

COMBAT COMMAND™

TAKE COMMAND...
IN A NEW ROLE-PLAYING NOVEL

#8

IN THE WORLD OF

GORDON R. DICKSON'S DORSAI



DORSAI'S
COMMAND

BY

GORDON R. DICKSON,
TROY DENNING AND
CORY GLABERSON

A WARRIOR'S FATEFUL DECISION

Mies saw the distant lights of the first spotters searching for him. He increased his pace, trying to escape into the Jacal Mountains before they located his heat signature.

He could not move fast enough, however. There were over two dozen spotters searching every square inch of the area. Within twenty minutes, one of the spotters shined its searchlight on him. Mies jumped out of the beam just as the spotter released a volley of needles. The deadly projectiles struck the ground where he had stood a moment before.

Mies ran, his body low to the ground. The spotter, he knew, had locked onto his heat signature. There was nothing he could do to shake it. He stopped and removed a white handkerchief from his pocket.

The spotter's searchlight found him. He waved the handkerchief. It didn't work. Three needle charges ripped through his body and he toppled over . . .

Dorsai's Command

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DORSAI, DORSAI'S COMMAND
*by Gordon R. Dickson,
Troy Denning and Cory Glaberson*

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AND CORY GLABERSON**



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DORSAI'S COMMAND

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*Dedicated to Gordon R. Dickson
by his co-authors, with thanks*

Special thanks to Sandra Miesel

INTRODUCTION

by Bill Fawcett

You are in command. With a blare of trumpets accented by a hurriedly barked order, it's off to battle. Marching behind are your men, trained warriors, whose lives depend upon the decisions you are about to make.

At least that's how you pictured it . . . a long time ago. Instead here you stand with one of the famous Graemes about to give you a briefing on the situation. As the Dorsai's top commander is not in the habit of briefing newly graduated and completely inexperienced officers, something must be wrong.

Your problems begin even before you get off the shuttle. Only you and the men you will command have to make things right again. Or die in the effort.

The Combat Command series puts you at the head of science fiction's toughest soldiers. In this book you are a Dorsai officer hired to command a force of tough irregulars. How well you do could mean the fate of a continent, perhaps even a planet. It certainly will reflect on all Dorsai during one of the most perilous times humanity has ever faced.

The Combat Command books provide one more chance to read about a well-known science fiction world and its familiar characters: in this book the fascinating universe of the Childe Cycle and the Dorsai who inhabit it. These books are also a "game." In each section of this game/book a military decision is described. You are given the same information as you would actually receive in a real combat situation. As a Dorsai officer you give the orders. The consequences of your decision are described in the next section. When you make the right decisions, morale improves and you are closer to completing your mission. When you make a bad decision, men die . . . men who are not going to be available for future battles.

FIGHTING BATTLES

This book includes a simple game system which simulates combat and other military challenges. Playing the game adds an extra dimension of enjoyment by making you a participant in the adventure. You will need two six-sided dice, a pencil, and a sheet of paper to "play" this adventure.

COMBAT VALUES

Each man in your command is assigned six values. These will be the same for all the men in the same type of unit. In the various Combat Command books the force you lead may consist of spaceships, armored infantry, mercenaries, or plasma cannon firing atomic tanks. Their combat values provide the means of comparing the capabilities of the many different military units encountered in each book. These values are:

Manpower

This value is the number of separate fighting parts of your force. Each unit of manpower represents one man, one tank, or one spaceship. Casualties are subtracted from Manpower. In this book it represents the number of fighting men you have left in your command.

Ordnance

The quality and power of the weapons used is reflected by their Ordnance Value. All members of a unit commanded will have the same Ordnance Value. In some cases you may command two or more units, each with a different Ordnance Value.

Attack Strength

This value indicates the ability of the unit to attack an opponent. It is determined by multiplying Manpower by Ordnance ($\text{Manpower} \times \text{Ordnance} = \text{Attack Strength}$). This value can be different for every battle. It will decrease as Manpower is lost and increase if reinforcements are received.

Melee Strength

This is the hand-to-hand combat value of each member of the unit. In the case of a squad of mercenaries, it represents the

martial arts skill and training of each man. In crewed units such as tanks or spaceships, it represents the fighting ability of the members of the crew and could be used in an assault on a spaceport or to defend against boarders. Melee Value replaces Ordnance Value when determining the Attack Strength of a unit in hand-to-hand combat.

Stealth

This value measures how well the members of your unit can avoid detection. It represents the individual skill of each soldier or the ECM of each spaceship. The Stealth Value for your unit will be the same for each member of the unit. You would employ Stealth to avoid detection by the enemy.

Morale

This reflects the fighting spirit of the troops you command. Success in battle may raise this value. Unpopular decisions or severe losses can lower it. If you order your unit to attempt something unusually dangerous, the outcome may be affected by their Morale level.

THE COMBAT PROCEDURE

When your unit finds itself in a combat situation, use the following procedure to determine victory or defeat.

1. Compute the Attack Strength of your unit and the opposition ($\text{Manpower} \times \text{Ordnance or Melee Value} = \text{Attack Strength}$).
2. Turn to the charts at the end of this section. The description of the battle will tell you which charts to use.
3. Roll two six-sided dice and total the result.
4. Find the Attack Strength of the unit at the top of the chart and the total of the dice rolled on the left-hand column of the chart. The number found where the column and row intersect is the number of casualties inflicted on the opponent by the unit you were rolling for.
5. Repeat for each side, alternating attacks.

The unit you command always fires unless otherwise stated.

When you are told there is a combat situation, you will be given all the information needed for both your command and their opponent.

Here is an example of a complete combat:

Hammer's Slammers have come under fire from a force defending a ridge that crosses their line of advance. Alois Hammer has ordered your company of tanks to attack. Your tanks have an Ordnance Value of 8 and you have a Manpower Value of 8 tanks.

Slammers fire using Chart B.

Locals fire using Chart D with a Combat Strength of 3 and Manpower of 12 (giving them an Attack Strength of 36).

To begin, you attack first and roll two 4's for a total of 8. The current Attack Strength of your Slammers is 64 (8×8).

CHART B

Attack Strength Manpower

Dice
Roll

	1-10	-20	-30	-40	-50	-60	-70	-80	-90	-100	101+
2	0	0	0	1	1	1	2	2	2	3	4
3	0	0	1	1	1	2	2	2	3	3	4
4	0	1	1	1	2	2	2	3	3	3	4
5	1	1	1	2	2	2	3	3	3	4	5
6	1	1	2	2	2	3	3	3	4	4	5
7	1	2	2	2	3	3	3	4	4	4	5
8	2	2	2	3	3	3	4	4	4	5	6
9	2	2	3	3	3	4	4	4	5	5	6
10	2	3	3	3	4	4	4	5	5	5	6
11	3	3	3	4	4	4	5	5	5	6	7
12	3	3	4	4	4	5	5	6	6	7	8

Read down to the 60 to 70 Attack Strength column until you get to the line for a dice roll of 8. The result is four casualties inflicted on your opponents by your company.

Subtract these casualties from the opposing force before determining their Attack Strength. (Combat is not simultaneous.) After subtracting the four casualties you just inflicted on them, the enemy has a remaining Manpower Value of 8 ($12 - 4 = 8$). This gives them a remaining Attack Value of 24 ($8 \times 3 = 24$).

Roll two six-sided dice for the opposing force's attack and determine the casualties they cause your Slammer's company. Subtract these casualties from your Manpower total on the Record Sheet. In this case they caused one casualty, giving the Slammers a Manpower of 7 for the next round of combat.

This ends one "round" of combat. Repeat the process for each round. Each time a unit receives a casualty, it will have a lower value for Attack Strength. There will be that many less men, tanks, spaceships or whatever firing.

Continue alternating fire rolls, recalculating the Attack Strength each time to account for casualties, until one side or the other has lost all of its Manpower, or special conditions (given in the text) apply. When this occurs, the battle is over.

Losses are permanent, and losses from your unit should be subtracted from their total Manpower on the Record Sheet.

SNEAKING, HIDING, AND OTHER RECKLESS ACTS

To determine if a unit is successful in any attempt relating to Stealth or Morale, roll two six-sided dice. If the total rolled is greater than the value listed for the unit, the attempt fails. If the total of the two dice is the same as or less than the current value, the attempt succeeds or the action goes undetected. For example:

Rico decides his squad of Mobile Infantry (M.I.) will try to penetrate the Bug hole unseen. M.I. have a Stealth Value of 8. A roll of 8 or less on two six-sided dice is needed to succeed. The dice are rolled and the result is a 4 and a 2 for a total of 6. They are able to avoid detection by the Bug guards.

If all of this is clear, then you are ready to turn to Section 1 and take command.

THE COMBAT CHARTS

After you have made a decision involving a battle, you will be told which chart should be used for your unit and which for the enemy. The chart used is determined by the tactical and strategic situation. Chart A is used when the unit is most effective, and Chart G when least effective. Chart A represents the effectiveness of the Sioux at Little Bighorn and Chart F, Custer. Chart G represents the equivalent of classic Zulus with Assegai (spears) versus modern Leopard tanks. Even a very small force on Chart A can be effective, while even a large number of combatants attacking on Chart G are unlikely to have much effect.

CHART A

Attack Strength

	1-10	-20	-30	-40	-50	-60	-70	-80	-90	-100	101 +
Dice Roll											
2	0	1	1	2	2	3	3	4	5	6	6
3	0	1	2	2	2	3	4	5	6	7	7
4	1	2	2	2	3	3	4	5	6	7	8
5	2	2	2	3	3	4	5	5	6	7	8
6	2	2	2	3	4	4	5	6	7	7	8
7	2	2	3	4	4	5	5	6	7	8	8
8	2	3	3	4	4	5	6	6	7	8	9
9	3	3	4	4	5	5	6	7	8	8	9
10	3	4	4	5	5	6	7	7	8	9	10
11	3	4	4	5	6	6	7	8	9	10	11
12	4	4	5	6	7	7	8	9	10	11	12

CHART B

	1-10	-20	-30	-40	-50	-60	-70	-80	-90	-100	101 +
Dice Roll											
2	0	0	0	1	1	1	2	2	2	3	4
3	0	0	1	1	1	2	2	2	3	3	4
4	0	1	1	1	2	2	2	3	3	3	4
5	1	1	1	2	2	2	3	3	3	4	5
6	1	1	2	2	2	3	3	3	4	4	5
7	1	2	2	2	3	3	3	4	4	4	5
8	2	2	2	3	3	3	4	4	4	5	6
9	2	2	3	3	3	4	4	4	5	5	6
10	2	3	3	3	4	4	4	5	5	5	6
11	3	3	3	4	4	4	5	5	5	6	7
12	3	3	4	4	4	5	5	6	6	7	8

CHART C

	1-10	-20	-30	-40	-50	-60	-70	-80	-90	-100	101+
Dice Roll											
2	0	0	0	0	0	1	1	1	2	2	2
3	0	0	0	0	1	1	1	2	2	2	3
4	0	0	0	1	1	1	2	2	2	3	3
5	0	0	1	1	1	2	2	2	3	3	4
6	0	1	1	1	2	2	2	3	3	3	4
7	1	1	1	2	2	2	3	3	3	4	5
8	1	1	2	2	2	3	3	3	4	4	5
9	1	2	2	2	3	3	3	4	4	5	5
10	2	2	2	3	3	3	4	4	4	5	6
11	2	2	3	3	3	4	4	4	5	5	6
12	2	3	3	3	4	4	4	5	5	6	7

CHART D

	1-10	-20	-30	-40	-50	-60	-70	-80	-90	-100	101+
Dice Roll											
2	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	1	1	2
3	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	1	1	2	2
4	0	0	0	0	0	1	1	1	2	2	2
5	0	0	0	0	1	1	1	2	2	2	3
6	0	0	0	1	1	1	2	2	2	3	3
7	0	0	1	1	1	2	2	2	3	3	4
8	0	1	1	1	2	2	2	3	3	4	4
9	1	1	1	2	2	2	3	3	3	4	5
10	1	1	2	2	2	3	3	3	4	4	5
11	1	2	2	2	3	3	3	4	4	5	5
12	2	2	2	3	3	3	4	4	5	5	6

CHART E

	1-10	-20	-30	-40	-50	-60	-70	-80	-90	-100	101+
Dice Roll											
2	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	1
3	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	1	1
4	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	1	1	2
5	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	1	1	2	2
6	0	0	0	0	0	1	1	1	1	2	2
7	0	0	0	0	1	1	1	1	2	2	2
8	0	0	0	1	1	1	1	2	2	2	2
9	0	0	1	1	1	1	2	2	2	2	2
10	0	1	1	1	1	2	2	2	2	2	3
11	1	1	1	1	2	2	2	2	2	2	3
12	1	1	1	2	2	2	2	2	2	3	3

CHART F

[illegible]

CHART G

[illegible]

IN THE WORLD OF
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COMMAND



— 1 —

The circular pool of bright light at the gate to the military compound threw everything else into impenetrable darkness.

The open gateway itself—wide enough for a heavy forty-man carrier vehicle to pass through—the sentry hut, the one soldier within and the one soldier outside, now reaching for the papers of Mies Ohanlon's orders, half a section of the razor wire of the three-meter-high fence on either side of the gate . . . all this was visible only within the pool of illumination.

Lost in the utter blackness beyond it were what Mies knew was there: the two square miles of compound itself; then the desert surrounding, running to the base of the Wallonee Hills, brown and stark and sudden-rising from the flat, sandy soil like the dirty humps of camels. Humps from the spines of the vari-form camels which had been successful in breeding and flourishing only here on Ceta; as horses had bred and flourished only on the Dorsai, among all of the younger worlds. Mies had come home—but in secret and to a Dorsai camp which lay five hundred kilometers from his father's compound.

"Thank you, sir," said the soldier, accepting the orders that were also Mies' credentials.

"You're welcome, Group," answered Mies, automatically responding to the two black stripes sewn on the lower sleeve of the other to show his Groupman rank.

Yes, he knew the landscape, here and beyond, all too well. Mies' thoughts ran on while the Groupman scanned his orders. Would he had known the Dorsai home world of his family as well. Would he had grown up there, instead of here. He had hoped on graduation from the Dorsai Academy to find assignment anywhere rather than back on Ceta; but as a new graduate without experience he had to take what was offered.

At least, this first assignment as an active-duty officer would be only close to the home of his childhood and upgrowing, not actually at it. There was a good half thousand kilometers, all but a few hundred of it steeply uphill, between his father's compound in the Ch'ung Kingdom and the Jacal Mountains, where his assignment would take him. His father had been military

Section 1

advisor to the Ch'ung for over thirty years. In a sense, his father's compound was as remote from him now as it had been when he was back on the Dorsai, during the four years at the Academy that had qualified him to wear this uniform of a commissioned officer.

"Thank you, sir." The Groupman was handing him back his orders. Mies took them automatically and stuffed them into an inside pocket of his uniform jacket. He wondered what the thickset veteran before him thought of this nineteen-year-old officer he faced, slim to the point of skinniness in his brand-new Group-leader's uniform, with the oriental fold over his eyes proclaiming his ancestry.

Mies would fill out later, and experience would take the shine off his uniform and himself. So people had assured him. But for now there was only that special bearing and the uniform to mark him as a Dorsai. Not that this ought not to be enough to gain him respect from even an obvious veteran like the man before him, who would never have seen the seas of the Dorsai world. But, nonetheless, Mark wondered what the other thought of him. The expressionless, square, Caucasian face now turning away from him had told him nothing.

"This way, sir," the Groupman said over his shoulder. "I'll drive you directly to the Commander's office. Word was left you were to report there the moment you showed up."

Wondering a little, Mies followed and seated himself in a small two-man atmosphere floater. The forelights of the vehicle went on, showing before them the road between the orderly double row of single-story, rectangular buildings, dark in these hours ordinarily given over to sleep. They drove silently, from one street-crossing lamp into the illumination of the next, until they came at last to a larger, two-story structure, the windows of which were all alight.

The floater stopped. The Groupman got out and came around to open the door on Mies' side.

"They'll take care of you at the office just inside. Honored to have met you, Group-leader."

"Pleasure to meet you, too, Group," said Mies. He watched the man get back in the vehicle and drive off before he turned and went up a couple of broad wooden steps and through the plain wooden door into a brightly lit office with half a dozen desks scattered about it.

Only the chair of one desk was occupied, by a Senior Groupman,

with five stripes above the cuff of his sleeve. His uniform had been tailored to fit him and was slightly faded by weather from its sand-gray to a dull tan.

"Thank you, sir," he said as he accepted Mies' orders, apparently without even glancing at them. "Commander Graeme's been working late in his office, partly because he was waiting on your arrival. I'll take you to him right away."

He laid the orders on his desk and led Mies through a door in the back wall of the room and down a corridor to a door set in the wall that brought it to an end.

He knocked at the door.

"Sir, this is Chemb," he said in ordinary tones. "I've got Group-leader Mies Ohanlon with me, to report to you, as ordered, Commander."

"Bring him in, Will," said a voice from the annunciator buried somewhere in the ceiling overhead.

Chemb pushed open the door and stood aside to let Mies enter before him. Mies stepped into a room that was obviously built to serve a double purpose—both as office and as lounge. At the very back of it, seated behind a large desk covered with papers, was the General Commander Mies had been sent to serve under. He was, Mies knew, one of the near-legendary twins of the Graeme family, whose family homestead was at Foralie in the Western Isles on the Dorsai. This twin would be Kensie Graeme. Mies heard the door shut quietly behind him and found himself alone with his Commander. Instinctively he went forward to stand before the desk a single pace's distance from it.

"I left my papers with the Senior Groupman just now, sir—" he began.

"That's fine. Just as it should be. Will Chemb can take care of them. Sit down," said Kensie, nodding him to a straight-backed chair that sat before the desk.

"Thank you, sir."

Mies seated himself; once more, as with the soldier at the gate, he was uncomfortably aware of his youth and stiffly new uniform. In front of him sat the kind of man people from other worlds actually pictured in their imaginations when they spoke of the people from the Dorsai.

The imaginings were larger than life, of course. But then, thought Mies, so were the Graeme twins. Mies might fill out his height eventually, but he would never be the size or have the presence of the man before him. He could feel that in his bones,

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now that he was face-to-face with one of the twins. It was not just the legend, it was something real to be felt in the man seated before him.

The legend had actually begun with their birth. They had come into their world as nearly at the same instant as two children could leave the same mother; and they had remained equally close through childhood and their later lives, violating the usual Dorsai pattern in which members of the same family would avoid soldiering under conditions that might cause more than one of them to be lost to the family at the same time. The twins were said to be mirror images of each other, except for one aspect. Kensie, it was said, had the warmth and brightness of two men; while his twin brother, Ian, had two men's darkness.

It was as if some giant had been split in two and given two bodies and identities. They were as alike as a pair of brothers could be, but they were also the halves of a whole. Kensie was loved by those who served under and with him. Ian was . . . there was no good word for it . . . something more than merely respected. Mark remembered it being said that in any gathering of people, there was always a little extra space around Ian—or seemed to be. It was as if an isolation from other people wrapped his soul so tightly that it was not physically possible for anyone but his twin to reach through and touch him.

And in that isolation he was formidable; although nothing about him threatened or challenged. He only was what he was; but others stepped aside from him because there was nothing to be won, and everything to be lost, by confronting him.

So, they had spoken about Ian—the other young cadets, Dorsai-born and Dorsai-raised, who had been at the Academy with Mies in the four years he had been there. Mies had listened, never dreaming he would meet either one of the twins in person. That had been as unthinkable as meeting someone out of a storybook.

Yet, now, facing Kensie, feeling the warmth of the man flow out to him from the tired but smiling face behind the desk, Mies felt for himself not merely that what he had heard about Ian was true, but that something else was true as well. And this second thing was that Kensie's brightness was as real as his twin's darkness; but that fact did not make Kensie himself less formidable. Behind and around the warmth, a strength and a power surrounded, like stone walls enclosing a welcoming hearth fire.

It had been Ian whom the other cadets had spoken of most often and openly wished to be like. But it came to Mies now, in

this moment, that if he ever had such a choice, his decision would be to resemble the man who sat facing him now.

But that was as inconceivable as it was impossible. In that same instant Mies knew that he might put on weight and age and experience, but it was not in him to emulate Kensie. Just as it was not in his classmates ever to really emulate Ian.

"You realize, Group-leader," Kensie was saying in his warm, deep voice, "why you're here. You've no special qualifications on your service sheet yet, except one. You know this territory."

"Yes, sir," said Mies woodenly. "I came here with my mother when my father signed a twenty-year contract with his Royal Highness the King of Ch'ung. I was three years old at the time."

"I see the Ch'ung dialect hasn't corrupted your Basic," said Kensie.

"We always spoke Basic at home," said Mies, "and in fact, to tell you the truth, sir, the Ch'ungese make a point of speaking Basic themselves as much as possible to distinguish them from the mountain families."

"But you don't speak it like a Ch'ungese," said Kensie, "you speak it like a Dorsai."

"I've just finished four years at the Academy, back home," said Mies. "I could hardly have kept any kind of Ch'ungese accent among the other cadets there, sir."

"I suppose not," said Kensie. "But the point is, you can speak with it if you need to, can't you?"

"Oh, yess, yess indeed, sirrr," said Mies.

Kensie laughed.

"I shouldn't have bothered to ask," he said. "How many of the mountain family dialects can you speak—like one of them, that is?"

"All," said Mies. "Ch'ung City was full of people from the mountain families. Men or women who'd been cast off from their own families for something or other they did, and who'd be killed on sight by anyone belonging to one of the other families."

"What do they get cast off for?" Kensie asked, a note of curiosity in his voice.

"Any of a thousand reasons," Mies said. "They may have broken one of the family taboos, or committed anything from murder to something that incurred a small fine."

"No one would run to the city just because they owed a small fine, would they?" asked Kensie.

Section 1

"If they couldn't pay it, they'd be smart to," said Mies. "The rest of the family'd have fun killing them unless they got away in time."

Kensie shook his head. His eyes were thoughtful.

"I've been there eight local months now," he said. He glanced at Mies. "It's hard for me to believe even people like these families could go that far back toward barbarism in just a couple of hundred years." He frowned at Mies. "You realize our contract here is to the Five Cities? The so-called Cities of the Plain. They're one of the few alliances that've been able to hold out against William."

"So've the Ch'ungese and the mountain families, sir," said Mies.

"The Ch'ungese, yes. So far, anyway," said Kensie, "mainly because they were too small for William of Ceta to bother with. He may own better than half this world but he's still no more than the merchant he was to begin with; and he doesn't do anything unless there's a profit for him in it. There was nothing in Ch'ung territory to make it worth his time to take them over, and even less among the mountain families—until now. In fact, that's why you're here."

"Me, sir?" Mies stared at him. "You're not saying the mountain families have got something now that William could want? All they've ever owned have been their rags, their shacks—and their weapons."

"Well, it seems they've got something more now," said Kensie. "There's metal coming out of the Jacals these days—I shouldn't say metal, I should say rock with a high percentage of iron, nickel, and other heavy metals in it."

Mies' stare became stronger.

"Metal, sir?" he said. Ceta was a large planet, much larger than Earth, but with much less mass and barely a fraction more than Earth's gravity. Because it was so large and underpopulated, even three hundred years now after its discovery, knowledge of its geology was sketchy. But its surface, like the surfaces on a number of the New Worlds, was known to be poor in the heavy metals, particularly iron. Only here and there were pockets of heavy metals to be found on Ceta. One theory was that they were the result of ancient meteor strikes.

"Metal," Kensie nodded. "We've no doubt now a pocket has turned up somewhere in the Jacals, and several of the mountain families seem to have sunk their differences enough to work it

together. But that's not the interesting part. What's interesting is that the pocket seems to be rich enough to have attracted the attention of William to the Jacals after all. He's trading weapons to the families working the metal-bearing rock. Real weapons, something more than personal firearms; the kind of thing the families can use, once they get enough of them, to take over the Ch'ung Kingdom."

A cold thought was born in Mies.

"Word of this came out through my father, didn't it?" he said. "Does he have anything to do with my being here?"

Kensie looked at Mies intently.

"Would it make a difference if he had?" Kensie asked.

"No—I mean, of course not!" Mies was suddenly embarrassed and sure his face showed it. He loved his father as only a child with a single parent can love that parent. But . . . "It's just that I'd hoped to make it on my own."

"Well, you are," said Kensie in a tone that, for him, was almost dry. "We've had corroborating reports from your father, but they were in answer to queries of ours. I don't think he would particularly have picked you for the job we have in mind, in any case. But let me finish giving you the background."

Kensie leaned back in his chair and it creaked under the movement of his body weight in the quiet, night-lit office.

"From William of Ceta's interest in the overthrow of the Ch'ung Kingdom," he said, "we—that is, our employers, the Five Cities—assume that he, at least, knows that the pocket of metals the families are exploiting is considerably richer than they realize. He may have been able, with their agreement and protection, to slip an expert in—a mining engineer, say—who would be able to bring him a more professional estimate on what's really there. You understand that if there was a large enough supply of local nickel and cobalt, for example, the cost of getting the material to make the specialty steel he needs would only be a fraction of what he would have to pay to ship an equivalent in the finished metal from Coby."

Mies nodded. Coby was the one metals-rich world which supplied heavy or rare metals to the New Worlds. It was a small, but heavy, airless planet with all of its colonial civilization under its surface, supplied with air and water built from the oxygen- and hydrogen-bearing compounds in the substance of the little planet itself.

"I don't see why that would make him want to see the

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families take over Ch'ung City and its territory, though, sir," he said.

"Well, I mentioned William was a merchant," Kensie said. "He's far and away wealthy enough to crush the Cities of the Plains in a week, if that was all he was out to do. But the actuality of it is that he's got a hundred such projects going here and on half the other fourteen inhabited worlds, and his wealth is tied up in all of them. He's got a budget for dominating the Plains Cities, and so far he hasn't been able to spare the funds to fill it. But the possible profit from having local Cetan metals available to him in this area might just make the difference, as well as giving him a lever to do it."

"Lever, sir?"

"For the metals, he trades the families the weapons they need to take and plunder Ch'ung City. Then he directs their attention to the Cities of the Plains. Perhaps he gives them some even more powerful weapons in trade for that. Nothing too strong, mind, since he wants to be able to handle them with really heavy weapons himself, if he ever reaches the point where they're recalcitrant and he no longer needs them."

"But what good," asked Mies, "would it do him just to have the cities harassed—I suppose you mean by guerrilla raids and attacks on the standing crops of their surrounding territories?"

"Exactly that." Kensie nodded. "As it happens, right now it would do him a great deal of good, where it might not have four years ago when you shipped back to the Dorsai to go to the Academy. In the meantime, William's made it difficult for the Cities to import foodstuffs, except at exorbitant prices—it's one way of keeping the pressure on and weakening them while he's waiting for a chance to take them over.

He smiled a little sadly at Mies.

"So far," he said, "the Cities have been able to survive off the crops from their own arable ground and herds of meat animals. But with the families raiding and robbing their planted land and goat runs, a real food problem could be created which might force them eventually to sign something that put them politically under William's thumb. He doesn't really want them destroyed, you know; it's just that he wants to control the trade between the inhabited worlds eventually; and to do that he needs a world, all the parts of which back him solidly in what he chooses to do."

“But what about the families and Ch’ung Kingdom, if the Cities put themselves in William’s pocket?”

“He knocks down the families with some real war-level weapons,” said Kensie, “and puts his own governor in the King’s palace, together with enough troops and sufficient arms to keep the families from rising to any power again; and that’s that. Also, incidentally, we who’ve contracted with the Cities are out of a job. The contract is a try-to-deliver, not guaranteed-delivery. This on the advice of the second Amanda, of whom you’ll have heard, since the Academy’s on the same island as Omalu.”

Mies had indeed heard of the second Amanda—Amanda Morgan—from the same Foralie District as the Graeme family and who was the Dorsai’s leading expert on contracts. She had her office in the city of Omalu, which was the Dorsai’s closest approach to a planetary capital.

“You won’t like losing, even at that,” said Mies, with a perception that surprised even him.

“We haven’t lost yet,” said Kensie. He moved in his chair. “But that’s enough background. Your part in all this is to go up there among the families, find out all you can about the real potential of that metals pocket and what their arrangement is with William—put a spoke in William’s plans if you can, but I really don’t expect that of you—and get back here with a full report about it all. How about it? Can you go in among the families who’re running that mine, whether by pretending to be a member of some family yourself, or otherwise, and bring me back full information, not only about the mining, but who’s doing it, what William’s connection with it is and what plans he and the families concerned have?”

Mies thought of the families and what they did to strangers, to pioneers and even to those of their own they condemned.

“I can do it,” he said. “But I’ll want to make up my mind who I’ll pretend to be after I get there. I could be a Ch’ungese who’s willing to trade with them. A renegade from one of the Cities with a skill they can use—or even somebody connected with William himself. Even if there are already people of his there, he doesn’t always let his right hand know what his left is doing, from what they tell me.”

“They tell you correctly,” said Kensie. “But in any case, you’re going to need help and two sets of cover stories. Whatever you make up for yourself, underneath, and on top you’re to be a mining engineer coming in from the Dorsai. We’ve arranged

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for you to stow away on a linkship as it leaves Ceta for orbit. After the passengers come aboard from the freighter, you'll be assigned a cabin—so it will appear that you come from off-planet. You are to be a mining engineer named Marcus Ignatowski: while the linkship gathers its load. The whole thing will take about a week. When you come back planetside, you'll land near Kawlan. There, you should bail your five companions out of jail—they are five Jacals who have agreed to serve as your guide in exchange for their freedom. Watch them."

Mies smiled, not happily. He knew what Kensie meant.

"Take a look at them," said Kensie

He pressed a stud on his desk, and a large vid-screen in one of the room's side walls activated. It showed a cramped, dirty cell in Kawlan's jail.

There were five men in the room, which was furnished with only a couple of chairs and a bench. The floor and the walls were poured plastic—easy to wash; and a washing would be needed, Mies could see, for the five had already been able to get the place tolerably unclean with their own spit and dirt. None of them were using any of the furniture. One—obviously the youngest from the scragginess of his sparse facial hair—was seated on the floor, cross-legged. He wore a pair of tattered trousers, a goatskin jacket with the hair worn outside, some kind of shirt beneath it, and some suspiciously new-looking, commercially made boots.

The other four were either standing or leaning against the wall.

One man had shaved down to a mustache, and had his hair cut. Evidently he was something of a dandy. He wore a short Ch'ungese smock over his trousers. The other four were all fully bearded, but none of them showed any trace of gray in their hair. All were lean to the point of stringiness, and wore some variant of trousers, shirt, and jacket, all tattered and many times mended.

Guessing by the emblems on the pendants they wore, Mies took two of them and the boy on the floor to be of the Tager family. The dandy looked as if he might be one of the Morrow family, who had their territory in the mountains behind, and close to, Ch'ung City. The other could be a member of any of a number of families.

Kensie shut the screen off, and its scene vanished, leaving the apparent wall unbroken again.

"Let's forget rank for a moment," he said, "and sit down like neighbors."

The word "neighbors" had a special meaning on the Dorsai, where there was no planetary government and only the shadow of a regional or local government. Families depended on themselves and their neighbors, just as individuals depended on themselves. Kensie got up from behind his desk and led the way over to the lounge section of the room. He seated himself in one of the padded armchair floats and waved Mies to a facing one.

Once they were seated, Kensie smiled again and reached out with his hand.

"Kensie Graeme, Foralie," he said, as if they had just now this moment met. Mies Ohanlon reached out in his turn, felt his fingers enfolded by the much larger hand, and grasped it a second.

"Mies Ohanlon," he said, "Flume Island by birth."

They let go and sat back. Mies waited for the other man to say whatever it was he had in mind to say.

"This is going to sound very grandfatherly. I'm afraid," said Kensie. "But this is your first experience with active duty; and as your ultimate commanding officer I have a responsibility to help you in any way I can. Saying a word of two is one way of helping; and you're perfectly free to pay attention or listen, whichever you want."

"I'll be glad to listen, sir," said Mies.

"No 'sirs,' " said Kensie. "We're off duty for the moment. Just two Dorsai comparing notes, with no more difference in rank than we'd have back home now that you've graduated."

His voice slowed, his eyes focused directly on Mies' and his smile vanished.

"Mies, what I'm going to say to you now may not seem to make very important sense. Believe me, it does. The difference is the same difference that there is between a man being told what to do if he's climbing a mountainside and he's caught in a rock slide, when he's never even seen a rock slide, let alone been caught in one yet. Believe me, if you had, you'd find yourself listening very closely to what I'm going to say."

"My father taught me to believe in listening," said Mies.

"Good, then," said Kensie. "What I'm going to say to you is this. Try never to forget it. You'll find that, as it's always been down through history, wars are fought by boys and girls, but planned by men and women. Whether the boys or girls are good

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or bad doesn't help them one way or another. They don't have any choice, ordinarily, in what they do. But the men and women are either good or bad, and it makes a great difference which."

He paused, looking at Mies. Mies nodded to indicate he was following, so far at least.

"We on the Dorsai," Kensie said, "hire ourselves out to go in harm's way, for the sake of the interstellar credits that can be sent home to keep our people and our world alive. But we're valuable precisely because over several hundred years we've chosen to take the good side rather than the bad. We fight—and we try to fight more effectively than anyone else—but only when that's the last option open to us."

"I know that, sir—Kensie," said Mies.

"Then you know why it's so," Kensie said. "Conflicts are won by things that can't be weighed: friendship, loyalty, courage, and above all, intelligence. The good man or woman of war relies on wits rather than weapons. The ultimate victory is to win without damaging anything, animate or inanimate."

"Yes," said Mies. He had heard this before. It was part of the creed of his father; the one thing that had caught and held the attention of the King of Ch'ung and led to his twenty years of service there.

"You are not yet a man," said Kensie, "in spite of that uniform and the four years you just went through. You're still a boy. Things—certain things that you'll go through—will make you a man; and I've no idea what they'll be, since they're different for everybody. But eventually, whether you want to be or not, you'll be a man—good or bad is going to be up to you. Meanwhile, you're a boy."

Mies nodded. Kensie was only saying what his secret inner self had been saying ever since he left the Academy.

"Now, in that room there," said Kensie. "Are five men. Even the one on the floor, who may be a year or so younger than you are, is a man—and he's got reason to call himself one, since he'll have been put to work as one and held accountable as one since he was twelve. And each and every one of them is going to recognize you as a boy."

Mies felt a heaviness inside him. He had thought of that possibility. Now, face-to-face with it, he found that part of him wanted to shrink from the meeting and the job to come.

"Because they know this," said Kensie, "they'll try to take advantage of the fact. It'll be up to you to stop them every time

they do; and the way you'll stop them best will be by knowing them and understanding them better than they do you, and by being ready for whatever they're going to try before they try it. Because before you get into the family territory proper, they'll have tested you to a point where either they can dominate you or you can dominate them."

He stopped.

"Now," he said, "knowing that, do you still want to go ahead with this assignment? If you don't, if you'd rather go back into the officers' pool on Dorsai and wait for something you feel you could handle better, I'll send you back with no black marks on your record. Think. And tell me."

Mies' computer-generated background briefing lay unfolded on the cabin's small table. It was so long that it ran off the table and pooled in his chair, then spilled onto the floor. For an hour, since the orbital cargo shuttle had begun its descent back to Ceta, Mies Ohanlon had been studying the detailed document. He was hoping against hope to find some simple way to meet the obligations which brought him home.

On Dorsai, pilots learned to penetrate the atmosphere quietly and quickly. On Dorsai, even a so-called civilian pilot would never spend so much time descending.

On Dorsai. That was where he had spent the last four years, learning to "be a Dorsai," as if it could be taught. Despite his doubts, Mies could feel the effect of those years in the way he moved, in his newfound self-confidence, and most of all in his understanding of himself. Dorsai.

But he was now going home, back to Ceta and the dusty, red brick compound of his father's regiment. He was not, however, the typical returning son. The Dorsai exact a stiff price for their training: three years of absolute service. There was no escape, even in death: according to Mies' contract, the Dorsai had first claim on recoverable body parts. Mies had known the terms when he signed the contract, but his first assignment had dampened his enthusiasm. He was returning to Ceta with the cover identity of a mining engineer named Marcus Ignatowski in order to spy upon a country which bordered his own.

Through his cabin's tiny porthole, Mies studied the planet's huge horizon. Ceta, a giant world with surprisingly Earth-like gravity and lushness, was the only inhabited planet circling the yellow star Tau Ceti. Much of its vast landmass remained unex-

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plored, an irresistible temptation to prospectors and adventurers anxious to scratch their fortunes from Ceta's short supply of minerals. Few succeeded.

Some hardy adventurers in the first wave of settlers two centuries earlier had been smarter. They saw that the quickest way to make a fortune was to trade the goods others produced. Their industrious efforts soon created a booming trading economy on Ceta. The resulting rise of great merchant corporations brought great wealth to a select few of Ceta's inhabitants. While the majority of the planet's citizens continued to suffer poverty-stricken lives, these wealthy citizens bent their labors to extending Ceta's influence to other inhabited worlds.

Yet, despite Ceta's immense influence on other worlds, Prince William, the dark figure who engineered Ceta's great expansion of power, has not united the planet's thirty-eight independent countries. Although William has centralized the planet's interstellar commerce and established a World Police Force under his own control, the Cetan civilization has not yet evolved into a true world government. Each country maintains its old traditions, keeps "token" armies, and commissions ambassadors to deal with their neighbors. They have even hired mercenaries, like Mies' father, to train and lead their private armed forces.

It was to one of these countries, the Jacal Mountain Region, that Mies was now going. Kensie Graeme had given him his orders. He was to bail his guides out of the Kawlan city jail and proceed into the Jacal Mountains. There, he would determine the reason for William's sudden interest in the region. If possible, Mies was to aid the natives in maintaining their independence.

Gritting his teeth, Mies gathered his briefing and rolled it up, sealed it in a storage tube, then stuffed it back into his pocket. As soon as he reached Ceta, he intended to hide it in a secure place and leave it there.

The doorbell chimed. Two seconds later, the door opened and Bret Scoles entered, carrying a platter of food. Bret Scoles was Mies' roommate; it would have looked suspicious for Mies, who was supposed to be a simple mining engineer, to have a private cabin. Bret, a tall weathered man with sandy hair, originally introduced himself as a miner and engineer from the world of Coby. Although Bret acted boisterous and pushy, his eyes betrayed a sharp mind with impressive powers of observation. Mies' Dorsai training has led him to conclude that his roommate is more than he appears. At the same time, Bret has pierced Mies'

hastily constructed cover many times, a fact of which Mies is painfully aware.

“How you doin’, mate?” Bret asked.

Mies looked up. “I’m fine. Are they serving breakfast yet?”

“Serving breakfast? They’ve barely got the fat in the fire, mate. I had to give ’em a little of the old bull artistry, or they would of bugged up my tucker.”

“What?” Mies asked.

“My tucker, mate,” Bret answered. He raised his plate a few inches. “The mangy dogs couldn’t make decent tucker if Prince William himself was aboard.”

Mies shook his head; he barely understood a word. He started to prepare for landing. Bret continued to study him with those sharp eyes.

“You a military bloke?” Bret finally asked.

Mies smiled. “No, I’m just going to do a job.”

Bret took a pull from his huge beer mug. “You don’t figure, mate. I’ve been giving you the once-over, and you don’t figure. What do you do for a crust?”

Instead of answering, Mies finished his packing and stepped toward the door. Bret set his beer aside and reached for his knife.

Before Bret could pull the knife from its sheath, Mies was prepared to act, thanks to his exhaustive Dorsai training. As Bret drew and threw the knife, Mies observed the angle of the blade’s flight, its probably velocity, and its likely destination. The knife followed a slow, arcing path leading to Mies’ chest, but it was coming handle-first instead of blade-first.

Should Mies:

1. Grab the knife in midair and throw it back, attempting to kill Bret instantly and without a sound? If so, turn to Section 3.

2. Grab the knife in midair, press the tip against Bret’s throat, and warn him not to move a muscle? If so, turn to Section 5.

3. Allow the knife handle to strike him in the chest and fake surprise? If so, turn to Section 14.

—2—

Mies saved the liquor, which, according to the label, was brewed on Earth. It was called Red Ned. The only unusual thing about the liquor was its bitter taste.

The public address system crackled loudly, demanding Mies' attention. "We are experiencing a slight loss of power. Passengers please stay in your cabins and follow the life-support drill." The light faded to a soft amber color. Automatic locks sealed the door. Mies, easily overriding the locks, quickly left the room.

Turn to Section 4.

—3—

Mies snatched the knife from midair and threw it at Bret. Bret, his mouth open with surprise, tried to dodge. He was not quick enough, however, and the knife gashed his neck. Blood poured from the wound and he fell unconscious.

A tone sounded on the intercom system, and a pleasant female voice said, "Attention, passengers: please clear all corridors and go to the first available cabin. Repeat: please clear all corridors immediately."

Mies knelt and searched Bret and his luggage. Mies would have to decide what to do with Bret after he found out more about the man.

Turn to Section 7.

— 4 —

Mies left his cabin. A foglike sealant poured out of the floor vents in the hallway. The sealant was an emergency precaution used only when the crew expected a catastrophic breach in the hull.

The corridors were empty, except for a repair robot that zipped down a side corridor carrying a gas canister. Mies followed the robot toward the engine rooms, running to keep up.

The robot entered the starboard engine room. Mies saw two security officers and the ship's captain standing near the entrance.

"You!" called one of the security officers. "What are you doing here? Return to your quarters!" The security officer stepped out of the doorway brandishing a stun weapon.

"Officer," Mies stammered. "I was only . . ."

"Silence. Return to your cabin."

"Hold on, Henderson," the captain said. "Bring me that man."

The guard stood aside and Mies entered. The captain and four others stood before a vid-screen near the entrance of the huge room. The captain looked Mies over.

"Aren't you Marcus Ignatowski?" asked the captain.

Mies nodded.

"Your travel permit was issued on Dorsai, in a military port." It was less a question than a statement of fact.

"You are well informed," Mies observed.

The captain nodded at the console. "Not really. You are a mercenary?"

"No."

"Everybody from Dorsai is a mercenary."

"You are mistaken, sir," Mies responded coolly.

"Am I?" the captain muttered, his tone indicating that he did not believe Mies. "Be that as it may, we caught a terrorist attempting to sabotage the starboard engine. He is threatening to destroy the ship. My engineer thinks he can do it."

The captain turned his attention to the vid-screen. It showed a single man working at an access panel. An unconscious crewman lay at the base of the picture.

Section 4

"He knows his way around a linkship," said the man operating the vid-screen. He wore the insignia of the chief engineer on his collar.

"Stop admiring his skill, Chief," the captain said. "What's he doing now?"

"Patching his scrambler into the computer mainframe so he can override our programs. Once he completes that, we have no way of stopping him."

Mies nodded at the security officer standing next to him. "What prevents you from sending the troops after the terrorist?"

"Show him," ordered the captain. The engineer punched new instructions into the vid-screen. It showed a repair robot standing in a doorway, brandishing a cutting torch. In front of the doorway, the remains of an indeterminate number of security officers lay scattered about.

"Now do you understand?" asked the captain.

Mies nodded. "A makeshift combat robot, probably reprogrammed rather hastily and under some degree of remote control."

"Dorsai training includes instruction in this type of situation," the captain continued, his words more a plea than an observation.

Mies did not respond. Unpleasant memories of painful training sessions with similar remote-controlled robots surfaced in his mind. The robots he recalled were fast, maneuverable, deceptive, and well armed. Only the best pupils had lasted more than thirty seconds against the training models.

"That thing has killed five of my best men," the captain explained. "Ordinary men don't stand a chance against it. I was hoping you would be slightly extraordinary, or we'll all die."

The captain waited patiently for Mies' reply.

If Mies refuses, turn to Section 23.

If Mies accepts the challenge, turn to Section 19.

— 5 —

Mies grabbed the knife handle in midair, then leaped at Bret. He pressed the blade against the surprised man's throat.

"Take it easy, mate," Bret said nervously. "I meant no harm. Just drawing the long bow, you know."

Mies pressed the blade harder against the miner's throat.

"It was a game, a joke," Bret continued.

Mies moved away and Bret relaxed. "Keep the games to yourself," Mies said. He tossed the knife back to Bret. "Nice weapon," he added.

"Thanks," Bret said.

An attention tone chimed from the public address speaker. "Emergency alert!" said a woman's voice. "All passengers must clear the hallways immediately. Go to your cabin or any public area. Repeat: all passengers must clear the hallways immediately. Thank you for your cooperation."

"Something's up," said Bret. He pointed his knife at Mies. "I think I'll be a blow-in and see what's happening. How about joining me?"

Mies hesitated.

"Look, mate," Bret continued, "you're not sore about that knife thing, are you? If you wanna come along, I wouldn't put your bum in the meat grinder. Know what I mean?"

"Yes," said Mies, taking Bret's knife and setting it on the desk, "I know what you mean."

Should Mies go with Bret? If so, turn to Section 20.

Or should Mies stay behind and search Bret's luggage? If so, turn to Section 7.

— 6 —

Mies returned to his cabin and waited. A few minutes later, he heard a dull roar. The public address system crackled to life. "We have experienced a slight loss of . . . *zsst!*"

An explosion blew the door off Mies' cabin, and the room filled with fire. Mies took a breath of flaming air, then screamed in pain. He died before his body hit the floor.

Turn to Section 29.

— 7 —

Mies searched Bret's personal effects. Everything was in order. Mies found clothes, a whetstone, papers confirming Bret's occupation as a miner, and a picture of Bret with a young brunette.

The only thing that seemed odd was Bret's expensive satchel. Mies ran his fingers over the case and noticed that the leather was stretched over a hard metal shell.

The satchel was locked.

If Mies tries to break the lock, turn to Section 12.

If Mies tries to pick the lock, roll two six-sided dice: On a roll of 8 or higher, turn to Section 221.

On a roll of 7 or less, turn to Section 12.

— 8 —

Carrying his single piece of luggage, Mies left the ship as quickly as possible. A throng of reporters awaited the passengers at the entrance to the terminal. Mies wanted to avoid being interviewed, so he quickly worked his way along the edge of the crowd of debarking passengers and out the terminal gate.

Kawlan has never been a hospitable city. Its gray and smoky atmosphere was a by-product of the coal fields and oil rigs that dotted the landscape just beyond the city gates. Mies would not enter the city at all, except that his companions awaited him in the city's stinking jail.

A dozen empty rickshaws stood at the street corner. The owners squatted in a circle in front of the rickshaws, gambling with dice. Mies hired a tough old coolie to pull him through the fog-shrouded streets, then settled back in his rickshaw to reflect on his situation.

The Five Cities have always been a loose coalition of competing city-states, each struggling to keep its head above water by standing on its neighbors' shoulders. After endless decades of struggle, the leaders of these states had decided to band together in the face of the threat presented by Prince William. They hired Dorsai to protect their hastily formed union. A side effect of hiring Dorsai was that the petty fighting between the Five Cities came to a halt. In recent years, the Five Cities have remained peaceful and strong.

But Mies saw many signs of new tension as he rode through the streets. Many shops were closed, even during the busy midday shopping hours. Soldiers in full battle dress guarded major intersections. The citizens scurried about their daily tasks as if they were afraid to be caught in the open. Army listening stations hovered a hundred yards overhead.

Although Kawlan was only a way station for Mies, Mies knew that he must use his time in the city to learn more about the people inhabiting his target destination, the Jacal Mountains. He could use a number of different tactics to gather information.

Section 9

Mies can try to talk to officials in the government. Turn to Section 34.

Mies can interrogate the coolie pulling his rickshaw. Turn to Section 45.

Mies can read about the Jacal Mountains and their inhabitants at the public library. Turn to Section 35.

After he finishes gathering information, Mies must take stock of his situation. Turn to Section 30.

— 9 —

“Welcome home, my boy!” exclaimed Hanson Ohanlon, laying his hands on Mies’ shoulders. “Welcome home.”

“Father,” said Mies, “it’s good to see you again.” They began walking toward the exit.

A dozen news reporters hovered at a respectful distance, their cameras and microphones trained on the two men. Finally, a young man disregarded decades of ingrained custom and asked a direct question: “May we have a statement for the populace?”

Hanson Ohanlon stared harshly at the impertinent man. “You are very young,” growled Mies’ father. “You should not interrupt your superiors.”

“Father, let him speak,” said Mies. Hanson grunted his displeasure, but said nothing more.

“Tuan Ohanlon,” the reporter continued, again without regard for local custom. Only Mies’ father should be addressed at Tuan. “Tell us what happened on the linkship *Urshanabi*.”

“Nothing,” Mies answered. “My part was overrated. I was merely a passenger.”

“Forgive my insistence,” said the reporter, “but the captain claims you saved the entire ship.”

“He’s mistaken, I’m afraid. I did nothing to save the *Urshanabi*.”

They reached the exit. Hanson Ohanlon’s aircar awaited them outside the gate. As Mies and his father stepped into the car, the

reporter shouted one last question: "Is it true you were traveling under an assumed name?"

Mies pretended not to hear and closed the aircar door.

"You are wise not to brag, son," Mies' father said. "The press agents of my royal employer are much more efficient. Soon all Ceta will believe you saved the planet from an invasion of Friendlies."

"That is not what I desire, Father," Mies said. "I will not tolerate any exaggeration of my part in this incident."

"Royal policy intends otherwise. We have your best interests at heart."

"No, you don't!" Mies snapped. "I can . . ." Mies stopped himself midsentence. Was this how a Dorsai should act? But the old man did not understand. Notoriety would be a problem right now.

"Keep an open mind," Hanson said. "I've arranged a little reception at home."

As the aircar entered the red brick compound of his father's command, bittersweet pain filled Mies' chest. To the west, the cliffs rose high and golden in the afternoon sun. He had suppressed his love for this country through the long years of his training, but now that he was home, he shivered with emotion.

The aircar stopped in front of his father's house, and the two men entered. "Dress for dinner, son," Mies' father said. "You know the way to your room."

An hour later, Mies entered the dining room. It was an opulent room. Golden light shimmered over the polished woodwork and silken tapestries. The white bone china was as fine as any from ancient Earth. It was so delicate that Mies would not have been surprised if the saucers suddenly floated to the ceiling.

Around the table sat five soldiers decked out in dress uniforms that almost matched the splendor of the dining room.

"Mies," his father called, "I want to introduce you to the true leaders of the Five Cities." He spoke the words flatly and without any trace of inflection, a clear sign that what he was saying was politically expedient, but without basis in fact. The fattest commander smiled weakly, then presented his hand to Mies. It was as moist and soft as cake.

"Your father has told us of your exploits," the fat man rasped.

Mies smiled in return. A shiver of repulsion crept up his back. He did not understand how his father could deal with men like

Section 9

these. Their ribbons and medals were jewelry, not badges of valor or wisdom.

"We have an offer for you," the fat man continued. "We could use an experienced officer like yourself in our army."

Mies did not respond.

"We have a crisis on our northern border," said the thin man. Idly, Mies noticed that the medal-laden uniform was that of an artillery officer. "The mountain tribes in the Jacal Range have closed the roads."

Mies raised an eyebrow to show interest, then glanced at his politely smiling father. How much, Mies wondered, did his father know of his mission?

"Tell me more, sir," Mies said.

Mies' father interrupted by ringing for the servant. The bell also served as a warning to Mies not to appear too interested.

The artillery commander continued. "These mountain people have sophisticated power weapons and needle guns. They are shredding our militia."

"Come now," guffawed the fat commander. "I think 'shredding' is too harsh a word."

"What about the Dorsai advisors?" asked Mies, ignoring the fat man.

"Their contracts specifically exclude these types of actions. They will give us advice, but nothing more. This is strictly a Cetan problem, they claim, and does not concern mercenaries."

"You forget," Mies interrupted. "I am a Dorsai mercenary."

"No," asserted the thin man. "You were born here, under the sky of Ceta. You filled your lungs with Cetan air long before you knew of the world called Dorsai. Your blood and bones are made of this world's soil. You may have visited a distant world, but you owe your allegiance to this planet."

Mies had to fight to control his appearance, for the man's words rang of truth.

"We came here to offer you a job," said the fat man. "The Five Cities need men of your training and experience. We want you to find out what is happening in the Jacal Mountains."

Before Mies chooses any of the options below, he must take stock of his situation. Turn to Section 36. Return to this section afterward.

Should Mies turn the commanders down and try to learn more about the Jacal mountain people? If so, turn to Section 21.

Or should he accept the offer? If so, turn to Section 24.

Perhaps he should quietly return to Kawlan and meet his companions now languishing in the town jail. If so, turn to Section 17.

— 10 —

The ancient needle gun only appeared ancient. It had a state-of-the-art sighting and tracking system which was heavily protected against electronic scrambling. The gun was hardly a miner's usual sidearm.

The public address system crackled to life. "Attention, passengers: we are experiencing a loss of power. Please return to the nearest cabin and follow the life-support drill." The light faded to an amber color and a few moments later, the cabin door locks automatically sealed. Mies, curious about the cause of the power loss, decided to investigate. He easily picked the locks and left the room.

Should Mies take the gun with him? If so, note on a piece of scratch paper that he is carrying a needle gun. Turn to Section 4.

— 11 —

Mies leaped to the robot's left side and kicked at the central control panel. The robot swung a heavy wrench at Mies. It also emitted a high-pitched squeal to impair Mies' balance by disorienting his inner ear.

Return to Section 19 to complete the combat. Because of his clever move, Mies has the initiative and attacks first each round.

— 12 —

Mies used his pocket knife to break the lock spring. The satchel opened. Inside, Mies saw a bottle of contraband liquor, some documents, and an ancient needle gun. Suddenly, smoke poured from the bottom of the satchel. Within seconds the entire valise was burning.

Mies may be able to save one item. Roll two dice. If the result is 2–4, Mies fails to save anything. If the result is 5–12, Mies can save one item of your choice.

If Mies fails to save anything, turn to Section 4.

If Mies saves the contraband liquor, turn to Section 2.

If Mies saves the personal papers, turn to Section 16.

If Mies saves the needle gun, turn to Section 10.

— 13 —

The robot squealed, buzzed, then crashed to the ground. Before Mies had a chance to gather his wits, a dozen security officers rushed past him into the area containing the terrorist. A few shots rang out, then all was silent. The captain rushed past, stopping long enough to call, “Thanks, Dorsai!”

“Anytime . . .” Mies answered, but the captain was already out of earshot.

When Mies returned to his cabin, he was surprised to find that Bret’s luggage, along with any sign of Bret, was gone. Mies briefly considered trying to find out why, but decided to let the matter drop. The last thing he wanted was to draw attention to himself, and inquiries about Bret’s disappearance would do just that.

Deciding to take advantage of the extra room, Mies rearranged his luggage. In the single desk drawer, he found Bret's knife, recently cleaned and sharpened. He clipped the sheathed weapon to his belt. A good throwing knife was always handy.

Mies relaxed in the relative luxury of a private cabin for the next day. Toward the end of the day, as he was still pondering Bret's disappearance, his message screen's attention light brightened. Mies pressed the acceptance switch.

"Communication from Ceta for Mies Ohanlon," said the communications officer.

"I'm afraid you have the wrong cabin," Mies answered quickly, alarmed that his cover had been compromised.

"Nonsense!" exclaimed a familiar voice. The screen blinked off, then showed the image of a granite-tough face with long scar above the left eye.

"How did you know I was arriving, Father?" Mies asked.

"Your picture is being broadcast on all the news channels," the man answered. "You're quite a hero, you know."

"No!" snapped Mies. This was not the way Mies intended to begin his assignment. Spies did not usually announce their arrival to the media.

"What's wrong?" his father demanded, then added, "You can explain when I meet you at the terminal."

Mies sighed. "I'll be happy to see you again, Father."

"And I you," answered his father, ignoring the obvious disappointment in Mies' voice. Did he know of Mies' secret mission?

The screen blinked, then the communications officer returned. "We're preparing to land now, sir."

Turn to Section 9.

— 14 —

The knife thudded against Mies's chest, then fell to the floor. He faked a look of surprise, gaping and raising his eyebrows. Bret let out a whoop and slapped his knee. "Sorry, mate," he gasped, "but I wish you could see your face! You look like a blind freddy that's just been bitten on the arse!"

Before Mies could respond, the public address system crackled

to life. "Attention, passengers: please clear the hallways. Return to your cabin or the nearest available public room. Repeat: please clear all hallways immediately."

"Let's see what they're trying to pull, heh?" said Bret, grabbing his knife. He slapped Mies on the back as he headed for the door.

Should Mies go with Bret? If so, turn to Section 20.

Or should he stay behind and search Bret's luggage? If so, turn to Section 7.

— 15 —

Despite his instinctive urge to attack the robot, Mies forced himself to stand perfectly still. The robot swung a heavy wrench at Mies' head, but the arc fell short. The robot hesitated while its controller reevaluated the situation.

Perfect, Mies thought. He released his trained reflexes and attacked the drone in a flurry of fists and feet.

Return to Section 19 to finish the combat. Because Mies outsmarted the drone's controller, Mies rolls the dice before the drone. He also attacks on Chart A instead of Chart B (as stated in Section 19). The drone attacks on Chart D instead of Chart C.

— 16 —

The documents betrayed nothing unusual about Bret. They were personal papers completely consistent with his cover as a miner from Coby. "Could I be wrong about him?" Mies asked himself.

The public address system crackled to life. "Attention, passengers: we are experiencing a loss of power. Please return to the

nearest cabin and follow the life-support drill." The light faded to an amber color and, a few moments later, the door locks automatically sealed. Mies decided to investigate the cause of the power loss. He easily picked the locks and left the room.

Turn to Section 4.

— 17 —

Mies sneaked through the streets of Kawlan toward the jail like a beggar, hoping that he appeared just as anonymous. He had already created too much excitement; his mission was in jeopardy because of the publicity surrounding the terrorist incident. If Prince William were to take an interest in him or his doings, Mies would be forced to give up his mission or expose his purpose on Ceta.

Therefore, he paid the bond for his five jailed companions without needless conversation with the jail keeper. Thankfully, the man showed no signs of recognizing him. A few minutes later, a guard took him to the prison gate. His five companions emerged, shaved almost bald and washed relatively clean. Still wearing their prison fatigues, they walked over to Mies and, without being too obvious, placed themselves in a position to cut off any avenue of retreat for Mies. They then examined their benefactor with a mixture of distrust and loathing.

"Ignatowski?" asked one.

"Yes," Mies said, not letting his voice betray his bewilderment at their attitude. "I come from Kensie Graeme. He needs your help."

"Since when do Dorsai need the help of Jacal savages?" asked another. The group chuckled menacingly.

"We don't have much time," Mies said, trying to take control of the situation. "We must go."

"Our mountains have stood tall and proud for numberless years," said the man who had spoken first. "They will not crumble tomorrow. We will wait until the twin moons set before returning home."

"That will not happen for two weeks!" Mies protested. The leader simply shrugged.

Should Mies try to persuade the Jacals to start earlier? If so, turn to Section 28.

Or should Mies wait two weeks, using the time to learn all he can about the Jacal Mountains and his companions? If so, turn to Section 46.

— 18 —

Mies decided to take the disc he recorded to the communications room to see if he could determine the message's origination point. As he stepped into the hallway, the public address system delivered another message. "Attention, passengers: we are experiencing a loss of power. Please go to the nearest cabin and follow the life-support drill." The light faded to an amber color and, a few moments later, Mies heard the cabin door locks automatically seal.

As Mies continued down the empty corridor, a fog began to fill the air. The fog, Mies knew, was a special sealant used only when a catastrophic hull breach was expected. He continued toward the communications room with no small amount of concern.

Mies found the communications room a few minutes later. It was a clear plastic dome, transparent to most forms of wave energy and particle beam emissions. The bubble was crammed with equipment used to interpret transmissions of any type into an understandable form. Unfortunately, the bubble was also bustling with technicians.

As Mies considered his options, a crew member left the room, hanging his clean room gear on a hook outside the door. Mies quickly grabbed the coat and slipped it on, then entered the bubble. Most of the technicians stood clustered around the central vid-screen.

"How bad is it?" he asked, assuming a familiar tone.

"Terrible and getting worse by the second," answered one of the technicians, not bothering to look up from the vid-screen. "He's patched a scrambler into the starboard engine computer terminal. It appears he intends to blow the ship."

"Great," Mies commented. He stepped over to a directional analysis computer and put his disc into its drive. He doubted that

any of the technicians would pay him any attention. Fortunately, the machine had been used recently and Mies did not need to enter any security codes. He entered his instructions and waited for the computer to do its work.

A few moments later, the terminal displayed the computer's conclusions:

ANALYSIS OF SYSTEM DISC:

RADIO WAVE FORM, LOW FREQUENCY: 020234889.000

DIRECTION OF BEAM: TAU CETI PLANETARY SYSTEM

PLANET: CETA, GLOBAL COORDINATES: 21.89-32.90

Mies memorized the numbers and estimated the location they indicated: Prince William's organizational base!

The technicians shouted. Mies stepped over behind them. On the vid-screen he saw a repair robot. A lone man was attacking it with a needle gun. The robot easily avoided the man's aim, then lashed out with a heavy wrench and knocked him against the bulkhead. The man's head left a bloody smear on the wall.

"My God!" someone whispered.

"That's number four!" someone else exclaimed.

"What the hell is wrong with it?"

Mies knew. Someone had altered the robot's programming, turning it into a deadly adversary. They were undoubtedly operating it via remote control from someplace aboard the ship. He had received training dealing with these types of situations. Such robots could be sneaky, fast opponents. Their standard tools provided a nasty array of weapon systems. But they did have one weakness.

The vid-screen changed its picture. It now showed a skinny man with a single bolt of black hair clinging to his otherwise bald head. He looked directly into the camera. "Don't send anyone else, or I'll turn this ship into a fireball!"

Mies left the communications bubble.

Should Mies go back to his cabin? If so, turn to Section 6.

Or should Mies go to the starboard engine room and try to disarm the terrorist? If so, turn to Section 19.

— 19 —

Mies moved cautiously down the corridor, expecting to meet the drone at any moment. Unlike his predecessors, he was unarmed. Mies knew that all repair robots were equipped with safety overrides, even on their defensive circuits. No matter who was controlling a repair robot, it would use only as much force as was necessary to overcome its opponent. If its opponent carried a heavy weapon, the drone would adapt one of its tool systems to be a weapon of equivalent destructive force. If, however, the robot's opponent was armed only with his hands and feet, the drone would use something less deadly. Mies knew that his only advantage lay in misleading the drone as to his potential destructiveness; an unarmed man normally represented only a small threat to a repair robot. If the man was a Dorsai, however, the robot might be surprised and destroyed before it could adjust.

Mies remembered his lessons. Machines could defend only against the predictable. They suffered terrible disadvantages when facing the irrational or unpredictable.

As Mies rounded the last corner, he nearly gagged on the acrid smell of burnt human flesh which still hung in the air. He continued cautiously. A body lay directly ahead, smoke still rising from its torso. Nearby, another man was crumpled against the wall, his head cocked at an angle that left no doubt that he was dead.

Nothing moved in the cluttered corridor. Mies stepped forward cautiously, but there was no sign of the robot. He saw every detail of the hallway with unnatural clarity. Processing sensory input at top speed, he slipped into mental patterns impressed by years of rigorous training. His muscles were poised, ready for instant action. He was no longer simply Mies. He was a Dorsai warrior stalking a dangerous foe.

He heard a hiss ahead and instantly held his breath. The robot was releasing a chemical into the air. If he breathed a whiff of the stuff, he could be fighting a phantom instead of the drone. Without conscious thought, he spread his feet to shoulder width and bent his knees, at the same time raising his arms so that his hands were ready to strike.



Section 19

The drone was close, very close.

It was clinging to the ceiling directly above him!

Combat:

Before the battle begins, Mies must make a tactical decision which affects whether he attacks before or after the robot. His decision might also affect which combat chart he uses to attack the robot. Read the list of Mies' options below.

Mies' instinct tells him to jump up and deliver a series of smashing blows to the robot. If this is what he should do, turn to Section 22.

Mies' Dorsai training urges him to ignore his instinct and leap to one side, then attack. If this is what Mies should do, turn to Section 11.

Perhaps Mies should ignore both his instinct and his training, instead forcing himself to stand perfectly still. If this is what Mies should do, turn to Section 15.

After reading the list, choose one option and read the appropriate section. Then return to this section (19) and complete the combat. Remember, Mies can choose only one option.

Mies Ohanlan's values:

Manpower: 2

Ordnance: 6

Attack Strength: 24 (use Melee instead of Ordnance)

Stealth: 10

Morale: 11

Melee: 12

Repair robot's values:

Manpower: 1

Ordnance: 10

Attack Strength: 10

Stealth: 8

Morale: 10

Melee: 10

The robot fights on Chart D. Mies fights on Chart B. Unless instructed otherwise, Mies has the initiative and attacks first each round.

After every round of combat (a round is one attack by Mies and one attack by the drone), Mies faces one of three situations:

- 1. Both Mies and the robot are still active. If Mies elects to continue combat, roll the dice again and consult the combat charts. If Mies attacked before the robot on the first round of combat, he attacks first again. If he attacked after the robot on the first round of combat, he attacks second again. If both Miles and the robot are still active, but Mies wishes to flee combat, turn to Section 27.*
- 2. Mies' Manpower falls to 0. Turn to Section 29.*
- 3. The drone's Manpower falls to 0. In this case, turn to Section 13.*

—20—

Mies and Bret left their cabin. A foglike sealant poured into the empty corridor from the floor vents. Mies knew that the sealant was used only when the captain expected a catastrophic breach of the hull.

“Christ in a handbarrow,” said Bret. “That stuff stinks worse than a sheep’s shorts!”

A repair robot carrying a gas canister zipped down the corridor, paying no attention to the two men. Mies, not knowing what else to do, followed the robot. It led them, huffing and puffing from the exertion required to keep pace, to the starboard engine room. Two security officers and the ship’s captain stood just inside the door. They were looking over an engineer’s shoulder at a vid-screen.

“You two!” snapped one of the security officers. “Return to your quarters immediately!” He stepped into the corridor, brandishing his stun pistol.

“Look, Constable . . .” Bret began.

"Silence!" the guard demanded. "Return to your cabins."

"Hold on, Henderson," the captain interrupted. "Aren't you Marcus Ignatowski?" he asked, addressing Mies.

Mies nodded.

"Your travel documents state your point of origin as Dorsai."

"Your memory is very good," Mies observed noncommittally.

The captain shrugged. "You left a military port; are you a mercenary?"

"Look, Captain," Bret interrupted, "me and my mate were just out for a stroll . . ."

"Quiet!" the captain ordered. He considered Bret for a moment, then addressed the security officers. "Take this man back to his cabin," he said. "And keep him there, if you have to weld the door shut."

Each security guard grabbed one of Bret's arms. "Hold on a bloomin' minute," Bret objected. The guards, ignoring his string of profanities, dragged Bret down the hallway.

After Bret was out of earshot, the captain continued. "Are you a mercenary, Mr. Ignatowski?"

"No, sir."

"Everybody on Dorsai is a mercenary," the captain insisted.

"I'm sorry, sir," Mies answered. "You seem to have been misinformed."

"As you say," the captain answered. The captain did not believe Mies' denial. "Be that as it may, we have a bad situation here. A terrorist is trying to blow the starboard engine. My chief engineer says that if he succeeds, the whole ship goes. We think he has a good chance."

The captain pointed to the vid-screen. It showed a single man working with some wires inside an access panel. A crewman lay motionless at the base of the screen's view.

"He knows his way around a linkship," commented the engineer. "I think he's patching a scrambler into the main computer. When he finishes, we won't be able to counter his programs. He'll shut down the engine's cooling system, and we won't be able to start it up again."

"Why not send in your men now?" Mies asked the captain.

"Show him," the captain said. The engineer punched a new set of instructions into the vid-screen and it blinked. A moment later, it showed a repair robot standing in a doorway. In front of the doorway, the remains of an indeterminate number of security officers lay scattered about.

"Now do you understand?" the captain asked.

Mies nodded. "A makeshift combat robot, probably reprogrammed hastily. It must be operated via remote control."

"Dorsai training includes instruction in this type of situation," the captain continued, his words more a plea than an observation.

Mies did not respond. Unpleasant memories of painful training sessions with similar remote-controlled robots surfaced in his mind. The robots he recalled were fast, maneuverable, deceptive, and well armed. Only the best pupils lasted more than thirty seconds against the training models.

"That thing has killed five of my best men," the captain explained.

The captain paused, then asked, "Will you give it a try?"

If Mies refuses to try, turn to Section 23.

If Mies accepts the challenge, turn to Section 19.

—21—

Mies sat in his father's library, watching an informational video disc. "The Jacal Mountain Range was formed by the collision of two continental plates about ten million years ago. The enormous pressure caused by the collision caused the edge of one plate to buckle upward, creating a rugged line of mountains running the entire length of the contact area between the two continents. In fact, this collision is still continuing today. We see evidence of it in the region's numerous volcanoes, frequent earthquakes, and the sudden shifting of large areas of land."

Mies turned off the video. The geology of the Jacal Range interested him far less than its sociology. Fortunately, he had found a few history discs describing the colonization of the area. The original settlers were anarchists fleeing, as they saw it, the oppression of organized government. They chose the wild Jacal Mountains because of the range's remote location and the difficulty any government would have trying to administer the area.

This ruggedness also appealed to another group of less idealistic people. As word spread of the new settlements in the Jacal

Mountains, thieves, murderers, escaped convicts, and other social outcasts came to the range to prey on the anarchists.

It was a dark time for the mountain people, but they did not forsake their belief in complete individual freedom, nor did they ask any government to save them. Instead, each family dealt with the predators in its own way. Some families moved further into the mountains, establishing tiny communities even in the most remote valleys. Other families temporarily banded together to fight their would-be oppressors. Some families even welcomed the outcasts into their ranks.

Over the generations, these widely separated families grew into clans of fiercely independent mountain dwellers. As the neighboring Ch'ung Kingdom expanded its borders, it tried to assert its influence over the mountain clans. The clans' opposition, however, was stiff, and the Ch'ung soldiers soon feared extended campaigns in the lonely Jacal Mountains more than they feared the penalty for desertion. Eventually, the Ch'ung dynasty decided that a few thousand miles of mountain terrain was not worth the effort of colonization.

The mountain tribes returned to their independent existence, unaffected by the creed of greed and deceit that ruled the rest of Ceta.

Mies' father walked into the room, interrupting Mies' thoughts. "Turn on the local channel," he commanded. Mies obeyed automatically.

The vid-screen displayed a picture of his cabinmate aboard the linkship, Bret Scoles. The announcer's bland voice explained that Bret's body was found in the ship's cargo hold. The police have not yet apprehended the primary suspect in the case.

After the report ended, Mies' father said, "A friend called to warn me: you are the only suspect."

"Am I?" Mies commented.

"The report is Prince William's doing," his father continued. "He personally ordered the investigating detectives replaced with his own men. I've no doubt he also instructed them as to what their conclusions will be."

"I must leave," Mies said, rising.

"Running will do no good. They will convict you whether you are absent or present at the trial. They will then 'discover' a conspiracy involving me, and extend that conspiracy to all Dorsai on the planet."

"They'll never establish a convincing trail of evidence."

"They will," his father countered. "That is how William broke the Brainerd Coalition. He is a master at twisting public opinion; by morning all Dorsai on duty here will be under suspicion."

Mies knew that his father's conclusion was correct. He also knew, from his father's tone of voice, that the elder Ohanlon had thought of a solution.

"What do you suggest?" he asked.

"Turn yourself in."

"Father!" Mies exclaimed.

"This is the only way to foil William's plan," his father said, placing his hands on Mies' shoulders. "It will demonstrate that we respect the laws and institutions of Ceta."

"I won't last a day in their custody!" Mies shouted. He pushed his father away. "You're condemning me in order to save face?"

"You are reacting emotionally," his father said. "Control yourself. You are supposed to be a Dorsai."

"There must be some other way," Mies said.

"Show me," his father answered, already knowing that his solution was the only solution.

Mies turned to the window. Forcing any concern for his own life from his mind, he considered his dilemma. If he turned himself in, he would probably not live to complete his mission. What was more important, he asked himself: his assignment or the Dorsai reputation on Ceta?

Should Mies turn himself over to Prince William's police? If so, turn to Section 33.

Or should he escape into the mountains and continue his mission? If this is what he should do, turn to Section 48.

—22—

The repair robot had fixed itself to the ceiling above Mies' head. Mies leaped straight up, swinging both his fists at the drone's central sensor panel. The robot moved aside quickly and extended a heavy wrench. Mies instinctively prepared to duck the coming attack.

Section 23

He remembered his combat instructor's words, "Never use a direct attack on an automatic defense system!"

The repair robot rolls first on all combat rolls. In addition, the robot attacks on Chart B instead of Chart D as listed in Section 19. Mies attacks on Chart C instead of Chart B.

Return to Section 19 to complete the battle.

—23—

"My suggestion," Mies said, "is to give the man whatever he wants."

"He wants to blow up the ship!" shouted the chief engineer.

"You refuse to help, Mr. Ignatowski?" asked the captain.

"I'm just a mining engineer," Mies answered. "I'm not qualified to attack man or machine."

The chief rose and removed his coat. "Then I'll have a go at that thing."

"Request denied," snapped the captain. "If you get killed—"

"There won't be a ship to repair," replied the engineer, glancing coolly at Mies.

Five minutes later, the engineer entered the vid-screen picture, carrying a long piece of metal attached to a battery pack on his belt via two copper wires. The repair robot extended a torque wrench. The engineer suddenly stopped and stood completely motionless. The drone swung the wrench at a space three feet in front of the engineer, missing him cleanly. The engineer flipped a switch on his belt, then touched the metal rod to the robot's body.

The robot let out a high-pitched whine, then stumbled backward into a wall. It extended several torches and flailed them about randomly. The engineer dropped to the floor, but Mies could not tell whether he was struck or was just ducking. A second later, the drone crashed to the floor and its activation lights faded.

The captain punched a command sequence into the vid-screen, then said, "Robot deactivated. Security team to starboard engine room; use deadly force if necessary."

The captain punched another command sequence into the vid-screen and it displayed the chief engineer's smiling face. "For a minute there, I thought I had misjudged its programming," the engineer said.

"What did you do to it?" the captain asked.

"After observing the drone for a few minutes," he explained, "I realized that repair robots are programmed only for defense. They meet aggressors only with the level of force the aggressor displays, and I gambled that the terrorist hadn't had enough time to completely eliminate that basic programming. So I went in with what looked like a metal pipe to the drone's sensors."

"But it was so much faster than you," the captain interrupted. "How did you avoid getting your head smashed?"

"The robot has a computer brain. That means, no matter who is controlling it via remote, it is programmed with reactions to predictable actions. Standing still when something swings a metal club at you is not a normal reaction, so the drone's response was inappropriate and it missed," he lectured. "Then I turned on my electromagnet and polarized the robot's programs. Of course, if the robot had detected a magnetic field when I approached, the terrorist would have predicted my plan. That's why I had to use an electromagnet, which I could turn off until I needed it."

"Brilliant!" the captain responded. "Now check on the terrorist's handiwork. I'm sure that the security team has eliminated him by now."

"Aye-aye, Captain," the engineer said.

Turn to Section 27.

— 24 —

Two days after accepting the commission into the Five Cities military, Mies entered an army camp outside the city of Kawlan. He was met by three officers whose troops guard the northern borders. Mies asked each officer to brief him as they toured the camp.

"The clansmen are barbarians," said Burke, the first officer. He sported a drooping mustache and long, braided locks. "They live in wooden huts and scratch their living from rock-strewn

Section 24

valleys. They are descended from thieves and murderers, and their society has degenerated in the last hundred years. But in my last action, we saw signs that the Ch'ung Kingdom is supplying them with arms."

Mies removed a micro-recorder from his pocket and turned it on. "Tell me what happened."

"We received a report of armed Jacals moving south with a herd of cattle and camels. We mounted in two trucks and departed in order to intercept them. About two kilometers from Haven Pass, we sighted the enemy approaching our position. They were dirty rabble. I sent one truck ahead to disperse them."

"You split your force in the face of the enemy?" Mies asked.

"A routine maneuver, Group-leader. Jacals normally run the moment they see our trucks," Burke explained.

The thin, sandy-haired officer on Burke's right stared incredulously at his comrade. "We have never found that . . .

"Quiet, Henry," Mies ordered. "Let him finish."

Burke gave Henry a menacing glance, then continued, "The Jacals did not withdraw as expected. My men fired over their heads. Suddenly, we heard a tremendous explosion and a power beam sliced the truck's cabin in half. It rolled, spilling the occupants onto the ground. Rather than risking the remainder of my command, I ordered the second truck to retreat.

"When we returned with a relief column, the Jacals had staked out the bodies of our dead. The savages had torn out the corpses' eyes."

"Who saw the Jacals mutilate the bodies of your men?" Mies asked.

"No one, Group-leader," Burke responded. "We had returned to camp for help."

"Then how do you know your men were dead when the Jacals ripped their eyes out? And how did a bunch of savages, as you describe them, ambush and destroy half your company?" Mies fought to remain calm.

"In answer to your first question, I don't know when they died."

"Then you abandoned half of your command without knowing whether they were alive or dead?"

"The situation was hopeless, sir," Burke answered.

"I see," Mies commented, "and how did you allow it to become hopeless?"

"They were led by foreign mercenaries," Burke stammered. "I saw them myself."

"Then that explains it," Mies commented wryly.

"Sir, if I may interrupt," said Henry.

Mies nodded. "Please do."

"Group-leader, these mountain people may lead isolated lives, but they are not idiots. They are capable of laying an ambush without foreign mercenaries. They are a proud race with a long history of independence and self-reliance. But I must agree with Burke on one point: they are not capable of manufacturing power weapons, and they don't have the economic or political power to buy them through normal channels."

"Then where are they getting their power weapons?"

"If I may," the third officer interrupted timidly.

"Of course, Mr. . . ." Mies hesitated, unable to remember this man's name.

"Dortfeld, sir," he supplied, lighting his pipe. "Our pickets have reported caravans of pack camels leaving the Jacal Mountains. The caravans are reported to carry nothing but rocks."

"Pah!" scoffed Burke. "Rumors and gossip of magic rocks. We can attach no significance to such nonsense!"

"I agree," said Dortfeld. "We should attach no meaning to the rumors about magic rocks. Undoubtedly, those rumors were planted to mislead us. However, we all know how rare heavy metals are on Ceta. If the caravans are carrying metal ore, the clansmen might easily afford a few power weapons."

"Your theory makes more sense," Henry agreed, "but it is still just a theory. We need confirmation."

Dortfeld reached into his pocket and removed several tiny lumps. "Will this satisfy you? It is native copper." He gave the nuggets to Henry. "I bought these at market a month ago. I have checked with several geologists, and all of them agree that this is the first time they have seen native copper on Ceta."

Dortfeld smiled. "But I am also sure that the strike has panned out. The pickets have not reported a caravan since I bought these nuggets."

"You have given me much to consider, gentlemen," Mies said. They passed the remainder of the tour in small talk, then Mies was shown to his quarters. He had no sooner entered the modest apartment than his vid-screen flashed a message light. Mies activated the screen and saw a message: "Report to me immediately. Commander Thorne."

Mies left his apartment promptly, for Thorne was his superior. He had not yet met the man, but his father had told Mies that Thorne was a competent and fair leader. Mies asked the first sentry he saw to take him to Thorne's quarters. Three minutes later, Thorne's orderly admitted Mies into Thorne's office.

Thorne's office was dark, save for a pool of light around his desk. Thorne sat in the light, his face tense and his expression grim. "The World Police have charged you with murder," Thorne said, not even bothering to introduce himself.

"Whom did I kill?" Mies asked, choking back his alarm.

Thorne threw a news printout across the desk. The headline "Dorsai Commander's Son Murders Coby Citizen" was emblazoned across the top of the page. Beneath the headline was a picture of Bret Scoles. The report claimed that Mies cut Bret's throat and hid the body in the cargo hold of the linkship. The report made no mention of any uncertainty about whether or not Mies had actually killed Scoles.

"Reporters have already begun asking the Ministry of Security about you. They will soon know where you are stationed. If we don't turn you over to the World Police it will look like the government of the Five Cities is covering something up."

"What do you advise?" Mies asked.

"If you were anybody but Hanson Ohanlon's son, there would be no choice. But your father is an honorable man, and I cannot believe he would raise a son who was otherwise."

"Shall I leave tonight?" asked Mies.

"Yes," Thorne said. "Take an extended patrol into the Jacal Mountains, where you will be out of touch until this blows over. I have already assigned a squad of handpicked men to accompany you. They are waiting at the muster gate with hovercars carrying your weapons, supplies, and two bottles of rice whiskey." Thorne grinned, sure that Mies would appreciate the two bottles of nonessential cargo. "Your assignment is to discover the source of the metal ore the Jacals have been taking out of the mountains."

Should Mies take the patrol into the Jacal Mountains as Commander Thorne suggests? If so, turn to Section 25.

Perhaps Mies should sneak back to Kawlan and meet his companions in the city jail. If so, turn to Section 17.

—25—

Mies and his companions are about to enter the Jacal Mountains. Before they go, however, they have the opportunity to buy a few supplies. Study the list below, then choose two items for Mies to take along. On a piece of scratch paper, list the two items that Mies chooses to take.

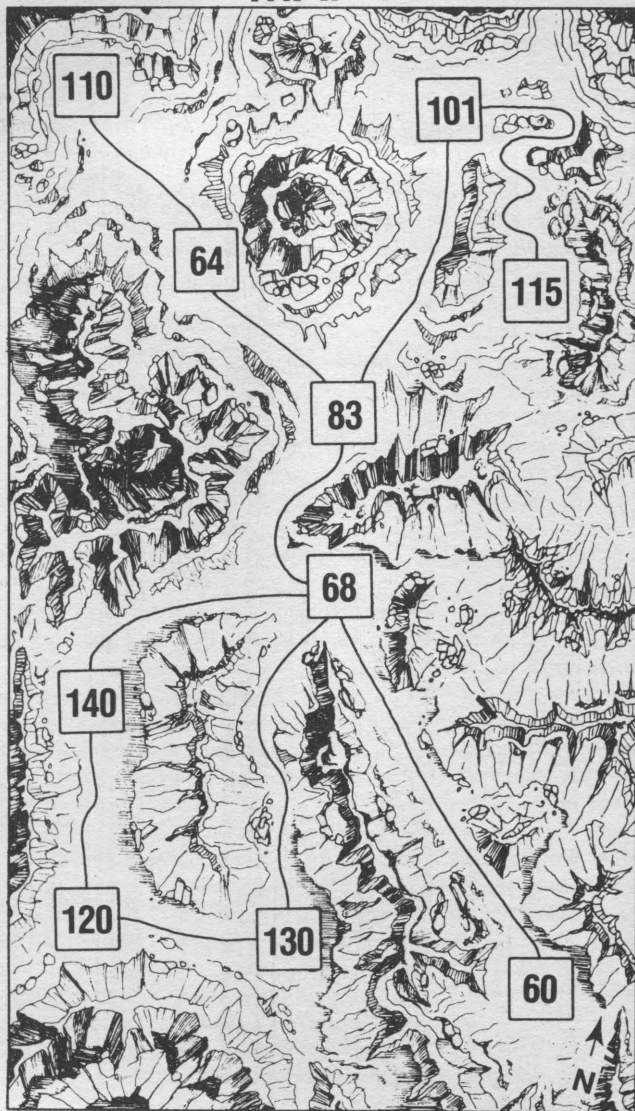
- 1 power beam handgun (fully charged)*
- 1 medical kit*
- 6 explosive charges*
- 1 listening device (1,000 meter range)*
- 6 poison darts with blowgun (easily concealed)*
- 1 power weapon scrambler (disrupts power weapons within 1,000 meters)*
- 1 hovercar (carries up to four people)*

Look at the Jacal Mountains Map. Ten different locations are represented on the map by small boxes. Mies and his party start at Haven Pass.

Mies may move from one location to another along the travel lines leading from one box to the next box. When Mies reaches the next location, read the section corresponding to the number listed next to the box.

Mies cannot move from one box to another unless he follows the travel lines, and he cannot skip boxes. When he comes to a box, he MUST reach the section that corresponds to the number next to the box, UNLESS he has already read the section. To keep track of which locations Mies has visited, write down the name of each place he goes, along with the number beside the location box. You are not required to read sections corresponding to locations which Mies has already visited. (Simply proceed to the next location box which you have not listed as one of the places Mies has visited.)

MAP 1



Mies and His Companions:

At this point, Mies might be traveling with the Jacal mountain men he bailed out of the Kawlan city jail, with the patrol assigned to him by Commander Thorne, or by himself.

If Mies is traveling with the Jacal mountain men, write these statistics on a piece of paper:

Manpower: 2 (add 1 point for each Jacal mountain man with him)

Ordnance: 3

Attack Strength: 3 times Manpower

Stealth: 9

Morale: 9

Melee: 10

This unit normally fights on Table C.

If Mies is traveling with the patrol assigned to him by Commander Thorne, write these statistics on a piece of scratch paper:

Manpower: 17

Ordnance: 5

Attack Strength: 85

Stealth: 5

Morale: 8

Melee: 6

This unit normally fights on Table D.

If Mies is alone, write these statistics on a piece of scratch paper:

Manpower: 2

Ordnance: 3

Attack Strength: 6

Stealth: 10

Morale: 11

Melee: 12

Section 26

Mies normally fights on Table B.

These values may change as Mies fights battles or faces other hazardous situations during his travels. Be sure to update the statistics written on your scratch paper when Mies loses (or gains) Manpower, finds a new weapon, and when otherwise instructed to change the statistics by the section you are reading.

Turn to Section 49.

— 26 —

Mies fired at the shadowy figure dashing across the alley. The man screamed and fell. Although the police stopped firing, Mies knew that at least a few of them were still hiding somewhere in the dark streets. He also knew that the officers he couldn't see would call for reinforcements. He signaled to the rest of his group to follow him. They sneaked away from the area, but Mies could not take time to count survivors.

Finally, he stopped. "Casualty report?" he asked.

"I don't know," Morrow answered. "But we need to rest."

Mies shook his head. "We can't rest here. They'll come after us. We'll rest tomorrow, in the mountains."

Morrow groaned.

"Spotter!" someone called.

Everyone scrambled for cover. A single-seat floater drifted by overhead.

"He's too high to see us," Morrow commented.

"He's not trying to see us," Mies explained. "They made me swallow a homing beacon. He's trying to get a fix on that."

If Mies swallowed the special pill he received in Section 33, they avoid the spotter and proceed to the mountains. Turn to Section 25.

If Mies did not swallow the pill, turn to Section 47.

— 27 —

"I never expected to meet a Dorsai coward, Ignatowski," said the captain. "But we managed to kill the terrorist and save the ship anyway. Have a pleasant trip."

Mies returned to his cabin. To his surprise, Mies discovered that all of Bret's luggage was missing. In fact, there was no indication that Bret had ever shared this cabin. Mies briefly considered inquiring about his missing roommate, but such an inquiry would be sure to bring attention to him. Therefore, Mies decided to let the strange disappearance drop without comment.

Two days later, the linkship descended into the Cetan atmosphere. Mies Ohanlon was home.

Turn to Section 8.

— 28 —

Mies did not have time to wait two weeks before beginning his journey. Yet, from what he knew about Jacal clansmen, he would not easily convince his companions to leave before they were ready. He would have to find a way to make them want to leave.

Mies can offer Pieter Morrow, the natural leader of the party, one of the items he carries. If he does this, turn to Section 38.

Mies realizes that it must be humiliating for the clansmen to have their heads shorn like sheep. He could buy wigs for each clansman, hoping that they would not be so embarrassed and would be willing to return home. If he does this, turn to Section 50.

Mies could force the Jacals to leave by secretly informing the police of the party's location. If Mies does this, turn to Section 53.

— 29 —

Mies has died. Try your luck again; maybe this time you will bring the story to a successful conclusion.

Return to the beginning and start again.

— 30 —

Mies must take stock of his situation. Below is a list of some equipment Mies may have gathered in his travels so far. On a piece of scratch paper, write the name of each item Mies has collected. Do not cheat by writing the names of any items Mies has not gathered.

*Bret Scoles' needle handgun
Bret Scoles' throwing knife
Bret Scoles' recorder and discs
Bret Scoles' liquor
Bret Scoles' satchel*

Turn to Section 52.

— 31 —

Mies shot at the shadowy figures.

Use the standard combat charts. Because of surprise and darkness, Mies uses Chart C. He has an Attack Strength of 6 (Manpower of 2 multiplied by an Ordnance of 3). Each point of Manpower on the result kills one of the three figures. (Mies cannot kill more than three figures; ignore any excess.)

•

Mies may shoot again after the first round of attack. The figures will not attack Mies. The combat ends after two rounds.

If Mies kills one or more of the figures, turn to Section 43.

If Mies does not kill any of the figures, turn to Section 37.

— 32 —

Mies fled toward the mountains. He was alone. At dawn he reached the location marked on the map. The cache of weapons was buried exactly where the map said it would be. Mies checked the equipment; nothing was booby-trapped or broken.

After digging up the cache, Mies started back toward the mountains. He wanted to rest, but he knew that resting would be dangerous. He continued to move, grimly ignoring the weariness that grew heavier with each step he took.

High in the sky, he saw a bird circle. He watched it for a moment, then realized that it was not a bird. It was a spotter. He scrambled for cover.

The spotter was too high to see him, but it was not trying to see him. The spotter was trying to locate the homing beacon the police had made him swallow.

If Mies swallowed the special pill given to him in Section 33, he avoids the spotter. Turn to Section 25. If Mies did not take the pill, turn to Section 47.

— 33 —

Remove all items from Mies' equipment list.

Within a few hours, Mies was taken to a prison. The guards treated him with great caution. Mies' hands were kept bound, and his ankles were hobbled by strong plastic restraints. The guards maintained a safe distance and held their weapons ready.

Mies chuckled bitterly to himself. Clearly, the guards expected every Dorsai to be a superman. He might be able to turn their fear to his advantage. He would wait for an opportunity.

The guards stripped him, shaved him, injected him with sedatives, and forced him to swallow a special capsule that would leave harmless traces of a radioactive isotope in his body for weeks to come. If he somehow managed to escape, the police would be able to track him by homing in on the isotope. They then threw him in a special high-security holding cell.

"Now what?" Mies asked himself. He felt miserable and cold. For three days, no one talked to him. His meals, which tasted faintly of insecticide, were shoved through a slot in the door. No one interrogated him. No one harassed him. They ignored him.

On the fourth day, the heavy tread of the jailer bringing his meal was accompanied by the sound of lighter feet. Mies stood and straightened his clothes. The door opened and he saw a thin man wearing poorly fitting civilian clothes. He carried a portable desk.

"Tuan Mies Ohanlon?" he asked politely.

"My name is Ignatowski," said Mies. "I am no Tuan."

"Of course," the man answered uncomfortably. "I am Edward Crumble, your defense attorney."

"I'll actually have a trial?" Mies asked sarcastically.

"Oh yes!" Crumble exclaimed. The jailer left, slamming the door. The attorney sat on Mies' bed and placed the portable desk across his lap. He punched a button and the desk hummed quietly.

"Forgive the noise, Tuan Ohanlon," Crumble said. "It is an electronic scrambler."

"Who sent you?" asked Mies.

The thin man stared at Mies. "I was hoping you would know," he said. "I received a note this morning asking me to accept this case. It was accompanied by a large sum of money. There was no return address."

"I'm sorry," Mies said. "I can't help you."

"The note instructed me to give you this." The lawyer removed what appeared to be a small hand-held calculator from his desk. Mies recognized it immediately as a high-frequency locksmith; he doubted, however, that the attorney had any idea what he held. With the locksmith, Mies could open any electronic or magnetic lock in the prison. He could leave when he desired.

"The note also instructed me to give you this," Crumble said. He gave Mies a blank piece of paper. Mies rubbed his fingers over the paper; it was constructed of two plies. "And here is a pen for your paper." Crumble gave Mies a bulky pen. Mies immediately recognized it as a disguised needle gun. It normally carried ten shots.

"Finally," Crumble said, "the note said you should swallow this pill before you leave. It will protect you for twenty-four hours. You should take your fate into your own hands, tonight if possible. Otherwise, you will not live many more days. Your Jacal associates will be waiting when you leave."

"I would like to see the note you received," Mies said.

"I'm afraid that's not possible," the attorney answered. "I don't keep such evidence long. Now hide the items I have given you; I don't know what they are, but we don't want the guard to see them."

Mies slipped the gifts under his mattress while the attorney banged on the door.

After the attorney left, Mies rubbed the paper between his fingers. A few moments later, the two plies separated into two sheets. On one sheet, there was handwritten schedule of the guard's nightly routine and a suggested escape route. On the other sheet was a map of the local countryside. There was an "X" marked at a location about twenty kilometers from the prison. "Supplies buried in tree roots" was written next to the "X."

Mies hid the escape kit inside the hollow frame of his bed.

Note on a piece of scratch paper that Mies carries a ten-shot needler and a high-frequency locksmith.

Later that night, after the jailer performed a rather careless search of his cell, Mies removed his escape kit. He noted that the locksmith bore the mark of his father's house. His father would not be so careless, Mies knew. Whoever had hired the attorney wanted the blame to fall on his father if Mies was caught. Mies carefully scratched the mark from the locksmith and redoubled his determination not to get caught.

Mies took a deep breath, then activated the locksmith. After several minutes of adjustment, his cell lock clicked open. Mies pushed the door open and stepped into the shadowy corridor.

He moved silently down to the first gate, which he remem-

bered was manned at all hours. As he approached, he saw a steaming cup of coffee sitting ignored on the table. The guards were nowhere to be seen. Mies used the locksmith on the gate and entered the main compound, leaving behind the dark building that housed his cell.

Mies sneaked across the open compound to the outer wall, easily avoiding the steady pattern of the searchlights. The night air was cold and crisp. After reaching the wall, Mies carefully walked along its length toward the south. He was searching for a small service gate, which would usually remain unnoticed by most people. With his trained Dorsai powers of observation, however, Mies found the gate easily.

He activated the locksmith and the gate's lock opened almost immediately. Mies pushed lightly at the gate. He quickly stepped through and was free of the prison. Now only a hundred meters of barren earth stood between him and freedom. He paused a moment to time the searchlights, then moved quickly away from the wall.

Just as he reached the far side of the barren swath, three figures rose from the tall grass. Without conscious thought, Mies drew the disguised needler.

Should Mies fire at the figures? If so, turn to Section 31.

Or should Mies hesitate? If so, turn to Section 42.

— 34 —

Since he had to obtain a permit in order to reenter the Five Cities from the Jacal Mountains, Mies decided to visit the ambassador of the Jacal Region to learn what he could. After arranging a 9 A.M. appointment, Mies went to the ambassador's office. A receptionist showed him to a seat in a large waiting room. At 4:15 that afternoon, he was still waiting. Finally, the receptionist beckoned him into the ambassador's office. It was a large, opulent room.

"Good day, Mr. Ignatowski," the ambassador said, not apologizing for the long wait. With his balding head and round belly,

the ambassador looked more like a low-ranking civil servant than a diplomat. "Why do you wish to enter the Jacal Mountains?"

"My business is confidential and I cannot discuss it," Mies answered.

The ambassador replied, "I do not mean to pry, Mr. Ignatowski. However, because of the unstable political situation in the region at this time, I must know something of your business before I can issue the travel permit. You must understand that the matter is so delicate I personally interview every person applying for permission to cross the border."

"I am a prospector, interested in minerals, fossil fuels, geothermal power—"

"Nothing else?" the ambassador broke in. His tone seemed accusing and nervous.

Mies hesitated. Something was wrong. He noticed for the first time that the ambassador was perspiring heavily. "What else would I hope to find in such a region?" Mies asked. "Why are you asking me these questions?"

"I have already told you why," the ambassador said, moving his right hand toward the edge of his desk. Too late, Mies realized that the ambassador was pressing a hidden alarm button. He jumped to his feet and tried to grab the ambassador's wrist, but he was poorly positioned. Scarcely a moment later, a dozen soldiers rushed into the room and grabbed Mies.

"What is the meaning of this?" Mies demanded.

"It means, Mies Ohanlon, that you are under arrest for murder," said the ambassador.

"What!" Mies shouted indignantly.

The ambassador opened a desk drawer and removed a news printout. He placed it on the desk in front of Mies. The headline read: "Dorsai Commander's Son Kills Engineer!"

Turn to Section 33. (Mies may not return to Section 8.)

— 35 —

“The Jacal Mountain Range was formed when two continental plates collided millions of years ago. The resulting pressures thrust the plate edges up, creating an unstable region of volcanic activity and numerous earthquakes . . .”

Mies turned off the vid-screen and sat back in the library carrel. He was not as interested in the geology of the Jacal Mountains as he was in the region's sociology. The original settlers of the Jacal Mountains had been anarchists attracted to the region by its isolation from the oppression of any government. Within a few years, they had established isolated family strongholds free of societal constraints on individual freedom.

As word of the anarchist communities spread, thieves, murderers, and other social outcasts came to the Jacal Mountains to prey on the isolated families. It was a dark time for the mountain people, but they survived the intrusions by organizing themselves into small defensive bands, by fleeing further into the rugged mountain valleys, or even by incorporating the would-be predators into their family structures.

Shortly after learning how to deal with the marauding bands of outcasts, the mountain people faced another threat. During a period of imperialistic expansion, the neighboring Ch'ung Kingdom decided to incorporate the Jacal Mountains into its territories. The Jacals would not give up their freedom easily, however, and resisted by forming small bands of tough guerrillas. It was only a short time before the average Ch'ung soldier decided that he would rather face the hazards of desertion than a lonely death in a barren mountain pass.

Eventually, the Ch'ung Kingdom realized that the Jacal Mountain Region was not worth the risk of an entire army and withdrew. Since that time, the Jacals have remained fiercely independent and refused to acknowledge any governmental authority.

Return to Section 8.

— 36 —

Mies must take stock of his situation. Below is a list of a few items Mies may have gathered during his travels. On a piece of scratch paper, write the name of any item Mies has picked up. Do not cheat by writing the names of items Mies could not or does not possess.

*Bret Scoles' needle handgun
Bret Scoles' throwing knife
Bret Scoles' recorder and discs
Bret Scoles' liquor
Bret Scoles' satchel*

Return to Section 9.

— 37 —

Mies was mildly surprised that his shots missed their targets. He dove to the left, then rolled into the high grass and waited.

There was no return fire.

"Ohanlon!" whispered a hoarse voice. "This is Pieter Morrow! Why do you shoot at your brothers?" The accent was unmistakable; the shadowy figures were Jacal mountain people. A man cautiously stood and walked toward Mies.

"You idiot! You could have killed one of us!"

"You didn't identify yourselves—" Mies said. He felt sick to his stomach. His hasty action went against all Dorsai training.

"Shut up!" Pieter ordered, his voice heavy with disgust. "No talk. There are pollies everywhere. Let's go!"

Before they took a step, however, a loudspeaker barked, "Don't move!" A searchlight's beam illuminated Mies. "You are under arrest! If you move, we will kill you!"

Turn to Section 39.

— 38 —

Pieter's face betrayed no emotion as he looked at the items Mies had offered him. He unslung his power weapon and raised it to a firing position.

"I didn't mean to offend you, Pieter," Mies said, raising his hands.

Pieter turned the weapon on the bribe and pulled the trigger. "Jacals do not sell themselves," he explained, as if he were talking to a child. "When you grow wiser, you will understand that."

Pieter then turned and walked away.

Erase the item(s) Pieter destroyed from Mies' equipment list. This item(s) was destroyed and cannot be repaired.

The next day, Pieter and his brothers informed Mies that they were willing to travel.

Turn to Section 25.

— 39 —

Pieter swore, flicking off his power weapon's safety. "I knew this was a trap! Come on, brother! Let's send as many pollies to the devil as we can." Just then, Mies heard the prison alarms go off.

Mies dove out of the searchlight's beam, picking out the locations of the police even as he moved. Three groups of four men each surrounded Mies and the Jacals. The searchlight was being operated by three guards on the prison wall. Somewhere in the distance, Mies heard an approaching hovercar.

All things considered, their situation was not that terrible. The tall grass afforded Mies and the Jacals some cover, and the prison guards did not seem well prepared to capture them.

Although Pieter might not agree, to a Dorsai, the odds seemed about even.

The statistics for the police are:

Manpower: 15

Ordnance: 3

Attack Strength: 45

Stealth: 2

Morale: 6

Melee: 4

The statistics for Mies and the Jacals are:

Manpower 7 (Mies may have mistakenly killed one or more Jacals; subtract 1 point for each Jacal that has been killed)

Ordnance: 3

Attack Strength: (multiply Manpower by Ordnance)

Stealth: 9

Morale: 9

Melee: 10

The police attack on Chart E. Mies and the Jacals attack on Chart B. Mies and the Jacals always have initiative and roll the dice first.

During any round, Mies may fire at the searchlight instead of attacking the police. Subtract 2 points from the Manpower score that turn; be sure to adjust the Attack Strength. If Mies rolls a 6 or better on two dice, he destroys the searchlight. Without the searchlight, the police fight on Chart F for the rest of the battle.

When the police have lost 8 points from their Manpower score, Mies and the Jacals may attempt to escape. If they roll equal to or less than their Stealth value, they escape. They may fight the police during the same turn they attempt to escape.

If Mies and his companions die, turn to Section 51.

If Mies and his companions defeat the police and escape, turn to Section 26.

If Mies alone survives (his side's Manpower score is reduced to 1 or 2 points), turn to Section 32.

— 40 —

When Mies reached home, he sent word for his father to meet him on a high bluff over a mile from the compound. It was a cold night, with a heavy cloud cover that made the darkness as thick as ink. After twenty minutes, Mies saw the shadowy figure of his father approaching. The sight of his father lightened his heavy heart. Mies wanted to rush over and embrace his father. Instead, he called to him softly.

“Father!”

“My son,” his father answered without emotion. He continued immediately, as always not wasting a single moment on frivolities. “A friend warned me of your situation.”

“What is my situation, precisely?” Mies asked.

“The World Police want you for murder,” his father answered. “This is Prince William’s doing. Friends tell me that William himself ordered the original detectives replaced with a handpicked team. No doubt he also had them instructed as to what they will find.”

“I must leave immediately for the Jacal Mountains,” Mies said.

“It is already too late,” his father answered. “William intends to use you to discredit me, and by implication all Dorsai on Ceta.”

“That’s ridiculous!” Mies exclaimed.

Mies’ father shook his head. “It is the same way he broke the Brainerd Coalition. By morning, all Dorsai will be under suspicion.”

Mies accepted his father’s opinion, for his father had been involved in local politics for many years. From the old man’s voice, he also knew that his father had already thought of a solution.

“What do you suggest?” he asked.

“Turn yourself in.”

“What!” he yelled.

Mies’ father placed a hand on his son’s shoulder. “This is the only way to foil William’s plans. It will demonstrate to the people of Ceta that we respect their laws and institutions.”

"There must be some other way," Mies said, shaking off his father's hand. "I'm as good as dead if I turn myself in."

"There is no other way, but I wish there were," his father said.

Mies faces a difficult decision. If he turns himself in to the police, he will probably not be able to complete his mission on Ceta.

Is Mies' mission more important than the Dorsai reputation on Ceta? If so, he should reject his father's plan and flee into the Jacal Mountains. Turn to Section 48.

Or is the Dorsai reputation more important than his mission? If this is the case, then Mies should turn himself in. Turn to Section 33.

— 41 —

"The Jacal Mountain Range was formed when two continental plates collided millions of years ago. The resulting pressures thrust the plate edges up, creating an unstable region of volcanic activity and numerous earthquakes . . ."

Mies turned off the vid-screen and sat back in the library carrel. He was not as interested in the geology of the Jacal Mountains as he was in the region's sociology. The original settlers of the Jacal Mountains had been anarchists attracted to the region by its isolation from the oppression of any government. Within a few years, they had established isolated family strongholds free of any societal constraints on individual freedom.

As word of the anarchist communities spread, thieves, murderers, and other social outcasts came to the Jacal Mountains to prey on the isolated families. It was a dark time for the mountain people, but they survived the intrusions by organizing themselves into small defensive bands, by fleeing further into the rugged mountain valleys, or even by incorporating the would-be oppressors into their family structures.

Shortly after learning how to deal with the marauding bands of outcasts, the mountain people faced another threat. During a

period of imperialistic expansion, the neighboring Ch'ung Kingdom decided to incorporate the Jacal Mountains into its territories. The Jacals would not give up their freedom easily, however, and resisted by forming small bands of tough guerrillas. It was only a short time before the average Ch'ung soldier decided that he would rather face the hazards of desertion than a lonely death in a barren mountain pass.

Eventually, the Ch'ung Kingdom decided that the Jacal Mountain Region was not worth the risk of an army and withdrew. Since that time, the Jacals have remained fiercely independent and refuse to acknowledge any governmental authority.

Return to Section 46.

—42—

"Ohanlon!" whispered a hoarse voice in the tall grass. "This is Pieter Morrow, your brother with the Jacals." Mies remembered Pieter's name from his briefing. He was glad that he had held his fire.

"Come on," Pieter whispered, "there are pollies everywhere! Let's go!"

"Don't move!" barked a loudspeaker. The beam of a searchlight suddenly illuminated Mies.

"You are under arrest!" the loudspeaker continued. "If you move, we will kill you!"

Turn to Section 39.

—43—

Mies rushed over to one of the figures he had just downed. He rolled it over and saw that it was a Jacal man. Actually, it was a boy—much younger than himself.

"Damn you, Ohanlon!" whispered a hoarse voice. "I am Pieter Morrow. We are your brothers."

Mies dropped to one knee, clenching his fists with anger at himself. He shuddered at the thought of what he had done. After a long moment of mourning, he stood. "I'm sorry," he said aloud.

"Get down, fool!" urged the voice. A man's form scuttled toward him through the dark grass. "You'll get us all killed!"

"What was his name?" Mies asked, indicating the fallen boy.

"It is not important," Pieter answered. "The pollies will soon be here. Let's go."

"Don't move!" commanded a loudspeaker. The beam of a searchlight suddenly illuminated Mies.

"You are under arrest!" the loudspeaker continued. "If you move, we will kill you."

Turn to Section 39.

— 44 —

Mies asked a local laborer about the Jacal people. The coolie knew that something terrible had happened to the them, but he did not know the specifics. A large armed force had occupied most of the region, cutting off all communication with the outside world. The force had large garrisons in the three main passes leading into the mountains. The coolie also said that the rulers of the Five Cities knew of this occupation and seemed to approve.

Return to Section 46.

— 45 —

Mies asked the coolie about the Jacal people. The coolie knew that something terrible had happened to the them, but he did not know the specifics. A large armed force had occupied most of the region, cutting off all communication with the

Section 46

outside world. The force had large garrisons in the three main passes leading into the mountains. The coolie also said that the rulers of the Five Cities knew of this occupation and seemed to approve.

Return to Section 8.

— 46 —

Mies decided it was better not to press his companions. While he waited for them, he had the opportunity to learn more about the Jacal Mountains and their people.

Mies can ask some of the local people what they know about the situation. If he should do this, turn to Section 44.

Mies can research the Jacal Mountains at the local library. If he should do this, turn to Section 41.

A permit is required to reenter the Five Cities from the Jacal Mountains. Mies can go to a government official under the pretense of obtaining such a permit and see if he can learn anything from official sources. If he should do this, turn to Section 57.

Mies can choose to investigate more than one of the options above. After Mies completes his research, and if allowed, you can return to this section and continue reading.

During the two weeks that followed, Mies came to know his Jacal companions well. Pieter Morrow was their leader. As the days passed, Pieter grew a thick mustache in which he took great pride. He did not often speak of his home. The others, however, spent most of their time talking about how good it would be to return. Jon and Ceil Tager were cousins from the Tager settlements. Ceil's son, Alex, had come along on this trip; although Alex was little more than a boy, the rest of the group treated him as a full man.

The other two party members were John and Simon Dunne,

brothers from southwest of Haven Pass. They intended to guide the party as far as Haven Pass, then return to their own family lands.

One day, while studying yet another set of maps of the mountains, Mies heard a commotion outside his window. When he looked out, he saw his companions and six camels.

“Tuan Ohanlon,” shouted Pieter, “are you ready?”

“For what, Pieter Morrow?” he asked.

“For the moonset, Tuan.”

Mies smiled and nodded his head.

Turn to Section 25.

—47—

The spotter hovered high overhead, circling Mies' location. Ten minutes later, three floaters carrying four policemen each arrived and attacked from the air.

The statistics for the police are:

Manpower: 12

Ordnance: 3

Attack Strength: 36

Stealth: 2

Morale: 6

Melee: 4

The statistics for Mies and the Jacals are:

Manpower 2 (Mies) plus 1 point for each surviving Jacal

Ordnance: 3

Attack Strength: (multiply Manpower by Ordnance)

Stealth: 9

Morale: 9

Melee: 10

The police attack on Chart E. Mies and the Jacals fight on Chart B. Mies and his companions always have the initiative and attack first.

Section 48

At the end of the second, fourth, and sixth combat rounds, Mies and the Jacals may attempt to escape by rolling against their Stealth score. If they roll their Stealth score or lower, they escape. Turn to Section 25.

During any combat round, Mies may attack a floater instead of its occupants. If he does so, subtract his Manpower score (2 points) from his unit's Manpower. He then rolls two dice; if he rolls 8 or less, he causes the floater to crash. All four occupants die; subtract 6 points from the Manpower score of the police.

If Mies' Manpower value falls to 0, turn to Section 51.

If the police Manpower falls to 0, Mies and the Jacals win. Turn to Section 25.

— 48 —

Mies decided that his mission was more important than the Dorsai reputation on Ceta. "I'm sorry, Father," he said, "but I can't turn myself in yet. I've got something to do before William gets me."

"Very well," his father said stiffly. "Then I wish you luck. You must go; I am certain that William's men are coming for you even now."

Without further conversation, Mies sneaked into the bluffs. An hour later, he saw the distant lights of the first spotters searching for him. He increased his pace, trying to escape into the Jacal Mountains before they located his heat signature.

He could not move fast enough, however. There were over two dozen spotters searching every square inch of the area. Within twenty minutes, one of the spotters shined its searchlight on him. Mies jumped out of the beam just as its occupants released a volley of needles. The deadly projectiles struck the ground where he had stood a moment before.

Mies ran, his body low to the ground. The hiss of the spotter followed him like his own breath; the spotter, he knew, had locked onto his heat signature. There was nothing he could do to

shake it. He stopped and removed a white handkerchief from his pocket.

The spotter's searchlight found him. He waved the handkerchief. It didn't work. Three needle charges ripped through his body and he toppled over.

Turn to Section 29.

—49—

As Mies travels through the Jacal Mountains, you must keep careful track of two things: the equipment he is carrying and the locations he has visited. Write "Equipment List" on the top of a piece of paper (this can be the reverse side of the sheet on which you wrote the statistics of Mies' unit in Section 25). Divide the rest of the sheet into two columns: In the left-hand column, write the name of the two items that Mies bought in Section 25. Also write "Bret's throwing knife," since Mies has possession of it. In addition, Mies has a disguised, ten-shot needle gun if he broke out of prison in Section 33. Finally, if Mies is leading the patrol assigned to him by Commander Thorne, he has four four-person hovercars. Write these items on Mies' equipment list. As Mies travels through the mountains, he will lose some of this equipment and find other pieces. Be sure to note these occurrences in the left-hand column.

In the right-hand column, write the name of each location that Mies visits. After reading a section, write that section's number in this column, too. Occasionally, the text will ask you to remember whether or not Mies has visited certain locations or performed certain actions. The notes in this column will help you remember.

Turn to Section 60.

— 50 —

After a few days of searching, Mies found the right gifts for his companions. He carted the boxes into the single room they had rented in downtown Kawlan.

The Jacals had heaped all of the mattresses, blankets, sheets, and pillows in the center of the room. John and Simon Dunne lay on the heap snoring loudly. Pieter Morrow stood in front of the room's single mirror, vainly inspecting the stubble atop his head. The three Tagers (Jon, Ceil, and Alex) were in the corner playing a game with straw stuffing they had pulled from the furniture.

"This place smells like the trainees' locker room!" said Mies as he entered the room.

Pieter looked at him with a blank expression. "Welcome back," he said. "What do you have there?"

"Gifts for my brothers," explained Mies. He opened the first box and pulled a wig from it.

"Instant honor!" called Alex. "Let me have one!" Mies tossed the wig to the young Tager, who plopped it onto his head without regard for style.

Pieter Morrow rubbed his own bald head. Mies opened a box and threw him a wig. Pieter put it on, then looked in the mirror and carefully adjusted it. "Ceil!" he barked. "Wake up Simon Dunn and tell him to arrange camels and provisions. We leave for Haven Pass tonight."

Turn to Section 25.

— 51 —

Mies and his companions fired at their well-protected targets, who were careful to stay out of harm's way. The deathly silence was broken by the occasional sound of a firing weapon and the groans of the wounded. The enemy unit took few risks, for it

knew that time was on its side. Reinforcements would arrive shortly, and when they did, Mies and his men would die.

Mies decided to run for it, realizing that in this case, fighting from a covered position would eventually lead to disaster. He scanned the area, searching for his companions. He could see nobody; each man had already fled or died. Without further hesitation, Mies stood and ran toward a hole in the enemy lines. Almost immediately, two needles ripped through the flesh of his torso. He fell, dead before he hit the ground.

Turn to Section 29.

—52—

Mies walked to his hotel. As he entered the lobby, the night clerk greeted him with a sullen nod. Mies noticed that the clerk did not meet his gaze; instead, the man looked at the floor as soon as he saw that it was Mies who had entered the room. Mies decided to use the stairwell instead of the elevator.

As Mies left the stairwell on his floor, he smelled a cigarette. He noticed a crack of light from two doorways, one on either side of his room. Without breaking stride, Mies walked down the hallway past his own door. As he had suspected, two men waited behind slightly opened doors, one in each room on either side of his. He had no way to guess how many more men waited in the rooms behind each lookout, or how many men already awaited him inside his own room.

As Mies passed the open doors, the lookouts studied him. Mies heard one of the doors open, and he ran toward the window at the end of the hallway.

The lookouts yelled in astonishment, but before they could act, Mies had already jumped through the window. He landed on the roof of the neighboring building. By the time the ambushers reached the shattered window, Mies was hidden in the shadows at the far end of the building. The ambushers did not even bother to come after him. They knew that it was one thing to ambush a Dorsai and quite another to be ambushed by one.

Later that night, as Mies pondered his situation in an all-night diner, he saw a news printout. The headline read, "Dorsai



Commander's Son Murders Miner." Next to the headline was a picture of Bret Scoles. The story ended with a pledge from Mies' father to support the government's attempts to bring his son to justice.

Should Mies try to rescue his Jacal guides now languishing in the Kawlan jail? If so, turn to Section 17.

Or should Mies go home and ask his father for help? If so, turn to Section 40.

Perhaps Mies should enter the Jacal Mountains with whomever he can recruit in a few hours, reasoning that the sooner he leaves Kawlan, the better. If so, turn to Section 25.

— 53 —

Mies waited a few days for the Jacals to relax. He knew that if he was too obvious, the Jacals would suspect he had arranged the police visit.

Finally, sensing that the Jacals were beginning to feel comfortable with him, Mies slipped away and called the police. He anonymously claimed that a group of Jacals matching the description of his companions were preparing to blow up a public monument. He told the police the neighborhood that they were staying in, but claimed he did not know the exact address. He then returned to the hotel room to wait.

Later that night, as Mies was sleeping soundly in his room, Pieter Morrow woke him. "Sssh!" Pieter whispered. "We must leave; the police are searching the neighborhood for a party of Jacals!"

"Really?" Mies said, feigning surprise.

After a few minutes, he and the Jacals were sneaking out of the neighborhood through its most obscure, filthiest alleys. An hour later, the sky turning gray with the first signs of dawn, Pieter joined Mies as they walked toward the edge of the city.

"We were lucky the police did not know our exact location," he said.

"Yes, fortunate indeed," Mies agreed, not meeting Pieter's gaze.

"I guess you bring us luck, Tuan."

Mies nodded. "We might as well go to the mountains," he said. "The police will keep looking for us in Kawlan."

"I have no doubt," Pieter said. Mies knew that Pieter suspected that he was the one who had called the police.

Turn to Section 25.

—54—

"Officer!" called a skinny man. He raised his glass in salute. The room buzzed with hushed conversations as Mies and his three officers walked to the back of the bar. Before the bartender had a chance to take their orders, a brawny man walked up to their table.

"Group-leader," the man said politely, "my name is Butler. I have a question for you to answer."

"All right, Mr. Butler," Mies said. While he spoke with Butler, Mies quickly sized the man up in case the big fellow was picking a fight. "Ask your question."

"Are you here to protect the merchant caravans?"

"Why should I say?" Mies asked.

"That's a fair question," the man answered. "But let's say that it's important for you to answer my question before I answer yours."

Mies looked at the man and noted the lines of concern around his eyes and mouth. "My orders are to go north into the mountains. We have no orders to protect caravans."

"Then that's the end of Haven," he muttered. "You've crushed our hopes, and I'll do the same for you. You have no chance of entering the Jacals with an armed column like you have."

"Why not?" Mies asked.

Butler's face screwed up in anger. "They closed the pass at the border, and they won't tolerate trespassers."

"If you try, Cap'n," added a fat merchant, "you won't last the first night. They'll sneak up on you just like they do the caravans and by morning you'll all be dead."

"An elite militia unit is hardly as easy a target as a merchant caravan," said Burke.

"They're using the Red Spear," countered Butler solemnly. "It's one of their oldest ritual weapons."

"Hardly a match for power beams," snorted Burke.

"The most powerful weapon is the human mind," Mies cautioned. "And even savages have those."

Mies and his men spent the night in Haven. The next morning, they left for Crossroads at dawn. During the night, however, the troops heard stories of Red Spear atrocities.

Subtract 1 point from the Morale score of Mies' unit.

Turn to Section 69.

— 55 —

After dark, Crossroads was silent. Mies and his unit scurried from the shadow of one house to another, surprisingly quiet for so many men. Mies stopped across from the only source of light or noise in the town: a bar.

The building was filled with soldiers who stood or sat in small groups drinking and laughing or gambling. Mies signaled his men to wait for him while he investigated. As he started across the street, one of his soldiers offered him a needle handgun. Mies refused and crossed the street armed only with his knife.

As he walked toward the bar, Mies observed the troops inside. He noted the fashion and style of their uniforms, their speech patterns, the quality of their weapon discipline, their general health, and much more. They were off-world mercenaries, probably in the pay of one of William's puppet governments.

Mies stopped outside of the bar and hid near an open window, listening to bits of conversation. The mercenary assignment was to subdue the local populace. Someone joked that there was no populace to subdue and everyone laughed. Morale seemed high until a rookie asked how long they must wait to avenge their friends who had died by the Red Spear. The veterans had no answer for his question.

Mies changed his attention to the conversation of several

Section 56

civilians. They were discussing moving the contents of three warehouses deeper into the Jacal Mountains. They were careful not to specify what the contents of the warehouses might be.

Mies listened a while longer, but learned nothing of further use. He returned to his men.

Mies now has several choices. He can go to the lands of one of three families:

If Mies elects to go to the Tager family lands, turn to Section 83.

If he elects to go to the Dunne family lands, turn to Section 140.

If he elects to go to the Stuben family lands, turn to Section 130.

If Mies has not already visited the military camp outside of town (Section 62), he may go there. If he does this, his unit must make another Stealth check. Roll two dice:

If the result is equal to or less than the unit's Stealth score, turn to Section 62.

If the result is greater than the unit's Stealth score, turn to Section 95.

— 56 —

As Mies approached the base, five tongues of flame lit the sky ahead.

“What’s that?” someone asked, alarmed.

“Floaters on power boost,” Mies explained. His stomach already ached with tension. “We’ve been spotted.”

Should Mies order his men to quickly dig in and wait for the coming attack? If so, turn to Section 79.

Or should he order them to flee? If so, turn to Section 88.

— 57 —

Mies waited in the opulent lobby outside the ambassador's office. It was now 4:15 P.M., and he had been here since 9 A.M., when he was scheduled to meet the ambassador to the Jacal Region. What was supposed to be a fifteen-minute meeting to obtain a travel permit had turned into an all-day ordeal. Normally, Mies would not have bothered with such a meaningless piece of paper, but he had hoped to learn something of events in the Jacal Mountains from a government source.

Finally, the receptionist showed Mies into the ambassador's private office. A paunchy, balding man sat behind a large desk. Despite the luxury of the office, Mies felt as if he were talking to a low-ranking civil servant.

"Have a seat, Mr. Ignatowski," the ambassador said, not looking up. "You are a mining engineer?"

"That's right," Mies replied.

"What brings you to the Jacal Mountains?" the ambassador asked.

"My employer would rather that I didn't say," Mies answered.

"I see," the ambassador responded. "Unfortunately, the unstable political situation in the Jacal Region forces me to investigate anyone seeking entry permission to the area. I'm sure you understand that this is a most important matter, or I wouldn't interview every applicant myself."

"Of course," Mies said. "I suppose it wouldn't hurt to say that I am prospecting for valuable commodities in the mountainous area."

"Such as?" the ambassador pressed.

"Minerals, geothermal energy, perhaps even heavy metals," Mies continued.

"That sounds more like a geologist's job, Mr. Ignatowski," the ambassador said.

Mies noticed the ambassador move his hand toward the edge of his desk. The ambassador suddenly dropped his eyes and Mies smelled nervous sweat. He lunged for the ambassador's hand, but he was in too poor a position to stop the ambassador from pressing his hidden alarm.

A dozen armed soldiers stormed into the office and grabbed Mies. He decided it was wiser not to resist.

“What’s the meaning of this?” Mies demanded.

The ambassador threw a news printout onto his desk. The headline read: “Dorsai Commander’s Son Murders Engineer.” A picture of Bret Scoles was beneath the headline.

“You are under arrest for murder,” the ambassador explained.

Turn to Section 33.

— 58 —

Mies did not like the situation. He positioned his unit in a boulder field a few hundred yards from the Red Spears. The Red Spears fell back to the towering ridge walls and vanished. For a moment, the mountains remained silent. Then a power beam shattered a boulder and an eerie cry echoed through the valley. The Red Spears have begun their attack!

The Red Spears’ statistics are:

Manpower: 30

Ordnance: 4

Attack Strength: 120

Stealth: 10

Morale: 10

Melee: 9

The Red Spears fight on Chart E. Mies’ unit attacks on Chart C. Mies and his men have the initiative and always attack first.

If Mies’ equipment list includes a power weapon scrambler, he may use it to reduce the Red Spears’ Ordnance value to 2.

After four rounds of combat, the Red Spears flee the battlefield.

Turn to Section 51 if the Manpower value of Mies’ unit falls to 0.

If Mies survives the battle, turn to Section 68.

— 59 —

Mies entered the camp, and his men, nervous and impatient, waited outside. Inside the camp perimeter, soldiers were busy loading equipment onto parked floaters. As Mies listened to a couple of technicians discussing the upcoming campaign against the Morrow clan, he saw them attach a canister of deadly nerve gas to one of the floaters.

Darting from shadow to shadow, Mies sneaked to the west end of the camp. There he found a warehouse filled with the deadly neurotoxin canisters. He estimated that the warehouse contained enough gas to kill every living being in the Jacal Range.

As he turned to leave, he saw a commander addressing a group of officers from a platform. Even though he strained to hear the words, he could not quite understand what the commander was saying.

If Mies' equipment list includes a listening device, turn to Section 81.

Otherwise, turn to Section 66.

— 60 —

Haven Pass was the traditional meeting ground for Five Cities traders and the mountain people. Most of the trading occurred in an open marketplace covering almost a square mile. It was filled with gaily colored tents, livestock pens, and primitive crafts and arts.

Mies' keen eyes detected the encroachment of modern technology, however. A Ch'ung merchant used a personal computer to print invoices, and a Five Cities trader passed a credit chit through an automatic authorization link. To the Jacals, however, such slight encroachments would hardly have been noticed. The

Section 61

merchants had obviously taken great care to make the square seem primitive and rustic.

The merchants of the Five Cities and the Ch'ung Kingdom made a considerable profit from the wool, homespun cloth, leather, handmade furniture, and exotic vegetables that the clansmen provided. In return, the merchants provided the few fruits of modern life the Jacals desired, and did it in an atmosphere that made the Jacals comfortable.

As Mies and his companions traveled toward the central square, he noticed that the market seemed filled to much less than its normal capacity. In fact, he saw no Jacals at all. Dozens of stalls stood shuttered or entirely empty, and the ring of hotels and taverns surrounding the square seemed half-deserted. He decided to enter an inn called the Five Flags.

The smoky bar was half-filled with merchants. As Mies entered, a few of the glum-looking men stared at him, then turned back to their drinks.

If Mies is alone, turn to Section 70.

If Mies is with the Jacals, turn to Section 85.

If Mies is traveling with the Five Cities militia, turn to Section 54.

— 61 —

Jeffre Tager-Hols quietly walked beside Mies. He was lost in his thoughts and not eager to be found. He had said little more in two days of travel than that he preferred to be called Jeff.

Even in the summer, traveling this pass was slow and arduous, for few animals and no vehicles were capable of negotiating the rugged terrain. Mies and his companions had to hike over the pass carrying their belongings on their backs.

If Mies' equipment list includes any hovercars, he must discard them now. Cross them off his list.

Eventually, Mies and his companions reached the hardest part of their journey: a stretch of steep, scree-covered terrain called the Hump. The trail rose four kilometers in this ten-kilometer length of trail, nearly to the top of the Jacal Mountains. The path ended at the base of a glacier which occasionally rolled avalanches of boulders and ice down the trail.

When Mies reached the top of the Hump, he was surprised to find an engineering corps restructuring the terrain. They had blasted a path through the glacier and were paving a road over the top of the Hump. Mies signaled his companions to stop and hide. He got as close to the construction site as he dared.

When Mies returned to his companions, he said, "We can't go around them, and we don't dare fight them."

"What can we do?" Jeff asked. "They call us savages, and they defile the land with great machines," he added spitefully.

"Perhaps we can scare them off."

Jeff grinned.

That night Mies and Jeff donned black clothing and sneaked into the engineers' camp. They completed their task within five minutes, then left. None of the engineers stirred.

The next morning, when the chief engineer left his tent, he saw a giant Red Spear painted on the door of his surfacing machine. Red Spears were painted everywhere: on the barracks door, in the mess tent, even on occupied sleeping bags.

Without even searching the area, the chief ordered his men to pack. By dusk, the pass was clear and Mies and Jeff had crossed. As they parted, Jeff pressed a small medallion into Mies' palm. It had a picture of a Red Spear emblazoned on a blue field.

On Mies' equipment list, note that Mies has a "Red Spear Medallion."

Turn to Section 64.

— 62 —

Mies and his men went directly to the camp. Mies easily avoided the clumsily hidden security sensors. As they neared the main encampment, Mies ordered his men to hide while he went ahead to investigate. He took only a knife, even though one of his men offered him a needle handgun.

The camp was well lit and Mies had difficulty finding a shadow to hide in. He slowly moved toward the administration center, picking his way carefully. He saw only one man on duty inside the building. Mies observed him for a short time through a window.

Already, Mies had seen enough to draw a few conclusions. The troops in the camp were off-world mercenaries, probably in the employ of one of William's puppet governments. There was an even mix of veterans and rookies, but there could be a few morale problems because the officers were segregated from the men.

Finally, the lone man left the administration building and walked toward the latrines. Mies sneaked into the building immediately and memorized the contents of the files on the officer's desk. He also found the daily requisition forms. From the requisition forms, he learned that the camp had been built in the last three weeks. He also discovered that heavy construction equipment had been requested from the mothership.

Mies was surprised to discover that this operation was based from a mothership. There had to be something very big in these mountains if someone was committing such a large vessel to the project.

Realizing that the duty officer was likely to return any moment, Mies returned the documents to the place he had found them and left.

As he left the building and started toward the warehouse, Mies realized that he had left the blinds closed. Unfortunately, when he returned, he saw that the duty officer had come back.

Should Mies continue his investigation, hoping that the officer doesn't realize that someone closed the blinds? If so, turn to Section 71.

Or should he flee immediately? If so, turn to Section 80.

— 63 —

Mies' attack took the engineers completely by surprise.

The engineers' statistics are:

Manpower: 30

Ordnance: 5

Attack Strength: 150

Stealth: 2

Morale: 4

Melee: 2

The engineers fight on Chart F. During the first two rounds, the engineers are so surprised that they cannot return fire. Mies attacks twice on Chart A. After the first two rounds, Mies attacks on Chart B. Mies always has the initiative and attacks first.

If the engineers lose more than 5 points of Manpower, they must make a Morale check at the end of every combat round. If they fail the check, they surrender.

If the engineers surrender, Mies has two options:

He can release the engineers without their communications equipment or vehicles. If he should do this, turn to Section 97.

Or Mies can take the engineers with him and release them near a camp. If he should do this, his unit must make a Stealth check. Roll two dice:

If the result is equal to or less than the unit's Stealth score, turn to Section 64.

If the result is greater than the unit's Stealth score, turn to Section 87.

If the Manpower score of Mies' unit falls to 0, turn to Section 51.

If the engineers' Manpower score falls to 0, turn to Section 64. In this case, Mies recovers some weapons. Increase his unit's Ordnance score to 5.

— 64 —

Mies and his men were through the pass and into the Plains family lands. The land here had been farmed for generations, but it was difficult to tell that. The fields were carefully intertwined into the forest so that the landscape appeared unbroken. No wire fences or wooden walls were visible, even in the most heavily farmed areas.

The fields were cleverly divided by border plants which kept the crops from mixing. The effect was startling to anyone who had seen the neat, mechanized agriculture common to other worlds.

As Mies traveled to the Plains homestead, he saw no other men, and he was confident that no one saw him. Twenty kilometers from the homestead, a column of gray smoke rose off to the right of the trail. Half a dozen birds circled the smoke.

Should Mies go straight to the Plains camp and ignore the smoke? If so, turn to Section 73.

Or should he investigate the column of smoke? If so, turn to Section 97.

— 65 —

Mies entered the Camel Herder Inn, a small hotel where the Jacals were supposed to reside. The place was run-down and tacky. Prostitutes sat in the bar looking bored and tired. Mies walked to the desk.

"I understand that a group of Jacal men are staying here," he said.

"So?" the clerk snorted.

"Please give this to them," he said. Mies gave the clerk Kensie Graeme's personal card. Kensie, the Dorsai who had briefed Mies for this mission, was known to many Jacals. With luck, Mies would run across some of those contacts. The clerk snorted again and walked away.

A few minutes later, behind Mies, someone said, "You not Kensie." Mies turned around and saw a mountain man. He carried a needle rifle that was taller than he stood.

"I am here in his name," Mies responded.

"You are boy," the man stated.

"I am pledged to Kensie Graeme."

The small man stared at Mies for a full minute. Mies stared back, his expression showing neither puzzlement nor irritation. Finally, the little man smiled, revealing a set of broken and missing teeth.

"Maybe we go with you. Maybe we don't. But we ride together a few days and let the Moon Goddess decide."

Mies now has a party of eight Jacal men pledged to support Kensie Graeme. They will follow Mies for a few days out of respect for the Dorsai commander.

The unit's statistics (including Mies) are:

Manpower: 10

Ordnance: 2

Attack Strength: 20

Stealth: 9

Morale: 6

Melee: 10

Write these statistics on Mies' equipment list.

Mies and his new companions now travel to Crossroads. Turn to Section 68.

— 66 —

The meeting broke up and the officers dispersed. As Mies watched the men disperse, he recognized one of the men from the linkship. The man had occupied a cabin just a short distance down the corridor from his cabin. Mies recalled seeing him speak to Bret Scoles several times.

The camp began to stir into heavy activity. Sensing that now was a wise time to leave, Mies returned to his companions and they departed quickly.

From here, Mies may go to either the Morrow family lands (Section 101) or the Ch'ung family lands (Section 110). If your notes indicate that Mies has already visited these locations, he may follow any set of travel lines to the first location he has not visited (see Jacal Mountains Map in Section 25).

If Mies has not yet visited the refugee camp at Section 67, he may do so now. If he should do this, turn to Section 67.

Be sure to note on Mies' equipment list that he has visited the military camp in Section 59.

— 67 —

At the refugee camp, hundreds of women, children, and aged men were crammed onto a tiny square of land. Their only shelter was a dilapidated barn. A six-strand barbed-wire fence enclosed the compound. Mies could see signs inside the compound that warned the occupants that anyone within three meters of the fence would be shot. The Jacals inside the fence paid no attention to the sign; dozens stood within centimeters of the fence. Faced with so many offenders, the guards ignored the rules infractions and contented themselves with making sure that nobody escaped.

The lack of able-bodied men within the enclosure made Mies uneasy. These people were clearly hostages, not refugees. He observed signs of sickness and starvation in every face; Jacals were not well prepared for life in confinement.

That night, Mies easily sneaked into the camp. The guard discipline was low. Instead of patrolling the camp perimeter, they crowded into small huts drinking and watching vid-screens. For a Dorsai, entering or leaving this camp was as easy as entering his own home.

Mies went over to the barn and entered. The occupants were having a meeting. Mies worked his way to the center of the crowd, where the leaders were discussing their people's terrible situation. Mies stepped into the yellow circle of light cast by the room's only oil lamp.

"Don't lose hope," he said. "The people of the Five Cities already suspect your plight. When I return, they will learn how truly desperate your position has become."

"I guess we're doing all this worrying for nothing," said an old man with a long, crooked nose. "This youngster has come to destroy the soldiers and save us poor savages single-handedly."

"I only meant—"

"What?" the old man yelled. "Why do you think a runny-nosed Ch'ungian brat can succeed where the Jacal people cannot?"

"Shut up, Hiram," snapped an old woman. She then addressed Mies. "Forgive him; he has received bad news. What do you want, young man? We have little to offer at this time."

"I ask only for information," Mies said. "And, perhaps, to offer what help I may."

"Help indeed," Hiram sneered. "Who sends your help? The Ch'ung Kingdom? The Five Cities? Or maybe Prince William himself?"

"None of those," said Mies quietly. "I come from the Dorsai."

The elders' faces showed their astonishment.

"Perhaps you can help," said the woman.

Mies spent the next few hours discussing the situation with the elders. About four weeks ago, off-world troops dropped from the skies. In an obviously well planned action, they closed all roads and jammed all radio communications in less than a day, cutting off all contact with the outside world.

The soldiers, or "pings" as the Jacals called them, were concentrated in the south at three locations: in Crossroads, on the Dunne family lands, and along the road to the Ch'ung Kingdom.

Section 67

A fourth group was pushing toward the Morrow family lands. Nobody knew the reason for the push on the Morrow lands or the occupation of the Dunne lands, but the other two groups were obviously trying to seal the Jacals off from the rest of Ceta. They were doing a very good job.

Some of the refugees had heard rumors of a rebel stronghold being established in the mountains south of the Ch'ung family lands.

Mies questioned them about the rumors of metal ore leaving the Jacal Region. The Jacals had heard the same rumors, but knew little more than Mies. The old woman said that her brother had told her of a small mining operation far to the south, in Stuben Pass.

Mies thanked the Jacals for their information. As he prepared to leave, he realized that the barn was filled with sick people.

If Mies' equipment list includes a medical kit, he may give the kit to the refugees. If he does so, erase the kit from his list. In return, the Jacals will give Mies a small medallion bearing the Morrow family crest. The Jacals place enormous significance on the possession of such medallions. If Mies gives his medical kit to the Jacals, write "Morrow Medallion" on his equipment list and scratch off "medical kit." Note that Mies has visited the refugee camp at Section 67.

If Mies has not visited the military camp at Section 86, he may do so now. If Mies should do this, turn to Section 59.

Mies may also travel to either the Morrow family lands (Section 101) or the Ch'ung family lands (Section 110) from here. If your notes indicate that Mies has already visited these locations, he may follow any set of travel lines to the first location he has not visited (see Jacal Mountains Map in Section 25).

— 68 —

Mies and his companions continued toward Crossroads, a small town at the end of Haven Pass.

Mies must make a Stealth check. Roll two dice:

If the result is equal to or less than the Stealth rating of Mies' unit, turn to Section 75.

If the result is greater than the Stealth rating of Mies' unit, turn to Section 89.

— 69 —

Dawn came at different times to different locations in the Jacal Mountains. The sun's early rays fell only on the highest peaks, while the valleys below remained shrouded in shadow. Haven Pass was in one of the deepest and darkest of these valleys. The mountain ridges on either side of it rose nearly four kilometers into the sky, keeping the pass under a pall of semidarkness until a few hours before midday.

The shadows worried Mies as his four hovercars sped forward through its inky twilight. At each bend in the road, Mies expected a party of Jacals to leap from the shadows and ambush them. Mies almost wished that something would happen, just so he could stop worrying about it.

His wish came true.

The leading hovercar rounded a bend, then swerved into a shallow ditch. Mies ordered the other cars to stop while he investigated. As he rounded the bend, he saw the reason the first car had gone off the road. A group of twenty Jacals stood in the middle of the road. Each carried a Red Spear. But the spears were not what made Mies nervous. Each warrior also carried a needle rifle.

Should Mies try to fly his hovercars around the Red Spears, despite the narrow breadth of the valley? If so, turn to Section 82.

Or should Mies order his soldiers to attack with their superior firepower? If so, turn to Section 74.

Perhaps Mies should stop and order his men to dig in, allowing the Red Spears to make the first move. If so, turn to Section 58.

—70—

Mies walked up to the bar alone. A man stared at him for a moment, then said, "Christ, you stink!" Mies studied the speaker for a few seconds. Seeing that the man posed no threat to him, Mies ignored him and scanned the rest of the inn. It was nearly empty. The few patrons that were here seemed bitter and desperate. Although he had no way of knowing the cause of their trouble, Mies assumed it had to do with the relative desertion of the marketplace.

The bartender waited for Mies to order.

"Are things always this quiet in here?" Mies asked.

"Have been this month," the bartender grumbled. "You want a drink or what?"

"What do you locals drink? I don't suppose you carry Dorsai whiskey this far up-country," Mies said.

"Gee," said the man who had insulted him earlier, "a real Dorsai."

Mies turned around and regarded the speaker with contempt. "The whiskey doesn't make the man. Don't push your luck a second time."

"Why not?" the man slurred. He was obviously looking for a fight.

"Leave the man alone, Forcell!" the bartender barked.

"Sure," answered Forcell, "as soon as he tells me what a Dorsai is doing here."

"With pleasure," Mies said. "However, I am not a Dorsai. I am a merchant. My company wishes to open a market here in Haven. I am looking for a group of Jacals."

Everyone in the inn, even the bartender, snickered.

"You'll have a long wait," said a man wearing a leather hunting jacket. "We're all awaiting the Jacals. Nobody's seen one in almost three weeks."

"I'll have to go after them, then," Mies declared.

"Then you'd better be a Dorsai," said the bartender. "Lots of folks have gone after them. Those that come back say the Red Spears turned them back at the frontier."

"That's right," said the man in the hunting jacket. "They've been ambushing caravans at night. They kill everyone in the caravan, but they leave the goods alone. It must be some sort of religious war."

"I guess you'll have to tell your employers to invest their money someplace else," said Forcell.

"The town is completely empty of mountain people?" Mies pressed.

"I heard Horace Spelman say he has a whole family staying over at the Camel Herder Inn," said the bartender. "He says they're a foul lot."

Mies goes to Horace Spelman's inn. Turn to Section 65.

—71—

Mies continued to the warehouses, anticipating the wail of alarm sirens at any moment. Nothing happened, however.

The warehouses stood behind a separate barbed-wire fence. Mies vaulted the six-foot fence and sneaked into the closest warehouse. It was filled with unmarked crates. Mies pried one of the crates open and found what he had expected: mining equipment. Mies quickly established that the huge warehouse contained an automated ore refinery. Mies quietly returned to his men.

He can now journey to one of three family lands:

If Mies goes to the Tager family lands, turn to Section 83.

If Mies goes to the Stuben family lands, turn to Section 130.

If Mies goes to the Dunne family lands, turn to Section 140.

—72—

After nightfall, Mies and his men tied ropes to each other and began the tortuous climb up the face of the Hump.

Mies led the way, moving lightly from rock to rock, occasionally stopping to mark a dangerous place or to help the next climber. When Mies' unit reached the halfway point, an alarm siren wailed from the engineers' camp, at that moment almost directly below. Someone had tripped an alarm wire!

Flares shot high into the sky directly overhead, casting an eerie green glow on the mountainside.

Should Mies continue up the mountainside? If so, turn to Section 77.

Or should he lead a mad charge down the steep slope? If so, turn to Section 63.

—73—

Kilometers before reaching the Plains homestead, Mies read the signs of mercenary occupation. Here he found a lost mess kit, there he smelled petroleum, a little later he heard the distant rumble of machinery. Although Mies tried to find a convenient perch from which to spy upon the Plains camp, he had no luck. In order to determine the extent of the occupation, Mies had to send patrols toward the enemy base.

Mies' men soon returned to camp with some interesting information. The mercenaries were using the Plains camp as a logistical and communications hub for three battalions operating in the area. Although the invasion had taken the Plains clan completely by surprise, many of them had escaped and were still hiding in nearby caves or deep within the forest. There was a large refugee camp four kilometers south of the military base. Most of the occupants of the camp were women and children. Finally, the

last patrol returned with news that the main body of the fighting force had moved north toward the Morrow family lands.

Should Mies investigate the refugee camp? If so, turn to Section 67.

Or should he spy on the military base? If so, turn to Section 86.

Perhaps he should avoid both the military and the refugee camps and push toward the Morrow family lands. If so, turn to Section 101.

Mies could also travel toward the Ch'ung lands. If he should do this, turn to Section 110.

If Mies does not investigate either the refugee camp or the military base, do not write that section on his equipment list as a location he has visited.

—74—

Mies ordered his unit to attack the neat row of Red Spears. As soon as Mies' unit approached, the Red Spears fled behind a ridge. Mies' hovercars zipped past the ridge, then wheeled around to attack from the rear.

Then Mies saw that the Red Spears had led him into a trap!

The Red Spears' statistics are:

Manpower: 30

Ordnance: 4

Attack Strength: 120

Stealth: 10

Morale: 10

Melee: 9

Mies' unit attacks on Chart C. The Red Spears fight on Chart E. The Red Spears have the initiative and attack first during the first three rounds of combat. After three rounds, Mies' unit has the initiative and attacks first.

Section 75

If Mies' equipment list includes a power weapon scrambler, the Red Spears' Ordnance value drops to 2.

Mies and his unit may flee this battle at the end of any round by making a successful Stealth check. Roll two dice; if the result is equal to or less than his unit's Stealth score, they have escaped the combat.

If the Red Spears' Manpower score falls to 0, or if Mies and his unit escape the combat, turn to Section 68.

If the Manpower of Mies' unit falls to 0, turn to Section 29.

—75—

As his unit progressed deeper into the Jacal Mountains, Mies kept a careful watch for signs of an ambush. He saw no signs of such a surprise, however, but as they neared the village of Crossroads, Mies got an uneasy feeling. He ordered his unit to stop.

Mies walked ahead. He saw several loose patches of dirt in the road. He knelt at the closest patch and brushed the loose dirt aside, then carefully started to dig. Within a few minutes, he had uncovered a land mine. A Red Spear was painted on the casing. After disarming and removing the mine, Mies gave the order to continue.

"The mine was set for hovercars only," Mies commented to his companions.

"So?"

"How many Jacals have ever seen a hovercar?" he asked. No one answered.

Mies and his party continue toward Crossroads. Turn to Section 91.

—76—

Mies decided to push on. He must sneak into the military camp unnoticed.

Roll two six-sided dice:

If Mies rolls a 4 or less, turn to Section 59.

If Mies rolls a 5 or higher, turn to Section 56.

—77—

As Mies and his unit continued to climb, the engineers took long-range potshots at them.

Roll one die. The result is the number of attacks the engineers make before Mies and his unit reach safety.

The statistics for the engineers are:

Manpower: 30

Ordnance: 5

Attack Strength: 150

Stealth: 2

Morale: 4

Melee: 2

The engineers fight on Chart G. Mies and his companions cannot attack. If Mies' equipment list includes a power weapon scrambler, reduce the engineers' Ordnance value to 1.

If the Manpower score of Mies' unit falls to 0, turn to Section 51.

If Mies and his unit reach safety before their Manpower value falls to 0, they make it over the Hump. Turn to Section 64.

—78—

Mies put one hand on Pieter and gently forced him to sit. Pieter tried to resist, but Mies had one finger on a vital nerve and the astonished Jacal had no choice except to sit.

Mies' show of restraint caused everyone to hesitate. Burke dropped his hand and the tension dispersed like smoke.

However, Mies realized he must leave Haven soon. He and his Jacal companions were too noticeable. They left for Crossroads before the end of the day. Pieter and the other Jacals grumbled that Mies had caused them to lose face.

Subtract 1 point from the unit's Morale value.

Turn to Section 68.

—79—

When attacking from armored hovercars, the correct procedure was to use infrared, sounding radar to locate enemy targets, then roar directly at the target firing every weapon the vehicle had. There were a few tense seconds between finding the target and firing at it, however. This was what Mies was counting upon.

The night was dark and silent. Mies climbed into the tree above his hastily dug foxhole and cursed at the awkward position he had to assume. Mies sensed fear and excitement from the man next to him, but noted that he himself felt unnaturally calm. He wondered if he would prove worthy of his Dorsai blood.

A few moments later, Mies heard the first ping of the enemy's sounding radar. Mies whistled a shrill note and his men dropped from the trees into their foxholes. The hovercraft computers would target on the images in the trees and, unable to detect them, ignore the men in the foxholes. The first wave of hovercars roared in, splintering the trees with power beam shot after power

beam shot. The computers never even suspected that their real targets were ten feet below where they were firing.

Mies has achieved total surprise. Roll a six-sided die. The result is the number of attacks Mies' unit makes before the hovercars fire back.

If Mies rolls an 11 or higher at any point during the combat, a hovercraft explodes, killing its entire crew. Subtract 6 points from the patrol's Manpower value, in addition to the losses it normally suffers that round.

If Mies' equipment list includes explosives, he may use one explosive charge per round. Treat this as a separate attack on Chart A with an Attack Strength of 30. Be sure to note how many explosive charges Mies uses.

The hovercraft patrol's statistics are:

Manpower: 24

Ordnance: 5

Attack Strength: 120

Stealth: 4

Morale: 5

Melee: 4

The hovercraft troops fight on Chart F. Mies and his unit fight on Chart A. They have the initiative and attack first each round.

If the hovercraft patrol's Manpower falls to 0, Mies wins. He and his men may go to the Morrow lands (Section 101) or the Ch'ung lands (Section 110).

If the Manpower value of Mies' unit falls to 0, turn to Section 51.

— 80 —

Mies fled the military camp.

He can lead his party to one of three family lands:

If Mies goes to the Tager family lands, turn to Section 83.

If Mies goes to the Stuben family lands, turn to Section 130.

If Mies goes to the Dunne family lands, turn to Section 140.

Remember to list Crossroads (Section 91) as one of the locations Mies has visited.

— 81 —

Mies listened to the officer's orders. "And that, gentlemen, is the force composition. Now, on to more important matters. The operation against the Morrows has bogged down in those endless forests. To break this stalemate, we have been authorized to use neurotoxins. We will test their effectiveness at coordinate 10-10-20 in three days. We will station our mop-up units at coordinates 11-11-21."

The officer then dismissed his audience.

Turn to Section 66.

— 82 —

Mies ordered his unit to bypass the Red Spears. As the lead hovercar began the maneuver, Mies saw a flash of blinding light on the mountainside. A power beam slashed the ground in front of the hovercar. Another barely missed his own car.

The Red Spears had carefully hidden three power beam weapons upon the ridge, and now Mies' unit was caught in a crossfire!

The statistics for the Red Spears are:

Manpower: 30

Ordnance: 4

Attack Strength: 120

Stealth: 10

Morale: 10

Melee: 4

The Red Spears attack on Chart F. Mies and his unit attack on Chart D. The Red Spears have the initiative and attack first during the first three rounds of combat. Mies' unit attacks first after the first three rounds.

If Mies' equipment list contains a power weapon scrambler, reduce the Red Spears' Ordnance value to 2.

At the end of any round, Mies' unit may attempt to flee this combat by making a Stealth check. Roll two dice; if the result is equal to their Stealth score or less, they have successfully fled.

If the Red Spears' Manpower value falls to 0, or if Mies and his unit flee combat successfully, turn to Section 68.

If the Manpower value of Mies' unit falls to 0, turn to Section 51.

— 83 —

When Mies and his men reached the Tager family lands, for the first time he saw the Jacal mountain people in their native habitat. Despite seeming primitive, the Jacal way of life met the demands of nature without stressing either the men or the land unduly. The Jacals were herders and farmers, moving about their tasks with the slow deliberation that was the most efficient method of work in the thin mountain air. The land yielded rich crops of specially adapted vegetables and staple grains, as well as grass for the grazing animals.

As fertile as the Tagers' land was for crops, it was not rich in minerals, however. The terrain showed no sign of ore deposits. Just to be sure, Mies occasionally made a few tests, which only confirmed his suspicions.

Mies and his party stopped at a small complex of buildings containing three houses, a large barn, a grain silo, and several other outbuildings. There were no inns, hotels, or restaurants, but each house looked as though it had plenty of room for guests.

As he studied the surrounding terrain, Mies noted that the Jacals had been working only enough land to feed themselves and to buy a few essentials. They apparently had no interest in the baubles and toys that other "primitive" societies craved from technological intruders.

A round-cheeked, bearded farmer with long arms and strong hands came out of the barn and greeted Mies. His name, he explained, was Smyth Tager-Hols. When Mies questioned him about signs of an invading army, Smyth Tager-Hols said he had seen no such signs, then invited Mies' entire unit to eat with his family.

After dinner, as the children cleared the dishes from the huge table, Tager asked, "Are you here for a profit, or do you have a reason?"

Mies found the question somewhat strange. Apparently, the Jacals did not consider profit a true reason to do anything.

"We are traveling," Mies said diplomatically, "through your beautiful mountains."

Smyth Tager-Hols raised one bushy eyebrow. "Really now?" He called to his wife, "We have tourists here!"

"And I am the Saint Sebastian!" she called back. Smyth Tager-Hols laughed merrily.

As the party prepared to leave the next day, Smyth Tager-Hols asked a favor of Mies. "Would you allow my son and his three companions to travel with you through the central mountains? He has business in the north, and this is a terrible time to be traveling in a small group."

Before answering, Mies must decide whether he will continue north toward the Plains family lands, or turn back south toward Crossroads.

If Mies has not already visited Crossroads (Section 55), he may turn south toward Crossroads. If this is what he should do, turn to Section 68. Jeffre Tager-Hols does not wish to accompany Mies in this direction.

If Mies decides to continue north, he must decide whether or not to take Jeffre with him:

If Mies allows Jeffre to join his party, increase his unit's Manpower Value by 4 and turn to Section 61.

If Mies refuses to allow Jeffre to join his party, fearing a trap, turn to Section 100.

— 84 —

Mies chopped Butler's wrist and the knife clattered to the floor. Butler held his sore wrist, a look of astonishment on his face.

"I didn't even see the stranger move," whispered the bartender.

"He'll move now," said one of Butler's friends. The man picked up a chair and threw it in Mies' direction.

The bar erupted into a whirlwind of knives, bottles, mugs, and anything else the merchants could throw. Most of the fury was directed at Mies. He stood in the center of the bar, struggling to

Section 84

block and dodge the flurry of attacks, occasionally wincing in pain as he missed one. Once in a while, he lashed out and an opponent fell.

The Jacals leaped into the battle with glee, charging Butler's friends with bloodcurdling yells. Although their powerful attacks were not subtle, they were effective. The Jacals had obviously practiced close-quarters combat.

Use each unit's Melee strength to fight this battle.

The merchants' statistics are:

Manpower: 15

Ordnance: 1

Attack Strength: 15

Stealth: 2

Morale: 5

Melee: 1

The merchants attack on Chart D. Mies and the Jacals attack on Chart A. Mies and his unit have initiative and attack first each round.

All Manpower losses from this fight are temporary: after the battle, Mies' Manpower score returns to what it was before the battle began. However, if the Manpower value of Mies and the Jacals drops to 0 before the Manpower value of the merchants drops to 0, Mies and his men are all knocked unconscious. They wake on the edge of town without their valuable possessions. All of the equipment on Mies' list is lost; scratch off all items except Bret's knife. In addition, the Jacals have lost face; subtract 1 point from the unit's Morale.

If the Manpower value of the merchants falls to 0 first, Mies and the Jacals knock all of the merchants unconscious. They find five power weapons. Add 1 point to the Ordnance value of Mies' unit. In addition, the Jacals have protected their honor. Add 1 point to the Morale score of Mies' unit.

After the fight, Mies realizes that he and the Jacals will attract a lot of unwanted attention from local residents. They leave town immediately.

Turn to Section 68.

— 85 —

As Mies and his companions entered the half-filled bar, a murmur of interest buzzed around the room. Without speaking, Mies and his Jacal companions took a table near the bar and arranged themselves so that they were covering each other's backs. The bartender glumly asked what they wanted to drink; Mies ordered whiskey and the Jacals ordered beer.

A rough-looking, broad-shouldered man walked up to their table. Without conscious effort, Mies sized the man up as an opponent in a fight. He was strong and his posture indicated that he was aggressive, but he showed no signs of formal combat training.

"My name is Butler," the man said, as if his name would mean something to Mies.

"So?"

"I have a question for you," Butler stated.

"Ask your question, Mr. Butler," Mies said.

"Are you coming down from the mountains or going in them?"

"Why do you want to know?"

"That's a fair question," Butler said. "But let's just say that it's real important for you to answer first." Butler's hand dropped to the hilt of the knife he carried on his belt.

"We are traveling into the mountains," Mies answered. Although he could easily disarm Butler, Mies had no wish to attract attention by starting a brawl.

"You'd better not do that," Butler said, moving his hand away from his knife. "It makes no difference to me, but the Jacals are on the rampage."

"They're ambushing caravans at night," interjected a fat merchant. "Their warriors—the Red Spears they call themselves—sneak into the camps and cut the drivers' throats while they sleep."

"I've always known they were savages," Butler said. "Now they've proven me right."

Pieter Morrow stood up angrily. "What do flatland dogs know of the Red Spears?" he demanded. Mies saw Butler's hand drop

again to the hilt of his knife. "When the refuse of your corrupt cities came to our mountains, the Red Spears defended our way of life. And when your invasion armies tried to strip our freedom from us, the Red Spears broke their will. The Red Spears are not thieves and murderers, like so many of your kin. They are warriors, and if they are in the battlefield, it is because your greedy kind have put them there!"

Mies sensed that Pieter's speech had done little to convince the merchants. They were angry and desperate, for without the Jacals' goods, they would go broke. And all of them were willing to take out their frustrations on Mies and his companions.

Butler reached for his knife.

Should Mies make Pieter sit down and be quiet? If so, turn to Section 78.

Or should Mies knock the knife from Butler's hand before he can attack Pieter? If so, turn to Section 84.

— 86 —

A magnetic sensor field surrounded the base; it would be extremely difficult to approach.

If Mies wishes to continue despite the field, turn to Section 76.

Mies can investigate the refugee camp (Section 67) if he has not been there. If he does this, turn to Section 67.

Mies can also leave the area entirely and investigate another location. If he does this, he may travel to either the Morrow lands (Section 101) or the Ch'ung lands (Section 110).

— 87 —

A few hours after he released the engineers, Mies saw a floater on the horizon. It circled Mies and his unit for several minutes, then moved some distance away. Mies knew that the floater was serving as an artillery spotter. Any minute now, heavy explosives would start to rain down on them from a battery several kilometers away.

If Mies' equipment list includes a communications scrambler, Mies can use this to foul the floater's radio transmissions. In this case, the artillery shells fall a kilometer away. Turn to Section 64.

If Mies does not have a communications scrambler, his unit must endure one attack from the artillery. Mies cannot respond. Use an Attack Strength of 10 for the artillery strike. It attacks on Chart C.

If Mies' Manpower value falls to 0, turn to Section 29.

If Mies survives the attack, turn to Section 64.

— 88 —

Mies decided to flee. But as fast as he and his men ran, the hovercrafts were much quicker. The hovercars caught them in the open and locked onto them with sounding radar. Within seconds, five floaters moved into position and Mies' unit was surrounded.

The soldiers attacked immediately.

Their statistics are:

Manpower: 24

Ordnance: 5

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Attack Strength: 120

Morale: 5

Stealth: 4

Melee: 4

They attack on Chart E. Mies and his men attack on Chart B. They have the initiative and attack first each round.

If Mies rolls an 11 or higher at any time, he blows up a hovercraft. Subtract 6 points from the soldiers' Manpower value, in addition to their normal losses that round.

If Mies' equipment list includes explosive charges, he may use one charge each round to make an additional attack. The charge has an Attack Strength of 30 and attacks on Chart A. All Manpower losses due to an explosive charge are in addition to normal Manpower losses for the round. Remember to mark one charge off Mies' equipment list each time he uses one.

If the Manpower value of Mies and his troops falls to 0, turn to Section 51.

If the Manpower value of the soldiers falls to 0 or less, Mies and his unit escape. They may not enter the military camp, for Mies knows it will be on full alert. Mies may now travel to the Morrow lands (Section 101) or the Ch'ung lands (Section 110). If he has already visited these locations, Mies may follow any set of travel lines to any location box he has not visited.

— 89 —

Mies was studying his map when an explosion shattered his concentration. His nerves tingled with excitement and his mind instantaneously shifted into full battle alert.

Someone had found a mine.

The mine makes one attack on Chart C with an Attack Strength of 10. Subtract any losses from Mies' Manpower value.

If the Manpower value of Mies' unit falls to 0, turn to Section 51.

After determining that there are no other mines in the area, survivors may continue to Section 91.

— 90 —

Mies deftly sidestepped the thrust, then grabbed the shaft of the pitchfork and pulled the man from the thicket. He snapped the man's neck with a single blow.

"Brian!" screamed a woman. She rushed to the body, which lay tangled in the thicket of thorns. Meanwhile, Mies' men rushed to the scene. They looked at the body without saying a word.

Subtract 1 point from the Morale score of Mies' unit.

Mies and his men continue toward the Morrow lands. Turn to Section 123.

— 91 —

In the Jacal Mountains, sunrise was as tart and crisp as a chilled apple. Mies breathed deeply of the cool air, enjoying the vigor it instilled in him. Mies raised a set of binoculars to his eyes and studied the valley below. The town of Crossroads sat in the valley, which lay at the junction of three rivers radiating to the north, west, and east.

Because of those three rivers, Crossroads occupied the most strategic position in the Jacal Region. The rivers carried timber, fish, crops, and other Jacal products into Crossroads. From there, the goods were combined into larger loads and ferried to Haven and the rest of Ceta.

Despite the town's stable economic base, the Jacals had steadfastly refused to allow any huge factories or power plants to be built. The entire town functioned in a primitive fashion.

Section 91

There was a huge camp just to the north of the city that puzzled Mies, however. Straining the electronic magnification of his binoculars to the limit, Mies saw a barracks, warehouses, communication stations, fuel dumps, ammo dumps, vehicles of all shapes and sizes, and even a small landing pad for upper-atmosphere craft. The camp could easily have housed three thousand soldiers and supplied a far greater number. Mies found it a blight upon the otherwise peaceful Crossroads valley; it was obvious that the Jacals had not built the camp.

No banner, emblem, or flag flew above the camp, which meant it was a mercenary camp. Mies knew that if he could get closer to the camp, he would learn much. He had studied the dress, discipline, and habits of every army on fourteen worlds. A few minutes of observation would do much to reveal where the mercenaries came from; that knowledge, in turn, might clarify the identity of the party whom they served.

Mies switched his attention to the rest of the countryside. To the north lay the Tager family lands. The Tager valley was small but important. It protected the base of the only known pass connecting the northern Jacals to the southern Jacals.

To the southwest, the Dunnes' broad valley ran deep into the mountains. The Dunne farms were famous for their exotic foods and livestock. An ancient volcano named Mount Fire was the primary residence of the Dunne clan.

A narrow valley, almost completely filled by a raging river, ran to the south. Although the Jacals had left this area largely unexplored, a family named Stuben had lived along the river for a few decades. The Stubens were a reclusive family and little was known of them. As far as Mies knew, none of their clan had ever set foot into Crossroads or Haven.

Should Mies bypass Crossroads and go to one of the three family lands he can see? If so, turn to the appropriate section: Section 83 for Tager family lands, Section 130 for the Stuben family lands, or Section 140 for the Dunne family lands.

Mies could go to Crossroads or even directly to the military camp. If Mies decides to do this, he must first make a Stealth check. Roll two dice. If the result is greater than his unit's Stealth score, he fails the check. In this case, turn to Section 95.

If Mies passes the Stealth check, he may continue into Crossroads or to the military camp. Turn to Section 55 if Mies goes to Crossroads. Turn to Section 62 if he goes to the military camp.

Write the name of Crossroads as a place Mies has been to ONLY if he passes the Stealth check and goes to Crossroads (Section 55) or the military camp (Section 62). Otherwise, he has not yet been to Crossroads.

— 92 —

The trucks soon stopped in a small valley that had been leveled to provide the foundation for a base camp. John Thomas, outraged at this rape of the land, growled.

The trucks parked and soldiers came to off-load the cargo. As the soldiers began work, Mies saw that, among the other supplies, there were hundreds of crates of ammunition.

Mies noticed two high-ranking officers conversing near one of the trucks.

“I’ve got to find out what they’re saying,” he said.

“I will come with you,” said John Thomas. It was an order, not a request.

If Mies’ equipment list includes a listening device, he does not need to move any closer. He can use it to listen to the conversation from here. Turn to Section 118.

Otherwise, Mies must sneak closer. He must make a Stealth check. Roll two dice:

If the result is greater than his Stealth score, turn to Section 125.

If the result is equal to or less than his Stealth score, turn to Section 118.

— 93 —

The attack worked perfectly: almost too perfectly. According to the lead unit, the ping resistance was weak. The unit gained its objective without any trouble; the commander radioed that they had caught the pings napping.

Should Mies commit another unit to exploit this attack? If so, turn to Section 147.

Or should he order the lead unit to withdraw to a more conservative and less exposed position? If so, turn to Section 152.

— 94 —

Mies and his men traveled all night. By dawn, they had reached their destination. It was empty. Mies has led his men to the wrong coordinates; their target was not here.

The radio crackled to life. "Ping force C is preparing to attack!" an anonymous voice said. "Return to base immediately."

Mies must return to camp. Turn to Section 136.

— 95 —

Mies ordered his unit forward. An hour later, as they descended into a gully between two steep ridges, Mies saw a flare shoot into the sky. Within seconds, the ridges erupted into flashes from half a dozen hidden power weapons. They have run into an ambush!

The statistics for the ambush patrol are:

Manpower: 8

Ordnance: 5

Attack Strength: 40

Stealth: 10

Morale: 5

Melee: 5

Mies and his unit attack on Chart C. The patrol fights on Chart E. The patrol has the initiative for the first two rounds of combat and attacks first. After the first two rounds, Mies' unit has initiative.

If the Manpower value of Mies' unit falls to 0, turn to Section 51.

If the patrol's Manpower value falls to 0, Mies' unit wins the battle. Unfortunately, Mies knows that they must still flee the area, for the ambush patrol undoubtedly radioed their position and situation back to base. Other patrols are sure to search the area. Mies may go to any of the three family lands near Crossroads: the Tager family lands (Section 83), the Stuben family lands (Section 130), or the Dunne family lands (Section 140).

— 96 —

Mies tried to follow the farmer and his family, but even his highly trained Dorsai skills were no match for the farmer's lifetime of experience in these mountains. Mies was lost.

He led his unit through the thick forest for hours, trying to find his bearings in what had become to him a green fog. When it became apparent that he was exhausting his men without making any progress, he ordered the unit to make camp.

An hour after sunset, the farmer reappeared with a large group of Morrow men. As Mies studied the farmer, he sensed a defiant spirit which, by its very existence, challenged the beliefs and training of civilized men like Mies. Without a word, the farmer motioned for Mies and his men to follow.

An hour later, Mies and his unit reached an abandoned distill-

ery. A band of about fifty Jacals camped there. They were armed with a poor selection of needle weapons and homemade explosives. The farmer took Mies to the Jacal commanders, who stood around a makeshift table examining a map.

After Mies explained that he would like to aid them, the rebel leaders outlined the situation for him. Three columns of pings had driven into the valley. The first column, and the smallest, was covering the southern flank and screening the other columns against attack from the forests to the west. The second column of vehicles had moved far to the north on what appeared to be a wild-goose chase. The third column, which consisted of armored vehicles and over a thousand mechanized infantrymen, was traveling straight toward the Well of Souls and the large Jacal force based there.

The job of this band of Jacals was to slow the advance of the third column. Obviously, it was a suicide mission, but the rebel leaders believed it might give the larger force at the Well of Souls time enough to respond.

Mies needed only one glance at the map to see that it made more sense to harass the column from the rear and force it to wheel about. The rebel leaders, however, did not trust Mies. Try as he might, Mies could not convince them to give his plan a chance.

Should Mies aid the rebel leaders and join them in the head-on defense of their position? If so, add 20 points to his Manpower, but reduce his Ordnance score to 3. Turn to Section 116.

Or should Mies attack the column from behind? If so, he may still increase his Manpower score. Does he have any of the items below with him? If so, adjust his Manpower and Ordnance scores by the amount indicated in the following table:

<i>Item</i>	<i>Increase to Manpower</i>	<i>Decrease to Ordnance</i>
<i>Red Spear Medallion</i>	+5	—
<i>Morrow Medallion</i>	+10	-1
<i>Well of Souls Medallion</i>	+5	—
<i>Jacal People's Banner</i>	+20	-1

Make the appropriate adjustments to Mies' statistics, then turn to Section 123.



— 97 —

Mies and his companions had just entered the Plains family lands when they decided to investigate a distant column of smoke. Thick smoke clung to the lee side of the steep hill. Mies could see nothing. The sick-sweet smell of decay permeated the air. As Mies neared the top of the hill he saw that the grass was slick with a dark red liquid. Mies rubbed his fingers in the liquid, then raised them to his nose. The liquid was blood.

A few steps further on, in the ruins of several hastily erected shacks, Mies saw the embers of the fires that had destroyed the site. Another dozen steps brought Mies clear of the smoke. What he saw sickened him.

One of Mies' companions retched when he cleared the smoke.

Thirty Red Spears were planted in the ground. On the end of each spear rested a man's head. Mies recognized the face on one of the heads; it belonged to one of the engineers he had seen at the Hump.

"What happened?" asked the man who had retched.

"What happened is not important," Mies answered. "What is important is that a patrol is sure to investigate. Let's move on."

Turn to Section 73.

— 98 —

A wild rooster heralded the morning. Mies had already been up for an hour studying his maps in the privacy of his own tent. Suddenly, John Thomas opened his tent flap.

"Three warriors want to speak with you," John Thomas said. In the center of his camp, three Jacals, all carrying Red Spears

and needle rifles, awaited Mies. Although they had weathered faces, Mies knew that they were just children.

"You and your men are to come with us, Group-leader Ohanlon," said the oldest.

Mies nodded.

Turn to Section 111.

— 99 —

The enemy hovercars roared into Mies' lines as if unconcerned about Jacal opposition. Needle guns and void rifles snapped everywhere.

Although Mies knew he was overwhelmed by the sheer force of the enemy attack, he stood his ground, determined to cause as many losses as possible.

The statistics for the attackers are:

Manpower: 30

Ordnance: 6

Attack Strength: 180

Stealth: 4

Morale: 8

Melee: 7

The invaders fight on Chart C. Mies and his unit attack on Chart B. They have the initiative and always roll first.

If the Manpower value of Mies' unit falls to 0, turn to Section 29.

If the Manpower value of the invaders falls to 0, turn to Section 128.

— 100 —

Mies decided not to allow Jeffre Tager-Hols to come with his party. There was too great a chance that the Jacals would have ambushed Mies' unit while it slept. Even if the boys were not spies, the last thing Mies needed was four young kids to look after.

Mies had now reached the most difficult part of his journey: a stretch of steep terrain called the Hump. Even in the summer, traveling this pass was slow and arduous, for few animals and no vehicles were capable of picking their way up this rugged terrain. Mies and his companions had to hike over the pass carrying their belongings on their backs.

If Mies' equipment list includes any hovercars, he must cross them off the list now.

The Hump rose nearly four kilometers over its scree-covered ten-kilometer length. The path ended at the base of a glacier near the top of the Jacal Mountains. This glacier occasionally rolled avalanches of boulders and ice down the trail, threatening the life of anyone foolish enough to challenge its domination of the mountain.

When he reached the top of the Hump, Mies was surprised to find an engineering corps restructuring the terrain. The corps had blasted a path through the glacier and was paving a road leading over the top of the Hump. Mies signaled his companions to stop and hide. He got as close to the construction site as he dared.

When he returned, Mies said, "We have two options. First, we can attack the camp. It has approximately thirty engineers. Second, we can try to sneak past them tonight. Of course, this could prove extremely dangerous because of the steep terrain."

Should Mies attack the camp? If so, turn to Section 63.

Or should he attempt to sneak past? If so, turn to Section 72.

— 101 —

The distant roar sounded like thunder to the untrained ear, but Mies knew power artillery when he heard it. He guessed that it was directed at the Morrows. He and his men marched toward the guns all day. The temperature rose every hour, and the sticky mountain dust coated everything with a grit that was impossible to wash away.

So when Mies came across a spring-fed pool, he could not believe his luck. Thinking it must be a trap, Mies spent over an hour looking for ambushes or booby traps. Finally, finding no sign of trouble, Mies told his men he would jump in first to see what happened. If nothing happened for ten minutes, they were free to leave their hiding places and join him.

Mies stripped his clothes off and leaped into the cool water. He floated on his back, watching the clouds and feeling the undying shock waves of power artillery. To Mies, the shock waves felt like shudders of abhorrence, as if the mountains themselves were disgusted by the violence that had come to their slopes.

The ten minutes passed and his men jumped into the pool. Mies floated to the shore, preparing to take his turn standing watch. As he started to climb ashore, he saw a child staring at him from behind a tree. He grabbed his pants, but by the time he pulled them on, the child had disappeared.

He walked a dozen yards into the forest. He saw a patch of clothing showing from a thicket to his right. Mies grabbed a handful of bush and pulled it aside. In the center of the thicket stood a man armed with a pitchfork. His family stood behind him. The man jabbed his pitchfork at Mies with a clear intent to kill.

Should Mies return the man's attack in kind? If so, turn to Section 90.

Or should Mies simply disarm the man? If so, turn to Section 109.

— 102 —

Mies moved as close to the hovercraft as he dared. Floaters drifted by above, apparently unconcerned with his presence. This made Mies nervous and he decided it was best to hide. He led his men down a steep gully that paralleled the direction of the convoy and instructed them to find cover. The convoy continued to pass for twenty minutes.

Finally, Mies crawled to the top of the gully and looked at the convoy. Its end was still not in sight.

Should Mies follow the convoy to its destination? If so, turn to Section 92.

Or should he wait another twenty minutes for the convoy to pass, then continue along his original course? If so, turn to Section 126.

— 103 —

Mies took the gas to the wrong coordinates.

Turn to Section 128.

— 104 —

Mies stole up to the hovercar and examined it. Most hovercars were equipped with motion detector security systems, but Mies knew that these troublesome devices were usually turned off. As he inspected the hovercar, he was surprised to find it crammed with electronics instead of weaponry. This was a communications unit!

He ordered his men to remain hidden and eased toward the farmhouse. Inside, he saw a dozen technicians and soldiers shuffling papers and assembling equipment. Mies returned to his unit and ordered them to surround the house.

A few minutes later, he gave the order and his unit charged into the building. The surprised technicians and soldiers gave up without a fight.

Mies and his unit earned three benefits for attacking this unit. First, they captured some of the invaders' weapons. Increase their Ordnance value by 2 points. Second, they captured some electronic equipment. Add a "power weapon scrambler" and a "communications scrambler" to Mies' equipment list. Third, their victory boosted their morale. Add 2 points to the Morale score of Mies' unit.

While his men tied the prisoners, Mies studied the equipment and documentation in the building. Among other things, this unit provided technical support for the three floaters parked in the field. These three floaters were equipped with nerve gas.

If Mies knew the coordinates of the main invasion force, he could take one of these floaters and deal some serious damage to the invaders. Unfortunately, operating a floater was a difficult skill to learn, so only Mies could do this.

From questioning his prisoners, Mies determined that there were four possible coordinates where the attack force could be located.

If Mies destroys the floaters, turn to Section 128.

If he decides to destroy two of the floaters and use the third to attack the primary force, he must choose to which location he will go. Choose one of the coordinates and turn to the corresponding section, as indicated below.

Coordinates Section

11-11-21 137

11-12-21 108

21-21-11 124

21-11-11 103

— 105 —

Mies and his men searched the rocks. Mies turned over the body of one warrior, his Red Spear still strapped to his back. It was a boy. A tag on the dead boy's clothing identified him as Sorensen Tager-Hols.

John Thomas looked at the dead youngster. "We were wrong to travel at night," he said simply.

Subtract 1 point from the Morale value of Mies' unit.

Turn to Section 106.

— 106 —

A wild rooster heralded the dawn. Mies had already been up for an hour, studying his maps in the privacy of his own tent. Suddenly, John Thomas pulled a flap open.

"There are three warriors here to see you," he said.

Mies nodded and followed John Thomas to the center of his camp. Three warriors, all carrying Red Spears and power rifles, awaited him. "You and your men are to come with us, Group-leader."

Mies nodded.

Turn to Section 111.

— 107 —

Mies and his men traveled all night. They reached their destination at dawn. The area was empty. Mies has led his men to the wrong coordinates; their target was not here.

The radio crackled to life. "Ping force C is preparing to attack!" an anonymous voice said. "Return to base immediately."

Mies must return to camp. Turn to Section 136.

— 108 —

Mies took the gas to the wrong coordinates.

Turn to Section 128.

— 109 —

Mies grabbed the haft of the pitchfork and pulled the farmer forward. His wife screamed "Brian!" and rushed out to him.

The man swore at Mies in a rich Morrow dialect. Mies tossed the fork aside. About that time, Mies' men rushed to his side, still wet and naked from swimming.

"It's okay," Mies said. "Get dressed. These people are harmless."

The farmer explained that he and his family were refugees fleeing the fighting in the north. He explained that the valley was crawling with soldiers—"pings" he called them. Some of the mountain people have fled to the forests; others have fled deeper into the mountains to join guerrilla groups. That, he explained, was where he was going.

Although Mies and his men tried to convince the farmer to tell

them where the guerrilla groups were located, he refused. Mies finally ordered the stubborn farmer to leave.

Should Mies follow the farmer? If so, turn to Section 96.

Or should Mies continue toward the sound of fighting? If so, turn to Section 123.

— 110 —

The Ch'ung family lands seemed familiar to Mies. These mountain people resembled his father's client. The Ch'ung mountain people wore the Ch'ungese style of dress; their manner of speech was pure Ch'ung dialect; even their diet consisted of spicy Ch'ung dishes. But no matter how closely they resembled their neighbors, they remained distinct. One could always tell the difference between a peasant of the Ch'ung Kingdom and a Ch'ung mountain farmer, just as one could always tell the difference between a native-born Dorsai and a man who was only trained on Dorsai.

The Ch'ung lands had suffered as much under the invasion force as the lands of any other mountain family. Yet the Ch'ung remained serene and calm. They seemed to accept death and destruction as part of the natural balance. They spoke as if they had some secret understanding of the purpose of life.

Mies and his party were waiting outside the homestead of Tuan Nokea, the head of the Ch'ung clan. When they had entered the Ch'ung lands earlier that day, Nokea had sent word to them to come to his house after the soldiers left that evening. As Nokea had promised, the soldiers left shortly after dark. Mies and his party entered the homestead half an hour later.

"Welcome, my friends!" said an elegantly dressed oriental man. As Mies stepped into the foyer, he searched for places an unexpected enemy might hide.

"You mustn't be afraid!" said the old man. His voice was slightly mocking. "The pings have gone. Please, sit." The old man indicated a cushion near a low table.

"Tuan Nokea," said Mies, sitting cross-legged before the

table, "how did you convince the pings to leave you alone at night?"

"I told them I would not escape."

"And they trust you?"

"Why should they not?" Tuan Nokea asked with a trace of irony. His servants brought food, which Mies' men ate eagerly. As Tuan Nokea ate, he briefed Mies on the situation in his lands.

The invasion force had quickly overrun the token resistance offered by the Ch'ung clan, Tuan Nokea explained without embarrassment. Less than an hour later, the Ch'ung family merchants had established a line of credit for the invaders and were prepared for brisk trade.

Sadly, the great majority of the invaders had gone south to invade the Jacals' northern ranges before spending much money. The small force that had remained behind quickly closed the mountain passes leading to the outside world.

"This force," Tuan Nokea said happily, pouring a powerful Ch'ungese liquor into small cups, "has been most cooperative. They have accepted Ch'ungese hospitality and generosity and have allowed us to live our humble lives peacefully."

Mies smiled. Tuan Nokea had just told Mies that he bribed the off-world forces. Beneath that level was an offer to pay a bribe to Mies and his party. "My mission does not directly concern your clan," Mies said. "I have merely come to assess the enemy strength in your land."

"Of course!" Tuan Nokea said brightly. He was pretending to be drunk, and Mies knew that Nokea knew that Mies knew he was only pretending, but it still offered Nokea an excuse to direct the conversation as he wished. "I have need of assessing and analyzing myself. Would you help?"

"I would be delighted," Mies agreed, taking the bait.

After dinner, Tuan Nokea led Mies to his private chambers. When they were comfortably seated, the Tuan clapped his hands. A big male servant entered the room. Mies noted that the servant carried a power weapon beneath his velvet robe. The servant gave a leather folder to Nokea, then left.

"This is a pet project of mine," Tuan Nokea explained. "It has been difficult to pursue with my other responsibilities, but now that you have agreed to aid me . . ." Nokea let the sentence trail off. He handed the packet to Mies. It contained geological reports, field surveys, and computer-enhanced satellite photos.

They all bore the seal of William of Ceta. Mies leafed through the information attentively.

Nokea continued, "The reports indicate that there are large deposits of iron, copper, nickel, and other metals near Stuben Pass, perhaps even enough metal for William to finance a large off-world expansion. With these holdings, he could gain a monopoly of crucial alloys that spans half a dozen worlds."

"Why has William not exploited these mines sooner?"

"He has had trouble locating the exact coordinates of the ore bodies. Perhaps he does not know that his reports have been altered."

Mies whistled.

"William of Ceta is an amazingly attentive man," Nokea continued. "He reads reports on the tiniest detail of each of his operations. In this way, he maintains an iron control over every corner of his vast empire. But it is possible to rely too heavily on a fragile piece of paper."

"So William is searching the wrong location for his ore," Mies deduced.

"For now," Nokea answered. "But he has ordered new surveys. He will find these deposits soon. I wish to claim them first."

Mies studied the old man. Nokea's eyes were bright with triumph, but Mies also saw a hint of desperation. Perhaps the old man had bitten off more than he could chew.

"William will deny your claim, of course," Mies said.

"Of course," Tuan Nokea agreed, "but he cannot deny the claim of the Jacal People's Republic. Especially if we have a few battalions of Dorsai-led troops to validate it."

"And you expect to get the battalions from me?" Mies asked.

"Oh no," Nokea declared with mock indignation. "I want you to lead the Republic!"

Mies was stunned. "You can't be serious."

"I am altogether serious," the Tuan said. "I need someone with your skills and integrity."

"Tuan," Mies protested, "I am wanted for murder in the Five Cities."

"Mr. Ohanlon," the Tuan answered, "that is one of the considerations in your favor!"

"No," Mies said. "I can't accept. I am not a Jacal."

"Of course," Nokea continued, ignoring Mies' protest, "you were not my first choice. There are others with stronger creden-

tials. But I have learned of your mission and its importance to those, shall we say, off-world. Their interests complement ours. Therefore, I would be willing to accept you as leader of the Jacal People's Republic."

"I say again that I cannot do this for you; I am not a Jacal. They would never follow me."

"You are so very simple that I wonder if you will make a good leader," Nokea answered. "That is another reason I picked you. We Jacals dislike interference from the outside, but there is one thing we dislike more: the thought that all of us are not equal. We could never accept the rule of another Jacal. But we could accept the guidance of an outsider. And besides, you are something better than a Jacal. You are a Dorsai, and a Dorsai can be trusted."

"I am not a full Dorsai," Mies answered quietly.

"Of course not," Nokea said. "I know that and you know that. But, like you say, you are wanted for murder. Even we Jacals have seen the news reports, and in the news reports you are a Dorsai. So you are a Dorsai even if you aren't, do you see?"

Should Mies accept Tuan Nokea's offer and form the Jacal People's Republic? if so, Tuan Nokea gives him a banner which reads: "Jacal People's Republic." On his equipment list, note that Mies now carries this banner. As a result of carrying this banner, a few of Mies' statistics change:

1. *Increase his Manpower value to 100.*
2. *Increase his Ordnance value by 1 point.*
3. *Increase his Morale value by 2 points.*
4. *Add one medical kit, an electronic listening device, and three charges of explosives to Mies' equipment list.*
5. *Decrease his unit's Stealth value by 5 points. Note that Mies' personal Stealth value remains unchanged in situations where he is not leading a large number of men.*

Tuan Nokea will then suggest that Mies go to the Morrow lands to help with the battle there. If Mies follows his advice, turn to Section 101.

If Mies does not want to go to the Morrow lands, Nokea suggests that he go to the Well of Souls to help lift the siege there. If Mies goes to the Well of Souls, turn to Section 115.

Of course, Mies is not required to take any of Nokea's advice, and may follow the travel lines (see Jacal Mountains Map in Section 25) to any location box he has not visited.

If Mies refuses to lead the Jacal People's Republic, his statistics remain unchanged. He may go to the Morrow lands (Section 101), the Well of Souls (Section 115), or follow the travel lines (see Jacal Mountains Map in Section 25) to any location box he has not visited.

—111—

The guides led Mies and his party to a ridge running between the Twin Peaks. A huge forest spread down into the valley and over the ridge beyond. On the valley floor, a small river cut the forest into halves.

"Down there," said a guide. He pointed at a flat spot in the forest near the head of the valley.

After several moments, Mies finally spotted the Jacal camp. As they descended into the camp, he saw why it had taken him so long to spot it. It was a masterpiece of camouflage. Even Dorsai instructors would admire Jacal tricks to deaden noise, eliminate telltale smoke, and disguise the appearance of the camp. The whole camp was covered by a net of living plants which was indistinguishable from the forest. The camp floor was covered with a layer of spongy moss which deadened sound. All cooking was done over bottled-gas stoves, which did not smoke.

The guides led Mies and his men to a great tree which served as headquarters. The guides asked everyone but John Thomas and Mies to wait at the base of the tree. They led John Thomas and Mies to a square box perched ten feet up in the tree.

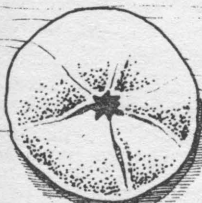
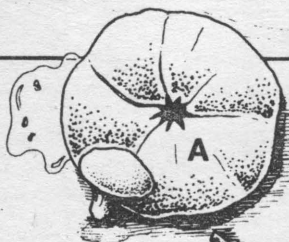
The box was a three-hundred-square-foot room. Six men sat around a conference table cutting vegetables for a stew.

"Welcome, Mies Ohanlon," said one, raising his knife in an informal salute. "I am Anderson. Your father said you might come among us. Come here."

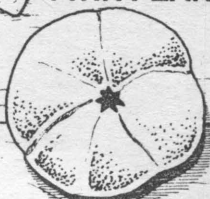
Mies walked to the table and Anderson handed him a knife. Mies began slicing carrots.

MAP 2

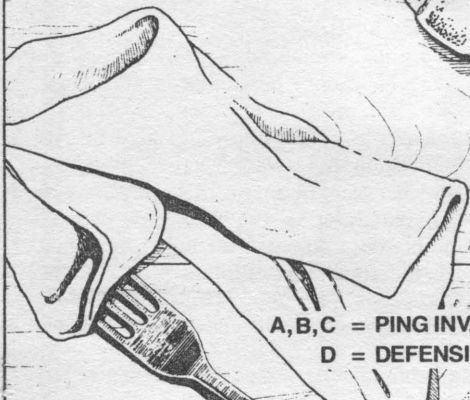
DOHLBRICKE MOUNTAIN



TWIN PEAKS



MOUNT LORRIMAR



A,B,C = PING INVASION FORCE
D = DEFENSIVE LINE

"So," said a man with a thick Germanic accent, "Herr Ohanlon. My name is Herr Brucker Stuben. You are Dorsai?"

"I studied there," Mies answered politely.

"Four years? Very good."

"I must warn you," Anderson said, "that we have heard many good things about you. But we haven't the time for flattery. This camp is in danger; the pings come closer by the hour. We want to meet the enemy, but the morale of our troops is low. They are suspicious of each other, and we can establish no clear lines of command. We were wondering if you'd be a good chap and take over?"

"Why me?" Mies asked, astonished at the candor of the request.

"Because you are a leader," said Herr Stuben.

"Now, here's our situation," Anderson continued. He arranged the vegetables on the conference table. "Let's assume this carrot top represents the Twin Peaks. This one is Mount Lorrimar. We'll say that a third carrot top is Dohlbricke Mountain. We'll be the potato square, here on the south side of the Twin Peaks. These other potato wedges represent our outposts, strung along a line between us and Dohlbricke Mountain."

Anderson broke the caps off three mushrooms. He placed the first cap next to the Dohlbricke Mountain. "The pings are approaching in three columns. Force A is on Dohlbricke Mountain; we lost contact with our troops over there three days ago. Force B is just to the east of that position. Force C is poised just north of our camp, ready to strike.

"We have survived until now because the ping supply line is in terrible shape. They have only been able to attack with one column at a time. The defense of this camp has been a simple matter of anticipating which column they intended to use, then meeting it with all our strength.

"However, things change. We know that they have built a new supply depot much closer to the front. They can attack simultaneously with all three columns. We will be crushed."

"Therefore, we should attack this supply depot immediately," Mies answered.

"We?" asked Herr Stuben. "Then you have decided to join the Jacals?"

"On one condition."

"Which is?"

"I have complete control of the forces you give me. No interference."

"A typical Dorsai request. We had expected no less," said Anderson.

"There is one other problem, Herr Ohanlon."

"What's that?" Mies asked.

"Even if we know where the supply depot is, we do not have the troops to attack," said Stuben.

"We only need a few units," Mies answered.

"No, I do not mean numbers. I mean cooperation. No commander will risk his prestige by taking such a risk."

"Then we will convince them."

"That will be a difficult task," said Anderson. "A lot will depend upon your credentials."

"Credentials?" Mies asked.

Look at Mies' equipment list and compare it with the list of credentials below. Mies must choose which of the credentials on the list he will present to the commanders. Mies cannot present any credentials which are not written on his equipment list. On Mies' list, place a checkmark next to each credential that Mies intends to present, then read the section number indicated next to each credential he checked. It is important that you place a checkmark next to the credentials he intends to use before reading any of the sections.

Remove any credentials that Mies does not present from his list of equipment. Mies must accept the units that choose to join him. He cannot reject a unit for any reason. Write the statistics and name of each unit that joins Mies on his equipment list.

A map number is listed next to the section that you should read for each credential. Write this number next to the name of each unit that joins Mies.

Credential	Section	Map No.
<i>Red Spear Medallion</i>	122	1
<i>Marshal of the Jacals</i>	114	2
<i>Morrow Medallion</i>	119	3
<i>Jacal People's Banner</i>	139	4
<i>Dunne's Crest</i>	127	5

In addition to the units that join Mies after he presents his credentials, Mies has the men that were already accompanying him. This is his personal bodyguard. Their map number is 6.

A note on scale:

Until now, each man in Mies' unit has counted as 1 point on his Manpower value. As Mies prepares to do battle on a much larger scale, the number of men per Manpower point must increase. For each unit above, the new scale is 10 men per Manpower point. To adapt Mies' bodyguard Manpower value to the new scale, divide their present Manpower value by 10. Round fractions less than .6 down; round fractions higher than .5 up. If you get a result less than 1, round it up to 1.

All other statistics remain the same.

At this point, Mies may have more than one unit under his command. When he sends a unit into battle, be sure to note which unit he sends. As the battle progresses, make the appropriate adjustments to each unit's statistics.

When Mies has finished picking his units, turn to Section 131.

—112—

Mies moved the unit forward to a quiet corner of the column's camp. Mies could not detect any security devices in the cleared area ahead. The nearest hut was one hundred meters away. As the first men reached the clearing, Mies whistled the order to move out.

Without warning, floaters zipped over the ridge and began firing void cones. Sirens screamed to life inside the compound.

Mies dropped to the ground and rolled toward shelter, but the man standing next to him was not so lucky—the poor fellow screamed in agony as a void rifle removed his arm.

Mies had walked into a trap!

The statistics for the attackers are:

Manpower: 20

Ordnance: 8

Attack Strength: 160

Stealth: 6

Morale: 6

Melee: 5

The attackers fight on Chart E. The attackers have the initiative for the first three rounds and attack first. Beginning with the fourth round, Mies' unit has the initiative and attacks first. Mies' unit fights on Chart B.

If Mies' equipment list includes explosive charges, he can make one extra attack with an explosive charge each round. The charge attacks on Chart A with an Attack Strength of 30. The results of this attack are in addition to the losses the attackers suffer as a result of Mies' unit's normal attack. Remember to subtract each charge used from Mies' equipment list.

In addition, if you roll a 12 on any attack, Mies kills a floater pilot. The floater crashes, killing everyone aboard. Subtract 10 points from the Manpower value of the attackers, in addition to their other losses.

If the Manpower of Mies' unit falls to 0, turn to Section 51.

If the Manpower value of the attackers falls to 0, Mies' unit defeats them. Mies must flee, however; more troops are coming. Turn to Section 126.

—113—

Mies and his men traveled all night. They reached their destination by dawn. There were no enemy troops within several miles. Mies had led his troops to the wrong location!

The radio crackled to life. "Mies, ping force C is preparing to

attack,” Anderson said. “You must return to headquarters immediately.”

Mies and his men started back toward the camp.

Reduce the Morale score of Mies' unit by 1 point.

Turn to Section 136.

— 114 —

As Marshal of the Jacals, Mies received pledges of loyalty from a hard-riding, hard-hitting collection of mountain men owing allegiance to no family. The unit, called Marco's Raiders, has stolen sixty hovercars of various shapes and sizes from the pings. They have reinforced each hovercraft's armor, boosted its engine performance, and added heavy weapons to its armament.

The group leader was Marco. He wore a leather jacket and sported a huge handlebar mustache. There was an enormous gap between his front teeth.

The council considered him a daring pilot and a tremendous pain in the neck. His unit was one of the Jacals' few effective countermeasures against the invaders.

Their statistics are:

Manpower: 20

Ordinance: 7

Attack Strength: 140

Stealth: 7

Morale: 10

Melee: 2

Special Equipment: 8 explosive charges; power weapon scrambler (1,000-meter range)

The standard chart of an attack by Marco's Raiders is Chart B.

Marco's Raiders dislike those who flock around the Jacal People's Republic Banner. If Mies uses the Jacal People's

Republic Banner as one of his credentials, drop their Morale score to 4.

Write their statistics on Mies' equipment list.

Return to Section 111.

—115—

The trail repeatedly rose and fell as it crossed ridge after ridge. Mies' party was following the secret trail toward the guerrilla encampment in the Morrow lands. They were very close to the body of William's off-world mercenaries which was preparing to attack the guerrillas. Mies regularly spotted airships circling high in the sky. Once in a while, an airship spouted flame and a few seconds later Mies heard the rumble of an explosion.

For Dorsai soldiers, battlefields were huge game boards with living pieces to be moved to and fro with scientific precision to win the objective at the least cost in blood and treasure. Victory depended on finding the single pressure point that would push matters along the desired course. The difficulty of this task lay in the fact that, since the gaming pieces were human, every battle was different, and events did not always follow textbook predictions. Even Dorsai could make mistakes.

Traveling to the camp, Mies wondered what pressure points he would find in the battles to come. He had learned that William's mercenaries had cut off the guerrilla camp and were slowly decreasing the size of the perimeter surrounding it. Because they lacked ammunition, medical supplies, weaponry, food, and just about everything else, the guerrillas were falling back. Now only the path that Mies walked upon linked their stronghold to the outside world.

Someone whistled and Mies dropped to ground instantly, as did everyone else. Mies crawled over to the man who had whistled, John Thomas Dunne. John Thomas Dunne was tall, burly, and heavy-lidded. John Thomas had approached Mies on the trail and asked to join him. At first, Mies had been suspicious, but he learned to trust John Thomas. On several

occasions, he had been thankful for John Thomas' knowledge of these mountains.

"What's up?" Mies asked.

John Thomas looked at Mies as though he didn't understand the question. "Ping dust is up," he finally answered, pointing ahead. Hundreds of hovercars were crossing a clearing ahead. Mies tried to count the vehicles.

"We must go," John Thomas finally said. "We will see spotters soon."

Should Mies investigate the convoy, taking a chance of being caught and killed? If he chooses to investigate, his unit must make a Stealth check. Roll two dice:

If the result is equal to or less than his unit's Stealth score, turn to Section 102.

If the result is greater than his unit's Stealth rating, turn to Section 112.

If Mies ignores the column and continues along his way, turn to Section 126.

— 116 —

Mies ordered his unit to form a line in the path of the huge war machine. He could already hear the rumbling, grinding vibration of a thousand men and vehicles in motion. Mies returned his thoughts to the map in front of him.

A shout broke his concentration and Mies rushed from his tent. Two men were racing toward him.

"Group-leader!" cried one. "We are lost!"

"Tell me what has happened!"

"The guerrillas have deserted! You have only us."

Should Mies hold his position and fight to the last man? If so, turn to Section 99.

Or should he flee and attack the column from behind? If so, turn to Section 123.

If Mies used his listening device at the military camp in the Plains family lands (Section 81), he has a third choice. If Mies remembers what he heard there, turn to Section 138.

— 117 —

As Mies moved closer, he saw infantry racing to the hovercars. "We're exposed!" he whispered. Mies ordered his men to attack. He couldn't let those hovercars take off.

If Mies' equipment list contains explosive charges, he may make one extra attack per round using explosives. Each charge has an Attack Strength of 30 and fights on Chart A. All casualties the enemy suffers are in addition to their normal losses.

The statistics for the infantry are:

Manpower: 15

Ordnance: 5

Attack Strength: 75

Stealth: 6

Morale: 5

Melee: 5

The infantry attacks on Chart E. Mies' unit attacks on Chart B. Mies has the initiative and attacks first each round.

If Mies' Manpower value falls to 0, turn to Section 51.

If the infantry's value falls to 0, turn to Section 132.

— 118 —

"I don't like this, Artemus," said the junior officer, who was obviously older and more experienced than his senior. "All of this equipment is a bad idea. It makes our whole campaign vulnerable."

"Nonsense," said his young superior. Mies thought that the youngster had probably bought his commission. "The scum we are chasing are miles from here, and we don't have the men to guard more than one camp. And the mothership cannot give us more troops; we are already over budget—"

"Forget the budget!" said the older man. "You can't fight a war on budgets."

"Do you ever wonder why you have not been given a larger command? You do not watch the bottom line. Our camp is heavily shielded, is it not?"

"Yes, sir," responded the older man. "Except at coordinates 21-78-09. We have an overloaded capacitor in that quadrant."

"A minor problem, since those coordinates are in the center of the camp. Do we have ample guards and electronic detection devices?"

"More than enough, but that is not the point—"

"Then we should have no problems," the younger man interrupted.

"There's no talking to you," the older man finally snorted in disgust.

Mies sneaked back to his unit.

Should he attack the camp, hoping to steal some equipment and disrupt the mercenaries? If so, turn to Section 129.

Perhaps he should simply leave and join the guerrillas. If so, turn to Section 126.

— 119 —

When Mies displayed his Morrow Medallion, hundreds of refugees from the Morrow and Plains family lands joined him. They were poorly armed, but revenge was uppermost in their minds. Mies believed they would be brave fighters. Since the group was composed mostly of refugees, Mies assumed that they would need more direction than a normal unit.

The Morrow/Plains unit's statistics are:

Manpower: 60

Ordnance: 2

Attack Strength: 120

Stealth: 3

Morale: 8

Melee: 4

Their standard chart in any fight is Chart E.

Write their statistics on Mies' equipment list.

Return to Section 111.

— 120 —

Mount Fire was one of the largest volcanoes on Ceta. Its lava tube, according to reports Mies had read, reached down to a magma reservoir that underlay the entire Jacal Range.

Mies and his men picked their way toward the slopes of the massive volcano. It had been dormant for many centuries, but the geothermal energy collectors that the Dunne clan had placed on its slopes attested to its sleeping fury. A huge lava dome bulged from one side of the mountain, giving it a lopsided look. The Dunne family sanctuary was situated directly beneath the dome.

When they met the outpost guards, Mies asked to be taken to the clan leaders. He and his unit were escorted into the main camp with little decorum. Mies was astonished to see the extent of damage that William's mercenaries had inflicted upon the Dunne clan village.

The buildings which once dotted the side of the mountain were in ruins. The Dunes had moved into underground vents to protect themselves from daily bombing raids by "ping" (mercenary) airships.

The guards led Mies into a deep fissure and eventually into a large, relatively opulent room. The Dunne council of elders, who had apparently been alerted by a runner that he was coming, awaited him.

Mies told the elders that he had come to help them defeat William's mercenary invaders. The elders thanked Mies for his offer, but reminded him that these were difficult times. They had no choice except to ask for proof of his words.

If Mies allowed the woman Dominique Franc-Dunne to join his party, his credibility is established immediately. Turn to Section 185.

If Mies' equipment list includes some token of respect from some other Jacal clan, such as the Red Spear Medallion, the Jacal People's Republic Banner, or the Morrow Medallion, turn to Section 163.

If Mies has none of these credentials, turn to Section 177.

— 121 —

Mies approached the floaters. They were highly sophisticated machines. Mies knew that he was the only one in his group who had received the training necessary to handle one of these floaters.

Beneath the floaters' bellies were slung canisters instead of bombs. Mies didn't know what to make of the canisters, but he was sure it was not a good sign. He looked toward the hovercraft parked at the homestead. Perhaps it contained a clue as to the purpose of the canisters. He decided to investigate the hovercraft.

Make a Stealth check for Mies and his unit. Roll two dice:

If the result is equal to or less than the Stealth score of Mies' unit, turn to Section 117.

If the result is greater than the Stealth score of Mies' unit, turn to Section 104.

— 122 —

When Mies displayed his Red Spear Medallion, a group of fierce warriors calling themselves the Red Spears flocked to his side. They were an aggressive, well-trained, well-armed unit.

The statistics for the Red Spears are:

Manpower: 30

Ordnance: 5

Attack Strength: 150

Stealth: 10

Morale: 10

Melee: 5

The standard chart for an attack by the Red Spears is Chart C.

Return to Section 111.

— 123 —

Mies moved deeper into the occupied Morrow lands, searching for signs of the mercenary column he knew had to be moving toward the guerrilla positions. One of his scouts returned and led Mies to a large farm. A hovercraft was parked near the home-
stead house, and three floaters were left unguarded in a nearby field.

Mies decided to take a closer look.

He must make a Stealth check. Roll two dice:

If the result is greater than the Stealth score of Mies' unit, turn to Section 117.

If the result is equal to or less than the Stealth score of Mies' unit, he may investigate either the hovercar (turn to Section 104) or the floaters (turn to Section 121).

— 124 —

Mies took the gas to the wrong coordinates.

Turn to Section 128.

— 125 —

Mies led his unit to a quiet corner of the mercenary camp. The mercenaries had cleared a wide stretch of ground surrounding the camp to provide a clear firing zone. Mies studied the cleared perimeter for several minutes, but saw no signs of security devices. He signaled his men to cross the barren stretch.

As the unit reached the midway point, floaters dropped out of the sky, their power weapons and void rifles blazing. Security alarms rang inside the camp.

Mies hit the ground and rolled away from a shot directed at him. The reactions of the man next to Mies were not so quick, however. The unlucky fellow screamed once as a void rifle removed his arm.

Mies had led his men into a trap!

The statistics for the attackers are:

Manpower: 20

Ordnance: 8

Attack Strength: 160

Stealth: 10

Morale: 6

Melee: 5

The Attackers fight on Chart D. Mies' unit fights on Chart B. They have the initiative and attack first each round.

At the end of the first combat round, roll two dice. If the result is greater than the Morale value of Mies' unit, it surrenders. Turn to Section 51.

If Mies' equipment list includes explosive charges, he may make an extra attack each round by throwing one charge at the mercenaries. This attack is on Chart A with an Attack Strength of 30. Any losses the mercenaries suffer are in addition to their normal Manpower losses.

If Mies rolls a 12 during any round, he hits a floater pilot. The floater crashes to the ground, killing all mercenaries aboard. Subtract 10 points from the Manpower value of the attackers. This loss is in addition to normal losses the mercenaries suffer that round.

If the Manpower value of Mies' unit falls to 0, turn to Section 51.

If the Manpower value of the attackers falls to 0, Mies destroys the attacking unit. He collects a few of the attackers' heavy weapons, then must flee. Add 2 points to the Ordnance value of Mies' unit. Turn to Section 126.

— 126 —

As Mies and his unit traveled toward the central Jacal Mountains, the trail rose and grew more rugged and difficult to follow. John Thomas Dunne periodically searched for hidden trail signs, which were becoming irregular and difficult to find. After one such search, John Thomas shook his head in exasperation. There were no more trail markers.

"Could we have missed a turn?" Mies asked.

John Thomas shook his head, but said nothing.

"How close are we?" Mies asked.

John Thomas pointed at the great twin-peaked mountain looming ahead. "Do you see that mountain?" he asked. "On the saddle between the peaks is the source of the Crystal River. The camp is there."

"How long will it take to reach the camp?"

John Thomas shrugged, then stood. "Maybe three or four days," he said, discouraged. He kicked a loose rock and it rolled a few feet down the trail. On the rock's underside was painted a Red Spear. "Then again," he said, grinning, "maybe just three or four hours."

Three hours later, John Thomas stopped again to search for trail signs. He turned one loose rock after another over, but in the growing darkness, Mies did not think John Thomas could see a Red Spear painted on a rock.

Should Mies stop to rest? If so, turn to Section 98.

Or should Mies force his men to march into the night? If so, turn to Section 133.

— 127 —

When Mies displayed Dunne's Crest, a group of men who called themselves Believers flocked to his side. Dunne's Crest was a religious symbol to them, and they demanded that Mies make public proclamations of his loyalty to the virtues for which the crest stood. The rest of the Jacals found these proclamations somewhat disturbing.

Reduce the Morale score of all of Mies' units (except the Believers) by 1 point.

The Believers' statistics are:

Manpower: 30

Ordnance: 4

Attack Strength: 120

Stealth: 6

Morale: 11

Melee: 3

Special Equipment: The Believers ride a species of camel especially adapted to life in the mountains. They usually fight from the animal's back.

The standard chart for an attack by the Believers is Chart D.

Return to Section 111.

— 128 —

Almost immediately, the mercenary attack encountered stiff resistance. The off-world commanders did not hesitate to use their trump card; they ordered the nerve-gas-carrying floaters to attack. However, Mies had already disposed of the pings' secret weapon. The floaters never reached the battlefield. Without the nerve gas to break the guerrilla lines, the mercenaries were confused and hesitant.

The guerrillas counterattacked, almost reaching the enemy headquarters before the mercenary generals could evacuate it.

After recovering from their initial shock, the off-world commanders quickly ordered a general retreat. They narrowly escaped a terrible disaster.

The guerrilla leaders honored Mies with a commission in their army. They then asked them to relieve the guerrilla units besieged at location boxes 115 and 120.

Whether Mies liked it or not, the guerrillas considered him a leader in their army. Ten Morrow men were assigned to his unit.

Add 10 points to the Manpower value of Mies' unit, but subtract 2 points from its Stealth score.

Should Mies lead his unit to location box 115? If so, turn to Section 115.

Or should Mies lead the unit to location box 120? If so, turn to Section 120.

— 129 —

Mies led his unit forward to a quiet corner of the mercenary camp. The mercenaries had cleared a wide stretch of ground surrounding their camp to provide a clear firing zone. Mies studied the cleared perimeter for several minutes, but saw no signs of security devices. He signaled his men to cross the barren stretch.

As the unit reached the midway point, floaters dropped out of the sky, their power weapons and void rifles blazing. Security alarms rang inside the camp.

Mies hit the ground and rolled away from a shot directed at him. The reactions of the man next to Mies were not so quick, however. The unlucky fellow screamed once as a void rifle removed his arm.

Mies had led his men into a trap!

The attackers' statistics are:

Manpower: 30

Ordnance: 6

Attack Strength: 180

Stealth: 7

Morale: 6

Melee: 5

The attackers fight on Chart C. They have initiative and attack first each round. Mies' unit fights on Chart B.

At the end of the first combat round, roll two dice. If the result is greater than the Morale value of Mies' unit, it surrenders. Turn to Section 51.

If Mies' equipment list includes explosive charges, he may make an extra attack each round by throwing one charge at the mercenaries. This attack is on Chart A with an Attack Strength of 30. Any losses the mercenaries suffer are in addition to their normal Manpower losses that round.

If Mies rolls a 12 during any round, he hits a floater pilot. The floater crashes to the ground, killing all of the mercenaries aboard. Subtract 10 points from the Manpower value of the attackers. This loss is in addition to normal losses the mercenaries suffer that round.

If the Manpower value of Mies' unit falls to 0, turn to Section 51.

If the Manpower value of the attackers falls to 0, Mies destroys the attacking unit. He collects a few of the attackers' heavy weapons, then must flee. Add 2 points to the Ordnance value of Mies' unit. Turn to Section 126.

— 130 —

No man could imagine a place more inaccessible than the southern Jacal Mountains. Its steep gorges, raging rivers, dizzying heights, sudden temperature shifts, and barren cliffs convinced Mies that man would never tame this land. No man-made force could bridge even a fraction of its hundreds of gorges, or scale its endless kilometers of steep ridges, or cultivate its endless barren plateaus. This was one place, Mies knew, where man's impulse to control and change his environment would prove a pitiful match for nature's defenses.

Mies' river journey ended at a two-hundred-meter waterfall where the river spilled into an ancient fissure. The river continued down the deep valley formed by the fissure. Mies saw no way down to the river's next level. He decided to camp and ponder the question in the morning.

Mies knew that Stuben men had been shadowing his unit for several days. Mies was not worried about them, even though this was their land and he was a trespasser. So far, they had kept their distance and caused him no trouble. It could be useful, however, to question one of the Stubens.

Should Mies capture a Stuben? If so, turn to Section 161.

Or should he just call to them? If so, turn to Section 148.

—131—

Now that Mies has picked his units, he must plan his attack. Below are three attack plans. Choose which plan Mies should use. If a plan requires a certain number of troops or types of units which Mies does not have, he cannot choose that plan.

PLAN A: Find the supply depot and attack it with every man available. This plan dangerously reduces the number of men available to repulse a ping attack. The Jacal Republic Troops dislike this plan and refuse to be a part of it; Mies cannot use their unit if he chooses this plan.

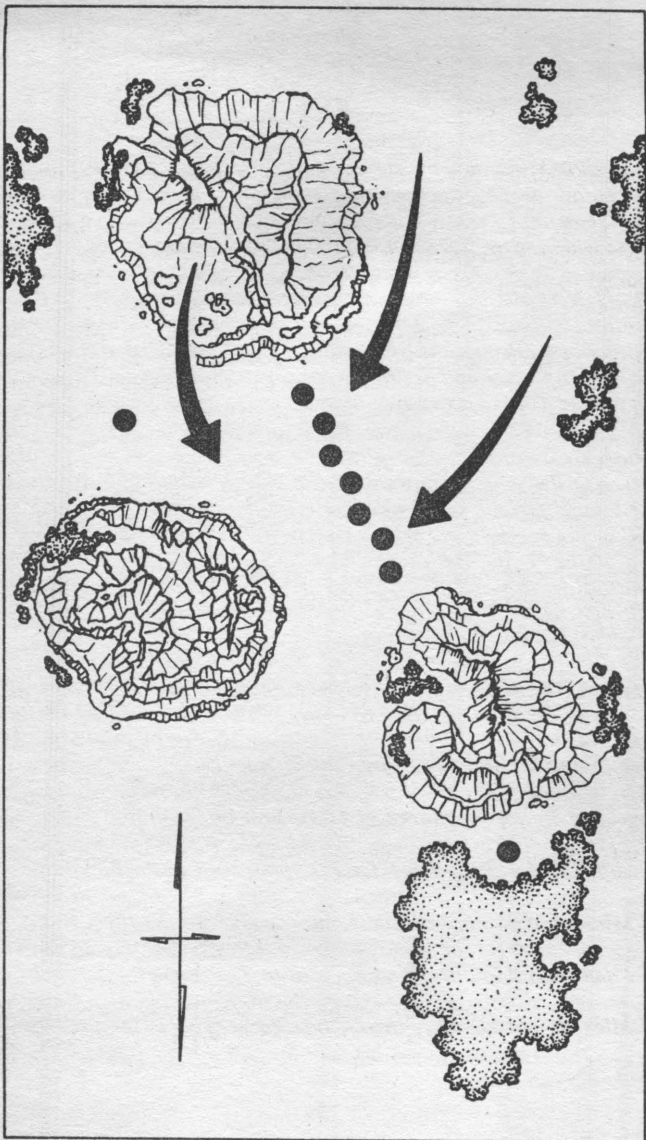
PLAN B: Launch an all-out attack against ping invasion force C. Because the pings are preparing to attack, they might be caught off guard. On the other hand, Mies is risking his entire army. If Mies chooses this plan, he must designate which unit will lead the attack. If the Believers (from Section 127) are one of Mies' units, they demand the right to lead the attack. If they are not allowed to lead the attack and Mies chooses this plan, reduce their Morale to 3 points.

PLAN C: Attack ping force A on Dohlbricke Mountain. The ping forces on Dohlbricke Mountain are exhausted after their effort to take the mountain. They should be undersupplied at this time. The danger is that ping force B will support force A and cut off Mies' attack force from its retreat path. This plan requires the armored might of Marco's Raiders; they must be one of the attacking units. Mies cannot use this plan if Marco's Raiders are not one of the units which have pledged support to him.

If Mies should choose Plan A, turn to Section 134.

If Mies should choose Plan B, turn to Section 93.

If Mies should choose Plan C, turn to Section 141.



— 132 —

Mies and his unit burst into action, cutting down the mercenaries as they dove for cover. Mies calmly squeezed off shot after shot. Needles and power beams flew past his head, but he did not flinch. He wasn't being heroic; his Dorsai-trained battle senses were keeping him calm despite the intense action.

All mercenaries were soon dead or wounded. Mies' men began to move forward, cautiously examining their enemies. Mies went straight to the mercenary vehicles and examined them. The floaters were equipped with nerve gas, which, Mies surmised, the mercenaries intended to use against the guerrillas.

If Mies only knew the coordinates of the main invasion force, he could use the tear gas to deal some serious damage to the invaders. He interrogated some wounded prisoners and searched the area for documents. From what he learned, there were four possible coordinates for the invasion force: 11-11-21, 11-12-21, 21-21-11, and 21-11-11.

Mies' unit found some mercenary equipment that could prove useful in the future. On Mies' equipment list, note that his unit now carries "six explosive charges," a "communications scrambler," and a "power weapon scrambler."

Increase the Morale score of Mies' unit by 2 points.

Should Mies destroy the floaters? If so, turn to Section 128.

Or should Mies destroy two floaters and take the third to attack the mercenary force? (Unfortunately, Mies is the only member of his unit who knows how to operate one of these floaters.) If so, he must go to one of the possible locations for the main invasion force. Choose one of the coordinates for Mies to attack with the nerve gas. Turn to the corresponding section, as indicated by the table below.

<i>Coordinates</i>	<i>Section</i>
11-11-21	137
11-12-21	108
21-21-11	124
21-11-11	103

— 133 —

Reduce the Morale score of Mies' unit by 1 point.

Using an infrared light to guide his way, Mies led his unit into the darkening twilight. His men grumbled at the idea of being forced to move over dangerous ground at night.

Mies turned around to order them to be silent and saw that three of his men were chewing something. He walked over for a closer inspection. He recognized the characteristic sickly sweet odor of cobetel, a kind of sense-dulling gum. "Spit that out," he ordered, "all of you. We've got to be alert for what's ahead—"

Someone cried out from behind him. Mies heard needles hissing through the air. His unit was under attack, but by whom?

Roll one surprise attack against Mies' unit on Chart A using an Attack Strength of 15. Subtract the result from his Manpower value.

Should he return the attack? If so, turn to Section 143.

Or should he retreat and hide until morning? If so, turn to Section 98.

— 134 —

Mies' staff submitted a list of five possible sites for the enemy supply depot.

Choose one of the coordinates below and turn to the corresponding section.

<i>Coordinates</i>	<i>Section</i>
21-78-09	149
22-79-10	145
78-10-21	113
78-78-09	107
09-78-21	94

— 135 —

If the victory over the pings was not complete, it was close enough. The remaining units quickly packed up and retreated to the Ch'ung family lands, leaving these mountains to the rebels.

A few days after the battle, the council met again. This time, it conferred more honors on Mies; the council proclaimed him leader of all Jacals. The honor both frightened and sobered Mies. He was barely three months out of school. Dorsai tended to move up quickly in any service, but Mies feared he was too young to lead a fledgling nation.

In private session, Mies and the council discussed the most important question facing the Jacal people: what next?

There were many proposals, though not all could be taken seriously. After all of the hours of debate, however, Mies and the council decided to focus on four possible courses of action. Even given this relatively limited scope of attention, the council argued through the night and well into the next day. The true problem, Mies realized, was that the young nation simply did not

have the resources to adopt all four plans. Somebody had to decide which plan to use.

The council agreed to let Mies make the decision the next morning. They dispersed and Mies went to his sleeping quarters.

Mies must choose one of the four plans listed below.

PLAN ONE: Attack the four invader base camps simultaneously. The strength of this plan was that the pings were disorganized, and whoever was backing them had just lost an enormous amount of money. By attacking now, the Jacals could force the mercenaries' employers to reevaluate the value of Jacal lands. The weakness of this plan was that Mies knew nothing of the condition of the mercenary forces beyond those that he had just defeated. Besides, attacking four bases at once might stretch his own forces too thin.

PLAN TWO: Break the mercenary siege on Mount Fire. The strength of this plan was that the guerrillas holding the Dunne family lands would fall if not relieved soon. Mies might be able to move his forces through secret passes and surprise the besiegers. If they succeeded, Mies could then unite his force with the large force at Mount Fire. The result would be a formidable force with a legitimate claim to nationhood. The weakness of this plan lay in the difficulty of moving a large force over rugged terrain without being detected. Mies' army might be detected and ambushed far from any supply source. It could be destroyed if the mercenaries caught them in the right position.

PLAN THREE: Ask for recognition of the Jacal People's Republic from Dorsai, the Five Cities, and the Ch'ung Kingdom. The strength of this plan was that friendly troops might be brought in from Dorsai or the Ch'ung Kingdom. The weakness of this plan was that if off-world troops were sent by Dorsai, William could send his own troops to repel them. He would appear to be acting in Ceta's best interest, and the resulting war would be long and bitter.

PLAN FOUR: Send an assassination squad to execute William of Ceta. The strength of this plan was that William was certainly the secret employer of the off-world troops. If he was removed, the pressure would disappear from the Jacal People's Republic.

Power vacuums would result on many of the fourteen worlds, and off-world regiments would be forced to return home to secure their power base. The weakness of the plan was that William was well protected. The plan's failure would give him the excuse he needed to devastate the Jacals.

After pondering his options for an hour or so, Mies finally yielded to his desire for rest. He lay down and was fast asleep within seconds.

Some time later, the whine of hovercar engines awakened him. Since this was a direct violation of his standing orders, Mies knew that something unusual was happening. He jumped out of bed and went to the door of his sleeping quarters.

Outside, he saw a mercenary hovercar in the middle of his camp. With its armored flanks and light power cannons, the vehicle was quite an impressive sight to Mies' sleepy mind. He noted that the vehicle carried hunting radar and a smoke screen. Mies saw with some satisfaction that his Jacals had already captured the pilot.

Mies' orderly came to the door. "My apologies, Tuan Ohanlon—"

"Never mind," Mies said, "what's happening?"

"A wild-eyed crazy man flew that into camp," the orderly said. "He claims to know you. We think he is an assassin, though he carries no weapons."

"Let me see him."

"It will be very dangerous," warned the orderly.

"I wish to see him," Mies ordered.

"This way," the orderly said.

Mies followed the orderly to the other side of the hovercar. A tall man knelt on the ground, surrounded by armed Jacals. As Mies stepped through the circle, the man looked up and smiled, offering his hand in greeting.

"Blimey, mate," said Bret Scoles, "you've come up in the world, you have."

Mies choked back his surprise and regarded the grinning man with icy silence for a long moment. Finally, he commented, "I thought you were dead."

"I've a tough hide," Bret said, rubbing a new scar on his throat, "though it's been scratched up a bit lately."

Mies stepped closer, attempting to menace the grinning man.

"I'm supposed to have murdered you," he hissed, "so how come you're still alive?"

"You ought to know better than to trust bloody William of Ceta," Bret said. "Any dingo with a set of eyes can see that I'm alive. William's boys just had me tucked away, they did. Wanted to talk."

"About what?"

"About their wives and kids!" Bret said impatiently. "They wanted to talk about you, you twit."

"And what did you tell them?" Mies asked.

Bret looked hurt. "I didn't say squat. You're my mate."

Bret explained that he would like to join Mies. Mies knew that Bret would be a nice trump card to keep in his hand, but Bret could also be a spy.

If Mies decides to allow Bret to join his band, write Bret's name on Mies' equipment list. If Mies orders Bret's execution, write "Bret executed" on his equipment list. Mies can also have Bret taken to an out-of-the-way place and held there. If he does this, write "Bret banished" on Mies' equipment list.

Mies must now decide which plan to follow:

If he should follow Plan One, turn to Section 186.

If he should follow Plan Two, turn to Section 192.

If he should follow Plan Three, turn to Section 188.

If he should follow Plan Four, turn to Section 200.

— 136 —

The ping forces probed the guerrilla positions for several hours. The mercenaries' tentativeness allowed Mies time to return to headquarters and study the situation before deploying his troops.

The Terrain Map shows the terrain in the immediate vicinity. On the map, there are several "placeboxes" with numbers beneath

them. The boxes represent the locations at which Mies may place his units. Mies may place any unit at any placebox, but he cannot place more than one unit at any placebox. He is not required to place a unit at every placebox (and in fact may not have enough units to do so). Write the map location of each unit (see Section 111 for map) on a piece of scratch paper; next to each unit's map number, write the number of that unit's placebox. Be sure to place Mies' bodyguard at one of these placeboxes. Unlike other units, Mies' bodyguard may occupy the same location as another unit. Add their Manpower value to the Manpower value of the other unit at that location.

The ping invasion force roars down the valley in three waves. When the first wave reaches each placebox, it attacks the unit at that location. (As the first wave reaches each location, turn to the section corresponding to the placebox number.) Mies fights one round against the first wave, then the second wave attacks and he fights one round with it. Then the third wave attacks. If Mies' forces survive the third wave, the remnants of the first wave attack again and the cycle continues until one side is destroyed or withdraws.

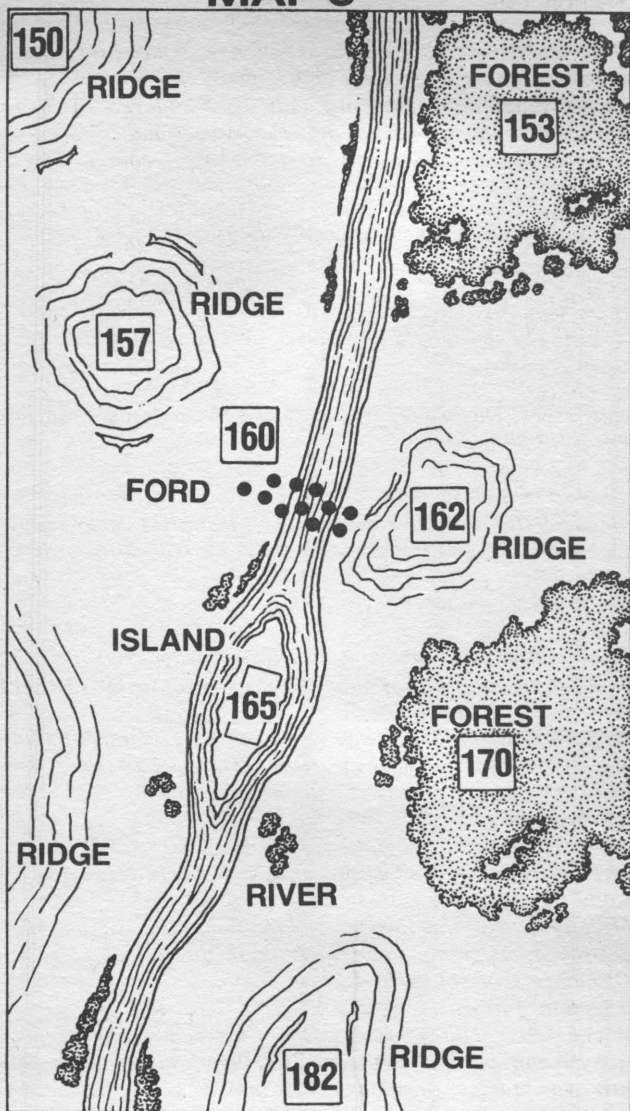
Mies cannot use any units in each battle except those that occupy the placebox being attacked (unless the text allows otherwise).

When the invaders reach an empty placebox (or clear one that Mies previously occupied), they move on to the next placebox, according to their plan (which is detailed later).

The statistics for each of the invaders' waves are listed below. Copy these statistics down on a piece of paper. Important: If Mies destroyed the invader supply dump (in Section 142), he destroyed ammunition earmarked for this attack. Reduce the Ordnance score of each wave by 4 points.

WAVE ONE: *This wave consists of veteran troops mounted on fast-moving ground vehicles. They are supported by floaters armed with heavy weapons. Their goal is to disrupt the defender's forces before the main attack begins.*

MAP 3



Section 136

Manpower: 30

Ordnance: 8 (subtract 4 if the supply depot was destroyed)

Attack Strength: 240 (adjust if supply depot was destroyed)

Stealth: 3

Morale: 9

Melee: 2

The standard chart for an attack by the first wave is Chart C.

Special Attacks: Roll two dice each round. If the result is a 9 or higher, they have successfully disrupted the defender's power weapons. The defender's Ordnance value is reduced by 3 points for that round.

WAVE TWO: This wave of floaters and low-flying aircraft bombards fortified positions.

Manpower: 20

Ordnance: 10 (subtract 4 if the supply depot was destroyed)

Attack Strength: 200 (adjust if supply depot was destroyed)

Stealth: 8

Morale: 11

Melee: 2

The standard chart for an attack by the second wave is Chart B.

WAVE THREE: This is a wave of mechanized infantry. Its job is to secure the positions taken by Waves One and Two.

Manpower: 80

Ordnance: 6 (subtract 4 if the supply depot was destroyed)

Attack Strength: 480 (adjust if supply depot was destroyed)

Stealth: 4

Morale: 9

Melee: 5

The standard chart for an attack by the third wave is Chart D.

Special Weakness: If the Manpower value of this unit falls below 40, it must make a Morale check at the end of every round it is involved in combat. Roll two dice; if the result is greater than its

Morale value, it will break off combat and flee. The third wave does not participate in any more attacks after this happens.

After writing down the location of Mies' units, turn to Section 151 to determine which placeboxes the pings attack first.

— 137 —

Flying low to the ground, Mies suddenly crossed a column of mercenaries strung out along the road. With deft precision, Mies swung the floater around and passed over the column. He opened the nerve gas canister as he approached the column head. By the time he reached the rear of the column, mercenaries already lay dead upon the road. A hovercar crashed into a tree and burst into flame.

Mies smiled grimly. He was sure the ping general would be pleased when he learned how effective his gas was. Of course, he would not appreciate the fact that it had been used on his own men, but such were the fortunes of war!

Mies returned to his men and landed the floater.

In the days that followed, the shattered invasion forces fell back toward Plains family lands. The Morrows rejoiced and declared Mies the first Marshal of the Jacals.

Write "Marshal of the Jacals" on Mies' equipment list.

In addition, many Jacals pledged their support to his leadership.

Increase the Manpower value of Mies' unit 10 points for each point of his unit's current Morale score. However, large forces are not as sneaky as small forces; reduce his unit's Stealth score by 1 point for each 10 points of Manpower Mies gains.

When the celebrations ended, Mies realized that he still had a mission to accomplish and that this victory would mean little until William lost interest in the Jacals. He had to decide what to

Section 138

do next. The guerrillas at Mount Fire (placebox 120) and near the Well of Souls (placebox 115) needed help.

Should Mies go to Mount Fire? If so, turn to Section 120.

Or should Mies go to the Well of Souls? If so, turn to Section 115.

— 138 —

Mies knew that the invasion force planned to use a deadly neurotoxin in its attack. He could use a communications scrambler to redirect the attack. If Mies' equipment list includes a communications scrambler, he can use it. However, if Mies does not have a communications scrambler, he can borrow one from the guerrilla commanders.

Using the scrambler, Mies could reprogram the floaters to dump the gas on any coordinates he desired. He studied his maps and decided there were four possible coordinates for the invaders to attack from: 11-11-21, 11-12-21, 21-21-11, and 21-11-11.

Unfortunately, he could only dump the neurotoxin on one set of coordinates. He had to see the enemy to accurately dump the nerve gas on their ranks; therefore, he had to go to the coordinates he selected.

Choose the coordinates to which Mies will go, then turn to the corresponding section in the table below.

Coordinates Section

11-11-21	137
11-12-21	108
21-21-11	124
21-11-11	103

— 139 —

When Mies displayed the Jacal People's Banner, a group of men who wanted the Jacals to unite into one nation flocked to his side. Although they were valiant fighters, they believed that every action had a political consequence and therefore had to be discussed and approved by a committee. This meant that, in general, they were slow to react and would question orders from their superiors.

They called themselves the Jacal Republic Troops.

The statistics are:

Manpower: 100

Ordnance: 5

Attack Strength: 500

Stealth: 4

Morale: 7

Melee: 4

The Jacal Republic Troops' standard chart is Chart D.

Unlike most other units, Mies can break this unit into either two or four groups. If he breaks it into four groups, each group has a Manpower of 25; if he breaks it into two groups, each group has a Manpower of 50.

If Mies also uses his Marshal of the Jacals credentials, many of these men will not join him. In this case, their Manpower is reduced to 50 and the unit can only be divided into two groups of 25 each.

Return to Section 111.

— 140 —

A floater passed by high overhead. Mies and his men crouched in the bushes, not moving. A long minute after the floater passed, Mies gave the signal to continue the march.

For the rest of the day, they inched along, hiding from floaters and bypassing remote security devices hidden along the road. Eventually, Mies decided to abandon the road and strike out cross-country.

As they advanced toward the Dunne lands, Mies did not find it difficult to believe that the valley itself was conspiring against them. With every mile, the vegetation became more dense and the terrain more steep. By the time the unit reached the north end of the valley, deep in Dunne territory, the valley had narrowed to a steep-sided canyon. Mies ordered a halt and studied his map.

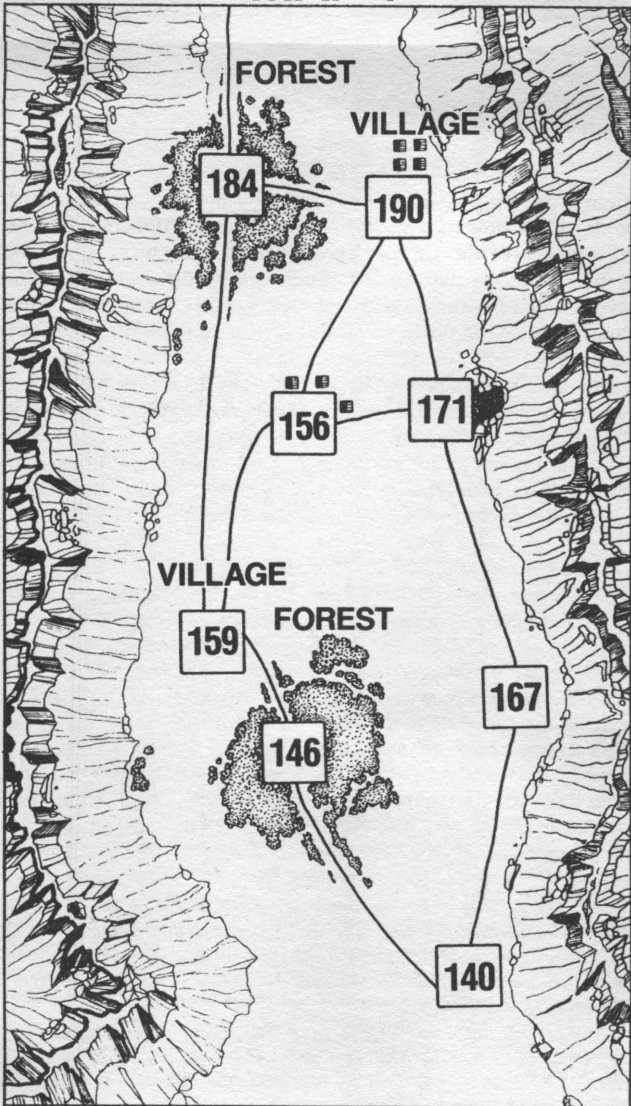
Look at the Dunne Map. This is a map of the terrain in this area. As Mies travels through this area, he moves from one box to another. He must move to adjacent boxes; he cannot move to a box that is not adjacent to the box at which he is currently located. As he moves to each new box, turn to the section indicated by the number next to the box. Write down the number of each box as Mies visits it; if he returns to that area, he is not required to read the section again.

At this point, Mies has two choices:

If Mies should travel over the river and into the forest, turn to Section 146.

If he should sneak along the cliff wall, turn to Section 167.

MAP 4



— 141 —

Mount Dohlbricke loomed up like a giant's head. Mies remembered the carrot piece Anderson had used to describe the situation. The plan had seemed so easy then. Now the battle's outcome seemed more uncertain. As dawn lit the sky, Mies prepared to give the order to attack.

Before he could issue the order, his radio crackled to life. The message was brief and to the point. Force C was attacking behind Mies. The council suggested that Mies return to base in order to meet the new threat.

Turn to Section 136.

— 142 —

The supply camp was surrounded by passive and active security sensors. The security sensors were shielded from electronic jamming or scrambling. Mies knew that it was impossible to sneak into the camp, and he did not even try. He and his men simply raced across the open field and plunged into the camp, screaming a war cry at the top of their lungs.

Despite the sensors, the defenders were still caught off guard by the sudden attack. Though the pings tried to fight back, Mies' attack could not be resisted. When Mies captured their artillery and brought it to bear on their hastily constructed shelters, the last holdouts surrendered.

One of Mies' units lost a few men in the firefights near the barracks. Choose which unit this was and roll two dice. This is the number of rounds the unit endured attack. The enemy attacks on Chart G with an Attack Strength of 30.

As the battle at the supply depot ended, Mies received a message from the guerrilla high command. Invader force C was preparing to attack across the entire front. Mies had to return to base immediately.

Turn to Section 136.

— 143 —

Even in the gloom of the evening, the needles were devastating. Mies had walked into a trap! He considered himself lucky, however, for it seemed like a small ambush. He was being attacked from only two directions. He ordered his men to return fire.

The statistics for the ambushers are:

Manpower: 3

Ordnance: 5

Attack Strength: 15

Stealth: 10

Morale: 9

Melee: 6

The ambushers attack on Chart A. They have the initiative and attack first every round. Mies' unit attacks on Chart B.

If the Manpower value of Mies' unit falls to 0, turn to Section 51.

If the ambushers' Manpower falls to 0, turn to Section 105.

— 144 —

Mies sent a unit down to investigate. As it crossed the barren perimeter around the camp, alarm sirens screeched a warning.

“Trap!” Mies thought. He ordered his other units to attack immediately, hoping to take his ambushers by surprise with a sudden surge of unexpected force.

The fact that the camp was protected by elaborate security systems did not matter when Mies’ men raced into the open field. They plunged into the camp, screaming at the tops of their voices, and took the pings by surprise.

The pings fell back to a barracks, where they put up a stiff resistance. For several minutes, a terrible firefight raged around the barracks. When Mies captured their artillery and brought it to bear on their hastily constructed shelters, the pings’ morale quickly broke and they surrendered.

The camp and its supplies fell into Mies’ hands.

Choose which unit was the attack’s lead unit. Roll one six-sided die. The result is the number of attacks the unit suffered from the ambush as they ran across the field. The ambushers attack on Chart E with an Attack Strength of 30. Subtract the losses from the chosen unit’s Manpower.

In addition, choose the unit which was involved in the firefight at the barracks. Roll two dice; this is the number of rounds of attack the unit endured. The pings attack on Chart G with an Attack Strength of 40. Subtract the losses from the unit’s Manpower value.

As the battle ended, Mies received a message from the guerilla high command. It simply said that force C was preparing to attack across the front. Mies had to return to base immediately.

Turn to Section 136.

— 145 —

Mies and his men traveled all night. They reached their destination by dawn. There were no enemy troops within several miles. Mies has led his troops to the wrong location!

The radio crackled to life. "Mies, ping force C is preparing to attack," Anderson said. "You must return to headquarters immediately."

Mies and his men started back toward the camp.

Reduce the Morale score of all of Mies' units by 1 point.

Turn to Section 136.

— 146 —

The forest swallowed Mies and his men. Huge trees towered over the party. They filtered out the sun's light, creating a zone of eternal twilight. The high arches of massive red branches reminded Mies of a cathedral he once visited on Old Earth. This must have been one of the lush forests planted when Ceta was terra-formed. The effect of the wood was so dreamlike that Mies would not have been surprised to awake and discover that the entire wood had vanished.

There were no pings hiding among the trees, nor were there the refugees Mies had expected to find. Even the river split and ran around the permanent dusk of the forest. The wood was silent, calm, and a reserve of absolute serenity. It soothed Mies to feel this emotional state. He drank in the peace, knowing that there would be little peace in the weeks to come.

The next morning, the party traveled to the other side of the wood. On the opposite bank of the river sat a homestead, apparently as peaceful and unconcerned with mercenaries as the forest from which Mies watched.

The forest journey soothed the men. Add 1 point to the Morale value of Mies' unit.

Mies entered the homestead.

Turn to Section 159.

— 147 —

“Spearhead to base,” the radio crackled. “We are reaching the second objective. We will cross the ridge in a few minutes.”

Mies listened to the report carefully. So far the attack had gone much too well.

“Base, we are on the ridge . . . Oh no! . . . We are under attack . . . Repeat we are under heav—” The radio continued to crackle, but the signal was jammed.

Mies had sent his lead unit into a trap. It was completely destroyed within minutes.

Erase the unit from Mies' sheet. The second unit sustained a few casualties. Roll a six-sided die. The result is the number of attacks the unit suffered before it could withdraw. The ambushers attack on Chart B with an Attack Strength of 30. Subtract the losses from that unit's Manpower value.

Shortly after the battle, Mies was ordered to return to guerilla headquarters. Force C was preparing to attack!

Turn to Section 136.

— 148 —

“People of Stuben,” Mies began in a clear voice. With sudden horror, he realized he did not know what to say. His imagination left him cold.

“I have come in peace in order to explore your land . . .” He



trailed off, realizing how ridiculous he sounded. But no one had shot him, and that was a good sign.

"Come into our camp light and we will talk."

Silence.

"Do you think they understand, Group-leader?" asked someone.

"We understand him perfectly," answered a cultured voice.

"Give me a moment to relate your offer to my colleagues."

A few moments later, several huge men walked out of the shadows. They wore leather jerkins, carried needle rifles, and sported long beards which were combed and braided elaborately. They all stood nearly two meters tall with wide shoulders and heavily muscled arms. With them was a well-groomed man who wore a fashionably styled suit. The man's bearing and the obvious respect showed him by the mountain men impressed Mies. There was something familiar and powerful about the way the man carried himself, but it was something Mies could not quite recognize or analyze.

The man offered his hand to Mies. "My name is Ben-Jamen Stuben. You are not part of William's invasion force," he said, smiling. "You are a Dorsai."

Mies smiled.

"No," Mies corrected him. "I was born here, in Ch'ung. But I studied there . . . Did you?"

Ben-Jamen Stuben broke into a softly mocking grin.

"I have studied many places," he said. Ben-Jamen's face grew serious. "Are the Ch'ung here to help the poor people of Stuben?"

"I represent the people of Ceta who reject William's rule," Mies said. "I would like to help you."

The slender man studied Mies, but said nothing. After several moments, Mies asked, "Do I pass? Will you accept my help?"

"No," Ben-Jamen answered. "But I might help you."

Ben-Jamen explained that the Stubens were responding to the invasion force in their historical manner. They were disappearing. The harshness of their land discouraged invaders. This strategy seemed to be working again, for the pings have confined themselves to a few small patches of Stuben lands.

But, Ben-Jamen continued, he was aware that their attitude would change. He said that he understood that his family's lands overlay great metal deposits. As soon as the invaders discovered this, they would come in force and stay, as they were now doing to the Dunnes at Mount Fire.

Ben-Jamen said that if Mies really wanted to help the Stubens and the Jacal people, he would travel to the Ch'ung family lands far to the north. There he would meet with Tuan Nokea, who was the only hope for the mountain people.

Remember to write down that Mies has visited the Stuben family lands (Section 130).

Should Mies go to Mount Fire and investigate the situation there? If so, turn to Section 120.

Or should Mies go north to the lands of the Ch'ung family? If so, add 5 points to Mies' Manpower value and increase his Morale, Stealth, and Melee scores by 1 point each. Ben-Jamen has sent a handpicked unit with Mies to escort him to the Tuan Nokea. Turn to Section 110.

— 149 —

Mies and his men moved up the final ridge to the camp. The valley was still covered in mist and shadow. It was impossible to see much.

Had he picked the wrong coordinates?

The sky turned gray and the mist thinned slightly. Below was the supply depot. No one moved in the camp except a few tired sentries. The camp was napping!

Should Mies send down one unit to test the defenses? If so, turn to Section 144.

Or should he simply attack with all his strength? If so, turn to Section 142.

— 150 —

The Jacals waited in their positions. Although they did not see the enemy, the earth shook with the vibrations of his advancing columns. A few minutes later, they sighted the first dust clouds on the horizon.

The radio operator listened to a message, then approached his commanding officer. "We're in the wrong position!" he said. "The pings are attacking somewhere else."

If this unit is Marco's Raiders or the Believers, they may be moved to any other empty placebox. Otherwise, the ping assault bypasses them.

Turn to the next placebox section in which a unit has been placed.

— 151 —

The invaders attack these locations in order:

Placebox 157

Placebox 160

Placebox 162

Placebox 165

Placebox 182

Note that these units are attacking from the lowest number to the highest.

Guerrilla units in placeboxes other than those listed here cannot fight the invaders.

The battle begins. If a unit has been placed in placebox 150, turn to Section 150. If no unit has been placed in that location, turn to the lowest placebox in which a unit has been placed.

If, at any time, the Manpower value of Mies' personal unit falls to 0, turn to Section 51.

If the Manpower value of all three of the pings' waves falls to 0, turn to Section 135.

— 152 —

Mies did not trust the ease with which his unit penetrated the ping perimeter. He stopped the attack and cautiously entrenched his lead units.

Three hours later, the first ping bombs fell among his positions. The entire ping force had been massing to strike; the force Mies had encountered on the line was just a screening unit. His caution was justified.

Turn to Section 136.

— 153 —

The Jacals waited in their positions. Although they did not see the enemy, the earth trembled with the vibrations of his advancing columns. A few minutes later, they sighted the first dust clouds on the horizon.

The radio operator listened to a message, then approached his commanding officer. "We're in the wrong position!" he said. "The pings are attacking somewhere else."

If this unit is Marco's Raiders or the Believers, they may be moved to any other empty placebox. Otherwise, the ping assault bypasses this unit.

Turn to the next placebox section in which a unit has been placed.

— 154 —

All units assigned to the fuel cells area may move to any other exterior area, as long as there are not more than two units in the area at the same time.

Turn to the section number corresponding to the area to which the unit(s) moves.

— 155 —

The pings scrambled for their weapons. The battle commenced.

The ping statistics are:

Manpower: 20

Ordnance: 5

Attack Strength: 100

Stealth: 3

Morale: 8

Melee: 2

The pings fight on Chart C. Mies' unit fights on Chart B. They have the initiative and attack first every round.

After two rounds, Mies may attempt to withdraw his unit, or he may order them into close combat. If Mies orders his unit into close combat, note that the pings' Attack Strength becomes their Manpower multiplied by their Melee. Once Mies has initiated close combat, he cannot withdraw until his unit or the ping unit has a Manpower value of 0.

Should Mies withdraw? If so, he must first make a Stealth check. Roll two dice:

If the result is greater than the Stealth score of Mies' unit, it cannot withdraw this round. It must fight another round, but may try to withdraw afterward.

If the result is equal to or less than the Stealth score of Mies' unit, he can go to the homestead to the west (Section 190) or to the woods to the west (Section 184).

Or should Mies initiate close combat? If so, continue the battle until either Mies' unit or the ping unit has a Manpower of 0. If the Manpower value of Mies' unit falls to 0, turn to Section 51.

If the Manpower value of the ping unit falls to 0, Mies finds himself in charge of two hundred refugee women and children. His Stealth rating drops to 4 until he leaves the women and children someplace safe. He takes them to the woods to the east. Turn to Section 202.

— 156 —

The rise hid everything but a pillar of smoke, which rose high into the sky and extended two great arms as if it were a cross. Mies and his men climbed to the top of the hill and looked down the sloping valley. Less than a mile away, a dozen military hovercraft sat dormant in the grass. The pings had set up a tent camp around the vehicles.

About a hundred yards from the camp, perhaps two hundred women, children, and old men were corralled inside a plastic wire fence. Through his binoculars, Mies read signs inside the corral warning the occupants to stay three meters from the fence on the pain of death. He also saw the body of a young girl that had been respectfully laid in the mud near the center of the corral.

One of his men tapped him on the shoulder and pointed to a clearing on the left side of the hill. The clearing was not visible from the corral. A group of refugees were digging several giant pits. The pits were long, deep rectangles with earthen steps

leading down into them. Next to each pit were hills of lime and ash. A single bulldozer sat nearby.

Mies' attention was drawn back to the corral by a hovercar. A single officer stood in the hovercar and addressed the refugees with a bullhorn. Mies could not quite hear what the officer was saying.

If Mies' equipment list includes a listening device, turn to Section 164.

If Mies does not have a listening device, turn to Section 168.

— 157 —

The Jacals were dug into their trenches, awaiting battle. "Curious," said a Ch'ung warrior. "I feel light as a bird." He waved his hand as if it were a bird flying high into the sky. As his hand went over the top of the trench, a buzz sounded and the smell of ozone filled the air.

The man brought back a blackened stump. He stared at his empty wrist for a moment, then fell over in shock. "Alert!" cried an officer. "Snipers moving into fire zones!"

A medic rushed over and sprayed the stump with foam, then dragged the moaning man away. Flashes began to fill the air overhead. The earth vibrated as enemy floaters and hovercars rushed forward.

"Man your weapons!" bellowed a sergeant. "They're coming over the ridge."

The smell of ozone filled the air and flashes dotted the horizon. Floaters roared overhead, spitting death down into the trenches. Needle rifles, cone guns, and power weapons answered.

After three rounds of combat, Mies may attempt to withdraw his unit. A withdrawing unit must make a successful Stealth check. If it rolls its Stealth score or less, it can withdraw to any empty placebox with a number higher than the one it now occupies. If a withdrawing unit rolls higher than its Stealth score, it must stay and fight another round before it may attempt to withdraw again.

After this placebox is abandoned or destroyed, turn to the next placebox section in which Mies has placed a unit.

If Mies' personal bodyguard is here and the unit's Manpower value falls to 0, turn to Section 51.

If the Manpower value of all three mercenary waves falls to 0, turn to Section 135.

— 158 —

As Mies topped the high ridge, he looked back at the military camp. It was still peaceful and quiet. "This will change," thought the Dorsai.

The first fuel cell blossomed into orange petals of fire, then faded away. Other fuel cells blossomed one after the other and, even from his distant perch, Mies felt their heat.

The explosions continued, spilling the stench of burning fuel into the mountain air. Other things burned, too. A smoking hovercraft floated out of the inferno, then exploded and spread the fire. A floater, escaped into the sky, trailing a dark streak of smoke. Mies felt a stab of regret over his decision, but this was war. And in war, innocent people died.

Turn to Section 184.

— 159 —

As Mies approached town, there was no indication of alarm. Not even a goat bleated. He smelled bread baking.

He followed the smell to a small, breezy summer-kitchen. As he approached, the fragrant aroma turned to the smell of burning bread. Smoke poured from the oven.

Obviously, no one was home. He wandered around the large house. Although people had recently inhabited the village, they were now gone. He saw hovercar tracks leading to the northeast,

which disappointed Mies. He wanted to go southeast, so if he wanted to track the hovercar, he would have to go out of his way.

One of Mies' men handed him a small doll. One eye was missing and the plastic head was cracked.

"I found this on the road," the man explained. "It must have dropped from the hovercraft."

Mies nodded.

"They were sure in a hurry to leave," the man commented.

Mies just stared at the sunset.

Should Mies follow the hovercar? If so, turn to Section 156.

Or should he carry on with his journey? If so, turn to Section 184.

— 160 —

The pings rolled over the ridge, scattering the outpost pickets. The mercenaries barely slowed down as they approached the river.

The defenders stood firm, but their position on the riverbank was exposed. An explosion sprayed mud into the ranks of Jacals. The men dove down for any cover they could find. The familiar ping of the mercenaries' hunting radar began to sound. Technicians answered with curses as they tried to find the frequency to jam the signal.

The floaters roared overhead, like horsemen searching for defenseless peasants to trample. The difference was that these peasants answered with high-powered needle rifles and occasionally dehorned a dark knight.

The pinging of the hunting radar grew louder as the hovercars reached the lines. The guerrillas showered the armored cars with needles, but to little effect. The hovercars rode along the trenches, their energy beams seeking targets with terrifying accuracy.

Suddenly, the beams dissipated. A cry rose from the technicians: "We jammed them!" The hovercars banked to leave, but the guerrillas renewed their fire and one hovercar's crew quickly

perished. A beam lashed out from the trench and another hovercar began to burn. It crashed into a platoon of advancing ping infantrymen.

The lack of defensible terrain here exposes the unit to withering ping fire. The pings increase the effectiveness of their attacks by one chart. For example, a ping wave that normally attacks on Chart C now attacks on Chart B.

Unfortunately, the unit at this location cannot withdraw because the river is at its back. It must fight to the bitter end.

If Mies placed a unit here and one in placebox 162, the unit in placebox 162 may support this unit. The unit in placebox 162 makes one attack for every ping attack. All guerrilla losses, however, must be subtracted from the unit in this location; no losses may be subtracted from the Manpower of the unit in placebox 162.

After this placebox is abandoned or destroyed, turn to the next placebox in which Mies has a unit.

If Mies' personal bodyguard is here and the unit's Manpower value falls to 0, turn to Section 51.

If the Manpower value of all three mercenary waves falls to 0, turn to Section 135.

— 161 —

Mies and his men crept up to the Stuben camp. A young boy sat next to a fire, apparently waiting for them. A plate of food sat next to him, growing cold. Mies attempted to introduce himself, but the boy made no response.

"He doesn't know Basic," said one of Mies' men.

"Maybe he's deaf-mute?" another suggested.

"No," insisted the first, "he just doesn't understand. The Stubens don't teach Basic to their children."

“Then does anyone here speak his language?” Mies asked. He received only blank looks in response.

Mies watched the boy watch him. The boy’s eyes were bright and hostile. Mies suddenly sensed the presence of more men; they were sneaking up on Mies and his unit. Although no one said anything, Mies believed that his men sensed the impending ambush, too. They were readying their weapons and backing away from the light of the campfire. Mies continued trying to talk to the boy while concentrating on the storm building in the darkness.

Mies heard the scrape of leather on stone, then saw a dark shadow move off to his left. To his right, he saw the outline of a man bringing a weapon to bear. Mies had only a matter of seconds before the battle began.

Should Mies call out to the Stubens, hoping that someone understands him? If so, turn to Section 148.

Or should he attack immediately, hoping to catch his would-be ambushers off guard? If so, turn to Section 174.

— 162 —

For the troops on the bluff overlooking the riverbank, the battle had been virtually a spectator sport as the pings overran the positions in the floodplain. They had occasionally lent fire support to an advanced unit, but so far they had not been attacked in return.

A heavy silence fell over the men as the pings crossed the floodplain. Now came their turn, and they intended to repay the pings for the Jacal losses so far.

The first wave reached the base of the bluff. Even before the ping hovercars began the ascent, the Jacals heard the *ping-ping* of the enemy’s hunting radar. They were prepared for this, for Mies had shown them how to provide false targets. As the guerrillas waited for more units to come into their trap, the hovercars began to fire. The ozone smell of firing void rifles drifted up to their noses.

After the pings exhausted their initial momentum against false

targets, the guerrillas opened fire with everything they had. Within seconds, burning hovercars and floaters littered the floodplain, and veteran ping troops seemed confused and hesitant.

Despite the cleverly laid guerrilla trap, however, the ping determination was remarkable. The ping pilots methodically located the guerrilla firing positions by sight, then brought their superior firepower to bear. More equipment crossed the plain, and the battle grew desperate for both sides.

Because of their skillfully prepared position, the guerrillas shift up one table for this battle. For example, a unit that normally attacks on Chart C now attacks on Chart B. The Jacals have the initiative and always attack first in this battle.

Mies may withdraw this unit from battle at the end of any round and move it to any empty placebox with a number higher than 162. He is not required to make a Stealth check for this withdrawal because his unit is well positioned. The mercenaries will be unable to follow closely.

After this placebox is abandoned or captured, turn to the next placebox section in which Mies has placed a unit.

If the Manpower value of Mies' personal unit falls to 0, turn to Section 51.

If the Manpower value of all three ping waves falls to 0, turn to Section 135.

— 163 —

The Dunne family council accepted Mies and installed him as a minor official. They showed him the great tunnel system beneath the volcano, and Mies made suggestions about how to improve the defensibility of their position. The Dunne force leaders were mature enough to accept his suggestions without animosity.

One afternoon, just after the daily bombing raid, a patrol returned with important news. They had discovered a major new

fuel dump and airpad between there and the Stuben lands. The pings clearly intended to use this base to launch a massive offensive against Mount Fire.

That night, the councilors decided that Mies should take his men and seek aid from other families. To show Mies how much trust they were placing in him, they led him deep below Mount Fire to an old lava tunnel that had been enlarged and extended. The temperature was uncomfortably hot.

Mies and his guides climbed aboard a tiny electric train that ran through the old tunnel. The guides explained that this train ran for dozens of miles to the place containing the great Dunne family secret.

Six hours later, the train stopped in a large cavern. The temperature was even hotter. Sweat ran in a steady stream down Mies' brow.

About two dozen men were working in the cavern, operating heavy mining machinery. The guides explained that the core of any planet was rich in metals because, as the planet formed, heavy elements tended to settle to the center of the gravitational field. Volcanic activity was one of the natural forces which brought these elements closer to the surface. The cavern in which Mies now stood was once part of the great magma reservoir which underlay the Jacal Range. Although the cavern contained only a fraction of the heavy metals that the core contained, there was enough metal ore to buy a good portion of Ceta. More important, the deposit was rich in rare metals used in the exotic alloys necessary for modern weapons and communications technology. If this deposit fell into William's hands, he could make himself the undisputed tyrant of fourteen worlds.

Mies vowed that this deposit would never fall into William's hands. He did not know how he would stop William, but he swore he would find a way.

Mies left Mount Fire and traveled to the Stuben lands with his unit.

Turn to Section 130. If Mies has already visited Section 130, he may follow the travel lines to any adjacent placebox which he has not visited.

— 164 —

“Attention! Attention!” blared the bullhorn. “You have one more chance to give up Dominique Franc-Dunne. If you do not comply, we will withhold your food rations for another day.”

The group remained silent and still.

“Very well,” the speaker said. By the tone of his voice, Mies knew the man enjoyed what he was doing. “This is costing us all time and money. You must give me your final answer by tomorrow morning, or we will exceed our budget for this project. You will force me to resort to a more expedient procedure.”

Turn to Section 168.

— 165 —

This unit was positioned behind the high bluff, on an island in the river. They could see the battle as the pings overran the bluff.

Roll a six-sided die. The result is the number of rounds that this unit was able to attack one of the ping waves (your choice) as it came off the bluff. The pings were unable to respond to these attacks.

After taking the bluffs, the first wave approached the island from three sides. The other two waves attacked from the remaining side, cutting off any hope of escape.

Mies may not withdraw this unit from battle unless it is Marco's Raiders.

If the unit is Marco's Raiders, Mies may withdraw them after the unit's free attacks on the pings. He cannot withdraw the unit after the pings have responded to an attack. If Marco's Raiders

are withdrawn, they may move to any other unoccupied placebox with a section number higher than 165. (They do not need to make a Stealth check to withdraw.)

For any unit except Marco's Raiders, this is a fight to the death.

After this placebox is abandoned or captured, turn to the section for the next placebox in which Mies has placed a unit.

If the Manpower value of Mies' personal unit falls to 0, turn to Section 51.

If the Manpower value of all ping waves falls to 0, turn to Section 135.

— 166 —

As Mies' unit approached the camp, one of the men made a fatal mistake: he stepped on a clump of earth. Mies felt the soft thud of a nearby explosion, then saw pieces of the man drop in front of him. The unlucky fellow had found a land mine.

A remote-controlled needle gun sprayed the area with thousands of needles. Mies returned fire blindly. After a few seconds, he thought he had located the gun. He raised himself up to get a good shot. A needle ripped through his shoulder and cracked his collarbone. Mies automatically compensated for the force of the blow and squeezed off a few shots. The needle gun fell silent.

After the surge of adrenaline faded, pain rushed down Mies' arm and throughout his chest. He felt dizzy and weak. Mies forced his mind to ignore the pain and stood. His arm hung limply at his side. One of his men rushed to him, looking for direction. "Mies," he began, "two men have . . ." The man stopped in midsentence, noticing Mies' wound. "My God! You're hit!"

Mies waved the man away, then took a deep breath and

staggered forward. He began to issue an order, but dropped to his knees before he could finish his sentence.

Before he dropped into unconsciousness, Mies heard someone call for a medic.

Turn to Section 29.

— 167 —

The cliff rose nearly a mile into the sky, and Mies saw no breaks in its vertical face. As Mies studied the cliff, a mist rolled into the valley. Within minutes, the sky turned from gray to black.

“I think we’re in for a storm,” observed one of Mies’ companions.

A violent storm could be the perfect shield for Mies and his men to travel further, but it could also be dangerous.

Should Mies continue traveling? If so, turn to Section 180.

Or should Mies seek shelter? If so, turn to Section 172.

— 168 —

The men in the hovercraft left, obviously unhappy about something.

“Tuan Ohanlon,” said one of his men, “we will attack when you give the order.”

The camp contained about three dozen soldiers and two hundred refugees. If he freed the refugees, Mies would probably have to protect them until he could find a safe place for them to stay.

Should he avoid the whole mess and continue on without attacking? If so, turn to Section 187.

Or should he free the refugees? If so, turn to Section 175.

— 169 —

Mies dropped his hand. Each man attacked a mercenary. The surprise attack worked beautifully; Mies did not suffer a single loss. The entire patrol lay dead within a minute.

Then a tree exploded into splinters. Mies heard the pinging of hunting radar and turned to see a hovercraft racing toward his unit. Mies ordered his men to return fire.

The hovercraft's statistics are:

Manpower: 6

Ordnance: 7

Attack Strength: 42

Stealth: 2

Morale: 5

Melee: not applicable

The hovercraft unit fights on Chart D. Mies' unit fights on Chart B. Mies and his unit have the initiative and attack first each round.

If the Manpower value of Mies' unit falls to 0, turn to Section 51.

If the Manpower value of the hovercraft falls to 0, turn to Section 120.

— 170 —

The ground trembled with the vibrations of the column's advance. The forward observer had sighted the first dust clouds over ten minutes ago.

So where was the enemy?

The men waited in their trenches, frightened at the prospect of the coming battle, yet determined to halt the ping invaders.

The radio crackled to life. The enemy column had bypassed this position. The men breathed mixed sighs of frustration and relief.

If this unit is Marco's Raiders or the Believers, it may move to any empty placebox with a number higher than 170. However, if this unit has already moved once since its original posting, it may not move again.

Turn to the next placebox section in which Mies has placed a unit.

— 171 —

Mies has run across a cave. The entrance, beneath an overhanging rock, was difficult to see. Mies could see that human beings had taken refuge inside.

Mies and his men approached carefully. Although he kept a careful watch for traps, Mies saw nothing to concern him. He moved to the entrance, expecting a challenge at any moment.

Nothing.

He peered into the dark interior. It was quiet. Mies took a deep breath, then turned on his flashlight and entered. A few steps into the cave, he stopped. His flashlight showed the frightened, dirty faces of a few tattered women and children. Mies could smell their fear in the musty air. His flashlight revealed crude chalk drawings of the sun, flowers, and trees on the cave walls.

"We let them draw," one woman said, noticing how Mies studied the walls. "We give them chalk and let them draw."

Mies studied the face of the woman who had spoken. She was terribly tired and ready to cry. Mies judged that she was close to a nervous breakdown.

"Where are the men?" Mies asked.

"Gone, dead, or fighting for Franc-Dunne at Mount Fire. They left us at the homesteads. No one thought the invaders would bother with women and children. But the pings came and started taking us away. We escaped and came here to hide."



“Where are they taking their prisoners?” Mies asked.

“I don’t know,” the woman answered. “Their hovercar trail still shows in the grass, though.”

Should Mies push on toward his original goal? If so, Mies’ unit must make a Morale check. Reduce their Morale value by 1 point. Then roll two dice:

If the result is greater than the Morale score of his unit, his men insist that they follow the hovercar tracks. Turn to Section 156.

If the result is equal to or less than the unit’s Morale score, turn to Section 190.

Perhaps Mies should go after the hovercar? If so, turn to Section 156.

— 172 —

The storm struck with raging fury. It hurled sheets of water upon the pitiful two-man tents Mies’ unit had hurriedly pitched. Throughout the night, the storm battered the makeshift camp, keeping the men awake and frightened. They could not read, talk, or do anything but wait and hope that the storm would end soon.

Because Mies had stopped, however, the unit endured the storm without losing anything more than a night’s sleep. When the storm broke the next day, Mies ordered his men to continue the march.

Turn to Section 171.

—173—

Mies moved through the dark field, thankful that neither of the twin moons was out tonight. The party easily reached the perimeter without incident. But Mies saw that the guards ahead were alert and plentiful. Mies selected a guard for each of his men to attack and communicated this information to them via hand signals.

Mies waited for his men to sneak into position, wishing he could read their minds. A few minutes later, he whistled and his men struck. They took out the guards in perfect unison.

Mies must make a Stealth check. Roll two dice:

If the result is 11 or 12, turn to Section 166.

If the result is greater than the Stealth score of Mies' unit, but less than 11, turn to Section 155.

If the result is equal to or less than the Stealth score of Mies' unit, turn to Section 176.

—174—

Mies and his men fired, but they quickly realized that they faced tough opponents. Several of Mies' men fell instantly, and Mies himself barely escaped a well-aimed shot.

The Stubens' statistics are:

Manpower: 7

Ordnance: 3

Attack Strength: 21

Stealth: 11

Morale: 11

Melee: 7

The Stubens fight on Chart A. The Stubens have the initiative and attack first each round. Mies' unit fights on Chart B.

Mies can attempt to speak with the Stubens, even in the middle of the firefight. To do so, his unit must cease firing for one round. The Stubens will continue to attack.

If Mies should try to talk to the Stubens, turn to Section 148. (Remember to allow the Stubens a free attack.)

If the Manpower value of Mies' units falls to 0, turn to Section 29.

If the Manpower value of the Stubens falls to 0, turn to Section 120. (Mies continues toward Mount Fire; he realizes he will find no aid here.) If Mies has already visited Mount Fire, he may follow any set of travel lines to a location which he was not visited.

— 175 —

Mies studied the camp all afternoon, trying to determine the best way to attack it. His men waited quietly, anxious to attack but aware that Mies liked to plan these things.

The pings here were hardened men, chosen carefully for a dirty job. They would not be easy to surprise or scare.

Still, Mies did see one weakness. The ping officers had moved their camp over the hill, to where the trenches had been dug. They were probably trying to escape the stench of the refugee camp.

Finally, Mies looked at his men. Their faces broke into smiles.

Mies has four options. Read the description of each option below, then choose which option Mies should use.

OPTION ONE: Sneak into the camp after dark and surprise the guards.

OPTION TWO: Surround the pings and order them to surrender.

Section 176

OPTION THREE: Attack the officers' camp, then use the officers to secure the release of the refugees.

OPTION FOUR: Rush the camp in a straightforward attack.

If Mies should choose Option One, turn to Section 173.

If Mies should choose Option Two, turn to Section 193.

If Mies should choose Option Three, turn to Section 179.

If Mies should choose Option Four, turn to Section 155.

— 176 —

Mies took the ping camp by surprise, but the pings put up a stiff resistance.

The ping statistics are:

Manpower: 20

Ordnance: 5

Attack Strength: 100

Stealth: 3

Morale: 8

Melee: 2

The pings fight on Chart E. Mies' unit fights on Chart B. Mies' unit has the initiative and attacks first each round.

Mies' men refuse to withdraw from this battle; it is victory or death for his unit.

At the end of every round of combat starting with the third, the pings must check their morale. Roll two dice; if the result is 9 or more, the pings surrender.

Mies can order his men into close combat at any time. If he does this, both the pings and his unit use their Melee scores instead of their Ordnance score to compute their Attack Strength.

If Mies orders his men into close combat, the battle must continue until one side is reduced to a Manpower of 0. The pings will not surrender in this case.

If the Manpower value of Mies' unit falls to 0, turn to Section 51.

If the Manpower value of the pings falls to 0, Mies frees the refugees. They must leave the camp before reinforcements come. Turn to Section 202.

—177—

Mies was not welcome at Mount Fire. He had to leave.

Do not write down Mount Fire as one of the locations Mies has visited.

Mies must go to the Stuben lands. If he has already visited the Stuben lands (Section 130), he must follow any set of travel lines from there to a location which he has not visited. Turn to Section 130.

—178—

Mies scouted out the ping positions. A large force lay between his unit and the guerrilla force at Mount Fire. Sneaking into Mount Fire would prove extremely difficult, yet this was the best course of action.

If Mies has a group of refugees/hostages with him, turn to Section 183.

If Mies does not have the refugees/hostages, he must make a Stealth check. Roll two dice:

If the result is greater than his unit's Stealth score, turn to Section 183.

If the result is equal to or less than his unit's Stealth score, turn to Section 120.

— 179 —

Mies and his men eluded the guards and sneaked into the officers' camp. Mies quickly found the man who was using a bullhorn to threaten the refugees. This officer was playing chess with a subordinate when Mies pulled aside the flap to his tent and stepped inside. Mies trained his needle gun on the officer's chest.

The officer reached for a weapon, but Mies shot it from his grasp. "You have a simple choice, Commander," Mies said. "You may choose to die, or to profit from your mistake." The group leader stared at Mies, his expression both defiant and curious.

"Go on."

"You are a proud and noble warrior. On Dorsai, we honor that."

"You are Dorsai?"

"Yes," Mies said. He sensed relief in the officer's eyes. It was one thing to be caught napping by barbarians, and quite another to be surprised by a Dorsai. The officer's humiliation vanished.

"Now, Commander," Mies continued, "the important thing here is to survive. Your troops are off-world, but you and your officers are Cetan, correct?"

The ping leader nodded.

"Order your men into the brush while I free the refugees. Then fill in the trenches and report your mission accomplished. In return, I will give you your life, and write a letter explaining that you did not execute these civilians. Then, after you are defeated—and when you are facing Dorsai, you will be defeated—you will have proof that you are a compassionate man caught in unfortunate circumstances—instead of a war criminal."

"There are men in my command who would not agree with

you, Dorsai. They would like nothing better than to report my insubordination."

Mies smiled. "You must bluff. Assign only men you trust to the execution detail. Order the rest to remain out of sight. Then march the refugees into the trenches. I'm sure they will gladly scream and cry while you fire over their heads. Then release them and fill the trenches."

"How do you know I won't kill the refugees instead of releasing them?" he asked. "It would be so easy."

Mies smiled and shot the officer's insignia off his collar. The officer screamed, then broke into tears. "You won't," Mies said.

Ten hours later, Mies was leading two hundred refugees to an uncertain, but brighter, future.

Turn to Section 202.

— 180 —

The storm struck with savage fury. After an hour of trying to make headway in this miserable weather, Mies' men simply dismounted and found what shelter they could. Mies knew better than to object.

The storm hurled sheets of water upon the pitiful men. Throughout the night, the storm battered the makeshift camp, keeping the men awake and frightened. They could not read, talk, or do anything but wait and hope the storm would end soon.

In the morning, Mies inspected the damage. Two men were missing and some equipment was soaked and useless.

Subtract 2 points from the Manpower value of Mies' unit and cross off one item from Mies' equipment list.

Turn to Section 171.

— 181 —

The patrol returned to its hovercraft and sped away. Mies escaped detection.

Turn to Section 120.

— 182 —

The survivors of the earlier ping attacks gathered at this small knot of land, along with the unit assigned to this placebox. Beyond this ridge, the land opened into rolling meadows perfect for hovercars and floaters, but deadly for men on foot.

This was the last stand.

There was no need to tell the men. As they prepared for battle, their commanders saw determination in their eyes—and smelled fear in their hearts.

A shout went up when Mies' staff car approached. The troops knew their commander would stand or fall with his men. Mies got out and inspected the firing lines, making suggestions and adjustments, all of which were quickly acted upon. Although Mies moved about his inspection with deliberate calmness, the officers that followed him were nervous and anxious to assume their positions. There was little time before ping snipers began to pick off the careless.

Just out of needle gun range, two floaters flew into view. They paralleled the guerrilla lines, dropping smoke charges and scrambling devices. A few minutes later, the mercenary infantry charged from the wall of smoke.

Two hovercars appeared without warning on the right flank of the guerrilla trench. They destroyed a heavy weapon position. Before the guerrillas could respond, the hovercar computers had already targeted half a dozen more positions and fired. By the time the guerrillas brought their weapons to bear, the hovercars were fleeing toward their own lines.

The battle grew, almost imperceptibly. The neat lines of men disappeared and the air grew hazy with smoke. The clean smell of ozone became almost sickening as void guns snapped and buzzed, leaving men incomplete or dead.

In the noise and smoke, the Jacal defenders could no longer determine whether the men beside them were friends or enemies. Many men fired at any shadow that moved; others curled up in the bottom of their firing positions, too uncertain of their targets to act. Officers of both sides rushed from one clump of men to another, trying to instill some sense of order to the chaos.

Add the remaining Manpower value of any units which the mercenaries attacked but did not destroy to the Manpower value of the unit in this placebox. Do not add the Manpower value of units which were bypassed.

Add the Manpower value of Mies' personal unit to the Manpower value of the unit placed here.

The defenders cannot withdraw. They remain at this location until their Manpower falls to 0, or until the Manpower value of all three waves of attackers falls to 0.

If the Manpower value of the defenders falls to 0, turn to Section 51.

If the Manpower value of the pings falls to 0, turn to Section 135.

— 183 —

The pings moved toward Mies and his men, who were hiding in the bush. They occasionally stopped and searched the dense clumps of vegetation. Mies raised his arm. When he brought it down, his men could ambush this patrol. But how many other pings were nearby?

A hovercar drifted by. The lead soldier was less than ten meters from Mies.

Sections 184, 185

Should Mies give the order to attack? If so, turn to Section 169.

Or should he order his men to remain still? If so, turn to Section 181.

— 184 —

Mies entered the woods barely ahead of a column of ping soldiers.

Mies' unit must make a Stealth check. Roll two dice:

If the result is equal to or less than the Stealth score of Mies' unit, turn to Section 178.

If the result is greater than the Stealth score of Mies' unit, turn to Section 183.

— 185 —

Dominique Franc-Dunne was the daughter of Kelson Franc-Dunne, a powerful member of the Dunne family council. When Dominique Franc-Dunne told her father that she could not have returned to Mount Fire if not for Mies, the old man hugged Mies and kissed him on the cheek. Mies' credentials were instantly established.

Kelson Franc-Dunne rewarded Mies by giving him a power weapon scrambler and a communications scrambler.

Write these items on Mies' equipment list.

Furthermore, after word traveled through the clan homestead of how Mies rescued Dominique Franc-Dunne, thirty men asked to join his unit.

Add 30 points to Mies' Manpower value. In addition, because Mies was no longer protecting a refugee, add 1 point to the Stealth rating of his unit.

The most important reward, however, was awarded by Dominique herself. She gave Mies a small metal pendant shaped like a bird with outstretched wings. This was the Dunne Family Crest.

Note on Mies' equipment list that he now carries the "Dunne Crest."

Turn to Section 163.

— 186 —

Attacking all four camps at one time sounded like a good idea. It was a bold move that relied upon the support of a people throwing off the yoke of oppression.

However, as disorganized as the pings were, they could still field an overwhelming force. As the inferior guerrilla forces attacked the four camps, the mercenaries fought delaying actions designed to test the guerrilla strength. A few hours after the battles began, the mothership began using surgical beam strikes to destroy guerrilla formations.

Mies saw the changing tide of battle early and withdrew his forces. Fortunately, he suffered only minor losses from the pursuing floaters and hovercars. Mies concentrated his forces in a protected area and reviewed his options.

Turn to Section 135.

— 187 —

The men refused to leave.

“I gave an order,” Mies cried. He realized that asking his men to desert those in need was a mistake, but if he backed down, it would hurt unit discipline.

“We know, Tuan,” said one of his men. “But we cannot desert these people.”

Reduce the Morale score of the unit by 1 point.

If Mies should change his mind and rescue the refugees, turn to Section 175.

If Mies should enforce his order, roll two dice:

If the result is greater than the Morale score of Mies' unit, they refuse to leave until he rescues the refugees. Turn to Section 175.

If the result is equal to or less than the Morale score of Mies' unit, he may go to a homestead due west of his present location (Section 190) or a woods to the west (Section 184).

— 188 —

The ministers of the Ch'ung Kingdom and the Five Cities were assembled in the grand ballroom at his father's compound. Mies had hoped that Kensie Graeme would be here in person. Instead, he had sent a young officer named Roubert Gares to represent the Dorsai on Ceta. It was a bad sign.

Mies stated the Jacal case eloquently, but his audience appeared unmoved. His father said nothing. When Mies finished, the ministers from the Ch'ung Kingdom and the Five Cities applauded and congratulated Mies. They eagerly pledged their

support. It was an enthusiastic show of support that no one believed would be honored.

The young Dorsai looked on without emotion. So Mies asked him, "Gares, what is your opinion of our nation's struggle?" Dorsai support was crucial to Mies' cause.

Gares yawned. "I don't know," he answered sleepily. "I will report your proposals to Kensie Graeme. You realize, of course, that I have no power to grant you anything."

"I am not asking for your troops at the present time," Mies said, "just your opinion."

Gares grew more serious. "You moved too soon. Our command cannot support you until it sees evidence of a true nation emerging from your band of barbarians. Defeat the off-world invaders, then your metal deposits might buy you Dorsai muscle."

Mies' mission has failed. Return to Section 135 and choose another plan.

— 189 —

The moonlight cast a dim light through the clouds. This was a perfect night to move. There was just enough light to facilitate travel. The night was dark enough, however, that high-flying reconnaissance planes would not see the long columns of guerrilla men and machines. All night, units rolled down the mountains toward the Stuben family lands.

To avoid ping patrols, the convoy crossed the border into the lands of the Five Cities. Mies was confident that the army of the Five Cities would not harass his troops. The Five Cities wanted to see the Jacals retain possession of the metal deposits in their mountains; allowing William to steal the ore was a dangerous alternative.

As morning approached, Mies' radio operator called him. "Sir, ping radio traffic is increasing around Crossroads."

Mies put on a headset. The signal was faint and he could not understand a word. The radio operator made some adjustments and finally locked onto the correct frequency. What Mies heard sickened him.

William of Ceta was going to the ping camp at Crossroads.

Mies was about to match wits with the most dangerous man on fourteen worlds.

Should Mies continue with his original intention to relieve the troops at Mount Fire? If so, turn to Section 194.

Or should he attempt to capture William and force an early end to the war? If so, turn to Section 205.

— 190 —

The ping mercenaries were using this homestead for a communications post. Hundreds of soldiers and vehicles surrounded the central buildings. There was even a floater pad and fuel dump nearby. Everything was heavily guarded.

If Mies should attack, turn to Section 211.

If Mies should continue on his way, turn to Section 184.

— 191 —

The fuel cells were unguarded.

The attackers assigned to this area may attack adjacent areas next turn.

— 192 —

After a solid day and night of work, Mies finally developed a plan he felt would work. The basic plan was simple. A large force of guerrillas would travel through secret mountain passes from the Well of Souls to Crossroads. From there, they would go on to the Stuben lands and link up with Stuben forces.

Then, at a specified time, a large force of Dunne men would launch a diversionary attack from inside the besieged mountain. The rest of the guerrillas would attack the large supply depot and the ping camp. Mies hoped that the destruction of the camp would lift the siege and earn the respect of the Jacals' neighbors.

The only drawback was that the plan would fail if the large troop movement was not completed in secrecy. That would not be an easy thing to accomplish.

The troops available for this attack are listed below. Mies may choose only five of these ten units for the attack. The other five units must defend various guerrilla camps from roving bands of mercenaries.

These five units will form Mies' attack force. Some of the units may not be available, especially if Mies has tried other plans from Section 135. Furthermore, the first five units in this list were available during the ping attack at the Well of Souls. If one (or more) of these units was completely destroyed during that battle, it will not be available for this campaign. However, units which survived that battle were able to replace their losses and now operate at full strength.

If Mies has had bad luck so far, it is possible that he may not have five units left. In this case, he can choose all of the units available.

UNIT ONE: Marco's Raiders. *They are an independent bunch of Jacal men that fly captured floaters and hovercars of every size and shape. They have reinforced the armor, boosted*

the engine performance, and added heavy weaponry to their captured vehicles. The leader is a Tager man named Marco who always wears a leather jacket and sports a huge handle-bar mustache. He has an enormous gap between his front teeth.

The statistics for Marco's Raiders are:

Manpower: 20

Ordnance: 6

Attack Strength: 120

Stealth: 6

Morale: 9

Melee: 2

Special Equipment: Four explosive charges, Attack Strength 40; power weapon scrambler (1,000-meter range)

The standard chart for Marco's Raiders is Chart B.

Marco's Raiders hate the Believers. If the Believers are participating in the attack, drop the Morale for Marco's Raiders to 4 points.

UNIT TWO: Red Spears. This group of warriors is aggressive and well trained. They are extremely loyal and will form the backbone of any attack force.

Their statistics are:

Manpower: 30

Ordnance: 5

Attack Strength: 150

Stealth: 10

Morale: 10

Melee: 5

The standard chart used by the Red Spears is Chart C.

If Mies has attempted to ask for help from the Ch'ung Kingdom, he loses his credibility with this unit. Their new statistics are:

Manpower: 10

Ordnance: 5

Attack Strength: 50

Stealth: 10
Morale: 5
Melee: 4

The standard chart for the disheartened Red Spears is Chart E.

UNIT THREE: Refugees. These Morrow and Plains men are poorly armed but highly motivated. They live for revenge on the invaders.

Their statistics are:
Manpower: 60
Ordnance: 2
Attack Strength: 120
Stealth: 3
Morale: 8
Melee: 4

Their standard chart in any fight is Chart E.

UNIT FOUR: The Jacal Republican Troops. They wish to unite the Jacals into a single nation. Unfortunately, they feel that every action has a political consequence and must be discussed before it is implemented. This means they are slow to react and question orders from their superiors.

Their statistics are:
Manpower: 100
Ordnance: 5
Attack Strength: 500
Stealth: 4
Morale: 11
Melee: 4

The standard chart for the Republicans is Chart D.

This unit can break down into two groups with a Manpower value of 50 each, or into four groups with a Manpower value of 25 each.

If Mies tried to use Plan One before he used this plan, the Republicans were decimated in the attacks. Cut their Manpower value to 25. They cannot be broken into separate groups.

UNIT FIVE: Believers. They are religious fanatics who demand that their leader proclaim his faith in their beliefs. They will not participate if Mies has tried to assassinate William. In this case, Mies may not pick this unit.

Their statistics are:

Manpower: 30

Ordnance: 4

Attack Strength: 120

Stealth: 6

Morale: 11

Melee: 3

Special Equipment: The Believers ride a variety of the camel adapted to the rugged mountain environment. They can fight from the animal.

The standard chart for the Believers is Chart D.

UNIT SIX: Mies' Unit. This unit is the prototype of a standard Jacal infantry unit. It is the only unit that conforms to Mies' specifications, since he created it. It is extremely loyal to Mies.

Their statistics are:

Manpower: 20

Ordnance: 5

Attack Strength: 100

Stealth: 5

Morale: 10

Melee: 5

The standard chart for Mies' Unit is Chart D.

UNIT SEVEN: Heavy Weapons Unit. This unit possesses the only conglomeration of heavy weapons in the guerrilla army. Although effective at attacking, they tend to flee when fired upon.

Their statistics are:

Manpower: 20

Ordnance: 8

Attack Strength: 160

Stealth: 2

Morale: 8

Melee: 2

Special Equipment: Artillery. This unit makes one additional attack per round, using explosive shells. The explosives attack on Chart A with an Attack Strength of 30. There is no limit to the number of times they can make this attack.

The standard chart for the Heavy Weapons Unit is Chart B.

If this unit loses more than 5 points of Manpower, it must roll its Morale value or less on two dice. If it fails this roll, it flees the battle.

UNIT EIGHT: Mercenaries. These mercenaries are paid by Tuan Nokea of the Ch'ung families to defend Ch'ung lands. They are at Mies' disposal. They are fierce fighters, but only when they have to be. Their morale is always a problem.

Mies may not pick this unit if he has tried to use Plan One before coming to this section.

The mercenaries' statistics are:

Manpower: 30

Ordnance: 7

Attack Strength: 210

Stealth: 8

Morale: 9

Melee: 6

The standard chart for the mercenaries is Chart D.

If this unit suffers more than 8 points of Manpower loss, it must roll its Morale score or less on two dice. If it fails this Morale check, it surrenders.

UNIT NINE: Crossroads/Haven Jacals. This unit is composed of Jacals from Crossroads and Haven. Its men know the terrain near Crossroads and Haven very well. Unfortunately, they are not well armed or highly motivated.

Section 192

Their statistics are:

Manpower: 20

Ordnance: 3

Attack Strength: 60

Stealth: 12

Morale: 8

Melee: 5

The standard chart for this unit is Chart F.

If this unit is part of the attack, their knowledge of the terrain increases the Stealth value of all other units by 2 points.

UNIT TEN: More Red Spears. Like the other group of Red Spears (Unit Two), this unit is well armed and highly motivated. Unfortunately, it will not work with the other Red Spears. If Mies picks Unit Two, he may not use this unit. Nor may he pick this unit if he tried to assassinate William.

Their statistics are:

Manpower: 50

Ordnance: 6

Attack Strength: 300

Stealth: 10

Morale: 10

Melee: 5

The standard chart for this unit is Chart C.

Final note:

Copy the statistics for the units Mies chooses. Note which unit Mies and his staff are with. Raise the Morale score of that unit by 3 points. If the Manpower value of the unit Mies is with falls to 0, Mies dies with that unit.

Turn to Section 189.

— 193 —

Mies cursed the dawn. He had too much left to do. The camp below was waking, its campfires sending gray threads into the pale sky.

Mies lifted his bullhorn. "Attention! You in the camp! Lay down your arms or you will be destroyed. The Jacal Army has you surrounded. Surrender or die!"

The last word was the cue for his men to show themselves. His force was spread too thin, but the mercenaries had no way to know that. Every third man raised a red flag tied to his weapon.

The scene in camp was one of total confusion. The pings scrambled to defend their perimeter. Some rushed to weapons emplacements, others started the hovercraft engines.

"This just might work," Mies whispered.

The success of Mies' plan depends on how many men he has. Consult the table below and roll two dice.

If the Manpower value of Mies' unit is: You need to roll this number or more:

1-10	12
11-20	9
21-50	6
51-100	3

If the roll is successful, turn to Section 176.

If the roll is unsuccessful, turn to Section 155.

— 194 —

The pings did not detect the guerrilla columns as the columns crossed Haven Pass. Mies' attack forces reached the Stuben lands on schedule.

A large force of Stuben warriors joined Mies.

The Stuben statistics are:

Manpower: 50

Ordnance: 5

Attack Strength: 250

Stealth: 11

Morale: 10

Melee: 5

The standard chart for the Stuben warriors is Chart C.

"Tuan Ohanlon," John Thomas Dunne said, interrupting Mies' thoughts. The formal title made Mies uncomfortable, especially when John Thomas used it. "We have received a message from the Dunne forces. They are attacking."

"Good," Mies said. "Has the enemy shown any sign of reacting to the Dunne attack?"

"None, Tuan."

Mies nodded. Although he smiled, he was worried.

"We will soon liberate your people," Mies said.

"Let us hope," John Thomas replied.

Eventually, the pings did react to the Dunne attack. A large force of hovercars left to support the pings fighting the Dunnes. Now that the camp was weakened, Mies had to attack.

Turn to Section 195.

— 195 —

Look at the Camp Map. Note that the camp is broken into ten areas, each of which is defended by its own unit. Mies must decide which of his units will attack each area. He may designate up to two units to attack any area. Mies may only assign units to attack the outer areas; he cannot assign a unit to attack the launching pad or headquarters until he had captured an adjacent area (reduced the Manpower value of the defending unit to 0).

Once he commits a unit to attack an area, the unit must fight in that area until either its Manpower value or the defender's Manpower value reaches 0. If an attacking unit captures the area it was attacking, it may then attack any adjacent area. Unless otherwise noted in the text, defenders may only attack in their area.

Mies' units always have the initiative and attack first. Make sure that both attackers and defenders complete all of their attacks before beginning the next round of attacks.

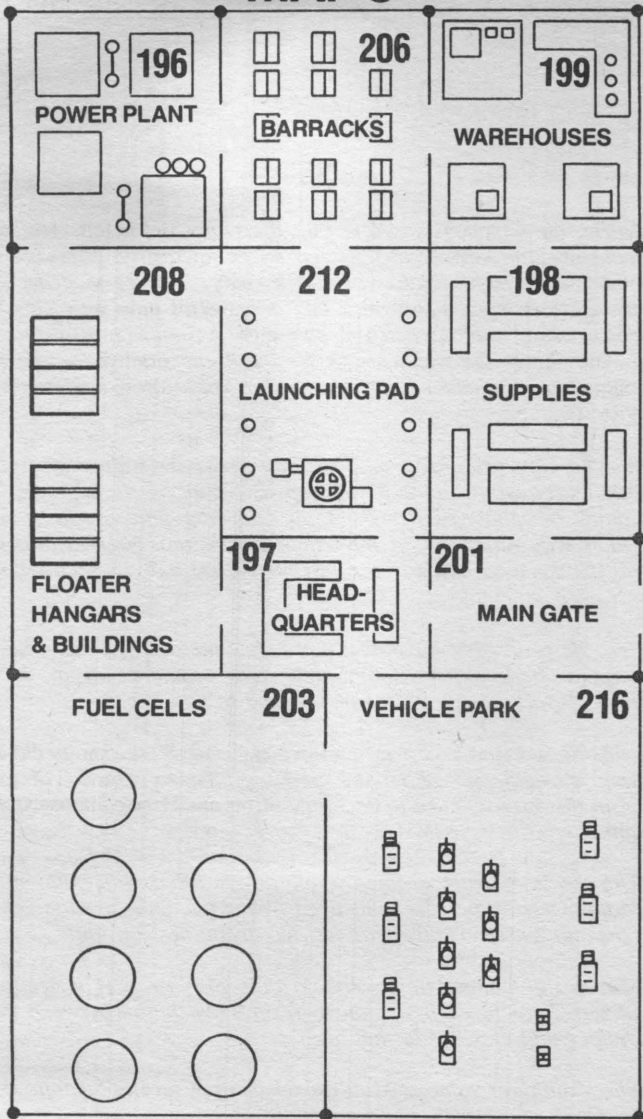
If this is not the camp at Crossroads and Mies has been to Mount Fire (Section 120), he knows something which will aid him in this attack. Turn to Section 214 before Mies completes his plans.

Make a note of which area each unit attacks. Remember that only two units may attack the same area. When two units are assigned to the same area, subtract losses only from the lead unit.

Look at the Camp Map again. Within each area is a section number. Turn to each section to resolve the battle between the defender and attacker in that area.

If the Manpower value of Mies' unit falls to 0, turn to Section 51.

MAP 5



— 196 —

The power plant was booby-trapped, not defended. The moment the attackers entered the area, the energy fields inside the plant were thrown into reverse polarity. The plant ceased to exist. In its place a fireball rose. Any and all units attacking the power plant were destroyed.

The shock shattered windows, punctured eardrums, and up-ended hovercars throughout the camp. The entire battle froze for a second, then grimly resumed its business.

If Mies is with the unit attacking the power plant, turn to Section 29.

Otherwise, return to Section 195 and complete the next attack.

— 197 —

Although the perimeter had been penetrated, the pings did not give up when the guerrillas attacked the headquarters. The mercenaries fought stubbornly to the last man; they harassed the Jacals from every doorway and every window.

The statistics for the headquarters troops are:

Manpower: 30

Ordnance: 3

Attack Strength: 90

Morale: 11

Stealth: 2

Melee: 4

The headquarters troops attack on Chart C. Mies' troops have initiative and attack first each round.

Section 198

Because the headquarters troops are behind cover, Mies' units attack one chart below normal. For example, if a unit attacks on Chart C, it now attacks on Chart D.

If the Manpower value of the headquarters troops falls to 0, turn to Section 217.

— 198 —

The pings have wired the area surrounding their supply depot with remote-controlled needle guns. The result was a hail of needles which stopped the Jacal attack in its tracks.

The statistics for the robotic needle guns are:

Manpower: 15

Ordnance: 9

Attack Strength: 135

Stealth: 1

Morale: 12

Melee: 2

The standard chart for this unit is Chart A. The robotic needle guns have initiative and attack first each round.

Before each round, the attacking unit must check its Morale. Roll two dice. If the result is equal to or less than its Morale score, the unit will attack. If the result is greater than its Morale score, the unit may not attack.

If the defenders' Manpower falls to 0, the attacking unit may continue its attack into any adjacent area.

— 199 —

The pings had entrenched in front of the huge warehouses. They had heavy weapons mounted on the roof of every warehouse. The heavy weapons poured fire down upon the attacking units. These units would fight to the death.

The statistics for the warehouse defenders are:

Manpower: 20

Ordnance: 6

Attack Strength: 120

Stealth: 2

Morale: 11

Melee: 6

The warehouse defenders attack on Chart C. Mies' units have initiative and attack first each round.

If the defenders' Manpower value falls to 0, the attacking unit may attack any adjacent area.

— 200 —

The assassination never occurred. Instead, something much worse happened. Mies sent a unit of guerrillas to William's home city to scout possible locations for the attempt. William's security forces promptly captured this group. Under the legalized torture of William's justice system, the members of this unit broke down. On regional television, they revealed the Jacal plan to kill William.

Within six hours, the parliament of the Five Cities and the ministers of the Ch'ung Kingdom transmitted a condemnation of the Jacal People's Republic. On a vid-screen, Mies

watched his own father condemn him as a mad dog and demand the death penalty. Over public communications channels, William announced that he would travel to the Jacal Mountains to personally take charge of the situation in the Jacal Region.

Mies knew that he had lost any chance of support from any legitimate government. Guerrilla morale sunk to a desperate low.

Subtract 3 points from the Morale score of all of Mies' units.

Write "assassination failed" on Mies' equipment list.

Turn to Section 135 and choose another plan of action.

— 201 —

Three heavily armored gun platforms barred the way through the main gate. The pings hid in slit trenches and picked off attackers as they rushed forward.

The statistics for the main gate defenders are:

Manpower: 20

Ordnance: 8

Attack Strength: 160

Stealth: 2

Morale: 5

Melee: 3

This unit attacks on Chart D. Mies' guerrillas have initiative and attack first each round.

Due to their heavy weapons, the defenders get an extra attack every round. This attack occurs on Chart B with an Attack Strength of 30.

If one of the units attacking the main gate has an Ordnance value greater than 6, the attackers also receive an extra

attack. If the dice roll for this attack is greater than 7, the unit destroys one gun platform and reduces the defender's Ordnance value by 1 point. This attack can succeed only three times.

— 202 —

An officer approached Mies. With the officer was a tall woman wearing a shapeless quilted jacket.

"This woman would like to speak with you, sir," the officer said.

Mies nodded and turned his attention to the woman.

"My name is Dominique Franc-Dunne," she said. "I would like you to take me to Mount Fire."

"No," Mies answered.

"I will follow you anyway," she said evenly. "My family is there." She removed her hat and released her dark, silky hair. Mies noticed that she was beautiful.

Mies may leave the refugees here, if they are with him. The refugees assure him that they will be safe in these woods.

Should Mies take the woman? If so, add 1 point to his Manpower value, but reduce his Stealth score by 1 point. Write the words "Dominique Franc-Dunne" on Mies' equipment list.

Turn to Section 184 whether or not Mies takes the woman.

— 203 —

The area surrounding the fuel cells looked deserted. Mies saw no ping positions; he feared it could be a trap.

Mies may choose to stop the advance of the troops assigned to this area.

If Mies should order the troops to continue to the fuel cells, turn to Section 191.

If Mies should order them to halt, turn to Section 154.

— 204 —

Mies entered the personal headquarters of the camp commandant. The commandant lay dead against the far wall.

A soldier said, "His last transmission was to the mothership. They'll probably carpet-bomb the camp any second. We'd better not stick around."

Mies looked out the window at the captured camp. Black, greasy smoke rose from burning vehicles in every direction. Here and there, sporadic firefights continued to rage. In the distance, the staccato report of a remote-controlled needle gun droned on.

A communications officer ran up to Mies. "Tuan!" he cried. "Someone is sending a signal to the Ch'ung Kingdom."

"Jam it!" Mies ordered. "Then find its location."

A few minutes later, the officer returned with the coordinates of the transmission.

If Bret Scoles was allowed to stay with Mies, turn to Section 210.

If Mies banished Bret Scoles (the words "Bret banished" should be written on Mies' equipment list), turn to Section 219.

If Mies ordered Bret's execution (the words "Bret executed" should be written on Mies' equipment list), turn to Section 207.

— 205 —

The order to change targets did not reach all units. One unit continued toward Mount Fire.

Choose which unit continued toward Mount Fire and write its name on a piece of scratch paper.

Mies studied Crossroads from a familiar perch. The last time he had been here, he had had only a few men. Now he had a small army. His units were already in position; he was waiting only for some indication that William of Ceta was truly in the ping camp.

Finally, he ran out of waiting time. He gave the attack order.

Turn to Section 195.

— 206 —

The barracks was defended for the most part by walking wounded.

The statistics of the barracks are:

Manpower: 50

Ordnance: 5

Attack Strength: 250

Stealth: 2

Morale: 4

Melee: 2

This unit attacks on Chart G. Mies' troops have the initiative and attack first each round.

After three rounds, this unit flees combat.

— 207 —

Mies raced to the position. It was an isolated room. Inside, he heard voices. He drew his weapon and kicked the door open.

Inside, Bret Scoles was speaking into a transmitter. "I understand," Scoles said. "Yes, I think he will wrap it up nicely."

"You're a hard man to kill," Mies said, leveling his needle gun at Bret's head.

Bret jumped up, alarmed. "Don't scare me like that, mate!" he exclaimed.

Mies motioned several soldiers into the room. "Take him," Mies said. "Shoot him if he so much as sneezes."

Bret looked somewhat nervous about having such a low value placed on his life. "Wait, mate; you don't understand!"

"I'll interrogate him later," Mies turned to leave.

"Mies," Bret said, dropping his Coby accent. "It's time you know the truth."

Mies did not stop.

"It concerns your father," Bret said.

Mies turned around. "Go on," he said. Bret shook himself free of the guards and nodded at them. He remained silent.

"Station yourselves outside this room," Mies said. The guards hesitated to obey, but Mies snapped, "Go on! I can take care of this baggage; I've done it before."

The guards reluctantly left and Mies regarded the lanky man in silence. Bret's ironic smile returned.

"For whom do you work?" Mies asked.

"Your father," Bret answered.

"Don't insult my intelligence," Mies said.

"It's true," Bret said. "Your father ordered me to pretend to

be William's spy. In fact, I am an agent of the Dorsai high command on Ceta."

Mies scoffed at the idea.

"I don't blame you," Bret said. "I wouldn't believe it either. I suggest we ask your father."

Turn to Section 220.

—208—

As the attackers crossed the open field, floaters dropped out of the clouds like birds of prey. They dropped their loads of bombs, then sprayed the troops with needle gun fire and streaked back into the sky.

Although the defense on the ground was weak and disorganized, Mies quickly realized that he must concern himself with the sky.

The floater statistics are:

Manpower: 20

Ordnance: 9

Attack Strength: 180

Stealth: 10

Morale: 10

Melee: 3

The floater attacks on Chart C. The pings have the initiative and attack first each round.

Because floaters are so difficult to hit, every time the guerrillas score a hit on the floaters, roll two dice. If the roll is less than 7, ignore the result.

Once the attackers destroy the floaters, the attackers automatically capture this area.

— 209 —

Mies raced toward the building, dodging a few potshots from the pings still hiding inside. He heard his men give covering fire, then charge toward the building themselves. They would take care of the pings, and he would take care of William. He threw himself into the building and rolled.

Inside, the corridor was filled with dust and smoke. Mies picked himself up and sneaked down the hall. Behind the closed door of an isolated room, he heard voices. He gripped his knife more tightly and kicked the door open.

To his amazement, he saw Bret Scoles speaking into a transmitter.

"I understand," Scoles was saying. "Yes, I think he will wrap it up nicely."

"You're a hard man to keep down," Mies said, holding his knife ready to throw. He heard several of his soldiers rush up behind him.

Bret jumped up, alarmed. "Don't scare me like that, mate!" he exclaimed. "That's my own knife!" he added indignantly.

Mies motioned several soldiers into the room. "Take him," Mies said. "Shoot him if he so much as sneezes."

Bret looked somewhat nervous about having such a low value placed on his life. "Wait, mate; you don't understand!"

"I'll interrogate him later," Mies turned to leave.

"Mies," Bret said, dropping his Coby accent. "It's time you know the truth."

Mies did not stop.

"It concerns your father," Bret said.

Mies turned around. "Go on," he said. Bret shook himself free of the guards and nodded at them. He remained silent.

"Station yourselves outside this room," Mies said. The guards hesitated to obey, but Mies snapped, "Go on! I can take care of this baggage; I've done it before."

The guards reluctantly left and Mies regarded the lanky man in silence. Bret's ironic smile returned.

"For whom do you work?" Mies asked.



"Your father," Bret answered.

"Don't insult my intelligence," Mies said.

"It's true," Bret said. "Your father ordered me to pretend to be William's spy. In fact, I am an agent of the Dorsai high command on Ceta."

Mies scoffed at the idea.

"I don't blame you," Bret said. "I wouldn't believe it either. I suggest we ask your father."

Turn to Section 220.

—210—

Mies raced to the position. Halfway there, he crossed the path of a remote-controlled void rifle. He threw himself on the ground and rolled to cover, then leaped up and continued on his way. The void rifle continued firing at him until he hurled himself into the bombed-out building from which the transmission issued.

Inside, the corridor was filled with dust and smoke. Mies picked himself up and sneaked down the hall. Behind the closed door of an isolated room, he heard voices. He drew his weapon and kicked the door open.

Bret Scoles was speaking into a transmitter. Mies heard his personal bodyguard rush up behind him.

"I understand," Scoles was saying. "Yes, I think he will wrap it up nicely."

"You're a hard man to trust, traitor," Mies said, leveling his needle gun at Bret's head.

Bret jumped up, alarmed, "Don't scare me like that, mate!" he exclaimed.

Mies motioned several soldiers into the room. "Take him," Mies said. "Shoot him if he so much as sneezes."

Bret looked nervous about having such a low value placed on his life. "Wait, mate; you don't understand!"

"I'll interrogate him later." Mies turned to leave.

"Mies," Bret said, dropping his Coby accent. "It's time you know the truth."

Mies did not stop.

"It concerns your father," Bret said.

Mies turned around. "Go on," he said. Bret shook himself free of the guards and nodded at them. He remained silent.

"Station yourselves outside this room," Mies said. The guards hesitated to obey, but Mies snapped, "Go on! I can take care of this baggage; I've done it before."

The guards reluctantly left and Mies regarded the lanky man in silence. Bret's ironic smile returned.

"For whom do you work?" Mies asked.

"Your father," Bret answered.

"Don't insult my intelligence," Mies said.

"It's true," Bret said. "Your father ordered me to pretend to be William's spy. In fact, I am an agent of the Dorsai high command on Ceta."

Mies scoffed at the idea.

"I don't blame you," Bret said. "I wouldn't believe it either. I suggest we ask your father."

Turn to Section 220.

—211—

Mies was alone, for his only hope of completing this raid successfully lay with his Dorsai training. Mies would need all of his infiltration skills to bypass the automatic security systems and sneak into the camp.

He moved quickly and silently toward the main fuel depot. The huge, flat-domed fuel cells were evenly spaced and well separated. It would be difficult to blow them all. As Mies wired the explosives to the tanks, he heard a voice. His hand dropped to his weapon and he froze.

For a long while, he heard nothing. Finally, he heard the voice again. Someone was crying. The sobs were coming from atop the fuel cell. He found the ladder and climbed to the top of the cell.

A dozen women and children were sleeping atop the cell. A young woman, about Mies' age, sang a lullaby to her crying baby.

Mies considered the situation for a moment. He could not possibly rescue the hostages; they would all be gunned down if he even attempted it. Nor could he sabotage some other area of the base; this was the only part of the base where the guard was thin enough for him to succeed.

Should Mies go ahead and destroy the fuel cell? If so, turn to Section 158.

Or should Mies leave and go straight to Mount Fire? If so, turn to Section 184.

—212—

A group of mercenaries made its last stand in a control tower overlooking the floater pad. From the tower, their fire swept all approaches.

Out of desperation, the attackers burned one of the floaters near the tower. As they had hoped, the smoke obscured the tower's field of vision. The attackers rushed the door.

Their tactic worked, and they quickly engaged the defenders in hand-to-hand combat inside the tower. The defenders discarded the power weapons and relied on knives and bayonets. They lurked in dark corners behind doors, or crouched beneath desks, and attacked when an unwary guerrilla passed.

The combatants quickly learned to fight in silence, for a cough or shout brought certain death in this dark game of cat and mouse.

The tower defenders' statistics are:

Manpower: 30

Ordnance: 5

Attack Strength: 120 (use Melee instead of Ordnance)

Stealth: 5

Morale: 7

Melee: 4

This unit fights on Chart D. The guerrilla unit has the initiative and attacks first each round.

If the Manpower value of the defenders falls to 0, the attackers may attack any adjacent area.

—213—

Mies raced toward the building, dodging a few potshots from the pings still hiding inside. He heard his men give covering fire, then charge toward the building themselves. They would take care of the pings, and he would take care of William. He threw himself into the building and rolled.

Inside, the corridor was filled with dust and smoke. Mies picked himself up off the floor and sneaked down the hall. Behind the closed door of an isolated room, he heard voices. He gripped his knife more tightly and kicked the door open.

To his amazement, he saw Bret Scoles speaking into a transmitter.

"I understand," Scoles was saying. "Yes, I think he will wrap it up nicely."

"You're a hard man to trust, traitor," Mies said, holding his knife ready to throw. He heard several of his soldiers rush up behind him.

Bret jumped up, alarmed. "Don't scare me like that, mate!" he exclaimed. "That's my own knife!" he added indignantly.

Mies motioned several soldiers into the room. "Take him," Mies said. "Shoot him if he so much as sneezes."

Bret looked nervous about having such a low value placed on his life. "Wait, mate; you don't understand!"

"I'll interrogate him later." Mies turned to leave.

"Mies," Bret said, dropping his Coby accent. "It's time you know the truth."

Mies did not stop.

"It concerns your father," Bret said.

Mies turned around. "Go on," he said. Bret shook himself free of the guards and nodded at them. He remained silent.

"Station yourselves outside this room," Mies said. The guards

hesitated to obey, but Mies snapped, "Go on! I can take care of this baggage; I've done it before."

The guards reluctantly left and Mies regarded the lanky man in silence. Bret's ironic smile returned.

"For whom do you work?" Mies asked.

"Your father," Bret answered.

"Don't insult my intelligence," Mies said.

"It's true," Bret said. "Your father ordered me to pretend to be William's spy. In fact, I am an agent of the Dorsai high command on Ceta."

Mies scoffed at the idea.

"I don't blame you," Bret said. "I wouldn't believe it either. I suggest we ask your father."

Turn to Section 220.

—214—

Mies knew that an extensive tunnel system underlay the ping camp.

He may use this tunnel network to approach the camp unseen and attack from the center first. In practical terms, this means he may assign one unit to attack the Launching Pad or Headquarters without first taking one of the outer areas.

Return to Section 195 and complete the troop assignments.

—215—

Mies raced toward the building, dodging a few potshots from the pings still hiding inside. He heard his men give covering fire, then charge toward the building themselves. They would take care of the pings, and he would take care of William. He threw himself into the building and rolled.

Inside, the corridor was filled with dust and smoke. Mies

picked himself up and sneaked down the hall. Behind the closed door of an isolated room, he heard voices. He gripped his knife more tightly and kicked the door open.

To his amazement, he saw Bret Scoles speaking into a transmitter.

"I understand," Scoles was saying. "Yes, I think he will wrap it up nicely."

"You're a hard man to kill," Mies said, holding his knife ready to throw. He heard several of his soldiers rush up behind him.

Bret jumped up, alarmed. "Don't scare me like that, mate!" he exclaimed. "That's my own knife!" he added indignantly.

Mies motioned several soldiers into the room. "Take him," Mies said. "Shoot him if he so much as sneezes."

Bret looked nervous about having such a low value placed on his life. "Wait, mate; you don't understand!"

"I'll interrogate him later." Mies turned to leave.

"Mies," Bret said, dropping his Coby accent. "It's time you know the truth."

Mies did not stop.

"It concerns your father," Bret said.

Mies turned around. "Go on," he said. Bret shook himself free of the guards and nodded at them. He remained silent.

"Station yourselves outside this room," Mies said. The guards hesitated to obey, but Mies snapped, "Go on! I can take care of this baggage; I've done it before."

The guards reluctantly left and Mies regarded the lanky man in silence. Bret's ironic smile returned.

"For whom do you work?" Mies asked.

"Your father," Bret answered.

"Don't insult my intelligence," Mies said.

"It's true," Bret said. "Your father ordered me to pretend to be William's spy. In fact, I am an agent of the Dorsai high command on Ceta."

Mies scoffed at the idea.

"I don't blame you," Bret said. "I wouldn't believe it either. I suggest we ask your father."

Turn to Section 220.

—216—

A large force of pings was dug in among the vehicles.

The ping statistics are:

Manpower: 50

Ordnance: 5

Attack Strength: 250

Stealth: 11

Morale: 10

Melee: 4

The pings attack on Chart C. The guerrillas have initiative and attack first each round.

If the defenders' Manpower value falls to 0, the unit attacking this area may attack any adjacent area.

—217—

If the battle just fought was to relieve Mount Fire, turn to Section 204.

If the battle just fought was to capture William of Ceta, turn to Section 218.

—218—

As Mies entered the headquarters of the Crossroads camp, the floaters parked outside exploded one after another. The commandant lay dead against the far wall.

“His last transmission was to a mothership,” explained a soldier. “The pings will probably carpet-bomb the entire camp any second to prevent salvage.”

“What’s left to salvage?” Mies asked, looking out a window at the burning camp. Black, greasy smoke rose from burning vehicles. Sporadic firefights continued nearby. In the distance, the staccato report of a remote-controlled needle gun droned on.

A grime-coated officer rushed into the room. “Tuan Ohanlon!” the man gasped excitedly. “We have found William of Ceta!”

“Take me to him!” Mies ordered.

The officer led Mies to a building on the edge of the camp. “William took refuge in this building. He is still defended by a few pings.”

“Do we know if the mothership is sending reinforcements?” Mies asked.

The officer simply shook his head. “No.”

Mies drew his throwing knife. “John Thomas,” he said. “I am going into that building.”

“Of course,” John Thomas replied, as if he had expected nothing else from a Dorsai.

If Mies allowed Bret Scoles to stay with his unit, turn to Section 209.

If Mies banished Bret Scoles (the words “Bret banished” should be written on Mies’ equipment list), turn to Section 213.

If Mies ordered Bret Scoles’ execution (the words “Bret executed” should be written on Mies’ equipment list), turn to Section 215.

— 219 —

Mies raced to the position. Halfway there, he crossed the path of a remote-controlled void rifle. He threw himself on the ground and rolled to cover, then leaped up and continued on his way. The void rifle continued firing at him until he hurled himself into the bombed-out building from which the transmission issued.

Inside, the corridor was filled with dust and smoke. Mies picked himself up off the floor and sneaked down the hall. Behind the closed door of an insulated room, he heard voices. He drew his weapons and kicked the door open.

To his amazement, he saw Bret Scoles speaking into a transmitter. About that time, he heard his personal bodyguard rush up behind him.

"I understand," Scoles was saying. "Yes, I think he will wrap it up nicely."

"You're a hard man to trust, traitor," Mies said, leveling his needle gun at Bret's head.

Bret jumped up, alarmed. "Don't scare me like that, mate!" he exclaimed.

Mies motioned several soldiers into the room. "Take him," Mies said. "Shoot him if he so much as sneezes."

Bret looked somewhat nervous about having such a low value placed on his life. "Wait, mate; you don't understand!"

"I'll interrogate him later." Mies turned to leave.

"Mies," Bret said, dropping his Coby accent. "It's time you know the truth."

Mies did not stop.

"It concerns your father," Bret said.

Mies turned around. "Go on," he said. Bret shook himself free of the guards and nodded at them. He remained silent.

"Station yourselves outside this room," Mies said. The guards hesitated to obey, but Mies snapped, "Go on! I can take care of this baggage; I've done it before."

The guards reluctantly left and Mies regarded the lanky man in silence. Bret's ironic smile returned.

"For whom do you work?" Mies asked.

"Your father," Bret answered.

"Don't insult my intelligence," Mies said.

"It's true," Bret said. "Your father ordered me to pretend to be William's spy. In fact, I am an agent of the Dorsai high command on Ceta."

Mies scoffed at the idea.

"I don't blame you," Bret said. "I wouldn't believe it either. I suggest we ask your father."

Turn to Section 220.

—220—

"Son!" Mies' father exclaimed, grasping Mies in a tight hug. Mies accepted the hug stiffly, showing no emotion.

"We need to talk, Father," he said.

"Of course," his father said, taking a seat on the couch. "Where shall we begin?"

"At the beginning," Mies said.

Mies' father explained that the entire war was part of a plan that he, the Five Cities, the Ch'ung Kingdom, and Tuan Nokea had devised. William of Ceta was within a few years of solidifying his hold on the Five Cities; once he accomplished this, taking the Jacal Region would be a simple matter. To keep this critical region from falling into William's hands, Mies father explained, it was decided to urge the Jacals into nationhood. The most expedient way to accomplish that goal was to create an outside threat, in the face of which they would unite.

It was not difficult to find a threat. The little group of plotters had to look no further than William, who was already becoming a true threat anyway. They decided to force William to play his hand early by starting a trickle of ore from the mountains. William, realizing that heavy metals would soon interest off-world investors too powerful to push around, predictably decided to invade before he could be assured of success.

Now that William was interested, all that the little nation builders needed was a leader to resist William and unite the Jacals. He had to be a man that the Dorsai, the Ch'ung, the Five

Cities, and, most important, the Jacals could trust. The only logical choice turned out to be Mies. And, since he was young, Mies' father explained, Mies would be easier to secretly control if the plan backfired.

It was a big risk, Mies' father admitted, but it paid off: Mies was now the leader of a new nation, the Jacal People's Republic!

—221—

Picking the lock was a snap. But as he began to open the satchel, Mies noticed a thin wire stretched between the two sides of the case. After a brief moment of consideration, Mies used his pocketknife to push the wire to one side. The wire slipped off a hidden hook with a slight click and Mies breathed a sigh of relief. Mies checked for other traps, then opened the satchel. Inside, he found a pocket recorder with a case of discs, an ancient needle gun, an envelope of documents, and a bottle of contraband liquor. Mies quickly scanned the documents; they were personal papers of no interest to him. He slipped the discs into the pocket recorder and listened. They contained recordings of current music.

As Mies started to close the case, he noticed that the lining was printed in a peculiar pattern. It resembled an electrical circuit. Upon closer inspection, he saw that the pattern was slightly raised and appeared to be metallic.

"Why, the mangy dog!" said Mies, imitating the miner's rich accent. "The whole case is a receiver-transmitter."

After a little inspection, Mies determined that it was similar to the tight-beam, low-power transmitters that Dorsai commanders used in the field. This unit was preset to send a low-frequency radio beam to preselected coordinates.

Unfortunately, assuming it was even half as secure as Dorsai transmitters, Mies had no way of determining where the transmitter was preset to contact—unless he turned it on and used it.

With a slight hesitation, Mies removed the power cord from the satchel handle and prepared the transmitter for operation. He also prepared the disc recorder to record any signal he received. Finally, he turned the power switch to the "on" position. A

green light shined from the disc recorder's function display, informing Mies that the transmitter was beaming its automatic annunciator signal.

A few moments of complete silence followed, then the recorder's function display showed an incoming message. Mies turned on the audio monitor.

“. . . is unauthorized. Repeat: signal from passenger ship *Urshanabi* is on a restricted channel. Further transmission is unauthorized. Repeat: signal . . .”

Mies turned off the transmitter and pocketed the recorder disc. As he carefully repacked Bret's belongings, Mies puzzled over how he could gain access to a communications room so that he could determine the origination point.

A soft *crump* and a slight vibration rolled through the ship. It could have been an explosion.

Should Mies investigate? If so, turn to Section 4.

Or should he go to the communications room? If so, turn to Section 18.

When Your Contract Takes You to the Dorsai World by Sandra Miesel

Excerpts transcribed from tape #183-34-8233, Basic Briefings for Off-Worlders, 57th ed. (Bakhalla, Kultis: Prajna Educational Services, 2345)

To this day, the origin of the word "Dorsai" remains mysterious. Folk etymology suggests that the Dorsai are "the people who stand up," just as the dorsal fin of a swimming fish rises straight up from its body. Dorsal, in turn, is derived from the Latin *dorsum*, referring to any projection such as a summit, ridge, or mountain chain, and from *dorsus*, a poetic term for a human's back.

But whatever the source of their name, planet and people proudly share it: the Dorsai world can rightly boast of breeding "men to match my mountains." Indeed, after more than two centuries together, one can scarcely imagine this starkly beautiful planet apart from its formidable people.

The Dorsai sun is Fomalhaut, brightest star in Piscis Austrinus, the constellation of the Southern Fish. It is one of those happy accidents of nature that the solar system of an A3 star should include a habitable world. Even this far from the primary, sun-screen and other radiation precautions are indispensable.

Approached from space, Dorsai seems all blue water and white clouds. Because the planet is in its most favorable interglacial phase, its oceans are at their maximum expanse. A mere 25 million square kilometers remain unsubmerged, and useless polar

continents account for nearly half of this. The flooded areas, however, do afford excellent fishing.

Such land as projects above the waves is largely mountainous. Dorsai's young, sharp-toothed peaks include a few snow-capped giants that rise as high as six thousand meters. Since the major ranges trace a global Ring of Fire, seismic and volcanic activity is all too common. Moreover, coastal highlands condense moisture-laden sea air into chronic drizzle or heavy snowfall, which in turn feeds swift streams and icy lakes. Rivers are seldom navigable, but deeply indented shorelines provide many fine harbors. From spectacular crags to misty corries, the whole landscape shimmers with a special aliveness beneath Fomalhaut's clear white light.

Virtually all of Dorsai's 5 million natives live in one of three regions: Landfall, South Continent, and the Western Isles.

As the name suggests, Landfall was the site of Dorsai's first settlement. This subcontinental island 2 million square kilometers in area lies in the northern temperate zone. Blessed by a warm ocean current, Landfall's coastal plain is the best and broadest stretch of arable land on the planet. All of Dorsai's wheat and much of its sunflowers, sugar beets, and flax are grown here. By-products of these crops support extensive chicken-raising and provide winter feed for the herds of sheep, goats, and horses, which graze on the foothills of the Paladins.

Besides key agricultural enterprises, Landfall also supports Dorsai's most populous centers, including the capital, Omalu, an inland city of fifty thousand people. Here are the planet's government offices, its best hospital, and its spaceport, as well as fully equipped yards for assembling and repairing spacecraft and aircraft. The next largest community is Tar Beach, whose oil field, petrochemical complex, and manufacturing facilities are small by the standards of any developed world. Finally, near Point Mikhail on the bleak northern coast stands the renowned Dorsai Military Academy, which operates as a self-sufficient town.

About 150 degrees east of Landfall, just below the Tropico del Sur, lies South Continent. With an area of some 5 million square kilometers, this is Dorsai's biggest, but also its driest and least populated, landmass.

On its northernmost spot, Cape Doom, Gloryhole volcano glows like a natural lighthouse. Its western mountains, the Bloody Range, rise nearly straight out of the sea to make a cold desert of

its lofty central plateau, the Empty Table. Here mineral wealth, including nitrates and sulfur, in addition to metallic ores, draws crews of seasonal miners, but no real towns exist in the area. As the continent curves south, the tableland steps down in a series of fissured cliffs called the Shikasta Country. Beyond these rocky wastes, the midsouth region of Gulistan offers grazing, but water is too scanty for farming. (In the last century, Mahub Van Ghent's attempt to control the deep wells at Suleiman's Drift led to a bloody clash still mourned by Dorsai.)

The northernmost section of the continent along the Drakanzee is a worthless dustbowl except during the brief wet season when the many-channeled Midnight River turns it to mire.

The east coast, however, from Iskanderbad southward to Osebeni, enjoys enough regular rainfall to be fertile. Its warmest districts yield crops including hardy grapes and soybeans that cannot grow anywhere else on the planet. Farther south, the variform pines of the vast Quathlamba forest provide wood pulp and a host of valuable organic chemicals, which are processed at the small port town of Witbaai.

Half a world away, the Western Isles, or "Sundowners," lie 120 degrees beyond Landfall in a great sweeping arc more than two thousand kilometers long. This archipelago—really a chain of half-submerged mountains—comprises more than a hundred sizable islands. Their combined area is perhaps one and a half million square kilometers, but only a fraction of this is arable.

Size and habitability vary dramatically. The southernmost and largest bodies, such as Caerlon, High Island, and Myogashima, are green with glens, forests, and alpine pastures. The northernmost sprinkle of rocks called the Veil barely manages to grow lichen beneath the constant pall of mist that gives them their name. Cailleach is a wilderness of ashy rubble spewed by its mighty volcano, the Hag, but humor is life's sole dry feature among the hardy fishermen of the Pipsqueak Islands.

Shortage of cropland is the overriding factor in local economics. Fishing dominates the small islands, stock-raising the large. Berries flourish in bogs; barley, rye, oats, buckwheat, and legumes occupy valleys; and potatoes fill hillside terraces. There is enough oil and natural gas for area needs, but neither these fields nor heavy-metal mines such as the nickel deposit on Caerlon offer much employment. So from colonial times on, service as mercenary soldiers has drawn surplus islanders off to the stars.

Although it was the second region to be settled, the Sundown-

ers seem more the home of the Dorsai legend than anywhere else in this world. Here the harsh environment stretched spirits without breaking them. Those who can hold their own against sea and stone make fearsome opponents for other mortals.

All living things on Dorsai were introduced by humans. Marine ecology is the most elaborate. Myriad species thrive in these cold, nutrient-rich, shallow seas, including the planet's only wild mammals (seals, sea otters, and killer whales). The land supports an adequate assortment of birds, insects, and humbler organisms. Forests, chiefly of conifer and hardwoods, clothe the highlands wherever trees can grow.

Although they made prudent choices when stocking their world, the Dorsai also remembered that they were building a homeland, not a zoo habitat. They left room for Nature to be her unfettered self and sowed their woods with wildflowers. Because their lives are so disciplined, they savor spontaneity.

The same pragmatism and restraint that determine the way the Dorsai use their planet's resources are evident in all other aspects of their existence. They bring strategic and tactical thinking to bear on the struggle to stay alive.

Dorsai's planetary government, the United Cantons, does not so much govern as inform citizens. (Among developed societies, only the anarchistic arrangements among the Exotics are looser.) To this end, an excellent library is maintained at the capital, Omalu. Besides being a data bank, it is a central—and neutral—file for contracts. (Dorsai bargain as cannily among themselves as they do with off-world employers.) It aids the private sector by arming Dorsai military ventures with accurate facts and the public one by researching issues that affect the common good. Major policy decisions are taken by popular vote after electronic debate. Although consensus is informally shaped by the most respected community figures (the so-called Grey Captains), the duties of the elector, the official head of state, are mainly symbolic. There is no career bureaucrat class.

Not politics, but the telecommunications network and the weather service are the governmental functions likeliest to affect visitors' lives. Obviously, both are vital to a widely scattered population on a geologically active and meteorologically violent planet. Since off-worlders cannot expect to emulate the practiced vigilance of natives, they are strongly urged to wear weather-watchers at all times in order to receive broadcast warnings of hazards of sky, sea, or earth.

Dorsai are all too familiar with natural disasters: storm or wave, ashfall or tremor can threaten them and theirs at any moment. And with their agriculture so marginal, even minor variations in growing conditions can mean crop failure. Since each district has a subtly different microclimate, one valley's harvest may be fat while its nearest neighbor's is lean. Contingency planning for emergencies is a key duty of cantonal governments within a framework of planetwide consultation.

Self-defense measures are handled in similar fashion. So successful was their first trial by combat, the Dorsai have not been tested further since the ignominious rout of the Alliance-Coalition Expeditionary Force in 2185. Today's Dorsai are coolly aware that maintaining this legend of unconquerability is greatly to their advantage.

Most governmental business, however, is routine and undramatic. Services are supplied and problems are solved on the local level wherever possible, in accordance with the Dorsai preference for managing their affairs at the simplest stage of organization.

For instance, consider how the planet maintains an adequate level of health care. The cornerstone of the system is individual responsibility. Not only do Dorsai take care of their bodies, they learn paramedical procedures to assist others. (Accidents are the worst health hazard here.) The cantons support traveling medics for routine maintenance and treatment. Critical cases are referred to regional hospitals, while the globally funded medical center at Omalu boasts an Exotic staff for advanced surgery and long-term rehabilitation.

This meshing of levels works because "neighborliness" is their guiding social principle. They have never forgotten the lesson the first Dorsai generation learned during the Outlaw Years: we must help one another or die. Survival demands solidarity. In practice, this means voluntary assessments, unstinting hospitality, and tactful charity. Community service is expected of all. Public opinion is a powerful incentive for cooperation—a reputation for selfishness can prove fatal.

Thus, patterns of everyday life on Dorsai broadly resemble those seen in pretechnological villages on Old Earth, but without the isolation and ignorance that blighted such places. Global communications make the difference. Most goods and services are sold via telemarketing. Atmosphere craft that require no special landing fields can reach the remotest areas. The electronic library network and Exotic-designed self-study programs

carry learning to anyone seeking it, compensating for the lack of conventional higher education.

Even the culture's martial focus is made to serve social ends. When the fortunes of war bring people from various cantons together, lasting personal and professional bonds may form. The same individuals and families can choose repeated assignments together, because Dorsai military contracts are privately negotiated by freely assembled teams, unlike the coercive practices of the Friendlies and other groups.

To encourage unity among civilians, enrollment in children's training camps and adult home guard units deliberately mixes personnel from different areas. Beyond these policies, the strongest counterweight to excessive localism is simply the Dorsai awareness of themselves as *one* unique people. They understand the dynamics of their society well enough to make conscious adjustments when necessary.

Since the first difficult colonial days, the Dorsai have fought to maintain social balance between local and planetary government, between individualism and community. Being human, they do not always succeed. The temptation to impose one's will on another by force exists here just as it does in all cultures—Dorsai has known would-be warlords and bad neighbors. But no other society instills a sense of responsibility towards self and others as deeply or fiercely as this one does. Responsibility is the bedrock upon which Dorsai's acclaimed integrity and fortitude stand. They learned in a harsh school that fidelity to principle is the ultimate pragmatism.

Because the constant need for cooperation imposes so much togetherness, Dorsai demand privacy and cultivate tact. They deal with each other in a brisk, objective, almost spartan style. They do not share their feelings easily. Visitors can expect courtesy, but no intimacy, from Dorsai associates.

Their self-assessments are invariably realistic—knowing exactly what to expect of each other in peace or war is essential for smooth functioning. For instance, the Rochmont Massacre in 2177 forced them to admit the deadliness of the infamous Dorsai "cold rage," the warrior fury their primitive ancestors glorified. Since Cletus Grahame's time, psychological training helps them keep this rage controlled unless deliberately released as hysterical strength for useful purposes.

Honest appraisal of their own abilities gives Dorsai such self-assurance, they sincerely respect the special gifts of other cul-

tures. Indeed, their world would scarcely be habitable without goods and services perfected by the Ste. Marian agronomists, Exotic medicians and educators, Cassidan technologists, and so forth. Dorsai pay well for off-world expertise but insist on getting every bit of what they paid for. Furthermore, being committed to excellence themselves, they demand no less of their contract workers.

The source of these Dorsai traits must be sought in the family, the basic unit of their society. Observers from other cultures more conventionally free in personal relationships may find this aspect of Dorsai life especially alien. Here, the family is no mere temporary union, nor even a reproductive unit, but an entire network of relationships extending through time. Dorsai waste no tears on identity crises: they know where they came from, they know who they are, and they know what they wish their descendants to be. Kindred cleave to each other like clansmen.

Reputation follows lineage; praise or blame that falls on one family member falls on all. Ideally, young Dorsai strive to live up to their forebears' glory. But should they inherit shame instead, survivors may be driven to change their talented name or even flee the planet, as the ill-fated Van Ghents did.

Even religion, for those Dorsai who adhere to a particular faith, is of necessity home-centered. Most of the populace is too thinly scattered to maintain local churches, mosques, or temples. Instead, households conduct their own worship services either independently or with neighbors, supplemented by periodic visits from itinerant clerics.

Dorsai have almost Confucian reverence for ancestors. These days, traditional ethnic and religious rites honoring the departed, such as the Japanese *Bon* festival or the Christian All Souls' Day, mean more on Dorsai than on Old Earth. Family history is faithfully recorded. Heirlooms are carefully preserved. Mementoes left by a family's founders have become virtual house talismans. The houses themselves take on a kind of life as generations pass. Even visitors respond to the romantic aura that clings to the oldest homesteads—for example, Fal Morgan in Foralie Canton. So vividly are the dead remembered in fact, relic, and legend, they almost seem to survive as unseen presences among the living who bear their blood.

Since the living regard themselves as stewards of their heritage, marriage is a matter of grave concern. (Rash impulses exist, but rarely affect behavior.) Dorsai prefer to marry young

and often finance this step by short-term military service. Life's uncertainties drive Dorsai couples to want large families—large by the standards of Old Earth but not by those of the Friendly Worlds—and to want them quickly. Voluntary childlessness is unheard-of here.

Although tours of duty on other planets multiply the opportunities for mixed marriages, few result. Dorsai is too harsh a world and too demanding a culture for most outsiders to successfully share. Visitors are cautioned not to entertain vain fantasies, no matter how attractive local people may appear.

Dorsai's original settlers established self-sufficient multigenerational households whose members held their property in common. This arrangement stressed mutual support for survival's sake: "Bare is a brotherless back." But over the past two centuries, Dorsai's population has increased a hundredfold. Economic development has brought diversification. Homesteads now operate like corporations instead of manors. Nuclear living is commoner than communal. Nevertheless, the old system continues in favor among commodity farmers, career military families, and South Continent miners. Immigrants still attach themselves to native families, often by legal adoption, in order to participate comfortably in Dorsai society.

Yet no matter where or how they live, today's Dorsai remain emotionally tied to some ancestral hearth and proudly display the emblems of their lineage. (For instance, the triple scallop shell device of Graeme is carved into a huge granite mantelpiece at Graemehouse in Foralie Canton.) Scattered relatives try to keep in touch and occasionally hold reunions. But Dorsai taste for cooperative living transcends simple nostalgia. Whether they reside in tiny villages or city complexes, nuclear families spontaneously link up with congenial neighbors to approximate the extended families of earlier times.

These domestic patterns affect child development. Formal education begins at home with one or more women in a family serving as teachers, supported by modern teaching aids. This continues through the primary years out in the countryside. Then those not destined for the Military Academy go on to district secondary schools. Youngsters from the most isolated areas board with other families while attending these institutions. Schooling stops at age eighteen except for local apprenticeship programs and limited vocational training in a few essential fields.

The psychological impact is even stronger. Children start ab-

sorbing Dorsai attitudes along with their mother's milk. The very structure of their homelife encourages a smooth transition from imitation to acceptance. Communal living instills discipline and consideration as well as diffusing bonds of affection and authority throughout the extended family. The presence of grandparents, aunts, uncles, cousins, or their equivalents modifies tensions between children and parents. With relationships running diagonally, vertically, and horizontally at the time, intensity of feeling may not always match closeness of blood: an aunt may seem more like a mother, or a cousin like a brother. Moreover, since alternative role models are always at hand, children suffer less from the absence or death of a parent. They grow up firmly oriented towards group identity and group action, qualities that equip them to function well in any area of Dorsai life.

The "masculine" flavor of Dorsai society masks its matriarchal character. But the careful observer quickly discovers that women dominate everyday life in this Splinter Culture. First, demographics favor this situation. The planet has a surplus of females because job-related mortality rates are higher for males, and Dorsai refuse to tamper with the naturally occurring sex ratio. Secondly, work keeps many Dorsai men away from home for prolonged periods. (This holds for peaceful and marital occupations alike.) Women prefer to work locally, often processing the raw material men provide. (For instance, women pack, market, and devise new uses for the fish their menfolk catch.) Women are the chief administrators of households great and small. Aside from imported contract specialists, Dorsai's education, medicine, and information services are largely in the hands of women. More women than men are free to serve in government or civic posts. Thus practical considerations combine to make women the guardians of continuity. They shape the Dorsai ethos and instill it in new generations.

Note that Dorsai women started that shaping early, during their culture's formative years, when necessity forced them to fend for themselves. Foralie Canton's legendary chatelaine, the first Amanda Morgan, exemplifies the virtues of her sister pioneers two centuries ago. Originally from Old Earth, this formidable woman kept her birthname through three marriages and founded a dynasty that continues to produce distinguished soldiers (At present, her namesake, the second Amanda Morgan, is the planet's leading expert on military contracts.) In middle life, she successfully led homemakers against brigands during the

Outlaw Years. In extreme age, she played a major role in local resistance to the Alliance-Coalition invasion, a campaign that could not have been won without women's valor.

Great households centered around such matriarchs remain the Dorsai ideal and are a perennial novelty to off-worlders. These establishments are, therefore, worth describing in some detail.

To begin with, these are rough-hewn versions of the traditional country estate (villa, manor, plantation, hacienda, station) built throughout Old Earth's pretechnological past. (Of course, on Dorsai, these are year-round homes of strictly practical construction and operate without servants.) Each homestead is separated from its fellows by huge tracts of land. Even if farming is not the family trade, space is needed for woodlots, pasturage, gardens, and landing sites for aircraft and spacecraft. With a whole planet at their disposal, the earliest settlers naturally chose the best real estate—well watered, arable, and containing a defensible homesite. Scenic beauty was a not unappreciated bonus.

The design of any given homestead depends on climate and available materials. There are earth-sheltered structures green with turf and others set into cliff sides, but the majority are archaic-looking buildings of wood and stone. Adobe is occasionally found in South Continent's deserts, but the synthetic substances common elsewhere are entirely absent. Since they are built by self-taught local craftsmen, their architecture is more functional than elegant. Yet these houses inevitably suggest immense solidity. The finest ones fit their surroundings so well, they look as if they had simply grown out of the ground.

On closer inspection, a Dorsai homestead stands revealed as an entire complex of buildings. The main residence often shows signs of expansion over the generations—at the height of the system its walls may have had to shelter as many as thirty residents and entertain more. Although farms have the most outbuildings, any communal household will include shelters for vehicles and animals, storage sheds, a toolshop, and exercise facilities. Originally, power was generated on the spot, but now that equipment only operates during emergencies.

Animals will surely be at hand. Horses are kept for pleasure riding and are actually useful in rough country. (Long-term visitors may wish to learn horsemanship.) In the early years, when Dorsai was less mechanized, draft horses and shaggy ponies proved their worth. Mules produced from imported jack-

ass semen are still prized in South Continent. Milk goats remain a standard feature, but these days, poultry-raising has been relegated to commercial growers. Sheepdogs will be found if the family's herds of sheep and goats are large enough to warrant their use. (These dogs are only bred on a few isolated islands and neutered or spayed before sale to preclude any possibility of feral packs forming.)

The household will also have extensive vegetable gardens and, if the climate permits, orchards of cold-tolerant fruit and nut trees. Small greenhouses are commonplace. Aside from their practical use for starting seedlings, access to live green plants boosts morale during Dorsai's long winters. Flowers, including tulips and the hardier strains of roses, brighten the brief growing season.

Despite their old-fashioned exteriors, these homesteads do enjoy the essential conveniences of civilized living. (Unlike extreme Friendlies, Dorsai see no virtue in hardship for its own sake.) Some visitors are startled by the contrast—a video screen in time-worn wooden paneling or sensor-cued lighting above a stone fireplace. Dorsai are willing to use automatic equipment that adds to the security or efficiency of their homes. They scorn as pointless luxuries, however, devices other cultures take for granted. Off-worlders must exercise caution in how they seat themselves: chairs will not float up to meet their bodies here. Nevertheless, handmade furnishings do provide adequate—if rustic—comfort, and the craftwork of generations has enriched initially stark interiors. The results inevitably charm nostalgia-minded observers, the sort who admire carved ceiling beams or shaggy wool rugs.

No two houses are alike, of course, but the general rule is to have large public areas and small private ones. Dining rooms in particular are huge, because sharing meals is an important sign of family unity. On the other hand, bedrooms, whether single or double occupancy, are mere cubicles, and children share a common nursery. Having a library, schoolroom, and infirmary right on the premises aids self-sufficiency. With so many mouths to feed, the kitchen may be a whole suite of rooms for processing and storing as well as preparing food.

From *sushi* to sauerkraut to scones, the major cuisines of Old Earth's cold regions are amply represented on Dorsai. Insofar as ubiquity makes a "national" dish, that honor goes to fish and

chips, since seafood is the planet's cheapest protein and potatoes its major carbohydrate.

Constrained as they are by climate and terrain, Dorsai try to vary their limited bill of fare by genetics as well as cookery. No one district serves every dish, but visitors should be prepared for such novelties as purple lettuce, red broccoli, white carrots, yellow beets, and more kinds of potatoes than Old Peru or Ireland ever knew. There is an amazing assortment of leafy greens, legumes, squashes, onions, cole crops, mushrooms, and root vegetables. Some are unique; most are delicious. Tomatoes, hot peppers, ginger, and other cold-sensitive species can sometimes be coaxed to grow under glass in private homes. But only the commercial greenhouses geothermally heated by the Forge of Iblis in South Continent produce such foods in any quantity and always at a premium price that restricts their use to festive occasions.

Similarly, wheat is eaten less often than rye, oats, barley, millet, amaranth, or buckwheat. The ratio of labor to yield makes so-called wild rice the rarest starch crop and potatoes the commonest. (The latter will flourish even on those treeless isles where fisher-families must manufacture the very soil to plant them in.)

Orchards yield apples, cherries, plums, walnuts, hazelnuts, beechnuts, hickory nuts, pine nuts, and other cold-tolerant species. Sunflower seeds are used like nuts, while nut oils and butters supplement sunflower oil and margarine. Every conceivable berry, from strawberries to cloudberries, is grown, plus juniper berries for flavoring and a relative of the bayberry for fragrant wax.

Since anything that *can* be fermented *is*, the Dorsai prepare a bewildering array of alcoholic beverages. Although their smoky-tasting whiskey is universally prized, other products are strictly local specialties that never leave the planet. Cantons—even individual families—seem to vie with one another in devising novel additions to neutral spirits, ales, and beers. Other drinks are prepared from fruits, beet sugar, honey, and maple syrup. Attempts to make wine from *vinifera* grapes have never proven satisfactory, although hardy grapes are grown for eating. Provided due caution is shown with unfamiliar liquors, off-worlders should be able to find some concoction or other that suits them, but obviously parsnip wine, blueberry beer, or maple rum are acquired tastes. It cannot be stressed too strongly that Dorsai

drink for conviviality, not oblivion. They view drunkenness as a lamentable loss of control.

Nonalcoholic beverages include cider and other fruit juices, herbal and variform *Thea* teas, a coffee substitute, and the milk of goats and sheep.

Most of Dorsai's milk, however, goes into cheese. Cultures and techniques developed on Ste. Marie yield many interesting varieties. Some are comparable to Old Earth's feta, fontina, gjetost, liptauer, chevret, and romano, but only certain cool caverns in the Paladin Mountains yield that incomparable blue-veined marvel known to gourmets among the stars as Fingal cheese. (Curiously enough, this delicacy did not win marketplace acceptance until Cetan consumer analysts were hired to merchandise it under its present brand name and packaging.)

Planetwide, mutton is the usual meat, with lamb and kid its preferred forms. The flesh of animals grazed on seaside pastures is especially flavorful. Chicken, turkey, and eggs are eaten oftener on Landfall than elsewhere because large commercial poultry growers can operate most efficiently here. There are no ducks or geese because of ecological considerations and difficulties adjusting breeding cycles. Although visitors are unlikely to be served seal or horsemeat, they should refrain from criticizing consumption by others.

Seafood—fish, crustaceans, mollusks—is the mainstay of the Dorsai table. Thanks to the variety of both catch and ethnic cuisines, one can enjoy a different and delicious seafood dish every day of the long Dorsai year without repeating or exhausting the possibilities. The oceans also yield seaweed, which is eaten as a vegetable or processed for food additives and fertilizer. Krill and plankton are harvested for animal feed.

Every temperate zone herb is grown—and liberally used—on Dorsai. Saffron, patiently gathered from the autumn crocus, is reserved for special treats. Other flowers, including roses, nasturtiums, chive and squash blossoms, are pressed into service as flavorings or even eaten themselves. Mustard, Andean chili, and horseradish help satisfy the craving for hot tastes. Herb-flavored fruit vinegars add extra interest to pickled dishes. A few simple synthetics such as vanillin and citral are also available.

But tropical spices are sorely missed. The Dorsai contrive to import them in cunning ways to minimize cost. (But it is a point of honor to give the material away afterwards and not resell it.) For instance, electronic components may arrive nestled in bags

of peppercorns instead of plastic foam. Although useful goods get higher priority, returning soldiers often devote a bit of their personal luggage allowance to spices. Wise visitors would do well to follow this example if such products are found on their homeworlds. Small packets of cinnamon, cloves, or the like make ideal hospitality gifts for Dorsai hosts. Thoughtful gestures do not go unnoticed here.

Good eating and good times go together on Dorsai. Those who have seen only uniformed Dorsai among the stars—and kept a respectful distance from them—must learn to relax with them when the occasions arise. And arise they will. Since Dorsai must endure long separations, they welcome any chance to be with their loved ones, if only for a simple gathering around the family hearth to toast raclette cheese and pop amaranth seeds. Indeed, their frugal lives would be intolerably grim without holidays. Some festivities (such as Freedom Day) are planetwide. Others are particular to a certain religion, locality, ethnic group, or family. Dorsai mark the seasons of the year and the stages of life: certain rituals accompany sowing and harvest, birth and death. Custom even decrees a special round of hospitality for the soldier home on leave.

On holidays Dorsai like to shed their practical everyday clothes for the kimono, kilt, or caftan of their ancestors. They feast as bountifully as they can and for that moment forget times when food was rationed by the mouthful. Besides eating, they enjoy singing and playing musical instruments. Folk dancing appeals to some, feats of strength to others. Displays of expert horsemanship are much admired.

Festivals aside, the prime season for recreation is winter, when most other activities come to a halt. Outdoors, snow sports attract all ages, while in foul weather, neighborhood and household gyms shelter lively ball games. Whatever their chosen pastime, Dorsai play with wholehearted vigor—action is sweet.

Nor do they sit idle at home. Dorsai hands keep busy with needles, loom, or tools. (Their menfolk are formidable knitters.) The fruits of such labor do more than brighten their surroundings. The planet's domestic furniture, clothing, fabric, and fiber manufacturing began as cottage industries, as did production of luxury export goods. (The most precious of these, Veilpoint lace, started with a crippled woman's need for income.) Besides their intrinsic quality, the personal touch evident in Dorsai cashmere angora, fishskin leather, fragrance and flavor essences,

liquor, cheese, and so forth is what commends them to the attention of elite classes on other worlds. Although the volume of this trade is small, its economic impact on participating families is considerable. Dorsai survival strategy depends on exploiting every possibility.

Of course, as everyone knows, what Dorsai sells to live is soldiers. The martial function defines this Splinter Culture. Every member acknowledges that "by spear my bread is kneaded." Not only do military contracts earn essential interstellar credits, military virtues—courage, loyalty, self-sacrifice, and discipline—shape the Dorsai ethic.

Yet surprisingly few take up arms for life. Their quality, not their quantity, commands a premium price. No more than five percent of the population graduate from the Academy to become professional soldiers. They multiply their effectiveness in the armies of other planets by serving in training as well as command posts.

Temporary enlistment is far commoner. Many young people serve one tour of duty off-world to earn capital for their families and themselves. Their upbringing gives them significant advantages over recruits from other societies, for example Friendly draftees, who are too often treated as cannon fodder. A few Dorsai volunteers find military life so congenial, they stay on permanently as noncommissioned officers.

But whatever their career plans, all Dorsai receive elementary martial arts training from childhood according to the theories of Cletus Grahame. Home guard duty involves everyone. Even the disabled find ways to participate. This unique defense capability has kept Dorsai free from invasion for the past two hundred years.

In the half-century since Donal Graeme gave our worlds temporary unity, there has been less fighting among the stars and therefore less demand for soldiers. As their earning power shrinks, some Dorsai share the complaint of medieval *condottiere* Sir John Hawkwood: "I live by war and peace would be my undoing." What does the future hold for Dorsai? Surely these valiant and ingenious people will find a fitting role so that their noble qualities will remain part of our race forever—the backbone of the organism called Man.

Worlds of the Childe Cycle

Star	Distance (Light-Years)	Type	Diameter	Absolute Magnitude	Planet	Dominant Culture or Group
Sol	—	G ₂	1.00	4.8	Venus Earth Mars	Scientists (research base) Full-Spectrum Scientists (research base)
α Centauri A α Centauri B	4.3 4.3	G ₂ K ₁	1.07 1.22	4.4 5.8	Newton Cassida	Scientists Technocrats
Sirius A	8.7	A ₁	1.8	− 1.42	New Earth Freiland	Mixed Mixed
ϵ Eridani	10.8	K ₂	.9	6.1	Harmony Association	Friendlyes—Faith-Holders Friendlyes—Faith-Holders
Procyon A	11.3	F ₅	2.6	2.7	Kultis Mara Ste. Marie Coby	Exotics—Philosophers Exotics—Philosophers Farmers Miners
τ Ceti	11.8	G ₈	.9	5.7	Ceta	Merchants
Altair	16.5	A ₇	1.5	2.0	Dunnin's World	Fishermen
Fomalhaut	22.6	A ₃	2.0	1.7	Dorsai	Dorsai—Warriors

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