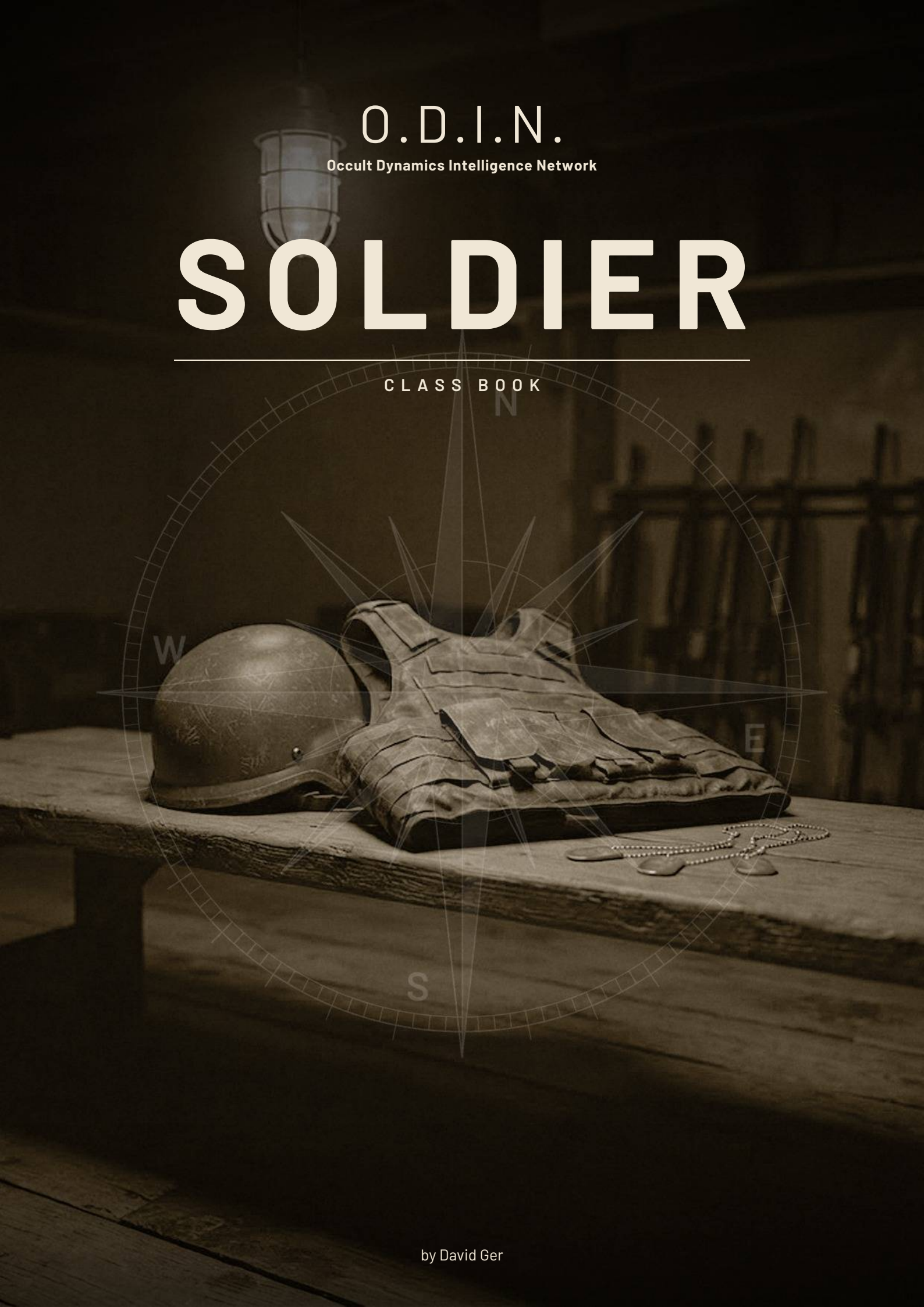
O.D.I.N.

Occult Dynamics Intelligence Network

SOLDIER

CLASS BOOK



by David Ger

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PROLOGUE
NORDLICHT

Prologue: Nordlicht

"We always arrive too late. It is not our fault. It is our profession."
Lieutenant Kjell Haugen, 1977

The helicopter landed at 6:40 a.m., an hour before sunrise, and Lieutenant Kjell Haugen was the first one out. The snow reached up to his knees. The wind came from the north and carried nothing with it but cold.

Five kilometres before the target, the pilot had said over the intercom that his compass was spinning. Not wildly, but slowly and steadily, like the hand of a clock. Haugen had told him to fly by sight. The pilot had asked what exactly they were looking for. Haugen had not answered, because he did not know himself.

The Nordlicht base lay three hundred metres away, a flat concrete building with two antennas and a corrugated iron shed, half buried in snow, so inconspicuous that one could mistake it for a weather station. A light was on in one window.

"Spread out," said Haugen. "Two squads. No one goes alone."

They were twelve, all from the Tactical Branch, all with winter gear and assault rifles whose magazines were filled with ammunition that was mixed in the Collegium and smelled of silver. Since Kiruna, the Branch carried nothing else in areas where crystals were stored.

The door was not locked. Haugen went in first.

The hallway was warm. The heating was running. From a radio in the kitchen came soft music, a Norwegian pop song that his mother had liked. On the kitchen table stood eleven coffee cups, ten of them half full. Haugen put his hand on one. It was warm.

"Lieutenant." The voice came from the radio, Corporal Lindahl from the second squad. "The sleeping quarters are empty. The beds are made. In one, a book lies open, with a bookmark."

"Continue."

They searched the base room by room, as they had been taught. The radio station: switched on, headphones on the table, the logbook open, the last entry at 10:08 p.m. *All quiet. Snow.* The workshop: a half-repaired generator, tools beside it, as if someone had just put them down. The infirmary: empty, clean, a note on the medicine cabinet saying that the aspirin supplies were running low.

In the station commander's office, a duty roster hung on the wall, filled in with pencil, forty-one names in neat columns. Behind each name, for 14 February, there was a small tick. Present. Haugen read the names, one after another, because that is what you do when you are looking for someone. He knew two of them.

Forty-one people. No trace. No signs of a struggle, no blood, no open doors to the outside, no footprints in the snow except their own.

And then the archive.

It was in the basement, behind a steel door that could only be opened with two keys. Both keys were in the locks. Behind it stood shelves, long rows, and on the shelves lay boxes made of lead, each with a number. Haugen opened one, because he could not help himself.

The crystal inside was grey. Like slate.

He opened a second. Grey. A third. Grey.

"Lieutenant," said Lindahl over the radio, "the clocks."

Haugen looked at his wristwatch. It had stopped, at 10:10 p.m. He knew for certain that it had still been running when the helicopter had landed.

"Everyone out," he said. "Now."

They left, in an orderly fashion, as they had been taught, two squads, one providing cover, one moving. No one ran. No one turned around. Haugen went last, and he counted the backs in front of him, twice, until he reached eleven and knew that he himself was the twelfth. Outside, the sun was just rising, and Haugen's watch was running again, as if nothing had happened.

In the helicopter, the pilot asked how many they had found. "None," said Haugen. The pilot nodded, as if that was exactly what he had wanted to hear, and took off without letting the machine warm up.

He wrote the report that same evening. He wrote what they had seen, and nothing else. He did not write that at the moment his watch stopped, he had heard the radio in the kitchen, and that the pop song had no longer been playing, but a choir.

Apart from Ashgrove, he did not tell anyone about it until almost fifty years later, to a young Soldier named Brandt, in a bar in Tromsø. Brandt had just survived a winter in the Karakoram, the only one of his unit, together with a radio that kept transmitting even though the battery was missing. Haugen was over seventy at the time, wearing a fisherman's sweater and drinking

aquavit, and Brandt had only sat down next to him because no other stool was free.

Haugen looked at his wristwatch, then at Brandt. “It has just stopped,” he said. “Ten past ten. It only does that when something is nearby.” He studied him for a while. “Or someone who was too close.”

They talked for a while about snow, about helicopters and about men who were no longer there. Then Haugen told him about the radio in the kitchen.

“And what did the Choir sing?” asked Brandt.

Haugen drained his glass. “The same as your radio,” he said. Then he stood up, put money on the counter and patted Brandt twice on the shoulder, the way one does with a recruit who has just understood something. “We always arrive too late,” he said. “That’s not our fault. That’s our profession. Remember that before you start to resent it.”

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O.D.I.N. / TACTICAL BRANCH / MISSION REPORT
Case: SA-1977-02 “Nordlicht”
Search party: 12 men, led by Lt. HAUGEN, K.
Result: Hold intact. 41 persons missing. 212 crystals depleted.
Own losses: none.
Recommendation of the troop leader: Seal the Hold. Do not enter again.
Note of the Council: Recommendation accepted. Sealing after clearance by the Institute and the Collegium.
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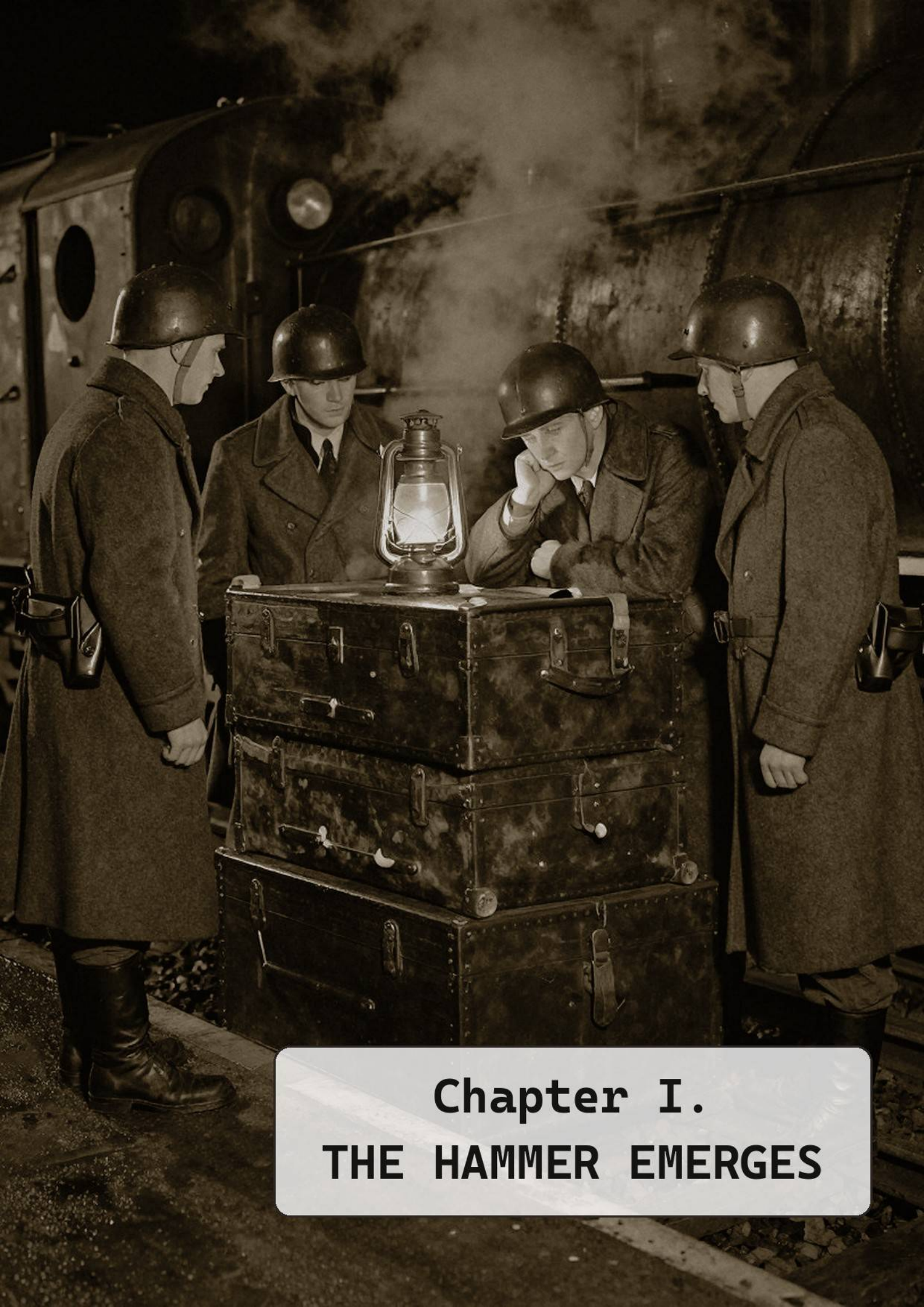


Chapter I.
THE HAMMER EMERGES

The Escort

"We were told to guard crates. Nobody said the crates whisper back."
Sergeant Frank Doyle, 1948

The Tactical Branch begins not with a battle, but with a transport. When the Collegium joined the treaty with O.D.I.N. in 1947, it brought crystals with it, and crystals had to be moved: from the chamber in Wales to new archives, from find sites to safety, from one laboratory to the next. For that, the young organisation needed men who could handle weapons and asked no questions.

It found them among the veterans of the war. The first soldiers of O.D.I.N. were former commandos, paratroopers and desert patrols, men and a few women who did not find their way back into civilian life after 1945. They called themselves **the Escort**. Their leader was **Major Thomas Ashgrove**, a Briton who had driven through the Libyan Desert during the war with a reconnaissance unit and had, as he later said, "seen things in the sand that were not Germans".

The Escort had no uniform, no insignia and no authority. It escorted lorries, secured railway stations and slept next to lead crates. The first six years passed quietly. Then came Kiruna.

Kiruna

In February 1953, an ore mine in northern Sweden reported a break-in into a tunnel that was not marked on any plan. The miners had seen crystals behind it, dozens, grown into the rock face. The Collegium sent two Thaumaturges, the Escort sent fourteen men under Ashgrove.

What they found in the tunnel is described by Ashgrove's report in a single sentence: *It was already awake.*

The fight lasted eleven minutes. The Escort's weapons, submachine guns and carbines from the war, had no effect. The bullets passed through what came out of the wall as if it were smoke, and it was not smoke. One of the Thaumaturges drew a warding circle, and the circle held long enough for Ashgrove to pull his wounded out. Outside in the snow, he counted. Of fourteen men, three were left, including himself. Eleven did not come back, and neither did the Thaumaturge who had drawn the circle. The second Thaumaturge came out with them. He never spoke about Kiruna again, not even with the Collegium.

Ashgrove spent the following months in the Collegium's workshop in Wales, with a young alchemist named Evan Pryce. Together they developed what every Soldier knows today: **incendiary ammunition with crystal dust**, projectiles whose core is mixed with the dust of depleted crystals. The first batch was tested in autumn 1953, at a small rift in Cornwall. It worked.

The Hammer

In spring 1954, the Escort became the **Tactical Branch**. Ashgrove received a title, a budget and permission to train. He founded a camp in the Scottish Highlands. There soldiers learned to shoot, and they learned what to do when shooting does not help: protect warding circles, cover Thaumaturges, withdraw without running.

On the O.D.I.N. grapevine, the branch quickly got its nickname: **the Hammer**. Ashgrove did not like it. He said a hammer only knows one problem. His soldiers liked it very much.

The following decades shaped the branch into units that are known today as subclasses:

- In **1961**, the branch trained the first **Shadow Paratroopers** after a squad in the Andes had needed three days on foot to reach a rift that was no longer open afterwards.
- In **1974**, the **Echo-Operatives** were created from a research programme on sonic weapons from the Cold War. Their first assignment was confidential. It had to do with rogue Psions.
- In **1979**, the **Stormbreaker** followed, as a response to a new kind of opponent: collectors with armoured vehicles and mercenaries.

- In **1987**, the Science Branch developed the first kinetic shields. The **Techno-Stormtroopers** were the first allowed to wear them.
- In **2004**, the programme from which the **Nanotech Veterans** emerged began. The branch still does not like to talk about it to this day.

Wales, 1971

In October 1971, a squad of the branch stood in front of a hall in Wales where Kantor had forty Psions sitting in a circle without helmets. The order was to let no one in and no one out. Shortly after ten in the evening, the men outside heard how all voices inside fell silent at once.

The squad leader, Sergeant Alun Rees, did not wait the prescribed ten minutes. He went inside, and over the following hour his men carried forty people outside. Three were dead. Seven would never again hear what a Psion hears. Rees received a reprimand for it and the first piece of silver the branch ever awarded for a rescue.

The Echo Operatives, which came into being three years later, are the Council's answer to that night: a means of stopping psions before they have to be carried out. The psions of the Choir have never forgotten that. The Soldiers haven't either, though for a different reason. For them, the Cascade was the night the Hammer left no one behind for the first time.

Nordlicht

When Hold Nordlicht stopped reporting in 1977, the Council sent a search party from the Tactical Branch. Twelve men under Lieutenant Kjell Haugen found an empty hold, warm coffee cups and 212 depleted crystals. They all came back. The relatives of the 41 were given deaths invented by the Print Shop of the Operations Branch. Haugen lives today in Tromsø, not far from a widow who writes every February to a company that does not exist. He never told her that he was at Nordlicht.

Nordlicht changed O.D.I.N. The Council decided that no hold would permanently house more than twelve agents. The Branch decided for itself the **Rule of Two Squads**: No Soldier enters an unknown place without a second squad that stays outside and waits. And since then, no Soldier drinks from a cup they have not filled themselves. That is not in any regulation. Everyone abides by it.

From Ashgrove's Notebook

"I learned more about war in Kiruna than in five years of desert. Above all, that you cannot win every one."
Major Thomas Ashgrove, 1954

Thomas Ashgrove kept a small notebook, which he carried in his breast pocket, from 1947 until his death in 1988. It now lies in the armoury of Hold-1, and every recruit at Camp Ashgrove receives a copy of the following pages.

MARCH 1947, CARDIFF

First transport. Six crates, two lorries, eight men. The crates are heavier than they should be. One of the men says they whisper. I told him to stop talking nonsense. I heard it too.

FEBRUARY 1953, KIRUNA

Eleven. I do not write down the names. I know them. The bullets went through. The Thaumaturge drew a circle and stayed inside it so that we could get out. I do not know his name. I should have asked.

NOVEMBER 1953, CORNWALL

Pryce's ammunition works. The rift screamed when the first bullet hit it. I thought I would be glad. I was not glad.

APRIL 1955, CARDIFF

Pryce gave me a knife, made of the new metal. It is warm. He says that will pass. It has not passed.

SEPTEMBER 1961, LIMA

Three days on foot. When we arrived, the rift was closed and the village empty. I want men who can fall. From the sky, I mean. The Council laughs. It will stop laughing.

MAY 1977, TROMSØ

Haugen called me. He said they had all come back. Then he said nothing for a long time. Then he said he had heard a choir. I told him not to write it down.

LAST ENTRY, 1988

The Branch is good. The young ones are better than us. They will need it. I wish I knew what for.

Betrayal and Escalation

Ashgrove died in the spring of 1988, in bed, which by his own account would have surprised him more than anything else. His successor was **Colonel Hendrik Vos**, a Dutchman from the first generation of Stormbreakers, a quiet man with a fondness for lists. Vos led the Branch through the hardest years of its history.

The betrayal of 1989 hit the Tactical Branch less hard than others, because its soldiers were rarely run under real names. But it changed its task. After 1989, the Branch took over the protection of all Holds. Since then, at least one Soldier stands at the door of every Hold, and no one comes in whom they do not know.

In 2011 came the accumulation. The number of rifts rose, the number of operations too, and the Council doubled the Tactical Branch within three years. In the same year, Vos handed the Branch over to a new general, on a single day, without a parade and without explanation. He moved into a house on the coast of Zeeland and has not entered a hold since. The new general calls himself **Ares**, and in a few years he has turned the Branch from a protection force into a combat force. The old soldiers say Ashgrove would not have wanted that. The young ones say Ashgrove would not have known the rifts of today.

CHRONICLE OF THE TACTICAL BRANCH, CLEARANCE AGENT

1947: The escort under Major Ashgrove.

1953: Kiruna. 11 dead. Development of incendiary ammunition.

1954: Founding of the Tactical Branch.

1955: The first piece of ashsilver.

1961: First Shadow Paratroopers.

1971: Wales. Sergeant Rees’s squad carries the cascade out.

1974: First Echo operatives.

1977: Nordlicht. Rule of two squads.

1979: First Stormbreakers.

1987: Kinetic shields. First Techno-Stormtroopers.

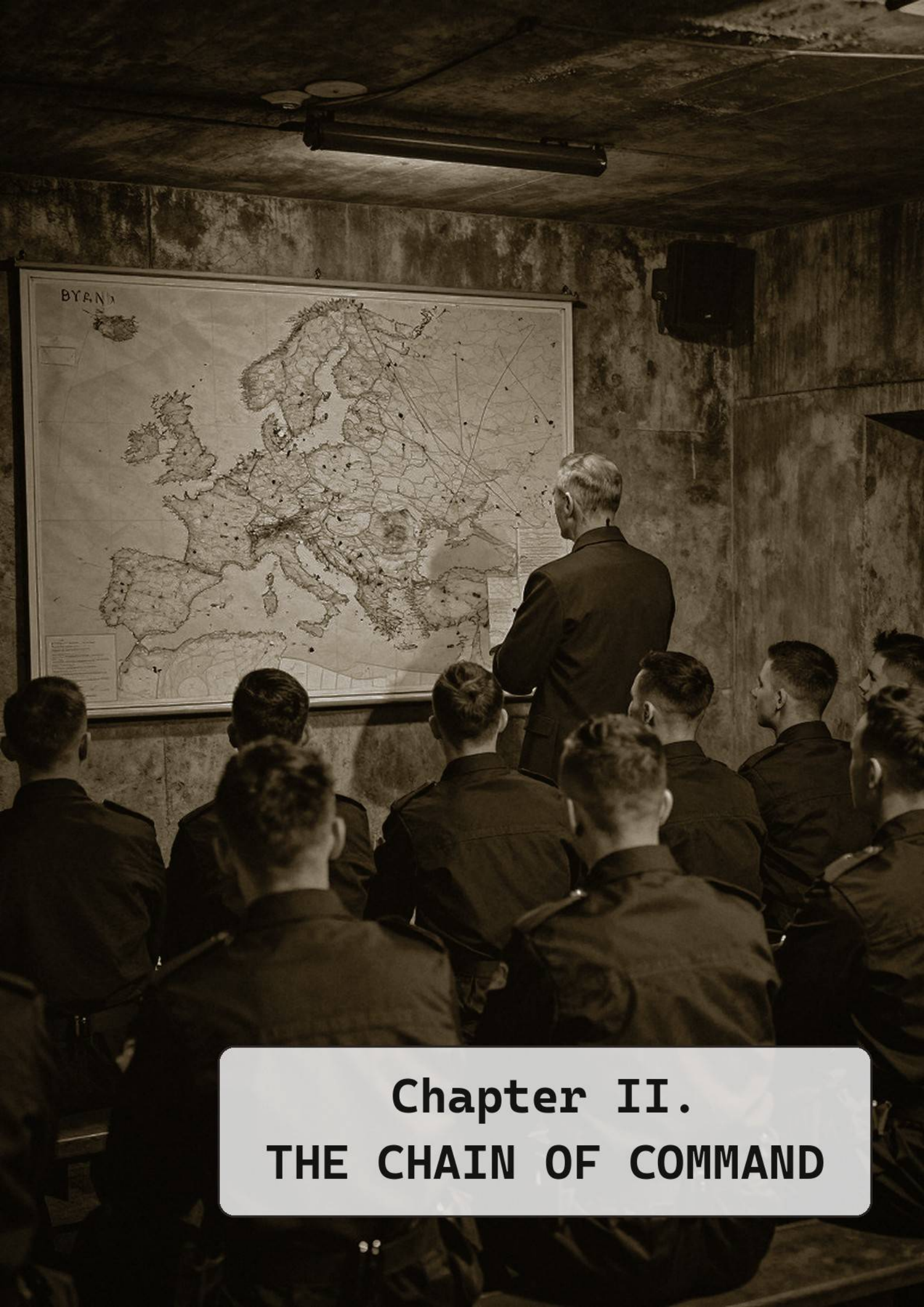
1988: Death of Ashgrove. Colonel Vos takes over.

1989: Betrayal. Takeover of base protection. The Collegium ceases production of ashsilver.

1991: Berlin. Shield wall holds the tunnel.

2004: Start of Programme Asklepios.

2011: Ares takes over. Doubling of the branch.



Chapter II.
THE CHAIN OF COMMAND

O.D.I.N. from the Hammer's Perspective

"The others ask what it is. We ask how many and from which direction."
Instructor, Camp Ashgrove

For most branches, O.D.I.N. is a riddle: an organisation that one must understand, see through, or survive. For the Tactical Branch, it is above all a chain of command. Soldiers know who gives them orders, they know to whom they give orders, and they know that both only work if nobody asks too many questions.

That does not mean that Soldiers are stupid or obedient. Most have seen more in the field than any other agent, and they have their own theories about what the Council conceals. But they have learned that in the moment of an attack, doubt does not count, but the man next to them. They ask the questions afterwards, in the canteen, over the third beer. Or not at all.

Ares

The general of the High Council, codename **Ares**, is responsible for the military and tactical organisation of O.D.I.N. For the Tactical Branch, he is the highest authority, and unlike Prometheus or Sphinx, he is no mere legend. Ares visits bases. He speaks with Soldiers. He was personally present at at least three operations.

Nobody knows his name or where he comes from. He speaks English with an accent that no one can place, and he has a scar on his neck, which he says comes from Kiruna. That is impossible, Kiruna was 1953. Ares does not look older than fifty.

The Soldiers love him anyway. He has doubled the branch, pushed through better equipment, and after every operation with casualties, personally visited the families, as far as there were any. The older Soldiers are more reserved. They have noticed that Ares is letting the branch grow faster than soldiers can be trained, and they wonder what he needs them for.

The Soldier in the Cell

Previously, Soldiers worked in their own squads. Since the betrayal of 1989 and the cell structure, most are alone or in pairs in a mixed cell, together with Agents, Scientists, Psions and Thaumaturges. For many, that was an adjustment. A Soldier is trained to rely on his squad. Now he relies on a telepath, a librarian and a man who draws circles with chalk.

Most Soldiers learn that quickly. They take on a role in the cell that goes beyond fighting: they plan the retreat. They count heads. They are the last to leave a place. In the branch, this is called the **Rule of the Last Man**, and every Soldier knows it, even though it is not in any service regulation.

The Armoury

In every Hold there is an armoury, and it belongs to the Tactical Branch. It is run by a **quartermaster**, usually an older Soldier who has too many scars to go into the field. The quartermaster issues weapons, ammunition and armour, records every issue, and decides who gets incendiary ammunition and who does not.

Incendiary ammunition with crystal dust is scarce. It is made with the dust of depleted crystals, and the Collegium only reluctantly releases this dust. A Soldier who wastes it gets none next time. A Soldier who uses it against humans never gets any again.

Ranks

Within the branch, the ranks of O.D.I.N. apply, but Soldiers use military designations among themselves that go back to Ashgrove's escort. Those who come from

an army often keep their old rank as a form of address: corporal, sergeant, lieutenant, colonel.

Rank	Called in the branch
Cadet	Recruit
Agent	Soldier
Senior Agent	Squad Leader
Veteran	Non-commissioned officer
Shadow Officer	Officer

A squad leader may lead a squad in the field, even if he is not the highest-ranking in the cell. This occasionally leads to friction with Agents and Thaumaturges, who are not used to taking orders from someone who is below them in rank. Most cells solve this pragmatically: when shots are fired, the Soldier has command.

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RUMOURS FROM THE CANTEEN (D6)
1: Ares was in Kiruna. He just doesn't look
like it.
2: The incendiary ammunition does not work
because of the silver. It works because the
dust remembers something.
3: Of the forty volunteers from Asklepios,
twenty-eight were buried. There was nothing in
their coffins.
4: In Camp Ashgrove there is a shooting range
that is only used at night. The targets move
by themselves.
5: Haugen entered Nordlicht once more, alone,
in 1989. He never went on an operation again
afterwards.
6: The branch is being doubled because the
Council expects something that cannot be
stopped with chalk.
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The Unwritten Rules

- **No one is left behind.** No Soldier leaves an operation site as long as a member of their cell is missing, alive or dead.
- **The last one leaves last.** The Soldier is the last to leave a place.
- **Don't drink from other people's cups.** Since Nordlicht.
- **Don't shoot at what you can't see.** Unless the Echo-Operative tells you where.
- **Silver is for things, lead is for people.** Incendiary ammunition is never used against people.
- **Don't ask about Asklepios.**

Life as a Soldier

Training

Every Soldier begins at **Camp Ashgrove** in the Scottish Highlands. Basic training lasts six months, often only three since 2011, and is harder than in any regular army, but not because of the physical demands. Most recruits come from special forces and are already at their physical peak. What is hard is what they must unlearn: that every threat has a body, that cover protects, that an enemy dies if you hit them often enough.

The recruits learn to fight alongside a Thaumaturge without stepping into their circle. They learn to listen to a Psion when they say that the room is not empty. They become acquainted with horror, in controlled exercises, and some leave the camp again after the third week. The camp does not hold it against them.

Between Missions

Soldiers often spend their free time together. They train, clean weapons, play cards, talk about everything except operations. Most have no family or one that knows nothing about their work. Many have dogs. A Soldier with a dog is considered stable in the branch, and the bases have surprisingly many kennels.

The File from the Hammer's Perspective

Every operation begins with a file, and Soldiers read files differently from everyone else. They look first at the colour, then at the number of people involved, then at the location, and only very last at the text. For each colour there is a sentence that the instructors at Camp Ashgrove teach in the first week: White means practise. Grey means wait. Red means run. Black means don't ask.

The Grey File is the most difficult for a Soldier. They are needed in case something happens, and most of the time nothing happens. They sit in the transporter, they stand at doors, they accompany an Investigator through flats from which people have disappeared. Good Soldiers use this time. They memorise exits, count the neighbours, listen to how a house sounds when nothing is happening. If the file turns red, they are then the first to know what has changed.

The Scars

Soldiers carry their operations on their body. Scars, healed fractures, a joint that aches in the rain. And scars that cannot be seen. The Tactical Branch has the highest rate of traumas at O.D.I.N., and everyone knows that. There are psychologists, there are conversations, there is the silence of the Psions, into which even Soldiers may sometimes lie, if no one finds out. And there is the rule that a Soldier gets three days off after a difficult operation, whether they want to or not. Most still spend them at the base. Outside it is too quiet.

Chapter III.
THE OTHER BRANCHES

The Hammer and the Others

"The others explain what it is. We make sure it stops."
General Ares, attributed

The Tactical Branch is both popular and underestimated at O.D.I.N. Every cell is glad to have a Soldier along when things get loud. But many agents consider Soldiers mere muscle, and that annoys the branch more than it admits. Soldiers know more about rifts, cults and crystals than one might think. They have simply learned not to mention it at every opportunity.

The Operations Branch: Agent

"The Soldier wants to go through the front door. I want no one to notice there is a door. We usually agree on the window."
Agent, codename Moth

How agents see Soldiers: as insurance. Agents plan operations in which no shots are fired. If shots are fired, the plan has failed, and then you need a Soldier.

How the Hammer sees agents: with respect and suspicion. Agents are brave, but they lie professionally, and a Soldier wants to know where they stand. Shadow Paratroopers get on best with agents. They share a love of darkness.

The Science Branch: Scientist

"They took my shield apart three times and put it back together four times. The fourth time it was better. Of course I don't tell them that."
Techno-Stormtrooper, codename Schildwall

How Scientists see Soldiers: as the people who break their inventions. And as the only ones who give honest feedback.

How the Hammer sees Scientists: as indispensable. Without Scientists there would be no shields, no nanites, no resonance pistols. Techno-Stormtroopers and Engineers work so closely together that in some Holds they sleep in the same workshop.

The Psionic Core: Psion

"If the telekinetic holds the door, I hold the corridor. I don't need to know more."
Soldier, codename Bastion

How Soldiers see Psions: with superstition and gratitude. A precognitive has saved more Soldiers' lives than any protective vest. Still, many Soldiers feel uneasy when a Telepath is nearby.

How the Choir sees Soldiers: as calm minds. A Soldier in combat thinks in short, clear sentences, and many Psions find that restful. There is an unspoken tension with the Echo-Operatives, whose frequencies also affect Psions. The older Psions know what the Echo-Operatives were originally trained for, and do not stand next to them on operations. The younger ones are rarely told.

The Arcane Branch: Thaumaturge

"He needed two minutes for his spell. In that time I would have changed the magazine, solved the problem and had a coffee."
Soldier, codename Bastion

How Soldiers see Thaumaturges: as slow, complicated and occasionally very useful. Since Kiruna, every Soldier knows that a warding circle saves lives when bullets fail.

How the Collegium sees Soldiers: with more respect than one might think. Without Soldiers, no Thaumaturge could complete a ritual. And the incendiary ammunition that every Soldier carries is made from the dust of the Collegium's crystals. The Collegium reminds everyone of this at every opportunity.

The Investigation Branch: Investigator

"The Soldier sees an opponent. I see a person who was a bus driver three days ago. We need both perspectives."
Investigator, codename Raven

How Investigators see Soldiers: as protection at crime scenes that are not yet empty. And as people who need to be reined in before they shoot a witness.

How the Hammer sees Investigators: as the ones who say where to go. A Soldier without an Investigator often storms the wrong cellar. Many Soldiers admire the investigators' patience, even though they could never work that way.

The Units Among Themselves

Unit	Reputation in the Branch
Stormbreaker	The loud ones. You hear them coming, and you are glad about it.
Echo-Operative	The quiet ones. You don't ask what they were first trained for.
Shadow Paratrooper	The invisible ones. Admired and rarely seen.
Nanotech Veteran	The eerie ones. You sit next to them in the canteen, but you don't talk about their scars.
Techno-Stormtrooper	The wall. Whoever stands behind them lives longer.

A Squad, a Door

How a Soldier works together with other classes is shown in this short excerpt. Brandt, the Stormbreaker, stands with Echo, the Telepath, and Folio, the Thaumaturgist, in front of a steel door in a cellar vault.

"Three behind," said Echo. "Two are afraid. One is praying."

"To whom?" asked Folio.

"Not to anyone I know."

Brandt nodded and took the charge from his pocket. "How long do you need for the circle?"

"One minute," said Folio. "Two if I'm to do it properly."

"You have one." Brandt stuck the charge to the door. "Echo, tell me when the praying one stops."

They waited. Folio drew his circle, cleanly and in one stroke, from the shoulder, as he had been taught in the Collegium. Brandt counted quietly along. At fifty-three, Echo said: "Now."

The door flew inward. Brandt was first through, rifle raised, incendiary ammunition loaded. Two men lay on the floor, hands over their heads. The third knelt in a salt circle, and in the centre of the circle the air began to darken.

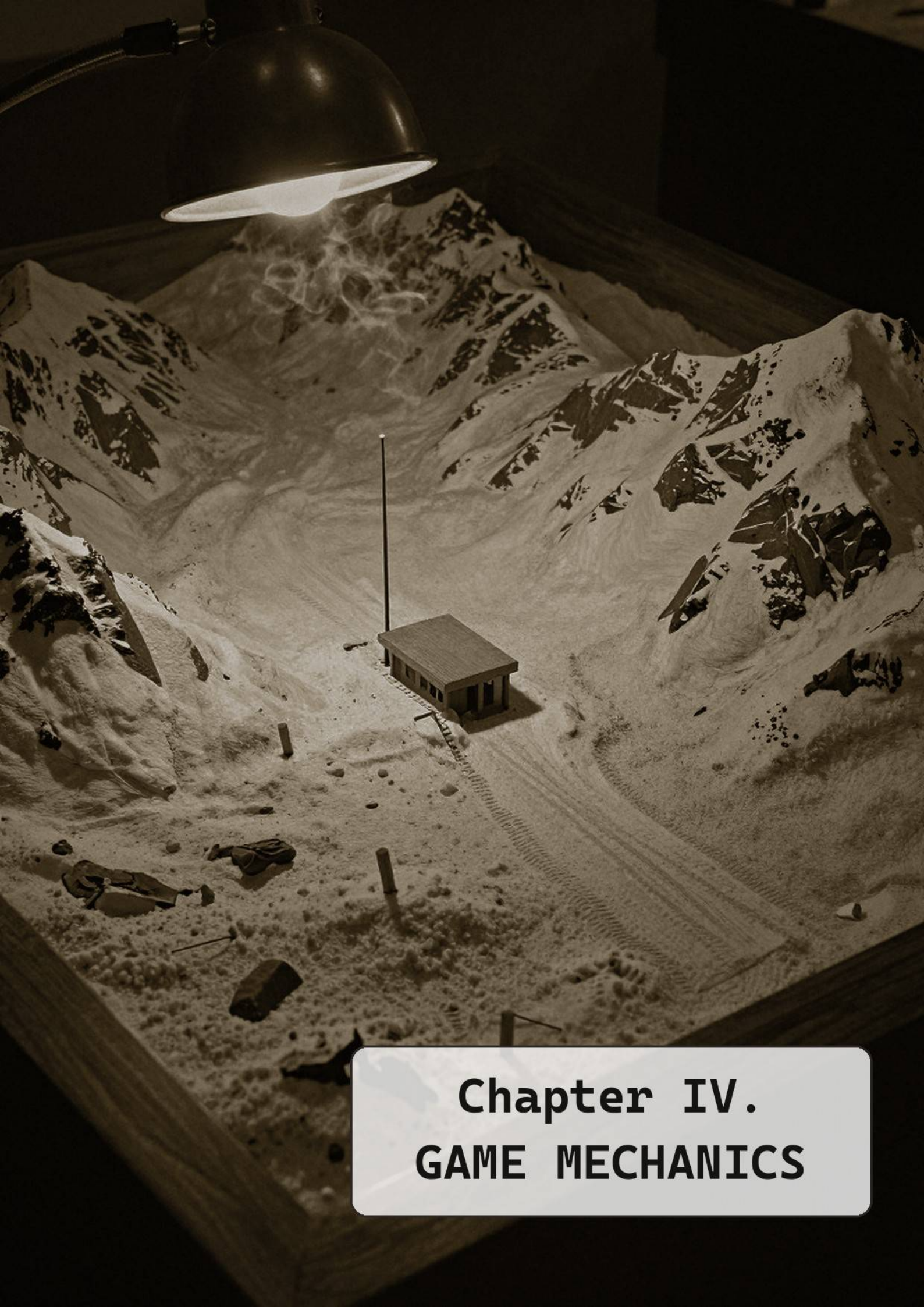
Brandt did not shoot. He stepped aside, and Folio stepped into the doorway, the crystal in his hand, and spoke a word that none of the others understood. The salt circle broke, and the air became air again.

"Thank you," said Folio.

"For what?"

"That you didn't shoot."

Brandt shrugged. "Silver is for things," he said. "That wasn't one yet."



Chapter IV.
GAME MECHANICS

The Five Units

"There is no Soldier who can do everything. There are only squads that can do everything."
Major Thomas Ashgrove, 1956

This chapter summarises everything you need to create and develop a Soldier. The basic rules for combat are in the Core Rulebook in Chapter VI, strain and horror in Chapter VII. Each of the five units has its own chapter in this book, whose number is in brackets, with its history, its play styles, an example character, and its modules in the arsenal.

Unit	Focus	Attributes
Stormbreaker (VII)	Armour-piercing, explosives, breakthrough	STR, INT
Echo-Operative (VIII)	Sonic weapons, detection, disruption of psi and magic	DEX, WIS
Shadow Paratrooper (IX)	Camouflage, airborne landing, attack from concealment	DEX, COM
Nanotech Veteran (X)	Self-healing, close combat, endurance	CON, WIL
Techno-Stormtrooper (XI)	Shields, boosters, protection of the cell	STR, INT

Creating a Soldier

Soldiers are created according to the rules from Chapter III of the Core Rulebook. Unlike Psions and Thaumaturges, they do not need a supernatural gift, but almost all have a past in uniform. Think about where your character comes from and when they first shot at something that did not fall. The character generator at odin-rpg.pages.dev/generator/en/ is quicker. It guides you through creation question by question, knows all five subclasses of this book with their backgrounds, and produces the character sheet as a PDF at the end.

The Service Path

D6	Where your Soldier comes from
1	**Special forces.** They were with an elite unit of their country until an operation went wrong, about which there is no report.
2	**Regular army.** They were a simple soldier and saw something on a foreign deployment that their superiors did not want to hear.
3	**Police.** Special operations unit, hostage situation, a perpetrator who was still standing after seven hits.
4	**Mercenary.** They worked for collectors until they realised what was in the crates.
5	**Foreign Legion or a foreign service.** They changed sides, and O.D.I.N. did not ask why.
6	**Civilian.** They were never in the military. They only survived where others died, and O.D.I.N. wanted to know how.

The First Trial by Fire

D6	The first time bullets were not enough
1	An opponent who got up after a headshot and kept going.
2	A shadow at which they emptied an entire magazine. The wall behind it was riddled afterwards. The shadow was not.
3	A comrade who suddenly spoke a foreign language and aimed at them.
4	A radio that kept transmitting even though the battery was missing.
5	A woman in a coat who drew a circle with chalk and thereby saved their life.
6	Nothing. They only read the file afterwards. That was enough.

The Path into the Branch

O.D.I.N. recruits Soldiers differently than Psions or Thaumaturges. It does not look for a gift, but for a reaction: people who, in the face of the inexplicable, did not freeze, did not flee, and did not go mad, but did the most obvious thing. Pulled the comrade out of the fire. Held the door shut. Counted the civilians.

D6	Who brought you to the branch?
1	A man in a grey coat who sat at your bed in the infirmary after an operation about which there was no report.
2	Your old commander, who has been working for years for a company whose name they never say aloud.
3	A quartermaster who had read your file and wanted to know why you did not tremble after the incident.
4	A Telepath who heard your thoughts in a refugee camp and considered them remarkably calm.
5	An Investigator who questioned you as a witness and in the end did not take you, but your answers.
6	Nobody. You searched for those who cleaned up back then for so long that they found you.

```
RULE: CHECKLIST FOR SOLDIERS
Core skills: +1 each to Firearms, Athletics,
and Tactics, plus the skills of the unit.
Equipment: assault rifle, combat suit with
helmet, two high-explosive grenades, first aid
kit, plus the equipment of the unit and a
small bag of salt. Starting funds (INT + WIS)
× €1,000.
Silver: the knife, variant of your choice
(Chapter V). Roll or choose whose name is
already on it.
Arsenal: no modules yet. Every Soldier masters
all six manoeuvres from the start.
Archetype: one of the six from this chapter,
in addition to the drive or instead of it.
Tip: Set Dodge to at least 2 and do not forget
Toughness. Soldiers stand at the front, and
every point in it is a hit point.
```

Why They Stay

Soldiers stay with O.D.I.N. because they have seen something they cannot forget, and because they believe that someone has to hold the line. The following archetypes supplement the drives from the Core Rulebook.

The Protector

He fights for those behind him. For his cell, for the people who will never learn what he has saved them from. The question for his game: Whom would he sacrifice to save ten others?

The Homeless

He has nothing left outside O.D.I.N. No family, no home, no life to return to. The branch is his home, the squad his family. The question for his game: What happens when the branch gives him an order he cannot obey?

The Avenger

He lost someone, at a rift, in a basement, on a night like Kiruna. He is here to settle the score. The question for his game: What remains when there is no one left to take revenge on?

The Professional

He is a soldier because he is good at it. O.D.I.N. pays better than any army, the equipment is better, the opponents are more interesting. He does his job. The question for his game: Where is the line at which even a professional says no?

The Believer

He believes in Ares, in the branch, in the mission. He has read the Chronicle, he knows Ashgrove's name, he wears the badge with pride. The question for his game: What does he do when he finds out that the chain of command is lying?

The Wounded

He is no longer the person he was before his first mission. He sleeps badly, he counts exits, he startles at loud noises. He stays because outside everything would be even worse. The question for his game: Who helps him before it is too late?

```
RULE: ARCHETYPE AND DRIVE
A Soldier can use their archetype as a drive
instead of a drive from the Core Rulebook.
They reduce 1 strain once per mission when
they make a difficult decision in accordance
with their archetype.
```

The Arsenal

"A Soldier does not learn one thing perfectly. He learns twenty things well enough to survive the twenty-first."
Instructor, Camp Ashgrove

Psions grow like a tree, Thaumaturges penetrate a seal. Soldiers build an **Arsenal**. Their class tree is broad and flat: few levels, many possibilities, and each unit can learn from every other. A Stormbreaker who wants to camouflage themselves learns from the Shadow Paratroopers. An Echo-Operative who wants to endure more has bone armour implanted.

	BASIC TRAINING	STORM-BREAKER	ECHO-OPERATIVE	SHADOW PARATROOPER	NANOTECH VETERAN	TECHNO-STORMTROOPER
LEVEL I Cadet, 4 XP	Fire Discipline Pain Resistance Position Change	Heavy Carrier Demolition Expert	Silent Steps Frequency Finder	Air Landing Trap Setter	Rapid Healing Bone Armour	Shield Technician Booster Jump
LEVEL II Senior Agent, 6 XP	Field Medic Iron Nerves	Bunker Buster	Resonance Shot	Ghost Run	Overload Protection	Quick Loader
LEVEL III Veteran, 8 XP	Command Voice	Wall Breaker	Dead Silence	Shadow of Death	Second Cell	Fortress

HARNESS

THE SILVER grows beside the arsenal, piece by piece, never with XP (Chapter V)

Knife · Vambrace · Breastplate · Pauldrons · Gauntlet · Barrel Jacket · Greaves · Visor

Own unit and basic training at the normal price, any other unit 2 XP more. No prerequisite except rank.

Structure

- **Three levels.** Level I is available from the rank of Cadet, Level II from Senior Agent, Level III from Veteran.
- **Six columns.** Basic training is open to every Soldier. In addition, there are the five units with four modules each.
- **No prerequisites.** Apart from the rank, a module needs nothing. A Veteran can buy a Level III module without owning the Level I of the same column.
- **Breadth.** Modules from one's own unit and basic training cost the normal price, modules from any other unit cost 2 XP more. There is no limit to how many foreign units a Soldier learns.
- **The silver.** Alongside the arsenal, the armour of ashsilver grows, piece by piece, with every rank and for every deed. It is never bought with XP. Chapter V explains how.

Level	From Rank	Cost
I	Cadet	4 XP
II	Senior Agent	6 XP
III	Veteran	8 XP

The modules of the five units are listed at the end of their respective chapters, from Chapter VII onwards. Here follows the basic training, which is open to every Soldier at the normal price.

Basic Training

Level	Module	Effect
I	**Fire Discipline**	Once per combat, +2 dice on a ranged attack if the Soldier has not moved this round.
I	**Pain Resistance**	Passive. The Soldier ignores the penalty for being battered. Other penalties from injuries and pain are reduced by 1.
I	**Position Change**	Passive. When the Soldier takes cover, they gain +1 defence in addition to the cover bonus.
II	**Field Medic**	Passive. First aid by the Soldier heals 1 HP more and is also possible under fire without penalty.
II	**Iron Nerves**	Passive. +2 dice on horror tests during combat. Changing the magazine to incendiary ammunition is a free action.
III	**Command Voice**	Once per combat, free action. All allies who hear the Soldier gain +1 initiative and +1 die on their next test.

Manoeuvres

All Soldiers master the following manoeuvres. They cost no XP and are available from the rank of Cadet. Other classes can only learn them if a Soldier teaches them. This takes one mission, requires the game master's approval, and costs the student 3 XP per manoeuvre.

Suppressive Fire. An action, only with weapons with the Automatic property. The Soldier covers an area up to 10 m wide and immediately rolls their attack. Until their next action, every opponent who enters the area or moves within it is attacked with these successes, each against their own defence. Consumes three times the ammunition.

Covering Fire. An action. Until the Soldier's next action, an ally who is moving receives +2 defence against ranged combat.

Back-to-Back. Free action, once per round. The Soldier and an ally within 2 m stand back to back. Both cannot be surprised and receive +1 defence as long as neither of them moves.

Mark Target. An action, WIS + Perception against Doable (2). The next attack by an ally on the marked target receives +1 die per success over the difficulty, up to +3.

Charge. If the Soldier has moved at least 5 m in a straight line towards their target this round, their melee attack or brawl deals +1 damage. Until their next action, they have -1 defence.

Orderly Retreat. An action. All allies within 10 m who can hear the Soldier may immediately fall back up to 10 m without it costing their next move, and receive +1 defence until their next action. The Soldier themselves remains standing, as the last.

EXAMPLE: BRANDT LAYS DOWN SUPPRESSIVE FIRE

Brandt lays down suppressive fire with his assault rifle over a basement corridor. He rolls DEX 4 white dice and Firearms 4 coloured dice.

White: 6, 3, 5, 1. Coloured: 4, 2, 6, 1. That is 2 plus 2, so 4 successes. The game master notes them.

A mercenary (defence 2) runs through the corridor. 4 successes against 2 are 2 margin. Damage: 4 + 2, and thanks to Armour Break his protective vest does not count. He loses 6 HP. The second mercenary stays in cover.

If Brandt had rolled only one success and also two ones, the attack would have failed and would have had more ones than successes: a botch. A jam, and the suppressive fire breaks off immediately.

Play Example: The Arsenal Grows

Nachtfalke, the Shadow Paratrooper, has collected 20 XP after four missions and reached the rank of Agent. His player considers what to buy.

The Options. Level I is fully open to him, Level II only from Senior Agent. The modules of his unit, Air Landing and Trap Setter, each cost 4 XP. Basic training likewise. Each Level I module of another unit costs 6 XP.

The Decision. The player takes Trap Setter (4) from his own unit and Fire Discipline (4) from basic training. Then he sees Silent Steps among the Echo-Operatives and takes it for 6 XP, because Nachtfalke often works in buildings. He saves the remaining 6 XP to be able to buy Ghost Run immediately upon promotion to Senior Agent.

The Consequences. Nachtfalke now carries four traps instead of three, has +2 dice on Stealth in buildings and once per combat a particularly precise shot from cover. No other class tree allows becoming so broad so early.

Combat Example: Manoeuvres in the Cell

A short combat scene shows how Soldiers use their manoeuvres. Brandt, the Stormbreaker, and Resonanz, the Echo-Operative, are with Folio, the Thaumaturgist, in a warehouse. Four mercenaries of a Collector (Core Rulebook, Chapter XI: defence 2, armour 2, 9 HP) stand between them and a lead crate in which something is awakening. Folio must reach the crate and place a seal on the lid for two rounds.

Round 1. Resonanz acts first, initiative 5. She uses **Mark Target** on the mercenary next to the crate: WIS 4 and Perception 5 against Doable (2). She achieves 4 successes, so 2 over the difficulty, and the next attack on him receives +2 dice. Brandt, initiative 4, fires with the assault rifle, with 5 white and 4 coloured dice, because the heavy combat suit costs him one white die. He achieves 7 successes, 5 margin. Thanks to Armour Break the protective vest does not count: 4 + 5 = 9 damage, the mercenary falls. Brandt uses the critical success for a second target in immediate proximity, which suffers the weapon damage of 4.

The remaining three shoot at Brandt. His heavy combat suit with armour 4 absorbs almost everything, he loses 1 HP.

Round 2. Folio must cross ten metres of open ground. Brandt provides **Covering Fire**, and Folio runs with +2 defence against ranged combat. Resonanz stands with Brandt in **Back-to-Back**, no one can surprise the two. Folio reaches the crate and begins the seal.

Round 3. The mercenaries press forward. Brandt lays down **Suppressive Fire** over the corridor and rolls 4 successes. Two mercenaries stay in cover, the wounded one tries anyway and falls. It was their squad leader.

Round 4. Folio closes the seal, and the crate falls silent. Without a leader, the mercenaries retreat and cover their retreat with fire. Brandt calls **Orderly Retreat**: Folio and Resonanz fall back behind the crates, with +1 defence. Brandt remains standing as the last, as the rule requires.

Between them, the cell lost a single Hit Point. The Soldiers did not win the fight because they defeated more opponents, but because they bought the Thaumaturge the two rounds he needed.

Frequently Asked Questions

Can a Soldier learn all five units? Yes. The Arsenal knows no limit. It just gets expensive.

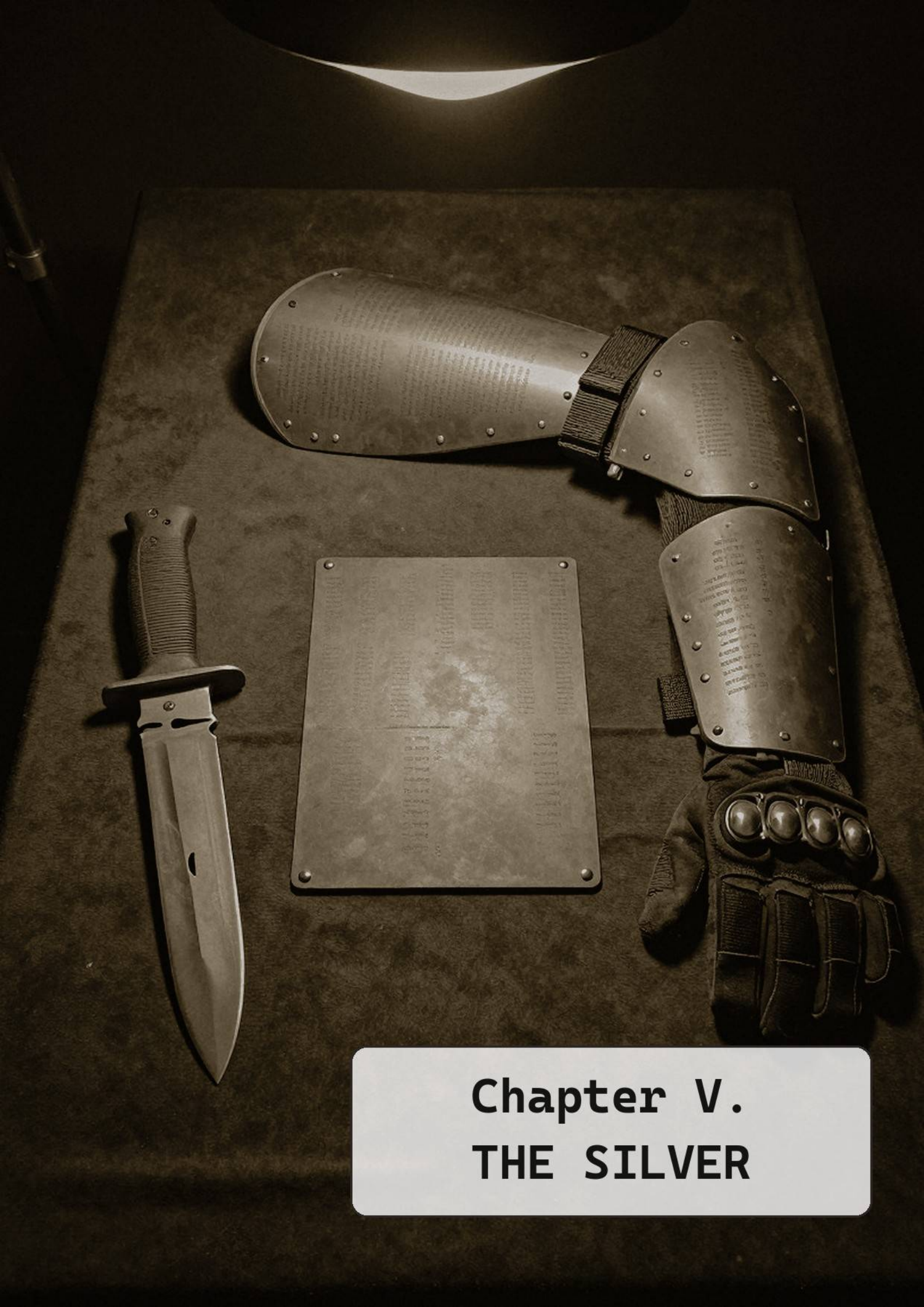
Do the abilities of my own subclass still apply if I buy a module from another unit? Yes. Modules add to the subclass, they never replace it.

Do I need another unit's equipment to use its modules? Sometimes. Resonance Shot needs a resonance pistol, Shield Technician an energy shield. The resonance pistol is common and freely available. The energy shield is not for sale and is issued according to the decision of the branch (Core Rulebook, Chapter X).

How many manoeuvres can I use in a round? One that costs an action, plus Back-to-Back as a free action. Movement is not affected.

Can a Soldier combine manoeuvres with a Psion or Thaumaturge? Yes. Covering Fire for a Thaumaturge running to their circle is one of the most common tactics at O.D.I.N.

What happens to my silver when my character dies? It goes back to the armoury, and your name stays on the inside, with a cross. If you play a Soldier again afterwards, they may receive one of your pieces. The game master decides.



Chapter V.
THE SILVER

The Silver

"You don't get new silver. You get the silver from someone who no longer needs it."
quartermaster, Hold-3

No Soldier begins their service with a harness. They begin with a knife, on the inside of which names are already written. Everything that comes after, every piece of metal on their shoulder, their arm, their chest, was worn by someone else before them. Whoever faces an experienced Soldier faces the history of dozens who came before them.

The silver is the only thing at O.D.I.N. that cannot be bought, cannot be requested, and cannot be acquired with experience. It is passed on.

Ashsilver

After Kiruna, Ashgrove and the alchemist Evan Pryce first mixed the dust of depleted crystals into ammunition. In 1955, Pryce succeeded in binding the dust into metal as well. The result was a matt grey metal, heavier than steel, always a little warmer than its surroundings. The Soldiers called it **ashsilver**, because it looked like silver that had been through a fire.

From the first melt came a single knife. Pryce gave it to Ashgrove, and today it lies next to his notebook in the armoury of Hold-1.

In the following 34 years, the workshop of the Collegium in Wales produced ashsilver for the Tactical Branch: knives, arm guards, plates, fittings, each piece by hand, each with a number. Ashsilver works against everything that comes from rifts. It cuts shadows, stops claws that go through steel, and beings that do not feel ordinary weapons feel it.

1989

In the year of the betrayal, the Collegium ceased production. It no longer released crystal dust for metal, only for ammunition, and there was never a justification that went beyond "security reasons". Ashgrove had been dead for a year at that point. His successor wrote three letters to the Collegium. None were answered.

Since then, there is only the silver that already exists. The Tactical Branch keeps a register of it. It comprises a good two hundred and fifty pieces, distributed among the armouries of all Holds. Each year there are a few fewer, because pieces disappear in rifts, break, or do not come back with their bearers. The older Soldiers sometimes calculate how long it will still last. They usually stop before they are finished.

The Register

The register is a linen-bound book, of which there are seven copies, one in each major armoury. Each line gives a number, the place, the variant, the year of the forge, and the Hold in which the piece currently lies or is worn. Number 1 is Ashgrove's knife. It is not lent out.

The quartermasters compare their copies once a year, by courier, never by radio. In doing so, they have noticed something they do not like to talk about: the highest number in the register is not the last one the Collegium delivered. Number 341, a visor, was forged in December 1989, three weeks after the decision to stop producing pieces. Who forged it is recorded nowhere.

The Names

Every piece of ashsilver bears a number on the inside and names below it. Real names, not codenames, engraved with a fine burin, one below the other. The first name is that of the first bearer, often from the sixties or seventies. The last is that of the Soldier who currently wears the piece.

If a Soldier dies or leaves the service, their silver goes back to the armoury. The quartermaster cleans it, checks it, and puts it on the shelf until someone earns it. Their name remains. Next to the names of the fallen, the quartermaster places a small cross, next to those of the retired, a line. On some old pieces there are twelve names and eleven crosses.

The names are the only place at O.D.I.N. where the real name of a Soldier is permanently recorded, except in the

helmet of their suit. And they are the reason why no Soldier wears their silver lightly.

The Roll Call

Silver is not handed over, but awarded, and that at the **roll call**: a short gathering in the armoury or in the courtyard of the base, in front of the squad or the cell. The quartermaster brings the piece. The squad leader or the highest-ranking Soldier reads out the names on the inside, all of them, including those with a cross. Then they say what the piece is now awarded for. Then the quartermaster engraves the new name below it, that same evening.

This is the most important ceremony the Branch knows, and it rarely lasts longer than five minutes. But no Soldier has ever missed it.

In play, the roll call is a short scene at the beginning of the session after the mission in which the piece was earned. The game master reads out the names of the previous owners, the table below helps with that. The player says in one sentence what their character receives the piece for.

How to Get Pieces

```
RULE: EARNING THE SILVER
With each rank a Soldier receives one piece:
the knife as Cadet, one further piece as
Agent, Senior Agent, Veteran, and Shadow
Officer.
After each mission the game master may award
another piece for a special deed. At most one
per mission and per cell.
Pieces can never be bought with XP.
The Soldier chooses which slot the new piece
fills and which variant it has. Each slot can
be occupied only once. The game master may
decide that a particular variant is not on the
shelf at the moment.
```

No Soldier wears more pieces than their rank allows: as Cadet 2, as Agent 3, as Senior Agent 5, as Veteran 7, and as Shadow Officer 8. Pieces for deeds beyond that remain on the shelf until the rank is sufficient. They are then safe for them.

What is a deed? The game master decides, but there are traditions in the branch. Pieces are awarded for:

- **Held the corridor.** Held a position against overwhelming force so that others could escape.
- **Carried the last one.** Brought a wounded or dead comrade out of a situation from which they could not have escaped alone.
- **Closed the Door.** Closed, sealed, or defended a rift until a Thaumaturge arrived.
- **Did not shoot.** Made the right decision even though the weapon would have been faster.
- **Went last.** Kept the rule of the last man when it cost something.

Pieces are never awarded for kills. That was Ashgrove's only condition, and the branch abides by it.

The Previous Owners

Every piece has a history. When a Soldier receives a new piece, the game master or the player rolls on the following table for the last name before their own. What it means may become important in play, or not.

D6	The last name on your piece
1	**With a cross, a name you know.** Someone from your training, your Hold, your cell.
2	**With a cross, a famous name.** Someone from the branch's chronicle. At the Hold they still talk about them.
3	**With a line.** The previous owner has left and is still alive. They know that you wear their piece.
4	**Without a mark.** No cross, no line. The quartermaster says the wearer "did not come back". They say no more.
5	**Illegible.** Someone has scratched out the name. Beneath it are two others.
6	**Your own name.** Not yours, but the same name. The quartermaster does not find it funny.

The Eight Slots

A full harness has eight slots. Each piece is attached to the combat suit with leather straps and buckles. For each slot there are variants. The Soldier chooses when they receive the piece, and cannot change the choice afterwards.

Slot	Variant	Effect
The Knife	Escort Blade	Melee with the knife affects beings from rifts like incendiary ammunition, +1 damage.
	Throwing Blade	Like the Escort Blade, can also be thrown up to 10 m.

Slot	Variant	Effect
	Ritual Blade	A salt circle drawn with it holds beings from rifts for three rounds instead of one.
The Vambrace	Defence Vambrace	Passive. +1 defence against attacks from beings from rifts.
	Catch Vambrace	Once per scene, without an action. A melee attack against the Soldier is rolled with −2 dice.
The Breastplate	Heart Plate	Once per mission it reduces the damage of a hit by 3.
	Silent Plate	Passive. +1 die against psionic and magical attacks on the mind, in addition to the suit's damping.
The Pauldrons	Vigil Piece	Passive. +1 die on horror tests.
	Troop Piece	Passive. Allies within 2 m gain the benefits of Back-to-Back, even when they move.
The Gauntlet	Rift Fist	Brawling against beings from rifts deals +2 damage. A blow tears apart illusions and shadow forms.
	Grip of the Last	Once per scene, one action, without a test. A dying ally touched by the Soldier is stabilised.
The Barrel Jacket	Silver Sight	Passive. A front sight of ashsilver on the weapon. +1 die on ranged attacks with this weapon against beings from rifts.
	Voice Barrel	Incendiary ammunition from this weapon deals +1 additional damage.
The Greaves	Walking Greaves	Passive. Warding circles, salt lines, and barriers of one's own side do not hinder them. They can enter them without breaking them.
	Standing Greaves	Passive. Supernatural beings cannot knock them down, push them back, or hold them.
The Visor	Clear Sight	Once per scene they see invisible things, illusions, and hidden things for one round.
	Death Sight	Passive. They recognise at a glance whether a being comes from a rift, and whether it is badly wounded.

When the Harness Grows

A single piece of ashsilver is a weapon. Several pieces become something else. The Soldiers say the silver recognises itself.

Pieces	Effect
3	**Recognisable.** Beings from rifts sense the silver. The game master decides for each creature whether it avoids the Soldier or attacks them first. Both are useful if you know it.
5	**Unyielding.** The Soldier is immune to horror up to level Disturbing (2). And they begin to hear the silver.
8	**Full Harness.** The Soldier is a legend of the branch. They choose one of the three old honours and possess it permanently: The Last Man, Command of Ares, or Kiruna Clasp.

THE THREE HONOURS

The Last Man: Once per campaign, the Soldier survives a situation that would have killed them. They remain standing with 1 HP, and the game master narrates how.

Command of Ares: Once per mission, the entire cell receives an additional round before the first combat round in which only they act.

Kiruna Clasp: Once per mission, the Soldier is immune to all horror for one scene.

Echo

Ashsilver contains the dust of exhausted crystals. The alchemists say the dust is empty. The Soldiers with five pieces or more say something else, if you ask them in the canteen after the third beer.

RULE: ECHO

From the fifth piece, a Soldier has an Echo value: the number of their pieces minus 4. Some rules increase it temporarily. That is noted there.

Whenever they fail a horror test or fall to 0 HP in a fight against beings from rifts, the game master secretly rolls a D6. If the result is equal to or less than the Echo, the silver answers. What that means is decided by the game master. The game master book gives them suggestions.

Most Soldiers with Full Harness report the same. In quiet nights, when the harness hangs on the hook, they hear a soft hum from the pieces. Some swear that it is voices. And that they know the names that are written on the inside.

Lost Silver

Pieces can be lost. A Soldier who disappears in a rift takes their silver with them. One who has to leave a harness behind in a burning building does not find it again. And sometimes a piece breaks, against an opponent who was too strong.

```
RULE: LOSING A PIECE
If a Soldier botches an attack against a
creature from a rift, the game master can
decide that a piece breaks in the process.
They never announce it beforehand and do it
rarely.
A lost piece is never replaced. The place
remains empty, forever. If the piece is not
broken but missing, it costs the cell 2 Trust,
as in the Core Rulebook. And the branch's
register becomes one line shorter.
```

A lost piece is lost to the entire branch, not to the Soldier alone. Whoever loses one is not reproached by anyone. But at the next roll call, their name is read out, at the piece they no longer have, and everyone knows what that means.

Therefore, Soldiers sometimes go back. Into burning buildings, into cellars, to the edge of a rift, to fetch a piece of silver that lies next to a dead person. The regulations forbid it. The unwritten rules demand it.

Customs

"One never polishes one's silver. The grey belongs to it. Whoever polishes wants to no longer see the names."
Soldier, codename Bastion

- **Never polish.** Ashsilver remains dull. Whoever polishes it is considered vain, or as someone who wants to forget.
- **The inside.** The names always face the body. No one reads the names on another's silver unless they are invited.
- **The first grip.** When first putting on a new piece, the Soldier reads the names once more, quietly, to themselves.
- **The visits.** Many Soldiers seek out the previous owners of their pieces who are still alive, or the graves of those with a cross. The branch does not like this. It does not forbid it either.
- **The knife stays.** Even those who wear a Full Harness keep the knife from the first day. It is the only piece that is never taken off, until the last roll call.

Your First Piece

Every Soldier receives the knife at the first roll call at the end of basic training. Choose or roll who wore it before you.

D6	The first name on your knife
1	A name from the escort, 1955. One of the first there ever were.
2	A woman who stood in Berlin in 1991 at Schildwall in the tunnel.
3	A Soldier who survived Kiruna, one of the three, whose name is on no other piece.
4	Someone from the search party from Nordlicht.
5	A name that is also on the knife of a comrade from your training.
6	Only one name, yours. The knife is one of the last forged in 1989, and has never belonged to anyone else.

Six Names

The roll call took place on a Tuesday, in the yard of Hold-3, under a sky that looked like snow. There were only four Soldiers there and the quartermaster, an old man with a stiff leg, who carried an arm guard in a cloth.

Brandt stood at the front. He had not known that it was today. They did not tell you beforehand.

Squad leader Mensah took the guard out of the cloth. It was matt grey, plain, with two leather straps, and along the outside ran a long, flat dent, as if something had scraped along it with great force. Mensah turned it over and read, slowly and clearly, as was proper.

"Number one hundred and fourteen. Robert Kane, 1962, cross. Élodie Garnier, 1971, cross. Kjell Haugen, 1976, dash."

Brandt raised his head.

"Jan Wierzba, 1990, cross. Siobhan Doyle, 2003, cross. Anders Holm, 2012, cross."

Mensah looked up. "Six names. Five crosses." He paused, as was proper. "Awarded to the Soldier with the codename Brandt. For the Karakorum. He closed a Door

that he himself had opened, and he never spoke of it." He folded the cloth. "By order of the general."

It was the first time the branch had awarded a piece for something that had happened before service. The four others looked at each other and said nothing.

Brandt took the guard. It was warm, although it had lain in the cloth all morning.

After the roll call he remained standing in the yard, when the others had already gone inside. The quartermaster came over to him, graver in hand, to engrave the new name.

"Haugen," said Brandt. "The Haugen? Nordlicht?"

"The same." The quartermaster set the graver to it. "He returned it in 1989, when he stopped. He said he no longer wanted to wear it, because it told him something at night."

"What?"

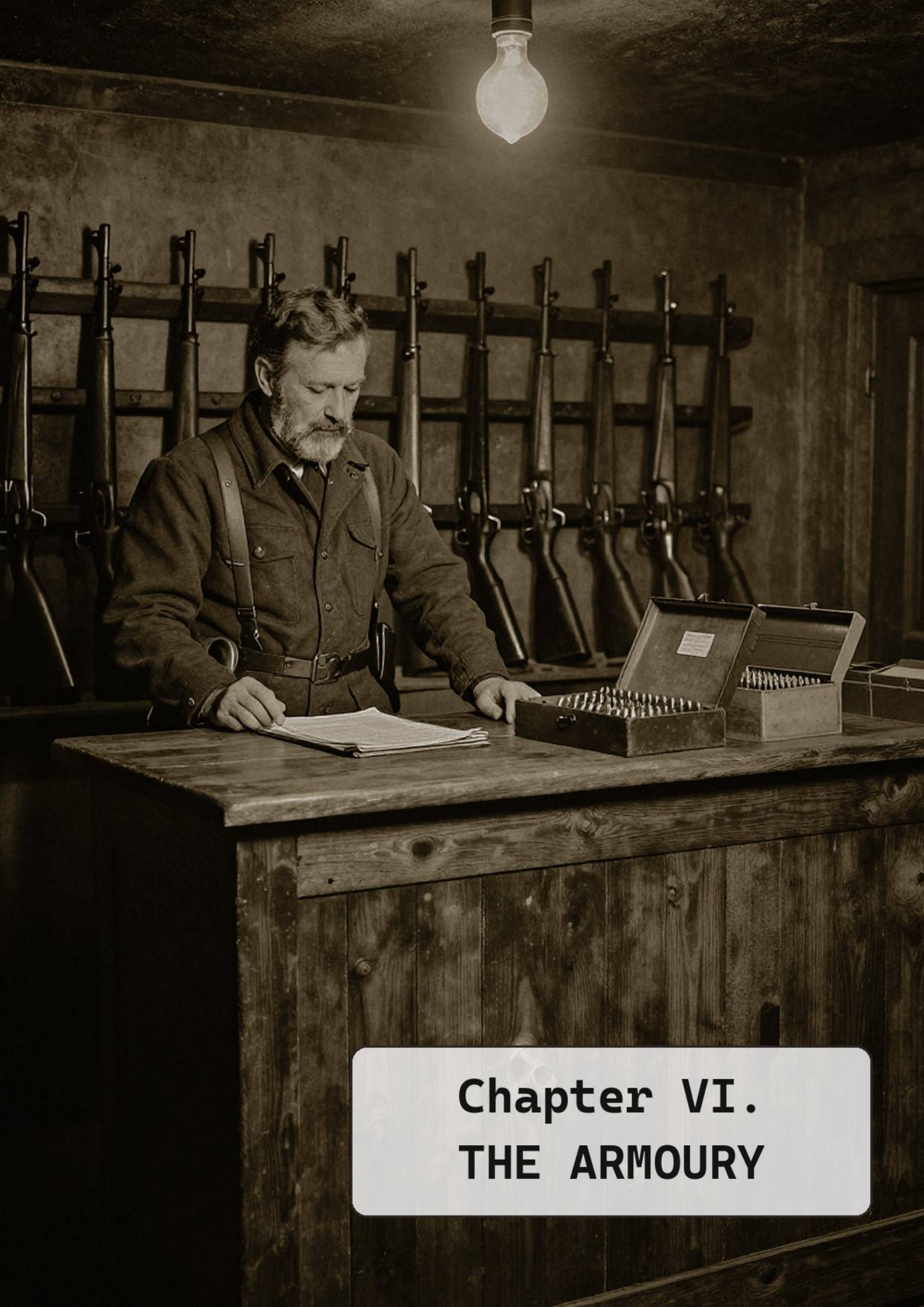
The quartermaster shrugged and continued engraving, one letter after another. "He didn't tell me. But he said, if the guard ever goes to someone who was in the Karakorum, I should pass something on to him."

Brandt waited.

"That the radio is not the only thing that transmits without a battery," said the quartermaster. He blew the metal dust out of the engraving and handed the guard back to Brandt. "No idea what he means by that. I'm just passing it on."

Brandt turned the guard over. Under Anders Holm now stood his own name, fresh and bright in the grey metal. Seven names. He pulled the straps tight and went inside.

At night the guard hung on the hook beside his bed. He lay awake for a long time and listened. He heard nothing. Not yet.



Chapter VI.
THE ARMOURY

The Armoury

"Silver is for things, lead is for people. Whoever mixes them up gets neither from me again."
quartermaster, Hold-3

The following equipment supplements Chapter X of the Core Rulebook. Soldiers rarely buy their equipment; they draw it from the quartermaster. What is available depends on rank, mission, and the quartermaster's mood. The game master decides what is approved. The equipment of the individual units is described in their chapters.

Ammunition and Weapons

Against the Supernatural

Since Kiruna, the branch knows that ordinary ammunition does not work against some opponents. The game master decides for each creature whether it feels ordinary bullets. Many beings from rifts feel them only half, like shadow beings, some not at all, and the dead almost never. Incendiary ammunition and silver work against everything from rifts, but against aliens, mutants, and machines they are no better than lead.

Ammunition	Effect
Incendiary ammunition (crystal dust)	Works against beings from rifts, including those that do not feel ordinary bullets. +1 damage against them. Against all other beings like ordinary ammunition. Never against humans. *One magazine per mission, via the quartermaster.*
Silver core	Works against beings from rifts and against beings that react to silver, such as some demons and shapeshifters. +1 damage against them. *Rare.*
Salt shot	Only for shotguns. Beings from rifts that are hit lose their next action. No damage against humans. *Common.*
Lead core	Ordinary ammunition. Works against everything that bleeds. *Very common.*
Resonance charge	For resonance pistols. The projectile shatters in the target and disrupts psi and magic: the target rolls with −2 dice on psi and spells in its next round. *Rare.*

In the branch, incendiary ammunition is simply called **silver**, although there is not a gram of silver in it. The name comes from the time of the escort, when the first batch smelled of silver polish. Whoever means real silver-core ammunition says **core**.

```
RULE: THE FIRST BULLET
Whoever shoots at a being that does not feel
ordinary ammunition notices it on the first
hit: the damage fails to occur, and the game
master calls for a horror test if there has
not yet been one for this being in this
mission.
Changing the magazine to incendiary ammunition
is reloading and costs an action. A Soldier
with the Iron Nerves module changes as a free
action.
```

Weapons

Weapon	Values and properties
Kiruna carbine	Damage 4, range 150 m. A carbine modelled on Ashgrove's design, optimised for incendiary ammunition. Incendiary ammunition gives +2 instead of +1 damage. *Very rare.*
Combat shotgun	Damage 4, range 20 m. Spread. Can fire salt shot. *Common.*
Ashgrove knife	Damage 2, melee. The first piece of ash-silver of every Soldier, see Chapter V.
Signal pistol with magnesium	Damage 2, range 50 m. The light dazzles shadow beings for one round. Fire. *Common.*
Compact flamethrower module	Damage 3, range 10 m. Area 3, fire. Attached to the underbarrel of an assault rifle. *Very rare.*

Equipment in the Field

Protection

Item	Effect
Salt pouch	A small pouch of salt. You can use it to scatter a circle that holds back beings from rifts for one round. Once per pouch. *Common.*
Smoke grenade with incense	Like a smoke grenade. Beings from rifts in the smoke roll with −1 die. From the Collegium's workshop. *Rare.*
Alloy plaque	A small plate of Alloy S, attached to the helmet. +1 die against psionic detection. *Rare.*

Reconnaissance and Communication

Item	Effect
Rift detector	Measures ozone and air pressure. Alerts when a rift opens or is open within 50 m. *Rare.*
Squad radio with relay	Radio that also works in cellars and tunnels. Range 2 km. *Common.*
Thermal imaging device	+2 dice on perception in darkness. Some beings cannot be seen on it, and that is then a clue. *Rare.*

Vehicles

Soldiers rarely drive their own vehicles on missions. If they do, then one of these three.

Vehicle	Description
Inconspicuous transporter	White van with company lettering, inside weapon mounts and a lead box for crystals. The standard vehicle of every cell.
Branch off-road vehicle	Armoured, armour 3 for occupants, all-wheel drive. For missions off the roads.
The helicopter	Only with Ares' approval. Brings a cell almost anywhere in Europe in three hours. The pilots ask no questions.

The Armoury Workshop

In every Hold, the quartermaster maintains the suits and the weapons. A Soldier who wants to have their weapon modified brings it to the armoury workshop and waits three days. The test is rolled by the quartermaster, not the Soldier. Whoever gets on well with them receives a bonus die.

Modification	Effect
Silver Barrel	The weapon can fire incendiary ammunition without wear. Without this modification, it must be cleaned after every mission with incendiary ammunition.
Suppressor with Salt Chamber	Like a suppressor. Additionally, every shot against shadow creatures acts like salt shot.
Sight with Echo Module	+1 die against invisible opponents if an Echo-Operative is in the cell marking the targets.

The Combat Suit

"The silver is the story. The suit is what you strap it to."
quartermaster, Hold-3

The combat suit is the carrier of the silver, and it is more than that. It is armour, tool belt, radio station, and sometimes a coffin. A Soldier spends more hours in it than in their bed, and most know every buckle, every seam, and every dent of their suit better than their own face.

The O.D.I.N. combat suit is no ordinary combat suit. Its plates are vapour-coated with a thin layer of Alloy S, which dampens the Whisper of crystals and the pressure of psionic attacks. In the collar sits a radio that still transmits near rifts, mostly. On its shoulders, arms, and chest are buckles for the pieces of ashsilver that a Soldier earns over the course of their service. And in the left breast pocket, every Soldier carries a small bag of salt, because it helped at Kiruna and no one knows whether it did not help after all.

From Coat to Plate

Ashgrove's escort wore no armour in 1947. They wore coats, boots, and steel helmets from army stocks. After Kiruna, Ashgrove had protective vests tailored from steel plates, heavy, uncomfortable, and barely effective against what had come out of the tunnel. The Soldiers called them **Oven Doors**.

In the seventies, the Science Branch developed the first suits of ceramic plates and Kevlar. After Nordlicht, vapour-coating with Alloy S was added, a process the Psionic Core had used for its helmets for decades and shared only reluctantly. Today's suits are the fifth generation. They are lighter than the Oven Doors, ten times as sturdy, and for Soldiers who did not grow up in them, still uncomfortable.

How a Suit Protects

The suit has three tasks, and only one of them is stopping bullets.

- **Armour.** Ceramic plates and Kevlar against bullets, blades, and shrapnel. This is the armour value from the Core Rulebook.
- **Dampening.** The vapour-coating with Alloy S weakens psionic and magical attacks on the mind. Not much, but enough that a Soldier thinks clearly a moment longer.
- **Connection.** The radio in the collar, the emergency transmitter in the back, the camera on the helmet. A Soldier in the suit is never entirely alone.

```
RULE: DAMPENING
A Soldier in an O.D.I.N. combat suit receives
+1 die on tests to resist psionic or magical
attacks on their mind. This does not apply to
protective vests, camouflage clothing, or
light armour.
```

Seven Days

The suit hung in its place in the armoury of Hold-3, among the others, and it looked like every other. Black plates, grey lining, a helmet with a scratch above the visor. Only the sign beneath it was new. A white piece of paper, fixed with tape, with a date on it.

Bastion stood before it and did not know what to do.

The suit had belonged to Corporal Aylin Demir. She had fallen four days ago in a cellar in Antwerpen, when a creature came out of the wall, faster than anyone could react. Bastion had been two metres away, with his shield. Two metres too far.

“You’ve been standing here for an hour,” said the quartermaster behind him.

Bastion did not turn around. “I know.”

The quartermaster, an old man with a stiff leg and a voice like gravel, stepped beside him. He looked at the suit, not Bastion.

“Seven days,” he said. “Then we take it apart. The plates go to recruits. The lining is burned. The helmet too.”

“Why the helmet?”

“Because her name is written inside.” The quartermaster took a small notebook from his pocket, leafed through it, found the page. “I entered it six years ago. I read it out on the seventh day, here, in front of all of you. Once. Then it is gone.”

Bastion was silent. After a while he said, “I was too far away.”

“Two metres,” said the quartermaster. “I’ve read the report.”

“Two metres.”

The quartermaster nodded slowly. Then he reached into his breast pocket and pulled something out, a small linen bag, grey with age. He held it out to Bastion.

“Kiruna,” he said. “One of the three who came back wore this. He gave it to me when I was a recruit. He said it does not help. He said you wear it anyway, so that you remember that you carry the others.”

Bastion took the bag. It was light, almost nothing.

“On the seventh day,” said the quartermaster, “you stand at the front. You hear her name. And then you go back out and don’t stand two metres away.”

He went back to his counter. Bastion remained standing in front of the suit for a while. Then he put the little bag into his left breast pocket, next to his own, and went to train.

The Models

The armoury issues various suits. The values from the Core Rulebook continue to apply. The following models supplement them.

Model	Armour and Special Feature
Combat Suit with Helmet	Armour 3. The standard. −1 die on Stealth and Acrobatics. Damping.
Heavy Combat Suit	Armour 4. For Stormbreaker. −1 die on all DEX tests, carrying capacity +20%. Damping.
Urban Suit	Armour 2. Wearable under civilian clothing, no penalties. Damping. *Rare.*
Night Suit	Armour 2. Black, low-noise, +1 die on Stealth in darkness. No damping. *Rare.*
Arctic Suit	Armour 3. Protection against cold down to −50 °C, −1 die on DEX tests. Damping. Mandatory north of the Arctic Circle since Nordlicht. *Rare.*
Asklepios Harness	Armour 3. Only for Nanotech Veterans. Ports for nanite injectors, no penalties, damping. *Not for sale.*

The Fitting

Every Soldier receives their own suit after basic training, which is tailored to them. This takes a week at Camp Ashgrove and is one of the few ceremonies the branch knows: The recruit stands before the quartermaster, the quartermaster takes measurements, and at the end he writes the Soldier's name with a pen into the inner lining of the helmet. The real name, not the codename. Apart from the silver, it is the only place at O.D.I.N. where a Soldier's real name is written.

```
RULE: ONE'S OWN SUIT
A Soldier wearing their own, fitted suit has
no penalty on Acrobatics from the combat suit
with helmet. In a foreign suit, all penalties
apply, and the damping is lost until the suit
has been fitted.
```

Modifications

Suits can be modified in the armoury. Each modification takes three days and requires a test INT + Technology against the stated difficulty. A suit can carry at most three modifications.

Modification	Effect	Difficulty
Additional Plates	+1 Armour, but −1 die on all DEX tests.	Doable (2)
Quiet Buckles	Removes the penalty on Stealth.	Doable (2)
Salt Lining	Beings from rifts that attack the Soldier in close combat roll with −1 die.	Doable (2)
Reinforced Damping	The damping gives +2 instead of +1 die.	Hard (3)
Emergency Beacon with Crystal Shard	The emergency beacon also works in a rift. Requires an exhausted shard from the Collegium.	Hard (3)
Medical Injection	A built-in medkit. Once per mission, the suit heals 3 HP as a free action.	Very Hard (4)

Customs

"You never hang your suit upside down. You never lend it out. And you count."
Soldier, codename Bastion

- **The Tally Marks.** Many Soldiers scratch a mark into the inside of the helmet for each mission. Anyone with more than a hundred is a legend. Anyone with more than two hundred should no longer be alive.
- **The Little Salt Bag.** In the left breast pocket. Since Kiruna. No one goes without.
- **The Name in the Helmet.** The real name, which only the quartermaster knows. When a Soldier falls, the quartermaster reads it aloud, once, in the armoury, before the others.

- **The Hanging Suit.** The suit of a fallen Soldier remains hanging in its place in the armoury for seven days. After that, it is dismantled. The plates go to recruits.
- **Never Upside Down.** A suit hangs with the helmet up. Upside down, they say, it attracts misfortune. Or something that wants to slip inside.

Your Suit

D6	What makes your suit special
1	The plates come from a fallen Soldier whose name you never learned
2	Inside the helmet there are tally marks that are not yours
3	A dent from a hit you should not have survived
4	The radio sometimes receives a transmitter that does not exist
5	A child painted you a picture that you carry in the lining
6	Your quartermaster misspelled the name in the helmet, and you never corrected it

Without a Suit

There are missions in which a Soldier cannot wear a suit: undercover investigations, weddings, courtrooms, aeroplanes. Many Soldiers hate these missions. They feel naked, and they behave accordingly: They stand with their backs to the wall, they count the exits, they keep their hands free.

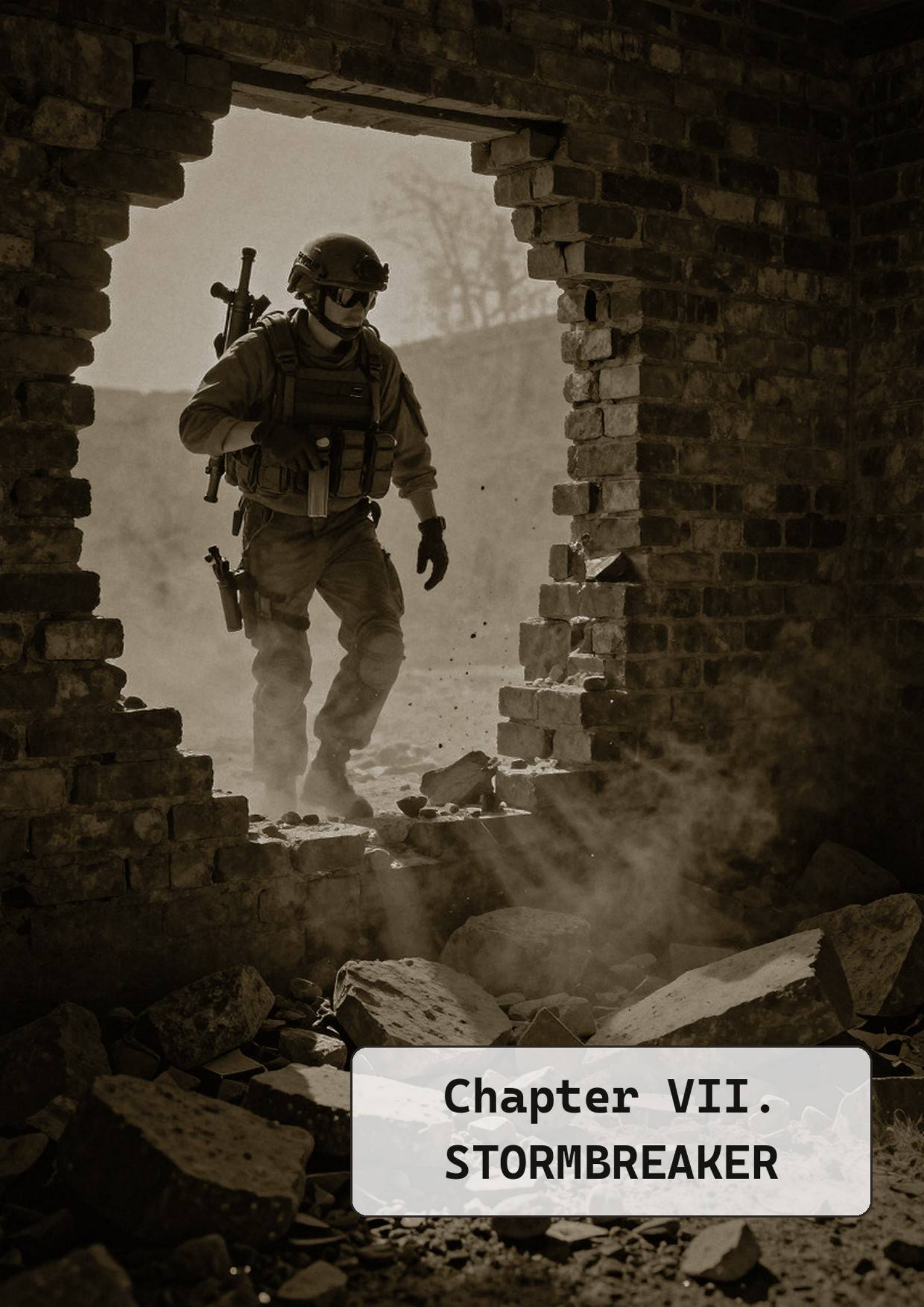
```
RULE: NAKED
A Soldier who has reached at least the rank of
Senior Agent feels uncomfortable without a
suit. In a fight without armour of at least 2,
they receive −1 die on horror tests. The urban
suit cancels this rule.
```

Artefacts of the Branch

The Tactical Branch possesses few artefacts, and it lends them reluctantly. Like all artefacts at O.D.I.N., they are only issued from the rank of Veteran, in the branch therefore to non-commissioned officers and higher, always only for one mission, and they all have a history.

The skulls indicate the **danger** of an artefact, from one to five (Core Rulebook, chapter X). Whoever uses an artefact pays its **price**, regardless of which class they belong to.

Artefact	Effect
Ashgrove's Compass 💀🤍🤍🤍🤍	The compass with which Ashgrove drove through the Libyan Desert and which he carried in Kiruna in 1953. Since then it does not point north, but to the nearest open rift. **Price:** Whoever carries it for longer than a day dreams of a tunnel in Kiruna and hears a knocking in the wall: 1 strain per night.
Lindahl's Watch 💀💀🤍🤍🤍	The wristwatch of a soldier from Haugen's search party, which stopped at 22:10 in Nordlicht. It always stops one round before something supernatural attacks. The wearer cannot be surprised. **Price:** Every evening at 22:10, the wearer hears forty-one voices for one breath: 1 strain.
The Kiruna Banner 💀💀🤍🤍🤍	A tattered pennant of the escort. Whoever carries it gives all allies within sight +1 die on horror tests. **Price:** It is heavy, and it stands out. Every opponent who can see it attacks the wearer first.
The Radio from the Karakoram 💀💀💀💀💀	Brandt's radio, which transmitted without a battery. It still transmits, sometimes. Whoever listens learns things they should not know. Not issued. Lies with the Council. **Price:** Whoever listens makes a horror test against Horrifying (3).



Chapter VII. STORMBREAKER

Stormbreaker

"If the door won't open, the wall's next."
Stormbreaker, codename Bulldozer

The Nature of the Unit

Stormbreakers are the cell's heavy artillery. They specialise in targets that resist others: armoured vehicles, bunkers, reinforced doors, beings with skin of stone. Their weapons are loud, their suits heavy, and when they enter a room, everyone inside knows they are there.

That is how it should be. A Stormbreaker is not there to remain unnoticed. They are there so that a door no one can open opens, and so that the opponent behind it is so busy that the others get in.

STORMBREAKER AT A GLANCE

Bonuses: +2 STR, +1 INT. **Skills:** +2 Heavy Weapons, +1 Explosives, +1 Tactics. **Equipment:** Thermal anti-tank launcher, shock grenade belt (three shock grenades), heavy combat suit.

Armour Break (passive): Their attacks ignore 2 points of armour.

High-Explosive Charge (active, 2× per mission): They place a charge (one action), which they detonate later. Damage 5 in a 5 m radius, cover does not protect.

Tactical Retreat (passive): After an attack with a heavy weapon, they have +1 defence until their next action.

Full rules: Core Rulebook, Chapter IV.

Karakoram

The radio lay in the snow, and it was transmitting.

Jonas Brandt lay beside it, on his back, looking up at a sky so clear that he could count the stars. He did not count them. He listened. From the radio came a voice, calm and friendly, and it read out coordinates, the same ones over and over, in English with an accent he could not place.

The battery lay two metres away. He had removed it himself an hour earlier, because he had thought the device was broken, because it had only hissed since the attack. Then it had started to speak.

His unit was dead. Eleven men, Bundeswehr engineers, assigned to an international mission that was officially supposed to survey border markings in the Karakoram. On the second day they had found a cave. In the cave there had been crystals, clear as glass, and in front of it in the snow footprints that led into the cave and not back out.

The captain had decided to blow it up. The cave, not the crystals. Brandt had been the demolition master. He had set the charges, cleanly, by the book, and when he pulled the fuse, something had come out of the cave that had no body and yet passed through people.

He remembered nothing after that. Only the snow, the silence, and the radio.

"Who's there?" he asked at some point into the night. He had no microphone in his hand. He asked anyway.

The voice stopped saying coordinates. It became quiet. Then it said, very clearly: "Demolition master. You've opened the door. Close it again."

Brandt sat up. The cave was three hundred metres away, on the slope above him. From its entrance came a faint light that did not come from fire.

He still had two charges in his rucksack. It took him an hour to cover the three hundred metres. He did not set the charges in the cave, but above the entrance, into the rock, and when he detonated, half the slope slid down and buried the light under a hundred thousand tonnes of stone.

The radio stopped transmitting, mid-word.

A rescue team found him two days later. He had frostbite on three toes and had not said a word since they had found him. The Bundeswehr wrote a report about an avalanche. O.D.I.N. wrote another. Three months later Brandt sat in Camp Ashgrove and learned what to do with a high-explosive charge when what you want to blow up has no door.

He handed in the radio. It lies with the Council, they say. Sometimes, on a quiet night, Brandt believes he still hears it.

The Breakers

The Stormbreakers were created in 1979 as a response to a change on the other side. In the seventies, collectors began to arm themselves. Those who owned crystals and artefacts protected them with mercenaries, armoured vehicles, and fortified camps. The Shadow Paratroopers got close to these camps, but not inside.

Ashgrove, already an old man at the time, proposed a unit that could do exactly that: get inside. He called them the Breakers. The Council called them Stormbreakers, because someone thought that sounded better in files. The first Stormbreakers were engineers from various armies, demolition masters, anti-tank specialists.

Today the Stormbreakers are the largest unit in the branch. Since 2011 they have been deployed against opponents against whom explosives used to be useless: beings from rifts that have solidified, cult sites with magically reinforced walls, things that have grown out of stone. The Collegium's workshop has developed charges for this purpose, whose explosive is mixed with crystal dust. The Stormbreakers call them **chalk bombs**, because they smell of chalk.

Chalk bombs are scarcer than anything else in the armoury. The Collegium issues the dust for them in portions that fit into a matchbox, and demands a report for every bomb detonated, stating what it hit. The Stormbreakers write these reports conscientiously. They have noticed that the Collegium reads them more carefully than any other report from the branch, and they would like to know why.

Legend: The Rotterdammer

Sergeant Major Greta van Houten, codename **Brecheisen**, led the 1994 operation against a cargo ship in the port of Rotterdam, on which collectors were transporting a rift, sealed in a lead freight container. When the container broke open, she was the only one still on board. She blew up the ship with the rift inside it, from within, and swam three hundred metres back through the harbour basin. She personally trained every Stormbreaker until her retirement in 2016. Her first lesson was always the same: "Know where the exit is before you make a new one."

The First Trial by Fire

D6	How your Stormbreaker first blew up something that refused to fall
1	A door in a cellar that was still standing after the blast. The wall next to it was gone.
2	A vehicle with a driver that kept going after the hit. The driver laughed.
3	A cave you sealed so that nothing could get out.
4	A creature with skin of slate that only shattered on the third hit.
5	A cult site whose walls threw the explosion back.
6	A radio that told you where to place the charge.

A Day in the Life

A Stormbreaker starts the day in the armoury. They check their charges, count the detonators, inspect the Panzerfaust. Explosives are incorruptible: they work or they do not, and anyone who only finds that out in the field does not get a second deployment. Most Stormbreakers spend more time with their detonators than with their weapons.

After that, training. Heavy weapons on the move, heavy weapons from cover, heavy weapons with a comrade on their back. Stormbreakers are the strongest Soldiers in the branch, and they train accordingly.

In the afternoons, many sit in the Collegium's workshop and have alchemists explain how chalk bombs work. The alchemists like the Stormbreakers because they are the only Soldiers who listen when someone talks about chemistry. In the evenings they play cards, loudly. It is hard to experience a Stormbreaker quietly.

Training

After basic training, prospective Stormbreakers spend three months in a disused quarry in Wales, not far from the Collegium's chamber. There they learn demolition: doors, walls, vehicles, rock. They learn to place a charge so that it opens a wall without bringing the building down. And they learn to place a charge so that it does exactly that.

The final examination is famous. The recruit stands before a wall of slate, behind which an instructor sits. They have one charge and five minutes. The wall must fall. The instructor must remain seated. No instructor has ever been injured. But the instructors take turns.

Play Styles

The following play styles are suggestions, not requirements. The modules mentioned are at the end of the chapter, basic training and manoeuvres in Chapter IV.

Play Style	Description
The Breaker	Doors, walls, vehicles. They open the way for the cell. *Modules:* Demolition Expert, Bunker Buster, Wall Breaker.
The Artillery	Panzerfaust, machine gun, heavy weapons. They keep opponents at a distance and pin them down with fire. *Modules:* Heavy Carrier, plus Fire Discipline and the Suppressive Fire manoeuvre.
The Pioneer	They tear down, and they build up: positions, barricades, traps made of explosives. Combines well with Trap Setter from the Shadow Paratroopers and with Engineering.
The Gravedigger	They close what is open: caves, tunnels, rifts that no one can banish. Chalk bombs are their tool, patience is their virtue. Combines well with Occultism and a Thaumaturge who tells them when it is enough.

RULE: BLASTING INDOORS

A high-explosive charge detonated in an enclosed space deals +1 damage. Everyone in the room, including the Stormbreaker, rolls COM + Stress Management against Easy (1). Anyone who fails is deaf and disoriented for one round: -2 dice on all tests.

RULE: HEAVY LOAD

Heavy weapons demand strength. A character with STR below 4 rolls -1 die with heavy weapons. A Stormbreaker with the Heavy Carrier module ignores this rule.

RULE: CHALK BOMBS

Once per mission, a Stormbreaker can draw a chalk bomb from the quartermaster. It acts like a high-explosive charge, but also hits beings that do not feel ordinary damage, and deals double damage against beings from rifts.

The Price

Stormbreakers pay with their hearing and their joints. Almost all have tinnitus after ten years, many have problems with knees and back. They wear the heaviest suits and the heaviest weapons, and their bodies notice it. And they pay with the things they have blown up. Every Stormbreaker remembers a charge where they were not sure what was behind it.

OPTIONAL RULE: THE RINGING

After every mission in which a Stormbreaker has detonated a charge in an enclosed space, they roll CON + Toughness against Easy (1).

If the test fails, they keep a ringing in the ear: -1 die on Perception when it comes to hearing, until they have had a week of rest. The third time, the ringing remains forever.

D6	What the Blasting Has Cost You
1	The hearing in your left ear. You always turn to the right when someone speaks.
2	Two fingers of your left hand. One was haste, the other was bad luck.
3	Sleep in old houses. At night you hear where their walls would give way.
4	Your knees. The stairs to the cellar are the hardest part of every operation.
5	A friend who went through a door too early, one you had just opened.
6	Nothing, you say, very loudly.

In Play

- **You are the cell's heavy artillery.** Armoured opponents, bunkers and vehicles are your speciality. You go through the door first and get shot at the most.
- **Think about walls.** Not every path leads through a door. Ask the game master what lies behind the wall.
- **The question for your character:** What have you opened that you could not close again?

For the game master: Give a Stormbreaker things that do not want to open: steel doors, cult sites with reinforced walls, armoured vehicles of the Collectors. And occasionally ask them, before they detonate, what lies on the other side. Not every wall should fall, and the best scenes arise when they ask themselves the question.

EXAMPLE: BRANDT SETS A CHARGE

Brandt sets a high-explosive charge on the steel door of a cult cellar. He rolls INT 2 white and Explosives 3 coloured dice against Doable (2).

White: 5, 3. Coloured: 4, 6, 2. That is 1 plus 2, so 3 successes. The charge is set.

One round later he detonates it by radio. Damage 5, in an enclosed space 6, and cover does not protect. The two cultists behind the door (5 HP) may each make a test on DEX + Dodge against Doable (2). One succeeds, halves the damage to 3 and keeps 2 HP. The other falls.

Afterwards, everyone in the room rolls against Easy (1) to see if they are deaf and disoriented for one round. Brandt too.

Playing with Other Classes

A Stormbreaker needs someone who tells them which wall is the right one. With an **Investigator** they find the cellar, with an **Agent** the moment. A **Thaumaturge** can tell them whether behind the wall lies something that is better not released. A **Psion** hears how many are waiting behind it. And a **Scientist**, Engineer or Physicist, makes a charge into a better one. The oldest allies of the Stormbreakers, however, are the telekinetics of the Choir: They hold a ceiling that wants to give way after the blast, and they open doors for which no charge is worth it. In the Branch they have been called the door openers since the fifties.

From the Files

OPERATION REPORT, EXCERPT

Case RA-2150, Marseille. Access to a warehouse of the Collectors.

Stormbreaker blows the back wall instead of the door. The door was secured with crystals, the wall was not.

Remark by the squad leader: That's how you do it.

OPERATION REPORT, EXCERPT

Case SA-2203, Harz. Tunnel in a disused mine.

Chalk bomb detonated. The tunnel collapses, as planned. Three days later a hiker reports singing from a ventilation shaft, two kilometres away.

Note: Forwarded to the Investigation Branch.

OPERATION REPORT, EXCERPT

Case RA-1994-03, Rotterdam. Freighter with lead containers, Collectors on board.

Container breaks open. Operative BRECHEISEN detonates the charges from inside and leaves the ship swimming.

Addendum, handwritten, van Houten: Just before I detonated, it stopped screaming and started counting. Backwards. It got to three.

Questions for Your Stormbreaker

D6	What Your Character Does Not Know Yet
1	Who spoke through the radio
2	What still glows under the slope in the Karakoram
3	Why chalk bombs really work
4	Who left the footprints that led into the cave
5	Why the voice called him "Demolition Expert" before he was one
6	What van Houten really blew up in Rotterdam

Unit Equipment

Item	Effect
Radio detonator set	Charges can be detonated from up to 500 m away. *Common.*
Shaped charge	A charge that eats its way through in one direction. Against doors and armour: armour is ignored. *Rare.*
Van Houten's Demolition Ledger	Handwritten notes on a hundred demolitions. +1 die on Explosives when placing charges. *Very rare.*

The Others and Us

About the Echo Operatives: "They hear everything. I wonder what they hear from us."

About the Shadow Paratroopers: "They get in without anyone noticing. We get in and everyone notices. Both have their moment."

About the Nanotech Veterans: "You can't talk to them. But you can stand behind them."

About the Techno-Stormtroopers: "We blow the wall, they hold the corridor. There's no better division of labour."

Members of the Unit

Sergeant Major Greta van Houten. The Rotterdam native, now retired, lives in a house on the dyke. She advises the branch on difficult operations, on the phone, smoking. Whoever visits her gets coffee and a lesson.

Squad Leader Kofi Mensah. The best demolition expert in the branch, calm, precise, father of three children who believe he works for a demolition company. He has never placed a charge incorrectly. He is the only one in the branch who knows how many chalk bombs are left.

Colonel Hendrik Vos. A Stormbreaker of the first hour, Ashgrove's successor and leader of the branch until 2011. He lives in seclusion in Zeeland, receives no visitors and writes a card with a single sentence to every Stormbreaker who is promoted: "Ask what is behind the wall."

Recruit Lena Saarinen. A young Finnish woman who passed the test in the quarry as the best of her year. She has a theory that chalk bombs do not work because of the dust, but because the dust remembers the voice that was once in it. Nobody listens to her.

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Van Houten's First Lesson, Notes by a Recruit

Know where the exit is before you make a new
one.

Count the people in the room before you
detonate, and again afterwards.

A wall has two sides, and you always stand on
only one.

And if something behind the wall starts
counting backwards: run.
```

Example Character: Brandt

Stormbreaker, Cadet. Jonas Brandt, 36, was a combat engineer in the Bundeswehr. In the Karakoram he was the only one of his unit to return, together with a radio that kept transmitting even though the battery was missing. His story is told at the beginning of this chapter.

Brandt	Stormbreaker, Cadet
Attributes	STR 4, DEX 4, CON 3, INT 2, WIS 2, WIL 3, CHA 1, MAN 1, COM 4
Skills	Firearms 4, Heavy Weapons 4, Athletics 3, Tactics 3, Explosives 3, Melee 3, Toughness 3, Endurance 3, Dodge 3, Perception 3, Stress Management 2, Mental Resistance 1
Values	HP 12, Strain Threshold 11, Initiative 4, Defence 2, Armour 4 (heavy combat suit) or 3
Abilities	Armour Break, High-Explosive Charge, Tactical Retreat
Silver	Knife (Escort Blade), Vambrace No. 114 (Defence Vambrace, for the Karakoram, previously worn by Kjell Haugen)
Archetype	The Homeless One

Equipment: Soldier basic equipment, thermal anti-tank weapon, three shock grenades, heavy combat suit, salt pouch. For covert operations he wears the lighter combat suit with helmet.

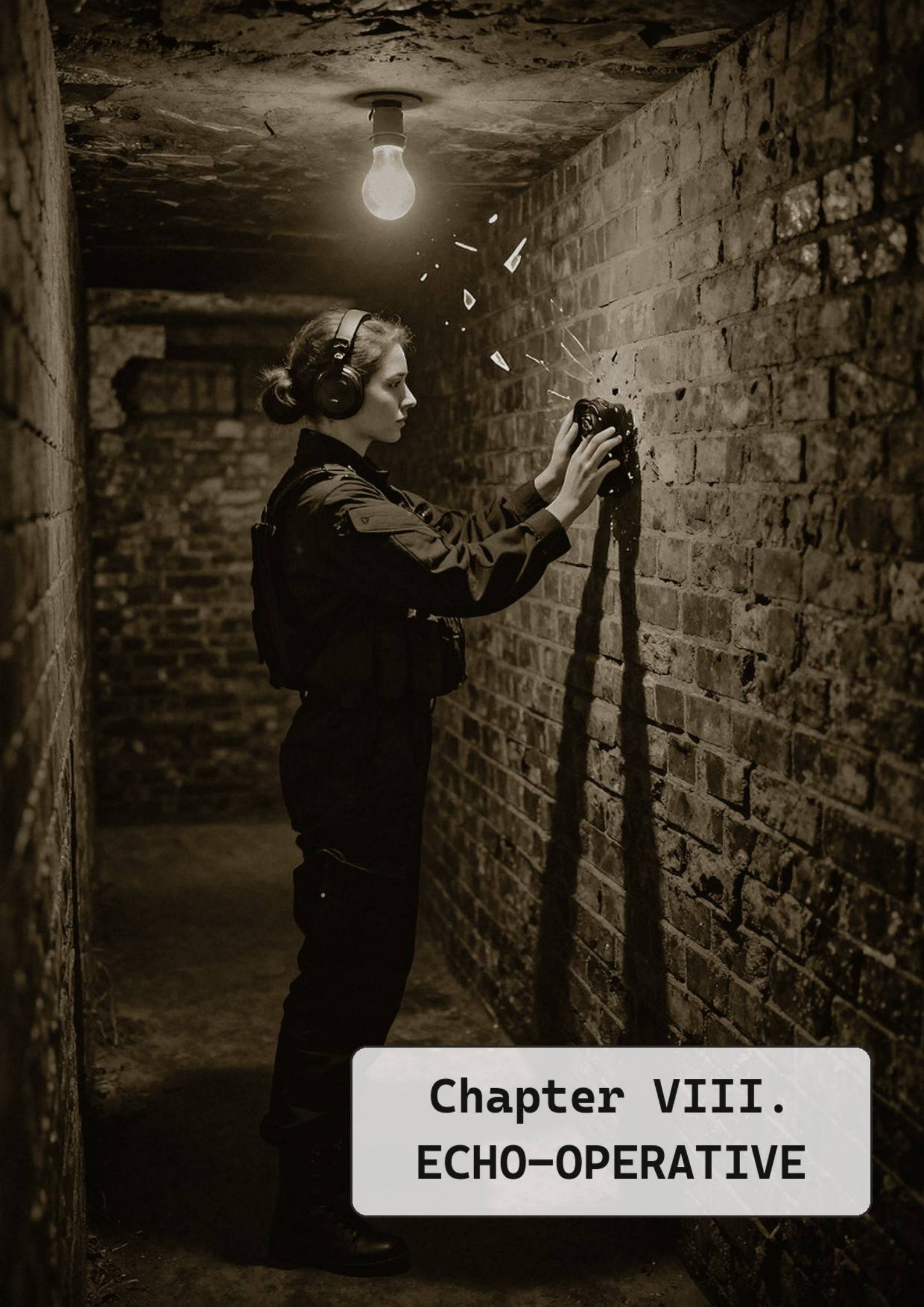
How to play Brandt: You are taciturn, reliable and always the first at the door. You do not talk about the Karakoram. When talking, you gladly let others go first, for good reason.

The Path Through the Arsenal

Rank	New Modules and Increases
Agent (20 XP)	Demolition Expert 4, Heavy Carrier 4, Fire Discipline 4, Pain Resistance 4. He saves the remaining 4 XP. Silver: Breastplate (Heart Plate).
Senior Agent (50 XP)	Bunker Buster 6, Iron Nerves 6, Position Change 4, Explosives to 4 for 8, Tactics to 4 for 8. Silver: Barrel Jacket (Voice Barrel).
Veteran (100 XP)	Wall Breaker 8, Shield Technician from the Techno-Stormtroopers 6, Command Voice 8, Heavy Weapons to 5 for 10, Field Medic 6, Toughness to 4 for 8. He now leads a squad. Silver: Pauldrons (Troop Piece). With the fifth piece he is unshakeable and has Echo 1.

The Modules in the Arsenal

Level	Module	Effect
I	**Heavy Carrier**	Passive. No penalty on heavy weapons from the Heavy Load rule. Carrying capacity +20%.
I	**Demolition Expert**	Passive. High-Explosive Charge three times instead of twice per mission, +1 damage.
II	**Bunker Buster**	Passive. Double damage against vehicles, doors, walls and other structures.
III	**Wall Breaker**	Once per mission the Stormbreaker breaks through a wall or door. All opponents behind are considered surprised in the first round. Afterwards 1 strain.



Chapter VIII.
ECHO-OPERATIVE

Echo-Operative

"Do you hear that? No? Then it works."
Echo-Operative, codename Resonanz

The Nature of the Unit

Echo-Operatives fight with sound. They hear what others do not hear, and they transmit what others cannot hear: frequencies that shatter glass, disrupt electronics, rob balance and orientation. In tight spaces, in cities, in cellars and tunnels, they are deadly.

And they can do something no other unit can: they disrupt psi and magic. Their frequency overlay paralyses everything within a radius that is not made of muscle and gunpowder. This makes them the most important Soldiers against rogue psions and thaumaturges. And it does not make them popular with either.

ECHO-OPERATIVE AT A GLANCE

Bonuses: +2 DEX, +1 WIS. **Skills:** +2 Firearms, +1 Acrobatics, +1 Perception. **Equipment:** resonance pistol, infrasound generator, sound-absorbing boots (+1 die on Stealth).

Deconstructive Bass (passive): A shot with the resonance pistol automatically destroys fragile objects such as glass walls, monitors or light sources.

Frequency Overlay (active, 1× per scene): For 3 rounds, all psionic and magical tests within a radius of 10 m roll with −2 dice, including those of your own allies.

Echo Location (passive): +2 dice on Perception to find hidden or invisible opponents. They cannot be surprised.

Full rules: Core Rulebook, Chapter IV.

Frequency Nineteen

Resonanz heard the heart before she saw the door.

It beat behind the wall of a cellar in Lyon, three metres to her left, through thirty centimetres of brick. Nineteen beats per minute. Too slow for a human. Too regular for an animal. She raised her hand, and the cell behind her stopped.

"What is it?" whispered Echo, the telepath.

"There is something." Resonanz pressed her ear to the stone. The sound-absorbing boots made her quiet, but she herself heard everything: the hum of the fluorescent tube in the stairwell, the breathing of the others, the cracking of the pipes. And beneath it, deeper than everything else, the heart. "Do you hear it?"

Echo shook her head. Then she froze. "I hear no thoughts," she said slowly. "There is something that lives, and it does not think."

Resonanz nodded. She knew that. In twelve years in the navy, as a sonar operator on a submarine, she had learned that the most dangerous things in the water make no sound. They wait.

The heart beat faster.

"It has noticed us," said Echo.

Resonanz pulled the infrasound generator from her belt. She knew what she had to do now, and she knew what it would cost Echo. Frequency overlay hit everything in the vicinity: every spell, every power, including those of her own people. For three rounds, Echo would be deaf, blind in the sense that mattered for a telepath.

"Echo," she said. "Put your helmet on properly. And cover your ears. It does not help, but it feels better."

Echo looked at her. She understood. She put on the helmet.

The wall broke open before Resonanz switched on the generator. What was behind it had no form she could describe, only movement and a smell of ozone and wet stone. She switched it on.

The sound was not audible. It was there, in the teeth, in the breastbone, in the bones of the skull. The thing in the wall flinched back, as if it had been burned. Beside her, Echo sank to her knees, hands at her temples, and made a sound that Resonanz would never forget.

Three rounds. Enough for Brandt, who had waited behind them and now fired into the cellar with incendiary ammunition. Enough for the heart to stop beating.

When the sound ceased, Echo sat against the wall and breathed heavily. Resonanz knelt beside her.

"I'm sorry," she said.

"What were you made for?" asked Echo. Her voice was hoarse. "Originally, I mean. The Echo-Operatives. No one ever told me that."

Resonanz was silent for a while. Then she told the truth, because you cannot tell a telepath something else for long.

"For you," she said.

The Silent Ones

The Echo-Operatives were created in 1974 after the Cascade. The Council had seen what happens when psions get out of control, and it wanted a means against it that was not itself psionic. Research into sound weapons from the Cold War provided a basis. Mercier found the frequencies that disrupt psions and thaumaturges almost by accident, when a test signal in the laboratory robbed a present telepath of consciousness.

The first years were the darkest of the unit. The Echo-Operatives hunted the Open Ones, psions who had taken off their helmets, and they were very good at it. Within the branch, people do not talk about it, and the chronicle mentions the first assignment only as confidential.

Since the nineties, the unit has changed. Echo-Operatives today fight primarily against beings from rifts, against cults with crystals, against renegade Thaumaturges. Their echo location is irreplaceable in cellars and tunnels. But the Psions remember, and many Echo-Operatives carry the old guilt of the unit with them, although they were not yet born at that time.

Since 2011, the tide has turned once again. On the orders of Prometheus, Echo-Operatives are again deployed against the Open Ones, against Psions who have removed their helmets. Some have refused these missions. No refusal has been punished so far. None has been forgotten.

Legend: Tinnitus

Dr. Paul Mercier, codename **Tinnitus**, was an acoustician in a French research programme on sonic weapons when O.D.I.N. recruited him in 1973. He developed the first frequency overlay and carried out the first mission with it in 1976: in a monastery in the Carpathians, against a group of Psions who had removed their helmets. He arrested seven of them without firing a shot. One of them was fifteen years old. After this mission, Mercier never again triggered a frequency overlay himself. He led the unit until 1998 and gave every recruit the same sentence: “Frequencies are for things. Not for children.”

The First Trial by Fire

D6	What your Echo-Operative heard for the first time that should not have been there
1	A heartbeat in a wall, too slow for a human.
2	A choir beneath the static of a radio.
3	Their own name, whispered in a frequency no human can speak.
4	A sonar echo on a submarine, from something larger than the boat that did not move.
5	The silence in a room where twenty people had just been.
6	A Telepath screaming in pain because you switched on a device.

A Day in the Life

Echo-Operatives get up late because they often cannot sleep at night. The world is too loud for them. Most wear hearing protection in the Hold, even in the canteen, and many sleep with white noise from a small speaker, because otherwise the silence is full of sounds.

The day belongs to technology. Calibrating resonance pistols, checking generators, testing new frequencies proposed by the Science Branch. Echo-Operatives work closely with Physicists and Engineers, and they spend more time in the laboratory than any other unit.

On missions they are usually at the front, even ahead of the Stormbreaker. They hear what is behind the next door before anyone opens it. The cell follows their ear. And in the evening, when everyone else is talking loudly in the canteen, Echo-Operatives often sit outside, alone, listening to the wind, because at least it wants nothing from them.

Training

Prospective Echo-Operatives spend four months in a soundproofed bunker in the French Alps, the **Silent House**. There they first learn to hear: heartbeats through walls, footsteps three floors away, the hum of a crystal in a lead box. Then they learn to send: frequencies that shatter glass, disrupt electronics, rob balance.

In the basement of the Silent House there is a room whose walls the Psionic Core has lined with Alloy S. There is nothing to hear there, not even your own heartbeat. Every recruit spends one hour in it at the end of training. Some come out crying. Some do not want to come out anymore.

The final examination takes place together with a Psion who volunteers. The recruit must trigger a frequency overlay while the Psion stands next to them, and then talk to them. The conversation is not recorded. It has been part of training since Mercier introduced it. He said an Echo-Operative should know what they are doing.

Play Styles

The following play styles are suggestions, not obligations. The modules mentioned are at the end of the chapter, basic training and manoeuvres in Chapter IV.

Play Style	Description
The Ear of the Cell	Echo location, perception, Frequency Finder. They say how many are behind the door and whether one of them is not human. *Modules:* Frequency Finder, Silent Steps.
The Disruptor	Frequency overlay, resonance charges, Dead Silence. They are the answer to hostile Psions and Thaumaturges. *Modules:* Resonance Shot, Dead Silence.
The Urban Fighter	Fast, agile, at home in tight spaces. Combines well with acrobatics, firearms and Position Change from basic training.
The Technician	They disable alarm systems, cameras and radio before the cell goes in. Deconstructive Bass is a tool for them, not a weapon. Combines well with technology, security systems and the targeting device with echo module.

RULE: FRIEND AND FOE

Frequency overlay also affects Psions and Thaumaturges of your own cell. Anyone who was warned beforehand, a free action of the Echo-Operative, rolls with only −1 die instead of −2. A Psion without a helmet in the area additionally suffers 1 strain.

RULE: HEARING THROUGH WALLS

With echo location, an Echo-Operative can hear through walls up to 30 cm thick. Test WIS + Perception against Doable (2). They learn how many living beings are behind it, roughly where, and whether their heartbeat is human.

The Price

Echo-Operatives pay with their hearing, but not in the way one thinks. They do not go deaf. They hear more and more. After ten years in service, many hear things they do not want to hear: the heartbeats of the people next to them, the hum of every crystal in the building, sometimes a soft singing in a frequency that should not exist. And they pay with the distrust of the Psions, which they have inherited and can never shed.

OPTIONAL RULE: HEARD TOO WELL

After every mission in which an Echo-Operative has triggered frequency overlay or dead silence, they roll WIL + Concentration against Doable (2).

If the test fails, they hear everything a little too clearly until the end of the next mission: +1 die on Perception when it comes to hearing, but −1 die on Concentration and on the test with which they reduce strain after the mission.

D6	What hearing has cost you
1	The silence. You only sleep with white noise from a small speaker.
2	Music. You hear in every song the frequencies that lie beneath it.
3	Churches, train stations, stadiums. Too many hearts at once.
4	A Psion who trusted you, until an exercise that you both do not talk about.
5	The phone calls with your mother. You hear when she lies, and she lies often, out of love.
6	Nothing. Only sometimes a melody that you do not know where it comes from.

In Play

- **You are the ear of the cell.** Go ahead, listen, tell the others what waits behind the door.
- **Weigh it up before you disrupt.** Frequency overlay also hits your people. Coordinate with Psions and Thaumaturges.
- **The question for your character:** What do you hear at night, when it is quiet?

For the game master: Describe the world to an Echo-Operative first through sounds and then through images: the hum of a fluorescent tube, a heartbeat in the next room, a silence that is too thorough. And regularly confront them with the decision of whether to use frequency overlay, even though a Psion of their own cell is standing next to them. This decision is the heart of the unit.

EXAMPLE: RESONANZ HEARS THROUGH THE WALL

Resonanz puts her ear to a cellar wall and rolls WIS 4 white and Perception 5 coloured dice, plus 2 white bonus dice from echo location, against Doable (2).

White: 6, 2, 5, 3, 1, 5. Coloured: 4, 3, 1, 6, 2. That is 3 plus 2, so 5 successes.

The game master tells her: three heartbeats behind the door on the left, two of them human and very fast. The third beats nineteen times per minute.

The cell now knows where the door is and what waits behind it, before anyone opens it. Echo, the Telepath, knows it too, and she takes a step back.

Playing with Other Classes

The Echo-Operative is the natural partner of the **Soldier** and the **Investigator**: They say where the opponents are, the others go there. With an **Agent**, they plan operations in buildings. The relationship with **Psions** and **Thaumaturges** is delicate. An Echo-Operative in the cell protects them from hostile magic, but they can also cripple them themselves. Agree beforehand when they switch on their generator. A code word that everyone agrees on has kept more Psions sane than any helmet. And a Soldier with the targeting device with echo module hits what the Echo-Operative hears, even if they never see it themselves.

From the Files

OPERATION REPORT, EXCERPT

Case SA-1976-11, Carpathians. Operation against a group of Psions without helmets.

Frequency overlay successful. 7 arrests, no losses.

Addendum, handwritten, Mercier: One of them asked after the operation why we did not want to hear him. I had no answer.

OPERATION REPORT, EXCERPT

Case GA-2188, Oslo. Echo location in a crystal archive.

The Operative reports a melody from a lead box. The box contains a Nordlicht stone.

Note: Forwarded to the Collegium. No answer.

OPERATION REPORT, EXCERPT

Case GA-2234, Lyon. Cellar under a laundry.

Echo location reports a heartbeat in the wall, 19 beats per minute. Frequency overlay. Target neutralised.

Addendum from the Healer: The Telepath of the cell did not speak for two days. On the third day, she asked if Resonanz would bring coffee.

Questions for Your Echo-Operative

D6	What your character does not know yet
1	What happened to the fifteen-year-old from the Carpathians
2	Which melody hums in the Nordlicht stones
3	Why the hearts of the Nanotech Veterans beat wrongly
4	Who first discovered frequency nineteen
5	Whether Echo has forgiven her
6	What she hears when everyone else is sleeping

Unit Equipment

Item	Effect
Noise Filter	A hearing protector that lets speech through and filters noise. No penalty from explosions or blasting in the room. *Common.*
Resonance Charges	Ammunition for the resonance pistol, see Chapter VI. *Rare.*
Mercier's Tuning Fork	A tuning fork made of Alloy S. When struck, it shows every crystal in the room for 10 seconds by a faint sympathetic vibration. *Very rare.*

The Others and Us

About the Stormbreaker: "They're so loud that I almost have peace next to them."

About the Shadow Paratroopers: "The only ones we don't hear before they're there. That bothers me more than it should."

About the Nanotech Veterans: "Their hearts beat wrong. Not too fast, not too slow. Just wrong."

About the Techno-Stormtrooper: "Their shields hum. I hear them three rooms away. That's practical when you're looking for them."

Members of the Unit

Dr. Paul Mercier. Tinnitus, the founder, over eighty, lives in a village in Provence and hears almost nothing anymore. He answers letters from Echo-Operatives by hand, and at the end of each is the same sentence about frequencies and children.

Squad Leader Hana Nowak. Head of the Silent House, a Polish woman with an ear that one might consider supernatural. She hears whether someone is lying by the sound of their voice. She is the only one who trains Echo-Operatives together with Psions, and she has received a lot of trouble for it.

Soldier Marcus Hale. A young Echo-Operative who claims to hear a melody near crystals. His uncle is a Thaumaturge in Oxford. The two do not talk to each other.

LETTER FROM DR. PAUL MERCIER TO A RECRUIT, 2019

You ask whether one gets used to it. One gets used to hearing. Not to sending, and that is a good thing.

When you switch on the generator, think of the person standing next to you, and of the one standing in front of you. One of the two will pay for it. Make sure it is the right one.

Frequencies are for things. Not for children.
P. M.

Example Character: Resonanz

Echo-Operative, Cadet. Amira Haddou, 31, was a sonar operator on a submarine of the French Navy for twelve years. During an exercise in the North Atlantic, she heard an echo of something that was larger than the boat and did not move. Her report was filed away. Three months later, a man in a grey coat rang at her door.

Resonanz	Echo-Operative, Cadet
Attributes	STR 2, DEX 5, CON 2, INT 3, WIS 4, WIL 3, CHA 1, MAN 1, COM 3
Skills	Firearms 5, Perception 5, Dodge 4, Acrobatics 3, Athletics 3, Stealth 3, Tactics 2, Technology 2, Security Systems 2, Toughness 2, Stress Management 2, Melee 1, Mental Resistance 1
Values	HP 10, Strain Threshold 10, Initiative 5, Defence 3, Armour 3

Resonanz	Echo-Operative, Cadet
Abilities	Deconstructive Bass, Frequency Overlay, Echo Location
Silver	Knife (Escort Blade)
Archetype	The Wounded One

Equipment: Basic Soldier equipment, resonance pistol, infrasound generator, sound-absorbing boots, noise filter, salt sachets.

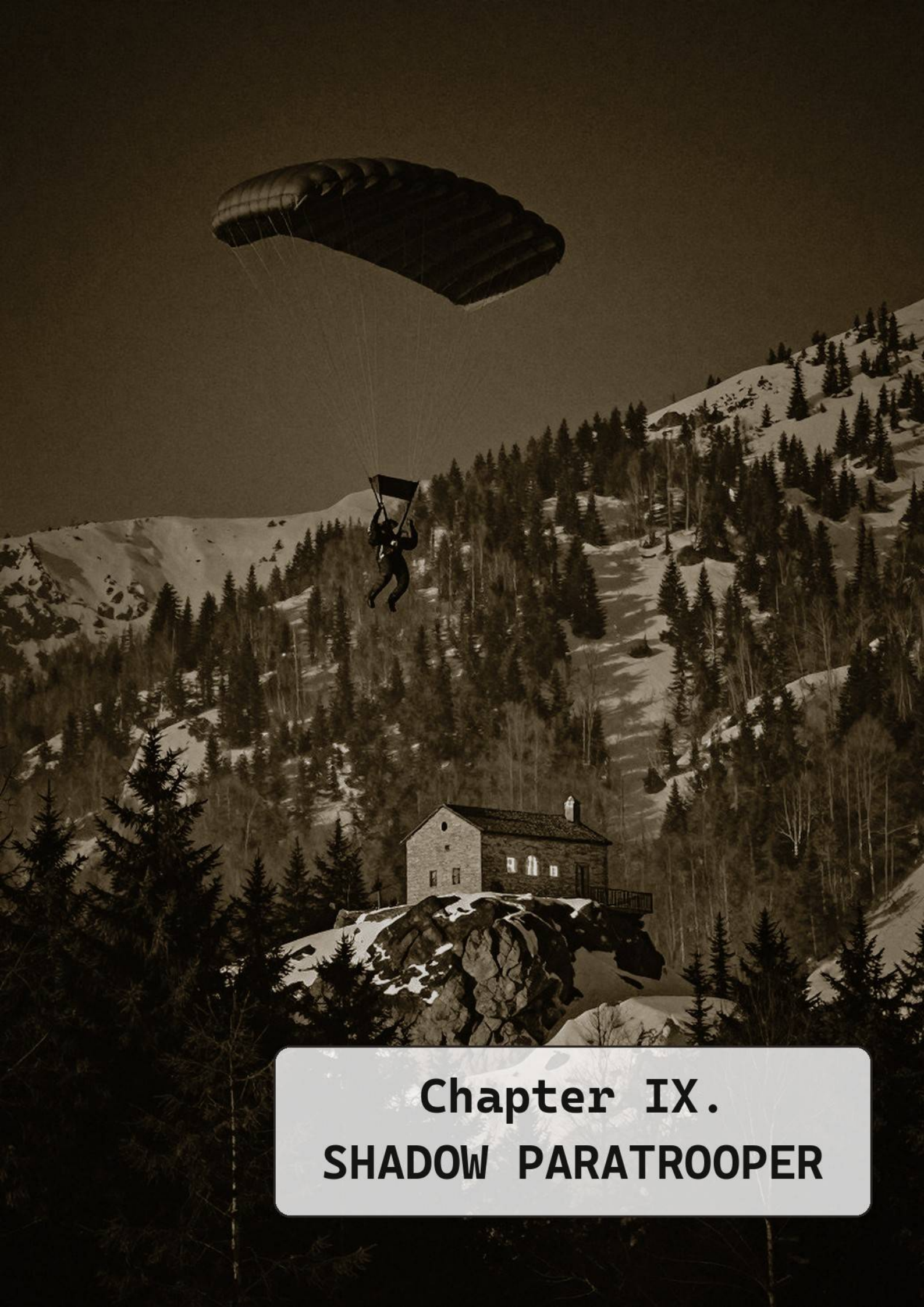
How to play Resonanz: You are calm, attentive and always a little elsewhere, because you hear things that the others do not hear. You carry the guilt of your unit, and you have decided not to hide it.

The Path Through the Arsenal

Rank	New Modules and Upgrades
Agent (20 XP)	Frequency Finder 4, Silent Steps 4, Position Change 4. She saves the remaining 8 XP. Silver: Visor (Clear Sight).
Senior Agent (50 XP)	Resonance Shot 6, Ghost Run from the Shadow Paratroopers 8, Iron Nerves 6, Perception to 6 for 12. Silver: Breastplate (Silent Plate).
Veteran (100 XP)	Dead Silence 8, Field Medic 6, Command Voice 8, Firearms to 6 for 12, Stealth to 4 for 8, Tactics to 3 for 6. Silver: Greaves (Walking Greaves).

The Modules in the Arsenal

Level	Module	Effect
I	**Silent Steps**	Passive. +2 dice on Stealth in buildings, cellars and tunnels.
I	**Frequency Finder**	Passive. The Echo-Operative senses when psi or magic is used within 30 m, and from which direction.
II	**Resonance Shot**	Passive. The resonance pistol deals +1 damage and ignores cover made of glass, wood and plasterboard.
III	**Dead Silence**	Once per mission. For three rounds, no psi or magic is possible within a radius of 10 m, for anyone. Afterwards 1 strain.



Chapter IX.
SHADOW PARATROOPER

Shadow Paratrooper

"They never saw us. That was the plan."
Shadow Paratrooper, codename Nachtfalke

The Nature of the Unit

Shadow Paratroopers operate deep behind enemy lines. They come from the air, at night, in storms, to places no vehicle can reach. They are masters of camouflage, of silent attack and rapid withdrawal. A Shadow Paratrooper who is seen has made a mistake.

They are the loneliest Soldiers in the branch. Most missions they carry out alone or in pairs, and they are often days without contact. That attracts a certain type of person: calm, patient, self-sufficient, with a preference for darkness and an aversion to canteens.

SHADOW PARATROOPER AT A GLANCE

Bonuses: +2 DEX, +1 COM. **Skills:** +2 Stealth, +1 Sleight of Hand, +1 Survival. **Equipment:** Adaptive camouflage cloak (+2 dice on Stealth in natural terrain), three collapsible traps (net, poison dart or smoke), light infiltration rifle.

Phantom Attack (passive): The first attack from hiding in a scene deals +3 damage.

Mist of Vanishing (active, 1× per scene): A cloud of smoke with a 5 m radius. All within gain +2 defence against ranged attacks and +2 dice on escape. It lasts 3 rounds.

Deadly Stealth (passive): If they score a critical success on an attack from hiding, they deal an additional +2 damage.

Full rules: Core Rulebook, Chapter IV.

Jump Over the Carpathians

At nine thousand metres the air was so cold it hurt. Nachtfalke sat at the open rear ramp of the transport plane, the oxygen mask over his face, and looked down into a darkness in which there was nothing except a few scattered lights, as small as pinpricks.

One of them was a monastery.

"Thirty seconds," said the dispatcher over the radio.

The briefing had been short. A monastery in the Romanian Carpathians, abandoned for decades, inhabited for three weeks. Thermal images showed twelve people. A Grey File: observe, do not intervene, take photos, disappear. The handler had not said who lived there. He had only said that it was better if no one noticed them, because the people in the monastery could hear things that others could not hear.

Nachtfalke jumped.

The free fall lasted two minutes. He fell through clouds, through freezing rain, through a silence broken only by the rush of wind against his helmet. At a thousand metres he opened the canopy, silent, black, and glided in a wide arc towards the forest below the monastery.

He landed among the trees, rolled and lay still. Ten minutes. That was the rule. Ten minutes do nothing, only listen. Anyone who gets up too quickly after a landing is seen.

After ten minutes he pulled on the camouflage cloak and walked.

The monastery stood on a rocky outcrop, three storeys of stone, a bell tower without a bell. Candles burned in the windows. Nachtfalke crawled up the slope, metre by metre, until he lay beneath a window through which voices came. He raised the camera.

In the room twelve people sat in a circle on the floor, hands on their knees. None wore a helmet. In the middle sat an old man, very old, white hair to his shoulders, and he spoke softly in English.

"He is here," said the old man. "Under the window. Leave him."

Nachtfalke froze. He had not breathed. He had not moved. The camouflage cloak was perfect.

The old man turned his head, slowly, and looked exactly at the spot where he lay, although there was a wall between them.

"Tell them," he said, "that we will not get the children. Not this time. Tell them that Kantor still lives."

Nachtfalke took his photos. He crawled down the slope, walked for two days through the forest to the extraction point and was never noticed, by no one except the one person who should not have noticed him.

In his report was what he had seen. The sentence about the children was not in it. He did not understand it, and he had learned that you only write in reports what you understand.

The Invisible Ones

The Shadow Paratroopers were created in 1961, after a mission that came too late. A squad of the branch had taken three days in the Andes to reach a rift on foot. When it arrived, the rift was closed, and the village next to it empty. Ashgrove demanded a unit that could be anywhere within hours.

The first Shadow Paratroopers were paratroopers from Great Britain, France and Israel. They practised the high-altitude jump with late opening, long before regular armies made it a standard procedure. And they learned something that no regular army teaches: to survive alone next to something you cannot fight, until help arrives.

Today the Shadow Paratroopers are the smallest unit in the branch, fewer than fifty women and men worldwide. They are used for reconnaissance, for operations in inaccessible terrain and increasingly for observations that the Council does not speak about. Many of them have photographed things they have never seen again.

Among the Shadow Paratroopers there is a rule that is written nowhere: what one photographs for the Council, one forgets when developing. Most stick to it. Some keep small notebooks that they show no one, and in some of these notebooks the same places appear.

Legend: Ruth Adeyemi

Sergeant Ruth Adeyemi, codename **Harmattan**, jumped in 1968 as the first woman of the branch with a parachute into the Andes to reach a rift that a squad on foot would not have reached in time. She landed alone, at four thousand metres altitude, and drew with chalk, which a Thaumaturge had given her, a warding circle around the rift. For nine days she held it, until a Thaumaturge arrived who could close it. She was the only one who slept for nine days beside an open rift. She later said one gets used to the singing.

The First Trial by Fire

D6	What your Shadow Paratrooper saw for the first time without being seen
1	A cult dancing around a fire in the forest. The fire cast no shadows.
2	A village in which all the inhabitants stood up at the same time and looked in the same direction.
3	An old man who looked at them through a wall.
4	A rift from the air, at night, like a hole in the ground with stars in it.
5	A group of O.D.I.N. agents carrying a child out of a house. They did not ask.
6	Nothing. They waited for nine days, and nothing came. That was the worst.

A Day in the Life

Shadow Paratroopers live by the rhythm of the night. Many get up in the afternoon and go to sleep at dawn, even when they have no operation. In the hold one rarely sees them. They train on the training grounds, in the forest, on cliffs, and they spend a lot of time with their equipment: folding parachutes, mending camouflage cloaks, building traps.

Operations come suddenly and last long. A Shadow Paratrooper can lie in a hiding place for a week and observe a house, without moving, without speaking, with energy bars and water from a tube. They need patience for that, which cannot be trained. One has it or one does not.

When they return, they sleep for two days. Then they write their report, short, factual, only what they have seen. And then they go back into the forest.

Training

Prospective Shadow Paratroopers spend five months in Camp Ashgrove and in the Norwegian mountains. They learn parachuting from great height, at night, in wind, with load. They learn to camouflage themselves in any terrain, in the forest, in the snow, in the city. And they learn what Ruth Adeyemi could do best: wait.

The final examination is called **the nine days**. The recruit jumps over unknown terrain, with equipment for three

days, and must survive unnoticed for nine days while instructors search for them. Whoever is found does not pass. Whoever gives up also does not. Whoever returns after nine days with a photo of every instructor passes with distinction.

The training ground in Norway is less than three days' march from Nordlicht. The instructors avoid that direction. Recruits who get lost during the nine days find themselves astonishingly often there again, at the edge of the sealed hold, and no one can explain to them how.

Play Styles

The following playstyles are suggestions, not mandatory. The modules mentioned are at the end of the chapter, the basic training and the manoeuvres in Chapter IV.

Playstyle	Description
The Scout	Reconnaissance, observation, photos. They see before the cell arrives. *Modules:* Air Landing, Ghost Run.
The Hunter	Attacks from concealment, silent and deadly. They take out guards before they realise someone is there. *Modules:* Shadow of Death, plus Fire Discipline.
The Trap Setter	They prepare the ground: nets, poison arrows, smoke. Opponents walk into their traps before they see them. *Modules:* Trap Setter, plus Silent Steps from the Echo Operatives.
The Warden	They stay when everyone else leaves: beside a rift, in front of a house, at a place where something will happen. They are the heir of Ruth Adeyemi. Combines well with Survival, Mental Fortitude and Iron Nerves.

RULE: FROM CONCEALMENT

An attack counts as from concealment if the target has not yet noticed the Shadow Paratrooper in this scene. After the first attack, they must hide again: one action and a DEX + Stealth test against Hard (3), with Mist of Vanishing only Doable (2).

RULE: TRAPS

Setting a trap takes one minute. It is built with DEX + Sleight of Hand. Whoever steps into it rolls WIS + Perception against the successes.

Net: The victim is held fast until they succeed with STR + Athletics against the successes.

Poison dart: Damage 2, plus one round of −2 dice on all tests.

Smoke: Fog in a 5 m radius, three rounds.

The Price

Shadow Paratroopers pay with loneliness. Anyone who lies alone in the forest for weeks forgets how to talk. Many struggle to function in the cell because they are used to deciding alone. And they pay with what they have seen. A Shadow Paratrooper sees more than any other Soldier, and they are almost never allowed to intervene. That leaves marks.

OPTIONAL RULE: THE LONG SILENCE

After every mission in which a Shadow Paratrooper was alone in the field for longer than a day, they roll COM + Stress Management against Doable (2).

If the test fails, they find it hard to come back until the next mission: −1 die on all social tests, including with their own cell.

D6	What the waiting has cost you
1	Your voice. After a week in hiding, it sounds foreign to you.
2	Birthdays, weddings, a funeral. You were always just somewhere in the forest.
3	Your sense of taste. Energy bars and water from the tube have overwritten everything else.
4	The ability to sit in a room without knowing all the exits beforehand.
5	A photo you took and are not allowed to show anyone. You carry it with you anyway.
6	Nothing. You preferred to be alone even before.

In Play

- **You are soldier and shadow at once.** You land where no one expects you, strike, and are gone before the enemy knows where the attack came from.
- **Go ahead.** Reconnaissance is your strength. The cell benefits when you see beforehand what awaits them.
- **The question for your character:** What have you seen and not reported?

For the game master: A Shadow Paratrooper thrives on being at the location before the cell. Give them short, dense scenes alone in which they see something the others do not see, and let them decide what to pass on. Make sure the other players are not just watching during this time: switch back and forth quickly, like a film between two locations.

EXAMPLE: NACHTFALKE SHOOTS FROM HIDING

A cult sentry (defence 1, armour 0, 5 HP) has not noticed Nachtfalke. Nachtfalke shoots with the light infiltration rifle (damage 4, Quiet, Precise). They roll DEX 5 white and Firearms 4 coloured dice, plus 1 white bonus die for Precise.

White: 5, 6, 2, 1, 3, 6. Coloured: 4, 5, 1, 2. That is 3 plus 2, so 5 successes against defence 1, 4 margin.

A critical success from hiding: 4 weapon damage, 4 margin, +3 from Phantom Attack and +2 from Deadly Stealth. The sentry falls, and no one outside 10 m heard the shot.

To hide again, Nachtfalke now needs an action and a test against Hard (3).

Playing with Other Classes

The Shadow Paratrooper has the closest partnership with the **Agent**: both live by inconspicuousness. With an **Investigator**, they provide the photos that the other interprets. An **Illusionist** among the Thaumaturges can further improve their camouflage. The interplay with **Stormbreakers** and **Techno-Stormtroopers** is difficult: they are loud, he is quiet. Plan who enters the room when. And seek the proximity of a **Precognitive**: a precognitive who says when the guard change comes is worth more to a Shadow Paratrooper than any night-vision device.

From the Files

MISSION REPORT, EXCERPT

Operation GA-2166, Carpathians. Observation of a monastery.

12 people without helmets. Photos handed over. Operative not noticed.

Addendum by the handler: The monastery was empty when accessed four days later.

MISSION REPORT, EXCERPT

Operation SA-2019, Portugal. Reconnaissance of a forest fire.

Operative reports a young man who goes into the fire alone. No intervention ordered.

Addendum: The fire goes out from within after 40 minutes.

MISSION REPORT, EXCERPT

Operation RA-1968-04, Andes, 4,100 m. Operative HARMATTAN holds a warding circle around an open rift, nine days, alone.

Addendum by the Thaumaturge who closed the rift on the tenth day: In the circle lay nine slips of paper with chalk marks. On the last one was a song in Yoruba. The operative says she does not know it.

Questions for Your Shadow Paratrooper

D6	What your character does not yet know
1	Which children Kantor meant
2	How the old man saw them through the wall
3	Where the monastery disappeared to after four days
4	Whom the Observer reports to, and why
5	What Ruth Adeyemi heard singing beside the rift
6	Whether they themselves were once observed by someone better than them

Unit Equipment

Item	Effect
Black Canopy	A parachute that is almost silent from great heights and invisible at night. *Rare.*
Observation Hide	A collapsible camouflage net with thermal insulation. Anyone lying inside is invisible to thermal imaging. *Rare.*
Adeyemi's Chalk	A piece of the chalk that Ruth Adeyemi used in the Andes in 1968. A warding circle drawn with it holds, even if a Soldier draws it. Once per mission. *Very rare.*

The Others and Us

About the Stormbreakers: "They come when we go. You can hear them already on the horizon."

About the Echo-Operatives: "They hear everything, they say. They don't hear us. We've practised that."

About the Nanotech Veterans: "We hide from the enemy. They hide from themselves."

About the Techno-Stormtroopers: "You can't hide behind a shield that glows."

Members of the Unit

Sergeant Ruth Adeyemi. Harmattan, over eighty, lives in Lagos and receives every Shadow Paratrooper who visits her. She rarely speaks about the nine days. When she does, it is about the singing.

Squad Leader Jarek Novotný. The best sniper in the unit, Czech, a cousin of Bastion. In eighteen years he has never fired a shot he didn't have to, and he has never missed.

The Observer. A Shadow Paratrooper whose name nobody knows, who since 2011 has worked for only one client: Prometheus. She watches places where children have disappeared.

```
ADEYEMI'S NINE RULES, TRANSCRIPT FROM CAMP ASHGROVE
1. Land, and then wait ten minutes.
2. Eat before you are hungry. Drink before you are thirsty.
3. Sleep with your face towards the entrance.
4. Count your chalk every evening.
5. Speak one sentence aloud every day so that your voice does not become strange to you.
6. Do not write down what you do not understand.
7. Do not listen to the singing.
8. If you start singing along, leave.
9. Come back.
```

Example Character: Nachtfalke

Shadow Paratrooper, Cadet. Elias Varga, 33, was a paratrooper in the Hungarian army. During a night exercise he landed next to a lake in which no stars were reflected, although the sky was clear. He sat beside it for a day and waited to see if anything would come out. Nothing came. But O.D.I.N. came.

Nachtfalke	Shadow Paratrooper, Cadet
Attributes	STR 2, DEX 5, CON 3, INT 2, WIS 3, WIL 3, CHA 1, MAN 1, COM 4
Skills	Stealth 5, Firearms 4, Dodge 4, Survival 3, Athletics 3, Acrobatics 3, Melee 3, Perception 3, Sleight of Hand 2, Tactics 2, Toughness 2, Mental Resistance 1
Values	HP 11, Strain Threshold 11, Initiative 5, Defence 3, Armour 2 (Night Suit) or 3
Abilities	Phantom Attack, Mist of Vanishing, Deadly Stealth
Silver	Knife (Throwing Blade)
Archetype	The Professional

Equipment: Soldier basic equipment, light infiltration rifle, adaptive camouflage cloak, three collapsible traps, night suit, black canopy, small salt bag.

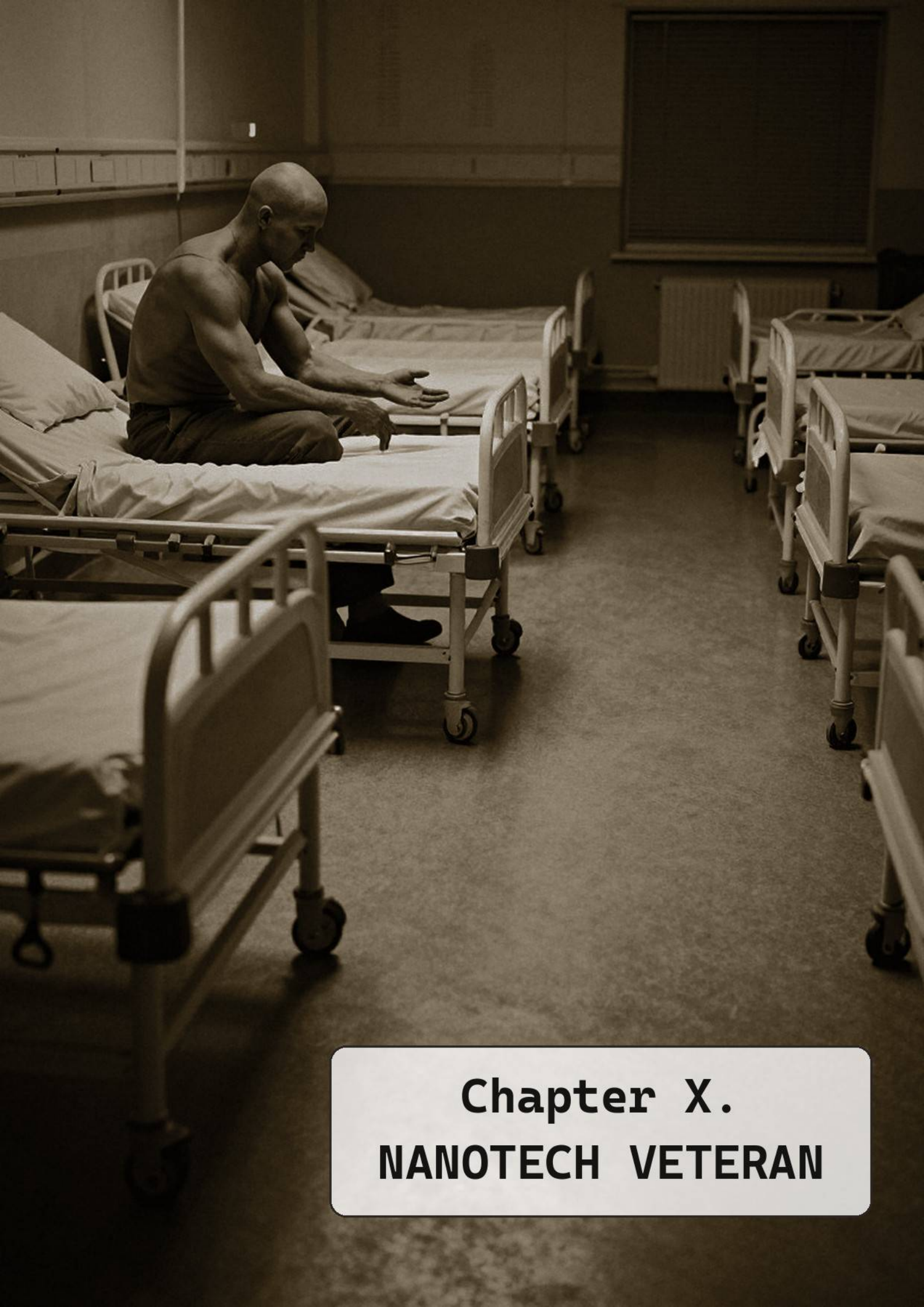
How to play Nachtfalke: You are quiet, patient and speak only when necessary. You go ahead, you see first, and you do not tell everything you have seen. You have not yet told anyone the sentence about the children.

The Path Through the Arsenal

Rank	New Modules and Increases
Agent (20 XP)	Trap Setter 4, Fire Discipline 4, Silent Steps from the Echo-Operatives 6. He saves 6 XP. Silver: Visor (Death Sight).
Senior Agent (50 XP)	Ghost Run 6, Air Landing 4, Iron Nerves 6, Perception to 4 for 8, Sleight of Hand to 3 for 6. Silver: Gauntlet (Rift Fist).
Veteran (100 XP)	Shadow of Death 8, Position Change 4, Stealth to 6 for 12, Firearms to 5 for 10, Survival to 4 for 8, Field Medic 6. Silver: Vambrace (Catch Vambrace).

The Modules in the Arsenal

Level	Module	Effect
I	**Air Landing**	Passive. Parachute jumps at night, in storms and from great heights succeed without a test. +2 dice on Survival.
I	**Trap Setter**	Passive. The Shadow Paratrooper carries four traps instead of three. His traps receive +1 die.
II	**Ghost Run**	Once per scene he moves from concealment to a new hiding place without a test being necessary.
III	**Shadow of Death**	Passive. Phantom Attack works twice per scene instead of once.



Chapter X.
NANOTECH VETERAN

Nanotech Veteran

"The nanites repair everything. Only not what I have lost."
Nanotech Veteran, codename Stahl

The Nature of the Unit

Nanotech Veterans carry nanites in their blood, microscopic machines that repair, reinforce and adapt their bodies. Wounds close in minutes, bones become harder, muscles stronger. A Nanotech Veteran keeps fighting when others would have fallen long ago, and they get back up when others stay down.

The price is high. The nanites do not only repair the body, they also smooth out what they consider damage: pain, fear, grief. Many Veterans feel less than before, some almost nothing at all. Their comrades notice it, and most keep their distance. They are feared almost as much as their enemies.

NANOTECH VETERAN AT A GLANCE

Bonuses: +2 CON, +1 WIL. **Skills:** +2 Brawling, +1 Toughness, +1 Nanotechnology. **Equipment:** Nanite Injector (one action, heals 2 HP, 3× per mission), monomolecular bone blades (weapon, see Core Rulebook, Chapter X), reaction booster (+1 initiative).

Adaptive Armour (passive): Each time they suffer damage in a fight, their armour increases by 1, up to +3. After the fight, it drops back to its normal value.

Berserker Protocol (active): They sacrifice 2 HP and gain +2 dice on their attack this round.

Last Cell (passive, 1× per mission): If they drop to 0 HP, they remain fully capable of acting for 3 more rounds. Afterwards they collapse and count as dying.

Full rules: Core Rulebook, Chapter IV.

Forty Beds

Grzegorz Wolski woke up, and the first thing he noticed was that it did not hurt.

It should have hurt. He remembered the injection, the burning that had travelled from his arm into his chest, the feeling as if someone were working on his bones from the inside with sandpaper. He remembered that he had screamed, and that he had been ashamed of it, because he had been with GROM for twelve years and had never screamed, not even in Afghanistan.

Now he lay in a bed, in a long white hall, and it did not hurt. Nothing hurt. He raised his hand in front of his face and saw that the scar on his thumb, which he had had since he was eight years old, had disappeared.

He sat up.

Forty beds stood in the hall, two rows of twenty each. He had counted them on the day of the injection, because he always counted when he was nervous. Forty men and women, volunteers, all from special forces, all with a signature under a document they had not fully understood. Programme Asklepios. The doctors had spoken of healing, of strength, of a soldier who no longer dies.

He counted again.

In twelve beds someone moved, himself included. In the others, no one. Over twenty-eight beds lay white sheets, pulled up over the heads.

In the bed next to him lay Tomek. Tomek Ryba, with whom he had done three deployments in Kandahar, who had once pulled him out of a burning vehicle, who had been best man at his wedding. Over Tomek lay a sheet.

Grzegorz looked at it and waited for something to happen. Grief. Anger. Pain. Anything.

Nothing happened.

He knew that Tomek was dead. He knew that he had loved him like a brother. He knew that he should cry now. But inside him there was only silence, clean and smooth like the skin on his thumb where the scar had been.

A doctor came along the aisle, a woman with a grey coat and a clipboard. She stopped in front of his bed and looked at him for a long time.

"How do you feel?" she asked.

Grzegorz thought about it. He wanted to be honest.

"Good," he said. "That's the problem, isn't it?"

The doctor wrote something on her clipboard. She did not look up.

"Welcome to Asklepios," she said. "You're number twelve."

The Twelve

Programme Asklepios began in 2004 in the Science Branch, at the urging of the Council. After decades in which Soldiers had died at rifts, they wanted a soldier who does not die. The Cyberneticists developed nanites that work in the body and sought volunteers. The nanites came in sealed ampoules of batch S-1. The injection ports were placed by a young doctor from Dr. Albrecht's team, Arvid Lund.

Forty volunteered. Twelve survived.

The Branch does not speak about the other twenty-eight. The official explanation is rejection reaction. The rumours say otherwise: that the nanites are programmed with crystal dust, that the dead were not buried, that nothing lies in their graves. The twelve survivors formed the first unit of Nanotech Veterans. Since then, more have been added, with better nanites and fewer deaths. But every new Nanotech Veteran knows that they stand on the shoulders of twenty-eight sheets.

The nanites of the later cohorts come from the same clinic, but from a different formula. Dr. Albrecht calls them gentler. The first-generation Veterans call them diluted, and they do not mean it as a compliment. Anyone who sees both generations fighting side by side recognises the difference not in strength, but in the eyes: the Twelve blink less often.

Today there are about forty Nanotech Veterans in the branch. They are deployed preferentially where others would not survive. And they are examined regularly, more often than any Psion, by doctors who send their reports to Prometheus.

Legend: Lazarus

The first survivor of Asklepios bore the codename **Lazarus**. He was a British soldier whose name no one remembers, and in 2004 he was the first to wake after the injection. He served for eleven years and survived injuries that would have killed twenty other Soldiers: a fall from forty metres, two shots to the chest, an attack by a being from a rift that tore off his arm. The arm grew back. In 2015 he went into a rift in Scotland to save a squad and did not return. The nanites in his blood still send a signal. It comes from a place that is on no map.

The First Trial by Fire

D6	When your Nanotech Veteran realised he was different
1	A shot to the chest. He stood up before the medic reached him.
2	His mother's funeral. He felt nothing, and everyone saw it.
3	A fight in which he stopped counting how many times he was hit.
4	A scar that disappeared, and with it the memory of how he got it.
5	A crystal that began to hum near him.
6	His daughter, who hugged him and said he felt cold.

A Day in the Life

Nanotech Veterans need little sleep. Four hours are enough for most, and they often spend the remaining night hours in the training room because their body demands movement. The nanites need energy, and Nanotech Veterans eat twice as much as other Soldiers, with a preference for iron: red meat, spinach, lentils. In the canteen you recognise them by their plates.

Once a week they go to the infirmary. Blood draw, measurement of nanite density, a conversation with a psychologist who asks questions to which they have no answers. How do you feel? What did you feel last week? Do you remember your childhood?

In the field they are at the front, next to the Stormbreakers, where it is most dangerous. They do not do it out of courage. They do it because they know they will survive it. And some do it because they hope that in the moment of danger they will feel something again.

Training

Nanotech Veterans are not trained, they are selected. Volunteers from the branch, mostly Soldiers with at least five years of experience, apply, and a commission of doctors and officers decides. Most are rejected.

Those who are accepted get a week of leave before the injection, the only one the branch grants without asking. Most spend it with their family. Some write letters they never send, because afterwards they no longer know what they meant by them.

Those accepted spend three months in a clinic of the Science Branch, first for preparation, then for the injection, then for recovery. Mortality is now below five per cent. After recovery they get to know their new body: how much they can lift, how quickly they heal, how long they can go without sleep. And they learn to cope with what is missing. That takes longer than three months. For some it lasts forever.

Play Styles

The following play styles are suggestions, not requirements. The modules mentioned are at the end of the chapter, basic training and manoeuvres in Chapter IV.

Play Style	Description
The Indestructible	He stands when others fall. He holds the position, pulls the wounded out of the fire and is the last man. *Modules:* Rapid Healing, Bone Armour, Second Cell.
The Berserker	Close combat, bone blades, Berserker Protocol. He advances on the opponent, not into cover. *Modules:* Overload Protection, plus the manoeuvre Charge.
The Seeker	He wants to know what happened to him. He searches for the twenty-eight, he searches for Lazarus, he searches for what he has lost. Combines well with Perception and Investigation.
The Medic	His body has taught him how wounds heal. He tends to the others before he tends to himself, and his hands never tremble. Combines well with Medicine, Field Medic and the Grip of the Last from ashsilver.

RULE: INTEGRATION

Every Nanotech Veteran has an Integration score. It starts at 1 and increases by 1 with each module of their own unit.

From Integration 3: −1 die on Insight and Persuasion. They understand others' feelings less well because they no longer feel their own.

From Integration 5: +1 die on horror tests, but −2 dice on Insight and Persuasion.

Integration never decreases.

RULE: NANITES AND CRYSTALS

Within 10 m of an open rift or an active crystal, the nanites become restless. The nanite injector heals 1 HP more. But the Nanotech Veteran hears a soft humming and makes a horror test against Uncanny (1).

The Price

Nanotech Veterans pay with their feelings. Not all at once, not the same for everyone. Some lose only fear. Some lose grief. Some lose the ability to feel joy. Many have families who can no longer cope with them, and comrades who do not know how to talk to someone who gets up after a shot to the chest and asks if there is still coffee. And all pay with a question they never get rid of: What did they actually inject into me?

OPTIONAL RULE: WHAT IS MISSING

Once per mission, the game master may ask a Nanotech Veteran what they should feel in a scene and do not feel.

If the player describes it in one or two sentences, this counts as a credibly played drive and thus as the personal bonus of the mission.

D6	What the nanites have taken from you
1	The fear of heights. You stand on roof edges and only realise from the faces of others that one does not do that.
2	The taste of coffee. You drink it anyway, out of habit.
3	The grief for your father. You know that you loved him. You only know it now.
4	Laughter. You laugh when the others laugh, one beat too late.
5	Pain. You have broken your hand twice without noticing it.
6	Nothing, you believe. Your daughter sees it differently.

In Play

- **You are hard to kill.** Your wounds close, your strength grows. Stand at the front when it gets dangerous.
- **Play the missing.** The most exciting question of your character is what the machines inside you do to your feelings.
- **The question for your character:** What would you give to feel something again?

For the game master: A Nanotech Veteran is hard to kill, so do not threaten them only with damage. Threaten what remains to them: a memory, a person who still reaches them, the question of whether they are still the same. And give them scenes in which Integration becomes a problem: an interrogation, a grieving family, a moment that demands warmth.

EXAMPLE: STAHL AT ZERO

Stahl (15 HP, CON 5) holds a corridor against two elite mercenaries. Adaptive armour has raised his armour from 3 to 6 after three hits, but a critical success means the armour does not count, and Stahl drops to 0 HP.

Last cell: He remains fully capable of acting for three rounds. In the first, he strikes with the bone blades. In the second, he sacrifices 2 HP for the Berserker Protocol and is at −2. In the third, the second mercenary falls.

Afterwards, Stahl collapses and is dying. At the end of each round, he loses 1 HP; at −5 he would be dead. Anker, the cell's healer, reaches him two rounds later at −4 and stabilises him.

Playing with Other Classes

A Nanotech Veteran is the ideal partner for anyone who needs to stand behind someone: a **Thaumaturge** who draws a circle, a **Scientist** who repairs a device, a **Psychic Healer** who tends to the wounded. With a **Psion** there is a special connection: telepaths report that the thoughts of Nanotech Veterans are unusually calm, almost empty. Many Psions recover in their presence. Some find them uncanny.

From the Files

MEDICAL REPORT, EXCERPT

Subject 7 (deceased), Programme Asklepios, 2004.

Autopsy not possible. The tissue transformed into a crystalline structure within 6 hours of death.

Note: Transfer to the Collegium. Discontinue further autopsies.

OPERATIONS REPORT, EXCERPT

Case RA-2015-09, Cairngorms. Rift in a bog, a squad trapped.

Operative LAZARUS goes in alone. The squad comes out, all accounted for. Lazarus does not.

Addendum, nanite scanner Hold-1: Signal received. Bearing not possible. The signal is equally strong from all directions.

Questions for Your Nanotech Veteran

D6	What your character does not know yet
1	What happened to the twenty-eight others
2	Where the nanites come from, and why they hum near crystals
3	Whether Lazarus is still alive, and where
4	Why he was number twelve, and who counted before
5	Whether the feelings come back when the nanites die
6	What Dr. Albrecht writes in her reports

Unit Equipment

Item	Effect
Asklepios Harness	See Chapter VI. Armour 3, no penalties, ports for injectors. *Not for sale.*
Iron Tablets of the Branch	Once per day: The next use of the nanite injector heals 1 HP more. *Common.*
Nanite Scanner	A small device that measures nanite density. Shows when another Nanotech Veteran is within 20 m. Or a Lazarus signal. *Rare.*

The Others and Us

About the Stormbreaker: "They blow things up, we go in. We're the ones who pull them out of the rubble afterwards."

About the Echo-Operative: "They say our hearts beat wrong. They're right. We've noticed too."

About the Shadow Paratroopers: "They hide. We don't need to any more."

About the Techno-Stormtrooper: "They wear their shield on the outside. We on the inside."

Members of the Unit

The Eleven. The remaining survivors of Asklepios, except Stahl. They meet once a year, on the anniversary of the injection, in a pub in Glasgow. They do not talk much. They just sit together and drink, and they do not feel the alcohol. Since 2015 there are only ten at the table, since 2019 nine. The chairs for Lazarus and for the man who disappeared in 2019 remain empty, and their glasses are filled every year.

Corporal Nadia Berger. A second-generation Nanotech Veteran, injected in 2016. She is the only one who says she feels more since then, not less. Dr. Albrecht sent her blood values to the Council, and since then Berger is examined every day instead of every week.

Dr. Ines Albrecht. The doctor with the clipboard. She has led Asklepios to this day and knows every Nanotech Veteran personally. She is friendly, professional, and has never said where the nanites come from.

> **FROM STAHL'S NOTEBOOK**
>
> Day 212. Ania called. She won a prize at school for an essay about her father. I said: That is nice.
>
> Afterwards I looked up what one says when one is proud, and I called her again and told her.
>
> She laughed. I think she noticed. I think she laughed anyway.

Example Character: Stahl

Nanotech Veteran, Cadet. Grzegorz Wolski, 63, who looks like early forties, was twelve years with the Polish special unit GROM before he volunteered for Asklepios. He is number twelve. His story is told at the beginning of this chapter. He is divorced, has a daughter in Krakow, whom he calls once a month, and he no longer knows what to say to her. Last month she sang him a song she had dreamed. He knew it. His nanites hum it when it is quiet.

Stahl	Nanotech Veteran, Cadet
Attributes	STR 4, DEX 3, CON 5, INT 2, WIS 2, WIL 3, CHA 1, MAN 1, COM 3
Skills	Brawling 5, Toughness 4, Athletics 4, Firearms 3, Melee 3, Dodge 3, Perception 3, Nanotechnology 2, Tactics 2, Intimidation 2, Stress Management 2, Endurance 1, Mental Resistance 1
Values	HP 15, Strain Threshold 10, Initiative 4, Defence 2, Armour 3 (Asklepios Harness), Integration 1
Abilities	Adaptive Armour, Berserker Protocol, Last Cell
Silver	Knife (Escort Blade)
Archetype	The Wounded

Equipment: Basic Soldier equipment, nanite injector, monomolecular bone blades, reaction boosters, Asklepios Harness instead of the combat suit, salt sachets.

How to play Stahl: You are calm, friendly, and strangely untouched. You go first into danger because you know

you will survive it. You watch the others when they laugh or cry, and you try to remember how that felt.

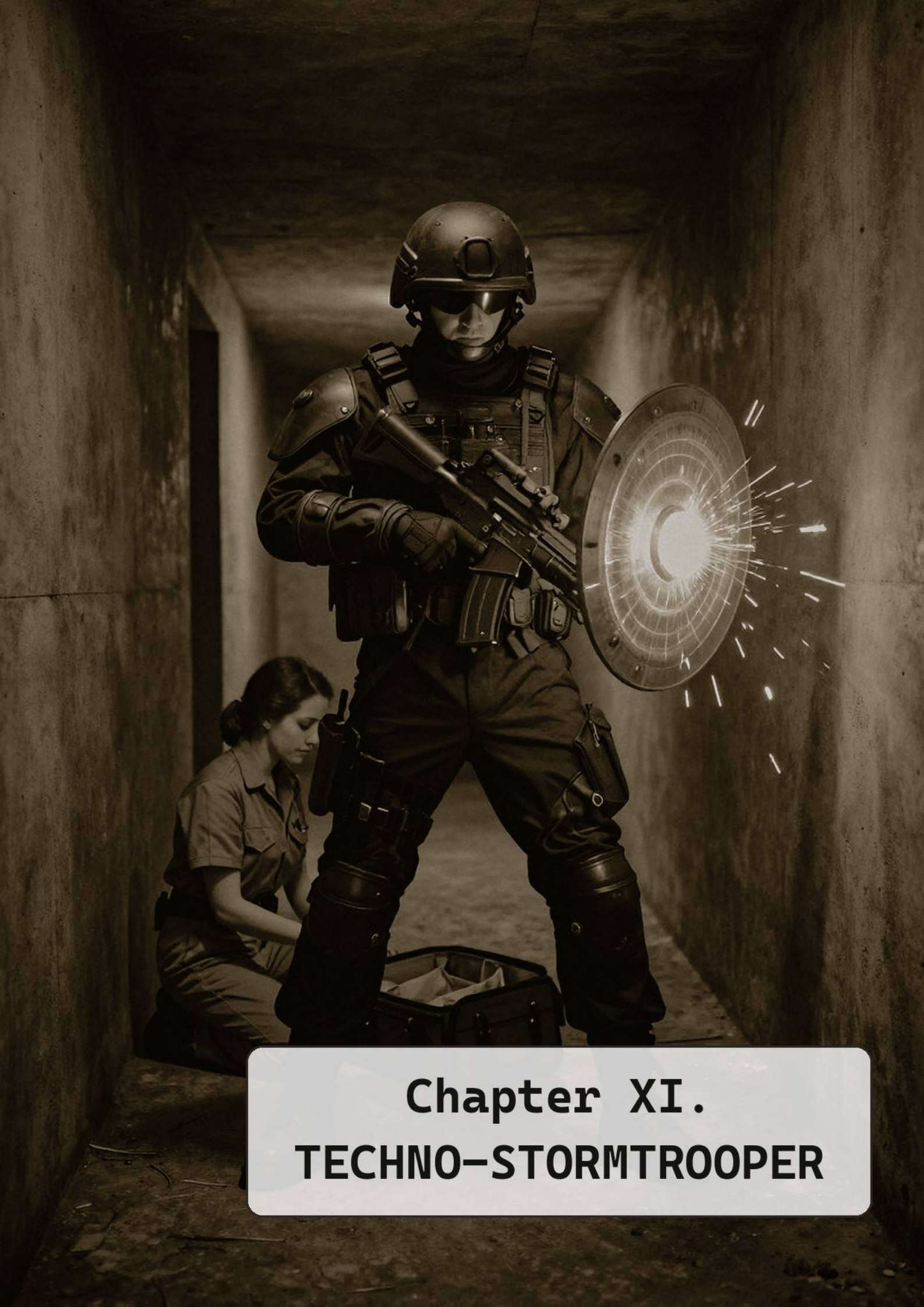
The Path Through the Arsenal

Rank	New Modules and Increases
Agent (20 XP)	Rapid Healing 4 (Integration 2), Pain Resistance 4, Position Change 4. He saves 8 XP. Silver: Gauntlet (Rift Fist).
Senior Agent (50 XP)	Overload Protection 6 (Integration 3), Field Medic 6, Iron Nerves 6, Melee to 4 for 8, Insight new at 1 for 3, because he wants to try it. Silver: Greaves (Standing Greaves).
Veteran (100 XP)	Bone Armour 4 (Integration 4), Second Cell 8 (Integration 5), Shield Technician from the Techno-Stormtroopers 6, Brawling to 6 for 12, Athletics to 5 for 10, Command Voice 8. Silver: Pauldrons (Vigil Piece).

The Modules in the Arsenal

Level	Module	Effect
I	**Rapid Healing**	Passive. The nanite injector heals 3 instead of 2 HP and can be used four times per mission.
I	**Bone Armour**	Passive. +1 armour, even without a suit. Metal detectors go off.
II	**Overload Protection**	Passive. The Berserker Protocol costs only 1 HP instead of 2.
III	**Second Cell**	Passive. Last Cell works twice per mission. The second use then costs 1 strain.

Each module of this unit increases Integration by 1 for a Nanotech Veteran. Other Soldiers who buy these modules receive a weak nanite treatment in the infirmary. They do not gain a value for Integration, but an appointment once a month with Dr. Albrecht.



Chapter XI.
TECHNO-STORMTROOPER

Techno-Stormtrooper

"Shield up, head down, keep moving."
Techno-Stormtrooper, codename Bastion

The Nature of the Unit

Techno-Stormtroopers are the wall of the cell. They wear heavy armour, kinetic energy shields and boosters that give them speed and strength. Where they stand, no one gets through. Their EMP weapons disable any electronic defence, and their shield catches fire that would kill anyone else.

They are the most technical Soldiers in the branch. A Techno-Stormtrooper understands their equipment down to the last screw, because they know that it is the only thing standing between them and the enemy, and between the enemy and the people behind them.

TECHNO-STORMTROOPER AT A GLANCE

Bonuses: +2 STR, +1 INT. **Skills:** +2 Energy Weapons, +1 Engineering, +1 Tactics. **Equipment:** Kinetic energy shield (+2 armour, absorbs a total of at most 10 damage per mission, then empty), EMP grenade launcher, booster boots (+2 dice on Athletics when jumping and sprinting).

Shield Overload (active, 1× per day): The shield discharges. All opponents within a radius of 3 m suffer damage 4. Afterwards the shield is ineffective for 2 rounds.

Kinetic Strike (active): Melee attack with the shield (STR + Brawling). Damage 3 + margin, ignores 2 points of armour and pushes the target 2 m back.

Tactical Recalibration (active, 1× per combat): +2 dice on all attacks or +1 defence for one round.

Full rules: Core Rulebook, Chapter IV.

The Corridor

The corridor was eight metres long and two metres wide, and Bastion stood at its end, and behind him Anker knelt and held her hands on an agent's chest.

"How much longer?" he asked over his shoulder.

"Three rounds," said Anker. "Maybe four."

In front of him, at the other end of the corridor, stood six men with assault rifles, mercenaries of a collector, well trained, well armed and for a minute very angry. They had just emptied half a magazine at him. The shield had held.

Bastion looked at the display on his left wrist. The kinetic energy shield reported what it had absorbed: seven points. It could withstand ten, perhaps eleven, if one interpreted the manufacturer's tolerance generously. Then it would be empty, and behind Bastion lay a healer and a man who was dying.

"Tomáš," said Anker. She never used his codename when things got serious. "If you have to go, go."

"I don't have to go."

The mercenaries reloaded. Bastion heard it, the click of magazines, the snap of bolts. He set his feet wider, lowered his head behind the edge of the shield and felt the hum of energy in his forearm, like an animal waiting for the command.

There was one thing he could do. The engineers called it shield overload, and they had spent three weeks explaining to him why he was only allowed to do it once a day. The shield discharged in a single wave, everything within three metres was hit, and afterwards it was dead for two rounds. Two rounds without a shield in a corridor with six rifles.

The mercenaries came closer. Four metres. Three.

Bastion pressed the trigger.

The wave was not visible, but audible, a deep hum, as if the air itself was tearing. The two foremost mercenaries flew backwards, into the others, and the whole corridor was for a moment a tangle of arms and weapons. Bastion charged after them, without shield, with nothing but his weight and the kinetic strike of his shoulder, and when the mercenaries stood again, he stood among them.

It took two rounds. Enough.

When the shield hummed again, six men lay in the corridor, and behind him the agent stood up, pale but alive, and Anker sat against the wall and bled from the nose, because she had given too much.

Bastion went to her and offered her his hand.

"Three rounds," he said. "You said three rounds."

"It was five."

"I counted," said Bastion. "You too. Neither of us said it."

The Wall

The Techno-Stormtroopers came into being in 1987, when the Science Branch completed the first kinetic energy shields. The technology came from research on crystals: the physicist Dr Martin Hofer had noticed that certain crystals absorb kinetic energy and release it slowly. His second prototype became the model for all shields. He did not live to see series production; he died in 1981. The first shields actually contained crystal shards, until the Collegium insisted in 1990 that this stop. Today's shields are purely technical. So they say.

The first Techno-Stormtroopers were volunteers from the branch, mostly Stormbreakers, who were used to heavy equipment. After Berlin 1991, the unit became one of the most respected in the branch. Today Techno-Stormtroopers are welcome in every cell that has to hold a place: during rituals, during evacuations, during retreats.

The unit works more closely with the Science Branch than any other. Many Techno-Stormtroopers are half engineers themselves, and in some Holds they sleep in the same workshop as the Engineers who build their shields.

Since 2011, the Techno-Stormtroopers have been receiving new shields faster than the workshop in Stuttgart can build them. Ares has had a second workshop set up, the location of which not even Ahrens knows. The shields from there are better. They hum deeper.

Legend: Schildwall

Petra Hofmann, codename **Schildwall**, wore one of the first production shields in 1991, one of the last with a crystal shard, when a rift opened in an underground tunnel in Berlin while a train with three hundred passengers stood inside. She held the tunnel for forty minutes, alone, while the passengers behind her walked to the next station. The shield absorbed more in that time than it was designed to withstand. When the last passenger was out, it failed. Hofmann still did not leave. She stayed until a Thaumaturge came. Her shield hangs today in the workshop in Stuttgart, dented and burned black. Every Techno-Stormtrooper places a hand on it once before they receive their first own shield.

The First Trial by Fire

D6	When your Techno-Stormtrooper first stood between someone and death
1	A child on a platform when a rift opened. The shield held. The child did not cry.
2	A comrade behind them who bled out while they held a corridor.
3	An explosion they intercepted. The shield was empty afterwards, they themselves unharmed.
4	A creature that scratched at their shield like at a pane of glass.
5	A Thaumaturge who drew a circle behind them and did not thank them afterwards.
6	A shield that failed, and a comrade who paid for it.

A Day in the Life

Techno-Stormtroopers start the day in the workshop. The shield is checked, charged, calibrated, the boosters are serviced, the armour examined for cracks. This takes an hour every morning, and no Techno-Stormtrooper skips this hour. Anyone who has done so once and then stood in the field with a shield that did not charge never does it again.

Afterwards, training. Running with the shield, jumping with the shield, holding a door with the shield while three instructors push against it. Techno-Stormtroopers are strong, but above all enduring. Holding a shield for forty minutes, like Schildwall, demands more than muscles.

In the afternoons, many sit together with Engineers and talk about improvements. The Engineers love these conversations because Techno-Stormtroopers know exactly what works in the field and what does not. In the

evenings, they are often the last in the canteen because they look after the others. That is part of the unit, they say. You do not only hold corridors.

Training

Prospective Techno-Stormtroopers spend four months in a workshop of the Science Branch in Stuttgart, not in a camp. They get to know their equipment before they learn to use it: they take apart a shield, put it back together, repair boosters, charge energy cells. Only then does the training follow.

The final exam is called **the Tunnel**. The recruit stands in a reconstructed underground tunnel, behind them sit twenty volunteers from the base, in front of them instructors with training ammunition. They must hold the tunnel for twenty minutes. Anyone who loses the shield beforehand repeats the exam. Anyone who loses a volunteer does too. At the end, they place their hand on Schildwall's dented shield. In the last week, every recruit receives their own shield and carves a sign into the inside that only they know. The Engineers pretend not to see it.

Play Styles

The following play styles are suggestions, not mandatory. The modules mentioned are at the end of the chapter, the basic training and the manoeuvres in Chapter IV.

Play style	Description
The Wall	They hold positions, protect the cell and absorb fire. Where they stand, no one gets through. *Modules:* Shield Technician, Fortress.
The Battering Ram	Booster, kinetic strike, charge. They storm through opponents and knock them down. *Modules:* Booster Jump, Quick Loader, plus the Charge manoeuvre.
The Technician	EMP, electronics, engineering. They disable security systems and repair what others break. Combines well with Technology and Frequency Finder from the Echo-Operative.
The Bodyguard	They protect not the cell but a person: a witness, a Thaumaturge in the middle of a ritual, a child no one may lose. They do not leave their side. Combines well with Perception, Back-to-Back and the Troop Piece of ashsilver.

RULE: SHIELD ENERGY

The kinetic energy shield fully recharges after every mission. Beyond the 10 damage from the Core Rulebook, a Techno-Stormtrooper can partially recharge it between two scenes in a workshop: one hour and a test INT + Engineering against Doable (2), then it absorbs an additional 5 damage again.

The Techno-Stormtrooper always knows how much their shield can still take.

RULE: EMP IN YOUR OWN RADIUS

An EMP grenade that explodes within the radius of your own shield disables the shield for one round. Even your own.

The Price

Techno-Stormtroopers pay with their bodies and with a feeling no one says aloud: the fear that the shield will fail. Each of them has once seen the display drop to zero, and each knows what happened or nearly happened behind them. Many Techno-Stormtroopers have nightmares in which they hold a corridor and hear voices behind them growing quieter.

OPTIONAL RULE: THE DISPLAY

If a Techno-Stormtrooper's shield drops to zero during an operation while someone is standing behind them, after the mission they roll WIL + Mental Resistance against Doable (2).

If the test fails, they suffer 1 strain and check the display at every opportunity in the next mission: −1 initiative, until they have once again held a corridor without the shield running empty.

D6	What holding has cost you
1	Your left shoulder. It still holds the shield, but it makes itself felt with every change of weather.
2	The ability to turn your back to the door in a room.
3	Your leave. You never take it, because otherwise someone else holds your corridor.
4	The name of a person you could not hold. You say it every morning before you charge the shield.
5	The hum. You hear it even when the shield is switched off.
6	Nothing. You are still holding, after all.

In Play

- **You are the wall of the cell.** Hold positions, protect the weaker ones, catch the fire.
- **Put yourself between.** Between the opponent and the healer, between the rift and the Thaumaturge, between the Door and the cell.
- **The question for your character:** Who have you once not been able to protect?

For the game master: Give a Techno-Stormtrooper places that must be held and people who stand behind them. The display of their shield is a countdown that the whole table should know. Say aloud how much the shield can still take, and let the other players decide what they do with the time they buy them.

EXAMPLE: BASTION HOLDS THE CORRIDOR

Bastion wears the combat suit with helmet (armour 3) and the kinetic shield (+2), together armour 5.

A mercenary hits him with 2 margin: 4 + 2 − 5 = 1 damage. The shield absorbed 2 points of it, the display reads 2 of 10.

After four such hits, it reads 8. Bastion triggers the shield overload: all opponents within 3 m suffer damage 4, and the shield is ineffective for two rounds.

In these two rounds, Bastion has only armour 3. He uses them for a kinetic strike with STR 5 and Brawling 3: damage 3 plus margin, 2 points of armour do not count, and the mercenary flies back 2 m.

Playing with Other Classes

The Techno-Stormtrooper is the best friend of every **Thaumaturge** who needs a ritual, and of every **Psychic Healer** who needs time to heal. They hold the room, they do their work. With a **Scientist**, especially an Engineer, they improve their equipment. And with a **Stormbreaker** they form the classic pair of the branch: one opens the door, the other holds the corridor behind it. And with the healers of the Choir, the unit maintains its own tradition: whoever has held the corridor for a healer gets the first coffee from them after the operation. Bastion has never paid for one.

From the Files

OPERATION REPORT, EXCERPT

Case RA-1991-07, Berlin. Rift in an underground tunnel.

Operative SCHILDWALL holds the tunnel for 40 minutes. 312 civilians evacuated, 0 losses.

Addendum by the engineer: According to the log, the shield absorbed 94 damage. Design limit: 10.

WORKSHOP LEDGER, STUTTGART

Kinetic shield, serial number 0441, in for maintenance after operation.

When opened, a small grey shard is found in the housing that does not belong to the parts list.

Note: shard handed over to Ahrens. No further documentation.

Questions for Your Techno-Stormtrooper

D6	What your character does not yet know
1	Whether a crystal shard is stuck in their shield
2	How Schildwall's shield could absorb 94 damage
3	Who scratched their shield, back then in the tunnel
4	What Ahrens did with the grey shard
5	Who they once could not protect, and whether it really was their fault
6	Why their shield sometimes hums when they have switched it off

Unit Equipment

Item	Effect
Spare energy cell	Recharges the shield by 5 damage once, as an action. *Rare.*
Shield edge with silver	Kinetic strike affects beings from rifts like incendiary ammunition. *Rare.*
Hofmann's calibration	A programme for the shield, written by Schildwall herself. The shield absorbs 2 more damage before it is empty. *Very rare.*

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RULE: SERVICE WEAPON
Techno-Stormtroopers are trained in energy
weapons. Each receives a plasma pistol as a
service weapon from the quartermaster,
regardless of rank, plus two energy cells per
mission.
Anyone who wants a heavier energy weapon buys
it like any other equipment according to rank
and availability.
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The Others and Us

About the Stormbreakers: "Our brothers. We carry the same weight, just in different places."

About the Echo-Operatives: "They hear our shields. That is good when someone is looking for us. It is bad when the enemy has an Echo-Operative."

About the Shadow Paratroopers: "They are never where we are. That is all right. Someone has to stay behind."

About the Nanotech Veterans: "We protect others. They protect themselves. But when it matters, they stand beside us."

Members of the Unit

Petra Hofmann. Schildwall, now in her early sixties, instructor in Stuttgart. She lost three fingers on her left hand, in Berlin, and she explains to every recruit that the shield does not stop when the display reads zero. You yourself only stop then.

Engineer Jonas Ahrens. An Engineer from the Science Branch, who has been building shields for twenty years. He is the only one who knows whether today's shields still contain crystal shards. He says no. He says it too quickly.

Soldier Tomáš Novák. Bastion, the example character of this chapter. He has a cousin in the Shadow Paratroopers and swears in Czech when an alchemist pours something into his wound.

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HOFMANN'S WORDS BEFORE THE TUNNEL, TRANSCRIPT
You will stand for twenty minutes. I stood for
forty. This is not a competition.
When the display jumps to zero, the shield
does not stop. You only stop when you allow
yourself to.
Behind you sit twenty people who trust you
without knowing you. That is the whole job.
Shield up, head down, keep going.
```

Example Character: Bastion

Techno-Stormtrooper, Cadet. Tomáš Novák, 35, was a Panzergrenadier in the Czech army and later a bodyguard. On a job in Prague, he stood between his client and something that went through walls. He stopped it, using an office door as a shield. O.D.I.N. thought he had talent.

Bastion	Techno-Stormtrooper, Cadet
Attributes	STR 5, DEX 3, CON 4, INT 3, WIS 2, WIL 2, CHA 1, MAN 1, COM 3
Skills	Energy Weapons 4, Engineering 3, Tactics 3, Firearms 3, Athletics 3, Brawling 3, Toughness 3, Technology 3, Dodge 3, Perception 3, Stress Management 2, Driving 1, Mental Resistance 1
Values	HP 13, Strain Threshold 9, Initiative 3, Defence 2, Armour 3 plus Shield 2
Abilities	Shield Overload, Kinetic Strike, Tactical Recalibration

Bastion	Techno-Stormtrooper, Cadet
Silver	Knife (Escort Blade)
Archetype	The Protector

Equipment: Soldier basic equipment, kinetic energy shield, EMP grenade launcher, booster boots, plasma pistol as service weapon, salt pouch.

How to play Bastion: You are big, loud and warm-hearted. You put yourself between the danger and the others without thinking, and you are the last one in the canteen because you want to know if everyone got home safely.

The Path Through the Arsenal

Rank	New modules and increases
Agent (20 XP)	Shield Technician 4, Booster Jump 4, Position Change 4, Pain Resistance 4. He saves 4 XP. Silver: Pauldrons (Troop Piece).
Senior Agent (50 XP)	Quick Loader 6, Field Medic 6, Iron Nerves 6, Engineering to 4 for 8. He saves 8 XP. Silver: Vambrace (Defence Vambrace).
Veteran (100 XP)	Fortress 8, Command Voice 8, Energy Weapons to 5 for 10, Brawling to 4 for 8, Bunker Buster from the Stormbreakers 8, Toughness to 4 for 8. Silver: Breastplate (Heart Plate).

The Modules in the Arsenal

Level	Module	Effect
I	**Shield Technician**	Passive. The kinetic energy shield absorbs 15 instead of 10 damage per mission.
I	**Booster Jump**	As a move, the Techno-Stormtrooper jumps up to 8 m far or 4 m high.
II	**Quick Loader**	Passive. Shield Overload twice per day. The shield is then only ineffective for one round.
III	**Fortress**	Once per mission. The shield covers all allies within 3 m for three rounds. They receive +2 armour. Afterwards 1 strain.

Imprint

O.D.I.N. Occult Dynamics Intelligence Network
Soldier, Class Book (English edition)

Author and publisher: David Ger
Feedback and contact: david.ger.bs@gmail.com
All books and the character generator: odin-rpg.pages.dev/en/

The illustrations are AI-generated; editing and the first translation of this English edition were done with AI assistance.

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