



# CHAPTER 3

El'Rahn waited. He waited as only a Lyran can. Wrapped in his deep purple robes, he peered through his mask at the slightly bloated creature enveloped in its artificial environment on the other side of his lab. "A Lyran's patience transcends even time," the High Mage had often counselled, "There is a moment for everything, the overeager will miss these moments, and thus fail to properly exploit them." El'Rahn knew this moment was fast approaching; still, he waited, almost immobile, silent and pondering.

Suddenly, almost unexpectedly, a muffled squeak from the creature signalled, at long last, the arrival of El'Rahn's moment. He rose finally and approached the creature, the words of incantations barely escaping his lips to make only the slightest of sounds as he carefully guided this creature he'd created through this, the final but most delicate stage of its development.

When it was done, El'Rahn carefully reached into the enclosed environment and lifted the new creature free, allowing himself only the slightest satisfaction as it survived outside the carefully controlled conditions its parent required. A wave of his staff toward the nearest wall activated a viewer which displayed the waiting face of one of his apprentices. "Prak'Al," he called the apprentice's name, knowing he had been waiting just as long for this summons as El'Rahn had for the birth of the creature he now held. "Come now, it is time."

"Yes, Master."

Prak'Al hated Earth. The entire planet somehow stank, he imagined, from the sheer inferiority of its occupants. He still had great difficulty accepting what he'd been told on ascending to the fifth circle, that such unevolved creatures could pose a threat to Lyra, but the High Mage had foreseen just that.

"Welllllll, we're all here. Shall we start?" the gravelly hiss somehow managed to sound saccharine sweet at the same time. Prak'Al regarded the orange and yellow demon with distaste that his well-worn magenta mask concealed. Having to be on Earth was bad enough, having to keep company with B'harne's chief lieutenant was irritating, having to do both of these and interact directly with sponge minions in this awful overlit room was nearly unbearable. "Of course. At your pleasure." he replied in as even a voice as he could manage.



## BLACK HATS & BASTARDS



## THE HELLWYRM

### BARNEY

The Jihad's primary adversary, the top villain, the great demon B'harne sits on a throne of skulls in a well-secluded hideout, plotting the downfall of the human race. The Jihad has many theories about the true nature of B'harne; some say he's a particularly powerful extradimensional, some call him a minion of Satan, Ogdru Jahad, or some similar religious figure, and some say that he's a manifestation of Evil itself. To date, nobody's ever gotten a straight answer on which theory is correct, but then nobody's ever thought to simply ask, either.

#### ORIGINS

The entity that calls itself "B'harne" began as a nameless, formless creature of indeterminate nature somewhere dark, cold and empty. Whether this place exists within our own universe or is actually some sort of interdimensional boundary zone is unknown. The original B'harne creature was by nature parasitic; it required some form of host to provide food and mobility. Being where it was, the creature didn't have much opportunity to feed or move as the centuries passed.

During the time of Atlantis (see p.29), one of the city's sages accidentally opened a portal to the place where the B'harne creature was hibernating. The shock of the portal opening, and the richness of the energy on the other side, moved the creature into action. It attempted to latch itself to the entire city and suck it dry. The attempt caused a massive feedback loop, catapulting the creature back into its hole and causing Atlantis to vanish in a reality quake.

The effects of the quantaclism on



B'harne were equally dramatic as the vanishing of Atlantis; the creature was given a reptilian form, its parasitic nature was shifted so that it no longer needed a host to remain active, and it received powerful new abilities. Despite these new powers, B'harne was still stuck out in the middle of an entropic wasteland with very little to do, so it returned into hibernation.

#### THE DEAL

B'harne slept in the void for a very long time, until — much like the last time — something woke him up. The Lyran High Mage Charn'El, in the midst of a summoning ritual, opened a portal to his resting place in search of a demon to use in destroying humanity. The original demon Charn'El was attempting to summon had resisted, and when the High Mage tried to force the argument, the demon emerged a bit too ripped up to suit his purposes. Before the portal to Lyra could close, B'harne forced his way through.

Charn'El, an opportunist if nothing else, saw potential in this new, unsummoned creature. B'harne was far more powerful than the pathetic specimen that has resisted the High Mage's

call, and that power could be put to good use. Charn'El quickly struck a deal with B'harne; assist him with his task of subjugating humanity, and he could have whatever was left of the species as his own empire. To a creature like B'harne, a planet full of slaves, subjects and potential food was too great a prize to turn down. The Wyrm accepted, and the two began working on a plan to use B'harne's powers to subjugate the masses.

#### NATURE OF THE BEAST

Though he appears physically quite often, there must be some part of B'harne's original formless nature that does not incorporate itself into his various manifestations, because he is always able to appear again if a particular manifestation is struck down. Eventually, B'harne will be somehow forced to draw even that remaining formless part of himself into a physical manifestation and while the resulting manifestation would be quite powerful, it would also enable the Barney-Slayer to destroy him completely.

Most prominent and most used among B'harne's abilities are mesmerization, or spongification as the Jihad calls it. B'harne's ability to mesmerize and stupefy humans is very strong, both through direct contact or intermediaries (such as toys and television). This power is strong enough that a completely mesmerized human, a sponge-minion, will not only fight for B'harne but sometimes will completely forget whatever personality he or she might've had before. How he does this is through a combination of tone of voice, movement and what he says; though there is also likely something intangible and possibly magical that helps him sway the will of human beings, especially through when used at a distance through recordings or toys.



## BJ and Baby Bop

B'hee J'hay and B'haby B'hop, as they are alternatively known, are B'harne's chief lieutenants. Subordinate manifestations of the same force from which B'harne draws his corporeal form and power, their existence and power are an extension of his will. Their functions are many: they have skills in magic and mesmerization similar to B'harne's (but of lesser strength, they have been known to oversee important operations or lead troops for B'harne both individually and together, working in conjunction they can greatly magnify B'harne's ability to mesmerize and spongify a large group of people. Because their entire existence is subject to B'harne's will, neither BJ nor Baby Bop can be truly destroyed until B'harne himself is; they can be struck down (and have been many times) with conventional or magical weapons, but eventually return if B'harne still exists. When B'harne is finally and completely destroyed, BJ and Baby Bop will either disappear along with the power that sustains them or, more likely, their power will be greatly diminished and they will be easily defeated.

As magic is part of his being rather than a force he draws from around him, B'harne is also quite adept in using many forms of magic, with spells that spongify among them. And though he is likely quite physically strong, he prefers to use sponge minions or other servants or allies in direct, physical confrontations.

B'harne is, in actual fact, not all that bright. While not the mindless beast of his earliest days, his physical incarnations are not strategic geniuses in any sense of the word. This lack of intelligence shouldn't lead PCs to underestimate him, though; B'harne still has a good measure of cunning and a nasty temperament to boot.

### MOTIVATION

B'harne wants to rule the world, it's that simple. The parts of B'harne that remember the early days drool at the prospect of billions of lives, billions of minds for the taking. The parts of him changed by the Atlantean quantaclasm have come up with concepts like "command" and "total rule," ideas that intrigue B'harne the more he thinks about

them. The mindless adoration he's instilled in his minions provides another reason to not simply devour everything like he used to in the old days.

## THE PURPLE HORDE

When it comes to conquering humanity, B'harne tends to rely on his hypnotic powers to recruit minions and eliminate resistance. As a result, most of his centers of power exist in the mundane world as businesses, youth centers and other seemingly ordinary institutions run by his loyal servants. B'harne's covert assets aren't intended for use on the general population (though they could very well be used for that, if push came to shove) but as opposition to the Jihad. In a sense, it's a logical conclusion; the Jihad expects opposition in terms of military action, and if B'harne gives the Jihaddi what they expect they won't concentrate their forces on his mundane infrastructure or B'harne himself.

To this end, B'harne created the Purple Horde. The Horde consists of

a band of B'harne's most loyal human minions, backed up by servitor spawn known as Loved Ones and a variety of Lyran servitor creatures. The Horde was designed to match the Jihad's combat strength, but not surpass it unless told otherwise. There are 25,000 dedicated members of the Horde scattered all over the world, protecting ten times that many of B'harne's servants engaged in non-combat roles.

Command of the Horde lies in the talons of B'harne himself. To call the Wyrms leadership style "autocratic" is a massive understatement: B'harne rules in the grand tradition of human leaders like Caligula and Ivan the Terrible. Orders are intended to be obeyed instantly, and anybody - except for a handful of Lyran "advisors" - who screws up or speaks out of turn is dragged off to be tortured to death, if they're *lucky*.

While this method of command is effective at keeping the troops in line, it doesn't help B'harne's image as the cute and cuddly friend of children. As a result, only a handful of people are allowed to see B'harne's true face and relay his orders to the rest of the Horde. These people are known as the Liaisons.

## INTERMEDIARIES: THE LIAISONS

The Liaisons are a rare breed of human. They're a small pool of people who can stand in B'harne's presence without being affected by his powers, and they're amoral enough to know that being second fiddles to a demon beast means potentially big rewards in the future. In a way, these Liaisons are the Horde's equivalent of the high-ranking Jihaddi superheroes. Becoming a Liaison is the highest post that a human can achieve in B'harne's service. As his most trusted generals, they can operate



independently and move troops and materiel around without scrutiny from others. Orders given by the Liaisons are treated with the same weight as orders given by the Wyrms, and everybody in the Horde knows that the Liaisons are to be obeyed just as quickly.

Each Liaison commands an important unit of the Horde. There are a few other humans of near-equal standing, but without the skills or near-total lack of morality. To be a "Liaison to Command" indicates command ability, long-term service and exceptional talents. They are the rank where the non-human forces interface with the human troops. Collectively referred to as "the Brass," the Liaisons work closely with B'harne and his Lyran allies to keep the Horde under control and aimed at the Jihad.

There have been only a few changes in the Liaisons since the beginning of the Horde. Mostly this is due to the trouble of finding people who can survive B'harne's presence with their skills and sanity intact. Jihaddi action has also resulted in the loss of Liaisons in the past. The Jihad's Operation HOMEFRONT successfully killed two of the Horde's most powerful Liaisons in one blow.

The current Liaisons to Command are:

*Kajj:* A very traditional battlefield captain who commands mostly sponge minions. His tall, tanned and bald profile has been seen at numerous battle sites. His traditionalist streak includes foregoing most modern equipment in favor of simpler weapons such as bows and swords, along with plenty of shock troops and human wave attacks. The Jihad's normal understanding of Horde tactics comes almost entirely out of Kajj's playbook.

*Arill:* The ultimate hedonist, Arill cares nothing for command or wealth beyond the necessities for his dreams of

Sybaritic excess once B'harne's conquest is complete. To pass the time between now and then, he heads the Horde's research department. Arill's well-developed streak of sadism, and his nasty imagination, have created things that have impressed some Lyrans on occasion.

*Gherin:* Much like Kajj, Gherin is another fighting Liaison. His responsibility is to train and lead commando groups. Once he's through with them, Gherin's men are a tightly trained, insanely strong group of soldiers capable of standing up to the Jihad's best. Gherin is best known in the Horde for despising sponge-minions and refuses to consider them for his strike teams.

*Linna:* The Liaison in charge of maintaining the Horde's hypnotized state looks like somebody's mother, complete with sunny smile and straight-out-of-the-50s wardrobe. In truth, the smile and those petticoats mask a mind that is warped beyond recognition. Linna is considered completely insane by the other Liaisons, most of the Wyrms' minions and quite possibly B'harne. However, she's still capable of performing her duties, so nothing changes.

*Painter:* A code name and the only one anyone has from him. Painter's true name and function are shrouded in mystery, but the Jihad believes him to be in charge of the Horde's internal

security. Intelligence reports following Operation HOMEFRONT suggest that Painter has been "gifted" by B'harne with some unknown power, and has been moved from the Liaison role into the ranks of the non-humans. The reason for this "promotion" is unknown.

*Winston:* The most aggravating member of the Liaisons, Winston is in charge of keeping B'harne's public holdings intact. In this role Winston is a known public figure, much to the Jihad's chagrin, and maintains a perfectly clean public image in order to keep up appearances. The Jihad would love to shut Winston down, but to date he's developed a reputation for being untouchable.

*Serevan:* An organizer and paper pusher of superhuman talent, Serevan is in charge of keeping the Horde's minimal bureaucracy in order. His rigid orderliness is held up by the other Liaisons as an example to the troops, as is his complete lack of empathy and ruthless devotion of efficiency.

## THOSE WHO SERVE: THE MINIONS

The ranks of the Purple Horde are made up of two types of soldier - those who have been exposed to B'harne's hypnotic influence, and those who haven't. The Jihad calls these soldiers

### Loved Ones

The Loved Ones are unusual creatures, bipedal lizards with mottled purple and pink skin and vaguely humanoid facial features. They apparently have some sort of direct connection to B'harne, but the nature of the connection isn't as yet understood. Loved Ones have most often been found in the darkest parts of enemy strongholds, usually guarding or serving spongins' colonies. Although they seem to understand human languages, they don't actually *speaking* them, instead communicating in a series of sharp clicks, grunts and squeaking sounds. A Loved One will defend itself and any spongins' in sight to the death - and the creatures do not surrender at all - with a variety of bladed weapons (for some reason they're not fond of guns).



## Mikey Crawford

4 points

Mikey Crawford is the oldest and luckiest sponge-minion in Barney's army. Mikey has survived more direct encounters with the Jihad than any other minion in history, and despite this still returns to "play with his Jihaddi buddies."

Where Mikey comes from isn't exactly known - he first appeared in the vicinity of Montreal in 1992 as part of an infiltration force sent to undermine the city's universities. When a NEBULA strike team took out Mikey's compatriots, he managed to evade death by slipping down into the steam tunnels beneath McGill University. When he emerged, he was rewarded by his master with command of the second attempt to infiltrate Montreal.

This particular dance continued through to the X'hirjq invasion, as Mikey slowly but surely became more and more famous in the Purple Horde as the Man Who Could Not Be Killed. He even managed to gain a small amount of respect from his Jihad adversaries - but only a small amount. Mikey played only a minor role in the invasion, mostly in keeping the other sponges out of the way of the wyrm-minions and alien warriors. For his efforts, Mikey was crowned Supreme Commander of Barney's Special Friends in 1997.

Today Mikey stays behind a play-desk at the Church of Barney HQ in Washington, D.C., directing Special Friends in their activities over the phone. He also harasses the Jihad on a regular basis using a captured Linker. Since no wiser minds in the Purple Horde have managed to figure out how the Linker works, all Mikey can do is use it to talk to his "bestest buddies," who tend to ignore him 90% of the time.

**Attributes:** ST 9 [-10]; IQ 10 [0]; DX 10 [0]; HT 12 [20].

**Secondary Attributes:** HP 9; Will 8; Per 8; FP 12; Speed 5.5; Move 5; Damage Thrust 1d-2, Swing 1d-1; Dodge 8; Parry 8.

**Advantages:** Administrative Rank 3 (Spongion leader) [15]; Hard to Kill 2 [4]; Patron (Barney, special abilities; 15 or less) [60].

**Disadvantages:** Easy to Read [-10]; Enemy (The Jihad) [-40]; Short Attention Span [-10]; Spongified [-60].

**Skills:** Driving/TL8 (Automobile)-9 [1]; Fast-Talk-8 [2]; Guns/TL8 (Pistol)-10 [1]; Guns/TL8 (Rifle)-10 [1]; Intimidation-7 [1]; Karate-10 [4]; Shortsword-9 [1]; Singing-14 [4]; Stealth-9 [1]; Strategy (Land)-6 [1]; Urban Survival-10 [8].

sponge minions and wyrm minions.

### SPONGE MINIONS

Sponge minions (plural spongion) are humans who have been enthralled by B'harne to the point where they've lost most of their cognitive ability. The name "sponge minion" comes from an old Jihaddi joke about their brans hav-

ing turned into sponge from one too many episodes of Barney & Friends. The average sponge minion has very little intellectual capacity beyond "Barney is my friend," and for that reason they appear most often as a source of simple, expendable labor: foot soldiers, propagandists, cannon fodder or just as a simple distraction for Jihaddi troops. Oftentimes, spongion are simply just

*there*, having been brainwashed and then just left to wander around Horde installations until somebody puts them to work or kills them out of hand.

If caught early enough, spongification can be cured and a sponge minion returned to complete functionality as a human being. The Jihad calls the process despongification, and uses a number of different methods to accomplish it. Most despongification methods involve completely isolating a minion from B'harne's influences, then surrounding it with influences that run contrary to B'harne's teachings. The favored influences are junk food, high-caffeine drinks and loud rock music. Because it seeks to save and protect humanity, the Jihad expends considerable effort towards despongification.

### WYRM MINIONS

People who are exposed to B'harne, discover his true nature and either don't become spongified or attempt to fight him are known as wyrm minions. Wyrms fight alongside the Horde for any number of reasons, most of them being fairly mercenary in nature. The average wyrm minion is convinced that B'harne can and will conquer the world, and that it's better to be an oppressor than the oppressed. Dreams of power, ego or simply sadism drive other wyrm minions. They are far more dangerous than spongion, as they still retain all their faculties and have no problems with pesky moral qualms driving them.

Where spongion are the "enlisted" ranks of the Horde, wyrm minions are the officers. They are placed into positions where their skills and native intelligence are required, often in technical or advanced combat roles. Many wyrm minions rotate in and out of B'harne's mundane holdings as combination managers/guardsmen, watching out for Jihaddi attacks. The more ruthless and successful a wyrm minion becomes, the



higher in rank they go until they are second only to the Liaisons in the over-all Horde.

### THE CHANGED

Little is known about the creatures collectively known as “the Changed.” Neither the Liaisons nor the Jihad have any real data on who or what the Changed were to begin with, though it’s suspected they were high-functioning spongin or wyrm minions that caught B’harne’s eye one day.

The Changed are weapons of war. Most of them show some signs of human intelligence, but beyond that there is little to distinguish any Changed as human. They are warped monstrosities, similar to mutated Lyran animals but without the sense of elegance or efficiency Lyran tools have. The one distinguishing characteristic the Changed all share is their skin; a bilious bright purple that resembles B’harne’s hide in color and texture. Aside from that one mark, each Changed is different in size, configuration and power from the others.

To date, B’harne has used the Changed only sparingly, and only when he personally goes into the field. Jihaddi intelligence has assumed that the Changed exist as a sort of Praetorian guard, beings tied directly to B’harne and capable of protecting him from even the more powerful Jihaddi warriors like the Maenads. Whether or not B’harne will create more Changed remains to be seen.

## CHILDREN OF THE HIGH MAGE: THE LYRANS

A tremendous distance from Earth, a most remarkable world orbits

an equally remarkable star. The inhabitants of that world, known as Lyrans, are a race of natural mages of incredible power. Ruled by Charn’El, a wizard so powerful he raised himself to the level of a living god, the Lyrans have spent millennia honing their talents to the point where they can do almost anything, from manipulating simple objects to reshaping living beings. Eschewing technology - because a Lyran only needs his will to bend reality to his whim - the Lyrans live in a society which is primitive only at first glance.

A closer look shows the extent of the Lyrans’ power. Attuned to magic on the most basic levels, the Lyrans have spent their entire history reshaping their world to serve them. Based on a love of order and control, the Lyrans have reshaped everything they come into contact with; their planet’s mana networks engineered for efficiency, their culture redesigned in ways to best use them, and changing the ecology itself to suit them if need be. Without the use of so much as a steam engine - or a hammer, for that matter - the Lyrans have ascended to the level of a mature interstellar civilization, centered on their god-king, surrounded by advanced biotechnology.

They are also a race at war.

Three thousand years ago, Charn’El had a startling vision of the end of his race during a routine meditation. In the vision, a primitive and unknown foe came to power beyond the furthest reaches of the Empire and challenged Charn’El’s people in battle. With a combination of strange and alien tools, led by a being the vision only referred to as White Death, the people of this mysterious race would topple even the citadel of the High Mage. They would scour the Lyran homeworld of all life - and all Lyrans - and rule over a desolate moonscape where once the Lyrans flourished. There was still time, how-

ever. Shocked by the vision, the High Mage prepared to turn fate on its head by preventing it from completing its course. The Lyrans would track down the threat, prepare their move, and destroy it before the natives could scourge Lyra.

Their target is a world named Earth.

The Lyrans’ search for Earth took thousands of years and hundreds of ships searching in the long dark of the galaxy, but eventually the fleet returned with an answer; the race of the High Mage’s vision - a species of jumped-up primates calling themselves “humanity” - had been located, still primitive but capable of deflecting the first assault. Earth’s great distance from Lyran space gave Charn’El a bit of breathing room. The High Mage ordered ships to make the journey and study this new enemy, but refrained from more immediate action.

Centuries passed as the Lyrans studied, prodded, poked and occasionally killed humans as they sought to understand how they could possibly be a threat to the mighty Lyran Empire. It was a result of these studies that the Lyrans came to the attention of the Maenads of the Holy Albino. For the two bands of nonhumans, it was loathing at first sight. The Maenads and the Lyrans clashed many times as the years wore on.

The opening of the Babylon Road in 1947 (see p. 30) allowed the Lyrans to reinforce their scout parties, but also led to a serious escalation of hostilities by the Maenads. The now-constant warring between the Cubs of White Death and the Lyrans ultimately led to Charn’El taking drastic action: the summoning spell which ended up bringing the demon beast B’harne out of the void.



## THE EMPIRE

Charn'El's empire is centered around Eta Carinae, a highly variable star some 8,000 light years away from Earth. Eta Carinae would normally be considered one of the worst pieces of galactic real estate possible; several times the mass of our sun, the center of a gigantic eruption of gas and firing off natural laser light in multiple directions, the star is the example of a supernova waiting to happen. Most of Eta Carinae's planets are uninhabited, Mercury-like cinders, gently glowing in the stark radiation. The Lyran homeworld however, through some lucky confluence of the incredible energies given off by its parent star, exists in a stable bubble, protected from the heat and radiation. This bubble is soaked in magical energy, which accounts for the Lyrans' magical aptitude. Through magical manipulation, the Lyrans have managed to stabilize Eta Carinae somewhat, so that from the Homeworld it currently looks like a slightly larger and brighter version of Sol.

From the Homeworld, the Lyrans rode their living starships out and conquered the worlds within easy reach. The first of these was the Saethrian homeworld, where the Lyrans had

their first encounter with the power of technology. While the initial encounters didn't go well for the Lyrans (their initial attack fleet was knocked out of the sky by nuclear missiles), in the end the Saethrians were conquered and the survivors modified. The conquest of Saethria triggered the expansionist phase of the Empire, which lasted for a thousand years and eventually resulted in two dozen planets under Lyran rule, as well as a dozen or more worlds sterilized by the Lyrans when they proved too difficult to bring under control.

## MASKS AND CIRCLES

Lyran society is caste-based, the castes corresponding to the level of magical power a Lyran can muster on his own. There are nine Circles, going in order from the First - the rank of newborns and toddlers - to the Ninth, the rank of the High Mage himself. Most of the adult Lyran population levels off in the Fourth and Fifth Circles, while prodigies may attain the rank of Sixth, and a small selection of hero figures may reach Seventh unaided. A handful of Charn'El's personal assistants and acolytes have been granted the status of Eighth, and are commonly known as



the Ascended, inferior only when compared to the High Mage.

A curious part of Lyran culture is their use of masks. No living Lyran, not even Charn'El, knows where the tradition originated, but over the years it has become an integral part of Lyran society. Every Lyran owns an elaborately carved mask, most often made of wood. The carvings on the mask act both as a symbol of the Lyran's status within his Circle and as a subtle net of protective spells and good luck charms. No Lyran will willingly remove their mask in the presence of a non-Lyran, and cultural norms make it extremely bad manners to display their bare faces in public.

When unmasked, Lyrans physically resemble human legends of elves; slightly taller than most humans (a trait more exaggerated when compared to humans from earlier times), very slight builds, narrow faces and pointed ears. Lyran skin tones are fairly homogeneous, usually settling on a light gray tone with only minor variations. Lyrans tend towards having dark hair, the few naturally light-haired Lyrans will use dye or modify themselves in order to maintain social customs. A Lyran's

## Saethrians

Saethrians are twelve to fifteen foot long winged and tentacled serpentine creatures. Long ago they were a very powerful race of warriors who fought against the Lyrans, eventually lost, and suffered the fate of most races that war with Lyra and lose (which to the Jihad's knowledge constitutes all of them thus far): they were enslaved and manipulated down to a genetic level to suit the needs and whims of the Lyrans. Independent intelligence and magic resistance bred out of them, they are now shock troops and commandos for the Lyrans; mindless but clever soldiers whose only ability and purpose is to kill with single-minded abandon at the command of a Lyran.





magegift often manifests as a subtle glow in the eyes, which can change color depending on mood or stress.

Lyrans are, for the most part, cruel, mean bastards. Manipulative behavior, arrogance and extreme tenaciousness are rooted in the foundations of their culture, and most Lyrans will display these traits almost to a fault. The Lyrans believe without reservation that they are the universe's perfect lifeform, often citing the immortality and power of the High Mage as the only proof they need of their superiority. In accomplishing their goals, which they regard not only as supreme but generally as the only goals with any value at all, they very rarely involve themselves directly, preferring instead to work at a remove with tools or servant races manipulated to fit their needs. Though tenacious to the point of obsession, Lyrans are also very patient beings, and think nothing of waiting years for a plan to develop or for a goal to be achieved. If the end result can be accomplished without a Lyrans' direct intervention, then they will remain plotting in the background while slaves and fair-weather allies do the dirty work.

On the rare occasions when a Lyrans emerges from the shadows to do battle, they tend to be arrogant to the point of overconfidence. If it wasn't for their overpowering magical skills, the average Lyrans could easily write checks his butt couldn't cash. With their abilities, however, Lyrans can quickly become terrors in open combat. Their arrogance and unfamiliarity with human technology has caused a few Lyrans to fall thanks to quick-thinking Jihaddi gadgets. And of course, the Maenads of the Holy Albino can force a Lyrans to retreat.



## DARK GREEN MAGIC

The Lyrans are - in the most literal sense possible - creatures of magic. Lyra is a planet steeped in mana, and as a result the natural evolutionary processes that gave birth to sapient life selected for magical ability as well as intelligence. Since the species' beginning, almost all Lyrans have been born with some level of innate magical ability; the very few who are born without the magegift are shunned as outsiders, barely considered members of the same race. Technology as humans understand it is something alien to the Lyrans mindset, a tool used by servants or barbaric inferior beings. The very *idea* of forcing inanimate materials into a shape by means of clumsy and inelegant manipulation of heat and light strikes the average Lyrans as utterly repugnant. The Lyrans pride themselves on being able to *will* materials into the shapes they want, without resorting to crude outside means to accomplish the job.

The pinnacle of the Lyrans' command over their world is their mastery of biotechnology. An offshoot of the earliest uses of magic (to lure or domesticate food animals, hunt predators and grow crops) Lyrans prefer to use specially modified plants and animals as tools for specific goals. For high-caste Lyrans, even something as simple as a mask or a staff will be a living creature. When the animals being modified started out as sapient beings, their sapience is warped until only a mindless subservience to the Lyrans is left.

The most spectacular example of Lyrans biotech are their fleet of starships. The Lyrans have little use for a "space fleet" as depicted in science fiction, as they rarely have a need to dominate space and only need a small number of vessels to maintain their Empire, but the ships they do have are incredible to behold. Long ago, the Lyrans encountered a pod of lifeforms that travelled through interstellar space without the need for protection. These creatures were, in effect, giant spacecraft them-



selves. These creatures were quickly herded, domesticated and regrown to meet the needs of Lyran explorers. Their minds were rebuilt to accommodate a Lyran pilot, their interiors were rebuilt to permit passengers and the ship-beings were equipped with special magical “batteries,” all the better for Lyrans to use as an aid to the ship-beings’ natural methods of propulsion. The ship-beings became the vanguard wave of Lyran expansion, first expanding the High Mage’s realm into the stars, then becoming the means through which the Lyrans touched their destined enemies.

### SPELLCRAFT

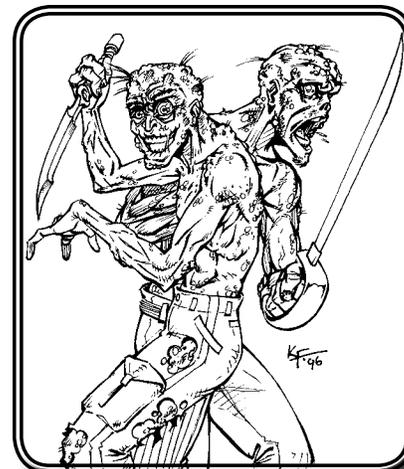
The needs of Lyran magic shape everything about them. While the average Lyran has an innate ability to use magic, it is another thing entirely to use it skillfully. Lyran languages have been carefully designed over the course of centuries to reflect the need for precision and accuracy required for successful spellcraft. As a result, the Lyran language is highly scientific in nature; complex clauses in a terrestrial language can be reduced to one or two words in Lyran, and there is no redundancy in vocabulary. Given sufficient command of the language, it is *impossible* to mis-

interpret a statement made in Lyran.

Using this language, a skilled mage can craft elaborate ritual workings capable of completely unweaving local reality and putting it back together again.

*The Babylon Road:* The best-known Lyran working on Earth, the Road is a wormhole that connects the Nevada desert to a designate staging base just outside Charn’El’s capital city on Lyra. The Road was designed as a ritual that could be initiated by a single mid-caste Lyran working with a handful of human dupes, and then strengthened and sustained by specialized mages and ritual circles on the Lyran side of the wormhole. With the Road open, traffic between Earth and Lyra no longer depends on the relatively slow starships, which allows the Lyrans better access to reinforcements. Unfortunately for the Lyrans, the Jihad knows that the Road exists, and has set up a watch to ensure that nothing comes through unnoticed.

*Thanatins:* An example of one of the more sadistic Lyran biological experiments, the thanatins were first discovered by the Jihad during Operation PACIFICA. In the middle of the rescue mission, TRES advance teams discovered that Jihaddi POWs taken



during the X’hirjq invasion had been transformed into Lyran soldier drones. Reports were vague as to the method, although it seemed to observers that it involved a series of ritual tortures where control spells were carved into various parts of the body. The resulting thanatin was a zombie-like creature, retaining only a desiccated mockery of its former human form, and driven insane by the torture. Worse, the thanatin retained almost all of its skills, which meant they could fight against Jihaddi just as effectively as they fought spongin. Most of the thanatins were killed during PACIFICA, but rumors about high-ranking MIAs turning up as zombie generals in the Lyran ranks continue to haunt the Jihad.

## Charn’El and the Barney Slayer

The Barney Slayer was broken in a battle between Lord Owsen and Charn’El at the conclusion of Operation PACIFICA. When the battle finally ended, the Maenads succeeded in magically sealing Charn’El into a dimensional pocket, but were unable to recover all pieces of the Barney Slayer. Because of their observations that the recovered pieces of the Barney Slayer are very slowly regenerating what has been lost, senior Jihaddi mages and scientists believe that the lost part is regenerating as well and, more significantly, that it is likely that the other piece was drawn into the dimensional pocket with Charn’El as the portal there closed itself.

The effect such an environment would have along with the presence of the Lyran High Mage on the blade and what it will regenerate into is unknown, but the JPV believes that a mage of Charn’El’s power could not only greatly speed up its regeneration but remake it into a powerful magical tool for his own use, a “dark” Barney Slayer, for those of a more melodramatic bent. The full extent of what Charn’El could do with such a weapon can only be guessed at by even the JPV’s most experienced magic users, one of the most probable guesses though is that it would enable him to far more easily escape from his interdimensional prison.