

Frozen Shadows:

A Cthulhutech game for 5 players

by

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Crash course in Cthulhutech for Gms:

Cthulhutech is fairly simple. Your characters have attributes and skills. When rolls are necessary, you're trying to beat a certain number based on difficulty. Start with the number of the relevant attribute. Then take a number of d10s equal to the relevant skill, and roll them. The roller has 3 options now:

- You can add on the highest die.
- If pairs or triples (or, very rarely, quadruples) are rolled, you can add them together, so if you rolled 3 dice and the results were 5, 5 and 8, you could add the two 5s together for 10, and add them on to the base attribute.
- If 3 or more dice come up with consecutive numbers, you can add them together, so if you rolled 4 dice and got 3, 4, 5 and 10, you could add the 3, 4 and 5 together for 12 and add that on instead of 10.

The higher one rolls, the better they do. If anyone succeeds by 10 or more, it's a critical success, and if anyone fails by 10 or more it's a critical failure. Criticals are at the discretion of the GM. Usually the results are twice as good as expected: Research is done twice as quick or uncovers twice as much information, repairs cost half the price, stuff like that. It's different in combat, see the relevant section.

The range of difficulties and required rolls to beat them are in the table below. Use the standard of you want to keep things quick:

Degree	Difficulties	Standard	Example
Easy	7-9	8	Stitching a small cut
Average	10-14	12	Hacking a home computer
Challenging	15-19	16	Searching for specifics of cult practice in a library/online
Hard	20-25	22	Noticing a tiny blood spot
Incredibly hard	26-31	28	Fixing a cracked D-Engine
Legendary	32+	34	Translating an ancient dead language

Automatic success: For routine or boring tasks that don't really add to the drama or story, you can automatically succeed at such tests if you would beat the target difficulty with your attribute+7. So if your Strength is 5, and the target difficulty of clearing away rubble is 12, you don't have to roll because your Strength+7 beats the difficulty. Now, if you were trying to clear away rubble speedily so you can hide in a cave from something horrible that's closing in on you, THEN you'd probably have to roll...

When a player doesn't have the required skill for a roll, they can still try. They roll 1 die, and HALF the result before adding it to their base attribute.

Drama points: Everyone starts with 5 drama points. They can be spent to add 1 extra die to their roll or an ally's roll, before or after the original roll. They can also be spent before an enemy roll to subtract 1 die from their roll. NB: They cannot be spent on Initiative, Armour or Damage rolls!

Combat - How to do it:

Determine Initiative:

Everyone rolls a die and adds it to their Reflex stat. Highest goes first, and so on in descending order.

Declare number of actions:

You can make one action at no penalty. You can make 2 actions at -2 to both, or 3 actions at -4 to all.

Make combat rolls:

Attacker makes an attack roll, defender makes a defence roll, according to this table:

Attack	Defence
Fighting	Armed fighting, Dodge or Fighting
Armed fighting	Armed fighting or Dodge
All other skills	Dodge

If shooting/throwing a ranged weapon, the following modifiers are applied depending on range:

Range	Difficulty modifier
Short range	+2
Mid range	0
Long range	-2
Extreme range	-6

Roll damage:

Compare the attack/Defence rolls. Add dice due to weapon type, and (if in close combat or throwing a weapon) the attacker's strength: A successful attack ALWAYS rolls at least 1 die of damage.

Result greater by	Damage	Strength	Damage
1-5	1 die	1-3	-1 die
6-10	2 dice	4-7	None
11-15	3 dice	8-9	+1 die
16-20	4 dice	10-11	+2 dice
		12-13	+3 dice
		14-15	+4 dice

Determine Wounds:

If target is wearing armour, they roll the armour's rating in dice and subtract the total from the incoming damage. PCs will have wound levels, each one equal to their Vitality, and each one imposing a penalty when reached.

Repeat the above for each player, and each action they have taken. Remember to apply multiple action penalties.

Called shots: If someone wants to to a precise shot, apply a penalty to hit. For every -2 applied, give them a bonus damage die. So aiming for the eye might be -8 to hit, but +3 damage dice.

Fear and Insanity:

Fear is an immediate in-game reaction to a mental or physical threat. Insanity is a permanent distortion of a character's perception. Players may start with some insanity-based disorder (They's witnessed some horrible things in the Aeon War), but mostly the game will be using Fear.

Call for Fear checks when something horrible or creepy happens. A Fear check is just a Tenacity Feat roll at a difficulty determined by the GM, same as any other roll.

If the Fear roll is passed, then you take it in your stride. If the roll is failed, however, you do not. Roll 2d10 and consult the following table:

2d10 total	Result
2	Physical effect: Your hair turns white, or you develop a permanent twitch or speech impediment. Lose a turn as you process the fear.
3	Lose bodily control: You are stunned into inaction. Lose a turn as you process the fear. You also lose control of bodily functions, with the associated embarrassment and discomfort.
4	Forget: -1 to all rolls for the rest of the scene. Afterwards, you completely forget the incident. You may still be plagued by nightmares and have several sleepless nights.
5-6	Faint: The fright hits you so deeply you just can't take it, and faint. You are unconscious for 5 minutes (1 minute if someone actively tries to revive you).
7-8	Cower: You cower in fear and feebly attempt to escape the source of the fear. The fright makes you too uncoordinated to run, the best you can do is crawl and whimper. -2 to all rolls for the scene and pass a Hard Tenacity test to take any direct action against the source of fear.
9-10	Scream: The sight terrifies you and you cry out in terror. Lose your next action.
11-12	Stunned: You are shocked beyond the capacity for thought. Lose a turn.
13-14	Twitch: You are shocked out of your skin. Causing you to retreat inside yourself. You can take no actions as you twitch and drool for 1d5 minutes. 50% chance of not remembering the event, as per Forget above.
15-16	Terror: You are utterly terrified and run screaming from the source. You'll do anything it takes to get away from whatever scared you. Once you escape, you suffer from the effects of Cower above for 1d5 minutes, likely sobbing and screaming all the while.
17-18	Morbid fascination: The sight frightens you but you find yourself drawn to the source, and have an obsessive urge to study and learn more about it for 1d5 days.
19	Temporary disorder: The experience is so scarring, you develop a permanent behavioural disorder of the GM's choice, as well as the effects of Twitch above.
20	Phobia: You become permanently terrified of whatever scared you, as well as the effects of Twitch above.

Examples of disorders players can receive include: Obsessive-compulsive disorder (OCD), Post-traumatic stress Disorder (PTSD), panic attacks (under stressful situations roll on the fear table again), mood disorders (mania, depression, anger management etc), paranoia, hallucinations. Pick as appropriate.

Regaining sanity lies outside the scope of this scenario. They're stuck with their problems.

Setting in a nutshell (for players and Gms)

- In 2019, A PhD student named Teresa Ashcroft discovered a book called *The Mysteries Within* while searching the archives of Miskatonic University (Arkham, Massachusetts). Contained within were detailed non-Euclidean mathematical principles which allowed her to pioneer a new field of science: Arcanotech. She is driven mad by her work.
- Her colleagues picked up where Teresa left off and eventually by 2026 an unlimited arcanotech power source is developed, the Dimensional Engine, or D-Engine. Many scientists are driven mad during the project, but eventually safeguards are put in place to make arcanotech research relatively safe.
- The Ashcroft Foundation is created to drive arcanotech R&D. It becomes the largest corporation in the world by the end of 2034.
- Things are good, humanity starts colonising the solar system.
- In 2058 humanity's farthest outpost, on Neptune, goes dark. Earth slowly begins losing contact with other colonies.
- In 2059 the Nazzadi attack. The First Arcanotech War begins. The UN and other nations establish a New Earth Government (NEG) to deal with the global threat. Its capital is established in Chicago in 2062.
- In 2064 the Nazzadi force begins to fracture: The highest ranks know that they are not a proud warrior race, but were created by the Migou who live on Pluto to eradicate humanity before it can become a threat. Nazzadi Marshal Vreta broadcasts the truth to the fleet and Earth alike. Three quarters of the force follow Vreta and eradicate the loyalists.
- In 2065 the Nazzadi meet with Earth's president to discuss peace. The Schaumburg Treaty integrates the Nazzadi into NEG society, and they take Cuba for their own, renaming it Nazza-Dhuni. The First Arcanotech War ends.
- By 2074 the Migou have arrive to Earth to finish what the Nazzadi began. A moon-sized mothership enters orbit over Antarctica and a full war of extermination begins with twice the original firepower of the First War. The Second Arcanotech War begins.
- In 2076 the Esoteric Order of Dagon emerges as a fully-fledged power, reclaiming the seas. Ships go missing, hybrids begin spawning in coastal populations, and underwater cities are eradicated.
- The Rapine Storm rises in Asia. Followers of the Dead God Hastur, they consume much of Southeast Asia in bloodshed and terror and begin threatening China and Indonesia. By 2080 they reach the north coast of Australia, and as far west as Turkmenistan.
- 2078: The Second Arcanotech war ends and the Aeon War begins as the NEG recognises the Cult threat and the Migou divert resources to fight mankind and cult both.
- Over the next years new biological mecha called Engels are developed to give the NEG an edge in the war. They manage to improve the odds a little: There is now something of a stalemate between the various battle forces.
- 2085: Present day. Humanity still fights for survival. Most NEG citizens live in massive city arcologies where crime is fairly low, there are well-paying jobs and living standards are comfortable. About 40% of Earth's population is Nazzadi, and considering the horrors of the Migou and monsters of the various cults, racism is almost unheard of. The Ministry of Information takes great care to ensure civilisation is protected from the worst of the truth. There is a quiet fear hidden deep within each community, but overall, people believe they will win the war and that the worst is over. Those on the front lines know differently. The term "Aeon War Syndrome" has been created to label the unique kind of mental stress caused by living in what could very well be Humanity's final days.

Game in a nutshell (GM's eyes only!):

The players are all a family living in Germany. The mother and father met while serving in the NEG military (Judith as a mecha pilot, Bernard as medical expert that patched her up) and saw duty together against some of the worst of humanity's enemies – Alien mecha, grotesque extra-dimensional monstrosities and worst of all, humans who lost their minds and turned on their friends. They both suffered great mental strain and eventually were honourably discharged back to civilian life so they could get the therapy they needed, and they started a family. Now in their 60's, they have 3 children, two girls (Anna, 14 and Maria, 18) and a son (Jonas, 28). They have yet to see the true horrors outside civilisation, although Jonas is learning, as his mental talents have led to his being enrolled in one of the Parapsychic Academies to learn the difficult and stressful secrets of sorcery.

Aeon survivors is a support group for families like this, and they help people readjust to a normal life away from the horrors of the Migou or the cults. It's a global group with a chapter in most cities, and gathers together people who served together or in the same platoon or company. The players are on an annual winter camping trip in the Black Forest with several other families. It has been successful for the last few years, with snowball fights, campfire singalongs, skating on the frozen lake, and hiking in the hilly woods.

It's going to go horribly wrong this time: a sudden snowstorm will cut off roads and ranged communication, leaving them stranded in their valley, and something will begin terrorising them, then murdering them. Tension and suspicion will run high between families, some clues will suggest extra-terrestrial or cultist activity, but the truth is worse. It's a person, Colonel Tommas Dreyfus, a commanding officer many of the families served with, thought dead when most of the platoon was lost defending Turkmenistan from the Rapine Storm. His incredulity at surviving was warped into a belief that he and his troops *should* have died that day, and he's determined to rectify this. Armed with magical devices (with which he caused the weather to cut off escape and rescue) and considerable military training, not to mention a total lack of fear or human empathy, the man who was once a father figure to most of the families is now butchering them, mentally as well as physically.

The family will need to survive a couple of murder attempts, accusations and witch hunts, neighbours-turned-murderers and Colonel Dreyfus himself if they are to survive.

- So the game will start off with a pleasant hike turned scramble for shelter as an unexpected storm hits, a little hiking back to the cabins.
- Then people will drown on the lake which was weakened with salt, leading to murder accusations and a fight or two breaking out.
- Dreyfus will abduct a family or two in the night and turn them into crazed murderers, which will attack the survivors.
- The survivors may well manage to track Dreyfus down after all of this and hit him where he lives: a cave system under the lake.
- If they survive, they will have a LOT of therapy to go through before they can even look at Aeon Survivors again.

Opening scene - Calm before the Storm:

The players have all arrived at Stausee Kliene Kinzig in the middle of the Black Forest in Germany. It's a lake made by the old German government in the 20th century to supply water for surrounding villages. The villages are gone since the 1st and 2nd Arcanotech Wars, but the lake survived, and has become a kind of holiday spot. There are several log cabins built for families, a boathouse and storage shed for watersports equipment in the summer and winter gear like snowshoes, ice skates for the frozen lake and bodyboards for sliding down hills. Away from the cabins, which surround the southern end of the lake is a large common building where families meet up for group activities like orienteering, treasure hunts, or campfires (a specific area is cleared for a large fire to be built, with a sort of gazebo structure to protect fire and campers from rain/snow and roll-down wind-breakers if the weather is stormy. It's a very nice place indeed.

Have the players take part in helping to pick their cabin. They could clash with another family and settle who gets to stay in that cabin with a snowball fight or ice-skating race or similar. There should be lots of joy and excitement from the other families, and hopefully that will rub off on the players. Once the cabins are settled, they can explore a bit. Show them the map, let them take a walk.

- If anyone checks out the reservoir tower (the kids may want to climb it or play hide and seek around it), have them make a difficult observation check to notice that the heavy-duty trapdoor used to seal off the levels that go below the lake seems to have scratch marks around it. Any adults present or told will probably think it was an animal clawing at it to try and get below the ice for unfrozen water.
- There will be a few footprints in the snow near the boathouse and common building that weren't visited by any of the families that just arrived. An average observation roll will detect them. Again, it's probably just the owners of the site making sure things are prepared for the holiday makers- removing damaged equipment, stocking up the woodpiles, making sure the ice is thick enough to skate on etc.
- Have one of the girls notice a good-looking boy from another family. Perhaps they might like to do whatever he's doing, if they're not really exploring the campsite by themselves...

Before anyone has time to think too hard about it, a majority of families will vote for an orienteering session- A nice afternoon hike in the woods along one of the many trails. This is where things start to go wrong, but give them a while to enjoy themselves first. Perhaps that good-looking boy and one of the girls slips away from the main crowd to find a nice quiet spot to, um, talk. Or someone might see a rabbit or deer, and chase after it. A couple of separations might make the next bit more interesting.

If someone is away from the main group, they can find a creepy sight: a small pile of animal bones, mostly rabbits or other small furry creatures. Have them make a difficult observation check. If they pass, they'll notice a a bigger bone was shattered into smaller pieces to hide it, but before they can investigate fully, their comm-radios (Everyone has one) will stutter to life. It's their parents or the main hiking group, whichever is more appropriate. They're warning that a heavy snowfall is due to pass soon, and they should get back to the cabins before the trail is covered by snow and they get lost in the hills. They'll have some rudimentary GPS software on their datapads, but it's difficult terrain and in heavy snow it could become quite dangerous.

If a group of kids has decided to sneak away, they can vote on going back or staying out a little longer to explore. The snow starts coming down and visibility drops, but they have maps so they're not too worried. Have them make easy observation checks to notice something watching them- it's shadowy in the evening and the snow, but looks like a big 4-legged creature, maybe a wolf? A fear check at this point would be appropriate. If that doesn't get them running home, then a terrifying howl from the creature ought to do it.

GM note: It's actually Col. Dreyfus on all fours, but no need to let anyone know that.

The snowfall becomes a total blizzard before too long, and everyone is hopefully back in the cabins or the common room by then. Let players make a difficult observation roll to notice that one family's pet dog is missing, a large, friendly mastiff called Emily. They're upset, but it's suicide to go out looking for her in this weather at night.

If anyone leaves their building, have them make observation checks of varying difficulties. It's dark and the snow is extremely thick, but even if they pass, there's nothing there. It's a transparent meta attempt to put players on edge. Then, when they're expecting nothing there, have them bump into a shadow and make a difficult fear check, as they bump into someone from the other families, who are just as shocked. That night, have players spooked by noises around the cabins. Creaking from the cold outside and the heat inside, clumps of snow thumping down the chimney, the hoots of owls etc. Nothing truly bad happens until the next morning...

Scene 2 - Stranded:

The snow has stopped by morning, although the snowfall was immense. For a little levity, have one of the players woken up by having a snowball chucked at them by a friend from another family who snuck in. There are sounds of children playing outside, snowball fights and snowmen and all that good stuff. They're all waiting for someone to open up the equipment shed to get the ice-skates.

Over breakfast, have one of the other parents arrive to the cabin. They have good news and bad news. The bad news is that the snow has closed all the roads for miles around, it'll be days before they can be cleared (The Black Forest is hilly, remote and the roads are small. It's very much a low priority in snowstorms). The good news is that the forecast is looking good, so there'll be no more blizzards, and everyone's well stocked up on food, water and fuel to stay comfy for more than enough time for the roads to be cleared. If there are any emergencies they can always radio for a flying vehicle from the city of Friburg, which is only an hour or two away by emergency vehicle. So nothing to worry about. Oh, and Emily managed to find her way back. She's a little frostbitten but she'll be fine after a day in front of the fire.

Now it's time for ice-skating. Whichever family has the key to the shed finally wakes up and opens the doors, and kids and parents rush to find a pair of skates. Nobody has to take part if they don't want to, there's a snowball fight planned between 3 cabins and they're looking for reinforcements, or there's another family looking for boardgame players.

If any of the players do go ice-skating, give them a couple of opportunities to show off to other kids/parents. A dex/presence-based performance roll of some sort, whichever's appropriate for what they want to try. After a little while, make them roll a difficult observation check. Success means they hear the ice underneath them crack. Not a good sign. How they deal with it is up to them. They can shout out or warn people to get off the lake. Either way, a child from another family WILL break through the ice, and a stampede to get away will occur. Anyone witnessing it and wanting to help the drowning child will have to make a difficult fear check to act.

Anyone not taking part in the ice skating will hear the crack and screams, and the crowd of people trying to get away from the ice. Again, anyone wishing to help the child must make a difficult fear check.

If nobody moves to help, the child's family will eventually save the kid. The father will dive in, grab the child, others will crawl out and give him branches to hold on to as they pull him ashore.

Bernard is the only doctor in the group, so more than likely he will be begged to come help. It's a case of hypothermia and lack of breathing requiring CPR. It's an Easy or Average medicine roll at most for a trained doctor. Grant bonus dice for clever thinking, like putting the kid in a hot bath with his arms and legs outside to raise his core temperature.**** If the roll succeeds, grand, the child comes to and has to stay put for a couple of days to recover. The family of the kid, understandably, would like to go home, so they tell a player to go get the emergency radio so they can start getting the roads cleared. If the roll somehow fails, then they're in trouble. They can get the kid breathing again, but the hypothermia is severe; They can treat him, but it'll take days without a hospital and might result in nerve damage. It's time for the emergency radio to Friburg.

The radio has been smashed**. Whoever goes for it needs to make a very difficult fear check. So does anyone they tell. What little internet connection there was isn't working either. The blizzard must have damaged a nearby broadcast tower or something. They can't communicate with the outside world. They're stranded.

It starts snowing again. This wasn't part of the forecast. People are getting worried. The father of the boy gets aggravated and attacks whoever came back with the bad news. Nobody will take his side, and the player (or their parents) are army-trained killers, so beating him won't be a problem. Stats for generic humans on page 14. Humiliated, he retreats to his cabin and shoos everyone out.

A meeting in the common room is organised for the evening so the families can decide what to do next.

****GM note:** Dreyfus again. He smashed the emergency radio and sabotaged the broadcast tower. He's also making it snow. The players can try to find the tower to see if they can get it working again, they have maps and orienteering gear, finding it won't be difficult but will take a day, and a whole new scene. When they find it, it's very difficult fear checks all round, and it was clearly not the snow that damaged it. Electronics are ripped out, support beams are sawed through, wires have been burned away. There's no fixing it.

****After making the CPR roll, take Bernard aside or slip him a note. The water the kid nearly drowned in was salty. The lake is supposed to be fresh water. It might be appropriate to mention the Esoteric Order of Dagon to him as well, if he's getting suitably paranoid. What they'd be doing this far inland is a mystery but they do like salt water. All bollocks of course, but Bernard doesn't need to know that...

Scene 3 – A Meeting, and a Chase:

This is an attempt to put the players in charge. It shouldn't be hard – The parents are both ex-military, so good at dealing with emergencies, Bernard's a doctor, Jonas is a sorcerer, between them they have more skills and experience than any of the others.

This'll involve a fair bit of drama and speaking as several families, so I hope you're reading this in advance! Topics to come up and get decided on include:

- Who the hell smashed the radio? Nobody here is dumb enough to do that. Is there someone else around? Should we search for them? What if we find them?
- As if that wasn't bad enough, another family went to get an item from their car, and the D-Engine had been disabled. A quick look showed them that all the cars had been similarly sabotaged. They can't be fixed without a full arcanotech workshop. Maria and any other random NPC with arcanotech experience can confirm this.
- The broadcast tower for the internet isn't working, probably from the snow (it's happened on previous trips but there were no emergencies then). Someone needs to hike out there (A few miles into the woods) and fix it. That'll need an engineer and some strong hands, probably (Maria for certain, player's choice after that).
- If Bernard hasn't mentioned the saltiness of the lake, someone else brings it up. One or two of the families can mention fish-men and the Esoteric Order, to get a little panic going.
- The family of the kid who nearly drowned aren't present. Someone should go check up on them. Maybe not the players, considering the altercation that happened earlier.
- Someone will be concerned that the saboteur might be one of the people in the room. There will be a vote for having everyone double up so that any potential traitor can be watched. The vote will be perfectly 50/50, with the player family having the deciding vote.
- Anything else you can think of, or anything the players themselves want to say. This may require some quick thinking if they suggest game-breaking measures.

After the meeting ends, one family goes to check on the family that never showed up while the others go about their business (in twos or whatever was decided at the meeting). A scream is heard from the missing family's cabin, and the people who went to check on them are crying things like “Oh Jesus! What have you... AFTER THEM!” which fade into the distance. Whoever arrives at the cabin will see a dazed member of the family that went to check on the others lying at the front door mumbling “They're gone, that way...”, and pointing to a trail of multiple footprints leading east into the woods. Anyone who gives chase rolls a Very Difficult strength/agility and athletics (or strength or agility feat) to try and catch up.

Whether they fail or succeed, they'll meet the angry father staggering back towards them, his faced full of terror and confusion and his hands clutching at his throat, which is spurting blood from a sliced artery. This will cause an Incredibly Difficult fear check to witness, and another if they want to ignore him and continue pursuing the others.

If they succeed, they'll be able to make out what looks to be the two families running over a distant hill. A later Intelligence and Observation roll will tell them that given the angry father is with them, there was one too many people on the hill.**

Bernard can't help this man, the combination of cold and blood loss will make stabilising him an Incredibly Difficult Agility and Medicine roll, and even if he manages that, there is poison in the wound. He's a dead man. His voice is ruined by the jagged puncture wound in his neck, his voice box is damaged and his throat is full of blood, so the best he can manage is a gurgling whisper before he dies. An Incredibly Difficult Intelligence and Observation roll is required to make out the words by lip reading. As far as anyone can make out, he said:

“we're ... dead... dead men walking...”

Another difficult fear check, please, as he coughs a gout of the blood filling his lungs (roll a die to see who gets splashed) and expires. By this time, the shouting has faded into silence, and the snow is so heavy it's obscuring the trails. Anyone who wants to keep after the two families can make another roll to chase, track or otherwise pursue them, but the tracks quickly disappear and the biting cold and blinding snow render any further action impossible. However they deal with the aftermath is up to them, whether they take the body back, or organise a watch, or start stripping down sports equipment to turn into weapons, or something else. Give them time to do that, and spring the next scene on them.

** Dreyfus again, singing a song of corruption and command to lure the two families away for indoctrination. He bit a chunk out of the angry father's neck and left him to distract and delay the others, and he has summoned the weather to hide his escape.

Scene 4 – The Prodigal Families Return:

Whatever the players and the others have been up to, at some point the following morning there's a shout from outside. Anyone who goes out will see the family that chased down Angry Father's family, blue with frostbite, shuffling slowly out of the woods. You'll recall that one member of the family was dazed the last night and stayed with the group. They are present, and they run over to their family, to give them a big hug as a crowd gathers around them, hopeful.

The father gets to one knee and embraces his child, who hugs back with frozen arms. This is where it gets nasty. Remember that opening scene in the remake of Dawn of The Dead, where the little girl zombie bites her dad's face off? This little child here bites deep into his father's neck, severing the artery in a similar way to what happened Angry Father, and tears out a lump of bloody flesh.

Everyone makes Very Difficult fear checks, but they take -5 to the end result to reflect the herd mentality of a crowd; having a lot of people panic around you makes it harder for yourself to keep calm.

It becomes a combat scene. The frozen family go first as a surprise round, players can roll their defence but they half the result. They roll armour as normal. Remember if anyone suffers a Fear effect that causes them to lose a turn, that stacks with this surprise round. Stats on page 15

After the first family member is put down, the OTHER family that got lost in the woods attacks from the other side, sandwiching the crowd, and increasing the panic.

The frozen people fight like only the completely insane can. They claw and kick and headbutt, and their teeth have been filed to needle points. The two parents will have to make an extra fear check (difficult) the first time they attack, as they suffer flashbacks to the attack of the Rapine Storm in Turkmenistan. They will not stop struggling until they are killed or knocked unconscious. There is no humanity left in them, and as soon as they awake they'll struggle and hiss and try to attack anyone they can.

When the fight is over, three or four families are dead or dying, several are suffering breakdowns. The players will see one man, looking at the torn body of his wife, gently close her eyes, before breaking off an icicle from a nearby surface and ram it into his eye, killing him instantly. Most are catatonic, weeping uncontrollably or hiding in terror.

The players can work out a few things after they've tried to help survivors or take stock of the situation (Intelligence and Observation or Medicine rolls here):

- The frozen people have had their teeth filled to needle points recently.
- Underneath their clothing, they've had runes carved into their flesh which look vaguely like Rapine Storm tribal markings. They're sloppy, and not from any Storm grouping or sect anyone present has ever encountered.
- The second family, judging by their drenched clothes and some footprints, sprang their ambush from the reservoir tower out in the lake. It's about 200 metres off-shore, so they'd have had to swim across rather than risk the thin ice cracking and alerting people.
- Someone may recall at this point the scuffmarks around the sealed entrance to the tower's lower levels.
- After a headcount is done of survivors and dead, more people have gone missing: The Albrecht and Miller families, both of which served with Bernard and Judith in Turkmenistan.
- If Jonas tries to sense anything with his powers, give him the description below, and then have him make a fear check at the end. If he passes, he takes a d10 of unsoakable damage from psychic backlash. If he fails, he takes double. Bleeding nose, migraine, that sort of thing. As soon as the link is severed, the ground shakes ominously (average fear check for everyone but Jonas) Then move on to the next scene.

For Jonas:

As your soul reaches out, probing, you can sense the anger and pain of what just transpired, mixed with something akin to relief or happiness as the frozen attackers died. Their trails glow a garish mixture of emotions, all dark, leading back into the forest, or over to the reservoir. Those from the forest lead back to a cave, well-hidden. It winds in and downwards, back towards the lake, underground. You encounter the scent of the second family too. These tunnels must lead to the reservoir tower! With a grunt of satisfaction, you link both trails, following them back, down below ground, where they reach a cavern, dimly lit. You can make out several people, the missing survivors, each tied to a crude crucifix. Another figure appears, hunched and shadowy, crude tattoos or scars carved into his flesh. He carries a box of nails and a hammer. He places a nail on the wrist of one of his victims, but just as he raises his hand to strike, he sniffs the air, turns around, and looks directly at you.

“Intruder alert! Hostile tango! Evasive manoeuvres!”

He moves the nail from the victim's wrist to his head, and the link is severed brutally just as the hammer makes contact.

Scene 5 - Frozen Shadows:

As the next scene progresses, have the ground shake as Dreyfus kills another victim, more violently this time, and Jonas gets a stabbing headache. It should become clear that every time the murderer kills, the ground becomes more unstable. The ice on the lake shatters totally, so they can only get to the reservoir by boat. Have a survivor fall into a sinkhole by the time the third quake happens. He can be rescued with a Hard strength and athletics roll (or just strength feat), otherwise he plummets into the deep (Another Hard fear check for anyone nearby). There were 6 people abducted, and it's a good guess that if all of them are murdered, Something Bad will happen.

The players get to decide on a plan. They can find the cave entrance or they can try to open the sealed reservoir hatch. The cave is easy to find but the tunnel in is rigged with traps. The reservoir hatch is thick steel and locked tight, it would take creative thinking to budge it, but they'd have a safer journey down to the caverns. Of course, they could rally the survivors and do both. With some tinkering a short-distance communication could be established so they could keep in touch.

Weapons are going to have to be makeshift and they don't have much time to make them, so nothing outlandish. Apart from Bernard, two other families brought a handgun, and they're not parting with them. But some clever thinking can see them fairly well equipped. Somewhere in the shed they could find some power tools, a chainsaw or a drill (remember, D-Engine tech means they don't need power cables!) or similar. Canoe paddles can make a decent fighting staff or javelin. There might be a crowbar in the boot of a car or two. There CANNOT be enough nice stuff to equip everyone, someone is going to have to make do with a paddle or a crowbar!

The cave entrance:

There are three major traps. They can be uncovered by a Hard int + observation roll, and disarmed with a Hard Agility feat roll (or appropriate skill. If they're with NPCs, one of them could have 2 dice of Demolitions, which is close enough). Failure springs the trap. If an NPC was disarming it, they're killed instantly by falling rocks or springloaded bats with nails in them or something else equally brutal. Players take 2d10 damage (armour roll applies, unless it was a critical failure). After a player disarms their first trap, the others all become Average rolls to notice and disarm. This does not apply to NPCs. Give them 2 Difficult fear checks during this scene as another pair of victims expires with a distant scream. They'd better get there soon.

The reservoir:

The tunnel down has a ladder and a small section of rusty stairs, which creak ominously when players set foot on them. Have some near misses, such as a ladder run or step snapping off and having the player dangling over a drop or taking a couple of points of damage from a fall or a nasty cut. Just something to soften them up a bit. This entrance is far closer to Dreyfus, and the screams of his victims will be clearly audible. Give them two Difficult fear checks during the descent as another pair of victims expires, and throw in a few agility and athletics or agility feat checks as the ground shakes while they're on rickety ladders or stairwells. Not many victims left, they'd better get there soon.

The showdown: (Stats for Dreyfus on page 16)

Hopefully the players will be able for a little exposition. If they attack immediately, Dreyfus automatically goes first and makes two attacks, shooting one character and slashing another with his poisoned knife. He'll talk to them during the fight anyway, and MIRACULOUSLY have enough hitpoints to last long enough to give everyone the gist of what's going on.

Dreyfus will be pleased to see them. He's a disgusting shrivelled misshapen creature at this stage, but after a few prompts, Bernard and Judith will recognise him. He speaks in a very militaristic tone, like he's still in the army and talking to new recruits. Dreyfus DOES have weapons, a handgun and a wicked knife, constantly dripping a pungent clear ooze. Further, he has a medallion around his neck that hurts to look at. It flashes with nauseating colours, and causes him to ignore all wound penalties.

Dreyfus went down fighting the Storm in Turkmenistan, and they captured him, and tortured him, and scarred him, and then they just let him go, broken and pathetic. He often wished he'd died instead of what happened. One day, he decided to drown himself, and as he looked at his reflection in the water, he saw someone else staring back. The King In Yellow, He Who Must Not Be Named. He had a flash of enlightenment: He *SHOULD* have died in Turkmenistan, and so should everyone else in his unit. That they survived was a crime against the cosmos that must be corrected, and HE was the one to do it. The Dead God kept him safe, whispered knowledge to him in his dreams, and he found out about the Aeon Survivors group, and he knew how to reach all the people who should have died. He killed half the survivors within 6 months of the battle, making it look like suicide. The rest he bided his time with, savouring their destruction. He's happy to inform the players that he and they are the only ones left now. And this place will become their grave as The Angel arrives. Jonas can make an occult lore check to understand what he means. Incredibly Hard fear check if he succeeds!

Final scene - The Angel:

As Dreyfus dies, the ground shakes one final time. Blood spurts out of his killing wound and hangs glistening in the air, taking on a life of its own. Another Hard fear check! The blood weaves through the air in a hypnotic way, and is joined by streams of the blood of the people Dreyfus killed, describing complex geometries in the air, speeding up, blurring, until the players are looking at a very complex summoning circle hanging in the air.

Naturally, something steps through.

It's a fairly powerful Bakhi, a demonic-looking creature with huge bird wings, an insectoid face and strong musculature despite an emaciated frame. This one is wearing what looks to be ceremonial armour and its talons are sheathed in metal blades. It diffuses through the portal and everyone makes one last fear check, difficulty explicitly 14. Anyone who passes is able to roll initiative like normal and the final fight begins as the cave collapses around them.

GM NOTE: pay attention to The Angel's weapons. A hit can deal damage the normal way, or it can sap the target's will to live by forcing a battle of wits. The Angel, being an inherently cruel being, will prefer the latter unless the fight's clearly not going his way. The target will experience a horrible vision requiring a Hard fear check -4. Failure results in losing d2 tenacity (Roll a die. Odds=1, evens=2). Success means they fight off the vision, but then they treat the attack as physical but dealing half damage. Armour applies as normal.

Example: The Angel hits Bernard, who is afraid of the dark. The attack deals no damage, but Bernard immediately suffers a flashback to the night that gave him his fear: the Migou cut the power to the base and assaulted, exterminating anyone they found. Bernard quickly ran out of ammo and had to hide in the dark, even as he heard the Migou tear through his hospital and murder patients in their beds. Bernard makes a Hard fear check, -4 due to the personal nature of the vision. If he succeeds he treats the attack as physical but only takes half damage. If he fails he loses 1 or 2 points of tenacity.

Jonas can attempt to banish the bakhi, but the bakhi will of course try to stop him, so everyone will have to get stuck in. They could be lucky and kill The Angel before the banishing, but ultimately it doesn't matter. Do whatever you have to do to make this scene dramatic.

Stats for The Angel are on page 17.

Win:

The players banish The Angel's form back to wherever it came. As it's dragged back into the portal, it addresses them in a surprisingly polite accent:

"I offer congratulations. Dreyfus said you were weak. Unworthy. I go now to my Lord with joyous news: You have passed the test."

And the tunnels give one last heave, and it all goes quiet.. What few survivors are left aren't much for conversation. They escape the tunnels without further incident. A couple of hours later, they are picked up by an NEG strike force; the death of Dreyfus and The Angel caused a significant psychic beacon. They're brought back to base for healing and debriefing. Through the whistling wind, they can half hear The Angel's last words: "You have passed the test".

Game over! Well done anyone who survived!

Antagonists:

Typical father/mother (half attributes rounding down for children):

Attributes:

Attribute	Rating	Feat level	Secondary attributes
Agility	5		Actions 1
Intelligence	7		Move 6
Perception	7		Reflex 5
Presence	6		Orgone N/A
Strength	5		Vitality 10
Tenacity	6		Drama points 0

Skills:

Skill	Level	Skill	Level
Fighting	1	Observation	2
Science(life)	4	Dodge	1
Marksman	1	Armed fighting	2
Athletics	2	Survival	1

Wounds:

Level	Vitality	Current
Flesh wound	10	
Light	20	
Moderate	30	
Serious	40	
At Death's Door	50	

Frozen people:

Attributes:

Attribute	Rating	Feat level	Secondary attributes
Agility	6	3	Actions 2
Intelligence	5	3	Move 6
Perception	5	3	Reflex 6
Presence	7	4	Orgone N/A
Strength	8	4	Vitality 12
Tenacity	7	4	Drama points 3

Skills:

Skill	Level	Skill	Level
Fighting	4	Athletics	3
Dodge	3		

Wounds:

Level	Vitality	Current
Flesh wound	12	
Light	24	
Moderate	36	
Serious	48	
At Death's Door	56	

Equipment:

Claws (Damage +1)

Bite (Damage +2, but -1 die to hit)

The Frozen are completely insane. They ignore all wound penalties. They can't be reasoned with.

Colonel Tommas Dreyfus:

Attributes:

Attribute	Rating	Feat level	Secondary attributes
Agility	7	4	Actions 2
Intelligence	7	4	Move 7
Perception	7	4	Reflex 8
Presence	8	4	Orgone N/A
Strength	7	4	Vitality 12
Tenacity	7	4	Drama points 5

Skills:

Skill	Level	Skill	Level
Fighting	4	Dodge	4
Marksman	4	Armed fighting	3
Athletics	4	Intimidation	4

Wounds:

Level	Vitality	Current
Flesh wound	12	
Light	24	
Moderate	36	
Serious	48	
At Death's Door	56	

Equipment:

Poisoned, enchanted blade:

+2 damage, if any damage is inflicted after armour, target must make a Hard Tenacity Feat check or lose another 1d10 health.

Handgun:

Damage +2, shots 2, clip 15+1

Dreyfus is completely insane. He is immune to wound penalties. He was captured by the Rapine Storm, turned into one of them, and set loose. He believes he should have died in Turkmenistan with the parent players, and has set out to fix this "mistake"

The Angel (Bakhi):

Attributes:

Attribute	Rating	Feat level	Secondary attributes
Agility	8	4	Actions 2
Intelligence	11	6	Move 6
Perception	9	5	Reflex 9
Presence	8	4	Orgone 11
Strength	9	5	Vitality 15
Tenacity	9	5	Drama points 5

Skills:

Skill	Level	Skill	Level
Occult	5	Observation	2
Armed fighting	4	Dodge	4
Marksman	3	Armed fighting	2
Athletics	3	Intimidation	3

Wounds:

Level	Vitality	Current
Flesh wound	15	
Light	30	
Moderate	45	
Serious	60	
At Death's Door	75	

Equipment:

Talons (+1 damage, ALSO see GM's note on Scene 6 – The Angel!)

A host of wicked looking throwing knives: Damage +0

Armour: 2 dice

Judith Werner:

Attributes:

Attribute	Rating	Feat level	Secondary attributes
Agility	6		Actions 2
Intelligence	4		Move 6
Perception	9		Reflex 8
Presence	4		Orgone N/A
Strength	6		Vitality 12
Tenacity	7		Drama points 10

Skills:

Skill	Level	Skill	Level
Survival	1	Athletics	3
Marksman	4	Dodge	3
Fighting	1	Savoir-faire (military)	2
Intimidate	3	Demolitions	3
Stealth	1	Observation	4

Wounds:

Level	Vitality	Current
Flesh wound	12	
Light	24	
Moderate	36	
Serious	48	
At Death's Door	60	

Equipment:

Mundane/camping items.

Psychological state:

Plagued by nightmares:

Judith must make an average Fear check after every night of sleep. Failure means she is fatigued for the rest of the day:
-1 die to all rolls (To a minimum of 1)

Bernard Werner:

Attributes:

Attribute	Rating	Feat level	Secondary attributes
Agility	7	4	Actions 2
Intelligence	7	4	Move 6
Perception	7	4	Reflex 7
Presence	5	3	Orgone N/A
Strength	5	3	Vitality 11
Tenacity	6	3	Drama points 10

Skills:

Skill	Level	Skill	Level
Medicine	4	Observation	4
Science(life)	4	Dodge	4
Marksman	4	Armed fighting	2
Stealth	1	Savoir-faire(military)	2
Athletics	2	Survival	1

Wounds:

Level	Vitality	Current
Flesh wound	11	
Light	22	
Moderate	33	
Serious	44	
At Death's Door	55	

Equipment:

Mundane/camping items.

Handgun: A fully functional military grade handgun. Bernard keeps it in the car in a locked box. It makes him feel safe.

CS44 Enforcer Pistol: **Damage** **Shots** **Clip**
 +2 2 15+1

Psychological state:

Fear of the Dark:

Bernard must make a Hard Fear check every time he ventures into a dark place. Failure means he cannot bring himself to enter the darkness. +1 die if some light source is available.

Anna Werner:

Attributes:

Attribute	Rating	Feat level	Secondary attributes
Agility	8	4	Actions 2
Intelligence	6	3	Move 7
Perception	5	3	Reflex 7
Presence	8	4	Orgone N/A
Strength	5	3	Vitality 10
Tenacity	5	3	Drama points 10

Skills:

Skill	Level	Skill	Level
Stealth	4	Fighting	3
Misdirect	2	Persuade	3
Athletics	4	Observation	1
Marksman	1	Performance (dance)	3

Wounds:

Level	Vitality	Current
Flesh wound	10	
Light	20	
Moderate	30	
Serious	40	
At Death's Door	50	

Equipment:

Mundane/camping items.

Psychological state:

Child:

Anna is still young. -2 penalty to ALL fear checks. This stacks with any penalties mentioned by the GM.

Maria Werner:

Attributes:

Attribute	Rating	Feat level	Secondary attributes
Agility	5	3	Actions 1
Intelligence	9	5	Move 5
Perception	5	3	Reflex 7
Presence	5	3	Orgone N/A
Strength	4	2	Vitality 11
Tenacity	8	4	Drama points 10

Skills:

Skill	Level	Skill	Level
Arcanotech	3	Computers	2
Dodge	3	Observation	4
Occult	4	Stealth	3
Technician	4	Marksman	2
Research	2		

Wounds:

Level	Vitality	Current
Flesh wound	11	
Light	22	
Moderate	33	
Serious	44	
At Death's Door	55	

Equipment:

Mundane/camping items.

Eyeglass monitor display w/ wireless interface

Wifi communications earpiece

Research books (reasonably mundane literature on non-Euclidean geometry and arcane engineering principles)

Psychological state:

Mood swings:

If Anna ever critically fails a fear check, she becomes very prone to outbursts of anger. -1 die (to a minimum of 1) to all actions until she calms down.

Jonas Werner:

Attributes:

Attribute	Rating	Feat level	Secondary attributes
Agility	5	3	Actions 2
Intelligence	7	4	Move 6
Perception	6	3	Reflex 6
Presence	5	3	Orgone 15/day
Strength	5	3	Vitality 11
Tenacity	8	4	Drama points 10

Skills:

Skill	Level	Skill	Level
Appraisal	2	Computers	2
Occult	4	Athletics	2
Armed fighting	2	Observation	3
Dodge	3	Marksman	2

Wounds:

Level	Vitality	Current
Flesh wound	11	
Light	22	
Moderate	33	
Serious	44	
At Death's Door	55	

Equipment:

Mundane/camping items.

Ritual knife: An elegant dagger, imbued with magic: It is sharper and a critical hit deals shock damage +2 dice damage

Special: On a critical hit, target rolls Tenacity feat or loses their next turn and defence.

Woeful Orb:

An enchanted spherical device that acts as a semi-autonomous non-lethal weapon. When activated they float about and follow the user around, following simple direct orders like a dog (they must stay within 100 feet or they deactivate). They fire electrical bolts with a range of 5 feet. The bolts give no damage bonus to attacks. If at least 1 point of damage after armour would have been dealt, the target must make a Hard Tenacity feat check or loses its action for 1d10 minutes.

The Orb has Marksman and Dodge 3, and attacks to hit the orb are at -2 due to size. The Orb has 5 hitpoints, after which it is utterly destroyed.

Spells:

Constitute Corporal Restorative: Takes 4 hours, 5 Orgone and various herbs, creates 10 doses. 1 dose heals the first health level, 2 heal the second level, etc.

Perceive Etheric Resonance: Takes 4 hours, 7 Orgone, requires a mirror, arcane circle and a fire. User can trace people by their thoughts and emotions.

Craft Woeful Orb: Takes 1 day, 15 Orgone, requires a perfectly spherical object at most 4 inches in diameter made of one single material, such as a rock. See stats above for a Woeful Orb. This creates 1 Woeful Orb.

Judith Werner, nee Simmons:

You were born in 2020 and you grew up in a technological revolution, Arcanotech and the D-Engine promised an end to energy shortages, flying cars and nanotechnology. It delivered, and more. Sure, there was tension with the oil-producing nations, and there was probably going to be a war, but it would have been a short one, and it would have been a human war, following human rules. The future looked bright as a child.

It didn't turn out that way though. The Nazzadi attacked, red-eyed, midnight-skinned warriors we thought were aliens. As a veteran mecha pilot you saw some of the fiercest fighting. A lot of people lost friends. You gained one- Bernard Werner, the chief medic in your unit, stitched you up after the worst battles. He was a good man, compassionate, brave. More than once he defended his patients from enemy assaults. The two of you became firm friends, then lovers, then married.

When the Migou arrived to exterminate life on earth, you and your husband were posted to a mecha battalion in eastern Europe under Colonel Tommas Dreyfus. A better commander you couldn't find- he was cunning, devoted to his troops and always achieved victory with minimal losses. It was horrible and brutal, but you were on the way to fighting the Migou to a standstill, and could eventually push them back, when suddenly central Asia became Hell on Earth. The Rapine Storm rose up in an orgy of insanity and bloodshed. Monsters out of nightmare slaughtered indiscriminately, survivors becoming as insane and twisted as them, devoted to desecrating and destroying humanity in any way possible. They rolled over most of south-eastern Asia, refugees terrified beyond anything you'd ever seen before. It wasn't long before your unit was posted to Turkmenistan to try and hold them back from advancing across Europe.

Long story short, you succeeded, but the cost was devastating. You survived, with a new pair of legs and several replacement organs. Bernard made it too, for which you are eternally thankful. But out of a line of 300 towering mecha, 15 pilots survived. 7 committed suicide within 6 months. Dreyfus sacrificed himself to buy enough time for the wounded to be saved. He bought enough time for reinforcements to arrive and set up a permanent kill-zone. He gave his life for all of you.

The things you've seen fighting for Earth's survival... You still have nightmares, nearly 20 years on. Bernard is still afraid of the dark. Therapy and medication can only heal so much. Your wonderful children have helped. You love them fiercely. You would do anything to keep them safe from the things you know are still out there. But it's not your war any more. Pushing 65, you're in good shape for a civvie, but you're done with the military. They don't fully understand the reasons behind the Aeon Survivors group. You hope they never have to. It's a way of holding on to the few friends that survived, it's group therapy, it's extended family and a light in the dark. It's hope that all the terror and bloodshed and nightmares weren't all for nothing.

Bernard Werner: My husband, my love. A great healer, a kind man. Afraid of the dark, thanks to the Migou's night assaults. We lean on each other. So far, we've held up. We don't need much longer.

Anna Werner: Our youngest daughter at 16. Very agile, and well on the way to being an excellent dancer. I admit I spoil her a bit, but she is always charming enough to get away with it.

Maria Werner: Our eldest girl. She has a sharp mind and eyes to match. Studying arcanotech in the hopes of becoming a civil engineer. Not fond of these camping trips, but she humors us.

Jonas Werner: Our son, and our eldest. He has the Gift, and insisted on the Sorcerer's Academy to learn to use it. He's seen things that help him understand what we went through on the front lines. The understanding is comforting, but the haunted look in his eyes is heartbreaking.

Bernard Werner:

These are dark days. Back in 2017 when you were born, nobody could have expected that humanity would be at war for survival against insectoid aliens, insane cultists and creatures from Beyond that hurt just to look at. All you wanted to do was help people. You did well in school and college, academically and socially, and the medical profession was definitely your calling. You can clearly remember the day you decided to join the military. Seeing pictures of a man on a stretcher, bleeding from bullet wounds and burns, you just... Needed to help people like that. With the introduction of mecha to the front lines, you thought maybe things would get quieter. They didn't. Weaponry advanced as fast as medicine, and things stayed much the same.

It was in the First Arcanotech War you met your wife Judith. She wasn't pretty when you met her – she was missing an arm, half her face and covered in blood – but when she came to after surgery, restored to her natural looks, she took your breath away. Unfortunately the war caused her broken body to come your way several times, but the friendship between you grew and grew, and when she asked you to marry her, you couldn't have been happier. You'd never really found the time to look for love. It just... found you. A little late in life perhaps, but love is love.

You needed that love to get you both through the Migou invasion. Not only did you have to treat serious wounds, you sometimes had to hold off attacks while doing so. Years of keeping a handgun next to your scalpel made you a good shot. The war still took its toll on you. The Migou liked night assaults. One night in Argentina found you hiding in the dark, listening to alien monsters murder defenceless patients, unable to help because you'd fired your last shot an hour ago. It left you terrified of the dark. Judith, bless her, got used to the night light very quickly.

When the Rapine Storm made itself known in Asia, things got worse. You were posted to Turkmeistan to halt their advance and evacuate refugees. There were far too few refugees, most survivors joining the damned cult. They were all scarred from things they saw – Parents mutilating their children. Creatures so horrible they could kill with a glance. You feared for Judith and yourself. But your commander, Colonel Tommas Dreyfus, he held you together, and led from the front. An inspiration to most. You didn't share your wife's enthusiasm. You had to see the handiwork of the Storm too often.

Against the odds, You and Judith survived to make it home to your son, and were blessed with two daughters. Colonel Dreyfus and nearly 2,000 more died holding the line to hold off the Storm. You can't stomach war any more. At least the Aeon Survivors know. There are colleagues here. People who have become brother and sister through the horrors they endured together.

Judith Werner: My beloved wife. We have survived everything life threw at us together. Now in our elder years, all I want to do is grow old with her. She still has nightmares from the Wars. I do what I can to soothe her. She, in turn, is the light that helps conquer my fear of the dark.

Anna Werner: My little girl, apple of my eye. 16 and just like every teenager that ever lived, but when she flashes that cheeky smile I just can't stay mad at her. She'll be a famous dancer some day.

Maria Werner: Our eldest daughter, bright, observant and a promising engineer-to-be. She'd rather be with her friends than at a camping trip, but she understands her mother and I need it.

Jonas Werner: Our only son. Perhaps it was because we were still in active service when he was born, but he was always a little strange. Attending the Sorcerer's Academy isn't that surprising. They say a talented sorcerer can read minds. I pray he doesn't read his parents', there are things from the wars we wish we could forget that no young man should see.

Anna Werner:

It's a big scary world out there. So your parents keep telling you, anyway. You turned 16 last month, and so far the scariest thing to happen you was getting birthday kisses at school. The history books go on and on about horrible things that happened, but you reckon most of it was exaggerated, like when your brother Jonas claimed he caught a fish as big as a man once.

Life's been pretty good to you so far. You're young, pretty, and you're very aware of it. You've learned that a smile and a giggle can get you out of almost any trouble. Your dance teacher lets you get away with murder. Your maths teacher says the word "rascal" was made for people like you. Climbing tall buildings or raiding the chemistry department for explosive things to toss into the bathroom (although that last one did come with the threat of expulsion, so best behave for a while), you think life is an adventure.

Well, ok, sometimes it is a *little* scary. You still remember this one time walking home from school in winter. There was snow on the ground, it was getting dark, and you were walking past an alleyway when you heard this huge growl, like some big dog, and then someone in the alley screamed. You ran to hide behind a car, torn between staying put and calling the police, but the alley was totally silent. The street lights started coming on to light the dark, and in the alley, you saw a dead end, containing nothing but a puff of mist from one corner. No hound, no person. Nothing. Freaky stuff. There was another time you were shopping with your mother and a mugger waved a knife at you and called for money. Your mom might be old, but she was in the army and she kicked his ass so hard he was unconscious when the police arrived. Before she stepped in though you were terrified. He could have killed you!

You like the Aeon survivors group. Your parents attend the meetings a lot. You went a couple of times, but they were boring, too much murmuring and reassuring pats on the back. But the things they organise are fun. There are trips to concerts and the beach and bake sales and loads more. Last year you got to put on a dance rehearsal with your friends. Your parents were so proud of you.

Judith Werner: My mother. She spoils me, and we both know it. She's scary when she puts her foot down though. I think she killed people when she was in the army. I don't know what that's like and I don't want to know!

Bernard Werner: Daddy! He doesn't spoil me, but I know he loves me. He's a doctor, he's really good at patching people up. He met Mom in the army. He doesn't really say much more about those days. I think he doesn't like to remember.

Maria Werner: My bossy stuck up big sister. She think she's soooo much better than everyone else just because she's in college and able to invent things and drink beer and stay out at night. She hates the camping trip, none of her friends are there.

Jonas Werner: My cool big brother. He's off learning MAGIC! How cool is that!? He's way too old for the camping trip so I don't know why he comes, but I think it has something to do with Daddy. I think Daddy told him things about the army, or Jonas found out.

Maria Werner:

What's to tell? You're 18, smart and in college studying arcanotechnology. You were born not long after your parents had left the army and settled down in the north of France. Apparently it wasn't too badly damaged by the Wars, so it gave them comfort. It's an ok area, really, but you much prefer the university of Marseilles. You were a smart child, and engineering turned out to be your calling, like dancing for Anna or mecha-piloting for Mother when she was younger. Arcanotech was the kind of challenge you relished, with high dropout rates and even one or two students and teachers having nervous breakdowns just from reading the subject material! An arcanotechnician needs a whole lot of willpower to handle the knowledge they possess, and so far, you've proven worthy.

That's not to say it hasn't been difficult. Your parents don't know yet, but you've had to see counsellors a few times over the last two years of the course. Some of the required reading contains words or pictures that shouldn't be possible, and after a night of study the movements caught in the corner of your vision can start to look awfully menacing, as if something is trying to tear its way through the fabric of reality and step into your eyesight, and after your first workshop practical, nobody in the class could just pass it off as just their imagination. Still, the therapy has been going well, and it only really gets to you during the busier college weeks. And the price is worth it – You've been learning the secrets to limitless energy sources, nanotechnology, even some of the mecha that have been put out of service! Imagine, building or designing giant robots for a living. Maybe some day you'll be able to work on the Engels, those half-organic mecha bred from... Well, from nothing in this reality anyway.

This Aeon Survivors group doesn't suit you. It's fine for Mom and Dad, they were soldiers, they fought in all the Wars and they've probably seen some horrible stuff, and if this group helps them deal with the mental scars then that's great, but you're not a soldier. You're an adult with a life and plans, and you'd really rather not ditch your friends and travel all the way to Germany for a fortnight in a wood cabin with barely any connection to the social netpace. But it means a lot to your folks, and it's rare enough that you're all together in one place, so it's just something to put up with.

Judith Werner: My mother. Ex mecha-pilot, I don't doubt she's seen and done a lot of awful things to protect humanity. She's got scars, inside and out. She often looks tired. I think she has a problem with nightmares.

Bernard Werner: My father. Still the only doctor I really trust. He met Mom in the army, but doesn't want to say much more. I did some digging though. Christ, the things they went through! I'm amazed they got out alive, never mind stable enough to rejoin society!

Anna Werner: My little sister. Bit of a brat, I don't know why Mom spoils her so much. Dad at least puts his foot down once in a while. She has charm, I'll give her that, and she's very athletic, but you need focus and hard work to get anywhere, and she hasn't realised that yet.

Jonas Werner: My older brother, a sorcerer-in-training. That still sounds weird, but I'm learning to build extra-dimensional power sources and the basics of Engel repair, so I can hardly talk. It looks like sorcery is at least as tough as arcanotech, if the grey streak in his hair is anything to go by. I bet he's seen things even Mom and Dad haven't. Creepy. But he's my brother, and he's hard to get mad at.

Jonas Werner:

The world is a strange and terrifying place, and most of humanity has yet to realise that they've barely scratched the surface. But you're beginning to understand. You may well go mad before you grasp the hidden meanings of the universe, but that's no excuse not to try.

Your parents were soldiers. They met in bloodshed. Blood bound them together as friends, then lovers, as they fought and then made peace with the Nazzadi, who then stood as brothers when their creators attacked. Their blood, Migou ichor, plenty was spilled on both sides of the Arcanotech Wars. You were born between wars, a precious moment of peace bought by war. You were ever an introvert, and perhaps it was this inward gaze that fanned the spark of the Gift in your soul.

There was no question that you would learn the ways of sorcery. So few had the Gift and the will to control it, a mixture of pride and fascination drove you to study. It is not an easy road to travel. The ancient languages hurt the throat to utter as they hurt the eye to read, incantations require iron will and meditating on impossible geometries. Many drop out, some from laziness but most from mental strain. Others still die in training, either by unleashing what they could not control, or assassinated by faculty staff before they could cause such damage.

You were in Chicago, on the Academy campus when your parents stood against the Rapine Storm in Turkmenistan. Video of the war was censored even back then, but you could feel the anguish and pain and depraved insanity of it all in your mind. Somehow, you knew when your parents fell to the horde. It's a miracle they survived, let alone held off the Storm long enough to contain them. You will never truly know what they experienced, but you can make a better guess than most, and you know without any doubt that half a billion people owe their lives to your parents.

Sorcery is not what popular media like to claim. It does not involve hurling balls of fire and lightning. Sorcery is patience, and introspection, and enlightenment. It protects with warding, it uncovers hidden things. Yes, it can be used to hurt, but it is a frivolous use of power, and as dangerous to a wielder as an enemy. It is better to rely on a weapon, be it blade or bullet. Rare is the inhuman creature from Beyond that can't be stopped with a spray of 25mm rounds to the face.

You attend the Aeon Survivors outings for several reasons. You feel you owe it to your parents after all they have suffered. The family is rarely gathered in one place, and you enjoy their company. The frozen lake is a pleasant focus for meditation. And even an uptight sorcerer can enjoy building a snowman with his little sister.

Judith Werner: My mother. A skilled mecha-pilot in her day, she sacrificed much to hold off humanity's foes. I see shards of nightmare embedded in her mind. She rarely finds peace in sleep.

Bernard Werner: My father. He managed to retain his compassion through the Wars, a stunning achievement, although he took alien life as often as he healed human. He dreams of being helpless in the darkness, and the dreams bleed into his waking self, causing him to jump at every shadow.

Anna Werner: My youngest sister. She remains innocent and naïve regarding what lies outside the safe zones. Perhaps it is good, for now. Childhood is precious, and her zest for life is a welcome balm for the troubled souls of our parents.

Maria Werner: My eldest sister. Driven and focused, yet holding on to some of the trappings of adolescence, hence fighting with Anna. She has chosen a dangerous profession, but a very necessary one. Whether she realises it or not, the Aeon War will get worse, and her skills will be even more demanded..