

Xenopocalypse

The Second Supplement for The Cursed RPG



Cursed RPG Supplement 2, Public version 1

The Cursed RPG written and game designed by Michael Evans 2007-2010

Official Site: <http://thecursedrpg.angelfire.com/>

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Chapter 1

Introduction

It all began on TV, three years ago. An ugly, reptilian thing appeared on all the channels, demanding that the Earth submit to his rule. Claimed to have an 'Unstoppable Army, Unbeatable Space Force' with which to exterminate any resistance. Most people thought that it was a practical joke of some kind, or an advert for some new film. Then the invasion started.

Monstrous reptiles descended on the land, calling themselves 'Alpha-Draconians'. I heard that they were seen all over the world, and massive ships taking up station in orbit as well, but I saw plenty enough for myself. The military responded, of course. Can't abide invaders, even if they are aliens. I gather that they were no match for the alien technology that their foes brought to bear, but that they managed to exact a heavy toll none-the-less.

Organised military resistance broke down within a month; but their commanders had been smarter than that. They still outnumbered the aliens so they went underground, harassing the aliens, who tried to take it out on the civilians. There were not enough Alpha-Draconians to truly control the population, none of whom were particularly accommodating. The aliens did not seem to be expecting such resistance, so confident were they in their own superiority, and they began to attack major population centres as well. 'Course, we weren't going to stand for that; and thanks to the resistances, guns were becoming a lot more common. Seems every house had a loaded weapon on hand, and every time an alien burst in someone tried to shoot it. They're huge, tough beasts; mark my words, but bullets still hurt them.

Resistance seemed, as the aliens had promised, hopeless. Many ran away from home, fearing to give the aliens such an obvious target, but others chose to defend their lands against passing hostilities, fleeing only from the concentrated assaults the Alpha-Draconians were forced to employ against larger cities. No one yielded, and the more brutal the aliens got, the less pliant the human population became. Rumours began to spread of other aliens interfering with the invasion, of remarkable weapons and healing, but these aliens seemed few and far between. There were these things that looked like Angels and Devils who seemed to be engaged in a massive war of their own, and occasionally someone else got caught in the crossfire. There were tales of humans who turned out to be aliens after they left, of squat grey things that could give the reptilian things a literal headache as well as a figurative one, and weird orange things that couldn't outfight a damp paper bag. At least, they were the most common stories, but the invaders were plenty enough aliens to be worrying about, thank you very much. Then, about seven weeks after the invasion of the Alpha-Draconians, things got really weird.

Another force announced itself on the scene as a staunch opponent of the Alpha-Draconians: The Illuminati. They spread the word across the globe with amazing speed, claiming that magic was real (and since aliens are, why not magic too?) and offering both magical and mundane support, training, and items to all but the invaders themselves. With their magical gifts, they soon established a secure open market where such things could be found; they offered their aid quite freely to any who would use them to resist the invasion, and other things began to step out of the shadows. Werewolves, witches, vampires, psychics and stranger things made themselves known. Instead of hiding among us and quietly resisting destruction, they fought openly alongside us. Friendlier aliens also made more of a public appearance, offering assurances that all was not lost. Some people chose to accept evacuation to Mars, though few stayed there for long. A pleasant enough place, apparently, but it was rather boring, and certainly no Earth. With magic so freely available, it was only a matter of time before the rest of us began to pick up a few supernatural symptoms.

The Old World is dead. The Alpha-Draconians have seen to that. But their invasion has stalled and, despite the loss of the official governing bodies, a new world is rising from the ashes of the old. It is still our planet.

They can't have it.

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Welcome to Xenocalypse, a supplement and world book for The Cursed RPG. This book has been inspired by all those 'alien invasion' scenarios that have filled our literature since H. G. Wells wrote the *War of the Worlds*, and seeks to encourage the deathless tenacity that invariably sustains the heroes of such sagas. So far this supplement has yet to be play tested. I hope to change that, but if anyone out there gets a chance to try it out, please, **please, please, PLEASE** send some feed back to thecursedrpg@gmail.com.

The basic premise of Xenocalypse is fairly simple – three years ago, an army of Alpha-Draconians descended upon the planet Earth. They tried to intimidate the human inhabitants into handing it over, and then tried to take it by force. Despite the destruction of much of the infrastructure upon which modern civilisation depends, the majority of the human population refused to bend; and, together with the Cursed, they even conspired to strike back. Neither brute force nor prolonged attrition on the part of the Alpha-Draconians sufficed to overcome the human resistance.

Players of Xenocalypse can choose to take an active part in that resistance, taking the fight to the invaders and disrupting their evil plots. Alternatively, you can play the part of common (and not so common) civilians stubbornly attempting to live out their lives with some semblance of normality. The possibilities are limited only by the extent of your imagination and, if your characters can endure the horrors of the Xenocalypse, who knows where they could end up.

Suggested Reading

The War of the Worlds: Obviously. This is the quintessential alien invasion scenario. Though if the Alpha-Draconians really could be killed by colds, they would all be dead by now. The film, though, is rubbish.

The Aubrey Stalking Portal: Though not a work of Science Fiction, this tale does tell of the struggle of a seemingly weak force, defending their island home against invasion with the aid of supernatural talents. Very much in the spirit, if not the world, of Xenocalypse.

Dr. Who: This Time Lord spends much of his time besting the forces of far 'superior' (or at least numerous) aliens with simple and bizarre devices, often improvised out of the highly mundane items he finds around him.

Mutant Future: Whilst mutants are not exactly Cursed, this RPG is about individuals with strange powers, who are attempting to survive in a post-apocalyptic wasteland littered with the potent remnants of high technology. It even has strange and hostile creatures.

Alien and Predator: Whilst not books that you could read, the Aliens in these films do highlight one of the more gruesome means that the Alpha-Draconians could potentially use to gain control (or at least break the humans' spirit). Predator, on the other hand, clearly has the heart of an Alpha-Draconian, even though he lacks the size.

About this Book

This book is broken into three chapters. They are:

Chapter 1: The Introduction

This is where I introduce the book. This section is very basic, and you have almost finished it.

Chapter 2: The Player's Section

This is where all of the information the players need to know goes. Remember, GMs, that you are players as well!

Chapter 3: The GM's Section

This is where all the information that only the GM should know goes.

This section is for GM eyes only!!!

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Water dripped from the stalactites as I set the finishing touches to my trap. A series of explosions would vent a veritable wall of shrapnel towards whoever set it off, firing the victim from the mouth of the cave like grapeshot from a cannon. The wires would ensure that the lethal shower would persist for a few seconds, and I centred the explosive spell most carefully. It would not do for an intruder to set it off early, only to find himself merely clipped by the blast.

Finally content with my preparations, right down to the escape route at the back of the cave, I set off to hook an alien to catch in my trap. I settled on my broomstick, pointed the head out of the cave, and flew off to find a likely looking squad of reptilian horrors to snare in my delicate little trap. Forget playing about with enough explosives to level a skyscraper. This was the dangerous part of my little game.

I patrolled the region for a full hour before I found them. Five twenty-foot tall monsters, probably scouting the region for an attack. I got their attention with a blazing arrow, and then led them on a merry dance. As dangerous as it is, I actually quite enjoy flying rings around the arrogant invaders. Laser blasts lanced towards me, though none struck me. None that I noticed, anyway.

They probably thought that they had me on the run. They probably thought that they had managed to chase me all the way back to my hideout, when I flew in through the mouth of that cave. They probably thought they could win the glory of destroying a Human stronghold and returning with the spoils. As I flew through the portal into my real residence, I heard the aliens landing at the mouth of the cave.

I did not see the explosion, though it must have been a sight to behold.

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Chapter 2

The Player's Information

In this chapter is the information that the players should know when they start playing Xenopocalypse, this second supplement for the Cursed RPG. This chapter will contain the basic background information for the setting, changes to classes, changes to any other rules the player needs to know. All players (including the GM) should at least browse through this chapter.

A SIMPLE TIMELINE

15TH NOVEMBER 2015:

THE ALPHA-DRACONIANS ARRIVE. THEIR LEADER MAKES HIS DEMANDS IN A TELEVISED BROADCAST. MOST PEOPLE TREAT IT AS A JOKE.

16TH NOVEMBER 2015:

THE ALIENS INVADE ALL MAJOR LAND MASSES SIMULTANEOUSLY. THE DEFENDING ARMIES TAKE HORRIFIC CASUALTIES OVER THE FOLLOWING MONTH, BUT ARE ABLE TO RESPOND IN KIND WHILST BUYING SUFFICIENT TIME FOR UNDERGROUND RESISTANCE TO DEVELOP.

15TH DECEMBER 2015:

THE TORKEP ESTABLISH A REFUGEE COLONY ON MARS, THOUGH IT TAKES THEM MANY MONTHS TO ESTABLISH LINES OF HUMANITARIAN AID TO EARTH. THE ALPHA-DRACONIANS IGNORE THEM AS THE TORKEP ARE 'NO THREAT'.

20TH DECEMBER 2015:

THE ALPHA-DRACONIAN LEADER DECLARES HIMSELF UNDISPUTED RULER OF EARTH. THE PEOPLE OF EARTH IGNORE HIM.

22ND DECEMBER 2015:

FRUSTRATED BY THE REFUSAL OF HIS OPPONENTS TO YIELD TO HIS MIGHT, THE ALPHA-DRACONIAN LEADER DIRECTS TERROR ATTACKS AGAINST THE CIVILIAN POPULACE. THE ALIENS' CASUALTIES EXCEED EXPECTATIONS.

25TH DECEMBER 2015:

IN DEFIANCE OF AN ALPHA-DRACONIAN PROCLAMATION, CHRISTMAS IS WIDELY CELEBRATED AROUND THE WORLD. EVEN REGIONS THAT HAD PREVIOUSLY IGNORED THE HOLIDAY JOIN IN.

26TH DECEMBER 2015:

OUTRAGED, THE ALPHA-DRACONIAN LEADER ORDERS HIS WARRIORS TO LAY WASTE TO THE LARGEST CITY ON EACH CONTINENT. THE POPULATIONS, HOWEVER, HAVE ALREADY FLED; LEAVING THEIR CITIES DEFENDED BY INGENIOUS BOOBY TRAPS.

29TH DECEMBER 2015:

WITH INSUFFICIENT FORCES TO MASS OVERWHELMING POWER AT MORE THAN A FEW LOCATIONS, AND SMALLER FORCES VULNERABLE TO HUMAN ATTACKS, THE ALPHA-DRACONIANS' PROGRESS IS SLOWED TO A CRAWL.

3RD JANUARY 2016:

THE ILLUMINATI ANNOUNCE THEIR PRESENCE TO THE WORLD, TRANSMITTING A VARIETY OF MESSAGES OVER A WIDE RANGE OF MEDIA AND DOING ALL THEY CAN TO FACILITATE CONTACT WITH THE PEOPLE.

13TH JANUARY 2016:

THE ILLUMINATI INAUGURATE THEIR 'LUMINOUS MARKET'. LITTLE IS FREE, BUT PLENTY IS CHEAP AND THE ILLUMINATI BUY AS WELL AS SELL. NO COMPETITOR TO THE GOBLIN

MARKET, THEY OFFER FREE GUIDANCE TO FINDING THE LATTER ESTABLISHMENT. THE TORKEP ALSO USE THE LUMINOUS MARKET TO PROVIDE A VARIETY HUMANITARIAN AID WITHOUT GETTING CAUGHT IN THE CROSSFIRE. THEY ALSO OFFER EMIGRATION TO MARS. FEW TAKE THEM UP ON THIS OFFER.

15TH JANUARY 2016:

THE CURSED ARE NOW OPEN MEMBERS OF MOST COMMUNITIES AROUND THE GLOBE, GUIDING THE INTEGRATION OF VAMPIRES, WHERE-CREATURES AND STRANGER MYSTERIES WITH THE RESISTANCE.

18TH JANUARY 2016:

LESSER ALCHEMICAL SECRETS, DIVORCED FROM THE ALCHEMISTS CODE, BEGIN TO SPREAD THROUGH THE LUMINOUS MARKET LIKE WILDFIRE.

20TH JANUARY 2016:

OTHER ALIENS ARE SEEN OPENLY AROUND THE GLOBE, ASSISTING THE HUMANS BUT NOT FACING THE ALPHA DRACONIANS OPENLY. 'NORDIC' ALIENS ARE THE MOST FRIENDLY, AND THE GREY INTERVENE IN SEVERAL MINOR SKIRMISHES, BUT NEVER GREATLY. ALMOST AS IF THEY ARE ONLY INTERESTED IN STUDYING THE COMBATANTS (THOUGH THEY ARE NEVER SEEN TO LET THE ALPHA-DRACONIANS WIN).

15TH FEBRUARY 2016:

THE WIDESPREAD SUCCESS OF THE LUMINOUS MARKET LEADS TO A SURGE IN THE NUMBERS OF ITEM SORCERERS AROUND THE WORLD.

25TH FEBRUARY 2016:

UNABLE TO BREAK HUMAN MORALE, AND HAVING DIFFICULTY ESTABLISHING SECURE SUPPLY LINES, THE ALPHA-DRACONIANS DIG IN FOR A PROLONGED CONFLICT, ESTABLISHING A SECURE BASE IN ANTARCTICA.

LATE 2018:

THE SETTING OF THIS SUPPLEMENT.

Why Invade Now?

There are many theories as to why the Alpha-Draconian invasion has finally fallen upon the world. After three years of Alpha-Draconian 'rule' everyone is thoroughly aware that these aliens claim that the Earth is their home planet, and that they have a long and distinguished record of planetary conquests to their name, but why have they taken this long to reclaim their own planet?

It's not their planet

Some people believe that the Alpha-Draconians claim any planet by default, but don't really care about Earth more than any other planet. This conflicts with the Alpha-Draconian's version of events, which most adherents of this belief attribute to self-important bluster.

Government Treachery

It was inevitable that someone would seek to blame those (formerly) in power. These people claim that the governments of the world had arrangements with the Alpha-Draconians that precluded an invasion – until the humans reneged on their side of the bargain. Others claim that this or that person in power actually invited the aliens in, seeking to derive greater personal power from the invasion, and was justly destroyed for betraying his species.

They were scared

The Alpha-Draconians claim to be the most superior race in the universe, as proved by their extensive populations of successfully conquered beings, but some theorise that some Alpha-Draconians recognised that the population of Earth was capable of giving them a run for their

money. Such a struggle would dent their racial pride, and cripple the self-esteem of those involved, a dire fate for any Alpha-Draconian.

Alien Interference

Some people believe the rumours of the Alpha-Draconians suffering from the interference of other alien races which, for their own inscrutable purposes, either wish us well or the Alpha-Draconians ill. The presence and support of such aliens during the present crisis lends some support to this theory.

Divine Intervention

If aliens can do it, then why not gods? Some people hold to the belief that their deity (or pantheon, as applicable) has withdrawn his divine protection as punishment for our sins. Once we become pure once more, therefore, he will re-extend his benevolent protection, driving the alien scourge screaming from our planet.

Extra-dimensional Horrors

Some assert that the Alpha-Draconians actually come from another Universe, where they evolved on a parallel version of Earth, and are disconcerted by *this* Earth which, whilst clearly their home planet, is also noticeably not. Ignoring the paradox was easier than dealing with it, until enough time had passed for the Alpha-Draconian race (or merely a rebellious subset thereof) to forget what their own Earth looked like.

Ultimately no-one knows why the Alpha-Draconians have chosen this moment to invade, or why they have failed to cement their grip of the Earth. The surviving natives are agreed, however, that the invaders can have the planet "Over our dead bodies!" or not at all.

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The readouts looked calm, peaceful even, but outside the heated base a snowstorm blustered across the continent. Visual scans revealed nothing – a white-out. Other scans cut strait through the snow to reveal – nothing. The lookout post covered the entire continent, yet there was nothing to reveal but snow and ice. Apart from the penguins, but that was the concern of the catering core.

"I want some action," grumbled one of the lizards. Military discipline kept his eyes focused on the screen, but he saw nothing.

"Be careful what you wish for, trooper," replied the post's commander, "Command is always in need of spare fodder,"

"Sir, I see something," interrupted another trooper, "Small metallic object approaching at Mach 1,"

"Show me," the commander replied, and the main screen lit up in blank white.

"We cannot see it through the snow," the trooper added, unnecessarily.

"Get me a wireframe scan," the commander snapped, and his troopers rushed to obey. The screen changed to display the outlines of a long thin shaft, tipped with wickedly barbed point.

"It's a spear," the commander commented, "an archaic human weapon,"

"No threat there then," grumbled the first trooper, staring at his white-out.

"Have it tagged for destruction, trooper," the commander ordered, "I want that thing shot down NOW! And display it's position on the screen,"

The screen changed to display a map of the Antarctic continent, with a rapidly moving red dot that denoted the spear. The base's lasers tracked the target, firing intermittent bursts through the snow, but there was little hope of the hitting such a tiny target at that range. The dot on the screen got closer and closer, approaching the base far faster than could be considered reasonable for such a primitive implement. The troopers manning the lookout post focused much of their attention on it, but the commander reminded them of their duty and they returned to scanning the continent for intruders.

“Sir,” one of the troopers broke the silence when the object was almost upon them, “the snow is thinning, and I think I have a visual.”

“Show me,” the commander replied, and the screen changed back to the white-out again. This time, however, it looked more like static – the white flickered – and the viewers could just about make out shapes in the white, “Highlight target,” ordered the commander, and a glowing red shape appeared on the screen. It jinked through the failing blizzard, gracefully dodging the laser blasts as it made it's final approach. The spear soared towards the Alpha-Draconian base at tremendous speed, before abruptly diving upon a complex of towers. The red glow faded as the spear erupted in a cascade of glowing acid, all but obliterating three laser turrets. As the Alpha-Draconians watched, the acid continued to eat away at the wreckage. Alarms began blaring throughout the base as command attempted to contain the damage, and the lookout post's commander turned to face his troopers.

“Is that enough action for you?”

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Changes in Classes

A lot has changed since the Alpha-Draconians landed. Magic has become much more widely accepted, and broadly used. Creatures that once stalked the nightmares of humanity have stood up to become heroes of humanity. Even some of the spells that the Cursed have used since time immemorial react differently in the changing environment. It should come as no surprise that the Cursed themselves have changed. This section details the changes or additions to the rules defining various classes of Cursed, including two new classes.

Human Hero

Some were strong to begin with. Others learned to be strong. Either way, no-one survives three years of alien invasion, without the benefit of supernatural power, unless they're good. While humans may not be capable of reaching the same physical and mental limits as The Cursed, nor have the powers over reality that The Cursed utilise, they tend to be more capable with skills and more rounded.

To determine the base stats for a normal Human Hero roll 1D6+1 for each stat. Alternatively, roll 5D6 + 5 and distribute the points between the five base stats. Secondary stats are derived the normal way. Human Heroes get skill points equal to the sum of the his base stats divided by 2 then add 35. Humans can get the Zombie spell and Summon spell like skills, but they must have at least 1 rank in the Magic skill to do this. Humans get 20 freebie points and can have up to 5 points in penalties. Human Heroes can get any bonus or penalty available to all Cursed characters (not the ones that can only be gotten by specific classes), whether that bonus or penalty are supernatural or not. With your GM's permission, they can also become full Alchemists and bear the Alchemist Mark.

Shaman

Shamans have not been greatly affected by the recent upheaval. With the many deaths inflicted by the Alpha-Draconians, they have become a little more common; as many spirits seek to redress the balance by granting the aliens' victims the power to strike back. The role of the shaman has also taken on greater import: with the physical representations of many spirits being destroyed by the invaders, such spirits have greater need than ever to communicate with the material world. With members of the Cursed community gaining open acceptance around the world, however, the Shamans' former role as a spiritual guide has regained it's former prominence. To reflect this, Shaman characters may ignore the -1 to their Social stat that their permanent Ban gives them, but *only* when interacting with members of a community where they are known and respected as a Shamanic practitioner. Such individuals are expected to be eccentric, though they never fully

welcomed into the most intimate social circles.

With the widespread success of the Luminous Market, and the guidance of desperate spirits, there are also certain rituals that have become far more common across the world over the last three years.

Mystic

Mystics live in tune with nature. When nature calls out, the Mystic hears, and when nature screams in agony, that scream resonates in the Mystic's mind. The sensations that a Mystic receives from the '*A Friendly Chat*' class feature have been less than pleasant of late, making your average mystic a most dire enemy of the invaders. Most have learnt some powerful curses and battle spells, though some few have instead chosen to focus on aiding those who fight.

Mystics have learned to channel the pain of Nature into spells against those who cause it. If a Mystic casts an offensive spell within one hour of receiving an unpleasant message from nature, he counts the environmental bonus as being one higher. Should he attempt to cast a benign spell in this time frame, however, he counts the environmental bonus as being one less. The GM may rule that some spells, being neither particularly benign or malign, are unaffected, and that some spells change aspect based on circumstance (i.e. blessing a rifle so that it will hit that b***** hard, as opposed to blessing your buddy so that he pulls through). At the GM's option, other Cursed with the '*When Nature Calls*' Bonus can learn to do this as well.

Psychic

With so many psychic aliens running around, not to mention the pervasive influence of the Luminous Market, finding Psychic tutors has actually gotten a little easier. Psychics have also become a little more common, as the technology to create one, however unpleasantly, is also available through these channels, if a little costly. Apart from access to the new feats, powers and items listed later, however, Psychics have been little affected by the Invasion.

Sorcerer

Sorcerers *love* the Luminous Market. It allows them easy access to the secrets of the world. Spells that would once have had to have been extracted from ancient tomes via laborious research can now be purchased for a pittance, and that pittance can be earned by selling to the market! Of course, most Sorcerers do not approve of sharing their hard-earned power, but most are more than willing to donate a few cantrips. Also, sorcerous orders tend to have more magical items than they know what to do with, as many Sorcerers spend much time enchanting such items. While trading such items on the Luminous Market can bring the Sorcerers more power, it also allows those Sorcerers to 'do their bit' in defending the planet (increasing the likelihood of their surviving the invasion) without directly exposing themselves to the aliens' aggression (reducing the chance of them dyeing in the invasion).

However, thanks to the Luminous Market, magical secrets are now more freely available to everyone; making it easier than ever to become a Sorcerer. Those Sorcerous organisations controlled by the Illuminati have been instructed to make their secrets more freely available – if someone wishes to learn the power to fight the invaders, less than exemplary intellect is no excuse for denying them. Therefore, the requirement that a prospective Sorcerer have an unmodified Mind stat of 4 before undergoing the initiation ritual (and thus gaining Sorcerous power) has been waived. The deepest secrets are still reserved for the most worthy, however, so Sorcerers without an unmodified Mind stat of at least 4 will not gain the benefit that all other Sorcerers get when learning new spells, that of the test being 1 difficulty level easier. The Orders of Sorcery bloat their lowest ranks with disposable 'assets', which serve the order with their new-found power in return.

The biggest change, however, is the rise in the numbers of Item Sorcerers (variant class, detailed below) around the globe. With magical items and instruction so freely available, a surge in the numbers of Item Sorcerers was inevitable:

Item Sorcerers

Not all Sorcerers have spent their lives studying ancient texts and locked away in hidden libraries. Not all Sorcerers gained their powers from centuries old ceremonies. Some have stumbled upon their power through luck, or misfortune, depending on how one looks at it.

Item Sorcerers are ordinary people who have stumbled on magical items and somehow figured out how to use it. The first item is rare, but than the would be Item Sorcerer must find more magical items. With enough magical items, the Item Sorcerer becomes one of the Cursed.

It tends to be treasure hunters, archeologists, museum curators, and thieves that become Item Sorcerers. They are not the only people who become Item Sorcerers however: a person who walks into a pawn shop and picks up a guitar that had absorbed someone's soul could become one, as could someone who was digging around his crazy uncle's attic, sorting out the uncle's things after the funeral. Sometimes an Item Sorcerer is made on purpose, with someone giving the individual magical items and explaining how to use them. The ranks of the Item Sorcerer tend to be extremely varied.

Becoming an Item Sorcerer

An Item Sorcerer was an ordinary person who stumbled upon a magical item. Seeing how common magical items are, that is not unusual: nearly everyone owns at least one or two magical items. The unusual part is that the would-be Item Sorcerer must learn how to activate the item, though these requirements have gotten a rather easier to meet since the inception of the Luminous Market.

As rare as that is, however, there is more to becoming an Item Sorcerer. He must get a hold of at least *five* magic items and use each of them at least a *dozen* times over the course of a single month. The energies of activating and using so many items fills the individual with mystical powers. After the person becomes an Item Sorcerer, he must have at least one magic item in his possession to use his powers, including the powers of simply being one of the Cursed. If the Item Sorcerer has no magic items and falls prey to a transformation into one of the undead, except for one of the rare few undead that the Cursed can normally become, he loses his Cursed abilities completely and permanently, even if he subsequently gains a magic item.

Conversely, if he is devoid of magic items, he can undergo the transformation into another type of Cursed (one of those types that mundane humans can be made into); at which point he immediately and permanently loses all benefits gained from being an Item Sorcerer, though he may keep any abilities that may be acquired by his new class, including generic Cursed abilities such as stats above 8. Some Item Sorcerers, upon becoming one of the Cursed and having their eyes opened to that world, seek to become the type of Cursed that they are best disposed towards; though most find themselves quite content with their lot.

Item Sorcerer Penalties

While it is not as demanding to become an Item Sorcerer as it is to become a regular Sorcerer (the Mind stat of 5 is not required) it is still a rather unusual set of circumstances that leads to the creation of a new Item Sorcerer. To become an Item Sorcerer the person needs to gain and learn to use at least five different magic items, and he must use each of them at least a dozen times within

the space of a single month. He also loses his powers if he has no magic items on him. If he gets another magic item he gains back his powers, unless he was somehow transformed while not carrying a magic item. Item Sorcerers tend to become obsessed with magic items. Also the Item Sorcerer does not get points for spells since he cannot cast any spells on his own.

Item Sorcerer Bonuses

1) An Eye for the Finer Things

An Item Sorcerer has a strong bond with magical items: it is these items that give him his power. An Item Sorcerer can recognize a magic item on sight, unless it was made to hide its aura, in which case he gets a chance to recognize it for what it is. The GM makes a Riddles check for him with a difficulty level of Average. If he gets it then he knows that the object is magical.

2) A Walking Manuel

An Item Sorcerer knows much about magical items. He develop a bond with them. With a successful Riddles check at a difficulty level of Average the Item Sorcerer can determine what a magical item does. If there is a trigger the roll tells the Item Sorcerer what that trigger is. The Item Sorcerer also gets +5 on concentration checks when trying to activate an item.

3) Making it on My Own

An Item Sorcerer can open objects up to the potential of holding magic. This power works much like Enchant Object spell, except it cannot be used on an object twice to create a magic eater. Otherwise it is exactly the same. He starts with 5 ranks in this power and can buy more later with starting points or XP. He can also purchase 'variants' for this power, just like the normal variants for the Enchant Object spell, except that he can also learn the variants from magical items using the Educational Toys Bonus below.

4) Saving That for Later

When the Item Sorcerer has an item that is ready to contain a spell and is near (seven metres (about 21 feet)) a spell being cast than the Item Sorcerer can force the spell into the item. This requires a Magic skill check with the target number being the roll to cast the spell.

5) Educational Toys

An Item Sorcerer can learn powers from magical items. Any power in a magical item can be learned by the Item Sorcerer with a month of studying the item and a successful Magic skill check. The Item Sorcerer cannot use the power himself but can put it into other items. Learning the power costs as much as learning a spell, but the item serves as the trainer. In order to use this Bonus, the Item Sorcerer must have at least 10 ranks in magic.

6) Building a Better You

Since Item Sorcerers don't get spells, they do get 10 extra free points at character creation.

Item Sorcerer's Opinion of the Other Cursed

Shamans - They deal with things more ancient than earth. They know old secrets. That is not what concerns me; what does, however, are the items they create. Their fetishes are fascinating. I can learn so much from them.

Mystics - They are wise in the ways of magic and know more than they should. The problem with the mystics is that they trust to much in what they can do and dismiss what they can create all to often.

Psychics - A few neat tricks, but ultimately useless to me. I want to understand the nature of magic by studying the artifacts we can create, but Psychics do not create any artifacts. It is like they are a burst of flame with nothing to consume. Brilliant, powerful, but leave no trace behind.

Sorcerers - Hooded figures that meet in dark places. They are shrouded in mystery and people say we are connected somehow, though I don't see it. They do, however, usually have great store houses of ancient and 'lost' magical artifacts. Make friends with them and perhaps they will let you into their vaults.

Summoners - They say Summoners are pure evil. I don't know about that; sure there is something creepy about them, but they make the most interesting items. Honestly, I couldn't care less if they have high tea with Lucifer himself every Sunday, I'll be a friend of a Summoner if he will let me study some of those items he can make.

The Blessed - Not only are they useless in my research, they try to lock away some of the most powerful artifacts. They are a menace.

Changelings - These guys are weird. We may be different from the average person, but at least we are still human which may be more than I can say about these guys. You can see it in their eyes.

Summoner

The Luminous Market has created quite a demand for magical items, and Summoners are quite adept at fulfilling that demand. True, Summoner Talismans may carry unpleasant side effects, but a good Summoner will warn you if that is the case, so the side-effects can be worked around. Unlike older artefacts, with powers and penalties unknown. This has led to greater degree of acceptance for the Summoners, though most still feel distinctly uneasy around them. They are welcome *in* the group, though it remains rare for them to truly become *part* of the group. For their part, most Summoners are already used to existing on the fringes of social gatherings, and so do not resent the minor ostracism.

With the success of the Luminous Market, and Summoners being such important part of that success, Summoners have also commonly gained access to some of the new spells and feats listed later. They are also a few more of them now, like every other class of 'trained' Cursed, as they offer mundane humans a greater fighting chance. Most seem to prefer to seek training in a more palatable class, however.

As a side note, due to the desperation of the world's natural spirits, Summoners have found it much easier to negotiate with such entities. Whilst the spirits would rather deal with Shamans, under the circumstances they will accept whoever they can get. Even Summoners who do not attempt to negotiate with such beings have noted a distinct drop in the number of cursed Talismans that they have produced when forcing power from such entities.

Blessed

The Blessed have finally found a crusade they can all agree on. Whilst opinions differ among the Blessed, even among Blessed of the same faith, almost every Blessed on the planet opposes the Alpha-Draconian invasion and can give several sound reasons why. The few exceptions are those that worship dark gods who appreciate wanton destruction. They are *extremely* rare, as most dark gods at least want something left for them to rule.

Most Blessed these days can temper their fanaticism with reality – they cannot save the souls of

their comrades in arms if the Alpha-Draconians kill everyone first. They tend to view any human as having a shot at redemption, according to their personal mythos, and while they do act as spiritual leaders they do not attempt to prevent their people from taking up Cursed power. After all, if it was the devil's gift, surely God would have warned them by now? As a result, their inherent prejudices have mellowed slightly, or at least been tempered with a slightly more accommodating prejudice. Either that, or the Blessed have been blinded by a far more pressing prejudice. Regardless, they are no longer quite so anti-Cursed as they once were.

Finally, unless your Blessed worships the Alpha-Draconians, the alien invaders automatically count as unbelievers who actively blaspheme against the Blessed's religion. Therefore, the Blessed find it hard to bless them and easy to draw down God's wrath upon them.

Changeling

Changelings have been largely unaffected by the Invasion of the Alpha-Draconians. Infants are no more likely to wander through to the Spirit World than before, and the Fey and Demons steal people away without regard for the aliens infecting the world. Their presence has been made public knowledge, they have the power to defend themselves better than the average mortal, and the Luminous Market has given most access to new spells; but their essential nature remains unchanged.

Spirit Stolen Changelings, like the spirits themselves, are quite opposed to the invaders. Most had been shocked to discover how disconnected the human world was from the spirit world; the Invasion showed them how much worse it could be. Fey Stolen Changelings also tend to be angered by the Alpha-Draconians interfering with their games. True, they are a little more resilient than human toys; but they don't want to play, which thoroughly ruins the appeal. As for the Demon Stolen, they enjoy making the Alpha-Draconians suffer as much as they enjoy making anyone suffer; and as far as they are concerned, this world is already claimed. Like most Cursed, Changelings tend to resist the Invasion.

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The Gilded Artificer lay in the rubble. In the street below vicious reptiles prowled, warily scanning the shadows for traps. Most humans had left the city months before, leaving an assortment of well improvised booby-traps behind to guard the ruins. A few, like the Gilded Artificer, still lurked in the rubble; by choice, habit, or lack of an alternative, and they too left traps in their wake for the reptiles. It was fast becoming the cities primary art form.

"Got something," the leading lizard uttered, "Metal sheet over a hole."

"Sewers," one replied.

"Wrong size, too thin." answered the first.

"Pitfall?" asked another.

"Thought they'd given up." said another.

"Take the lid off, see what it is," commanded the second voice. Must belong to the squad leader, the Artificer realised. There was a clumping of boots on tarmac, a groaning of protesting metal, and he even thought (because he was listening for it) that he could make out the faint click of his mechanism.

The sound was drowned out by the dull roar of an explosion. Risking a glimpse over the rubble he could see that the explosions had scattered the shrapnel and ignited the petroleum, just as he had intended. The Alpha-Draconian squad, though injured and spotted with flames, had survived the trap – they were extremely tough, something to do with being 20 foot tall pseudo-dragons. They were roaring in pain, however, which gave the Gilded Artificer time to do something about them. Selecting a certain wand from a pocket in his greatcoat, he focused his soul upon it's power.

The orb sailed gently through the air to shatter in the centre of the squad, releasing a tidal wave of

water. The reptilian creatures were driven back by the deluge, which erupted in explosive gouts where it touched the flames. One of the squad went down, gurgling as the brine flooded his lungs, whilst the others were dashed to the ground. Ducking back behind his rubble, the Gilded Artificer heard an unwelcome assertion:

“It came from up there!”

No sooner said than laser beams sliced through the rubble shielding his refuge, punching through fallen brickwork and floor supports alike. He threw himself flat as the lasers made short work of his temporary refuge, and hurled another soaking orb over his shoulders. During the brief lull, the Gilded Artificer pocketed the wand and drew his sidearm – an old flintlock that he had rescued from the ruins of a museum shortly after the aliens arrived. It was crude but effective, and only fools had the nerve to travel unarmed these days. He had barely readied his weapon when the shadow fell on him – a dripping, sodden alien appeared outside the wall, reaching for the ragged gash rent into the bricks and panting with the effort of flying four stories straight up.

The Gilded Artificer discharged his pistol, knocking the beast out of the sky, and began to reload in a panic. He could never hold off the whole squad by himself. What would happen when the rest flew up here? Seeking an escape, he paused in the act of ramming his charge when he heard a strange sound: the unmistakable, sickly sweet sizzle of flying Hellfire.

Help had arrived.

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Changes to Magic

The art of magic has changed since the Alpha-Draconians landed. Magic has become more accessible and far more accepted, and this has precipitated a change in the way some magic works. Most importantly, humans no longer count as mundane witnesses, as specified in some spells. Where a spell is affected by mundane witnesses, mundane humans now fit into the same category as mundane animals. As an example, a human who sees a homunculus does not cause the spell to fail, and teleporting Mystics are perfectly able to appear out of thin air in front of human witnesses. Nobody knows why this is the case, though some theorise that the increased levels of magic in use across the globe are beginning to rub off on the 'mundane' population, and others think that all humans have some magical power (as proven by their ability to create spontaneous magical items). When that mystical power has no other outlet, the human's subconscious focuses it against the supernatural power behind effects he believes cannot happen – and now that humans are much more accepting, they don't. Of course, these are merely theories; most don't care *why* humans don't mess up their spells any more, only that it makes them less of a liability.

It is also more difficult to learn new spells, rituals and psychic powers in the middle of a war zone. Regular practice is hard to come by, and most of the survivors are at least semi-nomadic, always ready to move on. As a result, your character must pass a Concentration check, with a difficulty determined by your GM (based on how disrupted your life has been over the past month), before attempting to learn a new power. Failure indicates that you have absorbed enough information to try again later (if learning from a trainer, for example, you have learned the theory and may put it to practice as soon as you pass your Concentration check: there is no need to find a new trainer), success indicates that you may attempt to learn the power normally. The normal rules, and consequences, apply to learning the power. Developing new spells has also gotten a little more difficult, as it is harder to find sufficient stretches of uninterrupted time to do so, however this is more of a role-playing consideration.

Ancient Magics

The single biggest change wrought on Cursed society in decades is the resurgence of many old, and nearly forgotten, magics. This is mostly due to the Luminous Market making extensive training available to all, though some suspect that the Luminous Market is a symptom, rather than a cause.

Either way, the following rituals, spells, psychic powers and variants thereof are now considered 'common'. Others spells may also be more or less available at your GM's discretion.

Ward Spell Variant

An old version of the Ward spell allows one to conjure a ward against specific creatures (such as undead, fey, The Cursed, human). This is not a spell, though the caster must learn to ward against each type of creature individually. In order for a mage to learn these versions of the Ward spell he must first have at least 10 ranks in the Ward spell. Each type of specific Ward cost 1 XP to learn. You can learn animals, which covers all mundane animals and mystical beasts (like unicorns, jackalope, griffins, and other such legendary yet ordinary creatures) as one creature. Other species must be learned individually.

This version of the spell uses the ranks the mage has in the Ward spell (minus 5 as he is casting a ward against a specific race). The spell basically makes a member of the race overlook the area being warded. Even if a member of the race the area has a compelling reason to be in the area he will find reasons more compelling to him not to go there. This type version of the Ward spell lasts for one day plus one day per degree of success, or until the mystic writ is damaged. This spell has been used with some success against the Alpha-Draconians, though it does not prevent them from shooting the mystic writ.

Enchant Object Variations

The variations given in the main rulebook were merely those most commonly used in the quiet world. Under the demands of war, the following variations of the Enchant Object spell have begun circulating more widely:

Bound - The magic in an item is bound to a specific person. The magic will work for no one but that person. If lost or stolen, the item will find its way back to the person it is bound to. The item can be willed to someone else so that it will be bound to the new owner after the current owner is dead. To do this while the current owner is alive, both must allow themselves to bleed on the item (must do at least one hurt point to get blood). This must be done willingly by both parties. If this is done and the current owner changes his mind and wants to will the item to another, he must do a day long ritual to reverse the spilling of the blood. A roll of Challenging is needed for the ritual. The ritual is known to all who know this variation. If the current owner dies before willing the item to someone then it will belong to the next person to willingly bleed on the item (doing at least 1 hurt point to draw the blood). (+2 degrees of success)

Magical Tattoos - With this variation the mage can create a magical ink and can enchant tattoos made with the ink to be magical items. The ink costs about \$100 to make one application. In order to activate the tattoo, the person with the tattoo must touch the tattoo while doing the Concentration check or do the Concentration check at 3 degrees of difficulty higher to activate the tattoo. If a spell requires mystic writ, the writ must be included in the tattoo. (No change, separate Enchant Object check of Challenging to make the ink)

Security - This is similar to the Trigger Only variation except that if someone tries to activate the item anyway other than with the trigger the Trap spell goes off. The trap does 1 point of damage for a successful casting of Enchant Object spell (with all the variations added in) plus 1 point of damage per degree of success. The explosion happens in a ten foot area from the device plus two feet per degree of success. The trap does not harm the item itself. The trap reloads instantly and will continue to go off as soon as another failed attempt is made to activate the item. Neither the Trigger Only variation or Trap spell is needed to know this variation. (+2 degrees of success)

Better Quality Merchandise – Normally magical items get an extra 5 hit points. With this variation

the item gains an extra 5 hit point on top of the 5 extra hit points it gets for becoming a magical item. This variation can be added multiple times, each time adding an extra 5 hit points. (+2 degrees of success)

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A sniper stands in the shadows.

He stands tall and proud, well concealed in the dark, peering through the scope of his rifle. A marvellous scope, this, it reveals the figures of three Alpha-Draconian warriors marching through the terrain. One carries a bulky box, with which he scanned their surroundings, and the sniper's finger tightens on his trigger.

The Aliens start at the sound, finding themselves unharmed as the bullet vents blazing phosphorus into the box. They turn to the source of the shot and advance, murder in their eyes and the box, forgotten.

The sniper smiles as he touches the cape tattooed on his hand. Then, he vanishes.

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Shaman Rituals

The following rituals are now in common usage across the world, gifted by spirits to Shamans as part of their contribution to the planet's fight for survival; other rituals have been known and practised for millennia by small groups who have only recently been forced into contact with the wider world.

Prayer of Healing (Challenging)

With this ritual the Shaman can take damage from a target, while suffering some of it himself. This ritual heals one point of damage plus one point of damage for every degree of success. The Shaman receives 1/3 the damage healed to the target (round up, the shaman always takes at least one point of damage).

Tongues of the World (Challenging)

Shamans are meant to be a means of communication between the spirit world and the physical world. This means that the Shaman must be able to communicate with the people around him, and this ritual allows the Shaman to communicate with anyone. When the ritual is finished the Shaman can understand all languages he hears and everyone who hears him understands the language he is speaking. This ritual does not effect the Shaman's ability (or more precisely, inability) to read languages.

Meeting at the Crossroads (Average)

This ritual was originally developed by vodoun priests. This spell is similar to the Summoning spell except rather than forcing a supernatural creature to go to the caster, it simply offers a polite invitation. This ritual is cast throughout the day or evening before the meeting. The target knows that he is being called and can decide whether or not to go, the caster will know if the creature accepts.

If the target accepts the invitation the two will meet at a specific crossroads, chosen by the Shaman. The spell will bring the target, but the shaman must find his own way there. The meeting starts at true midnight (the time exactly between dusk and dawn). During the meeting the Shaman and the target can not harm each other, but anyone else who comes to the meeting is fair game for either side. Once the meeting is over the target goes back to where he came from beforehand.

Shape Shift (Challenging)

This ritual allows the Shaman to take on the form, or certain aspects, of animals. The Shaman needs

bones, fur or feathers from the desired animal (a handful is enough). The ritual asks the spirit of the animal to bestow some of his power to the Shaman. The Shaman can either take the full form of the animal in question or change parts of his body to get some bonuses. In the full form of the animal the Shaman has all the abilities of the animal. With parts of him transformed, the Shaman gets bonuses related to that part of the animal (hands to dog paws hurt supernatural, dog's mouth instead of human to bark and frighten off supernatural, cat's feet for stealth and grace, e.t.c.). A Shaman can only shape shift into one animal at a time but could have multiple aspects of the same animal. If he wants multiple aspects of the same animal it requires multiple casting of this ritual, one aspect per casting.

Spells for Other Magical Cursed

The following spells are now in common usage across the world, mostly due to the efforts of the Luminous Market. Finding a teacher for these spells is a simple matter in the default setting, Mystics can learn them from magic, and you may select them during character creation.

Burn Away the Taint (Challenging)

This is a spell created by the Beautiful People which will get rid of a target's points in Taint the hard way. It burns the Taint away, allowing the victims to trade the spiritual scars of Taint for the transitory scars of pain.

The caster of the spell must touch the target. If the spell is successful and the target has points of Taint then the spell burns one point of Taint away for five points of damage to the target plus it will burn away one point of Taint for five point of damage to the target for every degree of success, up to the total amount of Taint a target has.

If the target has two points of Taint and the caster got four degrees of success then the target only takes ten points of damage since he has only two points. If a summoner is the target of the spell he can get the Untainted merit, or the fire leaves a scar and he still has a point of Taint to burn off.

Battle Magic (Challenging)

This is magic created specifically for fighting. There are five types of battle magic, each must be learned separately. Each type looks slightly different and have different side effects, but all work basically the same way. The mage calls up the primal essence of an element dependant on the type of battle magic he is using. A ball of said element then forms, floating above the mage's hand. The mage then throws this tiny, hard ball sized sphere at the target (Projectile, Thrown is always used for this). The damage is then calculated normally: the forces that form the element into a ball create a seal that deals damage when the target is struck, and then releases the elemental power within. If the ball misses the target it hits something close by, determined by the GM, which becomes the target for the purpose of the battle magic description. Damage is calculated normally, each different type of battle magic having a different damage rating, just like a weapon. Each type of battle magic also has a different side-effect. The five types are acid, electricity, fire, water, wind.

The acid battle magic takes the form of an orb of yellow or green liquid, to be thrown at the target doing a base damage of 2 points. When the acid strikes the target, it will splash on any surrounding objects or creatures (creatures and objects able to dodge get a dodge roll against the roll the attacker made to hit the target), within approximately two metres (about six feet eight inches) plus an additional two metres per degree of success on the attack roll. The acid will continue to do 2 points of damage, plus 1 point of damage per degree of success on the battle magic roll, per turn for the ensuing 3 turns plus 1 further turn per degree of success of the initial battle magic spell, unless washed off.

The electrical battle magic looks like one of those electric orbs that will make a person's hair stand on end when it is touched. In fact, when summoning this battle magic the caster's hair will stand on end. It does a base of 3 points of damage. When the electricity strikes the target, the target must make a Health check (if the target is susceptible to electrical damage) of $\frac{1}{2}$ Health stat plus D20 roll plus any applicable bonus versus being stunned at a difficulty level of Average. The target gets a -2 to this roll for every degree of success made on the battle magic roll. If the target passes, nothing happens, if the target fails, he is incapacitated for 2 rounds plus one 1 round for every degree of failure the Health check was failed by. While incapacitated, the target falls to the ground and can not do anything, except breath (unless this is hindered in some other way). This electricity is magical and can not be grounded in any mundane fashion, though it can be dispelled.

The fire battle magic creates an orb of red flame which does a base of 3 points of damage when thrown at the target. When the fire strikes the target, it will also ignite any flammable material and heat up any metal. The damage inflicted by heated metal is 1 point per turn, and this effect lasts for 4 turns plus one turn per degree of success of the battle magic, though the damage can be averted by casting the metal aside earlier. The damage inflicted by flammable materials catching fire is the same as a torch, 2 points of damage per turn of exposure, and the materials suffer a similar degree of damage.

The water battle magic looks like a sphere of swirling water. It does a base of 2 points of damage. When the water strikes the target, everything within a metre (about three feet four inches) plus one further metre per degree of success, is soaked. If the target is struck from the front, he must make a Health check, half Health stat plus D20 roll, with a -2 penalty for every degree of success on the battle magic spell. If the roll was passed then nothing happened, if the roll failed, then the character suffers 2 points of damage as the water floods his lungs. If the character failed the first roll, on his next turn he gets to try again. If he passes, he stops drowning. If he fails, he suffers another 2 points of damage and can do nothing else for that turn. The rolls continue until either the roll is passed or the character dies.

The wind battle magic looks like a cloud trapped in a soap bubble. It does a base of 2 points of damage when the wind strikes the target, and it will possibly knock everything over within about a metre and a half (about five feet) plus another metre and a half per degree of success in the battle magic spell. Everything within this range gets to attempt a Body check, which is $\frac{1}{2}$ Body stat plus D20 roll and any applicable bonuses, with a difficulty level of Average. There is a -2 to the roll for every degree of success in the battle magic. If the roll is passed then nothing really happens (other than that which made the roll had to brace itself against the wind), but if it fails then whatever failed the roll is knocked prone and must spend his next turn picking itself up (if he can).

Create Dimensional Pocket (Average)

note Summoners can cast this spell. When used with the Enchant Object Spell, each enchanted object is attuned to a specific pocket Dimension (size determined at initial casting) and can only link to (or manipulate) that realm. The object will never link to the caster's (or bearer's) dimensional pocket.

This spell creates a relatively safe area out of the void of the Darkness. The pocket dimension is usually in the non-sentient part of the Darkness, and most do not know where the pocket dimension exists. Those that do, and can communicate with the Darkness, can choose to set up their pocket dimension so that it is where the Darkness is sentient.

The first time a mage successfully casts the spell it creates a pocket dimension, ten feet by ten feet by ten feet (one thousand cubic feet) in size on a success and an additional ten feet by ten feet by ten feet for each degree of success. The dimension contains only a standard, earth-like atmosphere

(hospitable to the caster) which is maintained by the 'walls' of the realm. The dimension can be made larger by the original caster if he casts this spell again inside the pocket dimension. In order to do this the spell check of the second or subsequent Create Dimensional Pocket spell must have enough successes to create a pocket dimension bigger than the existing one. Increase the size of the dimension to match the size indicated by the new casting attempt. If the caster attempts to increase the size of the dimensional pocket and the spell fails or gets too few degrees of success to increase the realm's size, nothing happens: the dimension only increases in size or stays the same, it will not get smaller.

The creator of a pocket dimension can also manipulate the dimension by means of this spell. If he casts the spell inside his pocket dimension he can choose to manipulate the interior of the realm by changing its shape. He can only manipulate the inner surface of the realm, and only within the volume defined by the spell check. The caster may attempt to change the shape, though not the size, of the realm in this fashion; he can also create simple objects (such as chairs and tables, or dividing walls) by extruding the substance of the dimension's 'walls' into the space affected. The GM may require an appropriate skill check to create the object accurately, and such creations are limited in that they are physically fused to the outer surface of the realm and cannot be removed. After casting the spell in this fashion, the caster has one minute, plus one additional minute per degree of success, to direct the changes within the specified volume. Alternatively, the caster can bind another spell to the pocket dimension in this fashion, with the 'Create Dimensional Pocket' spell opening the dimension's fabric (within the designated area) to the potential of holding magic (like an Enchant Object spell). This feature is most commonly used with an Illusion to provide light.

This spell not only creates a pocket dimension, but also locks it to the physical universe by creating a door. A door must be locked to a physical portal (a door frame, a window frame, two crossing trees, a cave entrance, a hole in the wall large enough to crawl through, e.t.c.) in our world. A certain condition must be met to activate the door. The condition could be anything from a simple, almost unnoticeable action to a huge spectacle, to a specific thought in mind. If the condition is met as a person walks through the door they go to the pocket dimension. After the first time a mage casts this spell, every time he casts it again outside the pocket dimension he only connects another door to his dimension.

To stop a door from being a door to a pocket dimension the mage who created it must make a successful Concentration check of Average (the dimension will remain) at the door, or physically destroy that door. If the mage that created the pocket dimension is still in the pocket dimension when the last door to it is physically destroyed then he exits the dimension at the site of the last door, anyone else is trapped until the mage makes a new door.

Regrowth (Hard)

This spell works like the Healing spell, except that it can reattach limbs and it has a higher chance of giving cancer. This spell will heal one hit point plus one hit point per degree of success. It will also cause freshly (within three hours) severed appendages to reattach if the appendage is held wound to wound. If the appendage is held the wrong way to the wound, nothing will happen, but the wound will heal and have to be re-wounded in order to reattach the appendage.

There is a 10% chance plus 10% per degree of success that this spell will cause cancer in the target. The chance does not carry over from casting to casting, so each casting is a fresh 10% chance plus 10% per degree of success.

Shadow Weapon(Average)

note Summoners can cast this spell

This spell enables the caster to conjure a weapon of pure Darkness. As the mage casts the spell he

can shape it into whatever weapon he wishes (in game terms, he may describe it as he wishes and select the combat skill to be used with it). This weapon *must* be a melee weapon, however, and cannot be shot or thrown (as it disappears the moment it leaves the caster's hand). The weapon flows forth from the caster, so cannot be accidentally dropped or knocked from the caster's hand. Opponents must overpower the caster in a grapple before attempting a disarm check, whereas the caster can drop the weapon at any time by succeeding on his Concentration check to dismiss the spell.

Whatever the shape of the weapon, it is magical and has a base damage of 2.

Spring Cleaning (Average)

When a lot of magic is cast in a relatively small area (like a lab) mystical power has a tendency of building up, and strange things start to happen. This spell helps to prevent that from occurring. This spell takes the magical residue and solidifies it in the form of crystals. This spell only works on the magic that builds up from other spells, not naturally lingering magical power. This spell will take a plus one from the area, and another plus one for every two degrees of success up to the maximum amount of extra magic in an area. This spell will not take from existing spell, or any odd occurrences caused by having so much built up magic in an area.

All the pluses are stored in the crystal to be used later. The pluses in the crystal have to be used all at once: they can not be used a little at a time. The mage casting this spell can not lose control of the spell for having too many successes or failures. This spell can drain the excess magic this spell may cause if it has enough degrees of success.

Trap (Challenging)

This spell causes an explosion of magical energy that will harm any one who does an action that meets a certain condition. The spell does one point of damage plus one point of damage per degree of success. The trap can be set to go off if someone sits in a specific seat, opens a specific book, opens a specific door, any condition like that will work for a condition of the spell. The trap lasts until the mage cancels the spell with a successful Concentration check, the trap is triggered, or the trap is undone with the Undo spell. If the trap is set to go off if someone tries to cast Undo on it then the Trap spell goes off first. The mage must also set a condition to get around the trap. Getting around the trap in this way does not nullify the trap.

Psychic Powers

The following psychic powers have become more widely known, over the last three years, partly because there are a number of aliens with potent mental abilities who would love to see the Alpha-Draconians loose (or have, at least, calculated that as a preferential outcome).

Empathy (Average/Challenging)

An empathic psychic feels the emotions of those around him. This happens all the time. The psychic can focus on one target and this is when the Concentration check and power check comes into play. The difficulty for tuning into just one target's emotions is Average and will last for thirty seconds plus thirty seconds per degree of success.

In order to block out the emotions of others the psychic must make a Concentration check and power check at the difficulty level of Challenging. It will block out the emotions of others for one minute plus thirty seconds per degree of success.

An aluminium hat will also block out the emotions of others. The hat must cover as much of the head that would be covered by hair on an ordinary person with a full head of hair.

Intuition (Difficult)

This power will give the psychic one piece of information he should not have about the problem he is thinking of. It could be a name of a person connected to the problem, the location of something important, or just a new direction to look in an investigation. This power can be a double edge sword, if used to much (if it is the only thing relied on in a game) it could turn on the psychic and start filling his head with thousands of facts, relevant or not, which could drive the psychic mad.

Mind Over Matter (Average)

This power lets the psychic satisfy his base needs for water, food, and sleep with the power of his mind. This power will only work on one need per use of power, but all three can be done over the same period of time. On a successful use of this power the psychic will quenched his need for water, food or sleep for five hours plus one hour per degree of success. This is not tricking the body, it is like the psychic had enough to drink, eat or had enough sleep to get by for that long. This will not negate the effects of fatigue or insanity, the psychic will still have to rest for an hour for that.

Psychic Shield (Average)

This power puts up a protective wall around the mind of the psychic. It gives the psychic a +5 to Will checks vs any controlling or mind scanning effect plus + 2 per degree of success that is used against the psychic. It lasts for one minute plus one minute per degree of success. This power will also block out other people's emotions for an empathic psychic.

Psychic Surgery (Challenging)

This power allows the psychic to perform surgery with his bare hands, not even a blade is needed to make an incision. This will also allow internal organs and crippled limbs to repair themselves. The psychic must have either of the two Medical skills at rank 10 to use this power. A Medical skill check is needed following a successful use of this power, with the same results as given for surgery in the Medicine, Modern skill.

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A body lay on the slab, comatose, at the centre of the room. The walls themselves held charts detailing numerous mystical interpretations of the human body, and a few scattered sigils that kept the surgery secure. The doctor stood over the patient as her nurse confirmed that the sedative had taken effect.

The patient was a mess. Multiple scars marred his body, where laser beams had cauterised their wounds, but the real damage was deeper. Physical trauma had inflicted internal bleeding on the patient. Initially little more than a mild scratch, the patient had ignored it as the strain forced the injury wider and wider. Now, few could help him. The doctor only hoped that she was one of those few.

The doctor placed her hands upon the patient's chest whilst the nurse intoned his charms. Focusing her mind, she saw beyond the outer scarring, saw the bleeding gashes within his torso. Reaching in with her hands, she began to suture them shut.

Behind her, the nurse began to pray.

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Magical Items on the Luminous Market

The Luminous Market has spread far more than magical knowledge; it has also distributed a wealth of mundane and magical items. The Market rarely overcharges for these items – only the basic cost of the item itself, and occasionally a small handling fee if the artefact was particularly difficult to acquire and/or transport to the pick-up location. However, it is important to bear in mind that, while the Luminous Market is technically an open market, it operates in a fashion more reminiscent of a black market. Though the Illuminati created the Luminous Market to freely distribute goods to

those who resist the invaders, the Alpha-Draconians don't like that idea, and so have forced the market underground. Thus, 'finding' the Luminous Market is less about knowing where to go than who to ask. A group of people who call themselves the 'Luminous Marketeers' spend most of their time maintaining the underground links that make the Luminous Market effective. They also occasionally set up 'sales' where anyone (apart from the Alpha-Draconians) are welcome, so as to reach a wider audience.

To find a specific magical item on the Luminous Market requires a Socialise skill check of Average. A basic success means that they do not have it now, but there is one in storage, come back next time. Or they put you in touch with someone who wants to sell the item, but you have to meet them and make the arrangements yourself. With even one degree of success, you have found someone with the item in hand. Additional degrees of success mean that the person may be willing to offer a discount – but will likely want something specific in return (the GM decides what). Luminous Marketeers are likely to ask for relatively small tasks that will inconvenience the invaders, or seek to fill the wish-list of another customer by offering the item as trade for another, less valuable, item. They may even offer the item as payment if your character agrees to train someone (possibly the Luminous Marketeer) in anything from a rank in a skill to trainable class (if your character's class can be taught). On the other hand, if the seller is merely using the Luminous Market as a convenient place to offload his goods the price he demands for a discount could be virtually anything, from a bed for the night to an unspecified favour to be returned later. If you decline the offer you can still purchase the item at the normal price.

Selling on the Luminous Market is accomplished in a similar fashion. Failure on the Socialise roll means that you have failed to find a buyer with a reasonable trade available, but can try again later. Luminous Marketeers almost *never* refuse an offer, unless it is genuinely worthless or they cannot afford fair payment. Success means that you find a fair exchange, whilst degrees of success mean that you find someone willing to pay more than the base worth of the item; for a price. Again, the cost could be almost anything (or it could simply mean that they *really* want that item) and you are free to refuse and sell the item at its base cost.

These systems can be combined to work out a system of barter – in fact, the Luminous Market is particularly accommodating of barter, and most who frequent it would rather trade like for like (or I-Want for You-Want) than involve cash. The Luminous Marketeers will still accept (and exchange) currency at its pre-invasion values, but for most people currency is just a useful abstraction – they remember how much things used to be worth, and can use that knowledge to determine whether an offered trade is fair. When bartering, use one Socialise check of Challenging to find someone willing to trade what you want for what you have, with extra degrees of success indicating a particularly favourable deal that will likely have additional conditions attached.

As an alternative to the systems presented above, however, the players should always be permitted role play the exchange in full should they so desire. This may bring many other skills into play, from Double Talk (to persuade a vendor that your offer is more valuable than it really is) to Lore (Luminous Market) (to work out who to sell to). Also, browsing is a common strategy. If you find an item in this fashion, you may attempt a Socialise roll of Challenging to acquire a better deal – but failure does not make the item vanish.

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“Hot spuds, Jackets for sale!”

The stall-tender's cries cut through the smoky atmosphere of the abandoned basement, though he was clearly doing a roaring trade. Hot food was, as always, in high demand; people crowded round his tiny stall as he distributed the potatoes, roast, baked and even mashed. The people returned their gratitude with a multitude of items, though raw potatoes (or so said the sign) were

particularly welcome.

“Pint of water? I'll give yer a scoop of mash fer that. Fresh carp? Little small, you mind taking this one? Dollars? Drat. 1 for each roasted, 5 for baked. Oi! Watch that, lad, it's cursed hot! I don't bake me spuds in a fridge, yer know.”

The young boy who had been poking at the stall ducked his head, embarrassed, and faded into the crowd that filled the room. Much was on offer here, but connections were most important. They could be called in later. The drifting scent of cooking food, however, was enough to draw everyone, sooner or later, to the little stall where a man sold potatoes.

“Get yer spuds here!”

Sitting next to the potato seller sat a woman who was also doing quite well. As the satisfied customers left, hot potatoes in hand, she let her whisper emerge from the shadows.

“And how is your water supply today, sir?”

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Magic Items

These enchanted items have become quite popular over the last three years, and are always in high demand on the Luminous Market. If your character is seeking one of these popular favourites, a base success on the Socialise check means that they have already sold the last of them, but will try to reserve the next one for you (though the waiting list can quickly grow very long). Consequently, anyone who learns to make these items could quickly make himself very popular on the Luminous Market.

Spell Rifle (\$250 + Weapon Cost)

This weapon shoots spells – to be specific, each is enchanted with a particular form of the Battle Magic spell. A concentration check 'charges' the weapon (activating the Battle Magic spell) and pulling the trigger shoots the small sphere from the weapon (use Projectile, Fired rather than Projectile, Thrown for this) at the target. More expensive items may feature more powerful versions of the spell (the above price assumes a basic success) or even multiple types of Battle Magic spells for the firer to choose from (one per barrel is a popular choice). The item may take the form of any projectile weapon, and can be fired as a normal example of it's type if the Battle Magic spell is uncharged. Pulling the trigger whilst the weapon is loaded and charged (mundane cartridge and charged spell) results in the spell exploding in the barrel. Work it out as if the weapon had taken a direct hit from the Battle Magic Spell.

Pitcher of Plentiful Water (\$150)

This item can take the form of any watertight container, and has a single power – it is always full of clean, cool water. If the item is open topped, the water level will typically only come to within an inch of the top. Whilst this might not be much of an advantage when surrounded by the benefits of civilisation, when your water supply is imperilled (such as by an alien invasion) so are you. This item is actually a talisman created by Summoners, requiring the summoning of a particular type of creature. Details of the elemental spirits that can be used to create these talismans are also available on the Luminous Market.

Hellfire Rifle (\$150 + Weapon Cost)

This item is another Summoner Talisman that requires the summoning of a daemon from hell and the *Distort Talisman* Bonus listed later. Most Summoners are wise enough to choose a weak daemon, but the resultant weapons are potent all the same. Any projectile weapon can be enchanted in this fashion. The Talisman channels the freezing fires of hell through the projectile when it is fired, adding three points to the weapon's damage rating. Unfortunately, the projectile suffers two points of damage as a result, almost certainly destroying the projectile and reducing it's damage rating by one, to a minimum of zero. This gives a total net increase of 2 damage points, unless the target is immune to either mundane projectiles or Hellfire. Non-lethal weapons with light

ammunition, such as air rifles and paint-ball guns, are the most commonly enchanted in this fashion: such weapons loose the non-lethal rule and their own damage rating, resulting in a blast of, nearly, pure Hellfire with a base damage rating of three.

Book of Shared Intelligence (\$1500 per book)

These items come in sets. Anyone can record observations and other details in one of these, and the record will instantly be available to all of the books in the set. It requires a Concentration check of average to find a specific report in the book. These items allow spies and scouts to share and file their observations without returning to base, and are also employed by the Luminous Market to track it's stocks of items. Sometimes these books are enchanted with the Improved Use variation, which causes the reports to be presented in excellent handwriting; otherwise the original handwriting is presented.

Mundane Armoury

The desperate survivors will use anything they can, not merely magic, to survive and bloody the metaphorical nose of the invaders. The following items are given as an example, a small selection of the many items used to inconvenience the Alpha-Draconian 'masters' of the planet.

Air Rifle (\$50)

This weapon shoots tiny pellets that inflict little physical damage but are excellent for target practice. As it is possible to carry several hundred pellets in a tin a scant few inches wide, these weapons (and their pellets) are popular targets for a number of enhancing enchantments which can combine to make this humble technology superior to any military rifle.

A typical air rifle has a Damage rating of 5 (a typical air pistol has a Damage rating of 4) and the *Non-Lethal* special rule:

Non-Lethal:

A weapon with the non-lethal rule does not inflict as much damage as a normal weapon of it's type. Calculate damage normally, but then apply that damage as *hurt points* rather than *hit points*.

Light Armour(varies)

Against the might of the Alpha-Draconian weapons there are few, entirely effective, forms of protection. As a result, the past three years have led many to adopt light armours, which blunt rather than absorb incoming attacks.

Light armour has a rating, like conventional armour, which is the number of hit points it can blunt from any single attack. Reduce the number of hit points of damage done by an attack by this number (to a minimum of zero), if light armour is interposed (obviously, if the light armour only covers your torso, it won't do you any good when you get shot in the head), and then apply that number of hurt points to the protected individual. Against Non-lethal attacks – those which inflict hurt points anyway – light armour works in the same fashion as normal armour, allowing the wearer to ignore a number of hurt points equal to it's rating.

Light armour is readily improvised, which partly accounts for it's popularity, but high quality examples will generally sell for \$10 per point of rating.

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Tim settled the padded chest plate over his shoulders, resting it comfortably before he began his work. He held an enchanted staff in hand, and though he did not use it, it's magic flowed through his frame, empowering him.

Tim took a deep breath, and began to sing. Power flowed through his veins. Power flowed through

his nerves. Power flowed through his breath, echoed in his lungs and trembled in his song. Power settled in the padded chest plate, resting comfortably upon it's frame and opening it's substance to the flows of magic.

The timbre of Tim's song changed, then, after the minutes had seen his success. He sang of protection, of defence. He sang of bullets deflected, of threats defused. He sang of foes in vain, of safety granted, and of the armour wrapped around a shielded form. Powerful words, they rang with magic, magic that slid down the paths provided by his power to infuse the very substance of the padding. As Tim's voice rose into a beautiful crescendo, the magic warped and settled, wrapping Tim in the translucent shield of a bulletproof spell.

Satisfied with his result, Tim dismissed the shield (which collapsed back into the padding) before removing the padded chest plate and stowing it in a cardboard crate. The top bore a singular legend: "Tim the Enchanter: Fiery Magic Indeed!"

Below that Tim added a further note: "Padded armour with supplementary shielding. Complete protection NOT guaranteed. It always pays to be careful."

It always pays to be profitable, too.

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Armoury of Super Science

It is not just mundane tools and magical wonders that the human defenders of Earth have deployed in their struggle to inconvenience the Alpha-Draconians. The Illuminati also have access to storehouses of technological treasures, as did several pre-invasion organisations whose ruins have since been plundered. These are the product of cutting edge super-science. Most of it had been developed by a number of corporations prior to the Invasion, who were competing with each other to make the technology practical for mass-production. Of course, the practicalities of the post-invasion world are rather different. With that in mind, the following devices are available to the defenders of Earth.

Psychic Enhancer (\$2000 - \$8000 without power source)

Psychic enhancers raise psychic abilities. They give either +2, +4, +6, or +8 (1D4 times two) to all psychic power checks (not Concentration checks, also does not help with fatigue or madness rolls) and will cost about \$1000 times the bonus it gives (without a source of power). These enhancers usually look like a blue tooth headset for a cell phone (older versions looked like head phones), they need to be worn on the head, preferably near the ear.

While these enhancers are relatively inexpensive they tend to be hard to come by since they were usually only available through high tech powers (military, a handful of secret societies, and large organized crime syndicates), but then again, almost anything can be found on the Luminous Market. They are also hard to power, requiring magically enhanced batteries or micro cold fusion batteries to handle the energy needed to run the enhancers.

Shot of Nanobots (\$500,000)

These microscopic robots will repair the body into which they are injected, and will work to restore that body to the state it should have been in before any major poisoning, drugging or injury. After healing the subject's body, however, they burn themselves out, making this technology a one-shot.

Laser Rifle (\$50,000)

This weapon has a base damage rating of 3, but does not require ammunition. It contains an cold fusion generator that exploits advanced (to human understanding) physics to generate the power that the weapon requires. Theoretically it could run down, but that would take centuries, and it is simple to replace.

However, the generator takes a full minute to produce enough energy for a shot, and the internal

power cell can only store a maximum of 60 shots of power. This limitation has been deliberately built in, as firing the weapon any more frequently would almost certainly result in the weapon overheating and burning out.

A pistol based on the same technology is also available, with a damage rating of 2 and a power cell capable of holding only 30 shots. These weapons generally also incorporate targeting technology that improves the user's Projectile, Fired skill by 1.

Cybernetics

These are basic cybernetic enhancements that are reasonably easy to find on the Luminous Market. These are also the version most player characters will be able to get in the back streets and goblin market (unless you want goblin magitech, which could have worse penalties). At four times the cost it is possible to get, though difficult to find, cybernetics that lack the penalties.

Replacement limbs (\$100,000)

Bonus

Replaces a lost limb. These cybernetic components are designed to replace missing limbs as closely as possible to the limb missing. The new limb looks and feels completely natural and even gives the recipient a sense of feeling, though it is dulled. If the limb is damaged it takes 2 or 3 points of damage for the bearer to actually notice the pain.

Penalty

Since these limbs are meant to be replacements they seem to have very limited penalties as well. The only common flaw is that the sense of feeling is dulled, like touching things through a oven mitt.

Enhanced Hearing (\$50,000)

Bonus

This enhancement allows the recipient to hear up to three times better than a human normally could. Can be turned to normal hearing.

Penalty

Sudden loud noises will cause pain to the recipient. They will be dazed and unable to react for 1D4 turns.

See in Other Spectrums of Light (\$100,000)

Bonus

This enhancement allows the recipient to change the spectrum of light he is looking in (near infra-red, heat sight, e.t.c.).

Penalty

It takes a turn to switch from one spectrum to another, and this leaves the recipient blind for a turn as he changes spectrums.

Skill Slots/ Skill Chips (\$400,000)

Bonus

This implant allows the recipient to insert skill chips which contain skills at certain ranks (1D20 divided by 2, round up, is a good rule of thumb) which the recipient can now use as if he knew it all along.

Penalty

The implanting of the Skill Slot is dangerous. There is a 50% chance of causing brain damage and

memory loss. If this happens, divide the characters Mind stat in half and take away 10 points of skill ranks he had, as well as forgetting most of his past. Skill chips will still work when inserted. Also, Skill Chips will give you a predefined rank in it's skill. If you already possess a higher rank in that skill, therefore, your effective rank will be lowered.

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It was new. It was shiny. It was MINE!

The laser rifle lay on my bed, gleaming in the dull light as I gloated over my new acquisition. It had taken me a year of hard bargaining to acquire, but at last, it was mine!

Slowly I ran my hands over the weapon, revelling in the feel of the smooth metal finish, marvelling at the way the sights automatically aligned themselves, and smiling to think how wonderful it would be with a few well-chosen spells. It was a perfect moment.

So, of course, they had to ruin it.

The sirens were my first warning, old air-raid whines rising into the night's sky amidst horn calls and the shouts of the lookouts. Unfortunately I was on guard duty that night, so I pulled my padding out of the cupboard and armed myself, snatching the laser and checking my guards' bracelet. I slung a backpack, pre-packed with essentials, onto my back and buckled on my sword as a last resort. My old sidearm I had gifted to my nephew, and I sorely felt it's absence now, but there was no time for last regrets. I departed for my post, swiftly passing my family (who ordered me to return alive) and crossing the village in little time.

I took up station manning a machine gun nest with an old friend, who greeted me with a nod as he scanned the bleak horizon with binoculars. The aliens probably thought they'd get the advantage if they attacked at night, our 'primitive technology' not being up to the task of night fighting. It was true that their night-vision gadgets were better, but I could see well enough, and we had a few other tricks up our sleeves.

"Four hundred yards out," my companion whispered as he pointed, "on the ground,"

"Four hundred yards," I replied, letting loose with a trail of bullets. I knew the ground well enough that I did not need to see my targets. I could picture the scene well enough – they'd let themselves be caught in a narrow dip, where the confluence of three hills constrained travel. It was like shooting fish in a barrel at the best of times, and I couldn't help but wonder how they were taking it.

"One down, the rest are airborne," my colleague whispered, and I raised the barrel accordingly.

"Another one dropping, looks like you killed it's wing," he added as an explosion sounded on the other side of the village. Alpha-Draconians had reached the wall there, and were trying to get the upper hand.

"Not long now," I muttered, and my companion shook his head as the machine gun jammed. Again.

"we should get that thing blessed," he commented as I swore, reaching for my new laser. Turning it on the encroaching aliens I got a nasty shock. The scope revealed ten of them, flying in formation strait towards me. The strain in their faces did nothing to make me feel more comfortable about taking them on, so I pulled the trigger.

Hiss, CRACK!

The laser struck my target a powerful blow, cutting into it's wing and forcing it out of the air. The remaining invaders closed formation as I selected a new target and...

Hiss, CRACK!

The laser gouged into the shoulder of the leader who flew on regardless, snarling. It was then that I realised they were close. My new scope wasn't magnifying them.

My comrade's shotgun barked as I looked up, blasting another lizard out of the air as they tried to gain the wall. I fired myself, carving cauterised wounds into my enemies, but I only had so many shots. The snarling leader knocked me over the edge, breaking a couple of bones, but as I lay there I realised that the alarms had faded, and a moment later I received silent confirmation through my bracelet.

They were out.

The scarred leader launched himself from the wall, gliding towards me with the slow malice of a

merciless victor. I smiled at him, and focused my thought upon the guards' bracelet. Whereupon, the thing working, I vanished entirely.

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Changes to Bonuses and Penalties

The Alpha-Draconian Invasion shattered human society, and in the aftermath some Bonuses and Penalties no longer mean the same as they once did. In particular, no-one works a regular, 9-5 job and pulls in a steady wage any more; though most must still devote a portion of each day to the basic task of ensuring they survive to die another day. Rules that grant the character a boost or reduction to their regular income no longer apply (as they have no regular income), though your GM may allow you to take these bonuses to represent particularly strong connections on the Luminous Market (useless if you have nothing to sell, otherwise gain a bonus to all Socialise rolls on the Luminous Market equal to the cost of the bonus); Penalties may likewise represent reasons your character is shunned in the marketplace (perhaps you got caught offering a dodgy deal, or are just plain unsociable), making it difficult to find buyers (or sellers). Other changes are listed below:

Altered Bonuses:

Happy Home Owner(1 point)

Very few people are still paying off old debts from before the Invasion to financial institutions that were destroyed by the Invasion; so having a place to call your own does little to boost your income. Instead, this bonus represents the fact that you possess a relatively secure living space (perhaps in a pocket dimension), to which you can retreat when it all becomes too much. You reduce the difficulty of the Concentration check to learn a new power by one degree – if the check would otherwise be Easy (likely if you remain isolated in your 'secure' haven) you pass it automatically.

Library(3 points)

You need somewhere to store this bonus, such as an enchanted item that acts as a library, an e-reader with space for hundreds of books or the '*Happy Home Owner*' Bonus. If you do not possess one of the above three prerequisites, but do have a Library bonus, you are considered to have a library waiting somewhere. You cannot use it, therefore, until you meet one of the prerequisites; at which point the bonus functions normally.

Parents Know(2 points)

No longer applies. Everyone knows.

More Money(various)

No longer applies. See above.

New Bonuses:

Distort Talisman(2 points, Summoners only)

This Bonus allows Summoners to affect mild changes to the Talismans they can create. At this level, they can alter basic, unspecified details (such as whether the power they put into the Talisman affects the Talisman or its bearer) as determined by the GM. He cannot alter the base power, only its expression. He can also buy variations, as for the Enchant Object spell, for a number of XP equal to the increase in difficulty level + 1 (minimum 1); and then apply these variations to the Talismans he creates. If he chooses to apply a variation to a Talisman it works just like a variant Enchanted Object, and the increases to difficulty levels applies as a penalty to all rolls to create the Talisman (such as the will roll to put power in the item, and the battle of wills to prevent the creature cursing it).

Lesser Alchemy(3 points, requires the skills of Magic and Lore(Alchemy), both at 5 ranks)

Anyone can concoct a basic alchemical formula – it is simply a matter of following the recipe. The Zombie spell is an example of alchemy that has become common outside the field, but most alchemical formulas need to be altered according to the circumstance. This bonus indicates that the bearer has some understanding of the processes of alchemy, which allows him to utilise these more advanced formulas. His understanding is sufficient to allow him to utilise non-specific formulas, some of which are mentioned below, and to manipulate alchemical events to some degree. He must still learn and cast each alchemical formula as a separate 'spell', like the Zombie 'spell', but can attempt more advanced formulae which require a degree of tuning or control. The greatest results of Alchemy are still zealously guarded by the few 'Full' alchemists on the planet, but one with Lesser Alchemy can still change the world with his arts.

Garden(2 points, requires *Happy Home Owner*)

You have a safe place where you grow a few plants. These can be herbs, providing ingredients for uses of the Medicine, Holistic skill, alchemy, spells and similar crafts; vegetables which make feeding oneself easier, perhaps a poultry coop supplying eggs (and a little grain to feed them) or a host of other options. Get creative. Whatever you choose, there should be enough space for several things (depending on size), and you won't have to hunt/forage/search for the things you grow. Which gives you more free time for other stuff.

Cosmetic Improvisation(2 points, spell casters only)

The Alpha-Draconians are attempting to catalogue, and prepare counters to, all of humanities varied supernatural abilities; and with this bonus, you can make it that much harder for them. Before casting a spell you can take a Magic skill check, with a difficulty equal to the spell being attempted, to alter it's appearance. If you fail the Magic check, you may choose whether to attempt the spell (but it manifests unaltered if you do).

You may alter the cosmetic, but not the mechanical, effects of the spell. For instance, you could choose to manifest a Battle Magic spell as a spray of spectral bullets (forged from the elemental energy, but still using Projectile, Thrown) or call down the bolt from the skies above. Similarly, using the teleport spell, you could choose to vanish in a cloud of smoke or a spray of sparks rather than simply disappearing. Any number of cosmetic features can be added or removed, but the spell's actual effects remain unaltered.

New Penalties:

Genetically Tamed(3 points for Psychics, 2 points for everyone else)

The Alpha-Draconians use their knowledge of genetics to keep conquered populations docile, by engineering their genetic structure to eliminate strong wills. This has not worked quite as well on Earth as on previous planets, mostly because the Alpha-Draconians have yet to reach the stage of conquest at which they can actually forcibly apply the procedure to a cowed populace, and partly because the procedure needs to be tailored to the genetic template of a given species to have full effect.

With this penalty, however, your character has been an early 'prototype': the Alpha-Draconians captured you and engineered docility into your DNA, and either let you go or failed to prevent your escape. Though the result has not been proved quite as complete as the invaders' had hoped, your force of will has been substantially weakened – every time you make a roll based on will, you must roll twice and accept the lower roll.

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We sat in our garden, upon a bench under the trellis, and breathed in the clear, cool air. An enchanted portal overhead let the sunlight stream in, illuminating my beloved Moyra casting her

blessing upon our crop.

Sparks trailed from her hands as she invoked blessings upon their fruitful growth, forming images of abundant plant-life as they danced, and spluttered out on the ground. Tinkling laughter echoed as the sparks faded, shaking the plants as the spell took effect. She smiled, and it was a beauty to behold. But then, I thought, Moyra had always been beautiful.

“We will eat, then, My love.” I asserted as her exertions ended, and she laughed. Her laughter echoed within the confines of our safe haven, and I felt uplifted by our good fortune. Here in our safe haven, all manner of wonders seemed possible. At our feet, a glorious garden bloomed, safe from the horrors of the world. At its core a fountain bubbled away – my own contribution, it never ran dry – a gentle background music that never faded. Behind us wooden walls formed a few small rooms – store, workshop and bedroom – cloistered away from the woes of the world.

“We will not starve, My dear, for as long as I am able to tend our little garden here.” she replied as her laughter faded into echoes, “I thank merciful Mother Nature for the one who devised that little working.”

She snuggled into my side, stretching an arm around my back. Of all the people I knew, she was the only one who was not put off by my presence. She had never quailed at the feel of my chilling aura (indeed, she claimed that it felt quite comforting) or flinched at the sight of the scars left by my first little dalliance with hellfire. Of course, Moyra had been there before the scars, before the chilling aura, but so had many others. As she guided me through the steps of grasping some little fragment of the strength that came so easily to her, she had stayed with me. We both knew that there were things that she could do, skills that I would never master despite her patience. Yet when I developed skills forever denied to her, her praise was warm and genuine. In a world of horrors, man had few friends.

All I had, was Moyra.

New Alchemical Formulae

The following Alchemical formulae can be learnt by anyone, even mundane humans, as spells; provided they have at least 1 rank in the Magic skill. Some have the *Lesser Alchemy* Bonus as a prerequisite – these formulae contain ingredients or processes that must be varied according to the circumstance, so a significant degree of alchemical understanding is required (full Alchemists may ignore this prerequisite).

Alchemist Ink (Average)

This formula produces an iridescent liquid that shimmers with colours that change from moment to moment, but are commonly metallic. The precise colour of the liquid at any one moment depends upon a few environmental factors, such as the time, but mostly upon who made it and who is looking at it. This liquid can be used as an ink, to write upon paper or skin with a suitable implement, in which case the person who writes adds a third dimension to the final appearance of the ink. A single success creates enough ink to fill a single sheet of A4 paper with writing, and each degree of success creates enough ink for one further page. If inked upon living skin, the mark is permanent until the one so marked wills it away with a Concentration check of Average.

In addition, a character with the *Lesser Alchemy* Bonus may learn specific tattoos that grant power upon the marked individuals. These cannot simply be copied: they must be drawn in the correct order and require an appropriate Arts check with the difficulty indicated below. Failure creates a simple tattoo as detailed above, success creates a tattoo with the powers indicated. You may attempt to create one empowered tattoo with the ink required to cover an A4 page with writing.

Lesser Alchemist's Mark (Challenging)

The bearer of this tattoo may swear a promise 'on his mark', which causes a distinctive ripple in the

mark (identifiable with a successful *Push the Boundaries* test of Easy; or a Lore (Alchemy) test of Average, if the observer knows what to look for) and binds the bearer to his promise, as if he had cast a Bind to Your Word spell. The consequence of deliberately breaking a promise thus sworn is always the same – the Mark releases a magically tailored poison into the oath breaker's bloodstream, killing him within a week. Other parties to the promise will be aware if the bearer breaks his promise (as in the Bind to Your Word spell) but cannot be bound by the Mark in return. The bearer cannot will away his Mark while it still binds him to any promise, and an attempt to remove it by any other means will count as breaking the promise (releasing the poison). There is no cure or inoculation known that will save the bearer from the poison, it is mystically calibrated to kill the bearer (only) in a week, regardless of any other concerns.

Insight (Challenging)

This tattoo gives a one-time bonus to the use of any skill with Mind as the applicable stat. The inscribed creature wills away the tattoo and he gains a bonus to the next use of an applicable skill, provided that use begins within 1 minute. The bonus gained is equal to one plus one per degree of success in the creation of the tattoo. Only one tattoo can be used at a time (one per skill use), though a person can have as many insight tattoos as can fit on his body.

Love Potion (Average)

This potion makes the imbiber fall in love with the first member of the gender that the imbiber is attracted to. It lasts for a week per degree of success. The power of the love is determined by the amount of successes made while making the potion. Just a success is a mild attraction, two degrees of success makes the imbiber feel it must be true love, five degrees of success creates a dangerous obsession. If the creator of this potion possess the *Lesser Alchemy* Bonus and wishes to limit the power of the potion (set a maximum on the number of degrees of success), he can do so if he makes a Concentration check of Challenging before beginning the process.

Salve of Good Health (Challenging)

This salve works only on external injuries and is useless on internal injuries. This salve must be applied to the wound and heals one point of damage plus one point per degree of success to the wound it is applied to. There is no risk of cancer for the salve.

Lesser Alchemical Formulae

The following formulae can only be made by one with the *Lesser Alchemy* Bonus, and full alchemists.

Cure-all Potion (Challenging)

This potion cures ailments such as colds, fevers, up to pneumonia. It can also alleviate chronic ailments such as arthritis for a week plus one week per degree of success. This potion must be made for a specific person and requires a drop of his blood to make.

Fire-Water (Challenging)

This potion grants the imbiber the ability to spout fire like a dragon. At any point in the next hour, the imbiber can choose to spout flame with a simple exhalation. The fire bursts into existence about an inch from the user's lips, and projects a sheet of flame about 5 feet (1.5 metres) long that does four points of damage to those caught in it. Flammable objects then catch fire, taking 3 points of damage per turn (anything in contact with them likewise takes three points of damage a turn) until manually extinguished. The user can spout fire once, plus an additional number of times equal to the degrees of success the alchemist got when making the potion. If, after one hour has passed, the imbiber still has uses left, the fire explodes from within; inflicting a number of hit points of damage (protection short of complete immunity to fire does not apply) equal to the number of unused fire blasts remaining.

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A maze of glassware bubbled and burbled, interesting colours sliding along tubes and glowing with fluorescent vibrance. In front of the maze, however, stood a chalkboard that blocked most of the view. The pungent aroma that drifted past the board towards the class did not originate from the tutor standing next to the board, as some students had suggested, but stemmed instead from the fact that alchemy is a pungent profession.

That is to say, you cannot do it without raising a stink.

A row of plain wooden desks sat in front of the blackboard, and seven prospective apprentices sat in them. There had been ten, but three of them could not be bothered to complete the training and had left without even a basic recipe to show for it.

The remaining seven could claim more than that, at least.

“Well done, my students,” the teacher spoke to them quietly, so they had to pay attention to hear anything from him, “Your samples of balm pass the test, they are alchemically active, and they heal as required. Not the most potent healing in the world today, but more than adequate for new apprentices. If you would turn to the board, however; I have prepared the recipe for another potion you may find useful.”

Most of the students opened their books, preparing to copy the formula as the tutor explained it in plain English. Though he was a master of alchemy, the very secrets he had learned prevented him from passing them on in their preferred format. Or at all, in some cases.

One student spoke up instead.

“Why, sir? I thought you were to be teaching us alchemy, not formulas for lining your pockets.”

Silence descended, punctuated by the burbling of the master's apparatus, as that master turned to the speaker.

“It is true that, contrary to popular belief, Alchemists' pockets are always in need of lining.” he said, “But it is not my pockets that I am thinking of. You will need some service that allows for basic subsistence before you can practice anything else. You must also possess knowledge of multiple formulas before I can show you the underlying principles that are common to alchemical processes, the links that form a recipe. It is far faster to work from your own knowledge in this fashion, than to attempt to impose alchemical theory first, and then turn it into a working potion.

You do not have the time to waste, young one, so I suggest you focus on the formula before you, and leave the theory to later. Once you are ready to understand the lesser alchemical secrets, I shall not hold them back from you. I shall not restrain you from proving your worth of the mark, and shall not hesitate to induct you into the deepest depths of alchemy once you prove ready.”

Chastised, the class turned to the board once more, and their tutor began to teach them to the accompaniment of his gurgling glassware.

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Human Strongholds

Some of you may be wondering by this point where all the humans are hiding. What does a typical human base look like, and how can it hold off the aliens? There is no one single answer to this question – your characters can settle anywhere they might wish. Amongst the survivors, however, there are three popular choices. Some choose to become nomadic, always on the move, often using some form of portable shelter (anything from a covered hummock to an enchanted caravan). Others prefer a semi-nomadic lifestyle, moving frequently between more permanent accommodations to stay one step ahead of the Alpha-Draconians. Such accommodations are usually based on pre-invasion structures, fortified to resist the aggression of a casual interloper and slow down an invader, and possessing several secure escape routes. Semi-nomadic survivors usually keep portable shelters for use when moving between locations, and often team up with others to maintain such shelters. There are also those who (possessing the *Happy Home Owner Bonus*) manage to maintain a permanent home. These are usually hidden – in parallel dimensions, behind spells of various types

or simply underground – so that the invaders cannot easily find them, though some may simply be so well defended that the Alpha-Draconians do not dare attack. Yet.

The large human cities have all been largely abandoned, due to Alpha-Draconian attacks, but some semi-nomadic communities have fortified their cities and move regularly *within* those cities (large cities covering hundreds of square miles). Other, smaller communities have survived better, though the inhabitants must be ready to flee at any time. Some villages and hamlets (some pre-dating the invasion, some newer) have formed into groups – when one is attacked, the population scatters amongst the others (with the defences of each building, and the village as a whole, slowing the attackers long enough for the humans to get away). That way there is usually one empty at any one time, though the inhabitants move regularly between them. Over the past 3 years, however, pocket dimensions have become extremely popular, and by using Gate spells (or enchanting the pocket dimensions with the Create Dimensional Pocket spell) it is possible to link several such dimensional pockets together – creating a city of separate pockets. Not everyone can cast the spell, however, so magic items enchanted with the Create Dimensional Pocket spell have become very popular. Pocket realms are not Earth, however, and if everyone retreated into them, that would mean giving the planet up to the invaders, which few approve of. There are not, therefore, many human strongholds – which is why the Alpha-Draconians have had such trouble destroying the centres of resistance. The resistance is greatly, and deliberately, decentralised.

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The Towers were burning. The walls were ragged and ripped. The tunnels had been blocked, all 12 of them, and death flew towards the bedraggled survivors on reptilian wings.

“We must surrender,” begged one of the survivors. In a former age, his robes would probably have suggested wealth and power, though now they were as ragged as the rubble surrounding him.

“If we give ourselves up, they may be merciful,”

“No,”

From the shadows of a ruined ally a stranger emerged. All of the survivors felt the cruel emanations from the man, wrapped in a black leather greatcoat. His eyes, under the brim of his pointed hat, glimmered with unseen flames, much like the putrid green that twisted from the top of his ebony staff. The overall effect was somewhat nauseating.

“They do not accept surrender as readily as they might. You will find it difficult to communicate your desire to do so before they kill you. Even then, they are most likely to destroy you anyway, and that will be the greatest mercy you can expect. They need slaves to maintain what passes for an economy amongst their kind, to do the tasks that they would not stoop to attempt themselves, and they drive those slaves mercilessly. Once they have stolen your will to resist, they will work you to death by the most expedient means possible. There can be no understanding that way, only torment and death.”

Silence covered the group as the stranger glared, and the enemy glided ever closer. He stabbed an accusing finger at the timid man.

“Seek that fate if you wish, but do not drag the rest of us down with you. I am here to fight, and if my fate is sealed, then at least I might claim a death of my own choice, not the callous whim of some alien overseer.”

The survivor dressed in the ragged remnants of power and wealth looked for support amongst his fellows and, finding none, staggered off to beg the attackers for mercy. As they toyed with him, the dark stranger turned to the remainder.

“Prepare yourselves, those that can. If you've any spells, any weapons, anything at all, prepare them. May this be your finest hour, a glorious last stand worthy of the greatest of songs, whether any survive to sing them or not. The prospects are bleak: these foul beings have spread darkness across the galaxy – they're practised at it – but they cannot pollute your hearts unless you freely hand them over.”

*The ragged band had formed up by now, weapons pointed in every direction and the valuable (but vulnerable) casters protected in the centre. As the first shots were exchanged, the dark stranger was heard to voice his cry:
“For Death or Glory!”*

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Chapter 3

The GM's Section

This chapter will contain the extra information that GM's will need to know. It will include the details on what really caused the Illuminati intervention, what the Alpha-Draconians are up to and additional (all be it very basic) information the players should not be aware of. The background information is kept basic so that the GM can fiddle with the setting as much as they wish. If any of the background details from the earlier chapters do not fit with the game you wish to run, then change it but *TELL YOUR PLAYERS!* If, on the other hand, you wish to meddle with the background presented in this chapter, feel free to keep it to yourself and, if your players have read this bit and go on to make decisions based on false information, more fool them for forgetting the most important thing about this chapter: that ***This is for the GM's eyes only!!!***

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An orb of blue and green, shrouded in white, hung in space. A copy hung over the projector, around which several grey beings worked. They trawled the depths of their knowledge and databases, they ran projections and calculated variables. One of their number watched the planet below, but it mattered little. The creatures worked with one mind, and if one of them saw the planet, all of them saw it.

The final data was entered, and they stepped back. The projection flickered as the computer collated the inputs and extrapolated the possibilities. The grey creatures watched with mute patience, whilst their communal mind held it's metaphorical breath. Finally though, the projection stabilised, and the computer projected a telepathic monotone:

"Human Defeat Inevitable. Maximum Endurance: Nine Months."

The mind did not need to turn to the fragment watching the planet to know that the computer was mistaken. Nine months had been and gone long ago, yet still the human resistance thrived. The question that taxed the mental capacity of this communal mind was: why?

There must be some other factor that we have missed, it thought to itself, some variable absent from our calculations, but what? What could account for such a large difference?

A multiplier might, if it were properly focused, or perhaps there is more than one factor to find?

How could we have missed it? We must have done, but how? Is there a variable that we should not have dismissed, are our calculations accurate?

We must know how they have endured the Alpha-Draconian Invasion thus far.

We Must Know!

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What Has Really Been Going On?

The Alpha-Draconians do not really know where they come from, not any more. They claim to be from Earth, for reasons lost in history, but do not know the truth of that myth any more than the rest of us. Many Alpha-Draconians fear to discover that they are not actually from Earth (though they would never admit it, even to themselves), and so prefer to stay away from the planet. The one known as the 'Alpha-Draconian leader' is actually only a minor general. He managed to work his way up to command of a relatively small army (that race dividing all it's members into armies as a combined political and military structure) quite swiftly. Direct attacks on Earth have to deal with interception from a number of alien races that, for their own (highly varied) reasons, do not wish such an attack to take place. After assembling his army aboard their transports, this minor general managed to wheedle several other generals into briefly distracting and pinning down various military elements of those races that would otherwise block his route to Earth. He planned to rocket to the top by claiming the greatest victory of the Alpha-Draconian race – the conquest of their

beloved homeland, and the foul apes that took it from them. With the other aliens out of the way, it should have been easy. After all, these 'foul apes' are rather feeble creatures in the grand scheme of things...

Unfortunately for this general, he had underestimated the tenacity of the human race. They did not immediately capitulate when they saw the superior might of the Alpha-Draconian army. The military force possessed of his single, minor Alpha-Draconian army is insufficient to directly control an entire planet; there simply are not enough soldiers to exert such control without getting the cooperation of others, although they could probably manage to exterminate every living thing on a planet if they wished to. Since the Alpha-Draconians' general wishes to keep Earth, however, he needs minions to attend to the necessary tasks that no Alpha-Draconian would demean himself by doing (such as disposing of sewage and growing food). Since he lacks the influence to import labourers (which is one of the reasons he wants the glory of conquering Earth) he has to subdue the locals.

The Alpha-Draconians brought a number of means to bear to break the spirit of the Earth's people, including terror attacks on major (and minor) population centres and the public execution of civic and spiritual leaders. Despite these acts, the humans stubbornly refused to bend, and so the Alpha-Draconian general authorised his warriors to carry out ever more extreme acts. Unfortunately for him, the humans correctly identified this as a sign of desperation and not a cause for surrender. Even more unfortunately, one of the terror attacks he authorised on a 'minor civilian target' was to have dramatic and unforeseen consequences.

The target turned out to be an Illuminati mansion, where the 'leaders' of that organisation were gathering to discuss how to deal with the invasion and correct those plots it had disrupted. Though they are the highest ranked members of the Illuminati, they have very little control over the organisation – the Illuminati are saturated in a quagmire of numerous plots, plans and deceptions, often millennia old (and sometimes nested many times over); so much so that no-one can truly hope to exercise any appreciable degree of control over its activities. By virtue of their superior rank within the Illuminati, these people understood exactly how little control they could hope to exert and how little power they actually had; but they also possessed a considerable stock of personal power and potent trinkets, and so proved more than a match for the Alpha-Draconian raiding party that had sought to raze the building to the ground. In the aftermath they agreed to resist the invaders to the greatest degree possible, regardless of the cost. Disrupted plots could be repaired, given time, and the damage to their secrecy could be gradually reversed (or worked in favour of the Illuminati); but if the aliens won, the Illuminati lost.

The most immediate effect of this decision was the creation of the Luminous Market, offering training and equipment to anyone who would care to use it, but the various factions disagreed on how else to proceed. As a result, though the Illuminati are the single most significant contributor to the war effort, they exert the least control over the conflict. Some factions have spent the past three years working to establish secure strongholds and supply lines, whilst others attempt to make life inconvenient for the Alpha-Draconians or divert their raids. At least one faction changes their agenda on a weekly basis. In general, however, anything goes provided it either weakens the invader's cause, or strengthens the defenders.

The open arrival of Cursed defenders on the scene was an unwelcome surprise for the general leading the invasion. Though the Alpha-Draconians had faced other species that employed psychic or magical powers, the initial intelligence reports (sketchy though they were) had indicated that Humans lacked any such abilities. Discovering that they possessed both was a setback he was ill-prepared to deal with: he had already spent his meagre political capital in diverting the forces of other aliens long enough to reach Earth, and those same aliens were back, harassing his supply

lines (which were, as a result, as good as cut). With no hope of reinforcement (unless he asked a superior general to take over the invasion) and little hope of resupply, he resorted to more and more desperate measures. His few spacecraft were transport vessels, not combat craft, and of little help in battle. As a result, he held little hope of even orchestrating a successful escape. After increasingly desperate measures lead to increasing casualties for no apparent gain, he gave in to his advisors' insistence that he settle in for the long battle. He established a polar base, where the climate would provide a significant defence, and began attempting to wear the humans down with the resources remaining to him.

Three years later, the default setting of this supplement, he has not had much luck; though he has managed to make his base self-sufficient in basic necessities.

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“Change is coming,”

The seer looked up from the scattering of runes, her eyes boring into the questioner's soul. Or so it seemed to him.

“What do you mean?” he asked her.

“I mean what I say,” she answered, “No more, no less. There are too many futures, all of them murky, for foresight to ever be clear.”

“Is there any more? Murky or otherwise, I'll take it.”

The seer took a deep breath, and scattered a handful of herbs on the fire. Thick smoke billowed through the small tent, causing the questioner to cough. His eyes smarted, and he closed the unseeing orbs, but through the smoke he could still hear the seer. Her voice took on an unearthly timbre as she related the riddle unfolding within her inner sight.

“The lizard's fire sports cooling embers,

New fuels proffered by slavish vendors;

All may burn, All may choke,

Some might drown him in their smoke.”

The questioner opened his stinging eyes, seeing the glow of the fire through the swirling smoke. The seer's voice still echoed through the tent, ringing with power.

“He cannot leave the failing fire,

That fact alone may rouse his ire;

Choices made, He cannot savour,

A lonely slave might prove his saviour.”

The questioner shivered as he committed the seer's words to memory, fearing the images they evoked.

“The fire is fading and cannot endure,

Without the fuel he cannot conjure;

Even if proffered, Even if given,

A future fraught with rain is riven.”

The seer abruptly coughed, and the smoke began to flow away. She looked up, pinning the questioner with a glance that caused the question to die in his throat.

“Those words were spoken for you alone,” she added in her normal tone, “If you cannot unravel them, no one can understand them for you.”

With that, she shooed him from the tent.

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What is going on throughout the world?

The major institutions of the pre-invasion world have been destroyed, and the only group any person could look to (other than their immediate neighbours) are the Illuminati (a group so fractious they cannot even control themselves). Also, with the majority of the population becoming at least semi-nomadic, the boundaries between former territories have disappeared. The Alpha-Draconian

attacks have truly united humanity – there is no part of the world left untouched, no major settlement that is not in ruins.

North America, Europe, and East Asia, with their large, relatively powerful military forces were among the earlier targets (along with anywhere else that had nuclear weapons – no point in letting the humans destroy the prize, after all). Within a month, however, the situation was practically identical across the world. No country is handling things better or worse, is hit harder or softer, than any other (unless you, the GM, decides otherwise). Such is the power of the Alpha-Draconian army

What about the Martin Colony?

The colony on Mars is a refugee colony run by the Torkep. As such, there is only one rule – that of non-violence. Occupants are permitted to undertake any activity they see fit, providing it does not include inflicting deliberate unpleasantness on anyone else. The accommodations are fairly basic – it is a modular colony designed to sustain life in inhospitable landscapes, not a luxury hotel. The design was originally intended to serve as a possible centre for terraforming or studying inhospitable environments (the human inhabitants do not know that yet, or they would have asked to begin).

The rooms assigned to the refugees are small but comfortable, with room for a bed, and a desk with drawers (provided), though the Torkep modified the power socket so that it can conform to a number of Earth standards. The décor is rather drab – a typical 'space age' grey-on-grey – the food is bland, and the entertainments extremely limited. Most of those who come here end up returning to Earth (escorting a Torkep supply run) out of sheer boredom, whilst others make work creating and enchanting items to be supplied to Earth. Recently, upon learning of the modular nature of the habitat, some of the refugees have asked (and been granted) permission to build extensions (mostly to pass the time, but also to provide greater storage for the humanitarian supplies the Torkep are funnelling to Earth). The Torkep are not unpleasant rulers, just infuriatingly pacifistic.

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I was bored.

It was my default state of being, now. There was little to do, and I lacked the will to defy the orange masters of this little colony. I cursed the alien lizards for taking even that away from me, but the curse had no force. I lacked the will for that, too.

I was safe, here, amongst the drab walls of this emergency shelter. It was a prefabricated structure, or so I had been told, built and shipped in pieces. I had joined the teams that trekked out into the barren red landscape to slot some of those pieces together. It helped pass the time, if nothing else. The few fragments of my former life, those that I had been able to salvage, glared accusingly at me from the walls. I had decorated my cubicle with those paltry remnants, and could not muster the effort to remove them. I envied those who found the strength to return home, for I knew that I never would.

*One of the new arrivals had lent me a book, one I had not read before. I had been putting it off, hoping to stretch out the relief from tedium, but I could not force myself to wait any longer. I picked up *The Happy Yellow Boat* and opened the first page.*

It said "Recommended Reading Age: 4-5"

I was 34, but it was still the most exciting thing that had happened to me all week.

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Behind the Scenes

Many things have happened over the past three years of the setting, and much of it is not recorded here. For one thing, it would take more than three years to write, and the resulting text would be extremely long and tediously dull. The following summaries present an overview of the main pre- and post-war factions. All in all, three years is just enough time for things to have gotten interesting.

Both sides have had the opportunity to learn more than the basics of the other; and have even had time to examine those details, and attempt to come up ways of exploiting that knowledge.

The Alpha-Draconians

This supplement is set at an interesting time for the participants – the campaign hangs in the balance, and it is the Alpha-Draconians who get the next move. The humans have endured everything the alien invaders have thrown at them and struck back, so to do nothing is fail, and to persist in their present blunt tactics is to invite a slow and lingering failure. As a result, the Alpha-Draconians are preparing to attempt some more subtle strategies, though they came ill-prepared to implement them. The initial plan called for the application of overwhelming force, cowing the feeble humans into submission, followed by the application of genetic procedures to ensure the population's continued submission. They just don't know how to deal with a populace that refuses to fold. The Alpha-Draconian leader's more competent advisors have spent a sizeable portion of the last three years devising less overt means of gaining control and winning the war. The Alpha-Draconian leader must pick which one to go with, which means that the choice is in your hands, GM. Bear in mind that the Alpha-Draconians have not come prepared for this; they will need to improvise much of the necessary equipment for most plans, and that not something they seem to be particularly adept at. Some of the advisors' suggestions are outlined below, though feel free to suggest an alternative.

Several of these ideas are based on the use human infiltrators and spies, though detractors have asked what end such infiltrators might serve. If you go with this path, then perhaps a Player captured and released (with the *Genetically Tamed* Penalty) was meant to be an infiltrator. Perhaps he was not quite so cowed as the Alpha-Draconians thought, or perhaps he has implants that transmit vital intelligence back to base. With the humans constantly moving, however, and leaving no defined centre to strike, there is a limit to how useful such information could be. Other advisors may advocate a more active roll for their infiltrators, such as sabotage and betrayal, though genetically engineering docility into the infiltrator's DNA make them poor agents for this kind of thing. The Alpha-Draconians would therefore have to find subtler means of retaining control, or else accept sub-standard saboteurs. As a side note, those who have been 'tamed' in this fashion are far less likely to resist the invaders (which was the point) and so are more likely to accept evacuation to Mars. Which could result in an entire roomful of reports in the Alpha-Draconian base about how boring Mars is.

At least one advisor has suggested summoning reinforcements, however the Alpha-Draconian leader has spent all his political capital just getting to Earth. As a result, he cannot call in any more reinforcements himself without surrendering the war (which would pretty much destroy his credibility). Persecuting a long term conflict is not necessarily a bad thing to the Alpha-Draconians – it tends to indicate a stronger enemy, so there is more glory to be won. The Leader's political rivals are perfectly happy for him to embarrass himself, and he has no true allies to speak of (one of the downsides to being a young, new general). The other generals do not really care, yet, about the conflict on Earth. The only Alpha-Draconians to travel to Earth are those manning the Supply Convoys (which may include those born into the army, so some reinforcements), most of which are repelled or destroyed by the various alien factions that either oppose the Alpha-Draconians or support the Humans. Things would have to get much worse for that to change – mounting a campaign to save the war on Earth (and relieve the present general of his command) would be a major undertaking, requiring collaboration between several Alpha-Draconian armies. Bear in mind that the only reason the initial strikes managed to pin down enemy forces long enough for this particular army to get to Earth was that they had the benefit of surprise. Any subsequent campaign would face the blocking forces of several potent galactic powers, fully alert and expecting trouble.

An outside presence could offer aid to the Alpha-Draconian leader, or even to one of the advisors, perhaps one that had manipulated the events of the war to force the Alpha-Draconians' hands. The Alpha-Draconians are not the sort to accept the aid of 'lesser species' (which covers just about everyone), when they could simply enslave that species instead. They are also openly antagonistic towards almost every species they have ever encountered, and there are no references of approval for their acts, so it is unlikely that anyone would propose such an alliance. Those entities of sufficient power and callousness to contemplate such an alliance would probably beat the invaders at their own game (enslaving the Alpha-Draconian army before turning on the humans) which would dramatically change the nature of events. Of course, such entities have enemies of their own which would likely object to, and resist, any plan by that entity simply as a matter of course. This could turn the war into a chess game between ancient and potent forces, with the Alpha-Draconians and Humans caught in the middle as helpless pawns. Not the sort of atmosphere Xenocalypse is aimed at, but if you wish to evoke the feel of Cthulhu then by all means, go for it!

The Alpha Draconians (at least, those affiliated with this invasion) did not attempt to cultivate alliances with any Human organisation, or the war might have gone very differently. There are likely some who attempted to form such alliances with the Alpha-Draconians (and were slain or enslaved for their pains), but there have been no successful attempts to date. The invaders are now desperate enough to accept such an offer (provided they think they can control the human) though they have managed to destroy all those who might be willing to ally with them.

Remember, however, that there are only three paths that the Alpha-Draconian forces can take now. To perpetuate the present stalemate means a drawn-out death. To implement a successful comeback means a glorious victory. To attempt to execute the wrong plan, however, means over extending themselves and inviting a violent demise at the hands of the 'feeble' humans.

The Illuminati

The Illuminati have been working on various means to get, and keep, any advantage over the invaders, or at least to blunt the invaders' advantages, for the past three years. Advanced technology is an important part of that (as evidenced by the high-tech gadgets on the Luminous Market), as well as Cursed powers, accurate intelligence and the 'home-field' advantage. As mentioned above, however, the Illuminati are extremely fractious, and not even their highest leaders can hope to exert any real control over the Illuminati as a whole. Even after they decided to oppose the invaders with everything they had (and to include the rest of the population in the defence) innumerable factions remain divided as to how best to proceed. Despite this, they do try not to obstruct each other too much, as that would constitute helping the Alpha-Draconians. Thus, while some factions have focused on training and supplying the survivors, or on maintaining the Luminous Market, others have attacked the invaders or tried to establish hidden strongholds where the survivors could catch their breath before returning to the fight.

Amongst this morass of conflicting opinions, there were also those who thought of capturing and exploiting Alpha-Draconian technology, and developing means to counter or destroy that technology (though even an unarmed Alpha-Draconian is a deadly opponent). Such factions have had limited success thus far (though some of the technology available to the defenders actually originates from the invaders) though it is certainly possible that a faction has managed to build an extra-dimensional factory that produces a weapon based on an Alpha-Draconian design, but has yet to make enough to truly influence the course of the war; whilst another has developed an effective spell with a regrettable drawback. Some of the Extra Equipment, Spells and Bonuses presented below show the fruit of Illuminati research and development, though they have yet to be produced or distributed in significant numbers. Let your players guide you to just how great an impact the Illuminati's efforts have on your game.

What happened to everyone else?

The stated purpose of the Inhuman MIB is to cover up evidence of the supernatural (including aliens) and keep the bulk of the population happily in the dark. They do not seem overly concerned with dissuading those who genuinely want to know what is out there, or practise magic, providing that the people in question can keep it to themselves. To this end, they do not need great numbers, and were probably only present in small numbers on Earth. Such a small group cannot hope to truly repel an invasion, though they may have contributed to some of the Alpha-Draconians' early difficulties and certainly alerted the galaxy as a whole to the invasion. After the initial invasion, and the development of the subsequent resistance, the MIB most likely withdrew from the planet (once everyone knows, there is no ignorance to protect), leaving only a little aid behind (advice mainly, though some items on the Luminous Market have alien origins). Either way, their influence on events is subtle, and remains difficult to detect.

The Agency, like the Inhuman MIB, was too small to deal effectively with a large-scale invasion. As a result, they were among the first to go underground when the invasion struck. The early success of the various resistance attempts can be partly attributed to the efforts of Agency Agents, though they were soon supplanted in importance by the Illuminati. The Alpha-Draconians managed (quite accidentally) to sever most of the Agency's lines of supply and communication, effectively destroying it as an entity, though the majority of the Agents survived, and their experience within the Agency gave them a head start when opposing the Alpha-Draconian invasion. The Agency worked well within the pre-invasion societies, leeching resources from more open organisations and using them as cover for their more questionable activities. After the breakdown of human civilisations brought on by the invasion, the Agency found itself lacking vital resources and operational space; though it never 'officially' shut down (it never 'officially' existed anyway) it has ceased to be an effective organisation. Some of the measures it put into place, particularly Agent groupings, are still effective however – just how much the world owes to the Agency, it will never know.

Of the other aliens in the galaxy, it is the Torkep that have provided the greatest intervention. The Torkep, as already mentioned, created the refugee colony on Mars, and use it as a base to ferry humanitarian supplies (food, water, medicine and the like) to Earth. They have also supplied some more esoteric items, such as force field generators, to help the humans protect themselves until they come to their senses, but it should be noted that these items are for passive defence. They cannot be used to attack with (as an example, see the spacesuit listed below) or be modified for that purpose (though study of them might reveal underlying principles which can be transferred). The Grey are no ally of the Alpha-Draconians, who make poor experimental subjects, but are very interested in studying how humans manage themselves in this situation. Their intervention is mostly limited to intercepting Alpha-Draconian convoys, thereby preserving the situation under study, though they also attempt to set up interesting skirmishes between the Alpha-Draconians and Humans to study. The Nordic aliens see humans as a possible and valuable ally, but also seem to believe that this is a personal challenge we must overcome ourselves. They operate in the background, providing a little advice and tuition (perhaps even high-technology) when asked; but mostly preventing the other Alpha-Draconians from interfering. As for the Light Wings and Dark Wings, they are embroiled in a conflict of their own, and can see that now we are too. They are willing to trade a little aid for a little aid (perhaps a useful spell for a bushel of apples), but remain largely focused on their own war (much as before the Alpha-Draconians invaded). It is perhaps worth noting, however, that neither the Light Wings, nor the Dark Wings, attach any real stigma to those who deal with the other. If someone has bought a spell from a Dark Wing for a bushel of apples, then the Light Wings will still be quite happy to trade with him – though they won't do so whilst the Dark Wing is still present.

Finally, with the Cursed community coming out into the open, the legends and other terrible things hiding in the shadows have found it much harder to maintain their secrecy. Those of them which are

there, such as the Vampires and Werewolves, have largely stepped forth to fight alongside humanity against their common foe. Those which do not actually exist on Earth, such as the Fae and Angels, really don't care much either way. They are largely content to watch and wait. The exception to this is the spirits, as they are affected by the destruction wrought upon their real-world counterparts. As mentioned in the Players Section, they have responded by encouraging the creation of more Shamans, and helping those they can more freely (even Summoners, much to the Summoners' surprise). Whilst there could be more ancient and terrible things awakening, Xenopocalypse is meant to be about the humans' struggle against impossible odds (something we have been doing since our species first arose in Africa some 195 millennia ago). There is certainly room for such things, however, especially if the Players *deliberately* wake something up – to deal with the invasion – and then have to live with the consequences!

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The big lizard slumbered on a mound of treasure, just as I had foreseen. The cavern was illuminated by a golden glow, and I found it harder than I expected to restrain myself. I knew the predictions, the horrors and doom that would befall whoever succumbed, but that alone was not enough.

Fortunately, that was not what I had come for. Equally fortuitously, I was able to focus on my task. Stepping forth, I hailed the slumbering lizard.

“Greetings, Mighty Wyrms. Might I be granted audience?”

The lizard stirred, shedding the pretence of slumber as it turned its baleful glare on me.

“You wish for my treasure?” it growled, malice echoing in its voice.

“No,” I replied, simply, “I wish to converse,”

“Then speak, little one.”

“A great horror has befallen our planet.” I began, “An army of reptilian aliens has descended from space to conquer the world. They would smash the universe if they could, but are briefly content to settle for dominion.”

“They cannot fulfil their destructive urges?”

“They do not yet possess that capacity,”

“Then what is it to me?”

“They have come here to extend their rule,” I answered, “And will not stop at dominating mere humans. They claim to be your cousins, yet they would crush or enslave you all the same. If you wait, we might win your battle for you. If we don't, you will be facing them alone. Together, our chances are better – will you at least consider it?”

The mighty lizard raised a claw, gesturing for silence, and I assumed it wished to think on my words. Until the encroaching aliens betrayed themselves. They spoke aloud, the harsh grating of their voices echoing up the tunnel. The strange feel of their thoughts was not something I would ever get used to.

“They come,” I told my host, “The war is upon you, to my regret. Would you have my aid?”

“I would not serve any who would lead his enemies to my hold!” the great lizard fumed.

“Irrelevant though it is, I would not ask it.” I answered, “follow your own path, as you wish.”

“GO!”

I faded into the shadows as the alien reptiles burst into the cavern, weapons ready and bellowing demands for surrender. A blast of flame answered them, and the impressive weaponry of the aliens began to pummel the greater lizard. Ignoring the attacks, as one might ignore the shots of a water pistol, it laid into the flaming reptiles with a vengeful fury. Five had entered the room. Two fell to the first strike, whilst a third was backhanded across the room. I felt his mind flicker and die as I tried to work out how to leave alive, but then the great lizard fell back, screaming in pain, a smoking crater marring its chest. The invading reptiles grinned eagerly, levelling their longarms at the wound.

I stepped from the shadows, my mind focused on the evil beings before me. The force of my will hurled one into his companion, dashing them against the stone. Again I bore down with my will,

ignoring the strain that lurked at the corner of my thoughts. Ice-sharp, my thoughts thrust out, boring into the minds of the interlopers. I crushed their wills, shattered their minds, and dashed them against the stones again for good measure. When at last their minds gave out, fading from my perceptions, I turned to go. The path was now clear, but the strain of my exertions caught up with me, and I passed out instead.

I awoke in a soft bed, as a cool cloth soothed my brow. A beautiful woman held it, concern in her eyes as she tended to me. I smiled weakly, and she flushed, but something in her manner told me that she was the Mighty Wyrms I had come to greet.

“Rest now, young one. You are safe here.” she whispered, but I reached for my belt pouch instead. I removed a handful of crystalline magic and pressed it into her hands. Useless as they were to me, I knew that she would value the strange shards.

“Thank you,” I managed to whisper as the smog of sleep wrapped its gentle tendrils once more round my aching brain.

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Extra Equipment

The items listed in the previous chapter are freely available on the Luminous Market, and are frequently offered to those who visit Luminous Marketeers. As a result, nearly everyone on Earth has heard of them. The items presented below, however, are less common. Efforts are being made by some parties to provide more of them, but because they are not as widely known they remain much less common. As a result, you may choose whether to allow your players access to the items listed below, as well as additional items from the main GM book..

Enchanted Items

Most of these enchanted items require the use of obscure spells or variants, and are produced in small numbers because very few people know how to make them. Others are more like local variants, only popular in a small regions (for any number of reasons) or had simply failed to occur to anyone until recently. Magic being the vast and complex vista that it is, this can hardly be considered surprising.

Battle-suit Breastplate(\$350)

This item usually consists of the chest mounted 'target' of a Quasar or similar 'laser tag' system, enchanted with an Armour spell to provide the wearer with three armour points all over. This protection possess 15 hit points. The attached toy laser is usually enchanted with the fire or electrical Battle Magic spell, like a spell rifle, using the trigger only variant so that pulling the trigger charges *and* fires the spell. This full system costs at least \$500.

Planter of Endless Fruiting (\$300)

This item uses an obscure spell, one that is still percolating through the Luminous Market, to accelerate the growth of whatever is planted within. The planter can take the form of any plant pot, from one improvised from a broken cup to a multi-level 'mini-garden', however, the spell will only affect one plant. As the spell is always active, it targets the first plant (or seed) to be planted.

The growth of the affected plant will be accelerated by a factor of 168. It will therefore complete a week's growth in an hour, a month's growth in little over 4 hours, and a year's growth in 2 days and 4 hours. This is obviously very useful for food crops, whether you are attempting to get a few harvests each week, or simply fast-forward through the early years of growth until the plant reaches a viable size. More upmarket variations include a spell to maintain the quality of the soil, and some can accelerate multiple plants (but are correspondingly much more expensive).

Multi-Tool (\$150 + \$100 per additional tool)

This item uses an obscure variant of the Pocket Dimension spell to contain many tools in a 'single'

object. The base object is the item originally enchanted. To this item, a number of other items can be added, with each additional item being contained in its own tiny dimensional pocket (which may or may not be in the Darkness). When the bearer activates the item with a Concentration check, he can cause the item to morph into any of the other tools that he chooses. This will not work in front of mundane human witnesses (not much of a consideration in the default setting, but it might be if you transfer the item) and the user must be aware that the tool he desires is attached to the item. He cannot just try to make it morph into random items to discover which are there, and the item offers no insight into which other items are available. When the item morphs, the current item goes into its own dimensional pocket, and the new item emerges from its pocket; thus, the result is not a magical effect and cannot be dispelled. The same magic can be used to add other items subsequently, and items with other enchantments *can* be used.

High-Tech Items

These items are rare for any number of reasons. More than anything, however, the Invasion has destroyed the industries of civilisation – Earth no longer possess the infrastructure to produce and maintain advanced technology. Some technological wonders come as gifts from friendly aliens, whilst others have resulted from more magical sources. The factories of Earth may have fallen, but mages have ways of circumventing such minor impediments.

Laser Gauntlet(\$50,000)

This is weapon based upon similar technology to the Laser Rifle, but miniaturised and fitted into an armoured glove (armour rating 2-4, with 10 hit points). Some designs fit a single laser emitter into the palm, some attach a slim pistol to the wrist (firing over the back of the hand), whilst others fit a small emitter into each knuckle (firing in harmony). Despite these variations in design and use, they function identically in game terms.

These weapons have a base damage rating of 2, hold a maximum charge of 20 shots, and rarely incorporate targeting technology. The generator installed in these weapons is radically different from that installed in the Laser Rifle, however. Instead of using an advanced understanding of physics to generate a shot of energy every minute, the Gauntlets exploit an advanced understanding of biology to generate a shot of power every other minute. The coils tap the electricity generated by the wearer to produce the power required. This will not work if the wearer is dead, or lacks an electrical field for some obscure reason, but portable chargers are also available, at about \$10,000 each.

Most of the available models have been optimised for use by humans. Other species may find the gauntlets charging more slowly. It takes a Hard Science (biology) check of Challenging to determine the correct calibration for a given species, and a Challenging Tech roll to implement it. These weapons can be optimised for a specific user, allowing that user (only) to generate a shot every minute and a half. It takes a Hard Science (biology) check of Hard to determine this calibration (*after* optimising the device for the bearer's species) though the Tech roll to implement the calibration remains Challenging.

Force Field Generator(\$5,000)

These devices are readily portable, usually designed as a bulky belt, though they require micro cold fusion or a magically enhanced battery for power. They generate an energy field around the bearer that diffuses incoming energy, reducing the power of incoming fire from energy weapons (such as lasers), though not more physical weapons. This is, in effect, an armour rating of 5, though it cannot be directly attacked (destroying the generator, however, destroys the field) The field does not diffuse outgoing energy, so the bearer's shots remain unaffected.

When active, however, the bearer suffers a -5 penalty to Perception rolls, as the force field's diffusing effect means that he views the world as if through a light fog. The bearer is also surrounded by what appears similar to a heat haze – although anything contained *within* the field appears clear, anything viewed *through* the field is distorted. Lenses are available in a variety of forms on the Luminous Market that can correct this problem, from contact lenses to helmet visors, typically priced at around \$500 each. Of course, incoming weapons fire that targets the lenses is also 'corrected' (ignoring the protection offered by the field, but suffering the appropriate penalty for a tiny target). Enchanted variants which lack this disadvantage (merely projecting an Illusion of the world undistorted) are also available.

Torkep Spacesuit(\$1,000,000 - \$10,000,000)

These suits are similar to the armoured battle suits of other races, though designed to combat harsh environments rather than enemy forces, possess an armour rating between 1 and 5 points and a number of hit points equal to five times that rating. The suit appears as a slender metal bodysuit, and contains micro-circuitry that not only allows the suit to move with the dexterity of its wearer, but also boosts the wearer's effective Body score by a number equal to the suit's armour rating. This is a temporary boost, and so *can* allow the wearer to exceed his maximum Body score. A number of helmet designs are available, with the bubble dome being the most popular and a number of collars for those who prefer to go bare-headed (though not into space).

When the suit is sealed up it thickens the air immediately surrounding the suit, forming a defensive barrier that effectively doubles the protection provided by the armour (and provides adequate defence against the perils of deep-space radiation). Despite its many advantages, the suit does have one great drawback – it is Torkep technology, and cannot be used offensively. As such, if the wearer ever enters melee combat, the suit will seize up and impede the wearer's movements. This will not entirely paralyse the wearer, but will change the bonus to Body score to a penalty (also equal to the suit's rating). If the wearer's Body score is ever reduced to 0 (or less) in this fashion he is almost helpless, and can only hobble or crawl 10' per combat round. Note that these penalties do not apply to ranged combat, where having your arm stiffen is actually an advantage!

To calculate the cost of a suit, multiply the suit's armour rating by \$1,000,000. If you wish to incorporate more advanced nano-technology to make the suit self-repairing and self-maintaining (a popular upgrade), double that figure.

Mundane Items

These items are almost as rare as the high-tech devices listed above, though for different reasons. Building and maintaining advanced technology is difficult in an apocalyptic war-zone, but these items employ far simpler technology. Not all of them seemed particularly useful when the Alpha-Draconian's invaded, and were abandoned, whilst others were seen as the detritus of a dead world. With the open intervention of the Cursed, however, these items can be enchanted into highly valuable tools.

Paint-ball Gun (\$15)

This weapon shoots plastic globes of paint that are essentially harmless, but excellent for target practice. Being somewhat innocuous, these 'weapons' are popular targets for a number of enhancing enchantments which can combine to make this humble technology superior to any military rifle. A similar technology, pepper-ball guns, were used by police forces to deploy tear gas. Whilst it is not the most obviously lethal of weapons, experiments involving transmuted poisons are ongoing.

A typical paint-ball gun has a Damage rating of 2, as well as the *Non-Lethal* and *Purely Paint* special rules. A pepper-ball gun (cost \$75) has a Damage rating of 1, as well as the *Non-Lethal* and *Irritating Poison* special rules.

Non-Lethal:

A weapon with the non-lethal rule does not inflict as much damage as a normal weapon of its type. Calculate damage normally, but then apply that damage as *hurt points* rather than *hit points*.

Purely Paint:

This 'weapon' fires paint, not bullets. Though the impact hurts, and may bruise, it never does much damage. Do not add damage for degrees of success.

Irritating Poison:

This weapons effect stems from its poisonous payload, not its physical impact. Do not add degrees of success to the damage inflicted. Instead, apply them as a penalty to the victim's save vs Medium poison (inhaled).

Shields (\$25+)

Shields are not truly weapons, though they can mean the difference between life and death for any fighter. Different shields are made from different materials and in different sizes, which can make them more or less effective, though they all use the same rules. A shield must be at least as long and wide as the user's forearm to be effective – any smaller, and it is only good for parrying melee strikes. Larger shields grant greater bonuses.

Carrying a shield converts your Dodge skill into a Block skill, reflecting your ability to interpose the shield between yourself and danger. You gain a bonus on all your uses of the Block skill, equal to the Armour rating of the material in question, + 1 if the shield can completely cover your torso, or + 2 if it is at least as wide and nearly as tall as you. Successfully blocking an attack does not damage the shield, though direct attacks on the shield do.

Note that most shields available in the pre-invasion world were small plastic children's toys, offering no bonus at all. Hence their relative lack of popularity at present. In addition, the GM is always entitled to declare that a particular danger cannot be blocked, and force you to roll your unmodified Dodge instead. Although technically you *could* block an avalanche with your shield, if you do not get out of the way it will squash you flat regardless.

A good shield should set you back approximately \$25 multiplied by the bonus it grants. Poor shields are almost free, but useless unless enchanted.

Blowpipe (\$35)

This weapon shoots poisoned darts at the target and can come in a variety of forms, from hollow reeds to laboriously carved wooden tubes as long as a man is tall. Some may grant an accuracy bonus, whilst larger darts may inflict more damage, but many blowpipes approximate the profile presented below. Note that the poisons typically utilised are rarely immediately fatal, requiring the hunters to strike their victims several times. Stronger poisons can be used, but are far more dangerous to work with (and generally difficult to acquire).

A typical blowpipe has a Damage rating of 2, as well as the *Irritating Poison* special rule.

Irritating Poison:

This weapons effect stems from its poisonous payload, not its physical impact. Do not add degrees of success to the damage inflicted. Instead, apply them as a penalty to the victim's save vs Medium poison (injected).

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“Twelve wooden planters,
standing in a row;
how many apples,

can I grow?"

The changeling danced round the wooden boxes, laughing at the apples that were visibly ripening on the branches of the trees as she did so. A trestle table stood behind her, holding several bushel baskets of the lovely ripe apples. Laughing gaily, she snatched up another and began to stack it high with the fresh fruit she plucked from the branches. Fresh fruit was always in demand, especially in winter, and with these planters she had no need of a large, boring orchard to supply that demand.

*"One Apple,
And I cackle;
Two Apples,
That I snaffles;
Three more,
Funds the door;
Four, Five,
I feel Alive!"*

She giggled incessantly as she filled her basket, and frowned at the trees once she discovered that she had picked the last.

*"Half a Bushel Short!" she screamed at them, "For Half a Bushel's Sake!"
Abruptly she smiled, once more, dancing back to the table.*

*"Half a bushel for me then,
The rest to market go;
To feed the hungry people,
That sadly I do know."*

Chattering away to the trees, she began to pack the baskets for travel.

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Extra Training

As with the items listed above, the training required to master some abilities is not yet in common circulation. As with the items, however, there are some who have dedicated much of their lives to changing that. Their success can be measured in degrees – through their efforts, the abilities persist. In time they may even become common but, for now, their distribution remains under the control of you, GM. Share these secrets wisely.

New Bonuses

The following bonuses represent abilities that may prove useful in the post-apocalyptic world, but were hard to come by in the pre-invasion world. Some of those who know them have spent their time attempting to teach others but, frankly, surviving long enough to learn anything is a challenge; and there are many other things to learn.

Forager Supreme (2 points)

You are an expert forager in wild or urban environments. As long as there is food (and water) to be found, you may collect enough to sustain yourself in nothing flat (or casually whilst doing something else). If you try to forage for a group, however, it may take longer. Essentially, your character need never worry about starving, unless his surroundings are completely barren.

Mental Build-up (2 points, Psychic only)

Your character has received some training from an Alien species that boasts powerful Psychics (or from someone that has), and learned to mitigate the difficulties human Psychics face by building up the required energies more slowly. You can choose to make the psychic power check in the turn following the successful concentration check, rather than in the same turn. If you do, you only have a 10% chance of suffering fatigue as a result and only have a 10% chance to suffer from a temporary insanity if you do suffer from fatigue.

Desensitised (varies)

With this bonus, you gain a point of Corruption, but in return gain immunity to Corruption and Taint from a specific source. If you purchase this bonus at character creation, as opposed to earning it for free during game play, you are assumed to have overcome the associated compulsion to commit worse acts, and the Bonus costs 1 point for a minor act (Random Mugging), 2 points for a significant act (Accidental Murder), 3 points for a major act (Torture) and 4 points for anything worse (Cold-blooded Murder and up). This bonus can only be purchased at character creation, though its effects can be freely acquired during play.

This bonus is intended to allow the players to participate actively in the counter-invasion scenario, without devolving swiftly into unplayable psychopaths. GMs, be extremely wary of letting it be abused, particularly in more peaceable settings.

New Spells

With rising numbers of Cursed, and a number of previously unusual situations becoming common, spellcasters around the globe have found (or made) the time to devise a number of new spells. Spells that were formerly thought of as useless oddities have also gained more widespread acceptance, as shown by the spells in the Players Section, whilst the spells below have not had time to spread.

John's Growth Charm (Average)

When an invasion cuts off the normal supply lines, the ability to grow enough to feed oneself is vital, and anything that aids that endeavour is advantageous. As a result this spell, originally developed by a mystic to fuel his rituals, has begun to spread through the Luminous Market.

This spell can affect a single plant, plus a number of additional plants *of the same species* equal to the degrees of success. The affected plants complete the equivalent of 1 week (168 hours) growth, plus an additional week (168 hours) of growth per degree of success, during each hour the spell lasts. This accelerated growth lasts for 1 hour, plus an additional hour per degree of success.

EMP Surge (Challenging)

The Alpha-Draconian's advanced technology provides them with a significant edge over the human survivors, and this spell arose out of the efforts of an Illuminati faction to defuse that advantage. Despite being spread throughout the Luminous Market, it is unlikely to achieve much popularity as it lacks any friend/foe distinction. Even the caster's technology is at risk!

The spell disables any electrical device within 5 feet (1.5 metres) plus an additional 5 feet (1.5 metres) per degree of success. Of course, military equipment is often protected against such effects. The caster must succeed on a Concentration check against every protected device in order to disable it, with a difficulty ranging from Easy (for consumer-grade insulation) to Nigh Impossible (for military grade shielding over hardened circuitry). The caster cannot choose not to make these checks – it is a measure of the force he has put into the casting.

Shadow Shield (Average)

note Summoners can cast this spell.

This spell can conjure a shield out of pure Darkness. The shield is metaphysically fused to the caster's arm, and so cannot be dropped or taken (without removing the arm in question, that is). The shield is highly resilient, and can be used to provide shelter from enemy attacks. The user gains a bonus to his use of the Dodge skill (which becomes a 'Block' skill for this purpose) equal to 2 plus the degrees of success on the casting roll. This bonus lasts until the caster's arm is amputated, or he dismisses the spell.

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Jack Sableson had a family to feed.

Of course everyone had a family to feed, even if it was a family of one, and he would not begrudge them that. Feeding had gotten a little harder since those blasted reptilian horrors had laid claim to the world, but no-one had lasted this long unless they could cope with that. Jack Sableson had a head start, a little valuable experience that had stood him in good stead, but living off of that small experience had been hard.

Turning over a promising stone, Jack found a handful of grubs which he scooped up and bagged at once. The forest floor was littered with acorns and pine cones. True, they needed a little processing, but they would fill an empty belly at the day's end. Armouring himself with a whispered incantation, Jack seized several handfuls of nettles, to which he had grown quite accustomed, and collected the fresh water from a spring he knew to be clean. Out here, in the wild forest, he could almost believe that the Invasion had been nothing but a bad dream.

Almost.

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MODIFYING SPELLS

Looking at the *Cosmetic Improvisation* Bonus in the Players Section, some players may want to develop the modifications as a permanent spell. Rather than having to succeed on a Magic check every time they decide to throw a handful of glowing bullets (rather than a hard ball sized sphere) at their enemies, they may wish to have a spell that takes that form naturally. Or perhaps they lack that Bonus, but want the spell anyway.

It is possible to produce a spell that would do so using the rules for research in the main Cursed RPG Rulebook, but re-creating a spell from scratch seems to be a wicked waste of a good spell. With that in mind, GM, you may choose to allow your players to use the following rules for creating a spell as a modification of an existing spell. Do note, however, that these rules require that the one creating the new spell already has at least 5 ranks in the spell he is modifying – you cannot tinker with a spell you have not mastered – as well as 10 ranks in the Magic skill. If a character wishes to create a modified version of a spell he has not mastered, he must re-create it from scratch.

For the purposes of these rules, modifications are split into 4 categories: Minor, Substantial, Major and Radical. Minor modifications are those that could be made with the *Cosmetic Improvisation* Bonus: changing the appearance, but not the game effect, of the spell. If you wished to make your acid Battle Magic appear as an orb of flame, scattering searing fires over your enemies, or make your Armour spell visible as an illusory suit of golden plate, it is a Minor modification of the original spell. Substantial modifications are those which involve distorting the present interpretation of the spell to a new end, or editing a single discreet element of the spell. The Shadow Shield spell listed above is an example of the former – it is based upon the Shadow Weapon spell, distorted to produce a protective shield rather than an offensive weapon, whilst the five Battle Magic spells are examples of the latter – they each follow the same basic premise (summon an orb of a primal elemental essence to throw at a foe) but differ in one core factor (the primal essence summoned). Creating a Battle magic spell that utilises a different element (such as Earth, or Light), or editing the Fire Battle Magic to scatter searing flames over multiple foes, would therefore be a Substantial modification.

Major modifications are more thorough. They edit the structure of the spell, distorting the cosmetic and mechanical effects to slightly different ends. Any modification involving a change in difficulty level is almost certainly a Major modification. If, for example, your Spirit Found Changeling wished to edit the Create Dimensional Pocket spell to create a pocket dimension in the Spirit world, that would be a Major modification. Radical Modifications, on the other hand, are those which

maintain only a tenuous link to the original spell; therefore the creator gains no benefit over creating the spell from scratch. If you wished to modify a Teleport spell to transmit a thought to your target, for example, it would be a Radical Modification and would have to be effectively created from scratch. The GM will have to judge modifications on a case by case basis, and assign each one a category for rules purposes. The GM's word is final, and he is always entitled to reject a modification entirely or attach the most ridiculous penalty he can think of (forcing the caster to succeed on a Nigh Impossible spell check for each turn spent casting is always an effective deterrent against excessively powerful spells). If a player refuses to accept the category assigned, his character's bungling automatically bumps the modification up one category (from Minor to Substantial, Substantial to Major, Major to Radical, Radical to Waste of Effort) and may cause him to fail the attempt entirely.

Modifying a spell is quicker than creating one from scratch. Making a Minor Modification only takes 10 hours of work each week for one month. A Substantial modification takes 20 hours of work each week for 1D4 months. A Major modification takes 30 hours of work each week for 1D4+1 weeks. A Radical modification takes 40 hours of work each week for a total of 1D4+2 months, just as if the character was creating the spell from scratch. If the spell is a Waste of Effort, it takes 40 hours of work each week for 6 months. Otherwise, modifying a spell follows all the rules presented in the main rulebook for creating a new spell, though to benefit from multiple participants, *all* of them must meet the requirements to complete the modification themselves. It is possible to modify a spell, and then modify the result, and then modify that result (and so on) until an entirely different spell emerges. This might seem a rather laborious means of developing a new spell (and it is), but with the Alpha-Draconians disrupting everyone's lives, it can prove easier to achieve.

Remember, the GM's call is final on what modifications are allowed, and what advantage it imposes. Modifying spells can expand a character's repertoire, and extend his usefulness in a variety of situations. Above all else, modification of spells helps to keep the game varied. As GM, you may choose to provide already-modified spells to your players during play. After all, no-one said that every Teleport spell had to look the same. On a final note, however, never assume that purely cosmetic changes are entirely useless. Changing the Shadow Weapons spell to conjure a sword cast of pure light is a cosmetic alteration – all that is different (from a games-mechanics point of view) is the appearance of the spell. That appearance, however, allows the weapon to illuminate the area, sparing the caster the need to carry a torch. Clever players can find many ways to exploit purely 'cosmetic' changes – changes that have no real rules effect, but must be role-played. As GM, however, you should be able to find just as many ways to make the changes work *against* the character. Sure, a glowing sword lights the bearer's way, but it also reveals his presence to hidden foes and makes him an obvious target. Be canny.

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Diamond had a mission.

Everyone had told her, when her magic had first revealed itself, to be wary of the dark ones. She had been told that they were twisted casters with tainted souls, who enslaved and degraded noble entities – and that was the best ones! Over the years, though, she had learnt a different lesson. They always felt wrong somehow, but usually as if they had dealt with things that had rubbed off on them; more like soldiers enduring shell shock than villains with a mission. True, they were never the most sociable of people; but given how welcome they are, they doubtless get little practice. They even struggled with spells that came naturally to Diamond, and some remain forever out of their reach. With the invasion of the Alpha Draconians, however, that left them more vulnerable than Diamond liked. Her cramped study was filled with books, essays on the Dark and spell creation. She laboured to produce magics that would give the less privileged a fighting chance against the horrors of the world. Earlier casters had left her some clues – her experiments with Teleport spells had led her to an existing variation – but even now, she laboured.

There had to be a way to conjure dark armour. There had to be.

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ALPHA-DRACONIAN STATS

For a basic Alpha-Draconian warrior, use the stats presented in the main GM book (page 76 of the second rough draft), but remember that, after three years of fighting, they are at least passingly familiar with the planet and its inhabitants. For higher-level Alpha-Draconians, see the following.

Alpha-Draconian Squad Leader

Body: 10 Health: 10 Mind: 8 Social: 3 Soul: 3 HP: 20 Will: 6

Bonuses

Flight

Alpha-Draconians have large scaly wings which allow them to fly at the same speed they can walk. They can not manoeuvre well with their wings, but in a pinch they are helpful.

Way of the Warrior

Alpha-Draconians are trained to be warriors from the time they can crawl. They are resistant to pain and suffer no negatives to skill because of damage to their body. They are still unconscious if their hit points go between zero and negative whatever their hit points are.

Alpha-Draconians have also advanced their bodies to the point they regenerate with incredible speed. As a result, they heal one fourth their Health stat a turn.

Thick Skinned

The skin of an Alpha-Draconian is so thick that it forms a natural armour. The skin of an Alpha-Draconian gives him 2 armour with 10 hit points.

Penalties

Alpha-Draconians are cold blooded. They require less food, but their bodies can not regulate their temperature. They have technology that can do this, but once that technology fails they are at the whim of their environment.

Skills

Computers rank 12, Fly rank 7, Medicine Modern (advanced to our understanding) rank 10, Perception rank 10, Riddles rank 5, Dodge rank 10, Projectile, Fired rank 10

Description

Alpha-Draconians are large, winged, humanoid, reptilian creatures. The young are around fourteen feet tall though a squad leader will have grown to at least twenty feet. They have long clawed fingers and toes, as well as thick green scales. Squad leaders have some social acumen, but it tends to depend on exploiting a very rigid hierarchy and so is of little use outside their own squad. The equipment of a typical squad leader rarely differs much from that of his squad: armoured bodysuit designed to regulate temperature (armour rating of 3-4, with 15 hit points, is typical), 2 energy weapons (1 longarm, one pistol as backup), and spare energy cells; though he probably carries a more powerful comm. Link than his troopers, to connect with higher command. Additional equipment is supplied as required.

History

Alpha-Draconians seem to have come from Alpha-Draconis system, though they claim that they originated on Earth. There are theories that they came from an alternate reality, or are simply natural

liars, but no-one actually knows the truth of their origins. Least of all, the Alpha-Draconians themselves. They arrange their entire society in military units, so squad leader is the first aspiration of any up-and-coming young reptile. It is the first stage on the political, social *and* military ladders (those terms being essentially synonymous).

Alpha-Draconian Raid Leader

Body: 11 Health: 11 Mind: 10 Social: 4 Soul: 3 HP: 22 Will: 7

Bonuses

Flight

Alpha-Draconians have large scaly wings which they can use to fly at walking speed. They cannot manoeuvre very well with these wings, but they are helpful in a pinch.

Way of the Warrior

Alpha-Draconians are trained to be warriors from the time they can crawl. They are resistant to pain and suffer no negatives to skill because of damage to their body. They are still unconscious if their hit points go between zero and negative whatever their hit points are.

Alpha-Draconians have advanced their bodies to the point they regenerate with incredible speed. They heal one fourth their Health stat a turn.

Thick Skinned

The skin of an Alpha-Draconian is so thick it forms a natural armour. The skin of the Alpha-Draconian gives him 2 armour with 10 hit points.

Penalties

Alpha-Draconians are cold blooded. They require less food, but their bodies can not regulate their temperature. They have technology that can do this, but if that technology fails they are at the whim of their environment.

Skills

Computers rank 15, Fly rank 10, Medicine Modern (advanced to our understanding) rank 10, Perception rank 10, Riddles rank 10, Dodge rank 15, Projectile, Fired rank 15, Lore (Earth) rank 5

Description

Alpha-draconian are large, winged, humanoid, reptilian creatures, growing to about twenty two feet tall. They have long clawed fingers and toes, and thick green scales. Raid leaders will carry standard military equipment, as well as additional tactical and strategic gear such as maps, data-pads, and advanced communication equipment better suited to coordinating large groups.

History

Raid Leader is traditionally a temporary role, assigned to veteran squad leaders as a chance to prove themselves or a higher ranked warrior ideally suited to the raid in question. Either the Raid Leader proves himself and gets promoted, dies and is honoured, or disgraces himself and is returned to the ranks. On Earth, however, with its protracted conflict, certain warriors have shown a particular flair for handling the type of short, sharp engagements required and as a result gained official sanction to arrange and handle such matters. With such limited numbers of warriors, and a definite command structure to maintain, this does not quite constitute a promotion to the next rank, though it is definitely a promotion above Squad Leader. Raid Leader remains an intermediate rank, though it has received more prominence on Earth than is typical.

The Raid Leader gathered the leaders of his three squads around the projector, and pressed the button. Darkness fell as the counter-detection unit powered up, only to be illuminated by a glowing representation of the target. It hung over the projector before the eyes of the assembled lizards, a holographic illusion of a human village. The walls were reinforced wood, quick to assemble and moderately effective, whilst the gate had clearly been salvaged from a sturdier structure. The buildings within had been barricaded as well. This was a settlement that could hold out against considerable odds.

“We attack under cover of stealth.” the Raid Leader informed the others, “Do not reveal your approach. Once we have gained the walls, employ sleep gas grenades. With the humans unconscious, they can be safely bound and returned to base.”

“Why capture them?” asked the dimmest of the reptiles, “If they don't surrender, we should kill them.”

“Our illustrious General requires more slaves,” replied the Raid Leader, “Unless you are offering to clean out the sewage yourself, you should honour that request,” the object of his stare shuddered at the thought, “use the slave-prods if you have to. Go with swift stealth.”

The others recognised the dismissal, and left through the obscuring field generated by the counter-detection unit, but the Raid Leader held back his most trusted Squad Leader for a final word.

“When attacked previously, the humans fled through the tunnel here,” he pointed at the projection, indicating an entrance previously hidden “Cut them off when we attack, and gas the tunnel thoroughly for good measure.”

“Yes, Sir.” he replied, and left as the counter-detection unit powered down.

The Raid Leader watched his underlings return to give their squads his orders. He wondered how many of them would live through the night.

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ALPHA-DRACONIAN STRUCTURES

There is only one permanent Alpha-Draconian Stronghold in the world, and it is in the middle of Antarctica. Antarctica was chosen because it is completely cut off from all other land masses, uninhabited (apart from a few scientific expeditions which had already evacuated) and protected by an extremely hostile climate. Thus it was as well defended a location as the Earth has to offer, and the Alpha-Draconian leader can gain some measure of credit by claiming to have entirely 'conquered' the continent. One down, six to go. Creating additional strongholds would require significant expenditure of effort on the part of the Alpha-Draconians (and the humans are sure to attack the builders, requiring *extremely* powerful guards), and would then have to be manned by a significant force to drive off subsequent attacks. This would greatly reduce the Alpha-Draconians limited man-power, and maintaining enough strongholds to affect any significant degree of control over as much as a single continent would consume the Alpha-Draconian's entire remaining force. Therefore, the Alpha-Draconians rely on their one secure base and temporary camps. The camps are relatively secure bases for a short mission, but leaving a camp in place for more than a few days almost guarantees it's destruction (remembering that there are more than a few seers out there). Technically, they could also use their orbiting transport ships as well, but they are not much use for ground-based forces.

Typical Alpha-Draconian Camp

These camps are very temporary, usually intended to allow a raiding party to get a good rest before a raid. They also offer a position from which the raid's leader can assess any available intelligence, and perhaps send for (or conduct) more up-to-date reconnaissance. Similar camps are also set up to provide emergency recuperative aid to injured troopers before they are transported back to the main base. The Alpha-Draconian forces no longer use the same camp before and after a raid. Before the raid begins, the camp will be taken down. If one is needed afterwards, it will be set up somewhere

else. Too many camps were found and attacked by the humans in the early days of the invasion, simply because they remained predictably static.

A typical camp is centred around the projection unit. This device can create a secure environment where the Alpha-Draconians may conduct planning sessions and relate instructions without being overheard. It also incorporates a holographic projector to assist such meetings, and a sensor unit to detect approaching foes. The sensor unit works quite well on barren landscapes, but on Earth it keeps picking up local wildlife (anything from flies to elephants) and tagging it 'hostile contact'. Added to which, intelligent foes can sometimes trick the sensors (or the attached computer) into missing them and unliving hostiles rarely register at all. Each camp therefore depends primarily on patrols and lookouts for security – approximately a quarter of the camp's population will on lookout duty at any given time.

Surrounding the central projector will be a ring of personal projection units – the Alpha-Draconian equivalent of a tent. When activated, a personal projection unit will create a firm, warm crater, approximately three yards wide and centred on the unit. It also projects an energy field that keeps the area within that space at a temperature comfortable for the cold-blooded Alpha-Draconians, and is capable of blocking minor projectiles. This latter capability is not military-grade: it will protect the occupant from most forms of earthly precipitation, and winds less than gale force, but not larger or faster projectiles. Even a hand-hurled pebble would penetrate the shield. The shield can, however, be tuned to block or dim incoming and/or outgoing light, allowing the occupant a degree of privacy, and can also be made to glow from the inside and/or outside, providing illumination. It is common to block all light from leaving (granting the occupant privacy), but none from entering (allowing the occupant to see what is happening outside). Unlike the larger, central projection unit, this device does not block sound.

A particularly large encampment would have multiple rings, but such a concentration of force has proven unwise on Earth. The time taken to gather such an army would invite a devastating attack and give the potential victims plenty of time to evacuate; besides which there are few, if any, remaining targets that would warrant such a force. When deploying such a camp, positions in the innermost ring are reserved for the highest-ranking Alpha-Draconians present, whilst positions in the outermost ring are assigned to the lowest ranking members (usually the slaves required to support such a force). Note that the ranking system of any major military force is far more complex than it might initially appear. Within a given level of rank (say, Squad Leader) there are unofficial rankings as well. If six squads are present, and there is only enough room for 5 Squad leaders in the inner ring, the Squad Leader most recently promoted to that role, or the one with the poorest win-loss ratio, will be relegated to the second ring. The Alpha-Draconian's military structure serves triple duty as a military, political, and social structure, so it is naturally complex enough to handle all the needed positions, even if they are not always spelt out for outsiders.

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The General stood on his podium. His chief advisors stood in a ring around the podium, and beyond them stood a further ring of functionaries. Alpha-Draconian, of course, but each attended to by a small flock of lesser slaves.

“We have met the humans with overwhelming force on the field of battle,” intoned the General, his deep voice echoing through the cavernous chamber, “In battle, we were victorious. In conquest, we were failures.”

The accusation stung all of those present, even if he had not directed it at any of them. To be associated with any failure was a deep shame. The chamber was warm and insulated, but the advisors and functionaries felt the chilling weight of an encroaching dread as if it were still the bare Antarctic ice from which it had originally been carved.

“We met the humans' determination with like resolve, and faced them with grim attrition.” some of

the advisors quailed more visibly now, for attrition had not been the General's idea, "Attrition has proven to be the humans' ally, not ours."

The silence lay thick in the chamber, as the Alpha-Draconians waited with baited breath. The slaves, lacking the will to do otherwise, cowered before their masters.

"To continue as we have is to fail, slowly and horribly. To return to our old failure is to perish at the hands of the humans." the General swept the room with his glare as the silence deepened, before adding, "We must change or fail, again, and change we shall. I have summoned you here to tell you how we shall conduct this war from here on in. Follow my instructions and we shall snatch victory yet. Fail me in this, and the foe shall be the least of your fears."

With his audience thus quaking, the General began to relate his plan.

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