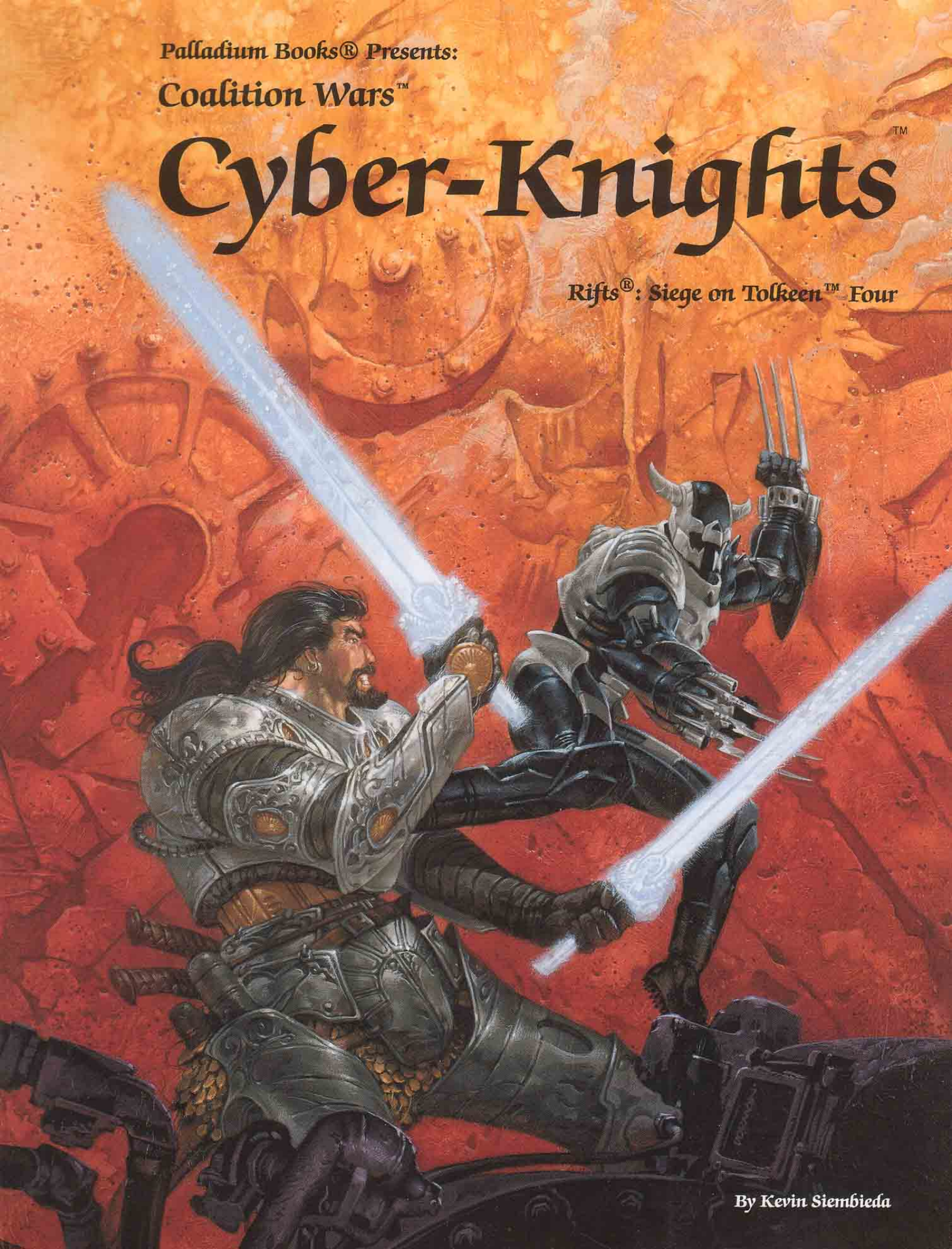


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To my dear friend Steve Sheiring. The man who created and played *Coake the Mysterious*, and whose outstanding role-playing and noble character inspired my version of Lord Coake and the **Cyber-Knights**.

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The cover: A **Cyber-Knight** with a pair of twin **Psi-Swords** battles a Coalition Juicer, **Vibro-Claws** drawn, in a **mano y mano** dance of death. Painted by Dave Dorman.

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Cyber-Knights™

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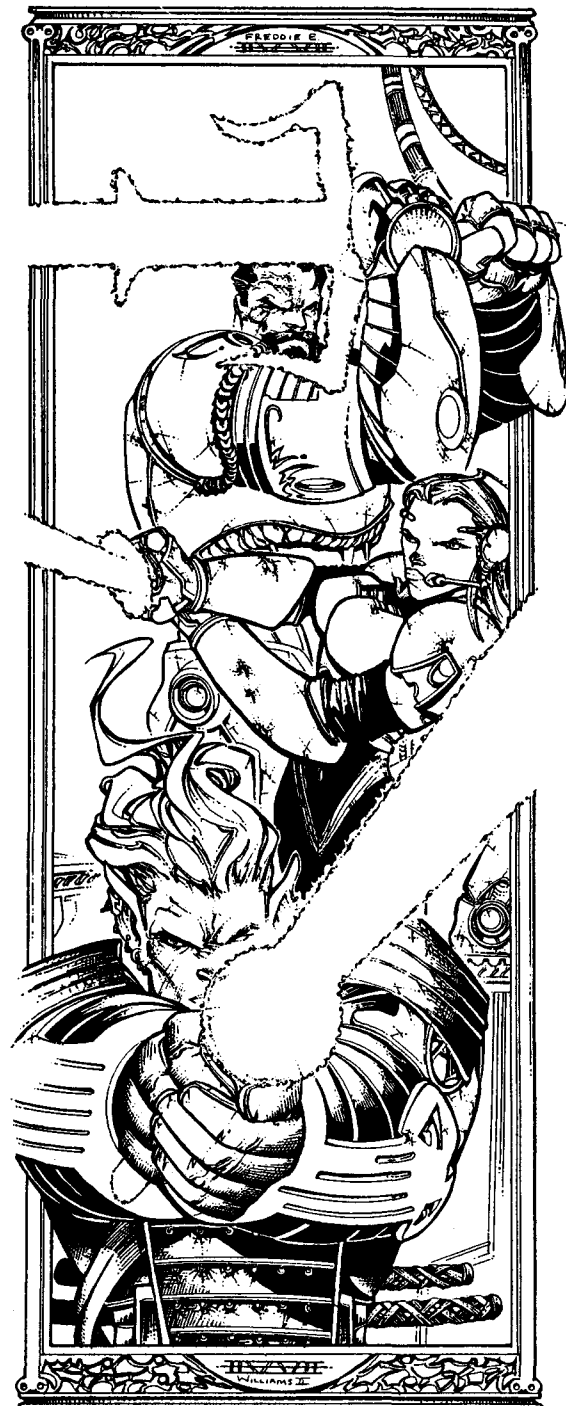
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Special Thanks to Bill Coffin for adding his vision of the Cyber-Knights to mine. All the artists who breathe life into my worlds and to Maryann, Alex, Wayne, Julius, Adam and the rest of the Palladium crusaders.

—Kevin Siembieda, 2000

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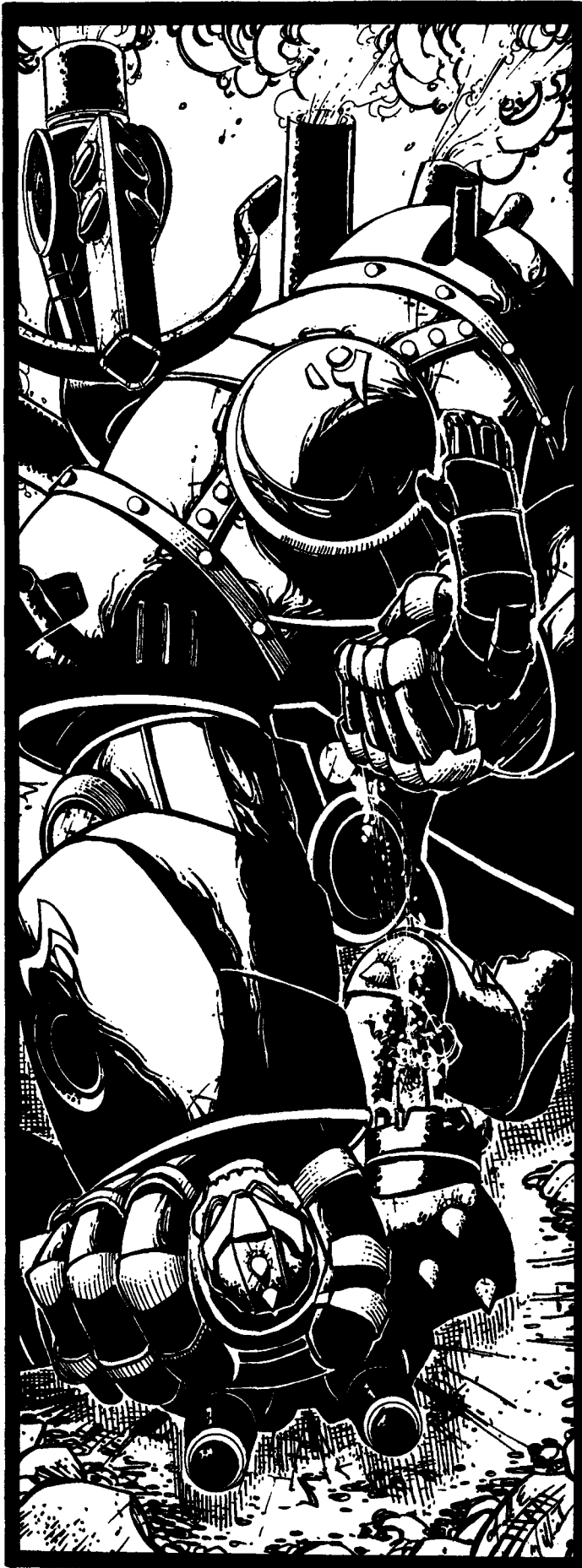
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Prologue



Video-letter from Sgt. Deon Canton to his wife

"Hey, Baby."

The first words to greet the listener are spoken in a deep, soft tone, full of warmth and caring. Unlike his last video, this time Deon Benjamin Canton looks healthy and sober.

"I want you to forget that last vid I sent. I was so drunk and ... well, I can only imagine how terrible it was. I'm sorry I sent it.

"Hon, please understand that war does terrible things to a body. Makes you cold and hard like the weapons you carry. Before long, you aren't anything more than the trigger to a gun. Shooting and killing because that's your life — your entire existence. Kill or be killed becomes your credo, and you can justify 'bout anything you do, Baby. As long as it's done to the enemy. And they're all your enemy.

"One day just runs into another. Most of them filled with hate and anger, and fear. You wake up one morning, and it hits you: you aren't even human no more. Saddest part is, you don't remember how it you lost it or when it happened. Losing your humanity, I mean."

A somber Deon pauses for a minute, smiles and continues.

"I don't know what the official word is at home, but the **Tolkeenites** handed our butts to us. Obviously I'm one of the lucky ones. I'm okay.

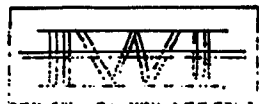
"There's no point of going into the gory details, Baby. They caught us with our pants down and our heads buried in a pillow. We never saw it comin' — none of us. Caught us by surprise and tore us apart. Couldn't have been more than twenty minutes before half the army was in a panic and the other half was **dyin'**.

"Noise is what I remember most. Shouts and screams. Crashing brick and screeching steel. Jet engines and crackling energy. Gunfire and explosions. Everywhere. Surrounding you. So loud you could barely hear your own voice even when screaming at the top of your lungs. You couldn't tell one word from another, either. Even the ground rumbled and shook, you could feel it through the soles of your boots. Noise and movement. That's all there was. Noise and movement ... and death. All blurred together and we were trapped in the middle of it.

"Me and my boys were lucky. We managed to stick together and fight our way out. Pushing southeast, with the clothes on our backs and only a few weapons and E-Clips among us. Baby, when I say we pushed southeast, I mean we ran. Ran like the gates of Hell was at our feet and we needed to put as much distance between us and it as we could, as quick as we could.

"Thought we had pushed through the worst of it too, when we were hit hard. Probably a sorcerer's lightning bolt that came crashing down in the middle of us. Sent us all sprawling. Two of my men ... Private Wilson and a new Dog Boy recruit whose name I don't remember were down for the count. I remember thinking they reminded me of bugs mangled into the ground by a **flyswatter**.

"We turned to face one of **Tolkeen's** monster squads. The leader was some white skinned woman. I mean stark white with black circles around her eyes. I don't know if it was white body paint, powder or whether she was some kind of D-Bee. The



witch just stood there smiling down at us. Behind her was a **Manslayer** and Feculence Daemonix, along with a few others for good measure. Somebody in the group threw down one of our few rifles and shouted that we were unarmed and surrendered. Found out later it was Corp. **Krakowski**. I woulda been mad at him, 'cept we didn't have nowhere near the **firepower** to take on this group. I hated the idea of surrender, but it was the smart thing to do.

"The woman just laughed and said that would make their job that much easier. I knew we were goners and my mind raced to figure out something. Some way to save some of us. That's when the knights stepped in.

"I don't know where they came from or who they were, but six **Cyber-Knights** stepped between us and the monsters. Told them to leave. That we represented no danger. That **Tolkeen** had won. That the Coalition Army was broken and on the run. She hissed and said **somethin'** I didn't hear, but the leader of the knights responded, saying that they couldn't have us — we were under *their* protection.

"The white-faced witch told them to mind their own business. That it was them who should leave. Then she raised her arms and said something in a foreign language, I think, **cuz** I couldn't understand a word. I saw the Cyber-Knights, all of **'em**, start to move and draw their weapons. Hell, some of the **weapons** just popping into their hands out of thin air. Next thing I knew there was a blinding flash and I was hit hard in the chest by something heavy. I heard a scream and shouting but couldn't see.

"When my vision cleared. I could see one of the Cyber-Knights was standing over the lifeless body of the white witch and the Feculence was hissing but backing up from two other knights. The Manslayer was hurt bad and already on the retreat.

"The weight still hung on me and it was then, like a delayed reaction, **that** I realized I was holding the smoldering body of a knight in my arms.

"The witch had tried to fry me with a lightning bolt. Before any of us knew what happened, one of the Cyber-Knights leapt in front of me and took the blast. Took the blast meant for me, Baby.

"I looked down to see the face of a Noli Bushman. His dark green eyes all wet and looking up at me. I swear a smile curled up one side of his mouth and all he said to me was, **'peace.'** Then he was gone.

"It's funny. Five minutes earlier, I would have drilled a hole in the back of his head with my laser rifle without thinking twice about it. But just then ... I don't know ... I clutched him to my chest like he was one of my own children. All I could think about was you, Baby. You and the kids. And I held him. This D-Bee I didn't even know, and screamed and screamed for somebody to help him. To save him ... with magic ... with anything.

"Two of the knights came over to me. The man bent down and put his hand on my shoulder to, like, comfort me. His comrade was dead because of me, but I was the one he was comforting.

"It was weird. I couldn't stop the tears. They just poured out of me. The rest of my men circled us and just looked at me not knowing what to say or do.

"Why?" I asked. **'Why** would he do it? I'm the enemy for god sake. I'm the god damn **enemy!**'

"That's when the female knight knelt down beside me and brushed some of the tears away from my face. Her touch was gentle, Baby, just like yours. She looked into my eyes and said softly, **'Maybe** he didn't see an enemy. Perhaps he saw a man about to die a most cruel and unjust death ... and couldn't let that **happen.'**

"Then, she pulled her fallen comrade **outta** my arms and carried him away. The other knight, the one who had put his hand on my shoulder, leaned over and said to me, **'Perhaps** one day, you can repay the **favor.'**

"And then they were gone. They stood against their own to save us from slaughter ... or worse. One of their own fell in the process, but they didn't blame us for it. There were no threats. No repercussions.

"I sit before you, my love, because a D-Bee I had never met, died in my place. He leapt in front of that energy bolt to save me. He knew exactly what he was doing and didn't hesitate. The very fact that he even tried is impressive. I can't begin to tell you how impossible it is to leap in front a blast like that. This Noli **Cyber-Knight** did the impossible and died to save ... me.

"Would he have done it if he knew how many D-Bees — how many Noli — I have **ki** ... slaughtered?"

"I ask myself that question every day, and I can picture his watery green eyes and see his trembling smile, and hear his one **word ... and ...** and I know the answer is, yes."

Sergeant Canton looks away from the camera and wipes his eyes before speaking again.

"Um ... I gotta go soon, Baby. As you can tell, this vid ain't exactly done to military standards. I 'spect they'd never let something like this go through normal channels, but then I ain't making or sending it by normal channels. You might want to destroy it after you've watched it, although I doubt High Command would do anything about it. Made sure there's nothing particularly sensitive in it, and they need experienced men like me and my platoon.

"Oh — for god sake, please destroy that last vid. I don't want you to remember me like that. Pretend it was just part of a bad **dream ...** because it was.

"I just wanted you to know that I was lost, Baby. Lost in that nightmare, but now I'm back. I'm back and I love you. Love you and the children more than words or a stupid vid can say.

"Our platoon is one of the few that survived intact, thanks ... thanks to them. With our experience, that means by the time you get this, I'll already be deep behind enemy lines pulling reconnaissance. The **Tolkeenites** may have caught us sleeping and sent us packing, but the Coalition Army isn't defeated and this war ain't over by a long shot. The army's rebuilding fast, and when it presses forward, there will be no stopping us this time.

"I miss you, Baby. Don't know if I'll get a chance to do another vid. You and the little ones stay well for me. Stay well and pray for me. Pray for us all."

— END TRANSMISSION —

—Sergeant *Deon* Canton,
made sometime after *Tolkeen's blitzkrieg* attack

Cyber-Knights

Traditionally, **Cyber-Knights** are trusted and loved above all other heroes. This is, in part, because they serve no particular nation or cause, rather, they fight for justice, **freedom** and the well-being of *all* people!

It is the **Cyber-Knights'** acceptance of all people, human and **nonhuman**, and their never-ending battle against supernatural evil, that have made them folk heroes and living legends. This means Cyber-Knights find allies everywhere, from tribes of Indians, **Simvan** and Sasquatch, to homesteads, towns and cities across the **Americas**, even the streets of the Chi-Town '**Burbs**. However, Cyber-Knights are especially loved by wilderness people who are often forgotten or looked down upon by the more advanced civilizations.

In the savage world of Rifts Earth, people tend to be segregated and isolated. Those who possess technology or magic are at the top of the social heap, for they possess the resources to defend themselves and build empires. Everybody else pretty much has to fend for themselves and eke out whatever existence they can. Sure there are local lawmen, mages and heroes within these communities. And there are adventurers, mercenaries, and other heroes to whom appeals can be made, as well as those who can be **hired**, but the Cyber-Knights are different — something nobler and heroic. They are the champions of the underdog. The heroes who fight for, and with, the "little guy" — those people whose voices are too small or too soft to be heard on their own, or who lack the muscle to stand against injustice and evil alone.

Nobody has to "ask" the Cyber-Knights for help, they seek out trouble and "**offer**" help without conditions or terms. Nor do the knights ask for rewards or expect any sort of payment or special treatment in return. Moreover, the Cyber-Knights embrace and understand the common man and often stop to lend a helping hand in little ways, such as pitching in to build a new barn, fix a fence, fight a fire, harvest crops or rescue a kitten from a tree. They sweat, cry, laugh and bleed *with* the common people.

Although the Cyber-Knights are often elevated by the people to hero status, the knights themselves (generally speaking) never see themselves as better than anybody else. They see the simple farmer, huntsman, ditch digger and D-Bee (even the monstrous looking ones) as every bit as valuable and important as the next man — or knight. Consequently, they treat all sentient beings of good intentions with equal respect and kindness, and fight just as hard for D-Bees as humans, for the poor as the rich, for peasants as kings. Cyber-Knights also avoid preaching — anything they **teach**, they usually do through good example. It is this close association with ordinary people that keeps the Cyber-Knights grounded and, in return, endears them to the common man more than any other lawman. As a result, the noble knights have won the affection, trust and respect of *all* people regardless of race and position. Thus, when a **Cyber-Knight** is spotted, many wilderness folks race from their fields, come out of their homes and ride out to meet the wanderer with a

hero's welcome. It matters not that they know the Cyber-Knight by name, just that he or she is recognized as a member of that noble fraternity of champions. Typically, those who greet the Cyber-Knight have no great wrong to be righted or monster to be slain. They race out to *welcome* the warrior and shake his hand. The good knight and his companions are typically invited to stay a night or two as guests at any number of homes, and are given food, water, supplies and little gifts as tokens of the people's esteem and appreciation. This is especially true in the New West, Canada, Mexico and other wilderness and low-tech regions. Why? Because the Cyber-Knights stand alone as a group whose members actively live among the people and constantly fight on their behalf.

Even the most aggressive and hostile people, like the Simvan, hold the Cyber-Knights in high esteem. While they will harass or rob others, most Simvan will let the Cyber-Knight and those with him (including entire caravans of people) pass unmolested. The Monster-Riders may follow from a distance or even ride alongside for a while, whooping and hollering, perhaps making threats and firing weapons into the air — in short, acting wild and dangerous — but never actually attacking unless attacked first. They only make a commotion to save face and to demonstrate that it is only by their leave (and their respect for the Cyber-Knight) that travelers are *allowed* to pass. Even the *Coalition States* have never taken up arms against the Cyber-Knights as a group. The CS has condemned the Cyber-Knights as notorious "**D-Bee-lovers** and self-appointed wilderness heroes," and they have even had their share of skirmishes with individual knights, yet the CS has elected to ignore Cyber-Knights as a whole. Some wilderness squads and platoons of Coalition soldiers have even been gone so far as to give up the hunt for refugees and fugitives when they learn a Cyber-Knight has placed them under his protection.

Staying the hand of evil

Of course, there are those soldiers, bounty hunters, **gunslingers** and brigands who see the Cyber-Knights as a personal challenge. A force to be sought out and confronted in order to prove one's own courage, self-worth or power. Likewise, the legendary knights are feared and hated by monsters, particularly vampires and demons. Lord **Coake** and his Cyber-Knights have made it something of a crusade to track down evil supernatural forces and destroy them. Many folks along the **Mexican/US** border swear that without the Cyber-Knights, vampires would have overrun the north long ago. Some go so far as to say that the *only thing* stopping the vampire hordes is the Cyber-Knights.

Indeed, the **Cyber-Knights'** campaign against the vampires in the south is legendary, and has inspired many others to follow in their footsteps, not the least of which is the infamous **Reid's Rangers** founded and led by a band of rogue Cyber-Knights (see **Rifts® World Book One: Vampire Kingdoms™**). The Cyber-Knights do more, however, than hold a border. Many

conduct raids deep into the Vampire Kingdoms of Mexico to rescue humans from their thrall and free slaves. Other knights have infiltrated the land of the undead to conduct a secret war to undermine the vampires' hold, and have established an underground railroad to smuggle people out and into the relative safety of the north. This has also inspired native Mexicans to become **Cyber-Knights** themselves, in order to carry on the fight to liberate their people. The truly hopeful believe the Cyber-Knights will one day deliver all of Mexico to freedom. However, most knights know they can never win without additional outside help, and take solace in rescuing those they can.

The fight for Tolkeen

Tragically, the war between Tolkeen and the Coalition States will have long lasting repercussions for the Cyber-Knights. Until the Siege on Tolkeen, the Cyber-Knights, as an organized group, stayed out of the affairs of kingdoms and politics. Except for scattered incidents where a dozen or so knights might fight on behalf of one side or the other, they NEVER made an *alliance* to any particular nation or cause. That all changed with Tolkeen.

Few outsiders even realize that the war has divided the Cyber-Knights for the first time in their long, illustrious history. A schism in the **Cyber-Knight** community has created two distinct camps of knights: those who remain true to the tenets and way of life the Cyber-Knights have followed under their founder, Lord **Coake**, for nearly two hundred years, and those who have broken away to join Tolkeen. It is a distinction that goes unnoticed by the CS and all but the most knowledgeable outside observers (like Erin Tam).

To most people, a Cyber-Knight is a Cyber-Knight. Period. The fact that so many Cyber-Knights chose to fight on the side of Tolkeen makes it seem (at least to outsiders) as if "all" Cyber-Knights have taken up that cause. This is understandable since nobody knows how many knights really exist or where they are headquartered. To see more than a dozen at any one place is a rarity. To see hundreds is to suggest that the entire legion of heroes has joined the cause and taken a side. This is the case at Tolkeen.

From the Coalition's point of view it is "The" Cyber-Knights as a whole, not some disenfranchised faction, who battles against them. Others see it the same way. Thus, those who have gone to fight on the side of Tolkeen represent *all* Cyber-Knights, and that means the hands of *all* Cyber-Knights are sullied by their deeds. Worse, *all* are forever associated with the villains, demons and horrors of that war and the atrocities committed by them. Guilt by association.

To compound matters, the general public and even those who know not all Cyber-Knights chose to fight for Tolkeen, can not tell which ones did or did not. All they know is that "The" Cyber-Knights fought at the side of sorcerers and dark magicks. That Cyber-Knights "allowed" (not that they had any real choice or say on the matter) the leaders of Tolkeen to unleash a plague of demons upon the land. That the Cyber-Knights battled at the side of such despicable "allies" as the **Daemonix**, **Brodkil**, Neuron Beasts, Necromancers, Witches and hundreds of other monsters they once sought to purge from the land.

Outsiders don't know or care that most of the Tolkeen Cyber-Knights showed mercy to the enemy. They don't know or



care that the **Tolkeen Cyber-Knights** disapproved of the use of supernatural monsters and often challenged and fought such dark forces. They don't know or care that most Cyber-Knights did not partake in the orgy of violence and murder that followed the routing of the Coalition Army during the *Sorcerers' Revenge*. Or that many a knight perished at the hands of **Tolkeen's** demonic "allies" trying to stop them from slaughtering and torturing the enemy. For most outsiders, it is enough to know that the Cyber-Knights were simply *there*. A fact that will forever diminish the knights' reputation as true heroes. A fact that will cause some to wonder if the Cyber-Knights can ever be completely trusted again, and others to actually fear and hate them.

Even the Cyber-Knights who stayed out the Tolkeen conflict will be suspect. For if so many knights could be swayed by the likes of Tolkeen, who is to say the same can not happen to the others? **Furthermore**, if the great Lord **Coake** and those who stayed at his side could abandon their fellow knights (misguided though they may have been), who is to say the noble warriors might not turn their backs on anyone?

Such are the questions and doubts the schism within the knights has borne. With so many Cyber-Knights joining the Kingdom of Tolkeen against the Coalition Army, much of what the legendary Lord Coake has built has been torn asunder. Damage that may be irreparable, for overnight, the vaunted Cyber-Knights have become the golden heroes of *yesterday*. The once unshakable heroes have proven to be vulnerable. A house divided. Those knights who persevere will rise to their feet and stand tall, but they will never stand quite so straight, or shine as brightly.

The Fellowship Lost?

Nowhere is the tumult of war more evident than among the Cyber-Knights. Torn in half, the schism effectively pits knight against knight. Those who stay true to the vision of their leader, Lord Coake, see those who leave to join Tolkeen as *traitors* to their brotherhood and to their mentor. Like dutiful children, they see the hurt the **traitors'** actions have inflicted upon their noble leader and feel the pain of a family divided. This evokes intense emotions of anger and resentment toward their brother and sister knights, for they are seen responsible for inflicting the wounds (and the tarnished reputation and turmoil yet to come). Emotional wounds and pain that causes both sides to dislike, condemn, and inflict more pain upon each other. Secretly, it also causes those who remain loyal to Lord Coake and the covenants they live by, to look inward and question the wisdom of their leader as well as their own beliefs and convictions. For some, it is the first time they have ever had doubts, or questioned their chosen path, or the man who leads them. For all, it is the first time that they have been divided. It is a loss that cuts them to the quick.

Meanwhile, those who chose to join Tolkeen also boil with anger and resentment. They feel betrayed and abandoned. Not only by their fellow knights, but by the person they once believed to be the greatest man who ever lived. The father-figure they had once **adored**, Lord Coake. The fact that Coake himself bears them no ill will, but simply implores them to "reconsider the dangerous path they now embarked upon," only makes the hurt that much worse. It would be easier if he admonished and condemned them, called them worthless traitors or tried to phys-

ically stop them, but it is not his way. Instead, he counsels against their decision and offers a strong opposing view, but in the end, he lets them make their own choice and watches them leave one by one.

Coake makes it public knowledge that all who leave are welcomed to return, and that they are in his prayers. It is a kindness that inflicts more pain, for it makes leaving that much harder, and causes those who decide to do so to feel like ingrates. Ashamed and angry they lash back at their ex-comrades and mentor, calling them cowards and fools unwilling to fight when it matters most. Cretins unwilling to stand against what they call the "evil empire." They accuse the loyalists of wrapping themselves in platitudes of self-righteousness and being gutless wonders. They scream insult upon insult to cover their own doubts, fear and tears, but they leave nonetheless.

It is **Coake's** years of experience that enables him to see the bigger picture. To anticipate the likely outcome of the war, and to recognize the absence of true concern for the people of Tolkeen by its leaders. "The madness born of pride and retribution," he once **said**, "has turned a nation of learning and peace into a slobbering hound of war. It can no longer hear anything but its own angry howling, and bites its own tongue to sate its lust for blood. I fear Tolkeen is lost. The best we can do is stand united and ready to pick up the pieces and help those who will need us in the aftermath."

Unfortunately, many of the Cyber-Knights do not share Lord Coake's vision nor can they bring themselves to trust his judgement. He is a great and wise leader, but Lord Coake is not God. He is not omnipotent. He can not see the future or know what beats in the hearts of Tolkeen's leaders. (Can he?) And so the barking of the hound calls to them, compelling many to break ranks and join Tolkeen in war.

The exodus has been a slow but constant trickle. There was no opposition leader, no revolution, or open dissension, just a difference of opinions that inexorably drains the Cyber-Knights like a siren calling them to war. All Lord Coake can do is watch with sad eyes and counsel those who remain to stay their course and harbor no ill will for their brethren. When the trickle finally slowed to nearly nothing, nearly half (approx. 47%; roughly 900) Cyber-Knights had joined with Tolkeen. Even today, the occasional knight or allied warrior will **apologize** to his friends, gather his things and ride off to follow his heart at Tolkeen.

The knights of Tolkeen

In fairness to the half that joined Tolkeen, most do so out of compassion and genuine conviction rather than feelings of revenge or hate. They see the war in black and white terms: Innocent human and D-Bee farmers, homesteaders, townfolk, sorcerers and scholars in the Kingdom of Tolkeen have been targeted for extermination by the Coalition States. Tolkeen has committed no wrong or injury against the CS — their only crime is that they chose a different way of life and dare to use the science of magic. What nobler cause could there be than to fight to protect these noble and innocent people? If only it were that simple, but that was their view. Consequently, many Cyber-Knights were shocked when Lord Coake not only opposed such a grand crusade, but forbade all knights from participating in the war. Outrage and confusion tore through the legion of heroes. They could not understand their leader's decision.

They felt he was turning his back on the greatest injustice and wrong of the age, and that they were, indeed, needed at Tolkeen. The fact that **Coake** went so far as to forbid **Cyber-Knight** involvement only accentuated their confusion, outrage and sense of injustice.

The founder of the **Cyber-Knights** tried to explain his position to a multitude that didn't want to hear it. He warned that joining Tolkeen would be tantamount to declaring an official alliance to one government and that the **Cyber-Knights'** long held autonomy and credibility as free agents allied to no government or cause would be instantly destroyed. That as Cyber-Knights, they should never, as a whole, take up to *serve* any one nation. That there was more involved than an issue of right and wrong. That **Tolkeen's** motives were not as sweet, innocent or just as many would like to believe. That **Tolkeen's** leaders were using rhetoric and high ideals to cover their lust for revenge and power. That there were already disturbing signs of overreaching and unholy alliances with supernatural evil. That Cyber-Knights answered to a higher call and that **Tolkeen's** leadership did not ascribe to their sense of honor and justice. That in the end, Tolkeen would resort to things Cyber-Knights would never condone and that all parties involved, knights included, would be condemned for it. Atrocities, horrors and catastrophic loss of life in a nightmare war they could not win and which could have been avoided.

Unfortunately, those who heard this argument were blinded by their passion and chose to focus on his last comments, which to them, suggested the great Lord Coake would not champion a cause he did not think he could win.

Coake tried to clarify that the CS was too powerful and too obsessed with destroying Tolkeen and that any war would mean the death of hundreds of thousands. He felt in this circumstance it was best to relocate and he (as was **Lazlo**) was willing to help in such a task, defending refugees from any CS aggression as well as helping them to establish a new kingdom elsewhere. However, **Tolkeen's** leadership would not hear of it. In Lord **Coake's** opinion, they were consumed with hate and vengeance that committed them to a suicidal war. This meant the level of suffering and death would be monumental, and the Cyber-Knights needed to be ready to step in and help civilian refugees and the survivors of **Tolkeen's** armed forces escape complete decimation from the invading Coalition Army.

As seasoned as most Cyber-Knights are as warriors, most had never seen a large scale, all-out war. Without first-hand experience, they could not picture what their founder was trying to tell them, and those who could, decided it was a gross exaggeration to get them to capitulate. Ultimately, those who left simply saw the war at Tolkeen as a noble and just cause. To not participate, a crime against humanity, an unjust and terrible act as wrong as the Coalition's invasion. The Coalition was the evil aggressor and had to be stopped. For many Cyber-Knights, their sense of justice, duty, and adherence to the Code of Chivalry left them no other choice.

So it is, the Cyber-Knights at Tolkeen fight to save lives, not take them. They hope that a united front will give the Coalition pause and get them to reconsider their position. However, they have become embroiled in something much larger than themselves, and despite their good intentions, the war spins out of control and spirals into something dark and ugly. That was



driven home during the Sorcerers' Revenge. Now, many Cyber-Knights feel swept up in chaos and horror beyond their imagining. They feel more conflicted and lost than ever. Most feel too ashamed or too angry and disenfranchised to return

home and rejoin Lord **Coake**. Besides, they remain committed to helping the innocent people of **Tolkeen** who need them more than ever, for even they are beginning to suffer for atrocities by the half-demon and monster Army of Tolkeen. And so the **Cyber-Knights** of Tolkeen remain, caught between conviction and a war where murder, torture and worse are approved methods on both sides of the conflict, and neither warring faction will consider anything short of the complete annihilation of their enemy.

In the meanwhile, the Tolkeen allied Cyber-Knights struggle with the grim realities of war and their increasingly uneasy alliance to a power that is almost as bad as the Coalition. Many try to come to terms with the atrocities they've seen — many of which they were, in one way or another, party to. Others try to justify tolerating camaraderie with hellspawned monsters and diabolic demons — creatures who torture helpless prisoners, murder unarmed foes, revel in carnage and even torment and prey upon the civilian population. Dark forces who grow ever more cocky, vicious and uncontrollable. Forces which many a **Cyber-Knight** has already clashed with on innumerable issues. Then there are the ordinary horrors of war: the chaos, brutality, cruelty, unfairness, and evil that turns a man's heart to stone and his blood cold. Many a Cyber-Knight has found himself contemplating (sometimes doing) things he never thought himself capable of doing. And there's the emptiness in one's soul and the weariness of the body made all the more difficult by the heavy disappointment in people. Real heroes and honorable men are a rarity. Lord Coake had warned them that war makes people do terrible things. An old cliché that is more true at the Tolkeen front than it has ever been.

The war at Tolkeen will take a heavy toll on the lives of the Cyber-Knights who fight for the Kingdom. The war will change them all, turning many into wandering Crusaders — roguish anti-heroes, vigilantes and disillusioned loners who will spend years trying to deal with all they endured. They will still strive to do what's right and to help others, but they will never return to the fellowship they so miss. The disillusioned and lost from the war will become *Hermits*, while the war will produce a frightening number of *Fallen Knights*. Villains who have turned so cold and heartless that no evil is too foul and wrongs are just scars of injustice to be exploited by the cunning. Only a tiny handful will come back to Lord Coake and the fellowship of old. Many will die on the battlefield.

Where there is hope

Many people saw the Cyber-Knights as the embodiment of *hope* as much as mighty warriors. Heroes who lived by ideals others strove to embrace. Many see the schism that divided these heroes, the resentment and animosity that erupted between them as a great disappointment. They feel a profound sense of loss and uncertainty. As much as **Coake's** legion and even those who fight at Tolkeen try to keep the nobility, goodness and hope that the Cyber-Knights represent alive, it has been diminished, and for many, replaced with sadness and chaos. If the legendary Cyber-Knights can falter and splinter, perhaps even come to an end, what chance is there for anyone? The people's confidence is shaken.

The ever optimistic Lord Coake has chosen to see the division and derision in a positive light. The Cyber-Knights had, he

believes, become too revered and overconfident. They liked that the people placed them on a pedestal reserved for gods, not men. They liked that the people sung their praises and practically worshiped them, which led to the individual Cyber-Knights becoming too full of themselves. They began to see themselves as special, superior and eternal. The strife brought on by the war has only served to bring them back to earth and reminded them that they are fallible mortals who make mistakes, feel pain and die like anyone else. All good things to keep a man humble and respectful of life and those around him. Coake had these words to offer his fellow knights.

"I hear hope has died with us. Funny, I feel pretty damned alive.

"At best, all we have ever been is the standard carriers of hope and goodness. Perhaps it is time to pass the banner to someone else. Perhaps. But I think not, for hope is part of every sentient being. We can not capture it, hold it or kill it for ourselves — even if we wanted to. To say otherwise is just plain crazy.

"Hope is a living thing buried in each and every one of us, waiting to bloom. In fact, hope is the most resilient 'weed' I have ever seen. Nobody, not Emperor Prosek, not King Creed, not the Cyber-Knights or the hosts of Hell can crush it or take it away. It keeps coming back even when it appears to have been torn out by its very roots.

*"No, the loss of our brethren is a reminder that we do not come to think too highly of ourselves and our accomplishments. That all we have built and grown to love, can be destroyed with amazing ease. Whether those who left will ever rejoin the fellowship, I do not know. I have my hopes, but only time will tell. Their joining Tolkeen has wounded us both personally and as an organization, but we are not alone. There are others who suffer far more than we. The **Tolkeen-Coalition** War kills thousands, children die, women are raped, families uprooted when their homes and the very land is shattered. These countless thousands suffer more than we will ever know. These people have lost everything, but even they dare to hope.*

"We are divided and diminished but we live. We still have strength in our arms and goodness in our hearts. It matters not that others may see us differently. It matters not that we have been knocked from our undeserved pedestals. Our goals, our code, and our purpose in life is unchanged, and I for one intend to continue on as I always have. We are needed and we shall be there.

*"I can not believe that I speak **only** for **myself** when I say that hope fills my heart to overflowing. Life is change. Life is adversity. So we Cyber-Knights have fallen on hard times, it happens. It doesn't make us any less than we were, **in** fact it challenges us to be the best we can be. Anyone can be strong and good when times are good. This is the time where our mettle is tested before the eyes of the world. Now is when each and every one of us must stand and be counted! Now is when heroes, or at least us lowly Cyber-Knights, are needed most!*

*"**Valor**, honor, caring, mercy and hope are all virtues that are contagious. If we can keep them in our hearts and display them in sincere word and **deed**, they **WILL** grow in others. Thus, I do not see this crisis as the time the Cyber-Knights flounder and die. I see this period as our greatest triumph. The time we rose to be greater than ever. **Are** you with **me**?!"*

Lord Coake's words are met with thunderous applause and cheers. The throng of **Cyber-Knights** feel uplifted and encouraged. These are uncertain times, but they know their mentor is right. They may be divided, and those good knights who left will be missed. Harsh criticism coming from their disenfranchised brethren, and doubt and suspicion from those who once practically worshipped them, hurts. Yet other than that, nothing has really changed. It's all a matter of perception and degree. Confidence and hope. For there are still multitudes who trust, respect and appreciate the Cyber-Knights. There are injustices to be righted and monsters to slay. There are people everywhere in **need**, praying that somebody somewhere, somehow, will appear to help them — and where a **Cyber-Knight** is needed, they will be **there!**

An Erin Tarn Experience

It was one of those rare moments when Erin Tarn and her companions had let down their guard to enjoy a few moments of silliness and laughter. The trio, Erin Tarn, Sir **Winslow Thorpe** and a young scholar, Alan **Vanhook**, were returning from a meeting of scholars and learned people held at Tolkeen before the onset of the war. Although tensions ran high and the Coalition's military presence was much stronger than the CS would have people believe, one could still travel to and from Tolkeen without any serious chance of trouble. Provided one was careful. Unfortunately, an exciting conference was followed by a string of increasingly bad jokes on the way home. It had created a joyful, relaxed atmosphere of fun and levity for the travelers. A cavalier moment that dropped them right into the lap of a Coalition patrol.

"Oh ... **dear** ..." said Erin.

Alan could only gulp hard and stare.

Sir Thorpe froze and said nothing.

Standing not more than 20 feet (6 m) before them was a quartet of Coalition Soldiers: a couple of grunts, their squad leader and a Glitter Boy Killer power armor looming behind them. All weapons pointed at the suddenly silent travelers who had burst onto the scene in laughter. Barely six seconds passes when one of the CS grunts points to Erin Tarn.

"Hey Lieutenant! That woman I ... I think ..."

"Yes," says Sir Thorpe, the Native American Cyber-Knight and Erin Tarn's friend and protector, "that is Erin Tarn, and your Emperor will reward you greatly for her capture ... alive."

There is visible excitement over having such a prize waltz right into their arms.

"To that end," continues Sir **Thorpe**, "I issue you a challenge. Ms. Tarn and her other companion will lay down any weapons they may have and go peacefully, *provided* you can take *me* in one on one, hand to hand combat. I will use only my Psi-Sword and **Psi-Tomahawk**. You can use whatever guns, armor and resources at your disposal."

Two of the CS grunts chuckle like giddy schoolboys peeping into the girls' locker room. The Military Specialist leading this squad, laughs and asks, "Why? We can cut you down where you stand right now."

"Yes, you could," comes the stoic replay from Sir Thorpe, the fingers of his left hand twitching ever so slightly, "but I am surprised. I thought the technocrat soldiers of the great Coalition Army would leap at a chance to prove their superiority over one, lone Cyber-Knight. But I understand. Fear can make a man into a child. I have seen it many times — especially among the Coalition."

"What the ..." words fail the one grunt.

"Fear? We aren't afraid of you, Indian Boy!" chides the other grunt.

"Yes, yes, the bark of the dog to disguise its fear. Common among the Coalition's soft soldiers. Do it then. If you will not accept my challenge, shoot me where I stand."

"Son of a ... damn straight you ..." snorts the tongue-tied grunt.

"Dog? Cowards? God damn!" howls the other as he raises his plasma rifle. "This little puke wants to die, Lieutenant. Just say the word."

"I say we oblige him," growls the pilot inside the Glitter Boy Killer over his loudspeaker. "Only I vote for a slow and painful death."

"Enough!" snaps their leader as he eyeballs the Cyber-Knight.

"No, please," interjects Erin Tarn, "he's only trying to protect me. I'll go without a fight. I promise."

"Yes," snipes Sir Thorpe. "Hide behind a woman's skirt."

"Winslow, stop it! All of you. There's no **need** ..."

"Shut your mouth, witch." Squeals the tongue-tied grunt who has finally found his voice. He can barely contain his anger, wagging his finger at the matriarch of history and taking several steps toward her.

"**Jansen!**" bellows the Squad Leader, stopping the soldier in his tracks. "I don't know what you think you'll accomplish baiting us into a fight with you, Sir Knight."

"Really? I didn't know Coalition soldiers were capable of thinking for themselves," retorts Sir Thorpe as he adjusts his stance to keep all the CS soldiers within his line of vision.

"Just say the word, sir," howls the grunt with the plasma rifle.

"It will be my pleasure to stomp this dung heap into the ground, sir," adds the power armored trooper.

"Bring it on, Lieutenant," encourages Sir Thorpe. "Four against one. I fight with no magic. No guns. No intervention from my companions. You win? I die. And you get the glory of having captured '**The**' Erin Tarn. I win? You die, and we say a prayer over your sorry corpses."

"You're completely insane," chuckles the Squad Leader. "You know that? Completely insane."

Having finished looking the knight up and down, the Military Specialist takes a few steps back and signals with a hand gesture for his men to strike, **saying**, "Show this madman Coalition mercy."

In a heartbeat the *Glitter Boy Killer* leaps to cover 15 feet (4.6 m) to land squarely on top of the Cyber-Knight — Sir Thorpe a small and vulnerable looking "David" to the Coalition's mechanical "Goliath."

With impossible speed and precision, the **Cyber-Knight** spins and dodges the thundering landing of his opponent, **Psi-Sword** appearing in his right hand, a **Psi-Tomahawk** in the left. He has positioned himself to end up between the Glitter Boy Killer's legs. The Psi-Tomahawk parries one of the Killer's own slashing blades as the Psi-Sword plunges into the belly of the mechanical beast.

The pilot screams and the Killer recoils, now on the defensive. **Sir Thorpe** uses the bulk of his power armored opponent to shield himself from the sight of the two grunts and their leader. Before the reeling pilot inside the Glitter Boy Killer can retaliate, two more blows stagger it. The behemoth dropping to one knee.

Sir Thorpe vaults over its shoulder and lands squarely between the two Coalition grunts — a hail of laser and plasma gunfire narrowly missing him during his display of acrobatics. The grunt who threatened Erin goes down with a Psi-Tomahawk chop to the back of his knee. He is not seriously hurt, but momentarily taken out of the action.

An astonishingly well placed blow from the Psi-Sword knocks the plasma rifle from his other assailant's hand. The Lieutenant, 20 feet (6 m) back, dares not open fire for fear of hitting his own men. The startled and enraged Glitter Boy Killer suffers from no such compunction, however, and spins around firing.

Erin and her young companion dive for cover — the lad, in shock from the storm of combat exploding around him.

The Lieutenant is screaming orders over his loudspeaker as he too dives for cover, but the words are lost in the hail of gunfire.

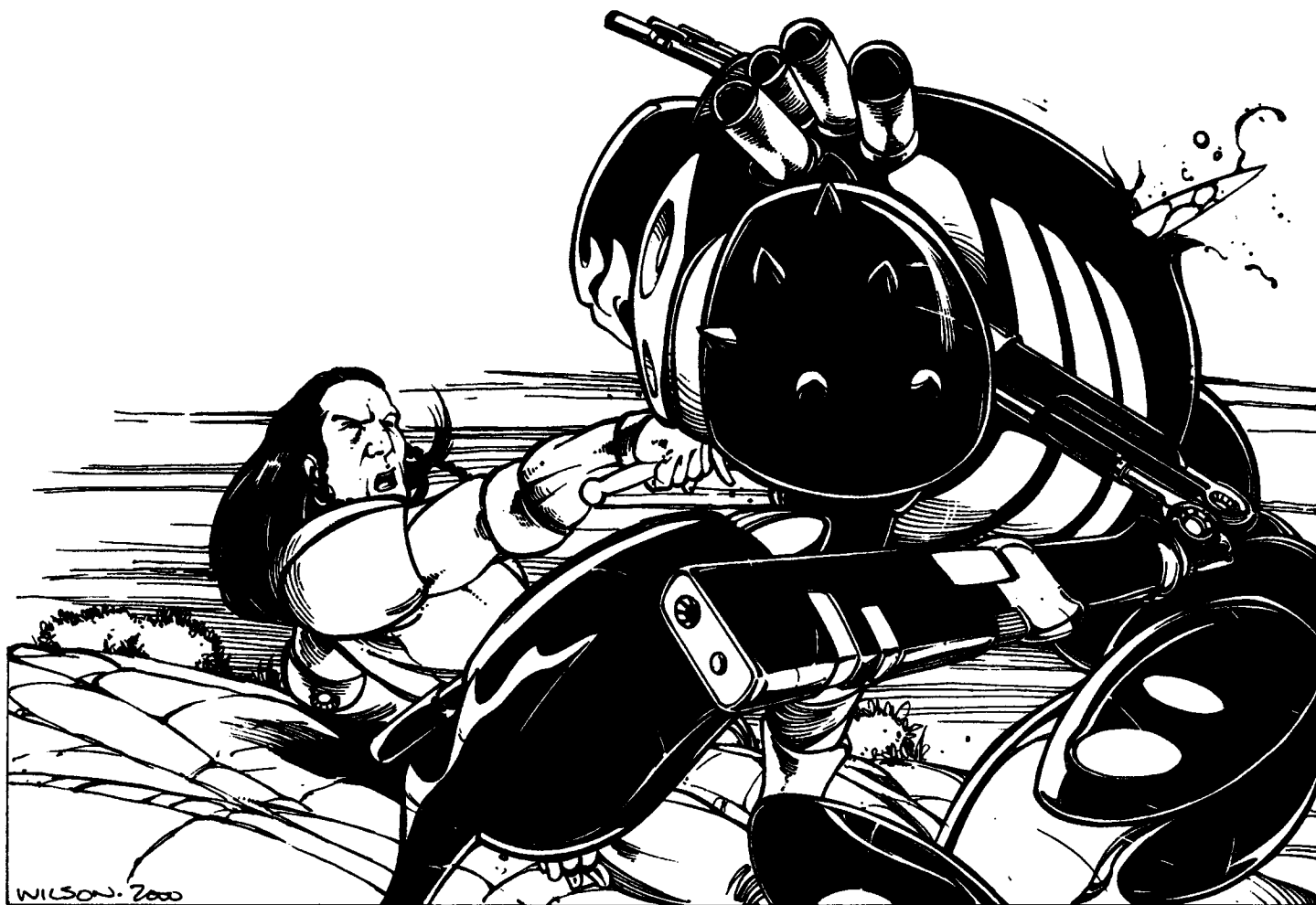
Sir Thorpe uses the Grunt who had threatened Erin as a human shield. The other soldier is cut-down by "friendly fire."

The grunt in hand is seriously injured, but alive. He is out of commission and the Cyber-Knight drops the dead weight to face the Killer.

There is a moment where everybody seems to be frozen like statues as they instantly size up the situation. A second later, the CS officer and the Glitter Boy Killer begin blasting away — the Killer pilot screaming like a crazy-man over the loudspeaker of his robot armor. Sir Thorpe charges the Glitter Boy Killer miraculously a half step ahead of, or successfully dodging, every blast directed at him.

A twisting leap and Sir Thorpe avoids a slashing strike by one of the huge forearm blades and (barely) twin blasts from the Killer's small shoulder guns. While still in midair, he slices the left shoulder gun in half, sending a shower of sparks flying into the air. He manages to kick the other shoulder gun to make its next blast miss, while looping the Psi-Tomahawk around one of three barrels of the top mounted laser turret, pulling himself up and over on the Killer's back a millisecond before the lasers fire — the energy blade slicing its barrel as he vaults over it.

Like a scurrying, swinging monkey, Sir Thorpe manages to hold on, chopping at the head and main body while dodging each swipe of the Killer's scythe-like blades. The right shoulder



gun is the first to go. Then the **tri-barrelled** laser turret. Then the right hand and chest guns, before a final well-placed blow to the chest unleashes a gusher of electrical sparks and the Glitter Boy Killer staggers.

The **Cyber-Knight** is already diving forward through the sparks before Erin Tarn can usher her scream of warning. An energy blast from behind silently cuts through the **air**, grazing the armor plated back of her champion.

The Lieutenant had circled around during the frantic melee with the Glitter Boy Killer. Sir **Thorpe** lopes like a panther, crouched low to the ground on all fours, dodging blasts until another one hits him square in the chest. His psychic energy blades vanish, and the knight is sent flying several feet backwards, where he lies like a rag doll on the ground.

The smoldering body of the noble knight is still and **unmoving** as the triumphant Military Specialist walks over to gloat, rifle still in hand, pointing at his adversary. Erin Tarn holds her hands over her mouth to stifle a scream. Only a whimper squeaks through her fingers. The lad with her begins to cry. His sobs as much for his own fate as for the death of the legendary Sir Thorpe.

Standing at the feet of his quarry, the Military Specialist smiles beneath the Death's Head face plate. "Damn, Injun. You were amazing. Crazy, but amazing. I've never seen anybody move like that. More luck than brains, though. No one man, not even a Cyber-Knight could have taken all four of us, you **crazy** son of a ..."

Before he knows what hits him, Sir **Thorpe's** feet entangle the soldier's right leg, and with a quick twist, knock the lieutenant's feet out from under him. Gravity does the rest. The Lieutenant falls backwards and to the side. His gun blaring, shooting laser bolts to the heavens. The instant he hits the ground the Cyber-Knight is on top of him. One hand blocking the still shooting assault rifle, the other wielding the Psi-Sword. In a swirl of light and motion it is over, the Psi-Sword parting the Lieutenant's head from his shoulders.

Sir Thorpe raises slowly. Cautiously. Surveying the battle scene around him. The injured grunt has passed away during the fight. That only leaves the crippled Glitter Boy Killer.

The right side of the mechanical body is locked. Frozen. Most sensors are dead, those that remain flicker unreliably. The left arm, leg and weapons still work, but to turn and face the Cyber-Knight, the pilot must kick and scratch at the earth with his foot like a crippled bull. Sir Thorpe easily rotates his position to keep out of the power armor's line of fire.

"You ... you'd be dead if my mini-missiles didn't lock up," wheezes the pilot inside.

"I know."

"Well, I guess this is it." says the Killer.

"**Yes**, I guess it is." replies Sir Thorpe.

"Wait!" Screams the pilot, realizing his death is moments at hand. Please. Please, don't kill me. Mercy. **Please!**"

"Coalition mercy?" Asks the Cyber-Knight as he raises his Psi-Sword.

"Oh, god," is the whimpered response that floats over the armor's loudspeaker.

The energy of the Psi-Sword cuts through the air and Mega-Damage metal screams in protest. Another and another

slash of the energy sword sends sparks flying as the knight finishes the job.

"Fortunately for you," says an aching Sir Thorpe. "I am not the Coalition. I am a Cyber-Knight. We know the meaning of mercy. Your armor is completely crippled. It will take you at least an hour to get out of your tin suit. Do *not* pursue us, or next time my mercy will come as a quick death. Understand?"

"**Uh ... yuh ... yes**," comes the response, a soft squeak like **that** of a mouse.

"Good."

With that Sir Thorpe turns to rejoin his companions. Erin rushes to tend to his wounds. Welts and abrasions have already begun to show on his face and shoulders. One of his tightly woven braids of hair has been disintegrated nearly down to the scalp. Blood trickles along the side of his face from a cut above his right eye as well as from a wound on his left shoulder, and a swollen and open lower lip.

"My dear friend, you're a mess."

"**Hrrumph**. You should see the other guys," he chuckles, causing the blood to stream from his split lip.

"Help us remove this worthless armor, Alan." Requests Erin of their young companion.

The scholar is in shock, but manages to wipe away his tears, rub his red eyes and stumble forward to lend a hand.

"Easy, **lad**," assures the valiant Cyber-Knight.

The youth stares helplessly with disbelief at the chest plate of the knight's body armor. A vaporized hole the size of soccer ball is burned right through it. Underneath, a few tattered edges of Sir **Thorpe's** shirt flutter **in** a breeze. Beneath that, a second **bionic-like** chest-plate, was grafted directly to his body.

"**That ... that's** how you survived. **I ... I thought ...** you were dead ... and we ... I mean ... **I ...**"

"It's alright, boy. Everything is all right, now."

Dropping the shattered remnant of his exterior armor to the ground and his other wounds quickly bound, Sir Thorpe urges Erin and the lad to make a hasty retreat back into the woodlands. A group of four is unusual for a Coalition squad, and he fears another 4-6 Dead Boys may be nearby. The three move quickly and reasonably **quietly**, without speaking a word. The mind of the young scholar replaying what he had seen over and over again in his mind. When the trio reaches what Sir Thorpe feels is a safe location, they stop to rest. Alan is more composed, but is now flush with excitement. His words gush out of his mouth in a frantic current of enthusiasm.

"That was amazing, Sir Thorpe! The fight I mean. I thought we were all dead ... or worse. Then you challenged the four of them and I thought, '**Oh** my god, he's crazy. Nobody can fight four Coalition troopers and win. Especially not when one of them is a ... a Glitter Boy Killer! Oh my god! Then you ... the way you moved. It was so fast and precise ... like a Crazy or Juicer, or something. God, I thought only Juicers could move like that."

"A lifetime of hard training and experience, Alan." The Cyber-Knight humbly replies.

"And a little bit more." Adds Erin Tarn with a wink.

"A little bit more?" Parrots the young scholar. "I don't understand?"

Erin looks up at Sir **Thorpe** with an expression as if to ask, "Should we tell him?" The weary knight grins, scratches his chin and raises one eyebrow, as if to say, "I don't know? What do you think?"

Before either can say another **word**, Alan begins to recount the events of the battle in a continuing rush of words and adrenaline.

"... and when you ran directly at the Glitter Boy Killer dodging those weapon blasts! I wouldn't have thought that was possible, not even by a Juicer or Crazy, or 'Borg, even! I must have been like, paralyzed with disbelief or something because the next thing I remember was you leaping from the back of the Glitter Boy Killer and a moment later getting blasted!

"**God**, I knew you were dead and we were next. I, **um** ... I wanted to run, I'm ashamed to say. But my legs were frozen. I ... I couldn't move. I just watched in horror. Then you came back to life! I mean you were obviously playing possum. I realize that now, but the CS officer didn't know that! I didn't know that! **And** ... wow."

The lad pauses to catch his breath and continues to blather on like a runaway freight train for another ten minutes.

"Sir Thorpe, no **offense** to your combat skill, but you must be the luckiest man alive to dodge those blasts. And to get shot in the chest and live! I still can't believe it."

"Well, I am a **Cyber-Knight**," laughs Sir Thorpe.

"Yes, and luck plays a role in every battle, although in this case, a smaller role than you might think," chuckles Erin Tarn.

Alan frowns. He has the feeling he's missing something, like being cut out of an inside joke shared by his two companions. The quizzical look on his face must have been priceless because the two glanced at each other, looked back at him and burst into laughter.

"What? I ... **don't** ..."

"Oh, you should tell the boy. He can be trusted," urges Erin in a motherly fashion.

"**Umm**, yes. I think Alan can be trusted, but you tell him," says Sir Thorpe, still chuckling. "You always tell stories better." "Alright," says Erin Tarn, taking the boy's hand and leading him to a tree stump. Erin sits, still holding his hand, but Alan is still too excited to park himself.

"While I feared for Sir Thorpe when he challenged the Coalition soldiers, I have seen him use this ploy before. He had to attract their attention. To get them all focused on him and to forget about us. Also by getting them angry he threw them off their game, so to speak."

"Yes, Erin, I understood all that, but the **fight** ..."

Erin squeezes his hand and smiles.

"I'm getting to that. All **Cyber-Knights** have a sort of bionic armor grafted to key parts of their body, like the chest, thighs, and forearms. It provides extra protection **that** ..."

"And that's how he survived the blast!" trumpets the young scholar with delight. "I should have realized that myself. I remember reading something about it. Something you wrote, I think?"

"Yes, well ..."

"And the rest was skill and luck!" the boy added.

"Well, not exactly."

"No?"

"No."

"I don't understand? **Ow!**" Alan yelled as a small green apple bounced off his noggin.

"Then be quiet for five minutes and maybe you'll learn something," admonished Sir Thorpe with a smile and another apple cocked in hand.

Alan sat down next to his teacher, keeping a wary eye on Sir Thorpe and rubbing the top of his head.

"Okay, I'll be quiet. Tell me."

Erin smiled and settled in for a story.

"I think people forget these noble men and women call themselves '**CYBER**' Knights — not **P-S-I-ber** knights. The very name suggests some connection to *technology*, not psionics. However, most people focus on the **Cyber-Knights'** power to create the Psi-Sword and their handful of other psychic abilities. Add in the fact that many ride a horses and call themselves '**knights**' — an archaic term that brings to mind the olden days of **pre-Apocalyptic** Earth and a time of low-tech and chivalry — and people lose sight of any technological aspects to the knights."

"I don't get it, everybody knows Cyber-Knights use guns and can operate computers and stuff." Alan cuts his comment short and darts a look at Sir Thorpe to make sure there are no apples hurling in his direction.

"My point is most people know very little about the Cyber-Knights, Alan. They know them as heroes who wander the land fighting monsters and injustice. They don't think of Cyber-Knights as technologically adept. Nor do most people realize the knights have a few *secrets* that give them an edge in combat, especially when fighting a technologically advanced opponent."



Erin glances at the knight and inquires, "Would you like to take it from here, Sir **Thorpe**?"

"Oh, no. You tell it much better than I. Please continue."

"Yes, please," implores Alan.

"Now, what I tell you here, must never see print or be spread by word of mouth. Do you understand?"

"Yes. Yes! I promise."

"Good."

"**Cyber-Knights** gain a sort of mystical ability as they master their martial arts and grow with experience. One such ability is a unique rapport with technology. An awareness of combat weapons and machinery. Some believe this ability is a psychic power similar to Tele-Mechanics, but it is very different. You see, the experienced **Cyber-Knight** can so tightly focus on the combat at hand, that he can reach out with his mind and senses to touch the machines around him. He can feel the gun turret charging before it fires. He knows when a weapon is pointed at him and when a targeting computer has him in its cross-hairs. Likewise, he *can feel* a suit of power armor, robot, or 'Borg sneaking up behind him or zooming down from above."

"No way!"

"Yes. And this knowledge combined with the **Cyber-Knights'** **zen-like** awareness and martial arts training gives them a slight advantage. Particularly when dealing with opponents who rely on technology. A fraction of a second to move, twist, dodge, parry or strike before his opponent, can make all the difference in the world, as you saw for yourself. Now, the Cyber-Knights can not actually communicate with the weapons and machines, nor do they exert influence over them in any way, but they are supremely aware of them and what they are doing.

"Humph," Sir Thorpe clears his throat and injects, "Well, we *can* influence certain machines just a little bit. We can cloud radar and sensors, knocking their data out of whack ever so slightly. This way a weapon turret or operator will fire an inch or so off. If the knight is aware of the weapon about to be fired at him, he knows which way to turn or twist and when and at what angle to dodge. Likewise, if an opponent can not rely on his sensors and computer targeting and is not used to eye-balling his targets, he is likely to be a terrible shot, giving a trained warrior a tremendous advantage. You'd be surprised what a difference even a tiny advantage can make in combat."

"Unbelievable." gushes Alan.

"Yes. So now you know the secret of the Cyber-Knights. Will you keep it?" Asks Erin Tarn sweetly.

"I — **yeow!**" yelps Alan as a second apple bounces off his noggin.

"Of course he will," grins Sir Thorpe. "I wouldn't have let you tell him if I thought otherwise."

The lad rubs his head and smiles like the cat who ate the canary. Of all the amazing things he has experienced this **day**, the most amazing and personally rewarding is that he has earned the trust of a Cyber-Knight. A great one at that. It is a day he will never forget. And a secret he will never reveal.

Cyber-Knight

O.C.C.

Who are the Cyber-Knights? Where do they come from? What special or magical powers do they possess? Who is their mysterious founder, Lord **Coake**? Why did he start the Cyber-Knights? Where are the Cyber-Knights headquartered? How many are there? Do they have a hidden agenda? Is their **brotherhood**, their *Fellowship*, collapsing? Can even the mysterious Lord Coake stop their fall?

All these questions and more will be answered in the pages of this book. Although a few, like that last one, will require time and the work of heroes to resolve completely.

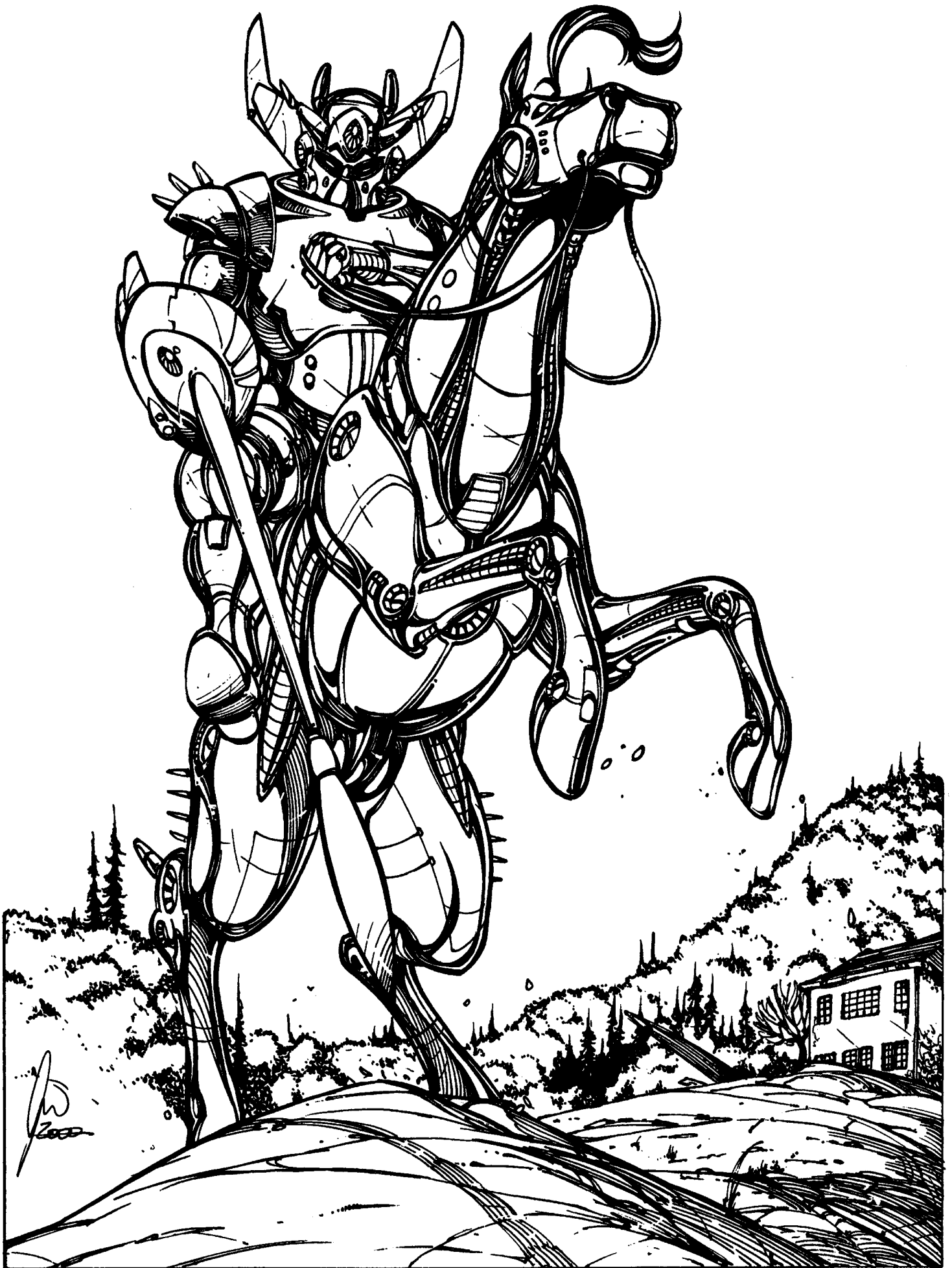
The genesis of justice

It is said that nobody knows exactly where they came from or why, but around 18 P.A. a band of self-styled heroes emerged, calling themselves **Cyber-Knights**. Horsemen who seemed to come from nowhere to tame the badlands of America. They first appeared in the plains of the American New West, but soon spread across the land. Although a Cyber-Knight can be found anywhere in North America, even today, they are most abundant in the western half of the continent, in what was once known as the Canadian Northwest Territories through the western States of the old American Empire, down into Mexico as far south as Mexico City. Beyond that they are far and few between, but they can occasionally be encountered in Central and South America, and a few have gone overseas.

Some believe the Cyber-Knights came into being to oppose the ever growing and corrupt Coalition States. Others say that they rose to fight the hordes of supernatural beings that terrorize the land. Those in the know proudly state that the real enemies of the Cyber-Knights are prejudice, ignorance and cruelty, as much as any vampire or hellish monster. Cyber-Knights dare to stand against maniacal sorcerers, powerful land barons, tyrannical overlords, slavers, bandits, and any being — be he man, dragon, demon or **godling** — who dares to enslave, torment or prevail upon the life and liberty of others. The truth is that Cyber-Knights are the champions of all who are oppressed, weak, and innocent, whether they are threatened by the Coalition, the Federation of Magic, invading vampires, monsters from a Rift or any source of evil or injustice. Their founder, the legendary Lord Coake, and all who followed him, truly strive to serve *the people* — all people. Or perhaps *sentient beings* may be more apropos, since the knights acknowledge, accept and defend the most inhuman looking intelligent beings including dragons, **Lyn-Srial**, Cactus People, Fennodi, Sasquatch, **Zembahk**, Yeno, and far too many others to list. Suffice it to say, the Cyber-Knights champion all that is good.

A hero from another place & time

As for the knights' origin, it has remained a mystery for generations. The Cyber-Knights don't speak about it, even though



most knights have a good to comprehensive understanding of their history and firsthand knowledge about their founder. The reason for the **Cyber-Knights'** silence has to do with image and secrecy. First of all, it is not important to their work and Cyber-Knights tend to be very direct and focused on the here and now. Secondly, they like the secrecy. Being rather enigmatic figures makes them larger than life to the common folk they protect, and mysterious and frightening to their enemies. This works to their advantage since good folk welcome them and villains fear them. It also helps to prevent one's enemies from using that information to strike at them. If an enemy doesn't know where a **Cyber-Knight** comes from, he can't track down and hurt the hero's loved ones or attack him at home. If an enemy doesn't know how many Cyber-Knights exist or where they herald from, the brigand can not anticipate who or how many might come to avenge their fallen comrade, or from where they'll arrive or what they might do. It keeps the enemy guessing and worried, and with any luck, makes them hesitate about seeking revenge or messing with any Cyber-Knight. This is also why the exact number of Cyber-Knights and the locations of their main camps and headquarters are also kept secret.

While it is true the Cyber-Knights were recognized as an organized *group* around 18 P.A., their beginnings stretch back into the dreaded Dark Ages. According to legend, a group of great and noble warriors, who called themselves The **Defilers**, came to the land. Their group was composed of many different manner of men and monsters, yet they showed by example of their courage, honor, and actions, that all people were equal and meant to be free. When the group left, years later, they had made a great impression on the wilderness people. One, in particular, a tall, dark-haired male, by the name of **Coake**, stayed (at the people's request) to train others in the way of the knights. It is said that Coake too, would leave, but not before creating the legacy that is the Cyber-Knights.

Like most legends, it contains both truth and fiction. Lord Coake was indeed a founding member of the group known as The Defilers. A diverse band of heroic men and monsters whose exploits have carried them to other places in the Megaverse. However, it was only Coake who appeared on Rifts Earth, not the others. He arrived sometime during the latter part of the Dark Ages, perhaps as far back as 70 or 80 years before the beginning of the Post Apocalyptic Calendar, he does not know for certain. A lifelong hero and leader, as Coake began to explore this strange, new world, he automatically helped those he encountered along the way. Quickly word spread that a new champion wandered the plains and very soon other adventurers, mages and warriors befriended and joined the stranger. Since Coake was blind to racial prejudice, and the New West (especially during the Dark Age) was filled with D-Bees and aliens more than humans, that group was diverse in racial heritage.

One of **Coake's** first crusades involved battling a demon lord who had claimed Wyoming and all who lived there as his own. The demon lord and his demonic legion ruled with an iron claw and tormented their enslaved, mortal subjects. Coake, being who he was, could not turn his back on the dire situation, and raised an army of his own and launched a war against the evil horde. Having had much experience in combating the demonic, Coake was recognized by the demon lord, and the monster mistook his diverse legion of heroes to be "The" Defilers. Thus, it was the

Wyoming demon who referred to Coake as "*Lord Coake The Mysterious*" and his inner circle of comrades as "*The Legendary Defilers*." When Lord Coake and his men defeated the demon lord three years later, Coake tried to dispel the notion that his old allies were part of the campaign, but word had already spread and it stuck, evolving into the legend that they were indeed **present**, stayed for the war, left after they had vanquished evil, and that Lord Coake chose to stay on Rifts Earth to continue to help the people and to form the Cyber-Knights. At any rate, after the demon lord of Wyoming was defeated, the army Lord Coake had gathered disbanded to return to their families. However, dozens remained at his side and looked to him for leadership. Moreover, as heroes triumphant against impossible odds, others from far and wide began to seek out Coake and petition his help. As Coake had done several times in the past, he decided to establish a legion of warriors, practitioners of magic and other diverse occupations into a formal group to protect the region and help others in a more organized way. Little did he know that he was setting the foundation for the Cyber-Knights.

Having come from a world of magic rather than technology, and a feudal society with kings, queens, dukes, barons and knights, these elements represented Coake's view of "civilized" society. Consequently, he established laws, rules, ethics and other aspects of "civilized" conduct that drew from what he knew. That is why Cyber-Knights call themselves "knights," act very much like the knights of old, wear armor, wield both swords and guns, wander the land like knights-errant and live by a **Code of Chivalry**.

Lord Coake had known many warriors, knights and kings, but also fought with heroes and people from every conceivable background and origin. He knew peasants often had a nobler heart than **kings**, and that **nonhumans** could be as human as any man. It was these extraordinary experiences that gave Lord Coake a unique outlook on life, and enabled him to adapt easily to the world that is Rifts Earth. It was also this outlook that would shape his new legion. To establish rules and philosophies (Coake was always a philosophical, thinking **man's** warrior) that encouraged both discipline and personal expression, and strong structure, regimentation, and sense of duty with tolerance and compassion for all. An outlook unique to the savage, post-apocalyptic world, and which endeared him to all he met. For Coake represented virtue and goodness in a place where such things seemed distant or lost. Furthermore, his strength and skill at combat combined with those willing to follow him enabled the warrior to bring stability. All of the things people dreamt of recapturing. It is little wonder that he grew to prominence so quickly.

When building his legion of heroes, Lord Coake stuck with what he knew and that which he felt most comfortable with. While familiar with "alien technology" like advanced energy weapons (he actually arrived to Rifts Earth with a particle beam rifle along with a plethora of magic items), he felt more comfortable with traditional melee weapons and magic. He believed in building the mind and spirit. He demanded strict adherence to what he called "chivalry, honor and the Code of Heroes." At the request of his troops, he wrote them down in an easy to remember outline which later became known as the **Cyber-Knights' Code of Chivalry**.

Over time, his legion grew and changed. It became clear there were those of nobility and honor who possessed great heart and good souls but who would never be warriors, soldiers or knights in the true sense of the word. Then there were those who mastered the arts of war and martial combat, but who simply lacked the dedication to reach the pinnacle of all they could be. Good men and women, capable warriors but not the ultimate, not the best. Lastly, there were those with the spirits of true heroes, humans and D-Bees, men and women, with the hearts of lions and unshakable resolve. Warriors supreme who embodied the Code of Chivalry and the arts of war, and whom Lord **Coake** dubbed his "knights." In another generation or two these chivalrous knights would become **Cyber-Knights**.

A **Chiang-Ku** Dragon named Azure Sky joined Lord Coake and stayed with the knights for 40 years before continuing on his journey. Azure Sky helped develop advanced martial arts training that enabled the knights in training to draw upon their inner spirit (chi and P.P.E.). It was this combination of building upon and using both mind and body that enabled the Cyber-Knights to create the **Psi-Sword**, and to become so attuned to combat and the weapons of war that experienced Cyber-Knights can actually "become one" with the overall action and sense weapons and attacks directed at them. This unique system of combat designed together by Lord Coake and Azure Sky, instills such focus, discipline and mastery of the martial arts, that it goes beyond mere physical training and takes on aspects of ancient Oriental mysticism. Mind and body working in concert to vanquish one's enemy. When a **Techno-Wizard** introduced the process of fusing bits of Mega-Damage armor to the human body (made possible only through years of **Cyber-Knight** training), the final piece fell into place and the Cyber-Knights were born.

Today, Cyber-Knights are the great heroes of the North American wastelands and wilderness. The knights answer to no authority other than the callings of their own hearts and the Code of Chivalry. Even Lord Coake is something of a figurehead and mentor who serves as the **Cyber-Knights'** progenitor, mentor and guiding light. Lord Coake *leads*, not *rules*. He is not a king, but the first of a long, illustrious line of heroes. It is the code of the knighthood that keeps its champions on the true path of honor, nobility, and goodness. It is this autonomy of action, their legendary hero status, and phenomenal combat skills, that make them a threat to despot kings, cruel overlords and would-be tyrants. Cyber-Knights tend to be obsessed with the intangible virtues of life such as freedom, fair play, justice, and honor as well as the protection of all innocent life forms, both human and **nonhuman**. They do not go looking to pick fights, but can not ignore injustice, cruelty or oppression. When they can, the knights try to reach a peaceful resolve, but in the endless struggle for survival on Rifts Earth, there are all too many who only seem to understand justice at the end of a sword blade or the barrel of gun. It is these bullies, tyrants and villains whom the Cyber-Knights are best suited to address.

Cyber-Knights rarely travel together or in groups larger than a pair, although they may be accompanied by an entourage of fellow warriors, adventurers, explorers, helpers or companions (but even then rarely more than 10). Thus, spotting a group of five or more true Cyber-Knights can only mean that some horrible danger is near. As a rule, Cyber-Knights disperse, each

roaming the land on horse-back or vehicle, seeking and righting injustice wherever it is found. They oppose injustice and evil in all its forms, from demon or dragon to the Coalition or a fellow knight gone bad. Like self-appointed sheriffs in a wild land, they deal out justice as judge, **jury**, and executioner. Although their methods are extreme, these are extreme and unusual times.

Rumor has it that there exists at least one monastery or camp of some sort that serves as Lord **Coake's** home and base of operation. A training ground that teaches the way of the knights overseen by Lord Coake, himself, its spiritual teacher. Most people believe it is located someplace in *Wyoming, Montana* or *Nebraska*, but there are an increasing number of stories that suggest that it, or a second such citadel is located in Calgary or Saskatchewan and perhaps a third or even fourth in Mexico! If permanent camps exist, it is certain they keep a low profile and are probably located in some remote part of America.

The Others

Cyber-Knights may be the elite, but Lord Coake and his noble knights do not dismiss or look down on others because they are not knights. No, Cyber-Knights are servants of the people and see themselves as no better than anybody else. For example, the farmer may not be a warrior, it is true, but his area of expertise is simply *different*. Rather than specialize in fighting, he specializes in planting, harvesting and feeding the people, a hard and noble profession if there ever was one. Thus, all people are regarded as the **Cyber-Knights'** "equals," although few are their peers in combat.

Sidekicks, Helpers & Companions

Cyber-Knights are particularly numerous in the American west, where they originate, but their feats of selflessness, compassion and heroics are known from Canadian Tundra to the rain forests of South America. Among their fellowship are Whites, Blacks, Asians, Native Americans, **Hispanics** (specifically from vampire filled Mexico), and D-Bees; people of every race, color, creed and origin ride with them, either as Cyber-Knights themselves or those who share their views or wish to be like them without actually becoming knights.

There are many people who trust and respect the Cyber-Knights but either can't become knights themselves, or simply don't want to become Cyber-Knights. Some of these join the knights on their adventures or support them in other ways. This means there is actually a vast network of friends, allies, warriors, supporters and fans covering the western half of the United States and Canada, and the northern half of Mexico. In times of need, a lone Cyber-Knight should be able to raise a small army of hundreds to a few thousand strong (if warranted). Lord Coake or a federation of gathered Cyber-Knights, could raise a force ten times that size. Of course, such a recourse is never taken lightly and done only when there is a threat of an incredible magnitude (such as the growing problem the demons of Calgary or the Xiticix may one day call for). In fact, the hundreds of Cyber-Knights who went to serve **Tolkeen** inspired thousands of mercenaries, fighters and people from all walks of life to do likewise. The point is, there are always people of varying O.C.C.s who are glad to join a Cyber-Knight to battle evil or right a wrong.

Cyber-Knight Allies

The following are notable groups and races who regard the **Cyber-Knights**, in general, as friends and allies. Most of the nonhuman races listed can not, for one reason or another, become Cyber-Knights, themselves, but all have good intentions, and respect and uphold the Code of Chivalry and all the good things the Cyber-Knights embody. Many of those who accompany the Cyber-Knights on their adventures are fellow warriors, adventurers and mages who have at least some combat skills, if not warriors themselves. However, the Cyber-Knights have a high regard for scholars, philosophers, healers, practitioners of magic and those who follow pursuits other than combat. They welcome their company, assistance and different points of view. Some, like the *Fennodi* and *Cactus People*, don't have a warrior's bone in their body, but are welcomed for their intelligence, insight, compassion, and company nonetheless.

Those with an asterisk (*) are the **Cyber-Knights'** stoutest supporters. Members of their race (usually warriors and adventurers) frequently aid and accompany the knights in peace-time as well as on their quests, crusades and adventures.

* Native Americans; most tribes, both Traditionalists and Renegades.

Psi-Stalkers of the West.

Aardan Tek of the West

Cactus People (American Southwest & Mexico).

* **D'norr Devil Men** (American Midwest).

Dragon Cats (see **Psyscape™**)

* **Fennodi** (American Southwest & Mexico; see New **West™**).

Grackle Tooth of the West.

* **Lyn-Srial "Sky-Knights"** of Arizona (see New **West™**).

Rogue Dog Boys.

* **Sasquatch** (see **Rifts®** Canada)

* **Tirrvol Sword Fist**.

True **Atlanteans** (group & sub-race of humans).

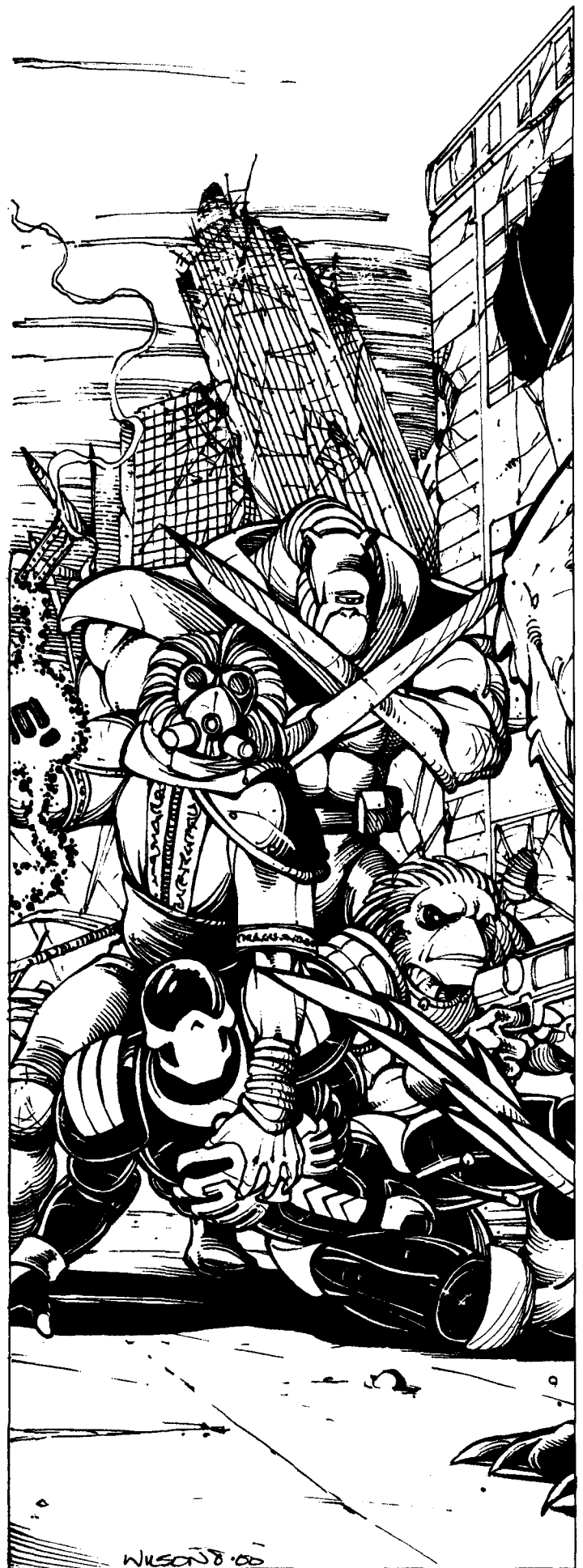
* **Yhabbayar Bubble Makers** (see **Psyscape™**)

Note: Justice Rangers, Tundra Rangers (both mixed groups of humans and D-Bees) as well as Lawmen, **Gunfighters**, Cowboys, and Wilderness Scouts see Cyber-Knights in a positive light and sometimes join forces to combat evil, or just ride along for a while to share some company before breaking off and going their own way. Most of these folks have their own responsibilities and agendas, but can usually find common ground easily and appreciate each others' devotion to truth and justice.

Juicers, Crazies, **Greot** Hunters, **Pogtal** Dragon Slayers and other powerful warriors, D-Bees and monsters often regard Cyber-Knights as rivals rather than allies, and may temporarily join forces but are more likely to challenge the knights to tourneys and duels, or attack outright to prove who is the better warrior.

Simvan respect the Cyber-Knights and don't usually take hostile action against them, but they don't welcome or assist them either. Monster Riders tend to view all **non-Simvan** as potential hostile forces.

There are other people and organizations not listed, of course, but as a general rule of thumb, people of good alignment know and respect Cyber-Knights and will probably welcome **and/or** help them when they can. Those of Anarchist or evil alignment probably respect and fear these lawmen. Whether they do anything to help or hurt depends on the situation and the individuals involved.



The Secrets of the Cyber-Knights

Breakdown of Cyber-Knights by Race

- 28% Whites (human)
- 18% Mexicans (human)
- 13% Native Americans (human; with the overwhelming majority who become knights coming from Renegades).
- 10% Blacks (human)
- 4% Other (human)
- 5% D'norr Devilmen (D-Bee; see *Sorcerers' Revenge™*)
- 1% Grackle Tooth (D-Bee; see *Rifts® Canada*)
- 1% N'mbyr Gorilla Men (D-Bee; see *Coalition War Campaign™*)
- 3% Noli Bushmen (D-Bee; see *Rifts® Canada*)
- 3% Psi-Stalkers (mutant human; see *Rifts®*)
- 9% Quick-Flex Aliens (D-Bee; see *Coalition War Campaign™*)
- 5% Other (D-Bees)

Note: This breakdown is largely shaped by geography, reflecting people who live in western America and Canada and northern Mexico. It factors in only true Cyber-Knights, and does not include men at arms or adventurers who may accompany them.

Selecting a name

The majority of Cyber-Knights (51%), particularly Courtiers, use their surname. Thus, Charles Maitland becomes "Sir Maitland."

Knights who are less formal or who have a last name that is difficult to pronounce, may use their first name (25%), i.e. Charles Maitland becomes "Sir Charles," or "Sir Charles of Calgary" to differentiate him from the six others named Sir Charles.

A Cyber-Knight may also choose a name for himself (16%) or have one ascribed to him (8%). The latter is usually the result of something the Cyber-Knight has done or is notorious for. Both a chosen or ascribed name often reflects the knight's character or a particular accomplishment. The Courtier, *Sir Salamander* is a great example of this. Likewise names such as those that follow are examples of names that result from the knight's deeds or character: "Sir Lionheart" or "Sir Charles the Brave" (because he is courageous), "Sir Whiteheart" (because he's known for being honest and pure), Sir "Goldenbraids" (because he has long blonde hair typically worn in tight braids), "Sir Demonclaw" (because he fights like a demon), "Sir Windrider" (because he is an amazing horseman or hovercycle pilot), "Sir Maitland the Sword of Truth" (because he is outspoken and honest), "Sir Firebrand" or "Storm" (because he has a hot temper or fiery personality), "Sir Charles the Avenger" or "Sir Maitland the Destroyer" (because he completely decimated or led the charge to decimate a terrible foe, group or monster), and so on.

Likewise, such a name may be derived from what the Cyber-Knight wears or the weapon he uses: "Sir Silverfist" (because he wears silver gauntlets), or "Sir Blackmace," or "Sir Maitland the Axeman" or "Sir Crimsonsword" (either because the blade is red or encrusted in rubies, or because it is often covered in blood), and so on.

Sometimes the name is not dramatic or heroic at all, and can even be rather silly, snide or embarrassing. Such names are likely to have grown out of nicknames from the knight's youth that could not be overcome: "Sir Charles the Round" (because he's fat), "Sir Tank" (because he's stout but tough and/or unstoppable), "Sir Whitelake" (because he was born on a lake or had a renowned battle at a place called Whitelake), "Sir Lark" (because he has a wonderful singing voice), "Sir Crow" (either because of his unkempt, fly-away black hair or scattered or shrill personality), "Sir Froggy" or "Squeaky" (because of his voice), "Sir Trek" or "Hadj" or "Wade" (because he's always on the move), "Sir Oak" or "Pine" (because he's tall or strong), "Sir Acorn" (because he's silly or because of some prank as a squire involving acorns), "Sir Slash" or "Scarface," "Sir Boast," "Sir Giggles," "Sir Weezy" "Sir Mouse," "Sir Shorty," "Sir Gobble," "Sir Ramble" or "Bramble" "Sir Rose" or "Violet" or even "Dandelion," and so on.

Some Cyber-Knights become so notorious or famous that their chosen or ascribed name is known by all. When this happens, the "Sir" part is often dropped to become simply one or two word names like "Whiteheart" or "Blackmace" or "The Salamander" or "The Shining One" (or simply Salamander or Shining One). This is comparatively uncommon, but it does happen.

The Code of Chivalry

See the section describing the *Courtier Cyber-Knight* to find the Code of Chivalry as written by Lord Coake, followed by an in-depth look at how many Cyber-Knights interpret it in their lives.

Psionic Powers

Inner Strength & Spirit

The Cyber-Knight's training is such, that ALL can call upon their Inner Strength and Spirit (ancient, pre-Rifts Oriental masters might have called this "chi") to perform superhuman feats as follows.

The ability to perform the following psionic abilities:

- Create Psi-Sword (no I.S.P. cost);
- Create Psi-Shield (half the normal I.S.P. cost);
- Meditation (to relax, restore I.S.P. and heal more quickly).

Inner Strength: P.P.E.: 6D6. The permanent P.P.E. base for Cyber-Knights is higher than the typical human or D-Bee and is part of what gives them their special abilities. This number is in addition to what a D-Bee might normally get.

Inner Spirit: I.S.P.: M.E. attribute number +1D4 I.S.P. per level of experience. Considered a Minor Psychic and needs a 12 or higher to save vs psionic attacks. This is applicable only to characters who are *not* psychic to begin with.

Psychic Cyber-Knights

Somewhere around 70-80% of all Cyber-Knights possess limited psychic powers. These candidates are selected, in part, for their innate psychic abilities and (usually) high Mental Endurance (M.E.).

Players can either decide that their **Cyber-Knight** character is psychic and make rolls or selections accordingly, or roll percentile dice for random determination. A roll of 01-80 means the character is a Major Psychic with additional psionic abilities. A roll of **81-00** means no natural psionics, but years of physical training and spiritual awakening will give the character the psionic powers noted above, as well as all other Cyber-Knight skills and abilities.

Next, if psychic, roll **6D6+10** to determine the character's amount of **I.S.P.** Add 1D6 **I.S.P.** per level of experience. Note: These Cyber-Knights are considered to be Major Psychics (mainly because of the Psi-Sword ability). **Saving Throw** versus psionic attack is 12 or higher.

Lastly, pick three permanent powers from the following list. The Cyber-Knight automatically gets *Meditation*, *Psi-Sword* and *Psi-Shield*. Select one additional power from the list at levels 9 and 14. A full description of these psionic abilities can be found in the **Rifts® RPG**.

Alter Aura	Sense Evil
Empathy	Sense Magic
Mind Block	Sixth Sense
Object Read	Speed Reading
Resist Fatigue	Summon Inner Strength
See the Invisible	

Additional Psionic Abilities for Natural Psychic: Minor Psychic: Two from Sensitive or Physical only. Major Psychic: Same as on page 12 of the **Rifts® RPG**. Master Psychic: Select a total of **ten** abilities from any of the three Categories (Healing, Sensitive, **and/or** Physical) at level one, one Super-Psionic power, and does an additional +1D6 M.D. with Psi-Sword at 2nd level. Nothing else.

Note: The Cyber-Knight is one of the few O.C.C.s, other than the Mind Melter, who can create a Psi-Sword at an early age, and the **ONLY** character who is not a Master Psychic to be able to do so! See the Psi-Sword "secret" for a full description.

Summon Psi-Sword

A Psi-Sword is a Mega-Damage energy weapon that the Cyber-Knight can mentally *will* into existence! Presumably the knight creates it using both his inner strength and inner spirit (an unusual combination of P.P.E. and **I.S.P.**). The creation of this weapon becomes so second nature to the Cyber-Knight that it effectively requires the expenditure of no **I.S.P.** Cyber-Knights insist the energy weapon is a manifestation of the human will and fighting spirit that becomes an extension of its maker. The creation of the Psi-Sword is a very personal thing and requires years of training, study, and conviction.

It is important to note that the **Cyber-Knight's** Psi-Sword is quite different from the Mind Melter's Super Psi-Sword. First, the Cyber-Knight can create the weapon in an instant; in many respects it is a living part of the hero. Second, there is no expenditure of **I.S.P.** in the conventional game sense, the **Cyber-Knight's** will and conviction is the driving power behind

the blade. Third, there is no limit as to how long the sword remains in effect nor any limit as to how many times a day the weapon can be created. If there is any downside, it is that the **Cyber-Knight's** Psi-Sword is not quite as powerful as the Mind Melter's, but it is still a weapon to be feared.

Psi-Sword Mega-Damage: 1D6 M.D. at first level, plus an additional 1D6 M.D. is gained at levels 3, 6, 9, 12 and 15.



Shape: At first level, the sword appears as a shimmering shaft of light and energy that resembles a glowing sword. By second or third level however, the sword's appearance can be shaped by its maker and generally reflects its creator. A Cyber-Knight who is impressed by strength and power will create a huge claymore or **flamberge-like** weapon. A character who prides himself on speed and agility is likely to create a rapier or saber type blade, while a hero who enjoys cunning and subterfuge may create a short sword. Each is equally powerful regardless of its form and size. Once a shape has been decided, that is how the sword will always appear. When a knight in training can create a Psi-Sword, he or she is ready to become a full knight-errant.

With experience and age, the Cyber-Knight learns that he can create a **Psi-weapon** in shapes other than a simple shaft of light. The Cyber-Knight can create virtually any single piece Psi-weapon (no projectile weapons or weapons with moving parts, such as ball and chain, bow and arrow, gun, etc.; and Psi-weapons can not be thrown). Thus, a Psi-weapon may depart from the traditional sword shape to appear in the form of a large or small **axe**, tomahawk, **knife**, pick-axe, hammer, club, pole, mace, morning star, etc., as well as any type of sword imaginable, from rapier to broad sword to scimitar, and so on.

Cyber-Knights tend to favor swords and similar "blade" configurations because they are the most versatile in close combat and are part of the tradition and image of knights. Fewer than

13% use a **Psi-weapon** other than some type of sword. (Note: All Psi-weapons are *energy* based, summoned and shaped by each particular **Cyber-Knight**. As energy weapons, even those with a "blunt" weapon shape like maces, morning stars, clubs and poles inflict the same damage as the traditional Psi-Sword). Likewise, the Cyber-Knight is so skilled and precise that he can make the glowing energy weapon look almost as tightly cast and shaped as if he were wielding a real one made of cold steel.

The ability to manipulate the shape of a **Psi-Sword/weapon** also means the experienced Cyber-Knight can *change* the appearance, size and shape of his weapon at will (counts as two melee actions; taking 4-6 seconds to reshape). Thus, the character can turn a Psi-Axe into a **Psi-Short** Sword or Long-Sword, or Sickle or other weapon, and back again as he desires or needs. This may be done to **frighten** inexperienced opponents or to adjust to a combat situation. Since **Cyber-Knights** are firm upholders of fair play, one might for example, change his big Psi-Axe or large sword into a short sword, dagger or hand axe to more fairly match his opponent. This is especially true when involved in one-on-one duels and contests.

The color of energy used to make the Psi-Sword is typically a light, electric blue or blue-white, similar to the natural color of magic energy. However, Cyber-Knights can make their Psi-Swords range in color and intensity from shades of blue-white to yellows, oranges, and the more rare and exotic tints of shimmering purple, violet, **red**, dark blue and green. Metallic colors, black, and earth tones are **NOT** possible as the weapon is always made of crackling energy and light.

The simpler the shape and more basic the color, the quicker and easier it is to make. A single shaft of blue-white energy, like the traditional Psi-Sword, can be created in a heartbeat with little or no thought or concentration. Years of training makes it so that its creation doesn't even count as a melee action! Psi-weapons shaped as something other than a sword (axe, mace, pick, etc.) use up *one melee action* to create. Adding an unusual color (dark blue, red, violet, green, etc.) uses up another melee action (counts as two melee actions to create). However, this loss of melee actions only counts for the first round in which the weapon is generated. Maintaining its creation into subsequent melee rounds is automatic and effortless for the Cyber-Knight.

Unique colors typically reflect the **Cyber-Knight's** personal tastes, desire to be theatrical or frightening, and sometimes reflect the character's alignment. The intensity of color or brightness of the weapon may vary with the mood of the knight, reflecting his emotion.

A brilliant, pure white Psi-Sword (all colors mashed together) is super-rare, but possible. It is very difficult to create and uses up a whopping five melee actions, virtually an entire melee round (**15 seconds**)! Furthermore, it is the only color that continues to burn up one melee action every round to maintain it and inflicts the additional penalty of **-10%** on the performance of all skills while the sword is up. It is not surprising then that few Cyber-Knights opt for a pure white Psi-weapon.

Note: A true knight will *never* use a Psi-Sword against a foe who is unarmed or not equipped with an equivalent weapon, or who is not a supernatural creature or dragon.

Creating two (2) Psi-Weapons: Only one energy blade can be created until third level, at which point the Cyber-Knight can create a second Psi-Sword — one for each hand. The second

Psi-Sword can be identical to the first, smaller, larger or completely different (axe, sickle, knife, etc.). Part of the knight's combat training includes paired weapons, so he is immediately adept at using them, or a **Psi-Shield**.



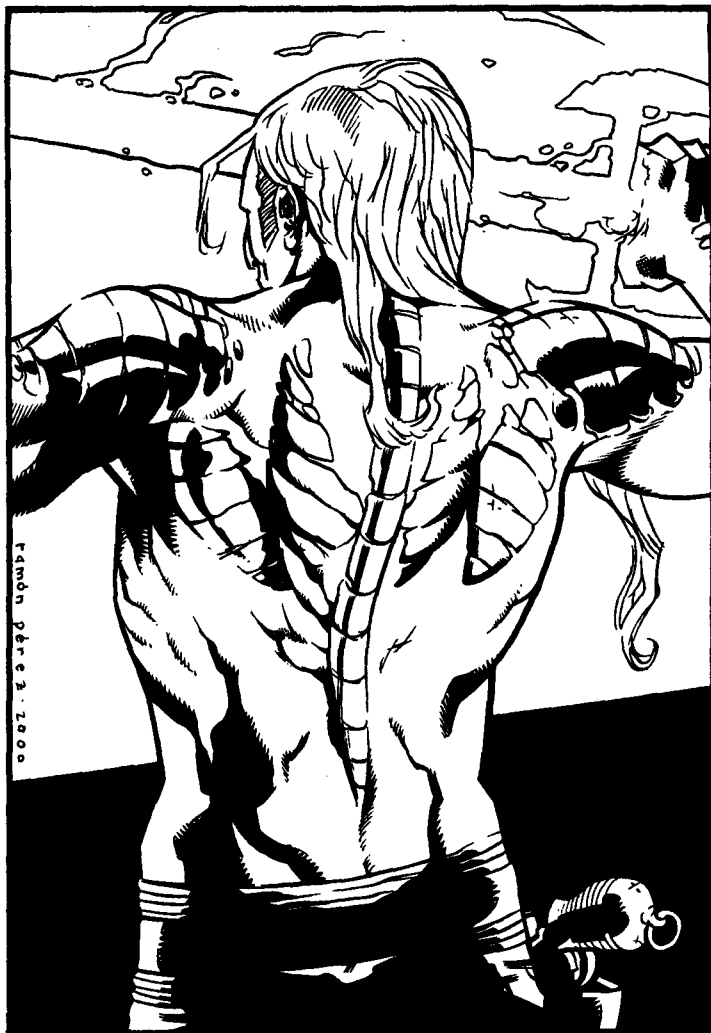
Cyber-Armor

Level One: Cyber-Knight Armor. When a Cyber-Knight has completed his years of martial arts training, body hardening exercises, and spiritual awakening (marked and symbolized by the ability to create a Psi-Sword), he becomes a first level Cyber-Knight. The warrior is also given special "Cyber-Armor" that is fused to his body.

Armor Rating: 16. Any attacker's roll to strike that falls at 16 or less, hits the **Cyber-Armor**. However, any roll of 17 or higher bypasses the armor and hits the knight's body, doing full damage. This is why all **Cyber-Knights** wear exterior suits of armor. **Cyber-Armor** is intended only to provide additional protection and give the knight an extra edge in combat.

M.D.C. by Location:

- Shoulders (2) — 8 each
- Back Shoulder Blades (2) — 15 each
- Forearms (2) — 10 each
- Thigh/Upper Leg (2) - 15 each**
- Chest Plate (main body) — 50 M.D.C.



Level Four: Living Armor: Unknown even to most friends and allies of the knights, at 4th level, the armor becomes a *living part* of the **Cyber-Knight** and can repair itself, regenerating 1D6 M.D.C. per hour until back to full M.D.C. and appearance. Furthermore, starting at fourth level the Cyber-Armor *grows* strong: +1D6 M.D. to the chest per level of experience starting at level four, and +1 M.D. to all other areas of Cyber-Armor, per level, starting at level four.

Level Eight: Increase A.R. to 17.

Note: When the Cyber-Knight dies the armor quickly degenerates and cannot be reused, not even as scrap metal nor grafted on to anyone else. Within 1D4 months it turns into rusted, crumbling junk.

Training

Being a Cyber-Knight is a way of life, based on strength of spirit, focus, ideology and code of ethics as much as physical prowess and keen fighting skills. One becomes a Cyber-Knight only if he or she is accepted as an apprentice and is instructed in the ways of knighthood by an accomplished master (a Cyber-Knight of no less than 6th level experience). After years of tutelage and training, the dedicated apprentice, or "squire," achieves the status of Cyber-Knight shortly after he is able to call forth his Psi-Sword. By then, the knight has already learned the precepts of the Code of Chivalry, awakened his inner strength and spirit and has probably accompanied his master on at least a few adventures. These **Cyber-Knights** in turn, teach others and the tradition continues.

The training of a Cyber-Knight is fastidious and strenuous. It builds both the mind and body, becoming a way of life, not just a simple philosophy. In that respect, it is similar to the ancient martial arts of **pre-Rifts** Earth. Although not a hard and fast requirement, most Cyber-Knights possess some degree of psychic abilities. Mental disciplines include learning to use whatever psionic powers they may have, meditation, literacy, the pursuit of truth and knowledge, mastery over one's emotions and living by the Code. The hero is taught to understand and control himself, before he can try to understand others. To recognize and acknowledge one's emotions, to feel them without losing control and being overcome by them. To maintain one's composure and continue to think coolly and logically even in the heat of combat. Take, for example, this Cyber-Knight proverb:

"It is easy to lose **one's** self to fear and hate, and therefore destroy that which you fear or loathe. But striking out at darkness does not eliminate it. Destruction out of anger, without reason or purpose, is simply destruction. One must learn to control fear and anger and love, for they can blind you to the truth. One must rechannel emotion, and learn to see in the dark. Become a builder, not a destroyer. Yet remember, one must tear down that which has become infested with rot in order to build anew."

Other areas of training include an understanding and appreciation for all life forms, an openness and tolerance to all ideas and philosophies, an appreciation of art and beauty, and an openness to magic and the unknown. Cyber-Knights are also taught to use their imaginations and to recognize magic as a tool. As a tool magic is neither inherently good or evil, just another resource that can be tapped and used for good or evil by men. This **open-mindedness** makes them one of the few non-magic O.C.C.s which can intuitively understand and use magic items and **Techno-Wizard** devices.

Physical training involves all manner of combat exercises, body **hardening/body** building, hand-eye coordination, martial arts, practice with numerous weapons, paired weapons, gymnastics, and horsemanship. The purpose is to fuse mind and body into one. To create a "thinking and controlled" fighting machine with lightning reflexes and dead-eye responses.

Special O.C.C. Bonuses

- +1D4 to M.A., M.E., P.S., P.E., and Spd attributes. This is in addition to bonuses gained from skills.
- +1D4x10 S.D.C., in addition to bonuses from skills.
- Combat Bonuses: +1 attack per melee, +3 to initiative, +2 to pull punch, and +2 to disarm. +1 to save vs Horror Factor at levels 2, 5, 8, 12 and 15. These are in addition to other attribute or skill bonuses.

Also see Psionic Powers, Cyber-Armor, and Zen Combat.

Also see, M.D.C. Armor, pg. 110



Cyber-Knight Zen Combat

Cyber-Knights possess a little known advantage against weapons of technology. An advantage that makes them aware of the weapons being used against them, even if they can't actually see them, and puts them a step or two ahead of their opponents. See the Erin Tarn Experience with Sir **Thorpe** for a clear example of this combat sense (and related abilities to block and cloud sensors) in action.

Level One: The Basics. All the basics have been learned and the character has all the O.C.C. and skill bonuses afforded by his training. With time and experience, however, the Cyber-Knight fine tunes his skills and abilities to such a point that he gains additional bonuses and superhuman awareness as detailed as follows.

Level Two: Paired Weapons: The Cyber-Knight can use a shield in concert with a weapon held in the other hand or a pair of weapons with equal skill. May use a man-made shield or **Psi-Shield**. Gets the W.P. Shield skill which provides a bonus of +1 to parry at levels 1, 3, 6, 9, 12, and 15. +1 to strike with a shield at level 4, 8, and 12.

Level Three: Combat Acrobatics: Ability to fight and strike even when moving and off balance. No penalty to strike when **moving!**

Level Four: Basic Combat Awareness. Initially, the Cyber-Knight can only focus and be aware of one opponent and all the weapons and weapon systems of that *one*, primary opponent.

The knight is aware of and able to react to all mechanical devices and weapons used by that particular opponent, including guns, **Vibro-Blades**, Neural Mace, environmental body armor, power armor, **cybernetics/bionic** weapons and systems, computers, optic systems, sensors, robots, vehicles and other devices. Basically any machine with moving parts or that uses electricity or has a computer chip (which is virtually all CS and other advanced people's entire **armory!**)

This awareness lets the Cyber-Knight know the very instant a targeting computer or radar locks on, the moment he falls into the cross-hairs of a gun, when a trigger is about to be squeezed, when an energy cell charges to fire, or a cybernetic muscle tenses or a turret begins to turn. More than that though, the Cyber-Knight can actually feel the weapons and war machines as they come on-line or are drawn to be used against him. It's as if he can see them as clearly as the weapon being pointed in his face.

Bonuses & Abilities Against Weapons and Technology:

- Negates any bonuses provided by the **weapon/machine**.
- The Cyber-Knight knows what his opponent is doing the same instant his opponent does it, enabling the knight to react a split second faster:
 - +3 on initiative against attacks from modern guns and machines (bionics, robots, etc.), and +6 against artificial intelligences and computers like Skelebots and automated defense systems.
 - Cyber-Knight is +3 to strike and parry.
- Meanwhile, the **Cyber-Knight's** gun toting or tech-laden opponent is -3 to dodge the Cyber-Knight's attacks and loses 2 melee attacks/actions due to time spent compensating for the Cyber-Knight's amazing agility, combat skills and awareness.

Level Five: +4 to Automatic Dodge against tech. The Cyber-Knight can twist, turn, duck, somersault, and otherwise *dodge* attacks from "guns" and advanced weapon systems (i.e. mechanical weapons) without using up a melee action (otherwise dodge as normal). The knight is so fast, mobile and "aware" that he or she can attempt a dodge against most weapon fire. This does not apply to spells or psionics unless they are generated and cast through or with a mechanical device. The automatic dodge applies to all attacks from a single, primary opponent at level five, two at level 9 and three at level 13.

Level Six: Cloud Sensors. The Cyber-Knight can cause sensors and weapon systems to either blink on and off, provide its user with mixed readings or faltering signals, or to not "see" the knight for a moment. (The Cyber-Knight pops in and out. Now you see him, now you don't!) This makes the use of sensors unreliable, impossible to pinpoint a Cyber-Knight or to identify the exact number of Cyber-Knight targets, through artificial means. High-tech soldiers not used to "eye-balling" their opponents are put at a great disadvantage as the penalties and modifiers that follow indicate.

Inexperienced sensor operators (1-3rd level) *can not read* or use the sensors at all and they *lose two melee actions* every time they try to figure out what they are or aren't seeing.

Even experienced operators are uncertain, hesitate and lose one melee action while they try to evaluate and respond to the data with a skill penalty of **-40%**!

The types of sensors are limited to those used in robots, power armor, vehicles and by or with weapon systems, including radar, sonar, motion detectors, heat sensor, laser targeting, optical enhancements and so on.

Level Seven: Nothing new.

Level Eight: Advanced Combat Awareness. Combat awareness (all opponents). Basically the same as level four, above, but the **Cyber-Knight's** awareness extends to *all combatants* who direct an attack at the knight. However, because the area of awareness is expanded to include several opponents, the overall bonuses are reduced.

Bonuses & Abilities against Weapons and Technology:

- Negates any bonuses provided by the **weapon/machine**.
- The Cyber-Knight knows what his opponent is doing the same instant his opponent does it, enabling the knight to react a split second faster:
 - +2 on initiative against attacks from modern guns and machines (bionics, robots, etc.) and +4 against artificial intelligences and computers like Skelebots and automated defense systems.
- Cyber-Knight is +2 to strike and parry, and +1 to dodge.
- Meanwhile, the **Cyber-Knight's** gun toting or tech-laden opponent is -2 to strike the knight, -2 to dodge the **Cyber-Knight's** attacks, and loses 1 melee **attack/action** due to time spent compensating for the **Cyber-Knight's** amazing agility, combat skills and awareness.

Level Nine: Cloud targeting computers and other weapon systems. Makes them offjust enough to negate any built-in bonuses and to make the shooter -2 to strike with any modern or advanced **weaponry**. **Note:** Penalties apply to power armor, robots, combat vehicles, cyborg systems, all energy weapons, and

any weapon utilizing sensors or optic systems, as well as **Techno-Wizard** "guns" and other TW machines. The penalty does not apply to hand-held melee weapons such as **Vibro-Blades**, Neural Mace, and modem bow and arrows, nor Rune weapons, or other M.D.C. weapons of a similar nature (swords, axes, pole arms, clubs, staves, etc.). Techno-Wizard swords and melee weapons (with possible magic bonuses) also suffer no penalties.

Dream Vision

All Cyber-Knights receive a **Dream Vision** at some point in their lives. This vision usually comes as a vivid dream that is remembered more easily than most.

The dream vision is said to provide a Cyber-Knight with insight to his destiny and help him find peace, purpose and direction in his life. Although these visions can be prophetic, they are NOT clairvoyant or a psionic power. The Cyber-Knight has no control over them whatsoever. The knight can not make a Vision Dream come when he wants it, nor make it somehow reveal information about some specific event, person, battle or doubt. A Dream Vision comes when it comes and tells what it tells whether the knight wants it or not. In fact, most Cyber-Knights report that they receive their Vision Dream when they are young, usually a few months to a few years after they have finished their training and become full-fledged Cyber-Knights. Most also report that their Dream Vision came out of the blue, often during quiet, peaceful tunes when one least expects it. The vision is rarely violent or nightmarish and is usually welcomed because it reaffirms the **Cyber-Knight's** commitment to the Code of Chivalry and points out some personal flaw or weakness that needs correcting (too cocky/overconfident, too cautious, too uncertain, traveling down a dangerous path, will soon face a choice or challenge that will shape his life, etc.). The Dream Vision also usually points to some purpose or mission to which the young hero can dedicate his life.

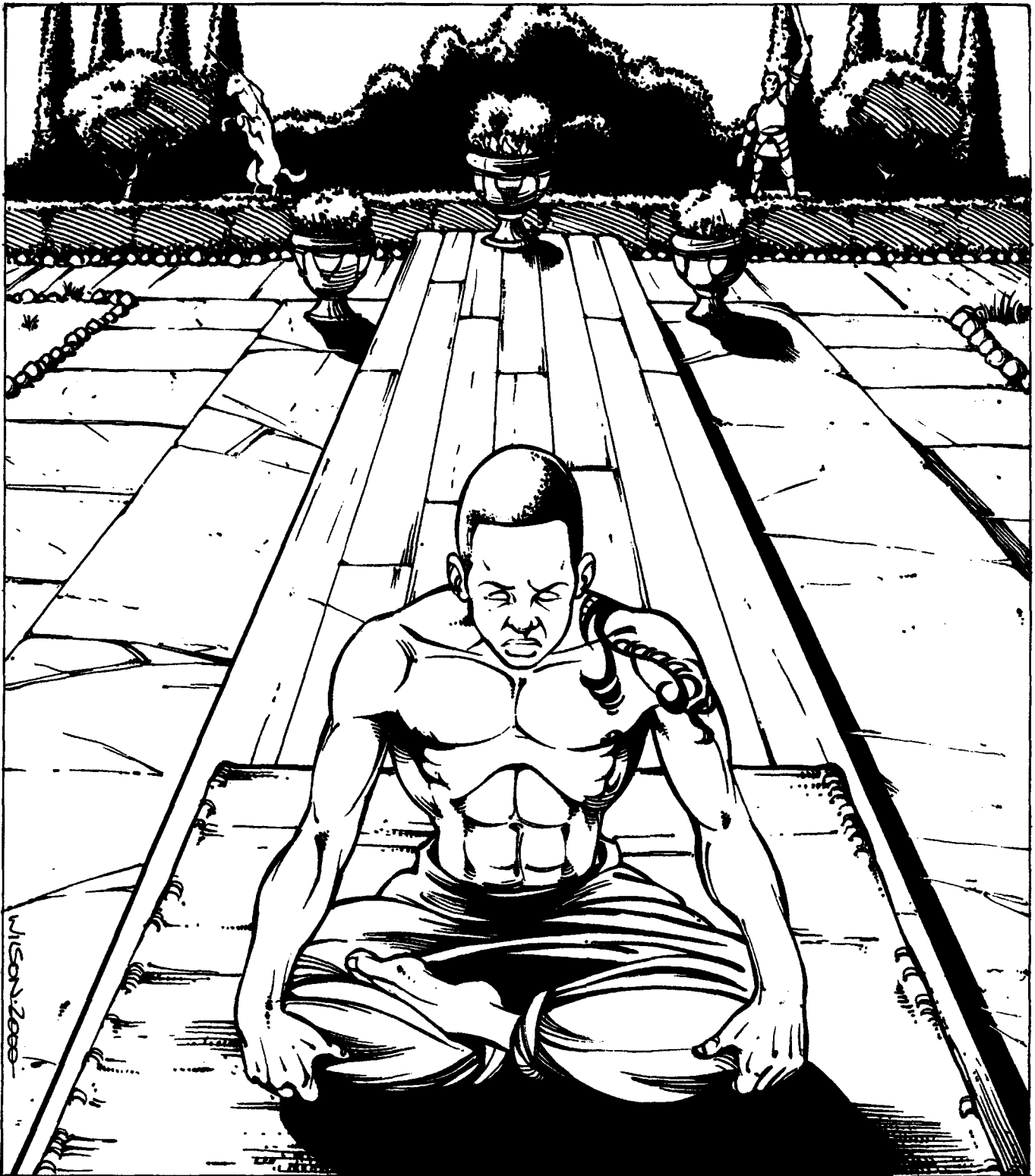
Like any dream, these visions are often cryptic and symbolic, although some (20%) are clear and straightforward. A Cyber-Knight may draw his own conclusions or seek input from his *mentor* (the knight who trained him) or a *Dream Sage* (a Hermetic Cyber-Knight who is wise, insightful and understands the ways of dreams). Whichever way one goes is acceptable.

Dream Visions are deeply personal and a Cyber-Knight will never talk about it casually. Most rarely mention it even to their closest friends, the mentor or Dream Sage being the two notable exceptions.

In most cases, a Cyber-Knight receives only *one* Dream Vision his entire life. In rare instances, twice. Those who receive two, usually get one very early in life (i.e. shortly after becoming a Cyber-Knight) and another in their middle years (40-60). Only Dream Sages are believed to get more than two visions in their long lives, and that's based on rumor (see the *Hermetic Cyber-Knight* and *Dream Sage* elsewhere in this book).

Deciphering Dream Visions

In a game context, since Dream Visions are so personal and such an integral part of the player **character's** life, it is usually best to let the individual *player* come up with one, as well as



how it motivated and inspired the character as part of his or her background.

If the *Cyber-Knight* has not yet had a Dream Vision and the player doesn't mind the Game Master whipping something up in the context of an ongoing campaign, the G.M. can introduce one. This works well when the G.M. knows the player and the character well. Try to present something that is poignant and dramatically suits the campaign, but which also fits the character. A G.M. should never use a Dream Vision to punish or dramatically change the character unless such a change is in line with what *the player* wants.

For players or Game Masters looking for some direction, here are a couple examples using the same basic setting.

One possible Dream Vision: A dream in which the *Cyber-Knight* rides or is carried through the streets surrounded by a thronging multitude cheering his name. It is clear he is popular and loved by all. The procession stops and the dreamer is confronted by something. It may be another *Cyber-Knight*, known villain, CS soldier, monster, woman or child, or just about anything. The dreamer is annoyed and perhaps angry that "his" celebration and accolades have been stopped because of the intruder and goes to face (confront?) **him/her/it**.

The intruder represents some internal (self) problem, such as pride, arrogance, **overconfidence**, falling prey to praise and adulation, losing sight of one's real purpose or addressing real problems, etc., **and/or** some external problem (enemy, imminent or future danger, coming conflict, etc.) that the dreamer must face. Depending on how the character acts and interacts with the "something" will reveal the thrust of the message.

For example, a beautiful woman (or man if the opposite sex) throws herself at the dreaming **Cyber-Knight**. The knight runs off with her, ignoring those who celebrate his name. The townspeople come to ask his advice, and return to invite him to join them in other events, celebrations and activities, but the dreamer is too busy with love and rebukes them every time. Finally, they ask him to come and help solve several problems **and/or** warn of some impending danger. In the dream he ignores each request, either choosing to spend time with the woman or to party or wallow in his celebrity.

One day the villagers stop coming. When the Cyber-Knight goes to investigate, he finds the townsfolk no longer have need of him and he is replaced by a new champion, one who cares about them and not himself or some fanciful distraction. Or worse, the town has been ransacked, many people are dead, and others missing, because he ignored their pleas.

In both instances the dream addresses issues of responsibility, commitment, and caring versus personal pride, arrogance and fleeting pleasure. It might also have to do with reputation and trust and what happens when one takes it for granted.

Note: The villain responsible for sacking the town — the CS, vampires, the demons from Calgary, Xiticix, **Daemonix**, members of the Federation of Magic, Fallen **Cyber-Knight(s)**, a specific villain or band of cutthroats, whoever — might indicate a specific danger that the knight should dedicate his life to destroying or stopping (especially if the character travels to several places in the dream and they are all victimized by the same force).

A different outcome: Same dream as before, only a scruffy-looking challenger, a boy no more than 16, stops the procession. He calls the Cyber-Knight names, accuses him of being arrogant and self-absorbed and challenges him to a duel. The Knight laughs, but the crowd becomes angry, half of them mock and push the challenger, the other half continue the merriment, praising the Cyber-Knight and push past the boy, leading the knight to the heart of the celebration. Later, the Cyber-Knight learns the boy has been beaten to death by an angry mob.

This dream speaks to being self-absorbed and callous, as well as injustice, intolerance and a lack of compassion. If the Cyber-Knight had stopped to listen to the lad's complaint or his reason for feeling injured by the knight, he might have settled the matter peacefully and invited the boy to join the festivities. Or he might have learned of some unintended slight or injury to the boy or his family and have been able to rectify or avenge it. Certainly, the knight could have prevented the murder. If the lad was a Coalition soldier, mage, D-Bee or other specific race or class of person it might speak to their plight of being ignored, misunderstood and persecuted. Something the Cyber-Knight might dedicate his life to resolve.

A different outcome: Same dream as before, only the challenger is a weakling, perhaps a woman, a little child, an old

man, frail D-Bee or young warrior. The knight stops to address the intruder. The dreamer may be nice and understanding, arrogant and condescending or outright mean, it doesn't matter. Before he knows it, the intruder transforms into a dragon or monster, or is suddenly joined by a dozen powerful fiends out for blood.

This dream may speak to preparedness, assumptions, naivety or betrayal. Or it may warn of some hidden danger or insidious corruption, perhaps something the hero should dedicate his life to stopping.

Another different outcome: The challenger is a fellow Cyber-Knight. One the dreamer has never met before. The stranger calls the dreamer a traitor and fool. He challenges him to a contest of arms or a duel to the death. The dreamer refuses and tries to discuss the matter, but the unknown knight will have none of it and warns he will cut the dreamer down where he stands. Whether the unknown Cyber-Knight is slain or subdued is unimportant. What is important is that the stranger hates the dreamer just for being a Cyber-Knight.

This dream speaks to the schism within the Fellowship instigated by the war at Tolkeen. It addresses the pain and anger that drives some to battle their brethren and to hate, which if left unchecked, may topple the Fellowship entirely. It also speaks to one's resolve as a Cyber-Knight and the trouble yet to come.

If the challenger is some other warrior or changes into several different O.C.C.s during the course of the conflict, the dream might be about the **Cyber-Knight's** damaged reputation and lost trust. Or about the Fallen Knights whose villainy confuses people and makes some believe all **Cyber-Knights** are dangerous villains.

Another different outcome: Same dream as before only, suddenly a dimensional Rift appears, and from it an invading swarm of ... fill in the blank ... vampires, Xiticix, evil dragons, the Coalition, a known (or unknown but memorable) band of villains, or something else. The dreamer can not fight them all alone. He needs help, but the people who adore him are no match for the enveloping force and flee in terror. The face of the horde's leader appears in the middle of the Rift, or the homeland from which the raiders originate can be seen for just a moment before the dream ends. Identifying the true source of the trouble.

This dream may indicate some impending doom, treachery **and/or** a specific enemy. An enemy the Cyber-Knight now knows and should face. He also knows he is no match for it alone and must find others to join in his crusade.

Another different outcome: Same dream as before only the dreamer strikes down the intruder in anger or fear, without determining if he was a danger or not.

This speaks to the dreamer's own inner demons, hate, fear, anger, and the tragedy that might occur if he does not learn to change or control himself.

Another different outcome: Same dream, only before him is a gallows. The prisoners about to be hung are guilty only of being different and misunderstood. The crowd who loves the Cyber-Knight scream for their death, but bow to "his" justice. The dreamer knows that any decision other than hanging these people will turn the crowd against him, but he is the only voice of reason. The prisoners' fate rests entirely in his hands.

This dream addresses difficult choices and taking a stand, even if it is an unpopular one. It also speaks to the anger and horrors spawned by prejudice, hate and lust for revenge.

If a particular person or group shouts the loudest or is clearly working the crowd into a frenzy, they may represent the cause of the hate or an undercurrent of conspiracy, and even a specific enemy to be vanquished.

Get the idea?

Squires & Mentoring

At some point, usually late in the **Cyber-Knight's** career, he is expected to mentor at least one new **Cyber-Knight**. To take a youth with the potential to become a Cyber-Knight and help him down that road. While the lad or lady may be placed in a group training camp, his sponsor is expected to help guide the trainee in his studies and exercises as well as teach by example. Teaching by example means spending time with the student and making him the knight's "squire" — basically his assistant and Cyber-Knight in training. This involves discussing philosophy, the meaning of life, instilling the Code of Chivalry and other aspects of education, including the student's combat training. It also requires taking the cadet on adventures so he may apply what he has learned (and to discover what he yet needs to learn) in the "real" world.

Some **Cyber-Knights** make excellent instructors and mentors, teaching scores of people during their lifetime. Others, particularly the self-absorbed Champions, either can't find the time or don't have the gift, and only help one or two to join the Fellowship. Remember too, even the most ambitious candidates may wash out of training, for ambition will only carry one so far. Less than 30% of all candidates for Cyber-Knight training make it to become knights. However, another third usually go on to become noble and heroic men at arms or adventurers in their own right. The rest fade away and are forgotten.

Cyber-Knight O.C.C.

Alignment: Theoretically any, but most true Cyber-Knights are Principled (36%), Scrupulous (34%) or Unprincipled (22%), with a handful of Anarchist (4%), Aberrant (2%) or some other alignment.

Attribute Requirements: Minimum P.E. of 11, with an I.Q., P.S., and P.E. attributes of 10 or higher suggested, but not required.

What is required is a strong will (**M.E.** 11+), a lust for life, and a good heart with a thirst for justice (as a rule, good alignments only, but Unprincipled, Aberrant and Anarchist are acceptable, and a knight may be corrupted and turn evil like anybody else).

Racial Requirements: None, provided one can meet the Attribute Requirements (above) and has the discipline and temperament to be a knight.

Many have dreams of becoming Cyber-Knights but few can actually stick it through to the end to become one. There is no disgrace in falling short, and many ex-students who couldn't make the grade continue to live by many of the covenants of the Code of Chivalry no matter what they become in life. Others who have failed become men at arms or adven-

turers who continue to serve the knighthood as warriors, companions, **aides**, and helpers — heroes in their own right, although they are not actually knights. Virtually any O.C.C. or R.C.C. can become a friend and companion of a Cyber-Knight.

O.C.C. Skills:

Literacy (+20%)

Languages: Speaks both American and **Dragonese/Elf** at 96% (and two additional of choice at +30%).

Lore: Demon (+20%)

Anthropology (+15%)

Paramedic (+10%)

Land Navigation (+12%)

Horsemanship: Cyber-Knight (see **Rifts® New West**, page 74).

Climbing (+10%)

Body Building

Gymnastics (+5%)

Swimming (+10%)

W.P. Ancient (select 2 of choice).

W.P. Modern (select 2 of choice).

Hand to Hand: Martial Arts

O.C.C. Related Skills: Select 12 other skills, but at least two must be selected from the Physical Category and another three must be W.P.s.

Select two additional skills at level three, three additional W.P.s at level five, two other skills at level six, two other skills at level nine, and one at level twelve. All new skills start at level one proficiency.

Secondary Skills: The character also gets to select six secondary skills from those listed, excluding those marked "None." These are additional areas of knowledge that do not get the advantage of the bonus listed in parenthesis. All secondary skills start at the base skill level.

Communications: Any

Domestic: Any

Electrical: Basic only.

Espionage: Any (+5%).

Mechanical: Automotive only.

Medical: None other than O.C.C. Paramedic skill.

Military: Any (+5%).

Physical: Any (+5% when applicable).

Pilot: Any

Pilot Related: Any (+5%).

Rogue: Any

Science: Any

Technical: Any (+5%).

W.P.: Any

Wilderness: Any (+5%).

Standard Equipment: Armor: suit of personalized, heavy, Mega-Damage body armor including Coalition armor; typically has a classic "knight" design with **1D4x10+55 M.D.C.** Only about 15% are environmental battle suits.

A suit of light M.D. body armor (30-40 M.D.C.), a set of dress clothing, and a set of black clothing for covert operations. Also a gas mask and air filter, tinted goggles, hatchet for cutting wood, knife (or two), 2D4 wooden stakes, a hand-held wooden or silver cross, ancient weapon of choice, modern handgun and rifle (probably energy weapons) and three extra ammo-clips, first-aid kit with extra bandages and

antiseptic, suture thread and painkiller, tent, knapsack, back pack, saddlebags, two canteens, emergency food rations (two week supply), geiger counter, and some personal items.

The knight's mode of transportation can be just about anything, but they lean toward real horses, robot horses, bionic horses, hover cycles, and modified motorcycles. They are also known to use magic devices. Rarely use power armor or robot vehicles.

Money: The character starts off with **2D6x100** in credit, and has a black market item that will garner another **1D6x1,000** credits. As always, money can be spent immediately on additional equipment or saved. Most **Cyber-Knights** tend to share their wealth with comrades and those in need. What money they spend on themselves usually goes toward their weapons, armor, equipment, quests and crusades.

Cybernetics: Only minor and basic items and prosthetics, never as much as partial or **full** bionic conversion. The **Cyber-Knights** are not opposed to cybernetic augmentation, just not for them. It interferes with the channelling of their inner strength and spirit. See *Cyber-Armor* (A.R. 16, 50 M.D.C.).

Average level of experience (NPCs): 1D4+3; elder **Cyber-Knights** 1D4+6, aged hermits 1D6+7.

Note: The Coalition has always taken a keen interest in **Cyber-Knight** activities. Officially, the CS has had little to say about these folk heroes, seldom even acknowledging their existence let alone painting a negative or positive picture. However, the powers that be have always regarded **Cyber-Knights** as a potential threat and secretly eliminate them whenever the opportunity avails itself. The Siege on Tolkeen has proven the Coalition's worst fears and suspicions, marking the **Cyber-Knights** as powerful and dangerous "enemies of the States." This has earned the **Cyber-Knight Fellowship** the distinction of being added to the Coalition's Enemies List. Furthermore, specific knights in the service of Tolkeen have had bounties ranging from 100,000 to 500,000 credits placed on their heads. Most are wanted "dead or alive."

That having been said, even many Coalition soldiers see **Cyber-Knights** as noble and heroic figures. As a result, few CS soldiers actively seek to destroy them. In the field of combat away from Chi-Town and military authorities, many will accept a **Cyber-Knight's** word of honor and allow them to pass unmolessted. A **court-martialable offense**, yet many do so out of respect — others out of fear.

Wilderness folk who respect and support Lord **Coake** and "his" **Cyber-Knights** remain loyal to him and the Fellowship, while those who have left to serve Tolkeen are often looked upon with derision and distrust.

Dreams

By Bill Coffin & Kevin Siembieda

... 108 P.A., not long after the Sorcerers' Revenge

The four of them trudged through the darkness across the western border of Minnesota. In the distance, the sky lit up intermittently with the flash of explosions and laser **fire**. So far away from the fighting, the combat sounded like a low, rolling thunder.

The point man **unslung** his NG plasma cannon. Like his buddies, he carried the heaviest energy weapons he could lift and wore a suit of bulky body armor, maybe powered, maybe not. It would be hard for an outsider to tell, especially now that every **robo-mechanic** within a three-day trip of Tolkeen was making **knockoff** suits to meet the demand. Ever since the war started, the market for Mega-Damage hardware just went through the roof. And now that the Coalition was busy running away, anybody with a grudge against the Dead Boys wanted to suit up and get some payback. Most of these jerks were just amateurs looking for some **freebie** trigger time. The worst, like these four, were bushwhacking bandits who used it as a license to loot and kill. Professionals had little use for these sorts, and they only made getting a job in what was left of the war zone that much more difficult. That was what these four were coming in for. **Sorcerers' Revenge** or not, they figured Tolkeen still needed as many hardcore gunmen as they could hire. **Headhunters**, 'Borgs, Juicers, even garden variety high-tech bandits could all post their resumes. In a place like Tolkeen, if you had a gun and the nerves to use it, you could find a job.

"Serious fighting out there," the point man, Able, said over his helmet mike to the others. They had heard nothing but static for the last few hours, and maintaining radio silence fell to the need to alleviate boredom through small talk. "Seems like a pretty hot zone for a place where the war is supposed to be over."

"Ain't over yet," said **Brightwell**, one of the others. "**Tolkeenites** might figure the Coalition's through, but ten will get you twenty those Dead Boys are gonna come back for Round Two some time."

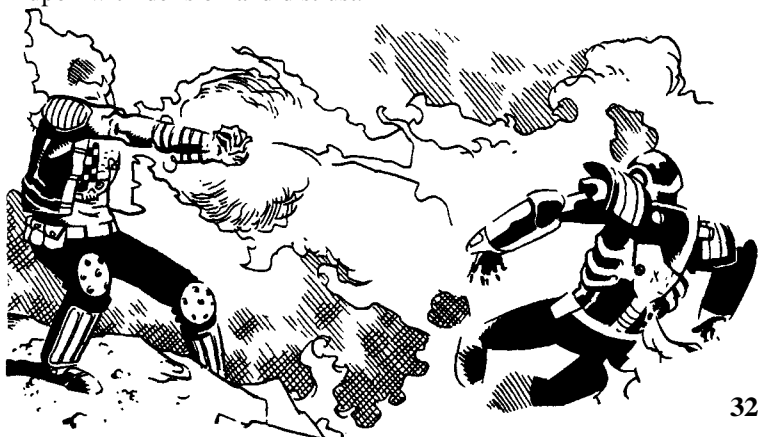
"I'll take them odds," said Carson. "Whole damn invasion force is history. Anybody who didn't get **flatlined** is either running like hell for Chi-Town or got stuck up north with the roaches."

"**Xiticix, heh!**" cracked Able. "Those Dead Boys are bug food for sure. Radio intercepts say the **Duluth** hive's on the fly. I heard the sky was so thick with 'em that spotter planes couldn't even ID their own guys on the ground."

"Like I said," noted Carson, "this thing's over. All that flash-bug you see out there is Tolkeen mopping up any Dead Boys too stupid not to run."

"Or too slow to get away," said Able.

"Look, we passed three **merc** companies coming out of here in the last three days. I'm telling you, those abracadabras in Tolkeen are gonna need us before long. Econ **101**, boys. Lots of **need**, not so much supply. That means we get top credits for the



trigger work. **This**'ll be the score to retire on. You can count on it."

"Shut up, all of you," snapped **Durant**, who was bringing up the rear. "I think I hear something. Able, you asleep up there or what?"

Able scanned the surrounding forest, clicking through every option in his multi-optics. **IR**, **UV**, radar, nothing. But wait ... what was *that*?

Ahead about a hundred meters, the shape of a lone armored man emerged from the darkness, like he phased in from the background or something. Able ran a diagnostic on his multi-optics, but they checked out. It was almost like the guy just decided to let the scanners pick him up.

"Bogey dead ahead, fellas. No light source, no energy sigs."

"**D-Bee** or a monster?"

"Does it matter?"

"Everybody deploy!" barked **Durant** over the closed channel. "Able, **Brightwell**, hold the line. Carson and me are **coming up**."

The four regrouped in a tight formation, having been walking about a hundred meters apart to prevent any one gunner from ambushing them all while they were on the march.

Durant scanned ahead at the mysterious figure, but still nothing, even the motion detector was a blank. "Able, get closer and ID this joker. He makes a funny move, splatter him."

"Let me spare you the effort," boomed a voice through the darkness. "I'm here to say that your services are not required in **Tolkeen**. Turn back now."

The voice stopped the gunmen cold, like they'd run into an invisible wall. Even through their second-grade audio systems, the voice sounded so noble, so pure. So much authority. Suddenly, these battle-hardened meres felt a little like children being scolded by a village elder.

Durant was the first to break out of it. "You the one to stop us, **squishboy**?"

Again, the voice. "It doesn't have to be this way. Last chance to go home."

Durant laughed through his nose, and then shifted his particle beam cannon to his shoulder. "Light him up," he ordered to the others.

In the darkness, a brilliant long sword of pure psychic energy emerged from the stranger's hand. Then, another one appeared in the other hand.

"**Cyber-Knight!**" shouted **Carson**.

"What's with the two **Psi-Swords**?" Able asked, more to himself than to his partners. "I didn't know they could do that."

"Who cares. Shoot!" **Durant** growled, squeezing off a particle bolt that lit up the forest as it flew.

The stranger ducked to the side, dodging the blast like it was just a dodge ball. Then he vanished from sensors altogether. The gunmen could see the light of his swords, but within seconds, they were brightening the woods with full-auto panic fire. All the auto-fire overloaded their **nightvision** optics, killing their last chance to see their opponent coming for them. Not like it would have helped them though. At the speed he was moving, it was all a blur.

That was when **Durant** realized it, somewhere between **Abie's** decapitation and **Brightwell** turning into a pile of cleanly

sheared pieces. He, like the rest of his crew, never stood a chance.

Sir Taloquin sat against a tree trunk to catch his breath. That wasn't as easy as it used to be. In the old days, he could have dispatched those four without breaking a sweat. Now, no small number of years later, the event left his lungs burning and his muscles aching. Maybe if he was a **D-Bee** with a prolonged life span this would not be an issue. But like most of his brethren, **Sir Taloquin** was human, with an all too brief span of years in which to do his work. He was born in '56, but he had well more than just fifty years' worth of bloodshed and misery under his belt as a **Cyber-Knight**.

Still, **Taloquin** knew he had little reason to complain tonight. After **all**, his opponents lay dead on the forest path, and he had nary a scratch on him. He smiled to himself as he surveyed his work. "These free-gunners just never learn," he mused.

From behind him came the sound of clapping. Even before he turned to look, **Sir Taloquin** knew exactly who it was. **Sir Rigeld**, **Taloquin's** old student and now contemporary.

"Well done, master, well done," said **Sir Rigeld** as he came out of the shadows. He was smiling and approached his old teacher with open arms.

The elder knight welcomed him with a hearty hug and clap on the shoulders. "Rigeld! It's been too long, old friend." **Sir Taloquin's** eyes narrowed a little in friendly suspicion. "This is the part where you tell me you were standing there the whole time, right?"

"You hardly needed *my* help dispatching those ne'er-do-wells," **Sir Rigeld** said. "But more about that later. Have you a fire?"

"My camp is just over the next hillock. I had bed down for the evening when these freebooters stumbled through. You are welcome to camp there if you like."

"Much obliged, master." **Rigeld** motioned to the fallen bandits. "And them?"

Sir Taloquin pulled a pair of collapsible vibro-spades from his back pack and threw one to **Rigeld**. "They deserve a decent burial, whoever they were before they died. Besides, the dead and dying in this land have gotten so thick that where there are no soldiers, there are beasts of every kind preying on the fallen flesh."

Sir Rigeld powered up his spade and dug into the earth. The humming edge to the digging tool sliced through soil and rock as if it were not even there. "Aye, a sad state indeed in **Tolkeen**."

Sir Taloquin had already bored out a hole deep enough for one of the dead. The elder knight kept his eyes on his work, unwilling to look at his former apprentice. "So you're still fighting for them, are you?"

Sir Rigeld stopped digging for a moment. "I am."

Neither of them spoke as they continued to bury the corpses.

"You know I still consider myself loyal to **Lord Coake**, **Robert**," **Sir Rigeld** said.

"Oh, it's **Robert** now, is it?" **Sir Taloquin** finished a second hole and threw a body into it. "You defied our lord and master."

You deliberately ignored **Coake's** specific orders *not* to fight for **Tolkeen**. Yet you did anyway. You are a traitor."

"Unkind," Sir **Rigeld** said quietly as he tamped down the earth on one of his freshly filled plots. The dead were all under the ground now, but both men found themselves wishing they had more work to do. It made it easier to talk when they had some other task to occupy themselves.

"The Coalition must be stopped, Robert. If they take Tolkeen, there is no telling how far their reach will extend. What shall be next? Free Quebec is already under attack. Where shall it end? The New West? Beyond Lone Star? The North Pole?"

"Spare me your concerns, Rigeld. Tolkeen is hardly any better. One time, they might have been a kindly nation, but now they spew just as much hatred as the Coalition. And we both know what kind of mercy they exercised during the Sorcerers' Revenge."

In the distance, more rumbling shook the night. A dull orange glow had filled the sky.

Sir Taloquin pointed towards the action. "Even now, your **Tolkeenite** friends continue the slaughter. The Coalition is defeated. Their forces are scattered and run, but still, Tolkeen pursues with a vengeance. Is massacring fleeing troops your idea of an honorable victory?"

"Hardly, Robert, but ..."

"But what? Rigeld, *you* are the one who first defied Coake on this. *You* were the one who insisted that it was better to side with Tolkeen than not oppose the Coalition at all. *You* were among those who encouraged your fellow knights to follow suit in this little secession. Now look at what it has wrought. Tolkeen stands triumphant, in part thanks to you and your cronies. The Coalition invaders are either smashed or lost to the Xiticix **Hiveworlds**. And our fellowship, once so proud and unified, unravels a little more each day. When you and your kind left, you took the spirit of our fellowship with you. Now every little difference between us is cause for another few knights to leave the fold. Before long, I fear there shall be no knights at all. Instead of our strength in numbers, we shall all become lone wolves, wandering without a cause."

Sir Rigeld turned off his spade and handed it back to Sir Taloquin. "Are you finished?"

"For the moment."

"Good. Because I have something very important to speak to you about."

"What on Earth do we have to talk about, Rigeld?"

"Isn't it obvious? I want you to join me."

At Sir **Taloquin's** camp, the two knights sat across from each other, warming their hands over a low fire. A stewing pot hung over the flames, a mixture of wild potatoes, carrots and cubed **Ostrasaur**. Sir Rigeld ladled himself a bowlful of the stuff, smelled it and took a bite.

"Dinosaur tastes better than I thought it would. Scored this from a **Simvan**, you said?"

"Enough small talk, Rigeld. Say what you've come to say."

"Right, then." The young **Cyber-Knight** put his bowl of stew aside and interlaced his fingers. He breathed out for a second, weighing his words carefully before speaking them.

"Everybody in Tolkeen thinks this thing is over. With the Coalition invasion force neutralized, there has been nonstop celebrating in the capital for weeks. Meanwhile, the rest of **Tolkeen's** forces are mopping up what is left of the Dead Boys as they hightail it back to Chi-Town.

"The thing is, Robert, the war is not over. Not by a long shot. **Tolkeen's** top players know it, the Legion of Dragons knows it, and so do you. I guarantee you the Coalition High Command is not through with Tolkeen yet. The only people who believe they've won are the very **Tolkeenites** and freelancers who scored this victory in the first place. They believe their job is over and they're leaving in droves. All those mercenaries and bandits you try so hard to keep from entering Tolkeen and making everything worse? Well, there's a small army of them leaving the kingdom every day. Now that they've been paid and the Coalition Army is scattered, they think their work is done. They want to go home. Same thing with many of the Kingdom's best spell casters. Most of these people are farmers and craftsmen at heart, not warriors. They just want to be left alone."

"Sounds like you have a manpower crisis."

"Indeed. Which is why King Creed has asked me to find knights such as yourself and convince them to volunteer for **Tolkeen's** defense."

"Is it not enough that hundreds of our best and brightest have already joined Tolkeen?" Sir Taloquin snorted. "Are you trying to convince *every* Cyber-Knight to break his loyalty to Lord Coake?"

"No Robert, not every knight. Just those who know that fighting for Tolkeen may not be the most appetizing crusade, but given what they are up against, it is the right thing to do."

"Says you."

"Spare me, Robert." Sir Rigeld stood from the fire and shouldered his traveling pack. "I thought I might convince you to follow your heart on this. It appears I was wrong."

"Yes, you were. I already follow my heart and stand by Lord Coake."

Sir Rigeld looked over his shoulder at his old mentor. "When you trained me, you always said that our greatest allegiance is to the truth. To what is right. To goodness. That no matter what our circumstance, we are on this planet for one thing: to fight evil in all its guises.

"I see a great war machine on the horizon, *Sir Taloquin*. And it is the Coalition States. A force of pure evil that thrives on fear, anger and oppression. It has already killed countless thousands and shall not stop until it conquers the world or until it is defeated."

Sir Taloquin sighed. "I also taught you that when fighting monsters, you must take care not to become one yourself. Look at Tolkeen. Nothing but warmongers scarcely better than the Coalition. How can you stand with them?"

"Because if we don't stand against the Coalition, who *are* we to stand against? Lord Coake has contrived a convenient excuse not to fight the Coalition, Robert. I wonder if he has retired from this conflict because he is wise or because he is a coward?"

Sir Taloquin was up in a flash, standing before his former student.

"What did you just say?" the aging knight **growled**, barely louder than a whisper.

"You heard me, Robert. It is on **everyone's** mind. You don't see it because you are too busy hiding behind him." **Rigeld** swallowed before saying, "The man who trained me would never have backed down from this war. I guess **Coake** breeds cowards these days."



Sir Taloquin summoned a Psi-Sword and leveled it at Rigeld, letting the point rest on the breastplate of the junior knight's heavy **cyber-armor**. "You're calling me a coward?"

"More like a blind fool. Heroes are those who act despite their fear. Cowards are those who use their fear as an excuse to do nothing. The war in **Tolkeen** is the most terrifying conflict of our age. It is only right to be scared of everything it represents, but whether you're a hero or a coward, Robert, or just an old man blinded by loyalty is something only you can honestly answer."

Sir Rigeld sidestepped his teacher, who was still holding up his Psi-Sword, but was also now lost in contemplation.

"I don't know what is stopping you, Robert. But when you are ready, I shall await you in Tolkeen."

Sir Rigeld left the camp area, heading out on the long path leading into the Kingdom of Tolkeen. As if defeated somehow, Sir Taloquin sat by his fire, weary, sagging. Staring into the flames, he dwelled somewhere between meditation and sleep, absorbing the heat from the fire, sifting through a host of thoughts and sadness.

Seven hours later, he came to with a jolt, as if shocked awake. The fire had burned out during the night, and a chilly dew covered everything. Sir Taloquin felt tired, as if he had activated his ability to ignore the cold while in his sleep and kept it on all night. He ignored his inner fatigue and gathered his meager belongings while working the stiffness out of his joints. He headed for a large bush almost a hundred meters from the camp. Not a bush, actually, but a piece of **well-crafted** foliage camouflage hiding the knight's **NG-300** hover cycle. Sir Taloquin fired it up.

Sir Taloquin punched in one of Lord **Coake's** secret frequencies on a long-range burst radio. This was how many of the **Cyber-Knights** in the field communicated, via one-way transmission. Ever since Coalition Intelligence triangulated the frequencies of a few knights in radio contact, just talking to each other risked blowing everybody's position. Especially when contacting senior knights of the fellowship, one-way bursting was the only way to go.

"Command, this is Sir Taloquin. Have completed weekly border patrol. Five engagements, twenty-three dead. I must take a leave of absence for the next two weeks, so a replacement is needed for my position. I can be reached by mono-directional burst transmission only. Taloquin out."

After that, the knight shut off the radio and broke down the rest of his camp. For the last week or so, this place had been his temporary home since it was near a common travelling spot for meres, bandits and other troublemakers looking to enter Minnesota and raise hell. Since the war started, all sorts of **hardcases** were drawn to the region like moths to a flame, looking to get in on the action or take advantage of it. When Lord Coake declined to lend his support to Tolkeen, the core fellowship spent their war tune doing the next best thing, evacuating refugees from overrun war zones, keeping civilians safe, delivering much-needed medical supplies and food to besieged locations, and holding the western border areas against the influx of foul militants.

Sir Taloquin had felt a particular sense of honor with his job during the war, but when the fighting was heaviest, there was still that nagging little voice in his head. The one that wondered if maybe, just maybe, his talents and conviction could have been put to a better use.

He shook himself out of his reverie and loaded the last of his extra foodstuffs and water onto the NG-300. Sir Taloquin needed all the extra supplies he could haul. It was going to be a long trip to Montana.

... five days later

High in the Montana Rockies and deep within a Pueblo-style homestead bored into the rock, *Grand Master Segaya Kross* was steeping tea while his old student Sir Taloquin related his conversation with Rigeld. By the end of it, Segaya was returning with two cups of steaming brew.

Sir Taloquin had never known how old his mentor was, but these days he seemed to be at least two hundred. The knight was already an ancient figure when he took young Taloquin under his wing. Once Taloquin became a full-fledged knight himself, Sir Segaya went into seclusion, the **Cyber-Knight** equivalent of retirement. Most never made it this far since the death rate for

older **Cyber-Knights** was fairly high. To many, Segaya was one of the elder-most knights in the fellowship, part of an elite circle second only to Lord **Coake** himself. He was one of the last Great Heroes of the knighthood, and Sir Taloquin had been told more than once how fortunate he was to have this man as *his* mentor. This reputation encouraged other, younger knights to seek the old knight's advice, like going to see the proverbial sage on the mountain. Only Segaya never enjoyed such visits, and he labored long and hard to let everybody know that he just wanted to be left alone. Still, the Grand Master was always willing to make an exception for a former student.

Sir Taloquin watched his teacher move about this little house, scarcely believing that such a frail, wrinkled figure could once have been the terror of warlords, monsters and other evils. Years of crusading had definitely taken their toll on the great warrior, both in body and spirit. Gone, it seemed, was the old codger's sense of humor, his legendary generosity, his selfless devotion. Nobody knew what happened to the Grand Master to have changed him so, least of all Sir Taloquin. The general consensus was that Segaya had seen too much bloodshed and misery, and bowed out of the game because of it. Now in his *own* twilight years, Sir Taloquin could better understand how that could happen.

"Sounds like he really told you off," Segaya said to Taloquin. "And if I know you, you probably just stood there and let him get away with it, too. Never did figure that out about you. You're a damn good **Cyber-Knight**. Have some pride. If some punk apprentice of yours lips off at you, give him a nice scar to teach him who's the teacher and who's not.

"That's not my way." Taloquin said.

"No, it isn't, but that's not why you're here, is it?" Segaya blew on his tea and took a sip. "You're here because of something else."

Silent, Sir Taloquin nodded.

Segaya exhaled through his nose and shook his head slowly. "Of all my students, Taloquin, how could I have known that you would have been my great disappointment."

The aging knight looked up at his master. His eyes seemed drained of color. A reflection of weariness, but something else, too. An emptiness. A void where there should have been something more. A hole in his soul.

"I used to think you were just a **coward**, Taloquin," Segaya said. "It was the only reason I could think of for why you turned down every Great Crusade offered to you. It was the only explanation for why you neglected to join the fight against those first **Naruni** landings."

"Others needed me elsewhere."

"Or the **Splugorth** incursions down on the Gulf."

"There was a small village **that ...**"

"Yeah, right. Always an excuse. That's the reason why you're still around when every one of your peers died glorious deaths long ago."

"**That's not** true, sir."

"Isn't it?"

"No. Besides, you're still alive, Master."

Segaya reached out and cuffed his student across the head, hard.

"Don't you ever cross me, boy. I'm alive because I paid a price for it. Never you mind what it is, just know that there is one. You want to hide forever from being a real hero, you do it. Live to be an old man like me. Just know that it's going to cost you. And don't come crying over my grave site when you decide it's too much to live with."

"I never avoided any of those things because I was **afraid**. There just always ... I don't know. There always seemed to be somebody who needed me more. Somebody small and insignificant, forgotten in the fervor of the larger moment. I felt *somebody* had to stay behind and help them."

"And that would always be you, eh boy?"

"They needed my help."

Segaya's eyes narrowed. "And? Go on. Spit it out."

"I have never had a *dream vision* to tell me what my destiny was, or how to best apply my gifts. I did what I thought was right, **but ...**"

"Wait, wait! This is all about you and your stinking *dream vision*?"

"Yes. Just one grain of sand can change the face of the beach. Perhaps I chose the wrong path, but without a dream vision to guide my hand? **I ...** I never had the insights the rest of you enjoy. I never had a dream to guide me."

Segaya sat back, quiet. Then he smiled. Then he laughed.

"What's so funny?" Sir Taloquin asked.

"That you wasted your life dodging your knightly duties all because you hadn't had some vague dream to tell you what to do."

"**But ...**"

"But nothing!" Segaya yelled, switching moods instantly; wrath replacing laughter like the flick of a switch. "How many people have died because you were too afraid to make a choice?"

"I made choices."

"How many evils went unpunished?"

"I never turned away from evil."

"How many quests unfulfilled?"

"**I ...**"

"You needed no dream vision to do any of those things. You just needed some heart. And you, miserable Taloquin, lack true heart."

Segaya's student looked ashen.

"Humph. It's getting late, Taloquin. I think I've talked enough for one evening. You have some serious thinking to do regarding this **Rigeld** thing and **Tolkeen**. Stay here for a while. Get your strength back. Think things over. Take whatever time you **need**, all right?"

Sir Taloquin nodded.

"Right. I'll see you in the morning."

The next morning, old Segaya came into the den to start the kitchen fires and boil some water. Sir Taloquin was still sitting exactly where the old man had left him the night before. The knight's eyes were open, but it was hard to tell if he was awake, asleep or somewhere in between.

"Sleep well?" Segaya asked.

"Not really," Taloquin said, his voice raspy from dehydration. "I had a most terrible dream."

Segaya raised an age-whitened eyebrow and smiled.

"Did you now?"

"Yes. Unlike anything that has come before. It felt so ..."

"Real?"

"Yes ... and no. Not real so much as vivid. And it had the air of possibility to it. Like a glimpse of a future that *might* come to be."

"And you think this might have been that dream vision you've waited for so long?"

"I don't know. It could have just been a bad night's sleep, but there is something about it all that I just can't let go. So vivid. So disturbing."

"Good. Don't let go of it. Don't you ever let it go." Old Segaya fixed his attention fully on his student. "Taloquin, look. Every knight receives the vision at some point in their life. You get it just once or twice, and when you do, you had better be taking notes, because it's telling you something important. When you're young, the vision lays out the kind of future you were made to fulfill. Your job is to get yourself there. When you're in the middle of your career, the vision is a good way of letting you know if you are on track as a knight. This is when most of us receive it."

Sir Taloquin looked dejected. "But what about ...?"

"You? For old vets like yourself, the vision is more like a mandate. You've paid your dues, put in your time. It is now time for you to step up and take care of business. The vision represents whatever it is your whole life has been leading up to."

Segaya sat down across from Taloquin. "Listen, this is important. If you had your vision, you will know it. And whatever it is, it's telling you something you really need to hear."

Sir Taloquin sat back in his chair, his eyes drifting off to the corner of the room as he thought about his master's words.

Segaya let his former student collect his thoughts, and for a few long minutes, the room was quiet except for the crackle of the stove fire, and the occasional cry of an eagle flying outside and far away.

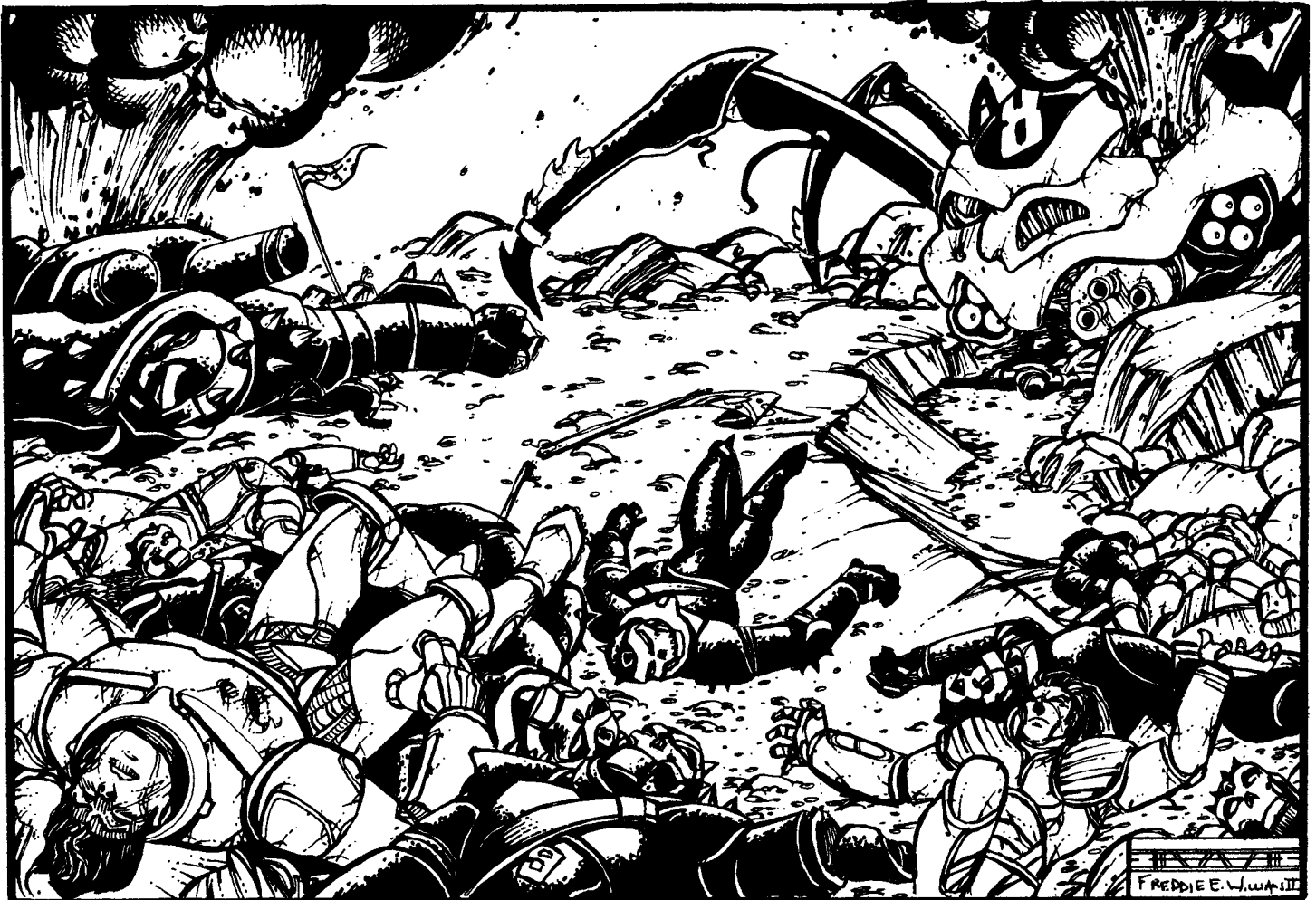
"Why don't you tell me what you saw," Segaya whispered.

"Broken," Taloquin began. "I saw our great fellowship sundered like the pieces of a broken mirror."

"What else?"

"I saw **Tolkeen** in flames, its ruins covered by a swarm of Coalition soldiers, but their faces were long, and their victory empty. Somehow I know that Chi-Town also lies in ruin and burns."

"Everywhere I look there is only death and destruction. Mangled CS war machines, burning settlements and the dead cover the ground like the snowdrifts from a January storm. The sky boils with dark, thick clouds, and a black rain falls upon the earth. The ley lines that jigsaw our world surge out of control,



fueled by the deaths of so many, and all along their lengths, Rifts appear to spill forth hordes of hideous monstrosities the likes of which we have never seen before. The land is dying a slow death, the aftershock of the **Tolkeen-born** apocalypse.

"But that is not the heart of the dream. For in the core of this dreadful wasteland stand two great armies, the final armies the region has to offer. They are twin hosts of **Cyber-Knights**, their ranks swollen like never before, but each side looking dishevelled and with heavy hearts. Both armies incorporate knights and warriors from dozens of varying factions, and to tell them apart, they all wear pole banners strapped to their backs, like ancient samurai. Clearly there has been a long period of warfare among the knights, and as one group defeated other factions, they absorbed them.

"These final armies are the end result of all this bloodshed — vast composite fellowships consisting of rival factions all bound by defeat to a singular lord. Now, after so many years, these armies have returned to the scorched plains of **Tolkeen** to settle their grudges once and for all. Everyone outside of the conflict scatters from the area — the petty warlords who built their kingdoms from the ruins of Tolkeen, the battered Coalition units, the squatters trying so hard to farm a wasted land. They all flee from the mighty hosts assembled before them, for they know that once these forces join in arms, there shall be no mercy until one side is destroyed.

"On the western edge of the field, rides my old protege **Rigeld**, he who was among the first to break ranks with Lord **Coake** during the Siege on Tolkeen. He, who led **Tolkeen's** troops so well during the blitzkrieg and made the Coalition pay so dearly for their past victories. He, whose hands would never be clean from all he had done. Behind him stands an army of Cyber-Knights made of those who left the fellowship to fight on Tolkeen's behalf. As the fellowship unravelled, more and more knights rallied to **Rigeld's** banner, as did countless other warriors, mages, aliens, and militants.

"On the eastern side of the field I see myself. Lord Coake has been dead for years, killed by treachery after the Siege ended. Exactly who killed our mighty leader and why has never been discovered, but those who remained loyal to his dream can only believe that it was a minion of Rigeld's. A cur who in a moment of hate-filled fervor, slew our leader with a cowardly and unprovoked assault. The assassination outrages legions of knights, many of whom had once broken ranks with Lord Coake, and had even fought in Tolkeen against the Coalition. Like a tidal wave, they surge back to the fellowship they had once forsaken, and a new fellowship is born, ready to avenge the death of He who raised us all.

"This new cadre defeats all other factions in their path, adding them to their ranks. But the campaign is long and dangerous, and one by one, the senior-most knights fall. At last it comes to me to lead our forces, and with a heavy heart, I prepare to drive my brethren into a final clash with a man I once considered my adopted son.

"Our armies stand poised on the battlefield, waiting, watching. A cold wind blows between us, and only the cries of hungry crows circling overhead break the silence. I find myself thinking of a better time, when this might have been unthinkable, but I know that such thoughts are folly, and my attention is for the battle at hand. I must turn my every energy towards defeating Rigeld and his host, or I shall die alongside of my cause.

"I summon my blazing sword and raise it high in the air, signaling to my troops that it is time. Behind me, in a wave, my legions do the same, holding their fiery weapons high, a field of blazing psychic energy. Across the field, Rigeld's forces mirror our own. It is time.

"Both Rigeld and I lead our charges, and after a minute, our forces crash into each other, turning the field into a chaotic slaughterhouse. I hack and hew all about me, slaying knights with just a single stroke of my weapons. From all sides my enemies assail me, but my armor holds, and my weapons cut down more men than I have ever slain before. Even after I am dragged from my mount, even as I'm blinded in one eye, even after I bleed from a dozen wounds, I fight on, as if possessed by the spirit of Lord Coake himself, driven to have his revenge whatever the cost.

"I am an ironclad machine driving through the press of Rigeld's men, leaving behind a wake of the dead. At last, I see him, Rigeld. He is more skilled and stronger than when we last parted ways. And even though I am an old, old man, for the first time my student seems vulnerable, as if the hardship and sorrow he has seen and inflicted has exacted a steep toll on his very soul. We lock eyes for a moment, and despite the madness of the battle around us, we each manage a salute before crossing swords.

"We fight like supreme warriors. We fight like expendable zealots. We fight like mad dogs.

"When it is all over, we both lay dying on the ground, mortally wounded from each **other's** blows. Rigeld is already gone, his eyes dark and his body limp. I am not far behind him, for I have scarcely a single drop of blood left to bleed. I only have strength left to roll my head to the side to survey the field and assess the damage we have done.

"The battle is over and the only thing left are the bodies of slain knights. They cover the ground like an armored carpet. From the edges of this grisly scene, the common folk who live here begin to return. Like vultures, some of them crawl among the bodies, searching for valuables and taking anything they can find. Others simply wander the carnage, weeping and wailing, for they know that now, at last, our mighty fellowship is dead. The Cyber-Knights, once great champions of peace and justice, have given up the ghost, and their familiar presence shall grace the land no more.

"And this is my final thought as I slip off into eternal sleep, thinking of these people who grieve not for our passing, but for their future. Since the Great Cataclysm, we provided the only justice these peasants knew. Our deeds were the last bastion of hope that goodness might still prevail in this wild, barbarous world. And now that our light has gone out, what can possibly keep the darkness from spreading forever?

"Nothing, I realize. And then the darkness claims me as well."

"Well," said Segaya, breaking the silence. "That was pleasant."

Sir **Taloquin** answered with the arching of one brow.

"Congratulations. You've had your vision all right."

"I wish I hadn't," said Sir **Taloquin** as he twisted in his seat, cracking most of his vertebrae like knuckles. "For years, I felt that despite everything I'd done, I was not a full-fledged knight because I had never had a vision of my own."

"Indeed," said Segaya. "The dream vision is what separates us from ordinary warriors."

"But never did I realize what it would be like. I don't know what I expected. Something ... different. Not a nightmare."

"The secret" said Segaya, "to any knight's vision, Taloquin, is that there is nothing to figure out. It gives you all the clues you need, right there — although you may be too overwhelmed at the moment to realize it. That's when the trip to the old teacher comes in."

"Master Gurgin helped you interpret your dream?"

"More or less. I was a very young knight. I could not even summon my sword yet, so you can imagine I didn't know what to make of my vision."

"That's a comfort," Taloquin sighed.

"So? Are you going to ride off and confront **Rigeld**?"

"Master?"

"You know? Kill him now before he destroys us all."

"No."

"Afraid?"

"No. It's wrong. Maybe the **Cyber-Knights** are doomed. Maybe this **Tolkeen** affair marks the end of a grand era for us, I don't know. But I will not lead the charge to hasten its destruction. If I've learned anything over the years, it's that hate only begets hate. Rigeld fights for what he believes in. I don't need to smite him down to prove ... or justify my own beliefs, or to avenge the Cyber-Knights for a crime not yet committed. I stand with Lord **Coake**. I uphold the old ways. That has been my decision and it's the right one ... for me anyway. With any luck, this vision will help me to be at Lord **Coake**'s side when the assassin's blade comes. Perhaps I will be able to stay the killing blow, and together we can change the outcome of my nightmare vision."

"And if you fail and Coake dies?"

"Then it will be left to me to mend the hurt and salvage the Cyber-Knights as best I can. If nothing else, I *will* prevent the Cyber-Knights from going at each others' throats in a battle to the death. I will be the cooler head that prevails."

"The Cyber-Knights will never be the same," moans Segaya. "Whether Coake lives or dies. Whether the Cyber-Knights destroy themselves or not, the fellowship will never be the same. You know that, don't you, Taloquin?"

"Yes."

"This war. It has torn us apart and we will never be whole again. Your own vision tells you that."

"Yes. I fear it does, but then everything changes. All things come to an end."

"And still you don't want to exact vengeance against the traitors who made it so?"

"Traitors, sir? No, not even Coake sees them as traitors. Misguided perhaps. Blinded by righteousness, lost to revenge, not realizing that vengeance only destroys, not heals. Master, you are the one who taught me that. So killing Rigeld now or later won't bridge the gulf between us. We must each stand strong

and true and suffer the consequences of our actions. With any luck, time and ... forgiveness will heal us."

"Some would say you are a fool and a coward, Taloquin."

"Some would. More than a few have."

"Did it hurt you when I said you were my greatest disappointment? When I called you a coward?"

"Yes Master, it hurt very much. Not because it was true, but **because you** said it. I thought you knew better of me."

The wizened Grand Master smiled warmly and said, "I do, my pupil. Know that you have never been a disappointment to me. Not now, not ever. I just wanted to remind you that many people mistake compassion and kindness for weakness. They see conviction and forgiveness as cowardice. And they will brand you as both weak and cowardly, and despise you for it. Never seeing your strength. Never understanding what it takes to forgive and build anew."

Sir Taloquin smiled and hugged his mentor. "That I have learned the hard way."

"Do you remember what else I taught you, young sir?"

"Of course."

"What?"

"Life is full of choices. The funny thing about decisions, they follow you wherever you go. You can't escape them. You have to make some kind of choice and live with all that comes with it. Even running away is a choice. Once cast, each decision makes ripples like a stone thrown in a pond. Good and bad. Large or small. They affect our lives and future. They also touch many others and change their lives. So how can anyone make any decision when such weight hangs on every choice? With an open mind and caring heart. To try to do what is good. To try one's best, for what more can any man do?"

"Ah yes," laughed Segaya, "my answer to the mystery of life."

... 74 P.A.

"... Taloquin! Wake up!"

In a dormitory, at a training compound located in a secret place somewhere in the Northwest, the mighty Sir Segaya was shouting at his latest recruit. The boy was only eighteen.

Sir Segaya cuffed the boy across the head with the heel of his hand. "Are you **listening**?! Snap out of it! You have combat drills to attend to!"

Young Taloquin shook himself back to alertness, but not from the blow his master had landed. It was more like he was stirring from a deep sleep.

"Master, I ... I have had a most rare vision."

Sir Segaya smiled at his new student. A vision? The boy had just barely learned to summon his Psi-Sword, and already talk of visions! This one had real potential.

The lad looked nervous. Unsure.

"Excellent, now **let's** get going."

"**Muh** ... Master? Don't you want to hear about it?"

"It was your vision. Not mine."

"Don't you want to help me decipher its meaning?"

"Dear boy, you've just had this *vision* and haven't been awake for more than 30 seconds. Don't you think YOU should give it some thought on your own before you come running to me?"

"But didn't Master **Gurgin** help you unravel yours?"

Sir Segaya couldn't help but to smile. He hadn't even mentioned his own mentor to the boy, and yet he knew.

"Alright. I will give you the same advice my Master gave me."

The young knight in training perked up and sat like a cat on the edge of his bunk, ready to listen intently.

"Life is full of choices. The funny thing about decisions, though, they follow you wherever you go. You can't escape them. You have to make some kind of choice and live with all that comes with it. Even running away is a choice. Once cast, each decision makes ripples, like a stone thrown in a pond. Good and bad. Large or small. They affect our lives and future.

They also touch many others and change their lives. So how can anyone make any decision when such weight hangs on every choice? With an open mind and caring heart. To try to do what is good and right. To try one's best, for what more can any man do?"

Segaya playfully slapped the lad on the cheek and added, "And, young sir, if that is the case, your decision will always be the right one. At least for you. One from the heart. No regrets even if the choice is a difficult or painful one."

"Is ... is that like a riddle, Master?"

"**Riddle?!** Not at all. That's my secret to a good, rich life, young sir. You'll hear me repeat it many times. Think about it for a while."

"**Yes ...** I will."

"Good, but right now it's time for combat drills. Let's move it, my dreamer. Time for the here and now."

One Way, Many Paths

By Bill Coffin & Kevin Siembieda

To many people, **Cyber-Knights** fit a single image, that of the true, noble and valiant crusader. Heroes who fight evil in all its guises, and who stand up for the weak, oppressed and helpless regardless of their race or the **direness** of the situation.

Indeed, most Cyber-Knights *are* champions of truth and justice in some form or another, but like most other things, there are among them various "shades of gray" when it comes to their motivations. Most of these differences fall along alignment lines, but more important than that, the different types of Cyber-Knights has more to do with their overall *motif* as an adventurer. What are their goals, ideals and priorities? Their world view?

It is this world view that truly sets apart one **Cyber-Knight** from another. Attitudes and outlooks that the war at **Tolkeen**, for better or worse, has helped to shape.

There are four basic Cyber-Knight motifs available to player characters: **Courtiers** (39%), **Crusaders** (31%), **Champions** (16%), and **Fallen Knights** (11%; at least half of which are true Blackguards). A fifth motif, the **Hermetic Knight** (3%), plays just as important a role in the Cyber-Knight fellowship as the others, but for reasons found below, these knights are best used as NPCs. In game terms, all of these warriors have identical powers and training as defined under the Cyber-Knight O.C.C. Where their differences come into play is how they are role-played to see and interact in the world. That having been said, each individual *player* will breathe life into his character that will set him apart from all others, and it is the player who is the final architect of any Cyber-Knight character.

Courtiers

Close to half of all Cyber-Knights are *Courtiers*, noble and lawful warriors who live their life by the **Chivalric** Code. All Cyber-Knights adhere to the Code in some way, shape or form,

but it is the Courtiers who have seemingly refined it to an "art and a science." Their every action corresponds in some way to the Code which binds them. Verily, they are living examples of the power of law and justice in a lawless world.

Courtiers are so named because they maintain the ancient practice of "holding court" so that a **Cyber-Knight's** deeds may be publicly known and the knight's worthiness evaluated by his peers. In ancient times, feudal knights attended the court of their lord and king for such purposes. On Rifts Earth, the Cyber-Knights are not a feudal organization. Indeed, they are not a formal organization at all, so they really have no formal meeting places or castles in which to "hold court." Instead, there is a tradition among them that whenever six or more knights gather, they head for the nearest town and "hold court." This typically entails the knights bringing large gifts of food and drink to the town, which in turn holds a large festival in their honor. At night, the Cyber-Knights are asked to come forward and tell stories of their deeds. Since Cyber-Knights in good standing do not lie or exaggerate, the stories told are assumed by all to be true. Everybody at the scene listens to the tales; in a world where most people have no books, television or movies, Cyber-Knight stories are much-loved entertainment.

While **comments**, praise, applause and questions are welcomed from all the listeners, either a single person or a small group of 4-8 people from the crowd are chosen to evaluate the Cyber-Knight based on his deeds. This person or group is always a **woman(s)**, usually a young maiden who has not yet been married or attained motherhood. In some cases, little children will also be called upon to evaluate knightly tales. The idea behind this odd practice is that these people represent the most easily trodden upon folks in the badlands where Cyber-Knights roam. In many wasteland villages and homesteads, women tend the home fires and have little or no means of defending themselves. Children are even more easily victimized, and the young

age of both suggests a certain level of innocence. Who better to judge the progress of the champions of the downtrodden than the downtrodden and innocent themselves?

Should a **Cyber-Knight** be deemed worthy of adulation, the other knights will all bear witness to it, and spread the word to any other knights they reach. This is how the reputation of a Cyber-Knight grows among other knights. Among common folk, knightly reputations often grow like wildfire and may get rather embellished along the way. By the time the tale of one **Cyber-Knight's** victory over a pair of **Simvan** in Minnesota reaches Texas, the deed has turned into a one-man battle against a horde of Simvan and all of their monstrous steeds. So on one hand, the practice of holding impromptu courts helps correct runaway stories of outlandish deeds, and on the other, helps to propagate them. For most knights, hearing that the magnitude of their deeds has been blown out of proportion is cause for embarrassment. Villages that hold court for **Cyber-Knights** often take it upon themselves to be the truthful keepers of the stories told during the festivities. The tales become part of the *village's heritage*, and in this way, many of the small communities dotting the wastelands of Rifts North America are themselves small museums of Cyber-Knight history. Should a scholar make an extensive trip among these places, he could assemble a mighty collection of Cyber-Knight lore. Erin Tarn herself gathered numerous accounts and has been said to have considered making a comprehensive history, if only she "were ten years younger."

The Code of Chivalry

1. To Live

Live one's life so that it is worthy of respect and honor.

Live for freedom, justice, and all that is good.

2. Fair Play

Never attack an unarmed foe.

Never use a Psi-Sword on an opponent not equal to the attack.

Never charge an unhorsed opponent.

Never attack from behind.

Avoid cheating.

Avoid torture.

3. Nobility

Exhibit self control.

Show respect to authority.

Obey the laws if they do not supersede the rights of life.

Administer justice.

Administer mercy.

Protect the innocent.

Respect women.

4. Valor

Exhibit courage in word and deed.

Defend the weak and innocent.

Fight for an ideal, like freedom.

Fight with honor.

Avenge the wronged.

Never abandon a **friend**, ally, or noble cause.

5. Honor

Always keep one's word of honor.

Always maintain one's principles.

Never betray a confidence or comrade.

Avoid deception.

Respect life.

Honor all **life**.

Respect all views of **life**.

6. Courtesy

Exhibit manners.

Be polite and attentive.

Be respectful of host, women, and honor.

7. Loyalty

To one's principles and heart.

To one's friends and those who lay their trust in thee.

To the code of chivalry.

Those knights who break the Code must be brought before Lord **Coake** or another senior knight and punished for their deeds. While some will undertake Quests (see the *Crusader*, below) to make up for their misdeeds, most are simply physically punished or stripped of their rank, left to wander outside the Fellowship as **castoff** warriors (not unlike the *ronin* — masterless samurai — of ancient Japan). These outsiders often fall into deep melancholy. Some retire from knighthood (coming out only when absolutely needed), others wander in search of some way to regain their lost status or continue to wander the land as rogue Cyber-Knights (anti-heroes if you will), living by their own standards. The worst descend into bitter villainy.

Most Cyber-Knights, even the fallen ones, strive to live by most, if not all of the aspects of the Code. However, nobody **up-holds** the Code like the Courtiers. They take it to an extreme where their every action must be attributed to one of the seven aspects of the code: *Life*, *Fair Play*, *Nobility*, *Valor*, *Honor*, *Courtesy*, and *Loyalty*. The following is how the Courtiers interpret the seven tenets of the **Cyber-Knights'** Code of Chivalry.

Life

In essence, this commands the knight to live his life so that it is worthy of respect and honor, living for freedom, justice and all that is good. This also teaches the knight that all life is precious, even that of his enemies.

While Cyber-Knights should be willing to lay down their lives for their cause, they should never, ever do so needlessly. Believe it or not, there are those who mistake a mortal devotion to knighthood for the need to die in combat or while committing some self-sacrificing act. Not so. Indeed, Cyber-Knights who go out that way are given a hero's burial, but every knight knows that if the circumstances warrant, it is often wiser to retreat and fight another day than perish in a futile effort.

No Cyber-Knight should make a habit of trying to kill himself doing the impossible. Rather, all knights are taught that they must do the best they can. Inevitably, there will come a time in a **Cyber-Knight's** career when the odds are stacked so grossly against his favor that victory is impossible. In such cases, if the knight is not shirking his duties or violating other principles of the Code, it is wiser to retreat or surrender, and return some other day to battle, when the knight has a more even chance of ridding this evil from the world. Those unfamiliar with the **Chivalric** Code sometimes confuse this for cowardice, and indeed, the sight of a Cyber-Knight withdrawing from battle for any reason leaves many wondering if the warrior has lost his nerve. Better for a momentary questioning of one's commitment than a pointless sacrifice. Moreover, since common folk and other heroes are quick to follow a **Cyber-Knight's** lead, the warrior must always ask himself if his decision to fight will ultimately lead to the pointless slaughter of those who follow him without



question. Survival of the hero-knight and those who stand at his side will, more often than not, serve the world better than noble sacrifice.

In keeping with their love for life, **Cyber-Knights** should live for *freedom, justice* and *all that is good*. This, more than any other single principle, defines the heart of the **Chivalric Code**. Living and fighting for these things reinforces the goodness not yet driven from the world. A goodness worth fighting for whenever any villain threatens it. Given the powers they have, and a love for life itself, the true hero has no need to cross-check a bad situation against the Chivalric Code to see if any action is necessary. No, a true **Cyber-Knight** knows instinctively when he is needed, and no matter what the challenge, he shall face it with bravery and steadfast commitment.

Curiously, it is this core commitment that has driven a wedge between various camps of Cyber-Knights, especially regarding the knights' involvement in the Siege on **Tolkeen**. What is more important: To let to evil forces fight it out amongst themselves, or to help one evil force to make sure that the other, stronger force will not someday take over the world? For the many Cyber-Knights gone to war on **Tolkeen's** behalf, *this* is what the Siege on Tolkeen is all about.

Fair Play

In this world of dirty tricks, magic and overkill, fair play is something for which the Cyber-Knights are legendary. Their refusal to employ undue force when meeting a foe sets them apart, at least in temperament, from most other adventurers, warriors and would-be heroes.

One of the top precepts of fair play is for Cyber-Knights to *never* attack an unarmed foe. Sometimes, this requires some interpretation on the knight's part. An evil sorcerer who is not carrying any weapons but is fully able to cast offensive spells is clearly an "armed" opponent. Likewise, a D-Bee who can present a serious threat of bodily harm to the Cyber-Knight through its natural abilities (claws, energy blasts, etc.) or psionics, is also considered "armed." This precept is really intended to keep the Cyber-Knight from attacking any foe who is unable to defend himself. Oftentimes, enemies will find it curious that a Cyber-Knight locked in mortal combat will immediately switch to subtle tactics once his adversary runs out of ammunition or is disarmed. To onlookers, it is a sign of their utter nobility. Their ability to show mercy to those who hardly know of the concept, much less practice it. Unfortunately, showing such grace and mercy can return to haunt the knight who granted it, when a defeated foe escapes, re-arms or later kills the Cyber-Knight or an innocent. Such is the risk of *noble heroism*, a price the Cyber-Knights are willing to pay.

Knights are also expected not to use their vaunted **Psi-Swords** against opponents not equal to the attack. In game terms, this means a Cyber-Knight will not use his M.D.C. weapon against S.D.C. opponents. Many knights take this a step further, refusing to employ *any* M.D.C. attacks against S.D.C. opponents. This, they liken to using a bazooka to kill an ant. It is simply dishonorable and conduct unbecoming of a true knight.

Likewise, Cyber-Knights will never charge an unhorsed opponent while they are mounted. This practice stems from ancient combat, when mounted knights enjoyed a vast tactical advantage over opponents on foot. Over the ages, as gunpowder

and other developments rendered the mounted warrior's advantage moot, knights themselves kept the practice alive more as a formal display of fair play than anything else. Clearly, a gun-toting Juicer on foot is at no serious disadvantage if a **Cyber-Knight** comes at him riding a bionic horse. Where this practice means the most is when **Cyber-Knights** themselves meet in combat, in which case, their sword-swinging style of fighting actually gives a breath of life back to mounted combat.

Cyber-Knights are often *solo operators*, assaulting entire enemy installations individually, using stealth and remarkable fighting abilities to their fullest. Yet, even when slaying his enemies by sneak attack will certainly benefit the Cyber-Knight, he is expected *not* to do so, or he will allow his opponent a moment to gather his wits and raise a weapon. Again, hitting an opponent incapable of defending himself is considered dishonorable. Of course, in cases where stealth is absolutely crucial, some Cyber-Knights might bend this rule, and many will bend it without hesitation if they intend only to grab an opponent to incapacitate, binding and gag him. Otherwise, most Cyber-Knights will at least give their enemy a warning ("stand down at sunset or face death"), or shouting a war cry before the first attack, so the enemy at least has a chance to surrender, parry or dodge before the knight's attack comes down on him.

Cyber-Knights are also expected to *avoid cheating* in all things. The term "avoid" is used because there are circumstances when cheating and trickery is considered acceptable behavior for these honor-bound warriors.

Most of the time, cheating is okay only when used against other cheaters or against villains who have manipulated the circumstances of battle to a grossly unfair advantage. In situations such as these, the odd dirty trick is permissible if it is used to even the playing field. Now, merely facing a strong opponent does not merit cheating; this is the sort of last-ditch thing that Cyber-Knights should only resort to when there is no other option, and never when it's not a life and death situation for the hero or the innocent. Even then, knights should not take pride in underhanded tactics. They may be necessary sometimes, yes, but they are never something to brag about.

Finally, the last tenet of fair play states that knights should *avoid torturing* their fallen opponents. One might think the **Chivalric Code** should strictly prohibit torture under any circumstance, but it does not. Nobody is sure why this moral wiggle room exists, but scholars believe that it is meant to accommodate those Cyber-Knights who are otherwise stalwart and true, but wish to employ harsh methods against demons and other vile monsters. Indeed, many Cyber-Knights find no fault in putting the irons to a captured demon or foul villain if (and only if) it is to reveal the location of his infernal brethren, to free innocent captives, or if it yields equally important information (the location of an active time bomb, the location of hostages, etc.). As distasteful as strong tactics and even outright torture may be, they yield results and are sometimes found to be acceptable. Like any other dirty trick, this is a task no true Cyber-Knight takes pleasure in. Those who do are often disdained by their brethren and soon find themselves sliding down the slippery slope of villainy.

Nobility

There is little evidence of true nobility in Rifts Earth. Any noble bloodlines died during the Great Cataclysm, and for various reasons, there has been no chance for any new ones to take hold. Chief among those reasons is time. By the early 21st Century, people had largely forgotten that nobility originates from warriors who forcefully exert this claim to a particular domain. As the generations pass, the warriors who initially conquered the land gave way to the more refined leaders that succeeded them. This position of power and "noble lineage" was passed down to the next generation, giving the inheritor (the children, grandchildren, and so on) a noble position without actually having to fight to attain it. With time the inheritors came to believe they simply *deserved* to hold the positions they occupied. That it was their birthright. Meanwhile the commoners who served them were in no position to question it.

Offsetting the inherent unfairness of it all is the softer side of nobility — ruling with kindness, fairness, wisdom and sincerity. These are the hallmark traits of the "true nobleman," along with the implied strength of a noble to vanquish anybody who would challenge his authority.

Although the Cyber-Knights do not profess to be nobles themselves, they do embody these latter traits of nobility. To the "little people" trying to survive in this world, Cyber-Knights are a cut above the petty warlords, bandits and other would-be conquerors who try so hard to carve out little kingdoms for themselves. These power-mongers are just craven conquerors who lack the grace and vision of true leaders. Brutes who rule by the sword. In short, they lack the refinement and purity of spirit that the Cyber-Knights exhibit.

Exhibiting self-control is one of the simplest and most important aspects the **Cyber-Knight's** nobility. Savage, barbaric behavior is the norm in this world. Even so-called "great civilizations" like the Coalition States or the Federation of Magic participate in all sorts of unrestrained savagery, ranging from cruel military campaigns to outright genocide. Against such a grim backdrop, the **Cyber-Knights'** refusal to partake in mindless bloodletting is no small distinction. It is an affirmation that no matter what, these champions of justice can be counted upon to always act with a clear head.

For some of the Cyber-Knights who participated in the *Sorcerers' Revenge* (the **Tolkeen** counterattack that massacred the Coalition invasion force), self-restraint went out the window as they were party to the merciless destruction of the scattered and fleeing Coalition forces. Although many Cyber-Knights themselves abstained from the carnage, and some even tried to stop it, that they had allied themselves with a force that seems incapable of such restraint is a troubling sign.

Another aspect of knightly nobility is to *show respect* to proper authority. Traveling Cyber-Knights spend their lives going from one small settlement, town or kingdom to another. The laws and customs of these places often vary considerably, but the Cyber-Knights make every effort to know what is acceptable behavior and to abide by it. This alone generates a lot of the universal goodwill. That they respect everyone's culture, laws and customs is a welcome change from the crass indifference most travelers and adventurers show, or from powers like the Coalition States who try to crush individuality and free-thinking in an effort to create militant conformity. It lets the town fathers know

that when a **Cyber-Knight** stays in town, he will at least keep things quiet, if nothing else. More importantly, **Cyber-Knights** often possess the power to take over the tiny hamlets they visit, or the influence to subvert local governments or even beliefs, but they choose not to for obvious reasons. To the people of these places, so used to being claimed or threatened by every two-bit warlord or Mega-Damage weapon toting punk who passes through, this is a sign of genuine benevolence and tolerance.

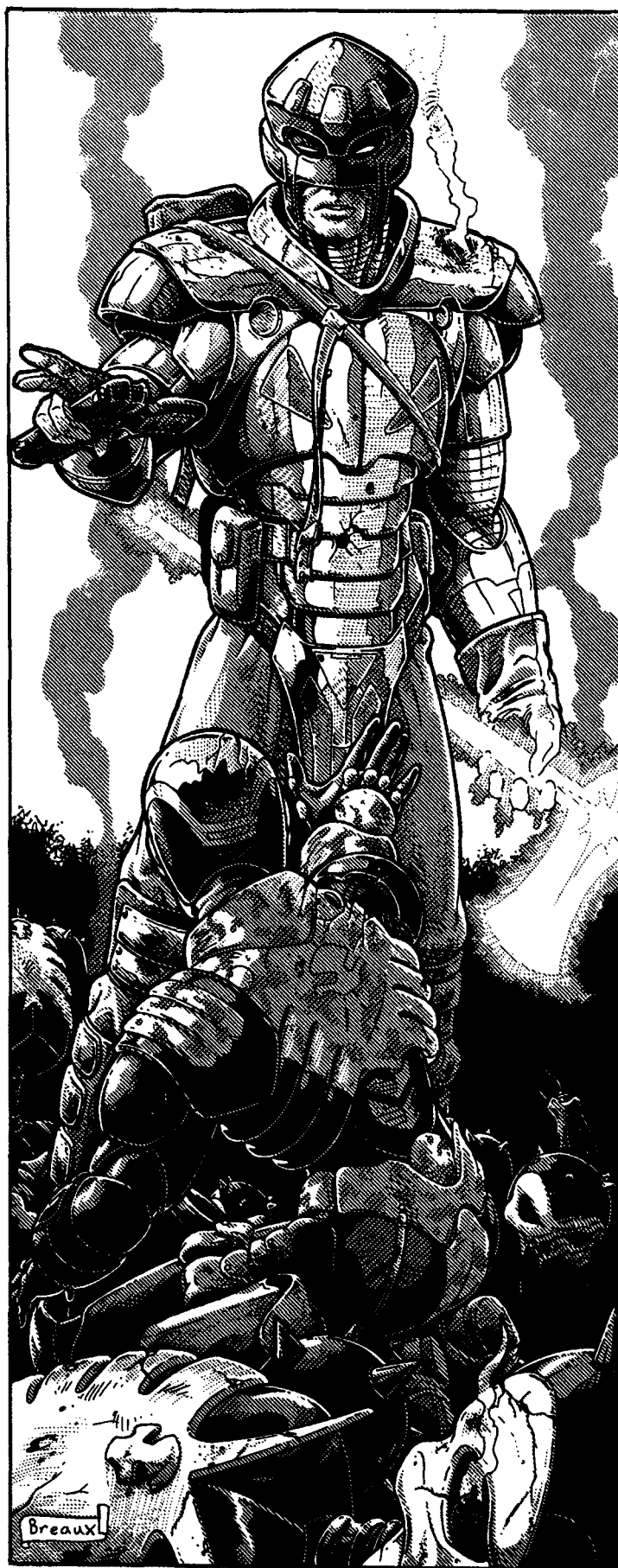
Generally speaking, **Cyber-Knights** try not to make assumptions or barge in where they are not wanted. They will usually *ask* if they can help (or at least investigate the situation) before jumping into action (or to conclusions). Likewise, most knights do not preach or try to instill any particular philosophy, religion or way of life. If the **Cyber-Knights** promote anything, it is tolerance and understanding of others, along with a strong, personal sense of right and wrong, and the courage to take a stand in the name of justice and mercy. Yet even these lofty ideals are presented through the **Cyber-Knights'** own *actions* and strength of character rather than from a pulpit or at the end of a sword blade.

Naturally, **Cyber-Knights** are also expected to obey local laws, but only if they do not supersede the "rights of life." Exactly what this means is open to wide personal interpretation, but for most knights it means that unless a regime's laws clearly ignore the sanctity of life (the Coalition's legal policies towards magic users and D-Bees are a good example), they should be followed. **Cyber-Knights** are not meant to rewrite the law of the land, merely to uphold it. That is why they might overthrow an evil overlord's realm, but they will not take a direct hand in forming a new government to replace the old. Most **Cyber-Knights** feel such action and duty lays in the hands the people, who then have the opportunity to determine their own destiny.

Administer justice. These two words are another cornerstone of the **Cyber-Knights'** nobility. Although knights recognize that every kingdom or town has its own laws and customs, they also know that there is a greater sense of right and wrong, and ultimately, they must answer to that above all other things. Of course, in a world such as Rifts Earth, finding opportunities to set the wrong things right is not difficult. With so much mayhem and barbarism everywhere, **Cyber-Knights** are in what military types would call a "target-rich environment." People who live in the Coalition States or any other built-up, modernized zone quickly forget just how lawless the rest of the world is. Out in the boondocks, all too often there is nobody to enforce justice except for oneself. With so many monsters, warlords, raiders and other villains about, it is impossible for most people to stand up for themselves. Many endure lives of endless suffering brought about by evildoers who are never brought to task for their misdeeds. Until a **Cyber-Knight** comes along, that is. Many times, when a knight frees the land of evildoers, it is the first real taste of justice the downtrodden people have known in years it is little wonder why **Cyber-Knights** are so beloved by those they serve.

However, *administering* justice is not the same thing as revenge. All too often, those who have suffered at the hands of villains simply wish to return the favor. When oppressed folk can not immediately strike out at their enemies or oppressors, then a vendetta takes root. A vendetta is particularly common in

areas controlled by familiar clans or small tribes where personal honor is important. Here, any altercation can turn into a never-ending feud in which each new generation inherits the



hostilities of the previous one, and thus the conflict goes on forever. Even in areas where monsters and warlords are not a serious problem, clan warfare, gangs and vendettas can seriously destabilize daily life and make conditions as unbearable as if some greater malignant force had taken over. (This is very much the case in the American south and parts of Mexico.)

The **Cyber-Knight** hopes to break such chains of violence with the simple act of granting mercy and forgiveness to who deserve it. The ability to cease fire when their opponent has had enough, be benevolent and exhibit fairness and compassion. In most cases, this serves to enhance a **Cyber-Knight's** reputation, for mercy and compassion can be rare commodities on Rifts Earth. Such "nobility" and generosity impresses the common man, and many an enemy or brigand spared by a knight will tell the story many times. For some (like **Sgt. Canton**), such acts of compassion can have a life changing impact.

Mercy, tolerance and mending fences are practices in which **Cyber-Knights** lead by example. That just because the world has become a bloodthirsty place, people need not perpetuate cruelty and injustice out of habit or revenge. All it takes is a simple leap of faith that enemies who are spared will remember the deed and that somehow it will take root in their hearts to bury the conflict, exorcise the hate and enable matters to be worked out peacefully. It is, perhaps, a rather naive approach, but one that does bear fruit every once in a while. For the Cyber-Knights, it is a way to plant the seeds for a better future.

Of course, sometimes spared villains return to attack the Cyber-Knight who defeated them once before, or they go on to inflict greater evil. That risk comes with the territory. However, Cyber-Knights are not so naive, foolish or blinded by compassion that they let any villains run free on a promise to reform. The knights typically turn evildoers over to the authorities for trial where (hopefully) justice will be delivered. Likewise, Cyber-Knights have little hesitation about utterly destroying monsters, tyrants and killers, including human ones. They know the face of evil and are glad to eradicate it whenever and wherever they can.

Protecting the innocent and respecting women come as the last two aspects of knightly nobility. This harkens back to the feudal duties of ancient nobles to protect the commoners who served them. The way a feudal society worked was that peasants, craftsmen and merchants all kicked their taxes up to the local **lord**, who used part of that money to hire knights to keep the peace. It was a nice, if costly arrangement (in theory, anyway) in which the common folk actually got something for their money: protection.

Rifts Earth is hardly a feudal one, overall, but the principle of protection remains at the heart of the Cyber-Knights, even if they have no financial requirements for those they serve. As the institution of medieval knighthood faded, the reality of their deeds and practices became **romanticized**, and the pragmatic tasks of knights (who were simply a layer of government) became glamorized as a system of noble behavior performed by worthy champions upholding goodness for **goodness'** sake. Clearly, the Cyber-Knights have inherited this romantic tradition and are running with it. A good thing it is, too, since no other group in this part of the world so ardently embraces ideals such as these.

Valor

Exhibiting courage in word and deed is what many people expect from Cyber-Knights. Not only do they routinely battle terrifying monsters and despicable villains, but they also take on enemies or forces that seem much more powerful than they. Yet, defying the odds, the Cyber-Knights more often than not come out on top. Such bravery is second nature to these knights, for one can not protect the weak and innocent if one is not ready to cross swords with the dark forces oppressing them. The legendary valor of the Cyber-Knights is not mere bravado or reckless disregard for life and limb. The knights are all too aware of their own mortality and they do not risk their lives foolishly. They know the dangers they face, yet they do so anyway. These fighters could just slip away into an easy life of safe luxury, but they choose the hard road for the good of all. This is the true face of courage. Enduring hardship and fighting evil so that other people will not have to.

The **Chivalric** Code reminds Cyber-Knights that it is not enough that they travel the world looking for a good fight. That would make their efforts no different than that of a callous mercenary. No, Cyber-Knights are expected to fight for a particular cause, such as truth, justice, or peace. This notion of fighting for a cause is something lost on more callow adventurers, who typically find themselves on the battlefield out for profit, power or the sheer hell of it. The true knight is above all of that, and at the end of a battle, he knows that there is a greater good to be served than that of mere bloodshed.

Fighting with honor is as important as fighting for a cause. Defeating one's opponent by any means available is not usually the honorable way of fighting. For the individual Cyber-Knight, this means not attacking from **behind**, not using Mega-Damage attacks against S.D.C. opponents, not exercising an undue advantage over an opponent, and showing mercy when appropriate.

It is the **Cyber-Knights'** sense of honor and fair play that makes the knights frown upon weapons of mass destruction. Nuclear weapons in particular are seen as filthy, dishonorable devices that are what plunged the world into its present chaotic state. As forces like **Tolkeen** and the Coalition States grow in power and declare war on each other, it is the fervent hope of the Cyber-Knights that weapons of mass destruction will be forsaken in favor of more honorable forms of personal combat. In the Siege on Tolkeen, for example, the Cyber-Knights lead by example, and refuse to operate heavy war machinery of any **kind**, relying solely on their personal weapons and skills. Furthermore, witnessing individual Cyber-Knights dashing across a field to engage large Coalition robots and armored vehicles is awe-inspiring, and has encouraged scores of Tolkeen soldiers to fight in like manner.

Ultimately, however, the true knight's valor is to be channeled towards the goal of "righting wrongs" and bringing about justice and peace. In this world, the Cyber-Knight has little opportunity to actually prevent bad things from happening. There are far too few knights, too much territory to cover, and too many villains and monsters running loose. Unless a Cyber-Knight settles down to protect a particular area (which almost *never* happens), they wander, finding regions where justice has been forgotten and setting things right again. Scholars **observe** that this mission of the Cyber-Knights — to restore order

as opposed to actually preserving it — shows just how badly society needs more of these champions. Were the number of Cyber-Knights to increase four- or five-fold, they might very well be able to tame some of the wilder parts of North America and return life to a more civilized state. Alas, with so many Cyber-Knights currently deployed to Minnesota to either defend Tolkeen or to help those caught in the crossfire of the conflict, the chances of the fellowship increasing in number any time soon are slim to none. Those knights who do not die in the conflict stand an excellent chance of becoming disenchanted by the horrors they experience and might very well forsake **their** occupation. Indeed, observers worry avenging the wrongs of the world might become a job the Cyber-Knights are no longer in a position to assume for much longer.

The Cyber-Knights scoff at such predictions and fears. Their duty is to fight the good fight for as long as they still draw breath. Even if there are only a handful of knights left in the world, they contend, they shall never abandon their quest to destroy evil. This is the final and perhaps most important aspect of knightly valor: the ultimate devotion to the cause. To abandon a friend, ally or noble cause is simply unbecoming of a true knight, and any **Cyber-Knight** who does so can not rightly consider himself a champion of anyone. By opposing the forces of evil and chaos that run rampant on Rifts Earth, the Cyber-Knights have already taken on an overwhelmingly difficult (some say impossible) task. This means nothing to the Cyber-Knights, however, whose lives are measured by their

dedication to resisting and thwarting evil no matter how strong it might be. This is the knightly way, and the true Cyber-Knight would not have it any different.

Honor

Such a simple concept, yet one that is largely missing in Rifts Earth. With the world locked in a daily struggle for survival, living by one's principles, keeping one's word, avoiding deception, being truthful and respecting all life has pretty much fallen by the wayside. It has fallen to rare champions such as the Cyber-Knights and ignored common folk to be the standard-bearers for such notions. Not only has this earned the Cyber-Knights a well-deserved reputation for being honest and trustworthy, but it also reminds people that living honorably is a strong measure of one's civility. For those wishing to elevate themselves from the barbarity of Rifts Earth, living with honor is an excellent first step.

To that end, Cyber-Knights must lead by example. First, they are expected to be true to any oaths and promises they make. This is the basic underpinning of trust, and the more the knights live up to it, the more people will believe their trust is well placed. More importantly, it teaches the people that heroes like the Cyber-Knights don't see trust and truth as a crazy idea, but a lofty ideal worth living and dying by. That an honorable and trusting society is a civilized and fair society. Second, Cyber-Knights try never to compromise their principles. Again, because people are so focused on merely surviving day to day,



abstract concepts like truth, honor and justice are easily forgotten. The **Cyber-Knights** strive to rekindle these things in the spirit of common people who often aspire to such notions. The fact that Cyber-Knights are willing to die to uphold truth, endure incredible hardships to see justice prevail, and forsake every comfort and safety to remain honorable inspires the people to do likewise.

This kind of remarkable self-sacrifice is what distinguishes the Cyber-Knights as true champions. Honorable knights will never betray a confidence or a comrade, even when tortured or under the threat of death. They just will not do it. Among kindlier settlements, this principle is already widely held. The world is hard enough to survive. If one betrays his friends, he is doomed to go it alone. Thus, the sanctity of friendship is one of the few virtuous things that has not perished in a savage world. Like so many other principles, however, the Cyber-Knights take it to the highest level. A **Cyber-Knight** can be expected to fight incredible odds for a friend, perhaps sacrificing his life if need be. Even if a friend betrays a Cyber-Knight, the hero is not likely to turn his back on him, especially if the knight understands there were extenuating circumstances and pressures placed on that friend. The Cyber-Knight might let such a friend hang by a thread for a while, but ultimately, no self-respecting knight would ever let a friend die or fend completely for himself. It is just not in a knight's character to do so. It is their unique generosity of spirit that enables Cyber-Knights to maintain friendships with even those who seem undeserving of it. That is the depth of the knights' impressive level of tolerance, compassion and forgiveness. It is just one more thing that elevates Cyber-Knights to the high station they occupy in the eyes of common folk.

On the other hand, treachery and deceit are perceived as cardinal sins and the most repugnant and despicable of acts. Those who willingly betray a Cyber-Knight or trusting **friend** can be expected to receive some harsh retribution for it. Likewise, liars and dishonorable characters are looked upon with disdain and disgust, and are *never* trusted. Moreover, an act of betrayal or treachery that results in the loss of innocent lives sends the knights' blood boiling and screams for revenge.

Ultimately, it all comes down to honoring life itself. Although a Cyber-Knight is in the business of slaying and destroying evil, he does so knowing that all life, good and evil, is precious. They see themselves as builders and protectors, not destroyers. Thus, a Cyber-Knight should never take killing lightly — even when they must destroy a vile monster or foul villain. Many Cyber-Knights find it difficult to believe that anything can be *entirely* evil. Certainly, there are those monsters or villains who are about as evil as one can be, and even though the Cyber-Knight will readily do battle with them to protect society, he does so with the conviction that the capability for goodness and honor is available to all creatures. Even demons can be honorable, if not outright good — and there are exceptions to every rule. Again, the knights are not naive, stupid or so compassionate that they stay their sword when it is needed. Nor do they hesitate to do what must be done, but they think about their deeds, take no pleasure in killing, and keep an eye open for when mercy makes sense.

This sensitivity — that most every foe is worthy of at least a tiny bit of sympathy — is what keeps most Cyber-Knights from becoming heartless killing machines. During the *Sorcerers' Re-*

venge, however, killing machines are precisely what many of the Cyber-Knights serving **Tolkeen** had become. As the smoke was clearing from the battlefield, the massacre of Coalition troops was revealed. Additionally, revenge killing, torture, mutilation and brutality reigned for over a week afterward, seeing more enemy troops, often **unarmed**, often begging for mercy, sometimes laying down their arms in surrender, cut down where they stood or tormented for days before the blessing of death finally delivered them. The Cyber-Knights would like to say it was only **Tolkeen's** demon hordes that went on the savage killing spree, for cruelty and murder are their nature. Yet even if that were the case, one must wonder why the Tolkeenites would ally themselves with such pernicious monsters and do nothing to stop them. Sadly, humans, D-Bees and even a few Cyber-Knights were in the thick of things, dealing out vengeance at the end of a gun or sword, and delighting in the carnage.

Many Cyber-Knights in **Tolkeen's** service are haunted by Lord **Coake's** words and begin to realize the unrighteous debauchery they helped to unleash upon the enemy. For many, the sights and sounds of merciless, wholesale murder plague their dreams and gnaw at their souls. They feel responsible, at least in part, and even though the vast majority had no part in the murder of helpless soldiers, and many actually took action to stop it (only they were far too few make a large difference), the guilt of their involvement remains. They should have known better. They should have trusted Lord **Coake**. They should never have associated with any people willing to condone nefarious magic and demon allies. It is a revelation that makes most of the Tolkeen Cyber-Knights feel forever tarnished and marked. Marked as fools. Marked as accessories to murder, **defilers** of the Code, and worse.

Many Cyber-Knights in service to Tolkeen will spend the rest of their lives trying to make amends for this day and the atrocities yet to come. Many will also come to openly defy their Tolkeen superiors and to follow their hearts and do what they feel is right. For others it will all be too much to bear. They will retreat from knighthood altogether, becoming hermits or lone-wolf wanderers in search of truth, redemption and peace. Others slowly transcend into darkness, becoming killing machines so embittered, angry or cruel that they are becoming villains themselves. Some have even grown to enjoy killing and the power that comes with it. Still others (the minority) might merely recoil from serving Tolkeen any longer, and seek to either rejoin Lord Coake's faction or will take a long personal journey to reflect on what they did and how they can make amends. How the knights of the Sorcerers' Revenge handle the consequences of their actions and events they helped to unfold is perhaps the strongest test of honor the Fellowship has had to **face**, collectively. How the knights meet this test, however, remains to be seen.

Courtesy

It may seem like a trifle, but to the Cyber-Knight, simple manners are the touchstone of civility. In a world where the strong survive all too often by preying upon the weak, there is little room for politeness of any kind. The Courtier, however, makes a point of exhibiting manners, reminding people that under finer circumstances, life can be so much more bearable than



it is presently. This means exhibiting manners whenever appropriate, being polite and attentive to those who merit it, and to be respectful of women, authority and anybody who gives the knight help of any kind. No Courtier expects to change the world by showing people common decency and respect, but they do hope that by exhibiting this kind of behavior, it will make people all the more intolerant of the rampant barbarism and disrespect. Ultimately, it will be this intolerance that drives people to quell the disturbances rocking this world and make it a truly better place. Courtiers realize that **Cyber-Knights** and other heroes might be able to defeat evil where it rises, but the task of building a better world falls to the everyday people living in it. By practicing courtesy, Courtiers hope to entice others to that task by showing them a glimpse of the kinds of luxuries a civilized life has to offer.

Loyalty

This is the final precept of the **Chivalric Code**, and it simply demands that the **Cyber-Knight** remain true to that to which he has dedicated his life. It has been previously explained why and how the knight is expected to remain steadfast and true to both his own principles and his friends and allies, but knightly loyalty extends a bit further than that. The true knight will also remain forever loyal to his superiors. Most immediately, this refers to **Lord Coake**, founder and leader of the Cyber-Knight Fellowship. Next is one's teacher/mentor.

Every Cyber-Knight enters the Fellowship by becoming the apprentice, or *squire*, of an established Cyber-Knight. After years of harsh tutelage, the knight in training becomes a

Cyber-Knight in his own right, and may take on a student himself at any time (typically only after years of experience; level 6 or higher). This is how the Fellowship propagates itself, and over the years, it has given rise to a large and complex network of knightly hierarchy. Every Cyber-Knight is expected to remember not only the Cyber-Knight who taught him, but who his teacher's mentor was, and the knight who mentored him, and so on. In this way, a Cyber-Knight creates an oral history and knows, by name only, who another knight was trained by and how high he ranks in the loose hierarchy of the Fellowship. Ultimately, all Cyber-Knights can trace their knightly "lineage" back to Lord Coake, the original Cyber-Knight. This is what gives Coake such great authority over other knights. Although he rarely enforces any set of rules over the rest of the Fellowship, the truth is that most Cyber-Knights consider the Code of Chivalry as law and willingly defer to Lord Coake as their superior and grand sage. Likewise, each successive "Generation" downwards from Lord Coake is a step down in authority. Thus a "sixth generation" knight is considered to be of greater status than a seventh- or eighth-generation knight.

There are some Cyber-Knights who do not care for this hierarchy and insist that it matters not who a knight "descended" from — all that matters is each knight's deeds as champions of justice. Indeed, that may be the case, and Lord Coake himself judges a man by his merits and character rather than lineage, but every knight is at least expected to show the utmost respect to his master/mentor. It is a cultural standard within the Fellowship, and any Cyber-Knight who disrespects or forsakes his mentor is considered a rogue and potentially dangerous loose cannon who is often shunned by fellow knights. After all, a

Cyber-Knight would not even *be* a knight were it not for the efforts of his mentor.

Above all, a Cyber-Knight must remain true to the **Chivalric Code**. This is no mere collection of rules and regulations. It is a way of life, a world view, a way of thinking, and an aspect of character that makes the **Cyber-Knights** what they are. This Code has forged the Cyber-Knights into a new breed of champions in a lawless and savage world. Without the Code, the knighthood becomes just another armed rabble trying to spread their way of life throughout the world. However, the Code of Chivalry is something higher than all that. It is greater than any of the knights who serve it. It is a set of *ideals* that in truth, no mortal Cyber-Knight could ever fully satisfy. But the struggle to meet the Code as best as one can is what makes the Cyber-Knights such paragons of virtue. In their striving to satisfy the Code, they stretch the upper limits of the goodness and nobility that the ordinary person can be. In the end, any Cyber-Knight may come and go, but the Code and all it stands for will live on forever. This is the Fellowship's legacy. It is their lifeblood, their spirit, their reason for being. This is the way of the champion. The way of the warrior. The way of the Cyber-Knight.

Notable Courtiers

Sir Tristram Starbuck. Race: Human. Level of Experience: 12th; 52 years old. Alignment: Scrupulous. Sir Starbuck is a "second generation" Cyber-Knight. That is, he was trained by Lord **Coake** himself! A magnificent warrior, Sir Starbuck has spent the better part of his life **fighting** the good fight and traveling all over North America to do it. Of all the Cyber-Knights in Minnesota, Starbuck has the best firsthand knowledge of the **region's** geography, which would make him a very helpful asset when figuring out how and where to evacuate refugees caught in the fighting. Too bad this aged and respected knight disappeared into the Xiticix **Hivelands** shortly before the Siege on Tolkeen began and has not been seen since.

Lady Shalder Lida. Race: Human. Level of Experience: 11th; age 34. Alignment: Principled. Not only is Lady Lida one of the most experienced Cyber-Knights on duty in Tolkeen, but she also has the distinction of being the first knight to personally deliver one of the Kingdom's mighty artifacts currently being used to fight the Coalition. Oddly enough, she will not say which artifact she delivered, but rumors abound that she had something to do with the acquisition of the prophecy-spouting skull, *Poor Yorick*. Rumors also stipulate that Poor Yorick had a specific prophecy for **Lida's** ears only, and that ever since, she has been a shell of her former self, apparently shaken to the core by whatever news Poor Yorick had for her.

Sir Kevin "The Salamander" Strauss. Race: Human. Level of Experience: 6th; age 25. Alignment: Principled. Sir Salamander got his name because of his actions during the **firebombing** of *Gulor Village* a year ago. Seeking to drive out whatever militants might have been living there (there were none), the Coalition **firebombed** the defenseless village, incinerating the entire place and creating a fire storm that ravaged the countryside for miles, like a giant tornado of fire. During all of this, Kevin was helping evacuate the innocent villagers when he learned that back in the core of the village was a house with several small children still trapped inside. Not heeding warnings that that part

of the village was to be firebombed next, Kevin dashed to save the kids from certain doom. As he got there, the first firebombs fell, torching the center of town and everything in it ...except Kevin! After the fires went out, he strode out of the smoke, carrying three children, all of whom were sooty but unharmed. Since his miraculous rescue, surviving the **unsurvivable**, he has been dubbed "Sir **Salamander**" (or just "The Salamander") rather than Sir Strauss.

How he survived, is that the quick acting knight found an underground bunker in the center of town and pushed the kids into it as the bombing started and the fire licked at their heels. Safe inside, they just waited it out. It was sheer luck that the inferno above did not suck out the oxygen in the bunker. To the villagers, Kevin was an immortal warrior impervious to fire and god-like in his valor. Although Kevin has tried debunking these wild stories, they persist to this day, and he has come to be known as "The Salamander."

Sir Galston Kurbod. Race: Quick-Flex Alien. Level of Experience: 7th; age 29. Alignment: Scrupulous. Sir Kurbod has spent most of his career on worlds other than this one. Shortly after his apprenticeship ended to the legendary *Miriam Redshield*, Sir Kurbod journeyed to *Wormwood*, where he took part in the ongoing struggles embroiling that sad place. After several years of constant action, he left the world for reasons undisclosed and spent another few years hopping around a multitude of worlds. It is said he was given the opportunity to become a famed **Cosmo-Knight** at one point, but there is no way to corroborate the story and Sir Kurbod will give no details on it. Finally, he returned to Rifts Earth to help with a slave uprising on Atlantis shortly before the Siege on Tolkeen broke out.

After finishing his mission on Atlantis, Sir Kurbod traveled to Minnesota to see what he could make of the conflict brewing there. While he disagrees with Lord **Coake's** call for the Fellowship to *not* directly help Tolkeen, he abides by the decision. Should something happen to Coake, however, Sir Kurbod will use the opportunity to enter Tolkeen proper and help his brethren in the fight against the dreaded Coalition forces. Under Lord **Coake's** directive, the good knight prepares Cyber-Knights to enter the fray during the last days of the war to help rescue and evacuate refugees to safer locations.

Sir John Nogar IX. Race: Human. Level of Experience: 1st; age 18. Alignment: Principled. The ninth son of a ninth generation knight, Sir Nogar IX has some large shoes to fill. His father was a noteworthy Cyber-Knight as were both of his grandfathers. However, Nogar IX himself has just become a Cyber-Knight (1st level) and has not seen much real combat, much less had the chance to become a hero.

Sir Nogar the Ninth (sometimes playfully called "Sir Nine" by the older Cyber-Knights) had planned to go to Tolkeen to distinguish himself in battle, only to learn of Lord Coake's proclamation forbidding such action. Loyal to Coake, the lad has complied but laments that he has still seen no serious action. He hardly considers stopping **Headhunters** and bandits from entering Minnesota in the west to be a full test of his skills. He is serving under Sir Kurbod and longs for the day they will step in to liberate refugees.

Lady Alasia Shard. Race: Human. Level of Experience: 4th; age 22. Alignment: Scrupulous. Another female knight, Alasia is as ambitious as she is deadly, fully committed to furthering

the name of the Fellowship as much as possible. To that end, she is constantly pushing herself and attempting to perform the impossible. Her brethren insist that she must have some kind of death wish to keep pulling the stunts of which she has made a habit (like raiding Coalition High Command posts for valuable information, or sneaking into top-security Coalition military posts just for some up-close intelligence, and taking on a Necromancer single-handed). Alasia retorts she only has so much time in her life to be the best knight she can be. So what if she takes wild risks? It is her life, and she has the right to risk it for a good cause if she so desires. The only problem, her critics contend, is that she sometimes jeopardizes others and gets captured every third or fourth mission, and somebody always has to go out and rescue her. One of these days, her brethren might just leave her to her fate.

Crusaders

Crusaders (who constitute a third of the total number of the Fellowship) perfectly fit the popular image of the Cyber-Knight: a tireless champion of truth, justice and honor. To these upright warriors, no wrong goes **unpunished**, no enemy goes unchallenged, no injustice goes unavenged. They are the popular heroes beloved by the legions of people trying hard just to survive the rigors of Rifts Earth, and wherever they go, they are greeted with kindness and appreciation, for they are the champions this world needs so very badly.

The Four Precepts

Typically of Principled (35%), Scrupulous (33%) or Unprincipled (22%) alignment, Crusaders are particularly zealous among **Cyber-Knights**. They are bold risk-takers and spirited warriors. Not only do they strictly adhere to their alignment and the Code of Chivalry that all Cyber-Knights are supposed to uphold, but they also labor under an additional set of self-imposed restrictions known as the Four Precepts. These guiding principles include *Poverty*, *Humility*, *Purity*, and *Generosity*.

1. **Poverty**. The Crusader is expected to live on just enough to get by, nothing more. The idea is that the constant hardship of the impoverished life builds character and strengthens conviction. There is less to hold the knight to any one place or to slow him down in his travels. Supposedly, the spirit toughened by such adversity makes for greater fortitude when faced with the evils of the world. To this end, Crusaders rarely carry more than a few thousand credits in cash or trade goods (valuable commodities meant for exchange, not consumption, like bulk quantities of grain, tobacco, or liquor) on their person at any given time. Likewise, Crusaders generally do not own any more possessions than they can carry. Although Crusader Knights may own a steed or vehicle, they typically will not use them as an excuse to load up on loot or extra possessions. The Crusader has little need for worldly possessions, preferring to rely on his natural skills and abilities, minimal equipment and provisions, and the generosity of others. Does this mean the Crusader Cyber-Knight can not own powerful or extraordinary things? Not at all. It is just that unlike many other adventurers, Crusaders do not hoard things; possessions are secondary niceties.

They keep only what they truly will need — the bare essentials — to keep focused and able to move on the wing. Traveling light is traveling smart. Enemies can not easily track them, and the Cyber-Knight can move at a **moment's** notice without leaving anything behind. Besides, the Crusader reckons, cluttering one's life with excess possessions merely distracts one from his true purpose: destroying evil and righting wrongs.

2. **Humility**. Wherever they go, Cyber-Knights tend to be met with cheering villagers who accord them with (appropriately enough) a **hero's** welcome. For many adventurers, this kind of attention is a ripe opportunity to gain followers, build a power



base, or simply to live well off of one's "killer reputation." Not so for the **Cyber-Knights**, and certainly not the Crusader. To him, the fame and glory that comes with his good work is merely a nice side effect that should be disregarded. Not that the Crusaders don't appreciate the laurels thrown upon them, they do. A typical Crusader, when thanked profusely for performing his duties, will humbly thank his benefactors, accept whatever gifts they press on him, and politely retreat from the spotlight. Whatever he can use, he keeps. Everything else the knight either gives away to others or tries to politely refuse (for example, a **Cyber-Knight** never accepts land or slaves).

The Crusaders feel basking in the glow of public adoration is unbecoming of a true knight and try to avoid it. The only ones who actively seek the praise and adulation of the masses are charlatans and the insecure (and sometimes Cyber-Knight Champions), not legitimate soldiers of justice. Along similar lines, Crusaders often feel uncomfortable when thrust into the role of leader (something Courtiers and Champions don't usually mind at all). They prefer staying out of the limelight and worrying only about themselves or their small group of companions. When put in a situation where more than a dozen people count on them or look at them for guidance, most Crusaders wilt under the heat. They are lone-wolf warriors and swashbuckling heroes. As such, most say what they think and have little interest or skill in diplomacy, politics or leadership. While these fighters might not have difficulty assuming temporary command of a fighting force, once the battle is over, they would rather return to their more or less solitary existence as heroic wanderers spreading justice throughout the world on their own, than settle down even for a few months.

Additionally, the precept of humility also discourages the Crusader from actively promoting himself or talking about his deeds. Some Cyber-Knights might find it worthwhile to "seed one's stories" wherever they go, to spread their reputation, but the Crusader finds such talk and tales to be uncalled for, self-serving and trouble-making. This breed of Cyber-Knight prefers anonymity and subtlety. They feel it gives them an edge as well as keeps them grounded. Crusaders prefer to travel anonymously and not have stories of their swashbuckling daring-do precede them to alert evildoers to their presence or attract the attention of gunslingers, bounty hunters and other unsavory villains. ("Good lord, a Psi-Sword? You ... you're a **Cyber-Knight?**") Crusaders will *never* actively recount their (often impressive) deeds in public, and when questioned, they will usually play-down the events — "Yes, there were seven bandits, but luck was with us in their defeat. And don't forget, **Carlos** (the one-legged, half-blind, 78 year old peasant farmer) was there to help me. I didn't do it all alone (yeah, right). Most Crusaders are more comfortable portraying themselves as simple and unremarkable travelers who just can not abide injustice, rather than a legendary destroyer of evil and hero to the people.

3. Purity. Crusaders often garner reputations as elitists, snobs or self-righteous prigs. This precept is the reason why. These Cyber-Knights hold themselves to a very strict moral code, and they believe that if the rest of the world did the same, there would be far less need for knights in general. The Crusader recognizes the world is not a perfect place, and people are always going to do unsavory things. Greed, lust, revenge, and hate are all human nature. The Crusader recognizes that, but still

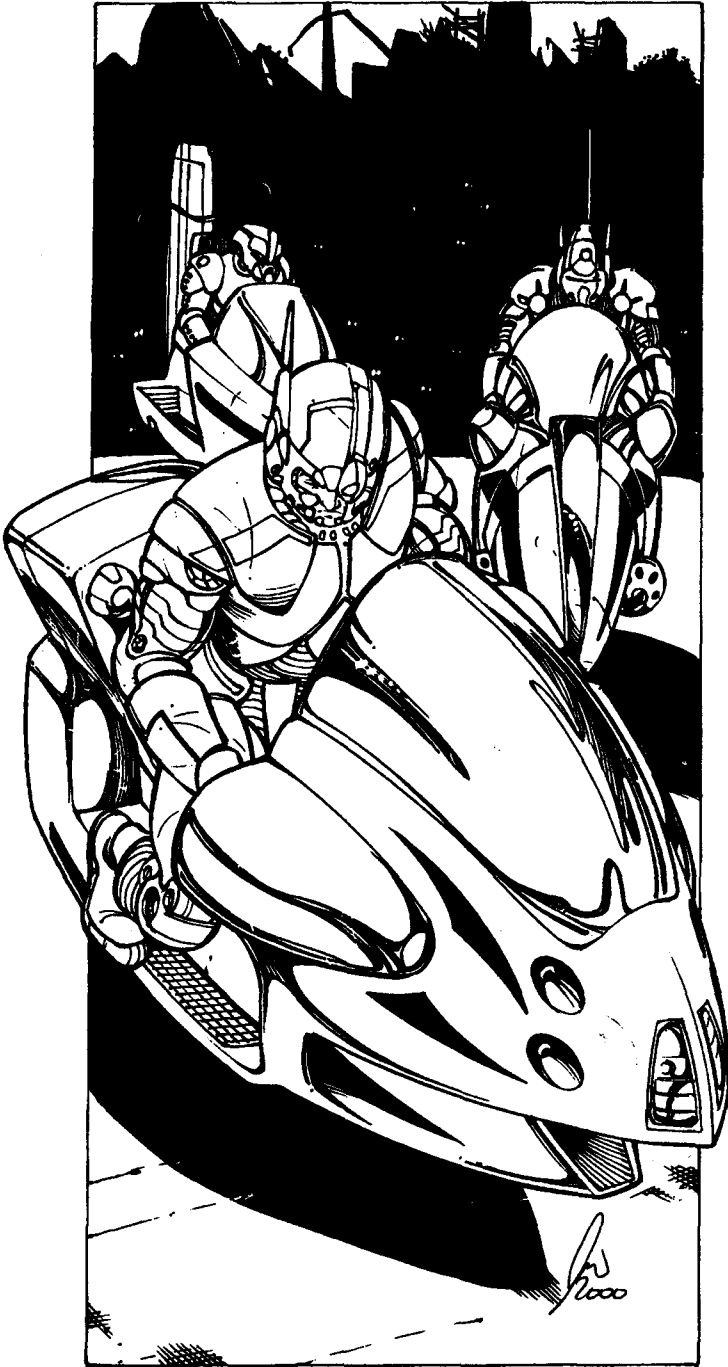
can not help but look down upon those "less moral" (i.e., less upright) people. This means those of Unprincipled alignments are regarded with disdain that is merely a kind of mild condescension, as if characters of this alignment are somehow morally confused or in need of a little improvement. Those of Anarchist and evil alignments, on the other hand, are considered unsavory and crass individuals tainted by selfishness, devoid of real honor and morally bankrupt. As such, Crusaders avoid associating with such foul characters and completely avoid conducting any kind of business or lasting relationship with evil folk. They certainly will not adventure with them, and they will be unnerved by any companion who associated with such morally crooked folk.

The **Cyber-Knights'** contempt for such "lowlifes" is undisguised and their disgust and disapproval drips from their tongues and shows in their expression and actions. Crusaders typically treat evil people and lowlifes with disdain, suspicion (they never trust them) and as the dishonorable, backstabbing scum they are (at least from the knight's point of view). Crusaders deal harshly with lowlifes and are uncharacteristically rough, pushy, demanding and even brutal toward them. They have no patience for **doubletalk**, skullduggery or shenanigans and are easily provoked to anger and violence when accosted with it. Crusaders will not immediately attack people of these alignments out of hand, but they are quick to lose their temper when dealing with them, and have no guilt for threatening, harassing and throttling them. From the Crusader's point of view, these cretins are not deserving of the most basic consideration, tolerance or trust the knights normally extend to all others.

4. Generosity. *Largesse*, or generosity, has long been considered an important facet of chivalrous and knightly behavior. Long before the Great Cataclysm, when feudal knights roamed medieval Europe, everyday generosity was expected of them. Being a knight was an expensive career, since weapons, armor and a horse were hardly easy to come by or to maintain. That is why knights of old typically allied themselves to a lord or king — because they required a wealthy benefactor to pay the steep bills that being a knight entailed. In return, the lord gained the services of a loyal but independent warrior to keep the peace and fight foreign enemies. To the lowly peasant in all this, this relationship between the lord and knight mattered little. All they knew was their link to the king was through his knights, who by peasant standards, were loaded with cash. As the code of chivalry emerged and evolved, it became expected that knights share their wealth when possible with those below them. It was a sign of goodwill to the peasantry as well as a declaration that the knight was more interested in serving his lord and the law than in lining his own pockets.

In the ravaged landscape of Rifts Earth, this practice has once again come into play. The average working person lives a hard and impoverished life. Even though Crusaders often carry few possessions, they still own gleaming weapons, expensive armor and high-tech equipment that bespeak of a life of comparative luxury. This does not go unnoticed by the Crusader, so when he can, he shares his wealth with those who most need it. Sometimes, Crusaders will undertake an adventure with a large payoff at the end just so they can spread the cash around and make everybody's life a little easier. But the precept of Generosity goes far beyond spare money and charitable acts. A Crusader is ex-

pected to offer everything he has, but his weapons, armor and steed, to those in need. In a rainstorm, the Crusader should offer a lady his only cloak. Even if the Crusader is down to his last bit of hardtack, it goes to the poor squatter who has nothing, even if it means that the Crusader has nothing to eat. This is knightly generosity — truly giving until it hurts. It is the way of the **Cyber-Knight**, but especially of the Crusader.



Quests and Crusades

In addition to upholding their uncompromising standards of behavior, Crusaders also define themselves by undertaking crusades and quests.

A crusade is any kind of noble cause that a knight *voluntarily undertakes*. Typically, crusades are grand and lengthy affairs, the sort of thing that might very well take the rest of the knight's life to complete. A Cyber-Knight crusade might include

liberating Atlantis from the **Splugorth** who rule it, overthrowing the sinister Federation of Magic, destroying the Vampire Kingdoms, bringing the Pecos Raiders to justice, defeating the monsters of the Calgary Rift, thwarting the coming of the Four Horsemen, pushing the Coalition out of Tolkeen entirely, and so on.

Crusades can also be more *modest*, say keeping a particular region of the New West free of bandits, or finding, rescuing, or protecting a particular individual from king to peasant, Erin Tarn to Joe Average; bringing peace to a particular region or town; defeating a specific villain, monster, or group; righting a particular injustice, and so on. These "smaller," often more personal, crusades are no less worthy than their more epic big brothers, since they have a better likelihood of actually being completed. Crusades to overthrow the Splugorth of Atlantis or Vampires of Mexico are indeed worthy causes, but realistically, ones the **Cyber-Knights** will probably never pull off, and are likely to die trying. There is deep honor in that, but not as much as a knight who has set out to achieve a truly worthy, noble, world-bettering cause and be able to return home to tell of it. Those few who achieve this enter an elite circle of Crusaders who have fulfilled their order's highest purpose.

Crusades are not taken lightly, and once taken, a knight is expected to spend much (not always all) of his efforts toward the *eventual* accomplishment of his crusade, even if it involves a multitude of small efforts and campaigns. Whether these efforts result in triumphs or defeats doesn't matter, only that the Cyber-Knight tries and keeps at it. Reid's Rangers, the infamous Vampire Hunters down south, are a good example of (albeit, fanatical and not entirely good) Cyber-Knights on a crusade. Doc Reid and the knights who form the core of the group are committed to destroying the vampires of Mexico and liberating the innocent people plagued by the undead. To that end, the knights wage frequent raids into vampire territory, fight and destroy the undead whenever they are encountered, rescue innocent victims, patrol the border, defend local communities, counsel those in need, educate the common folk on how to better defend themselves against vampires, and other comparatively "small" things as part of their quest, but which also add up to an impressive campaign. On a larger scale, they have established *Reid's Rangers*, a para-military "organization" that trains, organizes and leads a growing *army* of dedicated vampire hunters.

A knight who aborts his crusade is considered a coward or a dishonorable warrior, and will most likely be expelled from the company of any other Cyber-Knights until the transgression is somehow rectified. Cyber-Knights who die while on a crusade (that is, while actively pursuing the crusade) are usually given a hero's burial by their knightly brethren, and are considered to have died in the most noble manner befitting a Cyber-Knight. We say "usually," because sometimes a knight will become cruel, merciless and even evil in the pursuit of a crusade or quest and tarnish or destroy his reputation. Villains usually die villains, whether they start out a noble Cyber-Knight or not. Unless a *Fallen Cyber-Knight* can somehow redeem himself (usually through some dramatic turnaround and great sacrifice — usually the genuine risk or loss of one's life), he can expect no recognition from the Fellowship of knights.

A quest is fundamentally the same as a crusade, except it is usually smaller and *imposed* upon a knight so he can prove himself or so he can make up for some wrong he has committed. Most commonly, low-level Crusaders are given a minor quest to fulfill by their mentors as a final test of their skills and the benchmark of finishing their training to become a true **Cyber-Knight**. When the knight returns triumphant, he is then released from his mentor's tutelage and considered by other Crusaders as a full-fledged Cyber-Knight. Other categories of **Cyber-Knights**, like the Courtiers and Champions, also perform quests and crusades, but the custom of assigning junior knights a beginning quest is something that *all* Crusaders partake in as a right of passage.

A quest can also be used as *punishment* to impose hardship on an offending Cyber-Knight so he might realize the error of his ways and further dedicate himself to the principles of his occupation. Likewise, a Cyber-Knight who is philosophically confused, conflicted or lost, may be given or take upon himself some quest that should help him find his way or provide insight or an epiphany. Questing Cyber-Knights are given no or minuscule aid (the latter may be a bit of advice, tip, a thought-provoking comment, or the most basic of supplies) in their quest-journey by other Cyber-Knights, since to do so undermines the very reason why the knight is on a quest to begin with. As such, quest-driven Cyber-Knights often wear some kind of **sigil** or emblem identifying themselves as being on a quest. While this hardly prevents the quest knight from seeking aid and companionship from other adventurers, it sets him apart from his fellow Cyber-Knights until the quest is completed. In most cases, quests are determined by an outside source, whether it be from the knight's mentor, an authority figure, king, priest, elder, or other, and presented as an opportunity, challenge or punishment. In most cases, the Cyber-Knight must present proof of his quest's successful completion either to the individual who assigned the quest or to the world; i.e. the destruction of some terrible evil will be obvious to all, although the Cyber-Knight may still feel compelled to deliver the head (or some other symbolic item such as a flag or notorious bit of jewelry, magic item, or article known to have belonged to the villain) to the individual who charged him with the task as definitive evidence. Likewise, an offending knight must present proof that whoever the hero had wronged has forgiven him, or has been properly paid back for the wrongs they suffered. If the assignor deems the quest complete, he publicly declares so, relieving the Cyber-Knight of his burden, and celebrates his accomplishment **and/or** the regaining of insight, self-respect, or **reaffirmation** of his reputation as a noble, honorable and brave hero.

Not all Cyber-Knights finish their quest, however. Facing defeat despite one's best efforts may be disappointing and haunt the hero, but there is no shame in it. Such knights are likely to take on a similar quest only to prove to themselves they can succeed. However, there are those under particularly difficult quests who may fail because they did *not* try their best, took an easy out, or became dejected, or disillusioned and simply walked away from their mission. Such dishonored Cyber-Knights often become *Hermits* or *Fallen Knights* and are avoided **and/or** treated with disdain by their fellow knights. Such individuals are not regarded as failures — because failures and mistakes happen in life — but as "quitters" who have given up and forsaken their life as a true Cyber-Knight or who have

taken the "easy out" by hiding in shame as a hermit or becoming a cad and villain. In all cases, however, the knight can return to the quest and redeem himself at any point in his life, even if it's years later. Of course, if the knight was charged with saving an individual, group or community and failed, he must find some similar and equal or more difficult mission (ideally for the descendents of those he failed) and accomplish it, or die trying in order to redeem himself, and reclaim his place in the Fellowship of Cyber-Knights. **Indeed**, there are numerous farmers and craftsmen in the world who are really Cyber-Knights who have given up on their quest and would rather live as a peasant than return home and face the humiliation of having failed in their knightly duties.

The war at Tolkeen will create scores of Cyber-Knights who, as the conflict drags on, find themselves the unwitting participants in numerous massacres and other atrocities, and who undertake a quest of some kind to cleanse themselves of their perceived immoral alliance, mistakes or wrongs. Likewise, there will be several dozen who will forsake the knighthood to become Hermits hiding from their mistakes and the horrors of war, and Fallen Knights who have given in to despair or their baser instincts to become self-serving wanderers/mercenaries (typically Anarchist and Aberrant alignments) or outright villains (any evil alignment).

Notable Crusaders

One third of all Cyber-Knights are Crusaders. Many are currently deployed in western Minnesota and the **Dakotas** supporting Lord Coake's drive to make life more bearable for the innocents caught in the crossfire there. What follows is a sampling of some of the more reputable or interesting Crusaders currently in action somewhere around the Siege on Tolkeen.

Sir Solomon "**Whiteheart**" Lapeer. Race: Human. Level of Experience: 8th; age 32. Alignment: Principled. Solomon, a Native American, is one of Lord Coake's most trusted lieutenants regarding the situation in Tolkeen. He has done a great deal to coordinate refugee evacuations, delivering food and medical supplies to isolated communities within the war zone, and engaging monsters, Coalition spies and advanced strike forces extending beyond the borders of Tolkeen, as well as bandits, raiders, and criminals operating in and around the Kingdom of Tolkeen (and who only make things worse than they already are).

Prior to the Siege on Tolkeen, Sir **Whiteheart** battled vampires in the south and kicked up quite a ruckus in the Pecos Empire, striking numerous figures and installations in that bandit regime. Ironically, the whole crusade backfired on Sir Whiteheart, for it resulted in a Pecos Empire death mark on him, personally, and it seriously lessened the border threat the Empire posed to Lone Star for the next year or so. With the Empire destabilized, the Coalition was able to funnel some of its forces from that region to the war effort in Tolkeen, making Whiteheart's job there that much more difficult.

Lady Jade Seltic. Race: Human. Level of Experience: 5th; age 24. Alignment: Scrupulous. Lady Jade's personal crusade is nothing less than the utter destruction of the Coalition States, which she personally holds guilty for numerous counts of genocide. Lady Jade has abided by Lord **Coake's** wishes to stay out of the Tolkeen fighting, however, so she is biding her time until

Coake's order stands down, or until she can slip away from Tolkeen and begin operations within the Coalition's backyard itself. She has numerous contacts within the Chi-Town '**Burbs**, and word has it she is using them to plan a mission so big it would result in the shutdown of Chi-Town itself! Whatever she is up to, it must be important, because news of it has filtered to Coalition Intelligence, who are most eager to pick her up for interrogation.

Lady Moroba Goadgill. Race: N'mbyr Grollia Man (see **Coalition War Campaign™**, page 202). Level of Experience: 6th level; age 28. Alignment: Unprincipled. Lady Moroba has disobeyed Lord Coake's orders to stay out of the war against the Coalition, but she has also not thrown in with the knights formally backing Tolkeen. Instead, she wanders the edges of the war zone, finding suitable opponents and dealing with them appropriately. She uses the excuse that she is protecting the civilian population, travelers and refugees. Lady Moroba has fought enemies both from *Tolkeen* (particularly demons and monsters) and the *Coalition*, specifically any militants who have been sighted using their strength against any innocent civilians. This really draws the **Cyber-Knight's** wrath, and she will endure any pain to mete out punishment to those who make war upon the innocent. She has also done some scouting for Sir **Starbuck** (described under the Courtiers) and Sir **Whiteheart**.

This **Cyber-Knight** is especially fond of single combat and has a way of baiting robot pilots and powerful spell casters to engage her one on one. In such conflicts, Moroba always wins, much to the surprise of her enemies. She uses this tactic to "decapitate" larger forces by defeating their chief officer, leaving the rest of the unit to figure out what to do without their leader. Although both the Tolkeen and Coalition armies have redundant officer structures to account for this sort of thing, the reality is that most junior officers on both sides are unprepared to take command of their unit, so chaos ensues and the unit often disintegrates into a frightened rabble easily dealt with.

Lady Charisma Stalton. Race: Human. Level of Experience: 3rd; age 23. Alignment: Principled. Note: I.Q. 15, M.A. 20, P.B. 24. Lady Stalton is considered by many to be the most beautiful Cyber-Knight in the world. She is a statuesque, blond-haired, blue-eyed knockout, who is also a stalwart Crusader and a foe not to be underestimated. Her distinctive beauty, charm and fighting style, using paired **Psi-Sickles** or **Psi-Pick-Axes**, make her easy to pick out of a crowd. Rumor has it the Coalition put a 300,000 credit bounty on her head after she kidnapped a District Commander in Iowa and successfully ransomed him back to his garrison in return for a group of D-Bee prisoners and a shipment of weapons and supplies. Lady Stalton promptly delivered the hardware to a group of farmers who were heading west to flee the Coalition.

In recent months, Lady Stalton has joined the multitude of **Cyber-Knights** to break away from Lord **Coake** and gone to fight on the fields of Tolkeen. Although she arrived on the scene after the Sorcerers' Revenge, she does not believe the war is over, and can see the mounting Coalition forces gathering on the horizon. Likewise, as a latecomer she has seen the Tolkeen forces in action, and has no delusions about the insidious evil that eats at the core of its leadership. She has joined the ranks of Tolkeen for the people and her fellow knights. Lady Stalton agrees with Lord Coake's plans to intercede in the last days of

the war to rescue refugees, but she wants to try to intercede sooner. Not only that, Lady Stalton also hopes to prepare the knights in service to Tolkeen to be ready for the rescue operation and, hopefully, get a number to return to the fold (she plans on going back to the Fellowship when the war is over). Whether she will be successful in winning back even a handful of Cyber-Knights is yet to be seen. Moreover, her own survival is in question. Lady Stalton is so courageous, daring, and noble that she is likely to get herself into deadly situations.

Sir Harker Halestrom. Race: Human. Level of Experience: 8th; age 28. Alignment: Principled. Sir Halestrom spends most of his time tracking and destroying vampires in Mexico. He has become something of an expert in this, and even formed a sizable anti-vampire crew filled with **Techno-Wizards**, **Headhunters**, specially outfitted vampire-fighting 'Borgs and anybody else able to take up the fight against the bloodsuckers. To date, Sir Halestrom is responsible for the destruction of three entire vampire clans south of the Rio **Grande**, and has crippled several others. He and his growing band of vampire hunters are quickly building a reputation that may someday rival Reid's Rangers.

Sir Halestrom has recently travelled up north, at Lord Coake's request, to do a little undercover intelligence gathering within Tolkeen. It is Sir Halestrom who will help keep Coake apprized of the situation at Tolkeen and when its forces begin to crumble so he and the other Cyber-Knights know when to make a concerted effort to step in and evacuate civilians. Sir Halestrom has joined with a group of eight Cyber-Knights who are currently fighting for Tolkeen. This gives him firsthand exposure to the war and direct interaction with the Tolkeen troops without raising suspicion. It also enables him to assess both the Tolkeen and Coalition war effort. On a personal note, the eight Cyber-Knights have vowed that if he stays and fights in Tolkeen, after the war ends they will come with him to Mexico and join his crusade against the vampires.

The Shining One. Race: Unknown. Level of Experience: Unknown for certain, but is at least **10th** level. Alignment: Presumably Scrupulous, but not actually known (could be anything). This mysterious Crusader appears and disappears from areas of conflict without warning, leading some to believe that he is more like a ghost than a flesh and blood knight. Those who have fought alongside this figure know he is most definitely a soldier for justice but know little else, including his mentor and Cyber-Knight heritage. This has led some to believe he was mentored by a Hermit or Fallen Knight or is a (juiced up, perhaps) wannabe who has taken on the vestiges of a Cyber-Knight.

Appearing in gleaming armor, and wielding Psi-Weapons that glow a brilliant white, the Shining One is considered by some to be one of the purest Cyber-Knights. His feats of combat are legendary, and in the Tolkeen conflict alone, he has single-handedly destroyed entire Coalition transports, armored vehicles, robots and power armor. In combat, he is a whirlwind of energy, seemingly unstoppable. Word has it that Coalition troops are scared to death of this guy and that his mere presence on the battlefield will cause less disciplined soldiers to break ranks and flee. Not even Lord Coake knows who this person is, which only furthers his mystery. Not being an official member of the Cyber-Knight Fellowship, and not even working directly

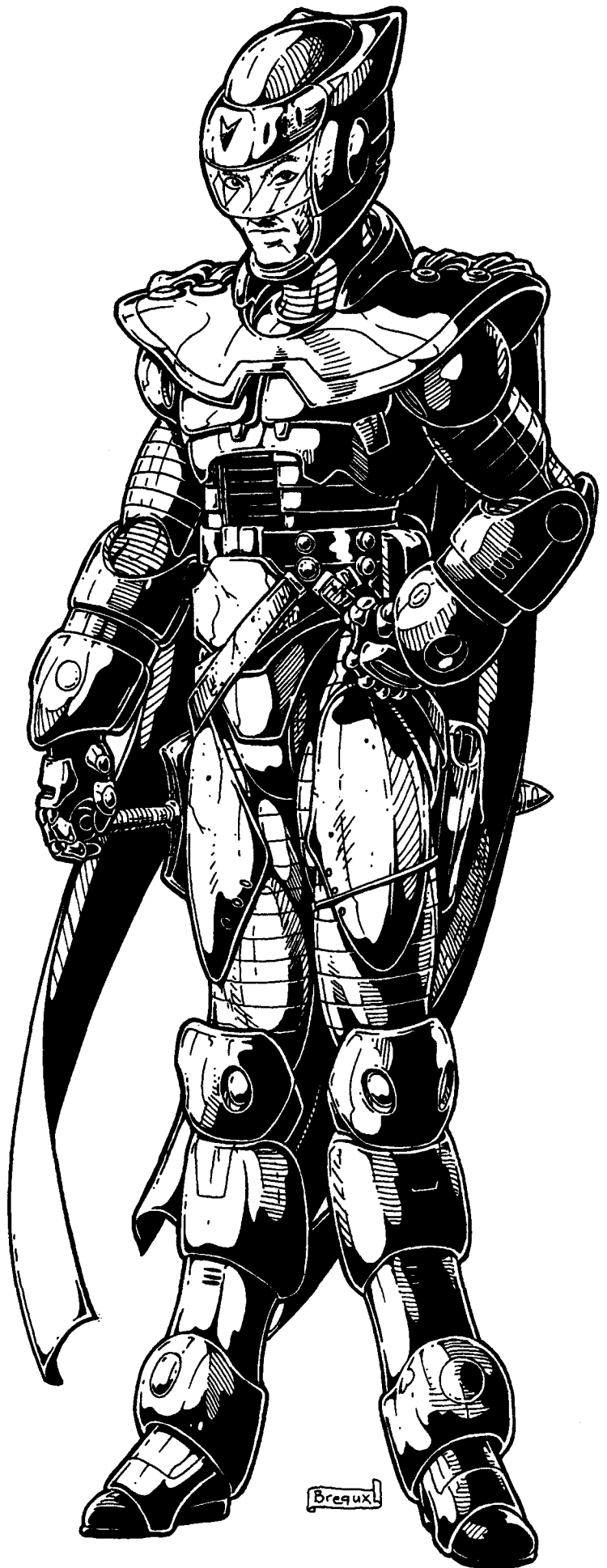
with other knights at **Tolkeen** (he comes and goes like a ghost, remember), this enigmatic vigilante is an X-factor in the war, and technically, has not defied Lord **Coake**. The Shining One seems to come and go as he pleases and does as he wants.

Champions

Not all **Cyber-Knights** devote their entire being to upholding the **Chivalric Code** or undertaking noble quests. A faction of arrogant and boastful Cyber-Knights known as *Champions* or *Warhounds*, seem to be as interested in perfecting their skills as warriors and gaining notoriety as they are in putting those skills to good use. Both Courtiers and Crusaders frown on Champions as undisciplined brawlers and jocks who are losing sight of true knighthood. To the Champion, such derision is misplaced. After all, the **Cyber-Knight's** job is to combat evil, and he can not do that if he doesn't keep his skills in top shape. A **Cyber-Knight** can recite the Chivalric Code all day or go on some roundabout quest, but in the end, it all comes down to being able to put one's enemy down for the count. And in that moment of truth, the only thing that really matters is who is the better fighter, or so the Champions say. It is the burning drive of every Champion to *never* be on the losing end of a fight to the finish. Sadly, the law of averages usually catches up with these warriors and sooner or later they take on an opponent who outclasses and prematurely "retires" them.

Before that happens, however, Champions spend their time as any other Cyber-Knight, roaming the world looking for worthy challenges. For Champions, however, it is most important to defeat strong opponents with noteworthy reputations. This way, when a Champion defeats such a villain, he might add the fallen foe's name to his own list of victories. This is how these dedicated warriors spread their name and reputation — through battlefield valor and good publicity. However, even more than the Courtier, a Champion only wants the truth, not exaggerations or incorrect stories to circulate about him. First, this discredits his real accomplishments. Second, it might also encourage old opponents to seek out the Cyber-Knight to settle the "truth" or to seek revenge for embarrassing falsehoods. Third, Champions are surprisingly vain glory hounds who cherish their reputations and want no falsehoods or even the suggestion of impropriety to tarnish them. This leads many Cyber-Knight Champions to contend they are "keepers of truth and honor" (at least as it applies to their exploits). To keep the record straight, many Champions select a few towns they are fond of visiting (and have helped out at some point) and charge them with keeping their personal history. Thus, anybody who wants the straight story on what a particular Champion has accomplished need only visit one of his host villages or towns and ask around.

Sometimes a Cyber-Knight Champion will need to show his battle record far away from a host town, so as evidence, most of these Warhounds keep battle trophies from their most important victories. The logic goes that if a Cyber-Knight Champion keeps trophies from his top five to ten victories, nobody will question the thirty or forty lesser victories he also lays claim to, but can not prove. These war trophies are most often collections of weapons, pieces of armor, emblems, or other such souvenirs. In the case of monsters or D-Bees slain, a piece of the creature (such as a claw, tooth or skull) might be kept as the trophy. All



of this is a little redundant, however, since Champions *are* Cyber-Knights and supposedly do not lie (and **Warhounds** are famous for being absolutely honest when it comes to their exploits). Still, many Champions are anal-retentive and fiercely competitive, especially with each other. After all, each Champion strives to be the greatest warrior the Cyber-Knights (or anybody) has ever known (or at least, one of the greatest), so they feel compelled to have *proof* of their triumphs. The fear that some other **Warhound** *might* embellish his or her record is what gave birth to the collecting of trophies and the establishment of host villages that serve as the depository of their proof and the holders of the truth.

Speaking to the competition between these aggressive Cyber-Knights, they also adhere to the "hierarchy" mentality. That is, every **Cyber-Knight** who was taught by Lord **Coake** is a "second generation" Cyber-Knight, and the knights they taught are "third generation" knights, and the knights they taught are "fourth generation" knights, and so on. Cyber-Knight Champions do not question the authority of knights in higher generations than they, but they do expect Cyber-Knights of a lower generation to defer to them. Where things get sticky is concerning Cyber-Knights of the same generation. By way of hierarchy, they are "peers." But the competitive spirit of the Champion is not satisfied with this, so these Warhounds must find a way to prove who among them is the better Cyber-Knight (to themselves if nothing else).

More level-headed Champions will merely compare their battlefield records and come to an amicable agreement as to who is the more "storied" knight. Sadly, most Champions are too hot-headed and competitive for such a sensible approach, and demand to meet their rivals in contests to prove who is the "superior" warrior. These contests are known as *tourneys* and still resemble their ancient medieval predecessors. Any Cyber-Knight unwilling to participate (because they see it as pointless or a waste of time and energy, or just don't feel like brawling) will have to endure the Champion's boasts that he or she was too "**frightened**" to engage the Warhound in an armed contest, or that the knight declined because he or she "knew who the better Cyber-Knight was and didn't want to face the embarrassment of losing." Something the haughty (and often overconfident) Warhound can most certainly understand — especially since the Champion would agonize over a defeat if he was in the other knight's place. It doesn't matter that this is not really true, because to the Warhound, if a challenge is not met (even a stupid one) the opponent or rival who declines automatically acknowledges "the truth" (i.e. the Champion is his better) by default! At least, that's how these warriors choose to see things. Such antics can sometimes create lasting resentment, rivalries, derision and feuds between Cyber-Knights, but nothing can shake the Champion from this practice.

Tourneys

The medieval tourney was little more than a formalized **bloodbath** that knights participated in whenever they were not off on a crusade or fighting a war for their feudal lord. Tourneys ranged from a few dozen to a few hundred men and would occupy a large stretch of countryside. The knights divvied up into two sides and simply went at it on horseback and on foot with live weapons. The goal was not to kill other knights, but merely

to give them a sound thrashing and, if possible, to take them prisoner. (Captured knights fetched a nice ransom from their lord and were a considerable motivation for many knights to participate in such wild melees.) However, knights were often seriously wounded or killed when the action got out of control. Indeed, it was difficult to tell the difference sometimes between these make-believe wars and the real thing. The fighting would go on for a day or so, with a small "neutral area" the only safe spot from the fighting. Here, knights would rest and re-arm. When ready to get back into it, they left the safe zone and began fighting **anew**.

Needless to say, various authorities tried stopping tourneys because they were needlessly wasteful — lots of good knights were hurt or died in them. But, they were way too popular to stop, so the next best thing was to formalize them. Over the centuries, as the role of knight in medieval society changed, so did their contests. Gone were the deadly tourneys and in their place were the considerably safer jousts, in which mounted knights took passes at each other with lances (and often blunt-tipped ones at that). These jousts were often heavily formalized and bedecked with all kinds of noble pageantry, far removing them from the bloody "war games" of the past and making them more like festivals or sporting events.

The contests the Cyber-Knight Champions of Rifts Earth hold amongst themselves draw from both of these traditions, while infusing some new practices as well.

First of all, Champion contests are much smaller-scale affairs than the **old, pre-Rifts** tourneys. For one thing, there are not that many Cyber-Knights, for another, they rarely travel in groups, and finally, not all Cyber-Knights are willing to participate in contests of arms with their brethren when there are serious villains that need vanquishing. Most of the time, a contest is merely what two to four Champions organize amongst themselves (or other challengers) upon a chance meeting. Champions will sometimes announce the date of a contest well in advance, but many knights think this is stupid, for it gives one's enemies an inviting target. Bring them on, retort the Champions — any villain foolish enough to attack a gathering of Cyber-Knights deserves the thumping he will get.

There are four main kinds of competition at a contest: *tilting*, *marksmanship*, *single combat*, and the venerable *melee*. **Tilting** is like jousting of old; the two Cyber-Knights each charge at one another on their respective "mounts." If they have lances they will use them, otherwise they will simply use their **Psi-Weapons** or a crude, makeshift pole or staff hewn from available wood or saplings (cut down and shaped with the Psi-Sword).

There are three basic kinds of tilting: Low-speed (i.e., horses), high-speed (i.e., hover cycles), and aerial (i.e., sky cycles, rocket bikes or similar high-flying, fast vehicle or flying creature, be it a pegasus, dragon or something else). The knights typically make pass after pass until one scores a blow that unseats the opponent. (Roll combat as usual: Initiative first, strike, and then parry or dodge. Unless the one who is struck makes a successful Maintain Balance roll, off he goes.)

Marksmanship is a contest of pure skill where knights will attempt to score hits with some kind of ranged weapon. Archery contests are preferable, but if no bows can be had, or if the knights are unskilled in them, knife or axe throwing may be **substituted**, as may guns of any type (S.D.C. or M.D.). Each contest-



tant fires 10 shots, and the winner is the one with the more accurate grouping. (Game Masters, an easy way to determine this is to have each knight roll 10 strikes, with the higher the roll on a D20 the better. Then compare their total score; don't even count anything lower than a 12).

Single combat can take form as a test of skill, test of strength, or a test of endurance. In all three, the contestants go at it with their weapons of choice — frequently Psi-weapons. So the chance of somebody getting wounded or accidentally killed is quite real.

In a test of skill, the **Cyber-Knights** simply fight each other with a chosen weapon; often one's Psi-Sword. However, it is not enough to clobber one's opponent, the bout must be won through exceptional, clever, **skillful** and devastating moves. (A Critical Strike, or any successful strike that is at least five points higher than the defender's roll to parry or dodge is considered an expert strike. Disarming one's enemy is another deft move considered to **reflect** skill and cunning, and counts as an exceptional strike.) Such matches are first to five, seven or ten hits; the first to get them wins.

Tests of strength are straight-out slugfests, in which the contestants take turns launching simultaneous strikes at each other without dodging and parrying! This goes on for two melee rounds; the one who has racked up the most damage on his opponent (or the one left standing) is the winner.

A test of endurance can either involve ordinary combat, except it goes on until one of the contestants either surrenders or is incapacitated or passes out, or it may involve some feat of endurance such as a **marathon** run, swim, or pentathlon-like multiple event. On rare occasions, it may actually involve work for the benefit of others, such as chopping down trees for lumber, gathering and hauling stone, building a house or other structure, hunting and providing the most kills for food or pelts for clothing, even ditch digging and other menial but work-intensive endeavors. Depending on the endurance contest, it might take only a few hours or several days. The one to finish first, or to accomplish the most by the contest's end, as the case may be (there's usually a quota or time limit to all contests), is the winner.

Melees are like single combat, except more than one pair of Cyber-Knights are involved at the same time in a free-for-all where the winner (last man standing) takes all. In melee contests, if one participant cripples the other, the victorious **Cyber-Knight** is expected to arrange for magical or psionic healing services (usually with medics and healers on the scene before the fight begins). Also, Cyber-Knights who lose are expected to give something to the winner. This may involve a set amount of credits, giving up a prized weapon, magic item, armor, horse or trophy, agreeing to serve the victor as his squire for an **agreed-upon** length of time (not more than six months, though) or doing the winner some favor (may be a small or simple quest).

Sometimes, there will be no clear victor in a melee contest. In such instances, the Cyber-Knights acknowledge each other as true equals and swear a *blood oath* of eternal friendship and loyalty to each other. If an outsider is involved (i.e. someone who is not a Cyber-Knight, but who issued a challenge to the knight), he is accepted as a "blood **brother**" and unofficially recognized as the equivalent of a Cyber-Knight, at least by those who participated; a rare honor, indeed.

Blood Oaths

When Champions meet a fellow **Cyber-Knight** (occasionally an outsider who is not actually a knight, but this a rarity) so evenly matched in skill that their contest ends in a draw, the participants generally take a blood oath with each other. This is a simple vow of eternal comradeship and loyalty to one another. The idea is that the two (or more) warriors (98% fellow Cyber-Knights) are so evenly matched that they are like brothers and fated to be comrades or "brothers in arms." The blood oath formalizes that. Once such an oath has been taken, the Cyber-Knights will usually adventure together for a while (usually between six months and a year), after which they will part. However, should one ever need the other, all he needs to do is call, and the blood brother will come (assuming he can hear the cry for help). **Likewise**, if the warrior learns that one of his blood brothers is in trouble or in need of support, he (or they) will come to his side. On more than a few occasions, villains have defeated a Cyber-Knight Champion only to have his evil schemes foiled by the timely arrival of another Warhound heeding his defeated brother's distress call or come to avenge him.

Where blood oaths hurt the Fellowship in general is that they encourage Champions to have closer ties with each other than their allegiance to the Chivalric Code or any other knightly principles. Many Cyber-Knights fear that if pushed to make a choice between their "blood brothers" and something demanded of them from the Code of Chivalry or the Fellowship in general, the **Warhounds** will choose their warrior brothers. Indeed, the alliance and sense of kinship is so strong, that most Cyber-Knight Champions automatically assume their "blood brothers" to be innocent of any crime and completely truthful, at least to a fellow "blood brother." This extreme and often blind loyalty is ripe for abuse. Yet, ironically, most Champions are so into this brotherhood thing (and remember, making blood brothers is reasonably uncommon, requiring exceptional circumstances to begin with) that most Cyber-Knights abide by the unwritten rules of the bond and *are* completely truthful, honest, sincere and loyal to their "blood brothers." Moreover, if a blood brother should deceive, trick, or betray one of his brothers in arms, the offended **party(s)** will track him down and either bring him to justice or challenge him to a life and death duel — similar to the test of skill or endurance, only the battle is to the death!

The practice of blood oaths adopted by Cyber-Knight Champions is generally frowned upon and avoided by most other Cyber-Knights. They contend that one's loyalty should be to truth and justice, and that one should never be *blinded* by personal loyalties, even to the Fellowship itself. Besides, a **Cyber-Knight's** word should always be true (at least to fellow Cyber-Knights, the authorities and other good people), and a sworn oath always truthful and promises seen through to fruition. Still the Champions maintain the practice and ignore those who scoff at them. However, this practice has caused the **Tolkeen-Coalition** War to send a shock wave throughout the Champion faction of heroes.

No group of Cyber-Knights is more at odds with each other and torn apart because of the war than the Champions. Basically, Warhounds who have stayed loyal to **Coake** see those "blood brothers" who have gone to fight for Tolkeen as traitors, not only to the Fellowship, but to their blood brothers. Those

fighting in service of Tolkeen (a whopping 53%) feel the same way, that their "blood brothers" have broken their trust and betray them by not joining them in their crusade. Worse, many Warhounds believe the only way to reconcile the situation is to challenge their "brothers" to combat! This has prompted scores of Champions to go to Tolkeen (also against Lord **Coake's** edict) to have an armed confrontation with their traitorous comrades. Those who recognize they are torn between philosophical points of view often challenge one another to a tourney, only in this case, the *loser* must join his "blood brother" in his choice whether he believes in it or whether it defies Lord Coake, or not. Those who refuse to a tourney under these terms or break their promise are challenged to duel to the death! If they refuse to fight they are attacked **and**, if they still won't fight, slain as traitors.

As one might guess, Lord Coake and most other Cyber-Knights do not condone this approach or either outcome, but the Warhounds continue to do it. To the Champions, it is the only resolve that makes sense to them, even if it means forcing a comrade to do something he finds morally reprehensible or killing a friend and ally who is loved like a brother! From a wider perspective, such *duels*, whether to the death or not, waste time, pull away manpower resources from one side or the other and give the enemy the opportunity to intercede and capture or kill both parties. Any way one cuts it, this situation is one of the many tragedies spawned by the war.

Notable Champions

Sir Gavin Grey; a.k.a The Grey Knight and Sir Gavin the Grey. Race: Vanguard Brawler. Level of Experience: 6th; age 23. Alignment: Scrupulous. Sir Gavin the Grey came to prominence by defeating the infamous "Seven Demons of Thunder Gorge," out in the New West. Exactly what happened during that battle has never come to light. All that is known for certain is that a team of seven powerful demons had come through a Rift and laid waste to a series of villages, destroying every building and killing every person. The women and children met especially gruesome fates as the sacrificial victims to an unholy rite meant to open a demonic Rift several miles in diameter! At the eleventh hour, Sir Gavin approached the seven demons and challenged them to single combat. What is said to have followed, is the stuff of legend.

At first the demons were humored and sent their strongest member to smash the Cyber-Knight. After Sir Gavin slew the fiend, the other six grew enraged and attacked him en masse. The valiant Warhound fought bravely but was overcome. After all, they were six, he was but one. With **their** enemy out of the way, the remaining demons resumed their Rift-building. And that's when it happened. Sir Gavin rose from the dead. His strength and vitality completely renewed. He flew into the demons with incredible ferocity and skill, catching them by surprise and cutting them all down in a matter of minutes. Eyewitnesses on the scene said that during the fight, Sir Gavin crackled and glowed as if he had been supercharged with some kind of energy. After the fight, the energy subsided, and The Grey Knight returned to normal. To this day, Sir Gavin the Grey claims to have no recollection of these events, but people are convinced that the battle indeed happened, and that The Grey Knight has the unique ability to tap into the ley lines or life or

hope and use them to energize himself as no other **Cyber-Knight** can.

The Grey Knight has come to **Tolkeen** to help out however he can, but he is also heeding Lord **Coake's** commands, so for most of the conflict, he has stood watch on Minnesota's southern border, intercepting Coalition troops out to attack border towns, refugees and travelers, as well as bandits and other militants up to no good.

Sir Tubros Belton. Race: Human. Level of Experience: 10th; age 41. Alignment: Unprincipled. Attributes: I.Q. 10, M.E. 11, M.A. 14, P.S. 30, P.P. 19, P.E. 24, **Spd.** 8 (was once 18). Sir Tubros is an enormous man. Weighing in at over 400 lbs (180 kg), he is a strange mixture of copious blubber and rippling muscle. Sir Tubros possesses Herculean strength (P.S. 30) and constitution (P.E. 24), but he is also a bit of a glutton, legendary for holding feasts lasting three days or more. At these events, Sir Tubros eats such incredible quantities of food that guests have taken to recording the menu for posterity and so that when the event is later recalled, people will not think it is all some outrageous lie.

Sir Tubros' excessive lifestyle also comes out in his love for holding contests with other **Cyber-Knights**. Certain Crusaders and Courtiers have publicly criticized the knight for spending more time "playing" with other Cyber-Knights than actually doing the real work of a Champion. Sir Tubros has taken great offense to this, and feels he must prove his honor to the Fellowship. Of course, the knights who offended him will not answer his call to a contest of skill, so he has resorted to an even more drastic measure. He has come to Tolkeen, defied Lord Coake's orders not to fight, and has joined with Lord Rigeld in defense of the Kingdom. Sir Tubros has performed well enough on the battlefield, but it is clear that the man has spent way too much time eating and partying, and not enough time adventuring. On more than one occasion, his fellow Cyber-Knights have had to come to his aid, lest he fall and be taken captive or slain. His considerable bulk slows him down to such a degree that Sir Tubros is usually given a stationary position to guard or hold so the rest of the group will not be slowed down by him.

Lady Megan Mbulu. Race: Human. Level of Experience: 9th; age 39. Alignment: Scrupulous. Lady Megan is quite the experienced knight, but she has not actively adventured in over six years. Rather, she lives in the Montana badlands, where she recruits new Cyber-Knights and trains good-hearted warriors. Having lost one of her arms in the Battle of Lowly Grange, the Lady thought it better to help raise a new generation of Cyber-Knights and warriors who share their noble views to replace her rather than keep up a futile effort to destroy evil all by herself. Since her semi-retirement, Lady Megan has successfully trained over a dozen new knights, all of whom are still in good standing with the rest of the Fellowship. Lord **Coake** personally requested that she come to one of his secret base camps outside the northwestern borders of Tolkeen to help train new recruits there taken from the refugees streaming out of the area. It seems Coake believed that a large number of potential knights could be found among them, so Lady Megan agreed. Since her arrival, she has tagged another twenty individuals as excellent prospects, and she has taken five as apprentices she is **mentoring** right now. The others have either been given to other Cyber-Knights for training or are waiting as *neophytes* (not

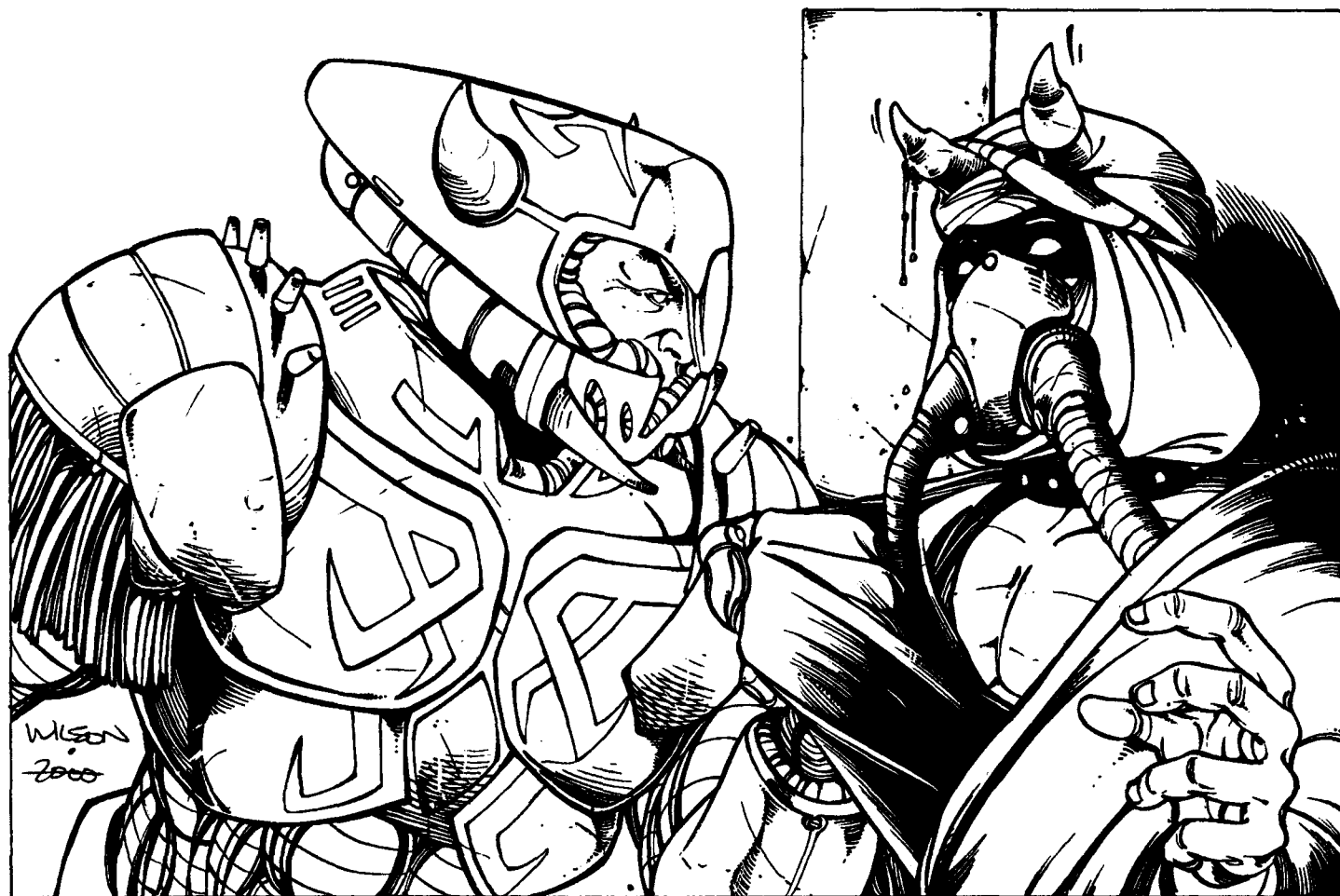
quite squires yet) until an apprenticeship opens up. She also teaches self-defense to groups and has proven to be a stabilizing influence to the refugees.

Lady Lorelei Winter. Race: Human. Level of Experience: 8th; age 31. Alignment: Principled. Lorelei Winter was once a lowly City Rat living in the largest of **Chi-Town's** 'Burbs, when she was taken in by a kindly old Cyber-Knight who saw great potential in the scrappy lass and took her away from the Coalition capital. Once in the wilderness, the elder knight, *Sir Trenton Macawber*, subjected Lorelei to a **grueling** regimen of physical exercise, combat training, and mental conditioning. After a three year period, Lorelei was "born again chiseled," as Sir Trenton was fond of saying. The young knight left her master and began her career as a roaming agent of justice. Lady Winter never forgot the many cruelties she suffered at the hands of Coalition stooges, and she has focused all of her energies toward dismantling the Coalition war machine piece by bloody piece. It has been quite an uphill battle so far (she is rather outnumbered, you see) but the fighting Lady Winter would not have it any other way.

Sir Chelton Hendleshire. Race: Human. Level of Experience: 9th; age 34. Alignment: Principled. Sir Chelton hails from England originally, where he had wished to become a knight but "for reasons beneath my need to explain," he turned to the Cyber-Knight Fellowship instead of the knights in his native land. He trained under the remarkable warrior *Sir Skor Thurgild*, and has become quite a storied hero in his own right. His greatest achievement to date is the slaying of an evil dragon somewhere in the Ohio Valley. According to eyewitnesses, Sir Chelton and the dragon spent three days fighting each other, spending hours locked in combat, then retiring to neutral areas to rest before clashing again. Sir Chelton took the dragon's head and later gave it to an unnamed mystic associate of his. Neither the associate nor the head has been seen again, and Sir Chelton simply will not talk about it.

Sir Robert the Red. Race: Human. Level of Experience: 7th; age 27. Alignment: Unprincipled. Sir Robert lives for a good fight, and when he is not mixing things up with a worthy villain, he is trying to goad other knights into contests with him. He has been accredited with over three hundred personal victories in combat, most of which were accumulated while on the outskirts of the Federation of Magic, during a brief stay in the Chi-Town 'Burbs, or during the Siege on Tolkeen. Sir Robert the Red has also slain a few Cyber-Knights by accident during contests of strength or endurance, something he regrets and has taken great pains to conceal. Thus, he lives with a remarkable reputation as a bold warrior, but behind the bravado lives an uncertain man compelled to prove himself in reckless acts of heroism. Many correctly regard him as a dangerous overachiever and a loose cannon, so they allow him and a hand-picked band of guerilla warriors (three Juicers, two **Headhunters**, one Crazy, one full conversion '**Borg**, a **Mastadonoid**, a pair of Yeno and a human Ley Line Walker; all 4-6th level) to wander the Kingdom fighting the enemy as they deem fit.





Fallen Knights

As with all things, there is the bad with the good. So it is that there is a dark side to the **Cyber-Knights**. A small but increasing number (thanks to the war at **Tolkeen**) who have abandoned the Fellowship and corrupt — impossible — dreams for goodness, nobility, honorable, justice and compassion.

There are what might be considered two camps of *Fallen Cyber-Knights*. The first and largest group are those who have become disillusioned and disheartened.

These Fallen Knights are broken, depressed and lost. In recent years, the cause has been the war at Tolkeen where they have born witness to the sins and horrors of war, or committed them, themselves. They are haunted by the memories and emotions of man's inhumanity to man and the wickedness of hate, revenge, desperateness, lust for power, greed, treachery and evil unleashed in war. They have seen cruelty and depravity on a scale they never dreamed possible, and it has broken their hearts and crushed their spirits.

As a result, Fallen Knights have come to see the **Cyber-Knight** Fellowship and Code of Chivalry as a joke or shattered dream not worth keeping. More importantly, the Fallen Knights have lost faith in people and no longer believe that humans or D-Bees nor high ideals are worth fighting for. They either want to be left alone and try to hide from the world, or go off as wandering adventurers (some still reluctant heroes or potential heroes) to either find a new place in it as self-serving adventurers, mercenaries, vagabonds and drunks, or to find

some way to redeem themselves (or renew their faith in people) so they might come to terms with themselves and find some measure of peace.

These one-time champions of justice have come to have little or no regard for the law and those who enforce it. They no longer believe in justice, and look-out only for "Number One," themselves. They see the world as a dog-eat-dog jungle. A place where talk about righteousness, justice, honor, peace and love is nothing but hollow words and empty promises. No, they have learned their lesson, and trust nobody but themselves and do only for themselves. **Alignments among Fallen Knights:** Roughly 15% are Unprincipled, 41% Anarchist, 22% Aberrant evil, 17% Miscreant and 5% Diabolic, but all have officially and often outspokenly forsaken their past as Cyber-Knights. The nicest thing they can say about the knights is that they are deluded or dreamers who haven't yet come to accept the realities of the grim world they live in. Many spit upon Cyber-Knights, mock them, disparage them and even battle them when provoked.

The level of selfishness, larceny, and villainy (layered with equal helpings of disappointment, bitterness and sorrow) depends on the individual and his alignment. This means some Fallen Knights are completely ruthless and dispassionate with little regard for life, happiness, truth, honor, justice, or mercy. Others still hold on to some tiny amount of appreciation and value for such things, though they are likely to adamantly deny

it. Many Fallen Knights are also angry or emotionally wounded, making them aggressive and violent — attacking with hard, cruel words or flailing fists or blazing Psi-Sword. While some can reasonably control their anger and hurt, most are quick to anger and many are walking time bombs ready to explode into violence at the slightest provocation. Many no longer see anything wrong with lying, cheating and stealing, and few have any problem with fighting to resolve one's problems or even resorting to killing.

The above having been said, many an **ex-Cyber-Knight** still has a weak spot for the underdog, children, women, innocence and injustice. This compels some to sell their combat skills as lawmen and guns/swords for hire or partake in acts of **vigilantism** or to respond (unfortunately, often in kind) to cruelty.

Blackguards

The worst of the Fallen Knights are Blackguards who have forsaken their vows to uphold the **Chivalric** Code and slipped into a life of wickedness and depravity. Nobody is sure why these knights choose the dark paths they tread.

Like other Fallen Knights, some become so disillusioned, bitter **and/or** dead inside, that nothing else really matters. They see no value in life, find no virtues to uphold, so they do as the please and hurt whoever gets in their way. These heartless zombies are likely to defend their cruel actions with something like, "I warned him to get out of my way," or, "He knew what I am, he was a fool to challenge (or oppose) me; now he's a dead fool." They are just cold and empty, with no compunction about killing or using intimidation or force to get what they want, when they want it.

Others have learned to enjoy killing and the feeling of power it brings. Some have just come to see murder and violence as a brutal but effective means to an end, or find it is what they do best. Still others are just mean and evil. They covet power, position, fame, wealth, or all of the above, and are willing to do whatever it takes to get it. They see the world as a place where power makes right, and they have power and are willing to use it.

Cyber-Knights once in good standing may be corrupted anywhere along the line in their careers. While the war at Tolkeen has exacerbated the number corrupted, many a Blackguard is simply evil through and through. They have always been villainous at heart and either hid it during their **Cyber-Knight** training or their base emotions blossomed afterward. The fact is, while we like to find a reason why somebody becomes a hero or villain, it is often difficult to tell. In the end, it probably comes down to emotions and feelings that make the individual feel good. Unfortunately, there are those who feel good, strong, and empowered when they dominate, bully, abuse and hurt others. There are those so consumed with lust for power, wealth or any number of things, that it motivates them to do evil and then do reprehensible things to hide their deed or to get more (whatever that more is; perhaps nothing more than satisfaction or revenge). The bottom-line is that it is very difficult to walk the straight and narrow, and strive to be good. Not only good, but in the case of the Cyber-Knights, the best. Once one falls off that line, it is easier to stray farther into the darkness than one might think, especially when fueled by powerful emotions such as hate or revenge.

Fallen knights have always been a problem for the Cyber-Knight Fellowship. Now that things have heated up in Tolkeen, they have only gotten worse. First, the number of Fallen Knights has risen dramatically in the last five years, an ominous sign by anybody's standards. Some point to the growing disillusionment among the Cyber-Knights in general, to bring about true change in this insane world. Others suggest that knights themselves have ceased to be good teachers and are giving their squires enough knowledge to have the skills of a Cyber-Knight, but not the moral discipline or conviction. Still others point to the schism and believe that the Fallen Knights are an unavoidable side effect of the **Cyber-Knights'** very existence — the **yin**, to their **yang**. In any group, no matter how loosely organized it may be, there will always be outcasts, rebels and troublemakers. The Fallen Knights are just that for the Fellowship, bringing about a small amount of confusion and bad public relations. As good as the rest of the Fellowship is, these bad apples attract an undue amount of attention. While these villains should be opposed whenever possible, the reality is, or so the reasoning goes, that Fallen Knights are an inextricable part of the Cyber-Knight movement, and they will *never* be entirely eradicated.

True Blackguards

Whatever the origin of these evil knights, they all fall into one of three distinctive groups: *Robber Knights* (thieves and raiders), *Justiciars* (demented hands of retribution), and *De-spoilers* (the most vile and evil of them all).

Robber Knights

Robber Knights are cretins who abuse their power for personal gam. They are most often good knights who broke down along the way. Either they succumbed to weakness or they underwent some kind of trauma that caused them to abandon their knightly ways and live as a villain. Either way, the bottom line is these knights have become just like any of the bandits and warlords prowling North America, using their strength to bully entire communities, terrorizing entire populations and destroying whoever resists them. Actually, Robber Knights are worse, since **they often** are welcomed into a town under the mistaken belief the villain is an upright and worthy knight (a ploy these crooks like to exploit regularly). Once the Robber Knight is within the settlement, it is too late. After beating, threatening or killing a few people to make his point, the Robber Knight usually just appoints himself the new lord of the town and begins demanding the citizens to turn out all of their precious goods. Once sitting in the proverbial catbird seat, Robber Knights abuse and victimize whoever they choose, satisfying their every base urge. For the terrified townsfolk, it is like a nightmare come to life. How were they to know this seemingly worthy Cyber-Knight would turn out to be such a monster? What's worse, how were they to anticipate being held hostage in their own home?

In most cases, these reigns of evil are eventually put to an end by a righteous Cyber-Knight (or adventurer group or hero) who has arrived not only to avenge the town, but to repair the damage the Robber Knight has done to the name of the Fellow-

ship in general. By this time, however, the Robber Knight might have recruited a band of **Headhunters**, gunmen and other outlaws, turning the community into a battleground. Or, if out-matched, or not looking for a fight, he may simply slip out of town, laden with loot in search of new opportunity. In most cases, however, the good **Cyber-Knight** (and whatever allies he might have with him) prevails, the Robber Knight is brought to Justice, and the town is liberated.

Not all Robber Knights seek a life as a village kingpin or tyrant lord. Many adopt the life of a Highwayman, launching raids and looting bands of travelers, outposts and towns. Many still like a challenge, seek to build a reputation or still crave revenge against those they perceive to have wronged them and target Coalition forces, other **Cyber-Knights**, Juicers, and powerful groups of adventurers, practitioners of magic, D-Bees and monsters. They may also target rival gangs. These Robber Knights swoop in, defeat all opposition and take what they want. Typically they loot is all valuables, but sometimes the entire exercise is to prove just how dangerous, powerful and fearsome they are, or to make some other point, and their loot is some comparatively insignificant "trophy" — leaving all (or most) real valuables alone. Likewise, since they only loot or attack to display their courage and power, many Robber Knights are satisfied with getting what they want without killing. Not that they will hesitate to slay those who refuse to surrender or to murder those who invoke their ire.

Typical Alignment Breakdown: 30% Anarchist, 40% Miscreant, 18% Aberrant and 12% Diabolic.

Justiciars

Dark crusaders supreme, the Justiciars are the twisted, Aberrant shadows of Courtiers and Crusaders. These strangely moral killers and villains often follow the Chivalric Code to a large extent, except they deviate at some point and either take a few precepts to an unusual extreme, or decide to redraw the lines of right and wrong and apply the Chivalric Code to it. An example of this would be the **Justiciar** who becomes obsessed with the notion of **chivalric** honor, and decides that not only must he be honorable to the utmost, but anybody who is not, deserves the harshest treatment. Thus, this brute respects and responds to nobility and honor but will beat, harass, torture and kill those without honor, often at the slightest provocation or fit of anger, without hesitation or hint of mercy. Those who offend are severely punished or slain. Those who oppose or challenge are crippled, maimed or cut-down where they stand. Those beneath him are treated like the garbage and insects they are, and so on, for it is the **Justiciar's** will and perception of truth, honor and justice that matters, no one else.

Of course, only the Justiciar decides who is honorable and who is not. Most often, the guilty parties are *everyone* even loosely involved or affiliated. Guilt by association is guilt all the same. So the darkly driven knight embarks on a never-ending bloodbath just to satisfy his bizarre devotion to right perceived wrongs (often wrongs against "him" rather than the innocent) and a warped interpretation of the knightly Code.



Another example would be a Fallen Knight obsessed with loyalty and who decides that even though Lord **Coake** does not wish to punish those who disobey him, *he* will. And so the **Justiciar** goes on a sinister quest to track down each and every knight fighting on **Tolkeen's** behalf and all who fight or ride at their side, to deliver swift and final justice.

As their name suggests, the Justiciar acts as a self-appointed judge, jury and (most of all) executioner. Although all **Cyber-Knights** do this to some degree, the typical knight tries to be fair, just and honorable in **their** decisions and often defers to local authorities and their brand of justice. By contrast, **Justiciars** care nothing about laws, lawmen or the opinions of others. They are the law. They are true justice. And anybody who stands in their way, including lawmen, heroes and Cyber-Knights, will pay for their petulance, often with their lives. Justiciars see nothing wrong with hurting or killing those who get in their way, even if they are good guys, because Justiciars don't really care about truth, justice or the law, only revenge and their version of justice as they see it in their insanely twisted moral code, and a homicidal enjoyment of punishing other people.

Thankfully, Justiciars tend to be loners, since nobody measures up to their particular definition of right and wrong. They are fond of torture and use tactics of intimidation, strong-arm techniques, blackmail and murder to achieve their goals. Likewise, theft and even framing a suspect is acceptable because the Justiciar "is" justice and local laws and customs do not apply to him. But even though as vile as most of those they battle, Justiciars are frequently ignored by lawmen and even Cyber-Knights. The logic they are using is that while, "Sure these guys are evil and employ all sorts of methods any reasonable person would find objectionable, more often than not, these madmen target other Fallen Cyber-Knights, bandits, evil warlords, supernatural menaces, and other such villains. Consequently, until the Justiciar steps way over the edge — like killing a number of lawmen or burning down an entire town or slaughtering an entire village of innocent people who the Justiciar believed were willingly harboring some terrible evil — they are often allowed to run free.

But in the end, Justiciars, even if they succeed in doing some good, are just one more evil in a whole rogues' gallery of evil. They are also another example of Cyber-Knights being forced to eventually come to blows against other (albeit fallen) Cyber-Knights.

Typical Alignment Breakdown: 65% Aberrant, 17% Miscreant, 15% Diabolic and 3% Anarchist.

Despoiler

Despoilers are, in effect, anti-paladins. Evil knights who have rejected the Code of Chivalry, goodness and all the Cyber-Knights represent in favor of wanton self-gratification and evil. Despoilers almost seem to be bora, not made. Blackhearted plunderers who have no regard for anyone but themselves, and who are a power unto themselves. Those who oppose them are crushed or made to suffer.

As the war in **Tolkeen** heats up, more and more Despoilers have been attracted to the kingdom, for it is a place of rare opportunity and unchecked villainy. Some of them wish merely to partake in the mayhem, others to extract revenge, some to steal a

fortune, others to grab power (even if it is fleeting), some for fame, and others biding their time, waiting for the war to end and the chance to carve Tolkeen up for themselves. Whatever their motivation, the good Cyber-Knights at Tolkeen find themselves forced to tolerate, if not work with, Despoilers and Blackguards in the defense of the Kingdom. A sickening **turn** of events that is an affront to all they hold dear and symbolic of the underlying evil and problems that eat away at Tolkeen.

Of course the worst of these villains are *the Despoilers*, who take every opportunity to belittle, mock and (physically and emotionally) hurt the Cyber-Knights of the Fellowship. True to their name, Despoilers torment the good Cyber-Knights by constantly reminding them that they are "traitors" who have shed their allegiance to the Fellowship and are (supposedly) no better than any Blackguard. The issue of defying (or as the Despoilers prefer to say, "betraying") Lord Coake and leaving the Fellowship to serve Tolkeen is a hot poker Despoilers and other Blackguards delight in sticking to the good Cyber-Knights. They are also quick to point out acts of brutality, cruelty, torture and crimes being delivered against the enemy and suffered by the civilian populace. Despoilers particularly love to flaunt their crimes and evil acts — committed in the name of Tolkeen's peace and freedom — knowing full well the Cyber-Knights can do nothing about it. After all, the Despoilers and their reprehensible tactics are *sanctioned* by Tolkeen's leadership. This has not stopped a frightening number of clashes between these factions, frequently with the good guys losing. Despoilers often antagonize with the intention of evoking a conflict, and because of that they are ready for it with strategies, dirty tricks and minions to join the battle and insure victory.

Away from the war, Blackguards continue to be a thorn in the side of the Fellowship. Not only are they an evil force to be reckoned with (Despoilers love to assemble and lead small armies of bandits, mercenaries and monsters as well as instigate crime, unrest and trouble), but they **also** give the rest of the Fellowship a bad name. In the extreme hinterlands where Cyber-Knights are not as well known, the presence of Despoilers and other Blackguards can make people think that *all* knights are to be feared. This has been the case in certain stretches of Mexico and Texas. As a result, the Cyber-Knights have had a much harder time crusading at those locations. Many villages hear a Cyber-Knight is on the way and lock their doors for fear the knight might be a Blackguard. Despoilers themselves delight in this, and do all they can to further their already sinister reputations and malign the good Cyber-Knights.

Naturally, they do not follow the Chivalric Code, but they do familiarize themselves with it because it is part of their origin and serves as a blueprint for mapping the weaknesses and strategies of the good Cyber-Knights and lawmen who aspire to be like them. Using the Code as a weapon, cunning Despoilers can lay traps, manipulate their heroic opponents and more easily bait a Cyber-Knight into single combat (only to ambush him) or arrange for numerous other situations where their Cyber-Knight rivals will be at a disadvantage. Furthermore, since Despoilers are the worst of the worst, they have no problems with placing innocent people in jeopardy to distract, trap, trick, manipulate or kill Cyber-Knights and other lawmen.

Typical Alignment Breakdown: 45% Diabolic, 35% Miscreant, and 20% Aberrant.



Notable Fallen Knights

Tibor Kensington. Race: Yeno (Rifts® Canada, page 139). Level of Experience: 6th; age 24. Alignment: Miscreant. All the rules, the self-sacrifice, constant hardship, and the pressure to be *good* all the time finally took its toll on Tibor Kensington. Three years prior to the Siege on Tolkeen, this promising **Cyber-Knight** underwent a radical personality shift, turning from a noble and honorable champion of justice to an incorrigible rat who uses his powers in any way he can to satisfy his base desires. Sir Kensington has become the archetypical Robber Knight, routinely terrorizing entire villages and shaking them down for whatever valuables they might have.

Unfortunately, Sir Kensington is one of the most clever bandits and skilled Psi-Swordsmen in recent history. Thus, when he occasionally slips up and is cornered (a rarity in itself), no Cyber-Knight has ever succeeded in besting or capturing him. The fact that he has hired four 3rd level Juicers, a 9th level rogue Dog Boy, a 6th level Conjurer and a 4th level Mystic (suspected of really being a **hatchling** Fire Dragon) as loyal members of his gang (and to watch his back at all times) has not made him any easier to capture. In the meantime, heroes and commoners alike wonder when somebody will find the skill, brains and brawn needed to remove this scumball from the face of the earth.

Uder Scaracen, a.k.a. The Unknown, and Sir Uder the Deceiver. Race: Human. Level of Experience: 4th; age 19. **Alignment:** Miscreant. **Attributes:** I.Q. 15, M.E. 17, M.A. 23, P.S. 21, P.P. 20, P.E. 13, P.B. 10, Spd. 17. **Skills of Note:** Dis-

guise, Impersonation, Seduction, Gambling, Pick Pockets, Palming, Land Navigation and Wilderness Survival, along with the more usual Cyber-Knight skills. **Uder's** great joy in life is sowing discord among the **Cyber-Knights**. He does this by pretending to be either a wandering Cyber-Knight or an innocent traveling adventurer. He then tries to instigate arguments, brawls and tourneys as well as pick pockets, steal valuables during the commotion and, when possible, frame unwitting Cyber-Knights (or other heroes) for crimes they did not commit (and frequently ones that *he* did). The Unknown, as Uder likes to call himself, sometimes uses this ploy to secretly rob or ambush lone Cyber-Knights. He always makes sure not to kill his victims, which only adds to their embarrassment and ire (half the time they never know who he really is or what he really looks like). Frequently, Uder the Deceiver will disguise himself as another, real, Cyber-Knight, lawman or hero to add to the confusion. Situations that sometimes result in duels of honor and the death of one party or the other (both of them innocent).

The Executioner. Race: Unknown, but probably human. A knight with black armor and partial bionics. He seems too big to be a human (a little over seven **feet/2.1 m**), but bionics and bulky armor can be deceptive. In fact, some claim the armor is really an exoskeleton that doubles his strength (P.S. 36) and speed (Spd 44). He also rides a large, silver robot horse. Level of Experience: Again, unknown. He is thought to be of moderate experience, perhaps a 7th or 8th level **Justiciar**. Age: Unknown, **30+**. **Alignment:** Aberrant.

The Executioner wears **black** armor, with silver, gold and red accents, and a helmet that conceals his true features and gives

him a rather alien and bionic appearance. His trademark armor is enhanced with a hooded red cloak with black stripes. In addition to being able to create a massive Psi-Axe (his favorite weapon), both forearms conceal extendable **Vibro-Short Swords** (2D4 M.D. each) and he can fire a laser (2D4 M.D., 300 **foot/91 m** range) from just beneath a mechanical looking left eye. Whether the eye and laser are part of the armor or his actual face is difficult to tell.

The Executioner has become a feared figure in Minnesota and the Great Plains. Riding a massive robot war horse, this deadly figure rides the wastelands in search of those who need to be punished or purified (a euphemism for executed). He fully believes in the Crusader precepts and adheres to the **Chivalric Code** with a vengeance. Anybody showing the least sign of dishonor, however, are to be punished (a sound beating or torture) and those who are deemed "treacherous or murderous lost souls — deceivers and betrayers" are slain immediately. And not only the offender, but the offender's friends, family, and even casual acquaintances. The Executioner views dishonor as a kind of disease and if society is to be purged of it, then all those who may have been "infected" by association must likewise be cut away like dead flesh.

Codebreaker. Race: Human. Level of Experience: 8th; age 44, looks **thirty-ish**. Alignment: Diabolic; an insane Despoiler.

Like the Executioner, Codebreaker is a man with a mission. Only he believes that the Chivalric Code is corrupt and those who follow it (i.e., almost every other **Cyber-Knight**) are even more so. To rid the world of such corruption, Codebreaker must — you guessed it — wipe out anybody who upholds the Code until the Code itself disappears from the collective memory of mankind. A tall order, but hey, the Codebreaker has time. He has already carried on his quest for the last 15 years, and shows no signs of slowing down. Rumor has it he received some kind of experimental **IRMSS** treatment that actually prevents the cellular breakdown that happens as the body ages. If this is true, then Codebreaker can not really age, and will only die by disease or combat. To aid him in his crusade, he is assisted by a pair of Loup Garou (sometimes mistaken for feral Dog Boys; see *Rifts*® Canada for details), a 5th level Necromancer who worships Codebreaker like a god, a half dozen 2nd and 3rd level bandits and the most recent addition to the team, a renegade **Manslayer Daemonix**.

The Cyber-Knight Fellowship at large is interested in putting an end to **Codebreaker's** insane quest. Coalition scientists have learned of his rumored "**cyber-immortality**" and want to check it out for themselves. Thus, a small army of Coalition agents have been dispatched to find the Blackguard knight and bring him in alive using whatever means necessary.

Lord Morturus Slaine. Race: Rumor suggests he is a **Lantaur Psi-Hunter (Psyscape, page 123)**, but nobody among the official Fellowship trained him. If he is really a Cyber-Knight and not a "poser," it would be the first time anybody has seen such a thing, and would make Morturus a rare individual indeed. It is possible that a Hermit or other Fallen Knight trained this **Lanotaur** villain. Lord **Slaine's** racial identity is not certain because this rogue knight wears armor that conceals his physical appearance, and because most heroes and Cyber-Knights who face him in combat, perish. Level of Experience: 10th; age unknown, but he's been on the scene for at least

12 years. Alignment: Diabolic Despoiler. Devilish, cunning, evil and murderous. Attributes: **I.Q.** 19, **M.E.** 21, **M.A.** 6, **P.S.** 21, **P.P.** 24, **P.E.** 15, **P.B.** 7, **Spd.** 88!

Lord Slaine is an infamous figure among the Cyber-Knights because he is directly responsible for the deaths of over thirty knights, all victims to his nefarious plots. Lord Slaine routinely ambushes and assassinates other knights in his own personal war to destroy the Fellowship. What drives this malicious fiend remains a mystery, but the general consensus is that Morturus is just an evil bastard who, like a mad dog, can not help but attacking others. Cyber-Knights aren't his only victims by a long shot, just his favorite targets. Sick of this villain's actions, a team of **Crusaders** recently swore to find Lord Slaine and destroy him, no matter what. This touched off an intense manhunt and ultimately Morturus was flushed out somewhere in the Deep South. His citadel was set upon by a dozen Crusaders, Courtiers and Champions, who slew the **Despoiler's** minions and smashed his fleet of war machines. Finally, Lord Slaine himself was close to being captured when he disappeared in the Everglades swamp and has not been seen since. Rumors have placed him in Wisconsin, Minnesota and Manitoba (Canadian Xiticix Territory) but none have been confirmed.

The Fellowship is hesitant to write Slaine off, since they just know that the moment they believe he is dead, he will pop up again and start trouble. **Instead**, an ongoing effort remains to find Lord Slaine's remains and present them to Lord **Coake**, so they may be properly destroyed.

This villain often works alone, but is also known to usurp towns and small kingdoms, as well as command scores of minions and lead small armies. Likewise, he has connections with and allies among dozens of criminal gangs and desperadoes (mainly in the south), and is said to have ties to the Pecos Empire and Lady Epheseia, the Black Widow. He is also wanted by the Coalition States, El Dorado, **Whykin** and **Kingsdale** for numerous crimes and acts of terrorism.

Lady Epheseia **Gloordon**, a.k.a. "**Black Widow**." Race: Human. Level of Experience: 7th; age 30. Alignment: Diabolic Despoiler. Attributes: **I.Q.** 15, **M.E.** 11, **M.A.** 23, **P.S.** 20, **P.P.** 18, **P.E.** 12, **P.B.** 24, **Spd.** 17.

This black widow of the Cyber-Knight world has proven all too successful at seducing noble knights and turning them into evil shadows of their former selves. She commands a small army of some twenty Fallen Knights (3rd to 6th level) and four dozen lesser brigands; mostly bandits and Highwaymen, but a few Gunslingers, Bounty Hunters, **Witchlings**, Zenith Moon Warpers (see *Psyscape*™, page 138), Battle Magi (see Federation of **Magic**™), Conjurers (see FoM), Shifters and Ley Line Walkers are also counted among them (most are 3rd to 5th level).

This evil seductress has a secret stronghold somewhere deep within the Federation of Magic and is said to have powerful friends in high places within the Federation. Supposedly, she has hashed out some kind of deal with the powers that be there, and in return for her services as their agent, she has her own castle, retainers, and a legion of other underlings and outside freelancers (hired guns and mages) at her disposal. Lady Epheseia has been sighted recently in Tolkeen now that the initial Coalition advance has been repulsed. Like her sometime associate Lord Slaine, she is biding her time, waiting for either

Tolkeen's various factions to begin fighting each other, or for the Coalition to return and lay the entire Kingdom to waste. In both scenarios, Lady Epheseia is considering moving in, claiming a chunk of old Tolkeen for herself, offering a non-aggression pact with the Coalition, and beginning her new life as conqueror and queen. And if that doesn't happen, she has a dozen other schemes, each more insidious and diabolical than the last.

Sir Michael Garcia, a.k.a. Sir Shining Light. Race: Human. Level of Experience: 3rd; age 21. Alignment: Anarchist Fallen Knight. Like so many others, Sir Shining Light was full of spirit and good intentions when he arrived at Tolkeen. He knew in his heart supporting the Kingdom of Magic was the right thing to do and expected to spend his days rescuing children and widows from the evil clutches of the Coalition Army. Two years later, the Shining Light (so named because of his youthful optimism, gold armor and early battles against the supernatural up in Calgary) is broken and disillusioned.

Sir Shining Light deserted from Tolkeen during the blitzkrieg that launched the Sorcerers' Revenge. His spirit was already at low ebb and rather than face the carnage and atrocities during the blitzkrieg, he simply turned tail and fled. Not knowing where to go he wandered aimlessly northeast, where he stumbled across two of General Drogue's death camps. Horrified, but not surprised, he was about to flee again, but something nags at him, telling him to do something. To gather others and rescue these people. Only he can't seem to bring himself to do it.

The Shining Light has momentarily found peace among trapper-hunters at a Wisconsin-Canada border outpost. He has kept his identity as a **Cyber-Knight** (and the existence of the death camps) a secret from all and is considering either becoming a hunter-trapper himself or heading toward **Lazlo** to make a new life. However, the knowledge of the Death Camps haunts him and holds him to the area. Paralyzed by both self-loathing and numbness (caused by the war and depression), he continues to hang out at the outpost, lost to indecision.

Sir Martin Vicent Ryan, a.k.a. Red Ryan. Race: Human. Level of Experience: 5th; age 28. Alignment: Miscreant Fallen Knight/Robber Knight. Red Ryan never felt like a success. Sure he followed the precepts of the Code and had his share of adventures, but he was always one of the "invisible" **Cyber-Knights** — nobody important, nobody special. That all changed when he left to fight for Tolkeen. He felt like he was part of something unique and important. It was in Tolkeen's service that he learned to bend, and then break, the Code. To be ruthless and vicious. Mercy was a luxury one could not afford in war, while treachery, savagery, and murder paid off in spades. The war taught him that as a Cyber-Knight, he was *special* — faster and better than most experienced soldiers, as deadly in combat as any Commando, Juicer or Terror Trooper. An elite fighting machine that people feared and respected. And he liked it. He liked it all, especially the killing and the power that came with fear. People got out of his way, gave him their possessions and fell to their knees begging for "his" mercy. It was grand. Exhilarating. Empowering.

Red Ryan currently leads one of the most infamous, murderous monster squads in Tolkeen: A 6th level Conjurer, 4th level Shifter, a malicious Black Faerie who loves to torture and interrogate, a bloodthirsty Gargoyle, a couple of 5th level Vanguard

Brawlers (Grunt O.C.C.) and a trio of 3rd level Brodkil who obey his every command as if he were a General. They have already made plans to leave Tolkeen if things should turn against the kingdom, but for now they enjoy vendettas against Coalition soldiers, looting the dead of both Tolkeen and the CS, and terrorizing homesteads, towns and travelers where they waltz in like kings, do as they please, steal what they want and kill anybody who tries to stop them.



Hermetic Knights

Most **Cyber-Knights** never make it to "retirement age." The grim reality of their work is that most never live long past 50 or so. Their work is so dangerous that sooner or later the law of averages catches up and the Cyber-Knight dies a glorious death locked in combat with somebody stronger. Or, the hero gets popped by some dishonorable assassin who kills the Cyber-Knight before he ever had a chance to defend himself. Knights in general are at peace with this, though. There is no greater glory than giving one's life to the cause of freedom and justice. The thought of eventually dying while in the line of duty is a fate most Cyber-Knights look forward to.

Sometimes, however, a **Cyber-Knight** is lucky enough, or plays his cards in such a way, that he lives to a ripe old age. **Eventually**, elder knights get too old to stay on the battlefield, **and**, by that time, the individual has usually seen enough killing and strife to fill a dozen lifetimes. Some semi-retire, staying active as teachers, historians, and drill instructors at Cyber-Knight camps, and enjoying high status within knightly society. However, many of these aged and respected heroes choose not only to retire from active duty, but to withdraw from the Fellowship and often society altogether. In most cases, these elder knights move to remote locations and spend the rest of their lives in contemplation and meditation. They become known as Hermetic Knights, and are considered by the Fellowship to be the *sages* of the Cyber-Knight world.

Alignment Breakdown for “Retired” Cyber-Knights: Same as the typical Cyber-Knight, usually good; no alignment change from their earlier life.

Penalties and Modifications for Hermit Knights: Reduce speed by 50%, P.S., P.P. and P.E. by 30% and S.D.C. and combat bonuses (initiative, strike, parry, etc.) by *half*. For elder Cyber-Knights, also reduce the number of attacks per melee round by one per every ten years after age 60. Hermits (who crave isolation) and elder Cyber-Knights also tend to be less tolerant and a bit cranky when bothered.

The facts of life dictate as one gets older, one slows down. This is especially true of warriors who, like professional athletes, put their bodies through years of physical punishment. **Consequently**, an elder Cyber-Knight (60 years old or older, for humans and most D-Bees) and any "Hermit" regardless of age (largely because they are out of shape and out of practice) suffers diminished capabilities.

Early Retirement

Hermetic Knights who attain that distinction by age alone are exceedingly rare. Many become hermits because they can not bear to face some terrible defeat or tragedy, or because they are tired of combat and killing, or simply because they can not physically or emotionally endure the hardship any longer. In short, they burn out and seek seclusion to get away from it all.

Now, not all Cyber-Knights who burn out or get old become hermits. Like the Fallen Knights, or perhaps more like aging athletes, many go on to build new lives with less adventure and fewer physical demands. A Cyber-Knight may become a merchant, town leader, landowner, carpenter, teacher, scout, farmer, priest, vagabond drifter or just about anything. Exactly what depends on the individual. However, there are those who just want to be alone, whether it's to contemplate their past, their future, their failures, their triumphs, the meaning of life, higher learning, or to find redemption, peace or enlightenment in thought and philosophy. And some just want to escape. To be left alone, forget their past and be forgotten themselves. This can be because they are just tired, or because they can not bear anymore strife, or are disillusioned, or have become a person of peace and simply want a simple, quiet life of self-reflection.

Whatever the reason, these warriors willingly become hermits and avoid social interaction. Such prematurely retired Hermetic Cyber-Knights *may* continue to make themselves somewhat available to talk and offer advice (often questioning motives and reasoning) to other knights, and *may*, from time to

time, even step out of retirement to partake in a quest or to stand up for the downtrodden. When this happens it's usually because they become aware of some injustice that they just can not ignore. The reluctant Cyber-Knight hermit may resent being pulled back to active involvement and may even hate himself for doing so, but the character is still a hero or champion at heart and feels compelled to "do the right thing." The younger the Hermetic Cyber-Knight, the more likely he is to take an active hand. However, a Hermetic Knight's return to duty will be rare and far between, as the loner would prefer to offer advice, insight, motivation and clues to others rather than participate directly.

With the splintering and discord within the Fellowship and the war at **Tolkeen**, the number of young Cyber-Knights abandoning the knighthood and either becoming Fallen Knights or Hermits, has risen dramatically. Disillusionment, soul-searching, disappointment, doubt, and shell-shock all play a role in such developments.

Typical Alignment Breakdown for knights who become hermits at a young age (under 55): 30% Principled, 20% Scrupulous, 24% Unprincipled, 16% Anarchist, 6% Aberrant, 3% Miscreant and 1% Diabolic.

Dream Sages

All Cyber-Knights receive a **Dream Vision** at some point in their lives. In broad strokes, a **Cyber-Knight's** Dream Vision is an insight to his destiny, the reason for why he was made to become a protector of the innocent. Cyber-Knights take their visions very seriously, and many live their lives by whatever cryptic clues their visions have to offer them. Once in a while, a Cyber-Knight will fulfill the aspects of his Dream Vision. Those who do this are considered to have fulfilled their duties as a knight, and they often retire from service shortly thereafter. There are two reasons for this.

First, some Cyber-Knights that no longer have a vision to spur them on have been shown to become aimless and distracted. In other words, they no longer do their job with the same kind of fire that they used to. Why? Because in some cases, the Cyber-Knight decides that with the accomplishment of his Dream Vision, he has fulfilled his "destiny" and it is all down hill from that point forward. Many a Dream Sage, scholar and elder Cyber-Knight will tell them that such thinking is foolish, but it happens nonetheless. Its not unlike the inevitable let-down an athlete feels shortly after winning a championship game. It is a natural release and downer, that after a short time, one should get over, enabling the individual to get focused and re-energized all over again for the next challenge. However, some Cyber-Knights do not. As a result, they just aren't as inspired or motivated, and as a result, do not function at 100percent. This means being a bit slow to react and a step or two off, which in the business of the Cyber-Knights usually results in death or tragedy.

The second reason is that if Cyber-Knights retire once their vision has been fulfilled, then they can live a life of sagely contemplation, answering the questions and problems of other knights not as experienced as they. It is this second reason that the rest of the Fellowship is most concerned with. Since all



Cyber-Knights receive a Dream Vision at some point in their lives, they naturally want to interpret it the best they can. Like most "dreams," these visions are, by nature, vague, so many Cyber-Knights make a pilgrimage to a Hermetic Knight, or better yet, the insightful **Dream Sage**, in the hopes they can convince the elder to help them to accurately interpret their dream.

The problem is, Hermetic Knights enjoy their privacy. They deliberately isolate themselves from the world, so they generally dislike visitors, especially **wet-behind-the-ears** junior knights who want a free course on Dream Vision interpretation, or some adventurers looking to them for a helping hand, clue or lead. So, most **Dream Sages** will set up some kind of bodyguard to challenge visitors before entering. This could be a trained monster or animal, a robot, some kind of magical guardian, or perhaps even another **Cyber-Knight** or loyal assistant sworn to serve the hermit. (Many Cyber-Knight hermits have one or two aides/assistants or somebody who looks in on them regularly and helps with chores around the house, preparing food and making sure the old sage is alright. Most feel bound to the Hermit Knight because of some heroic deed by the knight in his earlier days, or because he is revered as a sage or oracle.) If the visitor gets past this guardian, then the Dream Sage will relent and answer questions, but getting past the guardian is often a difficult task, and sometimes does not entail mere combat. Some Dream Sages are fond of having their guardians pose incredibly difficult riddles or demands for (reasonable) quests as the criterion for getting an audience.

Some Dream Sages forsake the guardian approach altogether and simply will not provide any kind of help to visiting Cyber-Knights or adventurers without a steep price, such as performing a dangerous quest or agreeing to act as his personal ser-

vant and bodyguard for a year, or doing him some hard but menial task or difficult favor (perhaps something the hermit promised some other Cyber-Knight or neighbor). In its weird way, this simple and nonaggressive approach is remarkably effective at keeping away all but the most earnest visitors.

It should be said that Dream Sages usually make exceptions for when their former students visit them. Any students who studied directly under his tutelage are allowed to visit without charge or trouble, but those removed from the hermit even by only one generation will still have to prove themselves.

G.M. Note: For obvious reasons, Hermetic Knights, especially elder sages, are best reserved as Non-Player Characters (NPCs) only. They are designed to provide player characters with insight, motivation, information, and, sometimes, avenues of adventure. As such, sagely hermit knights are not really suited for adventuring or use as player characters.

A Hermetic Knight *may* come out of retirement if the circumstances truly merit it, but for the most part, these elder Cyber-Knights prefer to live their lives of quiet isolation. Furthermore, Dream Vision Hermits are almost always 7th level or higher. Any retired Cyber-Knight professing to have had his Dream Vision *and* fulfilled it entirely before then is either a liar or mistaken.

It should also be noted that many Cyber-Knights suspect that true Dream Sages experience multiple Dream Visions during their lives (a rarity that is seen as both a blessing and a curse) to provide them with insight denied the average person, making them a kind of oracle. Dream Sages will not comment on this, but if they could see the future, or if they did receive multiple Dream Visions, it might explain why so many have a distant, even haunted demeanor and no patience for tomfoolery. It is said that Dream Sages with such powers all end up foreseeing the same events, a common destiny that ties together not only all Cyber-Knights but all life in North America. Whether this rumor is really true or a romantic notion, is difficult to say, since the Dream Sages refuse to confirm or deny.

Note: Dream Sages suffer the same penalties as any hermit or aging knight, however they do enjoy some advantages: +1D6 to save vs psionic attack and any form of mind control, +2 to save vs illusions, +1D4+2 to save vs possession, and 1D6 to save vs Horror Factor.

Notable Hermetic Knights

Lady Jessica Plainfield, also known as "Lady Strange."
Race: Human. **Level of Experience:** 9th; 46 years old, but looks 76. **Alignment:** Principled. Lady Plainfield made a career of investigating and vanquishing supernatural menaces of every kind. After receiving a Dream Vision to staunch the flow of monsters coming through a Rift located in the American northeast, Lady Plainfield rallied a small army of adventurers and fellow Cyber-Knights to assault the Rift and employ the mystic knowledge needed to seal it forever.

When that quest **ended**, Lady Plainfield retired from the adventuring life. And with good reason — the hair-raising events of her adventure had actually aged her more than thirty years in the span of a month, the results of a bizarre magical curse she suffered during the fighting. Now she rests her prematurely weary bones in seclusion, acting as a local expert on all things supernatural. She is a living encyclopedia on the bizarre, the **un-**

explained, and the downright weird. However, her information does not come cheap. Lady **Plainfield** left her knightly career with many tasks left undone, things she would very much like to see completed. Any **Cyber-Knight** or adventurer who comes to her for information, insight or advice can expect her to ask that in return, they undertake a quest for her. Most of these are "medium-weight" quests that entail handling some serious menace or problem, but can easily be handled in under six months.

Sir Brugai Rensibor. Race: Human. Level of Experience: 9th; age 69. Alignment: Anarchist. (He probably would become Scrupulous if he sobered up.) Most **Cyber-Knights** retreat into the Hermetic life for more or less good reasons. Not so with Sir Rensibor, who became embittered years ago after a failed quest, and retreated into a self-destructive world of alcoholism and self-pity. His students have written him off as a broken spirit unable to be repaired, but there are still those Cyber-Knights and adventurers who refuse to give up on the old codger, and periodically, pay the hermit a visit to see if there is anything he needs or if there is something they can do for him. Sir Rensibor greets his visitors with a steady mix of bile and bitterness, blaming everybody in the world but himself for his problems. The tragedy of this is he really used to be an excellent Cyber-Knight who struck fear in the hearts of evildoers. Now, he is just a drunken mockery of his former self, somebody many Cyber-Knights wish would go away.

Sir Rensibor is not completely lost, however, for he has a soft spot for children, naive and noble warriors and heroic causes, and will try to help them if he can. Furthermore, if someone were to beat the odds and rehabilitate him, he would not only return to his former greatness, but he would be in his **savior's** debt for life. Sir Rensibor is at heart, a good and carrying knight who could become a Dream Sage if he allowed it to happen.

Sir Maxwell Claymore. Race: **Trimadore (Coalition War Campaign™**, page 208). Claymore is the only Trimadore *on record* to have become a true Cyber-Knight, but he insists that there are numerous others of his kind who have either begun Cyber-Knight training or are themselves, full-fledged Cyber-Knights. Level of Experience: 11th; age 62. Alignment: Scrupulous. This powerful knight retired from service once he reached a fairly high level and felt he had no more wars to fight. All of the arch-enemies he had cultivated were gone, and Sir Maxwell simply felt in his bones that it was time for him to step aside and let younger Cyber-Knights take over. As he has retreated into the Hermetic life, rumors have circulated that he possesses vast mystic knowledge and that he has become a sorcerer of some kind. Of course, this is untrue — he merely owns the rune sword *Black Ivory*, which itself can cast a considerable number of spells. In truth, Sir Claymore feels uneasy owning this mighty weapon without putting it to use, so he hopes to give it to the first knight who proves himself worthy of the boon. To this end, Sir Claymore has devised a series of five challenges (the G.M. is at liberty to decide what they are or to add a few more) to earn the right of owning Black Ivory. Whoever proves that he is the first to complete the challenges shall win the sword.

Sir Oslo Thomas, a.k.a. "the Knight of Sorrows." Race: Human. Level of Experience: 6th; age 30. Alignment: Principled. This Cyber-Knight retired upon finishing the legendary Quest of Sorrows, the details of which are barely known even to

the Cyber-Knights. All that is known is that it involved the **Splogorth**, demons, magic and great personal sacrifice. Since the end of the quest, Sir Oslo has retired to a quiet little temple he built in the Pacific Northwest, where he contemplates on the extraordinary risks he took during the Quest of Sorrows, and how his arrogance could have touched off a chain of events that might have led to the end of the world. He feels unworthy to counsel anybody and avoids human contact.

Lady Brianna Beltaine, a.k.a. "the Noble Lady." Race: Human. Level of Experience: 8th, age 60. Alignment: Unprincipled. Lady Beltaine became a Hermetic Knight after she fulfilled the quest illuminated by her Dream Vision — to smash the Red Flag pirate fleet operating in the Gulf of Mexico. The Red Flag had been raiding the coast for years, accumulating a massive slave inventory. Almost single-handedly, Lady Beltaine sunk the flagship, slew the pirate **leader**, took the lieutenants prisoner, and freed the slaves. She narrowly escaped from that adventure with her life, and has moved well north of the Gulf ever since.

A few years later, she realized she had completed the task her life was meant for, and she quietly became a revered Hermetic Knight. She lives a simple, unassuming life in the foothills of southern Canada, where she entertains respectful visitors. Many young Cyber-Knights seek her out, because Lady Beltaine is one of the few Dream Sages who welcomes visitors and is always ready to help interpret their dreams and offer valuable advice. The payment for such services is simple: perform three deeds of heroic goodwill within one month of visiting her. However, even the Noble Lady has her quirks, and she will not see or help the same visitor more than twice in her life. Interpreting a Dream Vision is one thing, becoming somebody's crutch or den mother is quite another, and young Cyber-Knights and adventurers must learn to fend for themselves.

Lady Sora Ochobar. Race: Human. Level of Experience: 12th, age 72. Alignment: Unprincipled. (She used to be Scrupulous, but years of being wrongly accused have embittered her somewhat, so she is not as kindly as she once was.) Lady **Sora's** noble career was marred by a strange case of mistaken identity. For years, she was plagued by reports that an evil Cyber-Knight matching her description was cutting a swath of terror across the Midwest. Lady Sora's name suffered greatly for it, despite her protestations that she had never done such things. Finally, she conducted a search for whoever was besmirching her name. Eventually, she found what she was looking for, but she could never have prepared for it. **Indeed**, there was a woman that looked like her, committing evil deeds. It was Lady Sora's long-lost twin sister, also known as *Dame Malevola*. The twins had been separated at birth and never knew of each other. Both became Cyber-Knights, trained by separate and distant factions, and both taking similar paths, only Dame Malevola became a Fallen Knight — a Despoiler.

Legend says their meeting and the battle that followed was inevitable. The two crossed swords, and when it was over, Lady Sora was triumphant and Malevola was dead. The shock of killing her own twin was more than the aging Sora could bear. She had been contemplating retiring from the knighthood and this grim chapter in her life convinced her it was time. She withdrew to a **mountaintop** hermitage in the northern Appalachian mountains where she remains to this day, shunned by some Cyber-Knights, pitied by others, and avoided by all.



A Fractured Fellowship

Although Cyber-Knights do not belong to a centralized organization, they consider themselves members of the *Fellowship*, a name used to refer collectively to all Cyber-Knights in good standing. Although a formal census has never been conducted, the most recent studies suggest there are between 900 and 1,300 Cyber-Knights in good standing within North America. Those who renounced Lord Coake to fight at Tolkeen, as well as Fallen Knights who have forsaken their allegiance to the Code of Chivalry, or who have become outright villains, are, obviously, no longer in good standing and no longer considered part of the Fellowship.

According to Lord Coake, there are at least one hundred villainous Cyber-Knights prowling the land, and their numbers are on the rise. A troubling sign **indeed**, especially when one considers that evil Cyber-Knights have a tendency to build small armies for themselves and present far greater threats to the world than what just one knight could accomplish on his own. But most troubling are the estimated 900 or so gone into the service of Tolkeen. Lord Coake fears that a third of these heroes will fall to despair and join the ranks of Fallen Knights, perhaps forever lost to the Fellowship. He hopes at least a couple hundred will return to the Fellowship, and prays for the rest whom he fears will perish in the conflict.

The Fellowship of **Cyber-Knights** has no formal rules or regulations, except for its members to be good and true Cyber-Knights. Unfortunately, the different kinds of Cyber-Knights make interpreting this requirement a little tricky at times. What a Champion considers appropriate conduct might not be what a Courtier or Crusader finds appropriate. Thus, despite the unified exterior the Fellowship presents to the rest of the world, the truth is it is a group divided into smaller factions with conflicting priorities and outlooks on life.

Until recently, these divisions meant little in the long run, since Cyber-Knights often operate alone or with parties of **non-Cyber-Knight** adventurers or warriors. Therefore, Cyber-Knights really did not have many opportunities to get together and let their differences get in the way of things. The Siege on Tolkeen changed all that.

For the first time in nearly a century, a conflict brewed in this part of the world that truly threatened to shake up what **fragile** balance of power existed. The Kingdom of Tolkeen, once a center of learning, peace and magic, had grown dark and corrupt, its leaders forgetting the kindly and noble ways of their forefathers. As such, the Kingdom had become belligerent and **expansionistic**, placing them directly in the cross-hairs of the equally hostile *Coalition States*. Both societies had long-term agendas that involved the destruction of their enemies, making war inevitable. The general consensus had always been that the Coalition would strike first. Tolkeen had seriously militarized, but still lacked the **firepower** to take on the Coalition in its home territory. So, Tolkeen waited for the fight to come to it. In the meanwhile, most of Minnesota turned into a network of fortified settlements, kill zones, bunker grids, outposts and other defensive fortifications as the mage-state nervously awaited the coming of the enemy.

Much of the rest of the region also waited with bated breath. For this was no mere brush war. This would determine the fate of not only Tolkeen and the Coalition, but the destiny of much of North America, too. The Coalition States was already at Free Quebec's throat and had dozens of minor flash points to handle along and within its borders. The Coalition's entire social stability rested on it having a successful military, so for its continued survival, the CS could not afford to lose any war it undertook, especially to the likes of Tolkeen. The Kingdom of Tolkeen, unlike Free Quebec, had nothing in common with Chi-Town or the rest of the States. It was a rival and mysterious power composed of inhuman D-Bees, monsters, demons, sorcerers and savages. Everything the Coalition feared. Everything the CS professed to be more powerful than.

Likewise, Tolkeen would be annihilated if it allowed the Coalition to overrun its territory. They too had to fight with everything they had to prevent their fledgling nation from being blasted off the face of the Earth. As part of their defense, they painted themselves the innocent victims of invasion by an evil empire. The victims of ignorance and persecution. Never mind that they dreamed of retribution, built magical machines of destruction and made alliances with demonic forces so they would be ready to meet their hated enemy when the time came.

The question, then, was how would the Cyber-Knights get involved? Many knights had crossed swords with Coalition agents in the past and had little love for the Death's Head Empire. In addition, the CS never made it any secret that they feared and

hated practitioners of magic, dragons, and D-Bees, all of whom called Tolkeen their home. All of whom the CS would like to see eradicated from the planet.

At the same time, Tolkeen was not the haven for the scholastic, **freethinking** and even adventurers that it used to be. Many Cyber-Knights felt (and correctly so) that Tolkeen had become nearly as dark and sinister as the Coalition States. This was no longer a black versus white situation. It was a battle between two shades of gray. As most of the Cyber-Knights in North America gravitated towards the conflict, they found themselves having to decide exactly where in this conflict they should fall.

For **Lord Coake**, the first **Cyber-Knight** and de facto leader of the Fellowship, the lack of a clear hero or underdog in the conflict disqualified it from Cyber-Knight intervention. Whatever hardships would come from this war, both Tolkeen and the Coalition brought it upon themselves. Thus, neither one was worthy of the Cyber-Knights, help, Coake reckoned. He therefore requested that *all* Cyber-Knights *not* directly help Tolkeen defend against the Coalition and to avoid the conflict. Tolkeen could fight its own war for once. The Cyber-Knights would stay on the sidelines, using their strength to help the innocents caught in the crossfire (evacuating them to safe areas, delivering food, vital supplies and medicine to settlements within the war zone, etc.). They would also patrol the southern and western borders of Minnesota, intercepting and turning away carpetbaggers, bandits, villains, and monsters coming into the region. As far as Lord Coake was concerned, the situation in Tolkeen was bloody enough without a legion of bandits, monsters and thrill-killers coming in to have some fun and making a bad situation worse. Since both Tolkeen and the Coalition made heavy use of outside mercenaries in their campaigns, adventurers and patriots were allowed in. Keeping out the flood of freelancers and thugs wrapping themselves in the flag of patriotism would have been impossible anyway. This was not the **Cyber-Knights'** war to fight. Both sides were simply too evil themselves to consort with. They were beneath the nobility of the knights, and simply had to make do without their help.

Other than that, the Cyber-Knights would wait till the war's end and enter to rescue fleeing refugees vulnerable to Coalition retribution, victimized by the worst elements of their own Tolkeenite army, and preyed upon and victimized by the elements, wild animals, bandits and monsters. Demons and aliens, many of whom their own leaders called to action, would be free to reap whatever carnage they desired. The Cyber-Knights would also be needed to help refugees find new places to settle, new homes and new lives, to survive **natures'** fury (especially in the winter months), and to battle vultures of war — roving bands of monsters, raiders, thieves, bushwhackers, and other hostile forces. And then there was the Coalition Army, who flush with victory, might decide to make limited incursions beyond the borders of Tolkeen to finish their campaign of genocide on the fleeing refugees and to test the mettle of other **nonhuman** settlements around Tolkeen.

That was Lord **Coake's** decision. While he strongly encouraged the rest of the Fellowship to follow his suggestion, he did not *require* any Cyber-Knight to do so in kind. Lord Coake figured that if the Cyber-Knights were to defer to his authority, they would have to do it voluntarily. Any other way simply was not a genuine show of agreement and broke with the unspoken



covenants of the Fellowship. At first, most of the Fellowship agreed with Lord **Coake**, and as they came to **Tolkeen**, they **funneled** into one of **Coake's** temporary headquarters along the border zone to await their orders.

However, sentiments quickly turned as the Coalition Army arrived in all its glory in a semicircle to the southeast. Yes, Tolkeen had become corrupt, just as Lord Coake had said. They conspired with demons and (in desperation and fear, the argument went) called upon dark magic and foul tactics. But compared to the Coalition, Tolkeen seemed saintly. They had never committed genocide, nor did they openly announce their intentions to cleanse the planet of magic use and D-Bees. More importantly, however, was that Tolkeen opposed the Coalition's grim bid to dominate North America, no matter how many would die in the process. Faced with such stark reality, many Cyber-Knights felt that it would be better to side with the "lesser of two evils," if it meant that the greater evil was stopped in its tracks. It would be a difficult moral compromise for the Cyber-Knights to make, but a necessary one. Otherwise, the Fellowship would merely watch as a truly evil juggernaut rolled across Minnesota in a first step towards conquering the rest of the continent.

The argument had its merits, and those who believed in it appealed to the general Fellowship in direct defiance of Lord Coake. They insisted to ignore Tolkeen's cries for help was to violate the Chivalric Code itself. If the Fellowship could not take action now, then when *could* it take action? Some went so far as to suggest that Lord Coake was a coward and those who supported him hid behind his reputation and their loyalty to avoid making the hard choice to defy Coake and fight for Tolkeen. If Lord Coake lacked the courage to join the righteous fight against the Coalition, then perhaps the knights who defer to him should take their destinies into their own hands. In a controversial move, one after another, a charismatic young knight, Sir Rigeld, being one of the first, disavowed themselves from the Fellowship and sought to join the forces defending Tolkeen on their own terms.

At first, the tiny handful to leave the Fellowship were dismissed as hot-heads, rebels, fools and even Fallen Knights, but with time, other knights followed. Within a few months, nearly one-eighth of the total Fellowship had openly joined Tolkeen in defiance of Lord Coake. This was no longer a few rogue Cyber-Knights going **off** on their own. This was a serious crisis. A growing schism within the Fellowship, and everybody knew it, Lord Coake most of all.

Once the schism began, all of the philosophical differences among the Cyber-Knights became much more pronounced. Disputes, brawls and rivalry increased significantly, as did challenges among the Champions. Seemingly overnight, the Fellowship Lord Coake had worked so hard to nurture and develop over the decades teetered on the brink of total disintegration. To some outside observers, this did not seem like such a crisis, for they couldn't see any structure to the organization in the first place. Besides, whoever left the Fellowship was still a **Cyber-Knight**, Fellowship or not. These individuals were top-rank warriors of justice, there could be no doubt of that.

Others pointed out that if a handful of new Cyber-Knight factions were to break away and create their own Fellowships, it would be possible for them to grow so distant from each other

that one day they might grow to hate (and possibly even fight) each other. While such a situation seems extreme or ridiculous to some, others fear it could happen (not that it is). As bad as things **are**, they would be worse if the Cyber-Knights turned on each other rather than battle the true evils of this world.

So far, however, this is an academic notion. The only ones breaking away from the Fellowship are those who went to fight at Tolkeen; the remaining Cyber-Knights seem to be as strong and dedicated (and loyal to Lord Coake) as ever. And even the renegades who fight for Tolkeen broke ranks for what they saw as a noble and just purpose. Whether or not there are more surprises for the Cyber-Knights rests in the hands of fate.

In the meantime, this schism is having a ripple effect among the very people in Minnesota. These people find themselves taking one side or the other of the conflict, and distancing themselves from those who support the rival Cyber-Knight camp. Many are confused and do not know what to think. Some consider those fighting for Tolkeen to be traitors and rogues no better than the untrustworthy mercenaries who have also come to fight on Tolkeen's behalf. The others look at Lord Coake and the rest of the Fellowship and wonder what is holding them back from joining arms against the Coalition. Why won't they come and help them like the renegade knights? Are they cowards? Do they hate practitioners of magic and D-Bees too? Aren't they important enough to help? Maybe it's Lord Coake and those who support him who have broken with the Code of Chivalry? The very notion of a fractured Cyber-Knight Fellowship is a grim sign of worse times to come. The result of such questions is sadness, doubt, confusion and disillusionment — for some, even hate.

We have already seen the war at Tolkeen tear the Cyber-Knights in half. We have seen the two well-intentioned factions take different high-roads. We have also seen the ensuing confusion, doubt and hurt that followed. Ragged emotions that have caused some, like the Cyber-Knight Champions, to challenge, battle, trick and sometimes slay their own brethren in the name of justice and honor. We have seen other Cyber-Knights chewed up and spit out by the war, killed or their spirits broken and sent into seclusion. We have seen others forsake the way of the hero and turn to wretched villainy. Yet through all the tumult, the majority of Cyber-Knights fight for what they feel is right. Whether a unified whole or splintered into a thousand tiny facets, the Cyber-Knights are heroes through and through. In many ways, the true test of their mettle is to never give up. To never lose hope and to lead by their good example. The inspiring words of Lord Coake may indeed be proven to be prophetic. Hope is not dead, far from it. And as long as even a single true Cyber-Knight breathes, their legacy continues and their dream for a better, safer, gentler world lives with them.





Lord Coake

Founder of the Cyber-Knights

Excerpts from Lord Coake's diaries.

Now that I have more or less settled in this new world, I have decided to pen my memoirs for this chapter of my life. I have always kept a diary, and I have found it very useful over the years. It helps to remind me of who I am, where I have been and where I am going.

*I am no stranger to dimensional travel (or magic), so I recognize it when I experience it, and I do **not** fear it. I have been to many realms and many worlds in my day. A world of the **Undead**, a land of Trolls, a world of science, a place where time repeated and a place where time did not exist. I have seen the domain of Dragons and, believe it or not, I have been to Hell and back; or at least a dimension demons called their home. Some of these places I chose to visit, others I was swept away to without my consent.*

*I can not actually say how it is I arrived to this world called "The **Earth**." I suspect that my native world and this Earth are somehow connected, for not only have I seen the same hell-spawned demons who plague the land of my birth, but also the occasional Goblin, Ogre, Wolfen, Elf and other creatures I do believe are native to my homeworld. As further evidence, my heart did leap when I encountered the fur-bearing men known as **Sasquatch**, for one of their kind did fight among us in my native land. A hulking man-beast whose mighty visage frightened the men, women and children who first did see him, but who exhibited uncommon gentleness, kindness and heart so that all whom he met came to love and respect him like no other. Moreover, the land of the New West and the tribesmen called Indians are without a doubt the home of my old friend, for many a night did we sit at the **campfire** or lay in a meadow when he would me tell about the place of his birth. I sometimes think I will one day stumble across my dear friend, but I know that he came from a far different period in The **Earth's** history. Still, we have both traversed space and time, so it is not out of the realm of possibility, although I **find** it quite improbable.*

*I hope I do not sound **too** full of **myself** when I write that I see my arrival here as fate or perhaps the direct working of the gods. I can not say which ones for I have truthfully met many. I would chance to think it is the Forgotten One whom we brought back to the hearts and minds of my people, but it could very well have been Thoth or Ra, or any number of the gods of light. The world of my birth is also a place of magic and mystery, as is the Earth, although never have I seen any realm where magic pulses so strongly through everything as this one. Thus, it is possible that some tide of magic did bring me here, although I have no knowledge of it or a way to return to the world of my birth. I have no sorrow over this, for truth be told, Earth has become my adopted home.*

I was brought to the "Earth" for a reason, of that I am certain. I have had many dealings with gods and godlings, and great experience fighting demons and the forces of darkness. I had thought such grand adventures had reached their pinnacle when I was part of a legendary group of heroes that battled through the pits of Hell fighting both the servants of good and

evil. So great was that adventure that the Lords of Hades and the gods themselves did wager on our success or failure. Truth be told, I thought we were doomed, though I kept my fears to myself and fought without quarter. It was only through the greatest sacrifice a man can make, that a dear friend and long time companion did save us all. I think of him often.

*It was shortly after that episode that I retired from a life of adventure. Many of the old group did the same, scattering to corners of the world to make a life of their own. For my part, I formed a legion of rangers. Men and women of diverse heritage and race to go forth into the wilderness as heroes to protect the innocent and to enforce justice in a world where savagery and injustice all too often ruled the day. **It** is with some pride that I report my rangers have gone on to much good in the land of my birth. And so it was, as I sat fat and sassy, believing I had done all that I could in a long and fruitful life, that I was spirited away to the Land of Magic, The Earth.*

I had thought my native land to be a wild and woolly realm of mystic power, mystery and spiritual forces, but The Earth is unparalleled to anything I have witnessed. And a world much in need of heroes.

*I have always found the heart and soul of mankind to be strong and resilient. I have also found them to be fertile soil for which to plant the seeds of nobility, honor and goodness. There are some in the land of my birth who see people of low stature or **nonhuman** heritage as lesser beings. Men and women who do not deserve the same level of respect as those born to nobility. It is with some shame that I confess I too once held such beliefs. It was only through my adventures that the light of truth opened my eyes. For I have fought alongside those **born** from peasantry, thievery, slavery, and the monstrous, only to see them rise up from their humble, sometimes crippling beginnings to become the greatest heroes in the land. I have seen low-born men and frightening monsters fight with the courage of a lion. I have seen the lowest of the low and monsters without the slightest hint of the human, lay down their lives so that others may live. I have seen them battle evil in all its forms — afraid and trembling like children but unwilling to shirk their duty in the defense of those in need.*

I have also seen monsters become saints and men born of nobility become monsters. So it is, that I know every living, breathing mortal creature has worth, whether he be called human, Troll or Goblin. Be he called man or be he called D-Bee, there is worth in them all. One needs only to plant the seeds of goodness and nobility and then show them the way by good example. That is what my compatriots and I did in the past and so I hope to do again. For the Earth has great need of heroes and fertile soil for which to grow them.

Coake on the Cyber-Knights and Division

*It is with great pride that I have given birth to the noble champions of justice, peace and mercy known as the Cyber-Knights for I believe they are the greatest good I have helped to bring to any world. I can not take complete credit for their coming into **being**, for I had no formal plan at the outset. Only to help those in need and to build a strong but merciful fighting force to protect the innocent. These western lands are*

plagued by tyrants and demons that **need** to be quelled so that gentler folk might prosper. That the **Cyber-Knights** grew from such good intentions is as much a triumph of the mortal spirit as anything I may have done.

Before the advent of the eastern Post Apocalyptic Calendar, I strode across the land exploring, observing and helping in small ways. Soon however, I found myself drawn into conflict, yet again, with the demonic. I built an army and we struck down the demons who would dare to claim the land of **men** for themselves and turn good men into chattel. When the war did end and most returned home to continue their **lives**, many turned to me for guidance. Warriors, mages and D-Bee peasants with the hearts of heroes desirous of forming a union to free this land of the monsters and injustice that plague it.

It was from these first warriors that the Cyber-Knights would spring, though it would be, by my count, three generations before the first, true Cyber-Knights would be born. At first we were few, but like most good things, as word spread and our deeds were sung, our numbers grew. Our numbers would be greater still if the precepts of our Fellowship were not so stringent and demanding. Many an ambitious youth or warrior comes to us with dreams of heroism, glory and power. And though heroes we may be called, and while glory may be thrown upon us, these things are not the spirit nor the goals of our humble Fellowship. We are but humble sentients who give of ourselves to our fellow mortals. We desire not the label of hero, the chains of glory or the mantle of power. We **long** for truth, justice, freedom, honor, mercy and peace. We fight on behalf of those who are overwhelmed and held prisoner under the heel of evil and injustice because we have the strength of spirit and body, and skills of the warrior they do not. We serve to give people freedom and choice and a voice by which to express it.

So it is that ambition is not enough to become a knight, and desire for glory and power obstacles to overcome. Thus, many come to us but many fail. Others have the soul of a hero and the heart of a knight, but lack the strength of body or the conviction or desire to become a Cyber-Knight. Still others see the world through different eyes and hold to different dreams. From these two camps are often forged the lasting bonds of friendship and worthy alliances. And so the Cyber-Knights touch and influence others.

Regrettably, with strength of character, conviction and hero status, our fragile humanity gets forgotten or overlooked. **People** forget that we too are but mortal creatures of flesh and bone. We too feel the sting of prejudice, hate, fear and misunderstanding. We too suffer from love, hate, pride, envy, anger, bias and intolerance. Whether human or D-Bee, we have our hopes and dreams, our fears and desires, our aspirations and our shortcomings.

So it is, that I am not shocked nor provoked to hate over the tide that now divides us. The Cyber-Knight Fellowship has stood united for over one hundred and thirty years. A long time for any union. And like any union, there **will** come times where the ties that bind will be tested and some will break. While the schism has horrified and disappointed many, I tell them this test of our mettle is not yet done. That we are being tested and the end is not yet here. While the Fellowship is shaken to its very foundation, it still stands. To many an observer, those who have left the Fellowship are called traitors and villains, but that is a

most cruel and unfair label, for most have left to follow their hearts and to do what they believe is right. They **fight** and give up their lives for others in pursuit of a dream that is noble and good, but unattainable under the current scenario. These **Cyber-Knights'** good intentions are corrupted and their aspirations foiled by those in power; hate-filled warmongers driven by fear and lust for revenge and power. As I see it, the only wrong these knights have committed by leaving the Fellowship is letting themselves be blinded by their own dreams for a better world. I only hope the injustice and demons of war do not destroy too many and that whether they return to the fold or not, that they hold true to themselves and always champion justice and goodness.

There is no denying their departure has hurt the Fellowship. Our numbers are diminished, our enemies are many, and our good name has been sullied. On a more personal level, all of us must deal with hurt feelings, **rejection**, and a misplaced sense of betrayal. As I have said, we are human after all, and it pains us to lose a friend or ally no matter the reason. We want to lash out, push back and call names to hurt back and mask our own pain and insecurities. **It** is a knee-jerk reaction we of the Fellowship must resist.

Some have called me a dottering old fool. Others, too compassionate, a dreamer, because I hold true to the belief that this division is both temporary and a wake-up call. Even I had come to believe the songs that spoke to our indomitable will and indestructible union. This humbling schism speaks otherwise and reminds us of our frailty and the work we must do to preserve and keep safe our Fellowship. In the end, I believe many will return to us, though it may take years, we shall **all** become stronger for these difficult times.

The Immortal Lord Coake?

Lord Coake has honestly lost count of his age but knows he is at least 230, although he looks only to be in his late forties or early fifties. An impossibility for any human. Coake makes this observation in his writings.

Although I was born of human mother and father, it would seem I have become something a bit more, for I have lived an extraordinarily long life without showing much sign of aging. My body is as stout and strong as it ever was, my mind is sharp and my skills honed to peak efficiency. Some have asked me if I am immortal, I tell them no for I am certain I can die of mortal injury and I do see hints of aging. Every generation or so, I see a new wrinkle or **a** few more white hairs, though without doubt I age at the pace of an Elf or even a dragon. Whether I will live into my hundreds or into the thousands of years I can not say, although I hope it is the former rather than the latter. While I truly enjoy and appreciate an exceedingly long and fulfilled life, I do not desire to live forever, nor **even** for a millennium. I think immortality is greatly overrated, for one endures many hardships, losses **and** tragedies in his life. To live the equivalent of five or ten life times is to endure five or ten times the hardship. While it is true that the good balances the bad, and helps to rejuvenate the spirit, a man grows tired nonetheless and the world grows small. I have been blessed with a long life full of worthy challenges and triumphs that have renewed my spirit and keep me happy and going. Still I miss the many who have passed be-

fore me and I know there will come a day when I will become tired and want to close out my days — though no time soon.

As to how this boon of long life may have befallen me, I can only hazard a guess. I have long had a fascination with all things magical, and amassed quite a collection even in my early years of adventuring. As a foolish youth, I did quaff down my share of magic potions without knowledge of their benefit, I once lost my soul, died and was magically restored, and experienced many a rare and strange happenstance. Any one of these things may be responsible for my current condition. However, there is one that stands above the rest.

There was a time when a companion, one among many heroes with whom I did keep company, beseeched an ancient artifact of seemingly immeasurable power to grant us all the power of the gods. It was not a boon any of us had requested, but as I said, we were young and foolish, so our stalwart companion believed what he wanted, so did we all. Now even this artifact had its limits, and creating 25 gods was beyond them. However, we were all awashed with mystic energy that knocked us to our feet and inflicted grievous damage upon us all. We escaped and recovered without further incident or change. Only the one who made the request was transformed into something resembling a godling, though only a strange quirk of fate did prevent him from dying in the process. It is this incident that I suspect changed me in ways I would not realize till decades later. Having not seen my old comrades in well over a **century**, I can not say if they too have lived as long as I, but I suspect it is so.

As all things in life, one must adjust and do. And so I have made peace with my **quasi-immortality** and enjoy the long life I have been granted.

Lord Coake

Founder and Leader of the Cyber-Knights

Also known as "Coake the Mysterious," although that is a name from his youth and little known on Rifts Earth. True name unknown (and Coake likes it that way).

Race: Human

Alignment: Scrupulous

Attributes: I.Q.: 18, M.E.: 17, M.A.: 17, P.S.: 22, P.P.: 20, P.E.: 23, P.B.: 12, Spd: 22

Height: Six feet, one inch (1.85 m). **Weight:** 220 lbs (99 kg).

Age: Uncertain. At least 230 years old, (may be closer to 250 or even 270), but looks to be a strong and healthy **40-something** or 50-ish. **Coake's** brown hair is white at the temples and streaked with grey. His weathered face is strong and handsome.

Hit Points: 94; **S.D.C.:** 72.

Experience Level: 15th level **Cyber-Knight** and Wilderness Scout (he started life as a medieval Ranger).

Mega-Damage via Cyber-Armor: A.R. 17.

M.D.C. by Location:

Shoulders (2) — 19 each

Back Shoulder Blades (2) — 26 each

Forearms (2) — 21 each

Thigh/Upper Leg (2) — 26 each

Chest Plate (main body) — 87 M.D.C.

P.P.E.: 28; **I.S.P.:** 106

Skills of Note: Literacy: American and Dragonese (98%), Spanish (70%); Speaks American, Mexican (Spanish), **Dragonese/Elf**, and **Gobblely** (98%); Basic Math, Lore: Demons & **Monsters**, Lore: Faeries, Lore: Religion, Anthropology, Paramedic, Recognize Weapon Quality, Track **Humanoids**, Track Animals, Trap and Skin Animals, Identify Plants, Gemology, Whittling, Land Navigation, Wilderness Survival, Detect Ambush, Detect Concealment, Escape Artist, Intelligence, Horsemanship: Cyber-Knight, Body Building, Boxing, Wrestling, Gymnastics, Swimming, Climb, Prowl, Dance, Pilot: Motorcycle, Pilot: Hover Vehicle, and Radio: Basic, all at **98%**! Computer Operation, Art and Writing at 78%.

W.P. Sword, W.P. Battle Axe, W.P. Blunt, W.P. Knife, W.P. Archery and Targeting, all at 15th level proficiency. W.P. Energy Pistol, W.P. Energy Rifle and W.P. Energy Heavy at **10th** level proficiency.

Special Abilities: All standard Cyber-Knight Abilities, including creating two Psi-Swords or **Psi-Battle Axes** (6D6 M.D.). Perhaps as another side effect from the same influence that has granted Coake longevity, he seems to be impervious to disease and has superior resistance to poison.

Psionics: The basic Cyber-Knight abilities to summon Psi-weapons at no **I.S.P.** cost, **Psi-Shield** (15; half the normal cost), and Meditation. Coake is not a natural psychic.

Magic Knowledge: Always fascinated by magic, Lord Coake knows much in the way of lore and has centuries of personal experience. He also has a huge collection of **Techno-Wizard** items and magical weapons from Rifts Earth and other worlds.

Combat Training: Hand to Hand: Martial Arts.

Attacks Per Melee: 10

Combat Bonuses: +4 to initiative, +8 to strike (+9 with swords, axes and Psi-Weapons; not including any bonuses the weapon may provide), +11 to parry and dodge, +15 to damage, +4 to disarm, +5 to pull punch, +4 to roll with **punch/fall/impact**, +16% vs **coma/death**, +4 to save vs magic, +9 to save vs poison (special), +5 vs Horror Factor. **Note:** Does not include bonuses from Lord Coake's many magic items.

Other Combat Info: Karate Kick (2D4+2), Snap Kick (1D6+2), **Tripping/Leg Hook**, Backward Sweep, Critical Strike or **Knockout/Stun** on 18-20, Death Blow on a Natural 20, pin, and **crush/squeeze**, as well as the usual bonuses and abilities from Cyber-Knight Zen Combat.

Weapons of Note: As leader of the **Cyber-Knights**, Lord Coake has access to a huge range of conventional weapons. His personal favorite modern weapons include particle beam rifles of any type (his alien rifle was destroyed in combat 80 years ago), **Wilk's** laser rifles, **Vibro-Blades** and the Neural Mace. He hates explosives and missiles and will not use them himself. When Coake has a choice, he still prefers a long sword or bow and arrow over high-tech weapons and gadgets. Also see *magic items*.

Magic Items: Coake has always been fascinated by magic and had an impressive collection of magic items long before coming to Rifts Earth. Over the years he has amassed an unbelievable personal "armory" of **Techno-Wizard** devices, magic weapons and items from Rifts Earth and other worlds. In fact, his old teammates, The **Defilers**, used to tease and

razz **Coake** about the number of magic items he used for his adventuring, saying that he actually "glowed" at night from the magic he carried. Note: Lord Coake typically wears his Belt of Supernatural Strength, Gauntlets of Trapping, Magic Ring, Speed Boots, and takes his two long swords and a long bow (with an assortment of ordinary, high-tech and M.D. arrows) on most missions.

Some of Lord **Coake's** favorite and most notable magic items include:

Belt of Supernatural Strength: An alien, off-world magic item. Lord Coake has had this item since his early days of adventuring. Bonuses (in addition to natural bonuses): +3 on initiative, +3 to strike, inflicts +18 M.D. from punches or with melee weapons (like his long swords) and enables him to carry up to six tons (12,000 lbs/5400 kg)!

Gauntlets of Trapping: An alien, off-world magic item from his early days of adventuring. Spell Casting: Each of the following spells can be cast three times per day at 5th level potency: Magic Net, Carpet of Adhesion and Force Bonds. The gauntlets must be worn in order to cast the magic.

Magic Ring: An alien, off-world magic item from his early days of adventuring. A simple platinum and gold ring that enables the wearer to see the invisible for one hour per activation. Can be used **five** times per 24 hour period.

Speed Boots: An alien, off-world magic item from his early days of adventuring. Triples **Coake's** normal speed to a rate of 66 (45 mph/72 km; nearly as fast as his Psi-Pony), +2 to dodge, and can leap six feet (1.8 m) high, 12 feet (3.6 m) long. Running is done without fatigue for the first hour, and at half the normal rate of fatigue for every hour after that.

Sword: Long Tooth: An alien, off-world magic item from his early days of adventuring. An **enchanted**, silver-plated long sword he likes to use against vampires and the supernatural. The hilt is in the shape of a cross, the blade is indestructible, the weapon does 1D6 M.D. (+3D6 M.D. to the supernatural or creatures of magic, 4D6 Hit Points to vampires), is +4 to strike when used against the supernatural and has the weird magical power to steal and store the Hit Points of those it strikes (up to 120 points) and *give them* to the owner of the sword (Lord Coake) whenever he needs them to restore his own Hit Points. (Can not be applied to S.D.C. and can not give M.D.C. to Lord Coake. In this case, each M.D.C. point absorbed counts as one Hit Point). Long Tooth does S.D.C. damage when in S.D.C. environments.

Sword: The Joker's Ace: Another magical long sword said to have been given to him by a friend before coming to Rifts Earth. This sword has an indestructible, bluish steel blade and is +3 to strike, +5 to strike when thrown (very unusual for a large sword, maximum range is 100 feet/30.5 m), +5 to parry, +5 to damage (M.D. on Rifts Earth, S.D.C. in those environments), and can magically turn invisible for up to an hour (to conceal it) three times a day. Note: Coake often uses *Long Tooth* and *The Joker's Ace* as paired weapons, particularly when going up against creatures of magic and the supernatural.

TW Six Gun (revolver): 1D6 M.D., 500 foot (152 m) range. Six shot payload. See *New West™* for details.

TW Thundergun (revolver): 3D6 S.D.C. to mortal beings, 5D6 M.D. to mages and creatures of magic, 1D6x10 to the supernatural; range 500 feet (152 m). Six shot payload.

TW Old Lightning Rifle: 5D6 M.D. lightning bolt, 1200 foot (366 m) range.

Splogorth Crystal Fire Rod: See *Rifts® World Book 2: Atlantis*, page 129.

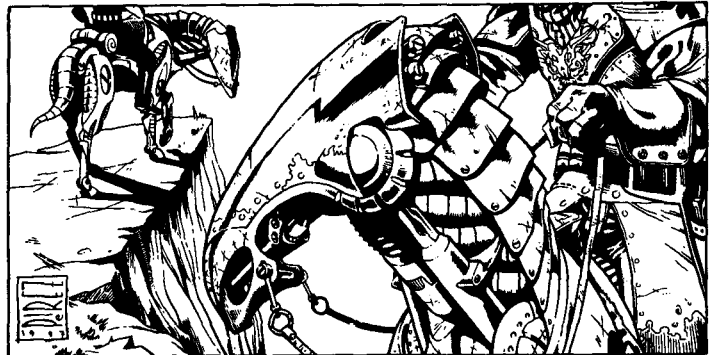
Millennium Tree Staff of the Earth: See *Rifts® World 3: England*, page 20.

Note: Lord Coake avoids using Splogorth weapons except under extreme circumstances and sometimes lends them out to trusted knights.

Techno-Wizard Body Armor (Plate): Effectively full environmental armor when the helmet is in place (magically breathe without air, plus See the **Invisible** and **Nightvision** as per the spells); A.R. 19 without the helmet.

Special Properties: 300 M.D.C.; magically noiseless/silent and lightweight (no mobility penalties), and impervious to fire.

Other Equipment: A gold cross trimmed in silver, and studded with a total of 12 blood red rubies. He wears this item around his neck at all times. It has sentimental value and is effective against vampires and other demons vulnerable to this holy symbol, but has no magical properties. Lord Coake has access to most any basic **outdoorsman** and military equipment and vehicles.



Vehicles: Prefers horses, motorcycles and hover trucks, and has a TW **Glittermount** Magical Horse (a gift), but his favorite "mount" is a fast, clever, independent and loyal **Psi-Pony** named "Wild Wind." Attributes: I.Q.: 10, M.E.: 20, M.A.: 16, P.S.: 32, P.P.: 20, P.E.: 18, P.B.: 15, Spd: 72 (48 mph/77 km); Female, 1000 lbs (450 kg), 5 feet, 4 inches (1.63 m) at the shoulders. Level: 7th, Age: 9 (in her prime for a Psi-Pony). Hit Points: 28, S.D.C.: 39, but wears light Techno-Wizard **barding** (100 M.D.C.) and uses her psionic force field for protection. Natural Abilities: Swim 50%, jump 6 feet (1.8 m) high, 15 feet (4.6 m) long, keen hearing, can carry 500 lbs (225 kg); also see psionics. Combat Notes: Three physical or three psionic attacks per melee **round**, front kick 2D6 S.D.C., rear kick 4D6 S.D.C., bite 1D4. Bonuses (including attribute bonuses): +3 on initiative, +5 to **strike**, +6 to **dodge**, +17 to **damage (S.D.C.)**, +3 to roll with impact or fall, +5 to save vs mind control and possession. Psionics (female): Healing Touch, Psychic Purification, Mind **Block**, Empathy, Sixth Sense, **Telekinetic** Force Field, and Bio-Regeneration (self). I.S.P.: 94. Skills: Basic wilderness and land navigation skills. Note: Wild Wind is as much a colleague and a friend as she is a horse. The two greatly like and respect each other and have worked together (nobody can actually own a Psi-Pony) for the last **five** years. See *Rifts® World Book 14: New West™* page 156, for complete details.

Cybernetics: Cyber-armor only.

Other Notable Knights

Sir Taloquin

Some insight to this elder **Cyber-Knight** can be gleaned in the story **Dreams**, presented earlier in this book. He is an experienced Courtier who has served the Code of Chivalry, Lord Coake and his Fellowship admirably. Although greatly respected and highly placed among the leaders of the Fellowship, the sure and steady Sir Taloquin is the least flamboyant.

The Courtier is a deep thinker, weighing all issues and sides carefully and giving every decision its due consideration. While it may take him a bit longer than most to make a decision (he never acts in haste), once he makes a choice it is usually the right one and his resolve is unshakable (unless some new, compelling evidence is brought to bear). Sir Taloquin never rushes to judgement and always tries to be fair and merciful. He is tolerant, patient, soft-spoken, compassionate, strong-willed (if quiet and sober), honorable to a fault and noble in the extreme. However, his greatest virtue is the power *offorgiveness*. Sir Taloquin can usually see all sides to any conflict and can find some common ground, sympathy and avenue for compromise or amends. This generous spirit has earned the knight Lord Coake's favor, who refers to the old warhorse as his "stout and silent oak" — unassuming yet sturdy and much stronger than most realize. Sir Taloquin is one of Lord Coake's trusted confidants, generals and most loyal and trusted knights.

Sir Taloquin is a big, burly warrior with dark brown hair (almost black) and greying beard and mustache. Trained in a variety of weapons, he is a master swordsman and prefers using his twin Psi-Swords in combat, but will use whatever is most suitable to the mission. He rides a **Glittermount** (see *Rifts® World Book 14: New West™*, page 218, for details, as well as for a variety of robot horses) or a real horse in light **barding** (60 M.D.C.); there really isn't anything quite like a real horse, as many **Cyber-Knights** and Cowboys will tell.

Sir Taloquin

Also known as "Taloquin the Peacemaker."

Real name: Robert Benton Taloquin

Race: Human

Alignment: Principled

Attributes: I.Q. 15, M.E. 22, M.A. 17, P.S. 24, P.P. 23, P.E. 19, P.B. 13, Spd. 15

Height: Six feet, five inches (1.98 m); Weight: 260 lbs (117 kg).

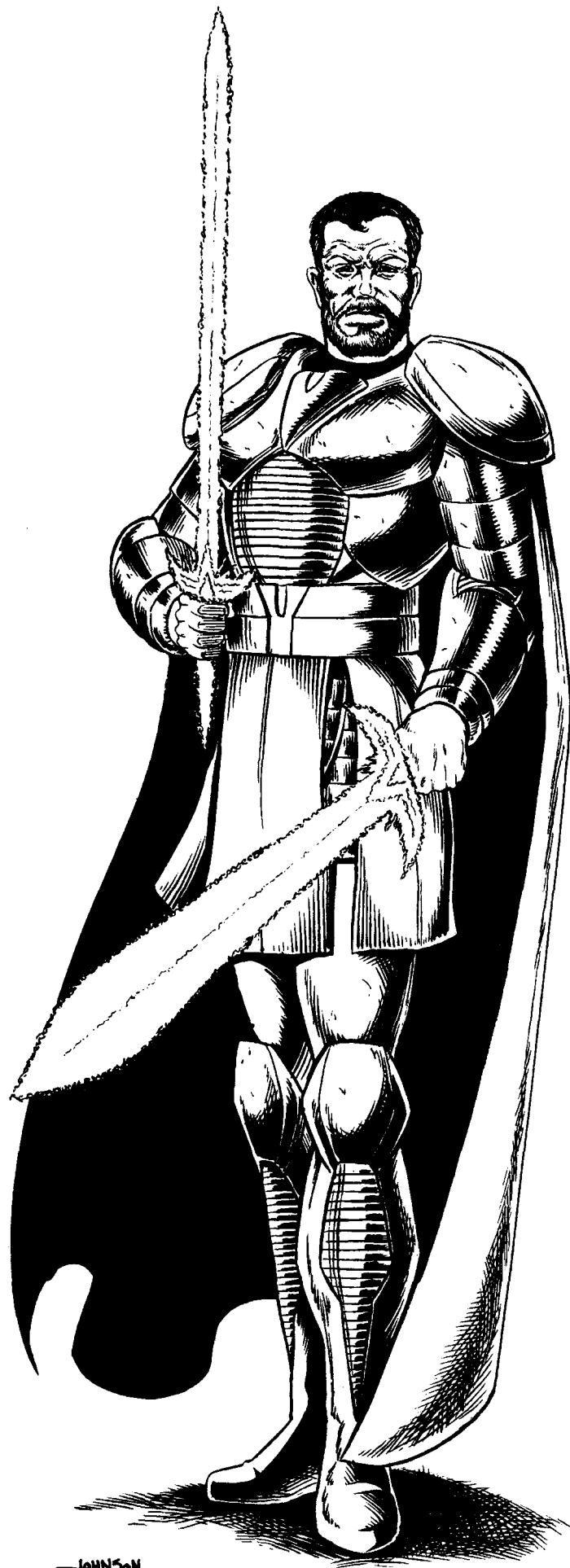
Age: 51

Hit Points: 78; S.D.C.: 64.

Experience Level: 11th level Cyber-Knight.

P.P.E.: 29; I.S.P.: 98

Disposition: Quietly noble and caring. A man of conviction. An outstanding warrior, capable, a solid leader (although it does not come naturally or easily to him). Known for his deep thoughts, gentleness and many kindnesses, Sir Taloquin can



be surprisingly swift, sure and deadly in combat, fighting without hesitation or quarter.

Mega-Damage via Cyber-Armor: A.R. 17.

M.D.C. by Location:

Shoulders (2) — 15 each

Back Shoulder Blades (2) — 22 each

Forearms (2) — 17 each

Thigh/Upper Leg (2) — 22 each

Chest Plate (main body) — 76 M.D.C.

Skills of Note: Literacy: American and Spanish (98%); Speaks American, Mexican (Spanish), **Dragonese/Elf**, and Gobblely (all at 98%); Lore: Demons & Monsters, Law, Anthropology, Paramedic, Recognize Weapon Quality, Track **Humanoids**, Land Navigation, Wilderness Survival, Camouflage, Find Contraband, Interrogation, Detect Ambush, Disguise, Escape Artist, Intelligence, Body Building, Boxing, Wrestling, Gymnastics, Swimming, Climb, Prowl, Dance, Play Musical Instrument (Guitar), Horsemanship: Cyber-Knight, Pilot: Motorcycle, Pilot: Hover Vehicle, and Radio: Basic, all at **98%**! Computer Operation, Art and Writing at 78%.

W.P. Sword, W.P. Knife, W.P. Blunt, W.P. Energy Pistol, W.P. Energy Rifle and W.P. Energy Heavy, all at **11th** level proficiency.

Special Abilities: All standard Cyber-Knight Abilities, including creating two Psi-Swords (5D6 M.D. each).

Psionics: Summon Psi-weapons at no **I.S.P.** cost, **Psi-Shield** (15; half the normal cost), Mind Block (4), Meditation (0), Alter Aura (2), Empathy (4), Object Read (6), and See the Invisible (4). Sir **Taloquin** is a natural, Minor Psychic.

Magic Knowledge: Respects and understands magic and creatures of magic, but is not an aficionado like Lord **Coake**.

Combat Training: Hand to Hand: Martial Arts.

Attacks Per Melee: 9

Combat Bonuses: +3 to initiative, +10 to strike (+8 with swords, axes and **Psi-Weapons**), +11 to parry and dodge, +17 to damage, +4 to disarm, +5 to pull punch, +5 to roll with **punch/fall/impact**, +8% vs **coma/death**, +2 to save vs magic, +2 to save vs poison, +4 vs Horror Factor.

Other Combat Info: Karate Kick (2D4+2), Snap Kick (1D6+2), **Tripping/Leg Hook**, Backward Sweep, Critical Strike or **Knockout/Stun** on 18-20, and **Crush/Squeeze**, as well as the usual bonuses and abilities from Cyber-Knight Zen Combat.

Weapons of Note: As one of the upper echelon of the **Cyber-Knights**, Sir Taloquin has access to a huge range of conventional weapons. His personal favorite modern **weapons** include pulse laser rifles, and plasma weapons of CS, Triax and **Wilk's** design, as well as **Vibro-Blades** and **Techno-Wizard** devices.

Uses the following regularly: Wilk's Laser Knife (3D6 M.D.), Coalition CP-40 Pulse Rifle (2D6 M.D. or 6D6 M.D.) and C-27 Light Plasma Cannon (6D6 M.D.).

Magic Items: **Splugorth Sword of Life** (4D6 M.D.) and can cast Invulnerability, Negate Magic, Cure Illness, Purification, Stone to Flesh, and Remove Curse three times each, per day, equal to an **11th** level sorcerer. A gift given to him by Lord **Coake** (see **Rifts® Atlantis** for complete details).

Techno-Wizard Body Armor (Plate): A suit of gold and blue armor with a blue skirt. Effectively full environmental armor when helmet is in place; A.R. 19 without the helmet.

Special Properties: 180 M.D.C.; magically lightweight (no mobility penalties) and Chameleon.

Other Equipment: Standard Cyber-Knight gear, saddlebags and riding equipment, vampire fighting gear (including TW rain flares and other TW anti-vampire items) and a small version of the gold and silver cross **Coake** wears, with four rubies.

Cybernetics: Only Cyber-Armor.



Grandmaster Segaya Kross

Sir Segaya Kross was one of the greatest swordsmen the **Cyber-Knights** had ever seen. He was a dynamic force in the Fellowship as both a heroic warrior and teacher. Although he remained active as a Crusading knight well into his sixties, he spent a considerable amount of his time teaching combat and swordsmanship at the **Cyber-Knights'** main headquarters and has personally mentored over 70 **Cyber-Knights**, Sir Taloquin among them.

Grandmaster Kross is one of the few elder knights trusted and respected by all **Cyber-Knights**, including those who have left the Fellowship and even most Fallen Knights. He is a long-time friend and confidant to Lord **Coake** and a father figure to Sir Taloquin. If Lord **Coake** should ask him to come out of retirement to help mend the divide between the **Cyber-Knights** he will do so, but until then he remains in seclusion.

Sir Segaya Kross

Also known as "The Grandmaster."

Real name: Unknown

Race: Human

Alignment: Principled

Attributes: I.Q. 15, M.E. 24, M.A. 18, P.S. 17 (used to be 26), P.P. 16 (used to be 23), P.E. 14 (used to be 20), P.B. 9, Spd. 12 (used to be 24).

Height: Five foot, five inches (1.65 m); **Weight:** 150 lbs (67 kg).

Age: 89

Hit Points: 62; **S.D.C.:** 35; both reduced from what they once were by age.

Experience Level: 14th level **Cyber-Knight** Hermit and rumored to be a Dream Sage.

P.P.E.: 31; **I.S.P.:** 158

Disposition: Insightful, straightforward, noble and just. He is an expert on the Code of Chivalry and the history of the **Cyber-Knights**, including Lord Coake. He is **frustrated** by his diminished physical capacity, which tends to make him impatient and cranky with those who ask dumb questions with obvious answers or who are not plain speaking and straightforward. He once served Lord Coake and the Fellowship as a judge and is renowned for his sense of fair play and justice. At the age of 80 he decided he had enough of the world and decided to retire as a hermit.

Mega-Damage via Cyber-Armor: A.R. 17.

M.D.C. by Location:

Shoulders (2) — 18 each

Back Shoulder Blades (2) — 25 each

Forearms (2) — 20 each

Thigh/Upper Leg (2) — 25 each

Chest Plate (main body) — 80 M.D.C.

Skills of Note: Literacy: American and Spanish (98%); Speaks American, Mexican (Spanish), **Dragonese/Elf**, **Techno-can** (all at 98%); Advanced Math, Lore: Demons & Monsters, Lore: Religion, Lore: Indians, Law, History of the West, **Anthropology**, Paramedic, Recognize Weapon Quality, Military Etiquette, Interrogation, Find Contraband, Track **Humanoids**, Land Navigation, Wilderness Survival, Detect Ambush, Intelligence, Swimming, Prowl, Dance, Horsemanship: Cyber-Knight, and Radio: Basic, all at **98%**! Streetwise 72%, W.P. Sword, W.P. Knife, W.P. Shield, W.P. Bolt-Action Rifle, W.P. Automatic Rifle, W.P. Energy Pistol, W.P. Energy Rifle, all at 14th level proficiency.

Special Abilities: All standard Cyber-Knight Abilities, including creating two Psi-Swords (4D6 M.D. each).

Psionics: Summon Psi-weapons at no **I.S.P.** cost, **Psi-Shield** (15; half the normal cost), Mind Block (4), Meditation (0), Alter Aura (2), Empathy (4), Clairvoyance (4), Commune with Spirits (6), Machine Ghost (12), Object Read (6), Remote Viewing (6), Sense Time (2), Sense Evil, Sense Dimensional Anomaly (4), Intuitive Combat, and See the Invisible (4). Segaya had already developed psychic powers before becoming a Cyber-Knight and was a Major Psychic. The additional powers listed here are in addition to those he gained as a Cyber-Knight. He is currently a Dream Sage.

Magic Knowledge: Respects and understands magic and creatures of magic, but is not an aficionado like Lord Coake.

Combat Training: Hand to Hand: Martial Arts.

Attacks Per Melee: 9

Combat Bonuses: +1 to initiative, +5 to strike (+6 with swords, axes and **Psi-Weapons**), +6 to parry and dodge, +5 to damage, +2 to disarm, +2 to pull punch, +2 to roll with **punch/fall/impact**, +2 to save vs magic, +2 to save vs illusions, +5 to save vs psionic attack, and +10 vs Horror Factor.

Other Combat Info: Karate Kick (2D4+2), Snap Kick (1D6+2), **Tripping/Leg Hook**, Backward Sweep, Critical Strike or **Knockout/Stun** on 18-20, and **Crush/Squeeze**, as well as the usual bonuses and abilities from Cyber-Knight Zen Combat.

Weapons of Note: Has a **Vibro-Knife** (1D6 M.D.), bolt-action rifle (5D6 S.D.C.), assault rifle (4D6 S.D.C.); both for firing silver bullets and combating the **undead**, TX-42 Laser Pulse Rifle (See Sir **Rigeld** for stats), and a few **Techno-Wizard** weapons. He gave everything else away when he retired.

Magic Items: None.

Techno-Wizard Body Armor (Plate & Chain): A suit of silver armor that is effectively full environmental armor when helmet is in place; A.R. 17 without the helmet. Hasn't worn it in years and prefers a suit of light padded, armor (25 M.D.C.).

Special Properties: 180 M.D.C.; magically lightweight (no mobility penalties), Impervious to Fire and Shadow Meld.

Other Equipment: Basic Cyber-Knight gear plus vampire fighting gear. Gave up his horse too, so he needs transportation or walks.

Cybernetics: Only Cyber-Armor.

Sir Rigeld Baltacle

Among **Cyber-knights**, the only thing that distinguishes Rigeld is his courageous (some say traitorous) stand against Lord Coake. He is only a modestly experienced (4th level) Cyber-Knight who possesses no special skills, abilities, or equipment. He is, in essence, an "average" young Cyber-Knight distinguished by his striking good looks and flamboyant, swash-buckling, and outspoken personality. As a Courtier, he is extremely loyal to the Code of Chivalry and it was his understanding of and conviction to the Code that drove him to leave the Fellowship and fight for **Tolkeen**. He was one of the first to break the ranks and arguably most outspoken to leave. Sir Rigeld made known his opposing views in open debates at court and on the streets, causing much distress and rancor among his fellow knights before taking his leave.

The other thing that distinguishes Sir Rigeld is that he was mentored by Sir **Taloquin**. To some Cyber-Knights, **Rigeld's** conduct and treason is a black mark on Sir Taloquin's otherwise spotless record. However, the elder knight dismisses such harsh criticism, pointing out that Sir Rigeld and most who have gone to serve Tolkeen, do so with good intentions, and that he believes Rigeld will, someday, return to the Fellowship.

Since he left the Fellowship, Sir Rigeld has been catapulted to the forefront of the drama in Minnesota. The Kingdom of Tolkeen has given him **VIP** treatment as "the first and boldest" Cyber-Knight to publicly ally with them. The Kingdom, it seems, has had a little difficulty convincing some of the outlying communities that Tolkeen is the victim in this war, and not an



equal party to it. The presence of **Cyber-Knights** on Tolkeen's side helps the Kingdom appear more legitimate to outsiders, encouraging more people to volunteer for the Tolkeen Defense Forces. To this end, the Kingdom of Tolkeen gives Sir Rigeld a free hand and supplies him with pretty much whatever he wants to fight the Coalition. As far as Tolkeen is concerned, Sir Rigeld is a valuable public relations asset and should be *used* to the utmost.

At first, Sir Rigeld believed the treatment he received was that deserving of any **Cyber-Knight**, but with time he came to recognize the politics involved. He doesn't like being "used" even for a good cause, and finds many of the actions of Tolkeen's leaders to be disquieting. He, more than many Cyber-Knights, has spent time among the courts of Tolkeen and gotten to see The Circle of Twelve, King Creed, Warlord Scard and the Dragon Kings in action. He has seen their elitist attitudes and heard their angry debates and plots for revenge. They see nothing wrong with manipulation or treachery, and the end justifies the means because they claim to serve a higher cause. Sir Rigeld doesn't like any of it. All he ever wanted to do was save innocent lives and stop an evil empire (the CS). The politics and aspirations at Tolkeen are something far different.

Sir Rigeld is also experiencing a far more disturbing kind of celebrity. The Cyber-Knights who followed his lead and joined Tolkeen look up to him as their own version of a fledgling Lord Coake. A heroic pioneer signaling a new era for all Cyber-Knights. Sir Rigeld considers himself just another knight, no better or worse than anyone else. But all of a sudden, he has become the standard bearer of a revolution he never intended to inspire, and like it or not, he has become their symbolic leader. At first this bothered Sir Rigeld, since he never aspired to lead others and lacked the training and experience to do so. As it turned out, he (like many Cyber-Knights) is a natural leader, and has had little difficulty commanding his fellow Cyber-Knights and other volunteers as fighting units within the Tolkeen Defense Force. However, as the war grinds on, the rigors of leadership are wearing upon the young Courtier. He feels personally responsible for every Cyber-Knight who has died under his command, and he feels responsible, at least in part, for the factionalism that is dividing the rest of the Fellowship. Sir Rigeld never hated Lord Coake, his mentor or the Fellowship. He merely wanted to determine his own fate and do what he felt in his heart was right. Furthermore, as the war spins out of control, he realizes just how wise and insightful Lord Coake and Sir Taloquin were.

At first, Sir Rigeld ignored claims of Tolkeen's brutality and cynicism, but during the fighting, the Sorcerers' Revenge in particular, the Cyber-Knight witnessed the full savagery and viciousness of Tolkeen firsthand. He watched as scores of helpless Coalition prisoners suffered torture and summary executions once taken prisoner. He has walked through villages burned to the ground by Tolkeen forces because they once hosted Coalition troops or simply stood between the Tolkeen attackers and their quarry. True, Tolkeen might lack the military wherewithal to inflict genocide upon the Coalition, but the truth is Tolkeen really *has* become the flip side of the Coalition in word and deed. This embattled mage-state is no better than the evil they are fighting.

This epiphany has left Sir Rigeld wondering what he is really fighting for here. Faced with the obvious evils of Tolkeen, Sir

Rigeld's conviction to oppose the Coalition by helping Tolkeen is fading fast. The only thing is, there are still hundreds of **Cyber-Knights** who believe in the cause and justify the inhumanity as doing what they must to survive. In his heart of hearts, he wishes he could turn back time and heed Lord Coake's decree. However, as he looks around, he also realizes that more than ever, somebody must stand up for the real innocents in this war to make sure they don't get trampled by the very forces who claim to be trying to save them. As long as the other Cyber-Knights stay and the civilians need him, he will stay. His die is cast now, and he must live up to whatever new destiny he has forged for himself.

Sir Rigeld Thomas Baltacle

Also known as "Sir Rigeld the First" and "Rigeld the Traitor," because he was one of the very first to leave the Fellowship and was undoubtedly the most public and well known to do so.

Race: Human

Alignment: Scrupulous. If he doesn't return to the Fellowship, he might slide down to Unprincipled. If he becomes truly disillusioned and cold-hearted he will either become Unprincipled or even Aberrant evil. He used to resent Lord **Coake**, Sir **Taloquin** and the other Cyber-Knights of the Fellowship, but is beginning to see their point of view and the logic (if not wisdom) of their actions. He will always care for his mentor, Sir Taloquin, no matter what.

Attributes: I.Q.: 12, M.E.: 11, M.A.: 14, P.S.: 18, P.P.: 19, P.E.: 21, P.B.: 21, Spd: 22

Height: Six feet (1.83 m); Weight: 190 lbs (85.5 kg).

Age: 29; handsome.

Hit Points: 46; S.D.C.: 70.

P.P.E.: 18; I.S.P.: 53

Experience Level: 4th level Courtier **Cyber-Knight**, but starting to lean more to being a Crusader.

Disposition: Well **intentioned** but driven by personal demons to make his mark in the world and save the world. He tends to take on more than he can handle because of this, and acts on emotion rather than reason. In many ways, he is the opposite of his mentor, Sir Taloquin, when it comes to making decisions and weighing issues. The young Cyber-Knight is sometimes blinded by his own righteousness as he strives to uphold the Code, crush evil and defend the innocent. If the war does not disillusion him or make him **cold-hearted**, Sir Rigeld will remain a force for good whether he returns to the Fellowship or strikes out on his own as an independent Crusader. If the latter occurs, he is likely to be joined by 2-4 other Cyber-Knights who have broken with the Fellowship, 2-4 Fallen Knights, D-Bees and other (non-knightly) adventurers and mages. The charismatic Sir Rigeld could find himself leading a band of heroes (or anti-heroes) the size of a platoon if he chooses.

Mega-Damage via Cyber-Armor: A.R. 16.

M.D.C. by Location:

Shoulders (2) — 9 each

Back Shoulder Blades (2) — 16 each

Forearms (2) — 11 each

Thigh/Upper Leg (2) — 16 each

Chest Plate (main body) — 54 M.D.C.

Skills of Note: Climb (80%/70%), Prowl (55%), Literacy (65%), American (98%), Dragonese (85%), **Techno-Can**

(85%), Gobblely (85%), Lore: Demon (75%), Anthropology (50%), Paramedic (65%), Land Navigation (60%), Horsemanship (80%), Body Building, Gymnastics (73%/81%/75%/87%), Swimming (75%), **Boxing**, Wrestling, Wilderness Survival (55%), Detect Ambush (50%), Detect Concealment (45%), Escape Artist (50%), Intelligence (52%), Sniper, Pilot: Motorcycle (84%), Pilot: Jet Pack (66%), Tracking (45%), Radio: Basic (45%), Computer Operation (40%), Computer Hacking (30%), W.P. Sword, W.P. Blunt, W.P. Chain, W.P. **Knife**, W.P. Archery and Targeting, W.P. Energy Pistol, W.P. Energy Rifle, W.P. Heavy Energy Weapons, W.P. Heavy.

Special Abilities: Sharp vision, **nightvision** 300 feet (91.5 m),

Psionics: In addition to being able to summon a Psi-Sword (2D6) at no I.S.P. cost, Rigeld also has the following psychic abilities: Meditation (0), Empathy (4), Sense Evil (2), Mind Block (4), See the Invisible (4), Create **Psi-Shield** (15).

Magic Knowledge: None, other than lore and personal experience.

Combat Training: Hand to Hand: Martial Arts.

Attacks Per Melee: 7

Combat Bonuses: +3 to initiative, +4 to strike, +5 to parry and dodge, +4 to disarm, +5 to pull punch, +2 to roll with **punch/fall/impact**, +3 to damage, +6% vs **coma/death**, +2 to save vs magic and +1 to save vs Horror Factor; plus Zen Combat skills and bonuses.

Other Combat Info: Karate kick (2D4+2), snap kick (1D6+2), **tripping/leg** hook, and backward sweep.

Weapons of Note:

NG-LG6 Northern Gun Laser Rifle & Grenade Launcher: Mega-Damage: 3D6 per laser blast or 4D6 per grenade. Rate of Fire: Standard. Range: Laser: 1,600 feet (488 m); grenade launcher: 1,100 feet (335 m) and a blast radius of 12 feet (3.6 m). Payload: 10 shots per standard **E-clip**, 20 shots per long E-clip, or 70 shots with a power pack. Grenade launcher holds four grenades.

TX-42 Laser Pulse Rifle: Mega-Damage: 2D6 M.D. per single shot or **1D4x10** M.D. per rapid-fire pulse (three simultaneous shots). Rate of Fire: Equal to user's attacks per melee. Range: 2,000 feet (610 m). Payload: 40 shots per **FSE-clip**.

CP-30 Laser Pulse Pistol: Mega-Damage: 2D4 M.D. per single blast or 4D6 per triple-blast burst. Rate of Fire: Standard. Range: 600 feet (183 m). Payload: 30 laser shots per long E-clip.

Extra Ammo: 12 standard **E-clips**, 8 long **E-clips**.

Techno-Wizard Body Armor (Plate): A suit of silver armor with blue shoulder plates and leather accessories. Effectively full environmental armor when the helmet is in place; A.R. 17 without the helmet.

Special Properties: 180 M.D.C.; magically lightweight (no mobility penalties), Escape and Invisibility. The armor was gift from Sir Taloquin.

Other Equipment: Standard Cyber-Knight gear; travelling light.

Vehicle: Hovercycles provided by Tolkeen, a CS Rocket Bike acquired in combat and his personal steed, currently stabled at the City of Tolkeen.

Cybernetics: Cyber-Armor (A.R.: 16, main body M.D.C.: 54), clock/calendar implant and cybernetic polarizing lens — a

thin membrane that is sort of a second eyelid that slides down to cover and protect the eye from bright light, functioning effectively like a pair of polarized sunglasses.

HLS Adventures

Situations Critical

By Bill Coffin

The Siege on **Tolkeen** has created various developments that are not in and of themselves theaters in the campaign, nor are they specific mission objectives of either side. They are merely interesting circumstances that have been either created or exaggerated by the war and provide some interesting possibilities to those who care to notice them. These can be the springboards for entire sub-campaigns within your playing of the war in Tolkeen, or they can merely be divergent threads of the larger story line involving the Tolkeenites' defense of their homeland.

What follows here are brief overviews of some of these "sitcrit" scenarios, a slang term used by Coalition and Tolkeen intelligence officers alike to describe the various "situations critical" involving **Cyber-Knights** in and around Tolkeen.

Following each overview will be a few **Hook, Line & Sinkers™**, a handy adventure format where only the barest elements for an adventure are provided. The rest of the development is left to the Game Master. Hook, Line & Sinkers work well both as stand-alone adventures and as stepping stones in a larger campaign.

The Hook is the current situation or location of the adventuring party.

The Line is an opportunity for adventure that presents itself to the player characters. Think the "bait" or enticement for the party to enter the adventure.

The Sinker is the clincher to the Line. The Sinker presents the party with a dilemma or development that makes the situation a true adventure.

The few adventure examples presented in the following pages provide a good look at the kinds of situations that are affecting the course of the war (or at least the **Cyber-Knights'** involvement in it). Game Masters, hopefully after reading these you will be familiar enough with this to try designing some Situations Critical of your own. Good luck, and enjoy!

Conspicuous Gallantry

Cyber-Knights in general and *Champions/Warhounds* in particular are famous for their acts of extreme daring and martial prowess. Nowhere has that been more apparent in recent years than on the battlefields of Tolkeen, where Champions are given maximum opportunity to display their skills. Throughout the conflict, the knights who have fought for Tolkeen could be found on every front of the war, always at the head of the charge and where danger was the greatest. Having gained a reputation as fearless front-liners, these knights have become an elite force

among **Tolkeenite** defenders. Most of the Cyber-Knights who were with Tolkeen in the beginning of the war are still alive, having fought in constant battles. The battlefield achievements of these warriors are beyond counting in some cases. All have slain dozens upon dozens of Coalition invaders, be they Dead Boys, fields of Skelebots, or even large armored vehicles and power armor. If the Coalition has sent it into the Kingdom, chances are one of the Cyber-Knights has destroyed a few of them. It is something the Coalition High Command is more than a little disgruntled with, and something the Cyber-Knights themselves have become immensely proud about. In fact, a little *too* proud, some would say.

For the first time since the war began, Tolkeen is on the offensive, and the Coalition appears to be the underdog. In the wake of the *Sorcerers' Revenge*, Tolkeen units are currently chasing disheveled Coalition invaders back across their borders, mopping up those few brave (or foolish) enough to stand their ground and fight. Those with an eye for the future know that this is merely a temporary victory, and that the Coalition will return one day to finish the war, but for many of the grunts fighting **Tolkeen's** war, this is the end. As far as they are concerned, Tolkeen stands triumphant over a broken and dispirited Coalition invasion force. Some of **Tolkeen's** Cyber-Knights stand among such wildly optimistic fighters, utterly convinced that the legions of Chi-Town will never again return to Minnesota with hostile intent.

Whether wrong or right, the reality is that the very same Cyber-Knights who helped lead the Tolkeen charge against the Coalition are now facing the unpleasant reality of maintaining their "killer reputations" as warriors with considerably fewer opportunities to prove themselves. As the Coalition menace drains out of Minnesota (for the time being, at any rate), the Cyber-Knights of Tolkeen, especially the Champions, are becoming increasingly desperate to seize upon whatever chances currently remain for them to display their fighting abilities and sheer heroism. In many cases, this merely results in more dead and destroyed Coalition personnel and hardware. Other times, the over-enthusiasm of these knights works against them, and against the greater good of Tolkeen, in the long run. In situations such as these, the conspicuous gallantry that **Tolkeen's** Cyber-Knights have come to live by might very well be their unmaking.

Glory Hounds

Cyber-Knights trying to outdo each other; acting as individuals, not as a team. Disintegrating teamwork. Nowhere is this

more apparent than in a battle in which several groups of rogue **Cyber-Knights** all converge on the same spot looking to do different things, and all getting in each other's way. Things can get especially chaotic and contentious when those forces consist of *Crusaders*, *Champions/Warhounds*, *Fallen Knights* and/or *Blackguards*.

Hook: Now that the current phase of the war is winding down, Tolkeen's Cyber-Knights have begun to compete with each other for dibs on battlefield opportunities. After all, many of these knights thrive on constantly keeping up their renown as warriors. In terms of this war, that means the more "neutralized" Coalition targets one can count to his name, the better. Only there are not many Coalition targets left at the moment and most of the celebrating is done. It's a slow time, and a number of Tolkeen Cyber-Knights are feeling antsy. To complicate matters, the more aggressive and reckless (and evil) knights have been chastised and even set upon by their more reserved and noble brethren, causing clashes between Cyber-Knights with opposing views and ethics.

This is simple battlefield economics, wear and tear: not enough supply for too much **demand**, war weary (and sometimes shell-shocked) combatants and too much quiet time. In terms of the Tolkeen Cyber-Knights, Juicers and monster squads, this has gotten them very competitive with each other, to the point that some knights and Tolkeen squads would rather attack a large Coalition force single-handedly than call in other Cyber-Knights or teams for help. This is the case at the Battle

of Lonely Bones, a bombed-out village that was gutted in the early phase of the invasion and is now the site of the intense kind of fighting punctuating the days following the Sorcerers' Revenge.

A mixed force of Coalition troopers — some infantry, a few power armors and fighting robots, and one or two heavier ground units like **Abolishers** — have been on the run for days from **Tolkeenite** forces. The Coalition force has taken quite the beating and it really can not go much farther without stopping for repairs, rest and time to heal. The shattered ruins of Lonely Bones are the best and only place for the Coalition troops to bunk down for a while, even if it makes them a sitting target. And it has. Tolkeen aerial units have spotted the stationary enemy and made their location known. Now, as the Coalition troops frantically try to fortify the miserable village they occupy, Tolkeenite forces are converging from every direction to bring a little pain to the Boys in Black.

Line: There are 2D4 separate Cyber-Knights each heading towards Lonely Bones to cause some trouble with the Coalition defenders. Any one of these knights might be a player character with his comrades (the player group) or a Cyber-Knight who has retained the services of an adventuring party or monster squad to provide a little extra **firepower**. (Note: Some Cyber-Knights may be brazen and foolhardy, but they are not stupid, and a fair number of knights routinely travel with fellow fighters for both companionship and support.)



Each of these converging **Cyber-Knights** and the squads or platoons they lead know about their competition also heading to Lonely Bones and want to be at them to the **punch**. That is why, upon arrival, the first **Cyber-Knight** and his troops on the scene will immediately launch some kind of attack upon the Coalition troops without waiting for support or coordinating their efforts. Of course, the Coalition forces will be dug in by that time and prepared for an attack. The motivation for these isolated attacks (which gives the CS soldiers the upper hand) is the "greatest honor" will fall to those who engaged the **Coalition** *first* and to those who finally *defeat* them. That is why the Cyber-Knights in the area are in such a hurry to get to the scene and fire up their Psi-Swords. A battlefield free-for-all where the victor takes the credit.

Sinker: Exactly when the *player characters* arrive on the scene will play a big part in how this battle will turn out. Those who get to the village first will be presented with a double-edged opportunity. While the village presents a target-rich environment, the heroes will most likely be overwhelmed by the sheer Coalition **firepower** present. These troops are expecting a fight, have fortified the village into a large bunker, and are pretty **twitchy** on the trigger finger. Any frontal assault upon the village will alert the entire Coalition force very quickly to hunker down.

If the player group is to inflict serious damage on the wary Coalition defenders, they will have to use a combination of brain and brawn. Using diversionary tactics, for example, would be an excellent notion, allowing the heroes to each infiltrate the village and divide the Coalition forces into smaller, more manageable units. That way, the force can be whittled down to size, component by component, and never given the chance to defend themselves *en masse*. Likewise, capturing or eliminating the five or six main officers will also send the troops into disarray and likely entice them into surrender.

The exact size and composition of the **Coalition force** is left to the G.M., but a good rule of thumb should be 4-6 infantry plus one heavy vehicle, robot or power armor per player character. If the G.M. wishes to make this force even larger, or smaller, that is fine. In any case, the player characters will have to rely on tight teamwork and good planning more than automatic fire and bravado.

Where things get really interesting is if the player heroes are not the first Tolkeen squad on the scene. If the heroes arrive after other Cyber-Knight bands have, then all hell will have already broken loose, and the opportunity to enter the village stealthily will be gone. However, in the chaos of open combat, the heroes might actually have an *easier* time entering the village. After all, depending on how the fighting is going and how many other **Tolkeenites** have breached the perimeter, the Coalition troops might be in disarray, or will have lopsidedly redeployed their numbers to face the enemy at key junctions, leaving one or more areas of the village virtually undefended.

In such a scenario, the tactically-minded can make a great deal from the confusion of this situation. If the player characters decide to hang back and survey the situation before diving into the combat, they might be able to set up a great ambush for some of the Coalition troops or a couple key leaders, or at least provide some nice crossfire for the other Tolkeenites in the area. This kind of joint fighting has two drawbacks, however.

The first is exercising restraint. The whole reason why the player characters are here is because they are either travelling with rash Cyber-Knights who are in dire need of a good fight or trying to prevent other groups from killing themselves in wild acts of bravado and daring. With such an opportunity before them, it will be the rare **Champion/Warhound** indeed who can refrain from wading into the fray in favor of tactically appraising the situation first, including any among the player group. In many cases, the **Cyber-Knight(s)** will simply fire up their Psi-Sword, wade into the nearest nest of Dead Boys and go to work, plunging themselves right into the thick of the danger.

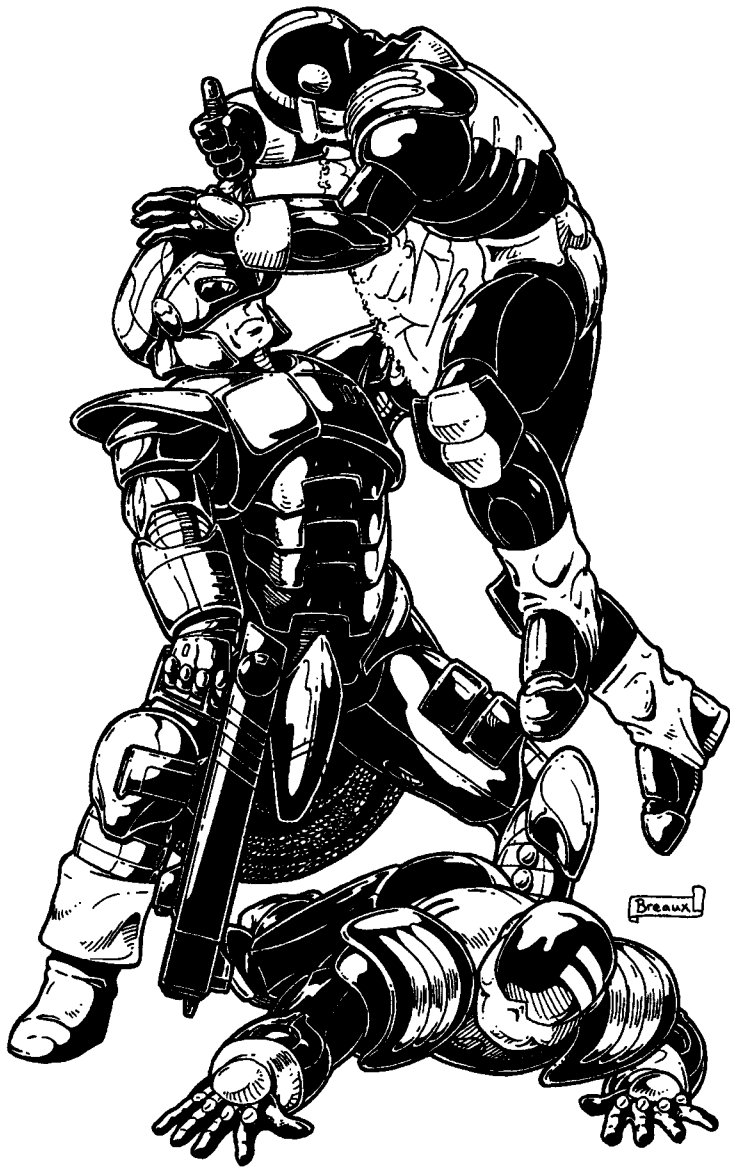
The second concern is friendly fire. If the heroes engage the Coalition forces without letting other Tolkeen units in the area know about it, there exists the possibility of fellow Tolkeen soldiers attacking each other by accident. Sure, this could be resolved with some quick radio traffic to the right people. But do not forget that the various **Tolkeenite** interests in town are more interested in putting feathers in their cap than in exercising responsible teamwork. It is a foregone conclusion that the Coalition troops here are done for. The only question for most of the squads on the scene, Cyber-Knights included, is who will be the one to take the enemy and how many can they kill to add to their personal tally of "combat kills" before the rest of the army shows up and flattens the village? As a result, many of the Cyber-Knights and other Tolkeen combat groups here will be unwilling to coordinate with each other out of fear of giving their (friendly) rivals the opportunity to score more kills than they do or claiming final victory over the stronghold.

Third, some of the monster squads and Blackguards *may* use this situation to extract a little personal revenge. Not just on the enemy, but against the *player characters* as well. If the player group or an individual character in the group has had a run-in with a particular villain, monster squad or Fallen Cyber-Knight, the **brigand(s)** may use the cover and confusion of the situation to attack them.

Does any of this make sense militarily? No. Does it cut to the heart of the madness and **cold-heartedness** that is enveloping the vengeance and hate-filled Tolkeen fighters? Most definitely. It also speaks to the aggressive and competitive aspects of the Cyber-Knight Champion, the heartless nature of the Blackguard and the disintegration of the Tolkeen army. Likewise, any true "hero" who encounters a monster squad or evil knight torturing or butchering Coalition soldiers who are unarmed **and/or** have surrendered, will feel compelled to intervene on the enemy soldiers' behalf. An act that might evoke the ire and combat with their own Tolkeen comrades (or will payback come later when the player group least expects it?).

A final note: Regardless of when the heroes arrive on the scene, or how many Cyber-Knights and Tolkeen war parties the G.M. eventually decides to visit upon Lonely Bones, these small groups will only have a few hours after their initial engagement until a large, overpowering Tolkeen force shows up. This force will consist of hundreds of infantry, a dozen or more magical Juggernauts, and other surprises. This force will crush the remaining Coalition troops like bugs underfoot, and if the player characters are not careful, they might get caught in the crossfire. The best thing to do at that point is to withdraw from the fighting altogether and watch the finale from a safe distance. Otherwise, the heroes can keep their heads down and either join in on

the final assault, or pursue those Coalition troopers who will flee at the last moment, escaping **Tolkeen's** advance (which could lead to another adventure).



An Army of One

Hook: Throughout the war, there have been numerous tales of extreme gallantry among the **Cyber-Knights** and the other forces of **Tolkeen**, too. Dozens of heroes have been born amid the fighting, noted for their extraordinary bravery or accomplishments on the killing fields. Among the Cyber-Knights, one of the greatest of these heroes is *Sir Miles Iverson*, a mid-level (6th level) Courtier **Cyber-Knight** who has been credited with the single greatest knightly victory in the war to date: the *Roundabout Massacre*.

As far as anybody knows, the story goes like this: Shortly before the Sorcerers' Revenge, Sir Iverson and a squad of Tolkeenite regulars were on a reconnaissance mission deep into Coalition-held territory when they were discovered by Coalition aerial units. Suddenly, the group found themselves on the run from an entire brigade of over a thousand Coalition soldiers and mechanized units! It seems that the brigade had been waiting

there for some time expecting new orders and had grown restless. When the tiny group of Tolkeenite warriors was found at their feet, the brigade took to them like a fox hunting party. The entire group participated in the chase, dogging the **Tolkeenites** until they were too tired to continue or cornered, at which point, they would simply cut them down like vermin.

Sir Iverson, who knew of this tactic, decided that if he and his comrades were to die, they might as well take a few Dead Boys with them. A tactical genius, Iverson rallied his squad, reversed their path, and flanked the oncoming Coalition horde. Attacking the brigade on its right flank, Sir Iverson got the enemy's attention. He then kept flanking the Coalition troops, swinging around the rear of their force and hitting them along the edge. As Sir Iverson's squad circled the Coalition brigade, the entire brigade soon got caught up in a giant swirling pursuit of the Tolkeen rogues. Even though Sir Iverson's entire squad was eventually eliminated and Sir Iverson himself was badly wounded, the tactic paid off. For several hours, Iverson's group kept nipping at the brigade's edges and moving around it. The brigade soon mistakenly thought they were under attack by a much larger Tolkeenite force and began to panic. They had good reason to, since Tolkeen had made a habit of baiting large Coalition units into well-constructed (and lethal) traps. The brigade thought they had just fallen into one, and the discipline of the group quickly broke down. Smaller platoons and squads began digging in and throwing down panic fire at anything that moved. In the ensuing chaos, the brigade inflicted withering friendly fire upon itself, which only furthered the group's disarray. Worse, the combat attracted the notice of other Tolkeen scouts and brought down a full attack from a Tolkeen battalion of sorcerers, Shadow Dragons and Elementals. The charge was led by Sir Iverson and what was left of his squad who leapt into the thick of things.

The battle lasted only a few hours, ending with over 500 dead and 310 captured, all thanks to the bravery and skill of a lone Cyber-Knight and a few self-sacrificing Tolkeenite defenders. The Coalition itself covered the incident up, but it became big news among Tolkeen's warriors, and before long, Sir Iverson was one of the Kingdom's biggest heroes, a perfect symbol of a scrappy warrior triumphing over a larger, stronger foe.

Line: Sir Iverson's Roundabout Massacre was a fluke, and even Iverson himself will admit that luck had as much to do with his stunning victory as anything else. Despite his humility, many other Cyber-Knights long to have a victory such as his to their name. As such, a virtual flock of Cyber-Knights (most of them Champions and Fallen Knights, but a few Courtiers and Crusaders, too) are hot on the Coalition retreat from Tolkeen, looking to make a name for themselves by scoring the biggest kill they can. There are a few targets of opportunity:

1. A single Mobile Fortress that is run by a skeleton crew and currently unable to move. The severely understaffed and battle-damaged craft *might* prove vulnerable to a small and skilled raiding party, for whom the destruction of this vehicle would be a major accomplishment.

2. A convoy of staff vehicles fleeing to the south, containing an entire field staff for the southern invasion forces. Many of the occupants are high-ranking officers and intelligence officials whose death or capture would give Tolkeen a nice boost at the end of the Sorcerers' Revenge.



3. A downed Death's Head Transport reportedly carrying a nuclear warhead to a secret location within Minnesota. According to scattered field reports, the transport's contingent of Skelebots and six Super SAMAS has been joined by a squad of ten Smiling Jack SAMAS to defend the craft until another large flying unit can come in and off-load the dangerous cargo. Unknown to either side, only 4D6 Skelebots have survived the crash and most of the 60 troops are communications officers and technicians with little to no combat training (1st-3rd level, and they will fold if combat gets rough and their armored defenders fall).

4. A squad of eight Abolisher combat robots and one Scout Spider-Skull Walker have been trapped in a huge quagmire supposedly crafted by a team of Warlocks. With their legs sunk into the deep mud and muck, the Abolishers and Scout Spider-Walker have little choice but to slowly trudge their way out of the trap. Until they get out, however, they are sitting ducks. They have requested air support, but with so many Coalition units scattered and in complete disarray, it is quite possible that none will show up.

5. And finally, a convoy of four specially designed ultra-heavy transport vehicles that resemble Behemoth Explorers that ride on gigantic tank treads rather than articulated legs. Nobody knows what these Coalition vehicles contain, just that Tolkeen aerial spotters sighted the convoy mere hours ago, and that the convoy is making top speed for the southern border of Minnesota (trying to get into Missouri, which is also spread thin and being bombarded by Tolkeen's forces).

Unconfirmed reports suggest the vehicles contain the unassembled components of a massive rail cannon nicknamed *Big Red*, a device that could deliver conventional warheads that hit with the rough force of a small tactical nuke, in short, some new type of "super-cannon." The gun was supposed to have been assembled well to the west of Tolkeen, where it could bombard the city into submission while ground troops invade. The Sorcerers' Revenge changed all that, and suddenly, these heavy carriers found themselves without support deep in enemy territory. The slow speed of the vehicles makes them easy to catch up to. So far, no Tolkeenite defenders or mercenaries have made contact with the convoy, but that is only a matter of time.

Sinker: Any one of these targets can be something for the player characters to target (or spun into a separate adventure), but whatever they choose, the going should *not* be easy. Furthermore, capturing or destroying any one of these targets will make the player characters heroes and Coalition outlaws. Aside from the considerable difficulties the heroes will face in eliminating any of these targets, what is perhaps more important is how the heroes' lives will change afterwards. As heroes of Tolkeen, the player characters can expect to be placed either in the command of a military unit of their own, or in a position where they can pick and choose *special assignments* in any future fighting against the Coalition. As Coalition outlaws, the player characters can expect an eventual attempt on their lives either by Coalition assassins or by mercenaries looking to cash in on the sizable bounties Chi-Town will place on the player characters' heads (100,000 credits each, minimum).

First things first, though. The heroes must take down one of these targets. Regardless of their success, the group will probably get a shot at only one target (at least at this time).

Decapitation

The **Suleyman Gambit**. A corps of **Cyber-Knights** intends to make a Suleyman charge against a leading Coalition General to decapitate the leadership against **Tolkeen**. The problem is, lots of other Tolkeen warrior groups and knights are thinking the same thing.

Hook: Not everywhere have the Coalition forces completely collapsed. Along the southern central front, a remarkably well organized force of Coalition troops (the *Fighting 61st*) have held the line against their Tolkeenite foes, and are just now beginning their tactical retreat to help the Invasion Force to regroup and reorganize. The Coalition sees this unit as central to its reorganization and quick redeployment of troops along the enemy border.

Led by the infamous **Lt. General Shania Thrice**, this brigade-sized force of over 1,900 infantry and assorted robots, power armor and fighting vehicles poses a significant thorn in the side of any Tolkeen operations in the area. In fact, unless Tolkeen can dislodge this force entirely, the borders of the Kingdom remain breached and open for subsequent invasion. Tolkeen can accept nothing less than the total destruction of **Thrice's** brigade or the banishment of this force far from Tolkeen held lands. However, accomplishing such a task will not be easy. Even amid the spectacular success of the Sorcerers' Revenge, Tolkeen has failed on two separate occasions to destroy the Fighting 61st, despite its vast numerical superiority. The reason for the Fighting 61st's survival is simple — the brilliant tactical leadership of Lt. Gen. Thrice (and the disorganization of **Tolkeen's** fighting forces since the success of their blitzkrieg).

Line: The Fighting 61st has managed to successfully wage a running **gunfight** as it moves towards Tolkeen's southern border for the Coalition State of Missouri. In another two days, it will cross back into Coalition territory where the CS is likely to send devastating air support. Should the brigade succeed in escaping, it will be a dark spot on Tolkeen's otherwise brilliant counter-strike.

Ever since the beginning of the invasion, Lt. General Thrice has been a major figure on the fighting front. She has been marked by Tolkeen's agents as a primary target of opportunity, and Tolkeen spell casters, psychics, dragons and Cyber-Knights have expended no small effort to capture or assassinate her. Only the Lt. General's incredible will, skill and luck have kept her alive. Now that she stands on the verge of escape, Lt. General Thrice will become one of the important Coalition officers to have survived the cataclysm of the Sorcerers' Revenge. She is also believed to have sensitive Tolkeen intelligence that will be of great help to any subsequent invasion, an invasion Lt. General Thrice will certainly spearhead. For these and other reasons, the Tolkeen Warlords have decided that Lt. General Shania Thrice must die! To that end, it has deployed their best squads and assassins, Cyber-Knights among them, on an intercept course that will head off the Fighting 61st before they escape Minnesota. Their mission is to get the Lt. General at all costs, even it means a suicide charge upon the entire brigade so that just one of them might reach Thrice and kill her. Such sacrifice has been deemed a necessary and worthy one.

Sinker: As odd as it seems, this mission is not completely impossible, provided the attackers play their cards just right. Success may come by way of an interesting bit of **pre-Rifts** history. In the 1500s, *Suleyman the Magnificent*, sultan of the Ottoman Empire, led his mighty army into battle against the Hungarian army at the Plain of Mohacs. **Suleyman's** forces vastly outmatched the Hungarians, who were quickly routed and slain. During the fighting, however, a cadre of thirty knights swore to slay the sultan or die trying. They formed a massed cavalry charge and miraculously drove through the entire Ottoman force. All thirty knights died in the attempt, but before they did, one of them actually got to Suleyman and seriously wounded him before the assailant was cut down by Ottoman soldiers. It was a bizarre episode that, had it gone differently, could have had a serious impact on human history. The Warlords of Tolkeen envision **their** elite forces making a similar assault upon the Fighting 61st. They believe that Lt. General Thrice is one of the most capable military minds involved in the Tolkeen war, and that if she is given the opportunity to command a much larger return invasion **force**, Tolkeen might fare far worse than they did the first time around. For the survival of Tolkeen, Thrice simply has to go, regardless of the cost.

This mission is definitely a dicey affair. The Fighting 61st is a small army unto itself, on the move and on high alert. Somewhere in the thick of the group is Lt. General Thrice, who will not be wearing any special outfits to separate her from the crowd. Other than her Heavy Dead Boy armor, she will seem like any of her ordinary soldiers, making the target like a needle in a haystack. Magic or psionic characters may have an easier time locating their target among the nearly 2000; otherwise, ad-



venturers will have to use their heads to figure a way of flushing out their quarry.

Meanwhile, the astute Lt. General anticipates this sort of attack and has several **countermeasures**, ambushes, and traps planned for her would-be assailants, meaning any suicide runs are likely do to just that and fail, even if backed by magic or the supernatural. A full third of her forces are power armor and another third heavy armor (CS tanks, Scorpion and Spider-Skull Walkers, and other heavy CS war machines). Additionally, 960 Skelebots are not counted as part of her troops, making the real army closer to 3000 (a third of which are robots who can be sacrificed without loss of life!)

Note: If the *player group* fights for **Tolkeen**, especially if hot off some impressive victory, they will be counted among those given this assignment. On the other hand, the player characters may seek to stop the attack as unjust or have some other motive for rescuing the Lt. General or countering the Tolkeen squads. Perhaps, simply because it is suicide and a pointless waste of life and resources. Another example of the reckless, self-destructive conduct of **Tolkeen's** leaders, for how many heroes, patriots, mages and supreme warriors will perish in the attempt? And even if the assassination succeeds, will it really stop the Coalition Army? No.

A House Divided

One of the casualties of the war at Tolkeen has been the unity of Cyber-Knights in general. The strife over Lord Coake's order to not serve in Tolkeen has created a schism in the Fellowship that has divided the knights nearly in half. **What's** worse, it has also given rise to even further **fragmentation** as various sub-groups in the Fellowship polarize amongst themselves. At present, these divisions are merely differences in philosophy and for lack of a better term, knightly style. They do not represent serious divides in method or morality, and they certainly are not reason enough for the knights of the Fellowship to go to war with each other.

Or are they?

Lord **Coake** and others worry that the slow disintegration of the Fellowship is leading to the eventual breakdown of the Fellowship altogether, and possibly **fractionalized** warfare among the Cyber-Knights. Possessing tremendous wisdom and experience, Lord Coake has seen this kind of thing happen before and wants to reverse the balkanization within their ranks; it is only a matter of time before the one true Fellowship becomes a collection of smaller ones. If that happens, it is inevitable that the differences between these new Fellowships will turn to fear or mistrust, which shall beget hostility, which shall beget rivalry and war.

Thankfully, this possible turn of events is far away and may yet be remedied. Numerous Cyber-Knights, mostly traditionalists loyal to Lord **Coake**, have spent a great deal of time during the Siege on Tolkeen conducting diplomatic missions with various **Cyber-Knight** leaders and factions, trying to find some common ground for them all to stand on. So far, the effort has been fruitless, but that is not enough to keep these heroes from trying. To them, the Fellowship represents one of the last true noble forces in the world, a small army holding the line against the tide of darkness that has engulfed much of the world. How can

goodness prevail when it fights to destroy itself? How can the world survive when its protectors have forsaken it? And how can evil falter when the forces that would oppose it are preoccupied?

The question now is whether the schism is hurtling the Fellowship headlong into a premature end. Time — and the actions of key individuals — will tell.

In the meantime, the following adventure ideas provide a glimpse of what kind of future awaits the Fellowship should it fail to settle its internal differences **peacefully**. In the aftermath of the Sorcerers' Revenge, certain extremist Cyber-Knights



have found reasons to turn on each other. The player characters may become directly involved if they or any among them are **Cyber-Knights**, or they (and others) may get caught in the middle of feuds, crossfires, foolish rivalries, deadly disputes and treachery. Ironically, it may be left to heroes like the player characters (probably without a **Cyber-Knight** among them) to be the light of reason and help to show the once great heroes the folly of their ways. It may fall on their shoulders to guide the future of the Cyber-Knights, while helping those caught in the more immediate and deadly consequences of the Coalition Wars.

Treachery Revealed

Hook: A group of rabidly **pro-Tolkeen** Robber-Knights seeks out a convoy thought to be carrying *Lord Coake*. They blitz the convoy and kill some Cyber-Knights and refugees, but not Coake — he was never there in the first place. The killers' info was wrong. But now there is a security situation, and plenty of **Lord Coake's** people fear for his safety and seek to avenge those slain. Lord Coake himself is trying to keep a good grip on the situation, but things are rapidly spinning out of control.

Lord Coake's order for the Fellowship *not* to help Tolkeen has angered more than a few knights. Most of them simply disobeyed the order and went to fight for Tolkeen anyway. Among them there is an extremist element that is so incensed at Lord Coake, that they feel he must be punished for "his" betrayal of the Fellowship. To them, Coake must be a coward or a traitor. For only a coward would fear going up against the Coalition, and only a traitor would dare abandon Tolkeen in their hour of need and allow the Fellowship to splinter. For the last few months, these venom-filled Cyber-Knights have been too busy fighting the Coalition to act on their newfound hatred for Lord Coake, but in the waning days of the Sorcerers' Revenge, they have had ample time to think and plot their brand of justice (at least, until the Coalition returns for Round Two). To that end, several of these Fallen Knights have decided to slay Lord Coake as punishment for his betrayal of both the Fellowship and Tolkeen. They see this as a wake-up call to the rest of the Fellowship as well, a warning that unless they support Tolkeen and unite the Fellowship, *this* is the kind of fate they should expect.

In recent days, these brigands have learned that Lord Coake would be moving among his small border encampments on the western edge of Tolkeen. This will provide them with a perfect opportunity to nail the old man while he is away from his stronghold and vulnerable to an ambush. With that in mind, the extremist Cyber-Knights (Anarchist, Aberrant, Miscreant and Diabolic alignments) move to put their deadly plan in motion.

Note: How the player characters figure into the plot is their ticket into this adventure. Presumably, they will somehow discover the plot and take action to warn or protect Lord Coake, or in the event of his capture, rescue him from a fate of torture and execution. They might consider taking on the conspirators directly, before they threaten Lord Coake, except that other than talk and rail against the founder of the Cyber-Knights, they have committed no crime and *may* not actually go through with their plan. Even if the player characters are convinced the chances of that are zero, their respect for the law is likely to prevent them from attacking the Fallen Knights without good cause or provocation.

Line: The tactical conditions of the assassination attempt will be the same regardless of whatever side the player characters are fighting for. All things considered, the fight will be pretty even. Lord Coake and his retinue will be travelling from their temporary base camp, *Serenity Falls*, to a command post in the village of *Aurora*. There is just one road (a glorified path, really) connecting the two places, and word has it that Coake will be travelling along this route. Not suspecting a specific attack, he has no reason to make special travel arrangements. The best place to hit Lord Coake is where the path crosses a cleft in the earth, where a weird geological upheaval created a huge, dry waterfall. To get down the fall, travelers must travel a series of tight switchbacks as the road winds its way down the nearly vertical face. This series is known as *Sidewinder Road*, and it is the perfect spot to attack. The nature of the pass makes it difficult for those on the road to flee or even dodge, while those on the high ground or with aerial support enjoy a huge firing advantage. Trapped on Sidewinder Road, even a sizable military force could be whittled down to size by a far smaller opposing force. By blocking off the road ahead of the traveling group, Lord Coake would find himself stranded with no easy way out. From there, the assailants could take the dishonorable way out and simply open fire on the group, killing them all. Lord Coake and his men will probably be armed with weapons and magic of their own, but in a situation like this, it may not do them any good. Within a few melee rounds, unless something odd happened, Lord Coake and his group would be dead.

However, killing knights like this is not befitting of noble conduct, and the better option (from the knights' point of view) is to meet Coake and his guards in hand to hand combat. The victims would still be at a disadvantage, being on the narrow, winding surface of Sidewinder Road, but finishing the job through melee combat would make the attack more rewarding and something the aggressor knights could proudly brag about. Remember, while these Robber-Knights are dangerous zealots, they still are knights, and they believe, to some degree, in the Code of Chivalry. They just happen to interpret it in such a way that makes killing Lord Coake a noble and desirable goal. Therein lies the heart of the problem with the various knightly factions going their own separate ways.

Sinker: Lord Coake may be able to survive the attack without intervention from others, but he will need to surround himself with clear-thinking, resourceful and able bodyguards (the player characters, **perhaps?**). Coake typically travels with an apprentice, a Line Walker, and a few (1D4+1) fellow Cyber-Knights or other stout warriors, not because he requires protection, but because being who he is, other knights frequently yearn to travel or adventure with him, and Lord Coake usually accepts such offers. Lord Coake's trip to Aurora is no different. Only this time, he just might have a few player characters riding shotgun. (G.M. Note: Subtract the number of player characters from the typical number of companions Lord Coake travels with. Conversely, the attackers should outnumber Lord Coake's group by at least two to one, including the player characters (if they participate).

The battle itself will most likely consist of the assassin party blocking off the road ahead of Lord Coake's group, then blocking it off behind them, trapping them on the road. Then, the assailants will close in for the kill in hand to hand combat. The road is only 20 feet (6.1 m) wide, so the ensuing melee will be

particularly dangerous, as any of the fighters could easily tumble over the edge and fall hundreds of yards/meters to their doom. With **Psi-Swords** flaring and **Cyber-Knights** ready to battle to the death, the fight promises to be a trying and brutal one.

One interesting note: Since Cyber-Knights on both sides will regard their enemies as being at least a little dishonorable (Lord Coake for his controversial order "against" **Tolkeen**, and the assassins for, well ... being assassins), the knights in this battle will be loath to grant or ask for mercy in the fight. Those who engage in the conflict had best be prepared for victory or death. The nature of this attack makes taking prisoners an undue risk.

G.M. Note: However the battle turns out, the G.M. should consider carefully what kind of impact it will have on his campaign and the world if Lord Coake is killed (and he shouldn't be). Lord Coake is an important NPC tying into multiple **Rifts** story lines, so eliminating him from play *may* complicate other adventures down the road. Of course, including an NPC such as Lord Coake and then saying he can not be killed defeats the purpose of this adventure and the freedom of role-playing. Why bother assassinating him, or even protecting him, if he is an un-touchable fixture? As a catalyst for an epic adventure, why else? For the risk of Lord Coake dying during this critical period has dramatic repercussions for the Fellowship and North America. On the other hand, the individual G.M. may elect to have Lord Coake killed or fall off the side of the mountain and vanish (to make a dramatic reappearance later?) and simply modify events that happen in the official Rifts world in future sourcebooks. **Note:** If the player group is defeated, give them a second chance

by having Coake captured so his assailants might properly torture him before he is slain. This gives the group the chance to track them down and rescue Coake, and perhaps spin off into some new adventure.

Like all things in life, there are *consequences*, and like it or not, whoever is involved in the attack on Lord Coake will ultimately have to answer for it somehow. In the unlikely event that Coake actually dies (he is a powerful and experienced warrior, remember, and not likely to go down easily), those who killed him will become heroes of the first order among Cyber-Knights who hate him as well as villains, but such glory will be short-lived. Most of the Cyber-Knights in Tolkeen may have defied Coake, but they certainly did not want him dead. Associating with his killers will only bring dishonor, so Lord Coake's assassins will face alienation from their own. And that's the *best* reception they can expect to receive from other knights. Cyber-Knights loyal to Coake are certain to hunt them down and kill them like mad dogs! The assassins will know that they will *never* be free of this death mark. Wherever they go, they will always have the wrath of other Cyber-Knights hanging over their heads. The only real hope for an ally is to go to the Federation of Magic, Calgary, the Vampire Kingdoms or other place of villainy to hide and do more evil work.

Those who tried to protect Lord Coake and failed will feel a tremendous sense of loss and failure. Their reputations are ruined, forever recognized as failures or cowards, and as the warriors who "let Lord Coake die." They will suffer great shame and face suspicion from others that they may have betrayed the



great hero or may have been secret conspirators. How else did they manage to survive, unless they were in on it or cowards who ran and let Lord **Coake** perish? For any **Cyber-Knight** party to the failure, the death of Lord Coake will be a stain on their personal record they might never outlive.

Ironically, the murder of Lord Coake may shock the good knights fighting for **Tolkeen** in to rebuking their evil brethren and the questionable Tolkeen leadership to return to the Fellowship in droves! Problems and resentment will remain, but the Fellowship, at least for a while, will be restored. If amends can truly be made, the **Cyber-Knights** might become as strong as ever. If not, it will continue to splinter and fall apart worse than before.

Whether or not Lord Coake lives or dies, there are other long-ranging effects from the battle of Sidewinder Road. The very thought of assaulting Lord Coake will incense any Cyber-Knight loyal to him. That the attack came from renegade Cyber-Knights will make it a thousand times worse! Many knights of the Fellowship will want blood for this crime, and by hook or by crook, they will have it! Most will simply blame *all* Cyber-Knights fighting for Tolkeen, and will demand that any knight loyal to the Code and to Coake extract justice for the deed. Even though Lord Coake himself will ask his knights not to avenge him (he knows vengeance is a self-destructive path, especially for the Cyber-Knights), it will be almost impossible to prevent *all* of his knights from seeking some kind of revenge. Should that happen, it will almost certainly touch off a cycle of resentment, accusations, feuds, and vendettas that will lead to increased violence among the divided factions. This will be avoided only if the villains responsible perish at the hands of Cyber-Knights serving Tolkeen, the player group or some other outside force.

In the end, the Cyber-Knights and heroes who preserved the Fellowship will be remembered with much more reverence than those who tried to destroy it.

Shadow of Doom

Hook: The nefarious Cyber-Knight band known as the Seven Shadows are once again on the move. They are a group of diabolic knights dedicated to the destruction of the Fellowship, the general spreading of misery and chaos throughout the world, and who knows what else. This time, the Despoilers are targeting specific Cyber-Knights of the Fellowship and those currently fighting for Tolkeen. So far, three knights have died gruesome signature deaths that could only have been carried out by the Seven Shadows. All of the slain knights, *Sir Ivor Stanski*, *Lady Beresel Coda* and *Sir Tholkun Gurdock*, were found disfigured and mutilated.

What is more disturbing than the vile way their victims suffered before being slain, is each of these figures were prominent leaders among their peers. Experienced and charismatic knights who kept calm heads and spread the word of reason on both sides; i.e. ambassadors of peace dedicated to reuniting the Fellowship. It is no coincidence that these figures have been killed.

Line: The Seven Shadows are doing everything in their power to keep cooler heads from prevailing and both sides divided. After all, it is easier to sink a ship by destroying a few nuts and bolts keeping it together, than dismantling the entire vessel. The Seven Shadows always do things in sets of seven, so

they doubtlessly have another four Cyber-Knights leaders targeted for assassination. The question is who? To answer that, the player characters must first figure out who the next four most likely targets will be. It is difficult to say who definitely, but after consulting with Cyber-Knights and those in the know, the player group will find themselves with the following short-list of candidates: *Sir Obelee Sorg*, *Lady Amanda Wheeling*, *Sir Nogg Xavern*, *Sir Dryan Usher* and *Sir Taloquin*.

Sir Qbelee Sorg (Principled, 8th level Crusader) is a prominent figure among those Cyber-Knights still loyal to Lord Coake. Although he has stridently criticized those who have left the Fellowship, he has also rejected any notions of forcibly reuniting those knights with the rest of the Fellowship, or otherwise "punishing" rogue Cyber-Knights. In terms of temperament and personal philosophy, Sir Sorg is considered by many to be one of those who will carry Lord **Coake's** thoughts into the future once Coake himself is dead.

Lady Amanda Wheeling (Scrupulous, 9th level Courtier) has earned a fine reputation as a Tolkeenite trophy hunter. During her involvement with the Siege on Tolkeen, she has bagged over a dozen worthy targets for herself, including a trio of Coalition Juicers who were at the time of their death, some of the most highly decorated ground troops the Coalition had stationed in Tolkeen. Lady Wheeling's amazing combat prowess and success serve as an inspiration to many other knights to simply forget about the divisions among them and to simply focus on one's job at hand. Prove yourself on the battlefield, Lady Wheeling is fond of noting, and your fellow Cyber-Knights will forget whatever imperfections you might have. She is a voice of wisdom and calm. She frequently speaks about Lord Coake's honor and nobility and how no ill will should be held against him or those who stayed loyal to him. She also ruminates about how the schism may ruin them all unless the factions can reconcile. Rumor has it she plans on returning to the Fellowship once "her work" is done at Tolkeen. If she does, scores of other knights will follow her lead.

Sir Nogg Xavern (Unprincipled, 9th level Champion) is another rogue knight fighting for Tolkeen. A rare Grackle Tooth alien (made even rarer with his Cyber-Knight training), Sir Xavern is a kind of ambassador for D-Bee Cyber-Knights everywhere. D-Bee knights are considered especially valuable as alien and monster hunters, since they tend to have an innate knowledge of such targets that human knights simply can not match, as well as serving as the living embodiment of tolerance for all people. Sir **Xavern's** humility before others, despite his preference for a good fight over the Code of Chivalry, has made him a bit of a poster boy among other **Warhounds**. He has great influence over his fellow Champions and does a mountain of good, regardless of his break with the Fellowship.

Sir Dryan Usher (10th level, Scrupulous Crusader) is known best for his ceaseless crusades against extra-dimensional menaces of every kind. He has little use for politics or formality, only living a life of hard fighting against the big evils threatening the world at large. Although nobody knows the details, rumor has it he has adventured off world with Lord Coake and True **Atlanteans**, and engaged in a fierce battle in Africa with other Crusaders. Sir Usher himself will not talk about these things, since he believes it to be unfitting of knightly humility. He will only admit to being a devout follower of the Code of

Chivalry, and to having a deep love for smiting evil. Gifted with great charisma, Sir Usher is immensely popular among other knights on both sides of the **Tolkeen** divide. His removal from the scene will help to destroy any meaningful reconciliation between the factions.

Sir Taloquin (presented in detail elsewhere in this book) is a man of quiet strength, compassion and conviction. If Lord **Coake** had to pick someone to replace him and lead the **Cyber-Knights** in his place, Sir Taloquin would be at the top of a very short list. Sir Taloquin is a builder and a **nurturer** capable of great leaps of faith, forgiveness and bringing people together.

Sinker: The greatest challenges facing the player characters in this are:

1. Learning which four Cyber-Knights are indeed the Seven Shadows' next targets. Which may include some or *none* of those listed here. What about Lord Coake, himself? Are even the Seven Shadows that brazen? Learning which of the four previously mentioned Cyber-Knights are the Seven Shadows' next targets will require a mix of deductive reasoning, old-fashioned detective work, and perhaps a bit of luck.

2. Protecting these "targets" from harm, even if these characters refuse the player characters' protection.

3. Finding the Seven Shadows and bringing them to justice (or at least stopping their current mad quest).

4. Repairing the damage the Seven Shadows have already done to the Fellowship at large.

Any one of these priorities could be spun out into its own adventure or even a small campaign, depending on how **indepth** the players and G.M. were willing to go.

Game Master Note: Clues! Before this killing spree began, a list of cryptic phrases was sent to Lord Coake and to Sir Rigeld. The list had no explanation on it, just seven odd phrases that supposedly contained some hidden meaning:

- In Darkness Bound
- The Final Movement
- Freedom Has Its Price
- Even Light Has Its Shadow
- Honor is Not a Trophy
- Learn Some Manners
- No Quest Lasts Forever

Soon after this list of phrases was **delivered**, the body of Sir Ivor **Stanski** was found. Pinned to his body was a revised list with **Stanski's** name replacing the phrase "In Darkness Bound." Stanski, it was well known, was blind from birth but had developed mystic ways of overcoming his handicap in combat. When Lady Beresel Coda's body turned up, the list on her body was like the one on Sir Stanski's body, except the second phrase, "The Final Movement" was replaced by Coda's name. The phrase, it seemed, was a modestly clever allusion to Coda's name. And when Sir **Tholkun** Gurdock was found dead, the list on his body had his name replacing "Freedom Has Its Price," perhaps alluding to **Tholkun's** escape from **Slugorth** slavery many years ago, when during his **fight**, his three brothers and co-escapees died.

The final four phrases each correspond to Sir Obelee Sorg ("Even Light Has Its Shadow" — in reference to Sorg's similarities to Lord Coake), Lady **Amanda** Wheeling ("Honor Is Not a

Trophy" — in reference to her incessant trophy hunting), Sir Nogg **Xavern** ("Learn Some Manners," — in reference to his coarse, alien demeanor) and Sir **Dryan** Usher ("No Quest Lasts Forever" — in reference to Usher's questing career, and how it, like his life, must one day halt). The thing is, nobody besides the Seven Shadows knows what names match to what phrases (and the G.M. may change or provide new clues for different people, one of the player characters, perhaps). That is a task for others to figure out right now.

Should the player characters deduce who this list is referring to, the question becomes, what measures will they take to protect them. Would it be best to simply alert those endangered knights, so they are not taken unaware? Or should the heroes provide the targets with their services as bodyguards (even if the noble knights don't want **them**)? Or should the heroes keep the truth to themselves and watch from a distance so they can nab the Seven Shadows when they move next to strike? Note that such a tactic *might* cause the authorities or other protectors to mistake them as assailants. Or the clever members of the Seven Shadows *might* see them first and decide to either eliminate the opposition first (the player group should make for some good sport) or still manage to kill (or attempt to kill) their target and frame the heroes for the attack!

Exactly how the player characters resolve this unusual situation is left to them. One thing is for certain: every knight on this cryptic list who dies is another loss to the unification of the **Cyber-Knight** Fellowship. Should the Seven Shadows complete their mission and kill all seven of their targets, extremists and grudge-bearers in every faction will be that much more able to bring their grievances to bear. Without the voices of moderation to keep things civil between the factions, the grim specter of civil war among the Cyber-Knights has a better chance of becoming reality. And should the villains escape, what dark plot will the Seven Shadows come up with next?

Do the Right Thing

Some would say that the rigors of war have a way of corrupting one's morals, that the daily business of slaughter gradually seeps into one's soul to the point where they simply no longer view good and evil, right and wrong, as they once did. Everything becomes about life and death, and to a lesser extent, victory and defeat. As these principles supplant more lofty ones like generosity, mercy, forgiveness, honor, and so on, so do entire generations of people lose a part of their civility to the maddening process of war.

In its own way, the Cyber-Knights are going through this same process. Never before have they had to deal with such "shades of gray" as they have during the Siege on Tolkeen. Prior to the war, the average Cyber-Knight found himself faced with fairly simple situations in terms of right and wrong. A **Simvan** horde is overrunning a town and eating the inhabitants. The mission is clear: Stop the Simvan and save the helpless villagers. Likewise, if those villagers or their hired guns then retaliated against the Simvan by killing each of their first born infant children, that too is clearly wrong, and must be stopped.

Unfortunately, throughout the Siege on Tolkeen, things have been unclear and painted in shades of grey. Certain



Cyber-Knights and scholars believe that because the war is being fought by two societies that are both driven by hate and fear, it is hard to see any side as truly right or wrong. Certainly, as other parties get involved in the conflict, such as mercenaries, volunteers, adventurers, demons, dragons, monsters and other sideliners, the moral picture becomes increasingly fuzzy. In the end, these things have helped create an atmosphere of moral uncertainty. Aside from Tolkeenite and Coalition patriots, many of the militants fighting in Minnesota have at least a nagging doubt as to whether they are on the right side or not. Others wonder if they should be involved at all. Or at the very least, if they have been conducting themselves honorably during the war. There has been enough genocide and atrocities to go around that very few combatants can honestly say that they are completely blameless of the inexcusable savagery and barbarism (on both sides) that have been the hallmark of this conflict.

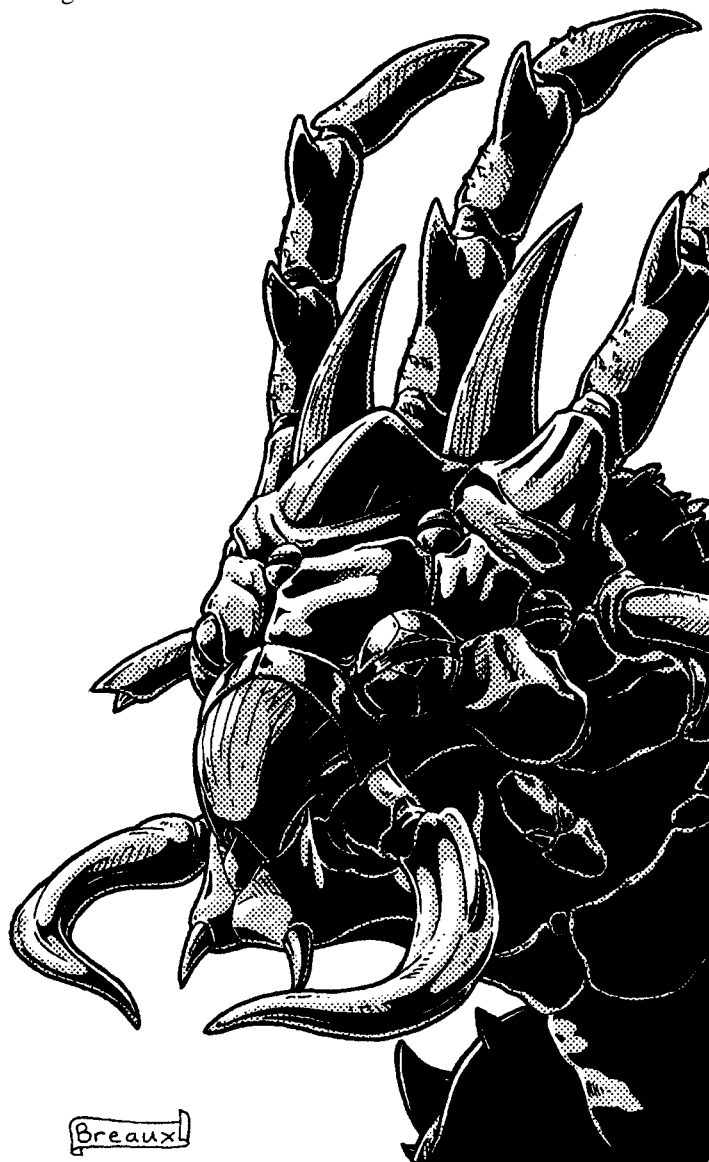
For the Cyber-Knights, navigating the murky waters of the **Tolkeen** conflict has proven especially troublesome. The knights have long relied on their Code of Chivalry to show them the way to righteous behavior. But when faced with paradoxical situations that the Code can not solve, that is when Cyber-Knights have begun to find themselves acting in ways they might once have thought incomprehensible. The unbridled slaughter of the Sorcerers' Revenge is a prime example. For the first time in anyone's memory, the Coalition has been defeated, and its broken forces are fleeing Minnesota as fast as they can. They are in no position to defend themselves, and care only to leave the battlefield. **Tolkeen's** forces seized upon this opportunity to slay as many of the fleeing Coalition troops as possible.

Some of the Cyber-Knights fighting for Tolkeen also took part in the slaughter, cutting down hundreds and thousands of troopers who never saw their killing blow coming. It was like shooting ducks in a barrel. Some Cyber-Knights tried to stop the slaughter and torture, facing down their own troops to do so, while others, not knowing what to do or how to stop the carnage, stepped out of it. Refusing to participate, but knowing full well that it was their efforts that helped to create this situation.

Did even Tolkeen's Cyber-Knights who joined the slaughter do so because they are heartless monsters? Of course not. Most of them strive to be true and noble warriors who fight for Tolkeen because they wish to thwart the evil plans of the Coalition. For many combatants the dilemma before them was, kill defenseless soldiers on the run and prevent them from returning to further savage Tolkeen, or show these hated enemies some mercy and deal with the consequences of that mercy later, when they return with vengeance. Most of Tolkeen's warriors that day, many Cyber-Knights among them, chose the former, and destroyed as much of the routed invasion forces as they could. Many of these knights and patriots acted in the heat of the moment, caught in the blood frenzy of Tolkeen's victory, but others made a level, rational decision to partake of the massacre. In the end, few knights are proud of what they did during the Sorcerers' Revenge, and many would not repeat their decision if they had the chance to do it all over again.

The Sorcerers' Revenge is just the largest-scale example of this phenomenon. Every day the same kind of dilemma plays itself out somewhere in Tolkeen. Although the major fighting has subsided for now, the Kingdom of Tolkeen remains a very dangerous and untamed place. Pockets of Coalition resistance, un-

employed mercenaries, roving bandits, monsters, and other hazards are found across the countryside, and wherever they appear, they create situations where characters must choose between what is right and what seems most practical. How the knights of Tolkeen respond to these challenges will ultimately define them far more than to whatever faction they swear their allegiance.



The Xiticix Gambit

Hook: For some, it is not enough to see the Coalition invaders driven before them. No, the invaders must *pay* for their **crimes**, and *their* homeland must be made to suffer as Tolkeen's has. After all, one look at Minnesota will show just how much damage the Coalition offensive has wrought. Before the invaders were reduced to a dispirited rabble, they destroyed countless villages, slew droves of innocent civilians, ruined farmland, desecrated landmarks, and inflicted countless other kinds of damage to the land and people. Tolkeen's most rabid supporters feel that the Coalition States should suffer at least this kind of damage in return. Military aggression is an integral part of the Coalition culture, these supporters believe, and unless Emperor **Prosek's** legions are taught a harsh lesson in the politics of pay-back, they will inevitably forget about their losses in Tolkeen and will someday invade again.

With that in mind, a small group of **Tolkeen** extremists are putting a plot in motion that if successful, could result in the destruction of the entire Coalition military and the great city of **Chi-Town!** The plan is as simple as it is insane. As Coalition units pulled out of Tolkeen, they left behind a considerable quantity of weapons, armor, vehicles, robots and other hardware. By many estimates, the Coalition left so much military equipment behind in their mad dash for safety that Tolkeen could practically re-arm half its army with Coalition issue gear! For the moment, Tolkeen salvage crews are working around the clock to police as much of this hardware as possible, store it centrally, catalog it all, and redistribute it to defensive units throughout the kingdom. However, this job is far from complete, and a horde of profiteers and trophy-seekers are picking areas of the land clean. Some groups have harvested entire unused phalanxes of Skelebots, while others can be seen carting off crate after crate of energy-firing small arms and spare **E-clips**. It is a scrounge rat's paradise, and precisely the kind of situation the **Tolkeenite** extremists need to set their *doomsday plan* into motion.

Using spare Coalition vehicles and robots, the extremists (led by a few essentially good **Cyber-Knights** who have been blinded by their hatred of the Coalition) have assembled a small aggressor force which they plan to march straight into the Xiticix **Hiveland**s to the north and pick a fight. Although the aggressor force will contain some Skelebots, the majority of it will employ live Tolkeen soldiers wearing Dead Boy armor and piloting Coalition vehicles. The force intends to engage a force of Xiticix and then withdraw, getting the alien insectoids to follow them. The Xiticix should already be on the alert, since a huge chunk of the original Coalition invasion force stumbled into **Hiveland** territory during the Sorcerers' Revenge and is considered lost (probably decimated by now). Getting the Xiticix to attack easily identified Coalition invaders again should be no problem. Staying alive long enough to lead them to another Coalition target, however, will be.

Once the aggressor force gets the Xiticix to give chase, they intend to lead them either south along the western border of Minnesota and into Coalition-held Iowa, or they will lead them east to the Great Lakes, where numerous Coalition naval units are stationed. The **Tolkeenites** will probably go for option #2, and draw the aliens to the Great Lakes. That way, the Coalition Navy will engage the Xiticix, drawing more of the bugs to the lake areas, putting the Coalition on high alert (they certainly won't like so many Xiticix buzzing around that close to Chi-Town). After that, the situation will hopefully escalate to the point where an entire hive's worth of Xiticix will follow their Coalition enemies back to Chi-Town, where the metropolis will come under Xiticix attack. Once that happens, there is no telling how much damage the aliens will wreak upon the Coalition States.

Line: Like we said before, the plan is optimistic at best and insane at worst. This is a case of pulling the tiger by the tail if ever there was one. The possibility of this thing going wrong and bringing the Xiticix into Tolkeen is fairly high. Plus, with a menace like the Xiticix, there is no telling what the aliens might do. Believing they can be so easily manipulated is courting disaster. Despite these things, the potential **payoff** is incredible. Just think about it: Chi-Town overrun by Xiticix. The Coalition



guttled of its capital, its naval ships on the Great Lakes now just floating Xiticix motels! For these **Tolkeenite** extremists, the ends are almost certainly worth the risk.

There is just one tiny problem, though. There is a defector among the aggressor group, and he intends to spread the word of this sneak mission in the hopes that *somebody* will stop it before it can get started.

Sinker: As fate would have it, he runs into the player characters and tells them about it, insisting they help him to get the message to others. If the player characters are, for some reason, sympathetic to the so-called "Xiticix Gambit," they will capture and gag the poor fellow and turn him over to an uncertain fate in the hands of the extremists, or kill him. They may also wish to join the effort as soldiers, or try to silence other outsiders the man may have told the plan to. Such "hatchet work" is not the typical fare of a **Cyber-Knight** or any character of good alignment, so any heroes in the group might find themselves at odds against their own comrades. More likely than not, the player characters will be opposed to the Xiticix Gambit and seek to defend the informant and get word to somebody to stop it. That might mistakenly be the Circle of Twelve or King Creed of Tolkeen, all of whom secretly support the plan! This could get the group in trouble as Coalition sympathizers or turncoats.

The group is likely to be set upon by a band of conspirators who will want them to turn the "**traitor**" over to them. If the heroes refuse, they'll be attacked. Even if they comply, they'll be attacked because the extremist faction is so fanatical that they won't believe the man didn't tell them anything or that they'll keep their mouths shut. This will be the case even if the player characters are known patriots or heroes of Tolkeen — their death is a price the extremists are willing to take.

After defeating the first band of attackers, more will follow, but no **Cyber-Knights** will be among them. The rest of the mission will revolve around figuring out how to stop the Xiticix Gambit without looking like traitors or hurting the Tolkeen people (i.e. telling the CS will enable them to stop the plot but will bring down grim retribution on all of Tolkeen).

Turning to the *Cyber-Knights*, even those serving Tolkeen, is a good option as a noble knight would never consider this treacherous plot. The nice thing about this situation is that Cyber-Knights supporting Lord **Coake** or Tolkeen might find themselves at a rare *common ground* and be willing to work together to stop it. To most Cyber-Knights, this plan should be stopped because of the sheer number of innocent people it endangers and because of the risks of it backfiring. Most people do not want the Xiticix any farther south than they already are, and certainly not in the vicinity of Chi-Town or Tolkeen! As much as most Cyber-Knights, D-Bees, adventurers and agents of Tolkeen dislike the Coalition, they fear the Xiticix even more, and any plot that delivers this alien menace closer to the heart of the continent is a bad idea. With that in mind, the heroes can now set about the business of thwarting the plan before it can get underway.

Like all good adventures, there is a complication. The player characters will have come into this information with very little time to spare before the Xiticix Gambit gets underway. Whether it is a matter of hours, a couple days or a week is left to the discretion of the G.M. In any case, the group must act quickly! There will not be much time for recruiting additional **firepower**

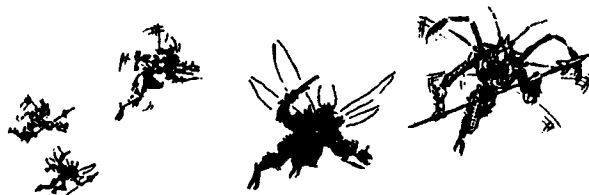
or making any long stops along the way. If Cyber-Knights are involved (the G.M. might present a chance encounter, maybe a band helps the group to fight off their attackers and save the defector), they will send some NPCs to get help, but in the meanwhile, ask the player characters to join them in making a **beeline** for Minnesota's northern border and engage the Gambit force at once! The defector can lead the way.

If the player group agrees, once there, they will run into **Complication #2**. The aggressor force is considerably larger than the heroes', even with the Cyber-Knights accompanying them. Ideally, they should be outgunned by a ratio of at least two to one, if not four or five to one, with a few heavy-hitters (mage, Cyber-Knight Blackguard, dragon hatchling, etc.). That ratio can be scaled up or down as is appropriate.

When the heroes arrive, they will have maybe one or two hours before the aggressor force moves out. It really does resemble a small Coalition army, with a Death's Head transport, a couple dozen rocket cycles, a pair of Spider-Skull Walkers, the whole nine yards. Now, the heroes can try to stealthily sabotage the force before it moves out, but realistically speaking, it would take a small miracle for them and the Cyber-Knights to disable the entire force before it moved out or before the heroes themselves were detected. A more expedient solution might be to simply radio the aggressor force's coordinates to Tolkeen defensive units in the area, who would gladly fall upon the area in search of enemy targets. All the heroes would have to do then is hold out long enough for "the cavalry" to arrive. Then, they could take part in the open fighting. If the G.M. wishes to make a battle out of it, the Tolkeen units first on the scene can be roughly equal to the aggressor unit in size and strength. If this is the case, the G.M. should just pitch the heroes against a small selection of key villains participating in the action, and the outcome of that fight will determine the outcome of the larger battle. As battle ensues, the player characters will get separated from any Cyber-Knight companions and whether the battle is won or lost should fall in their hands.

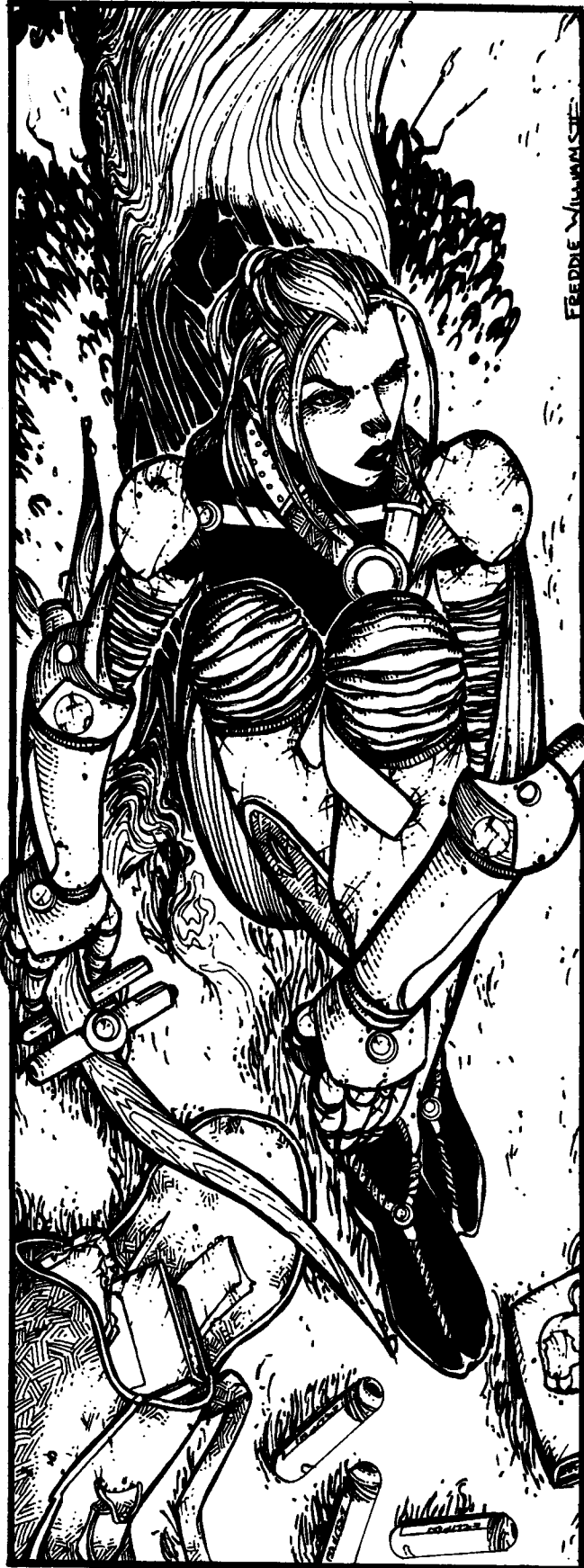
Should the heroes stop the Xiticix Gambit from embarking, they will have earned the respect and lasting friendship of the Cyber-Knights who accompanied them (which can be an avenue to many future adventures). They may also be given a heroes' welcome either in Tolkeen (the leadership will not tip its hand that it secretly sanctioned the Gambit) or among Lord Coake's traditionalists (probably at a border outpost). They will have performed a great service to the entire region, and for a while they will be treated like royalty for their bravery.

If the heroes fail to stop the Xiticix Gambit, they may be taken prisoner and what happens is best left to the Game Master. However, the extremists are likely to be destroyed by either the Xiticix or the real Coalition Army before any serious trouble is stirred up. Whether our heroes manage to escape depends on the resourcefulness of the players and (fair) opportunity. Getting stranded in Xiticix Territory could be the start of a new adventure. And even getting back to Tolkeen will be difficult.



Other People's Property

Hook: These days, the fields of **Tolkeen** are a grisly sight indeed. One does not have to look long to **find** a crater, ruins or slaughter zone where dozens of Coalition soldiers met their un-



timely end. Skelebot graveyards, slagged convoys and other sights bear silent witness to the utter lethality of the Sorcerers' Revenge and the war in general. For the would-be treasure hunter, old battlefields are something of a grisly paradise, since one can scrounge a **truckload** of usable equipment, spare parts, salvage and whatever booty these dead soldiers might have to offer. As the Tolkeen soldiers have chased the Dead Boys out of Minnesota, they have not had time to stop and completely loot dead bodies. As a result, many of the dead and dying along the Minnesota and Wisconsin border have yet to be searched. Some of them carry incredible treasures on them, too. So it is with the strange case of **Private Dennis Holstrom**.

Holstrom was mortally wounded just a day or two ago, but the nature of his injuries took a long time to kill him. By the time the player characters (who might be on another mission) stumble upon him, the poor trooper is in his final minutes. He is delirious with pain, but manages to squeak out a few lucid words before he gives up the ghost: "I ... risked everything ... for this. Muh ... make s-sure it gets ... to the **right** ... people. Promise **m-me** ..." and with that, he dies.

In **Holstrom's** hand is a small, **chiseled**, eight-sided stone, not unlike a large **polyhedra** die. Carved into each face of the die is a runic number that radiates magic. When Holstrom had the stone, each of the eight numbers seemed black and carbonized, as if the numbers themselves were lights that had burned out. As soon as another person takes hold of the stone, however, the numbers lose their sootiness and begin to sparkle once more.

This curious rock is one of the many legendary magic items Tolkeen sent its agents all across the Megaverse to find to further the war effort against the Coalition. The stone is called The Octohedron, and its powers are as simple as they are profound. Whoever owns the rock will be granted eight lives. Each time he dies, he will come back to life within 1D4 hours, provided he has the stone in his possession at the time of death and it is not removed from his possession between his death and his resurrection. The rock can only do this eight times for each holder, after which the stone becomes useless to him.

Holstrom, never the greatest soldier in the army, obtained the stone from a **Tolkeenite** explorer who chanced upon the stone while in another dimension. She returned to Rifts Earth to present it to her superiors in Tolkeen, but before she got home she drove over a Coalition land mine and was killed. **Holstrom**, who was part of the squad that laid the mine, found the Octohedron and, not fearing magic like so many of his Coalition brethren, secretly kept it. Using its **marvelous** powers to grant himself multiple lives, **Holstrom** soon became a fearless hero, completely impervious to pain or fear. However, he quickly burned through his eight lives, and during the Sorcerers' Revenge, he finally died for the last time.

Line: Now the player characters have his legacy and must decide what to do with it. Assuming they can even figure out what it is (perhaps an adventure in and of itself).

Once they learn of its powers, **Cyber-Knights** and heroes in the party will have some conflicting priorities to contend with. First of all, there are the wishes of a dying man to honor. Regardless of who **Holstrom** fought for, a **Cyber-Knight's** respect for life in general will make it difficult to ignore the late private's dying wish; the same is true of characters of good alignment. Of course, carrying out **Holstrom's** last request will be a

bit difficult, owing to the vagueness of it all. "Get the stone to the right people?" Who the heck are *they* supposed to be? This may leave the group to broadly determine who the right people are in support of their cause or biases.

On the other hand, there is the stone itself to consider. Here is a magic item of incredible power and value. Most adventurers, even good ones, might be inclined to keep it for themselves, especially since it came from a mere Dead Boy — an agent for an enemy that knows neither honor nor mercy. Who is **Holstrom** to make requests as he lay dying? Would Holstrom himself have honored the same request from a dying D-Bee or magic user? Certainly not. In like manner, adventurers might also take the stone because they are convinced they can do great good with it. This might be the seductive line of reasoning good characters, could use to justify using it themselves not for personal gain, but as a powerful tool to further goodness in the world. Less honorable alignments might want to sell it. Both Tolkeen or the Coalition Army would be willing to pay at least a couple million credits for it (probably a hundred times more), if for no other reason than to keep it out of the hands of the enemy.

And finally, there is Tolkeen to consider. A cursory examination of the stone, especially through powers such as *Object Read*, will reveal its magical nature (as might a dragon or practitioner of magic with knowledge of magical treasures). Surely Tolkeen knows of the **Octohedron** and expects it to be delivered to them posthaste. Should the heroes hang on to the rock, they might very well incur the wrath of **Tolkeen's** leaders. Of course, **Tolkeen's** leaders are also corrupt and greedy, so chances are they want the stone for their own purposes more than for the good of the kingdom. It seems the leadership has grown fond of its arcane collection and will use any means to further it. Obtaining the **Octohedron** will only make the powerful more powerful.

Of course if word spreads that the characters have the fabled stone, a number of people great and small, evil and self-serving, who will want it for themselves or for some purpose, so the group can expect constant trouble and attacks.

Sinker: There is a dark side to the Octohedron that the player characters do not know about. Each time it is used to resurrect **somebody**, that person runs a **01%-08%** chance of being transformed into a hideous, monstrous version of himself! Each subsequent time that character is resurrected by the stone, that "corruption percentage" goes up by another 8%. Thus, a character being resurrected by the Octohedron for the third time runs a **01%-24%** chance of corruption. Once the corruption begins, it intensifies each time the owner of the stone is resurrected.

Those corrupted by the stone first have their alignment turned permanently to Diabolic.

Second, the victim's I.Q., M.E., M.A., and P.B. all reduce by 1D8.

Third, the character immediately begins to suffer from three randomly determined insanities.

Fourth, the character is transformed into a Mega-Damage creature with supernatural strength (if he is not one already).

And finally, the character takes on the characteristics of a demonic monster from a Rift. When determining the character's precise **monstrosities**, the G.M. may simply assign them himself or consult a random table, such as the Oni Creation Table in **Rifts® Japan** or the **Gigante** Creation Table in the **Rifts® Conversion Book (One)**.

The transformation wrought by the fickle Octohedron seems to be permanent and irreversible, but there is no telling for sure. Characters with friends stricken by the stone might wish to seek a sage's advice on this matter. Masters of arcane lore might know something of the stone and its powers, and could offer possible remedies. Otherwise, the heroes will have little choice but to either live with their newly deformed (and villainous) friend, put him out of his misery, or keep him restrained while they find a "cure" for him.

Note: Depending on how a character is transformed by the Octohedron, wearing conventional armor might become impossible.

A Test of Mercy

Hook: A unit of Coalition soldiers stumbles into **Coake** territory unarmed and willing to surrender. **Tolkeenite Cyber-Knights** are hot on their trail and demand that Lord Coake (or his knights if Coake is not personally present) give up the Coalition troops, who include suspected war criminals and intelligence officers whose deaths would greatly further the Tolkeen war effort. On both sides, this is a tough issue. Are these villains worth fighting other Cyber-Knights over?

Line: The alleged criminals are taken in by **Coake's** men, but as prisoners. Coake's Cyber-Knights manage to broker a compromise to let an **unallied**, third party, the *player characters*, take these prisoners to a particular town where justice is known to be fair and forthright. Here these men will be placed on trial where their guilt or innocence will be determined and a just punishment (rather than a mob hanging or quick beheading by an angry knight) will be delivered. All agree to accept the final ruling of this judicial body. The Tolkeen Cyber-Knights agree, but have vowed that there will be serious trouble if even one of these criminals escapes before going to trial.

Sinker: The player characters have the weight of delivering these treacherous and cunning suspects to justice. If the group should fail, it will cause another rift between the Cyber-Knights of Tolkeen and the Fellowship, and perhaps a feud or war between those who reached the fair compromise. The journey can be fraught with trouble, escape attempts, attacks by other patriots or victims who want to inflict their own murderous justice, and so on.

Quiet Time

Hook: It is the final days of the Sorcerers' Revenge. Minnesota is largely quiet for now, since most of the heavy fighting is in the outermost edges of the realm. In the heart of the kingdom, things have finally quieted down — a rare moment, considering how violent the last few years have been. For the player characters, now is the time to get some well-deserved rest and relaxation. Whether they have been part of the fighting in Tolkeen or helping refugees on the fringes of the conflict, things have been pretty exhausting recently. Where the player group is currently visiting is the last place anybody would expect a crisis to spring up, but "Murphy's Law" prevails, and once more the player characters find themselves in the thick of trouble.

While evacuating from Tolkeen, a company of around 100 Coalition troops stumbles into a village on the western edge of Minnesota, outside the borders of Tolkeen. The village had been

a base camp for Lord **Coake** and his knights, a place where refugees often were gathered together, reunited with their friends and family, given food and medical attention, and then shipped out to safe havens further west. When the Coalition troops come into town, they are on the verge of collapse. The soldiers have

virtually no weaponry, and what few guns they do have are perilously low on ammunition. What little armor the soldiers still have is seriously beaten up. But that pales to the condition of the soldiers themselves, all of whom are either wounded, malnourished, **exhausted**, or suffering from psychological combat fatigue ("shell shock"). Clearly, these wretched soldiers are in no condition to fight. And upon entering the village, they turn over their weapons and *beg* for safe haven. All they want is some food, **water**, and maybe a little medical care. They immediately place themselves at the mercy of the villagers and await an answer.

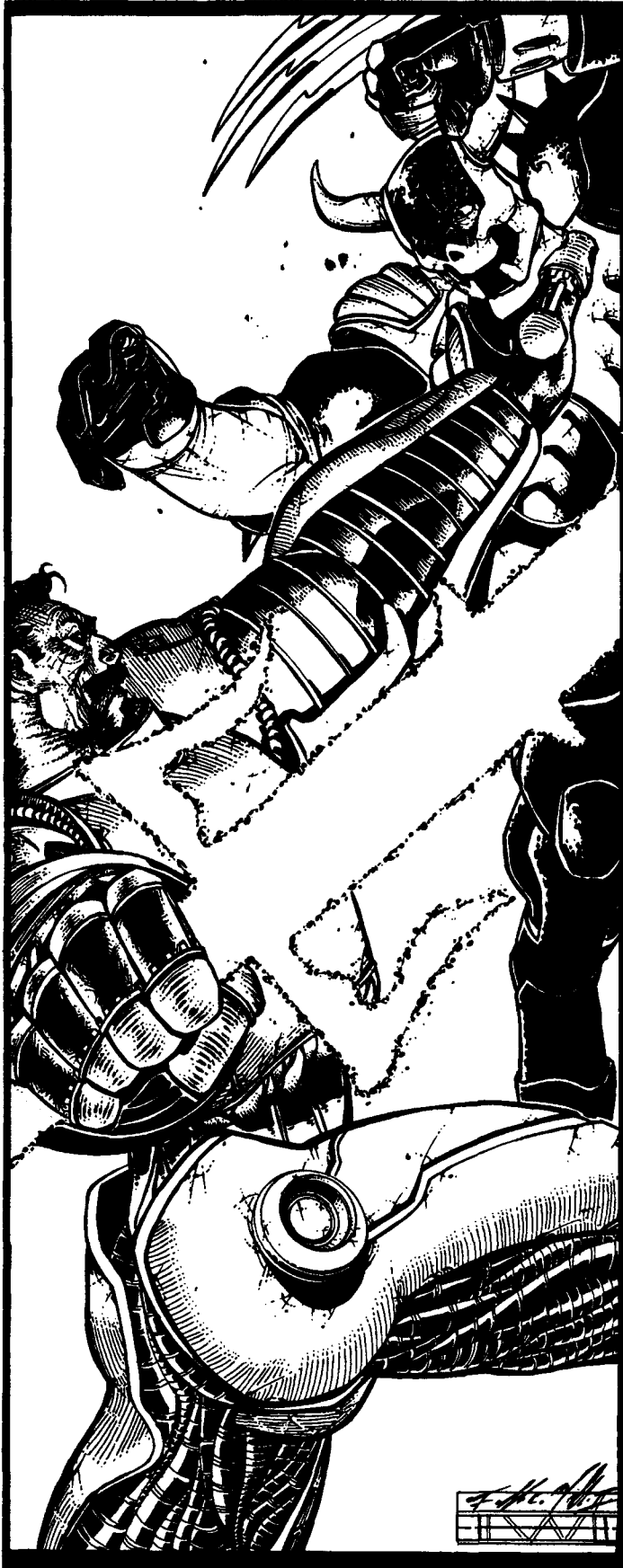
The stunned villagers immediately contact Lord Coake, who dispatches to the scene a liaison team of a **Cyber-Knight** or two and other trustworthy heroes which may be the *player characters*. Lord **Coake's** orders are that if the Coalition troops are genuinely nonbelligerent, then they are welcome to rest and recuperate in the village for up to three days. Then they must either move along or surrender to him and be placed in a prisoner of war camp. Any soldiers too sick or wounded to walk at that point may stay behind but the rest of the crew must vacate immediately.

Lord Coake is a generous and trusting individual, but he knows that hosting Coalition troops is just asking for trouble. Even if the soldiers are not trying to pull some underhanded military maneuver (which they are not, but Coake can not be 100% sure of that), their presence might very well draw Tolkeen revenge parties, monster squads, mercenaries, and Coalition search and rescue teams into the area. These are all things the village itself does not need. Unfortunately, they are things the village will get. And in spades, too.

Line: For two nervous days, the village awaits some kind of trouble to show up, but nothing happens. It would seem that most of the region's fighters are off to the south and east, busy destroying what is left of the Coalition invasion force. The northern and western borders are silent. If there is any kind of organized military activity here, it is limited to reconnaissance and espionage.

On the dawn of the third day, the Coalition visitors prepare to move out. Of the 100 who arrived, 80 are able to leave. The remaining 20 are in such bad shape that to make them travel will probably kill them. Just as the troops prepare to leave the village, a group of riders appears to the east and rapidly approaches the town. It is a force of **Cyber-Knights** from Tolkeen! There are six to eight of them, acting as the forward element of a Tolkeen fighting force of some 400 troops and assorted fighting vehicles and magical juggernauts. The knights approach the town flying a flag of truce, so they are admitted. Their visit is short and to the point: They had been pursuing the Coalition troops staying in the village and were about to destroy them when a freak storm came up and gave the troops the cover they needed to escape. After an extensive search, the Tolkeen unit found this place and sighted the soldiers receiving care.

These Tolkeen Cyber-Knights know this village is one of Lord Coake's, and they also can imagine that the Coalition troops asked for mercy and Coake, being the noble sort that he is, granted it. The warriors have no problem with this, and they will communicate that back to their fellow **Tolkeenites**. However, even mercy must have its limits, they warn. The Coalition troops staying here are the staff members of a Coalition death



camp. Until it was overrun by **Tolkeen** troops, the camp routinely exterminated innocent civilians every single day. A bona fide death factory. The Tolkeen fighting force simply wants to return the favor to these monsters, who truly deserve nothing less than a swift death for their crimes. The **Cyber-Knights** give the village until sundown to release all of the Coalition troopers, after which the Tolkeen unit will simply swarm the settlement. Any casualties among the villagers will be out of their hands. As the Cyber-Knights leave, the Coalition visitors beg the village and the knights running it to grant them further sanctuary.

Sinker: What the village's Cyber-Knights are to do next is a litmus test of their dedication to the Code of Chivalry as well as their own personal morality. It is a fact that if the villagers let the Coalition soldiers go, the surrounding Tolkeen forces will slaughter them. In addition to the ultimatum, the village knights have a compelling reason to send these Dead Boys packing, as they all probably deserve the fate awaiting them. On the other hand, the Code of Chivalry mandates that the noble Cyber-Knights respect *all* life, even that of the enemy. Two wrongs, after all, do not make a right. These Coalition troops asked for mercy in good faith, and the village knights gave it to them. Even if they had known in advance that the Coalition fugitives were death camp attendees, the village knights *still* would have taken them in. "Mercy and honor should not be measured in degrees," as the saying goes. This situation is a strong test of that belief.

If the village knights let the Coalition troops go, there is not much to figure out. The Tolkeen troops will murder most of them and take a few prisoners to bring back to the City of Tolkeen for public ridicule and execution. If the village knights refuse to turn the Coalition troops over, they jeopardize the safety of hundreds of innocent people for the lives of monsters. However, they question if the Tolkeen Cyber-Knights will really attack them. Those knights understand the complicated obligation the village knights are under, and there is no need to punish them for doing a good deed. Likewise, the villagers themselves would suffer from such an attack, and it is hardly their fault that the Coalition troops picked their village to seek sanctuary. Thirdly, any such attack would end up with Cyber-Knights fighting Cyber-Knights, and such an ugly situation is always to be avoided. However, these Coalition scum *must* be punished for what they have done, so the Tolkeen battle group, and its Cyber-Knights in particular, do not have the option of walking away.

The Tolkeen Cyber-Knights will wait 1D4 days after the deadline passes before the rest of the battle group gets uncontrollable and demands to attack the village. At **that** point, the knights have no other option than to take the village, so it is imperative to all sides involved that this situation resolve itself before then.

The best alternative would be to give the Coalition troopers some method of instant transportation to somewhere else. That way, they could escape without running into the slaughter force waiting on the village's edge. Lacking that, or some inventive way to get the troops out safely, the village knights might have to prepare for a defense of the place. Should the Tolkeen force overrun the place, the village knights will be compelled to defend themselves and the villagers. Whether or not they defend the helpless Coalition troops is something best left to the *player characters and/or* the G.M.

Should things boil down to a **fight**, the ramifications will promote further strife among the Cyber-Knights, pushing the Fellowship ever closer to all-out war. Of the situations in which Cyber-Knights find themselves fighting each other, this one poses the widest avenue for a diplomatic solution. The Cyber-Knights opposing each other here have no grudge against one another (unless the G.M. stocks NPCs that have angry histories with the heroes), and they fully understand why each side must make their stand. The whole situation is a regrettable conflict of obligations that the Code of Chivalry is powerless to help untangle. The only way out while avoiding bloodshed is for the Cyber-Knights on the scene to exercise hefty portions of **cunning**, tact, honesty, and courage. With so many lives in the balance, there can be no margin for error.

A final note. Should the village knights provide safe escape for the Coalition troops, a possible epilogue might be for them to wait a day or so before joining up with the Tolkeen knights and then hunt the Coalition troops down. Once their initial obligation of mercy has been fulfilled, the village knights will be at full liberty to bring these Coalition dogs to justice. If the village knights can somehow strike that kind of deal with the Tolkeen knights, it might be a way for all parties to be satisfied. An alternative might be like the one outlined in the previous adventure where all agree to have a fair trial followed by a just punishment for those found guilty (despite the allegations, only half the CS refugees worked at a death camp). Of course, here the irony may become that the Tolkeen **Cyber-Knights'** own forces break ranks, turn into a mob and attack the village, putting their Cyber-Knights in an even more awkward position.

Those who manage to pull off such a feat of diplomacy will certainly see their fortunes rise among other Cyber-Knights, especially those who put a high value on keeping the Fellowship intact.

Deadman's Quest

Hook: A Cyber-Knight falls in combat.

Line: One or more of the player characters are present to charge to his rescue. Unfortunately, the hero is mortally wounded and will die before any magical or psychic healing can reach him.

Sinker: The dying knight asks the player character or the group to fulfill some last deathbed wish for him (he will ask for a blood oath). Something important he had promised to do, fix, finish, **etc.**, but which he'll be unable to do now, unless somebody does it for him. A quest or crusade that might lead the group **anywhere** and on any kind of adventure. Exactly what the quest may be, we leave to the Game Master.

The Great Crusade

While Lord **Coake** has forbidden the Fellowship from fighting on **Tolkeen's** behalf, he and his fellow knights have not exactly been absent from the war. On the western and southern borders of Tolkeen, Lord Coake and his Cyber-Knights have spent the war evacuating refugees, finding them new places to live away from the battle zones, and policing the borders to make sure the war and the vultures and villains it attracts do not spill over into other lands. To this **end**, they have turned back any militants and raiders looking for easy targets outside the war

zone and provided sanctuary to those in need, including adventurers, refugees, Fallen **Cyber-Knights** and even the dreaded Coalition. Anybody in search of peace can find a place among Lord **Coake's** border knights, refugee camps and strongholds. The Cyber-Knights of the Fellowship also engage in reconnaissance and spying, studying the troop movements of both sides, investigating claims of atrocities (including rumors of death camps) and coming to the aid need of most any innocent in need of them, whether they are outside or inside the borders of **Tolkeen**. A fact that makes these Cyber-Knights interlopers and a pain in the side of both the Coalition and the Tolkeen Army. The Fellowship also has knights and agents headed for Wisconsin where the neutral inhabitants of that region are getting trampled by both sides.

Of these tasks, handling refugees has proven to be the most demanding. As the bloodshed in **Tolkeen** spirals out of control (especially after the Coalition began herding **Tolkeen's** civilians into death camps), floods of refugees have come west, seeking refuge. Lord **Coake** has recruited the help of several villages and towns to act as refugee processing centers. Here, the civilians are cared for, organized into groups, and then shuttled off to safe havens far from the fighting. When things cool down, the refugees can either try going back to their homes or they can just keep heading into the New West to build new lives for themselves.

In recent months, however, the influx of refugees has far outpaced the rate at which Coake feels he can safely transport them out of the region. The Coalition has already shown it will



slaughter civilians, especially D-Bees, and Lord **Coake** fears that if he moves refugees in large numbers, Coalition aerial units will spot them and zoom in for the kill — it has happened once already. Meanwhile, the **Cyber-Knights** have even enlisted the limited aid of the Tundra Rangers to relocate some of the refugees in Canada.

By the time of the Sorcerers' Revenge, each of the **Cyber-Knights'** "mercy villages" will have swollen to the breaking point, and neither Lord **Coake's** Cyber-Knights, army of volunteers (like the player characters?) nor the permanent residents of these communities can provide for all the refugees any longer. Food, water and medical shortages are frequent and commonplace, and health problems such as cholera and dysentery are bound to happen even with benefit of psychic healers and practitioners of magic.

The unprecedented success of the Sorcerers' Revenge suddenly reduced the burden on the refugee camps but has created a new dilemma even Lord Coake and his volunteers can't seem to stem. Hundreds believe the war is over and are returning home. Coake and his Cyber-Knights have tried to warn them that this is but a momentary respite and an opportunity to relocate far from their homelands, but hundreds ignore their petitions and head back for **Tolkeen**. The momentary cease-fire and pull back at least allows Lord Coake and his forces to finally move the rest of the refugees in a few mass migration far out of harm's way and restock the refugee camps and **Cyber-Knight** border camps for the final dreadful days of the war he fears the future holds.

Lord Coake has already made arrangements with a number of friendly kingdoms and small city-states west of Minnesota to absorb the refugees. All he has to do is get them all to a central rally point, a lonely town known as Serenity. And that is where *the player characters* come in — as the Cyber-Knights seek volunteers to take part in the greatest relief effort in post-Apocalypse history.

When the wolves come calling

Hook: Refugees are on the move to Serenity and beyond.

Line: As the refugees move out, so do countless bands of Juicers, mercenaries, bounty hunters, thieves, raiders, **slavers**, Coalition deserters, Fallen Cyber-Knights, maniacs, and brigands of every stripe. **Low-lives** and criminals who have either decided the war is over or the gravy-train has ended and it's time to get out while they can leave. Many are as down and out on their luck and desperate as the refugees, and a whole lot meaner, ruthless, and downright evil. Villains who see the refugees as easy pickings and sheep ready to be fleeced.

Sinker: Who will be there to help and defend these refugees? Who will come to rescue them from the elements, monsters, **raiders**, slavers, bandits and worse?

This basic premise can be used for dozens of adventures. Refugees captured by slavers. Refugees forced into slave labor by a powerful mage or dragon for a work camp or by an evil community of **humans**, demons or monsters. Refugees scattered and lost like cattle due to a storm, or an attack by raiders or by a monstrous predator (see New West™ and Rifts® Canada for a host of predators that wander the North American badlands). Refugee families torn apart when a loved one is lost during an armed conflict or kidnapped by **Simvan** Monster Riders, a hos-

tile tribe of D-Bees, or monsters, or bandits, or a Coalition long-range reconnaissance team or CS search and destroy squad, or any number of candidates for villainy. The individual(s) stolen away may be earmarked for slave labor, torture, food (as in, to be killed and eaten), rape, sale into slavery, human sacrifice, and so on.

Refugee groups are lovely targets for robbery by evil meres, bandits, demons, monsters or Blackguard Cyber-Knights. Refugees may even be robbed of *everything*, including their vehicles, horses, food, water and belongings, leaving them stranded. Refugees may also be endangered from an approaching storm, flood or war party. Tribes of Simvan and other hostile D-Bees or semi-intelligent monsters may see them as invaders and respond by attacking and killing them. Misunderstandings and altercations may arise between traveling refugees and the local natives. And then building new homesteads and settlements introduces a whole other avenue of conflict and adventure.

Making the Pickup

Hook: Among the three largest "mercy villages," there are well over **10,000** refugees awaiting transport. The easiest thing to do would be to move these people by foot. Were this evacuation taking place on the Wisconsin border, it would be no problem. The thick **treetop** canopy there would help shield the refugees from the prying eyes of aerial units and flying menaces — a frightful number of marauding dragons, gargoyles, Xiticix and other fliers soar in the skies above and around Tolkeen, as well as continuing CS **fly-bys**. By contrast, there is only barren scrub land and small patches of thin forest offering few places to hide in the western end of Minnesota and the **Dakotas**. Thus, to move the refugees quickly and safely, they will have to go in vehicles. But where does one find the hardware to move that many people? The answer lies with the very people who created the refugee problem in the first place: the Coalition.

The Coalition abandoned and lost a tremendous amount of weapons, vehicles and other hardware as a result of the blitzkrieg attack. In most cases, fleeing military units left their heavier gear behind once it became damaged or could no longer move effectively. In other cases, large command and supply centers were overrun so quickly by Tolkeen forces that entire fleets of vehicles were captured by the enemy in the blink of an eye. For now, much of this equipment remains up for grabs, since Tolkeen has only begun to salvage this stuff. The Tolkeen personnel needed for a mammoth salvage operation are still busy kicking Coalition tail on the borderlands and will not be available for the clean-up operations for at least another two or three weeks.

Lord Coake knows of a recently constructed and outfitted Coalition airfield just under a day or two's ground ride from the refugee camps. Word has it that the place was a hastily constructed troop drop zone that was overrun in the early days of the Sorcerers' Revenge and has not yet been picked clean. The field was built to house up to twenty CS *Sky Lifter* APCs as well as a small fleet of trucks and transport vehicles. If this kind of hardware can be relieved from the airfield, then the refugees will be able to ride in style and safety. Meanwhile, he has encouraged other volunteers and adventurer groups to liberate and bring whatever deserted vehicles they can lay fair claim to, from the battlefields along the Mississippi River.

Line: Lord Coake's intelligence reports are right. There is a Coalition airfield not too far from the refugee villages, and there are indeed many Coalition vehicles there for the taking. The top prizes are the dozen Sky Lifter APCs, as well as a few ground-based APCs and heavy cargo vehicles. Together, these vehicles should be able to accommodate in one heavily loaded convoy the 10,000 refugees that need to be transported. The problem now is actually acquiring the vehicles and getting them to the mercy villages before anybody else recognizes that they are ripe for the taking. As a result, Coake's **Cyber-Knights** have scrambled a large unit of knights and volunteers to go out to the airfield and bring back the vehicles in question. The group being sent is a mixed unit, consisting not only of Cyber-Knights but their comrades and other freelancers they have come to trust.

The reason for this is the vehicles being stolen ... er, "liberated" ... require large crews to operate, and not every **Cyber-Knight** has the skills of a pilot. The *player characters* could very well be one of these crews of specialists brought in. Their responsibility might be to commandeer just one vehicle and bring it back. After the refugees are off-loaded, the characters may be allowed to keep smaller vehicles or other (reasonable) booty as a reward, but the large transports will be kept for future operations.

Stealing these vehicles will not be as easy as it sounds. When the airfield was overrun, the Tolkeen warriors' first priority was to destroy the running Coalition troops, and then to return to collect booty for themselves. As a result, they secured the airfield and then left it behind so they could continue their pursuit of ground troops. After they **left**, they never noticed the airfield

initiate its *automated defense routine* — the activation of an entire Skelebot company, **160 bots!** There is actually another company of Skelebots present but a malfunction prevents them from being activated.

The **Skelebots'** standing orders have been to cover the field and prevent any non-Coalition personnel from entering. So far, the Skelebots have done a stellar job, killing the odd adventurer or mercenary crew looking for treasure, as well as a few dozen returning warriors' cutdown before they knew what hit them.

When the player group arrives and assesses the situation, they will have some planning to do. A frontal assault will work, but the inevitable friendly casualties will result and the sounds of a heavy **firefight** will attract unwanted attention. Another option is for elite groups of warriors (the player group and bands of Cyber-Knights) to go in alone and use their unique skills to hit the Skelebots from behind and whittle their force down to nothing. Or to try to find some override system in one of the buildings. Or do the player characters have some other cunning plan to put in motion? However they do it, the player characters and their allies must bypass and somehow eliminate/shut-down the **160** skelebots standing guard at the airfield to get the vehicles the Cyber-Knights need so badly for the refugees. Assuming there are enough crewmen to fly all the transports, the trip back to the mercy villages should be brief and uneventful. Which is **good**, considering the troubles awaiting our heroes back at home.

Sinker: As if getting the vehicles weren't trouble enough, when the player characters' transport convoy arrives, they will find at least one, if not all of the mercy villages under siege by



out-of-work mercenary companies. They have already taken one refugee camp and hold thousands of innocent people hostage. As noted earlier, with the end of the Sorcerers' Revenge, a lot of **Tolkeen's** volunteer population figured the war was over. The many mercenaries, raiders and bandits working for the Kingdom have begun to pour out of the region and in search of a new source of income. On their way out, they began to loot whatever settlements they came across, taking what they needed or wanted. Border towns previously untouched by the war made the most appealing targets. Lord **Coake** anticipated this, which is why he established a large number of the remaining **Cyber-Fellowship** and their volunteer allies (adventurers, mages, etc.) along the western and southern borders. However, they can not be everywhere, and with the mission to secure the vehicles at the airfield, were spread too thin to handle the invading *army* of mercenaries.

A large mercenary army just happened to come across one of the mercy villages on their way out of **Tolkeen** and learned of the heroes' mission to obtain enough transport craft to evac the refugees to safety. The enterprising mercenary commander immediately began scanning the airwaves for encoded military transmissions ... like the ones the heroes' unit used to keep in touch with each other while obtaining their transport craft. The **merc** commander had his men capture the largest village and wait for the group to return. The few **Cyber-Knights**, warriors and mages left behind could not hold off the entire mercenary force without enormous civilian casualties and surrendered, staying with the people to keep them from panicking and to seize any opportunity to change their fortune should it arise.

The commander offers a simple proposition: The heroes can have the refugees in exchange for all of the transports. The meres load up in the stolen Coalition vehicles and they will leave without incident. Refuse to play ball, the commander warns, and the refugees die.

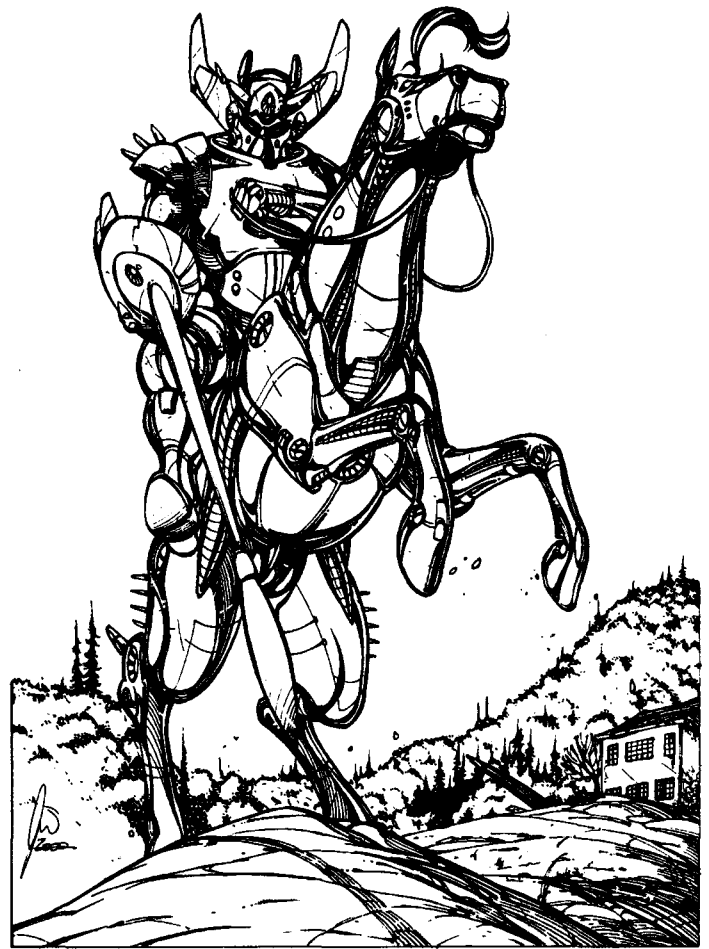
This is a tough situation, since the mercenary commander *will* have refugees killed by the hundreds to make his point. He will not negotiate any further or accept any noble challenges of **combat**, winner take all. He already holds all the cards and either the heroes capitulate to his demands or people die in droves. This is his only offer.

Further complicating things is that the craft the player group and many of the other heroes took, have no working weapon systems on them. These Sky Lifters are an unarmed variant rush-produced by the Coalition so they could shuttle as many troops to the Tolkeen front as possible. (**G.M.** Note: Almost every main **Coalition** vehicle type has an unarmed **variant** being mass produced to meet the Coalition's logistic needs. Fighting a two-front war is stressful for even the mightiest power, and the twin conflicts in Tolkeen and Free Quebec are stretching the Coalition manufacturing abilities to their breaking point.)

Even if the warships were armed, any attack would kill thousands of the very people they are trying to save. These freelance soldiers are well equipped and about one in every 20 commands a suit of power armor or some fighting vehicle. An out and out battle with them will likely result in the destruction of at least one mercy village and the deaths of many refugees. Capturing or killing the **merc** leader *might* be an option, but again, too many innocents will be **endangered**, and this seems to be a fairly experienced group not easily shaken.

The meres are scum-bags, but they don't care about the refugees or the heroes one way or the other. Once they get what they want they are gone.

Sometimes one has to lose in order to win. It is the lives of the refugees that is important here, nothing else.



The Joust

Hook: Somebody has gotten the bright idea of staging a joust pitting Fellowship loyalists against those who left to serve Tolkeen. After the first day of the tournament, when all of the Cyber-Knights formally introduce themselves and provide displays of their skills (target shooting, horsemanship, sword drills, etc.), the tourney turns into one great big party in which friendly Cyber-Knights catch up on each other's careers and antagonistic Cyber-Knights and Blackguards try their best to be civil, even if it hurts. On the second day is when the serious competition begins, as the knights partake in a **marathon** jousting competition.

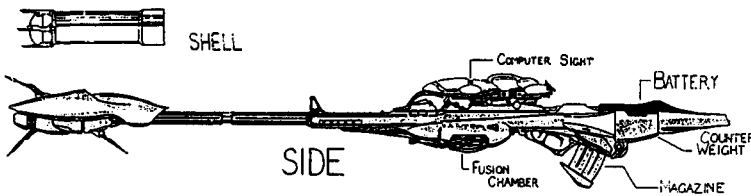
The joust is an ancient event that has always been an esoteric part of the **Cyber-Knight** culture. Traditionally, two mounted knights would square off at the opposite ends of a tilting yard. Each pair of knights ran their horses down a straight path separated by a low wall or some other kind of partition. As the knights passed each other, they struck out with long lances, hoping to unhorse their opponent. Sometimes the lances would be blunted to prevent serious injury, but sometimes they were not, and the loser went home in his funeral shroud.

The Cyber-Knight version of this retains much of the old while infusing it with the new. For this new version, combatants

are equipped with a most rare weapon — a modified **Shemarrian Rail Gun**! These heavy-duty weapons are similar to Glitter Boy Boom Guns except they are lighter and more slender. They are also exceedingly rare; these things are *not* available on any black market, and exactly how the event organizer got his hands **on** four of them remains unknown. However, the **Cyber-Knights** of the tourney are all eager to give them a try.

The rail guns have all been powered down to fire a non-lethal "sponge round" that inflicts only one M.D.C. upon impact (certainly not enough to kill a **Cyber-Knight**) but also delivers a tremendous kinetic blow. A knight hit with one of these rounds must successfully resist the blow by making two attribute rolls. He must roll under his P.S. on a D20; failure to do so means he has not been able to hold on to his seat and is thrown. The knight must then roll under his P.E. on a D20. Failure to do so means the Cyber-Knight is stunned for the next melee round, during which time he will be unable to attack or defend. If the other knight hits him with a round, he will be automatically knocked from his horse. The Cyber-Knights are mounted on robot horses and will have enough space between them on the tilting yard to have a full melee round of combat as they close in on each other. The rail gun can be fired single-shot only, up to six times per round, or however many attacks the knight has, whichever is less. The joust ends when one knight has been thrown from his horse twice. Any pass in which both knights are unhorsed does not count. No melee attacks are allowed as the knights pass each other.

For easy reference, here is a reprinting of the Shemarrian Rail Gun, originally presented on page 91 of **Rifts® Sourcebook One**.



Shemarrian Rail Gun: This electromagnetic mass driver system is similar to that of the Glitter Boy Boom Gun. Although the basic principles are the same, this weapon is designed for accuracy rather than destructive power and has a suppressor system that lessens the recoil and muffles the sonic boom (the shot is still extremely loud, like that of a shotgun or small explosion). When not modified for cyber-jousting, the weapon fires a single **flechette-filled** cartridge. The cartridge breaks open and releases hundreds of shards that strike at such speeds that they punch through Mega-Damage armor.

Primary Purpose: Assault.

Weight: Gun: 128 **lbs** (57.6 kg); belt: 30 **lbs** (13.6 kg). Note that for cyber-jousting, these weapons are mounted on the robot horses used for the joust. The knight controls the horse with one hand and fires with the other hand. Knights strong enough to heft the gun on their own usually forgo any kind of mounting, claiming that anybody who needs such a crutch should work-out more.

Mega-Damage: 2D6X10 M.D. per round.

Rate of Fire: Aimed or wild; bursts are not possible. The number of shots is equal to the total number of hand to hand attacks (6 maximum).

Effective Range: 6000 feet (1828 m).

Payload: 12 shots per ammo clip or 220 rounds per belt-fed backpack.

Special Bonuses: The gun has a unique built-in computerized targeting system that provides a +2 to strike. This targeting system has been deactivated for the cyber-joust, however.

Black Market Cost: Not available! None of these fabulous weapons have made it to the black market, because they typically are destroyed when the Shemarrian is destroyed (self-destruction/explosion). Exactly how the event organizer got a quartet of these weapons remains a mystery, and even he claims that it would be virtually impossible for him to obtain any more of these remarkable weapons. Of course, if one of these guns fell into the hands of a weapons designer or manufacturer, **knock-offs** might be able to be produced in limited quantities. Other Cyber-Knights have shown intense interest in these things, as it would give them the kind of distance **firepower** they have long sought as a complement to the hard-hitting Psi-Sword. In the unlikely event that a Shemarrian rail gun makes it to market, it would probably go for a million credits or more to a buyer who knew what he was buying. An ignorant seller might let the device go for a paltry 10,000 credits, thinking it only to be a quirky alien device with limited usability.

Line: This joust is proving hugely popular among the Cyber-Knights, with members of the Fellowship and those who have left to serve Tolkeen having the opportunity to go at each other outside the field of battle. It is great for relieving tensions and pent-up emotions. Unfortunately, the joust suffers from three small complications.

One, friendly **fire**! Already a few Cyber-Knights and spectators have been wounded by errant rail gun shots. Should a round hit an **unarmored** civilian, it will splatter him. The participants in the joust must be careful, lest any innocent onlookers get hurt. In general, any roll of a 1-3 means the knight has accidentally sent a round into the crowd. What happens after that is left to the G.M.'s discretion.

Two, accusations of cheating. One of the guns (the G.M. may randomly determine which one) has been accused of hitting harder than all the others. (This is true; the gun hits for 1D4 M.D. and the victim's attribute rolls must be made at -6, making it much more difficult for them to stay seated.) Naturally, several Tolkeen Cyber-Knights (mostly those who have already been eliminated in competition) are angry at this revelation and want a rematch with their opponent. A few Cyber-Knights are even going so far as to suggest that the Tolkeen knights intentionally tampered with the weapon trying to tip the favor to their side of the competition, or maybe even to try killing some of the Fellowship loyalists by "accident."

Accusations of dishonesty are not taken lightly by other Cyber-Knights, and if this situation is not resolved soon, a serious brawl might erupt.

The third complication are the **Shemarrians** themselves! These guys do not appreciate their unusual technology being paraded about, and used by **non-Shemarrians**. A few Cyber-Knights are concerned that this trivial display of the rail guns will in some way attract undue attention. Already the tourney has become a public spectacle. It need not draw monsters and villains to the scene as well, but that is just what it might end up doing anyway.

Sinker: The gun is recalibrated, weak apologies are made and no one seems to be at fault of deliberately cheating. The rest of the tourney goes well and spirits are high. At the end of the day, the **Cyber-Knights** retire from the field, nursing the bumps and bruises they received during the jousting. However, just as the evening festivities get under way, one of the **sponsors'** pages bursts into the central hall with shocking news: somebody has stolen the rail guns! While the Cyber-Knights are disturbed by this news, they are not exactly surprised. **Shemarrian** rail guns are extraordinary weapons, the kind of thing any warrior or brigand would covet. However, these weapons are also quite heavy and it is unlikely that any of the commoners milling about made off with these things so easily. The most likely explanation is that a **Cyber-Knight** took the guns! But who would have done such a thing? And how does one find the culprit without wrongly accusing somebody else and dishonoring him? Although things are fairly jovial now, the entire tone of the tournament will turn hostile if Cyber-Knights begin slinging accusations at each other.

Exactly what transpires next is up to the G.M. It could all be a plot to frame and discredit one side or the other. (Could the

Seven Shadows be responsible and lurking around in the background?) Finding the weapons will certainly stop finger pointing and hard feelings. The culprit might not be a Cyber-Knight at all, but a band of bold thieves, or a band of strong D-Bees like Grot Hunters or **Grackle** Tooths. Or a band of **Shemarrians** may have snuck in and taken their stolen goods back. Or the thief could have been a squad of Coalition Special Forces with a couple of full conversion cyborgs or Juicers and another couple of power armor suits among them. They knew the kind of unrest and conflict stealing the rail guns would cause, that's why they did it. Heck, they might even have ditched the weapons and split, letting nature take its course. Or any number of other possibilities are left to the G.M.

In the end, it is left to the player characters (and the G.M.) to uncover what happened and who the guilty party might be. Should the weapons not turn up at all and a suspect not be nabbed, the finger pointing from this episode will spoil the mood for the rest of the tourney. If the weapons are safely returned, those responsible will be richly heralded as tourney heroes and not have to pay for **food**, drinks and trinkets for the rest of the festivities. Enjoy.

Cyber-Knight Armor

The following are some afterthoughts about Cyber-Knights and body armor. The knight's unique *Cyber-Armor* is intended to provide additional Mega-Damage protection. To give the hero an edge in combat. It is not intended to be the **Cyber-Knight's** sole means of protection. Consequently, Cyber-Knights wear an exterior suit of body armor just like any other man of arms. This M.D.C. armor can be any of the conventional types of body armor presented in the **Rifts® RPG** and supplemental **World Books**. However, like most *groups*, the Cyber-Knights have chosen a particular image or style of dress to represent them.

In the **Cyber-Knights'** case, that *image* is the look of the traditional "knights of old." Plate **and/or** scale or chain mail clad warriors who look like heroes stepped out from the pages of a fairy tale or history book. Of course there are differences unique to the world of Rifts. For one, all such suits are made of modern, Mega-Damage materials, or magically enchanted equivalents. This means while the armor may look archaic or clunky, it is usually made of lightweight materials — often a composite of M.D.C. ceramics, plastics, metal alloys and advanced technology.

Who makes such suits of armor? Lots of folks. **The Black Market**, **Bandito Arms** and even **Northern Gun** and the **Manistique Imperium**. While these notorious arms and armor manufacturers make a variety of archaic or antique styled armor for general retail (such as the *Gladiator* and *Crusader*, originally presented on page 209 of the **Rifts® RPG**), they also take "special orders" and will build armor to individual design specifications to create unique, one of a kind or limited edition suits of armor. This is done for anybody willing to pay the additional 50,000 to 500,000 credits to make specialized armor. The cost varies with the requirements of the purchaser and the number of unique features and level of ornamentation — many Cyber-Knights have very ornate suits of armor.

All suits start with the basic framework of a standard type of body armor (see the **Rifts® RPG**, pages 209-211), from *Crusader* to *Urban Warrior* to *Bushman* and even Triax and Coalition "Dead Boy" armors. (See **Rifts® New West™** for additional styles of body armor from Bandito Arms). This means most suits of *environmental armor* have all the standard features for Environmental Battle Armor the same as the CS Dead Boys. Mega-Damage Capacity (M.D.C.) ranges from minimal (35 M.D.C.) to heavy (80-120 M.D.C.). Only **Techno-Wizard** armor and other types of magical armor may possess unusual amounts of M.D.C. (120+) and special powers.

The exact type of armor depends on the individual Cyber-Knight. Remember, the knights are a loose knit group of strong individuals. Although they share certain goals, ethics, history and Code, they mostly function as independent operatives or small groups. Thus, just as a Cyber-Knight selects the shape and style of his Psi-Sword, so too do they select the style and appearance of their armor. A choice that typically reflects **their personality**, personal taste and level of combat. Those who prefer stealth and maximum **mobility**, engage in espionage/Commando style operations or who seldom engage in heavy combat are likely to desire light to medium types of armor (or magic armor). Those who like to display power, evoke awe or fear, **and/or** who frequently engage in combat, such as most *Champion Cyber-Knights*, prefer heavy M.D.C. armor. Likewise, the level of ornamentation — engravings, **insignias**, crests, patches, trim, ribbing, spikes, horns, wings, fins, tassels and similar artistry and imagery — will often reflect the personality and showmanship of the knight.

A **Cyber-Knight's** lean toward particular types of armor is also influenced by **their** knightly background and chosen path.

Courtiers tend to wear medium to heavy plate or plate and banded armor with a classical "medieval knight" styling. Their

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armor is often ornate and regal, frequently accessorized with a fancy helmet, and cape or cloak. However, they can wear any type of armor and some prefer more modern looking armor like the classic Kevin Long illustration in the **RPG** and the armor on page 44 of this book.

Crusaders can wear any type of armor, but the majority seem to lean toward simple, light to medium armor with maximum mobility. About a third wear traditional, ancient crusader-style armor with **surcoat**, chain mail with **vambraces** (forearm and leg plates), or plate and chain armor, or banded metal and chain mail. However, half prefer armor that looks more modern (and is typically full environmental EBA), while keeping the overall look of the traditional "knight." These can look quite fanciful sometimes.

Champions, for the most part, seem to prefer heavy armor, although they can wear any of the types. About half seem to prefer more modern-looking armor (while maintaining an overall "knight" look and feel) while the other half prefer the plate armor look of the "traditional" knight in shining armor.

Blackguards can wear anything from light to heavy, modern to ancient-looking. *Robber Knights* lean toward light and medium armor, *Justiciars* and *Despoilers* tend to lean toward medium and heavy armor with a traditional ancient knight appearance.

Fallen Knights usually stick with whatever type of armor they originated with, although those who have truly forsaken knighthood and wish to conceal their past as a **Cyber-Knight** (about 50%) will choose to wear modern, mass market armor.

Hermits are basically the same as the Fallen Knights except most, about **60%**, prefer light armor and **15%** don't wear any armor at all!

Note: A knight's *mentor* usually provides him with the knight's first suit of armor, which is typically medium or heavy, and fully environmental.

Non-Environmental Armor

This is Mega-Damage armor that may look like virtually any of the armor depicted in this book, but which *lacks* the sophisticated modern electronics and high-tech features of EBA, such as oxygen supply, circulation system, radiation proofing, built-in communications, etc. Most non-environmental armors are old-fashioned, traditional armor as worn by medieval knights or modernized versions of said armor.

Non-environmental armor is common among the poorest **Cyber-Knights** down on their luck, used by knights when nothing else is available, by Cyber-Knight "wannabes" and by the assistants, squires and companions of Cyber-Knights.

Class: Medium to Heavy Non-Environmental Battle Armor.

Size: Human equivalent.

Weight: Medium: 15-18 lbs (6.7 to 8.1 kg); Heavy: 20-25 lbs (9 to 11 kg).

Mobility: Good to fair. Medium: **-15%** to climb, **-20%** to prowl, swim, acrobatics and similar physical skills/performances. Heavy: **-25%** to climb and perform any other listed ability.

M.D.C. by Location:

Head/Helmet — 30 (45 heavy)

Arms — 25 each (30 heavy)

Legs — 30 each (40 heavy)

Main Body — 40 to 50 (60-75 heavy)

Cost: Medium: 28,000-38,000 credits; Heavy: 45,000 to 65,000.

Mega-Damage materials are just plain expensive, and a lot of skill goes into making body armor.

Modern Armor

Standard environmental body armor properties:

- Complete environmental battle armor suitable for use in all hostile environments, including space.
- Computer controlled life support.
- Internal cooling and temperature control.
- Artificial air circulation systems, gas filtration, humidifier.
- Computer controlled, independent oxygen supply and purge system that automatically engages in low oxygen or contaminated air environments. Five hour oxygen supply.
- Insulated, high temperature resistant shielding for up to 300 degrees centigrade (572 F). Normal fires do no damage. Nuclear, plasma and magic fires do full damage.
- Radiation shielded.
- Polarized and light sensitive/adjusting tinted visor.
- Built-in loudspeaker; 80 decibels.
- Directional, short-range radio built into the helmet. Range is 5 miles (8 km).
- Helmet face plate is removable.
- Concealed Wrist **Mini-Comp:** A multi-purpose miniature computer and display that will indicate system errors within the armor, damage levels, and oxygen supply, as well as a directional **compass, time, and date.** Ammo and supply waist belt, shoulder belts, and shoulder holster. Pilots and officers have their choice of shoulder or hip holster.

Special Features

The following are usually available for additional costs.

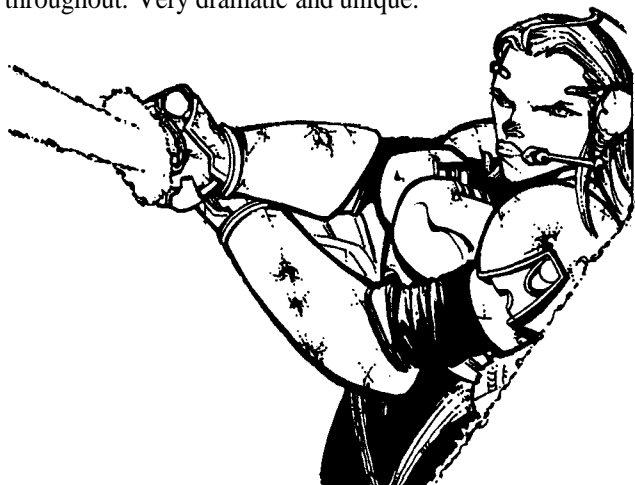
- Built-in language translator, includes English, Euro, **Techno-can**, and a dozen other regional languages (four of which can be programmed by the wearer). Cost: 30,000 credits.
- Oversized Shoulder Plates: Adds 8 M.D.C. to each arm. Cost: **18,000** credits for both shoulders (9000 for one).
- Protective Neck and Shoulder Collar: This raised, padded and armored collar helps to protect the neck and shoulders; adds 8 M.D.C. to main body. Cost: 10,000 credits.
- Additional Main Body Armor: Up to the high range listed for an additional cost of 1000 credits per M.D.C. point. For example: If the M.D.C. listed is 50-60, the basic price is for 50 and the higher price is for 60 M.D.C. or, in this case to get a suit up to the maximum of 60 M.D.C. one must pay an additional 10,000 credits.

This cost may be **10-60%** higher for special ornamentation and artistry. Does not include other special features.

- Forearm Flashlight (1 or 2): Built into the armor above the wrist is a flashlight that can be activated by a tiny wrist button or voice command. Cost: 2000 credits.
- Retractable Vibro-Knife: Does 1D6 M.D.; in some cases this is just a housing that can release and store the weapon, enabling the Cyber-Knight to completely remove it. May be

substituted with a Laser Wand or Scalpel (1 M.D. plus S.D.C. damage). Cost: 6000 credits.

- **Optical Enhancement Systems:** Basically the equivalent in function and cost to Optics listed under *Equipment* (page 245 of the *Rifts® RPG*), plus 6000 to 8000 credits to "build into" the armor. May include goggles and eyepieces (that are worn over the eye) that include telescopic vision, passive or infrared **nightvision**, targeting sight, **thermo-imaging**, and multi-optic band.
- **Polarized/Tinted Goggles/Face-Plate:** Typically a polarizing tint that automatically darkens depending on the level of light to prevent glare (**just like tint changing sunglasses**). Cost: 600 credits.
- **Ornamentation and Frills:** Plain: No extra cost. Moderate Frills: 15% the cost of the armor; just an insignia and a few bits of trim, spikes or etching. Ornate: A noticeable level of artistry and extras that cost 30-50% of the overall armor. High-Art: 80-100% the cost of the armor; super-fancy and ornate with etched scroll work, etchings, trim and frills throughout. Very dramatic and unique.



Light Cyber-Knight Armor

Examples of this type of armor can be found here and on page 99. Typically a combination of padding and ceramic or plastic plating (similar to the Plastic Man). May look modern or retro.

Class: Light Cyber-Knight Environmental Battle Armor.

Size: Human equivalent.

Weight: 8-10 pounds (3.6 to 4.5 kg).

Mobility: Good to excellent; no penalty to climb or prowl, -5% to swim or do acrobatics, and similar physical skills/performances.

M.D.C. by Location:

Head/Helmet — 35	Legs — 30 each
Arms — 20 each	Main Body — 25-35

Average Cost: 25,000-30,000 credits.

Modern-Looking Medium Cyber-Knight Composite Plate

Typically a combination of M.D.C. materials and padding. Plating is used to cover the chest, shoulders, forearms, thighs and lower legs with lighter, flexible material for the rest of the body. Examples of this type of armor can be found on pages 35,



42, 48, 52, and 82 (Sir Rigeld for a more traditional look). Plus helmet.

Class: Medium Environmental Battle Armor.

Size: Human equivalent.

Weight: 11-15 pounds (5 to 6.7 kg).

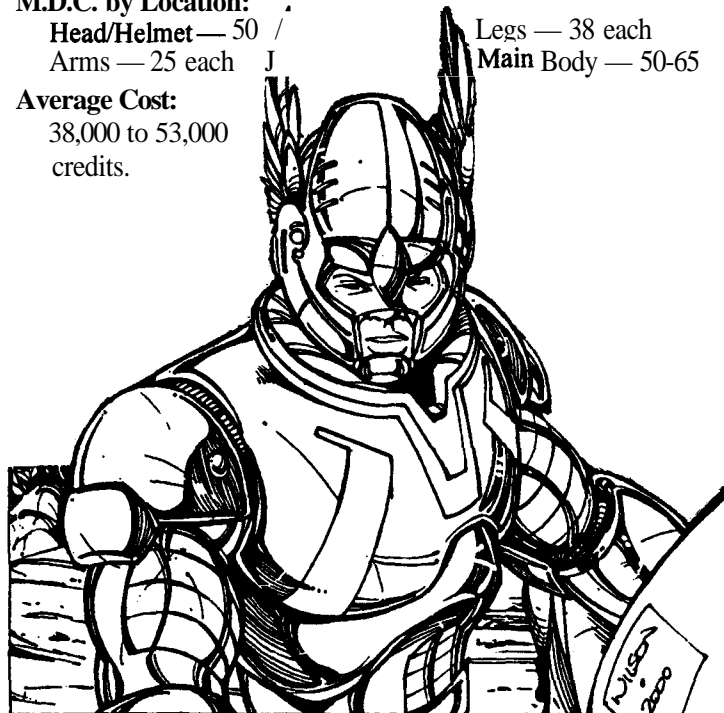
Mobility: Very good for **Cyber-Knights**, Juicers or Crazies (double penalties for normal people); -5% to climb and prowl, but -10% swim, do acrobatics and similar physical skills/performances.

M.D.C. by Location:

Head/Helmet — 50	Legs — 38 each
Arms — 25 each	Main Body — 50-65

Average Cost:

38,000 to 53,000 credits.



Traditional-Looking Heavy Cyber-Knight Plate & Banded Metal

This armor resembles the classic knight in shining armor with some modern accents and features. Examples of this type of armor can be found on the cover and pages 3, 8, 50, 74 (Lord Coake), 101 and 105.

Class: Heavy Cyber-Knight Environmental Battle Armor.

Size: Human equivalent.

Weight: 16-20 pounds (7.2 to 9 kg).

Mobility: Fair for **Cyber-Knights**; -10% to climb, -20% to prowl, swim, acrobatics and similar physical skills/performances (double penalties for normal people).

M.D.C. by Location:

Head/Helmet — 50

Arms — 35 each

Legs — 55 each

Main Body — **90-120**

Average Cost: 60,000-90,000 credits.

Modern-Looking Heavy Cyber-Knight Composite Plate

Examples of this type of armor can be found on pages 1, 10, 12, 19, 24, 44, 55, 60, 64, 87 and elsewhere.

Class: Heavy Cyber-Knight Environmental Battle Armor.

Size: Human equivalent.

Weight: 15-18 pounds (6.7 to 8.1 kg).

Mobility: Fair to good for Cyber-Knights; -10% to climb, -15% to prowl, swim, acrobatics and similar physical skills/performances (double penalties for normal people).

M.D.C. by Location:

Head/Helmet — 50

Arms — 35 each

Legs — 50 each

Main Body — **80-100**

Average Cost: 50,000 to 70,000 credits.

Crusader Style

Examples of this type of armor are shown here and also found on pages 90 and 97. Considered a medium to light-heavy armor.

Class: Medium Cyber-Knight Environmental Battle Armor.

Size: Human equivalent.

Weight: 10-14 pounds (4.5 to 6.3 kg).

Mobility: Good to excellent; no penalty to climb or prowl, but -10% to swim or do acrobatics and similar physical skills.

M.D.C. by Location:

Head/Helmet — 40

Arms — 30 each

Legs — 38 each

Main Body — 45-55

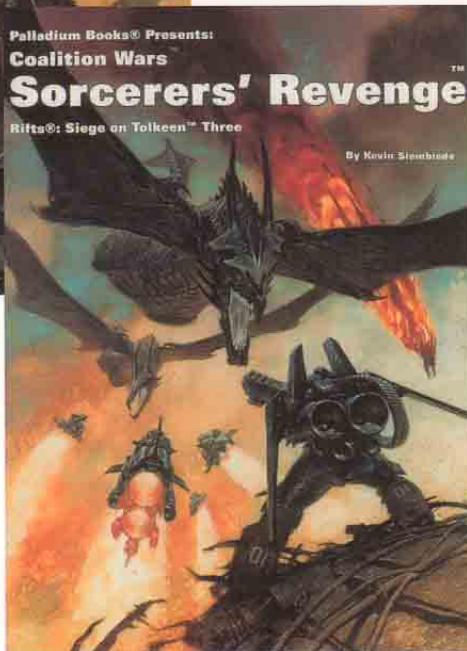
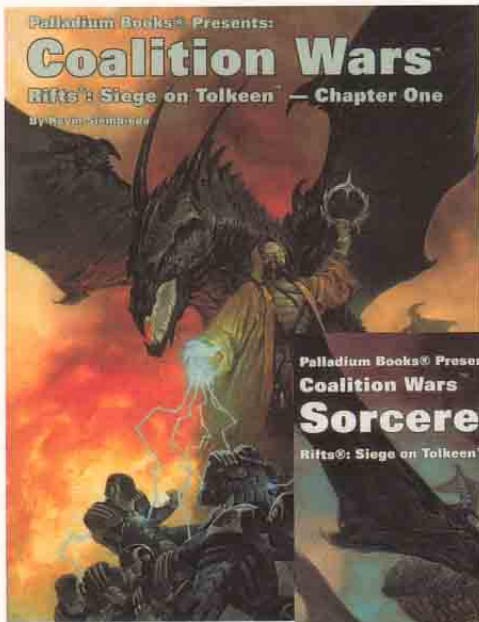
Average Cost: 40,000-50,000 credits.

Techno-Wizard Body Armor

This is special magically enchanted and empowered armor and costs upwards of 150,000 credits. The most common features of TW Cyber-Knight armor include: Tech-Environmental capabilities and construction elements, *Breathe Without Air* (magic environmental feature), *TW Magical Silence* (costs 90,000 credits; doesn't jingle, click or creak; no prowl penalty due to noise), *TW Magically Lightweight* (costs 60,000 credits and erases any penalties the suit might otherwise have); costs listed are in addition to the basic cost of the armor and any additional TW features. See page 93 of the **Rifts® RPG** or see **Coalition Wars™ Six** for TW features that can be placed on body armor. Limited to a total **of four** for body armor.

Note: Many experienced and famous Cyber-Knights have TW armor, often presented as a gift or sold at half the normal price.





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