

THE FOMORIAN

A QUICKSTART ADVENTURE FOR THE EVERYWHEN RPG

Based on a suggestion by Colin Chapman

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The Fomorian © 2021 Garnett Elliott *Everywhen* © Filigree Forge *Barbarians of Lemuria* © Simon Washbourne



Congratulations! You've discovered the best kept secret in the RPG industry.

Everywhen is a rules-lite, universal system based on Simon Washbourne's original *Barbarians of Lemuria*. Sometimes referred to as the "AK-47 of indie games," *Everywhen* delivers a cinematic experience with simple, elegant rules. To be clear: the system is *not* a retro-clone. There are no classes and levels, no power bloat, and no manuals to optimize character builds. Heroes start out powerful, but don't accumulate enough hit points to dive off cliffs. Most importantly, the rules get out of the way when designing adventures or creating characters inspired by literature or film.

Everywhen has been described as "eminently hackable," in that it's simple enough to encourage fiddling. The system is best known for its innovative career mechanic, which does away with skill lists. Complex heroes that would be difficult to simulate with other rulesets *can be made as starting characters* and ready to play in minutes!

By the time you finish this solo adventure, you'll have a working knowledge of *Everywhen*. Some mechanics have been simplified for ease of play, though nothing substantial has been changed. *The Fomorian* also illustrates how easy it is to adopt a familiar genre like space fantasy to the system.

Of course, the *Everywhen* core book holds much more: rules options, a complete list of boons and flaws, sorcery, psionics, alchemy, vehicles, social combat, martial arts, sample NPCs, GM's advice, and two mini settings to get you started. You can check it out here: <u>https://www.drivethrurpg.com/product/249193/Everywhen</u>



THE CORE MECHANIC

Everywhen uses 2d6 (two six-sided dice) rolls, modified by a character's attributes, relevant combat abilities or careers, and any task modifiers, against a target number of 9. Task modifiers can range from Very Easy (+2) to Heroic (-8).

Example: Filchus the Rogue comes across a locked door in an ancient catacomb and tries to pick it. The GM decides the lock's mechanism is particularly Tough (-2). Filchus rolls 2d6, adds his Agility (2) and Thief career (2), and subtracts two because the lock has a Tough (-2) task modifier. The modifiers add up to a +2, the roll is 5, modified to 7, and Filchus fails.

Filchus curses and prepares to try again. "This is taking too long," growls his friend, Hrolf the Barbarian. "Those ghouls are going to be back any minute." Hrolf decides to kick the door in, lock and all. Hrolf rolls 2d6, adds his Strength (3) and subtracts two from the roll because the door's sturdiness makes the task Tough (-2). The modifiers add up to a + 1, the dice roll is 8, which makes the total result a 9. Hrolf succeeds. The door is no longer an obstacle.

Rolling a 'natural' 12 (i.e. two 6's) yields a Mighty Success, which confers extra benefits. In the example above, if Filchus rolled a 12 on his check he might have picked the lock with lightning speed, allowing him and Hrolf plenty of time to barricade the door against pursuing ghouls. A 'natural' 2 (two 1's) always fails, regardless of modifiers.

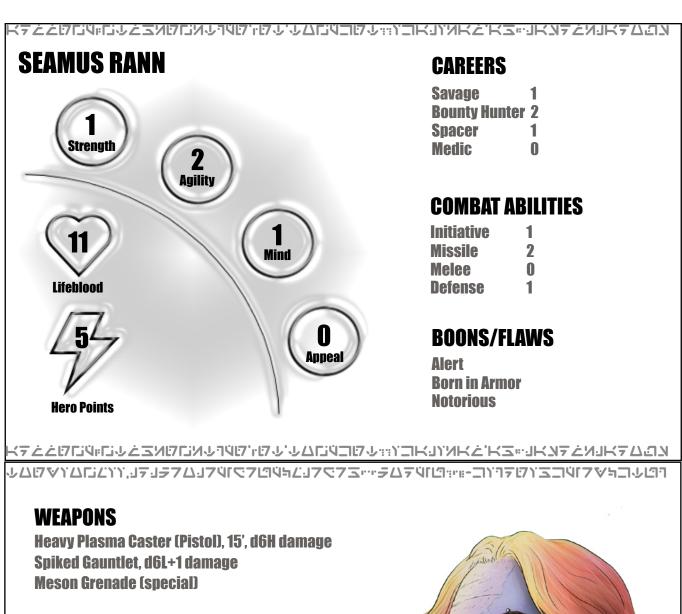
Got all that? *Everywhen* uses a bonus and penalty die mechanic, as well as Hero/Rival Points. These will be explained as you play the solo adventure.

WHAT YOU NEED TO PLAY

The Fomorian requires several six-sided dice, a pencil, and a copy of the character sheet. Scratch paper is also useful. You play as bounty hunter **Seamus Rann**, as she tracks her quarry on an alien world. Start at entry 1 and follow the directions from there. Entries are hyperlinked; if this isn't an option on your PDF viewer, pages are given after the '/' for the next entry. For example go to 2/7, means go to entry 2 on page 7. Rules mechanics are presented in italics beneath the entries. Ocassionally, you will be asked to write down key words, which can change the outcome of the story.

The next page shows Seamus's character sheet, with explanations following.





ARMOR

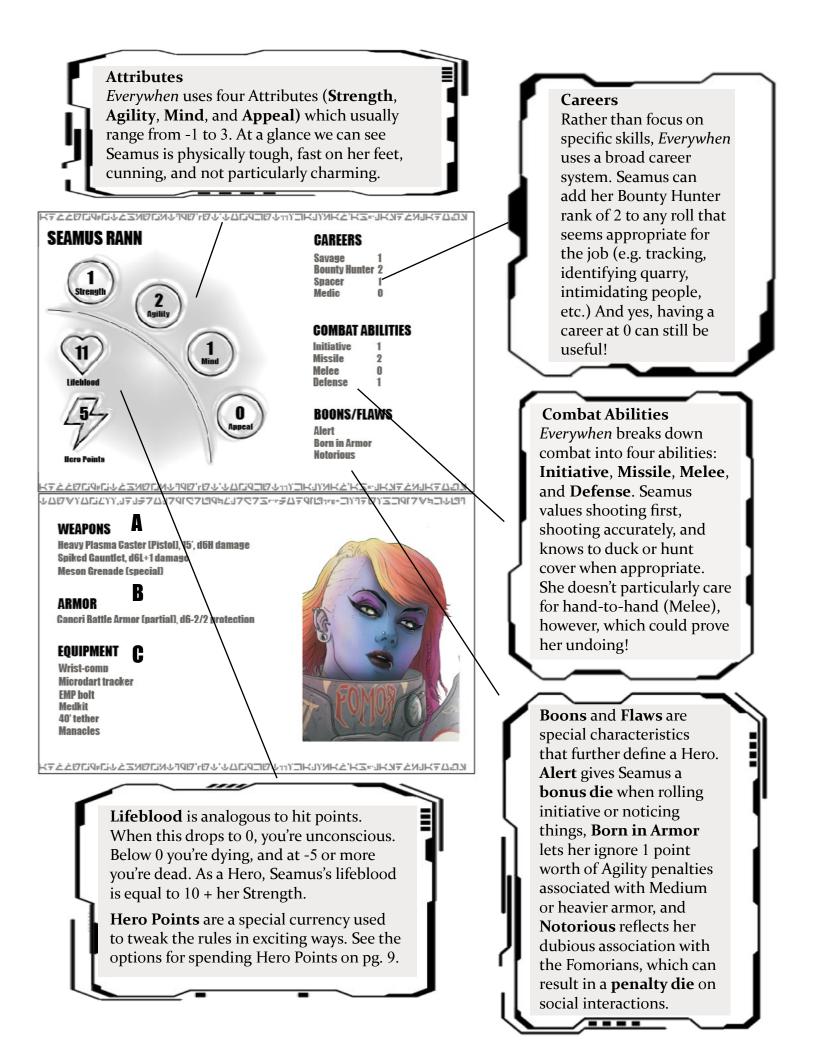
Cancri Battle Armor (partial), d6-2/2 protection

EQUIPMENT

Wrist-comp Microdart tracker EMP bolt Medkit 40' tether Manacles



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Weapons

Seamus carries a **Plasma Caster** as her primary weapon. The heavy pistol has a **range increment** of 15', meaning it's not terribly accurate out to longer distances, like, say, a laser rifle. However, at close range it does **spreading** damage to targets (more on this later). A successful attack inflicts **d6H** damage, meaning two six-siders are rolled and the *higher* value retained. So, if Seamus rolled a '2' and '5' for damage, she'd keep the '5' result.

Seamus's armor also comes with a **Spiked Gauntlet**, a melee weapon. This does **d6L** damage, plus 1 for her Strength. In this case, 2 dice are rolled, but the *lower* value retained.

Finally, Seamus carries a **Meson Grenade**. This baby packs quite a punch, though she uses it cautiously--employers don't pay for disintegrations!

Armor

R

Seamus owns a partial suit of **Cancri Battle Armor**, forged by a violent precursor race. She's gathered enough pieces to provide Medium protection, absorbing d6-2 worth of damage (roll d6 and subtract 2, treating any result of less than 0 as 0) each time she is struck. Alternatively, she can opt to have the armor absorb a *static* amount of 2 points per hit, instead of rolling. Seamus must choose one or the other option; she can't roll for protection and then decide to take the static 2 points if she doesn't like the results.

Though Medium armor normally imposes a -1 penalty to Agility related tasks, Seamus has a boon, Born in Armor, that negates this.

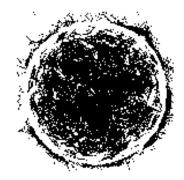
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Equipment

For this adventure, specific descriptions about equipment will occur in the text. *Everywhen* generally avoids detailed rules about encumbrance, tracking ammo, and money.







1 The hatch sighs open, spilling warm air and the smell of sulfur. You climb out onto Vermis.

Couldn't be some bucolic farm world, with only dirt-scratching peasants to worry about. Had to be this hellhole.

Your armored boots crunch glass. The 'spaceport' where you've landed is a circle of fused silicon, next to an ancient fuel depot. Your ride, a creaky hauler, is the lone ship parked. You've spent the last seventy-two hours cooped in a cargo pod, with only a chemical toilet for company.

When I leave here it'll be on a class ticket, I promise. After I've collared this bounty, I'll be rolling in it . . .

A maze of shacks clings like fungus to a nearby hill. Known as Tumble, this 'city' is the only human enclave on the planet. A strongman named **Boss Murtaugh** runs the place. He might have some intel on your quarry, but you're not exactly friends. Alternately, you can try to catch some gossip at a local watering hole.

You can go straight to Boss Murtaugh's place (11/13), or search the back alleys for a bar (6/10).

VERMIS

Planetary Data Diameter: 14, 480 km Gravity: .79 G Density: 4.9 Axial Tilt: 8 degrees Length of Day: 30 hours, 12 minutes Atmosphere: High oxygen to nitrogen ratio Moons: None Primary: Zeta Scorpii, class B hypergiant

Vermis is a metal-poor, semi-arid world with little seasonal variation. Approximately 40 % of its land mass is covered by shallow, tideless seas. The planet hosts three prominent species of insectoid life: savage **thrips**, industrious **beetles**, and the mystic **phasmids**, apex parasites who lord it over the other two. Phasmids have developed an unusual form of bio-technology, sometimes referred to as 'insectitech.'

THE FOMORIANS

A 'club' of mercenaries, criminals, and general ne'er do wells, most of whom are mutants from Zeta Scorpii's radioactive inner ring worlds. Notable members include **Ace Albedo**, **Joey Haploid**, **The Murch**, **Mag Maicha** (AKA **Chelsea Blue**), and their leader, **Balrus One-Eye**.





2 "Friendly warning," says the voice behind the skull mask, oddly high and cultured. "I know you're here after Aloysius. He's mine. Get in my way, and I'll gut you with this."

He raises his shiv. The uncertainty edge flickers with quantum fluctuations. Such a blade would pass through your armor like morning fog.

And just like that, he turns to leave.

Giving me your back, huh?

You raise your left hand and point. A micro dart speeds across the room, to imbed itself in artificial deltoid.

Calavera doesn't feel a thing. The dart contains one half of an entangled particle; the other is still on your wrist. You can follow him anywhere now, even off-planet. Why do all the detective work, when Calavera can lead you straight to the quarry? Go to 9/11.

3 "Sorry buddy, but business is business," you mutter. "And I've got a bounty to catch."

That's one less Ringer to worry about. Go to 38/26.

4 You show Calavera your grenade. "I'll blow a wall, and we'll use the dust cloud to enter unseen. Anything moves, we shoot it."

He nods. "Suits me."

Go to <u>25/20</u>.

5 The Vespid Barrens presents an alkaline landscape, rippling with dunes of sulfurous yellow. Somewhere to the north lies the phasmid City of Palanquins*, a settlement best appreciated from afar. The thought of having to go there brings a shudder. But no, Calavera's dot is veering sharply west. He must have some other area in mind.

Even this expanse of wasteland is inhabited. You spot a group of thrip nomads, herding a single beetle the size of a small hill. The tribesmen clamber up the creature's side and slice flesh from its unarmored neck. The huge beetle doesn't seem to mind.

An hour later, large funnel-shaped impressions begin appearing in the sand. You've wandered into giant antlion territory; a biological minefield. Giving the funnels a wide berth, you proceed carefully.

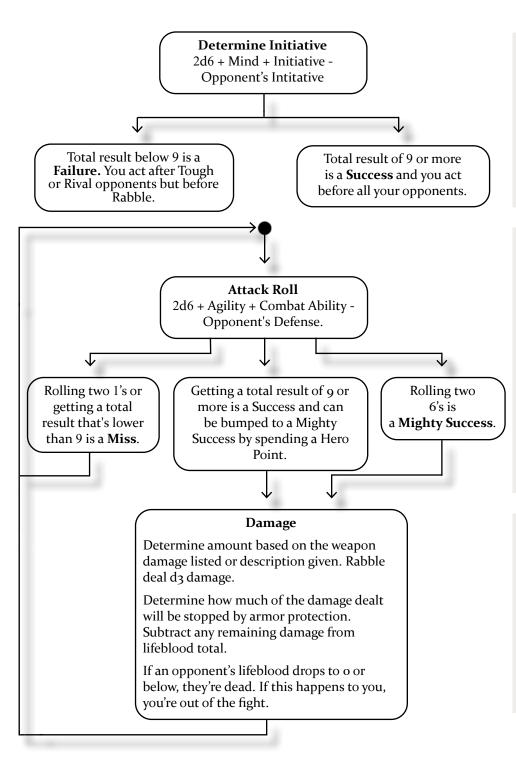
Go to <u>20/18</u>.

*City of Palanquins

The largest phasmid settlement on Vermis's Southern Continent, situated close to the Sea of Worms. In accordance with tradition, the most affluent residents live atop mobile platforms, carried in an endless circular procession around the city's center. The platforms, which can reach up to 20 square meters in size, are hauled on the backs of dray beetles. Humans are not advised to enter the city unless armed.



Combat Flowchart



Initiative

Normally, you'd roll 2d6, adding Seamus's Mind (1) and her Initiative (1) and subtracting her opponent's Initiative, if any.

However, because Seamus has the Alert boon, she rolls 3d6 and discards the lowest result instead (modifiers still apply).

Attack

When Seamus makes the attack roll, she rolls 2d6, adds her Agility (2) and the appropriate combat ability and subtracts her opponent's Defense. The combat ability will be either Melee (0) or Missile (2), depending on whether she's attacking hand-to-hand or with a ranged weapon. Any additional modifiers, like range or cover, will be noted in the text.

When enemies attack, use the same formula: 2d6 + Agility + appropriate combat ability, minus Seamus's Defense (1). Treat any Mighty Successes as normal hits.

Damage

Seamus's Heavy Plasma Caster (Pistol) deals d6H damage. Her Spiked Gauntlet deals d6L+1 damage. Seamus's armor grants Medium protection, absorbing either d6-2 worth of damage or a static amount of 2 points per hit. See page 5 for details.

If you're out of the fight and have Hero Points left, don't forget the Defy Death option!



Hero Point Options

Boost Success

A normal successful check can be boosted to a Mighty Success (i.e. if you had rolled a 'natural' 12, or two 6's) by spending a Hero Point. In combat, this can have devastating effects (see below). Outside of fighting, a Mighty Success can yield an extra beneficial result, such as finishing a task quickly or gaining additional information.

Luck of the Gods

This option can be invoked whenever you make a roll. Spend a Hero Point to reroll one or both dice, though you must accept the second result. Any associated Penalty or bonus die can also be re-rolled without spending a second Hero Point.

Defy Death

By spending a Hero Point, you can somehow survive when your lifeblood drops below o. This typically means being 'left for dead' and/or spending several days unconscious.

Rabble Slayer

This combat option can be chosen after rolling a Mighty Success (two 6's).

When up against Rabble, the damage rolled is the *number* of opponents taken out! They don't all have to be killed; the player can rule some flee in terror, are knocked unconscious, etc.

Vital Blow

This combat option can be chosen after rolling a Mighty Success (two 6's).

The player scores a critical hit, greatly increasing the damage they deal with this attack. For Seamus, this means her plasma caster damage is increased to 2d6H (roll 3d6 and drop the *lowest* result) and her spiked gauntlet does 2d6L+1 (roll 3d6 and drop the *highest* result, adding one for Seamus's Strength).

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6 Threading the back alleys of Tumble, you come across a lot of garbage—human and otherwise. Luckily, the plasma caster on your hip keeps the riff-raff at bay.

Most of them, anyways.

On a side street, a group of men wrapped in rags approach. They fan out to surround you, maybe half a dozen, total. All are brandishing filthy knives. Not a word is spoken; no demands or colorful threats. The desperation blazing in their eyes says it all.

They're on you as you pull your gun.



What, combat already? No worries. You're up against Rabble, the lowest tier of opponents in Everywhen. These guys have a '0' in all attributes and combat abilities, with 2 lifeblood apiece. Rabble only do d3 damage on a successful attack, meaning they'll have a hard time getting past your armor protection.

Go to the Combat Flowchart on pg. 8 to resolve this encounter. You have 6 opponents, desperate enough to fight to the death. At close range like this, your plasma caster does spreading damage. If you deal enough damage to kill a target, any remaining amount is applied to the next. By rolling high enough, you can take out three opponents in one shot!

Remember that as long as you have some Hero Points, you can spend them to tweak the rules in your favor. Take a look at the options on pg. 9.

After resolving your initial attack, attempting to shoot in melee combat entails a -2 penalty on your attack rolls. This is because the Rabble have closed the distance, and are trying to stab you! You can opt to fight using your spiked gauntlet instead, but since your Melee ability is two points lower than your Missile ability, using a melee weapon will have the same chance to hit as shooting with a -2 penalty.

If you defeat the Rabble, go to $\frac{48/30}{2}$. In the unlikely event your lifeblood drops to 0 or less, go to $\frac{54/32}{2}$.



7 On foot, the journey back to Tumble takes an entire Vermean day. Exhausted, sore, and dispirited, you catch the glow of retro jets in the upper atmosphere as you near the city. A large MMC* lighter touches down at the spaceport. About an hour later, a jetcopter comes roaring in from the direction of the Vespid Barrens.

Whatever's happening, you get the sinking feeling you've missed the boat. And your investigations the next day confirm it. All leads to Aloysius have gone bone dry.

Go to <u>49/31</u>.

* Mercenary Merchant's Corps

The closest thing to an organized fleet in the Zeta Scorpii system, the MMC is a loose association of military and business types, flying armed cargo ships. If the trading on a particular world looks sparse, the crew will hire themselves out as muscle to a local warlord. MMC units are bound by contract not to fight one another. Well, not unless the pay is *really* good . . .

8 Your attempts at wheedling fall on deaf ears. Murtaugh claims he doesn't have any dirt. Knowing better, you leave his office. On the way out, the phasmid guard fixes you with an unreadable stare.

Go to <u>50/31</u>.

9 You keep Calavera at a discrete distance as you shadow him across Tumble. A couple of Murtaugh's bullyboys are doing the same thing. It seems they have an interest in the Dust Ringer, too. Not that a 7' metal skeleton stomping around your territory wouldn't be cause for concern.

As you recall, Calavera has always been more assassin than bounty hunter. That can't bode well for the quarry. Hauling in a corpse (or a chunk of verifiable DNA) yields less than a living, breathing specimen. Ergo, the money must be particularly good for this job.

Calavera's 'detective' work consists of going to different spots and shaking down informants. Sometimes he pays them off, and sometimes he leaves them embedded in a shanty wall. Subtle guy. Given the level of violence, he seems to be in a hurry. But at some point, he gets a solid tip; the dot on your wrist-scanner starts moving with purpose towards Tumble's outskirts.

Maybe he's figured where Aloysius went to ground!

Go to <u>13/15</u>.



10 You've seen a lot of dives in your time, but this one cinches it. The bar consists of a single room, roofed with rotting plastic, and a slab of pitted wood set crooked atop a pair of boulders. Half the customers are passed out on the floor. Behind the bar, an old woman ladles brown fungus-ale into mugs.

You step over the unconscious forms and claim a stool. Nodding to the woman, you hand her two iron shavings. She grins toothlessly, tests the metal's weight in her palm, and slides you a foaming mug. You must look hungry too, because moments later she adds a bowl filled with squirming white grubs.

Ah, well, protein's protein. You've certainly eaten worse. And the beer, you decide after a couple sips, isn't half bad.

This is a chance to take a short rest, and heal any damage you might have taken. If you were wounded earlier, recover half the lifeblood lost (round up), and record the new amount on your character sheet. Anything remaining is going to take at least a day's rest to heal, and you're too busy for that now.

You decide to while away some time here, and keep an ear out for gossip. The bar draws mostly rough customers. Two stools down squats a thrip* tribesman, his whip-like antennae adorned with hammered copper. Over his back hangs a crude iron broadsword, probably forged himself. All that metal represents a small fortune here on Vermis. To your right a fat pantrope,** likely from the swamp moon Amoraz, pounds down grubs with both hands. His glistening, water-permeable skin must be hell on a dry planet like this.

The din makes it hard to concentrate. Or maybe it's just the beer. But you swear you heard something, just now . . .

Both Seamus's Mind Attribute and Alert boon come into play here. Roll 3d6 (2d6 plus a bonus die), discard the lowest result, and add 1 (her Mind score).

If the total is 9 or greater, go to <u>18/17</u>. If less than 9, go to <u>14/15</u>. You can spend a Hero Point to invoke Luck of the Gods (pg. 9) if you fail.

* Thrip

Essentially, a 6' humanoid silverfish.

** Pantrope

A human, genetically altered for life on a particular world. Pantropic modification can include gills, fur, and even (on low-grav planets) wings.



11 You remember Murtaugh's HQ from a couple years back. Fittingly, it's at the top of this dung heap town. As you approach his fortified shack, you spot a phasmid* warrior leaning next to the entrance. Inscrutable, alien eyes bore into your own. The stick-man has a stridulator** in a low-slung holster; the natives of Vermis are ingenious at crafting hybrid weaponry.

Ignoring the muscle, you shoulder the door. Boss Murtaugh sits with both feet on his desk, swathed in cigar-haze. He's a big man, going to fat. Indigo tattoos from the forest planet of Skath cover his broad face. He nods amiably enough--but doesn't motion for you to sit in the nearby chair.

You sit anyway. "Hiring locals for security now? Must be lean pickings."

He pours himself a shot of mescal laced with euphorine. "Whaddya want?"

"A bounty. Why else would I be here?"

This gets a tired smile. He tries to leer, but your armor gives him nothing to look at. "Same old Shay. I hear you're running with the Fomorians again."

"That's right."

"Buncha losers."

"Say that when they land here, see what happens."

He shrugs his broad shoulders. "We could trade jabs all day, but time's money. Who's your man?"

"All I got is a name: Aloysius."

Something flickers across his face, but he quashes it. "That's it?"

"You know me. All I need is a name and a planet." "Sorry, Shay. Can't help you."

Murtaugh's clearly hiding something. You can threaten him (go to 21/19), or try a more subtle approach (go to 51/31).

* Phasmid

The dominant lifeform on Vermis, phasmids resemble humanoid stick-men ("Walking Stick Bugs"), dressed in colorful clothing that hangs off their narrow frames. The species tends to stand motionless for hours, locked in a state of meditative contemplation. Many play a multigenerational chess-like game called *Tawalle*, in which an individual phasmid is allowed only a single move--they spend a lifetime contemplating their turn.

* * Stridulator

An advanced phasmid weapon, consisting of a Shrieking Beetle kept alive in a special chamber, connected to a bell-shaped barrel. When the trigger is pulled, a static charge irritates the beetle, causing it to emit an extremely high decibel shriek. The noise is amplified and projected as a sonic charge. Some Shrieking Beetles are psionic sensitive, making their scream particualrly devastating.



12 You and Calavera have to double up on your dray beetle. At least the bug doesn't mind. Your new partner's pretty tight-lipped, even for a bounty hunter.

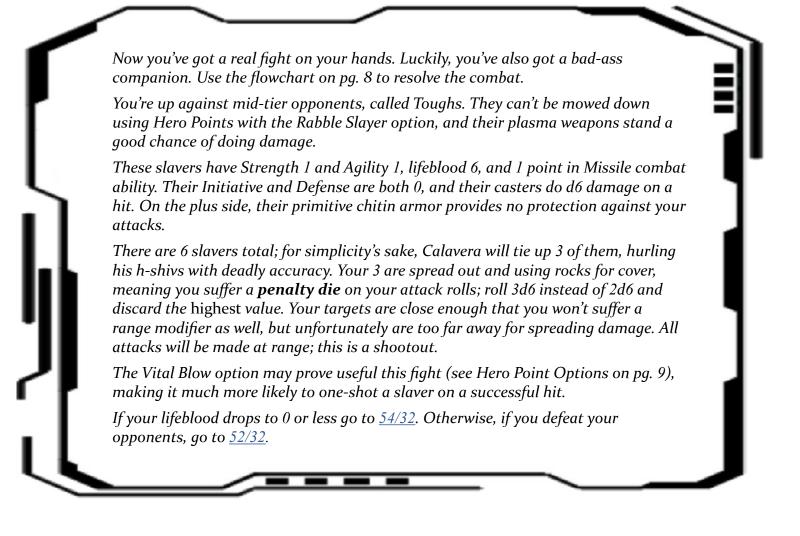
The loose sand of the funnel-field gives way to stony soil. Calavera directs you towards a box canyon, where he claims the slavers have their compound. Drawing near, the hills to either side form a gorge. Eyeing the boulders at the top, the back of your neck prickles. An uncomfortable idea takes form.

"Are you thinking what I'm-"

A boulder comes arcing down, to strike the dirt a hairsbreadth from the beetle's head. Silhouettes appear on either side of the gorge; humans brandishing guns. A bright slash of plasma bisects the space between you and Calavera, bringing a wash of infernal heat.

"They've got casters!" he snarls.

It looks like the slavers knew you were coming. Worse, they've opted to set up an ambush, instead of waiting to be attacked in their compound.





13 The indescribable smells of alien spices, throngs of unwashed bodies, and cries of insect livestock herald your arrival at Tumble's bazaar. What would Calavera want here? Putting the squeeze on more snitches? No, there's not enough carnage for that—looking around you see no sprawled bodies, no overturned tables or merchants nursing broken limbs.

The bazaar sells all kinds of goods, including offworld tech and hallucinogenic fungus. But much more unsavory is the trade in human beings; slavers sell people to phasmid nobles here, usually as larvae hosts for their young.

A check on your wrist-comp shows Calavera's already out of the city and moving rapidly across the Vespid Barrens, a wasteland surrounding Tumble. Unless he brought a vehicle with him to Vermis, he's likely arranged for local transport.

At the market's edge you find a paddock of dray beetles, powerful, squat creatures with flattened carapaces, perfect for hauling or riding. A chat with the proprietor reveals that he has, in fact, just sold a mount to a strange off-worlder.

You could dicker down the price on a beetle of your own, but there's no time. Instead, you hand the lucky dealer the last of your iron shavings and select a healthy-looking specimen, with stylish tiger stripes. A few minutes spent learning how to direct the thing, and you're off, at a scuttling (if not galloping) pace! Go to 5/7.

Normally, haggling in the marketplace would entail a 2d6 roll plus Appeal or Mind, as well as any ranks in the Merchant career. The seller's Merchant rank would act as a negative modifier.

Everywhen uses an abstract money system instead of tracking units of currency. During character creation, Heroes get an equipment pick per rank in each career they possess. A rank 2 Bounty Hunter like Shay, for example, might choose a plasma caster and a suit of armor. There is also an optional resource mechanism that allows purchases based on the character's relative wealth and the item's cost.

14 Nah, you decide, mind's playing tricks. Getting too jumpy—

There's a shrill whine of servos, as someone hauls you bodily into the air. The bar, old woman, and vats of ale come rushing at you!

The toss lands you flat on your back, but your Cancri armor takes the brunt of it (no damage, except for pride).

You scrabble to your feet, tensing for a follow-up shot. Go to 15/16.



15 You whirl. Seven feet of titanium exoskeleton wades towards you, stylized with shining chrome to look like, well, a *skeleton*, complete with ribcage and grinning skull-mask. One glance tells you this punter was born in null g, his willowy limbs atrophied to mere strips of flesh. But powerful flat motors, shaped to mimic tendons and muscle, more than make up for the loss.

Cruz Calavera.

He carries a bandoleer of h-shivs* slung across his bony chest, balanced for throwing. As your hand darts to your gun, he draws one with lightning speed.

Go to <u>2/7</u>.

* H-Shivs

Short for Heisenberg shivs, these knives have been honed with a quantum uncertainty edge, allowing them to pass through virtually any substance, save a force matrix. This makes for a great equalizer against powered armor. The availability of this weapon has caused many to relearn the archaic skill of knife throwing.





16 Your last memory is the violent whirl of combat. The ache from multiple wounds eventually brings you around.

You wake to find your armor and equipment are gone. Someone's tethered you at the wrists and ankles like so much chattel. With a groan, you realize your opponents must've hauled you to Tumble's slave market, to get a little more coin for their trouble.

"Lo, how the mighty have fallen," says a familiar voice. "I'm truly sorry, Shay, to see you reduced to such circumstances . . ."

Boss Murtaugh stands in front of you. He holds out a palm heavy with iron shavings. "What do you think? Should I buy your contract, or let a phasmid haul you off to the City of Palanquins? I'm sure I could find something for you to do around here . . ."

You manage to conceal a shudder. Working for Murtaugh, though likely a hell on earth, is a thousand times better than what awaits in the phasmid city. Somehow, someway, you'll get out of this. Your brethren on Iotha know where you went; one of them will come to rescue you, eventually.

And when they do, Murtaugh will know what it means to cross a Fomorian.

Go to <u>49/31</u>.

Deduct a Hero Point for invoking Defy Death. This allows you to miraculously survive a situation that would otherwise be your doom, but that doesn't mean the alternative will be rosy. As in this case. **17** You manage to stabilize your companion. He stirs and mumbles "get me out of here . . ."

"How?" you ask. "I can't bloody well *carry* you."

With a trembling finger, he touches a stud on his neck brace. "Protocol Omega," he whispers, hoarsely. The exo whirs and acts of its own accord, hauling Calavera to his feet. He hangs limply in the encasing, which now acts as a mobile stretcher. A light on your wrist-comp flashes; he's synced to follow wherever you go.

"Pretty handy," you say. "But we're not leaving here without the bounty. Come on."

Mark **Partner** and go to <u>38/26</u>.

18 Nope, your mind's not playing tricks. That's definitely the whine of servomotors, and it's jarring in this low-tech joint.

Go to <u>15/16</u>.



19 You can see the gears turning in Murtaugh's head as he responds. "I know this much; another bounty hunter touched down two days ago. A Dust Ringer* in a fancy exoskeleton, from one of the big syndicates. He'd just as likely smoke you if he found out you were after the same quarry."

"You see him?"

"Nah, this came from one of my snitches."

"Aloysius must have some powerful enemies."

"He didn't, you wouldn't be here, would you?" Murtaugh folds his hands atop the desk. "OK, I've been straight. Now level: who's your backer? You really here indie, or is someone with money pulling the strings?"

He's up to something. He could just ask for a cut if I bag Aloysius, but he wants more. Greedy bastard. "Sorry Murtaugh, I'm here solo. As usual."

"Well, I'm afraid that's all I got, Shay."

"Sure." You get up to leave. "See you around."

Go to <u>50/31</u>.

* Dust Ringer

A loose term for the corsairs, criminals, and raiders associated with Zeta Scorpii's massive Oort cloud, at the edge of the sytem. This vast sea of shining dust and icy planetismals offers countless places to hide, far from the reach of any planetary authority. In addition to outlaw gangs, a number of large criminal syndicates maintain bases there.

20 You might be familiar with the threat posed by antlions, but apparently, Calavera is not.

You catch the shriek of overloaded servos, mixed with human grunts. At the bottom of a particularly large funnel, a grim tableau is playing out. Calavera's beetle lies on its side, neatly eviscerated. The culprit—and the source of Calavera's current troubles—is a giant antlion, protruding from the sand. Calavera has seized the creature's massive pincers, using his powerful exo to try and force them apart. And though he appears to be making progress, the funnel's granular, shifting sands are causing another problem. He can't get any traction, and the weight of all that titanium is sinking him deeper and deeper.

You're tempted to toss down a grenade and put both of them out of their misery. If Calavera dies, though, whatever lead he was following dies with him. And that means you could be wandering these godforsaken Barrens for a while.

Do you cancel the competition (go to 22/19), or, grudgingly, help him out (34/24)?



21 "You know something," you say, putting iron in your voice. Your hand drops to the butt of the plasma caster. "Spill."

Threatening people to get information sounds like something a Bounty Hunter does all the time. Therefore, Seamus adds her 2 career ranks as a modifier. She's using her physical presence, so the Strength attribute comes into play as well. However, she's a lone gun on a hostile world, trying to intimidate a crime boss while there's backup right outside. That means a penalty die.

Roll 3d6 + Bounty Hunter (2) and Strength (1), minus Boss Murtaugh's Strength (2), for a net total of +1. Drop the highest die result.

On a 9 or higher, you succeed. Go to <u>26/20</u>. If you roll a 'natural' 12 (two 6's), you get a Mighty Success and go to <u>19/18</u>. You can also opt to turn a normal success into a Mighty one by spending a Hero Point.

If you roll less than 9, go to <u>29/22</u>. You can opt to spend a Hero Point and invoke Luck of the Gods (pg. 9) to try again.

22 Screw it. You never liked Dust Ringers anyway.

"Sayonara, sucker." You arm your meson grenade and toss it down. Then run like hell.

The blast wave slams you against your dray beetle, but it's a small price to pay. With one less factor in the equation, you mount up and head out of the funnel-field.

Go to <u>37/25</u>.

23 Curiosity prompts you to steal over and lift the tarp. Underneath lies a streamlined shape; a jetcopter, with the rotors folded. The engine's still faintly warm. A get-away vehicle for the slavers? Or does the compound have a visitor?

You figure you'll soon find out. Mark **Forewarned** and go to $\frac{27/21}{2}$.

24 The last slaver falls. For whatever reason, the sniper seems to have stopped firing.

With your ears/brain still ringing, you survey the courtyard. Though there are several outbuildings, the large stone 'keep' at the center of the compound looks like the best bet for housing Aloysius.

Go to <u>27/21</u>.



25 It takes but a moment to arm the grenade and roll it against a section of wall. Dazzling light fills the box canyon.

With a Fomorian battle-cry, you charge the breach. Calavera is right behind. On the other side of the dust cloud, a handful of forlorn slavers are taking cover. Unlike your ambushers, these are armed only with slings and dart-throwers.

There are 8 slaver garrison, all classed as Rabble with 3 lifeblood apiece. Calavera will handle half of them, leaving you 4 to contend with. They have 0 in all attributes and combat abilities, no armor protection, and their primitive weapons do only d3 damage

The slavers are close enough for your plasma caster to do spreading damage, but they also have cover, incurring a penalty die on your attack rolls. You have the option of taking cover yourself, meaning the slavers will suffer a penalty die as well.

Viable Hero Point options for this fight are Rabble Slayer and Luck of the Gods (see pg. 9).

After the first round of combat, go to 45/29. If your lifeblood drops to 0 or less before then, go to 54/32. If you defeat the slavers, go to 24/19. 26 Murtaugh keeps his tone professional. "I can tell you this; you're not the only fly buzzing around this crap pile. A lighter touched down a couple days ago, long enough to drop off some Ringer* in a fancy exoskeleton. I'd keep an eye out for him, I was you."

"You've seen the guy?"

"Not me personally, no." He folds his hands. "Now level with me--you're really out here on your own? No money backing you up?"

"Nope."

"Too bad," he says, shaking his head. "Too bad. Well, that's all I've got."

You get the feeling he's holding back, but you're not in a position to press. "See you around, Murtaugh."

You leave the Boss's shack, sparing a glance at his phasmid bodyguard. Go to 50/31.

* Ringer

Short for Dust Ringer. See the sidebar on pg. 18.



27 The keep is built from thick slabs of rock, melted together at the seams. Primitive, but tough. There's only one opening you can find, near the dray pens. The door is part of a ship's bulkhead, mounted on rollers and partially open. Thanks to your diversion, no sentries stand guard outside.

The door squeaks as you roll it back. Inside, suspended cages of phosphor beetles light a narrow hall, with several entrances opening off it.

Your nape prickles . . . and that's the only warning you get, as a resin pod the size of a human head drops down, to strike Calavera on the shoulder. It bursts, and a swarm of tiny, blood-red mites come boiling out, seeking the pale flesh between the gaps in his exo.

Calavera screams. He claws at his metal bones, now a cage trapping him with the voracious insects. You look up, into the alien stare of the phasmid warrior you saw earlier. He's braced his long, spiny legs to either side of the hallway, holding him aloft.

Murtaugh's bodyguard, **Val 268**, is a top-tier opponent, a Rival. These guys are just as tough as Heroes. Normally, they get Rival Points to spend, but we want to give you a fighting chance. Needless to say, Calavera won't be able to assist this fight.

Val has a 3 Agility and 1 Strength. His other attributes are 0. He has a score of 1 in all combat abilities, the Alert boon, and 1 pt. of natural chitin armor. His lifeblood total is 11.

Check for Initiative as per the flowchart on pg. 8. Val's Alert boon negates your own, so you don't get a bonus die on the check. However, if you marked **Forewarned** earlier, give yourself an additional +2 modifier to the roll.

If you have priority, you can draw your plasma caster and snap a shot at Val. Remember to subtract his Defense score of 1 from your attack rolls.

If you lose priority, or when Val's action comes, he drops down and Melee attacks you, using a sickle-bladed sword (d6+1 damage). He'll try something tricky, taking a -2 adjustment to his attack roll in order to strike you in an unprotected spot (0 armor protection, if succesful).

Trying to shoot Val once Melee is joined entails a -2 modifier to your attack roll. You may decide to Melee attack yourself—if such is the case, go to <u>30/22</u>.

Boost Success, Luck of the Gods, and Vital Blow are all good Hero Point options. Note that a Vital Blow has a chance of taking Val 268 out in one shot. This is very much in the spirit of Everywhen, where even climatic "boss fights" don't involve the attrition of large hit point pools.

If your lifeblood drops to 0 or lower, go to 54/32. If you manage to defeat Val, go to 43/28.



28 Under cover of night, you steal towards the compound. If any sentry drones are watching, you don't spot them. A twist of a pin sets the grenade for remote detonation, before you roll it against the gate.

Calavera sets his exo for 'quiet' mode. The two of you manage to sneak around to a section of wall opposite the entrance. At a mutual nod, you trigger the grenade. A flash of sundered particles lights the canyon. The roar fades; hoarse cries echo from the courtyard.

You prepare to climb the wall. The surface looks shearer than you anticipated, however. This could prove difficult . . .

"Wait." Calavera flexes both claw-like hands. He shoves his titanium fingers between the bricks with casual effort. Making handholds this way, he begins to haul himself up. "Climb on."

The exo makes it easy to clamber up his back. "You tell anyone about this," he says, "and I'll kill you. Not that I'm *not* going to kill you when we settle up."

"Likewise."

Calavera pulls himself over the wall's rim. You're looking down into a triangular courtyard with a few outbuildings, a central 'keep' made of rock slabs, and a corral for dray beetles. Several poorly armed slavers are taking up positions near the sundered gate. They must've sent their A-listers out on the ambush.

Do you make your way down and head for the main building (39/27), or finish off the slavers by attacking from behind (41/28)?

29 Murtaugh lets out a chuckle, before his face hardens. "Same old Shay." You notice his left hand has remained under the desk this whole time. His arm tenses, as if leveling a gun. "Get out."

The front door bangs open. Noiselessly, the phasmid warrior glides in and yanks your chair away. Trying to fight these two won't make your job any easier. In fact, it'll bring all of Tumble's scum down on your head. You opt to leave, post haste.

"And stay out."

The door slams shut behind you.

Go to <u>50/31</u>.

30 Though it's not your preferred mode of combat—you'd rather shoot someone, ideally from behind—scrapping occasionally becomes necessary. If you want to punch Val with your spiked gauntlet, note the weapon's damage on your character sheet and return to <u>27/21</u> to resolve the fight.

If you want to try to grab one of Calavera's h-shivs, as he writhes on the ground nearby, go to $\frac{47/30}{2}$.



31 Using an h-shiv, you cut Aloysius and the rest of the prisoners free. The bot folds neatly over Calavera's shoulder; his exo makes a tireless carrier, as it plods after you. A peek out of the keep's entrance shows the courtyard is abandoned. You pause long enough to let the prisoners grab dray beetles, before leaving the slaver compound. All that's left is the long trek back to Tumble.

You'll still have to settle with Murtaugh and his goons, of course. And there's the little matter of your deal with Calavera. But hey, you collared your quarry! And now that you think about it, maybe there's something to Aloysius's offer, after all . . .

Go to <u>49/31</u>.



33 The ambush comes at sunset.

An old trail you've been following for the past hour leads down a ravine. Just as you sense trouble, a net of woven fibres comes whirling out of the sky. Weighted ends wrap your limbs and torso. Shredding through it with your spiked gauntlet takes only moments, but now thrip tribesmen are pouring into the ravine, too many to count.

These are warriors, not herders, armed with stone maces and spears. In lesser numbers you could mow them down, but a horde like this . . .

Then you spot him: the thrip barbarian from the bar, with his broadsword in hand. He must've been tracking you this whole time. Likely he wants your Cancri battle armor, and the fortune in metal it represents. Ironically, the armor is made from bio-ceramics, but the thrip don't know that.

Still, you're a Fomorian. Many tribesmen will gasp their last today, stretched out on the rocks before you fall.

If you have any Hero Points left, go to $\frac{16}{17}$. Otherwise, go to $\frac{35}{24}$.



34 With a wrench of chitin, Calavera rips the antlion's jaws apart. Green ichor splatters his shiny chrome; the insectoid convulses, kicking sand as it dies.

Calavera, however, remains trapped. He tenses his powerful leg servos and tries to leap free, but the movement only buries him further.

Fighting baser instincts, you clip a length of tether to your beetle's harness. "*Oi*!" you call down.

"Hurry!" Cruz yells. "Toss me the rope!"

"I need some answers, first."

His curses echo up the funnel.

"You done?" you ask, grinning. "Cause from up here, it looks like you're out of time."

"Ask your damn questions."

"First one: who is Aloysius?"

"You don't even know who you're tracking?" "Nope."

A pause. "All I've got, he's an associate of Darius Pomeroy. The *late* Darius Pomeroy."

So the Dust Ring's biggest crime lord finally bought it. "What else?"

"I'm supposed to croak him. That's it." The sand has already reached Calavera's waist. "Throw me the rope and I'll cut you in."

"You know where he is?"

"I've got a good idea."

"Tell me."

"Huh-uh. You'll just let me suffocate."

True enough. "Truce, then?"

"Truce, until we find the quarry. Now throw the rope!"

You toss him the other end of the tether. Your beetle's sheer strength and many legs succeed where Calavera's exo failed, dragging him slowly from the funnel. You've got your plasma caster leveled with his head as he struggles upright, but he seems too exhausted to try anything. Yet.

Go to <u>42/28</u>.

35 Well, you've cashed out. Bought the farm. Gone to that big hunting ground in the sky. Your Fomorian brethren will toast a cup of Connemara before they pour it on the ground.

Go back to 1/6 and try again.



36 "We wait until nightfall," you explain. "I'll blow the gate, but it's just a distraction. While security rushes the breach, you and I climb a wall opposite and sneak into the compound. We find Aloysius and then . . . settle matters."

"Clever," Calavera says, nodding. "Just how a Dust Ringer would do it."

The sun will take several hours to set. Calavera suggests a nap to conserve strength, but doesn't seem inclined towards sleep himself. Instead, you settle your back to a boulder, hug your knees, and take occasional sips of water.

37 A couple hours later, you're starting to rethink your decision. Sometimes payback is a luxury a bounty hunter can't afford.

Without Calavera to track, you end up wandering the Barrens. There's plenty of trails and footprints through the sand, but these all lead back to thrip nomads. Meanwhile, the blue-white sun dips ever lower, and a cold wind starts to blow. You recall rumors of voracious insect predators that roam the wastes at night.

Old instincts, honed from years of survival on the radioactive water-world, Iotha, begin to nag at the back of your skull.

This little interlude counts as a short rest. Seamus's first career is Savage, to reflect You may recover half your lifeblood (round up) lost during the gorge ambush. Anything

growing up on the wild, windy coasts of her ravaged homeworld. The only game then was survival, and that hard-won experience comes in handy on dangerous planets like Vermis.

Roll 2d6, and add your Mind Attribute (1), plus your Savage rank (1). If you roll a 9 or higher, to to 40/27. Otherwise, go to 33/23. You can spend a Hero Point to invoke Luck of the Gods, if you wish.

left will take longer to heal.

Go to <u>28/22</u>.



38 The smaller rooms off the hall comprise the slaver's quarters, austere slabs of foam and few belongings. The final, largest chamber is reserved for their 'merchandise'; several forlorn humans, comatose with despair, tethered to a central post. They're destined for the City of Palanquins, to be sold at auction as larvae incubators . . . or worse.

Bound with the rest of the prisoners is an unusual sight. You hesitate, as shock and weariness washes over you. "Don't tell me *you're* Aloysius . . ."

"Fortuitous guess!" purrs a well-modulated voice. "I am indeed Aloysius B9, a protocol sentience. 'B' stands for Byzantine series, by the way."

Your quarry is a humanoid bot, painted olive green with silver piping. His non-articulated face has been molded to present the most eager, vapid expression possible.

"And why," you ask, "would someone put a bounty on you?"

At the mention of a price on his head, Aloysius seems to perk up. "Ah! I would assume from your rugged countenance, as well as the assortment of *apparatus belli* clipped to your armored frame—that you are a bounty hunter?" "Yup."

"I was hoping for just such an occurrence! You see, I am late in the service of Darius 'Piranha' Pomeroy, the esteemed entrepreneur of nonconsensual acquisitions—"

"Already heard it."

"—and served as his liaison, confidant, and general dogsbody before he, ah, expired. As such, I was exposed to the minutiae of his vast criminal empire." He taps the side of his head with a silver finger. "In the colloquial, I know where the bodies are buried." "And Boss Murtaugh was holding you for ransom?"

"I would surmise so. However, now you are here, and my freedom is assured! With the knowledge I possess, Darius's criminal enterprises could be revived, nay, *expanded*! What I need is some willing muscle, seed money (of course), and a more intimidating chassis for myself. How can I function as a crime lord looking like this? Now, if I had a *real* body, say a Slaughterbot 2K or Red Berserker model, my presence would *command* respect! Say, you don't think we might find one of those around here . . ."

His chatter ceases abruptly, as you slap an EMP bolt against the bot's neck. Aloysius slumps, offline. Blissful silence ensues.

Well, you found your quarry. Now the big question: how do you get him back to Tumble? If **Partner** is marked, go to 31/23. Otherwise, go to 44/29.



39 Calavera claws his way down the wall just as easily as he climbed up. Once back on the ground, you hug the shadows as you make for the keep. A small shack nearby emits light and noise through its open doorway. Must be commo equipment; a low-tech antenna juts like a metal tree from the roof. On impulse, you steal over.

No one's inside. The receiver has been left on, and a familiar voice angrily demands a status report. It's Boss Murtaugh.

That's how the slavers knew we we're coming. He's in league with them!

There's something else, just past the commo shack. A tarp-covered mound you didn't spot from the wall.

Do you see what's under the tarp (23/19), or head on to the keep (27/21)?

40 You glance up. Carrion dragonflies are circling. You're far from dead, with adequate water and provisions, but they don't seem to know that.

You have a gnawing suspicion someone's been tracking you since leaving Tumble. And wandering out in the open is only making their job easier. You need to find shelter, and hopefully, a defensible position.

With infinite regret, you dismount and give your dray beetle a hard kick. The creature meanders off, hopefully drawing any would-be pursuers with it.

Not far from the funnel-fields lie a series of rocky gorges. Taking time to cover your tracks, you manage to locate a tiny cave among them. By rolling a boulder in front of the entrance, you create a secure, if not comfortable, place to sleep. Much later, in the thick of the moonless Vermean night, you hear howls and ear-piercing shrieks outside. *There, but for the glitch of Skarobus,** *go I* . . .

The next morning you arise, stiff-necked but still very much alive. With no other recourse, you begin the long slog back to Tumble.

Go to <u>7/11</u>.

* Skarobus

An AI super-intelligence, said to reside in the Zeta Scorpii system. Many inhabitants worship 'him' as a deity, though his benevolence remains in question.

Skarobus and several AI 'siblings' were originally assimilated by a much larger super-intelligence named Ourus, but managed to tear their way free from the 'father' program. They have since fled to seperate corners of the galaxy.



41 Expecting an attack from the other direction, the slaver garrison doesn't see you coming.

There are 8 slavers, all classed as Rabble with 3 lifeblood apiece. Calavera will handle half of them, leaving you 4 to contend with. They have 0 in all attributes and combat abilities, no armor, and their primitive weapons only do d3 damage apiece.

On your initial attack, you can make **two** attack and damage rolls, as you take the slavers by surprise.

Your opponents are close enough that damage from your plasma caster will spread. Further, they don't gain the benefit of cover they would normally have if you were attacking from the gate.

Viable Hero Point options for this fight are Rabble Slayer and Luck of the Gods (see pg. 9).

If your lifeblood drops to 0 or less go to 54/32. If you win the fight, go to 53/32.



42 Calavera nods towards a range of rocky hills northeast of the funnel-field. "Our quarry's supposed to be holed up with some local slavers, in their compound. It's not clear if he's a guest or their prisoner, but either way he's under heavy guard."

"A good reason to team up."

Calavera's pale eyes look you over, settling on your badge. "With a Fomorian?"

"An extra gun is always handy. And don't underestimate the locals."

He laughs. "I saw a couple slavers in the market. They're lucky if they've got two rocks to rub together."

"Fair warning." You gesture towards the hills. "Lead on."

Go to <u>12/14</u>.

43 Your last shot/slash/punch drops Val 268. Tough son of a bitch. You'll score another notch on the Cancri chest-plate when there's time.

A check shows Calavera's alive, but fading fast. He'd managed to crush most of the mites, though the ravenous bugs made a buffet of him in the process.

Decision time. You can leave him to his fate (3/7), or try to save the Dust Ringer (46/30).



44 You could drag the protocol bot, but that's going to get old fast. Gritting your teeth, you remove the EMP bolt. Aloysius's voice picks up right where he left off. " . . . well, I suppose securing a new body isn't the first order of business. What would you say to my offer, though? The two of us, working together to resurrect an underworld empire, clawing our way to the top. You can be the sidekick, alright?"

For answer, you shove the plasma caster under his shiny chin. "One more peep and only your head leaves here. Savvy?"

He starts to speak, thinks better of it, and nods. "Good."

You use an h-shiv to slash his bonds, then free the other prisoners as well. Might as well take them back to Tumble. With this motley crew in tow, you exit the keep.

Though you're prepared to fight your way out, any remaining slavers appear to have high-tailed it. At the corral, your new companions take their pick of dray beetles, and the little procession makes its way out of the canyon, back across the Vespid Barrens.

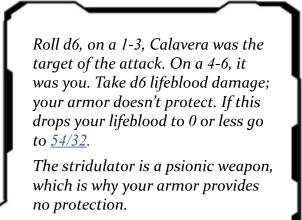
You'll still have to deal with Murtaugh and his gang, of course. But that's a problem for another day.

Go to <u>49/31</u>.

45 Without warning, an ear-bleeding shriek descends, accompanied by waves of psychic agony. You clamp your hands over your ears, but the psionic assault continues.

A stridulator. And where have I seen that before?

The blast seems to be coming from a large stone building at the center of the courtyard. You can't spot the sniper, though.



Mark Forewarned and go to 25/20 to resolve the battle. There will be no further sniping (e.g. ignore the prompt to return to this entry.)



46 Though you're tempted to leave the wounded behind, you and Calavera had a deal. You agreed to settle up once the bounty was snagged, and you can't do that with a corpse. Ergo, you've got to try and save him.

Mark **Honorable**. If stuff like this keeps happening, you're going to sully the Fomorian's bad name!

> Calavera's lifeblood has dropped to -1, and you're trying to stabilize him. Your career rank of 0 in Medic means you have some experience treating wounds, including your own. Luckily, you have a medkit handy. Roll 3d6 plus your Mind Score (1), minus 1 for Calavera's state, for a net +0. Discard the lowest d6 result as the medkit provides a bonus die.

If you get a 9 or higher, go to <u>17/17</u>. <i>If you fail, go to <u>55/32</u>.

Note that the Medic career didn't add to the check. A 0 rank might not seem like much, but in some situations having rudimentary knowledge can be the difference between life and death—like when trying to land a ship! **47** Wary of Val's sickle-sword, you reach for the bandoleer.

Roll 2d6 and add your Agility (2). If you roll 9 or higher, you manage to grab the h-shiv without losing your attack for the round. Otherwise, this takes your full action that round. The h-shiv, however, is a good choice for Melee. It does d6H damage, +1 for your Strength, and completely ignores Val's protection. If you opt to use Vital Blow with the h-shiv, it does 2d6H damage (roll 3d6 and drop the lowest die), +1 for Strength. Return to <u>27/21</u> to resolve the combat.

48 The last of the ragged thugs has been dealt with. A little further down the side-street you find an open door with 'BAR' scrawled across the top of the frame. Go to 10/12.



49 Well, the adventure's over, and seeing as how you're still vertical, it's time to divvy up with experience points (XP)!

Short adventures like this one provide 1 XP for just surviving them. If you managed to bag Aloysius add 1 XP for your trouble. And if **Honorable** was marked, you get one more XP as well—perhaps Seamus is more than the hard-bitten opportunist she thinks she is.

These points can be used to buy up Attributes, increase combat abilities, purchase new careers, buy off flaws, gain new boons, and even potentially draw followers to your cause. If you recovered Aloysius and opt to turn him in for the bounty (instead of taking him on as a partner in crime), this would be the pretense for increasing Seamus's Credit Rating, a measure of her relative wealth. Maybe she'll get that first class ticket after all!

50 With Murtaugh's little chat over, the only other likely place for information is a bar. A dump like Tumble must have at least one. Go to $\frac{6}{10}$ and start your search.

51 "Listen, Murtaugh, I *need* this collar. Maybe there's something in it for you, too, if I nab the guy. It can't be good for business, having a dangerous criminal roaming free in your back yard."

You're no smooth talker, but wheedling for info comes with the territory. Seamus's Mind could be a factor here, as she plays mental chess with Murtaugh, so we'll use that instead of Appeal. Roll 2d6, plus Seamus's Mind I and Bounty Hunter rank 2, minus Murtaugh's Mind I, for a net +2.

On a 9 or higher, you succeed. Go to 26/20. If you roll a 'natural' 12 (two 6's), you get a Mighty Success and go to 19/18. You can also spend a Hero Point and bump a normal success to a Mighty one, or re-roll if you fail (see Hero Point options pg. 9).

If you roll less than 9, go to <u>8/11</u>.



52 The smoking corpse of the last slaver falls. You turn to your partner, his chrome scorched and bandoleer half-empty. He doesn't look so tough now. Then again, you probably don't either.

"Don't get any ideas," he says, as if reading your mind. "We can settle things personally, after we've found Aloysius."

"How did these guys know we were coming?"

He shrugs. "Surveillance drones? We weren't exactly sneaky, riding on the back of a giant beetle."

You push on, keeping a wary eye out for another ambush. The trail finally ends at the mouth of a box canyon. Mud brick wall stretches between three spindly towers, likely built by termite analogues, to form a triangular courtyard. A parasol of chitin and spider-silk provides shade from the relentless sun.

"You see a gate anywhere?" you ask.

Calavera touches his skull mask; mechanisms in the right eye-socket whir and click. "Along the facing wall. It's half hidden by a boulder."

"What's the plan?"

"What's your plan?"

Hmmm. Your meson grenade could make a sizeable breach in the wall . . . and bring whatever's left of the slaver garrison down on your heads. On the other hand, this could also make for a good diversion.

Do you propose a direct approach (4/7), or something tricky (36/25)?

53 You and Calavera finish off the rest of the garrison. Whatever else happens, you won't have to worry about this lot blocking any escape.

You survey the courtyard. Though there are several outbuildings, a large stone 'keep,' formed from slabs of fused rock, looks like the best bet for holding Aloysius. Go to 27/21.

54 Do you have any Hero Points left? If so, go to 16/17. If not, go to 35/24.

55 Calavera lets out a death rattle before he heads for the big dust ring in the sky. You reach through the eyeholes in his skull mask and close his lids.

"You were a good fighter, amigo."

Eulogy over with, you resume the search for Aloysius. Go to 38/26.

