

FREEDOM SQUADRON

Plans & Operations Manual



HEADS UP, COMMANDOS!

General Steel issued the mandate – stop VENOM’s latest scheme at all costs! Mirage gathered the initial intel, Top Boss crunched the numbers, and Uplink sent out the call. Now Sundown is calling you onto the Hornet so he can get you to the rendezvous with the rest of your mission team.

Now it’s up to you and your fellow Commandos to work up the plan, insert into the op-zone, bypass security, talk your way past the front office people, hack the systems, and take out the Pythons you find guarding that last vault. It all comes down to making a good plan and executing a solid operation!

The **Freedom Squadron Plans & Operations Manual** is everything you need to generate adventures and scenarios, as well as learn all about the world of VENOM Assault and Freedom Squadron:

- The new and highly innovative **Plans & Operations** rules, developed by Sean Patrick Fannon to enable GMs and players to narratively work together to create immersive, multi-faceted “mission montages” that use all of a team’s skills and resources while encouraging maximum narrative creativity for each player.
- A **Mission Generator** that works for Freedom Squadron or any modern post-modern setting featuring military and special operative heroes.
- A richly detailed history of the world of Freedom Squadron and VENOM, with a **Timeline** that covers everything from pre-history all the way through the end of World War III and the founding of Freedom Squadron.
- A system of special Mission Rewards that includes a new **Contacts** system, enabling players to develop special connections and relationships with specialists who can help them in future missions.
- Files and stats for lots of VENOM bad guys as well as **Mission Specialists** that can be called in to fill gaps in a team’s capabilities.

Grab this manual and get cracking on missions against VENOM and the other threats that endanger the whole world. Welcome to **Freedom Squadron!**



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FREEDOM SQUADRON

Plans & Operations Manual

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INTRODUCTION

You hold in your hand a different kind of Game Master's manual, both in *Savage Worlds* terms and in the greater scheme of RPG products designed to help run a game. I say this because of how proud I am of the **Plans & Operations Rules** that are the centerpiece of this book—a system that not only serves as a mission generator, but as a means to allow every character to participate in a game-playable narrative experience in which *all* of their specialties, skills, and creative ideas can come out efficiently and excitingly.

Think of it as a kind of subsystem within *Savage Worlds*—akin to Dramatic Tasks and Social Conflict—that engages every participant through every part of it. The system is meant to represent a combination of the planning stages of military-style and special operations missions, but it just as easily handles heists, investigations, exploration of new worlds, and anything else where a team of specialists might employ a wide array of abilities to cooperatively solve problems and get to a shared goal.

Shane Hensley—the creator of *Savage Worlds*—has this to say about the Plans & Operations rules:

“Savage Worlds was created to handle the kinds of games I often like to play and run, where you can be a badass fighter or wizard or whatever, but you can also be a leader. A planner. I’m proud of how the game accommodates that, and my friend Sean Patrick Fannon has added even more to it in Freedom Squadron.”

I had a blast in the Plans & Operations phase riffing off the other players,

figuring out how best to use our individual characters’ skills, and then watching it all come together in the adventures that followed. Sean isn’t afraid of big games and big ideas, and this may be his best yet. I can’t wait to back, buy, and run it myself!”

You’ve also got a rather massive timeline and explanation of the history of this world. Similar to our own in many ways, yet full of magic, mystery, science-fiction technology, and advanced quite a few years into the future. How did we get to World War III, and how did we survive? Read on and find out.

There’s a discussion of appropriate Setting Rules to use, including some designed specifically for the *Freedom Squadron* setting. Though we are planning a full *Friends & Foes Manual*, you’ll find plenty of bad guys to throw at your Freedom Squadron Commandos in this book, as well as some very useful Mission Specialists. Finally, the appendix reprints the vital Edges and Special Abilities that relate directly to Plans & Operations play for easy use and reference (especially if you plan to use this book in other campaigns aside from *Freedom Squadron*).



THE WORLD OF FREEDOM SQUADRON

It is the year 2051. World War III only ended two years ago, and the world is still recovering. Having discovered the war was in great part the result of the manipulations of **VENOM***—a once-secret organization bent on world domination through criminal, financial, political, and military activity—the United Nations authorized the formation of **Freedom Squadron**. Freedom Squadron is a fully international special operations force, independent of all nations, comprised of elite soldiers and operatives of every conceivable specialty.

Freedom Squadron is tasked with finding the forces of **VENOM** and defeating their operations all over the globe.

At the same time, Freedom Squadron is the world's most important peacekeeping force in a world defined by the New Cold War.

(*)—Some evidence suggests this is an acronym for **V**iolence, **E**xtortion, **N**ihilism, **O**bfuscation, and **M**alefaction. Another implicated name is **V**ile **E**verlasting **N**ation **O**f **M**ayhem. Neither has yet to be confirmed, and there are those in Freedom Squadron I/CI (Intelligence/Counter-Intelligence) who are convinced it means nothing more than what it says—poison for the world.

HISTORICAL OVERVIEW

The world of Freedom Squadron and **VENOM** is one of alternate history, fantastic myth, and star-spanning science fiction. Although grounded in a reality we can all understand, there is much more happening in the shadows and mists of history than the average citizen understands. As the war between Freedom Squadron and **VENOM** heats up, these mysteries are revealed, and the veil over the wonders and horrors facing Earth's population recedes.



MYTHS, MONSTERS, & MAYHEM A TIMELINE

PRE-HISTORY

LATE TRIASSIC PERIOD

A sapient and mystically-capable reptilian species of humanoids evolves on Earth. Called the Griftstals, they have both ophidian and saurian qualities. Some research indicates there are many sub-classes within the species, though available information is incredibly sparse (and only known to those with the highest of security ratings). Evidence strongly suggests other sapient species also exist, capable of wielding arcane and psionic powers.

MID-JURASSIC PERIOD

The Griftstals dominate all other sapient and sentient species, having warred with and enslaved at least two other major cultures over the course of millennia. References to powerful, gargantuan beasts used and destroyed during these wars exists in a handful of records recovered; five of these beings remain unaccounted for or are referenced as “locked away” by ancient mystical rituals. During this period, the Griftstals develop a kind of organic technology that enhances their dominance of the planet.

END OF THE CRETACEOUS PERIOD

What most believe was a comet or asteroid impact wipes out nearly all life on Earth. In truth, it is a massive Robotron ship that breaks up on entry into Earth’s atmosphere, scattering incredible technological discoveries that will change the world millions

of years later. The ship was fleeing a terrible war tearing the Robotron civilization apart over a large swath of the galaxy beyond.

EARLY CENOZOIC ERA

A powerful and brilliant Griftstal arcano-scientist named **Ouroboros** rises up among the survivors in the nation of Ven-taala; he gathers all he can together and enacts a plan to save his (and other) people from the extinction disaster changing the ecology and geography of Earth. Leading them to the range of mountains we now know as the Himalayas, he commands them to invade the hidden nation of Shamloc (the entrance of which is found near the top of Kangchenjunga), nearly wiping out the extant civilization there.



Combining Grifstal technology with the mystic thermal pools of Shamloc, Ouroboros places over 600,000 of his people into stasis in order to endure the dramatic ecological shifts of the world. He also stores extensive samples of genetic material from the many species of his time.

MID-PLEISTOCENE EPOCH

Millions of years take a toll on the Grifstal stasis machinery, and the “Great Awakening” begins. Barely more than 10,000 of the beings who followed Ouroboros remain, but he is among them and leads them back to the surface of the world. There he discovers the presence of a mammalian bipedal species asserting dominance over the planet, and he once again wages war to rule the Earth. Vastly outnumbered, the Grifstal civilization once more faces extinction and is driven back below the Himalayas to begin the arduous process of rebuilding and repopulating. Ouroboros believes these humanoids will wipe themselves out in time. He is wrong.

HOLOCENE EPOCH

Via extensive and complex applications of ancient science and dark sorcery, Ouroboros affects the forced evolution of his people. Their life spans are extended to near-immortality, and they become more homogenous in their birth form. At the same time, the practice of “fleshcrafting” becomes standard among the Grifstals, so while they see themselves as a singular species, their appearance and physical functions are as varied as the imagination of their scientists and leaders. Over the

millennia, the Grifstal civilization spreads throughout the “Hidden World Below” that extends beneath central, southern, and eastern Asia.

422

Bodhisattva **Khando Randgol** (guided by Buddha, according to the legends) leads 18 devoted followers far into the Himalayas to find “a home of spirit, light, life, and understanding.”

430

Khando and his disciples discover the eternally green valley of Shambhala, the place promised to them when they set out on their quest. It is here they found a kingdom dedicated to learning, healing, and the guidance of Buddha.

488

Via deep meditation, Khando and the Eighteen (as those who initially followed him are called) discern the existence of the Grifstals and their mighty empire in the “Hidden World Below.” A great debate erupts over whether or not to reach out to them; it is finally decided to wait and see if one or more of the ancient beings reach enough enlightenment to find Shambhala.

589

The Chinese warlord **Lian Chang** leads an army of over 5,000 to invade Shambhala. Only through mastery of the great magics of the valley and extraordinary martial skill were the inhabitants able to repel the invaders, and only at great cost (including the loss of six of the original 18 followers). Following this terrible war, Khando and the rest of the elders decided to

erect powerful guardian pillars at key ley line nexus points around the valley. These pillars were intended to both hide the kingdom and “unlink” it from normal time, placing the inhabitants several minutes into the past. Chronomancy being a very difficult discipline, instead the valley is unstuck in such a way that for every ten years that pass in the rest of the world, only a year passes in Shambhala.

617

Khando and his remaining “Original Twelve” construct hidden portals leading into Shambhala across the world. These portals are aligned such that only those who reach a certain level of enlightenment might ever discover them.

634

The first of seven unassuming temples is completed in Tibet, hosting a mystical gate that leads to Shambhala. The temple is home to dedicated disciples seeking enough enlightenment and understanding to be ready to enter the “Pure Land.” Many are content simply to learn as they may in the temple and stand guard over the one place of peace left in the world. The other six temples are built in various spiritual places around the world, also hosting guarded gates. Each temple is a testing ground for potential candidates to enter the kingdom.

875

Gölsinä, an exceptional student of mysticism, breaks several sacred laws of Shambhala as she pursues studies in necromancy. She and a handful of followers flee the magic kingdom,

carrying tomes and scrolls of the forbidden knowledge into the world.

AUGUST 25TH, 1758

Grifstal explorers discover a path to the surface world that opens into a hidden valley in the Ural Mountains. Ouroboros decides it is time to learn of the world above and orders scouts to go out and covertly gather information about the state of things. Amidst the worldwide conflict that would become known as the Seven Years’ War, the scouts discover the species has continued to multiply exponentially and has developed an extraordinary capacity for war and dominance through the use of metal machines and inorganic tools. Ouroboros orders all the passages to the surface carefully guarded as he contemplates how to return his people to dominance.

OCTOBER 2ND, 1772

The enlightened Grifstal Shytella finds her way to Shambhala via one of the Hidden Gates; welcomed with open arms, she warns the elders that Ouroboros would destroy Shambhala utterly were he to discover it.

FEBRUARY 4TH, 1854

The extraordinary warrior destined to become **Blindsight** is chosen by his master, Lhawang, to enter into Shambhala, where he will study the arts of *Lama Pai Gao* (“the Path of the Blind”). It is hoped he will one day take a leadership role in defending the “Pure Land.”

JANUARY 27TH, 1872

Noted archeologist and scientist **Matthew St. Paulson** gives a



presentation at the University of Cambridge, detailing his theory of an ancient civilization that rose to power in the Jurassic period. He is practically laughed out of the building, losing his fellowship and the respect of most of his peers. He spends years and his family's fortune searching for additional proof of his theory.

MAY 30TH, 1883

Matthew St. Paulson discovers the existence of a tablet in the keeping of Hindu monks in Kashmir. When they prove unwilling to part with it or even allow him to examine it, he hires mercenaries to acquire it "by any means necessary." The tablet proves to be the vital missing piece to the puzzle that is his obsession, as he

spends the better part of the next two years deciphering it.

MARCH 28TH, 1885

With a nearly cult-like following of believers and a coterie of dilettantes and hangers-on supporting him, Matthew St. Paulson launches an expedition deep into the Urals in search of the ancient beings he'd dedicated his life to proving once existed.

JULY 21ST, 1885

Matthew St. Paulson lay near death in a cave in the Urals, having eaten the last of his now-dead party of supporters. He is discovered by Grifstal scouts, who bring him before Ouroboros for evaluation and then execution. The Grifstal leader, impressed with the tenacity and ruthlessness of the man, instead decides to use his arcano-tech to reengineer St. Paulson into a powerful servitor. Investing him with a powerful need to show humanity his ultimate superiority—as well as that of the race that will one day come to rule them—Ouroboros undertakes to train this being to act as his agent in a long-range plan to return his people to their rightful place.

JULY 21ST, 1888

Three years to the day from his disappearance, the being once known as Matthew St. Paulson is released into an unsuspecting world, armed with his own genetic and arcano-tech modifications, Grifstal artifacts of power, and a cache of precious metals, gems, and jewels to provide him prodigious wealth. With the "Second Industrial Revolution"

(AKA the “Technological Revolution”) underway, he adopts many false identities and travels the world, investing in and buying up companies he recognizes will serve his long-range goals. His investments include controlling interests in petroleum, rubber, telecommunications, and early electronics.

AUGUST 7TH, 1888

While pursuing investments in London, St. Paulson endures a period of psychosis as his Grifstal-induced changes dramatically alter his brain chemistry. He commits the first of a series of grisly murders in the White Chapel district, discovering both a propensity for violence and a capacity for scheming and evading discovery.

FEBRUARY 13TH, 1891

St. Paulson finally regains full control of himself, thus ending the White Chapel murder spree. Despite his vicious proclivities of the time, he’s managed to secure a significant financial empire, while at the same time making extensive inroads in the underworld of Western Europe. He’s also begun a long series of investments into private archaeological digs, scientific research, and many other avenues designed to give him every advantage in his master’s schemes.

MAY 5TH, 1893

St. Paulson’s first attempts at economic manipulation are a smashing success as he arranges the Panic of 1893, thus engineering one of the major economic depressions

of the modern age and realigning the political landscape of the United States.

DECEMBER 31ST, 1900

Ouroboros declares “My creature has become a venom in the bloodstream of all mankind.” In observation of the beginning of the 20th century, he changes the ancient name of the kingdom he once overthrew from Ventaala to VENOM-La.

JULY 23RD, 1903

The first newspaper report to feature the name “the Commander” as a mysterious underworld figure in Europe is published by a smaller French magazine. The publisher and his family die in a tragic house fire a week later, but the name crops up again and again from that point forward, albeit mostly within tabloids and conspiracy-oriented circles.

JANUARY 14TH, 1907

Successfully combining Grifstal arcano-tech with an ancient Peruvian artifact, the Commander triggers an earthquake in Kingston, Jamaica, killing over 1,000 people. Later in the year, he uses unrest in Romania to test psionic-manipulation technology, setting off the Romanian Peasants’ Revolt. Over 11,000 are killed.

FEBRUARY 12TH, 1912

The Manchu Qing dynasty abdicates, opening the way for the Republic of China. The Commander is there.

JUNE 22ND, 1914

Through various intermediaries (his underworld empire having grown

significantly), the Commander arranges significant financial and resource support to the Serbian nationalist group known as the Black Hand. Four days later, Gavrilo Princip assassinates Archduke Franz Ferdinand of Austria, touching off World War I. Ouroboros is pleased.

JULY 20TH, 1916

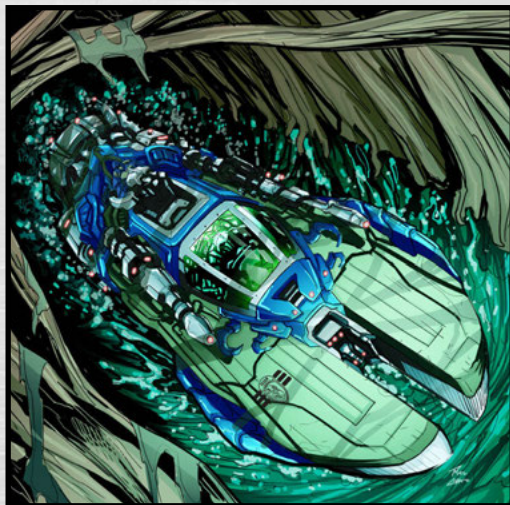
Undercover as a German officer, the Commander observes the intensity and intellect of a young Bavarian message runner during the Battle of Fromelles. He makes a note to keep an eye on the young man.

APRIL 2ND, 1917

President Woodrow Wilson asks Congress to declare war on Germany, thus bringing the United States into World War I. A highly secretive organization (some whisper the name VENOM and are never heard from again) ensures the latest in military technology is aboard American transport ships headed to Europe. Meanwhile, that same organization continues to prop up the Central Powers with older, more readily-available military hardware, thus ensuring even more gratuitous bloodshed and horror before the war can end.

NOVEMBER 11TH, 1918

Armistice with Germany is signed, thus ending the Great War. Many thousands of disillusioned men—trained for war and nothing else—look for a life beyond the trenches. Many of them find it in service to the charismatic Commander.



SEPTEMBER 12TH, 1919

Through various manipulations, the Commander arranges for Adolph Hitler to be assigned to infiltrate the German Workers Party. At a meeting on this date, Adolph meets party chairman Anton Drexler, receives the pamphlet *My Political Awakening*, and goes on to become one of the Commander's greatest accomplishments.

JANUARY 16TH, 1920

Extensive graft and political manipulation achieves the Commander's goals to enact Prohibition in the United States. He then undertakes to manipulate both the criminal and law enforcement factions towards his ends. Chicago is considered his greatest success.

JANUARY 21ST, 1924

Vladimir Lenin dies; the Commander's operatives immediately assist Joseph Stalin in his bid to consolidate his control of the Soviet Union.

OCTOBER 29TH, 1929

Agents provocateur perform the Commander's bidding, bringing on Black Tuesday and instigating the Great Depression. Countless desperate people look for any means to survive; some find it among the ranks of VENOM.

SEPTEMBER 1ST, 1939

Convinced by various sources (some of which reported to the Commander), Hitler orders the invasion of Poland. World War II begins, and VENOM engages the same strategy it used during the First World War (but with exponentially greater and more devastating results).

OCTOBER 23RD, 1954

West Germany is admitted into the North Atlantic Pact, a huge turning point in relations between the West and the Soviet Union. Another of **VENOM Commander's** projects bears fruit.

MAY 14TH, 1955

In one of his many undercover guises, VENOM Commander is personally present at the signing of the Warsaw Pact. The moment will reverberate over the next century, resulting in the next world war. Later this month, a side-project by various VENOM elements produces unexpectedly dramatic results in Vietnam.

APRIL 17TH, 1961

VENOM agents within the CIA arrange for the launching—and subsequent failure—of the Bay of Pigs invasion.

OCTOBER 16TH, 1962

VENOM nearly succeeds in instigating a nuclear war between the United States and Soviet Union with the Cuban Missile Crisis. It is one of the first major setbacks of VENOM Commander's 20th century program.

FEBRUARY 14TH, 1979

A VENOM assassin, embedded with Russian advisors in Afghanistan, kills US Ambassador Adolph Dubs during an attempt to rescue him from "mysterious militants." VENOM manipulated the faction into kidnapping the ambassador in the first place, thus engineering events that eventually set off the Soviet–Afghan War (which served as a proxy fight between the superpowers for nearly a decade).

FEBRUARY 17TH, 1989

After decades of internal and external negotiations and wrangling, the Arab Maghreb Union (AMU) is founded. It's member states are Algeria, Libya, Mauritania, Morocco, and Tunisia. Though the official union goes essentially dormant by the early 2000s, VENOM forces secretly maintain underlying communications between the member nations in case unifying the region suits their purposes later.

AUGUST 2ND, 1990

Saddam Hussein orders the invasion of Kuwait, convinced by his very good and powerful friends this will all work out very well for him and Iraq. VENOM Commander's plans to maintain chaos in the region work for decades to come.

JULY 16TH, 2001

The Sino-Russian “Treaty of Friendship” is signed, marking the beginning of what will become the Pact of Iron.

SEPTEMBER 15TH, 2008

After extensive manipulations of such elements as the subprime mortgage market in 2007, VENOM arranges for the complete collapse of the Lehmen Brothers investment bank, instigating the Great Recession. Though it technically ends by 2012, the political and economic instability of this period leads to dramatic shifts within such powerhouses as the United States, the European Union, China, and Russia, ultimately laying the groundwork for World War III.

DECEMBER 4TH, 2019

Professor Jonathan Stephens, Vice-Chairman of the TEG (Totality Econo-Geopolitics) Institute, found dead of unknown causes in a departure gate waiting area in Las Vegas Airport. It is later determined he suffered acute radiation poisoning. Professor Stephens is the main author of the controversial “Commander Dossier,” which details various incidents linking many of the sources of geopolitical unrest over the last century to a single conspiracy. Largely dismissed at the time, his work becomes of great interest in intelligence circles following his death, especially as rumors abound of a secret cache of additional information he was reportedly prepared to present to the United Nations Security Council.

SEPTEMBER 15TH, 2021

Russia and Saudi Arabia sign a number of trade deals, signaling an obvious partnership going forward.

JUNE 3RD, 2024

Russia, China, and Saudi Arabia accept Morocco’s invitation to the “Casablanca Summit,” to which the other original members of the Arab Maghreb Union also attend. The summit’s stated purpose is to “explore mutually beneficial economic, military, and energy policies.” This follows major political upheavals worldwide, but especially across the Western world. As Russia and China emerge as ever stronger political rivals to the United States and the E.U., this marks a significant challenge to the global status quo.

OCTOBER 31ST, 2030

“Shattered Thursday”—In what is later determined to be the concerted efforts of Russian hackers under the leadership of someone known only as “Golden Ophid,” a massive computer error causes thousands of automated buy orders to fail, triggering a catastrophic spiral that crashes first the New York Stock Exchange and NASDAQ, then Tokyo, then every other capitalist market in the world. The US economy is completely demolished, while the rest of the world suffers an average 25% loss. This marks the beginning of the **2nd Great Depression**, the worst economic crisis in world history.

MAY 15TH, 2031

The member countries of the Union of South American Nations (USAN)

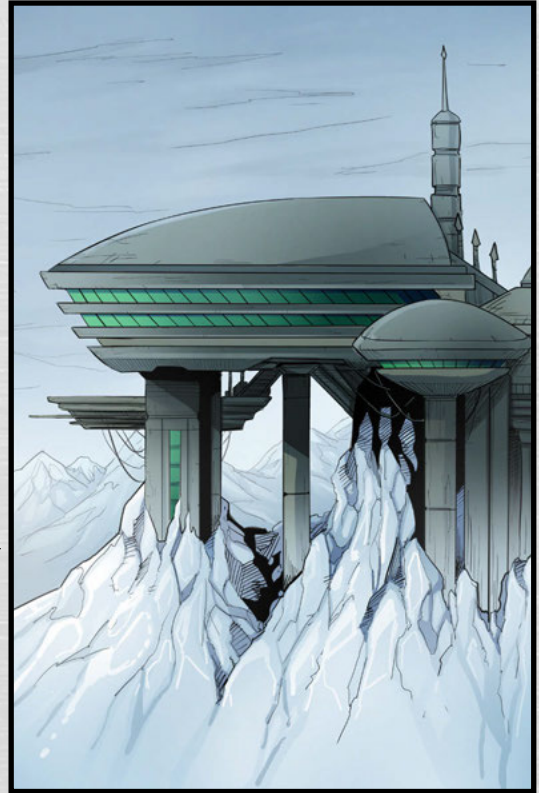
gather for the Caracas Financial Recovery Summits. A general commitment to work together for mutual economic recovery while further disentangling from the damaged markets of the Northern Hemisphere recommit many nations (but not all) to stronger ties. This further isolates the United States from a world gradually turning its back on the original sole superpower. Various intelligence organizations take note of Claudio Quintana (father of the twins, Andre and Rodrigo) at these talks, exerting extraordinary influence.

SEPTEMBER 22ND, 2032

After decades of devastating economic collapse and political unrest, the German Bundestag is taken over by reactionary and ultra-conservative elements of Germany's political landscape. This signals a complete reversal of the nation's political direction and very dark times ahead. MI5 records indicate significant outside influences from as-yet-undermined political and economic operatives.

JULY 12TH, 2039

In an effort to gain economic and political ground in the recovery from the 2nd Great Depression, the original Arab Maghreb Union is revised and reformed as the **United Nations of Northern Africa** (more commonly referred to simply as "North Africa"). Functioning as a confederation organized on neo-communist principles, North Africa makes many aggressive moves to secure power on the African continent and around the world, primarily via its natural resources and relative economic



strength in the aftermath of the Depression.

OCTOBER 14TH, 2040

The United States, citing continued failure of other member nations to maintain their financial commitments and its own crushing national debt, officially withdraws from NATO. This effectively guts and dissolves the long-standing military alliance. The European Union scrambles to reorganize in the wake of this crisis.

MARCH 18TH, 2042

Russia, China, the United Nations of Northern Africa, and Saudi Arabia sign the "Pact of Iron," forming the Neo-Communist Bloc. Near-panic sets in at the United Nations; meetings are

called, to which the diplomats of each Bloc nation fail to attend.

JULY 6TH, 2041

Tirza Denkar—an extreme nationalist with strong anti-immigration views and a platform founded on leaving the European Union—wins the chancellorship of Germany. She immediately forms the Unity Coalition, which gives her extraordinary governing power. Her party ramps up rhetoric against “all nations who would foist their immigrant problems upon Germany... especially Poland!”

JUNE 22ND, 2042

The Neo-Communist Bloc issues a joint statement to the UN and the world, establishing the manifesto of its founding. The statement includes reference to the “reckless capitalist economic and military machinations of the United States and Europe, which led to most of the great ills of the 20th and 21st centuries.” The statement also makes it clear the Bloc intends to be the next true superpower and a “unifying and stabilizing force” going forward towards the 22nd century and beyond. The diplomats of each nation return to their UN posts, but insist their seats be rearranged to place them next to one another in the General Assembly.

JANUARY 15TH, 2043

A series of coordinated attacks strike numerous cities and towns in proximity to the Crimean Peninsula, including devastating explosions in the city of Krasnodar that kill thousands. Factions still opposing Russian occupation within Ukraine take credit, demanding the world

take action to free the Crimean. Russia begins immediate full-scale military mobilization while the UN calls for emergency talks and the Bloc nations unify in their condemnations of Ukraine and any who support this “rogue nation.” Interpol documents indicate a young Fiona Burke (AKA **Sabotage**) was in Krasnodar two days prior to these attacks.

FEBRUARY 2ND, 2043

Russia launches a full-scale invasion of Ukraine, utterly overwhelming the nation’s forces within three days. The E.U., UN, and USAN all issue strong condemnations but take no direct actions. The United States issues a statement calling for diplomacy, but little more. Most historians mark this as the first strike of **World War III**.

MARCH 15TH, 2043

Citing evidence of support for the “attacks against Russia,” a joint Neo-Communist Bloc invasion is launched against Belarus. While primarily conducted by Russian forces, Chinese air force assets support the invasion, while both Saudi and North African special forces units are seen on the ground. This marks the first official joint military operation of Bloc forces. In the general council chambers of the UN, the Bloc diplomats declare their nations will secure peace and security as they see fit “in the wake of the West’s utter failure to do so.” Russia and China refuse to take up any Security Council measures.

MAY 22ND, 2043

Following dominance of the Bundestag by the Unity Coalition,

Germany signs the “Pact of Iron,” joins the Neo-Communist Bloc, and begins extensive military mobilization. In a terrifying repeat of history, Germany’s Chancellor Denkar declares “Poland’s refusal to pay reparations for the damage caused by decades of poor stewardship of our borders will no longer go unanswered.”

AUGUST 21ST, 2043

With the United Nations unable to foster any talks among European nations in the ever-collapsing political environment, the United Kingdom announces a Mutual Assistance Treaty with Poland in hopes of “waving off any military adventurism Germany might be considering,” as stated by Prime Minister Edward Doolittle.

AUGUST 31ST, 2043

German military forces mobilize near the Polish border while both German and Russian air units flagrantly violate Polish air space in constant flyovers. The UK begins significant fleet mobilizations, while significant voluntary evacuations from London are noted by many news services. Austria signs the “Pact of Iron” and joins the Bloc.

SEPTEMBER 1ST, 2043

Following extensive artillery and naval bombardment, as well as air strikes against key military and communication targets, German forces cross Poland’s border from the west and land marine forces in the north, with Chinese, Saudi, and North African special forces and logistics units in support. The invasion of Poland begins.

SEPTEMBER 3RD, 2043

Despite pleas from UN Secretary General Raul Ibanez for economic sanctions and diplomacy, the United Kingdom, France, Australia, and New Zealand jointly declare war against the Neo-Communist Bloc. Within 12 hours, British Royal Air Force and French Air Force squadrons begin operations against the German Navy.

SEPTEMBER 5TH, 2043

Citing the need to focus on continued economic recovery in the wake of the 2nd Great Depression, President Bonnie Mae Miller declares the United States neutral “in all ongoing global conflicts.” She goes on to say “We will no longer throw good American money—and the blood of good American sons and daughters—after the bad policies of bad neighbors.” As though in response to President Miller’s affirmation of American isolationism, China launches invasions of Mongolia and Thailand.

SEPTEMBER 7TH, 2043

Japan withdraws all diplomats and calls for all citizens to return home from other Pacific Rim countries, citing significant concerns for safety in the wake of China’s expansionist rhetoric. China responds with extensive flyover violations of Japanese air space.

SEPTEMBER 14TH, 2043

Prime Minister Ella-Grace Trudeau announces Canada’s declaration of war against the Neo-Communist Bloc. In her statement, she declares “We must always remember we are, ultimately, one nation of people on this Earth, and we must stand against

↑ aggression and protect freedom for those who cannot. We hope we can show the path for our friends and neighbors who have lost their way.” Numerous sources indicate talks have begun between Canada and the other nations allied against the Bloc about a formal alliance.

SEPTEMBER 17TH, 2043

Russian forces rapidly advance into Poland from east, smashing through what little resistance the nation has left to offer. The forces of Britain and France remain mostly in a harassment mode against Bloc operations as they desperately try to build up their reserves and mobilize for more effective war execution. Australia, New Zealand, and Canada are also in rapid buildup mode, but can do little to stem Bloc operations at this time.

SEPTEMBER 28TH, 2043

Russian and German officials meet in Warsaw to accept President Eryk Kosa’s unconditional surrender. They immediately begin drawing up a formal agreement for dividing the nation for annexations.

NOVEMBER 18TH, 2043

↓ No longer bothering to issue statements of justification, Russia launches an invasion into Finland. Sweden immediately sues for peace when Bloc diplomats present demands. Russian forces stage throughout the nation even as Sweden signs the “Pact of Iron” (though it is little more than an occupied puppet state now).

NOVEMBER 30TH, 2043

At a conference hosted in Cairo, the nations of Egypt, Eritrea, Iran, Iraq, Lebanon, Qatar, Sudan, Syria, Turkey, and Yemen all sign the “Pact of Iron.” The combined nations issue a statement that distances them from actual communist political philosophy, yet unites them to the Bloc’s overall goals for a post-democratic world society.

DECEMBER 18TH, 2043

Bloc forces led by Turkey invade Greece, while primarily Iranian and Saudi forces lead an invasion of Afghanistan and Pakistan. Bloc special forces units move to rapidly secure Pakistani nuclear assets.



JANUARY 28TH, 2044

Greek forces valiantly defeat the Turkish Aegean Army at the Battle of Drama.

MARCH 12TH, 2044

Finnish officials sign a peace treaty with the Neo-Communist Bloc, though President Pekka Wallendahl refuses and disappears into the wilderness with Finnish special forces. Finland becomes an occupied nation, but most of the population refuses to accept they have surrendered.

MARCH 14TH, 2044

The Devonport Naval Base near Scotland is bombed by unidentified air units and is completely destroyed. Allied intelligence agencies scramble to learn what aircraft were used. Bloc propaganda uses the incident to encourage English citizens to sue for peace.

APRIL 9TH, 2044

Bloc forces begin their invasion of Denmark. The Danes put up a spirited defense.

MAY 10TH, 2044

Bloc forces launch attacks into France, Belgium, and the Netherlands. The Russian 423rd Guards Motorized Rifle Regiment alone conquers Luxembourg in two days.

MAY 11TH, 2044

Prime Minister Bas Diepen of the Netherlands surrenders to the Bloc.

MAY 25TH, 2044

Finally committing significant ground

forces, British Army and Royal Marines join the French to launch a major counter-offensive, and the Second Battle of Dunkirk begins.

MAY 29TH, 2044

With the entire royal family and the Prime Minister dead from extensive combat in and around Brussels, Deputy Prime Minister Joyce Van Moorlehem surrenders to Bloc forces, and Belgium joins the rapidly-growing list of occupied nations.

JUNE 3RD, 2044

Mysterious air forces bomb Paris overnight, and the Bloc issues surrender demands in the aftermath of the devastation. French and British forces retreat to the coast for evacuation as the Second Battle of Dunkirk ends with their devastating defeat. US naval units—primarily supply and medical frigates—are dispatched to assist in the efforts.

JUNE 10TH, 2044

Prime Minister Gilbert Gallo of Italy declares war on the Neo-Communist Bloc. In his passionate statement, he says “We will show our friends and neighbors of the world the valor of Italy, and we will defend freedom for all!” Italian forces immediately move into occupied portions of France and station along the Austrian border for a push northwards towards Germany.

JUNE 14TH, 2044

Amidst the rubble of Paris, President Patrice Trémaux tearfully signs the documents of surrender to the Neo-Communist Bloc. Marshal General of France Claudine Guilbert defiantly

refuses the surrender on the part of the French Army and other military units; the majority of French assets able to escape capture flee into Spain to reorganize.

JUNE 18TH, 2044

In a move that shocks the world (and even elicits a condemnation from the United States), the Bloc issues the “Rain of Fire” proclamation against the Baltic States—Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania. If they do not surrender, they

will be the first to suffer nuclear attack in the war. Statements of capitulation come within hours, and Bloc forces roll in within days to take up full occupation.

JUNE 23RD, 2044

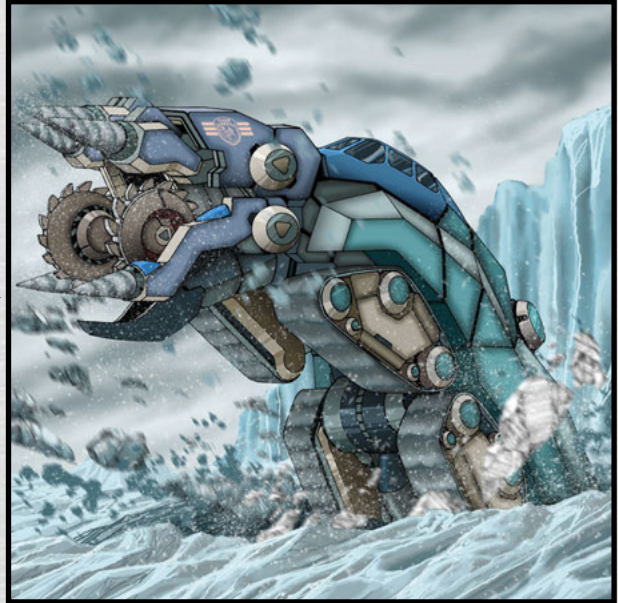
Thanks to valiant and tactically superior efforts on the part of British, Canadian, and French naval units, the routed troops from the Second Battle of Dunkirk land on British soil.

JULY 10TH, 2044

German and Russian air units engage British, Canadian, French, and Australian squadrons over the British Isles. The Second Battle of Britain begins. Pilots from the United States and Mexico are noted among those volunteering to defend England.

JULY 17TH, 2044

Japanese diplomats meet with Portuguese President Plácido Moura



to discuss a gathering of heads-of-state to address the world crisis.

AUGUST 3RD, 2044

The United Nations of Northern Africa enter the war in earnest, launching the Invasion of Italy. Malta falls in an hour, Sicily in just over a week. North Africa forces are outside of Gioia Tauro and Siderno by August 19th.

SEPTEMBER 3RD, 2044

Egypt joins the Invasion of Italy, landing all across the bottom of the Italian “boot” and laying siege to Crotona. Italy is forced to recall most of its forces originally committed to liberating France.

SEPTEMBER 16TH, 2044

At a secret conference in the Azores, the leaders of Australia, Canada, Japan, New Zealand, Norway, Portugal, Spain, and the United Kingdom sign onto the **Trans-Atlantic Coalition (TAC)**. This officially commits

each nation to war against the Bloc. Italy pledges allegiance in absentia.

OCTOBER 7TH, 2044

Bloc forces swarm through Romania.

OCTOBER 14TH, 2044

Unidentified air units, believed to be the same craft responsible for similar mysterious bombing raids earlier in the war, devastate a US-led aid convoy in the Atlantic. The *USS Annabelle*, a medical frigate, is among the craft lost with all hands. “Remember the Annabelle!” becomes a rallying cry among US citizens for America to officially join the war.

NOVEMBER 3RD, 2044

In a landslide victory, military veteran and human rights activist Nestor Rodriguez defeats Bonnie Mae Miller to become the next President of the United States. Among his campaign promises, he vowed to “return America to a position of honorable leadership and compassionate involvement in the world.”

NOVEMBER 10TH, 2044

“The Taranto Raid”—squadrons of Greek bombers (some dating back as far as World War II) launch a daring raid against the Bloc fleet anchored at Taranto, Italy. The fleet is utterly crippled, but 230 of the 350 planes used in the raid never make it home.

NOVEMBER 23RD, 2044

Now the latest puppet state of Russia, Romania signs the “Pact of Iron.”

DECEMBER 25TH, 2044

“The Christmas Offensive”—In a move calculated to shift Bloc focus away from the British Isles, UK, Spanish, and expatriate French forces launch attacks into the western part of North Africa. South Africa formally joins the Trans-Atlantic Coalition and mobilizes forces to join in the attack.

JANUARY 20TH, 2045

The United States announces a series of new programs to allow Canada to purchase extensive military hardware and other needed materials at “freedom-friendly rates” and with significant deferments for payment. The Bloc issues a formal statement declaring this means the US is no longer a neutral nation in the conflict.

JANUARY 22ND, 2045

Australian and New Zealand forces arrive in North Africa in time to lead a mighty push that conquers Morocco and pushes Bloc forces well into Algeria.

JANUARY 28TH, 2045

President Rodriguez addresses the citizens of the United States as the first convoys and air-drops of humanitarian aid begin arriving in the British Isles and other places around Europe. “We will no longer stand idly by as the light of freedom is extinguished across the world.”

FEBRUARY 14TH, 2045

British-led TAC forces arrive in Greece to begin staging new offensives while bolstering the nation’s defenses.

MARCH 11TH, 2045

A series of submarine attacks on a wide range of commercial and military vessels in the Western Caribbean begin, killing thousands of crew from many nations in the region. Commando-style raids cripple the Cocoli and Miraflores Locks of the Panama Canal; hundreds of civilians and Panamanian military personnel are killed before the raiders are hunted down days later. American and Brazilian intelligence personnel have difficulties confirming exactly which nations operated the subs, and the commandos are identified to be from all over the world, bearing only Bloc insignia and no national military identifications.

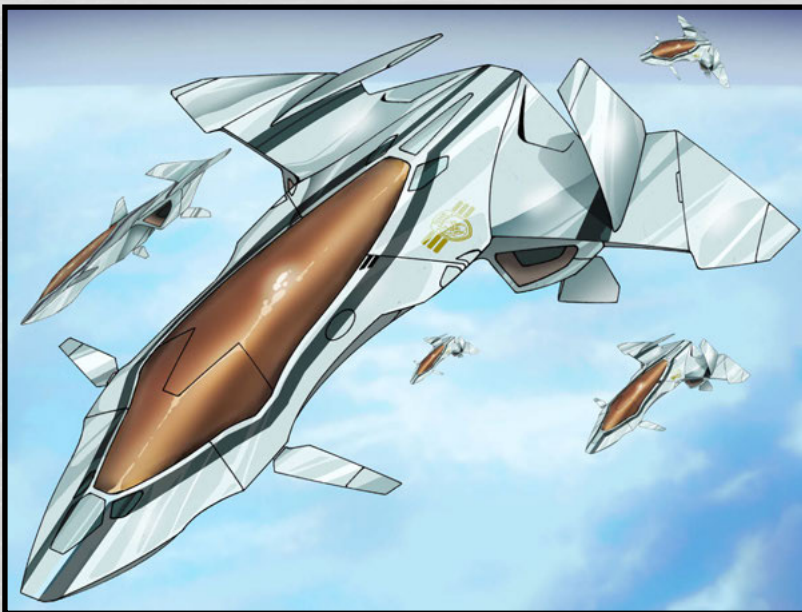
MARCH 13TH, 2045

Brazil, Columbia, Mexico, Panama, and Uruguay join the Trans-Atlantic Coalition, issuing a joint statement to the Organization of American

States urging their neighbors to do the same. Bolivia, Peru and Jamaica call for an extensive alliance between the OAS and the TAC, gaining wide support among the member nations that remain hesitant about full commitment to the war.

MARCH 15TH, 2045

President Rodriguez formally requests Congress issue a declaration of war against the Neo-Communist Bloc; the bill to do so passes nearly unanimously through both houses within hours, and the US joins the Coalition. Nearly every other nation in Central and South America, either via directly joining the TAC or through the OAS-TAC alliance treaty, contributes forces of some kind. The exceptions are El Salvador, Guatemala, and Venezuela; each of these nations make public declarations of neutrality. Rodriguez pledges to have American forces in Europe by the end of the year.



MARCH 27TH, 2045

A United States Pacific Fleet enters the waters of the Philippines and begins coordination with Japanese forces for operations against China.

APRIL 6TH, 2045

German and Russian forces lead the Bloc invasions of Greece, Albania, and Macedonia.

APRIL 14TH, 2045

North African-led Bloc forces retake Morocco from the TAC.

APRIL 17TH, 2045

Albania and Macedonia surrender and become the latest Bloc puppet states under Russian control.

APRIL 27TH, 2045

Saudi naval and marine forces join the invasion of Greece, focusing on coastal areas. The Second Battle of Thermopylae begins, and Greek armored and mechanized units are devastated by a strange new tank design introduced to the battlefield. Sporting multiple weapon mounts, full 360 degree firing arcs, and multiple tread mounts to cover terrain in frighteningly effective ways, the Greeks call it the "Hydra."

MAY 1ST, 2045

In the wake of a devastating defeat in the Battle of the Vevi Line, Greece surrenders to Bloc forces.

MAY 10TH, 2045

Lieutenant Colonel Abraham Steel, along with his light mechanized battalion (the "Steel Riders"), arrives

in London to help coordinate future US staging in the British Isles.

MAY 13TH, 2045

Lt. Col. Steel thwarts an attempt on his life that leaves one of his aides critically wounded and three would-be assassins dead. Assumed to be Bloc operatives, all three are impossible to identify by any regular means; there are simply no records of them in any database anywhere. Steel describes their attacks as "highly skilled, if a bit archaic with all the bows and swords." Legends of Steel taking on "three ninjas with a coffee pot" stem from this incident.

MAY 15TH, 2045

British-led Coalition forces launch "Operation Brevity," a highly-mechanized rapid force counter-attack against Egypt.

JUNE 8TH, 2045

TAC forces invade Syria and Lebanon.

JULY 3RD, 2045

Thailand formally surrenders to China. Chinese information ministers insist Mongolia has also surrendered, though no sign of a formal process thereof can be produced.

JULY 10TH, 2045

North Korea signs the "Pact of Iron" and, within hours, launches a full-scale land and sea invasion of South Korea with Chinese support.

JULY 12TH, 2045

Bloc forces invade India. Several Japanese subs, stationed in the Bay of Bengal to support Indian naval forces, vanish. They are assumed sunk by Bloc forces.

JULY 14TH, 2045

British, Australian, and New Zealand forces occupy most of Syria and all of Lebanon.

JULY 26TH, 2045

The invasion of Norway begins. Finnish and Swedish resistance fighters join the Norwegian military in defense of the nation.

AUGUST 1ST, 2045

Neo-Communist Bloc forces stage amphibious and parachute assaults all across Britain. Dover, Bexhill, Brighton, and Portsmouth fall within hours, and Bloc forces use these beachheads to immediately begin pressing inland.

AUGUST 14TH, 2045

The Siege of Oslo begins.

AUGUST 20TH, 2045

Soviet mechanized units seize Rochester, placing Bloc forces within 30 miles of London.

SEPTEMBER 1ST, 2045

Lt. Col. Abraham Steel organizes British and French armor, mechanized infantry, air cavalry units, and special operations teams for a counterattack to retake Rochester. Spearheaded by his own Steel Riders, the force succeeds in liberating Rochester though Steel is badly wounded



during the Battle of Rochester Castle. Refusing to relinquish either command or momentum, a team of combat medics and doctors attend Steel as he pushes his force on to Dover less than 48 hours later.

SEPTEMBER 19TH, 2045

The Battle for Dover begins as "Task Force: Steel Spear" engages entrenched Bloc forces.

OCTOBER 16TH, 2045

The Battle for Dover concludes as Steel's forces capture numerous Bloc units and materiel. Even as Steel receives a battlefield promotion to full colonel, news comes that Bloc forces have taken New Delhi.

OCTOBER 24TH, 2045

South Korea falls, and North Korean leaders now insist the nation is united as Korea once again. Southampton, Reading, and Reigate are among the municipalities that fall to Bloc mechanized and airborne units, with an invasion of London imminent.

OCTOBER 30TH, 2045

In direct defiance of TAC mobilizations in the Pacific, Chinese forces begin full-scale invasions of Cambodia and Vietnam.

NOVEMBER 12TH, 2045

Colonel Steel joins other TAC commanders aboard the supercarrier *HMS Indomitable* off the coast of the Isle of Wight to plan coordinated combined-arms attacks against Bloc forces holding Portsmouth, Brighton, and Bexhill. It is hoped this will draw enemy forces away from any attack against London.

NOVEMBER 27TH, 2045

Cambodia falls to Chinese forces after particularly bloody fighting. The nation's infrastructure is devastated.

DECEMBER 5TH, 2045

The *USS Defiant* supercarrier arrives in the Philippines with a full battle group, bolstering US and Japanese naval and marine forces as they weigh anchor and move towards the Sea of Japan to begin operations against China.

DECEMBER 9TH, 2045

Her husband and eldest son having died in actual fighting against Bloc forces, Queen Karina Hovland of Norway is forced to surrender to save Oslo from further devastation and death after the brutal siege.

DECEMBER 16TH, 2045

Elements of the US Pacific Fleet and Japanese Defense Force naval units arrive in the Sea of Japan, led by the *USS Defiant*. Bloc naval and air forces immediately attack, initiating the largest naval battles in the 21st century. China lands massive forces on the main island of Japan.

DECEMBER 19TH, 2045

HMS Indomitable spearheads the TAC assault against Bloc forces holding Portsmouth and Brighton; over 2,000 fighters and bombers are put into the air on a bright, clear day, leading news reporters to call this "The Battle of the Azure Skies." At the same time, Colonel Steel leads a mechanized and infantry assault to liberate Bexhill.

DECEMBER 25TH, 2045

After nearly a week of extensive success in the air war, TAC air forces



encounter a new jet fighter in the skies over England. Faster and more maneuverable than anything anyone's seen before, nearly half the Coalition's planes are shot down over the course of the next 12 hours. At this unexpected turn, the defenses at Bexhill stiffen considerably; the Steel Riders and attached units effectively hold over half the town, however, helping to stall Bloc attack plans against London.

DECEMBER 26TH, 2045

The supercarrier *HMS Indomitable* is sundered in half by a massive explosion that could be seen from space. Ballistic experts conclude a kinetic strike from near-orbit may have been the cause. All hands are lost.

JANUARY 1ST, 2046

The Trans-Atlantic Coalition issues the "Declaration of Global Freedom," affirming its commitment to defend democracy and prevent the Neo-Communist Bloc from destroying liberty across the world. Within a week's time, over two dozen previously neutral nations sign this declaration and enter the war against the Bloc.

JANUARY 4TH, 2046

Bloc reinforcements flow into Bexhill, forcing the Steel Riders to retreat to Dover.

JANUARY 18TH, 2046

Bloc submarines (primarily Russian and German) launch a series of raids against US naval bases on the American east coast. The New London submarine base in Connecticut is

completely wiped out, as is the Naval Air Station in Jacksonville, Florida. Many other bases suffer varying levels of devastation before the enemy subs are destroyed or driven away.

JANUARY 21ST, 2046

Extensive US forces arrive in England, along with Canadian and Mexican reinforcements; London is heavily refortified. Colonel Abraham Steel is recalled to London, where he is promoted to Brigadier General. The TAC counter-offensive against Morocco begins.

FEBRUARY 1ST, 2046

The *USS Defiant* receives extensive TAC air force assets from multiple nations, enabling it to begin regular bombing strikes against Chinese forces currently holding central Japan.

MARCH 10TH, 2046

Returning to the world after his studies, the one who would one day become Blindsight is disillusioned to discover a global war, strife, and the untold ways in which humankind could destroy itself. He decides to remain in residence in his mountain home, continuing his studies and defending the way into Shambhala.

APRIL 3RD, 2046

Bloc forces launch the first of a new wave of air raids directly against London, hoping to force the UK government to capitulate.

MAY 8TH, 2046

With plumes of smoke constantly in the air over London from constant air raids and bombardment, Bloc forces take on massive reinforcements from their beach holdings and launch a major offensive to take the city once and for all.

MAY 10TH, 2046

The Battle of London is suddenly and dramatically won by TAC forces after General Steel conducts “Operation: Sewer Rats,” launching a daring and devastating special operations counter-attack via the sewers and London Underground tunnels. Captain Sean O’Finnian (the man destined to become **Big Irish** within Freedom Squadron) of the Irish Naval Service leads a surprise raid against Bloc naval units based in Portsmouth, using unorthodox techniques to sink ships considerably larger and more advanced than in his command. When informed of this unexpected boon that supported his actions, General Steel is overheard to say “Someone give that Irish pirate a box of medals and put him on my payroll!”

MAY 11TH, 2046

TAC forces fully secure Morocco and push on into Algeria.

MAY 27TH, 2046

A massive combined-arms TAC operation is launched from the *USS Defiant* and other ships in an effort to retake central Japan from China. Reports come from elsewhere on the island that various Yakuza and ninja clans are supporting the attack with insurgency tactics.

MAY 30TH, 2046

“The Green Wave”—one thousand bombers are launched from airfields all over Ireland and Scotland against Bloc forces and assets in Germany.

JUNE 5TH, 2046

Chinese forces use overwhelming force and high-yield munitions (like fuel-air bombs) to drive TAC forces back into the sea. Pacific Fleet Command decides to reinforce the northern and southern ends of the island in order to hold China to the center.

JUNE 10TH, 2046

“The Eye”—As the last major offenses come to a close, this date marks a period of relative peace as all theaters grow quiet and forces on both sides simply dig in or otherwise secure their holdings.

AUGUST 17TH, 2046

The peace is broken as the Trans-Atlantic Coalition launches “Operation: Albatross,” a massive bombing campaign against Bloc forces in the United Kingdom and France.

AUGUST 23RD, 2046

Bloc air forces take to the skies en masse, beginning the largest ongoing air battle in the 21st century.

SEPTEMBER 2ND, 2046

A fleet of primarily Russian and German ships encounter US and Canadian fleet assets, beginning the Second Battle of the Atlantic.

OCTOBER 18TH, 2046

Bloc high command orders the public execution of a large number of British commandos captured in operations across Europe. Though a daring rescue operation secures some of them, the majority are shot and the video shared worldwide. TAC officials declare this a war crime that will be prosecuted; General Steel goes on record saying “I’ll avenge those men with these two Desert Eagles if I have to!”

NOVEMBER 8TH, 2046

“Operation: Blowtorch”—US forces arrive in great number to join the invasion of North Africa.

DECEMBER 13TH, 2046

Bloc forces are driven into the eastern half of Algeria.

DECEMBER 17TH, 2046

“Remember the Indomitable!”—After many months of devastating aerial bombing and ground offenses, Bloc forces begin withdrawing from most of their southern England holdings, retreating back to France. General Steel leads a highly successful attack against Bloc troops and naval assets in Portsmouth, where the cry to remember the loss of the *HMS Indomitable* drives his forces to destroy or capture the vast majority of enemy troops and materiel before anything or anyone can escape. Captain O’Finnian is in charge of the naval part of the operation.

DECEMBER 21ST, 2046

“Operation: Snatch”—In a top-secret operation he keeps even from TAC command in London, General Steel

puts together a special ops team comprised of his own Steel Riders and various UK, Canadian, and French operators. Employing Captain O’Finnian’s customized attack boat, *Brigid*, Steel launches a raid against a Bloc command craft headed for France. His team captures a significant number of high-ranking Bloc officers and other assets, but at the cost of most of his team. Steel is severely injured and barely makes it back himself.

DECEMBER 23RD, 2046

Bloc special forces, using stealth subs and hydro craft, launch a daring night attack against the supercarrier *USS Defiant*. Dubbed the Battle of the Japan Trench (due to extensive sub-to-sub combat beneath the carrier), the giant craft is turned into a war zone as saboteurs and demolitions experts employ extreme tactics to damage anything they can.

DECEMBER 28TH, 2046

The last of the invaders surrender to TAC defenders aboard the *USS Defiant*, but extensive damage from both the boarders and enemy attack subs forces the mighty ship to run aground on the southern coast of Japan to avoid sinking.

JANUARY 14TH, 2047

“The Drumbeat Conference”—Leaders or high-ranking officials from all of the Trans-Atlantic Coalition nations gather in Washington, D.C. for an extensive conference to discuss the war and plans going forward. UK Prime Minister Edward Doolittle declares “This war can only end with the unconditional surrender of the Neo-

Communist Bloc.” Debate rages for almost two weeks on how to bring the war to an end.

JANUARY 23RD, 2047

From his hospital bed in London, General Steel draws up and submits his plans for “Operation: Wounded Lion.” TAC planning staff scoff at his proposal and work to shut him out of further strategic discourse.

JANUARY 27TH, 2047

TAC forces gain enough air superiority to renew bombing operations against key Bloc holdings in occupied France.

FEBRUARY 2ND, 2047

Bloc forces are crushed by TAC armor, mechanized infantry, and air assets and the remnants are driven out of Algeria. This represents the worst defeat yet for Bloc forces on a large scale.

FEBRUARY 8TH, 2047

TAC forces retake New Delhi, beginning the process of liberating India.

FEBRUARY 12TH, 2047

The Second Battle of Kasserine Pass begins as TAC armored units seek to destroy what’s left of North Africa’s mechanized forces.

MARCH 2ND, 2047

Their military forces in tatters, the United Nations of Northern Africa begin pulling out of Tunisia.



MARCH 15TH, 2047

Chinese President Xian Zhi announces his nation’s break with the Neo-Communist Bloc and issues peace overtures to the Trans-Atlantic Coalition. At Japan’s urging, the Sakura Armistice is signed by both parties in the old Emperor’s Palace in Tokyo. After devastating fighting that has damaged the infrastructure throughout the islands, Japanese and TAC officials hope this truce will allow for recovery while TAC military assets can be reassigned to other theaters.

MARCH 20TH, 2047

The Second Battle of the Atlantic reaches a climax with a massive push that drives Bloc navy forces into retreat. TAC naval losses reach 27 vessels lost or scuttled, while the Bloc loses 48 vessels.

MARCH 28TH, 2047

As Bloc forces continue to retreat from Tunisia into Libya, a second armored

force (primarily American in makeup) catches them at the Mareth Line and initiates the Battle of the Crimson Dunes.

APRIL 9TH, 2047

North African forces fight a running battle as they retreat into Libya. TAC forces cut off entire divisions and chew them up piecemeal, further devastating Bloc military capability in the region. At the same time, valiant defense of their homes drives North African forces to fight viciously, inflicting significant casualties on the TAC invaders.

APRIL 12TH, 2047

All Bloc forces in Libya surrender. Tunisia officially surrenders a week later.

MAY 13TH, 2047

The United Nations of Northern Africa formally and unconditionally surrender to Trans-Atlantic Coalition forces, signaling a massive change in the war.

MAY 18TH, 2047

Bloc command suspends all naval activity in the North Atlantic, effectively surrendering the seas of Europe.

JUNE 10TH, 2047

“The Condemnation of Steel”—Caught by reporters leaving TAC High Command in London, General Steel cannot contain himself and speaks out. He is quoted as saying “Letting the Bloc dig in so deep in so many places means digging them back out will be a long, bloody process. I hope they’ve invested well in body bags

and coffins; we’re gonna lose a lot of good men and women because of their pig-headedness!” Three days later, he is assigned to provide support and advice to insurgency fighters in Finland and Northern Europe.

JUNE 15TH, 2047

TAC forces enter Paris, Copenhagen, Amsterdam, Oslo, and Helsinki in a multi-pronged attack to shake loose Bloc control points throughout Europe. Unfortunately, this instead initiates many weeks of block-to-block fighting in the cities and trench warfare throughout much of Western Europe. TAC advances are halted, and casualties mount up dramatically on both sides.

JULY 2ND, 2047

TAC forces, led by American, Australian, and New Zealand units, hit the beaches of Sicily.

JULY 17TH, 2047

TAC air units and missile batteries begin surgical strikes into and around Rome.

JULY 20TH, 2047

Coalition forces successfully liberate Palermo.

JULY 24TH, 2047

Massive bombing raids begin against German military production in Hamburg and elsewhere in Germany.

AUGUST 8TH, 2047

Bloc forces begin giving ground in Sicily; TAC forces relieve Messina days later.

SEPTEMBER 2ND, 2047

TAC forces land in Salerno and Taranto, beginning the liberation of Italy.

SEPTEMBER 10TH, 2047

Bloc forces begin fortifying and entrenching around Rome. Skirmishes occur between the Vatican's Swiss Guard and Bloc elements attempting to secure the Holy See.

OCTOBER 4TH, 2047

The Neo-Communist Bloc formally declares war on China and sends armor and infantry units into the western mainland of the country. TAC and other officials publicly wonder at the rather unwise choice.

OCTOBER 8TH, 2047

TAC forces liberate Naples.

JANUARY 10TH, 2048

TAC forces begin pushing northward towards the Monte Cassino region of Italy.

JANUARY 22ND, 2048

Spearheaded by Brazilian, Columbian, Mexican, and other Central/South American marine and amphibious units, the TAC launches a major assault to take Anzio, Italy. Australian, South African, and New Zealand units move in days later to reinforce the valiant Americas forces.

FEBRUARY 16TH, 2048

The Bloc launches a surprising and vicious counterattack against the Anzio occupation forces, pinning them down and halting advances on that front.

FEBRUARY 19TH, 2048

Advance TAC armored and mechanized infantry units heading into the Cassino region are repulsed by heavy Bloc resistance.

MARCH 15TH, 2048

The Second Cassino Offensive begins.

MARCH 18TH, 2048

"The Red Wave"—Bloc air units launch a surprise daylight bombing raid against London, staging most of their attacking bombers out of Norway. Over 3000 tons of munitions are dropped on the beleaguered city, resulting in some of the highest civilian casualties in England one day.

MAY 1ST, 2048

"The Second Battle of the Gustav Line"—TAC forces push towards Rome through heavy Bloc emplaced defenses.

MAY 12TH, 2048

Bloc forces begin pulling northward, retreating from TAC forces advancing from the south. Days later, they relinquish Anzio, converging on their fortifications in Rome.

JUNE 5TH, 2048

Advance TAC units enter the outskirts of Rome; the Battle for the Coliseum begins.

JUNE 28TH, 2048

TAC operations in Occupied France ramp up with the liberation of Cherbourg. Days later, Caen is also liberated.

JULY 18TH, 2048

Photojournalist Kimberly McDonald takes the first of her many famous wartime photos, entitled “A Friendly Wager.” The photo depicts a game of soccer being played between TAC and (primarily Russian) Bloc forces in contested Oslo during a lull in fighting. The image appears in every major magazine and newspaper around the world, and goes viral online. Social media explodes with conversations about it being time to end the war.

JULY 20TH, 2048

Operatives dressed in neutral, yet clearly advanced special operations armor and gear, initiate coordinated assassination attempts against TAC commanders and officials in multiple theaters. Excellent intelligence work prevents any major successes, though one major staff officer is killed and two others are critically injured.

AUGUST 1ST, 2048

Kimberly McDonald continues her crusade to “bring humanity to both sides” as she enters Helsinki under press authority from both TAC and Bloc forces. Discovering Brigadier General Abraham Steel (still in the region as a commander of “insurgency support forces”) and Major General Pavel Avdonin (commander of Bloc forces in the region) sharing a drink in a bombed-out bar, she convinces them to grant her a brief interview and some photos. She shoots the award-winning “Tired Lion & Old Bear,” featuring the two war leaders toasting each other and smiling. The photo is published with the quotes from each leader as they part ways at the end

of the interview: (Steel) “It’s been fun, but I need to get back to my troops. I’ll do my best not to shoot you in the morning, Pavel.” (Avdonin) “Ha! No fear there, Comrade Steel. How do you say in your country? I would have to be size of barn and you still miss, da?”

AUGUST 7TH, 2048

Mongolian resistance fighters launch multiple insurgency strikes against Chinese forces in their country, seriously calling to question the degree to which the larger nation actually has control.

AUGUST 15TH, 2048

Operation: Falling Tiger begins in India as an effort to drive Bloc forces out completely.

AUGUST 25TH, 2048

As the last Bloc tank units flee into Pakistan, Operation: Falling Tiger is declared a success and India liberated.

AUGUST 27TH, 2048

As Bloc forces push further into China’s western borders, President Xian Zhi petitions the Coalition for military aid. The United Nations hosts talks between TAC and Chinese military and diplomatic officials.

AUGUST 31ST, 2048

TAC officials demand China release all occupied lands and agree to restitution after the war; China refuses and walks away from the talks, thus ending any chance of an alliance.

SEPTEMBER 2ND, 2048

Back in the public eye thanks to McDonald's photo and interview, TAC officials agree to bring Steel back to London to discuss his plans for breaking the stalemate in Europe. Operation: Broken Door enters the planning stage.

OCTOBER 2ND, 2048

Operation: Broken Door commences; coordinated TAC offensives in Italy, France, Denmark, and the Netherlands are launched against key objectives while resistance movements (heavily armed and reinforced by TAC special forces) engage in extensive guerrilla strikes aimed at disrupting supply lines, communications, and enemy morale. Russian media calls this the "Night of Fire."

OCTOBER 30TH, 2048

Bloc Command orders full retreats from Brussels, Rome, Copenhagen, Amsterdam, and Oslo. Despite warnings from Steel and others, TAC leadership orders immediate heavy occupation of each of these cities

NOVEMBER 3RD, 2048

TAC forces fully occupy the five cities abandoned by the Neo-Communist Bloc, declaring a major victory. By nightfall, five previously hidden five-megaton nuclear warheads are detonated by the Bloc as part of their "Operation: Scorched Earth." The devastation and loss of life is beyond any other single moment in human history.

Infodump—By Nuclear Fire

The following cities were utterly destroyed on November 3, 2048, when Neo-Communist Bloc High Command initiated "Operation: Scorched Earth." Each city was obliterated by a five-megaton nuclear warhead:

- Brussels, Belgium
- Rome, Italy
- Copenhagen, Denmark
- Amsterdam, Netherlands
- Oslo, Norway

As might be expected, these nations are still devastated, with large swaths of territory suffering from nuclear fallout and other effects. The international community struggles to provide continuing aid towards recovery.

Among other necessary changes, the Holy See was moved to the capital of Brazil, Brasilia. The Government of Brazil gave over most of the peninsula containing Alvorada Palace, and the entire district is now known as Alvorada City, serving as the independent capital "nation" of the Catholic Church in the way Vatican City once did.

NOVEMBER 4TH, 2048

Major General Pavel Avdonin, citing publicly that he cannot condone the actions of his leaders in choosing to unleash nuclear devastation in such a cowardly fashion, surrenders Bloc forces stationed in Northern Europe unconditionally to Brigadier General Abraham Steel. He urges other Bloc commanders to do the same, and stages a public display of he and his men removing Bloc insignia and uniform coats, throwing them onto a bonfire in Helsinki. Days later, Steel is promoted to Major General.

NOVEMBER 25TH, 2048

Tirza Denkar is forcibly removed from office and her government collapses as she is arrested for war crimes. The temporary government of Germany formally announces separation from the Neo-Communist Bloc and withdraws its troops from almost all theaters.

DECEMBER 1ST, 2048

Insurgent forces in Norway, Sweden, and Finland, under the command of Finnish special forces Colonel Jupe Rantalainen, launch extensive offensives against Bloc forces throughout the region. Most encounters end with rapid surrender by the primarily Russian troops; barely a shot is fired in Norway as Bloc commanders turn over nuclear warheads they've found and dismantled already.

DECEMBER 8TH, 2048

Bloc demolition specialists willingly invite TAC counterparts to help search for and dismantle nuclear devices scattered through Paris as the city is liberated without another shot fired.

DECEMBER 27TH, 2048

Greece military and civilian insurgents rise up against Bloc forces determined to hold the country. TAC special forces help win the fight three days later, and an already-dismantled warhead is turned over by Bloc forces in Athens as they surrender.

JANUARY 17TH, 2049

The United Nations, with Trans-Atlantic Coalition backing, announces that any further attempts by Bloc forces to

detonate nuclear devices anywhere will be met with direct retaliation in kind.

JANUARY 18TH, 2049

Celebrated as a global hero, Abraham Steel is bumped from two to four stars and recalled to Paris, where he is given leave to celebrate his daughter's birthday at a special event under the Eiffel Tower. Sadly, saboteurs strike at the event in an attempt to assassinate him; Steel suffers only minor injuries (having been delayed in getting to the event by a meeting that ran just a little too long), but his entire family is lost in the attack.

JANUARY 20TH, 2049

Even as he attempts to put together a team to hunt and destroy those responsible, Steel is relieved of duty, put on bereavement leave, and rather forcibly returned to the United States.

FEBRUARY 1ST, 2049

The remaining leaders of the Neo-Communist Bloc formally sue for peace and talks begin. Despite the UK's demands from the Drumbeat Conference, it becomes clear "unconditional surrender" must be taken off the table if the world is to know any peace at all.

FEBRUARY 20TH, 2049

Top leaders from the Coalition and the Bloc, under United Nations oversight, meet in Paris to discuss terms.

MARCH 10TH, 2049

"VE2 Day"—Both sides formally sign the Treaty of Laurels, officially ending World War III. While the treaty clearly

ends all aggression and demands Bloc forces withdraw from all contested territories, neither the Coalition nor the United Nations can fully enforce liberation of firmly held territories. Poland effectively no longer exists, permanently split between Germany and Russia. Germany also retains much of northern Italy and southern France. Saudi Arabia remains in control of Pakistan and Afghanistan, and Korea remains united under what was North Korean leadership. Large swaths of western China remain under Russian control, as do a number of effectively puppet states (all but reinstating the original Soviet Union). At the same time, China retains control of the vast majority of the Pacific Rim.

MARCH 18TH, 2049

Following leads she picked up while moving through the chaos of Northern Europe in the latter days of the war, Kimberly McDonald makes her way from Finland into St. Petersburg, Russia with a small cadre of Finnish and other freedom fighters. Russian operatives seeking absolution for the “Scorched Earth” catastrophes lead her to a restricted hangar, where she observes (and photographs) soldiers in strange uniforms packing up high-tech weaponry and issuing orders to Bloc generals.

MARCH 30TH, 2049

Finnish Colonel Jupe Rantalainen accompanies Kimberly McDonald to a meeting with UN and TAC officials, revealing what they’ve learned of a third party that seems to be manipulating Bloc officials and may have done so since before the war.

APRIL 2ND, 2049

The UN forms several fact-finding missions to investigate the existence of this mysterious organization. When the first team’s plane explodes within minutes after takeoff, the UN assigns heavy tactical support and security to the remaining teams.

APRIL 8TH, 2049

Mysterious operatives move to assassinate Kimberly McDonald, who barely manages to escape thanks to bodyguards assigned by Col. Rantalainen. She takes several photos of her assailants, who are garbed in advanced stealth combat armor and wielding katanas. Headlines hit most of the major news services with her photos, one prominent news



organization declaring “High-Tech Ninjas – the Real Threat to Us All?”

APRIL 30TH, 2049

Officials of the Trans-Atlantic Coalition announce the alliance will continue as a permanent organization, effectively taking up the role once filled by NATO. TAC’s focus is far more global, with an immediate goal of further stabilizing the world and establishing security for all member nations.

MAY 7TH, 2049

Only one of the UN investigative teams returns, mostly intact and with significant evidence to present (there are indications that former MI6 operative Aderyn Cadwaller effectively assigns herself to this team for most of their journey, though entirely unofficially due to her “burned” status). The evidence reveals the presence of VENOM, and its involvement in manipulating the Neo-Communist Bloc into forming. Further evidence shows VENOM supplied extensive logistical and financial support, advanced weaponry, and elite special operatives to the Bloc throughout the war (including the team responsible for the death of General Steel’s family).

MAY 8TH, 2049

The UN General Assembly gathers to discuss the ramifications of the revealed evidence of VENOM’s existence and how to proceed. The meeting breaks down into abject chaos as Bloc nations deny the evidence and others insist their nation or coalition should be placed in charge of any actions going forward.

MAY 16TH, 2049

In a joint statement, the UN Security Council and the Trans-Atlantic Coalition announce the formation of the United Nations/Trans-Atlantic Coalition Strategic Coordination Council, or UNTAC. They furthermore announce **Project: Freedom Squadron**—a proposed independent, international military force tasked primarily with rooting out and destroying VENOM. Though many nations object to the ability of this organization to act with “the necessary authority and autonomy to go anywhere in the world required to fight the enemy we must defeat,” the resolution passes by a significant margin in the General Assembly.

JUNE 5TH, 2049

UNTAC announces the selection of General Abraham Steel as Squadron General of Freedom Squadron. They pin five stars on him and set him loose to recruit the best people he can find from anywhere in the world to serve this new force.

The New United Nations Security Council

In the aftermath of World War III, Russia withdrew from its permanent seat on the UN Security Council. After some debate and wrangling, India was granted the vacant seat. Shortly thereafter, it was decided to expand the permanent seats to seven, and Canada and Japan were added to the permanent roster. Though China remains a permanent member, the nation’s influence is greatly blunted by the preponderance of TAC-member nations holding seats.

JUNE 11TH, 2049

One of General Steel's first major recruits comes from friends in British Intelligence. The MI6-burned operative, Aderyn Cadwaller, is brought in from the cold thanks to her exceptional work in helping reveal the existence of VENOM. She joins Steel's efforts to build up the organization and track down leads on the enemy force as **Mirage**.

JUNE 26TH, 2049

A heretofore classified US Department of Defense military research depot located somewhere in Death Valley is re-commissioned as the new headquarters for Freedom Squadron. General Steel announces formal operations against VENOM have commenced.

JULY 8TH, 2049

General Steel recruits Altani Zaya—**Sparks**—to take over development of Freedom Squadron's mechanized and aerial assets.

AUGUST 29TH, 2049

Following evidence and intelligence developed by both **Mirage** and **Snapshot** (the code name assigned to photojournalist Kimberly McDonald when she was placed on permanent assignment with Freedom Squadron), FS Commandos engage in the first open conflict with identifiable VENOM Troopers in Germany's Black Forest.

SEPTEMBER 15TH, 2049

After proving himself on Sergeant Ajeet Baldev's hardest proving grounds, General Steel recruits the

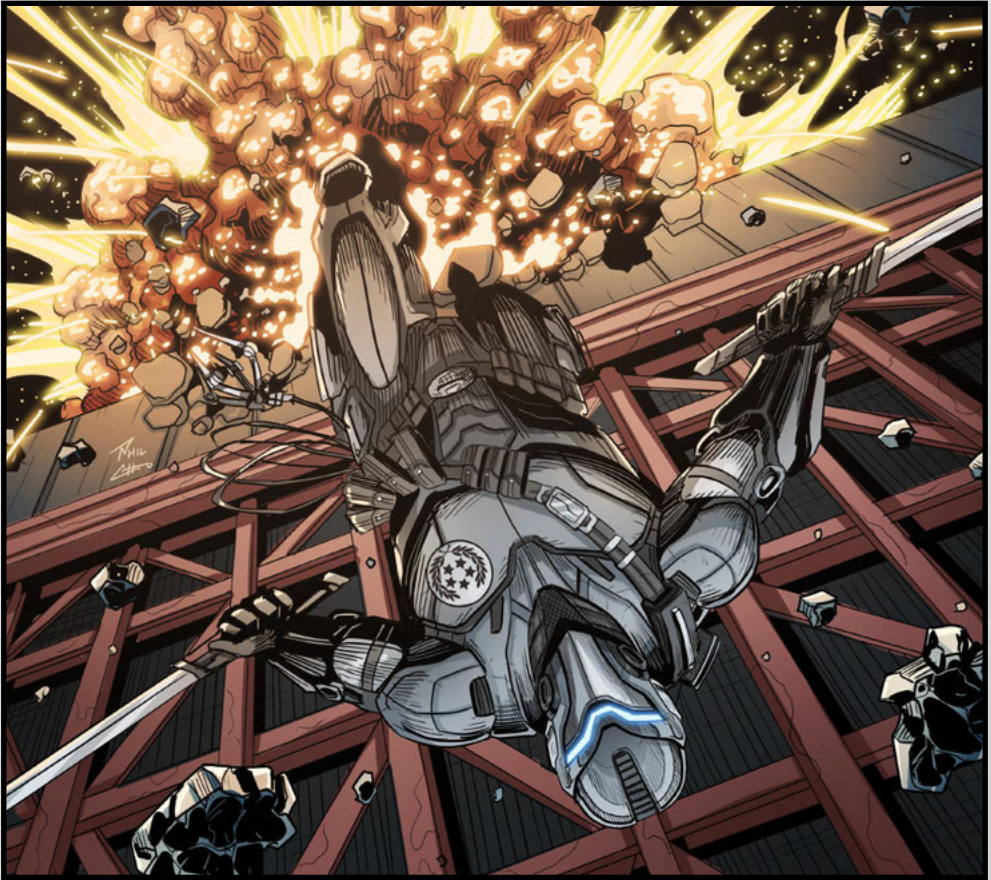
Indian drill instructor. **Sandbar** takes over Freedom Squadron's training programs.

OCTOBER 6TH, 2049

Following the "untimely" death of their father, twin brothers Andre and Rodrigo Quintana (**Rojas** and **Azura** within VENOM ranks) state their desire to "legitimize" their father's criminal legacy by investing their inheritance in the formation of the multi-national, multi-portfolio Steelz Industries. They then reveal the new CEO—**Miles Steelz**, who looks uncannily like a younger, more muscular version of General Abraham Steel. When called before the United Nations to account for this shocking similarity, Steelz gladly subjects himself to independent DNA testing... which proves entirely inconclusive, and the Security Council issues a formal apology.

DECEMBER 24TH, 2049

Hijacking the airwaves and Internet, a being identifying himself as VENOM Commander issues his "Christmas Greetings" message to the world. Declaring that the days of freedom and chaos are over, he assures the population of Earth that they will know peace and security under the "benign" rule of VENOM, "but only once your misguided leaders and your foolish would-be protectors—Freedom Squadron—are taught that opposing me means certain death." As his laughing form fades to black, ATMs in most major population centers around the world flash "Merry Christmas from VENOM" on their screens as they spew forth money of all currencies, sending the world markets into a spiral and triggering inflation woes.



JANUARY 22ND, 2050

General Steel recruits **Corporal Carnage** to take on the task of rehabilitating Commandos too valuable to allow past mistakes to wash out of service. Ex-Shadow Fang Barry Primm (**Ambush**) is the Corporal's first major project.

APRIL 12TH, 2050

CIA hacker Tina Cassidy, having accessed sensitive Freedom Squadron databases, is transferred to General Steel's command and receives the code name **Uplink**.

MAY 20TH, 2050

Echo Akash leads the rescue of General Steel from a crash in the Indian mountains. Three months later, she is recruited into Freedom Squadron as **Tundra**.

JUNE 13TH, 2050

Led by **Bulkhead**, **Topside**, **Selkie**, and **Sparks**, Freedom Squadron and TAC recovery crews extract the *USS Defiant* from Japan's shores and begin a complete retrofit and upgrade. The supercarrier is destined to become the floating strategic carrier base, the *FSS Freedom* ("FSS" standing for "Freedom Squadron Ship").

DECEMBER 2ND, 2050

Under orders from VENOM Commander, **Toxin** leads a team of Shadow Fangs into a particular area within the Himalayas, seeking an ancient temple believed to hold the key to finding the mystical land of Shambhala. Guided by intelligence gathered by Mirage, a team of Freedom Squadron commandos led by Tundra, **Glacier**, and **Hollowpoint** is sent in pursuit. Decimated by Toxin's Shadow Fangs, the team comes across a mysterious traveler (he who would become **Blindsight**) and asks for aid; the stranger refuses, declaring their war is not his. He offers only to show them the way to a safe passage back down the mountain, and with many wounded on her hands, Tundra reluctantly accepts and pulls her team out of the mission.

DECEMBER 5TH, 2050

The man destined to become **Blindsight** returns to the temple where he trains to discover Toxin and his Shadow Fangs within the walls, murdering his fellow students and his teachers. He dives into battle, only to watch Toxin pierce his Master Lhawang through the heart. The two battle fiercely; Toxin only achieves the upper hand by flinging poisonous acid into the defender's face and eyes. As he lay dying, Tundra, Glacier, and Hollowpoint charge into the temple and help drive off the VENOM invaders; they had returned to their mission as quickly as possible after getting the other commandos to safety. Tundra's unwillingness to give up saves **Blindsight's** life... but not his eyes.

DECEMBER 31ST, 2050

Khando and the elders of Shambhala make the heartbreaking decision to close nearly all pathways into the "Pure Land," essentially shutting themselves off from the rest of the world. **Blindsight** (having learned the full truth of who killed his master and feeling a great debt to the Freedom Squadron soldiers who saved him and the rest of the temple) is among the few who choose to remain in the world to fight against the forces of VENOM. As the elders finish the sealing ritual, they are shocked to discover **Shytella** the Grifstal has vanished, having apparently also returned to the world beyond the gates.

JANUARY 4TH, 2051

After months of extensive buildup of personnel and materiel, General Steel announces the formation of **Freedom Squadron: Global Operations Force**, a much larger and more robust combined-arms military force to combat the growing threat of both VENOM and other strange and dangerous forces facing the world.

FEBRUARY 3RD, 2051

Hardcore is recruited personally by General Steel to join Freedom Squadron. He's granted the rank of Master Chief Warrant Officer and given direct oversight of SpecOpForce Mission Teams.

MARCH 10TH, 2051

The first named Mission Team—the **Monday Night Savages**—hits the field against **Doctor Devo** and the **Cold Mountain Mercenaries**, signaling the official start of Global Operations Force field activity.

THE STATE OF THE WORLD

The entire world is aware that they're experiencing the **New Cold War**, a term regularly invoked by the news media. While the Bloc suffered significant defeat, they were not fully divested of their occupied territories. The Trans-Atlantic Coalition and the United Nations simply had neither the resources nor the stomach for the continued open warfare necessary to restore all pre-war boundaries.

These conditions leave a state of continued strife and conflict, which VENOM seems to thrive upon. World War III was terrifying for all, but the next great war could spell the end for humanity...

...which is exactly what VENOM Commander's true masters want.

MATTERS OF NOTE ON THE GLOBAL SCENE

Among the many complex situations facing the world of 2051, the following are key conditions and situations that occupy the minds of world leaders and those who plan Freedom Squadron operations:

- Every nation still identified as part of the Neo-Communist Bloc is officially designated by the United Nations as a "VENOM Client State." This designation carries mandatory and **severe** economic sanctions and embargos. Black market and smuggling operations are thriving in this environment, and mega-cartels are cropping up all over the world. Freedom Squadron's mandate has expanded to deal with these multinational criminal factions.
- **Steelz Industries** is the leading supplier of vast sums of necessary goods and services within many of the VENOM Client States. Absolutely precise and careful in its dealings, the multinational has thus far avoided any and all efforts to uncover corruption or illegal dealings on its part. Despite General Steel's great consternation, CEO Miles Steelz moves internationally with impunity,



smugly daring Freedom Squadron to catch him at anything.

- Italy's Prime Minister, Gilbert Gallo, has vowed to retake Italian territory from Germany. Border skirmishes are a constant fact of life, and the UN applies continuous diplomatic pressure to keep Italy from reigniting full-scale warfare with Germany. As France rebuilds, Claudine Guilbert (the Marshall General who refused to surrender, now President) is promising to join Italy in any efforts to restore original national borders for both of their nations.
- Insurgents maintain a constant state of guerrilla warfare against Saudi Arabian forces in both Pakistan and Afghanistan. The Saudi government has accused Freedom Squadron repeatedly of supplying weapons and tactical support.
- Mongolian freedom fighters are putting up a very respectable resistance against Chinese rule; Sparks regularly urges General Steel to propose liberation assistance, which he regretfully denies due to current UN stances on avoiding open warfare against anyone not VENOM.
- Japan is a shattered nation. China retains control of the central part of the main island. A line running roughly between Niigata and Sendai demarks what is now called Northern Japan, while another rough line from Maiuru through Kyoto to Matsusaka marks off what is now called South Japan. Both halves are under one government, but half the population relies more on Yakuza and similar underworld factions for services and protection. The Trans-Atlantic Coalition denies any active plans to liberate central Japan... yet.
- Mostly unmolested during the war, many of the nations of central and southern Africa are enjoying an economic boom as they operate cooperatively (via the auspices of the African Union and the Pan-African Parliament) to leverage natural resources and other strengths to both assist recovering nations and compete in the new global markets. Unfortunately, their fortunes have attracted VENOM efforts to infiltrate, exploit, and destabilize, making the African continent an evolving battlefield in the war between VENOM and Freedom Squadron.
- Though isolationist factions still work tirelessly to return the United States to its pre-war footing, the nation is an invested partner in world matters once again. Extensive talks are underway to reinvigorate and expand the function of the Organization of American States in the hopes of creating mutual security and economic prosperity throughout the Western Hemisphere. Collectively, the nations of the OAS represent the vast majority of the funding of Freedom Squadron.
- Between captured arms and other materiel from VENOM-supported Bloc units and the natural effects of global warfare, the state of technology has advanced dramatically. Bionics and cybernetics are rapidly evolving out of limited production into the mainstream, and other major medical advances are extending the life expectancy of the human species. Computer technology is many generations advanced from the early part of the 21st century, with virtual reality interface systems nearly commonplace and holographic interfacing the latest craze in high-scale environments. Hardlight holography tech is real, though very much in its

infancy as an applied technology. Coherent light-and-plasma weaponry is primarily the province of large, complicated vehicle and emplacement systems, though a handful of person-portable systems are in the prototype stage. Aeronautics have reached a state that it is now possible to build and fly vehicles into orbit and back; Freedom Squadron's Star Corps has a handful of these in service now.



In order to consolidate resources, restore global order and security, and establish some kind of united effort against the newly-revealed VENOM, the United Nations and the Trans-Atlantic Coalition constructed a framework within which to coordinate and cooperate. Based on similar efforts between NATO and the UN in the past, the United Nations/Trans-Atlantic Coalition Strategic Coordination Council was formed. Referred to as UN/TAC SCC—or more commonly just UNTAC—this body features multi-disciplined appointees from both the United Nations and TAC.

The Council is chaired by the Deputy Secretary General of TAC (currently **Heleen Gagelman** of the Netherlands) and is comprised of generals, diplomats, political strategists, and intelligence directors. UNTAC has access to the greatest minds in military operations, economics, science, and more that the world has to offer. Their stated purpose is to provide post-war recovery and security for all member nations. This includes oversight of all global military and strategic operations within the UN's purview—especially Freedom Squadron.

Infodump – The Trans-Atlantic Coalition

The Trans-Atlantic Coalition is the dominant military alliance of the world these days, though it remains hard-pressed on all fronts by both the recalcitrant Neo-Communist Bloc and openly-hostile VENOM forces. The current membership includes:

- Australia
- Canada
- Finland
- France
- Greece
- Italy
- Japan
- Mexico
- Netherlands
- New Zealand
- Norway
- Portugal
- South Africa
- Spain
- Sweden
- The Union of South American Nations (Argentina, Bolivia, Brazil, Chile, Columbia, Ecuador, Guyana, Paraguay, Peru, Suriname, Uruguay). El Salvador, Guatemala, and Venezuela are not members.
- The United Kingdom
- The United States

If not for the threat of VENOM, the TAC may have spun down to a more tenuous and politically-entangled alliance. Instead, it remains a firmly united global entity, especially as it has strengthened its relationship with the UN. Unfortunately, these efforts suffer from varying degrees of renewed isolationist attitudes from the populations of each member nation, ready to be done with war and the economic trials created by WWII. However, if not for the Trans-Atlantic Coalition's and United Nations' commitment to united efforts against VENOM and its client states, World War IV might well be on the horizon.

A WORLD WITH VENOM REVEALED

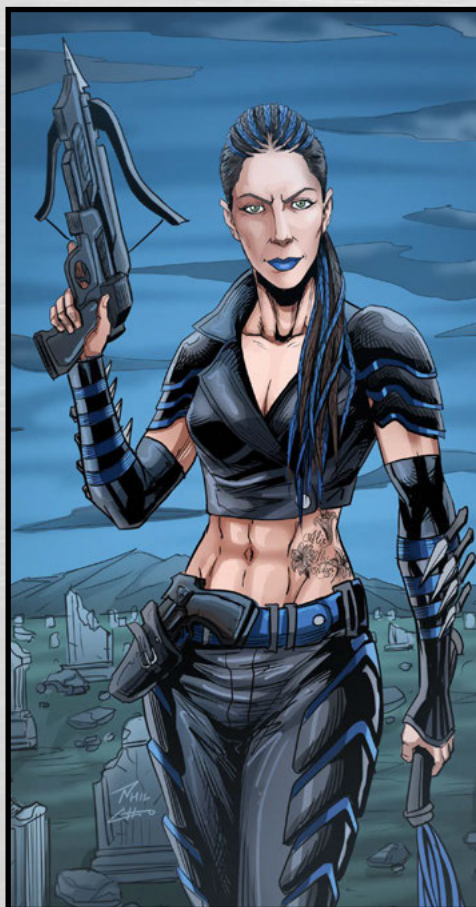
With VENOM now out in the open, many of the Neo-Communist Bloc nations effectively became client states to the multi-national, paramilitary mega conglomerate. Only Russia and Saudi Arabia seem to have some modicum of autonomy from VENOM, though the organization's influence is still heavy and they are deeply dependent on its vast wealth and resources to balance losses from international sanctions. With so much economic might and capital assets in these nations, beyond the reach of the TAC and the UN, even a fully-revealed VENOM is able to maneuver with impunity in many parts of the world.

As well, former Bloc nations such as Germany and China continue to benefit from their unofficial ties to VENOM, though they have to work harder at concealing those relations (at least in a politically defensible way) to avoid UN sanctions and worse reprisals. Post-war Germany still controls Denmark, Belgium, and Luxembourg. Parts of Poland, France, and Italy remain under the German flag as well.

In the East, China's annexation of so many nations (Vietnam, Cambodia, Mongolia, Thailand, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Myanmar, Laos, Taiwan, and the Philippines) remains effectively unchallenged. China also controls large portions of Japan, leaving the once great nation fractured and crippled. China is the powerhouse of Asia and much of the Pacific Rim, and its leaders remain unmoved by UN and TAC pressure to relinquish dominance of the conquered nations. There are those in political and

intelligence circles who believe China has extensive covert ties to VENOM, emboldening its recalcitrance in the face of international sanctions.

The events of World War III brought about a dramatic strengthening of the African Union. Though the continent is still made up of many distinct and autonomous nations, mutual economic and military interests drove efforts to combine strategic assets. The stronger, more democratic member nations also moved to empower the Pan-African Parliament in order to ensure security and growth in a post-war world.



Though the Union never signed a formal agreement with the TAC during the war, coordinated efforts between the two entities effectively shut down many Bloc pushes on the African continent. Unsurprisingly, Egypt, Sudan, and North Africa (still Bloc members) have been ejected from the Union, and there's been more than a few border skirmishes and other incidents since the end of the war between AU and Bloc forces.

Though most of the members of the Union of South American Nations are active members of the Trans-Atlantic Coalition, El Salvador, Guatemala, and Venezuela remain staunchly outside of that alliance. Current intelligence suggests each of those nations—especially Venezuela—are under various degrees of infiltration and influence from VENOM.

Infodump—The Neo-Communist Bloc

This alliance still exists, and while it remains devastated from the failures and losses of the war, the collected resources and might of its members continues to hinder global peace and prosperity. Quite simply, VENOM won't allow the Bloc to simply roll over and bare its throat to the Trans-Atlantic Coalition, instead ensuring ever-escalating tensions that keep the worry of a World War IV on everyone's mind.

The following nations are still members of the Bloc; those in italics are effectively puppet nations to Russia, essentially restoring the Soviet Union in all but name:

- *Albania*
- Austria
- *Belarus*
- *Bosnia/Herzegovina*
- Cambodia (protectorate of China)
- *Croatia*
- *Czech Republic*
- Egypt
- Eritrea
- *Estonia*
- *Hungary*
- Iran
- Iraq
- *Kosovo*
- *Latvia*
- Lebanon
- *Lithuania*
- *Macedonia*
- *Moldova*
- North Korea (Korea)
- Philippines (protectorate of China)
- Qatar
- *Romania*
- Russia
- Saudi Arabia
- *Serbia*
- *Slovakia*
- *Slovenia*
- Sudan
- Syria
- Turkey
- *Ukraine*
- United Nations of North Africa (Algeria, Libya, Mauritania, Morocco, and Tunisia)
- Vietnam (protectorate of China)
- Yemen

In addition to all of its fully-annexed client states, Russia also holds much of Kazakhstan (China holds the rest), Uzbekistan, and Turkmenistan (with Iran holding a large portion of the latter). The nations China controls that are not listed as protectorates are, instead, fully conquered and annexed states.

SETTING RULES

What follows are new Setting Rules designed for *Freedom Squadron*, as well as a section detailing which ones from other sources are recommended.

HEROES (AND VILLAINS) DIE HARD

Less a new Setting Rule than a modification of how the **Heroes Never Die** from *Savage Worlds* applies to this setting. *Freedom Squadron* has a lot of established characters (sometimes referred to as “Card Characters,” calling back to the idea that most of them are featured on cards in the *VENOM Assault* board game) that appear in various media—and that promises to only expand over time. As far as canonical continuity is concerned, they’re not going to be killed off any time soon.

While individual Game Masters are free to do as they will with any character in the game, if you’re of a mind to consider your campaign as part of the **Global Operations Force** continuity (the shared world which leaves things open for players to bring their characters to convention tables and other venues where other GOF players and GMs are sharing their narratives), you may wish to employ this Setting Rule.

Simply put, characters established in the IP (intellectual property) that is the *Freedom Squadron* universe never quite die. Instead, they disappear in the explosion; fall to their certain doom (but no body is found); collapse into a deep coma, with no idea when they might awake (but definitely at a dramatically

Setting Rules from Other Sources

The following Setting Rules found in *Savage Worlds* are suggested for your *Freedom Squadron* campaigns: **Blood & Guts**, **Born a Hero**, **Joker’s Wild**, and **Multiple Languages**. In some limited situations, the Game Master should feel free to employ the **Fanatics** rule (especially against top-level VENOM leaders like VENOM Commander, Vipress, Gorgon, and Professor Mortis). The **Heroes Never Die** rule is modified a bit as **Heroes (and Villains) Die Hard**.

From *Savage Rifts*®, the Setting Rules of **Blaze of Glory**, **Extra Effort**, and **Death & Defeat** are highly recommended. In the latter case, simply use the table found in *The Tomorrow Legion Player’s Guide*.

appropriate time); or in some way survive what would otherwise kill them.

What does this mean for heroes created by players and villains created by Game Masters? That is entirely up to you, of course, but it’s recommended you follow these guidelines:

- For **Novice Commandos**, there’s really no “script immunity” at all. Until they earn their Code Names, Recruits and Commandos are as subject to the lethal dangers of combat and the universe as anyone.
- **Seasoned heroes**—those that have earned their Code Names—now enjoy some protection. They gain the benefits of the **Harder to Kill Edge**. This is also true for any named “lieutenants” created by the GM.

- **Veteran** heroes are even harder to permanently cross off; if one dies, roll a d8, and they manage to survive on anything but a 1 or 2. Named “captains” of the GM’s creation enjoy the same benefit.
- **Heroic Commandos** roll a d10 when “killed,” again only really dying on a 1 or 2. Major villains of the Game Master’s crafting get the same protection.
- **Legendary** heroes roll a d12 when death comes calling, and only truly go out on a 1. For GM characters that are deemed of this level, it’s simply a matter of arbitration on the Game Master’s part.

Note that in all cases, the Game Master can simply arbitrarily decide if a character of their creation truly dies or somehow survives the impossible. As well, some GMs may decide they want the specter of Death to loom more oppressively over their players’ heroes, thus choosing to simply not employ this Setting Rule. We highly recommend using at least the **Blaze of Glory** rule to compensate here.

MISSION SPECIALISTS

With the **Plans & Operations** rules in play, many teams may discover an imbalance that makes accomplishing missions very difficult (at best). This is where bringing in one or more **Mission Specialists** is a good idea. Mission Specialists are non-player characters that the GM can allow the players to request to fill out the ranks during P&O sessions, possessing

expertise and training that allows them to act as **Team Lead** for certain types of Challenges.

Unlike **Contacts** (described later as one of the **Special Mission Rewards** Commandos can achieve during **Plans & Operations** game play), **Mission Specialists** are treated as **Wild Cards** and are able to be a **Team Lead** for a **Challenge**. They should *only* be employed when the team is significantly deficient in a category of **Challenge**, such as no one having an appropriate skill in the **Interaction** category of higher than d6 (and no **Charisma** bonuses). The GM is the final arbiter of when it is appropriate to call in a **Mission Specialist**.

Example **Mission Specialists** are included in the **Friends & Foes Recognition Files** section later in this book.



PLANS & OPERATIONS

A special set of rules designed to integrate the planning stage of a mission with actual game play, **Plans & Operations** is meant to take what is often a tedious, drawn-out part of many games and turn it into something fun and playable as a kind of “mini-game.” This system is also intended to bring out the skills and talents of heroes that aren’t always as combat-intensive in nature, such as technical abilities and social skills.

Savage Worlds fans will see other known subsystems integrated into this idea—Cooperative Rolls, Dramatic Tasks, and Social Conflict all influence this system significantly.

Plans & Operations functions as a series of three rounds—much like a combat scene—with a more abstract passage of time involved. Although this system can work fine in the abstract, having a map and miniatures to represent the operational area may greatly enhance the experience. For larger operational areas (an entire city, or maybe even different places around the world for really big operations), a more abstract map or table layout may work best.

In general, **Plans & Operations** works in one of two ways:

- As the run-up to a combat scene in which all of the heroes will gather and join in (we tend to call this a **Boss Fight** in *Freedom Squadron*).
- As a means to obtain multiple pieces of information, items, or other mission goals, all towards the larger goals of *Freedom Squadron* and dealing with ongoing story arcs.

While the Game Master should provide the general setup where locations and opposition forces are concerned, **Plans & Operations** is intended to be fairly player-driven. As each player takes his turn, he should use the opportunity to narrate the scene and invoke a skill to deal with a Challenge in that scene. In this way, players can give some spotlight to the special training, experience, and talents of their characters.

For example, in a sequence where a team is infiltrating a corporate facility, one player may explain how his character is using his Persuasion skill (along with his exceptional Charisma) to charm his way past a receptionist as part of an indicated Interaction Challenge, while another player may describe her character using Stealth to crawl her way through the air ducts as part of Covert Challenge. Meanwhile, a third player may be offsite, using his Computers skill to hack into the facility’s network and run interference to resolve a Technical Challenge.

Plans & Operations goes according to the following phases: **Establish Mission Parameters**, **Initial Plan**, **Run the Operation**, and **Determine the Outcome**.

PHASE I: ESTABLISH MISSION PARAMETERS

First things first, the players and the GM need to figure out what the team is actually attempting to accomplish. Often, this will come from information the Game Master puts into play—a directive from *Freedom Squadron* superiors, a distress call from someone in trouble,

or a message from an ally detailing a VENOM plot. At other times, the players may well decide to run a **Plans & Operations** mission in order to find more information about a mystery they've been investigating or take a run at an enemy that's plagued them for a while.

The Game Master can obviously just decide what the mission is about, based on his plans for the scenario and the campaign. Alternately, he can roll on or select from this table:

MISSION TABLE

d20 Result

- | | |
|-------|---|
| 1-4 | Information: One of the more common types of missions Freedom Squadron teams are sent on, involving infiltration of a facility, hacking secure computer systems, rifling through file folders, and questioning folks to obtain vital information the force needs to find and stop VENOM operations. |
| 5-6 | Sabotage: There are times when shutting down a plant, frying the computers of an enemy technician, or blowing up a munitions dump is called for. |
| 7-8 | Rescue: Freedom Squadron has a lot of trained search-and-rescue folks on the payroll, and there are times the team is called upon to help rescue folks in dangerous situations. In these missions, Enemy Leadership should be reinterpreted to mean environmental conditions and other elements that provide significant opposition to the team's efforts. |
| 9-10 | Emergency Relief: Humanitarian aid is something General Steel insisted be included in Freedom Squadron's charter. The force's assets and personnel are regularly called upon to bring food, supplies, and medical support into the world's most devastated regions. In these missions, Enemy Leadership should be reinterpreted to mean environmental conditions and other elements that provide significant opposition to the team's efforts. |
| 11-12 | Retrieval: Sometimes a key piece of technology or something else of value falls into nefarious hands. Freedom Squadron teams may be called upon to get such things away from the Bad Guys. |
| 13-14 | Extraction: There are times when an asset—an undercover operative, a scientist captured and forced to work for VENOM, etc.—needs to be pulled out of a bad situation. |
| 15-16 | Capture: In the ongoing war between Freedom Squadron and VENOM, capturing key enemy personnel is a vital part of the strategy. Teams might be sent to grab an important enemy asset when the opportunity presents itself. |
| 17-18 | Investigation: Interpol and law enforcement organizations the world over often ask Freedom Squadron to employ its top agents and investigators to help against the multinational criminal cartels that aid VENOM. There are crimes that lead to larger, more dangerous conspiracies that teams are asked to look into. |
| 19-20 | Multiple Goals: Many missions have multiple objectives. Roll (or select) two different results to combine into one mission. If this result is rolled again, simply roll/add a third result, and so on. |

Note that there are no combat-only missions listed on the Mission Table. Combat missions are handled either with the **Quick Combat Rules** (available as a free download from Pinnacle's web site) or via normal *Savage Worlds* combat rules. They are often the result of other missions, successful or not.

Once the basics of the mission are figured out, the GM decides four qualities about the operation: the **Complexity**, the **Difficulty**, the **Risks**, and the **Enemy Leadership**. The Complexity of an operation determines how many Challenges a team will face in each of the three rounds it must complete for the mission. The Difficulty indicates how many successes the team must achieve over the course of the sequence in order to fulfill the objectives. The Risks clearly outline the consequences for failure. The Enemy Leadership indicates the overall competency and effectiveness of the VENOM Leader or other commander and his forces, which can come into play if certain cards are drawn during the operation.

Complexity

All **Plans & Operations** sequences are done in three rounds, so the number of Challenges per round has a dramatic impact. Low Complexity missions are best for smaller and less experienced groups, while Extreme Complexity missions require an experienced team with lots of members or lots of allies, Contacts and other support. The total number of Challenges are indicated at the end of each entry, which is important

to the **Difficulty** section that follows. Note that the Complexity of a mission also determines how much game session time it will take up.

- **Low Complexity** missions have a single Challenge in the first round, two Challenges in the second round, and three Challenges in the third round (1/2/3). They represent a small operation area with only a few elements in play. A team of at least three is needed for total success; for a smaller group, the GM may need to assign a non-player ally to assist. Low Complexity missions have a total of **6 Challenges**.
- **Medium Complexity** missions require two Challenges to be completed in the first round, three Challenges in the second round, and four Challenges in the final round (2/3/4). These missions represent a larger op zone with a few more elements involved. Teams smaller than four will absolutely need some outside assistance. Medium Complexity Missions have a total of **9 Challenges**.
- **High Complexity** missions have three Challenges in the first round, four in the second, and five in the last one (3/4/5). A minimum of five team members are needed, and more would be better for a mission like this. There are a lot of things going on, obviously, with multiple operation sites and complicated interactions between elements. High Complexity Missions have a total of **12 Challenges**.
- **Extreme Complexity** missions require the largest teams with the most capabilities, and solid outside assistance (Contacts, allies, and other help) may



spell the difference between success and failure. These operations have four Challenges in the first round, five in the second, and six Challenges in the final round (4/5/6). Extreme Complexity—often global in nature, dealing with multiple factions and operational sites—missions have a total of **15 Challenges**.

Difficulty

Complexity is one measure of how hard a mission is to accomplish; Difficulty is an indication of just how many pieces of the greater puzzle must be put together for ultimate success. The number of successes required for the operation is based on the level of Difficulty, which applies a multiplier to the total Challenges determined by the Complexity.

- **Low Difficulty** missions only require **1 success** per Challenge to complete. They represent fairly straightforward operations with a narrow range of targeted goals.
- **Medium Difficulty** missions require **2 successes** per Challenge to complete. Ops like these have quite a few moving parts and interconnected goals.

- **High Difficulty** missions require **3 successes** per Challenge to complete. Only the most skilled (and lucky) teams can pull together the assets and talent to bring off such an elaborate operation.

It's a good idea to have a set of tokens (like poker chips or plastic beads) to track the number of successes and raises achieved with each Challenge. These are commonly referred to as success tokens in these rules.

Risks

Just as there are rewards for success, there are consequences to failure. A lot of this is narrative, of course—elements of the story are affected dramatically for or against the heroes, depending on how the mission goes. However, using the **Plans & Operations** system also allows for game mechanic effects that abstractly represent advantages to the enemy or complications for the heroes when a plan goes badly.

- **Low Risk** missions thankfully have fairly minimal consequences. The Game Master gains one additional GM Benny, and if the heroes end up in a confrontation, it's probably only against a handful of Extras.

Quick Look Table for Mission Successes

As a matter of convenience, here's a table that compares the Complexity and Difficulty of a mission to tell the GM and players just how many success tokens are needed to complete an operation:

	Low Comp.	Med. Comp.	High Comp.	Extreme Comp.
Low Diff.	6	9	12	15
Med. Diff.	12	18	24	30
High Diff.	18	27	36	45

- **Medium Risk** missions represent a significant increase in risk. The Game Master gains a number of additional Bennies equal to half the players involved (round down). A confrontation likely involves one or more Wild Cards, including one of significant capabilities (a Lieutenant).
- **High Risk** missions carry the worst consequences for failure. The Game Master gains a bonus GM Benny for every player involved. A confrontation here is against overwhelming forces, including at least one very powerful Wild Card (a Boss) along with a handful of Lieutenants. On the first round of such a combat, the GM draws an additional Initiative card for each villain or group.

Note that the Risk factors come into play under two conditions. First, if the team fails to complete a specific Challenge, the GM gains the Risk benefits. Under these circumstances, the team may still be able to complete the total operation successfully (by achieving the total

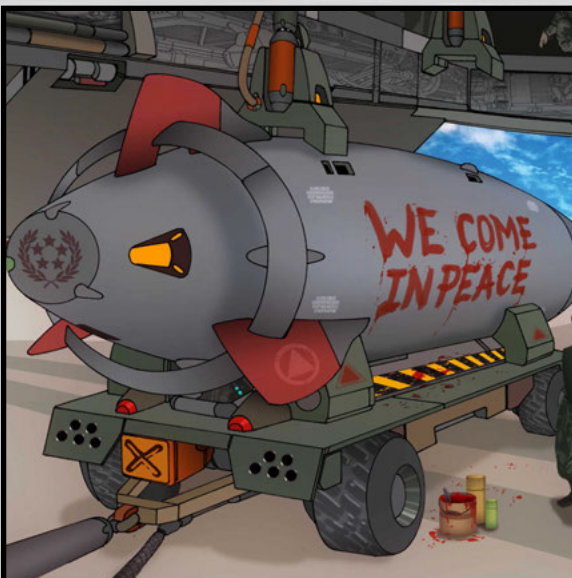
number of success tokens required), but still invoke the Risk benefits for the Game Master by failing a single Challenge.

The other condition that triggers the Risk element is not achieving the minimum success tokens required for the mission.

Enemy Leadership

Under certain circumstances, the enemy leader (and a combination of opposition forces, security assets, environmental conditions, and other influences) may become actively engaged against the team. This is usually the result of certain cards being drawn during the **Run the Operation** phase (*SNAFU* and *Disaster!*). In this circumstance, the team is rolling against the established Opposition Die, instead of against the usual Target Number of 4.

- **Moderately Competent Enemy Leadership** means the team is up against well-trained forces and decent security measures under a fairly effective leader. The Opposition Die is a d8 with *no* Wild Die.
- **Highly Competent Enemy Leadership** means the team faces high quality tactical forces and excellent security measures under a top-notch leader. They're possibly facing a well-known VENOM lieutenant. The Opposition Die is a d10 with a Wild Die.
- **Elite Enemy Leadership** means the team is facing world-class opposition forces and bleeding edge security measures under one of VENOM's most capable and respected leaders. Only experienced Code Name members of Freedom



Squadron are considered for such challenging missions. The Opposition Die is a d12 with a Wild Die.

- In some rare cases, the Game Master may decide a mission is particularly difficult, granting a +2 to Opposition Die and a d10 Wild Die (equal to having the Master Edge). Such missions should only be attempted by the best Freedom Squad has to offer.

PHASE II: INITIAL PLAN



Once the **Mission Parameters** are established, the group moves on to this phase. The Game Master either selects or (much more commonly, and highly recommended) randomly generates the first Challenge or Challenges that define the opening part of the mission. This system uses the **Plans & Operations Deck** (*download the free print-and-play PDF, or you can purchase the deck from Evil Beagle Games or from various retailers*) to define both the nature of the Challenge and its potential difficulty. There are four types of Challenges in play:

- **Tactical Challenges** require military, physical, and combat skills to overcome. This might mean taking out a guard, shooting a security drone, climbing a wall, or otherwise dealing with a potential threat to the mission by aggressive or physical means. This rarely means all-out combat, though; if that happens, the mission is probably blown, or at least now requires combat play to resolve. The skills required to solve a Tactical Challenge are: Athletics, Battle, Boating, Demolitions, Driving, Fighting, Notice, Piloting, Riding, Shooting, Survival, or Tracking.

- **Interaction Challenges** are best for characters with skills oriented towards dealing with people and positive Charisma values. They may have to charm their way past receptionists, intimidate underworld contacts, interrogate captured enemies, trick a neutral party into giving up a piece of information, etc.. The skills required to solve an Interaction Challenge are: Intimidation, Investigation, Performance, Persuasion, Streetwise, or Taunt.

- **Covert Challenges** call upon the more sneaky and undercover oriented characters to take the lead. This is also where certain technical skills can shine as hackers and those who can defeat electronic security step in. The skills required to solve a Covert Challenge are: Computers, Electronics, Investigation, Notice, Stealth, Streetwise, Thievery, or Tradecraft.

- **Technical Challenges** call upon a character's various areas of knowledge and study. These are the Challenges that call deeply upon what a character knows and is expert in outside of more applied skills. It's also where those of psionic or mystical nature can really shine with their more esoteric knowledge. The skills required to solve a Technical Challenge are: Academics, Computers, Electronics, Healing, Investigation, Logistics, Psionics, Repair, Science, or Spellcasting.

The particular difficulty of a specific Challenge is indicated on the card. The following explanations further clarify things.



Disaster!

Something has gone very, very wrong. Not only is the enemy leadership aware of the actions of the heroes, but extra effort and resources are thrown into stopping them at all costs. All rolls made on this Challenge are against the Enemy Leadership die, and suffer a -4 to boot! Disasters have a specific consequence for failure, based on what kind of Challenge is being faced.

- For **Tactical Challenges**, failure means everyone on the team dealing with that Challenge suffers 1d3 wounds. These wounds affect the heroes through the rest of the Plans & Operations part of the session. A hero can attempt to heal wounds (their own or another's, as per normal rules), but this takes up their turn on the following round of P&O Challenges (meaning they cannot contribute to solving any Challenges on that round). Such healing attempts can be done before Challenges are attempted, meaning wound penalties can be lessened or eliminated. Alternately, any wounded heroes can be medevaced to a base before the start of the next round of Challenges. If this happens, they are fully healed, *but* they are completely out of that round and cannot help.
- For **Interaction Challenges**, failure means everyone involved in that Challenge either loses an established Contact (each affected player chooses, and has to explain how and why this happens) or that hero is considered "Burned." A Burned character suffers -2 to all future Interaction challenges (in or out of Plans & Operations play; in the latter case, the penalty applies whenever a skill listed under Interaction Challenges is used) until the end of the *following* session. For example, a Burned spy will suffer a -2 to all Persuasion, Streetwise, and similar skills until the end of the next session, indicating they are not in good overall favor because of how badly things went and what folks may believe about them. See **Mission Rewards** for what Contacts are and how they work.
- For **Covert Challenges**, failure means everyone involved in that Challenge is "On the Run." This means everyone gains either the Enemy (Minor) or Wanted (Minor) Hindrances (with no added benefit). Generally, everyone involved in that Disaster! should take the same thing, and work out the story of what happened.

- For **Technical Challenges**, failure means everyone working on that Challenge suffers a “Setback.” Setbacks cause a -2 to all future Technical Challenges (in or out of Plans & Operations play; in the latter case, the penalty applies whenever a skill listed under Technical Challenges is used) until the end of the *following* session. For example, a hacker who suffers a Setback deals with a -2 penalty to all Computers, Electronics, and other related skills until they can recover at the end of the next session.

SNAFU

A significant problem dramatically hinders the heroes facing this Challenge. Someone might have obtained the wrong codes; an unseen security measure gets tripped; a bitter ex-spouse happens to be working at the place the team is trying to infiltrate; and so on. All rolls made on this Challenge are against the Enemy Leadership die. The penalty for failure is the same as for Disaster! Challenges, except *only* the hero who takes lead (the Team Lead) on the Challenge suffers the penalties.

Major Issue

A relatively big problem unexpectedly crops up, causing any roll made by the team dealing with this Challenge to be made at -4. They might encounter stronger security than anticipated, or they've been spotted by someone who thinks he knows them and is trying to figure out how. If the roll is failed, the Team Lead suffers the same penalties as listed under Disaster!

Interference

Something delays the heroes—a guard passing by at the wrong moment, a technical glitch, an overly-talkative stranger—causing them to suffer a -2 to any roll they make.

Situation Normal

All is proceeding according to plan. There are no penalties, nor are their bonuses.

Bit of Luck

Something happens to give the hero and their team a moment of good fortune or extra assistance. They gain a +2 on their rolls for this Challenge, as does anyone backing them up.

Jackpot!

The team discovers something of significant value, or gains some extraordinary aid from an unexpected source. Everyone gains a +2 on their rolls for this Challenge, and they also each gain a new Contact (of the type relevant to the Challenge) at d8 or a new Focus relevant to the Challenge type.

After the Game Master lays out what the first Challenges are, this is where the players work out who will do what during the mission run. The **Initial Plan** should function as a narrative exchange between the Game Master and the players. While the GM establishes the basics of the scene, he should be open to player creativity and input here. For example, say the team is running an operation to gather key data from a corporate building that's a front for enemy forces. The player whose character is a strong “face” type might offer that there is an administrative assistant she can persuade to set up a meeting with the CEO, thus handling an initial Interaction Challenge. The intrusion expert character's player suggests there's a way to use the sewers to get into the basement of the building, handling a Covert Challenge at the start.

The Game Master should freely go with this, allowing the players to help them set up the details of the mission. In fact, one of the most entertaining ways to handle

Team Leaders

Always a potential sticky wicket for gaming groups, having a team leader can either enhance a group's enjoyment of a military-style campaign or make things difficult for most of the players. As a general rule, if the players respond well to having one of them act as a team leader, directing things like the Initial Plan phase to some extent, it's fine to let that go as it will. There are, in fact, a number of very cool Edges and special abilities that leader-type characters can have which greatly enhance the Plans & Operations game play (more on that later in this section).

If, however, a player uses this role to diminish the initiative and creativity of the other players, it's generally up to the Game Master to reign that in a bit. *Freedom Squadron* is a setting where strong individuals team up in a unique military force to run special operations missions against a powerful, over-the-top set of foes. It's meant to be less realistic and more action-movie driven (with, perhaps, a strong dose of comic book influences thrown in).

Players who take the role of team leader should be encouraged to guide things towards a collective effort, not command or cajole the other players into making their characters follow orders. The "that's an order, soldier!" scene *can* be a fun, dramatic moment at the right time; it should never become the standard phrase coming out of the team leader's mouth.

In other words, a good team leader will make the Initial Plan and other aspects of this system—and the entire campaign, for that matter—run smoothly and entertainingly for the whole group with their effective leadership and inspiration. They won't be demanding everyone do things her way, or else the group's got the wrong team leader.

this phase is to imagine a sequence similar to that of various scenes (like the Baghdad operation) in the *A-Team* movie, or many of the planning/execution scenes from the television show *Leverage*. The players imagine their characters around a map or looking at a series of screens, each going over their part of the plan; they also imagine a "flash-forward" to the actual operation, where their characters are engaged in the first part of the mission.

Once these scenes start coming together, segue into **Phase III: Run the Operation**.

PHASE III: RUN THE OPERATIONS



In many ways, this is the most straightforward part of the process; the previous phases deal a lot with roleplay, storytelling, and narrative exchanges between the GM and the players, which is necessarily involved and potentially complex. At this phase, everyone gets down to the basics of establishing tasks, picking skills, and rolling dice.

However, don't think this in any way diminishes the roleplay and player-driven narrative aspects of the experience. Quite the opposite, in fact, as *now* every player has a story to tell as you go forward.

The following steps in this phase will help structure things as you start figuring out how a Plans & Operations session works:

Determine Who Does What

This is where the players figures out which Challenge should be handled by which heroes. If more than one character joins in against a single Challenge, determine who is taking the lead; that

character is the **Team Lead** for that Challenge, while all other heroes involved are providing a **Cooperative Roll** against that Challenge to enhance the lead hero's efforts. Characters who aren't Team Leads are providing **Support** for that challenge.

A very important thing to remember—if your character is the Team Lead on a Challenge, you *must* use one of the listed skills to resolve that Challenge. If your character is Support for a Challenge, however, you may use **any skill you wish** as a cooperative roll; all that is required is a good narrative reason for how that skill was used to support the primary Challenge roll.

It's important to remember that *all* Challenges have to be handled (succeed or fail) on a given round before the team can move on to the next round. Considering there are consequences to failed Challenges—not to mention failing the mission entirely—it's advisable that *someone* tackle each Challenge given. This is why a well-rounded team is vital.

The order in which Challenges are handled in a given round is entirely up to the players. Players who are Support (rolling cooperative rolls to support a primary skill roll) should coordinate with the player they're supporting to get everything in order. Each player may only act once on a round; there are no



Problem & Puzzle Solving vs Narrative & Roleplay

The **Plans & Operations** rules do a lot of things all at once, which is very much by design. They encourage a great deal of problem solving and puzzling out solutions, which is very stimulating for players who like that kind of thing in their games. At the same time, they require the players each come up with narrative descriptions of what they are doing, often adding major story elements to the experience that the Game Master didn't even think about. This is also by design; we wanted to add a new level of player-driven narrative to the *Savage Worlds* experience, and this is the tool for it.

One thing GMs can do to encourage more roleplay and narrative choices during this part of the game is to award bonus Bennies whenever a player chooses a suboptimal skill to tackle a Challenge (either as Team Lead or Support). For example, the sniper with the d12 Shooting maximizes his mechanical value by using Shooting in the Support role every time (or Shooting while Team Lead on a Tactical Challenge). However, if the player of the sniper decides the story makes more sense for him to use his d6 Streetwise in support of, say, an Interaction Challenge (because he had a cool story to tell about finding some old friends in the neighborhood where the operation is taking place), this choice should absolutely be worthy of a Benny. Similarly, if players elect to use different skills each time they address the same category of Challenges (for example, a high-tech and science character who keeps choosing different related skills, instead of just using her Computers d10 each time) should also be rewarded a bonus Benny.

Don't punish the tactical and puzzle solving players, though; when they step up with a good plan that maximizes the success of the team, that should *also* be worthy of a bonus Benny.

multiple actions in this system. There are special abilities that override that, but otherwise the restriction is firm.

Note that most groups will take the approach of mixing and matching narrative and problem-solving in a way that is more comfortable for them. Very often, the assignments of Team Leads and Support happen first, and then each team comes up with the narrative of what they are doing to meet the Challenge only after roles are worked out. This is perfectly fine.

Narrate a Scene, Finalize the Skills

When it comes time for a hero to act, the player narrates a scene or sequence that goes along with their part in the mission. If others are working with them (either through Support rolls or via special abilities and Edges), those players narrate their part of aiding Team Lead's efforts.

In this process, the Game Master consults with the players to determine if the appropriate skills are being used for the Challenge, and if what the players are narrating fits with the skills they are wishing to use. This should *absolutely* be a narrative exchange involving the GM and the players, allowing for some shared creativity in making the scene interesting and exciting. Any complications suggested by Challenge cards should be worked into the narrative, as well, making things more interesting and exciting.

Make the Roll, Narrate the Results

This is where the dice meet the table. Each player in a Support roll first rolls their skill checks; remember that any bonuses or penalties indicated on the Plans & Operations Card apply to *all* rolls for that Challenge, whether the character is in Support or is the Team Lead. For

Using Hindrances in Plans & Operations

One of the potential benefits of this system is its use as a catalyst for invoking the Hindrances of the heroes in a meaningful, yet easy-to-apply, way. As the Game Master, you're greatly encouraged to look through the Hindrances of your group's characters, looking for those you can bring to bear during the **Run the Operation** part of the process.

While you certainly should make a point of integrating the specifics of the Hindrance into the narrative of the mission, there's also a direct mechanical way to impose its effects. If it's a Minor Hindrance, use it to add a specific, one-time penalty of -2 to a single Trait roll, while a Major Hindrance should impose a -4 to a roll. Don't use more than one Hindrance against a hero for any single Trait roll, however, as that gets more than a bit excessive and punitive.

Of course, players may decide to invoke their Hindrances themselves, which is perfectly good storytelling!

Either way, when a Minor Hindrance is invoked, reward the player it affected a bonus Benny, but only **after** the Challenge is completely resolved. If a Major Hindrance is invoked, the player should be reward two bonus Bennies (again, after the Challenge is resolved).

every success and raise (as per the *Savage Worlds Cooperative Rolls* rules) the Support character achieves, the Team Lead gains a +1 to their roll to solve the Challenge. Support rolls can provide no more than a total of +4 to aid a Team Lead.

After all cooperative roll bonuses and other modifiers are figured out, the Team Lead makes a single final skill roll to

solve the Challenge. Consult the following for results:

- **Total of 1 or Less:** The Enemy Leadership becomes aware that something is wrong, and the very next Challenge tackled is against the Enemy Leadership die (no matter what the conditions of the card indicate). No success tokens are awarded and this Challenge is failed (thus granting the GM the Risk benefits).
- **Failure:** The team gains no success tokens towards the mission outcome, and this Challenge is failed (thus granting the GM the Risk benefits).
- **Success:** The team gains one success token towards the mission outcome.
- **Raise:** For each raise, the hero gains an additional success token towards the mission outcome. If *three* or more success tokens are achieved on a single Challenge, the team gets to redraw one Challenge card on the following round. Multiple iterations of this result *do* stack.

Once the success or failure of a Challenge is determined, the involved players should be allowed to complete the narrative of the process. Each player should be allowed to describe what happens as their part of the story of that encounter or operation. After that, move on to the next Challenge in the round and repeat the process with those heroes.

At the end of the last Challenge of the round, figure out how many free redraws will be allowed on the following round (remember, for each Challenge where three or more success tokens are achieved, the team gets to remove and replace one Challenge card on the next round). Note that this is not necessary to track during the third and final round.

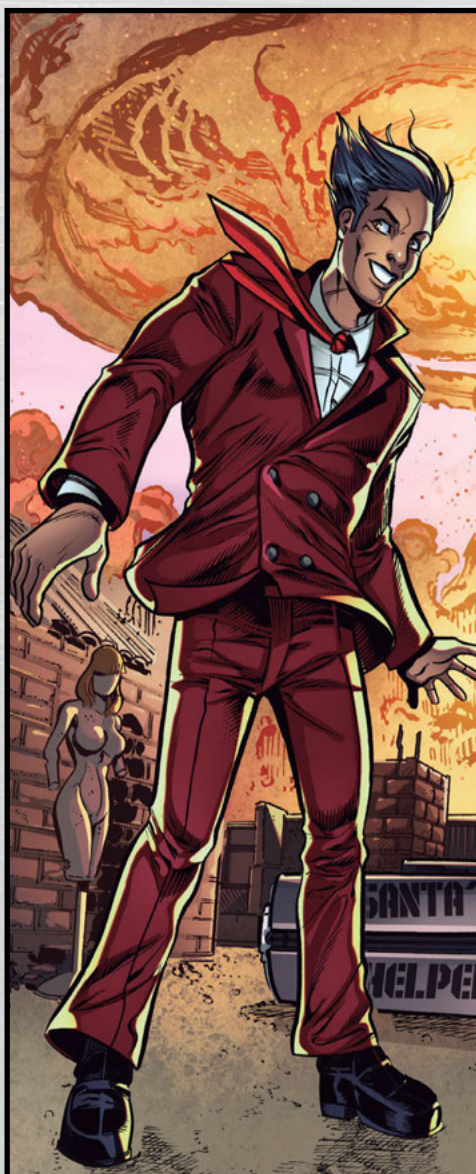
The second round of Challenges consists of one more Challenge Card than the first round, drawn and presented at random (even if the GM selected specific Plans & Operations cards for the first round). This represents the unexpected twists and turns of a mission underway. The third and final round consists of *two more cards* than the first round had.

Once the three rounds of Plans & Operations play are concluded, it's time for the finale.

Duplicate P&O Abilities

It's entirely possible to have more than one member of a mission team with the same Edge or Special Ability that directly affects Plans & Operations play. When this happens, use the following guidelines to adjudicate how to handle it so that things aren't too over-balanced in the heroes' favor:

- **Operational Planning:** Only one hero may use the "replace a Challenge Card" part of this Edge on a given round of P&O play. Multiple folks with this Edge may use their capacity to make a free Battle roll as a Cooperative Roll each round.
- **Air Support:** Multiple characters may use this Special Ability each round, no restrictions.
- **Analysis:** Multiple characters may use this Special Ability each round, no restrictions.
- **Sensory Overwatch:** Only one hero may use this ability on a given round of P&O play.
- **Tactical Communication:** Only one hero may use the Plans & Operations portion of this Special Ability per round.
- **Tactical Coordination:** Only one hero may use this ability before P&O play begins.
- **Tactical Logistics:** Only one hero may use the "replace a Challenge Card" part of this Edge on a given round of P&O play.



PHASE IV: DETERMINE THE OUTCOME

At the end of the three rounds, compare the number of success tokens achieved by the heroes to the following:

- **Zero Tokens:** If the team somehow experiences such a disaster (this is

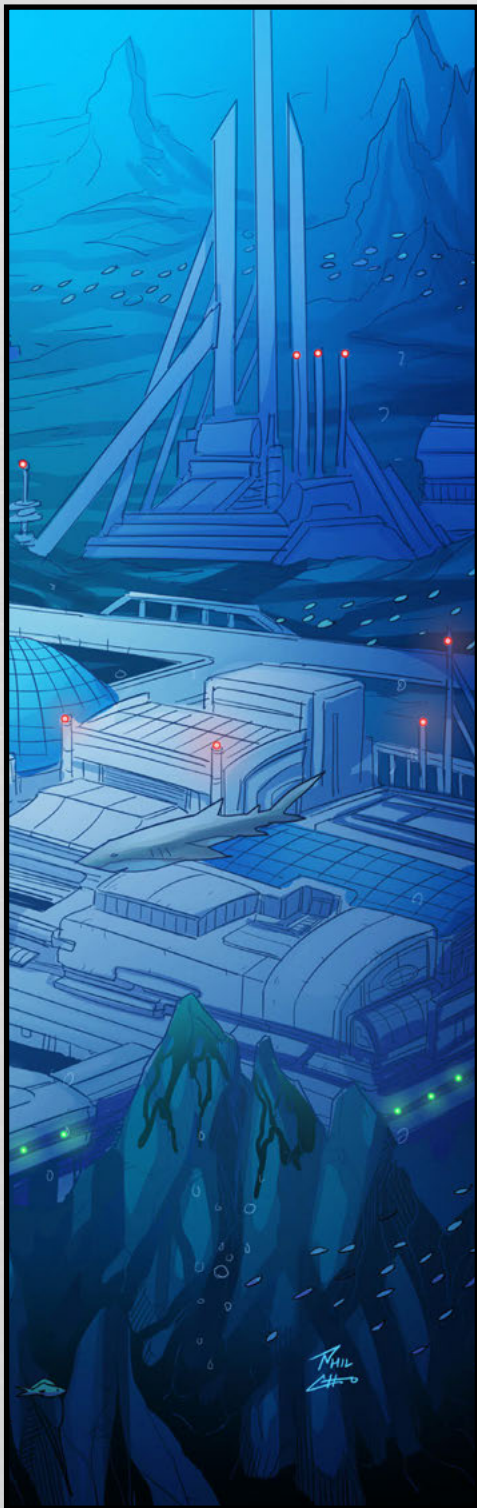


virtually impossible, by the way, and this is only presented here because it's *technically* possible), the worst possible result should apply. Most or all of them have been captured, Freedom Squadron is publicly embarrassed, or some other dramatic circumstance means the team will need to fight twice as hard to come back from this catastrophe. Also apply the Failure results that follow.

- **Failure:** If the team doesn't achieve the necessary tokens to complete the mission successfully, the Game Master gains the **Risks** result described under the **Establish Mission Parameters** section. The team is likely in a retreating fight for their lives as VENOM forces close in for the kill or capture. Alternately, the team might *be* captured, and the next part involves their escape. The results should fit the mission, of course.
- **Success:** If the team achieves the required number of tokens, they accomplish the mission and receive the appropriate **Mission Rewards**.
- **Success +5:** If the team gains at least five more tokens than needed, each member gains an additional Benny on top of the **Mission Rewards**.
- **Success +10:** If the team gains at least ten or more tokens than needed, each member gains one **Special Mission Reward**. This is only possible for **Medium** or **High Difficulty** missions.

Mission Rewards

The **Mission Rewards** include the story-specific goals of the mission—largely determined by the Game Master or through narrative exchange between him and the players—and more concrete



game-affecting rewards. These rewards abstractly represent advantages gained by the Freedom Squadron team members for succeeding in the operation.

The **Mission Rewards** are defined by the **Difficulty** of the mission, as the following table indicates:

Adventure Cards

This system assumes the use of Adventure Cards (which are available from **Pinnacle Entertainment Group**). These are very cool narrative/mechanic elements that empower the players to add fun narrative bits and abilities to act at key moments in the session. With Adventure Cards in play, the GM can afford to make the opposition even stronger, as these cards act as momentary “force multipliers” for the heroes in many cases. Special *Freedom Squadron* Adventure Cards are planned as part of the product line.

If you, as the Game Master, do not wish to use Adventure Cards, simply replace any instance where they are awarded with a bonus Benny (or some other reward you feel is appropriate). If you are using Adventure Cards, note that every reference to a **bonus** card means the player receives an extra draw *and* she’s allowed to use an additional card during the game session.

When playing Adventure Cards during a **Plans & Operations** run, such a card counts for an automatic *two success tokens* for that Challenge! The card must be somehow appropriate, though creative interpretations should certainly be allowed. In convention and home games, we’ve discovered players like using the non-combat Adventure Cards during P&O play, saving the combat ones for the inevitable Boss Fights that follow.

MISSION REWARDS TABLE

Difficulty Mission Rewards

Low The objective grants some useful tidbits of information, low-level data, a minor human asset, or a somewhat-important piece of technology. This usually points the way to an objective of greater importance. There may be more questions than answers that come from what's discovered, but at least now the Freedom Squadron folks have a better idea where to look for the next piece of the puzzle. Everyone on the team gains a bonus Benny the next time they deal with foes or tasks that directly relate to what's discovered or achieved. If this was a Rescue or Emergency Relief mission, each team member simply gains a bonus Benny at the start of the next session.

Medium The objective grants significantly useful information or data; a human asset of compelling importance, or technology that demands great attention. Very likely, a location or name of great relevance comes from the results of the mission. Every member of the team gains a bonus Benny and a bonus Action Card on each round of combat; both of these rewards are granted the next time the team deals directly with elements related to the mission (such as the likely Boss Fight that often follows a P&O session). If this was a Rescue or Emergency Relief mission, each team member simply gains a bonus Benny at the start of the next session.

High The objective provides a vital breakthrough for the team, and for Freedom Squadron. Information of a critical nature; an asset of astonishing value; or technology that changes the balance of power is attained. After this mission, the next move represents a critical juncture and an impending conflict of world-shaking implications. The team members each receive a bonus Benny, a bonus Action Card each round of combat, *and* a bonus Adventure Card. Again, all of these bonuses are triggered the next time the team is dealing with the specific elements that relate to the mission that granted them. If this was a Rescue or Emergency Relief mission, each team member simply gains a bonus Benny and a bonus Adventure Card at the start of the next session.

Special Mission Rewards

There are two ways in which heroes may achieve **Special Mission Rewards**. The **Jackpot!** Plans & Operations card awards specific Special Mission Rewards, listed on the card (a relevant Contact at d8, or a relevant Focus). As well, when a team manages to achieve **ten more success tokens** than was required for the mission, each member receives their choice of a Special Mission Reward. Game Masters may always choose to award Special Mission Rewards as they feel is appropriate during the game, in or out of Plans & Operations play.

The three types of Special Mission Rewards are **Contacts**, **Focuses**, and **Gear Points**.

Contacts

A Contact is a specific person the hero has encountered over the course of their efforts, someone they've developed a relationship with of some kind. This may be strictly professional, friendly, or even romantic—it's entirely up to the player and the GM to work out the details as they see fit. This Contact should have a name and at least a one-sentence description for when they are brought into the story for narrative purposes later.

Contacts have a specific mechanical role within game play, as well. Each Contact is designated as one of the four Challenge types—**Tactical, Interaction, Covert, or Technical**. This means they have a set of skills and knowledge that makes them useful for dealing with that particular category of situations and tasks. For Jackpot! cards, the designation is based on the Challenge (a Technical Jackpot! means any selected Contacts are Technical). For “+10” rewards, the players may choose what category a Contact is.

Contacts also have a die type assigned to them. Those gained from Jackpot! cards are automatically rated at d8. Those obtained as a Special Mission Reward after the mission are rolled for:

d8	Die Type
1-4	d8
5-7	d10
8	d12

Contacts can be brought into Plans & Operations play to assist with a **single Challenge**. They can only ever be used as Support (never Team Lead). They roll their die type (no Wild Die) as a cooperative roll, just like any other Support character. Contacts can only be used on Challenges that match their type (Interaction Contacts for Interaction Challenges, Covert Contacts for Covert Challenges, and so on).

Outside of P&O play, players can call on a given Contact once per scene (as designated by the Game Master) to provide assistance, information, etc.. Players should be allowed to freely roleplay and provide narrative interactions with their Contacts as fits the game and situations.

***Example:** During a mission, Bullrush rescues the family of an FDA inspector who got caught up in a VENOM scheme to put psychoactive mind-control drugs into breakfast cereal. The team does an exceptional job finishing the overall operation, gaining +12 success tokens. Ed decides his Special Mission Reward will be turning Robert Forrester (the FDA official) into an Interaction Contact. He rolls a 7 on a d8, making Forrester an Interaction Contact (d10), who is very useful at navigating government bureaucracies—potentially very helpful in future missions!*

Focuses

Introduced in the **Freedom Squadron Commando’s Manual**, Focuses are specific +1 bonuses applied to an existing skill, representing a special application of that skill for the hero. For example, a hero might have the Science skill at d6, and they can take a Focus: Nuclear Physics, meaning they roll d6+1 whenever dealing with a nuclear physics issue. Another character might have Focus: Throwing, applied to their Athletics skill whenever they are throwing something.

When awarded via a Jackpot! Challenge, a player choosing this Special Mission Reward must choose a Focus attached to a skill of that type. For example, if it’s a Technical Jackpot!, the player must choose a focus for one of the listed skills (Academics, Computers, Electronics, Healing, Investigation, etc.). If the award is because the whole team achieved the +10 success tokens result, a player may choose *any* Focus as a Special Mission Reward.

Note that, in the **Freedom Squadron Commando’s Manual**, players are not normally allowed to take a Focus for a combat skill. This rule is lifted when

the Focus comes as a Special Mission Reward. As such, a player could take a focus for Shooting with assault rifles (Focus: Assault Rifles). This means they get a +1 whenever firing that kind of weapon.

Gear Points

This Special Mission Reward is *only* available when the team achieves the +10 success tokens level (or as a special award granted by the Game Master for other reasons). If a player elects to choose this reward, they get to add 3 Gear Points to their normal allotment (determined by how many experience points their hero has). These Gear Points may be used to increase how much Gear the hero carries, or they can be used for customization of their Gear. This may be done even for characters who have not yet reached Seasoned Rank (which is normally when Commandos are allowed to customize).

What Comes Next?

While most Game Masters will have an idea of where the team might go next, and what they might do, it's also entirely appropriate to let the players have significant input into this. They will be much more engaged and enjoy having their intellect and creativity impact the flow of the game, and the **Plans & Operations** system is meant to stimulate that process directly.

In other words, if the players take an idea that evolves out of the mission they just played out and want to run with it, you as the Game Master should reward that

as often as possible. It's fairly easy to re-skin a combat scenario you had planned already to fit the specifics of what they propose as their next move, for example. Sure, you may have planned for them to head to an abandoned oil platform, but it's not so difficult to take the same enemies and put them into the hidden arctic bunker the team decides is the next target.

It has been our experience that a typical four-hour game session works pretty well with a Plans & Operations mission in the first part, followed by what we call a "Boss Battle" immediately following the P&O stuff. In this way, there is an immediate payoff for the heroes as they wind up the mission by taking down the bad guys responsible for everything. In the case of a failed mission, this may instead be an exciting firefight while trying to escape vengeful enemy forces.



EXAMPLE OF PLAY

Because this is such a new concept for many, it may best be understood by example. We've put up video tutorials on the **Plans & Operations** rules (which can be found on www.evilbeaglegames.com), and here's a narrative example of play to help you grasp the basics.

In this example, we have **Sean** as the Game Master (SPF for short). **Carinn** is playing her field surgeon/scientist/demolitions expert, **SURGICAL STRIKE**. **Donavin** is playing his special agent/combat archaeologist, **CRAZY IVAN**. **David** is playing his digital warfare expert and gadgeteering technician, **GREMLIN**. **Ross** is playing his sailor and tactical expert, **SKIPPER**. **Michael** is playing his pilot and electronics engineer, **FALCON**, and we round out the team with **Len** playing his gunslinging combat expert, **LOBO**.

Before the game session, SPF worked out the **Mission Parameters** as follows:

- **Mission Complexity:** High (3/4/5)
- **Mission Difficulty:** Medium (24)
- **Mission Risk:** High (GM gains bonus Bennie for every player)
- **Enemy Leadership:** Highly Competent (d10/Wild)

SPF knows these are very capable Code Name characters all, so he made the Complexity such that they will really have to spread out near the end (and will certainly call in some Contacts they have from previous missions). He doesn't want to make it take all evening, so he sets the Difficulty to Medium; this means they need to average two success tokens per Challenge, and with 12 total Challenges, that means a minimum of 24 for basic success.

He sets the Risk to High to really motivate them, and he wants to challenge them pretty hard if any SNAFU or Disaster! cards come into play, so he goes for the Highly Competent rating for the Enemy Leadership.



As the players gather and settle in, he takes on the role of **BIG IRISH**, addressing them aboard the *FSS Lion of Ireland*, explaining they are underway and ready to drop the team wherever they decide they need to be to start their mission.

SPF (as BIG IRISH): *All right, folks, here's how it is. We've had a series of incidents involving vehicles and computer-aided machinery in major metropolitan areas all over the globe. Eight cabs in London all went berserk at once, and three people are dead and dozens injured. A*

speedboat in a race off the coast of Australia careened into three others; messy business. There's a train yard outside of Denver that's a total mess, and a crane in Dubai actively started attacking buildings. Something's definitely up, and it's your job to help figure out what it is, and put a stop to it.

With that, he lays out the first three Plans & Operations Challenge Cards. He's decided to go completely random with this (SPF usually does) and see what comes up and how the players wish to proceed with their initial investigations. The first three cards are:

- **Interaction, Minor Interference:** This means a -2 to all skill rolls in dealing with this Challenge.
- **Covert, Disaster!:** Right off the bat, a very bad draw. This one requires everyone involved to roll against the Enemy Leadership die (d10 with a Wild Die), *and* all hero skill rolls are at -4! Worse, if the Challenge attempt is failed, everyone involved suffers a consequence ("On the Run," in which each person on that team gains an Enemy or Wanted Hindrance).
- **Tactical, Situation Normal:** One for the action-oriented team members, with no penalty or bonus in play.

That Disaster! card makes things look pretty grim for the heroes. However, Ross' SKIPPER has some very useful leadership abilities that help in this situation. In this case, his **Operational Planning Edge** allows him to draw an additional Challenge Card each round; he can either use it to replace an existing Challenge, or add it to the array of Challenges (in order to give more chances for success tokens). He draws the extra card, which turns out

to be a **Technical, Major Issue** card; that means all rolls are made at -4 for that Challenge, and the Team Lead could suffer a "Setback" consequence if the Challenge is failed.

ROSS: *Well, that's not great, but I think it's far better than that Disaster.*

DAVID: *I'm feeling pretty good about being able to handle that Technical Challenge.*

CARINN (as SURGICAL STRIKE): *I can most certainly be of assistance to Gremlin if we are pursuing any kind of engineering investigation.*

ROSS: *Yeah, we're dumping the Covert and replacing it with this Technical. Everybody good with that? (the other players nod or say "yes").*

With that, they now have the three Challenges they are going to have to deal with. As indicated, David wants to assign his hero, GREMLIN, to take Team Lead on the Technical Challenge, and Carinn asks to have SURGICAL STRIKE assigned to back him up in Support. Ross decides that, with the penalty being so high, he's also going to Support GREMLIN with SKIPPER being directly present on that part of the mission.

MICHAEL: *That Tactical Challenge is pretty straightforward. I think FALCON can handle that one solo.*

ROSS: *Well, be that as it may, I have Tactical Communications as a special ability. That means I can make my Battle roll as a free Support action to help everyone, even those I am not in the same place with.*

MICHAEL: *So much the better!*

DONAVIN (as **CRAZY IVAN**): *I believe, comrades, that leaves me as best for handling the Interaction Challenge.*

LEN (as **LOBO**): *Well, partner, if y'all don't mind, I think I'll tag along and watch your back.*

DONAVIN (as **CRAZY IVAN**): *Da, friend Lobo, that would be most excellent. Where I am going, my back may, indeed, be prone to sudden hole-makings.*

At this point, SPF realizes Donavin already has a story idea in mind.

SPF: *So, Donavin, you want to have Crazy Ivan and Lobo go first, then?*

DONAVIN: *Yeah, this should be fun.*

LEN: *Uh oh. What did I get myself into?*

CARINN: *It's Donavin. It's always... interesting.*

DONAVIN: *Crazy Ivan recalls that Russian engineers were working on a way to subvert computer chips in military vehicles near the end of the war. Even though he's a very wanted man in Mother Russia, he still has many good contacts. So he will arrange to get himself smuggled into the country—with his good and dear friend, Lobo, of course—and make his way to a special lab he knows about outside of St. Petersburg. There, he will talk to some old friends and see what they know.*

SPF: *So, Persuasion, then?*

DONAVIN: *I was hoping to use my Investigation, which is at a d8+2.*

SPF: *OK, but that means you're probably asking some question and digging*

through records, just from a story-perspective.

DONAVIN (as **CRAZY IVAN**): *It comes down more to knowing who and what to ask, and following where that leads.*

SPF: *Fair enough. Len, what is Lobo doing to back up Crazy Ivan?*

LEN: *I'm figuring there's gonna come a point where we come across someone who isn't too friendly or cooperative. (He stands up, picks up a lip balm tube, and indicates the others should pretend it's a large caliber bullet; Lobo uses twin .50 caliber custom revolvers. As Lobo, he leans over to an imaginary person on the ground and drops the "bullet" onto where the forehead would be.) The next one's comin' a whole lot faster.*

The whole table loses it, and SPF gives Len two Bennies. One for the really great roleplaying, and another because he knows Len is invoking a sub-optimal skill. Len *could* have worked out some way that his Shooting (which is a d12!) could be used in Support; instead, he had a great story idea, but it relies on his Intimidation (which is only a d6).

At this point, you may note that we are seriously mixing-and-matching between working out the puzzle of who does what while also inserting roleplay and narration. This is the best, most organic approach to Plans & Operations.

SPF: *OK, Len, go ahead and roll your Intimidation.*

Len rolls, getting a 2 and a 5; he immediately spends one of the two awarded Bennies and declares Extra Effort (one of the Setting Rules in *Freedom Squadron*), allowing him to roll

a d6 and add it to his best result. He rolls a 6, rolls again and gets a 3; this gives him a total of 14. Even at the -2 for Interference, he gets a success and two raises, granting Donavin a +3 when he gets around to rolling the final skill roll to resolve the Challenge.

ROSS: *OK, remember that I can use my Battle skill to help everyone, so let me go ahead and roll that before Don goes.*

Skipper has a Battle skill of d8; Ross rolls and gets a total of 7. With the -2 for the Interference, he still provides a +1 to Donavin, for a total of +4 from cooperative rolls (which is the maximum cooperative rolls can provide as a bonus). Ross notes his roll for the other Challenges, since it will apply across the board. This means he will also grant Michael a +1 when Falcon tackles his Tactical Challenge. Unfortunately, at -4, this means he won't give any extra help to Gremlin and Surgical Strike when they tackle their Technical Challenge.

ROSS (as SKIPPER): *Looks like there's some interference wherever Gremlin and Surgical Strike put in; I can't reach 'em. Crazy Ivan, I've analyzed your initial plan, and I think you'll want to start with Building 43. Falcon, take a look at the flight plan adjustments I've suggested and see what you think.*

That is some excellent narrative and roleplay on Ross' part as he explains how he's using his Tactical Communications ability to help some of his teammates. Of course, since he's also supposed to be "on site," helping them, that means he'll need to come up with some added narrative to figure that out. But first, it's time for Donavin to both roll and narrate the outcome. Crazy Ivan's looking at a -2 from the card, but he gets +2

for Investigation checks (he has the Investigator Edge) and +4 from Skipper and Lobo's assistance. He rolls and gets (after exploding dice) a 15. He wants as many success tokens as possible, so he spends a Bennie for Extra Effort, rolls a 3, thus earning a total of four success tokens.

DONAVIN (as CRAZY IVAN): *Comrade Doctor Anayova, as you can see, I am keeping very interesting company these days. I suggest we cooperate with one another to analyze if someone stole your research and is using it against civilians...*

At this point, SPF nods and smiles; he hadn't planned on the plot revolving specifically around stolen Russian tech, but he really likes that and incorporates it into his thinking for later.

SPF: *OK, with those four success tokens, that means you'll get one free re-draw on the next round, in addition to Skipper's option to draw and replace (or keep). Who wants to go next?*

ROSS: *I've got an idea I'd like to explore, but it really depends on where Surgical Strike and Gremlin are going.*

DAVID: *I think at this point, I want to head into the China-occupied part of Japan. We went there once before on a previous mission, and I developed a Technical Contact named Yukio. I was thinking we could meet with her and see what she and her people can help us figure out.*

ROSS: *OK, cool. Michael, you mind if I suggest something for your Tactical Challenge?*

MICHAEL: *Go for it. I was hoping to use my Piloting, naturally...*

ROSS: Perfect, that's what I was thinking, too. So we kind of established that Skipper lost radio contact with Gremlin and Surgical Strike earlier, so my idea is that we know where they headed, so I am going to have Falcon airlift me into the area.

SPF: Yeah, that works.

MICHAEL (as FALCON): All right, Skipper, get ready for some serious close-to-ground drop action, 'cause Chinese radar ain't easy to fool. I'm rolling in practically on top of the deck.

Michael rolls his Piloting of d10+2, gaining another +1 from Ross' earlier Support roll via Tactical Communications. He gets a total of 4, which is a hideous roll for what he had going. Deciding he wants much better, he spends a Bennie for a reroll. This time, he gets a total of 13 and decides that's just fine.

ROSS: Skipper parawings in, landing on a hilltop overlooking the area where he's hoping to spot Gremlin and Surgical Strike operating.

CARINN (as SURGICAL STRIKE): We will be meeting with this Yukio and her underground hacker cell, comparing our data and findings with what they've uncovered (she looks at David to confirm this is cool with him, and he nods). I will be using my Science knowledge to analyze the data they uncover and provide my insight.

ROSS: Unfortunately, Chinese secret police (secretly working with VENOM agents) are closing in on where they are working; Skipper's going to use Shooting and play overwatch sniper to give them time to finish their work.

DAVID: Then Gremlin will use Computers to hack those Chinese secret police systems and dig out any data they have that might tie these machine freakouts to VENOM.

At this point, SPF is just grinning and nodding, as the players are telling a great story all on their own. Now it's time for rolls: Carinn rolls Surgical Strike's Science and gets a 9, which becomes a 5 with the prevailing -4 for the Major Issue part of the card. That's still one success to Support Gremlin. Ross rolls Skipper's Shooting and gets a 5; he considers spending a Bennie, but David waves him off, suggesting he save it for more critical needs later. David then rolls Yukio's



Technical Contact rating of d8 (as a Contact, she doesn't get a Wild Die); with an exploding die, she grants him a total +2 in Support.

David then rolls Gremlin's rather impressive d10+4; he gets a +2 straight up from special abilities, and he's developed a Mastery with hacking VENOM-connected systems (Mastery is a maximized level of Focus, as per the *Freedom Squadron Commando's Manual*). So even with the -4 from the card, Gremlin is at a net +3 thanks to Yukio and Surgical Strike, and he winds up getting a 9. That's two success tokens, and he decides to stand on that since the team is more or less ahead of the game, so to speak, with a grand total of **nine success tokens** out of the total 24 they will need by the end for minimum mission success.

SPF: *So I am going to go ahead and insert some GM-driven narrative here. The reason Skipper wasn't able to provide as much help is because he had to bug out as VENOM Shadow Fangs arrived in pretty large numbers.*

ROSS (as **SKIPPER**, pretending to be on a radio): *VENOM ninjas everywhere! Bug out! Bug out!*

MICHAEL (as **FALCON**): *Falcon inbound for hot dustoff!*

SPF: *Gremlin's got a hard drive and some initial data, which Surgical Strike has helped evaluate. It does look like that Russian tech was compromised and turned into something even nastier, but you'll need to do some more investigation and analysis to get a better handle on it. Fortunately for you, both Crazy Ivan's team and Falcon generated enough successes to give you two free redraws on*

the next round. This is an indication that you have a solid plan and good intel to work from. Time for the next round, where you have four Challenges to handle.

ROSS: *Or five, if we're feeling lucky and want to keep my bonus card instead of using it to replace anything.*

MICHAEL: *I wanna push for more success tokens so we can get that +10 level. I'd like some more Gear Points.*

DONAVIN: *And I have an idea for a new Contact I wish to develop.*

CARINN (as **SURGICAL STRIKE**): *You just wish to add that sexy Russian scientist to your list of international relationships, Crazy Ivan.*

DONAVIN (as **CRAZY IVAN**): *What can I say? I am a lover, not a fighter...*

LEN (as **LOBO**, looking at **GREMLIN**): *I'm seriously wondering how much trouble a case of friendly fire might get me in...*

From here, the team faces four Challenge cards, and then five as the last round. After that, Mission Rewards are assigned, and Special Mission Rewards if they manage to get that many success tokens. More than likely, a nasty boss fight involving insane machines and some VENOM mad scientist ensues.

PLANS & OPERATIONS: THE SHORT FORM

The above system is intended to be a significant part of a game session. There may be smaller missions that a Game Master wishes to incorporate into a scenario, but doesn't want them to take as much time. This streamlined (one might say "Fast! Furious! Fun!") version is intended to fulfill a similar role to that of the **Quick Combat Rules** created by Shane Hensley (available as a free download from Pinnacle Entertainment Group)—a way to quickly run an op and get on to the other parts of the session.

The process works like this:

- **Draw Challenge Cards:** Draw one Challenge Deck card for each player present. Note that the GM may need to decide on the Enemy Leadership if one of the Challenge Cards indicates that as a complication.
- **Select Challenges:** Each player selects one Challenge for her character to tackle. Only one character per challenge; no teaming up for Cooperative Rolls (though certain special abilities may still allow this, and Contacts can still be called in).
- **Select a Skill, Roll to Resolve:** Each player chooses a skill to resolve the indicated Challenge. The skill must be related to the Challenge in some way, using one of the skills listed on the card. In some desperate cases, the GM *might* let a player come up with a clever way to leverage a non-listed skill (especially if the team just doesn't have the right mix to meet the particular spread of challenges, like might happen in a five-player game where four Covert Challenges are drawn).

- **Determine the Outcome:** Consult the list below to determine the outcome for each character.

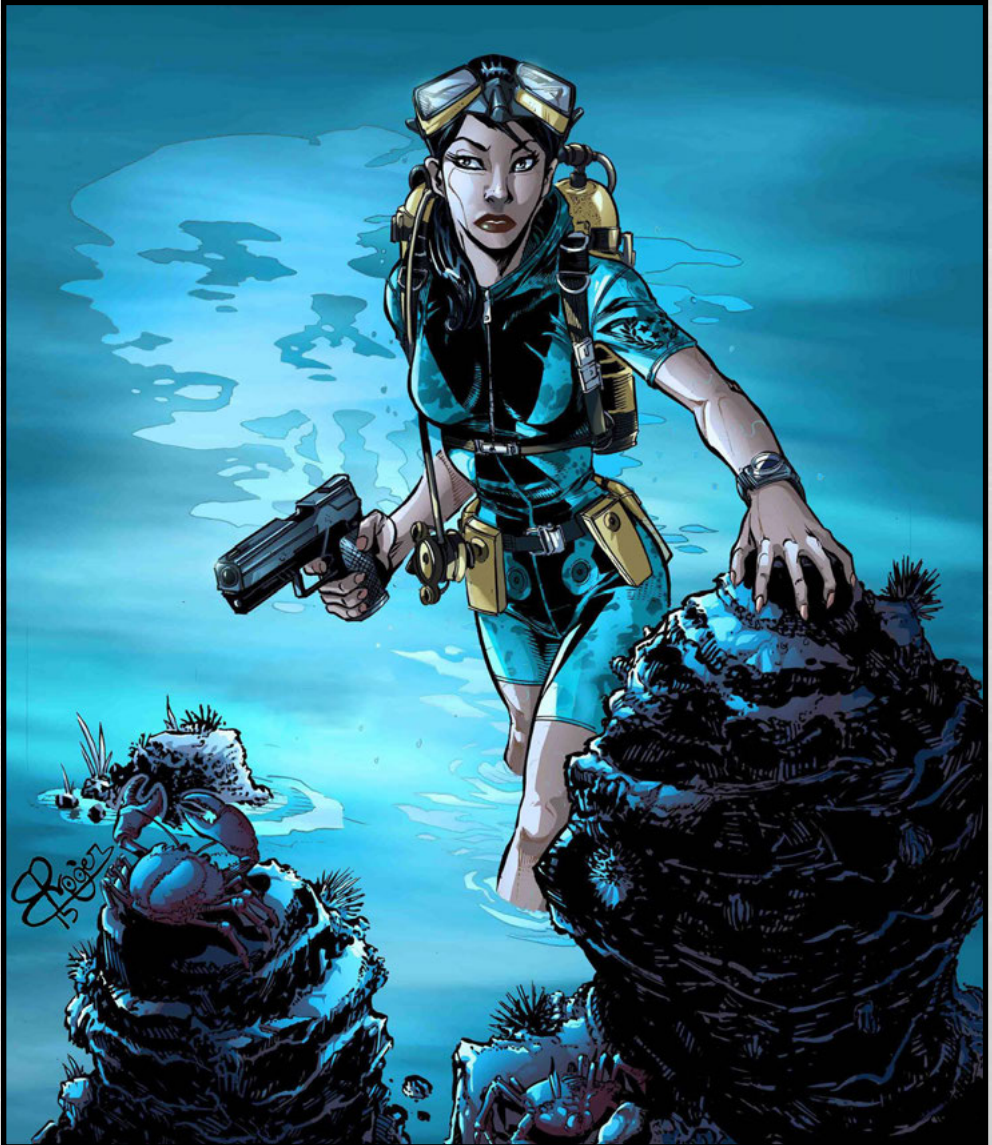
The outcomes for this system are:

- **Critical Failure:** The opposition gains significant advantage and advance warning of the team's efforts and goals. This means the GM gains an extra Benny per player at the table for use during the rest of the session.
- **Failure:** The hero fails in his part of the mission, and the Game Master gains one Benny.
- **Success:** The hero achieves his part of the mission's goals; everyone on the team gains an additional Action card each round during the next combat scene that deals with the opposition related to the mission.
- **Raise:** The hero achieves significant success with his part of the mission; everyone on the team gains a bonus Adventure Card as well as the benefits of Success.

Note that, while characters cannot team up for a Challenge (and therefore grant Cooperative Rolls), there are special abilities that come from Edges or Specialization tables that do apply pretty much as-written to this version of **Plans & Operations**. They include:

- The **Operational Planning Edge**, which allows that player to exchange one Challenge card for a new one they draw. They can also use their Battle skill to give one other character a Cooperative Roll bonus during the mission (in addition to them handling their own Challenge).
- **Operational Expertise** works as written.

- **Tactical Communication** works as written, granting everyone a potential bonus for their one Challenge roll.
- **Tactical Logistics** allows that player to discard and re-draw one Challenge card.
- **Tactical Coordination** works as written; the player rolls to draw a number of cards before the Challenges are determined, and they can replace Challenge cards with the ones they drew as desired.



FRIENDS & FOES RECOGNITION FILES

Although we have a separate *Friends & Foes Manual* in the works, *Freedom Squadron* Game Masters will need a solid roster of bad guys to use for running scenarios and campaigns right away. As well, a handful of **Mission Specialists** are included here to supplement mission teams that have a gap in their skill sets. Many of these specialists are the creations of folks who have kindly supported my Patreon (<https://www.patreon.com/SeanPatrickFannon>).

MISSION SPECIALISTS

These four distinct Freedom Squadron operatives can be tapped to help teams overcome Challenges and otherwise fill out the ranks with needed skills and abilities. They also serve as potential Contacts.

DETOX

Created by Kathryn Jones

File Name: CLASSIFIED (alias “Sarah Smith”)

Primary Military Specialty: Intelligence/Counter-Intelligence

Additional Specialties: Black Ops, HUMINT, Close Quarters Combat

Birth Place: CLASSIFIED

Commando “Smith” is the only Freedom Squadron operative to ever have her official code name changed. At one time known as Zephyr, she quickly rose through the ranks of ReComInt (Reconnaissance, Communications & Intelligence) as a top infiltration and human asset manipulation specialist. She became one of Mirage’s favorite “pieces” in the chess game the FS intelligence



chief constantly played against VENOM’s Lockdown.

Then came the day when Lockdown moved Toxin into place to take down Zephyr. That was also the day the world learned just how much attention the acrobatic spy paid to her close quarters combat training with Roughhouse. With skill, ferocity, and no small amount of fortunate choices within the difficult terrain of the crumbling castle ruins, “Smith” clutched at the worst of her wounds while Toxin plunged into the river below.

Within an hour of the operation, her code name was officially changed to Detox, and she was sent for advanced black ops and combat training with Blindsight and Nightshade. Toxin made it clear he intends to punish her for the effrontery of his defeat, and she relishes this new game she plays with the VENOM ninja master.

"I love being underestimated. It makes my job so much easier."

Mission Specialist Use: Though her combat skills are formidable, Detox's primary role remains intelligence and human asset manipulation. This makes her most useful for Covert and Interaction Challenges in Plans & Operations play. As a Contact, she counts as either Covert or Interaction at d10.

Attributes: Agility d10, Smarts d8, Spirit d8, Strength d6, Vigor d8

Skills: Athletics d8, Computers d6, Driving d6, Electronics d8, Fighting d10, Healing d4, Investigation d6, Notice d8, Persuasion d10, Shooting d8, Stealth d8, Streetwise d8, Survival d4, Thievery d8, Tradecraft d8

Cha: +4; Pace: 6; Parry: 8; Toughness: 14 (7)

Hindrances: Curious, Loyal, Enemy (Major, Toxin)

Edges: Acrobat, Ambidextrous, Assassin, Attractive, Extraction, First Strike, (Improved) Martial Artist, Quick Draw, Thief, Two-Fisted

Gear: Custom Kinemesh Armor (+7, +1 Toughness), 2x FN Five-seveN Pistols (Range 12/24/48, Damage 2d6+1, AP 2), 2x Custom Stun Batons (Damage Str+d4, Vigor check [-2 with raise] vs Stunned, +1 Parry), covert surveillance pack, intrusion tools, night vision goggles.

Special Abilities

- **Acrobatics:** Detox enjoys +2 to all Strength rolls for jumping and movement-related Athletics checks.

She can climb at her Strength rating in pace, and she ignores difficult ground modifiers to movement. She also reduces the effective distance she falls with an Agility check (Acrobat bonus applies (-10 feet, or -20 feet with a raise).

- **Analysis:** She can spend a Benny to "get a clue" from the GM about opposition actions or plans. During Plans & Operations play, Detox gains a free action to make a Tradecraft roll as a cooperative roll for any other team member's Challenge.
- **Combat Focuses:** Agility Trick Maneuvers, Trick Shots.
- **Endurance Training:** Detox gains a +2 to all Vigor checks to resist Fatigue from any source (including poison).
- **Infiltration:** Detox gains a +1 to all Investigation, Persuasion, Stealth, and Streetwise rolls related to infiltrating a faction or organization, or whenever she is working undercover.
- **Intelligence Focuses:** Bribery, Disguise (Mastery), Forgery, Intelligence Analysis (Mastery), VENOM Operative Toxin.
- **Quick and Adaptable Mind:** Detox only suffers -1 to any unskilled checks.
- **Reactive Fighting:** She can use her First Strike even if she is Shaken. She ignores any wound penalties when making a First Strike attack.

IRON

Created By John Atkinson

File Name: Robert Hairgrove

Primary Military Specialty: Tactical Command & Planning

Additional Specialties: Mounted Cavalry, Infantry, Logistics, Desert Operations, Military History Instructor

Birth Place: Fort Riley, KS, United States

Robert "Bob" Hairgrove is a relatively recent transfer into Freedom Squadron, formerly serving in the United States

Army. He is known for a personal approach to leadership, welding ad hoc teams into functional units. Much to his displeasure, he finds himself most frequently on planning teams and doing mission control for field units, often juggling several teams operating in disparate theaters world-wide. For some of the most complex operations Freedom Squadron executes, he manages an entire staff and becomes the terror of junior planning officers, hammering home that people's lives depend on a workable plan.



He always briefs his teams personally, face to face. While he appreciates the efficiency and necessity of electronic communications in all forms, nothing matches the personal chemistry of being at the same table or in the field together where he's concerned. He often goes out of his way to mentor Freedom Squadron troopers who show potential for leadership.

Iron almost never mentions his former position, assignment, or rank in the US Army or why he transferred to Freedom Squadron. He scrupulously never asks about anyone else's past before Freedom Squadron, either. Those at the higher echelons of Freedom Squadron's command structure are aware Iron has a mild case of ADHD-C and PTSD; his exceptional skills and preparedness overwhelm these challenges, and it takes extended interactions over a long period of time before most would ever observe these challenges he faces.

Iron has an encyclopedic store of quotes and references to military history and

historical strategists. He always refers to Carl von Clausewitz as "Dead Carl" and George S. Patton as "28." His go-to curse replacement (he tries to maintain decorum among the international community that is Freedom Squadron) is "Foxtrot;" he uses it in every grammatical role possible (and some that he probably invented). He also has a thing for sticky notes. He routinely uses sticky notes as a substitute for emails, strolling to someone's office and slapping a sticky note on their computer screen if they are not available for immediate discourse. He also tends to maintain to-do lists in the form of sticky notes, one for each step, and throwing them away as each is completed. Teams he's briefing and overseeing will frequently discover extensive sticky note "appendixes" to briefing documents, featuring observations that he knows won't stand up to official scrutiny or data testing, but represent considerations he doesn't want them to overlook.

"What would Dead Carl say about complex plans that depend on precise

timing? Friction is a thing, Grasshopper. Unfoxtrot this."

Mission Specialist Use: Iron is intended to serve as a substitute for tactical and logistical leadership support for any team where no one took Operational Planning or any other Plans & Operations oriented Edges or Special Abilities. He can provide the capacity to replace bad card draws and Battle support rolls, as well as full-on leadership abilities in the field if the GM permits (otherwise, he's considered to be operating from a remote command post, offering insight and overwatch). Iron can also be helpful in both Tactical and Technical support roles, and serves as a great Contact in both areas (providing a d10 in each role).

Attributes: Agility d8, Smarts d10, Spirit d8, Strength d6, Vigor d6

Skills: Academics d8, Athletics d6, Battle d10, Demolitions d6, Driving d6, Fighting d8, Healing d4, Logistics d10, Notice d8, Persuasion d8, Riding d6, Shooting d8, Stealth d6, Survival d6

Cha: +0; **Pace:** 6; **Parry:** 6; **Toughness:** 12 (5)

Hindrances: Code of Honor, Loyal, Stubborn

Edges: Command, Dodge, Hold the Line!, Operational Planning, Scholar, Tactician, Zone Specialist (Desert)

Gear: KevRam Combat Armor (+6, +1 Toughness), Custom ACR IV Assault Rifle (Range 24/48/96, Damage 2d8+2, RoF 3, AP 5), Five-seveN MK 5 Pistol (Range 12/24/48, Damage 2d6+1, AP 2), Model 1840 Heavy Cavalry Saber (Str+d6), three Frag

Grenades (Range 5/10/20, Damage 3d6, LBT, HW), three Smoke Grenades (Obscuring smoke, -4, LBT, 1d4+2 rounds), satellite radio pack, field computer.

Special Abilities

- **Academic Focuses:** Geography, History, Human Resources, Materiel Management, Operational Theory, Politics, Strategy (Mastery).
- **"Bullet Radar":** He gains +1 to soak damage from bullets and shrapnel.
- **Defensive Tactics:** When his troops are in a defensive position, they gain +2 Toughness (instead of just +1 from Hold the Line!).
- **Equine Training:** Iron gains a +2 for all Riding checks, and can mount or dismount as a free action.
- **Operational Expertise:** Iron adds +2 to any Battle rolls when he is supporting someone else's actions.
- **Qualified Expert:** Focuses in Assault Rifles, Knives, Throwing.
- **Tactical Coordination:** Iron draws his Tactician pool of cards with the benefit of the Quick Edge (ignoring those of 5 or less). He can draw an extra set of Plans & Operations Challenge cards using the same rules for drawing Initiative cards as a Tactician (replacing cards during the session from his pool as desired).
- **Tactical Positioning:** Once per combat scene, he can make a Battle roll. On a success, all under his command are -1 to be hit by ranged combat (-2 with a raise) for three rounds.

MALWARE

Created by Jen Atkinson

File Name: Lahkmi Kaur

Primary Military Specialty: Tactical Technology

Additional Specialties: Digital Warfare, Vehicle Mechanics, Combat Robotics, Infantry

Birth Place: Southall, London, England

Lahkmi (AKA “Lucky”) Kaur, a Punjabi Sikh born and raised in London, comes from a very close family. Though very proud of her, they all wish she’d get out of military service (her two brothers are both very successful barristers). She joined the British Army in 2042 after graduating M.I.T. (third in her class). She was granted a reserve commission and assumed she’d be working in the Defense Science and Technology Laboratory. Instead, she was assigned to QinetiQ, a private firm associated with DSTL doing ultra-secret research and weapons development. Her work there remains classified to this day (though top-level Freedom Squadron commanders know she was part of the teams that developed weapons used in Operation Falling Tiger, as well as tech used in response to the Bloc’s Operation Scorched Earth). Most of her teammates assume Frick and Frack—the two highly advanced autonomous ground drones that accompany her everywhere—are results of her time there.

Lucky dated and eventually agreed to marry a Royal Marine named Michael Peters, who she met in a specialized warfare training course and with whom she shared a love of cooking and motorcycles. Tragically, Peters was killed when Bloc High Command ordered the execution of all British Commandos in their custody on October 18th, 2046. Following that incident, she became a proponent for larger and more lethal weapons of mass destruction to be employed against the Bloc, which caused her family serious concern. It wasn’t until the war ended and she had a chance to process her grief that she once again softened her stance and returned to a measured view of weapons technology.



Malware was recruited to Freedom Squadron almost immediately after it was formed, her file being among the many Mirage put in front of General Steel as someone to help form the backbone of the force’s technology efforts. She spends equal time in the field and in the R&D labs, working closely with folks like Sparks, Uplink, Wild Card, and Fixer to continuously upgrade Freedom Squadron’s technical warfare capabilities. When time permits, she travels frequently to Jalandhar, Punjab, to work with the Prakash Laur Home for Abandoned Girls, where she finds young women to sponsor into various science and technical universities.

“Uh...who do I talk to about the fire suppression systems in the computer labs

here in the Bastion? And relax! That was barely enough smoke to bother anyone!"

Mission Specialist Use: Malware is an engineer, technician, and computer specialist of significant talent and capability. She's clearly most useful for Covert and Technical Challenges, the former via use of her Computer and Electronics skills. She works as a Technical Contact with a value of d10. Teams who gain access to her services during P&O sessions will almost certainly want her to use her Sensory Overwatch ability (unless they are desperate for someone to directly handle a Technical Challenge).

Attributes: Agility d8, Smarts d10, Spirit d8, Strength d6, Vigor d6

Skills: Athletics d6, Computers d10, Driving d4, Electronics d10, Fighting d8, Investigation d6, Healing d4, Notice d10, Repair d8+2, Shooting d8, Stealth d6, Thievery d4

Cha: +0; **Pace:** 6; **Parry:** 6; **Toughness:** 13 (7)

Hindrances: Overconfident, Loyal, Quirk (Talks to machines)

Edges: Combat Reflexes, Elan, McGyver, Mr. Fix It, Quick Draw

Gear: Custom Kinemesh Armor (+7, +1 Toughness), Five-seveN MK 5 Pistol (Range 12/24/48, Damage 2d6+1, AP 2), Custom XM-25 Grenade Launcher (Range 24/48/96, Damage per grenade, +1 Shooting), three Frag Grenades (Range 5/10/20, Damage 3d6, LBT, HW), grenade loads of every type, satellite radio pack, field computer, technician tools.

Special Abilities

- **Born for Battle:** At the start of any combat scene, Malware gains an automatic bonus Benny.
- **"Frosty":** Any adjacent allies gain +1 to recover from Shaken.
- **"Hairtrigger":** Malware gains +2 when rolling to interrupt someone.
- **Sensory Overwatch:** When positioned to use surveillance and sensory gear to provide "overwatch" support, Malware can make an Electronics roll as an action. With a success, she provides everyone a bonus Action Card, while everyone gains a +1 on their next Trait roll with a raise. During Plans & Operations play, she can make an Electronics roll to give everyone a +1 on their next Challenge roll, or +2 with a raise (that's all she can do on that round of P&O though).
- **Technical Focuses:** Computer Security, Digital Data (Mastery), Electrical Engineering, Electronic Security, Mechanical Engineering.

TRACKER

Created By John Ackley

File Name: Ben Laga

Primary Military Specialty: Combat Search & Rescue

Additional Specialties: Medic, Aquatic Operations, Desert Operations, Mountaineering, Wilderness Survival

Birth Place: Glenorchy, Otago, New Zealand

Benjamin Manaaki Laga's earliest memory is of him and his mum on horseback with the mountains looming on all sides. His family owned the local outfitter and stables in Glenorchy, New Zealand, and his days were filled with riding, swimming, climbing, and tracking game through the lakes and mountains. With a passion for helping and healing, he attempted medicine at university, but

was overwhelmed by the sheer boredom of academic studies. He eventually found his calling as a medic in the New Zealand Special Operations Force.

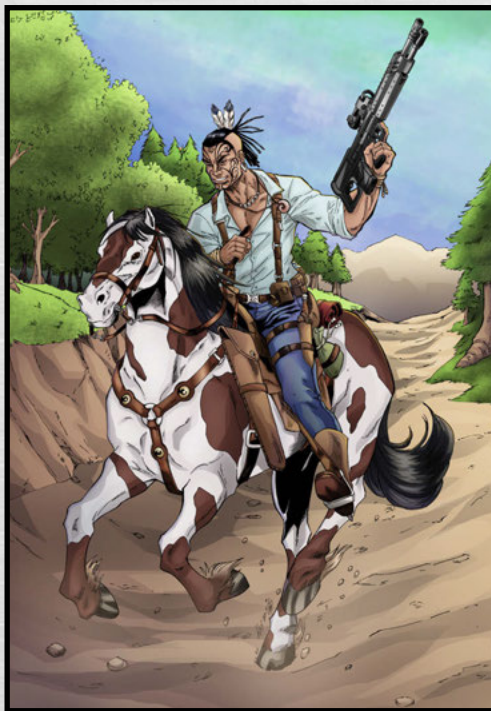
After two tours with NZSOF, he wound up in a joint operation alongside Surgical Strike and Tundra to provide aid and security in the aftermath of a tsunami that struck much of the Pacific Rim. They were impressed with his daring and his expertise; two weeks later, he was called up to the Global Operations Force, where he earned the codename Tracker in the Disaster & Emergency Response service.

Tracker is often first on scene to disasters worldwide—both natural and those caused by VENOM. He can take charge of response and relief efforts, or he can track a person, missing or wanted, in almost any terrain for days. If the victim is injured, Tracker has the healing touch and can evacuate them safely from any wilderness or combat zone. He's no slouch in combat, either, often speed-rappelling into VENOM bases with his custom SCAR-H roaring!

"I love going in against VENOM Constrictors. They get so mad when I bust their little ambushes."

Mission Specialist Use: Tracker is the specialist to call in if the team doesn't have a good outdoor operator in the ranks, or if they need a solid medic. He's going to be best used in Plans & Operations for Tactical Challenges, though his Healing abilities can be useful for Technical Challenges as well. He's going to be great for getting teams through the woods, over mountains, and underwater. As a Tactical Contact, he's a d10.

Attributes: Agility d8, Smarts d8, Spirit



d6, Strength d6, Vigor d8

Skills: Athletics d8, Driving d4, Fighting d6, Healing d8, Logistics d4, Notice d8, Riding d6, Shooting d8, Stealth d6, Survival d8, Tracking d10

Cha: +0; **Pace:** 6; **Parry:** 5; **Toughness:** 13 (6)

Hindrances: Heroic, Loyal, Vow (Minor, Protect Innocents)

Edges: Combat Medic, Common Bond, Dig In!, Elan, Woodsman, Zone Specialist (Desert, Forest, Mountain)

Gear: KevRam Combat Armor (+6, +1 Toughness), Custom FN SCAR-H 21 Assault Rifle (Range 30/60/120, Damage 2d8+1, RoF 3, AP 5), Five-sevenN MK 5 Pistol (Range 12/24/48, Damage 2d6+1, AP 2), Air Mask, Trauma Pack, Field Computer.

Special Abilities

- **“Born for Battle”:** At the beginning of any firefight combat, Tracker gains a bonus Benny.
- **Combat Trauma:** If Tracker can reach a Wild Card who has died within three rounds, he can make a Healing check at -6. On a success, the hero is brought back (though they are still Bleeding Out). On a raise, the hero is stabilized, but still Incapacitated.
- **Disaster Relief:** All teammates within Tracker’s Spirit radius gain +1 to Spirit checks.
- **Equine Training:** Tracker gains a +2 for all Riding checks, and can mount or dismount as a free action.
- **First Responder Focuses:** Climbing, Disaster Response (Mastery), Land Navigation, Mounted Logistics, Swimming (Mastery), Tracking Humans.
- **Swim Training:** Tracker can swim at a Pace equal to his Athletics die, and he can hold his breath for a number of minutes equal to his Vigor die.



The rank-and-file soldiers and specialists that serve VENOM’s agenda, a seemingly endless wave of mostly-faceless minions armed to the teeth and determined to make the world theirs. The standard VENOM Troopers are competent enough, but it’s the various special forces that are the greatest threat to Freedom Squadron... and the world.

New Hindrance—Obligations

Introduced in *Flash Gordon*, this Hindrance represents service to an authority that is compulsory and carries significant consequences for failure to follow orders. As a Minor Hindrance, violation of orders can result in detention, fines, and other significant disciplinary action. It could also transform into a Wanted (Minor) Hindrance if the soldier abandons their post or duty. At the Major level, severe punishment is forthcoming, and in certain draconian services, this could result in charges of treason and execution. Going AWOL results in the Hindrance transforming into a Wanted (Major) Hindrance.

VENOM Troopers and other such soldiers face summary execution when abandoning their Obligations (Major).

VENOM TROOPERS

Classification: Infantry/Security Force Troopers

Recruited from the militaries of their client states, mercenary and security forces, criminal cartels, and anywhere else where aggression and a talent for fighting might be found, VENOM Troopers represent the largest body of armed men and women ever found under one flag in the world. Once they process into the service of VENOM, they are further drilled to follow orders without question and indoctrinated in the philosophy that only VENOM can truly lead humanity to greatness. VENOM Troopers are taught to believe that only through mass chaos, conflict, and fear can they help bring ultimate peace and order to the world.

Most of them don't truly believe that, instead paying lip-service as required around the leadership. They do enjoy the decent wages; full benefits; excellent weaponry and gear; and the opportunity to actively bear arms across multiple theaters around the world. While disciplined and generally professional, the average VENOM Trooper won't needlessly throw their life away; if escape is an option when facing overwhelming odds, they'll take it. Otherwise, they will often surrender.



"No matter how many I mow down in a major assault, VENOM still manages to find more of these idiots to put on the armor and step up. Must be one hell of a dental plan!" - Caliber

Attributes: Agility d6, Smarts d6, Spirit d6, Strength d6, Vigor d6

Skills: Athletics d6, Driving d4, Fighting d6, Intimidation d6, Notice d6, Shooting d6, Stealth d4, Survival d4

Cha: 0; **Pace:** 6; **Parry:** 5; **Toughness:** 9 (4)

Hindrances: Obligation (Major—Serve VENOM)

Edges: —

Gear: VENOM Combat Armor (+4), VENOM Assault Rifle (Range 25/50/100, Damage 2d8, RoF 3, AP 3), VENOM Pistol (Range 12/24/48, Damage 2d6, AP 2), Combat Knife (Str+d4).

VENOM ARCTIC WOLVES

Classification: Arctic/Cold Weather Troopers

VENOM learned early on that the polar regions and the remote frozen mountains of the world represented highly valuable untapped real estate for bases and secret labs. To protect them and execute the kinds of missions the terrain and weather necessitated, VENOM needed a special class of soldier. Recruiting from the local populations (showing the communities with food, technology, and other wealth, a program conceived by Stiletto and the Quintana twins), the backbone of VENOM Arctic Wolves corps was formed. Jack Knife then set about training them to own the frozen and inhospitable realms they are named for. Those VENOM Troopers with arctic and cold weather expertise (many coming from service in Neo-Communist Bloc armies where such

conditions prevail) were then offered significant incentives to flesh out the service.

A fierce *esprit de corps* exists among the Wolves, derived from their mastery of environments most of humanity cannot hope to survive. They tend to think of themselves as truly wolf-like, which can make them unnerving for even other VENOM operatives to deal with.

Experts at ambush and hit-and-run tactics, Arctic Wolves are known for leading opposing forces into treacherous ice or where avalanches can be triggered to bury them. TAC-allied militaries have become very hesitant to engage VENOM in such environs, insisting Freedom Squadron take the lead in any operations against Arctic Wolves. The Global Operations Force continues to develop training and strategies for dealing with the “icy ghosts” of VENOM, with Glacier and Tundra taking the lead.

“Do you hear that—the faint howling on the wind? It is either the Wendigo or the Arctic Wolves. Either way, we are in for some serious trouble.”—Glacier

Attributes: Agility d8, Smarts d6, Spirit d8, Strength d8, Vigor d8

Skills: Athletics d8, Demolitions d6, Driving d6, Fighting d8, Healing d4, Intimidation d8, Notice d6, Shooting d8, Stealth d8, Survival d8, Tracking d6

Cha: 0; **Pace:** 6; **Parry:** 6; **Toughness:** 11 (5)

Hindrances: Loyal, Obligations (Major—VENOM), Quirk (Wolf-like demeanors)

Edges: Brave, Combat Reflexes, Marksman, Martial Artist, Zone Specialist (Arctic, Mountain)

Gear: VENOM Arctic Armor (+5, +4 Vigor vs cold and thirst, low light vision, self-contained breathing), VENOM Assault Rifle (Range 25/50/100, Damage 2d8, RoF 3, AP 3), VENOM Pistol (Range 12/24/48, Damage 2d6, AP 2), Combat Knife (Str+d4).

Special Abilities:

- **Rocket Skis:** Many Arctic Wolves units are equipped with special rocket skis, giving them Pace 10 with a d10 Run die in snow and ice conditions.
- **Zone Specialists:** In Arctic and Mountain Zones, the GM draws one additional Benny for his side when Arctic Wolves are present. They draw an additional Action Card each round in combat, and they gain +4 to resist all environmental hazards in those Zones.

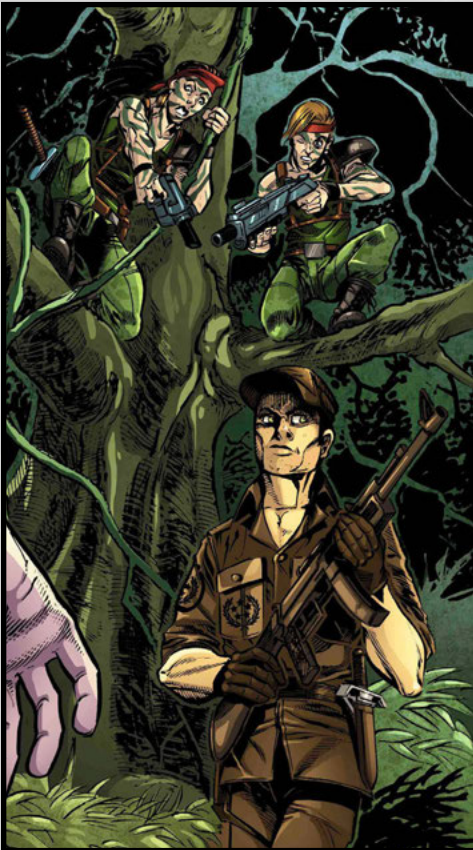


VENOM CONSTRICTORS

Classification: Forest/Jungle Terrain
Troopers

The men and women who join the Constrictors often hail from the most inhospitable tropical regions around the world. Primarily composed of ex-guerrilla fighters and rebels who decided that their leaders were no longer following their own cause, or forces had been utterly crushed, these people have sought a new cause to champion, and found it in VENOM.

Constrictors are often deployed to help defend remote jungle or forest locations where their talents are best put to use.



Even a small number of these guerrillas can hold off a force three times their size with ease. They obtained their name from the few survivors who have faced them, saying that the jungle was squeezing and choking them into an ever shrinking space with ambushes and traps.

Constrictors employ some of the nastier weapons used by VENOM, such as the Shredder (a specialized custom shotgun), Spring Mines, and pit traps; they have even been known to bury bullets around a trip mine to increase the shrapnel damage. These forest warriors have pushed back more than one attempt to rout VENOM from the jungles.

“There is something out there in this jungle waiting for us, hunting us, and I am not sure it is entirely human.”—Tundra

Attributes: Agility d8, Smarts d8, Spirit d8, Strength d6, Vigor d8

Skills: Athletics d6, Demolitions d8, Fighting d8, Healing d6, Notice d8, Repair d6, Shooting d8, Stealth d8, Survival d8, Tracking d8

Cha: 0; Pace: 8; Parry: 6; Toughness: 9 (3)

Hindrances: Loyal, Obligations (Major—VENOM), Stubborn

Edges: Combat Reflexes, Fleet-Footed, Marksman, Martial Artist, McGyver, Woodsman, Zone Specialist (Forest, Jungle)

Gear: VENOM Jungle Ops Armor (+3), VENOM Shredder (Range 10/20/40, Damage 1-3d6+2, AP 2), VENOM Pistol (Range 12/24/48, Damage 2d6, AP 2), Combat Machete (Str+d6), Constrictor Spring Mines (Range n/a, Damage 3d6, AP 2, LBT, -2 to Notice).



VENOM SCOURGES

Classification: Elite Guards

The first among all the soldiers created by VENOM Commander, the Scourges are the true elite among all of VENOM's forces. The brotherhood bond is so strong within this corps, VENOM Scourges often fight to the last rather than leave one of their fallen comrades behind. Their loyalty to VENOM is absolute and unshakable. Those outside of VENOM's inner circle are surprised by this level of dedication, not realizing how much of it is a combination of psychological programming and a specialized drug that only VENOM Commander can procure. It takes a minimum of five years of service in VENOM's ranks before a soldier can petition to join the Scourges; that service must be exemplary, on and off the battlefield.

Once chosen to undertake the Trial of Dedication, the trooper walks through the golden doors of the Inner Sanctum, where he engages a series of tests that push him past physical, emotional, and spiritual limits. Those that come out again never speak of what they encountered or experienced; many never exit and are never seen again.

VENOM Scourges serve as VENOM Commander's personal bodyguards, and are often assigned to guard all of the organization's top leaders. They are also put in charge of the security for key installations and projects. Scourges are known for their willingness to lay down their lives without hesitation if it means protecting what they are set to guard.

"He who stands with me shall be my brother, and shall accept that only in death does our duty end"—found on the armor of VENOM Scourges.

Attributes: Agility d10, Smarts d8, Spirit d10, Strength d10, Vigor d10

Skills: Athletics d8, Battle d8, Driving d8, Fighting d10, Healing d6, Notice d8, Shooting d10, Stealth d6, Survival d6

Cha: 0; **Pace:** 8; **Parry:** 7; **Toughness:** 15 (5)

Hindrances: Loyal, Overconfident, Vow (Major—Serve VENOM Commander)

Edges: Alertness, Battle Hardened, Combat Reflexes, Danger Sense, Dodge, Fleet-Footed, (Improved) Frenzy, Marksman, (Improved) Martial Artist, Quick Draw, Steady Hands

Gear: VENOM Scourge Armor (+5, +2 Toughness), VENOM Assault Rifle, Enhanced (Range 25/50/100, Damage

2d8+2, RoF 3, AP 4), VENOM Pistol, Enhanced (Range 12/24/48, Damage 2d6+1, AP 3), 2 x HE Grenades (Range 5/10/20, Damage 3d8, HW, MBT), Combat Knife (Str+d4).

Special Abilities:

- **Drug Enhancements:** Scourges take a drug cocktail that boosts Agility, Spirit, Strength, and Vigor by one die type. It also grants +1 Toughness and +2 to Spirit checks to resist fear, Intimidation, and Taunt, as well as any use of psionics. A treatment lasts for one week, and is highly addictive (to the point of the soldier potentially dying after a week of withdrawals).
- **Melee Shooting:** Scourges know how to fight in close quarters with ranged weapons, gaining a +1 shooting against any adjacent opponent, and their Parry is +1 against any opponent shooting at them from an adjacent space. They can use any short-barrel weapon (SMG, sawed-off shotgun) as well as pistols in melee.
- **“Sentinel”:** Elite bodyguards, the Scourges gain +1 Action Card when in combat, which combines with Level Headed.

VENOM SEA SERPENTS

Classification: Deep Sea Troopers

As VENOM Commander undertook to expand his organization globally, he understood that he would need to put bases and forward operation outposts in the most remote and hidden locations around the world. In addition to high mountain reaches, sky fortresses, and remote wilderness locales, the vastly unexplored deep sea offered ideal opportunities for fully hidden elaborate bases.

To protect these ocean posts, the Sea Serpents corps of VENOM was formed. Recruited from many of the naval Special Forces downsized after World War III, the Sea Serpents come from both the TAC and Neo-Communist Bloc service, unwilling to give up the call of either action or the sea. Each member brings years of combat experience both beneath and above the waves, now dangerously married to the advanced technology of combat dive suits designed by Octavia. Combining lightning-fast assaults with the intentionally frightening appearance of their armor, the VENOM Sea Serpents have crafted a nearly-mythical reputation as “sea monsters attacking from the deep” among the few survivors they’ve left.

“The oceans hold many strange and deadly creatures already; VENOM didn’t have to go and pollute it with their own ugly mugs, did they?” - Bulkhead

Attributes: Agility d8, Smarts d6, Spirit d8, Strength d8, Vigor d8

Skills: Athletics d8, Boating d8, Demolitions d6, Electronics d4, Fighting d8, Healing d4, Intimidation d6, Notice



d6, Repair d4, Shooting d8, Stealth d8, Survival d6

Cha: 0; **Pace:** 6; **Parry:** 6; **Toughness:** 11 (5)

Hindrances: Loyal, Quirk (Strongly prefer sea to land), Obligations (Major—VENOM)

Edges: Combat Reflexes, Zone Specialist (Sea)

Gear: VENOM Aquatic Assault Armor (+4, see below), VENOM Spear Rifle (Range 12/25/50, Damage 2d8, RoF 1, AP 4), VENOM Pistol (Range 12/24/48, Damage 2d6, AP 2), Combat Knife (Str+d4).

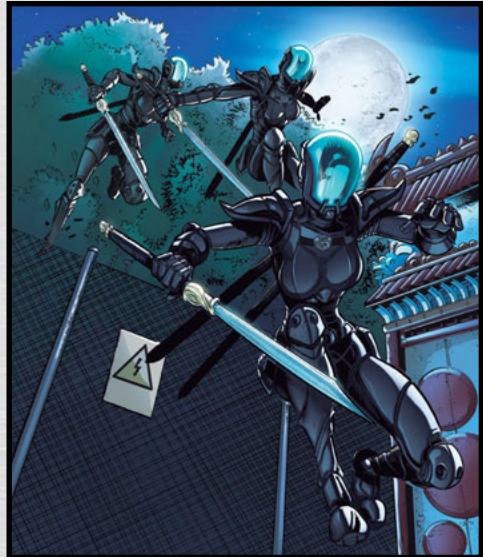
Special Abilities:

- **Swim Training:** Sea Serpents have Focus: Swimming and can swim at their full Athletics die as their Pace in and under the water. Even without their armor or any other gear, they can hold their breath for a number of minutes equal to their Vigor die.
- **VENOM Aquatic Assault Armor:** In addition to its armor rating, the suit provides a Swim Pace of 10", underwater environmental protection even at significant depths, self-contained breathing for up to 3 hours, and low-light vision.

VENOM SHADOW FANGS

Classification: Assassin/Espionage Troopers

When Toxin joined VENOM, he petitioned VENOM Commander to create his own specialized team of infiltration operatives. Always eager to increase his network of spies and assassins, the Commander



gave him the resources and leave to do so. Toxin set up his base of operations deep in the Tian Shan Mountains, where he began to train a select handful of people he chose from the best of VENOM's current forces. They train in the same techniques Toxin mastered, and he seeks to hone each operative into a deadly weapon.

In order to graduate from training into full Shadow Fang status, the student must complete an assignment to either assassinate a well-protected enemy or infiltrate a high-security installation and procure valuable intelligence. Failure means death, which makes Toxin's elite team small, but a high-precision tool VENOM wields to great effect.

"To find enlightenment, one need not seek the light, but rather they must bring consciousness to the shadows around him." – Toxin, to his students

Attributes: Agility d8, Smarts d8, Spirit d8, Strength d8, Vigor d8

Skills: Athletics d8, Computers d6, Fighting d10, Investigation d8, Notice d8, Persuasion d8, Shooting d8, Stealth d8, Streetwise d8, Survival d6, Thievery d8, Tracking d8, Tradecraft d8

Cha: 0; **Pace:** 8; **Parry:** 8; **Toughness:** 10 (3)

Hindrances: Loyal, Obligations (Major—VENOM), Vow (Major—Serve Toxin)

Edges: Acrobat, Alertness, Assassin, Counterattack, Dodge, Fighting Style (Evasive), First Strike, Fleet-Footed, (Improved) Frenzy, Improvisational Fighter, (Improved) Martial Artist, Quick, Quick Draw, Thief, Tricky Fighter

Gear: Shadow Fang Armor (+3, +1 Toughness), Shadow Fang Sword (Str+d6+2, AP 2), VENOM Pistol (Range 12/24/48, Damage 2d6, AP 2), infiltration tools.

VENOM SIDEWINDERS

Classification: Desert Terrain Troopers

Just as Freedom Squadron has its own forces especially suited to desert warfare, so does VENOM. In fact, the Sidewinders are some of the best ever put into the field. Drawn from nations which contain the harshest deserts and arid conditions, these soldiers are trained by Jack Knife in the three-thousand-year-old art of *Zaros de Bada*. The practice, once mastered, allows the Sidewinder to go days without food or water while blending completely into their desert surroundings.

Sidewinders have been known to shadow an opposing force for weeks, striking not at them, but at their water supplies and vehicles, thus allowing the

desert to defeat their enemies. To the chagrin of other specialized corps within VENOM, the Commander makes it clear he values his Sidewinders almost as much as his Scourges; he often insists on employing them even in non-desert operations for the purpose of crippling, rather than killing, Freedom Squadron forces. Masters of stealth and sabotage, the Sidewinders are known and feared among special operations forces everywhere.

"I don't know how they did it, but by the time we got the water truck to stop leaking, they had managed to cut every fuel line right under the nose of the entire convoy." – Commando Antony Caravuci

Attributes: Agility d8, Smarts d8, Spirit d8, Strength d8, Vigor d8

Skills: Athletics d6, Demolitions d8, Driving d4, Fighting d8, Healing d6, Intimidation d6, Notice d8, Repair d6, Shooting d8, Stealth d8, Survival d10, Tracking d8

Cha: 0; **Pace:** 8; **Parry:** 6; **Toughness:** 11 (5)

Hindrances: Loyal, Obligations (Major—VENOM), Stubborn



Edges: Combat Reflexes, Demolitions Expert, Fleet-Footed, Marksman, Martial Artist, McGyver, Zone Specialist (Desert)

Gear: VENOM Desert Exo-Armor (+5, see below), VENOM Assault Rifle (Range 25/50/100, Damage 2d8, RoF 3, AP 3), VENOM Pistol (Range 12/24/48, Damage 2d6+2, AP 2), Combat Knife (Str+d4), sabotage equipment.

Special Abilities:

- **VENOM Desert Exo-Armor:** The armor increases the Sidewinder's carry capacity to Str x6, their Pace by +2, and they gain +2 Vigor vs heat and thirst as well as low light vision.

VENOM LEADERS

GORGON

File Name: Unknown

Primary Military Specialty: Logistics/
Strategic Operations

Birth Place: Unknown

A great mystery surrounds the man behind the iron mask, and that is just how he likes it. He appeared on the arms scene shortly after the start of World War III and sold to anyone who could meet his price. Gorgon became known as the man who could obtain anything you wanted and smuggle it anywhere you needed. He was a serious thorn in the Trans-Atlantic Coalition's side; after they issued a one million dollar bounty for his arrest, he responded by becoming more brazen in his activities. When the war ended and various TAC intelligence agencies started focusing on taking him down, Gorgon found himself constantly



on the run; that's when VENOM offered him protection in exchange for supplies and help running their operations. His ruthless manner and abilities quickened his rise up the ranks, and he became the unspoken right hand to VENOM Commander.

"You want guns, drugs, vehicles...anything at all, I can get it for you. If you intend to be around to use it, though, you'd better be able to pay the devil his due."

Attributes: Agility d8, Smarts d10, Spirit d8, Strength d12+2, Vigor d10

Skills: Athletics d8, Battle d8, Computers d8, Driving d6, Electronics d8, Fighting d10, Intimidation d8, Logistics d10, Notice d10, Persuasion d8, Piloting d8, Repair d10, Shooting d10, Stealth d8, Streetwise d8, Survival d6, Taunt d8

Cha: +2; **Pace:** 8; **Parry:** 7; **Toughness:** 19 (10)

Hindrances: Arrogant, Cautious, Greedy

Edges: Charismatic, Combat Engineer, (Improved) Combat Sense, Command, Connections, Danger Sense, Elan,

(Improved) Extraction, Hard to Kill, I Know a Guy, Killer Instinct, Leader of Men, (Improved) Level Headed, Marksman, (Improved) Martial Artist, McGyver, Mr. Fix It, Operational Planning, Strong Willed, Tactician

Gear: Custom Gorgon Armor (+10, +2 Toughness), Plasma Rifle (24/48/96, 3d10, HW, affects least armored area), Wrist Rockets (40/80/160, 4d6, AP 15, HW, SBT), Wrist Blades (Str+d8+2, AP 6, HW)

Special Abilities:

- **Custom Armor Systems:** Gorgon's personal armor provides him full environmental protection (it can even protect him in space). It also grants him thermal and night vision; vision magnification to x50; advanced visual and audio systems giving him +2 to Notice; and targeting systems that give him +2 to all Shooting rolls. The suit also grants him d12+2 Strength and a Pace of 8 (with a d8 Run die).
- **Gravitic System:** The battlesuit gives Gorgon flight at Pace 12 (with a d10 Run die) for up to one hour.
- **Resource Networking:** Gorgon gains a +2 on all Connections rolls to gain support, and he uses his Logistics roll in place of Streetwise to find contacts.
- **Tactical Logistics:** At the beginning of any action sequence, Gorgon rolls Logistics. On a success, his side receives a bonus Action card on the first round, while a raise gives his team a bonus Action card on the second round as well.

TOXIN

File Name: Qiung Jun-Ling

Primary Military Specialty: Martial Arts Expert/Assassin

Birth Place: Bozhou, China

Qiung was left on the doorstep of an isolated Shaolin temple high in the Himalayas as an infant. He grew up knowing only the confines of the monastery walls, training in the art of stealth and combat. Qiung quickly grew restless and wanted to journey to the outside world, but the Masters urged him to stay, warning him of a world seduced by the riches of greed and corruption. On the day he turned 16, he rejected their warnings and journeyed from the mountains to Beijing. Qiung Jun-Ling was instantly in awe of the city and vowed to do whatever it took to live among the rich and powerful. Using the only talents he had, he worked for the Triads, killing competitors and protecting important leaders.

Unfortunately, Qiung crossed paths with an ancient leader of a rival group; he assassinated the old man, eagerly seeking a rich reward for his death. Qiung had not risen high enough in the ranks to know of the long-standing agreement that elder leaders were to be untouched. When he presented evidence of his kill, he was banished and left vulnerable to enemy reprisal. After weeks of running and hiding, a desperate Qiung returned to his childhood home, seeking sanctuary. The Masters reminded him of their warnings, saying he had been seduced by greed and violence himself and was no longer welcome.

A starving and cold Qiung wandered the mountains, awaiting death, when he crossed paths with VENOM Commander (who had personally tracked his abilities and development, and had engineered the circumstances in which he might kill the elder in Beijing). Understanding Qiung's potential, the Commander promised him the full might of VENOM to exact his revenge, in exchange for his



absolute loyalty. Qiung readily agreed and assumed the name Toxin. Once fully healed, he took teams of VENOM warriors and slaughtered the Triad groups that were looking for him. When they had been eliminated, Toxin turned on the Shaolin temple, destroying his former family.

“A worn path may be safer than none, but it may not lead where you want to go. I carve my own path with VENOM, and it leads me directly to power.”

Attributes: Agility d10, Smarts d8, Spirit d10, Strength d10, Vigor d8

Skills: Athletics d10, Computers d8, Driving d6, Electronics d8, Fighting d12, Intimidation d8, Investigation d8, Notice d10, Persuasion d6, Piloting d6, Shooting d12, Stealth d10, Survival d8, Taunt d8, Thievery, d10, Tracking d8, Tradecraft d10

Cha: +0; **Pace:** 8; **Parry:** 10; **Toughness:** 15 (6)

Hindrances: Arrogant (Major), Enemy (Major—Blindsight), Vow (Major—Serve VENOM Commander)

Edges: Ambidexterity, Assassin, Battle Hardened, Brawler, Brawny, Combat Reflexes, Fighting Style (Brawl, Evasive, Fast, Power), Fleet Footed, Florentine, (Improved) Block, (Improved) Combat Sense, (Improved) Counterattack, (Improved) Dodge, (Improved) Extraction, (Improved) Frenzy, (Improved) Level Headed, (Improved) Martial Arts, Marksman, Master Qi Focus (Corrupt), Quick, Steady Hands, Thief, Two-Fisted

Gear: Custom Ceramtek Combat Armor (+6, +2 Toughness), High Tech Bow (Range 18/36/72, Damage 2d6+2, ROF 1, AP 2), Twin High Tech Katanas (Damage Str+d8+2, AP 4), Intrusion Tools, Covert Surveillance Pack

Special Abilities:

- **Covert Focuses:** Bribery, Disguise, Forgery, Poison.
- **Counterstrike Fighting:** Toxin can use other maneuvers with his (Improved) Counterattack.
- **Invisibility:** Toxin has a special coating on his Armor that allows him to sneak into even the most guarded of areas. This acts as the Invisibility Power at the normal (non-raise) level, and functions as long as he is not engaged in combat.
- **Licensed to Kill:** Toxin gains a +2 on all Athletics (throwing), Fighting, and Shooting rolls to offset Called Shot penalties.
- **Reactive Fighting:** Toxin can use his (Improved) First Strike ability even when Shaken, and suffers no Wound Penalties with such strikes.
- **Weapon Poison:** Toxin coats his weapons in a special poison that slows down his enemies. On a Shaken or worse result, the target must make a Vigor check (at -2 with a raise on the attack roll). On a raise, there is no effect. On a success, they suffer -2

to all Trait rolls and -2 to their Pace and Parry. On a failure, the target is Incapacitated for 1d6 hours.

LOCKDOWN

File Name: Abbey Bishop

Primary Military Specialty: Espionage Agent

Birth Place: London, England

The VENOM Agent once known as Abbey Bishop was once a spy for MI6. Abbey was orphaned at a young age and placed in an experimental program where children would be trained in the art of espionage. Abbey's first friend there was Aderyn Cadwaller, a girl who would one day become Freedom Squadron's "Mirage." These two girls always seemed to be steadfast friends as well as friendly rivals, each competing for the top spot in whatever skill they were tested in. Unfortunately, Abbey developed a fierce jealousy of Mirage, burning with anger and resentment whenever she was bested by her "friend".

When it seemed that MI6 favored Mirage over herself, Abbey arranged for damning evidence to come forward showing her fellow trainee to have been selling secrets. Sometime after Mirage's removal, she managed to return with new Intel that revealed Abbey was responsible. A burn notice was issued along with a capture order, but by the time all of the paperwork had cleared, Abbey was a ghost in the wind. Several months later, she turned up once more, in Guatemala, working for Steelz Industries as their public representative and secretly as the head of VENOM's spy cadre.

"If information is power, then I am the most powerful woman in the world."

Attributes: Agility d10, Smarts d10, Spirit d8, Strength d6, Vigor d8

Skills: Athletics d8, Boating d6, Computers d10, Driving d8, Electronics d10, Fighting d10, Notice d10, Persuasion d8, Piloting d8, Shooting d10, Stealth d10, Thievery d10, Tradecraft d10

Cha: +2; **Pace:** 8; **Parry:** 8; **Toughness:** 12 (5)

Edges: Acrobat, Alertness, Assassin, Attractive, Combat Sense, Connections, Danger Sense, (Improved) Extraction, Fleet-Footed, I Know a Guy, Jack-of-All-Trades, Level Headed, (Improved) Martial Artist, McGyver, Scrounger, Thief, Tricky Fighter

Gear: Custom Tactical Espionage Armor (+5, +1 Toughness), Advanced SMG (Range 12/24/48, Damage 2d6+1, RoF 3, AP 4), Concealable Pistol (Range 10/20/40, Damage 2d6+1, RoF 1, AP 3), EMP Grenade (Range 5/10/20, Damage 3d6 to electronics, non-lethal,



no armor, MBT), Thermal Grenade (Range 5/10/20, Damage 3d10, HW, SBT), Smoke Grenade (Range 5/10/20, -4 Obscuring, LBT), Intrusion Tools, Covert Surveillance Pack, Portable Computer

Special Abilities:

- **Generalist Training:** Lockdown suffers no untrained penalties with either Smarts or Agility linked Skills.
- **Global Contacts:** Lockdown gains a +2 on all Connections rolls to gain support, and she uses her Tradecraft roll in place of Streetwise to find contacts.
- **Infiltration:** Lockdown gains a +1 to all Investigation, Persuasion, Stealth, and Streetwise rolls related to infiltrating other organizations. She has Focuses in Bribery, Disguise, and Forgery.
- **Stun Gauntlets:** The gauntlets of her suit grant her the Stun ability (targets of a successful martial arts or touch attack make a Vigor check at -2 or are Incapacitated; they roll a Vigor check each round to become Shaken).
- **Tactical Espionage Suit:** The suit grants Lockdown a +2 on all Computers, Electronics, and Thievery rolls. It's also shielded against EMPs and can act as a backup power source for most electronics.

SABOTAGE

File Name: Fiona Burke

Primary Military Specialty: Demolitions Expert

Birth Place: Cork, Ireland

As a young woman, Fiona always sided with the chaos caused by the radical groups of her homeland. She would march and protest anything, simply because of the disruption it caused. At the age of fifteen, her boyfriend introduced her to some friends who were members of the IRA. Fiona felt like she

had finally found a group of like-minded people, and under their teachings she found a natural affinity for making explosives. For nearly fifteen years, numerous bombings throughout the country were attributed to her homemade bombs. Due to their common parts, Fiona's bombs were nearly impossible to trace, and she was never caught. Eventually, she learned that a Diplomat had arrived in Ireland to broker peace with the IRA. As this peace would end the chaos she desperately coveted, Fiona made plans to slip a bomb in the Diplomat's car. However the IRA refused to let her carry out her plan, saying that this was what they had been fighting for, and their goal was finally in sight. Enraged, she refused to accept their orders and bombed the negotiations instead.

Now hunted by the U.N. and the IRA, Fiona fled Europe and headed towards the war torn Middle East. She never made it too far south, as she was cornered in Budapest by bounty hunters, where she was narrowly saved by VENOM agents. The agents offered her refuge in their ranks, a place where she would not only be safe but where she could indulge her explosive talents. Seizing the opportunity, Fiona joined them and has been developing new explosives for them ever since.

"A bomb is made to explode. That is its meaning; its purpose. I hate people who try to stop a bomb from becoming what it was meant to be."

Attributes: Agility d8, Smarts d8, Spirit d8, Strength d6, Vigor d8

Skills: Athletics d6, Demolitions d12, Driving d6, Electronics d8, Fighting d8, Intimidation d8, Notice d8, Repair d8, Shooting d8, Stealth d8, Streetwise d8,

Thievery d8

Cha: 0; **Pace:** 8; **Parry:** 6; **Toughness:** 14 (6)

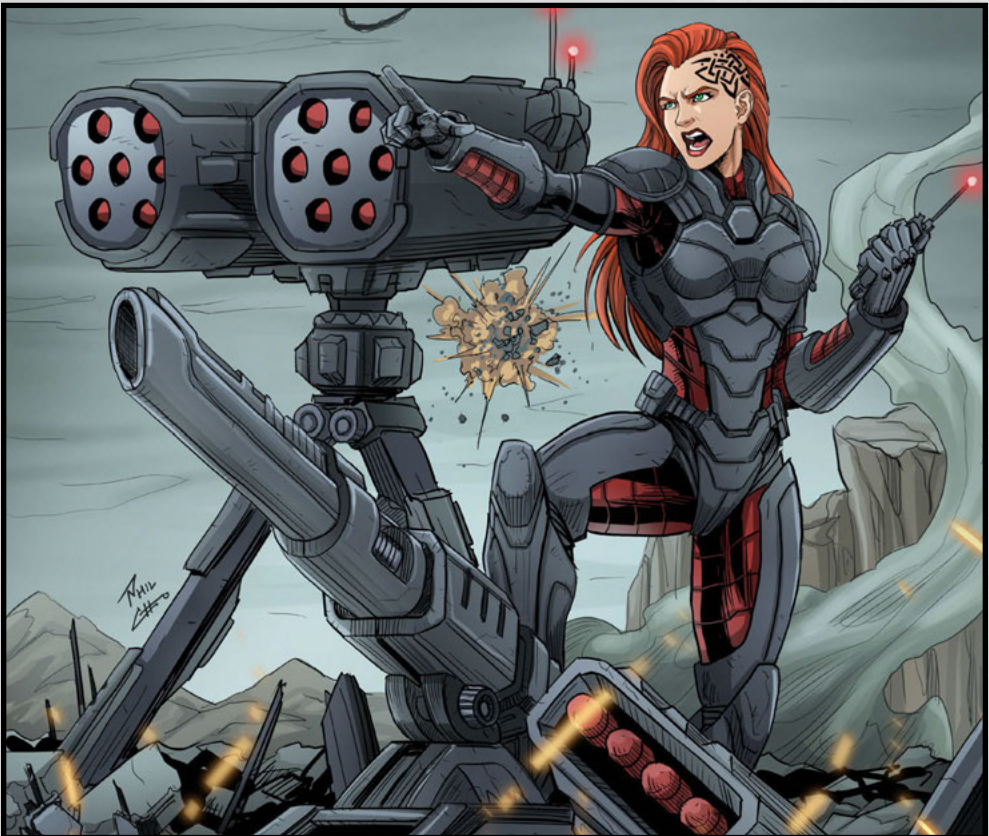
Hindrances: Bloodthirsty, Mean, Wanted (Major—U.N and IRA)

Edges: Combat Reflexes, Demolitions Expert, Fleet-Footed, Martial Artist, McGyver, Nerves of Steel, Scrounger, Zone Specialist (Urban)

Gear: Custom Assault Armor (+6, +2 Toughness), Custom Gyrojet Rifle (see below), VENOM Pistol (Range 12/24/48, Damage 2d6+2, AP 2), Combat Knife (Str+d4).

Special Abilities

- **Custom Gyrojet Rifle:** Range 30/60/120, RoF 1, damage as per rocket:
 - **Armor Piercing:** Damage 2d6, AP 10, HW.
 - **Boomer:** Damage 5d6, LBT, HW; minimum arming distance of 20".
 - **Heat Seeker:** Damage 3d6; missiles (Shooting vs Agility).
 - **Rocket:** Damage 3d6, HW.
- **Demolition Focuses:** Structural Engineering (Mastery), Sabotage (Mastery)
- **Remote Heavy Weapons:** Sabotage usually has one or more remote-control heavy weapons set up in any area she's operating within. Range 50/100/200, RoF 1, Damage 6d6, AP 20, HW, MBT. Alternate launchers have RoF 3 and Damage 4d6, AP 10, HW, SBT.



APPENDIX: PLANS & OPERATIONS EDGES & SPECIAL ABILITIES

One of the key elements of the Plans & Operations rules is how they enhance and encourage leadership-oriented players to really shine. Instead of a player having to actually come up with detailed plans and ideas that would pass military or CIA inspection, the P&O rules allow such characters to influence game play in an abstract, narrative fashion. This enables players to feel special in their role as leaders, tacticians, and logistical support specialists without having necessarily attended a military academy or spy school.

The following are specific Skills, Edges, and Special Abilities that directly relate to the Plans & Operations game play.



Following the style as presented in *Flash Gordon*, these skills are no longer presented as Knowledge Skills. Instead, they stand alone and have specific functions in a setting.

BATTLE

This Smarts-linked skill represents a character's knowledge and understanding of strategy and tactics. In addition to being very useful for Mass Combat situations, this skill can help with strategic and tactical elements during **Plans & Operations** play (specifically if the character has the Operational Planning Edge).

ELECTRONICS

For a *Freedom Squadron* operative, this Smarts-linked skill covers the understanding, use, and even creation of advanced electronic devices and systems. This includes communications, sensors, high-tech gizmos, and even alien machinery.

LOGISTICS

A far more powerful skill than most might care to believe, Logistics covers the ability to manage supplies; requisition special equipment; navigate the military and government bureaucracies that oversee *Freedom Squadron*; and get personnel assigned and transported to where they're needed. This is a Smarts-linked skill.

TRADECRAFT

Knowledge of all things connected to espionage, counter-intelligence, cryptography, and related matters. This is an important skill for anyone who's serious about spy work or countering other spies. It includes the practices of bribery, disguise, and forgery. Tradecraft is Smarts-linked.



There's only one Edge in the *Freedom Squadron Commando's Manual* that specifically applies to Plans & Operations, but it's pretty key. At the same time, there are a few other core Leadership Edges from *Savage Worlds* that are important: Command and Tactician have

specific importance (the former as a requirement for rolling on the Command table in the Hero's Journey section of the Commando's Manual), while Leader of Men and Natural Leader both have obvious applications.

OPERATIONAL PLANNING

Requirements: Seasoned, Smarts d8+, Battle d8+

The planning and execution of a successful field operation requires exceptional intuition and insight, as well as an ability to understand your team's capabilities and giving them room for initiative. Team leaders with this Edge are able to draw one additional Challenge Card each round during **Plans & Operations**; they can replace an existing Challenge, or leave this new card on the table as an *additional* Challenge (thus providing added opportunities to generate successes). You are also able to make a Battle check as a Cooperative Roll for one other team member's Trait roll, once a round, throughout the mission. This is in *addition* to whatever action you take during that round; there are no penalties for doing both these things.

Outside of **Plans & Operations**, this Edge allows you to make a Battle roll as an Action (in or out of combat) to serve as a Cooperative Roll for *any* check, including an attack roll.

SPECIAL ABILITIES

These are all the direct result of rolls on various tables in the Hero's Journey section of the *Freedom Squadron Commando's Manual*. For those of you wanting to use them in your games without those charts, you should treat



them as Edges. Notes are added to effectively convert them to Edges for that purpose (but anyone running *Freedom Squadron* really should keep them as Freedom Squadron Specializations instead).

AIR SUPPORT

There are times when the only cover a Freedom Squadron team has in the field is the weapons of friendly aircraft. Whether as an effective door gunner or a very skilled operator of forward-mounted machine guns, you can use your aircraft's weapons to perform the Suppressive Fire maneuver over a Large Burst Template. Targets suffer a -2 to their Spirit checks against your overwhelming firepower. This maneuver requires the vehicle to be capable of hovering. During **Plans & Operations** play, this ability gives you a +2 on any Cooperative rolls you make using Piloting (this does *not* stack with the bonus gained from **Hot Zone Maneuvers**).

Edge Notes: Treat it as Seasoned and requiring Steady Hands and Piloting d8+.

ANALYSIS

You're an expert analyst, able to sift through mountains of data (signals, imagery, measurements, and related) and work out what the enemy or target is up to. You gain Mastery: Intelligence Analysis, which usually applies to Investigation and Tradecraft rolls that relate directly to analyzing opposition information and actions. You may spend a Benny to "get a clue" from the Game Master about opposition actions or intentions. During Plans & Operations play, you gain a free action to make a Cooperative Roll to aid any other team member, using Tradecraft. This is in addition to any other action you take.

Edge Notes: Treat it as a Seasoned Edge, one that also requires Investigation d6+ and Tradecraft d6+.

OPERATIONAL EXPERTISE

Combining excellent knowledge of combined-force strategy and tactics with extraordinary improvisational thinking, you're the one everyone else wants running their Plans & Operations. You gain the **Operational Planning Edge**, and when you make your Battle check as a Cooperative roll to help a teammate, you gain a +2 on that roll.

Edge Notes: Treat this as a higher level version of Operational Planning; it requires that Edge to take, and is a Veteran Edge. It also requires at least one other Leadership Edge.

SENSORY OVERWATCH

When you're the "eye in the sky," or otherwise in a position to use sensor systems and related tech to watch over your team, everyone gains significant advantages. As an action, you can make an Electronics roll to grant everyone a bonus initiative card on the next round.

With a raise, you give everyone a +1 on their very next Trait roll. You can do this every round, as an action, so long as you have reasonable access to sensors, cameras, and the like. This ability can be used during **Plans & Operations** play, but this is all you can do on a turn in that system. In that situation, you grant a +1 to everyone else on a success, and a +2 on a raise (target number 4, no modifiers).

Edge Notes: Treat this as a Seasoned Edge that also requires Notice of d8+ and Electronics of d8+.

TACTICAL COMMUNICATIONS

A leader for a modern age, you know how to use electronic communication to extend your leadership across any distance. You have the **Command Presence Edge**, but so long as you can speak directly to troops over radio, your actual command radius is limited only to radio range. During **Plans & Operations** play, if you have the **Operational Planning Edge**, you can roll Battle as a Cooperative Roll for every member of your team, each round! You make one single roll, and it potentially generates a bonus for each other teammate (apply the bonuses or penalties from each Challenge independently).

Edge Notes: Treat this as an advanced version of the **Command Presence Edge** (requiring the character to have that before taking this). It's a Seasoned Edge, and it also requires Electronics of d6+.

TACTICAL COORDINATION

You are such a master Tactician (gaining that Edge), you draw your pool of Action Cards with the benefits of the **Quick Edge** at work (discard and replace any cards of five or less). You can also use

the Tactician ability during **Plans & Operations** play (drawing a number of Challenge Cards, based on the roll, to use to replace cards drawn during the mission).

Edge Notes: Treat this as an advanced version of the Tactician Edge (requiring the character to have that before taking this). It's a Veteran Edge, and it also requires Battle of d8+.

TACTICAL LOGISTICS

You're such a master planner and strategist, your team gains significant advantages wherever things go pear-

shaped. At the start of any initiative-driven sequence, you make a free action Logistics roll before cards are dealt. With a success, you and your team members gain a bonus initiative card; on a raise, everyone gets a bonus card on the second round, as well. This stacks with Level Headed and similar bonuses. This ability also allows you to discard and replace one Challenge Card per round during **Plans & Operations** play.

Edge Notes: Treat this as a Veteran Edge that also requires Smarts of d8+ and Logistics of d8+.

