

NE CEDE MALIS: THE EMPTINESS ENGINE

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INTRODUCTION

Ne Cede Malis is a setting for the *Savage Worlds* roleplaying game. This jumpstart is an introduction to the defenders of the *Hymns Like Honey* and the terrifying struggle ahead.

This jumpstart includes six pre-gen characters and their new Edges, Hindrances, and sources of powers. The full game includes even more options, weapons, and gear.

Content Warning: *Ne Cede Malis* has themes of body- and cosmic horror.

What Came Before

Your hero is a troubleshooter on the generation ship *Hymns Like Honey*.

The *Hymns* is approaching the end of a 2,400-year pilgrimage to the planet Hamish. It has been a long journey, and bitter, but a new home for humanity and the Hecate is within their reach at last.

Last night, something landed on the hull. The first team sent to investigate have not reported back.

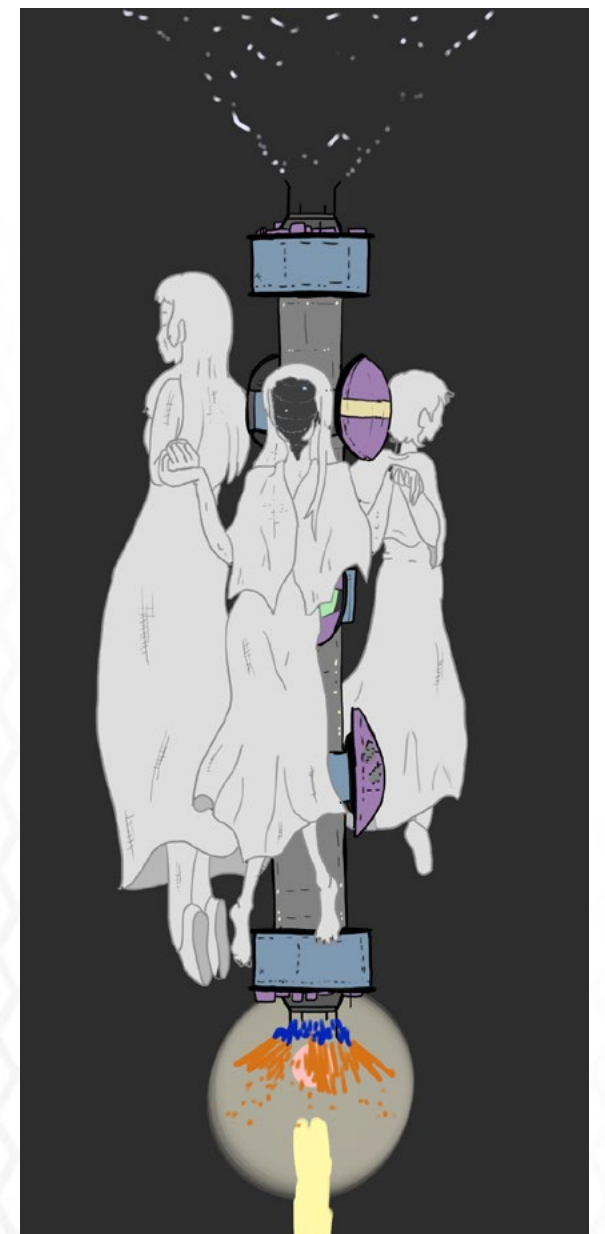
Now it's up to you.

Where Am I?

The *Hymns Like Honey* is a 180-mile-long starship ferrying a cargo of nearly a billion pilgrims in stasis, with around ten million active on the ship.

The *Hymns* is home to six habitat discs that preserve some of the lost homelands of Home, four Forests that likewise protect samples of its untamed wilderness, and two Bridges to help run the ship and maintain the colossal Dawnfire engines that allow it to travel interstellar distances. The Hecate use their colossal computing power to steer the *Hymns* and monitor its Dreamers in stasis; the Ship Authority maintains the ship and keeps the peace.

The *Hymns* is protected by three statues of the Hecate each around 150 miles tall. The compressed moon-stone conceals delicate sensors and batteries of matter-evaporating XASERS.



What Am I?

Troubleshooters exist on the periphery of the Ship Authority. They are skilled and powerful individuals who thrive outside of the chain of command. When a conventional solution can't solve a problem, a troubleshooter can set it right.

The pre-gens of The Emptiness Engine are drawn from humans and the avatara.

Humans (*Homo sapiens reformari*) are the children of the long-dead planet Home. Culturally, they come in three broad categories:

- Crew are humans born on the Hymns. The ship is simply too massive and complex for even the Hecate to control alone, and so a permanent population of waking humans helps keep this shadowcaster flying.
- Dreamers were born on the planet Home; hundreds of millions are in stasis on the Hymns. Some leave stasis to serve the Hymns or just to "stretch their legs." They embody what humanity has lost and what it hopes to regain.
- Outsiders are people who exist outside the Ship Authority. Some are existing cultures from Home that simply don't align with the Authority, others are new, thriving in the vast workings of the ship.

The Hecate (*Deus voqui*) are a mystery even to themselves. They were created, or conjured, in the dying days of Home, and pledged to help save humanity. They interface with 3D space through biomechanical avatara (*Deus voqui familiaris*). Each avatar is born from one of the three goddesses:

- Gorgo is the Transitional Facet of the Trinary, full of energy, with a bottomless love of science, discovery, and advanced weaponry. Her avatara are often scientists, researchers, or teachers.
- Mormo is the Axiom Facet who seeks to create and preserve a livable status quo. Her avatara are often priests or artists, or, if they can prove themselves, serve in leadership roles.
- Bombo is the Crone, a frightening being who shocks the other facets out of complacency. Her avatara are the most likely to be created for the hell of it, serving to make life more interesting, or at least weirder.

What Just Happened?

The object that collided with the ship took a .05-second XASER pulse, adjusted its course, and slipped past the statue of goddess Mormo, crashing into the Forest of Sky. It resisted attempts by the ship to scan it. It's no ordinary piece of space debris, whatever it was.

The Forest of Sky is a preserve for plains and temperate rainforest. The impact site was near both the Outsider colony of Cipactli and the local ranger and Infranet service station, Century Peak. The first group of engineers and Security dispatched within an hour of impact. They are not answering any Authority hails and have not messaged back. This morning, Cipactli's daily wellness message did not reach the Authority.

It's not looking good down there. Your heroes are being tapped to get to the heart of the matter before it grows worse.

SETTING RULES

For this Jumpstart, the only core Setting Rule from *Savage Worlds* is **Unarmored Hero**. The following new Setting Rules are in play:

After All, We're Flesh and Blood

The pilgrims of the Hymns improve their lives with mechanical implants. Avatara are likewise a mix of metal and synthetic flesh. By default, heroes are Semi-Organic. They can be healed by both the Healing and Repair skills.

Heroes with the **Flesh and Faith** Hindrance are purely Organic, and can only be treated with the Healing skill. Those with the **Machine and Nerve** Hindrance are purely Inorganic, and can only be healed with Repair.

Arcane Backgrounds: Athame and High Sorcery

Every hero in *Ne Cede Malis* has an Arcane Background. Most humans use athame (AA-thuh-MAY), a powered harness that can mount tools and weapons called hexes. Avatara and certain humans have a surgical connection to Witchspace, allowing them to control their hexes with high Sorcery.

Heroes with athame don't use a casting skill to activate their powers; they use a skill listed in the hex's description. Heroes with High Sorcery instead use a casting skill, even if their mundane skill associated with the hex is higher. That's the price of linking one's brain to a mathematically higher dimension and running calculations through the goddesses' subconscious.

Self-Targeting hexes don't require activation rolls; simply spend the power's Power Point cost and it activates at a normal level of success. Spend two more Power Points for the Raise effect. Passive hexes only provide a passive bonus, and require no roll to activate. However, they cease functioning while your hero is at 0 Power Points.

Dramatic Task: Reverse-Engineer

If the Hymns is being invaded, the enemy may have interesting new technology. Troubleshooters can crack the secret of new tech and turn it against their enemies.

Reverse-engineering is a single-person Dramatic Task. Reverse-engineering an Obvious piece of equipment (like a gun) is Challenging. Tricky equipment (like a vehicle or an enemy equivalent of a hex) is Difficult. Black Box equipment (like something that taps into an entirely new branch of science) is Complex. While only one character can be a research lead, their allies can Support them.

Usually reverse-engineering calls for a Science or Repair check. Technology that defies conventional physics instead requires Occult to understand from a ritual perspective, or Academics to understand from a symbolic or historical perspective.

Resistance

Armor may optionally have Ballistic Resistance or Energy Resistance. Resistance lowers its type of damage by 4 before applying Armor Piercing.

Ballistic attacks use bullets, arrows, or other physical projectiles. Energy attacks use lasers, fire, extreme cold, or other non-physical mediums to do damage.

Melee weapons and explosives ignore resistances.

NEW HINDRANCES

Hindrances marked with an asterisk * have additional, hidden effects that will emerge during play.

Bewitched (Minor or Major)*

Prerequisite: Trinary Human.

The Hecate accept worship begrudgingly, but do not consider themselves omnipotent or above reproach. Your hero finds this prospect nonsense. Are the Hecate not divine?

At Minor, your hero is an ardent worshiper of the Hecate in an unsubtle way and follows their orders as close as they can. At Major, your hero considers the will of the goddesses absolute. They're the first to risk their lives for the Hecate, whether to protect an avatar or preserve the honor of the goddesses.

Flesh and Faith (Minor or Major)

Your hero's nothing but soft parts. At the Minor level, your hero is still enhancile, but tailored organs and gene therapy are more limited than what metal can provide. She can only be healed with the Healing skill and power. Further, she can only swap hexes before or after missions; lacking the integrated cyberware makes rapidly mounting and unmounting hexes more difficult.

[WARNING: HIGHER LEVEL LOCKOUT]

In Bloom (Minor or Major)*

Your hero was one of the test subjects for Libet's bouquet from back before the Braking Conflict. (They probably went into stasis for a while awaiting a cure for this condition. No dice.) They still suffer the effects. At Minor, your hero only has a strange tell: flowers grow in lieu of hair. For some this is a "flower crown" around the scalp, for others every single hair on the body is replaced by a petal.

[WARNING: Critical Libet's bouquet infestation has long-term effects not seen during short-term engagements.]

Machine and Nerve (Minor)

Your hero's got no soft parts. Common candidates for this Hindrance include full-conversion cyborgs who have little more than a brain and a few glands left, sentient robots (as distinct from drones, who lack true intelligence), or avatara who were built without organic systems (or who traded out their guts later on).

Your hero is Inorganic. She can only be healed with the Repair skill or the healing power. She can't gain the benefits of resisting Hacking and resisting computer-aided attacks if she only wears a vac suit.

One of Many (Minor)

Prerequisite: Avatar.

Your avatar is a dead ringer for another. Mormo gets this all the time, though Gorgo and Bombo have a few twinsies running around, too. This usually leads to social awkwardness, but from time to time your hero gets caught up in their twins' issues.

When your hero undergoes an Interlude or Downtime, draw from the Action Deck. If it's a Club, she's pulled into the issues of an avatar lookalike instead of their intended benefit.

Overengineered (Minor or Major)

Dang it, something's rattling around in here... Your hero's body has an excess of small moving parts. (A Flesh and Faith troubleshooter may have congenital issues. Well, even more congenital issues.)

At Minor, your hero suffers a -2 penalty to resist Bumps and Bruises from physical causes (like bad tumbles).

[WARNING: HIGHER LEVEL LOCKOUT]

NEW EDGES

Background Edges

Combat Skin

Requirements: Novice, Strength d6+, Vigor d8+
Special: Characters with the Flesh and Faith Hindrance cannot take this Edge.

Why wear armor when you can build yourself into it? Your hero's vitals are built into a cyber-core which can be plugged into combat-ready mechanical bodies. These bodies are much lighter and more subtle than wearable armor.

Your hero always benefits from wearing a vac suit. They may plug into either a non-combat body and wear armor normally, or plug into an armored body in lieu of armor. Armored bodies come in the same types as armor; their minimum Strength requirement is lowered by one die type, and they weigh half as much. A Sepulcher body still negates its weight as normal while your hero has Power Points. Your hero also gains +1 Toughness.

Changing into a new body, or changing the Resistances of an equipped body, takes about thirty minutes. If it's likely you'll need to change armor on the fly, it may be a better idea to take a noncombat body and wear armor the old-fashioned way!

Receptor Vitalis

Requirements: Novice, Trinary Human, Spirit d6+

Your hero's devotion to the Hecate and the Hymns is absolute. Becoming a Receptor means undergoing deeply invasive brain surgery to allow an interface with Witchspace.

Living receivers gain the Arcane Background High Sorcery, replacing the Athame Arcane Background. Your hero's casting skill is Faith, Performance, or Spellcasting, chosen when you take this Edge. At character creation, you start with a d4 in that skill; if you take this Edge after character creation, that skill increases by one die type.

Becoming a Receptor Vitalis is a grueling endeavor and nobody makes it out the other end unscarred. Take an additional Minor Hindrance to reflect your experience; it grants no more points.

Combat Edges

Fatum Celer (Swift Fate)

Requirements: Seasoned, Shooting d8+, Notice d8+
What pistols lack in size they make up for in precision. The fine-tooled sidearms of the Hymns can consistently group bullets through fine seams and soft points in armor, provided of course a steely-eyed gunslinger brings them to bear.

When making a called shot with a pistol-class weapon (like the heavy or laser pistols), your hero ignores 2 points of Shooting penalty. This doesn't stack with Marksmanship, but it does stack with Aim. Blast the guns out of their hands... or plow a .55-caliber round through their visor.

Feel the Noise

Requirements: Seasoned, Shooting d8+, Ambidextrous
There is another way of gun-slinging: not wildly spraying rounds into crowds of foes, but firing two weapons as one.

When your hero wields two of the same one-handed ranged weapons, she can treat them as Twin-Linked. This stacks with Edges like Double Tap and rules like Three-Round Burst.
When wielding paired scatterguns, your hero can use the Double-Barreled weapon tag by firing one shot from each weapon.

Foe-Hammer

Requirements: Seasoned, Fighting d8+
The three precepts of room-to-room fighting are this: never stop running, never stop firing, never burn money. This martial technique combines the first two in one awe-inspiring rush.

Your hero can charge with a melee weapon (including unarmed strikes with Martial Arts or other sources of unarmed damage) as if they had Horns.

Power Edges

Drone Circus

Requirements: Seasoned, Electronics, Hacking, or casting skill d8+

Your hero's drones are custom-tooled to their exacting specifications. The summon ally power costs two fewer Power Points to a minimum of 1. Attendants, Bodyguards, and Sentinels benefit from wearing raiment, visage, and sepulcher armor respectively instead of their native Armor bonus.

Your hero gains the warrior's gift power. It is a Self-Targeting power, except that it affects your hero's drones instead, giving all drones under your hero's command the chosen Edge.

Infinite Devil Machine

Requirements: Veteran
There are limits to how many hexes can fit on one athame or in one body, but through innovative techniques your hero's made more room.
Your hero can mount an additional hex and gains 5 more Power Points on top of it.
This Edge can be taken again at Legendary.

Manus celeris Dea (Swift Hand of the Goddess)

Requirements: Heroic, Avatar or Receptor Vitalis, casting skill at d10+
Each muscle-locking stroke of an electrolaser, each drumroll pop of Firefly micromissile swarms, is the baleful gaze of the Hecate falling upon an enemy of the Hymns. Show them the punishment due their sins.
Your hero's damage-dealing hexes deal +2 damage.

Professional Edges

Apostle of the Left-Handed Path

Requirements: Novice, Hacking d6+

Through use of specialized electronics and tiny drones, your hacker can target computers (or enemies with electronics or cybernetic parts) at a range equal to double his Smarts.
Further, he can Test targets with Hacking, uploading malware onto enemy systems or feeding them false information.

Keep It Clean

Requirements: Novice, Electronics d8+

Hackers get all the fame, and that's fine by your hero. There is a joy to being both indispensable and invisible. You can Support your allies with Electronics, feeding them useful information or sorting out common computer errors or cruft before they act. If an ally is hacked or otherwise affected by information warfare, successfully Supporting them also clears conditions inflicted by hacking.

EQUIPMENT

Your hero starts with the equipment lined on their character sheet, plus everything under Common Gear.

Common Gear

Cedarbox

Cedarboxes are portable fabricators carried by troubleshooters and other personnel. The machines are approximately ten inches in length, five in width, and five in height. Cedarboxes take their name from the pleasant aroma the machine produces as it works.

Like all the ship's fabricators, cedarboxes are connected to Witchspace where most of the ship's fuel and raw materials are stored. Cedarboxes are designed to make ammunition and small tools in the field. Installing a hex expands its permissions to produce any material the hex needs, such as explosives or medical chemicals.

Cedarboxes can print non-Heavy ammunition as part of an action to reload. A full Heavy Weapon reload or a single grenade costs 2 Power Points. Heavy Weapons begin each mission loaded.

Illumination

Flashlights are ubiquitous and have no weight. All armor and Combat Skin bodies can produce a 10" flashlight beam. Sepulchers also have floodlamps that provide a Cone Template of illumination.

Helmet HUDs have an option for active night vision as outlined in *Savage Worlds*. While using night vision, heroes suffer a -2 penalty to resist Tests or powers or special abilities based on bright light.

Universal Harness

This is the standard mount for Security and troubleshooters. Anything equipped on a universal harness mount can be retrieved with a normal free action to ready. The harness has three multi-mounts which can each hold one two-handed weapon or two one-handed weapons. One mount is a backpack mount which must be used to store backpack weapons or mosaic shields. The harness can also hold up to four grenades for easy access.

Further weapons or grenades can be carried, but not easily accessed. One-handed weapons or items take one action, two-handed 1d4 actions. Backpack weapons and mosaic shields are so massive they must be stored on the backpack mount or equipped.

Armor

Vac Suit Armor +2, Min. STR -, Weight 5

Environmental Protection.

If your hero only wears a vac suit, they benefit from the Unarmored Hero rule. Hacking attacks and explosives other than thrown grenades suffer a -2 penalty to attack a target only wearing a vac suit.

Vac suits cannot gain resistance, nor use the Self-Targeting version of Reaction Armor.

Vac suits are ubiquitous and come in an endless variety of styles, anywhere from resembling ordinary clothes to looking like an old-fashioned body-hugging spacesuit (with folding helmet for easy storage). They're comfortable enough to wear all day in any environment, and serve as insurance for hazardous environments that may suddenly pop up on the ship.

Even lighter versions exist which weigh around half a pound and can fold up to fit in a pocket. These are purely for civilian use, they are too prone to damage for troubleshooting purposes.

Raiment (Light Armor) Armor +4, Min. STR d4, Weight 10.

The basic armor suit aboard the Hymns. Most commonly these are armored versions of the Ship Authority uniforms, with temple guards donning their own breezy, robe-like raiments for ritual purposes.

Ballistic raiments use bulky spider-web padding to foul and turn aside bullets. Energy raiments make use of conductive mesh to distribute damaging energy evenly across the body.

Visage (Medium Armor) Armor +6, Min. STR d6, Weight 20.

Visages are as heavy as armor gets outside of emergencies. They are marginally bulkier than a raiment, but that bulk is made of colloidal ballistic silk and polysteel bolts.

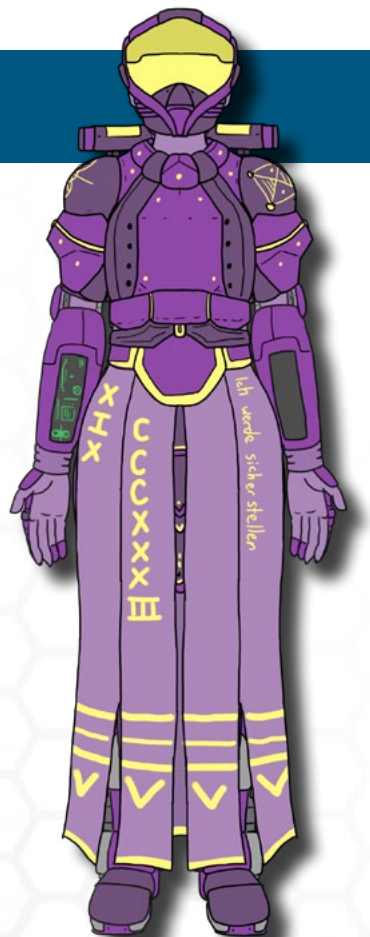
Ballistic-resistant security armor is the iconic protective wear of the crew, with its dragonfly-like helmet and smooth, agile lines of ceramic plate. Energy-resistant EVA suits are the standard wear for entering hard vacuum or into areas of the ship known to have critical damage.

Sepulcher (Heavy Armor) Armor +8, Min. STR d10, Weight 100*.

As long as your hero has at least one Power Point, sepulchers are treated as weightless for encumbrance and reduce the minimum Strength requirement of other equipment by one die type. Your hero gains a natural weapon, a Str+1d4 Strike, while the sepulcher is powered. This stacks with enhancements to unarmed damage through Edges or equipment.

If your hero's Strength doesn't meet the minimum, a Critical Failure on an Agility-linked skill inflicts a level of Fatigue in addition to any other complications.

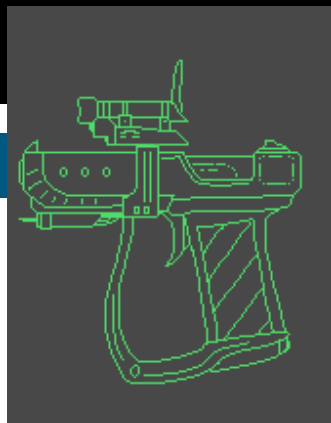
While all the armor on the Hymns is technically power armor, nothing evokes the name like sepulcher-class armor. Sepulchers are most commonly paired with Lift Webbing to push their enhanced strength even further. Ballistic-resistant sepulchers up-armor with thin sections of fitted hullplate. Energy-resistant suits are draped with cloth-pattern receptors and sump batteries that distribute and transform damaging energy into light.



Ranged Weapons

Heavy Pistol Type 1

Range 15/30/60, Damage 2d8, AP 2, ROF 1, Shots 12, Min. STR d6, Weight 5. One-handed. Ballistic. Precision.
The Type 1 is an efficient and humble semiautomatic pistol in .55 caliber, manufactured to exacting standards and coming standard with grip HUD link and generously-sized reflex sight. In spite of their size, heavy pistol rounds excel at defeating armor and scything through weak points.



Personal Defense Weapon Type 2

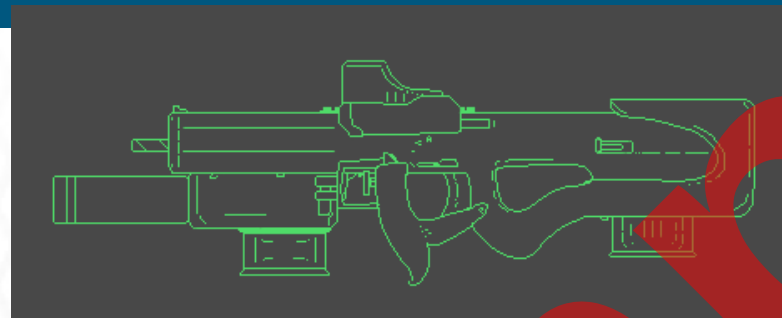
Range 12/24/48, Damage 2d6, AP 2, ROF 3, Shots 50, Min. STR d4, Weight 3. One-handed. Ballistic.

The PDW (“Petey Dub”) is an electrically-triggered, full-automatic, caseless flechette gun. The flechettes are armor-piercing and the flat magazine has a surprisingly high capacity, allowing for tight, controlled bursts or filling the air with shrieking needles.

Automatic Carbine Type 3A

Range 24/48/96, Damage 2d8+1, AP 2, ROF 3, Shots 30, Min. STR d6, Weight 10. Two-handed. Ballistic.

The Type 3A is the default weapon of security, used by every branch and even mounted on lighter gun emplacements. Its reputation is mixed; it’s a solid and reliable weapon, but it doesn’t excel in any one specific role. A good all-rounder is ultimately the second-best gun for any given job, which some security can’t stand. Most agree that the underslung grenade launcher is pretty nice, though.



Grenade Launcher

Range 24/48/96, Damage 3d8, AP -, MBT, ROF 1, Shots 3. Heavy Weapon. Explosive. Evasion.

Designated Marksman Rifle Type 3B

Range 24/48/96, Damage 2d8+1, AP 2, ROF 1, Shots 30, Min. STR d6, Weight 8. Two-handed. Ballistic. Three-Round Burst. Precision.

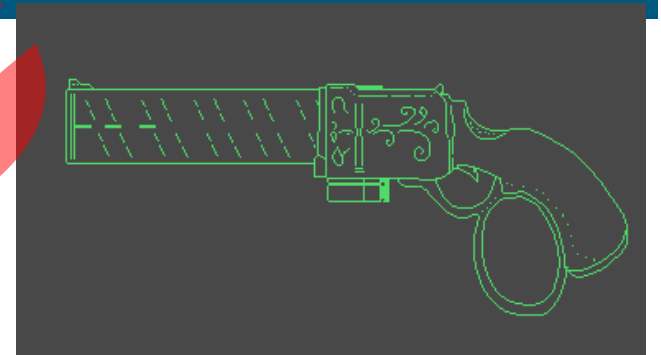
The DMR is semi-automatic when not fired in three-round bursts.

The Designated Marksman Rifle variant of the 3A was created to serve as a middle ground between the Type 1 and the Type 5. It ditches the grenade launcher and improves the optics and manufacturing tolerances, creating a lightweight but powerful sharpshooting rifle. Unlike the all-rounder 3A, the versatile but focused 3B was met with universal praise and is considered the thinking shooter’s weapon of choice.

Scattergun Type 4

Range 8/16/32, Damage 1-3d6, AP 0, ROF 1, Shots 4, Min. STR d10. One-handed. Ballistic. Shotgun. Double-barreled. Can load slug rounds.

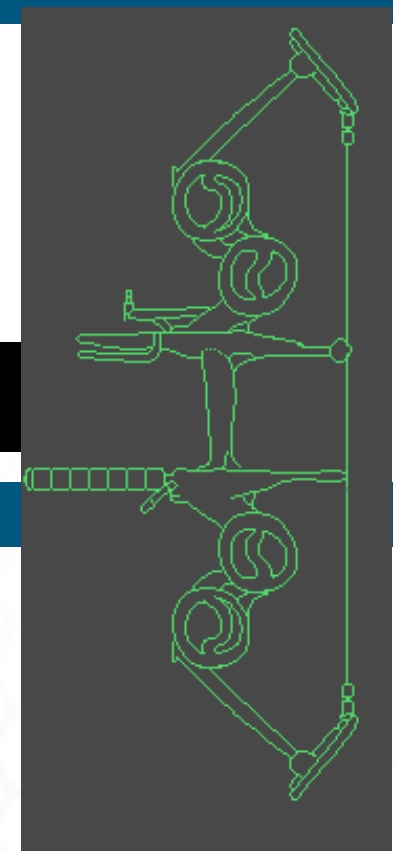
The Scattergun may be fired two-handed. Its minimum Strength when fired two-handed is d6. Scatterguns are minimalist firearms; one may say “primitive” and not even be pejorative. Its most advanced feat of engineering is its robust lever action that allows it to be cycled one-handed. It was designed to be used by room-to-room fighters in sepulchers alongside a mosaic shield. Unsurprisingly, “a shotgun you can have two of, and it does this flippy thing” makes the crowd go wild, and troubleshooters love to build morale.



Tension Bow

Range 20/40/80, Str+d8, AP 2, RoF 1, Min. STR d6, Weight 4. Two-handed. Precision.

Tension bows are strung with construction-strength cables and are capable of storing enormous amounts of kinetic energy. They are simple to assemble and versatile; they have been used for their subtlety as well as their ability to (as the late, great Humbaba Bombo-22 put it) super-strength-stab someone from across the hall.



Melee Weapons

Trusty Knife

Str+1d4+1, Min. STR d4, Weight 1. AP 2. One-Handed. Thrown 5/10/20. Big Trusty Knife Str+1d6+1, Min. STR d6, Weight 4. AP 2. One-Handed. Thrown 4/8/16.

Both versions count as trusty knives for Edges. A trusty knife can be printed as part of a free action to ready. The envy of all knives that came before, these are formally classified as the All-Purpose Knife and Forestry Tool. The All-Purpose Knife comes in a variety of styles unified by their obscenely fine edge. Likewise, the Forestry Tool may be a hatchet, machete, or a gruesomely huge knife. These aren’t quite as horrifying as a ribbon sword, but they have no moving parts and can be thrown. They aren’t called “trusty” for nothing.