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IN THE BEGINNING

There are a number of people who want to play something along the lines of a contract killer, but they're not too sure of how to start out doing so, this is a collection of random thoughts on how to start working on such a project.

The Primary thing to consider when putting together any contract circuit campaign is that it involves very colourful characters, most of them very extroverted. The players need to be able to work in a high pressure environment, with constant calls on their time and requirements of them to stay in character for a good part of the time. If the players are into cerebral campaigns with a lot of problem solving and a lot of investigative work, it would be the humble option of this person that a contract circuit campaign might not be the best option for them.

However, that said, it can be fun to go for a circuit campaign for a month or so, just to give them a break from operative life. It should be understood that the Differences between Contract Circuit characters and Operatives is only a small one, despite what many people think.

Most operatives get BPN's to see what they're doing next, most killers get orders, there's very little difference in the two. However, we should stress (and I'll probably repeat it numerous times) is that the combined killer/operative campaign is not for the inexperienced GM. The Campaign can be run in several ways, but before we get to that, we have to through the process of putting together a killer. This may seem to be fairly easy, but as will be revealed, a regular, derivative killer is easy to do, but the circuit is not made on derivative characters. What follows is a few guidelines on individuality.

All killers are created equal?

What type of killer do you have there? Usually, killers fit one of several different profiles.

Brawler

These killers use pure physical force to deal with almost all their matches. They're not especially technically gifted, this is not to say that they're not inhumanly good at close combat, because they usually are, it means that they're not usually very good in multiple arenas. They'll be sterling in basic slugfests, probably have some ability with short-ranged weaponry, and have the staying power to outlast most of their competition. However, if you put them through their paces on the full range of things in the contract circuit, they'll come up wanting on most of the levels. Brawlers tend to be of the larger race types, Stormer, Shaktar, Frother, but you occasionally find Ebons and wasters with a high level of protect, healing, and enhancement in this category, contrary to popular belief, humans who are unaugmented are not usually found in this category.

Specialist

These guys have all their points invested in one particular skill or skillset, usually something that keeps them out of danger, such as sniping, you'll occasionally get one that works with close combat, but that's usually the brawlers territory. Specialists work extremely well by themselves, but they work better in a team, where their own shortcomings can be made up by the rest of the team. Once again, it is usually the aliens that work in these particular fields, or at least, the augmented humans.

Technician

Different in a lot of ways to the specialist, the technician is a killer with intention and will, they are capable of taking on targets at their discretion, but never on their own field of battle. They are not as skilled as specialists or brawlers in their own field, but they can probably take them on another field.

Now, this has got most people thinking that they're going to be technicians, but this leads us on to the other problem. If you're a starting character and you want to have any depth (and we'll come on to this in a while), you can't be a technician, there's not enough character points in the world. You'll also note that both of the other fields say that it's not dominated by unaugmented humans, which is something that you're going to have to put up with. The simple fact of the matter is that humans are just not exceptional enough in any field to create dominance, there are more of them than any other race, but numbers do not constitute dominance unless you're at war. They weren't created for combat, and they weren't born on a planet where most of them died before their second birthday, they are the evolutionary step backwards, but when they do excel, they're amongst the best any race has to offer.

So, why can't you be a technician to start with? Simple, to be a technician takes well rounded capability, it takes mastery of a few fields, enough to challenge most people at a good level, and for that, we're talking skills of 9+. Beginning characters with the stats to pull those skills off, and the skills themselves, has left nothing to build a character with unless they've taken massive loads on disadvantages, and that's where we go when we're building the rest of the character, which is not where we are yet.

Before you were a Killer

All starting killers have to excel at something, one of their combat skills should be at least 8+, anything less and they should stay in

the little leagues, as they're not going to get anywhere in the bigs. There are some who will argue that this is min-maxing, it's not, it's simply the nature of the game. If you're mediocre at a fighting skill, then mediocre is where your fame will sit, and unless you have a hankering to fit in at the bottom, then you need at least one skill that you can rely on. Choosing this skill is the first stage of the character, you build everything else from there.

So you want to be top? Not the eighties game show I'll wager, but still, now you have a skill to build the character on, the next stage is the basics of the character. You have their primary fighting skill, it always does well to have a secondary, and at least one other fighting skill other than your primary type. So if you have your primary fighting skill as Blade 1H, your secondary should be something ranged, the warrior who only knows one thing is not a warrior, he's a hit waiting to happen.

Then you have to build the rest, contract killers tend to have high stats, and that's not just the physical stats. A stupid killer is a mistake, the only stupid killers in the world are the ones who are in the grave, or the ones who aren't possessed of any actual intelligence (Lucky Die, the Bad Thing, the Lash). Now, if you're playing an animal, then that's fine, you're not actually playing, so we'll discard these options. I'm not saying maximise your entire stat range, but pay attention to what you're doing with the stats, remember that charisma, while not important at the moment, will be something that you will be using later in the game.

Then work on the rest of the frame, the other skills, it's all very well to have Rifle 10 and a Fen Surekill, but that won't get you to the top of the circuit, you need the other skills that go with it. Most killers have some level of Tactics and Evaluate Opponent, but snipers also need knowledge of terrain, weapons, fieldcraft, and patience. Three of these you can get with skills, one of them you need to work with as a player. If you're a close in specialist, you need your primary skill, a secondary one to fall back on, and some form of unarmed combat to fall back again to in case you find yourself with no weapons. You'll also need knowledge of opponents, tactics, and terrain.

For those of you thinking that you'll take the skills of Evaluate opponent, Tactics, and one or two hobby skills like physiography and that'll do the trick, think again. It's all well and good to rely on your character to know these things, but you as a player need to work on these things as well, if you're playing a sniper, read a few articles on the subject, there's plenty on the net. It's not a case of getting too involved with the character, it's a case of knowing enough to make the character interesting to both you and the other people involved in the game. A sniper who sits there with his scope visible to all because he didn't get any anti-glare covering will only be of interest (i.e. alive) if the GM does not penalise them for it. This is not actually roleplaying, this is getting God to let you off, it doesn't happen in real life, why should it happen in the game? The best types of game to play in are where the characters and GM work together to raise the level of play without playing off against each other. A character who works in the hand to hand realm who tries to fight with double handed weapons in each hand will be a liability to themselves for reasons that we'll go into later.

Read those articles, see what qualities are listed when the people in them describe what they're doing, work skills from there, and don't forget to put together skills beyond the combat side of things. You can build the best combat monster in the world, but your skills are what define you, if you can only do combat, then you're not a character, you're a caricature, and that's no fun to work with. Look at fighters through history, every one of them had something other than fighting to go on, Bruce Lee read books for example. It may seem to be not much of a hobby, but he read in volume, he read books on all manner of subjects, and what he gleaned from them, he used when he fought. Ian "The

Machine" Freeman, a world class Vale Tudo fighter, writes poetry in his spare time. These are pastimes you wouldn't associate with killers and fighters, but they understand something that most people don't, you can't be a fighter all the time, you have to be a person first before you can be a fighter. It is no different to this when you play a character, your character must be a person first and a fighter second. If you make them as a fighter first and a person second, then you might as well nip down to the arcade and have a blast on Tekken 4, because that's more fun than doing it with dice.

Basic Image

The character has an idea, they've got the skills that they will work with, now you have to put an image together, the first step with this is the name of the character. A character needs a name, and the name has to fit with the image of the character.

Name

The stumbling block of almost any character, no matter how well designed, no matter how well thought out, is the name. Players the world over have the same problems, how to name a character. The first step is to get a book or list of names, and I'm serious about that, all good roleplayers have access to a list of names somewhere. You can find them on the RPGA list, on the raven sites, all over biblical sites, and who amongst us does not have access to the Internet? The key with names is to work with what you have, there are some countries who have particular sounds to their names, there are languages that sound better and worse in certain aspects, and you have to consider what aspect of the character you need to emphasise.

Do you want the character to sound militaristic, romantic, capable, easy going, vicious, or philosophical? Whatever you want, you have to consider that each language sounds different because of the way that it's pronounced. Consider the different languages and their particular takes on a given name. For example, taking as an example, the English Christian name of Peter. In English, it's a simple name, it means rock, or stone, and was the name of one of the most well known apostles of Christ, traditionally regarded as the founder of the Christian church. However, then you must consider the other options, take a few other options, Pierre (the French version), Pedro (the Spanish version), Pyotr (the Russian version), and Peidearan (the Gaelic option), and see what you have.

In general, if you use one of the softer languages, French, Spanish, Portuguese, similar romance languages (in other words, from the romance language groups, not because they sound romantic) will all sound milder and more rounded, flowing from the tongue, than the versions that you'll hear from the more martial cultures, such as German, Russian, and the other northern lands. If you want your character to seem more military, martial, or in general, more competent in the ways of war, then you should choose a name from one of the military backgrounds. If you want your character to have an edge of mystery, choose a language that few people are familiar with, or get a regular name and find the translation for it into something that you find suitable. Be careful that when you choose a first name, you have to choose the last name from the same cultural background, you can sometimes choose from similar backgrounds, but working with the same culture guarantees continuity in the character, something that is too often missing. Finally, when you're choosing a name, consider that multiple uses of the same letter at the beginning of the name will mean that unless you have a very strong handle, then you'll be known by your initials. An example of this would be Robert (Bobby to his friends) Bruce Banner, from this, you'd get Triple B.....Unless this man wasn't known to millions as

The Hulk.....

With regular names however, it's easy to see how good names are thought up.

For example

Robert Paulsen, a well known character, has both parts of his name based in Germanic origins, it makes the repetition easier, because both parts seem to fit with themselves.

Kurt Bartholomew, part of the name is Germanic in origin, part of it is English, but the two parts of it don't gel well even though the words are from a similar baseline. If you were to re-arrange the last name to its Germanic counterpart, you get Kurt Bartek, a far shorter sharper name, with all the images that that conjures up.

The difference in these two is that one of them was thought about, and the other one had to try real hard to sound wrong. If you're using the same language base, then the names will usually gel fairly well, give it a go.

Handle

The next step is to make the name that your character goes to work with. The best way of doing this is to work with the same language that you chose their name from, take the English word for whatever thing you want to represent and then translate it into the chosen language. Well, it's not the best way of doing it, but it's certainly the easiest. Consider the types of names that you can use in the creation of the character, try not to stray too far from their backgrounds when you do so.

If no basic names present themselves, work with what you have around you, and that means that all the things that you have around you every day. You can see things in every day life and then work on that, the most mundane things can be used in various ways if you use a little imagination. The next thing is to consider that your character is a killer, they'll be in matches when commentators have to deal with their name, if it's too long and involved, it'll get truncated, not always in your favour I might add. When you're using animal names, be careful not to go for the staid old favourites like Black Panther, White Tiger. Sometimes it's enough just to go with the name of the animal itself, but be careful that any animal you take the name of has something that you want to emulate about it, Rhino is a good name, symbolising power, aggression, and resilience. Platypus, on the other hand.....

"So why do you call yourself Platypus?"

"Erm, well, my agents' bills are fearsome....."

You can take this to extremes, again, be careful with this.

"And once again, Moth triumphs over his adversary by cutting off their testicles.....Why do you do that then Moth?"

"Well, I was thinking moth, moth-balls....."

Use the names of gods, be aware what the god was god of, and be aware of what culture the god was representing. It's okay for a character with a real name of Halgir Jorgensen to take the name of Thor as his character handle, it would be a little strange if a character by the name of Ahmed ibn Fadlan ibn Rashid did the same thing. Take mythology in the same way, stay within the characters culture, but feel free to look around in these areas, they often provide a great amount of inspiration. Mythological beasts often provide excellent names for characters to work with, but again, care should be exercised with these things. Hydra may seem to be an excellent name for a character, but the hydra was something that survived getting its head chopped off by growing new heads. Most players, when faced by such a thing, would

attempt to cut off the hydras head to see if it grows back, don't give them the temptation, keep it sharp and clear.

A final word on the choosing of a stage name for the character, it can seem a good idea in many ways for the character to take one of the stock names that are out there. However, this is a bad idea, a character who works on the ideas of others will only end up copying others, and that way lies death and no fame. The only time that this works is when the character is built around a concept, and that concept can be contained within the name.

Examples of this include a character that takes the name of "Nemesis", when their entire existence is based on the idea of vengeance and retribution. It doesn't work too often, but when you can get a character like this, they can be a lot of fun to play.

Be careful if you're using initials or numbers, in other words, try not to use them, if you're using numbers, you make it sound like there's more just like them back at home. You can do the old trick of calling yourself "one", then when you get killed, call your next incarnation "two", but you'll find that everybody will end up trying to get you to "one thousand" fairly quickly. If you're using initials, try and avoid the obvious ones, those who can think back in WWF history will remember I.R.S. (Irwin R Shyster), amusing character, quickly became a joke in more ways than one, and soon found himself on the way out. The same holds true for contract circuit characters, it's all well and good to call your character CS1, but you'll find that he'll end up spending most of his time in CS1. If you have to use multiple names for the handle, try not to exceed five syllables in all the names put together. After all,

Ti-ta-ni-um Di-no-sau-r

Doesn't work

The Bea-st

Does

An easy way of looking at it is to see things from an announcers point of view, have a name that people can shorten if they want to, it works wonders for most killers. You can get a longer name so that they can take some time announcing you, then a shorter version of it for when they're yelling it in the ring. The best way to accomplish this is to choose something that describes you, then a name that works well with the description. Real Life examples include "Stone Cold" Steve Austin, Ian "The Machine" Freeman, and Don "The Dragon" Wilson. Each one of them has two names that complement each other, it's remarkably easy to do when you think about it, go Mafia, think names that are an animal, add "the" to it, and you're there. For Example, take a look at the various Gladiators programs from the last part of the nineties, each one of them had a one word name, you could easily add a regular name to both sides of it, but each name was usually something fairly mundane, take a look.

Jet, Lightning, Shadow, Warrior, Saracen, Scorpio, Nightshade, Panther.

Everyone of them something that you can find in general life just looking around, and in case you're thinking that you can quite easily find ways of making them funny or silly, you'd be right, it's more simple than you know, take a look at the same list of names now.....

"Jump" Jet
 "Greased" Lightning
 Shadow "Rising"
 "Ultimate" Warrior
 Saracen "Malt Vinegar"
 "Starsign" Scorpio

"Deadly" Nightshade
 "Black" Panther.

Easily done, but the fact of the matter is that almost any name is easy to make fun of, so there's no point worrying about what everyone else thinks, take a name that you're happy with and then make something out of it.

For those thinking it can't be done with existing killers, think again, as much as I'm against the idea of making some of the legends seem a little silly, check it out.

"False" Deity
 The "Permanent" Frown
 "Jesse" Preacher
 The "James" Bond
 "Cor" Delia the Destroyer (Watch buffy a few times and watch how skewed that gets)
 Johnny "Hey, I don't sell Sex Aids" Automatic (think how many times the papers have asked if Johnny really is automatic.....)
 The "Aaarrrr Jim Lad" Spinner (Thanks to Owen Hughes for making the most powerful killer on the planet the biggest laughing stock ever.....)
 Mr "Where's my white face and green hair" Midnight
 "Needle and" Thread

So we don't worry about what other people make out of our names, a name is only an embarrassment as long as you let it be one.

Appearance

So why did we do the name before we did what the character actually looks like? Simple, because most people do it the other way around and then have trouble working in what to call the big purple and yellow four armed loony.

So, how do we put together the image of the fighter?

General body shape and type, all fighters by definition are going to be defined (No pun intended), you don't get bad looking killers unless they're in the animal category. There will be those people who say that many of the killers without any form of looks are not animals, but take a good think about that. Take Screech for example, he doesn't talk, he doesn't interact, and the only commercials he's likely to be doing are for Dark Lament in the "Don't go to Karma, they made me" sort of vein, not the sort of thing that most people want to be doing.

You'll have ranks in good looking, that's almost a given, and certainly a few ranks in charisma, now you have to earn them. Firstly, consider the stats on the character, a character with Strength 20 is not going to be a small person, no matter what they try, they're going to have massive muscles, that's a given. Equally, if a character has Strength 5, then they'll be not in the big muscles league. Consider also the skillset that the character has, a character with any close combat skill above 6 will have a functional muscle structure, not that of a low muscle, no matter what their stats are. There's a simple law that muscles are only functional in the areas that they're worked, and no matter what anyone says, you can't work all the muscle groups in the body and still have spare time in the day to go killing things, it doesn't work that way.

If the character has more skills in melee weapons, then their upper body will be more developed than their lower body. If they have a high level of athletics and unarmed combat skills, then their body will be more all over developed, higher levels of running will boost the size of the lower body. Either way, take a look at a few comic books, because that's where most

anatomy comes in for the type of character that you'll be playing. Consider the differences between how the character looks and how the character works. Most comic book heroes have overdeveloped muscles, but they're still in proportion to the rest of their body. The Hulk may have fifty inch biceps, but he's got a two hundred inch chest and he's nine feet tall, who cares if he's green, he's in proportion.

There's nothing to stop you having the sort of matchstick legs, barrel chest character that used to be prevalent, but you'll not get respect for that, you'll be good for novelty value, but nothing else. To illustrate this point, take a look at the female characters, the classic ones are in proportion, they're the ones with the capability to make a difference. The ones with the balloons directly below their chin are the outtakes, the also-rans, they're the ones who end up as munchies for the bad guy. The same holds true for the men, it's just less obvious.

Whether they're the large brutish looking type or the thin wiry death machine, the thing that makes the fighter is the total package, which brings us to.....

The Costume

A fighters costume represents several things, it identifies them to the public, it is their shield against crazed stalkers, and the mystique that surrounds them. A good costume is half the battle, and the character you currently have isn't good enough for a few tattered bits of cloth and ancient armour (hello Mr Automatic) or a funky mask (Behold, Deity) to serve as their identification.

Don't go for gimmicks, they'll work for the newbies, and you'll be eternally embarrassed that you ever had them when you reach a level other than nobody (for those who need it spelling out, leave the purple jumpsuit at home MTV boy....)

Choose colours, two of them, make them different, and by that, I don't mean orange and yellow, they should be distinct, vibrant, and clear. Why is this? The simple answer is that if your character is colourful, then so is your career, if you're dressed in brown and grey, then unless you're playing the role of a warrior monk out to get vengeance, not many people will take much notice of you.

Consider then, the way that the costume is put together, most of the regular costumes work by putting the darker colour on the raised parts of the body and the lighter colour in the more subdued areas. A simple colour scheme often works well, avoid using insignias unless you're looking to avoid sponsorship, as the logo will almost certainly clash with any sponsor that you get. The other thing to consider is that if you use an insignia, you might get haunted by it in years to come if you're not most successful in your first incarnation. Batman and Superman get where they are because they're the best there is at what they do, no one laughs at the idea of a man emulating a giant winged rodent because they know of the legend that precedes him. However, in the initial stages of the career of the Batman, he was derided because the costume was not well known enough. The same holds true for any character with a last name of "man", take a look.

Spiderman, Batman, Superman, Plastic Man (although there are some who would say that fame was no benefit to that last one).

Consider the benefits of mask-wearing, it helps you keep a part of your life private, it allows you to get away with excess on the field because no one knows where you are or who you are away from the wars. If you're not wanting to wear a full mask, consider how your face should be presented, there are a number of ways you can present yourself. Go with the full mask, partial mask, or open head look. A full mask will present the mystery approach, and

there are several ways of doing this, the first is with the carved face mask, usually in the image of some beast or mythical thing. This is all well and good until you consider that the only people using these particular masks are the comedy villains of the piece. The hero needs a little more dignity than that, and anyone in the world of progress who needs to have a false demonic face when you can buy a real one down the road at karma is seriously in need of an ass-kicking. The next is the full face shield, as exhibited by the ninja in metal gear solid. This can take one of many different forms, such as the mechanised units that can be retracted into the side of the mask, or the ones where the blast shield comes down in the front of the mask (a la Star wars). The benefit to this type of mask is that it presents the image of inscrutability to the public, and therefore increases the need for them to find out about the killer. However, what it also does work with is allowing the public to identify with the killer, size restrictions aside, the killer could be anything under that mask, human, ebon, Frother, waster, Stormer, carrier, or any number of other races. This allows more people to become fans of the character.

Something that a lot of people underrate is the half mask, it's neither one or the other, and so most people discount it as a waste. A mask that only covers part of the face serves to inspire the imagination though, and most of the public will spend their lives trying to figure out what the rest of the face looks like. This of course requires that you never show the public what the rest of the face looks like, but that's a small price to pay for the interest that it will generate. Take a look at the most famous of the half masks, Judge Dredd, no one's ever seen the entire face, they've seen bits of it, but never the whole thing unless he's been disfigured or face changed. As a result, the character becomes famous for what they almost are, not what they are, but everyone can identify with the character behind the mask. Go to the other extreme and have only the eyes visible, and you've got another excellent combination, the eyes can be massively expressive, and in only letting people see the eyes, they can only *think* that they know what's going on in the head of the character.

The final way of doing things is without the mask, this is almost unheard of, because lets be honest....

Head Shots Rule

However, any character that runs around without their mask on most of the time gets the one thing that the freaky-deakys don't.....

Respect.

A character who doesn't have a mask will have the public watching them all the time, when they're annoyed, they'll be seen to be annoyed, when they're upset, the public will see that. It may not be seemly for the public to see the killer roaring in frustration, but it lets them know that he's not afraid for them to see what he is at all times, and that earns points in any language. A character who wears what they are on their arm will always get bonus points for not needing to hide from the public, but it should be noted that this only tends to work for characters who do have the face to face charisma to pull it off.

Variety is the spice of life. All operatives are given two suits when they hit the streets, you can spot the difference between the successful operatives and the unsuccessful ones, the unsuccessful ones are still wearing their first two suits. The same holds true for killers, you have the clothes you go to work in, and then you have the clothes you go home in, and if you were a civilian, this would be fine.

But you're not.....

Killers should have some skill with wardrobe and style, or if they haven't, they need someone who works with them who has

the skill. The only time that a killer has only the one costume to go to work in is because they have something invested in the costume or because they don't have the money to buy another one. What does this teach us?

If you're not the Batman, buy a spare costume.....

Style

All killers have style, it goes with the territory, the successful ones have a style all their own and not last months from the magazines. So how does this work?

At the beginning of the book, there was a point about how characters don't use two handed weapons one handed, I know what everyone's thinking, why not?

I'll tell you why not, if you're using a two handed weapon, then you're using a weapon that you can't use in one hand, that's why not. There're people out there who think that you can use a two handed weapon one handed if you have sufficient strength, and in this, they're right, but you'll not be using it with a two handed style unless you're not tremendously bright. All hand to hand weapons are used to attack in one of five different ways, up, down, left, right, and thrusting, there is no other way to attack, no matter what you dress it up like, hand to hand weapons only work in those directions. It doesn't matter how much you spin the quarterstaff or how many times you hit yourself in the head with the nunchaks, you can only attack in those directions.

You've got five directions, that's all, so how do you make it interesting?

You might think that it's difficult to make something out of only five different things, but consider that the human body only has five senses, and from these five senses come the sum of all human experience. This is the same with all things to do with combat.

Combat is done one of two ways, with style or without, it's all just a question of position and place. A two handed weapon is a two handed weapon because it is used with both hands, not because it is larger or heavier. Two handed weapons are used in a winding, twisting motion, there aren't simple attacks, because, contrary to popular belief, you can't stake everything on a single blow unless your opponent is already defeated, it would open you up to any retaliation that they would want to throw at you. With a two handed weapon, you have to attack and parry at the same time, you have to strike in a way that both deflects your opponents blows and strikes one of your own at the same time. You don't have the luxury of disengaging at speed as you do with the rapier and sabre, your attacks have to be committed for the weapon in your hand to be of any use whatsoever.

This is a lesson that most people don't make any use of, most people attack, wait to see what effect their attack had, then attack again if they need to. This is fine if you're fighting with rules and constraints, if you can tell your opponent to stop and then make your recovery before you continue with the fight. This is not something that most people understand, in a real fight, you have to keep going till your enemy is destroyed, not just down, not floored, but destroyed, anything less will let them come back at you and take you instead.

When you design a killer, and you choose their method of hand to hand combat, you have to consider what you want them to appear like when they fight. An excellent suggestion would be take a look at a few of the better martial arts films out there at the moment, then put together something based on that. The real world isn't the same as the world that the killer is fighting in, when your character is out there in the world, they fight like

someone in a film, and that's what you have to work. Look at different fighting styles, are you impressed by the brutality of the fight scenes in films like Rob Roy and Braveheart? If so, you need to take a look at two handed weapons. Maybe you prefer the English fighter in Rob Roy, if you do, then you certainly need to take a look at short sword. Look at crouching tiger hidden dragon, in the fight scene between the two women, the differences in fighting style are clearly apparent, and although one of the fighters has a far superior weapon, it is clear to all concerned who the better fighter of the two is. It is no different in the circuit.

When you look at weapons, consider the way that each weapon works, when you're using a regular single handed or hand a half sword, you can use the weapon to attack, parry, and disarm, but you can also use it to lightly injure or disable another fighter. When you're using a two handed sword, you have a far more limited set of options. Any hit from a two handed weapon will cause far more damage than one from a smaller blade, limiting your options by removing the options of lightly injuring or disabling (without permanently disabling) your opponent.

These are also things to consider when you see other people carrying the weapons that they do. Anyone carrying a sabre probably has some degree of training in it, they'll be looking to extend the fight and make a show of it, not finish it quickly. Anyone carrying a Claymore or flick scythe is looking to destroy their opponent, two handed fighting styles are not pretty, but they are effective. When you see people using weapons like Mutilators and jolt gloves, you can be sure that they want the audience to appreciate the damage they can cause with "their own two hands". Weapons that only have a range equal to that of natural weaponry are used by people who want to make sure of their opponents' demise at the closest range possible.

But back to making it interesting, if you decide to tell the GM

"I hit him"

Then you're doing everyone, especially yourself, a great disservice, it takes no imagination to say that you hit something, most of us were doing it way back in the early days when SLA was but a dark future away. What it takes here is a willingness to get into the character, to be where they are and to work with them. Take a look at fencing manuals, look over old fighting manuals from yesteryear, they can all be found on the net, ask questions, take an interest in how these fighters looked. You'd be amazed at the sheer variety of techniques and ideas that they come up with, and each one can be easily adapted into your characters fighting style. Don't be worried about using the terminology that they used, just make sure that the GM is familiar with what you're referring to, it's far easier to orchestrate a fight if you're using the right language.

For those wishing to wander around with chagrins holding claymores in each hand, be aware that they'll be using them more like sabres than claymores, and the claymores won't be chagrin sized claymores, they'll be human sized claymores. The weapons themselves aren't designed to be used in pairs, and anyone with Blade 2H will know how to use the weapons as two handed weapons, not just take the ambidexterity advantage and take double attacks every round with two handed weapons. This is what causes a lot of people the problem. The current system is set up to allow players to make this sort of play quite easily, and in my honest opinion, it makes it too easy to abuse and turn players from regular, realistic fighting machines, into wholesale combat gods. See the new Skills section for further details on this matter.

KILLING THINGS

Different Weapons and their styles.

The first step in deciding what weapons you're going to be using is knowing how each weapon works, what follows is a small listing of how each weapon type tends to work, together with a few new options for the weapons in question.

Blade 1H

This category covers a wide range of weapons, ranging from the sabre to the hand axe, to the dagger, and as such, is problematic to cover with broad definitions. The Axe will be covered under the axe skill, so we start with the sword, one handed swords are used in both a cutting and a thrusting motion, most of them have the edge and the point required to do so. When using a one handed blade, it is important to remember that the body does not come into use very much on the weapon. When you swing it, you use your arm and shoulder, never throwing the foot and body behind it, it's too fast a weapon to be slowed down by clumsy movements. It is also important to consider that the one handed blade moves fast enough to attack, then parry, then attack again. It is rare that killers in the world of progress use this weapon by itself, the usual method of using one handed weapons is one in each hand. There have been occasions where the weapon is used in conjunction with the shield, but these are rare.

The other way that the sword is used is when the weapon is more like a rapier, it is rarely used like this in the contract circuit, because rapier fights are essentially not very interesting. There are a few stabbing motions, and one of the combatants falls over dead, doesn't make for very cinematic television.

Considering that the vibro sabre is one of the most popular weapons on the face of mort, it is worth mentioning why, the vibro sabre usually has a curve to the blade, which permits for a far wider range of techniques than the regular straight blade. Consider that when you parry a regular sword, that's all it goes to, it can't go

anywhere else. When you parry a curved sword, the attacker can flick his wrist over, reversing the angle of the blade, allowing them to attack again without having to withdraw and bring the weapon back to bear. Usual targets when this is done are a second thrust to the chest area or a cut to the wrist and arms of the opponent. The same holds true of any weapon with a curve to its edge.

Finally, the smaller weapons of the circuit, the power disk for example, this weapon can attack with any side of it, but it lacks the range and capability of the longer weapons. The average sabre is three feet long, and can attack with any part of it. The disk extends maybe three inches from the hand. This means that you it's slower than the average sabre, which most people don't understand, but consider this, when you flick your wrist, the disk moves at the same speed. When you've got a sabre in your hand, and you flick your wrist in the same motion, the fingers still move at the same speed, but three feet from the end of your fingers, the end of the blade gets from point to point in the same time. Simple physics, the blade is faster, and you have to understand that. When you're in close, the disk will be more useful, but you've got to get close first. For the most part, disks tend to be used with the martial arts skill rather than the blade 1H skill.

The primary consideration with a one handed blade is your defence. The weapon isn't heavy enough to collapse most defences, and it's not powerful enough to make the first hit a lethal one unless you're always aiming for the head (which isn't a bad idea in itself), which only the best of combatants can pull off. Thus, when you see a fighter with a one handed sword, chances are that they're going to be looking to make the fight last a while, and are more concerned with coming out of it on the other side in one piece.

Weapons such as the gash fist are covered in the hand weapons section.

MJL SplinterSword

Following the success of the Power Claymore, MJL moved into the smaller blade market with the production of the SplinterSword, a straight blade with separate retractable blades all the way down the blade. It can be used in either mode, with blades retracted or extended. Rumours of the weapon being unstable when the blades are extended have not been confirmed, the tests are ongoing.

Type	Mode	Dam	Pen	Ad
SplinterSword	Extended	5	4	2
	Retracted	4	4	2

Cost : 110c

Blade 2h

Two handed blades are a whole different story, and most people don't understand this *at all*. When you're using a two handed weapon, you have to strike and parry at the same time, there can't be a pause between attacking and parrying, the style just doesn't allow you to do it. Consider the differences in weapons, we will start with the two handed sword. Any two handed sword has to have no consideration for defence, you have to attack, then wind into the next attack, then the next, and not give your opponent chance to consider what he's trying to do. This style isn't for everybody, and although you'll often get the reputation for being a berserker, those who fight well know the difference. A thing to consider when using the two handed sword is that it has the weight behind it to cleave through half hearted defences, and the power to make any wound inflicted a lethal one. There is the question of style, and unfortunately, many people cannot tell the difference between style and berserk. To most people, the two

handed blade is only the Claymore used by many frothers, but there are far many more two handed blades. These range from the Dacian Falx (think Katana with the point reversed) to the Tachi (double handed Katana), to the Zweihander, a sword both longer and broader than the Claymore. Always bear in mind that the two handed blade is only wielded by those looking to finish their opponent with certainty, it is not a weapon for showboating with.

DPB Zweihander

Following MJLs foray into the single blade market, DPB decided that it was time for them to go into the larger blade market. The Flick scythe is still one of the most popular of the larger weapons in use at this point in time, but they're not as good for telegenics as the sword is. Working on the same principle as the Flick Scythe, they put together a weapon with a five foot blade, capable of slicing through most things with a single blow. Unfortunately, this blade is configured so that the blade does maximum penetration but far less armour damage as a result, the cuts are shallower and sharper, but most armour can stand up to this type of damage for far longer. Despite the improved performance on the weapon, the calibration specialists at DPB did not factor in the difficulties that most people would have adapting to this longer weapon. Initial reports have the weapon still selling, but usually only to the larger races. In Game Terms, this means that anyone using this weapon for the first time suffers a -2 on their hit rolls, this drops to -1 after ten fights with the weapon and to no penalty after ten more fights.

Type	Dmg	Pen	Ad	Cost
Zweihander	5	6	1	130c

MAC Tachi

MAC covered the knife market a long time ago, and this unassailable position allowed them to move into other markets. The MAC Tachi represents the latest development from the Orientan labs, very similar in length to the Power Claymore, but with the precise curve and beauty only present in orientan weaponry. Due to the way that it is used, the Tachi has a longer strike profile than the claymore, hitting more of the target with a single blow than the regular two handed weapon. Whether this proves to be a sticking point is yet to be determined, however, so far, the sales are encouraging.

Type	Dmg	Pen	Ad	Cost
Tachi	5	4	4	120c

Blunt 1H (Club 1h)

A very underused category of weapons, too many people consider that the blunt one handed weapons lack the credibility to be effective on the circuit. This is one hell of a misunderstanding when you consider that one of the deadliest fighting arts on our planet (i.e. you, the player) is Escrima Stick fighting, a style using two lightweight (less than a pound) sticks made out of light wood. Blunt weapons follow several different rules to that of bladed, the first of which is that they're heavier than the blades, which means that they require a greater level of concentration and strength to use. However, this is more than counterbalanced by the fact that these weapons can hit with any part of them, not just the blade, so blade alignment and cutting technique go right out of the window. The only exceptions to this are the weapons with a head, such as the mace, hammer, and morning star, and so this is the distinction that we will make. Any blunt weapon without a head will be used in a flicking and striking style, making swift, debilitating hits on the target till they drop from multiple bruising injuries or until they can get one good hit on a vulnerable spot. Any blunt weapon with a head will be used in a decisive

swiping motion, aiming at joints and vulnerable spots. The thing to remember when using blunt weapons is that most races have inbuilt shock absorbers in most of their bodies, so don't just be satisfied with aiming at the body in general. If you hit the chest plate on a suit of armour, you might do some damage, you might even move them back if you hit them hard enough. However, if you strike at one of the joints on the armour, you might be able to freeze the joint in place, you can certainly transfer some of the impact to the limb underneath, and that will usually be enough to follow up the first with a second. In Escrima fighting, they work on this principle, that by striking one location, you'll lock up another, and that's where you hit next, which will freeze up another location, which is where you hit next, and so on. While a lot of blunt one handed weapons are used in similar ways to one handed bladed weapons, they crush defences and make blocks far more effectively than their bladed counterparts. But with this in mind, they cannot be used to make glancing hits on the opponent that do anything vaguely resembling good damage in the same way that blades can sever surface arteries and cause tendon damage.

Another thing to think about is that blunt weapons can be used to lock up the opponent without damage far more easily than an edged weapon, any wrestling move that requires a straight arm can easily have a blunt weapon substituted in its place, and when you think about the possibilities involved in neck holds and chokes.....

You get the picture.

ITB Escrima Stick

After a brief interlude working with several of the Top contract circuit killers, ITB made several new forays into the weaponry forum, making use of their patented mutilator technology. Their first weapon was a short staff, three feet in length, with mutilator options fitted along the length of it. This weapon is light enough to be used in pairs, but also carries with it the power to do serious damage to anyone on the receiving end of it.

Type	Dmg	Pen	Ad	Cost
Escrima	5	2	3	100c

Blunt 2H

And it's here that the serious damage starts coming in. A two handed sword will split you in two, a six foot iron staff will do the same job and make it look *messy*. Once again, two different types of two handed blunt weapon, those that get used in the quarter stance, which is used in heavy, crushing blows, but also has the drawback of leaving the user more open to retaliation due to the increased weight of the weapon at the end. Also, unlike the bladed weapon, the extended range of the weapon doesn't provide the same level of deterrent as that of edged weapons, it's hard to be threatened by the end of a weapon that you can take hold of and move around fairly easily. So we move to the other type, two handed, but not long enough to count as a pole weapon. These weapons are again used in a crushing motion, beating aside the other persons weapon and striking in a similar fashion to the sword. However, the weapon must be used to strike at the vulnerable points if used in this fashion. The quarter staff is an interesting weapon, and amongst most fighters, is acknowledged as the master of all weapons because it combines excellent range with immensely powerful blows. Contrary to the listing in the Contract Directory, the quarterstaff is not a six foot pole, it is closer to eight or ten feet long. Also, it is not used by holding the middle of the staff, it is held in the last quarter (hence the term *quarter* staff) and used to jab and poke at the opponent in a manner similar to a spear. The weapon listed in the Contract Directory is actually known as a Bo Staff, and is held in the

middle, using both ends to strike and defend against the enemy. Further rules for the use of this weapon will be introduced in the weaponry and skills section of this book.

ITB "No Quarter" QuarterStaff

Nine feet long, and weighing in at over three kilos, the NQ is one of the largest hand to hand close quarter weapons on the contract circuit today. When you consider that the weight and mass of the weapon would already cause serious injury if it were not powdered, adding a mutilator option to the last six feet of the weapon make this one of the most damaging weapons on the circuit today. It is primarily used for events where its range and damage can be used to the advantage of the killer, it is of very limited use in the closer confines of many arenas, and has proven to be a liability in certain contest. Despite this however, the weapon remains a popular addition to the circuit.

Type	Dmg	Pen	Ad	Cost
No Quarter	5	5	5	200c

Flexible weapon

This skill covers the use of too wide a variety of weapon to cover easily, so we'll go with the ones that most people make use of, starting with the eponymous nunchaks, a weapon made famous by a number of films. The nunchaks are used in two different ways, with a swinging motion, and with a direct striking motion. Most of the strikes delivered from the weapon are used with the striking motion rather than the swing, which is a concept many people have problems with, given the way film stars use them. When swinging, the Nunchaks are typically used in an entangling motion, and they can assist the wrestling and martial arts techniques involving strangles and disarms when used in this manner. Flails are also used in this manner, but they cannot be used to strike in a direct manner, which reduces their combat effectiveness by an order of magnitude. Improvised weaponry such as chains and whips can be used with this skill, but each one of them has a very specialised method of attack. A typical block will not stop a chain, a straight parry will only line up the chain with the defenders body or head. This means that not only is fighting with the weapon an acquired skill, but also fighting against it is a skill which has to be learned as well. A skilled fighter can work with a chain in either hand, using one to entangle the opponent whilst striking at them with the other. This principle works well with the net as well, although the net can also be used as a shield (as many people in olden times knew well, fighting with cloak and dagger, cloak and rapier, and other such combinations to cover against the opponent.)

ITB Powerchuks

The difficulty in adapting nunchaks to use with mutilator options has been well documented. Due to the need to be able to switch which end of the weapon is being grasped, ITB came up with a set of sensors in the chuks themselves, which detect when they are near the user and deactivate themselves to prevent self injury. There have been a few teething problems with the sensors, but these seem to be mostly done now.

Type	Dmg	Pen	Ad	Cost
Powerchuks	3	2	3	70c

Pole arm

Other types of two handed weapon are weapons such as the scythe and the poleaxe (or lochaber axe as some people refer to it as), many people think that there's little difference between the two, but they are very wrong. A poleaxe can be used in two different stances, quarter and half, in the same manner as the

staff. In quarter stance, the weapon is held in the last quarter of the weapon, and the additional range is used to keep the enemy at bay. This particular style is frowned upon by most of the circuit, it suggests that the fighter is afraid to get in close with the enemy, but in contests against some of the more vicious animals, it is more than a little useful. The second way is half stance, in which the weapon is held in the middle of the shaft, allowing the weapon to be used in a similar fashion to a Bo staff. This allows the character to strike with both ends of the weapon with minimal pause between the strikes. Contrary to popular belief, the poleaxe doesn't weigh all that much, usually between two and five kilos depending on the head and foot of the weapon. Anyone of any level of acceptable strength will be able to use the weapon without too much of a problem, not losing anything in the realm of speed, more on this will be discussed in the weapons section.

Scythes are a different matter, there are two types of scythe, the ones with a blade at ninety degrees to the staff, and the ones with the blade straight up from the staff. The ninety degree blade is used in the poleaxe half stance, and is used to block with the back end of the weapon whilst attacking with the blade, it is a very difficult weapon to use, and as such, many killers choose not to make any use of it. The straight blade is used very much like a spear, and is often used in the quarter stance, which has the same problems that the poleaxe has.

Axe

There are many different types of axe, far many more than are typically considered when people see the word. The most common types are those know as bearded axes, such as are seen in the contract directory, page 101 (Battle Axe), they are called bearded axes because the head of the axe extends down towards, allowing it to snag the edge of other weapons and shields. The other types of axe, such as those demonstrated in the contract directory, page 102, the pick, and the lochaber axe, have an armour piercing head at the other end of it, this is to enhance the effectiveness of the weapon. Against good armour, the axe is little more than a hammer, but when the weapon is reversed, the armour can be pierced easily for massive tissue damage, but there is often problems retracting the weapon from the injury so caused. The lochaber axe usually has a hand section directly behind the head to allow control of the weapon in areas where full swinging is not possible. The Axe can also be used to hook and snare opponents, pulling them into position where a second weapon can be used to finish them. It is for this reason that many people use the axe over the sword.

Chain Weapons

The Chain weapon is as merely a regular bladed weapon with a rotating set of teeth attached to the place where the blade would usually be. These weapons are used in the same ways as regular weapons of the same type, but there are other considerations. The first of which is that any chain weapon pretty much has a life of its own, you can't just swing it, bounce off and swing again. When a chain weapon connects with something properly (i.e. edge first), then it will ricochet off the target unless the cutting alignment is perfect, and even then, it can be very difficult to keep the weapon on target. When a chain weapon bounces, a skilled user can bounce the weapon directly into another part of the target, making a skilled fighter a truly fearsome opponent. Knowing how to work the weapon also gives a skilled fighter the ability to press the chain weapon into the target causing further damage to an already damaged target. The exception to this is the eponymous chain axe, the usual methods of axe use, such as snagging and dragging, tend to be either impossible to use due to the weapon head revolving the target off the end of the weapon or dragging the target through the striking zone. A *truly* skilled user can make use of this where necessary.

GASH ChainSword

The ChainSword is basically a regular chainsaw blade placed over a carbon fibre shaft, allowing the user to gain the power of a ChainAxe without the cumbersome usage of that most eponymous of weapons.

Type	Dmg	Pen	Ad	Cost
ChainSword	5	3	3	80c

Hand Weapons

Most popular amongst a lot of contract killers, the hand weapon is quite literally a glove or arm based weapon that allows the killer to augment their own natural attacks whilst not having to learn how to use a new weapon skill. The second reason why they are popular is because they can only be used up close and personal, and this is always the best way to impress the crowds. Most hand weapons can be fitted with a variety of options in addition to the modifications they already contain. These modifications are listed below

HandiCam

This option fits a small camera on the fist, just behind the striking point of the weapon. This camera is small enough not to affect the balance of the weapon, but the camera can transmit all images of the struck target with pinpoint accuracy. The cost of the camera includes five free repairs of the main lens in case of an accident, further repairs of the camera cost 5c each.

Cost = 50c

ITB Crusher

After Chuerrin killed one of his opponents by crushing their skull in one of his hands, ITB saw the potential for their latest weapon. The Crusher is an industrial looking weapon, combining a regular ceramic glove with a series of massively powerful motors that function as a gripping device. The Glove works by constricting the gripped target with over 2000 psi of force from all directions, This is not sufficient to crack heavier powered armour, but has had spectacular results against lightly armoured and unarmoured targets. The Weapon is used with the Martial Arts or Unarmed Combat skill, and once a hit is scored, the user may simply constrict the glove to score an additional hit automatically each round. The users strength bonus is not added to any damage this weapon causes, because the weapon does not do more than regular damage because it does do damage by striking, and the motors in the weapon that constrict are far more powerful than any organic muscles. This weapon can also be used to hold on to a target without constricting it, this can be used for a range of options, from hanging on to pipes and walkways to ensuring that a target does not escape. These gloves have become very popular with Grapplers all over the world of progress.

Type	Dmg	Pen	Ad	Cost
Crusher	4	4	4	110c

ITB HeftyMitt

Recognising that the mutilator was almost certainly the most

popular hand weapon on the market at the time, ITB realised that although the weapon was spectacularly effective at what it did, it often didn't allow for the show time that killers were often requiring. This was a thing that required immediate attention, and with the assistance of a number of technicians from SLA industries themselves, the Tech team at ITB came up with the HeftyMitt. This device is similar in operation to a regular Mutilator first, but it incorporates a variable damage control on the wrist of the glove, allowing the user to configure the weapon for the fight style that they wish to be using at the time. In game terms, this means that the weapons statistics can be modified to any combination as long as at least one point remains in each section. For Example, the weapon could be modified to a 6/1/1 weapon, representing that the damage control has been set to cause maximum disruption to living tissue, or to 1/1/6, representing the fact that the weapon has been set to cause fractures in solid objects. Changing settings on the HeftyMitt takes three seconds.

Type	Dmg	Pen	Ad	Cost
HeftyMitt	3	3	2	100c

Taking the Shot

When it comes to SLA industries, there are a couple of lines that spring to mind, one of them is

"It's not about big guns"

Erm.....

Actually?.....

It is, at least, certainly in this bit of the game. You see a few characters using smaller calibre weapons, but there isn't an operative squad in history that doesn't have some sort of hefty boomstick somewhere in the squad, unless the GM has a marked preference for cerebral campaigns.

So here we are, in the contract circuit, home of the big gun, and then we start looking at things, are the smaller guns of any use in the circuit?

Of course they are, everyone needs paperweights.....

Seriously though, when you're choosing weapons to keep you alive at range, consider the following:

Is it enough to keep you in one piece?

Can you handle it?

Is it going to kill the referee standing behind the person you're killing?

These are all considerations that you have to work with, everyone gets issued with a FEN 603, even though a good 90% of all characters lack the skill to use the autofire on the weapon with any degree of success. It's the most popular weapon in SLA history, so consider the points about it, it's a multi purpose weapon that can cause a fair bit of injury to anyone not wearing armour and be an inconvenience even for those wearing light armour.

As with the characters costume, you need to have some variety in what you're using, you can turn up to every event with the automatic shotgun and hope for the best, but you'll run out of money real quick doing that. Same with the 17mm cannon, sure, it'll put anything down in one hit, but will it be of any use against that b***** in the silverback that you can't draw a line of fire

on? Not too likely.....

So, we're back down to choosing weapons, it's best to consider each type of weapon for what it is.

Pistol

The average sidearm of the Contract circuit, for several reasons, first of which is the size of the weapon in question. Pistols are concealable, can be used two at a time, and have just as much variety of ammunition if not more. The only drawback that pistols have against rifles is that they lack the power and range at the higher calibres, and for most events on the circuit, this is more than sufficient. The other thing to consider is that pistols can be carried in multiples, rather than the one, maybe two rifles that they can carry. When you see a killer who specialises in the use of pistols, be aware that they're going to be showmen without a doubt, this does not make them any less lethal, but it does mean that their image is very important to them.

Rifle

One shot, one kill, that's why you're carrying a rifle, no other reason, you can't wield them very well in close combat, they're bulky, and they're not all that much better than pistols in the performance department. However, you can pop a target at 1200 metres without worrying about the hit ever being aware of it. The rifle is the tool of a killer, not a fighter, be wary of anyone who uses one of them.

Esoteric Ranged Weapons

There are other ranged weapons, notably the vibro disk, chopper, and power disk, each one of them has a specific purpose, consider that the vibro disk is the perfect weapon for short range assassination work. The chopper is capable of taking down most lightly armoured targets in a single hit, and the power disk is one of the most versatile weapons on the circuit, short ranged, but it helps to have a backup ranged weapon to hand if all the others run out.

Horses for Courses

Then consider the type of events that you're going to be doing, it's not enough to have a weapon that can take down anything in one hit and then religiously stick to it, no matter what. Well, let's rephrase, you can do that, but you'll get known for that and nothing else. The public has a problem in that it fixates quite easily, and unless you're careful, it'll fixate on your equipment and not you. Ultra violet gets away with it because she makes it look messy and lets be honest, firing buzzsaws on full auto means that the fights never going to last long. Either they're going to be dead or you're going to be out of ammo, but either way, once the crowd has recovered their hearing, they're going to want a dead person in the arena somewhere.

Finishing Moves

You've got your name, your costume, your handle, your skills, and your weapons, that's it isn't it?

Not quite, you've still got to figure out how you finish people off, perhaps the most essential part of any contract killer. Contract killers all have finishing moves, and these have to be figured out as well. As with all the other things about the contract circuit, you need to take care and attention with it. Finishing moves come in several different types, these are as follows:

Blunt Force Trauma: Focussed, this type of finisher causes damage by direct striking into the

target, examples of this in heavy blows from either a blunt weapon or the natural weapons of most regular humanoids in the worlds of progress.

Point/Edge Trauma: Focussed, this type of finisher causes massive trauma with either sharp natural weapons or edged weaponry.

Crush/Compression: Usually part of an unarmed combat move, this finisher works by dumping the body of the target at high speeds into the floor or some other solid surface or by using your character to crush part of the opponent.

Ripping/Tearing: This finisher tears parts of the opponent off, or rips muscles or tendons from vulnerable spots, leaving them unable to retaliate. It is usually a move for the more physical races to work with.

Projectile Trauma: One of the lesser used finishers on the circuit, the killers uses their firearms to finish the opponent. It usually has to be in a manner that is somewhat unusual for firearms, such as locking up one of the limbs to expose a vulnerable point on the armour of the target, then firing there for maximum effect.

Velocity/Impact: This finisher works on transference of motion and speed, sending the target flying in one of several ways, ranging from simply away from them to the throwing of far larger targets into positions where they can be finished more easily.

Nerve/Precision: Textbook finisher which hits the target in an area that will cripple them easily, requires knowledge of the species that the finisher is used on. It can also be used in nerve holds and immobilisations.

These particular moves are to give people an idea of what sorts of damage are most commonly used when finishers are done. The way to work with a finisher is to have an idea in your head about what you want the target to look like *after* you've finished with them, that's the best way of doing it. Of course, you can go with the easy methods such as taking their head off, or maybe splitting them in half, ripping the head off with the spine attached, and yes, it's a good one, but it's also been done to death, and the name of the game is originality.

Consider all the things that have brought you to where you are now, you have a character with a history, skillset, weapons, and a costume, it should be an easy thing to consider what that character would do to finish off the opponent.

If you don't have a clear idea, then consider the background of the character, go back to those manuals where you found the characters history, what did those people do to kill people? Failing all else, there's a good number of resources on the net that will give you ample ideas. If your character came from a Viking style background, most of their deaths (ceremonial and ritual) were done by fire, it was how they honoured their dead. Taking

this one step further, you incorporate fire into the finisher, then consider how you're going to deliver it. Most ceremonial fires were lit by a torch of some sort, consider that if your character isn't an ebon, then they might want to have some sort of flame-thrower or incendiary system built into their existing weapon so they can make the desired effect.

For Example, going back to our example character, Thor, who's got his Nordic hammer and get up, all not so original, but it works, so hey, not to worry. But now he has to think of a finisher, so what do we have? Nordic Cultures were fairly big on sacrifices to appease the gods, so that's one thing to work on, and then there's the matter of how to make it look impressive. Nordic cultures also placed a fair amount of emphasis on the weapons that they used, so to combine the two, Thor comes up with a finisher called "Sacrifice", where he takes his hammer, pops the spike on the top of it and plants it in the floor. Before the hammer has time to fall, he grabs his opponent and slams their body onto the top of the spike, frequently causing it to burst through them. He calls the move "Sacrifice" because as a final signature to the move, he goes to one knee before the twitching corpse which is now holding his hammer upright, as if in prayer to the gods.

To warm up on this sort of thing, think about how the major characters in the Contract directory might make up their finishers, they've got background and weapons already, it shouldn't be too hard to think of how they'd finish things off.

Example

Johnny Automatic has a number of finishers, the most common of which is known as "Dante", a reminiscence of his time on the war world. He takes one of his grenades and slams his opponent through the chest, leaving the explosive inside them. The disorientation from the blow is almost always enough to prevent them from removing it before it goes off. In more powerful targets, it's usually enough just to leave the grenade inside the armour, it's equally effective.

Chuerrin, being the monster that he is, employs his massive strength in his finisher, he has never named it, but the popular term on the circuit is "Boneless", he slams both front and back of the victim with all his strength, pulverising most of the bones and internal organs. The victim loses all control over their body and slumps to the floors as if Boneless, hence the name.

Calling it

The final part of a finisher is to give it a name, with this, it's a simpler thing than you think, you can either go with the simple description of what it is, when look at the key word, then find a thesaurus. When you're working with descriptions, try and bring it down to one word where you can, thus the example.

- Wraith-Maker – Interesting idea, but too long winded
- Soul-Shredder – Interesting, but sounds like a cheesy computer game.....
- Doom – That works doesn't it.....

When you can't think of a single word or phrase, work with other things. Unlike names, initials and numbers can be used to describe finishers quite easily. The Difference is in the working of the words, when you're using initials, be careful that real world acronyms don't stray in there. An example of this would be a few I came up with that sounded perfectly reasonable, until I thought about the initials

- F***ing Big Injury: F.B.I.
- Crushed In Agony: C.I.A.
- Drop Torque Impalement D.T.I.

Excruciatingly Crippling Move: E.C.M.

Don't get me wrong, it's fun to look at, but that's the problem, you won't be able to go through with the move without smiling at it, and that's never good for a killer.

Then there's the number finishers, again, these are mostly tied in to the real world, and as such, you have to be careful with them. For Example, you couldn't use the following without smirking:

711 (Don't think of it as Seven-One-One, think Seven-Eleven)

999 (Is there an emergency in the house?)

911 (Obvious really.....)

And other similar ones, most number finishers have to define themselves first before they get a name, and be careful of cheesy names sneaking in there. A Chagrin could have a finisher called 714, meaning that their opponent has 7.14 seconds left to live, same with any Stormer variant really, but it is not a very good one.

Combine the two, chances are that some element of real life may make it in there, and in some cases, that's no bad thing, consider the finisher of Brock Lesnar (a heavyweight wrestler), the F5. The F5 is the most destructive type of twister on record, and the delivery of the finishing move mirrors this, excellent imagery, name that goes with it, complete picture. The same can be done with the world of SLA, think of a character that's good with blades, coming up with a finisher called "CS1" that leaves the victim of it looking like it's been through CS1.....

Easy, then think about how fast you can say the word, the faster the better, bear in mind that announcers will be shouting that name when you use that move, use the five second rule to see how well it works.

The Five second rule is how many times you can yell the finisher name in five seconds....

3+	Excellent
2	Good
1	Average
0	Try again Old son.....

Go with simple words and phrases, think up big descriptive phrases for it, and then think about the most important part of it, because that's what it will be reduced down to when it's being yelled at high decibels. For example, you could call your finisher the "Whirlwind of Righteous Mortality", and before you know it, crowds will be yelling for "Whirlwind", or worse "W.....O.....R.....M....."

and we all know where that leads.....

PLAYING THE GAME

Playing the Game

Right, equipment check, you've got the attitude, the weapons, the gear, the cool costume, the cooler name, and the coolest of all finishers, now all you have to do is learn how to play the game.

Most contract killers don't know anything about the rules and agreements in place in the contract circuit, fewer still give anything resembling a damn about it, they figure that their agent will take care of it.

Of course, this can be done, there are three agents that work as a team to take care of contract killers that prefer this approach. If you need them, simply seek out the firm known as Duey, Cheetam, and Howe, who will be happy to take care of all your problems for a modest 35% of the fees involved.

Of course, you're not anywhere near the level required to get to needing an agent just yet, and unless you were a very famous operative or someone who came straight off a warworld into a cushy sponsorship deal, you're going to have to start at the beginning.

Personality

There's no such thing as bad guys and good guys, that's only what the crowd believes. However, what they will look at is how you present yourself. Your own personality may be perfectly good for the folk' back at home, but it's not good on the circuit. I'm not saying that the public won't like you for you.....but they won't, simple as that. Work on angles with the crowd, do you want them on your side or not, that's the only question you have to consider at this point.

If you do want the crowd on your side, you have to consider why you want them on your side, they can't make you famous, only you can do that. However, they can help you on the way there. The trouble with being a good guy is that you have to be a good guy all the time. You do one bad interview, one snap at the press, or one incident that's not in keeping with your personality, and you may have lost the good guy image for a good while, and with it, all the work that you put it into making it. But that said, the good guys tend to get life easier for the most part, there aren't very many good guys in the world of progress, and most people tend to steer clear of someone who's been "good" forever, there's obviously something different about them.

If you don't want the crowd on your side, that's the easy way of doing it, swear at them, threaten them, hell, even kill a few of them occasionally, it's all part of the game. You have to bear in mind though, that a thousand other killers all over the worlds of progress are doing the same thing, it's not so much a matter of it being easy to be a bad guy, it's just easier to be an all round scumbag, that's all.

At the furthest extreme are the characters who aren't on the crowds side, but they're so good at being a bad guy, that the crowd like them for it. These characters make the most powerful of the crowd pleasers, but it takes a special talent to do this, and very rare are the individuals who can do this.

If you examine the characters on the circuit at the moment, you can see which characters follow which profiles. Johnny's a Good guy, so is The Bond, Delia was before the Icon incident, now she's in the indifferent category, she's only still at the top because she's the one of the best that there is, it's nothing to do with her personality anymore. At the other end of the Scale, Chuerrin is a Bad Guy, so is the Frown, Holocaust certainly gets close to being a bad guy, but then you have the bad guys who are so good at it that they become legend. The Spinner, Thread, both of them are ancient monsters, both of them at the top of their game, no one would doubt that they don't give a damn about anything to do with anything apart from themselves, but the crowd love them for this.

The Whole point to the circuit is the fact that it's a colourful escape to the world that most people have to live in, those figures out there aren't real, they're larger than life and twice as bold. It is this that draws peoples attentions to the circuit, and it's this that makes things more fun for the audience at home. With this in mind, it should be noted that the circuit will keep an eye on most beginning fighters, if they don't show the proper amount of crowd response and flair, they will very likely be asked to either change their personality, costume, or, if all else fails, their occupation. The problem with these things is that while most killers do not like to be given orders, they especially dislike the idea that their whole image is wrong, this can lead to somewhat *explosive* conclusions, and this should be understood by all new players.

At the bottom levels of the circuit, the personality that you take on doesn't matter, but you have to bear in mind that the stuff you did when you started out will be on TV somewhere, and when you get famous, there's nothing worse than seeing yourself talking about yourself in the third person whilst wearing a purple jumpsuit.....

Well, for most people anyway.

You have to remember that when you've got your personality, you've got to stay in it, the only time you can come out of it is when you're all alone in the dark, the rest of the time, you belong to the circuit. Try to remember though, that even though you may be in your game face 90+ percent of the time, you still have to have your regular face. If you don't, you'll wake up one

day, and you won't be there anymore, and what's the point of surviving the circuit if you're not there afterwards to enjoy it?

Watching the Competition

There's two different types of fighters, those who know what their opponents are doing, and the dead ones. It's not just common sense, it's an unspoken rule, if you're going to challenge someone, make it your business to know about them, go to watch their fights, make sure you know their weapons and tactics. When they fight, do they match their costume with the fighting style that they're using that night, do they swap tactics with their weapons or are they always the same? The best fighters have enough fighting styles to never do the same fight twice, and these you have to adopt a different strategy with. However, between Rep 1 and 4, the fighters are unlikely to have had the raw ability, experience, or equipment to make too much of a variation, this is why the Contract Quarterly (See the Merchandising Section) only lists the killers above rank 4. Be aware of the fact that other people are also watching you, and will take notes on your fights, avoid developing any trademarks early on in your circuit career, as you won't be good enough to carry them out without someone taking advantage of it. Remember that Raw Talent is no substitute for Training, Training is no substitute for Experience, and Experience is no substitute for Raw Talent. If you have one of these, you can be average, if you have two, you can be good, if you have all three, you can be a God, but don't get too excited, you can only ever start with two at most, no matter how good you think you are. Then think about it, if you know that you're going up against someone, when you've made the challenge, vary your fighting style a little, if they're any good, they're going to be watching you as well, and every thing that you can bring against them will help. You don't have to watch everybody either, confine your sight to those within two levels of you in either direction. Anything lower than two levels below you won't challenge you unless it's not very bright, and anything two levels higher than you shouldn't be a target unless *you're* not very bright.

Crazy?

You're a contract killer, of course you're crazy, but this is something else, you have to get a psyche exemption form, and to do this, you have to prove that you've got something fundamentally wrong with you. All Contract Killers have a psychological problem of some sort, so take a look in the back of the contract directory, most people just pick psychopath, because that's the easiest one to work with. All you have to do is occasionally randomly hurt people who you don't know, this should come fairly easy to most roleplayers, but then you have to consider that psychopaths aren't actually very interesting as far as the world goes. They kill things and then hurt things, and then kill things again, the actual thinking part of their day is pretty much looking around with a fine eye that looks on everything as a target. If this actually sounds interesting to you, get a playstation, put on time crisis, and then play it for 24 hours straight without a break, and if it still looks appealing, then go ahead, play a psychopath.

If instead you gave up after a couple of hours, then perhaps being in the mindset of a psychopath isn't to your liking, consider the other types of psychoses

Schizophrenia

Forget it, unless you are one of them, you'll never understand it, you might have seen it on the TV, but you'll never live in their shoes

Paranoia

We All Think its Cool to Have Infinite Numbers of credits in Game time, but You should realise that Others see the Undercurrents in things that normal people don't. don't believe me? Most paranoids would count the capital letters in the first sentence of this description and see the hidden message there... ..well, you get the idea, but hey, if you got the message without the prompt, damn man, get some help.....

Multiple personality disorder

You're not mad when you talk to yourself, you're mad when you answer. This is not quite the truth, you have a problem when you answer, you're mad when you argue with yourself.....in public.....out loud.

Volatility

When was the last time you broke your Kids/brothers/sisters/parents favourite thing for no better reason than it was the nearest thing that was to hand. Haven't? Congrats, you haven't suffered from Volatility.

Vacillation

Try and imagine everything you ever get told or asked being screamed at you by a chagrin with an itchy trigger finger and a full auto farjacket loaded with 17mm HESH.....

Depression

Stop reading, sit there, do nothing, eat pot noodle (all the time), wonder what that smell is, realise that it's you, wonder what a hairstyle is (it's not that rug on your head, that's for sure), Watch black and white TV all day every day, listen to the test pattern on the TV as if it were your favourite band.....

Fantasiist

It don't hurt, none of it does, just try out that carving knife.....
...

What am I getting at? Easy, unless you've been in the mind of a mad person, unless you've lived there (and I for one sincerely hope that none of you have had to) you cannot understand what it is like to see the world in different colours to the rest of the world. You cannot know what it is to hear languages that other people cannot begin to dream, and to see charred human flesh coated in pus and blood when everyone else just sees that joint of roast beef with potatoes and gravy.

There are mechanics for insanity, your character may have an insanity, but do not try and play it all the time. That's not what an insanity is, you may be a psychopath, but that doesn't mean that you get to kill with impunity when you like. It means that when your character fails his dice roll, he goes and kills something, and whether that's your child, your parents, your agent or whatever, that's what they kill. The whole point of insanities is that they are uncontrollable, and as such, the mechanics will dictate when you have to play the insane part of yourself, and when that's the case, do your best, but don't let it take over how you work the character.

If you need to think over the insanity side of things, then consider the characters already on the circuit and what's wrong with them, Delia's a psychopath, pure and simple, Deity is an obsessive, Johnny has multiple personality disorder, Sour Blood... ..Well, let's not go there shall we, anyone caught bumping uglies with a pack of carrier doesn't need any further explanation.

Don't play insane all the time, there's enough of that in the world, only do what you have to.

Someone asked me once, if I was Insane?

No such thing, never was, never is, never will be, and that's the truth. They say that you have to be insane to work in the contract circuit, you don't, how would a madman ever fight coherently? It couldn't be done. You build mountains in your front room because you saw a few lights in your rear view mirror? Message from extra terrestrials, that's what it is. You cut yourself repeatedly on the wrist for "no good reason"? There has to be a good reason, just because you can't think of it doesn't mean that it isn't there. So you kill people, well gee, millions of soldiers every day get that privilege, why should you miss out?

I can hear the rain, I can hear it talk to me, you think it isn't talking to you? Perhaps you don't understand morse code, listen to the rain, dot, dot, dot, hear it speak to you, listen to its message. Look around you, see the signs, look at the newsreaders, listen to what they're saying, take every second letter and listen to what they're really saying, you don't think that everyone can speak the language of the chosen do you? Can you hear what they're really saying? If you can't, don't worry, all that separates man from apes is consonants, listen to apes, AA, OO, EE, all vowels, they don't use consonants, what's the difference? So some people cannot understand it, so there are some apes in the human gene pool that don't understand? So what, only the chosen go forwards.

Can you see the message in the clouds, listen to the animals, know what the difference is, there is no difference, when did you see an animal worry about killing to survive, why should we, aren't we a higher form of life? And what if the world is only a dream, what are you killing except parts of other peoples imaginations, that's not a crime, corporations have been doing that for years. Who is to say which person is insane, there are some people who say that killing people is insane, who's to say that putting your life on the line every day for no better reason than somebody with a bigger number than you said so isn't insane? What about hoping that no one puts a hesh round into you, hoping that when you do catch one, you're not hopped up on adrenaline, so you can see your body burst in slow motion

like a baked potato in a microwave, what if that's insane? We live in a world where thousands die every day for no better reason than they were born in a different part of town, we kill people for no better reason than some executive pointed a finger and said "bang". What if there is no bigger plan? Who decides who lives and dies, what if it's all just a game? Don't children play games? Isn't it the truth that all adults keep a part of whatever child they once were buried deep inside them? Who is the insane one, the one who keeps the child locked away in the darkness, or the one who lets them come out to play once in a while.

Do you hear voices? Do you talk to yourself? There's a difference here, if you hear voices, that's one thing, if you talk to yourself, you're a pretentious bastard or a fool, after all, it's you, what are you going to say to yourself that you don't already know the answer to? Nothing else, everyone hears voices, everyone, otherwise you wouldn't do anything. What makes you buy food, is it the fact that you're hungry, or is it the voice in your head telling you that it likes the taste of burgers with relish? If you only ate when you were hungry, then no one would be fat, because you'd only eat what you needed to to survive, nothing else, so don't talk to me about voices in your head, I listen to them all the time.

But I digress a little, the original question was, am I insane?

Of course I am, I live on Mort.

Johnny Automatic, Excerpts from his book
"Meditations on a Gray World"

Climbing the Ladder

But Still, now you have all the stuff that you need to walk into the circuit, now you get to see the ladder.....

The Ladder is the reputation scale, you're at the bottom of the ladder right now, you're not even Rep 1 yet, so how do you get your foot on the ladder.

Unranked

Everyone starts somewhere, and for the most part, everyone starts here. As an unknown, you just literally walked in off the street, but don't be downhearted, we all did it at some point. At this level, you have to fight every night, sometimes two or three times a night, just to get by. You can go straight in and challenge a few of the Rep 1 Killers, you'll probably beat them and get on the ladder, but this is the most important part of the circuit, this is the place where you learn your lessons.

The first part of this is understanding that while the rep system is fairly easy to manipulate, anyone who starts off by running up the ladder will find themselves sliding back down it real quick. The problem is that most killers have done the long haul, they started at the bottom and took their time, getting experience and intelligence to work their way up the ladder. Now they're in a good position, and they come across some speed freak who's burned their way up to Rep 6 in a month. Not by taking time and showing respect, but by manipulating the system and only challenging people on their territory whilst not waiting around long enough to get burned by those they went flying past, what is our established killer going to be thinking at this point? That's right, there's an accidental major head shot and bye-bye hot shot. There are those people who think that you couldn't get to Rep 6 that quickly, well, you could, but anyone with any degree of intelligence will take at least some time to get there, doesn't do to be getting the attention of the top of the ladder sooner than you can handle it.....

When you're unranked, you fight in local arenas only, the major arenas won't recognise you, and they won't let you in unless you're there to sit down and buy popcorn.....

After a few weeks, when you've fought enough to at least have some experience of the dirty tricks and fighting involved in the circuit, then you go to the official circuit and register yourself as a killer. Only one thing to get through for most people, and that's the psyche evaluation, so how do we work this? See the Crazy? Section of the book for the solutions to that.

Rep 1

At Rep level 1, you're effectively nothing, you want to get anywhere, you have to work the circuit. For this, you have to have an agent, the circuit will provide these (and by the circuit, I mean your GM, your character is not important enough to be recognised by well known agents.) It takes no great amount of skill to remain at rank one, but it is worth ingraining yourself with the local sector arenas, making a name that the crowds may have heard. It might take a while, but the rewards will be reaped at the higher levels. You have no chance of sponsorship, no matter what the blurb says, you've been around for the blink of an eye, and sponsors look for someone who has a name, if your weapons are anything above sla blades and motorcycle leathers, then you'll look good. You fight every night, and you fight where there's a fight to be had, you don't decide where you fight, you fight where you can and you're thankful for the opportunity to do so. You may not be known, but that's not so much of a problem, it means you can get away with things once in a while, people don't notice quite so much at this level.

Rep 2

The first step on the ladder to all intents and purposes, Rep one is the ground before the ladder, Rep two is where you start throwing dice to play the game. You'll still be fighting in local arenas, you still fight every night, you've got to prove that you're there for the circuit, that your own life doesn't matter to you, the circuit is all. You're not good enough to go for the sector wide contests yet, but you're known in your local place, now is the time to make sure that they'll carry your name to the other places that they go. You might attract the attention of one of the local sponsors, and they'll probably want sole rights to your image, so be sure not to sign for more than a month. Be sure that when you do sign, they understand that you're signing because you want to sign, not because they're the only people offering you anything (even if they are). The game works on different rules, the first of which is that if you let people own you, they will, there's no such thing as an altruistic agent.

Rep 3

Now we start to climb, you now have something to lose, it's not much, but it's something, and every time that you lose, everyone who's been watching you will lose a little faith in you, so start watching your matches. If you see someone to challenge, be sure you can account for them, if there's even the slightest doubt, then don't make the challenge. When people underneath you challenge you, crush them, without mercy or pause, do not give them a chance to come back against you, but do not finish them in a way that they cannot come back from unless you are left with no choice. To destroy a challenger is what is expected of a good killer, to destroy wantonly is the mark of a savage, and unless you have the fame to hold up to your assaults (Hello to Chuerin if he's watching). At Rep 3, there's not an agent on the planet who won't drop a liability instantly if he starts costing them money.

Understand the difference between Relentless and Brutality, one will finish the fight no matter what, one will finish the fight and leave the audience without their lunch, and while most mort

natives find vomiting very amusing, they only find it amusing when it's someone else doing it.

You're every night fighting in downtown, that's still the way things have to go, once in every few weeks, you might get a minor booking in a sector arena, but usually, that'll only happen if you challenge someone of higher rank than you.

Rep 4

Before now, you didn't matter, but now you're taking a step into the big wide world that's out there. At Rep level 4, you're still fighting every night in the downtown arenas, but once a week you're in one of the sector arenas, and now people start to know your name as something other than a drunken remembrance. With this comes responsibility, for although you now matter, you have to pay more attention to what you're doing. You can't just disappear into a bar after you've finished for the night, now you have to start working the angles, you have to make the scene, and you have to *be* seen when you do. Your image has to improve, you have to stay clear and focussed on the task at hand. Your agent will start providing you with chances for sponsorship, the previous rules still apply when it comes to this, don't sign away everything to the first person who comes with an offer. Your agent should deal with most of this, after all, it's not in his interests to screw you over if you're the next big thing, but it has been known for agents to let things slip if they get a large enough bribe.

Around this time, you'll start to get challenges from people who are something to worry about. This is not to say that most of the lower levels of killers aren't much to contend with, there's always the wild card, but at this level, you're being challenged by people who've got past the first stages of the game. They're not the booze fuelled psycho's you've been wiping the floor with on a Saturday night, they're people who know what the score is, if they didn't, they wouldn't have got past rank 2.

Rep 5

Now you're in it.....

Rep 5 is where you know if you can play or if you're just skimming by on luck. Firstly, you made it to the level where you are officially noticed. Every month, there's a profile put out on you, what you won, what you lost, and the interesting points that went through regarding you (this will include anything unsavoury that you've been involved in over the past month). You will have sponsors by this point unless you have turned them all down (and if you have turned them all down, then the other sponsors will be wondering why you've been turning everyone down, do you know something that they don't?). You will also fight regularly in sector arenas, hardly ever will you be down in the lower arenas, unless you're challenged by someone who's out to make a name for themselves, and at this point, you should be more than capable of handling wannabes.

Take a look at your agent at this point, have they been doing what needs to be done, and have they been trying to increase your standing within the circuit? If they have, consider that you're now providing them with a far better amount of income than you were when you first went to them. It's all well and good to be loyal, but at the end of the day, when you're all alone in the dark, your agent isn't going to be tucking you in at night, that's what you're going to need money for. If you've done nothing but what they ask, try asking for a little in return, any reasonable agent will pay what a killer is worth. They won't pay one uni more, so don't think that you're going to get a good deal on it, but they should be paying you what you're worth.

Now would also be the time to start interacting with the circuit if

you haven't already, it's all very well to start challenging people, but it's something else when you've already got some history to work with. Take the feud ongoing between Delia and Top Notch, there's been friction, there's been fighting, and there's been Drama, when the two of them ever do find their way into the same ring, the ratings will be through the roof. The same holds true for any match that has history with it.

Also, when you get invited to events (and you will) consider how you're turning up to them, it's no good to turn up to them in weapons and armour. You'll only get invited to circuit official meetings if you do that, but at the same time, you do want to be careful. You're now at the level that designers might listen to you, not the big names, but some of the smaller companies may be willing to bend over backwards to curry the favour of an up and coming star. Never go out without some form of armour on, it should be concealed or even almost invisible, but it should be there, it's no longer safe to do without it. Any of the top level killers won't mess with you in that way, it's just not done, but you're still at the level where the street slime can possibly mess with you, and it's just not worth the chance. You should be aware that the media will now start investigating you personally, if you do get up to anything in your private life that doesn't fit your circuit profile, be advised that now would be a good time to either give it up, or make it invisible.

Consider that people might be hunting you, before now, you didn't exist, but now, get your agent to keep a look out on the hunter sheets being issued, if someone should put one on you (or even try to put one on you), go find out why.....

You don't have to fight every day anymore, but you would be as well to do so if you can, it does help with the image that the circuit is everything. When you do fight, it's always in a sector arena, and there's always TV coverage.

Finally, you're in the big leagues, get an LAD account, you'll be thankful that you did.

Rep 6

Fame and Fortune to the right, scantily clad anything you like on the left.....

Or that's how it should be anyway. The truth of the circuit is that anything that you want can be brought to you, but you still have to pay for it. Now comes the time in between when you were big league and when you get to major league status. You should be working the circuit at least four nights a week, never anything less than a sector arena (and we mean NEVER anything less than a sector arena) unless you have to go downtown for some reason. It's not about where you're fighting, it's about how many people are seeing you in the flesh. There will always be those who think that some of the fighting on the TV is done with wires, that's always the way it's going to be, but when they see you in person, they can't doubt anything, and that's how solid reputations form.

Next thing to consider is that you can now get access to designer weaponry, we're not saying that you *have* to have designer weaponry, but as was mentioned previously, you can't get by on one set of clothes, and the same holds true for weaponry. If you've made your way all the way up there on one weapon, then great, get it reinforced, make it indestructible, but whatever you do, keep it safe. Either way, you don't seriously think that Hassen Alba worked his way across his home world with a single unenhanced sabre do you? If you do, take your naïve ass back to Rep 1, you're not ready for where you are.

Now you find that the media is not content with knowing who you are, now they want to make sure that they know exactly where you are, when you're there, and what you're doing there.

If it can get oppressive, but bear in mind that the people who bring you to the mindless masses are the media, you want them on your side.

If you haven't already got a plan worked out for where you're going, get one, and get it quick, it's no longer a matter for fighting every day, now you have to seriously play the game. You'll be fighting at least three times a week, again, never anything less than a sector arena, sometimes, you'll be seen all over mort, but that's a very rare thing to say the least. Be very careful about what you say and who you say it to, and be aware that venues can change at a single moments notice (and frequently do at this level).

Rep 7

Now you get to the level where fame is getting old to you, it doesn't matter if you got here in one month, or one hundred months. The basic levels of the circuit should no longer hold any interest to you as they neither provide the coverage that you need to progress, or the money to make it worthwhile. You're fighting more now, as the game speeds up, you need to be taking on a good number of challengers to keep your skills at the level that they need to be, and you will be receiving challengers on a regular basis. Start thinking about hiring people other than your agent, some firms (see Backup resources) operate surveillance and up to the minute data on a wide variety of killers. Information can be bought if you want it, and it's worth setting up regular contracts to keep yourself at the top of the ladder.

If there is one thing about the circuit that cannot be avoided, it's copycats, and you're now at the level where you're good enough to warrant a few of these. For the most part, it's not a serious problem, but you may want to keep an eye on some of them, and getting a certification on your image and catchphrases may also be a good idea. You're a part of the circuit now, so you can stop being so frenetic about proving it to people, now is the time that you begin to reap rewards for all the hard work so far.

When you reach this stage, give serious consideration to specialising in certain contests and making a name for yourself there, it's often best to start eliminating the events that you're not very good at. If everyone thinks that you specialise at something, then they tend to challenge you at other things, which gives you that extra edge that you'll need at this level. This is not to say that you should give up totally on certain events (you're good, you're not that good), but be very wary of what you're doing, the media is watching, but now, so is the circuit.....

Rep 8

It's all very busy now, you're near the top, and so you've got to speed up, the top of the circuit doesn't stand still, and you've got to sprint to catch it up. You're fighting at least five nights a week, and at least three of those nights are going all over mort. There is the occasional off planet job, they're very few and far between, but when you get them, bear in mind that it's not just mort that you're working on, you're being seen all over the worlds of progress. You are guaranteed to have a least a few copycats out trying to make themselves feel better by being like you, and if you haven't already got a fan club, have a word with your agent and get yourself one. At this level, you're good enough to warrant one, and nothing helps the public to identify with you more than you telling them what they should be thinking.

If you don't have sponsors by this point, you're either independently wealthy, unbelievably competent at what you're doing, or living silently in downtown hoping no one finds you. If you have the choice, try and make it one of the first two. While it may seem to be fun living in a hole in the ground (Hi to the Bad thing if someone drops a copy of this to him), it's not, the only

people that do this are the ones who have no choice.

Presuming that you have a choice and aren't living in the floor, then you're watched everywhere, and unless you get special dispensation from the circuit (Behold, Deity) to have a home life, then you can't have one, that's one of the things you sacrificed on the way up. If you feel sad about this, quit, it's not negotiable, you're not private property anymore, you belong to the public. On the good side of things, if you've played the game well, the public belong to you as well.

Rep 9

Almost there now, it's no longer just a race for the top, you're either there or you're not, the rest of the world just doesn't know it yet. You work five days a week minimum, and it's not all fights, there's regularly scheduled press appearances and other events that take up your time, there are regular slots on day time and night time TV that have nothing to do with the circuit. If you're still living in downtown and not in a hole, get out of there, there's no reason for you to be there unless you have family, and if you have family, at this level, they're just a liability, keep them safe or they'll be sorry.

You know that you're good, you wouldn't be here if you weren't, but you now have to challenge for the throne, to do this, you have to raise the game again. Challenge more than you have to, make sure that everyone knows that you're equal to the task. If you've got here on a single image (Batman), then capitalise on it, at this level, there's money to be made from people wearing your image for you.

And then there's training, it's taking up a good portion of your life at the moment, make sure that you're in a good gym, there's a few places in uptown that cater to people who are as good as you, be sure that you're part of one of these. Training in mickeys Gym was all well and good for Rocky Balboa, but wake up and smell the *real* coffee, Rocky only had to deal with Ivan Drago. You've got Deity around the corner and Johnny automatic next week, running around in the cold with a beanie hat on isn't going to help here.

To get to Rep 10, you've got to challenge a number of the very best that all the worlds of progress have, not just the best of mort. You're working regularly both planet wide and across the other worlds of progress, but you should understand that although there's over fifty Rep 10 killers in the monthly directory, it's a proven fact that less than 1% of all circuit killers never get any higher than rank 9. If you're going to be the best, you've got to beat the best, most killers who get to Rep 9 stay there, they believe that there's little else to be found at the higher levels, and, content with the fame that they have, they never look any further.

Rep 10

So you looked further did you?

Well, if you made it here, then you don't need to be told about the game, you've played, this is the last part of the circuit, you made it to the top, now all you have to do is stay here. This is both easy, and not so easy, you don't challenge any more, well, not unless you believe that you are in fact the living embodiment of the circuit. We say this because to get any higher, you have to go to the old man, and no one has ever beaten him. So if you can say that you're the best there is, the best there was, and the best there ever will be, then go for it, just don't blame us if you go home in a box.

As far as the world is concerned, this is where the gods rule, the media now leaves you alone for the most part, and when they do speak about you, it's almost always good. The reason for this

is because at this level, you can get dispensation to hunt down individual reporters if you think that they have proved to be unfair and unreasonable in the eyes of the circuit. You have to pay for their death, but at this level, it's no longer the problem that it should be. In 756, Archon (Rep 10, Brain Waster) went berserk and hunted down a reporter who said that he was afraid of the colour white. It was a documented fact that Archon was very close to going necanthrope at the time, so the death of the reporter was accepted, but the fact that Archon then hunted down the reporters family, friends and all who had associated with him. After this event, it was decided that it was much easier to let the press know to be careful with the top killers, and as no one wants a repeat of those events, most of the media are careful with who they mock.

But still, this is where you looked when you started, you've now arrived.

Well done.

Rep 11+

Made it Ma, Top of the world!

WHERE THE ACTION'S AT

There are a number of places that killers fight, each one varies in size and type of events that go on there. What follow is an overview of the basic types of arena to be found on Mort, certain sectors and various offworld arenas can differ wildly from what is presented here, but these are the averages for most of the Contract Circuit.

Downtown Arenas

The first part of the circuit is done with downtown arenas. Every suburb in downtown has an arena, usually little more than a cage with an area around it to watch, these places have few rules, and the rules that they do have are very rarely observed. Grudge matches are frequent, and ganging up, several fighters to one, are very common, particularly when a good newbie turns up. When fighting in these arenas, fighters should make sure that they have their team with them, if they're going in by themselves, then they'd better be sure they have an exit strategy worked out before they get in there. No matter how good you are, five against one doesn't make for a good fight, and the weapons may only be CAF down here, but enough of those can perforate anything. The average Downtown fight is over very quickly, there aren't enough good fighters to make the fights last any longer than is absolutely necessary. To make an analogy, downtown arenas are closer to conveyor belts in how they work, it's not that they want the fights over quickly, it's just easier for the downtown crowds to keep track of things that way. Fighters don't tend to get names down here, they get a number, and when they're called, they fight whoever it is that they've drawn. In these arenas, there's hardly any firearm battles, it's just too easy to shoot one of the crowd, and then it turns into a bloodbath. Some of the downtown arenas are equipped for firearm battles, but these are very few and far between, any killer who knows what they are doing will

quickly find such an arena if they need one.

The Entrance rates for Downtown arenas are usually the muscle to push to the front of the queue, very few of these arenas ever bother charging for entrance.

Sector Arenas

These place are larger, far larger than the average downtown arena, they usually have an entrance gate and the actual fighting zone is blocked off either by walls, fence, or guards. Security is usually good, and although there are still occasionally problems with crowd riots, these tend to get put down fairly quickly. The primary difference between sector and downtown arenas is that the sector arena is always televised, and it's always open, there's always a fight of some sort going on in them, and it's not uncommon for all the different areas to be in use at the same time. The other thing to consider is that the rules of the circuit are enforced here, often more rigorously than the uptown arenas. These arenas are owned by private individuals who lease their rights to hold circuit events from the main circuit authority. Any infringement of the rules can be punished by revocation of the license and large fines. Most of the licensees decide that it's better to keep the rules too well rather than possibly risk not well enough....

To get a sector arena license, the owner of the arena must provide clear proof of ownership to the circuit, and also a list of prospective killers who will use the arena on a regular basis. They are responsible for all upkeep of the arena, all costs to do with policing and maintaining the grounds, and all medical and funeral expenses therein. The circuit charges a mere 10% of the total Gate takings per day to keep the license in place.

To spectate in one of the sector arenas is not a cheap thing, time is sold by the event, not by the visit, a regular fight between killers of rep 4 and under will set you back 10u per person entrance fee, with food and drink on top of that. You have to book your tickets a few days in advance (depending on the popularity of the fight), but seating is usually available. For anything above Rep 4, you pay the going rate. This is usually 5u multiplied by the rep of the highest ranking fighter who's on the card, so if you had a rep 5 and a rep 6 going at it, the cost of the fight would be 30 (rep 6 x 5) unis. Again, this is for standard seats in the stalls, if you want a seat with a clear view in one of the balconies, the price doubles, and if you want to sit in the sky boxes, then you can multiply the base price by ten at the bare minimum.

Mort Arena

This is the grandstand of the circuit, over five miles in diameter, with over twenty arenas inside it, including Showcase, the largest purpose built arena in the worlds of progress, over one mile in diameter by itself and the only arena capable of housing the massive GoreWar once yearly event. This arena is on the outskirts of central, and is almost exclusively the province of those who can pay the massive fees to gain entrance. There is a separate section of the arena that is set up for the poorer cases, but this is mostly filled with contest winners and wealthy downtown types, as even the lower fees are enough to bankrupt most people. Most of the sector houses and some of the more prestigious fighting houses often hold competitions for people who can't afford entrance, a once in a lifetime opportunity for those living in the darkness of downtown.

Mort Arena occupies an entire sector, and has transport in and out of it by underground and overground rail, there is a 30,000 space car park with private security and insurance taking care of things, and there is a regular overground taxi service that operates specifically in that sector alone. There is standing space outside

the arena, enough for nearly a million people, and Vid-screens that stand over a hundred metres square on all sides of it. The arena is never closed and is never quiet, there is usually anything between a hundred thousand and a million people in attendance, more when major events are underway. At GoreWar 904, the attendance was recorded at 1.9 million people of all races, not to mention those who were watching the events on live broadcast.

Prices for Mort Arena vary tremendously, if you want standing room in the main court, a standard fee of 5c per person (payable at the sector entrance) is due, this does not include transport to cover the two mile walk to the main stadium in the fee. If you actually want seating in the main arena, prices start at 10c for seats at the back of the ground floor, up to 200c for balcony seats near ringside, this is only for the smaller arenas in the building. Prices for Mort One, the main arena, start at 50c for back ground level seats, all the way to 2000+ credits for ringside balcony seats. Mort one is usually only used in larger planetary events, battles between Rep 10 killers, and end of season showdowns. It has full capability to emulate almost any terrain, and entire sets are built for the use of this arena.

BEASTIES

Or more accurately
“We’re going to need a bigger boat.....”

It’s not only people against people in the circuit, frequently, it involves other types of life, both plant and animal (and I’m not referring to the Bad thing here). What follows is a brief listing of some of the basic creature types, their evolution, their primary attack modes, and their threat level.

Rhake

Origin Frussdey II

Evolution The Rhake are a race of swamp dwelling beasts, first found on the moons of Frussdey, they are over ten feet in length, and are quadripedal in nature, having evolved to be capable of living on both land and under water. They are herbivorous in nature, but have many predators on their homeworld, and as such, have developed defences against all the predators that they have encountered there. They have a massive mouth, lined with powerful molars to chew the vast amounts of vegetation that they have to consume. Their defensive system is also their digestive system, they expel quantities of gas that causes degeneration in living tissue, whether plants or animals, allowing them to digest food with ease.

Appearance Rhake are approximately four feet long, one quarter of which is taken up by their mouth, they have smooth black skin, silky to the touch, and no traces of bodily hair. This makes them perfectly suited for camouflage within their native waters, but they can vary the pigmentation of their skin to nearly that of whatever they are standing on. However, they have to be standing still to do this. They are bipedal, with four eyes, two above the mouth and two below, and can see in the infra red spectrum if they choose to. They are not hostile for the most part, but if they feel

threatened, they will release their gas immediately rather than risk any injury to themselves. They are pack animals, and if separated from their family, they will feel very threatened, releasing gas at the slightest noise.

Attack Modes The Rhake only attack by releasing their gas, they have no concept of any other attack mode.

Move Rate 1 – The Rhake do not have any instinct of flight, recognising that the predators on their homeworld are faster and stronger than them.

Natural Armour 2 on all locations.

Statistics

Str – 2-5
Dex – 3-5
Dia – 5-8
Conc – 2-4
Cool – 1-4

Skills Scent 4 (this is used by the Rhake to scent the difference between predator and prey)
 Secrete Gas
 Camouflage 8 (limit: must be stationary)

Damage The defensive gas of the Rhake causes damage to living tissue at the rate of 1 point per phase, this gas also causes a very painful rash and blurred vision resulting in a -5 to all actions that they undertake whilst under the effects of the gas. The non-damaging effects of the gas will wear off in three rounds once exposure has ceased.

Vulnerabilities/Notes Besides being small and harmless, the Rhake has no real vulnerabilities.

Threat Level Very high at close range, Very low at range or if in sealed armour.

Thyow

Origin: Thyow IV

Evolution: The Thyow is a creature that evolved underground, they have never seen the light of their planet surface due to the hostile nature of the star that their planet revolves around. The neutron radiation given off from this star killed all the life on the surface of the planet long ago, but the mineral deposits layered thickly through the planets crust have provided protection from these rays. Sequestered beneath the surface, the Thyow evolved into one of the most lethal natural predators ever found in the world of progress. The Thyow has at no organs that can be said to “see” in any sense of the word, but they have a massively developed sense of motion and location of the things around them. They are only aware of things up to a hundred metres away, but they can perfectly sense all the things around them. This said, the same massively developed senses can detect any form of radiation that is in the vicinity, this includes infra-red, ultra-violet, and in the rarest of examples, Sunlight. This is something that they are mortally afraid of, and although the other types of radiation cannot harm them in the same way as the neutron radiation of their homeworld, they have never managed to work this out. They will avoid or try and destroy anything that attempts to bring such things anywhere near them. They have adapted perfectly to the tunnels of their homeworld and can move at paces unheard of in such environments. They

are fully able to dig through most solid rock, and can survive on a diet of only minerals if they have to. This said they much prefer meat when they can get it and have been known to turn quite easily cannibalistic if left by themselves for any length of time.

Appearance: The Thyow is a six legged beast, with no visible head to speak of, but it does have prehensile claws and a tail that can be used to grip things as well as attacking them. It’s mouth is situated at the top of its torso, and is the primary weak point if it can be hit in that location. They are covered in a white chitinous armour that slopes towards their tail, which can be shifted across the body to allow the Thyow to move easily through tighter spaces.

Attack modes: The Thyow attacks using claws or it’s tail, anything that it is feeding on has already been reduced to smaller mouthfuls before it attempts to eat it. However, it can attack using four claws simultaneously as well as a tail attack, or alternatively, if it is using its tail to hang from a location, it can attack simultaneously with all six claws. This creature can also spit stomach acid directly in front of it, this was primarily a method of assisting it get through the more difficult tunnels on it’s homeworld, dissolving the rocks in front of it. However, Thyow adapt quickly, and it is often used as an attack mode if one or more of its limbs are disabled.

Move Rate 2/4/6 (8 in close quarter tunnels)
Natural Armour 5 points of armour on all locations.

Statistics

Str - 7-14
Dex - 7-12
Dia - 5-10
Conc - 2-4
Cool - 5*

- The Cool statistic of the Thyow is given purely for use when required against things that it fears, it only fears radiation of any sort (including that given out by flashlights), the GM will judge and assign penalties depending on the type and severity of light being given out. Not being a pack creature, the Thyow does not understand the concept of losses to the enemy, and as they do not have vision, horrific appearances do not have any effect upon them. They will not retreat from anything except radiation, making them a very dangerous creature.

Skills: Claw attack – 6 (The Thyow can make claw attacks as indicated above)
 Tail attack – 4
 Acid attack – 3 (only usable directly in front of the thyow)
 Motion Sense – 12 – this is the Thyows sense of direction and location, it can judge distance and space as well as prevailing winds and other moving objects. It can use this skill at level 6 to dodge hand to hand attacks of one creature that it is in close combat with (if two or more creatures are attacking it, it can only dodge the attacks of one creature). If it is using this ability to dodge, it can only attack with two claws at any time.

Damage Claws Pen 4, Dmg 4, Ad 4
 Tail Pen 6, Dmg 4, Ad 2
 Acid Spit Dmg/Ad - 3 per round for five rounds, application of water or other alkali based substance will neutralise this acid instantly

Vulnerabilities/Notes All hits to the mouth area (called shot at -4) do double damage to the Thyow.

Threat Level: High underground, medium above ground

Kanin

Origin: Pyteg

Evolution: The Kanin are not a naturally evolved species, they were once the indigenous inhabitants of the planet of Pyteg before the forces of SLA and Thresher declared that the massive mineral resources of the planet would be of use to both of them and started a war over it. The Kanin were once a peaceful world of scholars and adventurers, most of them human in origin, having settled there many centuries before. Their world wasn't perfect, but it was far superior to the polluted dustbowl known as mort, and for years, many of their ilk went to this planet to further their studies. There are some who theorise that the war was started not for the minerals of the planet, but to teach people loyalty to the world of mort. In any event, the war lasted a total of twelve days before the catastrophe. It is not known which side threw the fateful device that destroyed the world, but a viral warhead was detonated on the northern hemisphere of the planet, affecting almost half of the population instantly. The combined forces of both SLA and Thresher removed themselves from the planet instantly, as did any of the scientists who had the capability to do so, leaving the horror behind them. The virus didn't kill anyone (well, not directly anyway), but it removes all direct higher brain functions, leaving behind the primal responses of feeding, breeding, and bleeding. All life on the planet devolved into a free for all, with everything returning to primate level behaviour. Victims of the virus can recognise another infected creature, and while they can eat the flesh of their own, they prefer the purer flesh that hasn't been tainted by the virus. This is where their use to the contract circuit comes into play. This planet is used regularly as a dumping ground for prisoners who have no use for SLA industries, the average life expectancy on the planet is less than a day, as the infected will hunt them down and either convert them or consume them.

Appearance: Kanin appear unchanged from the race that they originally were (see attack modes), with the only difference being in the eyes and unhealing wounds. Kanin do not speak, or make any other noise, they have neither the impulse to do so, nor the capability to articulate it in any way, making them eerily horrific as they run forwards towards their next meal.

Attack modes: Kanin are only equipped with the natural weapons of the race that they were before they were infected. The main danger with Kanin is the fact that they become stronger and more resilient to pain as the virus affects them. That of course, and the fact that any bite wound or transference of bodily fluids into any open wound or orifice carries with it the virus that laid them low in the first place.

Move Rate 2 – Kanin do not move at any rate other than running when in combat.

Natural Armour None

Statistics

Str - Max+2
 Dex - Max-2
 Dia - 0
 Conc - 0
 Cool - **

- Kanin possess the racial maximum of their race in these statistics, modified as indicated above ** - Kanin are not affected by any form of psychology; they will attack when they see food, and they will fight until they drop, nothing else will make them waver.

Skills: Natural Weapon 3
 Bite 4

Damage All damage from Kanin attacks is the same as their natural weaponry would do. Any bite attack will also carry the virus with it.

Vulnerabilities/Notes Kanin take half damage from weapons in the same way as vevaphons do, however, any wounds that they do sustain do not heal in the way that regular wounds do. They have no natural healing mechanism, and will bleed to death from the slightest injury, this makes them very dangerous in the short term, but very little danger in the long run.

Threat Level Very high at close range, Low at range

Finthgere

Origin Vicenmarnkt

Evolution Finthgere do not occur naturally, their homeworld is listed as Vicenmarnkt only because it was on the Karma laboratories on Vicenmarnkt that they were created. The Finthgere are lifeforms, but they have only been released into the circuit arenas after much debating between circuit officials and Karma executives due to their nature. They have been designed to defeat all types of creatures, and imprinted in their cells is the knowledge of the weaknesses of the creatures in the world of progress, they are remarkably unassuming in their appearance, and in that is the danger of these creatures.

Appearance Finthgere range in size from ten centimetres to one metre in length, but they are all the same in appearance. Finthgere are worm like in their appearance, possessing neither limbs nor obvious organs of any sort, they are completely smooth to the touch (should anybody decide to do so), and have a similar muscle structure to that of an earthworm. Their colour varies depending on what they have been exposed to, but in their natural state, they are a pale luminescent green. They react by colour and gesture depending on what their intentions are, the darker their colour, the more damaged they have become, when they reach black, they usually die. More on the Finthgere will be revealed in the upcoming campaign supplement "it's not easy being green"

Attack Modes Finthgere only have one method of attack, they secrete a corrosive solution from their skin, this eats through all the alloys and bio materials that it has been tested on, including Dark Lament deathsuits and karma implants.

Move Rate 0.5 (this can be raised to 1 if the Finthgere is more than 30cm in length)

Natural Armour 0

Statistics Individually, Finthgere have statistics that all equal 1, however, this changes when they use their other abilities (see below)

Skills See Below

Damage Corrosion damage to armour at the rate of four points per phase, damage to flesh is at the rate of one point per phase, with additional effects as listed below.

Vulnerabilities/Notes Finthgere were designed to be a stealth weapon of sorts, they are not much use as a single organism, and they will quickly fall to anyone who chooses to wipe them out. The problem occurs when they are found in numbers. Finthgere have a statistic value of 1 by themselves, but they can combine with each other to increase their capabilities. Two finthgere linked together as a single organism have a stat value of 2, three linked together have a stat value of 3, and so forth. They are usually programmed with a mission objective, and then sent out in a group to deal with the matter at hand. Skills they require will be implanted in them prior to the mission, and these increase at the same rate as the statistics. Multiple Finthgere can form rudimentary skeletons and use several of themselves to create rudimentary manipulative organs, enabling them to use tools where required. Like Vevaphons before them, they take half damage from certain weapons, and when they are linked into a single organism, it is impossible to injure more than one of them with a single attack unless the weapon is using an area affect weapon. Damage is dealt to each individual Finthgere, with each attack killing one of them (if it does more than one point of killing damage).

Threat Level Very High

Jovo

Origin Lilliethanapteknthekeihl

Evolution The Jovo were originally conflict race 21665, scheduled for termination along with all the others in the Stormer rebellion, it was though that they were terminated with all the other when the massive shift took place. Until late in 605, when a planetary exploration team lost contact with their ground team and sent in a rescue team. This team was beaten back by ferocious warriors who bore the ancient markings of a race long dead. SLA sent a full investigation team along with the military might of an Endeavour Class WarFolder to investigate the incident. After the slaughter of the entire colony, information was retrieved from the archives of the destroyed world that indicated that the Jovo had survived the destruction of their system, and had founded several other colony worlds where they survived to this day. Contact was re-initiated with the Jovo and it was agreed that in return for several hundred of their best warriors each year to fight in the circuit, their race would be spared extinction. The whole culture of the Jovo re-arranged itself to service this need, and each year, the tithe is met. There are some in the hierarchy of SLA who believe that allowing this race of dedicated killers to go on living is a mistake, but currently, the merchandise value of these soldiers far outweighs the problems that might be caused if a few worlds go rogue. The rationale for this is that , after all, the stormers nearly took care of it once, it would be a simple matter for a few Dante shipments to be redirected to finish the job.

Appearance In their natural state, Jovo are bipedal creatures with Dark Green Mottled skin all over their body, hair is present in a massive variety of colours and runs across the body, and the backs of the arms and legs. Their head is naturally a cross between a wolf and snake, being broad of jaw, but with the natural elongation of the wolfs nose and distended eyes of the snake to each side. They have an excellent sense of smell as well as exceptional vision and hearing to match.

Attack Modes The Jovo are very fluent with the use

of weaponry, and are more than willing to use such things to ensure their survival, their natural methods of attack are their claws (hands and feet), and their bite, which also injects a mild venom.

Move Rate 1/2/3

Natural Armour 0

Statistics

Str - 5-12
Dex - 5-9
Dia - 5-8
Conc - 5-12
Cool - 7-14

Skills Varied, each Jovo is fully capable of learning and will have weapon skills in the 5 to 9 range, with other skills in the 3-5 range.

Damage Natural Weapons
 Claws – Pen 2, Dmg 3, Ad 1
 Bite – Pen 4, Dmg 1*, Ad 1

- The Bite of the Jovo injects a mild venom on any successful hit, this venom causes a -2 to all skill checks for the victim, and this lasts for the best part of three hours, it is rarely fatal unless the victim has an allergy to it or is particularly vulnerable.

Vulnerabilities Jovo are particularly vulnerable to carbon monoxide, to the point that even heavily polluted rain can have a debilitating effect on them. Any time that they are in contact with It, they will be at -2 to all their skills, if they are in direct contact with the gas, they will be a -8 to all skills until they have had three clear minutes away from the source of the gas.

Bwoina

Origin Dorne

Evolution The Bwoina is the largest creature to currently walk the circuit, standing over thirty feet tall, this monster from times forgotten is always specially transported in for contests, and never against anything less than several killers in a confined area. There was a serious incident when one of these beasts escaped in 786 and killed over fifty spectators. It took three wraith specialists to bring it down with multiple explosive rounds to it's head, and since then there has been a bounty payable on the heads of anyone found to be in possession of one of these things without the proper circuit authority.

Appearance Standing at least thirty feet tall when fully grown, these creatures are heavily armoured mammalian/reptilian hybrids. They have powerful tails that are used to strike rather than for balance and while their arms are shorter than the usual bipedal mammals, they are still of use when it comes to gripping and tearing at their opponents. Their heads are usually anything between four and six feet long, and possess an array of sharp incisors that are capable of cracking almost any armour.

Attack Modes The Bwoina can attack by Biting, Striking, Tail Lashing and Stomping to creatures less than a quarter of it's height.

Move Rate 3/6/9

Natural Armour 15 points of armour all over.

Statistics

Str - 15-30
 Dex - 5-10
 Dia - 1-2
 Conc - 0
 Cool - N/A

Skills

Bite 4
 Strike (Claws) 6
 Strike (Kick) 5
 Tail Whip 4
 Stomp 2

Damage

Bite – Pen 10, Dmg 15, Ad 7
 Strike (Claws) – Pen 7, Dmg 8, Ad 4
 Strike (Kick) – Pen 9, Dmg 10, Ad 6
 Tail Whip – Pen 12, Dmg 12, Ad 8
 (The Tail whip can hit up to three targets within a three metre vicinity.
 Stomp - Pen 20, Dmg 25, Ad 10.

The Bwoina will press this attack every round without the need to roll again simply by exerting more force on the crushed victim. The only way this can be removed is by something with more strength than the Bwoina pressing in the opposite direction (i.e. up). More than one person can help if need be, but the Bwoina will get a free attack (bite or claw strike) against one of the people helping for each phase that they try and get the foot off the victim.

Vulnerabilities – The only real vulnerability the Bwoina has is the fact that it’s an animal, and as such, can be distracted in the same way as an animal can. One hint though, for anyone who’s seen Jurassic park 27, return of Rex Man, if you stand still, that doesn’t make you invisible, it just makes you into dinner.

HOW TO RUN A CAMPAIGN

The following section has notes showing how to run standard contract circuit games involving groups that have contract killers in them. There are two different ways to run the circuit games, either involving an entire team made up from killers, or having just one or two killers in the game with the rest being operatives. It should be said that it is far easier for games to consist of all the same types of character, not a mixture, but it can be a challenge for the experienced GM to undertake if the players want to try it.

Setting up

The primary problem with any contract circuit game is that the SCL levels vary wildly from the operative scene, and it is very much a problem that the game will face if the players choose an operative/killer mix. The best way around this is to have all the players in the team who are playing killers to be put together underneath one fighting house, which will then cover the SCL risk that is undertaken by having lower SCL people on the same team as those with higher. The other way is to make sure that the squad only take BPN's and missions that all members of the squad can undertake, which can be fine, but it will get a little tedious after a while.

"Got a BPN!"

"What is it, we'd better not be chasing pigs down sewers again"

"Er, no, no, nothing like that.....we've got a contract to terminate a coven of suspected darknight subversives"

"Brilliant, do we have any details on them?"

"Er, yeah....they're quadruped carnivores with a tight knit attack strategy"

"Quadruped Carnivores?"

"Er, yeah, what are you doing with that blitzer?....."

Again, our suggestion would be to check up on the rules for the

fighting houses and make the best decision for all the players concerned. It is possible to have the killers working for one of the fighting houses as specialists, but this means that they will be directly under orders from the house, and BPN's will be a thing of the past. The problem with all of these things is that the two lifestyles do not interact very well, operatives can mostly choose the sort of thing they want to do (unless you have a rail-roading GM, and if you have one of these, get the GM changed, not the campaign). Killers are told what they have to do, no choices offered, which makes most circuit games ideal for Rail-roading GMs. Still, we'll move on to that later on.

Teams Vs Solo

When it comes to running a contract circuit game, there are two things to consider, firstly, killers do not start as single entities, they have to have friends and allies to help them in the early stages. For those thinking that they can make do with what they have and a secure hiding place at night, think again, there will always be those willing to bomb your homes, particularly in the grudge filled world of downtown. When you have a team at your back, it is far easier to play a circuit game, as the whole thing does not revolve around the next fight. It means that one player gets to be the killer, and the rest of the players get to be the support teamsters, contrary to popular belief, this makes for a very narrative game, with the fights taking up far less time than in regular games. Another way of doing it is for the players to be the support team for a killer who is in fact an NPC, all they do is damage control on his activities and cover all the PR and other activities behind the scenes. This can be a very intensive game, but it means that the players do not feel left out when one player gets all the thanks and kudos.

When playing solo, the problem is that the player will have to put points into allies and background friends to make sure that they have enough people watching their backs when the bad guys come for them. If the character being the killer is playing as part of a team of operatives, then special care has to be taken that the killers far higher profile activities do not overshadow the rest of the team. This results in the rest of the team feeling left out, and this is a sure fire way for the group to dissolve in record time.

The best way for the campaign to be run is in agreement with the basic premise of the game, have a killer assigned to the players for the purpose of a series of BPN's. The easiest way for this to work is to have the players (operatives) take part in "Operative?", a reality TV show where a killer is placed with an operative squad to see if they can manage to keep themselves in check in regular life without going colourfully overboard. The Circuit directs the BPN's that the squad goes on, giving them a basic set of choices every week for their next mission. These missions will tend not to be massively over complicated missions, but they will frequently involve situations where the volatility of the average killer will prove to be a massive liability, such as hostage situations, and operations where silence is of the essence. More on this is dealt with in the Fighting houses section of the book.

Circuit Monthly

Every month, the Contract Circuit publishes the Circuit monthly (CM), not to be confused with the contract directory, which is a yearly publication. CM lists all the killers of Rank 4 and above, together with a brief description of their appearance, fighting style, and equipment. For killers of rank 7 or above, CM will also make a list of their agent and also their regular charge for events and media appearances if the killer makes such a request of them. CM also provides a table of results and the current top contenders within the circuit, this is measured by number of challenges undertaken, number of challengers defeated, and variety of events undertaken. The final duty of CM is to indicate up and coming

killers in the lower ranks, and also if they have been signed to anybody apart from a standard contract agent. Circuit Monthly is available to all killers of Rep 6 and above free of charge, and to all other people, whether circuit personnel or not, at a subscription fee of 100c for the year. CM is published in both electronic and bound formats, although due to the size of the publication (over three hundred pages an issue), it is usually sent directly to the agent of the killer in question, where they will verify the information. Where killers have not paid the required fee to have their agent analyse the data held within the publication, they can have their copies sent to them directly, either in electronic format, on slug, or any other medium that they choose to use.

SYSTEMWORKS

New Combat System

The existing combat system allows for the use of manoeuvres within the unarmed combat field of battle, but it only has a limited number of moves, and these have to be purchased within a very specified field of use. The problem with this is that it limits what the players can do because they have to choose from the items already on the list, this is both a bad and a good thing. It means that the players can have moves that make them more efficient in combat, but they have to use specific moves to do more damage. There is no premise within the system to allow the combat to flow at the speed it needs to, this is where this new system comes in. I should make indication on this, I'm not putting down the combat system in the contract directory. It was the best job that anyone could have done with the word count that was given, hell, I've used more words on the introduction to this than the other combat system had to work with. I should also stress that this is the system that my players use, and it may not fit in with the world of progress that you run, so if its of use, great, if it's not, don't use it, either ways good. This part of the system also applies to natural weapons and those weapons which are used in the same way as unarmed combat techniques, such as mutilator and gash fists.

Rather than tell the players that they have to work with a specific move set, slow and heavy blows, fast and light blows, that sort of thing. It should be possible for players to execute moves that are both fast and heavy (ask anyone who's done any type of full contact sport if the blow that knocked them out last was delivered slowly). The way that this is accomplished is to reduce the level of ability that the player has in exchange for extra points of damage, penetration, or armour damage, rather than specify that a particular move has a hit bonus, does more damage, etc. This represents that when people put extra effort into a blow, they often lose a little of their focus to do so. Anyone who tells you that it's just as easy to deliver a jump

spinning back kick as it is to jab with your fist is either lying or is phenomenally gifted at their combat art (and phenomenally useless at jabbing with the first).

The way this works is with the skill level of the player directly, the way to make combat more interesting is not to give players a list to choose from, but to give them something that makes them think about the way their character is fighting. The best roleplayers in the world will not be able to make a good fight scene unless they've had some experience with martial arts or video games (involving fighting of some sort), or something that gives them some basic premise of how combat is done. You can tell anyone how a spin kick works, but they won't have the faintest clue as to which situations it would work in until they've seen it in action.

With the new system, players can elect to lower their skill by increments to modify the statistics of their strike on a one for one basis.

Thus for example, If a character with a skill of 6 wanted to raise the profile of their attack from Dmg 0, Pen 0, Ad 0 (+damage bonus) to Dmg 2, Pen 1, Ad 1, then they would lower their skill level by 4 for that phase only. This would be made up of a reduction of 2 for the damage bonus, 1 for the Penetration bonus, and 1 for the Armour damage bonus. This is not a modifier to hit, but an actual reduction in skill for the phase that the enhanced attack took place in. The reason for this will become clear as the special moves listed below are explained. Characters can only reduce one skill at a time, and they can only use the modifier on attacks for which they have a skill. An example of this would be a character with the wrestling skill attempting to make a complex kick attack, something that they just would not have been trained for.

For those who are saying that this means that characters can come up with moves that do 9 damage on an unarmed combat attack? Yes, you're absolutely right, but in order to do so, they have to have the 9 skill points to spend on the attack, which means that they're one step away from being godly in their combat skills. Anyone who has ever done martial arts of any sort will know that a properly trained martial artist can easily kill with a single blow, but many moves that can kill instantly require an inordinate amount of concentration. In the example above, the person making the "death blow" would have to roll $2d10 + 0$ to hit, a 50% chance to hit, not counting any environmental modifiers, so yes, it would kill them if hit, but there's no guarantee that it would hit. If they were trying for a guaranteed kill (a head shot for example), then their roll would be at $2d10 - 4$, not good odds at all.

Fighters can also use their own skills to prevent the opponent from hitting them, fighting defensively so they can either prolong the fight or save their opponent. The character can reduce their skill by one to reduce their opponents skill by one, and they can do this for as many points as they have to spend, this reduces their own chance to hit as well as their opponents. This particular skill can be used on multiple opponents, and they can do this with as many opponents as they have skill points to spend on. Any character with Martial arts as a skill may also pull their blows, dropping their skill by one point allows them to stop up to three points from any combination of DMG, PEN, and AD. Thus, a character lowering their skill by three points when using a mutilator fist can choose to modify the stats on the hit by any combination of up to nine points. In this way, a fighter can demonstrate total excellence in a fight, toying with their opponent at their leisure, meaning that

This does not take into account the special attack types that characters can undertake, we have quantified this by listing the special attack types below, together with the skill modifier that

that particular move costs the player when they attempt it. Note that all these moves are to do with the wrestling discipline, it is assumed that anyone taking up striking skills will be able to just use those skills and learn a few interesting moves by themselves. Wrestling is a different Barren Den Schluppen altogether, and as such, is described as follows.

Grapple (Leading to grapple options).

The primary move of all wrestlers, but the thing about grappling is that it's remarkably difficult to get into close range when the opponent doesn't want you to get there (unless you're in confined area). To grapple, you roll your attack as normal, but deduct your opponents current skill level from your dice roll. This represents the fact that although you may be faster than your opponent, trying to close with a world class Tae-Kwon-do master is almost impossible to do unless they're recovering from an attack. It's also a proven point that most grapplers take a hit to get close, it's part of the territory. With the current system, a grappler can either try and rush in to make the grab, or can wait for their opponent to take their shot, and then rush in to take them down.

An Example of this would be two combatants of equal skill (7), one using a striking art, one using a grappling style, the grappler has a higher dex than the striker.

If the Grappler wants to rush to grapple, his roll is on $2d10 + 0$ (7-7) to make the hold. If he decides to wait until the striker makes a committed attack (Dmg 2, Pen 2, Ad 1), giving them a minus five to their skill for the rest of that phase, then he can attack with $2d10 + 5$ (7-2). This means that while they will have most likely taken a hit, but they will have a far better chance of actually getting hold of the striker.

The danger inherent with waiting for your opponent to strike you is that they may just decide to put all their skill into damaging you, possibly causing a serious injury while you hesitated.

Just like real life.

When characters have successfully grappled an opponent, they then have to move to one of several different options. Each one of these options takes a phase to do which the opponent may react to if they have the same phase available to act in. They may make a single unmodifiable (i.e. they cannot choose to enhance it for damage, penetration, or armour damage) attack against the person grappling them using either their arms, legs, or any one handed weapon that is already in their hand (and yes, this includes single handed pistols). This will not make the grappler release them unless it kills or renders them unconscious, but it represents the brief pause from grapple to mangle. The other option is for the grappled character to pit their own wrestling skill (not martial arts or unarmed combat) against that of the grappler, making a roll of their wrestling skill minus the grapplers combat skill, a success means that they break free of the hold. In the example above, once the grappler had got the hold, the striker could either take a single hit at skill level 7, or attempt to escape, if they chose the second option, they would roll $2d10 - 7$, being that they have no wrestling skill of their own. This represents the lack of grappling training that most striking arts have.

If a player should make the comment that they learned several martial arts and some of them involved grappling, then make them buy the wrestling skill to represent that fact.

Grapple Options.

Note that all grapple options take place at the normal Dex level of the character, rather than at the end of the phase. This represents the fact that while grappling moves can be slow, once the grapple

has been achieved, any competent grappler can be frighteningly efficient at mangling things.

Lock

A lock is precisely that, a twisting of the muscles and bones so that the limb no longer functions at all. It also ensures that the fighter who has had the lock applied to them will not be able to move without causing themselves intense pain or damage. This can only be applied to a limb, not the head or body, and doesn't do any direct damage to the person in the lock. What it does do is prevent the person from moving without taking damage equal to their own strength bonus. This damage cannot be prevented or avoided and represents the muscles and bones ripping and tearing against the lock. The reason that the damage taken is measured by the characters own strength bonus is that the person applying the lock is not actually applying any force to the move. They are just applying muscle holding techniques, when the other character tries to move, it's their own muscles doing the damage to them, and for a stronger character, that means more damage. If the character chooses to move when in the lock, then they may make an unmodifiable attack (see above) with any free limb that they have.

Break

Requires a Lock to be established – Once the grappler has a lock on the opponent, they may proceed to break the limb in question, this takes another phase to activate and does double the strength bonus of the grappler to the limb in question. Unlike the lock, the grappler is now actively trying to damage the other character, which is why their own strength bonus is used. Once the limb reaches minus double what it originally had (i.e. a character with 4 hit points in the arm taking 8 damage to reach -4), then it is broken and rendered useless. Without proper treatment, even regeneration will not help (the arm will heal but the one will still be in the wrong position to use it).

Thus, to break a limb, the grappler has to first grapple, then lock, then break, taking a total of three phases to execute the move fully.

Takedown

When a grappler has made a successful grapple, then they make attempt to bring their target to the floor, the grappler matches their own strength (including armour and drug bonuses) against the weight of the target. To knock over a target, take the characters maximum lift (including armour and drug bonuses) and match it against the weight of the target (without armour and equipment). If it equals or exceeds the weight of the target, then the target is knocked to the floor with the grappler on top of them. The reason that the weight of the targets armour and equipment is not factored into this is because although armour may weigh lots, it's not very good at helping people not fall over when they're already going. There are some who might argue this, but (not being funny), they're wrong. The character who is being grappled may make one unmodifiable attack if they have a higher dex than the grappler, otherwise they are brought to the floor immediately. If they want to escape from the grapple, then they make an attack roll against the grappler, using their own wrestling skill or half their striking skill (round down) against the grapplers skill. Thus, a character with a striking skill of 9 against a grappler with skill 8 would roll $2d10 - 4$ to escape the grapple.

Grind and Pound

Requires a Takedown to have been completed – Once the grappler has managed to take down the opponent, they now pound and hammer at the opponent with hands, elbows, and head. The grappler will score a number of hits automatically on the

opponent equal to their skill minus the opponents grappling skill or half their striking skill, rounded down. Thus a grappler with skill 7 against an opponent with grappling skill 5 will score two automatic hits against them, the grappler may not increase the statistics of these attacks. The same grappler against an opponent with a striking skill of 8 will score three hits on the opponent ($8/2 = 4$). The opponent can attempt to either strike back at the grappler or can attempt to escape. If they are striking back, then they can make attacks with the hands only, at half their regular skill (round down), or they can make an escape roll, at their normal skill level, minus the number of attacks that the grappler has landed on them that round. Thus, the aforementioned striker (skill 8) against the grappler (Skill 7) could either make a single attack back at the grappler at skill level 4 or they could attempt to escape at $2d10 + 5$ (skill 8 minus three hits scored). If the striker has a higher dexterity than the grappler, they take the same penalties to escape, but if they manage to escape, the grappler will only score on hit on them as they escape.

Muscle Wrench (performable from grapple)

The Grappler wrenches at the opponent, twisting muscles and cartilage to cause damage directly to the muscles of the opponent. It's possible to perform this move even through armour, as correct positioning of the limb can be used to exacerbate the muscle straining. An example of this is twisting the arm when the elbow is hyperextended. This move doesn't do any direct damage to the limb, but it reduces the skill roll of any particular move using that limb by a number equal to the strength bonus of the grappler. This penalty lasts for a number of hours equal to the penalty imposed by the move. Thus, something with a strength bonus of +3 would reduce all skill rolls using the wrenched limb by 3 for 3 hours. Muscle wrenching can be done more than once on any given limb, and all penalties and recovery times are cumulative.

Throw

From Grapple, the grappler now moves to throw the opponent, this is executed in the same way as a regular strike and does a total of three damage (ignoring armour) to the opponent. This damage can be boosted in the same way as strikes by lowering the skill of the grappler on a point for point basis. The character being thrown will go a distance equal to the throwers strength bonus multiplied by two. Thus a strength bonus of +3 will throw the target six feet. Anyone being thrown can half the damage being done by a successful martial arts or wrestling roll. Either way, when the throw is executed, whether successful or not, the grapple on the opponent is lost (see below).

Choke

The character locks hands, arms, or legs around the opponents throat and pulls back hard while applying tension. This move doesn't work against hard armour of any sort, but against anyone wearing either soft armour or no armour, it does an amount of damage equal to the strength bonus of the character to the opponents head. This hold can be applied from one phase to the next without having to reposition, making the damage cumulative. When the opponent reaches 0 hit points in the head, then they are rendered unconscious. If the hold is maintained beyond 0 hit points, the opponent dies when they reach minus their normal hit points in the head region. This is actual damage, rather than bruising damage, and represents the serious damage done to the windpipe when applying a committed choke. Anyone wishing to escape a choke hold may make a standard wrestling roll or a martial arts/brawling roll at half their normal skill to avoid the choke damage that round. If they make the roll at an exceptional success (20+), then they escape the hold and the grapple altogether.

Throw Options

Chain Throw

If the grappler lowers their skill by two points for the attack, then whether or not the throw succeeds, the grappler maintains their grapple on the opponent. If exercising this option, then the target being thrown will not be thrown any distance (as per normal throws).

Throw to Takedown

The grappler lowers their skill by three points when making their throw. If they succeed with the throw, they follow the opponent down and go straight to the completed takedown position.

Distance throw

This move cannot be used in conjunction with chain throw. The grappler lowers their skill by two points when making the throw, and launches their opponent a number of feet away from them equal to two times their strength bonus. Thus, a character with a strength bonus of +3 will throw their opponent six feet in any given direction. If there is an obstacle in between where the opponent is launched from and where they land, then they take damage equal to the amount of distance left to travel before their flight was interrupted. Thus, a character thrown six feet who hits an obstacle two feet into their flight will take four damage (6 - 2 = 4). Armour helps with this damage.

Weapon Combat System

The unarmed combat system doesn't work with the weapon side of things, so we've added in a separate subsection to the new combat system. It should be noted that for the purposes of this system, we do not apply the term weapon to anything that is actually attached to the fighter, such things are better suited to being dealt with by the Unarmed combat system. This includes all natural weapons, teeth, claws, horns, Gash fists, Mutilators, power disks, and similar items. With weapons, it takes a little more care to work with the system to prevent it becoming a one hit kill system, so here goes.

Increased Statistics

Weapons can increase their Damage, Pen, or Ad by reducing the skill of the fighter using them by two for that phase in the same way as the unarmed combat works. Thus, to raise the damage code on a weapon by two, the fighter would lower their skill by four for that phase only.

Parry/Deflection

Anyone trained in weapons knows that a solid parry is the last thing you do in any given situation, you're giving up the initiative to the opponent. With this, the character can lower their skill to lower the attack roll of the opponent on a one for one basis. Thus a character lowering their skill by four points would lower the attack roll of their opponent by four. This only works on the phase that they lower their skill.

Defensive Fighting

This can only be used with a weapon that has a length of six feet or more, the fighter takes up a defensive stance with the weapon out in front of them, preventing the opponent from closing them with ease. The killer subtracts half their skill from any attack that is made upon them from the direction they are defending in (choose a ninety degree arc on the character). But, any attacks made by them may not be boosted in any way, and any attacks that they land are automatically at half damage, half Pen, and half

Ad. A killer who makes a habit of fighting defensively will get the reputation of being a coward, so use this sparingly.

Bind - (Leading to Bind Options)

The killer reduces their skill by two when making the attack, but if they succeed, they can move on to bind options. A Bind is quite literally a double edged sword however, as the other fighter might be able to use the bind to their advantage. When a Bind is achieved, the opponent may use any of the bind options as well, but is at a -2 on any of their actions due to the bind being applied to the advantage of the other fighter.

Bind Options

Disarm

The killer moves their weapon in such a way that it dislodges the other fighters weapon. The killer lowers their skill by three for the purpose of this attack roll and if they succeed, they tear the weapon out of the opponents hand. If the killer chooses to lower their skill by five for the attack, then they can take the weapon off the opponent and keep hold of it as well. (Note that taking the weapon off the opponent does not mean that you can automatically use it as well).

Throw

Using the binding motion of the weapons, the killer levers the other fighter around their weapon and brings them to the floor. This usually involves levering the damaging end of the weapon into a vital spot and pulling, but it can also be used by applying the business end of the weapon to the joints of the target to bring them down. The character reduces their skill by three points and makes their attack roll. If they succeed, the opponent is thrown a number of feet equal to the unmodified Strength bonus of the killer multiplied by two. Thus, a killer with a strength bonus of +3 would throw their opponent six feet upon completing this move.

Lock

The Killer uses their weapon to lever the opponent into a position where they cannot move without damaging themselves. This does not work in the same way as unarmed combat locks, in that the weapon itself is the locking mechanism. The killer lowers their skill by two to make the roll, and if they succeed, the lock is immediately on to the opponent. Escaping from weapon locks is different to escaping unarmed combat locks. Anyone attempting to escape from a weapon lock makes their roll using the skill of the weapon that they were using at the time they were locked. They will automatically take damage equal to the damage code of the weapon they are locked with, added to the strength bonus of the character locking them. Thus, a character with a power Claymore and a strength bonus of +3 would do 9 damage to the character trying to escape from the lock. The fighter escaping the lock can reduce the damage done to them on a one for one basis by lowering their own skill. In the example above, if the locked character had a skill of 7, then they could use their entire skill to lower damage, and only take two damage when escaping from the lock. If the character fails in their escape roll, they still take damage but do not escape the lock.

With regards to escaping locks with weapons, armour protects from the damage caused by locks, as the weapon is not actually locking up the character with their muscles and bones but keeping them in place with the threat of the weapon damaging them.

NEW WEAPONS

“Stop thinking Chech secret police, start thinking playstation, Blow s*** up”
Xander Cage, xXx

FEN 357 “Viper” Cannon

The 357 is one of the latest Fen weapons that have just been approved for use in regular circuit work rather than just for warworld and army work. The 357 is a 17mm quad barrelled support cannon with a firing rate of upwards of 1200 rounds a minute. It is worn either underneath or above the forearm with the barrel protruding slightly in front of the hands, the firing mechanism is tied to the gauntlets that are supplied with the weapon. The killer merely clenches their fist and points to fire the weapon, all the ammunition is held in the pack at the rear of the weapon, and can be linked with up to three ammunition packs being held at the rear of the weapon at the same time. Unfortunately, the weapon does have a few drawbacks, the first of which is that changing the ammunition clip is a slow (One entire round) process, and due to the nature of the weapon, it cannot be used to fire anything other than standard rounds. The reload system does not react well to specialist ammunition, and after a few spectacular incidents of charge-firing 200+ 17mm Hesh rounds at the same time, it was decided to disable the weapons capability to fire anything else.

	<u>Clip</u>	<u>Cal</u>	<u>ROF</u>	<u>RCL</u>	<u>Range</u>	<u>Cost</u>
357	100	17mm	5/10	13	100m	4,000c 110,000u

Weight : 10kg

FEN 001 “Punisher”

The 001 is the 900th anniversary concept gun for Fen armament. It is a triple barrelled long slide pistol with a separate ammunition clip attached to each barrel. All the ammunition is held in each clip and does not autoloading into the chamber, allowing the round to be chosen every time with a single flick of the selector switch. The trigger is double action, both loading the round from the current ammunition clip into the chamber and then firing it with a single

pull. The selector is on both sides of the gun, one rotating it clockwise, one counter-clockwise. Despite the weapon requiring specialist training (several of the prototypes were sent back when most people couldn't get used to pressing a button near to the clip release on most guns), it has proved to be a favourite with many of the new killers, particularly the new Parisian fighters.

	<u>Clip</u>	<u>Cal</u>	<u>ROF</u>	<u>RCL</u>	<u>Range</u>	<u>Cost</u>
001	10*3	12mm	1	6	20m	800c 20,000u

Weight : 1.5kg

MAL SF (SwitchFire)

Recognising that the assault cannon was losing it's appeal in the market with all the new weapons being seen, MAL decided to make an entry into the pistol market, putting together one of the heaviest automatics that the world of progress has ever seen. Firing 12.7mm rounds, the SF has three barrels, all feeding from a linked clip held underneath the gun. The weapon can be set to fire either one round from each barrel, or go auto, firing three from each barrel in a single shot. Many people have criticised it as being less efficient than the farjacket, but the far larger ammunition clip and the capability to go automatic have made this a serious contender for the heavy pistol category. The ammunition used in the weapon cannot be varied, it has to fire identical ammunition from each barrel or the minute difference in weight can throw out the weapons calibration, causing inaccuracies at ranges beyond ten metres. When firing three rounds at once, the weapon still uses the pistol skill, not the automatic support skill, if a hit is scored, all three rounds hit the target.

	<u>Clip</u>	<u>Cal</u>	<u>ROF</u>	<u>RCL</u>	<u>Range</u>	<u>Cost</u>
SF	20*3	12.7mm	1/3*	5/13	20m	1,500c 40,000u

Weight : 2kg

Prime Arms 24/7

The 24/7 is the first foray into the pistol range from Prime Arms, a new company from downtown founded by the Alexander Thamus, an operative of forty years service, recently returned from secondment at orange crush. The 24/7 is a multi purpose operative pistol that it being billed as the new Fen 603. The armoured gauntlet replacing the pistol grip is a new innovation on the circuit, but with the addition of a mutilator option into the palm and edges of it, it has proven to be a most popular weapon with those who like things up close and personal. The weapon is a snub nosed 10mm pistol with a ten round clip, which makes it not the most formidable of weapons, but the flexibility offered by not having to hold the pistol makes it more than popular with many killers. The 24/7 can be used as either a standard 10mm pistol or a Mutilator on any given round, and can be used to score an automatic hit on any target that has been gripped by the hand using the 24/7.

	<u>Clip</u>	<u>Cal</u>	<u>ROF</u>	<u>RCL</u>	<u>Range</u>	<u>Cost</u>
24/7	10	10mm	1	0	10m	300c 5,000u

Weight : 1kg

MAL LEO

If you sometimes you find yourself in deep space, but you don't want to find yourself unprepared then the Leo is a weapon for you. The Leo uses compressed air to 'cold launch' a miniature missile. After leaving the gun this unguided missile ignites and burns its way to the target. Special vents around the gun emit the compressed air keeping the gun stable and negating recoil. The Leo uses a 12.7mm unguided projectile that behaves in all other

respects as 12.7mm AP rounds.

The compressed air cylinder is hot swappable, and MAL appreciating that the Operative or Killer on the go may not have time to recharge the Leo cylinders have included a universal coupling so that a standard medical compressed air cylinder maybe used. However the heavy usage of compressed air in this weapon means that you can only get 5 uses out of a medical cylinder.

With a casing of composite ceramics the Leo can take most firearm accessories except for Flash Suppressers, Recoil Baffling and Silencers.

	<u>Clip</u>	<u>Cal</u>	<u>ROF</u>	<u>RCL</u>	<u>Range</u>	<u>Cost</u>
Leo	10	Special	2/1	0	500m	4,500c 100,000u

Weight : 6kg

	<u>DMG</u>	<u>PEN</u>	<u>AD</u>	<u>Cost</u>
12.7mm Proj	9	12	2	12c/200u
Cold Launch Projectile				

The Leo cannot load normal 12.7mm rounds. The Leo's projectiles cost 12c/200u and additional compressed air cylinders 10c for 20 uses.

GA 17 "Tommy gun"

For those times when you don't want to put just one hole in a target GA have released the 12.7mm Tommy gun. A sub machine gun in 12.7mm the Tommy gun's chief advantages are the stopping power of its ammunition and the large capacity of its snail type magazine.

Made with typical GA workmanship the Tommy gun is ready to fit a range of accessories.

	<u>Clip</u>	<u>Cal</u>	<u>ROF</u>	<u>RCL</u>	<u>Range</u>	<u>Cost</u>
17	100	12.7mm	5	10	10m	1,250c 24,000u

Weight : 2.4kg

GA 29 Liquidator

There are times when 12.7mm just doesn't do the job. GA understands that and gives the larger customer the option of owning a 17mm SMG. This larger round craters target armour and makes a real mess out of biological tissue. The Liquidators rate of fire is the icing on the cake.

With the normal workmanship associated with the GA name the Liquidator comes ready to fit a range of accessories.

	<u>Clip</u>	<u>Cal</u>	<u>ROF</u>	<u>RCL</u>	<u>Range</u>	<u>Cost</u>
29	20	17mm	5	15	25m	1,500c 30,000u

Weight : 3kg

SLA Ind's "Shredder" shotgun

Are you a larger customer looking for the spread pattern of a shotgun but frustrated with 10gauge rounds? SLA Industries are proud to present you with their Shredder. A modified war world grenade launcher the Shredder is recommended only to those customers with the excessive strength required to handle 4 gauge shot rounds

With a comfortable and pleasant finish the Shredder can fit all major firearm accessories except silencers and flash suppressers.

	Clip	Cal	ROF	RCL	Range	Cost
Shredder		8	4g	1	18	20m
						45,000u

Weight : 6kg

	DMG	PEN	AD	Cost
4g Shot	32	17	14	6c/120u
+2 to hit				

Karma 752 "BioBurn"

The BioBurn is worn like a glove, covering the entire lower arm from fingers to elbow. Inside the BioBurn there is a bulb that fits in the palm of the Killers hand. This bulb is squeezed to fire the weapon. Despite the BioBurn not having a functional safety and early models having a constant 'drip' problem use of the BioBurn is taking off, especially among the stranger Killers.

	Clip	Cal	ROF	RCL	Range	Cost
752	15	Special	1	0	5m	4,500c
						100,000u

Weight : 3.5kg

	DMG	PEN	AD
Karma 753BB	32	8	8
Acid burn Damage			

FEN 602

This gun has been seen being used by the more style-conscious of, often human, lower ranking Killers. These Killers often trick the 602 out with stock, silencer and telescopic sights to best take advantage of the 602's abilities.

	Clip	Cal	ROF	RCL	Range	Cost
602	10	10mm	1	1	20m	370c
						7,000u

Weight : 1.5kg

GA 71 "Gentlemen's Friend"

Don't like everyone know you're packing but don't want to forgo personal protection? GA has released their first walking stick with the employees of SLA Industries firmly in mind. When swung against a target the ice pick style handle can penetrate many armour types. Additionally in the hardened shaft of this self-defence weapon there is a 12.7mm round. To prime the round you simply push in the locking buttons either side of the handle and twist the barrel round in your free hand. Once primed all you need to do is push the locking buttons again to fire

The 71 is unable to fit standard firearms accessories, but is available in a range of attractive finishes. Self-defence in the 900's needn't be style-less.

	Clip	Cal	ROF	RCL	Range	Cost
71	1	12.7mm	1	6	5m	4,500c
						100,000u

Weight : 2kg

	DMG	PEN	AD
GA 71	2	8	1

BLA 764 "Predator"

BLA have made a step out of their market with this under/over rifle for the discerning hunter. This twin barrelled rifle has a notably long range and feels incredibly well balanced. Built to order the Predator is a work of art in its own right, the ceramic composite working parts are available in the same stunning range

of finishes as the Blitzter with the stock and furnishing honed from real wood. Every Predator sold comes with a BLA weapon maintenance kit

	Clip	Cal	ROF	RCL	Range	Cost
764	2	12.7mm	2/1	6/4	1,000m	2,500c
						55,000u

Weight : 12kg

AGB Dartgun

This Bull pup rifle from AGB fires bolts containing chemicals of the Killers Choice. Once the round has penetrated the exact effect depends on the chemical loaded into the round. This weapon has been finding favour with both Circuit Hunters to subdue prey and particularly sadistic Killers.

	Clip	Cal	ROF	RCL	Range	Cost
Dartgun		5	Special	1	0	600m
2,000c						40,000u

Weight : 4kg

	DMG	PEN	AD
Dart	2	12	1

delivers 1 dose, drug of users choice

KK 35 "Butterfly"

KK continue to expand their repertoire of off the wall weapons with this unique 12mm handgun. The Butterfly folds up into a solid ceramic case and unfolds into the users hand with a practised flick of the wrist. It is this flick that feeds another round into the chamber and cocks the weapon. Although the Butterfly can be difficult to control, feels a little underpowered and is unable to take most standard firearms accessories it is finding favour with Killers who like the telegenic appearance of its action. For a nominal fee KK will etch a design of the Killers choice on to the casing of the weapon.

	Clip	Cal	ROF	RCL	Range	Cost
35	6	12mm	1	9	8m	500c
						1,000u

Weight : 0.5kg

KK/SP "Discus"

A joint project this weapon combines some of the best attributes of the weapons produced by both companies. The Discus is mounted under the users arm with KK famous flick trigger attached. The rest of the workings are pure SP. SP have worked on the design to give the discus a shorter barrel with the same punch expected from experienced Vibro users. Discus already has a growing fan base from Killers and Operatives who occasionally need a hand with their close in work.

	Clip	Cal	ROF	RCL	Range	Cost
Discus	4	Chopper	1	0	20m	800c
						17,000u

Weight : 2kg

KK 50 "Leopard"

Sharing the same design features that have made the Ripper popular with Operatives all over Mort the Leopard clips onto the shoulder/upper arm, with the under hand flip trigger that has made KK famous. The Leopard is unable to fit a silencer, flash suppresser or telesights. However it will happily fit a standard laser painter and aftermarket recoil baffling. The Leopard has a single barrel and is fed from a magazine. These magazines, although unique to the Leopard are readily available from KK

	Clip	Cal	ROF	RCL	Range	Cost
50	3	10g	1	8	3m	710c 15,000u

Weight : 4kg

AGB Speargun

AGB's development team have been busy. This month they also bring us this development of the Speargun used by divers on New Paris. A one shot speargun it uses compressed air to hurl a miniaturised harpoon into the target. AGB have produced this speargun using the same canisters as MAL's Leo. Although this weapon is designed for use in and out of water there is a noticeable decrease in the weapons range when used on land. Some Killers have already adapted to this weapon, attaching a line to the end the harpoon and using it to heave the target back to the Killer.

	Clip	Cal	ROF	RCL	Range	Cost
Spear Gun	1	Special	1	0	10/5m	2,500c 50,000u

Weight : 4kg

	DMG	PEN	AD	Cost
Harpoon	8	12	4	10c/200u

Target can be pulled back by line attached.

ZIP Gun

There are times in every Killers life when plans go astray. A weapon dropped, a pursuing Killer or just getting caught unprepared. These are the times when real professional Killers really stand out. This is when the truly professional Killer will improvise. Zip Guns are not made by anyone for sale in the world of progress and SLA Industries heavily recommends its citizens don't use them, but for the Killer trying to avoid LAD there is sometimes no other option.

A zipgun is made by a Killer or Operative, sometimes even gang members in the field. The critical components are a live round, tube, a nail and a method of fixing everything together. There are several examples on file of Killers using the Campbell Clans heavy McT tape to create one of these weapons.

	Clip	Cal	ROF	RCL	Range	Cost
Zip	1		1	8	2m	100u

Weight : 0.25kg

The Killer needs to make a successful Weapon Maintenance roll as well as scrounge the critical elements. Damage done is half the normal for the round used.

SLA Industries "Guardian" Sentry gun

This is not a new weapon in its own right but rather is an automated weapons platform for area denial. The Guardian is a tripod mounted weapon guided by a dedicated Oyster in a concussion proof casing. This Oyster takes targeting information from an on board motion sensor. The Guardian can be programmed to ignore targets based on size data or broadcasting correct IFF codes. Additionally some Guardians are fitted with basic speech modules, these modules can give simple instructions such as "Please do not cross the redline." Early attempts with remote operators using the Guardian were prone to signal jamming and unauthorised users hacking into the fire control system.

The Guardian is often found mounting FEN 706's or 808 Power Reapers. On war world duty it isn't uncommon to find that Guardians are rigged to explode rather than fall into the wrong hands. This proximity charge goes off with the force of a grenade

if targets get within 2m of the weapon.

	Clip	Cal	ROF	RCL	Range	Cost
G808	80	12mm	10/5	13/8	30m	3,500c 80,000u

Weight : 25kg

SLA isn't the only company producing these weapons, Dark night often produce a similar weapon platform for denying an area to SLA Operatives. The DK version is scratch built using whatever weapon is at hand and so can be any calibre.

Blaze Pack

The blaze pack was created to try and lower the typical dependency of most killers on infra-red and ultraviolet vision options. The Blaze pack is a micro explosive approximately 2cm is diameter, set to go off on contact once it has been primed. The pack detonates with both a magnesium flare detonation and also a small thermal charge. The result is a blinding light to all of the regular vision options (normal vision, infra red, and ultra violet). The Thermal charge raises the temperature in the area by 100 degrees centigrade and remains in the air for a good seven to eight seconds. The initial flash will blind anything looking directly at it or close to it for 3 rounds, any killer making a dex check on 2d10 can avoid the initial flash, only having to deal with the thermal after effect. It is impossible to use infra red or heat seeking vision options through the haze, and motion scanners will not be able to penetrate it unless they are of a radar type. This grenade can also be used to mark targets for thermal tracking, as it will raise the temperature of any armour it hits by 50 degrees for a period of three minutes. The heat flare is enough to give any race discomfort, but the only life form that will suffer any damage from the detonation is the Wraith, and only then if they are not wearing their cool suit.

Cost - 5c per pack

NEW EQUIPMENT

Phoenix Arms Bone Knitter

The bone knitter is the latest innovation for medics who have to operate in the field without adequate medical facilities. The bone knitter is placed on the limb that has been damaged and activated, it penetrates the skin and muscle, straightening and resetting the break. It then works with a combination of layered drugs and calcium implants to provide a working replacement for the broken bone. This replacement is good for twenty four hours, after which, the bodies natural enzymes will break down the replacement. This allows for operatives suffering serious injury in the field to remain mobile for the few hours necessary to make their way to a proper medical facility where the limb can be treated.

Cost – 100c (comes with five sealing cartridges), replacement cartridges cost 5c each. One cartridge repairs any one broken bone, anything with STR 13 or more requires two cartridges to set a bone

Phoenix Arms LAD Booster

LAD takes four minutes to arrive, or at least, it better do, because if it doesn't, then it doesn't matter how much money you've got in that account, you're off the board. With the LAD boost, it becomes a second chance when you're in the middle of nowhere with no chance of four minutes being sufficient. The LAD booster is a small device worn next to the skin on the neck area, when it registers that flatline has occurred, it automatically takes over the circulation of the blood to the head and provides oxygen where required. It doesn't pump in any healing drugs or attempt to make any resuscitation on the patient, but it will keep the brain supplied for six minutes before it gives out. This extends the time that LAD have to get to the patient to ten minutes, but if anyone removes the device at any time, then it puts the time back to four minutes from the very second that the box is removed. The Box can be placed on a dead person who hasn't suffered brain death to extend their time,

but to do so requires a first aid roll of 15+, if this roll is failed, the device will not function (although it will appear that it is doing). The contract circuit is currently considering the provision of these devices for killers as a standard, but it hasn't negotiated a suitable price as yet.

Cost – 100c (anyone with over 4000c in an LAD account is provided with one free of charge)

Delta Grey Therm optic camouflage

Therm-Optic (Thermographic – Optical) camouflage is one of the newer inventions to reach the circuit, combining sophisticated heat dissipation layering with light refracting glassteel, the suit works to seriously assist in the hiding and sneaking of the killer wearing it. It works more efficiently when the killer is motionless, but this has always been the case with hiding. The suit protects the user from all attempts to locate them through infra-red vision, and it lowers any searchers detect roll by 3 if the user is in motion and 5 if they are stationary. If the wearer takes more than three points of damage on any location, the suit loses it's protective capabilities in that area.

Cost 300c (Suit) 200c (cloak)

Delta Grey Holo imaging system

This tiny projector provides a life-sized image that mimics exactly what the killer is doing at the time. It is usually used to decoy against other killers by leaving it in a specific location where the killer might have hidden, the killer then stays in their own position and waits for the other killers to go get his image. There have been several problems with this device, the first of which is that the transmission system is only good for a hundred metres, meaning that if you spot the image, the killer is not far away. The second is that the image doesn't give off any heat, and so is easily deducible as an image unless the killer is being very inventive.

Cost 50c (projector and transmitter)

Delta Grey "Buddy" radar/motion scanner baffling system

The Buddy system is a small air density modifier, it creates a field of widely skewed particles that can be set to go in front of the killer, to either side, behind, or centred around him. This has the effect that motion scanners and radar cannot zoom in on them while the field is activated. The practical application to this was first put together in the sewers, where the unstable field of confusion causes many people to stay away from the killers using it, not being able to pinpoint the location of the opposition is a powerful deterrent.

Cost 75c

Prime Arms Auto-Range Laser pointer

The Auto Range is a modified laser pointer that incorporates a range-finder into the laser pointer, the range finder automatically sets the range and re-calibrates the laser pointer to be accurate at that range. It is becoming more popular with the rifle specialists in the circuit, and is available in infra-red, ultra-violet, and regular red dot types, all at the same costs.

Cost 10c

Armour cushioning

Regular armour includes with it a regular set of shock absorbers to prevent the armour itself from damaging the occupant when they fall or are struck, however, it does nothing to prevent the

actual concussion that can result from heavy impacts and falls whilst wearing it. Armour cushioning comes in three levels, which are explained below.

Level 1 – The armour receives an extra set of multi-layer padding across the shoulders, neck, head, and hips, preventing light impacts from causing too much more damage. This layer adds 5 kilos to the weight of the armour, and reduces fall and impact damage by one point, and if there is only one point of damage getting through, it can prevent it entirely.

Cost Cost of regular armour +75c

Level 2 – The armour now receives a back plating and reinforcement across the triceps and forearm areas, together with a head gauge that automatically registers impacts and makes certain that whiplash is vastly reduced in its effects. This layer adds a further four kilos to the armour, and reduces fall and impact damage by two points, with the same effects as level one.

Cost Cost of regular armour +200c

Level 3 – Only available for powered armour, this final padding is electronically controlled, and regulates the armours motor systems when it registers falling or impacts. This layer automatically adjusts the position of the armour to prevent impact from being taken on one part of the body, this layer only reduces direct impact damage by two, but it reduces any falling damage by five points. Falling damage includes that damage which is done by throws in close combat.

Cost Cost of regular armour +400c

NEW ARMOUR

Phoenix Arms Medical Suit

Phoenix arms produced this suit in early 902, when they were still known as Alpha One Medical services, but it did not see commercial use until early 904. It was originally designed as light armour for contract circuit medics who didn't have time to keep a clear check on what was happening to them while in the zone. It is a light suit of armour with a full onboard medical computer that projects onto the Heads Up Display the complete bio-readout of the person wearing it. This does not help their frame of mind for the most part, but it is becoming more popular with a lot of the contract killers who do not feel pain whilst on most of their combat drugs. It was made famous when Video Nasty started linking the display into his helmet readouts whilst he was out and about killing things, and a lot of the public like to see how people are getting hurt even when they can't see it directly. The suit loses its readout capability if the ID in the torso or head falls to 5 or less, this can be repaired at any Phoenix Arms outlet free of charge when the ID of the suit is restored.

PV	<u>ID/Location</u>				Cost
	Head	Torso	Arms	Legs	
4	15	30	15	20	600c 12,500u

Delta Grey Stealth Suit

The DGSS is a light suit of powered armour that incorporates a set of features that make it ideal for urban warfare. It has a set of adhesive pads on the hands, knees and feet, which can be activated and deactivated at will, together with a powered override on the arms and torso allowing the wearer to climb faster. The suit is also covered in a Therm-optic layering, making it doubly effective for infiltration exercises. The suit suffers from a lack of

actual protection for the most part, stopping only very light ammunition, but the additional advantages given by the suit more than offset this.

PV	Head	ID/Location			Cost
		Torso	Arms	Legs	
6	10	25	15	17	1,000c 20,000u

*1 - Sealed environment suit with four hour independent air supply, Therm optic camouflage on all external parts of the armour, adhesive pads (max weight limit 1000kg), auto climb system (allows character to move directly up walls at move rate 2, max weight limit 400kg).

MAL 650 "Thunderbolt" Armour

This very light armour comes with attractive designs of the Killers choosing etched into it. These designs can be chosen from a range of standard designs or for a small waiting period the design of the Killers choice.

What really makes the difference is the Velkra element of this armour. Killers can have the Velkra in a Macintosh style, covering the Torso, Arms and most of the Killers armoured Legs. This style is slightly less obvious downtown and has the possible to conceal items beneath the Velkra as well as functional pockets in the coat. This Velkra outer is also available in an over the shoulder clan tartan, it is this style that is becoming very popular with Clan Frothers. Ordering a suit of Thunderbolt made to the Killers specification takes one week.

The Velkra element is integral to the armour and cannot

PV	Head	ID/Location			Cost
		Torso	Arms	Legs	
7	8	19	13	16	800c 16,500u

Power Projects 9 "Crusader" Armour

Power Projects latest creation is aimed for Technical Operatives and Killers who need protection as well as technical ability. The Crusader is being marketed as Command and Control Armour. The unit uses overlaid visual displays and force- feedback gloves to use the suits on board Oyster. With a selection of Chippy leads, multi-adapters and electronic lock picks this suit is designed to penetrate most hostile locations. The Crusader is no one trick pony though, the suit also comes equipped with a signal Booster and shoulder mounted Telescopic Tightbeam which enables the operator to remotely use suitably equipped vehicles and equipment. Other adaptations of the Crusader include a medics suit, which can monitor the condition of Squad mates and dispense suitable medication via their drug injectors and the Command suit, which accepts live video feed from Squad members allowing the Squad leader to make better real time tactical decisions.

The Crusader is only available in the technical mode from Power Projects, however they are willing to customise the armour to Operatives and Killers requirements.

PV	Head	ID/Location			Cost
		Torso	Arms	Legs	
10	20	50	40	45	2,500c 50,000u

Delta Grey Skin Suit

Along with their groundbreaking stealth suit, Delta Grey also came up with the Skin Suit, an unpowered suit of armour with an appearance closer to that of a regular armour undersuit. The

Skin Suit is put together with a series of alloy fibres that mimic the muscles of the user, this means that the user does not suffer any penalties for the use of the armour. Unfortunately, it also means that the suit can only be worn by one person, Skin suits are not interchangeable between players without prior modification. Skin suits are becoming popular because they can be modified in a number of ways that benefit the operative on the move and they are also thin enough to place under regular clothing. Skin Suits are provided in a choice of colours, ranging from regular skin tone (choose one that matches the race of the user, detect roll at -5 to spot the armour when not wearing the helmet of the armour), to any combination of polychromatic hues. The suit can be modified in any of the following ways, each modification costs 100c and each suit can fit up to three modifications on it.

Thermal Suit - This modification puts a thermal layer underneath the top layer, which can be modified from +50 to -50 degrees as required. The suit has an external sensor which can modify the suits temperature to that of the outside world, this may make the user uncomfortable, but it will render them all but invisible to Thermal vision options.

Rocket Pack - This fits a series of rockets all over the suit, one on each limb and a pack on the back, these rockets can be used in the same way as the jets on the silverback suit. The limitation is that they do not have the same power as the silverback jets, with all speeds and distances halved.

Life Support - The suit has a built in life support system, this system has a three hour air supply and includes a full pressure regulator and waterproofing to four atmospheres.

RC Broadcaster - The RC (Riot Control) option on the Skin suit is a set of four microphones fitted on the suit, two on the back, two on the front, the volume level of which can be boosted up to 150 Decibels if required. This option includes a separate audio defense screen which works with the microphone system to make sure that the suit user is not deafened when using the RC.

Claws - This option fits a set of retractable razored fingernails into the gloves of the suit, this increases the damage and penetration of any attack made with the hands by 1.

Vision Options - This option fits any two of the following options to the helmet of the suit, accessible by tapping the temple on the left or right to activate/deactivate the vision option. Available vision options are Low light, Thermographic, Ultra Violet, Telescopic (x40), Microscopic (x1000), Motion (the vision field only shows moving images, nothing stationary will show up), Range Finder (relays range to all targets moving in field of vision)

Equipment mount- This option fits two maglocks and a 2 12'x12' equipment packs on the suit at the wearers discretion, these do not affect the suits armour rating or the use of the suit in any way.

PV	Head	ID/Location			Cost
		Torso	Arms	Legs	
6	10	25	15	17	600c 12,500u

PEOPLE

Fighting houses and Agents

The Fighting houses of the circuit are many and varied, to try and catalogue all the different houses would be an exercise for someone with far too much time on their hands, so we will list the five main houses and their particular way of operating.

House Arken

House Arken are one of the oldest fighting houses, with over three hundred circuit regulars on their books and the ratings to prove it. They do not openly challenge the will of the circuit, but it is a well known fact that Jason Arken, the current head of the house, doesn't approve of many of the circuit practises when it comes to new fighters. There have been several interviews that were cut from public viewing due to the inappropriate nature of the comments that were made at the time. House Arken provides full medical care, insurance, training, and housing for its people, the cost of this hospitality is that the killers have to fully obey orders, no matter what they are, this can be anything at all, and is an absolute law. It is a well-known fact that no one gets out of life alive, and at Arken, life is exactly what you give them. All Sponsorship is handled directly through the house, killers have neither the choice nor the rights to make their own deals, and all perks from the sponsorship are vetted through the house before they are passed down to the killer. Very often, the perks of the sponsorship are held back for the executives of the house rather than passing them down. This can be irritating for the killers in question, but they knew what they were signing on for when they took the deal, no time to back out of it now. House Arken do not assist their own people, this is both a universal and an unspoken rule. They have a policy that if the killer can take care of themselves, then they are good enough to work for the house, if they need help, then they weren't good enough, and there's no place for *almost* good enough in this world.

Entrance Requirements – Rep 4 or higher, fewer than ten confirmed losses per level of Rep.

Benefits – Full insurance (1000c per level of rep, payable on the killer being permanently unable to fight any longer)
 Full Medical – All medical expenses are paid, this includes all recovery fees but not LAD fees. As long as the killer is still alive, the house will pick up all the medical expenses.
 Weapons and Ammunition supply – The house supplies all weapons, ammunition, and armour for the killer, on the understanding that they have to use the thing supplied and nothing else.

Penalties – The killer may not take any form of sponsorship without referring it to the house
 The killer may not use anything that is not sanctioned by the house
 The killer is not permitted to make any interview or statement without the permission of the house, this is sometimes waived if the killer reaches or surpasses Rep 8

House Maul

Maul are well known as the main house for anyone wanting to make a career in violent short-ranged terminations. They have mostly killers on their books, but they have a few operatives who work with them from time to time, and they have a very tolerant policy when putting killers out to placement. House Maul have a reputation for taking things personally, this is maybe not a policy of the house, but rather the killers who work within it. The primary requirement for house Maul is the ability to kill things and make paintings with their blood; all other priorities are secondary. House Maul is populated by seriously over muscled psychotics, there aren't any killers in this house without muscles in here, it wouldn't fit with the image. Snipers need not apply

Entrance Requirements – Rep 3 or higher, over 20 close combat kills per point of Rep, Strength/Physique 9+, any two close combat skills at 8+

Benefits – Full Medical, excluding LAD (all the medical bills, including implant repair and replacement are covered, excluding any fees for LAD)
 All Karma implants are available at cost price (reduce the cost of any karma enhancements by 75%)

Penalties – If the killer ever wants to leave the house, they have to pay the full price that was discounted when they first bought them. This also applies if the house gets rid of the killer for any reason.
 The Killer is not permitted to use firearms in their contests unless the contest actually requires them.

House Liberty

The number one house for working with operatives is House Liberty. This house works closely with the Department of Employment to place killers with squads that want to use them. They negotiated with the Department of Employment and the Contract circuit to provide temporary passes for killers to be permitted access to information necessary for them to work with operatives on BPN's higher than their personal SCL level. This comes at a high cost to the house, and in return, they will want a good share of the media from the BPN, often requiring their own media teams to follow the party around to get the best pictures of the action. Unfortunately, many departments of SLA are aware of the particular demands that House Liberty places upon their people. As such, some BPN's can be found with a small "nl" in the corner of the card, which stands for "No Liberty", meaning that any squad with a killer seconded from house Liberty may

not apply for the BPN in question. The house is aware of the problems involved in the employment market, and will often provide a list of BPNs for any squad that is willing to take on one of its people.

Entrance Requirements – Charisma 8+, no psychopaths (too uncontrollable)

Benefits – The killer can work with operative squads that acquire the proper forms

Penalties – The killer is chipped and monitored at all times, no matter where and when. All images are the property of house Liberty; all sponsorships must be agreed with the house prior to acceptance.

House Echelon

House Echelon doesn't deal with flashy people, they deal with specialists, and specialists only. Those working for House Echelon are efficient, clean, and discreet, they are dedicated to getting the job done, no matter what, and there are many who consider that several of the killers in house Echelon are altogether too sane to be regular members of the contract circuit. It is an unfortunate rumour that continues to dog the members of house Echelon. The house does not concern itself for the most part with the day to day aspects of the circuit, its members are restricted in the sponsorships that they can take, but they are permitted to use whatever they choose in the execution of their duties. For a house that pays so little heed to the workings of the circuit, house Echelon has received surprisingly few investigations into its workings from the powers that be. The opponents of Echelon take this as just another sign that the leaders of the house have made a deal with other parties for their immunity.

Entrance Requirements – Rep 6 or higher

Benefits – Full provision of ammunition, armour and equipment. Full medical care, including provision of implants and upgrades Full LAD benefits.

Penalties – May only take sponsorship from Karma, Dark Lament, or Cloak Division
 Must undertake special missions at the request of the house.

House Hammer

Even amongst killers, there are those who are nearly beyond reclamation. House Hammer are the people who deal with these unfortunate individuals. All members of the house are afflicted with at least one chronic insanity, often two, and their unpredictability makes them a liability for any other house. Hammer tends to have its people sent out in boxes, that way the crowd never knows quite what's going to be arriving until the box opens. If they make it back, to the better, if not, the box can be what the crowd buries them in. House Hammer has the largest turnover of killers in the entire world of progress, and this is no mistake. Whilst the fighters of house Hammer are amongst the most colourful on the circuit, they are also the most short lived, usually paying no heed to the tactics of the fight and just trying to take as many of the enemy with them as they can. It is not recommended that players choose to work with House Hammer unless they like making their GM cry.

Entrance Requirements – Minimum one chronic insanity and one severe insanity (these cannot be the same)

Benefits – Free Box to be buried in
 Penalties. – Free Box to be buried in

Operative?

One of the more popular of the reality shows in the world of progress, Operative? places a known killer with an operative squad for the duration of one of their BPN's. The killer is chosen from a random list each week, and the cameras follow the operatives around as they try to complete their BPN. Civilians' place votes to decide which killer goes on the missions, often choosing the most inappropriate for the job. A notable example of this was when Sour Blood was assigned to Squad Mylar for the Duration of one of their BPN's, which was to safeguard a group of females chaplains, sworn to celibacy. Somehow the BPN was completed according to specification, but at least two of the chaplains now work on channel 69, in roles best left undescribed.

This particular show is also one of the best ways for killers to be assigned to operative squads for good. They will have to act to certain personas as the crowd demands, but it is rare for a successful operative not to be at least a little out of the ordinary. All things considered, amongst the higher profile operative squads, certified lunatics can fit in quite nicely.

When playing a campaign that involves both killers and operatives, it is suggested that the squad in question either takes on a killer provided by one of the houses (The GM can decide which house best suits their purpose for the BPN's that the squad will be offered). The killer has to listen to both sides of the coin, both in the execution of their duties for the house, and also for the squad and the BPN that they are on. A cunning (Read: Evil) GM will often put killers from a house completely unsuited to the BPN's into the squad, it gives the killer character a chance to work their character as more than just a two dimensional character.

When the players are given full reign over their characters, it is often difficult for an inexperienced GM to keep track of things, as players (unless everyone generates at the same time) never build characters as a group but rather as individuals. This inevitably leads to one character (usually the one that the GM is most comfortable with) getting all the limelight, this is unfortunate, and more than often, it leads to the alienation of the other players. At this point, we make reference to the fact that when you've got killers and operatives in the same squad, it's going to lead to friction, no matter how good the GM is, the character types aren't fundamentally compatible. The best way around this is for the GM to make sure that the killers character has enough skills to interact with the rest of the group, well, either that or make sure that the operatives can do the job without the killer except in times of combat. Either way, it is recommended that when there is going to be a mix of operative and killer at the game, all the players have a go at it using pre-generated characters built by the GM to see if they can handle the differences in characters. This just saves the GM building a campaign when the characters may have to be changed after a few weeks.

As for Experienced GMs.....?

What are you reading this for.....?

Circuit Personalities

Renna Durell - Financier, Rep 9 (when fighting).

Now in his fiftieth year, Renna Durell is the epitome of all that most wraith aspire to, he has held the rank of Terminus for over forty years, and has been an operative for over twenty five. Standing easily above six feet tall, Durell is lean and wiry, with the scars of a lifetime of battle covering him like a blanket, his hair is always immaculate, and his clothing in perfect condition, no matter what he has been doing. He is never without his clan

colours, having been adopted into the Clan Samildanach over a decade ago, but that is all he wears, taking no sponsors or armour, relying in his own preternatural senses to get him out of harms way at all times. He no longer works the circuit in the way that he used to, having amassed enough money to easily retire many times over, he now watches over his kin, helping out the young ones where he can. Durell does not take payment for his services, but neither does he tolerate failure in those that he looks after. Over the years, he has gained many enemies, but none more than the mutate abomination Quill. It is a foregone conclusion for most of the speculators on the circuit that despite his age, Durell could easily destroy the beast, why he doesn't is a matter of curiosity for many. His other rivalry is with the Human, Top Notch, where many would pay handsomely to see a contest between the best of the humans and the best of the wraith. Again, many do not know why he doesn't take this contest, there is talk that age has faded his abilities, but to these comments, Durell only smiles.

"Be straight with me, and I'm the best friend you'll ever have, cross me.....no, you're not that stupid are you?"

Patchwork - Lunatic, Rep 5.

Patchwork is exactly that, a young woman held together with prayers and wire, the open wounds that she has suffered still ooze blood and implant fluid as she drags her broken body around the circuit. She speaks with a voice that has many components, none of which were ever hers to begin with, and works her way through the circuit taking parts from those she defeats to make herself better. Janie Case started her career as an ordinary reporter, working for third eye in the field and reporting live. Had she possessed even the slightest amount of common sense, she could have continued in this field for a very long time without serious incident. However, after her first live report went a little wrong (A giant carnivorous pig ate her left arm live on camera), the public decided that it was much more fun watching her get mangled in interesting ways rather than listen to her squeak in an irritating manner. Third eye arranged for a series of incidents to befall her in the course of her duties, all the while not letting her in on what was going on. Over the course of the two years that she continued working for third eye, Janie lost all of her limbs at some point or another, got blinded, was turned blue by animal toxin, and deafened. In the second season, things got off to an explosive start when she got burst by an industrial sewage pump, went through a car compactor, got dissected on the recycling plant down at mort central, got cut out of a Bwoina after it ate her and suffered explosive decompression on three separate occasions. Even this would not have deterred her from her chosen profession except for the fact that several concerned uptowners uncovered the truth of the matter and sent her documents proving third eyes complicity in all that had happened to her. The next day, as she took on her latest assignment, which was an in depth look at the creatures in downtown, the viewers found themselves looking through the camera at the mouth of a farjacket. Janie killed her news crew and applied for amnesty through the Tynes complex. She was granted this, and took her place amongst those who would be honest when it came to trying to kill her. Today, very little remains of the blonde bimbo who started her employment with third eye so long ago. Patchwork is what remains of her, she is no longer under the third eye medical plan, so all the injuries that she has sustained have been repaired with back street surgeons and drugs that even darknight wouldn't mess with. She is held together with steel wire and karma implants that were outdated when Intruder was still in diapers, but she is all the more terrifying an opponent for this reason. She shows no sign of concern when bits of her fall off, picking them up and putting them in her backpack to be reattached later. She doesn't recognise what she is, and often speaks as if she's still reporting on the scene as a loyal employee of the company. It is theorised that she will see what she has become and kill herself,

but so far, she shows no signs to getting to that stage.

“This is Janie Case reporting live, where the vicious killer Patchwork has been hard at work, follow us now as we see the trail of bodies left by that twisted soul”

Ghost - Manchine Rep 8.

Ghost is one of the few remaining mostly intact manchines still walking the streets, originally a war model, he stands over eight feet tall, clad in the mountainous armour that he has worn ever since he came to the circuit. It is not known whether or not the thick plating all over his body is actually armour or if it is actually his body. However, given that he can graft other body parts onto his body and make them function as if they were a part of him, it is presumed that the armour is in fact his body. His favoured tactic is to take bits off his opponents and then attach them to himself where he uses them to batter them to death, and the last sight many a contract killer has seen is their own arm waving mockingly at him. He chooses not to speak very much, but when he does, there is depth to his words, as if he's been alive far longer than his files say he has. He strides the circuit alone, neither machine nor man, something that has no kindred in this world. Of late, he has been taking matches that have taken him closer to the walls surrounding CS1, although he refuses to indicate why. Many are placing bets that he will challenge Digger, and although none are placing any bets on him living through the encounter, it will certainly be the match of the year when he does.

“Life? What do you know of life? Yours was given to you and you never had to take someone else's for it, how can you speak to me of life?”

GAMES WITHOUT FRONTIERS

With characters as colourful as most contract killers, the campaign needs to run at the same sort of pace as those inhabiting it. Contract killers aren't stable enough to work with most departments of SLA, which is why they tend to be confined to the circuit. There are a number of possibilities for killers to be used in every day operative life, which don't take too much work to put together. What follows is some of the ways that the various BPN's can be used for both killers and operatives.

Black BPN's

I personally have never seen one of these that wasn't at least slightly combat intensive, perfect environment for the killer. It's also useful when you get a tense moment when the operatives are trying to defuse the bomb and the killers sat in the background yelling "red light, green light". It's a proven fact that god looks kindly on loonies, and on the strength of that alone, that gives most killers at least a 50% chance of getting out in one piece.

White BPN's

Killers aren't best designed for this sort of thing, although some of the investigations have combat potential within them, by and large, this sort of BPN is best left to operatives.

Green BPN's

These BPN's have ample requirement for killers, but only the discerning killers, not the mad dog types. Green BPN's are often in unexplored (or at least, they haven't been explored in a good many years anyway), so who knows what the team will find out there. Very often, killers are sent along with operative teams to make sure that nothing untoward happens to those who skills will be needed later in the BPN.

Yellow BPN's

Covering fire for the retrieval team, that's about all the killers can provide here, unless the area where the item is has been layered with traps and places where it takes the superior physicality of the killer to reach them. It takes a while to put together a BPN where the killer will be of use here, and unfortunately, it often requires putting together specific parts for specific players, which is never the best way of doing things.

Jade BPN's

Ebons are good at a whole variety of things, but resisting 17mm Hesh isn't one of them. If of course, you've got to bring them back alive, then it's likely to be a different story, but still.....

Grey BPN's

Does the killer work for House Echelon? If they don't, there's little point in sending them on one of these. If they do, then they could well be perfectly suited to this sort of task.

Red BPN's

Direct action, lots of it, and quickly required, the ideal purpose for a contract killer.

Silver BPN's

Depending on the type of coverage the requesting party wants, these BPN's are the very meat and drink of any killer, played carefully with plenty of opportunity for the killer to do what they do best, whilst retaining other things for the other players to be doing at the same time, these BPNs are often the best of all the choices.

Platinum BPN's

Yeah, head office needs a team with ability, image, discretion, intelligence, and the ability to represent the very best that SLA has offer.....Sure they're going to pick a team with an unstable lunatic in it.....

The real problem occurs when the killers' player wants to contribute something to the creative plans of the squad. Many GMs allow them to speak out of character to put across the ideas, because although their character would never say any such thing, it is possible that other characters within the party may have come up with a similar idea, but their players did not. In truth, there is no right way of doing things in these situations, but I would suggest to anyone who roleplays that the best way of doing things is to let all players make suggestions. It's only a game, and sometimes a player doing their best to roleplay by playing a character with a handicap will have a suggestion that none of the other players have come up with. It isn't helping anyone to have the suggestion vetoed simply because their character wouldn't think of it.

Killer?

My name is Thor, you might have heard of me, I'm a contract circuit professional working with Squad Ragnar on a clearance mission over on Vicenmarnkt. You heard that right, I'm a professional, I don't take kindly to being called a killer, so watch what you say there. There are six of us in total, and from what we've been told, only one thing to pick up and take back, something called a finthgere. From what I've seen on the records, these things are tiny, they can be troublesome, but nothing that a good hesh round won't take care of.

The rest of the team is around me as we listen to the briefing. It's being given by a person who could only be described as desperately needing some colour in her cheeks (although it's got to be said that I could think of a few other things that she could do with in her cheeks, but that's another matter). She has a voice three degrees above zero, with a pair of eyes that have never seen anything that she found even remotely interesting.

"You are to proceed to the I-one complex in the lower levels of the forests on Vicenmarnkt, the creature is small, and does not possess the capability to burn through the suits that we will be providing for you"

Illyana snorts derisively "You expect us to believe that?"
 "To be honest operative, I couldn't give a damn what you believe, these are your orders. You've had Thor here for the last few weeks, and the arrangement has worked well, but his house has requested that you take care of this matter for them in return for the continued use of his services" She looks over at Illyana "if you don't like what they're asking you to do, then you can sign the release and send him back to his house with no further repercussions"

I have to smile at that, the team only has one competent fighter on it, Katya, and she's a little unstable, she could work the circuit if she was a little bit more gone than she is. I'm not saying that Circuit Professionals are all crazy, but it certainly helps. The deal that the house is offering them is to make sure that I stay with them, and unfortunately, they can't hack the life they're currently living without me, so it's not really a choice.

Pyotr snarls, even for a wraith, he's a little feral. Rumour has it that he started life at the sharp end of things, no parents, no relatives, the academy found him prowling lower downtown living off tramps. He doesn't like me much, I can understand that, wraith get nervous around other predators, and there aren't any in his squad apart from me. His hand has dropped to his side casually, and anyone who doesn't know him would think that it's just a motion, but he only does this when he's concerned about something.

"What are the targets priorities?" he growls
 "I don't understand"

"There's one of it, it's in a sealed bunker, and it can't penetrate the suits that you're going to give us, why do you need five operatives and a certified psychotic" he nods casually at me in punctuation of the comment "to take it down"
 "That's not your concern operative"

Pyotr opens his mouth to voice his differing opinion at that statement, but is cut off by Mikhail, the team leader.

"We understand, we will move out at your discretion" His voice is calm, but holds the edge that I've come to recognise means that he doesn't want any arguments. The rest of the team hear it as well, the matter is dropped.

Standing here at the entrance to this building, I do wish that the rest of the team had the balls to stand up to him. I'm not permitted, I'm on a strictly "they say jump, I say how high" contract, so it's not my concern, if the whole team gets bumped,

I get my release and walk back to the circuit. The first problem I have is with this "Forest", I've never seen anything like it, it's huge, things called trees, huge wooden constructs, are all around, and the motion scanner is off the board, there's thousands of living creatures around here. I haven't had any experience from unknown creatures that haven't been bad, so I'm not having the best of times here. Anna, the mechanic, is currently running the code for the door, her tech suit glinting dully in the mid afternoon, she's a fairly new addition to the squad, having joined around the same time as I did, following the team losing their other technician.

I really don't like it here, there are too many targets and we're currently on camera, it wouldn't do to open up on the trees just to get the beasties, it'd look like I was afraid, and we can't be having that. I holster my gun and pick out my hammer, far easier to resist shooting something when I don't have a gun in my hand.

I took a brief look at the files on this thing, and from what I can gather, it's small, glows in the dark, and moves like a worm. This really shouldn't be too difficult to do, the complex is a fairly large one, and there's only a few places where the thing could nest (again, that's if the information is accurate). But there's something that the house isn't telling us, they won't tell me what the situation is, so I'm guessing that whatever it is is probably going to be going live for the element of suspense. The tiny drones following us in the air are each assigned to one of us, and through them, the public will be able to keep an eye on all that's going on.

The Whirr of the door brings me back to the present, there's no light on the inside of the complex, but a faint smell of blood, I glance over at Pyotr to find him looking at me, he spotted it as well. The rest of the team are all humans, but not like me, as they don't appear to have picked up on it.

Katya, the teams resident gloryhog is first into the door, I close to a tight formation behind her and heft my hammer to a ready position. There, faintly below the smell of blood, another smell, one I'm not familiar with, almost like an uncooked burger from downtown. Strange, no sounds coming from the complex, it's an industrial complex, and it's not deactivated, the emergency lights are still on, but there's no other sounds.

The Team moves in, the door closing behind us, standard deployment, I bring up the rear while all the others are getting good camera time, irritating, but it's what the house have ordered, so it's what we do. It's silent, you can see the levels below through the grille flooring, and from all the vision options I've got, there's nothing here, nothing moving (the motion scanner is now thankfully quiet), and It's a clear run to the command centre, where all the base controls are.

So much for stealth, Katya can't see any enemies, and now she's getting impatient, you can tell when she gets impatient, she starts stomping around. If there's anything in here, it knows we're here now.

Too many of them, too many, make them come to me, take them then

The command centre main deck is open, but something else, there's a faint breeze coming from the end of the corridor, and a low, quiet whistling noise, like wind chimes in a still atmosphere. Katya is off and running to the end of the corridor, both weapons drawn, with an abrupt curse, Mikhail orders the rest of us after her. The corridor ends with the main command room, there's a fan on in the corner, directed at a person sitting with their back to us, it's here that the whistling noise is coming from.

Katya grabs the chair and spins it round, the whistling stops immediately and the body pitches forwards to land on the floor

with a wet crack. Illyana kneels by the body and turns it over, then looks away quickly, putting her hand to her mouth.

From a purely professional point of view, I do have to say that I was impressed by the sight. Something had carved channels into the body of the man, massively intricate, going right through most of his body. The rest of the squad keeps a distance as I crouch down by the side of the body, then look up at Mikhail, eyebrow raised.

"I could be mistaken boss, but he looks dead" I keep my tone level, I can understand that they might not want to get near the body, but professionalism should at least get Illyana back down here to see what made the holes.

"So what was whistling?" says Katya, it's a good question, I haven't got a clue.

Illyana gets over her revulsion and looks at the body, then picks up the fan and points it down at the body. Pyotr draws in a sharp breath as the low whistling starts again, coming from the body. "Something cut holes in the body, that would channel the air and make that noise" her voice is detached, she's going into forensic mode, it's a thing that most good medics do, they've got to be able to distance themselves from the trauma at hand. She crouches down by the body and places her pen in one of the holes, surprisingly it fits rather well. She stands back up smoothly.

"Looks like something ate its way through the body, there's no sign of cutting or tearing, and there's no spare tissue anywhere on the scene and no spillage from wounds" She looks over at Mikhail "I'd say that the harmless little green thing just get a new appetite"

Mikhail nods once "We need to finish this quickly, if it got one extra habit, it might pick up others before long, there are two places where we know the conditions *were* ideal for it to live in." He turns slightly so that his gaze takes in the entire group "Illyana and I will take one of the locations, Thor, you and Pyotr will take the other. Katya and Anna remain here and see about getting the surveillance systems working"

I nod, Pyotr looks down for the briefest of seconds and sighs, then looks back up "Right Boss" his tone is one of resignation. For some reason, Mikhail seems to believe that because Pyotr and I are often at each others throats, we must be good friends. I don't know what world he came from, but it wasn't the same one that I came from. Still, orders are orders.

Now they belong to me, first the leader

Ten minutes later, we're three levels down in the basement of the complex, it's not a very large complex thankfully, but that only means that it's a shorter time before we run across that thing. The com crackles once and I hear Anna speaking quietly.

"We've got motion scanners on line, no movement in the complex apart from us, I'm trying to get the main cameras on line"

I nod and go around the next corner, Pyotr following close behind me, the corridor dips sharply and descends into darkness, no lights at all, I sign back to Pyotr to stand back for a second, flipping on my UV laser and pointing it down into the darkness. The tunnel is at least three hundred metres long, and isn't part of the complex, it's been dug by something else, an animal of some sort. It's perfectly circular, maybe half a metre in diameter, and there's no sign of where the rock went when it was dug.

Not good, either this small green thing turned into a real big green thing, or there's something else down here, either way, it's not good. The comlink sparks to life again, it's Anna, and there's an edge to her voice now.

"Thor, Pyotr, we just lost motion tracking on Mikhail and Illyana, can you raise coms from there?"

I thumb the direct com switch, nothing but static.

"No" barks Pyotr "Nothing here, we've got a problem here though, we've encountered a large hole in the building, possible hostile in the complex, I need to wire off this entrance, make sure nothing else gets in here, I can take care of this myself." He glances over his shoulder at me "Go, make sure they're okay, I'll be fine here"

I nod and sprint for the last known location of Mikhail.

I don't know if you've ever run through hostile territory by yourself, not knowing what's in the area with you, but I can say from experience that it's not a fun thing to do. I thumb my com unit again "Anna, can you get me a signal on where they were?" "Trying now, I have a weak and intermittent signal on level 3, think its Mikhail, corner of stairwell one and medbay" Checking my vision map, I see that that's directly above where I am, I charge up the stairs, hammer ready. I clear the top of the stairs and there's a crack at the back of my head, I pitch to the floor, vision blurring, the sound of footsteps still ringing in my ears.

Not his time, not yet, now for their medic

My vision clears momentarily and I lever myself up on all fours, Mikhail is sat in front of me, a neat bullet hole in his throat, blood and tissue oozing out of the front and back of the wound. He's still barely alive, but he's fading fast. I thumb my com unit again. "Man Down, I repeat, Man Down, can you get a fix on Illyana?" Anna replies, her voice gapped with static "Sh.....area..... moving.....other.....movement"

I look down at Mikhail, I don't have time to wait to see if they get a fix on Illyana, she was last seen in this area, she can't be that far, she would probably head for the medbay. I turn and look through the window to the medbay and see that there's a figure in the operating chair, but it's turned away from me.

I pop the door and dive inside, coming up facing the chair with my gun ready. It's Illyana, she's been tied to the chair and opened up with surgical implements, her torso is split open top to bottom and her internal organs are clearly visible, still pulsating. I've no experience with dealing with this sort of thing, so I take a closer look, the medbay is operational and I can see that the life support feature is activated. Her eyes are closed and she appears to be breathing, but there's a thin red line around the front of her face, it looks as if something was in the process of carving something into her face a short time ago, I must have just missed them.

Now the others

The Com chimes again, it's Katya "We just lost contact with Pyotr, I'm heading down to check on him"

"What about Anna?"

"Sealed in the control room, she's safe there, meet me down at Pyotr's last position"

"Understood"

Another Crack at the back of my head, the last thought I have before hitting the floor is that this is getting real tiresome.

No door will stop me

Sight returns with a resounding headache, the surroundings are unfamiliar, but I'm still in the base, my com unit is chiming insistently. I roll to my knees and flip the com on. It's Katya and she's sounding frantic.

"Anybody, Anybody, all squad respond, Pyotr's down, anybody listening, Anna, Thor, please respond, please, anybody"

"Thor here" I mumble semi incoherently "what happened?"

"Pyotr's down, looks like either a grenade or some other explosive, I can't raise any of the rest of the team, do you have any contact?"

I glance at my watch, ten minutes have gone since I last looked at it, he can't be alive now "He's gone, If Illyana is still alive, she's in no condition to help, meet me at the medbay in five minutes".

"On my way"

And now the endgame

I stumble back to the medbay, my head feels like its splitting, and I can't focus very well. I check my drugs supply, shooting up a shot of pain away. The medbay is open, and Katya is already there standing over the bay chair, weeping piteously. I look down at the chair and see why, illyanas face is in her lap, the lines in her face were obviously far deeper cuts, through the hole formed, you can clearly see the insides of her head, and the fact that her brain has been removed. I look up at Katya questioningly.

"I got here" she gasps through deep racking sighs "and just touched her" her face is pale now, as if all the blood has drained from her body "and her face....." She can't finish the sentence, but her eyes are saying all that needs to be said.

"You need to focus" I say calmly, there's no point in letting my fear get the better of me "It'll do no good to panic now, we have to get to anna and get out of here" She's still wearing her autoinjector, and she seems to have forgotten about it. "Don't you have anything in there to help yourself with?"

She looks down and regains some of her composure, flipping up the panel and shooting up a few drugs, the effect is almost instantaneous, her breathing stabilises and her eyes re-focus.

"Alright" she mumbles "lets go"

I suspect that she's more embarrassed by the freakout than she wants to let on, so I let it go and we make good time to the command centre, the door is still locked, and Katya leans over to the voice panel.

"It's Katya, code 31315"

The door remains closed, we wait a second and Katya presses the button for the voice panel again

"Anna? It's Katya, code 31315"

No response, the com is still coming up with nothing but static. I motion for silence and then point at the door and dig my hammers spike into one side of the door, starting to pull on it. Katya shoots up a few more drugs and starts pulling on the other side. The door creaks and groans, but it's not a proper blast door and we get it open fairly quickly. A blast of fetid air erupts from the door as we open it and I switch to internal air supply reflexively.

Behold my artistry

Anna is still in the chair, but her whole body is straining against the bonds that are holding her there, there's smoke rising from her body and I can feel the heat even from where I am. Walking around the body, I can see the power cable that has been torn from the back of the main computer and plugged into her tech suit. The power required for the entire complex has been rerouted through her, there's no way she could have survived this for more than a half second.

A muffled grunt behind me causes me to turn around, Katya is doubled over holding her stomach and I drop my hand to my cannon, taking one step backwards. As I watch, her fingers clench convulsively and the remaining drugs in her injector shoot into her. There were several doses of kickstart in there, that should do the trick.

It's not working, she straightens up and tenses, then looks down in horror as the veins in her body become engorged with blood, she shudders and falls back on the floor, almost cartoonlike in

her rigidity. Her body hits the floor with a dull thud and she lies there convulsing. I move over to her slowly, this could be just another distraction for whatever's doing this. She's gone purple the way a newly formed bruise does when all the blood rushes to the surface of the skin, and I quickly check the store of drugs that I've got, nothing that was designed to take care of this. Seconds later, the veins in her neck and face begin to bulge and swell as blood is forced around them ever faster, her whole body is convulsing helplessly, her eyes are bulging out of their sockets as the pressure builds up inside her.

It's over quickly, her back arches and a horrible strangled noise erupts from her throat, as if she's gargling with her own blood, then she lays still. I'm alone in the base with whatever it was that did this, and lord knows, I'm not going to hang around for it to get me. The exit to the base is a short distance, and I cover it in far less time than it took to get me here, they say that fear lends speed to tired legs, I'll testify to that. All the way back, I can feel the press of invisible eyes at my heels. I hammer the emergency rescue switch and set my cannon, covering the front door.

The longest three minutes of my life right there, I nearly hose the door with 17mm hesh twice because of falling leaves, but the rescue ship arrives and I dive on board. The ship screams away from the complex and as I sit back in the seat, suddenly everything clicks. This had to have been a set up, whatever it was swapped the drugs in Katya's injector, replacing them with a toxin of some sort. They knew to take out the team leader and medic out so that no one could give the retreat order or take care of the injuries. It took the wraith with remote devices rather than try and take it one to one, the technician was no danger, so it took her out at its leisure. The only part of its plan that failed was getting me.....

But that was the idea all along, after all, if you die, we die.

Thanks to

Team 8 - In a world where no one tries anymore, some try to keep the dream alive

Kal - Master of Guns and Goodies, and the holder of the record for pulling at autopsies

Jay - Warrior, Poet, Kindred Spirit, the only man who plays werewolves better than me

Andy - Living proof that the world can't beat you no matter how hard it tries.

Nate - Only the good die young, and though heroes are fools, the world still needs them

Mark - Just Because

Cheers people.

Dodd

Not so much a Stormer as a Frother with a Height problem

ps. some diabolical liberties were taken with this document by AJCrowley when formatting it.....