrative department. Headed by veteran attorney Roger Norville, it operates out of the M-Force mansion. The division has strong ties to Public Relations and Oversight, as staffers from two or all three regularly work together when accusations are leveled against M-Force and its agents.

Legal has three primary duties. The first, mentioned above, is to defend M-Force and its operatives against legal assaults. An M-Force agent who is accused of a crime or sued for damages that occurred while the agent was on active M-Force duty will receive legal advice and advocacy to the limits of the organization's power, provided the offense was a justifiable one according to M-Force policy. Over the years, M-Force attorneys have helped set a number of precedents for leniency in judging a monster hunter's actions. Most judges will ignore requests for additional punitive damages in property-damage suits against M-Forcers, and reduce or dismiss minor criminal charges incurred in the pursuit of duty.

Dealing with the government is the second major duty of the Legal Division. M-Force lawyers act as liaisons with the Bureau of Monster Affairs, and as lobbyists when legislation that notably helps or hinders the monster-hunting profession comes before Congress. They also assist M-Force satellite offices in staying out of trouble with the local authorities, and in dealing with conflicts when they do arise.

Finally, sometimes M-Force Legal does go on the offensive. The M-Force name is practically synonymous with monster-hunting, and sometimes people take advantage of that. Once or twice, smaller monster-hunting organizations have used logos or advertising very similar to M-Force's, obviously attempting to draw on the larger group's popularity but also threatening to implicate M-Force in their mistakes. At other times, merchants out to make a buck have peddled everything from unauthorized M-Force T-shirts to bogus "monster detectors" supposedly endorsed by the organization. Legal deals with all such infringements. Those who are in effect simply conducting unauthorized advertising for M-Force are usually invited to enter into more official arrangements, while those who threaten the organization's good name are dragged into court and stopped.

ASK DR. FIELDS!

Every month, Dr. Fields answers your questions about M-Force.

Dear Dr. Fields: I think monsters are scary. Aren't you ever scared when you fight a monster?

—Becky Newland, age 8

Yes, Becky, I've been scared plenty of times, and I'm sure every other M-Force agent would say the same. Being a little scared can be good. It makes you extra careful, and that's important when you're going into danger. But we don't let ourselves get so scared that we can't do our jobs. If we start feeling like that, we just think about all the men and women and boys and girls who would be in terrible danger themselves without M-Force to protect them.

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Dear Dr. Fields: I really liked last issue's article on the Stake-O-Matic 2000. It's the coolest gun ever! How can I get one?

—Zach Wyatt, age 13

Sorry, Zach, but even M-Force agents have to pass rigorous training courses before they can use special equipment like the Stake-O-Matic. However "cool" it may look, it's a very dangerous tool, and M-Force always puts public safety first. As a consolation prize, though, we'll be sending you a nice M-Force T-shirt.

• • • • •

Dear Dr. Fields: Doesn't M-Force ever try to make friends with the monsters? I'm sure some of them just want people to like them. I think there's too much violence in the world already.

—Erica Zubrick, age 11

First, Erica, you must understand that when M-Force uses the word "monster," we always mean creatures that are a threat to people. The world holds many creatures besides humans, and not all of them are monsters. Once upon a time, I myself befriended a young Frog-Man I called Timmy. But not everything we meet is as pleasant as Timmy. There are real monsters out there, who only want to eat us or worse. No one likes violence, but sometimes it's the only way to protect people we care about – and for us here at M-Force, that's all of you out there.

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COMMUNICATIONS

One of the important challenges M-Force faces is that of passing information between its members in a timely and accurate manner. Cultural tradition and the general march of technology have done some of the work, of course. An M-Force office runs on memos and paperwork like any other office. Personnel keep in touch by phone, fax, and email, and share tales of their exploits in print and online. This section covers the most important channels of communication that M-Force agents will encounter and use during their time with the organization.



M-Forcer Magazine

Every active and retired M-Force agent has an automatic subscription to this glossy monthly magazine. *M-Forcer* articles fall into three broad categories:

- 1) News and features about M-Force itself. This includes updates on recent and ongoing cases; spotlight articles on specific offices, teams, or pieces of equipment; and announcements of interest to M-Force personnel (from new members, retirements, and deaths among their colleagues to new training opportunities at the Academy).
- 2) Pieces about monsters and monster hunting. This includes profiles of new and classic monster species; updates to the OML; in-depth analyses of

notably successful or unsuccessful field missions; and essays on the monster hunter's life.

- 3) National and world news of interest to M-Force. This includes reports of legal, political, and social events that seem likely to impact the organization's work; commentary and opinion pieces on same; and a "strange news" page culled from papers across the nation, presenting possible leads for M-Force agents to follow up.

M-Force Alerts

Distributed by fax and email to local offices and active agents on an as-needed basis, M-Force Alerts keep the organization's operatives apprised of current events and developing situations. M-Force uses Alerts to pass on time-critical information of importance to all its personnel. Examples include major staff or policy changes at headquarters, announcements from the Bureau of Monster Affairs (such as amendments to the OML), and warnings of monsters at large.

Electronic Resources

In addition to performing the administrative bookkeeping necessary to any large organization, the computers at M-Force headquarters house a sizeable repository of information meant to assist field agents in their work. Access to these resources is limited to authorized M-Force personnel, as much of the data is sensitive and could be damaging to M-Force—or at least considerably dull its edge in the ongoing fight—if it were to fall into the wrong talons.

Unlike the eye-catching, graphics-intensive look of the public M-Force website, this information is meant to be starkly functional, and is designed for maximum ease of access and usage no matter how primitive the hardware and software an agent has to hand.

Among the resources available are these:

- The Official Monster List, with linked data on all known monster types.
- Fully searchable archived field reports from past M-Force missions.
- A sizeable percentage of the entire Quinn Library collection (see page 39), also fully searchable and expanding as fast as the indexing staff can work.
- The M-Force personnel database, searchable by name, location, and areas of expertise.
- Field manuals for the operation and repair of equipment commonly used by M-Force agents.
- The text of all recent M-Force Alerts.

The M-Force ID Badge

Worn at all times by every M-Force agent, the M-Force badge incorporates a satellite pager, a global positioning system, and a personal locator beacon in one small, shock-resistant, and stylish package. The pager can be activated from an agent's local office or from the national headquarters, and can reach the agent nearly anywhere on the planet. The GPS and PLB work together to insure that an agent in danger can always be found. The beacon may be activated deliberately by pressing a button on the casing; it also activates automatically when the badge suffers serious damage. The activated PLB transmits its unique ID code to a satellite, which triggers a "broken badge alert" in the M-Force War Room (see below) within seconds, and calculates an initial approximation of the agent's location within a few minutes. After that, the badge transmits continuously for as long as it remains operational.

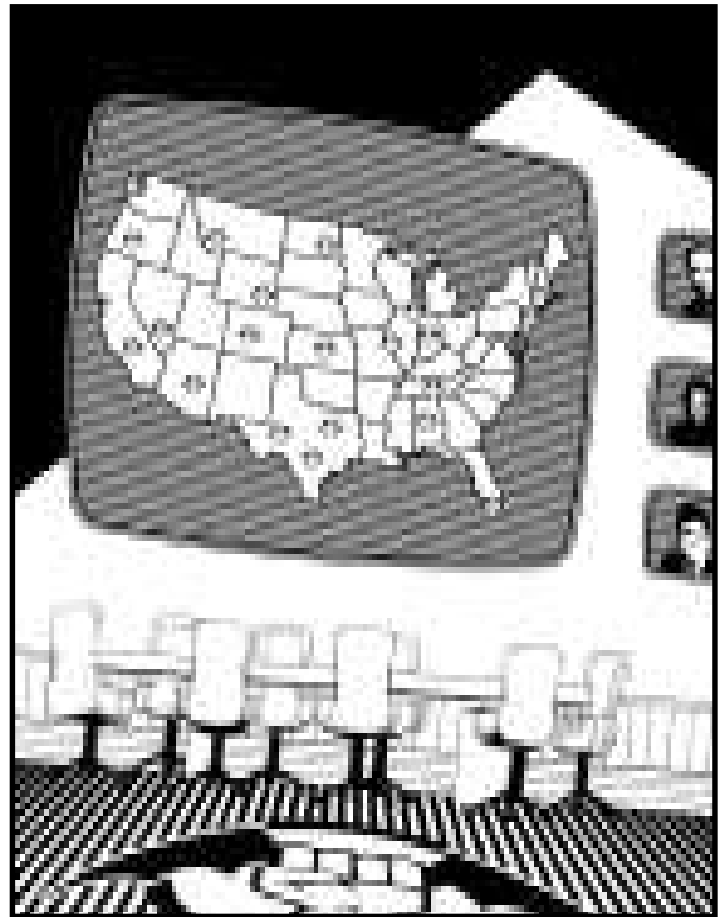
The War Room

Located in the M-Force headquarters building in Caledonia, this is another 24-7 operation, responsible for keeping tabs on M-Force activity around the globe. Any time a field mission is initiated, the War Room staff updates its maps and status boards to show the identities and locations of the active agents. The team is also assigned a personal War Room liaison, a staffer who serves as the team's point of contact with the rest of the world for the duration of the mission. It is the liaison's responsibility to meet all the team's needs, whether that means putting them in contact with M-Labs (page 37) or the mission support desk (see below), working to get needed equipment shipped to their location, or even activating a backup team. The liaison will be the first to know in the event of a broken badge alert. If he cannot contact the distressed agents, he informs the national headquarters and the team's local office of the situation, and serves as liaison for any search and rescue mission sent after the missing agents.

The Mission Research Hotline

"Red, you say? Uh-huh. Fur or scales? Oh, more like armor plating? Gotcha. And burning yellow eyes, right. Let's see here ... would you say it's making more of a howling sound or a groaning sound? Uttering blasphemies in multiple languages ... I see. Let me get Greta on the line as well, she keeps our demonology collection"

Operated by the research staff of the Quinn Library (see page 39), the mission support hotline is every M-Force field team's lifeline to needed information and resources. Several lines are staffed 24 hours a day, seven days a



week. In addition to performing needed research in the extensive Quinn collection, the mission research specialist can handle remote legwork — contacting experts elsewhere in the world or chasing down obscure clues — while the team deals with the primary problem. Though not as versatile as a team's War Room liaison, a good mission support researcher is of unparalleled value when a team needs information it can't procure in the field.

FUNDING

"Love makes the world go round. Money is what lets M-Force buy enough bullets to keep monsters from overrunning it." — G. Carlton Saunders

In reality, it's more than just bullets. It's the guns that shoot the bullets, the agents who fire the guns, the instructors who train the agents, and the scientists who figure out what sort of bullets they need to be firing in the first place. All of this, and the organization to keep it all running smoothly, takes money, and rather a lot of it.

Sources of Funding

When Sadie Witterstadt died in 1965, her will established the Witterstadt Trust to fund M-Force in perpetuity. Despite its size, the Witterstadt Trust does not supply



nearly enough money to cover all of M-Force's operating expenses. To make up the difference and to provide for future growth, M-Force solicits charitable contributions and donations at all levels of the organization.

The national organization runs ads, does direct mailings, and sponsors other promotional events, such as concerts and lecture series. The goal of these efforts is twofold: to raise public awareness about monsters and to generate donations. The annual M-Force telethon is the most prominent of these events. Every November, this star-studded 12-hour fund-raising event combines live performances with footage highlighting the accomplishments and travails of M-Force teams from the preceding year.

Corporate donations figure prominently at the national fund-raising level. Monsters are bad for business, and most companies (especially the larger insurance underwriters) appreciate the service M-Force provides in combating them. The "M-Force Source" program lets M-Force donors advertise their support by displaying "M-Force Source" logos on products and promotional literature.

Individual M-Force offices can frequently count on financial support from local government and business, in recognition of their community-protection role. In addition, most M-Force offices have reciprocal fund-raising arrangements with other local charities or causes, such as churches, volunteer firefighters, rescue squads, scout troops, and support groups. Not only do both parties benefit from these arrangements, but they also serve to build strong ties between the local offices and their communities.

Despite these sources, there is always a need for more money to continue the war against monsters. M-Force brings the same creative and aggressive energies to identifying and seizing new revenue streams that it does to monster hunting. This energy and M-Force's huge talent pool are its most bankable assets.

Disbursal of Funds

Once the money comes in, it is funneled into three main budget categories: National Operations, Regional Operations, and Research.

The National Operations budget funds M-Force headquarters operations, general administrative services, and central supply operations. It also funds the M-Force Academy in Caledonia (see page 42).

The Regional Operations budget provides funding for M-Force's local offices. Every local office receives an annual stipend. This stipend is often supplemented by state

monies and individual contributions, which can lead to wide disparities in funding for different offices. A local office that hosts a regional headquarters receives additional funding to cover the added administrative costs. Maritime field offices and other local offices that provide unique capabilities also receive extra funds to help offset the costs of extra equipment and training. These monies are supplemented with local or regional contributions.

The Research budget funds the operations of M-Labs and the Quinn Library, a variety of projects at universities across the country, and an assortment of grants and fellowships. Research also provides some of the funding for the three monster containment facilities (see page 50), with the rest coming from the sponsoring organizations.

LOGISTICS

M-Force Logistics handles the procurement and distribution of the equipment and supplies used by M-Force, its field offices and its agents. In addition to mundane items such as coffee and copier paper, Logistics works with Research & Development to evaluate and purchase off-the-shelf equipment from a variety of manufacturers. Furthermore, Logistics will also work with R&D to develop and commission customized systems to fill a particular need, such as special ammunition or sensor equipment.

M-Force Logistics works to secure the best prices for the organization through special pricing contracts and the buying power that comes with being the largest anti-monster organization in North America. While all offices may purchase weapons, equipment, and ammunition with their own discretionary budgets, they will generally find better prices through Logistics, resorting to local purchase only for items not normally stocked or on backorder.

RESEARCH

Ignorance is a monster's best friend. M-Force's enemies lurk in the shadows, both literally and figuratively. Oftentimes their greatest strengths lie in what humans don't know about them. Intelligent monsters revel in the mystery that surrounds them, and may even spread deliberate disinformation to deter opposition. Others, from ghosts and ghouls to Typhonis itself, have likewise benefited from human fear of the unknown, receiving propitiation or even worship from local populations awed by their "supernatural" powers.

M-Force does not intend to let its foes continue to enjoy the advantages of human ignorance. That is why research has always been a high priority for the organiza-

tion. Learning more about monsters—their nature, habits, strengths, and weaknesses—is key to stopping their predations. Knowledge of the signs of monstrous presence also helps in preventing infestations before they start, and in cleaning up any residue of a monster’s visit (be it eggs, young, or psychic background noise) that may lead to future problems. In some cases, M-Force research has even led to new understanding between humans and the other inhabitants of the world, enabling peaceful coexistence with beings once called monsters.

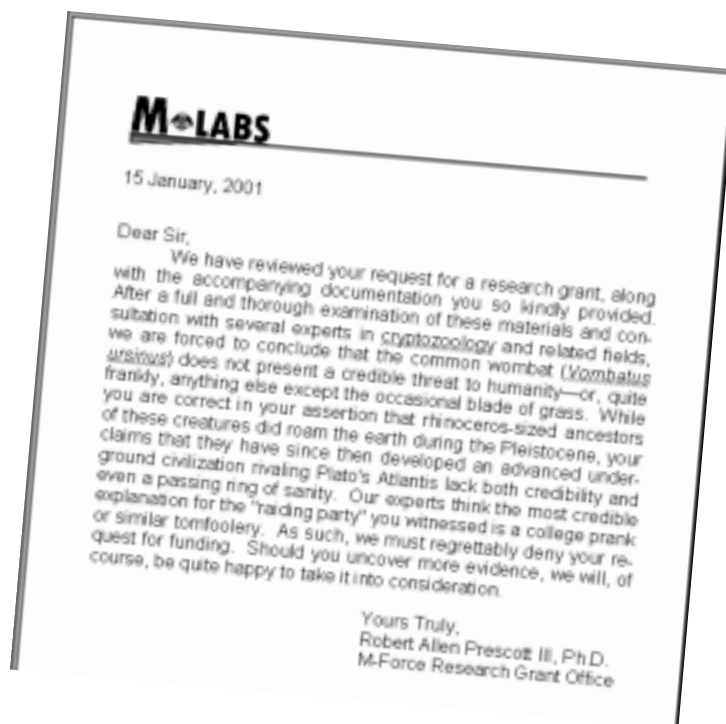
Staff Researchers

The largest part of the M-Force research budget goes to the organization’s own research facilities, most notably M-Labs, the Quinn Library, and the three containment facilities that M-Force co-sponsors with other organizations. The M-Force agents assigned to these locations receive the usual basic training but are most valued for their specialized knowledge and skills. Some do see field work, when their particular expertise is called for as part of an agent team, but plenty of others spend their M-Force careers in entirely scholarly pursuits. Friction between staff researchers and the more active field agents is typical, with each group believing that the importance of its work and of its brand of knowledge (scholarly vs. practical) is underappreciated by the other.

In addition to the full-time researchers, some part-time M-Force agents have day jobs that lend themselves to scholarly work in support of the M-Force cause. College professors, librarians, rare-book dealers, and similar sorts find themselves drawn to M-Force at least as often as men and women of action. Sometimes they have served the organization as research fellows or have been consulted as experts by agent teams before signing on as full agents; other times their professional work has led them directly into monstrous encounters. Whatever the reason, plenty of agents outside the full-time facilities find themselves with the skills, resources, and motivation to delve into matters of interest to M-Force. Often that work can be conducted as part of an agent’s primary career, or the cost defrayed by an M-Force grant or fellowship, but these agents still tend to find themselves doing a lot of work on their own time.

Research Grants and Fellowships

Of course, research into subjects of monster-hunting import occurs outside the boundaries of M-Force itself. To support such endeavors, a portion of M-Force’s research budget is devoted to providing grants and fellowships to outside scholars.



A research grant is a sum of money awarded to partly defray the costs of an ongoing or proposed investigation. Like other grant-awarding organizations, M-Force generally requires that would-be recipients submit proposals describing their research and its likely contribution to the goals of M-Force. On some occasions, the relevant authorities at M-Force headquarters will bypass that procedure and preemptively offer a grant to a researcher whose work has been brought to their attention as particularly significant to the war against monsters. All grant recipients are expected to file regular reports on the progress of their research and the use of the grant money.

A research fellowship is a more involved proposition, in which M-Force offers a promising scholar the use of its facilities and resources for a set period of time (typically a year or two) in order to pursue a research project. With some fellowships, the nature of the project is chosen by M-Force as part of the fellowship offer, and interested researchers submit their qualifications; with others, would-be fellows submit projects they plan to pursue, and M-Force chooses which it prefers. A fellow may be stationed at one of the full-time research facilities or at a local (usually collegiate) office, but answers to a supervisor at M-Labs rather than to the Agent in Charge of that office, a fact that leads to frequent resentment of such an “interloper” by the regular staff assigned to that locale. On occasion, a fellow will persuade her supervisor to send her along



on a field mission. Since the fellow's purpose in such a case is to further her project rather than to assist the rest of the team with its goals, most team leaders dread such an occurrence.

Types of Research Projects

M-Force research is interdisciplinary, embracing a wide variety of fields. Here are some examples of the sorts of projects that M-Force conducts or sponsors.

Biological Research: Most monsters have bodies, and the study of captured specimens or remains is an important component of M-Force research, especially at the containment facilities (see page 50). Knowing a monster's anatomy and physiology immediately suggests ways of disabling or neutralizing it. Humans or animals victimized or possessed by monsters are also studied, to learn the signs of those conditions for future use in the field.

Psychological and Sociological Research: Monsters rarely think or act like humans, but they do have their own motivations and patterns of behavior. Being able to identify the type of monster by the nature of its predations, and perhaps even to predict its next move, is invaluable to agents in the field. M-Force also takes an interest in studies of fear and stress, for use in training and counseling its agents and in dealing with the after-effects of monster activity.

Documentary Research: M-Force's Quinn Library is the world-renowned center of research into historical and legendary accounts of monster activity. While less trustworthy than knowledge gleaned from the study of a captive monster, sometimes fragmentary reports of prior encounters are all a field team has to go on. M-Force values researchers who can locate new sources of information or link together existing sources into a more complete picture.

Engineering Research: Just as important as knowledge of the monsters themselves is a constant influx of new ideas and tools for fighting them. From weapons to detection equipment to the latest refinement of M-Force's revolutionary ID badges, all have their part to play in the ongoing battle.

The *Journal of Cryptid Studies* and the Annual Convocation

"Tissue samples were obtained from the remains of Giganto (Los Angeles, 1952), Rokagi (Tokyo, 1954), Vegastator (Las Vegas, 1954), Urato-san (Tokyo, 1957) and Son of Rokagi (Tokyo, 1960). . . . Mass spectrometry indicated that concentrations of ra-

dioactive Californium-249 were 1000-2500 times greater in the surveyed Size Class IV cryptids than in tissue samples taken from Size Class I cryptids killed during the same time period. Similarly, Americium-245 concentrations were 3500-4700 times greater than expected, and Neptunium-239 concentrations were 5000-7500 times greater than expected. In addition, first appearances of Size Class IV cryptids were significantly correlated ($r^2 = 0.89$, $P < 0.005$) with atomic testing, with most (58 %) appearing within 7 days of detonation."

—Hepner, J. D. 1961. "Atomic testing and Size Class IV cryptids." *J. Crypt. Stud.* 3(3): 487-500.

"Contrary to popular belief, Size Class IV cryptids ('giant monsters') are not solely a result of recent atomic testing (e.g., Rafinesque 1836, Cormier 1946). Further, the probability of giantism resulting from atomic testing is much lower than is popularly assumed. While further research is necessary, recent studies by Watkins (1959) and Feltner (1962) indicate that the true likelihood of a given atomic blastproducing a Size Class III or larger cryptid is only on the order of 10-15%...."

—Rogers, E. M. 1962. "Facts must matter: United States Department of Energy response to Hepner (1961)." *J. Crypt. Stud.* 4(2): 201-205.

The M-Force research community publishes its own peer-reviewed scholarly journal, the *Journal of Cryptid Studies*. ("Cryptid" is a term coined to describe mysterious animals such as Bigfoot or Nessie, and has been adopted by M-Force researchers as a neutral synonym for "monster.") In the pages of JCS, M-Force staff researchers, grant recipients, research fellows, and others share and debate their findings. The journal provides a respectable, scholarly venue for work that might otherwise find publication only in tabloids and fringe magazines.

Once a year, M-Force sponsors a convocation at which the cryptozoological community may gather to present and discuss their work. The location of the gathering changes from year to year, but is most often a major city or university town friendly to M-Force activity, so as to avoid trouble with the locals. Field agents in the region may be called upon to provide security for the convocation, since such a gathering is a tempting target for the more intelligent sorts of monsters.

CHAPTER 4

THE NATIONAL HEADQUARTERS



THE WITTERSTADT ESTATE

Leon Witterstadt bought 15 acres of land in Caledonia, MA and ordered the construction of the Witterstadt mansion in 1907, the year he made his first million. Work continued on the mansion until 1909, when it finally met Mr. Witterstadt's exacting standards. Upon Leon's death in 1938, ownership of the estate passed to his only child, Sadie. Though dismissed by many as eccentric and possibly insane, Sadie kept the mansion's tasteful decorations intact and continued to make the garden more elaborate and ornate. Now the estate retains its charm and splendor, even though it houses the high-tech nerve center of M-Force.

CALEDONIA, MA

Caledonia, Massachusetts is a small town located near Shelburne Falls. Caledonia was founded in 1663 by Robert Wall. Wall longed for his native Scotland, which he had fled as part of a scandal involving witchcraft. Caledonia soon established a reputation among those in the know as a haven for unsavory occult activity, resulting in the Acolytes of Leviathan's relocation there in 1918. Once M-Force moved into the Witterstadt mansion, occult and monster activity dropped sharply. Now Caledonia is one of the safest places in America.

THE MANSION

The Witterstadt mansion is the center of all M-Force activity and home to its highest ranking staff members. The mansion has four floors and a large basement, and features a variety of decorating styles that just barely cohere.

The First Floor

The first floor serves a wide range of functions. Inside the main door is a lobby, and in the center of the lobby is an information desk. Visitors must check in here if they need to go past the designated tour areas. Against the east wall of the lobby is a desk, where Claire,

the M-Force receptionist, sits. In addition to running the building's switchboard, Claire makes sure that only people with scheduled appointments enter the business wing. There are two sets of stairs leading to the second floor, both ornate, as well as an elevator that was recently added to comply with federal regulations.

The east wing of the first floor is the business wing. Here Junior M-Force National Chairman John Wood, Bureau of Monster Affairs liaison Alan Northrop, and M-Forcer managing editor Susan Stewart keep their offices. The Chiefs of the Business and Administrative departments (and the division heads of Public Relations and Legal under Administrative) are found here as well. Also on the east side is the grand dining room. As per Sadie's will, no furnishings have been removed or significantly altered, and the antique china is reserved for special occasions. The only addition is the M-Force symbol inlaid in mosaic in the center of the table. The kitchen, however, has been completely modernized, so as to provide for the occasional VIP dinners.

Most of the mansion's tourist attractions are in the west wing. The piano room sits next to a large bay window. It contains Sadie's grand piano and some of her original pieces of furniture, mostly of Directoire vintage. The ballroom, a two-story refectory with Art Deco chandeliers and exotic décor is just past the piano room, reached through massive mahogany doors. Half the room has been left in its original state and is used for special events. The other half has been turned into the M-Force Museum. The museum houses newspaper clippings, pictures, weapons, souvenirs from missions, and assorted Witterstadt heirlooms, knick-knacks, and artifacts. In addition, there are numerous monster remains, including golem dust, a pickled Devoured, and a phoenix tail feather.

Past the museum is the trophy room. This was originally Leon Witterstadt's billiard and trophy room. The billiard table still stands, as do the bearskin rug, elephant tusks, and other trophies from Leon's hunting trips. M-Force has added a few trophies of its own, including one of Galaxikhan's teeth. Just to the east of the trophy room is the gift shop, formerly Sadie's "Africa Room."



Here visitors can purchase M-Force T-shirts, key rings, and other mementos, as well as books about the history of M-Force, the Widderstadt mansion, and the greater Caledonia area (including *A Pictorial History of New England Eccentrics*, which includes a section on Sadie).

The Second Floor

The mansion's second floor is mainly made up of high-ranking M-Force officials' offices. As a visitor reaches the top of the staircase, he is confronted by a long glass display case full of awards, trophies, and other honors given to M-Force as a group or to the present or past Directors. Executive Secretary Marge Philbrick—the only M-Force employee to work for the organization continuously since 1959—has her office immediately to the right of the case. Before a visitor can speak with the Director or Assistant Director, he or she must go through Marge. Overlooking the ballroom is Sadie's personal library, organized according to a system that no one alive understands.

The Director's office is the most lush office in the mansion. In addition to Carlton Saunders' desk, the room contains a couch, an entertainment center, a bar, and an attached bathroom. Next to the fireplace is a glass display

case holding M-Force artifacts, including Dr. Fields' pipe, Abernathy Quinn's sword and breastplate, and Mike Mulligan's favorite revolver. The bookshelf is filled with pulp sci-fi novels from the 40s and 50s.

Assistant Director Adam Sekowsky's office is much more spartan. It contains only a desk, two chairs, a bookshelf (containing every known edition of the M-Force handbook, back to the mimeographed handouts Dr. Fields made when he founded the organization), and a table. This table is the home of the weekly M-Force poker game, hosted by Adam and usually attended by Carl, Mary Anne, and "Chainsaw." Adam Sekowsky is, according to his comrades, one of the worst poker players in the history of the world, but he loves the game.

The Chiefs of Research and Development, Training, Logistics, and Oversight have their offices on this floor as well. Except for the stuffed Chud'beth in Chuck "Chainsaw" Findley's office, these offices are much the same. The heads of Logistics, Training, and R&D all have main offices in other buildings, but also maintain offices in the mansion. Most of the time, the secretary is the only person in this group of offices. The secretary's office is Sadie's former "Greek Room." The display cases in the room are filled with Greek pottery, coins, and other artifacts, and there is a statue of Pan in one corner of the room.

The Third Floor

This floor contains the living quarters of the Director, Assistant Director, and Operations Chief. Each of the three units has standard apartment doors and locks on the main door. Though the floor is not entirely off-limits, the elevator button for this floor requires a key.

G. Carlton Saunders and his wife live in the large 4-bedroom, 2-bath apartment in the east side of the mansion, redecorated recently since their youngest daughter went off to college. Adam Sekowsky's 3-bedroom, 2-bath apartment is, like his office, neat and mostly empty. Mary Anne Mayes lives in a 2-bedroom, 1-bath apartment. The apartment is crammed full of bookshelves containing cookbooks, survival manuals, volumes of military history, and trashy romance novels.

The Fourth Floor

The mansion's attic has been converted into M-Force's War Room. A receptionist, responsible for keeping the number of "civilians" in the area to a minimum, sits just inside the door. The Operations Chief's office is here, overlooking the map.



MANSION TOURS

M-Force Mansion is open for tours six hours a day, five days a week, barring emergencies. Organizations are encouraged to schedule tours in advance. The standard civilian tour keeps entirely to the first floor, primarily the west wing, except for a stop at the library on the 2nd floor. In addition to the tour, Junior M-Forcers get a chance to meet the Director, Assistant Director, or the National JMF Chairman—M-Force tries to schedule visits so that at least one will be available. When an actual M-Force team visits the mansion, they get a much greater tour, including “the bunker” and (unless the place is on high alert or dealing with numerous cases) the War Room. They also get a brief tour of the east wing on the first floor.

The central feature of the War Room is the giant digital map that shows the location of all active M-Forcers and broken badge alerts. Beneath the map is a briefing table. The newswatch room is filled with fax machines, wire service readers, and telephones. The agents stationed here are responsible for fielding calls to M-Force’s hotline, sorting through news reports for monster sightings, and keeping up with breaking news. The newswatch room also serves as the office of the head of Communications division. There are six television sets mounted to the wall across from the division head’s desk. They are always on, though usually muted. At least four are always tuned to news channels or major networks, and at least one is usually tuned to a bad game show. Past the newsroom is the media room, which contains several rows of movie-theater style chairs and a big-screen TV. This room is used to screen training videos and pertinent news stories.

This floor also contains an employee lounge and two guest rooms. The guest rooms are for visiting VIPs or War Room staff who are sleep-deprived and can’t safely drive home. There are additional fold up cots in the janitor’s closet, in case of a Galaxikhan-level emergency.

The Basement

Lovingly referred to as “the bunker” by mansion staff, the basement is primarily used for storage. Merchandise from the gift shop, folding chairs and tables, original mansion décor that is no longer in use, and overflow from the museum and trophy room are stored here. Sadie’s wine cellar is still intact, and still mostly full. Sadie left exacting instructions (approximately 50 pages) in her will detailing on what occasions the rarest bottles could be used.

The basement also features both men’s and women’s barracks and several heavily-secured weapons lockers, just in case. There is a lounge that is technically for use by those staying in the barracks, but is frequently used as a general employee break room. It contains a pool table, kitchenette, couches, big-screen TV, bar, and Ms. Pac-Man machine.

THE LAWN AND GARDENS

From the back patio of the mansion, one can view the M-Force Memorial Gardens and lawn sloping away to the south and framing the mountains beyond. The large open lawn is the site of M-Force Academy graduation ceremonies. (In cases of bad weather ceremonies are moved into the ballroom.) To the left of the patio is a statue of Perseus cast in bronze, surrounded by a circular herb garden approximately fifty feet across, quartered by wide paths of reddish stone. The easternmost path passes briefly through the surrounding forest before emerging at the M-Force Laboratories.

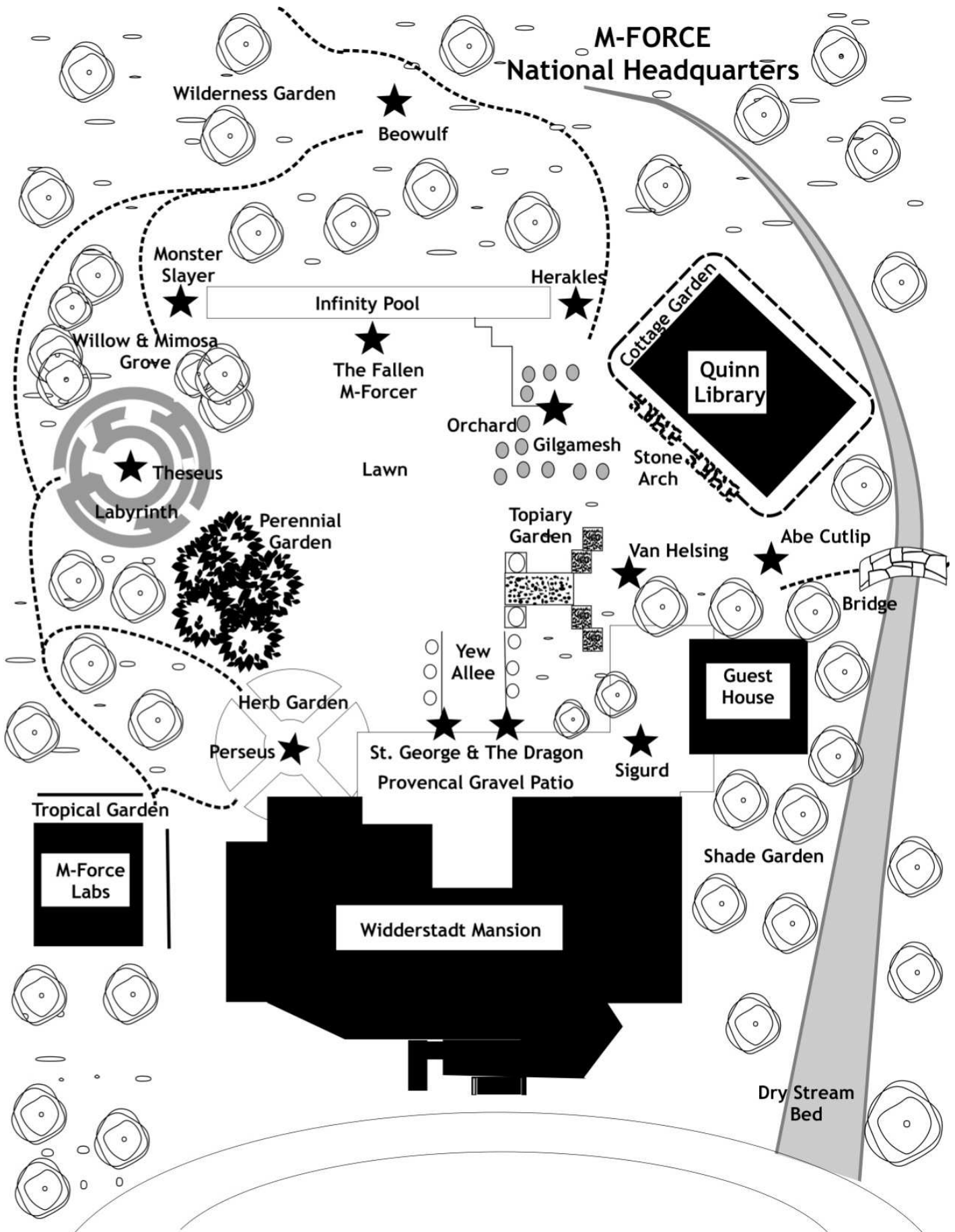
To the south and west of the Laboratories is a labyrinth, at the center of which is a statue of Theseus. Surrounding the labyrinth is a wildflower garden which separates it from the herb garden to the north and a grove of willows and mimosas to the south. These exotic-looking trees screen the view to a black-lined reflecting pool at the edge of the lawn. A statue of the Fallen M-Forcer stands at the edge of the pool, gazing into the valley below. Statues of Herakles and the Navajo hero Monster-Slayer guard either end of the pool. Several faint paths wind down through the brush into the wilderness garden, where a statue of Beowulf is a sudden and meaningful surprise.

A slender stream spills into the pool from the north, flowing from a statue of Gilgamesh in the apple orchard. Immediately to the west of Gilgamesh is the Quinn Library, which is surrounded by a colorful cottage garden. To the north of the library is the topiary garden, in the center of which is a statue of Dr. Abraham Van Helsing. The topiary garden leads out into a yew-lined allee, the northern end of which intersects the back patio of the mansion and which has as its opening arch statues of St. George and the Dragon. Both the allee and the topiary garden are bordered to the northwest by a shade garden. The guest house sits in the center of this area, with a statue of Sigurd just outside its door. Hidden among the branches to the south of the guest house is a statue of Abe Cutlip. From his statue, a path runs directly west towards the M-Force Academy.

THE STATUES



M-FORCE National Headquarters



When Sadie Witterstadt first invited M-Force to take up residence in her guest house in 1959, she commissioned statues of Theseus and Perseus to decorate her garden. Since that time nine additional statues of great monster hunters have been added, making the garden into a catalogue of heroism. The statues were created by a variety of sculptors in a wide range of styles, but all celebrate the heroes they represent. Only two of the statues represent purely historical figures; the others are heroes taken from world legends. The statues are as follows:

Theseus

The ingenious Athenian Theseus is shown standing triumphant over the dead body of the Minotaur. The statue's inscription reads:

*As an oak tree falls on the hillside
Crushing all that lies beneath,
So Theseus. He presses out the life,
The brute's savage life, and now it lies dead.
Only the head sways slowly, but the horns are useless now.*

Perseus

This classical sculpture depicts Perseus soaring through the air clutching the head of Medusa. The statue's inscription reads:

*So over the sea rich-haired Danae's son,
Perseus, on his winged sandals sped,
Flying swift as thought.
In a wallet of silver,
A wonder to behold,
He bore the head of the monster,
While Hermes, the son of Maia,
The messenger of Zeus,
Kept ever at his side.*

The Fallen M-Forcer

This statue depicts a young man in contemporary clothing stepping into the reflecting pool. The statue has no name and no inscription, but M-Forcers traditionally refer to it as "Bill," in honor of Bill Snyder, the first M-Forcer to die. On either side of the statue are plaques, affixed to the edge of the pool, bearing the names of every M-Forcer who has died while on duty.

Gilgamesh

This statue depicts the ancient Sumerian hero Gilgamesh. The inscription reads:

'Oh my friend, I have always wanted

*To climb Cedar mountain.
There dwells fierce Humbaba
Who is evil and fearsome to look upon.
I wish to slay him
And banish what is evil from the land.'*

Abraham Van Helsing

This statue of the famous vampire hunter matches Bram Stoker's description of "a man of medium weight, strongly built, with his shoulders set back over a broad, deep chest and a neck well balanced on the trunk as the head is on the neck." His face is "indicative of thought and power." The inscription reads:

'I have learned not to think little of any one's belief, no matter how strange it may be. I have tried to keep an open mind, and it is not the ordinary things of life that could close it, but the strange things, the extraordinary things, the things that make one doubt if they be mad or sane.'

St. George and the Dragon

St. George and the dragon form the two sides of an arch that stretches over the entrance to the yew alley. The inscription reads:

At the town of Silene, in Libya, there was a dragon, who was appeased by being fed two sheep a day; when these failed, the townsfolk offered by lot one of their young people. One day the lot fell on the King's daughter, who was led out to the sacrifice, dressed in her wedding gown. George appeared and transfixed the dragon with his spear and then using the Princess's girdle led the bemused dragon into the town, where it was beheaded.

Sigurd

This statue shows the Norse warrior Sigurd looking bloody and exhausted, but clearly thrilled with his victory. The inscription reads:

Now crept the worm down to his place of watering, and the earth shook all about him, and he snorted forth venom on all the way before him as he went; but Sigurd neither trembled nor was afraid at the roaring of him. So whenas the worm crept over the pits, Sigurd thrust his sword under his left shoulder, so that it sank in up to the hilts; then up leapt Sigurd from the pit and drew the sword back again unto him, and therewith was his arm all bloody, up to the very shoulder.

Abe Cutlip

This statue depicts Abe Cutlip holding his shovel, gazing steadily ahead. Though largely forgotten by the gen-



eral populace, Abe died defending his wife and children from an unnamed horror. The inscription reads:

*Ain't no monster going to kill my family.
1864-1901*

Beowulf

The noble king of the Geats is shown in the midst of battle, his sword held high. The inscription reads:

*'I thus often the evil monsters
thronging threatened. With thrust of my sword,
the darling, I dealt them due return!
Nowise had they bliss from their booty then
to devour their victim, vengeful creatures,
seated to banquet at bottom of sea;
but at break of day, by my brand sore hurt,
on the edge of ocean up they lay,
put to sleep by the sword. And since, by them
on the fathomless sea-ways sailor-folk
are never molested.'*

Monster-Slayer

This sculpture of the Navajo hero is the most recent addition to the garden. The inscription reads:

When the monster Ye'iitsoh had used up all its weapons, Monster-Slayer took aim with his lightning arrows. With a jagged lightning arrow he shot Ye'iitsoh in the foot, and with a straight lightning arrow he shot him in the hip. Ye'iitsoh fell to his knees, but got to his feet again. Then Monster-Slayer shot a jagged lightning arrow into the monster's back, but again it only fell for a moment before getting up again. At last Monster-Slayer shot a straight lightning arrow into the back of Ye'iitsoh's head, and Ye'iitsoh fell dead.

Herakles

Discovered at the Kallinikos castle in Britain and brought over to join Sadie's statues of Theseus and Perseus, this statue depicts the Greek demigod wrestling the Nemean Lion during his first great labor. The inscription reads:

And having come to Nemea and tracked the lion, he first shot an arrow at him, but when he perceived that the beast was invulnerable, he heaved up his club and made after him. And when the lion took refuge in a cave with two mouths, Hercules built up the one entrance and came in upon the beast through the other, and putting his arm round its neck held it tight till he had choked it; so laying it on his shoulders he carried it to Cleonae.

INSCRIPTION SOURCES

Theseus By the ancient Greek poet Apollodorus.

Gilgamesh From the *Epic of Gilgamesh*, author unknown, composed c.2600 B.C. Translated by Robert Temple.

Van Helsing From *Dracula*, by Bram Stoker, first published in 1898.

Saint George From Jacobus de Voragine's *Golden Legend*, written around 1275, translated into English and published by William Caxton in 1483

Sigurd From Chapter 18 of the *Volsunga Saga*, author unknown.

Beowulf From *Beowulf*, author unknown, written sometime between the seventh and the tenth century. This version is from The Harvard Classics, Volume 49, translation by Frances B. Grummere.

Herakles From Apollodorus, as translated by Sir J.G. Frazer in 1921.

Monster-Slayer Contributed by M-Force agent Carson Yazzie, based on oral tradition.

M-FORCE LABORATORIES

The M-Force Laboratories building (often shortened to "M-Labs") is a long two-story 'glass shoe box.' A wall of ivy-covered stone and brick archways at one end of the building tries valiantly to blend it into the rest of the landscape. The aboveground portions of the building house offices, meeting rooms, and the best-stocked snack bar at headquarters. The building's three basements contain storerooms, several laboratories, a morgue, and a mechanical, electrical and electronics shop. The roof is home to the various antennas and satellite dishes that connect M-Force headquarters to the world.

M-Labs is dedicated to maintaining and expanding M-Force's knowledge of monsters, compiling information on current and anticipated world-wide levels of monster activity, providing scientific advice and analysis to field teams through the Quinn Library mission research desk, and developing new anti-monster systems through the Experimental Operations Team. To further these goals, M-Labs is loosely organized into five sections: Bio, Medical, Forensics, Engineering, Psych/Soc.

Bio section performs biological and cryptozoological research in concert with research facilities around the world.

The focus of much of the research is on monster vulnerabilities and their exploitation. They work closely with the various monster containment facilities, and will on occasion venture into the field to examine monsters “in the wild” or acquire samples. M-Force regulations strictly forbid the transport of any live monster (or one whose death is questionable) to the headquarters facility. As such, any experiments involving live specimens are conducted at an allied cryptozoological research lab or monster containment facility.

Medical section is responsible for developing new and improved treatments for the victims of monster attacks. While most monster-related injuries are simple lacerations, abrasions and punctures (with the occasional third-degree burn for flavor’s sake), the injuries from the more insidious attacks often go unrecognized by medical professionals. Internal injuries from debilitating ultrasonic pulses, hyper-aggressive fungal blood infections, and somnambulistic catatonia induced by toxins that disrupt the brain’s neurochemical balance are just a few of the more bizarre injuries health care professionals must be prepared to deal with. In concert with the Training department, Medical offers courses and seminars on identifying and treating monster-related injuries for doctors, nurses, EMTs and aid workers. They also work closely with the world-renowned Monster Injuries Centers at Johns Hopkins and Emory University.

Forensics section provides research and development into new monster detection methods and evidence analysis techniques. Equipped with one of the world’s finest forensics labs, they provide evidence analysis services to field teams, as well as advice on evidence collection and transport. Forensics works with the Training department to provide courses on evidence collection and analysis to M-Force agents. In addition, they offer courses for forensics science professionals and crime scene investigators on identifying and analyzing evidence of monster activity.

Engineering section is responsible for the development of new monster hunting equipment and customizations for



off-the-shelf equipment. They work closely with the Supply and Training departments to develop these systems, deploy them to M-Force teams, and integrate their use into the Academy curriculum. The Academy firing range and Haunted House are often used for preliminary testing of new equipment and weapons

Psych/Soc section is responsible for the study of intelligent monsters’ psychology and sociology. The behavior patterns and drives of less intelligent monsters are the responsibility of Bio section. Psych/Soc section concerns itself with understanding and predicting the actions of non-human intelligences both as individuals and in groups. At the individual level, their experts are often called upon to assist field teams pursuing an intelligent monster in developing a psychological profile of their quarry. Like the other M-Labs sections, Psych/Soc offers courses in intelligent monster psychology to criminologists and forensic psychologists.



QUINN LIBRARY

The Abernathy Quinn Memorial Library houses the world's most comprehensive collection of materials dealing with the creatures of the night and those who hunt them. M-Force field agents and researchers alike have found the library—and the dedicated, knowledgeable staff that manages it—an invaluable and sometimes literally lifesaving help in their work.

Externally, the library has a neo-Classical look, meant to evoke images of the Library of Alexandria and similar repositories of ancient knowledge. Inside, though, is an ultramodern research and information hub, boasting high-tech facilities for manuscript preservation and analysis, and a state-of-the-art online catalog/database with unparalleled searching and cross-matching capabilities. M-Force knows that the lives of its agents may depend on the fast and accurate provision of information, and allocates its budget accordingly.

The Staff

The Quinn Library employs some fifty full-time information professionals—librarians, programmers, indexers, and research specialists—supplemented by a like number of part-time staffers and interns (primarily library science students from universities in the region). The current director of the library is Marlene Sullivan, a skilled administrator who has been with Quinn since she was herself one of those student interns (she is now in her fifties).

The library staff is organized into four sections: on-site support, mission research, data collation/indexing, and collection management. The first of these is where the majority of part-timers and interns find themselves employed, under the direction of three full-time librarians. The primary job of the on-site support staff is to assist those patrons who physically visit the library. They help agents locate materials, retrieve items from restricted collections, answer reference queries, shelve books, and otherwise perform the traditional duties of a library staff.

The mission research section is unequivocally the most prestigious and demanding of assignments, employing fully half the professional staff and only the most proven of paraprofessionals and interns. These staffers man the research “hotline” used by agents in the field. All too often, they are called upon to collate data from disparate and obscure sources, on tight deadlines, with terrible consequences should they fail . . . or simply prove too slow. Even with the aid of the library's sophisticated databases, this work is highly stressful, and mission support staffers are

encouraged to work short, rotating shifts. Of course, the official policy is undercut by legends of dedicated researchers who stayed on the job round the clock to insure that the teams they served got the information they needed to save the day.

Of course, while the mission research staff may serve on the front lines, they wouldn't be nearly as successful without the behind-the-scenes work of the data collation and indexing section. These tireless and detail-oriented folks spend their time combing through every bit of material added to the library's collection, seeing to it that key topics and vital references are properly entered into the database. Also in this section are the interns who endlessly scan in print materials, constantly expanding the library's collection of fully indexed and searchable electronic texts.

The collection management section oversees the actual acquisition and processing of new materials, as well as the translation of non-English works and the preservation of manuscripts that require special care. The section even manages to have its glamorous side, in the form of the Special Collections teams. These agents are practically treasure hunters, chasing down rumors of lost works of lore or bidding in estate auctions in obscure eastern European countries. At times they will even be assigned to field teams as special consultants, in cases suspected to center on a moldy old tome, cursed scroll, or the like.

The Collection

The materials available at the Quinn Library range from fragile papyri kept under glass to the latest records of M-Force's own investigations, from rune-covered basalt slabs to alien-autopsy videos. Age, format, and language don't matter; as long as there is a good chance that an item offers new insights into monsterdom or monster-hunting, the librarians will find a place to store it and ways to care for it. The total number of items in all formats at present is 427,306.

The collection covers a wide variety of topics, but its contents generally fall into one of five broad classes of subject matter. These are as follows:

Records of Monster-Hunting Organizations: The heart of the Quinn collection is the former Herakleion library, consisting primarily of otherwise-unknown documents kept by the ancient and secretive Kallinikoi. These works, in a variety of languages and styles, detail the struggles of human heroes against the world of monsters down through the millennia. Though sometimes difficult to understand, given the wide gulf of time and culture between their authors and the present day, the Kallinikos writings are unlike

the legends and tales typical of their eras, in that they focus on passing down accurate information on monsters and monster-fighting methods. Possessing these documents has given M-Force a substantial leg up on its monstrous foes. Likewise, over the past five decades, M-Force has carried on the Kallinikos tradition by carefully preserving its own records of monster encounters, all of which are archived in print form and made available in electronic form by the Quinn staff.

Other Records of Monster Encounters: In addition to their own documentation, the Kallinikoi collected numerous primary-source accounts of monster depredations throughout history. M-Force has followed suit, archiving thousands of supposedly-true accounts of supernatural encounters in the modern world. Diaries, interviews, offhand mentions in medieval histories--any of these may one day be invaluable to an M-Force team in the field. Naturally, these documents are not considered to be nearly as reliable as the writings of trained monster-fighters, and where possible M-Force investigates claims before treating them as gospel. Still, M-Force hasn't nearly enough personnel to chase down every purported ghost sighting that supposedly occurred even last week, much less to verify accounts of events that are now decades old. In practice, agents are advised to take any concrete claims made in these works with a grain of salt. Even so, more than once these records of ordinary folks in extraordinary situations have provided the key to defeating a monstrous menace.

Scholarly Works: From the psychical research and cryptozoology of past centuries to the cutting-edge work of M-Force's own scholars, humans have sought to apply the tools of the scientific age to the great mysteries of all time. These efforts are chronicled in a legion of journals, monographs, pop-monsterology paperbacks, and scribbled notes, which form a third major part of the Quinn collection. Particularly notable in this category is the *Points Papers*, the record of Professor Phillip Points' nineteenth-century investigations in monsterology.

Operational Tools: Though the Quinn collection focuses on works about monsters, a sizeable chunk of the collection covers information on other topics of use to M-Force agents. Travel guides to foreign countries, manuals on improvised explosives, works on unusual religious practices, textbooks on crime-scene investigation, and the like are included in this category. Frequently these works are acquired on the recommendation of a field agent, or at the request of a member developing a training course for the M-Force Academy.

The Real Thing: Monsters and other preternatural threats are often associated with documents of one kind or another -- cursed scrolls, blasphemous tomes, cuneiform tablets, you name it. When works like these are uncovered in the course of an M-Force assignment, the Quinn Library staff takes charge of their preservation and security. The most ostensibly dangerous of these works are kept in the secured armory and storage facility elsewhere on the M-Force headquarters compound, but it is still the librarians' responsibility to catalog and index them and to explain any unusual storage conditions that may be required.

For the most part, Quinn is a reference library. Officially, the stacks are closed, and materials are not to be removed from the library premises. The staff understands, however, that the exigencies of M-Force service may require that the usual policies be bent from time to time. M-Force agents and affiliated researchers who demonstrate a compelling need to take out materials are permitted to do so -- but that doesn't mean the librarians are going to be cheerful about turning over a handwritten copy of *Ye Outer Spheres and Ye Inhabitants Thereof* to a bunch of field agents who haven't showered in days and reek of cordite. The ongoing effort to transfer the entire collection into electronic form is in part meant to provide access to texts at need without endangering the original manuscripts or depriving others of their use.

Since Quinn does not ordinarily lend materials, it does not participate in the usual interlibrary-loan arrangements. However, the uniqueness of Quinn's collection, combined with its vast archive of fully-indexed electronic texts--and the custom-written, cutting-edge database software that produced it-- has put the library on extremely good terms with a number of other institutions, which means easier access for M-Force agents to works not held by Quinn. Other libraries with which the Quinn staff has a notably good rapport include the small public and college libraries in Caledonia (whose own interlibrary-loan networks Quinn sometimes borrows, in exchange for the use of its software); the libraries at Harvard and MIT (which frequently send researchers to Quinn, and vice versa); and the Vatican Library (which shares its "secret archives" with M-Force scholars in return for access to the Kallinikos material).

GUEST HOUSE

The Witterstadt guest house once served as M-Force's headquarters. Since M-Force's move into the mansion, it has reverted to its original function of housing guests, though now it is run like a hotel. There is a small office where visitors may check in, and 13 available rooms. The rooms



are \$40 a night. If a visitor is staying on official M-Force business, he will generally be reimbursed for the room fee.

LOGISTICS BUILDING/SUPPLY DEPOT/MOTOR POOL

The center of M-Force Logistics is a multi-building facility located a few miles from M-Force headquarters. Its warehouses are filled with survival and exploration gear for any environment, advanced sensors and communication equipment, and the most advanced anti-monster weapons and ammunition Logistics and R&D can purchase or devise. Due to the variety and volume of dangerous devices stored there, the entire Logistics facility is heavily secured with armed guards, several nested electrified fences, and a variety of security systems. To date there have been only two attempts to breach the facility, neither successful.

In addition to serving as M-Force's warehouse and armory, the Logistics facility serves as the Headquarters' heliport and motor pool. This area also houses the Experimental Operations Team bunker. These parts of the facility are separated from the main storage areas for security purposes.

Experimental Operations Team

"You have to be a little crazy to hunt monsters, but those guys are just nuts."

—Sarah Kelley, Lexington, Kentucky office

Monsters are constantly evolving. That means M-Force has to continue to push the envelope, maintaining and developing cutting-edge technologies and tactics. That's the role of the Experimental Operations Team, or EOT. What's the best wood for staking vampires? EOT is researching it. Is there a one-shot kill device for putting down a zombie? EOT is testing it. Does silver actually affect werewolves? Ask EOT; they'll have the answer. If they don't, they'll go and find out.

Often seen by other M-Forcers as being a little past the bounds of sanity, EOT agents don't display much military bearing or respect for authority. The EOT is staffed by full-time agents who aren't afraid to take a brand-new weapon, vehicle, or defense into the field for a test ride. Agents from EOT are proud to be "test pilots," and most keep a cocky face to the world to cover for the fact that they are often in as much or more danger than the monsters they're facing.

The EOT grew out of an informal testing process at M-Force HQ in the 1960s. As agents requested specialized equipment, a need for more information about monsters, tactics, and weaponry developed. The scientific types originally used an unofficial arrangement with various agents of the Special Reaction Team (a sort of M-Force SWAT). The paramilitary nature of the SRT and their constant missions in support of agents made them ideal for testing new weapons and equipment. However, the SRT spearheaded the “War on Slugs,” and its agents’ black jumpsuits and armbands became associated with the worst abuses of that period. As part of the congressional hearings following the Slug War, the SRT was disbanded.

When Carlton Saunders restructured M-Force, he realized that there was still a need for the testing that the SRT had performed as well as the tactical skills that the team had developed. He knew that reforming the unit was impossible, but that didn’t mean that a different unit couldn’t fulfill the same purpose. The Experimental Operations Team was designed to be an innocuous replacement for the SRT with many of the same personnel. Given the formerly unofficial testing role as their new primary mission, the EOT was put under the command of the new M-Labs to enforce the image of the team as testers rather than fighters.

Surprisingly, the EOT’s cover role turned into its actual main function. Having a team to test weapons, tactics, and theories improved the functions of M-Labs immeasurably. While the team was occasionally used as an emergency tactical force, its research and testing functions saw far more use. The EOT rewrote the book on M-Force operations, and saved hundreds of lives through its tests. Based on the philosophy that the only place to field-test was the field, the EOT constantly traveled to find actual monsters.

Field-testing is still the heart of the team. Even such terrible failures as Operation Toothpick, in which twenty-two agents lost their lives, have not kept the EOT from its primary role. The difficult job and extreme danger have led to a tendency toward eccentricity, but these agents are extremely dedicated and strongly believe that it is better for them to suffer the consequences of bad ideas and equipment glitches than for unsuspecting fellow M-Forcer to discover those problems too late while out in the field.

The EOT AIC (currently “Mean” Mike Combs) oversees 32 agents and 20 support personnel as they deploy on missions across the country. The EOT receive their assignments weeks in advance from M-Labs. The mission may be a Request for Research (RfR) to test some theory about a certain type of monster. It might be a new type of equipment that has passed lab tests and is ready for the field.

Often, the mission is passed on from the Academy when the staff wishes to field-test new curriculum or tactics. The AIC then assigns the mission to one of the four teams (Carnivore, Granite, Machete, and Teapot) for mission planning. Each team has eight agents and five support staff (1 researcher, 2 pilots, 1 recording technician, and 1 supply specialist). They work together to identify possible target areas appropriate to the mission, assign responsibilities, prepare equipment, and rehearse the operation. The team then goes into an on-call status, waiting for the circumstances appropriate to their mission. The circumstances vary according to the mission, but often revolve around waiting for a certain kind of creature to appear. When a team finally deploys on its mission, a second team immediately goes on call as a backup and recovery team.

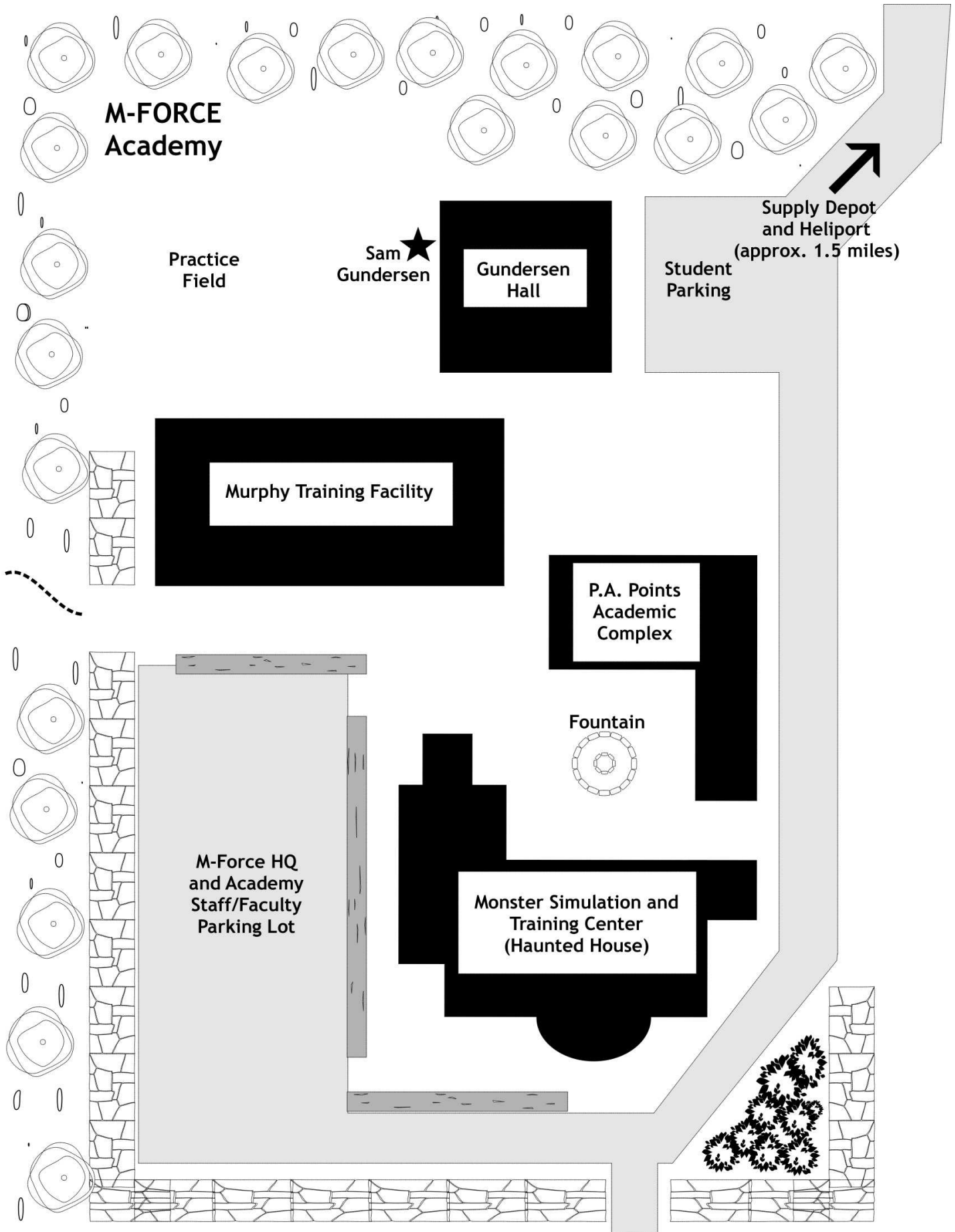
At times, EOT agents are called upon to act as an armed fire brigade or rescue force. As the most highly trained and equipped M-Forcers nationwide, the EOT often has to be used in emergency situations. One of the teams is always kept at the bunker and can be ready to go in under two hours. As the years have progressed, the EOT has trained less and less for this purpose, but they still learn to carry out these duties. The EOT’s high-performance helicopters and pilots give the agents mobility that is unparalleled in the organization. For this reason, as well as their strong sense of duty, the agents of the EOT will always end up in the middle of M-Force’s most disastrous situations.

M-FORCE ACADEMY

In 1973 the Witterstadt Trust purchased the abandoned estate that occupied the lot next to the Witterstadt manor and built the M-Force Academy there. Two new buildings, Gunderson Hall and the Murphy Training Facility, were built. Remaining elements of the estate were converted into the P.A. Points Academic Complex and the “Haunted House.” The path between the mansion and the Academy is well-worn.

Gundersen Hall

Gundersen Hall is a classic example of neo-prison block architecture. The drab cinderblock complex houses students and instructors at the M-Force Academy in spartan style. Gunderson is 6 stories tall, with a cafeteria and recreational areas on the first floor, study areas and a small library on the second floor, faculty housing on the third floor, and three floors of student rooms. Students live six to a suite. Each suite consists of two rooms sharing a bathroom. Faculty housing (intended for instructors whose responsibilities require them to be on campus at all times) is in the form of single-occupancy apartments.



P.A. Points Academic Complex

The Points Complex is an extreme contradiction in terms. The outside of the facility exudes a warm, homey feeling, with its old shingle roof, copper drainpipes, and tudor-style appointments. Inside, the old house has been gutted and rebuilt into an ultra-modern learning facility. Eight classrooms, two labs, and three discussion areas make up this facility. Each has access to the latest in educational technology, including video-conferencing capabilities, links to the Quinn Library's extensive collection, and a host of other tools for teaching future agents.

Murphy Training Facility

With its gyms, firing ranges, and other active training facilities, Murphy teaches aspiring agents the physical side of their role. Here agents learn basic hand-to-hand combat, familiarize themselves with weapons, and learn skills such as demolitions, first aid, and basic rescue techniques. Murphy also has a fine selection of physical labs that simulate a variety of environments, including swamps, deserts, and mountains. In these, agents learn to deal with common monster threats in their home environments. Murphy's two sub-basements provide equipment storage for the Academy obstacle course and athletic fields.

The "Haunted House"

The most famous of the Academy facilities, the "Haunted House" provides a unique experience for every graduating agent. Though it appears to be a rundown, abandoned mansion, the House actually contains some of the finest monster simulation training in the world. Using special effects, pyrotechnics, and liberal robotics, the "Haunted House" provides the kind of training that can't be learned in gyms, labs, or classrooms. Trainees go through three different exercises in the House: *Disorientation Week*, *They Killed Our Teacher*, and of course *Hell Night*. No trainee graduates the Academy without vivid memories of his time in the House. Ironically, few people realize that the location's real name is much more pedestrian. The Monster Simulation and Training Center (or MySTiC as a few insiders call it) also serves the lesser-known purpose of housing the Academy's administrative offices. Finding the entrance to these offices may be the greatest mystery of all in the "Haunted House."



CHAPTER 5

BRANCH OFFICES



OVERVIEW

The M-Force regulations model the ideal M-Force office, but the reality of the matter is that there is no typical office. No single set of regulations can possibly cover the vast array of conditions in which an M-Force office may be needed. The composition of the ideal local office staff is five full-time staff members. There is an Agent in Charge (AIC) who oversees all of the office operations and occasionally leads missions. An Administrative Officer, in many ways a glorified receptionist, mans the phones and keeps in contact with the various law-enforcement, fire, EMS, and hospital offices which might be the first to encounter monster activities. The Supply Officer maintains the office's equipment, vehicles, and weapons, and also makes procurement recommendations. Finally, two Watch Officers split the night and weekend duties. They answer phone calls and monitor police/fire/EMS radio bands for unusual activity that might be monster-related. Watch Officers are usually up-and-coming agents who want to be AICs. The overworked, under-appreciated job of Watch Officer is seen as good preparation for becoming an Agent in Charge. Because M-Force is constantly short of personnel, many offices are understaffed. Often, a smaller office will have no dedicated Watch Officers.

DAILY OPERATIONS

The average day at an M-Force office consists of paperwork and maintenance. The staff attempts to keep up with the never-ending bureaucracy of modern life and keep all equipment in order. Occasionally, promotional activities such as recruiting booths or an informational visit to a school break the monotonous routine. The job of a full-time agent is generally not glamorous. Many full-time M-Forcers envy the life of the part-time agent who only shows up for exciting events like training and actual missions. Most days, an M-Force office is just like any other office.

Unlike other offices, however, M-Force branches must be manned by at least one agent 24 hours a day. This is accomplished in different ways depending on the office. At huge offices like Atlanta or Dallas, an entire staff of Watch Officers handles this responsibility, but many offices have to make other arrangements. Locations that are short on staff will often require part-time agents to work a watch shift once a



month or more. The agent will be responsible for monitoring local emergency frequencies and answering any emergency phone calls. When a team is on a mission, the AIC and other agents will often join whoever is on watch. The watch schedule is created by the AIC and posted each month. The AIC will generally take into account schedule requests as best as possible, but it is not always possible to accommodate people. Schedule swapping is a common activity at weekly meetings.

Many part-time agents stop by their office on a regular basis just to check in and to get in some individual training, but most offices only require agents to show up once a week. Watch schedules, maintenance, promotional activities, and other administrative tasks are the main focus of these weekly meetings. It is a chance for the AIC and his staff to talk directly with their part-timers. If a team has gone out in the past



week, then the weekly meeting is the time to review the mission. The team leader will be asked to describe what occurred and discuss lessons learned. Other team members will also share their experiences, and the AIC and office staff will comment.

In addition to these weekly meetings, one Saturday a month is scheduled as a training day. Everyone participates in these sessions designed to keep agents up to date and ready for action. Specific training topics vary depending on the needs of the office, but common topics include monster familiarization (focusing on breeds local to the area), evidence collection, team tactics, M-Force history, and marksmanship. Prospective team leaders are often assigned to run training sessions as a test of their abilities.

Training isn't restricted to these sessions. Many M-Forcers take other classes at the office, whether for certifications or just to learn more. Periodically (at least twice a year), an office will schedule a major training event. These events can last up to a week and take many different forms. Agents may visit a police or military facility for a mission simulation. The entire office could head out of town to hike, camp, and learn the surrounding terrain. Once every two years, agents are supposed to go through a qualification session in the "Haunted House" at M-Force Academy. Large offices will often stagger these biannual events into several sessions so that agents have more scheduling choices. Smaller offices will generally only have the funding for one set of events and will often join together with other small offices to hold these sessions.

All activity comes to a stop when a mission is in the field. Daily maintenance tends to be ignored, training is suspended, paperwork is left undone, and many AICs grow roots in front of the radio. While the office has to continue functioning, a mission ensures that only the most crucial activities occur. At times, one branch will have multiple teams in the field. This can strain the resources of many locations. During major operations, small offices often have to borrow staff from other locations just to keep someone on the phones. Supplies and backup agents may also have to be borrowed. At the end of a mission, the AIC may call in other agents to help with cleanup and maintenance as the field team tries to recover and tend any wounds.

LOCAL SUPPORT

M-Force offices differ in the nature of their relationships with the communities they serve. Past performance is a key determining factor. An office whose agents have distinguished themselves in public battle with monstrous threats—saving citizens' lives at the risk of their own—will probably be treated as an ally by local governments and police forces in the re-

TYPICAL SMALL OFFICE

Follansbee, West Virginia

Whether hunting down beta-rabid white-tail deer or protecting barge traffic on the Ohio River from giant mutant catfish, these agents give their all. The Follansbee office may be small, but it casts a long shadow across the monsters of the Mountain State.

Although responsible for a large portion of the upper Ohio valley, the Follansbee M-Force office is typical of the smallest M-Force operations. Five agents work out of a storefront office in the steel mill city's downtown, although only the Agent in Charge works full time. The AIC is Darius Danyluk, who lives in the apartment above the offices. Danyluk acts as the daylight watch officer, maintaining the media watch while carrying out the additional functions of Administrative Officer and Supply Officer. For the most part, Danyluk expects his agents to be responsible for the storage and upkeep of their own weapons, keeping only the most specialized monster-fighting gear at the office. Although most of the agents in this field office are steel mill workers, Mary L. Jones is a copywriter and overnight DJ for a local radio station. MJ's connections to other media make it easier to keep up with the monster activity in the upper Ohio valley. The Follansbee office often works in conjunction with the Wheeling, WV and Pittsburgh, PA offices to cover their large (but sparsely populated) shared zone of responsibility. Although the area is one of the more active monster zones in the Midwest, the Follansbee office boasts only one vehicle, Danyluk's pickup. He submits fuel and repair bills for reimbursement and keeps his personal weapon in the gun rack, "locked, loaded, and ready for action."

gion, who are likely to share information and to value the M-Forcers' expertise. Media outlets are also likely to be friendly, offering opportunities for good publicity and bringing unusual happenings to the agents' attention. Conversely, an office associated with spectacular failure will find its agents' future efforts obstructed by the authorities and their every action scrutinized with suspicion by the press. An office with no particular reputation either way might find its operatives seen as anything from dashing role models to dangerous nutcases to just another group of eccentric hobbyists, depending on the mood of the community and the PR efforts of the staff. Offering monster-related training programs to local police and medical personnel; maintaining a well-supported Junior M-Force chapter; even teaching summer courses in basic





monsterology at local colleges—all are ways in which M-Force offices have served their communities (and kept themselves in the public eye) even when there were no monsters to fight.

Naturally, these generalities don't hold in every case. Some offices with sterling reputations find themselves facing the jealousy of local police who dislike being compared to the "action heroes" of M-Force. Likewise, even an office that is barely tolerated by its community may be able to find a sympathetic ear or two among citizens of influence. And any office can cultivate ties to local scientists and other experts who may be able to lend a hand when the monsters come calling.

SPECIAL PURPOSE OFFICES AND TEAMS

Maritime Field Offices

"The last thing you want to hear is, 'We're gonna need a bigger boat.'"

—Key West AIC, Captain Frank Cassidy

Any sizeable body of salt or fresh water can support a wide spectrum of monsters that either wait for man to

come to them, or give up waiting and decide it's time for carry-out. Maritime and riverine field offices are equipped to handle the special equipment and personnel needs that come with hunting down sea monsters and amphibious creatures that operate from, or escape into, bodies of water. These offices receive additional funding from HQ for the purchase of boats, diving gear, and other specialized equipment for detecting and dealing with waterborne threats. The majority of M-Force's rated combat divers can be found in these offices, and most personnel have more than a passing familiarity with watercraft of various sizes.

Despite their focus on waterborne threats, these offices also handle a full load of landlocked cases, as the scattered nature of M-Force offices means there will rarely be a second office in the vicinity. Generally, M-Force will try to situate these offices near regions that encounter a higher than usual percentage of waterborne threats. M-Force maintains riverine offices along the Mississippi and other large intercoastal waterways, a joint field office in concert with the Canadian government to cover the Great



Lakes area, and maritime offices on both coasts and along the Gulf of Mexico.

Because of their mutual interest in protecting human life at sea, M-Force maritime offices work closely with the U.S. Coast Guard. It isn't unusual for a USCG cutter to be the first to report a monster sighting, or for an M-Force ship to be the first to respond to a more conventional distress call. Sometimes, though, the assistance M-Force provides is a little more unusual. In 1984, the Florida maritime office was responsible for breaking up a pirate ring that had mistaken the MFO's flagship, the *Rum Runner*, for a defenseless yacht. After repelling the boarders and crippling their vessel, the crew of the *Rum Runner* picked up the survivors, brigged them, and turned them over to USCG custody. Captain Cassidy and his crew earned Coast Guard public service awards for their assistance in the matter.

An MFO is generally equipped with one or two large ships and several smaller sup

port craft, depending on its agents' fundraising abilities. While the smaller craft are usually stock boats purchased "off the shelf," the capital ships are generally converted from large yachts that began their lives as pleasure craft. Before becoming an M-Force ship, such a vessel typically undergoes a major refit incorporating various modifications. These involve adding light armor, weapons, and electronics packages, all of which make hunting sea serpents, giant squid, or crazed white whales moderately less risky. The ship might mount depth charges, deck guns, or even torpedoes. Individual weapons such as submachine guns, harpoons, spear guns, and nets are stocked. Some of the ships include a "hull-clearing" system capable of directing a massive electrical charge to the steel of the ship's hull with the intent of zapping a monster that is in direct contact with the hull. Since most captains try to avoid monsters making contact with the hull, this feature is seen as a last resort.

Sample Maritime Field Offices

Massachusetts

The Massachusetts field office is based out of the Woods Hole Oceanographic Institute on Cape Cod. Because of this association, they lean toward a more research-oriented approach to sea monsters, with deterrent options being weighed against more direct action. Although this puts them in good standing with their more academic colleagues, there are many who consider the Woods Hole task force to be "soft on monsters." However, no other maritime office has contributed more to

humankind's knowledge of sea monsters than Woods Hole, Florida

Based out of Key West, the Florida MFO and its agents have a reputation for eccentricity and a relaxed attitude towards life, M-Force, and monster hunting. Agents in other offices call it "Parrotland," and some of the more serious offices have worse names for it. It's not that the Keys agents do sloppy work. They have an excellent case completion record, and no real problems with Oversight. It's not the individual agents' eccentricities. The office boasts a number of veteran field agents with excellent records, and any agent who's been "on the job" for a long while in any office tends to get eccentric. It's just sometimes hard to take an office seriously when they hold all their staff meetings on the beach. It's also hard not to be a little jealous, and that, more than anything else, may be at the root of "Parrotland's" reputation.

Despite the easy-going reputation, anyone who's seen them in action can attest they are one of the hardest-hitting field offices on the East Coast. They have to be. Open-ocean



and salt-water coastal monsters are extraordinarily dangerous, can grow to enormous sizes, and often require heavy firepower to kill. As such, the Keys office favors a “harpoon first, then depth charge the hell out of it” approach to maritime menace management.

Their preferred methods are often at odds with the deterrent-based approaches favored by more scholarly operations. In particular, the agents of the Massachusetts maritime office attached to the Woods Hole Oceanographic Institute do not see eye to eye with the Keys agents on this matter. This longstanding disagreement over methods always creates friction when the two offices must engage in joint operations.

The Keys office is also home to the M-Force Maritime Museum, and the AIC, Frank Cassidy, doubles as the curator. The museum tells the story of mankind’s long struggle against sea monsters from the dawn of time to the latest efforts by M-Force to eliminate these horrors.

Hawaii Office (University of Hawaii Pacific Rim Cryptid Studies Research Program)

Run by an M-Force research fellow, Dr. Malia Kawaguchi, this relatively young operation is possibly the first seed of a full-time office in the Hawaiian islands. Kawaguchi’s research team coordinates with other projects in various Pacific Rim nations to track the host of major sea monsters inhabiting that ocean. Kawaguchi’s program began with the work of the late Professor Hal’ea Akao’ono, who had done extensive research into the origins of Polynesian monster myths. Akao’ono was the first modern anthropologist to speculate that the Polynesian exodus began because of the oppressive dragon kingdoms in the region of pre-historic China.

Kawaguchi was fascinated by the possibility that major anthropologic and historic changes in Polynesian life might be linked to monster activities. In 1987, Kawaguchi began her first comparative monster research program, designed to link reports of sea monsters from all points of the Pacific Rim to determine if there were any commonalities among species and behaviors. In the first year of study alone, Kawaguchi catalogued over three thousand historic and modern accounts of monster sightings, attacks, and captures. In 1992, Kawaguchi went international with her project, recognizing that to truly map out Pacific cryptid patterns the program would have to gather more accounts than she and her graduate students could hope to catalog on their own. Key to the expansion was the aid given to Kawaguchi by Professor Fujimoto Kamasaki of the Tokyo Institute of Maritime Research. By incorporating Dr. Kamasaki’s database into her own, Kawaguchi was able to finally begin drawing conclusions about monster migration, speciation, and evolution.

TYPICAL COLLEGE OFFICE

Rocky Mountain College, Billings, Montana

Bobby’s eyes began to glaze over as he stared at page 317 of The Definitive Guide to Carnivorous Extraterrestrial Plants. He glanced up at Ed. “Hey, we got any pizza left?”

Ed did not respond. Bobby put the book down and yanked Ed’s earphones off. He shook his head in disgust. “Listening to the radio? Again? Ed, you’re supposed to be monitoring the police band!”

“But it’s so boring!”

Bobby sighed. He looked at his watch. Three hours to go. “Just turn the police band back on. We can play cards or something.”

Rocky Mountain College seems like an unlikely location for an M-Force office. The small liberal arts school is certainly not a hotbed of cryptid activity, but a small vocal group of students managed to make a difference. Fifteen students, led by Amy Hall, put together a funding proposal that they submitted to the Witterstadt Trust. The funding for a single lab and one professorship was approved in 1996 and the Rocky Mountain College office was born. At present, only five students are seeking a cryptid studies degree, but the program and its courses remain popular among the rest of the student body. Students meet three times a month under the supervision of the cryptid studies professor (currently Prof. Cara Reid) to discuss monster-hunting techniques and office business. In addition to classes, the students monitor local forestry and police band radio for any possible monster activity. Though the school has not had any monster encounters in its history, the students are ever hopeful. In 2001, Prof. Reid made an arrangement with M-Labs (where she once worked) to supply monster cadavers to the program, and in the spring semester of 2002, students were privileged to dissect a pair of hecklestimps.

Although it is the major center for information on Pacific menaces, the University of Hawaii does not have true monster-hunting capabilities. In fact, there are no M-Force offices in Hawaii, the nearest facility being the Guam office. However it is reasonable to assume that if a five-hundred-foot-tall sea drake began attacking the Big Island, U.S. military forces based in Hawaii would respond accordingly if for no other reason than to protect their own assets and installations there.



Containment Facilities & Transport Teams

"We're M-Forcers. We kill monsters, not collect them."
-Mike Mulligan, former head of M-Force

Sometimes mistakes happen, and a live but incapacitated monster is left over at the end of the day. Although many hard-line M-Forcers would call this a failure, the reality is that sometimes the only way to research and better understand monsters is to take a live one and study it. When that happens, transport and containment become issues. Obviously, you can't lock a monster in a crate and ship him via U.S. Postal Service to the biology department at State University. A specialized containment facility is needed to house the creature, along with handlers to see to its care, keeping, and confinement. Also essential is the equipment and expertise to adequately study the monster in question. Such a facility is expensive to operate, dangerous if run poorly, and likely to be unpopular with the neighbors. M-Force maintains only three, each in a different part of the country, and all operate in cooperation with existing governmental or academic institutions.

Trained personnel and specialized equipment are required to get a captured creature from the scene of the incident to the containment facility safely. This is the role of the M-Force transport teams, one of which is attached to each containment facility. Transport teams move their highly dangerous cargo using vehicles ranging from tricked-out semi-trucks and cargo helicopters to dedicated, modified railcars for the largest creatures.

Triangle Universities Joint Center for Cryptid Studies

Located in Durham, NC, this facility (like other Triangle Universities programs) is a joint research effort of Duke University, North Carolina State University, and UNC-Chapel Hill. M-Force's primary contribution is the transport team and a number of research fellows who study there.

True to its academic roots, TUJCCS is devoted primarily to the quest for knowledge. Monsters are studied as phenomena to be understood, not threats to be eliminated. Indeed, Center director Dr. Malcolm Wallace has openly challenged the classification of monsters as intrinsic threats to human life. He points out that the opposite seems to be true: humanity continues to flourish and to spread aggressively, while monstrous species have been reduced drastically in numbers or forced into hiding. "Undoubtedly we are their monsters, as they are ours," he has written, "and their 'unprovoked attacks' could easily be the work of their own 'M-Force.'" His personal research focuses on finding

ways in which monsters' needs might be met without bringing them into conflict with humans.

While the Center's other staffers don't share Dr. Wallace's radical position, their research all tends toward study for its own sake, rather than for the benefit of M-Force and its monster hunters. Indeed, much of their work has been denounced as unconscionably risky by M-Force

TYPICAL MID-SIZED OFFICE

Albuquerque, New Mexico

In the relatively monster-quiet backwater of Albuquerque, a team of M-Forcers races across the desert night to put a stop to an attacking army of Inferno Ants. The hackles of their mascot rise up as the dog sees the telltale glow of the six-foot-long ants in the distance through the windshield of the speeding truck.

Housed in a former fire station and riding with their Dalmatian mascot Jason, the Albuquerque M-Force office is the best of the best, matching the skill of a large office with the tight-knit community mentality of a small neighborhood office. Headed by one of the first female AICs, Jamie Dustrud, the "Desert Dusters" are one of the highest-rated offices in the nation. Dustrud can call on the skills of a very diverse team to keep her territory free from the scourges of monsterdom. Members include a Navajo medicine man, a Jesuit priest, and a retired Texas Ranger. The office's primary vehicle is a converted NaviStar Resq-Medic ambulance nicknamed Argo, with ample equipment storage and crew space to transport the whole team to the location of a monster sighting. A high-powered interceptor engine gets them to the scene fast, while the black paint job and emblazoned M-Force logo announce their identity. The Argo and Jason the dog are favorite features of school visits and fundraising events. Dustrud is also a leader in the Junior M-Force program. She has developed a curriculum that is educational, enjoyable, and not threatening to the community's sometimes outspoken critics. The Desert Dusters support other charities, including a yearly softball tournament appearance to help the local children's hospital. They are also active football boosters for nearby Blanc High School. Although their colleagues at the Hunt-Ray Complex look down on them as being "cavalier," "swashbuckling," and "too Indiana Jones for their own good," even their loudest critics have to admit that the Desert Dusters get the job done right.



lobbyists at least as many times as it has produced results useful to the organization. Many suspect that the only reason M-Force maintains its relationship with the Center is to have agents close at hand when the inevitable disaster occurs.

The core staffers' interests and backgrounds are varied. Dr. Sara Vinton, a biotechnologist, studies those monsters that infect or transform humans, in the hope of deriving non-damaging improvements to human biology. Dr. Isaac Kress, formerly a police profiler, interviews captured intelligent monsters to develop models of their unique psychologies. Dr. Mark Beard, an epidemiologist, studies Dr. Vinton's "infectives" from another perspective, tracking the spread patterns of everything from alien fungi to vampirism. And Dr. Sheldon Raymond, an evolutionary biologist, attempts to trace the origins of, and possible ancestral connections between, different monster species. In addition to these four and Dr. Wallace, the Center is home to a changing population of graduate students and M-Force research fellows.

The M-Forcers who make up the Center's transport team find themselves in a quandary, having to work with people whose beliefs contradict everything M-Force stands for. Every new capture job becomes an excuse to drag out the same old ideological arguments on both sides. Agents who tend to agree with the Center staff's philosophy (though usually to a lesser degree) sometimes request to be assigned to the team, but friction with their fellow M-Forcers makes the position just as stressful for them. Turnover among the transport team membership is high, and it has been used as a "punishment detail" for errant M-Forcers who have survived Oversight investigations but still need to be transferred away from their present locales to mollify the public. The one constant on the team is the leader and driver, Daniel "Sarge" Shannon. Though not actually ex-military, Shannon earned his nickname for his no-nonsense approach to security. He and Wallace have come to a tense agreement that the researchers may do whatever they please so long as it is understood that Shannon and his people are absolutely in charge of keeping the monsters restrained and neutralized while they are in the Center's keeping.

*Hunt-Ray Paranormal Research Complex, California
Institute of Technology (Pasadena, CA)*

Hunt-Ray is the most active of the containment facilities and is thought of by many in the business as "how containment ought to work." Its emphasis is on practical research into methods of monster neutralization and elimination. Hunt-Ray hosts the largest menagerie of captive living monsters in the world, all of them kept contained in

"habitat chambers" not unlike the habitats at the best zoos in the world. A major difference in the zoos' habitats and

TYPICAL LARGE OFFICE

Asheville, North Carolina

"It seems so peaceful here, not a monster in sight," the new agent commented, looking through the big bus windows of the ACSV at the natural beauty of the forest.

"Don't let it fool you," I replied. "Set foot out there right now and you'll wish you were dead."

Seated high in the Appalachian Mountains, the Asheville M-Force office is the prototype for large M-Force operations. It employs over one hundred agents to cover territory that includes Cherokee National Forest, the Black Mountain and Ridgecrest, NC area, and the Interstate 40 corridor through the mountains. Because of their large area of responsibility, this is one of the most mobile M-Force offices. In addition to two large-capacity Humvees, the office also boasts an Area Command and Support Vehicle (ACSV) in a converted tour bus for the long duration Search and Containment (SAC) missions in which its agents are so often involved. To help speed up deployment to the remote areas of the mountains, the Asheville office maintains a helicopter for missions classified as Fast Action Response Situations (FARes). The office itself is located in a large warehouse near the Asheville Regional Airport. Inside, the vehicle maintenance section is equipped to keep the office's various trucks in good repair. In a secure section of the warehouse is an armory that contains every offensive and defensive weapon needed to keep the area monster-free. The administrative offices are a high-tech monitoring and control station, coordinating agents in the field, on call, and on station in the office itself to ensure rapid response to any situation. The building's dorm area houses nine Watch Officers, one of whom is always on duty. One FARes team, composed of ten field agents, is also housed in the dorm area, and is ready to deploy on five minutes' warning. A second FARes team is on a one-hour call-up, and usually deploys by ground vehicle. Among the best supplied and disciplined of the large offices, Asheville works closely with the Pigeon Forge and Knoxville offices to keep the Great Smokey Mountains monster-free and open for business.



the Hunt-Ray habitats is that most Hunt-Ray habitat chambers have a “lethal containment” option that can be triggered if the captive monster for some reason gets out of hand. Also, most zookeepers aren’t armed as if going to war.

The facility is constantly growing, thanks to a variety of government grants. The authorities’ attraction to Hunt-Ray is twofold. First, Hunt-Ray presents a more government-friendly atmosphere than the other facilities, with a highly developed chain of command, bureaucratic decision-making process, and uniform front. The attitude at Hunt-Ray is very technical, businesslike, and quasi-military. As one Hunt-Ray official explained, “We’re too busy keeping the monsters from overrunning humanity to field a softball team or talk with a bunch of scouts.” Second, since the early 1980s, Hunt-Ray has been the primary center for US military research into monster-related applications—including both containment and utilization.

The M-Force transport team from Hunt-Ray considers itself an elite unit. Spit and polish is a way of life for these agents, and they hold themselves aloof from the rest of M-Force. Most of the members are ex-military, and they behave like a Special Forces team, complete with coordinating uniforms and photo identification badges. Hunt-Ray provides them with state-of-the-art equipment, ranging from top-shelf vehicles to the latest in lethal and non-lethal weaponry. Often, the transport team will volunteer to test a new theory or device for the Hunt-Ray staff, claiming that the “nut jobs” in EOT aren’t qualified to adequately evaluate cutting-edge technology. In many ways, the Hunt-Ray transport agents consider themselves the only real M-Forcers, and think of the rest of the organization as amateurs who are just going to get themselves hurt playing with things that they can’t possibly handle. Much of the rest of M-Force thinks that all of the Hunt-Ray personnel are just a little too intense for their own good. Although every Western field office counts on them to safely remove leftover monsters, as Jamie Dustrud of the Albuquerque office once commented, “We’re glad to see them come, but we love to see them go.”

Fields Institute, Washington University (St. Louis, MO)

The Fields Institute is located at the edge of Forest Park at the corner of Sinker and Lindell. Four worn-out buildings make up the facility. The A. J. Farmer Containment Facility, better known as “Zoo North” to staffers, is where live monsters are kept. The Lanier Center (formerly the Eliot Center) houses the research labs. The Bancroft Building is home to the administrative offices and the St. Louis field

office. The final building is a small garage where the facility’s hopelessly battered vehicles are kept.

The Institute’s current dilapidated state belies its origins. The oldest of M-Force’s monster containment facilities, it was founded in 1967 at the suggestion of the retired Dr. Fields himself, then employed at Washington University, where M-Force had gotten its start more than a decade earlier. University Chancellor Thomas H. Eliot and M-Force Director Mike Mulligan agreed, and the four-building facility was completed in 1969. At the same time, the university began offering degrees in the nation’s first college cryptid studies program, headed by Dr. David Lanier, a biology professor and M-Forcer.

Shortly after the facility opened, M-Force’s activities were suspended by the federal government (see page 14). Unsure of how to deal with the specimens contained at the Fields Institute, the authorities ruled that the facility would remain open and continue to receive funding from the Witterstadt Trust, but that all non-University employees were to be suspended. The administrative hassle of running the facility without M-Force help, coupled with constant bad press, soured university officials on the whole idea of the Institute.

Even after M-Force returned to operation, negative feelings remained. Ongoing budget battles marked the next two decades, with the Institute most often coming out on the losing end. Since Dr. Lanier’s death in the early 1990s, a new cryptid studies professor has yet to be appointed, and the Institute itself survives on a shoestring budget. Its staff is among the lowest-paid in M-Force, but the members show a high degree of camaraderie and determination stemming from their “outcast” mentality.

The current director of the Fields Institute and unofficial head of the cryptid studies department is Dr. John MacClellan. He is the figurehead around which the staff rallies, and he continues to exhibit a weary optimism about the Institute’s future. His chief ally is “Big John” Wildharbor, the head of the transport team, a foul-mouthed and opinionated former construction worker. The Institute also maintains close relationships with the Saint Louis Zoo (where Fields Institute researchers identified the first case of beta-rabies in 1972) and with the St. Louis M-Force office, headed by John Ross, a 70-year-old alumnus of Dr. Fields’ original Cryptid Studies Club.





CHAPTER 6

TEAMS AND MISSIONS



INTRODUCTION

As important as the national and local offices are, the real work of M-Force occurs out in the field, where teams of agents pit their skills and resources against the monsters that plague us all. This chapter looks at the field team and its work—from selection of the agents involved and procurement of equipment to interactions with the local populace and, of course, the actual hunting of the monstrous threat.

TYPICAL MISSION BREAKDOWN

Every M-Force mission begins with an alert—the contact that brings an unusual situation to M-Force’s attention. This can occur in a variety of ways: a civilian witness or surviving victim reports a monster encounter via the toll-free hotline; the staff of the news-monitoring room at M-Force headquarters spots a report that bears further investigation; a part-time agent notices signs of monster activity in her hometown; a “broken-badge” alert comes in from a team already in the field.

If the alert comes in at the national level, the next step is to relay it to the appropriate local office. Afterward (or if the alert reached the local office first), the local Agent in Charge selects a team of agents and activates their badges. The AIC also reports the composition of the team to the national headquarters, where the War Room staff marks those agents “active.”

Upon receiving their badge alerts, the agents call in, and are given their assignment. If circumstances permit, they may meet at the local office for a full briefing and to pick up any special equipment or vehicles. Where that is impractical, the agents may gather in a pre-arranged meeting place, or simply make their way separately to the site of the investigation.

Once the team is assembled and briefed, the team leader takes charge, and the mission proper begins. In its early stages, the typical M-Force mission is not unlike a police investigation: there are witnesses to be questioned, evidence to be examined, and leads to be followed. The goal at this stage is to determine what exactly occurred, what sort of creature is responsible, and how it might be



tracked and neutralized. Even in cases where the threat is obvious, such as giant monster attack, this data-gathering stage is still important, as few such creatures can be stopped by main force alone.

During their investigation, the agents have a number of resources to call upon. The researchers at the Quinn Library and the scientists at M-Labs can often be counted on, if there are obscure documents to be retrieved or evidence to be analyzed. In addition, there are likely to be parallel police and media investigations of the situation; smart agents arrange to share information for everyone’s benefit.

In many cases, additional monster attacks occur while the investigation is underway. If the agents learn of an encounter in progress, they may have a chance to deal





with the menace then and there. Even if the creature manages to escape, the agents may be able to rescue the victims and test their theories about the opposition. Learning about subsequent victims after the fact is never pleasant, but may still allow the team to gather additional clues about their quarry's nature and location.

Eventually, the team has enough information to begin actively hunting the monster, rather than simply reacting to its attacks. Perhaps they have discovered a way to track it to its lair. Alternatively, they may have worked out its pattern of attack, and can lie in wait at the home of the next likely victim. Ideally, the agents will be able to ambush the monster without being spotted, and will use their knowledge of its weaknesses to end the encounter quickly, with minimal danger to themselves and the surrounding population. Of course, in actual practice one is rarely offered the ideal situation, but good planning and clever use of resources can approximate it.

Once the monster is slain or driven off (or, on rare occasions, communicated with and offered an alternative to munching on the citizenry), the team must deal with the aftermath. Wounded agents need treatment, and fatalities

ties must be reported to headquarters for investigation. If the agents have overstepped their bounds in the eyes of the authorities, the Legal division may also be called in. Most importantly, the agents must insure that the defeated menace was the only one, and has left no mates, eggs, or the like to trouble the populace in the future.

Finally, the agents head home. The team leader's work is still not done, however, until he or she has submitted the official report on the case to M-Force headquarters. The War Room will then return the agents to standby status, and the Quinn Library staff will add the mission report to its archives. The agents then return to their everyday lives until the next monstrous threat rears its head.

OTHER TYPES OF ASSIGNMENTS

While the Investigation/Elimination mission described above is the most common assignment M-Force agents will encounter, it is not the only one. Sometimes agents may find themselves running down leads or inquiries on behalf of a team in the field. Other times they may be part of a team called in to assist a federal investigation into monster activity, or to provide training and advice to a police department that is developing its own anti-monster capabilities.

Investigative Support assignments are undertaken to provide research and investigation services for a team in the field. While field teams are expected to be able to do basic local research (newspaper and magazine archives, title and deed searches, examining police records, and so forth), sometimes local conditions make this difficult or impossible to accomplish. At other times, the information they need may simply not exist locally. A team may need a background check run, an esoteric subject researched, or something verified halfway across the country.

When a team finds itself in these situations, they often contact their War Room liaison. Once the liaison is reached the team's request is assigned a priority level. Depending on this priority and the availability of resources, calls are made, experts are consulted, or possibly other agents are assigned to the request. Investigative Support assignments can range from intellectually stimulating to agonizingly dull. Commonly, it is research or investigative legwork at a location too distant for the team making the request to reach.

These assignments sometimes take a turn for the bizarre. Agents must often devise unconventional strategies to uncover people and information while operating on a tight deadline. Other times, these assignments turn hot.

FIELD TEAM COMMUNITY RELATIONS

“When dealing with uncooperative people, remember the Fundamental Rule of Community Relations: These people have to live there after you leave. That’s generally more punishment than they deserve.”

—Ray Petrucho, AIC, Berkeley, CA Field Office

M-Force field teams often encounter additional complications in the field beyond bloodthirsty monsters out to kill them. Occasionally they must contend with bloodthirsty anti-M-Force protesters, uncooperative local officials, lawyers, or worst of all, the press. Fifteen minutes dealing with these sorts of complications can make a team wish for something as straightforward as a breach-and-burn assault on a nest of Leviathan Fleas in a flaming hail storm.

For the most part, M-Force field teams succeed in establishing and maintaining good working relationships with the communities their assignments bring them in contact with. They are, after all, here to help people, they seem to know what they are doing, and they don’t hand you a bill afterwards. It’s hard to find fault with earnest people who are there to keep an inhuman, unholy monstrosity from eating you and your dog.

Of course America was founded on this kind of hard work. In some cases, local officials will resent M-Force’s involvement in what they see as a purely local matter. They may feel it reflects badly on their competence that an outside agency has to be brought in to resolve the monster problem. Some officials fear that outside involvement will bring to light less than flattering details of their own efforts. Some simply dislike the very idea of a group like M-Force. Others have decided to latch onto the “monster problem” as their ticket to bigger and better things. Whatever their reasons, they can make their dislike felt in a number of ways, ranging from refusal to cooperate and share information to arrest and prosecution.

In other cases, individual citizens with an axe to grind against M-Force will appear out of the woodwork. Motivations vary from simple cussedness to a desire to obscure details of the case for personal gain. The sorts of aggravation these types can cause runs the entire continuum. Some will verbally harass the team at every opportunity; others will just send nasty letters to the editor. The truly dangerous will attempt to actively obstruct a team’s investigation by destroying evidence or persuading other citizens to refuse to cooperate.

Sometimes, problems with a community may be due to outside agitation. There are a number of anti-monster hunting groups out there, and some of them have settled on harassment of field teams as a way to make their case to the world. Particularly irritating groups will retain a lawyer and attempt to litigate a team into paralysis. Lawsuits centering on damages (both real and imagined) arising from a monster elimination effort are a common tactic. Other tactics include disruption of evidence-gathering efforts and attempts to marshal public opinion against the field team.

The press can be a particularly sticky wicket for a field team to contend with. In some cases, they can be a great asset, helping the team alert the community and gather information about the monster. In other cases, uneven or sensationalistic coverage of a monster threat will omit or distort important information about the threat. It can be hard to discern a reporter’s “angle” on a story, and some will conceal the true thrust of their investigation so subjects won’t hold back information. Many an M-Force agent has



Searching for someone who doesn't want to be found and asking questions that others don't want voiced carries inherent risks. Agents are expected to prepare accordingly, but sometimes seemingly innocuous inquiries can place agents in mortal danger.

Despite their often boring nature, there is a strong institutional ethic to discharge Investive Support missions in a timely and thorough manner. One man's boring deed search may be the difference between life and death for a fellow M-Forcer a thousand miles away.

Tactical Support missions are similar to Investigative Support missions, only with more gunfire. Sometimes a team in the field will discover that its manpower and firepower are insufficient for the threat it faces. Perhaps the giant spider's eggs have hatched in the local cave network, or the master vampire has created a number of progeny that now must be hunted down and destroyed before sundown. In any case, once the beleaguered team puts in a call for backup, one or more nearby local offices will dispatch agents to the scene. Agents activated to provide tactical support are expected to respond posthaste; the initial team has already been lucky to survive the realization that it is overmatched, and that luck may not outlast additional delays. As always, agents are encouraged to remember that someday it may be their necks on the line.

When different teams of agents mix, questions of leadership naturally arise. M-Force policy for Tactical Sup-

port missions is that the leader of the original team, if living, takes charge of the entire force for the duration of the mission. If that agent has been killed or incapacitated, command passes to the next most senior agent with team-leader training, whether part of the original team or one of the responding agents.

A Search & Rescue mission is triggered by a broken-badge alert or other distress call from an active field team. Whereas a Tactical Support mission is concerned with helping to eliminate a monstrous threat, the focus of an S&R mission is on finding the initial team (or survivors thereof) and getting them to a place of safety where they can receive needed medical care. Going back in to eliminate the monster is a secondary goal, though it may often be necessary to do so in order to effect the rescue. The same chain-of-command rules apply here as on a Tactical Support mission.

Other M-Force assignments don't even involve monsters, at least in theory. M-Force engages in a variety of educational and public-relations activities that frequently require the participation of individual agents or agent teams. Thus, agents may find themselves teaching basic courses to new M-Force recruits in their area; training local police, firefighters, or emergency medical personnel in monster-response protocols; taking the members of their local Junior M-Force chapter out for a pizza party; providing security for a cryptozoologist or other important figure specifically targeted by monsters; or even serving as techni-

cal advisors during the filming of a monster movie. Even these seemingly dull "missions" have the potential to turn dangerous, though. While that is most obvious in the case of a bodyguarding assignment, agents should be alert at all times, remembering that they themselves are targets, especially when they appear in public as representatives of M-Force. Even in a completely routine situation, the training of M-Force agents could turn up clues—concealed anywhere from the grumblings of a frustrated police detective to the enthusiastic yammerings of a Junior M-Force youngster—that reveal a lurking monster threat to be dealt with.



ASSEMBLING A TEAM

M-Force normally fields teams of 4-8 agents, depending on agent availability and the nature of the assignment. These teams are called up by the local offices and are generally formed from agents within an office's jurisdiction. Sometimes, personnel with key skills for an assignment are unavailable. In those cases, the local office's AIC will contact other offices to see if they have personnel that can help fill out the vacancy. M-Force strives to field versatile teams capable of conducting a thorough and effective on-site investigation. The team must also be able to render whatever threat-elimination services may be called for. A number of factors go into selecting the team for an assignment:

Skill Sets

Good teams have a mix of investigative and combat skills among their agents. For example, a team assigned to an Investigation/Elimination mission needs to be able to protect itself and defeat the monster. It also must be able to find the monster, identify it, and determine and devise the means of its destruction. The team must also be able to operate smoothly within the community it is assigned to protect.

Experience

Good teams have agents with field experience. That is not to say a team composed exclusively of grizzled vets is always ideal. There is never as much training time as M-Force would like. Field operations alongside more seasoned agents are an important source of practical experience and training for all M-Force agents, especially newer ones.

Special Skill Considerations

If an assignment calls for a special set of skills or professional experience, be it SCUBA certification or restaurant confectionery, M-Force takes that into account. One of M-Force's great strengths is the breadth of talent and experience it can tap.

Regional Familiarity

M-Force prefers that at least some members of a team be familiar with the assignment's region. Not only does this familiarity aid in accomplishing the mission, but it also helps to build ties with the community.

Previous Experience Together

A team that has worked together successfully before is likely to be called up again. This is not always possible,

but it is something the local offices shoot for. It seems to bring better success rates, and helps to build camaraderie and support networks among agents.

ACCESSING RESOURCES IN THE FIELD

The resources available to M-Force field teams fall into several distinct tiers. Resources in "closer" tiers will be more immediately available, but may be limited in terms of variety or quantity. Resources in more "distant" tiers are likely to be of greater depth and scope, but their availability may be affected by availability and time or distance lags.

The first tier includes those resources the agents have brought with them to the mission site—their vehicle, weapons and ammunition, communications gear, equipment for investigation and scientific analysis, and exploration/survival gear. For wilderness missions, food also falls into this tier (or at least, it had better). For missions in civilized settings, agents are issued an M-Force credit card which can be used to purchase food, lodging, and other necessities. All of these assets are immediately to hand at all times, unless lost or damaged in the course of a mission.

The second tier of resources includes those available at the mission site. Obviously, these will vary greatly depending on the nature of the mission. In wilderness settings, teams will be limited to the natural resources of the area, such as wood or water. It may be possible to hunt or scavenge for food if provisions become scarce. Agents with survival experience may be able to work even greater wonders with natural materials—but in general, these settings offer limited resources at best.

Agents on assignment in a town or city setting have a great many local resources at their disposal. Naturally, the variety and scope of what is available will depend on the size and resource base of the community. The accessibility of these services will likewise depend on the relationship between the team and the locals. If the monster has kept the entire town in terror for weeks, agents can probably look forward to full cooperation. On the other hand, if the agents were summoned by a lone citizen whose story has met with derision from the authorities, support from other quarters may not be forthcoming. These resources may include the following:

- Police, EMT, and other emergency services (who may already be involved with the monster attacks)
- Scientific and forensic analysis services
- Locals who know the terrain, from hunters and camping enthusiasts to search-and-rescue volunteers

- Informational resources, such as colleges, libraries, newspapers, and historical societies
- Special equipment, such as heavy machinery in use by local industry

The third tier includes those resources available via a call to the local field office. The most common request of this sort is for additional weaponry or equipment, perhaps of an unusual or specialized sort that would be especially useful in tracking or neutralizing the current threat. The local office can also contact other M-Force agents, providing investigative support or tactical backup to a team stretched too thin. Further, the office can call upon resources throughout its region of operation—whether other agents or outside institutions—to provide equipment, skills, information, or expert opinions that might not be available locally.



Finally, the office can relay requests to other local M-Force offices or to M-Force national headquarters, bringing the fourth tier into play.

The fourth tier, then, includes those resources that can be accessed with a call to M-Force HQ, initiated either by the local office or

directly by the team. The War Room is the most common avenue for such a request. Working with a War Room liaison, a team can make a request for any and all of the resources available to M-Force. The most obvious of these are the extensive archives of the Quinn Library and the evidence-analysis facilities of M-Labs. Headquarters also has its vast roster of agents in all walks of life, and contact information for experts in every field throughout the country. Of course these resources are limited. In short, if an agent team is in need of any imaginable item, skill, or piece of information, M-Force can at least try to obtain it for them. The national headquarters is also the place to call if one needs to mobilize all agents in a wide region, as when

a monstrous threat turns out to be much greater or more widespread than originally believed. M-Force's full reach and scope becomes most obvious during a "broken badge alert," triggered when the locator beacon in an M-Force ID badge is activated. In such an event, M-Force makes full use of its agents, outside contacts, and favors owed in order to assist the agents in distress as swiftly and effectively as possible.

While the resources available via the third and fourth tiers are considerable, they also take time and effort to mobilize. Field teams operate on the monsters' schedule, which rarely permits unlimited time to wait for the results of research and testing, or even for the arrival of reinforcements. Even with all of M-Force at their back, sometimes all a team of agents can rely on is their own ingenuity, the best guesses of the fellows in research, and the certainty that they will be avenged.

TACTICS AND TECHNIQUES

What we call tactics here is a body of approaches to a problem that you use to analyze it and formulate a plan of action. Techniques are the details of how you execute the plan arising from your tactical choices. For example, using shock action and an aggressive entry to gain and maintain the upper hand in a confrontation is a tactic. Employing door-breaching charges and flash-bangs are the techniques you use to implement your chosen tactical approach.

The tactics and techniques used by M-Force are as varied as their membership roster and the fantastic range of horrors they oppose. The approaches used to counter an infestation of Leviathan Fleas are not appropriate for use against Devil Clams, but they work quite well against a flotilla of possessed cement mixers. A team with a rated sniper/observer has different options open to it than one with experts in explosives and trap construction.

Regardless of the situation, the M-Force code of conduct forms the basis for the tactical choices and rules of engagement employed. On the one hand, M-Force agents are not police, and they do not have to concern themselves with niceties like search warrants or taking their quarry alive. On the other, like the police, the safety and security of innocent bystanders takes absolute priority over any other tactical concerns.

CHAPTER 7

THE M-FORCE AGENT



The war against monsters requires a great many troops with a wide range of talents. In addition to field agents, M-Force employs administrators, scientists, librarians, lawyers, and more. These agents come from all walks of life; M-Force does not discriminate on any grounds, be it race, class, sex, gender, religion, political affiliation, or sexual orientation. These men and women generously give M-Force their time and energy in exchange for very little pay and a great deal of danger.



RECRUITMENT

Between agents getting incapacitated or killed in the line of duty and the continuing upward rise of the Hunt-Ray Curve, M-Force is constantly looking for new agents. Because of this, the Public Relations division launches a new recruitment drive every summer. On the local level, this can mean an appearance on a college campus or a membership drive and cookout. On the national level, the campaign consists of magazine ads, television and radio spots, and the occasional billboard. Recruitment ads are usually simple and bold, with messages like “Kick Monster Butt” and “Monsters Are a Problem—Be a Part of the Solution.” The ads direct interested parties to their local M-Force office for more information.

An applicant who visits the local office is given an immediate interview (unless a crisis at the time requires the entire staff’s attention). In this interview, the local Agent in Charge makes it clear that M-Force can be incredibly dangerous, discusses the pay and benefits, and otherwise makes sure the applicant knows what he’s getting into. If the applicant is still interested, he is scheduled for a return visit. At that time, he will undergo thorough physical and psychological testing. Over the years, M-Force has developed an elaborate system for weeding out psychopaths and undercover monsters. If the candidate is a sane human in reasonably good shape, he will then start filling out his application to the M-Force Academy.

TRAINING

M-Force strives constantly to see that all its agents possess and maintain the skills needed in their profession. This function is the bailiwick of the Training department, created in 1973 after the Slug War showed the dangers of sending poorly trained monster hunters into the field on faith alone.

Basic courses in M-Force operations, monster identification, first aid, investigation, firearms, and tactics are required of all agents, whether full-time, part-time, or support staff. (Yes, even good old Claire, the recep-



EXCERPTS FROM FAILED INTERVIEWS

AIC: So what brings you to M-Force?

Applicant: I always loved guns. Even as a kid, I loved 'em.

AIC: Really? Tell me about your childhood.

Applicant: I hated it. Hated all the other kids. They laughed at me. Called me a loser. Well I'm not a loser now, huh? I'm gonna be in M-Force and carry around some big damn guns! I'm gonna be a hardcore killing machine! When can I start?

.....

AIC: What do you think of other people?

Applicant: Teeming maggots, incapable of understanding the great work of M-Force.

AIC: And what is that work?

Applicant: Murdering monsters. Furthering human domination of the world.

AIC: I see. You know, this x-ray we took of you, it looks kind of strange. This thing—

Applicant: Oh, that's just a growth, something I've had ever since I was hatched. . .born, ever since I was born. A perfectly normal thing.

AIC: Mm-hmm. Listen, you go ahead and fill out that form. I seem to have lost my pen. I'll be back in just a second. . .

tionist at M-Force headquarters, knows this stuff; only the fact that the entire staff is trained and ready to defend the place has kept the Witterstadt estate from being an almost constant target of monstrous attack.) One elective course, chosen by the trainee, is also taken; this can be further training in one of the required areas, or the first course in a specialty area. Traditionally this initial training occurs at the M-Force Academy in Caledonia (see page XX), though it is possible to test out of some courses or arrange to take equivalent courses elsewhere. The final week of the basic training course must always be taken at the Academy, and includes simulated missions in the "Haunted House." An agent who has completed all requirements except for that final week is deemed a probationary agent, and may be sent on missions. A probationary agent must complete the final week of training within six months, or she will be placed on suspension until the last requirement is met.

Once accepted as a full-fledged agent, every M-Forcer is expected to pass annual qualifying exams in the basic skills in order to retain that status. Additionally, M-Force offers a variety of elective courses which agents are encouraged to take when they are able. Many of the most common training courses are listed in the sidebars of this chapter.

Recognizing that few agents have the time to commit to full-time schooling, the Academy offers weekend-only programs in all advanced courses. For those who can't even make it to Caledonia that often, alternatives are available. Classes in purely academic subjects like monsterology can be taken and graded by correspondence or online. Many of the physical training and weapons courses can be found locally, sponsored by organizations other than M-Force. M-Force agents are generally treated as police or military personnel for purposes of these third-party training courses. Another option is to make use of the Academy's mobile training units, which cycle through the M-Force regions on a regular schedule. Finally, there will be some M-Force agents in each region who have earned instructor certification in various subjects. Any of these individuals is considered qualified to teach the lower-level courses in that subject to others.

CERTIFICATIONS

While the Academy and other Training-sponsored programs are designed to turn out competent monster hunters, there are plenty of useful skills that Training has neither the resources nor the expertise to teach. Conversely, an agent may come to M-Force with valuable skills already learned elsewhere. For these reasons, Training has established a standardized system of certifications that relies on actual tested ability. Regardless of whether an agent learned to shoot at the Academy, during military or police training, or through childhood instruction by his parents, if his marksmanship has been certified by M-Force, the organization knows it can rest secure in his competence. M-Force certifications are of four general types:

Skill Certification: Each skill certification applies to a specific area of expertise, such as first aid or monsterology knowledge. These certifications come in three levels, denoting "competence," "expertise," and "mastery," and requiring progressively more difficult tests to attain. Certain broader certifications and positions within M-Force (see below) require that the applicant possess certain skill certifications. The initial M-Force training curriculum results in competence-level certification in marksmanship, self-defense, first aid, monsterology, and investigation. Certifica-

tion in other skills can be obtained by taking appropriate Academy courses, demonstrating pre-existing skills to the satisfaction of the M-Force Training department, or completing an M-Force-endorsed third-party training program (necessary for areas M-Force doesn't cover, and sometimes more convenient even for subjects that are taught at the Academy).

Professional Certification: M-Force needs all sorts of skilled professionals – doctors/medics, counselors/chaplains, and others – that the organization couldn't possibly turn out itself. Fortunately, M-Force's largely part-time structure allows already trained professionals to donate their time to the monster-hunting cause. As monster hunting brings in certain factors not covered in ordinary schooling, the Training department has established a set of courses dealing with the special concerns that face an M-Force medic, counselor, or whatever. Passing such a course means that the professional is certified to practice as part of his or her M-Force duties (treating fellow agents' monster injuries, counseling victims, and so forth). A would-be M-Forcer with a useful profession will generally take the appropriate "monster-hunting considerations" course as his or her elective during initial Academy training.

Training/Specialist Certification: Sometimes it is useful to recognize an entire connected set of skills; in those situations, M-Force issues training certifications. The skills must each be certified individually, and can be learned by any of the means outlined above under the description of

skill certification. Whether the skill certifications earned must be competence-level, expert-level, or some combination of the two depends on the individual training certification being awarded. A specialist certification is like a training certification, only it generally requires deeper knowledge and entitles the agent to refer to himself as a specialist. (Training and specialist certifications are often compared to college minors and majors, respectively.) The most commonly issued training certifications are "(subject) instructor" and "team leader." Common specialist certifications include communications specialist, firearms specialist, and vehicles specialist.

PAY AND BENEFITS

New M-Force agents are often disappointed when they take a look at their first paycheck. Make no mistake; no one stays with M-Force for monetary gain. However, M-Force believes in providing all the necessary benefits to keep its agents happy and healthy – or, in the event of misfortune, providing for the agent or the agent's family. In addition, agents have access to other perks that make both their work and their home life easier.

Insurance

M-Force offers one of the most comprehensive insurance packages in the country. All coverage begins on the agent's first day of active service. Medical, dental and vision coverage costs for the agent are paid completely

SAMPLE CERTIFICATION REQUIREMENTS

Communications Specialist Certification: Completion of "Tactical Radio Operations" and "Advanced Tactical Radio Operations" courses, or certified expert-level demonstration of equivalent skills.

Counselor/Chaplain Certification: Completion of a trauma-counseling program at some accredited institution; completion of "Psychology of the Monster Victim" course; clerical status (for "chaplain" title only).

Firearms Specialist Certification: Certification of expert-level skill in marksmanship, maintenance, and repair of at least three distinct classes of firearms.

Instructor Certification: Certification of demonstrated expert-level skill in subject area; completion of appropriate "Instructor Certification" course or certified demonstration of teaching skill.

M-Force Medic Certification: Completion of medical or paramedic training at an accredited university; passage of "Tactical Medicine for the Medical Professional" (for physicians) or "Monster Attacks: Considerations for the EMT" (for paramedics).

Team Leader Certification: Completion of "M-Force Team Leader" course; completion of "Advanced Search Planning," "Advanced Close Quarters Battle," and both "Advanced Monsterology" courses (or certified demonstration of expert-level skill in those areas); recommendation of local AIC.

Vehicles Specialist Certification: Driver's or pilot's licenses for at least five distinct categories of vehicles; completion of an M-Force-approved third-party emergency driving course.

by M-Force. Agents may also have dependents covered under each plan at fairly low cost. Dependents include children, spouse or domestic partner, and disabled dependents. Agents are also covered under M-Force's Disability Insurance program for no cost. Disability Insurance applies to any disability, whether the event that caused the disability occurred on assignment or not.

M-Force provides all agents with a basic life insurance policy of \$50,000 at no cost. Agents, at their expense, may also apply for supplemental life insurance in a maximum amount of five times their annual salary. In addition, agents may pay for life insurance for their dependents at a cost of \$25,000 for a spouse/domestic partner and \$5000 per child under age 25.

M-Force also offers a unique Death and Dismemberment plan. Available at low cost to the agent, this plan can cover the agent and all qualified dependents, up to a maximum benefit of \$500,000. This plan covers any and all causes of death or dismemberment for anyone covered under the plan. Agents will find the definition used in this plan for 'dismemberment' to be remarkably comprehensive and tailored to fit the circumstances that misfortune and monsters may place them in.

The newest insurance program offered by M-Force is the Agent Assist Program (AAP), designed to meet the psy-

chological needs of the agent. Whether the agent needs counseling after witnessing a particularly brutal werewolf attack or help overcoming his alcoholism, AAP can help. The program is completely confidential and is entirely paid for by M-Force.

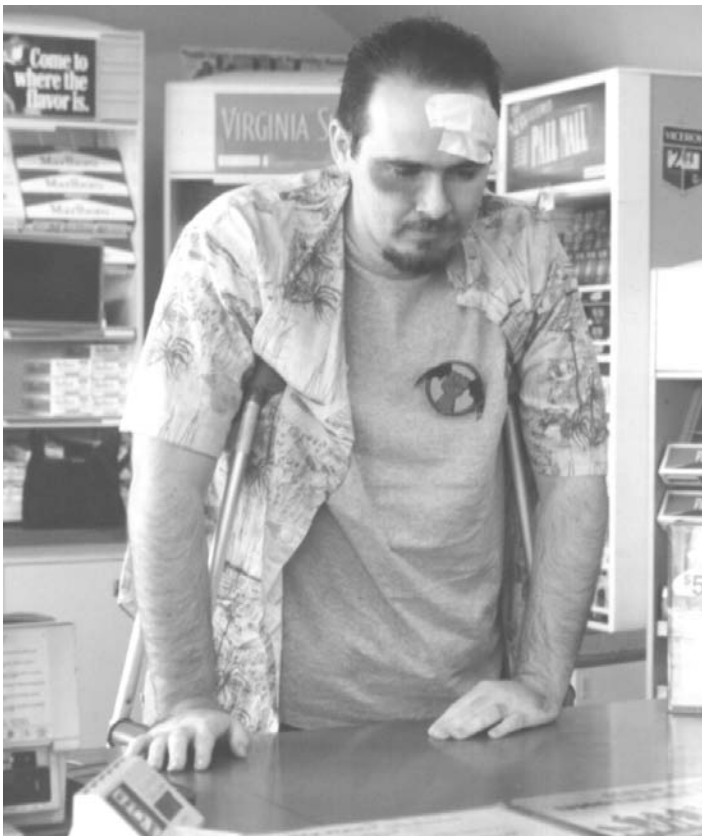
M-Force requires that all of its agents be covered under medical insurance. Agents who wish to waive the offered medical options due to coverage under a separate policy must provide proof of coverage. Agents may change their coverage options during a specified time each year, or any time after a major life event (marriage, birth of a child, death of a spouse, etc.).

Other Benefits

M-Force offers a 401(k) plan that is administered by a third party, with specific details varying from region to region. Considering that the average retirement age of a field agent is 42, M-Force realizes that a 401(k) plan will not be sufficient for the majority of its agents. Because of this, M-Force offers a strong pension fund for all field agents. An agent becomes vested in the program after five years of service. The agent becomes fully vested in the program after ten years of service. This means that he will receive his full paycheck for the rest of his natural life. Surviving dependents of vested agents may also qualify for this benefit in the event of the agent's demise.

For agents who wish to further their education, M-Force offers an education reimbursement program. M-Force will provide up to fifty percent reimbursement on tuition expenses from qualified programs and institutions. Children of agents disabled or killed in the line of duty are automatically enrolled in the Jackson Atchison Scholarship Fund. Several prominent universities around the country also have scholarship funds for M-Force agents and their children. Some of these were founded by wealthy alumni who served in M-Force, others by institutions grateful for services rendered.

Agents are entitled to discounts at numerous locations throughout the country. While M-Force has a list of several national merchandise and service providers who offer discounts to agents and their families, local merchants frequently offer agents discounts as well. Since 1982, no M-Force agent, retired or active duty, has ever been allowed to pay for his breakfast, lunch or dinner at Roy's Steamer, the finest hole in the wall in Miami, Florida. Similarly, Petrucho Hardware in Modesto, California has a special sale price on chainsaws and chainsaw accessories for M-Force agents: one dollar, 30-day terms available.





M-Force also makes discounts and free material available to its agents. The free subscription to *M-Forcer* magazine (see page XX) is one example. Additionally, agents and their families are always allowed free admission to the M-Force Museum (and can get discounted tickets for anyone else), as well as discounts on books, “Agents Only” apparel, and accessories from the M-Force online store.

RESPONSIBILITIES

In addition to respecting the law and upholding high ethical standards, M-Forcers must make a serious time commitment to the organization. Since the M-Force badge functions as a pager, agents are required to carry or wear the badge at all times. The badge can be carried in a pocket or purse while an agent is off-duty, but while an agent is on assignment he must wear the badge in a clearly visible location, in compliance with the requirements of FMHA-72.

Though the local offices try to consider agents’ regular work schedules, agents may be paged at any time. Once paged, an agent is expected to be ready for action and on his way toward the local office (or other location, depending on the page) within five minutes.

M-Force agents are required to take part in their local office’s activities even when they haven’t been paged. There are always jobs that need to be done, from washing the office’s vehicle to organizing a bake sale to filling in for a sick Watch Officer. As mentioned previously, most local offices hold weekly meetings which all agents are expected to attend if possible. The range of excuses accepted varies from office to office.

Because of the nature of monster hunting, M-Force requires that every agent undergo a complete physical at least once a year. The organization reserves the right to use the information from this physical to determine an

agent's fitness for duty. M-Force may also require additional physicals throughout the year, if deemed necessary.

Another annual requirement is the basic skills test, to make certain that every agent is up to snuff in marksmanship, self-defense, tactics, investigation, first aid, and monsterology. As with the annual physical, questionable performance on these tests can lead to an agent being taken off active duty until the deficiency is rectified.

HONORS

M-Force recognizes the special accomplishments of its agents in a variety of ways, ranging from certificates any business might award to decorations more reminiscent of those granted to military heroes.

Local and Regional Honors

Local Agents in Charge and Regional Directors are empowered to establish their own special awards for outstanding agents and teams. Typically, such an award will be in the form of a certificate, trophy, or plaque. These minor tokens of recognition are often awarded for exceptional performance in community service or fundraising activities, or as prizes in friendly competitions between teams or offices.

Mastery Certification

Above and beyond the normal training courses that M-Force offers (see Training, page XX), there exists the mastery series. Most every subject taught or certified by M-Force has an associated mastery course; thus, there are Master Marksmen, Master Divers, and even Master Instructors. Entry into such a course requires the permission of the local Agent in Charge, which will only be granted to those of demonstrated expertise in the appropriate field. Not everyone who enters a mastery course will complete it; the instructors are demanding and the washout rate is high. Those who do pass are recognized as the best of the best, and wear pins signifying their accomplishment (a different pin for each field) next to their M-Force badges.

Kallinikos Award

An agent's first monster kill is commemorated with this bronze medallion, bearing the image of Herakles slaying the Hydra. For most agents, this will be the first award they receive, and signals the end of "rookie" status.

Ace Status

An M-Force agent who participates in five monster kills is deemed an Ace (terminology borrowed, of course,

from the fighter pilots of World War I). A small silver pin in the shape of a sword signifies the accomplishment. Additional pins are awarded for every five additional kills; an agent sporting these may be termed a Double Ace, Triple Ace, and so forth. At twenty-five kills the decoration changes to a single, larger crimson sword, and the agent is deemed an Ace of Aces. No further decorations are granted beyond this point; every Ace of Aces has already stretched his luck quite far, and M-Force does not wish to encourage additional recklessness on the part of such valued agents.

The Bronze Shield

An agent who shows extraordinary valor in the protection of innocents, despite risk to his own life, is awarded this decoration. The pin appears exactly as the name of the award suggests, edged in crimson if the agent was seriously wounded in the act of heroism and in silver otherwise.

Gundersen Award

An award for truly exceptional valor in the field, created upon the death of M-Force hero Sam Gundersen to honor his life's accomplishments. Since that time (in the early 90s), only four Gundersens have been awarded, three of them posthumously. The medal is a combined sword-and-shield design in gold and silver. Posthumous awards have the crimson edge, as with the Bronze Shield.

Witterstadt Service Medal

This gold medal, engraved with a picture of Sadie Witterstadt and the motto "Facio Servitum," is awarded to agents for outstanding service in an administrative capacity. Generally this award is given to agents after a successful stint serving at headquarters.

Outstanding Regional Field Office

Each M-Force region grants this award to one of its offices each year. The method by which the award is granted differs from region to region - some have committees that review the deeds of each office, while others hold annual competitions like the one for the Fields Trophy (see below). The award itself is a plaque engraved with the office's name and the year of the award.

Fields Trophy

Each Outstanding Regional Field Office sends a team to Caledonia for the annual M-Force Anniversary Celebration. While there, the teams take part in a series of contests of skill, knowledge, and teamwork, ending with a run through the Haunted House. The victorious team is awarded

the Fields Trophy and the title of Outstanding National Field Office for the year. Each member of that office may thereafter add a gold ribbon bearing the year in red to his or her formal sash.

Order of Herakles

Agents who have given especially outstanding service to M-Force may be rewarded with membership in the Order of Herakles. Generally, this distinction is given to members only after years of service. There are exceptions, however, such as rookie agent Karen Holt, who was inducted after her first mission (in which she masterminded the plan that stopped the Grain Brain). A member of the Order of Herakles is identified by a gold pin in the shape of a laurel wreath. This pin may be worn at all times. Members of

the order are invited to meetings every three months at the Witterstadt mansion. The order also holds an annual ceremony in the mansion gardens on M-Force's anniversary, commemorating the monster-hunting heroes of the past.

List of the Fallen

As a final honor, of course, every M-Force agent who dies in the line of duty is memorialized with a plaque next to the statue of the Fallen M-Forcer on the Witterstadt Manor grounds. In addition to the agent's name and dates of birth and death, the plaque bears representations of the pins indicating the other major honors the agent earned during his service.

M-FORCE COURSE LIST

Following is a partial list of courses offered by the Training department. The list focuses on courses commonly taken by active field agents, and should not be taken as exhaustive. Training is always expanding its course selection, and some electives may be available only in certain regions or at certain times of year, depending on instructors' schedules.

Course Requirements:

- * - Required of all M-Force agents during initial training
- ** - Required of all M-Force agents within 6 months of completing their initial training
- # - Required for all M-Force team leaders

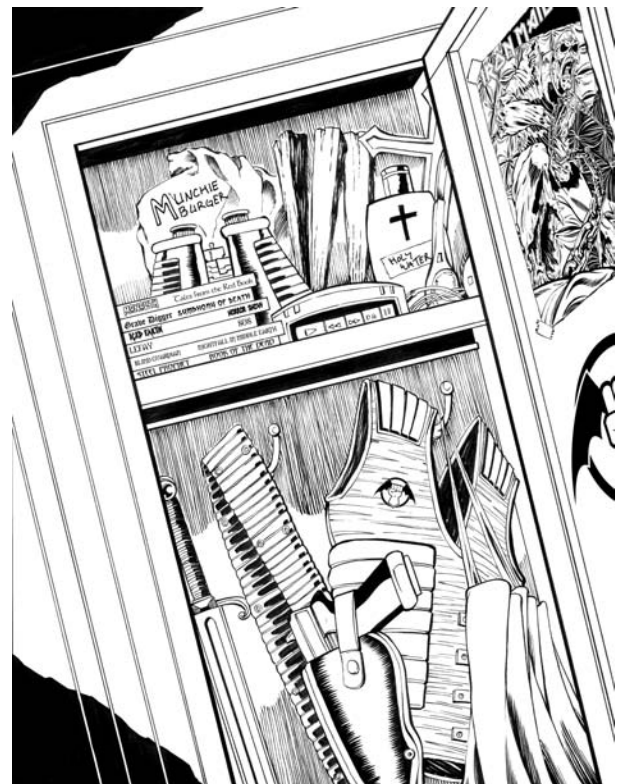
M-Force Specific Courses

- MFOR 101 - Introduction to M-Force *
- MFOR 201 - M-Force Headquarters Defense (required for Caledonia staff)
- MFOR 301 - M-Force Team Leader #
- MFOR 302 - Local Office Administration and Management
- MFOR 501 - Instructor Certification in Leadership & Administration

Monsterology Courses

- MON 101 - Basic Monsterology 1 *
- MON 102 - Basic Monsterology 2 **
- MON 201 - Predatory Psychology
- MON 211 - Advanced Monsterology 1 #
- MON 212 - Advanced Monsterology 2 #
- MON 401 - Advanced Monster Psychology
- MON 410 - Focus on the (fill-in-the-blank)
- MON 501 - Instructor Certification in Monsterology

(cont. on next page)



COURSE LIST (cont.)

Medical Courses

MED 101 - Basic First Aid *

MED 201 - Intermediate First Aid

MED 301 - Advanced First Aid

MED 310 - Monster Attacks: Considerations for the EMT

MED 311 - Monster Attacks: Considerations for the Trauma Nurse

MED 315 - Monster Attacks: Considerations for the Medical Billing Professional

MED 401 - Monster Attacks: Considerations for the Emergency-Room Physician

MED 402 - Monster Attacks: Considerations for the Trauma Surgeon

MED 501 - Instructor Certification in First Aid

Operations Courses

OPS 101 – Psychology of the Monster Victim

OPS 111 - Tactical Radio Operations

OPS 201 - Crowd Control and Incident Management

OPS 211 - Advanced Tactical Radio Operations

Investigation Courses

INV 101 - Investigation 1 *

INV 102 - Investigation 2 **

INV 201 - Advanced Search Planning #

INV 202 - Remote Sensor Techniques

INV 211 - Investigation Photography and Recording

INV 221 - Crime Scene Investigation 1

INV 222 - Crime Scene Investigation 2

INV 230 - Victim Interview Techniques

INV 301 - Monsters: CSI considerations

INV 320 - Monsters and the Arson Investigator

INV 501 - Instructor Certification in Investigation

Tactics and Firearms Courses

TAC 101 - Basic Firearms & Tactics *

TAC 102 - Basic Close Quarters Battle **

TAC 111 - Basic Self-Defense 1 *

TAC 112 - Basic Self-Defense 2 **

TAC 121 - Tactical SMG

TAC 122 - Tactical Rifle

TAC 123 - Tactical Shotgun

TAC 124 - Tactical Grenadier

TAC 202 - Advanced CQB #

TAC 211 - Advanced Self-Defense

TAC 222 - Heavy Weapons

TAC 223 - Special Purpose Weapons

TAC 231 - Basic Demolitions

TAC 251 - Monster Hunting in the Urban Environment

TAC 252 - Monster Hunting in the Forested Environment

TAC 253 - Monster Hunting in the Desert Environment

TAC 254 - Monster Hunting in the Cold Weather Environment

TAC 255 - Monster Hunting in the Mountain Environment

TAC 256 - Monster Hunting in the Wetland Environment

TAC 257 - Monster Hunting in the Ocean Environment

TAC 303 - Airmobile Tactics

TAC 321 - Tactical Medicine for the Medical Professional

TAC 331 - Advanced Demolitions

TAC 350 - Monster Hunting Combat Diver

TAC 501 - Instructor Certification in Tactics & Firearms

PART TWO: THE GAME



CHAPTER 8

CREATING YOUR CHARACTER



Whether you're making a player character or a gamemaster character, there are a number of things you need to know about the character before you ever start describing him in terms of game rules. While the aspects of a character described by game rules can be important during an M-Force mission, most of the really important things about a character—his personality, past, friends, hopes, dreams, and goals—don't have a space on the character sheet. Without these things, you don't really have a character, just a list of numbers and maybe a boring stereotype.

DEFINING THE CAMPAIGN

M-Force allows for a huge range in character groups, from backwoods rednecks and thrill-seeking college kids to the crack teams of the Atlanta office. Before you can really start making your character, you'll need to get together with the rest of the group and decide what mood and tone you want for your game. While your GM may have some ideas, it's important for everyone involved to have input into the style of the campaign. The questions below should help you get started. As you discuss them, you and your fellow players will probably come up with some ideas for possible characters.

Where is the group based? In addition to coming up with the location of the local office and figuring out what regional office it operates under, you might want to come up with details about some of the important GMCs. Decide how they expect their agents to behave (and maybe how much they'll let their agents get away with). Maybe the AIC is an aspiring stand-up comic who's always trying out new material on his agents, or the Supply Officer requires that the proper requisition forms be submitted in triplicate before issuing even the most routine equipment. You might also want to come up with some basics about the local office, the

quality of its supplies, and what the locals (law enforcement agents, politicians, and average citizens) think of M-Force.

What types of missions does the group prefer? Do the players prefer solving mysteries and puzzles or simply kicking monster butt with great big guns? In addition to giving the GM an idea of the types of missions the group will enjoy, answering this question will help determine what types of characters are most suitable for the game. You might also want to decide the baseline experience of the group. Are they hardened veterans in the monster fighting game, or fresh out of the academy?

What is the tone of the game? Does the group joke around a lot, or is monster hunting grim and serious work for them? Will high adventure or gloomy fatalism be the general mood? While your game can easily feature a wide variety of tones, it's a good idea to decide right up front what mood will predominate. It may also be a good idea to come up with a few themes (loss, pain, strength, ingenuity) that the group would like to explore during the campaign.



Allison, Jim, Nick, Sarah, and Tony have decided to play a game of M-Force. Tony, always the first to buy and read up on hot new games, has agreed to be the GM. He calls a meeting to discuss the game and make characters. After explaining the basic concepts of M-Force to the players, the group begins discussing the type of game they'd like to play.

TONY: I'll let you know up front that I've been looking into a lot of folklore, and I'm hoping to work some classic monsters into the campaign.

NICK: You mean like Frankenstein, the Wolfman, and Chucky, right?

TONY: Actually I was thinking of things like succubi and black dogs, but I suppose there might be room for a werewolf or twelve here and there—though M-Force werewolves aren't exactly what you'd call "wolfmen," they're more like. . .

SARAH: Okay, we get the point. Old World nasties. That works for me. We can still kick their butts; it'll just be dustier.

ALLISON: I was kind of hoping we wouldn't be playing another straightforward hack-and-slash. I mean, after the last game we played. . . .

JIM: Yeah, yeah, we know. Your herald never got a chance to do anything. You want to play a game where the PCs spend their time hosting elaborate dinner parties and debating 19th century light fixtures.

After a ten-minute discussion of the last campaign, "Blood, Guts, and a Herald," Tony finally leads the discussion back to M-Force.

TONY: Anyway, I was hoping that this game would be a bit less violent. Fighting monsters is the primary focus of M-Force, though, so there should be plenty of opportunities for action.

ALLISON: That sounds like fun. I like some action sometimes, but I'd like to get a chance to solve puzzles and role-play a little bit, too.

SARAH: I like the non-action stuff okay, as long as we get to kick some butt every couple of sessions.

JIM: Every session would be better, but I suppose I can live with every other.

TONY: How about you, Nick?

NICK: Hey, you know me—just happy to be invited.

TONY: All right then, we know we want a more intellectually and emotionally stimulating campaign than the last one, but still enough action to keep Sarah and Jim interested. I was hoping to work with the symbolism of some of the monsters—why they exist, how they'd evolve over time, things like that. So I was hoping for a more-or-less serious tone.

ALLISON: That sounds like fun, but I don't think we should be all grim and study-y.

SARAH: That's for sure. I don't want to play a bunch of old fogies. We can be fun-loving without things getting too silly.

JIM: Yeah, like *Reservoir Dogs*!

NICK: Only hopefully without the part where all the main characters die at the end.

As the discussion continues, the group slowly settles on a playing style and fleshes out a few details of the campaign. They want the overall tone of the game to be on the light, action-movie side, but not silly. They decide that movies like From Dusk Till Dawn and Scream will provide the baseline tone for the game. The agents will be young, just starting out as M-Force members. All of the other teams working out of the local office are considerably more experienced, and the PC group will come to be known as "the kids" by other agents. They'll usually get the missions that the old-timers think are too easy or boring to bother with. The group wants an office that's somewhere fun and interesting. Someone suggests Florida as the location, which reminds Tony of the entry about "Parrotland" in Key West. After hearing the details, the group decides that the Florida maritime office is just the sort of local office they want. They decide that the AIC is Frank, a middle-aged fisherman/beach bum. The counselor/chaplain for the office is an aging hippie named Rainbow. While most of the agents operating out of "Parrotland" will be fairly laid-back, Nick thinks there should be a few agents who are constantly giving "the kids" grief. From this concept Ted "The Terminator" Loffleholtz is born.

CHARACTER CONCEPT

The first step to creating a good character is coming up with a character concept. Think of the character concept as how your character would be described in the *dramatis personae* of a play or the blurb on the back of a video box. While a good character idea will be more than just a quick sentence, the character concept boils your character down to the bare essentials and gives you a starting point from which to develop the character. A strong character concept will help you create a character who is a complete person rather than just a mishmash of neat ideas and cool abilities.

When creating your character concept, it's a good idea to think in terms of archetypes—types of characters common throughout fiction. For example, your character may be “a hard-boiled private detective,” “a plucky runaway with a heart of gold,” or “a journalist in search of the truth.” Obviously, you won't want your character to be a carbon copy of some established fictional character, but a strong basic concept will help you make your character unique and interesting while keeping him coherent. As you think about your character concept, you'll probably want to discuss the idea with the other players. That way, you can be sure your character won't be too similar to that of another player, and that he will fit in with the rest of the group.

BRAINSTORMING

Once you've got a basic character concept, you can work on the details. The brainstorming questions below should help you get started. Don't try to fit everything together into a perfect whole right away. Instead, just come up with a basic idea of what the character's life is like, and jot down the things that you really want to work in. As you go along, you'll get a better idea of what your character's all about.

Where does your character live? A person's home says a lot about him, and your character is no different. In addition to the town, city, or state, you need to know a little bit about the character's home. Does he live in his parents' basement, a run-down apartment, or a palatial estate? How is the place decorated? Is it messy or clean? Does anyone live with the character? Is the character happy with his current residence?

Nick decides that his character, whom he thinks he'll name Al, isn't very happy with his living conditions. Al has roommates he gets along with, but doesn't really like, and the place is a dump. Nick writes “Lives in a dump. Nothing in common with roomies” on a sheet of paper.

What does your character do for a living? Like it or not, people are often defined by their jobs. A character's



job determines where he spends most of his time, defines the types of people he encounters on a daily basis, and determines the kind of lifestyle he's able to afford. In addition to knowing your character's basic job description or position, you may want to consider conditions at the workplace, the character's work schedule, and his relationship with supervisors, clients, and co-workers. You'll also need to think about how these things affect the character's personality and mood when he's off the job. A character who works the night shift, for instance, may have trouble staying awake during M-Force briefings, and a character who works in a loud factory may be a little hard of hearing.

Al's job, Nick decides, is just as impressive as his apartment. Nick knows he works at some sort of dull, low-paying job, but he's not sure exactly what Al does just yet. He writes “Crappy Job—clerk, flipping burgers, pizza guy” on his brainstorming sheet.

What does your character do in his spare time? Knowing your character's hobbies can help you get a better grip

on his skills, contacts, and general outlook on life. A character who spends his time working out at the Y will be in better physical shape than one who sits around watching the tube. Likewise, a person who spends a lot of time hanging out in bars will probably have more casual acquaintances than one who spends his spare time reading trashy romance novels. Knowing what your character does in his spare time will give you some insight into his tastes, values, and personal philosophy.

Nick thinks pool would be a nice hobby for Al—it fits the whole “regular guy” concept nicely. He also decides Al likes working on classic cars. Unfortunately, since Al’s got a crappy job, this hobby is mostly theoretical. Al spends his spare time reading Hot Rods magazine, but can’t actually afford a hot rod of his own. Nick doesn’t think either of these pursuits screams “loser” quite enough, so he adds “comic book geek” to his list of potential hobbies for Al.

Whom does your character know? While the previous questions may have answered this one to some extent, there are probably still other important people in the character’s life. Decide who your character’s family is and how he interacts with them. Does he have dinner with his mother every Wednesday night? Does he have a sister he hasn’t spoken to in 20 years? Does he have kids? You’ll also want to consider the character’s friends and acquaintances. Does he keep in touch with his old army buddies? Is Mrs. Weinberg in apartment C constantly trying to set him up with her daughter? While you don’t need a comprehensive list of all the character’s friends and associates, knowing a few of the people who are important to him or whom he sees regularly can help bring the character to life.

Al’s only been in Key West for a few years, so he doesn’t know that many people—his roommates, a few guys from the pool hall, and some people from work are about the extent of his circle of friends here. He also has family and friends wherever he grew up.

What was your character’s childhood like? Experiences in childhood can often play an important role in a person’s life. When creating your character, consider where he grew up, how he interacted with his family and friends, and whether there were any important or traumatic events that may still affect the character’s worldview. A character whose brother drowned when he was ten may avoid boating or swimming, and a person who grew up around animals may keep a number of pets.

Nick decides that Al’s childhood was relatively normal. He grew up in the suburbs in someplace fairly boring—he’s thinking Ohio. Al’s love of cars comes from his father, who owns a garage. Al’s mother also worked, but Nick’s not exactly sure what she did for a living.

Did they laugh at you in high school? A person’s adolescence is often very important in shaping his outlook on the world. Was your character a rebellious youth or a model student? Is he reminded of his high school sweetheart every time he sees a redhead? Does he hate bullies because he used to get beaten up a lot? Has an adolescence full of role-playing games stunted his ability to interact in social situations? Knowing a bit about the character’s teen years can be very helpful.

Like his childhood, Al’s adolescence was unremarkable. Al was an average student. He had friends, but wasn’t one of the popular kids. He played basketball in high school, but not that well, spending most of his time on the bench. The only thing anyone noticed about Al was his car—a classic Mustang that he and his dad restored. Al totaled the car when he was 19. This is the single greatest tragedy of Al’s life.

What is the character’s educational and vocational background? Did your character graduate from high school? Has he attended college or served in the armed forces? If so, what was his field of study or specialty? What kind of jobs has your character had? How did he get his current job? Does he rely on his skills, his connections, or something else to make his way through life? Knowing the answers to these questions can help you get a better handle on the character’s skills and abilities. It can also help you to better understand his personality and even his beliefs.

Since Al was never a great student, college didn’t really seem like the best option for him. He spent about a year after high school working in his dad’s shop. Eventually, this got boring. So he joined the army.

What were the major turning points in your character’s life? Knowing the big events in a character’s life will help you better understand his personality. Maybe a bitter divorce is the root of his misogynistic tendencies, or he was involved in a terrible car crash five years ago and still gets edgy when he’s in a speeding automobile. Consider events that may have led to the character’s beliefs, fears, and pet peeves.

Nick decides that Al nearly died in the car wreck that destroyed his Mustang. This caused him to seriously think about his life, and he decided that being a grease monkey wasn't much of a future. Al needed a career, and those TV commercials made it seem like the armed forces were a good option for someone like him. Unfortunately, Al soon realized that he didn't have the discipline and drive necessary to excel in the military. Rather than return home with his tail between his legs, Al decided to make a brand new life for himself. He'd been briefly stationed in Florida, so as soon as he was

able to leave the army, he headed for Key West, dreaming of sailboats and bikini-clad coeds.

Who are the character's role models? A person who idolizes Richard Pryor will probably have a better sense of humor than one who wants to be Dirty Harry. Consider the people who have influenced the character's ideas, personality, and beliefs. Maybe the character's religious views are shaped by his grandmother's unwavering faith, or he gets all his political views direct from Rush Limbaugh without having to think for himself.

Nick realizes that historical and political figures probably haven't influenced Al very much. Al's role models are most likely figures from pop culture. Nick eventually decides that Al's heroes are Bruce Willis in *Die Hard* ("just a regular guy, doing what he has to do"), Dante from *Clerks* ("I feel his pain"), and Superman ("because, well, he's Superman").

What is important to the character? Does the character have strong views on any political or religious issue? Is a certain value, such as friendship or loyalty, important to him? Are his children the most important people in his life? Knowing what the character cares about will affect the decisions he makes and the way he reacts to certain situations.

While Al doesn't have any lofty philosophies or political agenda, Nick decides that he's a good person who wants to do the right thing (he doesn't always know exactly what that is, but he tries). Al doesn't like to see anyone suffer, and tries to help people, even complete strangers, in any way he can. He's a prime mark for panhandlers and a regular at blood drives.

What are your character's strengths? What does your character do well? Does he have any mental, physical, or social advantages that make his life easier? Does he have a knack for any particular activity or ability? Does his personality make certain kinds of interaction easier for him than for most people?

Above all, Al is a dependable guy. He may not excel at anything, but he can always be counted on to be there and do a decent job. He doesn't cause trouble and he takes things as they come. Al's also willing to help other people out when he can—he'll work your shift when you're sick, give you a ride to the airport, or help you move.

What are your character's flaws? What does your character have trouble doing? Does he have any physical



handicaps, mental problems, or social stigmas that he must overcome? Does the character have any weaknesses, addictions, or bad habits? Does he have any annoying or obnoxious personality traits? What kinds of things make the character uncomfortable?

While Al's dependable, he's not especially driven. He doesn't tend to think long-term, and he usually does what's expected of him, but not much more. If Al gets a promotion or raise on the job, it's probably because of how long he's been there, not because the boss has noticed he's doing a great job. Al also has trouble saying no to people, sometimes putting other people's needs above his own.

How would the character's friends, family, or co-workers describe him? Is your character a "nice, quiet young man—sort of a loner"? A party animal? Serious and determined? Decide how other people view your character. Keep in mind that different people may see different sides of him.

Unless Al's an active part of their life at the time, most people would have to think for a few minutes before they remembered him. Once they did, they'd describe him as "reliable," "dependable," and maybe "loyal"—kind of like a good dog.

What does the character want out of life? Does your character crave power? Respect? Money? Would he be happy spending all his time fly fishing or watching old movies? If he had a million dollars, what would he do with it? Decide what your character wants out of life, so you will be able to play him accordingly.

Al wants "to have a good life," though he has absolutely no idea what that means. It involves some kind of family, a house with a pool table and a shop for working on old cars, but that's all he's really sure about. If Al had a million dollars, he'd probably end up giving a lot of it to charity, even though he wouldn't necessarily say that if someone asked "what would you do with a million dollars?"

TYING IT ALL TOGETHER

Now it's time to take the ideas you've come up with and work them into a cohesive character. Work from your notes from the brainstorming section and start filling in details, refining ideas, and throwing out the stuff that doesn't work. Some things to consider when refining your character are discussed below.

Your Character's Place in the World

You'll want to figure out how your character fits into the game world. Where does he live? Who are his friends? What does he do for a living? The more you know about your character's day-to-day existence, the easier it will be to make your character come to life during the game. Make sure that these details fit well with the character concept. For example, your "out-of-work actor" probably doesn't have his own TV series. Don't think about your character in terms of M-Force just yet. Most M-Forcers are part-timers, and should have lives outside of monster hunting.

At this point, Nick starts filling in some of the details about Al's daily existence. It's not pretty. Al is a pizza delivery guy for Ike's Pizza. He drives a beat-up 1989 Ford Escort and lives in a run-down house. His roommates are Tom, who works at the pizza parlor with Al, and Tom's two high school buddies, Bob and "Monkey Boy." The roommates spend most of their time smoking pot and playing video games. When Al's not at work, he's a regular at Big Ed's Beer Palace. Big Ed's is a sleazy place, but it's close to Al's house and has some of the best pool tables in town.

Establishing Background Information

While knowing your character's current lot in life is very important, knowing how he got there can often be vital to making the character seem real. You'll want to consider the character's education and training, his childhood, and important events in his past. In many cases, the basics will be obvious—you'll just need to fill in the details. For example, if your character is a lawyer, you'll know he's completed law school and passed the bar—but knowing his *alma mater* may give you a bit more insight into the character. A Harvard man will probably have a different outlook on life from a person who went to a state school. In other cases, the details will not be as obvious, but may be much more important. For example, your "billionaire playboy" who lived in a mobile home until he won the lottery will be very different from one who comes from old money.

Nick has a good handle on Al's background from the brainstorming session. He details Al's family a bit more, deciding his mother was a high school teacher and that he has a younger sister.

Character Beliefs and Values

Your character's personal beliefs and values will have an impact on his personality and outlook on life. Consider your character's political beliefs, spiritual life, and personal view of important issues. Does your character have fanatical or radical beliefs? Does he go to church? Is he a



Nick already has a good idea of Al's strong points and character flaws from his brainstorming session. He can't think of much to add.

Personality

By now, you should have a good idea of what your character is like, how he spends his time, and what he loves or hates. With these in mind, it's time to decide how your character interacts with other people. Is he easy-going or argumentative? Does he like playing practical jokes? Is he hot-tempered or calm and collected? What makes the character mad? Don't worry about coming up with every aspect of your character's personality right now—most of it will come out and become better defined as you play the game. Just have an idea of what others' first impression of him will be like.

For the most part, only people who know Al well have any idea that he has a personality at all. He doesn't make a strong first impression (or much of a first impression at all, for that matter). People who know him well would describe him as a nice guy who has an almost supernatural talent for lame jokes.

Goals and Motivations

What does the character want in life, and why does he want it? Everybody wants something—material wealth, true love, whatever. Decide what your character really wants and how hard he's willing to work for it. Think about his plans for the future (both short and long term), his hopes and his dreams. Consider his fears and concerns about achieving those goals. Does he want to be remembered as a great hero? A good father? A talented artist? Knowing what your character wants will help you play him better.

Al doesn't know what he wants, much less how to get it. He has a vague concept of "living the good life," but hasn't worked out the specifics. Right now, he's just sort of drifting along. Nick's hoping that as the campaign unfolds Al will find some direction, but he doesn't have any definite plans for the character at this point.

JOINING M-FORCE

By now, you should have a well-thought-out and complete character. The final step is to figure out your character's role in M-Force. You'll want to figure out why he joined M-Force in the first place, as well as his status in the organization.

registered voter, and if so, what party does he vote for? What's important to the character? Is he active in any political organizations? Knowing these things will help bring your character to life.

Al lives by the Golden Rule and tends to see the best in everyone. This makes him come across as a little naïve at times. Al votes regularly because it's his "duty as a citizen" and is registered as a Democrat. Al's parents were Catholic, so he guesses he is too, though he doesn't actively practice his religion. Al likes to help others, but limits his community service to things that don't require much effort.

Character Strengths and Flaws

Everybody has strong points and weaknesses. Think about what your character excels at doing, as well as what he's not very good at. What personality traits of the character do others admire or loathe? Does he have any extremely useful or detrimental characteristics? What about special or unusual advantages or hindrances? Everybody has good qualities and shortcomings, and you should know those of your character.



Reason For Joining

People join M-Force for many different reasons. The character's background, personality, and lifestyle may already suggest a few possible reasons why he would join. If this isn't the case, look over the list of common reasons for joining below. Most likely, one of them will fit with your character concept.

For the Money and Benefits: M-Force agents aren't paid very well, but some people welcome the extra income. More often, people join M-Force for the comprehensive benefits package that comes with membership. This is especially the case for people who are self-employed, or who work for companies that don't offer insurance and other benefits.

For the Experience: Some people, especially those in or just out of college, join M-Force to help build their resumes. While the skills learned in M-Force are somewhat specialized, agents do gain discipline, leadership skills, and teamwork abilities that can be useful in the work force. Many employers regard M-Force service as a valuable asset in an employee.

For the Adventure: At any time, an M-Force agent might be sent halfway around the world to battle unknown beasts from the fifth dimension. As a result, many people join M-Force in search of adventure. Recruiters are careful to make sure that such thrillseekers are aware of the potential danger of the job.

To Complement Their Day Job: Scientists, paranormal investigators, and law enforcement officers often join M-Force because it can provide them with skills and opportunities useful for advancing their regular jobs. M-Force offers a number of grants and fellowships, and membership in the organization can certainly help a researcher's chances of receiving those funds.

Sense of Duty: Many people join M-Force simply because it's The Right Thing to Do. Some people join M-Force because the organization has helped them or someone they love, or because they have had first-hand experiences with monsters. Others join because they see it as a way to help their fellow man and make a difference.

For Publicity: A few celebrities are M-Force agents because membership is good press. While such people rarely actually engage in field work, M-Force is more than happy to let them join because of the publicity and monetary donations they provide. Even lesser-known entertainers can benefit from M-Force publicity, as agents often get a chance to show off their talents at M-Force fundraising events.

As a Career: M-Force rarely recruits full-time field agents. A full-time field position with M-Force is usually the result of promotion. Therefore, anyone who wants a full-time job with the organization must start out as a part-

timer. Additionally, many people seeking full-time support positions in M-Force join on as field agents to help them get a jump on the competition.

Al's ultimate reason for joining M-Force should fall into the "Sense of Duty" category, but Nick doesn't think Al would have the motivation to join up on his own. Something has to have happened to show Al that there are monsters out there and that somebody has to do something about it. Nick decides that Al had a run-in with a monster, was helped by M-Force, and decided that he wanted to help fight the bad guys. After thinking about it for a while, Nick decides that Al met a girl, Emma, when he first moved to Key West. They went out a few times and things seemed to be going well—until she revealed herself to be a demon and expressed a serious desire to eat Al's soul. Al called M-Force, and Rainbow (the chaplain of the Key West office) managed to banish the demon. Al joined M-Force shortly thereafter.

Agent Status

All M-Force agents are required to complete a basic training course before becoming active members. While the preferred method of training is for an aspiring agent to attend the M-Force Academy, this is not always possible. A person may also join M-Force as a probationary agent. Such agents get most of their training locally (in night classes, weekend seminars, and the like). Probationary agents are allowed to go along on missions only after passing basic competency tests in self-defense and firearms use. They are not considered full agents, however, until they've attended a one-week course at the Caledonia campus.

Most M-Force player characters will be probationary agents or agents who have just completed training. You'll need to decide which category your character falls into, as well as whether he attended the M-Force Academy or got his training as a probationary agent. This is also a good time to determine your character's M-Force elective skill. This is a free skill that M-Force agents pick up during their training. M-Force elective skills are listed in the next chapter. If your character trained as a probationary agent, his elective skill will have to be something that he could have learned locally.

If your character has been with M-Force a while, you'll need to have a vague idea of how many and what kinds of missions he's been on, and what kinds of monsters he's encountered (if any). Last but not least, figure out what role M-Force plays in the character's daily life. How far

away is the nearest field office? Does he hang out there in his spare time? Does he check in regularly at the local office, or does he only show up when he gets a call to action?

Nick decides that Al got his training as a probationary member, and has just completed the final training session in Caledonia. Since Al likes fast cars, his elective skill will be Emergency Driving, which he learned through a training partnership between M-Force and a nearby police academy. He's been on one mission so far, but it turned out to be a false alarm (the culprit was an alligator, not a sea monster). Al tries to check in at the local office a couple of times a week, depending on his work schedule. When he visits, he does whatever he can to help out, from manning the phones to cleaning the weapons. His current pet project is fixing up the office's van, which has seen better days.

Character Review

Before you start assigning numbers for your character, you'll want to go over the character with the GM. You don't have to share every little bit of background information you've come up with, but you should hit the high points and point out any monster or M-Force-related information to make sure that these fit the GM's campaign. You'll also want to point out any story hooks, important NPCs, or other information that could be important to the game. Finally, talk to the GM about what you'd like the character to do during the game, especially his role on the team and what kinds of subplots you'd like to explore. As you describe the character, the GM will probably suggest minor changes, fill in world-related details, and ask for clarifications. She may also veto things that just don't fit the world or the campaign.

Nick and Tony get together to discuss Nick's character. Tony likes the basic concept, and doesn't feel that anything's out of place, though he does prod Nick for a bit more information about Al's army service to see if there are any potential story arcs there. Other than detailing where Al was stationed in Florida (which Tony secretly notes as a potential "friends in danger" hook), they don't find much there. Both agree that the demon could figure out a way back and come after Al, and Nick's idea of a "delivering pizza to a monster" adventure intrigues Tony. Tony also asks Nick to come up with a few more details about Al's sister, and suggests that he might want to introduce her as a GMC at some point. Nick tells Tony that he doesn't want Al to be an obvious hero—he pulls his own weight, but should rarely (if ever) save the day single-handedly. As the campaign plays out, Nick wants Al to

find some sort of goal in life. Tony thinks this is a good idea, but warns Nick that this will mostly be up to him. Finally, Tony gives Nick some details about the people at the local M-Force office, since Nick's character has been hanging around there for a while.

Once you and the GM are satisfied with the character, and everybody else has discussed their characters with the GM, it's a good idea for everyone to get together and describe their characters. You might notice some possible non-M-Force links between the PCs. While such connections aren't essential to a game like *M-Force*, they can add depth to the group dynamic and give the characters additional reasons to stick together.

After the characters have all been created, the group gets together to "introduce" their characters to the group. Sarah and Allison have already decided that their characters, Alicia and Susan, know each other from school, where they're both juniors. They were roommates their freshman year, but don't really travel in the same social circles these days. There's a good chance Al has delivered a pizza or two to the girls, but they probably wouldn't recognize one another on the street. Jim's character, Sid, is the lead singer of a local band, which has played at several Key West bars, including Big Ed's Beer Palace. All three of the other characters know who Sid is, or at least will recognize the name of the band (*Knife in the Brain*) when they hear it. The general consensus among players (with the exception of Jim) is that *Knife in the Brain* sucks.

WHAT TO DO WITH ALL OF THIS

Don't feel the need to introduce every detail of your character's life as soon as play begins. Let the other players naturally learn such information. From time to time, you may decide that your original ideas don't quite make sense or could be better. Don't worry—as long as you don't contradict established facts or alter the basic concept or personality of your character, no one will be the wiser.

CHAPTER 9

THE NUMBERS



Now that you know everything there is to know about your character, it's time to convert that information into game mechanics. Each character is represented by the words and numbers on an agent's sheet (see page 188 for a sample agent sheet.) To keep things clear we refer to the words on the character sheet—such as Body, Job, and Gimmick—as *Words*. The numbers attached to these Words are referred to as *Numbers*. This chapter will tell you how to fill in Numbers next to the Words. Keep in mind that your character sheet will never fully describe every aspect of your character. There are many things that simply cannot be quantified in terms of game mechanics. The *M-Force* game system is designed to give players and GMs an understanding of the characters' basic abilities and determine the outcome of common game events. Bringing your character to life and making him believable requires role-playing, not dice rolls.

YUM YUM CHARACTER CREATION SYSTEM

Every *M-Force* character starts the game with a certain number of points called Yum Yums (YY), the exact number of which is determined by the GM. A player uses Yum Yums to “buy” abilities and skills for his character. The cost

ROUNDING

Some of the *M-Force* rules require the character to divide one of his Numbers in half. When this is required, always round down. For example, $1/2$ of 9 is 4.

The GM may also place limits on the type of abilities or minimum/maximum scores a character may have. If you have any questions about character creation, talk them over with the GM. You and the GM should also work together to define your character's Job, Gimmick, Weakness, and Skills.

Tony wants the PCs in his game to be inexperienced as *M-Force* agents, so he gives them 75 Yum Yums to spend. He

doesn't have any limits on scores other than those already mentioned in the game rules. Players must spend at least 70 of their starting Yum Yums. Leftovers can be eaten or put into the character's Yum Yum pool.

Body, Brain, and Nerve

Body, Brain, and Nerve describe a character's natural abilities and aptitudes. Most people have Body, Brain, and Nerve scores between 6 and 16, with 11 being an average score. *M-Force* Agents are required to have an 8 or better in all three scores. These three Words describe the character's overall physical, mental, and emotional/social condition. In order to describe extreme variations within one of these three areas (for example, a character who is physically fit but extremely clumsy), you'll need to choose an appropriate Gimmick or Weakness. The Yum Yum costs for Body, Brain, and Nerve are equal to the character's Number in that Word. For example, a Body of 15 costs 15 YY.

Body is the character's overall physical condition. This includes brute strength, hand-eye coordination, manual dexterity, agility, and general health. It also describes a character's basic physical appearance, though it should be noted that personal hygiene, mode of dress, and even attitude can make a person seem much more or less attractive than he really is. If a character wants to break down a door or dodge a monster's attack, he'll use his Body score.

Nick decides that since Al was a mediocre athlete in high school and a member of the armed forces, he's in slightly above-average physical condition. A 13 Body Number seems appropriate. This costs 13 Yum Yums, leaving Nick 62 points to spend.

Brain describes a person's mental abilities. Common sense, memory, general knowledge, and the ability to think abstractly and solve problems are all aspects of a character's Brain. Brain also covers a character's perception of his environment and surroundings. If a character needs to spot a hidden object or remember the 23rd President of the U.S., he rolls his Brain score.

Al's not stupid, but he's not the brightest apple in the bunch, either. Nick decides that his Brain score is an average 12, costing 12 Yum Yums and leaving 50 points to spend.

Nerve describes the character's emotional and social abilities. Characters with high nerve scores are cool under pressure, have good instincts, and know how to interact with people. Nerve also describes a character's willpower and ability to cope with fear or stress. A character uses his Nerve Number when he wants to impress the ladies or face down a monster.

Al's doesn't really make an impression on people, and tends to be a little naïve and socially awkward. Nick decides that his Nerve score will be a bit below average, at 10. This costs 10 YY, bringing him down to 40.

Jobs

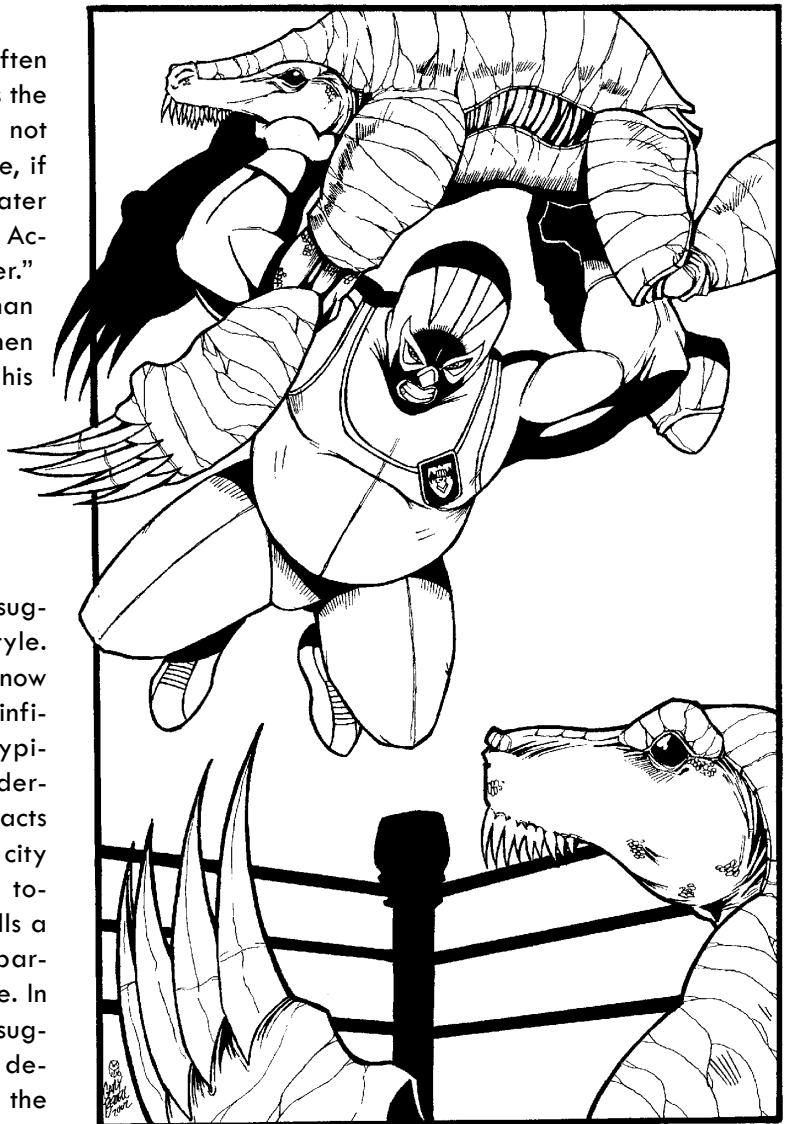
A character's *Job* describes what he does. This often means what he does for a living, but that is not always the case. Sometimes, a character's current profession may not adequately reflect his skills and training. For example, if your character is waiting tables but has studied theater and performed in a number of plays, "Out-of-Work Actor" is probably a more appropriate Job than "Waiter." Likewise, "Former Army General" is a better choice than "Retiree" to describe your ex-military character. When deciding whether your character's day job should be his Job, it's a good idea to consider the level of training needed for the job. For instance, the "Cook" Job isn't necessary to flip burgers at the local fast food joint, but if the character is the head chef at a fancy restaurant, that probably needs to be his Job.

A Job is more than just a set of skills—it often suggests or defines a character's role in society and lifestyle. While someone with the Job "Detective" does indeed know how to solve mysteries, fire a gun, and prove marital infidelities, there's a lot more to the Job. For instance, a typical detective has an office, a car, and probably an underappreciated secretary. He is also likely to have contacts among both the police and the criminal element of the city in which he works. The player and GM should work together to determine what trappings, benefits, and skills a job entails. They should also consider ways in which a particular character departs from the standard archetype. In some cases, the setting and the name of the Job will suggest these differences. For example, a modern police detective and a Victorian inspector have approximately the

same job description and similar skills, but their trappings and methods are very different.

Once you've decided on a Job, you'll need to decide how good the character is at doing his Job. Jobs have a Number between 6 (world's worst) and 19 (world's best). The average professional will have a Job Number between 9 and 13. The YY cost of a Job Number is equal to twice that Number. So, if a character wants a "Detective" Job with a score of 15, it costs 30 YY. A Job Number can never be lower than 1/2 the highest trait (Body, Brain, or Nerve) applicable to the Job, plus one.

Nick sees three potential Jobs for Al: "Pizza Guy," "Former Soldier," and "Mechanic." Since pizza delivery isn't exactly skilled labor, he's not sure it's an appropriate job. Former Soldier might make sense, but Al's army career was neither long nor distinguished. Besides, most of the



skills he learned in the army (shooting a gun, self defense, etc.) will be covered by his M-Force Job. Nick decides that “Mechanic” is the most appropriate Job for Al, but decides to call it “Shade Tree Mechanic” to show that Al is not currently employed in the automotive repair field. Since Mechanic is primarily a Brain-based Skill, Nick’s Job Number must be at least 7. Nick decides to give Al a Job Number of 9, which costs him 18 YY (leaving 22 in his YY pool).

The M-Force Agent Job

All characters in the M-Force game have made it through M-Force basic training (See Chapter 7, “The Agent,” for more information), giving them a Job of “M-Force Agent.” Since an M-Force agent must show a minimum level of competency to become an active field agent, all M-Forcers begin play with a Job Number of 9 at no cost in Yum Yums. This Number can be increased up to 13 by spending 2 Yum Yums per point of increase. These Numbers are for “fresh” M-Force agents who have completed training but had little or no field experience. If the GM wants a more experienced PC group, she may raise the maximum. Some GMs may want to role-play the PCs’ training using the character advancement rules. If this is the case, your character won’t have the M-Force Job at the beginning of the campaign.

Since Al’s a new agent of M-Force, Nick decides that his score should be 9. He’s managed to graduate basic training, but he’s still got a lot to learn. This doesn’t cost him any Yum Yums.

Gimmicks

A Gimmick is an unusual or unique trait, advantage, resource, or ability your character possesses. In general, Gimmicks should not simply be skills that fall outside of the aegis of your character’s Job. The exception to this rule is when a character has some kind of natural (or supernatural) knack at using a skill that allows him to take it beyond the normal range of human accomplishment. For example, a character with the Gimmick “Stunt Driver” should be able to make cars do things that most Hollywood stuntmen wouldn’t even attempt. In most cases, you can’t learn a Gimmick—you either have it or you don’t.

A Gimmick can also represent a facet of the character’s Body, Brain, or Nerve that is not reflected by the basic score. For example, a character may be average in most physical attributes, but stronger than an ox, represented in the game rules by the “Strongman” Gimmick. In

PROBATIONARY AGENTS

The term “Probationary Agent” is an administrative distinction, not a measure of skill. It denotes any agent who has met the minimum requirements to participate in missions, but has not yet completed the final week of testing at M-Force Academy, and is therefore not eligible for full M-Force benefits. Some veterans who have not yet made it to Caledonia are still technically probationary agents. If you’d like your character to be a Probationary Agent, just add “Probationary” in front of “M-Force Agent” when recording his Job.

general, such a Gimmick allows the character to use that aspect of his Body, Brain, or Nerve in ways above and beyond normal human levels. For example, the “Strongman” Gimmick may allow a character to lift a car every now and then.

Finally, A Gimmick can represent some important advantage or resource that your character has which is not described by his other Words. For example, a character with a magical ring may choose the “Cool Toy” Gimmick. Just keep in mind that some Gimmicks may not be appropriate because they are already reflected by the character’s other scores. For example, the Job “Billionaire Playboy” implies a certain level of material wealth—taking the “More Money Than God” Gimmick as well would probably be overkill.

Nick decides that Al’s Gimmick will be “Hide in Plain Sight,” since Al doesn’t make much of an impression on people.

Weaknesses

A Weakness is something that causes your character problems. It should be like a tragic flaw in literature, not just some annoying character trait or minor inconvenience. The character’s Weakness should be something that he has little or no control over which presents a constant threat to his well-being. Enemies, addictions, and curses are all good examples of Weaknesses. As with Gimmicks, a character’s Weakness may reflect a facet of his Body, Brain, or Nerve that is not properly reflected by his Number in that Word. For example, a character may be of average physical abilities, but look like the Elephant Man. In that case, “Ugly” is an acceptable Weakness.

When determining your Weakness, make sure that it does not contradict other character traits. For example, the



“Poor as Dirt” Weakness makes no sense for a character with the “Billionaire Playboy” Job. Also, make sure that the Weakness does not duplicate the effects of the character’s Body, Brain, or Nerve Number. For example, it doesn’t make sense for a character with an extremely low Brain Number to take the “Dumb as a Rock” Weakness—he’s already dumb as a rock, and the Weakness is unlikely to make him dumber.

Al’s Weakness is his desire to help others. Whenever someone needs a hand, whether it’s a close friend or a complete stranger, Al has a hard time saying no. Nick decides to call the Weakness “Good Samaritan.”

Gimmick and Weakness Numbers

Gimmick and Weakness Numbers start at 10. For every point by which a player wishes to increase his Gimmick Number, he must spend 2 YY and increase his Weakness Number by 1. The character may decrease his Weakness

Number by spending 3 YY for every point by which he wants to lower the Number. A character may also increase his Weakness Number, gaining 2 YY for every point of the increase. Gimmick and Weakness Numbers must be approved by the GM.

Note that the Number assigned to a Gimmick or Weakness does not have to reflect its power relative to other Gimmicks and Weaknesses. A Gimmick of “Phenomenal Cosmic Power” starts out at 10, just like one of “Always Find a Parking Space.” Rather, the Number should reflect how often the Gimmick or Weakness comes into play. A Gimmick that is supposed to be unreliable, difficult to use, or just rarely seen in the story should have a low Number; conversely, a simple, reliable, and/or frequently-appearing Gimmick should have a high Number. Similarly, a Weakness that rarely impacts the character should have a low Number, while one that plagues the character often should have a high Number.

Nick decides that 13 is a good Number for his “Hide In Plain Sight” Gimmick. This costs him 6 Yum Yums and raises his “Good Samaritan” Weakness to 13. That sounds about right, so Nick doesn’t change the Weakness Number. Nick has 16 YY left to spend.

Multiple Jobs, Gimmicks, and Weaknesses

With the GM’s permission, a character may begin the game with two Jobs (not counting the M-Forcer Job), Gimmicks, or Weaknesses. A second Job costs 3 YY for every point the character wants in the Job Number. A second Gimmick costs a number of YY equal to 5 times the desired Gimmick Number. An additional Weakness gives the character 2 YY per point in the Weakness Number.

Nick briefly considers giving Al a low Job in “Former Soldier,” but ultimately decides that the army wasn’t a big enough part of Al’s life to warrant a Job of its own.

Skills

A *Skill* is an ability or area of knowledge possessed by a character, but not covered by his Job. In most cases, Skills reflect a character’s hobbies and unusual or specialized training that the character has received. For example, if a character spends his spare time studying history or has managed to get a pilot’s license, it would be appropriate for him to take a Skill in “History” or “Pilot” respectively. A Skill differs from a Job in a number of ways. The main difference is that a Skill represents a specific area of knowledge or training, while a Job represents a number of skills

SKILLS

There is no set Skill list in the *M-Force* game. Nearly anything a person can learn to do can be a Skill, but keep in mind that a Skill basically represents amateur knowledge of or ability in a subject. Therefore, if it's impossible for an amateur to practice a Skill (brain surgery comes to mind), you'll need a Job to be able to do it. Likewise, Skills should not grant exceptional or unusual abilities ("Firearms" is an acceptable Skill. "Crack Shot" should be a Gimmick). If you're not sure whether something is a reasonable Skill, check with your GM.

Possible Skills: *"21 Jump Street" Lore, Archery, Aromatherapy, Astronomy, Bartending, Baseball Card Collecting, Basket Weaving, Brawling, Card Tricks, Ceramics, Chainsaw Fighting, Climbing, Computers, Conspiracy Theory, Deadhead, Differential Equations, Driving, Electronics, Environmental Awareness, Exotic Dancing, Fencing, Fishing, Flipping Burgers, Flying Disk Sports, Good with Tools, Gambling, Golf, Gymnastics, Hagglng, Horseback Riding, Hungarian Literature, Ice Skating, Internet Junkie, Jack T. Chick Appreciation, Juggling, Knife Throwing, Kickboxing, Knows Way Too Much About Chuck Dixon, Kung Fu Fighting, Limericks, Movie Trivia, Mr. T Fan Club Member, Norse Mythology, Origami, Panhandling, Pet Owner, Photography, Quail Hunting, Register Jockey, Seduction, Sewing, Slam Dancing, Snappy Dresser, Sword-Swallowing, Topiary, Trekkie, Ukrainian History, Video Games, Violin, Whale Watching, Yiddish, Zoroastrianism.*

that the character uses regularly. A person with the "History" Skill has read books on the subject and knows a great many historical facts. A character with the "Historian" Job, on the other hand, knows a lot more about research, understanding the significance and circumstances of historical events, and presenting his findings. Also, since the person with the "Historian" Job deals with history on a day-to-day basis, lots of historical information is "hard-wired" into the character's brain. Because of this, he can more easily recall historical facts than a person who just has the Skill (in game terms, this means that a Job will require die rolls less often than a Skill). Finally, a Job entails a number of trappings. The Historian will have contacts, access to research materials, and opportunities denied the "history buff" who just has a Skill.

When selecting Skills, it's important to remember that you don't need to account for every single learning experience

the character has ever had. There are a lot of "skills" already accounted for in the character's Body, Brain, and Nerve scores. For example, most people take a foreign language class in high school or college, which means the character can probably use his Brain number to muddle through asking the Mexican barkeep for a beer. A Skill in "Spanish" would only be necessary if the character is relatively fluent in the language. Likewise, it may make more sense to reflect your character's high school football career with a few extra points of Body rather than a "Football" Skill. Most characters will have 2-4 Skills.

A Skill's value is expressed as a modifier between +1 and +5, known as the Skill Bonus. The cost of learning a Skill is 3 Yum Yums for a +1. Each additional +1 costs 1 Yum Yum.

Nick already knows that Al is a pool player, so he writes "Pool Player" on his character sheet. He spends three Yum Yums to get the Skill at +1, then spends three more to bring the skill up to +4.

Nick thinks for a while and writes down "All Things Pizza" to reflect special knowledge he's gained from his current career. Since Al's been a pizza guy for about a year, Nick decides +2 would be an appropriate Skill. This costs him 4 Yum Yums.

Along the same lines, Nick decides to give Al a Skill in "Army Stuff" to cover his experience in the military. Since Nick didn't retain much of his army training, he just spends 3 Yum Yums, giving him a +1 Skill.

Nick briefly considers spending points on a "Comic Book Lore" skill, but ultimately decides that since Al's a casual reader and not a hardcore comic geek, the Skill isn't really necessary.

Totaling things up, Nick sees that he's spent 13 points on Skills (6 for Pool, 4 for All Things Pizza, and 3 for Army Stuff). He's still got 3 YY left to spend.

M-Force Elective Skill

During basic training, M-Forcers must digest a lot of information in a very short time frame. While they are given overviews of a number of useful subjects, the main focus of training is on identifying and dealing with monsters. Because many subjects cannot be taught in depth to all students, every M-Forcer chooses an elective skill, such as "first aid," "investigation," or "firearms." The character learns a bit more about this subject than the average agent, giving

him a Skill in that subject. This Skill costs nothing and starts out at +1. It can be further increased just like a normal Skill.

Nick already knows that his elective Skill will be “Emergency Driving.” Since Al’s only completed the basic class, his score starts out at the minimum of +1. He doesn’t have to spend any Yum Yums.

ELECTIVE SKILLS

Communications, Crowd Control, Emergency Driving, Firearms, First Aid, Grenades, Heavy Weapons, Investigation, Knife Fighting, M-Force Administration, Monsterology, Monster Detection & Tracking Technology, Research, Search & Rescue, Self Defense, Specialty Weapons, Surveillance, Tactics

Health Points

A character’s *Health Points* determine how much damage he can take before he dies. Whenever a character gets shot, clawed by a monster, or hit in the head with falling rocks, he loses Health Points. When his Health Point total reaches zero, the character is in danger of being added to the list of fallen M-Forcers. A character’s initial HP Number is equal to his Body Number. Characters may use Yum Yums to raise this total at the rate of 2 YY per point.

Nick’s character has 13 Health Points. He could use 2YY to raise the total to 14, but ultimately decides that he’d rather hold on to the Yum Yums for the game. He writes “13” in the Health Points space on his character sheet.

Yum Yums

Yum Yums have many uses beyond the character creation system. These uses are explained in Chapter 12. If you have any Yum Yums left, record them in the appropriate space on your character sheet. Please note that some GMs may limit the number of YY a player may keep from character creation. If this is the case, you’ll probably want to spend excess YY on Words and Numbers rather than lose them.

Nick has 3 YY left, but decides he’s a little hungry, so he eats one of them. The remaining 2 YY will carry over into the game, so Nick writes “2” in the Yum Yums space on his character sheet.

Who Would Play Him/Her in the Movie? (WWPHITM?)

This Word is useful for helping other players get a better idea of what your character is like. Taking all the information you know about your character into account, try to figure out what actor or actress you would cast as the character if you were making the game into a movie. Physical appearance is not the main concern here—instead, you want an actor who could properly convey the character’s attitude, emotions, and personality. In some cases, you may want to further refine this Word by noting that your character is similar to an actor’s role in a specific film—Val Kilmer plays a very different character in *The Doors* than he does in *Thunderheart*, for example. While knowing this information can be useful in playing your character, don’t take it too far. Simply mimicking your favorite monster hunter will result in an unoriginal and annoying character.

Nick thinks about this one for a while. Neither of the actors he was thinking of when he originally came up with the character concept (way back in Chapter 8) really seems to fit. After considerable effort, Nick decides that Casey Affleck could do the job.

Tag Line

Your character’s *Tag Line* is a quotation that conveys useful information about the character, his outlook on life,

CHARACTER CREATION

Trait	Cost (in Yum Yums)
Body, Brain, Nerve	Number
Job	Number x 2
Additional Job	Number x 3
M-Force Job	2YY/Number Above 9
Gimmick	2YY/Number Above 10*
Weakness	3YY/Number Above below 10**
Additional Gimmick	Number x 5
Skill	3YY for +1, 1 YY per additional +1
M-Force Elective Skill	0YY for +1, 1 YY per additional +1
Health Points	2YY/Number above Body Number
Yum Yums	Equal to YY left after character creation

*The character must also raise his Weakness Number by 1.

**A character who raises his Weakness Number (without raising his Gimmick) gets an additional 2 YY to spend. A character may also take a second Weakness, which gives him an additional YY equal to the Weakness Number x 2.

and so forth. Like WWPHITM?, your character's Tag Line helps to give other players an immediate impression of the character. It can reflect his general speech pattern, how he communicates, and a little about the character's personality. Don't feel like you have to use the character's Tag Line frequently (or ever) in the game—that's not the point.

Nick wants Al's tag line to sum up the "not a hero/kind of a loser" aspect of Al's personality. Eventually he settles on "Don't make me have to run away screaming like a little girl. Because I've done it before, and it's NOT pretty."

SUGGESTED GIMMICKS

Citizen of the World: The character has traveled extensively, and the things he learned in his travels occasionally come in handy. The character can use this Gimmick to get good rates on airline tickets, recall a bit of history he picked up while touring Versailles, or remember how to order a beer in Japanese.

Contacts: While every character will know people, a character with this Gimmick knows everybody. When the character needs to get in touch with a person who has specialized knowledge or skills, a successful Gimmick roll means that he has an old high school friend, frat brother, co-worker, or other acquaintance who can handle the job. Note that contacts are not simply resources—they'll expect the character to be around for them from time to time, and will rarely risk their jobs, reputations, or lives for the character.

Clue Magnet: The character has a knack for stumbling across important clues. The GM decides when this Gimmick comes into play, and should usually make the roll in secret.

Duct Tape & Chicken Wire: A character with this Gimmick is able to build or repair just about any mechanical or electronic device, even if he doesn't have access to the proper tools.

Empathy: The character knows how to "read" people. This Gimmick can be used to tell if someone is lying, figure out what kind of mood a person's in, and determine the best way to get information out of a subject.

Famous: The character is extremely well-known. Whenever the character tries to use his fame for personal benefit, he makes a Gimmick roll, with success indicating that the character's status gets him what he wants. The Gimmick Number should reflect how well-known the character is. A minor soap opera store might have a "Famous" Gimmick of 7, while the President of the United States prob-

SAMPLE OF PLAY THEATER

Nick's almost finished with his character. The only thing left to do is to run it by Tony for approval.

TONY: I like the character, and all the Numbers look good, but I do have a couple of questions.

NICK: Shoot. For once, I might actually have answers for you.

TONY: First of all, this "All Things Pizza" Skill—what does it entail?

NICK: It's stuff Al's learned working as a pizza guy—shortcuts, where the good and bad neighborhoods are, how to scam free pizza—stuff like that.

TONY: I understand. Now your Gimmick is explained in the book, so I think we're both clear on how it works. The "Good Samaritan" Weakness is new. I understand the general idea behind it, but wanted to discuss the limits of it with you.

NICK: Huh?

TONY: Basically, are there any times that Al can ignore his instinct to lend a hand without making a roll—for example, if the person in need of help is an enemy?

NICK: It depends on the situation. The Weakness doesn't apply to monsters, but he'd probably help a human bad guy fix a flat tire, as long as the guy isn't wanted by the police or obviously on his way to do bad guy stuff.

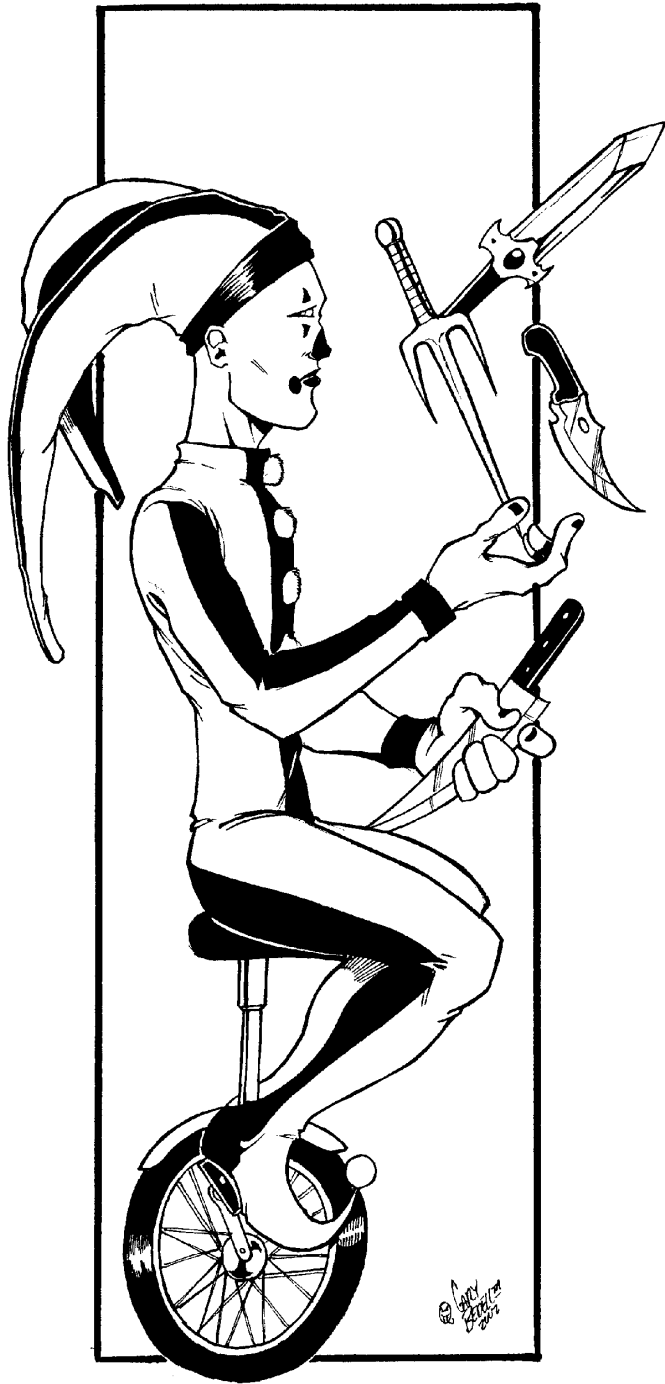
TONY: Okay, what if Al's on a mission and, for example, sees an old lady who needs help crossing the street?

NICK: Again, it kind of depends. If the team was just investigating stuff, he'd stop to help. If they were chasing down a beastie, he wouldn't. I guess a good rule of thumb would be that Al can ignore the Weakness if helping out would put others in danger.

TONY: That's more or less what I was thinking. Everything else looks good. You can go watch TV while I talk to Sarah about her character.

ably has a score of 18 or 19. Characters with this Gimmick should consider taking the "Famous" Weakness as well.

Fast Healer: Whenever a character with this Gimmick regains Health Points (from medical treatment, natural healing, or spending Yum Yums), he makes a Gimmick roll. If the roll succeeds, he regains 2 additional H.P.



Fearless: The character doesn't spook easily. Whenever a fear-based Nerve check is required, the character rolls his Gimmick. If the roll is successful, the character doesn't have to make the Nerve Check. (If the Gimmick fails, he still gets to make the Nerve check normally).

Friends in High Places: The character knows important and influential people, and can use these connections to get what he wants. The player will need to define the nature of these ties—the childhood friend of the governor

would use the Gimmick differently than the brother of the local crime boss.

Hard to Kill: A character with this Gimmick just doesn't want to die. Whenever he's reduced to zero HP, he gets to make a Gimmick roll. If the roll succeeds, he immediately gains 1 Health Point. Even if the roll fails, he still gets the normal Body roll to stay alive (assuming he's an important person, that is).

Hide in Plain Sight: This character doesn't make much of an impression on people. As a result, he tends to blend into the background. As long as there are at least two other people around, a successful Gimmick roll means that nobody will pay any attention to what the character's doing, unless he specifically draws attention to himself.

Intuition: A character with this Gimmick has good instincts. Whenever he's faced with a simple decision (left or right, fight or flee, etc.), a successful Gimmick roll allows the character to essentially ask the GM what he should do. If none of the possible choices is particularly better or worse than the others (all the hallways lead to traps, the character has about a 50/50 chance of taking the monster), his instincts may not help him much. At the GM's discretion, this Gimmick may also be used to give the character hints (for example, "there's something about that guy you just don't like"), but this option should be used sparingly.

I've Seen Worse: The character is used to seeing blood and guts. This Gimmick works just like Fearless, but only applies to carnage-based Fear Checks.

Filthy Rich: For a character with this Gimmick, money is no object. While the character can afford nearly anything he needs, his money is often tied up in investments. Whenever the character wants to purchase an expensive item (house, jet, senator) outright, or needs a lot of cash in a hurry, he'll have to make a Gimmick roll to free up the necessary funds. The player should define the source of the character's wealth (lottery winnings, old money, insider trading, etc.).

Kind Ear: People naturally want to share their problems with the character. Sometimes, this can yield useful information. Characters with this Gimmick make good psychiatrists and bartenders.

Lifetime of Experience: This Gimmick is reserved for really old people. They've been around a long time and done a lot of things (which they'll undoubtedly tell you all about). As a result, the character has a chance to know a little bit about any given subject. The extent and accuracy of such knowledge is left to the GM.

Local Hero: This Gimmick is essentially a limited version of the “Famous” Gimmick. The character gets roughly the same benefits, but the Gimmick only affects a certain group of people. While this group is usually the citizens of a geographical region, it could also be members of certain sub-culture. For example, the third Klingon from the left in episode 6 of Star Trek might have the Gimmick “Local Hero (Trekkies).” The group or region to which the Gimmick applies should be defined when the Gimmick is chosen.

Lucky: The character is naturally lucky. Whenever an action relies primarily on blind luck rather than skill, the character may roll his Gimmick in place of another Word (assuming the Gimmick is higher). Additionally, if the character rolls a 20, he may re-roll without spending Yum Yums (though if the second roll is also a 20, he’s stuck with it). Additional benefits of the Gimmick are up to the GM.

Master of Research: The character is extremely skilled at finding information. As long as the character has access to the appropriate resources (a library, the web, newspaper archives, etc.) and a little time, the character can find out anything about anyone.

Prepared: The character is ready for any situation. Whenever someone needs an aspirin, an ink pen, or the local doctor’s telephone number, a successful Gimmick roll means that the character has the item or information. This Gimmick is limited to common items and easy-to-find information.

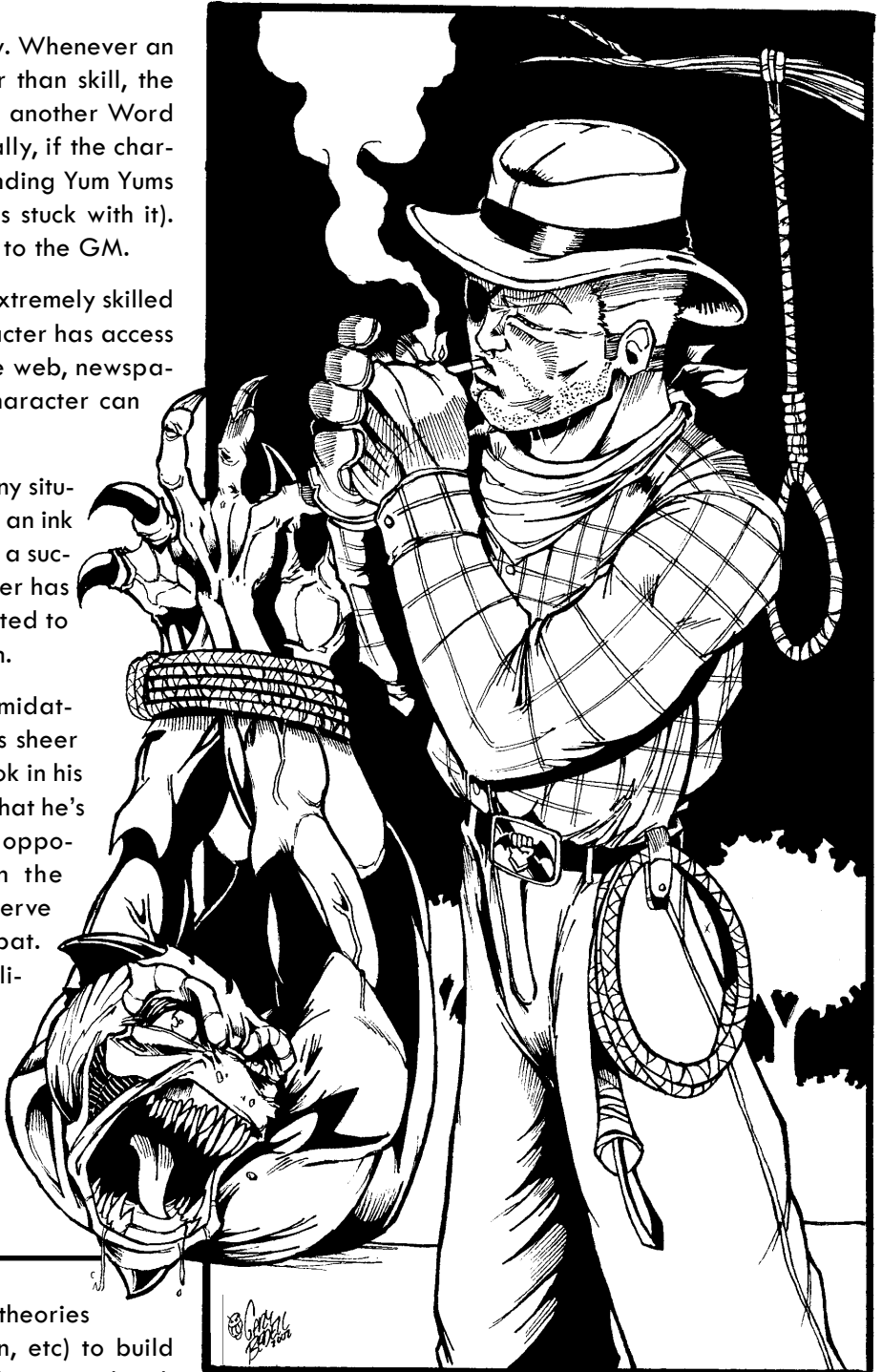
Thug: The character is extremely intimidating in combat. This might be because of his sheer size, his confident stance, or just the wild look in his eyes. In any case, most people will realize that he’s not somebody they want to mess with. An opponent whose Body Number is less than the character’s Gimmick Number must make a Nerve check before engaging him in melee combat. The Thug Gimmick has no effect on unintelligent monsters or creatures (zombies, for instance).

Tough: A character with this Gimmick takes pain well. Whenever the character takes damage, he makes a Gimmick roll. For every 5 points of the roll, reduce the damage by 1 health point.

Weird Science: The character has learned to use the more unusual scientific theories (anti-gravity, time travel, orgone radiation, etc) to build functioning technological marvels. Exactly how weird such

devices can be depends on the tone of the game, as determined by the GM.

Well-Read: A character with this Gimmick has read about a variety of subjects, and tends to retain such information. A successful roll means the character “remembers reading something about” whatever subject is being discussed, assuming the subject has been written about. The extent of such information and the accuracy of the character’s memory depend on the roll.



Other Suggested Gimmicks: Animal Empathy, Babe/Stud, Born Leader, Eagle Eyes, Escape Artist, Everybody's Buddy, Green Thumb, Iron Will, King of the Road, Lightning Reflexes, Mr. Fix-it, Pinball Wizard, Strong as an Ox

SUGGESTED WEAKNESSES

Achilles' Heel: The character has a weak spot—maybe a glass jaw or a war wound that could be re-injured. Whenever the character takes more than 5 points of damage (or whenever an opponent who knows the character's Weakness successfully attacks the weak point), the character must make a Weakness roll. If the weakness takes effect, the Achilles' Heel has been exploited. The exact effects will depend on the nature of the Weakness. (A character with a glass jaw would be knocked out, while a re-injured leg wound would hinder the character's movement).

Big Dork: The character is extremely unskilled in the realm of social interaction. Whenever he interacts with NPCs, he must make a Weakness roll. If the Weakness takes effect, the character comes across as a complete goober. This may result in him being beaten up, not taken seriously, or made fun of, depending on who he's talking to.

Coward: The character is easy to scare. Whenever a fear check is required, he has to make both a Weakness roll *and* a Fear Check to avoid the effects. Additionally, the GM may require the character to make a Weakness roll even if a Fear Check would not normally be required.

Enemy: Somebody is out to get the character. It could be a business rival who wants to bankrupt him or a monster with a grudge. The lengths to which the enemy will go to hurt the character, and the resources available to him, depend on the Weakness Number.

Famous: While fame has its benefits (see the Famous Gimmick), it also has a price. A character with this Weakness is regularly mobbed, stalked, and otherwise annoyed by his adoring public and must take precautions to avoid being recognized.

Flashbacks: The character suffers from some kind of post-traumatic stress disorder. The GM and player should determine possible triggers as well as effects of the Weakness.

Getting Old: The character's not as young as he used to be. Whenever the GM feels that the character's advanced age will cause problems, the character must make a Weakness roll.



Heart of Gold: While he may act tough, the character actually has a conscience somewhere. When faced with a choice between looking out for Number One and doing the right thing, the character must make a Weakness roll. If the Weakness takes effect, the character must follow the "right" course of action (though he is free to grumble and rationalize as he sees fit).

Longhair: Something about the character makes "The Man" nervous. It could be his leather jacket, his gang colors, or his attractive purple mohawk and extensive body piercings. In any case, the character tends to attract unwanted attention from cops, rednecks, and other fun-loving types. Whenever the character encounters would-be

oppressors, he must roll his Weakness. If the Weakness takes effect, he is harassed.

Overconfidence: The character is extremely confident in his abilities. Whenever the character is faced with the possibility of admitting defeat, incompetence, or inability, he must make a Weakness roll. If the Weakness takes effect, the character cannot accept failure and will pursue the course of action no matter the consequences.

Phobia: The character has an irrational fear of something (crowds, heights, dogs). Whenever the character is faced with the object of the phobia, he must overcome his Weakness in order to take any action.

Punching Bag: People and monsters agree: this character is a lot of fun to beat the crap out of. Whenever an enemy has a choice of targets, the character must make a Weakness roll. If the Weakness takes effect, the opponent chooses the character as his target and will continue to attack until one of them is dead. At the GM's discretion, this Weakness may also cause NPCs to actively try to pick fights with the character.

Strange Vehicle Magnet: This Weakness is recommended for characters with driving-related Skills, Jobs, or Gimmicks. Whenever the character needs to commandeer, borrow, rent, or otherwise drive a vehicle that is not her own, roll this Weakness. If the weakness takes effect, the vehicle is weird—pink vans with purple polka-dots,

weinermobiles, and riding lawnmowers are just a few possibilities.

Victim of the Past: The character has lived in interesting times, and they occasionally come back to haunt him. The GM can roll this weakness any time he decides that a dark secret or indiscretion in the character's past could make things more interesting. If the weakness takes effect, the character may have to deal with anything from an old girlfriend to an outstanding warrant.

Weak Stomach: The character blows chunks at the slightest provocation. Any time he witnesses carnage, drinks too much, or eats spicy foods, he must make a Weakness roll. If the Weakness affects the character, he spends a round praying to the porcelain gods.

Unlucky: This is the opposite of Lucky. Any time a roll relies primarily on luck, the character must make a Weakness roll. If the Weakness takes effect, the character automatically fails the roll. If a character rolls a Lucky Break, he has to re-roll (if he gets a Lucky Break on the second roll, treat the result normally). Other effects of this Weakness are up to the GM.

Other Suggested Weaknesses: Absent-minded, Addiction, Bad Reputation, Clumsy, Code of Honor, Dirt Poor, Good Samaritan, Gullible, Handicapped, Learning Disability, Obligations, Psychological Problems, Redneck, Stubborn, Ugly as Sin, Uneducated, Weakling.

CHAPTER 10

DOING STUFF



You may have noticed that most good stories revolve around characters doing things. They search for information, hack into computer systems, and beat up bad guys. In the best of all worlds, the things the characters do lead to some kind of character development or plot resolution. Occasionally, a story is written in which the characters do absolutely nothing—*Waiting for Godot*, for example. This approach may work in absurdist theater, but in general is dull and not well-suited for role-playing games.

When an author is writing a story, and decides that one of the characters tries to do something, it's relatively easy for him to determine whether the character succeeds or fails. He simply takes into account the consequences of success or failure—how will it affect the characters, how might it alter the plot, whether it's dramatically appropriate, and so on. If he feels that the character's success will improve the overall narrative, the character succeeds. If he feels that failure is more appropriate, the character fails.

Because RPGs are a cooperative form of storytelling, neither the gamemaster nor the players have the same luxury as a fiction writer in deciding whether a character succeeds or fails. While the perfect solution would be to let the action's outcome be decided upon by all players (including the GM), this rarely works in practice. There will come times when different parts of the group feel that different outcomes are appropriate. When this happens, such communal decision-making runs the risk of breaking down. A neutral arbitrator is needed to determine the results when players can't agree. Since finding an unbiased third party (much less explaining all the details of the situation to him) can be tough, *M-Force* uses a set of game rules to determine the outcomes of such events. In most cases, these game rules take the form of die rolls and candy exchanges.

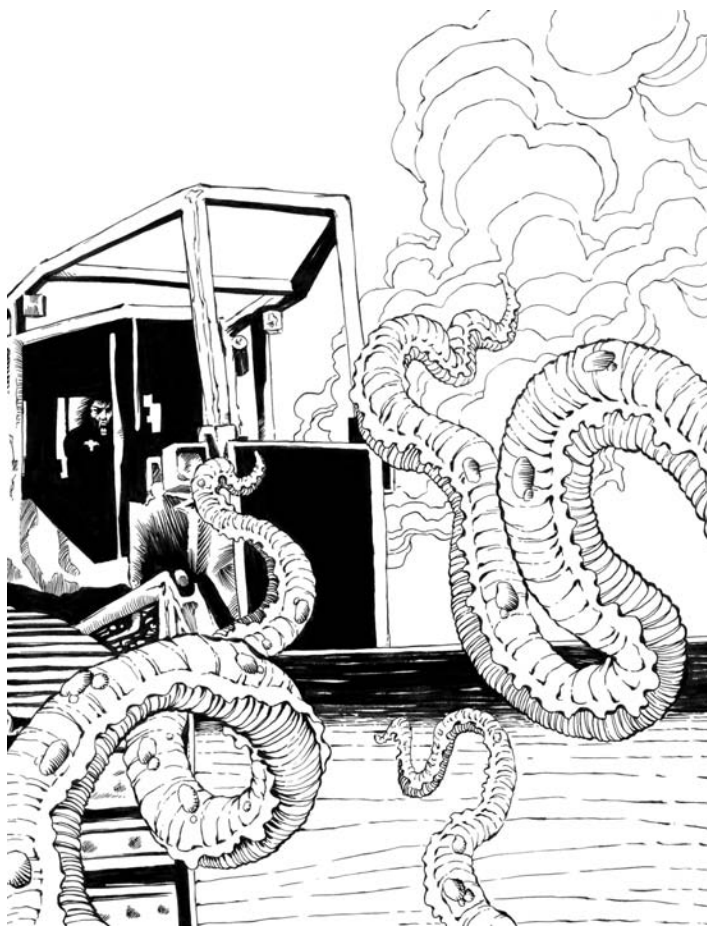
WHEN TO USE THE RULES

The rules of *M-Force* are relatively unimportant. As long as everyone is enjoying the story and having a good time, it's perfectly acceptable to ignore the rules in favor of dramatic license. There will be times, how-

ever, when the using the rules will become necessary. In some instances, using the rules can actually enhance the overall story. There are five main instances in which rules can be useful.

When Outcomes are Uncertain

When everyone agrees that success or failure is more or less a foregone conclusion, and when that outcome is dramatically appropriate, there is no need to involve the rules in the decision-making process. However, if an action could result in either success or failure, and both are equally appropriate dramatically (or if different players have different views on which is more appropriate), you may want to make a few rolls.



Ted “the Terminator” Loffleholtz has always gotten on Al’s nerves—he’s a loudmouth braggart who constantly belittles Al and the other new recruits, and Al thinks Ted’s basically an ass. One day Al and Frank (the local AIC) are talking about an upcoming pool tournament that Al’s playing in. Ted hears them talking and, with seething overconfidence, mentions that he’s played a game or two in his day. Al likes the idea of kicking Ted’s butt on the slate, and asks if Ted would be interested in a game. They decide to settle things right then at Jimmy’s House of Crabs, a bar across the street. Since both of the characters have a Skill in “Pool,” either of them could win. If Ted wins, he gets to continue strutting around and gets something else to annoy Al about. If Al wins, he gets to take Ted down a notch. Since both results are equally interesting, Tony decides to use the game mechanics to determine the outcome of the game.

To Provide an Element of Risk

In most stories, the protagonists “win.” RPGs are no different, and most game systems are written with a bias towards PC victory. However, knowing that success is a foregone conclusion can take a lot of the excitement out of a story. Authors overcome this problem by creating an atmosphere of danger and putting the hero in life-or-death situ-



ations that he narrowly escapes. While a good gaming group can do this to an extent, knowing that the PCs will “win” can take away some of the excitement. The random element provided by the game system creates a chance of failure that helps to build tension and excitement.

The Kids are raiding an old mansion that has been overrun by demons. As they burst through the front doors, the group is set upon by a pack of lesser creatures. The group knows where the head demon can be found, so they attempt to fight their way through to his lair. The players are doing a good job of role-playing the intensity of the battle, so Tony forgoes the rules—instead, he gives them a few superficial points of damage as they make their way to confront their primary target. The team can beat the minor demons easily, so bringing in the game rules would simply bog down the action. Eventually, the team reaches the main villain. At this point, Tony starts using the combat rules, because he wants the players to realize that they’re now involved in a fight they may not win.

To Determine the Degree of Success

Usually, a character can experience varying degrees of success when attempting an action. You may know that a character will be able to do whatever he’s attempting, but you don’t know whether he’ll do it clumsily or stylishly. When this happens, you can use the result of a die roll to determine exactly how well or how poorly the character accomplishes his task.

Sid’s band, Knife in the Brain, has finally gotten their big break—a chance to record a demo CD for Starecase Records. While the crew obviously has the ability to make sounds with their instruments, the quality of the CD will play an important role in the band’s future. While the players (except Jim) have decided that the band is lousy, Tony decides it would be wrong to let the other players define Sid’s ability. Besides, even Vanilla Ice sold records for a time. Tony decides to let Sid’s roll decide the outcome. Sid rolls a 5 which, while successful, is not really that good. One reviewer says, “I haven’t seen a debut CD like this since MC Scat Cat,” which *might* be considered a good thing. Otherwise the demo doesn’t make much of an impact on the music scene.

To Answer Questions

Sometimes, the players may ask questions about character knowledge or the game environment to which the GM doesn’t know the answer. Often such questions involve knowledge that the characters could have reasonably encountered, but which has not actually appeared “in game.”

When this happens, using the rules can provide the answers.

Allison's character, Susan, is investigating an alleged werewolf attack. As she questions a particular witness, he mentions a similar attack a few years earlier. Allison asks Tony whether she knows anything about the previous attack. Tony knows that the attack has never been the subject of game play, but that Susan may very well have encountered the information while reading through old case files. Therefore, he has Allison make a Brain roll. The roll succeeds, and Tony uses the roll to determine how much Susan remembers about the incident.

Later, Susan has managed to track down the werewolf and is engaged in a life-or-death battle with the beast. She has used up all of her ammunition and is running for dear life. She finds herself in an old graveyard in the woods, with the monster fast approaching.

ALLISON: Is there anything in the graveyard that can be used as a weapon—a tree branch, a shovel—something like that?

TONY (who just now made up the graveyard): Make a Brain roll.

ALLISON: Darn it! I failed the roll. Bad d20!

TONY: You don't see anything.

ALLISON (handing Tony a handful of candy): Are you sure? Maybe there's a gravestone that's about to fall over or something. . .

TONY: Actually, now that you mention it, there is a rather large statue of an angel that seems to be precariously balanced. If you can lure the werewolf into position, you may be able to knock the statue onto him.

To Help Explain a Scene

There are times when everyone will agree that a particular outcome is preferable, but the outcome seems unlikely or impossible. When this happens, using the rules can often help make the outcome a little easier to swallow. Because using rules provides a more specific “play-by-play” view of a situation, the results of various die rolls and Yum Yum expenditures can often spur creativity and help the outcome seem less contrived.

The entire Key West office goes into battle against a horde of zombies. The fight does not go well, and eventually only Sarah's character, Alicia, is left standing. Under normal circumstances, there is no way a single agent could

survive this situation. But since Alicia is the only thing keeping the zombies from devouring everyone, simply going with the logical “Alicia fights bravely but eventually falls to the zombie hordes” ending would mean the campaign was over. Tony asks if anyone can think of a way for Alicia to survive the encounter and get the team to safety. Nobody can think of anything (especially since everyone who Alicia could call for back-up is already dead or injured), so Tony decides to use the combat rules to determine the outcome. There's a good chance everybody will end up dead, but hopefully the play-by-play will spawn an idea that will help Alicia survive.

SIMPLE AND RESISTED ROLLS

There are two main types of rolls in *M-Force*: *simple* and *resisted*. In a simple roll, the player rolls a 20-sided die and compares it to his Number in the most appropriate Word. If the roll is less than the character's Number, the action succeeds, with the value of the roll determining the general level of success. If the roll is higher than the character's Number, he fails, with the difference between the roll and his Number determining the general level of failure (see *Degrees of Success and Failure*, page 96, for more information).

Alicia has agreed to give a presentation about the Junior M-Force at a local middle school. Since Alicia's Job of “Kung Fu Chick” and Gimmick of “Fast Healer” are inappropriate, Tony asks for a Nerve roll. Sarah rolls an 8, which is less than her Nerve of 13. Alicia does a good job with her presentation, but doesn't exactly leave the audience begging for more.

A resisted roll, on the other hand, is used when two characters are directly competing against one another. Resisted rolls are most often used in combat, but can also be used when two characters engage in a contest of skill, or when a character attempts to outsmart or outmaneuver an opponent. To make a resisted roll, both players make simple rolls. If one person succeeds and the other fails, the successful character wins the contest. If both succeed, the character with the higher roll wins. If both rolls succeed and the result is a tie, the GM may declare a stalemate or have the players reroll. If

YUM YUMS & ROLLS

Player can use Yum Yums to improve, reroll, alter, and sometimes completely ignore die rolls. For more information on how Yum Yums affect rolls, see Chapter 12.

both rolls fail, neither character gains an advantage.

A few weeks after their pool battle, Al and Ted run into one another at Big Ed's Beer Palace. Al just smiles and asks Ted if he's up for a rematch. "Pool isn't really my game," replies Ted, "I'm more of a rock-paper-scissors man." Al can't resist the challenge and simply asks, "Best two out of three?" The two prepare for another contest of skill. Since neither has an appropriate Job, Gimmick, or Skill, the GM decides that a Nerve check will best reflect the skill and intuition required for the game, and asks the players to make resisted rolls. Al has a Nerve of 10. Ted has a Nerve of 14.

Round 1: Nick rolls an 8. Tony (rolling for Ted, since he's a GMC) rolls a 19. Since Ted failed and Al succeeded, Al wins the first round. Scissors cut paper.

Round 2: Nick rolls a 9, but Tony rolls 13. Both rolls succeed, but Tony's was higher, giving Ted the win. Paper covers rock.

Round 3: Nick rolls 16, Tony rolls a 17. Both rolls fail, meaning that nobody wins this round. Ted holds up three fingers, Al holds up four. The two look confused and prepare for the next round.

Round 4: Both players roll 9s. Tony decides that they both choose "rock" and calls for a replay. Nick rolls another 9 and Tony rolls an 8. Paper covers rock and Al wins the match.

Who Makes the Roll?

In most cases, the player will make rolls for his character. However, there will be times when the GM doesn't want the player to know the result of the roll. When this happens, she will ask the player for his Number and make the roll herself. For example, if a character is searching a room for clues, the GM may decide to make the roll in secret. Otherwise, a character who makes the roll will know that there are no clues to find, while one who fails will realize that he might have missed something.

Which Word Should I Use?

When making rolls, a player should use the Word that best reflects his ability to perform the action. Usually, this is relatively obvious (for example, if Ryan Trimble wants to purchase Luxembourg, he'll roll his "Billionaire Playboy" Job). If none of the character's Words is appropriate, the character will have to make a default roll (see below). In some cases, the character will have to make a Weakness roll before making the normal roll. For example, if a character has the "Clumsy" Weakness, he'll need to make a Weakness roll before he can attempt an agility-related Body roll. If the Weakness affects him, the Body roll automatically fails.

DEFAULT ROLLS

When a character is attempting to do something that requires training he does not have, he makes a *default roll*. The character's Number when making a default roll is equal to one-half his most appropriate Word (rounded down). Body, Brain, and Nerve are most commonly used for default rolls, though Jobs, and even Gimmicks may occasionally be more appropriate.

EXAMPLE 1: The Kids take out the team boat to hunt for a sea serpent. Through a convoluted and hilarious series of events, Al ends up on skis behind the boat. Since Al doesn't know the first thing about water skiing (or any type of skiing, for that matter), Tony tells him to make a default



DELAYED RESISTED ROLLS

Resisted rolls are not always made simultaneously. In some cases, a character may try to counteract or overcome the result of actions that another character took previously. For example, if Ted “the Terminator” decides to sabotage Al’s favorite chair so it falls over when Al sits in it, the quality of his work will determine how easily Al falls for the trap. If Ted rolled a successful 8 on his trap-making roll, Al will need to make a Brain roll of 9 or better to notice that his chair’s been tampered with. Otherwise, Ted will get a good laugh at Al’s expense.

Body roll. Since Al’s Body is 13, Nick will need to roll a 6 or less.

EXAMPLE 2: While out on a hunting trip, Ted “the Terminator” accidentally shoots himself in the foot. Ted doesn’t have any kind of first aid-related Jobs, Gimmicks, or even Skills. However, all M-Force agents are required to take a basic first aid course. Therefore, Ted can make his default roll using either 1/2 his Brain Number or 1/2 his M-Forcer Job Number, whichever is better.

WEAKNESS ROLLS

Whenever a character’s Weakness may come into play, he will have to make a Weakness roll. While most of the Numbers in M-Force are the character’s chance of success, the Weakness Number is actually the character’s chance of *failing to resist*, and therefore succumbing to, the Weakness. In effect, the Number is that of the Weakness, not the character. If the roll is less than or equal to the Number, the Weakness takes effect. If the roll is greater than the Number, the character is able to control, overcome, or avoid his Weakness.

Sid and Al are relaxing at Big Ed’s Beer Palace when a guy walks up and asks Sid if that’s his bike parked outside. Sid tells him that it is, and the three begin discussing the merits and flaws of various motorcycles. After a while, the stranger suggests that he and Sid find out once and for all who’s got the faster bike—maybe even make a small wager. Jim realizes that Sid’s outclassed, but Tony requires a roll against Sid’s “Overconfidence” Weakness. If Sid can avoid succumbing to his Weakness, he can turn down the wager. Otherwise, his ego will force him to accept, even though he’ll probably lose.

SECOND CHANCE ROLLS

If a character has two Words that could both apply to the situation, he is entitled to a *second chance roll*. For the first roll, use the Word that is most appropriate to the situation (or the Word with the higher score if both are equally appropriate). If this roll fails, the character may make a second roll using the other Word. A character can never use a default roll as a second chance roll.

M-Force agent Barney Magnum is investigating the scene of a possible slumbear attack. Since Barney believes a slumbear is to blame, he rolls his M-Force Agent Job, which fails. However, because Barney’s other Job is “Private Detective,” the GM decides that Barney gets a second chance roll. Barney rolls and gets a success—he doesn’t find any of the classic signs of a slumbear attack, but he does locate the victim’s diary, which describes her recent nightmares.

USING SKILLS

Whenever one of the character’s Skills is applicable to an action, he gets to add his Skill Bonus to the Number he’s rolling against. Most Skill Bonuses are added to the character’s default Number, but they can also modify Jobs, Gimmicks, Body, Brain, and Nerve. If more than one Skill applies to the action, the character may add all appropriate Skill Bonuses.

EXAMPLE 1: One of Al’s buddies is having problems with his car, an old surplus Army Jeep. Al volunteers to help him fix it. Normally, Al would roll against his Shade Tree Mechanic Job of 9. However, Tony decides that he can add his +1 Army Stuff Skill to the roll, meaning he needs to roll a 10 or less to get the jeep running again.

EXAMPLE 2: A few days later, Frank and Ted are discussing the history of a nearby military base. They’re wondering when the base was built, but neither of them can remember for sure. Since Al was an army man, they ask him. This is a simple Brain roll, but again Al’s time in the service might come in handy. Tony lets him add his Army Stuff Skill to his Brain Number before rolling.

EXAMPLE 3: Later that evening, Al decides to visit a new pool hall. Immediately upon entering, he discovers that the place is a regular hangout for ex-military types. Considering his less than distinguished career in the armed forces, Al decides to use his “Hide In Plain Sight” Gimmick. Since he’s standing in a bar full of former army guys,

Tony decides that Al's army training will help him blend into the crowd even better. Al adds his Army Stuff Skill to his Gimmick Number before rolling.

EXAMPLE 4: Al fails his Gimmick roll, and pretty soon a group of drunk patrons recognize Al as someone who doesn't belong. With a brawl imminent, Al decides to head out the back door. Unfortunately, Al's oppressors are right behind him, and he finds himself standing in a dead-end alley with a group of drunken ex-Rangers between him and freedom. He decides to try to scramble up the wall behind him. This would normally require a default Body roll, but once again Al gets to add his Army Stuff skill (after Nick convinces Tony that Al spent "all kinds of time climbing over stuff in boot camp."). Al needs to roll a 7 (1/2 his 13 Body Number, +1 for his Army Stuff skill) to make it over the wall. He rolls a 5 and manages to escape the bad (or at least drunk) guys.

OTHER MODIFIERS

In many cases, the GM will ask the player to apply a modifier to his score before making his roll. Except in a few special cases (such as combat damage), these modifiers are always applied to the Number the character is rolling against, not the die roll. So, for example, if a character is awarded a +2 modifier for a Job check, and his score is 15, he needs to roll a 17 (15+2) or less to succeed. Regardless of modifiers, a natural "20" always fails.

Situational Modifiers

These modifiers are based on the specifics of the situation at hand. For example, if the character is attempting to shoot a monster, the GM may impose a penalty to the roll because of the distance between the character and the monster. The result of a character's Weakness roll may also create a situational modifier.

Most situational modifiers are between -5 (conditions greatly impede action) and +5 (conditions greatly improve chance of success).

EXAMPLE 1: Al is running after a swamp monster. Tony decides that a resisted Body roll is in order. However, since Al is slowed down by the terrain of the swamp, Tony decides that Nick will have a -2 penalty to his roll. Al's body score is 13, so Nick has to roll an 11 or less to succeed.

EXAMPLE 2: Alicia decides to paint a picture for a local art show. She's rolling against a 7 (1/2 Brain plus her Painting Skill), but Tony gives her a +2 bonus for coming up with a cool idea for the painting (Typhonis and Galaxikhan fighting one another in San Francisco Bay). She needs to roll a 9 or less to make the idea work.

Supporting Word Modifiers

Sometimes, one or more of the characters' Words may "support" the primary Word being used. For example, if an M-Force agent is attempting to fight an invisible opponent, he'll have a penalty on his attack roll. However, if he has the "Keen Hearing" Gimmick, the GM may decide that this penalty is reduced or negated. A supporting Word modifier is +1 if the character's Number in the supporting Word is 10 or less, +2 if it's higher than 10. Supporting



Word modifiers generally don't apply to rolls subject to second chance rolls.

Sid's trying to convince Frank that he needs to borrow the office van for "an important M-Force related mission." In reality, Knife in the Brain has a gig tonight and the drummer's truck is in the shop—Sid needs the van to haul the equipment. Tony tells Jim to make a Nerve roll (resisted by Frank's Brain roll) to see if Frank believes the lie. Sid has the Poker skill at +3, so Tony lets him have a +1 bonus (to account for Sid's skill at bluffing).

Character Concept/Background Modifiers

This type of modifier is used almost exclusively for default rolls. If some established or implied fact about the character's background would help or hinder his chances to perform an action, the GM may reflect that fact with a modifier. Concept/background modifiers should be between -2 and +2.

Rainbow the Deadhead is fighting a monster that uses vivid hallucinations to disorient its victim. Normally, the character has to make a Nerve roll to resist the monster's

Roll	Degree	Result
20	Bad Break	Audience actually attacks the band.
17-19	Average Failure	A few people yell "You suck!"
12-16	Minimal Failure	The audience pretty much ignores them.
11	Lucky Break	The band is so good they attract groupies.
6-10	Average Success	The show is good but not particularly memorable.
2-5	Minimal Success	Scattered applause.
1	Quirky Success	The band isn't particularly memorable, but Sid's fly is open the whole time.

psychedelic attack. However, since Rainbow is an established "pharmaceutical explorer," Tony decides to give her a +2 concept bonus to ignore all the groovy illusions.

Degrees of Success or Failure

When a character makes a roll, you can use the value of the roll to determine how well he succeeded or how badly he failed. For successful rolls, the degree of success is determined by the value of the roll. For failed rolls, the degree of failure is determined by the difference between

RANDOM ACTS OF FATE

Quirky Success: When a character rolls a natural "1," the action succeeds, but has some unusual or negative side effect. For example, if a character is attacking a monster with a pickaxe and rolls a "1," the GM may decide that the axe gets stuck, leaving the character weaponless.

Lucky Break: Whenever a character rolls his modified score exactly, he's gotten a lucky break. Regardless of the roll, the action is a spectacular success and the GM may decide that there are additional positive side effects.

Bad Break: When a character rolls a natural "20," he's gotten a bad break. The failure is spectacular (regardless of the roll), and the GM may decide that there are additional negative side effects.

OPTIONAL RULES

the roll and the character's modified Number. The degree determines the general level of success or failure.

- 1-5: Minimal. The character just made it or just missed it.
- 6-10: Average. There's nothing noteworthy about the character's performance.
- 11-15: Impressive. The character performs the activity with a distinct style and grace (or lack thereof, if he failed).
- 15+: Spectacular. People will talk about the character's performance for years.

Knife in the Brain is playing at a local club, and Jim wants to know how well the band performs. Tony decides that since Sid's the lead singer, his roll will determine the band's overall success. Sid's got the Musician skill at +4, and Tony decides that the performance is based on a default Nerve roll. Since Sid's Nerve is 14, Jim will need to roll an 11 or less to succeed. Tony is using the optional Random Acts of Fate rules. The following table shows the possible outcomes.

ROLLING AGAINST A DIFFICULTY NUMBER

While modifiers will usually be sufficient to reflect the ease or difficulty of a situation, there are times when it makes more sense for the GM to set a difficulty number. Rolling against a difficulty number is a lot like making a resisted roll. The character must make a successful roll that is higher than the difficulty number. If the difficulty number is higher than the character's score plus any applicable modifiers, the character cannot perform the action (except

with a Lucky Break, if the Random Acts of Fate rules are used). The most common reasons for using a difficulty number are described below.

When a task is especially precise or unforgiving. When an action requires great skill and offers little margin for error, a DN can reflect the complexity of the task.

The Kids are fighting an animated statue. While the statue can be damaged with any attack that would break up rock, chipping away at the thing could take a while. Luckily, the statue's animating force is stored in a gem set in its forehead. In order to shoot out the gem, a player must beat a difficulty number of 10.

When there are multiple levels of success. In some cases, a character may be able to succeed at an action without actually achieving the desired effect. When this is the case, he must beat a DN to achieve the intended result.

For reasons too complicated to explain, the Kids need a pizza of unparalleled perfection to use in a magical spell. They recruit Al's boss, Ike, for the job. Tony decides that to create such a pizza, Ike will have to beat a difficulty number of 15. If Ike rolls 14 or less, the pizza is still edible (and possibly very tasty), but won't be good enough to make the spell work.

When characters are working against a time limit. If characters are racing against the clock, you can use a DN to determine whether they get the job done on time.

Al's delivering pizza to a regular customer. He knows that the guy always tips very well if the pizza gets there within 30 minutes. Unfortunately, the guys in the kitchen took longer than usual and Al's only got 10 minutes left. Tony decides that getting there on time will require Al to drive like a madman. Tony tell him to make a default Nerve roll (adding his All Things Pizza and Emergency Driving Skills) against a DN of 5. Al needs to roll less than an 8 (1/2 Nerve of 10, +1 Emergency Driving, +2 All Things Pizza) but higher than a 4 in order to get the pizza there on time. If Nick fails (either by blowing the roll or rolling less than the DN), Al still makes the delivery, but misses out on the fat tip.

When a situation has a built-in resistance. In some cases, an object or situation may have an innate (and constant) resistance number. This is essentially an example of a (sometimes extremely) delayed resisted roll, but in most cases the GM won't want to bother figuring out the stats of the person who set up the situation.

The group is attempting to decipher a coded message found in an ancient book. Rather than figuring out the long-dead code maker's Cryptography Skill and using a resisted roll, Tony simply assigns the code a DN of 10.

To combine multiple rolls. Sometimes, it may make sense to combine a number of individual rolls into a single roll with a DN.

Sid, Al, and Frank are trying to move a big rock that a gravel monster tossed through the front window of the local field office. Rather than try to determine the mathematics involved in combining three rolls, Tony simply has the person with the highest Body roll against a DN of 5.

When there are lots of modifiers at work. In some cases, it may be easier for the GM to simply set a DN rather than figure out all of the modifiers involved in a situation.

Al attempts to swing across a ravine using a moth-eaten curtain attached to a rotten tree branch while it's raining. Al is also naked, on fire, temporarily blind and deaf, and carrying a small child. Tony assigns a DN of 15—unless Nick spends some Yum Yums, it ain't gonna happen.

DIFFICULTY NUMBERS

The DN Table won't print anymore.

See QAGS Second Edition.

CHAPTER 11

KICK MONSTER BUTT



A monster, by definition, poses a threat to human life. The M-Force agent's job is to remove that threat. In the process, he puts his own life on the line. While it is occasionally possible to get rid of a monster without the use of force, most monster hunts end in violence. This chapter describes how to resolve such fights using the M-Force rules. Combat should be one of the most exciting aspects of the M-Force game, but there's no way the rules alone can lead to exciting battles (in fact, too much reliance on the rules can have the exact opposite effect). The GM and all the players should work together to make sure combat doesn't become a boring series of die rolls.

THE BASICS

The Combat Round

Combat in the M-Force game is divided up into rounds. A round is defined as "the amount of time it takes for everyone in the scene to take one action." The round does not represent a set amount of game time—it's simply a convenient way to break up combat. In spite of this fact, the GM may occasionally rule that an action will take multiple rounds to complete (usually when the action being attempted is a complex non-combat action).

Who Goes First?

Since a lot of things are going on at the same time, the order of actions in a combat round is not usually important. The GM will go around the table, asking each player what he plans to do during the round. Once everyone has declared their action, she will ask for rolls in the order that makes the most sense (for example, if one character is shooting at a monster with his sidearm and another is attacking it with a sword, the character with the gun will probably go first). If for some reason exact timing does become important (for example, a character is attempting to keep a monster from attacking a companion), the GM will either compare the appropriate scores (usually Nerve or Body) of the characters involved or ask for a resisted roll of some kind.

When declaring your actions, go with your instincts. Don't think too hard or take too long. Also, keep in mind that combat is chaotic and disorienting—your character won't know what the other characters are up to, so don't try to base your actions on what everyone else is doing. If your action no longer makes sense when it comes your turn, the GM will probably let you do something else, as long as you can think of something fast. If you take too long deciding what to do, the GM may rule that you've missed your chance to do anything this round.

Types of Combat

There are two basic types of combat: *hand-to-hand* and *ranged*. Hand-to-hand combat occurs when two people are swinging fists, claws, swords, or other melee weapons at one another. Ranged combat happens when a person or monster attempts to harm another person or monster from a distance; when your agent shoots at the monster, or when the monster tries to use its atomic breath on you. Both types of combat are resolved using a resisted roll, though the details vary slightly.

HAND-TO-HAND COMBAT

Each round of hand-to-hand combat between two characters is resolved with a resisted roll. Each person uses the Word that best describes the type of attack he is making; for most PCs, this will be the "M-Force Agent" Job. The roll represents a series of feints, parries, and other maneuvers. The winner of the roll gets to inflict damage upon his opponent.

When making combat rolls, roll the die where the GM can see it, if at all possible. Even if you have to tell the GM what you rolled, don't simply say "I rolled a 12." Instead, tell the GM what your character *intends* to do, as descriptively as possible. At the same time, keep in mind that even if your roll succeeds, the monster might roll better, so make sure your description doesn't assume success. For example, instead of saying, "I cleave the werewolf in two with a mighty blow of my silver axe," say, "With every ounce of strength I have left, I swing my axe toward the monster's skull." If your roll fails, on the other



hand, feel free to explain how you screwed up. For example, "Sparks fly as my axe hits the stone wall, narrowly missing the creature's head."

RANGED COMBAT

Ranged combat is also handled with a resisted roll. Unlike hand-to-hand combat, however, a single roll in ranged combat represents only one attack (not a complete "exchange of fire" between the two combatants). Therefore, there is always an attacker and a defender. The attacker is the person firing the gun, breathing the atomic breath, or throwing the rock. The defender is the guy he's shooting at, breathing on, or throwing towards. While the attacker uses whatever Word is most appropriate to the sort of attack he's making (again, usually "M-Force Agent" for PCs), the defender uses whatever Word best reflects his ability to avoid the attack. This is almost always Body, though a few Jobs or Gimmicks can be used instead. While either participant in hand-to-hand combat can cause damage to the other, only the attacker can cause damage in ranged combat. If the defender wins the roll, the attack simply misses.

While shooting things tends to be a safer, faster and deadlier way to kill them, combat scenes that consist entirely of gunfire can bog down if you're not careful. When you're shooting at a monster, keep in mind that unless he has a ranged attack of his own he's probably trying to get close enough to chew on you. Describe what you're doing to stay out of his reach. If you and an opponent are exchanging fire, do what you can to avoid the combat turning into a "two guys stand there shooting at each other" situation. Unless both of you are shooting from heavily fortified positions, your character should constantly be on the move as he attempts to get a clear shot at the bad guy and avoid incoming bullets/fireballs/atomic halitosis. If things start to get dull, feel free to declare that your character has run out of ammo, dropped his gun, or otherwise lost his ability to return fire. Such situations can add a bit of tension as the character reloads, tries to reclaim his weapon, or looks for another way to defeat his opponent.

If a ranged attacker fails his roll, the GM may decide that there's a chance that the bullet will hit someone else in the immediate area. The easiest way to do this is to assign everyone in the area a number (with a nice big range in the middle that indicates the bullet didn't hit anyone) and roll to see who gets hit. Therefore, if there are more friends than enemies near your target, you might want to hold your fire.

Damage

Whenever the result of a combat sequence indicates that a character takes damage, simply subtract the losing roll (or zero, if the loser failed his roll) from the winning roll. The result is the base amount of damage caused by the attack. If the character who caused the damage is using a weapon, add the weapon's *damage bonus* (see table) to this total. Subtract the result from the injured character's Health Points.

Remember to take the damage your character has been dealt into account when describing his actions. For example, if your character has taken a lot of punishment during the game, don't simply say "I run forward and attack the monster." Instead say "I stumble towards the creature and painfully lift my weapon for another swing."

Constantly erasing and rewriting your character's health points will quickly turn your character sheet into a giant mess. Instead, simply keep a running tally on a scrap sheet of paper. Since most characters have fewer than 20 H.P., you can also use a 20 sided die to keep track of your current total, or use the life counters designed for collectible card games (which are available at most game stores).

All sorts of things can be used as weapons, from beer bottles to TV sets. If your character is attacked without his weapons, have him grab whatever's handy. Be creative.

Whenever possible, use chainsaws.

Death

When a character's Health Point total reaches zero, he's dead—usually. If the character is an important person (as determined by the GM—most PCs qualify), he gets one last chance. The player (or GM in the case of an important GMC) must make a Body roll. If the roll fails, the character dies. If the roll succeeds, the character is alive, but in serious danger of shedding the mortal coil. Until the character gets medical attention, he cannot do anything other than bleed, gurgle, and perhaps gasp out a word every now and then. For every hour the character goes without receiving treatment, another Body roll is required. If the roll fails, the character permanently loses 1 point from his Body score. If the character's Body score reaches 0, he dies.

As described in Chapter 12, you can use Yum Yums to reduce the amount of damage your character takes. If an attack causes enough damage to reduce your Health Point total to zero, spend some Yum Yums. After all, they probably won't do your character much good in the afterlife.



COMPLICATIONS

The basic combat system for *M-Force* is extremely simple. Unfortunately, there are a number of factors that can make things a bit trickier. In addition, some groups may want to add a few additional rules to enhance their combat scenes. Before the game starts, check with your GM to determine which optional rules he plans to use in the game.

Weapons can be intimidating in non-combat situations, especially if the person you're trying to spook is unarmed. Encourage the GM to let you apply your weapon's damage bonus (or at least its "scariness" bonus) to other rolls as well. Just keep in mind that threatening a person with a deadly weapon is very illegal in most circumstances.

Armor

Armor is something designed to prevent or lessen damage from an attack. For *M-Force* characters, armor usually comes in the form of Kevlar vests, helmets, riot gear, and so forth. Monsters, on the other hand, often receive the benefits of armor because of their tough skin, lightning reflexes, or supernatural powers. "Hard cover" (solid objects between the combatants that can stop or reduce the force of an attack) can also act as armor. Regardless, all armor works the same way: you simply subtract the character's *armor rating* from the damage total of the attack.

Keep in mind that while armor is very useful in preventing attacks, it comes with its own set of problems. Even the most modern forms of protection tend to be a bit uncomfortable. Also, you'll look like an idiot walking around town wearing a sumo suit.

For reasons that are best left unexplained, Sid is walking down the street wearing a full suit of chain mail. Suddenly, a mugger attacks him. The mugger rolls a successful 9 on his attack roll. Jim's roll is also successful, but is only a 3. The mugger's knife (a little, sharp weapon) has a Damage Bonus of +2. The attack would normally cause (9-3+2) or 8 points of damage. Luckily, Sid's wearing his chain mail, which Tony decides counts as medium armor, so he only takes (8-3) or 5 points of damage from the attack.

Automatic Weapons

Attacking Multiple Targets

A character using an automatic weapon on full-auto mode may attempt to hit up to three separate targets. To do this, he simply declares which targets he wants to try to hit and makes a single roll. If the roll succeeds, each of the

targets rolls to dodge normally. For every 5 points of the attack roll, each target that is hit takes an extra +1 of damage (this modifier replaces the normal +3 for automatic fire). Anyone caught in the arc of fire (as determined by the GM—it should include all characters between or adjacent to the declared targets) must also make a dodge roll. Those who fail to dodge take damage normally, though the shooter may spend his own Yum Yums to help them dodge or resist damage from the attack.

If the attacker fails his roll, the attack is handled just like a full-auto burst against a single target (as explained in the notes following the weapon damage table).

Ted "the Terminator" and his pal Bill are fighting a group of werewolves. Ted decides to spray three of them with automatic fire. Tony determines that an additional werewolf and Bill are also in the arc of fire. The possible results are as follows:

Ted fails the roll: The three target werewolves, the bystander werewolf, and Bill all make dodge rolls against whatever Ted rolled. Those who lose the resisted roll take damage as if from a normal attack.

Ted succeeds, but rolls less than 5: All five characters in the arc of fire make dodge rolls. Those who fail take normal damage. If Bill is hit, Ted may spend his own Yum Yums to help Bill avoid damage.

Ted succeeds with a roll of 5-9: As above, but the three targeted werewolves each take an additional point of damage.

Ted succeeds with a roll of 10-14: As above, but the targeted werewolves each take an extra two points of damage.

Ted succeeds with a roll of 15+: As above, but the targeted werewolves each take three extra points of damage.

Suppressive Fire

In addition to using automatic fire to wound opponents, a character can use it to keep a target from taking action. When this is the case, the attacker simply declares that he is laying down suppressive fire and declares what action he is attempting to keep the target from taking. If the GM rules that suppressive fire will work to prevent the action, the character makes a normal attack roll, but damage is not applied immediately. Instead, if the target attempts to take the forbidden action during the round, his roll to perform the action is resisted by the attack roll. If the target wins the resisted roll, he may take the action



normally. If he loses with a failed roll, he takes damage normally from the attack (no dodge allowed). If he loses with a successful roll, he realizes the danger of taking the action. If he decides to take the action anyway, the target's action is resolved normally, but he takes damage from the attack (no dodge allowed).

The Kids have managed to corner a demon. Sid declares that he will lay down suppressive fire (using an automatic rifle with a weapon damage bonus of +3) to keep the demon where it is while the others move into a better position. Sid rolls an 8, which succeeds. The forbidden action is movement—as long as the demon stays where it is, it can do anything it wants without fear. However, if the demon tries to move to another location, it must roll against Sid's attack. Tony decides that the demon's locomotive ability is based on its Body. If the demon succeeds in its Body roll with a result of 8 or better, it can dodge Sid's fire and move to another location. If the demon fails its Body roll, it takes 11 points of damage and fails to get to wherever it's headed. If the demon's Body roll succeeds, but is less than 8, it realizes that moving would be rather dangerous. It can still move if it wants, but will take 11 points of damage in the process.

Shotguns

When a character fires a shotshell, it discharges a number of pellets in a cone-shaped pattern centered on the muzzle of the gun. The amount of damage this does to the target depends on how many of the pellets hit. More pellets will hit a nearby target, which is why shotguns do more damage at close range (see weapon damage table). A character with a shotgun can also use shot to his advantage when he wants to attack two adjacent creatures. The targets must be within a few feet of one another and in close (but not point blank) range. Basically, the shooter aims between the two targets so that a roughly equal number of pellets will hit each one. The shooter makes only one roll, which each target may dodge normally. If either target hits, he takes damage normally (though the +1 bonus for close range does not apply to the roll).

Al encounters two monsters in a hallway. They are at close range and, because of the confined space, are standing very close to one another. Al decides he'll use his shotgun, hoping he can take out both monsters. He rolls a 10 on his attack roll, which is a success. The monsters roll to dodge. The first rolls an 8. The shotgun's damage modifier is +4, so the first monster takes 6 points of damage. The second monster fails its roll, taking 14 points of damage.

Combat Modifiers

Many situations can give a combatant an edge against his opponent. In hand-to-hand combat, size, reach, and the conditions of the battlefield can all affect the outcome of an exchange of attacks. For ranged combat, the distance between the attacker and defender, targeting equipment, and visibility can affect the outcome of an attack. Because it's impossible to actually catalog every single thing that might cause such an advantage (and because looking through the rulebook for those modifiers would bog down combat scenes), we leave such modifiers entirely to the GM's discretion. Ultimately, common sense and dramatic propriety should determine combat modifiers. Generally, no single circumstance should result in a modifier worse than -5 or better than +5.

Most GMs are human, and won't be able to keep track of every little detail of combat. If you feel

Cover/Armor Type	Examples	Armor Rating
Minimal*	Catcher's Gear, Tree Branches	1
Light*	Sumo Suit, Wooden Fence	2
Medium	Concealed Bullet Proof Vest**, Steel Door	3
Heavy	SWAT-style Assault Armor**, Stone Fence	4

*Offers no protection from bullets and other high-velocity weapons
**+1 armor rating against bullets and other high-velocity weapons
Note: Armor-piercing rounds, as well as a few other attack forms, ignore all armor.

that your character is entitled to a modifier, point it out to her. Just remember that no means no.

Al is firing a big gun at a Flesh-Eating Woodchuck from Planet Zalooga. Al's M-Force Job is still 9. Tony decides that since the Woodchuck is partially hidden behind some shrubs and the weather is rainy, Al will suffer a -2 modifier. That means Nick has to roll a 7 or less (9-2) to succeed.

Using Yum Yums to Increase or Decrease Damage

Characters may increase the amount of damage they do to an opponent, or decrease the amount of damage an opponent does to them, by spending Yum Yums. Every YY spent increases or reduces damage by 3 points.



After a long and exciting chase, the Kids have cornered a pair of rampaging swamp beasts that have wandered into the city. The maritime office wants to study the creatures, and has asked the team to capture rather than kill them if possible.

TONY: Ok, you've managed to chase the beasts into a dead-end alley. What do you do?

NICK: I shoot the tranq gun at one of them.

SARAH: I'm going to open up a case of Jackie Chan on the big one's ass!

JIM: I'm going after the other one with the big stick I'm carrying.

ALLISON: I'm looking around the alley for a way to get up on the roof of one of the buildings. Hopefully I can drop the nets on them from up there.

TONY: Right. Since Al was still reloading the tranq gun when you got to the alley, Alicia and Sid will go first. Then Al will be able to take his shot. We'll deal with Susan's attempt to climb the roof last. Alicia's a little faster than Sid, so you get to go first, Sarah.

SARAH: Cool. (*rolls a 12, which is less than her "Kung Fu Chick" Job of 14*) I jump up and do a flying monkey kick right for his head.

TONY: (*Rolls a 10, which also succeeds*) The beast rakes at you with his claws as you fly through the air. He misses you, but his sudden movement throws off your aim. As your feet hit the ground, you manage to punch him in the chest, but the blow doesn't feel very solid. (*Tony records in his notes that the swamp beast has taken (12-10) 2 points of damage.*)

JIM: (*Rolls a 18, which fails.*) I attempt to beat the creature brutally about the head and neck, but he manages to block my attacks with his great scaly claws.

TONY: (*Rolls a 16, also a failure*) Fortunately, the brutality of Sid's attack keeps the creature too busy to make an effective counterattack. Your turn, Nick. Which creature is Al going to shoot at?

NICK: I'm guessing the one's Alicia's going after is more open—sounds like Sid and the other beast are in pretty close quarters. Can I get off a shot at the one Alicia's attacking without hitting her?

TONY: They're both off-balance and not locked in mortal combat like Sid and the other one, so you can probably get a safe shot off at the creature.

NICK: I yell "Incoming!" take aim, and fire. (*Rolls a 10, which succeeds*).

TONY: (*Rolls a 17, which is higher than the creatures' Body. This would normally mean that the creature takes 10 points of damage, plus the Weapon Damage Bonus of the gun. However, the tranquilizer gun Al is using is a special piece of equipment. It never causes more than 2 HP of damage, but if the attack would normally cause 5 points of damage or more, the target immediately falls unconscious*). The creature, preparing to take a swing at Alicia, doesn't notice you. The dart hits him square in the chest and its knees seem to go weak. Allison, Susan's noticed a fire escape about halfway down the alley. She can get to it this round, but won't be able to start climbing up just yet.

ALLISON: Actually, I'm going to head toward the monster Al just shot. Hopefully we can get him secured before the tranquilizers wear off.

TONY: Right. You head past the fire escape toward the monster. He falls to the ground just as you get there. Time for a new round.

It's a whole lot easier to avoid damage in the first place than to heal up later. If your character is getting the crap beaten out of him, use some Yum Yums. That's what they're there for.

Al hits the Woodchuck from the previous example. The damage (including weapon modifiers) is 6. "That's not good enough," says Nick. "That Woodchuck's caused me nothing but pain and heartache, and I want him dead. I'm

spending 4 Yum Yums." Al's attack causes $(6+(4 \times 3))$ 18 points of damage, utterly destroying the Woodchuck.

Special Types of Damage

Fire

In M-Force, fire usually comes in the form of an attack—from a monster's magical ability, a flamethrower, or some other wonderful source. Therefore, fire attacks work



just like any other attack on the initial round. If a character is in danger of fire from a non-monstrous source, simply assign it an “attack number” based on the size of the blaze.

The problem with fire is that it keeps burning. When a character takes damage from a fire, he’s considered to be on fire. The amount of damage taken is the character’s *On Fire Number* (OFN).

Each round, the character’s OFN automatically drops by 2. Additionally, the character may attempt to put out the fire. This requires a Body roll. If the Body roll succeeds, subtract the roll from the character’s OFN. Once the character’s OFN reaches zero, his Human Torch impersonation is over. Until then, the character takes damage equal to his OFN at the end of every round.

A third party may attempt to put out the fire with a fire extinguisher, bucket of water, etc., by making an attack roll resisted by the OFN. If the attack is successful, the “damage” is subtracted from the burning character’s OFN. A third party may also attempt to smother the fire with a blanket using the same mechanic. However, if the OFN wins the attack, the person trying to help the burning man catches fire himself, with an OFN equal to the damage caused by the fire.

During the M-Force July 4th picnic, Frank puts a little too much lighter fluid on the grill.

Round 1: Frank leans in to light the charcoal. A tongue of flame shoots up, igniting Frank’s favorite Jimmy Buffett T-shirt. The GM decides that Frank’s On Fire Number is 8. Frank fails his Body roll and takes 8 points of damage.

Round 2: Frank’s OFN drops to 6. Frank attempts to stop, drop, and roll. Frank rolls a successful Body roll of 1, meaning that his OFN drops to 5. Frank takes 5 more points of damage.

Round 3: Frank’s OFN drops to 3. Sid grabs a tablecloth and tries to smother out the flames. Sid fails his Body roll and catches fire, with an OFN of 3. Frank now gets another chance to put out the flames himself. He makes a successful Body roll of 6, ending his own torment. Unfortunately, Sid’s on fire now, and takes 3 points of damage.

Round 4: Sid’s OFN drops to 1. By this time, Al has returned from inside with the fire extinguisher. He rolls a successful 8 on his ranged attack, putting out the fire. Sid doesn’t take any damage this round.

For those of you keeping track, Frank took a total of 13 points of damage and Sid took 3.

Falling

Falling doesn’t hurt one bit—it’s the sudden stop at the end that’s painful. When a character falls, there’s a chance he will hurt or kill himself. To find out what happens, have the character make a Body roll. If the roll fails, the character takes one point of damage for every foot he fell. If the roll succeeds, multiply the roll by 5 and subtract the result from the total distance fallen (in feet) to determine damage. (The damage may be further modified by the conditions of the area where the character lands).

While helping fix a leak in the roof of the local office, Al slips and falls. The building 20’ tall and Al is lucky enough to land in the grass (no damage modifiers). The base damage for the fall is 20. Al makes a Body roll, and succeeds with a 3. He takes $(20-(5 \times 3))$ or 5 points of damage.

Nobody falls silently. If your character falls (especially from a great height), make appropriate noises.

Drowning/Suffocation

Whenever a character is deprived of oxygen, he loses two Health Points per minute. Once the character reaches 0 HP, he gets the normal “important person” Body roll, if applicable. If this roll succeeds, the character is still alive but loses one point of Brain per minute automatically (no roll allowed). This is similar to the Body loss that accompanies other forms of dying, but represents brain damage from lack of oxygen. Once the person’s Brain reaches 0, he dies.

Alicia gets knocked out and thrown into a pond. She has 13 Health Points. Unless somebody saves her (or she somehow wakes up and



saves herself), she will reach 0 HP in six and a half minutes. At that point, she'll get to make a Body roll. If the roll succeeds, she'll permanently lose 1 point of Brain per minute until she dies.

Poison

The GM must define the game effects of a given poison. For most poisons, the player makes a Body roll (often

STRAY LEAD

Because of the way shotgun shells work, there is a chance that characters other than the intended target will be hit by stray pellets, especially at longer ranges. If the GM wants to model this, he can simply make everyone within the pattern make a simple Body roll. Anyone who fails is hit, taking damage equal to the shooter's roll (without the weapon damage bonus).

OPTIONAL RULES

against a difficulty number representing the potency of the toxin), with success negating or reducing the effects of the poison. For some poisons (sleep-causing ones, for example), only one roll is required. For others, the character must continue to make Body rolls, and suffer any effects of the toxin, on a regular basis until the poison works its way out of his system, medical treatment is administered, or the character dies.

Susan gets bitten by an ancient horror that is, unfortunately, poisonous. The poison is one that slowly kills the victim by draining Health Points. It has potency of 8, meaning that the victim must make a Body roll with a DN of 8 to resist it. The roll is made once an hour. If the roll succeeds, the character takes no damage. If the roll fails (or is less than the DN), the character takes damage as if from an attack roll of 8. The results of the poison are as follows:

Hour 1: Susan makes a successful Body roll of 9, beating the poison. No damage.

Hour 2: Susan fails her Body roll. She takes 8 points of damage.

Hour 3: Susan makes a successful body roll of 4. Since the poison "wins" the roll, she takes 4 points of damage.

Hour 4: Susan finally makes it to a hospital, where an antidote counteracts the poison.

If your character is slowly dying from poison, he should get weaker and weaker with each failed roll. Keep this in mind when conversing with other characters and describing your actions. If the other players seem to think there are more important things to do than find a cure, feel free to express your dismay. Say things like, "I wish somebody loved me," and "If it were Al, we'd be at the hospital already."

Explosions

When something is about to blow up, the GM assigns each character nearby a DN based on their distance from the center of the explosion, the force of the explosion, and so forth. Each character must dodge the attack as if the DN were a successful ranged attack roll. These rules can also be used for other instances of large-scale destruction—for example, when a giant monster knocks down a building.

A nasty (and extremely well-equipped) monster chucks a grenade at the Kids. Alicia and Al are both within a few feet of the grenade when it explodes, so they have to roll against a DN of 15. Alicia rolls a successful 8 (taking 7 points of damage) and Al fails his roll (taking 15 points of damage, though he immediately spends 2 YY to reduce the damage by 6 and avoid death). Susan isn't nearly as close to ground zero, so her DN is only a 10. She rolls a successful 9, taking 1 point of damage. Sid is even farther away, and only has to beat a DN of 5. He fails his roll, but luckily he's behind a car, which Tony decides provides him an armor rating of 4. Sid takes a measly point of damage.

ARMED vs. UNARMED

When one person has a weapon and the other doesn't, the unarmed combatant is at a definite disadvantage. To reflect this, the armed combatant may add his weapon's damage bonus to the Number he's rolling. This rule only applies to hand-to-hand combat. This rule does not usually apply to monsters with natural weapons (such as claws or teeth).

Alicia is using her kung fu against a sword-wielding demon. The demon's sword-swinging Number is a 12. Because the demon is armed and Alicia is not, it gets to add the sword's damage bonus (+4) to its score, meaning it is successful on a roll of 16 or less.

OPTIONAL RULES

Explosives can be a lot of fun, but use common sense. Even the most hopeless mad bomber doesn't carry dynamite to the bathroom with him, and a character who resorts to high explosives to solve every problem probably wouldn't have passed M-Force's psychological tests in the first place. Explosives should be used judiciously and with great care.

Monster Attacks

Many monsters have unique "attacks" that can affect a character. The creatures of the night might charm an M-Force agent into doing their bidding, cause "psychic damage" that reduces the character's Brain Number, blind a character, and do all sorts of other nasty things. The GM is

GANGING UP

When multiple people attack the same opponent, that opponent becomes much easier to defeat. The first attack against an opponent during a combat sequence is resolved normally. For each subsequent attack, the character being ganged up on receives a -2 penalty to his combat Number. (-2 for the second attack, -4 for the third, etc). Unless the creature being ganged up on is exceptionally large, no more than four people can attack him in a given combat round. This rule does not apply to ranged combat—a character can dodge each ranged attack that comes at him using his full Body Number.

The Kids are fighting a walking corpse with a combat Number of 12. All four decide to make hand-to-hand attacks against the creature. Sid attacks first, using his M-Force Agent Job Number of 10. The monster uses its combat Number of 12. Sid rolls an 8, but the monster rolls an 11, causing 3 points of damage. Alicia goes next, using her Kung Fu Chick Job Number of 14. The monster again uses its combat Number, but this time at a -2 penalty, giving it a score of (12-2) or 10. Alicia rolls 13, while the monster rolls 9. The monster takes 4 points of damage. Susan gets the next swing, using her M-Force Agent Job of 11. The monster's combat score is now (12-4) or 8. Susan rolls a 15 and the monster rolls a 12. Both fail, but at least nobody gets hurt. Last but not least, Al jumps into the fray, using his M-Force Job of 9. The monster's combat score is now (12-6) or 6. Al rolls an 8. The monster rolls a 10, failing its roll. Al causes 8 points of damage, sending the beastie back to the grave.

OPTIONAL RULES

encouraged to use her imagination when deciding exactly how a home-brewed monster's attack works within context of the game system.

Don't wait for the GM to come up with all the cool monsters. If there's something you'd like to fight, work with the GM to create the creature.

HEALING

When a character gets hurt, he'll most likely attempt to get better. The rate of recovery can be determined by consulting the Healing Table. A character can heal an additional 1 Health Point per week by spending a Yum Yum.

If your character's recovering from an injury, milk it for all it's worth. If he was injured while saving the life of another team member, you'll probably want to hold it over their head for years to come (or until they save your skin and you're even).

After the grenade incident, Al's left with only 4 HP. His friends immediately rush to his aid. Since there are 3 people working on Al, all of whom have been through M-Force's basic first aid course, Tony decides that no die rolls are necessary. Al regains 1 HP. A few hours later, the team manages to get Al to a hospital. The doctors work on him for a while, restoring 2 more HP (bringing Al to a total of 7). Since Al's still badly injured, the doctor's admit him to the hospital. After a week, he's feeling much better (up to 10 HP) and is discharged. It'll take him 3 more weeks to heal back up to his original 13 HP (unless he spends Yum Yums).





HEALING TABLE

Treatment	Rate of Recovery
First Aid	1 HP
Emergency Room Care	2 HP
Bed Rest	1 HP/week
Doctor's care	2 HP/week*
Hospital care	3 HP/week*

*Once the character has regained 3/4 of his original HP, his rate of healing drops to one HP/week, regardless of what level of care he's receiving. After a certain point, only time will heal a wound.

EXPLOSION DIFFICULTY NUMBERS

What Exploded?	Difficulty Number*
M-80	10
Hand Grenade	15
Land Mine	25
Stick of Dynamite	50
Car Bomb	100
Conventional Bomb	1,000
Nuke	10,000
Tunguska Blast	10,000,000

*The DN given here is for characters at ground zero of the explosion.



WEAPONS DAMAGE BONUSES

Weapon Type	Examples	Damage Bonus
little dull weapons	brass knuckles, sticks, rocks	+1
little sharp weapons	knives, arrows, throwing stars	+2
medium dull weapons	baseball bats, lead pipes	+2
little guns	.22 long rifle, .32	+2
medium sharp weapons	hatchets, spears	+3
big dull weapons	steel chairs, sledgehammers	+3
medium guns	.38, 9mm, .40S&W, .45ACP	+3
big sharp weapons	swords, axes, chainsaws	+4
big guns	12ga-00, .44, .357, 5.56mm, 7.62mm	+4
REALLY big guns	.50BMG	+5

Notes-

3-Round Bursts: Some automatic weapons are capable of firing in bursts of three bullets. When this option is used, add +1 to damage, assuming a hit is scored. If the burst misses the target, the GM should keep in mind that there are three stray bullets to deal with.

Full-Auto Fire: Whenever a character fires an automatic weapon in full-auto mode and hits his target, an additional +3 is added to the damage. If the roll fails, everyone in the gun's arc of fire (as determined by the GM) must make a dodge roll. Those who fail or roll less than the attacker take damage normally (the +3 bonus for full-auto fire does not apply).

Shotguns: When a character is firing shot (rather than slugs), damage is increased by +1 at short range and +3 at point-blank range.

CHAPTER 12

YUM YUMS



WHAT ARE YUM YUMS?

Yum Yums are the single most important mechanic of the *M-Force* RPG. The basic system lets you describe your character's abilities and determine his chances of success or failure in various situations. Yum Yums, however, are what allow your character to become a hero. Essentially, Yum Yums are "brownie points" awarded to a player by the GM when the player does something to make the game more fun. While Yum Yums can take the form of simple

of harrowing and improbable things. A number of factors can make a character interesting—background, dialogue, and personality, just to name a few. In a book or movie, the writer provides these things. In a role-playing game, it's up to the player. When the player does things that make his character more interesting, he earns Yum Yums. Later on, these Yum Yums can be used to succeed at the impossible and save the day. A player may also use Yum Yums to improve his character, reflecting what the character has learned during the course of the story.

EARNING YUM YUMS

In most campaigns, the players will start out with a few Yum Yums, but these will quickly disappear. In order for your character to thrive (or in some games, simply survive), you'll need to earn Yum Yums. Yum Yums will most often be awarded for good role-playing—staying in character, bringing up important bits of character background, and pursuing your character's goals. Additionally, the GM will occasionally award Yum Yums for non-character actions that improve everyone's enjoyment of the game or make her job easier. For example, you may earn Yum Yums for playing a GMC when your character is not in the scene, providing the GM with story hooks, or even springing for pizza.

A number of local teenagers have mysteriously disappeared, and monster activity is suspected. The Kids investigate, and find out that all of the missing teenagers were in some kind of trouble—one was a thief, another was a drug dealer, and so forth. Al has a theory: "It's some kind of boogeyman that comes after people who have been naughty. Maybe we can lure it to us. Sid—you run with scissors. I'm going to play with matches." Everybody has a good laugh, and Al gets a couple of Yum Yums. It doesn't matter that his theory is completely wrong.

USING YUM YUMS

As noted earlier, the continuous exchange of Yum Yums between GM and players is a vital part of the *M-Force* game. The GM awards Yum Yums to players in exchange for making the game more enjoyable. Players, for their



part, can use Yum Yums to improve their characters' fortunes and abilities. The most common uses for Yum Yums are described in the following paragraphs.

As Food: Players can, at any time, simply decide to eat their Yum Yums. Eating Yum Yums has absolutely no effect on the game.

Jim has 8 YY. He eats one of them. He now has 7 YY.

To Succeed Automatically at a Roll: A character may spend Yum Yums to succeed at a roll automatically, without actually needing to roll the dice. If the value of the roll is important (for example, the character is making a resisted roll or rolling against a DN), each YY spent is worth 3 points, up to the character's modified Number for that roll. Beyond that Number, each YY is worth only 1 point.

Susan is shooting at a Giant Frog of Doom, using her M-Force Agent Job of 11. She only has one bullet left, so she decides to make it count. Rather than rolling, she decides to spend Yum Yums. Her final "roll" for the attack depends on how many YY she spends. If she spends 1 YY, her roll will be a 3; 2 YY will give her a roll of 6; and 3 will mean she has a roll of 9. If Susan spends 4 YY, her roll will only be 11 (since 12 is higher than her Job Number, she loses the extra point). For each Yum Yum beyond 4, her roll goes up by 1. Since Susan really doesn't like Giant Frogs of Doom, she decides to spend a whopping 8 Yum Yums. This gives her a roll of 15 for the attack.

To Re-Roll a Failed Roll: A character may re-roll any failed die roll by spending 3 Yum Yums.

Alicia is attempting to con a guy at a bar into buying her a drink. To do so, she needs to make a Nerve roll modified by her Sorority Girl Skill of +2. Alicia's Nerve is 14, meaning she needs to roll 16 or less. She rolls a 20. Rather than deal with the potential ramifications of a Bad Break, Sarah decides to spend 3 YY to re-roll the failure. On her next roll, she gets a 12, and Alicia gets her Long Island Iced Tea.

To Improve a Roll: When a character wishes to improve the final value of a roll (when rolling for degree of success, against a DN, etc.), he may spend Yum Yums to do so. Each YY spent improves the roll by 3 points, up to the character's modified Number for the roll. Beyond the character's modified score, each YY only improves the roll by 1.

Al attempts to swing across a ravine using a moth-eaten curtain attached to a rotten tree branch while it's raining. Al is also naked, on fire, temporarily blind and deaf, and carrying a small child. Tony decides that this is a Body roll with a DN of 15. Since Al's Body Number is 13, there's no way he can

make it without spending some Yum Yums. An automatic Success would cost 7 YY, but Al only has 5. He decides to try rolling and hope for the best. Al gets a 10, which is a success. He then spends 3 YY (the first one gets him 3 points, for a total of 13, the other two get him 1 point each, for a total of 15) and miraculously manages to pull it off.

To Avoid Succumbing to a Weakness: When the GM calls for a Weakness roll, the character may spend Yum Yums to keep the weakness from taking effect. The YY cost is equal to the character's modified Weakness Number divided by 3.

In a show of blatant disregard for the laws of physics, Ted "the Terminator" Loffleholtz is hanging from a tree by the back of his underwear. Luckily, Al shows up to help him. Al's "Good Samaritan" Weakness is telling him to help Ted. Every other part of Al's mind, body, and soul is telling him to run and get a camera first. Al's Weakness Number is 13, which means he needs to spend 4 YY to automatically overcome the Weakness. Al spends the Yum Yums and gets a nice picture of Ted's super-wedgie before helping him down.

To Avoid or Reduce Damage: A character may spend YY to reduce the amount of damage he sustains when an opponent successfully attacks. Damage is reduced by 3 points for each YY spent.

Sid gets into a bar fight with a guy named Gus. Gus lands a serious punch that's about to do 6 points of damage. Jim spends a Yum Yum to reduce the damage to 3—Sid manages to roll with the punch, at least a little bit.

To Increase Damage: When a character successfully attacks an opponent, he may increase the amount of damage caused by spending YY. Each YY spent increases the damage by 3 points.

Don't you remember the space woodchuck from the previous chapter? How the heck can you forget a space woodchuck?

To Bend Reality: In addition to using YY to affect game mechanics, players may also use them to affect the game world. Essentially, a player may spend YY to create a situation more favorable to his character. The basic rule of such "reality bends" is that they cannot contradict anything that has already been established. The number of Yum Yums required to bend reality is entirely up to the GM. This use of Yum Yums is the purest, most basic form of GM bribery, and should be handled as such.

Alicia needs to make a phone call, but since there are no pockets in the Wonder Woman costume she's wearing, she doesn't have any change.

SARAH: I check the change return slot. Any change there?

TONY: No.

SARAH: (Handing Tony a Yum Yum) How about on the floor of the phone booth? Any change there?

TONY: As a matter of fact, there is.

For Character Improvement: This is described in Chapter 13.



CHAPTER 13

IMPROVING YOUR CHARACTER



During a good game, characters will grow and change. Most character development has nothing at all to do with the game rules. A character who suddenly finds his calling in life or falls into a deep depression is often unchanged in terms of game mechanics, regardless of the effect on his personality and outlook on life. However, characters will sometimes change in ways that require alterations in their Words and Numbers. For example, a character may learn a new skill or become more physically fit.

While the GM may of course award a character new abilities or higher Numbers at any time, the type of character improvement described above does not always take place “on screen.” A player may want his characters to improve his Number in a Word not often used in the game, or to learn or improve abilities during downtime. For example, a character may spend his spare time working out or taking piano lessons. Even if such improvement happens in the game, the GM may be uncomfortable deciding how quickly such improvement occurs (or the GM and player may disagree on the issue). Therefore, the easiest way to handle rules-related character development is by using Yum Yums to improve your character’s stats. The costs of such character improvements are given in the table below.

Improvement	Cost
Increase any Number* by one	New Number
Decrease Weakness Number by one	Current Number
Learn a New Job	10 YY for 1/2 Body/Brain/Nerve** + 1
Learn a New Skill	3 YY for +1

*Including a Skill Bonus

**Whichever of the applicable scores is highest

In most cases, there must be some in-game reason for the character improvement. For Body, Brain, Nerve, and existing Gimmicks, Jobs, or Skills, this can be as simple as the character using the Word multiple times during the adventure or achieving a great success or failure (and learning from the experience). In order to learn new Jobs or Skills, the character must have both a

teacher (be it a book, another character, or trial and error) and sufficient time to learn the Job or Skill. In order to decrease a Weakness Number, some in-game reason must be given for the Weakness to loosen its grip on the player (perhaps a character with the Alcoholic Weakness has been going to AA, or the Ugly character has finally gotten rid of that nasty rash).

EXAMPLE 1: After a few missions, Nick decides to raise Al’s M-Force Job from 9 to 10. This costs 10 Yum Yums.



EXAMPLE 2: After a session in which Sid undergoes several very humbling experiences, Jim decides that he should reduce Sid's Overconfidence Weakness. Tony decides that this does indeed make sense given the humiliation Sid has suffered in recent days. Sid's Weakness Number is 13. By spending 13 YY, he reduces it to a 12.

EXAMPLE 3: Alicia decides to major in education. After graduation, she takes a job as a teacher. Sarah decides that Alicia should have the Teacher Job to reflect her new lot in life. Tony decides that the teaching profession is based on Brains (to know stuff) and Nerve (to deal with the students). Since Alicia has Brain 10 and Nerve 13, spending 10 points will give her a Teaching Job Number of 7 (1/2 of 13, plus 1).

EXAMPLE 4: Susan has recently become extremely interested in the occult. She's read several books on the subject and has been spending a lot of time talking to Rainbow (the resident witch). By spending 3 Yum Yums, she can get the Occult Skill at +1.

GIMMICKS, WEAKNESSES, AND YUM YUMS

Once the game has started, a character may not spend Yum Yums to gain new Gimmicks, nor does he gain Yum Yums when he takes on new Weaknesses. However, this does not mean that the character will not get new Gimmicks and Weaknesses during the game. He may inherit a large sum of money ("Rich" Gimmick) or lose an arm ("Missing Arm" Weakness). If the GM determines that such new Gimmicks and Weaknesses need to be defined as "official" Gimmicks or Weaknesses, she will simply assign them appropriate Numbers. In many cases, no Number will be necessary.

EXAMPLE 1: Al becomes involved in the Junior M-Force program, serving as a troop leader for the local group. While all the little rugrats take a liking to Al, one of the kids, a scrappy Asian boy named Timmy, decides that Al is his personal hero. Timmy tries to follow Al wherever he goes, including on missions. Tony does not, however give Al a Timmy-related Weakness ("Pest") or Gimmick ("Sidekick"), because it can all be handled through role-playing.

EXAMPLE 2: While on a mission, Sid is cursed by an old gypsy woman. Tony decides that the curse will work just like the "Unlucky" Weakness, and assigns it a Number of 10.

OTHER MEANS OF CHARACTER IMPROVEMENT

Expertise

Sometimes a player will want his character to have a particular area of expertise. For example, a character who almost exclusively uses a shotgun will probably have a slightly better chance to hit when using that type of weapon than, say, a pistol. To reflect this, the character simply takes the area of expertise as an additional Skill. The expertise Skill is a normal Skill in every respect.

A few months into the campaign, Al has raised his Emergency Driving Skill to +3. Since he's almost always driving the local office van when using this Skill, Nick decides to give him an area of expertise. Nick pays 3 Yum Yums to get a new Skill called "Driving (Vans)" at +1. Any time Al's driving a van, he gets a +1 to his roll. If he's driving in an emergency situation, he gets a total bonus of +4 (+3 for Emergency Driving, +1 for Driving (Vans)).

M-Force Continuing Education Courses

M-Force offers a number of continuing education courses to its members. Some of these are taught exclusively by M-Force (either at M-Force Academy or by local classes taught by visiting Academy instructors or certified field agents who live in the area). Other courses are made available to agents through training partnerships with police academies, universities, and the like. As long as the character fills out the proper forms, M-Force covers the costs of the class. Most of these classes allow an agent to either improve an existing Skill by +1 or gain a new Skill at +1. For some classes, the exact Skill improved or learned may not be immediately obvious. When this happens, the GM makes the final decision (though she may choose to let the player decide). No course will improve more than one Skill, however.

Ted (who has a Firearms Skill of +2) takes the Tactical Submachine Guns course. Tony decides that Ted can either increase his current Firearms Skill to +3 or take the Submachine Guns Skill at +1 (gaining an area of expertise).

Certifications

As mentioned on page 65, M-Force recognizes demonstrated ability in its agents by awarding certifications. These are primarily a matter of in-character achievement; acquiring a certification does not increase the Numbers on the character sheet. Should characters seek to acquire cer-

DO CLASSES COST YUM YUMS?

When a character takes an M-Force continuing education class, the GM decides whether or not the player has to spend Yum Yums to get the Skill Bonus. Such decisions will most likely be based on how the class fits into the overall story, and will be made on a case-by-case basis. He may decide to require the normal Yum Yum expenditure, give the bonuses to the character for free, or allow the characters to take the bonus at a reduced cost. Along similar lines, the GM may decide to give a character a Skill or improvement based on events in the story. For example, if Al has ended up flailing around in the water quite a bit recently, Tony may decide to give him the Swimming Skill at +1. Essentially, Tony is giving Al 3 Yum Yums on the condition that they be spent on the Swimming Skill.

tifications in play, however, here are some suggested game mechanics for the process.

Skill Certification

To simulate the required test, the player should roll against the character's appropriate Number, trying to beat a difficulty number based on the level of certification desired. Competency certification is difficulty 5; expert certification is difficulty 10; and master certification is difficulty 15. If the roll succeeds, M-Force awards the certification. The GM may choose to waive the actual roll if the character's Number is clearly high enough to succeed without the use of Yum Yums. Note that the term "skill" is used here in its normal, real-world sense. The Number tested does not have to be a specific Skill on the character sheet, but may be an aspect of a Job or Gimmick. As previ-

ously stated, being certified has no direct game-mechanical benefit, but the GM may award a concept bonus (see page 96) for the certification in situations where the character's proven expertise would be beneficial.

Al wants to get certified as an M-Force diver. He's been taking classes at a local diving school, and has a +1 Skill Bonus. All he has to do is pass the certification test. To make the roll, Al would add +1 to 1/2 his Body of 13. Since this would give him a total of 7, Tony decides that he's learned enough to get certification, and waives the need for a roll.

Professional Certification

Since this type of certification recognizes outside professional training, the only game-mechanical requirement is that the character have the appropriate Job. In some cases, a relevant Gimmick, Skill, or set of Skills may be substituted, if the GM agrees. That would be acceptable, for example, if a character is seeking certification in a profession for which he has the training but no actual job experience (and therefore no related Job). The character must also be in a position to take the M-Force "monster-hunting considerations" course applicable to the profession in question. The GM may require a Brain or Job roll to pass the class.



When she's not fighting monsters, Rainbow makes her living working as a counselor at a shelter for battered women (Job: Crisis Counselor). By taking the "Counseling Monster Attack Victims" course offered by M-Force, she can become an M-Force certified counselor.

Training Certification

A training certification recognizes an agent's possession of a number of distinct skills. Each appropriate Number must be tested (or the roll waived) as for skill certification. (Descriptions of specific training certifications will indicate which competency level is required for each skill.) As with a professional certification, the character may also be required to pass an M-Force training course.

The M-Force team leader certification requires that the character demonstrate expert knowledge of monsterology and close-quarters battle as well as exceptional leadership skills. The agent must also attend a two-week M-Force Team Leader training course.

Specialist Certification

This is exactly like a training certification, with one distinct game-mechanical twist. When a character completes such a certification, the player may change his Job description to match his new specialty. The Job Number does not change, and the new Job includes all the capabilities of the old one.

Ted "the Terminator" has met all the requirements to become an M-Force Firearms Specialist. He may now change his Job from "M-Force Agent" to "M-Force Firearms Specialist."

DYNAMIC CHARACTER ADVANCEMENT

Unlike most game characters, people in real life do not have a set list of skills that they add to and improve. Instead, people constantly learn new skills and forget (or at least get rusty at) old ones. A person who took a First Aid class twenty years ago isn't going to be as handy in an emergency as someone who took the same class last week. In addition to the limitations of the human memory, a person's knowledge of a subject can be rendered incorrect or obsolete by new discoveries and technology, especially if he doesn't keep up with the latest news on the subject. Also unlike most game characters, people in real life rarely learn new things all at once, but gradually over time. This is especially true of jobs. Training courses and college de-

grees only go so far. A person really learns his job by actually doing it.

The point here is that it would be impossible to create an accurate "character sheet" for a real person. In order to do so, you'd have to account for every job they've ever had, every class they've taken since first grade, every sport they've ever played, and every hobby they've ever practiced in their spare time—and you'd still probably miss something. This task might be possible, however, if you only had to list the skills that they are actively using at this point in life, and assumed that all of those forgotten skills and experiences were accounted for in the person's Body, Brain, and Nerve.

The M-Force system assumes that the character's Jobs and Skills describe him "right now." They don't represent an exact history of everything he's ever done, learned, or experienced. The past is represented abstractly by his Body,



Brain, and Nerve Numbers (though some of the character's past experiences are also implied by his Jobs—for example, a character with the Doctor Job almost certainly attended college and medical school at some point). This assumption is not unique—most games make it to some extent.

Most character advancement systems (including the basic *M-Force* “spend Yum Yums to improve your character” system) abandon the “right now” assumption immediately after character creation. From that point on, the character sheet attempts to describe the character's entire history since the beginning of the campaign. The optional system described in this section allows for a more natural approach to character advancement, allowing the character sheet to describe the character as he exists “right now”, no matter how much time has passed since the game began. In addition to providing more realistic character development, this system keeps the character sheet from turning into a complicated list of Skills and Jobs.

Learning and Improving Skills

A character learns and increases Skills by spending Yum Yums, at the cost described in the basic *M-Force* character advancement system (3 YY to learn a new Skill; the new modifier in YY to improve a Skill by one). The character can only increase a Skill Bonus by 1 per session.

Trading In Skill Bonuses

A character can improve any Number (except another Skill Bonus) by “trading in” appropriate Skill Bonuses. To do this, determine the number of Yum Yums it would take to increase the Number under the basic system and divide by 3 (the math's already been done in the *Trade-In Cost Table*, below). The character then trades in that number of Skill Bonuses in Skills appropriate to the Word being improved (as determined by the GM) and increases the Word's Number by 1. The traded-in bonuses are lost; if this reduces a Skill Bonus to zero, the character no longer needs to keep track of that Skill—it's now abstractly represented by the character's improved Number in the chosen Word. In some (admittedly rare) cases, a character may even be able to trade in Skill Bonuses to reduce a Weakness Number. For example, a character may trade in “12-Step Programs +4” to reduce his “Drunk” Weakness from 13 to 12.

EXAMPLE 1: Al has an “M-Force Agent” Job of 10 and the following skills: Emergency Driving +1, All Things Pizza +2, Pool +3, Army Stuff +1, Firearms +1, Monsterology +1, Urban Monster Fighting +1, and Investigations +2. He decides to trade in some Skill Bonuses to improve his “M-Force Agent” Job, which means he needs to trade in 3

Skill Bonuses. Tony tells him that Firearms, Monsterology, Urban Monster Fighting, and Investigations are all applicable to the Job. Nick decides to trade in one Skill Bonus each from Firearms, Monsterology, and Investigations. Al now has the “M-Force Agent” Job at 11 and the Skills Emergency Driving +1, All Things Pizza +2, Pool +3, Army Stuff +1, Urban Monster Fighting +1, and Investigations +1

EXAMPLE 2: Allison wants to raise Susan's Brain score from 15 to 16, which means she needs to trade in 5 Skill Bonuses. Looking over her character sheet, Tony decides that the following Skills are Brain-appropriate: Occult Lore +2, Computer Geek +1, First Aid +1, Investigations +1, Hungarian Literature +1, “Charles In Charge” Lore +2 and Greek Mythology +2. Allison decides that she will trade in one point each from Computer Geek, Hungarian Literature, and “Charles In Charge” Lore, plus both points in Greek Mythology. This leaves her with the following Brain Skills: Occult Lore +2, First Aid +1, Investigations +1, “Charles In Charge” Lore +1.

EXAMPLE 3: Tony decides that Trixie, a gamemaster character, will improve her “Seduction” Gimmick of 12 to a 13. Looking over her Skill list, he decides that the only applicable Skills are Snappy Dresser +2, Model +1, and Talk Dirty +1. By trading in all of her points in these four Skills, she can improve the Gimmick.

Trading In Skill Bonuses to Improve Skills

A character may also trade in Skill Bonuses to improve other Skills. The cost to improve a Skill by 1 is equal to the new Skill Bonus sought. Usually, the applicable Skills will be areas of expertise under the Skill to be improved.

Ted has the following Skills: Firearms +3, Shotgun +1, Rifle +2, Sub Machine Gun +1. He can trade in his Shotgun, Rifle, and SMG Skills (a total of 4 Skill Bonuses) to improve his Firearms to +4.

Learning New Jobs

Characters can learn new Jobs gradually by using the trade-in system for improving Numbers. When a player decides he wants his character to learn a new Job in this way, the GM should first make sure that the character's Weakness and/or background don't automatically disqualify him. For example, a character with the “Blind as a Bat” Weakness won't be able to take the “Air Force Pilot” Job. Likewise, a character with an extensive criminal record is unlikely to be accepted into the FBI Academy (though he might look into the “Politician” Job). Assuming the charac-

ter isn't automatically barred from the Job, the player should work with the GM to determine the qualifications for the Job, as described below.

Are there any Body, Brain, or Nerve requirements for the Job? In some cases, a character will need a minimum Body, Brain, or Nerve just to do the Job. For example, a character who wants to become a politician probably needs a 10 or better in either Brain or Nerve.

What are the primary Skills required for a person with the Job? Most Jobs will require the character to be proficient in a few key Skills. The primary Skills for the Job "Politician" would be Public Speaking and Fundraising.

Does the character need any minimum scores in the primary Skills? Unless the character can go into business for himself or employers are desperate, the character will probably need to show a minimum level of competence in the primary Skills for the Job. A good rule of thumb is that the character will need at least +2 in the Job's primary Skills.

What other Skills does the Job require, and how much competence does the character need in those Skills? Some Jobs will require some level of competence in skills not vital to the Job. For example, the politician needs to actually know at least a little about politics (at least +1 in Politics, Government, and/or Current Events Skills).

What non-game mechanics things are required for the character to get the Job? For some jobs, the character will merely need to convince someone to hire him. For others, he'll need to pass tests, make contacts, and acquire other trappings of the Job. Our politician, for example, would need to find a few supporters, buy a nice suit, and actually run for office (which may imply additional age, residency, and other requirements).

Once the GM and player have figured out the Job's qualifications, they need to determine whether any of the character's Jobs or Gimmicks allows him to meet or ignore any of the qualifications. For example, a character with the "Fearless" Gimmick may be able to ignore the minimum Nerve requirement for the "Stuntman" Job. The character must then acquire all of the Skills and other trappings needed for the Job over the next several sessions of play. Once the character has met all of the requirements, he trades in an equal number of Skill Bonuses from each of the primary skills. He also trades in the minimum Skill Bonus from each required skill. His Job Number starts out equal to 1/2 his Body, Brain, or Nerve Number, whichever is most appropriate to the skill. If two or all three are appropriate, his Job Number starts out at 1/2 of the highest Num-

TRADED-IN SKILLS

Don't keep a running list of all the Skill Bonuses your character has ever traded in. If a character trades in all of his bonuses in a Skill, erase it from your character sheet. The Skill is now represented abstractly by whatever Number you traded it in for, so there's no need to keep up with it. In a few rare cases (most notably default rolls), a concept bonus may be appropriate based on a Skill the character has long since traded in. However, if you can't remember having had the skill without looking at a list, chances are your character didn't use it that much in the first place (and probably doesn't remember much about it now).

ber. To this, he adds the number of points that he traded in from each of the primary skills.

EXAMPLE 1: Hex Games Art Director Ryan Trimble decides to join M-Force. His Body 14, Brain 13, and Nerve 17 allow him to meet the minimum requirements, and he miraculously has no felony convictions or other shortcomings that would keep him out of the organization. Neither Ryan's "Billionaire Playboy" Job nor his "Sex Appeal" Gimmick grants him any of the skills required of an M-Force Agent, so Ryan has to learn all of the required skills through either classes or field work. After many game sessions, Ryan has managed to attain the following skills: Firearms +4, Investigation +3, Monsterology +3, Hand to Hand +3, and First Aid +1. On his way back from Europe, Ryan stops by the M-Force Academy for the final week of training and tests. After trading in the appropriate Skill Bonuses, Ryan has an "M-Force Agent" Job of 11 (1/2 Nerve (8) plus 3 for trading in 3 Skill Bonuses each in Monsterology, Firearms, and Investigation) and the following skills: Firearms +1, Hand to Hand +1.

EXAMPLE 2: Barney Magnum is a private detective who tends to get bizarre cases. After several encounters with creepies, crawlies, and other assorted nasties, Barney decides to join M-Force. He has no Weaknesses or dark secrets that would disqualify him from joining, and his Body 12, Brain 13, and Nerve 15 are well above the M-Force minimum requirements. The GM decides that Barney's Job of "Hard-Boiled Detective" allows him to meet the minimum Firearms, Hand-to-Hand, and Investigations requirements. Furthermore, since Barney has encountered a few monsters already, the GM lets him spend a few Yum Yums to get the Monsterology skill at +1. Barney goes to the local M-Force office and signs up. Since he's able to

meet the minimum requirements for a probationary agent, Barney is allowed to go on missions. Over the next few sessions, Barney takes a First Aid class (giving him the First Aid +1 Skill) and spends time talking to the other M-Force Agents and reading old case files (allowing him to spend Yum Yums to increase his Monsterology skill to +2). Barney also enrolls in a correspondence class in Basic Monsterology, which gives him another +1 to the skill. After meeting the minimum requirements, Barney goes to the M-Force Academy for the final week of training. He trades in his Monsterology +3 and First Aid +1 (since the Firearms, Hand-to-Hand, and Investigations Skills are covered by his P.I. Job) skills to get the “M-Force Agent” Job at 10 (1/2 his Nerve, plus 3).

Job Switching

Sometimes a character’s Job may switch to a related Job because of events in the story. For example, a character may graduate from college, go to work for another company or department, or get a promotion. There are three basic types of Job switches:

Changing Job Titles: If there are very few differences in the basic duties and skills for the Job, the character simply changes his Job title to reflect his new position, pay scale, or whatever.

Before completing the final week of training at Caledonia, Al met all the requirements for the “M-Force Agent” Job, but it was a few months before he managed to make the trip to Caledonia. During this time, he had the “Probationary M-Force Agent” Job at 9. A person with the Probationary M-Force Agent Job has roughly the same skills as a full-fledged agent. The difference is mainly a matter of benefits and pay. Therefore, when a Al completed the final week of training at the M-Force Academy, he simply changed his Job to “M-Force Agent,” keeping his Job Number the same.

Shifting Focus: Sometimes a character takes on a new job with different duties but many of the same primary skill requirements. When this happens, the character will change his Job title and lose a few points off his Job Number to reflect the fact that he’s still getting used to the new duties and learning the new skills. The number of points lost will depend on how different the two jobs are.

Sid quits his DJ job at Club Cheetah to become an on-air personality at the local classic rock station. He’s still using the same basic skills (selecting music to play, operating stereo equipment, and chit-chatting between songs),

but will have to make a few adjustments. He has to get used to using a few new pieces of equipment, working from the station’s play list, and performing without an audience (or at least one he can see and interact with). Tony decides that Sid loses 2 points, switching his “Club DJ 12” Job to “Radio DJ 10.”

Becoming a Specialist

If the character is merely taking on a more specialized form of her existing job, she’s becoming a specialist. To do this, the player and GM first determine the requirements for becoming a specialist. This is much like determining the requirements for a Job. Once the character has met those requirements, she trades in the appropriate Skill Bonuses for a new Job title (the Job Number stays the same).

“M-FORCE AGENT” JOB

Disqualification: A convicted felon cannot become an M-Force agent. Neither can a monster. M-Force also administers psychological tests to weed out maniacs and sociopaths. Finally, anyone with a physical or mental handicap that prevents the person from performing the basic duties of an M-Force agent is disqualified.

Body, Brain, and Nerve: In order to become an M-Force agent, a character must have a Number of at least 8 in each of these Words.

Primary Skills: Firearms +3, Investigation +3, Monsterology +3

Other Required Skills: Hand to Hand +2, First Aid +1

Other Requirements: Character must pass M-Force competency certification tests in firearms, investigation, monsterology, first aid, and self-defense. Character must also complete a one-week course at M-Force Academy, which includes passing the “Haunted House” test.

Probationary Agents: In order to become a probationary agent (and therefore be eligible to go on missions), a character must pass basic firearms and self-defense certification courses (DN 5). This does not, however, allow the character to take the “Probationary M-Force Agent” Job. In order to do so, he must fulfill all of the requirements of the “M-Force Agent” Job, except for the final week of training at the M-Force Academy.

Susan wants to change her Job from “Student” to “History Major.” Tony decides that to do this she needs to trade in 3 Skill Bonuses in history-related skills. If Susan has History +2 and American History +1, she can simply remove the skills from her character sheet and change her Job title.



Keep in mind that meeting the requirements for a specialist Job does not mean the character has the Job. For example, the skill requirements for becoming an M-Force Supply Officer can be met by getting a Supply Officer certification. However, the certification alone doesn't make the character a Supply Officer—he has to get hired for the position to get the power that comes with the Job. Other M-Force specialist certifications, such as Vehicles Specialist, are merely designations of skill rather than positions within the organization. When this is the case, the character may take on the specialist Job simply by passing the certification tests.

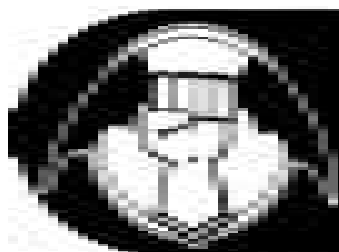
Getting Rid of a Job

Sometimes, one of a character's old Jobs just doesn't make sense anymore. When this happens, the character can get rid of the old Job. When he does this, the character gets a number of Skill Bonuses (unattached to any specific skill) equal to his Number in the Job. These Skill Bonuses may be traded in to improve any of the character's other Numbers or Skills, or even to buy new Skills, as long as the improvements make sense.

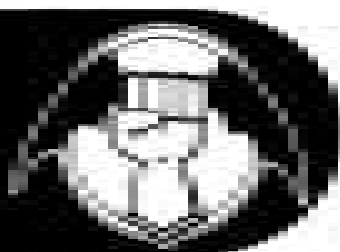
After getting out of the army, Al decided to dump his Soldier Job of 10, which gave him 10 Skill Bonuses to spend. He used 4 of them to raise his Body from 11 to 12 and 4 more to raise his Brain from 11 to 12. He used the remaining 2 points to buy two skills: Army Stuff +1 and Firearms +1. (He later traded in the Firearms skill for his “Probationary M-Force Agent” Job.)







INTRODUCTION



THE FINE ART OF GAMEMASTERING

If you're reading this section, you're planning to take up the duties and obligations of being the gamemaster. That, or else you're a player trying to uncover the dark, hidden secrets of *M-Force*. If the latter is the case, skip right to the next section, *Dark, Hidden Secrets of M-Force*.

If you are the GM, welcome! GMing is extraordinarily hard work that doesn't pay very well; in fact, it doesn't pay at all. If you are the GM, you, more than anyone else, are responsible for making the game a success. You have to devote time and energy to the game before it's even played, oversee dozens of characters and monsters, administer the rules, make the hard decisions, and improvise when things don't go as planned. And when the game is done, you're the one who is criticized by anyone who didn't have a good time.

Still, the job does have some perks. GMing is not just a matter of settling disputes—it is a creative discipline. If you have an urge to create stories, to bring characters to life, and to orchestrate an evening of drama and excitement for your friends, then GMing can satisfy your urges as no other pursuit can. As GM, you wield tremendous power. You control lives and shape worlds. When the game goes well, you receive the accolades of your players. Most of all, though, you feel intense satisfaction in a job well done.

Never let the power go to your head, though; if you run the game like a tyrant, your players can easily end the game by deciding not to come back. Your duty to your players goes beyond simple self-interest. They are

not your audience—they are your partners. All of you are working together to create a story. You provide the backdrops, the supporting cast, and the plot elements, and the players provide the main characters. The result is something that neither you a good time, and strive to tell new and interesting stories. The rules don't really matter—they



are there to facilitate the game, and should be discarded the second they get in the way.

Now that you know about the duties and obligations that come with GMing, think long and hard about whether you want to take up the task.

DARK, HIDDEN SECRETS OF M-FORCE

In practically every RPG, the GM's Section is where one turns to find the dark, hidden secrets of the game world. We will furnish such secrets on the pages that follow, but don't expect to find the "hidden truth" behind the description of M-Force given in Part One. M-Force is actually just what it appears to be—a benevolent organization devoted to defending humanity from monsters. As in all bureaucracies, there may be under-qualified people in positions of authority, inefficient organization, and errors in judgment, but there is no hidden power behind the scenes, no secret conspiracy at work.

M-Force is meant to show the positive side of the human spirit. In some pieces of fiction, monsters are used for racist or xenophobic ends. These monsters represent an alien culture that must be destroyed for the good of the dominant culture. M-Force games should not have this kind of negative message. In M-Force, as in many works of classical literature, monsters represent the terrible adversity that people must overcome. The game is about heroic struggle, and ultimately about human achievement. This doesn't mean the heroes always win. Sometimes they may have to make terrible sacrifices, and sometimes they may die. Win or lose, the important thing is that they fight the good fight.

Organization

Part Three is divided into four chapters, followed by appendices. Each chapter focuses on a different aspect of GMing. Unlike Part One, which works from the general to the specific, Part Three starts with the individual and gradually expands its focus. The chapters are roughly chro-

nological in terms of the order you will need to think about various aspects of the game, but the concepts do tie back into previous chapters, so you will need to read everything before you prepare for your game.

The Individual focuses on the players, player characters, gamemaster characters, and monsters. These are the necessary components you will need before you begin your game.

The Session is about the nuts and bolts of GMing. This chapter tells you how to run a session, how to use the mechanics, how best to run combat scenes, how to build plots, and how to create the right tone in your game.

The Campaign describes how to run an ongoing game, and offers plot ideas, advanced GMing tricks, and tips on keeping things interesting.

The World places everything else into a larger context, and examines the role of technology, magic, M-Force, and other organizations in your game world.

The *Appendices* include monster entries, sample PCs, equipment descriptions, worksheets, handouts, and inspirational materials.

Disclaimer: The following chapters do not summarize all the possible ways to run M-Force. The techniques found in this section are the ones we have found most effective in our own games, and we strongly endorse them. There are other ways to GM, however, and you should not feel constrained by our advice. Change anything you want, from the content, to the tone, to the methods of running the game. Remember: Only the players and the story matter, and anything else can be discarded.



CHAPTER 13

THE INDIVIDUAL



YOUR PLAYERS

The player is the most essential element of any role-playing game. You may have devised a brilliant plot and created a world full of memorable characters, but it's all for nothing if you can't find anyone to play in your game. Sometimes GMs recruit players at their local game store, or through role-playing organizations. Most of the time, though, GMs recruit their friends. Don't be frustrated if your friends don't have any previous role-playing experience. Explain the basic concept and answer any questions they may have. Even people who say they've never role-played before probably played make-believe as children. Once they realize that role-playing is a grown-up version of the same activity, they should have no problem getting into the game.



GAME TIP

If you have recruited players who are unfamiliar with role-playing, don't try to make them learn too much too soon. Many people are interested in telling stories, but still find RPG rules systems (even those as simple as the *M-Force* system) intimidating. Don't just hand a novice player a rulebook and tell him to make his character. Instead, go through the character creation process with him step by step, explaining how everything fits together.

Make sure your players, both the newcomers and the seasoned veterans, know up front what *M-Force* is about. If a potential player listens to your explanation and says, "I've got a great idea—how about I play a vampire," then he is probably not right for the game. Let the players know what kind of game you're planning on running. Be honest; if you're hoping for a weak band of PCs who will constantly get mauled by monsters, let them know. If you plan to run the game as a comedy, let them know. Most interpersonal problems in RPGs result



from conflicting expectations. If everyone knows what's going on from the very beginning, you can avoid this problem.

Once you've got an interested group of players, you can get ready to play. Ideally, every player will buy a copy of this book and read Parts One and Two in their entirety. Realistically, many players, especially those new to role-playing, won't want to invest great amounts of their free time into learning about *M-Force* before the game begins. Therefore they're unlikely to do a lot of reading. They are also probably not going to remember everything



you tell them about M-Force's world. The easiest way to overcome these problems is to create handouts listing the important facts about the world and your campaign. The players can then refer to these during the game when their memories fail. In addition to looking simpler and easier to digest to the players, the list format forces you to boil everything down to the most important points. For best results, stick to one or two simple lists. We've included a sample "M-Force Basics" handout in the Appendices.

CHARACTER CONCEPTS

Once the players have a working knowledge of the game, they will need to create characters. Start by brainstorming general concepts. Maybe you already have a plot or setting in mind. In this case, you can give the players a starting point, such as "This game is going to be about a small M-Force office in Wichita, Kansas," or, "The first game is going to center on a biological experiment gone horribly wrong, so you guys should have at least one scientist in the group." If you don't have anything in mind, take suggestions from the players. If a player says, "My character joined M-Force because he's being pursued across the country by an ancient cult of talking dogs," feel free to use the cult as the starting point for your game. On the other hand, if you think talking dogs are too silly for the tone you want to achieve, tell the player to think of a new concept.

Invariably you will have at least one player who wants to play a monster. Tell him no. M-Force is understandably opposed to the idea of monsters infiltrating its ranks, and has developed an elaborate screening process that weeds out all non-human applicants. If the player who wants to be a monster complains, show him this rule: **NO MONSTERS AS PLAYER CHARACTERS.** Period. Not even a "monster with a heart of gold." There are plenty of games about monsters. M-Force is focused on humans.

In addition to screening out monsters, M-Force is always on the watch for dangerously unstable members. Let's say you're talking to the player who originally wanted to play an undercover vampire. Now he's decided he wants to play a closet psychopath, a ticking time bomb who's just waiting to go off. He'll start play normally, see, but once his character fails a Weakness roll, he'll immediately open fire on his teammates. Again, say no. This character concept is not going to enhance anyone's enjoyment of the game.

Role-playing is a group activity. As players are creating their characters, think about how well the characters will fit together as a group. Unless your game focuses on a highly specialized group, such as an EOT team, you will

MAGIC & SUPERPOWERS

In addition to wanting to play monsters and psychopaths, some players will want to create characters with superhuman powers. Perhaps they'll propose a character who occasionally gets visions of the future, or a character who has inherited a magical locket that allows him to walk on water. Or perhaps they'll go all the way and ask for a super-strong character who can lift trucks and shoot fire out of his mouth. Consider these requests carefully. The world of M-Force is a strange and wonderful place, and people with superhuman powers surely exist in it. Still, the focus of M-Force is on regular humans overcoming tremendous opposition, so we recommend avoiding PCs with amazing powers. Ultimately the decision is up to you. Will the proposed abilities add to the game, or will they make the other players jealous? Whatever you decide, such abilities should be rare and treated as such.

want a good mix of skills. Find a balance between bumbling newcomers and seasoned veterans, between die-hard soldiers and clumsy scientists. You will also need to make sure the group's balance of skills is up to the challenge you set them. If you're planning on unleashing a particularly deadly monster, you'll need PCs who stand a chance of killing it.

At some point the players will need to split up to work on fleshing out their individual characters. After a player has gone through the questions in Chapter 8, you'll want to talk to him about his character. In addition to making sure everything makes sense, listen for and discuss the areas listed below. Feel free to ask for details and clarification as you see fit.

The Character's Life

The most important thing to determine here is if the character has a life. While all players will develop background and lifestyle information at different rates, every player needs to have at least a vague idea about the big stuff. This is especially important if the character concept seems more like a list of cool abilities than a coherent character.

M-Force and Monster-related Stuff

If the character's background includes encounters with M-Force or monsters, make sure that his story fits both the M-Force setting and your particular campaign. If the character's entire background rests on an incorrect assumption, help him find a way to make his ideas fit into the

world without contradicting it. In some cases, this can be as easy as changing the name of a monster.

GMCs

A good character will have friends, relatives, and co-workers. Make sure that you have a good idea of the characters who are important to the PC. While some players will bring in gamemaster characters by themselves, many think it's the GM's job to do so. In addition to taking note of GMCs who are important to the character, be on the lookout for GMCs who can be interesting in the game or important to the storyline you have planned.

Story Hooks

If anything in the player's background seems like a potential story hook, discuss it with the player and ask for details.

The Future

Finally, talk with the player about the campaign—what types of adventures he wants to play, how he wants his character to grow, and the like. If the player has any adventure ideas, listen to him—it could make your job easier.



If a character's abilities don't seem to make any sense, make the player justify them. When you do this, try not to be argumentative. For example, instead of saying "There's no way your character could know how to fly a helicopter," say "I'm not sure how the 'helicopter pilot' skill fits the character concept—where would Joe have learned that?" At all times, present yourself as a friend who's trying to help the player improve and refine his character. This doesn't mean that you can't say "No" to a player—in fact, you'll often have to do so. Just make sure to soften the blow as much as possible, and make sure the player realizes you have a reason for your decision.

THE CHARACTER SHEET

Once you have approved their character concepts, the players can begin filling out their character sheets. Before the players can begin this process, though, they will need to know how many Yum Yums they have to spend. Creating characters with 75 Yum Yums is recommended if you want your characters to be relatively new at the monster-hunting game. Characters created with fewer than 75 Yum Yums will be extremely weak and unlikely to survive for long. Giving players 100 Yum Yums to start with will yield moderately experienced agents—they've been on a few missions and returned to tell the tale. Characters cre-

STARTING YUM YUMS

Experience	Yum Yums
Fresh from the Academy	75
Moderate	100
Ace	125

ated with 125 Yum Yums are even more experienced—in fact, many of them have probably earned the "Ace" designation. You are, of course, welcome to give the players more than 125 YY, but this will lead to extremely powerful characters. If the characters are all hardened veterans, most of the interesting stories about them have happened long before the game begins. You may give individual players additional Yum Yums for coming up with particularly good characters.



While awarding Yum Yums for good character concepts encourages players to work extra hard on their characters, it can also cause problems. Players who did not get YY awards may feel left out, or may believe that you're playing favorites. To overcome this problem, you can let the players decide who gets the YY awards. Have everyone describe his or her character to the group. Then have each player write down his two favorite characters (not including his own). If you want, you can also choose your two favorite characters. For every "vote" a character gets, his player gets a set number of Yum Yums.

While you don't need to be involved in every aspect of the character creation process, you should be available for players who have questions, and you should review every character sheet once it's finished. In the following paragraphs, we'll discuss some of the common questions players will have, as well as things to look for when reviewing character sheets.

Body, Brain, and Nerve

The most common problem you'll have regarding Body, Brain, and Nerve is the player who wants to have very high Numbers in everything. Luckily, most players will quickly realize that putting a lot of YY into Body, Brain, and Nerve will severely limit their other scores. If this doesn't happen, and a player gives the character extremely high Body, Brain, and Nerve, remind him that the average human Number is 12, and make him justify his character's high Num-

bers. People who are Olympic-level athletes, geniuses, and fun at parties are exceptionally rare.

Some players will ask about Numbers outside of the normal range. The lowest normal human score is a 6. Normally, M-Force agents must have Body, Brain, and Nerve scores of at least 8. However, no screening process (except for M-Force's monster-detection procedure) is perfect, so it's possible for a character with a slightly lower score to become an agent. However, 6 is the lowest Number possible for a healthy human being. A character with a lower Number will have an obvious mental, physical, or psychological handicap that will prevent him from becoming an M-Force agent. While M-Force will hire such people for appropriate support roles, they will not be allowed to participate in active monster hunting. On the other end of the spectrum, 16 is normally the highest possible score in Body, Brain, or Nerve. Scores of 17 or higher generally represent superhuman-level abilities, and are not well suited for M-Force games.

Jobs

The most important thing about a character's Job is making sure that it is appropriate for the character. In many instances, the character concept will make the character's Job obvious. If this isn't the case, you'll need to help the player find a Job that makes sense. For example, if the character's concept is "slacker," then "Retail Clerk" is probably a more appropriate Job than "A.D.O." In addition to making sure the Job is appropriate, you'll want to make sure that you and the player have similar ideas of what skills, trappings, and so forth the Job entails. This is especially important if the player chooses a vague name for the Job.

Many characters will want their characters to have Jobs that are "exciting" or will be useful during the game. While this is fine if it fits the concept, simply choosing an exciting or useful Job because it's exciting or useful should be discouraged. In this instance, remind the player that the game is about fighting monsters, so all the characters will get their fair share of excitement. Point out how the Job could interfere with the character's ability to become involved in M-Force, or why it doesn't make sense for such a person to become an M-Forcer. Below are some common types of Jobs you'll have trouble with, and some tips on talking players into something more reasonable.

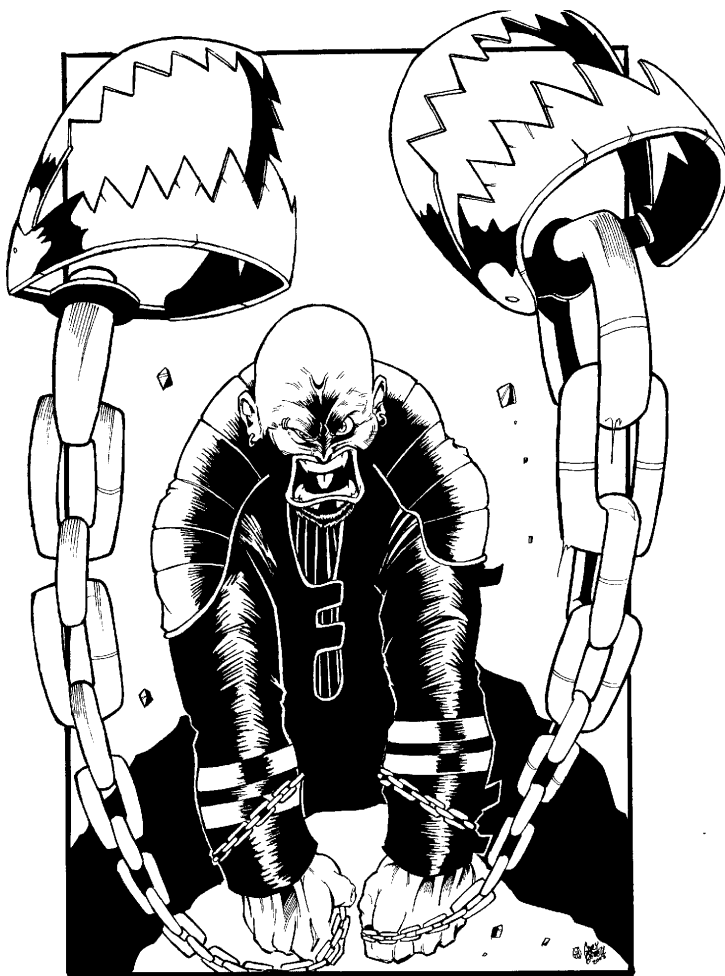
Military Types

Most military bases have their own "Monster Teams" made up of soldiers trained by M-Force. If the character is

active in the military, he'd most likely be assigned to one of these teams. Unless everyone else is playing a soldier, the character concept is probably inappropriate. A mercenary might have the opportunity to join a civilian M-Force team, but since most of his work is in foreign countries, he'd rarely be available for missions.

Criminals

While M-Forcers aren't required to be model citizens, they are expected to obey the law. Convicted felons are not allowed to join M-Force, and because of the privileges afforded to M-Force members, the organization must be careful to keep the criminal element out of its midst. Therefore, even if a character doesn't have a police record, any person who obviously makes his living through crime will not be allowed to join. Likewise, an agent with no visible means of support (or who obviously lives beyond his means) will quickly become the target of investigation by the Oversight department. Unless he has a very good cover, a criminal agent will quickly be weeded out.



Some players will want to play the rich and famous—celebrities, politicians, and billionaire playboys. While this is acceptable if it fits the tone of your game, such characters can become problematic, using their money, influence, and contacts to take the fun out of a mission. The rich and powerful, for the most part, find the idea of mucking around in the woods hunting for monsters rather distasteful. Those who want excitement have many safer avenues of adventure—world travel, jungle safaris, and the like. Even if a rich or famous person feels a deep need to end the threat posed by monsters, many are simply too busy—after all, performing 25-city tours and running multinational corporations is hard work.

Assuming that your character has chosen a Job that fits the character concept and the tone of the game, all you need to do is make sure that the Number makes sense. Some characters will choose extremely low Job Numbers, especially when the Job they've chosen has no obvious in-game applications. While this is fine, you might want to point out that a character who is lousy at his job will probably have a hard time convincing his boss to give him a week off to fight monsters. Therefore, characters with extremely low scores are likely to find themselves unemployed. On the other end of the spectrum, some players will give their characters extremely high Job scores. If you think that a character's Job score is so high that it will cause problems, simply remind the player of the normal average and make him justify his high score. For some Jobs, characters with extremely high Numbers will have a certain level of fame, wealth, or influence, which means the problems discussed above may come into play.

The M-Force Agent Job

Since it's already defined, the M-Force Agent Job shouldn't present any problems. However, if you're running a game featuring experienced monster hunters, the 9-13 range given in the rules might not make sense. Feel free to increase the starting Number and maximum to fit the game you want to run. In general, experienced characters will have scores of 13-15 and seasoned veterans will have scores of 15-17. Characters with M-Force Agent scores of 18 or 19 will be legends.

Gimmicks

When helping a player decide what Gimmick is appropriate, make sure that it fits both the character concept and the tone of your game, and that the Gimmick is truly a Gimmick—not simply a Skill or Job (see page 81 in Part

Two for more details). Watch out for Gimmicks that overshadow or duplicate those of other characters. Sometimes, players choose extremely powerful Gimmicks, or their idea of the Gimmick's uses differs from your initial impression. It's extremely important that you and the player discuss the exact uses and limitations of the Gimmick, especially if it's not defined in the M-Force rules. You'll also want to make sure that the Number makes sense. Keep in mind that the Gimmick Number represents how often the Gimmick works, not how powerful it is in relation to other Gimmicks.

Weaknesses

As with Gimmicks, the first thing you'll want to do is to make sure that what the player has in mind is really a Weakness, not just a quirk or personality trait. Many players will try to find Weaknesses that won't actually come into play during the course of the game. If you can see a way to bring the Weakness into the game anyway, let the player think he's outsmarted you until the game begins. However, if you simply can't think of any way the Weakness would come into play, tell the player that it's inappropriate. Remind him that the Weakness is supposed to be the character's major flaw, and that characters without flaws are boring and unrealistic. Hopefully this will appeal to the player's sense of drama. Another common pitfall is the "one-shot" Weakness. A good example of this is the Dark Secret. Until the secret is revealed, it doesn't have any real effect on the character. Once it is revealed, the revelation either renders the character unplayable or blows over. If possible, such Weaknesses should be avoided. As with Gimmicks, make sure you and the player both understand the effects (and, if necessary, the triggers) of the Weakness. When looking at the Weakness Number, remember that it represents how often the Weakness affects the character. In addition to making sure that the Number is appropriate, make sure that the name of the Weakness fits. For example, a character with the Weakness "Deaf" with a Number of 6 should probably change the name of the Weakness to "Hard of Hearing."

Skills

When explaining Skills to the player, point out that their main purpose is to flesh out the character's personality, not to make him a one-man army. The main problem you'll experience with Skills is that players will want to take Skills that are useful, even if they don't fit the character. You'll also want to be on the lookout for Jobs and Gimmicks masquerading as Skills. If you don't feel that a Skill is appropriate, be pre-



pared to make the player explain how and why the character would have learned the Skill.

M-Force Elective Skill

While the most common M-Force elective Skills are listed in the character creation section, other Skills are possible. Just keep in mind that M-Force is paying for the character to learn the Skill, so they do have a few requirements. First of all, the Skill must be potentially useful to M-Force. Therefore, Skills like “Volleyball” and “Rolling Stones Trivia” aren’t acceptable. Second, the Skill must be something that the M-Force Legal division would feel comfortable letting someone do after just a few classes (which is why Skills like “Demolitions” and “Helicopter Pilot” are not listed).

Health Points

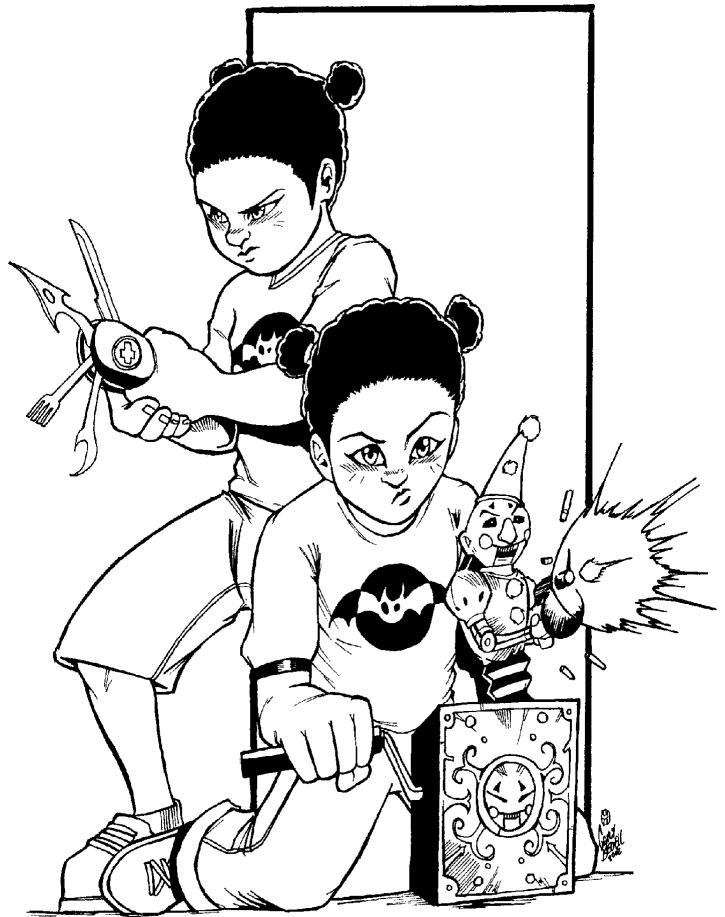
Players can increase their characters’ Health Points by 2 points for every Yum Yum they spend. Since players can reduce damage during the game by 3 points for every Yum Yum they spend, this isn’t very economical. The reason for this is simple—it encourages characters to increase starting HP only if it makes sense for the character to be tougher than his Body would imply. However, some players (especially those who are inexperienced or don’t understand the game system very well) will assign an inflated importance to Health Points and will want to spend an inordinate number of Yum Yums to increase their total. When this happens, point out the simple math of the situation.

Yum Yums

As mentioned in Chapter Nine, it’s up to you to decide how many Yum Yums from the character creation process the players may carry over into the game. This is ultimately a matter of personal taste. Since using Yum Yums can affect the game significantly, and good players will earn Yum Yums during the course of the game, you might want to keep the players’ starting totals low. On the other hand, if the first few sessions you have planned will be especially difficult, or if the players are mostly novices (who may take a few sessions figuring out how to earn Yum Yums), you might want to let them keep slightly higher totals.

WWPHITM? and Tag Line

These two stats are entirely up to the player. However, as with everything else, they should make sense. As always, ask the player for more information if you don’t understand (or recognize) the actor or Tag Line he’s chosen. A character’s Tag Line and WWPHITM? can also serve as warning signs that a player is simply mimicking his fa-



vorite movie character. If this is the case, an intervention may be necessary.

GAMEMASTER CHARACTERS

Gamemaster characters (GMCs) are a crucial part of any game. Simply put, every character not controlled by a player is a GMC. The farmer who calls in M-Force, the innocent eight-year-old girl kidnapped by a vampire, the sassy waitress at the local Denny’s, the politician who denounces M-Force, and the vampire himself are all GMCs, and therefore your responsibility. GMCs can be created before the game begins or while the game is going on, but either way you’ll end up creating quite a few of them. Most GMCs will fall into four broad categories.

Allies

These are the people who help the PCs in their monster hunting. This category includes fellow field agents, administrators in the organization, local authorities, obscure experts in monster lore, and anyone else who might give assistance. When using allies, be sure not to let them solve the major problems for the PCs.

Loved Ones

These are the people the PCs value. This category can include parents, children, spouses, lovers, and friends. Loved ones most often come into play during a character's downtime. A character's loved ones help define him and give him something to fight for. They are also good for creating drama—a kidnapped or murdered loved one is a powerful motivator for a PC.

Villains

This category includes not only monsters, about which more is said below, but also humans who are up to no good. Two of the more common types are mad scientists, who are prone to creating monsters, and cultists, who frequently attempt to summon creatures from beyond. Villains can also be more subtle, such as the politician who wants to shut down the local M-Force chapter, or the government agents who are covering up a recent outbreak of beta-rabies. A human threat can be an interesting change of pace once your players have grown accustomed to monsters.

Regular Folks

This category includes all the people in the game world who are not allies, loved ones, or villains—which is to say, most people. The PCs should run into regular folks throughout their adventures. They'll feel more motivated fighting to save ordinary humanity if they have actually interacted with some ordinary humans. If the PCs regularly eat at the same restaurant, give their server a personality. When they interview an eyewitness to a monster attack, make her memorable.

During the character creation process, players will generally provide you with loved ones that you can use as GMCs. Some players may also contribute villains, such as the cult of talking dogs mentioned earlier. It's up to you how involved the players will be in GMC creation. Make sure players understand that, even if they create a GMC, you will ultimately be in charge of that character. Sometimes players may assist in playing GMCs; this topic will be covered further in Chapter 16.

Using GMCs

Ideally your important GMCs should have the same kind of depth and background as the player characters. Before you introduce a new GMC into the game, give that character some thought. What is her personal history? Her likes and dislikes? What has she been doing recently? Much of this information may never come to light, but knowing where a character comes from can make her a lot more believable.

If a GMC is going to be a major recurring character, you'll want to give her just as much thought as a player character. Use the methods described in Chapter 8 to help fill in the details.



As you run the game, the PCs will frequently head off in directions you didn't anticipate, and you'll need to create GMCs on the spur of the moment. Even though you won't have time to prepare detailed backgrounds for these characters, you'll want them to be distinct from one another. Keep a list of names handy—a phonebook or a book of baby names works well—so you can immediately identify the new character. Pick a basic personality and run with it. Many times these improvised GMCs end up becoming major recurring characters, so when you introduce a new GMC, make sure to take a few notes. If the characters encounter the GMC again, you'll want to make sure that she looks the same, acts the same, and answers to the same name. And before the GMC's next appearance, you'll have a chance to flesh out her beliefs, goals, and role in the game world.

Whether your GMCs are created ahead of time or made up during the game, you should avoid making them one-dimensional. Stereotypes can be a good starting point—for instance, the absent-minded scientist, or the pig-headed police officer—but you shouldn't stop there. Not every character can be fully developed, but each character should have a unique quirk or personality trait. Maybe the police officer loves show tunes, and the scientist suffers from bipolar disorder. These sorts of details make all the difference.

Well-developed GMCs have their own lives. No GMC should be simply a resource or an adversary for the main characters. As your game keeps going, GMCs should change over time. Maybe the retired M-Forcer that the PCs regularly visit for information loses his wife to cancer, or the bartender at the PCs' favorite watering hole is wounded in a holdup. Such events show that there is a world beyond the characters and that, while they may be the focus of your story, everything doesn't revolve around them.

GMCs are regular people and are subject to the same range of feelings and emotions as everybody else. While it's important that GMCs be consistent, they don't always have to act exactly the same. In fact, letting them show their emotions can help bring them to life. For example, the normally grumpy police chief may be in a good mood right after the Cowboys win a game.



Monsters

Since *M-Force* is about monster hunters, most games will feature at least one monster. The type of monster will determine much about what sort of game you're going to run. As you've probably noticed, there are many possibilities. Some monsters pose an obvious physical threat. Others are more subtle, feeding on people's emotions or manipulating society. Some monsters are solitary creatures, while others attack in herds. You can make up your own monster or choose one from the appendix. Either way, you should consider what sort of threat would be best for your game. Listed below are some questions you should ask yourself.

What size is it? Some monsters are big and some monsters are small. Some monsters, like Omega Ants, are small but can be dangerous in large groups. Giant monster adventures can be very exciting, but won't allow the PCs to engage in any hand-to-hand fighting. Similarly, cosmic horrors from beyond space and time will require a more cerebral approach.

What is the monster's origin? Some monsters, like vampires and werewolves, are supernatural. Others are natural, like giant squids, and still others are man-made, like genetically engineered abominations. Each of these types of monster can lead to a different tone for the game—for instance, a supernatural foe will require some horror trap-pings, as opposed to an action/adventure feel.

Will the monster mainly require the PCs to think or to fight? Sometimes a monster just needs to be shot a few hundred times. Sometimes the real challenge lies in tracking a monster down before it kills again. As mentioned above, giant monsters will require the PCs to worry about logistics, while the average human-size monster will only require them to worry about getting off enough shots before it eats them.

Will the monster have any symbolic or thematic significance? Monsters in fiction signify, on some level, things that we're afraid of. If this interests you, you may choose to create a monster with a specific symbolic meaning. Common themes for monsters are fear of death, fear of the unknown, repressed passions, the cruelty of nature, fear that life is meaningless, and man's hubris.

What will the PC group be able to handle? If all your PCs are fresh out of the Academy, they may not be able to deal with the star-devouring horror from beyond space and time.

What did I use last time? If you're running an ongoing game, you'll want some variety. Alternate between the occult and super-science, between action and mystery, and you're more likely to keep things interesting.

Answering these questions should narrow down the possibilities. Unless you've decided to use an existing creature, you're ready to make your own monster. Draw on folklore, movies, the ideas in this book, and any other resource you can think of. The Monster Worksheet on page 189 should help the creative process. While you're filling it out, ask yourself what makes your monster different from all the others. See if you can come up with a fresh twist or quirk that will make your monster unique. Consider ways that your monster might evoke a sense of horror, or a sense of wonder, or both.

Monster Numbers

After you've got a concept, you'll need to define your monster in game terms. You can use the rules for PC Words and Numbers, only you are not limited to any set number of Yum Yums. Listed below are some factors to consider when assigning Numbers.

Body

For non-human monsters, Body refers to the creature's strength and stamina; physical appearance doesn't need to be considered when assigning the number. Non-physical monsters, such as ghosts, may have Body scores of 0.

Brain

In the case of non-sapient monsters, Brain will reflect the creature's instincts. Mindless creatures like living statues will have Brain scores of 0.

Nerve

For most monsters, Nerve represents fearlessness. Therefore most monsters have very high Nerve Numbers. For creatures incapable of decision-making, Nerve is 20.

Job

Unless the monster has a job in the traditional sense, the monster's Job will usually represent its role. Jobs such as "Predator," "Restless Spirit," and "Body Snatcher" are appropriate for monsters. Some monsters' Jobs may simply describe what they are—for example, a Job of "Demon."

Gimmick

There are two types of monster "Gimmicks"—those that always work and those that have a chance of failure. For

example, a monster may always be able to change shape but still need to roll to control animals. You can either itemize each of the creature's powers as a Gimmick with its own Number or give the creature a Gimmick of "Creature Type" (for example, "Vampire"), with the Number only being used for powers that require rolls.

Weakness

Weaknesses work the same way as Gimmicks.

Health Points

Monsters that can be killed through physical means should have Health Points representing the ease or difficulty of killing them. Monsters that can't be killed physically do not have Health Points.

Yum Yums

Monsters should start with a few Yum Yums, with the number determined by how much of a challenge you want to give the PCs.

Other Traits

Most of the time you won't need to worry about assigning Skills, Tag Lines, or WWPHITM? Be sure, though, to note any traits of your monster that don't fall into other categories. For example, a vampire's trait of casting a distorted reflection is not really a Gimmick or Weakness, but can be important in the game.

Giant Monsters

A giant monster is one whose height is measured in stories rather than feet, the kind of creature that endangers a city just by walking down the street. Obviously, giant monsters exist on a larger scale than the PCs. Thus giant monsters do not have most of the usual Words and Numbers. They have only two scores: Power Level and Yum Yums.

A monster's starting Power Level is roughly equivalent to its height in feet. Power Level represents the monster's



physical strength and level of health, taking the place of both Body and Health Points. The Power Level determines how much destruction a giant monster can cause—when the creature attacks, it does damage equal to its Power Level. When the monster is injured, its Power Level decreases. When it reaches Power Level 0, it is dead. When a giant monster is attacked, it absorbs a number of points of damage equal to its Power Level without harm. If the monster is hit with damage greater than its Power Level, then the overflow damage is subtracted from its Power Level.



EXAMPLE 1: The great dragon Typhonis has been awakened from his slumber beneath the waves, which makes him angry. He decides to devastate San Francisco. Typhonis is 100' tall, and so starts the game at PL 100. When Typhonis attacks the Golden Gate Bridge with his tail, he does 100 points of damage. The army, understandably disturbed, drops a bomb on Typhonis that does 50 points of damage. The 50 points is less than the dragon's PL of 100, so he takes no damage.

EXAMPLE 2: Thanks to the hard work and ingenuity of the PCs, Typhonis has been seriously wounded and is now down to PL 30. The military drops another bomb on him for 50 points of damage. Typhonis' Power Level soaks up 30 points, but the remaining points reduce him to Power Level 10 (30 - 20).

Giant monsters have Yum Yums just like PCs, except that giant monsters tend to have vastly larger quantities than the average character. In addition, a monster may have special conditions for gaining Yum Yums. Monsters can spend Yum Yums to cause extra devastation or to prevent taking damage. Each Yum Yum spent prevents damage equal to the monster's current Power Level.

Because Typhonis is ancient and magical, he starts the game with 200 YY. While he cannot exceed this number, he can regain Yum Yums just by submerging himself into the ocean. Typhonis is at PL 10 when the military decides to drop another bomb, again doing 50 points of damage. Since Typhonis' PL would only soak up 10 points of damage, the bomb's remaining 40 points would kill him—except that Typhonis still has Yum Yums. He spends 4 YY, canceling out 40 (4 x 10) points worth of damage, emerging unscathed from the barrage.

Many giant monsters possess special abilities. In terms of the rules, these abilities are powered by Yum Yums. Some creatures, such as the Crescent Valley Horror, grow larger as they feed. Such a creature can increase its Power Level (and size) by spending Yum Yums equal to the new Power Level desired. In such a case, Power Level actually reflects the creature's fluctuating size as well as its overall health.

A Crescent Valley Horror has grown to giant size feeding on the happiness of the children in a small town. The M-Force agents sent to stop it have succeeded in driving it away from the town while it is 30 feet tall (PL 30). Unfortunately, a school bus full of kids on a field trip drives by, and the monster is able to gain 50 YY from the students'

collective joy (its special condition for gaining Yum Yums). It immediately puts these YY into a size change, growing to PL 50 and a height of 50 feet. The agents re-evaluate their plan.

Other monsters will have special attacks based on their abilities. Typhonis has power over the sea, and can use it to attack. In instances like this, the total damage done by the monster's power should be equal to the Yum Yums spent multiplied by the creature's current Power Level. Naturally, you should be sure to describe the "special effects" of the monster's power rather than merely toting up damage numbers.

Still at PL 15, Typhonis spends 10 YY to call forth a waterspout which does a total of 150 points of damage (15x10). The humans are dispersed, so Typhonis slinks back into the ocean to nurse his wounds.

Power Level and Yum Yums give you a simple way to keep track of a giant monster's overall status, but don't get too bogged down in keeping track of these Numbers. As you can see, giant monsters are enormously difficult to kill. A game involving a giant monster will require more elaborate strategies than simply shooting it repeatedly.

CHAPTER 15

THE SESSION



WHAT IS A SESSION?

A session is a single episode of a role-playing game, played in one sitting. Generally a session is a few hours long. A single story may last only one session—which is called a *one-shot*—or it can be spread out over the course of multiple sessions. Either way, the individual game session is the heart of role-playing. Before a session begins, you'll need to determine a tone, setting, and plot. These things can't really be decided sequentially, since each affects the others. You may base the plot and setting on a desired tone, or base the setting on a desired plot. Whatever the case, all three aspects are important.

Tone

Tone is elusive, but it is crucial to a successful game. The game's tone is its unique style and mood, the “feel” of the game. Your tone will determine what sort of things are possible in your game, the PC fatality rate, and how ludicrous the plots can become. You will want to let the players know what kind of tonal slant you are planning on giving your game. One game you run may be light-hearted, while another may be grim. Knowing what tone you want will help in determining the characters, plot, and setting.

Even though you should determine your general tone up front, a good game will, like life, vary in tone. At times your game will be dramatic, at times action-packed, and at times sad, sometimes all in the same session. Comedy can blend into tragedy, and vice versa. Don't be afraid to mix things up and keep the players guessing.

Three key elements you'll want to keep in mind in every session are horror, humor, and quirkiness. Each of these should be present to some extent in every *M-Force* game, though the amount of each will vary.

Horror

M-Force is not, despite its appearance, a horror game. The horror genre is about powerlessness in the face of a terrifying threat. *M-Force* is about taking an

active role against such threats. Still, for the characters to be heroic, they will have to overcome great opposition. And for this opposition to be impressive, you'll periodically need to instill a sense of horror in your PCs (and, to some extent, in your players). A vampire, for instance, is naturally horrifying. The sight of a corpse returning to life, in defiance of all natural laws, should give any character pause. Simply looking at a giant monster like Galaxikhan should disturb a character's sense of scale. In addition to the horror of monsters' very existence, PCs should periodically confront the horrible things monsters do. Monsters prey on humans, and the results should be disturbing. The



The information given here about horror is an extremely abbreviated version of advice given in *Spooky: The Definitive Guide to Horror Gaming*, also from Hex Games. If you'd like to know more on the subject, from creating the proper mood to using and abusing the trappings of the horror genre, we highly recommend that book.

effects can range from the obvious, like gnawed limbs, to the more subtle, like a man slowly driven mad.

The key to creating a tone of horror is atmosphere. Carefully consider the effects you can use to set something apart as horrifying. Detailed description can be a powerful tool, though you don't necessarily need to be graphic to be disturbing. Horror can work on an existential level—for instance, making the characters question the nature of their reality. For any type of horror to be effective, the players will have to work with you. They are essential in building the right mood, and one wisecrack can derail an atmospheric scene. Encourage players to stay in character. Ask them to keep in mind that some things will be genuinely frightening, no matter how experienced their characters. Fear will not usually incapacitate M-Forcers, but it should be acknowledged. If you judge a situation to be particularly horrifying, and the players are not reacting as such, ask them to make Nerve checks for their characters. Characters who fail might lose their next action, or suffer penalties to future die rolls. On the other hand, players who contribute to the spooky mood should be rewarded with Yum Yums.

Humor

Historically, most role-playing games shy away from humor. In *M-Force*, however, humor is just as important as horror. Don't be afraid to be funny. Even a session that is primarily serious can feature some light-hearted moments. No less an authority than William Shakespeare would often follow a particularly tragic scene with some lowbrow comedy.

In the course of the session, humor should spring from the characters and situations. When we talk about humor in games, we're not referring to players quoting their favorite lines from Monty Python. Players cracking jokes is a distraction; characters cracking jokes can enhance the game. You can get in on the fun by using GMCs to provide comic relief and introducing humorous plot twists. The key thing is to keep the game consistent. Let the humor come natu-

rally, and don't force it in improbable ways. When a humorous element introduces itself, though, run with it.

Quirkiness

Quirkiness is essential to any *M-Force* game. Quirkiness is hard to define, but it comes largely from the weird, distinctive touches you add to your game. For instance, maybe there's a statue of a winged pig in the town square and no one is sure why. You don't have to explain these sorts of things—the truly quirky resists explanation. Quirkiness exists somewhere between comedy and horror, and sometimes it can fuse the two together into something unique.

One of the most rewarding things an *M-Force* GM can do is to mix the humorous and the serious. *M-Force* includes a number of concepts that are ludicrous on the surface, but are taken perfectly seriously in the fictional setting. Some of the monsters in Appendix 1, like the slumbear and the Electric Linguine, have funny names. Don't worry—if you present something with enough conviction, the players will buy it. Keep a straight face, and before



tional town or city to serve as your setting. This book does not give a master list of all M-Force offices, so that players and GMs are free to locate offices wherever they wish.

When planning your game, you also need to consider when it is set. M-Force has been around since 1952, which gives you 50 years of history to play with. Most of the information in this book is geared toward a game set in the present day, but if you want to play a historic M-Force game, go for it. You could play a game starring Dr. Fields' wide-eyed college kids, or Mike Mulligan's grim Slug-hunters, or anything in between.

While playing a historical game can be lots of fun, it presents unique challenges. Part of the difficulty of running a historical game involves figuring out the technology and information available during that time period, but that is a relatively minor concern. It's much more important to make sure you and players understand the general tone of society during the period you've chosen. Characters in a 1950's game, for example, should be more like the cast of *Happy Days* than that of *Pulp Fiction*.

Choosing a setting is just the first step. When it's time to run the game, you'll need to bring the setting to life. The Atlanta game should have a different feel than the Lexington game. Convey a sense of place to the players by giving clear descriptions and making sure everyone understands where they are at any given time. To do this, you may need to do some research. Read up on your chosen city and find a map or two. If you've decided to create a fictional city, you'll need to draw the map and come up with some tidbits about the city's history, industries, and demographics. There's no need to know everything about your chosen city; you're a GM, not an urban planner. When the players decide to sneak through the sewers, don't interrupt the game to pull up Atlanta's sewer maps on the internet. You only need enough information to be convincing, and any other details can be improvised.



GAME TIP

When you use a real-world city as your setting, make sure that the players understand that exact realism is not important. After all, the *M-Force* game does not take place in our world. If there are monsters in Boise, there might just be a Flamingo Street, even if "the real Boise" doesn't have such a road. While players should be encouraged to bring in real-world knowledge about the city, they should not point out "mistakes." In most cases, doing so only breaks up the flow of the game.

On the smaller level, remember that a single room can be a setting. No matter where the characters are, you want to create a strong sense of place. Never simply say, "You're in a basement." Describe the splatters on the wall, the strange smells, and the skittering sounds off in the distance. Your descriptions are your players' only entry-point into the game world, so appeal to all five of their senses. Give them all the information they need, but don't overdo it. There's no need to bore the players with lengthy descriptions of a basement, after all.

Plot

When we talk about figuring out the plot of your game, we don't mean planning out every event in sequence. An RPG session can't be plotted like a short story. PCs have free will, and will generally go off in a direction you never considered. There will always be improvisation required. Still, before you go into a game, you need some idea of what it's going to be about and how things will likely play out.

When you're first plotting an M-Force game, it's a good idea to start with the monster. Once you have created your monster, as we discussed last chapter, see if that monster's quirks suggest a story. A creature that feeds off people's hopes and dreams, for instance, will create a number of strange effects in its community. If you want a sense of mystery in your story, where the players must investigate to find out what's happening, it's best to start this way, figuring out the central problem first. Then work outwards to figure out what the creature has done, what effects it has had, and what clues it will have left. The last step is to figure out what draws the PCs in to investigate, something that may be several steps removed from the monster itself. Because you have a clear idea what's going on, you will be able to improvise clues as necessary and still keep the mystery internally consistent.

Sometimes the specifics of the monster won't be as important as another idea you have. In these instances, you can map out your plot ideas before you choose a monster. If you're stuck, the world of fiction is a good resource for ideas. Think about your favorite books and movies. What are the elements that make them work as stories? Steal whatever you like, so long as you mix and match the pieces to the point where players won't recognize your sources. As mentioned before, players can also be sources of plots. Don't hesitate to build on a player's suggestion.

In Appendix 5, there is an Adventure Worksheet that can help you arrange your plot ideas for the session. In this context, *adventure* means the story you want to tell.

Don't feel constrained by the worksheet—it's simply a resource designed to help you. Most adventures can be boiled down to four key stages: Introduction, Conflict, Confrontation, and Aftermath. Since a single adventure can last over the course of several sessions, don't feel you have to build to a confrontation at the end of every session. A good cliffhanger can work just as well to bring the session to a close. The four key parts of every adventure are listed below.

Introduction

You can start your game with scenes of the PCs working their day jobs, or otherwise living their normal lives, until they get paged for a mission. Or you can start the game with the PCs already gathered around in their local office. Or a character can be out grocery shopping when she sees a spectral herd of elephants stampede down the street. The game can open as quickly or slowly as you want.

Conflict

Conflict can be introduced via M-Force pagers or briefings, or the characters can stumble onto it. Some conflicts are obvious from the very beginning, such as when a giant monster attacks the city. Others, such as a string of murders that may be the work of a serial killer but may also be a werewolf, are less so. The conflict builds as the PCs slowly piece together a trail of clues, or as they track a creature to its lair, or as they oversee an evacuation of the city. Whatever the nature or scale of the conflict, it needs to escalate as the story moves toward its climax.

Confrontation

At some point the PCs make their final move, leading to victory, failure, or something in between. Whether they win or lose, the confrontation should be the most exciting part of the game.

Aftermath

The aftermath allows the players to catch their breath. This is where plotlines are wrapped up, damage is assessed, reports are filed, and normal lives are resumed.

Once you've got all the key plot ideas figured out, be sure to write them down. You may feel certain that you will remember them, but in the heat of the moment it's easy to let something slip your mind.

RUNNING THE SESSION

Running a session means coordinating many different factors. In each session you'll be creating a sense of place,

introducing clues, overseeing GMCs and monsters, keeping things moving at a brisk pace, bringing in action when needed, and periodically slowing down to create a certain mood. This is a constant balancing act, and one you can only learn through practice. Still, there are some things you'll want to keep in mind as you run each session.

Always consider your players while you're running the game. You don't have to bend over backwards to give the players everything they want, but you do want them to have a good time. Try to keep them all involved. Don't focus on one or two PCs to the exclusion of everyone else. Give every player something to do. If one character is terrible at combat but a whiz at forensic science, throw in at least one crime scene that needs to be analyzed.

Some players, especially those who are shy or new to role-playing, will have trouble taking an active part in the game. If you have a player like this, you'll want to create scenarios that play to his character's strengths. This will help him build the confidence he needs to become an active member of the gaming group.

Another way to increase player involvement is to encourage character interaction. Characters will only come to life if they talk. Allow the players time to let their characters chat and get to know one another. GMCs can also be used to stimulate character interactions. If a PC has a strained relationship with his mother, have Mom pay a surprise visit. Reward Yum Yums as necessary to encourage good interaction. At the same time, watch out for the game that becomes entirely an exercise in banter with no plot development. At all times you want to find the right balance between interaction and plot.

Another important balance is that between story and action. If your game consists of nothing but fight scenes, then the players would be better off with a video game. On the other hand, a game that is all careful investigation and analysis will most likely bore the players. Make your action scenes exciting but not gratuitous. Work them in so they are important to the story. Keep things interesting, and keep the game moving. This also applies to investigation. Sometimes the players may miss an important clue, or may draw incorrect conclusions. If this happens, you need to get the game back on track. Introduce another clue, or make it obvious that they're on the wrong trail.

Page 54 gives a breakdown of the average M-Force mission and all the stages involved. Keep in mind, however, that there is no such thing as an average mission. M-Force hopes for every operation to go smoothly with little risk for the agents involved, but most of the time things

don't go as planned. The logical way to hunt a vampire is to dig it up during the day when it's powerless, cut off its head, and burn its body. However, that would not necessarily be an exciting adventure. It's your job to come up with the twists that keep the plan from working so easily. The players will appreciate your making things interesting, but they won't like it if you contrive a confrontation against all logic. Work with the players to achieve a good mix of action and internal consistency.

As the plot unfolds, don't railroad the PCs to a predetermined outcome. Work with the players to let the story grow organically. At some point, the story will build to its climax, whether that be the final confrontation with the monster or a scene in which one PC finally stands up to his overprotective mother. If possible, all PCs should have a chance to take part in the climax, though some will be more pivotal than others. Allow the PCs to successfully implement clever plans that are completely different from what you were expecting. If the PCs come up with a particularly good idea, you may decide to change some of your underlying assumptions about the situation to allow the plan to work.

Handling Problems

Sometimes players will become resentful of you as the GM. This is natural, since you have much more power over the game world than any individual player. Many of these problems arise from miscommunication. You can avoid this by setting the player/GM line early in your game. Make it clear what areas you control and which ones they control. Be consistent. If you work with the players, and don't go out of your way to torment them, they will come to see you as an ally rather than an adversary.



Even in the best of gaming groups, arguments will arise. Stay calm—don't bicker and don't insult people. Make firm decisions. Get the game moving again, and discuss the reasons for your decision later, if anyone is interested. If a player still seems genuinely angry, talk to him. If the two of you can't work out your differences, it might be best for him to leave the game. Just make sure that this is a mutual decision. After all, no game is worth ruining a friendship over.

Sometimes a single player will be the source of problems in the game. If you do end up with a psychopath in the PC party—something that happens with alarming frequency—we recommend that you simply respond to his actions in logical ways. If a PC decides to take a kinder-

garten class hostage, then most likely the SWAT team will arrive and kill him with a sniper rifle. Don't go out of your way to protect PCs who engage in wanton murder and mayhem. Inevitably charges will be filed, arrests will be made, and M-Force will kick them out. At this point, your problem player can either quit the game or make up a new, mentally stable character. If the player causing problems is not intentionally disruptive but is simply inexperienced at role-playing, cut him some slack. Tell him your concerns and discuss ways he can make a positive contribution to the game.

Using the Rules

Most of a typical session will consist of the players telling you what their characters try to do and you telling them what happens. Most character actions, like walking across a room or driving to work, can be resolved automatically. From time to time, though, the characters will attempt actions with a significant chance of failure. That is when the rules come into play.

The M-Force rules are designed to be quick and simple, eliminating the need to flip through the book looking for charts and tables. Players should get the hang of the rules after a few minutes of play. No rules system can cover every eventuality, so some improvisation will always be necessary. Adding bonuses or penalties to the players' rolls should cover most eventualities.

While you're running the game, you may find yourself in a situation where the dice contradict what you want to happen. For instance, you may want to wrap up a minor combat scene, but roll only to discover that your incidental monster has killed the GMC who was about to give the characters a vital clue. In a situation like this, there's no reason to accept the die roll at face value. Assume that the creature actually rolled high and failed in its attack. As long as you roll out of view of the players, you will be able to "fudge" rolls as necessary. Don't think of this as cheating—the dice are there to work for you, not vice versa.

The rules exist to resolve conflicts involving the PCs. Don't feel you have to roll to see how well GMCs fare against each other. If the army is trying to slow down the giant monster while the PCs head off to find a secret weapon, use your best judgment in deciding how long they last. If two GMCs are fighting each other, let the one with the higher relevant score win. If you genuinely don't know how a GMC conflict should turn out, but don't want to take time to use the combat rules, you can use randomizers other than dice. If two outcomes are equally likely, you can settle the matter with a coin toss. If you want to be creative, you

can use tarot cards, a Magic Eightball®, or countless other methods. The important thing is the decision, not the way you make it.

Yum Yums

We mentioned earlier that Yum Yums are the most important mechanic in *M-Force*, but players may be slow to realize this. When the game starts out, periodically remind them that they can spend Yum Yums to buy successes. Eventually they should get the hang of it, and learn when to use Yum Yums, when to save them, and when they can afford to eat a few. If a player continually refuses to spend Yum Yums, then he may end up taking a smaller role in the game.

Remember that you should award Yum Yums throughout the game session, whenever the players do a good job. Award them not only when they kill monsters, but when they uncover clues, come up with brilliant ideas, develop their characters, make you laugh, or help create the proper mood in a scene. In short, whenever a player contributes to making the game a success, toss him a Yum Yum. The amount you award is up to you. You don't want to drown them in candy, but the players should be able to build up a decent stockpile of Yum Yums for their showdown with the forces of evil at the end of the game. Of course the players should never be able to buy a major victory outright. Villains can also have Yum Yums, and they may resist the PCs' efforts. These Yum Yum bidding wars can add to the excitement of the game. Just be sure not to lose sight of what's actually happening in the story.

Combat

Combat should be fast-paced, exhilarating, and at least slightly frightening. Yet few things are as boring as hours-long RPG fight scenes, where hundreds of dice are rolled, tables are consulted, and equations are worked out. Running exciting combat scenes is one of the biggest challenges facing a GM.

Read over the combat rules in Chapter 11 a few times and make sure you understand them. These rules will be helpful, but don't let them get in your way. Sometimes you may decide to streamline the rules as they are written so that combat can move more quickly. Do what you need to do, as long as the players feel comfortable that there is some system behind your decisions. Players tend to prefer that combat scenes be resolved by factors other than arbitrary GM decision.

In addition to administering the rules, you need to create a sense of urgency when running combat scenes.

Don't think of the game as chess, where players have time to sit and ponder their next moves. Players should think of combat as happening *now*, with their characters' lives on the line and only seconds in which to choose a course of action. Ideally the players should feel their heart rates accelerate, their adrenaline pumping, and their fight-or-flight reflexes engaged. Act excited. Talk fast. Gesticulate wildly, describing the rapid action, then whirl around to point at a player and ask, "What do you do?" Setting a time limit for responses, or just threatening to do so, should speed the players up. If asked for details of the setting, give a quick response. In a truly dangerous situation, characters do not have time to carefully analyze everything around them—unless they want to forfeit other actions.

Combat scenes often require an element of suspense, where characters seem seconds away from death. Suspense does not always require a statistical chance of PC death. Encourage the players to get into character and imagine what it would really be like to leap off a skyscraper, grab hold of a rope ladder dangling from a helicopter, and open fire on the mutant pterodactyls menacing the city. Players who are in character will get swept up in the suspense and excitement of this scene, even if their characters don't take any damage.

Wounds

Be creative when dealing out damage. Characters can be slashed, burned, beaten, and shot. They can lose their equipment and their clothing. In extreme cases, they can be maimed. Even if a character survives a combat scene, his problems aren't necessarily over. Wounds can fester and become infected, and certain monster bites may be poisonous, all of which can lead to long-term problems. You shouldn't be a sadist toward the PCs; on the other hand, you shouldn't let them forget that monster hunting is a dangerous business.

Don't let the players feel like they're getting off easy by taking only a few points of damage. Anything can be made into a graphic wound. Be specific. Don't say, "You get hit for two points of damage," when you can say, "The bullet cuts through your shoulder. You're bleeding profusely, and it hurts to move your arm. Take off two Health Points." If you see fit, you may decide to give that character a penalty the next time he tries to use his wounded arm.

You may not be sure how to determine where a character is wounded. First of all, use logic. Let's say a character is being attacked by a minotaur with a sword. The character lost his gun last round, so he is going to lunge at the minotaur and try to grab the sword from him. The minotaur makes his

THE “CALLING THE AUTHORITIES” PROBLEM

Sometimes M-Forcers run into problems far beyond their abilities to handle. If a giant monster is rampaging through the city streets, for instance, the PC group may decide that they need to call the National Guard. This is fine. The PCs can work with the National Guard to coordinate the evacuation of the city, as they try to figure out a course of action against the monster. Things only become problematic if the players decide to sit back and let the National Guard handle the crisis from there.

In general, you should not let GMCs resolve major plot conflicts. The PCs are the heroes of the story, and they should be central to its resolution. If your PC group is too prone to calling in the proper authorities, you will have to take steps to teach them independence. Characters may call M-Force for backup at any time, but M-Force has a limited number of agents and is always stretched thin. Though they will want to send help, it may take awhile for that help to arrive — and if the help arrives to find out that the problem wasn't large enough to require their assistance, they will rightly be annoyed.

The police or the military won't be able to arrive immediately either. More importantly, these outside agencies won't necessarily want to do things M-Force's way. When the authorities show up, they can ignore the PCs and launch a foolish plan that's doomed to backfire. Or they can decide that a certain number of civilian casualties are inevitable in the battle against the monster, a decision that goes against M-Force's policies. If the PCs disagree about what needs to be done, they will have to break away from the authorities.

In most instances, extra GMCs are useful for providing a much larger body count. This can happen either when the authorities fight alongside M-Force, or in a separate scene where the PCs aren't directly involved. Once the National Guardsmen have all been burnt alive, the PCs will have to take an active role.

If the problem continues, consider why the players have taken to calling in outside help. Maybe they feel incapable of dealing with the opposition you've given them. In this case, give them a small victory to boost their self-confidence. Or maybe your stories need to be tightened, so there are fewer opportunities for calling in assistance. If the story is fast-paced enough, PCs will have to handle things on their own.

roll and the player fails his. Since the character is reaching toward the sword, it makes sense that the minotaur would slice into his outstretched arm. The amount of damage that the sword inflicts will determine whether the character's arm is slightly nicked or nearly cut off.

If there's no indication about where a character would be hit, but you want to give a specific idea of the wound, you'll need to randomly determine a bodily location. The table below, though not at all statistically accurate, can get you started. Roll a 20-sided die. The result gives you a general area. You can then make up a more specific wound. The penalties for different body parts should vary. If a character's leg is wounded, he won't be able to run. If a character's head is wounded, he may have trouble concentrating and suffer a penalty to all Brain rolls. Depending on the amount of damage, the wound can range from scarring to (in extreme cases) maiming.

PC Death

When a character runs out of Health Points, he dies. How often you want PCs to die in your game is largely up to you. Some games will have higher fatality rates than

others. If you're planning to run a game with a high body count, make sure the players know about it up front.

But if the rules determine when a character will die, do you really have any control over the matter? You certainly do. For one thing, it's up to you to apply the rules, and you will have to make decisions. For another thing, characters should never die simply because the rules say so. Role-playing is a form of collaborative storytelling. There's no dramatic reason for a character eating lunch to accidentally kill himself with his fork, just because the player makes a bad roll. Consider whether a character death is appropriate at a given time. Most deaths will be the result of monster attacks, which means you will be rolling at least one of the dice involved. If the dice dictate that a character dies early on in the game, while confronting a minor monster, you may fudge the die roll so that the character is only wounded. Or you might encourage the player to spend Yum Yums. At the very least, each PC death should be dramatic, if not central to the story as a whole.

If a player makes a series of bad decisions, death may be the only outcome. If the group attacks a pack of

werewolves, it may stretch suspension of disbelief if all of them survive. Some characters seem determined to die, and continually endanger themselves. Whatever the case, don't force a character death. Don't let the players feel that the character only died because you wanted him dead. Players should be involved, and should make the decisions that lead to their characters dying. Players grow attached to characters, and it may be hard for them to let go. You may need to remind them of the danger they are in, but also of the danger that the monster they are hunting poses to the general public. Make it increasingly clear that they will be putting their lives at risk if they continue after the creature. If the players are sufficiently in character, they should be willing to make the necessary sacrifices.

WINNING AND LOSING

In board games there is always a winning side and a losing side. You win by achieving a set goal. In role-playing games there are two goals: having fun and telling a good story. Everyone can achieve these goals, and everyone can win. These factors are separate from whether or not the PCs achieve their goals. A good role-player realizes that the game is often more fun when things go wrong for his character. Still, players are human, and they generally want their characters to succeed in the end. Since *M-Force* is about the human spirit overcoming adversity, stories will generally end with the characters defeating the monsters. Does this mean you should always let the PCs win?

No. PCs should at least lose battles, if not the war. Like character death, this can happen if the PCs make bad decisions, or are unlucky with the dice, or are too stingy with their Yum Yums. If your players get cocky, you may want to hand them a defeat to teach them a lesson. Most

REASONS TO AWARD YUM YUMS

- Player says something wildly amusing (while still in character)
- Player role-plays well
- Character defeats a monster
- Player stays in character even though it may be detrimental to the PCs
- Characters figure out a clue
- Player comes up with a brilliant plan
- Player provides food and/or drink to gaming group
- Player subtly keeps the group together and the story moving
- Player looks sad because everyone else has more Yum Yums
- Characters complete an important plotline
- Player decides to sacrifice his character's life for a noble cause
- While trying to piece together clues, player gives you a new idea

players don't like feeling that the fight they're in is rigged, though, so be careful not to blatantly force the outcome. It should be enough to create a powerful monster, give it plenty of Yum Yums, and temporarily stop fudging the die rolls on the PCs' behalf. Just because the PCs lose a fight doesn't mean they all die. Maybe they simply fail to prevent the monster's escape. Maybe the monster wounds them all but doesn't take the time to finish them. Or maybe the monster knocks them all out and drags them to its lair.

In these instances, the losing battle is often just setting up a rematch where the PCs will be triumphant. What if the final battle comes, though, and something goes horribly wrong? What if the PCs insist on a suicidal course of action? In that case, you may need to step in to save them. Or maybe you should let them follow their course of action through to the bitter end. There are three questions you need to ask yourself:

1. What is the logical outcome of this course of events? Consider whether, given all the facts at hand, the PCs could possibly succeed with their current plan. Logic will often be stretched in *M-Force*, but you don't want a happy ending that's entirely unbelievable.

2. What would be the dramatically appropriate outcome? Even if total defeat seems likely, it may not be the right ending for the story. If the whole session has had a humorous tone, you may not want it to turn grim at the last minute. In this case, you should contrive an appropriately humorous resolution. If, on the other hand, the game has had a dark tone and the PCs have acted in deeply

Die Roll	Wound Location
1	Head
2	Chest
3-4	Stomach
5-8	Right Arm
9-12	Left Arm
13-16	Right Leg
17-20	Left Leg

flawed ways, a tragic ending may be dramatically successful.

3. Will the players be able to take it if I kill their characters? Some players might get upset if the game has an unhappy ending. This is especially important if you're planning on playing multiple games with the same PC group—players in a one-shot are less likely to care about the fates of their characters. The players are there to have a good time, and you don't want the game to depress them.

Weigh your answers to these three questions. If you're still leaning toward the PCs losing, go for it. Losing doesn't

always mean mass death. Perhaps the PCs will simply fail to stop the monster, and suffer the humiliation of watching another group of M-Forcers step in to save the day. Even if you do kill off the PC party, you will always be able to create new characters and start again next session.

Outside of these extreme situations, the PCs should generally triumph over the monsters.

There are levels of success, though, and no battle should be won without a cost. Maybe all of them don't make it through the climactic battle. Maybe some of them are grievously wounded, or a loved one is dead, or a whole city block is destroyed. Whatever the case, victory shouldn't be easy.





Over time to the end

CHAPTER 16

THE CAMPAIGN



WHAT IS A CAMPAIGN?

Once you've wrapped up your first *M-Force* adventure you have a couple of options. Maybe you'd like to move to on something different—you want a new setting, new characters, and possibly even new players. Or maybe something about the PC group interests you. Maybe you'd like to run more stories with this group, a series of interconnected stories that build a large, rich narrative. In that case, it's time to start planning a *campaign*.

In RPG terminology, a campaign is an ongoing game made up of many sessions. It generally focuses on the same group of characters, though the cast can evolve over time, as on a soap opera. If a session is a single episode of a TV show, then the campaign is the whole series. You can develop a campaign from a successful one-shot adventure, or you can map out the course of your campaign from the beginning. Either way, running a successful campaign will take up many hours of your life, so make sure you're committed before you begin.

CAMPAIGN PLOTTING

M-Force campaigns center around a specific *M-Force* team and the monsters they fight. When running a one-shot game, you can choose a monster, introduce it into the game, and let the players take it from there. When running a campaign, however, you need to be careful not to let the game fall into a monster-of-the-week pattern. If the game becomes formulaic, players will get bored. Keep things interesting. Vary your types of monsters. Throw in plot twists. Every now and then, let the monster turn out to be a false alarm, or let humans be the real villains.

M-Force is about monster hunting, but it's also about the monster hunters. A campaign gives players the chance to develop characters and let them grow. As GM, you should facilitate this growth. Show the characters at home and at work. Bring their loved ones into the game as major characters. Most importantly, give the characters personal obstacles to overcome. For instance, a character's boss can threaten to fire him if he leaves work to go chasing monsters again. Agents can get into trouble for unnecessary destruction and be assigned to perform community

service. Conflicts can also develop within the group. If two PCs have a long-standing rivalry, their evolving relationship can be the heart of the story, with monster hunting serving as a backdrop.

These sorts of character-driven stories can be just as interesting as the action scenes, and a good game will have a mix of both. Each story makes up a plotline running through your campaign. Each plotline should have a beginning, middle and end. Don't limit yourself to just one plotline at a time, though—any time one plotline has become central to the game, there should be two or three subplots building in the background. When one plotline is resolved, one of the subplots can develop into the new main plotline. These plotlines can be monstrous or mundane, or a little bit of both. Avoid getting wrapped up in so many plotlines that they all slow down—this will lead to bored players. Try to significantly advance at least one plotline each session. Don't worry that you don't know exactly where a plot is heading; these things often take on lives of their own. Sometimes plotlines will unexpectedly converge, as when a character says, "Wait! If we can trick Dr. M into dropping his thermobomb on Ymir the frost giant, we can neutralize both menaces at once!" Study television dramas and monthly comic books to get an idea of how to successfully juggle different plotlines.

The Master Plan

A campaign can simply be the continuing adventures of a particular *M-Force* group. Most campaigns, though, feature a single overarching storyline. In this instance, the campaign is like a picturesque 19th century novel, full of digressions but ultimately leading toward a conclusion. Though the initial sessions may feature a series of seemingly unrelated incidents, over time connections will appear and a pattern will emerge. Random incidents early in the game will be revealed as foreshadowing of the key threat. Masterfully orchestrating a campaign like this can be tremendously satisfying, but you will have to do some serious planning before the game even begins. In order to build an epic storyline, you have to know what the central threat is going to be. You need to work in subplots that enhance the big picture. There are many types of plots you can use to struc-





ture your campaign. A few of the more common ones are listed below.

Recurring Monsters

This type of campaign focuses on the PCs' ongoing battle with a particular type of monster, and doesn't end until one side is victorious. Maybe Frog-Men have decided to annex Georgia, or werewolves are spreading throughout the Midwest. Or, worst of all, maybe the Slugs are back and only the PC group can stop them from taking control of North America.

Central Villain

In this type of campaign, a single individual is behind the game's monster attacks. This villain can be anything from a wizard trying to make himself into a god to a mad scientist bent on creating an army of mutant animals. The villain's plan can also be subtle—perhaps he is carefully engineering events so that he will end up as a powerful political figure.

Institutional

In this scenario the PCs run up against an organization that is opposing them, either through malice or misunderstanding. Maybe the feds are trying to shut down M-Force again, or maybe the higher-ups in the PCs' home town are conspiring to keep some monstrous secret under wraps.

Mystical Convergence

In this scenario, there are much larger forces bringing events together. Maybe the PCs' home town is the location of a supernatural nexus that attracts evil. Or perhaps the stars will soon be in position, allowing cultists to attempt to open a gateway for the ancient god Leviathan. In any case, it's up to the PCs to intervene.

Recurring Villains

As you run a campaign, it's important to create a supporting cast of GMCs. Some of the most useful GMCs are the



villains. Mindless zombies are a dime a dozen; a great villain, on the other hand, has resources, followers, and a diabolical master plan. Such a villain can become the focus of a campaign, the source of the PCs' miseries, and the ultimate obstacle to be overcome. Such villains should be developed into believable characters with their own personalities and goals. You should love your villains—but not too much.

Sometimes a GM can come to feel like a player, and may think of a GMC as her own personal character. Try to avoid falling into this trap. As a GM your focus is on the game as a whole. Don't get too attached to specific characters, especially not villains. Villains are there to provide conflict for the PCs and, in most cases, to be defeated. Sometimes you may find yourself thinking, "The players' plan should work, but I can't let them defeat Lord Breckinridge so early in the game. . .there's so much more I can do with him!" Learn to let go, and let your villains die when necessary. Don't worry if the players kill a villain that occupied a central position in the plot. Another character can be created to take that role, and any information the players didn't know about the first villain can be transferred to the second. You never got around to revealing the dark and mysterious past of Lord Breckinridge? Give that past to Count Blythesdale, and reveal how he was manipulating Lord Breckinridge all along. If you act confident, the players will never suspect that the Count is a new creation.

Incorporating Multiple Genres

M-Force encompasses many genres, drawing in elements from sources as diverse as gothic horror stories and 1950s giant monster movies. The fantasy and horror influences should be obvious; *M-Force* is not exactly a horror game or a traditional fantasy game, but it can dip into either genre. Surprise the players by mixing up your campaign's genre trappings. For instance, one session can feature a grueling battle with an undead axe-murderer, while in the next the PCs undertake a quest into a faraway mystical kingdom. Listed below are some other genres you can draw on to add variety to your games.

Mystery

Mysteries are a good source of inspiration for the investigative side of *M-Force*. A case can center on uncovering the truth about what's happening, with minimal violence once the monster is uncovered. The trick is to leave enough clues that the PCs can figure things out, but make it difficult enough to be a worthwhile challenge.

Romance

Of all genres, none is more neglected in RPGs than romance. Players are usually too embarrassed to role-play any

romantic feelings. That's a shame, because romance is a staple of most forms of fiction. If you follow a group of characters long enough, one of them will fall in love with someone, somewhere. Gently nudge the PCs into possible romantic situations. Respect their potential embarrassment and let them handle the situation at their own rate. Great character development can result. And, since this is *M-Force*, problems can develop if the new love interest turns out to be a succubus.

Science Fiction

Every time you introduce a giant radioactive iguana you're technically venturing into science fiction, but you may want to expand your horizons. Evil geniuses can threaten humankind with their inventions—and if those inventions somehow involve monsters, you can get the PCs involved. Malicious aliens, whether they come individually or in droves, are classified as monsters. For a change of pace, let the players work to stave off an invasion of Earth. Sending the players to another world can also be fun, whether it's an alternate Earth, a faraway planet, or the Kingdom of Nightmares.

Shakespearean Tragedy

M-Force usually wins its battles against monsters, but that doesn't mean every agent survives. Some agents die dramatically, and some of those die as a result of their own tragic flaws. Shakespeare's tragedies can give you insight on how to run these situations with maximum drama. You shouldn't try to force characters into tragic situations. If they're headed in that direction, though, help to make it a grand tragedy that none of the players will soon forget.

Super-Hero

There are many strange things in the world of *M-Force*—maybe even men in strange costumes who use their superhuman abilities to battle evil. While you may not want to delve into these concepts, many of the villains that comic book super-heroes face can easily be transplanted into your games.

War Story

If you want to run a gritty, violent campaign, war movies can provide inspiration. The hopeless tone that runs through most war movies works just as well when the enemy isn't human. Pin the characters down in a tight spot and let them make some plans while the enemy forces get ever closer. War movies also show that people develop tight bonds under tense circumstances, which will give your players a chance for some strong role-playing.

Western

Feel that your PCs have it too easy? Think they don't understand the hardships of being a hero, and the price of

honor? Familiarize yourself with the western genre, and see if you can't bring the PCs down to a more realistic level.

Adding Depth

In addition to being longer than a single session, a campaign should have more depth. Character development and intricate plots are the starting point, but not the end. The great tales of monster hunting, from the *Epic of Gilgamesh* on, resonate with us today because they deal with universal human concerns. Your game will take on new depth if you try to examine some of these timeless issues.

Before play begins, consider what the campaign's central theme might be. Try to sum up the main idea in a sentence, like "Actions have consequences," or "Be careful what you wish for," or "Man's reach should always exceed his grasp." The idea should be more complex than a single sentence, of course, but this will get you started. If you don't have any ideas, don't worry. Many times you won't know the theme until the game is well underway. Once you've realized what the theme is, you can introduce characters and events that underscore it. For instance, if your campaign is about the dangers of pride, introduce a likable GMC whose pride causes him to get eaten. Whatever you choose, avoid heavy-handedness. You should be dealing with big issues, not delivering a simple moral.

To increase the game's thematic complexity, you may want to add in an element of moral ambiguity. We're not talking about flagrantly amoral characters—M-Force should be about heroes who fight against evil. Fighting evil can be a complicated business, though, and nothing can add spice to a game quite like ethical questions with no easy answers. For instance, werewolves are normal humans until they turn into wolves, at which point they are ferocious man-eating beasts. Werewolves in wolf form are on the OML, and can legally be killed. But is it always right to kill a werewolf, when there's a chance it can be subdued and allowed to turn back into a human? Don't answer this question for your players. Let the PCs make the tough moral decisions. If they fail to notice the complexity of a situation, make it clear to them. Let them meet the dead werewolf's heartbroken family and find out what a great guy he was. Let the players realize that doing the right thing can be hard work, and that every decision will have consequences.

ADVANCED GM TECHNIQUES

Once your campaign is underway and seems to be going smoothly, you may want to try some advanced GM techniques. When we refer to "GM techniques," we're not talking about the story, but about the way you run the game—form

rather than content. Role-playing is a fluid medium, and none of the rules are set in stone. There is ample room for experimentation and innovation. In order for innovation to work, though, you must have the trust and cooperation of your players. If they seem willing to try something new, there are many ways you can spice up your game.

The events of a story happen in a certain order, one after the other, but you don't have to present them in that same order. The chronological sequence can be disordered for dramatic effect. Parts of the story can be related through the use of flashbacks, cut scenes, and framing sequences. You can start a game session at the end of the story, with the police and fire fighters arriving at a burning building where M-Force has just killed a monster. As the M-Forcers start telling the police what happened, the game can cut back in time. Even once you've done that, there's no need to keep the story moving in a straight line; you can continue jumping around as long as you can still retain your sanity. The important thing to remember when running a chronologically disordered game is that you don't want to force the PCs into a series of predetermined events. Leave plenty of leeway for their actions.

If you want to give players more control over the game, try handing a recurring GMC over to a player for a scene or two. When running large group scenes, hand multiple GMCs over to the players. If the players really enjoy playing the GMCs, you could set up a whole session devoted to the adventures of your normal PC group's supporting cast. This flexibility with your GMCs will help to flesh out those characters, and will increase the players' sense of involvement in the game as a whole. If your gaming group has achieved a great amount of trust and cooperation, you can even ask the players to temporarily play the villains.

Players aren't just limited to taking on GMCs—at times you may ask them to create a whole new group of characters. You can then run a session focusing on these characters, who are tangentially connected to the main PC group. Perhaps they can play a different M-Force team that is investigating another aspect of the same case, or the Quinn Library research team that's tracking down the data their field team needs to handle a crisis. You can even create multiple M-Force groups from around the country, and alternate between groups from session to session. Each group can follow its own cases, and periodically the groups may meet. This will enhance the players' sense that their characters exist in a cohesive world, something we will discuss in more detail in the next chapter.

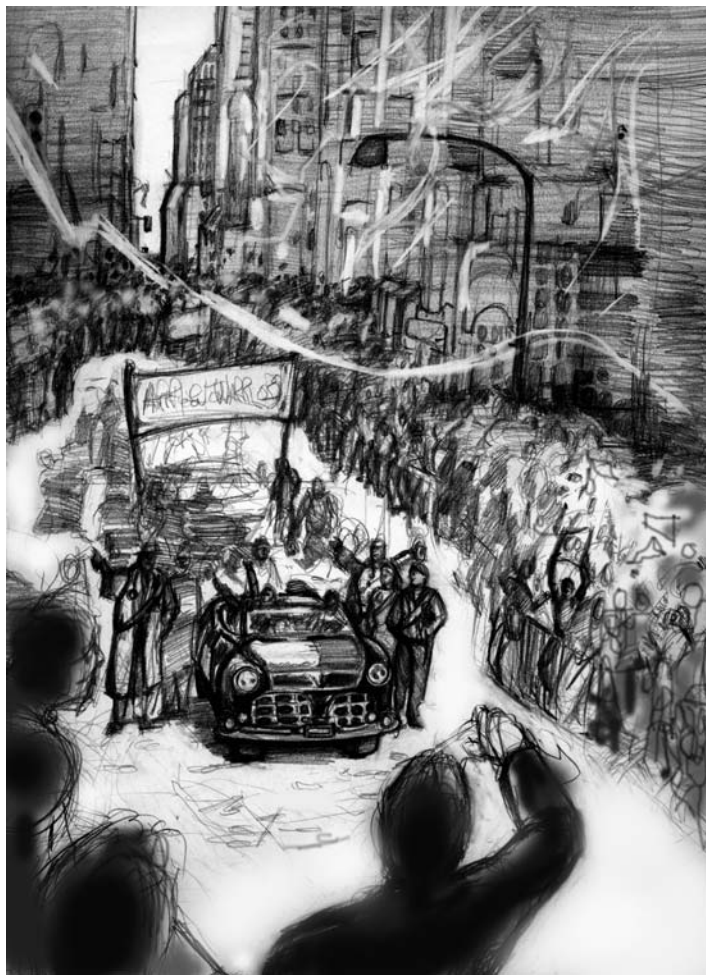
You can also manipulate your game's physical environment to create the appropriate mood. With a stereo handy, you can provide a soundtrack for the game. When the PCs



are attacked by a band of monsters, turn up an angry, fast-paced song. When they are investigating a gothic mansion, put on some classical music. Similarly, when the PCs enter a dark crypt, dim the lights. These tools can help immerse the players in what their characters are experiencing. Be careful not to overuse them, however, as they can become distracting.

So far these GM techniques assume that you and the players are still seated around a table. If you're tired of sitting, you may decide to bring live action into your game. This means getting up and acting out a scene, rather than simply describing it. This method harkens back to the childhood days of make-believe, and can really bring a scene to life. Props can help the players get into character. Make M-Force badges for the players, or hand out water pistols for them to clutch menacingly. Many times, however, players will have trouble recapturing their youth, and may feel uncomfortable acting out scenes. Live action also breaks down when it is time for combat to ensue. Though live action can be a great tool, we advise against using it for entire sessions. Use live action periodically, when the mood takes you, to liven up a dramatic scene.

Don't ever run around outside clutching toy guns. You're too old to get away with that sort of thing, and the police might not be amused.



ENDING THE CAMPAIGN

No story can go on forever. This is as true in role-playing as in any other medium. Stories that go on too long ultimately become stale. Endings are sad but also satisfying. Once you've wrapped up your central plotline—the major villain is dead, the apocalypse is averted, and all is right with the world—you may feel like the campaign has a few more years of life in it. Ask yourself if what's to come will improve on what you've already done, or if it will most likely be downhill from here. If you honestly believe the former, and the players agree, continue the campaign. If not, it's time to wrap things up.

The end of the primary threat does not mean the immediate end of the campaign. After the climax you'll need at least one session devoted to the aftermath. This will be a time for characters to mourn their fallen comrades, wrap up loose ends, and figure out what they're going to do with the rest of their lives. Some characters may be promoted through the ranks of M-Force. Others may retire. Be sure all the players have a chance to resolve any important sub-plots regarding their characters. Don't think you have to wrap up

every loose end, though; some things may always remain unexplained, as in real life.

At the end of the campaign, you may ask the players to give a brief overview of what happens to their characters. You may also want to give a rundown of what happened to all the major GMCs. For instance, "After the death of Count Blythesdale, his undead army crumbled into ash, and his underlings entered into a gang war to determine who would take control of his criminal empire. Meanwhile, your old friend Charlotte the waitress finally got her degree and went on to become an engineer. . ." and so on. On the other hand, you may not want to get into the specifics, letting the players imagine what became of all the characters. In this instance, you can end with good closing scene, like all the characters hanging out at their favorite bar one last time. Whichever way you do it, the important thing is to end the game on a good note, something that everyone involved can remember fondly.





THE WORLD OF M-FORCE

The world of M-Force is like our own, only immeasurably weirder. Things we only see in genre fiction in our world are a part of world history in this world, and legends are generally true. Monsters have always existed, and they are still out there. Unlike the situation in many other fictional settings, the general public knows about the monsters. But over time humans have gotten complacent. Earlier in the book we mentioned that monsters are like serial killers—people know they exist, but they don't expect to meet one. This analogy is inexact, because monsters are much more common than serial killers. Monsters, and other fantastic things, are everywhere. Nonetheless people try to ignore the strangeness and lead normal lives.

When running M-Force games, it is difficult to find the right balance between a world recognizable as our own and a world of weirdness. Creating this balance



will take some work. When running games, you want the players to feel as though the game world is a coherent whole, a whole of which their characters are an organic part. The world should be more than just a backdrop; it



GAME TIP

should seem to exist beyond and independently of the PCs. The game world, though not realistic, should feel real. Only when you have the players grounded in the world will they be able to suspend their disbelief, and only when they have suspended disbelief will they really care about what happens in the game. To make this happen, you will need to spend some time thinking about your game world.

YOUR WORLD

This book will give you a good start on creating your game world, but only a start. This book and other upcoming M-Force releases are full of suggestions. Though we hope these suggestions are helpful, ultimately it is up to you to bring your game world to life. To do that, you've got to personalize it. There are plenty of holes in the history section of this book, plenty of questions left unanswered. You can fill those holes based on your personal interests, beliefs, and storytelling needs. Ponder the big questions, such as the level of technology available and the power of magic. Give some thought to the seemingly trivial aspects of your world as well. How closely does the game world parallel our own? Who is the current president? What are the popular TV shows?

There's an old saying that if you can convince people of the little lies, they'll believe the big one. That's especially true in creating a game world. If the little things—people, settings, and the like—are realistic, players will have no problem suspending their disbelief when it comes to monsters, magic, and other weirdness.

Technology Level

Before the game begins you need to consider what level of technology you will allow. Most M-Force agents carry normal handguns, but the Experimental Operations Team tests new cutting-edge weaponry. It's up to you to

The important thing to remember about technology is that once you introduce a device into the game world, you can't take it back. And each device you introduce can also entail a host of theoretical breakthroughs and spin-off technologies. If you run a game set in the 1950's, such as *Galaxikhan Attacks!*, and allow the PCs access to an experimental freeze ray, then they will expect to have access to a much improved freeze ray in the 21st century. Tricks like "There was only one set of plans and they were lost" and "The government is covering up that technology" will work once or twice, but the players will soon grow weary of them. Be consistent in what you allow, and don't be afraid to give the PCs a nifty gadget every now and then.

Magic

While the characters in many RPGs use magic to teleport across the globe or shoot lightning from their fingertips, this flashy style of magic has few precedents in world mythology. As it is traditionally understood, magic is a subtle discipline that takes years to master. Magic always requires preparation and ritual. Unlike science, which is an attempt to understand the natural universe, magic is an attempt to force one's will onto the universe. When you introduce an occult element into your game, it should not be clear-cut and easily defined. When it appears, magic should always be mysterious, and usually unnerving.

There are many schools of magic. All have different beliefs about how magic, and the universe itself, works, and all employ different rituals. It's up to you to decide which types of magic work in your game world, and how well. For instance, you may decide that, in your game world, the Enochian system of magic was created as an elaborate practical joke and does not work. Conversely, you may decide that any school of magic will work as long as the practitioner believes in it.

We do not recommend allowing full-fledged wizards in an M-Force PC group. By "wizard" we mean someone who can cast spells that have sudden, dramatic effects, like creating fireballs or teleporting. This sort of magic is effectively a super-power and can unbalance the game (see the sidebar on super-powers on page 123). On the other hand, there is no harm in allowing PCs, such as Rainbow from the Key West office, with knowledge of the supernatural. Such knowledge can come in useful while hunting monsters. If a PC with occult knowledge wishes to cast a spell, let him. He may have to do research, and will definitely have to perform a ritual. Whether the spell works or not is up to you. Regardless, your decision should not be immediately clear to the players—magic should look more like coincidence than like special effects. Keep things am-

biguous enough that the PCs won't know whether to believe or not.

The above guidelines apply to human spell casters, but not to magical artifacts or magical creatures. For example, say the demon Hertozog is rampaging through town. The PCs have tracked down the *Book of the Red Gate*, an

DR. FIELDS ON MAGIC

"As a man of science, I have been often asked for my thoughts on the supernatural. By supernatural, I mean those things that seem to transcend the laws of nature, operating beyond the dimensions of science. In short, are there 'more things in heaven and earth, Horatio, than are dreamt of in your philosophy'?"

"I must admit, when I first encountered a magical being, I was quite taken aback. I knew then that monsters were becoming a problem, but I supposed that this was mainly due to the effects of atomic radiation. Imagine my surprise, then, when I first encountered the dragon Typhonis! This creature had existed for thousands of years, and could somehow be awakened by a glowing gemstone. I still remember my dear old friend Allison's comment on that occasion: "Try explaining that one, Professor!" The vampire is equally problematic. During the day a vampire is a corpse, inert, indistinguishable from any other dead body. Yet at night the creature becomes animated, possessed of powers that seemingly defy the laws of physics. Our agents recently captured a vampire, and their experiments have not yet yielded any insight into how the creature functions. Does this mean, then, that the mystics are right? That science is just another belief system, flawed and limited?"

"Even after all I have seen, I say no. The scientific method remains our best, our most effective method of approaching the world. It allows us to make sense of the seeming chaos in the universe around us. It is, if I may, a weapon that we humans use to beat back the forces of darkness and unreason. It is my belief that these magical phenomena operate according to natural principles, albeit principles we have not yet discovered. I also believe that some day we will find the answer to these questions. I only regret that I will most likely not be alive when that day arrives."

-From The Collected Writings of Dr. Henry Fields, Volume Six: 1970-1986, ed. Anastasia Fleming, ©2002 M-Force Press

ancient volume which supposedly contains the only incantation that will banish Hertozog. As the characters start to read the words aloud, they are bathed in an unearthly glow. The demon smashes through the wall and hurls fire at them, but the magical glow protects them. When they have finished reading, the ground shakes, and Hertozog screams as he is sucked into a swirling mystical vortex. Artifacts like the *Book of the Red Gate* can have magical effects built into them, and can therefore be more immediate and impressive than ritual magic. Similarly, magical beings like Hertozog may be able to alter reality with the wave of a hand. Have fun with these powerful artifacts and creatures, but remember that they are the exception, not the rule.

Metaphysics of Your World

Magic and science are two seemingly incompatible worldviews, and they will come into conflict in the course of most *M-Force* games. Scientist characters will have a hard time pinning all their hopes on a dusty old manuscript that's said to possess certain powers. Similarly, occultists may grow impatient with the *M-Labs* staff's insistence on rigorously forming and testing hypotheses. Sometimes when these two worldviews come into conflict, you will need to answer hard questions. Can a machine gun kill the undying horror? Can a spell improve the lab's productivity? Consider how science and magic interact, and how they explain one another. Is magic really beyond the scope of science, or is it just a set of phenomena that we don't yet understand? Once you've started on these questions you'll have begun working out your world's metaphysical underpinnings.

Much of what we call magic is someone's religion, and the line can become blurry. In addition to determining whether a particular tradition of magic will work, you must decide if holy water and communion wafers are effective against supernatural creatures. We have established that vampires are vulnerable to these things, but why? Is the Catholic Church right about everything? Or do all religions contain an element of truth? Will any religious icon wound a vampire? Did God really create the world? Did Leviathan once dominate the cosmos?

Ponder these questions, but don't feel like you have to come up with definite answers. All you need is a loose framework that will allow you to resolve the questions that arise during the game. Whatever you decide about your world's metaphysics, be sure to respect your players. No one wants to show up for a role-playing game only to have his personal belief system attacked.

Other Organizations

Bringing in, or even mentioning, organizations other than *M-Force* helps give depth to the game world. There are other monster-hunting organizations in the world, and plenty of other groups whose goals could intersect with *M-Force*'s. Below is a list of organizations that we've found useful in *M-Force* games. Some, like the Acolytes of Leviathan, are villains. They can mastermind a string of monster attacks, and might even be the focus of a campaign. Others, like the Sons of Thunder, are potential allies. If you've been playing *M-Force* for awhile, you might consider creating a new PC group affiliated with one of these other organizations. This will definitely add scope to your campaign.

Acolytes of Leviathan: The most widely known references to Leviathan are a few scraps of Sumerian myth (in which the creature is called Tiamat) and some faint allusions in the Torah. These sources tell us that long ago, before Earth formed, an unspeakably vast creature called Leviathan dominated the cosmos. No one knows how long its domination lasted, or why it ended, but at some remote point Leviathan was banished outside the universe, primal chaos gave way to order, and the world as we know it arose. Most scholars aren't aware that there are older texts handed down from the earliest human societies, texts that lay out horrible truths about Leviathan. The texts tell of seven gemstones that each contain a fragment of Leviathan's essence. These stones could be used to summon the spawn of Leviathan, such as the demon Abaddon, and devastate the Earth.

Throughout history there have been lunatics and mystics dedicated to locating the seven stones, but it was not until 1849 that Marcus Derth founded the Acolytes of Leviathan to systematically pursue the goal. The Acolytes believe that the currently existing natural laws are an affront to the universe's original, chaotic state of being. They are dedicated to summoning the spawn of Leviathan and preparing the Earth for Leviathan's return. They believe that it is only a matter of time before the stars are in alignment, at which point they will perform the appropriate rituals and open a gateway for Leviathan. Unfortunately this event would mean the destruction of all life on Earth, as well as the cosmos.

In 1927 the Acolytes thought the time had come, and were preparing to bring their activities to fruition. A small band of civilians, including A. J. Farmer and Sadie Witterstadt, thwarted their plans. After this defeat the Acolytes adopted a lower profile, and over the succeed



ing decades, they gained hundreds of members around the globe. In 1969 the Acolytes created a front organization, the Children of the Cosmic Mother, to draw in impressionable dabblers in alternative spirituality. The Children's sugarcoated message of creativity, spontaneity, and hedonism has drawn in thousands of members to date.

Thanks to Sadie's journals, M-Force knows about the Acolytes and their activities in the twenties. M-Force is not aware that the organization still exists, however, nor do they know about the Acolytes' connection to the Children of the Cosmic Mother. Because the Acolytes are still up to no good, it seems only a matter of time before they come into conflict with M-Force.

Ampersand & Ampersand Celebrity Services: In 1980, Frankie Ampersand founded the Ampersand Detective Agency in Burbank, California. Frankie's personable nature, discretion, and well-honed detective skills soon earned him a reputation among the Hollywood elite. When people learned that he had once worked for the Herrick Agency (see below), Frankie started to get more and more bizarre cases. He soon realized that Hollywood was stranger than he'd ever imagined—ghosts wandered the back lots and occult rituals increased box office receipts.

As Ampersand's caseload grew larger and stranger, Frankie hired additional detectives and expanded the operation to include bodyguard and security services. In the mid-1980s, Frankie's brother Stanley, an avid paranormal researcher, joined the organization. With Stanley's expertise, the company expanded its scope even further, to become Ampersand & Ampersand Celebrity Services.

In addition to providing mundane detective and security work, A&A now provides haunting confirmation (for those interested in cashing in on famous ghosts) as well as ghost and monster elimination. Because of their expertise in the occult and supernatural, the company also does a thriving side business providing expert testimony and technical advice for movies and TV.

On the national level, Ampersand & Ampersand has a very good relationship with M-Force. Stanley has been a recipient of several M-Force research grants for his studies of ghosts and hauntings. M-Force has licensed the rights to mass-produce some of Stanley's inventions, including the electroscopic plasmometer (a "ghost detector") for use by its agents. He has also lectured at M-Force gatherings and at the Academy in Caledonia.

On a local level, relations between the Ampersands and M-Force are considerably less friendly. The AIC of the L.A. M-Force office thinks that Frankie Ampersand is little

more than a "money-grubbing glory hound." The high-profile cases that A&A regularly get, coupled with the enormous fees they collect for their work (as opposed to the meager pay of M-Force agents), probably has something to do with this dislike. The fact that the Ampersands are rumored to keep a ghost on staff doesn't help matters. For their part, the Ampersand brothers dislike M-Force's often less-than-subtle approach to monster fighting. When M-Force gets involved with a case A&A is investigating, the agency often finds it hard to maintain its reputation for discreet elimination of supernatural menaces.

Still, Ampersand & Ampersand and M-Force often find it beneficial (or at least necessary) to work together. The Ampersands sometimes find themselves with more cases than they can handle, and occasionally contract work out to M-Forcers. They also share what monster-related information they can with M-Force, though they must keep certain details confidential to protect their clients. In return, M-Force allows A&A detectives to attend training seminars and classes, and occasionally arranges for them to utilize M-Force support structures, such as M-Labs and the Quinn Library archives.

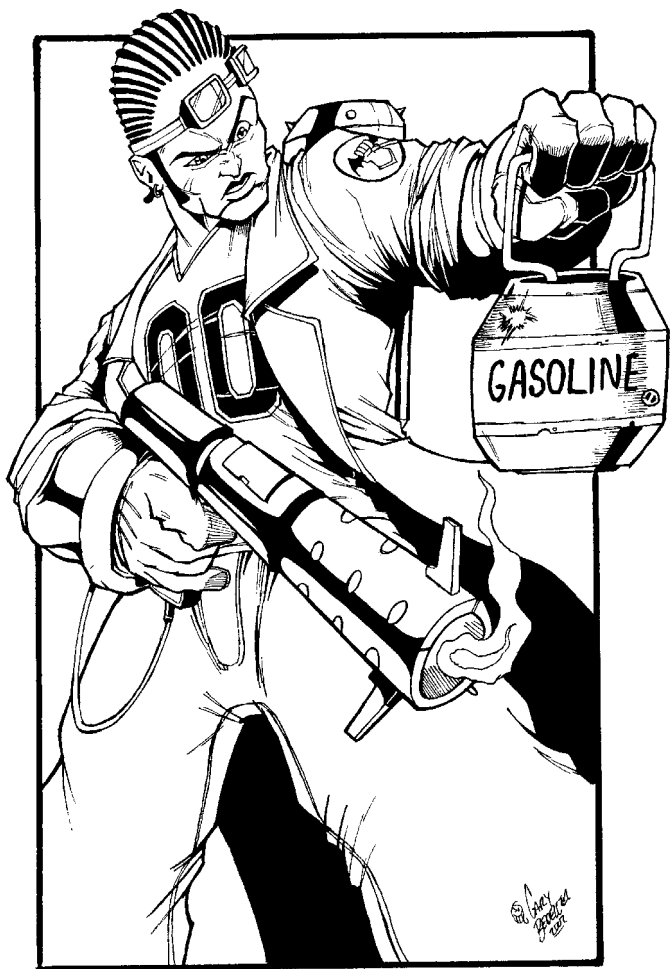
Crosse Society: The Crosse Society, named after 19th century scientist Andrew Crosse, is a group of scientists seeking to create life from dead matter. The Society provides discussion forums (including an internet mailing list and a newsletter), secures grants and donations to fund research, and otherwise assists its members in pursuing their goals. Because their work is so controversial, the Society has also set up a legal defense fund in the event that its members are taken to court.

While the Crosse Society seems like a perfectly legitimate consortium of scientists, many people believe that it has a more sinister goal. Religious groups in particular find the Crosse Society distasteful, often protesting its meetings and even attacking its members. Many of the Society's detractors refer to the group as "The Frankenstein Club."

Though M-Force has been careful not to make any official statements regarding the Crosse Society, it does keep close tabs on the organization. M-Force wholeheartedly agrees with Dr. Fields' philosophy that any research that increases humankind's knowledge of the world around them is valuable. However, they have dealt with enough man-made atrocities to realize that the type of work the Crosse Society endorses could be extremely dangerous in the wrong hands.

The Discordian Association for Monster Neutralization: Founded in 1995 by a man who calls himself "Beowulf Van





Helsing-Froglick IV," this "monster-hunting society" is believed (and hoped) to be an elaborate joke. The Association's official purpose is to "eliminate all monsters, except for those who are funny-looking and can be taught to dance." Its stated reason for wanting to destroy monsters is that "they're awfully tasty."

The BMA does not recognize the authority or existence of this organization, nor have there been any reports of its members actually fighting monsters. However, numerous (and often contradictory) printings of the *Monster Hunting Guidelines and Cookbook* have shown up in bookstores throughout America. In addition to recipes for leprechaun pie and a short play entitled "The Dance of the Hecklestimps," this book contains a wealth of poorly thought-out approaches to monster hunting—the favored weapon seems to be a spork—and elaborate initiation rituals. A supplementary book titled *The Enemy*, which details a technologically advanced, malevolent society of hyper-intelligent wombats, has recently been circulated on the internet and via e-mail.

Herrick Agency: In the 1920s a man called Mr. Herrick made a name for himself as a brilliant private investigator. He found himself working for rich and powerful clients, and used the money he made to start his own detective agency in downtown Manhattan. Even amid the Great Depression, the Herrick Agency prospered. The Agency was legendary for its discretion, and would reveal nothing about its investigations to anyone but its clients. In addition to working with sensitive matters of state, following adulterers, and investigating celebrity murders, the Agency was called in for a number of truly bizarre cases. Over the years, they investigated aliens, Nazi super-science, time travel, the occult, and much more. Eventually the Agency's reputation for investigating the strange supplanted its reputation for discretion, leading to a steadily increasing involvement in the paranormal.

Over the years the Agency has done well for itself. It is still headquartered in the same building, but now employs a full-time staff of operators and receptionists to handle the steady stream of calls. The Agency currently employs fifteen field operatives who are routinely sent all over the country. These field operatives include both trained detectives and agents who possess paranormal abilities.

The Herrick Agency has had many encounters with M-Force over the years, dating back to the very beginning. Before joining M-Force, Mike Mulligan worked for the Agency in the 30s and 40s. Herrick agents can be valuable allies, and are often willing to work with M-Forcers if their interests coincide. Since their primary loyalty is to their clients, however, they sometimes find themselves at odds with M-Force.

Lucky Seven: While monsters were not as common as in the 19th century as they are today, they did exist, especially in wild, uncharted places like the American West. When bounty hunter Jake "Six Gun" Sawyer and his partners first encountered the creatures of the night, their reaction was not unlike the one Dr. Henry Fields would have nearly a century later: if such abominations existed, they must be hunted down and destroyed. Sawyer recruited scientists and holy men and set out to do just that. For over a decade the group, who became known as "The Six-Gun Seven," traveled the West investigating and eliminating monstrous threats. In 1878, several members of the group, including Sawyer himself, were killed by werewolves. The only survivor of the encounter was William "Dead-Eye" Dixon.



After recovering from his injuries, Dixon realized that it was up to him to carry on the Seven's mission. He recruited six others and dubbed the newly formed group "The Lucky Seven." This was in part an homage to Dr. William Aristotle Clay, a superstitious but otherwise brilliant scientist who had always insisted that the group's luck came from the fact that there were exactly seven members. It is interesting to note that only six members of the group were present during their final stand. The seventh member, known only as "Mr. Addition," had recently returned to his home in London, England to attend to family business.

The Lucky Seven have continued their mission into the present, operating throughout the West and always maintaining exactly seven members. Whenever a member dies or retires, someone new is recruited before monster-hunting activities resume. The Seven ask a modest fee for their services, but have never turned down a person in need for inability to pay.

While the Lucky Seven's current leader, Mike Kilpatrick, maintains a good relationship with M-Force, he has been resistant to the idea of actually joining the organization, insisting that the Seven have their own ways of dealing with monsters. It's widely known that Sawyer's original group included an Apache shaman and a Romani woman believed to be a witch. Some people claim that the group still practices rituals Dixon learned from these mystics. Whether or not such claims are true, the Lucky Seven tend to be very secretive about their methods.

Office of Extraordinary Missions: A small, obscure office of the Vatican, part of the Congregation for the Evangelization of Peoples, the Office of Extraordinary Missions performs a unique function that sometimes brings it into contact—and conflict—with M-Force. They're the arm of the Catholic Church that deals with non-human species, though not in the fire-and-sword or holy-water-and-exorcism-ritual way one might envision. The Church has its share of exorcists and demon hunters, to be sure, but its organized efforts to battle monsters lapsed when the knights of the Christus Invictus order fell out of favor in the sixth century. Rather, the OEM is responsible for determining the place of Earth's intelligent non-humans in the Christian theology of sin and salvation.

Sporadic missionary efforts toward non-humans have gone on since the early days of the Church—it was once widely held that baptizing a fairy would turn it human and Christian, for example—but a specific office for that purpose was not organized until 1904, when the seventeenth-century priest Father Giacomo Nardi reported to Rome after spending more than two centuries under a fairy hill.

Even more incredibly, Fr. Nardi had several converts in tow. Though they had not, in fact, turned human, the fairies appeared sincere, and Fr. Nardi's appeal (along with his extraordinary reappearance in the first place) persuaded Pope Pius X to authorize further efforts.

Over the years, a series of fatal encounters with monsters (including one that tragically took Fr. Nardi's life just as he was beginning to adjust to the 20th century) has led the OEM to be very cautious in contacting new species. Missionaries rarely go armed in the conventional sense, but no team is without a qualified exorcist or two, and most are well equipped with traditional banes specific to the entity being contacted (silver, iron, holy water, et cetera). Much of the time the OEM deals with creatures that are not even "monsters" by M-Force's definition, but all too often the categories overlap. Werewolves, which are on the U.S. Official Monster List, are a common target of evangelization. Even generally benign species such as centaurs and Frog-Men can be a threat when their interests run up against those of humans. Thus, an M-Force team will sometimes track down a target, only to find it sipping tea in the company of OEM missionaries. The diplomatic handling of such a confrontation is a difficult task at the best of times. M-Force Director Saunders and Father Michael Jansen, head of OEM activities in the U.S., dread seeing each other's numbers on their Caller ID.

Project Eightball: In 1978, the FBI established a secret task force to deal with an increasing number of paranormal disturbances. Though it existed on paper as the "FBI Intramural Softball Team," the group quickly acquired the nickname "Project Eightball" after the popular divination device. Project Eightball is often called in to investigate unusual phenomena. Aside from identifying serious threats, the organization's primary goal is to cover up information that could lead to panic or mass hysteria if revealed to the general public. Since M-Force believes in full disclosure of monster menaces, it often comes into conflict with Project Eightball operatives.

Shadow Guild: The Shadow Guild is a loose coalition of monsters centered in Greenwood, Mississippi, and organized by the werewolf Zack Willoughby. Early in his life Willoughby renounced the Sons of Lycaos (see below) and embraced his savage side, devouring humans with great relish. In 1998 he narrowly survived a run-in with M-Force that left the rest of his pack dead. He spent the next few years nursing his wounds and planning revenge. Realizing he could not face M-Force alone, Willoughby decided to raise an army. So far he has managed to recruit hundreds of members—including fellow werewolves, demons, gob-

lins, aswangs, demi-gods, hyperintelligent cats, and imps—into his Guild. Though the Guild is made up of intelligent monsters, they are not above using mindless creatures to further their goals, and so have zombies, sea serpents, and Electric Linguine at the ready.

Willoughby's unlikely attempt to organize the creatures of the night would be doomed to failure if not for the monsters' common goal—in Willoughby's words, "to dethrone the imposter humans and take our rightful place as rulers of the Earth." More immediately, the Guild is planning to destroy M-Force. So far the Guild has spent its time making preparations, but soon it will make its move. When that day comes, the Guild's raw power, coupled with cunning and evil intelligence, will make it a serious threat to all of humankind.

Sons of Lycaos: The Sons of Lycaos is a semi-religious order of werewolves sworn not to feed on human flesh. More information about the Sons is given on page 176 in the monster appendix.

Sons of Thunder: The Sons of Thunder are a Scandinavian monster hunting society based in Oslo, Norway. They are active throughout Norway, Finland, Sweden, and parts of the former Soviet Union. The organization was officially founded in 1982, but some members claim that it has existed for hundreds of years.

While the Sons will accept any willing applicant regardless of religious orientation, their policies and practices are heavily geared toward worshippers of the ancient Norse gods. They take their name from Thor, the slayer of the Midgard serpent. While Thor is the primary deity paid homage by the group, other gods are represented. Some members, for example, wear black gloves on their left hands to signify Tyr's sacrifice in binding Fenris.

Though the Sons of Thunder are primarily concerned with killing monsters, some religious aspects of the organization have caused it problems. "Purists" who insist on using only traditional weapons to battle monsters and who believe that glorious death in battle is a virtue have caused the group to be closely scrutinized by officials in their home countries. Unverified reports of initiation ordeals have added to the organization's public image problems.

M-Force has had almost no experience with the Sons of Thunder, but does plan to initiate talks with them regarding its upcoming European expansion.

Strange Times: In 1970, former Air Force pilot Captain Jonathan Rickard inherited *The Investigator*, a Hollywood gossip rag that his father had founded. Initially, he

took a hands-off approach to the publication, making only one change—the addition of a column, written by Rickard himself, about Bigfoot. A crash landing had stranded Rickard in the Oregon wilderness five years earlier, where a mysterious benefactor provided him with food and supplies during the two weeks before he was rescued. Convinced that his benefactor was the legendary sasquatch, Rickard had been fascinated by the creature ever since.

As time went on, Rickard became interested in other unusual phenomena, and soon made contacts in the world of paranormal research. In 1975, Rickard made himself managing editor of the paper, changing the name to *Strange Times* and moving the focus to bizarre and unusual phenomena. The *Strange Times* is now America's largest and best-known journal of the weird.

The Captain, who believes that he was assisted by a so-called "monster," has often been a thorn in M-Force's side. While his magazine has recognized the value of what M-Force does, he has also been quick to print stories about M-Force's "wholesale slaughter" of monsters who "have not presented a clear threat to human life" (regardless of how many people have been killed by other creatures of the same species). Aside from this occasional muckraking, the *Strange Times* is a valuable resource. The magazine has a strong reputation for printing factual, well-researched information.

Whenever a major monster-related event takes place, *Strange Times* reporters are bound to show up. This can be a blessing or a curse for M-Force agents. Many reporters are serious journalists who are interested in getting a story. In some cases, they uncover and share facts that help M-Forcers solve their case. Of course, other *ST* reporters (either because they share Rickard's view of M-Force, or because they want to score points with the boss) pay as much attention to the M-Forcers as they do to the monster. When these reporters are on the scene, even the most minor indiscretion by an M-Force agent can become a major exposé for the *Strange Times* and a major nightmare for the M-Force PR division.

Wisdom of Allah: In A.D. 725, a group of Muslim alchemists began corresponding about the existence of monstrous creatures and the threats that they posed. Over time the group continued to pool their knowledge through correspondence and meetings. In 742, the group collected its writings in a book titled *The Wisdom of Allah*. To expand the scope of their knowledge, in 744 the scholars established a society that would continually update the body of information. Within fifteen years they had become widely known through the caliphate as experts on monsters. Mili



tary leaders and rulers sought out the members of the society to help them deal with monsters. Every great library possessed a copy of the *Wisdom of Allah*.

By 805 the society and its publication had become synonymous. The *Wisdom of Allah* maintained a tight professional core of researchers that managed the society, with hundreds of associate members contributing. Great was the city that could brag of funding a full-time society scholar.

During the Crusades, the society took a more active role in dealing with monsters. As the military might of the Muslim world focused on fighting the Christians, cities became more vulnerable to the monster threat. In response, members of the *Wisdom of Allah* began to fight monsters themselves. The success of the society had immediate and terrible consequences. The Assassins, an organization controlled by Slugs, realized the threat that the *Wisdom of Allah* posed and began targeting its members. Eventually, the members of the *Wisdom of Allah* went into hiding and the society became a secret organization. With the help of the Kallinikos library (captured and brought back from Constantinople), the *Wisdom of Allah* began to fight back. It was instrumental in helping the Mameluke Baybars finally crush the Assassin strongholds. Even after this victory, the *Wisdom of Allah* chose to maintain its secrecy.

Down through the centuries, the *Wisdom of Allah* has continued to research and battle monsters. It is still a secret organization; the current leaders do not feel it is powerful enough to operate openly. Members of the *Wisdom of Allah* are mostly scholars rather than warriors, and prefer to advise others rather than face monsters directly. M-Force has heard rumors of such an organization, but has had no official contact with them as of yet.

Wrath: The Wrath is a monster-hunting organization funded by several extreme right-wing groups and Christian Identity-type organizations. The goal of the Wrath's leaders is to use the "good work" of monster elimination to garner positive attention for their cause—a cause that, unfortunately, boils down to hate-spewing bigotry. Despite the organization's claims to be made up of "good, neighborly folks," it often attempts to associate black and Jewish people with monsters and monster activities.

The Wrath has little love for M-Force, and the feeling is mutual. The Wrath is not above butting into the middle of an active M-Force investigation in order to get publicity and take credit for killing the monster. In some out-of-the-way areas, the Wrath is the agency preferred by local authorities for monster-hunting requests. Adding to M-Force's irritation are strong suspicions that the Wrath's spon-

sors use members of the organization as enforcers in shady political dealings. So far no credible evidence has come to light despite two separate federal investigations, and to outside observers the Wrath seems clean as a whistle. Undaunted by this, M-Force has made it known that there's a case of fine Kentucky bourbon waiting at M-Force HQ for the M-Forcer who can provide evidence of any of the Wrath's misdeeds.

Maintaining Your World

No matter how much you plan, you won't be able to create a complete world before you begin play. Your designs will grow and take on life through the course of playing. Let the players take part in the creation of the world. Maybe a certain idea sparks a player's interest, and he'd like to flesh it out for you. Or maybe a player makes an off-handed comment ("I never shop there—I hear they rely on monster laborers") that gives you new material to build from.

You can encourage player involvement by creating in-game props. A sample newspaper front page, complete with "M-FORCE DEFEATS MOTHMEN!" headline, can be created fairly easily. While you're writing the news, put in some random tidbits for flavor. Some can be clues to future storylines, while others will just be miscellaneous background, but all these pieces of information will increase the texture of your world.

As the game progresses, you'll probably need to take notes to make sure you remember the details of your world. These don't have to be detailed, as long as you make sure you've got all the key names, places, and events recorded. These notes can be expanded, typed up, and distributed to players to make sure everyone is on the same page. In addition to taking notes during the session, you should also keep a notepad handy and jot down ideas as they come to you. It's easy to get obsessive about this, so be careful. You don't have to name every street in your fictional town, or figure out the location of every Slug in America. The goal is not to create a thoroughly detailed world, but to create a world that feels real. Once you and the players have become personally attached to your game world, you'll know that you have succeeded.



GAME TIP

If you can convince a player to keep a running journal of the characters' adventures, you can greatly reduce the number of notes you have to take. In addition to giving you and the players a history of things that have happened in the game, the journal can be fun to read—especially if it's written in character.





APPENDIX I: MONSTERS

This appendix represents only a small sampling of the thousands of monsters that M-Force has encountered. Monster descriptions are given in the form of M-Force records, and the GM may choose to share these portions of text with the players. After the description, each monster's game mechanics are given. The GM will probably want to keep this information to herself.

ANIMATED CORPSE

Animated corpses are, not surprisingly, corpses that display a disturbing tendency to rise from their graves and attack the living. Multiple theories abound as to what causes the phenomenon. Historically, cases of necromantic magic, toxic waste spillage, unauthorized biomedical experimentation, or combinations thereof have been observed in close proximity to animated corpse events. Animated corpses are normally encountered in large groups, particularly in cases of deliberate reanimation, as it is apparently more economical to revive an entire cemetery rather than a single corpse.

Animated corpses vary widely in appearance, depending on the age of the individual cadaver. Some could pass for living humans, while others are merely skeletal remains, and almost all variations between the two have been observed in the field. The creatures have no real intelligence to speak of, though in some cases they understand and obey their creators' commands. Those with intact vocal chords have been observed making sounds, but such "speech" is rarely intelligible. The creatures exist only to feed on living humans. While some reports may suggest that they evidence a preference for particular parts of their victims, such as the brains or the heart, most will settle for any available living flesh.

Animated corpses move at an ambling pace, and are generally physically frail due to the decomposition of their bodies. However, the creatures do not feel pain, and (excepting the brain) have no actual vital organs to speak of. Blowing off a limb may slow one down, but the severed limb is just as likely to come after you right alongside its former owner.

Destroying an animated corpse typically requires the destruction of the brain, immolation, or blowing the bugger to smithereens. The latter is a hit-or-miss proposition, as there have been some cases of the remains of an exploded corpse returning to wreak vengeance if the brain cannot be accounted for. The large intestine and liver in particular seem to be very determined organs in this regard.

Body: 10

Brain: 1

Nerve: 20

YY: 0

HP: 10

Job: Animated Corpse (15)

Gimmick: No Vital Organs (15)—On a successful Gimmick roll, a hit from any non-incendiary, non-explosive weapon does only one point of damage to the monster.

Weakness: Hunger (15)—When the Weakness takes effect, the corpse must move toward the last live human to draw its attention, and attempt to feed.

ANIMATED INANIMATE OBJECT

Animated Inanimate Objects, or AIOs, are common, everyday objects that have been animated by some unknown force. Typically, they exhibit animal-like intelligence and behavior. AIOs are territorial and tend to run in packs of similar objects. Upon gaining mobility, they will attempt to drive any people or dissimilar animated objects from their perceived territory. Attacks vary from object to object. Staplers will fire at their users; vending machines will lumber after customers; water coolers will attempt to pin and drown or scald nearby workers; and so on. Animated shop floor machinery can be particularly dangerous and, given its rugged construction, very hard to stop.

Regardless of how innocuous the object may seem, agents are strongly advised not to let their guard down. Many AIOs exhibit a remarkable cunning streak, and will strike from ambush or in other unexpected ways. Failure to treat an infestation of AIOs seriously nearly resulted in the death of the entire team dispatched to contain the unpleasantness at the North American Bean Bag Wholesalers' Convention in 1998.

When dealing with an outbreak of AIOs, speed and decisive action are essential. Left unchecked, the infesta-

tion will grow as more and more objects in the vicinity begin to move of their own accord and attempt to stake out territories. Most AIOs can only be stopped by blasting them to flinders. The animating force does not seem to convey any extra protection to the objects, so they can almost always be destroyed with sufficient firepower. What qualifies as sufficient depends on the object's construction and size. A simple kitchen chair can be quickly dispatched with a few rounds from a shotgun, but a fireproof filing cabinet is almost immune to anything short of a grenade or light machine gun.

Body: Variable. 5 for a pine chair, 20 for a large floor safe

Brain: 3

Nerve: 10

YY: 2

HP: 4 for a pine chair, 50 for a safe.

Job: Homicidal Everyday Object (14)

Gimmick: Variable. Light furniture might have Leaping at 12, while a safe might have Bulletproof at 15.

Weakness: Variable. A pine chair might have Flammable at 12, while a safe might have Slow-Moving at 15.

DEMON

M-Forcers use the term "demon" to describe malicious extra-dimensional creatures of unknown origins. While some demons claim to come from Hell and similar religious underworlds, the truth of the matter is impossible to determine, as demons are not known for their honesty. While demons sometimes find their way to our world independently, they are usually summoned here by magical means.

Demons show a great diversity in size, appearance, and abilities. Most are roughly humanoid in appearance, often with animal-like traits—claws, fangs, wings, scales, and the like. Nearly all demons are intelligent, though the extent of their mental prowess varies wildly. The majority of demons have quasi-magical powers, often related to their appearance or function. For example, a demon who resembles a rat may be able to transmit disease to his victims, while one who specializes in vengeance may have the ability to read a potential victim's mind.

Despite the sheer variety of demons, they do have a few things in common. All relish causing pain and misery to humans. Demons cannot be trusted and will do whatever is necessary to further their goals. Demons often embody negative human traits, emotions, and vices. In some cases, such inclinations can be used against them.

Most importantly to the M-Force agent, all demons have a weakness of some sort. It seems that they must abide by certain rules in order to enter and remain in our reality. Unfortunately, the exact rules vary according to the type of demon in question. Some must submit to the control of a summoning magician (or another demon). Others must invest some of their power into a magical artifact. Still others are subject to banishment or control through religious or magical acts. Research can sometimes reveal a particular demon's weakness, but more often, agents must resort to trial and error.

Sample Demons:

Bargainer

Bargainers are an extradimensional species whose members have nearly infinite power to fulfill any desire ... except their own. In their home realm, they have established an elaborate system of contractual arrangements to meet each other's needs, and delight in trying to get more out of the next Bargainer than they themselves are asked to do in return. Human magicians have been summoning Bargainers since time immemorial, and the demons are only too happy to make deals with a species that can't possibly have their eons of experience in negotiation. That very overconfidence is their weakness, however. A Bargainer is sent home empty-handed should it fail to deliver on a contract, or should it agree to a payment that proves impossible to collect. A human sorcerer can sometimes get the better of a Bargainer by setting up a deal that will be impossible to complete, though it looks simple enough on the surface. A Bargainer looks outwardly human, save for a forked tongue and eyes that reflect light like a cat's.

Body: 12

Brain: 15

Nerve: 16

YY: 4

HP: 12

Job: Demonic Salesman (15)

Gimmick: Make a Wish... (16)—A Bargainer's magical powers can do damn near anything, as long as it's part of a bargain.

Weakness: Overconfidence (12)—Roll when faced with human trickery. If the Weakness takes effect, the Bargainer falls for the scam.

Corruption Demon

Corruption demons, as their name implies, specialize in spreading corruption. While some prefer corruption of the innocent (clergymen are a favorite target), most corruption demons are not so ambitious, preferring to merely increase corruption that already exists. Not surprisingly, many operate in the realm of politics, though rarely as politicians themselves. More often they take less visible positions as campaign managers, lobbyists, and the like. Organized crime and law enforcement are also prime targets for corruption demons. To carry out their work, corruption demons usually kill an appropriate human and take his place. Using a magical ritual known by all corruption

demons, they can easily assume their target's physical form. Learning the person's history is a bit more difficult. Most demons study the target, sometimes for years, before they kill him. Using ESP (which they also use to learn how to best corrupt other victims), the demon is able to learn the victim's memories, personality, and mannerisms. The demon can't learn everything, however, and finding out something the demon doesn't know from the assumed identity's background is often the best way to expose him. A corruption demon can only be banished when it has taken on human form, and only then by a ritual involving the name, remains, and/or treasured possessions of the original human.

Body: 10

Brain: 13

Nerve: 16

YY: 3

HP: 15

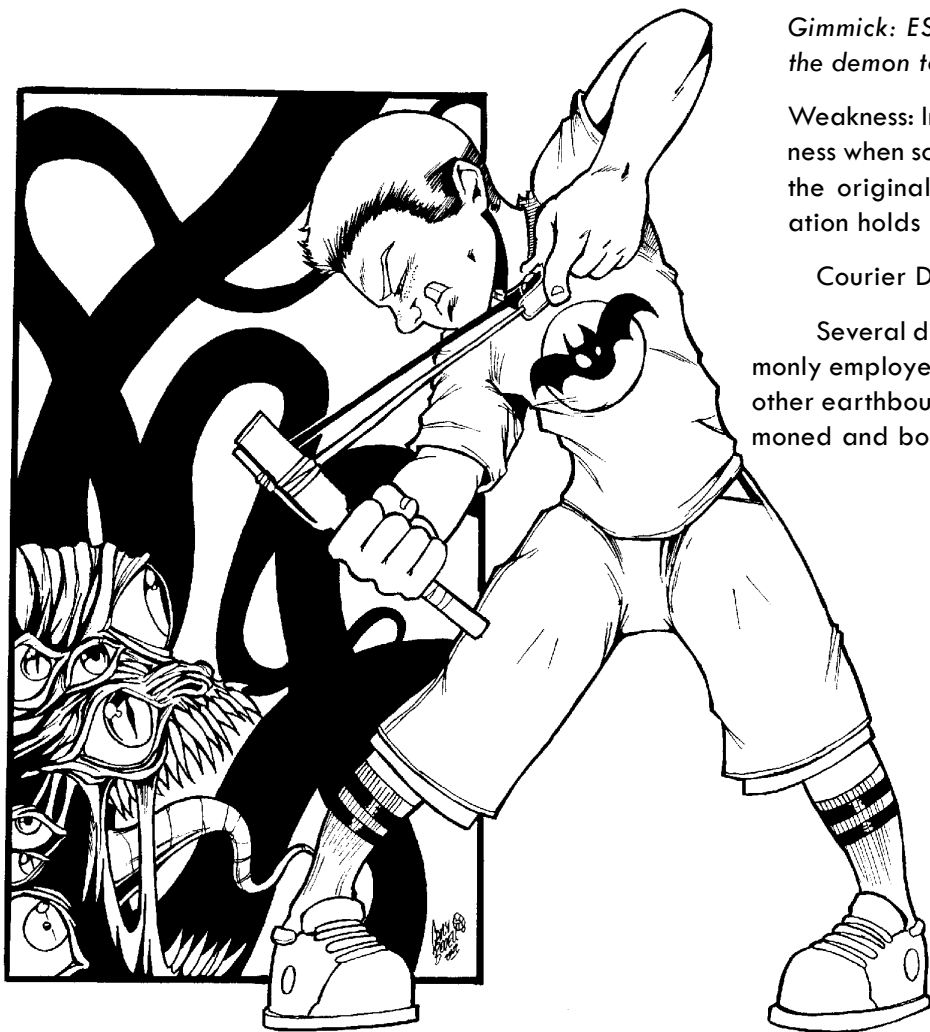
Job: Demonic Tempter (14)

Gimmick: ESP (14)—A successful Gimmick roll allows the demon to read a target's thoughts.

Weakness: Imperfect Identity (18)—Roll vs. this Weakness when someone questions the demon or researches the original victim, to see if the demon's impersonation holds up.

Courier Demon

Several different extradimensional species are commonly employed as messengers for human magicians and other earthbound demons alike. A courier demon is summoned and bound to deliver a particular message to a specified recipient within a given period of time. The magic of the summoning pact keeps the delivery on track in spite of nearly any physical obstacle. However, obstacles with sufficient symbolic power to confuse magical tracking—a crossroads or sizeable body of water in the path, for example, or the existence of a twin or soulmate of the chosen recipient—can confuse a courier demon terribly. A courier returns to its home dimension once its time limit is reached. The typical courier demon resembles a demonic-featured animal of some sort,



such as an oversized raven with glowing eyes.

Body: 5

Brain: 8

Nerve: 10

YY: 1

HP:

5

Job: Demonic Courier (15)

Gimmick: Rain, Snow, Sleet, or Brimstone (16)—A successful Gimmick roll will somehow contrive circumstances to get the demon past any obstacle in the way of its delivery.

Weakness: Magical Confusion (16).

Fire Demon (Lesser)

These small, stupid demons look like bald human toddlers with bright red skin and two small horns on their foreheads. Their only purpose or goal in life is to set things on fire. As they can generate and control fire at will, this is relatively easy for them. Their arsonist tendencies are also usually their downfall. Whenever confronted with something flammable, the fire demon must make a concentrated effort not to set it on fire, which means they rarely escape the scene of the crime and often put their desire to see things burn before personal survival. If kept for more than one hour with nothing available to burn, a fire demon's rage will finally consume its own physical form in a burst of superhot flame, sending it back to its home dimension. More intelligent fire demons do exist, and are much more dangerous.

Body: 11

Brain: 3

Nerve: 11

YY: 1

HP: 11

Job: Demonic Firebug (10)

Gimmick: Pyrokinesis (14)—A successful Gimmick roll allows the demon to start a fire by magic. Use the result of the roll as the fire's initial attack number if used against a living target.

Weakness: Arsonist (14)—When this Weakness takes effect, the demon cannot pass up a chance to start a fire.

Pain Demon

Pain demons feed on human suffering. Most often they do this quietly, lurking around hospitals, battlefields, and IRS offices and feeding off the suffering and pain that is present. However, when subjected to truly intense suffering, pain demons go into a frenzied state. When this happens, their invisibility fails and they attack the sufferer, attempting to absorb all of his pain through direct and violent physical contact. When visible, pain demons look something like hairless chimps with large yellow eyes, long claws, and pointed, razor-sharp teeth. Anesthetic agents of all sorts are antithetical to these demons, and will damage them like acid until they are finally banished to their home dimension.

Body: 14

Brain: 8

Nerve: 12

YY: 2

HP: 14

Job: Demonic Sadist (12)

Gimmick: Invisibility (18)

Weakness: Frenzy (13)

War Demon

Again, this is a general category that includes several extra-dimensional species commonly summoned to our world as bruisers or shock troops. Their "banishing" weakness varies, but frequently involves symbols or attitudes of peace and calm, traits not typically found in these creatures. The appearance of a war demon is almost always frightfully non-human; they tend to be large and well-equipped with natural weapons (+2 damage bonus from various talons, spines, and so forth).

Body: 16

Brain: 10

Nerve: 18

YY: 3

HP: 25

Job: Demonic Thug (15)

Gimmick: Terrify (16)—Resisted by Nerve. Success causes observers to freeze or flee.

Weakness: Indiscriminate (16)—When the Weakness takes effect, the demon must attack any and every potential target in the vicinity.

YY: 1

HP: 12

Job: Vicious Carnivorous Shellfish (14)

Gimmick: Burrowing (14)

Weaknesses: Moves Slowly on the Surface (14)—Roll when attacked while on the surface. If the Weakness takes effect, the creature gets no defense roll.

Tentacles Easily Cut (14)—When this Weakness takes effect, the creature treats its defense roll against edged weapons as 0. Any damage done results in the loss of one tentacle.

DEVIL CLAM

The Devil Clam is a carnivorous shellfish that can be found in coastal areas worldwide. The typical initial infestation ranges from a dozen to two dozen creatures, but they are voracious and reproduce rapidly. As they exhaust local animal life, they will begin to move inland and prey on anything they find, up to and including humans. Even a small infestation can severely damage a local ecosystem, not to mention an economy that depends on harvesting coastal wildlife and attracting tourism.

Externally, the Devil Clam resembles an enormous clam or oyster, generally ranging from two to four feet across. Inside its hinged shell are coiled a dozen or so muscular tentacles, generally 10 to 12 feet in length. Each of these ends in either an eye or a toothed sucker, with about a 1 to 3 ratio of eyes to mouths. Larger Devil Clams may have as many as two dozen tentacles, each longer and stronger than those of smaller varieties.

On the surface, the creature is slow and relatively vulnerable to gunfire, incendiaries, and the like. It can generate a water jet to propel itself through liquid, but its ability to turn or maneuver is sharply limited. Its preferred environment is subterranean, and the creature is a prodigious digger that can move quite fast in loose earth or sand.

To feed, the Devil Clam buries itself a few feet below the surface and spreads its eye and mouth tentacles in a circular pattern. When it encounters something to eat, the tentacles will burst up from the sand, attempting to entangle the prey and drag it back to the shell where the creature's main mouth resides. The vicious razor sharp teeth will make short work of any prey once it is immobilized.

A variety of techniques for combating Devil Clams have been developed over the years, many pioneered by the Ancient and Honorable Order of Devil Clam Squishers in Myrtle Beach, S.C. Explosive-laden remote-controlled cars as decoys, seismic sensors, and specially trained dogs have all been used with varying degrees of success.

Body: 7

Brain: 4

Nerve: 10

ELECTRIC LINGUINE

"Electric Linguine" is the colorful name for an extra-terrestrial life form that crashed to earth with Galaxikhan in 1958. Spawning from microbes found in or on Galaxikhan's body, the creatures rapidly adapted to life on Earth, and have developed into a serious menace. Electric Linguine typically appears in small clusters of writhing strands, each typically eight inches in length and emitting an orange glow. It is capable of movement, but is not intelligent in any sense of the word. It merely responds to outside stimuli, seeking only to feed and grow.

Electric Linguine clusters feed on ambient electromagnetic energy, including heat, sunlight, and even the faint emanations from power lines. Infestations will generally be found near sources of electricity or heat, though sometimes a cluster will seem to display a fondness for a particular portion of the electromagnetic spectrum, such as microwaves or near-infrared light. When a strand has absorbed sufficient energy, it reproduces by asexual budding. The newly formed strands immediately begin feeding as well, giving the organisms an exponential growth rate. A single cluster can overrun a city in a matter of days if left unchecked.

If violently handled, struck, or even approached too closely, Electric Linguine will generate an electrical discharge to defend itself. The intensity of the discharge varies with the number of strands in a cluster. While a single strand will only yield a mild shock, even a medium-sized cluster can yield enough current to kill a man-sized target. Larger clusters have been observed to discharge sufficient energy to liquefy metals. Oddly, the larger the creature gets, the more sensitive it becomes and the more likely it is to discharge energy at anything that approaches.

Electric Linguine can be killed with conventional weapons and incendiaries, but attacking any large concentration of strands will result in a catastrophic electrical discharge, unless precautions are taken to divert it to a suitable ground. Local electrical utilities will generally have the personnel and equipment to implement the necessary precautions, and consultation with them is strongly encouraged during any Electric Linguine infestation.

Body: 1/strand

Brain: 2

Nerve: n/a

YY: 0

HP: 1/strand

Job: Energy Leech (10) — On a successful roll, the creature is able to absorb enough energy to reproduce. The creature may receive a bonus if it's in a particularly energy rich environment.

Gimmick: Electrical Zap (12) — Damage depends on the number of strands in a pile, and is typically one point of damage for every ten strands.

Weakness: Easily Rent (12)—Roll when attacked with an edged or fragmentation weapon. If the Weakness takes effect, the pile treats its defense roll as 0. Each point of damage inflicted destroys one strand in the pile under attack.

FAIRY

Like demons, fairies are an ultra-terrestrial race of malicious beings. While demons are generally openly malicious, fairies often present themselves as benefactors. A person who has fallen victim to fairy tricks rarely realizes the damage that has been done until long after the creatures have left him. For example, a common fairy trick is to lure a victim into the fairy realm. After what seems like a short time enjoying the hospitality of the Good Folk, the victim is returned to the real world, only to discover that years or even decades have passed.

There are many different varieties of fairies, but all share a few common traits. While experts suspect that demons come from a variety of alternate dimensions, all fairies seem to come from a common reality. Also, while there is some variation, most fairies are essentially human in appearance, though often of a smaller stature or with wildly exaggerated features. Fairies are magical creatures, and

all have some skill in illusion magic. However, the extent of these powers varies wildly from group to group. Many types of fairies, for reasons unknown, desire human children. Often, they will steal newborns from their cribs, replacing them with changelings (fairy children).

Fairies are universally vulnerable to iron, and will avoid the metal at all costs. Iron will also cause fairy enchantments to fade. While normal weapons will harm a fairy, returning to the fairy realm (which all fairies can do at will) immediately heals such damage. Damage from iron weapons must be healed normally. For unknown reasons, fairies will run away at the sound of church bells and cannot set foot on consecrated ground. Other religious trappings or rituals may likewise repel fairies, but there is no solid proof of this. Finally, fairies are bound by the terms of any wager or oath they make. For this reason, trickery is often a viable option for getting rid of fairies.

Fairies can be exceptionally dangerous opponents. M-Force agents are advised to exercise caution if they anticipate encountering them on an assignment. A supply of iron-tipped ammunition and other iron implements is strongly encouraged, and the stream of molten iron generated by a thermite grenade has, on occasion, proven very useful to a field team in extremis.

Generic Fairy

The Illusion Gimmick of the typical fairy allows it to alter its appearance (including becoming invisible) and create seemingly real items out of thin air. Items created in this way will fade at the touch of iron, at the fairy's command, or upon the fairy's departure to the fairy realm. Animals and children can see an invisible fairy by winning a resisted Nerve roll against the fairy's Illusion Gimmick. Some clans of fairies have more limited Illusion powers and additional Gimmicks, as described below.

Body/Brain/Nerve: Varies, usually 4-18.

Job: Fairy (varies)

Gimmick: Illusion (varies)

Weaknesses: Iron (19); Religious Trappings (14); Bound by Oaths/Wagers (18)

Boggart

Boggarts generally torment a particular household, causing minor accidents, frightening pets and children, and breaking things. Their illusion power is limited to making themselves invisible.

Body: 4

Brain: 10

Nerve: 12

Job: Fairy (12)

Gimmicks: Invisibility (19); Telekinesis (14)

Weaknesses: Typical.

Goblin

Goblins are the most malicious tribe of fairies. Their illusion power is limited to blending into their surroundings, in a manner similar to a chameleon. A goblin may target any roll with its Cause Bad Luck Gimmick. When it does this, its Gimmick roll resists the targeted roll. If the goblin wins, the targeted roll is treated as a failure. If the victim's roll fails and the goblin's roll succeeds, the failure is treated as a Bad Break. The goblin's Cause Nightmares Gimmick is resisted by a Nerve check. If the goblin wins, the victim suffers from terrible nightmares and makes all rolls at -1 until he gets a good night's sleep. A goblin's laugh will spoil milk.

Body: 7

Brain: 8

Nerve: 11

Job: Fairy (12)

Gimmick: Hide (17); Cause Bad Luck (14); Cause Nightmares (12)

Weaknesses: Typical.

Leprechaun

These fairies, usually seen wearing green finery, are one of the few breeds that actually seek human interaction. They normally claim that they know the location of a great treasure, and offer to share the information in return for a service, or the solving of a riddle. If the Leprechaun's victim keeps his part of the bargain, the Leprechaun tells him where to find the treasure. However, such treasures are rarely easy to recover, and many have died while attempting to claim them.

Body: 6

Brain: 10

Nerve: 14

Job: Fairy (14)

Gimmick: Illusion (15)

Weaknesses: Typical.

Pixie

These creatures have the ability to confuse and confound a man's sense of direction. A person victimized by such creatures finds himself lost, or "pixie-led," even on his own land or otherwise familiar territory. The sensation may last for minutes or hours, but disappears as quickly as it came.

Body: 5

Brain: 8

Nerve: 10

Job: Fairy (11)

Gimmicks: Invisibility (16); Disorient (17)

Weaknesses: Typical

Pooka (Phooka)

Pooka are fairies who use their magic to assume animal form. They sometimes appear as horses, beckoning the victim to ride them. If the victim does so, he is carried into the fairy realm, or into a river or lake, where he drowns.

Body: 11

Brain: 11

Nerve: 12

Job: Fairy (13)

Gimmick: Assume Animal Form (18)

Weaknesses: Typical.

Red Cap

Perhaps the most dangerous variety of fairy, these creatures can move at incredible speeds and seek only to kill humans. They use the blood of their victims to renew the color of their namesake hats.

Body: 12

Brain: 6

Nerve: 13

Gimmicks: Invisibility (15); Speed (17)

Weaknesses: Typical

FLESH-EATING

WOODCHUCK FROM PLANET ZALOOGA

The “flesh-eating woodchuck” was first encountered by M-Force in late 1968. A strange alien craft crash-landed near Soda Springs, Idaho, and hundreds of the ravenous creatures scurried from the wreckage, feeding on local livestock and citizens. M-Force managed to destroy most of the creatures, but a few escaped into the wilderness. Little was learned from the wreckage, and the craft exploded shortly after the crash, presumably due to internal damage.

The creatures' colorful, if unscientific, name was coined by one of the M-Force agents who responded to the initial infestation. The creature resembles a woodchuck dipped in bright lavender paint, and the unusual pigments in its coat will fluoresce for as long as 20 minutes after exposure to ultraviolet light. Internally, the creature's physiology is completely different from that of any terrestrial animal, though regrettably, they seem to be able to metabolize terrestrial animals just fine. In particular, the creatures seem to have a fondness for human flesh.

When hunting, a group of the creatures will lie concealed well above or below the anticipated path of their prey, then use their prodigious leaping abilities to pounce upon a victim and attack en masse. Neck guards are strongly recommended for any agents pursuing these creatures.

Since the initial crash, there have been infrequent encounters with small nests of the creatures. In the past six years, however, sightings of Flesh-eating Woodchucks have been on the rise. While the highest-profile encounter of late was a very nasty incident at a cosmetic surgery clinic, most of the recent encounters with the creature have been near access points to underground telephone and TV cables. No reason for this correlation has been uncovered at this point in time.

Body: 5

Brain: 5

Nerve: 18

YY: 3

HP: 8

Job: Carnivorous Woodchuck (15)

Gimmick: Amazing Leaps (14)

Weakness: Glows After Exposure to UV (14)

GIANT FROG OF DOOM

Giant Frogs of Doom are enormous carnivorous frogs, roughly the size of bulls. They are usually found in swamps (though their cousins, the Giant Toads of Doom, are occasionally encountered in the Midwest), where they feed on small mammals and the occasional tourist. When food grows scarce, they will venture into civilized areas in search of sustenance.

Being a frog, the creature can jump considerable distances, with leaps of up to half a city block being recorded. While the creature will occasionally use its tongue to ensnare prey, it prefers to attack from above, landing on its victim and crushing it beneath its bulk, then devouring it.

The regular croaks of the Giant Frog are merely loud; however, when cornered or severely wounded, the creature may unleash the so-called “Croak of Doom.” This exceptionally loud croak will shatter glass, burst unprotected eardrums, and crack pavement and concrete.

Except for their enormous size and terrifying croak, Giant Frogs of Doom are normal frogs in every respect. The creatures are amphibious, and try to stay near a sizeable body of water if possible to avoid letting their skin dry out. Agents in pursuit of these creatures are advised to bring electronic hearing protectors and to try to avoid cornering or engaging the creature near large glass structures.

Body: 11

Brain: 4

Nerve: 18

YY: 3

HP: 30

Job: Man-eating Frog (13)

Gimmick: Croak of Doom (15) — Roll as an attack roll vs. half of target's Body to determine damage. Body armor provides no defense.

Weakness: Dehydration (10); Easily Absorbs Chemicals Through Skin (12)

GREMLIN

Gremlins are small, presumably ultra-terrestrial creatures who inhabit machines. Though actual sightings of the creatures are rare, they are most often described as small humanoids between 1" and 6" tall, often dressed in mechanics' uniforms or classic "mad scientist" garb (goggles, lab coat, etc). Gremlins nearly always carry a tool belt or box. They have been known to inhabit machines as small as a PDA, indicating they have some sort of innate ability to control their size.

Gremlins are mechanics and engineers by nature. They move from machine to machine, trying to determine exactly how each one works. In their experiments, they often

disconnect wires, reroute circuits, reconfigure gears, and otherwise play around with the internal components of a machine. Because of the constant work going on inside it, a machine with a gremlin will work perfectly one day and not work at all the next. Once a gremlin or group of gremlins has figured out how a machine works, it usually moves on to something else. Most leave the machine in roughly the same condition they found it, but accidents do happen, and some former gremlin dens never work properly again.

Some gremlins are malicious, taking pleasure in tormenting humans with "glitches." When such gremlins work in groups, they can cause a great deal of trouble. In extreme cases, automated manufacturing facilities have been turned on their occupants, and nuclear power plants have been brought to the brink of meltdown.

Because they are rarely seen outside of the devices they inhabit and possess the ability to change size rapidly, direct action against the gremlin itself is often impossible. A high-voltage surge into the device they currently inhabit may stun or kill them, but it can be impossible to determine if they have been eliminated or are merely playing dead until the agents leave.

The best way to get rid of gremlins is to create a trap disguised as an intricate machine or electronic device. The machine should function in some detectable way, so that the agents can determine when the gremlins have moved into it. Once the gremlins have taken up residence, the trap should be sealed and disposed of.

Body: 4

Brain: 17

Nerve: 10

YY: 3

HP: 5

Job: Mechanic/Engineer/Scientist (16)

Gimmick: Hide (19); Control Size (19)

Weakness: Scientific Curiosity (18)—When the Weakness takes effect, the gremlin must investigate whatever contraption has caught its attention.

IMP

"Imp" is a general term for a variety of ultra-terrestrial creatures that feed on specific human emotions. Commonly encountered types of imps include the Crescent Val-

ley Horror, which feeds on childlike joy, and the succubus/incubus, which feeds on sexual desire; there are also imps that feed on ennui, hate, love, despair, and so forth. Speculation in the occult community casts imps as the “cancerous” form of a sort of spiritual microorganism that regulates emotional expression, though there is presently no empirical backing for this hypothesis.

A standard imp is humanoid, with sharp teeth and glowing eyes. Imps vary in size and appearance depending on what sort of emotion they consume. An imp that feeds on childlike joy (called a Crescent Valley Horror, after the town where one first appeared) is covered with soft fur and is cute enough to be taken in as a pet. An imp that feeds on lust (called an incubus or succubus) takes the form of an extremely attractive man or woman.

When originally encountered, an imp requires relatively close proximity to an emotion source in order to feed. (Succubi/incubi seem to have the shortest range, needing intimate physical contact, whereas a Crescent Valley Horror of similar size can feed on anyone it can see.) As an imp continues to feed, the area around it begins to suffer from a noticeable lack of the particular emotion the creature favors. The warning signs may not initially seem bad—if an imp that feeds on hate is in the area, a town may become happy and loving. The danger arises because every imp’s capacity for emotion is finite, and once that capacity is exceeded, the imp bursts, showering the area with a devastating barrage of the formerly absent feeling. The visible manifestation of an imp’s level of satiety varies from type to type. The Crescent Valley Horror starts out small and increases in size, eventually becoming a giant rampaging monster that roams about eating humans directly; the original Horror reached a height of 120’ before bursting. A succubus/incubus also starts out tiny, but rarely grows much larger than human size, instead increasing in desirability until it reaches its bursting point.

Obviously, the primary warning sign of an imp’s presence is an inexplicable lack of some vital emotion in an area. Unfortunately, unless an M-Force agent happens to be particularly close to one of the initial victims, by the time the effect is widespread enough to be noticeable, the creature is probably near to bursting and will have to be neutralized with extreme alacrity.

Imps are vulnerable to firearms or explosives, though they become harder to kill as they increase in size. They can be starved (and forced to shrink) if they are removed from the emotion that they seek. Conversely, a powerful source of the desired emotion can be used as a lure; imps

are gluttonous creatures and can rarely resist the attraction of a new feeding source, especially if they have already largely drained the area.

Body: Varies

Brain: 8

Nerve: 10

YY: Varies

HP: Varies

Job: Emotion Leech (12)—Successful use on a PC drains one Yum Yum in addition to the appropriate emotion.

Gimmick: Inspire Appropriate Emotion (18)—The imp’s physical appearance is always designed to elicit the emotion it feeds upon.

Weakness: Gluttony (18)—Roll when a tempting source of the appropriate emotion becomes available. If the Weakness takes effect, the imp must attempt to feed.

LOCTULLA

The loctulla (pronounced lock’-chull-uh) is a creature of animate mud. It lives in the dank earth, in dirty corners of abandoned houses, or among shadowed ruins. A loctulla can extend like a growing shadow from a dark corner and envelop an unsuspecting traveller in its body of mud and slime. Loctullae are loners and rarely encounter others of their own kind.

A loctulla is roughly human-sized, with a nebulous form and a misshapen face. The face and other features can melt and reform on another part of its muddy form. It suffers all the benefits and limitations inherent to its semi-liquid state. A loctulla can be trapped in a room, for instance, and cannot hold weapons, but neither can it be held onto or cut.

The loctulla attacks by sapping the life from a victim through physical contact. Its physical form of mud cakes onto the person’s skin, crawling up to completely cover its victim. To a human, this is perceived as a bitterly cold mud, but the primary sensation is irrational terror. Once it has adhered to a victim, the loctulla slowly saps the human’s life force.

When combating a loctulla, sharp weapons and firearms are acutely ineffective. Sometimes a loctulla can be bludgeoned with a very blunt weapon, but water is a more effective deterrent. A victim can often simply wash a loctulla

off of his skin, preventing further harm. If enough water is poured on a loctulla, it can be diluted into ineffectiveness, at least until it dries out. Loctullae are somewhat flammable and can also be harmed by fire, although any victims they are attached to will certainly be damaged as well by such an attack.

There is much debate as to the loctulla's origins. Some say they are spirits of the dead, somehow bonded to the earth through black magic. Others claim loctullae arise from slain vampires, brought near death but able to hang on. Regardless of their origins, loctullae are a formidable foe to be avoided if at all possible.

Body: 5

Brain: 6

Nerve: 17

Job: Leecher of Life (15)—Roll once per round to drain 1 HP from a covered victim.

Gimmick: Semi-liquid (20)—Can change shape, pass through cracks, etc., with no need to roll.

Weakness: Semi-liquid (20)—Can be diluted, dried, or otherwise put out of commission with an appropriate attack plan.

The loctulla's victim must make a Nerve check when attacked or be paralyzed with fear and unable to act. The loctulla may only ever attack one victim at a time; even if two people are somehow in contact with it simultaneously, only one is subject to its life-leech power.

OMEGA ANT

Omega Ants are mutant ants with a disturbing appetite for human flesh. While an inch-long insect, even a flesh-eating one, is a relatively minor threat, Omega Ants reproduce rapidly and attack in enormous swarms, literally washing over their victims in a wave of legs and pincers.

The first reported encounter with a group of Omega Ants was near Roswell (N.M.) Army Air Field in 1947, a few weeks after what the U.S. Army described as a "minor radiologic event" there. Shortly before dawn on August 17th, a local sheriff's deputy discovered a disabled vehicle along the side of the road. Inside the blood-drenched passenger compartment were two sets of human remains, completely stripped to the bones. As the deputy backed away in horror, swarms of the creatures erupted from the car's underbelly. He only narrowly escaped death when

the rays of the rising sun struck the swarm, sending them scurrying back under the car and allowing him to escape. Army and law enforcement forces soon descended upon the area, located the nest, and destroyed it. Unfortunately, some Omega Ants survived or escaped, and they have been a scourge on the Southwest ever since.

The average Omega Ant is roughly an inch long, with a glistening black carapace and a vicious pair of oversized pincers capable of chipping through concrete if given enough time. Omega Ants are carnivorous, and have a particular affinity for human flesh, leading them to nest near human communities. They are highly resistant to conventional pesticides, but are incredibly sensitive to ultraviolet light. Any strong source, especially sunlight, will kill them in a matter of minutes.

Omega Ants tend to establish colonies on the outskirts of medium-sized rural communities, initially preying on livestock and isolated individuals while establishing nests and tunnels underneath the town. As the colony grows in size, the attacks will increase in number while moving closer and closer to the town's population centers, culminating in relentless nightly attacks on anyone still left. In many parts of the country, the discovery of a livestock carcass stripped to the bones is enough to cause an entire town to evacuate.

When dealing with an infestation of Omega Ants, the key to stopping them is to locate the colony, seal it off, and destroy it. Seismic sensors and ground-penetrating radar are often quite useful in locating colonies, especially in the early stages before they have had time to expand underneath more populated areas. To destroy the colony, incendiaries have traditionally proven quite effective, the most common tactic being to flood the colony with flammable liquid or gas and ignite it. Care should be taken to cover known or suspected entrances with flamethrower teams to mop up any potential survivors.

While humans are relatively safe from Omega Ants during the day, be aware that it is not unknown for them to construct elaborate pit traps by crisscrossing hundreds of tunnels underneath a patch of ground. These are used to protect likely approaches to the colony and, more disturbingly, to funnel potential prey into killing zones. When stepped on, apparently solid ground or even pavement will give way, entrapping the victim, who is then quickly engulfed by Omega Ants and slaughtered.

Body: 2

Brain: 2

Nerve: 14

YY: 0

HP: 1

Job: Flesh-eating Ant (11)

Gimmick: Burrow (12)

Weakness: Allergic to UV Light (15) — Roll for every 10 seconds of exposure. If the Weakness takes effect, the Omega Ant takes one point of damage.

RATHOMON

The Rathomon is better known as the “Monster Under the Bed” or the “Closet Monster.” Children have known for centuries that a horror lurks under the bed; a terror hides in the closet. When their parents leave and the lights go out, there is something there. That something is—just possibly — the Rathomon.

M-Force opinion is divided over whether the Rathomon actually exists. In 1988, Dr. Peter Rathomon presented evidence that a creature was actually responsible for these childhood fears. He theorized that there was a creature that could become invisible and incorporeal. This thing appeared to deliberately incite fear. The doctor argued that the creature was an empath feeding on human fear. Unfortunately, there was no objective evidence of the creature — only the testimony of some parents, two M-Force agents, and Dr. Rathomon.

Dr. Rathomon himself only managed a momentary glimpse of the creature, but he stated that it was a biped about one meter tall, with smooth orange skin and no tail. Other testimony confirms this description, but little more is known.

Not only is the creature’s existence debatable, it is debatable whether the thing can be classified as a monster. The Rathomon has not been placed on the OML, since it has not been confirmed to exist. Dr. Rathomon argues that the creature definitely ought to qualify as a monster, since it intends harm (or at least severe fright) to humans, and specifically children.

Body: 7

Brain: 12

Nerve: 18

YY: 2

HP: 7

Job: Children’s Nightmare (17)

Gimmick: Invisibility (15)

Weakness: Being Seen (15)—Roll whenever someone manages to catch sight of the Rathomon. If the Weakness takes effect, the creature will disappear, at least until the following night.

RED MIST

Red Mist is a gaseous predator that indiscriminately attacks and consumes any animal life it encounters. The creature is a dense crimson cloud approximately 30 cubic feet in volume and faintly phosphorescent. Despite its cloudlike appearance, it possesses a simple-minded intelligence and the ability to move of its own volition at speeds of up to 10mph in still air. It can make limited progress in the face of a headwind, but it is at the mercy of any wind over 10mph. Inexplicably, the cloud cannot be dissipated by wind speeds short of 150mph, and even then it may reform over time. Reports of Red Mist encounters tend to peak in mid-May each year, shortly after the Eta Aquarids meteor shower, leading some to speculate that the creatures originate in the cometary debris responsible for the annual shower.

Red Mist will gravitate toward any nearby animal life and attempt to engulf it, usually with lethal results. Contact with the cloud begins dissolving flesh and other tissue within a few seconds. Its normal method of attack is to sink from above onto a victim as he inhales. The resulting damage to the face and lung lining is almost always sufficient to immobilize the victim. The Red Mist then completely reduces its prey to a pile of viscera and bones in a matter of minutes.

The best defense against Red Mist is a full biohazard suit or similar protection suitable for use in a chemical warfare environment. Conventional gas mask filters will prevent the creature from entering, so a self-contained breathing system is not absolutely required. Offensively speaking, Red Mist can be a tough nut to crack. Its gaseous nature makes it immune to most projectiles and explosives in M-Force’s arsenal. However, some teams have had excellent results using specially modified vacuum cleaners to contain the creature for later disposal. Additionally, exposure to low temperature gasses will reduce its mobility and cohesion, and in sufficient quantities can completely destroy it.

Body: 1

Brain: 2

Nerve: 20

YY: 0

HP: 8

Job: Dissolve Tissue: 15 — Treat as an attack roll vs 1/2 victim's Body. Armor provides no protection unless it is gas-tight.

Gimmick: Gaseous Form: 15 — Immune to projectiles and explosives. A successful Gimmick roll allows the creature to resist being sucked up by a vacuum system.

Weakness: Frigid gases: 15—Roll for every 10 seconds of exposure to any gas colder than -50 degrees Celsius. If the Weakness takes effect, the Red Mist takes a point of damage.

SLUMBEAR

The slumbear is a homicidal ultra-terrestrial entity that targets, torments and kills a specific victim, and often anything that stands in its way. The creature is in some unexplained manner associated with or attuned to human sleep and dream cycles. A slumbear's chosen victim will begin to suffer from terrible nightmares, generally involving bears and maiming. These will persist for several nights, increasing in intensity, and culminating when the slumbear manifests in tangible form to murder its victim.

What motivates it, how it chooses its victim, where it comes from and goes to, all are unknown. Despite numerous attempts, slumbears cannot apparently be captured on film or video, leaving us with only verbal accounts of the creature's appearance. These are vague and in some cases contradictory, but the common thread that emerges is the impression of a looming, horrific bear that rends its victims to bloody tatters before fading from the room.

By all credible accounts, a slumbear can become intangible at will and pass through the walls of a victim's home to attack him. Projectiles and explosives have no effect until the creature becomes tangible again, and the only known attempt to use high-voltage electricity was inconclusive. Once tangible, conventional weapons will kill it, but employing them is far from easy. Everyone near a manifesting slumbear is rapidly overtaken by extreme drowsiness. Once face-to-face with the creature, it takes a tremendous force of will to keep from falling asleep. Caf-

feine and other stimulants are of only limited use against this effect

The intensity of the drowsiness effect seems to vary with proximity. A long-range approach using high-powered rifles can be successful, but requires relocating the victim to an area with adequate firing lanes. Ambushes, effected by placing armed agents in the bed and closets while the victim hides under the bed, have been successful, though some slumbears have shown an unusually precise awareness of their victim's location.

Body: 18

Brain: 7

Nerve: 14

YY: 3

HP: 20

Job: Murderous Bear (16)

Gimmick: Induce Sleep (15)—Make a resisted roll against the Nerve of every nearby target.

Turn Immaterial (16) — When a Slumbear is reduced to 5 HP, it will generally attempt to turn immaterial and return to the Kingdom of Nightmares. If this Gimmick roll succeeds, it does so.

Weakness: Single-Minded (15) — The Slumbear must succeed against its Weakness to take an action against anyone except its chosen victim.

SWAMP BEAST

The swamp beast is essentially a pile of dead and rotting vegetation that has attained cohesive form and some bizarre sort of animal intelligence. The exact mechanism involved is unknown, though a number of theories running the gauntlet from plausible to absolutely barking mad have been put forward. All that is really known is that a swamp beast is very strong, difficult to kill, and very, very angry. As soon as the beast becomes animate, it begins lashing out at anyone or anything in its general vicinity. The creature's rampage continues until it is killed or the force animating it dissipates of its own accord. Despite the name, swamp beast-like creatures have been encountered in landfills and compost piles the world over.

High-velocity projectiles will pass right through a swamp beast, often causing no damage whatsoever. Explosives, particularly ones that can be lodged in the crea-

ture, are much more effective, as they blow parts off, reducing its strength. Being made of plant matter, swamp beasts are extremely vulnerable to fire. However, their moisture content can make it difficult to get the fire to catch. White phosphorus grenades, flare guns, and thermite charges have all been used to good effect in the past. Napalm is absolutely wonderful for this, but can be difficult to obtain in the field, so plan ahead.

Under no circumstances should a swamp beast be allowed to overrun a sewage processing plant. In addition to the obvious health risks for the community, the influx of concentrated waste matter from a processing facility can cause the creature to triple in size in a matter of minutes.

Body: 14

Brain: 2

Nerve: 19

YY: 3

HP: 50

Job: Swamp Elemental (14)

Gimmick: Rampage (10)—A successful roll of this Gimmick will destroy any inanimate object attacked by the swamp beast, and do triple damage to any living target.

Resistance to Non-explosive Damage (13)—The swamp beast takes no damage on a successful Gimmick roll.

Weakness: Fire (10)—Roll when the swamp beast is on fire. If the Weakness takes effect, the monster's Body score is reduced by half every round until it reaches zero, at which point the creature dies.

APPENDIX II:

HIDDEN MONSTER LORE

This appendix gives GMs information about three of the most dangerous types of monsters. Players may want to skip this section, since reading it may lessen the enjoyment of finding things out through game play.

SLUG

No one knows when or how *Vermis imitor* evolved, but from the very beginning, the species has been a parasite on humanity.

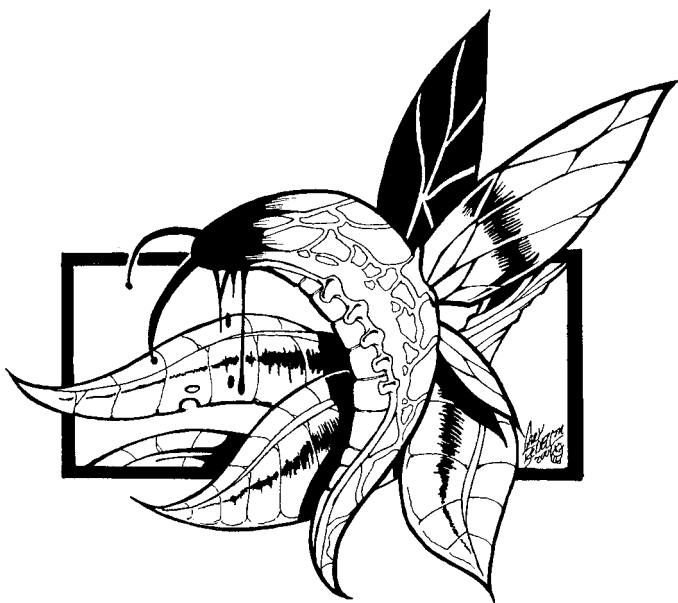
Slug biology is the same now as it was 10,000 years ago. A Slug begins its life in a winged larval stage. This tiny Slug flies until it finds an appropriate spot of dank, dark ground, where it can shed its wings and grow. Soon, the Slug develops dozens of sharp teeth. It then seeks out a human being and bites the person, putting him to sleep with its venom. It crawls inside the victim's body and nests in his stomach. Over the next six months, the Slug grows and eats. Eventually it consumes all the human's internal organs and replaces them with its own. As the Slug devours its host's brain, it absorbs the human's memories. Eventually the human is gone, but the Slug continues to live as the human. The Slug at this point cannot exist outside the human body; the skin and bones have been integrated into its own anatomy. Once the habitation is complete, the Slug seeks out another of its kind, following the scent of its phero-

mones. Once the two have met, they mate; months later, one of the Slugs grows a spore sac in its stomach. Eventually the spore sac ruptures, the Slug dies, and dozens of new larval Slugs are released into the world.

It is important to differentiate between two stages: the stage at which the Slug is still a parasite living inside the human, and the stage at which the human's brain has been devoured. A person with a Slug inside is unaware of what is happening, except that he does not feel well. Symptoms include fatigue, depression, memory loss, and blue-tinted secretions from the genitals. Such people need immediate medical attention. When the brain has been consumed, however, the Slug is the totality of the organism and can no longer be considered human. A Slug at this stage will be slightly stronger and harder to kill than an average human. Warning signs of Slug replacement include drastic personality shifts, a general lack of empathy, and jerky movements. In its final stages, a Slug can be recognized by the spore sac growing in its stomach. If the Slug is in female form, this causes the individual to appear pregnant; if male, it appears to be rapid weight gain.

From the time they grow out of their larval stage, Slugs are thinking creatures. Once a Slug has incorporated a human brain, however, its intelligence drastically increases.

Slugs can be said to possess thoughts and feelings, and they can understand humans well enough to impersonate them. Yet Slugs are an entirely separate species from humanity, and their thought processes are alien. When they are alone, Slugs communicate primarily on a chemical level. Through these chemical exchanges, a Slug can pass along a thousand years of history and lore in a few seconds, thus ensuring the continuity of the Slug cause. A fundamental gap of understanding separates the two species—humans can't comprehend these chemically communicated messages, and Slugs, for their part, do not seem capable of viewing humans as anything other than potential hosts or valuable tools. Still, Slugs realize that they are dependent on humans. In addition to needing hosts in the present, Slugs need for humans to continue reproducing to provide future



host bodies. Thus, there must be Slug-free humans to propagate the species. Because of these dependencies, and because they know humans will kill them if given a chance, Slugs have learned to be subtle, continually increasing their numbers without alerting humanity to their presence.

Because Slugs are intelligent, and because they are social creatures, they tend to develop elaborate networks. Their networks are Byzantine affairs, with hundreds of individuals bound up in an elaborate hierarchy with multiple redundancies and fail-safes. The primary goal of these networks is to take control of human affairs and, ideally, create a stable, pliable, and ignorant humanity. Slugs often take on political, religious, and social power in human communities, but they do not generally take over the entire ruling class. Because the average Slug lifespan is seven years, Slugs cannot effectively set up dynasties—a country whose ruler dies every seven years will not last long. Over time Slugs have learned that they must take positions peripheral to power and work through influence and manipulation.

Though Slug networks have frequently amassed power over humans throughout history, historians know little about them. The Slugs have managed to erase almost every trace from the official record. In the 2nd century B.C., the Greek historian Polybius wrote about a Slug he encountered in Carminia. This account indicates that the Slugs may have originated in India.

Little is known about Slug activity over the centuries, but in the eleventh century A.D., the Slugs formed the Order of Assassins in Iran. This organization allowed the Slugs to covertly expand the scope of their influence. The Kallinikoi learned the truth behind the Assassins and battled them at every step. Through their efforts, the Assassins were beaten back, but ultimately the Slugs helped engineer the Kallinikoi's dispersal in 1204.

The Slugs waged a covert war with the Kallinikoi, and with various other secret organizations, for centuries. Throughout this time they suffered some setbacks, but in general they were able to spread throughout Europe. As Europeans began to explore other parts of the world, Slugs trailed along. Slowly the Slugs spread to Asia, Africa, Australia, and the Americas. The Slug ruling hierarchy was still concentrated in Europe, though, especially in Scandinavia.

In 1857, the traveling monsterologist Professor Phillip A. Points investigated rumors of body-snatching worms in Stockholm. He and his comrades captured a Slug in human form, and incinerated it before its spore sac could rupture.

Humans had killed Slugs before, but the Slug leadership worried that a scholar like Points might try to reveal their existence to the general public. Upon further investigation, they learned that Points planned to publish a series of volumes detailing the truth about various monsters and supernatural creatures. While writing about the Slugs, Points gave the species its scientific name, *Vermis imitor*. On the evening of November 17, 1867, a band of Slugs broke into Points' apartments in Cambridge, killed him, and burned the building to the ground. They believed they had destroyed all documentation of their species, but didn't realize that Points had already mailed his manuscript earlier that night. Unfortunately for humanity, the package was lost in the mail, and would not come to light until years later.

Throughout the 19th and 20th centuries, hundreds of Slugs immigrated to America and built up their own social structures. A Slug posing as millionaire Herbert Gantley founded the Proteus Club in Concord Springs, New Hampshire in 1948. The Proteus Club was a place for Slugs to gather, socialize, make plans, and reproduce. As Slug activity increased in New England, it eventually caught the attention of the newly-arrived M-Force. M-Force tracked down and killed a number of Slugs throughout the early 1960s without realizing the scope of the Slugs' operations. The Slugs worried what might happen if M-Force knew more about them, and so on April 3rd, 1965, they sent a small army to attack M-Force headquarters. They thought this would permanently shut down M-Force and allow them to resume their activities in peace. This was the Slugs' single worst tactical error of all time. In response to the attack, Dr. Henry Fields led an assault on the Proteus Club that killed every Slug there and crippled the New England high command. The war was on.

New centers of operation sprang up around the country, as Slugs everywhere mobilized to oppose M-Force. Under Mike Mulligan's leadership, M-Force began hunting Slugs in earnest. Slugs were frequently forced to abandon their preferred subtle approach, as each side grew increasingly vicious and casualties mounted. M-Force engaged in countless firefights with Slugs, but in many ways the key struggle occurred on a social level. The Slugs struggled to discredit M-Force in the eyes of civilians, using political influence to shut them down. Meanwhile, M-Force endeavored to inform the public of the menace that Slugs posed. In 1966, M-Force found Professor Points' long-lost manuscript and, with it, a list of the telltale signs of Slug infestation. For centuries the Slugs had kept their existence secret, and for good reason—if humans recognized the warning signs, they could go to a doctor and have Slugs

removed before they took over. Modern science made Slug detection even easier, with both blood tests and x-rays revealing Slugs. As M-Force used this information to ferret out key operatives, the Slugs found themselves operating at a disadvantage.

The real turning point of the Slug War came in 1969, when a team of M-Force scientists headed by Dr. Augustus Fitzhugh cracked the secret of the Slugs' pheromones. M-Force now knew the composition of the chemical with which Slugs tracked one another, a chemical they dubbed Slug Pheromone Formula (SPF). Once scientists determined that SPF was not harmful to humans, they began producing it in massive quantities. M-Force agents introduced the chemical into urban environments, into the atmosphere, and even into public water supplies. With SPF everywhere, Slugs could not distinguish other Slugs from anyone else. Their communications were crippled. SPF allowed a team of M-Forcers to infiltrate the Slug high command in Colorado Springs, at which point they were able to kill the American Slugs' ruling council. After the collapse of the social network, Slugs still remained throughout the country, but now they could not find other Slugs with which to reproduce. When that generation died, a new one did not take its place.

Eventually, the United States government required that SPF-7, an improved version of the chemical, be added to all drinking water. Slugs around the world declared America off-limits. The ancient Slug centers of operation in Europe considered the whole North American expansion a disaster, and spent years trying to undo the damage that M-Force had done. People around the world had heard about the Slugs, and knew the warning signs. Slug leaders did everything they could to allay the public's fears. They managed to exert enough influence over politicians to prevent SPF from ever finding widespread application outside the U.S. And when M-Force sent teams to other countries, to see if Slugs existed there, they did everything they could to obfuscate the truth. Over time, M-Force became satisfied that the Slug menace had passed. People became complacent and forgot about the Slug War. And the Slugs slowly, and quietly, resumed their spread throughout the world.

Slugs today are organized into a number of rival factions. The two largest factions are called "Stone" and "Steel." The Stones believe that technology, which makes detection and elimination of Slugs so much easier for humans, is a menace that must be destroyed. They intend to use their positions of influence to bring about the destruction of modern human civilization, reducing humans to a

much more tractable Bronze Age level. The Steel faction, on the other hand, believes that technology is a wonderful resource that should be embraced whole-heartedly. This faction, led by the Slug known as Arne Lakanen, owns dozens of companies, including DeLarge Chemicals Ltd. For years DeLarge has worked on ways to extend the Slug life expectancy beyond seven years. Though those experiments have been fruitless so far, the company met with great success in 1998 when it developed chemicals that allow Slugs to communicate in an SPF-saturated environment.

In 1999, Arne Lakanen launched an ambitious project to "reclaim" the United States. So far a few scouting expeditions have been sent to the U.S. and met with success. In 2000 M-Force agent Barney Magnum inadvertently discovered one of these advance agents, but so far M-Force does not suspect the extent of the Slugs' operation. This time the Slugs are determined to keep their operations secret and avoid direct confrontation with M-Force. Slugs have masterminded the werewolf Zack Willoughby's creation of an alliance of monsters known as the Shadow Guild. Through the Shadow Guild, the Slugs hope to manipulate other monsters into destroying M-Force for them.

For years the Slugs have worked to prevent M-Force from expanding into other countries. Now that M-Force has announced definite plans to open up an office in Britain, the Slugs are preparing an appropriate reception. Key Slugs from around the globe met in April 2002 to discuss the new M-Force office. Representatives from both the Stone and Steel factions put aside their differences and agreed to re-commit themselves to their two greatest goals: the control of humankind and the destruction of M-Force.

Whether or not they accomplish these goals remains to be seen.

Typical Slug (outside a host body)

Body: 2

Brain: 5

Nerve: 16

YY: 1

HP: 4

Job: Body Snatcher (16)

Gimmick: Poisonous Bite (15)

Weakness: Salt (15)

When a human is bitten by a Slug, he must make a Body check, resisted by the Slug's Gimmick. If the Slug

wins, the victim falls asleep for a number of minutes equal to the difference of the rolls.

When a Slug inhabits a human, it takes on the host's Body Number +3, up to a maximum of 17. The Slug's Brain increases by ½ the host's Brain, again up to a maximum of 17. The Slug may make a Job check to access its host's memories, Jobs, and Gimmicks. It may also make a Job check to avoid being affected by the host's Weaknesses.

Typical Slug (in a host body)

Arne Lakanen

Body: 16

Brain: 17

Nerve: 18

YY: 2

HP: 20

Job: High-Powered Executive (14)

Gimmick: Find Other Slugs (15)

Weakness: Imperfect Impersonation (6) Rapidly Getting Old (11)

VAMPIRE

From the beginning, humans have witnessed the random horrors of life and have searched the universe for some sort of meaning. Failing to find it, many have given in to despair. Despair can be a powerful emotion. But it is more than just an emotion—it is also a tangible, seething force that periodically invades the waking world. Vampires are the walking embodiments of despair, a cancerous metaphor made physical.

Unlike Slugs, vampires did not evolve biologically. They are entirely magical beings that resist rational explanation. During the day, a vampire is a corpse. The corpse is always well-preserved—as though it has only been dead for a week—but otherwise unremarkable. There is no biological mechanism that explains how, when the sun sets, the vampire is able to rise from its grave.

During the night, a vampire appears to be a living person, and can easily fool the casual observer. Since it is essentially a corpse pretending to be a human, however, the vampire will not stand up to close scrutiny. A vampire's teeth are sharper than a human's. It is cold-blooded and does not have a heartbeat. Its shadows and reflections are

unnaturally distorted, sometimes acting independently. Its presence disturbs cats and dogs, and attracts rats, flies, and bats. A vampire's skin is unnaturally pale, unless it has just fed, in which case it becomes dark and bloated.

Hunting for prey is the primary focus of a vampire's existence. Vampires feed on fresh blood, preferably human, though other mammals can sustain them if necessary. An average vampire can sustain itself on one human victim a month. If it fails to feed for more than a month it will rapidly grow weaker, until it becomes an inert corpse once more. Though a vampire in a pinch can simply rip open a stranger's neck, in general a vampire prefers to build a strong personal bond with its intended victim. This often takes the form of a seduction or a fast friendship. The vampire uses the relationship to break the victim's spirit before it finally feeds on him. This feeding can be spaced out over the course of several days, or can occur all at once, but either way it ends with the victim's death.

At the moment of death, the victim is at risk of becoming a vampire. Once drained of blood, a void opens up inside the victim. At this point the malignant stream of despair that is the source of vampirism will rush in and attempt to fill the void. The outcome depends on the victim's mental and spiritual state before dying. Those who died in possession of hope, or belief in a higher cause—be it God, family, or art—are unaffected and die a natural death. Those who have succumbed to despair and, ultimately, nihilism, are consumed and reborn as vampires. This is why heroes never become vampires, and why there is no "vampire with a heart of gold." Vampires are all frightened, cruel, and selfish by definition.

Despite its personal failings, a vampire enjoys a wide range of special abilities. It possesses superhuman strength and speed. It is largely resistant to physical damage, including fire, gunshots, and explosions. It can turn intangible, allowing it to pass through the soil of its grave without a trace. It also possesses extraordinary mental abilities, and can entrance its victims and alter their memories. As vampires grow older, they learn to expand the scope of their magical abilities. An experienced vampire can control its body, physical objects in the room, other people's mental states, and possibly even the passage of time within its immediate proximity. Older vampires have wider ranges of control, sometimes extending as wide as a city block. No list of vampiric powers is complete, because vampires are constantly refining new abilities. Miklos Durgo was able to create three identical doppelgangers of himself, all possessing his full abilities. Ned McCoy had the ability to transform himself into a shadow; William the Diseased con-



will cause a vampire to return to its corpse state, as will a wooden stake plunged through its heart. In all these cases, the vampire will become active again once the offending agent—be it sun, water, or stake—has been removed. Cutting off a vampire's head causes its body to revert to the corpse state, but the head will remain active. Once the head gets close to the body, it will be able to reattach itself. Since it is an unnatural abomination, a vampire is vulnerable to attack by symbols of purity, such as silver, salt, and garlic. It is also vulnerable to holy items, great works of art, and other symbols of a higher meaning. These things will hurt a vampire, and possibly cause it to retreat, but they will not destroy it. The only way to effectively destroy a vampire is to drive a stake through its heart, cut off its head, burn the head and the body separately, and scatter the ashes separately over running water. Since vampires are immortal, some trace of the creature's intelligence will linger, but it will not be able to re-form itself.

Vampires exist all over the world, on the margins of every society. Vampires often pretend to be human while they are hunting, but they do not normally take part in human society. They do not hold down jobs or form social networks. In addition to hating humans, vampires generally hate other vampires as well. They are solitary creatures, spending much of their time underground or in other dark places. Though they are subtle and intelligent, they are incapable of acts of creativity or nobility. They are entirely self-serving, and have no real goals beyond feeding and growing in power.

Typical Vampire

Body: 20

Brain: 12

Nerve: 9

YY: 3

HP: 20

Job: Variable

Gimmick: Vampire (20)

Weakness: Vampire (20)

The Vampire Gimmick includes a wide range of powers, the details of which are up to the GM.

WEREWOLF

trolled an army of rats; Tomoko Sengoku could travel through mirrors. Because they are magically based, vampires are able to violate basic laws of physics. The range of their abilities seems limited only by each vampire's experience and willpower.

Though vampires are powerful, they are also subject to a wide range of limitations. During the day, regardless of whether or not it is in the presence of sunlight, a vampire is an immobile corpse. While in this state, the vampire must be interred within its proper grave, or else it will not be able to rise the following night. Vampires have found that they can overcome this limitation by moving the soil from their grave to another location. Immersion in water



Werewolves are humans who turn into wolves. However, not all people who turn into wolves are necessarily werewolves. Magical artifacts, rituals, curses, and even genetic mutation or manipulation can potentially give a human the ability to assume wolf form, but this does not make them werewolves. Werewolves have five specific common traits, outlined below. Creatures who do not exhibit all these traits are not technically werewolves, though in some cases the distinction may be purely academic.

The werewolf's condition is hereditary. According to legend, all werewolves are the descendents of the Greek king Lycaos, whose progeny were cursed by Artemis (on behalf of Zeus) to hunger for human flesh. Whether this story is true or false is unimportant, but its implication (that werewolves are born, not made) is the factor that most often separates a true werewolf from other shapeshifters. Werewolves can mate with humans, but the progeny of such a union is always a werewolf.

The werewolf only (and always) assumes wolf form during the full moon. Werewolves have no control over their transformations. They assume wolf form each month during the three days of the full moon. There is no way for them to assume wolf form at any other time, and they cannot repress their transformation. Therefore, if a creature can assume wolf form at any other time, or does not assume wolf form during the full moon, it is not truly a werewolf. According to werewolf legend, the timing of the transformation is thanks to Artemis, the moon goddess who cursed Lycaos.

Werewolves do not retain any human traits while in wolf form. Physically, werewolves look just like normal wolves, only much larger. Scars, missing limbs or eyes, and some other physical markings of the human form do carry over to the wolf form, but the resemblance stops there. Mentally, they are merely very hungry wolves. While werewolves are slightly more cunning than most normal wolves, they do not have any human intelligence or cognizance of their human existence. While in wolf form, werewolves are ravenously hungry and prefer human prey.

Werewolves, when in wolf form, are extremely resistant to damage, but can be killed with silver weapons. While werewolves in human form can be killed by anything that would kill a normal human, those in wolf form are able to shrug off attacks that would kill most creatures. However, an attack with a silver weapon that pierces the werewolf's skin will instantly kill it. Likewise, introducing mercury (quicksilver) into a werewolf's bloodstream will cause instant death. For the mythologically inclined, silver is associated with the moon, and therefore sacred to Artemis.

Werewolves are wolves. While this seems obvious from the name, stories from numerous cultures tell of men who are able to shapeshift into animals other than wolves. In most cases, such transformations are the result of magical rituals. While other shapeshifting breeds are certainly possible, they are not documented in the M-Force world and are unlikely to bear any resemblance to the werewolf beyond the human to animal transformation.

Werewolves in human form exhibit some of the natural tendencies of wolves. The most recognizable is the pack mentality. Most werewolves live in tight-knit family groups led by an alpha male. Those who are interested in hiding their true nature may go to great lengths to disguise this social structure, but close scrutiny will usually reveal the truth of the matter. While single werewolves may occasionally be encountered, such lone werewolves are rarely solitary by choice. In most cases, they have been exiled from their pack or the rest of the group has been killed or scattered. Most werewolves who have been separated from their pack will actively seek out a new "family."

The wolf's predatory nature is also occasionally present in the werewolf's human form. While some exhibit this on a basic level, excelling at hunting or becoming serial murderers in human form, most are a bit more advanced. Werewolves make extremely good loan sharks, drug dealers, and used car salesmen. The single most common profession among werewolves is con artistry, no doubt because the mobility and subterfuge involved in such work allows the pack better opportunities to hide its true nature.

Werewolf packs cannot live in settled areas for very long. After a few months of mysterious "wild animal" attacks in an urban setting during the full moon, even the most dim-witted police department will begin to suspect werewolves are to blame. The only documented case of werewolves settling in a large city for a substantial amount of time comes from Los Angeles. In 1984, a group of M-Force agents tracked a werewolf in human form to a mansion in the Hollywood Hills, where he remained for the duration of the full moon. Because the werewolf was a drug dealer in human form, M-Force was able to persuade the police to obtain a search warrant, which led to a gruesome discovery. Beneath the mansion was a soundproof bunker strewn with human bones. The pack had survived by kidnapping homeless people throughout the month. During the full moon, the pack locked itself in the bunker with these poor souls. This case, however, is very much an exception. For the most part, werewolf packs either live far away from human civilization or lead a nomadic lifestyle.

Werewolves who don't want to harm humans often live in self-sufficient communes far away from human habitation. Many such communes adopt the façade (and sometimes the actual beliefs) of other fringe groups who form their own communal societies—hippies, religious sects, and the like. While a few members of such a commune may attempt to lead a normal human life and only visit the commune during the full moon, they are the minority—it's simply too difficult to disappear for three days every month. The Sons of Lycaos (see below) and other packs opposed to killing humans are the ones who most commonly adopt this type of communal lifestyle. However, some communes operate as cults and use their human "converts" as a food supply.

Werewolf packs who do not form communes usually lead a nomadic life. In countries where nomadic cultures still exist, the werewolves are often members (or pose as members) of indigenous nomadic groups. In more developed countries, a nomadic werewolf pack might take the form of a traveling carnival, a biker gang, or the aforementioned group of con artists. While some nomadic werewolves actively avoid taking human life, camping out in the wilderness during the full moon, most nomadic groups have no qualms about killing humans. The Roma, or gypsies, have of course been suspected (and persecuted) as werewolves throughout history. However, there is no strong evidence indicating that Roma are more or less likely to be werewolves than any other ethnic or racial group.

The best-known werewolf organization is the Sons of Lycaos. Members of this religious group believe that their condition is the result of an ancient curse bestowed upon the descendants of King Lycaos (an Arcadian king who offered his son's flesh as a sacrifice to Zeus) by Artemis. The Sons believe that the curse will be lifted if followers worship Artemis and avoid eating human flesh. The Sons follow the teachings of the Regimen, a collection of precepts that help the werewolf lead a pure life. Each pack of Sons has a Rector who is trained in the ways of the Regimen. The Rector advises the pack leader and instructs the pack. Each Rector is chosen at birth and put on a strict vegetarian diet for life. The Rector may be male or female. Any member of the pack who fails to keep the Regimen is shunned for an appropriate amount of time. So far the curse has not been lifted, but the Sons continue their efforts.

A smaller group is Los Gauchos sin Corazones, a biker gang composed of werewolves. Los Gauchos do not deliberately seek out humans to prey on, but they don't take any special measures to isolate themselves during the full moon. The Gauchos are a national club with several separate groups totaling about one hundred members. Each year the gang gathers in Park River, North Dakota to celebrate their found-

ing with a pig roast. Members of the gang are easily identified by leather jackets sporting the club emblem, a dagger through a bloody heart. M-Force is oblivious to the existence of the Gauchos, but it only takes one bloody night to change that.

Another band of itinerant werewolves is currently operating under the name William Wedge's World of Wonders, though the carnival changes its name every few months. This is a particularly vicious pack that has gained a taste for human flesh. The carnival operators only spend a few days in any town, but when they depart, one or two townsfolk always seem to disappear as well. Most people assume that these folk have left with the carnival, and the carnies encourage this belief. The truth is that these poor souls have been captured and placed inside the Hall of Mirrors. This attraction is perpetually under repair, and is actually used as a larder for the carnival wolves. Right before the full moon, the carnival pulls into a desolate area and opens the Hall of Mirrors. The moon rises and the carnival wolves feed, leaving no one the wiser as to their nature.

Werewolf Stats

Human Form: Werewolves in human form are regular characters in every way.

Wolf Form: When in wolf form, a werewolf's Body is 4 higher than when in human form. Its Nerve is 6 higher, and its Brain is reduced by 4. The werewolf's Job is "Wolf," with a Job Number between 10 and 19, depending mostly on age. The werewolf has a Gimmick of Resist Damage and a Weakness of Silver, both with a Number of 20.

Typical Werewolf

Body: 15

Brain: 7

Nerve: 17

Job: Wolf (14)

Gimmick: Resist Damage (20)

Weakness: Silver (20)

YY: 3

HP: 15

All damage done to a werewolf through normal means is reduced by 1/2. A werewolf will die instantly if an attack with a silver weapon causes at least one point of damage.

WEREWOLVES IN THE GAME

Werewolves are regular people most of the time, but are monsters three days a month. While in wolf form, werewolves are classified as monsters by the OML and can legally be killed. However, when an M-Force agent kills a werewolf, he is also killing a human being. As mentioned in Chapter 16, this dual nature leads to some interesting questions and situations that can be explored in an M-Force game, some of which are discussed below. A GM who wants to explore the implications of a werewolf's nature to the fullest should make every attempt to introduce the werewolf as a person before revealing its monstrous side.

M-Force Priorities: At first, this looks cut and dried. M-Force's second most important priority is to kill monsters. Werewolves in wolf form are monsters, so they should be killed, right? On the other hand, M-Force's top priority is to protect human life. Since werewolves are human most of the time, are they included in this priority even when they're in wolf form? Should agents therefore avoid killing a werewolf if capture is a viable option? No doubt different local offices (and different agents) will have different views on the question.

Good Werewolves: Some werewolves don't want to hurt humans. Is this being addressed? Are there special containment facilities where werewolves can check themselves in during the full moon? Does M-Force view helping werewolves who don't want to kill as "cooperating with monsters?"

Guilt and Vengeance: The dramatic possibilities of putting players into a situation where they have to kill a werewolf who's a nice guy in human form are obvious. Even if the story doesn't allow you to show the PCs what a nice guy the werewolf was before they off him, it's easy enough to get the point across after the fact through GMCs who knew the werewolf's human personality. A more intriguing situation is to present a werewolf who is completely unlikable in human form. Then set up a situation in which capture is a viable option. If the PCs decide to kill the monster anyway, people may ask questions (possibly even Oversight, if you've decided that M-Force official policy favors capture of werewolves when possible). If the characters' decision to kill the werewolf was based on its human personality, have they overstepped the boundaries of monster hunting and engaged in vigilantism?

Criminal Law: An M-Forcer can kill a werewolf in wolf form if it poses a threat to human life. But what happens if a werewolf kills a person and then resumes human form? If the werewolf can be linked to the kill, he is presumably entitled to a criminal trial. Does the temporary insanity plea cover lycanthropy? If the trial lasts until the next full moon, can the werewolf be killed by guards when he changes, or is the wolf form also innocent until proven guilty? Assuming prison guards can't simply murder him, what if he's not convicted? Can a person be convicted of the crime of being a werewolf and sentenced to three days in jail every month (during the full moon) for the rest of his life?

Civil Law: An agent can't be criminally prosecuted for killing a werewolf while it's in wolf form, but can the family file a civil case? Are werewolves a race in the legal sense and therefore protected from discrimination? Are the civil rights of known werewolves limited in other ways? If so, are there werewolf activist groups campaigning for equality under the law?

The things mentioned above are just the tip of the iceberg. There are plenty of interesting issues that can be addressed simply by asking how werewolves would be viewed in a world where they were real, scientifically documented creatures rather than mere legends. While werewolves can be used simply as powerful monsters, taking their dual nature into account can lead to much more intriguing plots.

If a GM would like to introduce a breed of humans that transform into another animal, she is advised to develop (or research) a mythology to explain the transformation, then tie the powers, traits, and vulnerabilities of the breed to that mythology. In human form, such creatures will likely exhibit traits and mannerisms associated with the animal (such as the werewolf's pack mentality).

APPENDIX III: SAMPLE CHARACTERS

“THE KIDS”

Al Smith

Body: 13

Brain: 12

Nerve: 10

Jobs: Shade Tree Mechanic (9); M-Force Agent (9)

Gimmick: Hide in Plain Sight (13)

Weakness: Good Samaritan (13)

Skills: Pool +4; All Things Pizza +2; Army Stuff +1; Emergency Driving +1

YY: 2

HP: 13

Favorite Comic Book: Tom Strong

WWPHITM?: Casey Affleck

Tag Line: “Don’t make me have to run away like a little girl. Because I’ve done it before, and it’s NOT pretty!”

Al Smith is an average guy in his mid-20s. He grew up in Ohio, where his life was uneventful. Shortly after graduating from high school, Al joined the army. This didn’t work out as well as he planned, so Al left the armed forces and moved to Key West, where he currently makes his living in the fast-paced food transportation industry. Shortly after discovering that his girlfriend was a demon, Al joined M-Force. When he’s not delivering pies or fighting monsters, Al enjoys working on cars, playing pool, and reading comic books.

Susan Ashby

Body: 10

Brain: 15

Nerve: 10

Jobs: Student (14); M-Force Agent (11)

Gimmick: Well-Read (10)

Weakness: Big Dork (10)

Skills: “Charles in Charge” Lore +2; Computer Geek +1; Research +1

YY: 1

HP: 10

Favorite Historical Figure: Joan of Arc

WWPHITM?: Naomi Watts (as Jet Girl, only without the British accent)

Tag Line: “That was a really dorky thing to say, wasn’t it?”

In addition to being one of the few remaining active members of the Scott Baio fan club, Susan is a junior majoring in history at Key West University and Diving School. She was offered scholarships at a number of prestigious colleges, but chose KWUDS because it’s close to home, and she’s reasonably sure it’s accredited. Susan is very shy and kind of a bookworm. She joined M-Force at the urging of her mother’s friend Rainbow, who thought it would help Susan come out of her shell.

Alicia Yewell

Body: 13

Brain: 12

Nerve: 14

Jobs: Kung-Fu Chick (14); M-Force Agent (9)

Gimmick: Fast Healer (10)

Weakness: Blonde (10)

Skills: Sorority Girl +2; Painting +1; First Aid +1

YY: 1

HP: 13

Favorite Beverage: Long Island Iced Tea

WWPHITM?: Ali Larter

Tag Line: “You’re toast.”



Alicia Yewell is in her junior year at Key West University and Diving School, where she majors in education with a minor in visual art. She's a member of the Delta Delta Delta Sorority and gets invited to all the best parties. Alicia has four brothers who are also students of the martial arts. She started studying Kung Fu at age 10, mainly so she could stay alive. She soon discovered that she really enjoyed it and has continued to practice ever since. Alicia joined M-Force because she thought it would look good on her résumé.

Sid Vickers

Body: 13

Brain: 10

Nerve: 14

Jobs: Club DJ (12); M-Force Agent (10)

Gimmick: Fearless (11)

Weakness: Overconfidence (13)

Skills: Musician +4; Poker +3; Firearms +1

YY: 3

HP: 13

Favorite Band: The Ramones

WWPHITM? Christian Slater (*True Romance/Heathers*)

Tag Line: "Let's rock!"

When he's not working as a DJ at the Cheetah Club, Sid's the lead singer of the semi-popular local band Knife in the Brain. He's sure that one day soon the simple-minded fools in the recording industry will come to their senses and give the band the break it needs. Since that hasn't happened yet, Sid joined up with M-Force to earn a little extra cash. Sid is cockier than he has any right to be, and finds it hard to turn down a challenge. Even though he lives in southern Florida, Sid always wears a leather jacket.

OTHER KEY WEST AGENTS

Frank Cassidy

Body: 12

Brain: 14

Nerve: 15

Jobs: Museum Curator (12); M-Force Maritime Office AIC (15)

Gimmick: Citizen of the World (12)

Weakness: Getting Old (12)

Skills: Fishing +4; Guitar +1; History +3; Specialty Weapons +2;

YY: 5

HP: 14

Favorite Author: Mark Twain

WWPHITM? James Garner

Tag Line: "Which brings us to—well, to tell the truth, we never really figured out what the heck this thing is, but killin' it sure wasn't easy."

Frank grew up along the Gulf Coast in Alabama and joined the army right out of high school. After two tours in Vietnam, Frank traveled the world (especially South America and the Caribbean) for nearly a decade, spending most of his time serving assorted functions aboard ships of all types. In the late 1970's, Frank settled in Florida, taking a staff position at the newly established M-Force maritime office there. In 1989, Frank was promoted to AIC. In the early 1990s, Frank was instrumental in setting up the M-Force Maritime Museum, of which he is the curator. Some people have criticized Frank for the laid-back attitude of the Key West office, but nobody can argue with their record.

Katherine "Rainbow" Thompson

Body: 12

Brain: 14

Nerve: 12

Jobs: Crisis Counselor (14); M-Force Maritime Agent (13)

Gimmick: Intuition (14)

Weakness: Absent-Minded (12)

Skills: New Age Stuff +3; Deadhead +1; Jewelry-making +2; Monsterology +1

YY: 3

HP: 12

Favorite Color: Tie-Dye

WWPHITM? Mimi Kennedy

Tag Line: "There's a fine line between pacifism and stupidity."



Rainbow is a child of the 60's—in fact a lot of people would argue that she's stuck in the 60's. In any case, she joined M-Force after werewolves attacked a Grateful Dead concert she was attending sometime during the 1980s. No record of such an attack has ever been found, leading Frank to suspect that bad drugs, not monsters, were the problem. But Rainbow's a valuable member of the team, so Frank humors her when the subject comes up. Rainbow lives in Key West with her husband Barry, who runs a coffee shop. She serves as the counselor/chaplain for the Key West office.

Ted “the Terminator” Loffleholtz

Body: 15

Brain: 9

Nerve: 15

Jobs: Cop (12); M-Force Agent (11)

Gimmick: Thug (12)

Weakness: Overconfidence (12)

Skills: Pool +1; Sports Trivia +2; Hunting +2; Firearms +2

YY: 2

HP: 16

Favorite Movie: Heartbreak Ridge

WWPHITM? Ben Affleck

Tag Line: “Everything is under control.”

Ted grew up in Miami, where he was a star football player in high school and college. When he failed to make it to the pros, Ted decided to become a police officer, and currently works for the Key West PD. A buddy from work brought him into M-Force, where Ted earned the nickname “the Terminator” for his skills in marksmanship and hand-to-hand fighting. Ted's cocky as hell and sometimes comes across as a bit of an ass, but deep down he means well.

OTHER M-FORCERS

G. Carlton Saunders

Body: 12

Brain: 15

Nerve: 16

Job: M-Force National Director (18)

Gimmick: Experienced (15)

Weakness: Getting Old (15)

Skills: Monsterology +4, Strategy +4, Tactics +2, Military History +2, English Literature +1, Fundraising +1, Public Speaking +4

YY: 7

HP: 12

Favorite Movie: Seven Samurai

WWPHITM? James Earl Jones

Tag Line: “Never read Beowulf? You kids these days, you need to learn some respect for tradition.”

Carl Saunders grew up in Kansas City and attended Washington University as a student of English literature. Even though he was not part of the science department, Carl joined Dr. Fields' Cryptid Studies Club and was soon traveling around the country looking for monsters. After graduation, Carl played an active role in creating the M-Force alumni network, and continued to help keep a lookout for potential monster menaces. In 1959 Carl married his college sweetheart, Rose Katz, and moved to Chicago to begin work for Anderson Electronics, Inc. Carl quickly discovered a talent for business, and by 1973 he was Anderson's Senior Vice President. When Mike Mulligan resigned and M-Force needed new leadership, it came to Carl. Carl relished the opportunity to use his business skills for good cause and immediately accepted. He reorganized M-Force at every level and made it into what it is today. Though now in his seventies, Carl continues to oversee the organization. He is revered throughout M-Force, not only for his effective leadership, but because he treats each agent with kindness and respect.

Barney Magnum

Body: 12

Brain: 13

Nerve: 15

Jobs: Hard-Boiled Detective (11); M-Force Agent (10)

Gimmick: Intuitive Hunches (14)

Weakness: Act Without Thinking (14)

Skills: Firearms +3, Tattoo Artist +2, Dancing +1, Occultist +1

YY: 5



HP: 12

Favorite Gun Caliber: .454 Casull

WWPHITM? Ed Norton (with a shaved head)

Tag Line: "Don't #@&*in' #@&* with me, you sick #@&*!"

Barney Magnum is a profane, abrasive, impulsive man who has trouble making friends and is too quick to resort to violence. Despite that, he is a good guy who genuinely wants to protect people from monsters. After Barney dropped out of college, he worked many jobs over the years, from tattoo artist to exotic dancer, but didn't find his niche until he became a private detective. His keen intuitive hunches made him a success, and after several run-ins with occult horrors, Barney decided to bring his expertise to M-Force. Barney's sudden flashes of insight, as well as his occasionally irrational behavior, seem to stem from his years of drug abuse. Thanks to extensive counseling received through the Agent Assist Program, Barney is now clean and sober, though Oversight keeps a constant eye on him.

Samantha Raines

Body: 11

Brain: 14

Nerve: 13

Jobs: Reference Librarian (13); M-Force Special Collections Agent (12)

Gimmick: Contacts/Rolodex of Doom (11)

Weakness: Rivals (fanatical rare book collectors) (11)

Skills: Write Prurient Prose +1; Appraise Book +2; Haggle +1

YY: 4

HP: 11

Moonlights As: Writer of S&M Erotica

WWPHITM? Kim Cattrall

Tag Line: "Only two other copies exist, both under lock and key. Men have killed and died to possess it. What's it doing at a yard sale in Omaha?"

Samantha Raines grew up in M-Force's home town of Caledonia, Massachusetts. After acquiring a nebbishy husband and a job in the reference department of the Caledonia Public Library, she seemed headed for a per-

fectly normal small-town life, her somewhat scandalous sexual tastes aside. Then, one day in the early 1990s, an unusual request by a library patron put a Terrible Tome of Ancient Lore in Samantha's hands ... and, a day or two later, an M-Force Special Collections team on her doorstep. After seeing proof of just what the right book in the wrong hands could do, Samantha became intrigued with the work of M-Force, and took a position at the Quinn Library. After serving as a mission support liaison for a couple of years, she was assigned as a sort of roving field researcher, working with various field agents and teams, and later with government agencies forced to deal with monster threats. More recently, she returned to Quinn as a Special Collections agent, and today she is a respected team leader.

Ryan Trimble

Body: 14

Brain: 13

Nerve: 17

Jobs: Billionaire Playboy (13); M-Force Agent (11)

Gimmick: Sex Appeal (15)

Weakness: Morally Questionable (15)

Skills: Art Director +2; Snappy Dresser +2; Find Internet Porn +5; Self Defense +1; Firearms +1

YY: 8

HP: 14

Email Address: Britneyspearsnaked@hexgames.com

WWPHITM? Ryan Trimble

Tag Line: "Hi. I'm Ryan Trimble."

Damn. What a man.



APPENDIX IV:

Equipment & Weapons

EQUIPMENT

COMMUNICATIONS EQUIPMENT

M-Force Pager Badge

The signature piece of M-Force equipment, the electronic M-Force badge incorporates a satellite text pager, a GPS receiver, and an emergency personal locator beacon. The paging system is used to call up agents for assignments, and the GPS system gives agents a handy way to figure out where they are. The personal locator beacon is part of the device's last-ditch emergency signaling system. When activated, it continuously transmits a unique digital ID code that is picked up by orbiting search-and-rescue satellites. Once the badge's GPS receiver gets a fix on its location (which can take up to 3 minutes), that information is also transmitted and continuously updated.

Activated badges are detected within seconds. Only minutes later, M-Force can pinpoint the agent's location to within a few miles using only the unique ID code transmission, which also indicates whose badge has been activated. Once the GPS information becomes available, the badge can be located to within 30 yards. In addition, the badge transmits a lower-power homing signal that can be used by searchers on the ground to close in on the device's location from a few miles away. The beacon system can be activated manually if necessary. It is automatically activated in the event of destructive compromise of the badge's shell. The beacon draws upon a separate, dedicated battery that will keep it running for around 48 hours.

When an M-Force agent's beacon is detected, National HQ alerts the nearest local M-Force office and the closest law enforcement/search-and-rescue personnel. It then contacts the local office that dispatched the agent, and attempts to contact the agent and the other members of his team. A beacon activation is serious business for M-Force, and if contact cannot be established, or if contact indicates the agents are under any form of duress, HQ will assume the worst and dispatch a search-and-rescue team.

M-Force Tactical Radio System

The M-Force Tactical Radio System is a series of scrambled, spread-spectrum, frequency-hopping, digital voice and data radios manufactured by Witterstadt Industries. They are commonly used for conventional and tactical communications by M-Force agents in the field. Connectors are provided for supplementary power, headsets, and an accessory port that can be used to attach the communicator to laptops, satellite phones, or even a vital-signs monitor. A number of different systems are available.

The Personal Tactical Radio is a small, two-pound radio with a two-mile range. It will run for 20 hours on an internal battery.

The Manpack Tactical Radio Terminal is a backpack radio system with greater range and battery life than the Personal Tactical Radio. Its extended range is suitable for coordinating with other teams in multi-team call-up, or for communicating with local law-enforcement dispatch centers. This system can be set up as a repeater to boost the broadcast and reception ranges of Personal Tactical Radios by relaying their signals through its much more powerful transmitter. It has a ten-mile range when operating as a backpack radio, and its batteries will power it for 48 hours of continuous transmission. Mounted in a vehicle and attached to external power, it reaches as far as 30 or 50 miles, depending on antenna and terrain.

Similar in size, weight and battery life to the Tactical Radio Terminal, the Manpack Satellite Radio Terminal allows M-Force agents to relay voice and data communications through communications satellites from anywhere on the globe. The advent of portable satellite phones has reduced demand for these systems, but some teams still prefer them as they are more rugged than commercial satellite phones.

Satellite Phone

Looking like a bulky, oversized cell phone, satellite phones allow agents to place phone calls from anywhere in the world to anywhere else in the world. M-Force uses



conventional commercial satellite phones, but issues a special adapter 'sleeve' with each unit. This sleeve provides agents with encryption for their satellite phone conversations, and allows agents to attach the phone to any Tactical Radio System radio and tie the satellite link into the local radio communication net.

SENSORY ENHANCEMENTS

Image Intensification Systems

These systems amplify ambient light levels, allowing the wearer to see in low-light conditions that would appear pitch-black to normal human vision, such as those on an overcast, moonless night. The systems can also see into the infrared portion of the spectrum, which allows the operator to use an IR light source to illuminate an area or to detect IR lightsticks that would be invisible to unaided vision. Because there must be some minimal level of light for image intensification systems to function, teams must bring their own light sources with them into caves or sewers. Image intensification goggles, camera lenses, monoculars, binoculars, and telescopic weapon scopes are all available. Many models can be attached to a television or video recorder. The typical goggle models used by M-Force agents weigh around two pounds and will run for 15-20 hours before the batteries need to be changed. The goggles do severely limit an agent's peripheral vision, making it easier for monsters to sneak up on them. Also the need for a light source can attract creatures that see in the infrared.

Thermal Imaging Systems

These systems work by converting the heat emitted by objects into a visible display. This has a number of useful applications. Unlike image intensification systems, thermal imaging can work in the total darkness of a cave or sewer. Operators can see through thin barriers or smoke. Underground tunnel complexes can be identified from the surface. Even patches of recently disturbed earth can be detected, due to temperature differences between normal surface dirt and deeper dirt that has been churned to the surface. Thermal vision camera lenses, hand-held viewers, monoculars, binoculars, and telescopic weapon scopes are all available. Most models can be attached to a television or video recorder. At present, the systems are too bulky to incorporate into goggles. The typical thermal imaging weapon scope used by M-Force agents weighs around five pounds and will operate for eight hours before the batteries need to be changed.

Chemical Lightsticks

A lightstick is a fluid-filled plastic tube used for illumination and signaling. Bending the tube breaks a capsule suspended inside, starting a chemical reaction that emits light, but no heat or sparks, for 8-12 hours. A variety of colors are available. One model emits only near-infrared light, useful when illuminating or marking an area for personnel using night-vision equipment. A typical lightstick is six inches in length and has a loop at one or both ends for mounting or hanging. A 15-inch, impact-activated model can be thrown into a darkened area to illuminate it without giving away the thrower's position—very useful when there are likely to be hostiles about.

Hearing Enhancement Systems

What night-vision systems do for the eyes, hearing enhancement systems do for the ears. Two of the more common systems are parabolic microphones and hearing amplification headsets.

A parabolic microphone is a high-sensitivity microphone mounted on a parabolic dish. It allows the user to pick up faint or distant sounds in the direction the dish is pointed. This can be very useful for detecting hidden monsters in a specific location, or for narrowing down the location of an already-detected monster.

A hearing amplification headset is a special set of ear protectors with high-sensitivity microphones built into each earpiece. They amplify any ambient sounds, giving the user greatly enhanced hearing. An electronic cutout prevents dangerously loud noises from being amplified, protecting the agent's hearing at the same time.

PROTECTIVE GARMENTS AND ARMOR

Armor can be a great asset to M-Force agents facing physical threats in the field. For discreet protection, M-Force issues level II stab-resistant vests (armor rating 3) that can be concealed under normal clothing in 'casual' situations. For high-risk operations, agents are issued a full set of stab-resistant level III body armor with ballistic inserts (armor rating 4). This armor will stop or impede not only bullets, but also knives, claws, spines, stingers, mandibles, and a wide variety of monster teeth. Other useful pieces of protective equipment for high-risk operations are goggles, gloves, a kevlar helmet, a Nomex outer garment and balaclava, and a pair of steel-toed boots.

WEAPONS



FIREARMS

Pistol

Pistols are primarily used as secondary weapons or as backup in the event an agent's primary weapon has become jammed (sometimes into a monster's mouth). Because they are easy to operate in confined spaces or with one hand, pistols are often the best choice for operations in cramped environments. They typically hold anywhere from 6 to 20 rounds (plus one in the chamber), depending on caliber and model. Typical damage bonuses range from +2 to +4. While M-Force does not mandate a particular sidearm for its agents, the preferred primary weapon is a high-capacity semi-automatic capable of accepting a suppressor and an under-barrel tactical light. Popular models in use by M-Force agents include the Walther P99 (which holds 16 rounds) and the Heckler & Koch USP series (12 rounds).

Submachine Gun

A submachine gun (or SMG) is a selective-fire weapon that uses pistol ammunition. Though SMGs are capable of automatic fire, M-Force frowns upon the indiscriminate "spray and pray" approach seen in B-grade action movies. Its agents are taught to fire the weapon from shoulder using aimed, short, controlled bursts. SMGs are one of the preferred weapons for action in urban or heavily built-up areas. Their ammunition is less likely to over-penetrate walls and ceilings, reducing the risk to innocent bystanders. SMGs typically hold anywhere from 25 to 50 rounds in a detachable magazine (plus one round in the chamber), depending on caliber and model. The usual damage bonus is +3. Popular models in use by M-Force agents include the Heckler & Koch UMP and MP5 series (25 and 30 rounds respectively), the FN Herstal P90 (50 rounds), and the IMI Uzi (30 rounds, no extra round in the chamber).

Automatic Rifle

Automatic rifles are selective-fire weapons that use rifle ammunition. As with SMGs, M-Force discourages the use of indiscriminate full-automatic fire in favor of short, controlled bursts. Automatic rifles typically hold 30 rounds in a detachable magazine (plus one round in the chamber), depending on caliber and model. The typical damage bonus is +4. Popular models in use by M-Force agents include the Heckler & Koch G3 and G36 series, the Colt M16 and M4 family of weapons, and the FN Herstal F2000. All hold 30 rounds except for the G3, which holds 20.

Machinegun

Machineguns are automatic weapons equipped with high-capacity belt- or drum-feed magazines and heavier barrels for sustained fire. They fire rifle ammunition. The typical damage bonus is +4. Popular models in use by M-Force agents include the Heckler & Koch MG36 (100 round drum), FN Herstal M249 (belt feed or 100 round drum), and M240G (belt feed).

Shotgun

Shotguns are smooth-barreled weapons capable of firing a wide range of ammunition, making them a particular favorite among M-Force agents. Some shotguns feed from a removable box magazine, like SMGs and automatic rifles. Most, however, feed from an internal tube magazine running underneath the weapon's barrel. Shotguns typically hold anywhere from five to nine rounds (plus one round in the chamber), depending on caliber and model. The typical damage bonus is +4 for a 12-gauge weapon firing slugs. Popular models in use by M-Force agents include the Franchi SPAS-12 (6 rounds, internal tube) and SPAS-15 (6 rounds, detachable), and the Mossberg 590 family of weapons (5 to 9 rounds, internal tube).

Sniper Rifle

These are highly accurate rifles used for precision marksmanship at extended ranges with the aid of a telescopic sight. Typical damage bonus is +3, or +5 for weapons using the massive .50BMG round. Popular models in use by M-Force agents include the Barrett M82A1 .50BMG (10 rounds, detachable), the Stoner SR-25 (20 rounds, detachable), and a variety of Remington 700 series weapons (5 rounds, internal).

Rocket Launcher

Rocket launchers fire explosive missiles at high speed in a straight line. Rockets are useful for destroying very tough monsters. The downside is that rockets are simple and powerful, which makes it easy to miss the target and cause massive property damage. Rockets can also cause unintended damage due to their powerful back blast when launched. The AT-4CS avoids this problem with a small initial launch charge followed by a larger blast once the rocket has gone twenty yards. It uses the explosion rules (page xx) with a DN of 100.

Flamethrower

The standard issue M-Force flamethrower is the MF-FT8. Its dual-tank backpack weighs 25 pounds, and the sprayer weighs another 5 pounds. The MF-FT8 uses a bi-



nary fuel system. The contents of the pressurized tanks on the backpack are relatively harmless, but when mixed, they quickly catch fire and burn tenaciously. Pulling the trigger on the sprayer releases both chemicals into the flamethrower's nozzle, unleashing a hellish stream of fire. Damage bonus is +4, and the target is considered to be on fire (see page xx).

Tranquilizer Gun

The standard tranquilizer guns used by M-Force are identical to the ones found in the arsenals of wildlife researchers, animal control experts, and zookeepers. While heavy-duty and experimental models are occasionally used, they are rare. After all, if researchers have determined how to sedate a monster, they've probably also figured out how to kill it. Offices near containment facilities tend to keep larger and more varied arsenals of tranquilizer guns. Use the poison rules, page xx, with DN depending on the tranq load employed. For a dart almost guaranteed to put a man-sized target to sleep, use DN 10.

Grenade Launcher

A grenade launcher allows the user to fire a wide variety of nasty things on targets from afar. It can fire rounds in a ballistic arc, allowing the user to hit targets on the other side of walls, hills, and other obstacles. Popular models in use by M-Force agents include the M79 (single-shot break-open), and the Milkor MGL-MK1 (6 round rotary magazine).

GRENADES

Grenades are useful for delivering a small payload over a short distance. M-Force uses grenades extensively, but they almost exclusively use specialty grenades. The standard fragmentation grenade is hardly ever used, as it is terribly indiscriminate and fatal. M-Forcers receive very basic training in the types and usage of grenades.

Flash-Bang

As the name implies, this type of grenade, when detonated, makes an incredibly loud noise and emits a brief but extremely intense flash of light. Its primary purpose is to disorient an opponent temporarily. It is especially useful against monsters with very sensitive hearing or sight. In game-mechanical terms, the victim of a flash-bang must make a Body roll or be incapacitated for at least several seconds.

Gas

Gas grenades release a cloud of noxious chemicals when detonated. While the military uses them to deliver tear gas and similar chemical agents, M-Force has developed a wide range of monster-specific gases. The type of gas being released can be changed by merely switching out a chemical pellet loaded into the weapon.

Fragmentation

This type of grenade is badly misunderstood. According to most movies, a frag grenade detonates with the force of an A-bomb. The explosion is actually small and not very dangerous—it's the small slivers of metal driven out at a high velocity that will kill you. Because frag grenades are very dangerous, M-Force rarely issues them except for use against certain very specific monster types. The M-Force Type 8 is a multi-purpose grenade that consists of two parts. The main section is an explosive rod core with the detonator and pin attached to it. Wrapped around the main section is a sleeve of material that forms the fragments upon detonation. These sleeves can be exchanged for different purposes. Some standard M-Forces examples include wood, silver, and iron. Use the explosion rules on page XX, with a DN of 15.

Beehive (grenade launcher only)

The beehive grenade works much like a fragmentation round. The difference is that beehives are directional. Much like a very big shotgun shell, the beehive directs a stream of fragmented slivers down the tube of a grenade launcher at the target. While this reduces accidents, it makes the beehive grenade less useful than a standard frag. Beehives are produced with the fragmentation material already loaded into their casing; it cannot be switched out. As with frags, M-Force issues beehives with a variety of fragmentation materials for use against specific monsters. A beehive round does damage like a shotgun, not like an explosive; its damage bonus is +5.

White Phosphorus

When an agent needs incredible heat, he turns to white phosphorus. The grenade bursts, scattering white phosphorus particles over a 15-yard radius. On contact with air, these particles burn at 5000 degrees Fahrenheit for around 60 seconds, and produce a dense white smoke. Nothing short of vacuum or complete immersion in water will extinguish them, and they will spontaneously re-ignite if they are again exposed to oxygen. M-Forcers should exercise extreme caution when using WP, since it is so difficult to extinguish. In game terms, the area covered in white phosphorus is subjected to a DN 15 explosion effect (see page



xx). Living things affected are considered to be on fire (see page xx), with an initial OFN equal to the damage taken from the explosion.

Thermate (thrown only)

Thermate (an improved thermite composition, also called TH3) is used to burn through or melt things. When the grenade detonates, the thermate compound ignites and burns at 4000 degrees Fahrenheit for around 40 seconds. The chemical reaction supplies its own oxygen, and will burn anywhere, even underwater or in vacuum. There is no blast to speak of, only blinding light, hellish heat, and a stream of molten iron that can defeat a half-inch hardened steel plate. These grenades are useful for defeating doors, destroying equipment and making things vulnerable to iron wish they were never born. A living thing in direct contact with burning thermate from a typical grenade is on fire (see page xx), with an initial OFN of 40. This will kill most normal humans outright.

WEAPON ACCESSORIES

Suppressor

A suppressor is a metal tube attached to the barrel of a weapon to muffle the sound of firing. It does not eliminate the sound entirely, but only reduces it. M-Force issues suppressors not so much for the stealth benefits, but for their utility in indoor and underground combat. The report from an unsuppressed weapon in an enclosed space can be painful, if not debilitating. At a minimum, it can temporarily deafen agents at a time they can least afford it. Suppressors allow agents to use their weapons with far more freedom than they normally could in these situations.

Tactical Light

This is a high-intensity flashlight mounted under a weapon's barrel or in its foregrip. It provides illumination of the area the weapon is pointing at without occupying the agent's hand with a flashlight.

Under-barrel Chemical Spray

This is a small chemical spray system mounted under a weapon's barrel or in its foregrip. It allows an agent to spray his target with mace, tear gas, or other chemicals instead of shooting it. A typical sprayer can fire three times before it needs to be reloaded. Effects depend on what chemical is loaded.

Under-barrel Grenade Launcher

This accessory mounts a single-shot 40mm grenade launcher underneath a rifle's barrel. The two weapons can-

not be fired simultaneously. The agent may only fire one or the other as his attack. In all other respects it is identical to the M79 grenade launcher described earlier in this section.

Under-barrel Shotgun

This accessory mounts a short-barreled 12-gauge pump-action shotgun underneath a rifle's barrel. This is useful for disabling locks and hinges in an entry situation, or for quick access to specialty munitions. Due to its shortness, the shotgun can only hold three rounds in its magazine, plus one in the chamber. The two weapons cannot be fired simultaneously. The agent may only fire one or the other as his attack. Damage bonus is the same as a regular shotgun.

Line-thrower Modification Kit

This allows a shotgun or rifle to be used as a line-thrower. It takes a few minutes to affix to the weapon, but once in place, it can launch a floating buoy-like projectile trailing a light-weight line up to 200 yards. This is useful in maritime rescues.

SPECIAL PURPOSE SYSTEMS

Gel-fuel Spray

This is a largish spray can filled with a highly flammable and sticky fuel gel similar to napalm. It is used by M-Force agents for a variety of fire-starting and incendiary tasks. Affixed to the bottom of the can is a small plastic envelope containing two folded cloths for use in constructing Molotov cocktails and similar improvised incendiaries. A combination handgrip/igniter is also available, which lets the can be used as a small four-shot flamethrower (damage bonus +2).

AMMUNITION

M-Force offers a wide range of specialty ammunition for use against monsters with specific vulnerabilities to certain metals or other substances. Among the more pedestrian rounds available include silver-tipped full metal jacket; copper-jacketed, silver-lined hollowpoints; copper-jacketed, iron-lined hollowpoints; silver-tipped shotgun slugs; silver-coated shotshells; iron shotgun slugs; and iron shotshells. Should more exotic loads be required, Logistics can produce them or have the raw materials shipped to a gunsmith of the agent's choice.

Tungsten-tipped wooden shotgun slugs are one of M-Force's proudest achievements in specialty ammunition. These wooden slugs have a loosely coupled tungsten tip at



the end, which allows the round to penetrate body armor and bone that a wooden round would otherwise be unable to defeat. The tungsten tip separates when the round penetrates the target, continuing on through and generally out, leaving the wooden slug firmly embedded in the target. Unfortunately, these are more likely to jam than standard slugs.

CHEMICALS

Nose-Off

Nose-Off is a wide-spectrum, general-purpose olfactory blocking aerosol, developed from Slug pheromone-blocking research in the 1960s. It was initially fielded to assist agents in dealing with the infamous “Reeking” Reynoldsburg, Ohio giant skunk outbreak of 1973. On inhalation, the aerosol completely eliminates the sense of smell for up to two hours. Agents quickly realized it could be used to impair a monster’s sense of smell as well as their own. For some creatures, losing their sense of smell is worse than losing an eye, as it greatly limits their ability detect or track prey. Nose-Off is available in foggers, spray cans, liquid concentrate, and a variety of other forms.

HaemoDecoy™

HaemoDecoy™ is a synthetic blood decoy for use in traps and other situations where blood would make an effective lure. The bright red gel is shelf-stable, does not require refrigeration, and can be stored indefinitely, making it considerably easier to work with than real blood. While it does a reasonable job of duplicating the scent of blood, creatures with very acute senses of smell can detect the difference.

HAND-TO-HAND WEAPONS

Ranged weapons are M-Force’s preferred method of monster elimination. They allow the agent to deal with the monster while avoiding its claws, teeth, or tentacles. Unfortunately, most monsters aren’t content to stand idly by and let themselves be shot, gassed, or blown up. Eventually every agent finds himself in a situation in which guns are impractical or unavailable. Most useful hand-to-hand weapons will fall into one of the general categories below, and M-Forcers are given basic instruction in using such weapons during self-defense training. More exotic weapons, like bullwhips or flails, are usually impractical for monster hunting.

Stakes

The M-Force standard issue Mk. I stake is a cylindrical, one-inch-diameter sharpened oak shaft, available in lengths of 12 to 18 inches. Some agents attach a solid rubber foot to the end of the stake to increase the target area for their hammers and to protect their hands.

The Mk. II self-retaining stake has three recessed retaining barbs around its end. Attempting to pull the stake out of the target causes them to fold outward, making removal difficult.

The Mk. III self-retaining incendiary stake is similar to the Mk. II, only this stake has been hollowed out to accommodate a small thermate charge and detonator. Pulling the pin from the end of the stake initiates a 4000-degree exothermic reaction after five seconds. This will quickly ignite anything near by, as well as releasing a stream of molten iron into the target. Damage is as for contact with a thermate grenade (see page 181).

The Mk. IV self-retaining fragmentation stake is similar to the Mk. III, but has a small explosive charge inside. Five seconds after the pin is pulled, it detonates, fragmenting the stake and making the wooden shrapnel difficult or impossible to remove from the target.

All stakes are also available with sharpened tungsten or iron caps on the end for use against hardened targets or those with a vulnerability to iron. These “T” and “I” variants are identical to their wooden-tipped counterparts in all other respects.

Club

Any heavy object used to bludgeon an opponent is considered a club—lead pipes, two-by-fours, and beer bottles are just a few examples. In addition to being easy to find, clubs are extremely easy to use. Anyone who knows how to swing a baseball bat can wield a club. When clubs are used as more than just incidental weapons, police nightsticks, Louisville Sluggers, and Maglites are popular. The typical damage bonus for a club is +1 to +3, depending on size.

Knife

Fighting a monster with your bare fists is a bad idea. On the other hand, swords are bulky and difficult to master, making them impractical for modern fighting. Because the knife is portable and easy to use, it offers a perfect compromise between the two. The non-combat uses of a knife make it an essential piece of equipment for every M-Forcer. The Bowie knife is the classic fighting blade, though



hunting knives by Buck, Gerber, and Browning are also popular. The typical damage bonus for a knife is +2.

Axe

An axe combines a club's ease of use with a sharp blade, making it an excellent weapon for hand-to-hand combat. A few M-Forcers actually carry medieval replicas, but most make do with standard camping or fireman's axes. The typical damage bonus for an axe is +3 or +4.

Pole

The main advantage of poles is that they allow the agent to attack a monster without getting too close to it. While some pole weapons allow for advanced maneuvers requiring years of training, their basic function and use is usually obvious. Poles can be found everywhere, making them excellent incidental weapons. Walking sticks, garden hoes, and bayonets are common examples of pole weapons. The typical damage bonus for a pole weapon is +2 or +3, depending on size, weight, and sharpness of the business end.

Chainsaw

While many power tools could potentially be used in hand-to-hand combat, the chainsaw is by far the most com-

mon mechanical melee weapon. Because it is designed to be portable, the chainsaw is far more versatile than a drill or nail gun, whose power cord would tend to get in the way. Unlike most other gas-powered tools, such as lawn mowers, chainsaws are meant to be used in a wide variety of cutting situations, making them easily adaptable to monster hunting. The sheer intimidation factor of a chainsaw undoubtedly contributes further to its popularity. Popular chainsaws include the Stihl 08S Magnum, the Husqvarna 3120XP, and the Poulan Woodsman 2150. The typical damage bonus for a chainsaw is +5 (base damage +4, with an extra +1 for being scary).

THROWN WEAPONS

While mechanical missile launchers other than guns are occasionally useful for specific situations (the most obvious being the harpoon in seagoing monster hunts), most are impractical. For the most part, a gun works just as well. Thrown weapons are another story entirely, primarily because most are either portable or can be found anywhere. Knives and throwing stars are the most obvious throwing weapons prepared in advance. Possible incidental throwing weapons include rocks, computer monitors, and fruit-cakes.



APPENDIX V: WORKSHEETS

A GMs' life is hard. To make it easier, we have provided a variety of useful worksheets. Most of these are updated versions of the worksheets from *Spooky: The Definitive Guide to Horror Gaming*. They have been rewritten specifically to apply to M-Force games. Feel free to copy and reuse these pages over and over again.

M-Force Basics Handout

We have included an M-Force Basics handout to give to players new to the game. The first part covers basic information about M-Force that even new agents would know. The second part covers the basic mechanics of the game. The last section is left blank so that you can add information about your game or campaign before handing out the sheet to the players.





M-FORCE BASICS HANDOUT



UNIVERSAL INFORMATION

- Monsters are alive and well in the M-Force game world. They're a lot like serial killers in our world—everyone knows they exist, but few people expect to actually encounter one in the course of their lives.
- M-Force is America's premier monster hunting organization. It was founded in the 1950s by Dr. Henry Fields.
- The structure of M-Force is similar to the National Guard—agents work normal jobs most of the time, and are called up when there is a monster-related emergency in their area.
- M-Force has three major rules. They are (in order):
 - 1) Protect and preserve human life
 - 2) Protect humanity from monsters
 - 3) Respect the law and uphold high ethical standards
- M-Force first became nationally known in 1958, when they prevented the giant space monster known as Galaxikhan from destroying San Francisco.
- M-Force's greatest enemies are the Slugs, a race of "body snatchers" who take over their human hosts in order to carry out their nefarious plans. Most of the Slugs were destroyed during the "War on Slugs" in the 1960-70s.
- M-Force national headquarters is located on the late Sadie Witterstadt's estate in Caledonia, Massachusetts. The M-Force Academy is located right next door. All full-fledged M-Force agents must spend a week at the M-Force Academy. During that time, they are tested in the "Haunted House," a high-tech mission simulator.

GAME MECHANICS INFORMATION

- The basic mechanic for the M-Force game is a d20 roll. In order to succeed, you must roll lower than your score in the appropriate trait. The higher the roll (without exceeding your score), the better. In some cases your roll has to be higher than a difficulty number or another character's roll. Modifiers can increase or decrease your chance of success.
- Every character has a Weakness. When making a Weakness roll, you want to roll higher than your Weakness Number. Otherwise, the Weakness takes effect.
- Yum Yums are pieces of candy awarded to players for making the game more fun and playing their characters well.
- Yum Yums can be used to improve a roll, re-roll a failed roll, succeed without making a roll, decrease the damage a character takes, or increase the damage a character inflicts on a monster. They may also be used to improve your character or bribe the GM. Finally, Yum Yums can be eaten.

CAMPAIGN/ADVENTURE SPECIFIC INFORMATION





ADVENTURE WORK SHEET



GAME TONE: (CIRCLE ALL THAT APPLY)

Comedic

Dramatic

Action

Camp

WHAT IS THE MAIN CONFLICT OF THE STORY?

ACT I: THE INTRODUCTION

Describe your opening scene.

What needs to be established in the opening scene?

ACT II: INTRODUCING THE CONFLICT

How do the team become involved?

How will you build tension?

What M-Force resources will be available?

What will the monster do? (see Monster Work Sheet)

ACT III: THE CLIMAX

How can the conflict be resolved?

What are some likely climactic scenes to prepare for?

ACT IV: THE WRAP-UP

What are the consequences if the Agents' fail?

What plots have to be concluded?

GAME TITLE:

Describe the M-Force Office:

Size:

Resources:

Location:

Local Support:

Any special types of Agents?

What GMCs Are Needed? (List location and other important information)



CAMPAIGN WORK SHEET



NOTE: GMs SHOULD JUST NOT FILL OUT THIS SHEET BY THEMSELVES. DISCUSS THE QUESTIONS WITH YOUR PLAYERS. THEY SHOULD HAVE INPUT AND MAY HAVE SOME GREAT IDEAS

What is the overarching storyline of your game?

What kinds of missions will the team focus on (investigative, tactical, variety)?

What story arcs and subplots are likely?

What themes, if any, do you hope to use or explore in the campaign? How do they fit into the overall storyline?

Describe the M-Force Office (location, time period, size, history)

Describe the local area (town, likely monster haunts, recurring locations)

What specific resources does the local office have (vehicles, outside support, funding)?

What is the team's relationship with national headquarters?

How do you envision the campaign ending?

What Kind of Agents do you want:

Experience level?

Special agents (EOT, Junior M-Force, Special Collections, Containment Team)?

Status within the office?

Desired character archetypes?

What

Recurring GMCs



M-FORCE AGENT SHEET



PERSONAL
INFORMATION

NAME:

TAG LINE:

WWPHITM?:

M-FORCE OFFICE:

BODY

BRAIN

NERVE

JOBS

M-Force Agent

GIMMICK

WEAKNESS

SKILLS

KILLS

HEALTH PTS

YUM YUMS

AWARDS

NOTES AND
EQUIPMENT



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M-FORCE MONSTER WORK SHEET

GENERAL INFORMATION

NAME:

TAG LINE:

WWPHITM?:

LIFESPAN:

HAUNTS AND HABITATS:

BODY

BRAIN

NERVE

JOBS

GIMMICKS

WEAKNESSES

ECOLOGY AND LIFESTYLE

APPEARANCE

HEALTH PTS

YUM YUMS



APPENDIX VI:

INSPIRATIONAL

MATERIALS

This list is a small sampling of the books, movies, comics, and websites we found useful or inspirational in writing *M-Force*. Each one of these is full of ideas that you can bring into your *M-Force* game.

***Astro City: Confessions* (comic book)**

Confessions is a multi-part storyline from Kurt Busiek and Brent Anderson's comic book *Astro City*. It has been collected into a handsome paperback edition. This is the story that convinced us it was possible to create a world where everyone knows that monsters exist, yet still keep the monsters interesting and exciting. More than that, though, the story deals with the theme of heroism in a smart, powerful way.

***Beowulf* (book)**

We heartily recommend Seamus Heaney's translation of *Beowulf*, recently published by Norton. The story provides not only gruesome action scenes, but insight into honor, fate, death, and the human condition in general. As Heaney writes in his introduction, "There is an undeluded quality about the *Beowulf* poet's sense of the world which gives his lines immense emotional credibility and allows him to make general observations about life which are far too grounded in experience and reticence to be called 'moralizing.'" Heaney's translation is gorgeous, making the text a pleasure to read. This is required reading for all serious monster-hunters.

***Edith Hamilton's Mythology* (book)**

A respected work on classical mythology, and our key source for information about monster hunters like Theseus, Perseus, and Herakles.

***From Dusk Till Dawn* (movie)**

After years of angst-ridden cinematic vampires, we welcomed this return to basics—vampires as nasty, evil things that need to be destroyed. The humans use every means at their disposal, including squirt guns full of holy water. Not a brilliant movie, but a fun one.

***Godzilla, King of the Monsters* (movie)**

Forget the campy 60's movies—for one brief, beautiful moment, *Godzilla* was genuinely scary. In this first movie, Tokyo burned, refugees huddled in camps, and everyone

lived in terror of the radioactive monstrosity destroying everything in its path. This movie is the antidote for those who think giant monsters have to be silly.

***Hellboy* (comic book)**

One of the great modern American comic books, Mike Mignola's *Hellboy* features gorgeous, chunky artwork, weird shadows, brilliant design, and plenty of monsters. Even though the main character is a member of a government monster-hunting team, the stories have a strong folklore emphasis, and serve as great examples of how to keep the old monsters creepy in a modern setting.

***Marvel Monster Masterworks* (comic book)**

This collection of classic 1950s giant monster comics was one of the earliest inspirations for *M-Force*. Wonderfully ludicrous creatures like Groot, Zzutak ("The Thing That Shouldn't Exist!!"), Tim Boo Ba, and Fin Fang Foom can't help but spark the imagination. The monsters create havoc, but ultimately they are all foiled by quick-witted men of action like our own Dr. Henry Fields. The stories are all written by Stan Lee and illustrated by either Jack "King" Kirby or "Sturdy" Steve Ditko. These, of course, are the same three guys who would soon after launch the Marvel Age of comics. Sadly, the book is out of print, but it's worth tracking down.

***Moby Dick* (book)**

If a monster is any non-human creature that preys on humans, the great white whale *Moby Dick* qualifies, and his antagonist Captain Ahab qualifies as a monster hunter. Of course it's much more complicated than that, since author Herman Melville piles ambiguity on ambiguity, and symbol on symbol, and mixes in a great deal of information about whales, to create *The Great American Novel*. If you want to learn about grand, epic sweep, and about working powerful themes into your campaign, wade into *Moby Dick*.

***Them!* (movie)**

When we watched this at our Halloween party we had the sound off, so we can't vouch for the plot or dialogue, but we really enjoyed watching people fight giant ants.

GLOSSARY

M-FORCE TERMS

Administrative Officer – A full-time staff position in the standard M-Force office, the Administrative Officer is basically a glorified receptionist who mans the phones and keeps communicates with local authorities.

Administrative Services – One of the seven main departments of M-Force, Administrative Services oversees personnel, public relations, legal services, and other clerical work.

Agent in Charge (AIC) – A full-time staff position in the standard M-Force office, the AIC handles day-to-day administration.

beta-rabies A disease that produces monstrous animals, further described in the Field Guide to Monsters volume 2.

Bureau of Monster Affairs (BMA) – A division of the Department of the Interior, responsible for overseeing licensed monster hunters and maintaining the Official Monster List.

Caledonia – The small town in Massachusetts, near Shelburne Falls, where M-Force national headquarters is located.

containment facility – Locations that house living monsters. There are currently three: the Fields Institute, Hunt-Ray, and TUJCCS.

cryptid – The scientific term for “monster,” in use since the 1950’s.

cryptozoology – The scientific term for the study of monsters.

Department Chief – The person in charge of overseeing one of M-Force’s seven departments.

Experimental Operations Team (EOT) – The M-Force branch that field-tests new equipment and tactics.

Federal Monster Hunter Act of 1972 (FMHA-72) – The act of Congress that authorized civilians to hunt monsters as long as they meet certain guidelines. FMHA-72 also created the Bureau of Monster Affairs and the Official Monster List.

field agent – An M-Force agent who takes an active, as opposed to administrative or clerical, role in hunting monsters.

Fields, Dr. Henry – The Washington University Biology professor who founded M-Force in 1952. Dr. Fields died in 1998.

Fields Institute – A monster containment facility located in St. Louis, operated in conjunction with Washington University.

Frog-Men – A race of civilized amphibious humanoids that live underwater off the Georgia coast.

Galaxikhan – A giant extraterrestrial monster that crashed to Earth in 1958, Galaxikhan would have destroyed San Francisco, and possibly the world, if not for the intervention of M-Force.

Haunted House – Popular name for the Monster Simulation and Training Center, a part of M-Force University.

hecklestimp – A 2’ tall humanoid creature that travels in large groups and will attack and devour humans, the hecklestimp is further described in the Field Guide to Monsters volume 2.

Herakles – Alternative spelling of “Hercules.”

Hunt-Ray Curve – A mathematical model for the frequency of monster attacks throughout human history, the Hunt-Ray Curve indicates that monsters will only become more of a problem in the years to come.

Hunt-Ray Paranormal Research Complex – A monster containment facility located in Pasadena, operated in conjunction with the California Institute of Technology and the U.S. military.

Journal of Cryptid Studies – The scholarly journal published by the M-Force research community.

Junior M-Force – A national fan club for kids from ages eight to seventeen.

Kallinikoi (plural) – A monster-hunting organization founded in the Roman Empire that continued operation into the 20th century.

Leviathan – The primeval chaos god that, according to legend, ruled the cosmos long before the beginning of history.

Logistics – One of the seven main departments of M-Force, Logistics oversees the organization’s internal supply of weapons and equipment.



maritime field office (MFO) – An M-Force office near a large body of water, that receives extra funding to maintain a boat, diving gear, and other specialized equipment.

M-Force – The 21st century's premier monster-hunting organization.

M-Force Academy – The facility located next door to the Witterstadt mansion in Caledonia where M-Force agents receive their training.

M-Force Alert – Distributed by fax and emails to local offices and agents, M-Force Alerts keep agents apprised of current events and developing situations.

M-Force Maritime Museum – Located in the Key West office and overseen by Captain Frank Cassidy, the Maritime Museum tells the story of humankind's long struggle against sea monsters.

M-Forcer – Another name for an M-Force agent.

M-Forcer magazine – A glossy monthly magazine that all M-Force agents, both active and retired, receive free of charge.

M-Labs – The M-Force laboratory, located at the national headquarters in Caledonia.

monster – Any non-human creature that presents a clear threat to humans.

monsterology – M-Force's preferred term for the study of monsters.

Mulligan, Mike – M-Force's second National Director, Mike took over in 1965 and led M-Force through the Slug War. He resigned in 1973.

National Director – The leader of M-Force. To date M-Force has had only three National Directors: Henry Fields, Mike Mulligan, and G. Carlton Saunders.

Official Monster List (OML) – A list created and updated by the Bureau of Monster Affairs that lists creatures so dangerous to humanity that they may legally be killed on sight.

Operations – One of the seven main departments of M-Force, Operations oversees the hundreds of field agents who go out and fight monsters, as well as the headquarters staff that supervises them.

Oversight – One of the seven main departments of M-Force, Oversight investigates claims of wrong-doing by M-Force agents.

Quinn, Abernathy – Last of the Kallinikoi, Abernathy Quinn helped Dr. Henry Fields reshape M-Force into a successful monster-hunting team. Quinn died fighting the Slugs in 1965.

Quinn Library – The Abernathy Quinn Memorial Library, located at M-Force national headquarters in Caledonia, houses the world's largest collection of monster-related texts.

Regional Director – Ranking directly below the Chief of Operations, a Regional Director oversees one of M-Force's six geographical regions.

riverine field office - An M-Force office near a river, that receives extra funding to maintain a boat, diving gear, and other specialized equipment.

Saunders, G. Carlton – The well-loved current National Director of M-Force, who has overseen the organization since 1973.

Slug – Another name for vermis imitor, a malevolent species that takes over humans as hosts.

Slug War – Popular name for the M-Force's bloody conflict with the Slugs that spanned from 1965 to 1970.

Special Collections – Quinn Library's book-retrieval teams.

Supply Officer – A full-time staff position in the standard M-Force office, the Supply Officer maintains the office's equipment, vehicles, and weapons.

team leader – The individual in charge of an M-Force team during a specific mission.

Training – One of the seven main departments of M-Force, Training is responsible for teaching agents the skills they will need to survive in the field.

transport team – Agents trained to take captured monsters to one of the containment facilities. Transport teams are attached to each of the three facilities.

Triangle Universities Joint Center for Cryptid Studies (TJCCS) – A monster containment facility located in Durham, and operated in conjunction with Duke University, North Carolina State University, and UNC-Chapel Hill.

Typhonis – Ancient Oriental dragon that sleeps beneath the waves and can only be awakened with a magical green gem.

War on Slugs – See *Slug War*.



War Room – Located in the M-Force national headquarters building in Caledonia, the War Room tracks M-Force activity around the globe.

Watch Officer – A full-time staff position in the standard M-Force office, the Watch Officer monitor for signs of trouble at night and during weekends.

Witterstadt, Sadie – Millionaire heiress who battled monsters in the 1920's and became M-Force's patron in 1959. After her death in 1965, M-Force inherited her mansion.

Witterstadt Trust – Established by Sadie Witterstadt, the Trust funds M-Force's operations out of the substantial Witterstadt family holdings.

GAME TERM GLOSSARY

Adventure – A story in a role-playing game that may run over the course of several sessions.

armor rating – A number that represents the amount of protection a character has from an attack, generally ranging from 1 to 4, with a higher number representing more protection. A character's armor rating is subtracted from the damage total of an attack.

Bad Break – Optional rule: When a player rolls a 20 the character suffers a spectacular failure.

Body – The Word that represents a character's overall physical condition, including strength, dexterity, agility, and health.

Brain – The Word that represents a character's overall mental abilities, including memory, general knowledge, and the ability to solve problems.

campaign – A long series of sessions that includes multiple adventures, structured around a recurring group of characters and/or an overarching storyline.

character – A fictional being that exists in the game world. Characters can be either player characters or gamemaster characters.

combat round – The amount of time it takes for every character in a scene to take one action.
d20 – A 20-sided die.

die – The singular of "dice."

damage bonus – An extra number of points added on to the damage a character does when the character uses a weapon. Damage bonuses generally range from +1 to +5, with a higher number representing more damage.

default roll – When a character attempts to do something that requires training he does not have, he rolls against one half his Word, rounded down.

degree of success – The higher the player rolls without going over the relevant score, the greater the success.
difficulty number (DN) – A minimum required successful roll that the GM may choose to set for a difficult task.

drama – Any series of events having vivid, conflicting elements that capture one's interest.

fiction – A fictional world, such as the one in which M-Force exists.

Field Guides to Monsters – Two sourcebooks about monsters in the world of M-Force, available at your local game and hobby store.

Galaxikhan Attacks! – An adventure featuring M-Force in 1958, available at your local game and hobby store.

gamemaster (GM) – The overseer and arbiter of the game, the GM is responsible for creating setting, resolving action, running gamemaster characters, and settling disputes.

gamemaster character (GMC) – A character controlled by the GM. Also called a non-player character, or NPC.

Genre – A type of fiction that features its own rules and conventions. Popular genres include science fiction, romance, and mystery.

Gimmick – The Word that describes an unusual or unique trait, advantage, resource, or ability a character possesses.

hand-to-hand combat – Term for any non-ranged combat.

Health Point (HP) – Determines how much damage a character can take before he dies.

Job – The Word that describes what a character does well, generally what he does for a living.

Lucky Break – Optional rule: When a player rolls his Number exactly the character succeeds spectacularly.

modifier – An additional number added to a character's score to reflect positive or negative circumstances.

Nerve – The Word that represents a character's emotional and social abilities. Characters with high nerve scores are cool under pressure, have good instincts, and know how to interact with people. Nerve also describes a character's willpower and ability to cope with fear.

Number – The score, ranging from 1 to 20, attached to a Word and used to elaborate characteristics of a character.



On Fire Number (OFN) – The amount of damage taken when a character is attacked with some flame source, including residual damage from continuing to burn.

Player Character (PC) – A character within the game created, developed, and directed by a player.

Quick Ass Game System (QAGS) – A game system designed around the concept of fun storytelling as opposed to accounting. *M-Force* uses a modified version of QAGS.

Quirky Success – Optional rule: When a player rolls a “1,” the action succeeds, but has some unusual or negative side effect.

Ranged Combat – Any combat in which a person or monster attempts to harm another person or monster from a distance with a weapon such as a firearm, bow and arrows, or slingshot.

Resisted Roll – Roll in which two characters are directly competing against one another. Whoever makes the higher roll wins, as long as the roll is a success.

Role-Playing – Organized and/or directed make believe.

Role-Playing Game – Organized make believe involving a group of players creating a common storyline.

Sample of Play Theater (SOPT) – “Real life” examples of game play used as an illustration for educational purposes.

Scariness Bonus – Optional rule: Scary-looking weapons receive a +1 damage bonus simply because they’re so intimidating.

Second Chance Roll – When a character has two Words that could both apply to the situation, he is entitled to a second chance roll. On the first roll, use the Word that is most appropriate to the situation (or the Word with the higher score if both are equally appropriate). Should this roll fail, the character may make a second roll using the other Word.

Session – A single period of game play, usually lasting a few hours.

Simple Roll – A situation in which the player rolls a 20-sided die and compares it to his Number in the most appropriate Word. If the roll is less than the character’s Number, the action succeeds.

Skill – An ability or area of knowledge not covered by a character’s Job.

Skill Bonus – Instead of Numbers, Skills are ranked with bonuses ranging from +1 to +5. When a character’s Skill

is applicable to an action, he may add his Skill Bonus to the Number he’s rolling against.

Tag Line – A quote that conveys useful information about the character, her outlook on life, attitude, etc.

Weakness – The Word that describes a tragic flaw that causes a character problems, over which he has little or no control and that presents a constant threat to his well-being.

Who Would Play Him/Her In the Movie (WWPHITM) – The actor or actress a player would cast as his character if he were making the game into a movie.

Word – The key categories on a character sheet—Body, Brain, Nerve, Job, Gimmick, and Weakness. Each Word is rated with a Number.

Yum Yum (YY) – Pieces of candy that serve as the basic unit of exchange in a QAGS game. GMs reward players with Yum Yums. Players use Yum Yums to lessen damage taken, buy successes, and otherwise create favorable effects in the game world. Abstract Yum Yums—that is, points not represented by pieces of candy—are used for character creation.



AFTERWORD

I ran the first *M-Force* game in July or August of 1996, in a small apartment in Lexington, Kentucky. There were only two players, my good friends Dale “Barney Magnum” French and Stacy “Samantha Raines” Stroud. We had a great time, and started to wonder if we could possibly write an *M-Force* RPG. A few months later, when I started co-writing *QAGS* with Steve Johnson, I found out how much time and effort go into creating a role-playing game, and realized that *M-Force* was still a few years off. I waited until the time was right. Finally I made my pitch, and in October of 2000 Hex announced that it would release *M-Force* in 2002. Now here it is. Much of the last year and a half of my life has been devoted to this project, so I can’t begin to describe how thrilled I am that it’s finished.

Because I came up with the initial idea, *M-Force* is based on things—*Beowulf*, giant monster movies, the nobility of human struggle, and so on—that interest me, but this game would not exist if I’d tried to write it alone. Kevin Butler, Ray Forsythe, Steve Johnson, and Stacy Stroud were my partners, and each of them put in their fair share of long hours. Without Steve we wouldn’t have the rules or the maps; without Ray we wouldn’t have monster entries or mission protocol; without Kevin we wouldn’t have the EOT or the Kallinikoi; and without Stacy we wouldn’t have much of anything, because of all the work she did organizing the text and coordinating everyone else. I hate to divide up the credit at all, because everyone worked on everything. Even though I demanded that my name go at the top of the credits, I have to admit that these four were equal co-creators of *M-Force*.

The five of us are far from the only ones who worked on the book. When we realized we might have overextended ourselves, Carter Newton came in to write some of the remaining sections, Mike Waddell and Beth O’Hara contributed monster descriptions, and Jason Whisman helped us with the insurance benefits. My loving wife Alice designed the garden, and Jason Cormier and Ryan Trimble offered valuable editing assistance.

If this book looks good, it’s because of the Herculean efforts of Hex’s Art Director, Ryan Trimble. Ryan recruited the artists and convinced them to create our best batch of art yet. Gary Bedell, who illustrated both *Field Guide to Monsters 2* and *Galaxikhan Attacks!*, took a liking to *M-Force* and sent in even more art than Ryan requested. When an artist is as talented as Gary, this is a very good thing. Aside from Gary, Chad Sergesketter was most instrumental in defining the look of *M-Force*, and I thank him for doing such a fine job. Dale French supplied the “classic” *M-Force* symbol, and Mark Kidwell designed the ubiquitous gauntlet-crushing-a-bat symbol. David Daniel, Dale French, Mark Kidwell, Scarlett Ross, and Chris Sprouse all contributed great pieces. Photographers Matt Kish and Carter Newton took the time to travel to Somerset, Kentucky for an intensive photo shoot. Big thanks to them, and to all our hard-working models.

AUTHOR DEDICATIONS

Dedicated to my grandparents, Robert and Dolly Connor.

—Leighton Connor

To the United States Army for paying me to roleplay for four years.

—Kevin Butler

To Stacy—For putting up with far more on this project, and in life, than anyone should ever have had to.

—Ray Forsythe

To the Raf table crew.

—Steve Johnson

To my mother, Martha Hardman, who never failed to encourage me (even though she didn’t think a game company was a terribly likely venture).

—Stacy Stroud



Photographer, Matt Kish





Hex staff and photo shoot models in Somerset, KY.

Pulaski County Sheriff Sam Catron was kind enough to help with our photo shoot, and we were all devastated when, later that day, we learned that he had been shot and killed. We appreciate the Sheriff's help, and our sympathies go out to his friends and family.

Many other folks contributed along the way. Special thanks are also due to Steve Carrico, for his boundless enthusiasm in the early days of playtesting; Cynthia Connor, for color coordinating; Lone Damasco, for photo assistance; Lisa Garrison-Ragsdale, for being so helpful at Marcon; Drew Happli and Chris Canary, for Knomish endeavors; Sarah Hamer, for merciful scheduling; Cecil Leibman, for his fiction; Rainbow Jerry and friend, for helping us move a truck; and Colin Thomas, for creating Galaxikhan and Typhonis. Finally, thanks go to Rich Alexander, Ken Baughman, Scott Bowden, Rebecca Butler, my parents James and Mary Lou Connor, Jason Corner, Xan Hess, Martha Lynn Harrison, Lionel Houde, Dani and Hugo Peterman, Jeremy Schraffenberger, Brandon Stevens, Tom and Nancye Van Brunt, and Jason, Rebecca, and Dylan Weibel for moral support.

I hope M-Force is a good read and, more importantly, a fun game. Let us know what you think.

—Leighton Connor,
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